

# Eachtra Journal

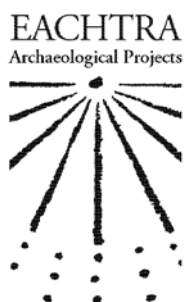
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## Archaeological Excavation Report

04E1071 - Mitchelstown 2, Co. Cork

Early Bronze Age pit and burnt mound



**Final Excavation Report of Early Bronze Age pit and  
burnt mound at Mitchelstown,  
N8 Mitchelstown Relief Road,  
Co. Cork**

**July 2006**

**Client:** Cork County Council,  
National Roads Office,  
Richmond,  
Glanmire,  
Co. Cork

**Licence No.:** 04E1071

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## Project details

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### Project N8 Mitchelstown Relief Road

Site Name	Mitchelstown
Site Type	Burnt mound and Early Bronze Age pit
Licence No.	04E1071
Ministerial Order No.	A012/003
Licensee	Bruce Sutton

Townland	Mitchelstown
Nat. Grid Ref.	180182 113286

Report Type	Excavation Report
Report Status	Final Report

Date of Submission	July 2006
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Distribution Ken Hanley, Project Archaeologist Cork County Council, Dept. of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, National Museum of Ireland and Cork Archaeological Survey Office.

## Non-Technical Summary

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This report details the results of an archaeological excavation undertaken by Eachtra Archaeological Projects of a site on the route of the proposed N8 Mitchelstown Relief Road, on behalf of Cork County Council. The proposed bypass involves the construction of 4.5km of the N8 from Cloonlough, south of Mitchelstown, to the junction of the R513 and the N8, north of Mitchelstown.

Phase 1 of the project (archaeological testing of the route) was carried out in June, July and September 2004 under licences 04E0889-04E0892 issued by Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG). The principal aim of this phase of the project was to test sites of archaeological potential identified in the EIS and geophysical surveying and to test for any previously unknown sites by a programme of centreline and offset testing.

Phase 2 of the project (resolution) involved the resolution of all archaeological sites identified within the proposed road corridor prior to commencement of the construction of the bypass in order to avoid delays and costs during construction works. This phase of the project was carried out from September-December 2004 and excavations were conducted by two licensed directors under the management of a Senior Archaeologist. In total five sites were excavated during this phase of works and all excavations were carried out initially under separate licences issued by DoEHLG and subsequently under Ministerial Order.

One of these sites, Mitchelstown 2 is the subject of this report. It was identified in the testing in the townland of Mitchelstown, at chainage 2830 of the proposed road scheme and excavated under Licence Number 04E1071 and Ministerial Order Number A012/003. The site comprised a truncated burnt mound spread and three Early Bronze Age pottery vessels deposited in a pit on the northern bank of the Gradoge River.

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## 1 Introduction

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### 1.1 Site location

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This report details the results of the archaeological excavation of a site on N8 Mitchelstown Relief Road (MRR), County Cork (National Grid Co-ordinates 180182 113286). The site is located on the northern bank of the Gradoge River c.1.5 km to the west of Mitchelstown and c. 1km west of the R513 Mitchelstown to Ballylanders road (Figure 1). It is located in the townland of Mitchelstown, the Parish of Brigown and barony of Condons and Clangibbon.

### 1.2 Scope of the Project

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This Archaeological Services Project was carried out on behalf of Cork County Council, National Roads Design Office, Richmond, Glanmire, Co. Cork. This project was funded by the Irish Government under the National Development Plan, 2000-2006. The purpose of the Project was to conduct Archaeological Site Investigations within the lands made available for the scheme and to assess the nature and extent of any new or potential archaeological sites uncovered.

Phase 1 of the project (archaeological testing of the route) was carried out in June, July and September 2004 under licences 04E0889-04E0892 issued by Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG). The principal aim of this phase of the project was to test sites of archaeological potential identified in the EIS and geophysical surveying and to test for any previously unknown sites by a programme of centreline and offset testing.

Phase 2 of the project (resolution) involved the resolution of all archaeological sites identified within the proposed road corridor prior to commencement of the construction of the bypass in order to avoid delays and costs during construction works. This phase of the project was carried out from September-December 2004 and excavations were conducted by two licensed directors under the management of a Senior Archaeologist. In total five sites were excavated during this phase of works and all excavations were carried out initially under separate licences issued by DoEHLG and subsequently under Ministerial Order.

Following completion of fieldwork a dissemination strategy was undertaken and submitted to the project archaeologist. A programme of post-excavation analysis was agreed and commenced. A lecture on the preliminary findings was given to Mitchelstown Historical Society in May 2005 by the project and senior archaeologists. It is envisaged that a second lecture will be given to Mitchelstown Historical Society during their autumn/winter programme 2006-07.

### 1.3 Circumstances of discovery

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Prehistoric archaeological material was discovered at Mitchelstown 2 during archaeological test trenching undertaken in June 2004 under licence 04E0890. Topsoil in the vicinity of the sites was subsequently stripped by tracked machine using a flat bucket under the direction of the licensed director. When the limits of the site had been determined, full excavation of the site commenced under license 04E1071.

### 1.4 Date and duration of excavation works

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The excavation commenced on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2004 under licence 04E1071. The work was suspended on October 14<sup>th</sup> 2004 as it was necessary to apply for a Ministerial Order under the National Monuments Amendment Act 2004. The Ministerial Order, A012/000, was granted in November 2004 and excavation recommenced on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2004 and finished on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2004 under licence 04E1071 and Ministerial Order A012/003.

## 1.5 Size and composition of the excavation team

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The archaeological excavation team consisted of the license holder, one supervisor, three site assistants and one general operative.

## 2 Receiving Environment

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### 2.1 The Natural Landscape

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#### 2.1.1 Geology

The topography of East Cork and Waterford consists of east-west orientated valleys separated by intervening ridges. The ridges consist of sandstones and mudstones of the Devonian Period (Old Red Sandstone) laid down 355-410 million years ago and the valleys of Carboniferous limestones laid down 290-355 million years ago. The sediments covering many of the rocks are mainly of glacial origin deposited by glacial ice or meltwater (Sleeman *et al.* 1995, 1). Major earth movements have resulted in the uplifting and folding of the rock units. Anticlines occur when local uplift results in a convex upward fold. Synclines occur when local uplift results in a concave upward fold (*ibid.* 3).

The Mitchelstown Syncline is composed of a variety of Carboniferous Formations. Three of these formations are located in the area of the route of the N8 MRR. The Croane Formation is composed of a mixture of mudstones and cherts and is estimated to be about 300m thick (*ibid.* 31). The Rathronan Formation is composed of micrites, wackestones and cherts (*ibid.* 32). The O'Mahony's Rock Formation consists of micrites, packstones, wackestones and grainstones and is estimated to be about 100m thick. The type area is between Mitchelstown Castle and Killee House to the west (*ibid.*).

#### 2.1.2 Soils and their uses

The soils to the north of the Gradoge River to the west of Mitchelstown are characterised by a mix of acid brown earths, gleys and grey brown podzolics, which are derived from mixed sandstone and limestone glacial till while the underlying rock is Carboniferous limestone. The acid brown earths and gleys occur in the gently rolling valleys of Cork and Waterford mainly at altitudes of 0-75m (Gardiner 1980, 61). The soils have a wide use range and are suitable for tillage and grass production. The soils to the south of the Gradoge River are characterized by a mix of gleys and peaty gleys which are derived from glacial till of mixed sandstone-shale composition with a small admixture of limestone in places. They occur mostly at altitudes of 76m to 152m. The soils have a limited use range as they are poorly drained even on good slopes. They are best suited to grassland (*ibid.* 77-79)

### 2.1.3 Topography

The route of the N8 Mitchelstown relief road (MRR) traverses the townlands of Cloonlough, Stag Park and Mitchelstown on the western side of the town of Mitchelstown. The route extends from the N8 *c.* 1km south of Mitchelstown, crosses the N73 Mitchelstown/Mallow road, the Gradoge River Valley and traverses the ridge on the northern side of the river valley to the junction of the R513 Mitchelstown/Ballylanders road and rejoins the N8. The northern half of the route traverses Mitchelstown Demesne, breaching the estate wall at the junction with the N73 and the R513. The southern half of the route climbs from *c.* 120m OD to 130m OD before descending to the banks of the Gradoge River, 80m OD and climbing northwards to the apex of the limestone ridge 110m OD.

The land is for the most part under pasture and is located at an altitude of between 80-130m OD. The landscape of the Mitchelstown area is dominated by the Galtee Mountains to the north, the Ballyhoura Mountains to the west and the Kilworth Mountains (the foothills of the Knockmealdown Mountains) to the south. The Gradoge River is a tributary of the Funshion River. It rises south of Mitchelstown on the southern slopes of the Kilworth Mountains and drains into the Funshion to the immediate west of the route of the N8 MRR. The River Funshion drains into the River Blackwater south of Kilworth.

The site of Mitchelstown 2 was located to the south and downslope of Mitchelstown 1 (04E1072) on the northern bank of the Gradoge River.

## 2.2 The Human Landscape

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### 2.2.1 Archaeological Background

There is a paucity of known archaeological sites within a 2 km radius of the route of the N8 MRR. Three prehistoric sites, fulachta fiadh (CO019-019, -020, -021) are recorded in Stagpark and Ballykearney between 100-500m of the route corridor. The site of Mitchelstown Castle (CO019-026), the associated demesne and the historic town of Mitchelstown (CO019-149) are the principle medieval and post-medieval sites in the vicinity of the route corridor (Figures 2 and 3).

### 2.2.2 Mesolithic 7000 BC - 4000 BC

The earliest known human settlement in Ireland dates from the Mesolithic period (*c.* 7000 BC - 4000 BC). In Munster, the majority of the evidence (flint scatters) for Mesolithic occupation has '*come from the Blackwater valley in Co. Cork*' (Woodman 1989, 116). Flint scatters were recorded in the townlands of Ballynamona (CO018-099) and Wallstown (CO018-100) on the northern and southern sides of the Awbeg river respectively *c.* 15km to the west of the route of the N8 MRR (Power *et. al.* 2000, 2).

### 2.2.3 Neolithic 4000 BC -2500 BC

The Neolithic Period is characterised by the introduction of agriculture and the beginnings of the clearance of the woodlands. The population increased and became more sedentary in nature. Sub-

stantial Neolithic settlement sites have been recorded at Lough Gur, Co. Limerick and Cloghers, Co. Kerry. The material culture includes the manufacture of pottery, flint and stone arrowheads, scrapers, axes etc. The range of monuments types includes Megalithic tombs (court tombs, portal tombs, passage tombs and wedge tombs), single burial graves and stone circles.

There is a paucity of evidence for Neolithic settlement sites in the south-west of Ireland.

Recent infrastructural development has increased the amount of Neolithic sites in County Cork. The nearest known Neolithic house was excavated on the N8 Rathcormac-Fermoy in the townland of Gortore. The structure was dated to the Early Neolithic cal BC 3928-3655 (UB 6769). Further evidence of the Neolithic was recorded at Fermoy and Curraghprevin.

#### 2.2.4 Bronze Age 2000 BC -500 BC

The Bronze Age is characterised by the introduction of metallurgy, the mining of copper ores and manufacture of copper, bronze and gold items. The range of burial site types includes, cist graves, pit and urn burials, cremation cemeteries, barrows, ring-ditches and wedge tombs. Stone circles and standing stones also date to the Bronze Age. Both enclosed and unenclosed settlement sites are known. The most prolific Bronze Age site type is the *fulacht fiadh*, over 2,000 examples have been recorded in County Cork alone. These monuments survive as low mounds of charcoal rich black silt packed with heat-shattered stones and are generally situated close to a water source. In many cases, however, all that survives to the present day are black spreads with fragments of shattered stones visible in ploughed fields. *Fulachta fiadh* are generally classified as 'cooking places', whereby stones were heated in a hearth and subsequently placed in a trough of water, the water continued to boil with the addition of hot stones and wrapped food was cooked within the hot water. The trough eventually filled with small stones, ash and charcoal that were removed and formed the basis of the familiar mound. The absence of animal remains and the scarcity of associated hearths have fuelled the debate in relation to the function of the sites. Other theories on their interpretation include bathing and dyeing textiles together with the production of hot water and steam for curative purposes and sweat houses (Kelly 1989, 225). Waddell (1998, 177) suggests the semi-industrial purpose of using the boiling water for dipping hides as part of the preparation of the leather, while Dunne (pers. comm.) suggests a relationship between burnt mounds and Bronze Age funerary rites and burial practices.

There are few wedge tombs or stone circles known from north or east Cork. Two of the exceptions are wedge tombs located at Labbacallee (CO027-086) and at Manning (CO027-091) both located c. 8 km south of the N8 MRR. Labbacallee is one of the largest wedge tombs in the country.

The cemetery of Mitchelstowndown West contains 53 small barrows. Four of this group were selected for excavation by the Discovery Programme (Daly *et. al.* 1992, 44). The site of the cemetery is located 16 km to the north of the N8 MRR.

Until recently Bronze Age settlement sites were a rarity in North Cork. A Bronze Age occupation site was recorded underlying the medieval ringfort Lisleagh I (CO027-158) c.3.5km to the south of the

N8 MRR (Power et. al. 2000, 210). A house site was excavated at Killydonoghoe on the route of the N8 Glanmire-Watergrasshill Bypass (Sherlock, 2003). A large Bronze Age settlement site consisting of four enclosures and three circular houses was excavated in 2003 at Ballybrowney on the route of the N8 Rathcormac-Fermoy (Cotter 2004, 38). A Middle Bronze Age settlement site was excavated in Mitchelstown (04E1072), a complex of Early and Late Bronze Age pits were excavated in Stagpark (04E1120) and three *fulachta fiadh* were excavated in Stagpark (04E1121 & 04E1119) on the route of the N8 Mitchelstown Relief Road. In addition a rare and important hoard of Early Bronze Age pottery was excavated on the banks of the Gradoge River (this licence 04E1071).

### 2.2.5 Iron Age 500 BC – 400 AD

At present, there is little evidence of a significant Iron Age presence in the Cork region. Settlement sites are few and far between as well as being difficult to identify (Woodman, 2000) while the material culture of this period is limited. Linear earthworks, which are believed to have marked tribal boundaries are one of the most visible monuments of the period.

Three separate stretches of one such boundary, the *Claidh Dubh*, have been recorded in County Cork. The longest stretch, c. 24 km extends from the Nagle Mountains, across the Blackwater valley and into the Ballyhoura Hills. The *Claidh Dubh* crosses the N73 c. 12km west of the N8 MRR. Radiocarbon dating following excavation of a section of it revealed it dated to some time before 100AD (Doody 1995, 23).

Three of the five hillfort sites in Cork are located in North Cork (Power *et al*, 2000, 205). Caherdrinny is located at the western end of the Kilworth Mountains, c. 3 km to the south of the N8 MRR and Corrin is located at the eastern end of the Nagle Mountains c. 15 km to the south of the N8 MRR.

A complex of monuments in Conva townland (c. 15 km to the southwest of the N8 MRR) was identified by aerial photography in the Blackwater Valley. Crop marks indicated three enclosures (CO034-7201, -7202, -7203) and a number of large pits (CO034-7204) possibly comprising a rectangular enclosure. The site was investigated in 1992 by Martin Doody of the Discovery Programme which involved geophysical prospection, topographic survey and trial excavation. Sections were dug through the three enclosures and through four of the large pits. Metal debris was discovered and radiocarbon dates indicated that the complex dated to the Iron Age/Early Medieval period.

A complex of pits, dating to the Iron Age, cal BC 346-45 (UB6719) was excavated in Stagpark (04E1120) on the route of the N8 Mitchelstown Relief Road.

### 2.2.6 Early Medieval 400 AD – 1000 AD

The Early Medieval Period/Early Christian Period is characterised by the arrival of Christianity to Ireland. Early ecclesiastical sites are located at Brigown (CO019-030) on the southeastern side of Mitchelstown and to the west of the N8 MRR at Aghacross (CO019-002), Leabba Molagga and Marshalstown. The monastery of Brigown founded in the 7<sup>th</sup> century gives its name to the modern parish

(Power 1996, 3).

The characteristic monument type of the period was the ringfort. Ringforts are the most numerous archaeological monument found in Ireland, with estimates of between 30 and 50,000 illustrated on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey 6" maps of the 1840's (Barry, 1987). As a result of continued research these monuments have a narrow date range during the Early Christian period between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. Although there are some very elaborate examples of ringforts they often take the form of a simple earth or stone enclosure and functioned as settlements for all classes of secular society (Stout, 1997). A major research excavation of two ringfort was undertaken at Lisleagh c. 3.5km to the south of the route of the N8 MRR. Structural, domestic and industrial evidence was recorded at both sites. A number of stake and wattle round houses, and iron working were recorded in Lisleagh I. Two phases of occupation were recorded at Lisleagh I. The Lisleagh I was constructed in the early seventh century and was occupied into the ninth century AD (Monk 1995, 105-116).

### 2.2.7 Medieval 1000 AD – 1300 AD & Late Medieval 1300 AD -1500 AD

The period is characterized by the arrival of the Anglo-Normans. Mitchelstown was formerly known as Brigown / Mitchelstown (CO019-149). It was listed as a market town in 1299 and was located on the southern bank of the Gradoge River, to the east of Mitchelstown Castle (Power, D. *et al.* 2000, 595). The town developed under the patronage of the House of Desmond. It passed into the hands of the Earls of Kingston in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Power 1996, 23).

Mitchelstown Castle was located on a limestone ridge on the southern bank of the Gradoge River. The first settlers, the Anglo-Norman FitzGibbons, held the title of White Knights. Their territory extended from Mitchelstown to Kilmallock (Power 2000, 1) and they built a tower house on the ridge. The White Knight lineage ended in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the estate passed through marriage into the hands of the Fenton family (*ibid.* 3) and ultimately to the Kingstons. The earlier castle was destroyed in the wars of 1641.

A corn-drying kiln dating to the Later Medieval Period cal AD 1310-1434 (UB 6833) was excavated in Stagpark 2 (04E1121).

### 2.2.8 Post-Medieval 1500 AD – 1800 AD

In 1776 Lord Kingsborough, the 2<sup>nd</sup> earl of Kingston, created the new town of Mitchelstown. He demolished the old town between Kingston College and the Castle. Kingston College developed into a Georgian square. The new town was centred between the two parallel main streets of George Street and Cork Street. King Square and New Market Square became the focal points of the town (*ibid.*). St George's Church, built in 1801, was located at the southern end of George Street and King Square at the northern end. New Market Square was located midway and on the western side of Cork Street. The new town was built on 138 acres.

Lord Kingsborough, the second earl of Kingston, built a new mansion on the site of the White Knights

castle and a demesne around the mansion in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A demesne wall was constructed around the parkland of some 1240 acres. The wall was '*six-and-a-quarter-mile long...between eight and ten feet in height*' (Power 1996, 24). All public roads that were located within the area of the demesne were closed and rerouted on the periphery of the wall. Entry to the demesne was gained through Mallow Gate also known as White Gate, Limerick Gate and the main entrance was at King Square. Extensive works were undertaken within the area of the demesne which resulted in '*a quadrangle of buildings, a garden of five English acres surrounded by a wall, large conservatories and lavishly arranged gardens became part of the scene. Two artificial lakes were developed beneath the rockface on which the castle stood*' (*ibid.*, 24). Several hundred acres of woodland comprising of oak, ash, larch, beech and alder were planted within the demesne. In 1823 the third earl of Kingston demolished the Georgian house and built a new castle on the same site. The architects James and George Pain designed and built this neo-Gothic castellated mansion. The limestone buildings formed three sides of a courtyard (Power 1996, 42).

Mitchelstown Castle was burnt by Republican forces in 1922. The stone was bought by the Cistercian Monks of Mount Melleray and reused to build a church. Few traces of the castle are visible today. At present, Dairygold occupies the site of the former castle. The 1240 acres of parkland was divided into farms, the town park and a golf course.

### 3 Research Framework

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The following issues will be addressed in this report.

- The construction date or date of initial site activity and the date of abandonment.
- The absolute / relative chronology of site use in terms of phases and events.
- The location of known contemporaneous and comparable sites.
- The extent of the viable economic catchment area in terms of sources of water, food, raw materials, transportation routes etc

### 4 Interim Findings

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#### 4.1 Excavation Methodology

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A total area of 50m N-S by 20m E-W were excavated under license 04E1119 at Mitchelstown 2 (figure 5) on the northern bank of the Gradoge River (Grid coordinates 180182 113286). A grid was established and the ground within the grid was cleaned by hand to locate and identify all archaeological features. Each identified feature was excavated, planned, photographed and recorded, with every fill and cut being assigned a context number. Charcoal and soil samples were taken from appropriate fills where necessary. All artefacts were retrieved, registered, bagged and labelled.

#### 4.2 Full Stratigraphic Report

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See Appendix 1 for the full stratigraphic matrix.

#### 4.2.1 Stratigraphic Sequencing

The site was located at the base of an east-facing slope on the northern bank of the Gradoge River. An area *c.* 50m north-south by 20m east-west was uncovered following the recording of burnt mound material during the testing phase (Figure 5, Plate 1). The archaeology consisted of a burnt mound C.4 which was truncated by a diverted stream bed C.3. Two small pits (C.16 and C.18) were recorded underlying the burnt mound C.4. A small pit C.12 containing 3 pottery vessels and a single possible posthole C. 9 were located *c.* 13m to the northwest of the mound C.4 (Figure 6).

The remnants of the burnt mound C.4 was composed of black sandy silt with frequent inclusions of burnt sandstone. It measured 9.5m by 1.66m by 0.25m on average. It was truncated to the south by a former stream channel C.3 (Plate 2). Two small pits (C.16 and C.18) were recorded under the mound C.4. C.16 measured 0.28m by 0.2m by 0.18m in depth. C.18 was located 2.5m north-west of C.16. It measured 0.15m in diameter by 0.14m in depth. Both pits contained single fills with no inclusions.

The former stream channel (C.3) was located *c.* 10m to the north of the present course of the Gradoge River. The former channel was traced for a length of *c.* 13m. It measured 2.5m in width by 1.6m in depth. The ground between the diverted stream bed C.3 and the Gradoge River had been disturbed in the recent past by agricultural activities.

A small pit C.12 was located *c.*13m to the northwest of the burnt mound C.4 on the western edge of the road corridor. The pit measured 0.6m by 0.5m by 0.3m in depth. The sides of the pit were concave and the base was rounded. Two flat stones had been placed in the base of the pit and three pottery vessels and a ceramic spoon had been placed on the stones (Plates 3 and 4). Three fills (C.10, C.11 and C.13) were recorded within the pit. A sandy clay (C.13), 0.1m in depth, was recorded around the stones. It may have been used to create a level surface for the base of the stones. A coarse sand (C.10) was recorded within the pottery vessels. The upper silty sand fill (C.11) was 0.12m in depth and included charcoal. A radiocarbon date of cal BC 1916-1696 (UB-6743) was returned from this charcoal. A stakehole C.9 was located 1.1m northwest of the pit C.12. It measured 0.2m in diameter by 0.19m in depth.

#### 4.2.2 Stratigraphic Discussion

The course of the Gradoge River has been altered in recent years according to the landowner. The alterations took the form of straightening the course of the river. C.3 represents a portion of a former channel or meander of the Gradoge River. There has been a lot of additional disturbance in the area of the Gradoge River in the recent historical past associated with the construction of the landscape features e.g. the fish pond within Mitchelstown demesne. In addition the land on either side of the Gradoge River has been truncated by pipes and drains associated with Dairygold farm. The former channel of the river C.3 truncated the burnt mound spread C.4. It is possible that C.4 represents the remains of burnt mound associated with a *fulacht fiadh*. *Fulachta fiadh* survive as low mounds of charcoal rich black silt packed with heat-shattered stones and are generally situated close to a water source.

However there was no trough or associated pits, with the exception of the very small pits C.16 and C.18, recorded in the vicinity of the mound.

The deposition of three Bronze Age pottery vessels and a ceramic spoon in a small pit is a rare and highly significant find. The pots were placed upon two flat stones that lay within the base of the cut on a bed of sandy material. The nature of this stone surface, placement of the pottery vessels, and backfilling with charcoal rich material, would indicate that this pit represents a symbolic and ritual deposit. A radiocarbon date of cal BC 1916-1696 (UB-6743) was returned from the charcoal.

### 4.3 Radiocarbon dates.

A single radiocarbon date was returned from the Radiocarbon Laboratory at Queens University Belfast. It was an accelerator date obtained from a sample of charcoal.

Table 1				
Lab. Code	Sample Material	Context No.	Yrs BP	Calibrated Dates
UB-6743	Charcoal	11		2 sigma cal BC 1916-1696

### 4.4 Plant Remains

The plant remains were examined by A. Brewer and P. Johnston. Two samples were examined from the charcoal enriched fill that surrounded the pottery. Only one of the samples contained the remains of any charred plants, one fragment of a charred hazel nut shell (Appendix 3).

### 4.5 Pottery

The Early Bronze Age pottery was examined by Eoin Grogan and Helen Roche (Appendix 4). Vessel 1 is a cordoned urn, it was deposited in the western portion of the pit in an upright position on a flat stone on the base of the pit (plates 5 and 6). Vessel 2 is a handled and footed face mask cup and was deposited centrally in the pit. The diameter of the rim measured 0.12m and the internal depth 0.07m. It is decorated by a handle or nose, eyes, lugs or ears and two protruding feet (figure 7, plates 7 and 8). Vessel 3 is a tub-shaped pot (plates 9 and 10) and was deposited upright and intact on the eastern side of the pit beside, and at the same time as, Vessel 2. The diameter of the rim measured 0.13m and the internal depth 0.07m. There are no parallels for Vessels 2 and 3 in Ireland. The original position of the spoon within the pit is not known as its bowl was broken into several fragments as found. The spoon (figure 8 and plate 11) measures 96 mm in length and the internal depth of the bowl is 20 mm.

A radiocarbon date of cal BC 1916-1696 (UB-6743) was returned from the charcoal recovered from the fill of the pit.

## 5 Discussion & Interpretation

The recording of three Early Bronze Age pots within a small pit is a very significant find. There are no parallels for the two small pots, one of which was decorated to represent a human face or body. The pit containing the pottery was located on the northern bank of the Gradoge River on the western fringe of the road corridor, it is possible that further archaeological features are located to the west. The pit maybe associated with the burnt mound. The radiocarbon date returned for the pottery would overlap with Early Bronze Age dates returned for *Fulachta Fiadh* in Stagpark 3 (04E1119), located 2200m to the south, and are almost identical to dates returned for Early Bronze Age activity in Stagpark 1 (04E1120), located 1400m to the south.

There are 16 Bronze Age burials, comprising cist burials, Food Vessel burials, Urn burials and pit burials, recorded within a 13 km radius of the site. The burials are generally located on low-lying ground between 60 m and 100 m OD. Some are located within 500 m of the Funshion River and its tributaries, the Sheep River, the Tooraleagan River and the Gradoge River. Generally, Early Bronze Age burials tend to be concentrated in low-lying areas such as valley floors, while the associated settlement sites are probably located on higher ground along the valleys (Cooney & Grogan 1999, 103). While the majority of graves contain the remains of one individual, multiple burials, either collective or successive, also occurred. The majority of the Cordoned Urns are associated with burials and the simple pit grave is the commonest type (Waddell 2000, 149).

The Mitchelstown pit and pottery group shares some characteristics of Early Bronze Age burial practices in terms of the low-lying location in the river valley, the simple form of the pit itself, and the deposition of the Cordoned Urn. However, many aspects are very different. The creation of a face and human features on Vessels 2 and 3, the positioning of the ears, anatomically incorrect, on both vessels and the inclusion of a spoon are all unusual. In addition, despite the inclusion of a Cordoned Urn—usually a funerary vessel, there was no evidence of burial recorded at the site. The deposition therefore points away from burial and towards other ritual, for instance libation to a deity. It is also possible that this pit does not exist in isolation and other archaeological features, including burials, may be located in the area to the west, beyond the edge of the road corridor.

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## 7

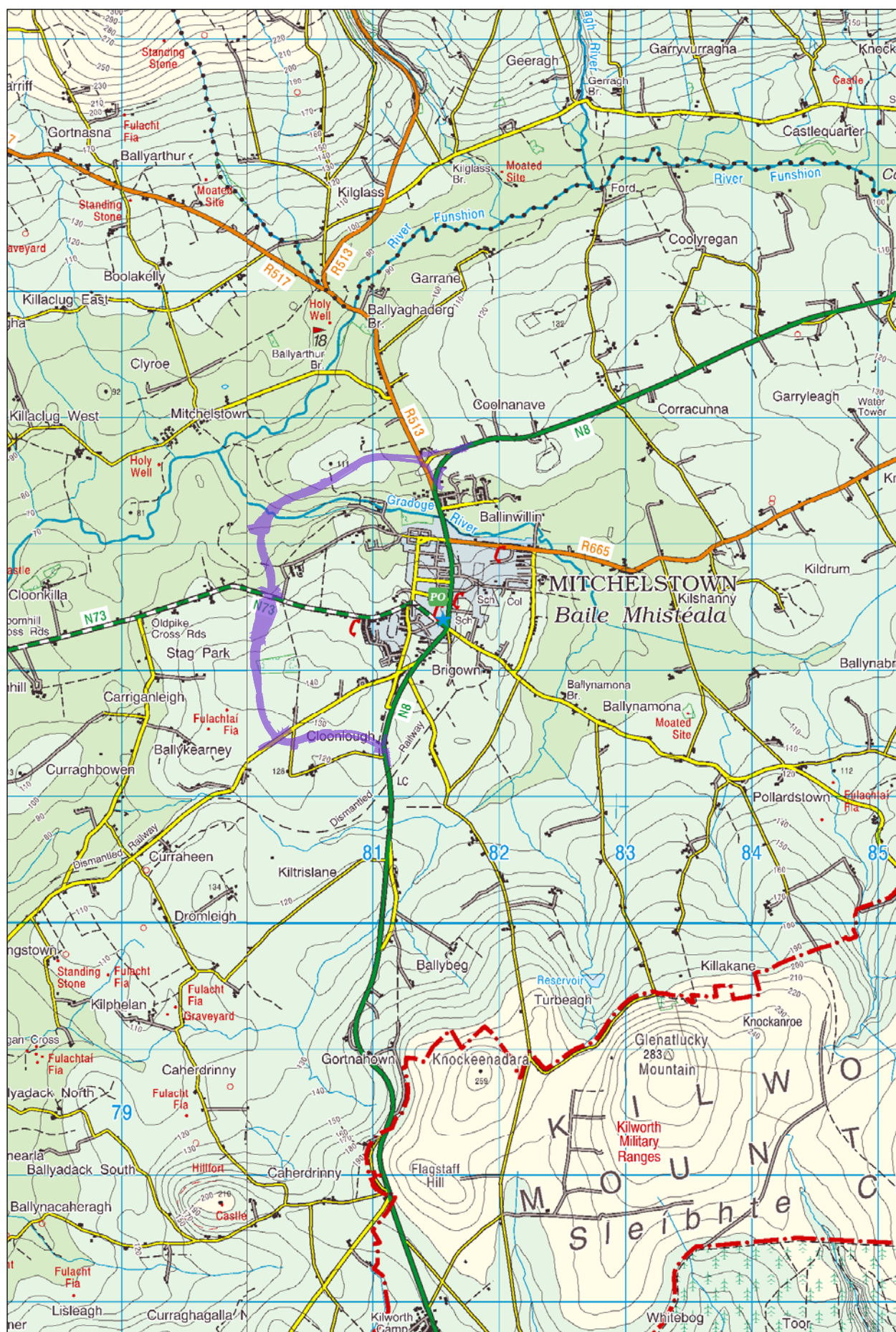
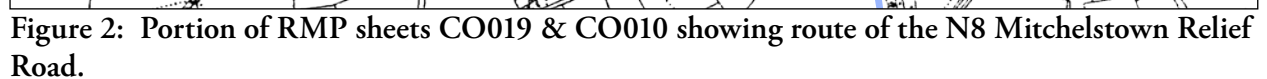


Figure 1: Portion of discovery map showing route of N8 Mitchelstown Relief Road.



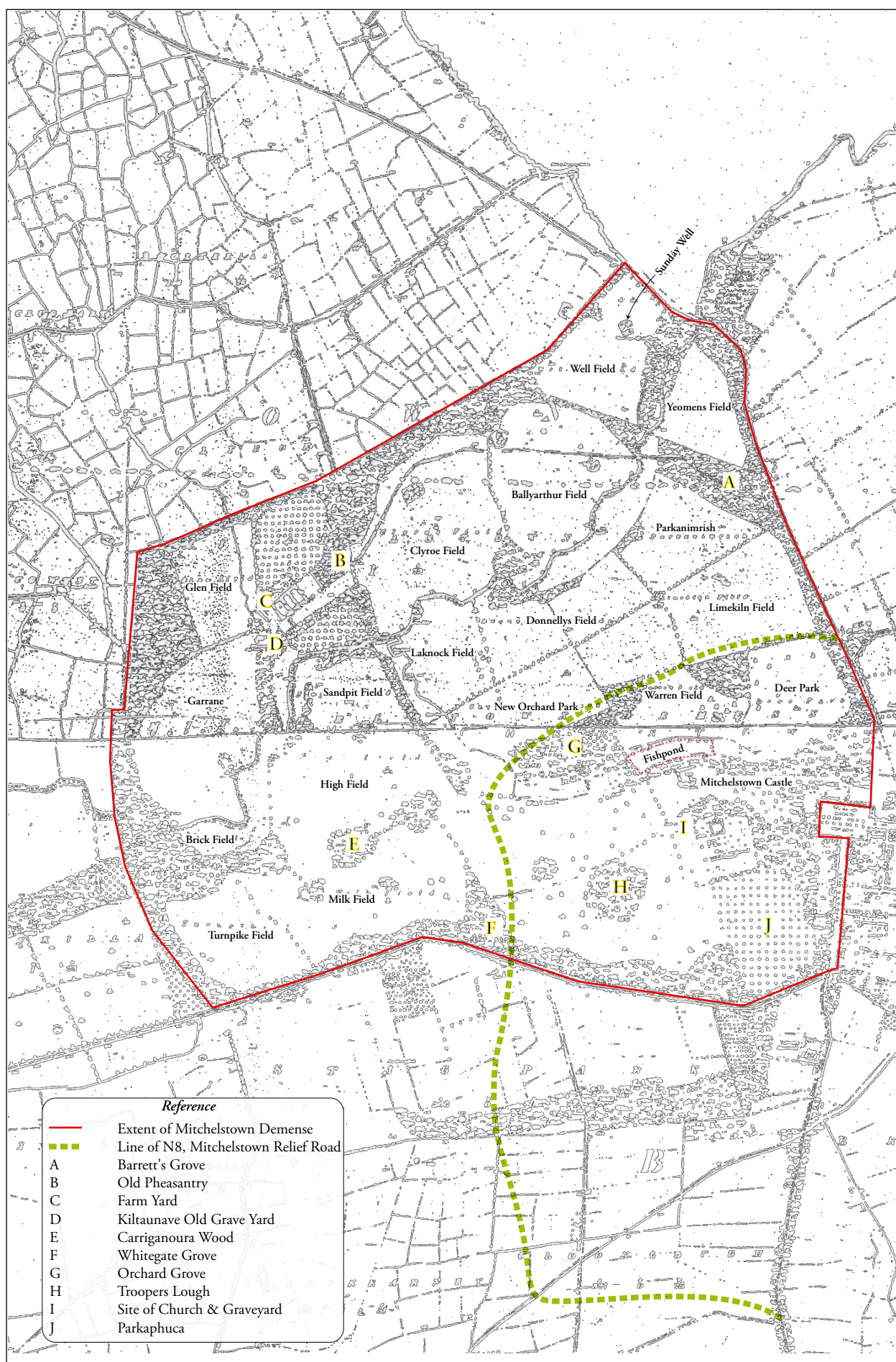


Figure 3: Portion of 1st edition maps sheets 10 & 19 showing Mitchelstown Demesne and the route of the N8 Mitchelstown Road.

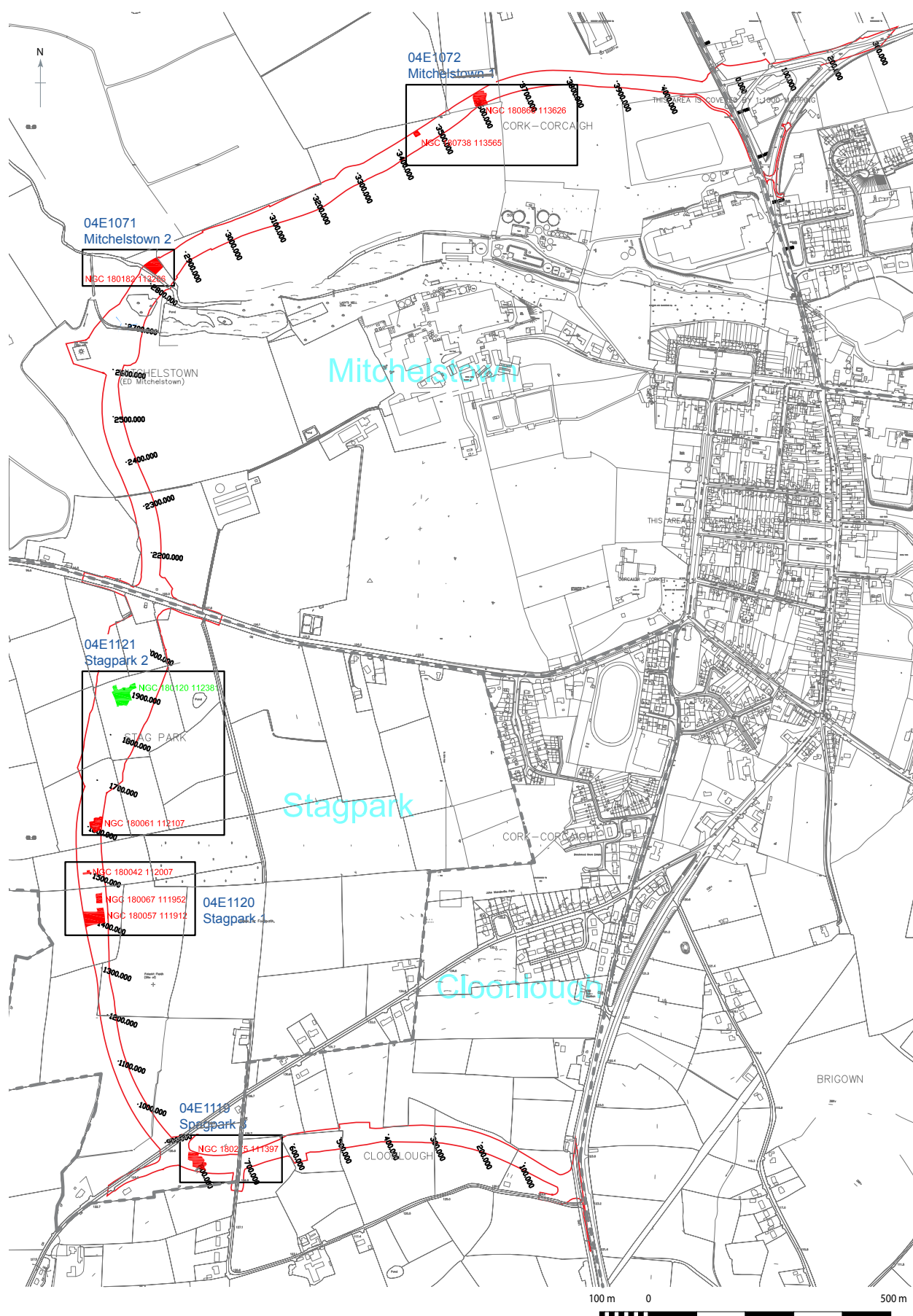


Figure 4: Route of the N8 Mitchelstown Relief Road showing location of all archaeological sites.



Figure 5: Portion of the route of the N8 MRR showing location of site 04E1071.

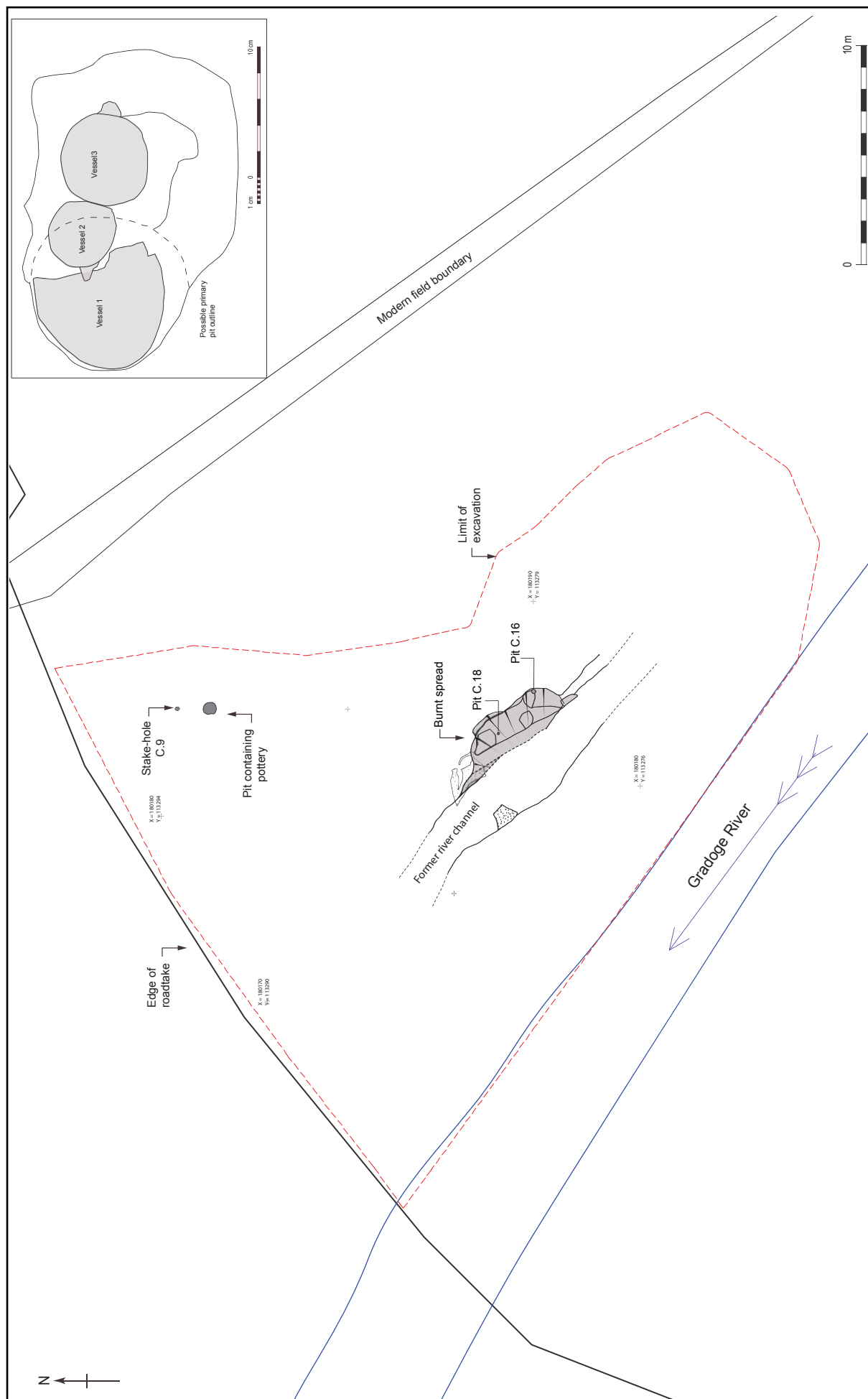
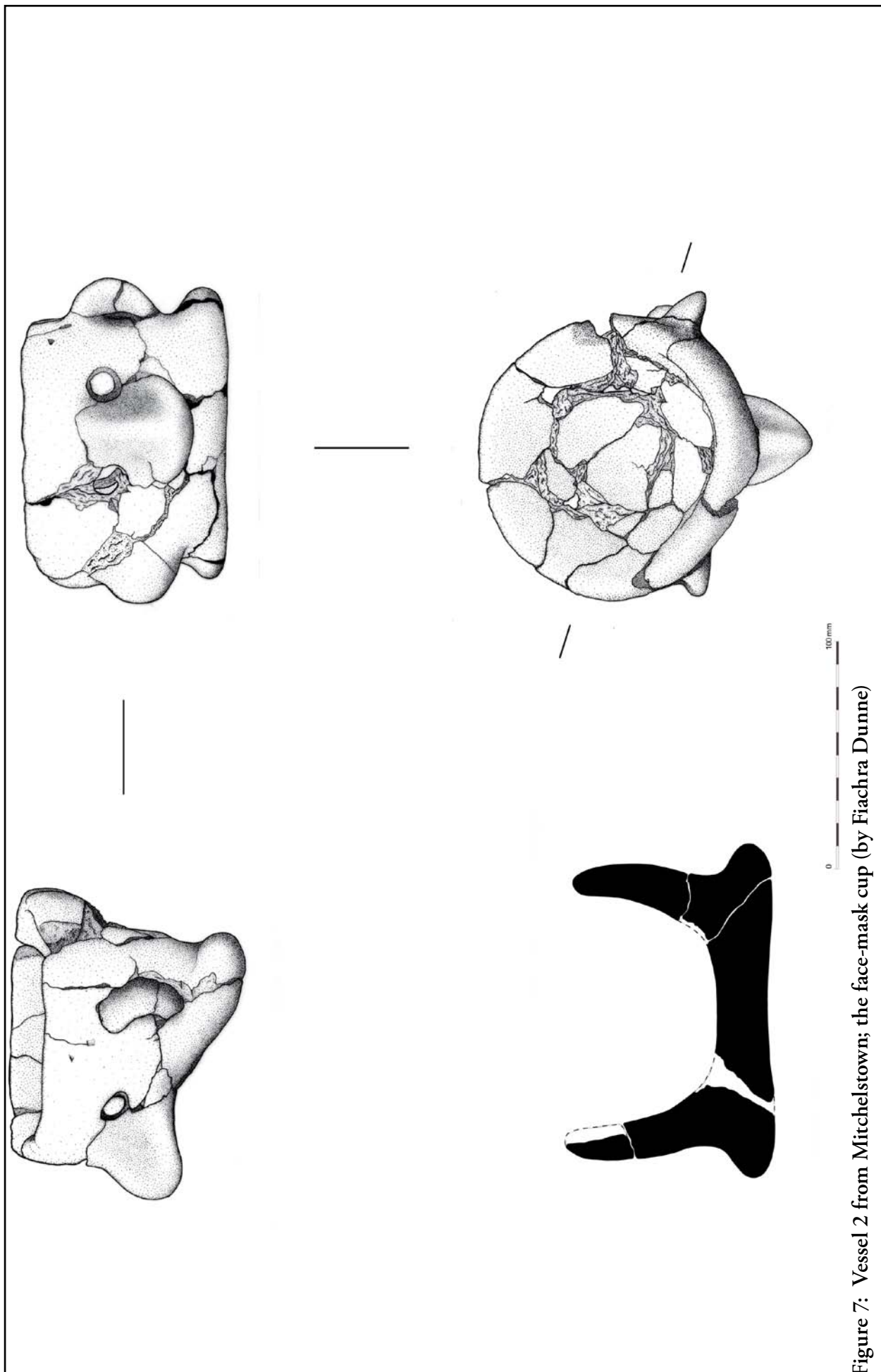


Figure 6: Post-excavation plan.



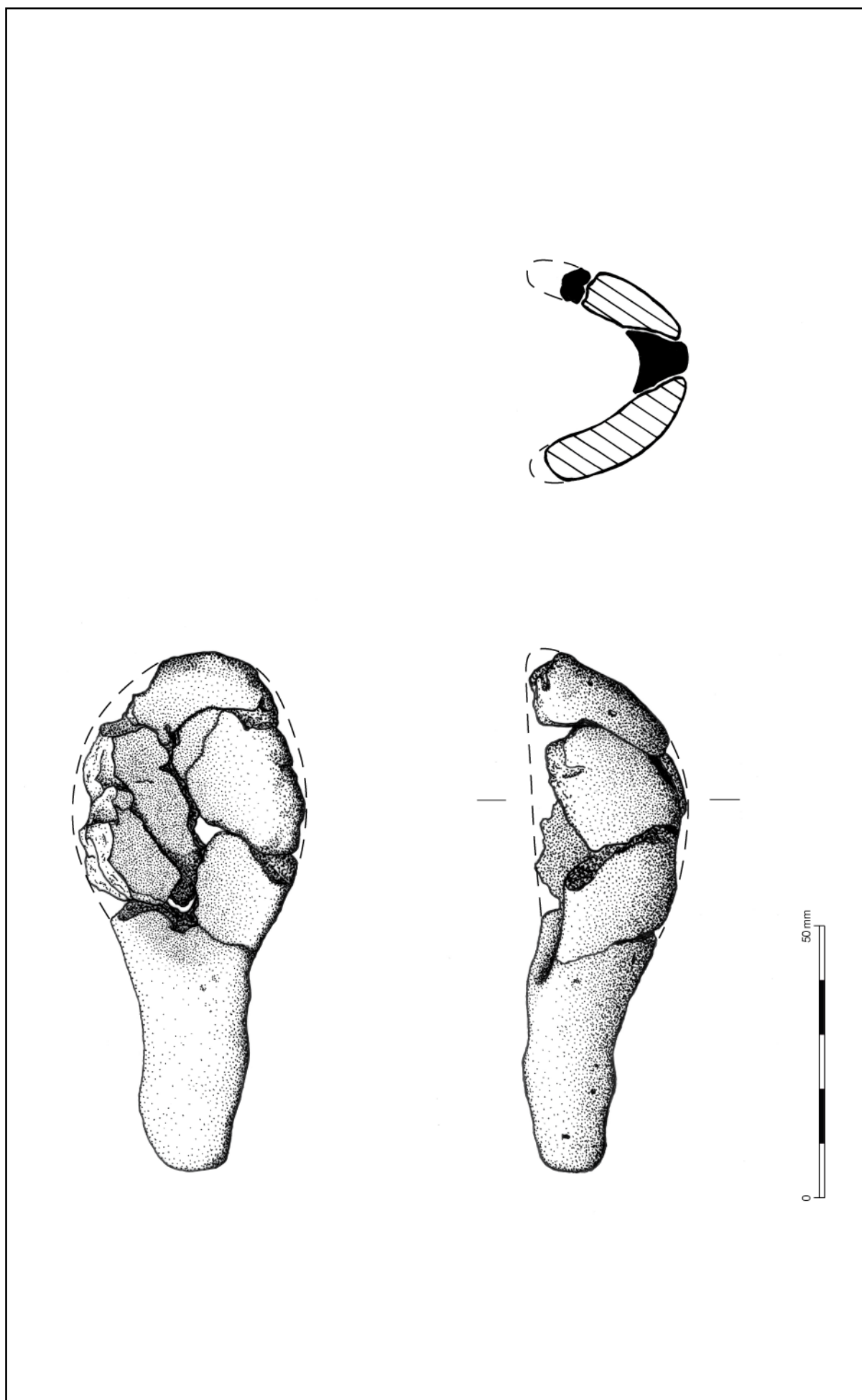


Figure 8: Ceramic spoon from Mitchelstown (by Fiachra Dunne)

## 8 Plates

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Plate 1: View of site from west.



Plate 2: Mid-excavation of C.3 old stream channel and C.4 burnt mound from west.



Plate 3: Mid-excavation of pottery in pit C.12.



Plate 4: View of pottery in pit C.12.



Plate 5: Vessel 1 cordoned urn. Photograph by John Sunderland



Plate 6: Vessel 1 cordoned urn. Photograph by John Sunderland



Plate 7: Vessel 2 handled and footed face mask cup. Photograph by John Sunderland



Plate 8: Vessel 2 handled and footed face mask cup. Photograph by John Sunderland



Plate 9: Vessel 3 tub-shaped pot. Photograph by John Sunderland



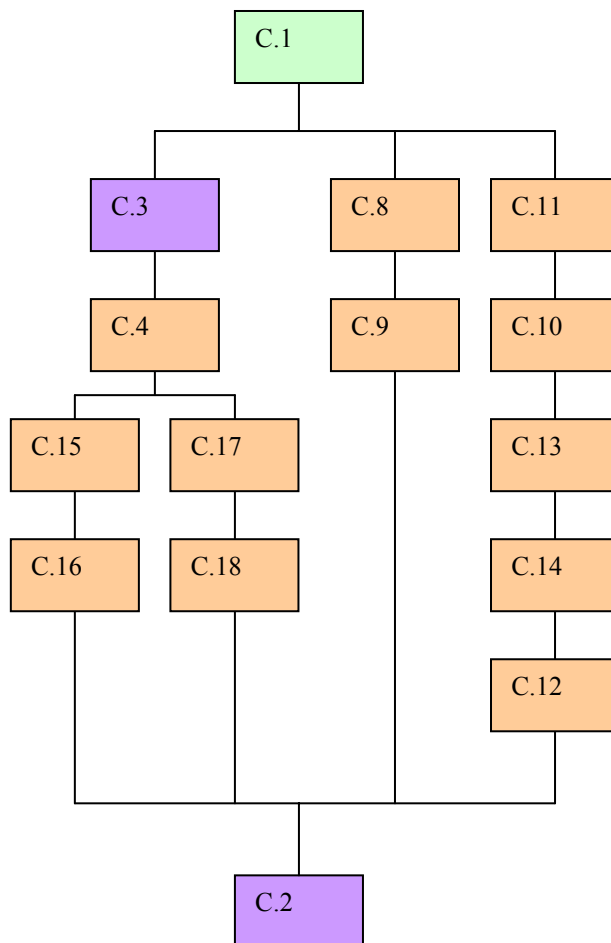
Plate 10: Vessel 3 tub-shaped pot. Photograph by John Sunderland



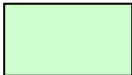



Plate 11: Ceramic spoon from Mitchelstown (John Sunderland)

## 9 Appendices

### 9.1 Appendix 1: Matrix



#### Key

	Phase 1: Formation of natural subsoil
	Phase 2: On-site activity during the Bronze Age
	Phase 3: Infilling of features after abandonment
	Phase 4: Modern activity including formation of current topsoil layer

## 9.2 Appendix 2: Context Register

Context #	Grid	Fill of	Filled with	Above	Below	Basic Interpretation	Phase	Basic description	Artefacts
1						topsoil	4	Loose brown silty clay topsoil 0.3m deep.	
2						Natural	1	Light brown firm clay.	
3				4		General number given to old back-filled stream bed that cuts through the site	4	Mixture of loose brown sandy clay topsoil and light brown firm clay natural	
4				15, 17	3	Truncated section of mound material	2	Moderately compact black sandy silt with frequent burnt sandstone inclusions. 9.5m (E-W) x 1.66m x 0.25m deep	
8		9		9	1	Charcoal rich fill of possible post-hole. Black charcoal rich nature suggests it was backfilled during occupation	2	Moderately compact dark brown/black sandy silt with frequent charcoal inclusions	
9			8	2	8	Cut of possible posthole located near pit 12	2	Circular cut 0.2m x 0.2m x 0.19m dep with sharp break of slope top, concave sides, gradual break of slope base and rounded base	
10		12		13	11	Sand fill solely within round bottomed pottery vessel #1 located in cut 12.	2	Loose mid brown coarse sand with no inclusions. 0.05m in depth.	
11		12		10	1	Charcoal rich upper fill of pit 12. Appears to have been purposefully backfilled during occupation	2	Moderately compact dark brown silty sand with frequent stone and charcoal inclusions 0.12m deep	three pottery vessels. One flat bottomed, one round bottomed and one polypod bowl

12			10, 11, 13, 14	2	14	Deposition pit containing three purposefully deposited and filled pottery vessels, all of different types. The pottery vessels were filled with a clean sand and the pit was backfilled with dark charcoal rich material. The pots themselves were placed on two flat stones located in the base of the cut	2	Sub-circular pit cut 0.6m x 0.5m x 0.3m deep with sharp break of slope top, concave sides, gradual break of slope base and rounded base	three pottery vessels. One flat bottomed, one round bottomed and one polypod bowl
13	12		14	14	10	Sandy layer lying around flat stones in base of 12, deposited to act as a base for the stones.	2	Loose light brown clayey sand with frequent stone and occasional charcoal inclusions 0.1m deep	
14	12		12	12	13	Stones deposited in base of pit 12 which then acted as platform for pottery vessels	2	Two large flat stones 0.17m x 0.16m x 0.06m and 0.23m x 0.17m x 0.06m in size	
15	16		16	16	4	Possible pit fill, located underneath mound material 4, therefore had to have infilled prior to buildup of the mound in this area	2	loose mid brown sandy clay with occasional stone incursions	
16		15	2	15	15	Possible pit cut with unknown function under mound material 4	2	Roughly oval cut 0.28m x 0.2m x 0.18m deep with sharp break of slope top, straight sides, sharp break of slope base and flat base	
17	18		18	18	4	Possible pit fill, located underneath mound material 4, therefore had to have infilled prior to buildup of the mound in this area	2	Moderately compact black sandy clay with occasional burnt stone inclusions	
18		17	2	17	17	Cut of possible pit located under mound material 4. Inclusion of burnt stone in the fill would indicate that use of the pit ended just prior to the build up of mound material	2	Sub-circular cut 0.15m x 0.15m x 0.14m deep with sharp break of slope top, straight sides, gradual break of slope base and rounded base	

### 9.3 Appendix 3: Plant Remains Report by Abigail Brewer and Penny Johnston

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#### Introduction and Methodology

One sample from 04E01071 was scanned for macro-plant remains. This sample came from C11 the charcoal rich upper fill of C12, the pit that contained three pottery bowls. A soil sample taken from C11 was processed using manual wash over and sieves with meshes of 1mm, 500µm and 250µm. The charred material recovered by sieving was then scanned to see if there were any remains other than charcoal in the sample. The scanning was carried out using a binocular microscope at x10 to x40 magnification.

#### Discussion

No plant remains other than charcoal were found in the sample from C11. This charcoal rich fill was interpreted as a deliberate back-filling, carried out as part of the ritual associated with the pit. Neolithic houses such as Tankardstown, Co. Limerick and Cloghers, Co. Kerry have produced plentiful evidence for the cultivation of cereals as well as gathered food plants. Charred plant remains are biased towards certain species, particularly cereal grains and arable weeds which become charred during crop and food processing. The presence of plant remains at Tankardstown and Cloghers is partly due to cereal and food processing having been carried out at the sites. No evidence of secular activities such as food and crop processing were recorded at 04E1071.

## 9.4 Appendix 4: Pottery Report by Helen Roche and Eoin Grogan

### The prehistoric pottery from Pit C12, Mitchelstown, Co. Cork 04E1071

Eoin Grogan and Helen Roche

#### Pit C12

This oval pit was located on the northern bank of the Gradoge River (Sutton 2005). The pit appears to be a discreet context and there was no evidence for other contemporary activity within the complex.

The pit (0.60m by 0.50m by 0.30m deep) produced pottery from three vessels (Nos 1-3) that were deposited upright and intact.

Two distinct, but not necessarily widely spaced, phases of deposition were identifiable in the pit.

*Phase 1* (Fig. 1). In the primary phase a vessel of the cordoned urn tradition was deposited intact in an upright position on a flat flag set in the base of the pit. At this stage it is possible that the pit consisted of a much smaller, rounded, feature not very much more in diameter than the pot itself (see below). This pit would be typical of those containing cordoned urn burials. Although no human bone was recovered from Pit C12 cordoned vessels are more frequently placed upright than other cinerary urns: of the fifty examples with good details of the circumstances of recovery eleven were upright (Grogan 2004a, table 3). It is possible that the mouth was also covered by a slab as were upright vessels at Fourknocks 3, Co. Meath (Hartnett and Eogan 1971), and Gortlush, Co. Donegal (Waddell 1990, 73): this may even have been the slab re-used as a flagstone in the base of the extended *Phase 2* pit (below).

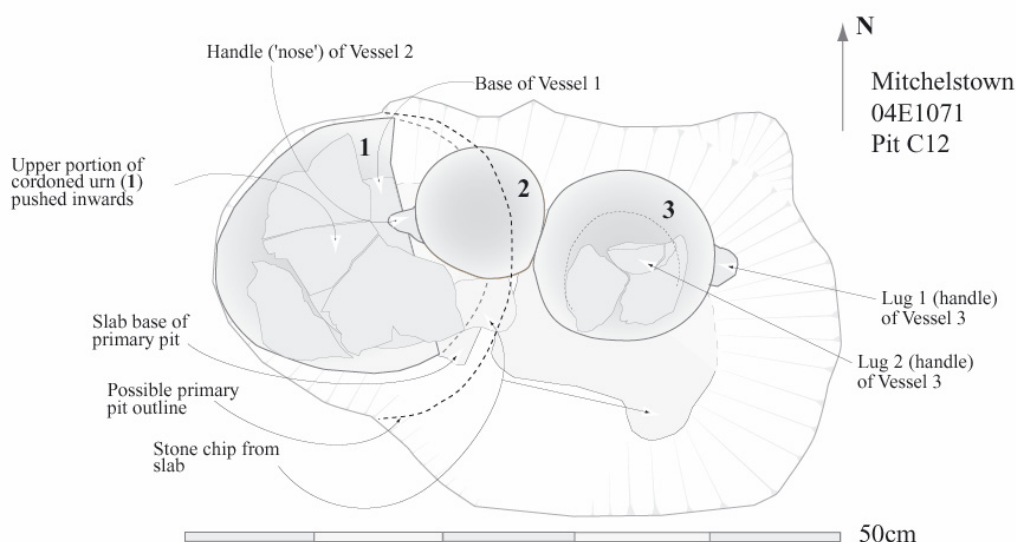


Fig. 1. Plan of Pit C12.

*Phase 2*. Some time later the pit was re-cut, and apparently enlarged to the east: the western edge of this pit cut through the urn damaging the upper portion, part of which was pressed down into the pot interior. In finishing the western base of this cut the diggers sliced neatly through the urn base (Fig. 1; Pl. 1). It seems that in the initial cut they encountered the slab over the urn which was chipped in the

process: the slab was then re-used as the base slab on the eastern side of the extended pit. Two vessels (Nos 2 and 3) were placed upright side by side onto this slab with their edges touching (Pl. 2). The pots may have been filled with coarse sand and the pit was backfilled with charcoal rich silty sand that stained the eastern and southern sides. As this fill settled the southern side of Vessel 3 was pressed into the pot (Pl. 3). There was no evidence for burial with this deposit.

### The pottery

This is an exceptional assemblage both for the unusual and sequential deposition of the pottery without clear burial evidence and for the nature of the vessels: Vessel 1, while clearly of the cordoned urn tradition is quite small and unusually fine-walled while Nos 2 and 3 have no parallels in Ireland (see Catalogue).

*Vessel 2: the handled and footed 'face mask' cup.* Both the handle and the two protruding feet make this an unusual vessel even within a wider European Bronze Age context. Footed vessels form a recurring component of late Neolithic and early Bronze Age ceramic tradition in Europe. A very small number of polypod bowls have been recovered in Britain (Clarke 1970, 89-92; Cleary 1983, 74); Manby (1995, 83) has noted that a series of these, generally with four feet, occur "in burial associations of Corded Ware, Single Grave and Beaker traditions across Europe north of the Alps". Vessels of this type have a very wide distribution in northern and central Europe and include examples from The Netherlands, the Saale region in Germany, Bohemia in the Czech Republic, and Poland (see Harrison 1980, figs 8, 26, 30, 39 and 45). In Ireland there are a small number of Beaker examples from Newgrange, Co. Meath, Rathmullan, and Newtownbalregan, Co. Louth (Cleary 1983, 74, fig. 25, group 15; Bolger 2002, 12-3, fig. 3; Grogan and Roche 2005). There are also at least six wooden examples (Earwood 1991/2; 1994); one of these, from Tirkernaghan, Co. Tyrone, found with two simple wooden bowls (Earwood 1991/2, 28) has been dated to 2870-2147 cal. BC (OxA-3013, 2010±100 BP).

This pottery style is continued by a small number of footed early Bronze Age vessels in Britain; these include examples of the food vessel tradition such as the pots with four short feet from Langham, Rutland, and Eglingham, Northumberland (Manby 1995, fig. 8.3).



Fig. 2 Preliminary re-construction sketch of Vessel 2.

*Vessel 3: the tub-shaped pot.* This is a flat bottomed tub shaped vessel or cup. Very broadly similar vessels occur as part of the Beaker tradition in Britain (Clarke 1970) although these are decorated and have a single pierced handle.

## Discussion

While their form is very distinctive Vessels 2 and 3 share some significant characteristics. They are of similar fabric and it is probable that they were made at the same time from identical clays, and probably by the same individual. The lugs are very alike, semi-hemispherical with a slight internal ridge – probably designed to provide additional stability when they were applied to the pot wall. The slight crudity in their manufacture may well result from their unique form – the potter had not only never made vessels of this type before, he or she had not seen anything like them to use as a model or template. Their deposition beside each other also indicates that they functioned as a pair. In the absence of evidence for use it may be that they were specifically made for this deposit.

Pottery type	↑ Cist - Inhumation	↑ Pit - Inhumation	↑ Cist - Cremation	↑ Pit Cremation	↓ Cist - Inhumation	↓ Pit - Inhumation	↓ Cist - Cremation	↓ Pit Cremation	↑ Cist Inhumation	↑ Cist Cremation	↑ Pit Cremation	Total with full details	Inhumation in cist	Cremation in cist	Inhumation in pit	Cremation in pit	Inhumation	Cremation
Bowls	30	3	20	2	1	0	1	2	9	3	1	72	76	67	23	11	100	87
Vases	5	0	29	2	2	0	5	2	0	3	0	48	17	71	0	6	18	84
Vase Urns	0	0	0	1	1	0	18	20	0	1	0	41	0	26	1	24	1	55
Encrusted Urn	0	0	1	3	0	0	22	30	0	1	0	57	0	32	0	36	0	71
Collared Urns	0	0	0	3	0	0	4	14	0	0	1	22	0	4	0	20	0	25
Cordoned Urns	0	0	1	10	0	0	2	36	0	0	1	50	0	8	1	61	1	96
No pottery													53	98	18	12	72	115

Table 3. Grave types, vessel disposition and funerary rite in major ceramic groups

## Catalogue

The excavation number 03E1362 is omitted throughout; only the context number followed by the find number is included. Where the pottery is listed in the catalogue the context numbers are in bold: e.g. bodysherds: **29.7**, 18, 31.

Numbers in square brackets (e.g. 29.[16, 20]) indicate that the sherds are conjoined.

R = Rimsherd      N = Necksherd      B = Bodysherd      S = shouldersherd      f = fragment      w = worn  
The thickness refers to an average dimension; where relevant a thickness range is indicated. Vessel numbers have been allocated to pottery where some estimation of the form of the pot is possible.

*Vessel 1.* This small cordoned urn related vessel was deposited upright and intact in the western side of the pit (or possibly in a smaller primary circular pit (see above) (Fig. 1). The upper portion was seriously during the insertion of the other vessels.

*Vessel 2.* This small pot was deposited upright and intact in the centre of the pit between Vessels 1 and 3 and at the same time as the latter (Fig. 1). The pot consists of a hemispherical bowl, originally circular in plan but slightly distorted by pressure from the pit fill to an oval, and narrowing to an oval base. It has two opposed protruding feet that merge with the pot base. Two semi-hemispherical lugs were applied vertically, but asymmetrically, at the midpoint of the bowl profile. Midway between these is a short applied handle with a trefoil section: on either side of the handle there are two carefully executed circular impressions (diameter: mm) impressed with a cylindrical tool, probably a cut animal bone. It is clear that the lugs (ears), handle (nose), impressed circles (eyes) and feet (legs or arms) are a stylised, and possibly comical, representation of a human. It is also evident that the close positioning of the lugs and handle on one side of the vessel created a serious weight imbalance and the vessel could not have stood upright unaided.

The vessel is inexpertly made, possibly moulded from a single lump of clay rather than coil or slab built. The reddish brown fabric is hard and compact and the vessel has been well-fired. There is a medium quantity of inclusions (generally  $\leq 00\text{mm}$ , up to mm) of crushed 000 and 000. Body thickness: 14.3-17mm.

Maximum external diameter at the rim: 12cm

Maximum external diameter: cm

Maximum height: cm

Maximum internal depth: 7.3cm

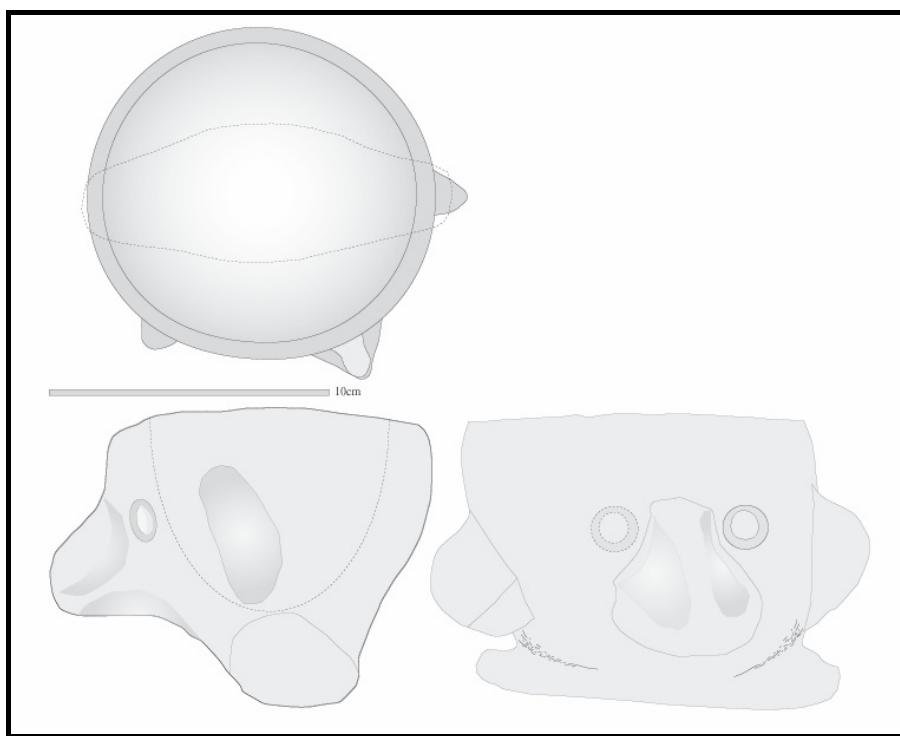


Fig. 1. Reconstruction drawing of the anthropomorphic vessel No. 2.

*Vessel 3.* This small tub shaped pot was deposited upright and intact on the eastern side of the pit beside, and at the same time as, Vessel 2. Some damaged was caused by the pressure of the pit fill and the southern side was forced into the pot (Fig. 1; Pls 1, 2). The vessel has a simple round-topped rim, a straight sided profile and a flat to slightly concave base. The red- to yellow-brown fabric is compact and well fired with a smooth, slightly glossy, finish. The vessel appears to have been slab-built and has broken vertically along the joints. There is a low to medium content of inclusions,

There are two closely spaced semi-hemispherical lugs applied vertically to the sides of the pot. These were closely spaced towards one side rather than symmetrically arranged on opposing sides of the vessel.

Maximum external diameter at the rim: 13cm

Maximum external diameter: cm

Maximum height: 8.5cm

Maximum internal depth: 7.2cm

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## 9.5 Appendix 5: Summary account of site archive

		04E1071	
Type	Description	Quantity	Notes
Contexts	Validated contexts from excavation	18	
Plans	1:100 plan (sheets)	0	
	1:50 plan (sheets)	2	
	1:20 plan (sheets)	1	
Sections	1:20 sections and profiles (Sheets)	0	
Matrices		1	
Photographs		41	2 rolls
Registers	Context	1	
	Photograph	1	
	Drawing	1	
	Finds	1	
	Samples	1	

## 9.6 Appendix 6: Dissemination Strategy

Publications		
Excavations 2004	Text submitted January 2004	Publication pending
NRA publication	Text submitted February 2006	Publication pending
Presentation	Lecture given to Mitchelstown and Mallow Historical Societies	May and October 2005
	Overview of the Scheme was given to the IAI conference in Cork	Apr-05

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It is the right of Cork County Council (the Council) to fulfil some or all of the stated presentation requirements, either in part or in full, should it so decide.

## 9.7 Appendix 7: Programme Schedule Dates & Deliveries

Phase 1 testing	June 2004
Phase 2 resolution	Duration of excavation 27th Sept-14th Oct & 8th-14nd Dec 2004
Phase 3 post-excavation	
Postex Assessment & Strategy	Document submitted to Cork County Council March 2005
Interim Excavation Report	Report submitted to Cork County Council August 2005
Final Excavation Report	Report submitted to Cork County Council March 2006
Publications	
Excavations 2004	Summary submitted January 2005
NRA Monography	Summary submitted to Cork County Council February 2006