



Monitoring Report No 111.

**Muckamore Abbey Hospital
Oldstone
Co. Antrim**

AE/06/271

Ronan McHugh

Site Specific Information

Site Address: Muckamore Abbey Hospital

Townland: Oldstone

SMR No.: Ant 050:152 and Ant 050:171

State Care *Scheduled* *Other* ✓

Grid Ref: J 1683 8407

County: Antrim

Excavation Licence No: AE/06/271

Planning Ref / No.: Not supplied

Date of Monitoring: 10th – 14th November 2006

Archaeologist Present. Ronan McHugh and Ruth Logue, both of the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, Queen's University Belfast.

Brief Summary: Archaeological monitoring of mechanical excavation on the site of two registered archaeological sites, Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record identifier numbers Ant 050:152 and Ant 050:171. No features or material of archaeological significance were encountered.

Type of monitoring: The monitoring consisted of the stripping of deposits by mechanical excavator, under the supervision of the licensed archaeologist, down to natural substrata.

Size of area opened: Approximately 1200 m² (See Figs 3 below).

Current Land Use: The site under development is a grassy park area forming part of Muckamore Abbey Hospital, a Treatment and Assessment Hospital for persons with learning disabilities.

Intended Land Use: The site is being redeveloped to provide a new Admissions and Assessment Unit and a Forensic Unit for the Hospital, together with an upgraded infrastructure to facilitate the new buildings.

Brief Account of the Monitoring

Background

Muckamore Abbey Hospital was set up in the late 1950's to provide a specialist assessment and treatment service for people with learning disabilities. It is situated in south-east Co. Antrim, approximately 4 km to the south-east of Antrim town (Fig. 1). The underlying geology in the area is predominantly igneous basalt.

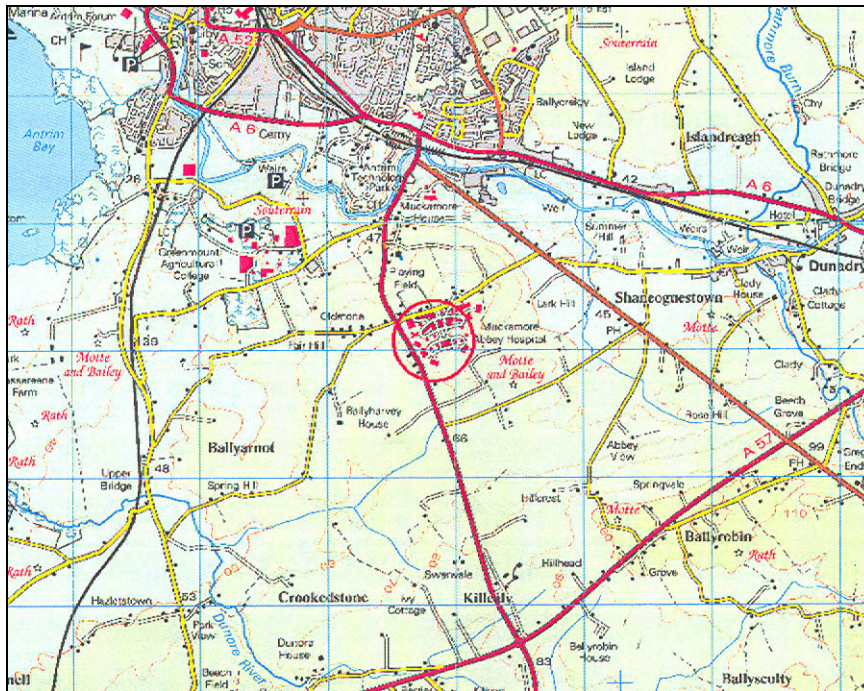


Fig. 1. Location map showing position of Muckamore Abbey Hospital (Circled in red)(Map supplied by EHS).

Redevelopment of the hospital grounds is currently ongoing and this project envisages the development of part of the hospital to provide new Assessment and Forensic Units, together with an upgraded infrastructure to facilitate the new buildings. A Grant of Planning Permission was issued by the Planning Service to authorise this development. However, the area to be developed coincides with the location of two recorded archaeological sites and the planning application was erroneously not referred to the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS). Consequently, no archaeological conditions were included in the Grant of Planning Permission. In order to address this omission it was subsequently agreed between the developer and the EHS that a programme of archaeological mitigation would be carried out on the site prior to the

commencement of the main phase of construction activity. The programme involved archaeological monitoring of the excavation in the area affected by the development, until either natural strata or features/material of archaeological significance were encountered. Any features or material of potential archaeological significance were to be manually excavated and recorded.

Archaeological background

Muckamore Abbey Hospital derives its name from Muckamore Abbey, an ecclesiastical site which dates back possibly to the sixth century (Hamlin 1976, 453), although the hospital grounds are situated more than 1 km to the south of the site of the Abbey. The two archaeological sites affected by the proposed development were recognised from aerial photographs of the area taken on the 23rd April 1962 and are recorded in the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record (NISMR) as Ant 050:152 and Ant 050:171. The aerial photographs were not available for inspection prior to the archaeological monitoring work, and the location of the sites for the purpose of this report is based on a representation of the crop marks on the NISMR field map (Fig. 2). Ant 050:152 is described in the EHS SM 7 file as the site of a circular enclosure with an approximate diameter of 40 m, defined by a ditch and bank approximately 5 m in width. The site recorded as Ant 050:171 is reported in the SM 7 file to be immediately to the north-west of Ant 050:152. It (Ant 050:171) is described as "a large but faint site which has a circular domed interior surrounded by a ditch". The diameter of this site is given in the SM 7 file as approximately 45 m.

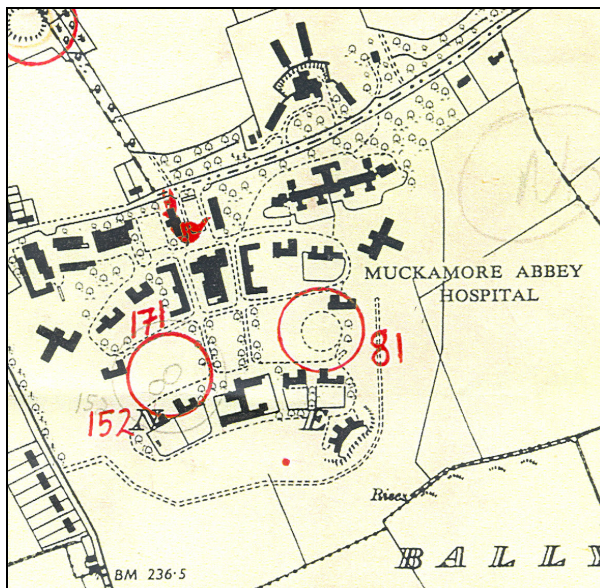


Fig. 2

Excerpt from NISMR field map depicting the two sites (Map supplied by EHS).

A site visit by Brian Williams of the EHS on 15th April 1981 concluded that there is nothing now visible of either site (EHS SM 7). The development site, together with the reported position of the two sites is depicted in Fig. 3. The location and dimensions of the two sites are transcribed from the NISMR field map. The development site today is situated in the heart of the hospital grounds, in an area which had been landscaped to form a grass-covered park.

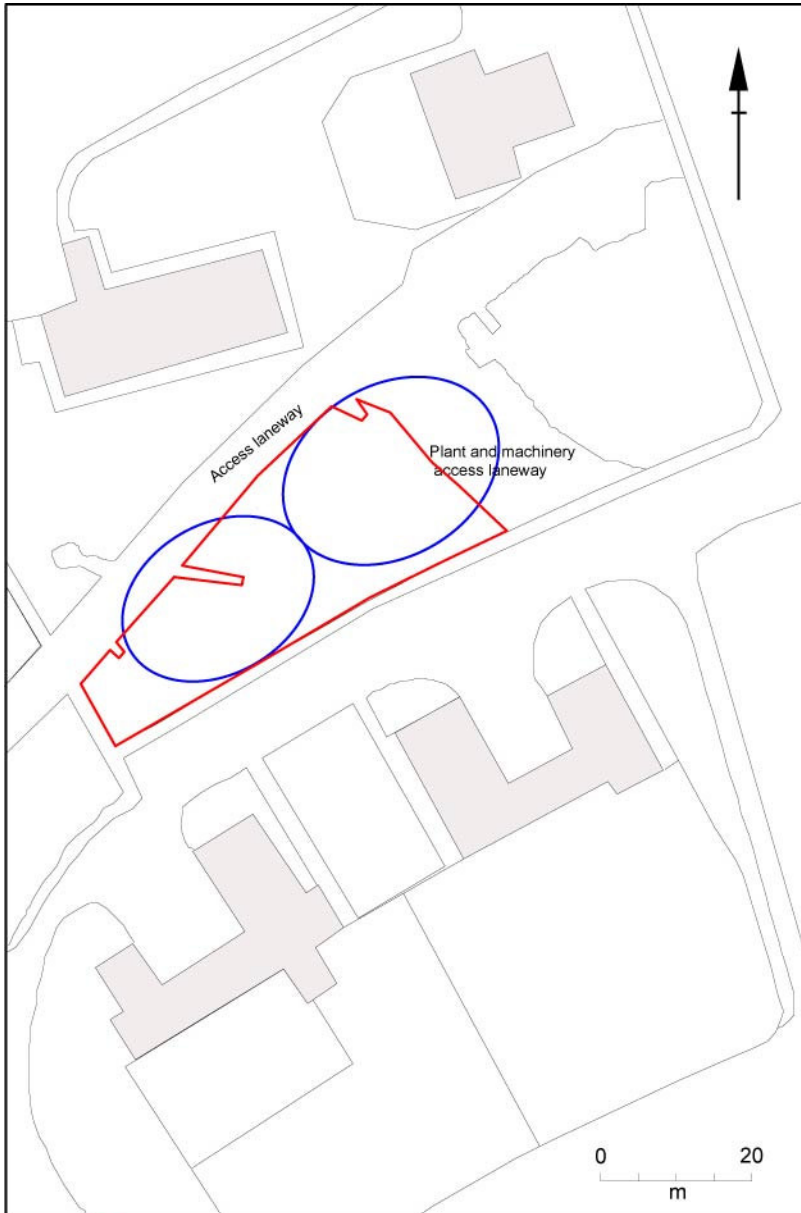


Fig. 3. Site map showing location of excavated area and sites Ant 050:152 and Ant 050:171



Site rendering works had been initiated prior to the commencement of archaeological monitoring at the site. A north-east/south-west running swathe had been cut through the centre of the development site, along the line of the proposed access laneway to the new development (Plate 1) (Fig. 3). A second, wider laneway had been excavated approximately perpendicular to this cut, to provide access to the development site for heavy plant and machinery (Plate 2)(Fig. 3).



Plate 1 Access laneway running through the site (facing south-west).



Plate 2 Plant and machinery access laneway (facing south-east).

A surface of hardcore rubble and chippings with a depth of approximately 0.2 m had been laid along both laneways. The position of both of these laneways coincided with the reported location

of the archaeological sites and the deposit of rubble and chippings prevented examination of the underlying ground, so it was not possible to determine whether archaeologically significant material had been affected by this activity. The site foreman reported that the laneways had been cut through the level of bedrock (P. Watson 2006, pers. comm.); However, a scenario which reduces the likelihood of archaeological survival beneath. The archaeological monitoring was confined to an area of landscaped grassland to the south-west of the wider laneway, in the probable location of the crop mark sites. This area is hereinafter referred to as "the excavated area" (Fig. 3).

The excavation

The excavated area was broadly trapezoidal in shape, although a number of cuttings had been excavated through the north-western edge of the area during the site-rendering works to facilitate the installation of pipes and conduits (Fig. 3). It was approximately 62 m in length (north-east/south-west). The north-eastern end of the area was wider, measuring approximately 25 m and it tapered to just under 10 m at the south-western end. The north-eastern and north-western sides of the area were defined by the two laneways created during the site-enabling works. An existing roadway and grassy verge delineated the south-eastern boundary, while a narrow tarmacadam footpath formed the south-western boundary of the area. The excavation was undertaken by a mechanical excavator, equipped with a smooth-edged (sheugh) bucket, under the supervision of the licensed archaeologist.

The uppermost layer across the excavated area was a sod of loose clay and short grass (Context 101), which had a maximum recorded depth of 0.2 m. Removal of the sod (Context 101) exposed a deposit of loose, dark brown silty loam (Context 102) that extended over the whole of the excavated area. The depth of this deposit was shown to vary greatly; at the south-eastern edge of the site, the depth of the deposit (Context 102) was recorded as 0.15 m but this increased to a maximum of 0.6 m in the north-west corner of the excavated area. The deposit (Context 102) was homogenous in character throughout the site and contained fragments of plastic pipe, earthenware flower pots, glass and soft drink's cans that confirmed that it was of twentieth-century date. The deposit was probably associated with the landscaping of the hospital grounds which has been undertaken in the past 30 years. Two linear features (Contexts 103 and 105) were observed cut into in this deposit (Context 102). Approximately 5 m from the south-eastern edge of the site, a linear feature (Context 103) extended across the excavated area on an approximate south-south-east/north-north-west alignment. The feature was between 1 m and 1.2 m in width and was filled by a deposit of weathered basalt flakes set into a matrix of loose dark brown clay (Context 104).



Plate 3.

Linear feature (Context 103) that was identified as a sewer conduit. The feature is shown here at subsoil level (Context 107), following removal of the landscaping deposit (Context 102) into which it was cut.

Examination of this linear feature (Context 103) within the context of the surrounding site identified it as the conduit for a sewer-pipe serving the hospital. Approximately 11 m to the north-west of the excavated area, a cutting had been excavated around a modern man hole as part of the site rendering works (Fig. 4). The cutting exposed portion of a dark brown linear feature extending south-south-east/north-north-west into the base of the man hole, on the same alignment as the linear feature unearthed in the excavated area (Context 103). This feature was not assigned a context number as it was outside of the excavated area. The feature exposed in the cutting was filled by a deposit of weathered basalt chips in a loose, dark brown clay matrix identical to the fill of the linear feature recorded within the excavated area (Context 104). Inspection of the man hole showed that the sewer pipe was set into the dark material exposed in the cutting, approximately 1.6 m below the ground surface (Plate 4). The sewer was still functioning so the portion of the sewer conduit in the excavated area (Context 103) was consequently not excavated.

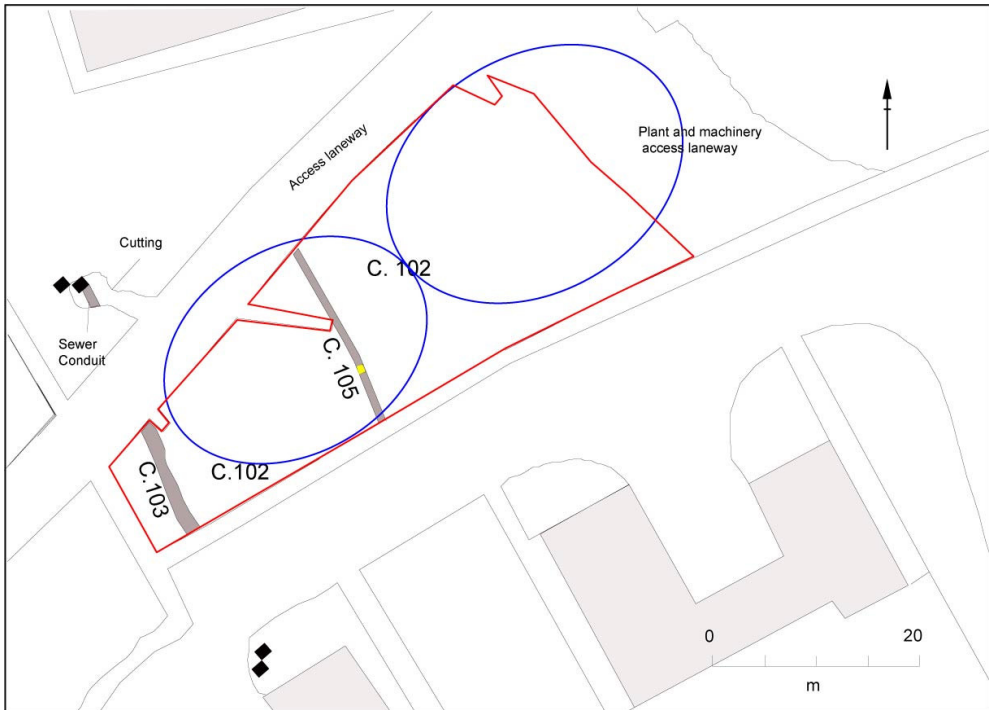


Fig. 4.
 Plan of excavated area following removal of sod (Context 101)





-  Excavated Area
-  Man holes
-  Location of cropmarks (taken from NISM field map)
-  Sondage



Plate 4. The man hole to the north of the excavated area, showing the cutting and line of the sewer pipe. This was probably a continuation of the feature (context 103) exposed in the excavated area.

The second linear feature (Context 105)(Plate 5) exposed by removal of the sod layer (Context 101) was located approximately 22 m to the north-west of the sewer-pipe conduit (Context 103). It was uniformly 0.4 m in width and was aligned approximately parallel to the cut for the sewer pipe. The feature (Context 105) was filled by a deposit of weathered basalt chips in a loose matrix of dark brown clay (Context 106), similar to the deposit recorded as the fill of the sewer cut (Context 104). A *sondage* was excavated through the feature, 5 m from the south-eastern edge of the excavated area. A sherd of bottle-glass and a fragment of modern pottery were recovered from the *sondage* (Plate 6), which showed the feature to be U-shaped in profile with a depth of 0.4 m (Fig. 4).

The purpose of the linear cut (Context 105) was not determined, but its stratigraphic position and the artefacts recovered confirmed it to have been of relatively modern date. The nature of the fill and the alignment of the cut suggested additionally that it was possibly associated with the nearby sewer pipe and was possibly an abandoned service conduit of contemporary age.

Following resolution of the two parallel linear features, the homogenous landscaping deposit (Context 102) was removed and natural strata were exposed throughout the excavated area. Stratigraphically beneath the landscaping deposit (Context 102) was an orange brown silty boulder clay (Context 107) which contained frequent basalt pebble inclusions; On either side of the linear sewer conduit (Context 105), the boulder clay layer was existed only as a lens with a depth of approximately 0.01 m, while a maximum depth of 0.2 m was recorded towards the north-eastern edge of the excavated area. The boulder clay (Context 107) overlay bedrock in these areas. Towards the centre of the excavated area, the boulder clay (Context 107) had apparently been completely truncated, probably as a result of the landscaping works, and a ridge of weathered basalt bedrock occurred physically beneath the landscaping deposit (Context 102). No features or material of archaeological significance were observed in the natural strata, although the two later linear features (Contexts 103 and 105) had been cut down into the bedrock (Fig. 5). The archaeological monitoring exercise was completed when the natural strata were exposed (Plate 7).

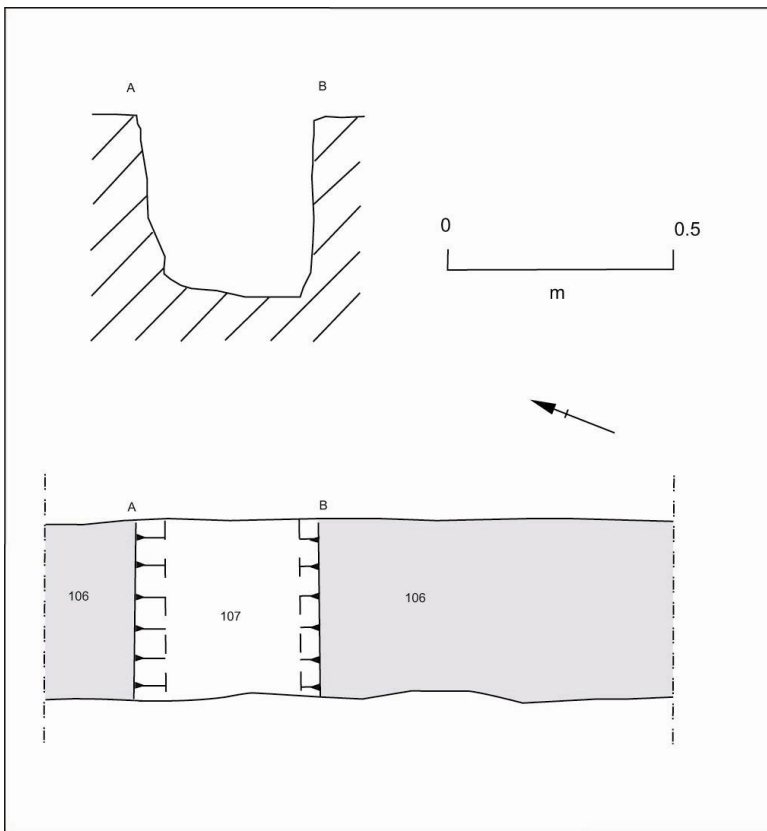
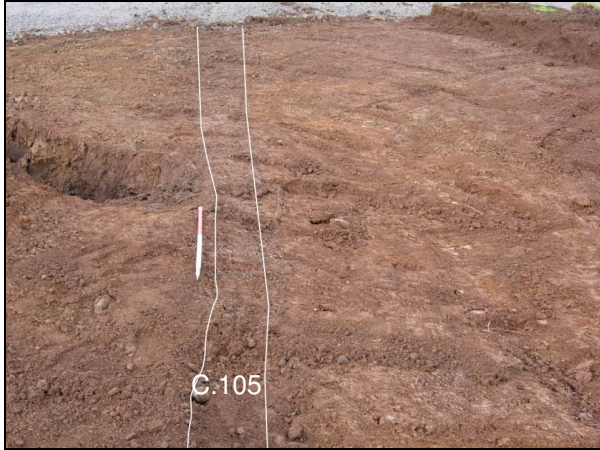
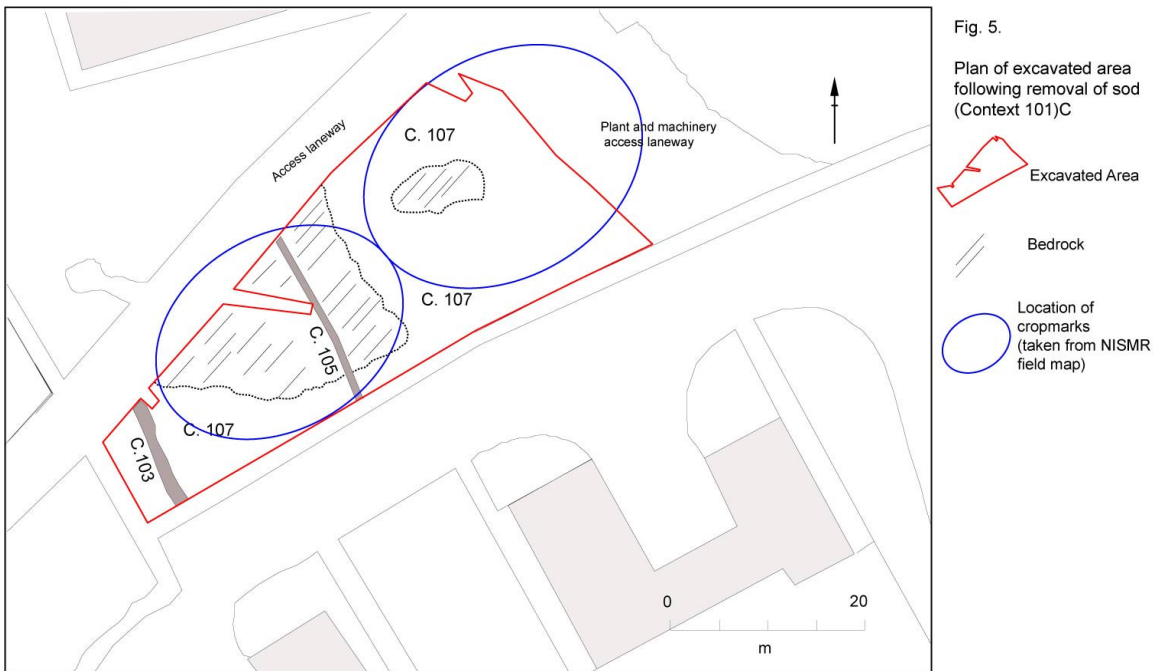


Plate 5 (Top left). Linear feature (Context 105)(Facing north-north-west) The feature is shown here at subsoil level (Context 107), following removal of the landscaping deposit (Context 102) through which it was cut.. **Plate 6** (Top right). Potsherd and glass fragment unearthed from linear feature (Context 105). **Fig. 4** Plan and profile of *sondage* excavated through linear feature (Context 105).



Plate 7. The excavated area at completion of the monitoring work. (The apparent arcs in the foreground are due to the tracks of the mechanical excavator) (Facing south-east).



Conclusion

The monitoring work undertaken by the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork demonstrated that there is no surviving remains of the two sites recorded in the NISMR as Ant 050:152 and Ant 050:171. The recorded location of the two sites has been heavily landscaped in the past 30 years and this landscaping activity is represented both by the discontinuity which resulted in the truncation of the boulder clay and weathered bedrock, and by the homogenous dark brown silty loam deposit (Context 102) recorded over the excavated area. This landscaping deposit was the only stratum overlying the natural subsoil and bedrock, suggesting that any earlier deposits or features of archaeological significance were completely truncated during the landscaping of the hospital grounds. It is consequently recommended that no further archaeological input is required in this project.

Archive

Finds: Fragment of glass and potsherd found in linear feature (Context 105) are held within the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology.

None

Photographs:

32 digital images were taken during the monitoring job. The images are digitally archived within the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast.

Drawings

1 plan and profile drawing are held within the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast.

Bibliography

EHS SM 7 file Ant 050:152

EHS SM 7 file Ant 050:171

Hamlin, A. 1976. *The Archaeology of Early Christianity in the North of Ireland*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Queen's University, Belfast.

In advance of the excavation, a small test pit was excavated in the north-west corner of the excavated area (Fig. in order to determine the depth and nature of the stratigraphy likely to be encountered. The test pit measured 1 m x 0.6 m. A sod of topsoil (Context T101) with a depth of approximately 0.2 m was removed to expose a deposit of dark brown silty loam with which contained modern potsherds, a soft drink's can and unworked flint flakes. The silty loam deposit (Context T102) had a depth of 0.55 m. Removal of the silty loam deposit (Context T102) exposed a shallow spread of orange brown silty boulder clay, which overlay bedrock (Context T103). Excavation of the test pit was discontinued with the exposure of the bedrock. The stratigraphy in the test pit was replicated in section edges formed by a number of cuttings made on the site as part of the site rendering works.

