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Archaeological Testing at

St. Johns Church, Abbeycartron, Longford, Co. Longford

Licence Number 22E898

April 2023

Client: Longford Co. Co.

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1   Introduction

This report assesses the results of archaeological testing at a proposed walkway at Abbeycartron, Longford. The works also involved braking a section through the graveyard wall at St. Johns Church and construction of a boundary wall. The report has been compiled by John Purcell Archaeological Consultancy. The desktop section of the report was compiled using: The Records of Monuments and Places; buildings of Ireland, Excavations Bulletin; historic maps; aerial photographs; place names and historic books and journals.

Archaeological testing was undertaken in March 2022. John Purcell Archaeological Consultancy undertook this report. Field walking was undertaken by John Purcell BA. John Purcell has been excavation licence eligible with the DAHC since 2002 and has worked consistently since then in the area of archaeology.

Figure 1:   Location of development Abbeycartron, Co. Longford
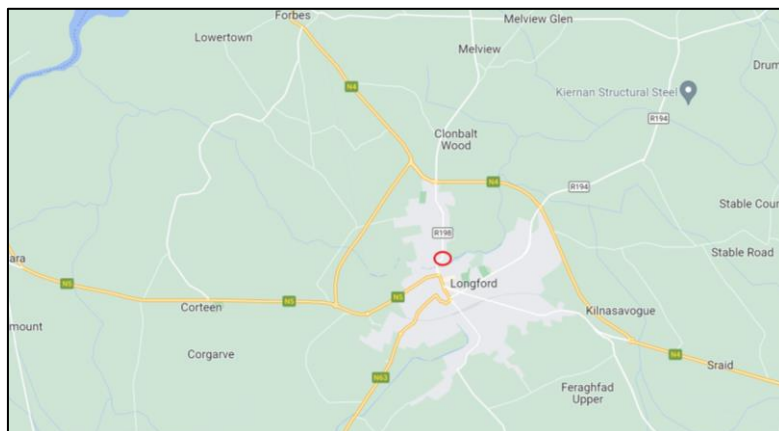
2   Receiving Environment

The proposed development will develop an area of scrub between a modern development and St. Johns Church ad Graveyard. This area currently has no function. The proposed works will create a walkway between the church and a pedestrian bridge over the River Camlin. Some of the area will be incorporated into the church grounds and will be used as a burial ground in the future. The northern

boundary of the site is a modern block wall from a previous extension to the graveyard. The southern and eastern boundary is modern housing (Plates 1-2).

3   Methodology

This report has been prepared having regard to the following guidelines;

- Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment (Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government, 2018)
- Environmental Impact Assessment of Projects: Guidance on the preparation of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (European Commission, 2017)
- Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports – Draft (EPA, 2017)
- National Monuments Acts, 1930-2014
- The Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Bill, 2006
- Heritage Act 1995
- Frameworks and Principles for the protection of Archaeological Heritage 1999
- Architectural Heritage (National Inventory) and Historic Monuments and the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act 2000

3.1   Study Methodology

This assessment consists of a paper survey identifying all recorded sites within the vicinity of the proposed development and a site inspection. The methodology has been conducted based on the guidelines from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG).

The desktop survey undertaken consisted of a document and cartographic search utilising a number of sources including the following:

- Record of Monuments and Places (RMP); The RMP records known upstanding archaeological monuments, the original location of destroyed monuments and the location of possible sites identified through, documentary, cartographic, photographic research and field inspections.
- The RMP consists of a list, organised by county and subdivided by 6" map sheets showing the location of each site. The RMP data is compiled from the files of the Archaeological Survey.

- National Inventory of Architectural Heritage; The inventory of architectural heritage lists all post 1700 structures and buildings in the country. This includes structures of architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, social, scientific or technical importance.

- County Development Plans; The Development plan was consulted to ascertain if any structures listed in the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) and/or any Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs). The Record of Protected Structures lists all protected structures and buildings in Wicklow. This includes structures of architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, social, scientific or technical importance.

- Cartographic Sources; The following maps were examined: Down Survey, 1st edition Ordnance Survey Maps (1836-1846) and 2nd edition Ordnance Survey Maps (1908), Rocque Map and the Cassini Map.

- Literary Sources; Various published sources, including local and national journals, were consulted to establish a historical background for the proposed development site. Literary sources are a valuable means of completing the written record of an area and gaining insight into the history of the environs of the proposed development. Principal archaeological sources include: The Excavations Bulletin; Local Journals; Published archaeological and architectural inventories; Peter Harbison, (1975). Guide to the National Monuments of Ireland; and O'Donovan's Ordnance Survey Letters.

- Previous archaeological assessments and excavations for the area were reviewed.

A comprehensive list of all literary sources consulted is given in the bibliography.

3.2   Site Inspections

An archaeological field inspection survey seeks to verify the location and extent of known archaeological features and to record the location and extent of any newly identified features. A field inspection should also identify any areas of archaeological potential with no above ground visibility. Archaeological testing and archaeological monitoring were also undertaken.

3.3 Assessment Criteria

The criteria used to assess the significance of the impact of a development on an archaeological landscape, site, feature, monument or complex are defined as follows:

- Profound Applies where mitigation would be unlikely to remove adverse effects. Reserved for adverse, negative effects only. These effects arise where an archaeological site is completely and irreversibly destroyed by a proposed development.

- Significant An impact which, by its magnitude, duration or intensity, alters an important aspect of the environment. An impact like this would be where part of a site would be permanently impacted upon, leading to a loss of character, integrity and data about the archaeological feature/site.

- Moderate A moderate direct impact arises where a change to the site is proposed which though noticeable, is not such that the archaeological integrity of the site is compromised, and which is reversible. This arises where an archaeological feature can be incorporated into a modern-day development without damage and that all procedures used to facilitate this are reversible.

- Slight An impact which causes changes in the character of the environment which are not significant or profound and do not directly impact or affect an archaeological feature or monument.

- Imperceptible An impact capable of measurement but without noticeable consequences.

3.4 Difficulties Encountered

No difficulties that could hinder the archaeological assessment were encountered,

Figure 2: **Site boundary with archaeological monuments marked**
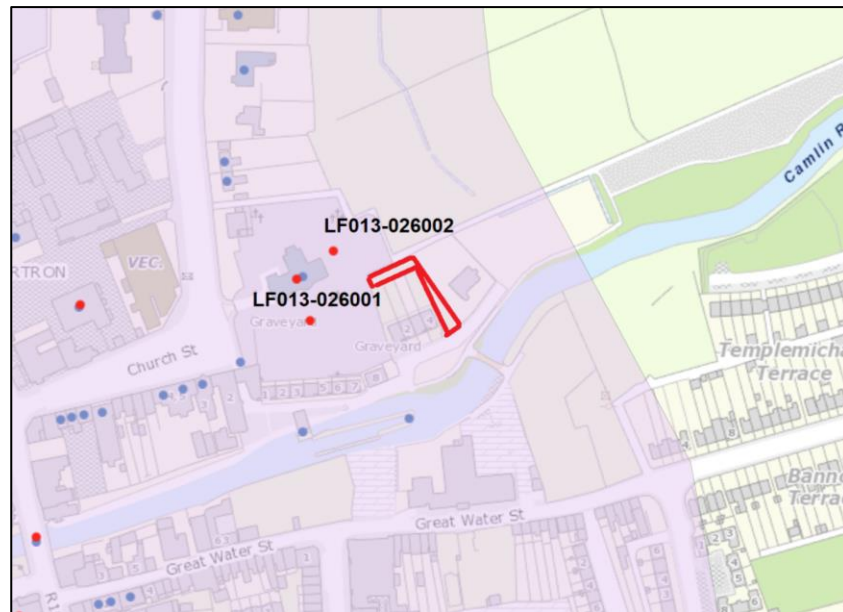
4 General Archaeological and Historical Summary

4.1 Brief Archaeological Background

Mesolithic to Bronze Age

Hunter-gatherer communities or Mesolithic people reached Ireland around 8000 BC. Early Mesolithic sites in Ireland are frequently found in coastal areas or further inland along river valleys. These settlers have left little trace on the landscape. Most Mesolithic sites are found accidentally, often by recovering Mesolithic stone tools from ploughed fields. The recovery of artefacts and identification of sites is usually where farmland is ploughed or in areas where developments include a topsoil strip. Most of the known Mesolithic material has been found on archaeological excavations. The Mesolithic period is divided into two periods – early (c. 8000–6500 BC) and late (6500–4000 BC) based on the type of tools.

The arrival of agricultural in the Neolithic Period led to a more sedentary way of life. The most visible remains associated with this period are megalithic tombs. These are recorded across the country. Over 90 Neolithic houses have been recorded across in Ireland. These are usually not visible at ground level and are only recorded during archaeological testing and excavation.

The commonest prehistoric monument are barrows. These are associated with the Bronze/Iron Age burial tradition (c. 2400 BC - AD 400) and are defined by an artificial mound of earth or earth and stone, normally constructed to contain or conceal burials. These sites vary in shape and scale and can be variously described as bowl-barrow, ditch barrow, embanked barrow, mound barrow, pond barrow, ring-barrow and stepped barrow. The incidence and frequency of these sites in the area attests to the extent of prehistoric settlement in this area from earliest times.

Iron Age to Early Medieval Period

In late Bronze Age Ireland the use of the metal reached a high point with the production of high quality decorated weapons, ornament and instruments, often discovered from hoards or ritual deposits. The Iron Age however is known as a 'dark age' in Irish prehistory. Iron objects are found rarely, but there is no evidence for the warrior culture of the rest of Europe, although the distinctive La Tené style of art with animal motifs and spirals was adopted. Political life in the Iron Age seems to have been defined by continually warring petty kingdoms vying for power. These kingdoms, run on an extended clan system, had their economy rooted in mixed farming and, in particular, cattle. Settlement was typically centred on a focal hillfort. Settlement in the Early Medieval Period is defined by the ringfort. These are the commonest monument across the country and have been frequently recorded in the environs of the town.

The introduction of Christianity to Ireland in the fifth century had a profound impact on Gaelic society, not in the least in terms of land ownership and the development of churches and religious houses. A number of early Christian Monuments are located in the vicinity of the site these include Holy Wells and Bullaun stones.

Historic Period

Following the Norman Conquest of the county a number of Motte and Baileys were constructed in the area, including the site at the rear of the site. These consist of square, rectangular or occasionally circular area, sometimes raised above the ground, enclosed by a wide, often water-filled, fosse, sometimes with an outer bank and with a wide causewayed entrance. They date to the late 13th/early 14th centuries and were primarily fortified residences/farmsteads of Anglo-Norman settlers though they were also built by Gaelic lords. These represent the first Anglo

Norman foray in the area. After the moated sites a series of Tower Houses were built across the county by the Normans descendants and local families.

Post Medieval Ireland

Seventeenth century Ireland saw massive upheaval a result of the Confederate wars, the Cromwellian response and the Wars of the two kings. The impact on the country was profound. It has been estimated that up to a third of the population was wiped out because of famine, disease and war. Soldiers were given land as payment resulting in further upheaval of the local population and the establishment of large estates. These came to dominate the landscape from this period onwards. Religious intolerance in other parts of Europe resulted in the expulsion of the Huguenot from France which were welcomed by the English Crown into Ireland.

4.2   Archaeological Monuments

The proposed works are within the zone of potential for a graveyard, an abbey and the town of Longford. The details of the recorded archaeological monuments are listed below.

LF013-026002-

Class: Graveyard

Townland: ABBEYCARTRON

Possibly associated with the Dominican priory (LF013-026002-). Memorials date from the early 18th century. However, Lennon (2005) suggests that 'many' of the memorials with now-illegible inscriptions may date to the 1600s.

LF013-026001-

Class: Religious house - Dominican friars

Townland: ABBEYCARTRON

At the N edge of Longford town (LF013-026----) within a graveyard (LF013-026002-). Established c. 1400 by the O'Farrells and dedicated to St Bridget (McNamee 1940b, 39; McNamee 1951, 8, 11-13; Gwynn and Hadcock 1970, 227). Following a fire in 1429 alms were requested for the 'restoration and completion of the Friars Preachers' House of St. Bridget' (Cal. papal letters 1909, vol. 8, 94). Granted to

Richard Stayne in 1566, to Nicholas Malby in 1579 (Nicholls 1994, vol. 2, 95, 492) and to Francis Annesley in 1615 (Cal. pat. rolls Ire., Jas I, 287). Depicted on an early 17th-century map of Longford barony as a small rectangular church, named 'Longford Abbey', standing near the bank of the Camlin River (BL, Cotton MS Augustus I.ii.24). In the late 17th century it was stated that 'there was a Priory of the Order of St. Dominick in this towne, now the Church said to be founded by Cornelius or Concober O'Fferrall' (Downing 1932, 21). McNamee (1954, 213) recorded that the Dominicans survived in Longford up until the mid-18th century and suggested that St John's Church (C of I) was built on the site of the priory. This church was the parish church of the 17th-century borough and while the present building appears to be modern, according to the local caretaker two walls of the priory were incorporated into it (Bradley 1985, 37). Wall foundations, probably also associated with the priory, were discovered to the N of the church when graves were being dug (ibid.). (Moore 2007, No. 26)

LF013-026----
Class: Historic town
Townland: DEMESNE,TOWNPARKS (Ardagh By.),ABBEYCARTRON,DEANSCURRAGH
In low-lying pasture, at a fording point on the Camlin River. Longford takes its name from the Irish 'longphort', meaning 'fortress' (see LF013-061----) (Joyce 1902, 104). The earliest settlement dates from the late-medieval period. There is no evidence of any Anglo-Norman settlement (Bradley et al. 1985, 35) and thus Longford belongs to the small sample of urban centres whose genesis occurred under native Irish development. A Dominican priory (LF013-026001-) was established, on the N side of the river, under the patronage of the O'Farrell's in 1400 (Gwynn and Hadcock 1970, 227). Farrell (1891, 23) has suggested that Longford became the seat of the O Fearghail of lower Anghaile, when Anghaile was divided in 1445; it was known as 'Longphort Ui Fergail' in 1448 (AFM iv, 957). By the late 15th century a native Irish market had developed attracting merchants from the E coast and the censure of the Irish parliament, which forbade English merchants to have any contact with it or the Irish markets at Granard and Cavan, which were harming the English markets of Meath (Stat. Ire., 12–22 Edw. IV). It is unclear how permanent this market was, it may have been linked to the castle (LF013-062003-), also on the N side of the river,

to which there are references from 1571 (Nicholls 1994, vol. 2, 247). Longford remained in O Fearghail hands until the reign of Elizabeth I and the importance of this settlement is indicated by the fact the county was called Longford when Anghaile was shired in 1571 (Bradley et al. 1985, 35). During the 17th century settlement appears to have expanded on the S side of the river and this area became known as 'Newtown-Longford' (Gearty et al. 2010, 3). A large house (LF013-026015-) surrounded by a number of smaller houses is depicted on the Down Survey (1655-6) maps of Ardagh barony and Ballymacormac parish (NLI, MS 719) on this side of the river.

The first royal grant for a market and fair was issued in 1605 to Richard Nugent, baron of Delvin (Cal. pat. rolls Ire., Jas I, 86). It appears that the Nugent family did not take up this licence and a town does not appear to have been successfully established for in 1613 Longford was unable to send any burgesses to the Irish Parliament because there was in the county 'no town fit for it' (Cal. S.P. Ire. 1611-14, 333). A new grant for the establishment of the manor and town of Longford was issued in 1620 to Francis Aungier, baron of Longford. Under the conditions of this grant Aungier was entitled to hold a market and two fairs (Cal. pat. rolls Ire., Jas I., 452). In 1666 the town was attacked by Irish forces under the command of Cornet Nangle who 'burnt most of the English houses, but none of the Irish in the town' (Cal. S.P. Ire. 1666-9, 158). In 1668 it was incorporated and made a borough by King Charles II (ibid., 646). The town was described by Nicholas Dowdall in 1682 as a 'Large Countrey Village having but few good houses in it, there runneth a small river thro it which affordeth little Fishes and is of Litle use save some few Mills it drives. There is an Old Abbey [LF013-026001-] of the Dominican Order in it which was formerly governed by a prior and a Stone bridge [LF008-026004-] lately built it was made a Corporation' (Gillespie and Moran 1991, 210).

The town is now concentrated on the S side of the river. The street plan is linear based on Main St., running NNW-SSE, and Bridge St., its continuation to the N of the river. This street ran from the castle (LF013-026003-) to the S to where the road divides into three (Bradley et al. 1985, 36). The area around Bridge St. and Church St. is probably the oldest part of the town and may represent the late-16th-century settlement. The houses fronting onto Main St. have long burgage plots and probably represent the 17th-century town (ibid.). A market-house (LF013-026008-), a prison or

gaol (LF013-026009-), a market cross (LF013-026011-) and two 17th-century houses (LF013-026014-, LF013-026015-) are associated with the town.

St. Johns Church, Longford (NIAH Reg 13002006)

Freestanding Church of Ireland church, built 1710, and altered c. 1780 and between c. 1810 and 1812, having three-bay nave and central three-stage tower to the west with needle spire over (on octagonal plan). Tower flanked to either side (north and south) by single-bay two-storey vestibules with cut stone parapets over. Apsidal sanctuary to centre of south elevation and northern transept added c. 1810. Twentieth century two-storey extension to north transept. Pitched and hipped natural slate roofs, with red brick chimneystack to northern transept, dressed stone coping, and cast-iron rainwater goods. Coursed rubble limestone masonry to spire, coursed rubble stone to tower with raised dressed limestone quoins and platbands, dressed limestone crenellations and spirelet pinnacles to corners. Rendered walls to main body of church, lined-and ruled, over stepped plinth and raised dressed limestone quoins to corners. Round-headed window openings, some with dressed limestone surrounds and sills, leaded stained glass, carved stone tracery, twelve-over-twelve pane timber sliding sash and replacement uPVC windows. Square-headed window openings to vestibules, and north transept extension with fixed timber frame and replacement uPVC windows. Round-headed louvered openings with tracery to tower, with dressed limestone surrounds and sills. Central classical carved limestone doorcase to west with engaged Doric columns and entablature. Replacement timber panelled double leaf door. Doorway flanked by round-headed niches with stone sills and having blind Diocletian motifs over with cut stone surrounds. Interesting interior with raised dado panelling and galleries at west end and to north transept. Gilded garlands and masks to galleries. Greek-key impost course to chancel arch. Number of marble wall monuments/memorials to the interior, including memorial to Rev. James Sterling, dated 1691, and to Helen Maxwell, dated. 1709. Set back from road in extensive grounds at the east end of Church Street and the south end of Battery Road. Chamfered cut stone plinth wall to the west boundary having cast-iron railings over and rusticated cut limestone gate posts at intervals along length. Ashlar limestone boundary wall to the south end of railings adjacent to flight of cut limestone steps (13002496). Pair of cut stone gate piers (on square-plan) to the west having moulded cut stone capstones and double-leaf cast-iron gates. Random rubble stone

boundary walls elsewhere. Church surrounded by graveyard with tombs and headstones dating from the early eighteenth century, some with elaborate cast-iron and/or wrought-iron railings. Earliest grave dated 1717. Located to the north end of Longford Town centre.

A complex and elaborate Church of Ireland church, which retains its early character. It is well-detailed throughout with some fine cut stone detailing, particularly to the classical doorcase and the delicate needle spire. It exhibits a characteristic Church of Ireland design of a three-bay west elevation with tower. This substantial structure has a subdued late eighteenth-century mid-Georgian classical character on account of the round-headed window openings and the classical doorcase. It was described as a 'new church' in 1787 by the Rev. Beaufort who visited Longford Town at this time. The further enlargement and renovations of the early-nineteenth century were to accommodate a larger congregation following the enlargement of the nearby barrack complex. Lewis (1837) describes the church as a' spacious edifice, with a tower and spire; it was repaired and enlarged in 1812, at a cost of £3221, being a loan from the late Board of First Fruits; and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners have lately granted £249 for its further repair'. These alterations were carried out to designs by M. McCleland, a Longford architect (IAA). The interior has a neoclassical feeling and contains a number of impressive marble memorial monuments, the earliest of which dates to 1691 and commemorates The Rev. James Sterling. This monument was probably moved from an earlier deconsecrated church, which was a common practice at the time. An attractive carved oak pulpit to the interior was designed in 1902 by John William Gunnis (born c. 1862), an English architect who was County Surveyor of Longford from 1891 – 1914 (IAA). The graveyard contains a number of finely carved gravestones, the earliest dating back to the early-eighteenth century, including a number with elaborate cast-iron and/or wrought-iron railings. One of the graves commemorates Sergeant Joseph Ward (1832 - 1872), who received a Victoria Cross for his bravery during the Indian Rebellion of 1857 - 8. This church building is constructed on the site of a medieval Dominican Priory (LF013-026----), which was established c. 1400 by the O'Farrells, and the present building may contain fabric from this earlier complex. The impressive cast-iron railings and the gateway complete the setting and add interest to the streetscape to the north end of Longford Town centre. The cast-iron gates, cast-iron railings and the limestone gate posts are of the same design as found at the associated church hall (13002022)

to the west, built 1864. This suggests that these railings etc may have been added to the front of the church at this time.

Figure 3:   Proposed layout with test trenches marked
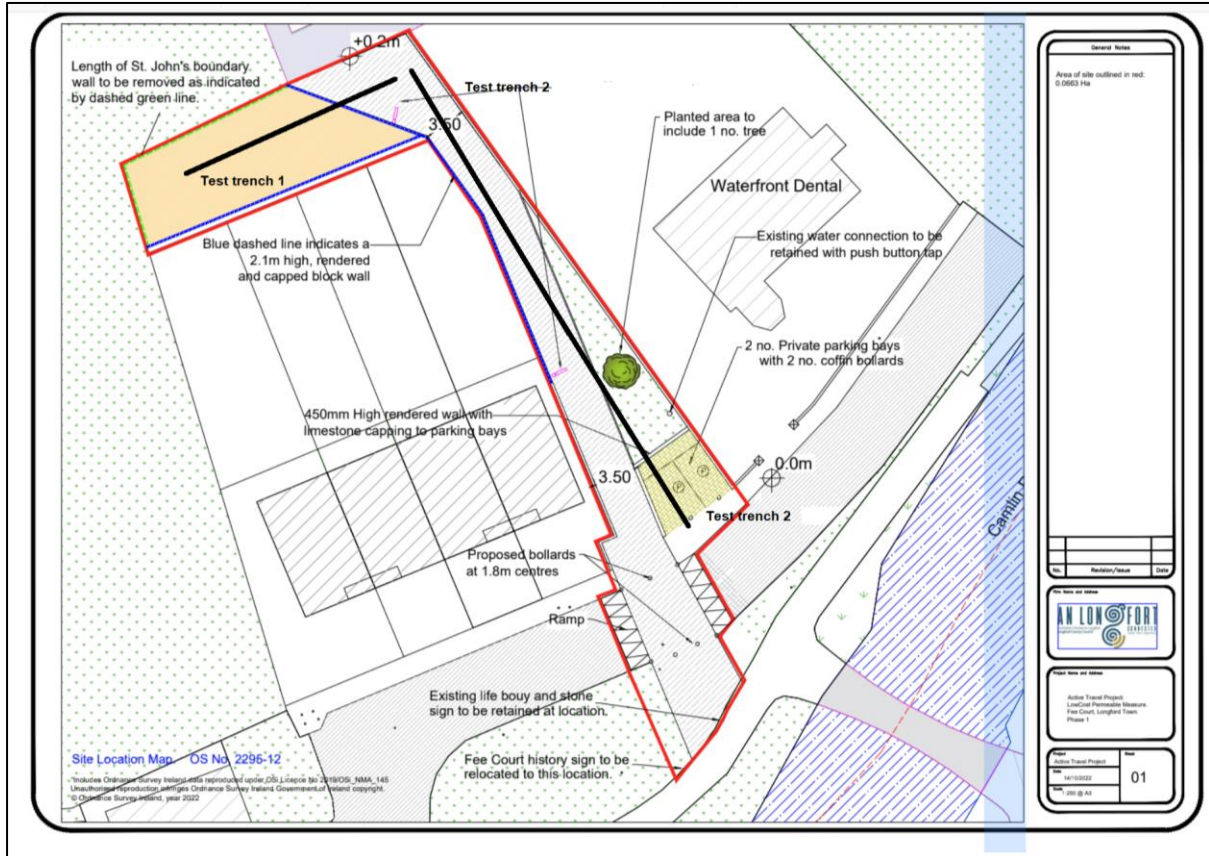
4.4   Cartographic Evidence

Longford is marked on the Down Survey as a number of structures on the bank of the river. The map does not show the layout of the Abbey located at the site of St. Johns Church. By the first edition OS map the church and graveyard are marked (Figure 4). This shows the area for the proposed works as open ground possibly a flood plain. The site also crosses an enclosed area to the east of the church and graveyard. This enclosed area is no longer marked on the 25" map for the site (Figure 5). This area has been incorporated into a larger field.

Figure 4:   First edition OS map for the site

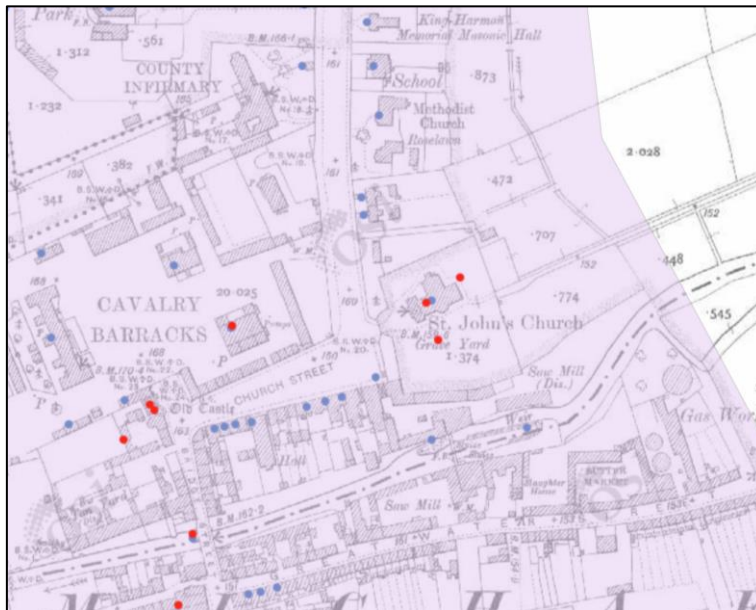**Figure 5:   25" OS map for the site**

Figure 6:   Aerial Photograph for the site

4.5   Place name Evidence

Townland names can give an indication of previous activities at the area that have since been forgotten and leave no trace at ground level. They can contain information on previous ownership, land use or archaeological monuments such as churches or settlement sites. Townland boundaries may reflect ancient territories, and some have associated archaeological features. The townland Abbeycartron refers to the Dominican Friary located in the townland.

4.6   Topographical Files

An examination of the topographical files housed in the National Museum of Ireland revealed no stray finds for the townland of Abbeycartron, Co. Longford.

5   Archaeological Testing

6.1   Archaeological Test Trenches

Archaeological testing was undertaken in March 2023. The results are outlined below.

Test Trenches 1

This test trench was excavated at the northern part of the site closest to the proposed graveyard, which is located to the north. It was excavated by mechanical excavator. The trench was 1.2m in width and 15m in length. It was excavated east to

west. The topsoil was 0.25m in depth and this overlay orange boulder clay. No archaeological remains were identified (Plates 1-4).

Test trench 2

This test trench was excavated at the southern section of the site and was orientated north to south. It was excavated by mechanical excavator using a grading bucket. The trench was 1.2m in width and 20m in length. This trench had been fully disturbed during excavation as part of housing construction to the east and west. Debris from construction was visible across the trench. No archaeological remains were identified (Plates 1-4).

7   Metal detection Survey

A metal detection survey was undertaken at the same time as the archaeological testing. This was under licence 22R0403. The entire site was assessed using a 'Klondike Metal Detector Professional'. The upturned soil from the testing and the test trenches were assessed using the detector. There were numerous positive hits recorded, these were all modern in date and related to dumping of material from construction works at the adjoining sites.

8   Archaeological Monitoring

Archaeological monitoring was undertaken for the demolition of a section of the wall separating the site from St. Johns Church and Graveyard. This section of graveyard wall was constructed of random rubble walling bonded with a lime mortar. The section of wall was knocked in March 2023. This showed the wall included no earlier fabric or architectural fragments were identified (Plates 4-6).

9   <u>Impact on the Cultural Heritage Landscape</u>

9.1   Recorded Monuments

The site is located in the townland of Abbeycartron. The site is located adjacent to St. johns Church and Graveyard which is thought to contain the remains of a

Dominican Abbey. The proposed works involve connecting the graveyard to the local walking track network and a small extension to the existing graveyard. These works are low in scale and will have no impact on the physical remains of the church or its setting.

9.2   Site Survey

Archaeological testing was undertaken across the proposed works. These did not record any sub surface remains. The testing has shown that much of the site is disturbed from works associated with adjacent construction at the east and west. A metal detection survey was also conducted across the site. This recorded a number of positive hits all of which were modern in date. Archaeological monitoring of the demolition of a small section of the Graveyard wall has confirmed that the wall in this area is constructed of random rubble walling, no earlier fabric or architectural fragments were identified.

10   Conclusions

The proposed development consists of the construction of a walkway and small extension to an existing graveyard at Abbeycartron, Longford, Co. Longford. The site is a narrow strip of land between two developments and St. Johns Church and Graveyard. Archaeological testing and a metal detection survey did not reveal any archaeological finds or features within the development. Archaeological monitoring was undertaken for a break in the boundary wall of the graveyard, this wall is at the west end of the graveyard and is constructed of random rubble with a lime mortar. No archaeological features were identified during the works at the site. No further archaeological input is required.

The recommendations outlined above are subject to agreement from the NMS at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

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Photographic Record:

Plate 1:   Looking north at excavation of test trench 2

Plate 2:   Looking north at excavation of test trench 2

Plate 3: Test trench 1 looking north during excavation

Plate 4: Test trench 1, looking north

Plate 5: Demolition of the break in the existing stone wall

Plate 6: Stone from break in the wall