

Proposed New House and Vehicle Access
Kildonan
Isle of Skye

NG 3556 5413

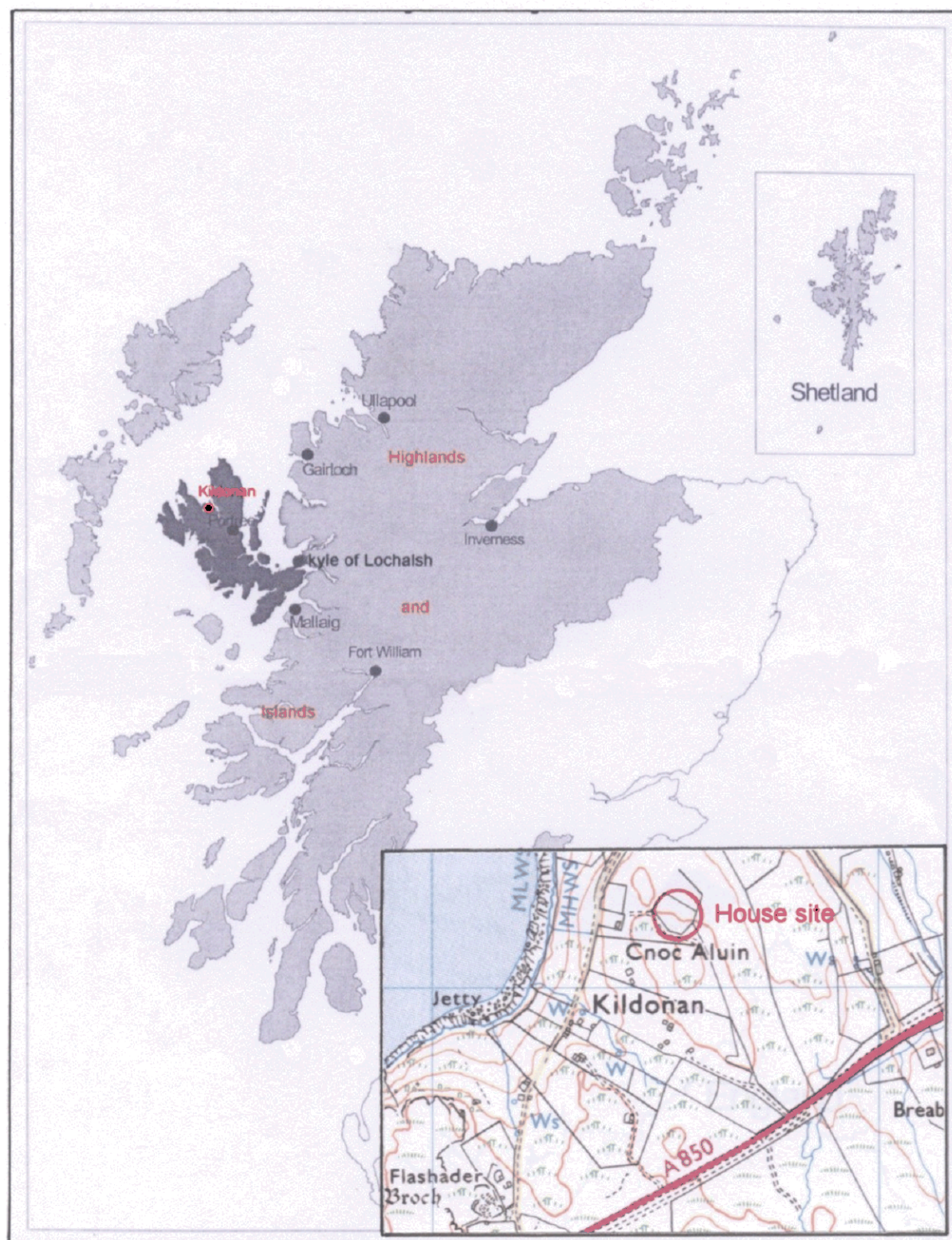
Archaeological Watching Brief
9th February 2005



Illus 1. Kildonan: The ruin removed during the excavation of the house site.

For

Mr & Mrs T. Naesmith



illus. 2. Location : Kildonan and area of new development. (Ringed red)

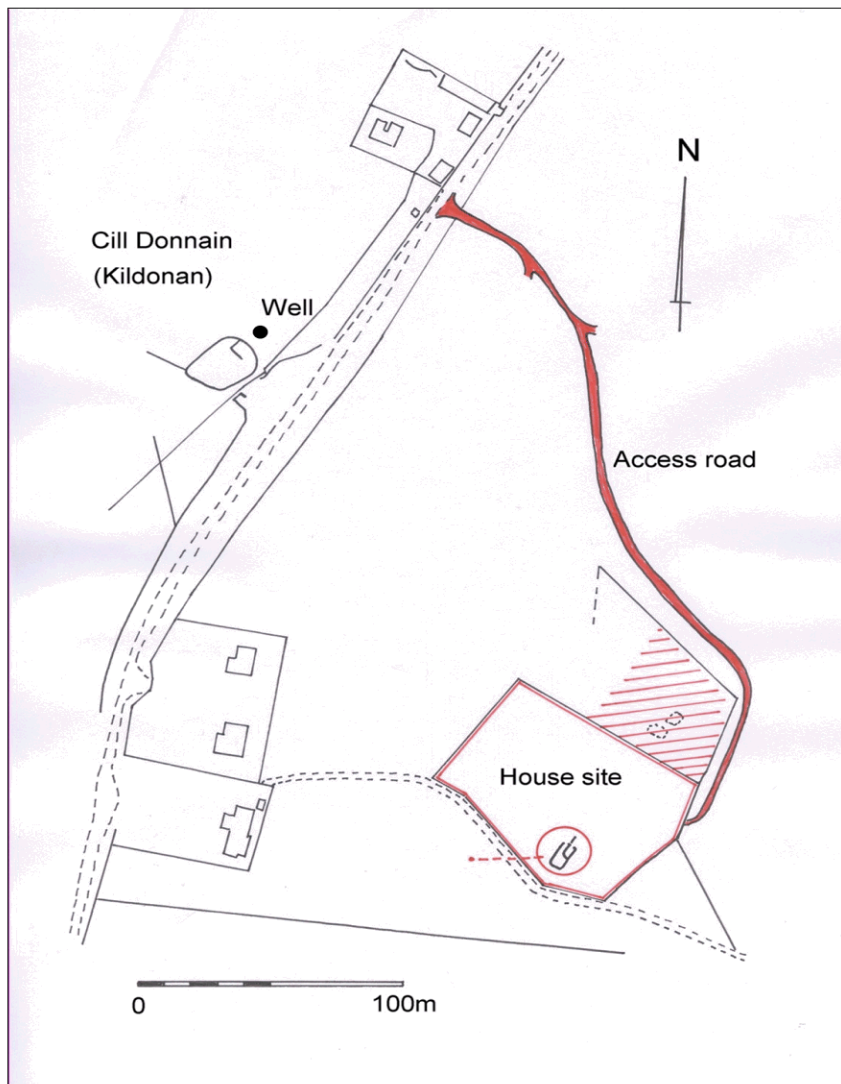
WATCHING BRIEF

KILDONAN, ISLE OF SKYE

NG 3556 5412

1. INTRODUCTION

The development covered by this report lies on the North facing slope of Cnoc Aluin, land owned by Mr & Mrs Naesmith of Croft 3 Kildonan. The site enjoys extensive views northwards over Lochs Greshornish and Snizort to the Trotternish Peninsular and beyond. The proposed site is bounded by an ancient, and still upstanding, stone faced dyke. Within the enclosure formed by the dyke is a ruinous structure of uncertain age which is to be removed to make way for a new house. The watching brief is concerned with the removal of the ruin and the route of a new access road and services to the proposed site, (See illus. 2 & 3 for location of site and access road).



Illus 3 : Location of house site and access road. The ruin is circled in red. The hatched area contains traces of turf buildings. The dotted line represents services.

2. THE WATCHING BRIEF

The watching brief consisted of 3 elements:-

- a) A desk-based assessment of the site.
- b) A walkover survey of the house site and the routes of the access road and services.
- c) A watching brief during the removal of the ruin. (Hereafter Site 1)

The results of each of these elements are set out below.

2.1 Desk-based assessment

The desk-based assessment consulted :-

- The National Monuments record for Scotland (NMRS) via the Internet.
- The Highland Council Sites and Monuments Record (HSMR) also via the Internet.
- The Dualchas Sites and Monuments Record in Portree.
- The Dualchas Aerial Photo Archive
- The Dualchas Map Archive.

A search of the above sources revealed that there are no recorded archaeological sites within 500 meters of the development site.

The OS 2nd Edition 6" map of 1904 (Sheet XVI) clearly shows Site 1 as an isolated structure within a small enclosure. There are no associated structures outwith the enclosure.

2.2 The Walkover Survey

2.2.1

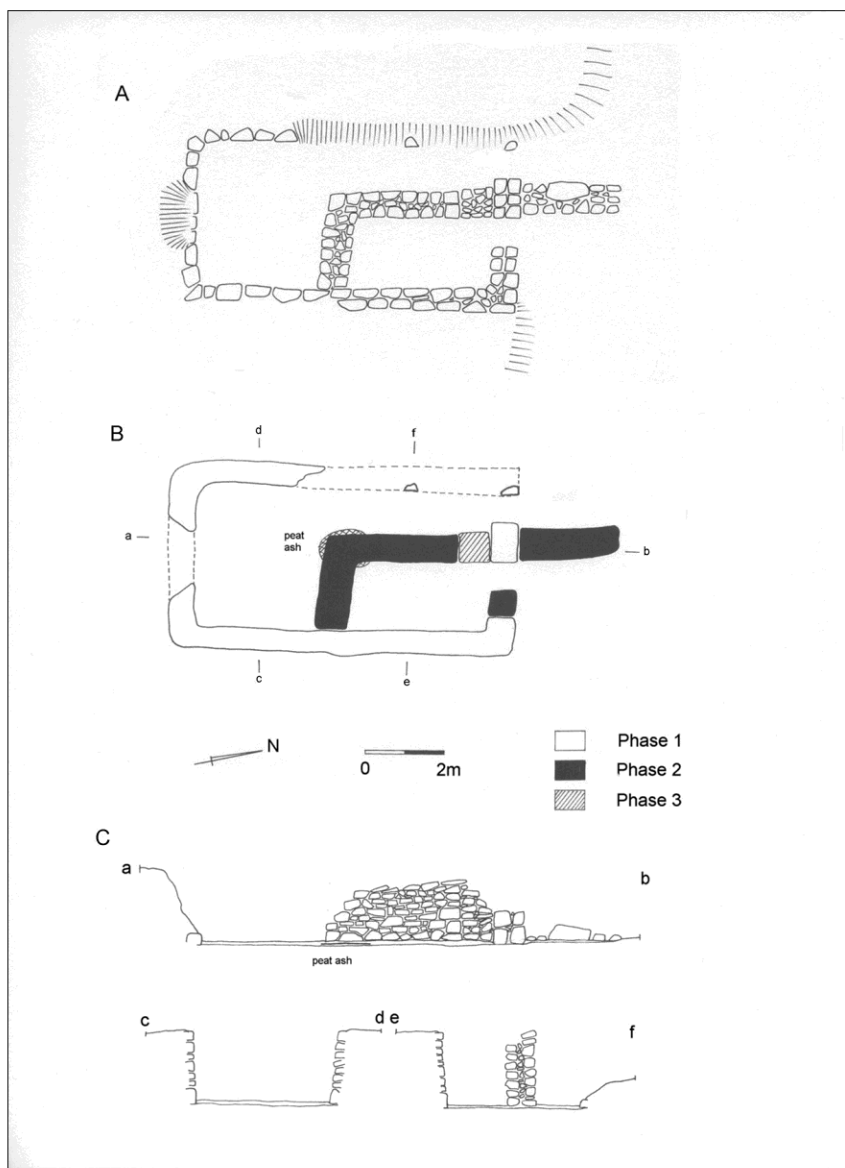
The walkover survey was carried out on the 7th of February (the same day as the watching brief.) The day was cold and fine with a gale blowing, the position of the site however afforded considerable shelter from the south-westerly wind.

2.2.2

No archaeological features, other than Site 1 were noted within the enclosure/house site (outlined in red on illus. 3). Site 1 was recorded (measured drawings and photographs) prior to the start of site works.

Site 1 (The Ruin) (see illus. 4 and 7 - 10)

The visible remains consisted of a rectangular, stone-built structure with rounded corners lying on a NE to SW alignment. The SW end of the ruin had been dug into the hill slope to its full wall height of 1.90 meters. The walls were constructed of random stone and were 600mm thick at the NE end. At the SW end, where they had been dug into the slope, they were of single face construction circa 400mm thick. The only entrance into the ruin appears to have been at the much disturbed NE end. At some point during its life the roof has been taken of this structure and a small pen had been constructed within the ruin. A short driving wall was also built against the NE end. This pen had seen at least two periods of use, with the entrance arrangements altered for the latter phase (see illus 4, B).



illus.4 : Plans and Sections of the ruin removed during excavation of house platform.

A. Ruin as recorded. **B.** Phasing of the remains. **C.** Sections (See B for location)

2.2.3

A group of poorly preserved turf structures (Site 2) were noted just beyond the enclosure dyke lying to the NE of the house site (In area hatched red on illus. 3.)

Site 2. (Turf structures)

Lying in a small area of well grazed grass, amidst heather landscape, are the remains of at least 2 turf structures each measuring circa 4.0 meters square. Humps and bumps in the turf around these structures may mark the positions of other turf buildings.

2.2.4

The routes of both the access road and services were walked with no visible archaeology being recorded.

Access road (see illus 3)

The access road leaves the east side of the township road some 200 meters north of the house named Sguir-An Duin climbing along the south side of a wet gully for some 180 meters before gaining the level, peat covered, ground to the north of the proposed house site. After a further 200 meters the road joins and runs along the north side of an upstanding dyke which, after a further 50 meters, and an abrupt turn to the south, joins on to the east corner of the enclosure around the house site. The access road enters the house site, through the upstanding dyke, after a further 20 meters.

Services

The services enter the site from the west after crossing open hill ground and a narrow green track which lies just outwith the south side of the house site.

2.3 Watching Brief

The watching brief was undertaken on the 7th of February. Site works were carried out by a tracked excavator using a 1 meter wide toothed bucket. Site works consisted of the removal of the ruin (the stone to be re-used on site) and excavation of a house platform.

2.3.1 Results

The demolition of the ruin confirmed the multi-phase nature of the site and single skin construction of the SW end. During the demolition a spread of orange ash was noted lying within the floor deposit below the W corner of the Phase 2 pen. A general scatter of pottery sherds (8) and the neck of a black-glass bottle were recovered during the works (see illus. 5). All the pottery sherds lay within the floor build-up of the ruin. No pottery sherds were recovered from outwith the ruin. The floor deposit consisted of a single, black/brown, fibrous, manure like layer (circa 100mm thick) which lay directly on the surface of an artificial cut into the rotten rock natural. A general scatter of plastic and tin-foil was also noted within the ruin.



illus. 5 : The pottery from the site. (Scale = 2p coin)

2.3.2 The Pottery

Eight sherds of pottery and the neck of a black-glass bottle were recovered from the floor deposit within the ruin. These are listed below:-

- K.1. Rim sherd of a red bodied earthenware bowl with brown glaze to the inside over decorated with a trailed white slip. (Circa 350mm diameter) Late 18th/Early 19th C.
- K.2. Rim sherd of a red bodied earthenware bowl with brown glaze to the inside over decorated with a trailed white slip. (Circa 350mm diameter) Late 18th/Early 19th C.
- K.3. Rim sherd of a red bodied earthenware bowl with white glaze to the inside. (Circa 350mm diameter) Late 18th/Early 19th C.
- K.4. Rim sherd of a clear glazed white earthenware bowl with moulded beads around the rim and an under-glaze transfer print in blue on the inside. Circa 260mm diameter. Early 19th C.
- K.5. Rim sherd of a straight sided, clear glazed, white earthen ware bowl. 190mm diameter. Early 19th C.
- K.6. Rim sherd of a Sponge Ware bowl. Glazed white with blue line and leaf decoration to the outside, 130mm diameter. Early 19th Century.
- K.7. Body sherd of a brown glazed stoneware flagon. Mid 19th C.
- K.8. Body sherd of a black/brown glazed flagon. Body very hard and purple in colour. ?
- K.9. Neck of a black glass bottle with applied lip. Late 18th/Early 19th Century.

3. CONCLUSIONS

3.1 Site 1. The Ruin

The visible remains are of a single structure which has been modified several times to allow different practices to be carried out. The evidence points to the site being in use from perhaps the second half of the 18th Century up to the middle of the 20th Century.

Local tradition relates that this structure was lived in until circa 1950. This is difficult to square with the evidence. Admittedly the ash from a fire was noted in the floor layers, however the position of this fire (pre-dating the conversion of the structure to a pen) and the nature of the floor layer (perhaps a rotted down bedding of bracken) would preclude it being the result of permanent occupation. The pottery recovered also appears to suggest something other than an occupied house, with four of the fragments representing large shallow bowls (K1 – K4) used for milk separation and the remainder being from storage vessels. The bottle, although having many uses may perhaps have been used as a dosing bottle.

The site appears to have started its life as a cattle byre/milking shed with one or perhaps two doors in its north end and no windows. (The way the structure has been dug into the hill slope makes it highly unlikely that window openings were present in the walls.) After an unknown period of time the roof was taken off, with the unwanted debris (turf and thatch?) being burnt within the structure. The interior was then converted into a twin-celled pen using the northern half of the west wall as a source of building material. A short wall was also added to the N end to assist with stock driving. This pen was subsequently redesigned at least once.

3.2 The Turf Structures

The partially preserved turf structures must represent either a small shieling group or, more likely, a group of temporary structures relating to Site 1.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 There are no further recommendations regarding Site 1.

4.2 Site 2. Turf Structures

The turf structures are not currently threatened by the development or access road. An area around the turf structures (30 meter buffer zone, hatched in red on illus. 3) should be considered archaeologically sensitive and should be avoided during any future development on the site.

4.3 The Access Road

For the first 100 meters (from the house site) the access road follows the line of an established track which runs along the E and NE sides of an upstanding enclosure dyke. Care must be taken to ensure that this dyke survives the construction of the access road.

When the line of the access road moves away from the line of the dyke the remainder of its route is over archaeologically sterile ground.

4.4 Services

Both the electricity and water supplies lie to the SW of the development and their routes to site cross bare open hill or sloping ground. There are no recommendations regarding the route taken by services.



illus 7. The ruin from the North (scale = 2 meters in 20cm grads.)



illus. 8. The ruin from the South West.



illus. 9. The ruin from the South. (Scale = 2 meters in 20cm grads)



illus. 10. Detail of the blocked door opening in the West wall of the pen.

5. LOCATION OF RECORDS

All records relating to this report and survey are held in the archive of:

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End

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