John O'Groats Mill
Newton, John O'Groats

Archaeological Watching Brief
Data Structure Report

November 2023

AOC Project Number: 70807

AOC Archaeology Group

ARCHAEOLOGY | HERITAGE | CONSERVATION

John O'Groats Mill, Newton, John O'Groats:

Archaeological Watching Brief, Data Structure Report

On Behalf of:	**John O'Groats Mill Trust** **John O'Groats** **KW1 4YR**
Planning Reference:	**21/04127/FUL**
National Grid Reference (NGR):	**ND 37023 73349**
AOC Project No:	**70807**
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OASIS No:	**aocarcha1-521145**
Date:	**30th November 2023**

This document has been prepared in accordance with AOC standard operating procedures.

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Abstract

This report details the findings of an archaeological watching brief which was required by John O'Groats Mill Trust regarding a proposed extension and car parking area at John O'Groats Mill, Newton, John O'Groats (Highland Council Planning reference 21/04127/FUL). The north coast of the Scottish mainland is rich in medieval and post-medieval archaeology, of which the Mill forms a key part for John O'Groats village.

The watching brief was conducted from 27th to 28th November 2023. No archaeological features or deposits were identified during the watching brief. As such, no further archaeological work is proposed in relation to the development area.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 An archaeological watching brief was required by John O'Groats Mill Trust regarding a proposed extension and car parking area at John O'Groats Mill, Newton, John O'Groats (NGR: ND 37023 73349) (Planning ref: 21/04127/FUL). The development (hereafter 'the Site') comprises the demolition of a building extension, alterations and extension to the mill building to form visitor facilities, landscaping, and creation of a parking area. The requirement for archaeological works had arisen due to the location of the Site within an area with a high potential for significant archaeological remains to survive below ground and the historical significance of the mill complex.

1.2 The Site lies within the administrative area of the Highland Council, which is advised on archaeological matters by Kirsty Cameron of the Highland Council Historic Environment Team (HCHET). The archaeological works were conducted in accordance with the principles set out in National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) (2023) and Planning and Archaeology 2/2011 (2011), and adhere to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) Code of Conduct (2022).

1.3 The objectives for the fieldwork had previously been set out in a *Written Scheme of Investigation* (WSI) (AOC 2023).

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Site is located to the west of the village of John O'Groats and north of the A836 John O'Groats to Thurso road (NGR: ND 37023 73349) (**Figure 1**). The area immediately surrounding the mill complex is predominantly open farmland with occasional small cottages.

2.2 According to the British Geological Survey (BGS 2023), the Site is underlain by the John O'Groats Sandstone Formation, a sedimentary rock formed between 387.7 and 382.7 million years ago in the Devonian period. The superficial geological deposits comprise Devenisan Tills of Diamicton, a sedimentary deposit formed between 116 and 11.8 thousand years ago during the Quaternary Period.

2.3 A comprehensive study of the mill was undertaken by AOC Archaeology in 2013 which recorded the mill structure, its contents, and conducted geophysical surveys of the immediately surrounding fields (Sproat et al 2013).

2.4 The historic mill complex on the site was built around 1900 to replace an older threshing mill built in the 1840s. The history of the site earlier than this is unconfirmed, but it is believed that a mill has sat on or near the same site for several hundred years, the feasibility of which is consistent with the medieval history of Caithness as a production centre and exporter of grain. Unpublished excavations undertaken in the 1980s adjacent to the Cromwellian Bridge identified a section of walling that is likely to have related to one of the pre-1840s milling structures (*ibid*.).

Figure 1: Site location plan

04/70807/DSR/01/01

04/70807/DSR/02/01

Figure 2: Watching brief area

3.0 OBJECTIVES

3.1 The *Chartered Institute for Archaeologists* (CIfA) defines an archaeological watching brief as '*a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons. This will be within a specified area or site on land, in an inter-tidal zone or underwater, where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed* (CIfA, 2020).'

3.2 The aims of the archaeological works were:

i) To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area prior to the destruction of any significant material

ii) To excavate, sample and record any features or to propose arrangements for their safeguarding, where possible

iii) To sample deposits for post-excavation work, including environmental analysis and dating

iv) To make recommendations for further measures necessary to mitigate the impact of the development

v) To make recommendations for post-excavation work that will require completion to fulfil the archaeological planning condition

4.0 METHODOLOGY

4.1 An archaeologist supervised excavation by mechanical excavators fitted with 1m and 2m wide straight-edged buckets. All work was conducted in line with the Highland Council *Standards for Archaeological Work* (2012) and the CIfA *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (2020).

4.2 All features of archaeological significance were excavated by hand in order to establish the date, nature, extent and state of preservation of the deposits. Archaeological features and deposits were drawn at a scale of 1:20 and section drawings were drawn at a scale of 1:10. All significant archaeological features were sampled for post-excavation analysis.

4.3 The watching brief location, including findspots and feature locations, were plotted using a Trimble DGPS capable of centimetre accuracy. The archaeological monitoring was recorded using high-resolution digital photography in order to record the process as well as any features or finds of interest.

5.0 RESULTS

5.1 The archaeological watching brief was carried out from 27th to 28th November 2023. The works were split into two areas (**Figure 2**), the proposed mill extension foundation and the main visitor's car park.

5.2 **Mill extension area**

This area comprised a 15m x 15m grassy slope directly adjacent to the north side of the mill building, dropping away to the burn below. On arrival at the site, some machine disturbance was apparent across this area (**Plates 1-3**), however, this was revealed to not have disturbed the underlying natural subsoil.

Topsoil was between 0.2-0.4m deep and comprised a dark brown clay silt with frequent inclusions of angular sedimentary stone fragments 0.05-0.2m in size, as well as occasional roofing slate fragments and other building material waste. The underlying natural layer mainly comprised a light reddish-brown gravel-rich, clay sand with occasional sub-angular stone 0.1-0.3m in size. Below this shallow, natural deposit areas of sandstone bedrock were seen as heavily fractured stone which appeared to have the foundation trench for the extant mill building carved into it.

Some areas of natural were noted to be disturbed in the northwest corner of the extension area and appeared to be consistent with modern building and agricultural debris (**Plates 4-8**).

5.3 **Visitor car park area**

The area for the proposed car park had similarly been disturbed by machine movements. The topsoil was a dark-brown clay silt between 0.2-0.3m deep but with slightly more clay than adjacent to the building. The underlying natural subsoil consisted of a light reddish-brown clay-rich gravel.

Throughout the topsoil removal occasional modern agricultural features were observed (**Plates 9-14**) which consisted of plough scarring (generally aligned north to south), and shallow drainage ditches filled with cobbles running in varying alignments.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 No archaeological features or deposits were identified during the watching brief. As such, no further archaeological work is proposed in relation to the development area.

6.2 Final decisions on further archaeological mitigation rests with the planning authority.

7.0 REFERENCES

British Geological Survey 2023. *Geology of Britain Viewer.* Accessed online at https://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html, on 23/11/2023.

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) 2014- Last Updated 2022 *Code of Conduct*.

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) 2014-Last Updated 2020 *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief.*

Glew, P. (2023). AOC70807 *John O'Groats Mill, Newton, John O'Groats: Archaeological Watching Brief, Written Scheme of Investigation.* Unpublished report, AOC Archaeology.

Highland Historic Environment Record (HHER) 2023. Accessed online at https://her.highland.gov.uk/, on 23/11/23.

Historic Scotland 2006. The Treatment of Human Remains in Archaeology.

Scottish Government 2023 *National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)*

Sproat et al 2013. *John O'Groats Mill, Huna, Caithness, Archaeology & Inventory of Artefacts Report*. Unpublished report, AOC Archaeology, Project 22376.

Plate 1: View west of access and condition of the mill extension area

Plate 2: View southwest of the mill extension area prior to topsoil stripping

Plate 3: View east of the condition of the extension area access

Plate 4: Record shot of stone layer under topsoil, facing east

Plate 5: Working shot of initial topsoil removal, facing east

Plate 6: Working shot of stone layer, facing northeast

Plate 7: Post-excavation view of the corner of the extension area, southeast to northwest

Plate 8: Post-excavation of the extension area, facing south

Plate 9: Post-excavation of the car park area, with plough scarring, facing southwest

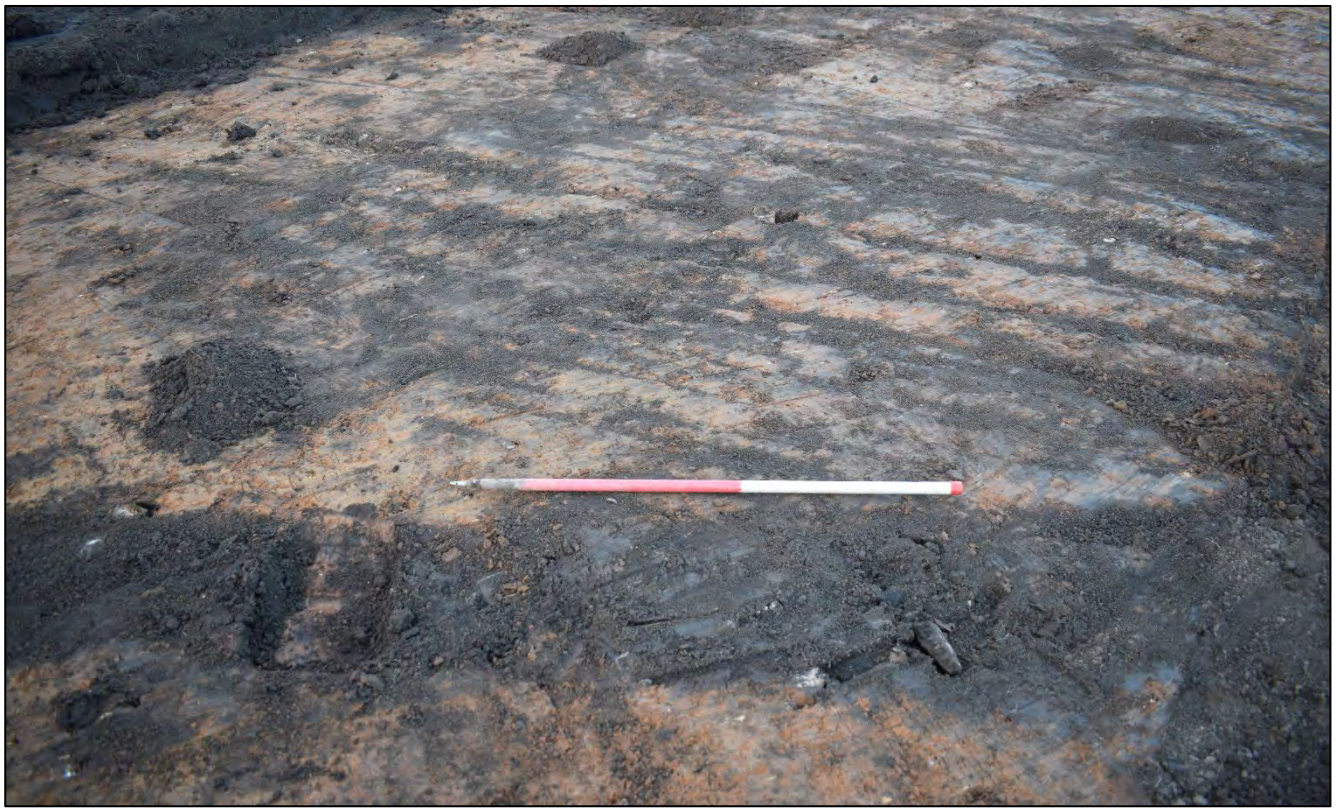

Plate 10: Post-excavation with modern drainage linear, facing west

Plate 11: Northeast-facing section of topsoil

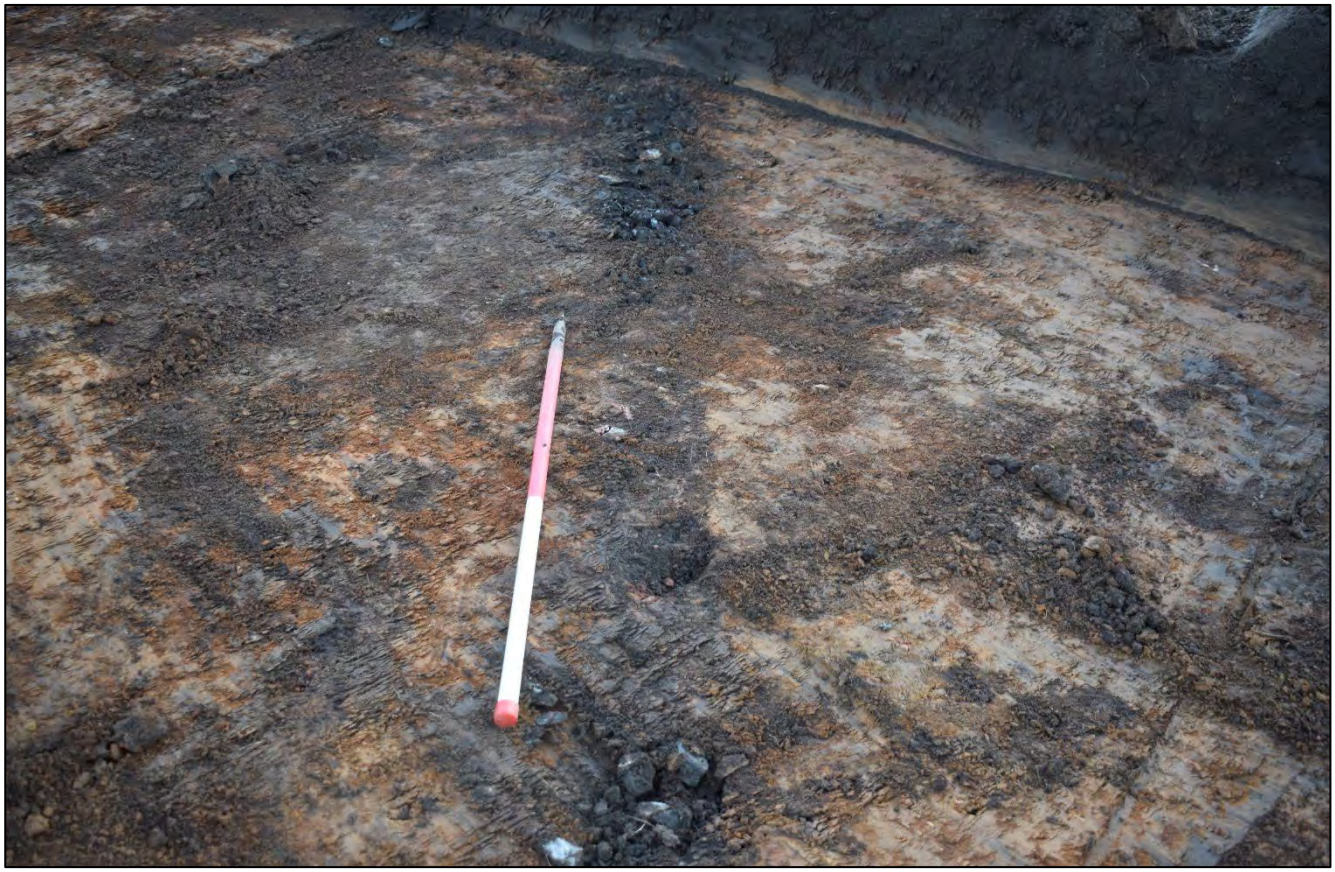

Plate 12: Example of cobble-filled field drain in the car park area, facing southeast

Plate 13: Post-excavation of the north side of the car park area, facing east

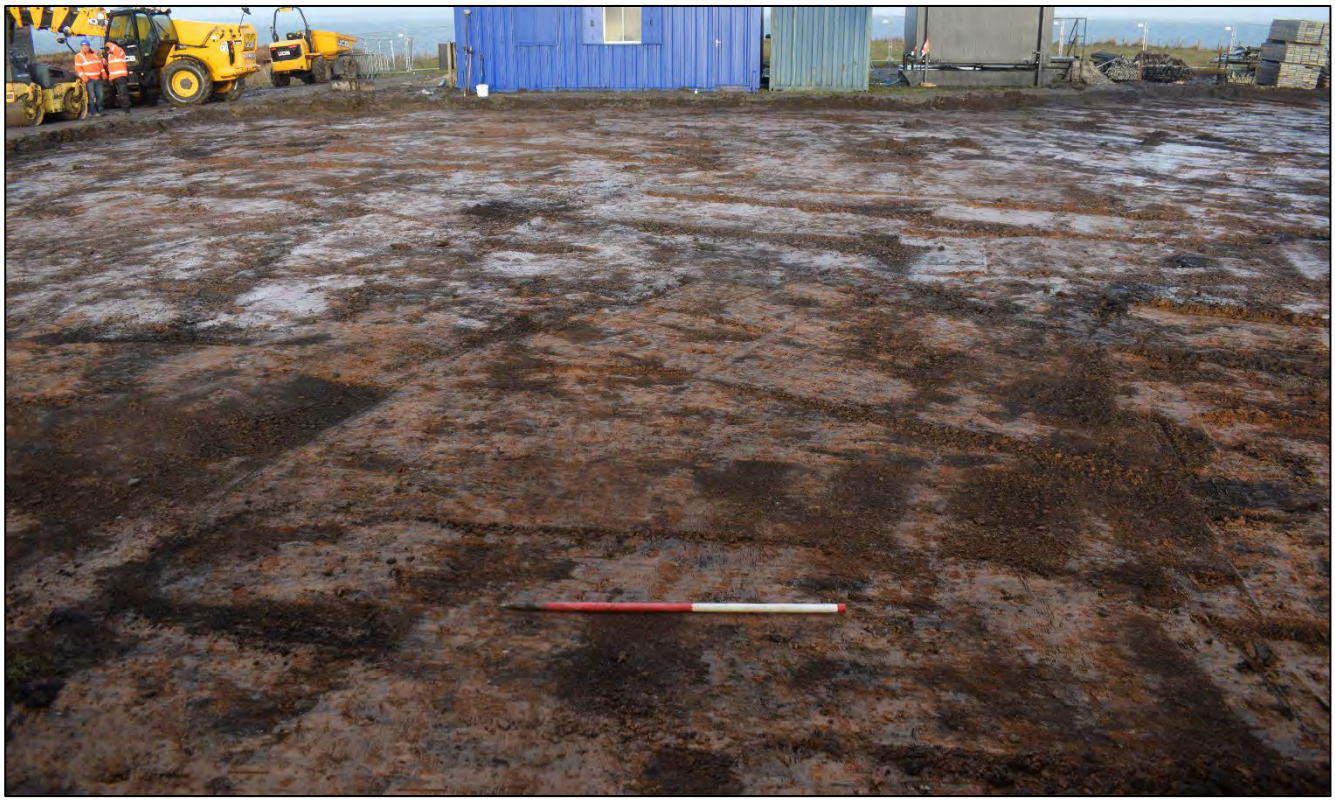

Plate 14: Post-excavation of total car park area, facing north

Appendix 1: Photographic Register

Photo No.	Description	Direction Facing	Date
1 - 2	General view of site access and conditions upon arrival	N	27/11/2023
3	View of mill related holiday cottages, extra parking	W	27/11/2023
4 - 5	General view of conditions upon arrival of proposed carpark area	E	27/11/2023
6 - 7	Access and condition of extension area upon arrival	NW	27/11/2023
8	North face of existing Mill with extension area in front	S	27/11/2023
9	View over condition of extension area upon arrival	SW	27/11/2023
10	View over condition of extension area upon arrival looking up access route	E	27/11/2023
11	View over condition of extension area upon arrival looking up access route	NE	27/11/2023
12 - 14	Working shot of stone layer underlying topsoil, possible sedimentary natural stone	E	27/11/2023
15 - 17	Working shots of initial topsoil strip with patches of natural appearing, mixed large stone chunks	E	27/11/2023
18	Northwest corner of Mill with fence posts for the edge of new build area, slope down to burn	SE	27/11/2023
19	View North of existing post and wire fence marking edge of new build area	N	27/11/2023
20	Working shot of stone layer underlying topsoil	E	27/11/2023
21	Working shot of stone layer underlying topsoil	S	27/11/2023
22	Working shot of stone layer underlying topsoil	E	27/11/2023
23	Post-excavation shot of northwest corner of extension area	SE	27/11/2023
24	Post-excavation shot of northeast corner with modern dumped material in section edge protruding outwards	E	27/11/2023
25	Post-excavation shot of extension area	S	27/11/2023
26	Post-excavation shot of extension area	N	27/11/2023
27	Post-excavation of topsoil removal, plough marks running southwest to northeast	SW	28/11/2023
28	Post-excavation example of shallow modern drainage linear	W	28/11/2023
29	Post-excavation example of shallow modern drainage linear	W	28/11/2023
30	Northeast facing representative section of topsoil	SW	28/11/2023
31	Post-excavation view of north side of carpark area	E	28/11/2023
32	Post-excavation view of central carpark area	E	28/11/2023
33	Post-excavation view of total carpark area	N	28/11/2023
34	Example shot of cobble drain	SE	28/11/2023

Appendix 2: OASIS Summary

OASIS Summary for aocarcha1-521145

OASIS ID (UID)	aocarcha1-521145
Project Name	Watching Brief at John O'Groats Mill
Sitename	John O'Groats Mill
Sitecode	70807
Activity type	Watching Brief
Reason For Investigation	Planning requirement
Organisation Responsible for work	AOC Archaeology Group
Project Dates	27-Nov-2023 - 28-Nov-2023
Location	John O'Groats Mill NGR: ND 37023 73349 LL: 58.643419972627854, -3.08667858533901 12 Fig: 337023,973349
Administrative Areas	Parish: Canisbay Council: Highland Country: Scotland
Project Methodology	This report details the findings of an archaeological watching brief which was required by John O'Groats Mill Trust regarding a proposed extension and car parking area at John O'Groats Mill, Newton, John O'Groats (Highland Council Planning reference 21/04127/FUL). The watching brief was conducted from 27th to 28th November 2023.
Project Results	No archaeological features or deposits were identified during the watching brief. As such, no further archaeological work is proposed in relation to the development area.
Keywords	
Funder	Research council or trust John O'Groats Mill Trust
Person Responsible for work	Patrick Rowan/Peta Glew
Archives	
DES description	
NGR	ND 37023 73349
Previous Work	Yes
Future Work	Yes
Caption(s) for illustrations	

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