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**Archaeological Test Excavation
at Le Fanu Road/Raheen Park
Ballyfermot, Co. Dublin**

(Licence Reference 98 E 0367)

for Irish Fencing and Railings Ltd.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report describes the results of archaeological test excavation at a proposed development site at the corner of Le Fanu Road and Raheen Road, Ballyfermot, Co. Dublin (*Figure 1*). The development site is located in the townland of Ballyfermot Upper, within the registered area of four archaeological sites (SMR site: DU 018:031/01/03/04). These sites include Ballyfermot Castle, and Ballyfermot Church and Graveyard. A site listed as a Gatehouse/ Castle (SMR sites: DU 018:031/02) is described as being located in Ballyfermot Upper, however, the monument should correctly be registered as being in Gallanstown. No standing remains of any of the above referenced monuments survive above ground today in Ballyfermot Upper.
- 1.2 Edmond O'Donovan directed the archaeological test excavation on site on October 21st, 1998, under license to *Dúchas*, the Heritage Service (License reference: 98 E 0367).
- 1.3 The assessment was carried out for Irish Fencing and Railings Ltd. who are developing the site. A planning application to refurbish a commercial building standing at the corner of Raheen Park and Le Fanu Road will be submitted to the Planning Authority (Dublin Corporation). The results of the archaeological test excavation forms part of this application. No change in ground level is proposed within the existing buildings; however, it is intended to reduce the ground level in the adjacent strip of land that abutts Le Fanu Park to construct a car park for the development.

2. Historical Background

- 2.1 The placename, Ballyfermot, is thought to owe its origin to the Irish chief, Mac Gillamcholmog. However, the earliest documented references to land ownership date from the early 14th century and concern the transfer of title to a manor at Ballyfermot. The manor passed from the Fitzwilliams to the De Clahull family. By the late 16th century, Robert Newcomen was resident in a castle at Ballyfermot. It is likely that this castle was located on the manorial site. The castle declined in importance during the 18th century when it functioned as a school (Ball, 101-5). Ballyfermot house is first depicted on Rocque's map (*Figure 4*) dated 1760. It was built across the road and to the south of the castle (*Figures 7 and 8*).
- 2.2 The foundation of the church at Ballyfermot dates from the 13th century. The church was dedicated to Saint Laurence and was in the possession of the Knights Hospitallers priory at Kilmainham. The church remained in the possession of the priory until the dissolution of the monasteries (c. 1540), when it was leased to Viscount Clandeboy. The church continued to be used up to 1660, when it appears to have gone out of use (Ball, 106). The site remained in use as a graveyard up to the end of the 19th century (Johnston, 1974).
- 2.3 *Ballyfermot Castle (SMR DU018:03/01)*
William Wakeman visited and illustrated both the castle and church in the early 19th century. The castle appears as a small two/three-storey crenellated tower house with a turret adjoined by a later two-storey building. The castle can be loosely dated to the 14th or 15th century based on architectural style. The adjoining building is a later addition and is likely to date from the 17th or 18th century. The site of the castle is located adjacent to the boundary of Le Fanu Park within a walled enclosure (currently used as a stable for horses), to the west of the proposed development site. There are no visible remains of the castle, although the walled enclosure that survives is likely to have originally formed part of the castle complex.
- 2.4 *Ballyfermot Church and Graveyard (SMR DU018:031/03-4)*
No above ground remains of the church or graveyard are exposed at present, as the site was covered with earth in the 1970s to protect it against vandalism. The site appears today as a mound surmounted by a rectangular platform. A description of the church in 1912 (Joyce, 346) describes how the 'road up the steep hill leads to the old church and graveyard of Ballyfermot, near which formerly stood a castle whose site is now occupied by Ballyfermot House. Between the house and road is a curious brick wall, built in a series of curves, and stated to have at one time formed [a] portion of the enclosure of an orchard belonging to the castle'. A local historian further described the monument (Johnston, 1974) as the ruins of a church, 18 yards long and 6½ yards wide and a graveyard (*Figure 3*). The date of the fabric of the church that survives under Le Fanu Park is not clear, however, elements of the church are likely to date the medieval period along with subsequent alterations.
- 2.4 *Gatehouse/ Castle (SMR site: DU 018:031/02)*
This site has been listed as forming part of the Ballyfermot Castle, Church and Graveyard (*SMR DU018:03/01/03-4*) complex. Its registration as a monument owes its origin to the records of the Down survey (c. 1660). The parish of Ballyfermot was described as having a castle with 10 hearths (Ballyfermot Castle), 20 other houses and 'a castle like house with the ruins of a gate house' on the lands of Gallanstown.

2.4 (cont)

This house (*SMR site: DU 018:031/02*) is clearly located in the parish of Ballyfermot, not in the townland of Ballyfermot Upper, but at Gallanstown (*Figure 6, an adjacent townland located to the south west*).

Bibliography

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| Ball, 1906 | <i>A History of County Dublin</i> , Vol. 4, 101-6. |
| Down Survey | Down Survey and the census of 1659. |
| Johnston, 1974 | <i>The ruins of the Church of St Laurence</i> , unpublished report held in the Ballyfermot Public Library. |
| Joyce, 1912 | <i>The Neighbourhood of Dublin</i> , 346. |

3. Test Excavation

3.1 Three test trenches were excavated on the site to establish the extent of the graveyard that borders the site's western boundary. The trenches were located along the sites western and north western boundary (*Figure 2*). The trenches were excavated down to the surface of any archaeological deposits. Trench 1 revealed the presence of burials at its western extremity. No significant archaeological deposits were encountered in trenches 1 and 2.

3.2 *Trench 1*

Trench 1 was 9.70m long and 1.15m wide. Two distinct soil profiles were recorded on either side of wall that bisected the trench. Human burials were located along the base of the trench to the west of the wall. The burials were identified 0.69m below the present ground level. No human skeletal remains were identified to the east of the wall, which was located 5.55m from the western end of the trench. It was located 0.40m below the existing ground level and was 1.40m wide. The wall was mortar bonded and was built from limestone calp blocks and red bricks. It was in poor condition. The soil profile at either end of the trench was as follows:

West End

0.00m-0.35m Black/grey clay, including mortar, glass and stone (turbated topsoil)

0.35m-0.69m Tan clay, including stone (fragments of limestone clap), brick and disarticulated human bone

0.69m-1.15m+ Tan clay, including stone (fragments of limestone clap), brick and articulated human bone

East End

0.00m-0.90m Black/grey clay, including mortar, glass and stone (turbated topsoil)

0.90m-2.25m+ Grey, wet, moderately compact, silty clay (natural)

3.3 *Trench 2*

Trench 2 was 4.20m long and 1.07m wide. The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.71m below the present ground level, where the following soil profile was revealed:

0.00m-0.23m Brown topsoil

0.23m-0.71m Light brown, stony, compact clay, including disarticulated fragments of human bone

0.71m+ Grey, wet, compact, silty clay (natural)

3.4 *Trench 3*

Trench 3 was 2.80m long and 1.12m wide. The trench was excavated to a depth of 1.53m below the present ground level, where the following soil profile was revealed:

0.00m-0.37m Brown topsoil

0.37m-0.63m Black, friable, silty clay, including mortar, plastic, glass and limestone calp blocks (recent turbated topsoil)

0.63m-0.90m Black/grey, clay, mortar-flecked clay

0.90m-1.53m Brow/tan, sandy clay

1.53m+ Grey, wet, compact, silty clay (natural)

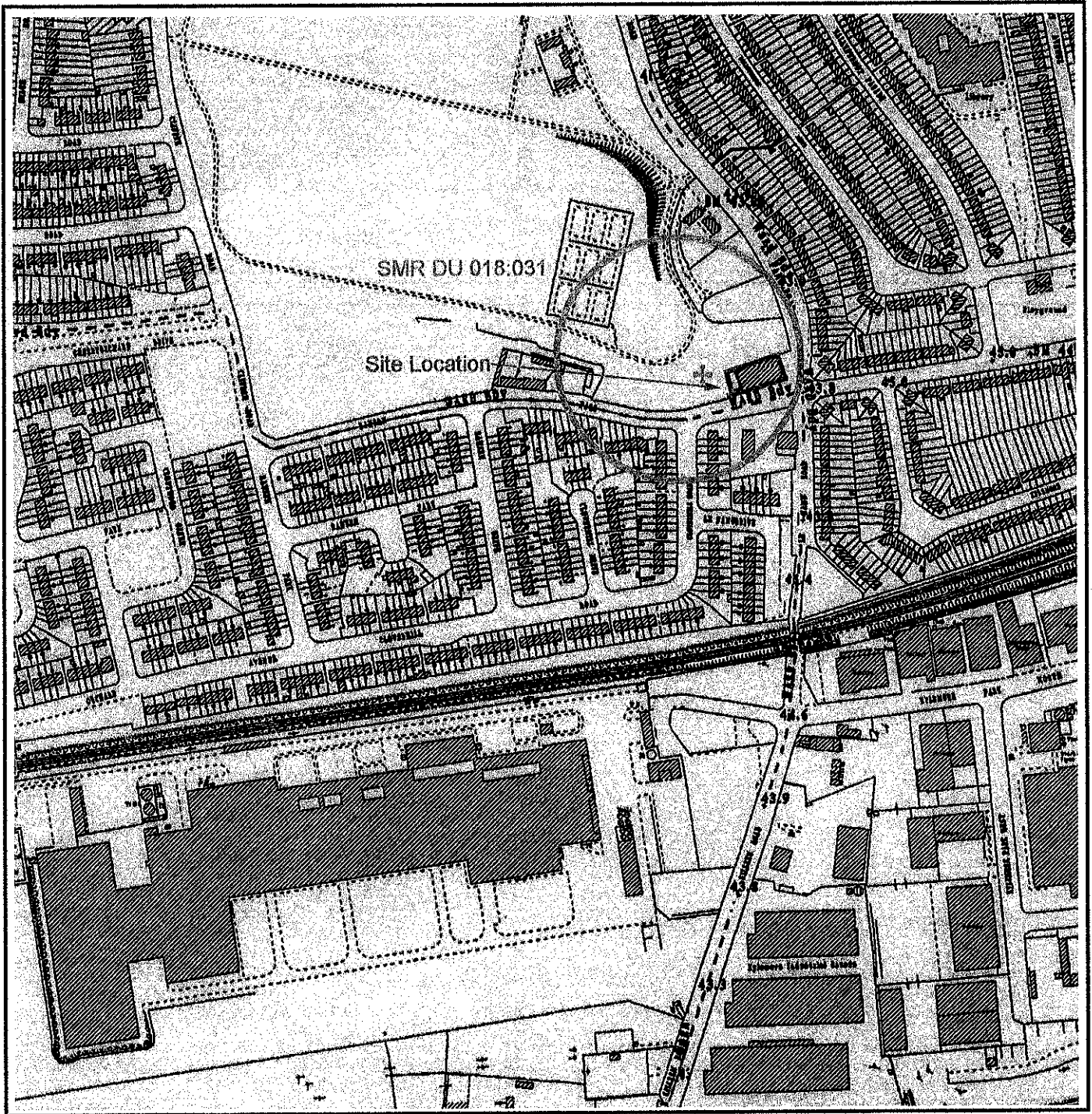
3.5 *Interpretation*

The archaeological test excavation located the presence of both articulated and disarticulated human burials at the western end of trench 1. The graveyard was used from the medieval period through to the beginning of this century and no clear date was established for the burials uncovered during the assessment. A wall was identified in trench 1. Its location corresponds to the graveyard wall that surrounded the church. It would appear that this boundary (the graveyard wall) turns sharply to the west between trenches 1 and 2 and defines the extent of the burials on site (*Figure 3*). Trenches 2 and 3 appear to be located on the eastern side (outside) the graveyard wall. The deposits identified in trench 3 record the landscaping of the graveyard in the 1970s.

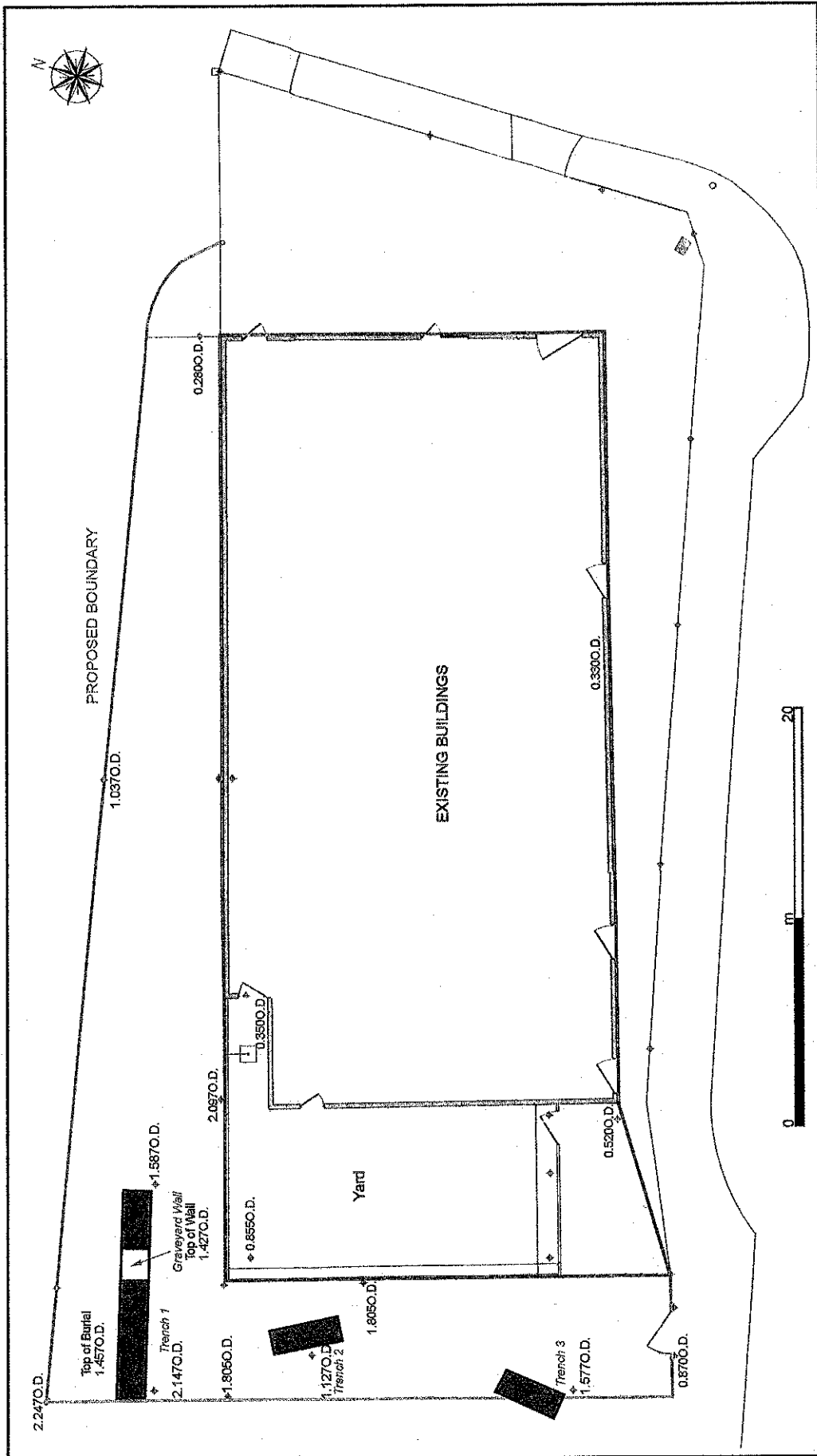
4. Results and Recommendations


- 4.1 The development site partially overlies the eastern fringes of Ballyfermot Graveyard (SMR site: DU018:031/04). Articulated and disarticulated human remains were identified within the graveyard boundary wall located at the western end of trench 1; other burials are very likely to be located within the graveyard wall. No articulated burials were identified in either trenches 2 or 3. The location of the graveyard wall has been estimated on Fig. 3. This suggests that the area of archaeological potential can be limited to an area measuring 20m by 6m in the north western corner of the site (*Figure 3, shaded area*).
- 4.2 The levels of the ground and floor surface adjacent to the archaeological test trenches and within the existing building are illustrated on Figure 2 (The levels are not tied into ordnance datum, however, they have been recorded relative to the site datum from which the new building is being designed). The articulated burials in trench 1 were located at 1.46m. The upper surviving surface of the graveyard wall was located in trench 1 at 1.43m.
- 4.3 It is proposed to redevelop the site and construct the new building using the existing foundations and also extend the property to the north and west (*Figures 2 and 3*). The foundation design and location of the proposed northern and western boundary wall should be assessed to establish the precise impact of the new structure on any archaeological remains. It is proposed to alter the design and layout of these foundations to limit the impact of the development to avoid as much as possible, any unnecessary disturbance to archaeological deposits on site.

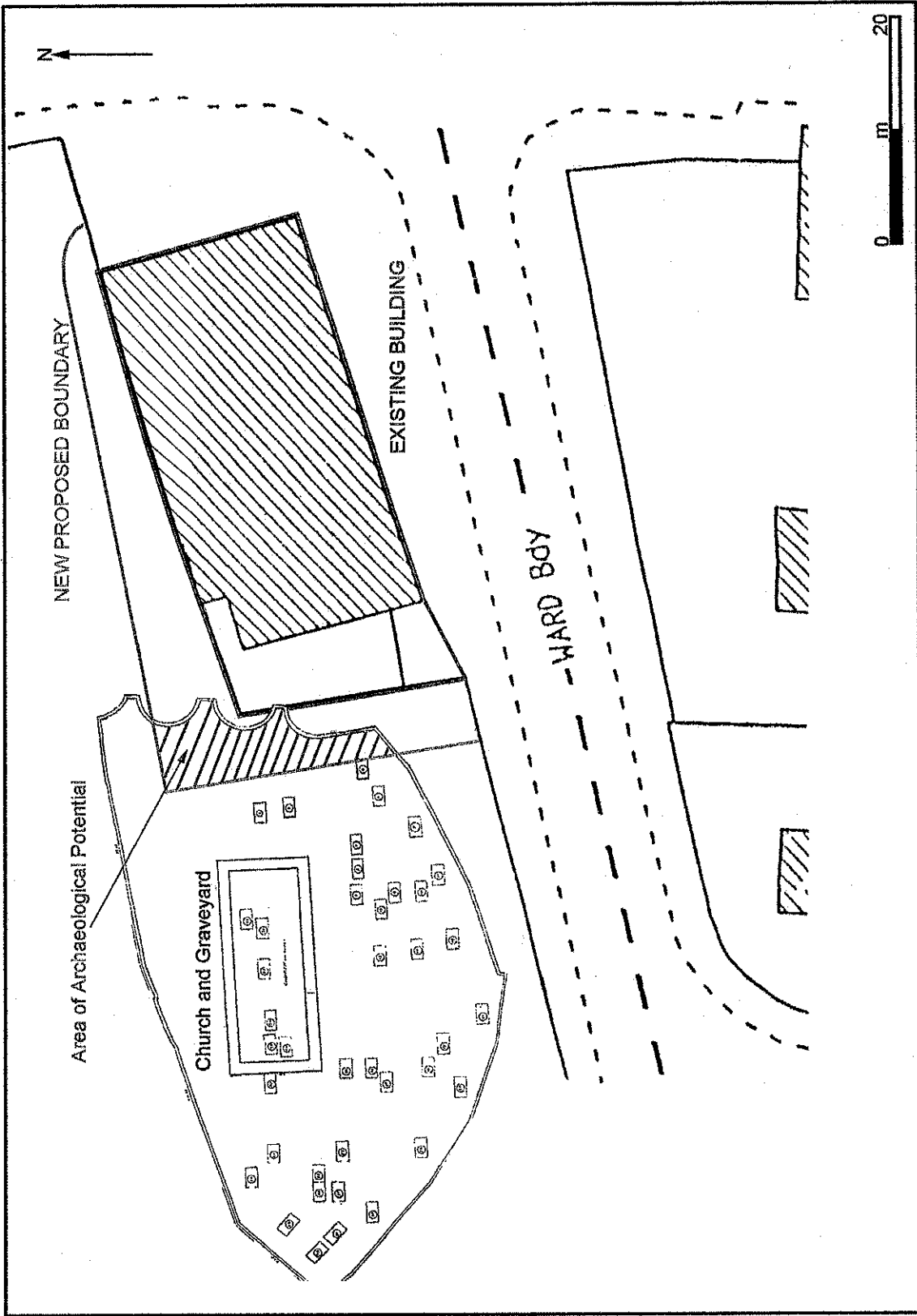
pp. Shirley Mackley
Edmond O'Donovan, 13th Nov 1998




Job Le Fanu Park, Ballyfermot
Ref. 98 E 0367; 98083
Date 03.11.98
Client Irish Fencing and Railings Ltd.
Scale 1:5000 reduced
Fig.1 SMR Site Location




Le Fanu Park, Ballyfermot
 Ref: 98 E 0367; 98083
 Date: 03.11.98
 Client: Irish Fencing and Railings Ltd.
 Scale: As indicated
 Fig. 2 Trench Location




 Archaeological Consultants & Project Managers
 Job Le Fanu Park, Ballyfermot
 Ref. 98 E 0367; 98063
 Date 03, 11, 98
 Client Irish Fencing and Railings Ltd.
 Scale As Indicated
 Fig.3 Supposed Location of Church and Graveyard



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Fig.4 Rocque (1760)