

## Introduction

As part of the conditions for granting planning consent for the redevelopment of this site for housing, archaeological trial trenching was required to establish the presence/absence of archaeological deposits in this area. The author was appointed to carry out this work and this report is a description of the results of this work.

## Archaeological and Historical Background

The site lies on a glacial terrace formed by meltwater at the end of the last glaciation. A number of prehistoric monuments have been found in the vicinity, including at least 3 burial cists at Culduthel, stone circles at Druidtemple and Culduthel, a palisaded enclosure now protected within the modern Balloan housing scheme and a pit circle to the south west of the present funeral parlour. This latter monument is a Scheduled Ancient Monument of National importance. All these monuments demonstrate a rich and extensive settlement throughout the prehistoric period.

This settlement clearly continued into the the medieval and modern periods with *Castle Lethers* and *Ballone* being both mentioned in surviving late medieval documents. The settlement pattern was probably little changed until after the agricultural improvements of the later 18th century. Surviving military surveys, particularly an anonymous drawing dated to 1725 and now held in the National Library of Scotland, show *Ballowen* as a township of at least 6 houses sited on the north west shore of a substantial lochan. This lochan has now vanished but originally extended as far east as the present Allt Skiach burn

Little is known of the settlement at Balloan, though a more determined search of the archives might reveal additional information. By the time of the 1st Ordnance Survey of 1857 the farm strading was largely as shown until its recent demolition.

A possible pit alignment was excavated by the writer and Jill Harden in 1990 in the area of the Morrison's housing development immediately to the south of the present site and revealed the remains of an earlier field system but no pit alignment. The remains of an old road and a possible *ha-ha* were found, as well as thick silts interpreted as filling the site of the former lochan. Further work in 1990 carried out by the writer and Chris Russell-White on behalf of the Scottish Office and Morrison's Homes established that there had been a major prehistoric settlement 200m east of the present development. In 1994 archaeological trial trenching to the west of Slackbuie Avenue revealed a series of silts connected with the former lochan site but no trace of other settlement remains.

## Objectives

The specification for this work, drawn up by Dorothy Low of Highland Council Archaeology Service, is appended to this report and the objectives are listed there, the principle one being:-

- '1. *To establish the presence (or absence), depth, extent, quality and importance of any archaeological remains.'*

## Method

To achieve the objectives specified by HC Archaeology Service 5 machine trenches were cut across the site as shown on Fig 1. A JCB back-actor excavator was used and operated by Mr Jackson, owner with his father of this site. Unfortunately despite the archaeologist specifying that a smooth bladed ditching bucket be used, a toothed bucket was employed. While this required more vigilance in supervising the machine, it is not thought that there was a significant loss of information.

The purpose of the machine-cut trenches was to search for archaeological features cut into the subsoil and thus preserved below the ploughsoil. The area exposed by machine was then manually cleaned by the writer to check for surviving remains. Any features recovered were recorded and photographed.

The trenches were sited to run approximately north/south and were not extended south beyond the line of the former lochan.

The area to the west of Trench 4 was opened up subsequent to the main excavation to examine the surviving remains in more detail.

The work was carried out in dry mostly sunny conditions.

## Results

The topsoil on this site had been partially stripped during the housing development to the south some 2 years ago. Topsoil did survive in all the trenches excavated and averaged 0.3m in thickness, though in some places, particularly the south end of Trench 4 it was no more than 50mm thick. The disturbed nature of this overburden suggested that much of it was derived from spreading of material after the topsoil had been stripped off.

A distinct fall in ground level was noted at the south end of the site and was confirmed by the greater depth of topsoil found in the Trenches 1, 2, 3 and 5. The position of this break of slope is marked on Fig . The modern fills in these trenches especially noticeable in Trenches 1 & 5 suggested that the present scarped edge is the result of modern machining.

*Trench 1*

Feature 1/1

A 0.2m diameter patch of dark brown silty sand & c40% medium gravel was markedly different to the surrounding yellow/orange gravel subsoil. It lay 9m from the S end of the trench.

However the dark colouration was mineral rather than charcoal-rich and could be the result of podsolisation around an old root hole, rather than being a man-made feature.

Feature 1/2

A compacted brown loam patch 0.6m in diameter rich in slate chips, coal, 19th century porcelain pottery & hand blown bottle glass was markedly different to the surrounding area. It lay 7m from the S end of the trench.

As the deposit was less than 40mm thick and set into an area of sandy silt in contrast to the more usual gravel subsoil, it was not considered significant.

*Trench 2*

No features were noted in this trench

*Trench 3*

Feature 3/1 4m from the south end of the trench a line of squarish stone blocks of sandstone and whinstone, averaging 0.2m in diameter. There were traces of white mortar within the loamy silt around the stones.

A loamy strip 1m wide ran parallel to this wall marking an old path or ditch.

*Trench 4*

Feature 4/1 The wall observed in Trench 3 was also found here and more fully exposed to reveal a wall 0.4m wide with the facing stones on the south side and smaller cobble type stones on the inside. Similar white mortar was observed as with 3/1

Feature 4/2 A patch of compacted pale cream/green clay 0.9m long by 0.4m max width lay N of the wall on the W side. It lay directly on the gravel subsoil and was no more than 20mm thick. Partially truncated by the present machining, it probably linked up with 4/3

Feature 4/3 An area of fire-reddened clay 0.2m wide and up to 40mm thick extends around a setting of stones c0.65m in diameter that extends E into the unexcavated area. Though clearly affected by intense burning it was unclear whether this was a hearth or a stone setting (such as a post support) that had been badly affected by fire.

Feature 4/4 Patches of compacted dark loamy silt were found to the N, especially in areas of sandy subsoil (cf Feature 1/2). These may have been extensions of the same floor as 4/2. A piece of red clay brick was found where the Feature is numbered on Fig 2 (i).

**Feature 4/5** Another patch of pale cream/green clay 1.1m long by 0.5m wide was found when the trench was extended westwards. It was separated by a ridge of subsoil gravel from 4/2. The gravel ridge suggested that the clay floor only survived in patches and was not an extensive deposit. Further west there was no trace of clay and the topsoil was in places only 50mm thick, suggesting that if there had been deposits then they had been previously removed.

#### *Trench 5*

No significant features were noted here.

### **Conclusions**

No prehistoric or medieval features or finds were recovered. The map of 1725 is difficult to locate in relation to the present topography but it probably places the 18th century farm town of *Ballowen* to the west of the 19th/20th century farm. The surviving remains observed, particularly in Trench 4 are therefore likely to date to the late 18th century or later. The survival of a fragmentary clay floor is a tantalising glimpse of an earlier building tradition sealed by the more recent mortar wall shown running diagonally across Trenches 3 and 4. This wall is clearly the same as that shown on the 19th century and later OS maps as forming the edge of the farm steading. It is not clear if the clay represents the remains of an earlier building sealed by part of the later steading or is merely a clay floor within one of the buildings of the steading. The brick fragment found Feature 4/4 makes the latter explanation more likely. The shallowness and truncation of this deposit make any further interpretation conjecture.

To the south the approximate position of the loch can be established though its true edge has been disturbed by later developments and there appears to be no archaeological value in the deposits contained within the former loch. Often such sites are seen as repositories of important environmental information but the freely draining gravel subsoil and disturbed nature of the fills means that this situation does not arise here.

### **Recommendations**

1. Preservation of the surviving remains is not recommended as the poor preservation and late date of the existing deposits makes them of low archaeological value.
2. Full excavation of this deposit is also not recommended as it is unlikely to produce more conclusive results.

  
*Jonathan Wordsworth MIFA, MA, FSA Scot*  
12th June 1996

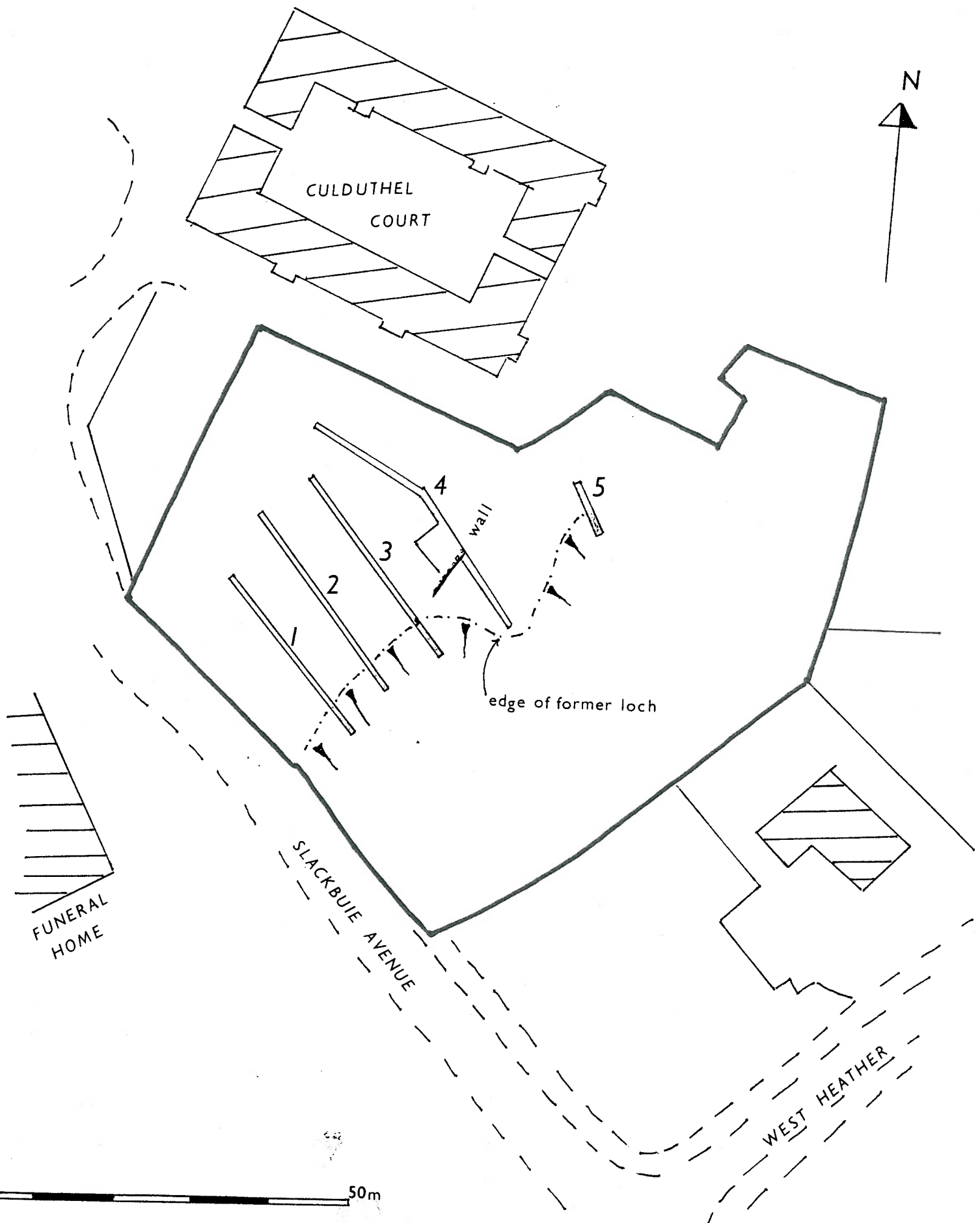
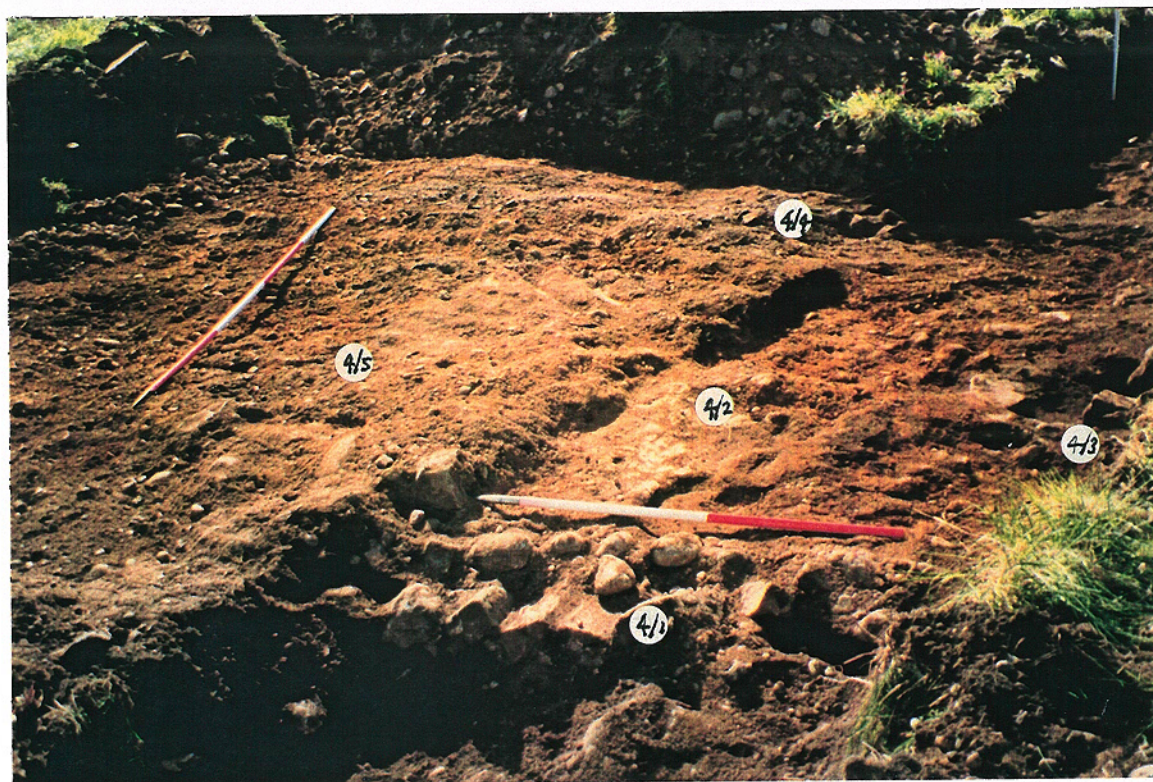


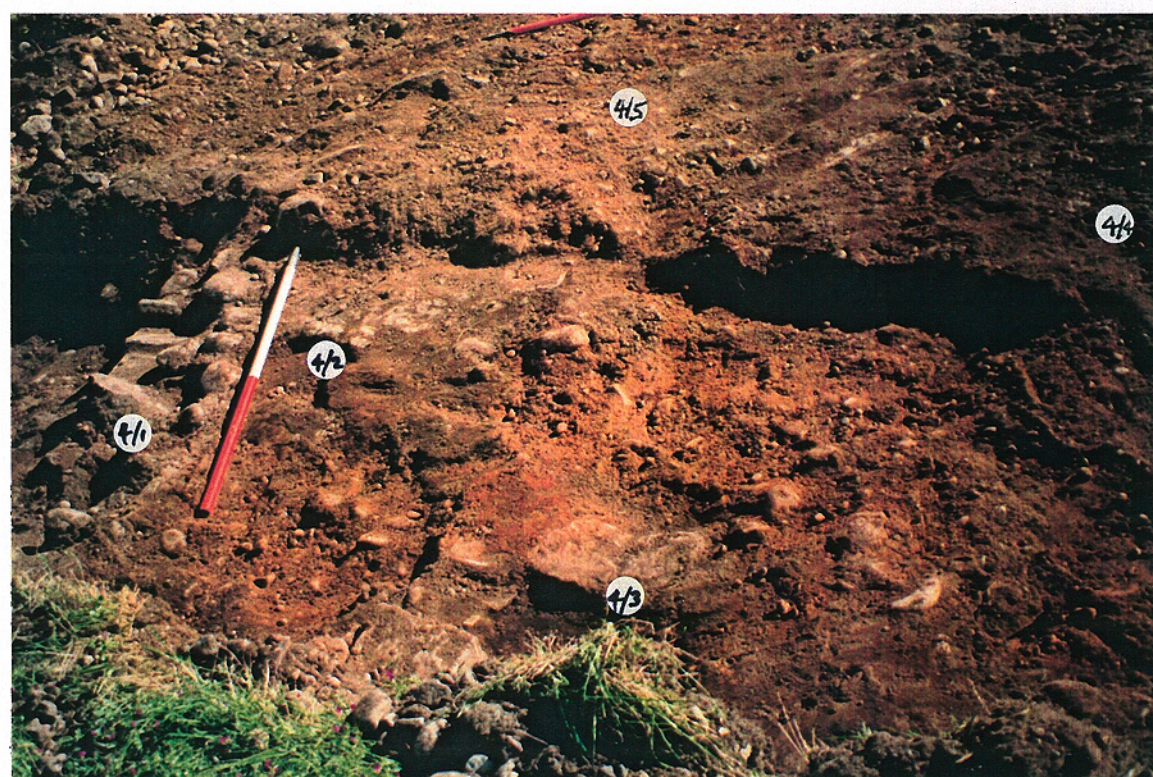
Fig 1

Location of trial trenches and proposed development





**Fig 2(i) Trench 4 Wall 4/1 and Clay floor 4/2 Looking North West**



**Fig 2(ii) Trench 4 Wall 4/1 and Clay floor 4/2 Looking South West**



**HIGHLAND COUNCIL**  
**ARCHAEOLOGY SERVICE**

**SPECIFICATION FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL TRENCHING**

**SLACKBUIE AVENUE, INVERNESS**

*Terms of Reference*

*This specification is valid until the 31st December 1996, after which time if no work has been carried out, a revised specification may be necessary. It is based on plans supplied by David S. Morris & Associates.*

*Objectives*

- 1. To establish the presence (or absence), depth, extent, quality and importance of any archaeological remains.*
- 2. To ensure that in the event of archaeological features being discovered, this is promptly drawn to the notice of the Highland Archaeologist, Architect, and Contractors, and that suitable arrangements are made to allow for the protection and preservation in situ, or preservation by record (excavation and analysis) of any remains identified.*
- 3. To ensure that the requirements for archaeological work are met without causing any unnecessary delay or disturbance to the construction project.*

### Scope

*The archaeologist appointed shall excavate test trenches in the areas proposed for development. These trenches shall be large enough to allow identification and assessment of any surviving archaeological features. A field record shall be made, and will take the form of measured plans and section drawings at a reasonable scale, along with photographs of any archaeological features noted together with a field notebook. This notebook must include details of all field observations, who was responsible for them, and weather/other conditions which may affect the quality of the results. Any features must be located on a plan at an appropriate scale. Photographs of individual features must be taken from at least three angles, and include a metric scale.*

*This specification is for a trial trenching assessment only. Should archaeological remains be located, the archaeologist appointed must propose appropriate arrangements for the protection and preservation in - situ of archaeological features wherever possible. If this is not feasible, arrangements shall be proposed for the preservation by record (excavation and analysis) of any features. These proposals will form the basis of a further agreed specification.*



### Reporting

*Any unexpectedly significant or complex discoveries must be reported immediately to the Highland Archaeologist, and David S. Morris & Associates.*

*The archaeologist appointed must produce a report within two weeks of the completion of fieldwork setting out:*

- 1. Location plan, showing the project area and archaeological sites and/or features affected.*
- 2. Circumstances and objectives of the work.*
- 3. Weather and other conditions affecting fieldwork.*
- 4. Plans, drawings and photographs of archaeological features noted during the survey.*
- 5. Details of measures to be taken to mitigate the impact of the works on the archaeological resource.*
- 6. A brief analysis of the results, drawing in comparative data as appropriate.*
- 7. A copy of this specification.*

*At least 4 copies of the report must be produced:*

- 1. One copy to be supplied to David S. Morris & Associates, 61 Wellington Street, Aberdeen, AB2 1BX.*
- 2. Two copies to be deposited in the Highland Sites and Monuments Record, maintained by the Highland Council Archaeology Service, The Old School, High Street, Clachnaharry, Inverness IV3 6RB, where they will be available for public consultation.*
- 3. One copy to be sent to the National Monuments Record for Scotland, (RCAHMS), John Sinclair House, 16 Bernard Terrace, Edinburgh.*

*In addition, a brief summary of the results must also be sent to the Council for Scottish Archaeology for publication in Discovery and Excavation in Scotland 1996. A small charge may be made, for which the archaeologist appointed will be responsible.*

#### *General.*

*The archaeologist appointed must be a Member or Associate Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (or of equivalent standing) and must carry out the work according to the Institute's Code of Conduct, and relevant guidelines and standards.*

*The archaeologist appointed must take all necessary measures to conform with the Health and Safety at Work Acts, and be covered by all necessary insurances.*

*The archaeologist appointed must agree a timetable for the work with the Highland Archaeologist, and David S. Morris & Associates. Any proposed changes to the timetable must be notified to, and*

*agreed with the Highland Archaeologist before implementation.*

*David S. Morris & Associates will afford all assistance and access to the archaeologist appointed in carrying out this work.*

*The Highland Archaeology Service will monitor the work in progress to ensure that timetables and professional standards are being adhered to.*

*The copyright of the report lies with the originator, unless formally transferred in writing. However, the completed report will be available for immediate public consultation at the Highland Council's Archaeology Service office.*

*The archaeologist appointed will agree not to comment to the press and media without prior approval from the Highland Archaeologist.*

*Proper provision must be made for prevailing weather conditions in northern Scotland.*

*Failure to meet any part of this specification may result in non payment for the work undertaken.*

*Dorothy M Low, Archaeologist*

*5th June 1996.*



**David S. Morris & Associates.**

61 Wellington Street,  
Aberdeen AB2 1BX

**Fax Cover Sheet**

**DATE:** May 24, 1996.

**TIME:** 17.00

**TO:** Ms Dorothy Low,  
Archaeologist.

**PHONE:**  
**FAX:** 01463 711188

**FROM:** Dave Morris/John Gerrie

**PHONE:** 01224 585130  
**FAX:** 01224 585130

**RE:** Site at Slackbuie Avenue, Inverness

**CC:**

**Number of pages including cover sheet: 1**

**Message**

**URGENT, URGENT, URGENT**

Dear Ms-Low,

Following our telephone conversation with you today we now enclose Ordnance Survey Sheet establishing the site in question.

We have Mr Jackson's approval for you to put the investigation in motion.

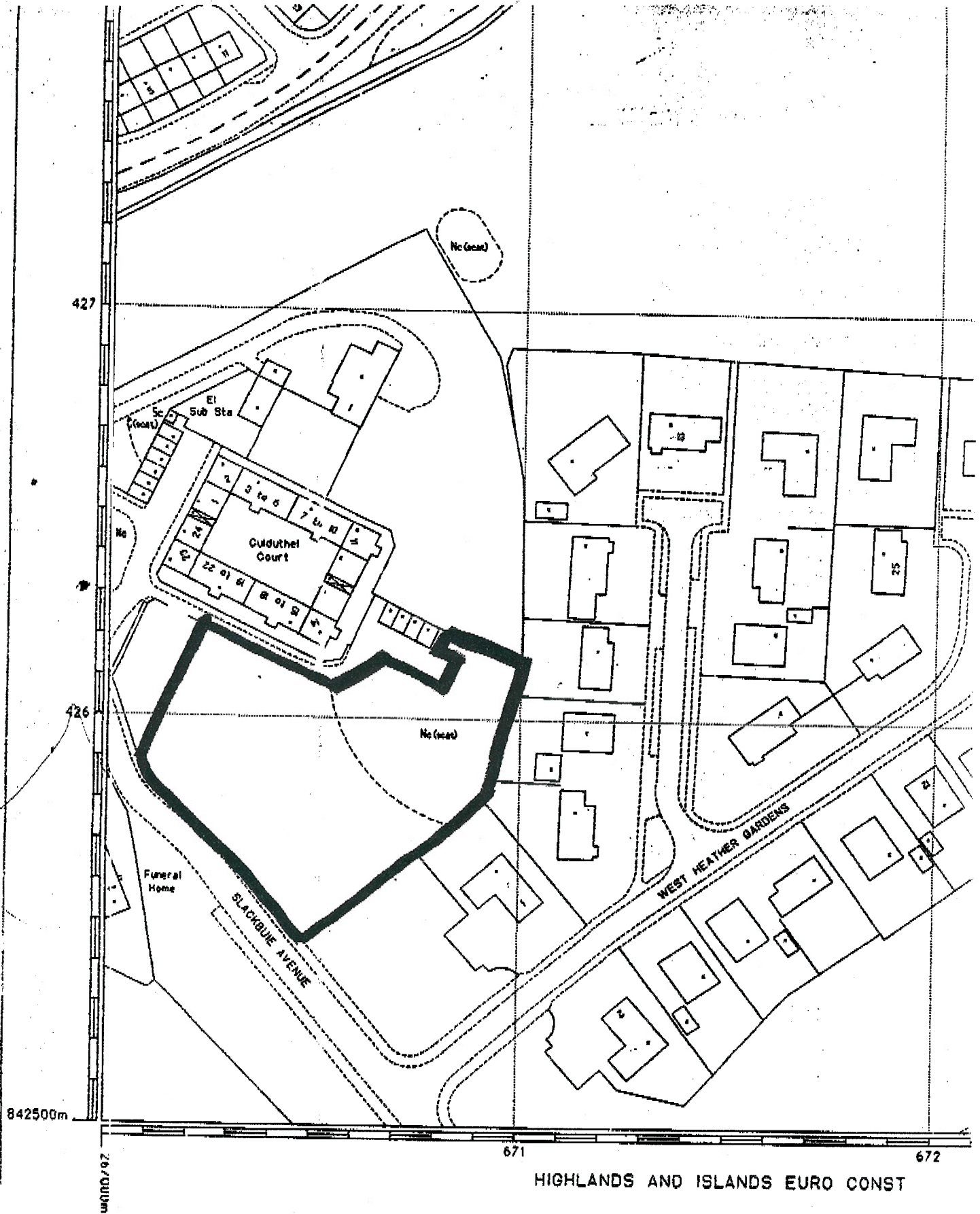
Mr Jackson has a digger which you may call upon for use.

Please contact the writer to arrange access.

Regards,

John Gerrie.





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 incorporating Survey available at:- DEC 1993  
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