



Highland Archaeology Services Ltd

Bringing the past and future together

Archaeological Report



Halcro, Bower Caithness

7 Duke Street Cromarty Ross-shire IV11 8YH Tel / Fax 01381 600491
Mobile: 07834 693378 Email: info@hi-arch.co.uk Web: www.hi-arch.co.uk
VAT No. 838 7358 80

Registered in Scotland no. 262144

Registered Office: 10 Knockbreck Street, Tain, Ross-shire IV19 1BJ

Archaeological Report:

Halcro, Bower Caithness

Report No.	HAS080301
Project code	HAS-HCB07
Client	N Clyne
Planning Ref	CA-06-663
Date / revision	15 June 2008
Authors	Paul Humphreys and John Wood

Summary

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

Contents

Introduction	3
Location.....	4
Aims and objectives	5
Site details and archaeological background.....	5
Method.....	7
Observations and Discussion.....	7
Conclusions and Recommendations	13
Appendix 1: Index of Photographs	13

List of Figures

Figure 1 Site Location	4
Figure 2 Sketch plan of site showing photo locations.	5
Figure 3 Extract from 1st Edition OS 1:10560 Map (1877)	6

Acknowledgements

The fieldwork and photography was carried out by Paul Humphreys; the report was prepared by Paul Humphreys and John Wood. We wish to thank Neil Clyne 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 N Clyne and Miss B McAdie, 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 located at Halcro, Bower, Caithness (ND 2350 6107) in improved pasture at 65m above sea level.

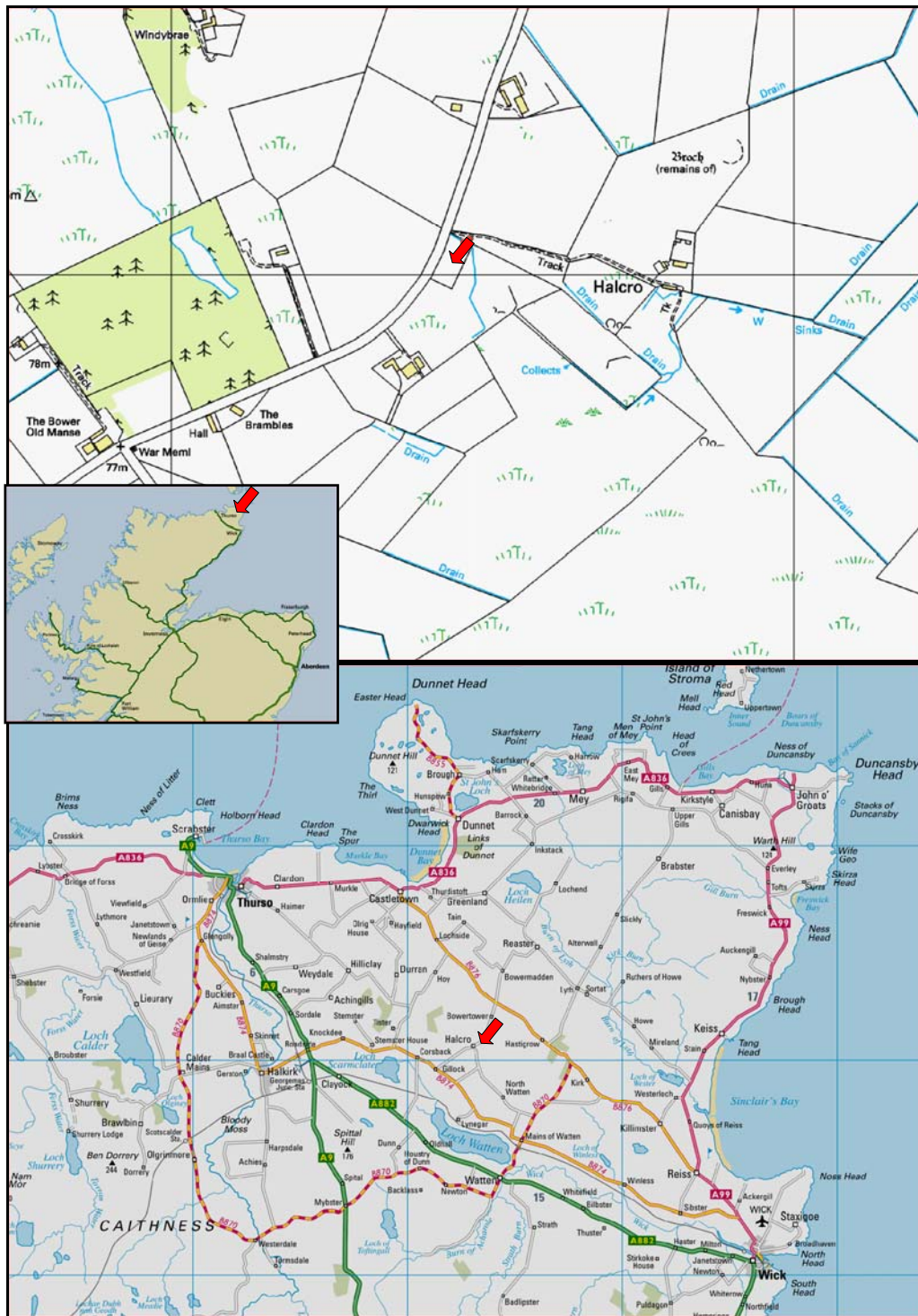


Figure 1 Site Location

Mapping reproduced by permission of the Ordnance Survey: Licence 100043217.

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

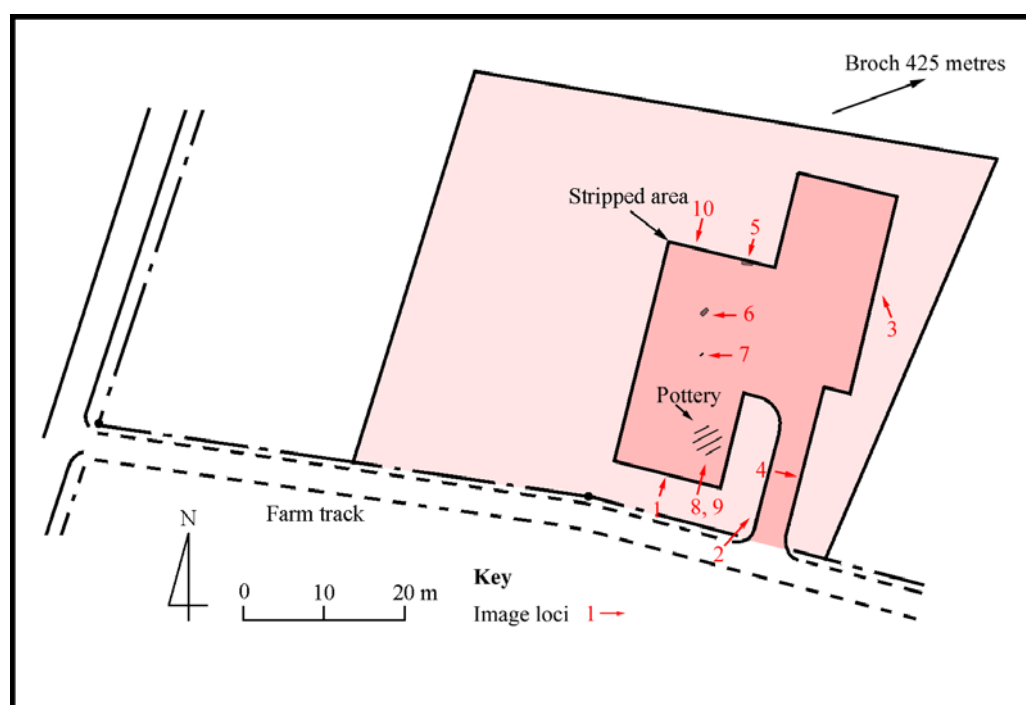


Figure 2 Sketch plan of site showing photo locations.

Caithness generally is rich in archaeology of all periods, especially Neolithic and Bronze Age cairns and standing stones; and Iron Age brochs, which generally date from around 2000 years ago. The present site is about 425 metres from Halcro Manse Broch (see cover photo), which is scheduled as a monument of national importance under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 (No.556). (NMRS and HSMR: ND26SW0001)

This is shown as a 'Pict's House' on the first edition OS 1:10560 Map of 1877 (see Fig 3). It survives as a flat-topped, grassy mound on a larger mound. It was first recorded by the Ordnance Survey in about 1872. As the OS surveyor noted on a visit in 1982,

The hummocky lower mound, an effect caused by robbing and probable structural collapse, measures 47m NW-SE by 33m with an average height of 0.6m. It has been somewhat reduced in size by ploughing. The higher broch mound is about 18m diameter across its flat top and 2.3m high. It is sited at SW end of

surviving lower mound. A stretch of wall is evident running down flank of mound on NE side.

According to the OS Name Book of 1872, as noted on the first edition map, human remains were found when an opening was made in the south side.

Halcro as a settlement has been recorded by the National and Highland Council archaeological records (NMRS ND26SW 55; HSMR ND26SW00-67), but there are no details available. The name appears to be Norse, meaning 'High Fold', although the second element 'cro' is thought to be a Norse borrowing from Gaelic. This hybrid Norse – Gaelic culture is typical of medieval Caithness.

It does appear to be long-established, although it does not merit a mention in the first Statistical Account of 1795. The farm itself is recorded separately following survey by Roger Mercer before 1995 (NMRS ND26SW 47; HSMR ND26SW0047). He notes a

Longhouse farm (ND 2383 6104), comprising:

A: Longhouse. Dimensions: 35 x 5m. Rectangular structure divided into three units, the SW unit residential. Orientation NE-SW.

B: Longhouse. Dimensions: 23 x 5m. A range of barns attached at right angles to the NE unit of A. It comprises three units, the central one containing a byre slot. Orientation NW-SE.

C: Outhouse. Dimensions: 18 x 5m. Rectangular structure that lies parallel to B without any internal divisions but with a small annexe attached measuring 3.5 x 3m without an evident entrance. Orientation NW-SE.

The Royal Commission subsequently noted that four roofed buildings are depicted on the first edition of the OS 6-inch map (Caithness 1877, sheet xii). One unroofed and three roofed buildings are shown on the 1970 edition at the same scale.

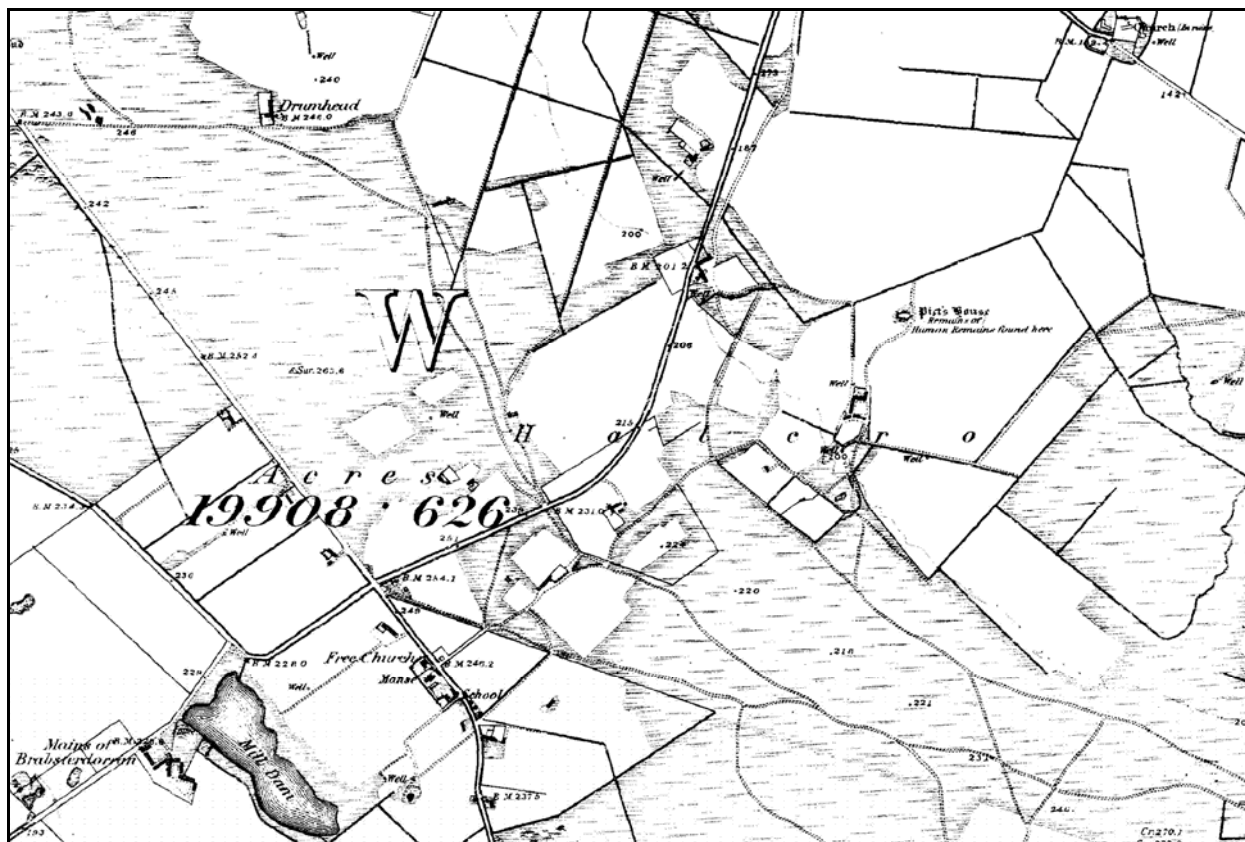


Figure 3 Extract from 1st Edition OS 1:10560 Map (1877)

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 30 April and 1 May 2007; the drainage and soakaway were completed in March and April 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.

Observations and Discussion

Site stripping

The observed site preparation work included the removal of the top soil over the area of the house base, workshop base and driveway (plates 1, 2 and 3). The revealed soil profile over the stripped area comprised 20 to 30 cm of top soil overlying oxidised till (plate 4) containing occasional cobbles and large slabs all of glacial origin. Conversation with the farmer confirmed that the land had not been ploughed for many years and there was no visible evidence for modern or ancient ploughing in the exposed till surface.

Two flat slabs, high in the soil profile on the till surface, were investigated (plates 5 and 6); no cut or other soil disturbance could be detected and they were interpreted as having no archaeological significance.

A small discrete area of colour change on the till surface was also investigated (plate 7). It lacked the coherence of form that might have indicted an anthropogenic interpretation. An old animal burrow was the most likely explanation.

Dark flecks (plate 8) on the till surface and in the soil section that had the superficial appearance of organic matter or charcoal proved, on close inspection, to be derived from decayed oil-shale that occurred in elsewhere on the site as large fragments.

Archaeological finds within the top soil amounted to occasional sherds of 19th century pottery and glass. These finds appeared to cluster in the area of the driveway however they were small in number and may constitute a statistical artefact.



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6



Plate 7



Plate 8



Plate 9



Plate 10

Foundation Trenches

The percolation test pit demonstrated that the thickness of the till at least 2 metres; it contained occasional large boulders and slabs of glacial origin. 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 (See Plates 9 and 10 above).

Septic tank and soak-away trenches

These were excavated in March and April 2008. They were observed by Paul Humphreys but were completely clean - no archaeological finds or features were noted.

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 8 - 12. Copies are also included on the enclosed CDROM. Photo locations are shown in Figure 2 on page 5.

Photo No.	Notes	Taken by	Date
1	Stripped house area	PDH	30/04/2007
2	Stripped drive area	PDH	30/04/2007
3	Stripped workshop area	PDH	30/04/2007
4	General soil profile	PDH	30/04/2007
5	Slab detail	PDH	30/04/2007
6	Slab detail	PDH	30/04/2007
7	Colour change	PDH	30/04/2007
8	Dark flecks	PDH	30/04/2007
9	Foundation trench looking north	PDH	01/05/2007
10	House foundations looking south	PDH	01/05/2007