

Results of an Archaeological Controlled Topsoil Strip and Watching Brief at Mark Farm, Pinwherry, South Ayrshire

Graeme Brown

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SUMMARY

Archaeological monitoring was carried out on the construction of a new overhead power line to Mark Farm, Pinwherry, South Ayrshire. Monitoring work was confined to four holes dug for new power poles. Construction work was being carried out for Scottish Power by Balfour Beatty Power Networks. The first two poles were in the vicinity of a previously recorded enclosure site (NMRS No. NX28NW7) and required a controlled topsoil strip. The other two were near the site of a farmstead (NMRS NO. NX28NW12) and required a watching brief. No archaeological discoveries were made during these works.

1. INTRODUCTION (Figure 1)

Scottish Power is providing a new overhead power line for Mark Farm, Pinwherry, South Ayrshire (NGR NX 2497 8790). Four of the proposed power poles are in the proximity of archaeological sites and the West of Scotland Archaeology Service (WoSAS) advised the planning authority that a programme of archaeological works was required to mitigate the potential impact of the development on the archaeological resource. Headland produced a Project Design (Headland Archaeology Ltd 2003) for this work which was subsequently approved by WoSAS.

Poles 21 and 22 of the new line are in the immediate vicinity of a small enclosure on Kilbride Knowe (NMRS no NX28NW7). This enclosure, some 23m in diameter, was situated on a gentle north – south slope 500m west/ south-west of Mark Farm. It is composed of an earth and stone bank approximately 3m wide and 0.5m high but apparently without an entrance (Plate 3). The enclosure's good state of preservation, in a landscape which has been farmed, suggested to an Ordnance Survey investigator that the work was not of a great age. However, another possible interpretation, given the morphology of the feature, is a small prehistoric enclosure. Poles 19 and 20, located a short distance to the south-west of the other two, were in the vicinity of a small farmstead identified on the Ordnance Survey 6" map of 1858 (sheet lxii). The farmstead comprised two buildings (marked as ruins) and a head dyke located at the foot of Kilbride Knowe.

The archaeological work was carried out on Tuesday 18th November 2003. The construction of the new powerline, commissioned by Scottish Power, was being carried out by Balfour Beatty Power Networks. Simon Stronach provided project management at Headland, with the curatorial input provided by Paul Robins of WoSAS.

2. METHOD

Poles 21 and 22 were dealt with by means of a controlled topsoil strip as they were near to a potentially important site. This approach required the removal of topsoil by means of a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. Excavation was to continue under archaeological control until the subsoil or archaeological deposits were encountered. The excavator was always to work in one direction to avoid tracking over cleaned surfaces. The resulting topsoil surface was to be clean enough to allow the identification of archaeological features.

A watching brief was specified for poles 19 and 20. Any ground disturbance associated with the construction of these poles was to be monitored by the archaeologist.

3. RESULTS

Pole No. 22 was the first to be worked on. This pole was positioned approximately 15m east of the enclosure next to an old field dyke (Plate 1). The hole dug was 2.3m long and approximately 1m wide. The topsoil was thin on this slope with a maximum

thickness of 0.2m. This material was machined off to a compact light brown glacial till with numerous small and medium stones. This surface was then cleaned by hand to ensure good archaeological visibility. No features were identified. After the completion of the initial work the hole was deepened to a maximum depth of 1.8m to support the pole. Pole No. 21 was located 60m west/ south-west of the first. It was located 10m from the outer edge of the enclosure on gently sloping ground (Plate 2). Exactly the same methodology was employed as on the first example. The hole was 1.9m long and 0.9m wide. Topsoil here was deeper up to a maximum depth of 0.3m and comprised a dark brown sandy silt with common small and medium stones. The subsoil was a stony orange brown glacial till, whose exposed surface did not show any sign of archaeological features.

A watching brief was maintained on poles 19 and 20. Pole 20 was 87m from No. 21 on a lower piece of ground at the foot of Kilbride Knowe. The land in this area was quite marshy with a noticeable increase in the height of the water table. The hole was 2m long 0.9m wide and 1.8m at its full depth and at this depth water was seen to flow in from the sides. The topsoil comprised a grey/ brown silty clay above a brown/ grey sandy clay subsoil. Hole No. 19 was the closest to the farmstead site in terms of absolute distance, however the steep slopes on which this pole was to be placed reduced the chances of archaeological discoveries. The hole measured 2m in length and 0.6m in width. Topsoil comprised a grey/ brown silty clay above a very stony glacial till. No archaeological features were uncovered in the watching brief.

4. DISCUSSION

Although no new discoveries were made in this work archaeological input may have prevented unnecessary destruction of a site. Previous experience has shown that the contractors constructing these lines have a certain degree of freedom as to where to locate the poles. Small changes in the location of pole No. 21 would have put it very close to the enclosure bank. An on site presence at this stage has prevented localised damage to the site.

5. REFERENCES

Headland Archeology Ltd 2003 'Project Design for archaeological works as part of erection of overhead electricity supply to Mark Farm, Pinwherry, South Ayrshire', dated November 2003.

6. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Photograph register

Film type: Digital
Film number: N/A

Shot	Facing	Description
1	SW	Topsoiled area for pole 22
2	SW	Hole for pole 22 as excavated
3	NE	Standing in enclosure looking towards pole 22
4	SW	Topsoiled area for pole 21
5	SW	Standing on the enclosure bank looking towards pole 21
6	SW	Hole for pole 21 as excavated
7	NE	Site of pole 21 looking back towards enclosure
8	NE	Upstanding element of enclosure bank
9	NW	Hole for pole 20 as excavated
10	SW	Pole 20 being erected
11	NE	Standing at pole 19 looking back towards 20 and 21
12	N	Hole for pole 19

Appendix 2: Soil descriptions for poles 19-22

Pole No.	Soil Description
19	Topsoil: grey/ brown silty clay, stony, thickness: (max) 0.17m Subsoil: grey glacial till, stony
20	Topsoil: grey/ brown silty clay, stony, thickness: (max) 0.3m Subsoil: brown/ grey sandy clay, stony, water table @ 1.8m
21	Topsoil: dark brown sandy silt, stony, thickness: (max) 0.3m Subsoil: orange brown glacial till, stony
22	Topsoil: mid brown sandy silt, stony, thickness: (max) 0.2m Subsoil: grey glacial till, compact, stony



Plate 1. Standing inside the enclosure and looking towards pole 22, looking north-east



Plate 2. Standing on the enclosure bank looking towards pole 21, looking south-west



Plate 3. Upstanding element of enclosure bank, looking north-east



Plate 4. Pole 20 being erected, looking south-west

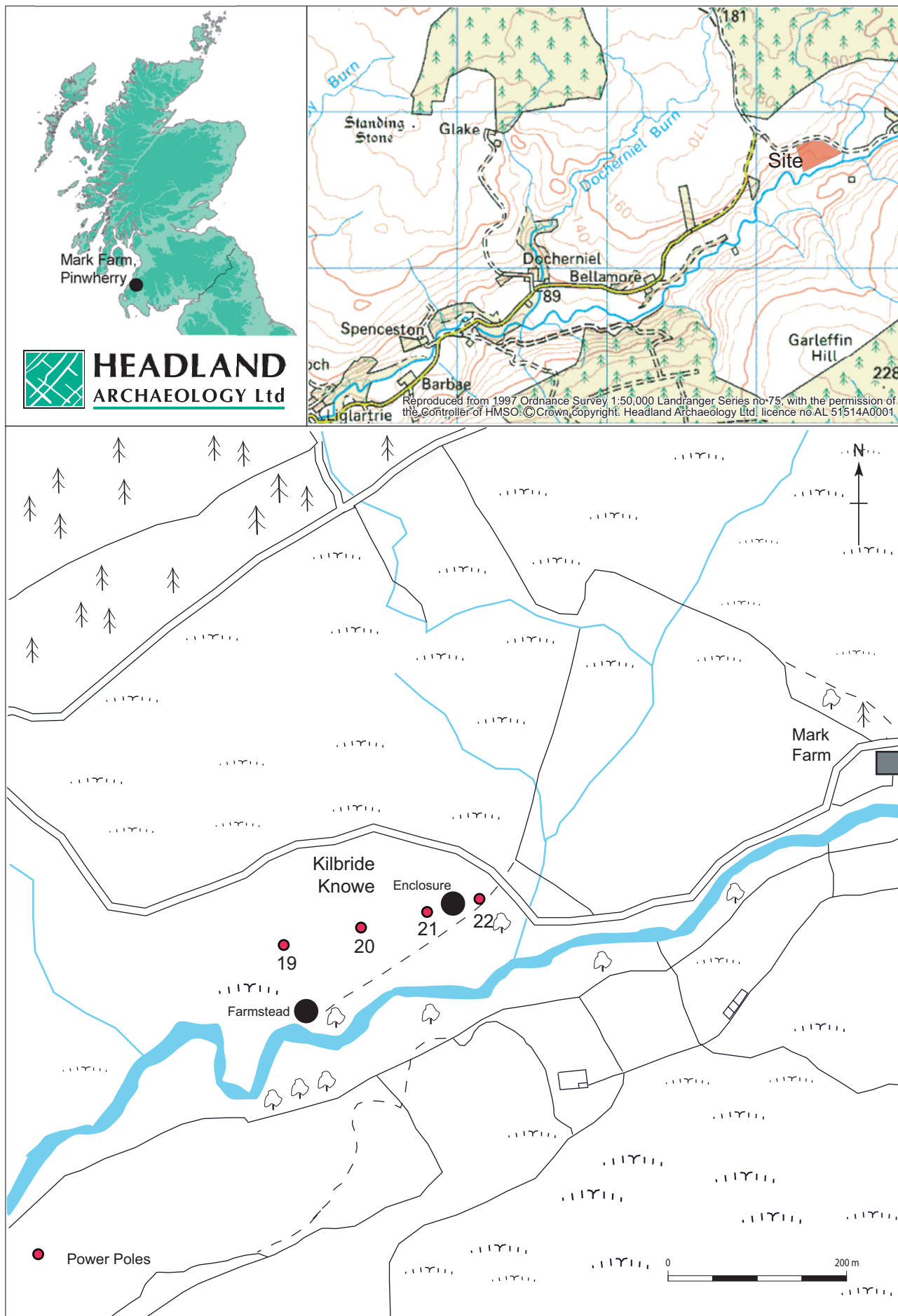


Figure 1: Site Location, Mark Farm, Pinwherry, South Ayrshire