



Monitoring Report No. 99

**Enniskillen Castle
Co. Fermanagh**

AE/06/23

Cormac McSparron

Site Specific Information

<i>Site Name:</i>	Enniskillen Castle
<i>Townland:</i>	Enniskillen
<i>SMR No:</i>	FER 211:039
<i>Grid Ref:</i>	H23154422
<i>County:</i>	Fermanagh
<i>Excavation License No:</i>	AE/06/23
<i>Dates of Monitoring:</i>	20 th , 25 th , 26 th and 27 th January 2006
<i>Archaeologist Present:</i>	Cormac McSparron, Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, QUB.
<i>Brief Summary:</i>	Possible internal architectural features of the Medieval towerhouse were uncovered beneath modern flooring deposits.
<i>Type of monitoring:</i>	Evaluation of archaeological strata revealed during removal of flagstones in the interior of "the keep" in Enniskillen Castle.
<i>Size of area opened:</i>	3.20m by 2.20m

Introduction

During renovations at Enniskillen Castle, prior to the relaying of a new, non-slip, floor surface, flags were removed from the floor of the atrium area of the “Keep” (Figure 1). NIEA (then EHS) staff engaged in the project noticed the presence of bone and pottery fragments on the exposed surface. The CAF was contacted by EHS and asked to carry out a site visit to assess whether the find was of archaeological significance. A site visit was made on Friday 20th January 2006. During this site visit the exposed surface was cleaned. This demonstrated that although the bone and pottery found previously by the workmen was modern and sitting within a disturbed rubbly layer, there were archaeological deposits immediately beneath. Dr. Chris Lynn of the EHS was contacted and it was agreed that further work in removing flooring from the site should be archaeologically monitored and that an evaluation of the archaeological strata in the opened area should be carried out. Consequently a small evaluation excavation was carried out from Wednesday 25th January to Friday 27th January 2006.

This evaluation revealed the presence of archaeological strata and structures. Consultation between Dr. Chris Lynn and Walter Boyd, of contractors CPD, established that enough room had already been created to accommodate the new floor surface and its bedding layers without impinging on the archaeological remains. Consequently there was no need to carry out further excavation.

Archaeological background

The current structure, at its core, is a 15th century Maguire tower house. The tower house was first directly mentioned in an entry in the Annals of Ulster for the year 1439 “and the castle of Inis-Ceithlenn was given to Donal Mag Uidhir” (Hennesey 1887, 143). A reference, in the Annals of Ulster, to the castle of Mag Uidhir, in 1438, probably also relates to Enniskillen Castle (Hennesey 1887, 141). The tower house was badly damaged when it was captured by the English in 1594 (Hunter 2004, 112), an event which has been illustrated in contemporary manuscripts (*ibid*, 128-9). Measurements of the Maguire castle made at the time of its capture in 1594 demonstrate that the modern “Keep” is, at least at its base, essentially the same structure as the Medieval tower house (*ibid*). The tower and walling were repaired by Sir William Cole in the early seventeenth century who also constructed the Watergate (Hunter 2004, 130). In the late 18th century the tower house was further refurbished as an army barracks with its upper wall levels removed and rebuilt in a Georgian style.

The Excavation

The area disturbed by the removal of the modern floor measured 3.20m (east-west) by 2.2m (north-south) (Figure 1, 2, 3 and Plate 2). Immediately under the flagstones was a layer of rubble and mortar (101), which had been partially consolidated by concrete poured onto it to make a solid base for the floor. This layer was approximately 6 cm thick and contained the modern bone and pottery, which led to the need for an architectural investigation.

At the base of this rubble layer there was a layer of grayish, mortar rich, friable, sandy loam (102) which was up to 4 cm in depth and covered most the trench. Directly below this friable mortar rich layer there were a number of layers at the same approximate level; a charcoal rich sandy brown loam (103), a light grey brown mortar flecked clay (104), a darker grey sandy loam (105), a mortar rich grey sandy clay (106) and a mortar flecked, grey/brown, sandy clay (112). The relationship between the grey-brown clay (104), the sandy loam (105) and the sandy clay (106) was uncertain as they remained unexcavated. However it is possible that context 105 represents later disturbance and as context 104 lay at a slightly higher level it is possible that it is above the mortar rich clay (106). The mortar rich clay (106) was above a length of stone walling (107) and a more diffuse stone setting (109), which may have been the remnants of a coarsely cobbled surface. The stratigraphic relationship of the stone walling (107) and the stone setting (109) was unclear but given that it only occurs to the west side of 107 it seems likely to be later.

The walling (107) was composed of several courses of dressed stone which turned at right angles at its south-west end. The overall length of the wall was approximately 1.65m running north-east to south-west. The width of the wall is more difficult to accurately estimate. The exposed stones demonstrate that the wall was at least 25cm in thickness and may have been up to approximately 65cm thick.

A small box-section, 1.4m by 0.5m, excavated beside the east side of the wall (107) revealed that it had been set into a foundation cut (110). The foundation cut was itself cut into a dark grey / brown clay (108) that contained within its matrix some flecks of charcoal. Unfortunately it was not possible to say if this represented a subsoil layer. It was certainly a heavy clay but the dark colour and the charcoal material within its matrix may be indicative of cultural activity and may point to earlier occupation at the site. There was a second, apparently linear, feature (111) cut into the clay (108) at the east side of this box section. This south-east part of this cut was filled by a charcoal rich sandy brown loam (103), which spread out over the south-east of the excavated area. The north-east part of this cut (111) was filled by a heavily mortar flecked sandy clay (112) which may have been a disturbed variant 108 and was below 103 and the mortar rich sandy loam (102).

Finds

The disturbed upper layer (101) contained animal bone and 20th century pottery. The mortar flecked layer (102) contained some bone as well as some small clay pipe stem fragments and creamware type pottery dating to the later 18th or early 19th century. No artifacts were found from the other strata.

Conclusions

This evaluation has established the existence of archaeological structures and strata beneath the modern floor layer in the atrium area of Enniskillen Castle's "keep" and by extension has suggested that there may well be survival of similar structural elements beneath other floor deposits, at ground floor level, in the building.

The disturbed layer (102) contained finds that date to the late 18th or early 19th century. The strata below this layer are undated by artifacts but seem likely to be either a doorstep with cobbled surface associated either with the Medieval tower house or the remodeled phases of building undertaken by Cole in the early seventeenth century.

Bibliography

Hennesey, W.H., 1887: *The Annals of Ulster*, Edmund Burke, Dublin

Hunter, R.J., 2004: "Sir William Cole, the Town of Enniskillen and Plantation County Fermanagh", in Murphy, E.M. and Roulston, W.J., *Fermanagh History and Society*, Dublin

Archive:

One hand drawn pre-excavation plan, scale 1:10, one hand drawn excavation plan, scale 1:10, one hand drawn location map, scale 1:20, currently at CAF

Finds: 3 bags of finds currently at CAF

Photographs: 56 35mm negatives and prints currently at CAF

Signed: _____

Date: _____

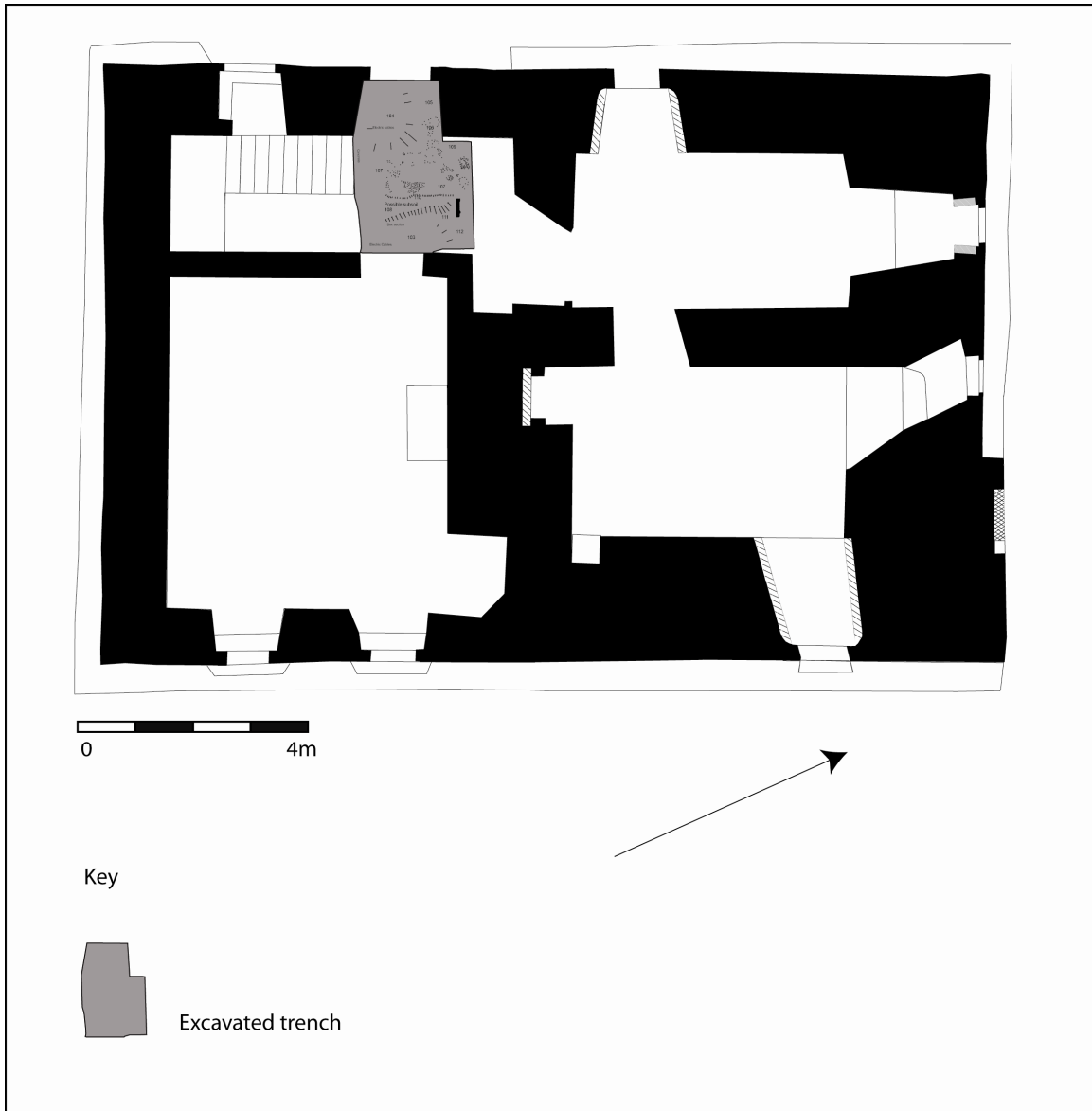


Figure 1: Plan of the ground floor of the “keep” of Enniskillen Castle, showing location of excavated area within the building (Ronan McHugh, CAF,2008).

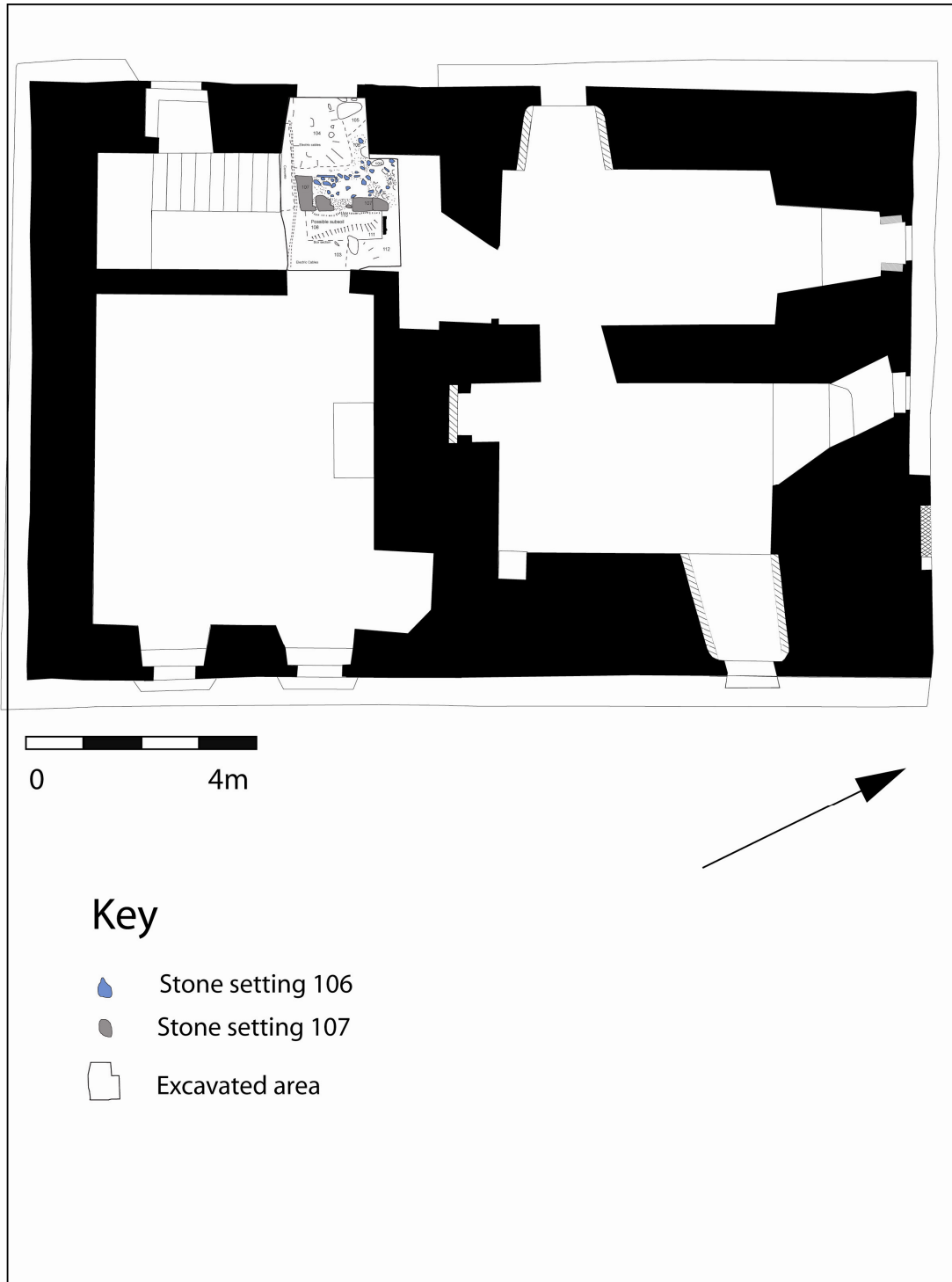


Figure 2: Location of excavated features



Figure 3: Plan of excavation trench and its setting within the building



Plate 1: View of the exterior of the west side of the "Keep" at Enniskillen Castle. The excavation was located in the modern atrium area located just inside the door to the center right of the photograph.

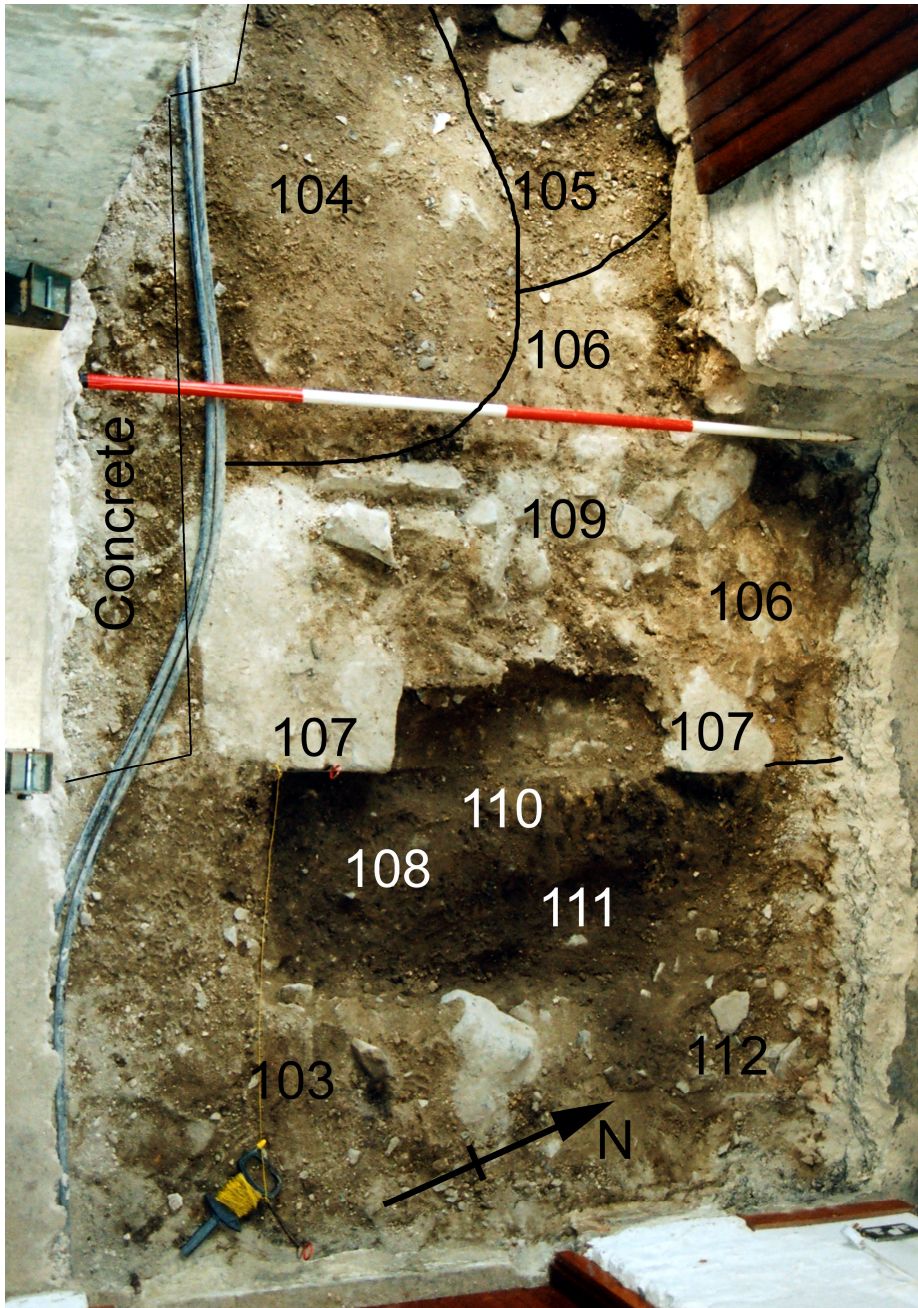


Plate 2: General view of excavated area showing the stone walling (107) and the irregular stone setting (109)

