

**Report of Archaeological Watching Brief  
February 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> 2004  
Auldearn Footpath Phase 1, Auldearn  
NH 91679/55473 to NH 91325/55513**

Client: H W Kinnaird Ltd on behalf of Highland Council

Planning Application No: PP70

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February 2004**

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## **Non-Technical Summary**

*Stuart Farrell was commissioned by H W Kinnaird Ltd on behalf of Highland Council in January 2004 to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Auldearn (NH 91679/55473 to NH 91325/55513) as part of a footpath. Highland Council Archaeology Unit produced a specification for this work.*

*Work revealed no archaeological features or deposits as the construction work was mostly limited to the removal of topsoil.*

*No recommendations for further work have been proposed.*

## **1. Introduction**

This report is for an archaeological watching brief conducted for H W Kinnaird Ltd on behalf of Highland Council by the author for a footpath at Auldearn. This work is form phase 1 of a series of paths around the village.

The site lies between the west edge of the village of Auldearn and the nearby football pitch.

The fieldwork was conducted on February 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> 2004.

## **2. Acknowledgements**

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

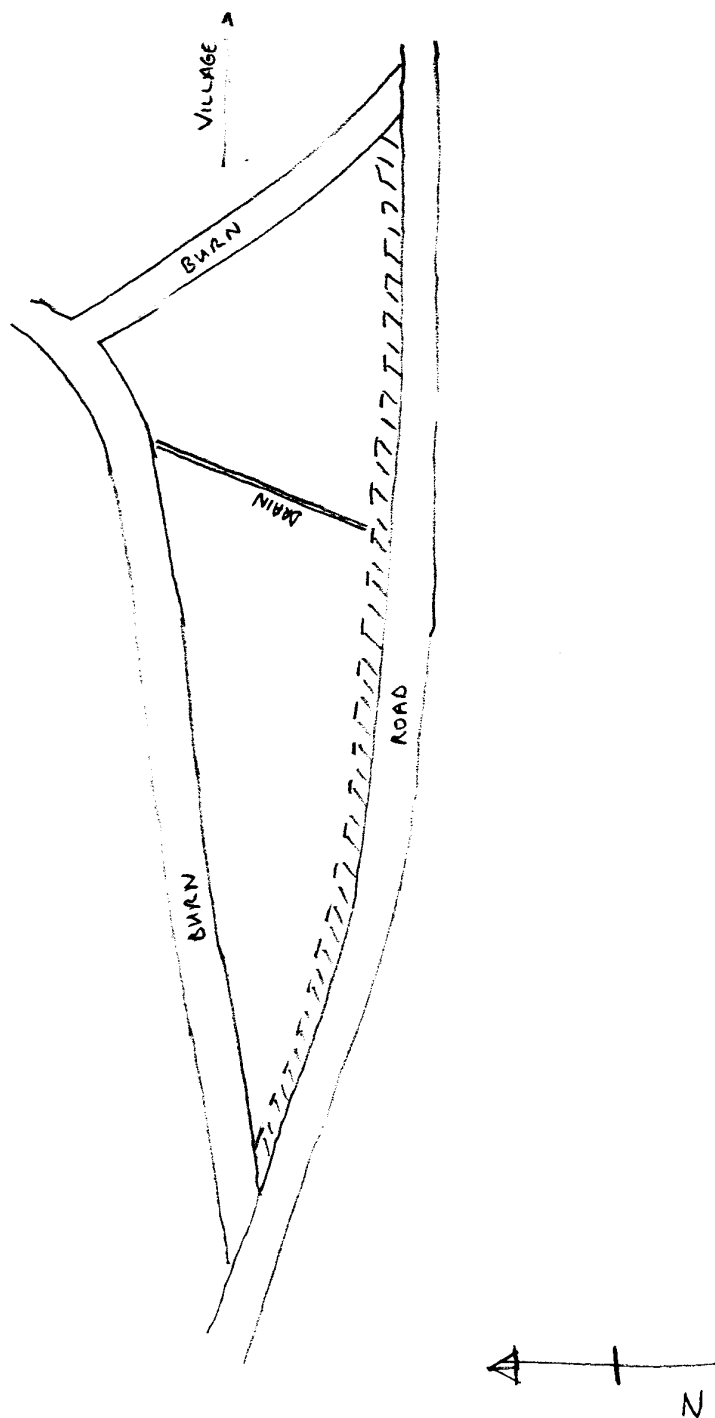
- Mr. H W Kinnaird, of H W Kinnaird Ltd;
- Staff of H W Kinnaird Ltd for onsite works;
- Staff of Highland Council Archaeology Unit;
- Staff of the Highland Council Archives.

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**Figure 1 - General Location 1:50,000**  
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Figure 2 – Site Plan – Sketch only – not to scale.  
Area of path hatched.



### **3. Historical Background**

It is unknown when the village of Auldearn was established, though the village is known to have existed from the late 12<sup>th</sup> century when the village is recorded in a charter of King William the Lion (1165-1214) in relation to the site of the castle. The church is 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 1754-7, replacing earlier church, of which the nave of c.1600 survives. The village was made a burgh of barony in 1511 (Gifford, 1992).

Recent archaeological work close to motte and dovecot centred at NH 917/556 in the form of trial trenching that took place in 1999 by the CFA. (Glendinning, 1999) The work to the southwest of the dovecot was in the form of 7 trial trenches made upon the results of partial geophysics with excavation forming a total of 370m<sup>2</sup>. Several features were revealed, including pits and gullies and signs of redeposited gravel over natural showing signs of quarrying. No dating material was found in any of these features. The site also lies close to the recorded site of the battle between the forces the Marquis of Montrose and the Covenanters on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 1645 (NMRS NH95NW 12 at NH 916/554) though the current OS map places the site of the battle to the south (see figure 1).

Currently no archaeological sites or finds are recorded to the area of the proposed path. The adjacent road is noted by Bain (1928) to be a turnpike road with the earlier road to the village being on a north-south axis rather than the modern east-west one as is currently known.

### **4. Objectives**

To conduct a watching brief on the excavation of the footpath to record those features revealed by excavation work. A copy of the specification provided by Highland Council Archaeology Unit is enclosed. Part of this brief included a search of the field by metal detecting, which was carried out by the Highland Historical Search Society.

### **5. Methodology**

A monitoring was made of the removal of topsoil and subsoil's to an average depth of 50mm for the path to a distance of c350m and 2.5m wide (inside edge being 0.5m out from fence). A back-acting machine with a straight edged bucket cleared the path. Work on the drain was made with a back-acting machine with a straight edged bucket to a depth of 0.7m with possible archaeological features being cleaned by hand.

Weather on the days of work (February 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> 2004) was generally slightly overcast but bright.

### **6. 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.

### Site Location

The site lies to the west edge of the village of Auldearn and is currently a grass field, with some parts being low lying and wet.

### Results

A monitoring of the excavation for the path revealed no archaeological features or deposits as most of the work involved only the removal of turf and some topsoil. Work along the road edge (to form part of a drain) increased the depth of excavation to up to 400mm but most of the road edge had already been eroded by cattle or was comprised of made-up ground forming part of the road. Finds were made in the topsoil of Victorian pottery and glass and modern debris including plastic.

A monitoring of the excavation for the drain 0.35m wide and 0.7m deep (from NH 91544/55468 to 91572/55552) from the lowest part of the road by the path to the corner of the burn revealed the occasional blocked clay field drain but no archaeological features or finds as the excavation was limited in depth as to provide level drainage. Only topsoil and subsoil's were excavated.

Work by the Highland Historical Search Society on metal detecting of the field failed to provide any evidence for historical use of the field, most of the finds made being empty drinks cans. (See copy of letter of results to rear)

### **7. Conclusions**

Overall no finds or features were made though the excavation work was mostly limited to the removal of turf and topsoil.

It may be possible that evidence of the site of the battle of Auldearn may lie to the south or at deeper depth than was excavated.

### **8. Recommendations**

No recommendations with regard any further fieldwork for this project is to be proposed due to no features being revealed, and no further work is proposed.

### **9. Archive**

A copy of this report is to be deposited in the National Monuments Record in Edinburgh.

A set of colour slides showing the progress of the work has been deposited with Highland Council Sites and Monuments Record as well as a copy of this report as a PDF file.

### **10. Discovery & Excavation in Scotland**

A short summary of the results of this project will be submitted to the Council for Scottish Archaeology's publication *Discovery & Excavation in Scotland*.

## **11. References**

Bain, G (1928) History of Nairnshire. Telegraph Office. Nairn. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

Glendinning, B (1999) Dooket Hill, Auldearn, Highland: Archaeological Evaluation. Centre for Field Archaeology. Edinburgh University. Report no.450. Unpublished report, copy held by Highland Council Sites and Monuments Record.

Gifford, J (1992) The Buildings of Scotland: The Highlands and Islands. Penguin. Edinburgh.

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

## **Appendix 1 – Photographic Register**

- 1 – View of site of path prior to excavation facing E.
- 2 – View of site of path prior to excavation facing E.
- 3 – View of site of path prior to excavation facing E.
- 4 – View of site of path prior to excavation facing W.
- 5 – View of machining in progress for path facing E.
- 6 – View of machining in progress for path facing E.
- 7 – View of machining in progress for path facing E.
- 8 – View of machining in progress for path facing W.
- 9 – View of machining in progress for drain facing NE.
- 10 – View of machining in progress for drain facing NE.