



Archaeological Desk Study of site of new Heritage Centre, Old
Blessington Road, Tallaght.

For South Dublin County Council

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Introduction

This report details the potential archaeological significance to a brownfield site at Old Blessington Road in the urban setting of Tallaght, Co. Dublin, administrative district of South Dublin County Council. The report has been prepared on behalf of South Dublin County Council, who intend to develop the site as a county heritage centre. The building will be two- storey, with the ground floor giving access to a new garden formed between the civic theatre and the heritage centre. The proposal, to be subject to Part VIII approval, will entail the removal of the existing hardcore and tarmac surface over the site, with projected disturbance into subsoil for foundations and attendant services.

It is projected that the archaeological potential of this site is very low.

Location and archaeological background

The site lies to the north of the Old Blessington Road, which was the main route out of the medieval village of Tallaght.

The gentle south- facing slope had a commanding view of the Dublin foothills. Several megalithic tombs are present on these hills, and certain tomb types have been shown to have distinct patterns in the landscape (Stout and Stout 1992, 8). 'Passage tombs appear as a coherent group on the peaks at Tallaght and Saggart with an outlier.. .. on Two Rock Mountain'. Portal tombs lie further east and downslope, extending into the lowlands at Brennanstown and Kiltiernan. Wedge tombs are in a close group centering at Kilakee- Kilmashogue. Both the passage tombs and portal dolmens are likely to have been in use concurrently, and point to a large stable population in the area, of which scant trace remains. In the lowlands it is certain that continuous tillage over the centuries has led to the destruction of a vast number of archaeological monuments. Chance finds such as the flint scraper from Greenhills Road (1989:47) and a small bronze palstave from Bancroft housing estate (1973:213) are classified as stray finds. Likewise, prehistoric sites in the immediate area in the lowlands are the results of chance finds, through archaeological monitoring of groundworks, such as the fulacht fia uncovered at Kingswood. An extensive settlement of the late Neolithic-early Bronze age was surveyed and part- excavated at Piperstown Hill, Bohernabreena, lying above the 365m contour. The site was fully exposed in 1960 when a fire set the heather alight, and burnt off the peat to expose a group of hut circles and burial cairns.

A possible enclosure site at the Kingswood quarry site was identified as a probable ringfort (DU021-025).

The site lies within the over-kingdom of Laigin, some short distance from the important monastery of Tallaght, founded in 769 (Gwynne and Hadcock 1970, 45). The monastery, referred to as Tamlacht-Maelruain, was a centre for the sub-rule of the Ceili- De (Culdees), famed for their austerity. In 824, Tallaght was plundered by the community of Kildare. The deaths of various abbots are recorded throughout the 9th to 12th centuries. The monastery is noted for the work *The Martyrology of Tallaght*, and the *Rule of Tallaght*, or *Teaching of Maelruain*.

Part of the enclosure of the monastery at the southern side was excavated in the 1990s by the writer (96E188). There were two enclosing ditches, the inner one being wide and deep, up to 6m in width, and 4m in depth. The outer ditch was 3m in width and 2.2m in depth. The ditches were spaced between 3 and 6m apart. A C14 date of twiglets from the base of the ditch returned a date between 530-762A.D., calibrated to 2s.

Part of a levelled section of the enclosing bank was excavated. Features excavated included a grain drying kiln, and fourteen burials, including a woman buried with an infant beneath one of her arms.

A medieval church tower and remains of a cross are the sole surviving monuments within the partly surviving enclosure. The present Church of Ireland building dates from 1829.

Archaeological work to trace the remainder of the enclosure in the adjacent development of the Institute of Technology were not conclusive. Medieval domestic settlement was however recovered at this site.

Following the Norman conquest, the lands of the monastery of Tallaght were confirmed by King John to the church, and Tallaght became one of the most important of the ecclesiastic manors in the county. The lands however decreased significantly in value due to repeated incursions by the Irish tribes, the O' Byrnes and O' Tooles. The bailiffs of Tallaght received a royal grant in 1311A.D. to aid in enclosing the borough. By the mid- 14th century the lands of Tallaght were in a pitiable state and only four of the tenants or betaghs remained, the remainder of the buildings or holdings being waste for lack of tenants. An extent of the holdings of the manor of Taulagh in 1326. is recorded in Archbishop Alen's Register (McNeill 1950, 180). This records that there are no buildings there because they were burned, apart from one small chamber for the lord, and other small cellars, begun and not finished and one small chamber for clerks.. At the 'vill of Taulagh' four betaghs hold 28a, 18 cottiers.... the farmland and meadow is recorded as worthless due to waste. Raids on Tallaght are recorded in 1331 when the castle was captured and 300 sheep were carried off. By the 17th century the former borough was reduced to the status of a village.

The street layout of the medieval borough was linear and appears to have been composed simply of Main Street (Bradley 1992, 141). The Archbishop's Palace occupied the north side of the street. There is no indication of the course of the medieval borough boundaries, which were funded through a murage grant of 1311.

The Archbishop's castle at Tallaght was constructed by Archbishop Alexander de Bicknor in 1324. as a country residence for the archbishops of Dublin. Monies for repair of the castle of Tallaght were sanctioned by parliament in 1453-4. Both the castle and enclosure of St Maelruain's church are depicted on Robert Newcomen's 1654 map of Tallaght. The church is shown in ruinous condition at this date, and the lands south of the church were held by the Archbishop, and described as meadow. In 1729 Archbishop John Hoadley caused a large part of the Archbishop's Palace to be demolished and he built a new palace with the materials. A square tower remained the only part of the medieval structure. This is incorporated into the Dominican Friary, and appears to be no earlier than the 16th century (Bradley 1992).

The subject site lies beyond the projected line of the vill of Tallaght, and probably outside any projected borough boundary. According to Handcock's History and Antiquities of Tallaght (1899) the Glebe house which lay to the north of the site was first mentioned in 1479, when John Alleyn, dean of St Patrick's, leased to Simon Cower, Clerk, the Glebe of Tallaght Church for 59 years, 'the lessee being bound to pay to the Dean eight silver pence yearly and to build a house thereon of four couples, to keep the same stiff and staunch, and to make new ditches to the glebe'.

In 1743 Rev Mr Jones expended £52.13.8 on improvements at the Glebe, and in 1787 a further £110.9.10 was spent. A holy well near the glebe house was covered over and piped to a pump in the glebe house kitchen. In 1791 Mr Cochrane, the Vicar, had an auction and many of the old people who remembered the well took the opportunity of attending the auction to get a drink of the miraculous water. None of the historic maps show the location or annotate the well.

The Glebe House was rebuilt in 1825. The house was described as square, not unlike a tea- canister. The garden was celebrated for roses and apples.

A house in this location is depicted on Rocque's 1760 map of County Dublin, where it is accessed from an avenue off the old road to Blessington. The avenue to the Glebe may lie on the subject site. It is depicted and annotated on Taylor's 1816 map of county Dublin.

It was sold into private ownership in the 1930s. It was known as St Maelruan's by the 1950s. It was unoccupied by 1983, reduced to a burnt out shell, and demolished in 1984 (Ask about Ireland.ie, accessed 15.09.2020).

Archaeological work in the vicinity

There is no record of archaeological work on the major developments of Tallaght, including Belgard Square, Civic Offices, or Civic Theatre, nor on the site of Tallaght Hospital. A site close by at Belgard Road was tested (17E0489) in advance of redevelopment. That site is bounded by Belgard Retail Park to the north, and Belgard Square North to the south, and was at the time in use as industrial and office facilities. No archaeological features were recovered.

More recently, the route of the Belgard to Cookstown Link road was monitored for archaeological activity (unlicensed, Red Tobin, June 2020). The route lies on the west side of the subject site, which had been in use most recently as a halting site, with concrete bays for caravans, and some services. No archaeological deposits were noted in several visits to the site in January 2020.

The site is presently in use as a surface carpark, with attendant hard surface.

Archaeological significance of site: Recommendations

The site lies in a densely developed part of the urban landscape of Tallaght. While the village and settlement developed from an early medieval ecclesiastic monastery, the subject site lies well beyond the zone of notification of this cluster of monuments. The ecclesiastic enclosure DU021-037002 is located some 500m from the subject site, close to the Church of Ireland church of St Maelruain's. Cartography shows a dwelling, Glebe House, to the north of the site on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey map. This was built in 1825, and demolished in 1984. An earlier building on the same site is shown on Rocque's map of 1760. Handcock's History and Antiquities of Tallaght records that the house was established on church lands at Tallaght in 1479, and refurbished on several occasions.

While much of the original soils on the site will have been removed by construction of the present hard surfaces, it is advised that periodic archaeological monitoring should take place as part of the initial construction on the site. It is possible that the lower levels of soil may contain some finds and features of late medieval date, including medieval agricultural ditches and other cut features.

While the likelihood of uncovering material of archaeological significance is low, it is advisable that archaeological monitoring is undertaken, as none appears to have taken place to date in this area.

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Web:

Archaeology.ie website of National Monuments, online record of Monuments and Places.

Excavations.ie summaries of licensed archaeological excavations.

Heritage Council Dublin County Heritage Maps.

South Dublin County Council/ libraries/ ask about Ireland.



Figure 1. Approximate site location on Newcomen's 1654 map.



Figure 2. Approximate site location on Rocque 1760.



Figure 3. Site location on Ordnance Survey first edition 1847.



Figure 4. Site location on Ordnance Survey 25in, 1890-1913.

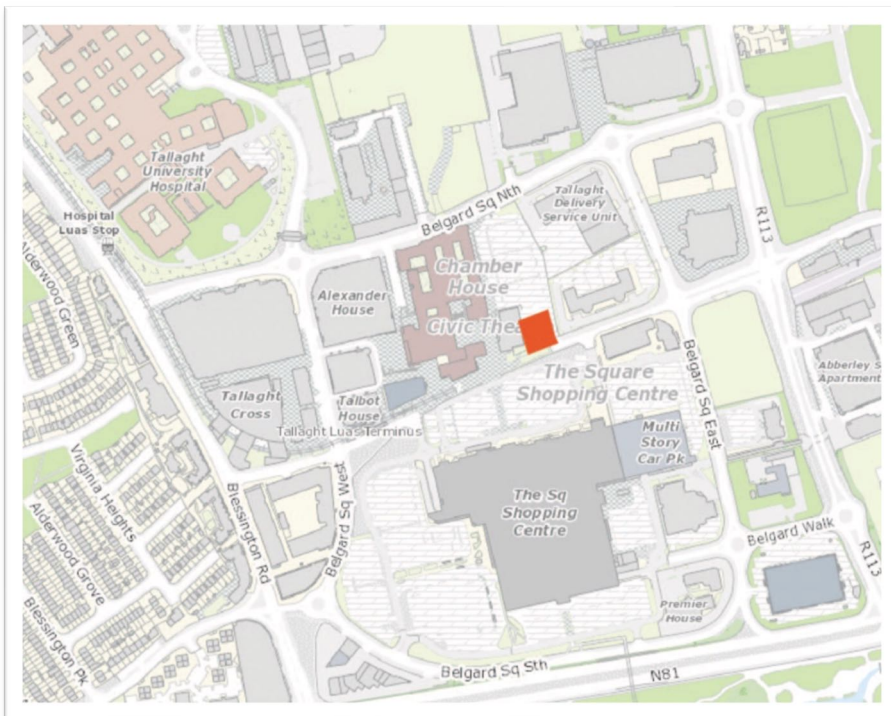


Figure 5. Site on modern Ordnance Survey map.