

Scheduled Monument Consent: Report on Handling



HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
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Case information

Reference/Case ID	201601960		
Scheduled Monument	Craw Stane, symbol stone and enclosure 575m E of Mains of Rhynie		
Index no	M69	Grid Ref	NJ497263 349700.0000 826300.0000
Date of Application	12 July 2016	Application Received	18 July 2016
Summary of proposed works	Excavation of a cropmark enclosure surrounding the Craw Stane at Rhynie		

1. Summary recommendation

This report recommends that approval for the excavation of a cropmark enclosure surrounding the Craw Stane at Rhynie be granted without conditions.

2. Background

The historic environment asset and its cultural significance

The monument comprises a Class 1 Pictish symbol stone, known as the Craw Stane or Rhynie No 1, which is situated on a south facing slope just below the crest of a hill in a pasture field which overlooks a valley below. The symbol stone stands within a multi-vallate enclosure which survives as a buried feature visible on some aerial photographs.

The Craw Stane is a rectangular block of grey granite, measuring 0.9m in breadth and 0.4m wide and 1.85m in height set in a concrete base. Its SW face bears the incised figure of a fish and, immediately below it, a Pictish beast. The symbols are grooved, pecked and reasonably clear.

The symbol stone stands at the eastern edge of the cropmark of a roughly oval enclosure. It is formed of three concentric rings, which probably represent palisade ditches. The outer ring has a maximum diameter of 66m SW-NE.

Recent survey and excavation at the monument has shown that the Craw Stane (and two other symbol stones whose findspots were downslope from the monument) was associated with a high status, probably royal site encompassing settlement and ritual dimensions that dated to the 5th-6th century AD. The cultural significance of the

monument therefore lies in the association of Pictish symbol stones with a high status settlement and ritual site, thus providing context to carved stones that is all too often not possible to attain.

The applicant

The Northern Picts Project (comprising researchers from the Universities of Aberdeen, Chester, and Glasgow) involves reconnaissance survey and fieldwork at a number of sites across Northern Scotland from Aberdeenshire to Easter Ross and has led to new key evidence for the nature, chronology and importance of Northern Pictland in the emergence of the early kingdoms of Scotland. The project has a wide popular appeal, a strong social media presence, has received extensive media coverage in previous years, and includes a spin-off community initiative called Rhynie Women which links local arts and culture to the archaeological work. The project includes a final year of excavation at Rhynie, where work under the auspices of the Rhynie Environs Archaeological Project (REAP) (run by the same researchers) has revealed an early royal centre for the Picts. This final year of excavation at the Craw Stane in Rhynie is the subject of this SMC application.

The Northern Picts Project is supported financially by Historic Environment Scotland in 2016-17 because it helps to deliver the aims of the Scottish Archaeology Strategy, specifically:

Aim 2 – Enhancing Understanding: The Northern Picts project aims to provide a detailed consideration of a range of Northern Pictish sites that will help to characterise major power centres as well as everyday life in Northern Pictland and the rise and fall of the northern Pictish territories. Rhynie and its wider context suggests that we have the potential to reveal significant elements of the early medieval landscape at Rhynie and its long term development.

Aim 3 – Caring and Protecting: The project also has the potential to look at how the partial excavation of archaeological sites affects their long term preservation.

Aim 4 – Encouraging Greater Engagement: The project has a strong focus on community engagement, empowering them to own their history creating a vibrancy and activity in a rural community with pop up cafes, volunteer excavation, social media and creative collaboration with the Rhynie Woman group.

Aim 5 – Innovation and Skills: The project is one of the few training opportunities for University of Aberdeen and the University of Chester and will supply suitable skilled archaeologists for the future. As it is also open to volunteers it also supports learning and development of amateur archaeologists.

As such, the principles of the project as a whole have been subjected to scrutiny prior to the grant being awarded. However, this does not exempt this proposal for excavation at the Craw Stane from the scrutiny that all scheduled monument consent applications undergo and is subject to the same policy tests.

Pre-application discussions

The applicant submitted a draft project design on 24 June 2016, to which HES responded with significant comments on 08 July 2016. The applicant wishes to commence excavation on 15 August 2016 for a period of three weeks. The present application has been adapted as a result of this pre-application consultation and it accords with the outcome of these discussions.

3. Proposals

Consented works - Excavation of a cropmark enclosure surrounding the Craw Stane at Rhynie

The proposals comprise:

- Excavation of a 15m x 35m trench (No 1) to assess a possible additional entranceway visible in the cropmarks in the NW of the enclosure complex, as well as an area outwith the enclosure.
- Excavation of a 15m x 35m trench (No 2) to assess the SW boundary of the enclosure complex, as well as an area outwith the enclosure that might contain an exterior palisade. This trench has some overlap with the 2012 trench.
- Excavation of a 3m x 25m trench (No 3) to assess an area downslope and to the S of the enclosure where geophysical survey is inconclusive and where buried soils or middens might be present.
- Excavation of a 12m x 15m trench (No 4) to reassess a beam and post structure that was identified during previous work in 2012 that sits close to the Craw Stane and the socket of another standing stone. This trench is entirely within the 2012 trench.

4. Representations received

No representations were received.

5. Report

a) Policy considerations

The application should be viewed with the following legislative and policy considerations in mind:

Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979

Part 1 Section 2 - Control of works affecting an ancient monument.
Part 3 Section 42 – Use of a metal detector.

Historic Environment Scotland Policy Statement June 2016 (the policy statement)

3.14. A monument is included in the schedule to secure the long-term legal protection of the monument in the national interest, in situ and as far as possible in the state it has come down to us. Scheduled monuments have an intrinsic value as monuments, not related to any concept of active use. It is the value of the monument to the nation's heritage, in terms set out in the section on Scheduling in Chapter 2 of this policy statement, which is the primary consideration in determining applications for scheduled monument consent.

3.16. Works on scheduled monuments should therefore normally be the minimum level of intervention that is consistent with conserving what is culturally significant in a monument. (Annex 1 sets out guidance as to how cultural significance and national importance should be determined).

3.17. As each monument will require treatment specific to its individual nature, characteristics, significance and needs, any proposed change to it must be fully and explicitly justified.

3.18. Scheduled monument consent applications must be considered in terms of the cultural significance of the monument and the impact that the proposals would have upon this cultural significance. The more important particular features of the monument are to its cultural significance, the greater will be the case against interventions which modify these features.

3.19. Extensive intervention will only be allowed where it is clearly necessary to secure the longer-term preservation of the monument, or where it will clearly generate public benefits of national importance which outweigh the impact on the national cultural significance of the monument. Such public benefits could come from, for example, interventions which make public access to scheduled monuments easier, or assist public understanding, or will produce economic benefits once the works are completed.

3.20. Where change is proposed, it should be carefully considered, based on good authority, sensitively designed, properly planned and executed, and where appropriate in the context of an individual monument, reversible.

3.22. Where consent for the range of works set out in paragraph 3.4 is granted, conditions are normally applied to ensure the works are undertaken in an appropriate manner. Common requirements are:

- a. the use of appropriate assessment methodologies to determine the full impact of any proposed management, use, or development;
- c. that where change is necessary, strategies should be adopted to mitigate its impact and limit intervention;

- f. that an appropriate level of record is made before, during and after any work and deposited in local and national archives, and, where appropriate, published;
- h. that any archaeological excavation or other intrusive investigation should be based upon a detailed research strategy, with adequate resources, using appropriately skilled and experienced archaeologists with a satisfactory record of the completion and publication of projects (see Note 3.10); and,
- i. that the design, planning and execution of works on scheduled monuments are undertaken by people with appropriate professional and craft qualifications, skills and experience.

b) Assessment

The works involve the excavation of a cropmark enclosure surrounding the Craw Stane at Rhynie through the opening of four trenches and the utilisation of the strip and map technique.

Overview of works

This SMC application is for the final season of excavation proposed at this monument as part of the Northern Picts Project / Rhynie Environs Archaeological Project. There have been multiple prior seasons: a small 2005 excavation (by others) to assess livestock damage to the NW of the Craw Stane, a 2011 excavation from the centre of the enclosure running NE, a 2012 excavation focussed on the interior of the enclosure, and a 2015 excavation focussed on the enclosure ditches and an annex to the NE of the Craw Stane. The trenches have been designed to specifically target areas where answers to previously established research questions are still required, and the excavation methodology of strip and map has proven to be effective in the 2011, 2012 and 2015 excavations in minimising the volume of material removed from the monument whilst maximising the information gained.

Methodology

All trenches will be machine stripped under the supervision of the site directors, with only the topsoil being removed and set aside for reinstatement. Prior to stripping, the topsoil will be metal detected to recover any metal artefacts that might be present in the topsoil only; previous approaches in 2013 and 2015 recovered only modern material from the topsoil. Once the topsoil has been stripped, the exposed topsoil profiles will be sampled for comparison with excavated material and will be subjected to botanical and geo-archaeological analysis.

The strip and map technique involves repeated cleaning back and weathering of the sub-topsoil layers in the trench, which allows sometimes ephemeral features to be identified and recorded in plan when they might not have been identified in section.

A maximum of 15% of archaeological deposits will then be excavated in each trench, with all excavated contexts dry sieved (weather permitting) for artefact retrieval and environmental samples taken (for soil flotation and micromorphology).

The four trenches have a combined area of 1,305sqm, which when compared with the total area of the monument of 9,432sqm means that approximately 14% of the monument will be topsoil stripped. This is a significant proportion of the monument being subjected to topsoil stripping, especially when considered alongside previous seasons of excavations (whilst accepting that there is overlapping of trenches between each season), although within this 14% of the monument only a maximum of 15% of archaeological features will be excavated. The impact of topsoil stripping on the long term preservation of unexcavated yet exposed archaeological deposits is uncertain, and whilst the excavation will only result in the intended destruction of a small part of the monument (15% of archaeological features in each trench), it nevertheless cannot be seen as the minimum works necessary to conserve what is culturally significant in a monument. Consequently, the application does not meet paragraph 3.16 of the policy statement and therefore the application must be assessed against paragraph 3.19 of the policy statement.

To comply with paragraph 3.19 of the policy statement, the application must demonstrate that it will generate public benefits of national importance which outweigh the impact on the national cultural significance of the monument. In addition, to comply with paragraph 3.20 of the policy statement the application must also demonstrate suitable methodology, planning, and execution. For research excavations such as this the following considerations should therefore be made: (1) Justification of principle of the works; (2) Quality and importance of the research agenda; (3) Demonstration of the use of appropriately skilled personnel; (4) Ability to fully implement the research design during the duration of the works; (5) Demonstration of the financial and general resources to carry out all the works; (6) Post-excavation and publication strategy; (7) Reinstatement or post-excavation site management strategy.

(1) Justification of principle of the works

In order to set aside the presumption against preservation in situ (through minimal intervention) the applicant must justify the principle of the works, primarily through demonstration that this cannot be done on another monument and that the works can demonstrate production of academic knowledge.

The applicant must prove that the same information which is being sought through excavation of the scheduled monument could not be found from another site that is not designated as being of national importance. In this instance, the presence of the in-situ Class I symbol stone within a contemporary multi-vallate enclosure is an important survival of upstanding art and iconography being associated with buried remains of settlement. The large collection of symbol stones from Rhynie, as well as the excavated remains of contemporary burial mounds means that together the various components of Pictish society are present all in one place. The combination of these elements is rarely found at other locations. I am content that the same information that is being sought through the excavation of this monument cannot readily be found through excavation of another monument that is undesignated.

The Northern Picts project intends to gain a better understanding of the development of a range of Pictish sites that will help characterise major power centres as well as everyday life in Northern Pictland. This contributes to our knowledge of the development of complex society within the emerging Scottish kingdoms. This research need has been highlighted at the level of national research agendas (eg SCARF). The outputs from this work will be published in a peer reviewed monograph at national level. I am therefore content that the works will make a significant contribution to our scientific understanding of the monument and its period.

(2) Quality and importance of the research agenda

The project aims to investigate the area surrounding a unique collection of Class 1 Pictish symbol stones found around and within the village of Rhynie. The Craw Stane stands in or very near its original location, and its location within a multi-vallate enclosure showing as a cropmark on aerial photographs has provided an unparalleled opportunity to understand the context of Pictish material culture in a transformative period of Scottish history that is poorly understood.

The research agenda has therefore been developed to address a series of key future research areas and issues as identified in the Scottish Archaeological Research Framework (SCARF), including investigating the formation of early medieval politics and centres of royal power and consumption, addressing the rise and fall of these centres, and uncovering settlement hierarchies of the first millennium AD.

Previous excavations in 2011 demonstrated the nature of the boundaries of the enclosure at the Craw Stane, and the 2012 excavations in the interior identified a series of timber structures along with sherds of Late Roman Amphorae of 6th century date, bronze and iron pins, metalworking moulds for pins and a brooch, metalworking tongs, and sherds of 6th century Continental glass. The finds are very unusual for northern Britain and suggest that Rhynie was an important high status, potentially royal, site for the Picts.

Excavations in 2013 outwith the scheduled monument and close to the village of Rhynie uncovered two square barrows including one with a partially preserved female skeleton dating to 450-550 AD, the same period as the enclosures at the Craw Stane.

The project to date has therefore uncovered the most complete ground plan of the layout of a Pictish high status settlement with ritual dimensions that can be tied to a wider collection of Pictish symbol stones.

The more detailed research questions for 2016 focus on further clarification and characterisation of features identified and perhaps not fully understood in previous years of excavation, as well as trying to establish if the multi-vallate enclosure was part of a wider settlement complex and targeting areas outwith the enclosure that might contain midden material or other 'ecofact traps'. Following this season of work,

the project will move to assess the major upstanding fortified enclosures close to Rhynie, with a view to providing a detailed picture of the long-term evolution of the Rhynie landscape from the Iron Age to early Medieval periods.

The wider project is also designed to facilitate and empower community engagement with archaeology and culture. Local volunteers have been involved in each season of excavation to date, and the project supports a community initiative known as Rhynie Women. These wider community aims are in line with 'Scotland's Historic Environment Strategy: Our Place in Time'.

I therefore consider the research agenda to be sufficiently robust and capable of delivering public benefits of a national level through enhanced knowledge of a high status monument and through established opportunities for community engagement.

(3) Demonstration of the use of appropriately skilled personnel

The applicant has confirmed by an email subsequent to the application that there will be two site directors (Gordon Noble from the University of Aberdeen and Meggen Gondek from the University of Chester) working with three professional archaeologists whom all have prior experience of overseeing excavation at Rhynie, and of which two of whom are employed by commercial contractor AOC Archaeology with the third being employed to manage the Northern Picts Project. These five directors will between them each manage a trench (allowing for one director to be away from site at any time on community engagement for instance).

Working alongside the directors will be five experienced student supervisors, who have each worked at least one prior season at Rhynie and have a minimum of 6 weeks excavation experience.

There will then be a pool of 7 undergraduate students and between 3-4 community volunteers on site each day, and they will be distributed amongst the trenches as needs dictate.

The ratio of directors/supervisors vs undergraduates/volunteers should therefore be averaging below 1:3. This ratio is considered acceptable on a site of national importance, and therefore I consider the project team has the necessary level of experience to work on this monument.

(4) Ability to fully implement the research design during the duration of the works

The approach and methods for the excavation have been outlined fully in the project design, and rely on a tried and tested approach that has previously received scheduled monument consent on this monument.

The trench sizing, position, and specific justification in relation to the research aims has been set out in the project design and has been revised following pre-application discussions with HES. A statement on sampling and post-excavation strategy has been submitted by the applicant which sets out an appropriate strategy for handling

environmental sampling, artefacts, and faunal material both during and after the excavation. The project design also sets out that relevant specialists have been keyed into the project where their expertise is necessary and as such I consider this sufficient to meet industry standards.

Taking into account the level of expertise displayed by the two directors and three professional archaeologists, I consider that the project design is deliverable within the timescale and resource available.

(5) Demonstration of the financial and general resources to carry out all the works;=

The excavation is partially funded by a grant from Historic Environment Scotland in 2016-17, as well as through various funding streams associated with the Northern Picts Project. A detailed budget was subject to scrutiny by HES prior to the awarding of grant aid. The project design sets out that complex archaeological deposits where post-excavation budgets are not sufficient to deal with shall be left in situ and unexcavated. As such, I consider that the project is adequately resourced.

(6) Post-excavation and publication strategy

The application sets out that the post-excavation programme for previous seasons at Rhynie is up to date, with over 40 radiocarbon dates having been obtained, all finds conserved, and select object drawn for publication. The 2016-17 budget for the excavation includes funds for object analysis, botanics and conservation. As mentioned above, a statement on sampling and post-excavation strategy has been submitted by the applicant which sets out an appropriate strategy for handling environmental sampling, artefacts, and faunal material both during and after the excavation.

A DSR will be produced within 3 months of the completion of the excavation on site, and this will be sent to HES and the local authority archaeologist. The final outcome will be an academic peer reviewed project monograph on the archaeology of the Northern Picts, and this will build on the three major journal articles and three book chapters already produced. Popular outputs will also be produced, including local newspaper and magazine articles and web content, and an exhibition will be held in Rhynie itself, at the Tarbat Discovery Centre in Portmahomack, and at the University of Aberdeen. The project archive will remain with the University of Aberdeen until the Northern Picts Project is complete, at which time it will be housed with a relevant body. As such, I consider that the post-excavation and publication strategy is sufficient to meet industry standards.

(7) Reinstatement or post-excavation site management strategy

Upon completion of the excavation, all excavated features will be backfilled by hand and then the remainder of the trench will be backfilled by machine using material previously excavated from the trench. The trench will then be reseeded and returned to its previous agricultural use.

Summary

Taking into consideration the above, the outcomes of the excavation as set out in the project design in relation to increased knowledge of a high status archaeological site, increased public understanding and engagement, and the developing of skills in the community represent a range of public benefits that are considered to be of national importance. The adverse impact of the excavation (and the precautionary approach taken to the impact of strip and map on the long term preservation of unexcavated deposits) as set out above has been judged in balance against these public benefits, and I consider that the proposals meet the public benefit test as set out in paragraph 3.19 of the policy statement.

I also consider that the research design and methods have been fully and explicitly justified, have been carefully considered and are based on good authority, and are sensitively designed and planned and are thus capable of being executed. As such, I consider that the proposal meets paragraph 3.20 of the policy statement.

c) Other material considerations, including impact of the works on Protected Species and Places

No impact on Protected Species and Places.

d) Conclusion

As a research excavation, the application should be viewed as works as set out in both Part 1 Section 2 of the AMAA Act 1979 and paragraph 3.4 of the policy statement, and the use of metal detecting equipment as set out in Part 3 Section 42 of the AMAA Act 1979.

The application, comprising the excavation of a cropmark enclosure surrounding the Craw Stane at Rhynie which forms part of a wider Northern Picts Project, is considered more than the minimum necessary to conserve what is culturally significant in this scheduled monument, and as such is not justified under paragraph 3.16 of the policy statement.

However, the application is considered compliant with paragraphs 3.19 and 3.20 of the policy statement as it demonstrates that there is a public benefit of national importance that outweighs the impact on the cultural significance of the monument, and that the works are carefully considered, based on good authority, sensitively designed and properly planned.

From the information provided with this application, and based on pre-application discussions with the applicant, further conditions as outlined in paragraph 3.22 to ensure the works are undertaken in an appropriate manner are not required.

6. Recommended decision

The works proposed are considered acceptable in meeting the terms of national policy for scheduled monuments, and also accounting for other material considerations.

I recommend consent is **granted without conditions**.

7. Conditions

None.

8. Approval

Officer	Oliver Lewis	Date	01/08/2016
Approved by	Aonghus MacKechnie	Date	08/08/2016

Annex A – list of supporting documents

- Project Design
- Email from Gordon Noble to Oliver Lewis on 03 August 2016 setting out that a DSR will be produced within 3 months of completion of the excavation.
- Email from Gordon Noble to Oliver Lewis on 04 August 2016 clarifying the ratios of experienced staff to inexperienced participants on site.
- Email from Gordon Noble to Oliver Lewis on 04 August 2016 providing an updated sampling and post-excavation strategy.