



Monitoring Report No. 028

**Aghaloo Church
Rousky
County Tyrone**

Licence No. AE/05/116

Naomi Carver

Site Specific Information

Site Name: Aghaloo Church

Townland: Rousky

SMR No: TYR 060:016

State Care Scheduled ✓ Other (excavation undertaken outside
scheduled area)

Grid Ref: H66335493

County: Tyrone

Excavation Licence No: AE/05/116

Planning Ref / No.: N/A

Dates of Monitoring: 19/9/05 – 21/9/05

Archaeologist(s) Present: Naomi Carver and Brian Sloan

Brief Summary:

Monitoring carried out on the site of a proposed slurry tank. The site may be located on part of an Early Christian enclosure centred upon Aghaloo Church. Several features of archaeological interest recorded including a probable ditch, three pits and a number of post- and stake-holes. No securely dateable artefacts were found associated with the features and therefore it is not currently possible to suggest which period they belong to. It is recommended that a full archaeological excavation is carried out accompanied by a geophysical survey to determine the extent of the ditch.

Type of monitoring: Mechanical digger and by hand

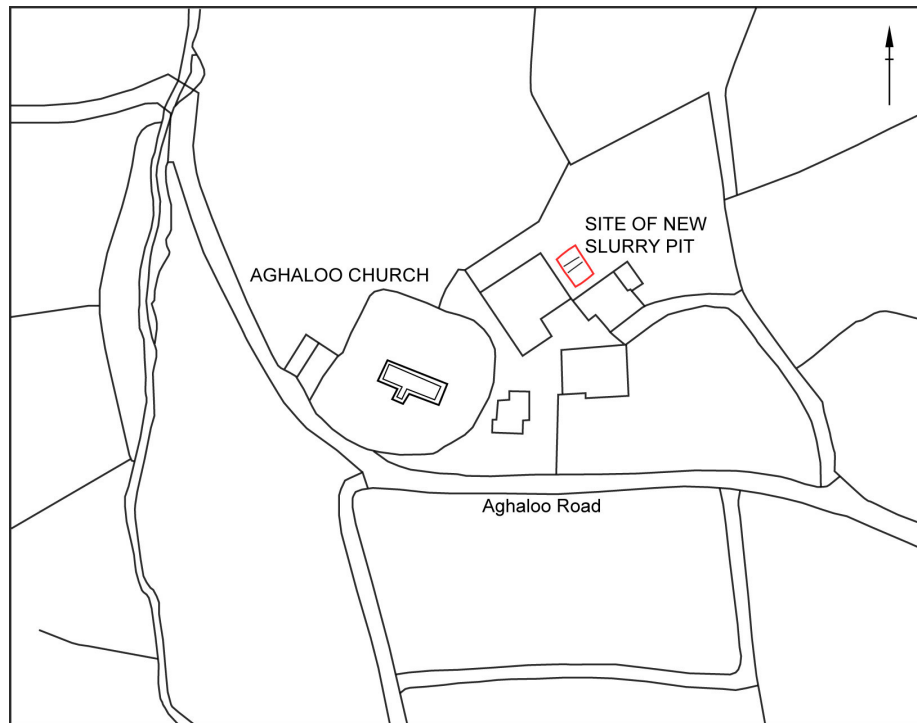
Size of area opened: 9.5m x 15.0m

Current Land Use: Farming

Intended Land Use: Farming (proposed site of a slurry tank)



Figure One: Location Map



0 125 metres

Figure Two: Detailed location map

Brief account of the monitoring

Introduction

The evaluation took place in advance of the installation of a slurry tank by the landowner, Mr Wildridge Coote. The intended location of the tank is approximately 50m to the north-east of Aghaloo Church. The church is a scheduled monument (SMR No: TYR 060:016) and is set within a D-shaped graveyard. It is thought to date to the Late Medieval period although it may have been built on an earlier ecclesiastical site.

The evaluative work was directed by Naomi Carver, assisted by Brian Sloan, of the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, Queen's University Belfast, between the 19th and the 21st September 2005. A number of features of archaeological interest were recorded, including a probable ditch, several pits and a small arc of post- and stake-holes.

The excavation area

The proposed location of the slurry tank is a field to the rear of a large barn and other outhouses (Plate One). The area of evaluation was slightly larger than the footprint of the tank to allow for the investigation of the entire foundation of the proposed development. The area was 10.0m by 15.0m with the long axis aligned north-west/south-east (Figure Four). The south-western limit of excavation is bounded by a concrete path alongside which is a large shed. The ground surface was slightly higher in this area, sloping up to the edge of the concrete. The landowner mentioned that during the construction of the shed and prior to laying down the concrete he had demolished a house and used the rubble as a foundation for the yard. The field is currently used as pasture although it has been ploughed in the past. The trench was excavated mechanically down to subsoil level and finds were recorded by context. A number of features were identified cut into the subsoil and these were excavated by hand.

The stratigraphically latest deposit was the topsoil (Context No. 101) which was a thin layer of loamy clay. A number of finds including ceramics, plastic and corroded iron objects came from this deposit. Below the topsoil along the south-western edge of the trench was a deposit of rubble (Context No. 102) which was the fill of a cut (Context No. 106) likely to have been associated with the construction of the shed and yard (Plate Two). Also below the topsoil were localised patches of a lime mortar-rich deposit (Context No. 104) which were present in the north-western part of the trench only and were probably deposited as a result of recent building or demolition work. The removal of the topsoil also revealed three modern pipe trenches which were unexcavated and allocated single context numbers (Context Nos. 110, 111 and 112). Stratigraphically below the cut (Context No. 106), the mortar-rich deposits (Context No. 104) and the pipe trenches (Context Nos. 110, 111 and 112) was the cultivation deposit (Context No. 103) which was a deposit of greyish brown silty clay up to 0.38m deep. A small number of sherds of 18th Century pottery were found within the cultivation deposit (Ruarí Ó Baoill *pers. comm.*). Below the cultivation deposit (Context No. 103) at the north-western end of the trench was a deposit of bluish grey clay

(Context No. 105) which had associated with it 17th and 18th Century pottery and a struck piece of flint. The bluish grey clay was stratigraphically below the cultivation deposit (Context No. 103) which was banked up against it (Figure Three). There was no evidence of any cut and the deposit was most likely a dump.

The removal of the cultivation deposit (Context No. 103) and the clay (Context No. 105) revealed a number of archaeological features (Figure Four and Plate Three).

Running parallel with the south-western baulk of the excavated area were two linear features (Context Nos. 137 and 138). Small box sections were excavated through each feature and they revealed that these were probably agricultural furrows; they were both shallow, filled with a compact greyish brown clay (Context Nos. 113 and 114) and had no artefactual material associated with them. The linear feature closest to the southern baulk (Context No. 113) had a pit cut into it (Context No. 135). The pit was not fully excavated but was found to contain burnt animal bone, lime and ash within charcoal-rich silty clay (Context No. 136). The condition of the animal bone suggests that it was not of any great antiquity.

In the north-western part of the trench were a number of negative features cut into the subsoil. These consisted of a pit (Context No. 116- see Figure Five and Plate Four) and six small post- and stake-holes (Context Nos. 117, 119, 121, 123, 128 and 130). The post- and stake-holes were in two rows of three and formed a slight arc. The pit was half-sectioned and the post- and stake-holes were fully excavated. All the features contained similar fills of dark bluish grey clay with frequent charcoal flecks (Context Nos. 108, 118, 120, 122, 124, 129 and 131 respectively). No cultural material was found associated with any of the negative features.

Approximately 1m to the south-west of the group of post- and stake-holes was another small post-hole (Context No. 125) with possible stone packing and a gritty clay fill (Context No. 126). This feature did not contain any artefacts. Immediately to the south-east of the small post-hole was an irregular-shaped pit (Context No. 127) with a charcoal-rich fill (Context No. 109) which at first had the appearance of a burnt spread. The pit had been cut through a small gully (Context No. 133) (Plate Five) which was filled with charcoal-rich clay (Context No. 134). The gully was cut through the north-western edge of a much larger feature (Context No. 132) (Figure Six). This feature was approximately 2m wide and a box trench across it was excavated to a depth of approximately 0.80m (for health and safety reasons it was not possible to continue the excavation of the feature's fills below this depth). It was visible on the surface as a mottled grey deposit (Context No. 115) running north-east/south-west across the centre of the trench. The cut of the feature had steeply sloping sides. The size of the feature strongly suggests that it was a ditch. The gully (Context No. 133) was cut into the north-western edge and it may be *tentatively* suggested that this may have been intended as a palisade trench, although it was not substantially deep (approx. 0.38m). Both the ditch (Context No. 132) and the pit (Context No. 127) were slightly disturbed by the insertion of modern pipe trenches (Context Nos. 110, 111 and 112). As the ditch (Context No. 132) was not fully excavated it was not possible to identify the primary fill. The fill (Context No. 109) of the pit (Context No. 127) lay above the gully and the base of the ditch on the northern side (see Figure Six) and therefore the ditch

must have been open at the time the pit was in use. Above the pit's fill (Context No. 109) lay a mottled grey deposit (Context No. 115) which filled the ditch (Context No. 132). The mottled grey clay (Context No. 115) contained a possible piece of struck quartz and around a dozen pieces of animal bone including teeth. The pit's fill (Context No. 109) also contained animal teeth, burnt bone and a flint flake.

Discussion

The evaluation demonstrated that the area under examination is archaeologically sensitive with a number of negative features at subsoil level (Plate Six). Although none of the features yielded significant quantities of artefactual material which could be used to date them, a large quantity of charcoal-rich material was sampled (from Context Nos. 108, 109, 118, 120, 122, 124, 126, 129, 131, 134) and could be used to provide a radiocarbon date. The pits and post-holes show evidence of small-scale activity in the area, whether in antiquity or more recently. The presence of a ditch (Context No. 132) suggests that more substantial activity took place and such a large feature would have taken significant effort to create. It was thought that there may have been an ecclesiastical enclosure in the area (Claire Foley *pers. comm.*), and the ditch (Context No. 132) might represent a component of this enclosure. Figure Four shows that the line of the ditch (Context No. 132) runs north-east/south-west towards the site of Aghaloo Church. It may be that the feature forms part of an irregular-shaped enclosure associated with an earlier church site.

Recommendations for Further Work

It is recommended that a full excavation is carried out of the area where the proposed slurry tank is to be located. The presence of a large ditch in the vicinity of a Medieval or earlier church site has great archaeological significance and can yield valuable information on the history of the site. The main aims of such an excavation could be to determine the nature and date of the ditch.

It is also recommended that the excavation is accompanied by a geophysical survey which may help to delineate or interpret the significance of the ditch (Context No. 132).

A copy of this report has been lodged with the Environment and Heritage Service: Built Heritage.

Archive:

Finds:

A small number of finds were recovered during the course of the evaluation. These included Post-Medieval ceramics, iron objects, struck flint and animal bone. The finds are temporarily archived within the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast.

Photographs:

Twenty-eight digital images were taken during fieldwork (AGH051-AGH0528). The images are digitally archived within the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast.

Plans / Drawings

Five drawings were made of the excavated features. These consisted of a section drawing of the south facing baulk (1:20), a pre-excavation plan of the site following removal of the upper deposits (1:50), a section drawing of Context No. 116 (1:10), a section drawing of the box section through the ditch (1:20), and a post-excavation plan of the site (1:50). The drawn record is held by the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

NE

E 990.575
N 998.077
H 500.136

SW

E 981.893
N 994.235
H 500.386

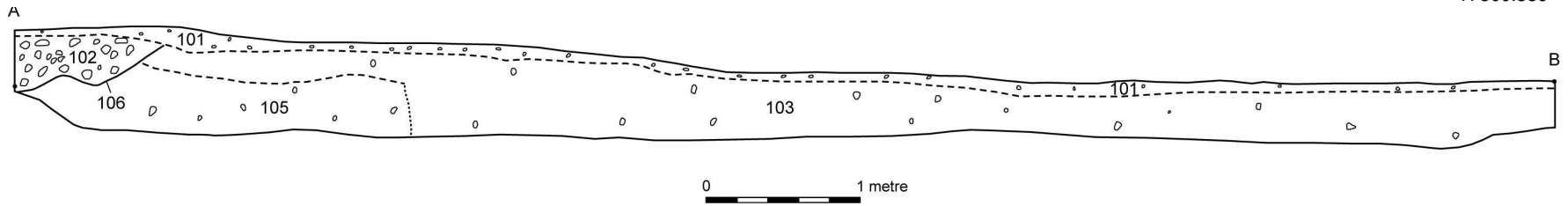


Figure Three: South-east facing section of trench

E 985.733
N 996.170
H 500.256

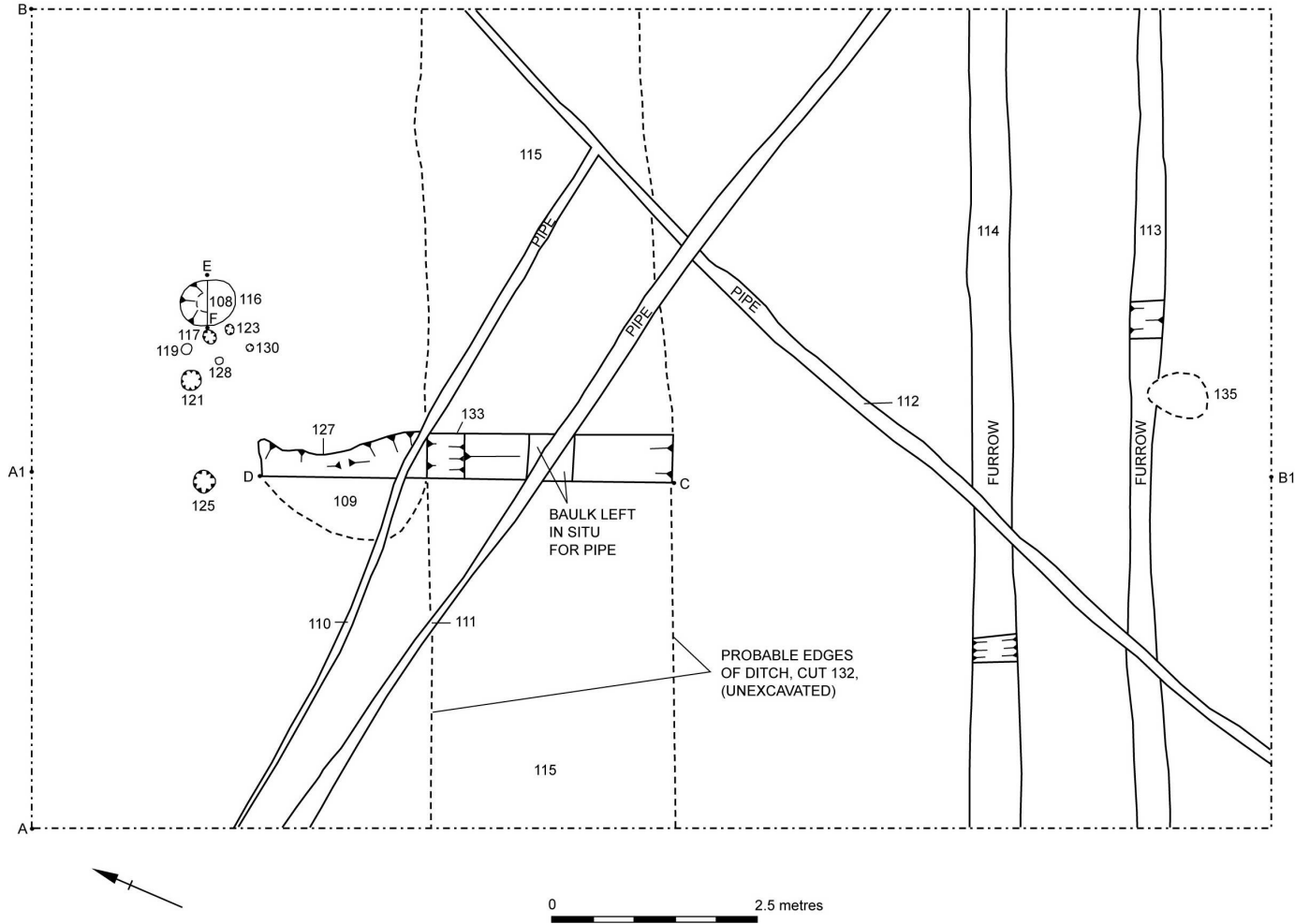


Figure Four: Post-excitation plan of trench showing features and probable line of ditch

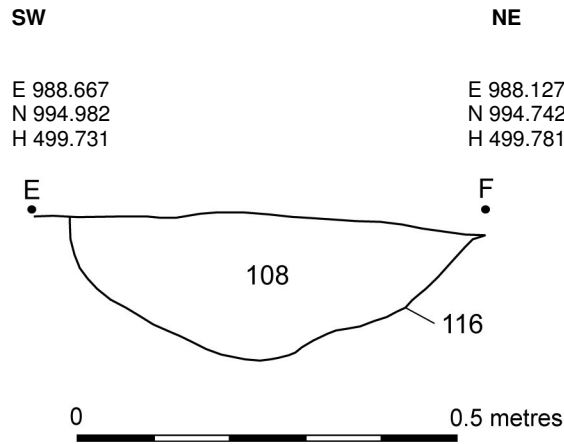


Figure Five: North-west facing section through pit (Context No. 116)

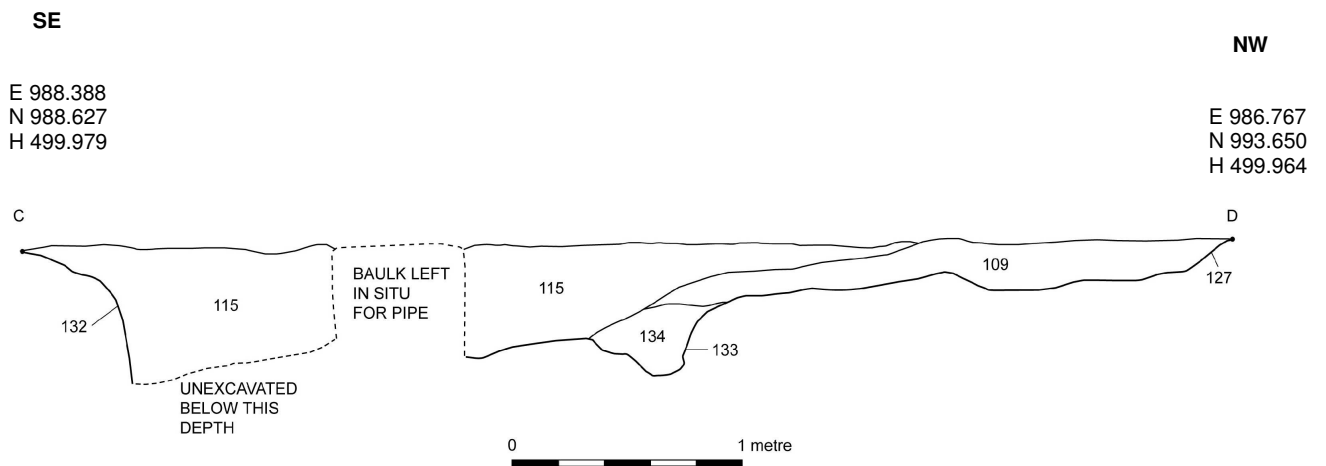


Figure Six: South-east facing section of box section



Plate One: General view of site, looking south-west



Plate Two: Southern corner of trench showing rubble deposit (Context No. 102) and cultivation deposit (Context No. 103), looking south



Plate Three: General view of trench immediately following removal of cultivation deposit (Context No. 103) by mechanical digger, looking south-east



Plate Four: Pit (Context No. 116) following half-section of fill (Context No. 108), looking south-east



Plate Five: North-western edge of probable ditch (Context No. 132) showing partially excavated gully (Context No. 133/134), looking south-west

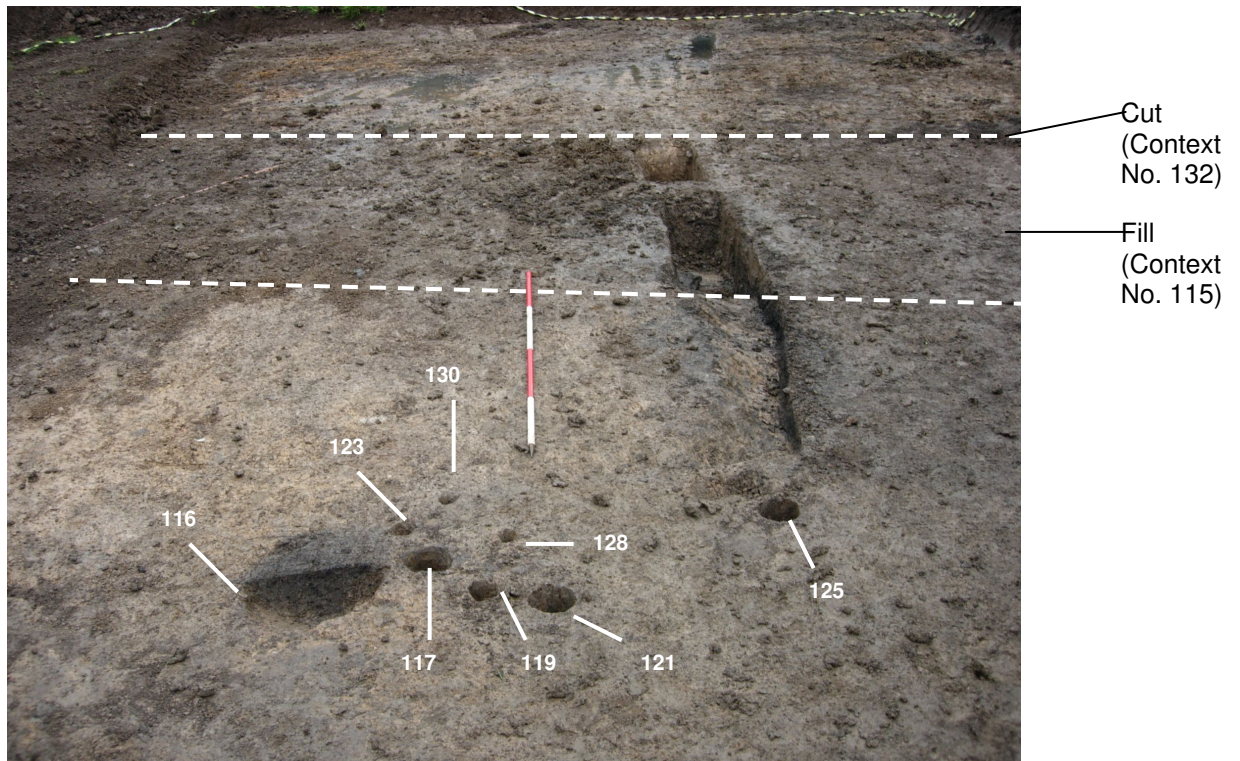


Plate Six: Annotated photograph of site showing section through ditch (Context No. 132), pit (Context No. 116) and post- and stake-holes (Context Nos. 117, 119, 121, 123, 128, 130 and 125), looking south-east