

Licence No. 18E0509

Archaeological Report for Licence No. 18E0509 Cross West, Co. Mayo

Architects Section, Mayo County Council Áras
an Chontae, Castlebar

Sue Zajac, Archaeologist,
Mayo County Council
18-12-2018

Table of Contents

Summary of Archaeological Testing	3
The Site before Archaeological Testing	4
The Test Trenches	5
Trenches 1-6	6
Trenches 7-14	6
Summary	8
Conclusion	8
Bibliography	8
Appendix 1-Contexts	8
Appendix 2-Finds	9

List of Figures & Plates

Fig. 1 The development site on eastern outskirts of Cross village, Co. Mayo, arrow points to centre of development site	3
Fig 2 Development site at Cross West outlined in red	5
Fig 3 Location of Test Trenches 1-14 within Development Site	7
Plate 1 General view of Development Site and excavation of Test Trench Two	10
Plate 2 Excavation of Test Trench Two showing gravel (Context 3) and clay (Context 1) and marl (Context 2) above it	11
Plate 3 General view of Test trenches looking north-east	12

1. Summary of Archaeological Testing

Pre-development archaeological testing, under licence number 18E0509 took place on the eastern edge of Cross village, in a green field site (ITM E519598/N755366) over two days during September 2018 (Fig 1).

The work was part of an archaeological assessment on foot of Part VIII planning conditions and was carried out prior to the construction of social housing units by Mayo County Council (Zajac, 2018).

A total of fourteen test trenches were mechanically excavated across the development site which is 1.1 Ha. in size. Nothing of archaeological significance was uncovered. The results of the testing concluded, no further archaeological mitigation was required, for development to proceed at this site.



Fig. 1 The development site on eastern outskirts of Cross village, Co. Mayo, arrow points to centre of development site

2. The Site before Archaeological Testing

The development site is a roughly L-shaped area. It has a maximum east x west width of 97m and a minimum east x west width of 75m, with a maximum north x south length of 140m (Fig 2). The eastern and western boundaries of the development site border existing one-off housing associated with the outskirts of Cross village. The site is enclosed on all sides by a substantial dry-stone, boundary wall. The ground falls from the highest point in the north-east corner to lower ground at south-west (OD 50-100m). A regional road borders the development site at south (Fig 2). A ridge ran approximately north-south at the eastern end of the field and rock could be seen protruding through the grass in places, associated with this feature. A drinking trough was also located in this part of the field.

Five sites are recorded in the townland of Cross West. These are located to the east of the development site. These sites are a ringfort (MA121-100001) and souterrain (MA121-100005) and three house sites (MA121-100002/100003/100004), grouped together and of an indeterminate date.

Nothing of archaeological significance is designated or could be seen at surface level within the proposed development area. The ground was characterised by good quality grass land which had been used to cut silage. A very large pile of grassed over, land clearance stones, was seen in the north-west corner of the site and had been fenced off from the remainder of the field. From this and the quality of the grassland, it suggested that land reclamation had already occurred within the development site. Silage bales were also seen within the field running in a line parallel to the regional road (Plate 1).

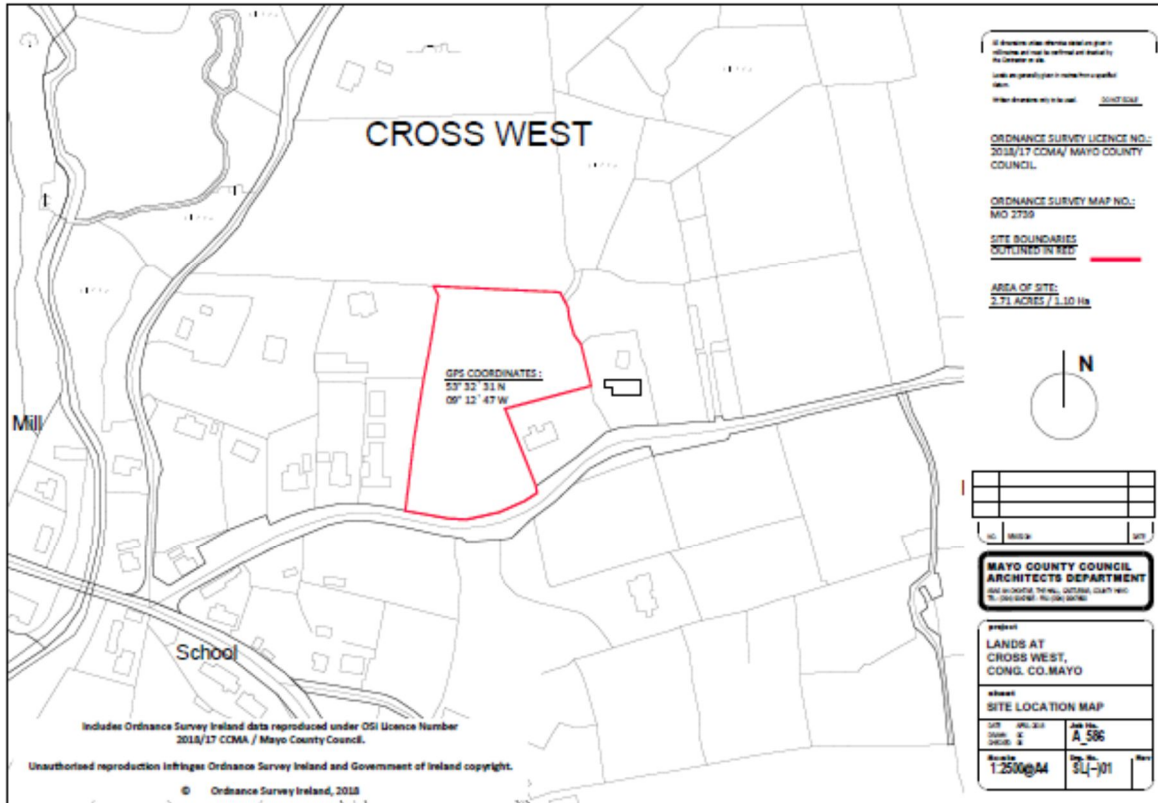


Fig 2 Development site at Cross West outlined in red

3 The Test Trenches

The test trenches were numbered 1-14 and ran on an approximate east-west axis across the site (Fig 3). They ranged from a maximum of 97m long (Trenches 1-6) to 75m long (Trenches 7-14). All the test trenches were 2m wide and were spaced 10m apart (Fig 3). They were mechanically excavated using a toothless grading bucket. The testing was carried out over two days starting on the 27th September 2018.

Three contexts were recorded during the archaeological testing and these are described in Appendix 1. In all trenches a reddish-brown clay (Context 1) overlay natural to a depth of between 0.1 and 0.3m. The clay had sparse inclusions of pebbles and roots, from the sod, going through it. It was archaeologically sterile and had almost no modern material, of any sort within it. Below the clay was a shallow layer of marl (Context 2), also reddish brown. It was difficult to distinguish between the two layers in terms of colour. The marl however was very smooth and composed of a very fine sand. The overlying clay was moderately loose. Below the marl was natural limestone gravel. On the higher ground this gravel was seen to contain sparse amounts of, large, limestone boulders or sheets of bedrock associated with the north-south

ridge. Generally, however the gravel was very coarse with frequent inclusions of pebbles and moderate inclusions of cobbles. The excavation did not go beyond this gravel layer. The testing showed that the ground had been thoroughly reclaimed prior to the archaeological testing. The ground was very sterile of any intrusive material and the soil stratigraphy was homogenous throughout all trenches. A narrow gage water pipe was seen crossing trench number eight and trench two. It seemed to be leading to the water trough and was deliberately avoided in all other trenches. Nothing of archaeological significance was uncovered.

Trenches 1-6

Six trenches were excavated in the larger area of the development site at north. They ran for an east-west distance of 97m. The western end of these trenches was 0.2m deep where the ground was lower and between 0.35 and 0.45m deep on the higher ground at east. The trenches were deeper at east because a certain amount of rock had to be removed in this area in order to get a clear look at the base of the test trench. This rock was associated with the ridge running across this section of the field. In trench two the excavation broke through a narrow gage water pipe that seemed to be leading to the field drinking trough (Plate 2). This pipe was deliberately avoided in the remaining trenches in this area. The stratigraphy for trenches 1-6 was a reddish-brown clay (Context 1) that overlay natural to a depth of between 0.1 and 0.3m. The clay had sparse inclusions of pebbles and roots from the sod going through it. It was archaeologically sterile. A golf ball was found in the topsoil in trench four and trench five (there is a three-hole golf course nearby) but there were no archaeological finds and no other material except for a piece of discarded tin in trench one. Below the clay (Context 1) was a thin layer of very fine reddish-brown marl (Context 2). This came down onto a coarse gravel (Context 3). At the eastern end of the trench the ground was higher and there was more rock associated with the gravel associated with the natural ridge in this area.

Trenches 7-14

Seven trenches were excavated in the smaller section of the field running on an east-west axis for 75m (Plate 3). The natural ridge already seen in trenches 1-6 was uncovered again for a short distance at the eastern end of trenches 7-14. In general, the clay topsoil (Context 1) became deeper in trenches 7-14 averaging 0.35m above the thin layer of natural marl (Context 2) and underlying gravel (Context 3). This was particularly apparent at the lower end of the

field in the south-west corner. Another water pipe was uncovered on top of the gravel in test trench 8.

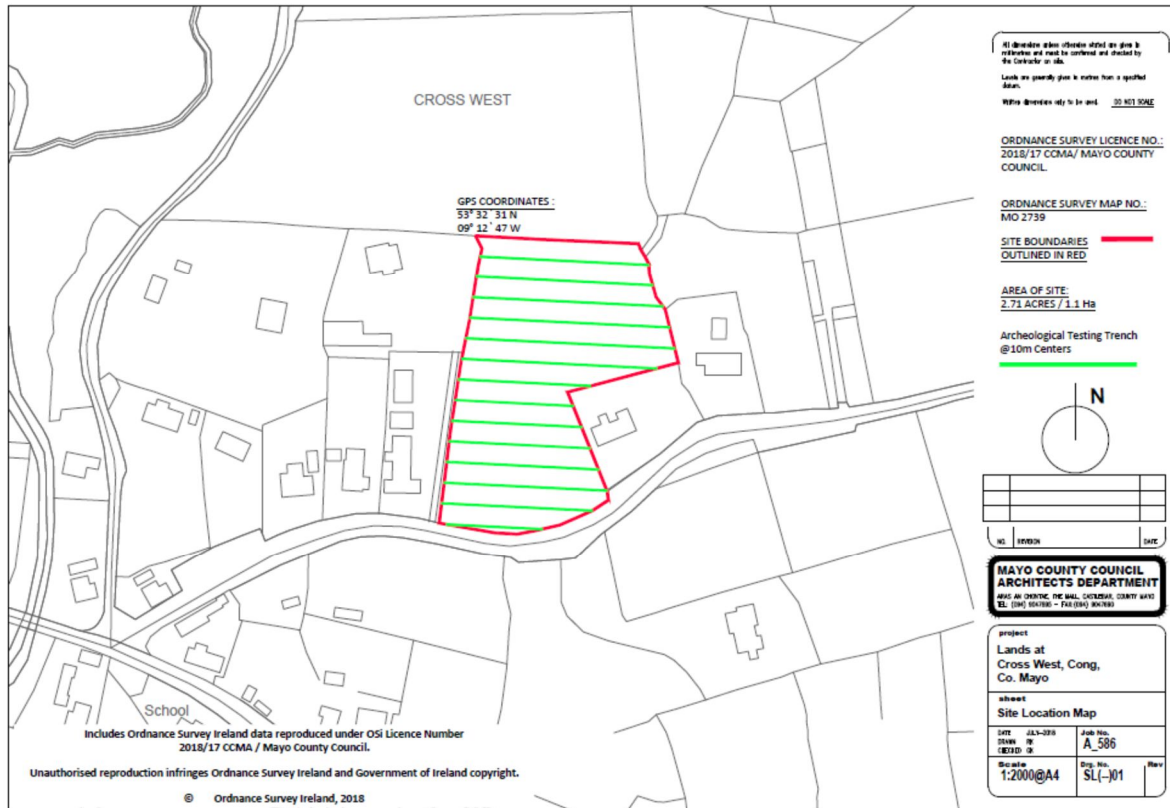


Fig 3 Location of Test Trenches 1-14 within Development Site

Test Trench 1 is located at the northern end of the site with remaining trenches running numerically in a southerly direction

4. Summary

Three contexts were recorded during pre-development, archaeological testing, of a green field site on the outskirts of Cross Village. Nothing of archaeological significance was seen in any of the fourteen test trenches mechanically excavated prior to the development of social housing by Mayo County Council. A fine clay topsoil consistently occurred above natural marl and coarse gravel to a depth of between 0.1m and 0.35m. Golf balls were the only modern finds in what was a heavily reclaimed field. A large pile of field clearance stones had been fenced off from the rest of the field in the north-west corner of the development site. A water pipe also ran through the area for a field drinking trough. Silage bales found within the field parallel to the road meanwhile suggest that this was an area of reclaimed pasturage that was progressively used for agricultural purposes.

5. Conclusion

The results of the predevelopment testing conclude that the proposed development site is of no archaeological significance and further archaeological mitigation at this location is not required.

6. Bibliography

Zajac, S. Archaeological Method Statement and Licence Application Social Housing Scheme, Cross West, Co. Mayo. Unpublished Report on behalf of Architects Section Mayo County Council, The Mall, Castlebar, March 2018.

Appendix 1 Contexts

Context 1

A fine clay topsoil (5YR 2.5/2 dark-reddish brown) with sparse inclusions of pebbles, overlying subsoil to a depth of between 0.1m and 0.35m becoming deeper in the south-west sector of the field where the ground is lower and away from a substantial ridge of natural gravel and rock at

the northern and eastern areas of the development site. The clay had been reclaimed and was very sterile in nature. Water pipes cut through this layer.

Context 2

A compact, silty marl located between 0.1m and 0.2m deep below the clay layer. Very similar to Context 1 (5YR 2.5/2 dark-reddish brown) and hard to distinguish between them based on colour. Formed a thin, natural layer above gravel and rock (Context 3).

Context 3

Natural limestone gravel. On the higher ground this gravel was seen to contain sparse amounts of large, limestone boulders, or sheets of bedrock associated with a north-south ridge running through the development area. Generally, however the gravel was very coarse with frequent inclusions of pebbles and moderate inclusions of cobbles. The excavation did not go beyond this gravel layer.

Appendix 2 Finds

There were no finds of archaeological significance associated with the predevelopment testing under licence number 18E0509.

Sue Zajac
Archaeologist

18/12/2018
Architects Section,
Mayo County Council,
Áras an Chontae



Plate 1 General view of Development Site and excavation of Test Trench Two



Plate 2 Excavation of Test Trench Two showing gravel (Context 3) and clay (Context 1) and marl (Context 2) above it



Plate 3 General view of Test trenches looking north-east.