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Excavations in Dungarvan – a Medieval Town Wall?

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Introduction

Three sites of archaeological significance were discovered during trenching for sewerage pipes in Dungarvan, county Waterford during July-September, 1989 (Fig. 1). However, only two of these were excavated: **Site 1**: a stone well and probable town wall in St. Augustine (or Friary) Street and **Site 2**: a town ditch at the junction of St. Augustine Street and Emmett Street (Fig. 1). **Site 3** (unexcavated), part of a wall, was uncovered at the top of Church Street near the junction with Emmett Street. The excavation was financed by Waterford County Council, while Dungarvan Urban District Council funded the post-excitation costs.

Excavation (Figs. 1-3)

Site 1. The Well and Wall in St. Augustine Street (Fig. 1).

This site is situated towards the northern end of St. Augustine Street (Fig. 1). The well was evident below modern (red brick) rubble, which probably resulted from the demolition of houses which stood in this area. Half of the well was destroyed by heavy machinery during trenching for the sewerage scheme.

This stone-lined well was 0.8m in diameter. It was excavated to a depth of 1.35m below the top stone course. It was considered dangerous to excavate below this level because there was a possibility that the well wall would collapse. The well was cut into a natural silt. The coursing was irregular. The stones were limestone and varied in diameter from 0.07m to 0.27m. The fill between the stones comprised mortar, sand and gravel.

Part of a stone wall was evident 3m to the east of the well and immediately under the road surface (Fig. 1). The coursing was regular and consisted of limestone blocks. The exposed wall was 1m in width and 2.69m in length, and the excavated depth was 0.19m. Obviously more of the wall exists below this level. Mortar covered the top of this wall.

This wall is on the site of the medieval town wall and may be the upper course of the enclosing town wall (Fig. 1). A row of buildings demolished in 1865 was located in this vicinity and the town wall had been incorporated within these. Excavation time did not allow further investigation of the wall or its relationship to the well. However, the location was recorded for future investigation (Fig. 1).

Site 2. Walls F2 & F3, & Fosse in St. Augustine Street (Figs 1, 2 & 3).

At the junction of St. Augustine Street and Emmett Street a cutting measuring 4.2m x 3.4m was excavated (Fig.2). During monitoring of the trenching for the sewerage pipes two layers containing 17th-19th century pottery were recorded in this area.

Immediately under the road surface in the south-east of the cutting there was a dump of dark brown clay (Layer 1) containing red and yellow brick, 17th-18th century pottery and glass as



well as animal bone and shell. This area was 1.3m in length on the south-west axis and it was 0.36m in width. It was c. 0.30m in depth.

Directly under this layer there was redeposited clay (Layer 2), which contained some animal bone, shells and 17th-18th century pottery. This clay covered an area 1.4m in length on the north-south axis, while its east-west width corresponded to that of the cutting. It was c. 0.35m in depth.

Another redeposited boulder clay layer was recorded under Layers 1 & 2. This layer (Layer 3) included 17th-19th century glass and pottery, animal bones, lumps of mortar and clay (Fig. 3). This layer varied from 0.20m-0.30m in depth and covered most of the trench. Under Layer 3 at the northern end of the trench there was a partially levelled wall (F2), and immediately south and south-west of this were some collapsed stones (F3), probably once part of the wall F2 (Fig. 2).

F2 extended N/S for 0.63m and E/W for 1.2m and stood to a height of 0.30m, with its stones varying from 0.05m to 0.2m in diameter. It extended north outside the limits of the excavation. F3 covered an area 0.47m x 0.47m, and the stones there were of similar size to those of F2.

Another concentration of stones (F5) occurred at the eastern side of the trench (Fig.2). They covered an area of 0.36m E/W x 0.76m N/S; it was 0.3m in height. The stones varied from 0.05m to 0.13m in diameter. These stone features were not completely excavated, but all were under redeposited boulder clay; they may represent the remains of a bank, perhaps associated with the town wall (Fig.3).

The stone features were within Layer 5, which comprised mainly a clay layer with fish bones, shell and finds of 17th-18th century pottery and glass. This layer varied in thickness from 0.24m to 0.6m. It covered most of this trench as well as the stone features of F2, F3 and F5.

Immediately under Layer 5, and running from the south-west corner northwards, part of a ditch (F1) was exposed for 3.5m (Fig. 2). It varied in width from 0.48m to 1.6m and was 0.88m in depth (Fig. 3). Layer 4 was a brown silty clay at the top of this ditch; it contained animal bone and 17th-18th century pottery. It was 0.35m thick.

At the bottom of this ditch there was a layer (Layer 6) of grey silt which contained few finds. These included one 17th-century sherd of pottery, some glass and copper fragments, one clay pipe and some animal bone. It also contained many land molluscs, suggesting that the ditch was left open for some time. Layer 6 varied from 0.5m to 0.15m in thickness.

The medieval town wall was located in this area, as well as one of the flanking towers (Fig. 1) (see Fraher, *infra*). The location of the ditch suggests that this was possibly a moat associated with the medieval town wall. Before the existence of the town wall there may have been a defensive ditch. The earliest record of the town defences was in 1463 A.D.; however, after the erection of Dungarvan Castle c.1200 A.D. the town may have been enclosed by a wall.

A deep fosse with a high bank existed round the western part of the town in the 16th century, and dues were often spent on walls, trenches and other defences. By 1700 the stretch of wall between this flanking tower and St. John's Castle to the north-east had been destroyed because it hindered the expansion of the town. Historical sources show that the town defences were used until the 17th century (*ibid*). Excavation indicated that the moat was quickly filled up in the 17th/18th century period, but continued to be used as a domestic refuse dump until the 19th century.

In recent times it was reported locally that "the foundation of one of these circular towers" was uncovered at the southern end of St. Augustine Street and near this excavation site when a new house was being built. The walls of this "tower" were said to be "three to four feet in thickness" and "consisted of huge stones" (see Fraher, *infra*). However, no provision had been made for archaeological investigation, so that no record was made of this structure when it was exposed.

Site 3. The Wall in Church Street (Fig. 1).

Part of a wall was uncovered at the top of Church Street near the junction with Emmett Street; 0.9m of its length and 0.5m of its height were evident. This may be part of the medieval town wall and is near the location of the South Gate (Fig. 1). The site was not excavated but its location was recorded and today it remains immediately below the present road surface (Fig. 1).

Conclusions

The two excavated sites on St. Augustine Street may be a section of the medieval town walls of Dungarvan: a portion of the wall in the northern part of the street and a possible fosse in the vicinity of one of the towers at the southern end of the street (Fig. 1). The third site, which remains unexcavated, may be part of the wall associated with the South Gate of the town wall.

Further archaeological investigation may confirm these interpretations. The fosse was used mainly as a domestic dump from the 17th-19th centuries. The bulk of the finds dumped here consists of imported English pottery as well as some from Germany, and local pottery.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

Exact location: Td:Dungarvan Urban District; Ph:Dungarvan; By:Decies Without Drum. O.S. 6" scale sheet Waterford, No. 31; Site 1: 25.3cm from W. margin; 16.5cm from S. margin; Site 2: 25cm from W. margin; 15.5cm from S. margin; Site 3: 26.4cm from W. margin; 15.2cm from S. margin.



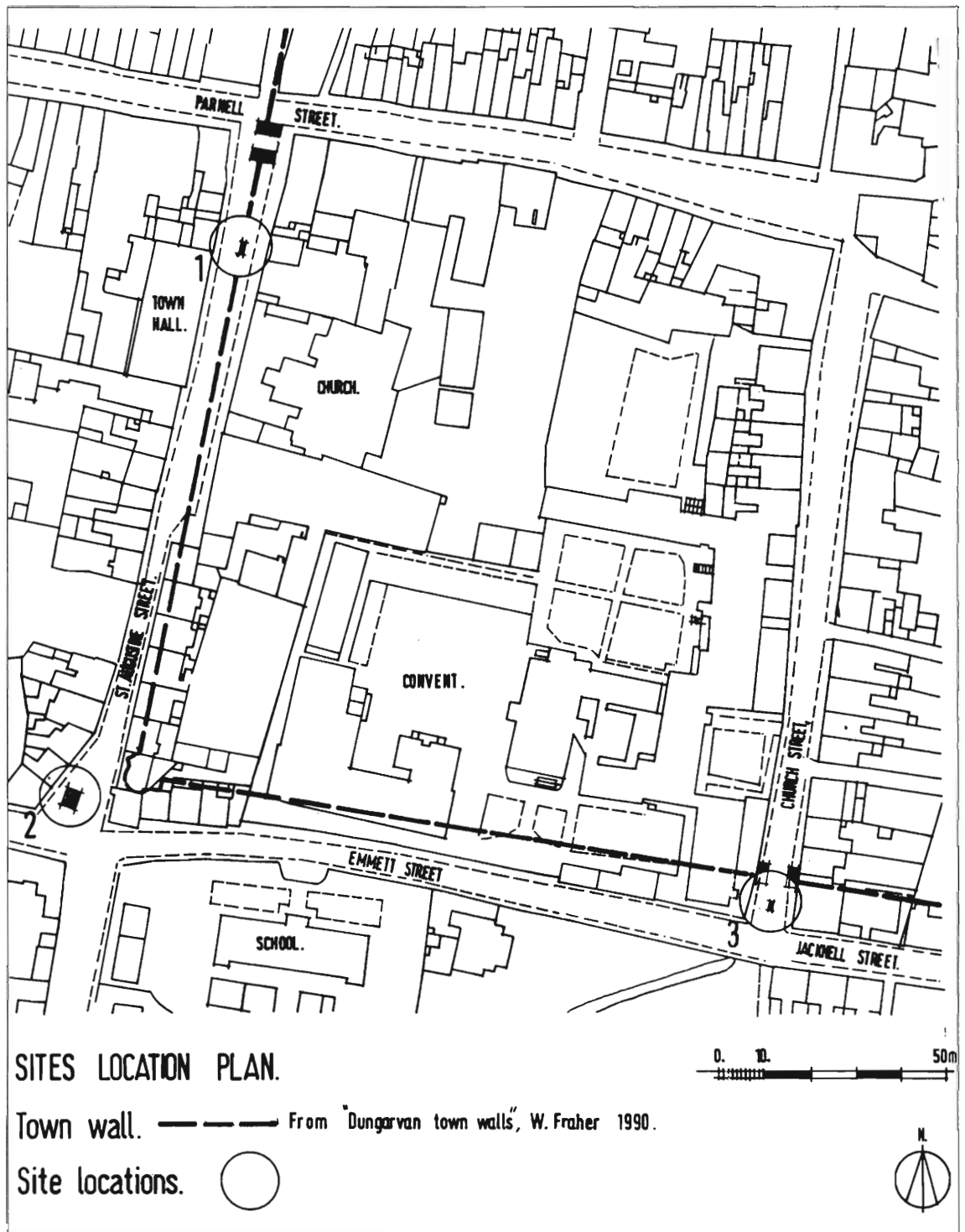


Fig. 1



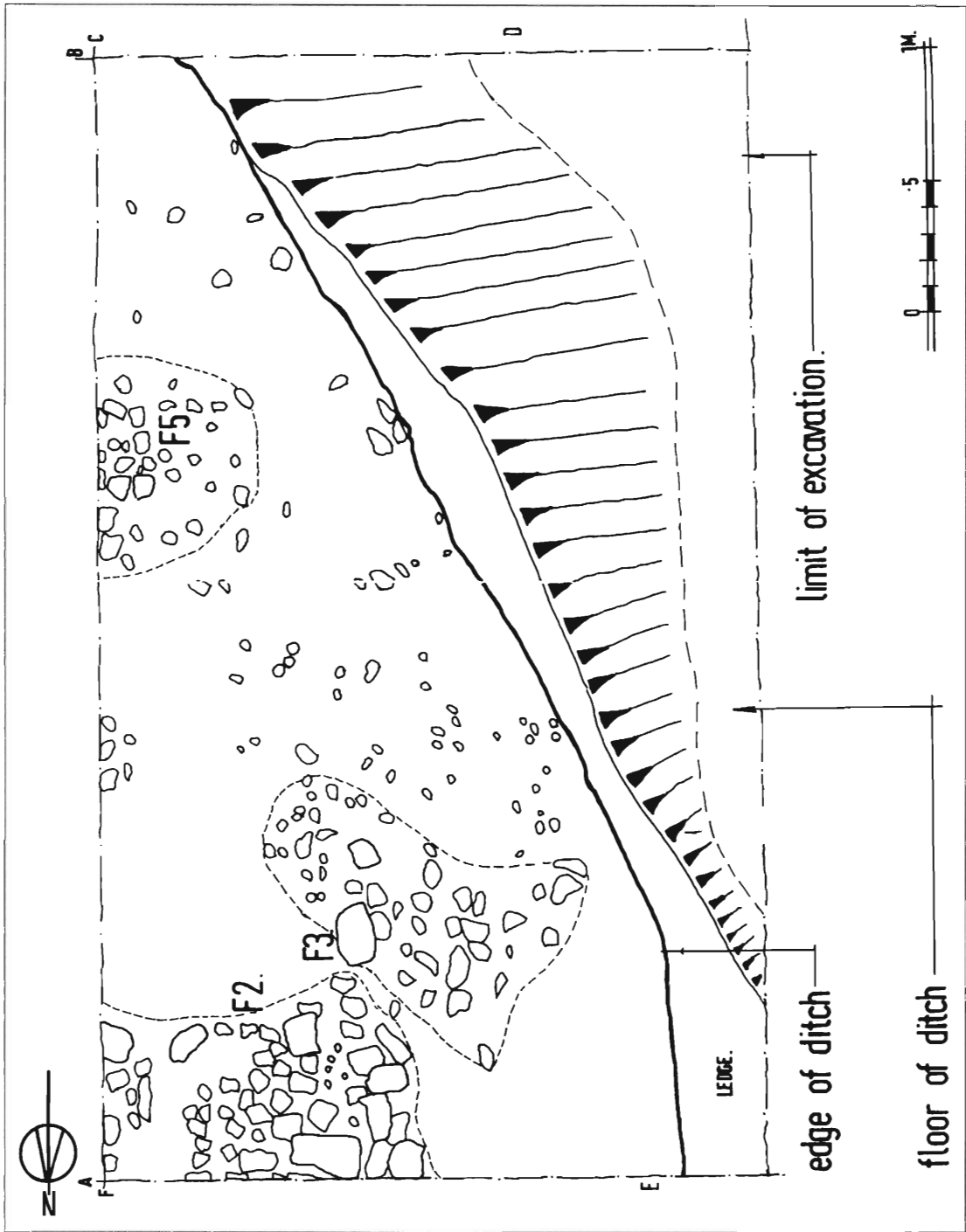


Fig. 2 - St. Augustine St., Site 2.

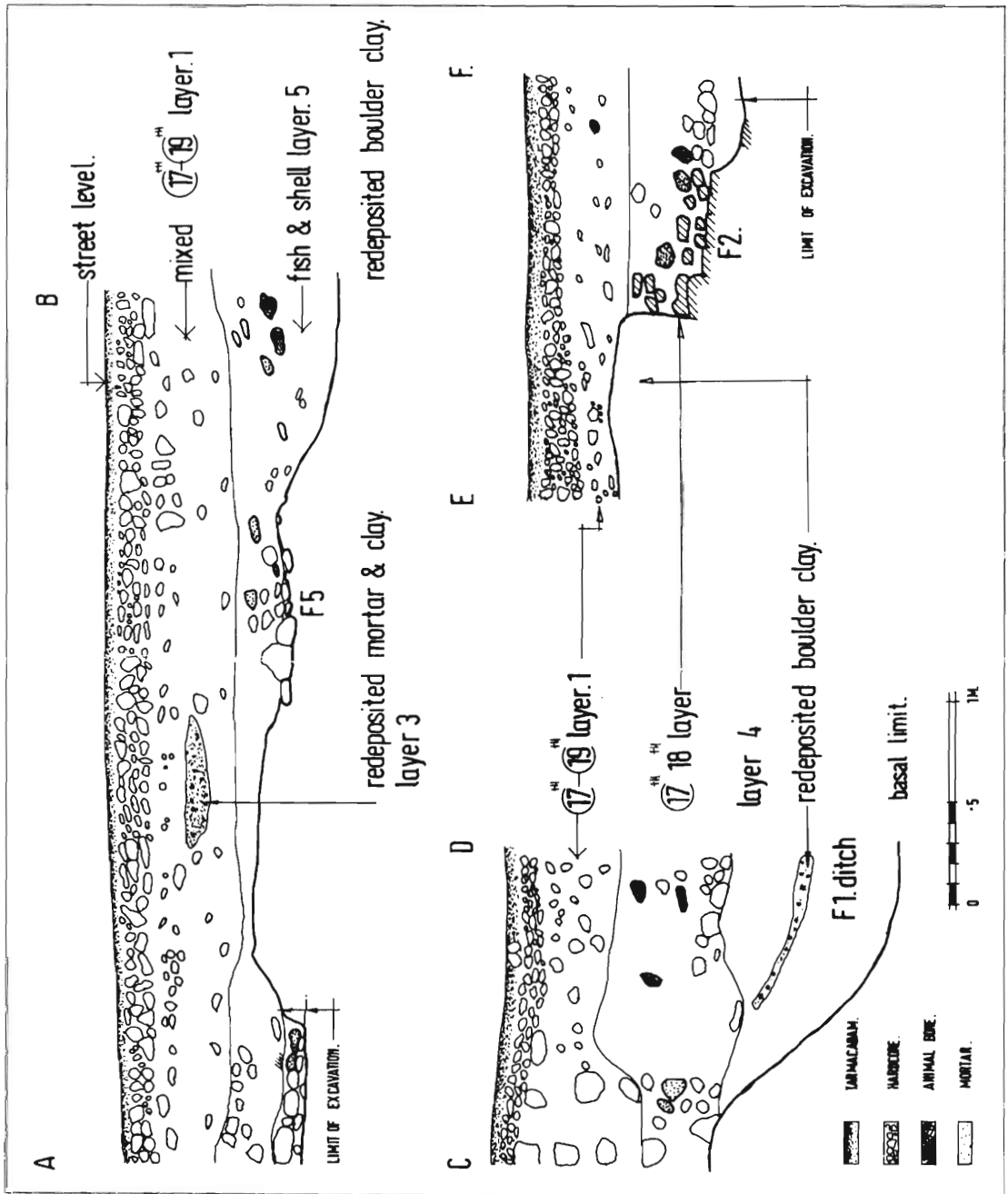


Fig. 3 - St. Augustine St., Dungarvan, Site 2 (Sections).