

## ANNUAL REPORT: IRELAND BLACKFRIARY 2014 FIELD SCHOOL

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Excavation uncovers the medieval Chapter House walls and the East Range

The Blackfriary Community Archaeology Project is carrying out archaeological research and excavation at the site of the Black Friary, Trim Co. Meath. Excavations have thus far uncovered the remains of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Dominican foundation.

Season 5 2014 excavations at the Black Friary focused on further investigation of the buildings within the friary precinct, and to investigate whether the town wall survives on the southern boundary of the site. Previous seasons focused on locating and delineating the friary church and cloister. This work continues, and three additional cuttings were opened to:

- investigate whether the town wall survives to the south of the site
- assess the damage to the site caused in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century by local development
- investigate features in the east range of the friary, as identified by topographical and LiDAR survey

Excavations are ongoing (scheduled to finish end September 2014). Findings thus far may be summarized thus:

### **The East Range**

A 20m long stretch of the east range, which would have accommodated the Chapter House, the sacristy and overhead, the dormitories has been exposed. The east and west walls have been robbed out to foundation level, but internal walls, including one which has been tentatively identified as the north wall of the Chapter House with a possible integral bench built into it, survive up to 1m in height. The lower steps of a stone staircase and post holes to support a

possible timber stairs above this have also been identified. This indicates the presence of upper story in the east range and, given its location, possibly to an adjacent building to the north. Outside the building and to the east of it walls interpreted as garden walls are being exposed. A number of exciting and definitive artifacts have been uncovered in this area including copper alloy buckle/clasps associated with leather manuscript covers, a range of medieval ceramics including glazed and decorated floor tiles, glazed roof tiles and pottery, and most significantly, medieval stained glass surviving in its original leading. The latter is a unique find in an Irish context.

### **The Town Wall**

A cutting/unit (Cutting 11) was opened in the south-west corner of the site to investigate whether the medieval town wall survived; this proved a particularly complex area to investigate as the medieval archeology has been heavily disturbed by modern demolition activity. This had truncated a number of burials, and obliterated the medieval strata in the eastern end of the cutting (Cutting 11). There was no evidence for the town wall or any associated ditch in this location.

An additional cutting/unit (Cutting 12) was subsequently opened at the south end of the site, located to investigate the location of the town wall. The results of investigation in this area indicate that the modern boundary of the site is in line with a previously unidentified medieval ditch that seems to have been situated on the north side of the town wall, possible delineating the friary precinct or serving as the ditch of the town wall, though not particularly large. It is however undoubtedly too wide to be a field boundary, and its interpretation as a significant boundary is justified by its form and location.

### **Research Aims, Reporting and Dissemination of results**

- The research aims of the project are evolving to include specific objectives including:
- To investigate the social and political context of the foundation of the friary
- To further our understanding of the use of building materials on the site including the importation of decorative stone and the apparently extensive use of stained glass
- To explore changing mortuary practices on the site from the medieval to modern period

Dr. Rachel Scott will be presenting a paper co-authored with Ms Finola O'Carroll on the site and interim excavation results at the *Conference on Medieval Archaeology 2014*, SUNY Cortland Dept. of Sociology-Anthropology, on Saturday, October 18, 2014. A submission has also been made by Ms O'Carroll and Dr. Scott to the Society for American Archaeology (SAA 80th Annual Meeting) 2015.

Interim reporting is published on line, and submitted to the Minister of Department of Arts, Heritage and the *Gaeltacht*, as per the requirements of the Ministerial Consent to excavate (C420, E4127).

### **Student Research**

To date one MA dissertation has been completed whose subject matter was the imported stone from the site, a second MA dissertation considers this imported stone as part of a wider study of such stone into Ireland in the medieval period.

Three undergraduate dissertations have been completed on aspects of the burial practices at Black Friary. Two students have presented papers on the excavations at the site (Anthro (+) 2013 Student Conference Department of Anthropology, the College of Behavioural and Social

Sciences of the University of Maryland; Power, Prayer and Public Archaeology (2014), Irish Archaeology Field School; Space and Medieval Settlement V (2014), Trinity College Dublin).

One student has applied to do a Master Degree in bioarchaeology, to undertake research on a subset of the human remains from the site, focusing on post-mortem damage. This study commenced this season. One student is completing a PhD examining ways of objectively assessing human remains for pre- versus post-mortem trauma/damage and is including examples from the Black Friary.

All students wishing to carry out research on material from the site must undertake one season of excavation at the site. Proposals for research on the site must include a written proposal for approval by Ms. Finola O'Carroll, and where human remains are concerned, Dr. Rachel Scott also. If their proposal is accepted then a Memorandum of Understanding between the student and the Principal Investigators is agreed and signed. Where appropriate, for example where a student is doing a bioarch thesis in the US, Dr. Scott requests to be added to the student's committee.