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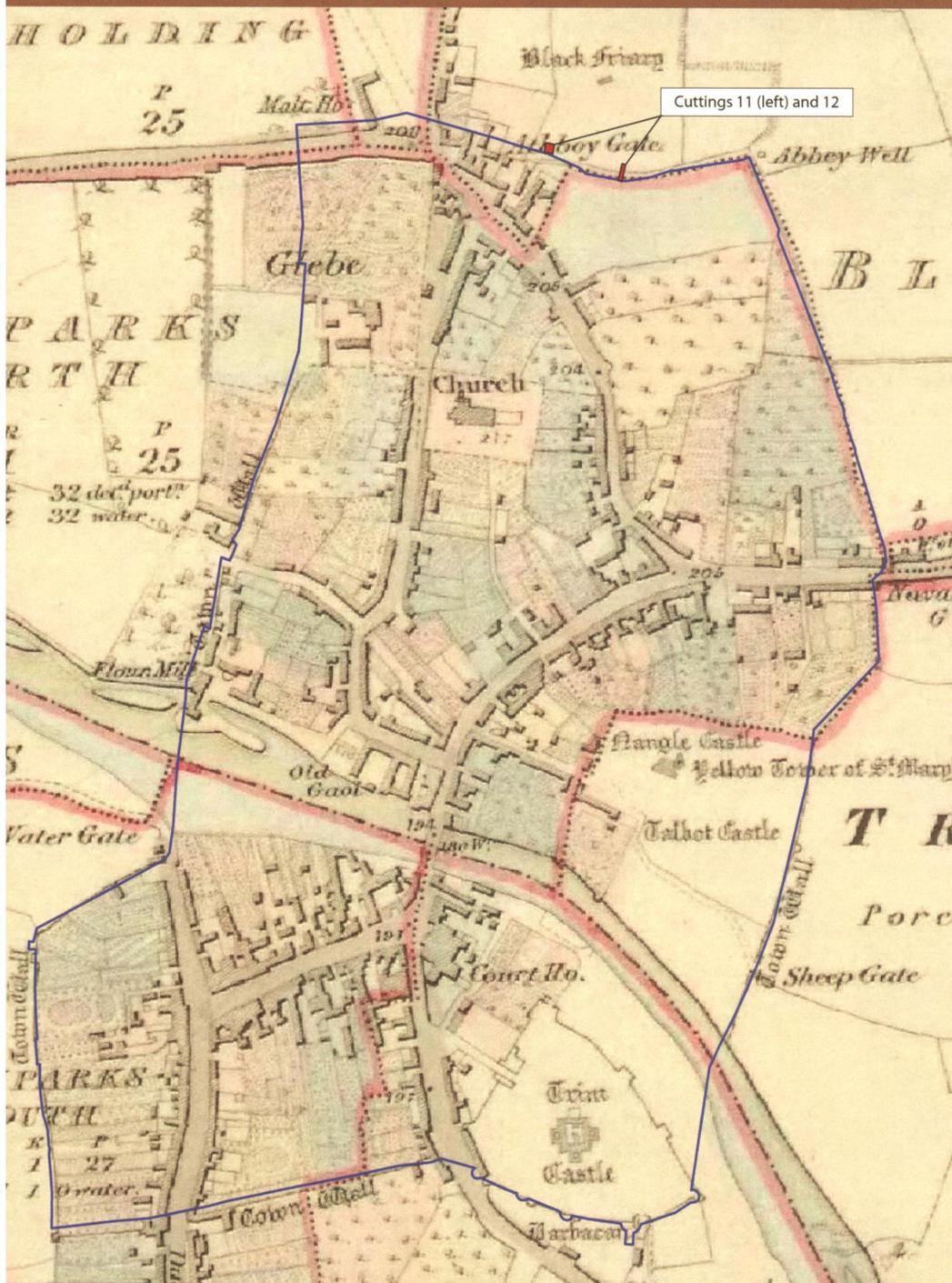
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WHAT LIES BENEATH— CHASING THE TRIM TOWN WALL CIRCUIT



Denis Shine, Ashley Green, Finola O'Carroll,
Stephen Mandal and Bairbre Mullee describe
geophysical survey at the Black Friary.

Introduction

In 2014–15 the Irish Archaeology Field School (IAFS) conducted a programme of archaeological research specifically designed to uncover evidence of the elusive northern boundary of the medieval town of Trim. Here the authors briefly summarise their findings to date and outline plans for future research on this potentially significant boundary.

The Trim town walls

Archaeological evidence indicates the presence of a monastic site in Trim from the sixth century (Potterton 2005; Potterton and Seaver 2009), but the medieval settlement, for which the town of Trim is renowned today, was not established until the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman conquests. Subsequently the town developed into one of the primary medieval centres in Ireland and still boasts an intact medieval street layout, significant stretches of town wall and several upstanding medieval monuments, including the largest conserved Anglo-Norman castle in Ireland—Trim Castle.

While medieval Trim has been well researched in the past (see, for example, Potterton 2005), the limits of the medieval town (and their defining boundaries) have remained elusive in places, especially at the town's northern edge. The historical context for the construction of the town walls is reasonably well understood. In 1290 Geoffrey de Geneville (then lord of Trim) received the right to levy a murage toll to build defences around the castle and town (a murage grant was paid by or extracted from the citizenry of a town for the maintenance of a town wall). This appears to be the earliest documentary reference to the enclosure of the town; apart from Drogheda, Trim was the only Meath town to receive murage before the end of the fourteenth century.

After de Geneville retired from public life and entered St Mary's Dominican Priory in Trim (the Black Friary; see below), his estates passed to his son-in-

Left: Fig. 1—First-edition Ordnance Survey map (1837–42), showing the town boundary and cuttings 11 and 12 at the southern limit of the site. Note the proximity of cutting 11 to the Athboy Gate (and the possible northern limit of the town 'defences'). (Image courtesy of Meath County Council.)

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Left: Fig. 2—The town wall behind Emmet Street undergoing conservation in 2011. Its original height is unknown; its width is 4ft or 1.2m.

law, Roger Mortimer, the earl of March. The estates remained in the Mortimer family for 120 years, though for much of this time the family did not occupy their estates or Trim town. In 1394 Roger Mortimer (the fourth earl of March) accompanied King Richard II on his Irish expedition and subsequently took up residence in Trim. He was granted a licence to impose tolls on all goods entering the town for the purpose of improving the town's infrastructure and defences, including the provision of an enclosing stone wall. The surviving sections of the town wall are likely to date from this time-frame, i.e. the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. The tolling licence was renewed in 1423.

Today our understanding of the medieval town wall circuit is based on the surviving remains, excavation data and evidence from the OS maps (where the wall no longer survives above ground). Based on these sources, the town defences are thought to have enclosed an area of 49 acres and to have had a circumference of c. 2km. The proposed town outline, as shown on the earliest OS mapping, suggests the sites for five gates (the Athboy, Navan, Sheep, Dublin and Water gates). No clear line is indicated for the town's northern boundary, however, unlike the other cardinal points (Potterton 2005, 174).

The western stretch of the town boundary, from the back of the mill on the River Boyne to Crowspark, is still clear, as

the wall is extant. From that point it appears that the wall was not available to be mapped in 1836. It was conjectured that the line of the wall ran north to the Athboy Gate (the site of which has recently been confirmed by archaeological excavations; Potterton and Seaver 2009) or turned east, south of the rectory, and continued eastward past St Patrick's Church to a point north of the Navan Gate (before turning south to meet the gate). This latter course would imply that the Athboy Gate acted as a gate to a suburb and not to the town proper. Assuming, however, that the town wall continued northward to the Athboy Gate, it is probable that it then turned east to run along a line marked as the municipal and townland boundary on the first-edition OS map. This boundary is the southern boundary of the Black Friary site, where the IAFS currently conduct their excavation, research and teaching programmes.

The Black Friary's southern boundary

Details of the excavations at the Black Friary site have been published previously, including in this journal (Mandal *et al.* 2015), and so are given only briefly here to provide context.

The Black Friary (founded in 1263 by Geoffrey de Geneville) is located c. 200m north-east of St Patrick's Cathedral (the probable location of the early monastic site of Trim) in a six-acre greenfield space surrounded by modern housing. Prior to 2010 the friary remains were visible only as a series of grassy hummocks (preserving the rough outline of the friary buildings) or as low earthworks, such as that which marks the precinct boundary (Fig. 7). Although a site of considerable importance during the medieval period (see Mandal *et al.* 2015 for a full discussion), the friary was suppressed in 1540 and later demolished for its limestone in the mid-eighteenth century. Consequently, by the time of the first Ordnance Survey only scattered pieces of displaced masonry, such as a piece of the bell-tower and one of the friary wells, were visible above ground (Fig. 1).



Left: Fig. 3—Aerial photograph of Trim, indicating the possible medieval boundary of Trim (blue line), the Black Friary site (top right) and cuttings 11 and 12. The precinct boundary is visible in the middle of the Black Friary site. (Image courtesy of Meath County Council.)

Below: Fig. 4—Cutting 11 being rehabilitated as a children's archaeological learning zone, complete with a 'town wall', after being excavated to natural subsoil. Pictured are (L-R) Keith, Michael, Greg and Richie—local men who undertook the construction work.

Unfortunately these burials were heavily truncated by modern mechanical excavation that had been undertaken to bury rubbish and scrap metal. Nonetheless, the archaeology in cutting 11 indicated that the graveyard extended to the southern limits of the site/medieval precinct; despite the proximity of the cutting to the site of the Athboy Gate (Fig. 1), no evidence for medieval boundary features was encountered.

Excavations of cutting 12 proved more informative. An additional three burials were encountered, extending the known limits of the cemetery to within 5m of the site's southern edge. More significantly, a ditch was uncovered that was initially identified as medieval (based on the recovery of a single sherd of medieval pottery—the only find from the ditch). This potsherd was contained within the ditch's basal fill, a redeposited natural which appeared to represent a slippage of material, possibly from a degraded bank, at the ditch's southern face.

Since 2010 archaeological excavations have focused on the cemetery, church, bell-tower, cloister garth, ambulatory and eastern range. A programme of archaeological testing in 2014 also helped to clarify agricultural practices in the eastern portion of the field (Fig. 7). In 2014 investigation of the southern boundary of the site was made a research priority, leading to the excavation of two additional archaeological cuttings—cuttings 11 and 12.

It was hoped that these cuttings might help to elucidate the southern limit of the friary's cemetery, which (as stated) could also potentially delimit the northern edge of medieval Trim. Within cutting 11 six inhumations were documented, constituting the southernmost burials recorded at the site at that time.



Table 1—Radiocarbon dates from cutting 12 at the Black Friary. Calibration after OxCal 4.1 using the IntCal09 dataset.

Laboratory code	Material	Burial no.	$\delta^{13}\text{C}$ (‰)	Radiocarbon age (BP)	Calibrated age (95.4% probability) (cal. BC/AD)
Wk-42075	Human bone	78	*	669 ± 20	AD 1270–1390
Wk-42076	Human bone	80	*	761 ± 20	AD 1220–1280

*Please note: The Carbon-13 stable isotope value ($\delta^{13}\text{C}$) was measured on prepared graphite using the AMS spectrometer. The radiocarbon date has therefore been corrected for isotopic fractionation. The AMS-measured $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ value can differ, however, from the $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ of the original material and it is therefore not shown.

The ditch is smaller than one might expect of a town boundary (measuring 5.5m by 0.9m) and is less substantial than recorded sections of the town ditch elsewhere in Trim. The ditch has never previously been recorded on the northern side of Trim, however, so its form and size at this cardinal point remain to be established. The boundary was also excavated within the friary precinct, which itself is surrounded by a sizeable earthwork. The existence of the friary precinct boundary may have obviated the need for a 'defensive' town boundary within the Black Friary—i.e. within the precinct, a smaller town boundary that simply delimited space may have been sufficient.

A single burial was cut through the upper ditch fills on its northern side, and two more burials were positioned directly

south of the ditch, on the 'town side'. A radiometric date of AD 1270–1390 (all dates are given at 95.4% probability) has been obtained on the burial cut through the ditch fill, providing a clear *terminus post quem* for the boundary (and confirming the medieval date indicated by the pottery sherd). This date also established that if the ditch served as a boundary between the town and friary it had passed out of use prior to the later fourteenth century, at which point the friary's cemetery extended into the 'town area'.

Geophysical survey

The discovery of the ditch in cutting 12, while potentially significant, raised more questions than answers. Was the ditch the town boundary? Did the friary cemetery extend into the 'town area' and, if so, what

Below left: Fig. 5—IACS students excavating the northern side of the ditch in cutting 12.

Below: Fig. 6—The burial fully exposed at the edge of the ditch, with the ditch, under excavation, visible behind.

does that imply about the use of space within the town's northern limits? To help answer these questions, a programme of ground-penetrating radar (GPR) survey was undertaken in 2015 (by Ms Ashley Green of Bournemouth University). It was hoped that this survey would clarify the line of the ditch and establish whether it changed form/size on either side of the precinct boundary—and specifically whether the boundary became more substantial outside the precinct. GPR was considered the most suitable geophysical technique, as it is well suited to delineating buried anthropogenic features through the presence of both modern rubbish and rubbles—the former of which has been confirmed along much of the site's southern limits.

Test surveys were conducted in four grids along the existing modern fence at the site's southern boundary. The westernmost grid was established to include a discernible 'raised' linear feature directly east of cutting 12; the extent of all other grids was determined from this first grid. The surveys (using a hand-pulled MALÅ™ RAMAC X3M GPR system) were conducted in north-south traverses to





Left: Fig. 7—Lidar survey of the Black Friary field (overlaid on modern Ordnance Survey data), showing archaeological cuttings from various seasons, archaeological test trenches from 2014 (on the right) and geophysics survey grids from 2015.

Below: Fig. 8—A filtered (DC Removal, Time-varying gain, Delete mean trace, increased contrast) time-slice processed in MALÅ Easy3D from grid A at c. 1.5m. The linear anomaly is outlined in red.

the survey may result from modern activity close to the ground surface, such as rubbish, backfilled holes and/or modern services.

Conclusion

The data garnered from geophysical survey at the Black Friary were undoubtedly limited by the absence of a 'clean site' (i.e. one with minimal modern disturbance). Future surveys, particularly with GPR and earth resistivity methods, would be more successful within less disturbed areas in delineating negative features (i.e. ditches, pits etc.) and/or structural remains. Investigation of the Black Friary's southern limits, and its implications for better understanding the medieval enclosure of Trim, will be best answered through a programme of targeted excavation—namely through extending cutting 12 and/or assessing the precinct boundary at the site's southern limit. Such an excavation may help to clarify the function of the medieval ditch in cutting 12 and its role, if any, in the enclosure of medieval Trim. The IAFS are planning a community dig on the site as part of Heritage Week (20–28 August 2016), when we hope the local community might help us to answer these important questions about Trim's elusive northern boundary! Anyone interested in participating in the dig should contact Denis Shine at denis.shine@iafs.ie. ■

References

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allow multiple hits on any remaining section of ditch/boundary, which, if extant, would be running east–west. Signal penetration of GPR, depending on the soil type and antenna frequency, can range from 0.5m to 10m; at the Black Friary penetration proved poor, owing to high attenuation within the silty clays, but still regularly achieved depths of c. 2–2.5m.

The GPR survey revealed a single visible linear anomaly, approximately 1m wide and 1.2m deep, at the western limits of the survey, c. 0.6m below the ground surface (Fig. 8). Based on the location of this test grid in relation to cutting 12, the linear anomaly may represent a continuation of the ditch uncovered during excavation; other interpretations, however, such as a geological formation, modern activity or the effects of topographic change on the stability of the GPR during survey, cannot be fully discounted without physical confirmation. The linear anomaly was not visible in any of the other grids, nor was any evidence for additional archaeological features recorded.

Owing to the paucity of data generated by GPR, an electromagnetic (EM) survey, detecting changes in magnetic susceptibility and conductivity, was also conducted across the entire area assessed by GPR. The EM survey (using a Geonics™ EM38B operating on a 14.6KHz frequency

with 1m coil spacing) recorded both 'in-phase' (magnetic susceptibility) and 'quadrature phase' (conductivity) values (again using north–south traverses). No evidence of archaeological features was recorded from this survey, which also failed to identify the linear anomaly detected during GPR. The limitations of the EM survey may partly derive from the constraints of the survey method, which may only reach a maximum penetration of c. 0.7m in low-attenuation materials. Thus the absence of observed anomalies during

