



Evaluation/Monitoring Report No. 233

**20 KERR STREET
PORTRUSH
COUNTY ANTRIM**

LICENCE NO.: AE/11/86E

NAOMI CARVER

Site Specific Information

Site Name: 20 Kerr Street

Town: Portrush

NISMR No. : ANT 002:014

State Care Scheduled Other [delete as applicable]

Grid Ref.: C 8570 4080

County: Antrim

Excavation Licence No. : AE/11/86E

Planning Ref. No. : C/2010/0514/F

Dates of Monitoring: 7th November 2011

Archaeologist Present: Naomi Carver

Brief Summary:

Archaeological surveillance was carried out at 20 Kerr Street, Portrush, County Antrim, as part of the planning process for the redevelopment of the site. The property lies within the Portrush Area of Archaeological Potential, as designated in the draft Northern Area Plan 2016, and therefore there was potential to uncover archaeological remains. However, in this case no remains of archaeological significance were uncovered during the course of the surveillance, and therefore the development was able to proceed.

Type of monitoring:

Excavation of foundations under archaeological supervision

Size of area opened:

An area approximately 5m (north-west/south-east) by 19m (north-east/south-west)

Current Land Use: Urban, residential

Intended Land Use: Residential

Brief account of the monitoring

Introduction

The site proposed for redevelopment is at 20 Kerr Street, Portrush, County Antrim (Figures One and Two). Kerr Street is located towards the base of the promontory of Ramore Head which juts into the Atlantic Ocean. Much of the core of the town is located on this promontory, which is slightly over a kilometre in length and up to half a kilometre wide. The terrace of houses in which the site is located is immediately to the south-east of the harbour. The site is bordered on its north-western and south-eastern sides by Nos. 19 and 21 Kerr Street and to the south-west by the road, beyond which is an area of recreation ground overlooking a sandy beach called the West Strand. From here views extend to Magilligan Point and beyond to Inishowen Head in County Donegal. To the rear (north-east) of the application site is a public right of way or alley way beyond which is a garage belonging to the property. Behind this building the ground level rises up to a vertical wall of rock, at the top of which is Mark Street, the level of which is significantly higher than the houses below. This terracing is probably the result of landscaping being carried out as the town developed and more houses were built.

The archaeological surveillance was requested by Rhonda Robinson, Senior Inspector with Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) as part of the planning process for a replacement dwelling.

Historical background

The town of Portrush takes its name from the distinctive promontory of Ramore which shelters the harbour. It comes from the Irish *Port Rois* meaning 'port of the promontory' (Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record [NISMR]). The promontory would have provided a strong defensive element, possibly influencing decisions to establish settlements in the area. Indeed, Adams says that "...it [the town] must have been a place of considerable importance, as it had a church and 2 castles..." (1906). The historical settlement of Portrush probably had its roots in the 13th century. A medieval church was already established by the time of the Papal Taxation in 1306, the value of which at that time was high (NISMR ANT 002:002). There are no visible remains of the church now but it was said to have still been extant at the beginning of the 19th century and its site also marked on the 1906 and 1935 Ordnance Survey six inch maps (Figure Three). The Ordnance Survey Memoirs describe an 'old church' in the Ancient Topography section which may refer to this building (Day, McWilliams and English 1995, 29-52).

The two castles on the promontory have been identified in the NISMR as *Caisleán an Teenie* (NISMR ANT 002:020) and Portrush Castle (NISMR ANT 002:001). There are no standing remains of either castle and, as documentary evidence is scant, it is not known if both were extant at the same time. *Caisleán an Teenie*, meaning 'Castle of the Fire', is unlocated but tradition holds that it stood on Rathmore Hill on the north-western tip of the promontory. There was a legend that a fire could often be seen burning in it, particularly on wild, stormy nights. The castle was supposed to have been destroyed in 1584 by Sir John Perrot who mentioned capturing 'a pyle' by Portrush (McNeill 1983, 106-107). Adams notes that it may have been owned by an old Irish family named O'Corr (1906) but little else is known about this castle.

The other castle is marked on the 1935 Ordnance Survey map to the north-east of the harbour (Figure Three). A visit to this site in 1993 described it as "...an area used as garden by the adjacent

houses to the N of it. It is a rocky height with steep scarp on the S and W and drops down also to the E. Steep scarp continues round to the SE and a large complex of apartments has been constructed to the E of the castle site on the scarped edge. The site is a very good vantage point overlooking the bay and along the coast to the S and SW..." (NISMR ANT 002:001).

The castle may be the same fortification which was built between 1603 and 1605 by Sir Thomas Philips (McNeill 1983, 107). According to O'Lavery the castle stood by the 'old church' but was gone by the time of his account in the late 19th century (1887, 262). According to the Ordnance Survey Field Report (No. 8) it was destroyed in 1642 by General Monroe (NISMR).

Analysis of the first and second edition Ordnance Survey six inch maps has demonstrated that the houses in Kerr Street were built between 1853 and 1906. Prior to 1853 the map shows nothing in the vicinity of No. 20 Kerr Street.

Excavation

The excavation of the foundations of the proposed replacement dwelling was carried out under archaeological supervision on 7th November 2011. The development site, an area of around 5m (north-west/south-east) by 19m (north-east/south-west), was stripped down to the natural bedrock, the surface of which was encountered at varying depths.

In the weeks prior to the monitoring exercise, the house which stood on the site was demolished, including the front façade, and the plot cleared of demolition rubble (Plates One and Two). The proposed installation of a concrete foundation raft required the ground level to be reduced to a depth of approximately 0.9m below the original surface.

The stratigraphically latest deposit remaining on the site was a mixed hardcore deposit (context no. 101) consisting of sand and stone rubble. Several pipes, both ceramic and plastic, crossed the site and the underlying bedrock was exposed in parts. As the excavation progressed the north-eastern end of the site became increasingly more water-logged due to the impermeable nature of the underlying bedrock and the water issuing from the severed pipes. The mixed hardcore deposit (context no. 101) was much more loose and rubbly towards the north-eastern end of the site, consisting mainly of large angular stones around 0.4x0.4x0.3m in size. These stones looked as if they had been worked and this may be an indication that they were reused from an earlier building- perhaps one that was demolished to construct the late 18th/early 19th century house. The rubble was presumably intended to provide a foundation for the concrete rear yard. Some of the stones had mortar adhered to them but none represented *in-situ* remains. The angular stones were in a matrix of dark grey, sandy gravel (context no. 102) which was loose and consisted of angular stones ranging from small (0.05x0.05x0.05m) to medium (0.2x0.2x0.1m).

At the north-eastern end of the site the hardcore deposit (context no. 101) physically overlay bedrock (context no. 103), the surface of which was exposed 0.4m below the concrete of the yard (Plate Three). The bedrock consisted of dolerite, a coarse-grained intrusive igneous rock which was dark greenish grey in colour and impermeable. The dolerite is part of the Portrush Sill which forms Ramore Head and also the islands known as the Skerries (Mitchell 2004, 196). In the northern corner of the site, the bedrock appeared to have been cut along its western edge, resulting in a straight edge and a plinth-like appearance (Plate Four). The reason for this is not clear- it may have been something to do with the foundations of an earlier house or perhaps the more recent one. Another suggestion is that it was intended to provide a crude drainage channel.

Towards the middle of the site the surface of the bedrock was exposed higher up, around 0.3 below the level of the concrete yard. In this middle area, towards the western limit of excavation, was a feature which resembled a small, rock-cut pit (context no. 104). The possible pit was polygonal-shaped and cut into the underlying bedrock. It measured 0.60m (south-west/north-east) by 0.82m (north-west/south-east) and was up to 0.17m deep. The possible pit was filled with loose, black gritty sand (Context no. 105) which contained frequent angular inclusions ranging from small (0.05x0.05x0.02m) to medium (0.15x0.15x0.10m). It appeared water-logged and had a distinctive odour. A few sherds of early 19th century pottery and some fragments of ceramic pipe, probably from a sewage pipe, were retrieved from the black gritty sand which was also spread over a larger area- around 5m by 5m- in the middle of the site. The deposit had stained the underlying bedrock black. The black gritty sand (context no. 105) was overlain stratigraphically by the hardcore deposit (context no. 101) which on this part of the site consisted of greyish brown sand. The bedrock at the south-western end of the trench was as close as 0.05m below the ground surface at points.

Conclusions & recommendations

The excavated evidence suggests that the original house on the plot at 20 Kerr Street had little or no foundations. At the south-western (street front) end of the site it appeared to have been built directly onto the bedrock and towards the north-eastern (rear yard) end on top of a mixed hardcore deposit. It is probable that the hardcore was used to level-up the site prior to the construction of the original house, particularly as the surface of the bedrock was so uneven. The pockets of sand lying over the bedrock were probably also used to level localized areas. The black gritty sand, which was localised to an area in the middle of the site, and the possible rock-cut pit, were investigated during the course of the monitoring work and assessed as not being of archaeological significance. The function of the possible pit however, remains unclear. The proposed re-development was able to proceed without impinging on archaeological remains and no further archaeological fieldwork needs to be carried out. A short summary will be prepared for inclusion in the annual 'Excavations' bulletin.

Bibliography

- Adams, W. 1906. *Dalriada, or, North Antrim: a historical account of some of its old families and ancient castles*. Coleraine, Ireland.
- Day, A., McWilliams, P. and English, L. (eds.) 1995. *The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland volume 33: parishes of Co. Londonderry XII 1829-30, 1832, 1834-6*. The Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University Belfast.
- McNeill, T.E. 1984. The stone castles of northern County Antrim. *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 46, 101-128.
- Mitchell, W.I. (ed.) 2004. *The Geology of Northern Ireland: our natural foundation*. Geological Survey of Northern Ireland, Belfast.
- O'Laverty, J. 1887. *An Historical Account of the Diocese of Down and Connor and Dromore* volume IV, 262 and 375.

Archive:

Finds: The artefacts recovered during the monitoring work are archived within Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast.

Photographs: The digital images taken during the evaluation are archived within the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast.

Plans / Drawings: N/A

Signed: _____ Date: _____

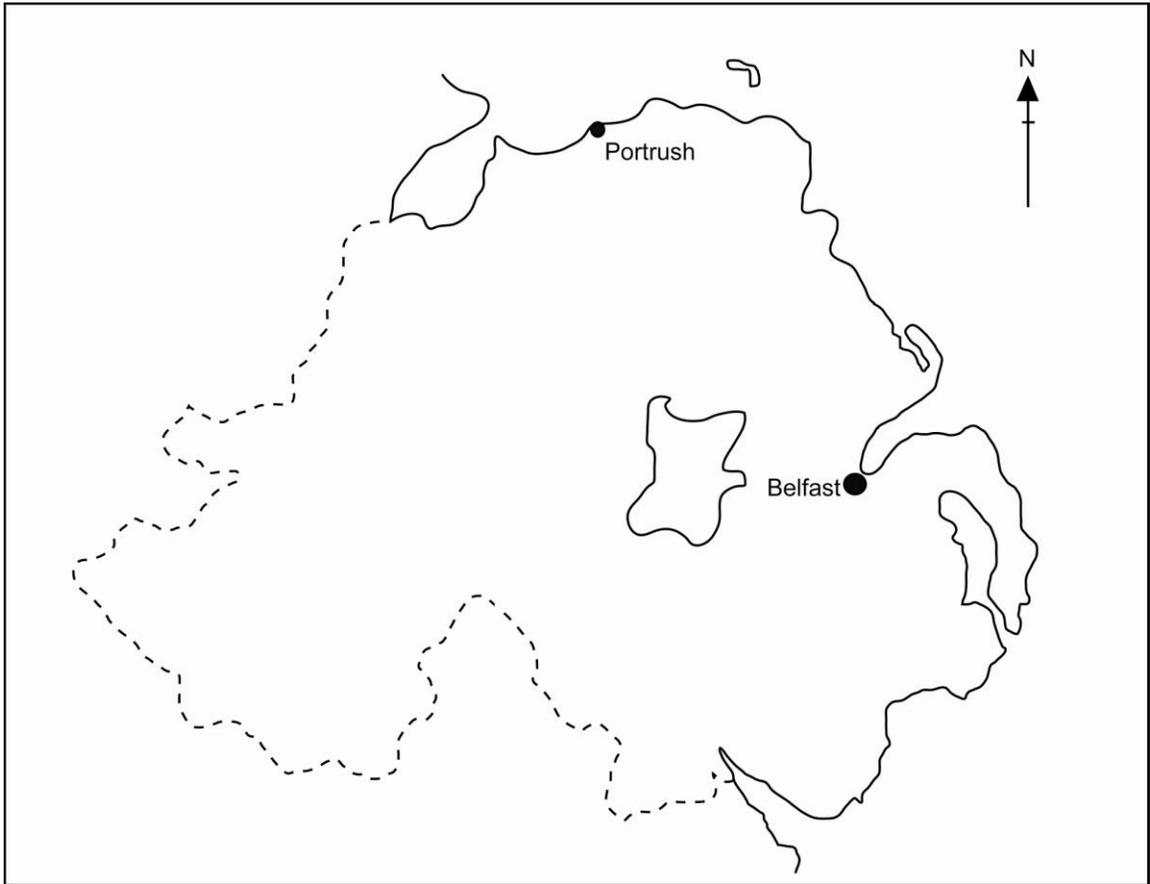


Figure One: Northern Ireland location map showing Portrush



Figure Two: general location map showing Portrush, with approximate site location circled in red (taken from OSNI 1:50,000 map Sheet 4 Coleraine)



Figure Three: detail from Ordnance Survey Six Inch map (1935 edition) showing sites of castle (1: NISMAR ANT 002:001) and church (2: NISMAR ANT 002:002) and also development area (red dot)

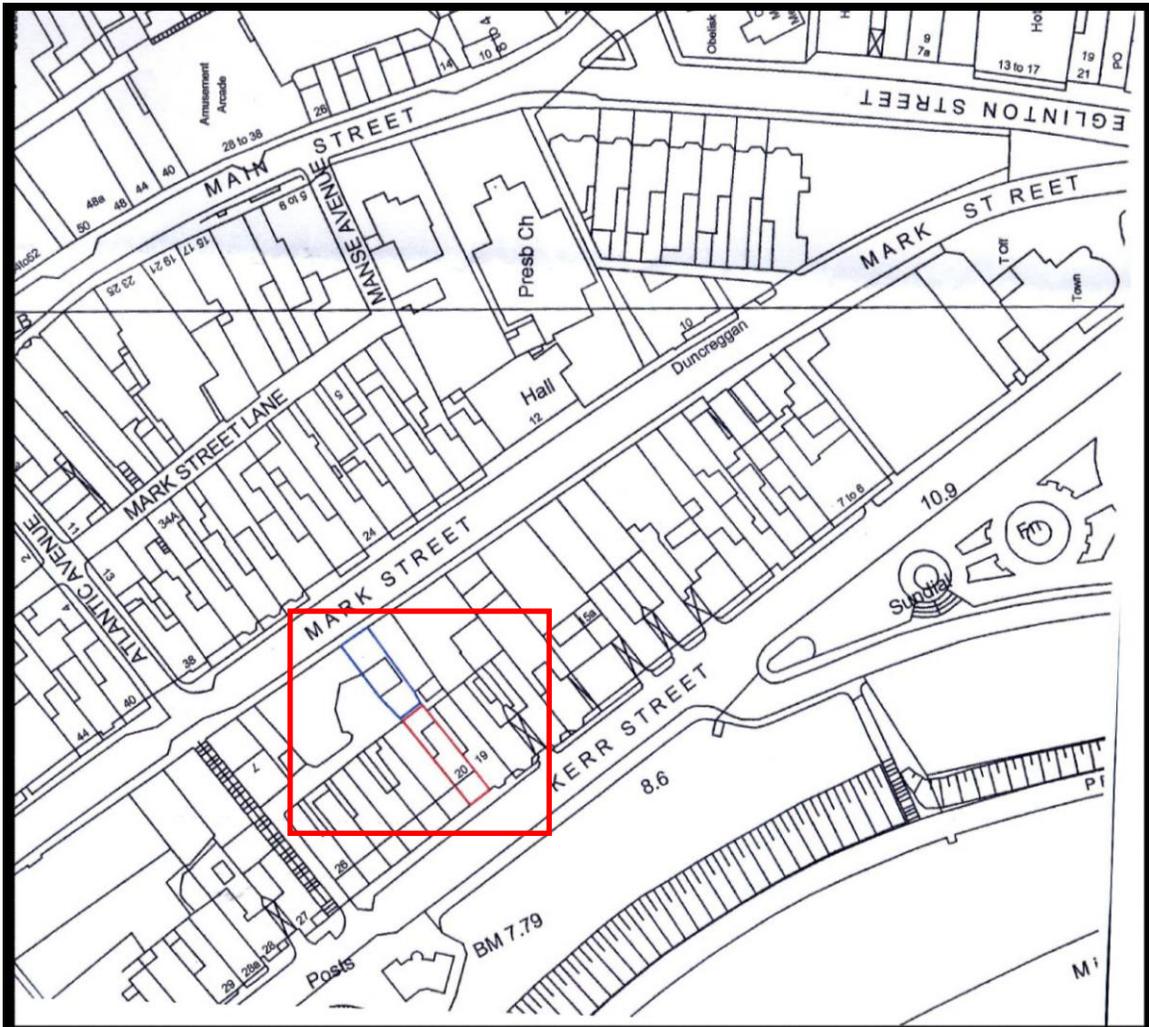


Figure Four: Site plan showing location of development site (within red box)



Plate One: general view of site prior to excavation, looking north-east



Plate Two: general view of site prior to excavation, looking north north-east



Plate Three: exposed bedrock at the north-eastern end of the site, looking north



Plate Four: detail of bedrock with possible cut edge, from above



Plate Five: the possible rock-cut pit, from above



Plate Six: general view of the site following the removal of overlying deposits and showing the bedrock exposed, looking north-east