

# Scotia Archaeology

REPORT  
TO  
MR & MRS M DRURY

CONSTRUCTION OF  
NEW DOMESTIC RESIDENCE  
AT SLIGNEACH,  
ISLE OF IONA, ARGYLL

WATCHING BRIEF DURING  
EXCAVATION OF WALL TRENCHES  
JUNE 2017

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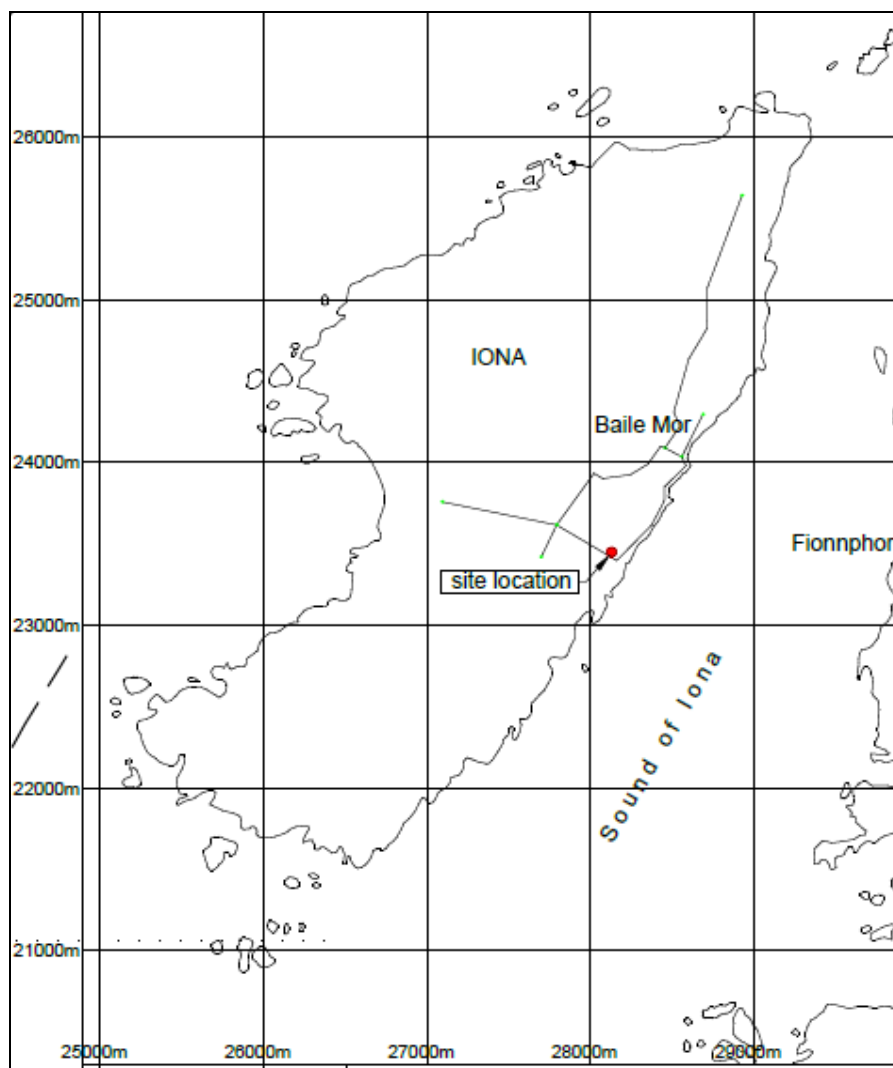
## INTRODUCTION

This document describes the results of an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of wall foundation trenches for a new domestic residence near Sligneach, Isle of Iona, Argyll. The first stage of work was carried out in March 2017 when topsoil was stripped under archaeological supervision over the house footprint and adjacent areas.

Argyll & Bute Council had granted consent to the project (Planning Application number 14/00253/PP) subject to several conditions. One of those conditions, based on advice from the council's archaeological advisors, the West of Scotland Archaeology Service (WoSAS), was that the removal of the topsoil and other materials that overlay the natural geology of the site should be monitored by an approved archaeological contractor.

The second stage was undertaken to investigate whether any evidence for human habitation was buried below the wind-blown sand exposed during the March 2017 operation.

On both occasions the archaeological work was undertaken by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology on behalf of Mr and Mrs M Drury of Caol-Ithe, Fionnphort, Mull.



*Map of Iona showing the location of the site*

## THE SITE

The site is located near the east shore of the island, on machair which characterises this stretch of coastline. It is situated some 1km south of Iona Abbey and a short distance from Sandbank Croft and Torran, two of several houses laid out along the road that runs roughly southwards from the abbey before turning to the north-east at Sligneach.

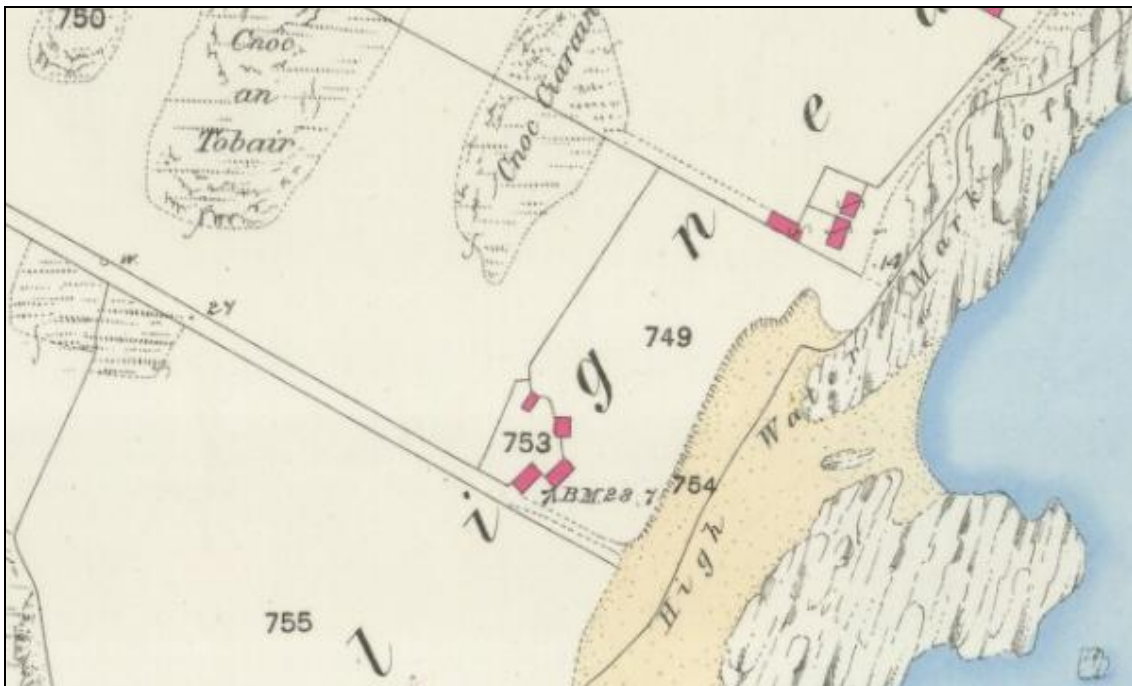
The predominant land use in this part of the island is sheep-farming, utilizing relatively good quality grazing on stretches of undulating ground punctuated by substantial rock outcrops such as the nearby Cnoc Ciarain and Cnoc an Tobair (see maps below, supplied by the client). The name 'Torran', meaning craggy hills, ascribed to a nearby house also attests to the rocky nature of this area.



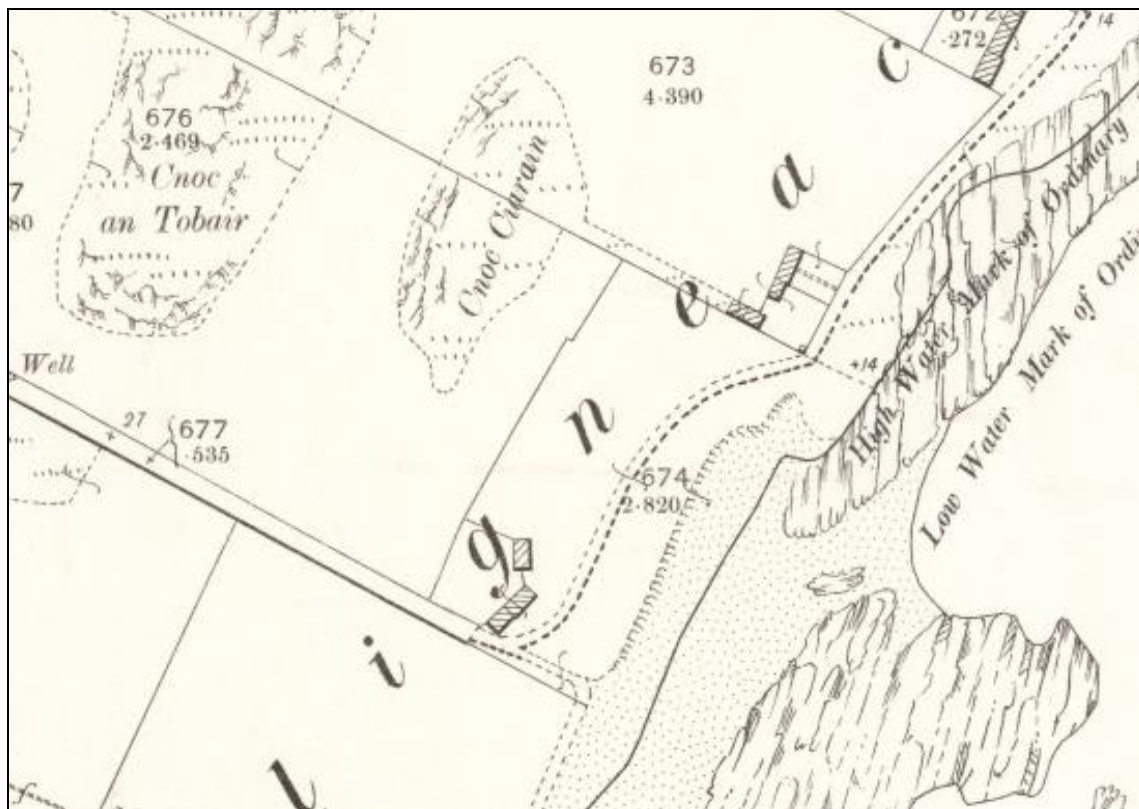
*Map showing the location of the development area*

There is little known evidence of early occupation in this part of Iona although, given the good potential for animal husbandry, it would not be surprising if such evidence yet awaits discovery.

However, there is clear evidence of 19th-century human occupation around Sligneach, as is demonstrated on the first and second editions of the Ordnance Survey (OS) 25-inch maps surveyed in 1875 and 1897, respectively (see below).



*Extract of first edition OS 25-inch map showing four structures at Torran*

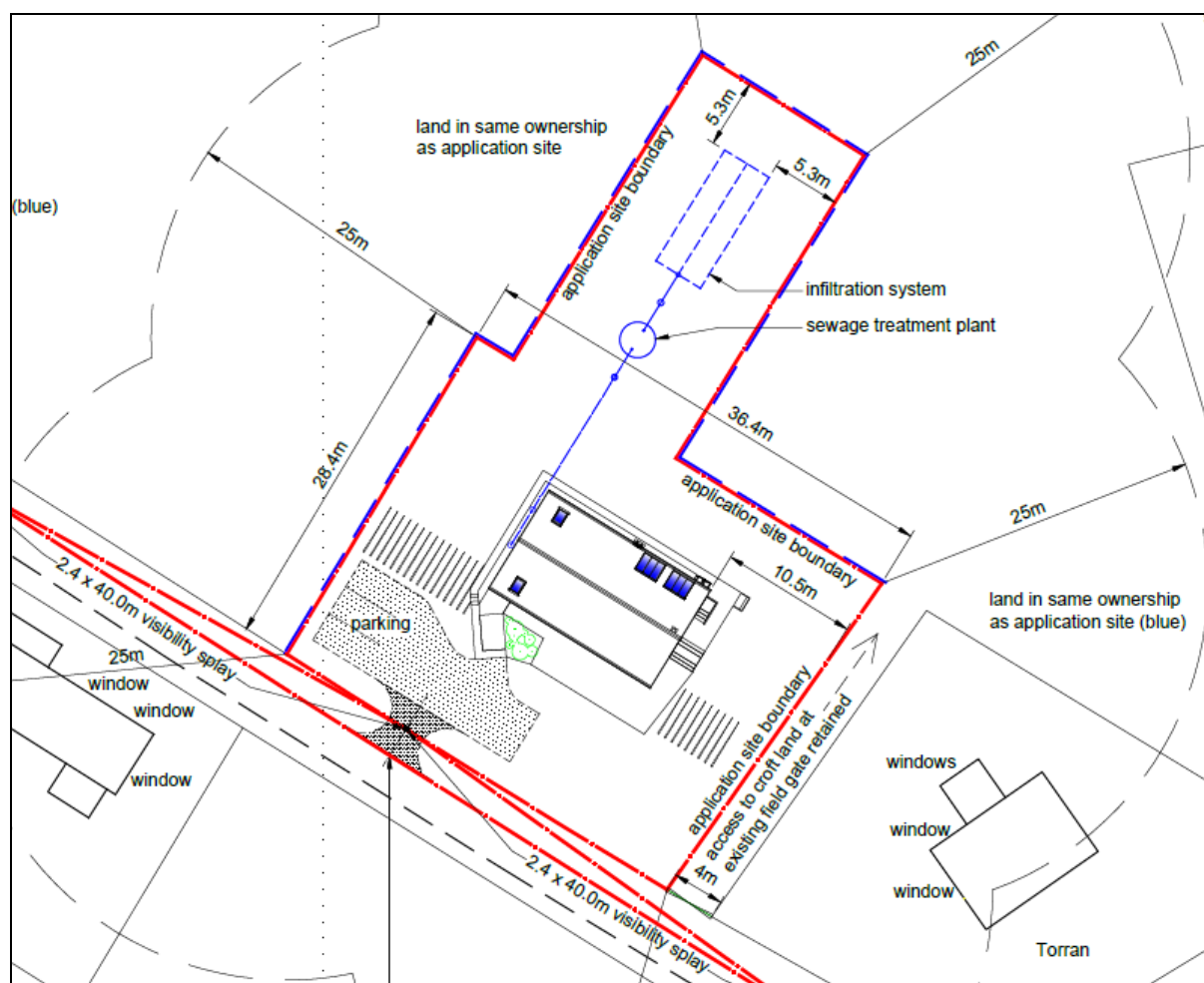


*Extract of second edition OS 25-inch map showing two structures at Torran*

Traces of buildings were identified around Torran and Sandbank during survey work undertaken by AOC (Scotland) Ltd in 1996 (DES 1996, 19). These features were almost certainly associated with the settlement shown on the early OS maps. In addition, a controlled topsoil strip in 2012 to the south of Tigh Shee and west of the present development area, uncovered what may have been a cut for an early boundary (DES 2012, 46).

A recent watching brief carried out by the writer for Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) during the refurbishment of the power line that runs across the development site uncovered nothing of archaeological interest, only natural beach sand which continued to a depth of 1.6m below present ground level (Lewis 2017a).

## TOPSOIL STRIPPING



***Plan of the plot (outlined in red) showing the house footprint, parking area and sewage outflow, septic tank and soakaway***

The areas stripped of topsoil on March 2017 consisted of:

the house footprint, centred on approximately NM 28127 23428 and measuring 16.3m SE/NW by 11.0m wide;

the west corner of the site which is to be given over to car parking, measuring some 16m by 12m;

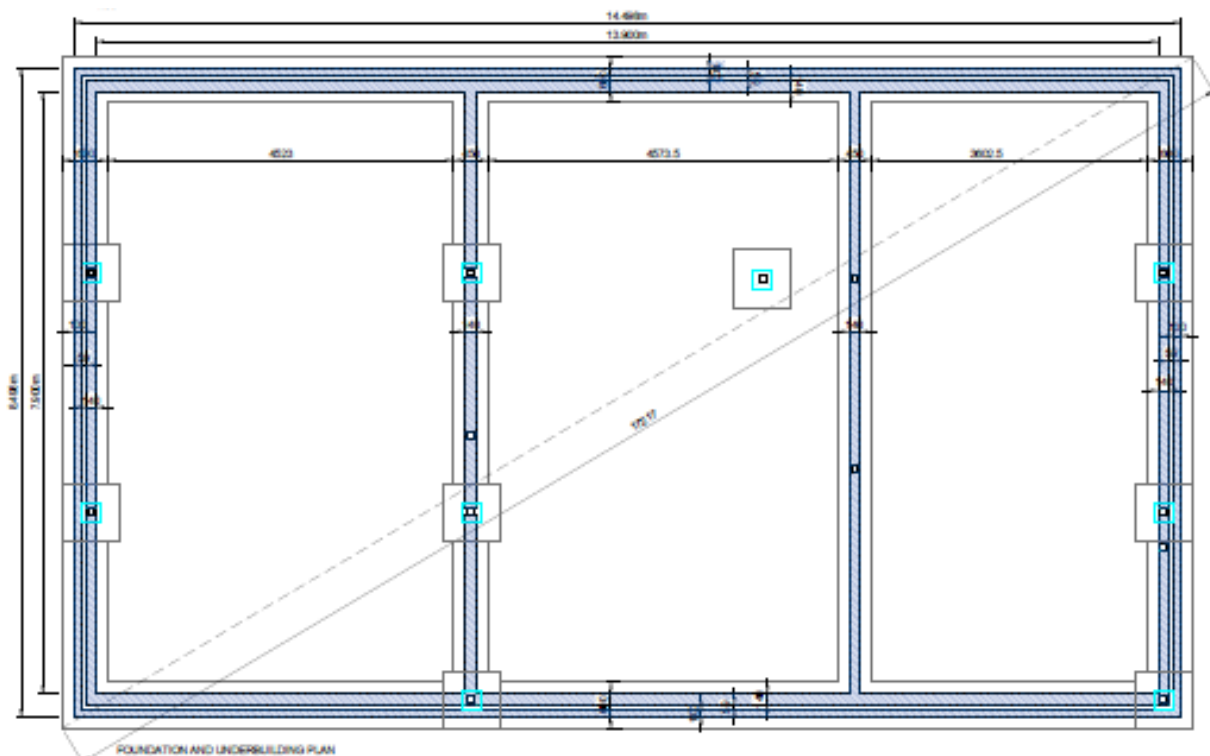
a trench to accommodate a new underground electricity cable, replacing the existing overhead power line; and

a trench, 14m long and 4.5m wide, running to the north-east from the house for the sewage outlet, septic tank and soakaway.

Nothing of archaeological significance was uncovered during that operation, the only material exposed below 0.3m of topsoil being beach sand which varied in colour from near-white to pale yellow. A full account of that phase of the project can be found in Lewis 2017b.

## THE WATCHING BRIEF

The watching brief was undertaken on 28 June 2017 in dry, sunny and predominantly warm weather.



*Plan of the house footprint showing the locations of wall trenches*

Trenching was carried out using a small mechanical excavator, the trenches being hand-cleaned by the archaeologist. They were excavated along the courses of the four external walls and two internal partitions and all measured 1m wide and 0.2-0.3m deep, cut through wind-blown sand containing occasional pebbles.

No structures, features or deposits of archaeological interest were uncovered in these trenches and the only artefact retrieved during the excavation was a single sherd of 19th-century, transfer-printed pottery, probably from a plate.





*View, from the south-west, of the site following the excavation of the wall trenches*

## CONCLUSIONS

Nothing of archaeological significance was uncovered during either phase of this project. However, map evidence shows that the area around Torran and Sandbank was settled during the second half of the 19th century although it is still unclear if this area was occupied before that date.

## REPORTS

Copies of this report will be deposited with Mr and Mrs Drury, the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS), WoSAS, the National Trust for Scotland and the online digital resource OASIS.

## REFERENCES

DES *Discovery & Excavation in Scotland*. Archaeology Scotland.

Lewis, J 2017a *Overhead 11kv power lines, Isle of Iona, Argyll: archaeological watching briefs, January 2017*. Unpublished report to Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks.

Lewis, J 2017b *Construction of new domestic residence at Sligneach, Isle of Iona, Argyll: archaeological monitoring during topsoil stripping*. Unpublished report to Mr & Mrs M Drury.