

Archaeological assessment

**21-23 Blackpitts
Dublin 8**

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For

Blackpitts Residence Unlimited Company

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Contents

List of figures and plates

Introduction	1
Archaeological and historical contexts	3
Projected impact of proposed development	14
Conclusion and recommendations	16

List of figures and plates

Figures

Figure 1	Site location (ASI, Historical Environment Viewer)
Figure 2	Bernard de Gomme, 1673
Figure 3	John Rocque 1756
Figure 4	Ordnance Survey, Dublin sheets 26 (top) and 31, 1838 (1847)
Figure 5	Ordnance Survey, DN018-11 (top) and DN018-15, 1907 (1911)
Figure 6	Footprint of proposed development (after Horan Rainsford Architects)
Figure 7	Basement plan (after Horan Rainsford Architects)

Plates

Plate 1	'Blackpitts, Dublin'. Robert French 1880-1900 (National Library of Ireland)
Plate 2	'Black pits Dublin May 1890' (National Library of Ireland)
Plate 3	'Blackpitts, The Coombe'. John Cooke, 1913 (Dublin City Libraries)
Plate 4	'Old Cottages, Black Pitts, the Coombe'. W.J. Joyce, c. 1914 (RSAI)

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report comprises a revision of an archaeological assessment of a development site at 21-23 Blackpitts, Dublin 8. It is being submitted along with a planning application for the site's redevelopment as purpose-built student accommodation, on behalf of the developer *Blackpitts Residence Unlimited Company*.

The site forms the corner with Donovan's Lane and is presently occupied by a modern industrial structure in brick which extends back along Donovan's Lane for approximately two thirds of its length towards Clanbrassil Street Lower. There is no known basement level and an open area covered with tarmacadam fronts the property to Blackpitts (Figure 1).

- 1.2 The site lies within the zone of archaeological potential for the historic city (DU018-020), although there are no discrete recorded monuments within the red line boundary. The frontage was an open culvert as late as the 1850s which accommodated some of the River Poddle's fluctuating volume, while also acting as a significant historical boundary between the archbishop's Liberty of St. Sepulchre to the eastern side, opposite the liberty of Donore, part of the medieval holding of St. Thomas's abbey, which would later pass to the earls of Meath.

Unlike many of the sites investigated in the city, the development site does not appear to have accommodated a tannery and it was occupied by a coal and turf yard for most of the twentieth century. The old course of the Poddle is culverted along the western site boundary and there may be earlier evidence for the watercourse surviving within the development footprint.

- 1.3 Planning permission is being sought for a Large-scale Residential Development (LRD) comprising

217 student bed spaces (209 no. single rooms and 4 no. twin rooms, 213 no. rooms in total), within one block. The block ranges in height up to 6 storeys with a basement below. All associated internal and external amenity space, including the provision of restaurant/café, on street carparking, cycle parking, landscaping, bin stores, service provision and all other associated site development works.

The proposed development comprises the demolition of the existing structure on site and its replacement with a six-storey student accommodation block arranged around an internal courtyard. There will be disturbance under the footprint to perhaps as much as 4000mm below the existing ground levels to accommodate a basement structure which will extend across c. 60% of the site footprint.

- 1.4 On the basis of discussions with DCC Archaeology, it is quite likely that further archaeological assessment involving the excavation of test trenches under licence will be a condition of planning permission. A detailed impact statement based on the results of the assessment, to include mitigatory proposals, will be submitted to DCC Archaeology for comment prior to development taking place.

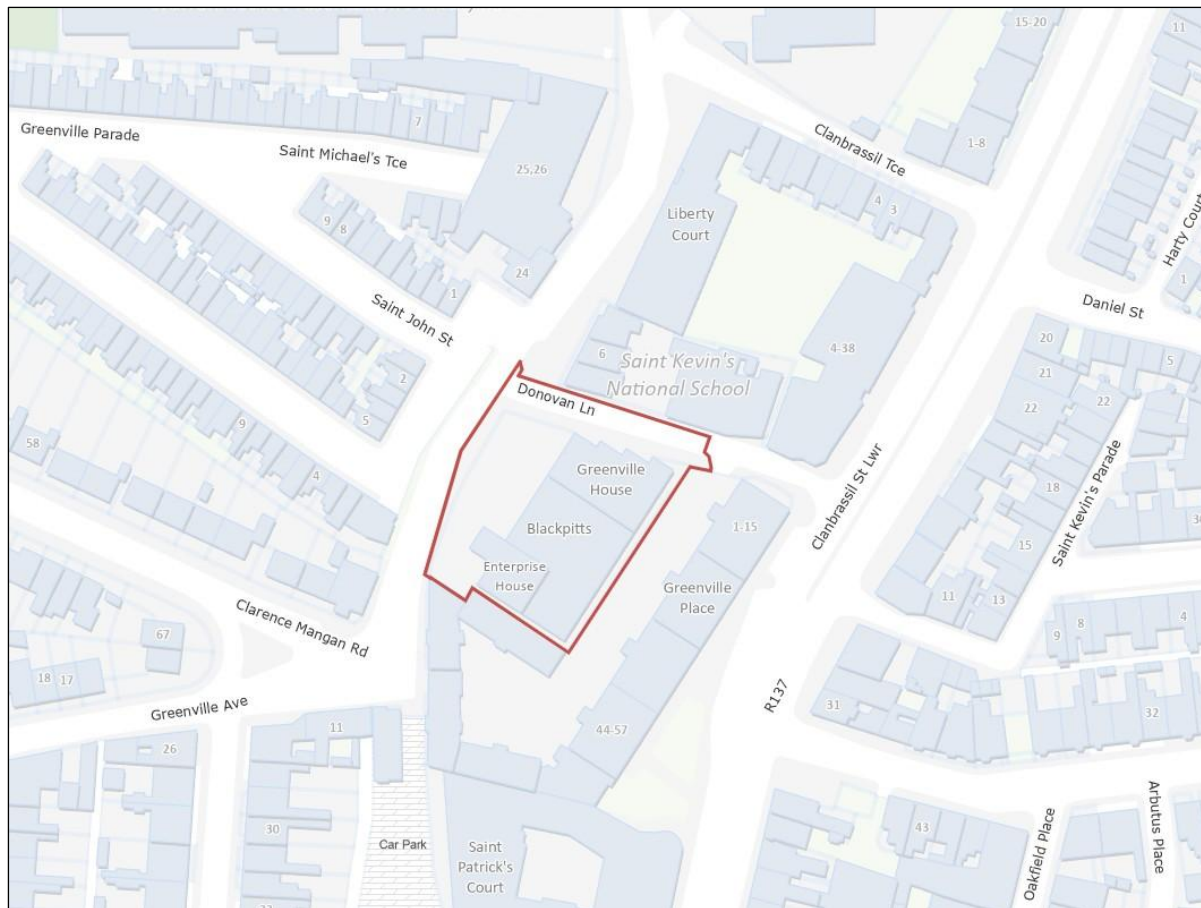


Figure 1 Site location (ASI Historical Environment Viewer)

2 Archaeological and historical contexts

2.1 *Introduction*

The development site is on a slight westward slope from the Clanbrassil Street alignment where the base of the slope corresponds to the primary course of the River Poddle. Given the state of knowledge of the rural fringes of the archbishop's liberty, the site was possibly unenclosed farmland until the end of the seventeenth century, and subsequent development, potentially occasioning disturbance to archaeological substrates, appears to have been relatively inconsequential.

Unfortunately the site falls just outside of the area mapped in detail by Rocque in 1756 and his smaller-scaled editions do not usefully help interpret the area over a crucial period of the site's morphology.

2.2 *Pre-medieval development*

The efficacy of attempting to assess urban development sites in terms of their potential to yield prehistoric evidence is clearly doubtful. Such material, if encountered at all, is recorded over the course of controlled archaeological excavation and its presence or otherwise cannot be predicted from a desk.

In any event, the development site is located on the right bank of a not inconsequential river, from the 1490s at least referred to as the Poddle, which continued northwards to the Liffey delta to the east of the ridge from which the initial urban settlement expanded. Riverbanks have notionally higher potential for settlement, however early evidence, where it survives, is usually truncated by subsequent development.

2.3 *Medieval development*

At some point, perhaps as late as the early thirteenth century, the newly established cathedral was granted outlying manors of land. In the area immediately adjacent to the cathedral, the farm was formalised into the Liberty of St. Sepulchre. Ostensibly under the control of the archbishop, the dean and chapter exercised effective hegemony and the liberty had the usual jurisdictional functions including a court and prison. The land was of some value and much coveted by the city. For a brief period in the 1520s the Mayor and Corporation took possession of the liberty but the title was reclaimed for the archbishop. There are no specific references to the area through the medieval period and the land may have been directly farmed by the cathedral chapter.

This period does however see the natural flow of the Poddle added to and later diverted at two points upstream of the site. The City Watercourse was diverted at the Tongue and brought around to the west to feed the City Basin off James's Street. The Abbey Stream was a separate watercourse engineered to power a series of mills developed by the abbey of St. Thomas. The Abbey Stream also extended in a wide arc to the west, mirroring the City Watercourse and acting as a boundary to the ecclesiastical liberty.

The old course of the Poddle, as it flowed north into the archbishop's liberty, received a trickle of water, however the stream retained its significance as a boundary between the two jurisdictions, and continued northwards along a small valley as the parish boundary between St. Luke's and St. Nicholas' Without. There are references to mills along the Poddle prior to the municipal and monastic diversions, however there is no indication that any were located along this particular stretch. The natural channel was augmented again by the Abbey Stream at the junction of Blackpitts and New Row and further downstream by the Commons Water, which came down the Coombe from the west. All of these watercourses have been generally referred to as the Poddle.

The site under discussion was located on the Poddle along its primary, undiverted course, probably in open ground on a slope up to one of the main routes south of the city. From a 1382 rental of St. Sepulchre's, Mills identified the farms of the liberty immediately southeast of New Street as Ardinatanoke and Newland. Ardinatanoke extended for 22 acres and the land held eight free tenants; Newland was 58 acres supporting five tenants. The farms were thus held in small parcels, and rents were set at 2s. and 16d. an acre respectively (with the more expensive land closer to the city).¹ These were relatively new settlements where the suburbs and outlying farms had been burned down in 1316. The site can possibly be located in Baugon's Park, a possession of the Vicars Choral of St. Patrick's in 1662,² which is probably the Bougayne listed on the 1382 rental covering diverse lands in the area.³

2.4 Post-medieval development

It is not until the late seventeenth century that this area begins to see development and de Gomme's 1673 mapping has the site on the edge of field enclosures (Figure 2). His representation of this corner of the expanding city is less useful than is usually given credit for. The depiction of the Poddle is slightly skewed where it is unlikely that the southern confluence with the Abbey Stream took place underneath the roadway.

The roadway, referred to as Blackpitts by 1728⁴ is clearly a continuation of *New Row*, where the 'elbow' at the junction of Ward's Hill and Blackpitts is clearly evident. De Gomme extends Blackpitts further south to the margin (where a rope walk may have been developed), and he ignores the sudden change of direction towards Ropers Rest. The depiction of the *Red Mills* is perhaps questionable⁵ as is a tail race entering the Poddle's primary north-south alignment.⁶

¹ Mills, J. 1889. 'Notices of the Manor of St. Sepulchre, Dublin, in the Fourteenth Century'. In *Journal of the Royal Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland*, Fourth Series, Vol. 9, No. 78 (Jan. - Mar.), 31-41.

² Monck Mason, W. 1820. *The History and Antiquities of the Collegiate and Cathedral Church of St. Patrick of St. Patrick's Cathedral*. Dublin, 99.

³ Mills, J. 1889. Notices of the Manor of St. Sepulchre, Dublin, in the Fourteenth Century (Continued). In *Journal of the Royal Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland*, Fourth Series, Vol. 9, No. 79 (Apr. - Jul.), 119-126.

⁴ It is annotated as the *Road from Roper's Rest* on map of the 'New intended Market of Donour' in the 1670s.

⁵ Contemporary documentary records calendared by Gilbert relate to a Red Mills outside of St. James' Gate. The mapping may simply be an elongation of the Earl of Meath's Watercourse, with the Double Mills at Warrenmount, annotated as the *Red Mills* on the map, located too far to the south.

⁶ This is evident today in the property boundaries at either side of a pronounced dip in the South Circular Road just to the west of Leonard's Corner.

The property boundary at the angle of the confluence is nonetheless of interest and continues as a boundary to this day, where the watercourses have long left the landscape.

The general area of the site can more usefully be assessed from a breviat issued in the winter of 1643-4 detailing the defence of the southwestern side of the city from the area in front of Trinity College to William Usher's house on the Liffey just west of Bridge Street.⁷ The regiment holding the defences between today's Heytesbury Street and Pimlico was commanded by Colonel Willoughbie, and with a company from the Major General's regiment it comprised 471 officers and men.

The regiment was quartered in the lanes around Patrick Street, New Street and New Row, where many of the houses had been vacated from the outbreak of the rebellion. The locations of the *poyns* on the defensive perimeter were carefully chosen and it would appear that the 'trenches and strong bulwarks' were for a period at least dug by citizens, work having commenced before June 1642 and set to continue into November.⁸ It is unlikely however that the deputy alderman and constables were able supply 40 men from each of the city wards on a daily basis 'to labour in the said work and be in readiness when they shall be thereunto required'.

The line of the defences can be accurately located on the modern landscape, where the paces between each position are given. With his second point at the New Street Gate, Willoughbie had to straddle the Poddle valley to link to 'the poynt on the hill' on higher ground to the west (fossilised in today's landscape on the sharp corner on Grenville Avenue). A defensive position, the point 'at the bottom', was thus constructed, the bottom being a reference to the lower end of the laneway to Ropers Rest.⁹ Collectively referred to as 'advanced outworks' in military architecture, the point 'at the bottom' probably took the form of a diamond-pointed embankment, large enough to support several musketeers and giving them a higher field of fire across the Poddle valley. More significant points located in the breviat are referred to as bulwarks or ravelins and the defences and associated military roadways have been recorded on several excavations on Ardee Street, in the Newmarket area, on Long Lane and possibly on a more recent development site at Cuffe Street/Protestant Row.

The points were certainly connected by earthen embankments in a slightly later, contracted iteration (as depicted on the Down Survey). The earlier defences can be traced on Rocque along Blackpitts (Figure 3), where an inner platform is still depicted on Scalé's 1778 revision straddling a ditch inside an elongated embankment. This is truncated to the south by two small houses, which were later cleared for the Annefield Nursery depicted on the first edition mapping. The embankment is recorded on this mapping in its absence where the street widens north of Donovan's Lane. The embankment approaching the point possibly survives today in the

⁷ 'Military arrangements in Dublin' in Historical Manuscripts Commission 1895. *The Manuscripts of the Marquis of Ormonde, preserved at the Castle, Kilkenny*, I. London, 156-60.

⁸ Gilbert J.F. 1892. *Calendar of Ancient Records of Dublin*, III. Dublin, 393-4; 398-400.

⁹ *Pers comm.* Peter Walsh. Much of this section of this report is indebted to Peter's research on the writer's excavation at Ardee Street, Dublin 8.

differential levels between Blackpitts and Greenville Parade. It is likely the 'poynt at the bottom' was located at the junction of Blackpitts and the rear property boundaries on the western side of Hammond Street, with the Poddle protecting the left flank.

The defences here were tested at least once. On 30 July 1643, a Sunday, and estimated 1500 horse and foot of the 'Birnes and Toolles of the county of Wicklow' attacked New Street. Despite the absence of most of the garrison they retreated with the loss of about 20 men.¹⁰

2.5 *Later development*

Blackpitts stops at the junction with Dowker's Lane (Clanbrassil Terrace) and the development of gable-fronted houses in rows spread quickly southwards c. 1695 from the corner of New Row and Ward's Hill. The houses on the corner (presently being excavated by Maggie Kobik of this office) were photographed on several occasions before and during their demolition, however the houses developed on Blackpitts south of Fumbally Lane deserve further study.

Plate 1 shows the corner of Fumbally Lane just after the demolition of a row of gable-fronted houses (c. 1700) which had extended to the corner of Malpas Street. The rooflines here in the background do not appear to be gabled and the houses are not depicted on Rocque (1756). One photograph from 1890 exists of the houses prior to their removal (Plate 2).



Plate 1 'Blackpitts, Dublin'. Robert French 1880-1900 (National Library of Ireland)

¹⁰ Empey, M. 2014. 'The Diary of Sir James Ware 1623-66'. In *Analecta Hibernica*, No. 45. Dublin, 53-146.



Plate 2 'Black pits Dublin May 1890' (National Library of Ireland)

Plate 3 shows the western side of Blackpitts with the two houses at the end of Bonny's Lane (one of which survives today) closing the vista. Of note are the formal Victorian cottages (right), seemingly derelict in 1913, which can be compared with the much earlier cottages on Plate 4. An older gabled house in the background, which must have stood in isolation for over 100 years, survived the later eighteenth-century houses beyond. A roofline on Warrenmount Place (centre background) nods to a new future for housing based on the artisan's dwellings model.

Plate 4 depicts the cottages on the eastern side, south of Dowker's Lane, with St. Kevin's School (*George Coppinger Ashlin* 1895) looming over the assemblage and the rear elevations on Clanbrassil Street Lower in the background. The development site is just out of frame (right) and the cottages are most likely those depicted by Rocque in 1756

The images of surviving architectural types suggest that the development of formal gable-fronted row houses had ceased by the 1720s. Later development was characterised by detached mansions such as the large house built by the Quaker brewer Joseph Poole on Fumbally Lane c. 1720,¹¹ Warrenmount, built c. 1740 by prominent politician and businessman Nathaniel Warren, and indeed the large house associated with the development site under discussion.

¹¹ See MacRory, R. 1990. 'A study of No. 12 Fumbally Lane, Dublin 8'. BA thesis, Trinity College Dublin, Department of History of Art and Architecture.

Blackpitts was however becoming less salubrious an address and on Mill Street and off New Street large tanneries were in operation by the middle of the century, the odours from which would have served to discourage further polite settlement. Meaner, single-storey cottages replaced the Dutch Billys, which by the 1850s were subdivided by several families. A large *Scavenging Depot* had opened by 1837 behind the cottages in Plate 4, and Bourne and Hartley's mail coach factory and William Rice's Warren Mount chemical works had opened opposite, occupying an area of the formal gardens developed by Nathaniel Warren the previous century. His house became a Carmelite convent and school c. 1813, which in turn became a Presentation convent c.1892.



Plate 3 'Blackpitts, The Coombe'. John Cooke, 1913 (Dublin City Libraries)



Plate 4 'Old Cottages, Black Pitts, the Coombe'. W.J. Joyce, c. 1914 (RSAI)

2.6 *The development site*

On the first edition 5ft mapping undertaken in 1837 the northern boundary of the site is partially occupied by a row of three cottages facing north on Donovan's Lane (Figure 4). A structure with a more engaging plan form is located directly to the east. This appears to be a large house with projecting wings and a central porch and it survived with the cottages at least until 1936 and they were listed as tenements as early as 1850.¹² The buildings are located within a larger parcel of ground, with the now open Poddle watercourse along its western boundary. The ground is likely associated with a large detached house and walled garden with direct access onto New Street (Clanbrassil Street Lower), which also incorporated a walled orchard to the north fronting Donovan's Lane. The house and orchard were removed by the turn of the twentieth century and are not on the 25 inch mapping (Figure 5).

The site does not appear to have seen much further development throughout the twentieth century and a large yard to Blackpitts was occupied by McHenry Brothers who had a fuel depot there from the 1920s until 1990 when the company was liquidated. A 1974 clip from an RTE interview with Tony McHenry was shot in the yard and large corrugated sheds are present along the northern boundary to Donovan's Lane, with the rear boundary comprising a blockwork wall to the Clanbrassil Street backplots.¹³

2.7 *Archaeological investigations*

The results of archaeological assessments in the immediate vicinity of the site have not been particularly informative. The closest site investigated was just to the north across Donovan's Lane where three test trenches revealed the presence of 18th/19th-century made ground in the vicinity of the Poddle.

No features of archaeological significance were recorded and the only finds recovered consisted of animal bone, fragments of glass bottles, slag and some sherds of 18th/19th-century delft wares and black glazed earthenwares.¹⁴

The results of the testing were, according to the excavator, consistent with the deposits recorded on the adjacent site to the north in 1997,¹⁵ where

undisturbed subsoil was found to consist of gravelly clay in Trenches 1 and 2; a laminated clayey silt formed natural on the western part of the site, probably resulting from the periodic flooding of the Poddle. The earliest recorded human activity on this site relates to the dumping of considerable amounts of rubbish and fill in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. This was probably an effort to raise ground levels on the site, which to this day has a high water-table. Evidence was also uncovered for the use of the site as a scavenging yard in the mid-19th century. In view of the post-medieval date for the earliest activity on the site and the lack of associated structural remains, no further archaeological excavation was recommended in advance of construction.

¹² Shaw, H. 1850. *New City Pictorial Directory*, Donovan's-lane.

¹³ 'Tangents', broadcast 15 February 1974. www.rte.ie/archives/2019/0128/1025996-collecting-free-fuel/

¹⁴ Russell, I. 2015. 'Former Scholars Bar, Donovan Lane, Dublin 8' in I. Bennett (ed.) *Excavations*. 2018:726.

¹⁵ Eogan, J. 1997:144, 'Lower Clanbrassil Street, Dublin' in I. Bennett (ed.) *Excavations* 1997:144.

2.8 Discussion

The settlement narrative of the site is relatively uncomplicated. In the medieval period the area was likely farmland under the leasehold control of the archbishop, its value perhaps lessened by the loss of flow from the Poddle occasioned by its two diversions upstream.

The area was militarily significant in the initial defences thrown up around the liberties in 1642-3, but perhaps less so as the situation stabilised and the defences contracted closer to the city. A diamond point defensive position established on the Poddle is represented by de Gomme thirty years later as an angle inadvertently mapped as a property boundary, located directly across from the site. There was little development locally until the end of the eighteenth century and much of this was on the Meath estate across the Poddle. Development in the archbishop's liberty extended along the New Street, with areas opened up for more private developments behind the back plots.

The site formed part of the property of a large house and orchard off Clanbrassil Street Lower, as of yet unidentified on the tenement valuation. This was mostly cleared away in the early twentieth century. The site was mostly open until the widening of Clanbrassil Street in the early 1990s saw a realignment of its western side and the attendant development opportunities which are characterised by the existing structure.

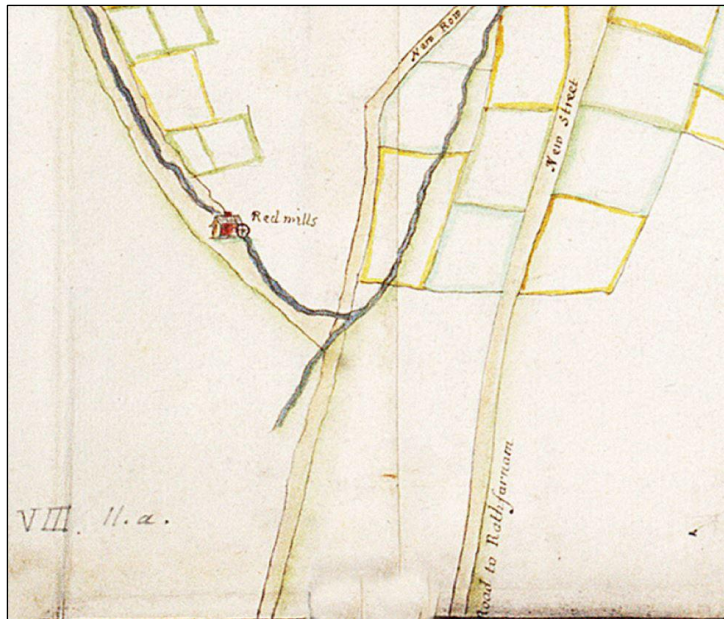


Figure 2 Bernard de Gomme, 1673

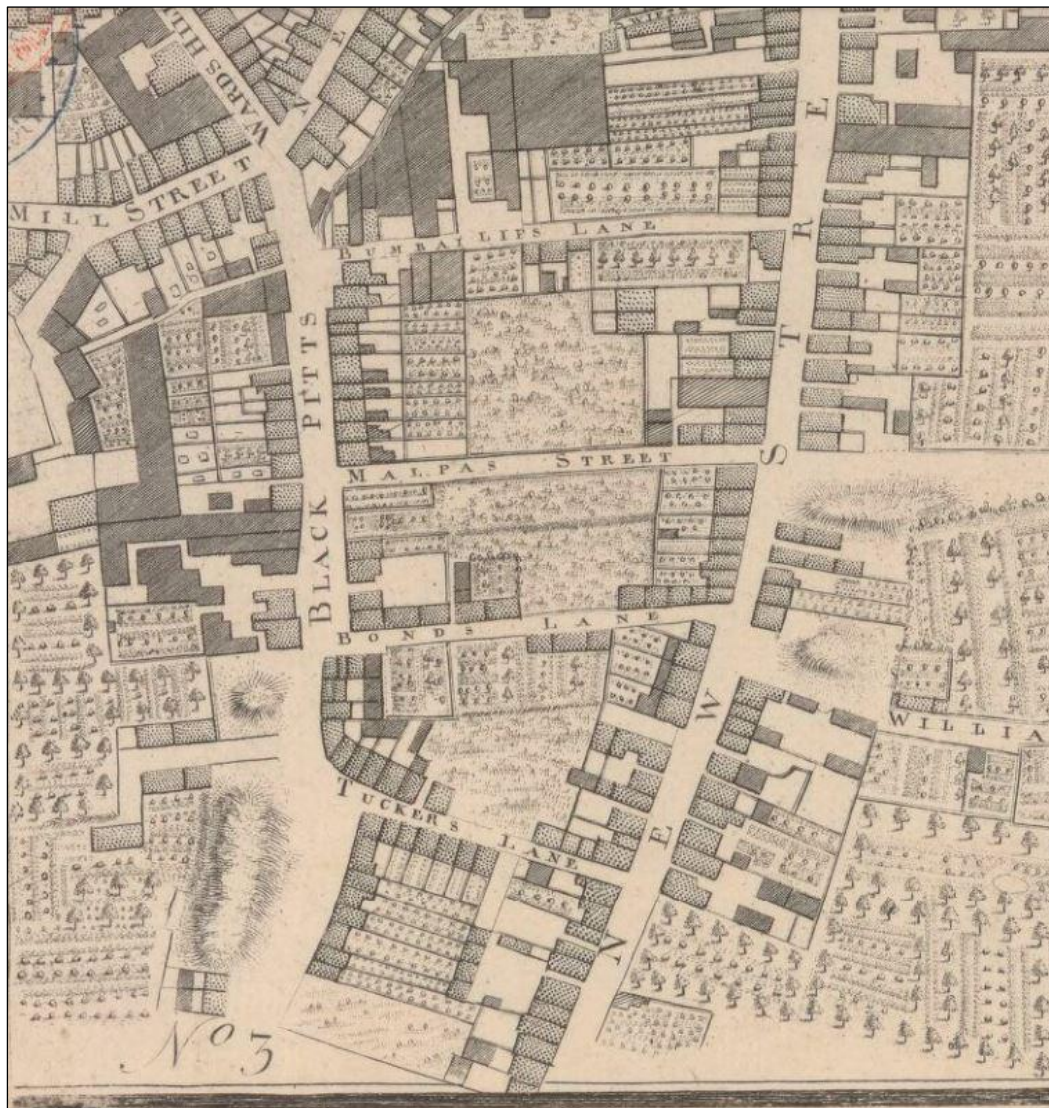


Figure 3 John Rocque, 1756. Donovan's Lane is beyond the southern property boundary

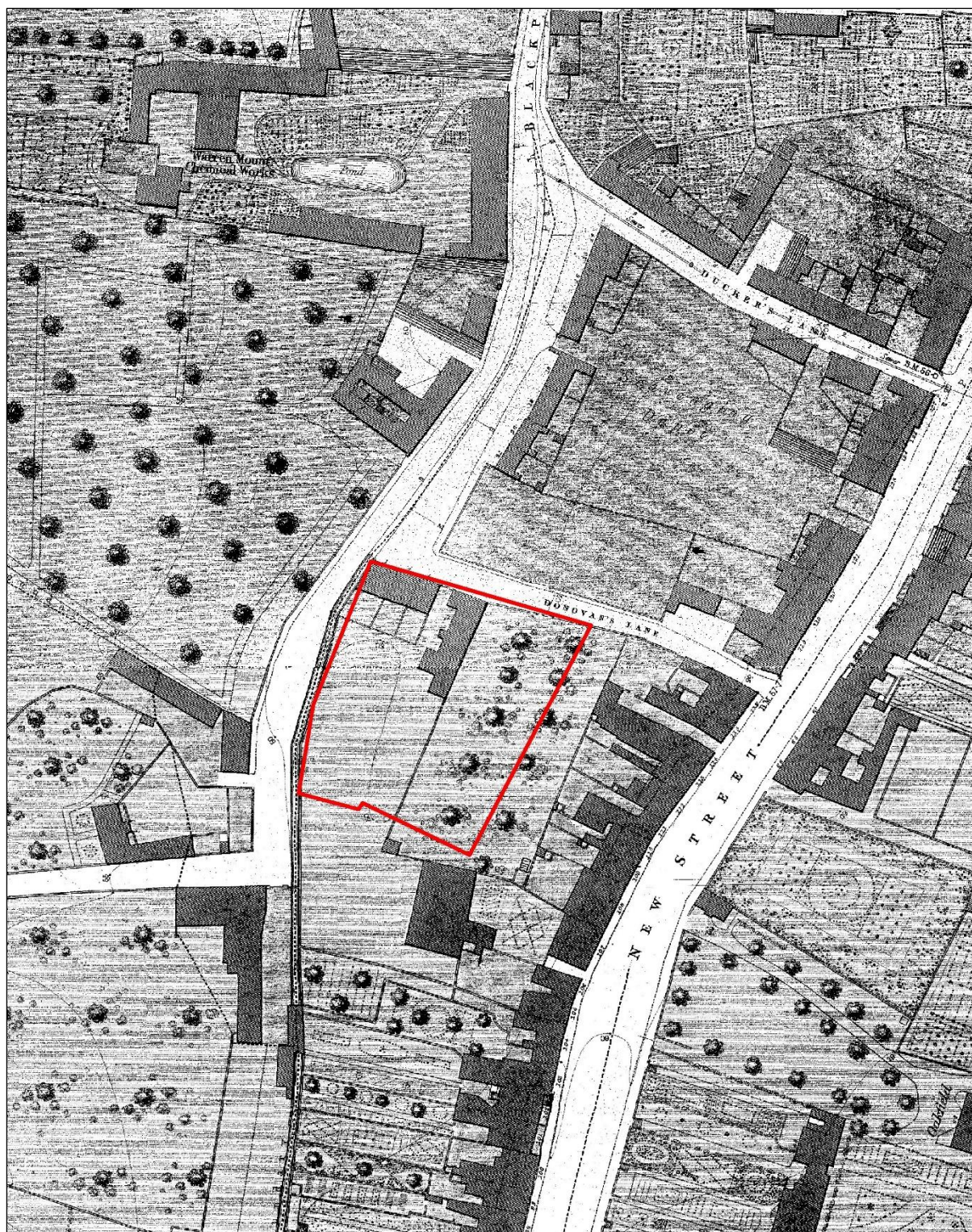


Figure 4 Ordnance Survey, Dublin sheets 26 (top) and 31, 1838 (1847)



Figure 5 Ordnance Survey, DN018-11 (top) and DN018-15, 1907 (1911)

3 Projected impact of proposed development

- 3.1 It is evident from the historic mapping that apart from at the northwestern corner, there is no indication of there being development along the Blackpitts frontage at the Poddle. The three cottages and the building adjacent to the east most likely survive in some form underneath the surface.

There is some documentary evidence nonetheless for mills along the Poddle outside of the immediate walled town and there may be evidence here for a millrace.

- 3.2 The proposed development will provide 222 student residential units within one block ranging in height up to 7 storeys with a basement below, to include for all associated internal and external amenity spaces, cycle parking, landscaping, bin stores, service provision and all other associated site development works. The new structure will be U-shaped, forming around a central courtyard (Figure 6).

The proposal includes for a single level basement under the footprint of the new build (Figure 7). This extends along the Donovan's Lane and Blackpitts elevations and will involve ground reduction in excess of 4000mm across much of the site.

It is likely therefore that the formation levels will truncate well into the subsoil, removing any surviving cultural deposits on the footprint of the new build.

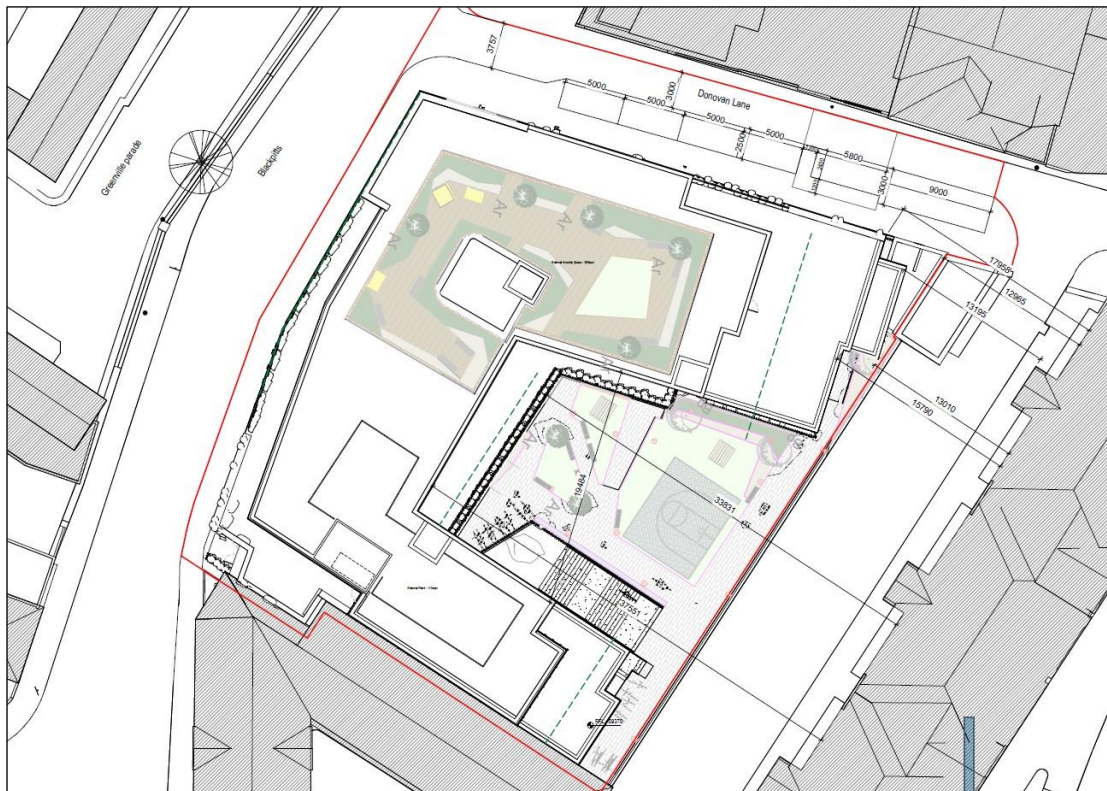


Figure 6 Footprint of proposed development (after Horan Rainsford Architects)

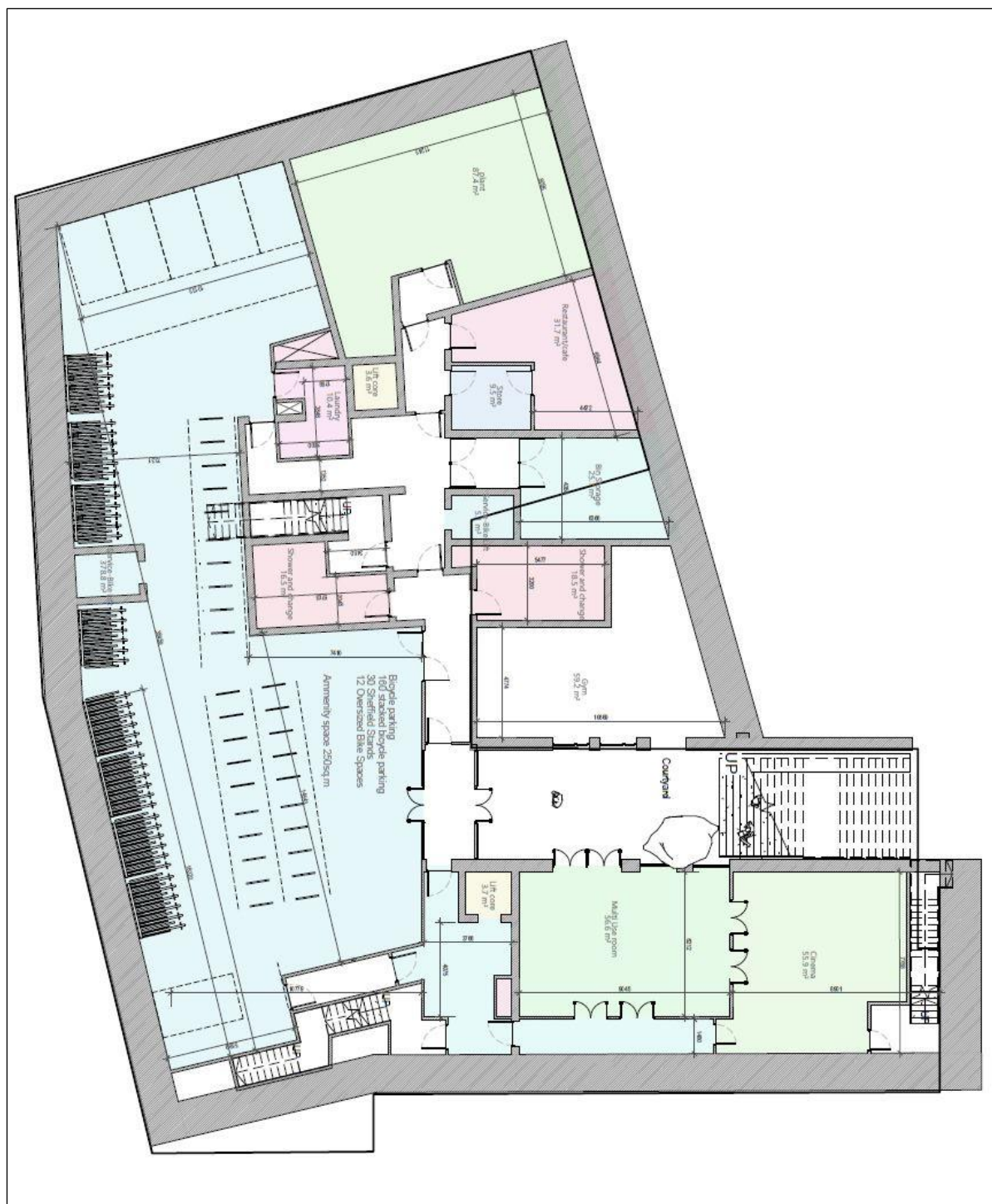
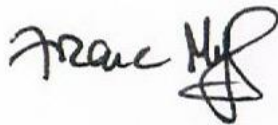


Figure 7 Basement plan (after Horan Rainsford Architects)

4 Conclusion and recommendations

- 4.1 This assessment has examined the trajectory of historical settlement on the development site, where there is little likelihood that modern development has substantially truncated into underlying strata. The likelihood of there surviving archaeological deposits of significance at this location is nonetheless considered slim.
- 4.2 As referred to above, it is likely that an archaeological condition attached to a successful grant of permission will require the excavation of test trenches after the standing structures are removed. Where there is a high probability of the survival at foundation level of the structures fronting Donovan's Lane, the design team should be cognisant of there being a further obligation to preserve by record any legible cultural material surviving. This will involve the hand-excavation of such material, an allowance for which should be made in the programme.

Given the proximity of the Poddle, test excavation should particularly focus on the area to the front of the existing structure to investigate for riverside activity which may predate the creation of the Abbey Stream.



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