

St Anne's Architecture

Thornhill House

1814 A newspaper article stated that Sergeant John Ball had recently built Thornhill house 'a mansion house, offices, garden and demesne', in the townland of Blackbush, Clontarf.

1835 Brothers Benjamin Lee and Arthur Lee Guinness purchased Thornhill House with 29 acres for the sum of £500.

The development of St Anne's house and estate

1837 The house was rebuilt in an Italianate style with a Roman tower, and renamed St Anne's after the local holy well.

1838 Benjamin Lee Guinness purchased his brother's share of the house.

Redevelopment of St Anne's house and estate

1868 Benjamin Lee Guinness died leaving the estate to his son Arthur Edward (Lord Ardilaun).

1873 Lord and Lady Ardilaun commissioned architect James Franklin Fuller to remodel the house, subsequently completed by George Coppinger Ashlin.

1870-76 The estate expanded to over 500 acres with land acquisitions from the Vernons of Clontarf and the Lawrences of Howth.

1885 Lord Ardilaun commissioned architect George Coppinger Ashlin to design the Red Stables.

The most palatial house built in Ireland during the second half of the nineteenth century

The two-storey Italianate style house took seven years to complete. Built with Bath and Portland stone, the exterior incorporated balusters, perforated parapets, projecting eaves, corbels, and imposing cornices.

The interior was furnished with marble columns and floors, decorative carved wood panels, Neoclassical plasterwork and coved ceilings. Interior mouldings, namely plaster corning and coving, were found in the more public areas of the house.

Inside, a top-lit two-storey entrance hall led to a Renaissance style double staircase. The Dining Room featured a large carved wood mantelpiece. This area progressed to a south-facing conservatory designed by Richard Turner. An ornate Picture Gallery and Statue Room housed a vast collection of art and antiques. The Drawing Room featured a coved ceiling and housed an organ in an apse. At the centre of the house, a glass roofed Palm Garden held exotic plants. Upstairs, a lavish boudoir led to a south-facing balcony overlooking Dublin Bay.



Archaeological Investigations

Test trenching 2021

Trench 1 revealed cellars, associated with the boiler room, which were infilled with large architectural fragments. Two limestone block walls at ground level contained stone door jambs projecting from the northwest side of the mansion.

Trench 2 also identified cellars with substantial arches forming a passage. Remains of the east-facing façade with dressed Portland stone and two tall windows survived. A light well that served the cellars retained many original white tiles.

Trench 3 revealed features from the ground floor of the house including internal walls of a 'circular room' and the walls and tiled floor of a 'triangular closet'. A brick arch protruding from the surface was aligned with the subsurface icehouse.

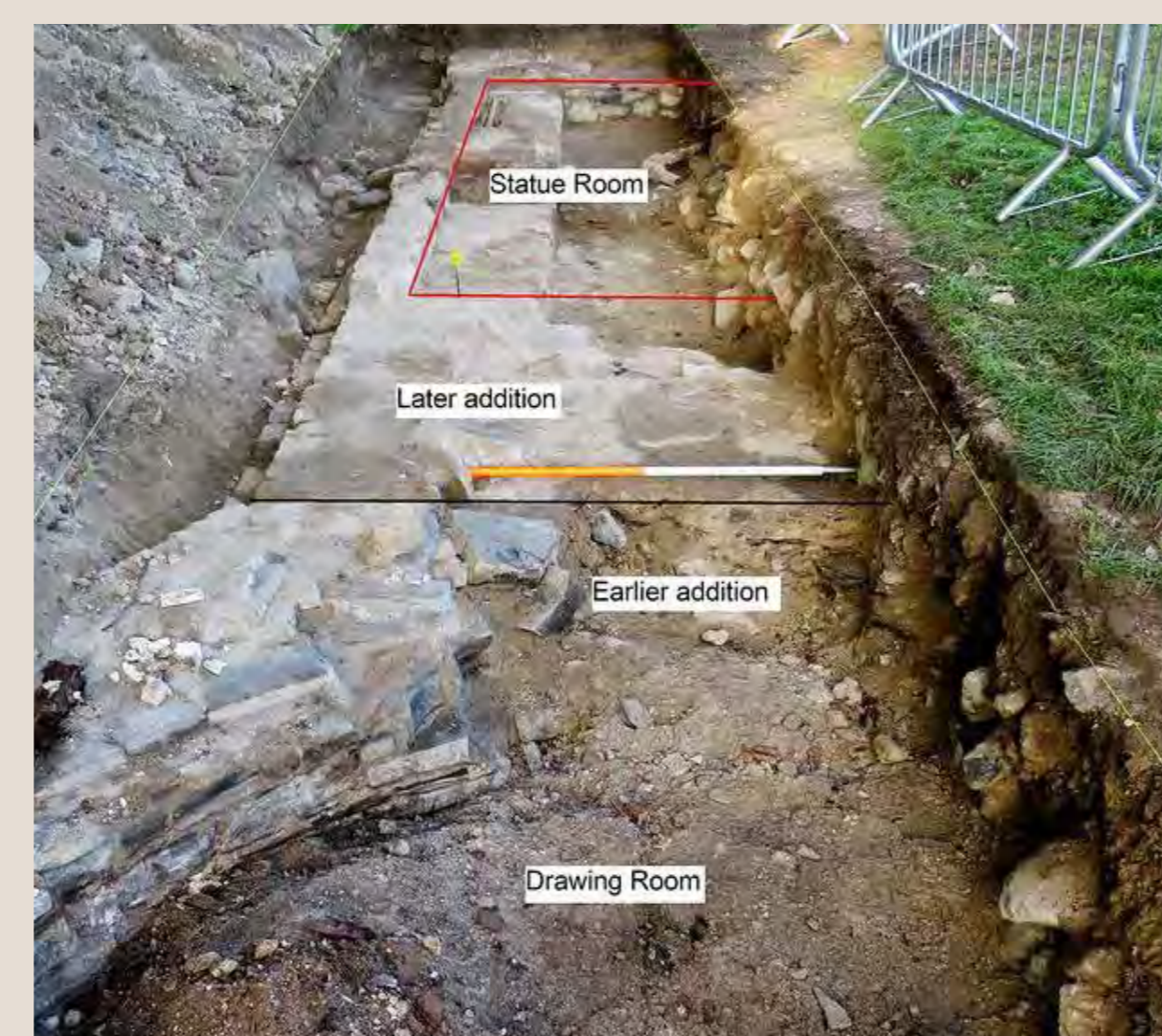
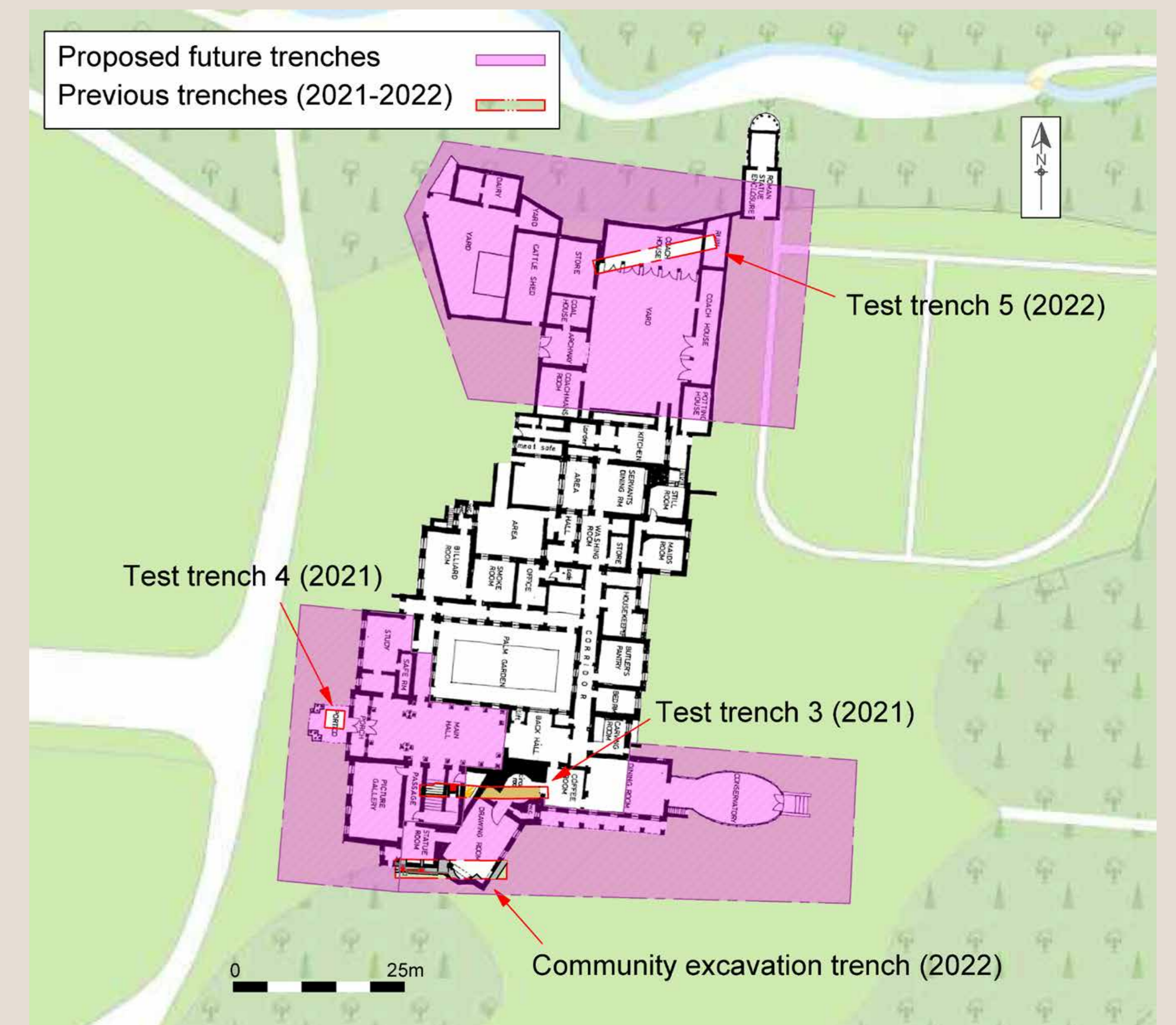
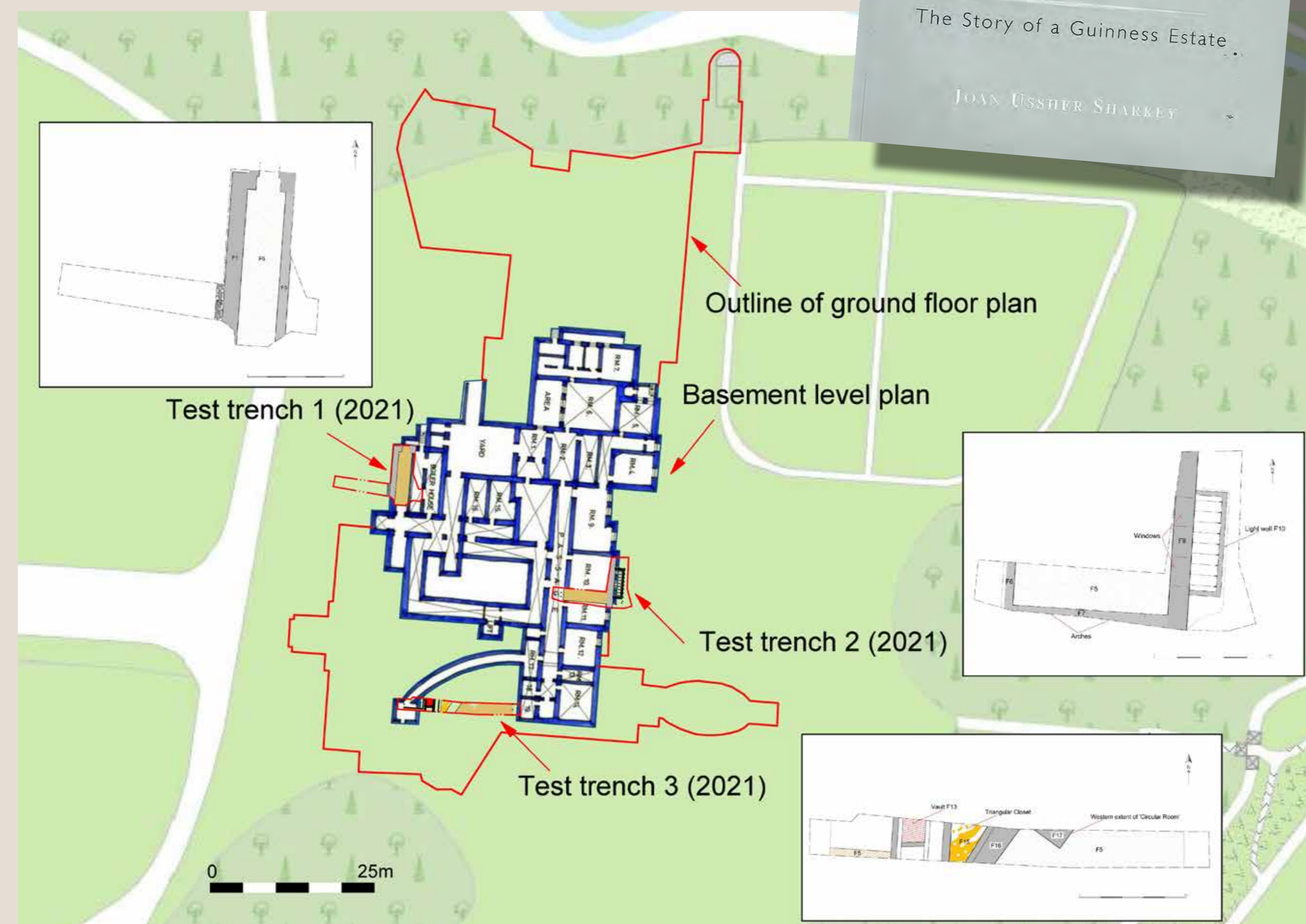
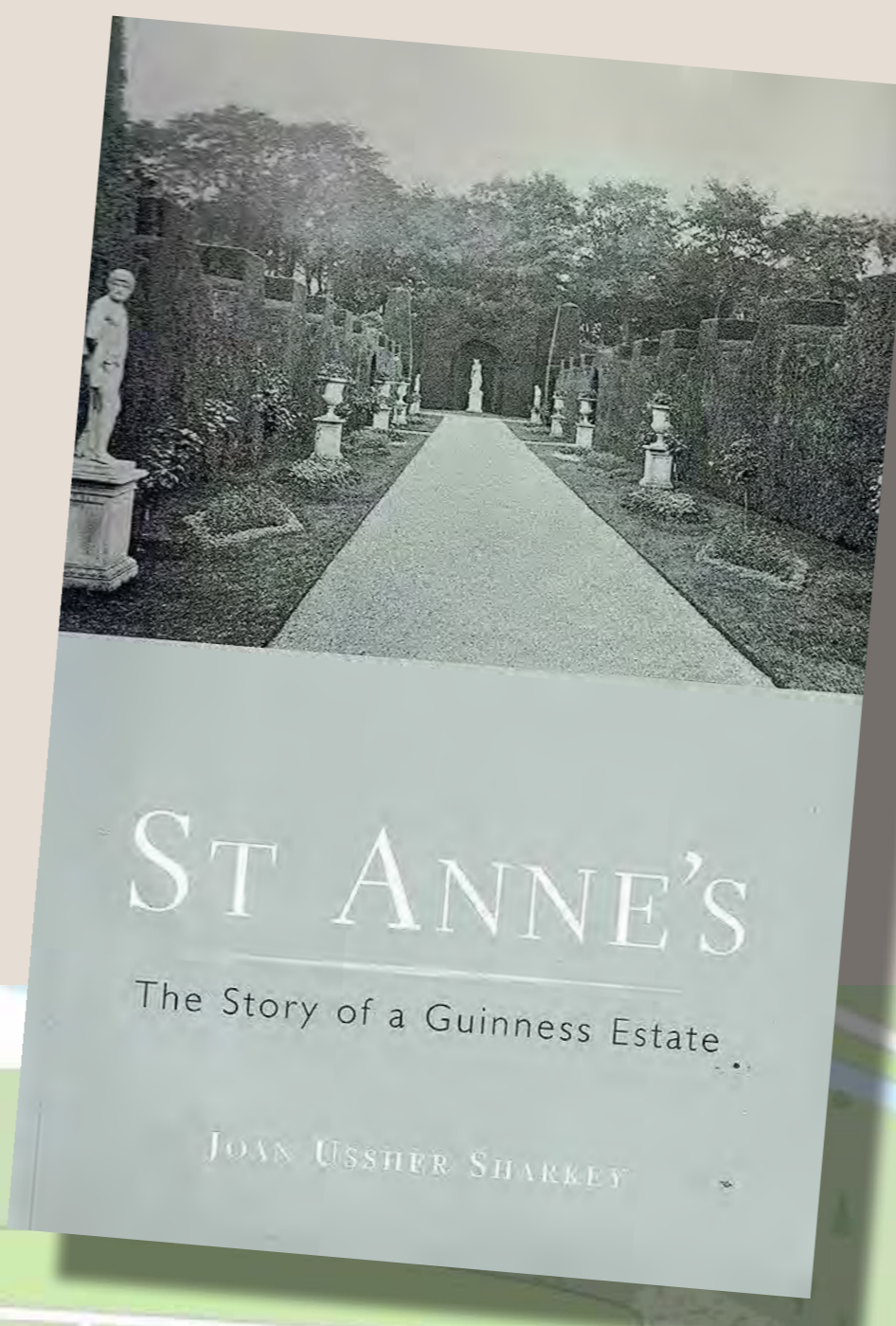
Trench 4 a small trench across the location of the portico revealed no remains.

Community Excavation 2022

Twenty-three volunteer archaeologists took part in a five-day excavation along the south wing of the mansion. The excavation revealed the preserved remains of the Statue and Drawing Rooms. Masonry features included substantial window recesses from the Statue Room, and the distinctive apse which originally housed an organ in the Drawing Room. A large collection of beautifully crafted plaster moulds from the apse were found. The excavation demonstrated that the external footprint of the south wing is preserved below the mound.

North Mound Investigations 2022

A test trench across the north mound revealed that it is made of clay. The surface of the original yard was exposed below the mound, as was a garden wall aligned with the Herculaneum Temple.



Beginning of the End

1925 Following the death of Lord Ardilaun in 1915 and Lady Ardilaun in 1925, the estate was inherited by their nephew Bishop Plunket.

1939 Following the sale of the house to Dublin Corporation for £55,000, a fine art auction of the contents was held.

1943 A fire broke out turning the building to ruin.

1968 The house was demolished by a wrecking ball.

Almost at once, flames shot out of the top windows of the east wing, in which the fire began.

On Christmas Eve 1943, the mansion was engulfed and brought to ruin by a large fire. The house had been unoccupied for several decades and was in the ownership of Dublin Corporation. The blaze was discovered around midnight by the caretaker Mr. Hugh Savage who summoned the fire brigade. The fire raged through the east wing and by 4.30am much of the building was engulfed. A.R.P. equipment including gas masks, boots and highly flammable chemicals stored in the building throughout the Emergency were destroyed. Despite the great efforts of the local fire services, the fire burned for three days.

The ruined shell survived for 25 years before a wrecking ball was employed to finally demolish what remained of the house. Many locals still have fond childhood memories of the ruins.

The story of St Anne's survives through these people with a new generation of volunteer archaeologists helping to unearth and resurrect the story of a local palatial mansion.



Evening Herald 1891-current, 14.08.1962, page 5
ST. ANNE'S PARK PLANNING
The burnt-out mansion at St. Anne's Park, Clontarf, would not be reconstructed and the remaining walls would probably have to be removed, the City Manager told Mr. Timmons, T.D. But a final decision to that had not been taken, he added, pending consideration in consultation with the Streets Committee of the final stages of the park development scheme.

Irish Press 1931-1995, 10.12.1936, page 6
BISHOP PLUNKET'S RESIDENCE
CORPORATION NEGOTIATING PURCHASE OF MANSION AND GROUNDS
REPORT that negotiations had been completed by the Dublin Corporation, with Bishop Plunket, for the purchase of St. Anne's mansion and gardens at Clontarf, and a demesne covering 480 acres, was denied by Mr. J. P. Keane, City Manager, when approached by an IRISH PRESS representative yesterday.
It is a fact, however, that negotiations for the purchase of the property are in the preliminary stages, and that the Housing Committee of the Corporation, with the responsible officials, propose to examine the property.
This prospective housing site has extensive frontages on Howth Road, and from Raheny strand to Dollymount. It is stated that the site would be an ideal one for building development on an extensive scale.
No concrete plans, it is understood, have been made by the Corporation authorities pending the outcome of the negotiations.

DUBLIN MANSION DESTROYED
ST. ANNE'S, Clontarf, one of Dublin's most picturesque mansions, with large stocks of A.R.P. equipment stored in it, was destroyed by fire last night.
The residence and the estate were taken over by the Corporation some years ago, and the emergency began to store A.R.P. equipment, including gas masks, chemicals for decontamination, rubber boots and gas masks, in the mansion.
The section of the house containing the historical library was first involved, and the fire spread to the rest of the building. A strong wind fanned the flames. The roof of the wing soon collapsed and the firemen could not get on trying to save the rest of the building.
The fire was discovered by the caretaker, Mr. Hugh Savage, about midnight. He investigated the cause of the fire and heard a crash in the wing above and saw flames in the sky. He then summoned the fire brigade and the fire was seen.



ST. ANNE'S CLONTARF, DUBLIN.
THE WELL-KNOWN MAGNIFICENT COLLECTION OF PERIOD FURNITURE, OLD WATERFORD GLASS, LIBRARY OF BOOKS, NAPOLEONIC AUTOGRAPHS, OLD SILVER, BIJOUX, AND OIL PAINTINGS.
AUGUSTINE JACKSON STOPS & FITZGERALD 15, WINDY STREET, DUBLIN



St Anne's Park Follies



Herculanean House or Temple
This folly, inspired by houses and temples of the Classical world, merges many forms of Neoclassical architecture. In 2018, conservation works revealed a tiled floor with 348 tiles from the historic Giustiniani ceramic manufacturer in Naples.



Bridge and Hermitage
Two ornamental bridges span the gorge of the Naniken River. The most elaborate is a gothic-style calp stone footbridge, which dates to c. 1865. Composed of Dublin calp limestone, it forms a single pointed arch over the river with two smaller pointed arched openings, one leading to a vaulted walkway off which a hermit's cell is located.



Rockeries
Rockeries became fashionable throughout the nineteenth century with the introduction of artificial rocks known as Pulhamite. A series of grottoes, caves and garden ornamentation constructed with Pulhamite were built along the Naniken River.



Ornamental Bridge and Grotto
Located further downstream a second ornamental bridge leads to a grotto. The bridge is decorated with stalactite rustication with carved limestone spandrels either side. The grotto is a domed structure of calp limestone with a rusticated stone front.



Roman Tower
The Roman Tower originally formed part of St Anne's house and probably functioned as a belvedere or viewing tower to enjoy views over Dublin Bay. It is depicted on the house on a sketch by architect Henry Hill dated to 1837 but was relocated to its present position in the 1870s.



St Anne's Well
The ancient holy well, for which the house was named, is historically associated with St Anne. The well is depicted on the 1843 Ordnance Survey map. Today it is defined by a rustic arch erected c. 1865. It is similar to the design and materials of the grotto and ornamental bridge along the Naniken River.

Walled Garden and Clock Tower
In 1850 Benjamin Lee Guinness developed the walled garden and four-storey clock tower. This served as a vegetable garden and included a range of glasshouses and outbuildings. The brick clock tower houses a large bell on which Benjamin Lee Guinness's name and family motto, *Spes Mea in Deo* (My Hope is in God) is inscribed.



Yew Circle
The yew circle, accessed from the walled garden, was defined by a central basin and sculptural fountain, surrounded by a circular yew hedge which originally had arched openings housing marble statues. Dublin City Council Parks Department has undertaken conservation works to the fountain and yew hedge in recent years.



The Rustic Arched Grotto
Experiencing the gardens at St Anne's started from the conservatory at the rear of the house, with a linear walk that led to this rustic grotto. The grotto is set within an artificial embankment and comprises three rustic arches faced with rubble conglomerate stone. It dates to c. 1855-1860.



Tower Bridge
The Tower Bridge was the earliest folly, built in 1839 to commemorate the birth of Anne Lee Guinness. The gothic structure is defined by a castellated tower leading to a narrow footbridge above the former carriage road which ran between the house and the coast road.



Pompeii Temple
The Pompeii Temple was also designed in a Neoclassical style inspired by ancient temples. It overlooks an artificial pond fed by the Naniken River and originally functioned as a tea house.

