



Monitoring Report No. 192

**Souterrain at Moneynick
Co. Antrim.**

AE/09/196

Site Specific Information

Site Name: Gribben building Plot

Townland: Moneynick

SMR No: NA

Grid Ref: Grid Ref. J0334 8961

County: Antrim

Excavation License No: AE/09/196

Dates of Monitoring: 12th November 2009

Archaeologist Present: Cormac McSparron, Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, QUB.

Brief Summary: A fragment of a souterrain was uncovered during construction of a private dwelling. An attempt was made to mechanically excavate the remaining section of souterrain on the building plot. Although the souterrain partially collapsed it was possible to ascertain the height and depth of the possible entrance passage, details of its construction and with the assistance of the eyewitness testimony of the landowner make a conjectural reconstruction of the souterrain.

Type of monitoring: Excavation of surviving portion of a souterrain on a building plot.

Size of area opened: 3m²

Archaeological excavation at Moneynick, Co. Antrim

The CAF was asked to investigate a souterrain discovered at Moneynick, Co. Antrim. The souterrain was uncovered during the construction of a private house by the landowner, John Gribben. The souterrain was largely destroyed by the construction work, its nature not being realised until excavation around it was very advanced. A section of a single passage, possibly the entrance passage remained. A portion of the surviving souterrain was excavated with the use of a mechanical excavator. The souterrain was in an extremely unstable condition and as soon as the lintels were removed it began to collapse, nevertheless it was possible to see some constructional details of the souterrain and get some idea of the height and width of the souterrain passage. These details were recorded photographically. No artefacts were uncovered in the souterrain.

Location

The souterrain is located in the townland of Moneynick, Co. Antrim (Grid Ref. J0334 8961) (Figures 1 and 2). It was constructed into what was likely to have formerly been a gentle slope running from flat farmland northwards to a stream. In the past few decades the ground appears to have been significantly landscaped, possibly as part of an abandoned construction project, the ground level having been reduced by up to 2.5m in places.

Methodology

As there had been considerable disturbance of the ground to the north of this souterrain fragment, in the process apparently destroying much of the souterrain, the remainder of the structure was unstable, both because of the breaching of its structural integrity and also because of the undermining of the subsoil around it (Photo 1). Consequently there was no manual excavation of this souterrain. Instead the souterrain was excavated entirely using a mechanical digger. The mechanical digger first attempted to remove the topsoil from the lintels of the souterrain, using a toothless bucket and then the lintels themselves. Using a narrow bucket the mechanical digger next attempted to remove rubble and recent infill in the souterrain passage. At no stage was it actually possible to stand upon or get inside the souterrain. Because it was impossible to enter the souterrain all recording had to be carried out photographically.

Results

Unfortunately the mechanical excavation of this souterrain was only partially successful. Due to the situation of the souterrain in the modern landscape the mechanical excavator found it impossible to position itself squarely with the souterrain. Instead it had to locate itself in a position slightly to one side and considerably above the souterrain (Photo 4). It had been hoped that it might initially be possible to remove topsoil onto flat souterrain lintels which could be exposed cleanly enough for photography by the flat toothless bucket of the mechanical excavator. However the lintels were not all flat but rather composed of both flat slabs and large rounded stones and boulders which the digger found impossible to clean for a photograph and difficult to grab from the angle at which the digger was forced to work.

The mechanical excavator proceeded to remove the lintels to get access to the souterrain interior. This further weakened the souterrain structure leading to the rapid collapse of the west wall. The northern wall of the souterrain wall remained standing. The digger managed to clean out most of the interior of the souterrain with only small amounts of earth and gravel left in the base allowing the bedrock floor of the souterrain to be seen. It was impossible, for safety reasons, to enter the souterrain and manually clean the base of the passage.

Despite the collapse of much of the souterrain during this excavation and the impossibility of entering the souterrain for recording it was nevertheless possible to say much about the souterrain from this project.

A short, less than 3m, section of souterrain passage was excavated running northwest-southeast (Photo 2). The passage continued beyond the area of excavations running southwest into the adjacent property. The souterrain passage was approximately 1.30m deep from the base of the lintels to its floor and it varied between 0.75 and 1.0m wide. The walls were composed of quite well sorted sub-angular basaltic blocks with vertical, horizontal and depth dimensions of about 20cm. The lintels were larger, more elongated, both flattened and rounded. The passage was not level but sloped downwards, from the higher ground southeast to the northwest. It is difficult, without actual measurement, to estimate the slope but a figure of 15 to 20° is probably a reasonable approximation. The souterrain was both cut into gravelly subsoil and, at its base, into bedrock. The floor of the souterrain was smooth bedrock (Photo 3). Because of the slope of the passage and its smooth bedrock floor there was little evidence for archaeological strata at the base of the souterrain, probably because of the washing effect of water running along the passage. No archaeological artefacts were discovered

The landowner who first uncovered the souterrain had given a description of the portion of the structure which had been destroyed by ground works at the site, indicating a passage joining at right angles, making a "T" junction, with the surviving passage and running for several metres either side of it. The landowner indicated that access between the destroyed passage and the passage now exposed had been controlled by a creep.

Conclusions

The excavation at Moneynick uncovered a fragment of souterrain passage. This fragment, possibly an entrance passage, led to a possible refuge passage or elongated chamber. Where it joined with the refuge passage / chamber it made a "T" junction. The access between the two was apparently controlled by a creep. The souterrain continued outside the development site, heading south-east into the adjacent property. It is likely that there may have been an Early Christian house, houses or possibly a rath to the south / southeast of the souterrain.

At the end of the excavation the souterrain was backfilled.

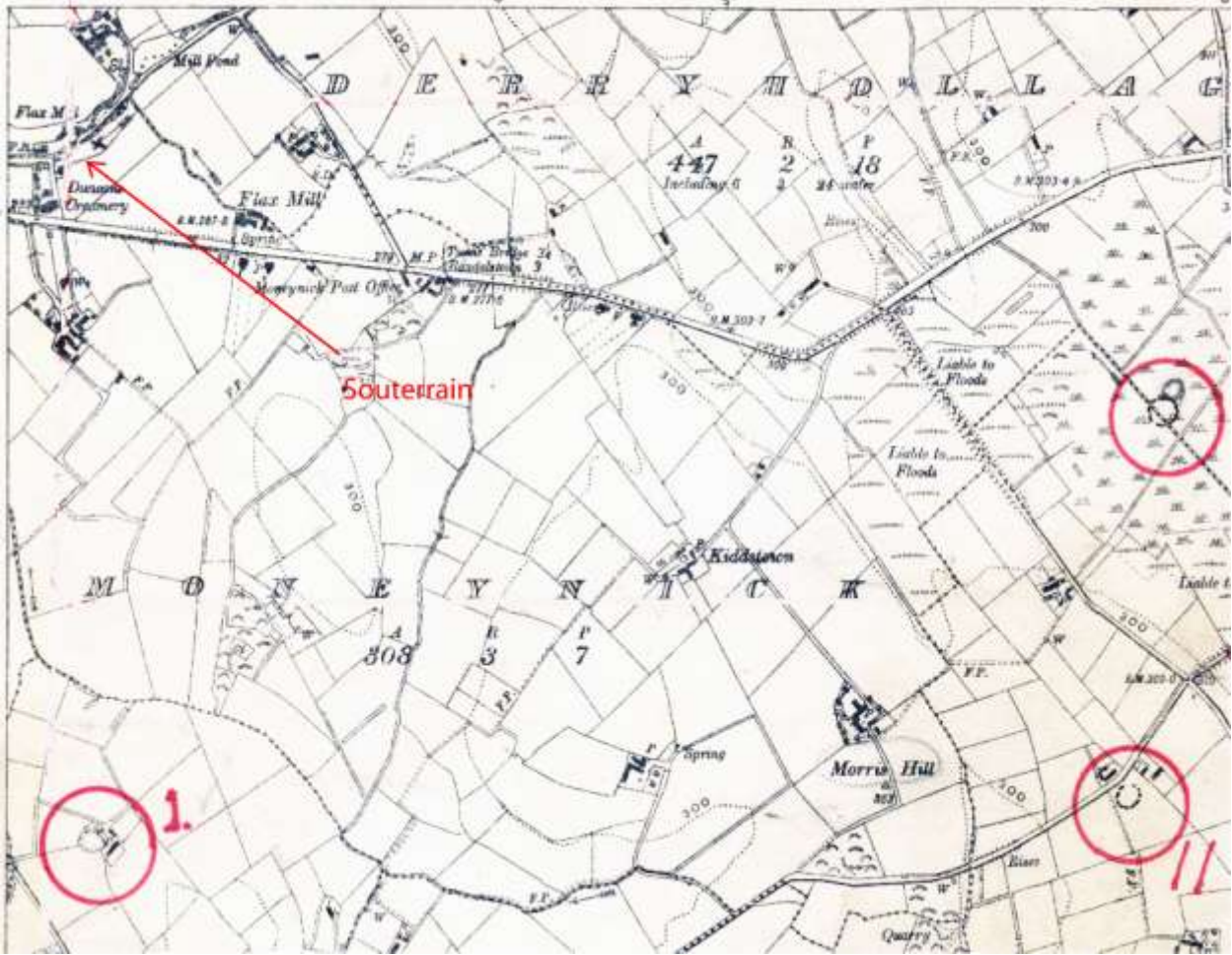


Figure 1: Location of souterrain on 6" Map No. Ant: 49

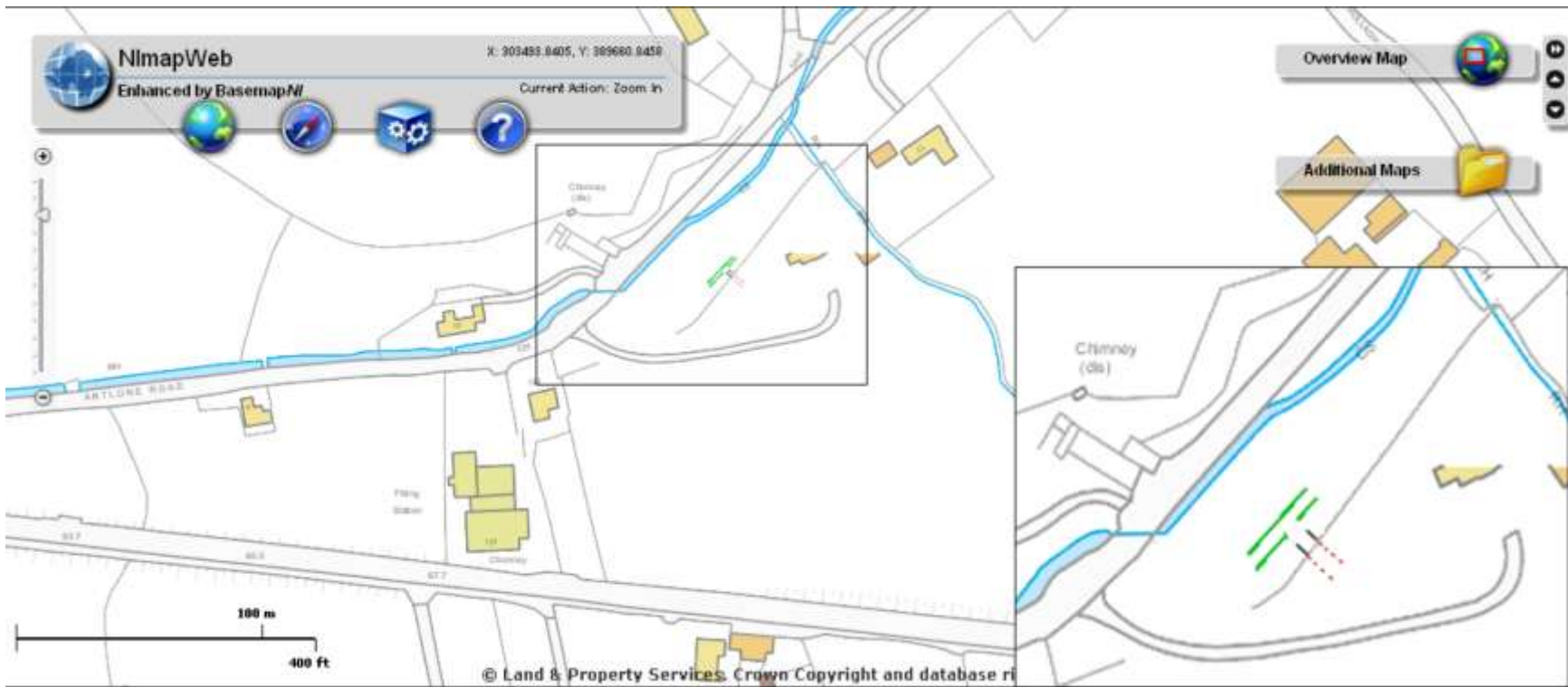


Figure 2: Location map of souterrain showing excavated passage (black) possible extension to southeast (red) and destroyed passage reported by landowner (green).



Figure 3: Aerial photograph of Moneynick, Co. Antrim showing location of souterrain (red square)



Photo 1: Photograph of the souterrain fragment from the south prior to excavation.



Photo 2: Souterrain passage after excavation showing surviving east wall.



Photo 3: Bottom of souterrain passage showing bedrock cut base



Photo 4: Photo of excavation showing difficult working position of mechanical excavator.



Photo 5: Souterrain backfilled at the end of the excavation.