

Preliminary archaeological excavation report

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

**Licence ref. 22E0688X ext**

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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been prepared by James Kyle and Wayne Malone of Archaeology & Built Heritage Ltd. to detail the preliminary results of season two of 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 excavation was twofold; to expand on the success of the pilot community excavation program 2022 while addressing the development of a significant Victorian palatial house. The preservation of in-situ architectural features and deposits relating to the occupation, fire and demolition of the structure ensures the opportunity for volunteers to engage with tangible archaeological material as well as assess the phases of the structural development and ultimate demise of the house. The excavation ran from 11<sup>th</sup> September to 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2023, and it was conducted by the site director James Kyle under licence ref. 22E0688X (ext), with thanks to the volunteer archaeologists with the assistance of site supervisor Wayne Malone and archaeologists Rory Blount, Mick Mongey and Aidan Giblin.
- 1.2 This excavation formed part of the St. Anne's Community Archaeology Project for 2023, which is an ongoing program of diverse events, archaeological displays and living history demonstrations 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 Offices of the Heritage Officer, the City Archaeologist and the Parks & Landscape services of Dublin City Council with grant funding from the Heritage Council's County Heritage Plan Grant Scheme and the Creative Ireland Programme.
- 1.3 This report has been prepared by the author on behalf of Dublin City Council in order to satisfy the terms of the archaeological licence as granted by the National Monuments Service, part of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. This document outlines the results of the archaeological excavation at the site which was centred on the western portion of the mansion's southern wing. All archaeological features were excavated and recorded in accordance with the former DoEHLG's Policy and Guidelines on Archaeological Excavation. The excavation produced a moderate range of materials including stained and painted glass, plaster mouldings, tile fragments and artefacts relating to the ultimate use of the house as a depot for Air Raid Protection (A.R.P.) rations and supplies during the period in Irish history known as 'The Emergency' but known to the rest of the world as World War II. All artefacts will be registered in a National Museum of Ireland standard database, conservation and specialist analysis will be undertaken where necessary.



Figure 1 Site location within St. Anne's Park (ASI)

## 2 Historical and archaeological contexts

- 2.1 The name St Anne's was adopted from the nearby 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 house 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 Ciannachta which occupied the coastal area between Annagassan and Dublin at the start of the early medieval period.

- 2.2 The Down Survey mapping from 1654-56 shows the area which St Anne's Park currently occupies as being part of the Lord of Howth's lands. 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 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.

- 2.3 Thornhill was built at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but the precise date is unknown, with land deeds dating to 1747 (Sharkey 2002). It was occupied by the H. O'Reilly Esquire, immediately before its sale to the brothers Benjamin Lee and Arthur Lee Guinness in 1835. After his marriage to his first cousin Elizabeth 'Bessie' Guinness in 1837 Benjamin Lee bought his brother out of the estate in 1838, with the house immediately undergoing 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, Benjamin Lee's son, Sir Arthur Guinness, commissioned James Franklin-Fuller to redesign St. Anne's. 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 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.

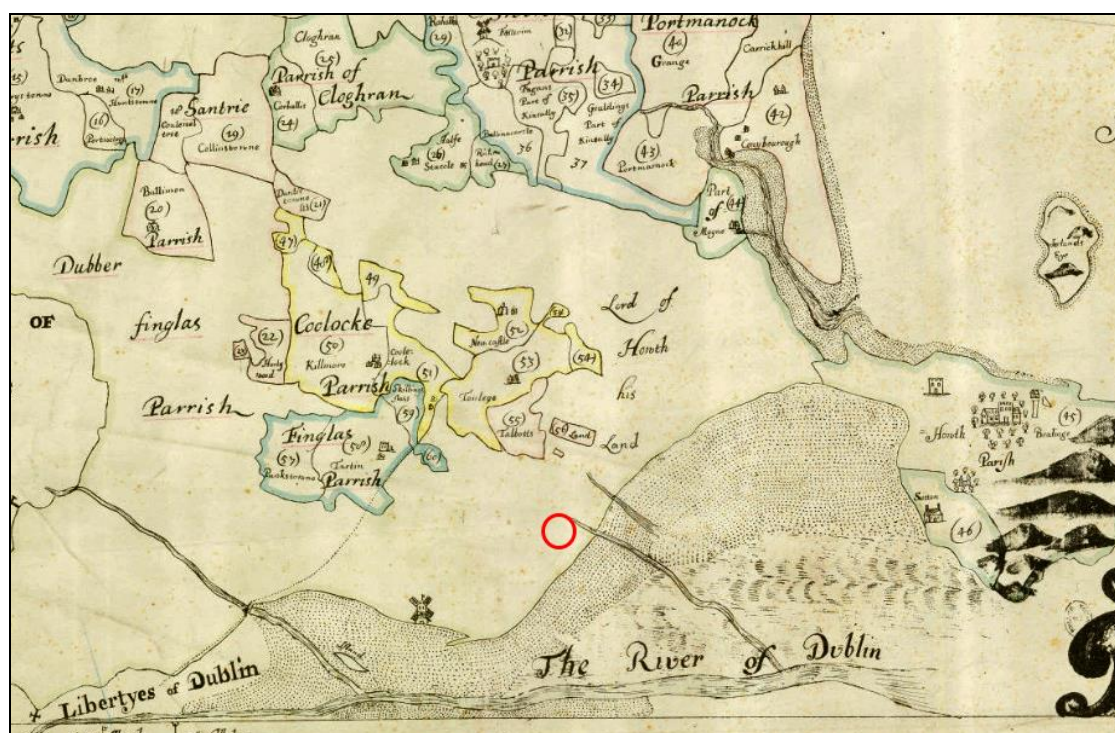


Figure 2 Down Survey map of the area 1654-56





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 c.1832 (Dublin City Council)



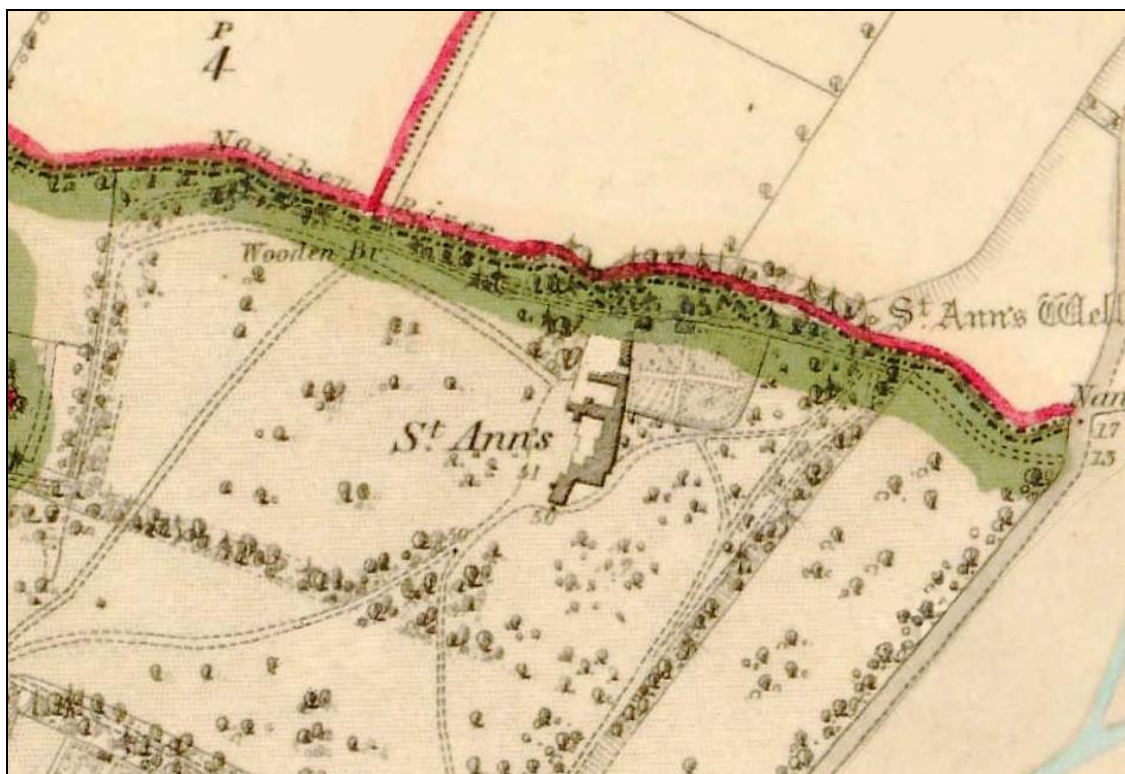


Figure 5 1<sup>st</sup> edition 6-inch Ordnance Survey map (Sheet DN019)

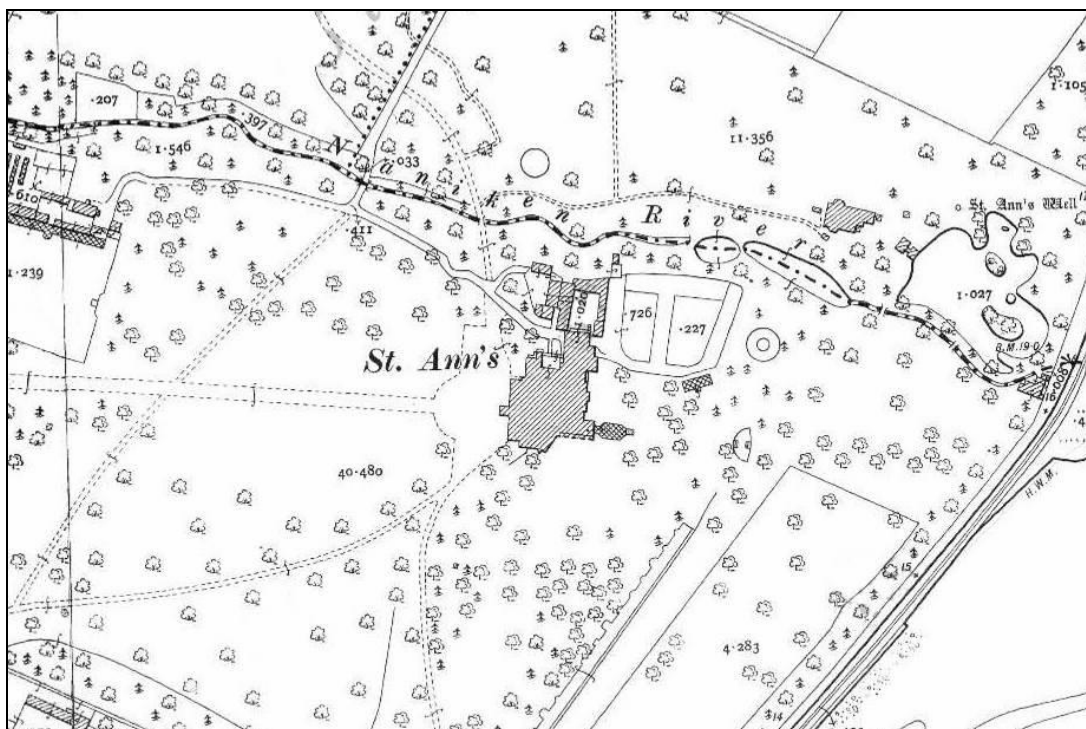


Figure 6 25-inch Ordnance Survey map (Sheets DN019-01 and DN019-02)

### 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.

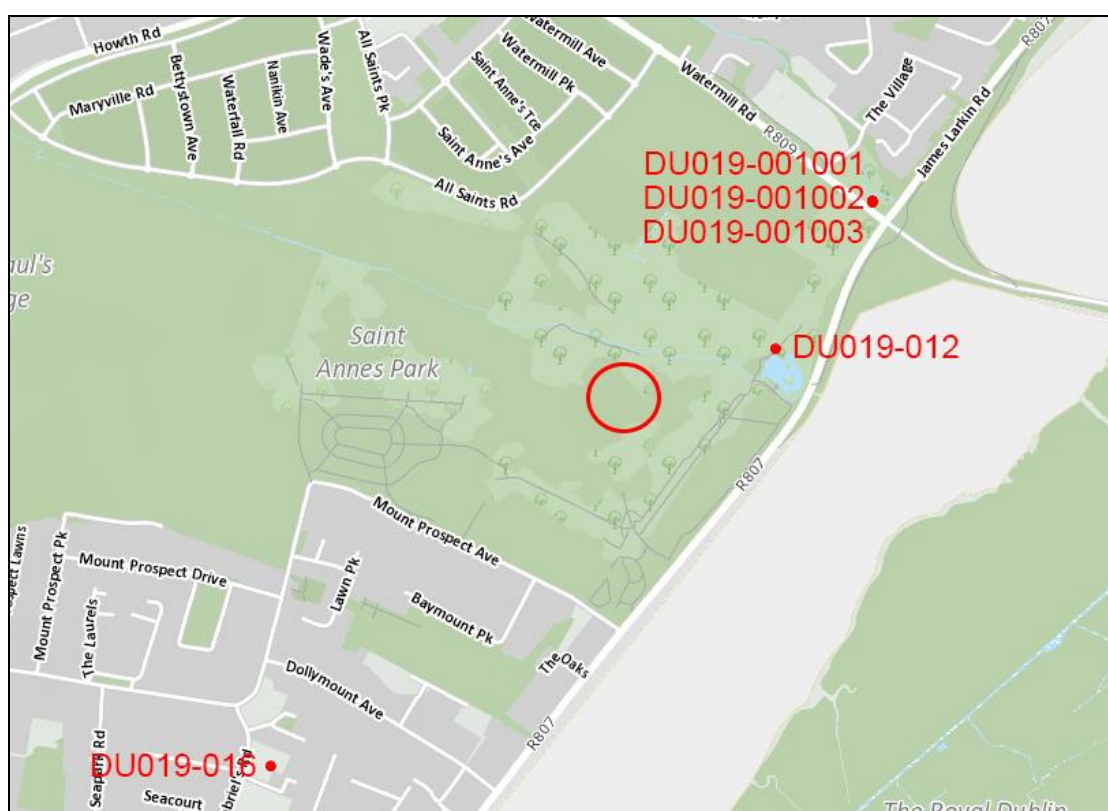


Figure 7 Location of recorded monuments within an 800m radius of the site (ASI, Historical Environment Viewer)

SMR No.	Class	Townland
DU019-001001	House - 16th/17th century	Dublin North City
DU019-001002	Armorial plaque	BETTYVILLE (Coolock) 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 Three 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.

*Licence Ref. 22E0688*

A community pilot excavation was undertaken by the author, with volunteer archaeologists to investigate the extent of preservation of the Drawing Room and the Statue Room over five days in September 2022, with a trench which was excavated by hand measuring 2m east-west by 25m north-south. A number of in-situ masonry features corresponding with the plan of the former house were revealed, with the features including both external and internal walls, surfaces, and architectural features such as window recesses.

- 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 basement in red, showing location of excavated area in blue (ASI & Sharkey)

## 4 Stratigraphy and discussion

- 4.1 An area totalling 150 sq. m<sup>2</sup> on the western side of the southern wing of the former mansion was excavated during the 2023 season, a substantial expansion of the area which was excavated during the previous year's pilot excavation. The roughly triangular cutting was situated on the southwestern edge of the south mound, a topographical feature occupying the site of the former St Anne's House. As demonstrated by archaeological testing and the previous excavation, the south mound comprises an extensive accumulation of building debris deriving from the demolition of the building in 1968.

The 2022 pilot excavation investigated and established the extent of preservation of parts of the Drawing Room and the Statue Room which comprised much of the building's southern wing. That excavation revealed a number of *in-situ* masonry features corresponding with the plan of the former house, including both external and internal walls, surfaces, and architectural features such as window recesses. The 2023 programme expanded on the previous excavation enabling a more complete investigation & recording of the Drawing Room and Statue Room, as well as a Vestibule, which would have functioned as a side access to the structure, and this was located at the western corner of the south wing between the Statue Room and the Picture Gallery (Plate 1 & 5), set back from the main façade. The preservation of the features and stratigraphy facilitated the teaching and training of the community volunteers as well as providing a visual experience for outreach and interaction with visitor groups and park goers.

- 4.2 The stratigraphic sequence served as a tangible exhibit of the final events in the life of the former mansion; the structural remains showed evidence relating to the 1943 fire, all of which was covered by the 1968 demolition layer, C.2, which was itself concealed beneath a layer topsoil/sod layer, C.1, which was added to the rubble pile in the late 1980s to landscape it. The demolition infill varied between 0.7m and 1.4m in depth, comprising a dense deposit of mortar, dressed stone (Plate 5), brick, corroded metal and decaying wood. A large quantity of highly ornate plasterwork pieces was recovered from C.2, including moulded stucco fragments. In terms of artefacts, the deposit C.2 yielded materials that predominately comprised the building fabric of the former house, including tile and stained-glass fragments. The topsoil C.1, was 0.15m in depth and consisted of a well-drained, sterile, and loose, brown silty clay, which was imported to the site in the 1980's to cover the demolished remains.

### 4.3 The Statue Room

The Statue Room (Plate 6), was located within the south wing of the former mansion and the extent of this room within the excavation measured 4.4m north-south and 3.9m east-west, representing approximately 80% of the total sq.m<sup>2</sup> area of the room. A subsurface horizon C.36 extended across the internal space serving as the sub-floor level of the statue room, comprising compact mortar rich brown clay with frequent stone inclusions throughout and this was a uniform 0.3m below the former floor level of the room.



A well consolidated length of wall, C.23, was oriented east-west across the Statue Room, beneath floor level, it measured 5.25m x 0.5m and it was constructed with an arrangement of cut limestone blocks. The relative position of C.23 and its place in the stratigraphic sequence of the excavation suggest that it may have been part of the external walling of Thornhill house. This was further underlined by the remains of the internal wall C.9, which was constructed on C.36 and which ran across C.23, indicating that the former predated the construction of the Statue Room. C.9 was orientated 3.9m north-south across the central axis of the room, it had been rubbed out towards its southern end, however it continued beyond the limit of excavation at the northern baulk. C.9 comprised cut, squared limestone blocks, 0.4m wide and 0.35m high, which were capped with a lens of mortar. The heavily decayed remains of timber floor joists survived in-situ on top of this feature, demonstrating that C.9 served to support the internal flooring of the Statue Room.

The remains of the wall, C.10, formed the internal partition wall between the statue room and vestibule, at the western end of the Statue Room. Partially exposed during 2022, the feature had been interpreted as a surface, however further excavation revealed this element of the structure to be a wall. Orientated north south, and heavily damaged at its northern extent where it originally joined an additional wall C.18, C.10 was 2.4m in length and comprised well-dressed limestone blocks with an internal rubble core. An arrangement of red brick at the southern end of the wall lined an internal lead downpipe, C.21, which suggests the presence of a convenience or sanitation at first floor level above the Statue Room.

The wall, C.7, formed the external wall of the Statue Room and it ran for 7.3m east-west, between the Drawing Room and the Vestibule. The limestone wall C.7 never enjoy a Portland stone façade; however, it would have been constructed above foundation level with red brick, C.8. The arrangement of the red brick of C.8 indicated the base of two window recesses, both a uniform 1.8m wide x 0.6m deep and the remains of a decayed plank of wood lined the base of the eastern recess, which was the possible remnant of a sash window. It was also noteworthy that a significant assemblage of broken glass was identified within C.2 in this area, many fragments of which were stained glass and/or painted, suggesting that the windows of the Statue Room, or indeed the first-floor windows on this side of the mansion were at least partially, if not substantially decorative in nature.

#### 4.4 The Drawing Room

The excavation of the Drawing Room (C.4) located to the east of the Statue Room investigated approximately 50% of the overall floor area of the room, which was oriented northwest-southeast, at an angle to the Statue Room. Excavations of the internal space by the community volunteers identified features which appeared to represent further fabric of Thornhill House.

A subfloor horizon, C.31, was present across much of the drawing room and this was located at a depth of 0.8m below the former floor level of the room, a significant difference to the subfloor of the statue room, which was only 0.3m below the former floor level. The surface

comprised a compact dark brown clay with moderate inclusions of charcoal flecks, brick fragments, mortar and it most likely predated the development of the drawing room (Plate 2).

The preserved remains of a rectangular room-type feature were uncovered under the demolition rubble which was present in the drawing room. This feature was orientated northeast-southwest, and it continued beyond the limited of excavation. The structure was defined by three walls C.28, C.29, C.30 enclosing an internal space, 1.5m by >2.1m, which was abutted by the subfloor layer, C.31. C.28, 29 and C.30 comprised roughly cut, well mortared angular limestone blocks with some later truncation evident in the walling, thanks to the later imposition of the central heating system pipes. C.28 was orientated northwest-southeast, and it measured 1.83m by 0.33m in width with a surviving height of 0.87m. C.29 was southwest-northeast orientated wall which was keyed into the southeast corner of C.28 and constructed of the same fabric, measuring 2.35m by 5.3m, surviving to a maximum of seven courses. The relatively poorly preserved and partially exposed wall C.30 ran parallel to C.29 and in a similar fashion it was keyed into the northwest corner of C.28, it measured 0.95m by 0.52m and it survived to a maximum of four courses. C.34 was an additional odd piece of walling, it mirrored the orientation and fabric of C.28, but was located 1.15m to the south. C.34 appeared to be contemporary with the C.28 structure, measuring 1.6m by 0.6m with a surviving height of 0.57m and it is suggested that it represents the partial remains of an external wall of Thornhill House, with C.28,29 & C.30 possibly representing the remains of a former cellar-type room, belonging to that earlier house.

C.27 is suggested to have been a sub-floor element of St. Anne's drawing room which was constructed to assist in the carriage of the timber joists for the drawing room floor. It was situated between the junction of C.25, C.26 and the southern face of C.28 and it comprised yellow and red brick (1.37m in length; 0.35m in width; 0.87m in depth) and was heavily disturbed with a later break (0.83m in width) which served to facilitate the later installation of a cast iron pipe from the heating system.

The Drawing Room footprint was defined by its northeast-southwest oriented walls (C.5 & C.25), something which marked it out from the rest of the exposed remains, with a distinctive semicircular recess located at its southeastern end, the apse, C.6. The fabric of the structure comprised substantial dressed limestone blocks, which did not appear have been dressed with a Portland stone façade. The eastern external wall C.5 (10m in length; 0.8m in width, 0.45m in depth) and its opposing, internal wall C.25, which formed the long walls of the drawing room were clearly abutted by the walls of the statue room. The remains of C.25 were only partially excavated (2.2m in length; 0.8m in width; 0.9m in depth) as they continued beyond the limit of excavation. Again, a break was present in the C.25, where the later imposition of the central heating pipes had truncated the feature.

Both C.5 and C.25 were linked to the apse C.6 (Plate 3) by two contemporary, short northwest-southeast oriented walls of equal length (1.8m) which had the appearance of shoulders to the apse. The semi-circular foundations of the apse, C.6, which would have

contained the organ depicted in Plate 7, survived *in-situ* and these comprised fair faced cut limestone blocks. The internal width of the apse measured 3.7m across, something which underlines the grandeur of the organ feature and the room itself, a detail which was augmented by the rich deposits of ornate moulded plaster fragments included in the rubble infill, at this location.

The junction of the Statue Room C.3 and Drawing Room C.4 comprised a relatively wide section of walling C.13 (1.1m in length; 1.5m in width; 0.21m in depth), which effectively formed the partition between the two rooms, with the former clearly abutting the latter room in its respective construction. C.13 comprised limestone cut blocks which were capped with a bed of mortar and again it had the general appearance of surviving only to foundation level.

#### 4.5 The Vestibule and Picture Gallery

A small room (1.5m east-west by 2m north-south) was located at the western end of the excavated area and whilst no label of it was made on the 1940s ground plan of the house (Figure 8), it would appear to have functioned as a vestibule (Plate 4), as it wasn't large enough to have been anything more than an antechamber next to the external side door of the former mansion. As with the other rooms, an internal subfloor was present, C.37, which comprised a moderately compact brown silty sand, with frequent inclusions of gravel and this would have been 0.3m below the floor level of the room. The remains of a ceramic drain C.21, which was fed by the lead downpipe was uncovered on the southern side of the room. The fabric of the drain (C.21) comprised a brown salt-glazed stoneware which was comparable to contemporary sanitary pipes.

The east-west external wall of the vestibule, C.40 (2.5m in length; 0.5m in width; 0.3m in width), which would have contained the side door, was the continuation of C.7 and it was defined by two large, well dressed Portland stone blocks, which showed the minimal extension to the building's façade which was present on its southern elevation, with the western return wall, C.41, (2.45m in length; 1m in width; 0.3m in depth) also comprising a Portland stone façade. C.41 comprised three large, well dressed rectangular blocks of Portland stone, which were external to a row of red bricks, C.17 (1.85m in length; 2.8m in width) which would have formed the base of window frame. C.16 was contemporary with the east-west wall of the picture gallery, C.18.

The Picture Gallery was only partially present within the north-west corner of the area of the excavation. The footprint of a wall, C.18, survived internally, forming a partition between the vestibule and the picture gallery (3m in length; 8.7m in width). The exposed portion of the wall comprised well dressed limestone blocks with a large Portland stone block C.19 across its south facing external face where it adjoined C.41. The presence of a further internal wall, C.22, served to form a dividing partition between the picture gallery and statue room. An additional internal wall, C.22, was recorded in the excavated area and this was heavily damaged with only its lower courses surviving and continuing beyond the northern limit of

excavation. The remains of a further element of masonry, C.20, was also recorded in the picture gallery and this would have supported the timber floor joists of that room.

## 5 Conclusion

- 5.1 The archaeological remains which were uncovered in the excavated area enhanced the findings of the 2022 pilot programme and assisted in further determining the footprint of the western side of the south wing of the former mansion. The extent to which the structural remains of the former mansion were preserved *in-situ* was evident, as was the ability of the excavated material to add to and augment some of the details of the structure, both in its heyday and its final incarnation. The physical remains were present of architectural features including the Portland stone façade, the window recesses and the decorative apse feature depicted on architect's plan of the building were all evident, closely mirroring any available contemporary photographs of the interior and exterior. A number of additional features or elements of masonry were also identified internally to the structure which were suggestive of elements of St. Anne's prior to its redesign and perhaps even Thornhill House, prior to its sale to the Guinness brothers. These were the comparatively cruder constructed walls or pieces of walling and the possible cellar-like structure which would have remained *in situ* beneath the drawing room floor. In the case of the Mansion's south wing, the extent of the redevelopment which took place between 1873 and 1880 was evidenced by the abutting structural remains which appear to survive in a reasonable intact fashion, just beneath the present ground level of the park. Perhaps the most important elements uncovered during this season's excavation were the smaller details which can all too often be overlooked or taken for granted; the cast iron pipes and boiler/stove pieces which evidence the early central heating system, which was installed in the house, under the flooring, after its redesign. Additionally, the single piece of curved hardwood window frame, evidencing the round headed windows present in the south wing at first floor level and only discernible on a forensic examination of a photograph of the interior showing the staircase. Furthermore, the fragments of several differing patterns of stained and painted glass and the ornate plasterwork, which in the case of the latter is a detail barely evident on the available contemporary photographs and in the case of the former was only previously hinted at by a small number of fragments from last year's excavation. Likewise, the small number of encaustic floor and wall tiles uncovered during the course of this year's excavation, a tiny fraction of the overall numbers which would have originally been present in the mansion and something which posed its own question, where did they go? The answer to that question was deduced by the author and confirmed by a visitor to the excavation; they were removed post-1943 and salvaged by organised individuals. Additionally, the gas mask pieces and tent windows which the volunteers uncovered echoed the later use of the mansion during World War II to store A.R.P rations.
- 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 Sheena Doyle, Marion Usher, Lois Hannon, Caitlin Kavanagh Dunne, Seán Mooney, Máire de Buitléir, Gerard Stanley, Karen Smith, Angela Hart, James Brown, Mandy Ingram Reese, Aimee Jones, Graham Lamont, Sarah Condell, Dara Golden, Anja Byrne, Michelle Donoghue, Megan Reid,



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## Plates



Plate 1 Overview of excavation area 2023



Plate 2 Remains of structures predating drawing room.





Plate 3 Organ apse foundation, facing south.



Plate 4 Layout of Vestibule, facing south.





Plate 5 Decorated Portland stone from infill C.2.



Plate 6 3D overview of excavated area, north to top.





Plate 6 Interior of Statue Room, c.1876 (Plunkett Collection)



Plate 7 View of Drawing Room towards organ and apse c.1876 (Plunkett Collection)

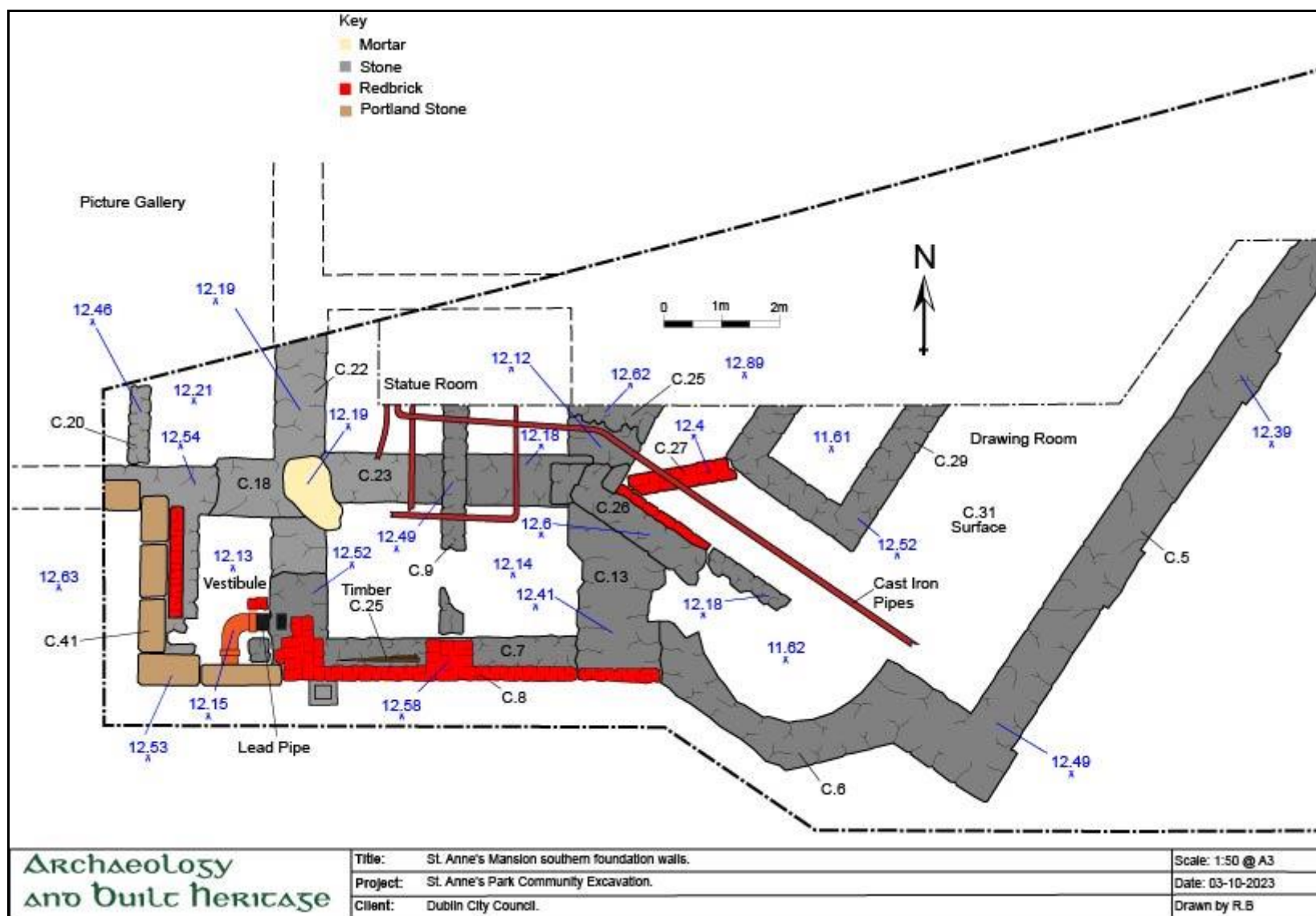


Figure 9 Post excavation plan of area 1:50 scale

