

# *Scotia Archaeology*

**REPORT  
TO  
TAYMOUTH CASTLE LTD  
AND  
TAYMOUTH ESTATES LTD**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS  
AT  
TAYMOUTH CASTLE  
MARCH 2012**

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## INTRODUCTION

This document describes the results of an archaeological excavation and a watching brief undertaken within the grounds of Taymouth Castle, Kenmore, Perthshire during March and April 2012.

Perth & Kinross Council has granted planning consent to Taymouth Castle Estate Ltd to erect a large number of new properties, including residential holiday accommodation and leisure facilities, within the grounds of the castle (Planning Reference number 11/00533/FLM). One of the conditions attached to that consent is that archaeological evaluations be carried out in advance of the construction of the new properties and watching briefs carried out during the excavation of new roads and service trenches.

Scotia Archaeology forwarded a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) to Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust (PKHT), archaeological advisors to Perth & Kinross Council, outlining a programme of works in response to requirements set out in PKHT's Terms of Reference. It was intended that the scheme would be agreed by PKHT and approved by the planning authority before work began on site. It was also decided at an early stage that the evaluation should be tailored so that the actual sites of individual buildings would be fully excavated archaeologically rather than exploratory trenches opened throughout the castle grounds.

Unfortunately, some access roads had been constructed without archaeological monitoring although no work had commenced on the footprints of any of the planned buildings. The first archaeological investigations took place between 28 March and 2 April 2012 when a watching brief was conducted during the removal of overburden for the construction of Road 13, towards the south side of the castle grounds, and following soil-stripping for a contractor's compound in its south-west corner.

## THE SITE

The extant Taymouth Castle dates from 1806-10 but is thought to include part of the earlier Balloch Castle, built in 1550 and extended by William Adam in c1733. Aerial photography has identified remnants of the castle's designed landscape including parts of its gardens and associated structures. As well as features contemporary with the occupation of the two castles, it is believed that the grounds may well contain remnants of hitherto undiscovered prehistoric sites and perhaps those of post-medieval settlements located on the lower slopes of Strath Tay. Two standing stones (NN74NE 3) are located at NN 7926 4668 at Newhall, towards the north-east corner of the castle grounds. A little further north, just outside the boundary of the estate at NN 7975 4726, stands the Croftmoraig stone circle (NN74NE 12). There are numerous other prehistoric sites as well as ones of early historic and later dates within a short distance of Kenmore, particularly around Dull and in Glen Lyon.

## Previous archaeological work

As part of the Taymouth Castle Estate Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) produced in 2003, CFA Archaeology Ltd undertook a desk-based assessment and field survey of the archaeological potential of the estate. These surveys identified 29 sites of archaeological significance, seven of which were within areas which might be disturbed during the development of the site, as perceived at that time. The latest scheme, however, is likely to impact on fewer sites.

In 2005 Addyman Associates undertook watching briefs during refurbishment work within the castle. As far as is known, no further archaeological work has been carried out within the estate since that time.

## **THE WATCHING BRIEF**

The watching brief was kept during the removal of vegetation and topsoil along the course of a new stretch of road towards the south side of the castle grounds, approximately midway along its length. Monitoring commenced at NN 78681 45864, where soil-stripping had stopped, running south-westwards as far as NN 78638 45838 from where the trench dog-legged to its terminus at NN 78630 45797.

The overall length of the trench was some 95m and its width 7-8m. It cut through turf and bracken and up to 0.3m of mid-brown, slightly silty topsoil which overlay glacial deposits of orange-brown silt, pebbles and boulders. No features or deposits of archaeological significance were uncovered in the trench.

An examination of the sides of an existing road trench a short distance from Road 13 revealed what appeared to be a field drain or sump at NN 78536 45780. It comprised cobbles and small, rounded boulders set 0.3m below present ground surface.

## **THE EXCAVATION**

A contractor's compound is to be built towards the south-west corner of the castle grounds, covering part of the footprint of what is to be a new equestrian centre, on land that slopes down gently towards the west. The centre will measure approximately 80m north/south by 45m wide overall, centred on NN 7770 4525, while the contractor's compound will cover the middle third of that area. It is bounded on its south by the A827 Aberfeldy to Kenmore road from where the ground rises steeply up the south side of the Tay valley. The road continues around the west side of the site, beyond which is the mouth of Loch Tay, some 200m from the compound. To the immediate north of the trench is a small, wooded area within which the ground rises onto a large mound of glacial material.

The compound was stripped of overburden under close archaeological supervision using a toothless bucket on a tracked mechanical excavator, the trench measuring approximately 40m east/west by 30m wide. Coarse grass overlay 0.3m of topsoil (F001), comprising mid- to dark brown, humic loam with some small pebbles and occasional larger stones. It overlay glacial till of stones of varying sizes, gravel and orange-brown sand with lenses of grey sand. Several test pits were dug into the glacial till to test its character and to ensure that it did not consist of redeposited material.

Numerous examples of stone voids and tree root holes were uncovered, some of which were ascribed context numbers at an early stage of the investigation. However, several genuine archaeological features were also exposed, most of them towards the north side of the trench and one near its west edge. They are described below.

### **Pit/?kiln F101**

This somewhat enigmatic feature was located a short distance from the west edge of the trench. It was revealed as a sub-rectangular area of burnt material which, on excavation,

proved to be a pit measuring 2.2m north/south by 0.8-1.0m wide and 0.25m deep at its south end increasing to 0.3m elsewhere. In many respects it resembled a kiln: it was roughly keyhole-shaped and its fill included much burnt material but there was no trace of a formal base or lining which would be expected of such a feature. Its principal fill (F110) comprised dark soil, much of it burnt, with a few small stones and many fragments of charcoal.

A few fragments of corroded iron and what appears to be a small piece of iron slag were retrieved from this material which overlay a thin (typically 50mm) layer of pale brown, silty loam with a few small stones (F113). In places, the subsoil along the sides of the pit showed signs of being affected by heat although the silty material lining the pit showed no such evidence.

The appearance of this feature, together with the presence of much burnt material, may point to it being a kiln although the absence of a stone or clay lining might suggest otherwise. The presence of iron fragments and slag are probably fortuitous: metal-processing would cause considerably more heat damage to the area immediately surrounding a bloomery or any other such furnace. Perhaps more likely is that it was a corn-drying kiln although again this would not explain the absence of a base.

It is possible that the silty deposit F113 had washed in when the pit lay open, before it was filled, presumably deliberately, with the burnt material of F110.

Samples were taken of fills F110 and F113.

### **Pit F103**

Hard against the north side of the trench, midway along its length, was a sub-circular pit measuring 1.0m by 0.8m with a maximum depth, at its centre, of 0.4m. Its principal fill (F108) comprised dark grey, humic loam with many stones, some of those against the side of the pit being quite large. Below this material was a mid-brown to grey, silty soil (F109) with some small stones. A fragment of a possible loom weight was retrieved from F108.

There was no trace of a post-pipe within either of the pit fills although it is thought likely that at least some of the stones within the pit had been post-packers. The presence of these stones and the size of the pit suggest that it had held a post of considerable girth. At this stage, it is impossible to interpret the function of such a post although more information may be gained when the area to the immediate north of the trench is excavated before the equestrian centre is built.

Samples were taken of fills F108 and F109.

### **Pit F105**

This pit was located a short distance east of Pit F103 and measured 0.5m north/south by 0.3m wide and a maximum 0.25m deep. Its single fill (F111) comprised mid-brown, humic loam with some small stones and, at the north end of the pit, a few larger ones which may have been packers dislodged when the post was removed. Otherwise there was no trace of a post setting. The pit sloped up on its south side, perhaps where a post had been removed.

A sample was taken of fill F111.

**Burnt deposit F107**

A spread of burnt materials (F107) was found 5m south of Pit F103 and measured approximately 0.5m east/west by 0.3m wide and 0.1m deep. It appeared to be mostly burnt peat with occasional fragments of charcoal and small lenses of soil and a few pebbles.

A sample was taken of F107.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The investigation at the site of the proposed equestrian centre uncovered a relatively small number of archaeological features considering the large area excavated, some 1,400m<sup>2</sup>. However, the trench is to be extended to accommodate the new centre and it is likely that more features will be uncovered at that time.

It would be interesting to discover if Pit F103 is just one of a number of similar features, perhaps associated with a substantial structure. It should be noted, however, that the area to the immediate north of the pit is heavily wooded and the identification of archaeological features may prove difficult.

Pit F101 is a somewhat enigmatic feature and it is not clear if it was a kiln. Again, it is hoped that extending the trench to the west and south will help interpret it.

An analysis of the soil samples and charcoal retrieved from the excavated pits might also shed some light on the dates and functions of these pits.

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## LIST OF CONTEXTS

- F001** Topsoil covering the entire site
- F101** Pit/possible kiln towards the west end of the trench
- F102** Probable stone void towards the north edge of the trench
- F103** Large, circular pit towards the north edge of the trench
- F104** Stone void or root hole towards the north edge of the trench
- F105** Post-pit 10m north of Pit F103, at the north edge of the trench
- F106** Modern feature, probably caused by the mechanical excavator
- F107** Spread of burnt material 5m south of Pit F103, towards the north edge of the trench
- F108** Upper fill of Pit F103
- F109** Bottom fill of Pit F103
- F110** Main fill of Pit/kiln F101
- F111** Fill of Pit F105
- F112** Modern feature, probably caused by the mechanical excavator

## LIST OF FINDS AND SAMPLES

- F107** 1 bag of soil
- F108** Fragment of possible loom weight: stone, circular, 135mm diameter with central hole 25mm diameter.  
1 bag of soil
- F109** 1 bag of soil
- F110** 1 bag of soil
- F110** 2 bags of iron/iron slag fragments  
1 bag of charcoal  
2 bags of soil
- F111** 1 bag of soil

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## LIST OF SITE DRAWINGS

The drawings contained within the report are copies of those executed on site.

### Sheet 1

Location of watching brief trench at Road 13

Location of trench for contractor's compound, showing positions of principal features excavated

### Sheet 2

Pit F101: plan

Pit F101: north/south profile

Pit F101: east/west profile

Pit F103: plan

Pit F103: section

Pit F105: plan

Pit F105: section

All illustrations on Sheet 2 are drawn at a scale of 1:20

## PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

The photographs described below form part of the project archive and are included only in digital copies of this report.

The prefix TMC-EC12, for Taymouth Castle Equestrian Centre 2012, is used in the list of photographs

- 01 East half of Road 13 trench, viewed from the east at start of trench, at NN 78681 45864
- 02 East half of Road 13 trench, viewed from the west, at NN 78638 45838
- 03 West half of Road 13 trench, viewed from the east at NN 78638 45838
- 04 West half of Road 13 trench, viewed from the west at NN 78630 45797
- 05-06 Drain/sump in road section at NN 78536 45780, viewed from the north
- 07 Drain/sump in road section at NN 78536 45780, viewed from the east
- 08-09 Equestrian Centre: first sector stripped, viewed from the east
- 10-11 Equestrian Centre: first sector stripped, viewed from the west
- 12-13 Equestrian Centre: second sector stripped, viewed from the east
- 14-15 Equestrian Centre: second sector stripped, viewed from the west, showing burnt materials at the top of kiln F101 in the right foreground
- 16-17 Kiln F101 before excavation, viewed from the east
- 18 Kiln F101 before excavation, viewed from the south
- 19 Equestrian Centre: third sector stripped, viewed from the west
- 20 Equestrian Centre: third sector stripped, viewed from the east
- 21 Equestrian Centre: fourth sector stripped, viewed from the east
- 22 Equestrian Centre: fourth sector stripped, viewed from the west, with a tree-hole in the foreground
- 23 Equestrian Centre: fifth and final sector stripped, viewed from the east

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- 24 Equestrian Centre: fifth and final sector stripped, viewed from west
  - 25 Pit F103 prior to excavation, viewed from the south
  - 26 Pit F103 sectioned, viewed from the west
  - 27 Pit F103 fully excavated, viewed from the south
  - 28 Pit F103 fully excavated, viewed from the west
  - 29 Pit F103 fully excavated, viewed from the north
  - 30-32 Kiln F101 sectioned, viewed from the north
  - 33 Possible feature F104 sectioned, viewed from the east
  - 34 Pit F105 partially excavated, showing possible packing stones in situ, viewed from the east
  - 35 Pit F105 fully excavated, viewed from the east
  - 36 Possible feature F112, viewed from the east
  - 37 Possible feature F112, viewed from the north
  - 38-39 Burnt patch F107, viewed from the west
  - 40-41 Longitudinal section through kiln F101, viewed from the west
  - 42 Kiln F101 fully excavated, viewed from the west
  - 43-44 Kiln F101 fully excavated, viewed from the south