

# **DUNOLLIE HOUSE OBAN, ARGYLL**

An Archaeological Watching Brief



Data Structure Report  
March 2011

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## Summary

Evidence of gravel quarrying was seen in the north of the area and this may be related to the construction of Dunollie House in 1746 or possibly the extensive remodelling of the house and grounds in 1830. The remains of a small structure were also located at the north the car park area, this likely used as a potting shed and subsequently demolished. The reason for its demolition is not clear but was likely due to the landscaping of the area in the front of the house coinciding with the refurbishment of the house in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century along with the construction of the large walled garden below Dunollie Castle.



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## 1. Introduction

This report outlines the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken in the grounds of Dunollie House prior to the creation of a new car parking area. The work was undertaken on behalf of the Dunollie Preservation Trust as part a planning condition by Argyll and Bute Council. The work was undertaken on the 25<sup>th</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 2011 and the site code used was DUN 11.

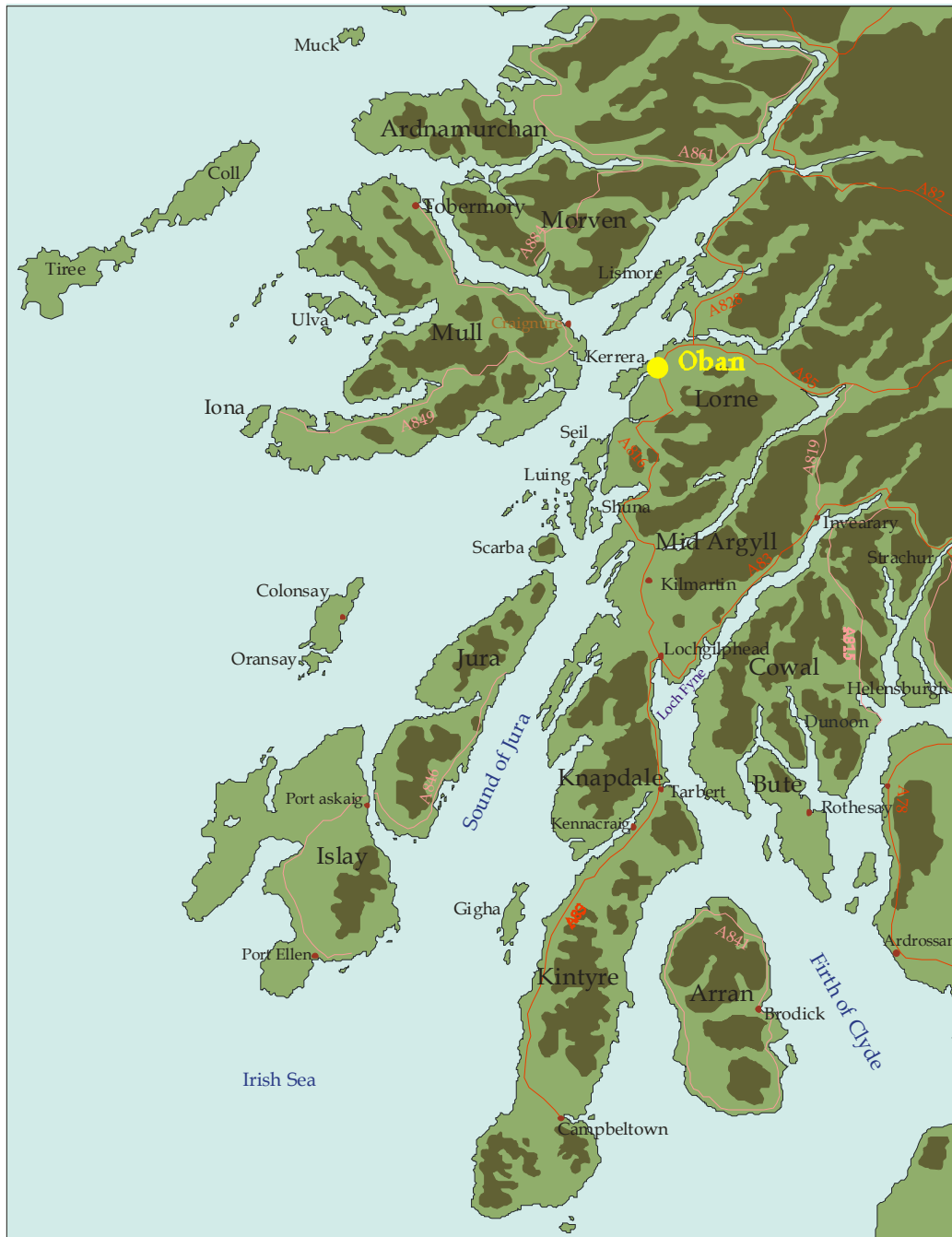


Figure 1: Argyll and Oban

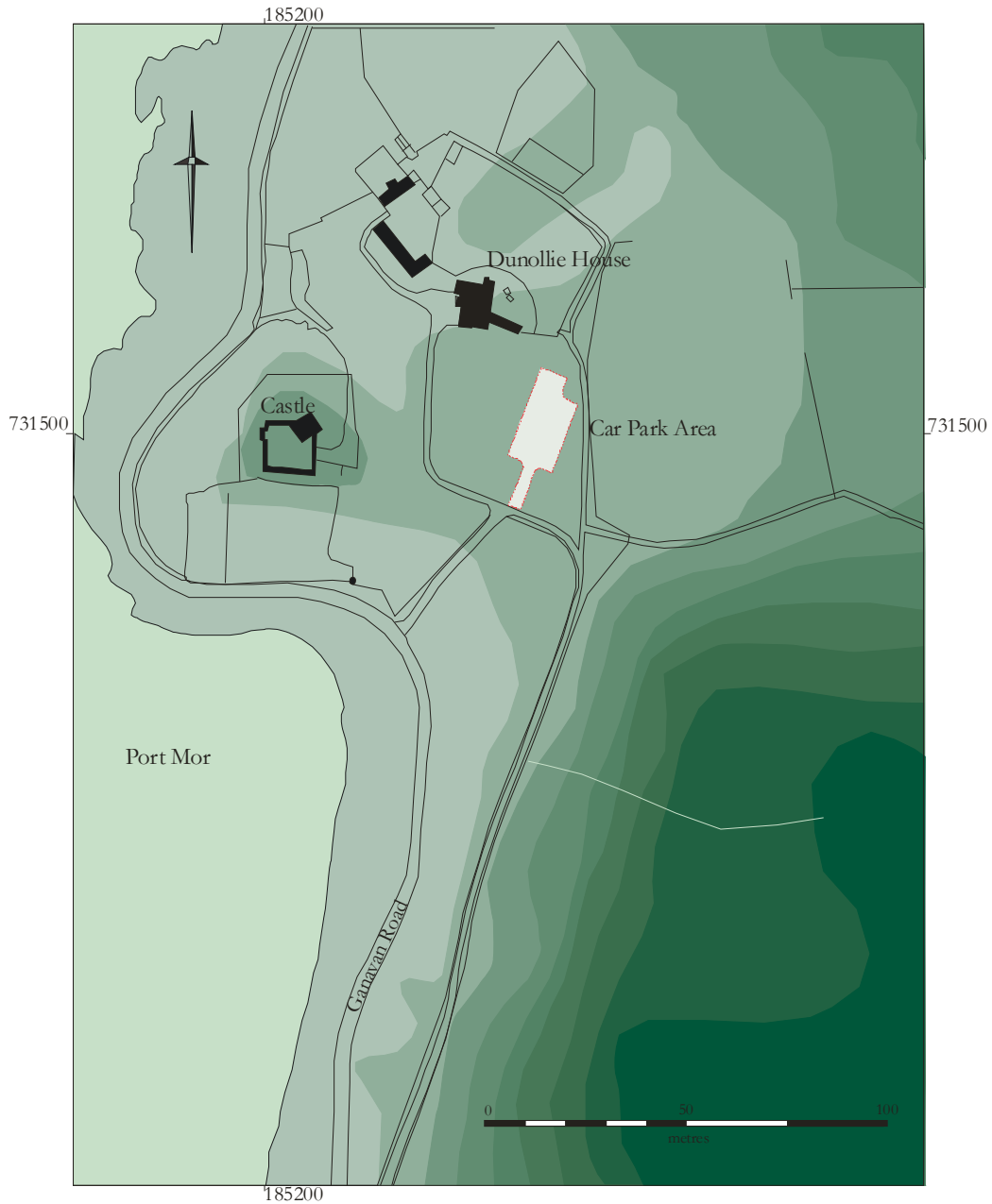


Figure 2: Dunollie House and Trench Location

## 2. Site Location and History

The site of the proposed car park lay c100m to the SE of Dunollie House on ground maintained as open parkland (centred NGR: NM 85275 31500, figure 2). The proposed car park encompassed a rectangular area measuring 34m x 19m, with a road corridor (19m long and 5m wide) linking the main car parking area and the current tarmac track at the south. The site lay on a grass and shrub planted terrace that overlooks a wide bay to the S. Within the application area the highest ground was at the S, which from there sloped down towards the W and N. The area lay W of the 15<sup>th</sup> century MacDougal stronghold of Dunollie Castle (NM83SE 11, RCHAMS 1975). Dunollie House (NM83SE 46) dates from 1746 when the chiefs of the MacDougal's abandoned the castle as their main residence. The House was thoroughly remodeled in 1830, a period which also saw major works on the policies of the estate including the construction of a

large walled garden which lay to the W of the site. Discovered in a 'cave' (now within the walled garden) during construction work in the 1860's, were the remains of three skeletons and uncovered within a 'vegetable garden' was a stone cist, containing a skeleton. A sword, some coins, a gold brooch and a finger ring were also said to have been found close to the cist (NM83SE 31). No evidence of the cist now remains and the recovered objects were later stolen from Dunollie House (RCHAMS 1975). Evidence of early medieval activity was uncovered on the N side of the castle within a series of defensive works, these dating from the 8<sup>th</sup> century and overlain by later 13<sup>th</sup> works (Alcock & Alcock 1988).

An 1823 sketch of the Dunollie House grounds by a Mr N. McLean, depicts the application area as open fields or parkland, clear of buildings or recognisable features (McLean 1826). This picture is confirmed on the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1875 and the area appears to have been utilised as open parkland prior to the present project.

### 3. Methodology

The area was stripped of topsoil by a tracked excavator using a 2m wide ditching bucket. Any archaeological features were then recorded and where necessary sampled by hand excavation.



Figure 3: Feature Locations

#### 4. Results

The topsoil [001] consisted of a mid to light brown silty loam with frequent angular pebbles. This for the most part overlay a natural mid brown angular gravel. Prior to stripping there appeared to be a bank running across the S end of the application area, but this turned out to be a natural ridge, possibly the remnants of a storm bank. The depth of the topsoil varied across the site, being as little as 0.15m deep at the S and E of the stripped area and increasing to up to 0.70m deep at the W and N. The discrepancy in depth is likely due to the accumulation of ploughed or worked soils within a natural dip behind the storm bank at the NW.

Several archaeological features were revealed below the topsoil. In the NE corner of the stripped area was a distinctive deposit of mortar and rubble fragments [002]. This deposit sealed the footings of a NW/SE aligned wall indicating [002] was a demolition deposit. The wall continued into the N section and was constructed of water rounded cobbles and schist or slate slabs bound by a light brown sandy mortar. Two horizontally lain slabs lay either side of the wall indicating that this was a former threshold. The wall appeared to terminate at the SE and there was no indication of a NE return (robbed or otherwise) or any indication it continued SE in another form, such as a wooden structure for example.

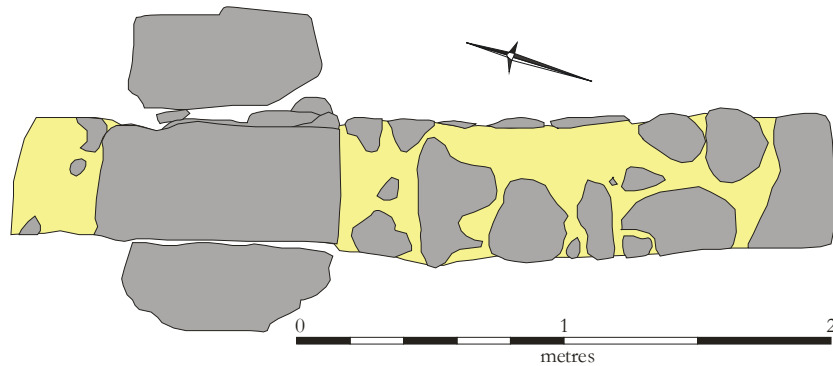


Figure 4: Wall [005]



Wall [005]

The large amounts of broken red earthenware plant pots (many appearing unused) along with the remnants of a iron rake-head amongst the demolition material perhaps suggest the building had been utilised as a potting shed.



Plant pot sherds and slate from layer [002]

No formal floor was in existence on either side of the wall, and it appears the surface consisted of a trampled deposit of natural [003]. This deposit contained some pottery and glass along with a very worn coin of George III that dated to 1776. A small pit had been cut against the inner wall of the structure and the burnt nature of the wall and the presence of ash charcoal within it indicated this shallow pit may have been used for burning rubbish. The pit also contained iron nails, glass and pottery (the latter all from one cobalt decorated plate).

Also located at the N end of the site and lying W of the wall was a large cut, or series of cuts, indicating an area of quarrying. The upper fill was similar if not the same as [001], suggesting soil accumulation within the depression caused the by quarrying activity. These upper soils were reduced by machine and two hand excavated sondages were excavated through the lower fills (Figure 3 and 5). The presence of the occasional large stone within Sondage 1 suggest attempts had been made at backfilling the excavated quarry area, which may have become the repository for cleared stones, possibly from nearby fields. Sondage 1 also contained a series of banded fills with evidence of dumping of burnt peat/ash. No artefacts were retrieved from the quarry fills and whether the dumped ash deposits were related to the structure at the E was not established, although the proximity of the structure to the dumped material suggests this relationship is likely.

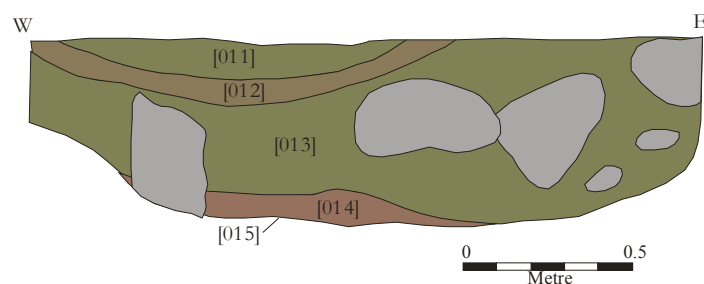
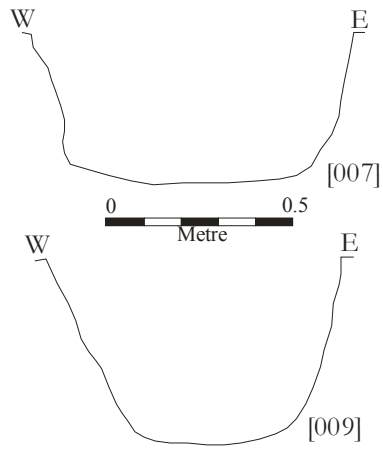


Figure 5: Sondage 1 Section

Two other small oval pits were located within the centre of the stripped area, pits [007] and [009]. The fills of these were similar in nature and pit [007] contained white glazed earthenware, suggesting a late date. The purpose of the pits remains unclear, although they may be pits for planting shrubs or trees?.





Figures 6 & 7: Pits [007] and [009]



Pit [007]



Pit [009]

Likely of recent date was the corner of a straight edged flat bottomed pit [017], filled with rounded rubble in very sticky clayey silt [016]. This pit is near the present tarmac road and although not confirmed, may be a borrow pit or a machine bucket-scoop related to its construction or upgrading, the pit, subsequently backfilled.

The only other archaeological feature noted was a land drain running along the W side of the application area.

## 5. Discussion

The watching brief revealed several features across the stripped car-park area, all of these appear to be post medieval in date. There was evidence of quarrying at the north of the area and it is possible this relates to the construction of Dunollie House in 1746 or its extensive remodelling in 1830. The wall of a demolished structure was also uncovered at the north east of the area, and judging from the frequent plant pots within the demolition rubble this would appear to have been a potting shed. A worn coin dated to 1776 was recovered from the trampled floor of this building and it may be that the building was demolished when the house was rebuilt in 1830 and the extensive walled gardens at the west were created. The function of two small pits remains unclear but these may also have a horticultural origin. Lastly the pit at the south of the area would appear to be of more recent origin.

## 6. References

Alcock, L. and E. A. Alcock 1988 'Reconnaissance Excavations on Early Historic Fortifications and other Royal Sites in Scotland, 1974-84: Excavations at Dunollie Castle, Oban, Argyll, 1978', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries Scotland*, Vol.117 119-47

RCAHMS 1975 *The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland. Argyll: an Inventory of the Ancient Monuments: Volume 2: Lorn*, Edinburgh

McLean, N. 1823 Sketch of proposed site for a new house in the Hope MacDougal Collection  
Appendix 1: Context Descriptions

## Appendix 1: Context Descriptions

[001] Layer. Topsoil cover of dark grey brown loam, with frequent angular gravel, between 0.17m and 0.70m deep.

[002] Layer. Demolition rubble, consisting of yellow brown mortar with frequent plant pot fragments (these in two sizes; larger 0.30m base diameter, smaller 80mm base diameter), occasional stone (largest 0.26m x 0.26m x 0.16m) and occasional roof slate fragment. Up to 0.26m deep.

[003] Layer. Dark brown silty gravel, up to 70mm deep.

[004] Fill. Dark grey sandy silt and ash, includes occasional nail, pot and glass.

[005] Wall. Stone rubble and mortar wall footings. Measures 3.10m long and 0.52m wide and stands 0.24m high. The stones consist of water rounded blocks and schist slate slabs (largest 0.94 x 0.55 x 80mm) bonded by a soft to moderately compacted light brown mortar with frequent coarse sand inclusions. Two horizontal stones either side of the wall form a threshold.

[006] Fill. Mid grey brown silt with frequent angular gravel.

[007] Cut. Oval pit measuring 1.45m long and 0.86m wide with steep sides (70°-80°) and a flattish base, 0.40m deep.

[008] Fill. Mid grey brown silt with frequent angular gravel and occasional coal ash.

[009] Cut. Oval pit measuring 1.16m long and 0.80m wide with steep sides (70°-90°) and a flattish base, 0.50m deep.

[010] Cut. Oval pit measuring 0.90m wide and 0.21m deep with shallow concave sides and base.

[011] Fill. Dark brown humic silt with occasional charcoal.

[012] Fill. Banded mid brown and pink (peat ash) silt.

[013] Fill. Dark grey humic silt and gravel mottled with dark grey ashy charcoal and occasional moderate to large stone (maximum 0.36m x 0.25m x 0.18m).

[014] Fill. Light red brown silt (peat ash).

[015] Cut. Quarry pit cut, full extent not seen, southern edge irregular concave to steep sides with flattish base up to 0.70m deep.

[016] Fill. Dark brown silt with frequent moderate to large stones (maximum 0.29m x 0.18m x 0.15m).

[017] Cut. Possible borrow pit only SE extent seen. Steep to vertical sides dropping to flattish base, maximum depth 0.38m,

## Appendix 2: Context List

Context No	Description
[001]	Topsoil
[002]	Demolition
[003]	Surface
[004]	Pit fill
[005]	Wall
[006]	Pit fill
[007]	Pit cut
[008]	Pit fill
[009]	Pit cut
[010]	Pit cut
[011]	Quarry pit fill
[012]	Quarry pit fill
[013]	Quarry pit fill
[014]	Quarry pit fill
[015]	Quarry pit cut
[016]	Pit fill
[017]	Pit cut

## Appendix 3: Finds List

Context No	Material	Quantity	Description
002	pot	3	plant pot sherds (sampled)
002	pot	4	glazed white earthenware
002	slate	1	small roof slate with nail hole
003	pot	3	glazed white earthenware, 1 with cobalt blue decoration
003	glass	2	green bottle glass
003	cu alloy	1	worn haf penny of George III dated 1776
004	pot	5	glazed white earthenware, 2 with cobalt blue decoration
004	glass	1	green bottle glass
004	fe	5	corroded nails
006	pot	1	glazed white earthenware
006	fe	1	corroded nail?

Appendix 4: Photo list

Photo No	Context	Notes
1	[006] [007]	Oval pit
2	[006] [007]	Oval pit
3	[008] [009]	Oval pit
4	[008] [009]	Oval pit
5	[005]	Wall
6	[005]	Wall
7	[005]	Wall
8	[005]	Wall
9	[005]	Wall
10	[002]	Wall
11	[015]	Wall
12	[015]	Wall
13	[015]	Wall
14		stripping
15		stripping

Appendix 5: Graphics List

Graphic No	Scale	Plan/Section	Context	Notes
1	1:100	Plan		Trench Plan
2	1:20	Plan	[005]	Wall
3	1:10	Section	[007]	Pit
4	1:10	Section	[009]	Pit
5	1:10	Section	[011]- [015]	Quarry Pit

Appendix 6: DES Entry

<b>LOCAL AUTHORITY:</b>	Argyll and Bute
<b>PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:</b>	Dunollie House, Archaeological Watching Brief
<b>PROJECT CODE:</b>	DUN 11
<b>PARISH:</b>	Kilmore and Kilbride
<b>NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:</b>	Roddy Regan
<b>NAME OF ORGANISATION:</b>	The Dunollie Preservation Trust
<b>TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:</b>	Archaeological Watching Brief
<b>NMRS NO(S):</b>	NM83SE 46
<b>SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):</b>	Parkland
<b>SIGNIFICANT FINDS:</b>	
<b>NGR (2 letters, 8 or 10 figures)</b>	NM 85275 31500
<b>START DATE (this season)</b>	25 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2011
<b>END DATE (this season)</b>	28 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2011
<b>PREVIOUS WORK (incl. DES ref.)</b>	
<b>MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION:</b> (May include information from other fields)	Evidence of gravel quarrying was seen in the north of the area and this may be related to the construction of Dunollie House in 1746 or possibly the extensive remodelling of the house and grounds in 1830. The remains of a small structure were also located at the north the car park area, this likely used as a potting shed and subsequently demolished. The reason for its demolition is not clear but was likely due to the landscaping of the area in the front of the house coinciding with the refurbishment of the house in the early 19 <sup>th</sup> century along with the construction of the large walled garden below Dunollie Castle.
<b>PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:</b>	
<b>CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:</b>	
<b>SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:</b>	The Dunollie Preservation Trust
<b>ADDRESS OF MAIN CONTRIBUTOR:</b>	An Goirtean Steading, Kilmichael Glassary, Argyll, PA31 8QA
<b>EMAIL ADDRESS:</b>	rodgy@kilmartin.org
<b>ARCHIVE LOCATION (intended/deposited)</b>	The archive will be deposited with the Auchindrain Trust and copies of the report lodged with, Historic Scotland, WoSAS SMR and the NMRS