Monitoring Report No. 184

Inch,
Co. Down.

AE/09/172

Site Specific Information

Site Name:	Kennedy Farm
Townland:	Inch
SMR No:	N/A
Grid Ref:	Irish Grid Ref. J 46989 44885
County:	Down
Excavation License No:	AE/09/172
Dates of Monitoring:	21st October 2009
Archaeologist Present:	Cormac McSparron, Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, QUB.
Brief Summary:	No archaeological artifacts or features uncovered during excavation of trenches
Type of monitoring:	Evaluation excavation at or close to the find-spot of a Late Bronze Age gold bulla.
Size of area opened:	A single hand dug 2 by 2m trench, three 20 by 2m trenches and a cross trench, dug in two sections measuring 5 by 2m and 3 by 2m.

Introduction

The CAF was asked by NIEA to carry out an exploratory excavation at or close to the find-spot of a late Bronze Age gold bulla at Inch Co. Down. The bulla was found by metal detectorists in 2008. The intention of the excavation was to investigate the vicinity of the find-spot of the gold object and its environment. A geophysical survey of the approximate area of the find spot was conducted in advance of the excavation. Five trenches were dug, one hand and four mechanically excavated. No artefacts or features were uncovered during the excavation.

Location

The bulla was found on a low rise, probably a drumlin, in the townland of Inch, Co. Down (Irish Grid Ref. J 46989 44885). Unfortunately the exact location of the find spot was uncertain although Richard Warner had previously identified a 20 by 20m square within which it was likely to be located (Figure 1). The land around the find-spot is currently being used for the production of cereal crops, suggesting that the land is relatively well drained throughout the year. Around the drumlin upon which the site is located are other similar rises, with areas of lower level, poorly drained, rough pasture between them. It is likely that these drumlins would have been islands before drainage in the nineteenth century, the land between them having been largely, if not completely, under water.

Methodology

A problem with conducting an exploratory excavation at this site is the difficulty in pinpointing the exact find-spot. A resistivity survey of a box 20m by 20m around the central grid referenced find was carried out with the assistance of Richard Warner. It appeared to show two linear high resistance features running northeast –southwest across the grid and a lower resistance area, possibly sub-circular in shape, close to the centre of the grid. The high resistance features appear to have been cultivation ridges. (Figure 2).

Note that, due to an equipment fault, the last three metres of the survey are thought to be unreliable and are marked as “unsurveyed” on the plot of the geophysics results.

A 2 by 2m trench, TR1 was hand excavated at the centre of the survey grid, at a point where the geophysical survey suggested there may have been archaeological features

Three 20 by 2m evaluation trenches, trenches TR2, TR3 and TR4, and a 10 by 2m cross trench, TR5, were mechanically excavated in the area of the find-spot. It was initially intended to space the trenches evenly through the 20 by 20m survey grid. However the metal detectorist who actually dug up the bulla, Glen McCamley, said that it was his recollection that our 20 by 20m grid was a few metres too far to the

east. Consequently the test trenches were concentrated on the centre and west of the resistivity survey area with one trench just outside it.

These trenches were excavated with the assistance of the metal detectorists who had found the gold. Before excavation a sweep of each trench was conducted by the metal detectorists. The trenches were then excavated by incrementally digging about 10cm of earth, using a back acting mechanical excavator utilising a toothless “seugh” bucket, carrying out a metal detector sweep of the trench at that depth and then repeating this process until subsoil was reached. Although more time consuming than a conventional evaluation this process would hopefully have allowed for the identification of metal artefacts in the soil before they were potentially damaged by the mechanical digger.

Results

Trench 1

This 2 by 2m trench was hand dug in advance of the mechanically dug evaluation trenches. The topsoil in this trench was a brown, soft, loam, 20cm thick. It sat immediately above the light orange clay subsoil. There were no archaeological features of artifacts found in this trench.

Trench 2.

This trench was mechanically excavated with the assistance of the metal detectorists as outlined in the methodology above. The topsoil in this trench was a brown soft loam, varying between 20 to 30 cm thick. It sat immediately above the subsoil. No archaeological features or artifacts were found during the excavation of this trench.

Trench 3

This trench was mechanically excavated with the assistance of the metal detectorists as outlined in the methodology above. The topsoil in this trench was a brown soft loam, varying between 20 to 30 cm thick. A gully, 20cm wide by 10 cm deep, was detected running northeast – southwest in the upper half of this trench, upon investigation it was shown not to be archaeological, and is likely to be the line of the field boundary, probably a hedge, which is noted on the map but which is now no longer extant on the ground. No archaeological features or artifacts were found during the excavation of this trench.

Trench 4

This trench was mechanically excavated with the assistance of the metal detectorists as outlined in the methodology above. The topsoil in this trench was a brown soft loam, varying between 20 to 30 cm thick. No archaeological features or artifacts were found during the excavation of this trench.

Trench 5

This trench was excavated in two sections, (a)3 by 2m and (b) 5 by 2m, either side of Trench 3. The trench was mechanically excavated with the assistance of the metal detectorists as outlined in the methodology above. The topsoil in this trench was a brown soft loam, varying between 20 to 30 cm thick. No archaeological features or artifacts were found during the excavation of this trench.

Conclusions

Although it was not possible to completely mechanically excavate the 20 by 20m grid around the find spot the evaluation there suggests that it is unlikely that there is either any large hoard or complex of archaeological features at the site.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Richard Warner for the help and advice which he provided to me on this project, Philip Macdonald who assisted with the excavation and also to Glen McCamley, John Hopps and Victor McKee, the metal detectorists who found the gold and assisted with the excavation of the evaluation trenches.

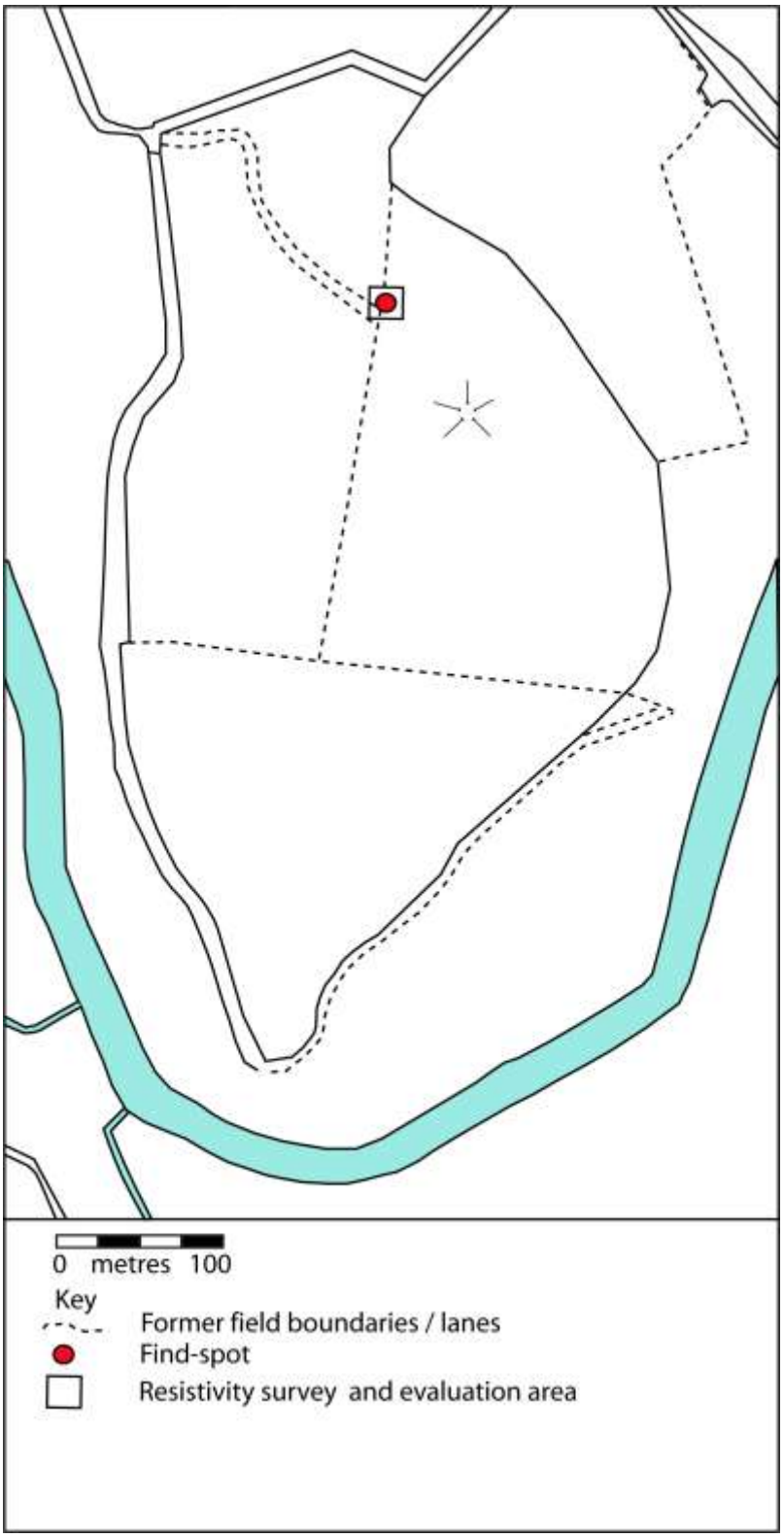

Figure 1: Inch Gold Find Spot and area of resistivity survey and evaluation trenches.

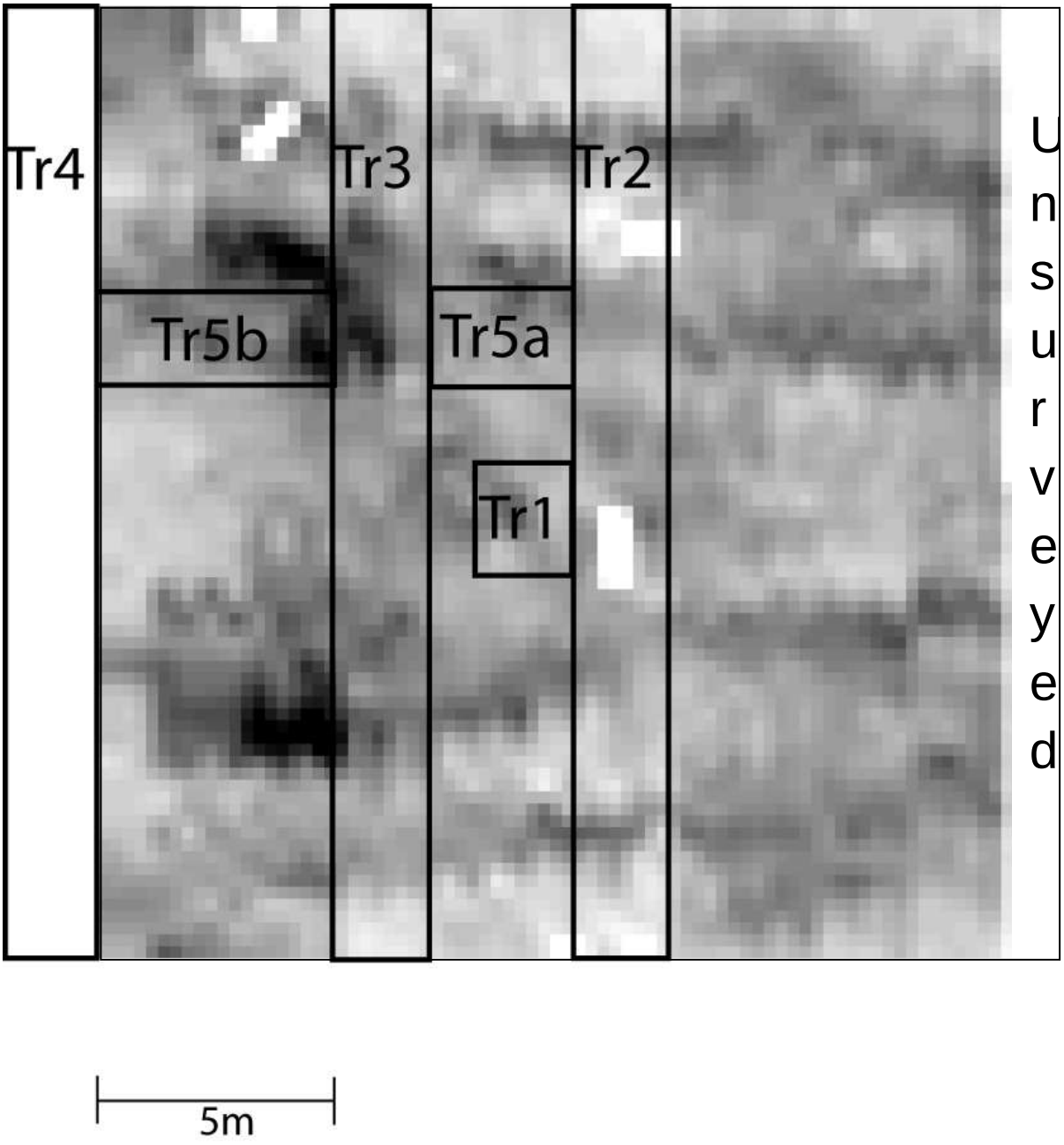

Figure 2: Geophysical survey of 20 by 20m grid around approximate finds location and location of evaluation trenches.

Trench 1 after manual excavation, showing brown loam topsoil and orange clay subsoil

Photo 2: Trench 2 after excavation showing brown loam topsoil and orange subsoil

Photo 3: Trench 3 showing brown loam topsoil, orange clay subsoil and old hedge line in north of the trench.

Photo 4: Trench 4 showing brown loam topsoil and orange clay subsoil

Photo 5: Cross trench Trench 5, showing brown loam topsoil, and orange clay subsoil. Note presence of hedge line in centre of the photo where the cross trench crosses trench three.