



Monitoring Report No. 202

**Sacred Heart Church
Aghamore
Boho
Co. Fermanagh**

AE/10/116E

Brian Sloan

L/2009/1262/F

Site Specific Information

Site Address: Sacred Heart Church, Aghamore, Boho, Co. Fermanagh

Townland: Toneel North

SMR No.: FER 210:014

State Care *Scheduled* *Other* ✓

Grid Ref: IH 1173146146

County: Fermanagh

Excavation Licence No: AE/10/116E

Planning Ref / No.: L/2009/1262/F

Date of Monitoring: 29th-30th June 2010

Archaeologist Present: Brian Sloan

Brief Summary:

An archaeological evaluation was requested at the proposed site of a car park adjacent to Sacred Heart Church, Boho, Co. Fermanagh (early ecclesiastical site with high cross – SMR FER 210:014). Five trenches (each measuring 15m in length by 2m in width) were excavated across the proposed development site. Archaeological features were present in Trench Three, with a pit filled with a charcoal rich strata being encountered. A knife blade recovered from this hearth has been tentatively dated to between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries AD (Philip Macdonald *pers comm.*). It is postulated that this feature represents medieval activity in the environs of the church site at Boho, and further archaeological mitigation is recommended.

Type of monitoring:

Excavation of Five test trenches by mechanical excavator equipped with a smooth-edged 'sheugh' bucket under archaeological supervision.

Size of area opened:

Five trenches each measuring approximately 15m in length by 2m in width (150m²).

Current Land Use: Waste ground

Intended Land Use: Car park facility for Sacred Heart Church

Brief account of the monitoring

Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was requested to assist NIEA make an informed response to the Planning Service regarding proposals to construct a car park adjacent to Sacred Heart Church, Boho, Co. Fermanagh (L/2009/1262/F). The site consists of a triangular piece of rough ground to the south-east of the present church, and is bounded on its north and west by a post and wire fence and mature hedgerow. The ground rises steadily to the east where there is another field currently used for cattle. There are panoramic views to the north-east and east where the site looks over the valley towards Derrygonnelly and Ross Lough. A distinct linear hollow is present running approximately north-west/south-east across the middle of the proposed development site. The feature measured approximately 27m in length and 5m in width and the author was informed by the agent for the site (Patrick Cassidy) that there was an abortive attempt to construct a road through the site in the 1950s.

The evaluation was requested due to the proximity of the proposed car park to Sacred Heart Church in Boho, Co. Fermanagh. This church is the site of a High Cross and reputedly an early ecclesiastical site. The Church and graveyard are scheduled monuments (SMR FER 210:014). The evaluation was requested by Paul Devlin (Casework Officer; NIEA) due to the proximity of the proposed car park to the ecclesiastical site and the possibility that previously unrecorded archaeological remains might be disturbed during the development.

Excavation

Five trenches were mechanically excavated to the surface of the natural subsoil, which consisted of a firm yellow clay. Patches of angular and sub-angular stone were frequent throughout the subsoil. On the whole, the stratigraphic sequences encountered were simple with topsoil directly overlying natural subsoil. Archaeological features were encountered in Trench Three, and it is intended that this provides the focus for further archaeological mitigation.

Trench One

Trench One was located towards the north end of the development site. The trench measured 16m in length by 2m in width and was aligned roughly north-west/south-east. The trench was excavated to the surface of the natural subsoil (Context No. 102) which consisted of a pale yellowish sticky clay and was encountered at an average depth of 0.25m. A simple stratigraphic sequence was encountered in this trench with sod and topsoil (Context No. 101; average thickness 0.25m) directly overlying natural subsoil (Context No. 102). Nothing of archaeological significance was encountered in this trench.

Trench Two

Trench Two was located 3.2m to the south-west of Trench One and approximately 1.5m to the north-east of the linear hollow. The trench measured 15m in length by 2m in width and was excavated

to the surface of the natural subsoil (Context No. 203) which was encountered at an average depth of 0.2m. A discreet linear band of pale white sand was observed running approximately north/south through the centre of the trench. This feature (Context No. 202) measured 2m in length (north/south) by 0.4m (east/west) and had a maximum depth of 0.02m. The alignment of this feature, running in a straight line between a telegraph pole and a house to the north of the proposed development site, would suggest that it represents a bedding layer for a redundant service cable/pipe and is of no archaeological significance.

Trenches Three and Four

At the outset of the evaluation, two trenches were excavated in the western end of the development area. However, following the identification of possible archaeological remains, the two trenches were manually connected making a single irregularly shaped excavation area. For the purposes of this report, the two trenches will be treated and described as a single excavation area.

The sod and topsoil in this trench (Context No. 301) consisted of a light brown sandy loam with frequent inclusions of small rounded and angular stones. This deposit varied in thickness between a minimum of 0.2m and a maximum of 0.35m. Removal of the overlying strata (Context No. 301) revealed the natural subsoil (Context No. 302) as well as a large spread of charcoal rich silty clay (Context No. 309). Numerous fragments of animal bone and slag were recovered from this deposit (Context No. 309), which had an average thickness of 0.4m. This deposit (Context No. 309) extended the width of Trench Three (2m – south-west/north-east) and ran for at least 8m north-west/south-east. A slot was excavated along the north-eastern edge of the trench, the removal of Context No. 309 in this area revealed it to be stratigraphically overlying a mid to dark grey clay loam (Context No. 324) as well as physically overlying a charcoal rich spread (Context No. 304). The mid to dark grey clay loam (Context No. 324) was found to be archaeologically sterile save the infrequent inclusions of small rounded stones.

The charcoal rich deposit (Context No. 304) encountered physically below the silty clay (Context No. 309) was the uppermost fill of a relatively shallow pit (Cut Context No. 303). The deposit (Context No. 304) was relatively thin (at its maximum 0.08m thick) and produced two fragments of (possible medieval) knife blades (see appendix for description) as well as metal slag and fragments of burnt and unburnt animal bone. A soil sample taken from this deposit (Context No. 304) showed that as well as a high percentage of charcoal being present, some charred grain was also recovered. This deposit overlay an artefactually sterile lens of silty grey clay (Context No. 327), which in turn overlay the main fill of the pit (Context No. 305). This consisted of a mid brown sandy loam, which included infrequent inclusions of animal bone. At the base of the pit, a deposit of stones (Context No. 306) was encountered, although these stones did not appear to have a coherent setting and are presumed to have been thrown into the pit. The cut of the pit (Context No. 303) was more apparent at the south-eastern end. Here, the ground broke relatively sharply to a flattish base. The north-western end of the cut was not as identifiable, largely due to the slope of the natural subsoil at this end of the development

site. Maximum dimensions of this feature are 1.15m (south-west/north-east) by 0.8m (north-west/south-east) by 0.3m deep.

Approximately 3m to the south-east of the pit (Context No. 303) was a ephemeral feature (Context No. 310) that was filled with large stones and grey clay (Context No. 311). This feature was very shallow, being approximately 0.08m deep and was a maximum of 0.4m (north/south) by 0.8m (east/west). The fill of the feature (Context No. 311) was relatively homogenous although did produce a fragment of coarse pottery (possibly Medieval Ulster Coarseware, although the sherd is too small to provide definite identification – Cormac McSparron *pers comm.*), as well as a fragment of an iron nail and piece of possibly worked rock crystal. Indications are that, although stratigraphically isolated to the other pit (Context No. 303), they may be contemporary.

Other features were visible and assigned context numbers. However, upon further investigation these were found to be natural depressions in the subsoil or the result of animal activity. Nothing else of archaeological significance was encountered in the rest of the combined Trenches Three and Four.

Trench Five

Trench Five was located in the south-western end of the development site and measured roughly 12m by 2m. The trench was excavated to the surface of the natural subsoil which was encountered at an average depth of 0.15m. Nothing of archaeological significance was observed in this trench although a service pipe was encountered in the northern end of the trench.

Interpretation

The evaluation showed there to be discreet areas of archaeological potential, although without further mitigation, their interpretation remains tentative. It is possible that the pits (Context Nos. 303 and 310) represent isolated industrial activity possibly related to the use of the site in the medieval period. However, it is hoped that further mitigation will provide samples suitable for dating so an accurate chronology of activity at the site can be developed.

Recommendations

The features encountered in Trench Three are deemed to be of archaeological significance and further archaeological mitigation is recommended. Prior to the development of the area as a car park, it is recommended that the area is mechanically stripped of topsoil and overlying strata to assess the extent and survival of archaeological strata. Further excavation will hopefully also provide samples suitable for dating purposes, as well as more material culture associated with the hearth and any other features. Following the excavation, publication of the site and the excavation results is merited.

APPENDIX

Ironwork from Evaluative Excavation at Boho, Co. Fermanagh

Philip Macdonald

1. Knife [Trench 3, Context No.304]

Apparently complete knife with a rectangular-sectioned, tapering whittle tang and a straight back and cutting edge both tapering to a tip. The tip of the blade is positioned around the midpoint between the shoulder and cutting edge of the blade. Total length 97mm, length of blade 66mm, length of tang 31mm.

2. Knife [Trench 3, Context No.304]

Incomplete knife with a broken rectangular-sectioned, tapering whittle tang and an incomplete tapering blade with a straight back and cutting edge. The knife has a distinct shoulder. Corrosion products indicate that the breaks on the knife are not modern. Total surviving length 66mm, surviving length of blade 37mm, surviving length of tang 29mm.

Knives are difficult artefacts to typologically classify and date, even when recovered complete, because of the inevitable changes to their original form caused by sharpening and wear. Consequently, it is not possible to closely date the examples from Boho on the strength of the parallels cited below. The two knives from Boho are notably similar in size and style, although only one is complete enough to identify parallels prior to investigative conservation. Whittle-tang knives were utilitarian objects which would have served a variety of industrial and domestic functions. They are essentially a medieval type, although their use probably continued into the post-medieval period. Goodall has suggested that in southern England the seventeenth century saw the widespread adoption of a new class of knife with a bolster between blade and tang (1993, 125). It is uncertain whether this was also the case in Ireland, but if so, this observation would suggest that the Boho knives are likely to predate the seventeenth century. A brief literature search has produced the following parallels for the complete example (No.1): a late thirteenth century knife from London (Cowgill, de Neergaard and Griffiths 1987, 82, no.28, fig.55), a thirteenth or fourteenth century example from Norwich (Goodall 1993, 126, no.804, fig.93) and a late fourteenth century example from London (Cowgill, de Neergaard and Griffiths 1987, 88, no.85, fig.60).

Neither of the knives have been subject to X-radiography or investigative conservation. Consequently, the above comments should be considered provisional. Additional research is required prior to publication.

References

Cowgill, J., de Neergaard, M., and Griffiths, N. 1987. *Knives and Scabbards. Medieval Finds from Excavations in London*, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London.

Goodall, I.H. 1993. Iron knives, in S.Margeson (ed.), *Norwich Households: The Medieval Households: The Medieval and Post-Medieval Finds from Norwich Survey Excavations 1971-1978*, (East Anglian Archaeol. Rep. No.58), The Norwich Survey/Norfolk Museums Service, Norwich. 124-133.

Archive:

Finds: The finds recovered during the evaluation are temporarily archived at the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, Queen's University Belfast.

Photographs: 9 digital images, temporarily archived at the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, Queen's University Belfast.

Plans / Drawings: The plans and section drawings generated during the evaluative exercise are temporarily archived at the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, Queen's University Belfast.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

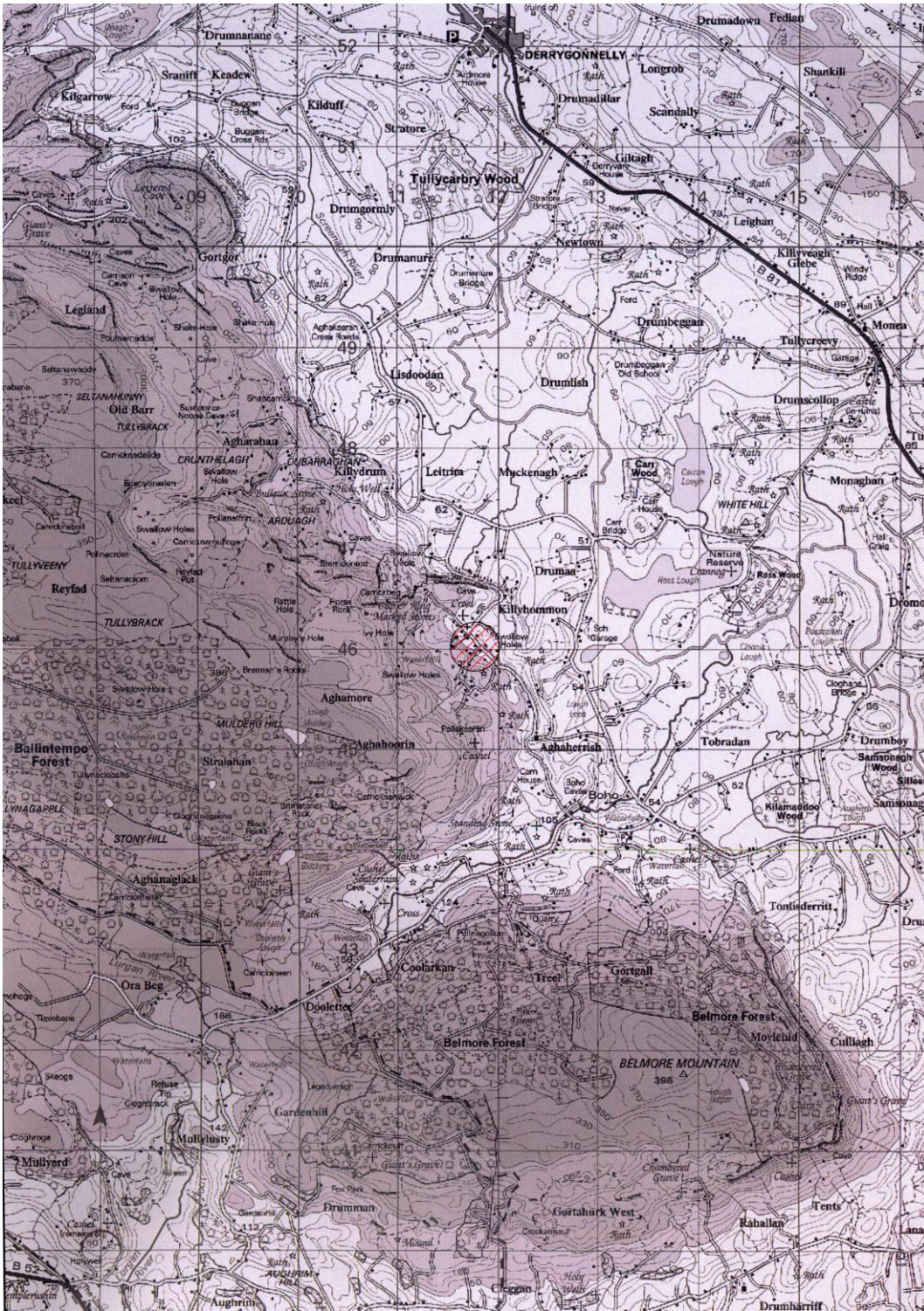


Figure One: General map showing proposed development site (red circle)

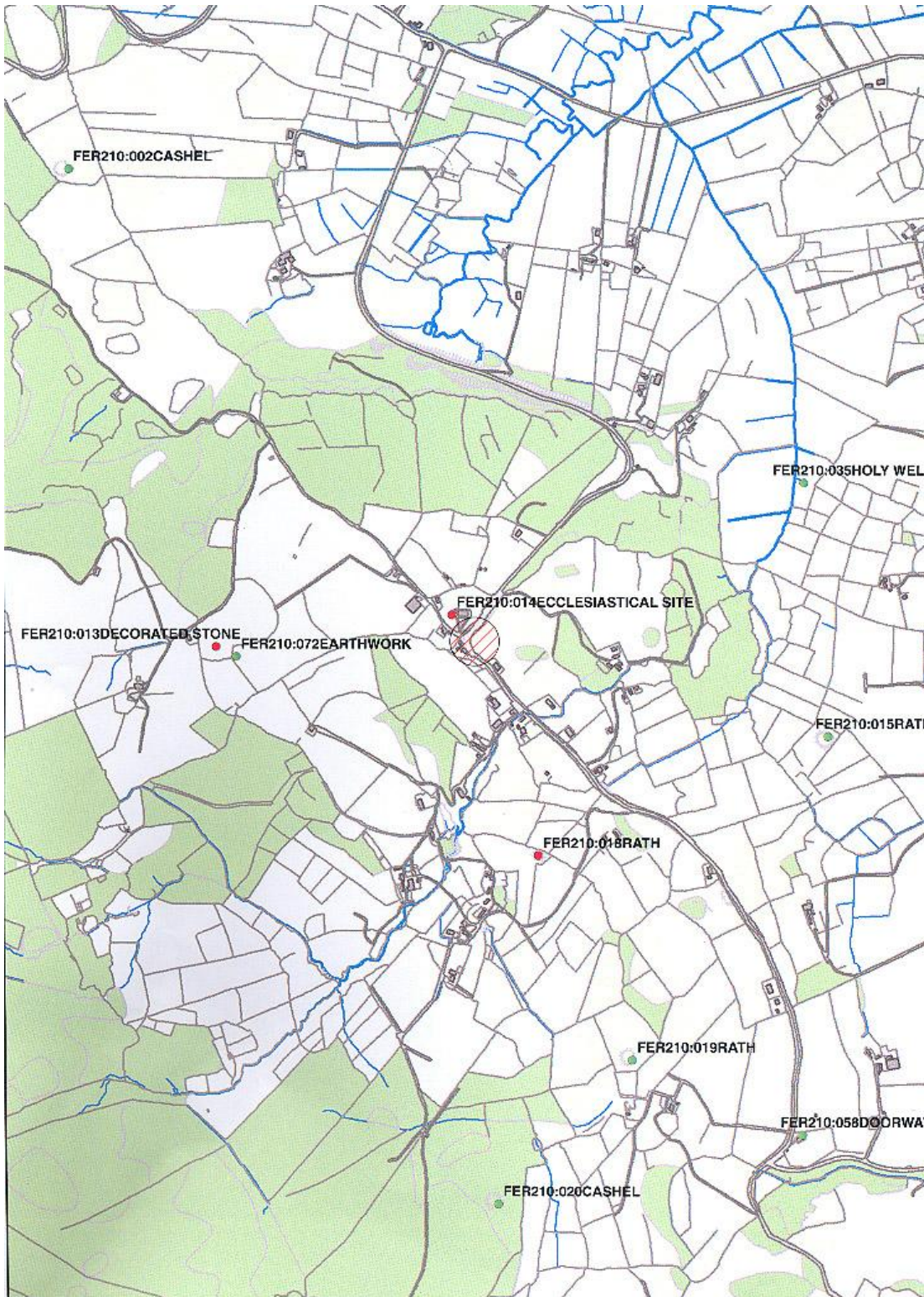


Figure Two: general map showing the development site (red circle) and surrounding archaeological monuments.

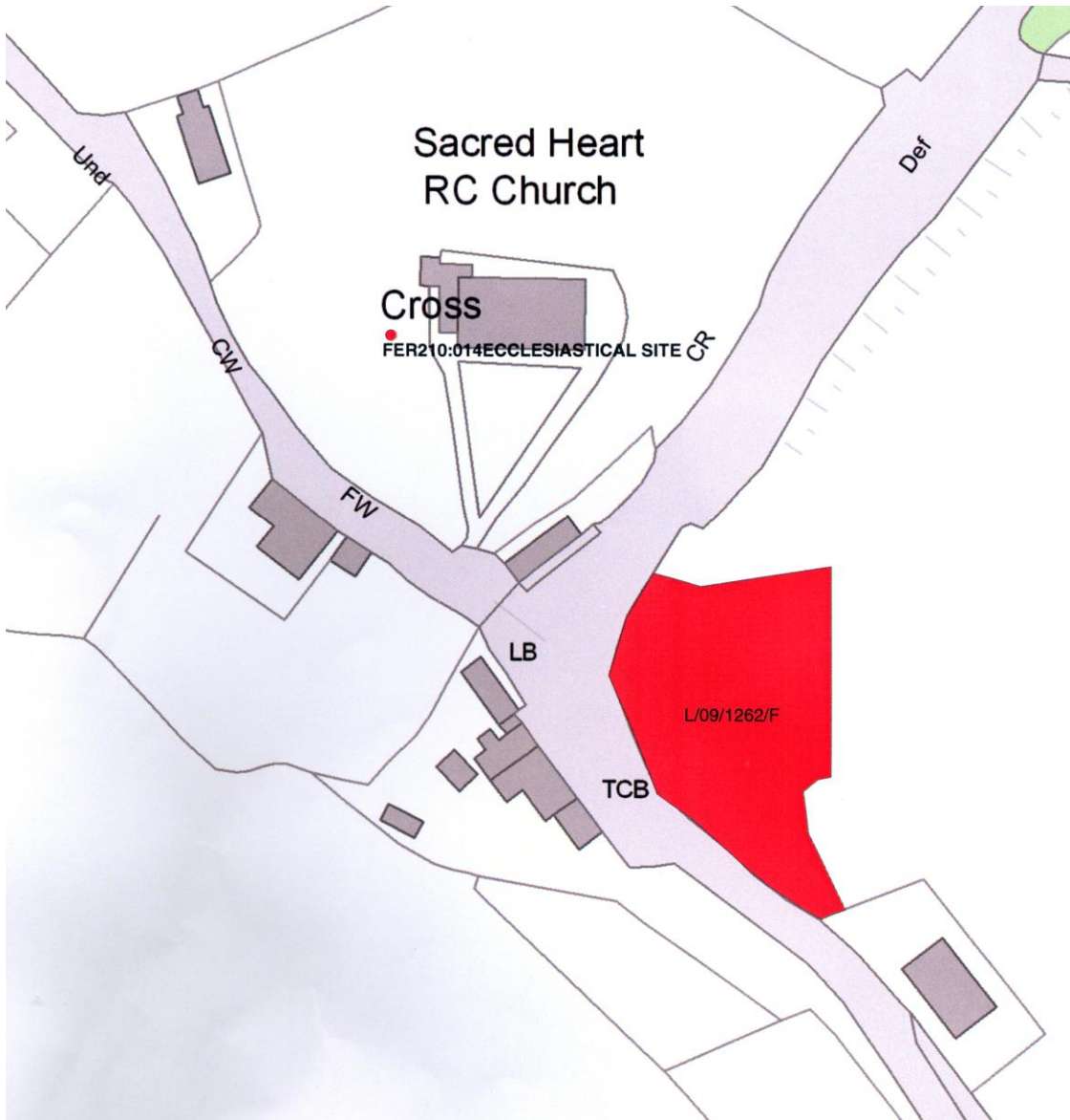


Figure Three: Development site (in red) in relation to Sacred Heart Church.

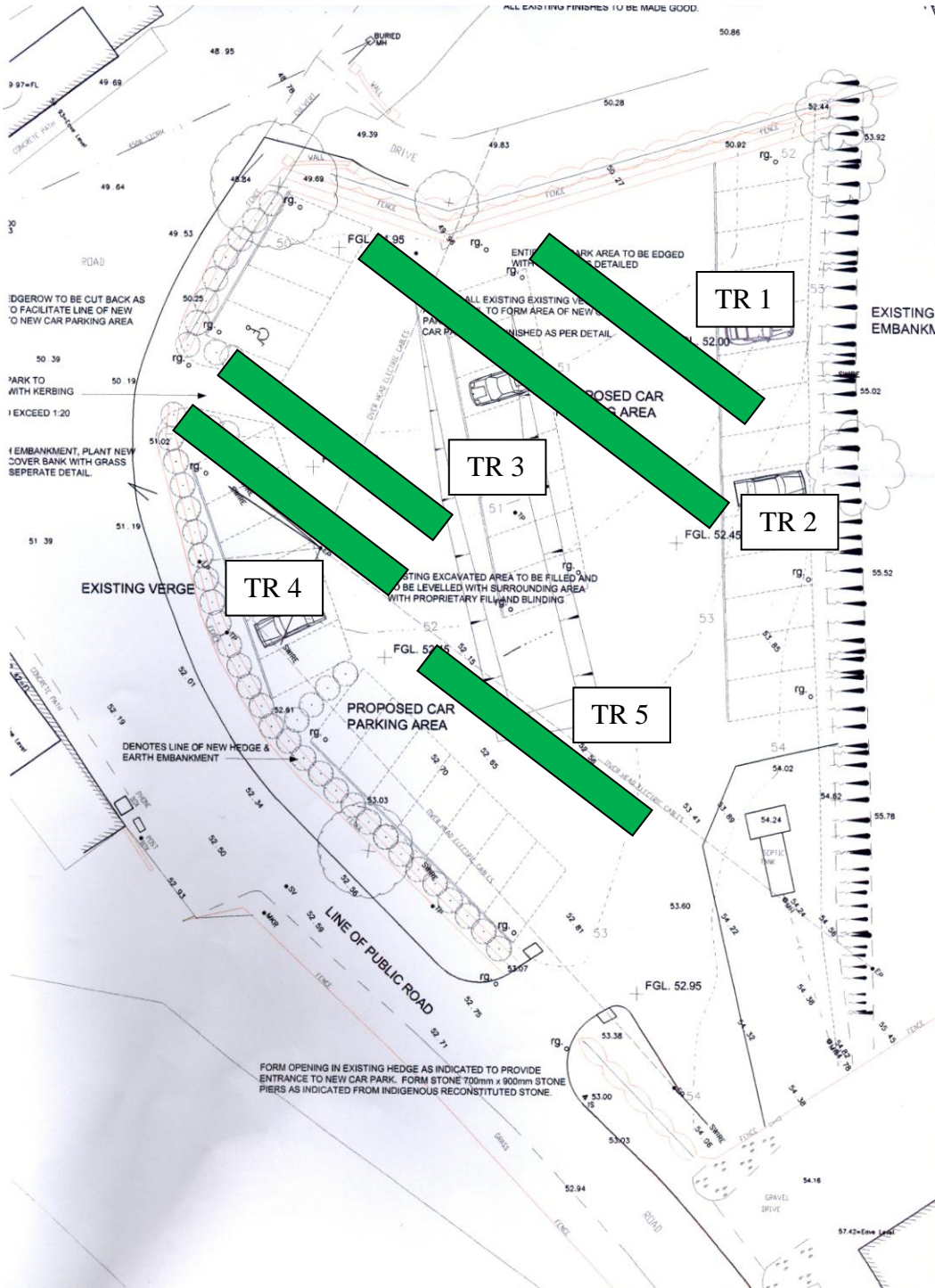


Figure Four: Plan of the development site giving details of the proposed car park layout, and locations of excavated trenches (in green).

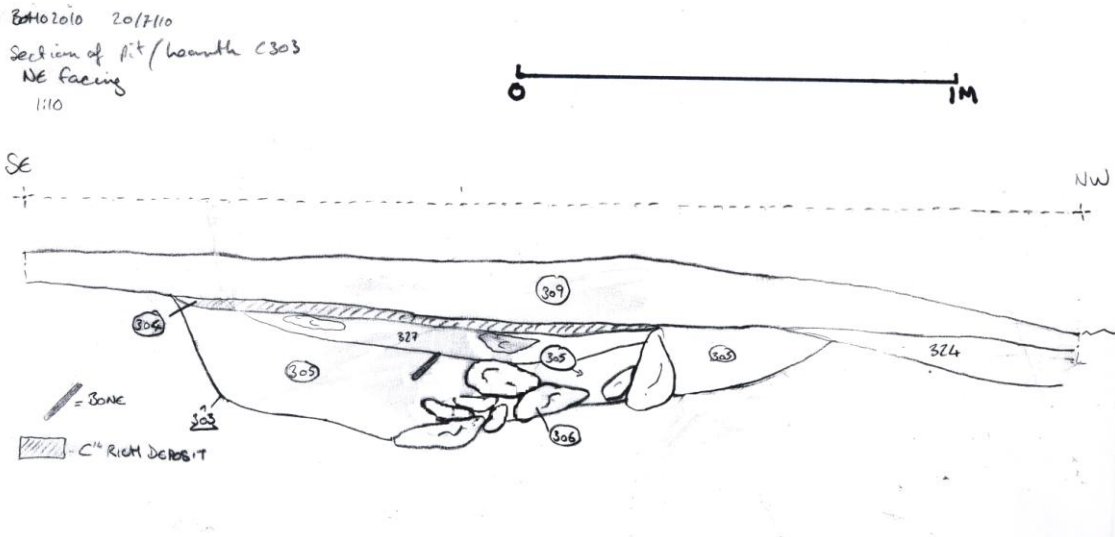


Figure Five: Scanned field drawing showing the north-east facing section of pit Context No. 303.

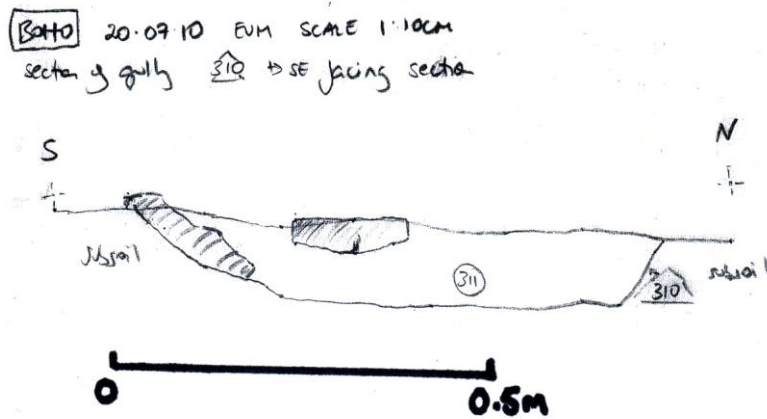


Figure Six: Scanned field drawing showing east facing section of pit Context No. 310.



Plate 1: View of the development site prior to the evaluation. The abandoned road (represented by the linear hollow) is visible to the right of the ranging rod (with the telegraph post).



Plate 2: Mid excavation shot showing Context No. 304. This deposit produced the two possible medieval knife blades, looking north-west.



Plate 3: North-east facing section of pit Context No. 303. The stone deposit at the base of this pit (Context No. 306) are visible.



Plate 4: Fully exposed pit Context No. 303 following the removal of the charcoal rich upper deposit (Context No. 304), looking west.



Plate 5: Detailed shot of stone deposit (Context No. 306) within pit (Context No. 303), looking north-west.



Plate 6: Knife blade possibly dating from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, recovered from Context No. 304.