



## **Monitoring Report No. 185**

**St Mary's Glebe, Macosquin,  
Co. Londonderry.**

**AE/09/142**

## Site Specific Information

*Site Name:* St Mary's Glebe

*Townland:* Glebe

*SMR No:* LDY 7:012

*Grid Ref:* Irish Grid Ref. C823 286

*County:* Londonderry

*Excavation License No:* AE/09/142

*Dates of Monitoring:* 3<sup>rd</sup> September 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 site of *Clarus Fons*, the Medieval Cistercian monastery at Macosquin.

*Size of area opened:* Two 20m by 2m evaluation trenches

## Introduction

In advance of the extension of the graveyard of St Mary's Church, Macosquin, Co. Londonderry, the CAF was asked by NIEA to carry out an evaluation of the likely survival of archaeological features and strata at the proposed site. St Mary's Church at Macosquin is generally believed to have been built upon the site of the Medieval Cistercian abbey of *Clarus Fons* (SMR No. LDY 7:12).

Two evaluation trenches, each measuring 20m by 2m, were mechanically excavated on the site of the proposed graveyard extension. No archaeological features, strata finds or other remains were encountered during the evaluation.

## Location

The site is located on flat ground at an OD of approximately 60m, in the townland of Glebe, Macosquin, Co. Derry / Londonderry (Irish Grid Ref: C823 286) (Figure 1). The Macosquin River is located about 30m east of the site and it is possible that the area may have been susceptible to inundation before modern flood defenses were constructed. The current land use is pasture, with deciduous tree cover around the field boundaries. The site is located about 80m to the east of the modern parish church.

There is a holy well Toberpatrick (*SMR No. LDY 7:13*) located about 60m to the north of the evaluation site.

The Merchant Tailors fortified house and bawn (LDY 7:045), now the site of the modern Glebe house, is located about 200m to the southwest of the excavation site.

## Historical Background

The Cistercian abbey of *Clarus Fons* (SMR No. LDY 7:12) was probably founded in the year 1217 and was a daughter house of the Cistercian abbey of Morimond in France, the only daughter house of Morimond in Ireland (Gwynn and Hadcock 1970, 139). The name of its founder is not known, nor is it certain if it was built by the Gaelic lords of north Derry / Londonderry, the O'Cahans, or by the de Galloways, who held much land in north Antrim and north Derry / Londonderry.

By the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century it is more certain that the abbey and its hinterland were under Anglo-Norman control. A grant exists, dating to between 1290 and 1305, by the Abbot of Macosquin of land at Lisschillin to William and Thomas de Sandal (Mullin and Mullin 1966, 51).

It can be demonstrated however that by the early fifteenth century Macosquin had probably fallen under Gaelic influence. Certainly all the references to north Co. Derry/Londonderry in the fifteenth century in the Annals of the Four Masters (O'Donovan 1856) suggest that the O'Cahans held the area securely. From the beginning of the fifteenth century there are a greater number of references to Macosquin in the historical record. This is due to progressively increasing involvement by Papal authority in the everyday running of local church institutions, not just in Ireland but throughout Christendom, from the thirteenth and fourteenth century onwards (Watt 1998, 130). This has left a legacy of Papal letters dealing with rather mundane, but enlightening, aspects of church life in Ireland. In particular they show that most of the abbots of Macosquin had Gaelic names, which would also suggest that the abbey had fallen into the sphere of O Cahan influence. O'Cahan control of this abbey is finally confirmed by the latest historical reference to Macosquin as a functioning monastery in the Annals of the Four Masters for 1505, when the Abbot of Magh-Coscrain, Donough O'Cahan was hanged by Dermot, son of Rory, son of Manus O'Cahan for which Dermot was himself maimed (O'Donovan 1856, 1281).

The date of the end of Macosquin as a Cistercian abbey is uncertain. It, like many monasteries in areas of Ireland outside English control, probably survived the dissolution enacted by the Act of Suppression of 1536 (Green 1992, 181). The mid-sixteenth century position of the areas ruling dynasty, the O’Cahans, was looking less than secure; but it was the MacQuillians and later the MacDonnells who were threatening them, not the English. The O’Cahans remained in control of Ciannachta however with Donnell Ballach O’Cahan succeeding Rory O’Cahan as lord of Ciannachta as late as 1598 (O’Donovan 1856, 1281). It is possible that the abbey could have continued in use until this time. It *had* ceased to be an abbey by 1603 however when an inquisition carried out for King James lists the lands and entitlements of the “late monastery of Meycosgum” (Griffith 1966, 58).

The inquisition of 1603 stated that the abbey site consisted of a church and church-yard and that the monastery held two quarters of land at Ferranmonastragh, one ballyboe called Sowlenamanagh, five acres to the east of the abbey, two quarters of land in Inishowen at Coolart and Burt. In addition the Monastery had a grange “in the land of McConnell” which was stated to be in Scotland (Griffith 1966, 58), although perhaps significantly there is a townland called Kilmaconnell close to Macosquin. Anne Hamlin states that the abbey of Macosquin held the Grange of Agivey (Hamlin 1976, 546) although she does not reference her source for this information.

The plantation settlement at Macosquin was mentioned several times in early seventeenth century documents. A survey, carried out by Nicholas Pynnar in 1619 mentions the Merchant Tailors fortified house as being complete but with an unfinished bawn. It mentions six freeholders with eighteen leaseholders and five cottagers. This made a total of 29 British families and 40 armed men. No mention is made of the native Irish population (Russell and Prendergast 1880, 378). A survey of the plantation of Londonderry carried out by Thomas Phillips, which reported to the king in 1622, describes the Merchant Tailors house and 2 freeholders, and a total of 36 British men, 29 armed and 124 “natives”. The castle is described as being complete but with gaps in the bawn wall for the insertion of flankers (Russell and Prendergast 1880, 364). An accompanying map by Raven (Moody 1939, 101) shows the location of the parish church and several houses aligned along a street, with the Merchant Tailors building and a mill at the south end of the settlement (Figure 2). Records of the accounts of George Casterdyne, agent for the Merchant Tailors detail many constructional aspects of the main plantation period structures at Macosquin (Blades 1981, 45). The accounts of the construction of the village show houses constructed in stone, with slated roofs and brick only used in the construction of chimneys. In addition there are two, smaller houses, not recorded in the accounts of George Casterdyne, located east of the church close to the bank of the Macosquin river. These houses are depicted more simply than the houses along the “main street” between Macosquin parish church and the Merchant Tailors fortified house. They are shown as having thatched roofs, possibly with stone walls, windows and slightly elaborated chimneys. There are no records of these two structures however and their location, removed somewhat from the rest of the village, may indicate that they were privately owned rather than owned and leased by the Merchant Tailors company.

The Abbey is discussed at length in the ordnance survey memoirs. It is stated that the Abbey was destroyed by Cromwell (Day and McWilliams 1993, 95). This is presumably a local tradition and is unlikely to have any validity as it seems clear from both the King James inquisition of 1603 and Phillips survey of 1622 that the Abbey had given way to the Parish Church at Macosquin long before Cromwell came to Ireland. Ruins of the Abbey were said in the Ordnance Survey Memoirs to have been standing within living memory (at the time of the compiling of the Ordnance Survey Fair sheets from 1831 to 1836), but to have been demolished to provide building stone for the Glebe. These ruins were said to consist of a gable and chimneys. A causeway was said to connect the Church and the Glebe (*ibid.*). A second causeway was said to connect the church and a near by spring, called Tubber na dhuy, the same well as Toberpatrick mentioned above (*ibid.*). The gravel and stones of this road were said to have been uncovered during cultivation of the field between the two (*ibid.*). A wall of old masonry is described “which once enclosed or surrounded the house”, the “house” presumably being the Glebe. This wall is mentioned as having an old gateway through which the causeway to the church passed (*ibid.*). The wall of the modern graveyard was also reckoned to be old by the writers of the Ordnance Survey Memoirs although it is described as being “half formed of fragments of newly inserted work” (*ibid.*).

A sketch plan of Macosquin is to be found amongst the Ordnance Survey Field Sheets (Figure 3). It shows Macosquin Church and it also shows, what it calls the “abbey”. It is interesting that the position of the “abbey” on this sketch plan, and the position of the Merchant Tailors’ house on the Raven Map seem to be the same.

Previous archaeological excavations at the site.

An archaeological excavation (Figure 1) was carried out by Nick Brannon at Macosquin in the 1980's (Brannon 1983). Brannon excavated an area 50m south-west of the present church and uncovered remains of a late Medieval and a Post-Medieval ditch.

A geophysical survey was conducted by the CAF in 2006 (Trick 2006) in advance of the graveyard extension at Macosquin which revealed a number of anomalies (Figure 1). These anomalies were tested in a subsequent excavation (McSparron 2007) which revealed the existence of a late medieval ditch closely following the line of the field boundary at the north-west of the site.

## Methodology

Two test trenches, measuring 20m by 2m, were excavated in the area of the proposed graveyard extension not evaluated in the 2006 excavations (Figure 4), under the supervision of the license holder. The excavation was carried out by a back acting mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless "sheugh" bucket. The excavation continued until subsoil was detected.

In addition two small test pits, were excavated, to the east of the current graveyard extension area and to the west of the Macosquin River to inform the site engineer of the depth of the water table.

## Results

### Trench 1

In this trench brown loam topsoil varying from 20 to 30cm in thickness was stratified above an orange brown clay subsoil with large numbers of rounded, and some angular, stones within it. In a number of places the dragging of these stones by the mechanical excavator left an irregular subsoil surface but in no places were any archaeological features, strata or artefacts detected (Plate 1 & 3).

### Trench 2

This trench was very similar to Trench 1 with a similar brown loam topsoil sitting on an orange brown stony clay subsoil. As with Trench 1 dragging of stones in the subsoil by the digger bucket left an unclean subsoil surface. There were no archaeological features, strata or artefacts uncovered in this trench (Plate 2 & 3).

### Engineering test pits

Two small engineering test pits were excavated at the edge of the graveyard site closest to the river on the south east. The digging of these two trenches was not monitored by the licensee however it seemed clear from the sections of both pits that no archaeological features or strata were disturbed (Plate 4).

## Conclusions

The absence of archaeological features and the lack of artefacts from the two test trenches makes it unlikely that there are archaeological finds or features at the site of the proposed graveyard extension.

## Bibliography

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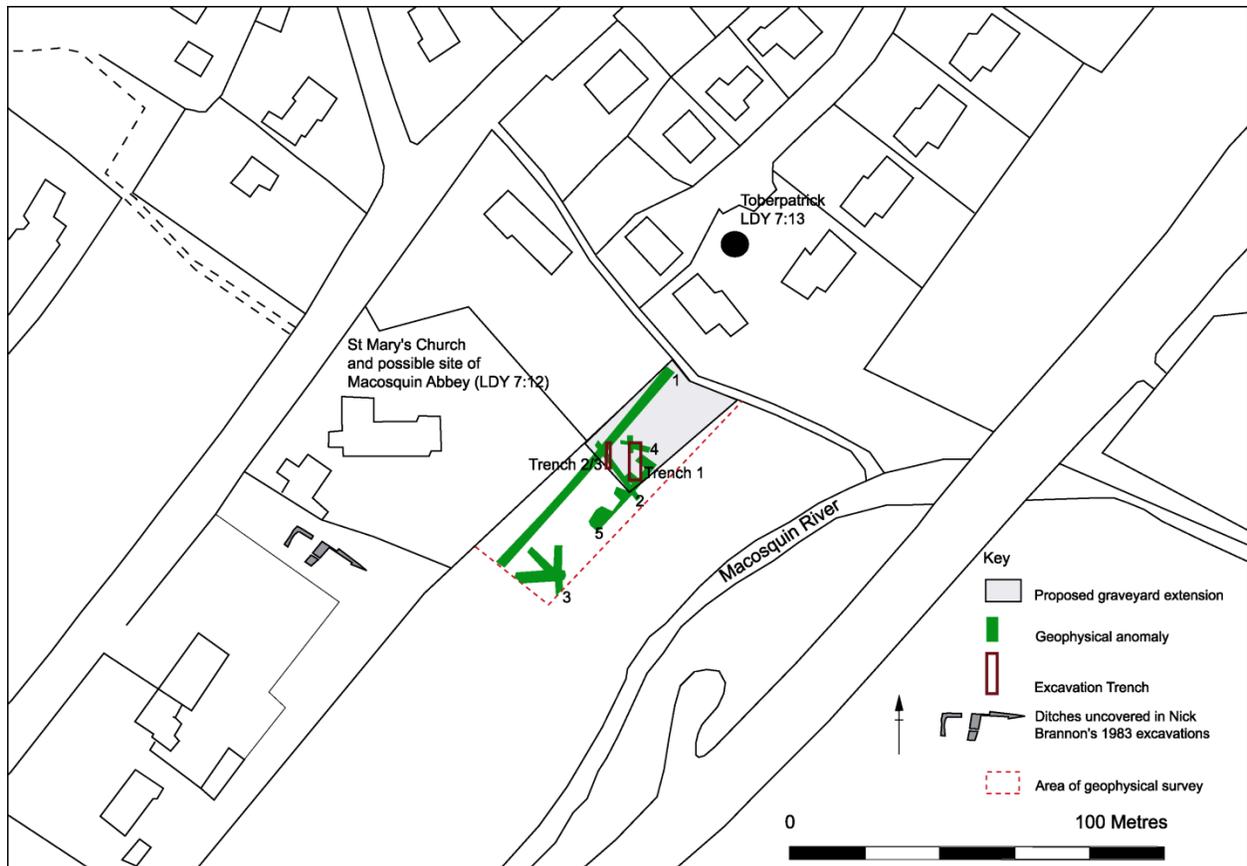


Figure 1: Map showing St. Mary's Church, the position of geophysical anomalies, the excavated features uncovered by Brannon (1983) and the trenches excavated by CAF (McSparron 2007)

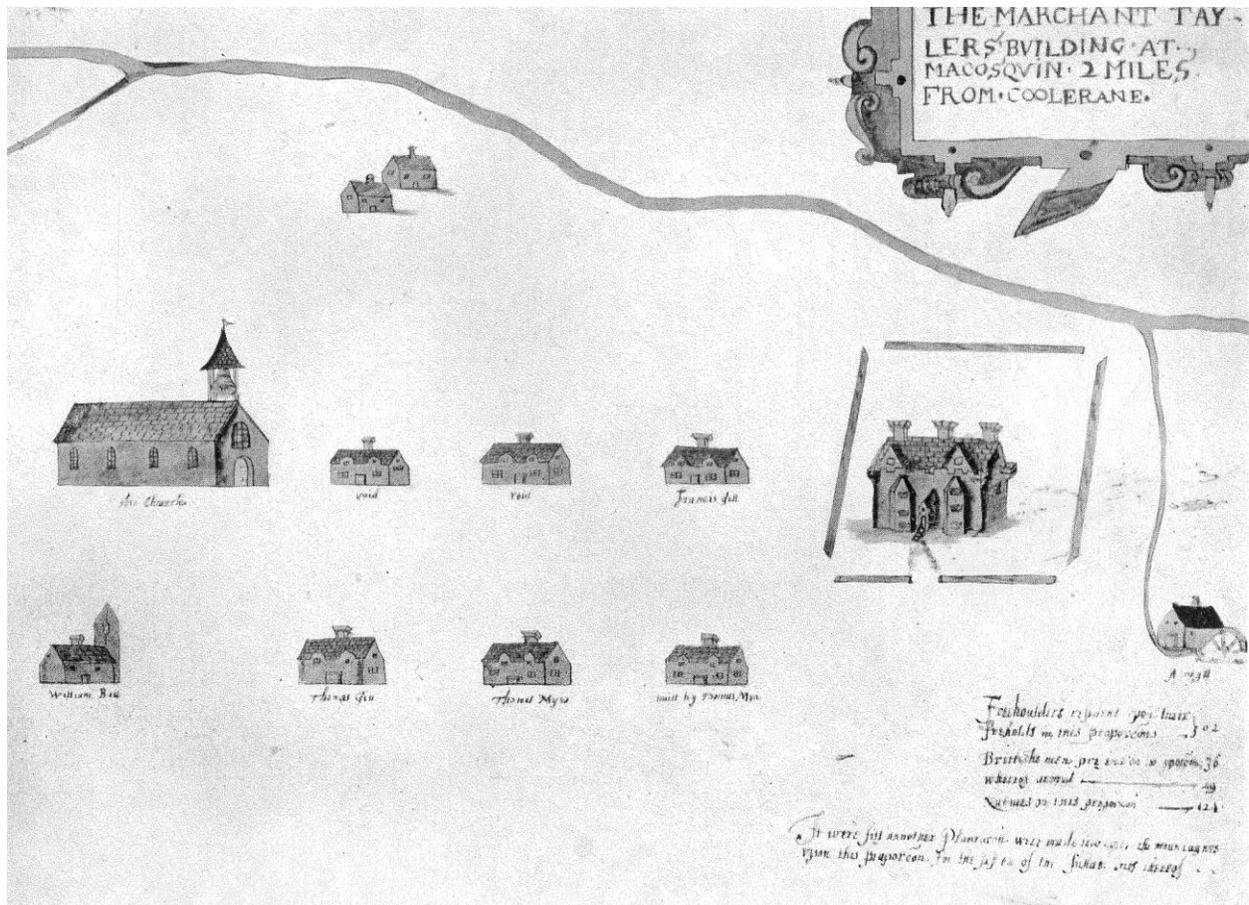


Figure 2: The Raven Map of Macosquin showing the church, Merchant Tailors building and vernacular housing.



Figure 3: Aerial Photograph of Macosquin overlaid with OS sketch map locating Abbey at site of Merchant Tailors building and later rectory

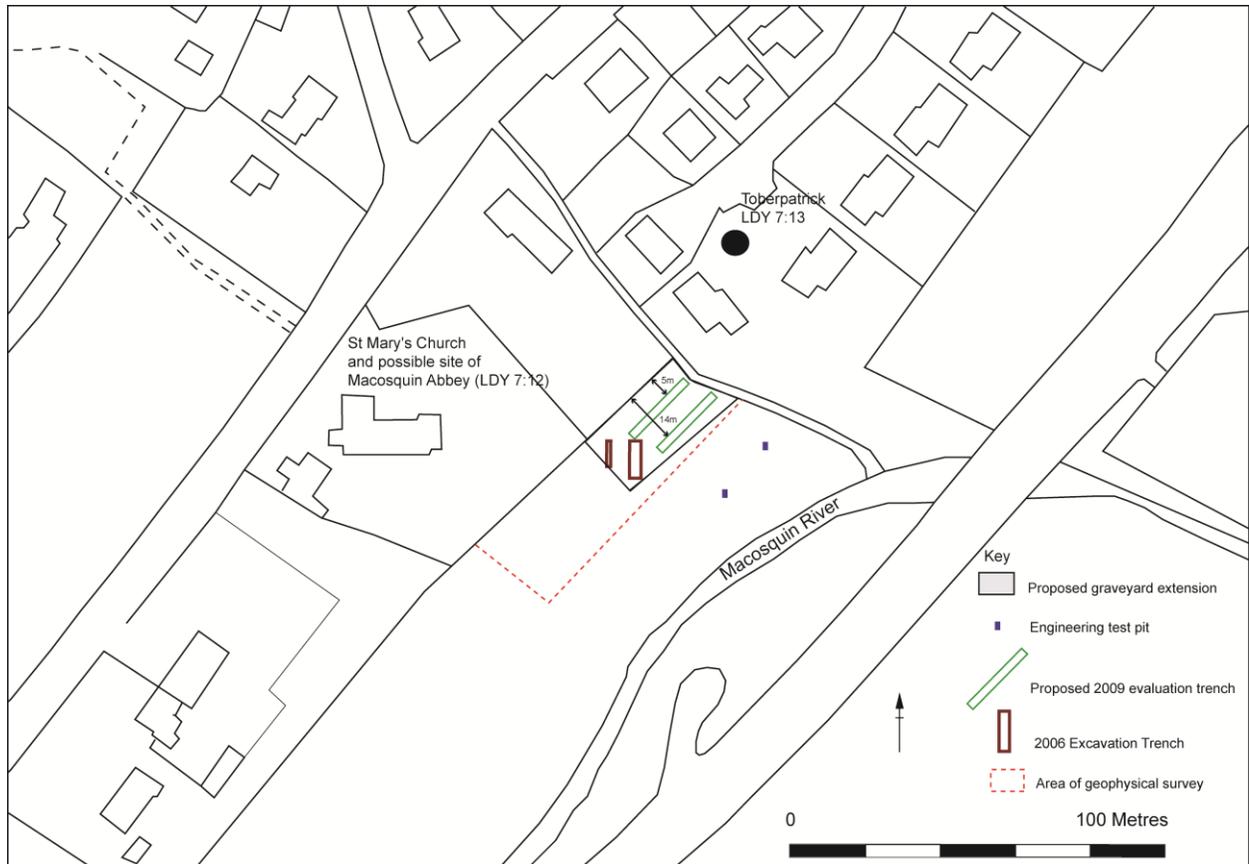


Figure 4: Evaluation and engineering trenches at Macosquin.



Plate 1: Trench 1



Plate 2: Trench 2



Plate 3: Location of Trench 1 and 2 relative to the north western field boundary



Plate 4: Engineering test pit