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Excavations at Dunlappie Bridge, Edzell, Angus

Data Structure Report

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Client: Roads Department, Angus Council

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Summary

Work was undertaken at Dunlappie Bridge, Edzell, by Headland Archaeology over a ten-day period. The excavation was undertaken in advance of the redevelopment of Dunlappie Bridge. The purpose of the excavation was to archaeologically sterilise the threatened ground, remove any human remains for analysis and in particular to investigate and record the enclosure bank and ditch identified in the CFA evaluation (Cressey, 1999).

The site was first trenched then totally excavated. The remains of three human burials were identified in situ and the enclosure bank was subject to detailed study and analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Work began at Dunlappie Bridge on Monday the 21st of February, and concluded on Friday the 3rd of March, 2000. The proposed work on Dunlappie Bridge (previously known as Dalhousie Bridge) involved removing the present structure which was built in 1877, repairing and broadening it to allow two lanes of traffic, and realigning it to reduce the angle of approach from the east. These undertakings would involve the western end of the bridge moving north, causing the road to impinge on the enclosure of the medieval Dunlappie Parish Church, on the west bank of the West Water river (Figure 1).

All work was undertaken in accordance with the brief supplied by Ian Shepherd, acting as Archaeological Advisor to Angus Council.

2. OBJECTIVES

The aim of the project was to fully excavate and record the area under threat - a triangular plot, measuring 14 m by 11 m with a total area of 71.3 m² (Figure 1). From the evidence of the evaluation, burials were thought to be restricted to the area within the churchyard's boundary. The area of threatened ground within the bank lay to the north and it was in this area that the burials were identified, suggesting the limit of the graveyard had not altered over time.

3. METHODS

The bulk of earth moving was undertaken using a JCB with 1.5 m flat edged ditching bucket. The small area of the site, compounded by restrictions on spoil management required the excavation to be undertaken in two halves, storing spoil on the half not being excavated. The eastern half of the site was excavated first, including the bulk of the area within the enclosure. Subsequently the western area was cleared, much of which consisted of bank material. The eastern portion was totally excavated as there were no visible earthworks requiring recorded sections and the deposit was considerably shallower. To the west, sections were recorded through the deeper deposits and enclosure bank. In the western area a total of 10 m of trench were cut, in the shape of a capital 'Y', giving complete cross-sections through the bank at two diagnostic points. All suitable sections and features of archaeological interest were trimmed of roots, cleaned by hand, drawn and photographed. Written records were made on Headland Archaeology *Pro Forma* sheets and a daybook was also maintained.

4. RESULTS

The site was heavily disturbed by tree roots and animal burrows and the previous evaluation trench which ran through the centre. Trench positions were chosen on the basis of likely surviving sections, positions of tree stumps and the manoeuvrability of the JCB in relation to the confines of the site boundary.

Burials (Figure 2)

Three burials were identified in the northern part of the site, to the north of and within the boundary bank.

The graves were shallow. Burial 1 bottomed onto the alluvial gravel natural, at a depth of 0.9 m, burial 2 was identified within the subsoil, at a depth of 0.7 m and burial 3 was only 0.6 m below the humic topsoil surface. The grave backfill layer was a homogenous, rich red-brown loam with few stones, evidently providing conditions unsuited to preserving bone.

Burial 1

The most complete of the three, burial 1, had both legs (tibia only) lying parallel to each other.

Burial 2

Only the right leg of burial 2 was preserved. The upper femur and pelvis were identified but crumbled to powder upon excavation but the lower quarter of the femur was recovered. The section in the area of burial 2 was extended to a distance of 40 cm, to ensure no human remains were left within the threatened area.

Burial 3

The least well preserved of the three, burial 3, was identified as a single tibia lying parallel to the leg bones of burials 1 and 2, slightly shallower in the soil and very fragmentary. Pieces of other bones, possibly femur, pelvis or the second leg were excavated from the immediate vicinity, but no closely identifiable or diagnostic pieces were identified.

All recovered remains were fragile and fragmentary and no trace of the fibula, tarsals, metatarsals or phalanges was found. The bones occurred at regular intervals and represented a regular, row pattern of graves. The bones were aligned west-north-west to east-south-east. As no other human remains were found to the south, it could be assumed that those encountered are the southernmost limits of grave activity in the churchyard. The most southerly skeleton was about 4 m north of the bank's crest, giving a margin of clear ground within the churchyard.

Bank and Ditch

The bank was clearly identifiable pre-excavation as a south-facing slope crossing the site from the west, becoming more shallow towards the east (Figure 2). The ditch was seen as a broad, gently sloping gully, gathering downhill from the west between the road's verge and the western limit of the enclosure. Following this course it skirted the edge of the site and followed the base of the bank.

A total of five different sections through the bank and ditch were recorded, the most comprehensive being those portions seen on the final post excavation section of the sites

northern limit (Figure 3). This records 13 m across the site, from the middle of the ditch at the south west, to the northern point within the churchyard. The ditch and bank took up the western half of the section, separated from the eastern churchyard half by the evaluation trench in the middle.

Bank

At its highest point the bank was 0.88 m above the lowest point of the ditch and 0.4 m above the level of the internal churchyard surface. It dropped by these depths over a distance of 4 m to the ditch and 2 m to the churchyard, suggesting even slopes on either side. The bank also displayed a concentration of medium to large stones under its apex, absent to any degree from all other deposits on site. One other difference between the stretch of section of the bank and the rest of the site was the greater concentration of rabbit burrows, both back-filled and 'active'.

The two deposits which formed the bank were given the context numbers 3 and 6 although the precise distinction between the two was blurred. Context 3 is described as bank material, mined from what would become the ditch and built up above it. Context 6 is described as sub-bank stony soil, although the concentration of stones begins within the bank material (context 3) and finishes within the subsoil material (context 2). The presence of these stones has, in the past, been explained as a rubble core to the bank (Cressey 1999). In light of the greater area available for study and the enhanced freedom to excavate as opposed to trench, these boulders seem more likely to represent remnants of a bank-top wall, robbed out post 1618 (Jervise 1861). The stones have been redistributed downwards through the surviving bank deposits by gravity, rabbit and root action. A rubble core would be expected to be more concentrated. The bank itself has collapsed somewhat, since the church was abandoned in the 17th century. This collapsed material has gathered in the ditch, along with water borne material from the surrounding fields *en route* to the river (context 9).

Ditch

In cross section the ditch was seen to contain two separate phases of deposit. These were separated by a dump of burnt stone and coal debris. The three contexts are 9, 10 and 11. Context 9 has been described as field-wash and bank slump, context 10 the burnt black material and context 11 as an older deposit of field wash or general primary silting of the ditch.

A cut for the boundary ditch was not clear, although a potentially manmade slope was recorded on the surface of the natural gravel. At present, excess water from the field to the west of the site drains into the West Water via the ditch channel, but whether it would have done this before the ditch existed is questionable. A small undulation in the gravel at 3.75 m along the section may be a post-glacial depositional feature or a naturally developed land-water eroded feature. It appears to pre-date all the soil development on the site and suggests the possibility that the medieval or later bank builders utilised a water eroded channel and a naturally upstanding spur upon which to build the southern portion of their enclosure.

5. DISCUSSION

The primary problems with these interpretations are that divisions between contexts are not clear, due to the extent of bioturbation. The degree of burrows visible today – open and filled in – is representative of perhaps the last twenty years, the previous examples having been dissipated over time. In the 280 years since the churchyard was effectively abandoned, the volume of soil movement caused by rabbits can only be imagined. We do not know how long the bank has surrounded the church as there were no datable finds from any stratigraphic level of the bank and no documentary sources connecting either individuals or events to enclosure construction or maintenance. Jervise records in 1861 that by the time of the last burial in 1842, the grave stones had all been removed and rebuilt into local hearths and floors. If people were prepared to remove gravestones from the churchyard, it seems unlikely the structural stones of a boundary wall would be shown any more respect, likewise the structure of the church itself. The evaluation trench excavated by CFA in June 1999 also raises interesting information when restudied within the context of the whole site (Cressey, 1999). The spread of stones identified to the south of the bank (context 5) is without parallel in the other areas of the site. This evidence suggests the entrance to the enclosure was originally to the south. In 1860 the public right of way ran along the line of the present road to a suspension footbridge where Dalhousie Bridge now stands (1st Ed. O.S. 6 inch map). The road ran further to the south and crossed a ford 100 m downstream. It is plausible although not beyond question, that the stones identified by the CFA represent more than just tumbled wall stones and could be structural debris from a gate post or other entrance feature resting in its foundation cut (context 10).

6. CONCLUSION

From the results of the excavation, it can be stated that a bank was constructed enclosing the churchyard of Dunlappie Parish Church at some point between 1296 and 1618. The deposits of stone within the bank are suggestive of the foundations of a bank-top wall displaced downwards by gravity and undercutting burrows. There is evidence to suggest an entrance to the south, but not conclusive proof. No human remains have been found outside the area of the enclosure, with the nearest burial to the bank being 4 m north. The bone remains recovered would suggest any burials of antiquity would be poorly preserved. No unexpected features of archaeological or other value were identified during the course of the project.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Ordnance Survey, Forfarshire XX, sheet 9. 1st edition and 2nd edition

Appendix 1 Site Registers

Context Register

Context No	Description
1	Topsoil
2	Subsoil
3	Bank material
4	Alluvial gravel natural
5	Possible cut into natural, south of bank
6	Stone concentration
7	Dark fill of ditch to south (modern)
8	Ditch cut (modern)
9	Bank slump/ field wash - upper fill of ditch
10	Dark brown soil with charcoal, coal and burnt stone
11	Primary silting deposit in ditch
12	Burial 1
13	Burial 2
14	Burial 3

Sample Register

Sample No	Context	Description
1	2/13	Grave fill from around burial 2

Photographic Registers

Film 1

Frame No.	Direction Facing	B/W	Co/Tr	Description
1	N	Y	N	Area 1 general
2	N	Y	Y	Area 1 general
3	N	Y	Y	Area 1 general
4	N	Y	Y	Area 1 general

5	SE	Y	N	Bank/ ditch feature, south of site
6	E	Y	Y	Animal burrows to north
7	NE	Y	Y	Section 3
8	NE	Y	Y	Section 3
9	N	Y	Y	Section 5
10	N	Y	Y	Section 5
11	N	Y	Y	Section 2+3
12	NE	Y	Y	Section 3
13	NW	Y	Y	Section 2
14	N	Y	Y	View along trench 2, towards section 5
15	N	Y	Y	View along trench 2, towards section 5
16	E	Y	Y	Section 6
17	E	Y	Y	Section 6
18	NW	Y	Y	Trench 1, post removal of c 009
19	NW	Y	Y	Trench 1, post removal of c 009
20	SW	Y	Y	Section 1
21	SW	Y	Y	Section 1
22	SW	Y	Y	Section 1
23	N	Y	Y	Stones in bank, between Trench 1+2
24	N	Y	Y	Stones
25	NE	Y	Y	Stones
26	NE	Y	Y	Stones
27	NE	Y	Y	Area 2, general surface of 004
28	W	Y	Y	Area 2, general surface of 004
29	N	Y	Y	Transition between 009 and 004 in area 2
30	NW	Y	Y	Sondage through 009 in SW corner of area 2
31	E	Y	Y	Drying of surface in area 2 leaving burrow marks
32	E	Y	Y	Drying of surface in area 2 leaving burrow marks
33	NW	Y	Y	Back section No 1, to SW Standing
34	NW	Y	Y	Back section No 1, to SW Crouched

Frame No.	Direction Facing	B/W	Co/Tr	Description
35	NW	Y	Y	Back section No2, left hand pole as frame 33/34
36	NW	Y	Y	Back section No 2

Photographic Register
Film2

Frame No.	Direction Facing	B/W	Co/Tr	Description
1	NW	Y	Y	Back section No 2
2	NW	Y	Y	Back section No 2
3	NW	Y	Y	Back section No 3
4	NW	Y	Y	Back section No 3
5	NW	Y	Y	Back section No 4
6	NW	Y	Y	Back section No 4
7	NW	Y	Y	No 4 with white arrows pointing bones
8	NW	Y	Y	No 4 with white arrows pointing bones
9	NE	Y	Y	General post ex site shot from road side
10	NE	Y	Y	General shot from further up road
11	SE	Y	Y	General shot from field
12	NW	Y	Y	Shot of chapel bumps in graveyard north
13	S	Y	Y	Ranging poles on Northwest corners of chapel
14	N	Y	Y	JCB back filling
15	NNW	Y	Y	JCB back filling
16	E	Y	Y	JCB back filling
17	NW	Y	Y	Back section No1 post weathering
18	NW	Y	Y	Back section No 1 post weathering



