

# Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork

School of Archaeology and Palaeoecology  
Queen's University Belfast



Data Structure Report: No. 14.

## Excavations at Donagh, Co. Fermanagh AE/03/23

On behalf of



**Data Structure Report: Donagh, Co. Fermanagh**

Peter Moore

**CAF DSR 014**

**SMR No: FER 246:033**

**Grid Reference: H 3982 2990**

**Excavation Licence: AE/03/23**

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## 1. Summary

### 1.1 Background

1.1.1 An archaeological excavation at Donagh, Co. Fermanagh (H 3982 2990), was undertaken in advance of the construction of a single private residential dwelling on the site. The excavation was conducted by the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast, on behalf of the Environment and Heritage Service: Built Heritage.

1.1.2 The site is located in close proximity to a (now ruinous) church which is thought to have initially been erected in the Early Christian period, perhaps in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> Century. Little is left of this monument, with the only surviving masonry consisting of the east gable and a portion of the south wall, each rising some 30 to 40 centimetres above ground level. Within a wider archaeological context the surrounding landscape also contains several ringforts.

1.1.3 The mechanical excavation for a foundation trench towards the southern extremity of the site revealed what appeared to be a linear alignment of stones, running roughly north-east to south-west, this feature was viewed by John O'Keeffe, Inspector with the EHS (Plate 1). Given the close proximity to an early ecclesiastical site, it was hypothesized that this could represent a souterrain or archaeological remains connected in some way to the church, and an archaeological excavation was commissioned.

1.1.4 Excavation of the site duly took place between the 31<sup>st</sup> March and the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2003. The foundation cuts for the garage provided a section that showed the site has been much levelled, with the original topsoil seen to dive steeply towards the small stream that is situated towards the east of the site. Therefore, the possibility that the site was partly levelled using stones was also examined.

### 1.2 Objectives

Three key research objectives were identified before excavation at the site took place. First, if possible, a date that could be attributed to the stone feature should be established. Furthermore if any relationship between the church and this feature existed it should be recorded. Second, the exact nature and purpose of the feature should also be identified, and the

hypothesis that it was a souterrain explored. Third, any other archaeological features present at the site, and uncovered during the course of the excavation were to be excavated and recorded, as the planned construction work was certain to destroy them.

### 1.3 *Excavation*

1.3.1 Initially the trench revealing the stone feature (Trench Two: Context 5) was cleaned of debris and a thin layer of backfill. This revealed the bluey yellow clay-sand subsoil (Context 4). However, several further features were visible; in the north-west facing section of this trench a roughly 'U' shaped gully was recorded (Context 7), now completely truncated by the mechanically dug trench. The fill of this cut (Context 8) resembled topsoil, in that it was a rich dark brown friable loam, with small stone inclusions. The stone feature was also cleaned and investigated. Although no bonding material was visible between any of stones - indeed it appeared as though there was subsoil between them - this was given a separate context number (Context 6). A small void in the feature became visible,. However, it would appear that whatever this feature might have been, the majority of it had been destroyed by the cutting of the foundation trench.

1.3.2 A second trench (Trench One), was opened to the immediate north-west of the stone feature to clarify whether Context 5 extended to form a much larger feature than was initially visible. This was subsequently shown not to be the case, but two gully or slot trenches were recorded (Contexts 10 and 12), each containing clay pipe stems, with Context 10 also containing a large fragment of a clay pipe bowl.

### 1.4 *Recommendations*

1.4.1 The potential importance of the excavation lay in establishing a link (had any existed) between the ruinous church site and the features found on the building plot, it would appear that one did not exist. The results of the excavation do not justify full or detailed publication. It is recommended, therefore, that a short note on the excavation at Donagh be prepared for publication in *Excavations 2003*.



Plate 1- Trench Two showing the stone feature (Context 5).

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 General

2.1.1 The following report details the results of the archaeological excavation at Donagh, Co. Fermanagh, undertaken by the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Archaeology and Palaeoecology at the Queen's University Belfast, from the 31<sup>st</sup> March to the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2003 (Licence No. AE/03/23). This excavation was undertaken on behalf of the Environment and Heritage Service: Built Heritage who funded the project.

### 2.2 Background

2.2.1 The Donagh excavation was carried out in advance of a housing development on a single building plot situated towards the south-west of the main area of settlement in Donagh, in the Parish of Galloon, Co. Fermanagh (H 3982 2990: Figure One). The site has been much leveled, with the original ground surface visible in the section of the cut made for the garage foundation. Originally the ground would have sloped (fairly steeply) towards the west and a small river that is located towards the base of the site. In close proximity to the site is a small quarry (Plate 2) and the subsoil for the area is either solid bedrock or a clay-sand containing rock outcrops.



Plate 2- Quarry site (now overgrown) located to the north-east of the excavation site.

2.2.2 The name Donagh is derived from the Irish *Domhnach* meaning '[early] church' (McKay, 1999, 57). The early history of the site is, unfortunately, somewhat unclear; it is likely to have originated as a pre-Norman religious



site with the later Medieval church used as a chapel-of-ease. The site now contains a polygonal graveyard, and there is also evidence to suggest that remnants of a roughly oval bank and ditch surround the site (Plate 3).



Plate 3- Possible bank and ditch surrounding the remains of the church

The site was known in the 1609 Inquisition as *Donaghmoyline* which is probably an Anglicised version of *Domhnach Mo Ling*, roughly meaning 'early church of Mo Ling'. The *Annals of Ulster* (Hennessy, 1887, AD 695), and the *Annals of Tigernach* (Ó Murchadha, 1997, AD 695), refer to Mo Ling in AD 695, while the *Annals of the Four Masters* (Daly, 1856, AD 696), refers to the death of St Moling Luachra (a Bishop) in AD 696. It is possible to infer that the church at Donagh could have been erected to St Moling / Mo Ling, and that the name *Donaghmoyline* is derived from this. Little survives of the church, with the line of the east gable and remnants of the south wall surviving to *circa* 30-40 centimetres above ground level. Even these remains are now virtually completely obscured by ivy and shrubbery. It would seem, however, that the church has long been in such a condition. The *Ordnance Survey Memoirs* record the structure as once having been "...52 feet long by 26 feet wide, the side walls 2 feet 8 inches in thickness and the gable 3 feet 2 inches." (Day *et al*, 1990, 98). )

### 2.3 Reason for excavation and research objectives

2.3.2 Following the mechanical digging of a foundation trench for the private residential dwelling, a linear stone feature running roughly north-east to south-west was observed during a site visit by John O'Keeffe (Environment and Heritage Service: Built Heritage). Given the close proximity of the site to the church, the Environment and Heritage Service: Built Heritage decided



that, prior to any construction work, an excavation of this feature was necessary.

2.3.3 The principle aim of the 2003 excavation at Donagh was to ascertain the character of the linear stone feature and to investigate the possibility that a relationship could be established between it and the Early Christian church site. Furthermore, any further archaeological anomalies that were observed during the course of the excavation were to be recorded and also brought into this wider context.

## 2.4 *Archiving*

2.4.1 A copy of this report has been deposited with the Environment and Heritage Service: Built Heritage. All site records and finds are temporarily archived within the School of Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast.

## 2.5 *Credits and Acknowledgements*

2.5.2 The excavation was directed by Peter Moore and assisted by Keith Adams of the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork.

2.5.3 Assistance during the course of the excavation and the preparation of this report was kindly provided by: Dr Colm Donnelly, Mr John Ó'Néill, Dr Philip Macdonald (Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork), Dr Finbar McCormick, Mr John Davidson (Queen's University Belfast), Mr Declan Hurl, Mr John O'Keeffe (Environment and Heritage Service: Built Heritage). The illustrations were prepared by Ruth Logue and Keith Adams (Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork).



Figure One: Donagh location map

### **3. Excavation**

#### *3.1 Methodology*

3.1.1 The excavation consisted of a new trench (Trench One) to the immediate north-east of the stone feature (Context 5) and the cleaning of the mechanically dug foundation trench which was designated as Trench Two (Figure 2). The site is set on a flat plateau with steep western and north-eastern edges that run towards the river to the west. This flat area has been artificially created; the line of the original ground surface is clearly visible in the section of the cut for the garage foundation. All of the features observed were excavated and fully recorded. At the request of the site owner the excavation trenches were left open. However, as an added precaution these open areas were 'fenced' with hazard tape in order to make their presence clearly visible to the public.

3.1.2 The archaeological excavation was undertaken by hand and the context record for the site was created using the standard context recording method. Individual features and deposits were planned and photographed both prior to and following excavation. For details of the photographic record see Appendix Three, for details of the field illustrations see Appendix Four. In addition to the records noted above, the site records also consisted of a small find register (Appendix Five), and a soils sample record (Appendix Six). The unique site code used to identify the records generated during the excavation is DGH 03.

3.1.3 It is intended that the Harris Matrix (Appendix Two) is referred to whilst reading the following account of the excavation.

#### *3.2 Account of the excavations*

3.2.1 Trench Two consisted of the mechanically dug foundation trench for the south-western wall of the house. The apparent linear arrangement of stones ran roughly north-east to south-west (Plate 3). The trench was initially cleaned and the section edges straightened to ease their drawing and recording. The stones (Context 5) did not appear to have any bonding material. Indeed, the soil between each stone resembled the natural blue-yellow clay/sand subsoil that had been exposed by the digger (Context 4). However, the material between the stones was given a separate context number (Context 6). The stones for a great length of the feature did not

appear to be faced or cut; rather, they resembled natural rock outcrops (Figure 3).



Plate 3- Trench Two showing Contexts 4 and 5.

Approximately 20 cm from the south-western edge of the trench, a small 'void' within the stone feature was observed (Context 9). Each side of Context 9 appeared to be marked with flat-faced stones (Plate 4). This feature was excavated to subsoil (Context 4), and its possible interpretation is included in the discussion section of this report (Section 4.3.1). Within Trench Two there was no evidence for a foundation cut within which the stones had been placed.

3.2.2 A 'U' shaped feature (Context 7) was recorded in the north-west facing section of Trench 2. The digging of the trench had completely truncated any remains that may have been otherwise still been *in situ*. However, its fill (Context 8) resembled topsoil, and it is probable that this feature was caused by modern agricultural activity rather than archaeological activity.



Plate 4- Context 9 (Void within the stone feature Context 5: 50cm Scale Bar)

3.2.3 After the removal of topsoil (Context 1) in Trench One, an orange modern pipe made of plastic and ceramic, either for water or sewage, was recorded in the south-west corner of the trench (Context 2). Beneath the topsoil an orangey yellow compact gravelly sand was encountered with frequent small stone inclusions (Context 3). Cut into this were several gully or slot features (Figure 4: Plate 5). Context 10 measured c.65 centimetres in width, and at its greatest extent was 20 centimetres in depth. Context 13 comprised the fill of this cut and was a dark brown friable loam with small stone inclusions. Within this context several small finds were retrieved (Small Find Nos. 2 and 5). Including fragments of a clay pipe stem and half of a clay pipe bowl. A second slot or gully was also recorded (Context 12) and was c.68 centimetres in width and (at its greatest extent) 30 centimetres in depth. Context 11 comprised the fill of this cut and was a dark brown friable loam with infrequent small stone inclusions. At the base of this context a clay pipe stem was retrieved (Small Find No. 8).



Plate 5- Trench One fully excavated (taken looking north-east)

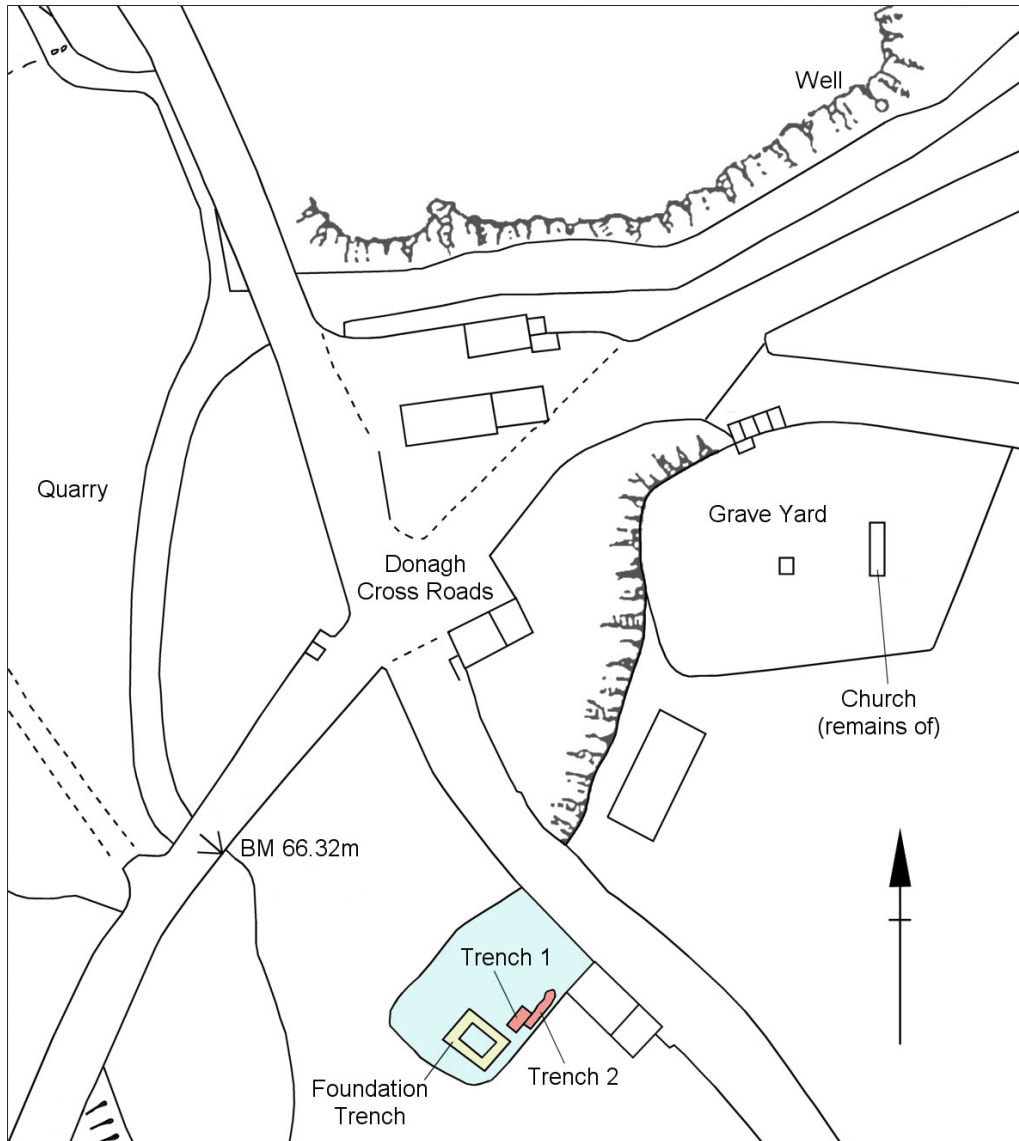
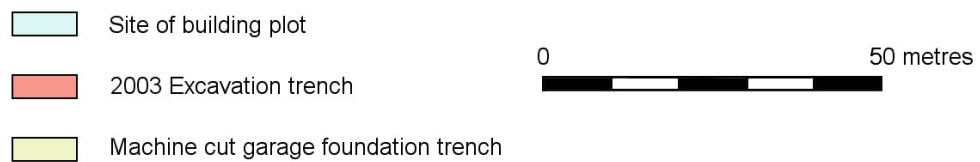


Figure Two: Location map showing the area of excavation and trenches opened





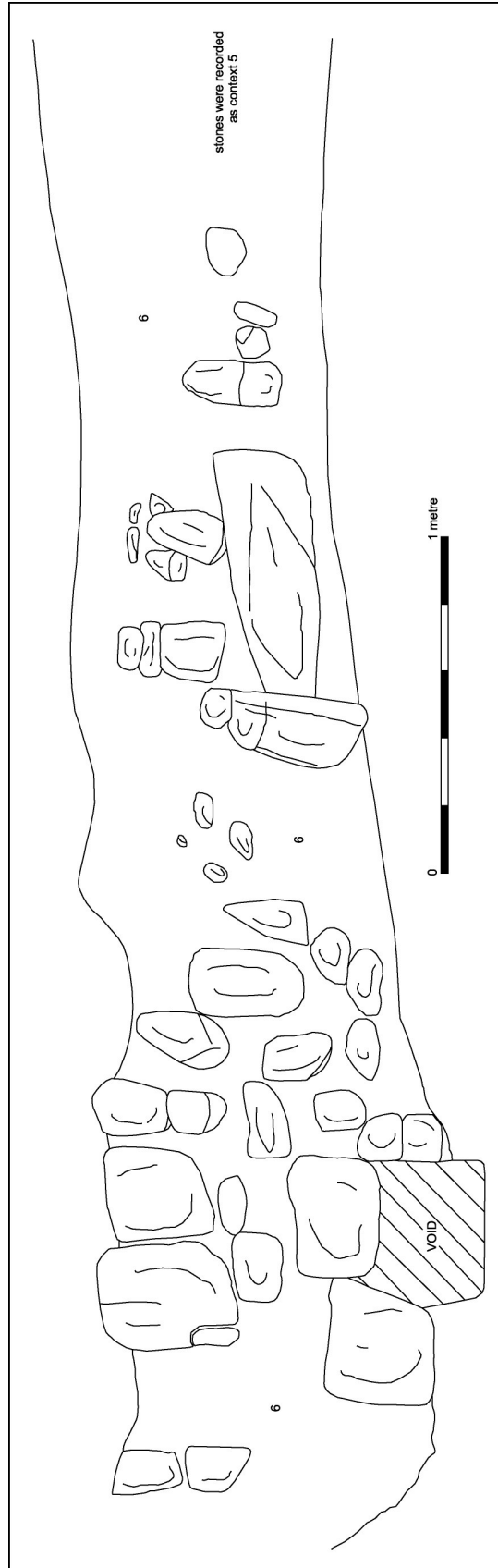


Figure 3: South-east facing section of Trench 2

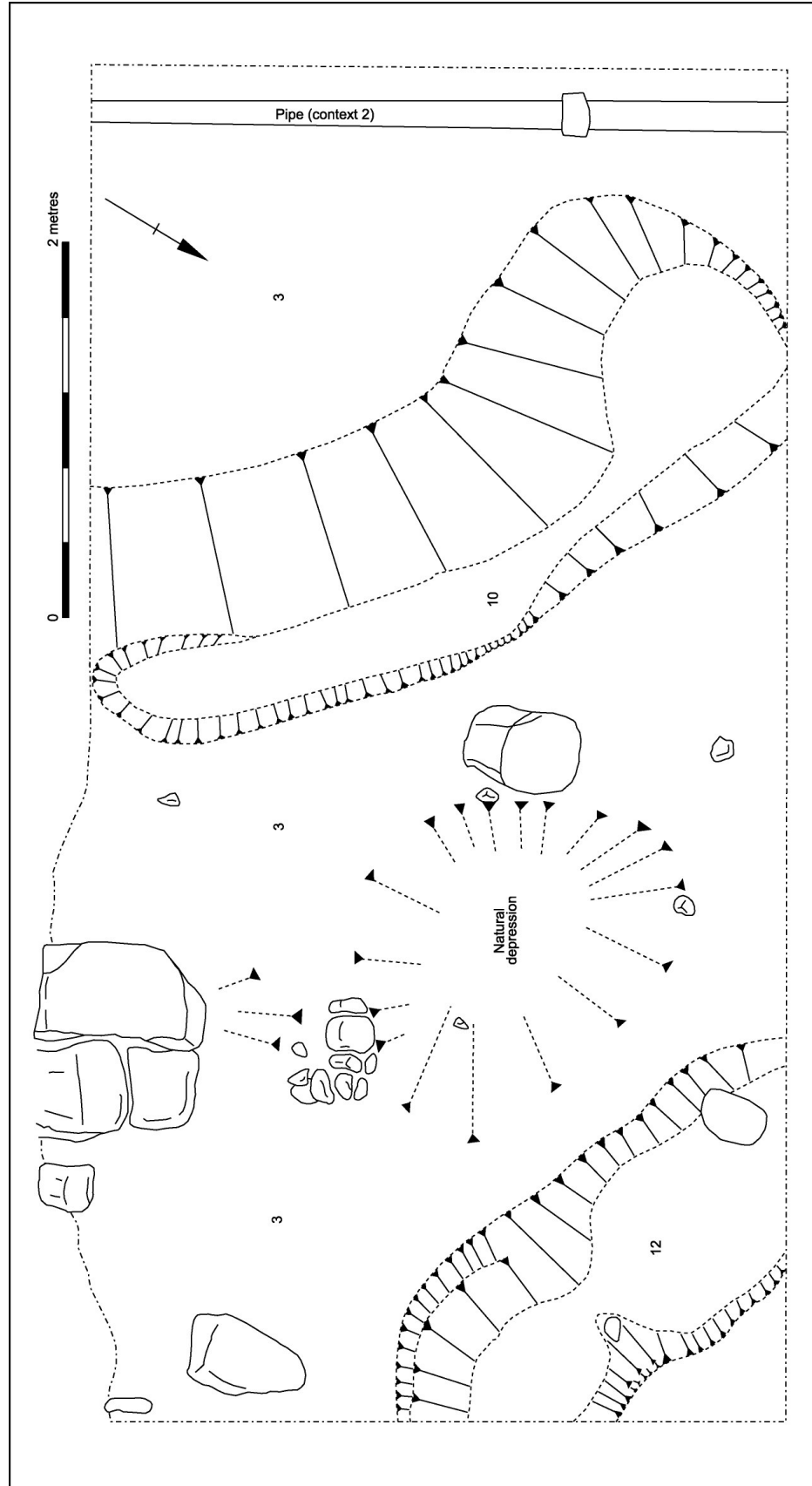


Figure 4: Plan of Trench 1

## **4. Discussion**

### *4.1 Background*

4.1.1 The archaeological and historical information available for Donagh relates to the church site, although the early history and exact origins of the church still remain uncertain. Within this report further theories to the church's origins are presented, but these remain widely speculative. The current investigation has failed to add to this limited knowledge base.

### *4.2 Trench One*

4.2.1 Trench one was designed to investigate the possibility that the arrangement of stones (Context 5) continued to the north-west to form a more substantial feature or structure. After the removal of topsoil it became clear that this was not the case. Several features were, however, recorded. Two slot trenches (Contexts 10 and 12) were observed running to the south-west and north-west respectively. The fills of these slot trenches was similar to the loamy topsoil excavated on the site, but different context numbers were allocated to them. From each of the fills several small finds were retrieved; Context 10 (filled by Context 13) produced a clay pipe stem and half a clay pipe bowl, while Context 12 (filled by Context 11) produced a clay pipe stem. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that these features, probably of an agricultural nature, date from the Post-Medieval period. It is also likely that the 'U' shaped feature observed in the north-west facing section of Trench Two (Context 7) represents a further episode of early modern agricultural activity on the site.

### *4.3 Trench Two*

4.3.1 Trench Two was mechanically dug as a foundation cut and had been opened before the archaeological excavation took place. Initially a small deposit of backfill was removed. After the removal of this material Context 4 (a blue-yellow clay/sand; natural subsoil) was observed. It also appeared as though the stone feature (Context 5) had been set into the subsoil. However, no foundation cut or trench for the stones was found and no finds from a secure context were retrieved from this trench. It is likely that the stones that were visible were not placed there artificially; rather glacial action can be suggested as the most plausible explanation for their position. The void

(Context 9) could simply have occurred by the mechanical digger removing a stone from its natural setting. The lack of a cut feature rules out the possibility that it could have been deliberately constructed, despite an initial interpretation that it may have been a drainage sump

#### 4.4 Other Features

4.4.1 A further gully or slot trench was recorded in the section of the foundation trench for the garage. This feature was similar to Context 7 recorded in Trench Two and the two gully trenches (Contexts 10 and 12) located in Trench One. The gully in the section of the garage foundation cut is located beneath the old topsoil layer (Plate 6) which would have sloped steeply towards the west. However, the use of modern rubble and backfill to level the site has meant the loss of the original topography. Given this, it is likely to have had a similar function to the other slot trenches recorded on the site, and it can be suggested that it too is an early modern agricultural feature.

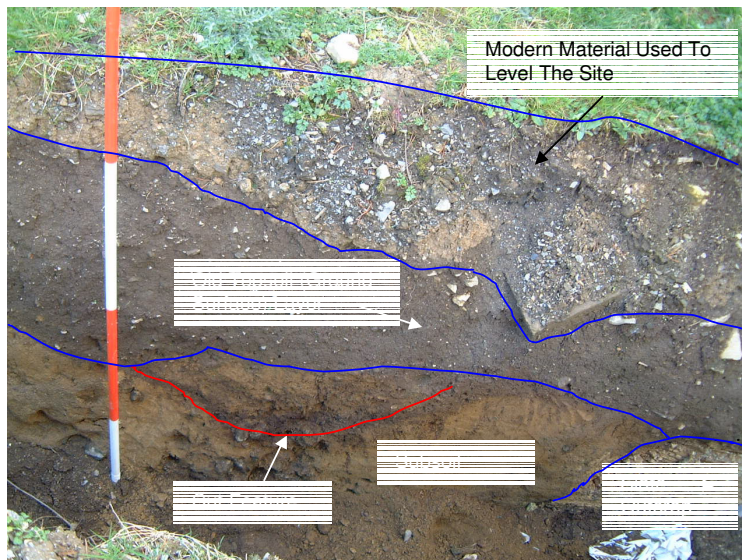


Plate 6- Section from garage foundation cut. Lines and labels have been added by the author

## **5. Recommendations For Further Work**

### *5.1 Post-Excavation Analysis*

5.1.1 The main objective for the excavation was to ascertain whether there was a link between the stone feature observed in Trench Two and the church site. The conclusion reached was that the stones have been deposited in their current position by glacial action and/or natural processes. Although Post-Medieval agricultural features were recorded in Trench One, the results of the excavation do not justify publication beyond a short summary in *Excavations 2003*.

## 6. Bibliography

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Hennessy, W. M., 1887: *Annals of Ulster- Vol 1: A.D. 431 – 1056*. Alex Thompson & Company. Dublin

McKay, P., 1999: *A Dictionary of Ulster Place-Names*. Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University. Belfast.

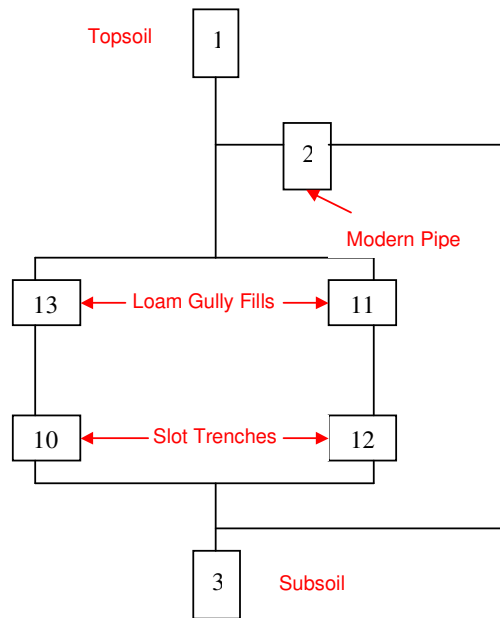
Ó Murchadha, D., 1997: *Annals of Tigernacht: Index of Names*. Irish Texts Society. London.



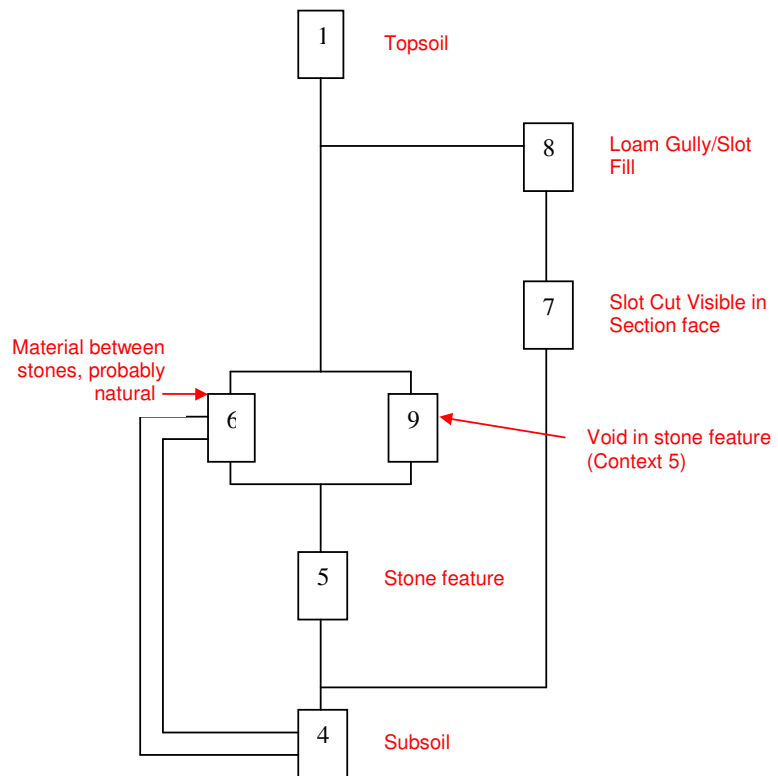
### Appendix One: Context Log

<i>Context No.</i>	<i>Description</i>
1	Dark Brown Loam with small stone inclusions (Topsoil Layer)
2	Modern Orange Plastic piping (probable sewage pipe) located towards the south-west of Trench One
3	Orangy-yellow compact gravelly sand with clay outcrops. (Subsoil Layer in Trench One)
4	Blue-yellow fairly fine clayey-sand. (Subsoil layer in Trench Two)
5	Linear Arrangement of stones in Trench Two running roughly north-east to south-west
6	Blue-yellow fairly fine and loose clayey-sand. Taken from between the stones that comprise Context 5, although similar to Subsoil in Trench Two
7	'U' shaped cut feature visible in the section of Trench Two (truncated by the mechanically dug trench)
8	Dark brown friable loam (similar to topsoil). Fill of Context 7
9	Small 'voiding' within Context 5
10	Slot/gully trench within Trench One
11	Dark brown friable loam (Fill of Cut Context 12)
12	Slot/gully trench within Trench One
13	Dark brown friable loam (Fill of Cut Context 10)

**Appendix Two: Harris Matrix**  
**Trench One**



**Trench Two**



### Appendix Three: Photographic Record

#### **Fuji Film Fine Pix 4700 Zoom**

*(All Photographs were also taken with a Fuji Colour 200 Transparency Film)*

- 1 Taken looking north-west, Trench Two; showing Contexts 4 / 5 / 6
- 2 Taken looking north-east, Trench Two; showing Contexts 4 / 5
- 3 Taken looking north-west, Trench Two; showing Context 9
- 4 As Above
- 5 Taken looking south-west, Trench Two; showing Contexts 7 / 8
- 6 Quarry to the north-east of the excavation site
- 7 Trench One showing Cut Context 10
- 8 Taken looking north-west, Trench One; showing Contexts 12 / 13
- 9 Taken looking north-east, Trench One; showing Contexts 3 / 10 / 12
- 10 As Above
- 11 Trench One fully excavated
- 12 As Above
- 13 Taken looking north-east, Trenches One and Two fully excavated
- 14 As Above
- 15 Taken looking north-west, Trench Two; showing Contexts 5 / 9
- 16 As Above
- 17 *Deleted*
- 18 *Deleted*
- 19 Taken looking south-east, Possible gull/slot within the section of the foundation cut for the garage
- 20 As Above
- 21 Taken looking south-west, Trench Two; fully excavated
- 22 As Above
- 23 As Above
- 24 Remains of the church at Donagh
- 25 Possible bank and ditch surrounding the church site
- 26 Possible second quarry site to the west of the church site
- 27 Trench One, slot taken out to verify subsoil
- 28 As Above
- 29 As Above

**Appendix Four: Field Drawing Register**

- 1 Trench Two, south-west facing section showing stone feature (Context 5), subsoil between the stones (Context 6) and 'void' feature within Context 5 (Context 9). Scale 1:10
- 2 Trench One (fully excavated) showing Context 2 (modern pipe) and gull/slot trenches Contexts 10 and 12.

**Appendix Five: Small Finds Register**

<b><i>Small Find No.</i></b>	<b><i>Context</i></b>	<b><i>Description</i></b>
1	4	Red/Orange ceramic sherd with black glaze (probable modern piping)
2	13	Clay pipe stem from gully fill (Trench One)
3	4	Trench Two black glazed ceramic sherd
4	1	Five pieces of modern white china ceramic
5	13	Large fragment of clay pipe bowl
6	1	Modern white china ceramic
7	1	Modern brown glass fragment
8	11	Clay pipe stem from gully fill (Trench One)

## **Appendix Six: Soil Sample Record**

- 1        Soil sample taken of Context 6 (subsoil – like material from between the  
          Stones (Context 5) Trench Two
  
- 2        Soil Sample taken of Context 11 (fill of gully/slot trench Context 12) Trench  
          One