

**Archaeological Watching Brief on Landscaping and
Construction of Pathways and Laybys at East Street,
Balintore, Easter Ross
(Planning Application 03/00218/FULRC)**



Catherine Dagg

For

**Seaboard Initiative
8, Main Street
Balintore
Ross-shire
IV20 1UE**

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1. Background

The present phase of landscaping work at East Street, Balintore, involves the construction of two lay-bys and a network of footpaths over two areas of waste ground between the road and the sea front. An archaeological watching brief has been required as a condition of planning consent because of the potential for archaeological finds or features of interest to be discovered during site work. A desk-based assessment was carried out before the watching brief to acquire background information on the archaeological and historical record of the Balintore area.

2. Desk-Based Assessment

The following easily-accessible sources were consulted during the desk-based assessment;

- RCAHMS database CANMORE, available online at www.rcahms.gov.uk
- 1st edition Ordnance Survey map, available online at www.old-maps.co.uk
- J. MacDonald and A. Gordon: Down to the Sea. An account of life in the fishing villages of Hilton, Balintore and Shandwick
- C. Dagg 2001: Archaeological Watching Brief on excavation work at a house site at Plot 4, Sand Dune Walk, Balintore, Easter Ross

3. Archaeological Background

A number of cist burials have been revealed in the Balintore area, together with a Bronze Age cemetery of several burials. The majority of these sites are located immediately inland from the harbour, in the area of Balintore old village and the mid-20th century expansion known as the Scandinavian houses, and have come to light during building work or the digging of wells or trenches for services. The following recorded sites are within 800m of the present area of development:

- Sloc Geal, possible Bronze Age cemetery at NH 861 754, NMRS no. NH87NE 5
- Cist burial at NH 8617 7578, NMRS no. NH87NE 13. Two inhumations found in 1976
- Cist Burial at NH 8626 7563, NMRS no. NH87NE 10, uncovered during insertion of sewer in 1950.
- Human remains, possible cist at NH 8630 7568, NMRS no. NH87NE 11, uncovered during building extension in 1919
- Cist burial at NH 8639 7570, NMRS no. NH87NE 8. Found while digging a well in 1932
- Burials at NH 866 758, NMRS no. NH87NE 14. Two extended inhumations below flat slabs possibly the remains of cists, found while excavating a trench for a sewer pipe in 1982.

This last site is located only 100m from the edge of the present area of development. The possibility of further burials being located within the area of development was therefore considered to be high.

4. Recent background

The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map shows no development along the track between Balintore village and Hilton of Cadboll. The modern road follows the line of this track, running above the shoreline and below the bank of the raised beach, which at this point runs parallel and close to the shore. In the 20th century a quarry was opened behind the top of the bank and was certainly being worked in 1930. Spoil from the quarry was apparently tipped over the bank. When, around the 1970s, it was decided to build houses along the inland side of the road, the site was levelled by removing this quarry waste to the sea side of the road. To this was added rubble from the demolition of buildings at the Fearn Airfield. Part of the landfill area thus created has been used as a builder's yard; the concrete foundations of a building are still visible. Apart from this, the only use of this ground was the location of posts providing sight lines for fishing boats. For this purpose, occasional attempts were made to clear the ground of whin.

5. Site description

The present development covers two areas of roughly similar size (Areas A and B) separated by a bungalow, between the road and the shoreline. The building up of the shoreline with quarry spoil and rubble (see above) has resulted in the ground level on the seaward side being considerably higher than the natural **(Photo no. 1)**



1. Area A. View NE from shore showing height of bank of landfill material.

The site has recently been cleared of vegetation, leaving substantial gorse roots. The only visible features are, in Area B, the concrete foundations of a modern building associated with the builder's yard, and indications of sewage pipes and other underground services running parallel to the road.



2. Area B: level, built up, area behind the grassy foreground, view from NE.

7. Methodology

Two main areas of work were covered by the watching brief:

- A. laybys: two laybys, one in each area, where topsoil stripping will cover an area approximately 20m in length by 4.5m in width, to a depth of 0.3m. Work on these is to be carried out at a later date, but both areas were stripped in the presence of the archaeologist and subsequently backfilled (**Photos 3 and 4**)
- B. Footpaths: Two main sections of footpath crossing both areas from ENE to WSW, crossed by shorter lengths connecting these to the laybys. The topsoil stripping was to a width of 1.2m and a depth of 10-15cm, to allow edging with kerbstones and the laying of hardcore. The entire length of the main footpath in Area A and approximately 50% of the footpath in Area B were stripped in the presence of the archaeologist. (**Photo no. 5**)

Archaeological Observations:

Removal of the top 10-30cm of material revealed a homogenous mix of sand and soil, slightly sandier in area B, together with stone, beach pebbles, brick and concrete fragments, coal, glass, china, plastics and bone. Any object located within this disturbed ground was considered to be completely out of context and was not recorded. Some bone fragments of uncertain identification were retained, while others were clearly butchered. The bone material was generally found lying weathered on the surface.

The removal of 30cm of material from the area of the layby in Area A possibly revealed the top of a layer of natural sand shelving down from the road edge (Photos no. 3 and 4) visible as a line of clean, pale sand approximately 1.6-1.9m from the kerb. This was not observed at the layby in Area B and the footpath work did not go deep enough to touch a lower layer.



3. Layby, Area A. Stripping of topsoil to a depth of 0.3m, view from SW



4. Layby, Area A. Lighter sand indicating the possible natural surface at a depth of 0.3m



5. Area A. Footpath, topsoil stripping to a depth of 10-15cm, view from east.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

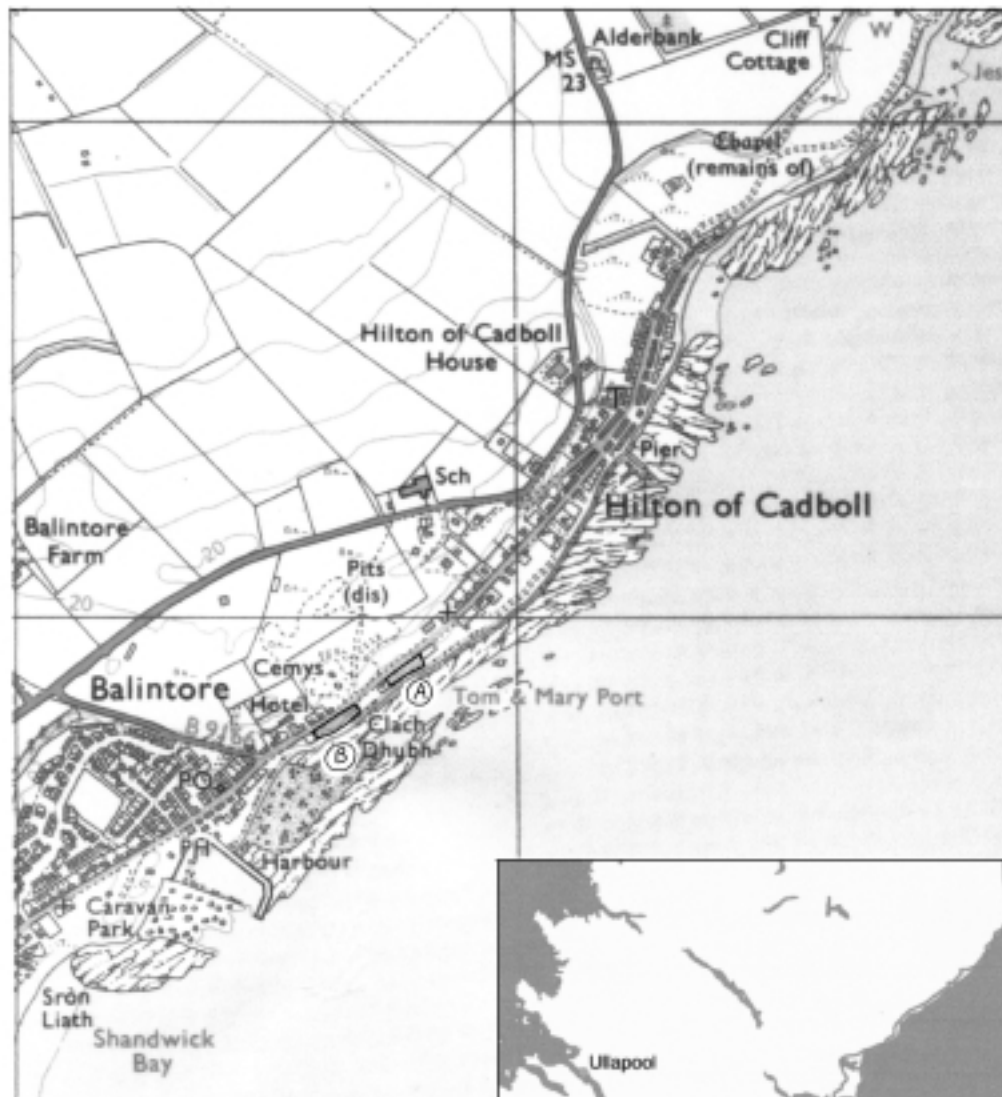
Although the possibility remains of further prehistoric burials or other archaeological features being located in the undisturbed natural layers under the landfill, this top layer of obviously imported material is effectively archaeologically sterile. At no point during this watching brief did excavation work extend into the natural soils or sands of the original foreshore.

It is recommended that, while archaeological monitoring would be advisable where any excavation is likely to extend deeper than 0.3m on the road side and possibly 2m at the sea side, it would not be necessary or useful to monitor shallow work such as further laybys or footpaths, where it is obvious that the ground is similarly made up of landfill material.

It appears that landfilling with quarry spoil or rubble from demolished military buildings has taken place along the greater part of the sea front between Shandwick and Hilton. The two exceptions, where the shoreline appears to be in its natural state, are the area of dunes to the north of Shandwick bay, and below Hilton chapel. This information may be useful to the consideration of the need for future archaeological watching briefs along the seafront.

**Catherine Dagg
2, Ruigh' Riabhach
Scoraig Peninsula
Dundonnell
Wester Ross
IV23 2RE
Tel: 01854 633 337**

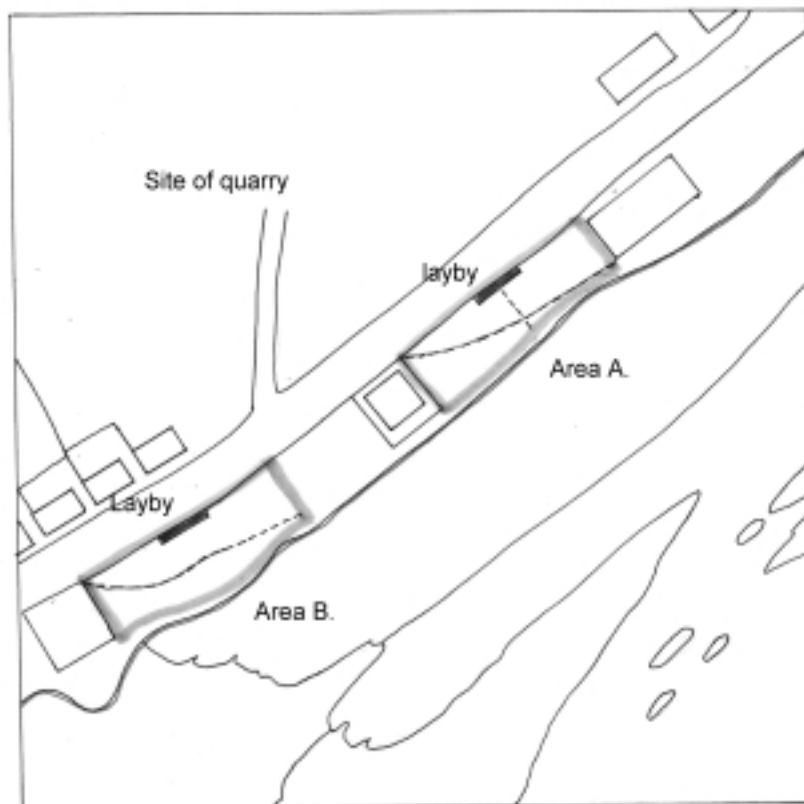
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East Street, Balintore

Location Plan





East Street, Balintore, Archaeological Watching Brief