

**Archaeological Evaluation of Buildings at Balavoulin, Glenelg,
Inverness-shire, and the potential impact of a Proposed Water
Main**



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for

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Introduction

The author was asked by Morgan Babbie Alliance to evaluate the potential impact of the excavation of a water pipeline trench past a group of standing ruins connected with the former corn mill at Balavoulin, on the south side of the Glenmore River, approximately two miles east of Glenelg village in Inverness-shire (NGR NG 843 198). A site visit was carried out on...during which the proposed pipeline route was examined with a representative of Morgan Water. It is proposed that the new pipeline will follow as closely as possible the same route as an existing main, laid in the 1960s, which carries water from Loch a' Mhuilinn to the present Glenelg Water Treatment Works. This water main is now overlaid by an access track, measuring no more than 3m in width.

It was agreed that all work on the new pipeline could be confined to this 3m wide 'sterilised' corridor, and that no further damage to the buildings and associated features would be necessary. It was therefore agreed that the project could go ahead as planned, with the proviso that the construction team would be advised of the necessity of keeping within this corridor and of the fact that they were passing through an archaeologically sensitive area.

The following notes on the buildings at Balavoulin are not intended as a measured survey, as no damage will be done to the archaeological record. The buildings are in a stable condition, so will not have deteriorated if a more detailed survey is called for in the near future. These notes and photographs were taken with the intention of including the site in Highland Council's Sites and Monuments Record, to ensure its future protection.

Historical Background

Only a very cursory desk-based assessment was carried out before the site visit, and the site does not appear to have been previously officially investigated, although local residents are probably aware of much more of its history than is noted below.

The site is recorded on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map as Balamhuilinn (corn). The main mill building lies west of the Allt a' Mhuilinn, with the lade indicated and labelled as 'mill lead'. A track leads north through cultivated fields to a ford on the Glenmore River. East of the Allt a' Mhuilinn are three smaller, roofed buildings with a track leading east. The small building upstream on the Allt a' Mhuilinn is not indicated.

By the 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map, the name is corrupted to Balavoulin, and there is no mention of a mill. This confirms local memory of the building being a dwelling only; one old lady living locally remembers her father living there, this probably refers to the early 20th century. The four roofed buildings are the same as on the 1st OS map, but

the small building upstream is now recorded. A footbridge has replaced the ford on the Glenmore River.

General Site Description

Superficially, there is now no sign that this was once a corn mill. The 1960s water main and track have removed all trace of the tailrace and the section of the lade nearest the mill building. Conversion of the mill building to a dwelling has involved the removal of the water wheel and the internal mechanisms, and much rebuilding of the basic structure, particularly to add fireplaces and chimneys. Of the three buildings on the other side of the stream, one has disappeared entirely, leaving not even stone footings, one has been rebuilt into a barn, now collapsed at its northern end, and one is the standing ruin of a much older building, probably utilized as a sheep shelter.

A number of components of the former water wheel have been utilized in the re-use of the buildings, notably the axle placed over the stream, possibly as the support for a bridge, the two hubs re-used as window frames in the barn, and lengths of iron, possibly the spokes, used as lintels and floor joists. There is, however, no sign of the internal mechanism or the mill stones.

Building Description

Building A: Corn Mill

This is a 1½ storey building with two full gables, and an internal stone partition wall also to full gable height. In this and the east outer gable are fireplaces and chimneys with ceramic chimney pots still in place. In the stonework of the west gable the roof line can be seen to have been raised and straightened, probably to convert from a thatch or turf to a slate roof (**Photo no. 4**). Both gables have two windows, all neatly blocked up with stone. On the front, north wall of the building, the main house part has a central door flanked by windows, but the west window has been placed in what was originally a wide arched doorway with decoratively dressed corner stones. One particularly distinctive style of decorative stone is plain across one half of its face, with incised horizontal lines across the other half (**Photo no. 1**). The arch appears to have supported only the front face of the wall, as behind it a wooden lintel runs the full width of the original doorway (**Photo no. 2**) There is one small window in the back wall. The internal partition wall is not keyed into the main walls and would appear to be part of the conversion. A doorway leading through this partition to the west part of the building, presumably an outhouse or byre, is now blocked with stone.

The eastern gable where the water wheel would have been located has no trace of this apart from two small square niches on either side of where the wheel would have been,

only about 20cm deep, which presumably supported beams over the channel (**Photo no. 3**). Where the axle of the wheel would have passed through the wall is one of the blocked-up windows. The only trace of the wheel within this building are the iron lintel over the window in the arched doorway and iron bars placed as floor joists to a second storey in the outhouse, which may originally have been spokes.

Building B.

The main point of interest in this barn is the hub of the water wheel set into the gable end (**Photo no. 11**) A second hub is lying against the wall near the other gable, which has collapsed, and may have performed the same function (**Photo no. 12**) Although this building is in the same position as indicated while the mill was still in existence, it was obviously rebuilt considerably when the hubs were inserted, possibly incorporating stone from the demolished Building D. Two opposing, fairly wide doors suggest a threshing barn, with the hub windows for extra ventilation. The remains of a tin roof lie within the ruin, and there is the concrete platform of a small extension on the north gable.

Building C

This building is probably a ruin from the early 19th century, which was abandoned by the time of the conversion of the mill. The walls are well built of rubble with no dressed stone, and a pronounced batter (**Photo no. 16**) The front, north facing wall is shored up with a rubble buttress just west of the doorway (**Photo no. 15**) and a corner of the interior has probably been used as a sheep pen

Building D

This building now no longer exists except as a level platform below the track

Building E

This is the building upstream from the mill, which is located between the lade and the Allt a' Mhuilinn. It is of rubble construction, the walls mostly standing no more than 1m high, except for the west gable, which is almost to its full height (**Photo no. 10**). It is possible that a water channel ran down from the lade to the stream immediately east of the building; this is suggested by a line drawn on both the 1st and the 2nd edition OS maps. The omission of the building from the 1st and its inclusion on the 2nd edition OS map suggest that it must have been constructed between the dates of these two editions, in the 1880s-90s, but its function is unclear

Other Features

See attached sketch plan for locations.

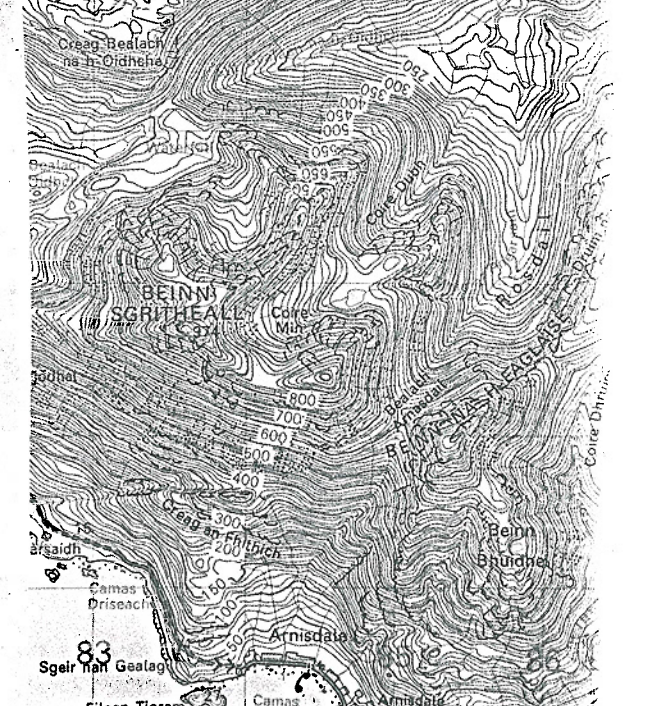
1. **Stone lined ditch; Trackway** This ditch probably indicates the line of the trackway running from the mill building to the ford, and later footbridge, across the Glenmore River (**Photo no. 5**) The line of the raised track has now been cut across by the changed course of the Allt a' Mhoulinn
2. **Footings of Drystone Dyke.** The grass-covered footings of a dyke running down the west bank of the Allt a' Mhoulinn, starting from the present access track and ford
3. **Trackway.** This partly cobbled track runs between buildings C and D, and between buildings B and C to the former bridge (no. 4, below). It probably connects the mill to the farm of Scallasaig to the east, running along the south bank of the Glenmore River. A line of edging stones to the track is particularly visible between buildings B and C
4. **Bridge and Water Wheel Axle.** The stone piers of a narrow bridge, now removed, over the Allt a' Mhoulinn. For some reason, the cast iron axle of the water wheel has been placed on the piers. This may have supported some form of footbridge structure. (**Photo no. 13**)
5. **Mill Lade.** Approximately 20m of the lade has been removed completely by the construction of the 1960s water main and access track, but above this, it is well-preserved running for approximately 40m round the contour from an intake point on the Allt a' Mhoulinn. Nothing is visible at the intake point. (**Photos 9 and 10**) Piles of rubble lying beside the modern access track where it runs up the slope behind the house probably represent the stone lining of the lade removed while excavating for the water main.
6. **Small Section of Walling.** This was originally thought to be a remnant of the lade, but it is too far west and, if a wall, is running towards a point one third of the way along the back wall of the mill building. (**Photo no. 8**) The remaining section is only 6 stones in length and two high.
7. **Retaining wall.** This short section of wall appears to be supporting a level platform running for a short distance away from the mill building below the hill slope. It does not continue as a track. (**Photo no. 7**)
8. **Trackway.** This track descends from the raised platform surrounding the mill building into wet ground to the west, heading for a gateway to the SW (**Photo no. 6**)
9. **Footings of drystone dyke.** These grass-covered footings appear to run parallel to the trackway (above, no. 8) at a distance of less than 2m (**Photo no. 6**) This is probably the line indicated on the 1st and 2nd edition OS maps.

The Photographs

1. **Building A:** Window set into a wide arched doorway. Note the decoratively dressed corner stones, some re-used for the window, and the iron window lintel, probably a part of the water wheel.
2. **Building A:** Back of window and arched doorway, showing the wooden lintel running the width of the doorway. To the left is the internal partition wall, not keyed into the main wall, and the blocked-off doorway into the outhouse section.
3. **Building A:** NE gable where the water wheel would have been located. The lintel stone visible in the centre of the picture is above a blocked up aperture where the axle would have passed through the wall. Near the corner of the walls are small square niches which presumably supported beams.
4. **Building A:** SW gable. This picture shows the raised line of the roof and two blocked-up windows. To the right is the remaining section of the retaining wall running along the back of the building.
5. **Feature 1, Ditch / Trackway.** The line of stones in the centre foreground mark the edge of the rush-filled ditch presumably at the edge of the trackway from the mill building to the Glenmore River.
6. **Features 8 and 9, Trackway and Drystone Dyke.** The footings of the drystone dyke are to the right of the track which runs to the gate in the background.
7. **Feature 7, Retaining Wall.** This supports a small platform extending out from the leveled ground on which the mill building is located.
8. **Feature 6, section of walling.** This is located west of the line of mill lade.
9. **Feature 5, Mill Lade.** View NW from Building E. The access track / pipeline crossing the lade are visible in front of the trees.
10. **Feature 5, Mill lade and Building E.** View SE from the access track. The Allt a' Mhuilinn is visible on the far left. The point of intake for the lade is in the trees.
11. **Building B, Barn.** SE gable with the inset water wheel hub.
12. **Building B.** second water wheel hub lying on the ground near the NW gable, now collapsed.
13. **Building B and Feature 4, Bridge Piers and Water Wheel Axle.** Building C is on the right, and the trackway passes between these two buildings.
14. **Building C.** View from the NE with building B in the background
15. **Building C.** Rubble buttress supporting the NW wall.
16. **Building C.** SW gable end, demonstrating the batter of the walling.

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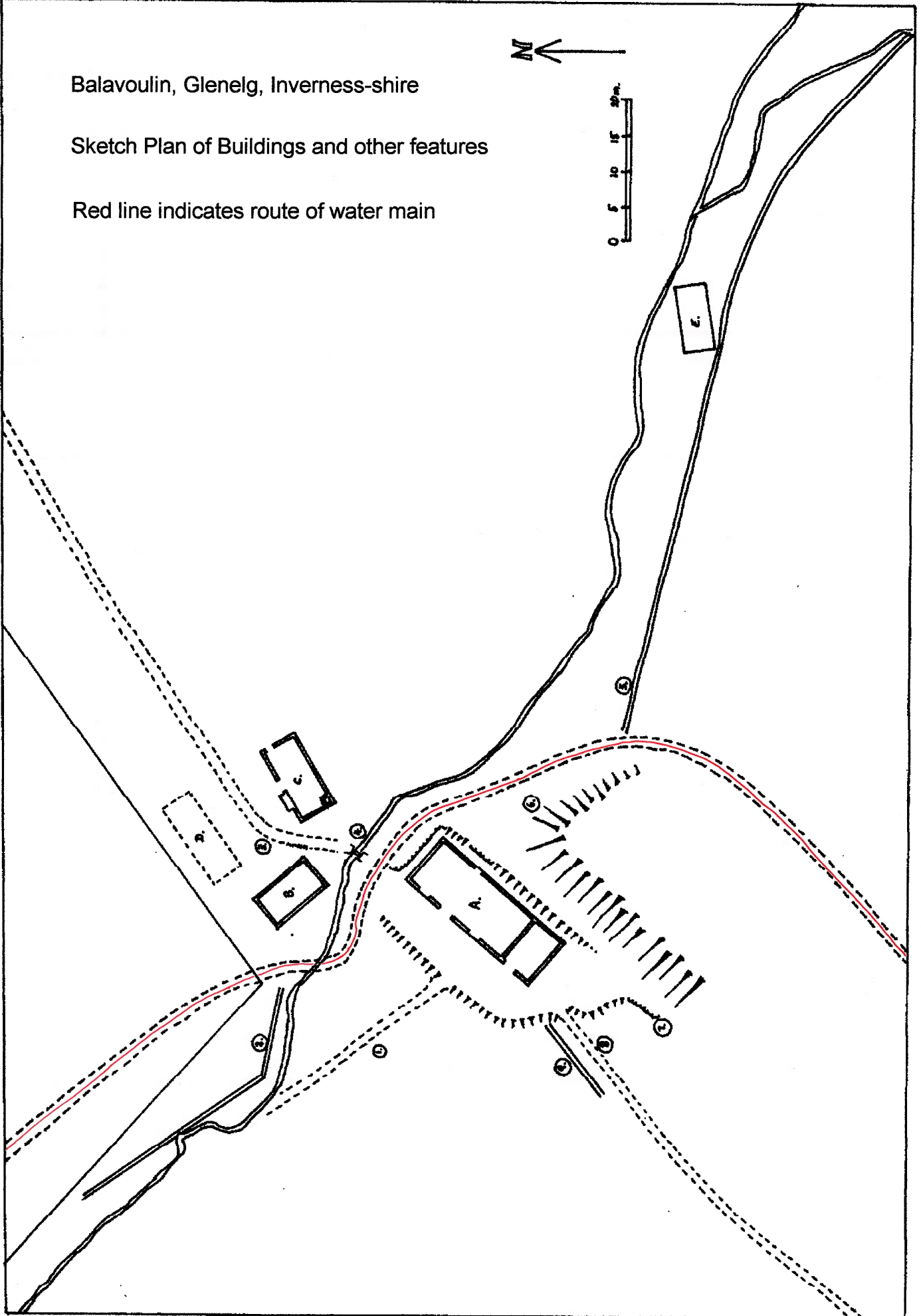
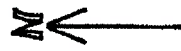
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Balavoulin, Glenelg, Inverness-shire

Sketch Plan of Buildings and other features

Red line indicates route of water main



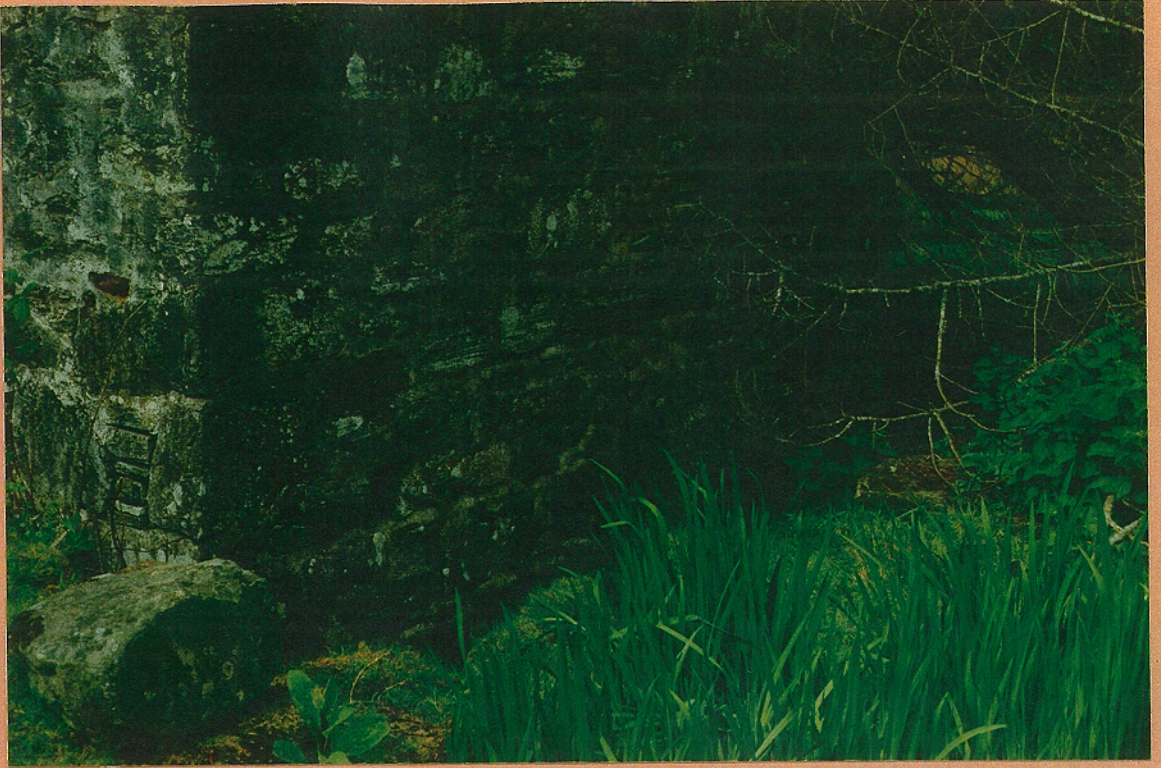
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