

House Plot, Broubster, Shebster, Thurso, Caithness

Erection of house, installation of services and formation of access

Ref. 08/00078/REMCA – 10/03136/FUL

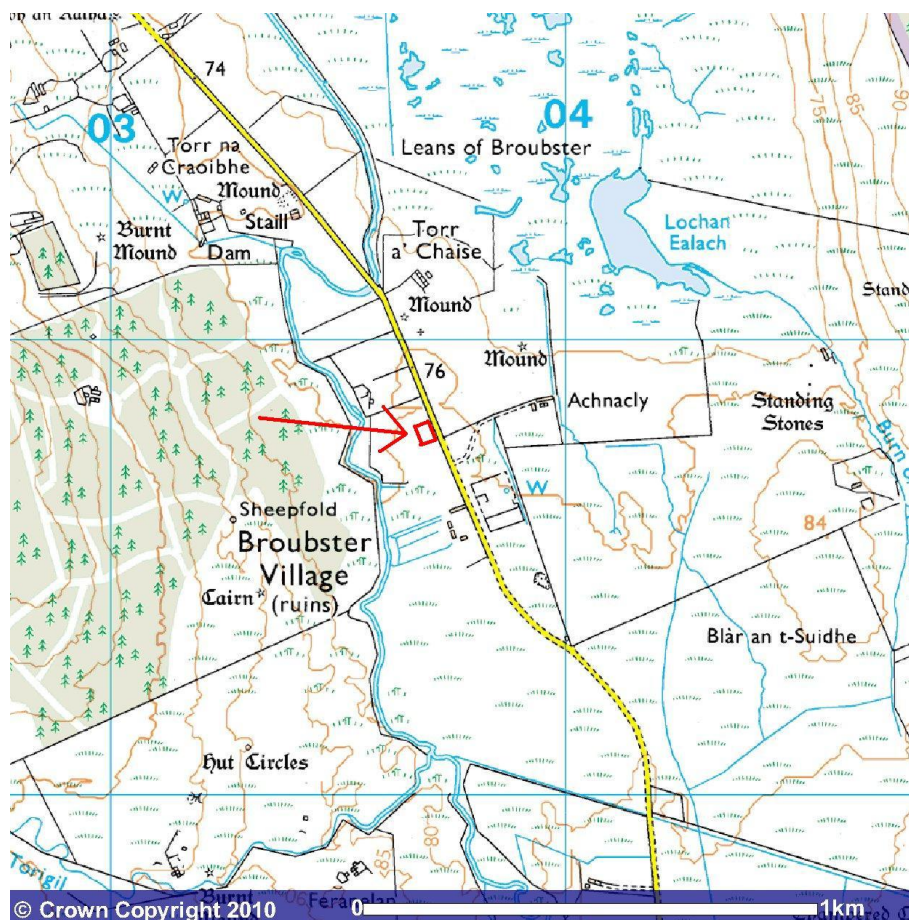
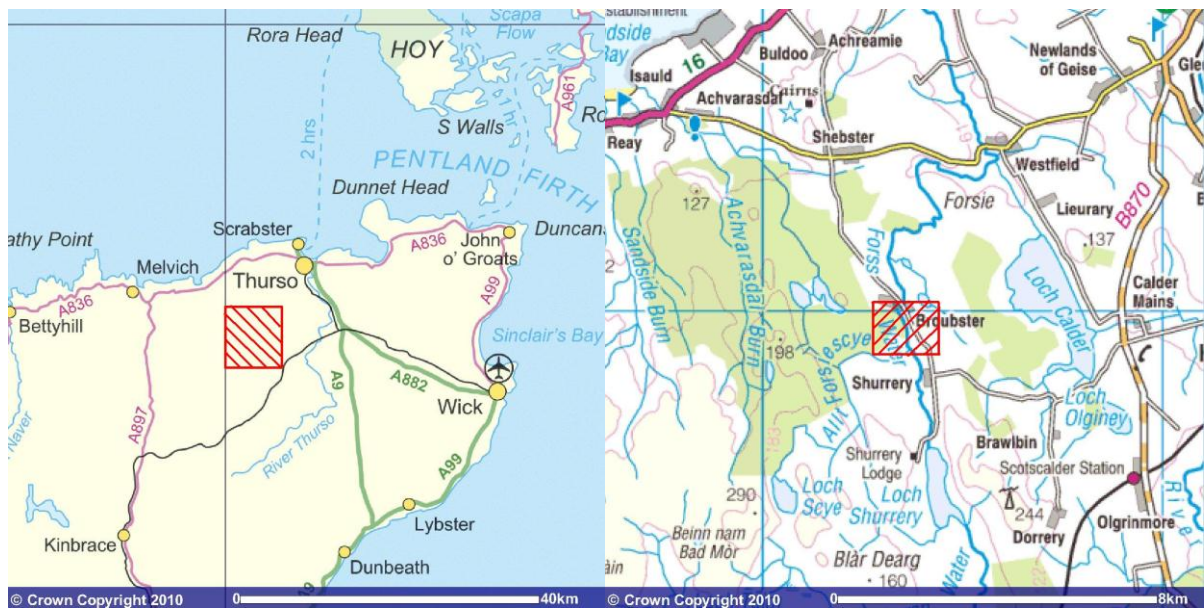
Archaeological Watching Brief



Catherine Dagg

For

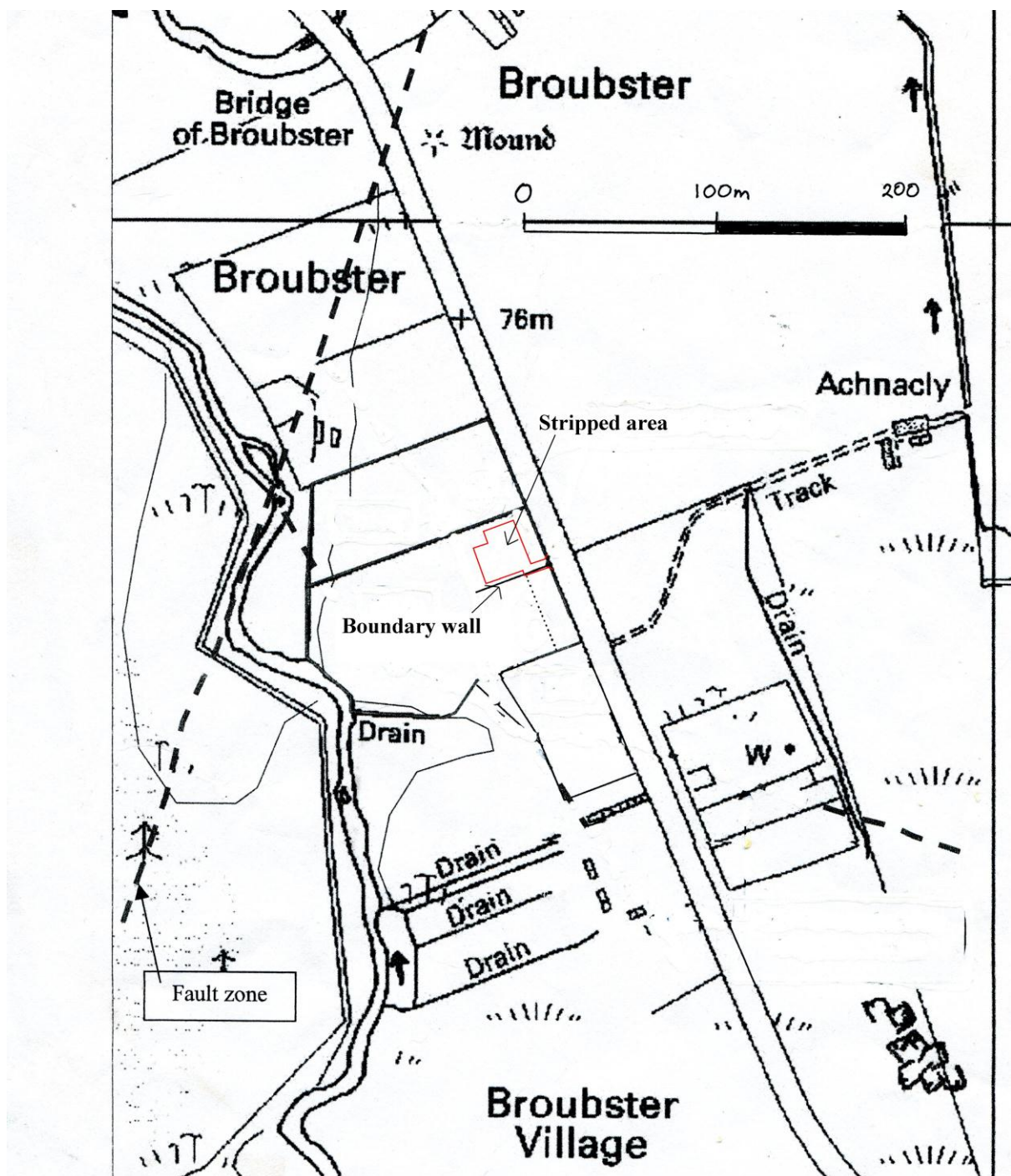
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Archaeological Watching Brief



1.0 Executive Summary

A watching brief during site-stripping for the erection of a new house at Broubster, Shebster, Caithness identified no sub-surface archaeological features. A field boundary dyke associated with Broubster clearance village was partially removed and construction details were recorded.

2.0 Summary

<i>Site summary</i>	Rural site
<i>Site location (NGR)</i>	Centred on 303715 959735.
<i>Total area of construction</i>	House plot, services and access
<i>Work required</i>	Archaeological Watching Brief
<i>Area of monitoring required</i>	All ground-breaking work

3.0 Background

This work has been carried out as a condition of planning consent, in accordance with a brief for archaeological work issued by the Archaeology Unit of the Department of Planning and Development at Highland Council.

The archaeological work is considered necessary as the site lies in an area where there is potential for the survival of unrecorded buried remains. 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 unless this is unavoidable. The archaeological watching brief will identify any such features at the earliest possible stage, to allow the possibility of preservation through re-design of the project or, if this proves impractical, will ensure that the features are recorded with minimum delay or disruption to the development.

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.

4.0 Method

The evaluation consisted of the following elements:

- a. **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 allowed a more accurate prediction of areas of particular archaeological or historical sensitivity
- b. **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.

5.0 Archaeological Background

5.1 Previous Archaeological Work

A Watching Brief, carried out by C. Dagg on 18th March 2008, on a house site and services adjacent to the present development, identified a number of minor features of cultivation in the field in which the development was located. These included field clearance piles and banks. None of the features was damaged during the topsoil stripping and no sub-surface features were located in the stripped area. However, a stone was recovered from the topsoil in the area of the access road which had cross-hatched marks which, it was concluded, were not accidental and may have been decorative. It has been suggested that the stone is a rough or unfinished hog-back grave marker dating to the Norse period. However, the marks may equally be the result of ploughing. A second stone located in the roadside dyke, bore similar but less well defined marks. The stones were offered as Treasure Trove and awarded to Dunbeath Heritage Centre.

The conclusion of the Watching Brief was:

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.

5.2 Recorded Archaeological Sites

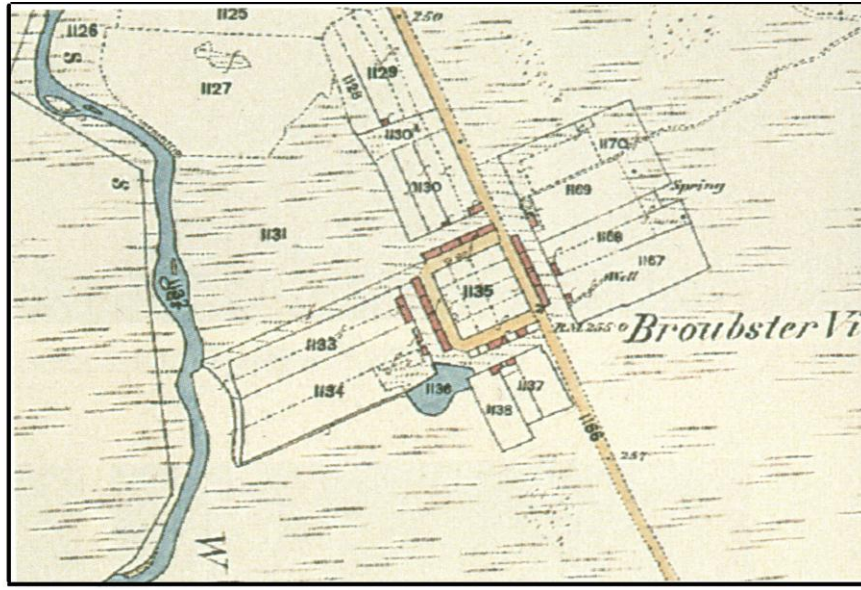
The following archaeological sites are recorded on the Highland Historic Environment Record (HER) in the vicinity of the development:

- **Broubster village** at ND 0380 5950 HER ref. MHG951
- **Tota Garbhaig, cairn with two stone cists** at ND 0390 5999, HER refs MHG 1524, MHG42422, MHG42423
- **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, HER ref. MHG53305
- **Garadhan Radha homestead** at ND 0301 6071, SMR no. ND06SW0014
- **Torr an Craoibhe mound, buildings, kiln** at ND 0339 6029 HER refs MHG 989, MHG13483 and MHG39494
- **Torr a'Chaise cairn with human remains** at ND 0368 6001, HER refs. MHG990, MHG996, 39495

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.

6.0 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. 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.



Broubster Square, 6" OS map, 1872, with linear cultivation plots. House site 1 is just above the top margin of the image, north of the northern boundary of the cultivation strips.

The present house site is located immediately north of the cultivation strips north of the village. These are assumed to be contemporary with the establishment of the village in 1839, and the north strips appear to partially overlie previously improved ground. The tenants of the village were relocated from the Broubster Estate, and it can be assumed that some of these had formerly occupied the abandoned farmsteads along the strath. The re-alignment of the field boundaries north of the village plots may represent a return of the strath to crofting tenure between 1872 and 1907

7.0 Site Description

The house site occupies a level terrace east of the Forss Water. To the east, on the other side of the road, is the low-lying Leans of Broubster, now a RSPB reserve. The site is bounded to the east by the public road, to the south by the northern boundary dyke of the cultivation strips associated with Broubster village, which lies some 300m to the south. These strips are now obscured by rushes. West of these strips is unimproved ground, low and waterlogged. To the north of the site is the previous house development (2008) To the west the ground falls gently to the river edge.

The ground is now rough grazing with encroaching rushes, but has in the past been cultivated. There are no field clearance piles or banks or any other indications of former structures within the development area.

8.0 Watching Brief

This was carried out on 11.5.10 in dry and clear weather. A fine sprinkling of snow on the ground did not obscure any of the work.

Topsoil stripping took place over an area 37.5m NE-SW and 30m NW-SE. This area incorporated the access road, hardstanding and house footings, while extensions west incorporated the sites of the septic tank and soakaway.

8.1 Access Road: Broubster Village boundary dyke

The access road for the house site required the removal of the easternmost section of the northern boundary dyke of the Broubster clearance village cultivation strips. This was visible as a low, rounded bank, spread to 2m wide and, in this section, no more than 0.6m in height, running WSW from the public road. The top of this bank consisted of visible small stones while the sides were covered in moss and grass. The remains of a relatively recent wooden post and wire fence following the same alignment survive in the form of posts inserted into the bank and some rusted wire. The easternmost 8m of this bank, adjacent to the road, had already been removed.

Removal of a section of this bank by mechanical excavator revealed the core of the bank to consist of generally small stones, under 300mm in diameter, and brown loamy earth. There was no evidence for any constructed wall and the stones all had the appearance of field clearance.

A number of fragments of bottle glass and ceramics, all dating to later than the mid-19th century, were recovered from the ground surface under the bank. These are consistent with the known dates for the planned village of Broubster, established in 1839.

8.2 House site and services

Topsoil stripping of the area to be covered by the house, hard standing and services, revealed no archaeological features or artefacts. The soil proved to be thin, to a maximum thickness of 200mm, overlying a compacted sandy subsoil. There were no land drains or any features excavated into this subsoil surface.

No large stones were recovered from this area, so the opportunity to investigate further the provenance of the grooves on the stone recovered in 2008 did not arise.

9.0 Conclusions

Apart from shallow ploughing and clearance of stones to improve cultivation and grazing, there appears to have been little human activity within this area of development. All the recovered artefacts date to the mid-19th century or later. There is no direct evidence for prehistoric to early post-Mediaeval land use and the land may not have been brought into cultivation until the establishment of Broubster village.

No further archaeological work is considered necessary at this site.

Catherine Dagg, BA, AIfA 19.10.10

Appendix 1. Site Archive

Copies of this report are lodged in the following locations:

- Highland Council Archaeology Unit
- OASIS online archiving of grey literature, report no. Catherin2-86543
- Summary report will be submitted to *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*

Appendix 2. Data Sources and Bibliography

The following data sources were consulted for this evaluation:

- Highland Historic Environment Record (HER) held by HCAU within the Dept of Planning and Development, Highland Council, Inverness
- Old maps held by the map Library within the national Library of Scotland, Edinburgh

The following publications provided background information for the evaluation:

- Beaton E. 1996 *Caithness an illustrated architectural guide*
- Dagg C 2008 *House Plot, Broubster, Reay, Caithness: Archaeological Watching Brief*
- Omand D 1972 *The Caithness Book*

Appendix 3. Photographic Record (Digital)

Photo no.	Feature	Description	Viewpoint
1	General	View south towards development site with Broubster village in background and Ben Dorrery on horizon. In foreground, under new access road, is site of recovery of rock with possible carved marks in 2008	From N
2	General	View north from development site to 2008 development	From S
3	General	View south across site of house and hardstanding before topsoil stripping, with ruins of Broubster village in background	From N
4	Boundary bank	North boundary of village cultivation strips, visible as low, rounded rubble bank overgrown with moss and grass	From E
5	Boundary bank	View of east part of bank before topsoil stripping. Note 8m section adjacent to the road already	From W

		removed, and fencepost inserted into bank	
6	Boundary bank	Removal of previously undisturbed section of bank to reveal rubble and earth core.	From E
7	Boundary bank	Removal of previously undisturbed section of bank to reveal rubble and earth core.	From NE
8	Boundary Bank	Section across bank, revealing lack of construction features and core of rubble and earth	From E
9	Boundary Bank	Section across bank, revealing lack of construction features and core of rubble and earth	From E
10	Boundary Bank	Section across bank, revealing lack of construction features and core of rubble and earth	From SE
11	Access and hardstanding	Topsoil stripped to reveal subsoil surface, south part of site	From E
12	Hardstanding and services	Topsoil stripped to reveal subsoil surface, south part of site	From E
13	House site	Topsoil stripped to reveal subsoil surface, south part of site	From S
14	Access and hardstanding	Topsoil stripped to reveal subsoil surface, south part of site	From W