

Archaeological Test Trenching Investigations Report

at Dalcassian House, Island Road, Limerick City

Planning Ref.: Pre-planning

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ÆGIS Ref: 159-5



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STATUTORY BODIES:

Planning section, National Monuments Section,
The National Museum of Ireland
Limerick City Council (as part of planning application)

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That the archaeological recommendations, mitigation proposals and suggested methodology followed in this report were first formulated and approved by the National Monuments Section, (formerly Dúchas), Dun Sceine, Harcourt Lane Dublin 2, prior to the commencement of the archaeological dimension of the project.

Every effort has been taken in the preparation and submission of this report to provide as complete an assessment as possible within the terms of the brief, and all statements and opinions are offered in good faith. However, ÆGIS cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from the data supplied by any third party, for any loss or other consequences arising from decisions made or actions taken on the basis of facts and opinions expressed in this report, (and any supplementary information), howsoever such facts and opinions expressed may have been derived, or as the result of unknown and undiscovered sites or artefacts.

ÆGIS acknowledges the information supplied from the Archaeological Survey of Ireland Files, maintained by the National Monuments Section, DoEHLG, and the financing of the project by the client.

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I. Abstract

This report details archaeological test trenching undertaken by ÆGIS ARCHAEOLOGY LIMITED on behalf of the client. Three trenches were excavated by machine and cleaned by hand across the site in order to ascertain if there were archaeological deposits remaining on the site, and if so, at what depth. Several features were identified on the site, many of which are archaeological in nature.

Suggested mitigation has been included in section 6 of this report.

The entire test-trenching project was funded by the client.

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III. Abbreviations and Terms Used

Bank Right bank and left bank of a river or stream may be determined when one looks downstream, i.e. in the direction that the river is flowing. It may also be an earthen 'wall' around an enclosure, often associated with a ditch.

Barony, Parish, Townland These terms refer to land divisions in Ireland. The barony is the largest land division in a county, which is formed from a number of parishes. These parishes are in turn made up of several townlands, which are the smallest land division in the country. The origins of these divisions are believed to be in the Early Medieval/Christian period (AD500-AD1000), or may date earlier in the Iron Age (400BC-AD1100).

Context Each feature found during the excavations is allocated a number, commonly termed a 'Context Number' in order to record the archaeology.

First Edition This relates to editions of the OS 6 inch maps for each county. The first edition map completed for the area dates to the early 1840s and this is referred to in the text as the "first edition".

G.S. Grid square

LI - This number is the number of the site on the RMP map (see below). It begins with the county code, here LI for Limerick, the 6-inch sheet number, followed by the number of the archaeological site.

M Metres, all dimensions are given in metres or part of a metre, unless otherwise stated

OS Ordnance Survey

Ph Parish

RMP Record of Monuments and Places. An update of the older SMR, (sites and monuments record), on which all known archaeological sites are marked and listed in an accompanying inventory. The sites marked afford legal protection under the National Monuments Acts 1930-1994. The record is based on the 6-inch map series for the country and is recorded on a county basis.

Sheet This relates to the 6-inch map for each county, which are divided into sheets and numbered accordingly

Td Townland

Undercroft A vaulted room, sometimes underground, below an upper room. Generally used as an alternative term for cellar.

1. Introduction

1.1 Location and The Existing Environment (Figs 1-3)

The site consists of a two-storey house (built in the 1930s) surrounded by gardens. The garden is completely overgrown to the rear (northeast) of the house. The site is on the Island Road, just to the north of a roundabout, put in as part of the northern relief road for Limerick City. This site has been previously subject to an archaeological impact assessment (Collins & Hayes 2005).

1.2 The Test Trenching Project: Scope of Study

The scope of these investigations was as follows:

- To ascertain the nature and extent (if any) of archaeological deposits across the site, by the excavation of test trenches across the site;
- To assess the impact of any proposed development of the site on the archaeology of the site;
- To make suggestions to mitigate against those impacts outlined.

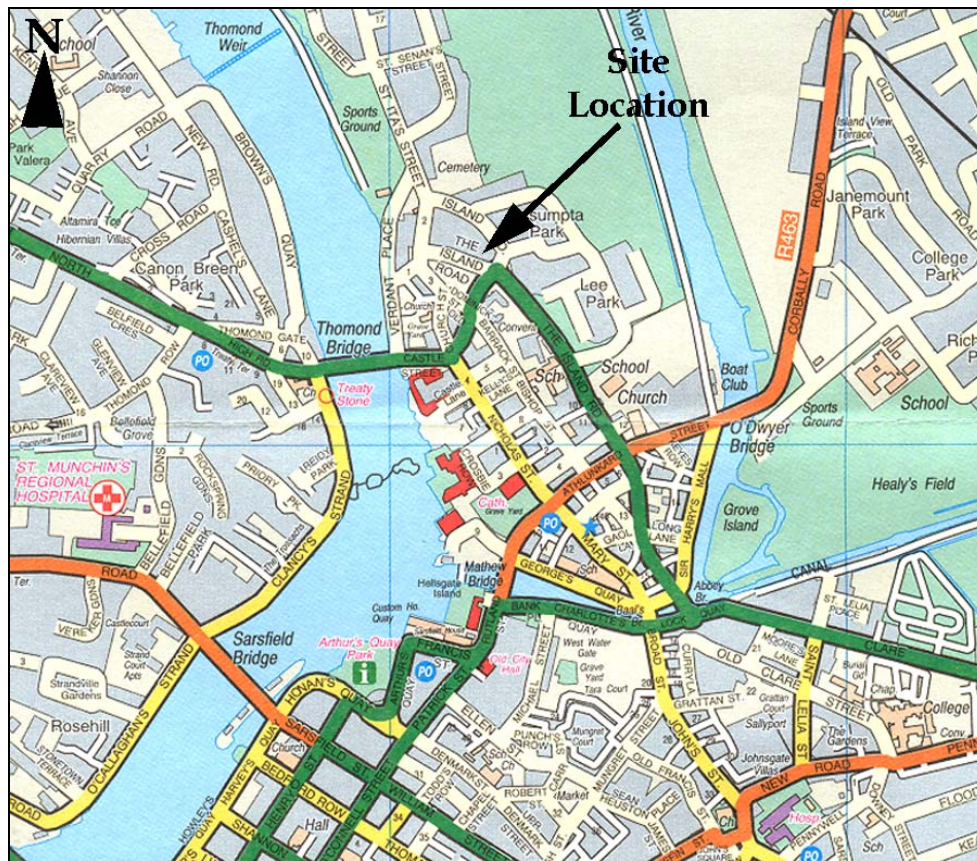


Figure 1. Limerick street map showing site location (north to top)



Figure 2. Site location (supplied by client), for indication only

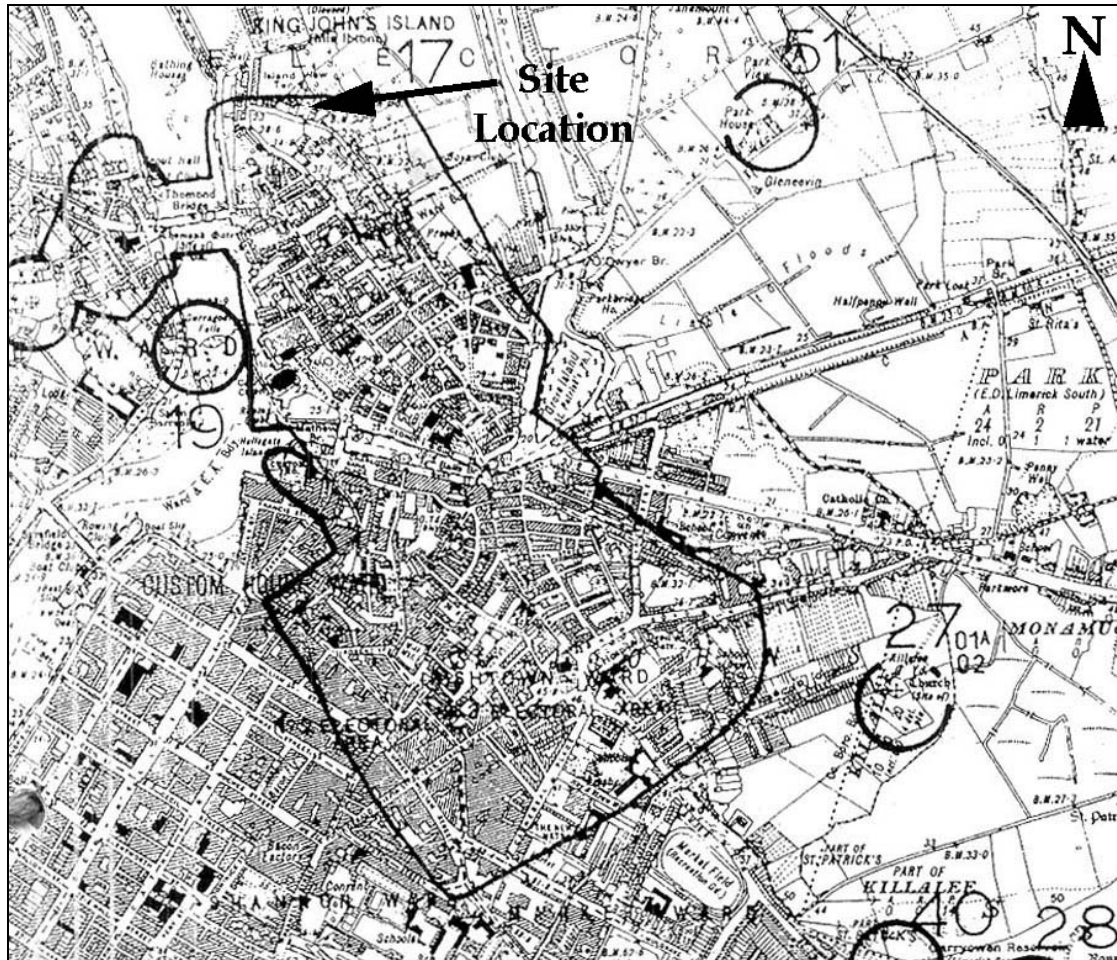


Figure 3. RMP Sheet 5 for Limerick, showing site location within the zone of potential for the historic town

1.3 Previous Archaeological Work

Due to the fact that this site in question is within the zone of archaeological potential for the historic town of Limerick a number of archaeological excavations and investigations have taken place in its vicinity. A programme of pre-development testing was undertaken by O'Rahilly in 1998 when the "Orchard site" to the southwest of the site in question (across the Island road). This site is currently a surface car park.

The pre-development testing was carried out by O'Rahilly in order to ascertain the location of the medieval town wall, which, according to cartographic evidence, crossed the site in a general east-west direction. There was no evidence in any of the trenches for the survival of the wall. However, the western side of an external ditch, believed to be located outside the town wall, was identified. It is likely that this ditch may have been associated with the later seventeenth-century fortifications that were put up around the town at the time of the sieges.

Hodkinson undertook excavations on the line of the Northern Relief Road, which immediately bounds the development site to the southeast. A series of boundary walls dated to the late medieval to post-medieval periods were identified. Hodkinson suggested, based on his excavations and cartographic evidence, that most of the area excavated was used for gardens or orchards throughout the medieval period (1990, 42).

Slightly further to the southwest stand the extant remains of the medieval Dominican Priory of St Saviour's. A number of archaeological investigations have taken place at this site (Shee-Twohig 1995).

The site was previously subject to an Archaeological Impact Assessment (Collins & Hayes 2005), which suggested that the site be archaeologically test-trenched after the demolition of the existing structure due to the location of the site within the zone of potential for **LI005-017**-- (the historic town of Limerick).

1.4 Historical Background of Site

Foundations

The origins of Limerick City lie in the tenth-century development of a Norse settlement on the island now known as King's Island (Killanin and Duignan 1967, 349; Spellissy 1998, 17). This settlement grew to become the pre-eminent Hiberno-Norse centre in the region, with considerable support from the O'Briens of Thomond, and was later to become a focal point for Anglo-Norman settlement. The city received its first charter in 1197 from Prince John (Killanin and Duignan 1967, 350).

The Medieval Twin-Towns

The medieval city resembled an hourglass in plan and the two parts, termed the Englishtown and the Irishtown, were separated by the Abbey River. The Englishtown occupied the southwestern part of King's Island, while the Irishtown lay across Baal's Bridge to the southeast. King John's Castle was built on the western side of the Englishtown in the early thirteenth century (Thomas 1992, 142; Killanin and Duignan 1967, 351; Wiggins 2000). McNeill (1997, 46) notes that the Pipe Roll of 1211-12 records the expenditure of £733-16-11 on the castle, a very substantial sum at the time. The castle was an important part of the city defences which developed over the following centuries, most notably with murage grants in 1237 and 1310-11. The city walls were maintained by grants up to the seventeenth century and Thomas (1992, 146) notes that twelve gates or posterns, the walls of both parts of the city, four drawbridges and two stone bridges were being maintained in 1637.

The ecclesiastical development of the city played an important part in the growth of the urban centre, most notably in the Englishtown, and, in addition to St Mary's Cathedral, foundations included a Augustinian priory off Bishop Street in 1172, a Dominican priory nearby in 1227 (to the east and adjacent to the site in question) and a Franciscan friary outside the south-eastern wall of the Englishtown in 1267 (O'Rahilly 1995, 168-71).

The High Street of the Englishtown, now termed Nicholas Street and Mary Street, was the most important thoroughfare in the Medieval city and linked Baal's Bridge with the castle and Thomond Bridge. Another street, now identified as Barrack Street, Bishop Street and Sheep Street, ran parallel to the High Street and these were linked by a series of small streets and lanes. A number of these lanes gave access to small gates in the city wall and so a number of names are common to lane and gate, e.g. Gaol Lane served Gaol Lane Gate and Creagh Lane served Creagh Gate. Two gates, commonly termed the Bonfields or Abbey gate and the Gaol Lane gate, gave access to the area outside the walls and, in particular, to the extra-mural Franciscan friary.

The Tholsel, which served as the town hall and civic courthouse, was apparently founded c. 1450 and was located on Mary Street. It was later superseded by a jail and its civic functions were transferred to the Exchange on Nicholas Street and the courthouse on Quay Lane, now Bridge Street (Hill 1991, 51-2; Spellissy 1998, 158-9).

The city of Limerick, as noted above, was the most important Hiberno-Norse centre in the region and this status was not diminished with the development of the Anglo-Norman city. Later, Killanin and Duignan note that the city had fifteen churches at the time of the Reformation (1967, 350). However, the city of Limerick is, perhaps, most famous as a city of sieges and as the 'City of the Broken Treaty'. In 1642 the city was captured by Confederate Catholic forces after a siege and was later taken by Cromwellian troops after a three-month siege in 1651.

The Sieges

The Williamite wars, which ranged over much of the country towards the close of the seventeenth century and had considerable international dimensions, also played a large role in the history of Limerick. The first Williamite siege took place after the battle of the Boyne in 1690, when the Jacobite forces regrouped inside the Medieval defences of the city and successfully resisted the three week siege by King William of Orange, who apparently had between 20,000 and 26,000 men at his disposal.

The second Williamite siege took place the following year and the city fell after one month, a French fleet arriving too late to be of assistance to the defenders. The Treaty of Limerick allowed the Jacobite soldiers to leave for France and gave basic rights to the remaining Catholic population. The leader of the Jacobite forces in Limerick, Patrick Sarsfield, was under pressure to renew the battle when the French reinforcements arrived, but would not breach the treaty which had been signed and left with 19,000 troops, 'the Wild Geese' to form the Irish Brigade in France. The terms of the treaty were soon breached, however, by the Williamite forces and the Catholic population was subjected to many discriminatory laws (Killanin and Duignan 1967, 350-1; Spellissy 1998, 49-62).

Resurgence of the Eighteenth Century: New Town Pery

During the eighteenth century, Limerick overcame the difficulties caused by the Williamite wars and began to regain its prosperity. Many civic buildings were repaired or rebuilt and brick became a common building material, particularly in the construction of the many Dutch gabled houses which were built in the city at the time. These unusual buildings, some of which survived in Mary Street until the early twentieth century (Hill 1991, 62-5), are testimony to the Continental influences and Dutch links which the city enjoyed in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

The growing prosperity of the city created a need for considerable expansion beyond the limits of the Medieval town walls and a new area of the city was developed to the south-west of Irishtown. This was the Newtown or Newtown Pery, and was developed in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the Georgian style (O'Flaherty 1995, 181-3). The streets were laid out on a grid pattern and the commercial centre of the city gradually shifted closer to this area of elegant Georgian townhouses, the smaller streets of the Medieval core becoming less important over time.

1.5 Trenching Methodology

A trenching plan was submitted to the relevant authorities on application of licence to excavate. These trenches were excavated by machine fitted with a flat bucket. All sections were cleaned by hand. One side of each trench was drawn, and photos of all trenches were taken. Recording was carried out using proforma sheets as per Aegis Quality Manual (2001 plus revisions) and per published guidelines from the National Monuments Section (please refer to project references).

While this report details the entire testing of this site in a reporting format, there is an archive of all the material related to the project housed with Aegis Archaeology Limited (reference 159-5).

2. Trench List

Trench Number	Orientation	Length (in metres)	Width (in metres)	Max Depth
1	NE/SW	21	1.80	1.00
2	NW/SE	15	1.80	0.75
3	NE/SW	14	1.80	0.60

3.Trench Descriptions

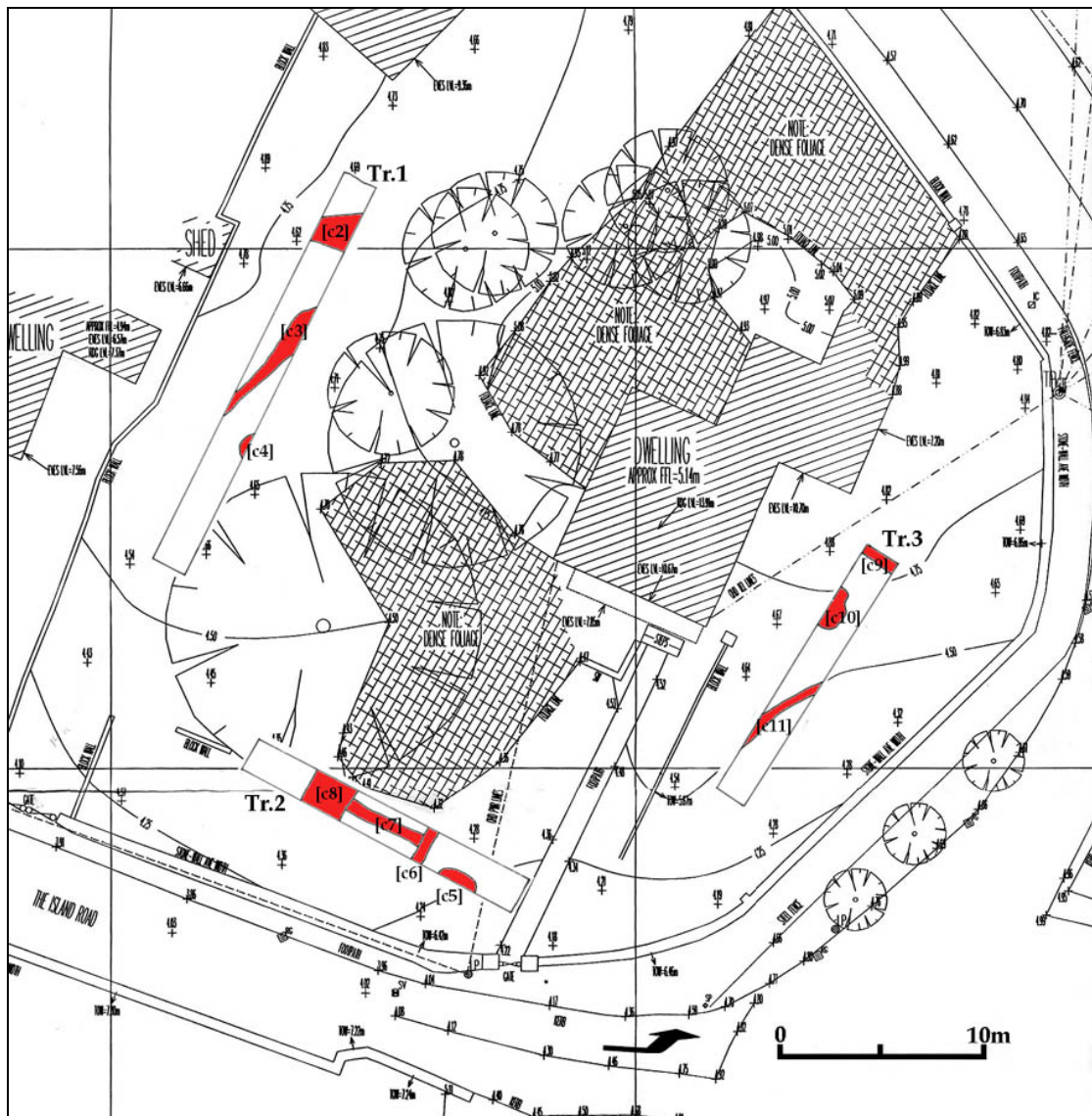


Figure 4. Layout of trenches on existing site with features marked in red (for illustration, north to top)

Below are the descriptions of the trenches excavated (figures 4 & 5). Finds recovered are listed in section 4 of this report.

Trench 1 (Figure 3; Plates 1, 4 & 5-7)

This trench was situated to the eastern side of the site and was aligned approximately from northeast to southwest. It was 21m in length and 1.80m wide. The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 1m, with the fill consisting primarily of topsoil with inclusions of rubble throughout. At 11.70m from the northeastern end of the trench there was a lens of mortar approximately 3m in length and 0.05m deep. This was approximately 0.20m from the end of the trench. At 15.70m from the northeastern end of the trench there was a layer of tarmac approximately 5.30m long at 0.70m from the base of the trench. Three features were noted in this trench.

[Context 2] This was located 1.60m from the northeastern end of the trench and was approximately 2.10m long. Its full extent could not be determined as it continued outside the trench to the east and west. It contained a dark greyish brown fill, with frequent fragments of post-medieval pottery (06E0125:2:1).

[Context 3] This linear feature ran across the trench approximately from northeast to southwest. It was visible at 6.50m from the northeastern end of the trench for approximately 6.50m, at which point it ran beneath the western baulk of the trench. It contained a mid greyish brown fill with frequent animal bone (06E0125:3:1).

[Context 4] This was visible running beneath the eastern baulk of the trench at approximately 13.50m from the northeastern end of the trench. It had a maximum visible length of 1m and contained a dark brownish grey fill with occasional inclusions of flecks of charcoal, fragments of animal bone and small stones (06E0125:4:1).

Trench 2 (Figure 3; Plates 2 & 8, 9-11)

This trench was 15m in length and was aligned approximately from northwest to southeast across the southern part of the site. It was 1.80m wide and was 0.75m deep on average. The general stratigraphy consisted of approximately 0.55m of topsoil with rubble inclusions. Beneath this there was approximately 0.20m of more concentrated rubble and mortar. Four possible features were noted in this trench.

[Context 5] Approximately 2.20m from the southeastern end of the trench there was a patch of dark brownish grey gravelly clay. This was approximately 2m in length and it extended approximately 0.60m out from the southern baulk of the trench. There were inclusions of mortar, brick, animal bone and pottery in this context (06E0125:5:1).

[Context 6] This was a linear feature approximately 0.40m wide, which ran across the trench from northeast to southwest. It was situated 5.20m from the southeastern end of the trench.

[Context 7] This was a linear feature, which ran along the middle of the trench from approximately 5.60m to 9.60m. It may have been connected to [c. 6] and [c. 8]. It had a maximum width of 0.50m and contained fragments of brick, mortar, modern pottery and glass throughout the fill ((06E0125:7:1).

[Context 8] This linear feature was located approximately 9.60m from the southeastern end of the trench and was approximately 2m wide. It ran across the trench from northeast to southwest and may have been related to contexts [c. 6] and [c. 7]. This feature may have been a trench for a sewerage pipe.

Trench 3 (Figure 3; Plates 3 & 12-15)

This trench was 14m in length and ran approximately from northeast to southwest across the eastern part of the site. The trench was approximately 0.60m deep and contained topsoil with inclusions of rubble throughout. Three features were identified in this trench.

[Context 9] This was situated at the northeastern end of the trench and extended approximately 0.50m into the trench. It contained a dark grayish brown fill with occasional flecks of charcoal and fragments of animal bone (06E0125:9:1).

[Context 10] This was situated in the western baulk of the trench at approximately 2.60m from the northeastern end of the trench. It was 1.80m in length and had a maximum width of 0.80m. It was an irregularly shaped feature with evidence of root activity throughout. The fill was dark grayish brown with fragments of animal bone and oyster shells in it (06E0125:10:1).

[Context 11] This was a linear feature, which ran approximately from northeast to southwest across the trench. It was 0.50m wide on average. It had a dark brown silty fill with frequent sherds of pottery throughout it (06E0125:11:1).

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Plate 1. General view of trench 1 and existing house,
from south



Plate 2. Excavation of trench 2, from east



Plate 3. Trench 3, from south



Plate 4. [c. 2] in trench 1, from southwest



Plate 5. Animal bone in [c. 3] in trench 1, from west



Plate 6. [c. 4] in trench 1, from northwest



Plate 7. General view of trench 1,
from southwest



Plate 9. [c. 6] in trench 2, from
southeast



Plate 8. [c. 5] in trench 2, from north



Plate 10. [c. 7] in trench 2, from southeast



Plate 11. [c. 8] in trench 2, from southeast



Plate 12. [c. 9] in trench 3, from
northwest



Plate 13. [c. 10] in trench 3, from southeast



Plate 14. [c11] in trench 3, from
southwest



Plate 15. General view of trench 3,
from southwest

4. Register of Finds

Several finds were discovered during this test trenching primarily for the purposes of dating of layers. Due to the fact that all finds were found under licence no. 06E0125, this number has been omitted from the list below. (However, it should be a prefix to each entry below.).

Context number	Find number	Description of find
2	1	Pottery
3	1	Animal bone
4	1	Pottery
5	1	Pottery
6	1	Pottery
7	1	Pottery
9	1	Animal Bone
10	1	Oyster shell
11	1	Pottery



Plate 16. Pottery from Trench 1 (North Devon Sgraffito to top, Glazed Red Earthenware to bottom)

5. Interpretation of Findings

5.1 Test Trenching Results

Archaeological features and artefacts were found on the site. It is difficult at this stage to determine the precise date and the nature of this material but the presence of post-medieval pottery in all three trenches suggests that there was activity in the vicinity of the site around the time of the construction of the 17th century fortifications. Some of the pottery recovered from sealed contexts in the test trenches is of seventeenth century date, for instance, North Devon Sgraffito. North Devon wares were introduced into the country at the beginning of the seventeenth century (Meenan 2004, 57). Several sherds of glazed red earthenware were also recovered from the trenches. This type of pottery is defined by their earthenware bodies that range in colour from light red or buff to a brown or dark red. The lead glaze took its colour from the fabric. The vessel forms found are usually coarse tablewares, kitchen and dairy vessels and sanitary wares. The production of these wares may have followed in the tradition of the medieval pottery industry, probably continuing through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Meenan 2004, 58). No medieval material, however, was uncovered during this test trenching. Therefore, it appears that the earliest activity uncovered in the testing dates from the seventeenth century.

A linear feature identified in trench 2 may be of modern date, (context [c. 8] because of the presence of fragments of sewer pipe) while contexts [c.6] and [c.7] may also be associated modern features. However, features [c. 2], [c. 3] and [c. 4] in trench 1, [c. 5] in trench 2 and [c. 9], [c. 10] and [c. 11] in trench 3 appear to be archaeological in nature.

The entire site could not be tested, as the existing structure remains standing. The exact location of 17th century fortifications in the vicinity of the site is not known. However, no substantial cut feature was noted in the trenches which may have indicated these fortifications.

5.2 Cartographic Evidence for the Site (figures 6-14)

The site in question maybe noted on many cartographic images of Limerick through the ages. Below are the more elaborate examples, with the development site highlighted. The site appears to have always been bounded to the south by island road, as seen on the 1st edition six-inch OS map (OS 1840). All the portions of the maps provided show the site within the area of archaeological potential for the historic town of Limerick. These have been analysed elsewhere (Collins & Haues 2005).

The Urban Survey map probably illustrates this best which, (Bradley *et al* 1989; figure 14), locates the site outside the medieval town wall but along the line of the 17th century fortifications. In many of the maps below the proposed development site seems to be located in garden areas according to earlier maps and in built up areas later (figures below). This would be consistent with the archaeological findings and interpretation by Hodkinson.

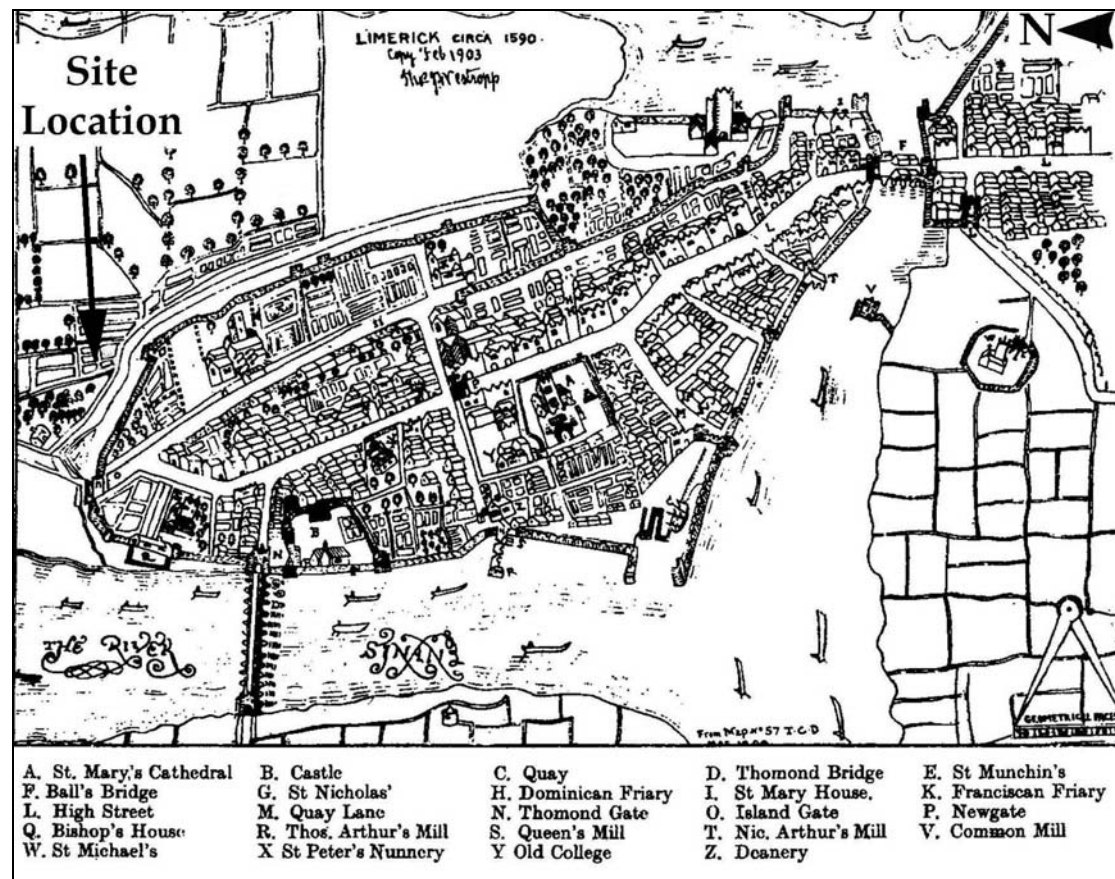


Figure 6. 1590 pictorial map of English town (O'Rahilly 1995, 166; with additions)

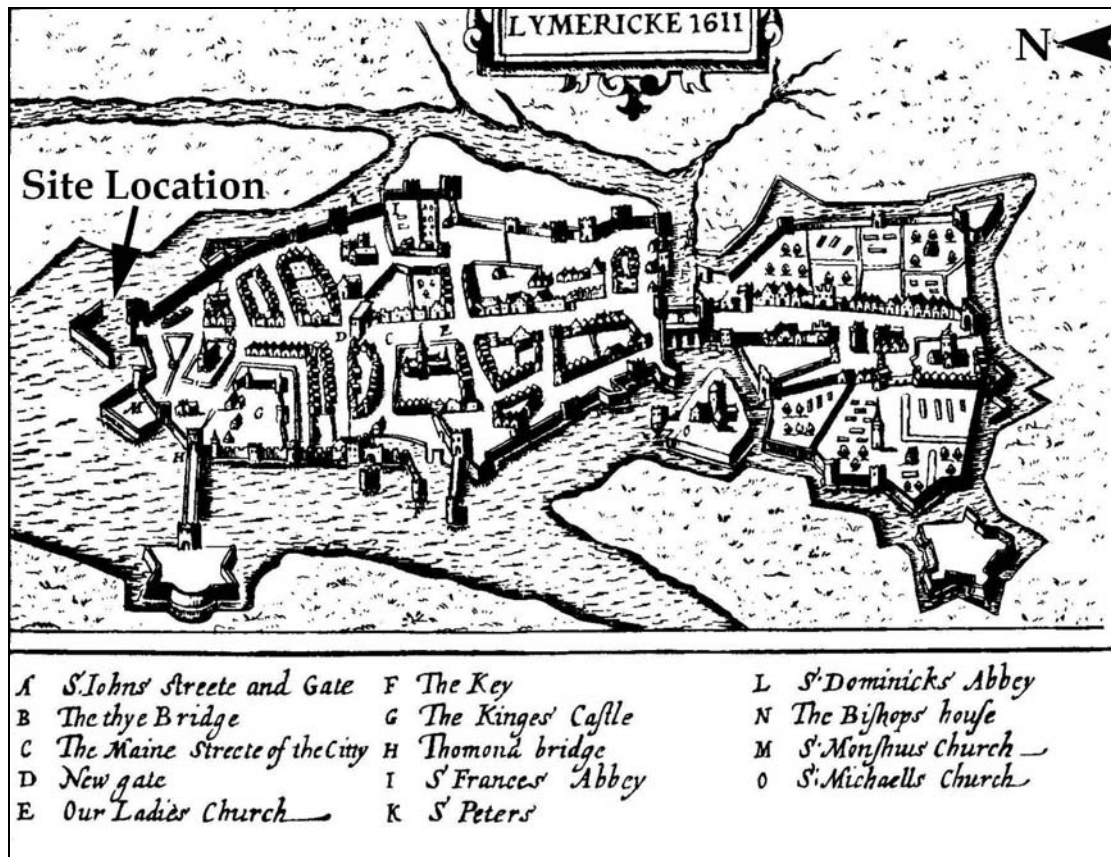


Figure 7. Speed's map of AD1611, showing site location (after Hill 1991)

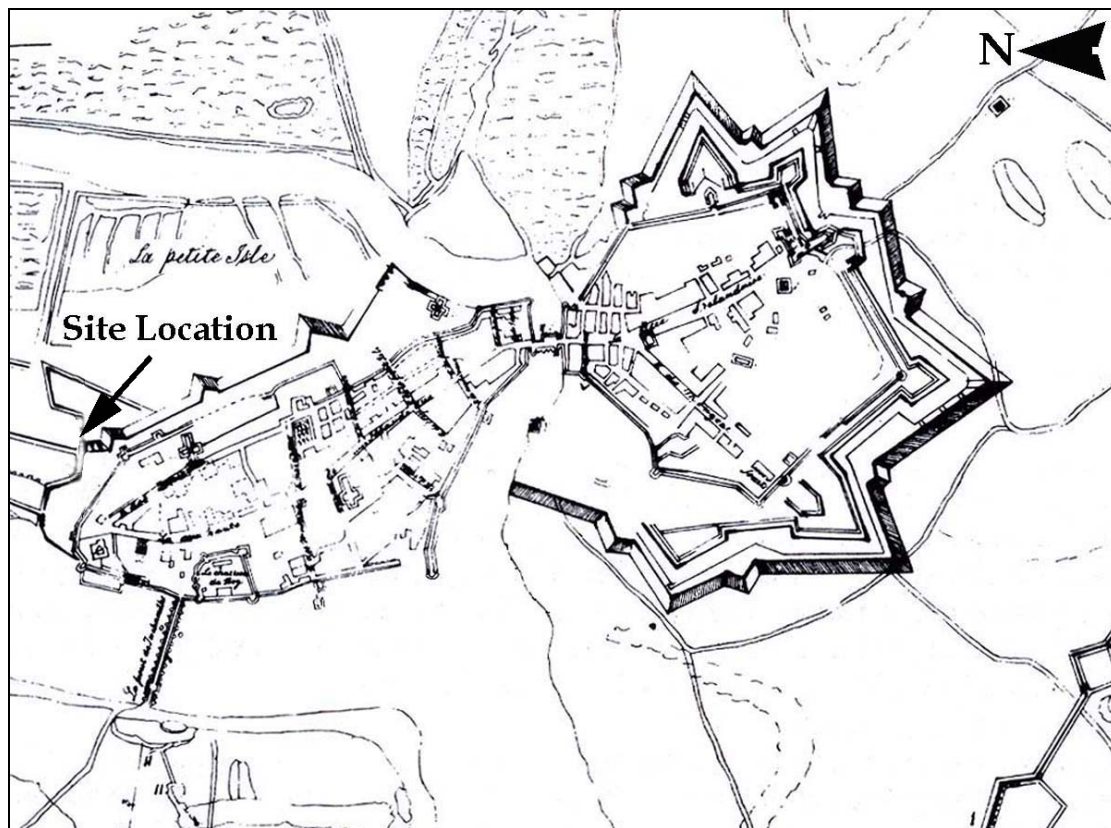


Figure 8. 1691 "French" map showing site location (Hill 1991)

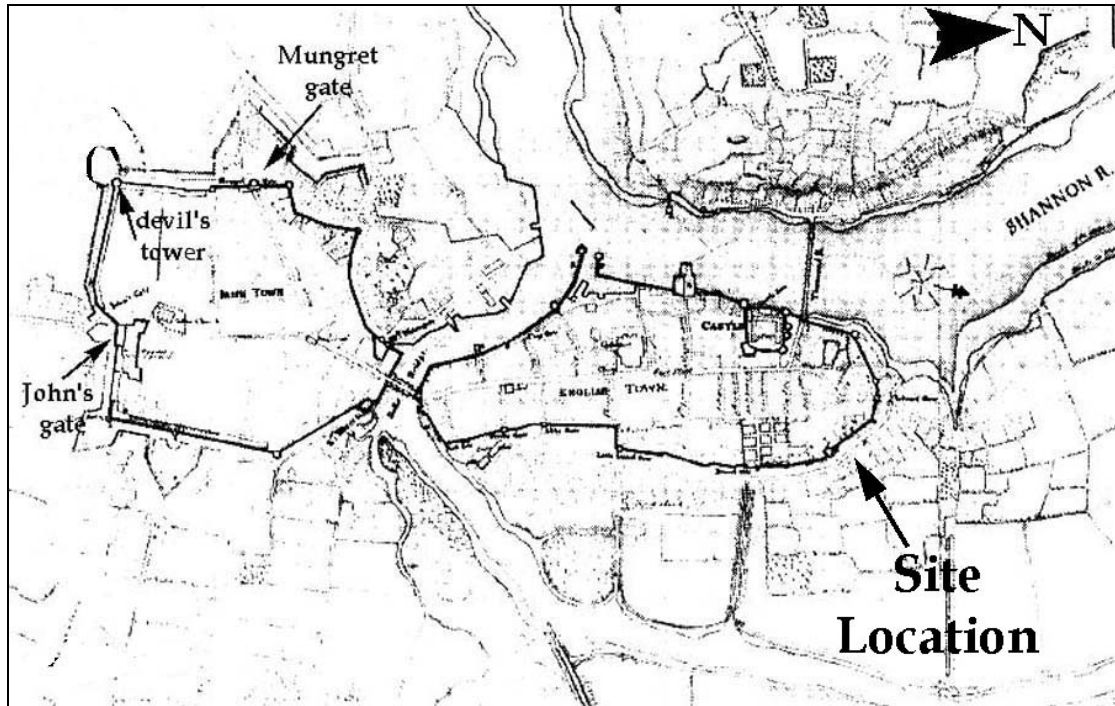


Figure 9. Eyre's 1752 map with site location (Hill 1991)

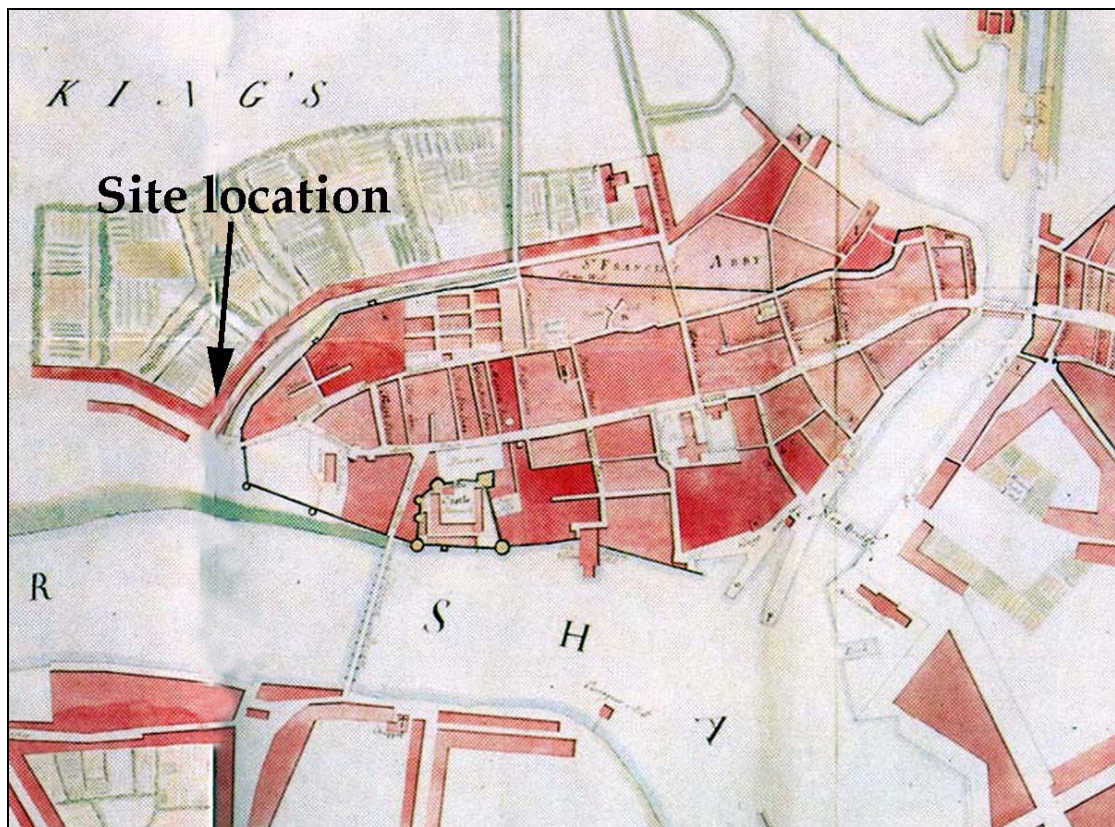


Figure 10. Portion of Colles' map c.1769, north to left (Joyce 1995; with additions)

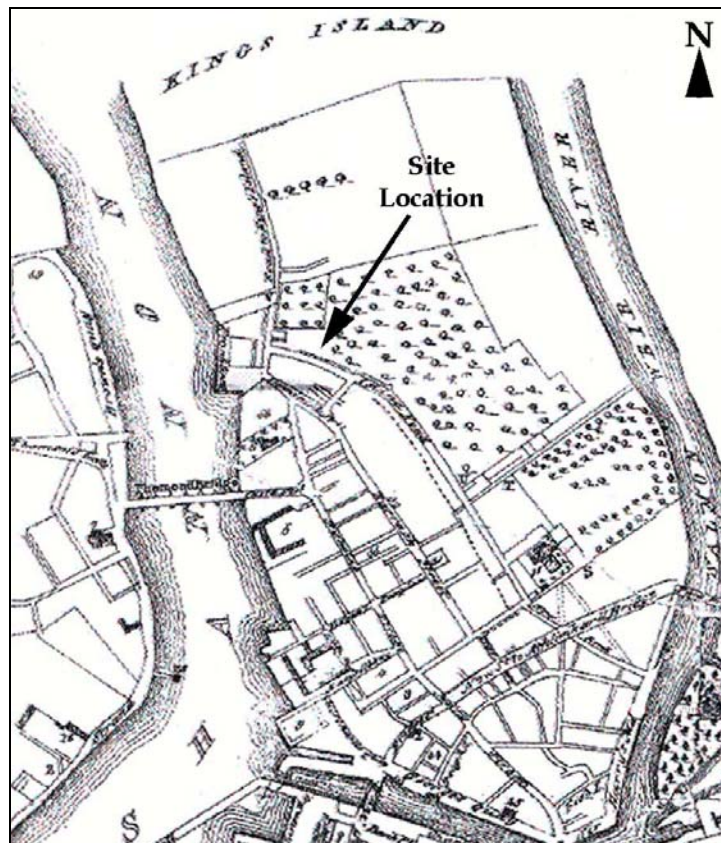


Figure 11. Street plan of 1827 showing site location (Fitzgerald & McGregor 1826)

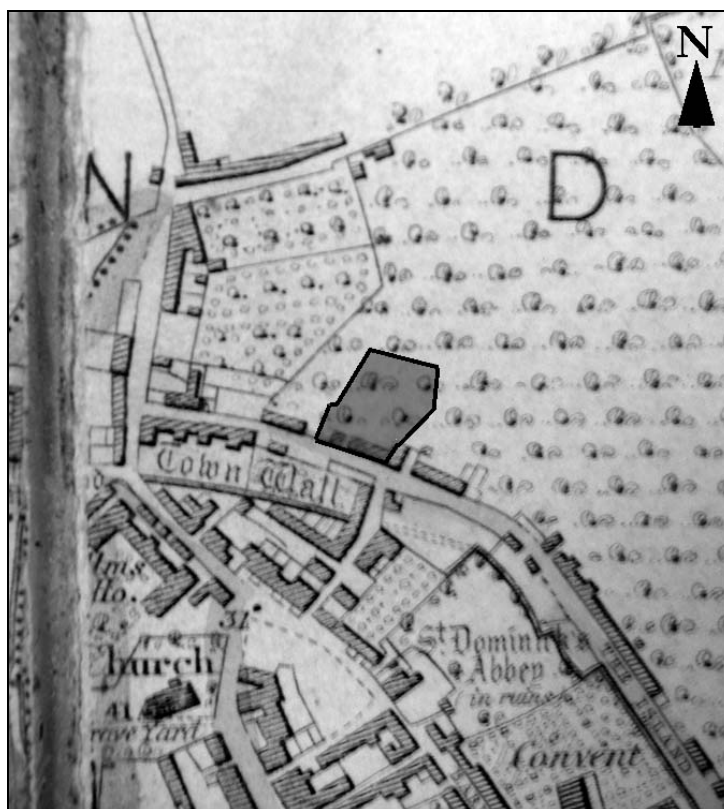


Figure 12. 1st edition six-inch map showing site location (OS 1840)

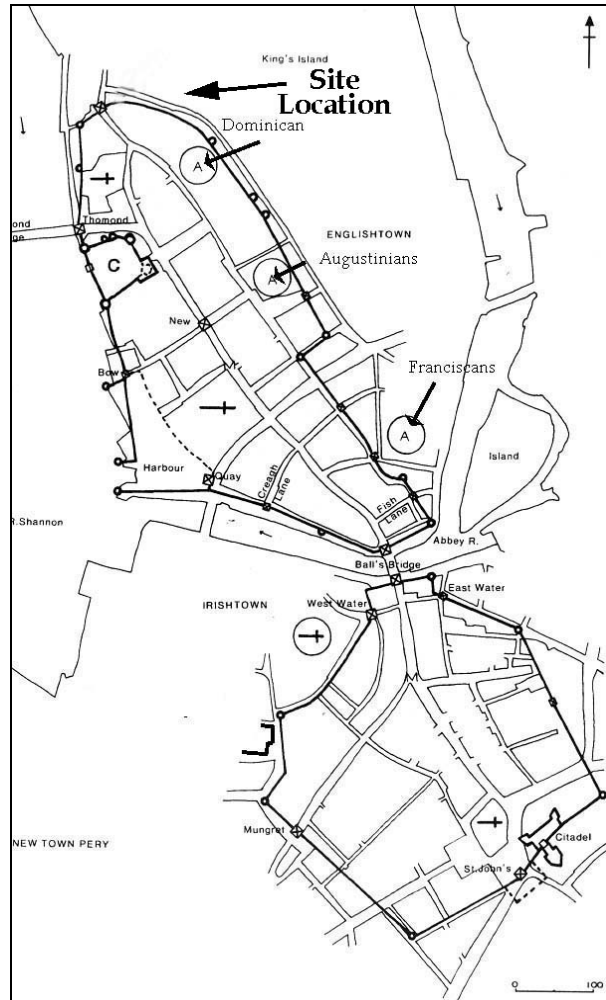


Figure 13. Thomas' 1992 map with medieval wall outlined, and site location

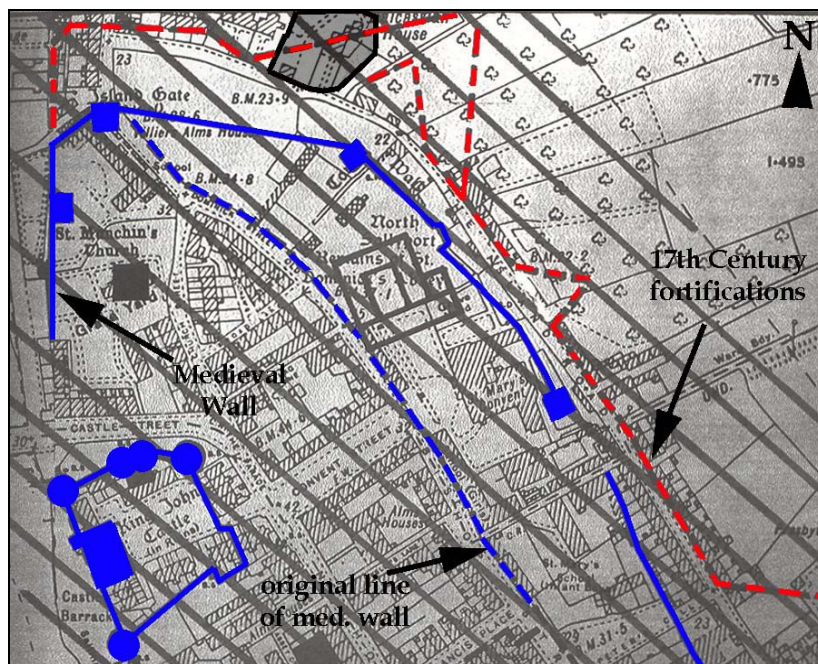


Figure 14. Urban survey map with site shaded at top of figure (Bradley *et al* 1989)

6. Conclusions and Suggested Mitigation

Development at this site has the potential to yield material of archaeological interest. The site itself is within the zone of archaeological potential for the medieval town of Limerick and it lies in the vicinity of the supposed location of 17th century fortifications.

It is suggested that any archaeological features impacted by the footprint of the proposed development should be archaeologically excavated by hand under licence from the National Monuments Section of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The archaeological features uncovered in the test trenching which are located under proposed car parking or landscaped areas might be preserved *in situ*, if it can be demonstrated that they will not be impacted by the development. This includes the proposed structure and any services *etc.* This might be demonstrated in plan form.

Due to the extant structure present on site (Dalcassian House) it was not possible to test trench in this area. However, when the house is demolished, this area should be archaeologically monitored, and should archaeological features be uncovered, these should also be excavated by hand.

The method of archaeological mitigation suggested here has been used in similar projects. It is the remit of the National Monuments Section (formerly Dúchas) to legally recommend the most appropriate mitigation measures and perhaps to make recommendations that have not been suggested here.

It is important to note that it is the National Monuments Section of the DoE, H, L G (formerly Dúchas) who will formulate and ratify any archaeological mitigation, should it be required

and this report can only make suggestions and report on the archaeological evidence found during this testing.

7. Project References

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8. Signing-Off Statement

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Dated: March 2006