CFA ARCHAEOLOGY LTD

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Aberlady Pier Aberlady, East Lothian Archaeological Excavation

Report No. 1561

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 General

In June 2008 CFA Archaeology Ltd (CFA) and volunteers from the Aberlady Conservation Society and Edinburgh University carried out an archaeological excavation of upstanding remains of a timber and stone structure within Aberlady Bay, Aberlady, East Lothian (NGR: NT 4586 8045 (centred); Figure 1). The work was commissioned by the Aberlady Conservation Society.

The site is located to the north of Aberlady village, within the sheltered Aberlady Bay. Historical records suggest that the bay has been utilised since the 14th Century (Ross 2008). The site is located on an intertidal zone, which restricted excavations to within low tide.

A Project Design was produced by the Aberlady Conservation Society and CFA, based upon information obtained from historical records and an earlier survey by the Aberlady Conservation Society which had identified surviving timbers of the Quay within Aberlady Bay

No previous invasive archaeological fieldwork is known to have taken place within the study area prior to this evaluation.

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To carry out an archaeological excavation of the recently discovered timber and stone structure identified as a harbour or pier.
- To assess the morphology and date of the remains through a series of small, hand dug trenches.

1.3 Historical and Archaeological Background

The following section is based on the historical research undertaken by Alasdair Ross (2008).

Aberlady Bay is a secluded bay providing natural harbourage along the East Lothian Coast. The port of Aberlady is first referred to in the 16th Century (ibid). It is not clear if the port existed before this time, it's possible that it was known by a different name (Port of Haddington) or that natural coastal erosion processes created the bay around the 16th century (ibid). Historical records recount that in 1535 it was advised funds should be used to for the construction of a harbour.

The Customs House (NGR NT 4569 8031), situated on the Aberlady shore, is of 18th century date and appears to have been a store and customs house for the port of Aberlady. Some sources state that this building was ruinous in 1807 (Graham 1971), suggesting an earlier structure predated the existing house.

Historical sources state that Aberlady Harbour consisted of a wooden pier and beacon posts – there is no evidence of any other works commissioned. In 1576,

1661 and 1672 there are records relating to the commissioning of beacons, to be made of wood and placed upon quarried stone platforms. The record relating to 1672, records the commissioning of a beacon and a bing for the Aberlady shoreline.

A field survey conducted by the Aberlady Conservation Society recorded upstanding remains of timbers and stone footings within Aberlady Bay, close to the customs house.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 General

CFA follows Institute of Field Archaeologists Code of Conduct, Standards and Guidelines for Historic Building Survey and Evaluation as appropriate.

2.2 Excavation

The total area excavation was 52m². Seven trenches were excavated spread over the pier (Figure 2). Six trenches (Trenches 1-6) were excavated over the exposed pier remains, a further trench (Trench 7) was placed to assess if the pier remains extended towards the Custom House. Trench positions were surveyed with industry standard survey equipment (Total Station).

Excavations took place between 26 June and 4 July 2008 and were carried out by CFA personnel, together with volunteers from the Aberlady Conservation Society and Edinburgh University.

The excavation was carried out by hand. The stratification of all excavated areas was recorded whether or not significant archaeological deposits were identified. All trenches were back-filled with dug material on completion of excavation.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

Seven trenches totaling 52m² were excavated by hand (locations shown on Figure 2). Context numbers are in bold and a full list is provided in Appendix 1.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was placed over the south west area of the structure. Sand and rock overburden (100) was removed to reveal a grey shell sand (101). Six posts and an associated longitudinal sleeper beam (110) were present. The remnants of the north and south stone walls were also identified. Posts (105), (106) and (107) were positioned within the southern wall (109). The possible remnants of the northern wall (108) were also recorded associated with a wooden post (102). (101) contained numerous finds (discovered through metal detecting) of post-medieval and modern date.

Trench 2

Sand and rock overburden (200) was removed to reveal grey shell sand and rock (201) and large stone boulders (202). Trench 2 revealed two posts (A11) (A12), which when viewed in section were set at an angle, away from the vertical. No associated walls were detected. Trench 2

Trench 3

Trench 3 was positioned within the middle of the pier remains. Sand and rock overburden (300) was removed to reveal a wall of large sandstone blocks (301). A large deposit of oval blocks (303) was also identified which may have been original infill material of the pier. Two posts (A23 and A24) were also found associated with the structures walls (301). A dark clay silty deposit (302), possibly a later silting event, contained pottery of $15^{th} - 16^{th}$ Century date.

Trench 4

Trench 4 was placed on the east area of the structure and revealed sections of wall with associated timber posts. Sand and rock overburden (400) was removed to reveal grey shell sand and rock deposits (401). A sleeper beam (409) was recorded with a rectangular 'notch' (410) - a mortice and tenon joint for an upright post (now missing). A wooden peg (411) protruding from the sleeper beam (409) secures an upright pile (412). The upright pile (412) when viewed sideways is set at an angle, away from the vertical. The sleeper beam (409) was, in turn, fixed to another sleeper beam (407) with a square wooden peg (408). A sample of (409), (412) and (411) was taken for dendrochronological dating and is discussed below.

Trench 5

Sand and rock overburden (500) was removed to reveal a grey shell sand and rock (501) and stone (502) deposit. A sleeper beam (505) running E-W was exposed at the east of the structure on the north side. A sleeper beam revealed in Trench 4 (407) was fastened onto (505) with a wooden peg (506) and a wooden wedge (507) was recorded associated with the checked joint between the planks (407 and 505). Two upright posts (508 and 511) were recorded within (505). A further sleeper beam (509) was connected by peg (512) to (505).

Trench 6

Trench 6 was positioned to the NE of edge of the structure. Sand and rock overburden (600) was removed to reveal large sandstone blocks (601), the Northern wall of the structure (602) and a natural marine sand (606). Two posts (603 and 604), and a sleeper beam running east-west (605) were also recorded.

Trench 7

Trench 7 was placed to the south west of the structure, to identify if the pier extended to the Customs House. A metalled surface (703) aligned with large sandstone blocks (701 and 702) was recorded, which may be the remains of an old

track or platform leading towards the Customs House. Attempts to reach the base of (702) were hampered by rising water levels. A humic lens (705) was recorded between (701) and the northern edge of the trench and may be remnants of an old ground surface from when the feature was in use.

Finds
Sue Anderson

Finds were collected during metal-detecting (001) and from a fill (302); a full list is included as Appendix 4. The copper alloy from (001) included two coins, one an Elizabeth II twopence, the other too worn for identification; an oval keyhole plate; a binding ring; two shirt buttons; three sheet fragments; and six fittings of unidentified type – all finds were post-medieval or modern. Lead finds comprised four bullets and a musket ball of post-medieval date. The pottery from (302) consisted of one body sherd each of Dutch-type redware, Raeren stoneware and a Scottish white gritty ware jug with dark green glaze; these finds suggest a late 15th- to 16th-century date for the context.

A rim/handle sherd of a small Dutch redware tripod cauldron was an unstratified find, and is also of 15th/16th-century date.

Preliminary analysis on timber recovered from Aberlady Bay Pier Mike Cressey

A section of timber comprising of a section of a sleeper beam (409) and pile (412) was obtained from Trench 4 - near the end of the terminus of the pier. The timber was sampled to assess its species and potential use for dendrochronological dating. The pile and sleeper beam were found with associated revetment stone (Plate 1). Two saw cuts placed on each side of the pile ensured recovery of both the sleeper beam and pile.



Plate 1 Section of the harbour sleeper beam (409), pile (412) and large block of stone (405) in-situ



Plate 2 Sleeper beam (409) and pile (412) prior to dismantling (top of the pile is eroded)



Plate 3 The tenon joint on the end of the pile (412) and the mortis socket in (409) following dismantling

The sleeper beam and pile have been fixed together using a mortis and tenon joint, and held in place using a tree-nail or oak peg that was hammered into a hole that was drilled through the side of the sleeper-beam. The mortis socket measured 160mm by 70mm and was 160mm deep. The mortise joint measures 120mm deep and 150mm wide. The hole has a diameter of 35mm.





Plate 4 Small wooden fillet hammered in a crack at the end of the mortis joint and tree-nail (411).

At the terminal end of the tenon joint, a small wooden fillet had been hammered into a crack in order to expand the joint and make it a tighter fit within the mortis hole. The fillet is oak (Plate 4).

The mortis socket was cut out using a chisel and this has left crude marks at the base. The sides are near vertical and very smooth. The weight of the pier deck has resulted in a distinct compression mark around the mortis hole (Plate 3). The sleeper beam has been hewn by radially splitting a large diameter trunk. The timber was then hewn more or less to a rectangle. Both the heart and sap-wood are present within the sleeper beam. The sapwood is the lighter coloured wood at the base of the beam.

Dendrochronology potential

The sleeper-beam (Plate 5) contains in excess of 100 annual rings with an estimated sap-wood growth pattern of +25 annual rings present. The tree ring sequence displays rapid growth in its first thirty years, after which there is a considerable slowing down of its growth patterns. The pile will need to be sectioned above the tennon joint and a tree-ring count of well over 50 annual rings is estimated.



Plate 5 Heart and sapwood in the sleeper-beam timber.

Recommendations

As a minimum the sleeper-beam should be subjected to dendrochronological dating to obtain a felling date of the tree used to supply the timber. As well as the felling date, important information on the origins of the timber will be ascertained. If the timber is

found to date from the 17th or 18th century, then it is highly likely that the timber was imported from Scandinavia. The use of imported timber within Scottish high status buildings is now well recorded from recent work carried out by CFA at Fenton Tower (East Lothian) John Knox House (Edinburgh) and Dunbar Town House (East Lothian). To date there has been no such similar work carried out on timber recovered from harbour installation timber anywhere within Scotland.

4. DISCUSSION

The excavation identified stone walls, upright timbers and inter-connected wooden sleeper beams connected through a tusk tenon technique – a type of mortice and tenon joint. Upright timbers in trenches 2 and 4 were set at an angle, away from the vertical, a technique which enhanced the structural integrity of the pier. Structural support was also provided by roughly hewned stone blocks, partially spaced to allow sea water to flow through the structure, which would otherwise have compromised its structural integrity. A metalled surface was also recorded, possibly the remains of an old trackway leading towards shore. Pottery found within deposit (301) was 15th to 16th century in date, although given the structures position within the inter-tidal zone, these sherds cannot be relied on to accurately date the feature.

The development of the mortice and tenon joints is dated to after the Norman invasion (Milne 1991) and evidence from excavations of timber structures in London suggest that by the end of the 13th century the joint had developed into the familiar form (Milne 1991). It is unclear at what date this tradition extends beyond London and therefore cannot be accurately relied to date the structure at Aberlady. Similar structures have been identified at Lincoln and Hartlepool, which have dated to the 13th Century (Chitwood 1991; Daniels 1991) but it is impossible to draw comparisons with the Aberlady structure, without further post-excavation analysis of the recovered timbers.

It is probable that the structure is the foundations of the 16th Century pier identified by historical research (Ross 2008; Aberlady Conservation Society). The number of vertical wooden posts suggests they originally supported a structure of horizontal timbers, a possible platform, which has since been destroyed by tidal processes. The proximity to the Custom House further supports this – an associated pier or quay would be expected near such a building, perhaps acting as a landing stage for smaller boats from larger ships docked in the bay.

Historical research also revealed that in 1672 a beacon and bing, to be made of upstanding posts and upon quarried stone, was commissioned for the Aberlady shoreline (Ross 2008). It is possible that the pier was the location of the location of the beacon. However, this must be considered a tentative hypothesis. The structure does not appear on early cartographic sources, which may suggest it is Medieval or early post-Medieval in date. Further dating of the timbers would be needed to ascertain the firm date of the structure.

A summary statement of the results of this archaeological work will be submitted for publication in *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*, a copy of which is attached as Appendix 5.

5. REFERENCES

Chitwood, R 1991 'Lincoln's ancient docklands: the search continues' in G L Good, R H Javes and M W Ponsford Waterfront Archaeology: Proceedings of the Third International Conference at Brighton 23-26 1988 CBA Research Report

Daniel, R 1991 'Medieval Hartlepool: evidence of and from the water-front' in G L Good, R H Javes and M W Ponsford *Waterfront Archaeology: Proceedings of the Third International Conference at Brighton 23-26 1988* CBA Research Report

Graham, A 1968-69 'Archaeological notes on some harbours in eastern Scotland', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot* 101 (1968-69), 212

Harris, R 1978 Discovering Timber-Framed Buildings

Milne, G 1991 'Waterfront archaeology and vernacular architecture: a London Study' in G L Good, R H Javes and M W Ponsford *Waterfront Archaeology: Proceedings of the Third International Conference at Brighton 23-26 1988* CBA Research Report

Ross, A 2008 Historical Report on Aberlady, unpublished report.

APPENDIX 1: Context Register

Context no.	Trench	Description
100	1	Sand and rock overburden
101	1	Grey shell sand and rock beneath 100
102	1	Northern timber post
103	1	Central timber post
104	1	Timber post to the north of trench 1 sondage
105	1	Eastern timber post on plank
106	1	Central
107	1	Eastern
108	1	Possible harbour wall
109	1	Southern Harbour wall
110	1	North to south sleeper beam to east of sondage
111	1	East and west part of harbour inner wall
200	2	Sand and rock overburden
201	2	Grey shell sand and rock beneath 200
202	2	Stones within 201
300	3	Sand and rock overburden
301	3	Large sandstone blocks of harbour 'wall'
302	3	Dark grey sandy-clay silt against 301
303	3	Rocks to the south of harbour, sat on 302
304	3	Sand rock overburden
305	3	Horizontal plank at base of harbour
306	3	Natural marine sand
307	3	Post (A23) on plank 305
308	3	Post (A24) on plank 305
309	3	Packing beneath 301 and post A23
310	3	Packing in front of post A24
400	4	Sand and rock overburden
400	4	Grey shell sand and rock beneath 400
402	4	Stone within 401
403	4	Natural marine sand
403	4	Tumble rock on 403
405	4	Sandstone harbour wall
405	4	Stone between wall and plank
407	4	North-south sleeper beam of pier
408	4	Peg securing 407 to 409
409	4	East-west sleeper beam of pier
410	4	Notch for missing upright
411	4	Peg for post 412 to sleeper beam 409
412	4	Upright pile still in situ
500	5	Sand and rock overburden
501	5	Grey shell sand and rock beneath 500
502	5	Stone within 501
503	5	Natural marine sand
504	5	Tumble rock on 503 – present along south and north sides of pier
505	5	
506	5	East – west sleeper beam of harbour Peg through 407 into 505
507	5	Wedge between 407 and 505
508	5	Post above 505
	5	
509	5	Sleeper beam at angle to 505
510		Western post Post to the cost of 407
511	5	Post to the east of 407
512	5	Notch into which 505 crosses 509
513		Notch from removed post 0.12m deep
514	5	Notch from removed post 0.13m deep

Context no.	Trench	Description
600	6	Sand and rock overburden
601	6	Grey sand shell and rock beneath 600
602	6	Wall of harbour
603	6	Post
604	6	Post
605	6	East-west sleeper beam of harbour
606	6	Natural marine sand
700	7	Sand and rock overburden
701	7	North wall
702	7	South wall
703	7	Sand and rubble interior of a possible trackway
704	7	Sand over 703 and 705 and below 700
705	7	Humic lense to the north of 701, under 704
706	7	Natural marine sand

APPENDIX 2: Photographic Registers

35mm	Digital	Description	From	Conditions
slide no.	image no.			
Film 1				
1-2	34	Volunteers working on pier	NE	Overcast
3-4	35	Projected central line of pier – working shot	Е	Bright
5-6	36-37	Projected central line of pier – working shot	W	Bright
7-8	38	Working shot of post in SW corner of trench 1 showing packing stones		Bright
9-10	39	Working shot of trench 1	N	Bright
11-12	40-41	General working shot of site	E	Overcast
13-14	42	Site pre-ex with canes showing position of posts	W	Overcast
15-16	43	Pre-ex photo of trench 1	N	Overcast
17-18	44	Close up of posts in trench 1	N	Overcast
19-20	45	Pre-ex photo of trench 1	S	Overcast
21-22	46	Working shot of posts in SW corner of trench 1 showing packing stones	S	Overcast
23-24	47	Pre-ex photo of trench 4	N	Overcast
25-26	48	Pre-ex photo of trench 4	S	Overcast
27-28	49	Pre-ex photo of trench 2	S	Overcast
29-30	50	Pre-ex photo of trench 2	S	Overcast
31-32	51	Working shot of trench 3	W	Overcast
33-34	52	Working shot of trench 3	S	Overcast
Film 2				
1-13	53-59	North-east sleeper beams (W to E)	N	Overcast
14-15	60	Packing stones in trench 3	S	Overcast
16-19	61	Packing stones in trench 3	Е	Overcast
20-21	62	Trench 3 after removal of stones	W	Bright
22-23	63	Post A1	S	Overcast
24		Void		
25-26	64	Post A2	S	Overcast
27-28	65	Post A3	S	Overcast
29-30	66	Post A4	S	Overcast
31-32	67	Post A5	Е	Bright
33-34	68	Post A6	S	Overcast
35-36	69	Post A7	S	Overcast
Film 3				
1		Registration shot		Bright

35mm slide no.	Digital image no.	Description	From	Conditions
2-3	70	Trench 1 working shot (102)	Е	Bright
4-5	71	Post C1	W	Bright
6-7	72	Post A8	S	Bright
8-9	73	Post A9	S	Bright
10-11	74	Post A10	N	Bright
12-13	75	Post A11	S	Bright
14-15	76	Post A12	S	Bright
16-17	77	Post A13	S	Bright
18-19	78	Post A14	S	Bright
20-21	79	Post A15	SW	Bright
22-23	80	Post A16	S	Bright
24-25	81	Post A17	SE	Bright
26-27	82	Post A18	S	Bright
28-29	83	Post A19	S	Bright
30-31	84	Post A20	SW	Bright
32-33	85	Post A21	SW	Bright
34-35	86	Post A22	SW	Overcast
Film 4				
1		Registration		
2-3	87	Working shot of trench 3 – south facing elevation	S	Overcast
4-5	88	West facing section of trench 3	W	Overcast
6-7	89	South facing elevation of trench 3	S	Overcast
8-9	90	Rubble at base of wall in trench 3	Е	Overcast
10-11	91	Post-ex shot of trench 4	S	Overcast
12-13	92	Post-ex shot of trench 4	Е	Overcast
14-15	93	Notch in sleeper beam (409)	N	Overcast
16-17	94	Peg (408) in sleeper beam (409)	N	Overcast
18-19	95	Peg (411) in sleeper beam (409)	Е	Overcast
20-21	96	Post-ex shot of trench 5	N	Overcast
22-23	97	Post-ex shot of trench 1	Е	Overcast
24-25	98	Post-ex shot of trench 1	N	Overcast
26-27	99	Close up of N-S timber in trench 1	Е	Overcast
28-29	100-101	Close up of N-S timber in trench 1	N	Overcast
30-31	102	North facing elevation in trench 6	N	Overcast
32-33	103	Oblique of North facing section in trench 6	NE	Overcast
34-35	104	General working shot	SW	Overcast
Film 5		-		
1		Registration		
2-3	105	Trench 5 – Notch over E-W plank (505)	W	Overcast
4-5	106	Trench 5 – post (508) on plank (505)	W	Overcast
6-7	107	Trench 5 – mortice and tennon joint of post and notch	N	Overcast
8-9	108	Trench 5 – joint of sleeper beam (509) under sleeper beam (505)	NE	Overcast
10-11	109	Trench 4 – peg through plank (407) and joint	Е	Overcast

APPENDIX 3: Drawings Register

Drawing	Description	Plan /	Scale
No.		Section	
1	Pre-ex plan trench 1	P	1:20
2	Post-ex plan of trench 1	P	1:20
3	Pre-ex plan of trench 2	P	1:20
4	Plan of 303 – trench 3	P	1:20
5	South facing elevation in trench 3	S	1:20
6	West facing section in trench 3	S	1:20
7	Post-ex plan of trench 4	P	1:20
8	Post-ex plan of trench 4	P	1:20
9	Post-ex plan of trench 6	P	1:20
10	N facing elevation of trench 6	S	1:20
11	Post-ex plan of trench 7	S	1:20

APPENDIX 4: Finds

Context	Find type	No	Wt	Notes	Date
001	Ae	2	12	coins, Eliz II 2p & worn, unident	?19th & 20th c.
001	Ae	1	9	oval keyhole plate with 4 rivet holes	Pmed/modern
001	Ae	1	2	binding ring	Pmed/modern
001	Ae	2	1	shirt buttons	modern
001	Ae	3	5	sheet frags	
001	Ae	6	30	unident fittings	modern
001	Pb	4	137	bullets	Pmed
001	Pb	1	25	musket ball	Pmed
302	pot	3	77	DUTR, GSW3, SWGW	L.15th-16th c.
U/S	pot	1	83	DUTR	15th/16th c.

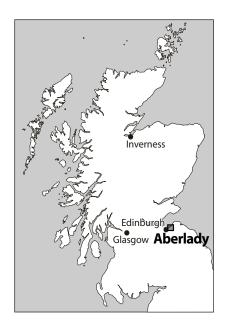
Pottery fabrics: DUTR – Dutch-type redware; GSW3 – Raeren/Aachen stoneware; SWGW – Scottish white gritty ware.

APPENDIX 5: Discovery & Excavation in Scotland Entry

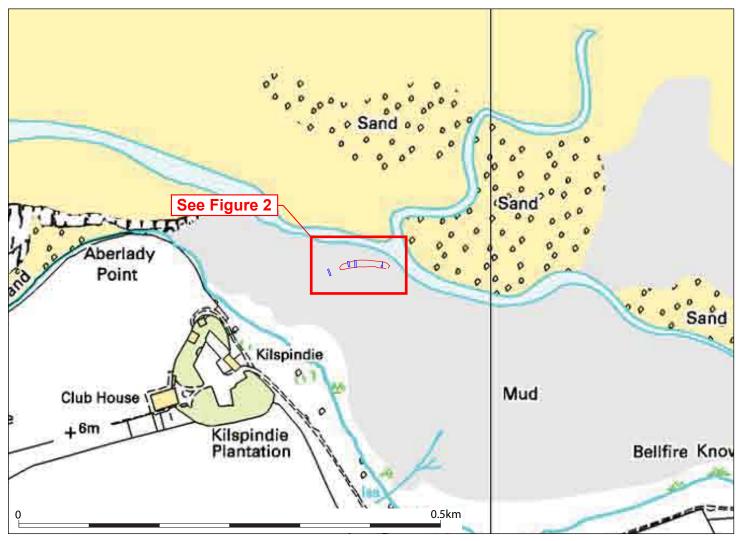
LOCAL AUTHORITY:	East Lothian Council
PROJECT TITLE/SITE	Aberlady Harbour
NAME:	
PROJECT CODE:	ABER
PARISH:	Aberlady
NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:	Cara Jones and Phil Richardson
NAME OF ORGANISATION:	CFA Archaeology Ltd
TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:	Excavation
NMRS NO(S):	
SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):	Pier (possible)
SIGNIFICANT FINDS:	Three sherds of 15 th –16 th century pottery
NGR (2 letters, 8 or 10 figures)	NT 4586 8045
START DATE (this season)	26/06/08
END DATE (this season)	04/07/08
PREVIOUS WORK (incl. DES	
ref.)	
MAIN (NARRATIVE)	CFA Archaeology Ltd and volunteers from the Aberlady
DESCRIPTION:	Conservation Society conducted an excavation of the upstanding
(May include information from	remains of a timber and stone structure within Aberlady Bay,
other fields)	Seven trenches were excavated by hand to assess the morphology and date of the remains. A series of upright posts, sleeper beams and roughly hewned sandstone walls were recorded. Tumble to the south of Trench 3 suggests the structure had a rubble infill. Three sherds of 15 th -16 th century pottery were recovered from deposit between a flanking wall and rubble deposit. A further trench was excavated to the SW of the structure, which revealed a mettalled surface and flanking walls, possibly an old trackway. The structure is in close proximity to the Custom House (NT48SE 116) and it is likely a quay or pier would have been associated with the building.
PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:	
CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:	N/A
SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:	Aberlady Conservation Society
ADDRESS OF MAIN	The Old Engine House, Eskmills Park, Musselburgh, East
CONTRIBUTOR:	Lothian EH21 7PQ
EMAIL ADDRESS:	Info@cfa-archaeology.co.uk
ARCHIVE LOCATION	Archive to be deposited with NMRS; reports to be deposited with
(intended/deposited)	East Lothian SMR and NMRS

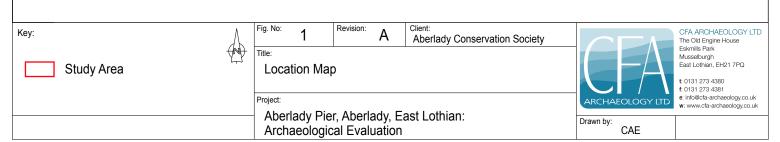
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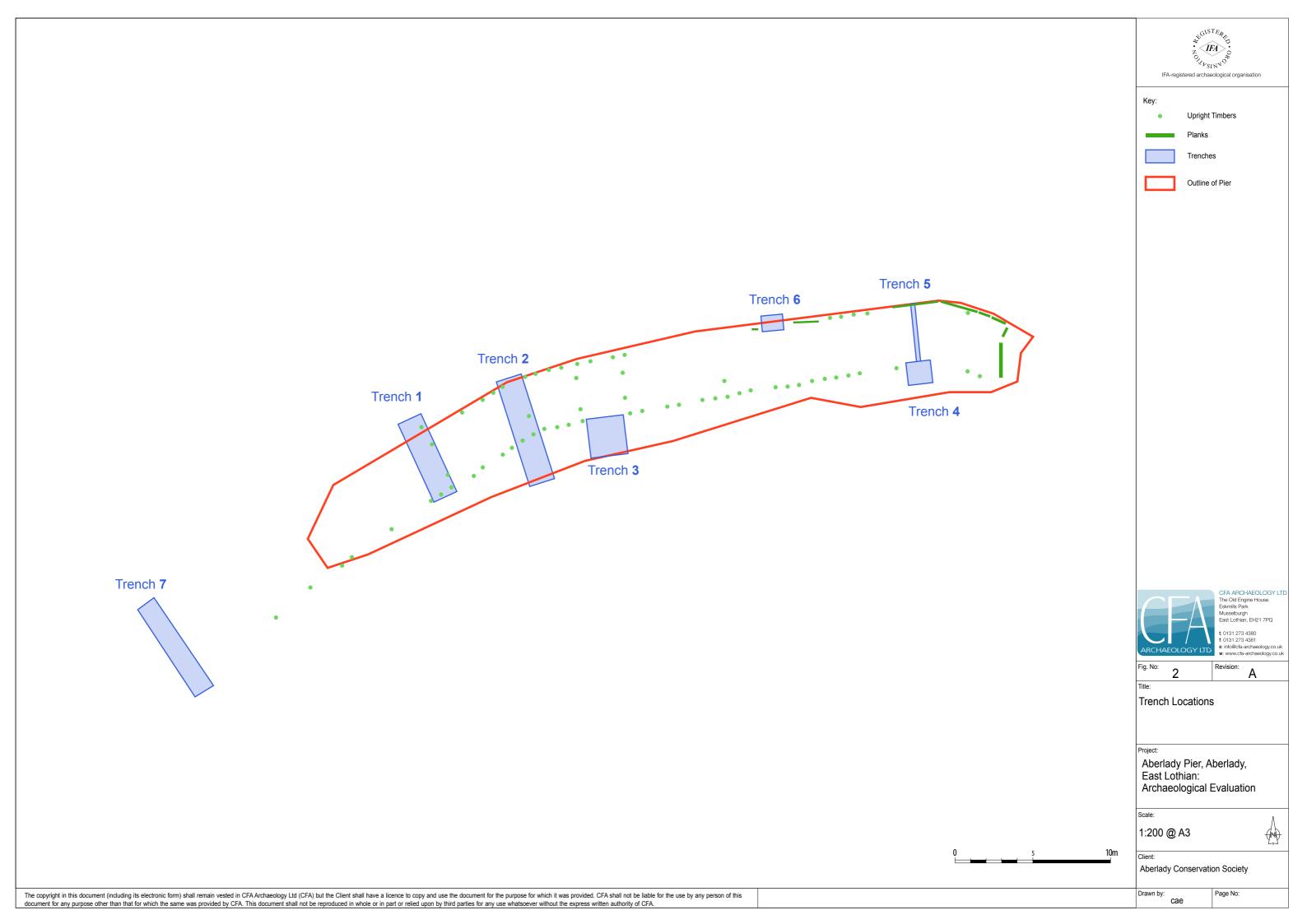




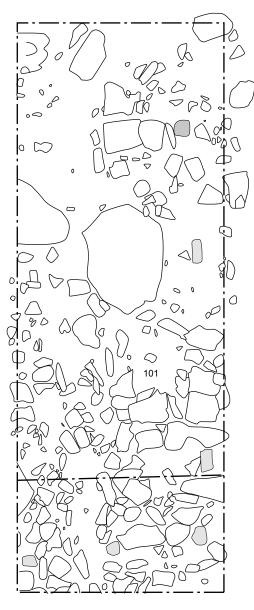




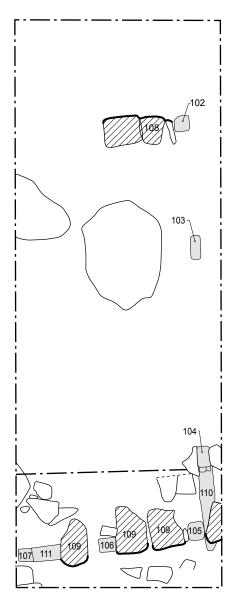








Pre-Excavation Plan



Post - Excavation Plan



Key:
Timber
Wall

Fig. No: Revision:

Client: Aberlady Conservation Society

Trench 1 - Pre - Excavation and Post-Excavation Plans

ect:

Aberlady Pier, Aberlady, East Lothian: Archaeological Evaluation



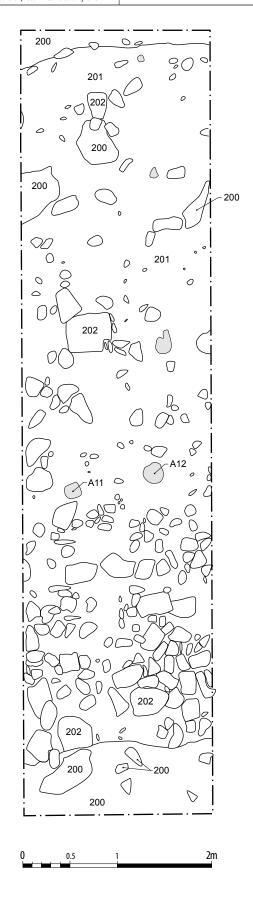
CFA ARCHAEOLOGY LTD
The Old Engine House
Eskmills Park
Musselburgh
East Lothian, EH21 7PQ

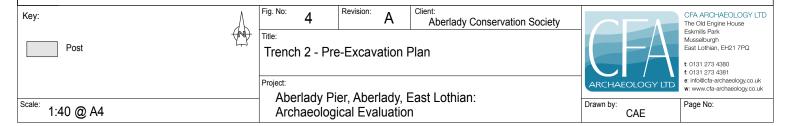
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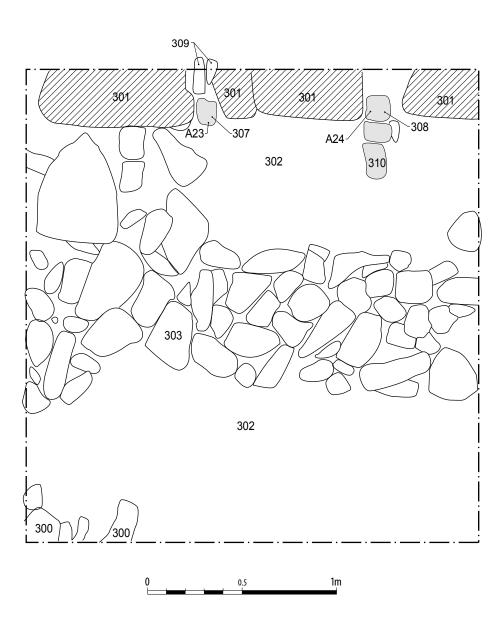
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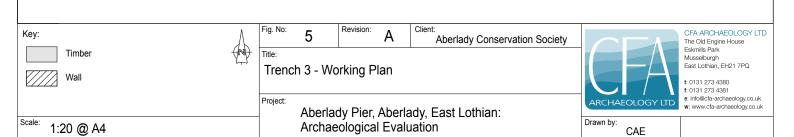




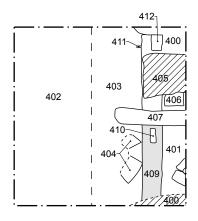




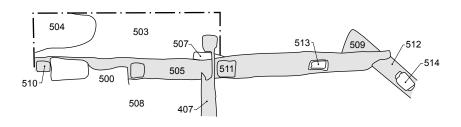




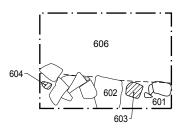




Trench 4 - Post-Excavation Plan



Trench 5 - Plan of Exposed Planks



Trench 6 - Post-Excavation Plan

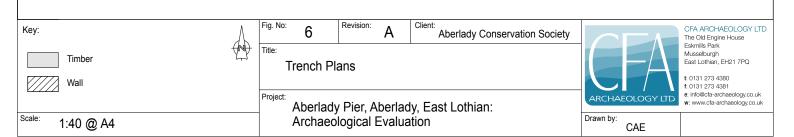






Plate 6 - General shot of Pier location



Plate 7 - Working shot of excavation

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Plate 8 - Example of post within pier remains



Plate 9 - Trench 3

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Plate 10 - Trench 4



Plate 11 - Post Excavation

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