



Monitoring Report No. 219

**First Derry Presbyterian Church,
Londonderry.**

AE/10/93

**Cormac McSparron
Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork
Queen's University Belfast**

Site Specific Information

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| <i>Site Name:</i> | First Derry Presbyterian Church |
| <i>Townland:</i> | Londonderry |
| <i>SMR No:</i> | n/a |
| <i>Grid Ref:</i> | Grid Ref. C4334016660 |
| <i>County:</i> | Londonderry |
| <i>Excavation License No:</i> | AE/10/93 |
| <i>Dates of Monitoring:</i> | 5 th to 9 th July 2010 |
| <i>Archaeologists Present:</i> | Cormac McSparron, Ruairi O'Baoill and Ruth Logue, Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, QUB. |
| <i>Brief Summary:</i> | Probable late seventeenth century stone wall found above possible Siege of Derry period human remains in two trenches excavated in the interior of First Derry Presbyterian Church |
| <i>Type of evaluation:</i> | Manual excavation |
| <i>Size of area opened:</i> | Two 2m by 2m trenches. |

Trial Excavations at First Derry Presbyterian Church

Renovations are currently ongoing at First Derry Presbyterian Church. The Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, Queen's University Belfast, was asked by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to use the opportunity provided by these renovations to carry out an evaluation excavation at the church. Two trenches, measuring approximately 2m by 2m were excavated in two holes in the floorboards which had been opened for the placement of temporary roof supports. The excavation commenced on 5th July 2010 and finished on 9th July 2010. The excavations uncovered the remains of an earlier, probably late seventeenth century, wall running approximately northeast to southwest. It was situated above strata which contained burials in association with artefacts of later seventeenth century date. It was possible in part of one of the trenches to continue the excavation to what may have been natural subsoil, although given the nature of the small area excavated it was not possible to state with certainty that it had not been re-deposited from another location.

The excavation was directed by Cormac McSparron of the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, assisted by a team from the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork. The project was funded by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. The excavation was carried out under excavation licence number AE/10/93.

Location

First Derry Presbyterian Church is located in central Londonderry along Magazine Street Upper, at the west side of the walled city (Grid Ref. C4334016660), at an OD of approximately 25m (Figures 1 & 2). The walled city occupies a portion of the "Island" of Derry. The Island is a wedge shaped area of land defined by the Foyle to the east and the low lying Bogside to the west. It has an area of approximately 80 hectares and a maximum OD of about 40m. The underlying geology of the Island is Silurian shale covered by boulder clay.

Historical background

There is little direct evidence for early Prehistoric occupation at Derry (Thomas 2005, 1), despite the potentially favourable location. The earliest known use or settlement of Derry seems to have occurred in the sixth century with the founding of the monastery there, usually attributed to Coluim Cille, although it seems likely that it was not actually founded by Coluim Cille, but rather another member of the ruling Cenél Connaill dynasty (*ibid*). It is possible that Derry was at this stage an important centre of the Cenél Connaill and that, in the aftermath of the granting of this land to the church, they moved their settlement to the Grianán of Aileach (Thomas 2005, 1). The exact location and the dispersal of the monastery are uncertain, although it may have occupied a considerable portion of the Island, an early monastic enclosure typically having a diameter around or in excess of 100m.

In the twelfth century the Cenél Connaill were replaced by the Cenél nEogain as the dominant dynasty in this area which indirectly resulted in an episode of considerable ecclesiastical building in Derry. Under the leadership of a new bishop Flaithbertach Ó Brolcháin, Derry became a diocesan centre in 1150 with a cathedral, the Tempull Mór, constructed in 1164.

The Anglo-Norman Earldom of Ulster influenced Derry from the end of the twelfth through to the early fourteenth century. This era saw the construction of Dominican and Augustinian monasteries in Derry.

The proposed excavation at the First Derry Presbyterian Church is located approximately 100m from the nineteenth century St Augustine's Church (Figures 1 & 2). The Augustinian Friary may be located at or close to the site of this church (McSparron 1972). Remarks by Bishop Alexander, the then Bishop of Derry, at the opening of the church in 1872, suggest that there was continuity of worship at the site from the early Middle Ages; "(it) occupies as nearly as possible the site of the ancient church of St Augustine, which was erected about the middle of the sixth century" (*ibid*). Whether Bishop Alexander was confused, overly simplifying Derry's historical geography, or whether he was relating an ancient tradition implying that this was also the location of the early monastic centre at Derry is uncertain.

Derry was used as a royal garrison in 1566. After a six month period which saw disease among the men and fire sweep through the garrison, in the process damaging the Tempull Mór which was being used as a munitions store, the town was abandoned.

In 1600 Sir Henry Docwra's forces entered the town, constructed earthen fortifications and built a hospital. He attracted some settlers but much momentum in the settlement of the town was lost with the sale of the town to his less able deputy and in 1608 the town was destroyed by Sir Cahir O'Doherty (Thomas 2005, 3).

From 1610 to 1618 the Honourable Irish Society built the planned, walled, town of Londonderry. The area enclosed by the walls was approximately 13 hectares. It did not sit squarely on the summit of the Island, but so as to protect the strategically important access to the Foyle sat towards its north end. The initial phase of town construction was originally intended to provide 200 houses and room for 300 more. However by 1618 there were between 92 and 215 houses built, dependant differing contemporary definitions of a house, and only room for at most an additional 100 houses (Thomas 2005, 4).

First Derry Presbyterian Church

Prior to 1633 Anglican worship in Londonderry had taken place at the church of the former Augustinian Friary. In that year St. Columb's Cathedral was built and the "little church" as the Augustinian Friary church was henceforth known, was granted for the use of the Presbyterians (McSparron 1972). In 1672 a Presbyterian Meeting house seems to have been constructed on Magazine Street, possibly on or close to the site of the later First Presbyterian Church. This church may have been suppressed but in 1690 the First Derry Presbyterian Church was constructed on Magazine Street Upper, with the assistance of a grant from Queen Mary in recognition of the bravery of the townsfolk displayed during the siege (Ferguson et al., 1970, 26).

This church was rebuilt in 1780 and repaired in 1828, at a cost of £700, when a new facade was added to the structure. Further restoration work was carried out in 1896 by Pinkerton and again in 1903 when Pinkerton oversaw further work on the church facade (*ibid*).

The First Derry Presbyterian Church is situated within the walled town and probably also within the line of the earthen defences of Dowcra's garrison. It is difficult to be certain if it is located on the site of buildings constructed during these early seventeenth century building phases as the map evidence is ambiguous.

Methodology

Two trenches, measuring approximately 2m by 2m, were excavated in the southeast of the church (Figure 3). Their locations were chosen because the church floorboards, which it is hoped can be mostly retained for re-use, had already been cut for the positioning of temporary roof supports. The trenches were excavated manually and the archaeological strata were recorded using the standard context recording system supplemented by scale drawings and photographs. Artefacts were recorded by trench and archaeological stratum.

After the excavation the trenches were backfilled.

The excavation

Trench 1 (Figure s 4 & 5)

This trench measured 2.30m northwest to southeast by 1.80m northeast to southwest. Its parameters were confined by the size of the opening in the floorboards made by the insertion of the roof support. After clearing away a mix of earth and building rubble (Context 1) the presence of a mortared stone wall (Context 2)(Figures 4, 5 and Photo 1) was detected running northeast to southwest across the trench. It was approximately 0.70m wide and 0.40m deep, with five courses of thin cut stone blocks surviving. The stone blocks appear to be typical of the shale / schist type rocks commonly found in the Londonderry area. At either side of the trench small pillars of stones, brick and mortar had been constructed on top of this wall to provide support for the existing floor joists. It was decided to leave this wall undisturbed because it was under no direct threat from the church renovations and because it was feared that disturbing the wall might undermine the joist supports based upon it and lead to subsidence of the floor.

Because of the decision to leave this wall (Context 2) *in situ* further excavations were confined to the northwestern half of this trench. The stone wall (Context 2) rested upon a dark brown loam (Context 3) (Figure 4) which contained brick and mortar chunks, some fragments of charcoal and was approximately 25cm thick. Artefacts found in this layer included oyster shell, animal bone and one fragment of Staffordshire Trilled Slipware, which dates to the late 17th to early 18th centuries. Context 3 is situated above a similar dark brown loam (Context 5) which is distinguished from Context 3 by the absence of building rubble and larger stones within it and which was 17cm deep. To the north side of the trench these two layers were separated by a thin spread of mortar (Context 4) which was up to 10cm thick and

was probably indicative of a phase of construction activity when mortar was dropped from the trowels of stone masons. A clay pipe bowl dating to the latter half of the seventeenth century was found within this mortar spread. Within Context 5 there was a skull (Context 10) (Figures 4, 5 and Photo 2) which protruded from the section across the centre of the site. This skull ran under the wall Context 3 which was not being removed and consequently it was both unnecessary and impractical to attempt to excavate this skull and any attached human remains completely, so it was left *in situ*. It seems likely however from the way it was situated that it belonged to a more extensive, possibly fully articulated skeleton, which was in the supine, extended position and orientated approximately west to east. Artefacts from Context 5 included fragments of three pipe bowls, and a fourth complete pipe bowl, all mid to late seventeenth century in date, several fragments of clay pipe stems, one fragment of possible Westerwald Stoneware pottery from Germany, two sherds of Tin Glazed Earthenware, which could be English, Irish or European, Carrickfergus Brown Ware and Staffordshire Manganese Mottled Ware . These ceramic finds are all consistent with a date for Context 5 in the late seventeenth century.

Beneath the dark brown loam (Context 5) was a slightly lighter brown clay loam (Context 6) (Figure 5) which was 12cm thick and which contained within its matrix some mortar chunks consistent with the collapse from a nearby building. This layer was somewhat firmer than the softer loams above it. It lay above a much more sandy mid brown layer (Context 7) (Figure 5) which was 20cm thick.

While cleaning the north section of the trench a second set of articulated human remains (Context 11) (Photo 2) was detected projecting slightly from the section. These were sitting at the interface between Context 6 and 7, and as such were situated at a stratigraphically lower level, and physically 0.30m lower, than the previously observed skull (Context 10), although it is possible that there may have been little time lapse between these two burials. As these human remains were almost completely outside the area of excavation they were not subjected to further excavation after their initial discovery.

Beneath Context 7 there was a reddish sand possibly with a trace of loam within its matrix (Context 8) (Figure 5). It was only a few centimetres thick and it seems likely that this was simply an eroded subsoil layer mixed with a small amount of loam. It was above a much firmer orange brown sandy clay layer (Context 9) (Figure 5 and Photo 2) which is likely to be the natural subsoil.

The excavation did not test the subsoil at the site; given the size of the trenches the excavation at Trench 1 was approaching the limit of a safe working depth by the end of the dig. As further excavation of this trench was not possible, recording was completed and the trench backfilled at this stage.

Trench 2 (Figures 6 & 7)

Immediately upon clearing off the topsoil and rubble (Context 201), a mortared wall (Context 202) was exposed (Figures 6 & 7 and Photos 3 & 4). This wall appears to be a continuation of the wall (Context 2) found in Trench 1. To the east side of the wall there was a brown loam layer (Context 203) (Figure 6 and Photo 3) which was very similar to the brown loam (Context 3) in Trench 1. It was partially covered by a patchy mortar deposit (Context 204) (Figure 7) which butted the wall (Context 202) and may be associated with its construction. Because of the confined working space to the east of the wall excavation was paused at that side of the trench. To the west of the wall under the rubble and topsoil mix (Context 201) there was the mortar spread (Context 204) above a brown loam deposit which was labeled (Context 205) (Figure 7) but which was essentially the same layer as Context 203 at the east of the trench. This layer contained a number of fragments of bone, probably mostly animal bone but some fragments of which may potentially be human. Three pieces of Carrickfergus Brown Ware, which dates from the late Seventeenth to early Eighteenth Centuries, were found in this layer as were two clay pipe stems of uncertain date.

When this loam was removed a stone setting was encountered (Context 208) composed of small elongated shale blocks laid recumbently on their narrow edge and mortared into place. The setting had a camber and dropped off slightly towards the northwest. To the east side the setting had been truncated by the wall (Context 202) which cut it.

The southern half of this stone setting was removed. A dark loam (Context 206) (Figure 6) was uncovered immediately below the stones of Context 208 at the west end of the trench. It contained three fragments of clay pipe stem. Beneath the rest of the stone setting was a dark grey / brown silty loam (Context 209) (Figure 6 & 7), which was similar to Context 5 in Trench 1. As this layer was being excavated human remains were encountered (Context 210) (Figure 6). The remains were the articulated lower two thirds of a person orientated south-southwest to north-northeast. Since these remains were not at risk of destruction during the church renovations it was decided that it was both ethically and archaeologically preferable that they be left in situ and reburied. As it was not possible to dig further in this trench without disturbing the remains excavation was paused at this stage, recording completed and the trench backfilled.

Context 209 contained a rich variety of artefacts. Carrickfergus Brown Ware, Staffordshire Trilled Slip Ware and Tin Glazed Earthenware pottery sherds all of which date to the late Seventeenth to early

Eighteenth Centuries were uncovered, as well as 21 clay pipe stem fragments, pieces of roof tile and brick fragments of uncertain date. One piece of North Devon Gravel Free pottery, which dates to the early seventeenth century, was also found from this layer.

At the west side of the trench, to the west of the stone setting Context 208, there was a reddish brown loam layer (Context 207) (Figure 6). It was stratified beneath (206) but its relationship to Context 209 is uncertain. It was not fully excavated but an initial trowel of its surface found that it was rich in artefacts with animal bone, some possible human bone, fragments of roof tile, glass, eight clay pipe stems and one clay pipe bowl being found. The clay pipe bowl dated to the mid to late seventeenth century.

Artefacts (Table 1)

The assemblage of artefacts from the two trenches is typical of the sorts of artefact assemblages found on seventeenth century sites in Ulster. The dating of the site is greatly facilitated by the presence of the clay pipe bowls which can be reliably dated to quite narrow periods. Clay pipe bowl styles changed frequently during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries and the comparative fragility of the pipes means that they were generally dumped within a few weeks or months after manufacture.

Consequently they are an excellent aid to dating archaeological strata. The clay pipe bowls found in the excavated trenches at First Derry Presbyterian Church are typical of pipes manufactured from the 1660's to 1680's (Ayto 1979). The other artefacts are compatible with the dating of the clay pipes. One fragment of pottery, the North Devon Gravel Free is significantly earlier than this, dating to the early seventeenth century, but it has become incorporated into later soils. The other pottery types found, the Staffordshire Slip Ware and Manganese Mottled, Carrickfergus Brown Ware and Tin Glazed earthen ware all are produced in the latter half of the seventeenth century, although all continue their production and use into the eighteenth century and in the case of the Tin Glazed Earthenwares (Delft) beyond.

Discussion

The archaeological features and strata uncovered in both Trench 1 and Trench 2 are similar. Immediately beneath a loam and rubble topsoil, a mortared stone wall (Context 2 / Context 202) was uncovered running approximately northeast to southwest in both trenches. This wall was situated above brown loam layers which contained within them evidence for the burials of three individuals. The stratigraphic location of the three burials was not identical, and there were subtle differences in the sequence of buildup of soil layers in Trench 1 and 2, however it is likely that the burials were contemporary or near contemporary. Deposits within burial areas can frequently be complex as there is continual cutting of graves, back filling and re-cutting and the fact that there are subtle stratigraphic differences between the two trenches is likely to reflect this. Of more significance is the collection of artefacts from the soils immediately around the burials. The artefacts collectively show the strata beneath the stone wall to have built up in the latter half of the seventeenth century, most probably the 1660s to 1680s. This suggests that the wall dates to, or immediately after this period. It is possible that this wall therefore is part of the earliest incarnation of the First Derry Presbyterian Church at this site, whose construction commenced in 1690.

The date of the burials at the site, which cut through these late seventeenth century strata, suggests that these burials must also date to that time period. It is not impossible that these burials are simply normal burials, perhaps the continuation of a tradition of burial in the vicinity of St Augustine's Church, with its monastic ancestry. However if these were burials in an ancient monastic graveyard we might expect even more evidence of human remains within the small area of excavation and we might also expect artefacts dating to the Medieval Period, which are conspicuously absent from this site.

It is also possible that these burials are not typical burials in a recognized burial ground or church yard. It is interesting that the orientation of the burials is not the same. The skeleton Context 11, found at the southwest facing section of Trench 1, was orientated approximately west-northwest to east-southeast. The skeleton Context 210, found in Trench 2 was orientated south-southwest to north-northeast. The difference between the orientations of these two skeletons was greater than 90°, much more than the degree of variance in orientation usually observed in a Christian cemetery, where most burials will be orientated approximately west to east. The skull (Context 10) from its resting position, and assuming it is attached to an articulated skeleton, also appears to be orientated approximately west to east. The aberrant orientation of Skeleton 210, which is close to south to north, suggests that it may have been a less formal burial than was usual. This raises the possibility that it, and the burials surrounding it, may

not have been formal burials within a graveyard but hurried burials in a convenient location. Given the history of seventeenth century Derry and the artefactual collection which seems to point at a date in the 1660s to 1680s it seems reasonable to suggest that the burials are likely to have been hurried and dating to the period of the Siege of Derry.

Conclusions

The objective of the evaluation excavation at First Derry Presbyterian Church was to ascertain if there was any survival of archaeological strata, features or structures at the site and to attempt to get an impression of the nature and dating of any archaeological remains found. The excavations were able to identify the existence of a wall which is likely to be part of the early structure of the church and beneath it the existence of burials which are likely to date to the period of the Siege of Derry. These burials were found in strata which contained seventeenth century artefacts but seem to contain no earlier Medieval artefacts.

Given that it has now been demonstrated that there is survival of structures, burials and seventeenth century strata at these two trenches it seems likely that there is further survival of archaeological material under other portions of the church.

Bibliography

Ayto, E.G., 1979 *Clay Tobacco Pipes*, Shire Publications

Ferguson, W.S., Rowan A.J., Tracey J.J., 1970 *Historic buildings, groups of buildings, areas of architectural importance in and near the City of Derry*, Ulster Architectural Heritage Society.

McSparron, W., 1972 *St. Augustine's Church, Londonderry, Diocese of Derry and Raphoe: short history, centenary, 1872-1972*, St. Augustine's Church.

Thomas, A, 2005 *Derry-Londonderry, Irish Historic Towns Atlas, No. 15*, A. Simms, H.B. Clarke, R. Gillespie (eds), Royal Irish Academy.

| <i>Context No.</i> | <i>Tin Glaze Earthen-ware</i> | <i>Stone-ware</i> | <i>Carrickfergus Brown-ware</i> | <i>Staff Slip-ware</i> | <i>Staff Manganese Mottled</i> | <i>North Devon Gravel Free</i> | <i>North Devon Gravel Tempered</i> | <i>Clay Pipe Bowl</i> | <i>Clay Pipe Stem</i> | <i>Bone</i> | <i>Oyster</i> | <i>Roof tile</i> | <i>Roof Slate</i> | <i>Brick</i> | <i>Glass</i> |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1 | 1 | | | 2 | | | | | 13 | Numerous small fragments | 8 | | | | 1 |
| 3 | | | 2 | 1 | | | 1 | | 8 | Numerous small fragments | 8 | | | 1 | |
| 4 | | | | | | | | 1 | 4 | | | | | | |
| 5 | 2 | 1 | 1 | | 1 | | | 4 | 13 | Numerous small fragments | Numerous | | 1 | 1 | |
| 6 | | | | | | | | | | numerous | | | 1 | | |
| 201 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | 6 fragments | |
| 205 | | | 3 | | | | | | 2 | Numerous | | | | Numerous | |
| 206 | | | | | | | | | 3 | | | | | | |
| 207 | | | | | | | | 1 | 8 | | 5 | 2 | 1 | Numerous | 3 |
| 209 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | | | 26 | Numerous | Numerous | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| <i>Unstratified</i> | | | | | | | | 1 | 1 | | | | | | 1 |

Table 1: Artefacts found by stratum

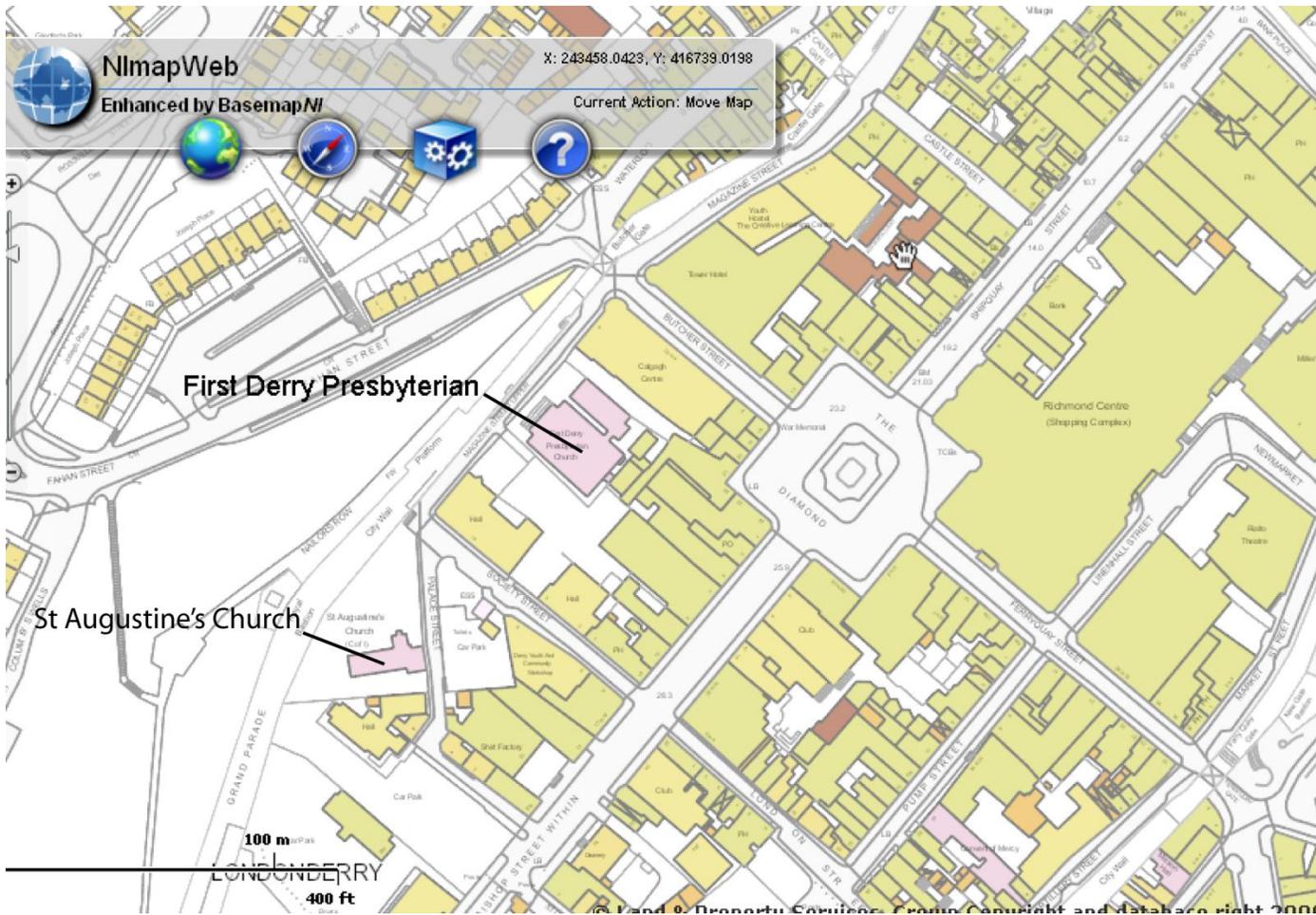


Figure 1: Location map of Londonderry showing First Derry Presbyterian Church and St Augustine's Church



Figure 2: Aerial Photograph showing location of First Derry Presbyterian Church and St Augustine's Church

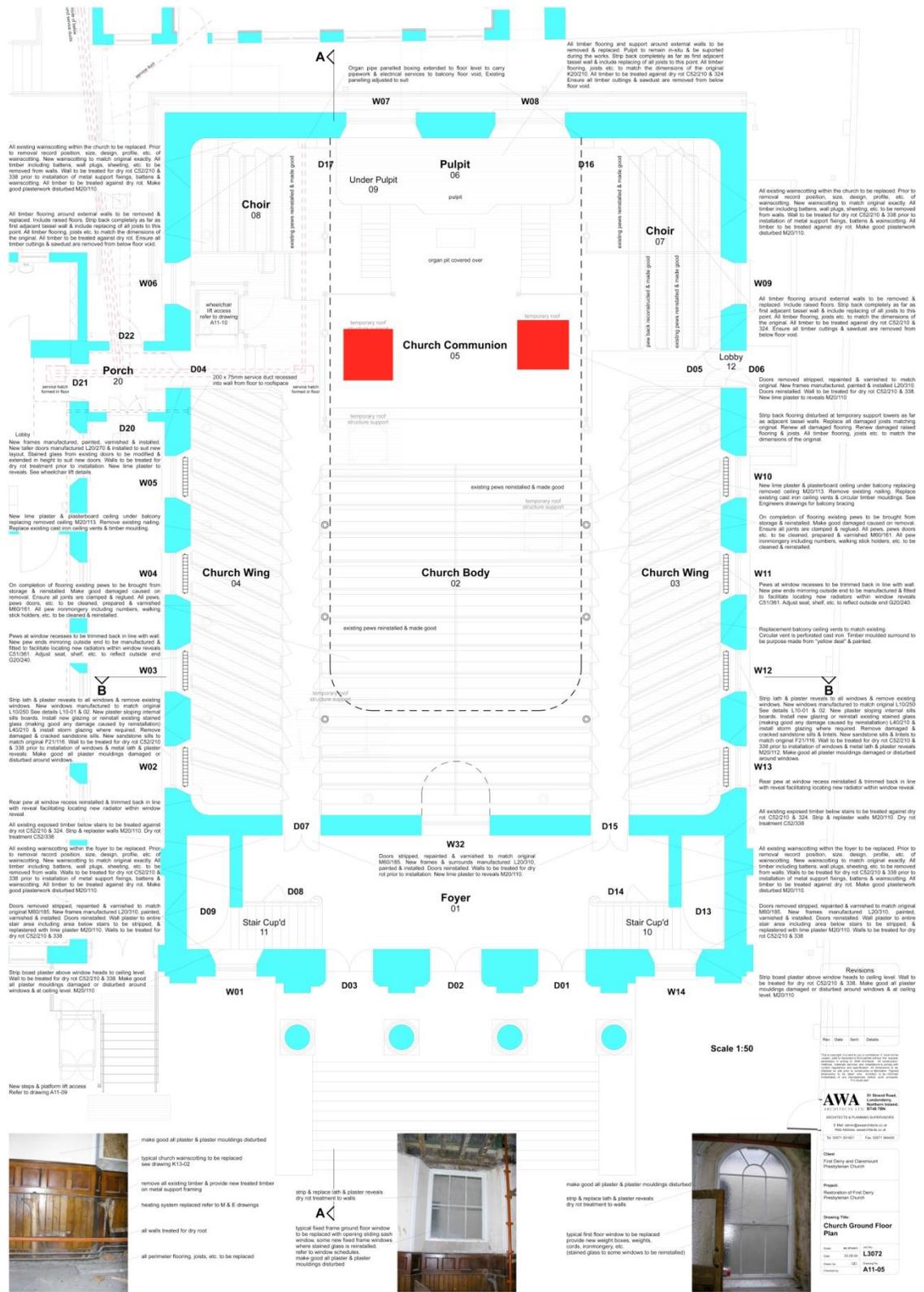


Figure 3: Floor Plan of First Derry Presbyterian Church showing (in red) location of proposed evaluation trenches

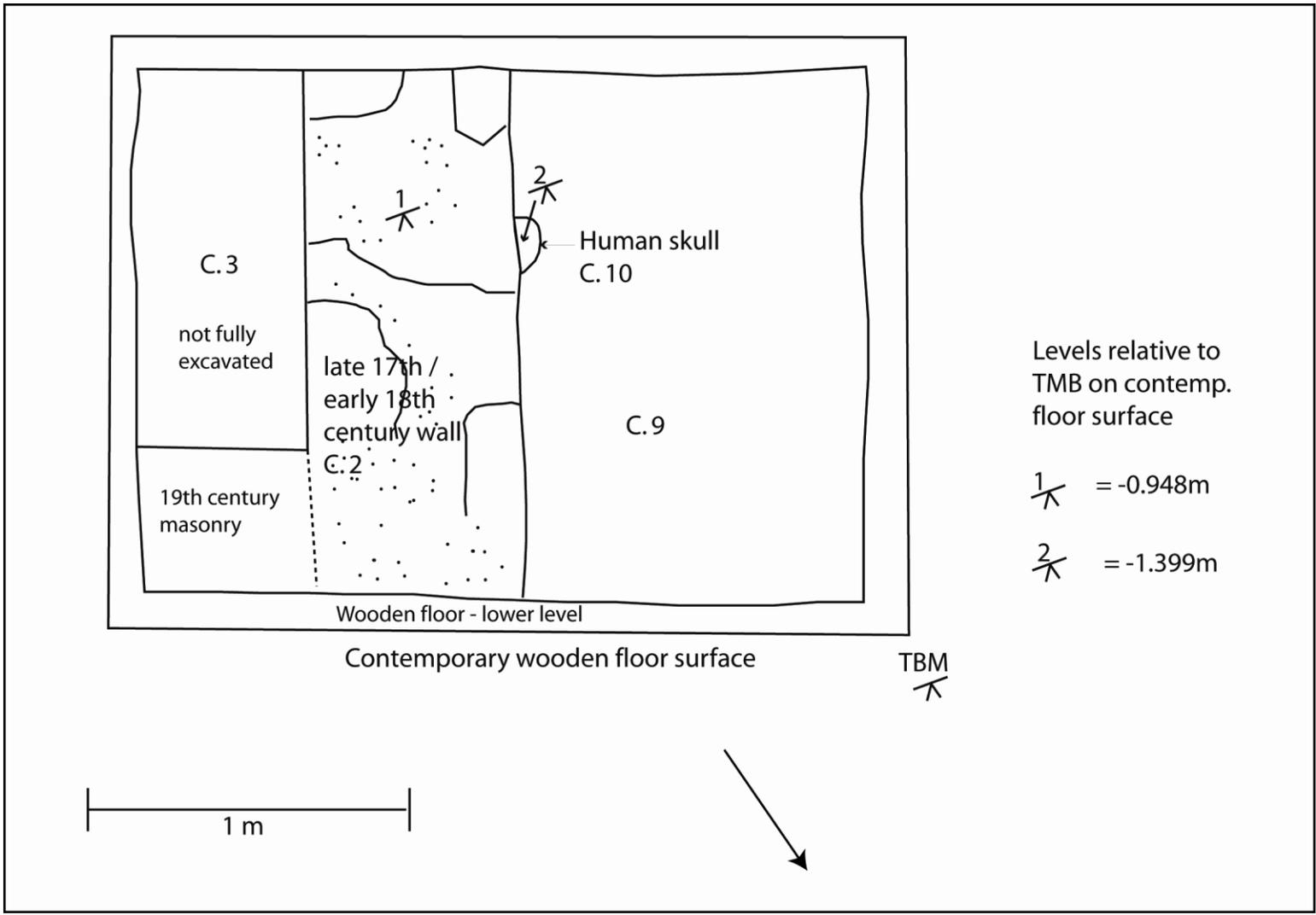


Figure 1: Plan of Trench 1

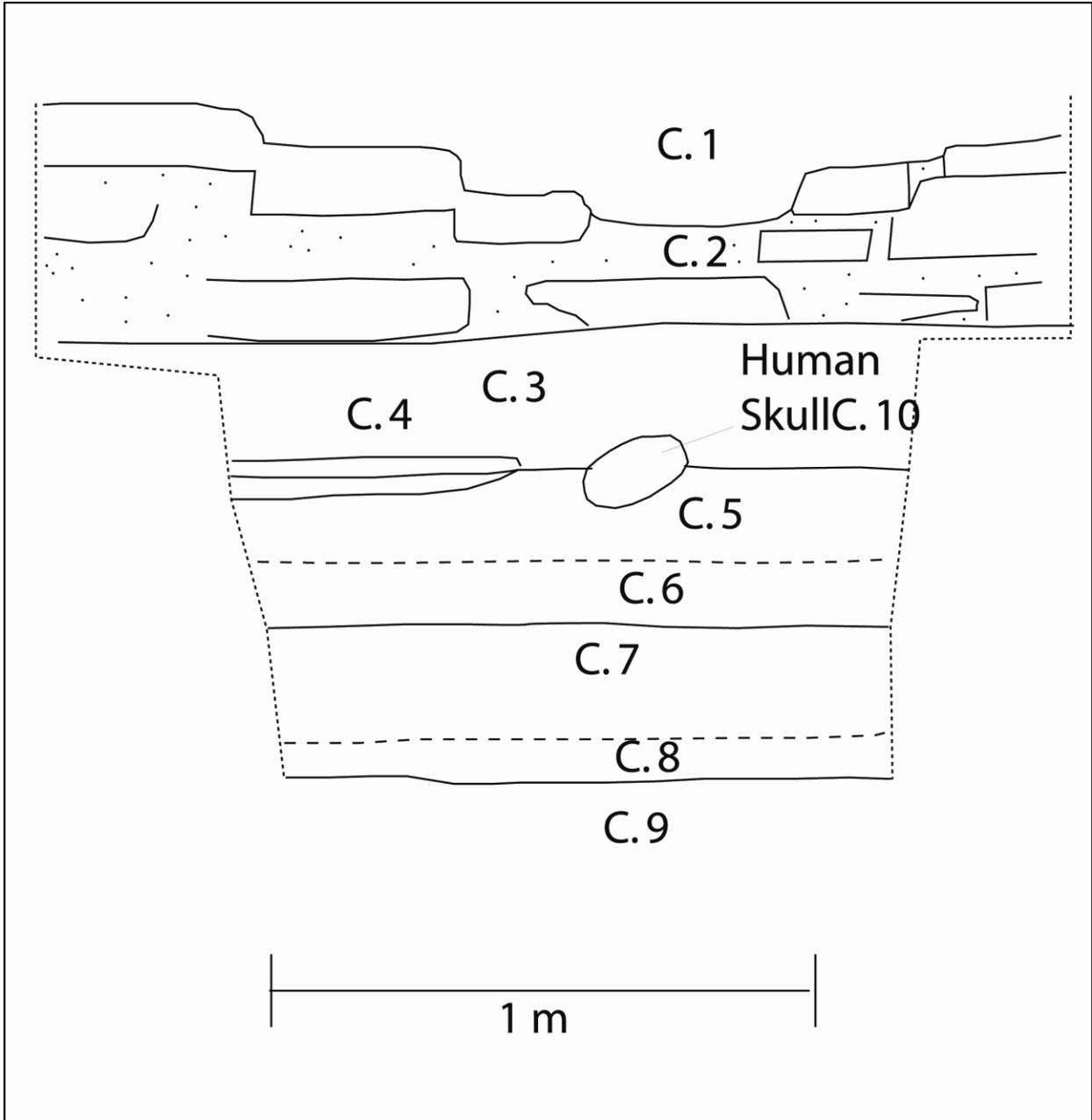


Figure 2: Northwest facing section of Trench 1

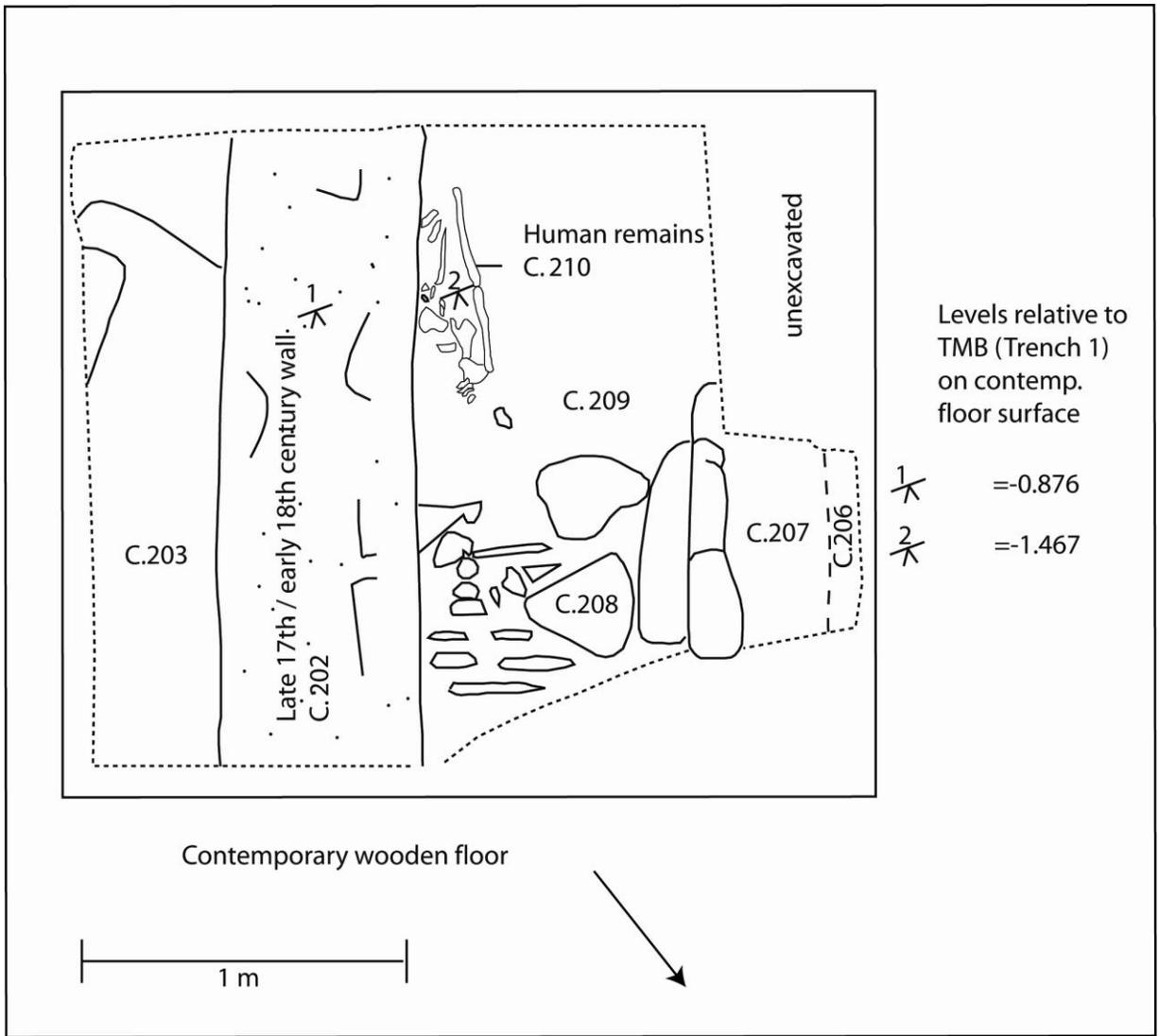


Figure 3: Plan of Trench 2

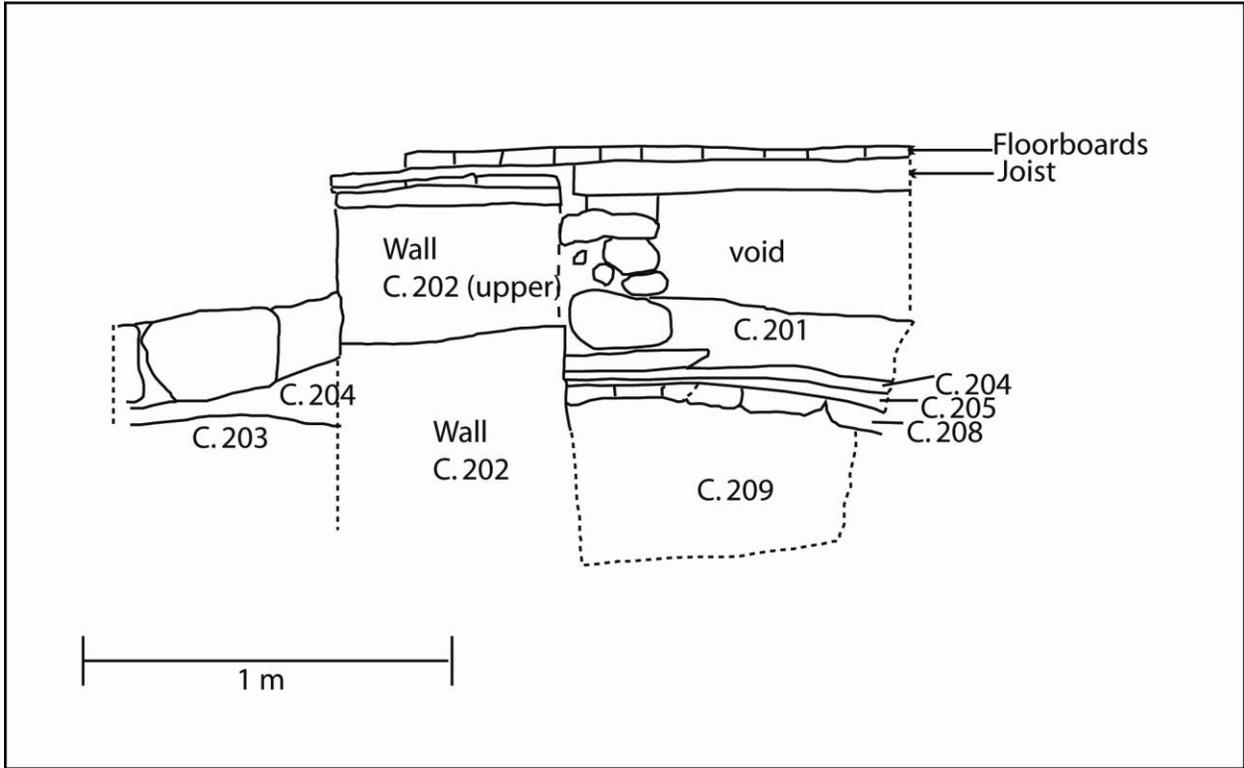


Figure 4: Northeast facing section of Trench 2

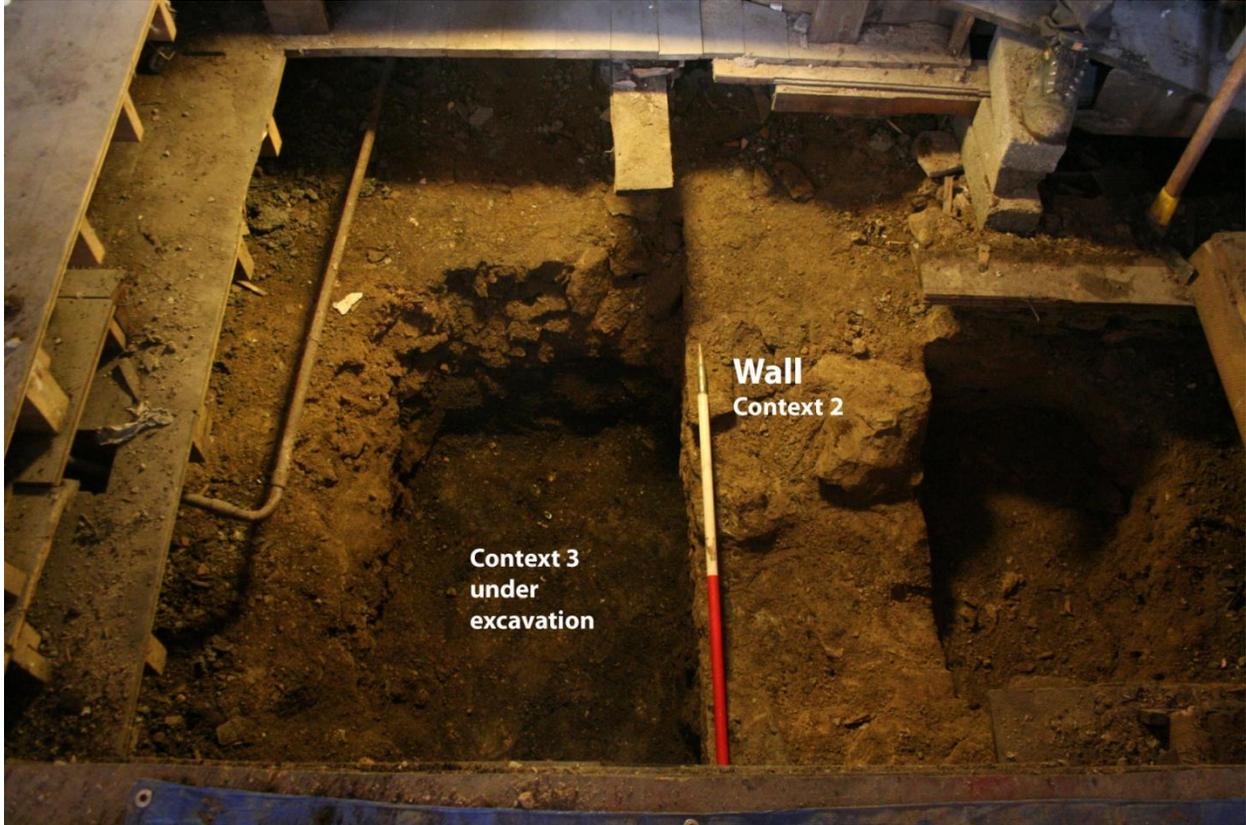


Photo 1: View of Trench 1 under excavation showing the wall Context 2 and loam layer Context 3



Photo 2: View of Trench 1 under excavation showing stone wall Context 2, the probable subsoil and human skull Context 10 and human remains detected in section, Context 11.



Photo 3: View of Trench 2 under excavation showing stone wall Context 202 , stone setting Context 208 and loam layer context 203.



Photo 4: View of Trench 2 showing stone wall Context 202, stone setting context 208 and the articulated skeleton Context 210, sitting within the dark loam 210.