



Monitoring Report No. 193

**St. Mary's Church Hall
Macosquin
Co. Antrim.**

AE/09/161

Site Specific Information

Site Name: St. Mary's Church Hall, Macosquin

Townland: Glebe

SMR No: LDY 7:12

Grid Ref: Grid Ref. C823 286

County: Londonderry

Excavation License No: AE/09/161

Dates of Monitoring: 13th and 23rd November 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: Monitoring of mechanical excavation of foundation trenches for church hall extension.

Size of area opened: Approximately 15m²

Archaeological Monitoring at St Mary's Church Hall, Macosquin, Co. Londonderry

Introduction

The CAF were asked by the NIEA to carry out archaeological monitoring of intrusive building works during the extension of the church hall of St. Mary's Church, Macosquin, Co. Londonderry. St. Mary's Church at Macosquin is generally believed to be built upon the site of the Medieval Cistercian abbey of *Clarus Fons* (SMR No. LDY 7:12).

Location

The church hall 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), approximately 5m southwest of the existing church porch. The Macosquin River is located about 80m east of the site. There is a holy well Toberpatrick (SMR No. LDY 7:13) located approximately 80m to the northwest of the modern Macosquin Parish Church. The Merchant Tailors fortified house and bawn (LDY 7:45), now the site of the Glebe, is located about 200m to the southwest of the excavation site.

The proposed porch extension to the church hall will take up the gap between the northeast of the existing church hall and the current church porch. The extension to the southeast of the church hall will take up most of the gap between the existing church hall and the graveyard wall (Figure 4).

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 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-Coscraín, 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

The current church hall is a nineteenth century building and is being augmented by the addition of a porch to the north east of the current building and the reconstruction and slight extension of the existing kitchen and toilet block to the east. As the renovations to the building and the construction of the extensions are designed to sit higher than the existing floor layer there was little likelihood of most of the building work disturbing archaeological strata. However there were a number of walls being built which had the potential to disturb archaeological strata (Figure 4).

There are four potential areas where it was suspected archaeological remains could have been disturbed

- 1) The west wall of the new porch.
- 2) The east wall of the new porch.
- 3) Removal of an existing stone retaining wall.
- 4) The east wall of the toilet block and kitchen extension.

All invasive ground works at these four areas were monitored by the licensed archaeologist.

Results

Area 1. Excavation of the west wall foundation trench in this area revealed the tarmac of the church carpark directly overlaying loam and sand layers, probably bedding layers for the tarmac. These layers were immediately above the natural subsoil. No archaeological finds or features were uncovered (Photo 1).

Area 2. In this area excavation of the new east wall foundation trench showed a mixed loam layer immediately above the subsoil. No archaeological finds or features were found (Photo 2).

Area 3. This retaining wall was removed by mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision. No artefacts or features were disturbed by this work (Photo 2 and 3).

Area 4. In this area excavation of the foundation trench for the east wall of the toilet block and kitchen extension, revealed a layer of loam and mid 20th century building materials, directly overlaying the natural subsoil. There was no indication of archaeological artefacts or features (Photo 4).

Conclusions

All ground works likely to disturb archaeological strata at the extension to St. Mary's Church Hall, Macosquin, Co. Antrim, were monitored by the licensed archaeologist. No archaeological artefacts or features were uncovered.

Bibliography

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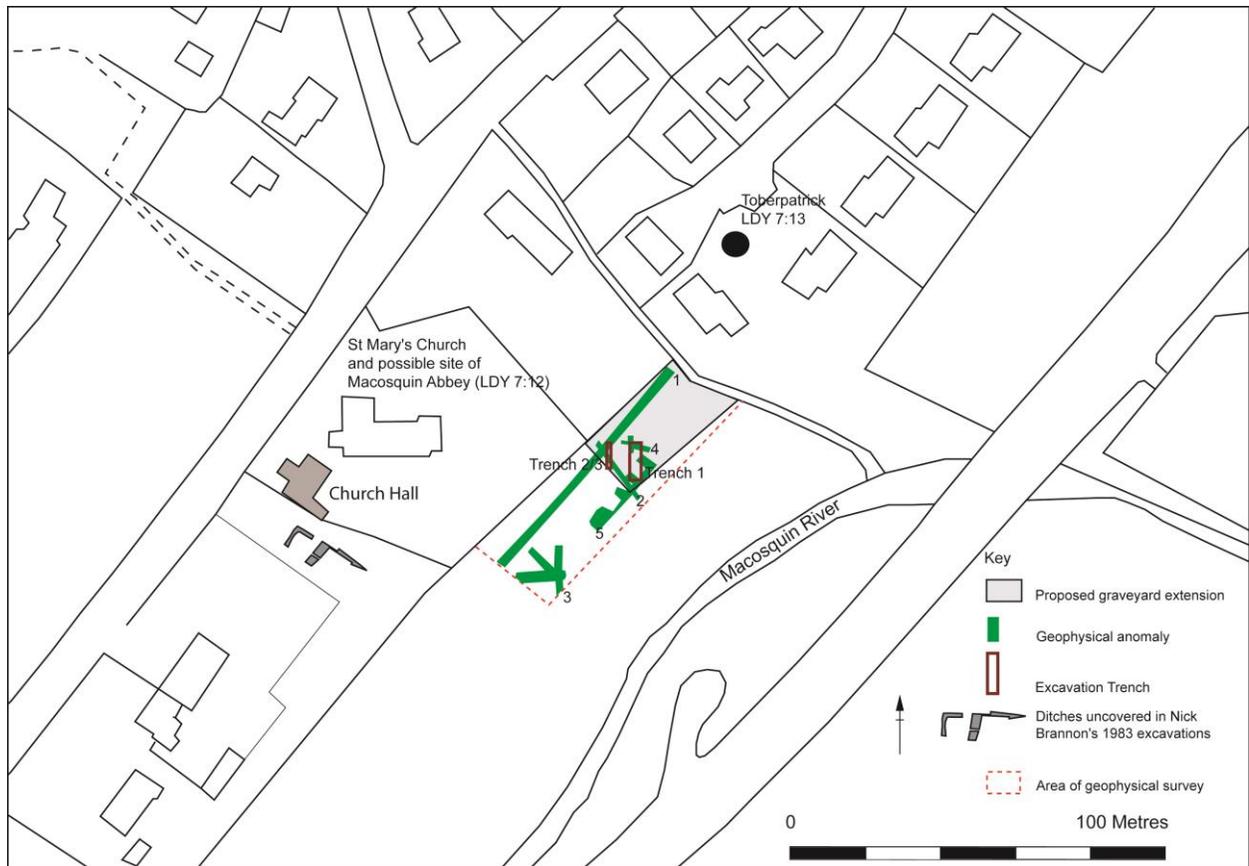


Figure 1: Map showing St. Mary's Church, the position of geophysical anomalies, the excavated features uncovered by Brannon (1983) and the trenches excavated by CAF (McSparron 2007)

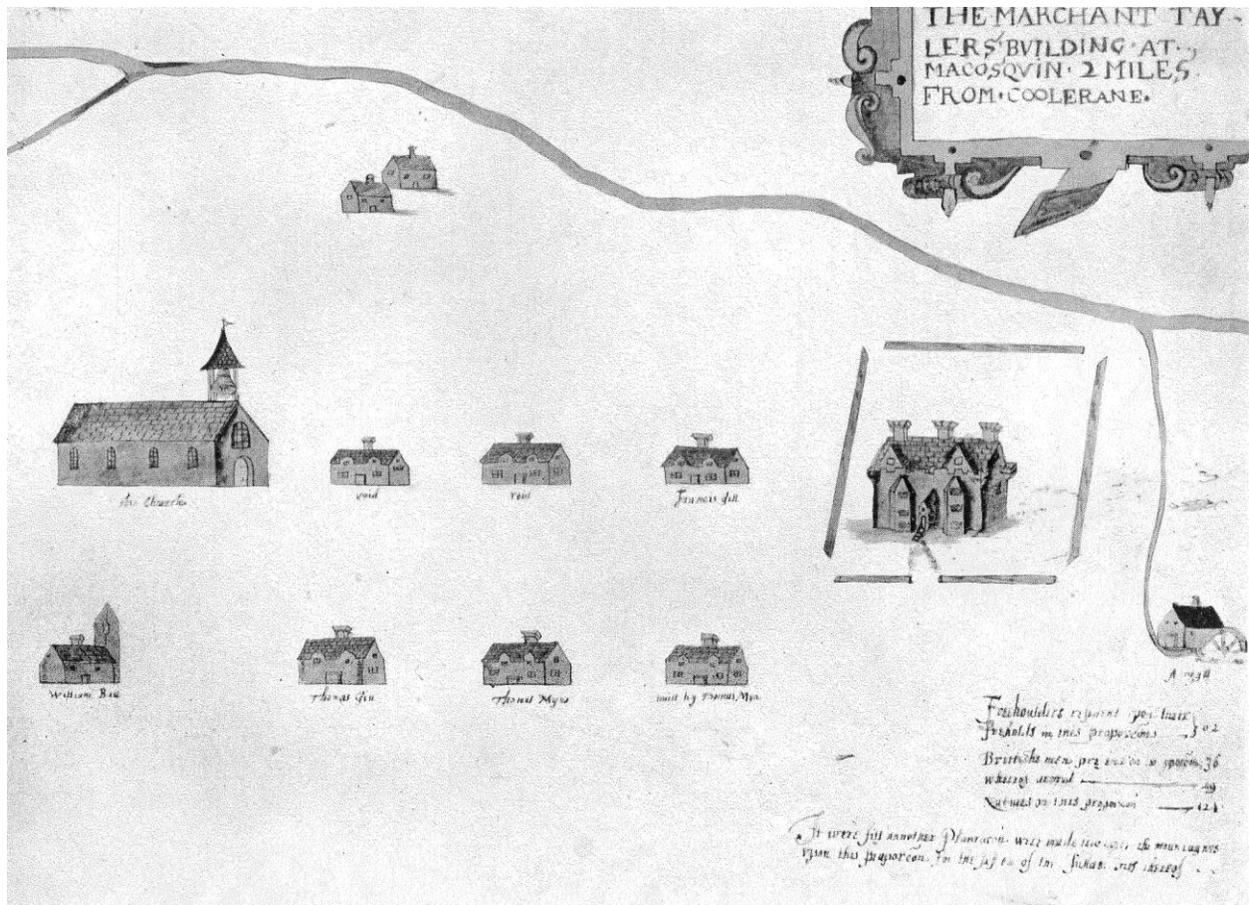


Figure 2: The Raven Map of Macosquin showing the church, Merchant Tailors building and vernacular housing.

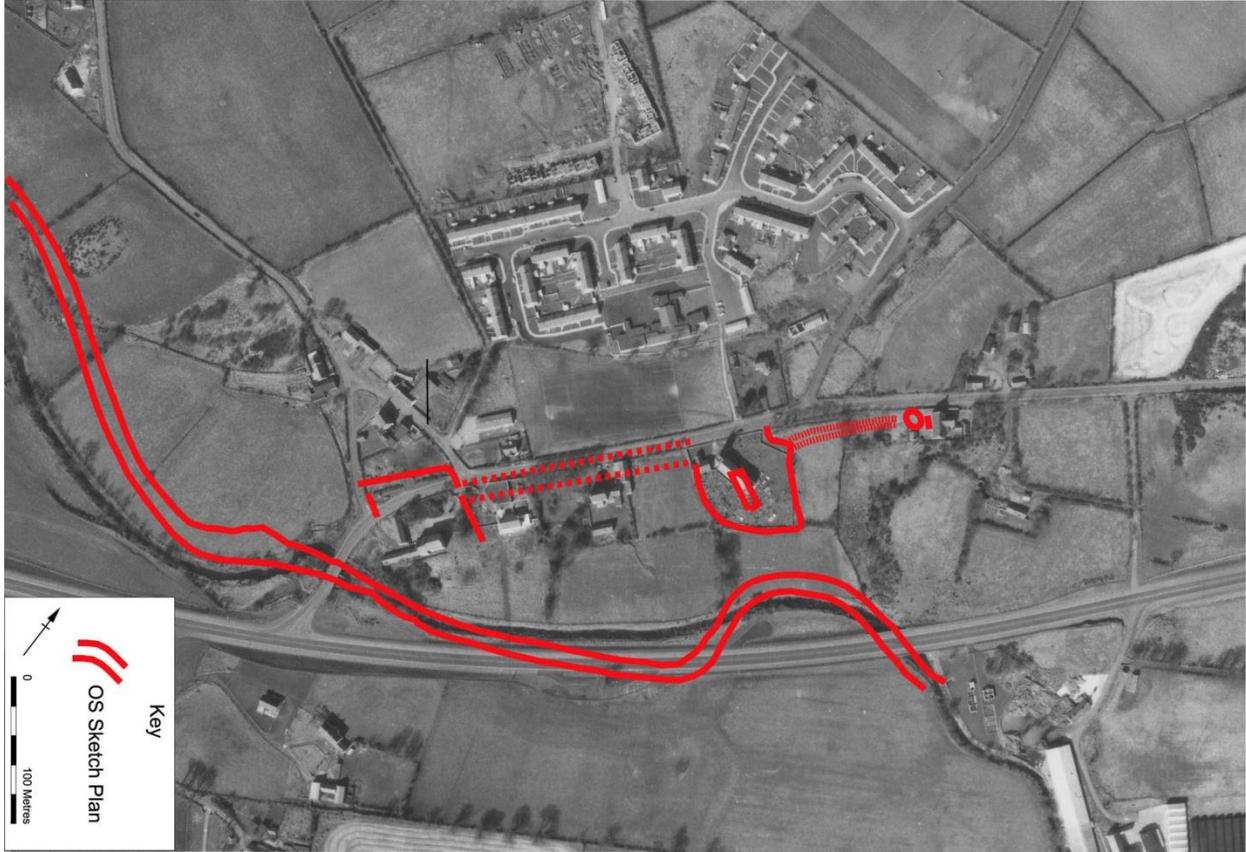


Figure 3: Aerial Photograph of Macosquin overlaid with OS sketch map locating Abbey at site of Merchant Tailors building and later rectory



Photo 1: Foundation trench of west wall of porch (Area 1) showing tarmac bedding layers and natural subsoil.



Photo 2: Foundation for east wall of porch (Area 2) after excavation, showing location of removed retaining wall (Area 3) in background.



Photo 3: Removal of retaining wall (Area 3) to west of graveyard by mechanical excavator.



Photo 4: Area 4 showing foundation trench for east wall of kitchen block / toilet extension.