



Monitoring Report No 70.

**Coolbuck
Lisbellaw
Co. Fermanagh**

AE/06/109

Ronan McHugh

Site Specific Information

Site Address: Lisbellaw, Co. Fermanagh

Townland: Coolbuck

SMR No.: Closest recorded site is Fer 212:149

State Care *Scheduled* *Other* ✓

Grid Ref: H3068443838

County: Fermanagh

Excavation Licence No.: AE/06/109

Planning Ref / No.: L/2005/1710/O

Date of Monitoring: 15th June 2006

Archaeologist Present. Ronan McHugh

Brief Summary:

The proposed development site is located in the heart of an area that has been designated as an *Area of Significant Archaeological Interest (ASAI)* by the Environment and Heritage Service, Northern Ireland. More specifically, there are 11 recorded archaeological sites, most dating to the prehistoric period, within 1 kilometre of the proposed development site. Five test trenches were excavated to evaluate the potential impact of the proposed development on any hidden archaeological remains. Nothing of archaeological significance was uncovered in any of the trenches.

Type of monitoring:

Excavation of five test trenches by mechanical excavator equipped with a grading bucket under archaeological supervision.

Size of area opened: Five trenches were excavated. Trenches 1 and 2 measured 20 metres x 2.5 metres. Trench 3 measured 60 metres x 2.5 metres. Trench 4 measured 50 metres x 2.5 metres and Trench 5 measured 41 metres x 2.5 metres.

Current Land Use: Rough grazing

Intended Land Use: Residential

Brief Account of the Monitoring

Background

Archaeological evaluation was requested as part of an application for outline planning permission for a single dwelling house in the townland of Coolbuck, Co. Fermanagh, approximately 2.5 kilometres north of the town of Lisbellaw (Fig. 1). The topography in this region is characterised by a scatter of low drumlins and glacial lake basins divided up by steep glens, all set on an elevated, upland plateau. The solid geology is Devonian Old Red Sandstone, with overlying sandstone tills. Much of the land surface consists of poorly draining gleys and blanket bog. The proposed development is situated in the heart of a region which has been designated as an *Area of Significant Archaeological Interest* by the Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland (Fig. 2). Recent work has indicated that the upland plateau is the location of a complex arrangement of at least 40 archaeological sites, suggestive of intensive activity in the Late-Neolithic/Early Bronze Age period (McHugh, Murphy and Hartwell 2004), with a particular concentration of sites being recorded around the shores of Lough Skale and in the townland of Moundrum, immediately to the south of the proposed development site (Fig. 3). Eleven of the archaeological sites are located within 1 kilometre of the proposed development site. The position of each of these 11 sites is shown in Fig.3 and the classification of the sites is set out in Table 1. A burnt mound of indeterminate age (NISMR No. Fer 212:149) is the closest recorded monument to the proposed development site.

Site no. in Fig. 3	NISMR No.	Site Type
1.	Fer 212:048	Standing Stone (Possibly the remnants of a megalithic tomb)
2.	Fer 212:049	Badly damaged round cairn
3.	Fer 212:050	Site of round cairn
4.	Fer 212:051	Wedge tomb
5.	Fer 212:052	Unclassified megalithic tomb
6.	Fer 212:053	Round cairn
7.	Fer 212:054	Wedge tomb
8.	Fer 212:060	Possible court tomb
9.	Fer 212:080	Site of a round cairn, now disappeared
10.	Fer 212:103	Burnt Mound
11.	Fer 212:149	Burnt Mound

Table 1. Archaeological sites within 1 kilometre of the proposed development site.

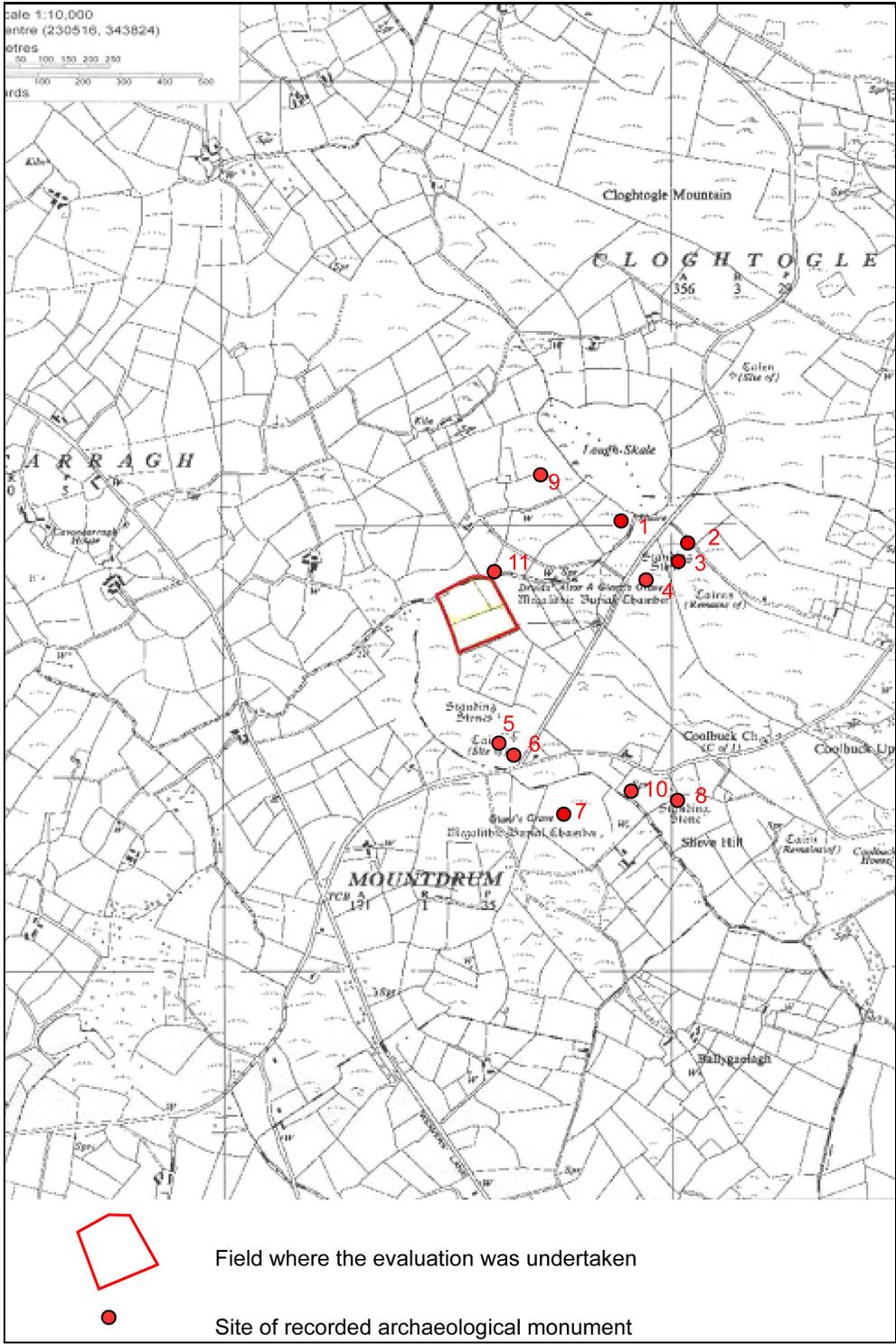


Fig. 3. Location of recorded archaeological sites within 1km radius of the proposed development site. Position of Lough Skale and the Mountdrum townland, where many of the archaeological sites in this region are located, is also shown.

Archaeological evaluation was required to assess whether the proposed development in an area of obvious archaeological significance would have an adverse impact on hidden archaeological remains. Many of the sites set out in table 1 have been concealed beneath a covering of peat until relatively recent times, highlighting the necessity for archaeological assessment in the planning process in this part of Fermanagh.

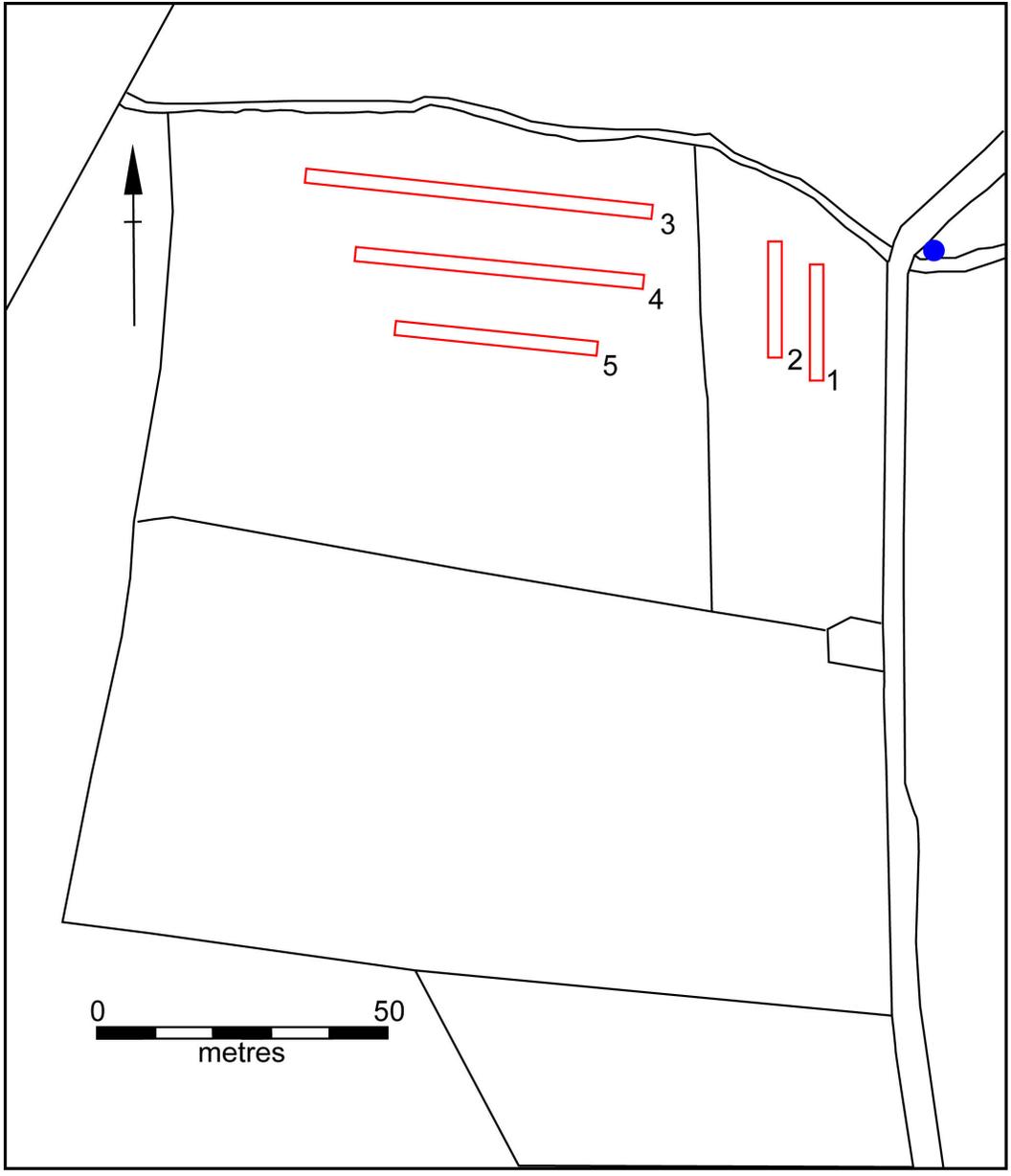
The Development site

The field housing the proposed development is almost square, with three sides of approximately 140 metres in length (Fig. 4). The northern boundary is more irregular as it follows the course of a narrow, east/west running stream. An old stone field-wall running approximately west-north-west/east-south-east bisects the field, although much of this feature, together with the most of the centre of the field, is obscured by a thick covering of gorse. The remnants of an old farmhouse stand at the eastern extreme of this field wall, while faint traces of lazy bed cultivation ridges were observed running down the slope in the north-eastern portion of the field.

The archaeological evaluation was confined to the area north of this wall, which is the preferred site for the proposed dwellinghouse. This northern area is divided in two by a shallow ditch which extends north-north-west/south-south-east across the field from the northern boundary of the field, down as far as the old field wall to the south. The most elevated portion of the field coincides with the ruined field wall and, from there, the topography slopes down to the north-west although the prevailing gradient is interrupted by a rounded knoll which overlooks the stream forming the northern boundary of the field. The intersection between the prevailing slope and the base of the knoll forms a natural cleft in the north-west of the field, where the terrain becomes particularly marshy and quantities of standing water had accumulated on the date of the evaluation. A further cover of gorse obscures much of this waterlogged area.

The Excavation

The archaeological evaluation consisted of the excavation of five test trenches; two in the smaller north-eastern quadrant of the field (Trenches 1 and 2) and three (Trenches 3 to 5) in the larger north-western quadrant (Fig 4). These were excavated mechanically using a smooth-edged (sheugh) bucket operated on a back-acting mechanical digger, under the supervision of the licensed archaeologist. Harris Matrices for each of the excavation trenches are presented in Fig. 5



-  Evaluation trenches
-  Approximate position of burnt mound Fer 212:149

Fig. 4. Location of trenches.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was set out parallel to the eastern boundary of the field, at a distance of 12.5 metres from the boundary. It ran for 20 metres downslope and was 2.5 metres in width. A thin marshy sod (Context 101) was removed to expose a dark brown peaty loam topsoil (Context 102), which occurred throughout the length of the trench and had a consistent depth of approximately 0.3 metres. Stratigraphically, beneath this horizon was a layer of humified grey-brown loam (Context 103), which extended for 8 metres from the southern end of the trench but was not visible thereafter. This stratum varied in depth between 0.1 and 0.4 metres. The terminus of this layer (Context 103) broadly coincided with the northernmost point of the cultivation ridges. This factor, together with the humified state of the soil (Context 103), suggests that this layer (Context 103) was associated with the agricultural activity represented by the lazy beds. This activity appears to have been confined to the elevated, more freely draining southern part of the field. A sherd of pearlware pottery (Plate 1) unearthed in the humified grey-brown loam layer (Context 103) confirmed a *terminus post quem* of the late eighteenth century for this layer and, possibly, for the agricultural activity represented by the ridges.



Plate 1:

Pearlware saucer-base recovered from possible agricultural horizon (Context 103) in Trench 1.

Approximately 12 metres from the southern edge of the trench, the topsoil (Context 102) overlay a thin spread of grey silty gravel (Context 104) which had a maximum depth of 0.1 metre. No archaeological material was recovered from this layer, which was probably a product of inwash from the stream to the north. There was no stratigraphic relationship between the possible agricultural horizon (Context 103) and the grey silty gravel spread (Context 104), although both overlay a sandy, reddish-brown natural boulder clay that contained rounded sandstone boulders (Context 105). The excavation in Trench 1 was discontinued when this natural horizon (Context 105) was reached. The maximum depth of the trench on completion was 0.7 metres (Plate 2).



Plate 2. Trench 1 at completion of excavation (facing south).

Trench 2

Trench 2 was situated to the west of Trench 1. It was set out parallel to Trench 1, at a distance of 6 metres (Fig. 5). Like Trench 1, it measured 20 metres in length (north/south) and was 2.5 metres in width. The stratigraphy of Trench 2 broadly replicated that recorded in Trench 1; the uppermost layers were a marshy sod (Context 201) which overlay a layer of dark brown peaty loam topsoil (Context 202). As in Trench 1, this layer of peaty loam spanned the length of the trench, although it was consistently shallower than the corresponding layer in Trench 1, varying

between 0.20 and 0.25 metres. Removal of the layer of peaty loam in the southern end of Trench 2 revealed a stratum of loose humified grey-brown loam (Context 203) similar to the probable agricultural horizon recorded in Trench 1 (i.e. Context 103). In Trench 2, this deposit extended across the first 6 metres of the trench, and reached a maximum depth of 0.2 metres. At the northern end of the trench, the topsoil (Context 202) overlay a spread of grey silty gravel, (Context 204), which was recorded between 15 and 20 metres from the southern end of the trench. As with the similar deposit in Trench 1 (i.e. Context 104), this spread was relatively shallow, with a maximum depth of 0.1 metres and was sterile of archaeological material. No stratigraphic relationship existed between the deposit of humified grey-brown loam (Context 203) and the grey silty gravel (Context 204) that occurred at opposite ends of the trench. Removal of these deposits (Contexts 203 and 204) exposed a sandy, reddish-brown natural boulder clay punctuated by exposures of bedrock (Context 205), similar to the natural material observed at the base of Trench 1. Trench 2 had a maximum depth of 0.6 metres (Plate 3).



Plate 3.

Trench 2 at completion of excavation. (facing north).

Trench 3

Trenches 3 – 5 were opened in the north-west quadrant of the field and were set out roughly perpendicular to the line of the ditch that partitions the northern portion of the field (Fig 4) Trench 3 was the northernmost of these three trenches. This trench was 60 metres in length and 2.5 metres in width. The eastern end of the trench was set 7 metres from the ditch and the path of the trench coincided with the profile of the knoll, the summit of which occurred between 28 and 36 metres from the east edge of the trench (Plate 4). The uppermost layer in the trench was a thin sod of marshy reed and soil (Context 301), which was noticeably drier at the top of the knoll.

Removal of the sod layer revealed a stratum of dark brown peaty loam (Context 302) similar to the topsoil recorded in Trenches 1 (i.e Context 102) and 2 (i.e. Context 202). The depth of this layer (Context 302) varied considerably along the length of the trench; it was recorded as 0.34 metres deep at 5 metres from the eastern edge, but dwindled to 0.11 metres deep at 32.5 metres. Stratigraphically, beneath this layer was a shallow deposit of clay loam (Context 303) which had a mottled, red-black patchwork appearance characteristic of moderate gleying (Cruickshank 1997, 9). The depth of this layer was relatively consistent, varying between 0.15 and 0.18 metres along the length of the trench. A single fragment of late eighteenth-century pearlware pottery was recovered from this deposit. The natural substratum was encountered immediately beneath the mottled clay loam; and consisted of relatively loose, reddish-brown sandy boulder clay with periodic sandstone bedrock outcrops (Context 304). The boulder clay had a slight blue-grey hue at the eastern and western extremes of the trench, probably due to increased waterlogging in these, more low-lying areas. The depth of Trench 3 varied considerably, from 0.52 metres at the eastern edge, it became as shallow as 0.28 metres at 32.5 metres along its length in a position at the top of the knoll, before becoming gradually deeper again towards the western edge, where it was recorded as being 0.37 metres in depth at completion of the excavation.



Plate 4. Trench 3. This photograph is taken from the western edge of the trench and illustrates both the relatively shallow depth to the subsoil and the rise of the knoll (facing north-east).

Trench 4.

Trench 4 was opened approximately 10 metres to the south of Trench 3 on a parallel alignment. It was intended that Trench 4 would be equal in length to Trench 3. However, a thicket of gorse along the west of the field restricted the length of the trench to 50 metres. Trench 4 was 2.5 metres wide. Removal of the sod (Context 401) revealed a linear feature (Context 402), cut through a layer of dark brown peaty loam topsoil (Context 403). This feature was filled by compact black clay (Context 407) and was 0.3 metres in width. It emerged from the eastern end of the trench and extended southwest across the trench before disappearing into the southern face of the trench approximately 6 metres from the trenches eastern end. Inspection of this feature showed that it was a cut for a modern water-main's pipe. An unexcavated baulk was left between the east edge of the trench and 6 metres to ensure that the waterpipe was not damaged during the evaluation (Plate 5).



Plate 5. The linear cut feature (Context 402) after removal of the topsoil deposit (Context 403) and the mottled red-brown clay loam (Context 404). The material surrounding the feature at this level is the grey silty gravel spread (Context 405)(facing east).

As in Trench 3, the peaty loam topsoil (Context 403) overlay a shallow layer of mottled red brown clay-loam (Context 404). although the depth of these layers in Trench 4 was more consistent than in the comparable strata in Trench 3. The dark brown peaty loam (Context 403) varied between 0.28 and 0.34 metres in depth, while the mottled red-brown clay loam varied between 0.13 and 0.16 metres. Both of these strata were visible along the length of the trench. Removal of the mottled red-brown loam (Context 404) at the eastern end of the trench overlay a spread of grey silty gravel (Context 405), similar in character to the spreads recorded in Trenches 1 (i.e. Context 104) and 2 (i.e. Context 204). This deposit was uniformly shallow; it never exceeded 0.15 metres in thickness, and extended over the easternmost 10 metres of the trench but was not visible thereafter.

Stratigraphically beneath the silty gravel spread (Context 405) lay a deep, compact deposit of mottled blue and red sand (Context 406). This deposit probably represented a naturally redeposited sandstone till and was sterile of archaeological material. The blue and red mottling in the deposit is due to differing levels of oxidisation in the soil (Plate 6). The deposit was relatively deep in places, reaching a maximum depth of 0.6 metres at 29.5 metres from the eastern end of the trench. This sandstone till deposit (Context 406) overlay red sandstone bedrock (Context 408) which was increasingly decayed after 40 metres from the eastern end of the trench. Trench 4 was the deepest of the five trenches, reaching a maximum depth of 0.9 metres. No artifacts or features of archaeological significance were found during the excavation of this trench.



Plate 6. North section of Trench 4, showing the mottled red and grey reworked sandstone till deposit. (Context 406)(Facing north)

Trench 5

Trench 5 was located 10 metres to the south of Trench 4 on a parallel alignment. Thick growths of gorse at the both the east and west edges of the area to be excavated determined that the trench could not be extended to the proposed 60 metres. The length of Trench 5 was therefore 41 metres and it was 2.5 metres in width (Fig. 4). The stratigraphy in this trench was similar to that of Trench 4. A thin sod (Context 501) overlay a dark brown peaty loam topsoil (Context 502) which varied in depth between 0.25 and 0.34 metres. The topsoil gave way, in turn, to a shallow deposit of mottled red-brown loam (Context 503), which was consistently approximately 0.2 metres deep. All three of these deposits were noted across the length of the trench although, from approximately 32 metres from the eastern end of the trench, in a position coinciding with the cleft formed by the junction of the gradual downslope and the base of the knoll, the ground surface was heavily waterlogged and it was difficult to identify the horizons between the uppermost deposits.

The pipe conduit encountered in Trench 4 (i.e. Context 402) extended from the northern edge of Trench 5 at approximately 5.2 metres and disappeared into the southern edge at approximately 7.4 metres from the eastern end of the trench. An unexcavated baulk was left surrounding the pipe between these points. The waterpipe conduit was assigned the context number 509 in Trench 5, while the compact black clay fill of the cut was designated context 510.

The excavation of the three uppermost deposits (Contexts 501, 502 and 503) exposed a layer of compact sand that had a mottled red and blue hue (Context 504), similar in character to the redeposited sandstone till deposit recorded in Trench 4 (i.e. Context 406). The till deposit in Trench 5 (Context 504) was shallower, achieving a maximum depth of 0.34 metres and it was punctuated by frequent bedrock outcrops along its length. The sandstone till deposit was increasingly damp after approximately 29 metres from the eastern end of the trench; it became more blue grey in hue, coinciding with the position of the standing surface water. Approximately 31 metres from the eastern end of the trench a relatively modern stone field drain (Context 505) was cut through the sandstone till deposit. The field drain emerged from the southern edge of the trench and extended down the prevailing slope for approximately 3 metres, where it emptied into a subrectangular sump (measuring 3 metres east/west by 1 metre north/south) (Context 506) at the base of the knoll (Plate 7). The drain was approximately 0.4 metres in width and was filled by angular stones and pebbles (Context 507), although no diagnostic cultural material was identified. Inspection of the south section of Trench 5 showed that the conduit for the drain had been cut from the level of the topsoil (Context 502) but, possibly because of the method of excavation and the condition of the ground surface at this point in the trench, the cut was not observed until the

stony fill at the base of the drain was exposed. The feature consequently suffered some damage during the evaluation. Exposure of the drain showed that it was still functioning, so the sandstone till deposit (Context 504) was not removed from its immediate environs. Elsewhere, excavation of the sandstone till (Context 504), unearthed jagged outcrops of natural sandstone bedrock (Context 508). Trench 5 had a maximum depth of 0.7 metres at completion of the excavation.



Plate 7. The field drain (Context 505) and sump (Context 506) at the western end of Trench 5 (facing west).

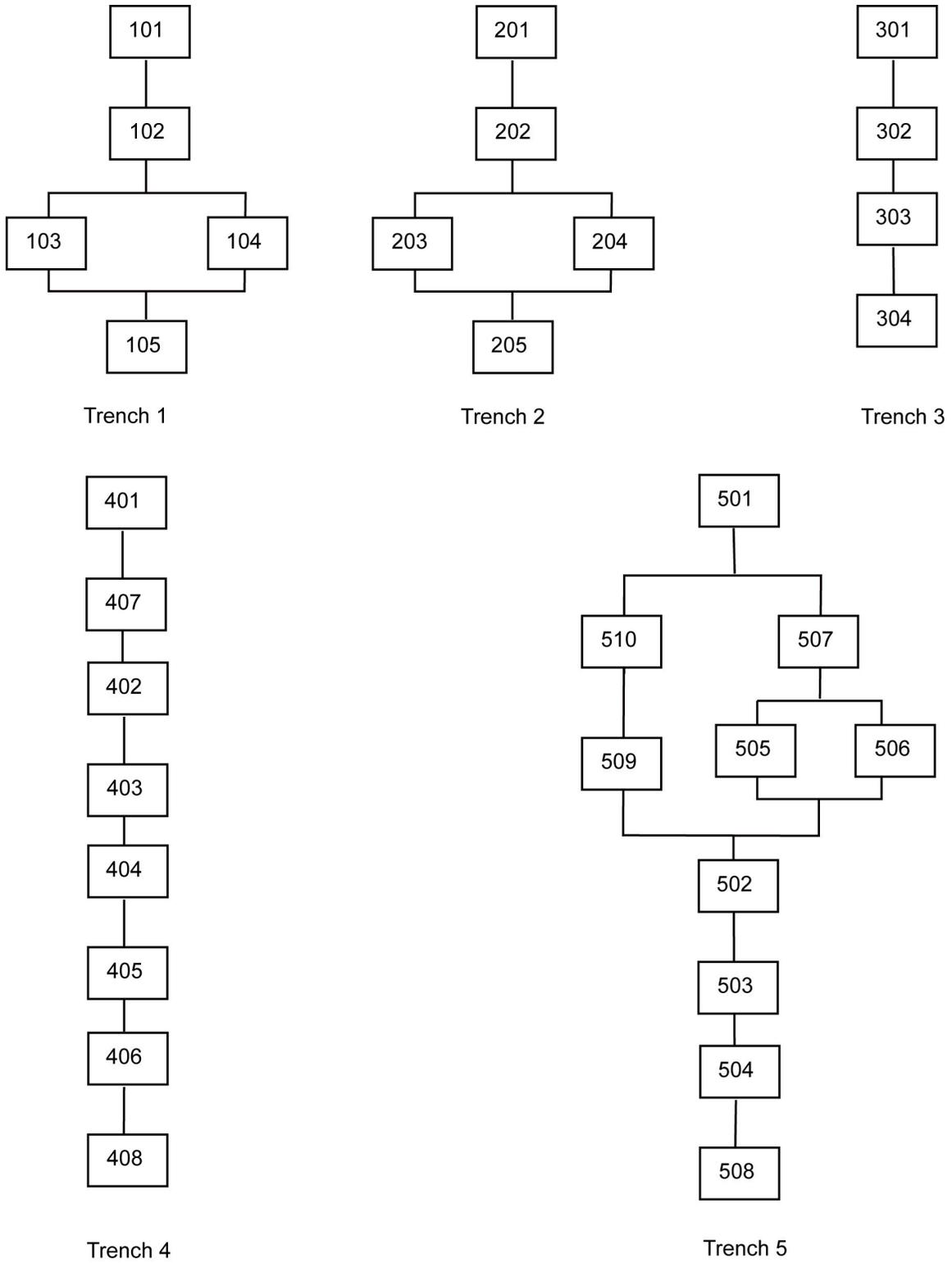


Fig 5. Harris Matrices for the excavation trenches.

Conclusion

The evaluation was concentrated on the area of the field which was the preferred site for the proposed development. After evaluating the five test trenches, no archaeologically significant features or artefacts were discovered, suggesting that there is no material of archaeological importance on the site. It is therefore unlikely that the development of a dwellinghouse in this field will have any archaeological impact.

Archive

Finds:

Two fragments of pottery are archived within the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast.

Photographs:

20 digital images were taken during the excavation. The images are digitally archived within the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast.

Drawings

None

Bibliography

Cruickshank, J.G. 1997. *Soil and Environment: Northern Ireland*, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and Queens University, Belfast.

McHugh, R., Murphy, E. and Hartwell, B. 2004 'A Landscape Analysis of the Topped Mountain Region, County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland' p. 304-322, in Gibson, A. and Sheridan, A. (eds) *From Sickles to Circles: Britain and Ireland at the Time of Stonehenge*, Tempus, Stroud.