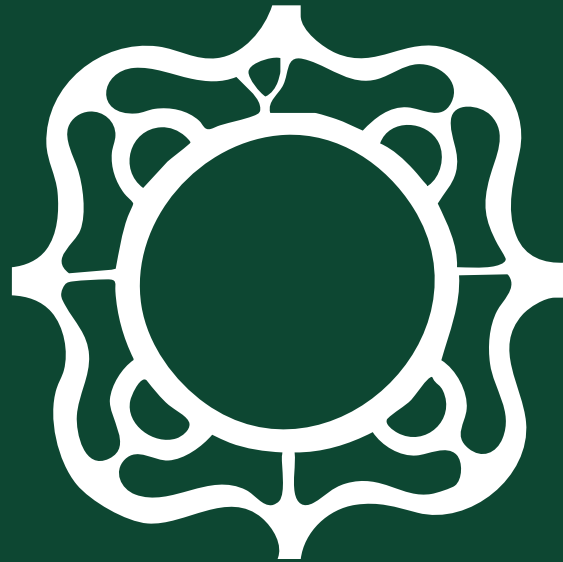


Mountjoy Square Park



1802

2025



Re-imagining Mountjoy Square

MOUNTJOY SQUARE PARK DUBLIN 1
ARCHAEOLOGICAL TESTING FOR
HISTORIC PATHS

Mountjoy Square Park Dublin 1 Archaeological Testing for Historic Paths



PROJECT NAME

Testing for historic paths at Mountjoy Square Park, Dublin 1

CLIENT

Landscape Architect Parks Division, Parks and Landscape Services , Dublin City Council, ,
Civic Offices, Wood Quay, Dublin 2

PROJECT REF

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RECORDED MONUMENT

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Section 1 Introduction

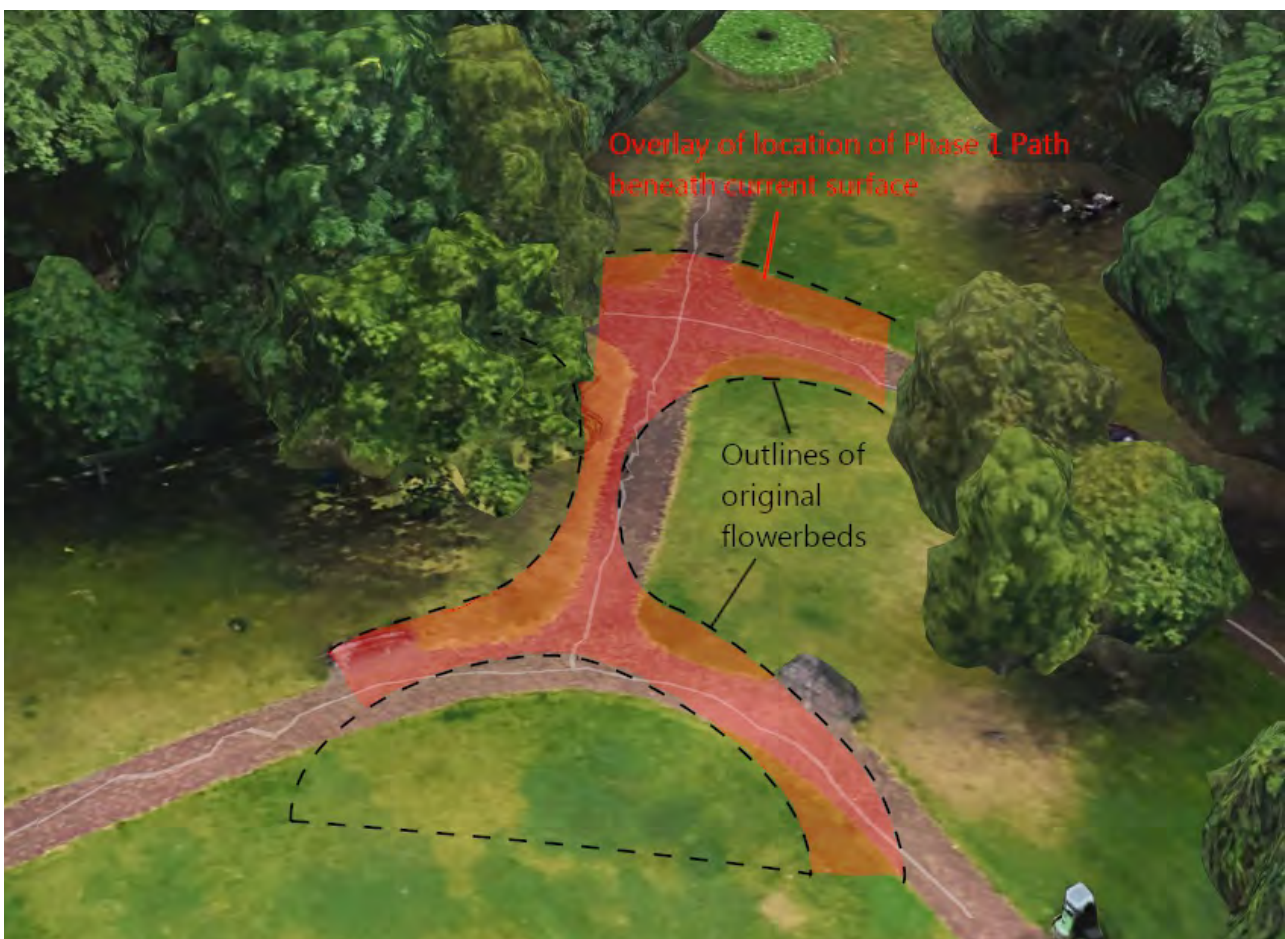
Report summary

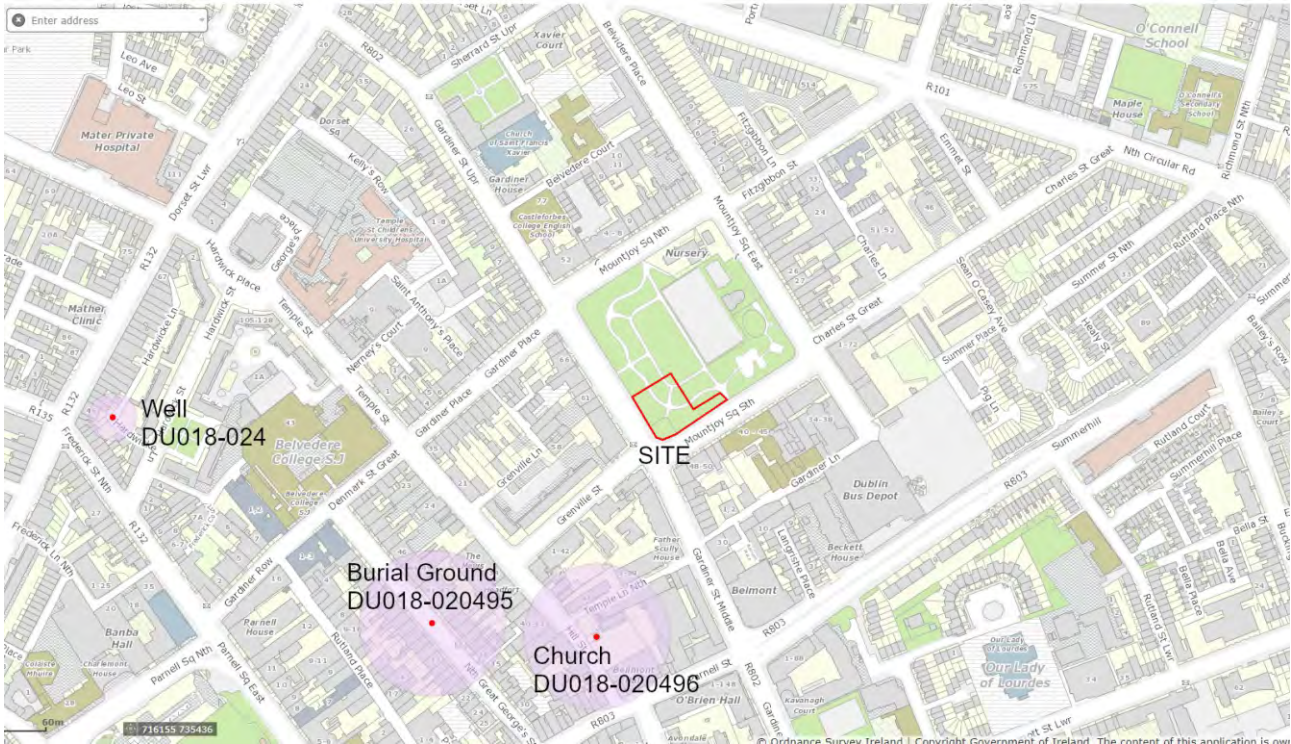
A programme of archaeological test-trenching was carried out in Mountjoy Square Park, Dublin 1 over three days from the 29th to the 31st of May 2023. The testing was carried out in order to investigate if any remnants of the original park layout survives beneath the modern paths and lawns.

Five test trenches were excavated by hand in the southern corner of the park. These identified extensive and deep disturbance towards the centre of the park, most likely related twentieth century works possibly associated with the installation and removal of tennis courts in the central lawn and later works regarding circular rose beds.

In two areas outside the disturbance, the remains of two earlier paths predating the existing path were identified. One of these was tarmacadam, and dates to the mid-twentieth century. The earliest path, which survived only in parts as a compacted stone sub-surface, was considerably wider than the existing concrete path and conforms with the 1847 OS map path layout. It seems likely this represents the original path layout of the park designed in 1803. It is also likely, based on the findings in the undisturbed sections of the trench, that the modern ground levels of the park are broadly similar to the historic levels.

Archaeological evidence for historic (Phase 1) path c. 1803 in red, overlaid on existing layout





Site location and Recorded Monuments nearby

Site location and project aim

Mountjoy Square is a public park in Dublin 1. Dublin City Council are looking to investigate whether any remnants of the original park from the 1803 design of Mountjoy Square survive, specifically whether there are any materials, path build-ups etc. beneath the current park layers, and assessing what the 1803 park levels are in relation to the existing park levels.

Archaeological potential

There are no known archaeological monuments near the park, and the closest Recorded Monuments is Hill Street Church 200m to the south, although there are vague and unverified indications that the ninth century burial ground DU018-020495 located in and around Parnell Square may have extended along the ridge of high ground towards Mountjoy Square (Traynor 1897, 106). Previous archaeological investigations to the south (05E1241, 10E0366, 16E0360) and east (97E0188, 04E0542) of the square have found nothing of interest.

This testing programme aims to investigate whether any remnants of the original park from

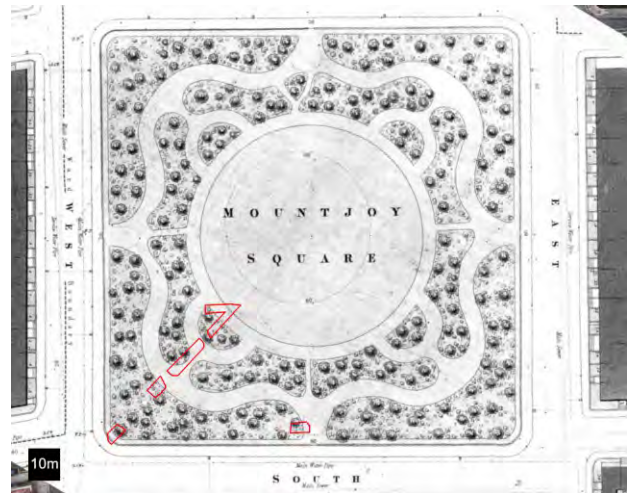
the 1803 design of Mountjoy Square survive. A report by Howley Hayes Architects (2014) sets out the historical context of the development and layout of Mountjoy square park, which was constructed between 1790 and 1818 as part of the Gardiner development in Dublin north city.

There have been a limited number of garden or park excavations in Ireland, however with the increased interest in post-medieval archaeology in the last four decades these excavations are becoming more frequent.

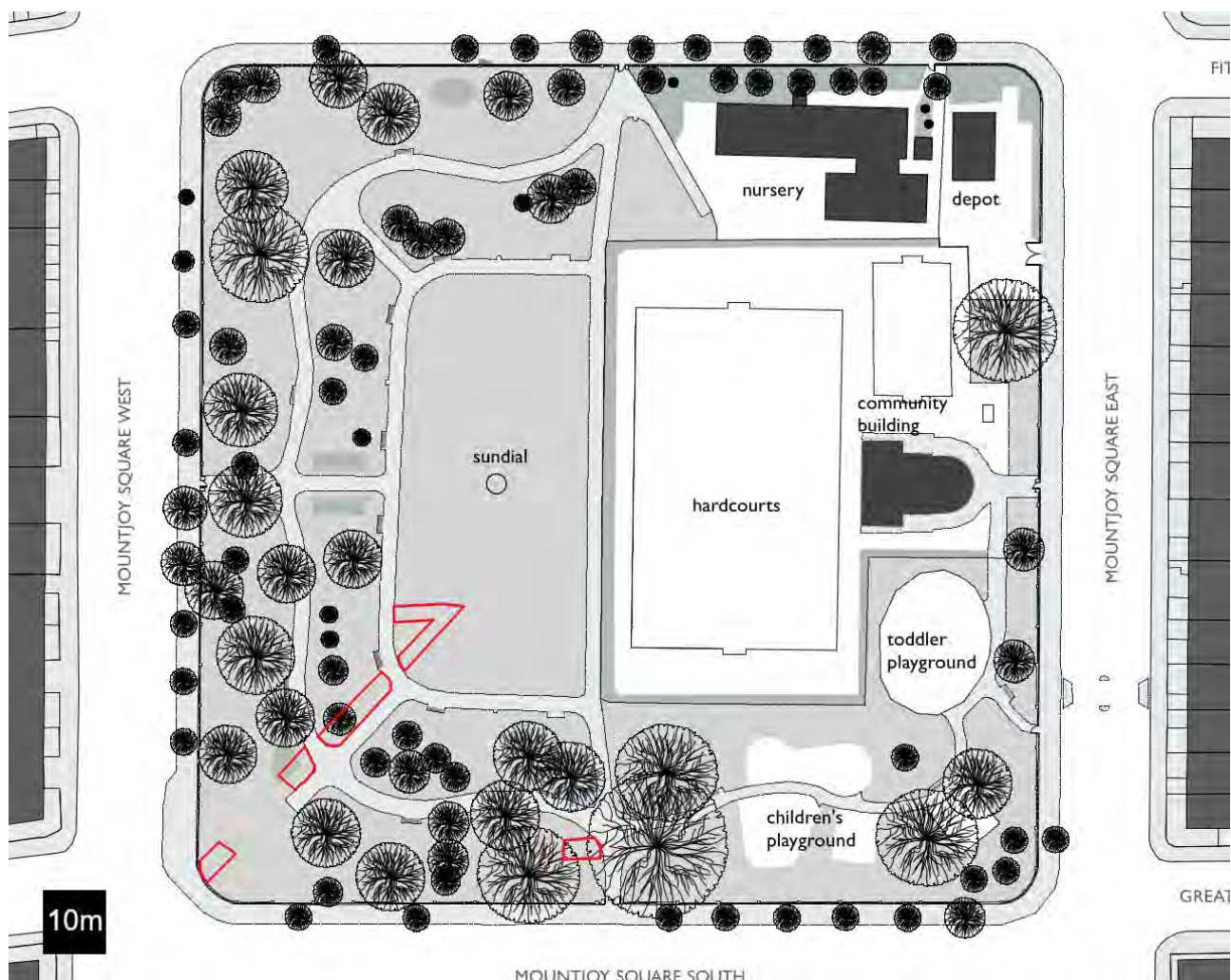
The walled garden at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham in Dublin was one of the first garden test-excavations and took place in 1991 (E000155). This excavation focused on the reconstruction of the path and flowerbed layout. In 2005 another reconstruction of the path and flowerbed layout was carried out on the walled garden at Ashtown Phoenix Park Visitor Centre (Halpin & Doyle 05E0307). Similarly, at the Rothe Family Garden at 18-21 High Street Kilkenny (O Drisceoil 07E0910 & O Drisceoil 2008). Excavations have also taken place in gardens at Holborn Street in Sligo (Henry 05E0344), Charlemont Demesne in Marino, Dublin (Myles E3453), Berryscourt Castle (Pollock 2004), and as part of a project to reconstruct the paths, gardens, and follies at Castletown House

(Saunderson 07E0200; McConway & McMullen 11E0273; McQuade 11E0273; Hayden 15E0070). There have also been a couple of excavations carried out on gardens within military complexes in Ireland: one at Clancy Barracks in Dublin (Myles 2007 & McQuade 2009), and another at the formal gardens in the Magazine Fort, Phoenix Park, Dublin (Giacometti & Barry 15E0540).

In Northern Ireland garden archaeology has taken place at St Patrick's Church Armoy (Nelis, Queen's University Belfast AE/05/50) Tully Castle in Fermanagh (Bowen, Queen's University Belfast, AE/09/82), Antrim Castle Gardens (Conway & Reeves-Smith 1999) and Castle Gardens in Lisburne (O Baoill 2005-6). In the UK the council for British Archaeology have produced a research report (Brown 1991) and a Practical Handbook for Garden Archaeology (Currie 2005). These texts refer mostly to large country estate gardens, often relating to the eighteenth century landscape architect Capability Brown.



Proposed test trenches above, superimposed on 1847 OS map, and below superimposed on modern map. The actual test-trenches were laid out differently, see image on page 6



Section 2 Testing results

Introduction

Five test trenches were excavated by hand in the southern corner of the park (Trenches 1-4 & 6). A sixth trench (Trench 5) was originally planned, but not excavated due to time constraints. The grass sod was removed using a sod cutter and was rolled up to be reinstated at a later point. The remainder of the trenches were excavated by hand. Evidence for previous paths were identified in Trench 1 and Trench 4.

General soil profile

Topsoil (C1)

The topsoil was a mid to dark brown soft peaty soil. It was 0.1m - 0.15m in depth and was topped with a closely mown grass. It contained frequent modern waste material and twentieth century pottery and glass. Several metal finds were also identified within topsoil.

Subsoil (C2)

Beneath the topsoil was a firm dark grey brown silt with frequent stone inclusions and a large amount of waste material including twentieth century pottery and glass fragments. This material made up a large amount of the mixed material excavated in Trenches 2 and 3. These trenches were heavily disturbed and this material likely represents a redeposit after some significant works were carried out in the area. This subsoil also contained fragments of tarmacadam, possibly from the Phase 2 Path identified in Trench 1.

Tarmacadam - Phase 2 Path (C3)

This path represents the second path phase identified during the testing programme. The path was identified beneath the subsoil C2 layer in Trench 1 and fragments were uncovered within that material. Only a small section of the exterior of the path remained with the interior likely cut away when the present path was constructed.

The path was constructed over the historical Phase 1 path. There were no signs of the tarmacadam path having cut through the original path. A thin layer of the dark backfill material (C4) was observed beneath the tarmacadam path and above the Phase 1 path.

Backfill material (C4)

Located beneath the subsoil layer and under the remaining tarmacadam path was a dark grey brown silt. It contained frequent rubble and waste material as well as pottery, metal and glass finds. This material was identified directly over the Phase 1 path and the natural clay. Due to this material lying directly over the Phase 1 path and the natural clay, it most likely represents the fill of the original flower beds within the park that had been disturbed by later redesigns. The amount of material was significantly thicker over the natural clay, while being relatively thin over the Phase 1 path. In Trench 2 this context was heavily disturbed and mixed with subsoil (C2) due to twentieth century activity.

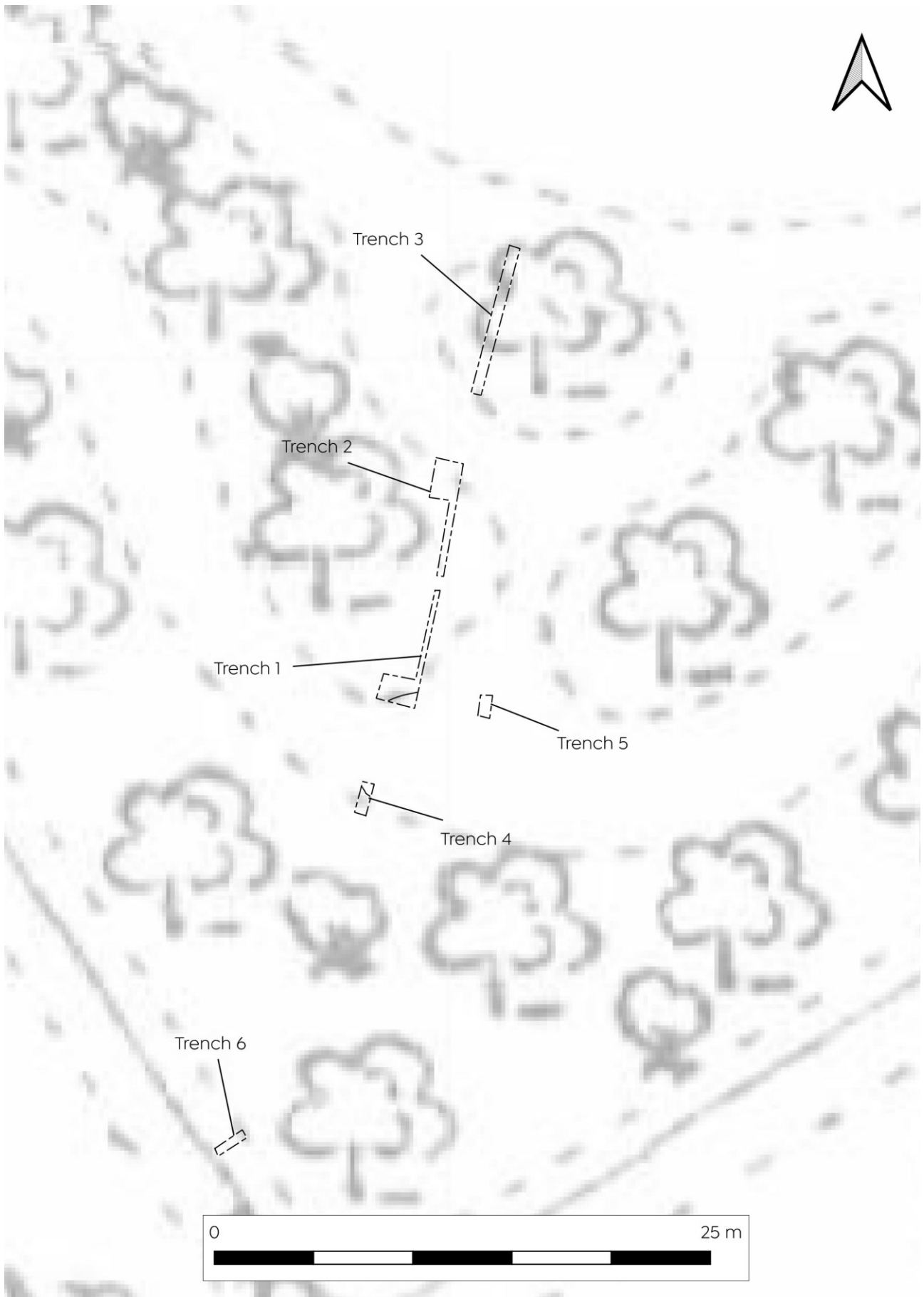
Historical Phase 1 path (C5)

A foundation surface for the Phase 1 path was uncovered in Trenches 1 and 4. It was a very compact dark brown silty clay with frequent stone inclusions. This surface lay directly over a natural yellow clay (C6) that was previously observed beneath the backfill material (C4).

There was no sign of any border material that delineated the edge of the path from the edge of the flower beds. However, due to the removal of the actual path surface it is likely that anything used as a border was also removed during subsequent redesigns.

Natural clay (C6)

Very compact natural yellow clay was identified beneath the Phase 1 path. This represented the natural subsoil present in both Trenches 1 and 4 beneath the Phase 1 path.



Test-trench layout

Trench 1

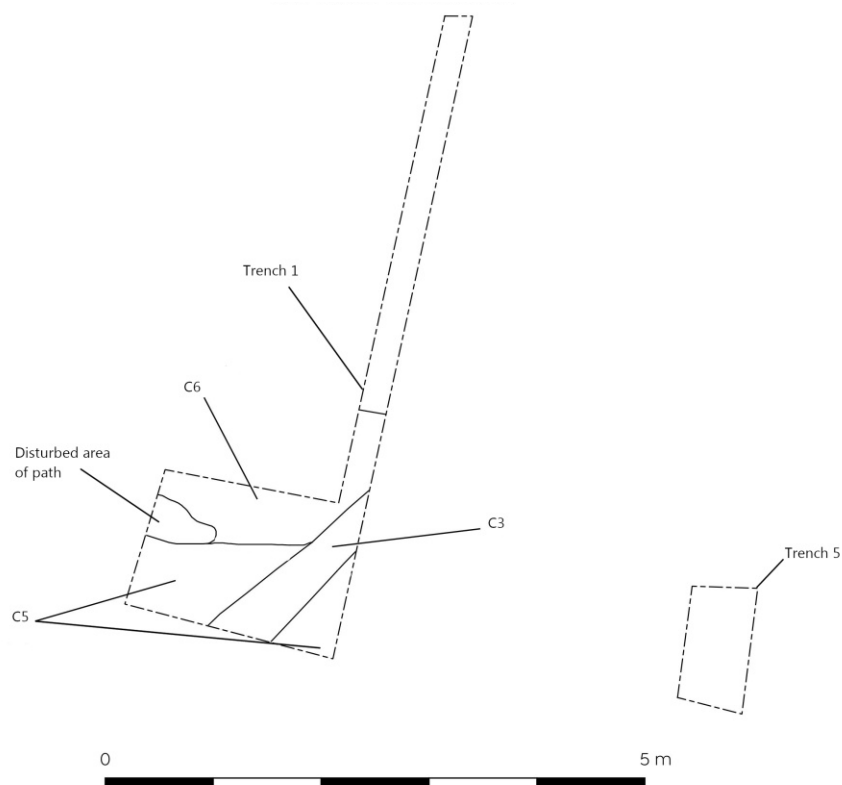
Trench 1 was located on the north side of the outer path. Its purpose was to identify the north edge of the older outer path and any possible boundary with the flowerbeds. The trench measured 5.78m in length, 0.3m in width and had a maximum depth of 0.45m. It was later extended to a width of 2m at the southern end.

Trench 1 was found to contain evidence for two older paths as well as foundation material related to the current modern path. A sandy layer was uncovered directly below the sod and topsoil layer and was identified as the foundation material for the current concrete-brick path. The sandy material overlaid an older tarmacadam structure that likely represented the previous phase of the path network. Only a small section of the tarmacadam remained as it appeared to be truncated and removed by the placement of the current path. Several tarmacadam chunks were observed in the material directly below the topsoil layer, this was the same layer that the sand was found in.



Trenches 1 and 2 looking north during sod removal

Trenches 1 and 5 plan view





Trench 1 looking north



Trench 1 looking south



Trench 1 looking northeast



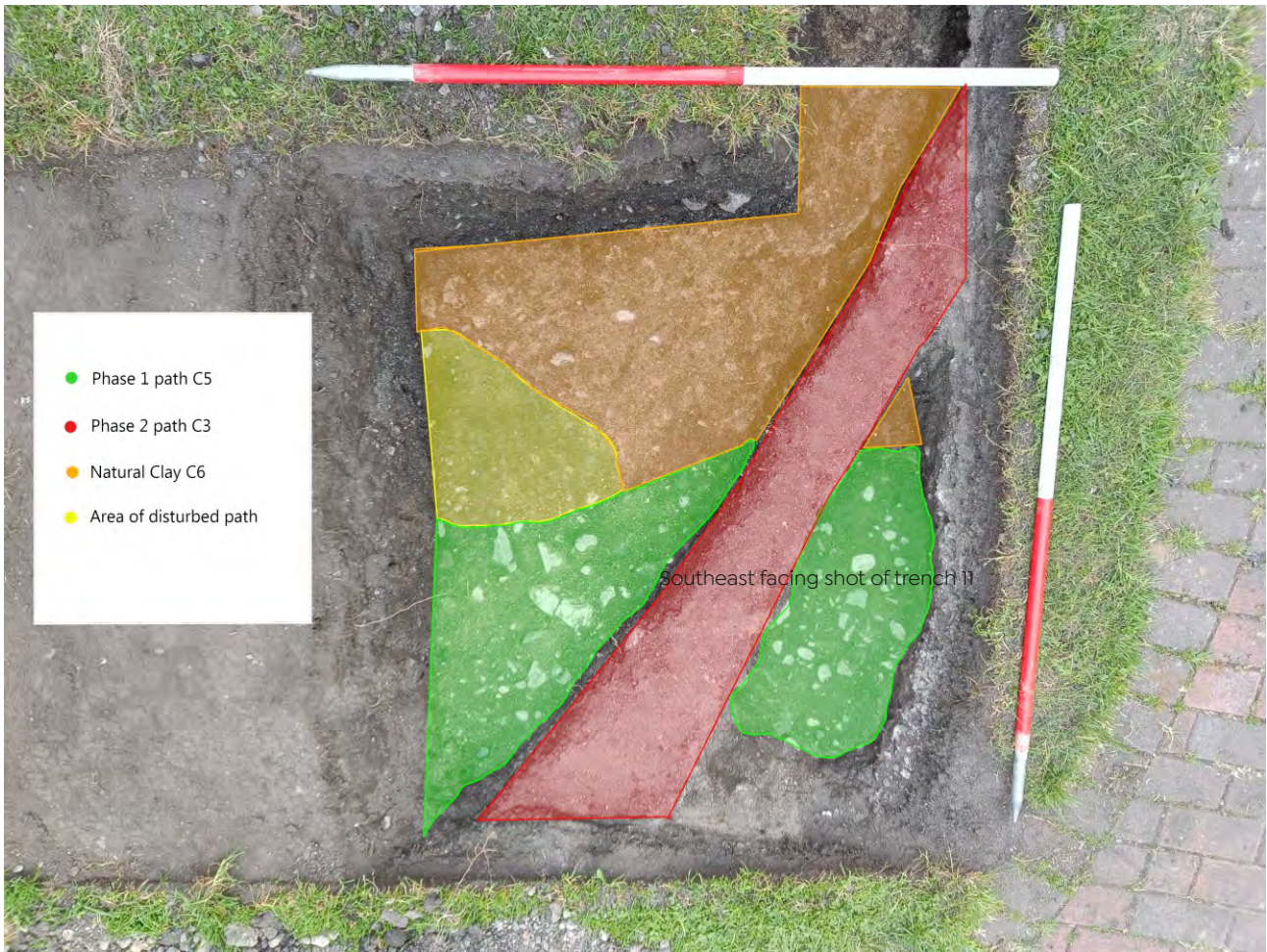
Trench 1 southern end detail



Trench 1 fills: C1 on top, C2 in middle and C3 at base



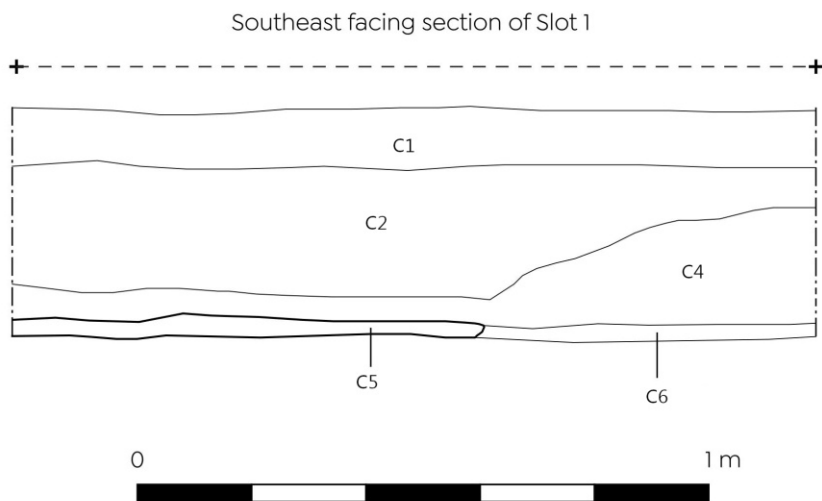
Trench 1 modern path sand foundation detail



Trench 1 highlighting different phases and contexts

Trench 1 southeast-facing section

This tarmacadam was overlying a compacted stoney surface that was laid onto the natural clayey subsoil. It extended 0.8m from the southern end of the trench and a slight curve was noted on the north edge. It is likely this represents the foundation material for the original path. This layer was identified at a depth of 0.29m beneath the park surface.



Trench 2

Trench 2 was located to the north of Trench 1. Its purpose was to identify the line of the path that ran north from the outer path to the inner path. It measured 5.7m in length, 0.3m in width and had a maximum depth of 0.9m. It was later extended to a width of 1.45m at the northern end.

Trench 2 contained a large amount of disturbed material below the sandy foundation layer for the current path. In the extended area at the north of the trench a large section of tarmacadam was identified at a depth of 0.9m. However, it was unclear if this was a large fragment of if the piece was in situ. It was thought to be associated with modern works carried out in the central lawn area. There was nothing else of note uncovered in the trench.



Trench 2 looking north



Trench 2 detail of northern disturbance



Trench 2 detail of modern path sand foundation



Trench 2 detail of tarmacadam path

Trench 3

Trench 3 was located to the north of the inner path and extended into the central lawn area. Its purpose was to identify a branching section of the older inner path and the possible boundary of the original lawn. It measured 7.7m in length, 0.64m in width and had a maximum depth of 1.05m.

Trench 3 also contained a large amount of disturbed material particularly to the north end. A ceramic pipe with concrete capping was identified 1m below the surface at the northern end. This was possibly due to twentieth century disturbances relating to the installation and removal of tennis courts in c. 1939, and circular rose beds and trees that were located on the central lawn in 1993, but removed between 2005 and 2008 according to Google earth imagery.



Trench 3 looking north

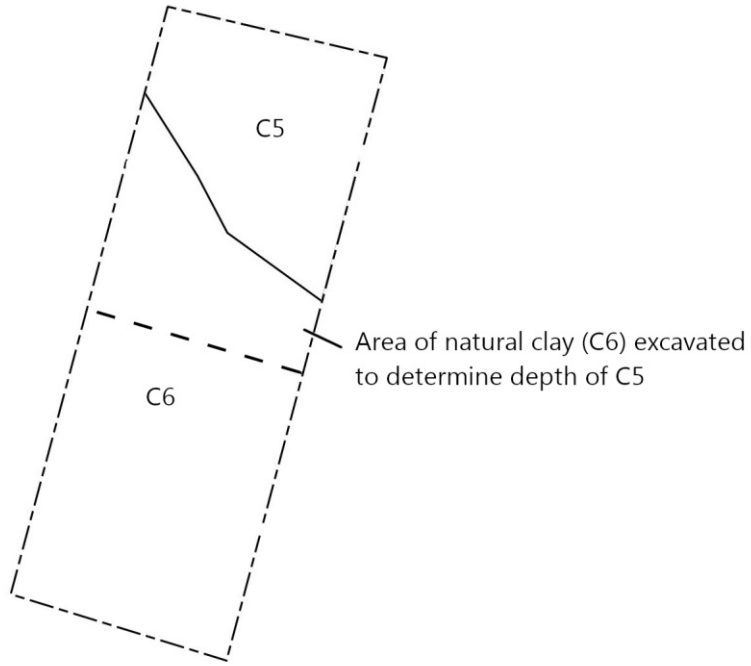
Trench 4 looking north



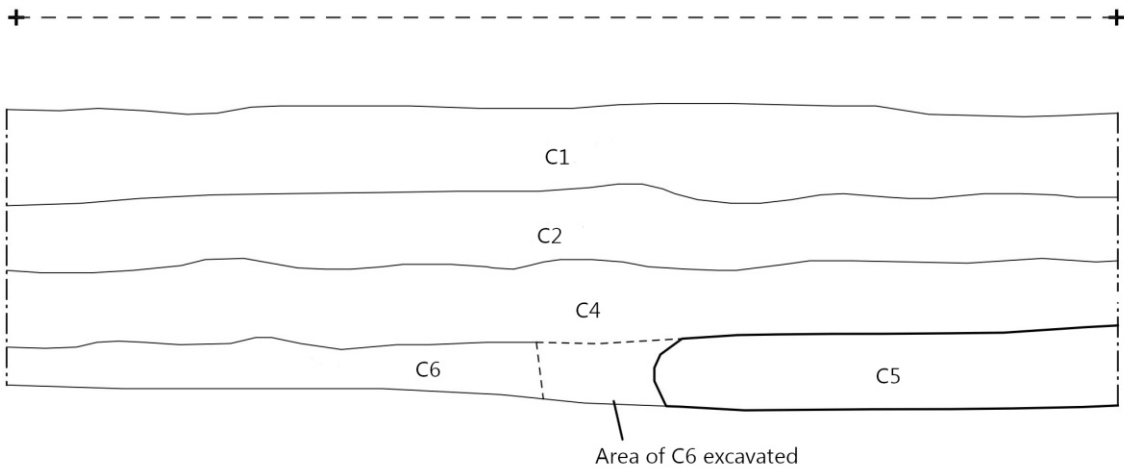
Trench 4 looking south



Plan view of Trench 4



Southeast facing section of Slot 4





Trench 4 looking west

the old outer path. It had a similar compacted stoney surface over a natural clayey subsoil that was observed in Trench 1. The compacted stoney material was observed at a depth of 0.33m from the surface, with the clayey natural at a depth of 0.45m. The dark backfill material observed above the historical path in Trench 1 was also present here. A large amount of tree roots were noted within the topsoil and subsoil above the compacted surface.



Trench 6

Trench 5

Trench 5 was located on the north side of the outer path and on the east side of the path connecting the inner and outer paths. This trench was not excavated due to time constraints.

Trench 6

Trench 6 was located close to the outer railings of the park, directly south of Trench 4. Its purpose was to identify a possible edge to the outer flowerbeds where a

discolouration in the grass had been observed. It measured 1m in length, 0.3m in width and had a maximum depth of 0.3m.

Trench 4

Trench 4 was located on the south side of the outer path. Its purpose was to identify the outer edge of the outer path. It measured 1.7m in length, 0.64m in width and had a maximum depth of 0.45m.

Trench 4 contained evidence for the south edge of

Trench 6 contained a small number of broken concrete slabs along the line of the discoloured grass. It is likely that this represents a later addition to the park as the broken slabs appeared modern in design, possibly late twentieth century.



Trenches 2 (foreground) and 1 (background) looking south

Finds

One hundred and four fragments of post-medieval ceramic were found during the excavation, along with a number of metal and ceramic pipe finds.

The majority of the ceramics were attributed to the late twentieth century and were found within the topsoil material. A small amount of nineteenth to early twentieth century material was found in the layers below the topsoil, particularly in Trench 1 and the mixed material of Trench 2. A single piece of North Devon gravel-tempered earthenware was also identified within the mixed material in Trench 2. This is the sole piece representing Phase 1 of the ceramic finds with a date of 1680-1730, however a single sherd of slipped earthenware may also date to this phase. The majority of the remaining ceramics are refined whitewares dating from 1750 onwards. Other pottery recovered included English porcelain, salt-glazed stoneware, buff fabric brown-glazed ware, black-glazed earthenware, glazed red earthenware, and fragments of unglazed earthenware. All these also represent phase 2 of the ceramic finds, and post-date 1750.

Five of the fragments were from ceramic building material. Most of these were pipe fragments found in the topsoil material and were not part of a sealed context. They have been dated to the early to mid-twentieth century. It was difficult to attain a solid context for these pieces as the subsoil in Trench 2, where the majority of the pieces were found, was badly disturbed.

Eight clay pipe fragments were recovered during the testing programme: seven stem pieces and a single highly decorative spurred bowl piece. The bowl is fluted with opposing leaf-decorated seams which are common nineteenth century decorations, and the upright form and large size of the bowl is consistent with a nineteenth century date.

Forty-four pieces of glass were found within the topsoil and mixed subsoil. The assemblage contained a mix of coloured and clear glass fragments that range from bottle pieces and possible window panes. All pieces that could be identified were determined to be machine made and post-dated 1850.

Religious pin with gold cross set in a green enamel shield with white inlay surround, from Trench 2 mixed subsoil





Refined whitewares



Refined whitewares



Refined whitewares



Black-glazed earthenwares



Refined red earthenware fabric with a black glaze



Slipped earthenwares (to right) and a glazed jug handle



Mottled ware teapot with buff fabric



Porcelain



Stoneware jars



Unglazed earthenwares



Glass bottles,
to right and left



Fifteen metal pieces were recovered from the trenches. Of these the most notable was a small religious pin with gold cross set in a green enamel shield with white inlay surround. It was discovered in the mixed subsoil in Trench 2 making its date unclear. It was likely a lapel or hat pin although the fixing at the back has been lost, giving a possible reason for its deposition. A single two pence coin from 1980 was also found within the mixed subsoil material. Five of the larger pieces were a collection of metal fragments possibly from gardening tools, a possible watering can handle was identified along with some metal fixings for wooden handled tools. The remaining eight pieces were a collection of nails, bolts and metal wire sections.

All finds were retained for analysis, and the single pre-1750 fragment of North Devon earthenware representing Phase 1 of the ceramic finds has been given a finds number and registered to National Museum of Ireland standards.



Clay pipe assemblage showing detail of fluted clay pipe bowl with opposing leaf-decorated seams





A 2p coin from 1980

Iron artefacts



Iron artefacts



Discussion

The testing programme has demonstrated that the multiple phases of the park's path design documented in historical sources also survive as archaeological evidence below the ground. These include the Phase 1 path which was represented by a highly compacted stoney surface, the Phase 2 path consisting of a tarmacadam surface that had been almost entirely cut away by the existing path, and the final phase was the current path of buff and red concrete brick setts.

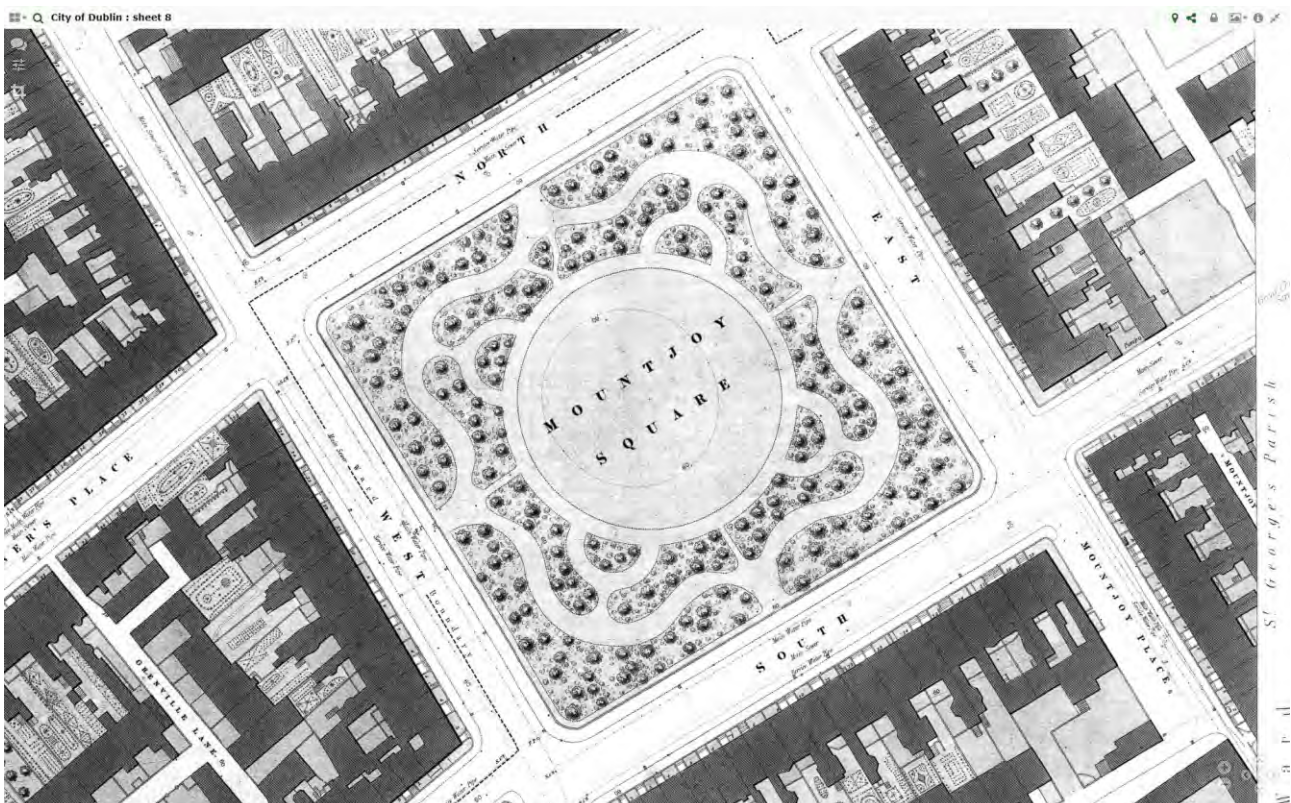
Phase 1 path

The oldest evidence for a path was a highly compacted stoney surface, which represents the foundation layer or sub-surface laid before the final gravel surface. Its stratigraphic position directly over the natural clay subsoil suggests it was the original path when the park was first

opened in 1805. This was only identified below the outermost path – no surviving evidence was encountered below the innermost circular path surrounding the inner lawn.

The original paths in the park are recorded as being surfaced in 'gravel' (Minutes of Mountjoy Square Commissioners 1802–1884, 24h Aug. 180, NLI MS 5386). Whilst this probably refers to a modern understanding of gravel, cobbled surfaces in the Phoenix Park Magazine Fort were occasionally referred to as 'gravel paths' in the late nineteenth century (Giacometti & Barry 2020, 13). The simple nature of the subsurface remains of the original path, and absence of any surviving cobbles, suggest that gravel (small loose stones) was the most likely original path surface used in the park. The original design also included a

1847 OS Map of Mountjoy Square) showing historic paths



narrow path inside the railings which was removed by the Commissioners in the 1830s, but no archaeological remains of this were identified within Trench 6.

The original paths extended much wider than the existing path. At the point where it survived, the earliest path measured 5.38m in width. This compares to c. 2m in width for the existing modern path. This large width of path is supported by the 1847 map which shows the park as having a wider outer path and narrower inner one. A close inspection of the 1847 and 1846 maps also shows that the narrow path connecting the inner and outer paths is located slightly to the east of the northeast-southwest axis that runs through the park. This is demonstrated more clearly in the 3D overlay image showing that the Phase 1 path and the existing path do not align. Similarly, if any of the Phase 1 inner path remains it would be expected to be found under the central lawn area of the existing layout. However, this is unlikely to be the case as the later twentieth century disturbances seems to have removed any archaeological evidence.

The foundation for the original path was located c. 300mm below the existing path surface. Allowing for c. 100mm of gravel over the foundation, this suggests that the original outer path was at broadly the same level or a little bit lower than the current layout, and that there has not been extensive releveling of the outer part of the park since c. 1800.

Twentieth century disturbance



Thomas Sherrard's map of 'Gardiner Square' (now Mountjoy Square) in 1787

No evidence for the inner path was uncovered during the testing programme. The overlay of the 1910 map with the survey data shows that Trench 3 was likely located within a flower bed and as a result, there would be no sign of the path. A large amount of disturbance was noted in Trench 3 towards the centre of the park and was likely due to twentieth century alterations to the park. Several test holes were excavated within Trench 2 and Trench 3 to determine the depth of the disturbances. Trench 2 showed signs of disturbance down to a depth of 0.9m and beyond and Trench 3 showed signs down to a depth of 1.05m in the north end of the trench.

Due to the twentieth century disturbance, it was unclear whether the ground towards the centre of the park has been built up, or if the raised area in the centre is part of the original levels. However,



Archaeological evidence for historic (Phase 1) path c. 1803 in red, overlaid on existing layout

based on trenches 1 and 4 that found the outer path, it is likely that the inner path was also at broadly the same as the modern level.

Phase 2 Path

An asphalt or tarmacadam path predating the current path but post-dating the historic path was also identified. Tarmacadam or asphalt uses tar or bitumen to bind loose aggregate into a surface. It was a novel material in the mid-nineteenth century, and was used for elegant pavements in France in the 1830s (e.g., in Paris on the Pont Royal in 1834, and at Place de la Concorde in 1835 in a black and white mosaic, Forbes 1958, 24). The material was favourably compared to stone and was said to be indistinguishable from granite. It was used sporadically on pavements in England from the 1830s but did not become commonly used for pavements and roads until much later in the nineteenth century (ibid). It is recorded as being

laid in Dublin for footpaths in the 1880s (RPCLC 1880, 485), and an early asphalt pavement in Ireland is documented in the Phoenix Park Magazine Fort from 1859 (Giacometti & Barry 2020, 18). The tarmacadam path most likely dates to c. 1938, when Dublin Corporation took over the park and constructed the tennis courts, or the late 1960s when the park works depot was created. Tarmacadam paths appear to be depicted on a 1965 photograph of the park by David Davison (Howley Hayes Architects 2014, Fig. 20).

While only a small section of the Phase 2 path was identified during the testing programme it was determined that the layout of the outer path was very similar to the existing path. This determination is due to the remaining section of Phase 2 path following the line of the curve of the existing path quite closely. It was also noted that this path cut across the Phase 1 path and could suggest it was at this point that the paths became



Trench 1 looking north

misaligned with each other. There is no evidence from the testing programme that the inner path remains below the existing path. This is likely due to the disturbance in the centre of the park.

Existing paths

The existing path surface with buff and red concrete brick setts laid in a herringbone bond are likely to date to 1993, when the park was repaved and the two large circular rose beds and trees were placed into the central lawn area. This path is significantly narrower than the Phase 1 path (3.38m in parts) and the Phase 2 path (approx. 1m).

In conclusion, the archaeological evidence suggests that only the foundation layer of the outer Phase 1 path remains, along with small sections of the Phase 2 path in locations where it

has not been cut away by the existing path. As a result, it is clear from the archaeological evidence obtained from this testing programme that the original designs from the 1805 layout were indeed implemented.

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