



Highland Archaeology Services Ltd

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Archaeological Report



Watten Caithness

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Archaeological Report:

Watten Caithness

Report No.	HAS080302
Project code	HAS-WAT07
Client	Mr and Mrs G Farquhar
Planning Ref	06/00667/REMCA
Date / revision	04 March 2008
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Summary

A watching brief was carried out on site clearance and excavations for foundations, services and drainage at Watten, Caithness. No archaeological finds or features were identified and no further work is recommended.

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Photographs are on pages 10 – 13.

Acknowledgements

The fieldwork and photography was carried out by Paul Humphreys; the report was prepared by Paul Humphreys and edited by John Wood. We wish to thank Graham Farquhar for commissioning this work and for his assistance. Background mapping has been reproduced by permission of the Ordnance Survey under Licence 100043217.

Introduction

Planning consent for the erection of a single dwelling for Mr G Farquhar required a watching brief to be conducted during all topsoil stripping and trenching works. This report describes that work and its outcome.

Location

The site is centred approximately at Watten, Caithness (OS Grid Reference ND 2362 5365) at 36m above sea level. .

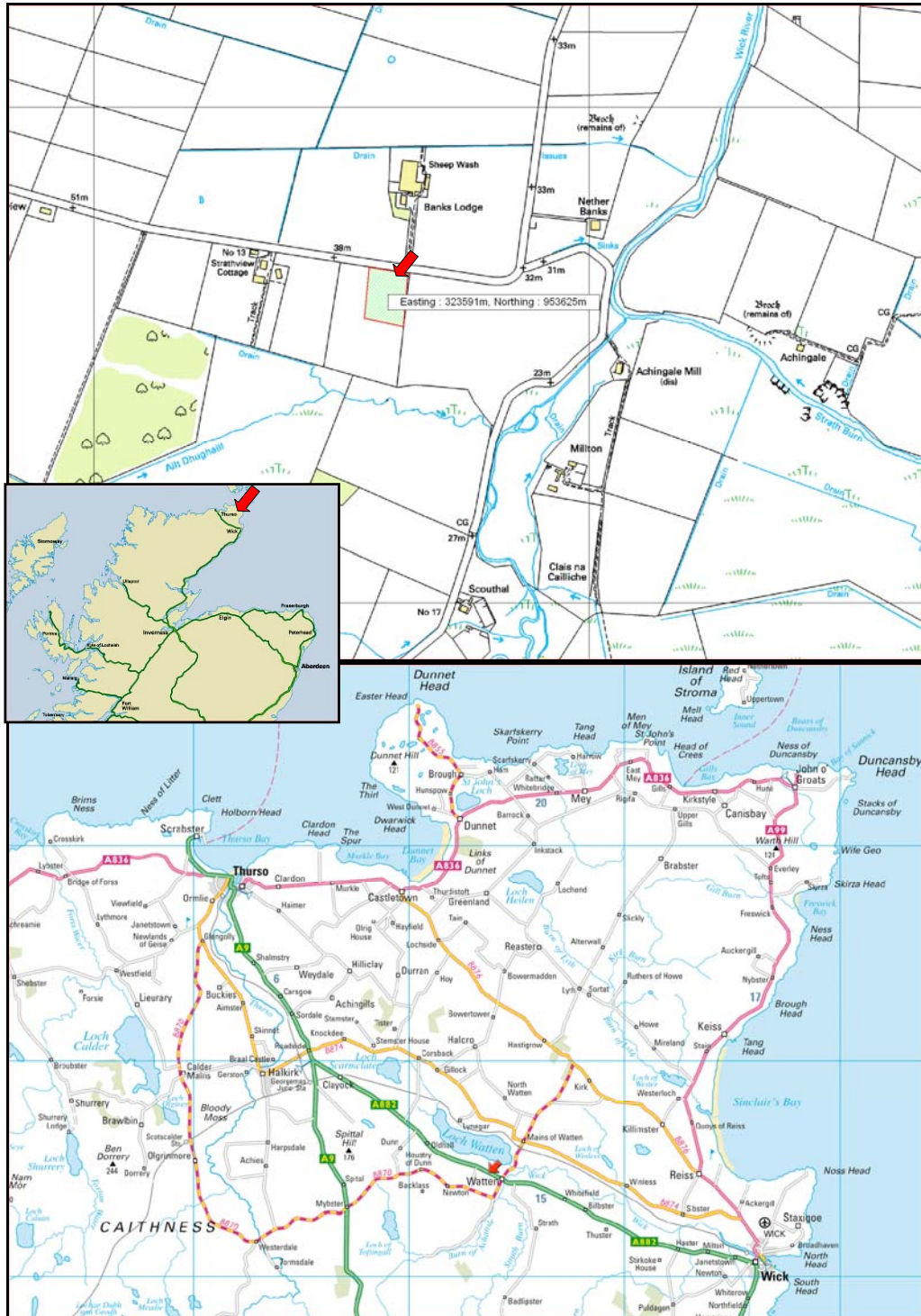


Figure 1 Site Location

Aims and objectives

- To minimise any possible delay or cost to the development by anticipating archaeological requirements as far as possible, timetabling and integrating archaeological recording work with the project, and dealing with any issues arising quickly and efficiently.
- To determine as far as possible the character, extent, condition, date and significance of any archaeologically significant remains; and to preserve these where possible and record where necessary in line with national and local policies and standards.
- To ensure that any artefacts or human remains are dealt with in accordance with legal requirements and current Historic Scotland policy guidance.

Site details and archaeological background

The site lies in improved agricultural land opposite Banks Lodge farm at Watten. It is quite close to Loch Watten and near the confluence of Strath Burn and the Burn of Acharole, in a prime location for prehistoric or later settlement. Archaeological sites that have been recorded nearby are shown in the table below.

Name	Type	NMRS	HSMR	NGR	Notes
Watten	Viking Burial	ND25SW 10	ND25SW0010	ND 24 54	A woman's grave of the Viking period was reported to be found at Watten by A O Curle, M Olsen and H Shetelig in 1954. No further information was obtained during field investigation by the Ordnance Survey in 1963 and only a very general provenance is available.
Watten Post Office	Broch	ND25SW 13	ND25SW0013	ND 2410 5397	A turf-covered broch mound, 25.0m E-W by 23.0m transversely and 2.5m high, situated on the edge of the natural slopes above the flood plain of the Wick River. No walling is exposed. A total of three stones at the base of the mound to the S and E may be the remains of an outer encircling wall. Visited by OS (N K B) 17 May 1982. Scheduled in 1938 as 'Nether Banks... the remains of a broch.' (SAM 609)

Name	Type	NMRS	HSMR	NGR	Notes
Achingale	Broch; Long Cist burial	ND25SW 14	ND25SW0014	ND 2434 5353	Dimensions: 16 x 10m. A small, subcircular, conspicuous turf-covered mound on a shelf beside a river escarpment is all that remains of a dismantled broch, opened by the antiquary William Larnach in 1841. He found the ruins of a broch, with human remains and a considerable refuse heap of shells, broken bones and deer horns.. According to the Ordnance Survey in 1871, most of the mound was removed by the farmer (J Waters, Auchingale) before the discovery of a cist over 2.1m long containing a skeleton and a small deerhorn comb put an end to the work. 'The portion which is left standing contains more human remains'. However the date of this is not apparently recorded.
Watten	Flanged Bronze Axe	ND25SW 20	ND25SW0020	ND 24 54	A Middle Bronze Age bronze flanged axe (Class III), found during peat-digging in a moss in the parish of Watten, was donated to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (NMAS) by Capt Alexander Gunn, Brae hour in 1871. This appears to be a stray find with no clear provenance.
Achingale Mill, Bridge	Road Bridge	ND25SW 26	ND25SW0026	ND 2405 5351	This bridge carries an unclassified public road over the Burn of Acharole.

Name	Type	NMRS	HSMR	NGR	Notes
Achingale Mill	Water Mill	ND25SW 27	ND25SW0027	ND 2405 5347	Early to mid 19th century, and marked on the first edition of the OS 6-inch map (Caithness 1877, sheet xviii). It was described by John Hume in 1977 as "One of the best Caithness mills, a three-storey rubble building on an L plan, with a double kiln and two external wheels, both wood and iron, one 4ft 6ins wide by 12ft diameter (1.37 by 3.66m), the other 11ins wide by 4ft diameter (0.28 by 1.22m). The mill appears to be in working order, but was not in use when visited in 1974". J R Hume 1977. It is disused but Listed Grade A.
Watten	Carved Stone Ball	ND25SW 28	ND25SW0030	ND 24 54	A type 4b (six prominent knobs) carved stone ball from Watten was reported to have been given to the Royal Museum of Scotland in 1893. However the provenance is recorded only as 'Watten'.
Achingale	Long-house	ND25SW 66	ND25SW0066	ND 242 533	In 1995 Roger Mercer recorded a rectangular longhouse, 12m x 4m, comprising three units. An outhouse 6.5 x 4m lies 18m E. Orientation NW-SE.
Achingale	Fort	nil	ND25SW0028	ND 2410 5370	This site is listed on the Highland Sites and Monuments Record as a 'Promontory Fort', but there are no details and it is not recorded on the NMRS.

Two medieval market centres also lie in the general area, as do another broch, a hut circle settlement and a chapel, as well as numerous other remains of prehistoric settlement and ritual activity. Unfortunately many of the records were made many years ago and the exact provenance of some nearby finds is not clear.

However given the considerable amount of recorded past activity in this area, there was considered to be a possibility that archaeological finds or features might be discovered in this case.

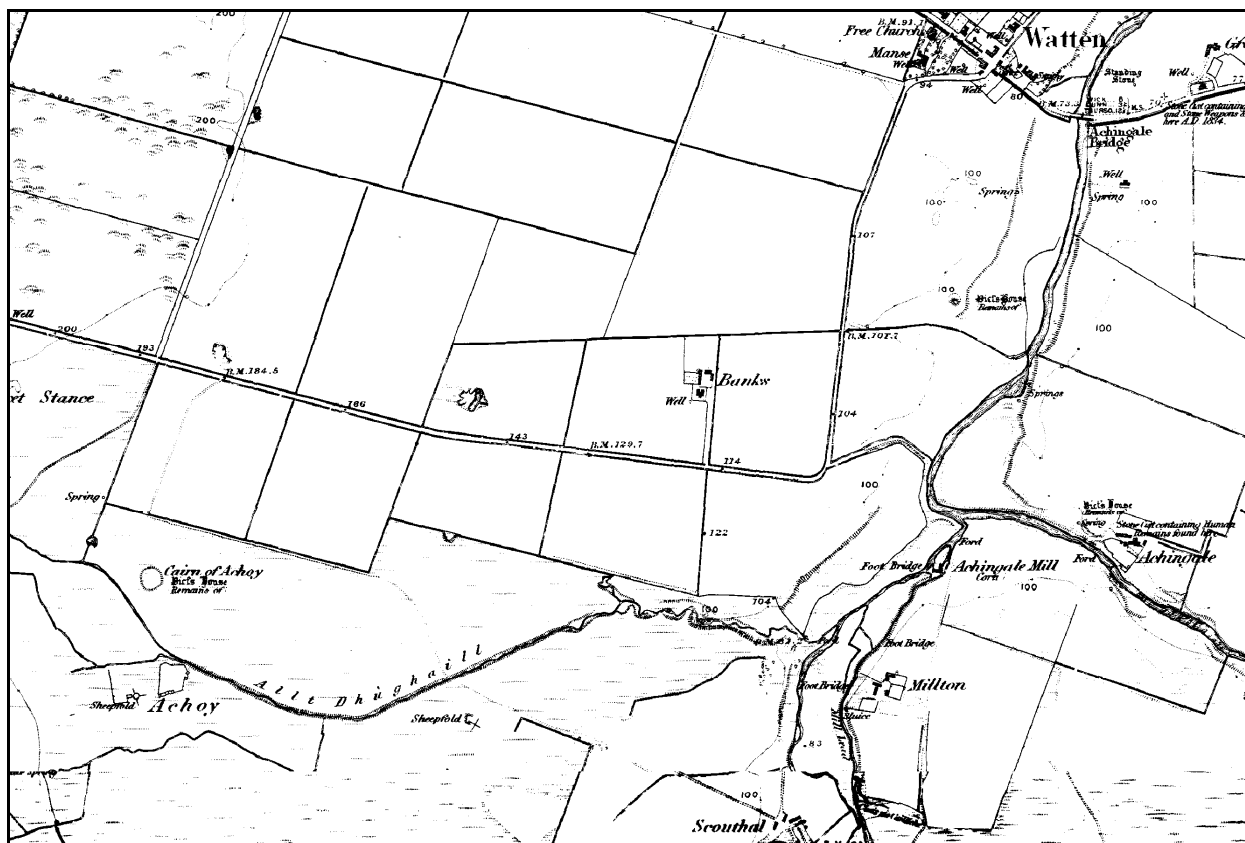


Figure 2 Extract from 1st Edition OS 1:10560 Map (1877)

Method

Desk Based Assessment

A check of all relevant archaeological / historical records, maps and aerial photographs was undertaken as specified. The results are summarised above.

Watching Brief

Working in co-ordination with the contractor, a watching brief was carried out on all ground-works. The site stripping and foundation trenches were done on 10 - 12 May 2007; the drainage and soakaway were completed in late February 2008.

Excavation took place under archaeological supervision, using a mechanical back-acting digger fitted with a straight-edged bucket. Trenches were cleaned by hand where necessary to clarify any possible archaeology, but no features or artefacts were recorded.

No archaeological excavation was undertaken as part of this work beyond the minimum necessary to achieve the objectives above.

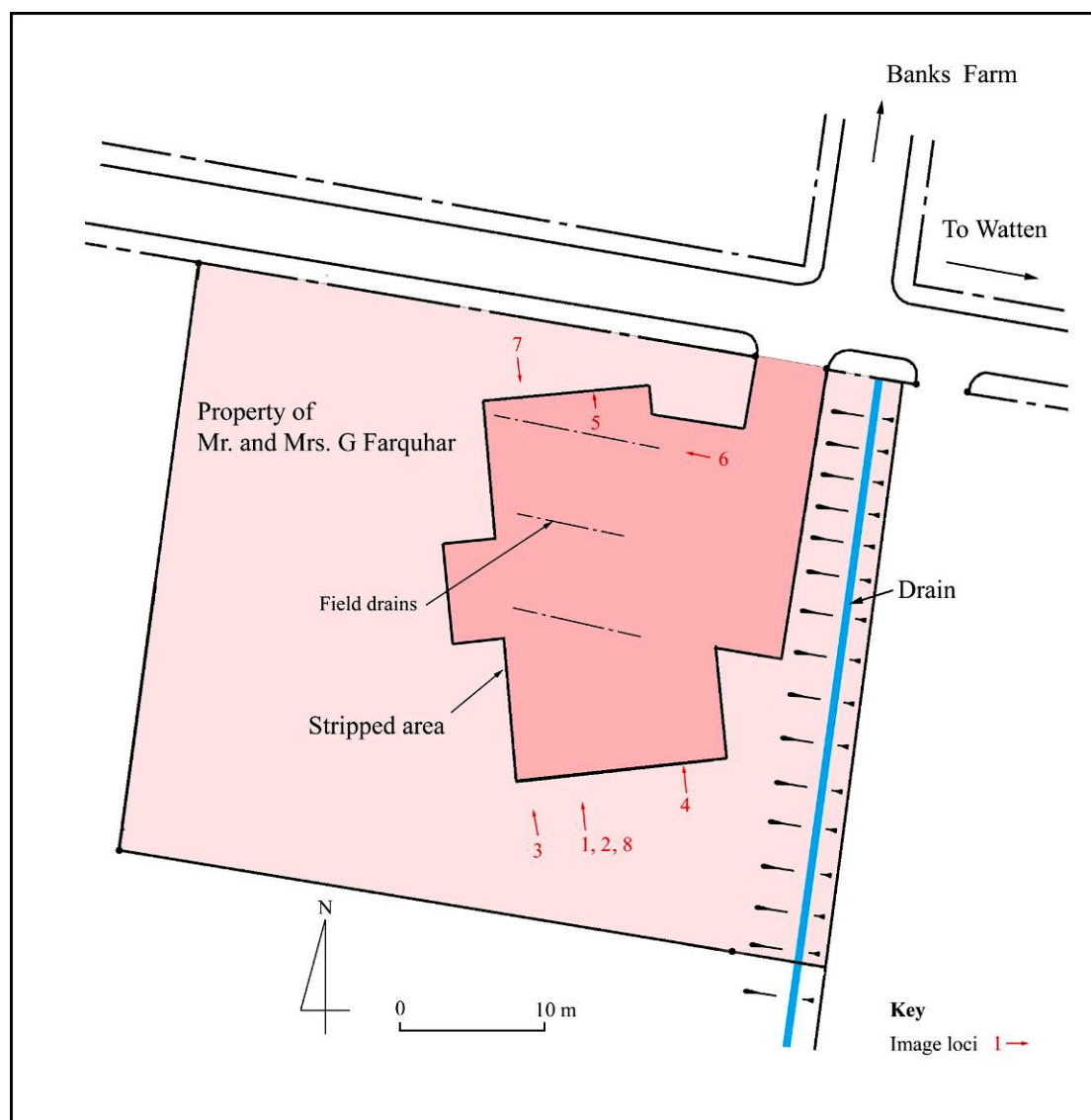


Figure 3 Sketch plan of site showing photo locations.

Observations and Discussion

Site stripping

Stripping of the area of the house-base and driveway revealed a soil profile comprising about 30 cm of undifferentiated plough-soil overlying till containing very occasional cobbles (Plates 2 and 3). The exposed till colour, mottled red-brown through greys to almost white, was indicative of gleying (Plates 4 and 5). This was consistent with the field-drains (both rubble and tile) revealed by the stripping process (plate 6).

Archaeological finds within the top soil amounted to occasional sherds of C19 pottery and glass.



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5 (30cm scale)



Plate 6

Foundation Trenches



Plate 7



Plate 8

A pit excavated to locate a known water main demonstrated that the thickness of the till was at least 1.5 metres.

The cutting of the building foundation trenches indicated that the nature of the till was uniform over the site. There were no indications of anything of archaeological significance (Plates 7 and 8, above).

Septic tank and soak-away trenches

The excavations for the soak-away were undertaken in February 2008. These cut directly into the underlying clay and nothing was found.

Conclusions and Recommendations

No archaeological features or finds were recorded during the fieldwork, and no further work is proposed.

Appendix 1: Index of Photographs

Photographs are reproduced on pages 10 - 13. Copies are also included on the enclosed CDROM. Photo locations are shown in Figure 3 on page 9.

Photo No.	Notes	Taken by	Date
1	Site prior to stripping	PDH	10 05 2007
2	Site after stripping 1	PDH	10 05 2007
3	Site after stripping 2	PDH	10 05 2007
4	Till surface	PDH	10 05 2007
5	Soil profile	PDH	12 05 2007
6	Rubble field drain	PDH	12 05 2007
7	Foundation trenches 1	PDH	12 05 2007
8	Foundation trenches 2	PDH	12 05 2007