

ANTRIM GARDENS, PORTRUSH, CO. ANTRIM

In the spring of 2005 a small excavation took place in the public park Antrim Gardens, Portrush, Co. Antrim, prior to the landscaping of the park. A 40m x 5m strip along the central-southern part of the site was opened to reveal numerous layers of wind-blown sand, beneath which were found several occupation layers, evidence of stone structures and four stone-built ovens.

Over 3000 sherds of medieval pottery were recovered, as were thousands of fish bones, fishing hooks, metal nails and a single sherd of **Roman Samian Ware** dated to the 1st Century AD.

Over half of the pottery recovered was from locally produced Irish Glazed Wares dating to the 13th-14th centuries. Imported wares from England and France were also noted amongst the assemblage.

The French Saintonge Ware vessels would have been used to transport olives and wine, while the English vessels were mainly used for cooking. The recovery of a sherd of Roman Samian Ware, along with the other diverse artefacts, indicates that this site had an ecclesiastical function. It is likely that the pot was brought to the site as a result of a pilgrimage to either a Roman site in England or the continent.

Two small ovens were excavated in the centre of the site. It is likely that these were used for cooking rather than pottery production. These ovens may have been part of the church kitchens. A row of five stone plinths were uncovered beneath the ovens, but their function remains unclear. The stone structures found may have been the foundations for a substantial building or may have provided the base layer for a large wooden building that later burnt down.

RIGHT - A number of carved animal **bone toggles and bone handles** were recovered from site. These may be evidence for craft-working around the church. Traditionally, churches have a long association with craft activities within their environs.



BELOW - Mid-excitation photo.



BACKGROUND - Post-excitation plan of the site.



LEFT - Large glazed jar.

LEFT - A large carved stone recovered from the site was made of sandstone and may have come from sandstone quarries at Scrabo, Co. Down.

RIGHT - 14th - 15th Century jar lid.

BELOW - Roman Samian Ware.

