

## LUAS CROSS-CITY WORKS REVEAL HUMAN REMAINS AT COLLEGE GREEN

Rubicon Heritage Services, on behalf of the Railway Procurement Agency, are currently undertaking monitoring works in central Dublin as part of the Luas Cross-City project. In July this year human bones were noted by supervisor Ivan Pawle (working under the direction of Nikolah Gilligan; licence ref. 14E003) during the excavation of a trench immediately in front of Trinity College in College Green. Further investigation revealed the remains of up to five separate individuals at a depth of 1.5m below the present ground surface within a shallow layer of redeposited boulder clay.

Four burials (SK1–4) in the northern end of the trench had visible grave-cuts aligned north–south, while one (SK5) in the southern end of the trench had been laid east–west. Two of the skeletons (SK1 and 2) had been placed in a flexed position, while SK5 was supine with the hands resting on the pelvis. Initial assessment of the remains by osteoarchaeologist Carmelita Troy suggests that SK2 was an adult male, while SK3 was less than eighteen years old at the time of death.

Although it is too early to state a definite date, it is surmised that the burials were Viking; there are historical and archaeological records for Viking activity and burial in this area, which formed the eastern core of the early Viking and the later Hiberno-Norse settlement. As part of an Irish National Strategic Archaeological Research project, Linzi Simpson noted the importance of the area (Study Area 5) throughout the centuries of Viking settlement in Dublin. She stated that ‘Study Area 5 has a very significant potential to produce additional evidence of burials and associated artefacts, dating to the Viking and Hiberno-Norse period’.

Prior to its modern incarnation as College Green, the open space was known as Hoggen Green, so called because of the presence of at least two Viking *haugr* (burial mounds) there. One of the mounds was demolished in 1646, in probable close proximity to where the five skeletons were found. The exact location is unknown but Ware records it as a ‘lowly hill’ within the eastern suburb. The other mound, located at the junctions of today’s College Green, Suffolk Street and Church Lane, has traditionally been recorded as the site of the *Thingmount/Thingmot/Thingmót*, the seat of the Viking assembly. Debates continue, however, about whether this mound was actually a *haugr* and the *Thingmount* was located elsewhere. It was rased in 1685; three male burials with associated Viking weaponry found to the east are believed to have been associated.

Other Viking burials in the vicinity were found in South Great George’s Street to the south-west of Trinity College: four male skeletons, radiocarbon-dated to between the late seventh century and the ninth century. The earlier dates suggest that they may represent a Viking band that arrived prior to the first recorded Viking settlement. The north–south alignment of SK1–4 is similar to other Viking graves in Dublin, such as at Islandbridge and Kilmainham. The association of Dublin Viking burial grounds with watercourses is reflected in College Green, with the generally accepted route of the pre-culverted Stein River running southwards from the Liffey close to the excavation site.

Of course, medieval activity and associated burials have also been recorded in this area. The Priory of All Hallows was located where Trinity College now stands, directly east of SK1–5. It was founded by Diarmait Mac Murchada c. 1162, and excavations within the grounds of Trinity uncovered medieval burials believed to have been associated with the priory graveyard. The Abbey of St Mary de Hogges is thought to have stood in the south-western corner of Hoggen Green,

Left: Fig. 1—Melanie McQuade working on SK3 and 4 (looking west) (Rubicon Heritage).  
Above right: Fig. 2—SK1 during excavation (looking south).



close to the contemporary St Andrew’s Church. This twelfth-century abbey was also founded by Mac Murchada and was up to two acres in extent, comprising a church and bell-tower, dormitory and chapter house, among other buildings.

The exact locations of two other medieval religious foundations once located within the eastern suburb are as yet unknown: the Chapel of St Clement, believed to have been located to the north of All Hallows, and the twelfth-century Hospital of St James, founded for the poor and for religious pilgrims, which is thought to have been situated on Townsend Street North, to the north-east of Hoggen Green, although the 1836 edition of the Ordnance Survey marks its location as that of the present Bank of Ireland on the corner of College Green.

The date of the burials found in July will be confirmed by radiocarbon dating and modern scientific techniques, such as isotopic analysis, during the post-excavation phase of the Luas Cross-City project. This will serve to place them in their chronological context and will allow additional research questions to be addressed. Detailed osteological analyses will also be carried out on the skeletal remains by Carmelita Troy. Watch this space for the next update!

Nikolah Gilligan

