



Rathellen, Finisklin, Sligo, Co. Sligo

Final Archaeological Assessment Report

for

National Development Funding Agency

21E0269

Graham Hull and Dylan Duane Roche

TVAS Ireland Ltd

J21/10

June 2021

ITM 567333 836849

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Co. Sligo**

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Summary

Site name: Rathellen, Finisklin, Co. Sligo

Townland: Finisklin

Parish: St John's

Barony: Carbury

County: Sligo

Planning Ref. No: Pre-planning

Client: National Development Funding Agency

Landowner: Sligo County Council

National Grid Reference: ITM 567333 836849

Naturally occurring geology: Glacial till (mid brownish orange silty clay and greyish white sandy clay)

TVAS Ireland Job No: J21/10

Licence No: 21E0269

Licence Holder: Graham Hull

Fieldwork: Graham Hull and Dylan Duane Roche

Site activity: Testing

Date of fieldwork: 15th to 17th June 2021

Date of report: June 2021

Report authors: Graham Hull and Dylan Duane Roche

Summary of results: Archaeological testing of the site of a proposed residential development in the grounds of Rathellen House, Finisklin, Co. Sligo did not encounter archaeological features, deposits or artefacts. A number of 19th and 20th century artefacts associated with Rathellen House were observed but not retained.

Monuments identified: None

Location and reference of archive: The primary records (written, drawn and photographic) are currently held at TVAS Ireland Ltd, Ahish, Ballinruan, Crusheen, Co. Clare.

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Report edited/checked by: Kate Taylor June 2021

**Rathellen, Finisklin, Sligo, Co. Sligo
Final Archaeological Assessment Report
21E0269**

Graham Hull and Dylan Duane Roche

Report J21/10b

Introduction

This report documents the results of archaeological test trenching undertaken in advance of construction of a social housing development at Rathellen, Finisklin, Co. Sligo (Figs 1-2).

The following Government publications set out many of the procedures relating to planning/development and archaeology:

Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (DAHGI 1999a)

Policy and Guidelines on Archaeological Excavation (DAHGI 1999b)

Archaeology and Development: Guidelines for Good Practice for Developers (ICOMOS 2000)

Review of Archaeological Assessment and Monitoring Procedures in Ireland (Lambrick and Doyle 2000).

Archaeology in the Planning Process (OPR/DHLGH 2021)

The planning background

The National Development Funding Agency intends to apply to Sligo County Council for permission to construct a social housing development at Rathellen, Finisklin, Co. Sligo (Figs 1-2). The development design is not finalised and no planning application has yet been submitted.

A detailed archaeological and historical background was compiled for the site as part of an earlier desk-based archaeological assessment (McCormick 2021). This desk-based assessment recommended that the site be subject to further assessment, namely geophysical survey and test trenching, prior to development. A geophysical survey of the proposed development site was carried out on 5th - 6th May 2021 (Leigh 2021).

Location, topography and geology

The proposal site is located in the townland of Finisklin, parish of Saint John's and barony of Carbury, Co. Sligo (ITM 567333 836849) (Figs 1-3 and Plates 20 and 21).

The proposed development site is part of a larger irregular-shaped plot that encompasses an area of approximately 3.485 ha. The area to be examined is approximately 2.19ha. The site is located south of the junction of two roads, Sea Road and Finisklin Road, approximately 1.5km west of Sligo town. Cummeen Strand is located a short distance north of the site. The IDA Finisklin Business & Technology Park is located directly south and east of the site. Rathellen House and associated buildings are located within the proposal site.

The proposed development site lies at approximately 10m above Ordnance Datum (OD).

Geological deposits encountered during testing were glacial till (mid brownish orange silty clay and greyish white sandy clay).

Archaeological and historical background

A detailed archaeological and historical background was compiled for the site as part of an earlier desk-based archaeological assessment (McCormick 2021) and not repeated in full here.

The proposed development site is rural in character and located close to Cummeen Strand. ‘Finisklin’ translates to the Irish *Fionasclainn* meaning ‘fair corner nook or angle’ (www.logainm.ie).

Geophysical survey (Fig. 3)

A geophysical survey of the proposed development site was carried out on 5th - 6th May 2021 (Leigh 2021). The survey revealed anomalies representing several structures and features that clearly relate to Rathellen House, in addition to large amounts of ferrous material that is likely to be of relatively recent date. Some faint curvilinear features could potentially be of archaeological interest, however they could equally represent modern disturbance (Fig. 3).

Cartographic sources (Figs 4-6)

The 1838 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 4) shows Rathellen House and its outbuildings set within a managed estate landscape. The 1912 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 5) shows an expanded Rathellen House with a greater number of associated outbuildings. This layout is essentially maintained as shown on the 1944 map (Fig. 6).

Recorded Monuments and Protected Structures (Fig. 6)

The early to mid-19th century Rathellen House and associated buildings are located within the site. Rathellen was the home of W A Woods, local merchant and former Mayor of Sligo. The house is a de-listed Protected Structure. The closest Recorded Monuments are located approximately 300-400m west of the site; SL014-055 (ringfort) and SL014-054 (barrow – ring-barrow), approximately 400m to the south-west; SL014-057 (enclosure) and SL014-058 (enclosure), and approximately 400m to the south; SL014-059 (*fulacht fia*) and SL014-060 (*fulacht fia*). Some of these monuments are shown on the 1944 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 6). The closest NIAH site is the mid-19th century Ursuline Convent located approximately 800m south-east of the site.

Previous archaeological investigations

The results of archaeological investigations in Ireland are published in summary form in Excavations (Bennett 1987-2010) and online at www.excavations.ie. A search of both sources was made for Finisklin and surrounding townlands. The most relevant are referred to here. Eight entries are recorded for Finisklin. In 2002, testing and monitoring of agricultural land surrounding Fort Garry House west of the Finisklin Industrial Estate site identified no archaeological features (Corcoran 2002a-b). In 2003 monitoring of the first phase of construction of the proposed Finisklin Business and Technology Park encountered nothing of archaeological significance (O’Connell 2003). Testing of industrial development in the townland in 2007 found no archaeology (Rooney 2007). Testing on behalf of IDA Ireland in 2016 near a roundabout on Sea Road found nothing of archaeological significance (Quinn 2016). In the same year, a programme of archaeological monitoring was carried out along the Finisklin Road of upgrading works to Sligo town water mains. No archaeology was encountered (McHugh 2016). Testing in 2020 close to the Ursuline Convent in Rathedmond and Finisklin identified several features of potential archaeological significance (McHugh 2020a). Subsequent excavation of these features identified evidence of charcoal production and metal working, possible bowl furnaces and charcoal production kilns/clamps (McHugh 2020b).

Test Trenching – Objectives and methodology

Test excavation took place at the proposal site in order to supplement the documentary research and geophysical survey for this assessment and, specifically, to establish the nature and extent of any archaeological deposits and features.

The National Monuments Acts 1930-2004 provide the legislative framework within which archaeological excavation can take place. A licence to excavate was issued to Graham Hull by the National Monuments Service of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The licence number is 21E0269.

The development site has an area of approximately 2.19ha (21,907m²). It was proposed to excavate twenty test trenches, each 1.80m wide, five of which would be 50m long and fifteen of which would be 25m long, giving an area of investigation of approximately 1,125m². In the event, mature tree cover and nesting birds reduced the number of trenches to 19 with an area of investigation of 1,088.3m² (Figs 7 and 8). Some of the trenches were targeted to examine some of the geophysical survey anomalies.

These trenches gave approximately 4.97% coverage of the proposal site, which sits well with simulation modelling based on empirical studies of archaeological testing (Hey et al. 2000) that has shown that the optimum sample fraction for the most commonly encountered conditions is in the order of 4-5%. Beyond this percentage the information gain suffers from sharply diminishing returns, while smaller fractions offer low probabilities for intercepting many potential sites. Higher sample fractions can be justified in exceptional circumstances (Orton 2000).

Topsoil and overburden was stripped from the test trenches using a 13 tonne 360 degree tracked excavator fitted with a 6 foot (1.8m) toothless grading bucket and operated under direct and continuous archaeological control. Mechanical ceased at the top of potential archaeological deposits or the surface of the natural geological deposits, whichever was encountered first. Archaeological deposits or potential archaeological deposits were hand-cleaned. The spoil was spread and visually scanned for finds. The purpose of the testing was to establish the presence/absence of archaeological deposits and features and where these exist, establish their nature and extent. It was not proposed that such features or deposits be fully investigated without consultation with the licensing authorities.

A full written, drawn and photographic record was made in accordance with the TVAS Ireland Recording Manual (First Edition). Copies of this manual have previously been submitted to the National Monuments Section and the National Museum of Ireland. The proposed works complied in full with government guidelines (DAHGI 1999a; 1999b).

The test trenching was undertaken by Graham Hull with assistance from Dylan Duane Roche between 15th and 17th June 2021.

Test Trenching – Results (Figs 7 and 8 and Plates 1-19)

Nineteen test trenches were excavated across the proposal area. The trenches ranged in length from 15.10m to 66.30m and were 1.80m wide. The test trenches revealed evidence of 19th and 20th century refuse and also land drainage and foundations associated with previously extant structures on the property of Rathellen House. Detailed descriptions of the trenches are given as Appendix 1 and features and deposits are listed in Appendix 2.

Topsoil across the site is a moderately compact dark brown sandy loam soil (50) with rooting and occasional small pebbles. The observed underlying natural geological deposit (51) was glacial till consisting of a firm pale grey and mid orange brown silty sand clay.

Results by trench

Trenches 1-11, 19 (Figs 7-8 Plates 1-11, 19)

Trenches 1-5 and 19 were grouped in the southern portion of the site (Fig. 7) within a field separate from the main area which included Rathellen House and its outbuildings, where the remainder of the trenches were located.

Trench 1, with a length of 52.70m and a depth of 0.35m contained a single feature. Ditch 1 aligned north-east to south-west was 1.00m wide and 0.32 m deep and contained a single fill (53) of dark grey clay silt with large stone and brick fragment inclusions.

Trench 2 located east of Trench 1 measured 49.20m in length and was 0.45m deep containing two linear features. Linear feature 2, aligned north-west to south-east, was found towards the southern end of the trench. This feature was 2.5m wide and filled with dark brown silty sandy loam (52) containing fragments of modern pottery and brick. Deposit 54, located within the west-facing section of the trench on the northern edge of and truncated by linear feature 2, was 2.00m long and 0.25m wide and consisted of sand and seashells. Ditch 3, aligned north-east to south-west was 1.90m wide and 0.45m deep and was filled with dark brown silty clay (55) with large stone inclusions. Ditch 3 is likely the continuation of ditch 1 seen in Trench 1.

Trench 3 located west of trench 2 was 28.00m long and 0.35m deep. Linear deposit 56 crossed the trench at an oblique angle, was 4.47m long within the trench and 0.34m wide and was probably a north-west to south-east aligned drain. Ditch 4, filled with deposit 57, was aligned north-east to south-west and was 1.5m wide. This feature is likely a part of the ditch seen in trenches 1 and 3.

Trench 4 located to the north of Trench 3 was T-shaped with a length of 26.10m with an additional 3.70m extension to the south. The trench was between 0.25m deep at the east and 0.45m deep at the west. Deposit 58 appeared to be a 0.40m wide foundation trench filled with large stone and brick fragments, that was seen for an overall length of 12m before extending outside the trench. Topsoil within this area revealed evidence of concrete and other mixed building rubble. Deposit 59 appeared as a sub-circular possible pit measuring 1.40m north to south by 1.30m, comprising dark brown silty loam with demolition material on top.

Trench 5 to the west of Trench 4 27.00m long and 0.22-0.30m deep, deepening to the east. Contained within the trench were five north to south aligned narrow drains filled with rough stone, each approximately 0.30m wide.

Trench 6 located to the north of Trench 5 within the main area of Rathellen House was 23.00m long and 0.60m deep. There was a single east to west aligned stone drain, 0.30m wide, at the north end of the trench which was near the entrance to a yard associated with the outbuildings adjacent to the house. Deposit 60 was visible within the west facing section at a depth of 0.22m for approximately 4m near the entrance to the above-mentioned yard, composed of a sand and gravel mix probably used as driveway aggregate.

Trench 7 to the north of Trench 6 measured 47.00m in length and was 0.60m deep. A series of eight east to west aligned drains was identified at intervals of 3.0-3.5m, each approximately 0.30m wide and containing large angular stones.

Trench 8 located east of trench 7, measuring 22.50m long and 0.40m deep, contained a single stone drain aligned north-east to south-west and was 0.30m wide.

Trench 9 located north of Trench 8 was 27.30m long and 0.60m deep and contained a pair of parallel 0.30m wide stone-filled drains spaced at approximately 5.5m.

Trench 10 located on the northern edge of the site measured 49.00m in length and 0.55m in depth and contained a single linear feature towards the centre which was likely the sewer associated with Rathellen House. A number of relatively modern finds including stationery equipment was identified within the topsoil of the trench possibly associated with the previous occupants of the house.

Trench 11 located south of Trench 10 was 29.30m long and 0.55m deep and also contained a portion of the sewer identified in Trench 10.

Trench 19 was positioned in the southern portion of the site between Trenches 2 and 3 was 20.60m long and 0.41m deep. Another portion of the ditch seen in Trenches 1-3 was noted here.

Trenches 13-18 (Fig. 7, Plates 13-18)

Trenches 13-18 were located in relative proximity to Rathellen House and followed a trend of topsoil (50) atop a pale grey clay and a mid orange silty clay glacial till natural subsoil (51) with occasional finds of 19th and 20th century pottery in the topsoil. An exception to this trend was Trench 16 which was the longest at 66.30m and varied in depth between 0.60m at the south-west to 1.10m at the north-east end. Towards the latter end of the trench was a 0.15m thick deposit at a depth of 0.80m of oyster, cockle, and mussel shells. This deposit was presumably collected locally in order to help reduce the acidity of the soil for the garden.

No archaeological features, deposits or artefacts were observed in any of the trenches.

Finds (Plates 23 and 24)

Later 19th or 20th century pottery, glass and other household waste was seen in many of the trenches. The largest quantity of this material was seen in Trench 4 and also Trench 2. The pottery and some of the glassware can be characterised as 'high status' and included delicate and well-made plates, teacups and bottles (Plate 23). The material is what might be expected as refuse from a large wealthy household. Galvanised steel mimeograph plates were recorded in Trench 10. The plates bear names and addresses in Sligo County and City (Plate 24). One address is Markievicz Road, Sligo. The street was renamed from Victoria Road in 1943 (Gallagher and Legge 2012, 11) and the plates consequently post-date this name change.

These items are not considered archaeological given their late date and have not been retained.

Samples

No samples were taken.

Test Trenching – Discussion

The proposal site is located within a relatively rich archaeological environment, with recorded monuments dating from the prehistoric to medieval periods found nearby. Geophysical survey identified anomalies, however targeted test trenching established that these did not refer to archaeological features or deposits. Test trenching across the site did not reveal archaeological features, deposits or artefacts.

Archaeological Impact Statement

In accordance with *Policy and Guidelines on Archaeological Excavation* (DAHGI 1999b), an archaeological impact statement is to be made. The impact statement should describe the following:

...possible direct or indirect effects of the proposed development on archaeological deposits, features or objects. The archaeological impact statement must be based on the results of the overall archaeological assessment as well as the results of the test excavation. (DAHGI 1999b, 21).

The documentary research has demonstrated that the proposal site is within an area of relatively high archaeological potential.

The geophysical survey identified anomalies that on ground truthing by test trenching proved to be non-archaeological. The test trenching did not encounter archaeological features, deposits or artefacts and on the basis of the results of the assessment it can be stated with confidence that the proposed development will not impact on any below-ground archaeological features or deposits. No further archaeological work is recommended.

The opinions given in this archaeological assessment report are made subject to approval by the National Monuments Service of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Recommendations and further work

Fieldwork

Following the test trenching that did not reveal evidence of archaeological features or deposits, no further archaeological intervention is recommended for the proposed development.

Post-excavation

An accessible archive of primary records will be prepared for long term storage and will be deposited with the National Monuments Service's Archive Unit in Swords in accordance with their guidelines (Barrett 2012).

Publication and dissemination plan

A summary of the findings of the excavation will be submitted to *Excavations 2021*.



Graham Hull and Dylan Duane Roche
TVAS Ireland Ltd
June 2021

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Web sources (accessed May 2021)

www.excavations.ie

www.logainm.ie

Appendix 1: Trench descriptions

Trench	Length (m)	Width (m)	Area (m ²)	Depth (m)	Comments
1	52.70	1.80	94.86	0.35	Topsoil 0.35m. Ditch 1.
2	49.20	1.80	88.56	0.45	Topsoil 0.45m. Linear feature 2, deposit 54 and ditch 3.
3	28	1.80	50.4	0.35	Topsoil 0.35m. Linear deposit 56 and ditch 4.
4	29.80	1.80	53.64	0.25-0.45	Topsoil 0.25-0.45m. Deposit 58 and deposit 59.
5	27	1.80	48.6	0.22-0.30	Topsoil 0.22-0.30m
6	23	1.80	41.4	0.60	Topsoil 0.60m. Deposit 60.
7	47	1.80	84.6	0.60	Topsoil 0.60m
8	22.50	1.80	40.5	0.40	Topsoil 0.40m
9	27.30	1.80	49.14	0.60	Topsoil 0.60m
10	49	1.80	88.2	0.55	Topsoil finds of mimeograph plates.
11	29.30	1.80	52.74	0.52	Topsoil 0.52m
12	25.30	1.80	45.54	0.60	Topsoil 0.60m. Lead water pipe present.
13	26.50	1.80	47.7	0.35	Topsoil 0.35m
14	19	1.80	34.2	0.50	Topsoil 0.5m
15	30	1.80	54	0.30	Topsoil 0.3m
16	66.30	1.80	119.34	0.60-1.10	Topsoil 0.60-1.10m. Long curving trench with layer of seashells at northern end - probably collected locally and used within garden to reduce soil acidity.
17	15.1	1.80	27.18	0.30	Topsoil 0.30m
18	20.70	1.80	37.26	0.45-1.00	Topsoil 0.45-1.00m
19	20.6	1.80	37.08	0.40	Topsoil 0.40m. Portion of ditch identified in trenches 1-3.

NB Depths are from current ground surface

Appendix 2: Catalogue of features and deposits

Cut	Deposit	Trench	Type	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)
1	53	1	Ditch	1.80+	1.00	0.32
2	52	2, 3	Linear feature	3.00+	2.50	-
3	55	2	Ditch	3.00+	1.90	0.45
4	57	3	Ditch	3.00+	1.50	-
-	50	All	Topsoil	-	-	0.25-1.10
-	51	All	Natural	-	-	-
-	54	2	Deposit	2.00	0.25+	0.15+
-	56	3	Linear deposit	5.00+	0.34	-
-	58	4	Deposit	12.00+	0.40	-
-	59	4	Deposit of possible pit	1.40	1.30	-
-	60	6	Sandy gravel deposit	4.00+	-	0.22

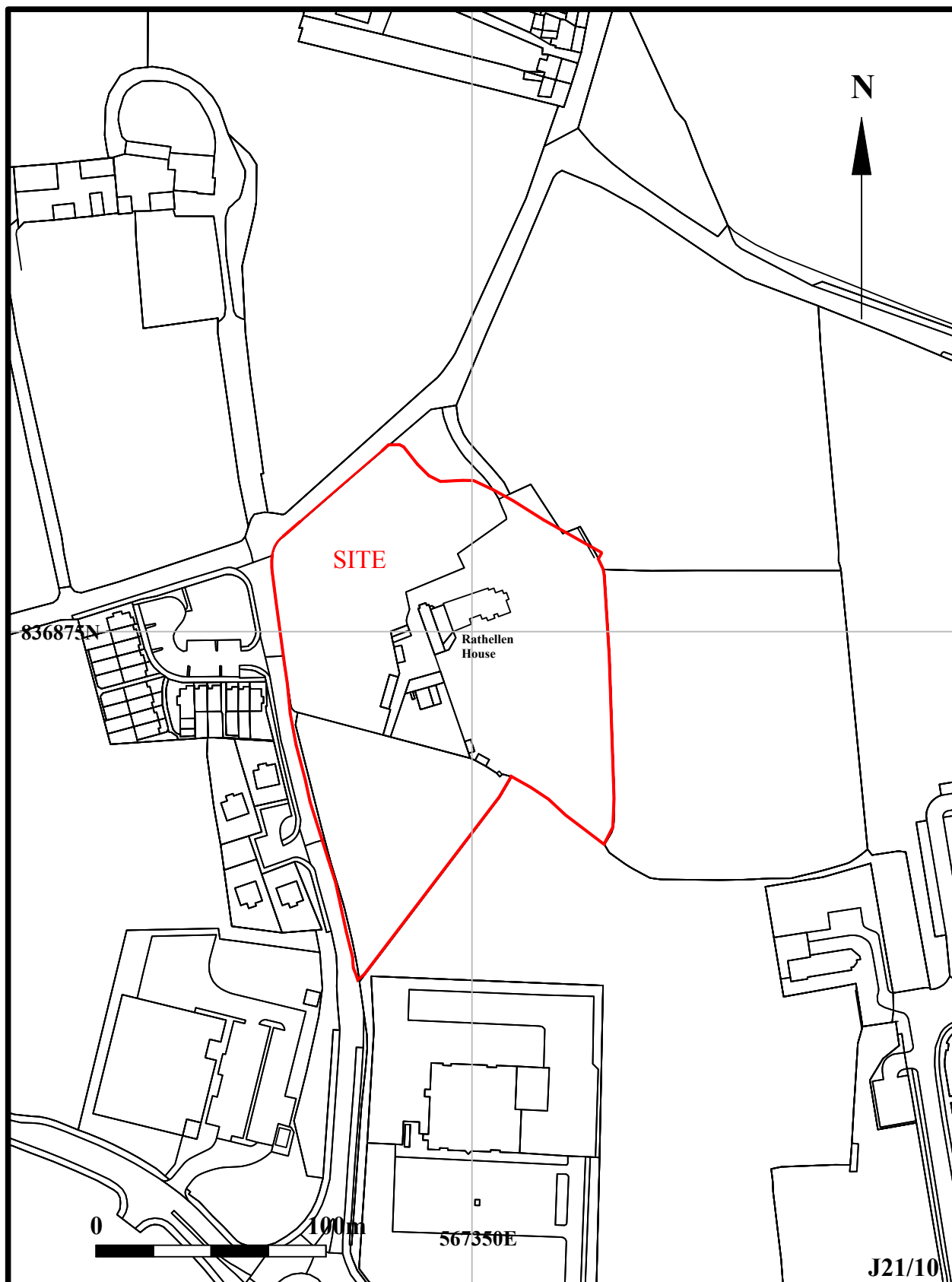


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Figure 1: Site location

Scale 1:50,000 @ A4. Grid NGR
 Based on Ordnance Survey Discovery Series 1:50,000
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Figure 2: Existing site layout and location

Scale 1:2,500 @ A4. Grid ITM
Based on Ordnance Survey Ireland digital mapping provided by client
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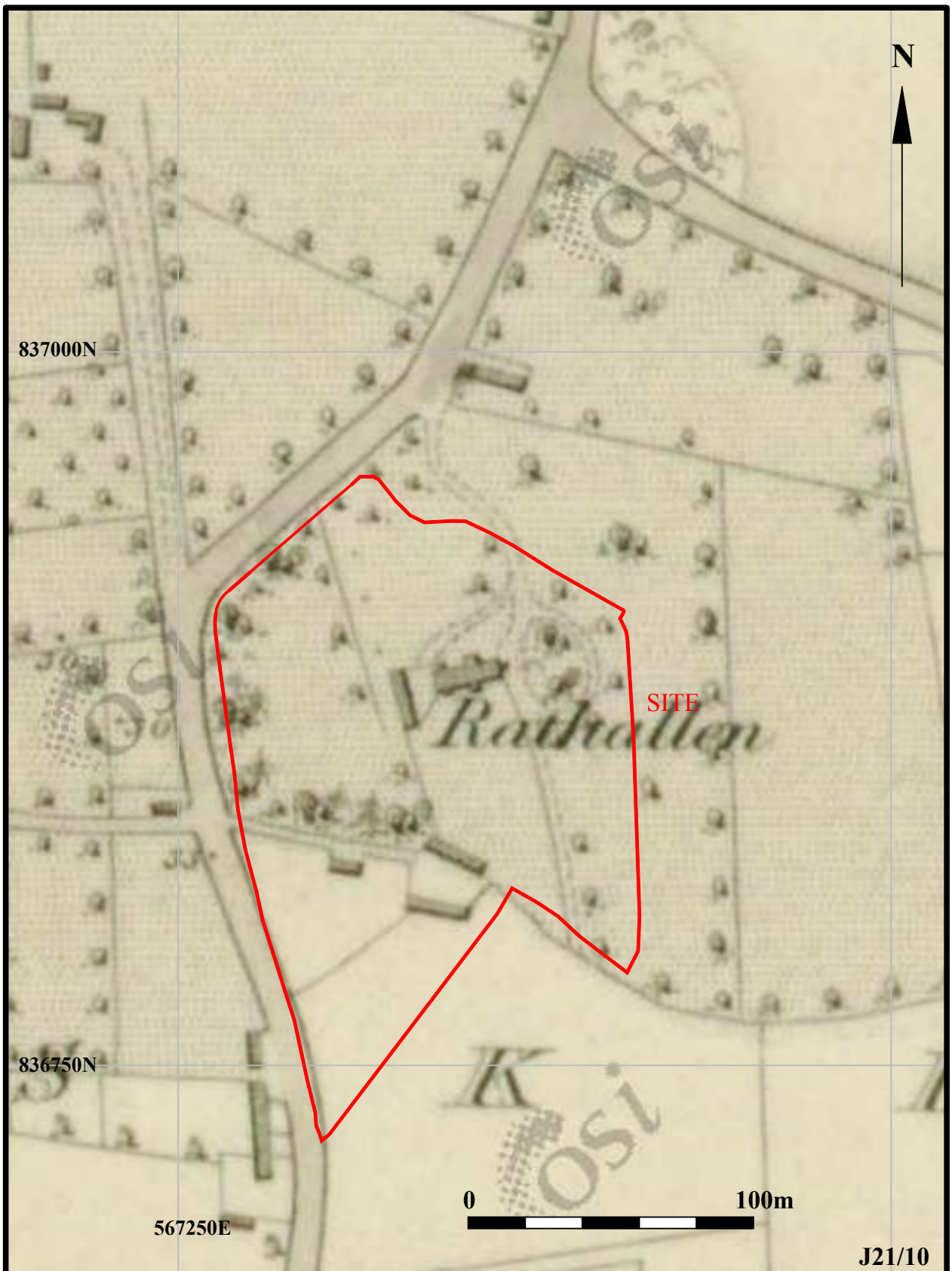


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**Figure 3: Geophysics summary interpretation diagram
with outline of test trenches**

Scale 1:1,000 @ A4. Grid ITM
Based on OSI digital mapping provided by client and Leigh 2021
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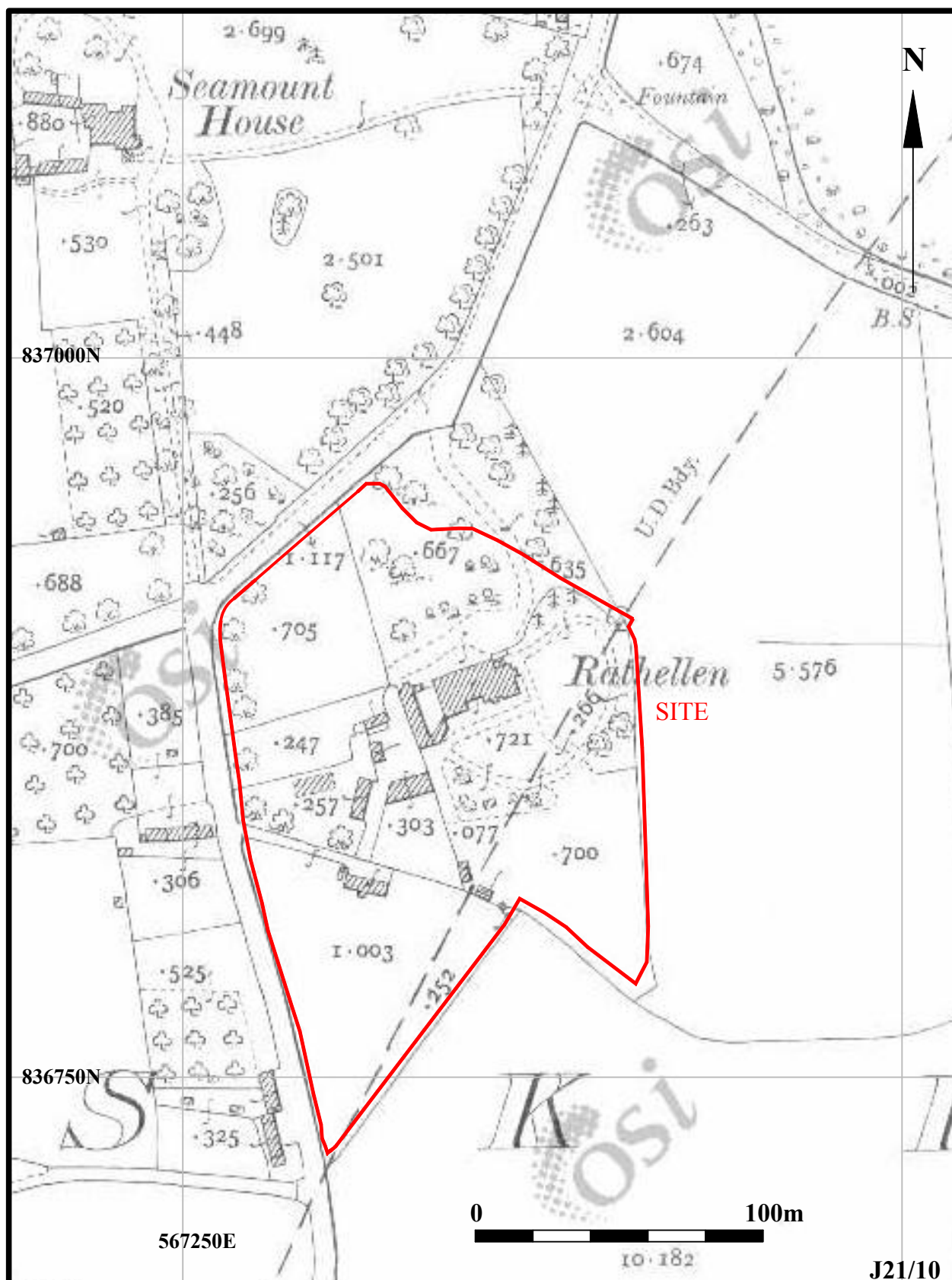


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Figure 4: Site on Ordnance Survey map 1838

Scale 1:2,000 @ A4. Grid ITM
Ordnance Survey 6" to 1 mile. Sheet SO014. Surveyed 1837.
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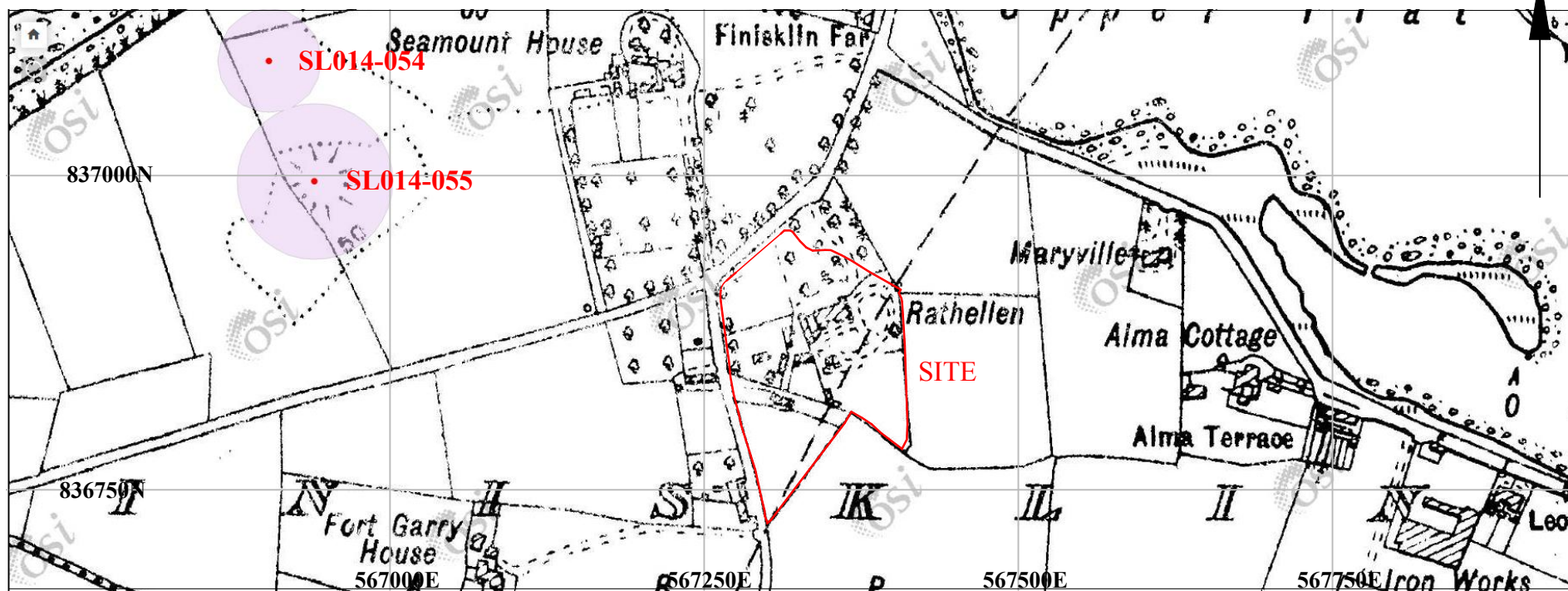
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Figure 5: Site on Ordnance Survey map 1912

Scale 1:2,000 @ A4. Grid ITM
Ordnance Survey 25" to 1 mile. Sheet SO014/07. Surveyed 1910.
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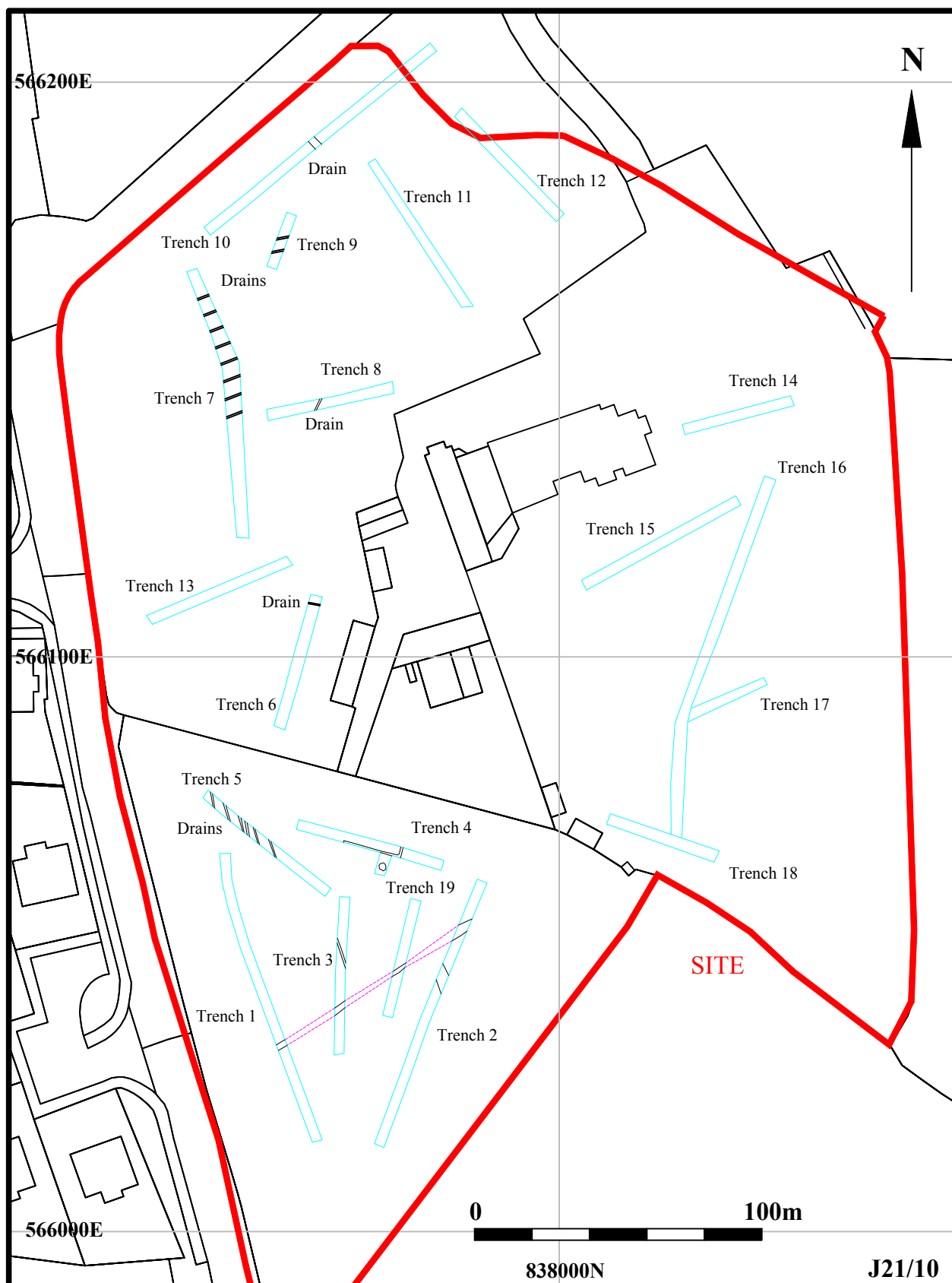


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Figure 6: Site on Ordnance Survey map 1944 showing
Recorded Monuments

Scale 1:5,000 @ A4. Grid ITM
Ordnance Survey 6" to 1 mile. Sheet SO014. Surveyed 1837, revised 1909.
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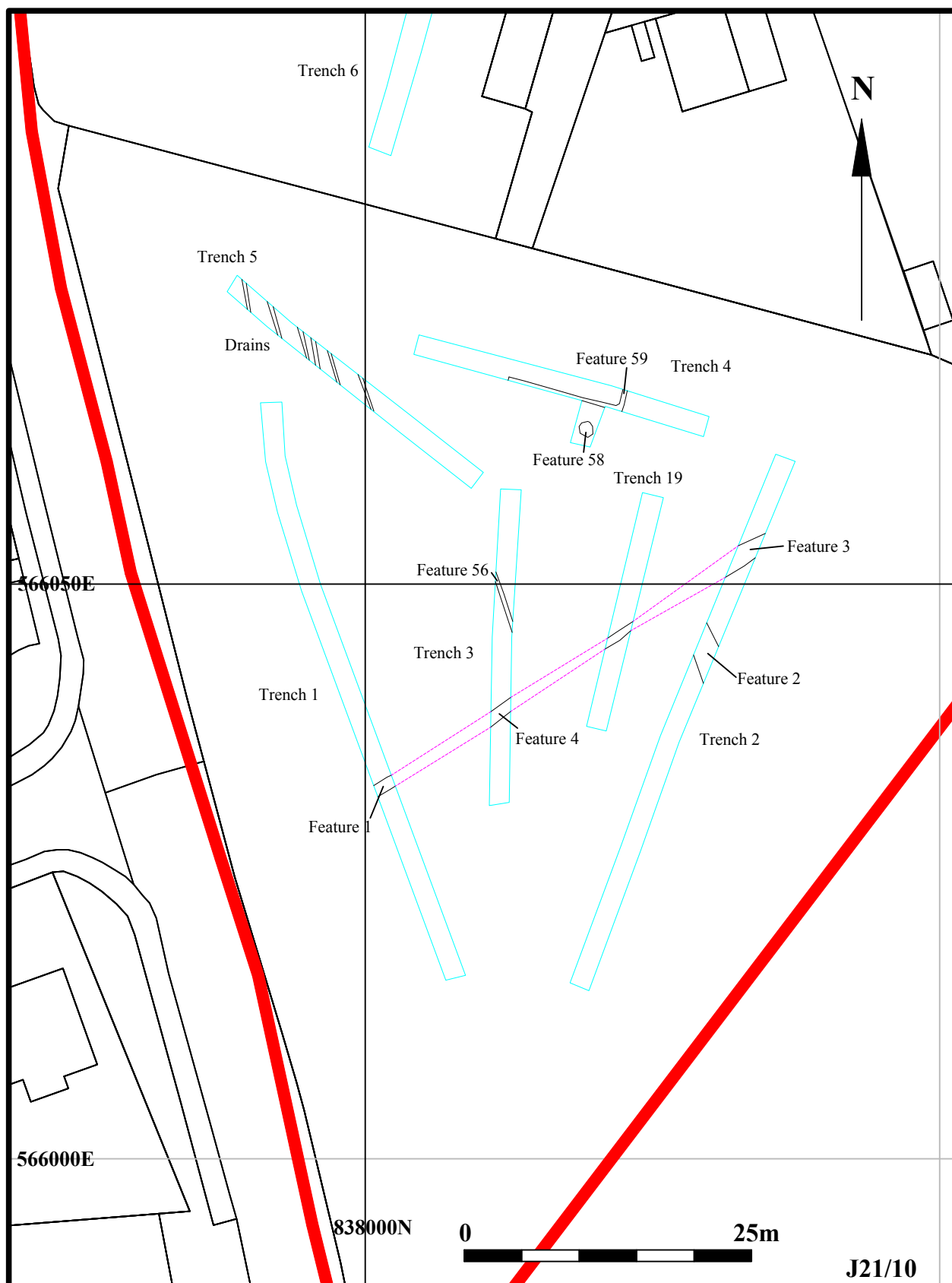


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Figure 7: Overall trench layout

Scale 1:1,000 @ A4. Grid ITM
Based on Ordnance Survey Ireland digital mapping provided by client
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Figure 8: Details of trenches in southern area

Scale 1:500 @ A4. Grid ITM

Based on Ordnance Survey Ireland digital mapping provided by client
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Plate 1: Trench 1. Looking S. Scales 1m



**Plate 2: Trench 1. Looking N. Showing cut 1.
Scales 1m & 0.5m**



Plate 3: Trench 2. Looking NE. Scales 1m



**Plate 4: Trench 2. Feature 2. Looking NW.
Scales 1m**



Plate 5: Trench 3. Looking SW. Scales 1m



Plate 6: Trench 4. Looking W. Scales 1m

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Plates 1 - 6

**T V A S
I R E L A N D
L T D**



Plate 7: Trench 5. Looking SE. Scales 1m



Plate 8: Trench 6. Looking S. Scales 1m



Plate 9: Trench 9. Looking NE. Scales 1m



Plate 10: Trench 10. Looking NE. Scales 1m



Plate 11: Trench 11. Looking N. Scales 1m



Plate 12: Trench 12. Looking NE. Scales 1m

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Plates 7 - 12

**T V A S
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**Plate 13: Trench 14. Looking NE.
Scales 1m & 0.5m**



**Plate 14: Trench 15. Looking SW.
Scales 1m & 0.5m**



Plate 15: Trench 16. Looking S. Scales 1m



**Plate 16: Trench 16. Showing shell deposit.
Looking SE. Scale 1m**



**Plate 17: Trench 17. Looking NE.
Scales 1m & 0.5m**



Plate 18: Trench 18. Looking SE. Scale 1m

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Plates 13 - 18

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**Plate 19: Trench 19. Looking SE.
Scales 1m & 0.5m**



**Plate 20: Trench 15. Aerial view of site.
Looking NW**



**Plate 21: Aerial view of site with test trenches.
Looking SE**



Plate 22: Rathellen House. Looking NW



**Plate 23: Selection of pottery and glass from
Trenches 2 and 4**



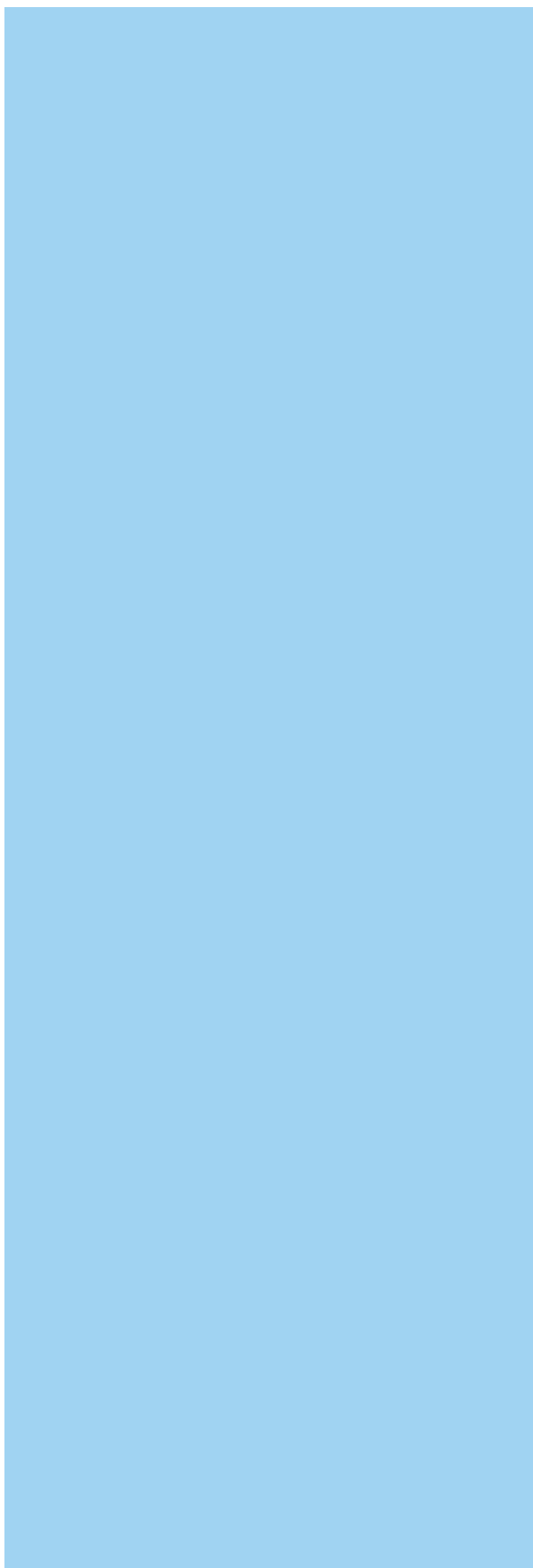
Plate 24: Mimeograph plates from Trench 10

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Plates 19 - 24

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TVAS Ireland Ltd
Ahish, Ballinruan, Crusheen, Co. Clare
Tel: 065 6823533
Fax: 065 6890980
info@tvasureland.ie
www.tvasureland.ie