

Erection of House at House Plot 1, Broubster, Shebster, Thurso

Ref: 07/00402/FULCA

Archaeological Watching Brief



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for

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<i>Site summary</i>	Rural site
<i>Site location (NGR)</i>	Easting: 303717. Northing: 959748.
<i>Total area of construction</i>	House footprint, access road and hardstanding
<i>Work required</i>	Archaeological Watching Brief
<i>Area of monitoring required</i>	All ground breaking work

1.0 Background

The development consists of: erection of new-build house, access track and hardstanding, septic tank and soakaway.

A brief for archaeological work has been prepared by the Archaeology Unit of the Department of Planning and Development at Highland Council, as a condition of the granting of planning consent for the present development.

The archaeological work is considered necessary as there is a significant risk that buried archaeological or historical remains could be affected. Although the full nature and extent of these features is not known, they are expected to be of historic interest and of value to future research, and as such they should not be destroyed without being recorded.

The site is located in the upper strath of Forss Water, a remote area relatively undeveloped compared with the rest of Caithness. Within the strath there are a considerable number of recorded archaeological sites, including prehistoric settlement, burial and ritual remains including burial cairns, mounds and roundhouses to the north, a prehistoric settlement to the SW on the other side of the river and a stone circle to the east. In addition, later, abandoned, settlement remains abound, with the significant planned settlement of Broubster Village to the south.

There is a high potential for the sub-surface remains of prehistoric monuments otherwise destroyed by ploughing and field improvement to survive within the development site, as well as unrecorded minor features of crofting and early modern land use and settlement.

2.0 Methodology

The evaluation consists of the following elements:

Desk-based assessment:

A check of all relevant archaeological and historical databases, records, historic maps and aerial photographs was undertaken, to build up a picture of previous settlement, land use and historical events which allow a more accurate prediction of areas of particular archaeological or historical sensitivity. This allows the nature and extent of the potential archaeological features to be established before ground breaking work commences, presents an assessment of the potential for archaeological remains to survive and minimises the risk of finds or features of interest being discovered and damaged during site works.

Watching Brief.

Monitoring of all ground-breaking work by the archaeological contractor. Archaeological monitoring of ground-breaking work allows the identification and recording of buried features and informs further archaeological investigation or recording, should the findings after topsoil stripping indicate that this is necessary or desirable.

In addition, as the house is to be faced with stone for the most part recovered from adjacent obsolete dykes, this evaluation provides an opportunity to evaluate these dykes, as elements in an historical landscape, as potential survivors of an earlier system of boundaries and as possibly constructed themselves from robbed stone from prehistoric features.

3.0 Archaeological Background

The following archaeological sites are recorded on the Highland Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) in the vicinity of the present development.

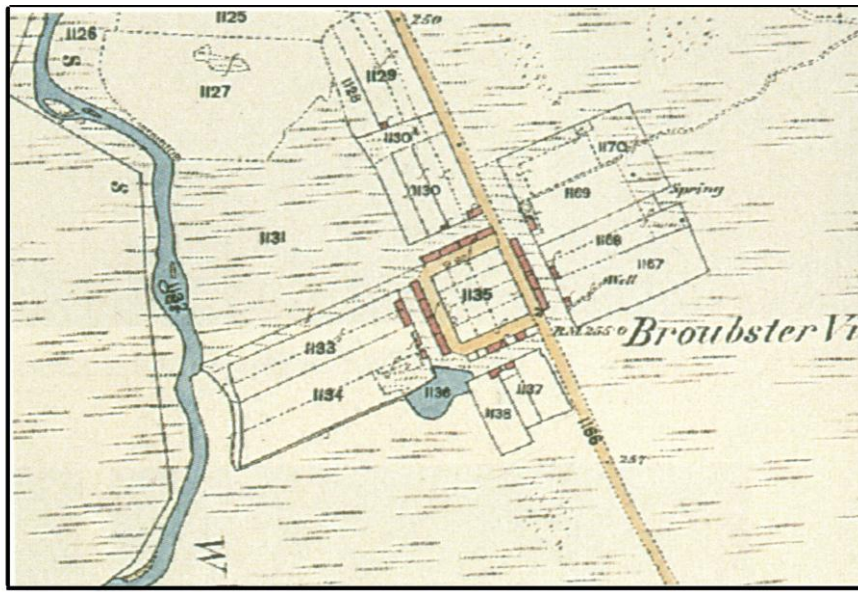
- **Broubster village** at ND 0380 5950 SMR no. ND05NW0030
- **Tota Garbhaig, cairn with two stone cists** at ND 0390 5999, SMR no. ND05NW0001
- **Allt Torrigil hut circles, settlement** at ND 0320 5920, SMR no. ND05NW0014
- **Standing stone at ND 030 590, SMR no. ND05NW0019 (lost)**
- **Broubster village field clearance cairns** at ND 0360 5930, SMR no. ND05NW0051
- **Garadhan Radha homestead** at ND 0301 6071, SMR no. ND06SW0014
- **Torr an Craoibhe mound, buildings, kiln** at ND 0339 6029 SMR no. ND06SW0055
- **Torr a'Chaise cairn with human remains** at ND 0368 6001, SMR no. ND06SW0017 or at ND 0364 6005 SMR no. ND06SW0022.

These sites indicate an important area, with both settlement and ritual remains dating back to the Neolithic period. There are further Neolithic cairns, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, within the present forestry plantation on the brow of the ridge between Forss Water and Loch Calder. The survival of these sites is due to the strath not having been brought into improved agriculture in the early part of the 19th century. Land use continued on a small scale, with scattered individual farmsteads. Tenants

moved from the adjacent estates of Broubster and Shurrery to make way for sheep farming were settled in the planned village of Broubster, an unusual hollow square of longhouse-type cottages, built in 1839. Although now derelict, the village was occupied until 1960.

4.0 Cartographic Evidence

The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map, dating to 1872, shows Broubster village with numbered agricultural plots radiating from each side of the square, surrounded by unimproved ground.



1. 1870 OS 1:2500 map of Broubster village. House site is just beyond top of image. Note irregular shaped unimproved ground within improved field top left.

To the north of these plots, the ground between the road and the river is divided into fields with boundaries running approximately WNW-ESE. A farmstead consisting of five roofed buildings and a roughly oval enclosure is located beside the river. By the 2nd edition OS map of 1907 the field alignments has changed to the present ENE-WSW and the farmstead buildings are unroofed.

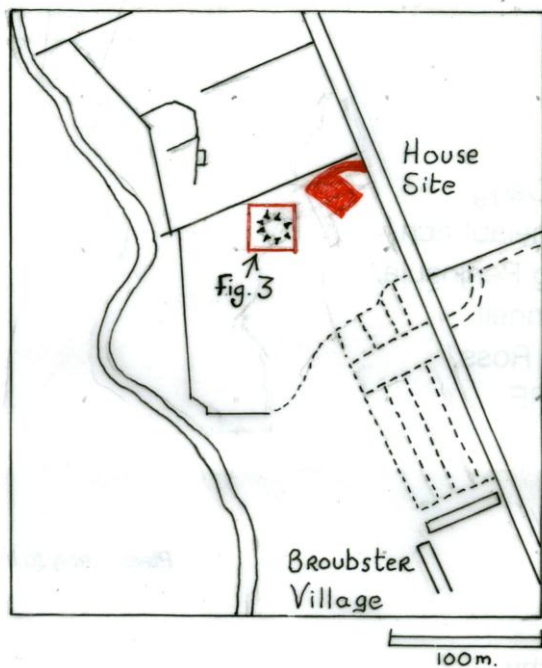
5. Watching Brief

This was carried out on 18th March 2008 in damp but clear weather conditions. The following observations were made before ground clearance began:

5.1 Site description.

The house site lies within in-bye crofting land adjacent to the public road. Between the field and the road is a partial drystone dyke, reduced to footings to the north but in good condition in the southern part (Photos 1, 2). To the north the field is bounded by a modern post and wire fence, beyond which, by the river, can be seen the footings of

the farmstead noted on the 1st edition OS map. To the south of the house site is a meandering rubble dyke in poor repair. This corresponds to a boundary dyke recorded on the 1907 2nd edition OS map which truncates the cultivation plots running north from Broubster village. South of this dyke the regular boundaries of these plots are visible and include footings of at least three small structures, possibly byres (Photo no. 3). North of this dyke the plot boundaries are not visible and would appear to have been removed when the fields were laid out in their present alignments between 1872 and 1907. It may be assumed that the removed stone boundaries make up the meandering rubble wall.



2. Location of house site and natural rise with archaeological features.

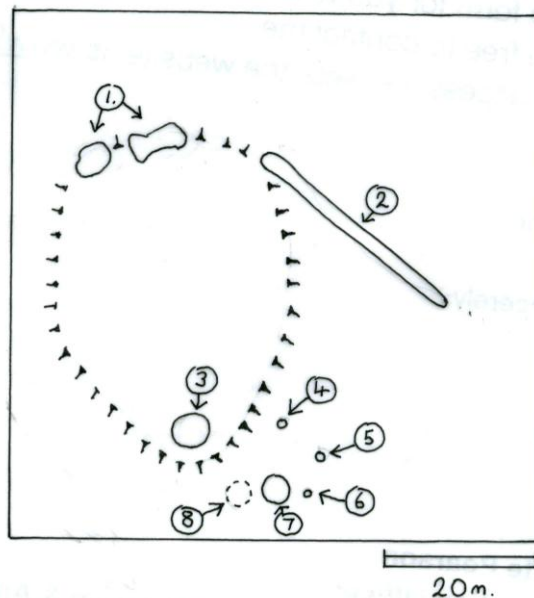
5.2 Archaeological Features

WSW of the house site is a notable rise which is irregular in shape, level and appears to be natural (Photo no. 4). This appears to correspond to the area left unimproved as recorded on the 1870 1:2500 OS map (see fig 1.) At the south end of this rise is a large, conical cairn and on the north side two irregular stone piles. These may all be from field clearance, but the large cairn may overlie an earlier structure. Adjacent to the irregular stone piles is a short section of turf and rubble dyke running WNW-ESE and adjacent to the large cairn is a group of stone piles and possible corn stack bases (see fig.2). These features are listed below.

1. Two irregular stone piles, grassed over, at the north edge of the natural rise (Photos 5, 6)
2. Section of turf and rubble dyke (Photos 7, 8)
3. Large stone pile or cairn, conical, partially grassed over, at SE edge of the natural rise. (Photos 9, 10)
4. Stone pile, oval, measuring 1.5x2m Appears carefully constructed and incorporates section of iron fence post (Photo no. 11)

5. Stone pile, oval, measuring 1.5x1.3m. Partially grassed over and incorporating fence wire (photo no. 12)
6. Probable stone pile, grass-covered, measuring 1.2m in diameter
7. Circular stone setting. Setting of single stones forming a circle 3.5m in diameter, partially grassed-over (Photos 13, 14)
8. Possible stone setting. Some set single stones immediately W. of 7 may originally have formed a similar circle.

This group of features may all date to 19th-20th century crofting. They all lie far enough from the present development to be unaffected (Photo no. 15)



3. Archaeological features west of house site



4. Feature 3: large stone cairn west of house site

5.3 Marked Stone A.

This stone was noted before the watching brief commenced, incorporated into the remaining footings of the removed drystone dyke running along the roadside (Photo no. 16) The stone is weathered and lichen covered on the exposed surfaces, but the cut grooves were immediately spotted by Mr Warwick, a stone mason. His immediate interpretation was that they represented the first rough chisel marks from shaping the stone (Photos 17, 18, 19)



5. Stone A

6.0 The Watching Brief

Before turf stripping commenced, the area of the house footprint, hardstanding and access road was featureless, close-cropped grass, occupying the marginally highest point of the field and sloping gently down to the west and south.

The following stratigraphy was revealed:

1. **Ploughsoil:** brown, friable, varying in depth from 0.4m at the east end of the site, by the road and to the south to 0.2m at the west, highest end of the site.
Inclusions: range of stones from large boulder (1m+) down to gravels
Finds: marked stone B (See below, section 7.0)
19th century ceramics, glass, typical of field manuring from the byre.
2. **Subsoil:** Glacial gravels, stony, sandy red-brown with patches of paler clay.
Some large stones (1m+) set into subsoil.

No archaeological features were revealed during topsoil stripping (Photos 21-25)

7.0 Marked Stone B

This was discovered at ND 0368 5985 within the topsoil approximately 6m west of the wall footings containing marked stone A., but had already been moved by the machine before it was recognised. It had not been visible on the surface and had no

adhering subsoil, so must have been floating within the ploughsoil and is likely to have been moved during cultivation. It is possible that it was at one stage placed in the drystone wall, but has no lichen or moss so has been buried for some time.

The stone is a soft, easily carved sandstone (and was easily damaged by the machine), roughly triangular in section, each face being a maximum of 250mm high, and 500mm in length. There are lines marked on two of the three faces and the marks run over to connect the two faces. The marks are broad and deeply cut, similar to those on marked stone A but more clearly defined. (Photos 26-32)

Various suggestions were immediately put forward as to the origin or function of the marks, given that they do not appear to be caused naturally;

- Grooves caused by ploughing: unlikely as the grooves cover more than one face and some of the shorter lines are not continuous
- Sharpening stone: unlikely as dissimilar to known examples
- Rough chiselling before shaping further: possible although there are no known buildings within the Broubster-Shurrery area constructed of ashlar.
- Decorative: possible. There appears to be a deliberate cross-hatching motif. Similarities to Norse hog-back type grave markers where decoration is supposed to imitate tiled roofing, although in this case a crude local imitation. However, this parallel is less convincing in the case of stone A, which must be considered as of the same origin or function as stone B.

The stones have been reported to the Treasure Trove Unit at the National Museum of Scotland. Stone A is still on site at Broubster, stone B is at present in the possession of the author.

8.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

The site is now completely stripped, including the septic tank and soakaway site. No further archaeological work is required at this site.

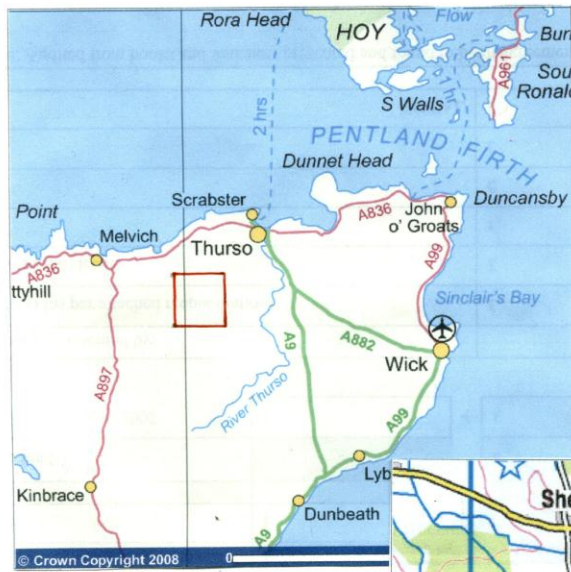
It is noted that two other house sites are about to be developed: one to the north and one to the south of this site. Archaeological monitoring is recommended at both of these sites. The northern site is adjacent to the unnamed farmstead by the river while the southern site is within the former cultivation plots of Broubster village. Both sites are likely to have an impact on archaeological features dating to the early modern or modern period and have the potential to produce further marked stones which may elucidate the question of date and function of the two stones already identified.

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6.5.08

Photographic Record (digital)

Photo no.	Description	Angle of view
1	Drystone dyke running along roadside. House site is slightly high ground centre of picture, with figure	From SE
2	Drystone dyke running along road side. Stone cairn, feature 3, visible in background	From E
3	View from Broubster village, across former cultivation plots to house site to right of centre figure.	From SSE
4	View to house site from road. Removed drystone dyke in foreground, cairn on rise far left.	From E.
5	Feature 1: stone field clearance pile	From N
6	Feature 1: stone field clearance pile	From E.
7	Feature 2: turf and rubble dyke section	From E
8	Feature 2: turf and rubble dyke section with feature 3 in background	From N
9	Feature 3: large stone pile or cairn	From S
10	Feature 3: large stone pile or cairn. Broubster village and Ben Dorrery in distance	From NNW
11	Feature 4. Stone field clearance pile	From N
12	Feature 5. Stone field clearance pile	From N
13	Feature 7. Circular stone setting	From N
14	Feature 7, circular stone setting with features 4 and 5 behind	From SW
15	Features 4, 5 and 7	From SW
16	Stone A. Lifted but in situ in remains of drystone dyke	From E
17	Stone A	
18	Stone A	
19	Stone A	
20	House site before topsoil stripping	From WSW
21	Topsoil stripping: access road	From W
22	Topsoil stripping: house footprint	From N
23	Topsoil stripping: house footprint	From W
24	Topsoil stripping: house footprint	From SE
25	Topsoil stripping: house footprint	From SE
26	Stone B	
27	Stone B	
28	Stone B	
29	Stone B	
30	Stone B	
31	Stone B	
32	Stone B	



House site, Broubster, Caithness
 Archaeological watching Brief
 Location Plan

