



**Archaeological Evaluative Trenching at Ardboe Point,
Co. Tyrone, carried out on 5th December 2017**

AE/17/186

CAF Monitoring Report No. 302

Ruairí Ó Baoill



LOTTERY FUNDED

Site Specific Information

Site Name: Ardboe, Co. Tyrone

Townland: Sessia and Farsnagh (Parish of Ardboe; Barony of Dungannon Upper)

SMR No (if applicable): In environs of NISMR TYR 040:003/TYR 040:004/TYR 040:005

State Care **Scheduled** **v** **Other**

Grid Ref: H 9653 7565

County: Tyrone

Excavation License No (if applicable): AE/17/186

Planning Ref / No. (if applicable): B273/03 Vol 2 ANT066:001

Dates of Monitoring: 5th December 2017

Archaeologist(s) Present: Ruairí Ó Baoill and Brian Sloan

Brief Summary:

On 5th December 2017 archaeological evaluative trenching was carried by out in the south-west corner of a field adjacent to Ardboe ecclesiastical complex (NISMR TYR 040:003/TYR 040:004/TYR 040:0050). Nothing of archaeological significance, either features or artefacts, was observed in any of the trenches. All finds and features related to activity in the field and adjacent farm over the last two centuries.

Type of Monitoring:

Excavation of thirteen test trenches by a mechanical excavator, equipped with a 'sheugh' (smooth edged) bucket under strict archaeological supervision.

Size of Area Opened:

Thirteen test trenches, all 2 metres wide. The ten shorter trenches ranged from 7.5-12.5m long, the three long trenches ranged from 45-47m long. A total of 457 square metres.

Current Land Use: Greenfield

Intended Land Use: Residential

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATIVE TRENCHING AT ARDBOE POINT, CO. TYRONE

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INTRODUCTION

On 5th December 2017, Ruairí Ó Baoill and Brian Sloan, Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork (CAF) Queen's University Belfast carried out archaeological evaluative trenching to assess the suitability of land at the southwest corner of a field at Ardboe Point, Co. Tyrone for a proposed building development. The field is adjacent to Ardboe ecclesiastical complex (NISMR TYR 040:003/TYR 040:004/TYR 040:005; grid reference: H 9653 7565) in Sessia and Farsnagh townland, parish of Ardboe and the barony of Dungannon Upper. The site of the proposed development lies within the scheduled area around the ecclesiastical complex.

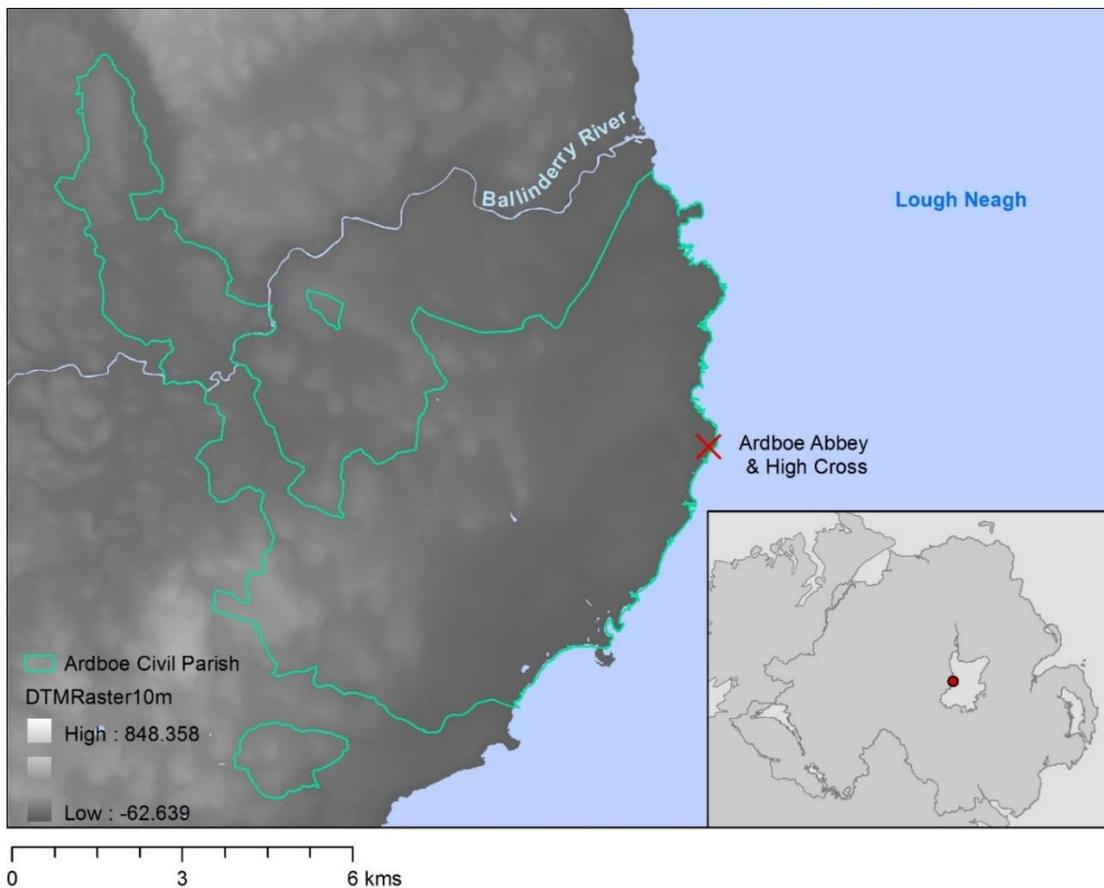


Figure 1 Location and landscape setting of the archaeological evaluative trenching.

The proposed development land is at the extreme southwest of the scheduled area, approximately 200m away from the standing ecclesiastical remains. A few faint features, recorded as geophysical anomalies, were picked up during a geophysical survey of the field carried out by the CAF in March and April 2017¹ (Figures 2, 4 and 5). These were

¹ McDermott, Logue and McAlister, 2017, *CAF Geophysical Survey Report No. 40*. HED Licence Number AE/17/53G.
<http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/CentreforArchaeologicalFieldworkCAF/PDFFileStore/Fileupload,784956,en.pdf>

interpreted as probably indicating drainage channels. It was thought unlikely that the proposed development area had any archaeological features within it prior to the archaeological evaluative trenching taking place on 5th December 2017.

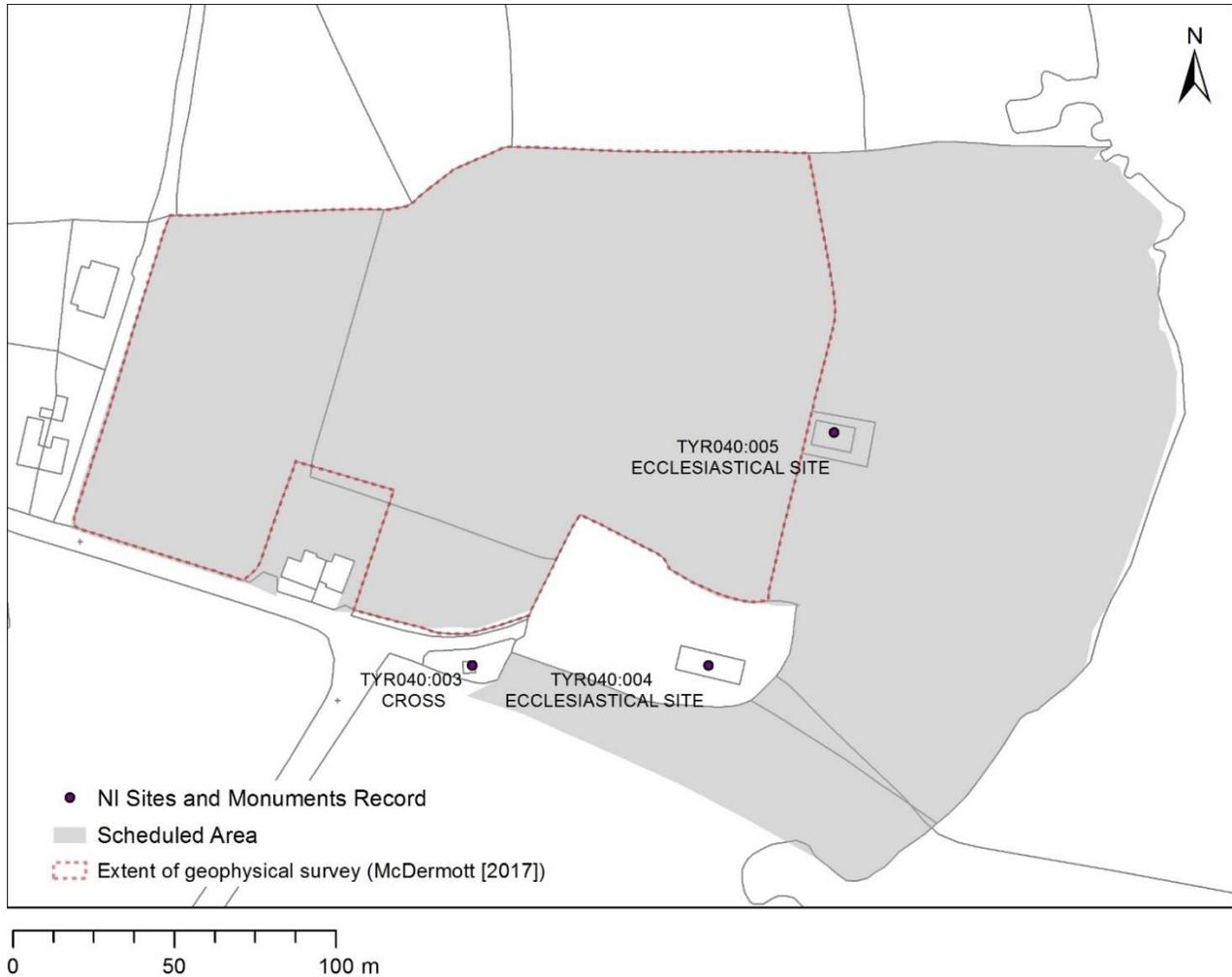


Figure 2 Recorded and protected archaeological sites and monuments at Ardboe.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND (Dr Siobhán McDermott)

In the immediate vicinity of the proposed development (**Figure 2**) are a number of monuments recorded in the Northern Ireland Sites & Monuments Record (NISMR). The remains of a small rectangular building (TYR 040:005), commonly called the Abbey, at the eastern limits of the survey area are believed to be the remnants of an ecclesiastical site. Land improvement works in the 1970s, to the east of the structure, revealed human remains and coarse pottery.² Situated c. 130m southwest of the possible abbey is a 10th-century High Cross (TYR 040:003). One of the tallest and finest decorated in Ulster this is a badly weathered sandstone cross. Just over c. 70 m east of Ardboe High Cross are the remains of a later church (TYR 040:004) and crowded graveyard. The ruins are probably 16th century but they may mark the location of an

² NISMR TYR 040:005 [online] http://appsc.doeni.gov.uk/ambit/docs/TYR/TYR_040/TYR_040_005/Public/SM7-TYR-040-005-02.pdf. Accessed May 2017.

earlier parochial centre. Fragments of 14th-century moulded brackets and columns are incorporated into the ruins, thus suggesting a richly decorated stone building was in the vicinity in the period, but later architectural features are absent.³

The pre-Reformation church was appropriated by newly arrived plantation communities in the early 17th century. Eventually the Chancel widow was removed from this site and erected in a new Church of Ireland parish church, at Aghacolumb, in 1714 as the isolated location of the former building was inconvenient for 18th century parishioners.⁴ The graveyard continues to be used for burials, while many of the earlier headstones have been incorporated into modern grave plots, either through the assimilation of the memorialised within modern inscriptions or the physical relocation of these older headstones. Notable within the graveyard are two steep banks, now with modern graves inserted into them, which have been likened to bastions from 17th-century military fortifications.⁵

Surprisingly little is known about the site at Ardboe with scant research on the site beyond art historical analysis of the high cross itself. The Gaelic chronicles have only two entries for the site from the 12th century. In 1103 the death of Murchada Ua Flaithecaín, erenagh of Ardboe, while on pilgrimage to Armagh is recorded by both the Annals of Ulster⁶ and the Annals of the Four Masters⁷. Erenaghs, an Anglicization of the Irish term *airchinnech*, were originally the heads of early Irish ecclesiastical communities who remained as tenants on Church lands even after the transfer of their estates to the Irish bishops during the 12th century.⁸ Murchada is described as a, 'master of learning, liberality and poetry' which may indicate that Ardboe was also considered a seat of learning. Two generations later, in 1166, Ardboe was burned by members of neighbouring Gaelic families by, 'Ruaidhri, son of Mac Canni⁹ and by the son of Cilla-Muire Uan Monrai¹⁰ and by the Crotraighi¹¹'. This indicates that Ardboe was functioning in an ecclesiastical role during the 12th century before emerging as a parochial centre as evidence by the 14th century architectural fragments.

The high cross itself most likely dates to the 10th century thus supplying a baseline date for an epoch phase of ecclesiastical activity at the complex. As discussed above the 'abbey' and 'cellar' have no early diagnostic architectural features, while fragmentary inclusions can date the church site to the 14th century at the earliest. High crosses are common at larger ecclesiastical sites with the Ardboe example being one of the most imposing and highly decorated of the Ulster crosses. The sandstone cross shows signs of weathering with well-meaning 19th-century repairs further threatening its structural integrity. Metal pins were inserted into the stone to secure the cross head and the shaft, and the shaft and the various elements of the plinth.¹² As ferrous metal corrodes the pins will erode and eventually destroy the surrounding stone. The cross has 22 carved panels depicting scenes from the Old and New testaments. It is difficult to say if the cross is in its original position. The relocation of this monument type is not uncommon.¹³ There is no

³ Roulston, W., 2002, 'An agreement to build a new church in Ardboe parish in 1710', in UJA, Vol. 61. P 149, Bigger, J. & Fennell, W. J., 1897, 'Ardboe, Co. Tyrone: Its cross and churches' in UJA, Vol. 4, No. 1, p 6.

⁴ Bigger & Fennell, 'Ardboe, Co. Tyrone: Its cross and churches', pp 5 – 6.

⁵ Paul Logue (Pers. Comm.) NISMR TYR 040:005 [online]

http://appsc.doeni.gov.uk/ambit/docs/TYR/TYR_040/TYR_040_005/Public/SM7-TYR-040-005.pdf. Accessed May 2017.

⁶ Hence forth *AU* Hennessy, W.M, and MacCarthy, B., (ed. and trans.) 4 vols (Dublin, 1887 – 1901).

⁷ Henceforth *AFM* O'Donovan, J., (ed. and trans.) 7 vols (Dublin, 1851).

⁸ Jefferies, H A 1999 'Erenaghs in pre-plantation Ulster: An early seventeenth-century account', in *Archivium Hibernicum* Vo. 53, p 16.

⁹ Probably the 'c. cána – the MacCanns on the south of Lough Neagh' Hogan, E. 1910 *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, [online] <http://publish.ucc.ie/doi/locus>.

¹⁰ Possible the O'Morgans, a family who were in near south-east Lough Neagh during the medieval period. Morgan, B., [undated] [online] <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~muireagain/Ulster.htm>.

¹¹ Family associated with the placename Cary in north Antrim, McSparron, C., [2015] 'Excavation at Doonmore, Co. Antrim: Data Structure Report No. 116' [online] www.heartoftheglens.org/cms/wp.../Doonmore-Community-Excavation-Report.doc, p 10.

¹² Linsay, C., [2010] 'An intergrated toolkit for the conservation of stone-built heritage' [Unpublished] submitted to NIEA.

¹³ O'Sullivan, A., McCormick, F., Kerr, T. R., & Harney, L., 2014 *Early Medieval Ireland AD 400 – 1100: The evidence from archaeological excavations*, Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, p 166.

evidence for a round tower or founder's tomb which are common features for larger ecclesiastical sites, although Leslie does refer to the latter being present at Ardboe. The building referred to as the 'abbey' is aligned east to west measuring 12m east – west by 8m north – south with no evidence for internal features.

Leslie¹⁴ refers to the establishment of Ardboe by a St. Colman at the close of the 6th century. He appears to calculate the foundation date by reference to the saint's genealogy. Given the abundance of St Colmans, nearly 130 names individuals across the island, and the sometimes fabricated nature of Irish genealogies this early date should perhaps be treated with caution. Neither is Ardboe readily identifiable as one of the seven churches founded by Patrick for the Uí Tuirtre, one of many tribal groupings that formed Airgialla, at the beginning of the Christian period.¹⁵ Whatever the foundation of Ardboe, the complex itself would have been at the heart of a community. Human remains were discovered at the site in the 19th century and re-interred by the east wall of the 'abbey' ruin.¹⁶ This is the same location that burials and coarse pottery were recovered from during land reclamation works in the 1970s.¹⁷ Little exists above ground to give much sense of how that community was organised. Certainly the organisation of internal space was an important consideration with the church building its foci. Larger foundations display a concentric arrangement of degrees of sanctity usually associated with enclosing features such as walls, banks or ditches. As centres of active communities there would have been domestic buildings, either circular or rectangular made out of stone, wood or post-and-wattle.¹⁸ Evidence for specialised craft-working, industrial activity and agriculture would also be expected.

The earthworks in Ardboe graveyard are associated with the fortification of the church by Hugh O'Neill's forces during the Nine Years War. At the end of the 16th century Hugh O'Neill started a prolonged military campaign against the Tudor Crown. O'Neill and his Gaelic confederates would eventually be defeated but only after a protracted, entrenched war which saw the province and civilian population left in a state of turmoil. An extract from the Bartlett map of South Ulster¹⁹ depicts a fortified church, inscribed *Drum-bo*, under fire from English naval forces (**Figure 3**). The church, which is roofless, is identified by a cross on the west gable. It is located on a small promontory, *Point Dromboe*, with a river emptying into the lough to the north. To the immediate south is the fort named *Forte Mountioie* (Brockagh) and to the south-southwest is *Clonogh* (Clonoe). Ardboe is situated on a promontory with the Ballinderry River running to the north. A linear feature with two oblique returns is positioned to the west of the ruin defending it from a land-based assault.

¹⁴ Leslie, J. B., 1911 *Armagh clergy and parishes*, [online] <https://archive.org/details/armaghclergyypari00lesl>, p 95.

¹⁵ Ó Doibhlin, É., 1971 'The deanery of Tulach Óg', in *Seachais Ardmhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society*, Vol. 6, No. 1, p 149.

¹⁶ Bigger & Fennell, 'Ardboe, Co. Tyrone: Its cross and churches', p 3.

¹⁷ NISMR TYR 040:005 [online].

¹⁸ O'Sullivan *et al.*, *Early medieval Ireland*, pp 168 – 173.

¹⁹ Bartlett, R., *Map of the southern part of Ulster...* c. 1602-3 [National Archives: Kew, MPF 1/36].

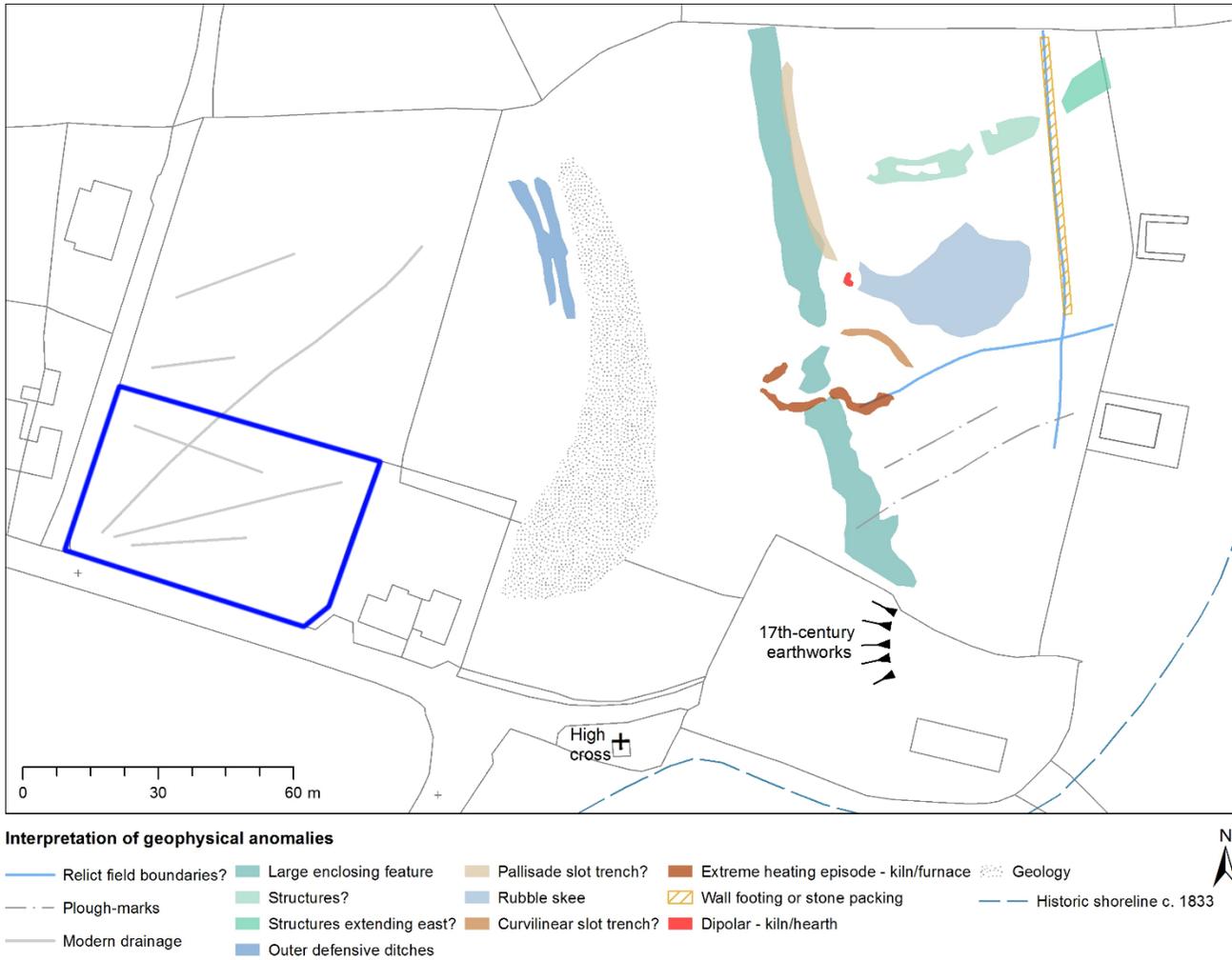


Figure 5 Interpretative plot of geophysical anomalies in the areas around Ardboe ecclesiastical complex, as recorded in the CAF geophysical surveys carried out in March and April 2017. The faint anomalies within the proposed development area (outlined in blue) were all interpreted as field drains.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATIVE TRENCHING

The archaeological evaluative trenching, under the direction of Ruairí Ó Baoill and Brian Sloan, CAF QUB, was carried out on 5th December 2017 and took the form of 13 mechanically excavated trenches across the proposed development area. These consisted of three long trenches, ranging 45-47m long, and running roughly east-west, and ten shorter trenches, ranging from 7.5-12.5m, running roughly north-south, at right angles to the longer trenches (Figure 6). All the trenches were 2m wide.

On the day of the evaluation the field was once again observed to be extremely boggy and waterlogged even before testing commenced. The trenches were excavated under strict archaeological supervision by a mechanical digger equipped with a back-acting, flat, toothless, bucket. No significant archaeological features were recorded in any of the thirteen trenches during the evaluation. Stratigraphy across the area of the proposed development was observed consistently to take the form of subsoil below topsoil below sod. The field where the testing took place always seems to have been prone to flooding and this is reflected in the many field drains dug into the subsoil (orange and cream clay and orange sand) that were uncovered in most of the trenches, bearing out the results of the earlier geo-physical survey. Most of the test trenches started filling up with water as soon as the machine had removed soil cover to subsoil level. It would appear that there has been a sustained effort to keep the field drained over the last couple of centuries

and pottery recovered from the evaluation also dated to this period. Ceramic types recovered included black glazed earthenware, stoneware, creamware and a fragment of Victorian clay tobacco pipe bowl. Other modern features observed in the test trenches were a septic tank (for the adjacent farm) in the southeastern corner of the development area and modern service cables are known to run along the western side of the field boundary inside the field. In the middle/north of the proposed development area there was also evidence of several large rubbish pits having been dug to subsoil level, presumably emanating from the adjacent farm. The material observed in these included Post-Medieval pottery, plastic and red brick.

After the test trenching was completed, the relevant HED Inspector (Gail Russell) was informed by phone that no significant archaeology had been revealed in any of the test trenches within the area of the proposed development. This being the case, permission was granted by HED to the landowner to backfill the trenches with the spoil removed during the testing so that the deep trenches would not constitute potential health and safety hazards if they were left open.

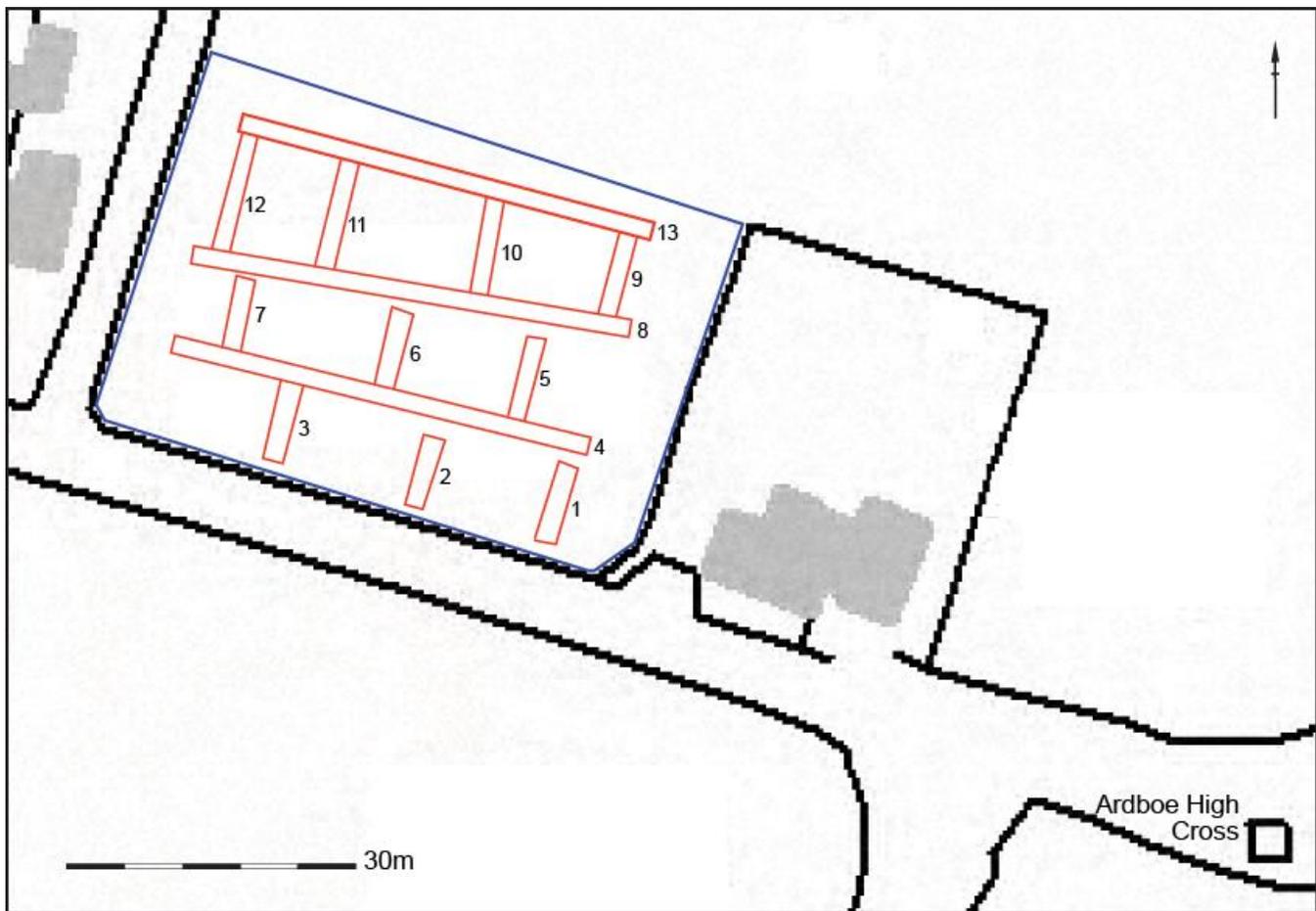


Figure 6 Location of the archaeological evaluative trenches within the area of the proposed development.

DETAILS OF TRENCHES ARCHAEOLOGICALLY TESTED

Trench 1

Length: 8.5m, aligned roughly north-south

Width: 2m

Trench 1. Depth of subsoil from modern ground surface

Northern end of trench: 0.25m

Middle of trench: 0.38m

Southern end of trench: 0.42m

Trench 2

Length: 7.5m, aligned roughly north-south

Width: 2m

Trench 2. Depth of subsoil from modern ground surface

Northern end of trench: 0.45m

Middle of trench: 0.49m

Southern end of trench: 0.63m

Trench 3

Length: 8.5m, aligned roughly north-south

Width: 2m

Trench 3. Depth of subsoil from modern ground surface

Northern end of trench: 0.37m

Middle of trench: 0.43m

Southern end of trench: 0.49m

Long Trench 4

Length: 45m, aligned roughly east-west

Width: 2m

Trench 4. Depth of subsoil from modern ground surface

Western end of trench: 0.34m

Middle/west of trench: 0.42m

Middle/east of trench: 0.39m

Eastern end of trench: 0.46m

Trench 5

Length: 9m, aligned roughly north-south

Width: 2m

Trench 5. Depth of subsoil from modern ground surface

Northern end of trench: 0.48m

Middle of trench: 0.41m

Southern end of trench: 0.39m

Trench 6

Length: 8m, aligned roughly north-south

Width: 2m

Trench 6. Depth of subsoil from modern ground surface

Northern end of trench: 0.46m

Middle of trench: 0.58m

Southern end of trench: 0.63m

Trench 7

Length: 7.5m, aligned roughly north-south

Width: 2m

Trench 7. Depth of subsoil from modern ground surface

Northern end of trench: 0.36m

Middle of trench: 0.38m

Southern end of trench: 0.41m

Long Trench 8

Length: 47m, aligned roughly east-west

Width: 2m

Trench 8. Depth of subsoil from modern ground surface

Western end of trench: 0.36m

Middle/west of trench: 0.45m

Middle/east of trench: 0.43m

Eastern end of trench: 0.49m

Trench 9

Length: 8.5m, aligned roughly north-south

Width: 2m

Trench 9. Depth of subsoil from modern ground surface

Northern end of trench: 0.44m

Middle of trench: 0.52m

Southern end of trench: 0.61m

Trench 10

Length: 10m, aligned roughly north-south

Width: 2m

Trench 10. Depth of subsoil from modern ground surface

Northern end of trench: 0.28m

Middle of trench: 0.35m

Southern end of trench: 0.56m

Trench 11

Length: 11.5m, aligned roughly north-south

Width: 2m

Trench 11. Depth of subsoil from modern ground surface

Northern end of trench: 0.24m

Middle of trench: 0.33m

Southern end of trench: 0.46m

Trench 12

Length: 12.5m, aligned roughly north-south

Width: 2m

Trench 12. Depth of subsoil from modern ground surface

Northern end of trench: 0.33m

Middle of trench: 0.39m

Southern end of trench: 0.31m

Long Trench 13

Length: 45m, aligned roughly east-west

Width: 2m

Trench 13. Depth of subsoil from modern ground surface

Western end of trench: 0.26m

Middle/west of trench: 0.23m

Middle of trench: 0.29m

Middle/east of trench: 0.39m

Eastern end of trench: 0.41m

CONCLUSION

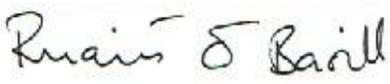
The archaeological evaluative trenching carried out on 5th December 2017 at Ardboe, Co. Tyrone uncovered no significant archaeology or features in any of the trenches archaeologically tested within the area of the proposed development. The test trenching completely supported the evidence gathered by the March-April 2017 CAF geophysical survey that the portion of the field tested always seems to have been waterlogged and prone to flooding. This is reflected in the Post-Medieval field drains dug into the subsoil (orange and cream clay and orange sand) that were uncovered in many of the trenches. It would appear that there has been a sustained effort to drain the field over the last couple of centuries and pottery recovered from the evaluation also dated to this period.

ARCHIVE

FINDS: A total of 14 fragments of Post-Medieval pottery and one fragment of the bowl of a Victorian clay tobacco pipe were recovered from the evaluation. Apart from a sherd of 19th century stoneware jar found in a field drain at the western end of Long Trench 8 and a sherd of 19th century yellow-glazed earthenware from the cut feature in Trench 2, all of the other ceramics were found in the topsoil during the test trenching. Ceramic types included black glazed earthenware, creamware and willow pattern.

PHOTOGRAPHS: All of the digital photographs taken during the evaluative archaeological test trenching at Ardboe, Co. Tyrone on 5th December 2017 are stored in the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, School of the Natural and Built Environment, Queen's University Belfast, and are available to view on request.

PLANS / DRAWINGS: N/A

SIGNED: _____ 

DATE: _____ 13th December 2017 _____



Plate 1. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. General shot of the area to be archaeologically test-trenched on 5th December 2017, prior to work commencing. From the north-east.



Plate 2. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. Subsoil in Trench 1. From the north.



Plate 3. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. Trench 2. Modern linear cut to subsoil level, possibly to dump rubbish from the adjacent farm and whose fill yielded 19th century pottery. From the north-west.



Plate 4. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. Trench 3. Trench at subsoil level. Field drain running across the southern limit of the trench and flooding of trench. From the south.



Plate 5. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. Trench 3. Trench at subsoil level. Two fields drain running across the northern limit of the trench. From the north-west.



Plate 6. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. Long Trench 4 at subsoil level. Flooding at the western end of trench, covering a field drain. From the west.



Plate 7. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. Long Trench 4 at subsoil level. Field drain, containing fragments of red brick, running diagonally across the middle of the trench. From the west.



Plate 8. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. Long Trench 4 at subsoil level. Modern rubbish pit, containing fragments of red brick, at eastern end of trench. From the west.



Plate 9. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. Subsoil in Trench 5. From the south.



Plate 10. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. Subsoil in Trench 6. Flooding covering a field drain running across the trench. Long Trench 4 in foreground. From the south.



Plate 11. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. Subsoil in Trench 7 immediately flooded after the soil cover was removed. From the south.



Plate 12. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. Subsoil in Long Trench 8. Western end. Field drain running across the trench in foreground. Flooded area in the middle of the trench also covering a field drain. From the west.



Plate 13. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. Long Trench 8. Field drain running diagonally across the trench and cut into the subsoil. Looking towards the eastern end of trench. From the west.



Plate 14. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. Long Trench 8. Stone drain with red brick cut into the subsoil at the eastern end of trench. From the north-west.



Plate 15. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. Looking back along Long Trench 8. Stone drain with red brick cut into subsoil in foreground, two field drains running diagonally across the trench in the middle of the shot and water covering a field drain at the eastern end of the trench in the background. From the east.



Plate 16. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. Trench 9. Several field drains, including one incorporating ceramic tiles, cut into subsoil at the northern end of the trench. From the south.



Plate 17. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. Trench 10. Field drain running across the middle of the trench. From the south.



Plate 18. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. Subsoil in Trench 11 with two field drains running across the trench, immediately flooded after soil cover removed. From the south.



Plate 18. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. Subsoil in Trench 12 with two field drains running across either end of the trench. From the south.



Plate 19. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. Long Trench 13 at subsoil level. Flooding at western end of the trench, covering a field drain in foreground. Field drain running along the middle of the trench at the eastern end. From the west.



Plate 19. Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. Long Trench 13 at subsoil level. Eastern half of the trench with field drain running across the trench in foreground and another running along the middle of the trench in the background. From the west.