



Evaluation Report No.239

79 Vianstown road,
Bonecastle,
Downpatrick, Co.Down

Licence No. AE/12/43E

Sapphire Mussen

Report Date: 4th May 2012

Site Specific Information:

Site Location: 79 Vianstown road, Downpatrick, Co. Down

Townland: Bonecastle

County: Down

SMR No.: DOW 037:041

Grid Reference: J 4679 4132

Current land use: Grassy field

Intended land use: Residential development

Excavation Licence No.: AE/12/43E

Planning Reference: O/2011/0620/O

Date of evaluation: 17th April 2012

Archaeologist present: Sapphire Mussen of the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, QUB

Size of area opened: Four trenches each of 2m width, three 15m in length, one 18m in length (approx 126m²)

Type of monitoring: Mechanical excavation of four evaluative trenches across the footprint of the development site with a 2m wide straight edged sheugh bucket, under archaeological supervision.

Brief Summary:

An archaeological evaluation was carried out at the above site in an effort to inform the Planning Service of the presence and survival of any archaeological remains that would be adversely affected by the proposed development. The development area is in the local vicinity of a site known as 'Bonecastle' which is described in the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record as the possible site of a castle of which there are no visible remains (NISMR DOW 037:041). Four test trenches were opened across the footprint of the proposed dwelling site and all were excavated to the level of subsoil which was encountered at varying depths between 0.3m and 0.54m across the site. The trenches were for the most part sterile with the exception of a field drain and a shallow curvilinear feature with no associated artefacts. All artefacts were retrieved from the topsoil layers in a single trench and were of 20th -21st century in origin.

Introduction:

An archaeological evaluation of a proposed new residential site at 79 Vianstown road, Downpatrick, Co. Down (O/2011/0620/O) (Figure 1), was undertaken on the 17th April 2012 in order to assess the presence and survival of any archaeological remains that would be adversely affected by the development and to assist the Northern Ireland Environment Agency in making an informed response to the Planning Service. The application site occupies a sloped area of grassed land behind a derelict single storey house which is to be demolished prior to construction of the new residence. The only apparent site of archaeological note in the vicinity is that of 'Bonycastle' (Figure 2), which is noted in the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record as the 'site of' Bonycastle with no visible evidence now remaining although it is also noted that large flat slabs with lime mortar were uncovered in the 1980's when a silage shed was built on the site. On arrival at the site it became apparent that the previously proposed layout of three test trenches running northeast-southwest across the site, one measuring 2m x 35m and two measuring 2m x 30m, would not be suitable (Figure 3). This was due to the presence of a wire fence running across the site with large trees and shrubs occupying the western half of the site closest the house. The revised trench layout (Figure 3) comprised of four test trenches, two measuring 2m x 15m and running northeast-southwest, one measuring 2m x 18m along the same alignment and one measuring 2m x 15m running northwest-southeast between the fence and the disused building. Two of the four trenches revealed features cut into the subsoil which included a stone lined field drain and a negative curvilinear feature which may be of archaeological interest. Further investigation revealed the feature to be of a shallow depth and void of any datable evidence. All artefact material was retrieved from the site was from Trench 4 and was of a 20th-21st century date.

Account of the evaluation:

Three trenches measuring 2m x 15m and one measuring 2m x 18m were opened using a 2m wide sheugh bucket and mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision on 17th April 2012. All but one were aligned northeast-southwest, roughly parallel with the northwestern boundary of the site. The fourth trench was placed between the wire fence and the house which still stands, and ran northwest-southeast. This placement of the trenches was necessitated by the presence of the wire fence and a dense growth of trees and shrubs in the western half of the site (Plate 1). All trenches were excavated to the level of natural subsoil, revealing a stone filled field drain and a narrow curvilinear negative feature in different trenches, both void of any datable artefact material. All artefact material from the site was uncovered from the trench closest to the house and comprised entirely of 20th-21st century household and farming materials.

Trench 1

Trench 1 measured 2m x 15m and ran northeast-southwest, roughly parallel with the northwestern hedged site boundary. A fairly homogenous and stone free grass sod layer (C101) covered the trench to a depth of 0.1m and was void of any artefact material. Below this was a mid grey brown silty loam topsoil with root inclusions (C102) ranging from 0.2m to 0.4m in thickness, void of any artefact material and containing no features, lying directly above the orange stony clay sterile subsoil of the site which was encountered at varying depths from 0.3m to 0.54m (Plates 2 & 3).

Trench 2

Trench 2 measured 2m x 15m and ran parallel to Trench 1. The sod layer (C201) and topsoil (C202) were of much the same character as those found in Trench 1, however these upper layers were removed to reveal a mottled mid orange brown silty clay (C203) measuring 0.2m thickness in the northeastern end of the trench and 0.4m at the southwestern end (Plate 4). Underlying it, at approximately 2m from the southwestern end of the trench, was a thin dark grey burnt layer (C204) 1.5m long by 0.8m wide, extending from the northwestern section of the trench where it reached a maximum thickness of 0.06m. It contained flecks of charcoal but no artefact material. The layer was so thinly spread towards the centre of the trench that it could be completely removed by very light trowelling to reveal sterile subsoil beneath (Plate 5). Its removal

subsequently revealed a more definite curvilinear line of dark grey brown silty material extending across the width of the trench (Plate 6). This feature (Cut C205 and Fill C206), had a maximum width of 0.3m and upon investigation was found to be cut directly into the natural subsoil with a maximum depth of 0.15m and contained nothing but a few flecks of charcoal. It is likely that the burnt layer C204 originally formed part of this curvilinear feature and spread from it in a natural downhill direction (Plate 7). No artifact material was found in Trench 2.

Trench 3

Trench 3 measured 2m x 18m and ran parallel with Trenches 1 and 2. The stratigraphic sequence in Trench 3 was much the same as Trench 2 with sod layer (C301), mid grey brown silty loam topsoil (C302) and mid orange brown silty clay (C303). Upon removal of these upper layers subsoil was encountered at a depth varying from 0.3m to 0.54m (Plate 8). A field drain (C304) of approximately 0.3m width was found to be cut into the subsoil and running the entire length of the trench (Plate 9). This was filled with small sub-angular and rounded stones to a depth of approximately 0.2m (Plate 10). No artefacts of any date were retrieved from Trench 3.

Trench 4

Trench 4 measured 2m x 15m and ran roughly northwest-southeast, between the wire fence and the building which currently stands on the site (Plate 11). The layers encountered in this trench were much the same as in Trench 3 with a sod layer (C401), mid grey brown silty loam topsoil (C402) and mid orange brown silty clay (C403), each of about 0.1m thickness, and coming directly down onto subsoil at a depth of 0.3 to 0.4m (Plate 12). No features were found in this trench and C403 contained much 20th and 21st century debris, including broken vinyl music records, plastic bottle stoppers, coal, iron bolts and hinges, ceramics, broken flower pots and a plastic hosepipe which currently provides water to an animal feeding trough in the field.

Conclusion

Of the four evaluative trenches excavated only two contained features of interest, one of which being a stone lined field drain of probable modern date. The shallow curvilinear feature of Trench 2 may be of interest but as no artefact material was found within it, it is impossible to say for certain. It is not thought that the planned residential development will impact upon previously unrecognized and unrecorded archaeological remains. It may be recommendable that some further archaeological monitoring of the site takes place during the first stages of development. With the exception of a short summary in the annual *Excavations Bulletin*, no publication of this work is merited.

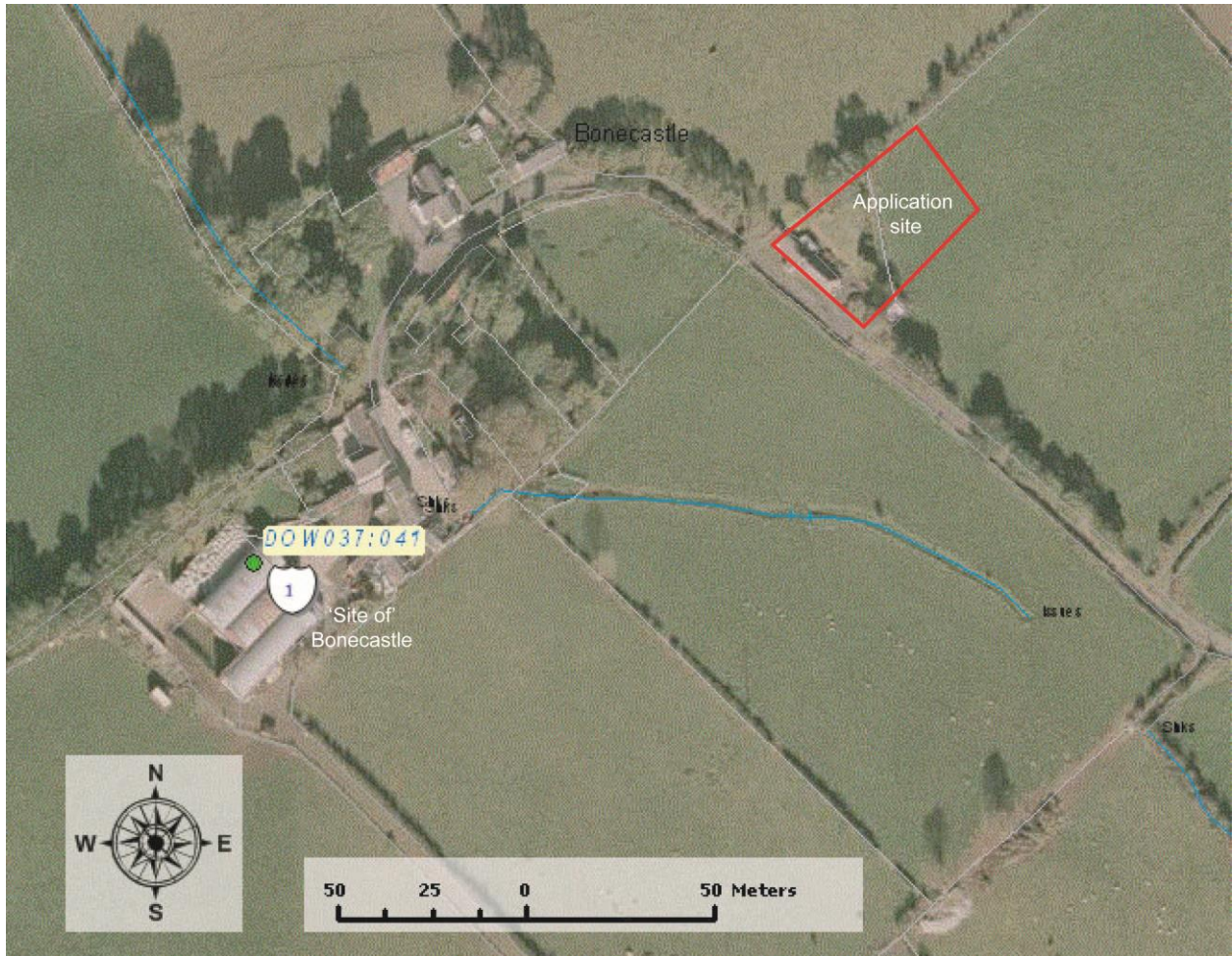


Figure 2: Google Earth image of the application site (outlined in red) and nearby site of Bonecastle.

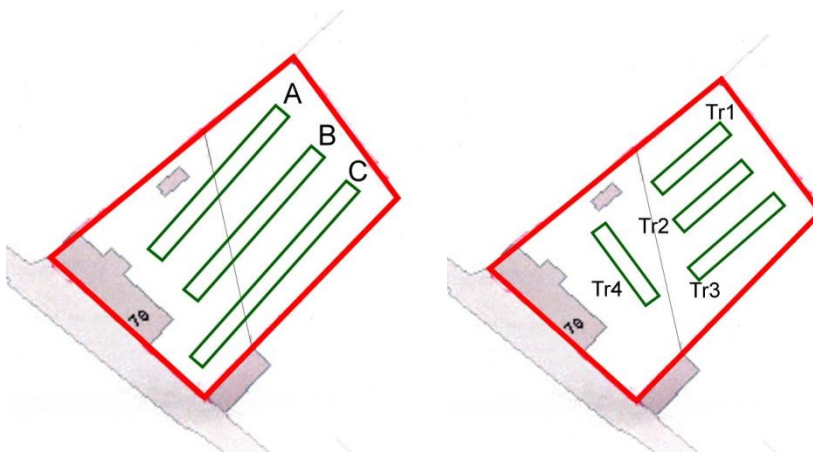


Figure 3: The original proposed trench layouts (labelled A,B,C), and the revised trench layout (Tr1-4).



Plate 1: General view of the site prior to excavation, looking southwest and showing the obstructing wire fence, trees, shrubs and house which currently stand on the application site.



Plate 2: General view of Trench 1 looking southwest



Plate 3: Southeast facing section of Trench 1



Plate 4: Northwest facing section of Trench 2 showing maximum thickness of mottled orange layer C203



Plate 5: General view of thin spread of burnt layer (C204) with natural subsoil showing beneath



Plate 6: General view of Trench 2 looking Northeast, the curvilinear feature (C205/206) clearly shown in the foreground



Plate 7: Southeast facing section of Trench 2, post removal of C206 to subsoil, showing the depth of the cut for the curvilinear feature (C205) and its association with burnt layer C204



Plate 8: Southeast facing section of Trench 3



Plate 9: General view of Trench 3 looking southwest



Plate 10: Trench 3 post excavation of a section through the field drain (C304)



Plate 11: General view of Trench 4 looking northwest



Plate 12: Northeast facing section of Trench 4