



Monitoring Report No. 188

**St. Mary's Church
Graveyard extension
Maghery Road
Maghery
Co. Armagh**

LICENCE NO.: AE/09/190

BRIAN SLOAN

Site Specific Information

Site Name: Site of proposed graveyard extension, St. Mary's Church, Maghery, Co. Armagh

Townland: Maghery

SMR No. : ARM 002:005

State Care Scheduled Other ✓ [delete as applicable]

Grid Ref.: H 9252063546

County: Armagh

Excavation Licence No. : AE/09/190

Planning Ref / Nos. : N/2009/0166/F

Dates of Monitoring: 3rd September 2009

Archaeologist Present: Brian Sloan, Hugh Stewart Alexander, Dermot Redmond

Brief Summary:

The manual excavation of four test trenches was undertaken to assess the presence and survival of archaeological strata, in advance of the area being incorporated into the current graveyard. Due to the possibility of human remains being present (on account of the 1st edition OS map), it was decided that the trenches would be manually excavated rather than mechanically. The excavations proved that the area had been subject to substantial quarrying in the recent past, and had then been leveled with imported strata. Finds from the excavation included sherds of modern ceramics, glass and corroded iron objects, as well as a single sherd of possible Bronze Age pottery. However, due to sherds of black glazed earthenware being recovered from the same context, the sherd of prehistoric pottery lends little to the interpretation of the site. Nothing of archaeological significance was encountered during the excavation.

Type of monitoring:

Manual excavation of four test trenches, each measuring 2m in length by 1m in width.

Size of area opened:

A total of 8m²

Current Land Use:

Grotto associated with Catholic Church (St. Mary's)

Intended Land Use:

Graveyard extension.

Brief account of the monitoring

Introduction

The site of the proposed graveyard extension lies adjacent to St. Mary's Church, Maghery, Co. Armagh (Figs. 5 and 6). The proposed extension is located in roughly tri-angular shaped field to the north-west of the present church, and is the supposed site of an ecclesiastical foundation (ARM 002:005) (Fig. 7). The field is enclosed by a wall and steep bank to the west and south and by a wire a post fence interspersed with mature conifer trees to the north. A considerable difference in the ground level of the present graveyard and the application site was noticed, possibly due to the area being used as a sand quarry in the recent past (local information describes the application site being known as 'the sand pit'). The surrounding area is predominantly used for arable agriculture, interspersed with residential dwellings.

The evaluation took place due to the proximity of the application site to the proposed ecclesiastical foundation and the present graveyard. The first edition of the OS map bears the legend 'Graveyard' across the area that Maghery Country Park now occupies. The evaluation was requested by Gail Howell, Casework Officer for the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, due to the possibility that previously unrecognised archaeological strata may be disturbed by the insertion of modern burials.

Account of the excavations

As the area was designated as a graveyard in the early nineteenth, the evaluation methodology was adjusted. Originally six mechanically excavated test trenches were requested across the application site. However, due to the possibility that human remains would be encountered, it was decided that four manually excavated would be excavated to assess the presence and survival of archaeological deposits. The excavation of these trenches proved that the area had been subject to major disturbance through quarrying. Finds from the trenches were on the whole, modern in date, with sherds of black glazed earthenware, white glazed ceramics, glass fragments and corroded metal objects. A single sherd of coarse pottery (of possible Bronze Age date) was recovered from Trench Three, although its association with a sherd of Blackware and white glazed ceramics means it lends little to the interpretation of the site as a whole.

A simple stratigraphic sequence was encountered in each trench. On the whole, the stratigraphy differed little between the trenches and is described below.

Trench One

Trench One was positioned in the southern corner of the evaluation area and measured 2m in length by 1m in width. It was aligned roughly north/south and was excavated to the surface of the natural subsoil, which consisted of a greyish white sand. A simple stratigraphic sequence was encountered in this trench (Fig. 1) (Plate 1).

The sod layer in this trench (Context No. 101) was manually lifted across the trench. On the whole, this layer (Context No. 101) was relatively shallow (a maximum of 0.04m) with little artifact evidence being recovered. The removal of the sod (Context No. 101) revealed a mid brown sandy loam topsoil (Context No. 102). The topsoil layer (Context No. 102) was on average 0.15m thick and produced modern artefacts such as sherds of black glazed earthenware, white glazed ceramics, glass and a single corroded iron object (most likely a nail). The topsoil (Context No. 102) overlay a compact, grey brown gritty loam (Context No. 103).

The gritty loam undulated between 0.05m thick in the south of the trench to a maximum of 0.1m in the north of the trench. Occasional fragments of cinder were observed throughout the deposit, although on the whole this deposit (Context No. 103) was relatively sterile. The removal of the gritty loam (Context No. 103) revealed a light brown sandy loam (Context No. 104). This deposit (Context No. 104) was generally sterile and uniform in thickness. Removal of this deposit (Context No. 104) revealed it to be the fill of a cut (Context No. 105) into the natural subsoil (Context No. 106). This cut was only observed in the northern end of the trench and thus its full shape or dimensions are unknown, although it is thought that it represents a filled-in sand pit relating to the use of the area as a sand quarry. The natural subsoil (Context No. 106) was encountered at a maximum depth of 0.7m. Nothing of archaeological significance was encountered in this trench.

Trench Two

Trench Two was located 9.4m to the north of Trench One, and was aligned north/south. The trench measured 2m in length by 1m in width and was excavated to the surface of the natural subsoil which consisted of a greyish white sand. A simple stratigraphic sequence was encountered in this trench (Fig. 2) (Plate 2).

The sod layer in this trench (Context No. 201) was manually lifted across the trench. On the whole, this layer (Context No. 201) was relatively shallow (a maximum of 0.06m) with little artifact evidence being recovered. The removal of the sod (Context No. 201) revealed a mid brown sandy loam topsoil (Context No. 202). The topsoil layer (Context No. 202) was on average 0.1m thick and produced modern artefacts such as sherds of black glazed earthenware, white glazed ceramics, glass etc. The topsoil (Context No. 202) overlay a compact, grey brown gritty loam (Context No. 203). The gritty loam (Context No. 203) was on average 0.2m thick, artefactually sterile and directly overlay a mid brown sand (Context No. 204).

The mid brown sand (Context No. 204) had an average thickness of 0.4m and produced few artefacts, with 3 sherds of white glazed ceramics (probably of 19th- or 20th- century date) as well as numerous sherds of bottle glass being recovered. This deposit (Context No. 204) directly overlay a relatively sterile dark brown sandy loam (Context No. 205).

The dark brown sandy loam (Context No. 205) had an average thickness of 0.3m, and although artefactually sterile, numerous flecks of charcoal and cinder were observed throughout.

The deposit (Context No. 205) sloped gently to the north, and directly overlay the natural subsoil (Context No. 206). The natural subsoil (Context No. 206) was encountered at an average depth of 1.1m. Nothing of archaeological significance was encountered in this trench.

Trench Three

Trench Three was located 3m to the north of Trench Two, and was aligned north/south. The trench measured 2m in length by 1m in width and was excavated to the base of a dark brown sandy loam (Context No. 307). The natural subsoil was not encountered in this trench due to the depth and stability of the deposits. A simple stratigraphic sequence was encountered in this trench (Fig. 3) (Plate 3).

The sod layer in this trench (Context No. 301) was manually lifted across the trench. On the whole, this layer (Context No. 301) was relatively shallow (a maximum of 0.1m). The removal of the sod (Context No. 301) revealed a mid brown sandy loam topsoil (Context No. 302). The topsoil layer (Context No. 302) was on average 0.3m thick and produced numerous artefacts of modern date. The topsoil (Context No. 302) overlay a compact, grey brown gritty loam lense (Context No. 303) that was observed in the northern end of the trench. The gritty loam (Context No. 303) was on average 0.3m thick, artefactually sterile and directly overlay a mid brown sand (Context No. 304).

The mid brown sand (Context No. 304) varied in thickness from a minimum of 0.08m to a maximum of 0.38m. The deposit had numerous fragments of bottle glass, corroded iron objects as well as charcoal and clinker throughout. The mid brown sand (Context No. 304) overlay a light to mid greyish brown silty sand (Context No. 305). The silty sand (Context No. 305) again varied in thickness with the maximum recorded thickness recorded as 0.31m. Excavation of this deposit produced sherds of black-glazed earthenwares, white glazed ceramics and sherds of bottle glass. A single sherd of coarse pottery was also recovered from this deposit (Context No. 305), although its association with modern artefacts shows that this is a residual piece and means nothing for the interpretation of the site as a whole.

The removal of the silty sand (Context No. 305) revealed a deposit of light grey clay (Context No. 306). This layer (Context No. 306) sloped to the north of the trench where it had a maximum thickness of 0.26m. Little was observed within this deposit save infrequent inclusions of small rounded stones and fragments of charcoal/clinker. The grey clay (Context No. 306) was removed to reveal a relatively thick deposit of mid brown sandy loam (Context No. 307). This deposit was not fully excavated due to the depth of the trench (1.4m), as well as the stability of the section face. The sandy loam (Context No, 307) appeared relatively sterile apart from frequent inclusions of small rounded and sub-angular stones. Apart from the single sherd of coarse pottery, which in itself is an imported residual find, nothing of archaeological significance was encountered in Trench Three.

Trench Four

Trench Four was located 11m to the west of Trench Three, and was aligned north/south. The trench measured 2m in length by 1m in width and was excavated to the surface of the natural subsoil which consisted of a greyish white sand. A simple stratigraphic sequence was encountered in this trench (Fig. 4) (Plate 4).

The sod layer in this trench (Context No. 401) was manually lifted across the trench. On the whole, this layer (Context No. 401) was relatively shallow (a maximum of 0.1m). The removal of the sod (Context No. 401) revealed a mid brown sandy loam topsoil (Context No. 402). The topsoil layer (Context No. 402) was on average 0.15m thick and produced modern artefacts such as sherds of black glazed earthenware and corroded iron objects.

The topsoil (Context No. 402) physically overlay two deposits; a charcoal/clinker rich gritty loam (Context No. 403) and a mid brown sandy loam (Context No. 404). The topsoil (Context No. 402) stratigraphically overlay the charcoal/clinker rich gritty loam (Context No. 403) which was on average 0.1m thick. This in turn overlay the mid brown sandy loam (Context No. 404) which had an average thickness of 0.08m. Finds from both deposits (Context Nos. 403 and 404) were scarce save three sherds of bottle glass recovered from the sandy loam (Context No. 404).

These deposits overlay a relatively thick deposit of dark brown loamy clay (Context No. 405). This deposit had a maximum recorded thickness of 0.3m. Numerous small rounded and sub-angular stones, as well as frequent inclusions of clinker and charcoal were observed in this deposit. Finds from the loamy clay (Context No. 405) included two sherds of white glazed ceramics, a single sherd of black-glazed earthenware and some corroded iron objects. This deposit (Context No. 405) overlay two deposits; a lens of light to mid brown sandy loam (Context No. 406) and a light to mid brown sandy loam with frequent inclusions of small rounded pebbles (Context No. 407). These deposits were similar in texture and appearance but were designated separate context numbers due to the presence of the pebbles in the lower deposit (Context No. 407). No finds were recovered from either of these deposits (Context Nos. 406 and 407), which had an overall thickness of 0.26m. The removal of these deposits revealed the natural subsoil (Context No. 408) which consisted of a greyish white sand at an average depth of 0.75m from the surface of the trench. Nothing of archaeological significance was encountered in this trench.

Conclusions

The evaluation showed no evidence of archaeologically significant deposits present in the evaluation area. The sherd of coarse pottery was recovered from an imported deposit, and was found in association with modern artefacts. It is thought that the quarrying of sand from the site, and the subsequent infilling of the area with imported material might have substantially disturbed any archaeological strata present on site. It is thus not thought that the development of the area through its use as a graveyard will impinge upon previously unknown archaeological deposits. It is recommended that no further archaeological work is carried out at the site and that publication

of the results of the evaluation is not merited, save a short summary in the annual Excavations Bulletin.

Archive:

Finds: All finds recovered during the evaluation are currently housed at the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast.

Photographs: The photographs taken during the evaluation are currently housed at the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast.

Written Archive: The written archive generated during the evaluation is currently housed at the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

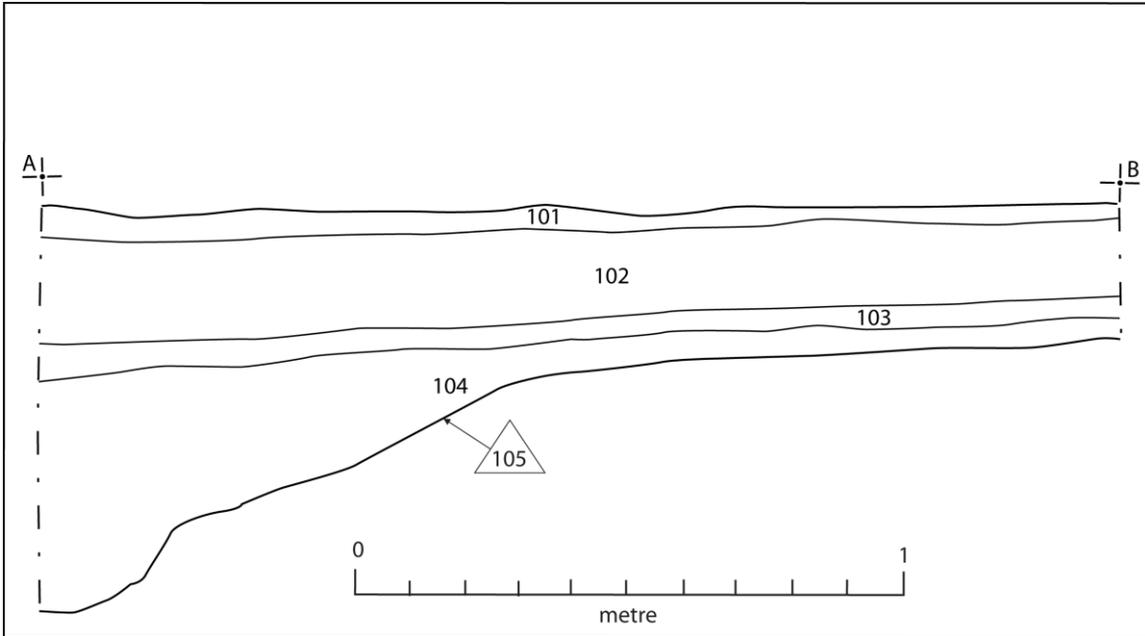


Fig. 1: West facing section of Trench One

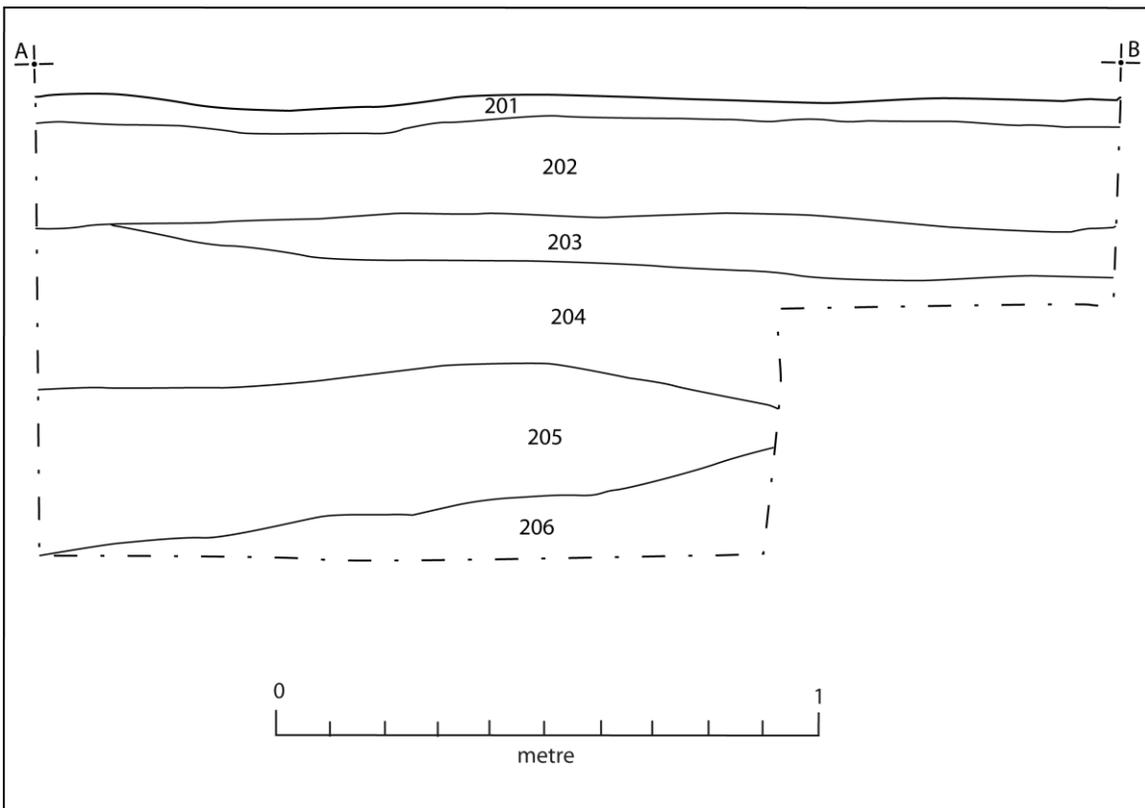


Fig. 2: West facing section of Trench Two

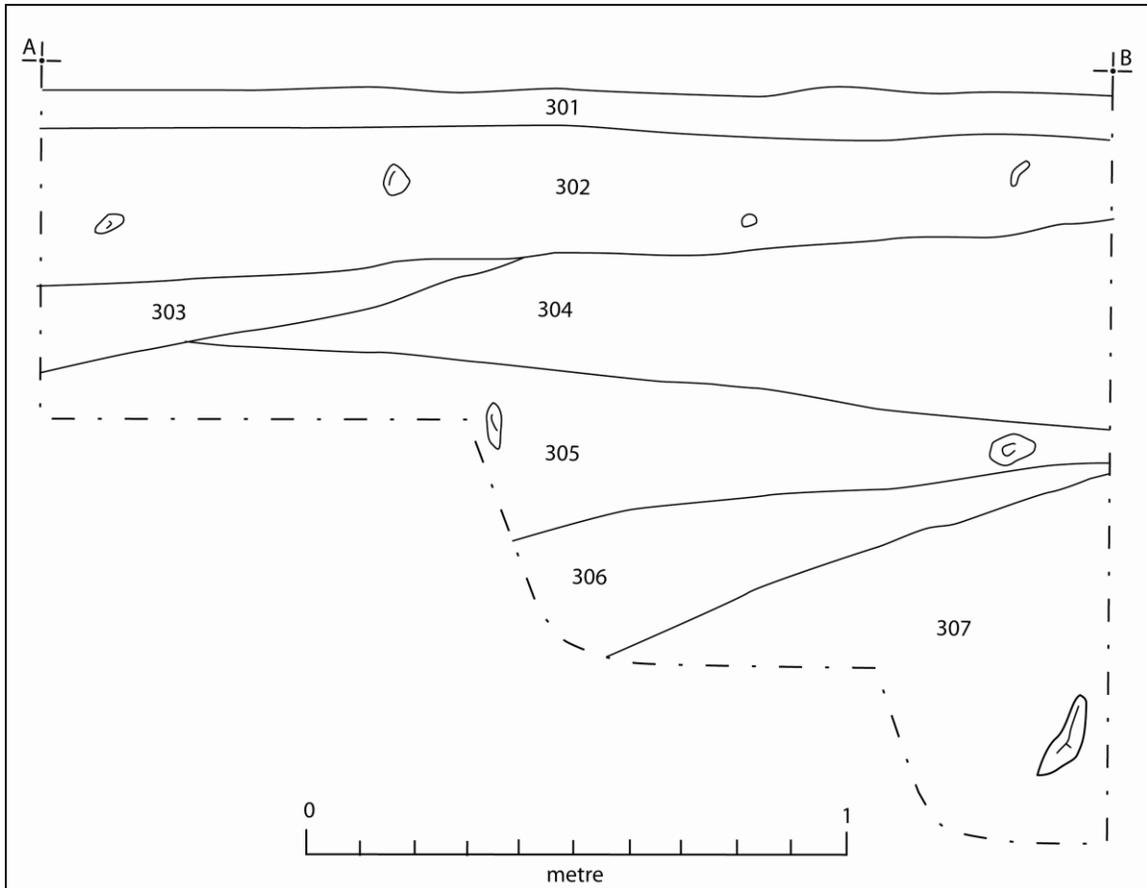


Fig. 3: West facing section of Trench Three.

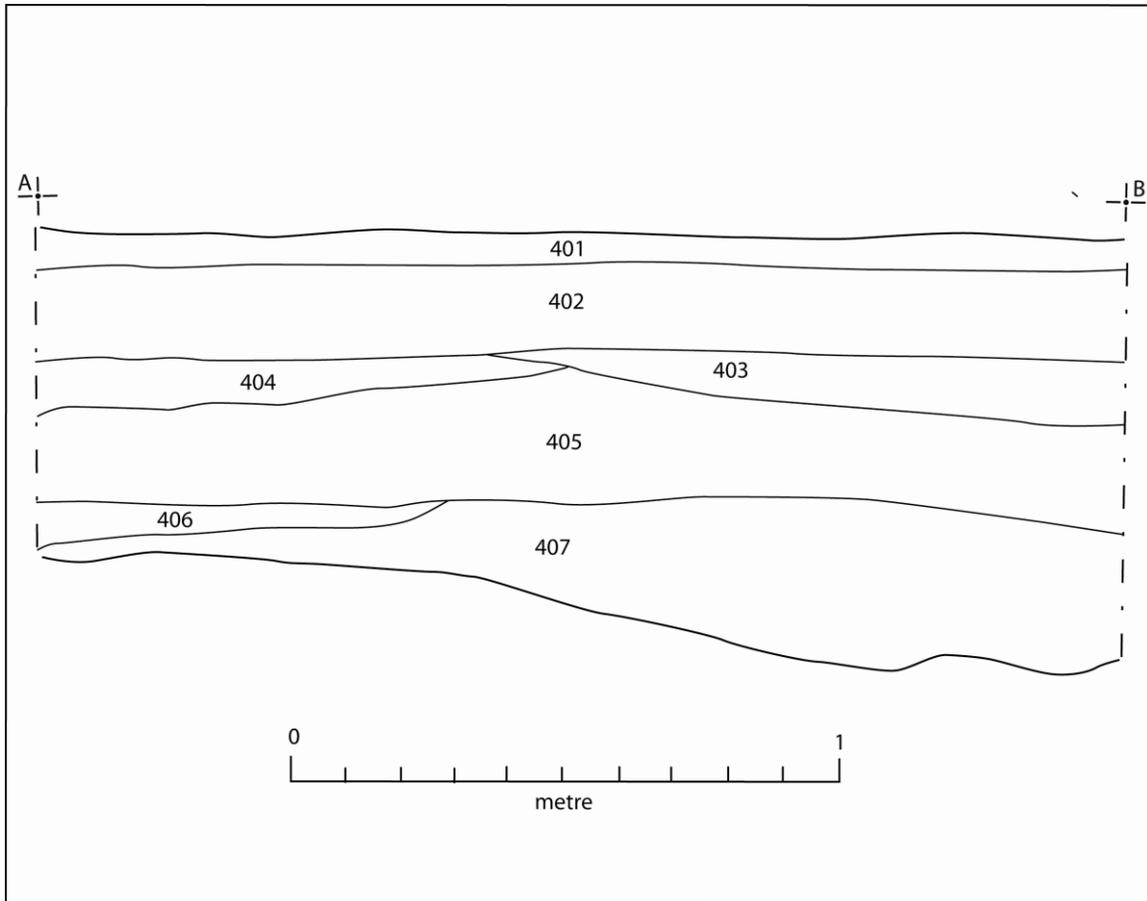


Fig. 4: West facing section of Trench Four.

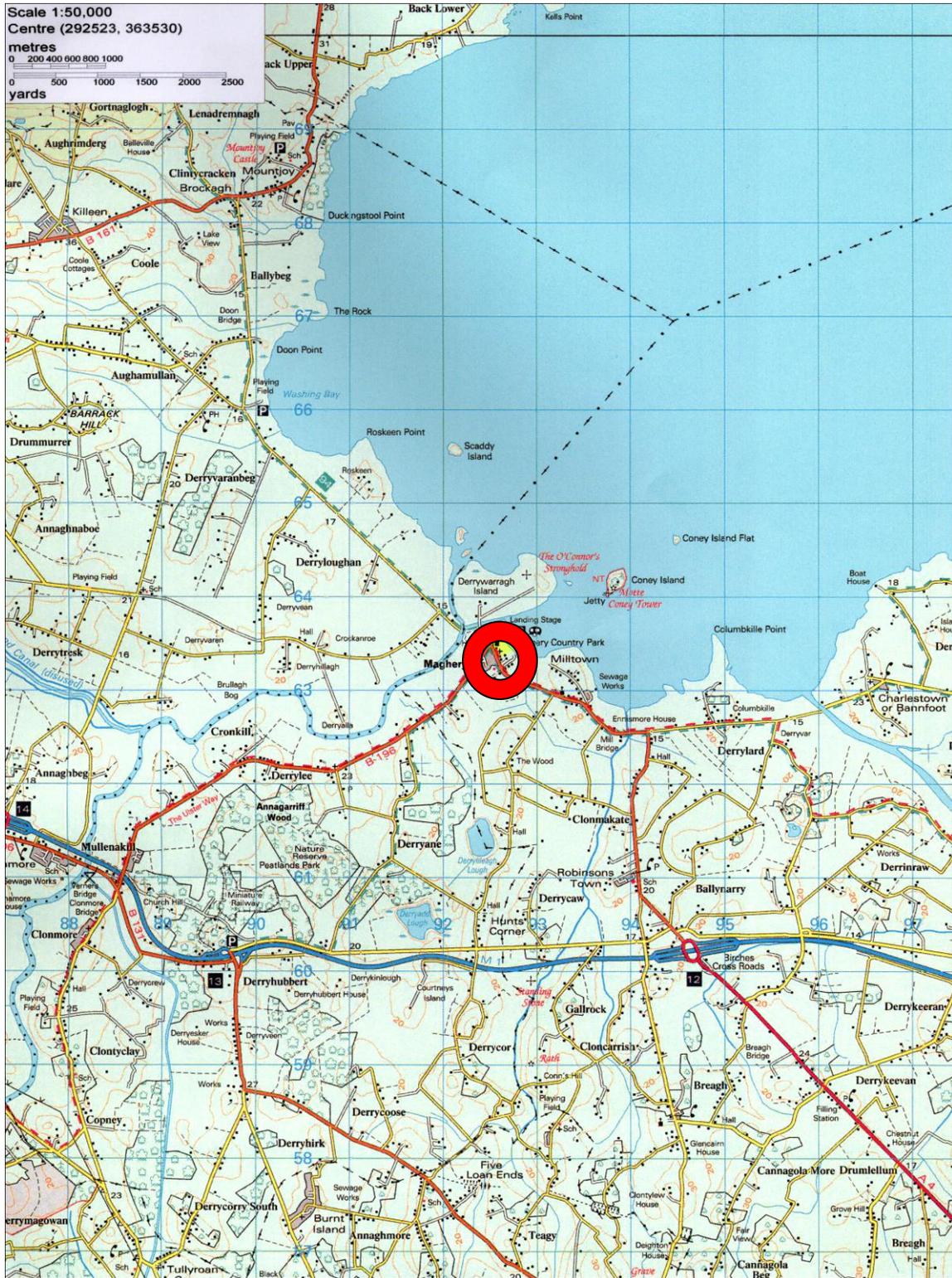


Fig.5: General location map showing Maghera (circled in red).



Fig. 6: Detailed location map showing Maghery (circled in red).



Fig. 7: Detailed location map showing evaluation area and proposed locations of evaluative trenches (in green).



Plate 1: Trench One following excavation to the surface of the natural subsoil, looking east.



Plate 2: Trench Two following excavation to the surface of the natural subsoil, looking west.



Plate 3: Trench Three following excavation to surface of the natural subsoil, looking east.



Plate 4: Trench Four following excavation to the surface of the natural subsoil, looking north-east.



Plate 5: Site of the evaluation following the backfilling of the evaluative trenches, looking east.