



**Evaluation/Monitoring Report No. 153**

**PORTAFERRY LIFEBOAT STATION  
BALLYPHILIP  
PORTAFERRY  
CO. DOWN**

**LICENCE NO.: AE/07/256**

**BRIAN SLOAN**

**Site Specific Information**

*Site Location:* The Strand, Portaferry, Co. Down

*Townland:* Ballyphilip

*SMR No. :* DOW 032:003, DOW 032:031

State Care                      Scheduled                      Other    ✓                      [delete as applicable]

*Grid Ref.:* J 5930 5085

*County:* Down

*Excavation Licence No. :* AE/07/256

*Planning Ref / No. :* X/2003/0163/F

*Dates of Monitoring:*    Phase 1 test trenches 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> January 2008  
   Phase 2 monitoring 21<sup>st</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> April 2008

*Archaeologist(s) Present:* Brian Sloan

*Brief Summary:*

An archaeological investigation was carried out at the site of the current Lifeboat Station in Portaferry, Co. Down. The archaeological investigation was requested due to the proximity of the development site to Portaferry Castle (DOW 032:003). The investigation was carried out in two phases; Phase 1 being the mechanical excavation of three test trenches to assess the presence and survival of any archaeological strata, and Phase 2 being the monitoring of the mechanical excavation of the footprint of the proposed replacement Lifeboat Station. In both cases, the area investigated was excavated to the surface of the natural bedrock. The archaeological investigation showed that a substantial degree of modern disturbance has occurred at the site. Nothing of archaeological significance was observed during the exercise. It is recommended that no further archaeological mitigation is necessary at the application site.

*Current Land Use:* Lifeboat Station

*Intended Land Use:* Lifeboat Station

## **Brief account of the monitoring**

### *Introduction*

A dual-phased archaeological investigation was undertaken in advance of the construction of a new Lifeboat Station in Ballyphilip, Portaferry, Co. Down (Figure One). The site is in the centre of the town of Portaferry, directly opposite the slip and ferry terminal. The application site is bounded on the north-east and south-east by a mortared stone wall and on the west by the Barholm self-catering accommodation. Prior to the investigation the current Lifeboat Station, as well as landscaped shrub area, existed on site. The landscaped area was approximately 1.5m above the current street level, indicating that a substantial episode(s) of dumping had occurred on site. Portaferry Castle (DOW 032:003), a seventeenth century fortification built by the savage family, lies approximately 25m to the north-east of the development site, which is known as 'Castle Court' in Patrick O'Hare's map of 1799 (Figure Four).

The investigation took place as part of the planning application for the construction of the new Lifeboat Station. The archaeological investigation took place in two stages; Phase One was the mechanical excavation of three test pits in order to assess the presence of archaeological strata, and Phase Two consisted of archaeological monitoring of the mechanical stripping of the site to the surface of the natural bedrock. The investigation was requested by Liam McQuillan and Maybelline Gormley (Environment and Heritage Service: Protecting Historic Monuments), due to the proximity of the development site to the Castle, and the possibility that there may have been previously unrecorded remains associated with the castle or any settlement that may have been established around the fortification.

### ***Summary of Phase One Test Trench Evaluation***

Three test trenches, each measuring approximately 2m x 2m were mechanically excavated to the surface of the natural bedrock. The trenches were located in the landscaped area and their positions are illustrated in Figure Two. Phase One of the archaeological programme of works was undertaken between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> January 2008.

#### *Test Trench One*

Test Trench One was located in the gravel area in the north-eastern part of the development site and measured roughly 2m by 2m. Following the removal of the gravel matrix of the pathway (Context No. 101) it became clear that this overlay a thin fabric membrane (Context No. 102). A rubble layer (Context No. 103), consisting of medium to large angular blocks and boulders within a mid brown gritty soil was observed beneath the fabric membrane (Context No. 102). After the removal of approximately 0.3m of

the rubble deposit (Context No. 103), three active service pipes were encountered. Due to the presence of these services, the trench was closed at this stage.

### Test Trench Two

Test Trench Two was located approximately 6m to the south of Test Trench One and measured approximately 2m x 2m. The trench was mechanically excavated to the surface of the natural bedrock (Context No. 206) which was encountered at a depth of 2.2m.

Following the removal of the shrub and bushes from the area, the uppermost deposit (Context No. 201) was mechanically excavated. This deposit consisted of a relatively loose mid brown loamy soil containing infrequent inclusions of small rounded and sub-angular stones and pebbles, and was interpreted as representing a garden soil. It was approximately 0.4m in depth, and finds included fragments of plastic, aluminium drinks cans and fragments of glass.

The garden soil (Context No. 201) directly overlay a mixed rubble and mortar deposit (Context No. 202). This deposit consisted of medium and large angular blocks and boulders, and was relatively sterile. This deposit (Context No. 202) was on average 0.6m thick. The mixed rubble deposit (Context No. 202) physically overlay two separate deposits. In the western part of the trench, the rubble deposit (Context No. 202) overlay a sterile red sand (Context No. 203). Upon excavation this proved to overlie a sewage pipe and was interpreted as a marker indicating the presence of the service.

The rubble and mortar deposit (Context No. 202) also overlay another deposit of rubble within a matrix of mid brown sandy loam (Context No. 204). This deposit (Context No. 204) was similar in appearance to the upper rubble layer (Context No. 202) although a paucity of mortar was observed. The mid-brown sandy loam (Context No. 204) was on average 1.1m thick and overlay thin isolated spreads of mottled orange clay (Context No. 205) suggested that this deposit was the remains of heavily truncated subsoil, only surviving in isolated pockets of the undulating bedrock (Context No. 206).

### *Test Trench Three*

Test Trench Three was located approximately 3m to the south of Test Trench Two and measured approximately 2m x 2m. The trench was mechanically excavated to the surface of the natural bedrock (Context No. 305) which was encountered at a depth of 1.9m.

Following the removal of the shrub and bushes from the area, the uppermost deposit (Context No. 301) was mechanically excavated. This deposit consisted of a relatively loose mid brown loamy soil which contained infrequent inclusions of small rounded and sub-angular stones and pebbles, and was interpreted as representing a garden soil, as observed in Test Trench Two. The garden soil layer (Context No. 301) was, on average, 0.3m deep, and produced similar finds to that in Test Trench Two.

The garden soil (Context No. 301) directly overlay a mixed rubble and mortar layer (Context No. 302). This was a relatively thick deposit (on average 0.6m thick), and consisted of medium to large

angular and sub-angular stones within a mortar-rich deposit. Numerous twentieth century machine cut bricks were observed in this deposit, as well as numerous sherds of black glazed earthenware of probable nineteenth century date (Ruairí O Baoill *pers. comm.*).

Immediately below the mixed rubble and mortar matrix (Context No. 302) was another rubble deposit within a mid to dark brown gritty loam (Context No. 303). This layer was similar in appearance to the lowermost deposit recorded in Test Trench Two (Context No. 204), and as well as sherds of nineteenth century black glazed earthenware produced sherds of a vessel possibly dating to the eighteenth century (Ruairí O Baoill *pers. comm.*). This deposit was on average 0.5m thick and directly overlay the truncated surface of the natural shale bedrock (Context No. 305). Again isolated patches of truncated subsoil survived in the hollows created by the undulating bedrock surface.

#### *Discussion of Phase One Test Trenches*

The excavation of the three test trenches in the development area proved that nothing of any archaeological significance survived in the areas investigated. Following the results of the test trenches, it was decided that the archaeological supervision of the mechanical excavation of the footprint of the new Lifeboat Station would proceed, and full scale excavation was not deemed necessary. The monitored mechanical excavation took place as Phase Two of the archaeological programme of works, and is detailed overleaf.

## Summary of Phase Two monitoring

Following the results of the Phase One evaluation, the mechanical excavation of the footprint of the new Lifeboat Station was undertaken during the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> April 2008. This phase involved the excavation of the strata down to the surface of the natural shale bedrock, of an area approximately 16m (north-west/south-east) by 22m (north-east/south-west). Despite the paucity of archaeological remains encountered in the Phase One evaluation, it was decided that this stage of work should be monitored in case any truncated features survived elsewhere in the development area. McHugh, in his investigations behind the Barholm building in 2005, found the truncated remains of a prehistoric shell midden, preserved in a hollow of the undulating bedrock and thus protected from the substantial redevelopment of the area in recent times (McHugh *pers. comm.*).

The current Lifeboat Station was demolished and the concrete floor lifted. This was found to be sitting on a relatively thin layer (0.2m thick) of hardcore. The mechanical removal of this hardcore layer was monitored to the surface of the natural bedrock. It became clear that the area had been heavily truncated, with a terrace being excavated into the bedrock slope to accommodate the Lifeboat Station in the 1980s (Avery 2007). Numerous old and existing service pipes were observed during the Phase Two monitoring, testifying the degree of truncation and disturbance that had been carried out on site prior to this archaeological investigation. Nothing of archaeological significance was encountered during the monitoring that would have implications on the development of the new Lifeboat Station.

## *Conclusion*

The investigations in advance of the construction of the new Lifeboat Station in Portaferry proved that little of archaeological significance is preserved in this area. It is assumed that the great degree of disturbance and landscaping that has occurred in the recent past may have severely truncated any surviving archaeological strata in the development area. Taking the results of the Phase One test trenches and Phase Two monitoring into account, it is not thought that the development of the new Lifeboat Station will impinge on any previously unrecorded archaeological remains and it is therefore recommended that no further archaeological fieldwork is carried out at the site. Publication of the investigation is not merited, save for a short summary to be submitted to the annual 'Excavations' Bulletin.

**Archive:**

*Finds:*

The artefacts recovered from the evaluation are temporarily archived within the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast.

*Photographs:*

The digital images (37 in total) taken during the evaluation are currently archived within the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast.

*Plans / Drawings:*

All plans and section drawings produced during the evaluation are archived within the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



Figure One: general location map showing location of application site (green dot)

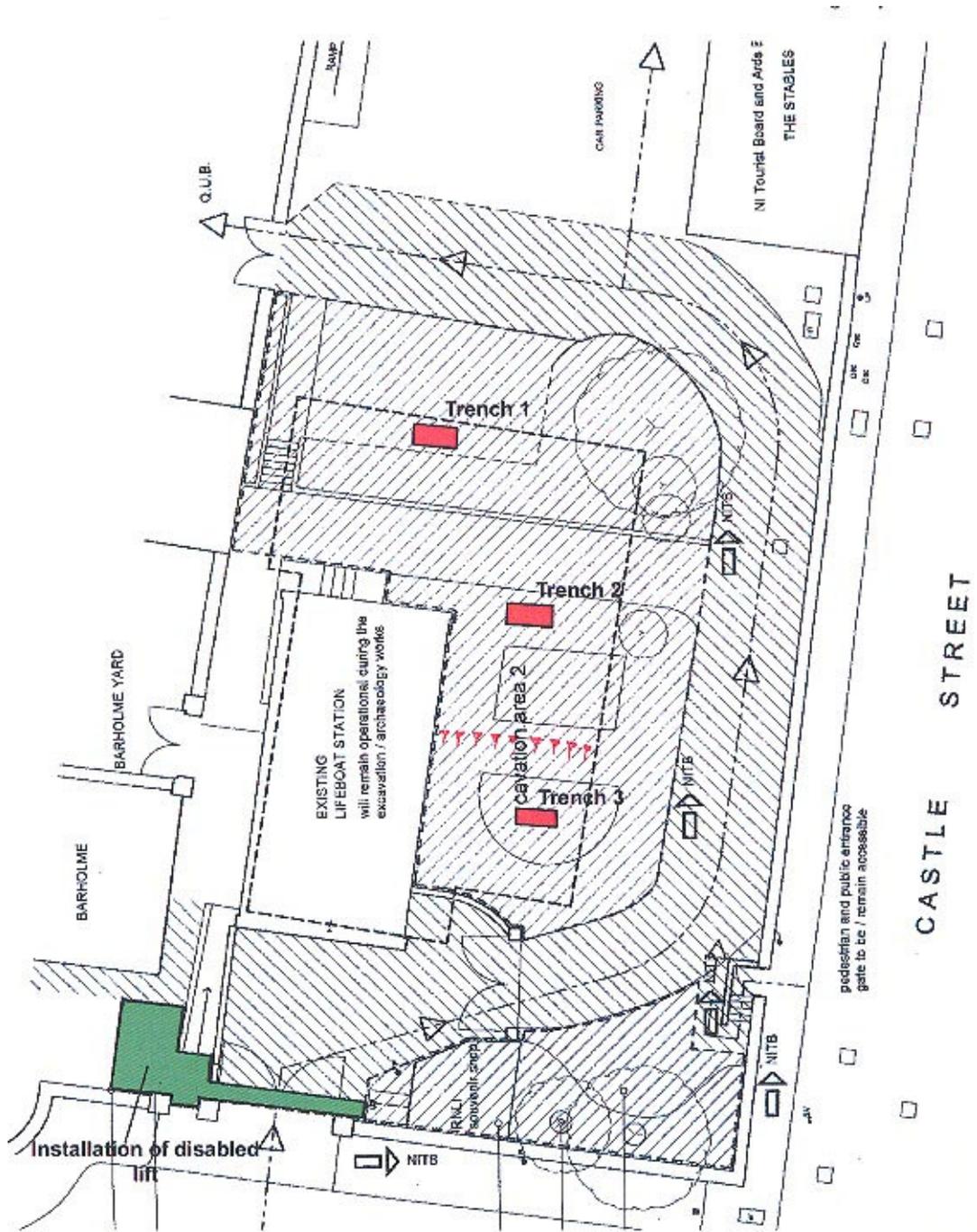


Figure Two: Detailed location map showing development area and the location of the Phase One Test Trenches (coloured red)

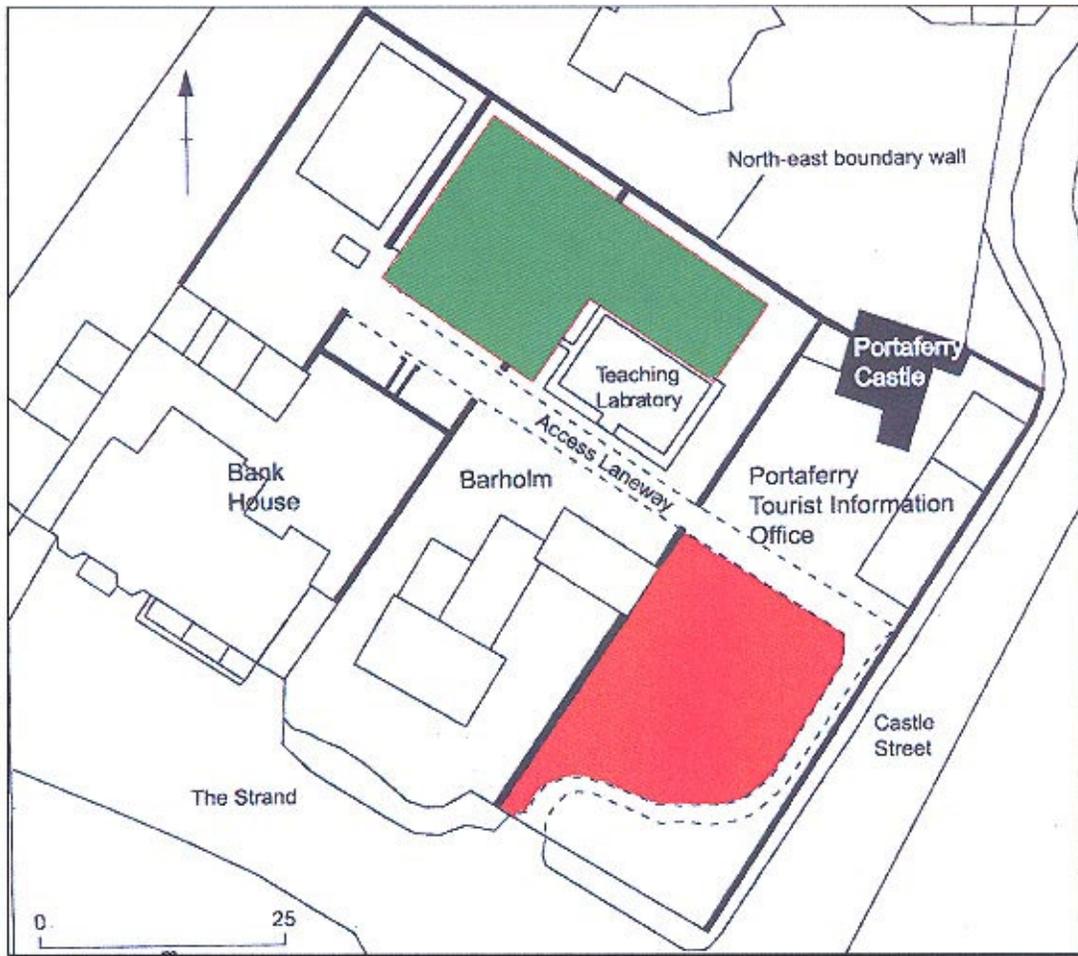


Figure Three: Map of the development area showing location of 2008 investigation (shaded red) in relation to Portaferry Castle (DOW 032:003) and McHugh's investigation in 2005 (shaded green)

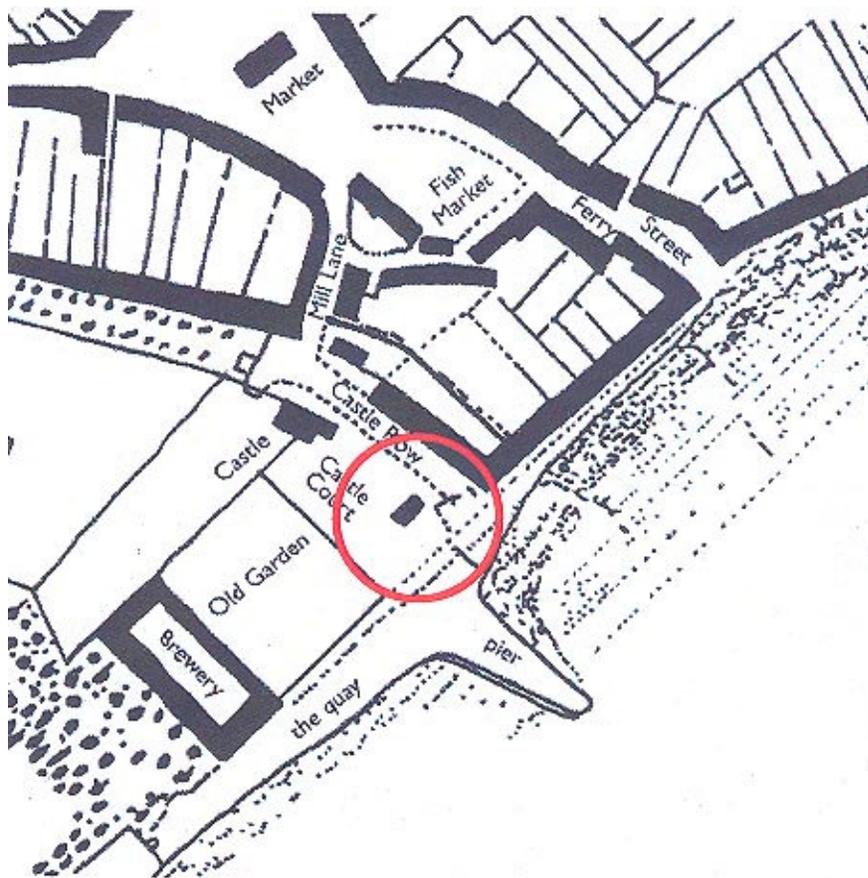


Figure Four: O'Hare's map of 1799 showing 'Castle Court', the 'Castle' and an upstanding building towards the east of Castle Court (circled in red) (McErlean et al 2002, fig 9.6). No trace of this building was encountered during the archaeological investigation.



Plate One: Surface of natural shale bedrock in Test Trench Two (Context No. 206), looking east



Plate Two: Phase Two monitoring of the mechanical excavation of the development site, looking north-east.



Plate Three: Phase Two mechanical excavation of the development site, looking south-west.