

**Report on the
archaeological evaluation of
a proposed house site at
Meadowfield, Auldearn,
Dairnshire,
June 1998**

James Kenworthy



Cannich Archaeological Services

Cannich

- 1998 -

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Introduction

The work reported on was undertaken at the instance of the Highland Archaeology Service, and was commissioned by David Legg of Altype Plans on behalf of the applicant, Mr H Innes. It is one of two semi-adjacent sites for which application has been made seeking outline planning permission for the erection of single dwelling-houses. This site produced no archaeological remains, while the other has revealed a limited but complex archaeology, whose investigation remains to be completed at the time of writing. Hence it was decided to report on this site immediately, and to leave full details of the archaeological background to be reported on in conjunction with the second site when this has been completed. The specification prepared by the Highland Archaeology Service for this work is included as an appendix.

Background

Investigation of this site was required because it lies in an area where a number of prehistoric cist burials were found in the nineteenth century, and is adjacent to an Early Bronze Age bell cairn which lies to the SE. A Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age stone alignment runs SE from the cairn. It might be expected, then, that prehistoric material might be recovered from this site. Details of the surrounding sites will be given in the report on the adjacent site, which lies to the SE, within the policy belt of Kinstearry House.

The site

The site lies about 1km SE of the village of Auldearn, to the SW of the Auldearn – Moyness road, immediately NW of the policy belt of Kinstearry House. It is set on a rise of fluvio-glacial sands and gravels, in the E corner of an arable field, the rest of which is lower and clayey. It stands at about 37m above OD and is centred at NGR NH 9312 5493 (Figure 1, page 3). The site area is not currently ploughed, although it has been in the recent past; previously there had been tree cover over part of the area, some of the roots of which were buried on the site when the trees were removed by the present farmer. Ploughing of the site was discontinued since the soil was very thin, and was almost non-existent on the sides of the rise where coarse gravels immediately underlay the surface.

Methodology

No surface features were visible before the commencement of work. It was decided to investigate the site by cutting a series of trenches to the subsoil surface using a mechanical excavator, to check for the presence of archaeological features. Given that there was a good chance of finding these, approximately a 10% sample of the area was taken.

Results of the investigation

The weather was fine and dry throughout the work, and conditions were optimal for observation. A JCB 3CX with a 1.4m wide ditching bucket was used. The pattern of trenches excavated is shown in Figure 2 (page 4), prepared by Altype Plans. The topsoil was shown to be between 0.4 and 0.1m deep, and was a brown sandy loam with frequent cobbles derived from the natural. The natural was a coarse cobble gravel with bands of sand appearing in the side of the rise.

No archaeological features were observed, though in the central part of the area there was a small area of recent rubbish, and holes containing buried roots were encountered (see above). Two possible features proved negative:

- 1: An approximately circular patch of dark soil in the subsoil, 0.4m across (6 on Figure 2) proved on excavation merely to be a shallow (0.1m deep) irregularity in the gravel, devoid of finds.
- 2: A linear area of soil full of tree roots at the NE fence gave the appearance of possibly following a shallow gully; investigation showed that this was not the case.

Recommendations

There is no evidence that there is an archaeological presence on this site, despite the finds and sites nearby. This does not mean that there is nothing, but rules out the possibility of a major and complex site. It would be prudent, however, to maintain a watching brief on any future building operations on this site.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Dorothy Low of HAS for advice and information, the National Monuments Record of Scotland and the Scottish Record Office for allowing me to consult their archives, and to David Legg of Altype Plans for information, for the plan on which Figure 1 is based, and for preparing Figure 2. Mr H Innes, the farmer, provided much useful information about the site and the area.

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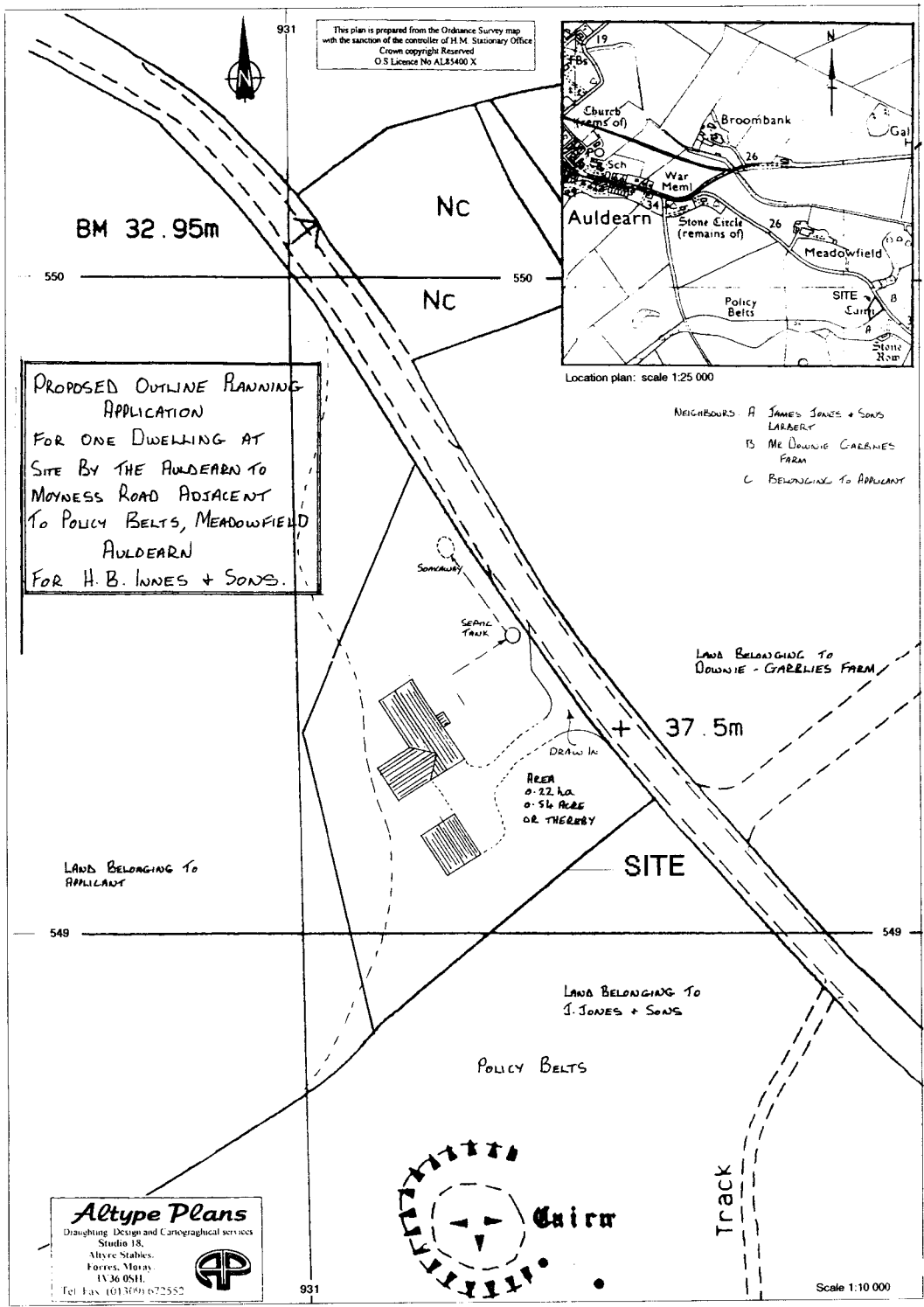
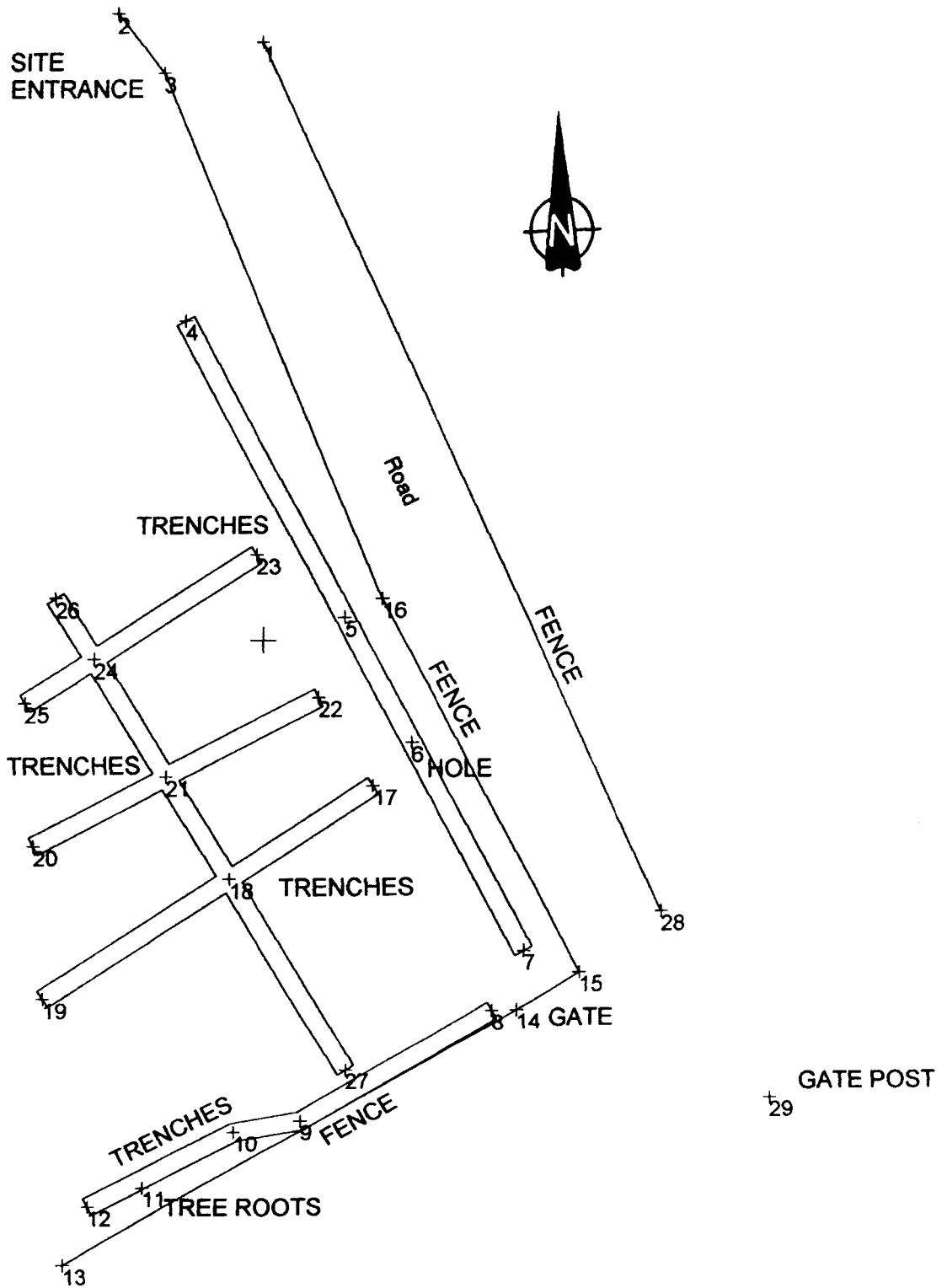


Figure 1: The site and its location



SCALE 1:500

Figure 2:
 PROPOSED HOUSE SITE AT
 MEADOWFIELD AULDEARN,
 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS.

HIGHLAND COUNCIL
Planning and Development Service
ARCHAEOLOGY SERVICE

Specification for archaeological work
prepared for Mr Legg

Sites by Auldearn to Moyness Road

Archaeological Evaluation

Background

This specification has been produced to enable the evaluation of proposed house sites which lie directly adjacent to a prehistoric cairn, and the site of a motte.

Terms of Reference

The specification has been produced for Mr Legg who will be responsible for the work, including all tendering and contractual arrangements. Estimates should be obtained from archaeological contractors on the basis of this specification. It is for a *minimum* standard of work; a higher standard may be offered and accepted.

Any reference to 'archaeologist' in this specification is to be taken to mean a qualified and experienced practitioner acceptable to the Highland Archaeologist. This is to ensure that work is carried out to professional standards. The project should be carried out by, or under the immediate direction of, a Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists or an archaeologist of equivalent standing.

If this is for a road or water or sewerage proposal the area to be covered is the entire wayleave except where otherwise indicated.

Objectives

1. To identify the nature and extent of any archaeological remains which may exist within the application area.
2. To propose arrangements for the safeguarding where possible and recording where necessary of any archaeological features or finds identified
3. To ensure that the needs for archaeological conservation and recording are met without causing any unnecessary delay or disturbance to the development project.

Method

1. A rapid, desk-based assessment of all records, documents and maps available in Inverness (HCArchaeology Service, HC Archive Unit) and in Edinburgh (Scottish Record Office, RCAHMS) relating to the application area will be carried out.
2. A survey will be made of the application area / area identified on the attached plan, using
 - * walk over the area indicated on the attached plan, indicating visible features of possible importance on a 1:2,500 Ordnance Survey base.
 - * EDM
3. Trial pits / trenches will be excavated at locations to be proposed on the plan attached, to provide a sample of the total site area

4. The report must propose appropriate arrangements for the safeguarding where possible, or recording where necessary, of any objects or features identified by this evaluation.

This specification includes arranging a presentation of the project results to the local community within a year of the completion of the fieldwork. Arrangements must be agreed with the Highland Archaeologist.

Monitoring

1. The Highland Archaeologist will normally monitor projects to ensure that specifications are met.
2. Monitoring will normally be by unannounced site visit. Alternative or additional monitoring arrangements may be made in individual cases.
3. Prior notice of fieldwork starting dates, with contact names and local addresses, telephone numbers and directions and other arrangements for access must be given to the Highland Archaeologist.
4. Any unexpectedly significant or complex discoveries, or any other unexpected occurrences or conditions which might affect the agreed project work or its timetable or cost must be notified immediately to the client and the Highland Archaeologist so that revised arrangements can be made. Reasons given later for non-completion to timetable or specification will not normally be accepted if immediate notification has not taken place.

Reporting

1. Project report

At least FOUR copies of the project report must be produced.

- * One copy for Mr Legg, Altyre Plans, Studio 18, Altyre Stables, Altyre, By Forress, IV36 0SH
- * Two copies for the Highland Sites and Monuments Record, Old School, High Street, Clachnaharry, Inverness IV3 6RB. where it will be available for immediate consultation by the public.
- * One copy to be deposited in the National Monuments Record for Scotland, John Sinclair House, 16 Bernard Terrace, Edinburgh EH8 9NX.

The report must be submitted to the Highland Archaeologist within 2 weeks of the completion of the field work.

The report must include, as a minimum,

1. Location plan showing the project area and archaeological sites and features affected
2. Circumstances and objectives of this work, including a copy of this specification
3. Weather and other conditions affecting fieldwork
4. Plans, drawings and photographs of archaeological features noted
5. A full index to any records or other material generated by the project including its location
6. Details of any measures proposed to mitigate the impact of the application on the archaeological resource
7. A brief analysis of the project results drawing in comparative data as appropriate.

8. General comments and proposals for future archaeological projects arising from the carrying out of this project
9. A catalogued set of colour slides detailing the progress of the project.

The completed report will be available for immediate public consultation for research purposes at the Highland Sites and Monuments Record.

2. Treasure Trove

The Project Director must liaise with the Assistant Curator (Archaeology) at Inverness Museum and Art Gallery prior to the start of fieldwork, regarding possible emergency conservation needs and future storage arrangements. Provision must also be made for a cataloguing system for artefactual material which will be compatible with the needs of the institution receiving these finds. Any report to the Queen's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer must be copied to the Highland Archaeologist.

Any finds, where appropriate, should also be reported to the Receiver of Wreck.

3. Discovery and Excavation in Scotland

A brief summary of the results must be sent to the Council For Scottish Archaeology for inclusion in Discovery and Excavation in Scotland. The archaeologist is responsible for any charge made.

General

1. The archaeologist appointed must be of a professional standing acceptable to the Highland Archaeologist and must carry out the work according to the Code of Conduct, standards and guidelines of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.
2. The archaeologist is responsible for taking all necessary measures to conform with the Health and Safety at Work Acts and be covered by all necessary insurances.
3. The archaeologist must agree a timetable for the work with the client and the Highland Archaeologist
4. The archaeologist appointed will not comment to the press or other media without prior approval from the Highland Archaeologist
5. Proper provision must be made for prevailing weather conditions in northern Scotland

Dorothy M Low
8.4.98
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