

**Report of Archaeological Watching Brief
3rd – 5th September 2001
Auldearn Church, Highland
NH 918 / 555**



**By
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October 2001**

Introduction

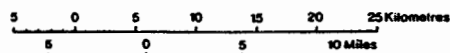
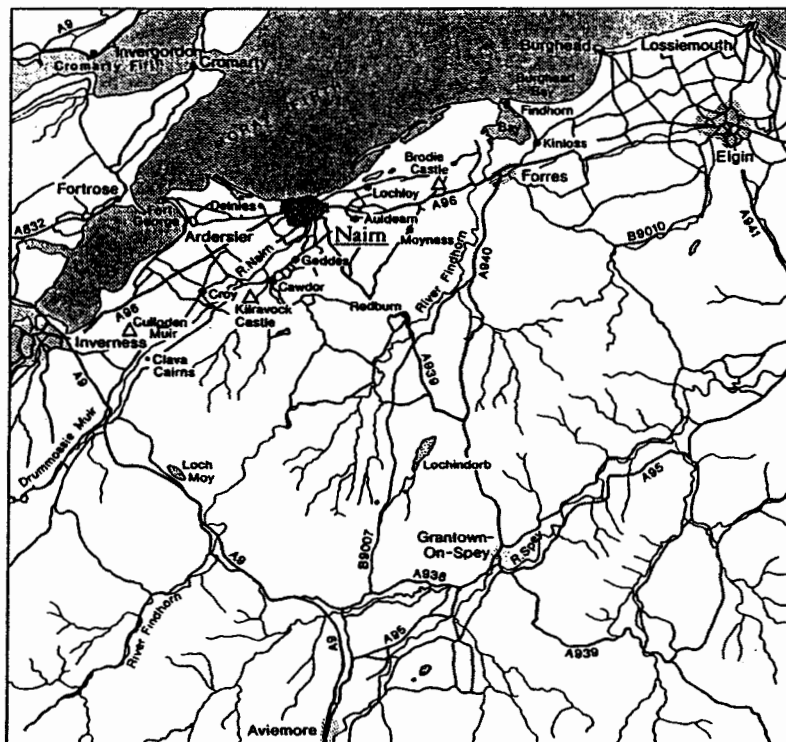
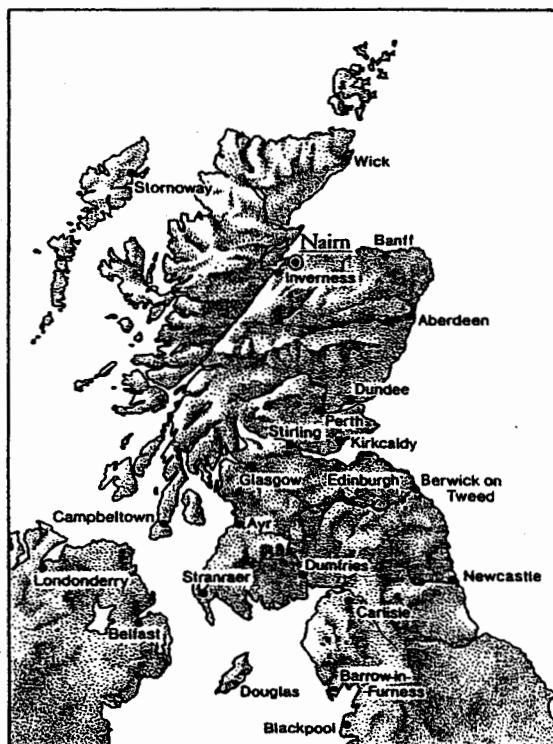
This report is for an archaeological watching brief carried out on the area around Auldearn Churchyard per requirements of Scheduled Ancient Monument consent for Scottish & Southern Energy Plc for the installation of an electricity cable.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following for their help during the course of this work :

- Mr. Allan Coburn, of Scottish & Southern Energy Plc;
- Staff of Hydro Contracts, for onsite help;
- Staff of MacPhee Contractors for onsite work;
- Staff of Highland Council Archaeology Unit.
- Mr. E Rutter, for on site help;
- Miss J Roberts, of Glasgow University for the palaeo-pathological analysis of the human bone.

Cover : church from south.





CHURCH

1:500

Historical Background

It is unknown when the church of Auldearn was established. Known to have been dedicated to St Columba and that the prebend was held by the Dean of Moray in Elgin Cathedral.

Present church was built in 1757, replacing earlier church, of which the nave of c.1600 survives. Church was altered in 1816-18 and 1898. The families of Hay of Lochloy, Brodie of Lethen and Dunbar of Boath reusing the earlier foundation as a burial vault. The nave was also used for burial of ministers in the late 19th century. The churchyard around the church was used principally for burials up to the 1890's when a new extension was built to the north.

Burial Records

Records for the church are fragmentary with Kirk of Session records surviving from 1805 onwards. Mortcloth records in the form of accounts exist for 1721 to 1754 (But with gaps); records of burials exist from 1816 to 1854. A later lair register exists but both lack details.

To date no archaeological excavation work has previously been conducted in the area of the church, the only work being a survey of the gravestones of the churchyard and adjoining cemetery. (Farrell, 2000)

Objectives

To conduct a watching brief on the excavation of the cable trench to record those features revealed by excavation work. A copy of the project design prepared for this work is enclosed.

Site Conditions

The area under investigation is predominantly a corner of the churchyard. Weather on the days of work (September 3rd – 5th 2001) was overcast with bright periods.

Watching Brief Investigation

The watching brief was carried out in accordance with accepted professional archaeological standards as published by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA 1999). Over the construction period a suitably qualified archaeologist was on site to carry out observations and assessment of the area affected by the excavation works.

Results

The watching brief was undertaken for the replacement of an existing electricity pole and a short length of underground cable.

The site of the pole lies to the northwest corner of the original churchyard with a small section of trench in the later extension to the north. The trench measured 0.25m wide, 0.5m deep and 9.5m in length, with an excavation for a strainer 1.4m by 0.5m.

Underlying the turf and topsoil was an underlying layer of mixed soil and sand. A small amount of disarticulated human bone was found in both trenches. (See copy of report on material to rear) No articulated skeletons were revealed. This disarticulated bone is probably a result of the insertion of the boundary wall and relating landscaping (see photographs 1 & 2) and tipping of spoil from grave-cuts. The insertion of the boundary wall also meant that material was probably brought in to bring up the level of the ground, hence the find of animal bone and a sherd of white glazed pottery.

Recommendations

No recommendations with regards to this development project are to be proposed.

Archive

Notebook of results to be deposited in the National Monuments Record in Edinburgh. A set of colour prints has been deposited with National Monuments Record of Scotland.

References

Farrell, S (2000) Auldearn Churchyard – A survey of its Memorials. 5 Volumes. Unpublished report held in the NMRS.

Historic Scotland (1996) The treatment of human remains in Archaeology. Version 1.1. & Earlier version (Operational Policy Paper no.5)

IFA (1999) By-laws, Standards and Policy Statements of the Institute of Field Archaeologists. Reading.

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Top - Photo 1 – View of excavation for strainer showing boundary wall.
Bottom – photo 2 – View of excavation from south showing bank



Photo 3 – View of excavation for cable trench.



HUMAN SKELETAL REMAINS FROM AULDEARN CHURCH

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The remains recovered from Auldearn Church comprised a small assemblage of disarticulated human and animal bone. It was derived from two contexts, One and Three, which were both interpreted as backfill from the graveyard (Farrell 2001). The state of preservation of the bones was poor. All were fragmented, and moderate surface erosion and weathering was evident indicating that they had been disturbed prior to this occasion, and had perhaps lain above the ground for a period of time.

An inventory of all the skeletal elements was made (Tables One and Two), and each of the fragments was examined with a view to identifying the minimum number of individuals present and, where possible, age at death, sex and any surviving skeletal pathology. There were no intact long bones present from which to calculate living stature. The minimum number of individuals was determined by recording any repeated skeletal elements, or elements from individuals of clearly different biological age. The methods used to determine age at death and sex were in accordance with those outlined by Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994).

RESULTS

Context One

Table One: Human Skeletal Elements Recovered from Context One

Key: R = Right M = Midline F = Female
L = Left U = Unknown

Element	Side	Age	Sex	Comments
Clavicle	L	< 25-29 yrs	U	Medial end unfused. Lateral end broken off. Smallish in size, could belong to individual in late teens
Thoracic vertebra	M	16-24 yrs	U	Centrum recently fused
Second metacarpal	L	Adult	U	Intact
Frontal	R	Young adult	U	Unfused coronal suture. Slight pitting ectocranial surface. Lateral edge cut by machine
Parietal	R	Young adult	U	Unfused lambdoid suture and posterior part of temporal line
Fibula	U	Adult	U	Mid shaft
Frontal	U	U	U	Small fragment
Rib	L	Adult	U	Neck
Rib	L	Young adult	U	Head and neck
Proximal phalanx of hand	U	Adult	U	Distal two thirds. Pronounced insertions for palmar interosseous muscles.
Proximal phalanx of hand	U	Adult	U	Proximal half
Tibia	U	U	U	Small eroded fragment of anterior border mid-shaft
Thoracic vertebra	M	Adult	U	Right superior facet, right and left inferior, and spinous process

No repeated skeletal elements were present, but it was thought that at least two individuals of different ages were represented.

The unfused medial end of the left clavicle indicated an age of less than 25 to 29 years at death. The clavicle was also slender and small in size. The epiphyseal plates of the vertebrae were recently fused, suggesting an age of little older than 16 to 24 years, and the cranial fragments had unfused lambdoid and coronal sutures. It is likely that these bones belonged to the same individual, who had died in his or her late teens or very early twenties. The second metacarpal and the two proximal phalanges were thought to belong to an older individual. This observation was based on the presence of slight osteophytes on the proximal and distal ends of the metacarpal, and the rugged insertions for the palmar interossei muscles on the phalanges.

No sexually dimorphic elements were preserved, and so the sex of neither individual could be determined. No pathological conditions were evident on any of the fragments.

Context Three

Table Two: Human Skeletal Elements Recovered from Context Three

Element	Side	Age	Sex	Comments
Clavicle	L	? Adult	U	Medial end missing, but adult length
Petrous temporal	L	Adult	U	Lateral surface eroded
Cuboid	L	Adult	U	Intact
Scapula	R	Adult	? F	Glenoid fossa, superior part of lateral border and base of acromion. Glenoid length: 3.4 cm, width incomplete
Parietals & occipital	R & L	30+ yrs	U	Fused right and left parietals, suture almost obliterated, and lambda.
Femur	L	Adult	? F	Head and most medial part of neck. Slightly too damaged to measure, but appears to be quite small.
Proximal phalanx first metatarsal	? L	Adult	U	Intact
Metacarpal	U	Adult	U	Distal half
Occipital	M	Adult	U	Posterior rim of foramen magnum
Radius	U	Adult	U	Small eroded fragment of mid shaft
Rib	R	Adult	U	Mid-shaft
Rib	L	Adult	U	Mid-shaft
Mandible	L	Probably 40+ yrs	? F	From menton to region immediately anterior to gonion. I2 & P2 lost P.M, all remaining dentition lost A.M. Periodontal disease around molars

Again, a minimum number of only one individual could be identified. The morphology of the surviving part of the mandible, the length of the glenoid fossa of the scapula, and the size of the head of femur (although slightly damaged), indicated that this individual was probably female. The cranial sutures were closed and partially obliterated, suggesting an age of 40 plus years at death, although this method of age determination can be unreliable (Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994). The ante mortem tooth loss and alveolar resorption evident in the mandible was consistent with this age estimate.

This female had suffered from quite severe dental disease. The left mandibular central incisor, canine, first premolar and first, second and third molars had all been lost ante-mortem. There was considerable periodontal disease around the sockets of the teeth, which had been almost, but not completely, resorbed. Periodontal disease is a general term used to describe the inflammatory changes that can occur in the soft tissues and bone around a tooth in response to plaque (Ortner and Putschar 1981). The most

common cause is poor oral hygiene. If, as in this instance, the periodontal ligament becomes affected, tooth loss generally follows.

No other pathological conditions were identified

Non-Human Bone

Four non-human bones, two from Context One and two from Context Three, were recovered together with the human remains. The bones from Context One comprised the distal end of a femur from a large ungulate, probably an ox, and part of the shaft of an unidentified long bone. The epiphyseal end of the femur was unfused indicating that the animal was immature, despite its large size. The shafts of both bones had been butchered using a sharp knife or axe. The remains from Context Three comprised a small long bone and a vertebra. These require specialist analysis in order for species to be determined.

References

Buikstra J E and Ubelaker D H eds. 1994 *Standards for Data Collection from Human Skeletal Remains*. Arkansas Archaeological Survey Research Series No.44

Farrell S 2001 *Interim Report on Skeletal Remains Recovered from Archaeological Watching Brief at Auldearn Church* Unpublished

Ortner D J and Putschar W G J 1981 *Identification of Palaeopathological Conditions in Human Skeletal Remains*. Smithsonian Institution Press

Appendix 1 – Photographic & Context Register

Photographs and negatives have been deposited with the National Monuments Record of Scotland in Edinburgh.

- 1 – View of ground before excavation facing west.
- 2 – View of hole excavated for strainer.
- 3 – View of trench along edge of boundary wall
- 4 – View of excavation
- 5 – View of retaining bank
- 6 – View of church from south
- 7 – View of rear of retaining wall
- 8 – View of strainer in place
- 9 – View of excavation to pole
- 10 – View of excavation at pole

Contexts

- 1 – deposit at north wall
- 2 – deposit at west wall
- 3 – deposit at west wall

Context Sheet

Site code: AUL 01 Area: Trench: Grid: (x,y) Context No. 001

Context type: LAYER / DUMP

Description in 5 words: MATERIAL LYING AGAINST NORTH CH. WALL

Length: 6.3m Breadth: 25cm Diameter: Depth / Height: 50cm

Location: NORTH CHURCH WALL
 Form (plan / corners / base):
 Orientation:
 Condition:
 Contamination:
 Finds:
 Other:

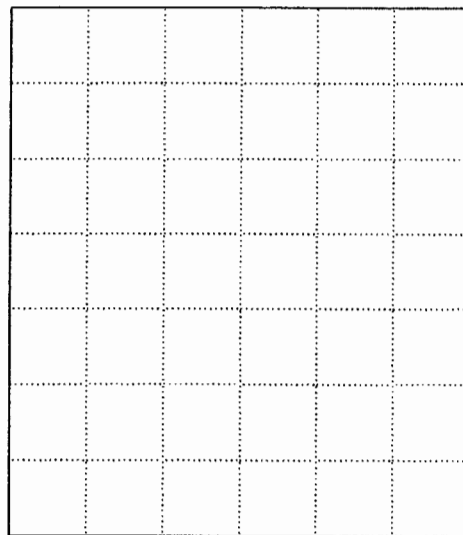
Soil colour (ASR and / or Muncell): MIXED PALE BUFFISH ORANGE & MID BROWNISH GREY
 Soil class: SLIGHTLY SILTY SAND
 Grain size and form: FINE
 Sorting: MODERATE
 Inclusions, size and form: BURNED MATERIAL; PLASTER & MORTAR; SOME ROUNDED PEBBLES
 Organics: FINE ROOTLETS
 Other:

Description:

Sketch:

DUMP OF MATERIAL PROBABLY DERIVED FROM GRAVE DIGGING; BARRICADE OVER WALL; DISARTICULATED HUMAN REMAINS INCLUDING SKULL, CLAVICLE, PHALANXES, & POSS. RADIUS/ULNA MIXED WITH CLEARLY BURNED ANIMAL BONES - SO BURNED MATERIAL PROBABLY DERIVED FROM DOMESTIC DUNGEON.

THIS WAS TRENCHED FOR CABLE LAYING;
 MEASUREMENTS ABOVE ARE TRENCH MEASUREMENTS.



Key words:

LAYER / DUMP / CEMETERY EARTH

Post excavation interpretation:

Plans: x Photos: x

Sections: y Samples: x

Method of excavation SHOVEL

Excavated by: CONTRACTORS - W.B. Recorded by: AER Date: 3/9/01

% excavated: Checked by: STF Date: 5/9/01

Context Sheet

Site code: Area: Trench: Grid: (x,y) **Context No.**

Context type: TURF & TOPSOIL.

Description in 5 words:

Length: Breadth: Diameter: Depth / Height:

Location: _____

Form (plan / corners / base):

Orientation:

Condition:	
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Contamination:	
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Finds:

Other: _____

Soil colour (ASR and / or Muncell): MID BROWNISH GRAY

Soil class: Slightly silty sand

Grain size and form:	fine
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Sorting:	POWERS
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Inclusions, size and form: occ. small pebbles & mortar flecks

Organics: very humic; fine rootwads.

Other: _____

Description:

Sketch:

TURF & TOPSOIL OVERLYING RUBBLE BACKFILL
BEHIND WESTERN CHURCH WALL. NO FINDS.

Key words: TRAF 9 Defect

Post excavation interpretation:

[illegible][illegible]

Method of excavation	Shovel
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Excavated by: CONTRACTORS: W/B. Recorded by: me Date: 3/9/01.

% excavated: Checked by: STF Date: 5/9/01

Context Sheet

Site code: AUL 01 Area: Trench: Grid: (x,y) Context No. 003

Context type: RUBBLE & SAND BACKFILL / LAYER / FILL

Description in 5 words:

Length: 1.4m Breadth: 0.5m Diameter: Depth / Height: 1.4m

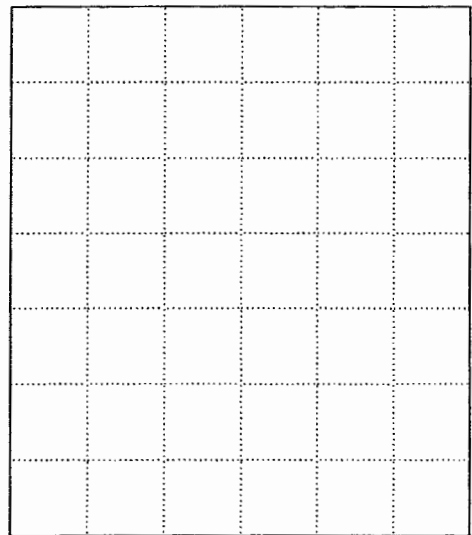
Location:
Form (plan / corners / base):
Orientation:
Condition:
Contamination:
Finds:
Other:

Soil colour (ASR and / or Muncell): PALM BUFFISH ORANGE
Soil class: SAND
Grain size and form: FINE - MEDIUM
Sorting: MODERATE
Inclusions, size and form: ANGULAR SANDSTONE AND PEBBLES - BOULDER IN SIZE
Organics: FEW FINE ROOTS IN UPPER PORTION
Other: /

Description:

REMAINING WALL (WESTERN) IF CHURCHYARD WAS
NEARLY BUILT FREE-STANDING IN A CUT, THE
REAR, UNFAVOUR SIDE OF WALL WAS THEN BACKFILLED
WITH THIS MATERIAL. IT DID CONTAIN HUMAN
BONE FRAGMENTS; MANDIBLE, SCAPULA etc. STRENGTH
OF CUT & LEVEL OF BACKFILL ARE PRESERVED
IN THE PRESENT CONTOURING BEHIND THE WALL.
(19th POT HANDLE FOUND.

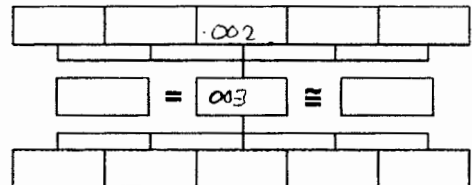
Sketch:



Key words:

RUBBLE / BACKFILL

Post excavation interpretation:



Plans: X Photos: X

Sections: X Samples: X

Method of excavation SHovel

Excavated by: CONTRACTORS: W.B Recorded by: ASL Date: 3/9/01

% excavated: Checked by: STF Date: 5/9/01

Project Design

Project name: Auldearn Parish Church Electricity Supply

NGR: NH 918 555

Local Authority: Highland Council

Client : Scottish & Southern Energy Plc.

Introduction

This project design is for an archaeological watching brief to be carried out on the area around Auldearn Churchyard per requirements of a Scheduled Ancient Monument consent.

Historical Background

It is unknown when the church of Auldearn was established. Known to have been dedicated to St Columba and that the prebend was held by the Dean of Moray in Elgin Cathedral.

Present church was built in 1757, replacing earlier church, of which the nave of c.1600 survives. Church was altered in 1816-18 and 1898. The families of Hay of Lochloy, Brodie of Lethen and Dunbar of Boath reusing the earlier foundation as a burial vault. Also used for burial of ministers in the late 19th century.

Burial Records

Records for the church are fragmentary with Kirk of Session records surviving from 1805 onwards. Mortcloth records in the form of accounts exist for 1721 to 1754 (But with gaps); records of burials exist from 1816 to 1854. A later lair register exists but both lack details. (Farrell, 2000)

To date no archaeological work has been carried out previously at this location.

Aims and Objectives

This project design is for a watching brief for the excavation of a trench by Scottish & Southern Energy Plc for an electricity cable trench in the vicinity of Auldearn Parish Church.

Trench location is proposed to be hand-dug and be 375mm wide by 450mm deep with a length in total of approximately 72m. The location of the trench has been proposed to run along the current footpath on the south side of the church and along the side of the west gable of the church.

Methodology

Where possible all interments will be left *in situ*; any disarticulated bone will be collected for post-excavation analysis. Where interments cannot be avoided, and where excavation has to be carried out, they will be recorded at 1:10 with photographs taken on black & white and colour slide. All burials and contexts will be recorded on standard recording sheets. Any artefacts (shroud pins or coffin furniture) found will be liable to Treasure Trove.

If numbers of burials are found during excavation works time is to be allowed for the archaeologist to carry out recording and excavation of remains. If large amounts of burials are uncovered time to be given for any further excavation work to be carried out by archaeological staff. Note - an alternative route should be sought, to minimise the amount of disturbance of remains, if this happens.

Any gravestones uncovered, as part of the work will be left *in situ*. They will be fully recorded as part of the watching brief.

Health & Safety

Due to the combination of onsite factors and the nature of the excavation a risk assessment has not been produced due to the small size of the proposed excavation.

Though the following factors will be undertaken –

That the archaeologist will provide evidence of an up-to-date tetanus injection.

All human bone to be handled only when wearing protective facemasks and disposable gloves. Both to be discarded by a 'burn bin', to be provided by archaeological contractor.

Any 'remains' to be handled with care and respect.

Post-Excavation & Reporting

Report to be made in standard data structure report.

Arrangements have been made by the archaeological contractor that Julie Roberts of GUARD will undertake any palaeo-pathology post-excavation needs. This will include the identification of the number of individuals, sexing, ageing, stature and basic pathological study of the remains.

Reporting to include any finds made.

Any remains recovered to be buried in a new plot in Auldearn Cemetery.

Bibliography

Farrell, S (2000) Auldearn Churchyard – A survey of its Memorials. Unpublished report.

Historic Scotland (1996) The treatment of human remains in Archaeology. Version 1.1.
& Earlier version (Operational Policy Paper no.5)