

Centre for Community Archaeology
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A COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION
AT LISDOO FORT, LISNASKEA,
COUNTY FERMANAGH

DSR No. 142

Licence number AE/2022/107





**A Community Archaeological Excavation at Lisdoo Fort,
Lisnaskea, County Fermanagh**

Ruairí Ó Baoill

DSR No. 142

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On behalf of



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A Community Archaeological Excavation at Lisdoon Fort, Lisnaskea, County Fermanagh

Ruairí Ó Baoill

1. Summary

A three-week community excavation was carried out at Lisdoon bivallate rath, also known as Lisdoon Fort, Lisnaskea Co. Fermanagh from 7th- 27th September 2022 (Licence No. AE/2022/107; NISMR FER 246:015; Grid ref H3627033130; Figs 1 and 2). The archaeological investigations were undertaken by the Centre for Community Archaeology (CCA), Queen's University Belfast on behalf of Lough Erne Landscape Partnership (LELP) under the direction of Ruairí Ó Baoill. The investigation was part of the *Project 21: People, Place, Power and Pageantry: Exploring Fermanagh in the time of the Maguires*. The excavation uncovered new information about the outer enclosing bank and ditch of the monument.

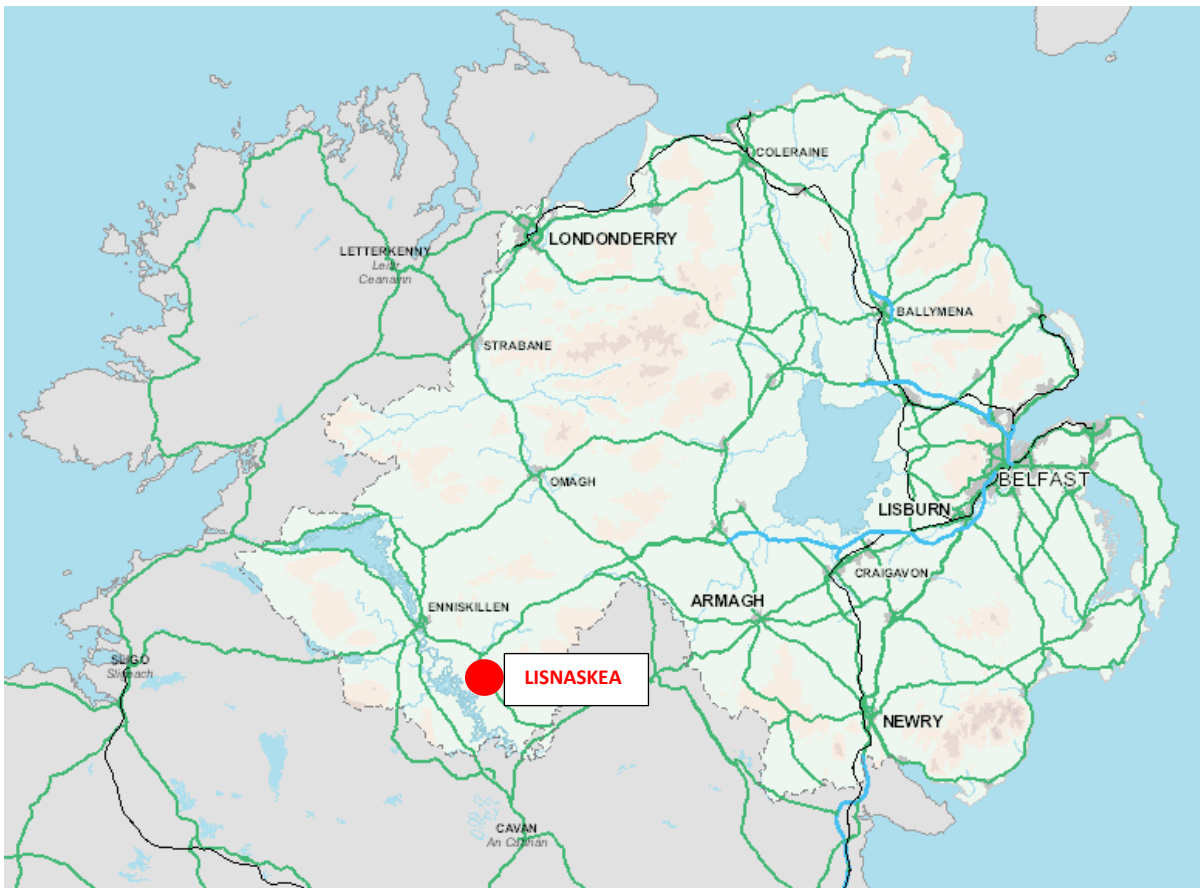


Figure 1. Map showing location of Lisnaskea, County Fermanagh.

2. Introduction

Lisnaskea village is located approximately 11.5 kilometres south-east of Enniskillen, in County Fermanagh. During the Medieval period Lisnaskea lay within the Gaelic Irish lordship of the Maguires (Mág Uidhir) and was the site of several important Maguire residences. It is also close to the Maguire lordly inaugural landscape of Sciath Gabhra. In September 2022, a three-week community excavation was undertaken at Lisdoo bivallate rath, also known as Lisdoo Fort, in Lisnaskea (Licence No. AE/2022/107; NISMR FER 246:015; Grid ref H3627033130; Figs 1 and 2). The excavation was carried out by the Centre for Community Archaeology (CCA), Queen's University Belfast on behalf of Lough Erne Landscape Partnership (LELP) under the direction of Ruairí Ó Baoill. The excavation took place in the garden of No. 27 Castle Balfour Road, whose house and grounds straddle the boundaries of the monument. Mrs June Jordan, who lives there, kindly facilitated the investigation and it would not have taken place without her consent. Mrs Elaine Kennedy, who lives within No. 29 Castle Balfour Road, adjacent to Mrs Jordan's property and also within the limits of the monument, was also of great assistance during the excavation. The 2022 archaeological investigation was part of the *Project 21: People, Place, Power and Pageantry: Exploring Fermanagh in the time of the Maguires*. Two trenches were excavated during the 2022 investigation and focused on the outer bank and ditch in the north-eastern portion of the monument to try and gather further information about the nature and function of the rath, which has undergone previous archaeological investigations, most notably Nick Brannon's excavation programme in 1977 (Brannon 1981-82).

2.1 Site Location and Description

The 2022 CCA excavation was the latest archaeological investigation undertaken at Lisdoo Fort (FER 246: 015; Grid Ref: H3627033130). Lisdoo Fort is located in Castle Balfour Demesne, close to the south-western limits of Lisnaskea village. It is within the parish of Aghalurcher and the barony of Magherasteffana. Prior to the seventeenth century the monument stood in the countryside, but it is now within the limits of the village, located in the middle of a modern housing estate. It is bounded to the east by the Castle Balfour Road, to the north by the road into the Kilmacrannell housing estate, to the west by a row of four houses in that estate and to the south-east by other buildings and some open land (Figs 6 and 7; Plates 1 and 2). The Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record entry for the site states that: *The interior of this rath is a slightly domed, oval area, 73.5m NW-SE x 55m NE-SW, enclosed by 2 banks & 2 ditches. The inner bank is 7.6m wide, 0.2m high & 2.1m above the inner ditch, which is 2.4m wide & 1.6m below the second bank. It is 10m wide & 2.8m above the second ditch, which is 8m wide & 0.40m deep. The original entrance is at the E.*



Figure 2. Location map showing Enniskillen and Lisnaskea.

3. Historical background

During the Medieval period Lisnaskea lay within the Gaelic Irish lordship of the Maguires (Mág Uidhir). The rise of the Maguires as the principal family in Fermanagh began in the late thirteenth century (Simms 2004, 85-103). In the fifteenth century as the Maguires steadily increased their holdings in Fermanagh, two main branches of the family developed. The senior branch had its base at Lisnaskea, while the junior grouping was based in Enniskillen. By the sixteenth century the Maguire lords ruled an area of roughly 450,000 acres and the lordship corresponds very closely to that of the modern county boundary. The Maguire lordship was in a very sensitive position, politically, as it was the principal gateway and buffer-zone between Ulster and Connacht.

Although they were a major Gaelic family within Ulster, the Maguires were in the position of *uir-rí* (underlord) and subject to the influence at various times to either the O'Neill (Tyrone, Armagh and Derry) and O'Donnell (Donegal) lords. These were the principal Gaelic lords of Ulster (Hunter 2004, 109-145) and both lordships bordered Fermanagh. At various times the Maguires were forced, through expediency and to try to maintain their lands, to side with one against the other in those families' continual struggle for supremacy in Ulster. This was mostly a successful policy. As a result, Fermanagh was, by the standards of other Gaelic lordships, relatively peaceful and was often described in the Gaelic annalistic histories as a place where arts and literature flourished, and where churches were sponsored.

It has been recently argued that in the Medieval period Lisdoon Fort may have been an important royal site of the Maguires and linked to the Maguire royal and inauguration landscape of Sciath (or Sgiath) Gabhra that lies close to the north and east of Lisnaskea (Logue, forthcoming). This ritual and lordship landscape also includes sites at Cornashee (FER 246:001-FER 246:003), Sheebeg (FER 246:007-FER 246:009 and FER 246:082) and Lisoneill ringfort (FER 246: 006) (FitzPatrick 2004; Fitzpatrick, Murphy, McHugh, Donnelly & Foley 2011; Murphy and Fitzpatrick 2014).

In the Late Medieval period a Maguire stone tower house seems to have been existence in the Lisnaskea area, probably the *Caisleán Scéithe* or *Castle-skeagh* mentioned in sixteenth and early seventeenth century Irish and Plantation documents and is located roughly 500m north of Lisdoon Fort. It has been suggested by Logue (forthcoming) that this building was constructed in the period *circa* AD 1500 as a replacement for Lisdoon Fort as the main Maguire residence and that what we know now as Lisdoon Fort was the original *Lios na Scéithe* that gave its name to the modern village. If this is the case, we do not know when and why the name of the rath changed from *Lios na Scéithe* to *Lisdoon* in the Post-Medieval period after the Maguires abandoned using the rath in favour of their newly constructed *Caisleán Scéithe*.

In the later sixteenth century, the growing Tudor English interference in the affairs of large parts of Ireland still under Gaelic control led to Cúchonnacht Maguire surrendering the Fermanagh lordship in 1585 to the English Lord Deputy Sir John Perrot, with a regrant from the Crown the following year on his promise that English forms of land tenure would be introduced to replace the old Gaelic *gabháil cine* (gavelkind) in the estates of his lordship.

During the Nine Years' War (1593-1603) the rival branches of the Maguire family took opposing sides. Hugh Maguire, of the Enniskillen branch, was the 15th chief of the Maguires and ruled Fermanagh from 1589-1600. He was one of the instigators of the resistance against the Tudor incursion into Gaelic Ulster and was a major leader in the war. He was killed in March 1600, in a skirmish with English soldiers close to Cork City and was succeeded by his half-brother Cúchonnacht Óg, last of the Gaelic chiefs to surrender to the English and organiser of the Flight of the Earls in September 1607. The rival claimant to the title of Lord of Fermanagh, Conor Rua of the Lisnaskea branch of the Maguires, sided with the English in the Nine Years' War but was only rewarded with a grant of part of the Barony of Magherasteffana in the plantations that followed the defeat of the Gaelic lords at Kinsale and their subsequent flight to Europe. The rest of Fermanagh was parcelled out to British and, to a lesser extent, Gaelic undertakers.

Lisnaskea village was established by the Balfour family during the early seventeenth century plantations and in later centuries was developed by the Earl of Erne. Initially, the proportion of *Castle-skeagh* was included in the grant from King James I to Michael Lord Balfour of Burleigh of the precinct of Knockninny. It was regranted in 1620 to James Lord Balfour of Glenawley, who had acquired his brother's Fermanagh estates in 1615 and was actively engaged in building a fortified

house - Castle Balfour - at Lisnaskea when Captain Nicholas Pynnar visited in 1618/19 and recorded the works going on there (Earl of Erne 1896; Waterman 1968; Hunter 2004; FER 246:057). The Maguire tower house may have been demolished to provide stone for the new building, although it remains possible that some of its lowest sections may have been incorporated into Balfour's castle (see Logue forthcoming), itself now a ruin following a disastrous fire in 1803.

3.1 Monument type

Raths, also known by archaeologists as ringforts, were circular enclosures surrounding (usually) farmsteads that most of the secular population lived in during the second half of the first millennium AD in Ireland. There were hundreds of these types of sites known from County Fermanagh and tens of thousands were constructed across the whole of Ireland during this period (Foley and McHugh 2014; Kerr and McCormick 2004; Stout 1997). The enclosure perimeters of most of the raths were usually defined by one or more defensive ditches and internal earthen banks, though unenclosed settlement was also practiced. It was within the area defined by the banks and ditches that people constructed houses, lived, and conducted their daily activities. Where there was one defensive ditch and bank surrounding the farmstead, these are known to archaeologists as univallate raths. Where there are two banks and ditches present the site is known as a bivallate rath. Lisdoon Fort, with its two earthen banks and external ditches, is a bivallate rath. Bivallate raths may have been deliberately located near the boundaries of *tuatha* (minor lordships or territories) functioning as defensive, ritual or high-status sites. They may also have functioned as a mixture of all three. Lisdoon Fort, within the barony of Magherasteffana, is in the south of the territory close to its boundary with the baronies of Coole and Clankelly (Kerr and McCormick 2004, 72-75 and their Fig 3.8).

3.2 Cartographic background

'Lisdoon Fort'/'Lisdoon' is portrayed on all editions of the nineteenth century six-inch to one mile Ordnance Survey maps. There are three banks illustrated surrounding the monument on the First Edition map (*circa* 1830; Fig 3) but only two, as is actually the case, on the Second and Third Edition maps (*circa* 1860 and *circa* 1900, respectively; Figs 4 and 5). The multiple banks shown on the earliest Ordnance Survey map, however, may simply be artistic licence or an inaccurate interpretation of the landscape at the monument by the nineteenth century surveyors.

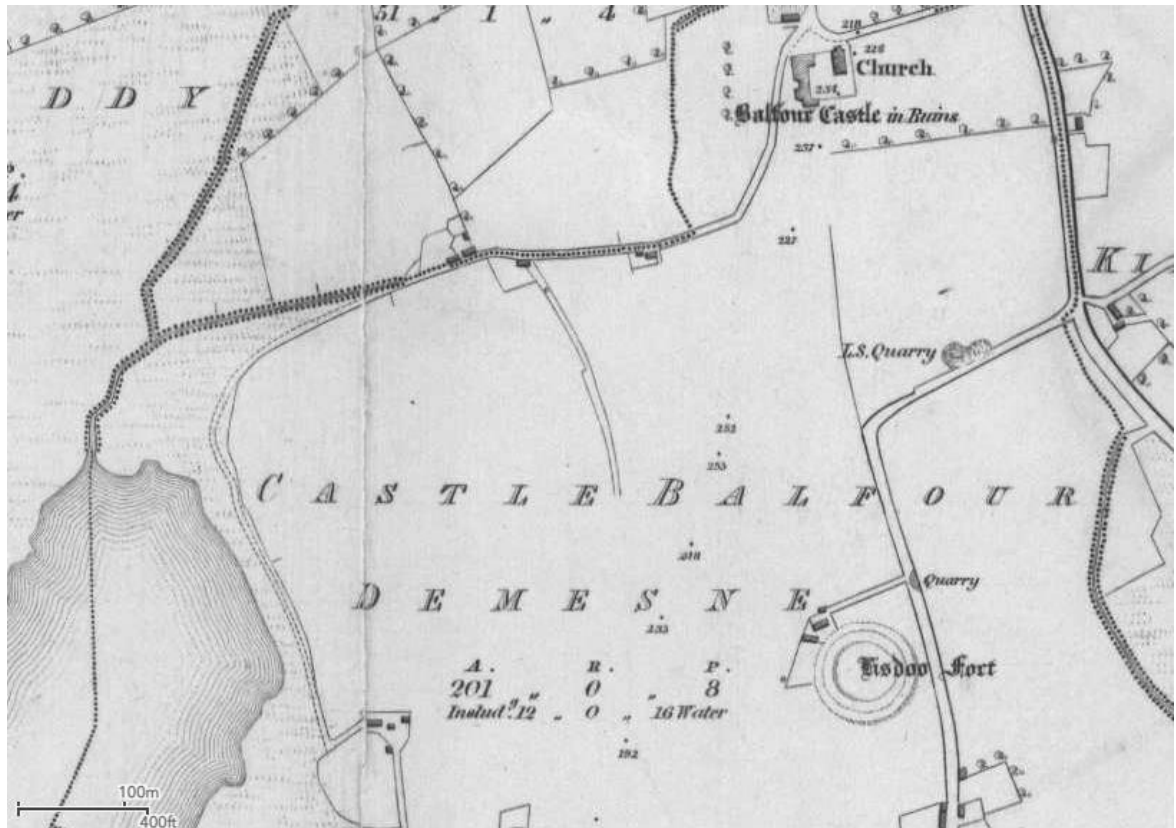


Figure 3. Detail from First Edition Ordnance Survey six-inch map sheet (circa 1830), showing 'Lisdoon Fort'.

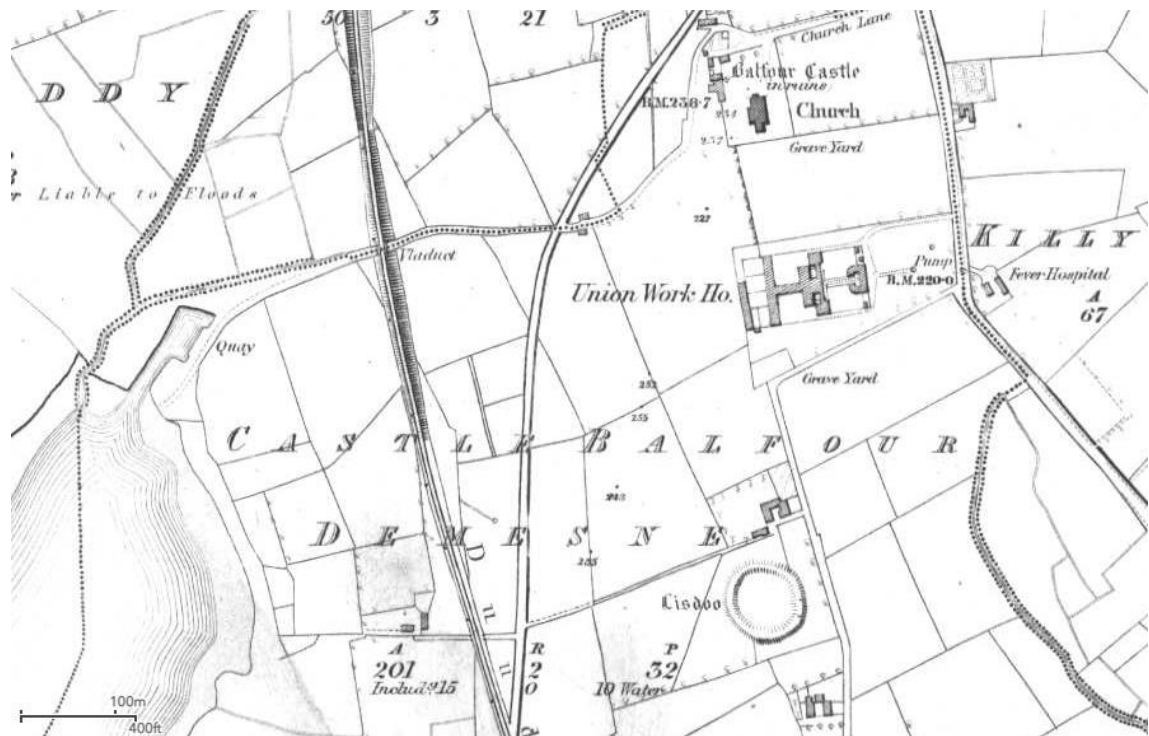


Figure 4. Detail from the Second Edition Ordnance Survey six-inch map (circa 1860), showing 'Lisdoon'.

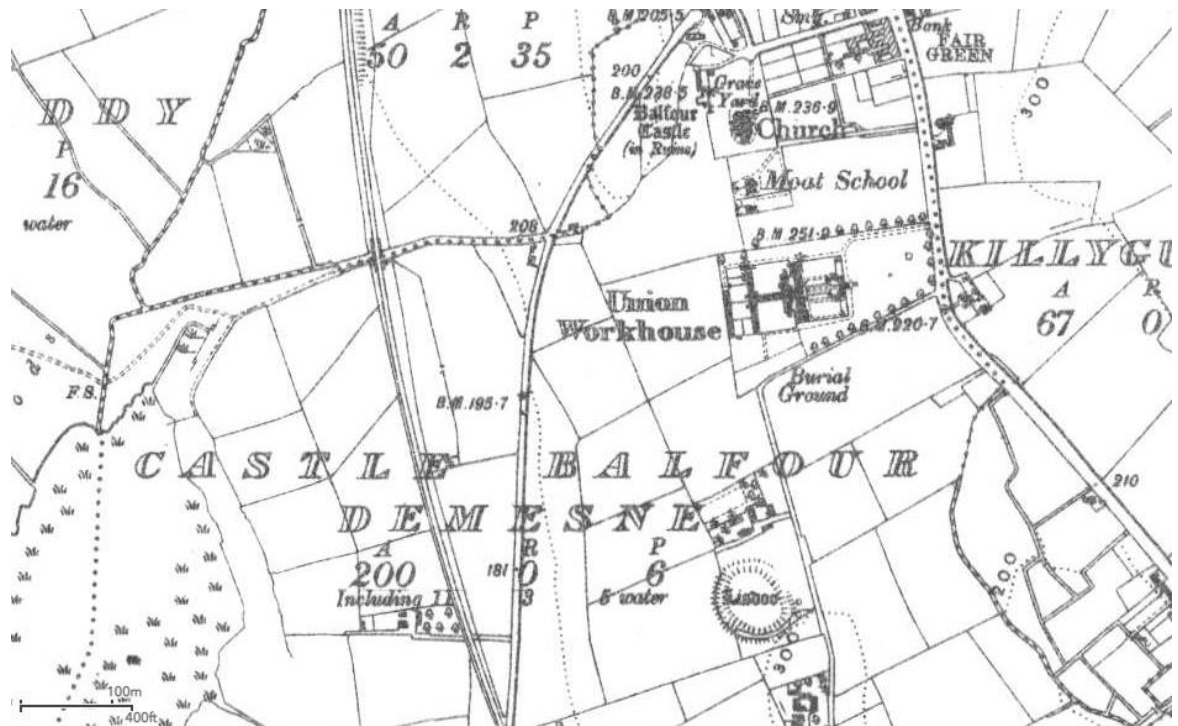


Figure 5. Detail from the Third Edition Ordnance Survey six-inch map (circa 1900), showing 'Lisdoon'.

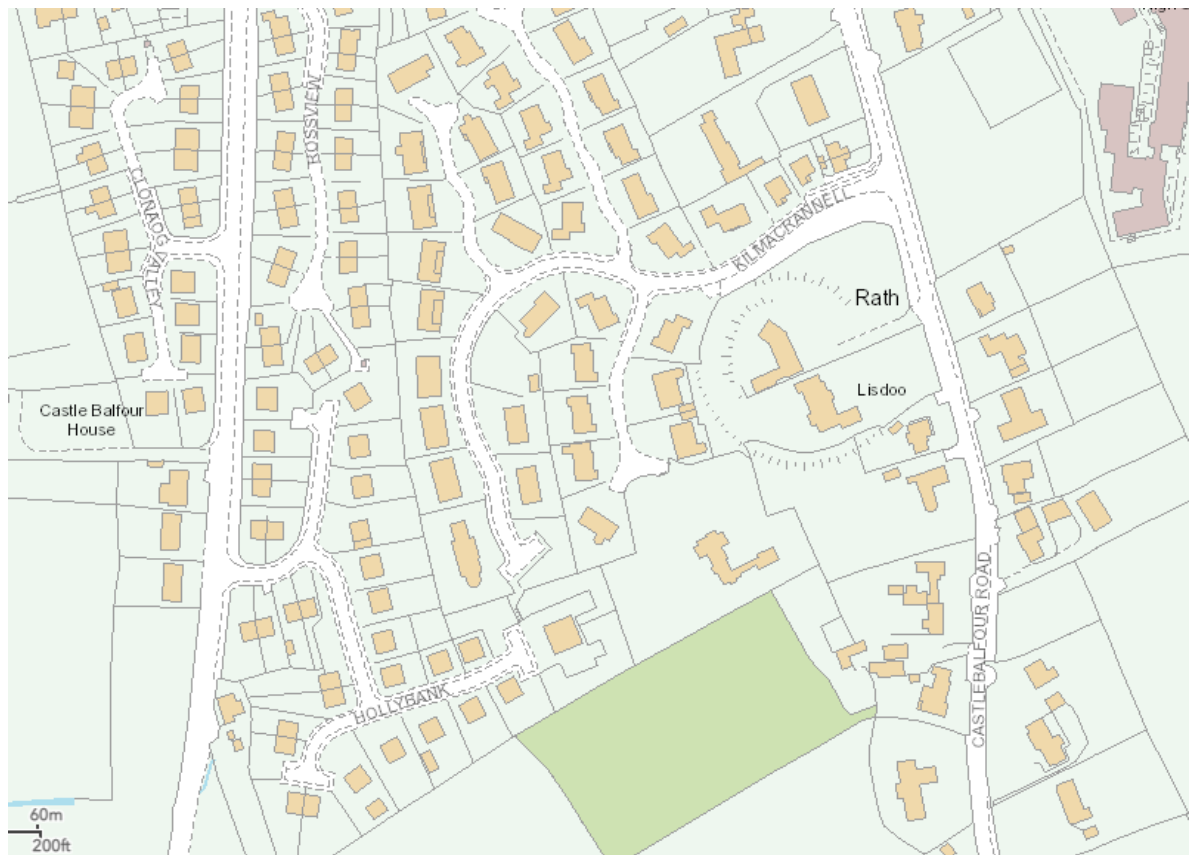


Figure 6. Map detail showing the location of Lisdoon bivallate ringfort within Lisnaskea, County Fermanagh. From the HED Historic Environment Map Viewer (accessed 19th August 2022).



Figure 7. Map showing the detailed location of Lisdoo bivalent ringfort within Lisnaskea village, County Fermanagh. From the HED Historic Environment Map Viewer (accessed 19th August 2022).



Plate 1. Aerial photograph showing the location of Lisdoo bivalent rath and the modern buildings within the interior of the monument, Lisnaskea village, County Fermanagh. From the HED Historic Environment Map Viewer (accessed August 2022).



Plate 2. Detailed aerial photograph showing the location of Lisdoon bivallate rath and the modern buildings within the interior of the monument, Lisnaskea village, County Fermanagh. From the HED Historic Environment Map Viewer (accessed August 2022).

4. Archaeological background to the site

Lisdoon Fort has been subject to previous archaeological investigations prior to 2022. The southern half of the ringfort and the south-east section of its earthworks had been damaged prior to Brannon's excavation in 1977 (Brannon 1981-82, 53) and this now constitutes No. 29 Castle Balfour Road, while his investigation focused on the northern half of the site which is now No. 27 Castle Balfour Road. The 1977 excavation uncovered two phases of occupation at the site dated to the first millennium AD and the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries AD, based on the finds recovered, including a Medieval coin and both locally produced and imported glazed pottery. The animal bones recovered from the excavation - such as wild fowl, red deer and swan or geese - suggest that the residents of the ringfort were of high status, and that this may have been the residence of the Maguires prior to the

construction of their tower house (for a detailed consideration see Logue Forthcoming). No structures were uncovered in the interior of the monument during the 1977 excavation.

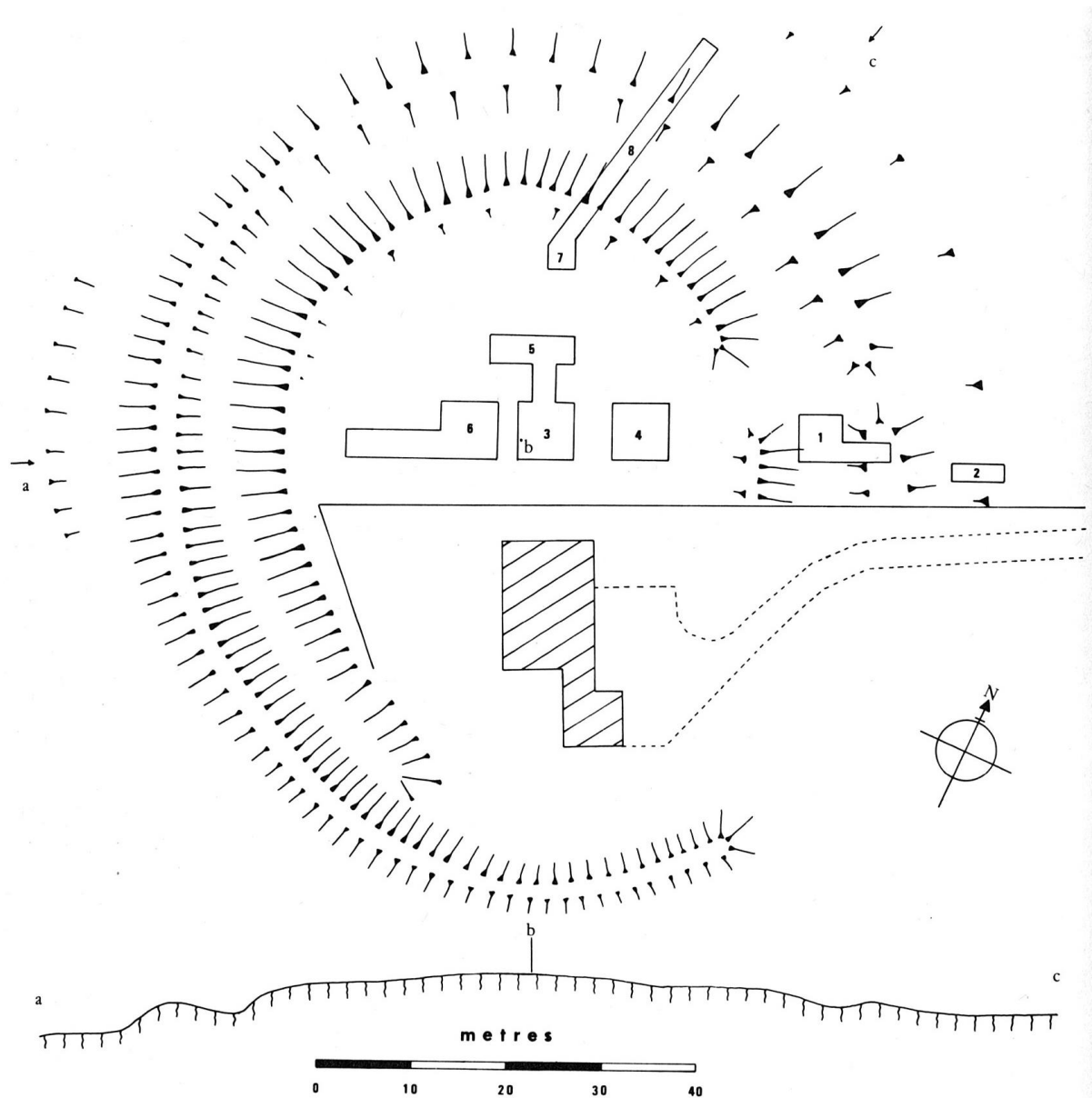


Figure 8. Plan of Lisdoon Fort from Brannon's 1977 excavation report (Brannon 1981-82, 54, Fig. 1). The drawings are replicated with different labelling in Foley and McHugh 2014.

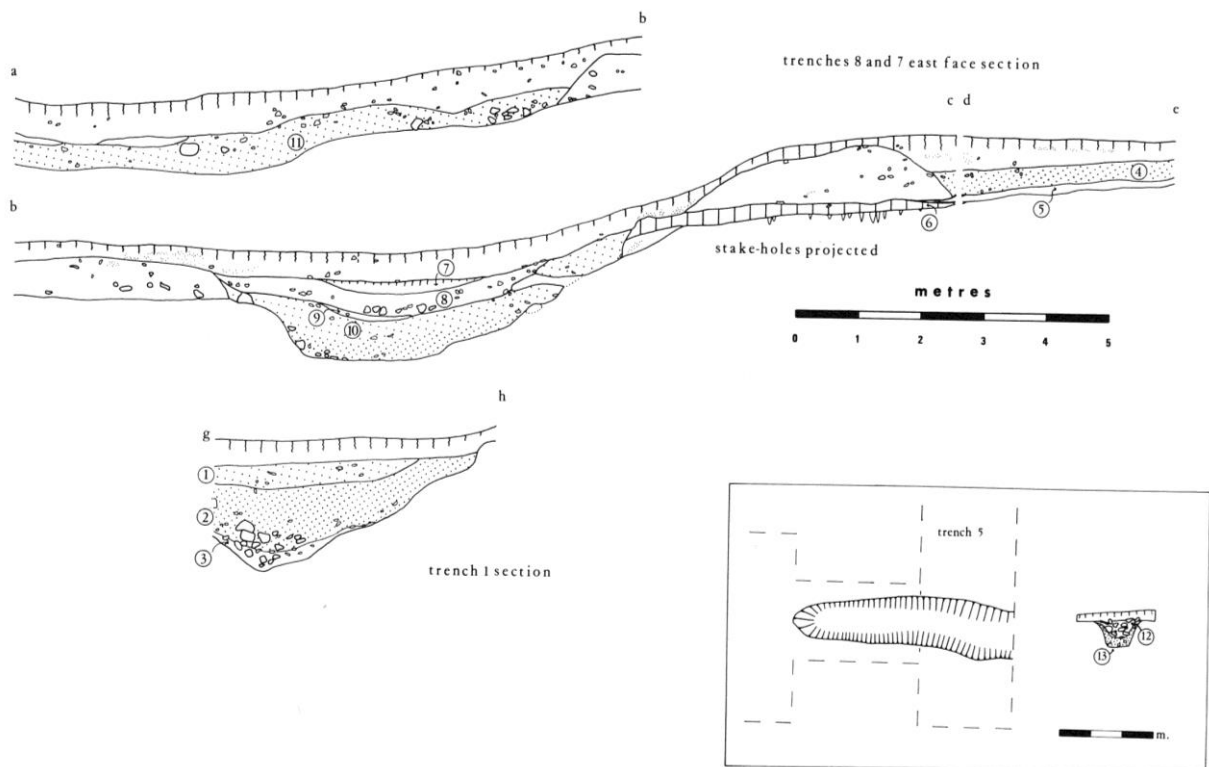


Figure 9. The section faces of Trenches 1, 7 and 8 from Brannon's 1977 excavation report (Brannon 1981-82, 56, Fig. 2).

In 2006 further ground works at the site were monitored by archaeologists when the existing dwelling at No. 29, in the southern half of the interior of the monument was demolished and a slightly larger building erected in its place. The archaeological monitoring of these ground works revealed that the area had been severely impacted by the previous construction work and it was recorded that the natural subsoil was directly overlain with building material. No archaeological features or artefacts were identified (Farrimond MacManus 2006). In 2004 topsoil stripping under archaeological supervision was carried in an area to the west of the fort but nothing of archaeological significance was uncovered (Gahan & Long 2004).

4.1 Other archaeological sites in the environs of Lisdoon Fort

Lisdoon Fort lies within Castle Balfour Demesne townland and, apart from Castle Balfour (FER 246:057), there are several other known archaeological within the townland recorded in the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record (NISMR). These include the historic settlement at Lisnaskea, a market cross and a later workhouse and workhouse burial ground (Table 1.)

NISMR No.	Site Type
FER 246:010	Cross: Lisnaskea Market Cross
FER 246:063	Historic Settlement: Lisnaskea (including Holy Trinity Church; FER 246:065)
FER 246:083	Workhouse
FER 246:083	Workhouse Burial Ground

Table 1. Archaeological sites in Castle Balfour Demesne townland (from the NISMR).

5. The 2022 Excavation

5.1 Recording Methodology

All investigations were carried out by hand. The two trenches were covered with protective terram and backfilled by a mini digger under strict archaeological supervision on completion of the excavation.

All features were recorded using context sheets for all strata and features encountered. Environmental samples were taken where appropriate. Section drawings and elevations were carried out at a scale of 1:10 and plans at a scale of 1:20. An appropriate number of photographs were taken during the excavation to ensure as full an archive as possible is created during the archaeological investigations. During the excavation trenches were identified by Trench Number (1, 2 etc). The context register for the site was generated using the standard context recording method. Separate context registers were maintained for each trench with a separate set of context numbers relating to each trench (Trench 1 = Context 100, Trench 2 = Context 200).

5.2 Risk Assessment and Health and Safety

Prior to work being carried out a detailed CCA risk assessment was completed and all personnel working on site or who visited site were advised of its contents. CCA staff wore Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) namely high-visibility clothing and steel toe-capped boots at all times. Trenches accessible to the public during the excavations were fenced off with warning signage clearly displayed in public areas to alert to the presence of open trenches.

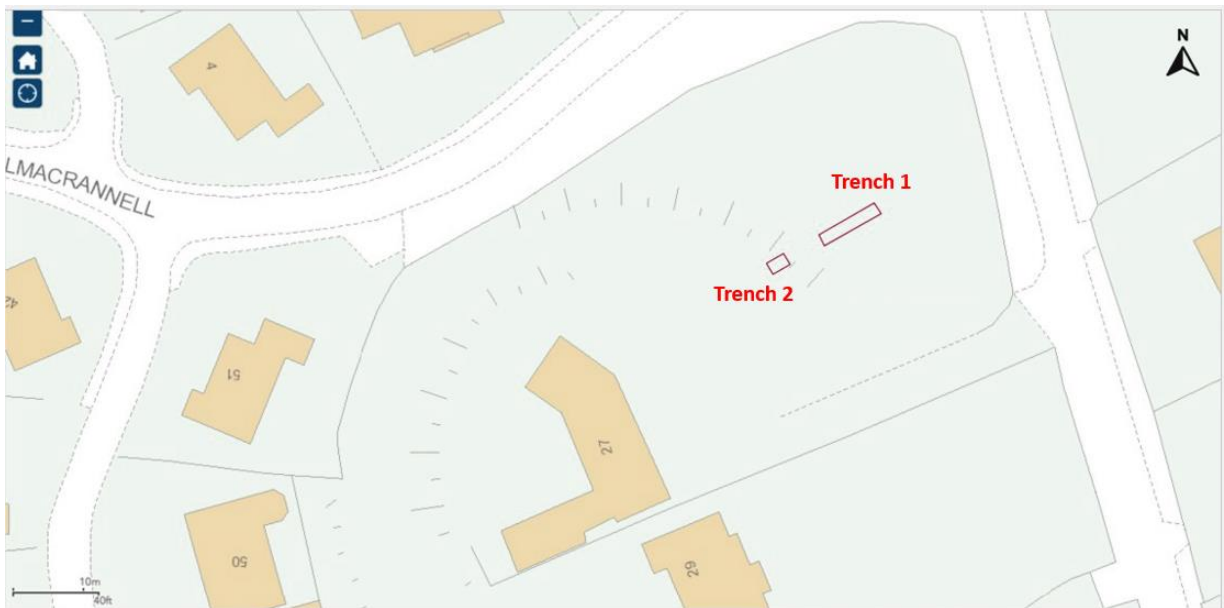


Figure 10. Lisdoon Fort, Lisnaskea. The 2022 CCA excavation. Trench location plan. Trenches overlaid on the HED Historic Environment Map Viewer map of the monument.

6. The 2022 Excavation: account of the archaeology

Two trenches (Tr 1 and Tr 2) were excavated across the outer bank and ditch of the monument within the lawn of No. 27 Castle Balfour Road. The two trenches were aligned together but were 5m apart.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was 9.2m long x 2 m wide. There was a maximum of 0.72m depth of stratigraphy recorded within the trench. Only a small area of the trench was fully excavated down to subsoil level.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was 2m, N-S, x 3m, E-W. There was a maximum of 0.64m depth of stratigraphy recorded within the trench. Only the northern half of the trench was fully excavated down to the level of subsoil.

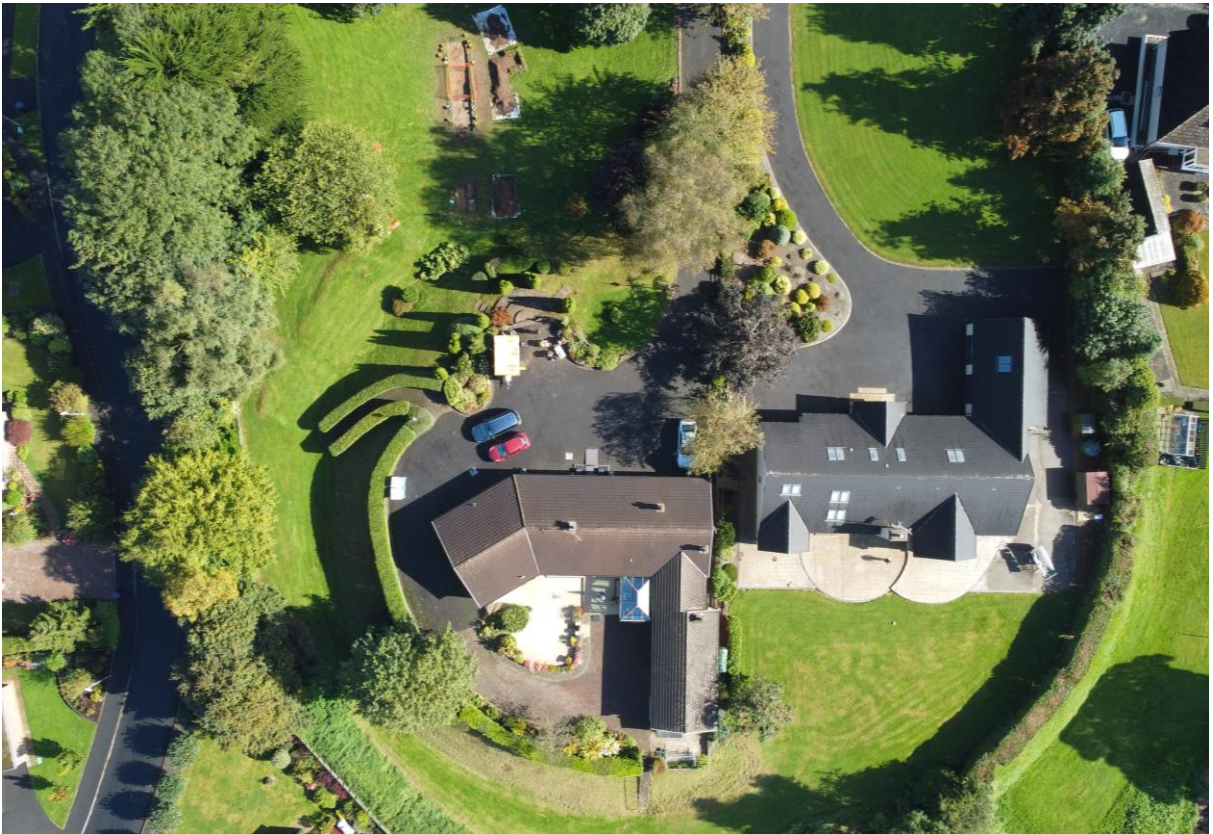


Plate 3. Aerial shot of Lisdoon Fort, September 2022, with the two excavation trenches visible in the garden of No. 27 Castle Balfour Road.

6.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was the larger of the two trenches excavated in 2022. It was 9.2m long, north-east/ south-west x 2m wide. It was excavated to investigate the outer rath bank of Lisdoon Fort.

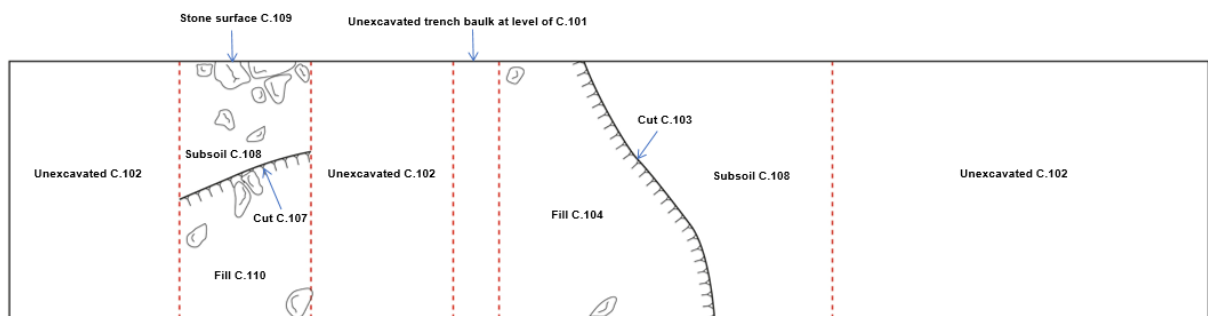


Figure 11. Lisdoon Fort. Plan of Trench 1, post-excavation, showing the main features uncovered.

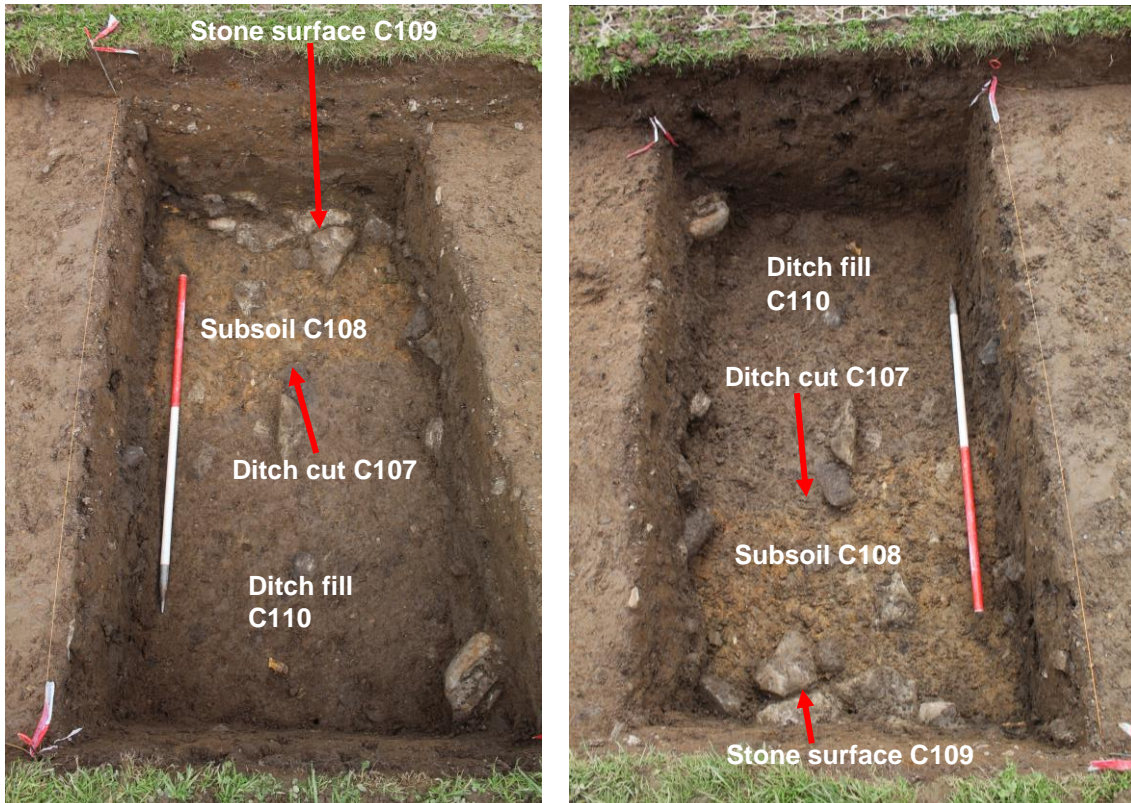


Plate 4. Lisdoon Fort, Trench 1. Cut C.107, fill C.110 and stone surface C.109. From the south-west (image on left) and north-east (image on right).

The earliest phase of activity was uncovered at the south-western end of Trench 1 and took the form of two linear cuts. Close to the southern end of the trench a short section of a linear cut (C.107) was observed in the compact yellow-brown stony subsoil (C.108). The cut was aligned roughly north-south and was tracked for a distance of 1.30m within the trench. The cut was filled with a grey-brown compact clay containing small and medium sized angular stones (C.110). Excavation ceased at the level that the cut and fill were uncovered and recorded, and no artefacts were recovered from the fill to provide a date.

Immediately adjacent to linear cut C.107 was a surface (C.109) of more than a dozen sub-angular, mostly medium-sized, but also some small stones, laid directly on the surface of the subsoil (C.108).

Directly above the cut C.107 and stone surface C.109 was a thick layer of dark grey-brown clay (C.105) that was compact, oily and organic. The material had all the appearance of a ditch fill. It had a maximum recorded depth of 0.34m within Trench 2. From this horizon was recovered 13 sherds of Late Medieval Ulster Coarse Ware pottery and animal bone.

Further east in the trench, on the other side of an unexcavated trench baulk was a very similar material (C.104) and both it and C.105 may in fact be the same ditch fill horizon. C.104 was the fill of a linear cut (C.103) in the subsoil, that was possibly the edge of a ditch, and which was recorded in

the middle of the trench. This cut was aligned roughly north-west/ south-east and a 2.20m long stretch of the feature was recorded within the trench. The feature continued both north-west and south-east beyond the limits of excavation.



Plate 5. Lisdoon Fort. Trench 1. Ditch cut C.103 and fill C.104. From the north-east.

Cut C.103 probably represents the outer/ northern edge of a substantial rath ditch and C.104 and C.105 are the surviving upper fills. Taken together, it could be that the two cuts- C.107 and C.103- constitute parts of the same archaeological feature, possibly a terminal of the substantial outer ditch of the bivallate rath, related to the period when the Maguires occupied the settlement in the Late Medieval period. The stone surface C.109 in this part of the site may constitute an adjacent surface or path, perhaps leading to the interior of the enclosure.

Immediately above the rath-related features was a layer of mottled, stony clay (C.102), containing chert, quartz, red brick, modern ceramics and fragments of styli. Above this was the dark brown loam (C.101) that made up topsoil in this part of the modern garden. It contained modern pottery, glass, iron objects, red brick and a golf ball. Horizons C.101 and C.102 clearly represent the re-purposing of this part of the monument as a garden in recent centuries.

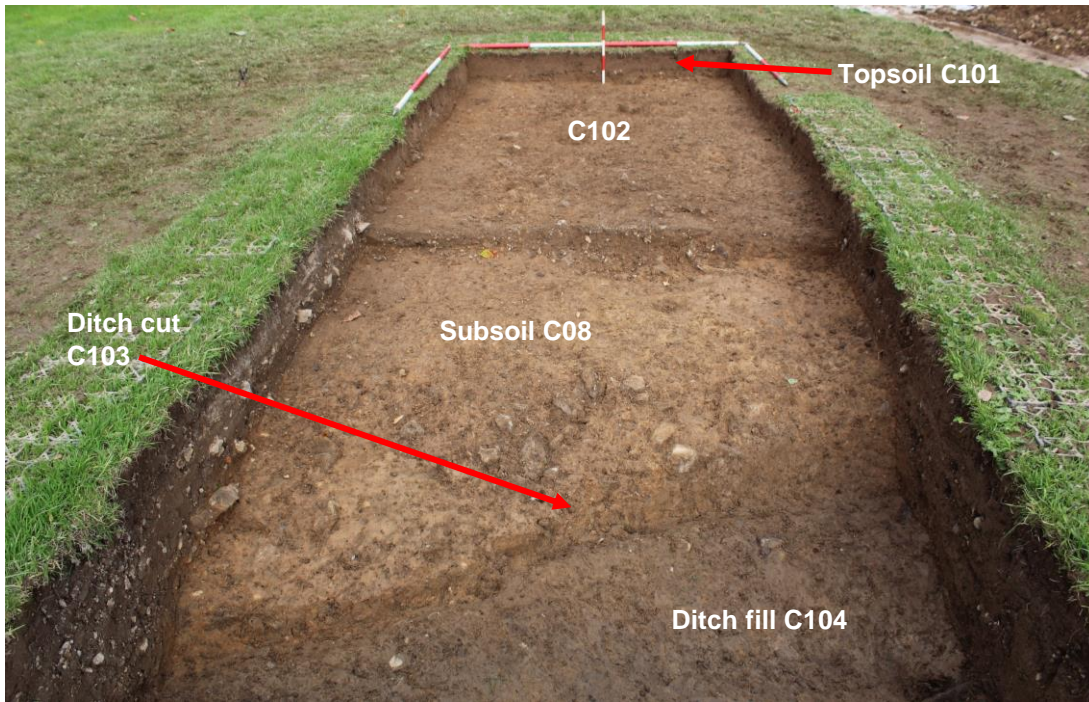


Plate 6. Lisdoon Fort. Trench 1. Ditch cut C.103, fill C.104 and subsoil C.108, in foreground. Post-Medieval surfaces C.102 and C.101 in the background. From the south-west.

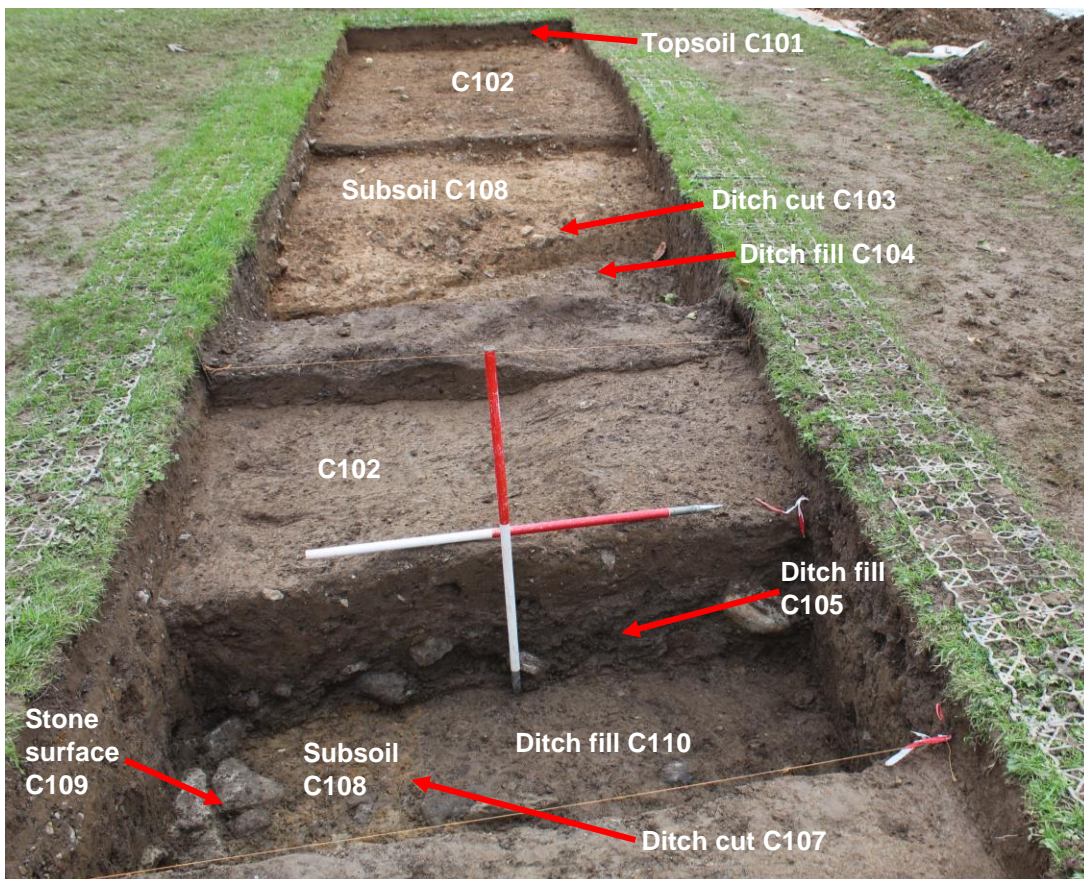


Plate 7. Lisdoon Fort. Trench 1. Ditch cut C.107, ditch fill C.110 and stone surface C.109 in foreground; ditch cut C.103, ditch fill C.104, subsoil C.108, and modern horizons C.101 and C.102 in background. From the south-west.

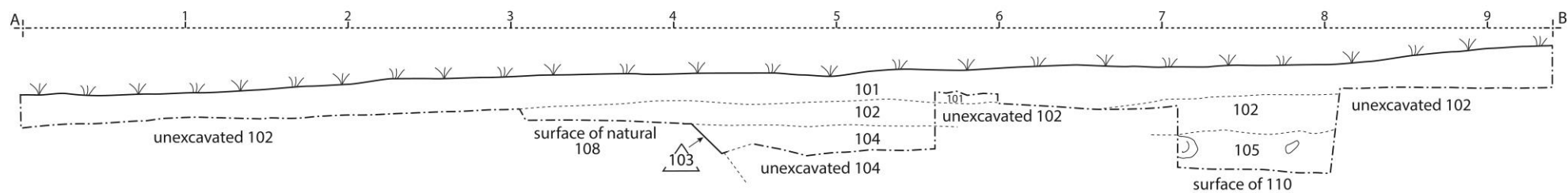
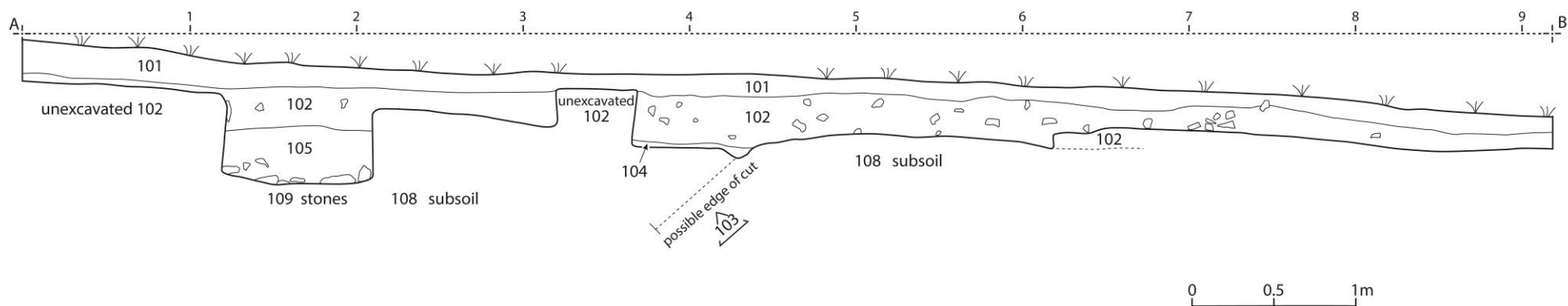


Figure 12 (top). Lisdoon Fort. South-east facing trench section, post-excitation, showing C.101-C.105, C.108 and C.109.

Figure 13 (bottom). Lisdoon Fort. North-west facing trench section, post-excitation, showing C.101-C.105, C.108 and C.110.

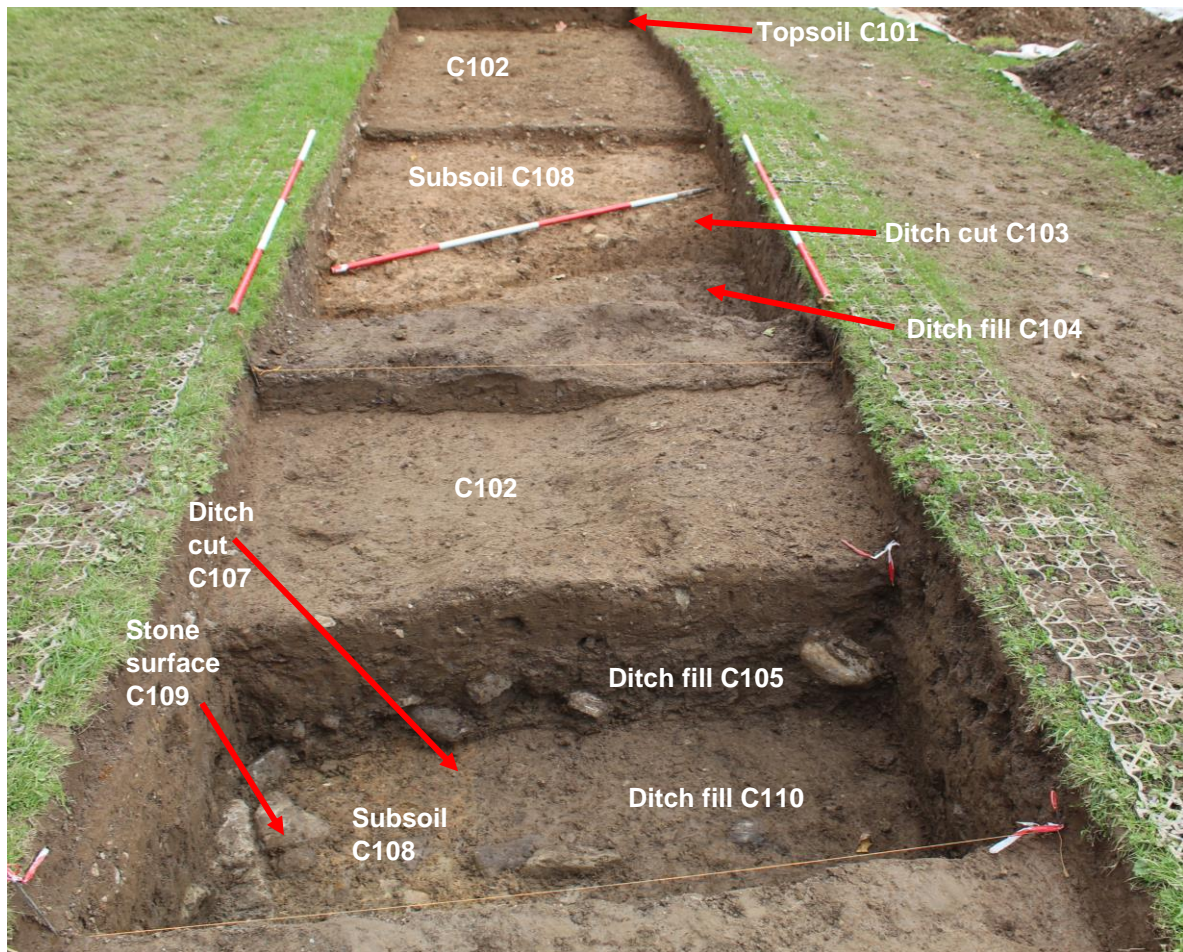


Plate 8. Lisdoon Fort. Trench 1. Ditch cut C.107, ditch fill C.110 and stone surface C.109 in foreground; ditch cut C.103, ditch fill C.104, subsoil C.108, and modern horizons C.101 and C.102 in background. From the south-west.

6.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was located 5.5m south-west of Trench 1. It was aligned north-east/ south-west and was 2m x 3m. It was sited to investigate the outer rath bank. Only the northern half of Trench 2 was fully excavated to subsoil level (C. 227) which was an orange stony clay. Directly above this was an old, pre-rath, ground surface (C.226) consisting of greyish-brown silty clay. From this horizon recovered animal bone and a retouched chert flake.

6.2.1 The rath bank

Built over the pre-rath, ground surface the badly disturbed remains of a rath bank were uncovered. Within Trench 2 the rath bank consisted of a line of revetting stones (C.224), laid directly on the pre-rath surface with no cut visible either in plan or in section. This revetment represents the remains of the western, inner face, portion of the bank. The eastern face lay beyond the limits of excavation. The line of revetting stones effectively cut the trench in half, the northern portion of which was dominated by a series of clay deposits (C.204 and C.225), which may represent in situ bank material.

Along the inner side/ western face of the bank and concentrated in the southern portion of the Trench 2 was a single layer of medium to large angular and sub-angular rocks (C.203). These were quite firmly set into dark brown silty clay (C.223). It is possible that both C.203 and C.223 represent slipped bank material.

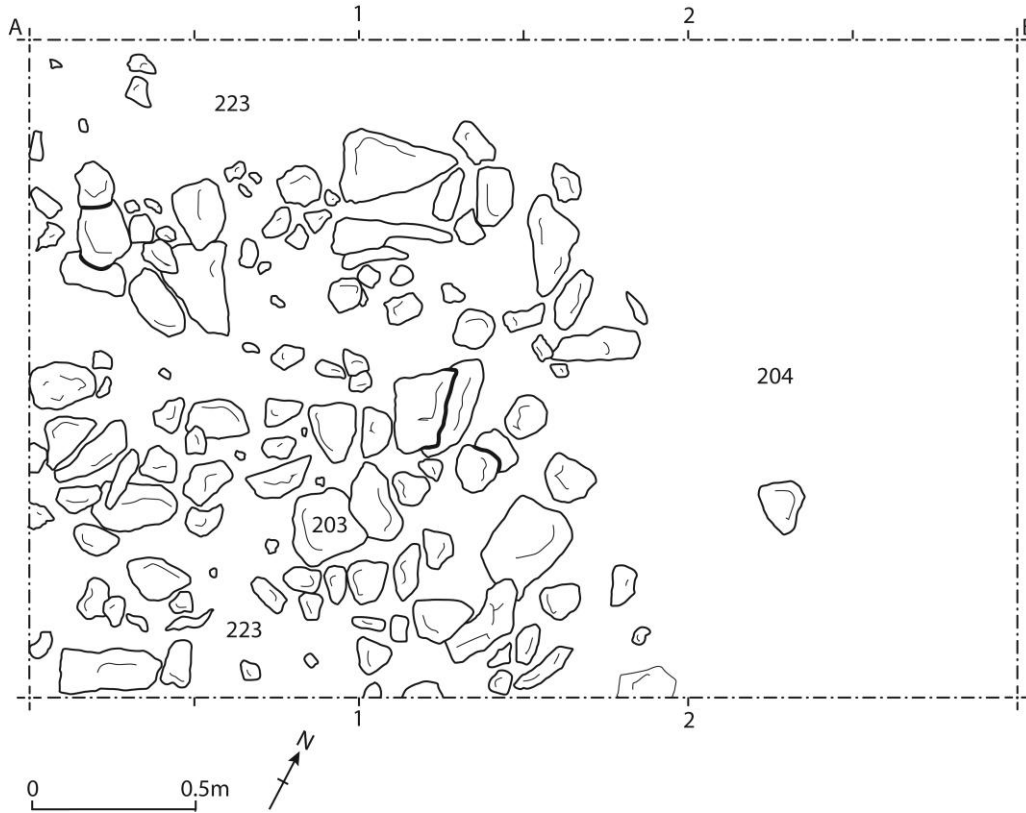


Figure 14. Lisdoon Fort. Trench 2. Plan of trench showing C.203, C.204 and C.223.



Plate 9. Lisdoon Fort. Trench 2. Mid-excavation. Revetting stones (C.224) of the inner face of the rath bank. From the north-west.

Directly above these was a layer of mottled brownish yellow stony and sticky clay with small to medium angular stones throughout (C.202). It is uncertain whether this was bank-related, possibly redeposited natural making up the bank. However, chert flakes and quartz but also eighteenth-nineteenth century pottery was recovered from this horizon so if the layer does originate from the bank, then it suggested that the bank has been heavily disturbed in very recent times.

Cut into horizon C.202 was a series of nine small post holes (cut 205/ fill C.214; cut C.206/ fill C.215; cut C.207/ fill C.216; cut C.208/ fill C.217; cut C.209/ fill C. 218; cut C.210/ fill C.219; cut C.211/ fill C.220; cut C.212/ fill C.221 and cut C.213/ fill C.222). These would appear to be an episode of Post-Medieval, probably relatively modern, activity. Above all of these was sod and topsoil (C.201), containing modern glass. Natural/ subsoil (C. 227) within the trench was an orange stony clay.



Plate 10. Lisdoon Fort. Trench 2, post-excitation. South-east facing section.

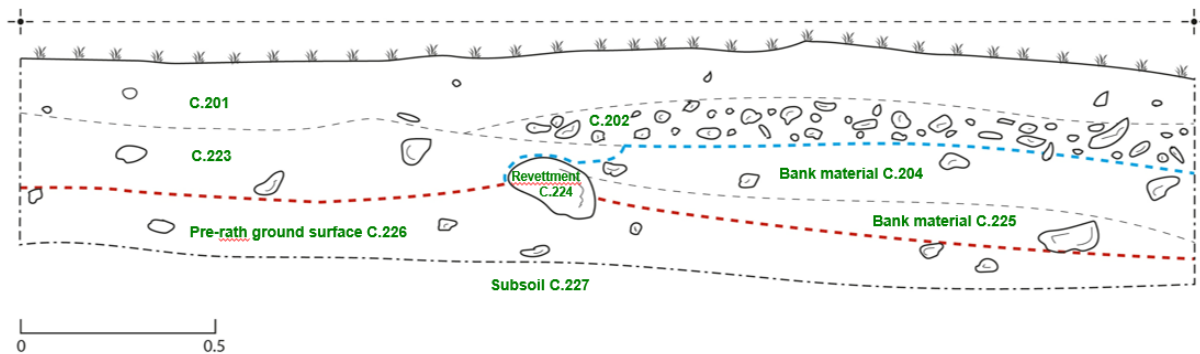


Figure 15. Lisdoon Fort. Trench 2. Annotated south-east facing section, post-excitation.

Presumably the bank investigated within Trench 2 related to the second phase of occupation of the monument when Lisdoon and Lisnaskea was an important Maguire residence in the Late Medieval period.

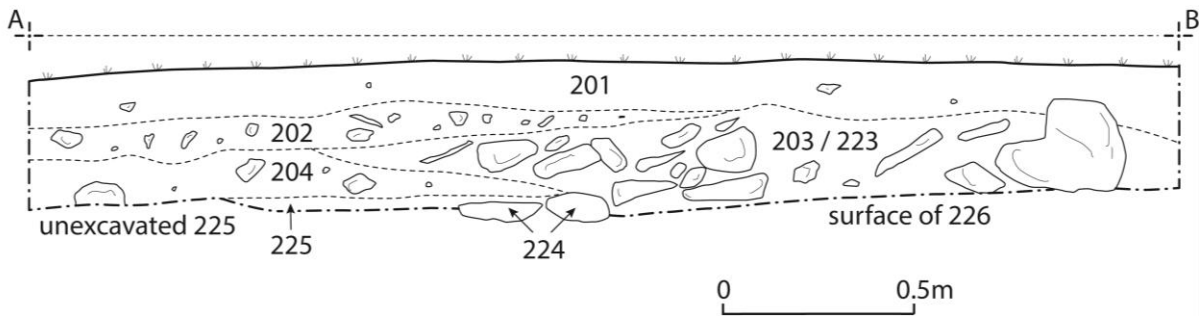


Figure 16. Lisdoon Fort. Trench 2. North-west facing section, post-excitation, showing C.201-C.204 and C.223-C.226.

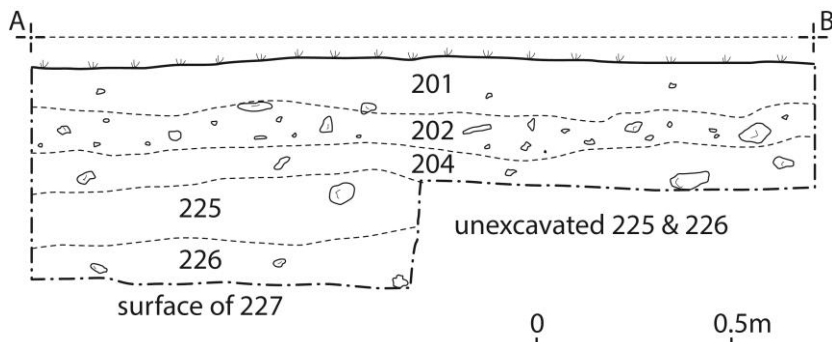


Figure 17. Lisdoon Fort. Trench 2. South-west facing section, post-excitation, showing C.201, C.202, C.204 and C.225-C.227.

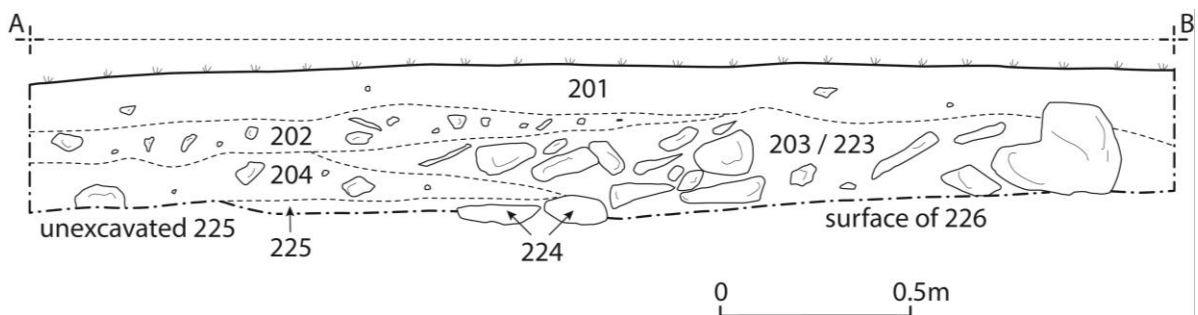


Figure 18. Lisdoon Fort. Trench 2. North-west facing section, post-excitation, showing C.201-C.204 and C.223-C.226.

7. The Finds

The finds from the 2022 CCA excavation were not abundant but this is not surprising given that only a very small portion of the rath was investigated and that the area where the trenches were sited has been used in recent centuries as a domestic garden. What was recovered seems to back up the sequence of activity at the monument recorded by Brannon in his larger excavation in 1977.

Post-Medieval and modern finds recovered from Trench 1 included ceramics, roofing slate, window and bottle glass, fragments of red brick, iron nails, stone styli and fragments of clay tobacco pipe. Medieval finds, from the time of the Maguires, included sherds of Medieval Ulster Coarse Ware pottery and animal bone. Evidence of possible prehistoric activity at the site was shown by the recovery of fragments of struck chert and flint.

Similar Post-Medieval and modern ceramics, glass and red brick and animal bone were uncovered during the excavation in Trench 2. Unglazed coarse pottery fragments and animal bone relating to activity at the rath was also found. Fragments of animal bone were recovered from the pre-rath horizon in Trench 2 and these, when these are analysed, may add interesting new information to the story of the site. As in Trench 1, evidence of possible prehistoric activity at the site was shown by the recovery of fragments of struck chert and flint in Trench 2.



Plate 11. Lisdoon Fort. Sherds of Late Medieval Ulster Coarse Ware pottery, including rim sherds, from the ditch fill C.105 in Trench 1, Lisdoon Fort.



Plate 12. Lisdoon Fort. Trench 2. Two fragments of unglazed coarse pottery, possibly Souterrain Ware, from C.223.



Plate 13. Lisdoon Fort. Fragments of stone styli from Lisdoon Fort, Trench 1.



Plate 14. Lisdoon Fort. The possible 18th century spurred clay tobacco pipe bowl from Trench 1.

8. Discussion and Conclusions

The 2022 CCA excavation at Lisdoon Fort uncovered new and important information about the monument which compliments that uncovered by Nick Brannon in his 1977 excavation and which helps us better understand the nature and function of this important Late Medieval Maguire residence.

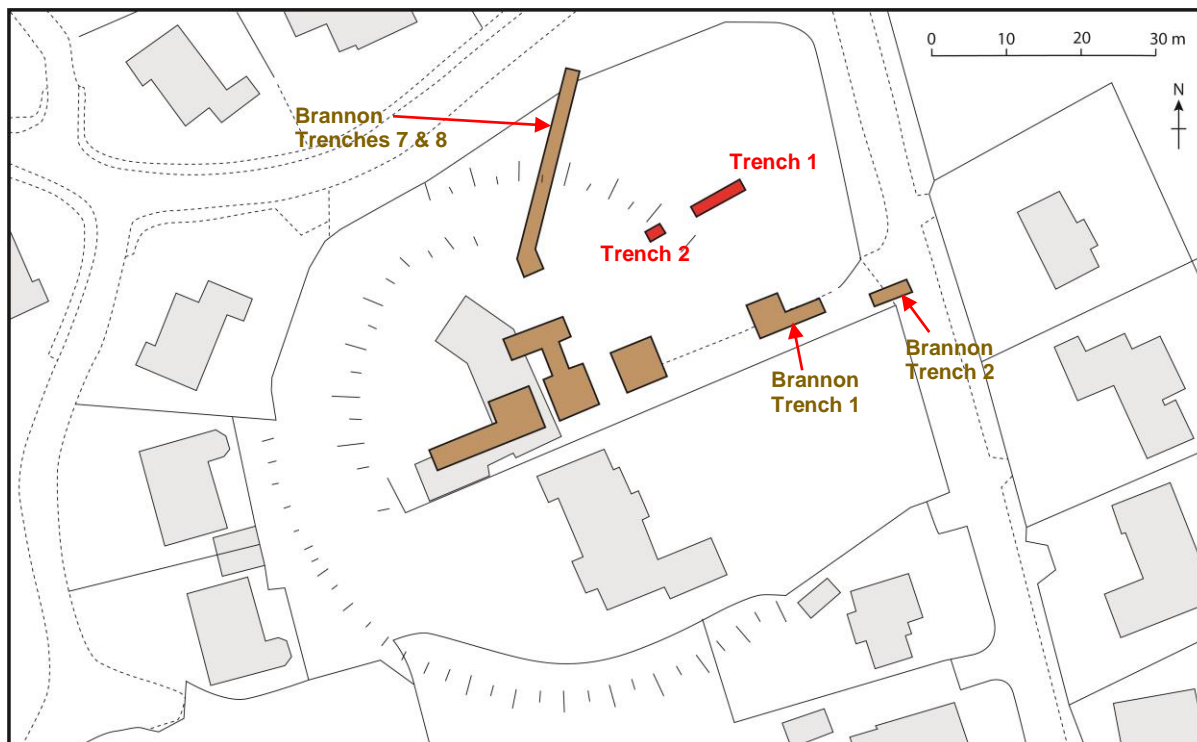


Figure 19. Composite plan of Lisdoon Fort with the 2022 CCA excavation trenches marked in red and the trenches from Nick Brannon's 1977 excavation in brown. Overlaid on the HED Historic Environment Map Viewer map of the monument.

In the report on his 1977 excavation Brannon describes how he excavated a 5.5m wide trench (his Trench 2) over the probable outer rath ditch in the south-east of the monument:

A feature with a maximum depth of 1.5 m was located, but with the trench running for 5.5m across the supposed ditch line no distinct, steep edges were located. It appeared, therefore, that this outer ditch was more of an elongated scoop than a sharply-profiled feature, which was confirmed with the excavation of trench 8 (Brannon 1977, 55; his Figs. 1 and 2).

The Late Medieval outer rath ditch uncovered in Trench 1 of the 2022 CCA excavation was located between 0.30-0.40m below the surface of the modern lawn of No. 27 Castle Balfour. The ditch was at least 4m wide (see Figure 11). It is possible that the original width of the ditch proper may have been wider than 4m but that it narrowed close to the ditch terminal. The organic fills of the ditch, which yielded sherds of Late Medieval Ulster Coarse Ware pottery and fragments of animal bone, dumped in the ditch as rubbish, were excavated to a maximum depth of 0.30m before the excavation finished.

Brannon interpreted an area immediately north of his Trench 1 being a causewayed entrance into the rath adjacent to the terminal of the internal rath ditch (Brannon 1977, 53-54; his Figs. 1 and 2). If the ditch feature and adjacent stone surface uncovered in Trench 1 of the 2022 CCA excavation, located north-east of Brannon's 1977 Trench 1, are the terminal and causeway of the Late Medieval Maguire fortification/ lordly residence at the site, it may well be that the Maguires significantly augmented and changed the layout of the earlier rath. This would not be unsurprising, if the new Lios na Scéithe was to be used as one of their most important lordly centres in Fermanagh.

Brannon got rath bank material surviving to a height of 0.80-0.90m in his Trench 7 (Brannon 1977, 55; his Figs. 1 and 2). In Trench 2 of the 2022 CCA excavation the undisturbed outer rath bank material only survived to a height of 0.30m but the 2022 excavation also uncovered evidence that the outer bank of the rath had been held in place by a course of revetting stones (see Plates 9, 10 and Fig. 15).

The number of fragments of chert observed in many of the archaeological layers uncovered during the 2022 excavation was interesting. There were quite a few struck chert pieces and some struck flint, but no finished tools in the assemblage recovered. This may be because only a very small area of the site was archaeologically investigated in 2022. However, it does show that there was flint and chert working there during the prehistoric period. And this throws up another interesting possibility. The Maguire lordly inauguration site at Cornashee was built over a prehistoric cairn, possibly a passage tomb, and appears to be a case of enforcing the idea of lineage back to the distant past (Murphy and FitzPatrick 2014, 898-900). It may be that there was there a known pre-existing prehistoric site at or close to the location of Lisdoo Fort and that aspect, along with existence of the earlier and smaller rath, could have influenced the Maguires in their decision to make Lisdoo Fort one of their major residences during the Late Medieval period.

The rath-related activity in both trenches investigated in 2022 probably relates to the Maguires lords of Fermanagh, when they occupied the site as a major residence, from around the fourteenth-sixteenth centuries. The discovery of Medieval Coarse Ware pottery sherds during the 2022 CCA excavation echoes the retrieval of similar artefacts during Brannon's investigations and provides further evidence to support the hypothesis put forward by Logue (forthcoming) that Lisdoo Fort was the historical Lios na Scéithe and that it was an important centre of power for the Maguires during the Late Medieval period. As Logue has noted, it is possible the fort was then abandoned when the Maguires built a masonry tower house castle - Caisleán Scéithe - in the sixteenth century. It remains possible that this castle in turn survived the surrender of the Gaelic lords in 1603 at the end of the Nine Years' War and - like the Maguire castle in Enniskillen - became incorporated into the early seventeenth century plantation castle, Castle Balfour, which still stands within the village of Lisnaskea as a State Care monument.

The 2022 CCA community excavation at Lisdoon Fort was very successful and enjoyable, both in the community aspect- more than 400 local people participated- and in discovering new important information about the rath monument, in terms of the possible Late Medieval ditch terminal, adjacent stone surface and the stone revetment for the outer rath bank. Moreover, the 2022 excavation confirms that a substantial proportion of the monument still survives intact below the surface of the garden in No. 27 Castle Balfour Road.

8.1 Outreach: Public Participation and Media Coverage

There was significant community involvement in the Lisdoon Fort excavation, and the community aspect was a great success. A total of 405 people- 319 local school children and 86 adult volunteers- participated in the excavation over the three weeks that the dig took place. The site director and some of the pupils from St Ronan's Primary School were interviewed by the BBC during the excavation and this story went out on BBC Radio Ulster's 'Your Place and Mine' on 17th September 2022 and there was a short piece on the excavation in the *Fermanagh Herald* on 18th September 2022.

9. Recommendations for further work

It is recommended that specialist reports on the small number of finds and samples recovered from the CCA community archaeological excavation carried out at Lisdoon Fort, Lisnaskea, in 2022 be compiled to enable the full publication of the excavation in the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*.



Plate 15. Aerial shot from September 2022 of the two CCA excavation trenches within Lisdoon Fort, Lisnaskea (in the foreground), with Lough Head in the background.



10. Acknowledgements

- Centre for Community Archaeology, Queen's University Belfast: Dr Colm Donnelly; my colleagues on the excavation, Brian Sloan and Dr Heather Montgomery.
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- Mrs June Jordan, who graciously allowed us to dig in her front lawn. Both she and Mrs Elaine Kennedy were very kind to us throughout the excavation and we all greatly appreciate it.
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- Volunteers: Aobha Ashman, Kathleen Beggan, Grace Boyle, John Courtney, Florence Creighton, Louise Devlin, Paul Fitzgerald, Ultan Gallagher, Rob Henshall, Vicky Herbert, Roy Huddleston, Alex Madden, Mary O' Donnell, Andy Smith, Caroline Stephenson, Linda Swindle, Kelly Thomson and volunteers from Action Mental Health, the Fresh Focus Group and the RSPB.
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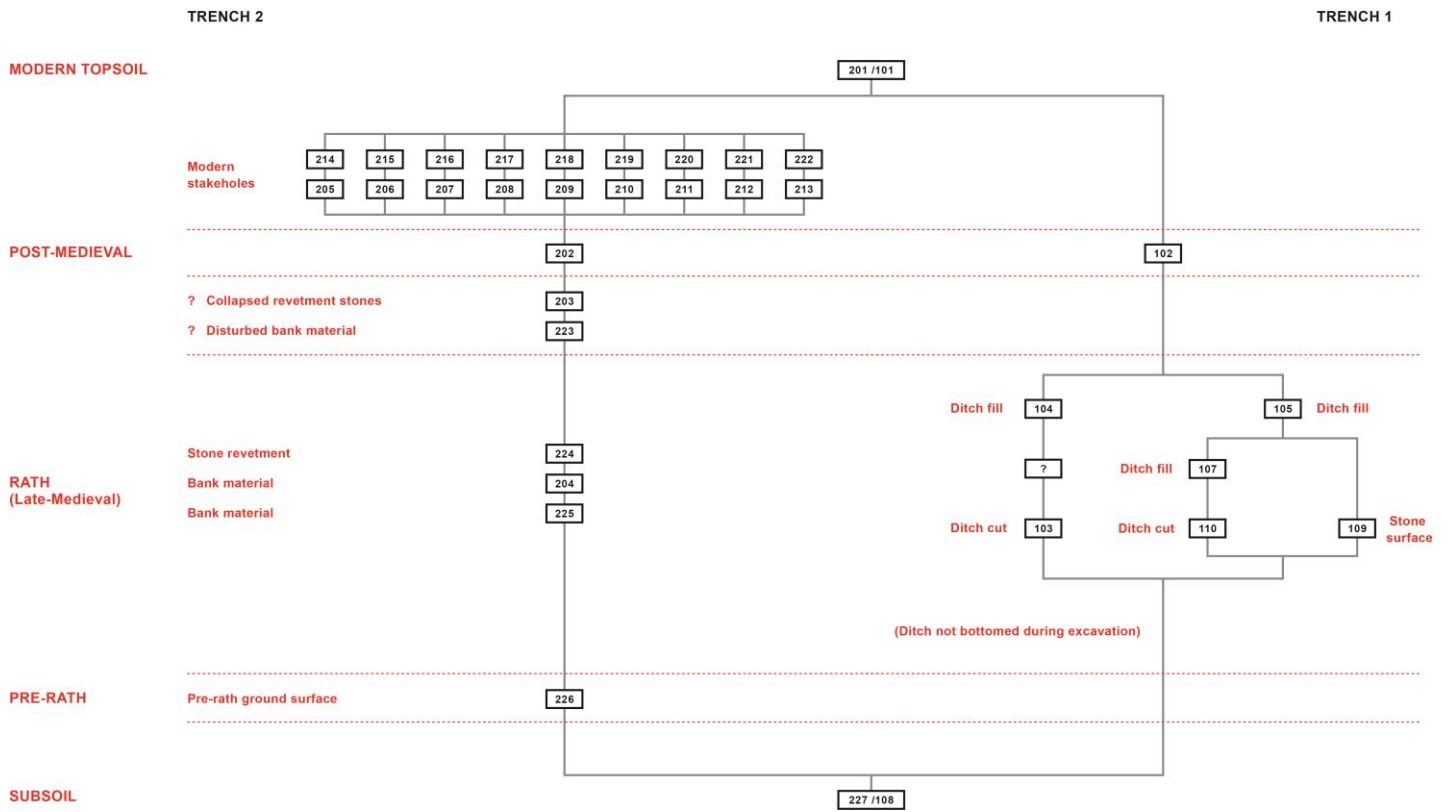
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12. Appendices

Appendix 1: Harris Matrix



Appendix 2: Context Register

Context No.	Description	Interpretation
	Trench 1	
101	Sod layer.	Sod layer that constitutes the modern surface of the field. Above C.102. Same as C.201.
102	Mottled, stony brown clay.	Below C.101. Contains chert, quartz, red brick, modern ceramics, and fragments of styli
103	Linear cut.	Cut for outer rath ditch. Cuts C.108. Filled with C.104.
104	Same as C. 105 but on the other site of unexcavated trench baulk.	Ditch fill of outer rath ditch.
105	Thick layer of dark grey-brown clay that was compact, oily, and organic. Fill of cut C.103. Same as C.104.	Ditch fill of outer rath ditch.
106	Voided context number	
107	Linear cut. Cuts C.108. Filled with C.110.	Cut for outer rath ditch.
108	Compact yellow- brown stony clay.	Subsoil in Trench 1.
109	Surface of more than a dozen sub-angular, mostly medium-sized, but also some small stones, laid directly on the surface of the subsoil (C.108).	Adjacent to cut C.107. Possibly a surface or path leading to the interior of the rath enclosure.
110	Grey-brown compact clay containing small and medium sized angular stones. Fill of C.107.	Ditch fill of outer rath ditch.
	Trench 2	
201	Sod and topsoil.	Sod layer that constitutes the modern surface of the lawn of No. 27 Castle Balfour Road Lisnaskea where the 2022 excavation took place. Above C.202. Same as C.101.
202	Mottled brownish yellow stony clay. Firm and sticky. Small to medium angular stones throughout.	Possible redeposited natural making up the bank? Chert flakes and quartz but also 18th-19th century pottery. If this layer does originate from the bank, then it suggests that the bank has been heavily disturbed in very recent times.
203	Single layer of medium to large angular and sub-angular rocks.	Revetment? Along the inner face of the bank and concentrated in the southern portion of Trench 2. Quite firmly set into dark-brown silty clay C.223.
204	= C.225. Mottled orange clay.	Below C.202 and C.223. Over stones C.224.

205	Cut. Stakehole in the south-eastern half of Trench 2. Filled by C.214.	Modern. Below C.201. Cut into C.202.
206	Cut. Stakehole in the south-eastern half of Trench 2. Filled by C.215.	Modern. Below C.201. Cut into C.202.
207	Cut. Stakehole in the south-eastern half of Trench 2. Filled by C.216.	Modern. Below C.201. Cut into C.202.
208	Cut. Stakehole in the south-eastern half of Trench 2. Filled by C.217.	Modern. Below C.201. Cut into C.202.
209	Cut. Stakehole in the south-eastern half of Trench 2. Filled by C.218.	Modern. Below C.201. Cut into C.202.
210	Cut. Stakehole in the south-eastern half of Trench 2. Filled by C.219.	Modern. Below C.201. Cut into C.202.
211	Cut. Stakehole in the south-eastern half of Trench 2. Filled by C.220.	Modern. Below C.201. Cut into C.202.
212	Cut. Stakehole in the south-eastern half of Trench 2. Filled by C.221.	Modern. Below C.201. Cut into C.202.
213	Cut. Stakehole in the south-eastern half of Trench 2. Filled by C.221.	Modern. Below C.201. Cut into C.202.
214	Fill of stakehole cut C.205.	Modern. Below C.201. Cut into C.202.
215	Fill of stakehole cut C.206.	Modern. Below C.201. Cut into C.202.
216	Fill of stakehole cut C.207.	Modern. Below C.201. Cut into C.202.
217	Fill of stakehole cut C.208.	Modern. Below C.201. Cut into C.202.
218	Fill of stakehole cut C.209.	Modern. Below C.201. Cut into C.202.
219	Fill of stakehole cut C.210.	Modern. Below C.201. Cut into C.202.
220	Fill of stakehole cut C.211.	Modern. Below C.201. Cut into C.202.
221	Fill of stakehole cut C.212.	Modern. Below C.201. Cut into C.202.
222	Fill of stakehole cut C.213.	Modern. Below C.201. Cut into C.202.
223	Mid to dark brown silty clay. Friable. Contained small to medium angular stones (C.203). Occasional flecks of charcoal. Over C.224.	The stones may originate from the bank (C.204/C.225) and post-date the demise of the monument or they may have been laid down to provide a firm footing along the inside of the rath bank and are therefore contemporary? The former seems a more plausible explanation
224	Line of revetting stones.	Stone revetment for the inner face of the outer rath bank. Below C.203/C.223 and C.204. Laid directly on C.226 with no cut visible either in plan or in section.
225		Same as C.204.
226	Greyish-brown silty clay.	Old pre-rath ground surface
227	Orange stony clay.	Natural/subsoil.

Appendix 3: Drawing Register

Drawing No.	Plan/ Section	Scale	Trench	Description	Date	Drawn by
1	Plan	1:10	2	Plan of Trench 2, mid-excavation showing stones C.203 and stakeholes, cuts C.205-C.213.	15/9/22	BS
2	Plan	1:10	2	Plan of trench following expansion of trench to the west. Shows C.203, C.204 and C.223.	20/9/22	BS
3	Plan	1:10	2	Plan following removal of C.204, showing stones C.224, C.225 and C.226.	21/9/22	BS
4	Section	1:10	2	South-east facing section of trench, post-excavation. Shows C.201, C.202, C.204 and C.223-C.227.	26/9/22	BS
5	Section	1:10	2	South-west facing section, post-excavation. Shows C.201, C.202, C.204 and C.225-C.227.	26/9/22	BS
6	Plan	1:20	1	Trench 1, post-excavation. Shows C.101-C.105 and C.107-C.110.	27/9/22	BS
7	Section	1:20	1	South-east facing section, post-excavation. Shows C.101-C.105, C.108 and C.109.	27/9/22	HM & RÓB
8	Section	1:20	1	North-west facing section, post-excavation. Shows C.101-C.105, C.108 and C.110.	27/9/22	HM & RÓB
9	Section	1:10	2	North-west facing section, post-excavation. Shows C.201-C.204 and C.223-C.226.	26/9/22	BS

Appendix 4: Photographic Register

Number	Date	Description
1528-1535	7/9/22	Pre-excavation shots of the location of Trenches 1 and 2 in the front lawn of No. 27 Castle Balfour Road. From NE (2), SE (5), E
1536-1542	7/9/22	Trench layout, pre-excavation, before the decision was taken to split the original single long trench into two smaller ones. From SW, W (2), S, SE, NE (2)
1543-1548	8/9/22	Artefact teaching (1) and Trench 1 schools community participation photographs (5).
1549	9/9/22	Trench 2, de-sodded onto C.201 and Trench 1 de-sodded onto C.101. From SW.
1550	9/9/22	Trench 2, de-sodded onto C.201. From SE.
1551	9/9/22	Trench 2, de-sodded onto C.201 and Trench 1 de-sodded onto C.101. From S.
1552-1553	9/9/22	Trench 2, de-sodded onto C.201. From NW.
1554	9/9/22	Trench 1. Schools community participation photograph.
1555	9/9/22	Trench 2. Dr Colm Donnelly excavating C.201. From SE.
1556-1558	9/9/22	Trench 1. Schools community participation photographs.
1559-1561	13/9/22	Trench 2. C.202 exposed, following the removal of C.201. From NW, NE and SW.
1562-1564	13/9/22	Trench 1. Expansion of Trench to the north-east after de-sodding onto C.101. From SW and NE (2)
1565-1574	15/9/22	Trench 2. Modern stake holes and fills C.205-C.213, C.202, stones C.203 and C.204. From SW, NW, NE, NW, SW, NW, NE, SE, NE and NW.
1575-1582	20/9/22	Trench 2. Stones C.203. From NE, SW (2), SE (2), NE (2), SE.
1583-1590	20/9/22	Trench 2. Removal of C.203/C.233 revealing line of stone revetment C.224. From SW, SE, E, NW, SW, NW, SE and SW.
1591-1596	23/9/22	Trench 2. Partial removal of C.226 and excavation of the northern half of the trench to subsoil level. From SW, SE (2), SW, NE and SE.
1597-1603	23/9/22	Trench 1. C.102, ditch cut C.103, ditch fill C.104 and subsoil C.108. From NW (2), SE, E and NE (3).
1604-1605	23/9/22	Community volunteer at Trench 1, with Dr Heather Montgomery and Ryan Montgomery from QUB.
1606, 1607, 1609-1611	26/9/22	Trench 2, post-excavation. South-east facing section
1608	26/9/22	Trench 2, post-excavation. North-east facing section.
1612-1615	26/9/22	Trench 2, post-excavation. South-west facing section.
1616-1617	26/9/22	Trench 2, post-excavation. South-west facing section.
1618	26/9/22	Trench 2, post-excavation. Stones C.224 and south-west facing section.
1619	26/9/22	Trench 2, post-excavation. Stones C.224 and south-east facing section.
1620	26/9/22	Trench 2, post-excavation. Stones C.224 and north-east facing section.
1621, 1623, 1624, 1690	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. C.102, ditch cut C.103, ditch fill C.104 and subsoil C.108. From NW.
1622,1625,1626	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. C.102, ditch cut C.103, ditch fill C.104 and subsoil C.108. From SW.
1627, 1632,1633, 1637-1640, 1692	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. C.102, ditch cut C.103, ditch fill C.104 and subsoil C.108. From SE.
1628-1631, 1635,1636, 1691	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. C.102, ditch cut C.103, ditch fill C.104 and subsoil C.108. From NE.
1640	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. C.102, ditch cut C.103, ditch fill C.104 and subsoil C.108. From S.
1641-1644	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. South-east facing section at eastern end of trench at level of C.102.

1645, 1646	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. South-west facing section.
1647	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. Eastern half of trench. C.102, ditch cut C.103, ditch fill C.104 and subsoil C.108. From SW.
1648-1650	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. North-west facing section at eastern end of trench at level of C.102.
1651-1653	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. C.102, ditch cut C.103, ditch fill C.104 and subsoil C.108. From NW (2) and N.
1654, 1658, 1659, 1670, 1672, 1676, 1677, 1685	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. Western end of trench. C.102, ditch cut C.107, ditch fills C.105 and C110, stone surface C.109 and subsoil C.108. From NW.
1655, 1674, 1683	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. Western end of trench. C.102, ditch cut C.107, ditch fills C.105 and C110, stone surface C.109 and subsoil C.108. From SE.
1656	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. Western end of trench. C.102, ditch cut C.107, ditch fills C.105 and C110, stone surface C.109 and subsoil C.108. From S.
1657, 1660	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. Western end of trench. C.102, ditch cut C.107, ditch fills C.105 and C110, stone surface C.109 and subsoil C.108. From N.
1661, 1663-1665, 1678, 1679, 1682	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. Western end of trench. C.102, ditch cut C.107, ditch fills C.105 and C110, stone surface C.109 and subsoil C.108. From NE
1662	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. Western end of trench. North-east facing section at level of C.102.
1666-1667	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. Western end of trench. South-east facing section at level of C.102.
1668-1669	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. Western end of trench. North-west facing section at level of C.102.
1671	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. North-west facing section above baulk of unexcavated C.102 between ditch cuts C.107 and C.103.
1673	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. South-east facing section above baulk of unexcavated C.102 between ditch cuts C.107 and C.103.
1675	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. Western end of trench. Detail of stone surface C.109 and subsoil C.108. From SE.
1680-1681, 1693-1698	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. C.102, ditch cut C.107, ditch fills C.105 and C110, stone surface C.109 and subsoil C.108 in foreground. Ditch cut C.103 and ditch fill C.104 in background. From SW.
1684	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. Western end of trench. C.102, ditch cut C.107, ditch fills C.105 and C110, stone surface C.109 and subsoil C.108. From SW
1686-1687	26/9/22	Trench 1, post-excavation. C.102, ditch cut C.103, ditch fill C.104 and subsoil C.108. From NE.
1699-1710	28/9/22	Photographs of Trenches 1 and 2 after they had been backfilled on completion of the excavation.
1711-1718	28/9/22	Photographs of Lough Head taken from the side of No. 27 Castle Balfour Road, Lisnaskea

Appendix 5: Finds Register

Ceramics

Trench	Context Number	Description
1	101 (topsoil)	24 small fragments of miscellaneous 19th and 20th century pottery.
1	102	7 fragments of Post-Medieval pottery, 19th-20th century date, including Spongeware, Creamware and unglazed red earthenware (possibly from a flower pot)
1	105	13 fragments of unglazed Medieval Ulster Coarse pottery. Late-Medieval.
2	201 (topsoil)	2 conjoined fragments of a 20th century glazed cup.
2	202	Two fragments of Post-Medieval glazed pottery, 19th-20th century date.
2	223	2 small fragments of unglazed coarse pottery. ?Early Medieval Souterrain Ware.

Clay Tobacco Pipe

Trench	Context Number	Description
1	102	Two fragments of clay tobacco pipe bowl, from two different pipes, and one small fragment of a clay tobacco pipe stem. All the fragments are undecorated. The bigger fragment of pipe bowl is spurred and probably dates to the 18th century. The smaller pipe bowl fragment is too small for any further identification.

Animal Bone

Trench	Context Number	Description
1	105	12 fragments of animal bone. ?Late-Medieval.
2	201 (topsoil)	3 fragments of animal bone.
2	202	3 fragments of animal bone with cut marks on them.
2	223	16 fragments of animal bone.
2	226	15 fragments of animal bone. Pre-rath horizon below outer bank.

Stone

Trench	Context Number	Description
1	101 (topsoil)	5 small fragments, one of them a point, of stone styli.
1	102	The bottom, pointed, half of a stone stylus.

Glass

Trench	Context Number	Description
1	101 (topsoil)	19 fragments of clear window and bottle glass. 2 fragments of green bottle glass.
1	102	1 small fragment of a green glass bottle. 18th or 19th century.
2	201	4 fragment of clear window glass. Modern.

Metal

Trench	Context Number	Description
1	101 (topsoil)	17 nails, tacks and other miscellaneous small pieces of iron.
1	102	1 iron nail.

Slate

Trench	Context Number	Description
1	101 (topsoil)	3 small fragments of probable roofing slate.
1	102	1 small fragment of probable roofing slate.

Red Brick and Tile

Trench	Context Number	Description
1	101 (topsoil)	2 small pieces of red brick.
1	102	15 small pieces of red brick.
2	201	1 fragment of unglazed red earthenware tile.

Slag

Trench	Context Number	Description
1	102	1 small fragment of slag.

Flint

Trench	Context Number	Description
1	102	4 pieces of struck flint
2	223	1 piece of struck flint

Chert

Trench	Context Number	Description
1	101	6 pieces of struck chert
1	102	30 pieces of struck chert
2	201	1 piece of struck chert
2	202	10 pieces of struck chert
2	204	2 pieces of struck chert
2	223	2 pieces of struck chert

Quartz

Trench	Context Number	Description
1	101	23 pieces of quartz
1	102	33 pieces of quartz
2	204	1 piece of quartz

Appendix 6: Samples

Sample No.	Trench	Context	Quantity
1	2	214	1
2	2	215	1
3	2	216	1
4	2	217	1
5	2	218	1
6	2	219	1
7	2	220	1
8	2	221	1
9	2	222	1
10	2	226	1
11	1	104	1
12	1	105	2
13	1	110	1