

Preliminary archaeological excavation report

**St Anne's House (formerly Thornhill)
St Anne's Park
Raheny
Dublin 5**

By

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been prepared by James Kyle of Archaeology & Built Heritage Ltd. to detail the preliminary results of a community excavation which was undertaken on part of the site of St Anne's House (formerly Thornhill) in St Anne's Park, Raheny, Dublin 5 (Figure 1). The aim of the community excavation was to give members of the local community and interested members of the public a chance to experience an archaeological excavation and also to gauge how much of the remains of the former St. Anne's House, survived below the surface in an area of the former mansion site which had only partially been subjected to geophysical survey and which had not been assessed under archaeological testing which was undertaken in 2021 under licence ref. 21E0275 by Johnny Ryan of Archaeology & Built Heritage.
- 1.2 This excavation formed part of the St. Anne's Community Archaeology Project for 2022, which is an ongoing diverse program of events, walking tours and living history that seeks to involve, engage and educate members of the local community about the rich historical and archaeological setting of the park and the wider area. The project has been funded by the Heritage Office, the Archaeology Office and Parks and Landscape services of Dublin City Council with grant funding from the Heritage Council's County Heritage Plan Grant Scheme and the Creative Ireland Programme.

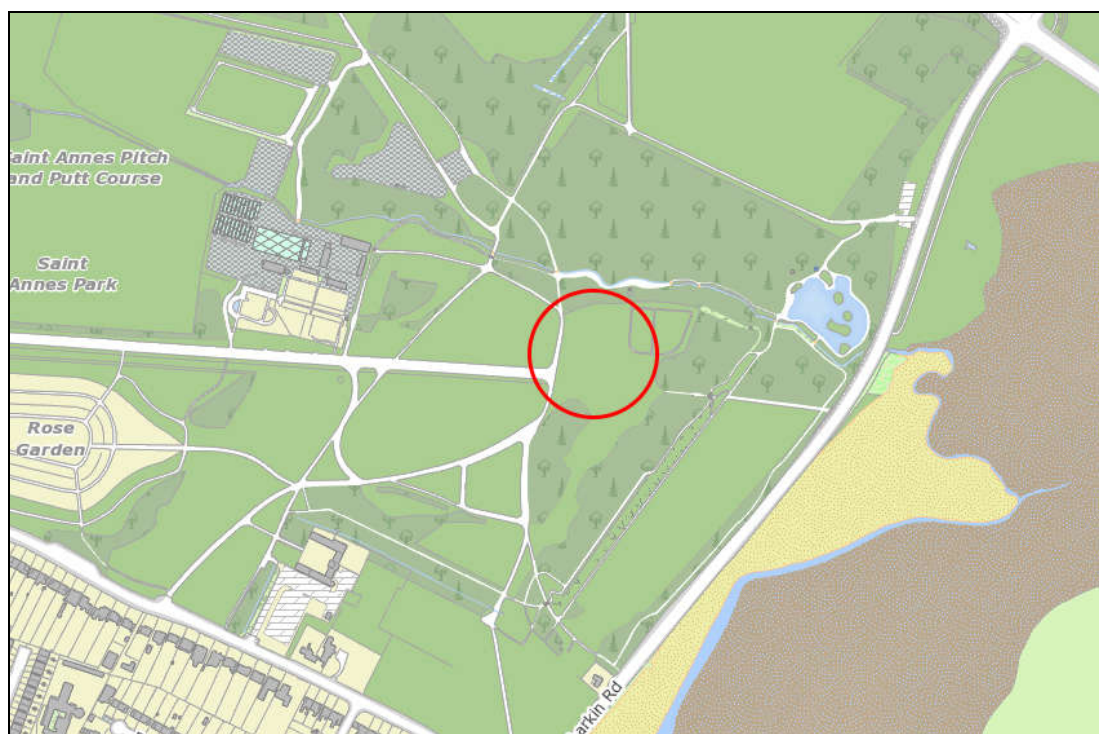


Figure 1 Site location (ASI)

2 Historical and archaeological contexts

- 2.1 The name St Anne's Park was given to the Thornhill estate by Lord Ardilaun in honour of St Anne's holy well (Reg. No. 50030022) that lies approximately 225m to the southeast of the mansion (Dawson, 1976, 127). The estate was formerly known as Thornhill estate but was renamed after it was acquired by the brothers Arthur and Benjamin Lee Guinness in 1835.

The Naniken River flows through the park. Naniken or *Abhann na gCian* being a derivative of the name of the local clan, the Ciannacht clan which occupied the coastal area between Annagassan and Dublin during the early medieval period.

- 2.2 Thornhill was built sometime at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but a precise date is unknown. It was previously occupied by the H. O'Reilly Esquire, before being sold to Lord Ardilaun and his brother in 1835. After the estate was taken over by Elizabeth and Benjamin Lee Guinness in 1838, the house underwent a series of expansions and developments, and a large Italianate-style residence was built and modified over several generations by the Guinness family.

In 1873, Sir Arthur Guinness commissioned James Franklin Fuller to redesign Thornhill. The building work was carried out by Thomas Millard and the result of the remodelling was to almost double the size of the original house.

James Franklin Fuller was born in Kerry to minor landed gentry in 1835, and in 1850 he moved to England serving apprenticeships in various firms including Summers, Day and Baldock mechanical engineers and then in the offices Frederick William Porter in London. He worked for a number of other architects in London, Manchester and Sheffield. In 1861 he returned to Kerry. In 1862 he started in the role of district architect under the Irish ecclesiastical commissioners in charge of the North-western Division and in 1869, after the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland, he set up his own office at 179 Great Brunswick Street, Dublin.

Thomas Millard was born circa 1811 and originally worked as a cabinet maker in Cheltenham before arriving in Dublin in 1838, taking up a role with the Board of National Education. He set up his own cabinetmaking and upholstery business on Mary Street in Dublin and by 1853 his business was completely dominated by building carrying out jobs for the Board of Public Works, while also specialising in the erection of residential mansions for the nobility and gentry.

- 2.3 The Down Survey from 1654-56 shows the area which St Anne's Park currently occupies as being part of the Lord of Howth's Land. The mouth of both the Nanikan River and the Santry River are clearly marked to the southeast of the approximate location of St Anne's mansion (Figure 2).

A more detailed map of the area was carried out by John Rocque in 1757 as part of his Survey of the City, Harbour, Bay and Environs of Dublin. That source depicts an area

dominated by field systems, with no buildings marked on the present site. Two buildings can be seen lying to the east of the future site of Thornhill/St Anne's.

An estate map by Brassington and Gale from 1835 shows Thornhill House, the surrounding walled garden and the access routes (Figure 4). The first detailed survey of the area was the 6-inch Ordnance Survey; carried out in 1836 and published in 1843. The revision of this map in 1868 shows St Anne's mansion (St Ann's) after its' expansion from the more modest, yet still substantial house that was depicted by Brassington and Gale.

The 25-inch Ordnance Survey of this area, carried out in 1907 and published in 1910, shows the extent of St Anne's house after it was completely remodelled. St Anne's Estate was acquired by Dublin Corporation in 1939 for approximately £55,000, after which it was used as a store by the Defence Forces. In December 1943 it was gutted by a fire. The shell of the house remained upstanding until it was demolished in 1968. It is believed that much of the two mounds that now stand over the footprint of the house were only added in the 1980's and further archaeological test trenching conducted by the author under licence ref. 21E0375 in late October 2022 evidenced the truth of that belief.

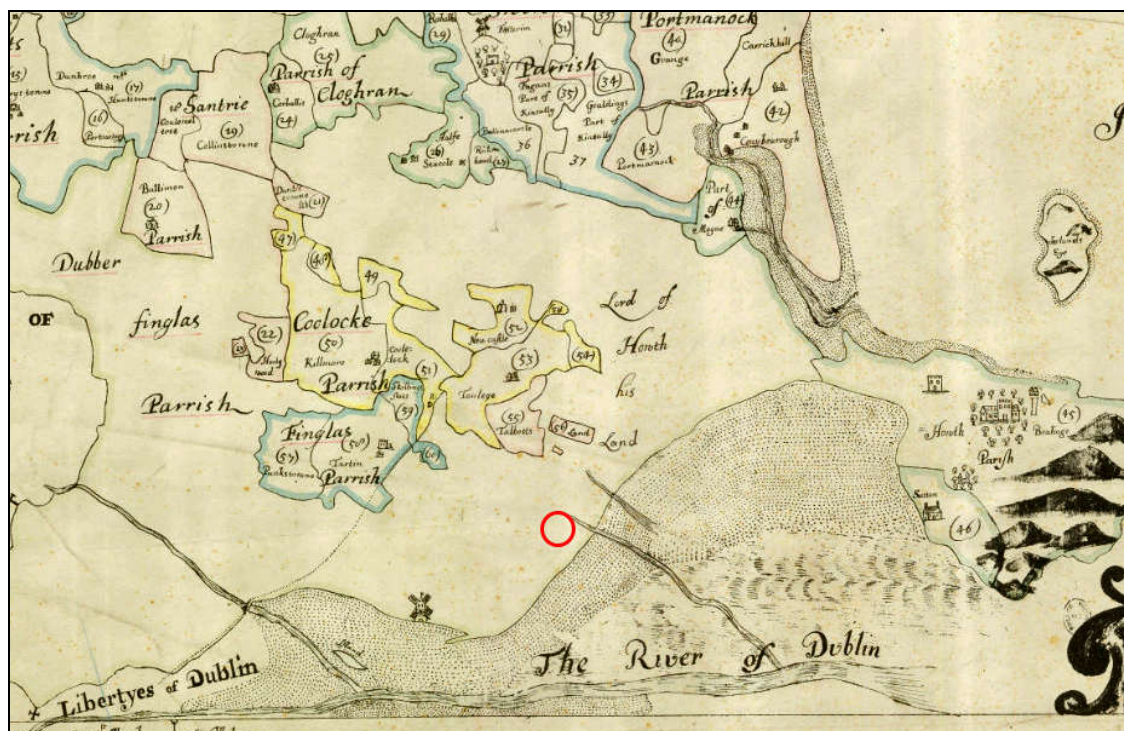


Figure 2 Down Survey 1654-56



Figure 3 Extract from John Rocque's 1757 survey showing the approximate location of the mansion



Figure 4 Extract from Brassington and Gale's Map of Thornhill House and Estate (Dublin City Council)

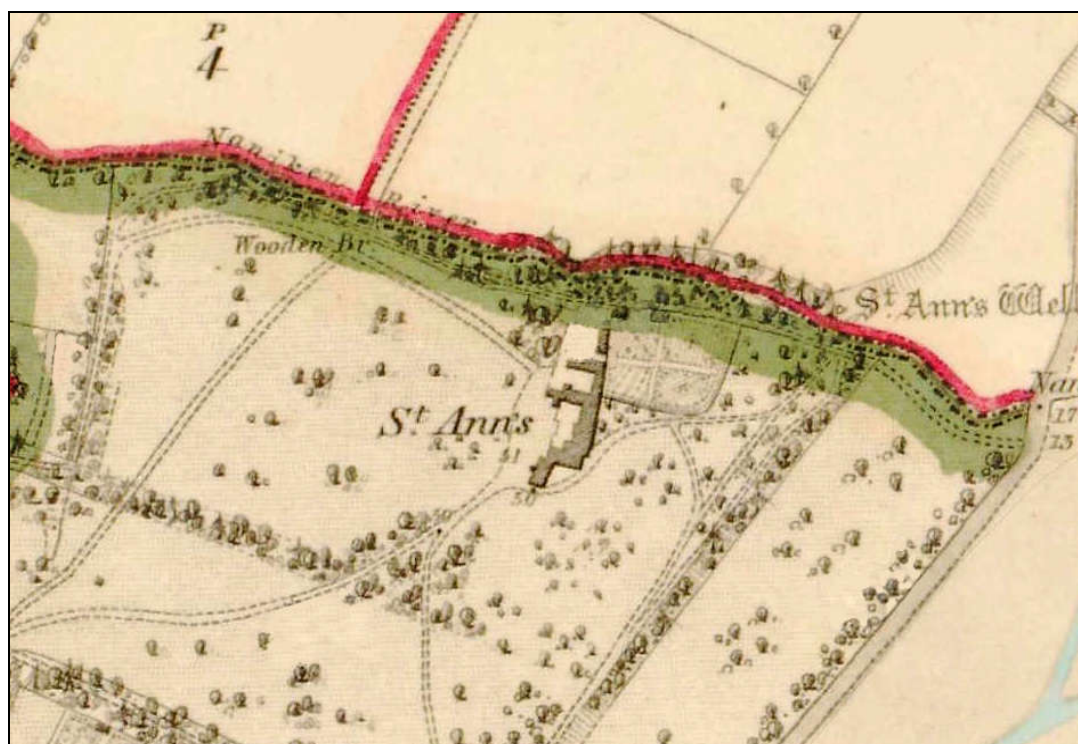


Figure 5 1st edition 6-inch Ordnance Survey map (Sheet DN019)

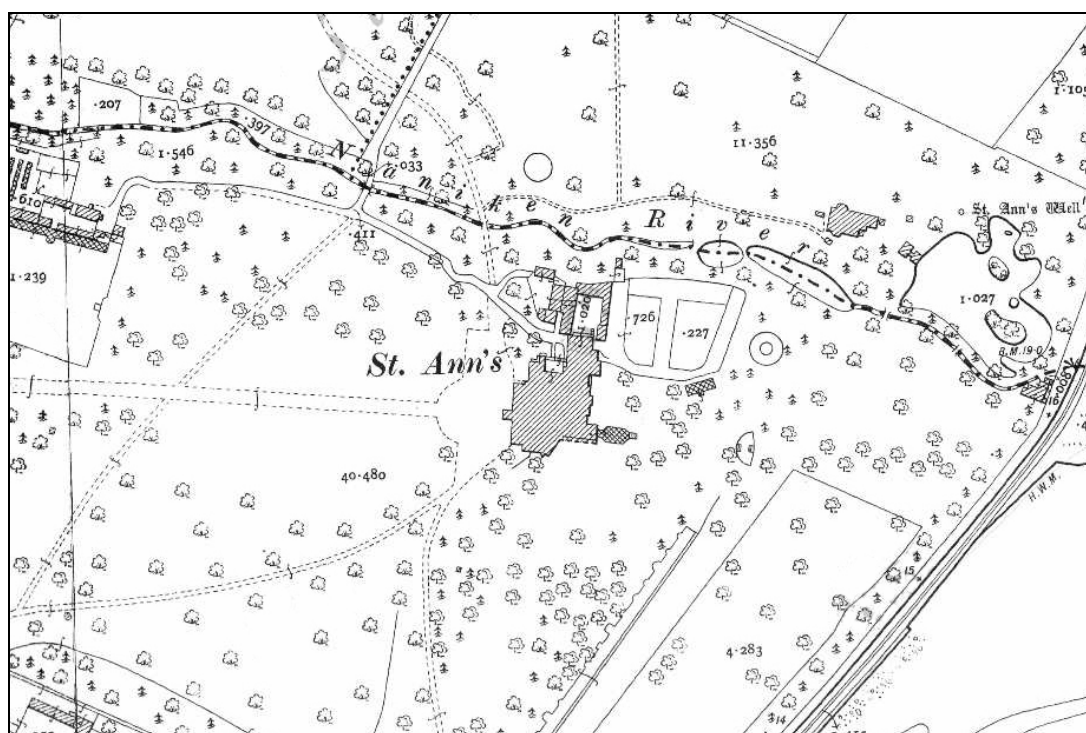


Figure 6 25-inch Ordnance Survey map (Sheets DN019-01 and DN019-02)

3 Recorded monuments and previous archaeological investigations

- 3.1 The archaeological constraint maps in conjunction with the county Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) provides an initial database for planning authorities, state agencies and other bodies involved in environmental change.

The Record of Monuments and Places comprise the following elements: (i) Letter or Letters indicating County (DU = Dublin); (ii) A three digit number indicating the relevant Ordnance Survey Sheet Number (e.g. 004); (iii) A three, four or five digit number indicating the dedicated number of the individual site or monument.

The proposed development area contains no known monuments. There are five known monumenets located within 800m of the site.

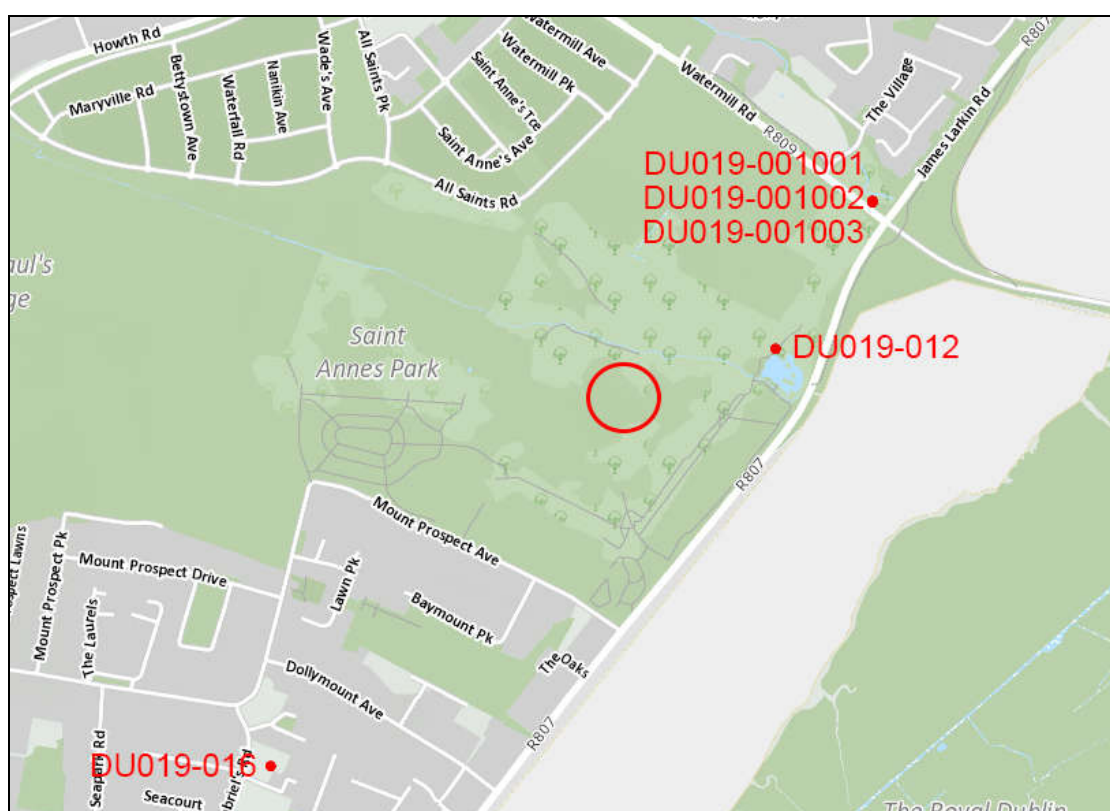


Figure 7 Location of recorded monuments within an 800m radius of the site (ASI, Historical Environment Viewer)

SMR No.	Class	Townland
DU019-001001	House - 16th/17th century	Dublin North City
DU019-001002	Armorial plaque	BETTYVILLE (Coolock By.),Dublin North City
DU019-001003	Water mill - unclassified	Dublin North City
DU019-012	Ritual site - holy well	Dublin North City
DU019-016	Mound	Dublin North City

Table 1 List of the recorded monuments within 800m of the site

- 3.2 Two previous archaeological investigations have been carried out within the boundaries of St Anne's Park, which is Dublin city's second largest municipal park, these were:

Licence Ref. 16E0164

Archaeological monitoring was conducted by Helen Kehoe on cleaning works at St. Anne's Well from which the park derives its name, (RMP -DU019012). This was part of an overall project to clean and sensitively repair many of the follies within the park. St. Anne's Well was carefully cleared of vegetation and built-up of organic matter, however nothing of archaeological significance was encountered.

Licence Ref. 21E0375

The aim of the 2021 program of archaeological testing conducted by Johnny Ryan of Archaeology & Built Heritage Ltd. on the site of St. Anne's House was to ascertain the extent to which subsurface remains of the former structure survived in-situ, in particular the cellars. The make-up of the two mounds which now stand on the site was determined through testing to be the demolished remains of the upper floors of the structure, with the ground floor of the structure found to be reasonably intact to a height of 0.4m above PGL, additionally the survival of the extensive cellars was also confirmed at basement level. That licence was re-activated in October 2022 and transferred to the author in order to assess the archaeological potential of the north mound and to examine for the presence of a structural link between the house & yard and the Herculaneum Temple folly. Those investigations indicated that the north mound comprised at its deepest point 4.2m of fill material deposited in two distinct episodes of deposition, both late 1970's/ early 1980's in date. Additionally, the investigation uncovered the line of a foundation running from the rear of the House/Yard to the folly. A preliminary report into those findings will issue from this office presently.

- 3.3 The files in the National Museum of Ireland have been consulted. Collectively known as the Topographical Files, they provide information on artefacts, their find spots and any field monuments, which have been notified to the National Museum.

Only one artefact has been found within a 1km vicinity of the site area which was believed to have been a 19th century belt clasp (IA/56/83) and returned to the finder, the find spot was located 500m northeast of the location of this site and external to St. Anne's Park.



Figure 8 Ground floor plan of St Anne's House with the outline of the two mounds, showing locations of proposed cuttings A, B, C, in blue (ASI and Sharkey).

4 Discussion

4.1 Upon initial consultation of the available mapping three trench/cutting locations A, B & C were identified (Figure 8) by the author in an effort to maximise the potential for structural remains of the former Mansion which could be excavated in a safe fashion and without the concern of encountering the underlying basement levels/mansion cellars. Trenches B & C were selected and ultimately time constraints meant that the efforts of our volunteer excavation team were concentrated, for best effect, on Trench B, to examine for the presence of structural remains relating to the Statue Room and Drawing Room of the former Mansion.

4.2 The excavated trench was located on the southwestern edge of the south mound, a topographical feature which is occupying the site of the former St Anne's House and built up as the result of an accumulation of rubble following the demolition of the building in 1968. The excavation sought to investigate the extent of preservation of the Drawing Room and the Statue Room, which effectively formed the south wing of the former Mansion. In all, the cutting measured 2m east-west by 25m north-south and our community volunteer archaeologists revealed a number of in-situ masonry features corresponding with the plan of the former house (Figure 8). The features included both external and internal walls, surfaces, and architectural features such as window recesses and what was believed to be a substantial bay window located at the southwestern end of the former Drawing Room. Subsequent reference to contemporary photographs of the interior from the Plunkett Collection have revealed this to be a highly decorative apse at the northwestern end of the Drawing Room, an apse which housed a substantial organ (Plate 6).

In terms of the stratigraphical sequence, the trench comprised of a rubble infill, C.2, concealed beneath the topsoil/sod layer, C.1. The rubble infill varied between 0.4m and 1.2m in depth and comprised a dense deposit of loose mortar, dimension stone, brick, occasional glass fragments and decayed wood. A large quantity of highly ornate plasterwork pieces was recovered from C.2, including moulded cornice fragments. The 0.15m in depth topsoil C.1 was a well-drained, sterile and loose, brown silty clay.

4.3 The Statue Room

The former statue room (Plate 1 & Plate 5), C.3, was located within the south wing of the former mansion, effectively forming part of the latter's western wing. The excavated extent of this room within the trench measured 5m by 1.8m. A row of *in-situ* red brick, C.11, was uncovered protruding from beneath the mortar floor surface in the statue room, which possibly indicated the presence of an underlying basement level or cellar beneath this level.

The excavation efforts of the volunteers also revealed that a mortared floor surface, C.14, (5m x 0.9m) formed an intact internal subsurface remnant beneath C.2. The remains of an internal wall, C.9, were uncovered and revealed to be constructed upon the foundation, C.14, and orientated north-south whilst being keyed into the external wall C.7, evidencing its contemporaneity with the latter. The feature (C.9) comprised cut limestone blocks, two

courses high and a single row in width, capped with a bed of mortar (0.85m x 0.4m x 0.2m). The remains of decayed wooden joists were identified sitting upon C.9 indicating that the internal feature supported a raised wooden floor. An additional internal supporting wall, C.15, was situated 2m west of C.9 and this was identical in size and form to the latter.

The outer extent of the room, and indeed the mansion, was defined by the external wall C.7, which was east-west orientated and comprised a limestone block foundation with a single course of red brick walling (C.8) surviving and terminating at a large cut block of Portland stone (part of an overlap of the house façade), located at its western end (within the trench). A clear footing 0.2m in width was identified on the external side of C.7. Additionally, the base of two window recesses, both a uniform 1.8m x 0.6m, were defined by twin reveals within the red brick wall (C.8). The remains of a decayed wooden plank lined the base of the eastern recess (Plate 2), which was possibly a remnant of a sash window. It was also noteworthy that a significant assemblage of broken glass was identified within C.2 in this area, some of fragments of which were stained glass and some of which were painted, suggesting that the windows of the Statue Room were at least partially decorative in nature.

A raised mortar surface C.10 (0.4m x 0.3m) was located at the western end of the Statue Room (C.3) which was suggestive of the small atrium/entrance room illustrated on the architectural floor plan of the mansion (Figure 8) and which would have permitted direct access from outside of the house to this wing of the mansion. The remains of a square sectioned cast iron downpipe and covered drain (C.12) were located externally on the southwestern corner of C.10, something which informs the detail of the former rainwear of this part of the structure. The excavation also uncovered evidence that the Statue Room masonry abutted that of the Drawing Room, indicating the former to be an addition to the structure as part of a later phase of the mansion's construction.

4.4 The Drawing Room

Part of the Drawing Room (C.4) was uncovered to the east of the Statue Room and the investigated extent within the trench measured 7m in width, with just over 2.5m of the room's original length present in the cutting. Due to time constraints and tree root ingress, the area was not fully excavated with some of the rubble infill remaining *in-situ*. Nevertheless, the floor plan of C.4 was ascertained with the identification of the external wall features including the northwest/southeast wall C.5 (Plate 4) and the organ apse, C.6. The limestone block construction of C.5 (2.4m in length; 0.8m in width, 0.45m in depth) ran at a greater than perpendicular angle to C.7, something which again alluded to the differing construction dates of the two walls.

The division between both the Statue Room C.3 and Drawing Room C.4 was defined by a relatively wide wall C.13 (1.1m in length; 1.5m in width; 0.21m in depth), which effectively formed the partition between the two rooms. The feature comprised limestone cut blocks which were capped with a bed of mortar and it thus had the general appearance of a foundation. The western edge of C.13 was abutted by C.7 with the western edge of the latter

running perpendicular to the former. The organ apse foundation, C.6, survived in-situ, with its curved foundation arc located against the southern section of the trench (Plate 3), which comprised fair faced cut limestone blocks. The internal width of the apse was quite expansive, measuring 3m across, something which suggested the grandeur of the feature and the room itself, a detail which was underlined by the rich deposits of ornate moulded plaster fragments included in the rubble infill, C.2, which was excavated from within the internal perimeter of the organ apse (Plate 6).

5 Conclusion

- 5.1 The archaeological remains which were uncovered in the excavated trench assisted in determining the footprint of this small part of the former mansion and additionally the extent to which the structural remains of the former mansion are preserved *in-situ*. Furthermore, architectural features including window recesses and the substantial decorative apse feature depicted on architect's plan of the building and as evidenced in contemporary photographs of the interior (Plate 6) were also revealed. This has reinforced the findings from the 2021 programme of test trenching (21E0375) which was undertaken by Johnny Ryan of ABH Ltd. on the south mound which had previously highlighted the survival of many of the internal and external masonry features (Ryan 2021). In the case of the Mansion's south wing, the extent of the redevelopment which took place between 1873 and 1880 is evidenced by the structural remains which appear to survive in a highly intact fashion, approximately 0.2m beneath the present ground level in the park.
- 5.2 The author wishes to extend his heartfelt thanks to the team of volunteers, for their enthusiasm, hard work and love for our shared heritage. Thank you, Caroline Beason, James Brown, Lorraine Collier, Rachel Cronin, Lynsey Curran, Maeve Deady, Alison Dempsey, Arthur Doherty, Clare Jordan, John Kehoe, Alan Keogh, Deirdre Kinlay, Eamon Kirwan, Hilary Klompenhouwer, Ilya Krinchiyan, Nichola McGrattan, Ellen McGuirk, Linda McGuirk, Miriam McGuirk, Danielle O'Sullivan, Donal O'Sullivan, Stephanie Peat, Sine Vasquez.

I'd also like to say an additional thank you to the hundreds of people who came to see us over the five days in St. Anne's Park, to my colleagues Rory Blount, Peter Dodd and Wayne Malone for their diligence and patience, to Cathy Moore for her dynamic organisation skills, to Maggie Kobik and Franc Myles of ABH Ltd., to everyone at all of the various divisions of Dublin City Council and particularly to Charles Duggan, Dublin City Council's Heritage Officer, Dr. Ruth Johnson, Dublin City Archaeologist and Dr. Niall Colfer, Assistant Dublin City Archaeologist.



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Plates



PLATE 1: The Statue Room, facing West



PLATE 2: Window recess in external wall of Statue Room, facing south



PLATE 3: Organ apse foundation, in north facing section



PLATE 4 External NE/SW wall, C.5, of Drawing Room, facing southeast



PLATE 5 Interior of Statue Room, c.1876 (Plunkett Collection)



PLATE 6 View of Drawing Room towards organ and apse c.1876 (Plunkett Collection)

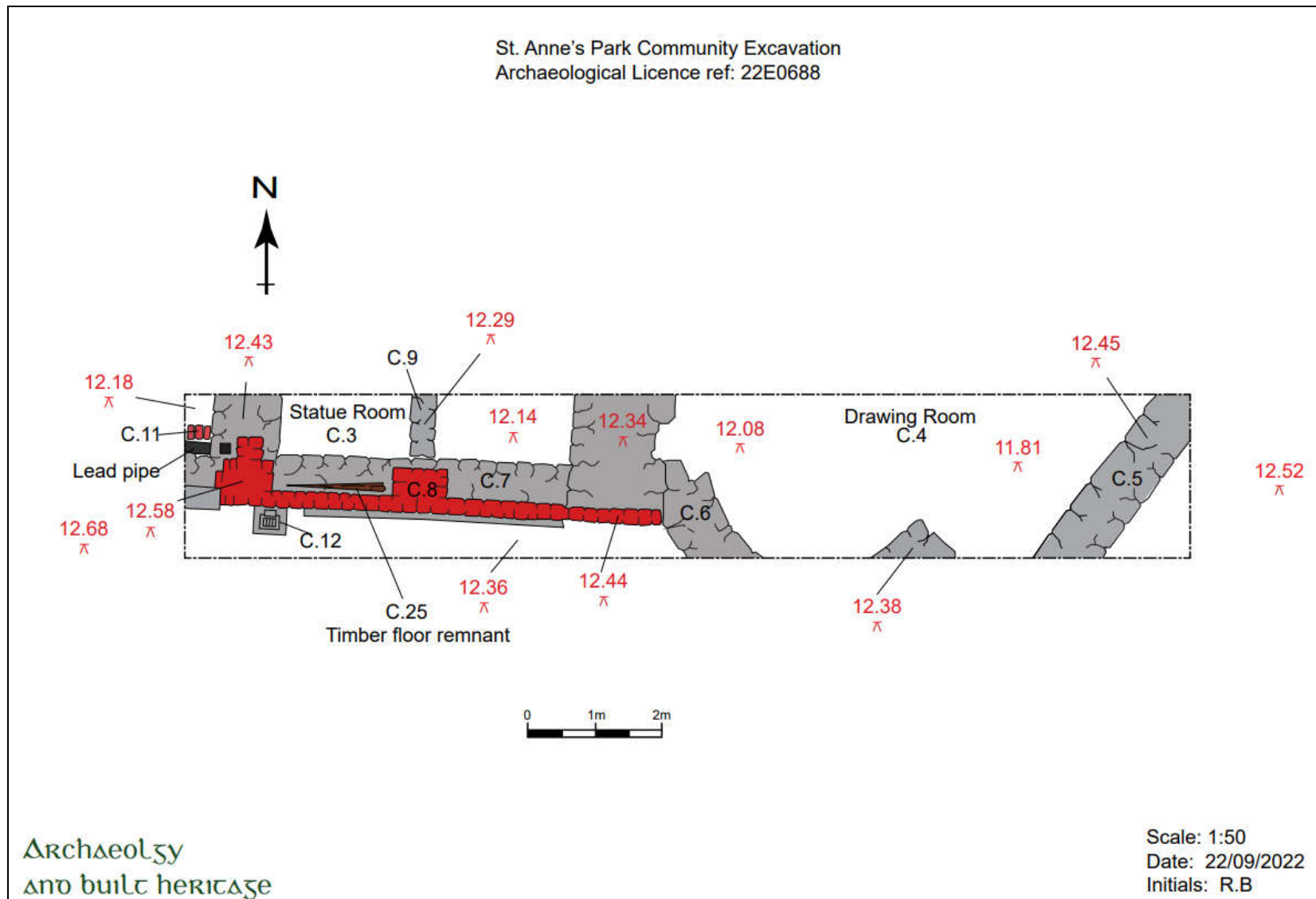


Figure 9

Post excavation plan of trench 1:50 scale

