



Archaeological Impact Assessment Report

Gort Mhaolir Housing Development, Athenry, Co. Galway

Adam Collins
January 2025

Report Status: Final

ACSU Ref.: 24193



ACSU
ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSULTANCY
SERVICES UNIT

HEAD OFFICE
Unit 21
Boyne Business Park
Greenhills, Drogheda
Co. Louth

☎ 041-9883396
☎ 041-2130310
✉ info@acsu.ie
🌐 www.acsu.ie

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PROJECT DETAILS

Project	Gort Mhaolir Housing Development
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RMP/SMR No.	n/a
RPS Id./NIAH Reg. No.	n/a
ITM Ref.	549831, 728050
Consultant	Archaeological Consultancy Services Unit, 21 Boyne Business Park, Greenhills, Drogheda, County Louth
Archaeologists	Adam Collins and Ciarán Davis
Report Author	Adam Collins
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VERSION CONTROL

Revision	Date	Description	Status	Author	Reviewed	Approved
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NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The following report presents the findings of an Archaeological Impact Assessment prepared in relation to a proposed housing development in the townland of Raheen, Barony of Athenry, County Galway (ITM 549831, 728050). The site is approximately 3.5 acres in size and is located on the northeast edge of the current Gort Mhaolir housing estate, next to the Gort Mhaolir Road, on the southwest edge of the Gort na Rí estate, next to the L3105 (Raheen Road) and on the east edge of the Athenry Primary Care Facility. The site is currently an open green space with no prior construction or other features visible. The assessment is based on the findings of a study of available archaeological, historical, cartographic and photographic sources and a site visit. It aims to identify and describe the known and potential archaeological and cultural heritage constraints within the site and its wider environs and, where present, offer recommendations for the mitigation of such potential impacts.

The site does not contain any known archaeological monuments, as listed in the *Record of Monuments and Places* (RMP) or *Sites and Monuments Record* (SMR), however, it is located just east of a road/trackway (GA084-118----), with a large enclosure (GA084-120----) c. 330m to the WNW, a designed landscape feature (GA084-119----) c. 270m to the northwest and the historic town of Athenry (GA084-001----) to the southeast. Similarly, there are no Protected Structures, as recorded in the *Galway County Development Plan 2022–2028*, within the site boundary, nor any structures listed in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH), with the nearest such structure, Raheen House (NIAH Reg. No. 30332002), located 250m to the northwest. While the antiquity of some of the nearby recorded monuments remains uncertain it is possible that at least some relate to the later nineteenth-century development of the Lopdell estate, centered on Raheen House. Furthermore, an archaeological investigation (03E1819) undertaken in advance of the construction of the Raheen Woods Hotel, less than 200m WNW of the proposed site and in the vicinity of enclosure GA084-120---, uncovered the remains of burials, including at least one articulated skeleton, as well as charcoal and metal-working residues (slag).

Cartographic sources and aerial imagery show that Raheen was generally comprised of agricultural fields, surrounded by field boundaries with mature trees and hedgerows, from at least the post-medieval period through to the mid-twentieth century, albeit the landscape was opened up somewhat during the late nineteenth century when Raheen House and its associated estate lands were developed. The edges of the townland next to the town of Athenry, along the L3105 and L3103 roads, have been subject to the most change in recent decades, with an expansion of housing and industrial developments since at least the early 2000s.

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Due to the undisturbed greenfield nature of the site and its proximity to known archaeology, there is therefore potential for previously unknown sub-surface archaeological remains to exist within the proposed development site. In line with national policy, as set out in the *Framework and Principles for the Protection of Archaeological Heritage* (1999), there 'should always be a presumption in favour of avoiding developmental impacts on the archaeological heritage' (Part III, 23–25). Adequate measures to allow for preservation *in situ* of archaeological features/materials cannot be established without adequate definition of the location and extent of any potential sub-surface remains. It is therefore recommended that in order to fully assess the impact on any potential buried features, archaeological testing should be carried out in advance of any development of the site. This must be carried out by a suitably qualified archaeologist working under licence from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Archaeological material identified during the course of the test trenching may necessitate further mitigation, including preservation *in situ*/or preservation by record (excavation) following consultation with the National Monuments Service.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The following report presents the findings of an Archaeological Impact Assessment prepared in relation to a proposed housing development in the townland of Raheen, Barony of Athenry, County Galway (ITM 549831, 728050, Figures 1–2). The site is approximately 3.5 acres in size and is located on the northeast edge of the current Gort Mhaolir housing estate, next to the Gort Mhaolir Road, on the southwest edge of the Gort na Rí estate, next to the L3105 (Raheen Road), and on the east edge of the Athenry Primary Care Facility. The proposed site is currently an open green space with no visible evidence for prior construction or other features (see Figure 7).

The assessment is based on the findings of a study of available archaeological, historical, cartographic and photographic sources and a site visit. The aim of this report was to assess whether or not the site contained any evidence for the presence of known or previously unknown areas or features of historical, built heritage or archaeological significance and what, if any impact the proposed development might have on such remains.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Proposal

The proposed works are for the development of a Large-Scale Residential Development (LRD) on a site of approximately 3.5 acres on lands in the townland of Raheen, Athenry.

2.2 Archaeological Condition/Requirement

The report was prepared at the request of the client to highlight areas of archaeological interest near the proposed works and assess the potential impact of these works on any such archaeological and cultural heritage assets.

3. METHODOLOGY

This assessment comprises a literature review and consultation of various written, cartographic and photographic sources. This included the *Record of Monuments and Places* (RMP) and *Sites and Monuments Record* (SMR), compiled and updated by the National Monuments Service and the National Historic Properties Service. The RMP is comprised of manuals that list all known archaeological sites and monuments in a county with accompanying maps (based on Ordnance Survey (OS) six-inch maps) locating these sites.

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All sites included in the RMP are protected under the National Monuments Acts (1930–2004). The SMR consists of all records stored in the Archaeological Survey of Ireland national database and is presented in the Historic Environment Viewer, which also includes sites listed in the *National Inventory of Architectural Heritage* (see below). The last published RMP for County Galway is dated 1997, and as such, many of the sites listed in the SMR are scheduled for inclusion in the next revision of the RMP.

The Topographical Files of the National Museum of Ireland were also consulted to assess the area's archaeological potential. These files list on a townland basis all archaeological artefacts in the care of or known to the museum. Such a record can provide evidence for human settlement or activity in the absence of physical remains or documentary references. The results of previous and ongoing archaeological investigations were also considered in order to evaluate the level of archaeological remains coming to light in the area. This was primarily achieved by searching the *Database of Archaeological Excavations in Ireland* (www.excavations.ie), which contains summaries of all investigations carried out under licence from 1970 to the present.

Historical maps, including Griffith's Valuation, those held by the Map Library of Trinity College Dublin and Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSi) were also consulted, as well as aerial photography and imagery from the Geological Survey of Ireland and Google Earth. These sources can indicate areas of archaeological potential through features like curving field boundaries, crop marks and soil marks, and can provide information regarding the nature and extent of recorded archaeological sites that have become denuded since the early 19th century. Historical maps are also useful in identifying other features of cultural heritage significance. Griffith's Valuation, for example, is a property tax survey with accompanying mapping that includes lists and details of every taxable piece of agricultural land or built property in Ireland (published county by county between 1847 and 1864).

The *Galway County Development Plan 2022–2028* was also consulted as this contains, among other things, a Record of Protected Structures. Further buildings and features of architectural interest in the area that are not included on the Record of Protected Structures are detailed in the *National Inventory of Architectural Heritage* (NIAH). The NIAH was developed by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and identifies, records, and evaluates the post-1700 architectural heritage of Ireland.

As part of the assessment a site visit was also carried out. The aim of which was to assess whether or not the site contained any visible or subsurface evidence of any previously unrecorded areas or features of historical or archaeological significance.

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4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

4.1 Archaeological & Historical Background

The proposed site lies in the townland of Raheen (*Ráithín*), in the Barony of Athenry, County Galway. The name *Ráithín* translates as ‘a small fort,’ possibly indicating the presence of a ráth or ringfort within the townland. The records for this area are a bit scant due to the vicissitudes of the history of Athenry. The Down Survey map (1656–1658) for the Barony of Athenry was destroyed in an accidental fire in AD 1711, however, the associated written records show that the barony was referred to as Lekertie, belonging to Richard Burke, and the townland of Raheen as ‘Rahine.’ The townland name of Raheen first appears in written records in AD 1709 (logainm.ie).

The main factor for the siting of the town of Athenry was to control the ford across the River Clarin, it was also in close proximity to the *Eske Riada*, the ancient highway which crossed Ireland from east to west (Coyne & Fitzpatrick, 2013). The name of the town derives from *Áth na Rí*, ‘ford of the kings,’ or *Baile átha an ríogh*, ‘the town of the river ford,’ (ibid.). While the area now known as Athenry was granted to Piers de Bermingham in AD 1178, the town itself was not built until after Meiler de Bermingham was granted the lands in AD 1235 by Richard de Burgo, for his support in conquering Connaught (ibid.).

Prehistoric period

Archaeological evidence uncovered in the landscape surrounding the townland of Raheen points to a long history of settlement in the area. Several polished stone axe-heads from the region point to occupation probably in the Neolithic (4000–2450 BC), while prehistoric graves to the west of Athenry reportedly included an ‘earthenware urn’ (Thompson, 2008). A probable Bronze Age cist grave (GA084-101----) located approximately 600m southwest of the townland of Raheen included a crouched inhumation and vase (Anon, 1928–9). Several copper and bronze artefacts collected from the surrounding area, such as a halberd, palstave axe-head, spearhead, sword, shield and scabbard chapes, also indicate human occupation during the Chalcolithic (2450–2200 BC), Bronze Age (2200–800 BC) and Iron Age (800 BC–AD 400) (Thompson, 2008).

Early medieval period

Although the Galway area is largely understood to be an area of low ringfort density (O’Sullivan & Downey, 2007), the remains of at least six ringforts (GA084-108----, GA084-011----, GA084-012----, GA084-075----, GA084-032---- and GA084-034----) are found approximately 1km from the townland of Raheen, indicating the presence of cattle farmers in this area during the early medieval period (AD 400–1100).

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The Vikings also made their presence felt in this area, as indicated by the townland of Tisaxon (*Teach Sachsen*), meaning the ‘Saxon’s House’ (Thompson, 2008), which is approximately 5km northeast of Raheen. The ford at Athenry is also thought to be the dividing border of three great Irish Kingdoms at this time: Aidhne (territory of O’Heyne and O’Shaughnessy), Hy-Many (territory of O’Kelly) and Moyseola (territory of O’Flaherty) (ibid.).

Late medieval period

Following the invasion of Ireland by King Henry in AD 1171, members of the de Bermingham family headed west in search of more conquest, reaching deep into the heartland of the O’Connor territory in Connaught. The first Baron of Athenry was Piers de Bermingham after he was granted the lands as a reward for his assistance in conquering Connaught (Mohr, 2015). Piers’ son Meiler was the second Baron of Athenry and is generally credited with the construction of the town. Having assisted Richard de Burgh in the conquest of Connaught and deposing Fedhlim mac Cathal Croibhdhearg Ua Conchobair, Meiler was granted lands to the east of Galway city in AD 1235 and erected a castle overlooking the ford of the River Clareen in c. AD 1238 (ibid.). Meiler was also responsible for allowing the construction of the Dominican Priory to the east of the town, where he was buried in AD 1258 in the unfinished church (Rynne, 1987).

The fourth Baron of Athenry was Richard de Bermingham, he was Sheriff of Connaught in AD 1299, 1310 and 1316. The Kingdom of Connaught was in a period of massive upheaval during this period and the Anglo-Normans were able to suppress the Gaelic Chieftains with relative ease. There were thirteen Kings of Connaught between AD 1275 and 1315, with some only lasting a fortnight before being murdered (Cosgove, 2008). Indeed, Richard aided Fedhlim O’Conchobair in defeating his rival claimant to the title of King of Connaught, Ruaidhri O’Conchobair, in AD 1315. However, the ambitious Feidhlim began plundering and expelling the English from West Connaught. On 10 August 1316, Feidhlim mustered a great army and descended on the Castle of Athenry; over a thousand Irish fighters died, including Feidhlim himself (Mohr, 2015).

The town of Athenry was further developed during the fourteenth century, with the addition of a surrounding curtain wall and an 8m-wide fosse or ditch protecting the river ford. The inner area of the walls was an impressive 28 hectares, signifying the wealth and high status de Bermingham had achieved, and, it is said, to compete with his overlord de Burgh, with whom he had a difficult relationship (Thompson, 2018). By the fifteenth century the town of Athenry was quite prosperous, it had its own member in the Irish parliament and the de Bermingham family were considered the premier barons of Ireland (ibid.). There was continued resistance to the Anglo-Norman occupation of Connaught, however, and in AD 1574 the sons of the Earl of Clanricard captured Athenry, destroying the walls, houses and castle, leaving it in ruins for a long time

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thereafter. The town was attacked by the Clanricard family again in AD 1577, soon after repairs had begun, and twenty years after that again, in 1597, Red Hugh O'Donnell sacked and razed the town during the Nine Years War (ibid.).

Post-medieval to early modern period

Following these periods of conflict and upheaval the town slowly bounced back and was granted permission to hold a regular market in AD 1629, where the market cross still stands (Coyne & Fitzpatrick, 2013). The Catholic de Bermingham family remained loyal to King Charles I during the Irish Rebellion of 1641. Francis de Bermingham, the nineteenth Lord of Athenry, continued to support the crown against the Parliamentary forces of Cromwell and had his lands, including Athenry, taken from him. All titles and lands were restored to him after the fall of the Commonwealth, however, and he took his seat in the first parliament of the Restoration in 1661 (Mohr, 2015). His successor, Edward, was granted even more titles and over five thousand acres in the Barony of Dunmore. He supported King James II against the Protestant King William III and as a result was outlawed in 1691 but was able to organise a reversal years later in 1707, continuing their ownership of Athenry. His successor, Francis de Birmingham, converted to Protestantism and took his seat in Parliament as the premier Baron of Ireland in 1713. In 1799, upon the death of Thomas de Bermingham, the twenty-second Baron of Athenry, the Barony of Athenry fell into abeyance, as Thomas had no surviving descendants (ibid.).

The town of Athenry was struck hard by the famine of 1740–41, before the loss of the de Bermingham's patronage, the town then lost its corporation status in 1840, just before the Great Famine of 1845 hit Ireland. The town layout had changed little from the seventeenth century, it lacked a public water supply, and the narrow streets remained unpaved (Thompson, 2018). The town did bounce back once again with the advent of the Land League in 1879, when a building boom took place that included new roads and houses within the town. The Great Western and Midland Railway reached Athenry in 1851 and the railway junction was added in 1875, further adding to the economic boom by making Athenry a distribution and transport centre. The importance of Athenry continued and during the Easter Rising in 1916, it was held by the Western Division of the IRA for a week (ibid.).

4.2 Previous Archaeological Investigations

Listed below (Table 1) are the nearest previous archaeological investigations undertaken in the environs of the site (see Figure 2), which further demonstrate the overall archaeological potential of the site and its

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surrounding townlands. The following information was taken from the *Database of Archaeological Excavations in Ireland* (www.excavations.ie).

The townland of Raheen has been subject to at least eight archaeological investigations since the late 1990s. Three of those investigations yielded archaeological remains. In 2000, test excavations (00E0364) west of Chapel Lane, next to the town wall and approximately 300m southeast of the proposed development site, uncovered a D-shaped enclosure, an earthen bank extending northwest–southeast with a ditch on either side, likely representing a field boundary, and a north–south ditch (Rooney 2000). Sherds of Saintonge pottery indicated medieval activity. Between 2002 and 2003, approximately 150m to the northwest of the proposed site, archaeological investigations (02E0246) in advance of a housing development uncovered large amounts of loose stones that could relate to a forgotten road or trackway (GA084-118----; see Section 4.3). Occasional inclusions of twentieth-century glass and pottery fragments, however, suggested the trackway may have been more recent in date (Rooney 2003). In 2003, investigations (03E1819) in advance of a hotel development, less than 200m WNW of the proposed site, uncovered an articulated human skeleton with further disarticulated skull bones nearby. Charcoal and metal-working waste (slag) was also recovered from the site.

Table 1: Previous archaeological investigations within the environs of the site

Excavation.ie reference	Licence No.	Site-Type	Investigation Type
2000:0365 - Raheen, Athenry, Galway	00E0364	Medieval D-shaped enclosure, bank and ditch	Test trenching
2002:0754 - Raheen, Galway	02E0246	Early modern trackway	Test trenching and monitoring
2003:2184 - Raheen, Athenry, Galway	03E1819	Burial	Test trenching and monitoring

4.3 Recorded Monuments

The site does not contain any known archaeological monuments, as listed in the *Record of Monuments and Places* (RMP) or *Sites and Monuments Record* (SMR), however, it is located just east of a road/trackway (GA084-118----), with a large enclosure (GA084-120----) c. 330m to the WNW, a designed landscape feature (GA084-119----) c. 270m to the northwest and the historic town of Athenry (GA084-001----) to the southeast (Figure 2). To the northwest of the proposed development site there are also thirty-eight recorded

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monuments in the form of twenty-nine cross-slabs, one inscribed slab, three graveslabs, two crosses, two architectural fragments and one sundial; these are originally from the ecclesiastical site on Inchbofin, Lough Ree, Co. Westmeath (WM015-001017-) but are currently stored in the Athenry National Monuments Depot, which is located next to the L3103 road.

The three nearby recorded monuments (GA084-118---, GA084-119--- and GA084-120---) were all recorded as possible antiquities by Hubert Thomas Knox (1917–18), a well-known antiquarian and historian who conducted a lot of work in the west of Ireland. The road (GA084-118---) was not marked on any editions of the Ordnance Survey mapping but the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) map indicated a trackway extending northeast–southwest from the avenue of the Rectory building along the line of the present roadway in the townland of Ballygarraun South, with the section in the townland of Raheen less clear but likely extending along the southern slope of a northeast–southwest gravel ridge (Rooney 2003). As mentioned in Section 4.2, limited archaeological test trenching (02E0246) along part of the roadway did uncover large deposits of loose stones but this was thought to represent a more recent, twentieth-century trackway (ibid.). It is possible that this trackway relates to the Lopdell estate and Raheen House (see Section 4.4), which is still extant today (see Figure 6). While Raheen House itself was constructed c. 1880, at the time of Griffith's Valuation in the 1850s a herd's house valued at £3 and gate lodges were recorded there. In 1894, Slater noted it as the residence of Mrs Lopdell (<https://landedestates.ie/property/1505>). The Lopdell family came to Ireland in the mid-seventeenth century and were settled in the Athenry area by the mid-eighteenth century and Captain Lopdell is recorded as the owner of over 1300 acres in county Galway in the 1870s (<https://landedestates.ie/estate/811>).

The designed landscape feature (GA084-119---) to the northwest of the development site also forms part of this estate, although originally thought by Knox (1917–18) to be a small rath it was subsequently deemed to be a nineteenth/twentieth-century garden feature. Just northwest of this, Knox also recorded a rectangular earthwork (ibid.) but this redundant record (GA084-133---) was subsequently the site a tennis court and part of the garden of Raheen House.

The large enclosure (GA084-120---) to the WNW of the development site was originally recorded as the remains of a bi-vallate cashel (Knox 1917–18, 104) defined by an arc of substantial but collapsed drystone walls and divided by the Athenry–Claregalway road, although its antiquity was long been questioned. In 2011, limited archaeological investigations in the area (11E0207) failed to confirm any archaeological remains, instead suggesting that the inner bank appears to be a natural ridge (Carey 2011; 2012). This is notable as Cody (SMR file, see below) previously suggesting that it may have been another landscape feature associated

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with the Lopdell estate, positioned at the entrance to the avenue leading to Raheen House. As outlined in Section 4.2, however, earlier investigations (03E1819) in this area, in advance of the construction of the Raheen Woods Hotel, did uncover the remains of burials, including at least one articulated skeleton, suggesting there is a high potential for additional archaeological remains to be uncovered in this area.

Below (Table 2) is a list of the recorded monuments located in the environs of the site (Figure 2). These descriptions are derived from the National Monuments Service Archaeological Survey Database (<https://heritagedata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/>).

Table 2: Recorded archaeological monuments in the environs of the site

GA084-118----	Road - Road/Trackway	Ballygarran South, Raheen, (Athenry By.)
No visible surface trace of this road, noted by Knox, still exists. The south section of the road in Ballygarran is overlaid by a modern gravel road. The section in Raheen is in fields of meadow and pasture. According to Knox it was, 'a very ancient road with high-sided fences,' which ran roughly northeast – southwest for roughly 900m. When noted by Knox in 1918, it was a little better than a path. Six-Inch First edition: Not indicated Six-Inch Latest edition: Not indicated ITM Coordinates: 549332, 727978 Latitude and Longitude: 53.299670, -8.760109		
GA084-119----	Designed landscape feature	Raheen (Athenry By.)
Described by Knox (1917-18, 119, no. 20) as 'a small rath, much altered for ornamental purposes, 48ft. by 36ft.' On inspection it proved to be a circular grove of trees on a rise c. 1m above the surrounding land. Within the grove there was a circular pathway delimited by a wall and at its centre a seating area. It is a landscape feature of 19th/20th-century date. Six-Inch First edition: Not indicated Six-Inch Latest edition: Not indicated ITM Coordinates: 549289, 728266 Latitude and Longitude: 53.302254, -8.760800		

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GA084-120----	Enclosure – large enclosure	Raheen (Athenry By.)
In gently rolling pastureland. Referred to by Knox (1918, 104, no. 19) as 'the Cashel of Raheen'; traces of its 'stout curved ramparts' survived at north but it was to 'a great extent a reconstruction'. It consists of a roughly triangular area defined from northwest to north northeast by an arc of substantial but collapsed drystone walls. Its other sides are straight and are defined respectively by a roadway and a natural scarp. Cody (1989, 300-2, no. 124) noted that the interior was marshy and doubted its antiquity, suggesting that it may have been a landscape feature at the entrance to the avenue leading to Raheen House (pers. comm. 1987). Six-Inch First edition: Not indicated Six-Inch Latest edition: Not indicated ITM Coordinates: 549140, 728130 Latitude and Longitude: 53.301017, -8.763013		

4.4 National Inventory of Architectural Heritage and Record of Protected Structures

The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) identifies, records, and evaluates the post-1700 architecture of Ireland in order to protect and conserve our built heritage. It is under the administration of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. It also forms the basis of a list for structures that should be included in the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) compiled by local authorities. A Protected Structure is a structure that a planning authority think is of special interest from an architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social, or technical point of view. The structured is recognised as important and is protected from harm under legislation. Every local authority in Ireland must keep an RPS in their development plans.

There are no Protected Structures, as recorded in the *Galway County Development Plan 2022–2028*, within the site boundary, nor any structures listed in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH), with the nearest such structure, Raheen House, located 250m to the northwest (Figure 2). This house is listed in the NIAH (Reg. No. 30332002) but is not yet included in the RPS. To the far east there are several additional structures and features that relate to the nineteenth-century railway and these form part of the Athenry Architectural Conservation Area (ACA).

Below (Table 3) are the details of the built heritage located in the environs of the site (Figure 2), derived from the *Galway County Development Plan 2022–2028* and the NIAH Database (<https://heritagedata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/>).

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Table 3: Buildings and structures included in the NIAH and/or the RPS in the environs of the site

NIAH No.	RPS No.	Name	Description	Importance
30332002	-	Raheen House, Raheen Road	Detached five-bay two-storey U-plan house, built c.1880, having asymmetrical front (south) elevation having full-height projecting end bays, that to west fronted by canted bay with windows and projection to east having canted plan. Flat-roofed entrance porch to corner between west projection and façade proper. Three-bay return elevation to east and two-bay to west. Two-storey single-bay extension with pitched slate roof to rear elevation of west return. Hipped slate roofs having slate ridge tiles, rendered chimneystacks with painted pots, and moulded render cornice to porch and to ground floor of canted bay. Painted lined-and-ruled rendered walls with cut limestone plinth, and having recessed panel details to ground floor canted-bay window and porch. Square-headed window openings having cut limestone sills. This house has an interesting asymmetrical front elevation. The projecting bays and canted-bay windows add variety to an otherwise plain façade. Elements such as the slate roof, tall chimneystacks and pots and the ruled-and-lined render enhance the exterior, creating a visually appealing structure added by the retention of some timber sash windows. The outbuildings, boundary wall, ashlar piers and cast-iron gate provide a context for and complement the house.	Regional

4.5 Finds listed within the Topographical Files of the National Museum of Ireland

The Topographical Files of the National Museum of Ireland were requested to further assess the area's archaeological potential. These files list all archaeological artefacts in the care of or known to the museum. Such a record can provide evidence for human settlement or activity in the absence of other physical remains or documentary references.

No artefacts have been recorded from the townland of Raheen, Co. Galway, in the NMI topographical files.

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4.6 Cartographic Evidence

A review of available historic mapping for the area was carried out to include Petty's map (1655), Taylor and Skinner's map (1777), Larkin's map (1819) and the Ordnance Survey (OS) of Ireland first edition 6-inch (1840) and Cassini edition 6-inch (1925–34) maps (Figures 3–6). Unfortunately, the Down Survey barony maps (1656–58) for County Galway were destroyed in an accidental fire in AD 1711 and this is also one of the regions where the OS 25-inch map is unavailable. Potential archaeological or cultural heritage features are often marked on historic maps and they can provide a useful resource in identifying sites, particularly if they no longer have any above ground remains.

The Down Survey county map (1655), drawn by Sir William Petty, shows the walled town of Athenry and its surrounding hinterland, the names of various townlands are indicated but with little geographic accuracy. The townland of Raheen does not appear on the map, with the earliest known recorded reference to the townland dating to the 1709 (logainm.ie).

Taylor and Skinner's *Maps of the roads of Ireland* (1777) depicts Athenry, the L3105 (Raheen Road) and the L3103 (unnamed road/Prospect Road), but no further information relevant to the site (Figure 3). Larkin's Grand Jury map (1819) similarly depicts the two roads with the area in-between illustrated as open agricultural land (Figure 4).

The first edition OS 6-inch map of 1840 (surveyed 1837) illustrates the townland of Raheen stretching northwest from the walled town of Athenry into the hinterland until it meets the border of the neighbouring townland of Cullairbaun, which cuts across its northern border. There are some forested areas in the northwest area of the townland and a single farmhouse on the east side, next to the modern L3105 road. The townland consists of 151 acres, 1 rod and 2 perches, which appear to be divided into large agricultural fields. The southeast border of the townland abuts the wall of Athenry town, stretching for approximately 410m southwest from Spiddle Gate. The proposed development site straddles two large agricultural fields, with a northeast–southwest field boundary extending through the site (Figure 5).

The mid-twentieth-century Cassini edition OS 6-inch map (1925–34) illustrates the restructuring of the townland boundary between Cullairbaun, Raheen and Moanbaun, whereby the northwest extension of Cullairbaun no longer exists, with this area now assigned to the townland of Moanbaun and reflecting the modern boundary. This map also shows that additional field boundaries have been introduced in the northwest of the townland of Raheen, while Raheen House and its associated landscape features have been constructed amongst the forested areas, with the earlier farmhouse now noted as the gate lodge for the house

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(Figure 6). A second gate lodge is depicted to the south of the house, with an associated trackway extending between the two. Some of the agricultural fields in the centre of the townland are also now designated part of Raheen park, with several of the field boundaries no longer in place, including those within and around the proposed development site. The Midland Great Western Railway track, constructed in 1851, is also depicted on this map in the southeast end of Raheen townland, along with the associated railway buildings and bridges and the 'Athenry & Ennis Junction Cattle Pen'. The townland still abuts the walls of Athenry but now Spiddle Gate is named Nicolas Gate and two towers are noted on the map as being in ruins.

4.7 Aerial Photography

A review of available aerial photography for the area was also undertaken as part of this assessment. Aerial photographs dating between 1995 and 2018 from the Ordnance Survey of Ireland (OSi, now Tailte Éireann) were assessed, along with Google Earth imagery dating between 2011 and 2024. Unrecorded archaeological sites can often be identified in aerial photographs as cropmarks or differential growth in a field, particularly during periods of drought, such as those experienced in the summer of 2018.

Aerial imagery of the townland of Raheen from 1995 show most of the land still being used as agricultural farmland, with housing beginning to spring up along the edges of the L3105 (Raheen Road). The proposed area for development is visible as part of a large agricultural field near the centre of the townland. The National Monuments Depot appears to be under construction on the western boundary of the townland, just off the L3103 road. Mature trees line the side of the L3103 and surround Raheen House and its driveway to the northeast lodge on the L3105. There appears to be few changes in the landscape until the early 2000s. Between the years of 2001 and 2005, a profusion of housing developments appear to the rear of the houses lining the L3105 road and an industrial park is also constructed to the east of these houses. The area south of the National Monuments Depot is also depicted as being cleared for the construction of the Raheen Woods Hotel. Between the years 2006 and 2012, the housing estate known as Gort Mhaolir is constructed along with a new northeast–southwest road, connecting the L3105 to the L3103 through the industrial development. A large area next to the Raheen Woods Hotel, which was cleared at the time of the hotel's construction, appears to lay vacant and unused during this period. The only visible changes between the years 2011 and 2013 are the preparations for the construction of the Ballydavid South Road, to the northwest of the townland, and the construction of the Athenry Primary Care Centre, which is positioned adjacent the proposed development site.

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No further large developments are noted in the surrounding area in the aerial imagery up to 2018, when the Presentation College is constructed to the southwest and the cleared land next to the Raheen Woods Hotel begins to have houses constructed upon it. Google Earth imagery from 2021 shows the construction of these houses continuing, but perhaps at a slower pace due to Covid restrictions at the time. The site appears complete by 2024. The proposed development site is now almost completely boxed in by developments on all sides and appears as a mostly unused green field (Figure 7).

4.8 Field Inspection

A site inspection was carried out on the 17 of January 2025 by Ciarán Davis of Archaeological Consultancy Services Unit (ACSU) Ltd (Plates 1–6). This was conducted in accordance with the *IAI Code of Professional Conduct* (Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland, 2006).

The greenfield site consists of undulating rough grass and scrub, with a slight rise towards the centre. The northeast boundary is a concrete brick wall that separates the site from the Gort na Rí housing estate, while there is a fence and young hedgerow along the southeast boundary, between the site and the Athenry Primary Care Facility. The remaining boundaries, along the Gort Mhaolir Road, between the site and the current Gort Mhaolir housing estate, are lined with green metal security fences. A more mature hedgerow is evident along the northwest boundary. To the southwest, the site is partially cut into by an unfinished section of road within the existing Gort Mhaolir estate.

5. IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The purpose of this impact assessment was to establish whether or not the proposed development site contains any evidence for the presence of known or previously unknown areas or features of historical, built heritage or archaeological significance. The site itself contains no known archaeological sites, built heritage or protected structures. The closest recorded archaeological monuments are a road/trackway (GA084-118----) just west of the site, while a large enclosure (GA084-120----) is c. 330m to the WNW and a designed landscape feature (GA084-119----) is c. 270m to the northwest. Some, possibly all, of these features are likely related to the Lopdell estate, centered on the late nineteenth-century Raheen House. The latter, located 250m to the northwest of the site, is also listed in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (Reg. No. 30332002) but is not yet included in the Record of Protected Structures. Notably, archaeological investigations (03E1819) in advance of the construction of the Raheen Woods Hotel, less than 200m WNW of the proposed site and in the

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vicinity of enclosure GA084-120----, did uncover the remains of burials, including at least one articulated skeleton, suggesting there is a high potential for additional archaeological remains to be uncovered in this area. Furthermore, approximately 300m southeast of the proposed site, adjacent the town wall of Athenry, archaeological investigations (00E0364) uncovered medieval remains in the form of a D-shaped enclosure, a bank and ditch. The site is therefore located within an historically and archaeologically sensitive area. Consequently, it has the potential to contain previously unknown sub-surface archaeological remains and further archaeological mitigation is required.

6. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This report presents the findings of an archaeological impact assessment prepared in relation to a site in the townland of Raheen, Athenry, County Galway (ITM 549831, 728050). The site is approximately 3.5 acres in size and is located on the northeast edge of the current Gort Mhaolir housing estate, the southwest edge of the Gort na Rí estate and the east edge of the Athenry Primary Care Facility. The land is currently an open green space, with no prior construction or other features visible (Figures 1–7; Plates 1–6).

Limited archaeological investigation has previously taken place within the environs of the townland. The wider area is, however, known to have produced several polished stone axe-heads, prehistoric graves, and both copper and bronze weapons and tools, all indicating human occupation from the Neolithic to the Iron Age. Early medieval occupation in the wider area of Raheen is evident by at least six ringforts within a 1km radius of the proposed site. The southern border of the townland also abuts the historic town of Athenry, which was founded around AD 1235 by the Anglo-Normans. There are also three recorded monuments (GA084-118----, GA084-119---- and GA084-120----) within 400m west and northwest of the proposed site. While the antiquity of some of these remains uncertain it is possible that at least some relate to the later nineteenth-century development of the Lopdell estate, centered on Raheen House (NIAH Reg. No. 30332002). Furthermore, previous archaeological investigations (03E1819) undertaken in advance of the construction of the Raheen Woods Hotel, less than 200m WNW of the proposed site and in the vicinity of enclosure GA084-120----, uncovered the remains of burials, including at least one articulated skeleton, as well as charcoal and metal-working residues (slag).

Cartographic sources and aerial imagery show that the townland of Raheen was generally comprised of agricultural fields, surrounded by field boundaries with mature trees and hedgerows, from at least the post-medieval period through to the mid-twentieth century, albeit the landscape was opened up somewhat during the late nineteenth century when Raheen House and its associated estate lands were developed. The road

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layouts also remain recognisable from the early nineteenth century onwards. The edges of the townland next to the town of Athenry, along the L3105 and L3103 roads, have been subject to the most change in recent decades, with an expansion of housing and industrial developments since at least the early 2000s. The site of the proposed development, however, appears to have remained a green area free of construction up to the present day.

Due to the undisturbed greenfield nature of the site and its proximity to known archaeology, there is therefore potential for previously unknown sub-surface archaeological remains to exist within the proposed development site. In line with national policy, as set out in the *Framework and Principles for the Protection of Archaeological Heritage* (1999), there 'should always be a presumption in favour of avoiding developmental impacts on the archaeological heritage' (Part III, 23–25). Adequate measures to allow for preservation *in situ* of archaeological features/materials cannot be established without adequate definition of the location and extent of any potential sub-surface remains. It is therefore recommended that in order to fully assess the impact on any potential buried features, archaeological testing should be carried out in advance of any development of the site. This must be carried out by a suitably qualified archaeologist working under licence from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Archaeological material identified during the course of the test trenching may necessitate further mitigation, including preservation *in situ*/or preservation by record (excavation) following consultation with the National Monuments Service.

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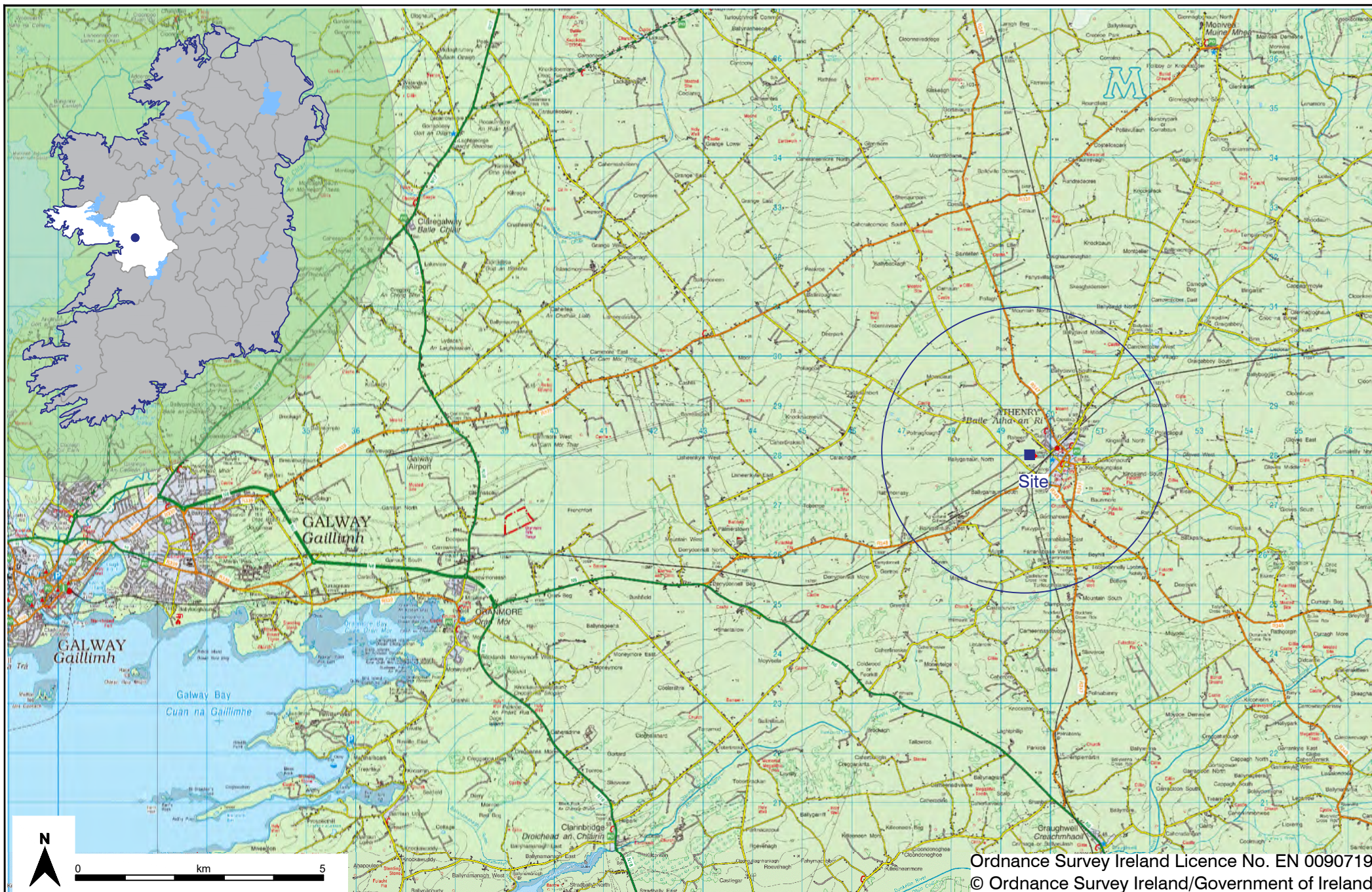
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Project Gort Mhaolir, Athenry, Co Galway

Date January 2025

Drawing No. 24193_C0001

Figure 1 Location of site

Scale 1:100,000 @ A4

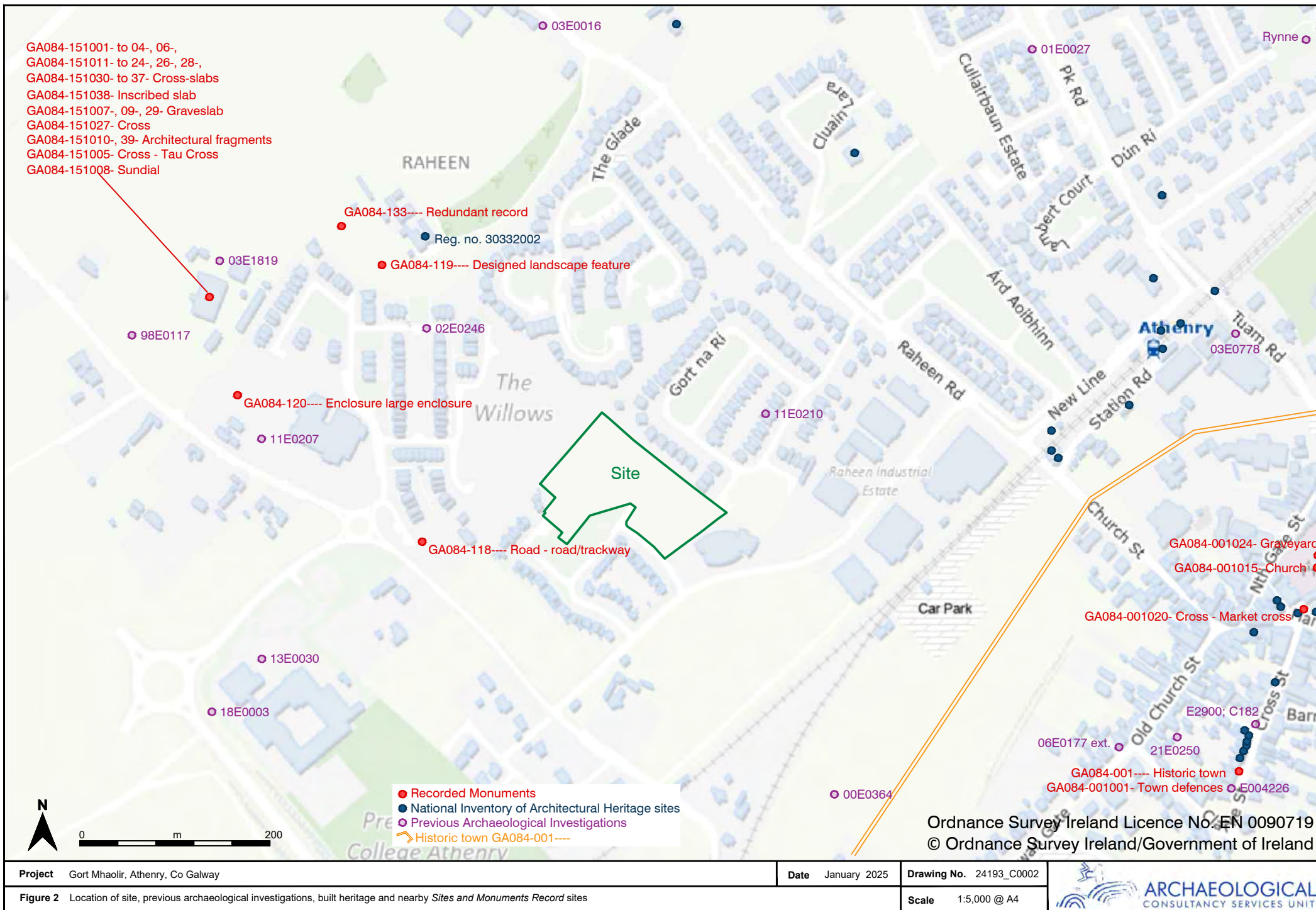
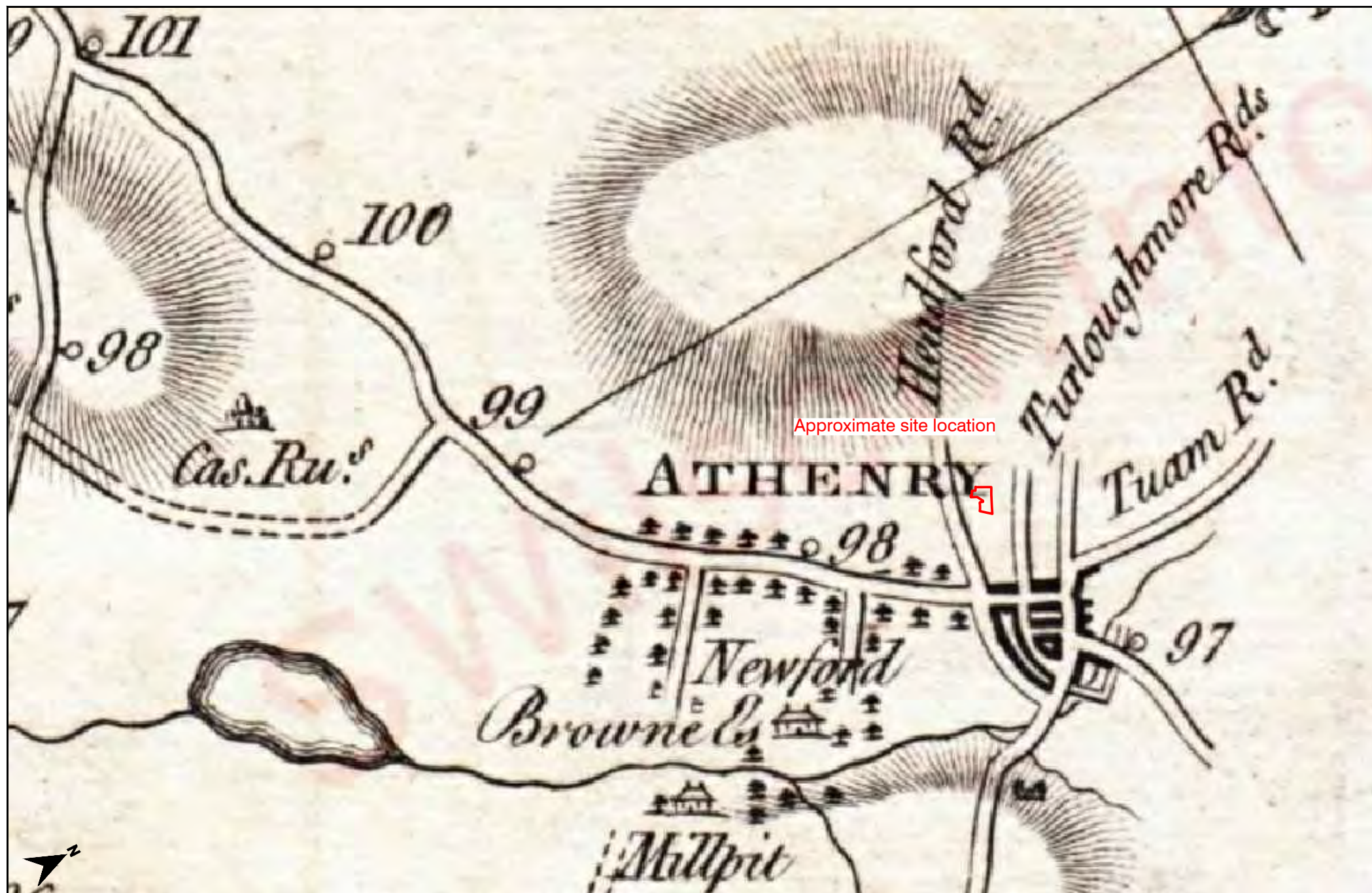


Figure 2 Location of site, previous archaeological investigations, built heritage and nearby Sites and Monuments Record sites



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Date January 2025

Drawing No. 24193_C0003

Figure 3 Extract from Taylor and Skinner's 'Maps of the roads of Ireland' - Map 89 Road from Dublin to Galway (1777), showing approximate location of site

Scale Not to scale



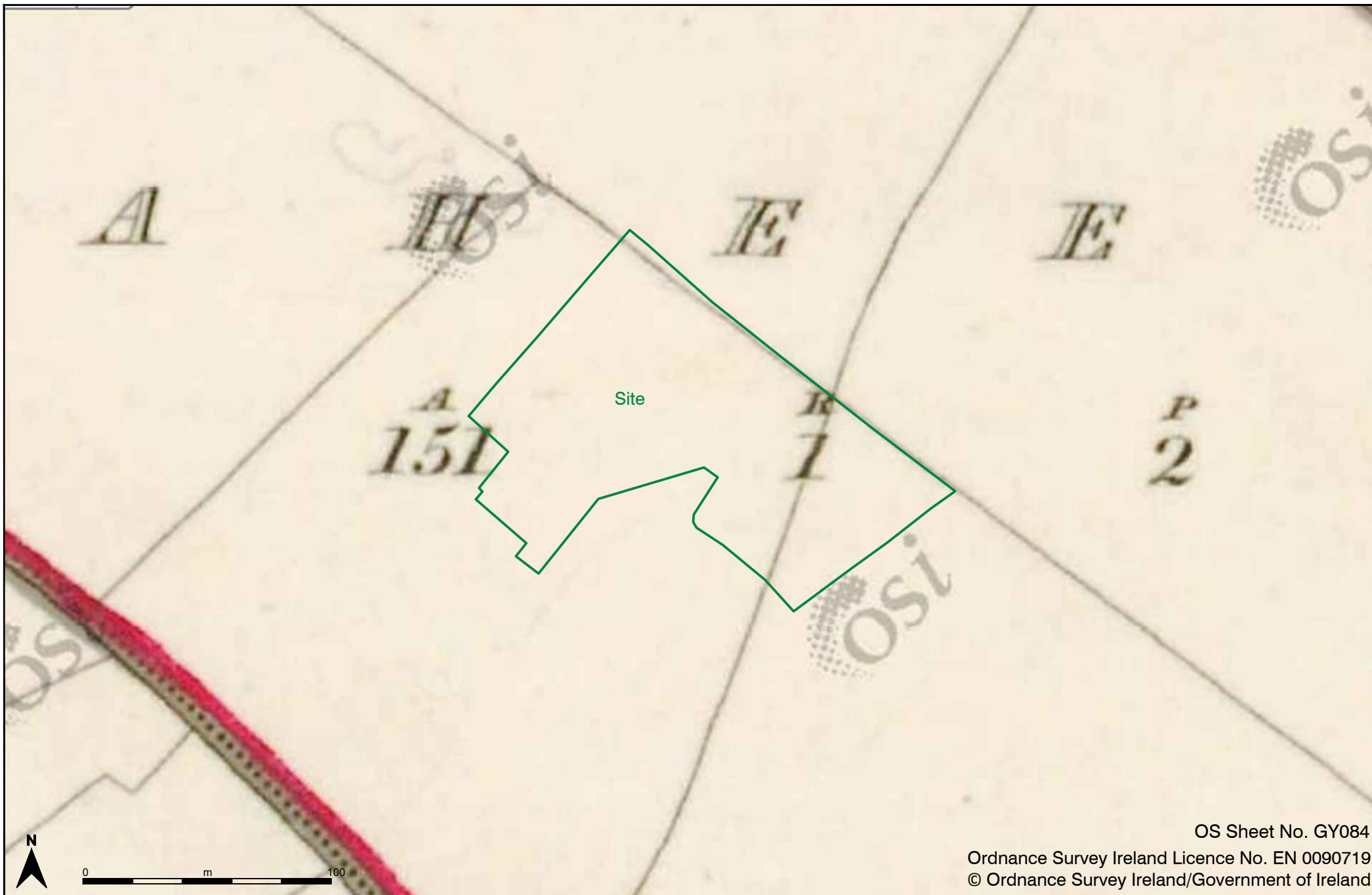
Project Gort Mhaolir, Athenry, Co Galway

Date January 2025

Drawing No. 24193_C0004

Figure 4 Extract from the Grand Jury map of County Galway, by William Larkin (1819) , showing approximate location of site

Scale Not to scale



OS Sheet No. GY084

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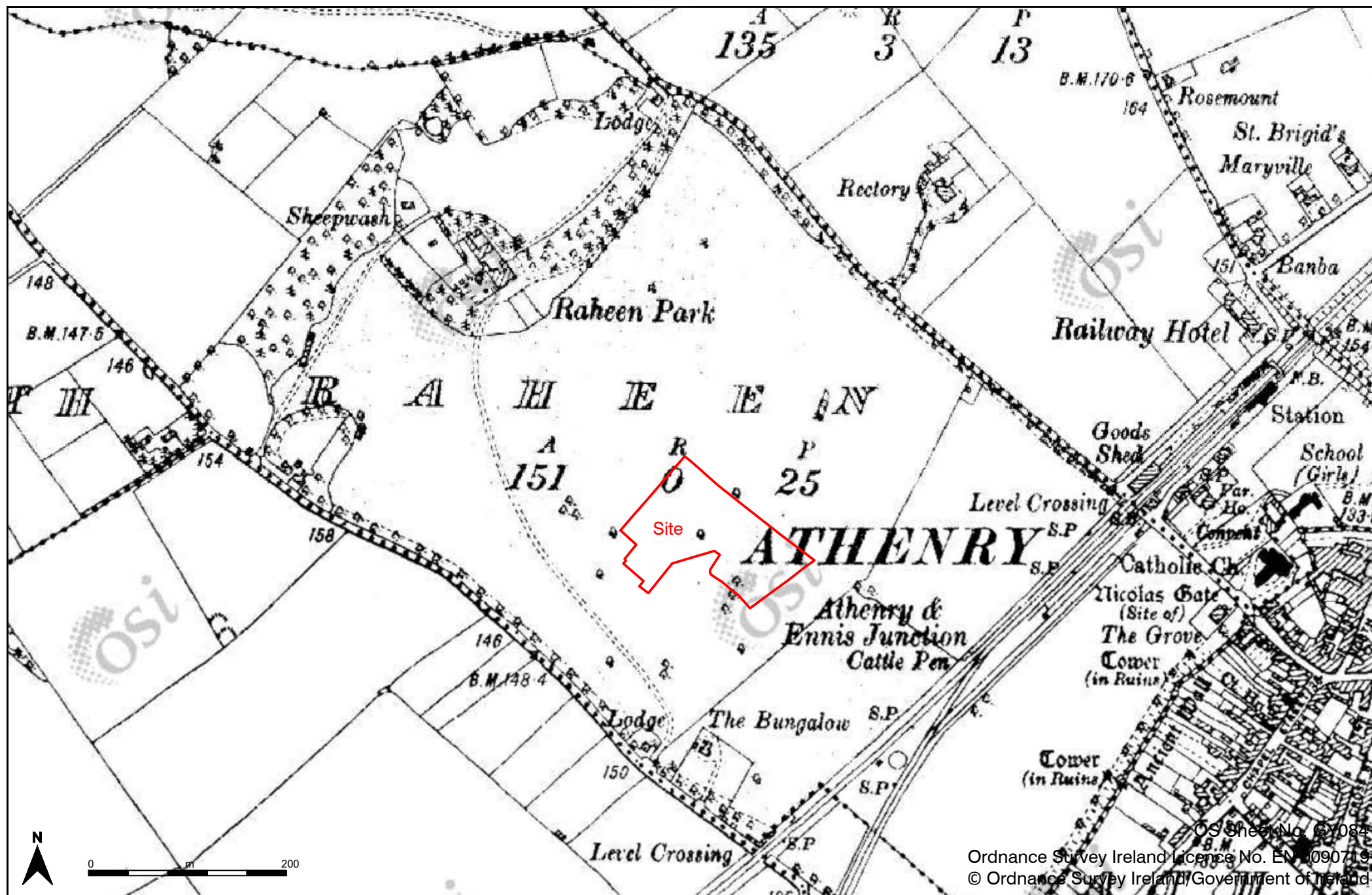
Date January 2025

Drawing No. 24193_C0005

Figure 5 Extract from 1st edition Ordnance Survey (OS) 6-inch map (surveyed 1837 - published 1840), showing location of site

Scale 1:2,000 @ A4





Project Gort Mhaolir, Athenry, Co Galway

Date January 2025

Drawing No. 24193_C0006

Figure 6 Extract from Cassini edition Ordnance Survey (OS) 6-inch map (1925-34), showing location of site within Lopdell estate centred on Raheen House

Scale 1:5,000 @ A4



Project Gort Mhaolir, Athenry, Co Galway

Date January 2025

Drawing No. 24193_C0007

Figure 7 Aerial view of site

Scale 1:1,000 @ A4



Plate 1: Undulating rough grass and scrub, looking NNE towards Gort na Rí housing estate



Plate 2: Southeast boundary fence with young hedgerow, looking northeast



Plate 3: Southeast boundary on left, looking WSW towards current Gort Mhaolir housing estate



Plate 4: Northeast extent of site, looking northwest



Plate 5: Mature hedgerow along northwest boundary



Plate 6: Security fence surrounding much of the site, looking east