

264/CA1

OCCUMSTER HOUSE PLOT
LYBSTER
CAITHNESS
Archaeological Watching Brief



House plot as excavated with Occumster Broch behind

Wordsworth

Archaeological

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Introduction

The author was asked to carry out a watching brief on groundworks for a house plot near Occumster Broch, Caithness at ND 269 356. This was in accordance with specifications laid down by Highland Council Archaeology Unit application no. CA/99/322.

Archaeological Background

Brochs, such as the one 80 metres to the North of the site at ND 2693 3565, are one of the most distinctive and important archaeological features of Northern Scotland. The origin and purpose for which these towers were built is still hotly debated by archaeologists. Many of them, including Occumster, have been Scheduled as Sites of National Importance.

Originally constructed as free-standing towers, several broch sites such as Gurness and the more recently excavated examples at Howe and Upper Scalloway, have been found to have developed into complex villages. Remains of these later medieval settlements extend many metres from the broch tower.

Though there is evidence for excavation at Occumster between 1967 and 1982, no record is known of what was found here. It is clear that the area surrounding this broch remains of high potential for the preservation of archaeological remains.

Survey Method

See enclosed drawing for location of site, and a detail view of the house plot.

The watching brief was carried out on February 20th 2000. The weather was extremely cold and slightly overcast, but dry.

The ground at this site was waterlogged due to a recently burst water pipe, but the house plot, being slightly elevated, was not too badly affected.

A JCB back acting machine with a straight edged ditching bucket was used to strip the topsoil and this was observed at all times.

Observations

Topsoil was stripped to a depth of 0.2m to reveal a yellowish gritty subsoil interspersed with large areas of bedrock, as can be seen on the accompanying photographs. In fact the bedrock composed about 75% of the exposed subsoil, and hindered the machining to some extent. The bedding plane for this bedrock ran in a N/S direction as is sketched on plan.

Results

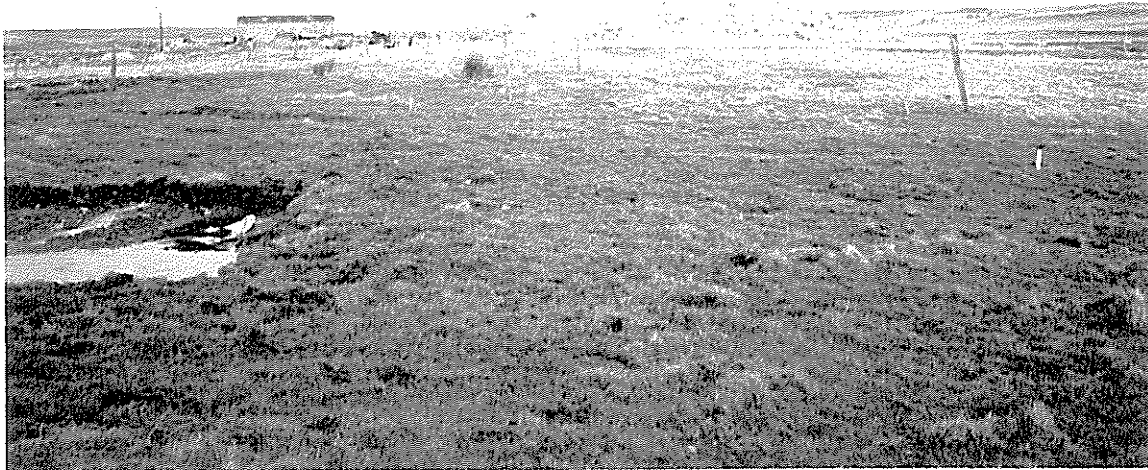
Despite its proximity at c80m from Occumster broch, no evidence of archaeological features was noted on this site. The shallowness of the topsoil over extensive bedrock outcrops reduced the likelihood of any archaeological remains surviving in this area.

Comments

The building of this small house at Occumster did not disturb any archaeological activity associated with Occumster broch. However as archaeological features can extend considerable distances from broch towers, it was clearly important to establish the presence or absence of such remains here, as any such features are of considerable archaeological importance.

I am grateful for the co-operation of the clients, Mr & Mrs Sutherland, both on site and for supplying the location plan reproduced here. I was kept informed in good time and was given every opportunity to inspect the site as necessary.

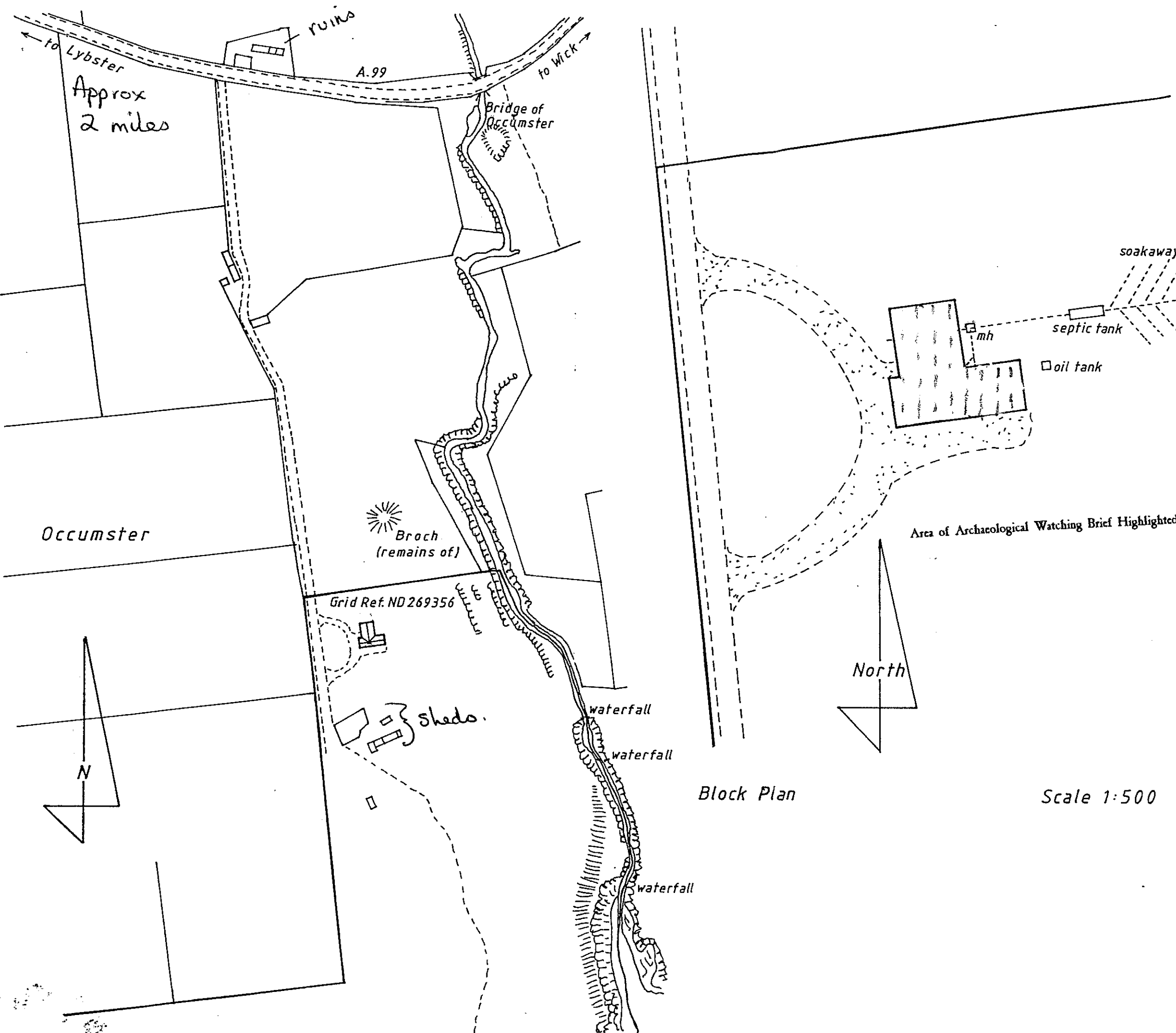
Jill Kendrick 3rd March 2000



Pegs mark location of house plot prior to excavation. Looking North to Occumster Broch.



Bedrock as exposed during removal of the topsoil.



Location Plan

Scale 1:2500

Block Plan

Scale 1:500

Proposed Dwellinghouse

at

**Occumster, Lybster,
Caithness**

for

Mr. & Mrs. S. Sutherland