

***Site Evaluation
69-71 and 73 High Street
Fortrose, Highland***

Abstract

SUAT Ltd undertook a site evaluation in advance of proposed development at 69-71 and 73 High Street, Fortrose, Highland. Approximately 5% of the area was investigated by machine excavated trial trenches. Five trenches were excavated to the rear of the two properties and one small trench was located close to the High Street frontage. The trenches revealed a substantial depth of black garden/horticultural soil in the backlands containing residual modern/early modern pottery. A subsoil underlay the black soil, from which one sherd of medieval pottery was recovered; this overlay crude drainage slots cut into natural sands. Part of a robbed out wall feature and the remains of a path both probably 18th century were found to the rear of 69-71 High Street, while close to the High Street at no 73, an early modern cobbled surface was exposed.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 SUAT Ltd was commissioned by CWS Property to undertake an evaluation on the site at 69-71, 73 High Street, Fortrose in advance of proposed development. A planning condition had been placed on the application by the Highland Council archaeologist John Wood. A desk-based assessment was prepared by SUAT prior to the site evaluation (see below).

2.0 The Site (Illus 1)

- 2.1 The site is located on the eastern edge of the historic core of Fortrose, centred on OS grid reference NH 7275 5671. To the north of the site at NH 7270 5672 is the supposed site of Seaforth Castle, completed between 1497 and 1502. The site comprises two standing properties, a traditional building at 69-71 High Street with rear buildings and small yard, and a modern bungalow at 73 High Street with a substantial area of ground to the rear. Part of the northern boundary of the proposed development site is only 25 m to the south-east of the supposed castle site.
- 2.2 Proposals for development include conversion of 67-71 High Street into a shop but retaining the facade and the demolition of 73 High Street to make way for a large carpark extending into the backland.

3.0 Archaeological Methods

3.1 Desk-based Assessment

A desk-based assessment of the proposed development was carried out, which involved:

- Consulting the staff at Groam House museum.
- Consulting staff at the Highland Council Archives.
- A scan of the Highland Council SMR.
- A scan of the records maintained by the National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS), including a selection of available vertical aerial photographs.
- Inspection of the readily available documentary sources relating to the site.
- Inspection of the available cartographic material pertaining to the site.

3.2 *Trial Trenching (Illus 2)*

The trial trenching for the evaluation was undertaken during the period 24th and 25th April 2001. The trenches were excavated by a JCB mechanical digger using a smooth-edged ditching bucket. Six trenches (A-F) were opened over the site; one to the rear of 69-71 High Street, four at the rear of 73 High Street and one small trench close to the High Street on the frontage of number 73. The trenches were hand cleaned and photographically recorded. They were then stratigraphically recorded and relevant sections drawn. After the recording the trenches were backfilled. During the fieldwork the weather conditions remained fair.

4.0 **Results of Desk-based Assessment**

Groam House Museum

Staff at Groam House Museum were contacted with regard to this project, no further communication was received.

Highland Council Archives

The Highland Council Archives were contacted regarding this project. The Highland Council Archives have a very large selection of material pertaining to Fortrose, although it was felt by the archivist that most of the information of use to us would be available from the other sources that were checked.

In support of this, the results of the evaluation do not merit a search of these archives.

Highland Council SMR

A search of the Highland Council SMR was conducted, the information recovered corresponding with that retrieved from the National Monuments Record.

National Monuments Record of Scotland

The National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS) was checked to identify any known sites around or within the proposed development area. Two of the buildings to be demolished, numbers 69 and 71 High Street (NH75NW 203 and 204) are not listed.

A small trial trenching exercise was carried out c 100 m to the south-east of the proposed development (NH75NW 79), but nothing of any interest was identified.

The supposed site of Seaforth Castle (NH75NW 19) is located to the north-west of the proposed development opposite the Free Church of Scotland premises.

A range of vertical aerial photographs was inspected, but these did not show anything of archaeological interest, the expansion of Fortrose after WW2 however, was quite evident.

Cartographic Information

A study of the readily available early maps was made, including maps by: Ainslie 1789, Blaeu 1654, Dorret 1750, Roy 1746-59, Taylor and Skinner 1776, Thompson 1830. Roy's map shows Fortrose, but it is called Chanry, the road through it is marked, and some buildings are shown, but it is impossible to tell how these relate to the modern layout of the town. Taylor and Skinner show Fortrose fairly clearly, a crossroads is visible which may be the crossroads between Church Street and the High Street, but damage to the available map made it impossible to tell if a building existed on that corner. Thompson's map is similar and buildings are shown around the crossroads, although it is difficult to ascertain what roads are actually depicted. The rest of the maps are at too small a scale to discern any land use.

A study was also made of the early 25" to 1 mile Ordnance Survey maps. The First Edition depicts a roofed building surrounded by woodland within a rectilinear enclosure, which is the only structure depicted in the area to the north-east of the High Street/Church Street crossroads. The Edition of 1905 shows the previous enclosure divided into three separate plots. The building previously depicted is still shown and another building is shown in the most northerly of the three plots.

The original rectilinear plot is still preserved in the modern layout of Fortrose, which has extended to the north and east, and it appears as if the buildings depicted on the Edition of 1905 are still standing.

Bibliographic Information

The New Statistical Account of Scotland 1845, Fraser, D 1912 and Geddie 1912 all note that Seaforth Castle completed by John Fraser, bishop of Ross between 1497 and 1507 is said to have stood in the environs of the proposed development. They add that it is shown as a rectangular tower and that the location of Castle Street leading up to this area supports this siting.

The Ordnance Survey adds that the siting of the castle to the north of the proposed development is approximate and the evidence for this comes from an old print dated 1693 labelled “Seaforth Castle”.

4.1 Results of Trial Trenching (Illus 2)

For recording purposes, the north end of the site was taken as the far end of the site (backlands).

Trench **A** was located at the far end of the backland of No 73 High Street. It was aligned east to west and was 13 m in length and 1.70 m wide. Below the turf was a black horticultural soil approximately 0.45 m in depth which merged with a less dense more sandy subsoil with a maximum thickness of 0.40 m, from which one residual medieval pot sherd was recovered. Below the subsoil a band of bright light-brown windblown sand, averaging about 0.20 m in thickness was encountered. The windblown sand was mottled with darker sand, caused by worm and root action. Underlying the windblown sand was a natural deposit of mid-brown, clayey, sandy silt at least 0.40 m thick, containing a moderate amount of fragmented and smooth small to medium-sized stone.

A feature was located at the western end of the trench below the subsoil and cut into the windblown sand. It comprised a shallow channel or trench 1.20 m wide with a maximum depth of 0.15 m running north to south. It contained a fill of clean sand with small pebbles. This feature was interpreted as a rough field drain. At a distance of 5.80 m from the western end of the trench a similar field drain feature with a maximum depth of 0.28 m was observed.

Trench **B** was located 6 m to the south of trench **A** and ran parallel with it. It was 10.30 m in length. The stratigraphy of this trench was basically the same as that of trench **A**. The topsoil and subsoil had a combined depth of 0.60 m. As in trench **A** two rough field drains were observed, one between 1 m and 2 m from the trench west end and the other between 7 m and 8 m from the west end. These features were considered to be continuations of those found in trench **A**.

Trench **C** was 13 m in length, aligned north to south and ran south from the east end of trench **B**. The main stratigraphy was the same as trenches **A** and **B**.

At the north end of this trench a pit, 1.10 m wide and 1.10 m deep had been dug in modern times through the topsoil and the subsoil and into the natural deposits. The pit contained a fill of medium to large cobbles in a matrix of black (horticultural) soil. Cobbles were concentrated at the bottom of the pit. The function of the pit is uncertain, it may have served as a soakaway.

A continuation of the field drain feature found in the east end of trench **B** was picked up in this trench. It crossed the trench floor diagonally and entered the west facing section between 5 and 8 m from the trench north end. Measured on the trench floor it was 0.60 m wide and where it entered the section it was 2.40 m wide and 0.20 m deep.

Trench **D** was 14 m in length and ran southwards from the western end of trench **B**. It revealed the same basic stratigraphy as trenches **A-C**. A rough field drain similar to those found in the previous trenches was observed in the west facing section between 2.50 m and 3.50 m from the north end. The field drain fill was 0.12 m in depth.

Trench **E** (Illus 3) was located in the front garden of No 73 High Street between the house and the pavement. It was a small trench measuring 2.30 x 1.60 m. Below the turf was a made-up garden soil of black silty loam 0.35 m thick. Below the topsoil a cobble surface was found. The cobbles were beach stones and ranged in size from small to large, the surface formed was rough and slightly uneven. The cobbled surface was 0.15 m to 0.20 m thick. From the loose gravel between the cobbles, shell and early modern pipe stem fragments were retrieved.

Below the cobbled surface was a makeup layer 0.25 m thick comprising loose cobbles in a matrix of sandy gravel. From this deposit early modern finds of pottery, pipe stem fragments and butchered animal bone were recovered. Below the loose cobbles and sandy gravel, natural clean sand and silty clay sand was reached at 0.93 m below the site surface.

Trench **F** was located in the rear yard of 69-71 High Street, close to the eastern side of the property. It was 13 m in length and aligned NNW-SSE.

The yard surface comprised small stone chippings in gravel up to 0.24 m thick at the north, thinning to 0.05 m at the south end. Below the modern stone chippings was a black silty loam up to 0.50 m thick. The loam contained abundant small-large stone fragments, which appeared to be remains of a demolished building. Natural silty sand deposits were reached at 0.80 m below the site surface.

At 9.0 m from the north end of the trench, the remains of a stone built feature were found on the east side of the trench. The feature comprised one large rectangular *in-situ* stone in a foundation trench cut into the natural sandy silt. Around the main stone was a packing of small-medium stone fragments in a matrix of silty sand mottled with black silt. The remainder of the feature was seen to extend westward 0.85 m into the trench and did not reach the opposite side of the trench. Immediately to the north of this feature was a deposit of large stone mixed with black soil which appeared to be demolition remains.

To the south of the stone wall feature, below the black loam, were three layers of makeup. The top layer was 0.20 m thick and comprised pale yellow sand containing abundant sandstone fragments and small pebbles. The middle layer was 0.15 m thick and comprised a mid-brown silty sand with frequent small-medium pebbles. The lower layer was 0.08 m thick and comprised light brown sand with small pebbles. These layers appeared to be cut by the stone wall

foundation trench and probably represent a pathway around the frontage property as indicated on the OS first edition Ross-shire sheet XC 7, 1871, 1:25". The stone wall feature probably represents an outbuilding shown on the OS second edition of 1905.

4.2 Trial Trench Results Discussion

The topsoil contained pottery sherds from the 18th and 19th centuries. At least one modern feature, a possible soakaway, had been dug through the topsoil. The subsoil yielded one sherd of medieval pottery indicating a possible build-up of soil across the site over time.

The cobbled surface found on the frontage of 73 High Street in trench **E** was dated to the modern period by the presence of clay pipe stem fragments and modern pottery sherds that were found in the make up below the cobbles.

Trench **F**, to the rear of 69-71 High Street revealed a wall and garden path dating from the modern period that could be identified on the first and second editions of the ordnance survey map.

5.0 Conclusion of Evaluation

- 5.1 SUAT Ltd concludes that the archaeological deposits and features identified on the site are of limited interest in themselves and are mainly early modern/modern and not of sufficient archaeological worth to warrant further investigation. However the decision regarding any further work lies with the Highland Council Archaeology Unit.

6.0 Acknowledgements

- 6.1 SUAT Ltd would like to thank the Highland Council Archaeology Unit for their co-operation in compiling the desk-based assessment, Highland Council Archives for their help and CWS for funding this evaluation.

7.0 References

Bibliographic

NSA 1845 Vol 14 Ross & Cromarty.

Fraser, D 1912 Fortrose: a garden by the sea

Geddie 1912 Fortrose

Cartographic

Ainslie, J 1789 Scotland.

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Dorret 1750 A General Map of Scotland and Islands.

Ordnance Survey Ross-shire Sheet XC.7 25" to 1 mile, Surveyed 1871

Ordnance Survey Edition of 1905, Ross and Cromarty Sheet XC.7 25" to 1 mile, surveyed 1868, revised 1904

Roy 1746-59 Military Survey of Scotland, sheet 26/2.

Taylor and Skinner 1776 Survey and Maps of the Roads of Scotland.

Thompson 1830 Inverness Shire.

Photographic

CPE/Scot/UK 223 4113-4114 27/6/47

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OS/66/34 141-143 30/4/66

OS/81/90 055-056 23/8/81

62688 108-109 13/6/88

Appendix I

Lists

Context List

Context	Trench	Description
1	F	Deposit, gravel surface in yard
2	ABCD	Deposit, topsoil, upper
3	F	Deposit, sandstone frags in sand, part of former surface
4	F	Deposit, sand and small pebbles, part former surface
5	F	Deposit, sand and small pebbles, makeup for former surface
6	F	Deposit, silty clayey sand, natural
7	F	Deposit, sand with silty loam, wall packing
8	F	Deposit, black silty loam, with pockets of clean sand, backfilling after wall robbing
9	F	Structure, large stone block, wall fabric
10	F	Structure, small boulder, void, wall tumble
11	F	Deposit, clean sand, natural
12	F	Deposit, fragmented and rounded stone, in black sandy loam and grit, makeup or part of wall demolition
13	F	Deposit, silty sandy loam, packing or infill around 10
14	F	Deposit, as ctx 7
15		Contexts 15-20 not used
20	C	Deposit in modern pit
21	C	Deposit, cobbles at bottom of pit 20
22	CBDA	Deposit, black silty loam garden soil
23	CB	Deposit, bright sand, abundant small-medium cobbles, fill of drainage channel
24	CB	Deposit, bright sand with worm action, natural
25	CB	Deposit, silty clayey sand, worm action natural
26	B	Deposit, silty clay natural, slightly darker than ctx 25
27	D	Deposit, fill in drainage channel as 23
28	D	Deposit, windblown bright sand, natural
29	D	Deposit, mid brown clayey silt, natural
30	A	Deposit, less dark than 22 and below it, subsoil
31	A	Deposit, fill of drainage channel
32	A	Deposit, loose sand, natural windblown
33	A	Deposit, mid brown clayey sandy silt, natural
34	E	Deposit, makeup below turf and over cobbles
35	E	Structure, cobble surface
36	E	Deposit, fill gritty sand with loose cobbles, below ctx 35
37	E	Deposit, lower fill, below, 36
38	E	Deposit, natural sand and silty clay

Photographic List: Slide and Black and White

Shots	View	Description
1-2	NW	General of backgarden of no 73 High Street
3-4	NW	General of backgarden of no 69-71
5-6	N	General of site frontage
7-8	NE	Trench A
9-10	NE	Trench B
11-12	SE	Trench C
13-14	NE	Trench F
15-16	N	Trench D
17-18	NE	Trench E, cobbles
19-20	S	General of excavated trenches and spoil at 73 High St
21-22	SE	Trench E, section

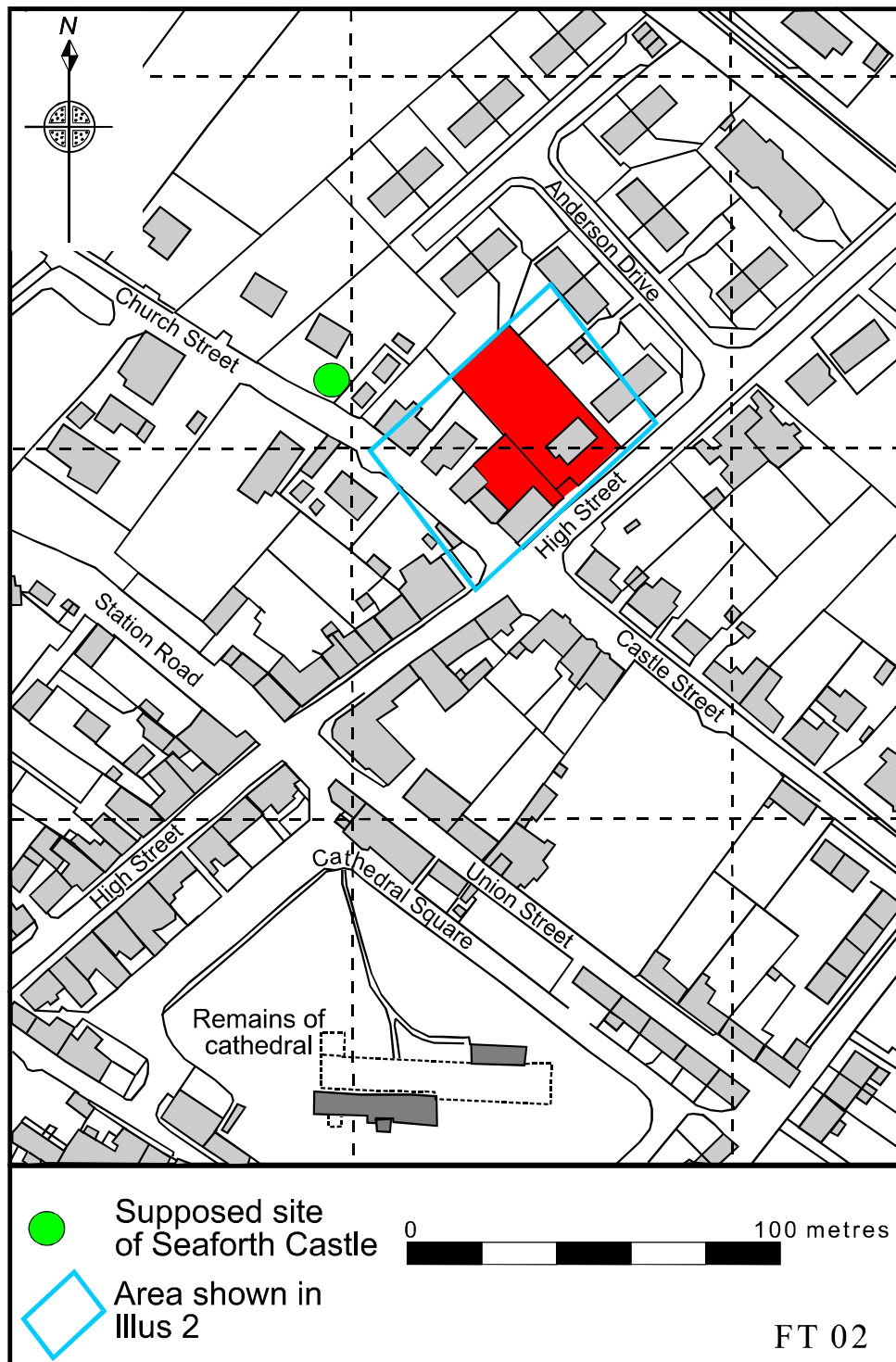
Finds List

Trench	Context	Material	Object type or Species	Details
A	30	Pottery	Sherd	Medieval redware sherd with patches of surface glaze
E	35	Pottery	Sherds	6 sherds; recent
E	35	Animal Bone	Cattle	1 deciduous molar tooth Atlas vertebra fragment Tibia shaft 2nd phalange
E	35	Animal Bone	Sheep/goat	Distal humerus Tibia shaft
E	35	Animal Bone	Domestic fowl	Tibio-tarsus (proximal)
E	35	Animal Bone	Indeterminate mammal	9 fragments
E	36	Pottery	Sherds	4 sherds; recent
E	36	Clay pipe	Fragment	1 stem
E	36	Glass	Window glass fragment	small fragment, pre-19th century
E	36	Mortar	Fragment	Fragment
E	36	Animal Bone	Sheep/goat	Proximal radius
E	36	Animal Bone	Large ungulate	3 rib shaft fragments 2 vertebral fragments
E	36	Animal Bone	Indeterminate mammal	7 fragments
E	36	Animal Bone	Domestic fowl	Coracoid fragment Humerus shaft
E	36	Mollusc	<i>Littorina</i> sp	1 wulk shell
E	36	Mollusc	<i>Mytilus</i> cf <i>edulis</i>	1 fragment
E	37	Clay pipe	Fragments	7 stems; 1 decorated
E	37	Pottery	Sherd	1 sherd, recent

E	37	Plaster	Fragment	1 fragment
E	37	Stone	Roof slate fragment	Fragment broken across nail or peg hole
E	37	Animal Bone	Cattle	Innominate fragment 2nd phalange
E	37	Animal Bone	Horse	Distal radius
E	37	Animal Bone	Large ungulate	2 rib shafts
E	37	Animal Bone	Indeterminate mammal	11 fragments
E	37	Animal Bone	Domestic fowl	Left ulna Right ulna
F	02	pottery	Sherds	2 sherds; 1 is recent china
F	02	Clay pipe	Fragment	1 stem
F	02	Mortar	Fragment	1 fragment
F	02	Animal Bone	Pig	2 fragments fibula
F	02	Mollusc	Ostrea edulis	3 fragments oyster shell
F	02	Mollusc	Mytilus <i>cf</i> edulis	3 small fragments mussel shell
F	04	Animal Bone	Cattle	Carpal (abraded)
F	04	Animal Bone	Indeterminate mammal	1 abraded fragment
F	10	Iron	Nail shaft	Shaft fragment

Illus 1

Site location



Illus 2 Trial trenches at 69-73 High Street, Fortrose

