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Data Structure Report No. 035

**Malachy's Wall, Bangor Abbey**  
DOW 002:002  
AE/05/01



**Malachy's Wall  
Bangor Abbey, Co. Down**

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CAF DSR 035

**AE/05/01**

**Grid Ref: J 5015 8110**

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## **1. Summary**

1.1 Bangor Abbey in Co. Down is regarded as one of the most important of the early Northern Irish monastic sites. According to early Irish sources, it was founded in the sixth century by St Comgall and it quickly became a centre of great academic and cultural renown (Flower 1947, 13). The abbey enjoyed a second period of pre-eminence under St Malachy in the twelfth century. Today, the site of the abbey is located in the heart of the town of Bangor and is situated 0.8km south of Bangor Bay (Figure 1). There are few visible remains of the early monastic site. The earliest extant feature is a stretch of rubble wall to the north east of the modern church. This wall is known as "Malachy's Wall" and probably dates to the thirteenth century.

1.2 In the past few years, concerns have arisen about the stability of Malachy's Wall. In advance of conservation work planned for the site for spring/summer 2005, an excavation was carried out at Malachy's Wall by the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork (CAF), Queen's University of Belfast on behalf of the Environment and Heritage Service in order to locate the foundation of the wall and to assess its condition.

1.3 Two Test Pits were dug at the base of the south face of Malachy's Wall. In conjunction with the CAF excavation, five cores were taken from positions along the perimeter of Malachy's Wall by the Structural Engineering Advisory Branch of the Department of Finance and Personnel. The position of these cores, together with the Test Pits, was surveyed using an EDM Total Station.

1.4 The excavation yielded no obvious evidence of ecclesiastical activity in either the Early Christian or Medieval periods. There was no trace of a foundation cut for the wall, which appears to have been built on a surface of firm loamy soil rather than sunk into the underlying boulder clay. Only a deep layer of dark clay loam containing an array of modern artefacts overlay this surface. The nature and contents of this dark clay loam suggested that it was a relatively recent deposit, possibly formed as a result of the development of Bangor Parish Hall and car park in the 1950s. Any archaeologically significant layers have consequently been truncated.

1.5 A quantity of human bone was sampled from the relatively recent clay loam deposit. This suggested that a phase of burials might have been among the material that was destroyed by the later building activity. The only other feature of potential archaeological interest was a slate-lined cut in the westernmost portion of the excavated area, which was initially identified as a possible grave cut but was probably a modern services conduit.

1.6 The excavation showed that the stability of Malachy's Wall has been undermined by the removal of material from around the base, most likely during the modern construction work. The layer of modern material that was deposited as a result of this work butted up against the south of the wall and probably represents the only support for the wall on its southern side.

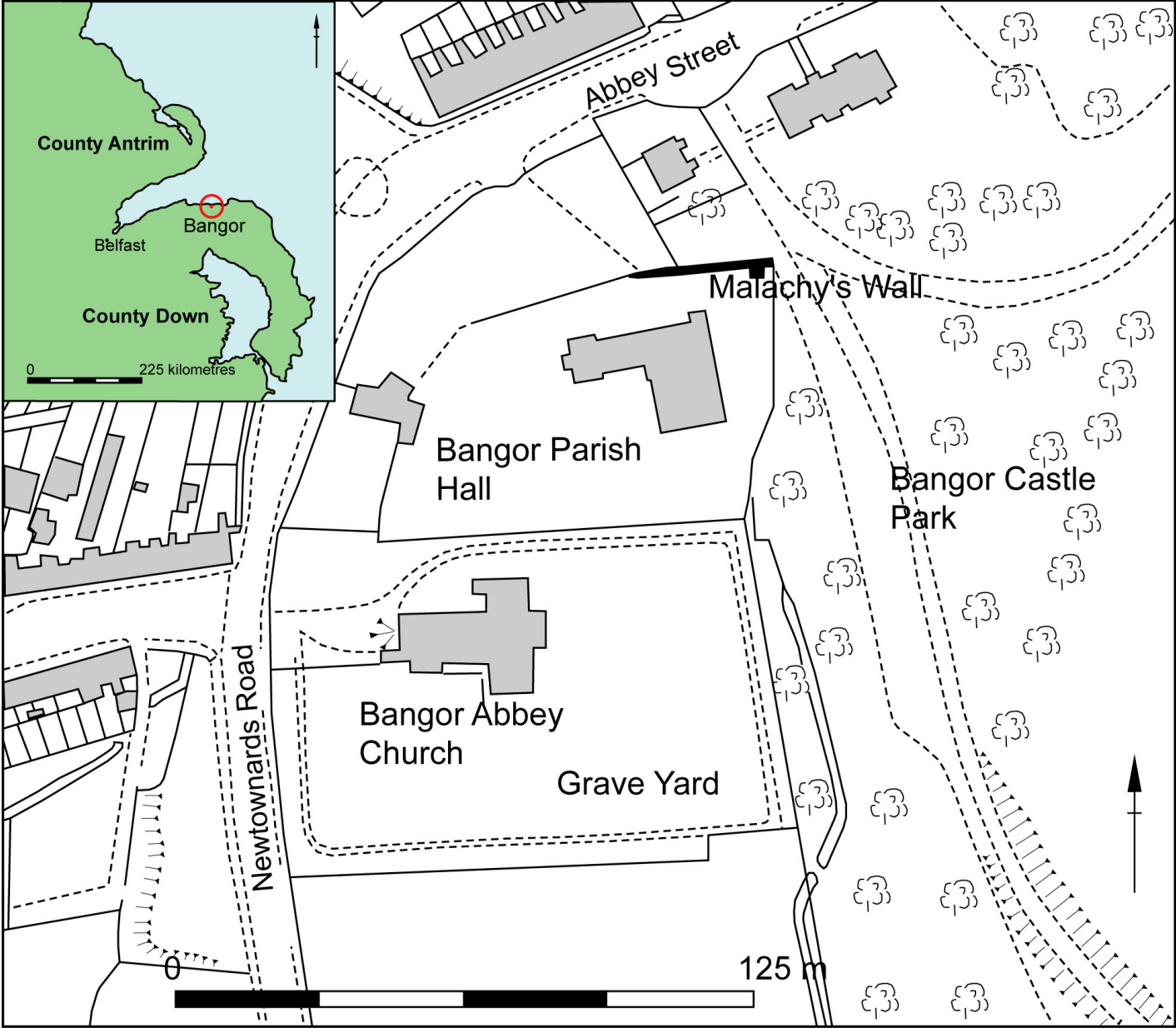


Figure 1: Location map.

## **2. Introduction**

### *2.1 General*

2.1.1 The following report details the preliminary results of the archaeological excavation at Malachy's Wall, which is the oldest extant structural remains of Bangor Abbey in Co. Down. The Excavation was carried out by the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Archaeology and Palaeoecology at Queen's University of Belfast between the 25 and the 27 January 2005 (Licence No. AE/05/01). The excavation was undertaken on behalf of the Environment and Heritage Services: Protecting Historic Monuments, who funded the project, and with the assistance of the Structural Engineering Advisory Branch of the Department of Finance and Personnel.

### *2.2 Historical Background*

2.2.1 Bangor Abbey is one of the best documented of the Irish monasteries in early sources. The Annals of Inishfallen, Ulster and the Four Masters concur that Bangor ("Benchor", "Benn chor" or "Beannchair") was founded in the sixth century, sometime between 555 and 560 by St. Comgall of Dal nAridi (O' Muraile 1998, 57; O'Donovan 1898, 189). All of these sources contain a comprehensive list of events, abbots and dignitaries associated with the monastery throughout the latter half of the first millennium AD, leading Hamlin (1976, 599) to conclude that Bangor ranked second only to Armagh in terms of importance of the Northern Irish monasteries.

2.2.2 A vestige of the prestige of the early monastery survives today. Although it has been housed at Bobbio in Italy for over 1000 years, the Antiphonary of Bangor was probably written by the monks of Bangor Abbey between 602 and 691 (Kenney 1966, 265-6). This manuscript, which contains a collection of Latin hymns, prayers and antiphons is one of the earliest surviving dateable monastic manuscripts from Ireland (Archaeological Survey of Co. Down 1966, 265) and has been described as "one of the most precious surviving witnesses to the early Irish church" (Lapidge 1985, 104). This manuscript provides an important insight into monastic life in Ireland and is also testament to the artistic and literary standard of the work attributed to the monks of Bangor in the seventh century.

2.2.3 The importance of the monastery at Bangor is attested to in other sources. An eighth century gospel of St. Matthew from Wurzburg contains the following note in Latin (Kenney 1966, 218) - "Mo-sinu maccu Min, scribe and Abbot of Bangor was the first of the Irish who learned by rote the compactus (the art of ecclesiastical computation) from a

- certain learned Greek". The same quote recounts how the ancient knowledge was subsequently written down by one Mo-Cuaroc maccu Neth Semon, a pupil of Mo-sinnu, prompting Henderson (1967, 165-8) to suggest that Bangor might have been the place of origin of the original Irish chronicle that provided the basis for the annals of Ireland. Flower (1947, 13), concluded that Bangor was the centre of historical studies in Ireland at the time.
- 2.2.4 Like many early Irish monasteries, Bangor was destroyed and rebuilt on a number of occasions. The Annals of Ulster record that Bangor was burned in 616 (O' Muraile 1998, 89) and again in 755 on St. Patrick's Day (O' Muraile 1998, 219). A particularly dramatic raid appears to have occurred in one of the years 822-824. The Annals of Ulster and the Four Masters both record an attack on Bangor Abbey by "foreigners" - presumably the Vikings (O'Muraile 1998, 319; O'Donovan 1898, 435). During this raid, "learned men and bishops" were smitten, while the relics of Comgall were taken from their shrine. Another probable victim of the Vikings was "Tanaidhe MacUidhir, coarb of Bennchor, who was killed by Foreigners" in 958 (O' Muraile 1998, 475).
- 2.2.5 It is impossible to ascertain the precise impact of the Viking raids, but there is a consensus that the importance of Bangor declined around the latter part of the tenth century. Hamlin notes that the references in the annals became fewer from this time. Kenney (1966, 766) suggests that the monastery was entirely abandoned after the Viking wars, however, this is not certain. The Annals of the Four Master contains a reference to a stone church at Bangor in 1065(O'Donovan 1998, 888-89), suggesting that some form of ecclesiastical settlement endured. Gwynn and Hadcock (1970, 161) and Reeves (1847, 154), associated the decline with the death of one Bishop Diarmait O'Maeltelcha in 1016 rather than the consequence of Viking raids.
- 2.2.6 The fortunes of the abbey were revived under the influential St Malachy in the twelfth century. References in the annals to Malachy are meagre, and much of what is known of his life is derived from an account written by his contemporary, St Bernard of Clairvaux. This work has been commented on by Luddy (1930), Lawlor (1920) and Meyer (1978).
- 2.2.7 Malachy first became Abbott of Bangor in 1123 or 1124 (Luddy 1930. 28). One of his first tasks was to "build or rebuild" a wooden church at Bangor (Lawlor 1920, 30-32). Malachy's first stay at Bangor was a short one. He departed in 1127( Meyer 1978, 2) and spent time in continental Europe, where he became influenced by the practices of the Cistercian and Augustinian Orders. When he returned to Bangor, c.1140, Malachy, built



- a stone oratory at Bangor “like those he had seen constructed in other regions” (Lawlor 1920, 109) implying that the church at Bangor was built in the fashion of the continental churches Malachy had observed in Europe. Certainly, this church was an example of a type that was unusual in Ireland, to the extent that it initially aroused local hostility (Lawlor 1920, 110). Gwynn and Hadcock (1970, 161) suggest that Bangor was the first monastery in Ireland to observe the Arroasian form of Augustinian rule and it is probable that a complete monastery was eventually built at Bangor, incorporating a full conventual plan including “cloisters, workshops, barns and stables and the like” (Leask 1990, 3). Malachy’s Wall is thought to date to the thirteenth century (Archaeological Survey of Co. Down 1966, 266). It is probable therefore that the wall dates to the early Augustinian activity at Bangor.
- 2.2.8 By 1469, Bangor Abbey had again fallen into disrepair when the then abbot, Marcus MacBrydyn “was guilty of simony, waste and dilapidation of Abbey property.” (Rogers 1938, 50). By Papal decree of Pope Paul II in 1469, a Franciscan, Nicholas O’Hegarty, was granted the Abbey, providing he accepted the habit of the Augustinian Order. The Abbey thereafter appears to have undergone a resurgence (Rogers 1938, 50) and it remained an Augustinian centre until the general dissolution in 1539.
- 2.2.9 Thomas Raven’s map of Bangor from 1625 contains an illustration of the Abbey and its associated buildings, providing an indication of the extent of the site in the seventeenth century. The structure containing Malachy’s Wall is shown complete so it is likely that the Abbey retained something of the thirteenth century plan at the time the map was drawn. This structure is the northernmost of the buildings depicted and is thought to have been one of the conventual buildings of the Abbey (Archaeological Survey of Co. Down 1966, 266). Malachy’s Wall was the northern wall of the building. The church is in the same position as its modern counterpart, to the south-east of Malachy’s Wall, while a cross is shown to the east, approximately in the position of the modern Bangor Castle Park.
- 2.2.10 In 1744, Harris (1744, 64) commented on the remnants of the monastic site, noting that “part of the ruins of Malachy’s building still subsists, and the trace of the old foundation discover it to have been of great extent”. However, subsequent building activity on the site has removed all trace of the thirteenth century structures, apart from Malachy’s Wall.
- 2.2.11 The church at Bangor has been reported on by Lawlor (1940, 81-82), Davies (1946, 100-104) and the Archaeological Survey of County Down (1966, 265-26). It was rebuilt

between 1617-1623 (Archaeological Survey of Co. Down 1966, 265 referring to Harris 1744, 61), and this is undoubtedly the building that was depicted by Raven. The modern building dates mainly to 1832 (Lawlor 1940, 82), however, the church tower appears to consist largely of a fourteenth century structure probably built during the revival of the Abbey under O'Hegarty, but which has since been substantially modified (Davies 1946, 103).

2.2.12 In addition to Malachy's Wall, there are three other surviving stone features from Bangor Abbey's early past, but these have been removed from their original position. A number of these have been discussed by Bigger and Hughes (1900, 191 – 203) and consist of the following: -

- A Cross shaft which is now set in a wall of Clandeboye Church, which Bigger and Hughes have considered to be pre-Norman (Bigger and Hughes 1900, 192) and which Davies suggests might be the cross shown on Raven's 1625 map (1946, 104).
- A Cross-carved stone, which reportedly was found in 1823 in the Abbey ruins (Bigger and Hughes 1900, 198).
- A probable sundial (Bigger and Hughes 1900, 195), which has been more comprehensively described by Hamlin (1976, 603).

2.2.13 A cast bronze bell which is decorated with an incised Latin cross and panels of fretwork was found on the site of the Abbey in 1780. This has been reported on by Nolan (1933, 243-44) and described by Hamlin (1976, 604). It is now housed in Bangor Castle Museum.

### 2.3. *Rationale and Objectives*

2.3.1 The excavation was prompted by concerns that have recently arisen about the stability of Malachy's Wall. The structure now leans noticeably to the north and overhangs a public footpath. The Environment and Heritage Service: Protecting Historic Monuments propose to carry out a programme of remedial conservation work at the site in the spring/summer of 2005. The excavation was undertaken in advance of this programme with the aim of informing the conservation strategy. The principle objectives were to locate the base of

the wall, investigate its condition and to evaluate the archaeological potential of the immediate surrounds.

#### 2.4 *Archiving*

2.4.1 A copy of this report has been deposited with the Environment and Heritage Service, Department of the Environment of Northern Ireland. All sites records and finds will be initially archived within the School of Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University of Belfast.

#### 2.5 *Credits and Acknowledgements*

2.5.1 The excavation was directed by Ronan McHugh. Peter Moore (CAF) assisted with the fieldwork and the EDM survey. Sincere thanks are extended to Maybelline Gormely (Environment and Heritage and Heritage Service) for assistance with interpretation of the site during the excavation. Advice regarding the stability of the site was provided by Neville Bell, (Structural Engineer of the Structural Engineering Advisory Branch of the Department of Finance and Personnel) and Stephen Donovan (Department of Finance and Personnel). Assistance during the course of the preparation of this report was provided by Philip Macdonald (CAF) and the Illustrations were prepared by Ruth Logue (CAF). Particular gratitude is extended to the Rev.R. Nesbitt for his background to the recent history of the site and to Dr. Eileen Murphy (Queen's University of Belfast) for her comments on the human bone assemblage.

### **3. The Excavation.**

#### *3.1 Site Description*

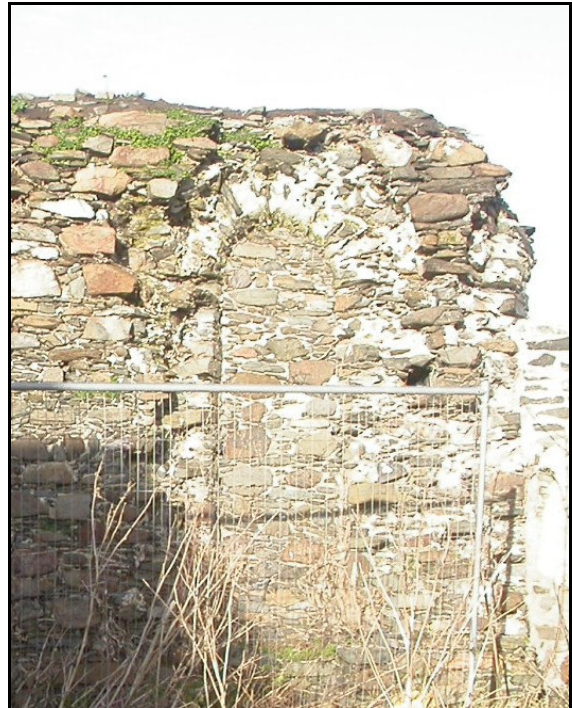
- 3.1.1 Bangor Abbey is recorded in the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record as Down 002:002 and is scheduled for protection under the Section 3 of the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. It is located at National Grid Reference IG J5015 8110. The scheduled area contains over 9,000m<sup>2</sup> and includes the monument known as Malachy's Wall, although the modern buildings contained within the area are excluded from scheduling (Figure 1). Both the upstanding wall fragment and the surrounding area are owned by the Church of Ireland.
- 3.1.2 The site of the Abbey is located in a relatively sheltered hollow approximately 0.8km south of Bangor Bay. Most of the scheduled area surrounding Malachy's Wall has been heavily landscaped in recent times. The area immediately to the south scarps down to Bangor Parish Hall and its car park, which now occupy the ground between the wall and Bangor Abbey Church. To the west, small quadrants of green park-land have been created between the wall and the Newtownards Road. Immediately to the north of Malachy's wall is an access road to the parish hall car park which runs parallel to the wall and opens onto a laneway to the east, before an expanse of landscaped parkland rises gradually to Bangor Castle Park.
- 3.1.3 No obvious surface evidence of the Early Christian nature of the site survives, although the street layout to the north and east of Malachy's Wall, where Abbey Street curves south onto Newtownards Road, forms an arc which might define the line of an early monastic enclosure. The earliest extant feature is the length of rubble walling known as "Malachy's Wall". As noted in Section 2, the wall is thought to date to the thirteenth century and probably represents the north wall of a building that stood at least until the seventeenth century.
- 3.1.4 The surviving fragment of wall runs approximately east-west for a distance of approximately 37.5 metres (Plate 1). It has been fortified at a number of points along its length with concrete and modern brick, and has been buttressed at both ends (Plate 2) The buttressing accounts for approximately eleven metres of the overall length. Where the wall has not been modified, it is possible to identify a number of the original features as described in the Archaeological Survey of County Down. At the east end of the wall



**Plate 1:** (Above) North face of Malachy's Wall (taken from north- east facing south-west).

**Plate 2:** (Below left) Modern re-enforcement to west edge of Malachy's Wall (taken from west facing east).

**Plate 3:** (Below right) Lancet window at east of Malachy's Wall (taken from south facing north).



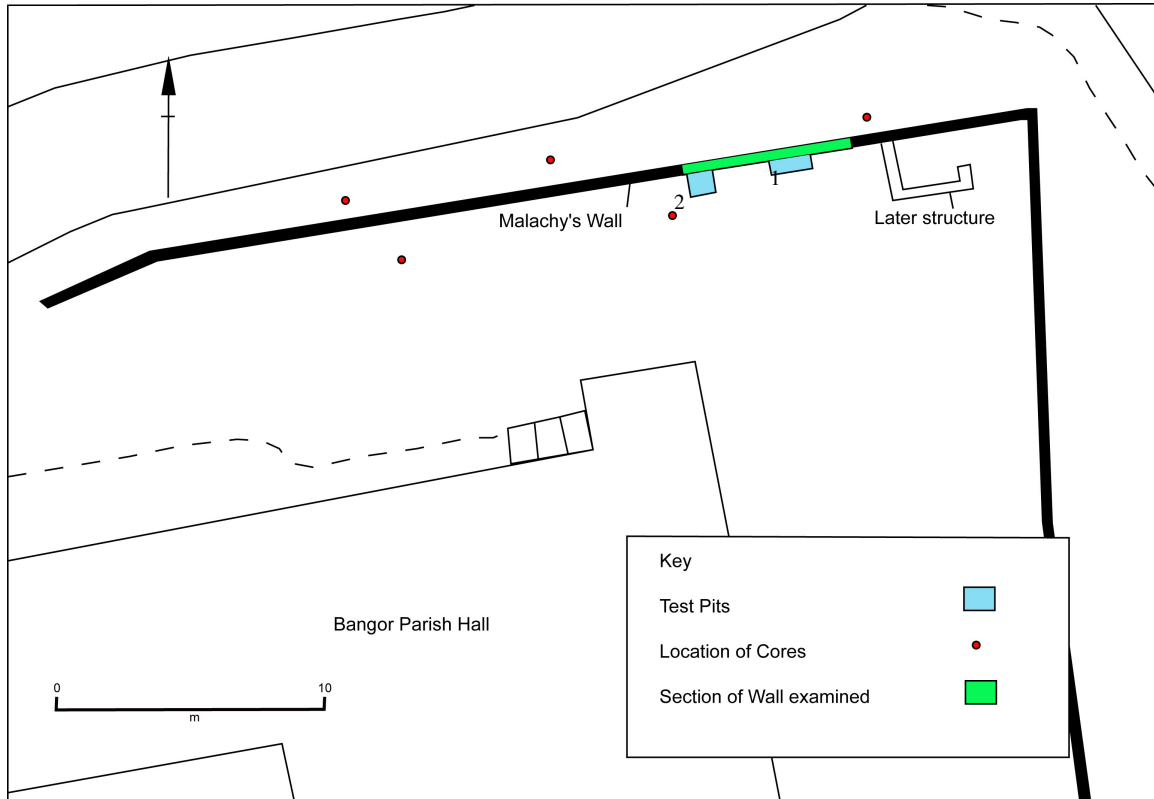
are two bricked-up lancet windows, which have been deprived of dressings (Plate 3). Approximately ten metres to the west is a third lancet window and, further west again is a door from which all of the dressings have been removed with the exception of the base of a roll-moulded jamb (Archaeological Survey of Co. Down 1966, 266). The north face of the wall has been exposed to its base, probably as a result of the construction of the modern road and footpath. The height of the wall varies because of the removal of a considerable amount of material from along its top. However, at its highest point it is approximately 4.74 metres above the level of the ground to the north of the wall. To the south of the wall, the ground level is approximately one metre higher than to the north, owing to a relatively recent accumulation of soil and the deposition of modern debris. The remains of a later structure of approximately square plan butted up against the south face of the wall towards its eastern end.

### 3.2 *Excavation Methodology*

3.2.1 The excavation took place to the south of Malachy's Wall in an area which would probably have been inside the original building (Figure 2). The terrain in this area consisted of an uneven scarp which slopes down to the modern parish hall approximately 20 metres to the south. The hall dates approximately to the 1950s (Rev. R. Nesbitt, pers.comm.). To the north of the wall, the ground surface is lower and has probably been levelled to accommodate a modern roadway. The location of the excavation, which eventually consisted of the insertion of two Test Pits, was determined after consultation with the Structural Engineering Advisory Branch of the Department of Finance and Personnel. It was decided to locate the archaeological investigation along the highest surviving section of the wall that had not been fortified or strengthened in modern times. At the same time, five cores were taken around the wall by the Structural Engineers (Figure 2).

3.2.2 The excavation of the archaeological strata was undertaken by hand, using standard context recording methods. The principal site records consisted of context sheets, augmented by photographs, field notes and a drawn record. Individual features were photographed and planned, both prior to and following excavation. Plans (Scale 1:10) were drawn of both Test Pits and a single section was drawn for each Test Pit (Scale 1:10). In addition, elevation drawings (Scale 1:10) of the portions of the wall exposed during the excavation were prepared. For details of site photography see Appendix 3, and for details of field illustrations see Appendix 4. In addition, separate registers were

kept for small finds (Appendix 5), samples (Appendix 6) and bulk finds (Appendix 7). The unique site code used to identify the records generated during the excavation was 'BAN '05'.



**Figure 2:** Site of 2005 excavation at Malachy's Wall.

### 3.3 Account of the Excavation

3.3.1 It is intended that the Harris matrices for the site (see Appendix 2) is referred to whilst reading the following account of the stratigraphic sequences of the Test Pits.

#### 3.3.2 Test Pit 1

3.3.2.1 Test Pit 1 was opened at the base of the wall, approximately ten metres from its eastern end. It measured 1.5 metres (east-west) x 0.5 metres (north-south). A sod, approximately 0.2 metres deep was manually removed (Context 101). It consisted of loosely bound loamy soil and roots and contained a large amount of modern refuse, including plastic bags, soft drinks containers and broken glass. Beneath the sod, a dark

brown clay loam was exposed (Context 102). This loam contained significant quantities of broken glass, bone, glazed pottery and metalwork. Approximately 10% of the material was sampled for further examination. All recognisable finds were modern and the artefacts were evenly distributed throughout the deposit. The base of the wall (Context 107) was exposed during excavation of this fill. The base was initially noted at a depth of 0.6 metres, but in other places was substantially lower, reaching a maximum depth of 0.9 metres. The clayey loam (Context 102) butted up against the wall along the base and extended into voids beneath the wall for approximately 0.3 metres. The soil abutting the wall was removed in order to define the base of the wall. Inspection suggested that a number of larger stones had been removed from the base of the wall at some stage (Plate 4).

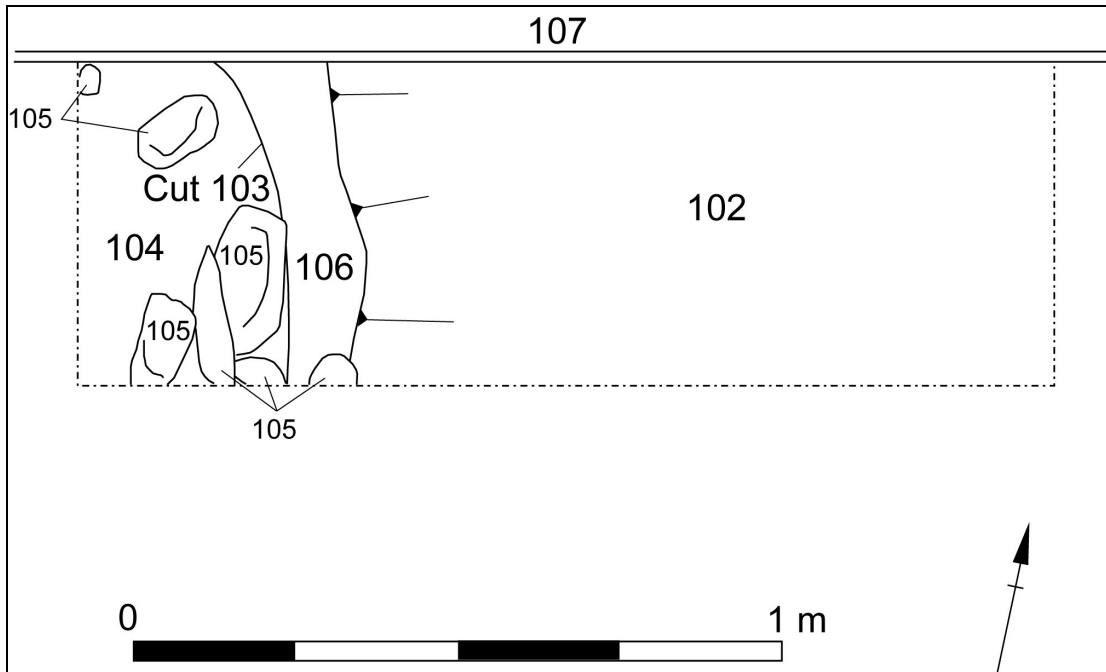


**Plate 4:** Test Pit 1 facing north.

3.3.2.2 The clay loam (Context 102) reached a depth of approximately one metre at the west end of the Test Pit, where it gave way to an orangey-brown loamy soil that was firmer in consistency (Context 106). This deposit was found 0.1 metres below the base of the wall. Examination of the voids between the base of the wall and the bottom of the trench revealed that the wall had been built on this surface. The upper portion of this material (Context 106) along the wall had been truncated by the activity represented by the deposition of the overlying clay loam (Context 102), probably during the construction of Bangor Parish Hall in the 1950s. The surface of the firm loam (Context 106) was



exposed with the overall depth of the Test Pit standing at 1.1 metres. Any further excavation in this trench would have raised Health and Safety queries and required extension of the trench to the south. Because the base of the wall had been located, it was decided not to excavate further in Test Pit 1.



**Figure 3:** Base of Test Pit 1.

3.3.2.3. Figure 3 is a plan of the base of Test Pit 1. The dark brown clayey loam (Context 102) still covered the majority of the area and its maximum depth in the east of the Test Pit was not ascertained. The suspension of the investigation at this stage also prevented the resolution of a notable feature in the west end of the Test Pit. A line of mid brown gravel-rich loam (Context 104) extended from the south of the trench across to the north, where it coincided with a gap in the base of the wall. Set into this material were five slates arranged in a line, which defined the edge of this feature (Context 105). The feature was cut into the orangey-brown loam (Context 106) upon which the wall had been built. Two fragments of bone extended from the base of the southern edge of the Test Pit in line with this feature. However, any possible association between these bones and the cut feature was not investigated during the excavation.

### 3.3.3 Test Pit Two

3.3.3.1 The excavation of Test Pit 1 heightened concerns about the overall stability of the wall. There were a series of gaps in the base of the wall where stones had been removed and

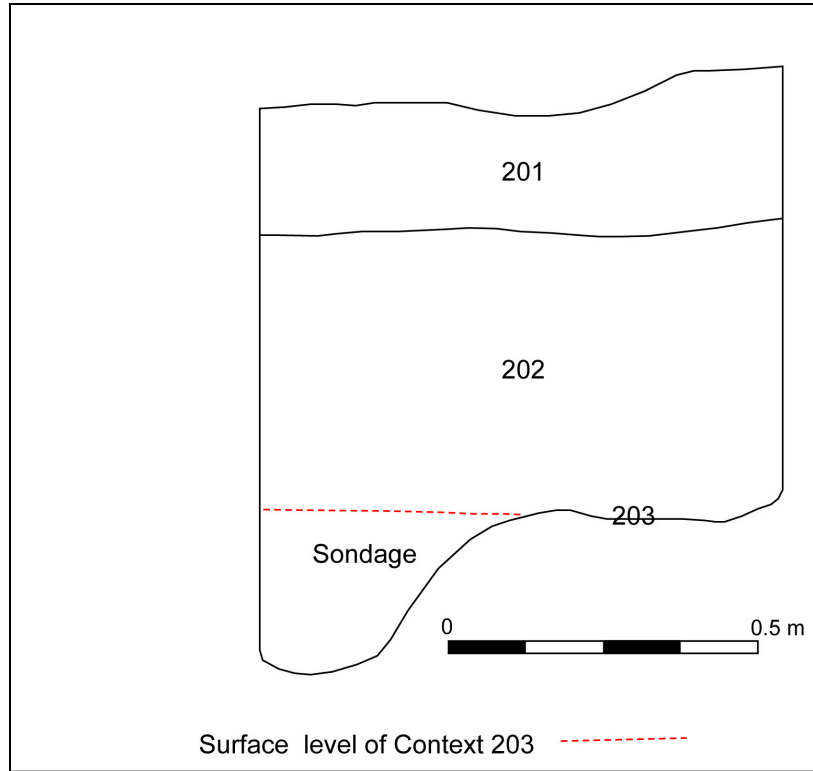
the surface on which the wall was built had been truncated. The only support for the wall was represented by the deep but loose deposit of relatively modern date (Context 102). In order to ascertain whether this was characteristic of the state of the wall elsewhere along its base, it was decided to open up a second Test Pit, 2.1 metres to the west. Test Pit 2 measured 1 metres (east-west) x 0.8 metres (north-south). A loose accumulation of stones and modern rubbish/rubble was removed to reveal a ground surface slightly lower than at Test Pit 1. The stratigraphy in the upper part of the pit replicated that of Test Pit 1. Removal of a shallow sod (Context 201) revealed a dark clay loamy (Context 202) similar to that found in Test Pit 1 (i.e. Context 102) which contained a comparable assemblage of human bone, modern glass, pottery and metalwork. As in Test Pit 1, a representative sample of the artefactual material, this time 5% was taken for examination. The base of the wall was exposed at a depth of 0.65 metres and, as in Test Pit 1, the modern deposit (Context 202) was found to extend into voids beneath the wall for up to 0.4 metres beneath. The base of the wall uncovered in Test Pit 2 was uneven, again suggesting that some of the stone had been removed or dislodged (Plate 5).



**Plate 5:** Test Pit 2 (facing north).

3.3.3.2 The dark clay loam (Context 202) was removed so that the base of the wall could be properly defined. At a depth of 0.8 metres, the clayey loam was found to overly a gravel-rich soil with mortar inclusions (Context 203). This deposit was not excavated, however, a *sondage* was excavated in the south-west corner of the Test Pit to assess the depth of the natural subsoil (Figure 4). Metal artefacts

and modern glazed pottery were noted within the layer. The natural subsoil was a boulder clay (Context 205) and it occurred at a depth of approximately 1.0 metres, that is 0.35 metres below the base of the wall.



**Figure 4:** East-facing section from Test Pit 2, showing position and depth of *sondage*.

#### **4. Discussion**

- 4.1 The excavation provided valuable information regarding the construction of Malachy's Wall. The sondage dug in Test Pit 2 indicated that the subsoil occurred 0.35 metres below the base of the wall. Therefore, when it was built, there was no effort to set the wall into the subsoil. No evidence of a foundation cut for the wall was recognised, although the truncation of the orangey-brown loam (Context 106) to a depth below the base of the wall would probably have destroyed any such evidence if it existed.
- 4.2 The wall appears to have been built into a compact surface, which is represented by the orangey-brown loam (Context 106). The base of the wall had a gradual slope of 0.15 metres from west to east over a distance of 4.8 metres (Figure 5), reflecting the original slope of the ground surface onto which the wall was built. This surface (Context 106) had been severely truncated by later activity and had been stripped away to a minimum of 0.2 metres below the base of the wall in Test Pit 1 so that, when the later deposits (Context 101 and 102) were removed, the wall appeared to be unsupported. However, examination of the voids beneath the wall in Test Pit 1 confirmed that the wall was built onto this surface (Context 106). Because of the depth at which it occurred, this surface (Context 106) was not excavated and no artefacts were recovered from it. The orangey-brown loam (Context 106) was not so readily identifiable in Test Pit 2. A gravel-rich soil (Context 203) was similar in colour, but the insertion of the sondage unearthed modern artefacts associated with this material. It is likely that this gravelly deposit (Context 203) represented redeposition of soil disturbed from the surface supporting the wall, which was mixed with the overlying modern material (Context 202) when the latter was deposited. Visual inspection of the void beneath the wall in Test Pit 2 suggested that a firm brown loamy soil (Context 204) similar to the proposed building surface found in Test Pit 1 (Context 106) supported the wall. It was impossible to confirm that these horizons (Contexts 106 and 204) were identical because only a visual comparison could be made.
- 4.3.1 It was not possible to ascertain whether the removal of the basal stones occurred in association with the truncation of the construction surface or at an earlier date. However, only the modern clayey loam (Contexts 102 and 202) was excavated from the voids created by the removal of the stones, so these stones were probably removed when the surface material was disturbed. The activity, which resulted in the truncation of the archaeological deposits, was demonstrably modern. The deep clay deposits (Contexts 102 and 202) were homogenous and contained modern finds throughout. This was graphically illustrated in Test Pit 1, where a modern fire-grate (Small Find 1001) was

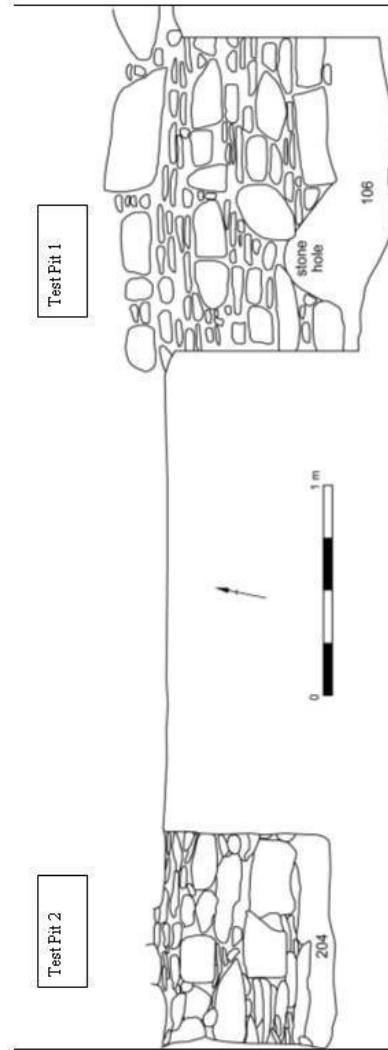


Figure 6: Excavations of portions of Malachy's Wall (south face) uncovered during the excavation

found wedged into the void beneath the wall. The depth of this material was 0.95 metres at the western end of Test Pit 1, but it extended deeper at the east end of the pit. No archaeologically significant layers occurred above this material in the stratigraphy; only a shallow sod (Contexts 101 and 201) overlay it. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the deposition of this material was responsible for the uneven scarping to the south of the wall which creates the height differential between the two sides of the wall (Context 107). The uniform nature and depth of the deposit suggests that it was deposited as the result of a large scale exercise, perhaps as spoil associated with the development of the town hall or car-park in the 1950s.

- 4.4 This modern activity destroyed any record of archaeological activity on the site post-dating the construction of the wall, including any floor levels or "occupation" deposits associated with the building. The only feature of potential archaeological interest recorded during the excavation of the Test Pits was an apparent cut (Context 103) into the possible construction surface (Context 106) at the west of Test Pit 1. Its fill (Context 104) was of a darker colour than the surrounding orangey soil (Context 106) and it was lined with five slates (Context 105). The feature is shown in plate 5 below.



**Plate 6:** Cut Feature (Context 103) at west end of Test Pit 1.

- 4.5 It was not possible to identify any stratigraphic relationship between this feature and Malachy's Wall – it extended into the void beneath the wall created by the removal of the basal stones, but, without excavation, it was impossible to verify whether it pre-dated the erection of the wall or was associated with the activity represented by the later removal of the stones. The presence of possible human bone in association with the feature prompted suggestions that this was the base of a slate-lined burial that had been disturbed by later activity. Stone-lined graves are a common Early Christian burial custom in the British Isles (Thomas 1971, 49), but slate-lined graves are less so. At Caherlehillian, Co. Kerry, Sheehan noted such a feature in an Early Medieval context (Sheehan 1999, 112). However, on the balance of existing evidence the interpretation of the feature as a grave is problematic. Fragments of human bone occurred throughout the modern deposit (Contexts 102 and 202) overlying the cut, and the bones in section might not have been articulated. It is worth noting that the feature was aligned north-south which is at variance with the normative Christian burial rite. It is more likely that the cut represented a ditch for a service pipe or drain, perhaps even associated with the modern construction phase.
- 4.6 The modern construction activity has had a negative effect on the stability of the wall. Any possible foundation cut has been overcut to a level below the base of the wall, while any the deposits which would have accumulated over the centuries against the base have been stripped away. They have been replaced by a single modern deposit (Contexts 102 and 202) of relatively loose consistency which probably provides significantly less support along the southern base of the wall than the earlier material which has been removed.
- 4.7 This modern activity has similarly had a negative impact on the archaeological potential of the Bangor Abbey site. The surface associated with the erection of the wall (Contexts 106 and 204) has been severely truncated and evidence of any later activity has been removed in the area immediately to the south of the wall. Disappointingly, no floor levels from the structure which included Malachy's Wall were preserved. It is probable that this situation prevails further south, throughout the probable site of the Early Medieval abbey as the activity which resulted in the truncation of these surfaces may have been associated with the building of Bangor Parish Hall and car-park which now occupy the site of Bangor Abbey.

- 4.8 Because the objectives of the excavation were achieved without the necessity of excavating down to the natural subsoil, the temporal extent of the truncated archaeological layers was not established. Malachy's Wall provides a *terminus post quem* of the thirteenth century for the surface into which it was set (Contexts 106 and 204), but the surface could, of course represent substantially earlier activity. If this is the case, then the truncation might have removed traces of earlier, possibly Early Christian, activity along with the later material. However, the *sondage* inserted in Test Pit Two demonstrated that the subsoil occurred 0.25 metres beneath the surface of the earliest stratum encountered in the Test Pit (Figure 4). The possibility therefore remains that some evidence of the earlier phases of activity at Bangor Abbey are preserved on the site.
- 4.8.1 Although no Early Christian or Medieval artefacts were found during the excavation, one indicator of the possible ecclesiastical character of the area was uncovered. The modern deposit (Contexts 102 and 202) contained a sufficient quantity of human bone which suggests that burials were disturbed at Bangor Abbey at some stage, perhaps during the construction work or possibly earlier, leaving residual deposits of bone in the soil (E. Murphy, pers. comm). Interestingly, small-scale construction work immediately to the north of the wall carried out in 2000 also disturbed fragmented human remains (M.Gormley, pers. comm.). It is therefore probable that the area in immediate proximity to Malachy's Wall once housed burials, although the location or date of the burials cannot be established at this stage without C<sup>14</sup> dates.



## **5. Recommendations for further work**

### *5.1 Future conservation strategy*

5.1.1 The aim of this excavation was to inform the most appropriate strategy for the future conservation of Malachy's Wall. The excavation has highlighted the tenuous condition of the base of the wall and the urgent need for its preservation. All further decisions in this respect of the conservation of the wall will be taken by the Environment and Heritage Service: Protecting Historic Monuments in consultation with the Structural Engineering Advisory Branch, Department of Finance and Personnel.

### *5.2 Post-excavation analysis.*

5.2.1 None of the artefacts recovered during the excavation apparently date of the Early Christian or Medieval periods (Appendix 5) and it is unlikely that they will contribute to a greater understanding of the site. It is therefore proposed that all of the artefacts will be studied by members of the CAF in-house. It is proposed to prepare descriptive catalogues of the principle material types and the materials will be assigned to the following people for study :-

- Pottery – Sarah Gormley.
- Metalwork - Philip Macdonald.
- Glass – Ronan McHugh.

5.2.2 The two bulk samples of human bone (Appendix 7) will be subjected to osteoarchaeological and palaeopathological analysis by Dr. Eileen Murphy, School of Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University of Belfast so that the number of individuals represented can be assessed. It is hoped that this analysis will shed some light on possible pathologies and perhaps on the likely temporal context of the burials.

5.2.3 Two soil samples were taken, one from each Test Pit (Appendix 6). These will be processed in order to facilitate comparison between the relative deposits that they represent.

### 5.3 *Publication*

It is proposed to publish a summary of the excavation in the *Excavations Bulletin* for 2005. Because of the historical importance of Bangor Abbey a note will also be published in a forthcoming edition of the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*. It is proposed to include an illustration of Thomas Raven's 1625 map in this account and arrangements will be made to secure the requisite permission from the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland. It is not anticipated that there will be cost implications associated with obtaining this permission.

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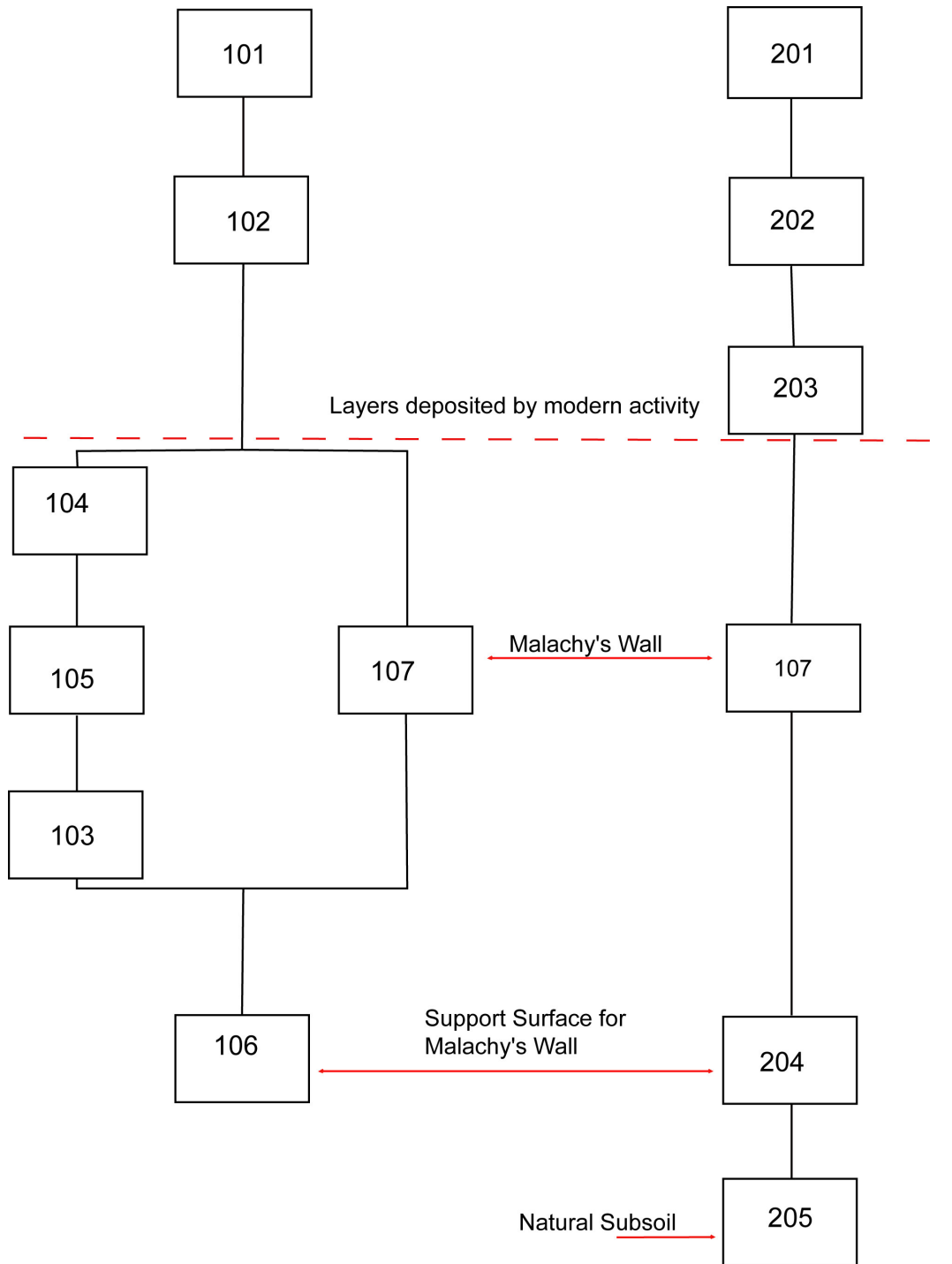
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**Appendix 1: Context list**

<b>Context No.</b>	<b>Test Pit</b>	<b>Description</b>
101	1	Thin sod of loose topsoil mixed with debris (Same as 201)
102	1	Deep deposit of dark clayey loam containing modern debris (Same as 202)
103	1	Cut feature, probably a drain
104	1	Fill of Context 104
105	1	Slate lining of cut feature 103
106	1	Orangey-brown loam supporting 107 (Same as 204)
107	1	Malachy's Wall
201	2	Thin sod of loose topsoil mixed with debris (Same as 101)
202	2	Deep deposit of dark clayey loam containing modern debris (Same as 102)
203	2	Gravel-rich surface noted in Test-Pit 2
204	2	Orangey-brown loam supporting 107 (Probably the same as 106)
205	2	Natural (Orange boulder clay)

**Appendix 2: Harris Matrix**



### Appendix 3: Photographic Record

Photograph no.	Description
01	Test Pit 1 – Cut 104 with Slate lining Context 105 (taken from south)
01	Test Pit 1 – Cut 104 with Slate lining Context 105 (taken from east)
03	Test Pit 1 – Cut 104 with Slate lining Context 105 (taken from east)
04	Test Pit 1 – Cut 104 with Slate lining Context 105 (taken from south)
05	Test Pit 1 – Cut 104 with Slate lining Context 105 (taken from east)
06	Test Pit 1 – Cut 104 with Slate lining Context 105 (taken from east)
07	Test Pit 1 – Cut 104 with Slate lining Context 105 (taken from east)
08	Test Pit 1 – Cut 104 with Slate lining Context 105 (taken from east)
09	Test Pit 1 – Cut 104 with Slate lining Context 105 (taken from south)
10	Test Pit 1 – Cut 104 with Slate lining Context 105 (taken from south)
11	Test Pit 1 – Cut 104 with Slate lining Context 105 (taken from east)
12	Test Pit 1 – Cut 104 with Slate lining Context 105 (taken from east)
13	Test Pit 1 (taken from south)
14	Test Pit 1 (taken from south)
15	Test Pit 1 (taken from south)
16	Test Pit 1 emphasising voids beneath wall (taken from south)
17	Test Pit 1 emphasising voids beneath wall (taken from south)
18	Test Pit 1 emphasising voids beneath wall (taken from south)
19	Malachy's Wall and Bangor Abbey Church (taken from north-east)
20	Test Pit 1 – West section (taken from east)
21	Test Pit 1 – West section (taken from east)
22	Test Pit 1 – West section (taken from east)
23	Test Pit 1 – West section (taken from east)
24	Test Pit 1 – West section (taken from east)
25	Test Pit 1 – West section (taken from east)
26	Test Pit 1 – West section (taken from east)
27	Malachy's Wall, south face (taken from south west)
28	Malachy's Wall, south face (taken from south east)
29	Malachy's Wall, south face (taken from south east)
30	Malachy's Wall, south face (taken from south east)
31	Close up of dressed stone in wall (Taken from south)
32	Close up of dressed stone in wall (taken from south)
33	Close-up of detail in wall (taken from south)
34	Close up of dressed stone in wall (taken from south)
35	Detail of later annex to south of Malachy's Wall (taken from south)
36	Detail of later annex to south of Malachy's Wall (taken from south)
37	Detail of later annex to south of Malachy's Wall (taken from south)
38	North face of Malachy's Wall (taken from north-west)
39	North face of Malachy's Wall (taken from north-west)
40	North face of Malachy's Wall (taken from north)
41	Detail on north face of Malachy's Wall (Taken from north-east)
42	Malachy's Wall (taken from north-east)
43	Malachy's Wall (taken from north-east)
44	Malachy's Wall – buttressing (taken from west)
45	Malachy's Wall – (taken from south)
46	Malachy's Wall and Bangor Abbey Church (taken from north-east).
47	Malachy's Wall and Bangor Abbey Church (taken from north-east).
48	Test Pit 2 (taken from south)
49	Test Pit 2 (taken from south)
50	Test Pit 2 (taken from south)
51	Test Pit 2 (taken from east)

52	Test Pit 2 – Close up of voids beneath wall (taken from south)
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#### Appendix 4: Fields Drawings Register

<b>Drawing No.</b>	<b>Scale</b>	<b>Test Pit</b>	<b>Plan/Section</b>	<b>Notes/Description</b>
1	1:10	1	Plan	Plan showing Contexts 102,103, 104, 06, 107
2	1:10	1	Section	East facing section of Test Pit 1, showing Context 101, 102 and 104
3	1:10	1	Elevation	North facing elevation of wall (Context 107)
4	1:10	2	Plan	Plan showing contexts 203 and 205
5	1:10	2	Section	West facing section showing Contexts 201, 202 and 203.
6	1:10	2	Elevation	North facing section of wall (Context 107).

## Appendix 5: Small Finds Register

Small Find no.	Context No.	Description
1001	101	Metal - Fire Grate
1002	101	Light brown potsherd
1003	101	Metal - Hooked object
1004	101	Glass - Two brown bottle fragments
1005	101	Glass - Opaque fragment
1006	101	Flint nodule
1007	101	White glazed pottery
1008	101	Roofing slate
1009	102	Metal object
1010	102	White glazed pottery
1011	102	White glazed pottery
1012	102	Pottery - Small fragment of glazed pot with blue decoration
1013	102	Roofing slate
1014	102	Pottery - Modern plant pot
1015	102	Pottery - Two fragments of decorated modern pottery
1016	102	Pottery - Plain white glazed pottery
1017	102	Pottery - Plain white glazed pottery
1018	102	Metal - Door handle
1019	102	Pottery - Small fragment of glazed pot with blue decoration
1020	102	Iron Grate
1021	201	Glass - Clear green bottle fragment.
1022	201	Glass - Brown fragment, probably from a bottle
1023	201	Pottery - White glazed sherd.
1024	202	Glass - Clear green bottle fragment.
1025	202	Pottery - Rimsherd of bowl.
1026	202	Pottery - White pottery with floral design.
1027	202	Pottery - Rimsherd with floral design
1028	202	Glass - Green base of bottle.
1029	202	Pottery - White fragment
1030	202	Metal - Badly corroded object
1031	202	Bone - Tooth(Human?)
1032	203	Pottery - Decorated sherd.
1033	102	Metal - Bottle Top

**Appendix 6: Samples Register**

<b>Sample No.</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Material</b>
001	102	Soil
002	203	Soil

**Appendix 7: Bulk Finds Register**

<b>Bulk Find No.</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Material</b>
001	102	Human Bone
002	202	Human Bone