Final Archaeological Excavation Report, Farthingstown 007, N6 Kinnegad to Kilbeggan, Co. Westmeath

February 2007

Client: **Westmeath County Council, Culleen Beg Mullingar, Co. Westmeath**

E Number: **E2744**

Ministerial Order No.: **A001/006**

Licensee: **John Tierney**

Written by: **John Tierney**

Contact details:
Ballycurreen Industrial Estate,
Kinsale Road, Cork.
Tel.: 021 4915850
Fax: 021 4975711
E-mail: info@eachtra.ie
Web Site: www.eachtra.ie

Table of Contents

Project Details III

Non-Technical Summary IV

1 Scope of the Project 1

2 Receiving Environment 1

2.1 Geology 1

2.2 Soils and their uses 1

2.3 Topography 2

3 Archaeological and Historical Background 2

3.1 Bronze Age c. 2500-500 BC 2

3.2 Iron Age c. 500 BC-500 AD 3

3.3 Early Historic c. 500-1100 AD 3

3.4 Medieval c. 1100-1650 AD 3

3.5 Post-medieval c.1650-20th century 4

4 Placenames and Townlands 4

5 Site Location and Topography 5

6 Excavation Methodology 5

7 Results 5

8 Conclusion 5

9 Bibliography 6

10 Figures 7

List of Figures

Figure 1: Extract from Discovery Sheets 48 and 49 with route of N6 indicated 7

Figure 2: Extract from Sites and Monuments Records sheets WM-027, -033 and -034 with site location indicated 8

Figure 3: Portion of 1st ed. OS map sheet WM033 with site location indicated 9

Figure 4: Site location map 10

Project Details

Townland:	Farthingstown
Site No.	Farthingstown 007 A001/006
Field No.	34
Plot No.	440A
Chainage	44790
National Grid Coordinates:	E 247272 N 239447 to E247277 N239442
Client:	Westmeath County Council
Licensee:	John Tierney
Date:	July 2006

Non-Technical Summary

This report details the results of archaeological excavations carried out at Farthingstown townland, along the line of the proposed new N6 realignment between Kinnegad and Kilbeggan for Westmeath Co. Council. Situated approximately 1.2 km south from Rochfordbridge, the site is one of fourteen identified during test excavations carried out in 2004. Following the identification of archaeological remains *in situ* during the testing phase, it was recommended that preservation of record would be required.

Test excavations identified a burnt spread at this site in Trench 5. This test trench was reopened and extended, where appropriate, in order to determine the full extent, configuration and date of the burnt spread. The burnt spread or hearth probably represented a temporary fire or hearth from an unknown period.

1 Scope of the Project

This archaeolgical services project was carried out on behalf of Westmeath County Council, County Buildings, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath. The project was funded by the National Roads Authority 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. There were two contracts; Contract 1 (Kinnegad to Tyrellspass) undertaken by Eachtra Archaeological Projects and Contract 2 (Tyrellspass to Kilbeggan) carried out by Valerie J. Keeley Ltd. and Cultural Resource Development Services Ltd.

This report covers results from Contract 1, Kinnegad to Tyrellspass (Figure 1). Phase 1 of the project (archaeological centreline testing of the route) was carried out in June and July 2004 under licence (04E0908) issued by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG). The principal aim of this phase of the project was to investigate known and possible sites of archaeological interest along the route of the proposed road scheme and to investigate the remainder of the route. This was done by a programme of centreline and offset testing. In addition Phase 2 included the resolution of identified sites which were excavated in the townlands of Monganstown, Farthingstown, Kiltotan Collinstown and Rattin. This phase of the project was carried out between January and March 2005 and excavations were carried out by two licensed directors under the direction of a senior archaeologist. In total fourteen sites were excavated during this phase of works and were carried out under Ministerial Order. The sites were situated near the western end of the scheme, in County Westmeath, and were found in the townlands of Farthingstown and Kiltotan Collinstown (in the Barony of Fartullagh) and Monganstown and Rattin (in the Barony of Farbill).

2 Receiving Environment

2.1 Geology

The bedrock geology is mostly comprised of Lower Carboniferous rocks, mainly limestone, which overlies Devonian Old Red Sandstone (Holland 1981; Riada Consult 2003, 58). Some sills of Carboniferous volcanic rocks also pass through the bedrock sequences. The dominant topographical feature of Croghan Hill, 7 km southeast of Tyrrellspass, is comprised of shallow intrusive basaltic and dolamitic rocks formed by volcanic activity (Riada Consult 2003, 59).

Superficial drift deposits overly the bedrock, varying from impermeable clay to permeable gravel (Riada Consult 2003). Glacial features such as eskers and kames dominate an otherwise flat landscape; the eskers are punctuated by sand and gravel quarries that provide good quality building materials (Casey 2002).

2.2 Soils and their uses

The soil type encountered in the area (Grey-Brown Podzolic) covers 3.43 % of Ireland, on the southern limit of the north to west Drumlin belt across the northern half of the country (Gardiner and Radford 1980, 91). The lighter Grey Brown Podzolics are 'good all-purpose soils' and the heavier Grey Brown Podzolics are better for pasture production (*Ibid.,* 27). Although the soil is technically a fertile type, it

has a high clay content which results in poor drainage and peat accumulation in the area is widespread. This is particularly the case along the western portion of the road route, (where the sites from this project were found), which has been covered by the growth of fens and raised bog. These peat lands have generally been worked and, while residual peats are often present, they do not tend to exceed 1 m thickness (Riada Consult 2003, 61).

2.3 Topography

The landscape followed by the route of the new road from Kinnegad to Athlone is generally lowlying, ranging from the low undulating drift cover east of Athlone to the flat plains of the central boglands and moraine near Kinnegad. Only a 4 km stretch of the corridor east of Tyrellspass rises above 100 m in height, most of the land undulating gently along the northern extremities of the Bog of Allen. Outside the area of bogland the landscape is typified by regular enclosed fields, bordered by densely overgrown banks with mature hedgerows of ash, elder and hawthorn. This uniform landscape is broken up by streams, eskers and rivers; the River Brosna and its tributaries drain the western part of the study area, while the land east of Rochfortbridge is drained by the Yellow River and other smaller tributaries of the River Boyne (Casey 2002).

The moist climate combined with the low-lying condition of much of the area ensures seasonal flooding, limiting the land-use capability to livestock grazing punctuated by infrequent tillage. In areas of marginal land close to the edges of the raised bogs the pasture is criss-crossed by drainage ditches without the usual accompanying enclosing bank (Casey 2002).

3 Archaeological and Historical Background

(based on an Archaeological and Histroical Background by Orlaith Egan)

The sites within this study area are located in a rich multi-period archaeological landscape (Figure 2) and several monuments have already been assessed in the original EIS report (Riada Consult. 2003). Recent excavations along the routes of new roads have added significantly to the list of known sites and the newly discovered sites from this part of the N6 road will add further knowledge to the overall understanding of the area.

The area is associated with ancient routeways of unknown date; a large togher discovered by R.A. S Macalister in the nearby townland of Baltigeer in the 1930s may possibly have linked up with the Slighe Dala or Slí Asail, two ancient routeways which led to Tara and Connacht. One of the five great ancient roads of Ireland, the Slí Mór, is also thought to have passed through the area. The earliest indication of archaeological activity within the area was the recovery of a stray Mesolithic Bann flake (IAWU 2002) and a stone axe (SA 1989:17), potentially of Neolithic date (c. 4000-2500 BC), found in the townland of Rattin (IAWU 2001). However, all the archaeological sites excavated in the area have been identified as of Bronze Age date or later.

3.1 Bronze Age c. 2500-500 BC

The earliest known evidence of settlement is represented by an Early Bronze Age (c. 2500-1500 BC) togher discovered by the Irish Archaeological Wetland Unit in the townland of Rattin (IAWU 2001).

Finds from the area include a socketed bronze axe head from the Late Bronze Age (1936:1873 NMI) which was recovered near Kinnegad townland (exact location unknown). Bronze Age burnt mounds are also reasonably common; one definite example (CHS 20) and several potential sites were discovered during fieldwalking of the proposed route (Riada Consult 2003, 247). A burnt mound was excavated at Kiltotan Collinstown 12 and at Kiltotan Collinstown 13 an anomalous pit produced a Middle-Late Bronze Age radiocarbon date.

3.2 Iron Age c. 500 BC-500 AD

There is a general dearth of evidence from this period in the Irish archaeological record. However, a site excavated as part of this project at Monganstown 1 produced two Iron Age radiocarbon dates from metalworking contexts.

3.3 Early Historic c. 500-1100 AD

The record of Early Historic activity in the study area and the surrounding countryside is rich. An ancient monastic site founded at Clonfad (WM27: 067, WM27: 066) to north of the townland of Rattin, consisted of a possible church site, a rectangular enclosure, a graveyard, crosses, and *Bishop's grave*. St. Etchen was bishop of Clonfad or *Cluain-fota-Baethain* in the sixth century and the annals of Ulster record his death between 578-84 AD. He is reputed to have ordained St. Columcille and St. Colmáin mac Lúacháin of Lynn and many others. The monastery survived into the eight century AD as Blahmac, an abbott of Clonfad was killed in 799 AD (Gwynn & Hadcock, 1970). Sites with evidence for craft/industry from this period include charcoal/metalworking pits at Monganstown 1, which produced two Early Historic radiocarbon dates, and material from a small metalworking pit at Kiltotan Collinstown 14, which also returned an Early Historic date.

The most common settlement monuments of this period are ringforts (also known as *rath* or *lios*). These are interpreted as enclosed farmsteads and they generally consist of a circular ditch outside an earthen bank (constructed with the upcast from the excavation of the ditch). Larger examples may have more than one ditch and a bank forming the enclosure. Several ringforts are known from the study area and in Farthingstown (WM033-069) and Kiltotan Collinstown (WM033-066) there were two ringforts located within 300 m of the roadtake. These sites are situated on the higher, drier ground at the edge of the bog, to the north and northwest of the site excavated at Kiltotan Collinstown 13. At Kiltotan Collinstown 14 there are four ringforts located within 1 km of the site. The nearest, WM033-061, is situated just 350 m to the north. East of the site are WM033-065 and WM033-066, at distances of 700 m and 400 m respectively. The fourth ringfort, WM033-062, is about 840 m north-northeast of the site. Also within 1 km of the site is a fifth recorded monument, WM033-068, listed as an earthwork. At Monganstown 1 a further two ringforts (WM 027:069 and WM 027:070) are located in the area between the site and the town of Kinnegad, with one just 500 m from the site. The evidence suggests that the area was quite intensely settled during the Early Historic period.

3.4 Medieval c. 1100-1650 AD

The villages of Tyrrellspass and Rochfortbridge both date from the medieval period and are located near the sites examined in this project. Rochfortbridge is located 11 km southwest of Kinnegad within

the Barony of Fartullagh. The village is named after the Rochforts, a French family who settled in Ireland in 1243. Before the Rochforts established themselves in the area the Tyrrells, a powerful Anglo-Norman family, held the Barony of Fartullagh. This included the lands around Rochfortbridge and the parish of Castlelost. In the 13th century (c. 1411) the Tyrrells built a castle that consisted of a motte and bailey (a stone castle came later) in Tyrrellspass, to the northwest of the town. It guarded the western entrance to the Barony of Fartullagh and it remained the centre of power for the Tyrrells until the Cromwellian Invasions (1650). They also built a semi-fortified manorial church on the castle lands which contained an effigy of armoured Knight John Tyrell dating to 1607. The site of another castle (WM 027: 071) and a bridge (WM 028: 003), reflecting further settlement in the later medieval period, are located in the townland of Kinnegad.

A defensive castle was also constructed in Rattin (WM34: 008), built to defend extensive Anglo-Norman territories in the midlands. The lands were owned by Hugh de Lacy but passed into the possession of Sir John Darcy and his descendents when he became Chamberlain and Steward of the household of King Edward, Chief justice of England and Peer of the realm. In the Insurrection of 1641 Nicholas Darcy forfeited Rattin and the greater part of his estates (Bardon, 1913). The remains of a sixteenth century towerhouse (called Rattin Castle) are found in the townland today. Test trenches *c.* 1500 m to the northwest of the castle failed to produce any archaeological remains (Conway 1999, 298). There is also a recorded earthwork site (WM 34:007) located to the west of the castle but its function and date are unknown.

The only excavated site from this project that dated to the Medieval period was a small furnace at Kiltotan Collinstown 14 which produced a fifteenth century radiocarbon date.

3.5 Post-medieval c.1650-20th century

The post-medieval archaeology examined during the project included the remains of field systems and vernacular architecture. Post-medieval field boundaries and ditches were excavated at Farthingstown 009, Farthingstown 011, Monganstown 2, Kiltotan Collinstown 12, Kiltotan Collinstown 13 and Kiltotan Collinstown 14. The field systems at Kiltotan Collinstown are probably related to a nineteenth century farmstead pictured on the 1st Edition OS map and located immediately adjacent to the site at Kiltotan Collinstown 12. Vernacular architecture was also examined at the site of Rattin 4, where a nineteenth century farmhouse was tested and recorded prior to road construction.

In addition there are two demesnes located within the study area (Farthingstown House and Sidebrook House), both found in the townland of Farthingstown. The term 'demesne' originates from Norman French and indicates the portion of an estate retained by a feudal lord for his own use. Most Irish examples typically consist of a big house with associated buildings, ornamental and recreational grounds, and perhaps the remains of an elaborate boundary wall (Riada Consult 2003, 249).

4 Placenames and Townlands

The sites were excavated in the townlands of Farthingstown, Kiltotan Collinstown, Rattin and Monganstown. The townland of Farthingstown lies in the parish of Castlelost in the barony of Fartullagh. It covers a substantial area containing c. 1802 acres. It is known in Irish as Baile na Feóirlinge meaning

'town of the farthing'. (Walsh P. 1957) It was known as 'Ballyneforlin alias Fardingston' in the inquisitions of the seventeenth century (Inq. Car. I no. 129). The townland of Kiltotan and Collinstown is also located within the parish of Castlelost and the Barony of Fartullagh. It lies south and southeast of the old mail coach road from Tyrrellspass to Dublin and borders part of the County of Offaly. In 1837 it consisted of c. 320 acres, which was mainly of arable and pastureland but included a narrow stretch of bog, which bordered the parish of Newtown. Kiltotan is known in Irish as *Cill Toiteáin* meaning 'the church of the conflagration'. Collinstown is known as Baile Choileáin translated as 'the town of Collins'. (OS Namebooks). The townland of Rattin is located in the west of the parish of Killucan within the barony of Farbill. It is known in Irish as *Rath Aitinne* meaning 'Rath of the furze'. The lands of Rattin were formerly part of the lands of Clonfad, situated to the west. The name Monganstown is derived from 'the town of the Mongans' and the townland covers an area of 483 acres.

5 Site Location and Topography

The site is approximately 1.2 km southeast from Rochfordbridge (Figure 3). The site lands were formerly the property of Francis John Lawrence. The area is relatively flat. The field had previously been used for tillage. Prior to initial testing there was no physical, documentary or cartographic evidence of any archaeological remains in the field.

6 Excavation Methodology

A Hitachi EX 120 tracked machine with a flat ditching bucket was used to re-open the test area. The original north to south offshoot test trench 5 was reopened. 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.

7 Results

A burnt spread was identified approximately 9 m north of the centreline trench in Test Trench 5 (Figure 4). It measured 0.5m NS by 0.75m EW and comprised a mixture of burnt, blackened soil and burnt reddish clay. Small, isolated patches of burning such as this are relatively common archaeological features and may represent temporary hearths. As such they may have dated to any period in the past. No other archaeological stratigraphy, features or artefacts were recorded in the vicinity.

8 Conclusion

Resolution phase excavation confirmed that an isolated patch of burning found during test excavations at Farthingstown 007 was not associated with other archaeological activity. The burnt spread or possible hearth probably represented a temporary fire or hearth from an unknown period.

9 Bibliography

Bardan, Patrick, 1913 no date, *Fairbill Topography*, typed manuscript, Westmeath County Council Library

Casey M. 2002, *N6 Kinnegad to Athlone Aerial Survey*, section of the N6 Environmental Impact Statement, 2004.

Conway, M. 1999, Rattin in Bennett, I. (ed.) *Excavations 1999: Summary account of archaeological excavations in Ireland*. Wordwell.

Gardiner, M.J. and Radford, T. 1980. *Soil Associations of Ireland and Their Land Use Potential. Soil Survey Bulletin No.**36.*** An Foras Talúntais, Dublin.

Gwynn, A. and Hadcock, R.N. 1970 *Medieval Religious Houses. Ireland.* London.

Holland, CH (ed.) 1981. *A geology of Ireland*. Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh.

Irish Archaeological Wetland Unit, UCD, 2001, Cavemount, Esker & Derryhinch Bogs, Cos Meath, Offaly & Westmeath in Peatland Survey Report 2001.

Irish Archaeological Wetland Unit, 2002 'Fieldwork 2000, Counties Westmeath and Offaly' in I. Bennett (ed.) *Excavations 2000*. Bray, Wordwell.

Ordnance Survey field name Books of the County of Westmeath, 1837.

Riada Consult, Westmeath County Council 2004, *N6 Kinnegad to Athlone Dual Carriageway Environmental Impact Statement.*

Tierney, J., McKinstry, L. and Moore, E. 2005 N6 Kinnegad to Kilbeggan Contract 1 Archaeological Testing Report. Unpublished report for Eachtra Archaeological Projects.

Walsh, Rev. Paul, 1957 *The Placenames of Westmeath*. Dublin

10 Figures

Figure 1: Extract from Discovery Sheets 48 and 49 with route of N6 indicated

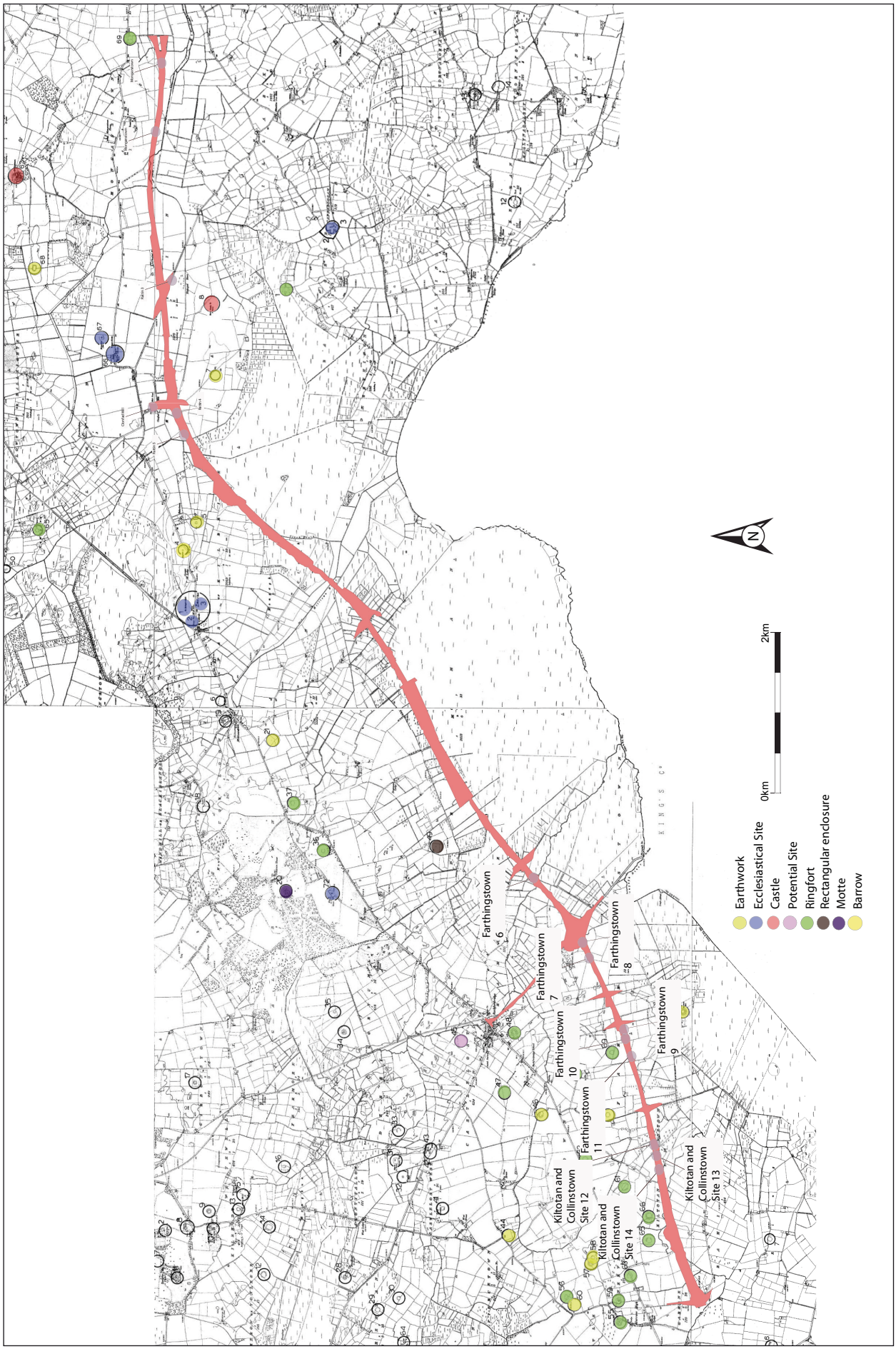

Figure 2: Extract from Sites and Monuments Records sheets WM-027, -033 and -034 with site location indicated

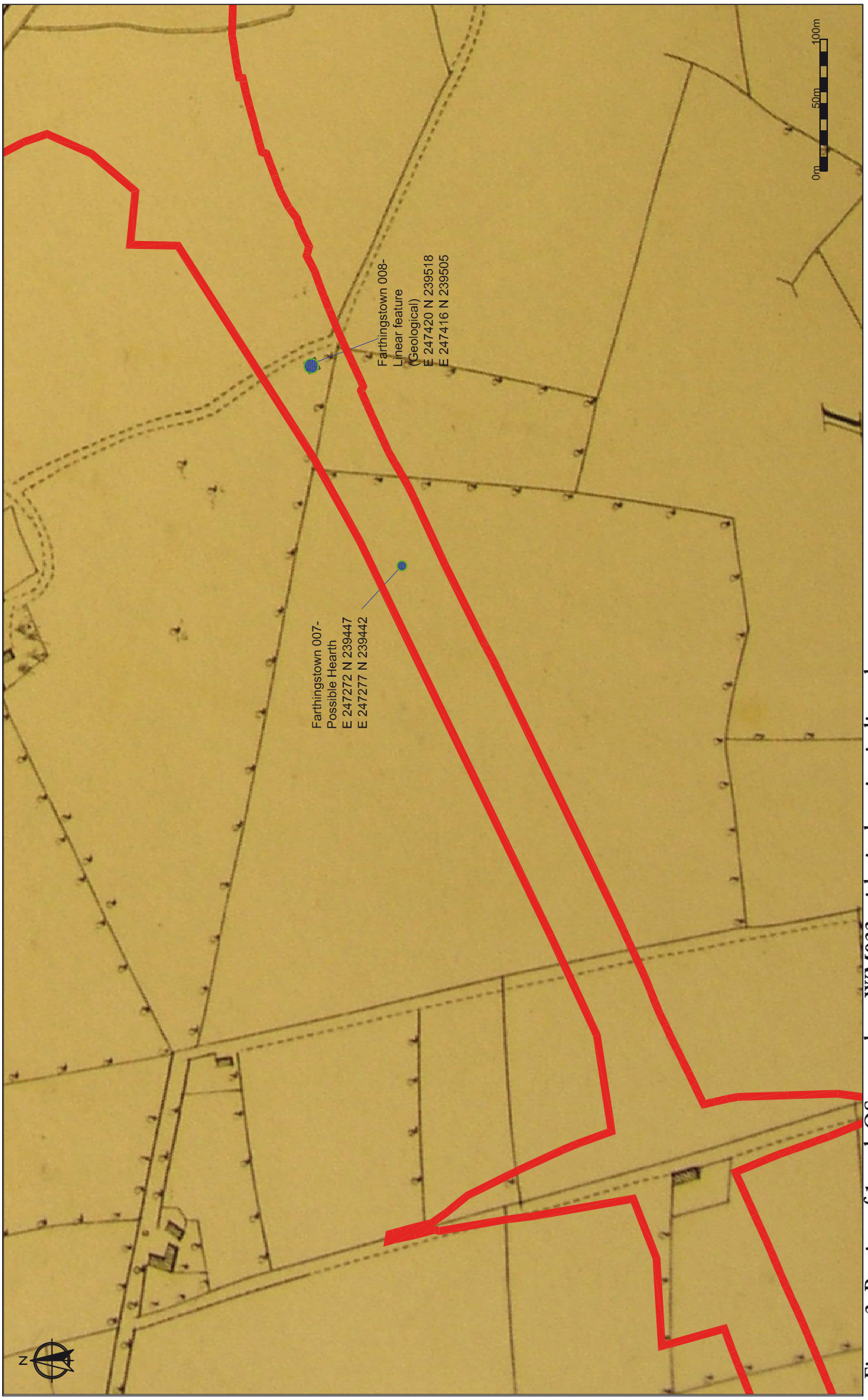

Figure 3: Portion of 1st ed. OS map sheet WM033 with site location indicated

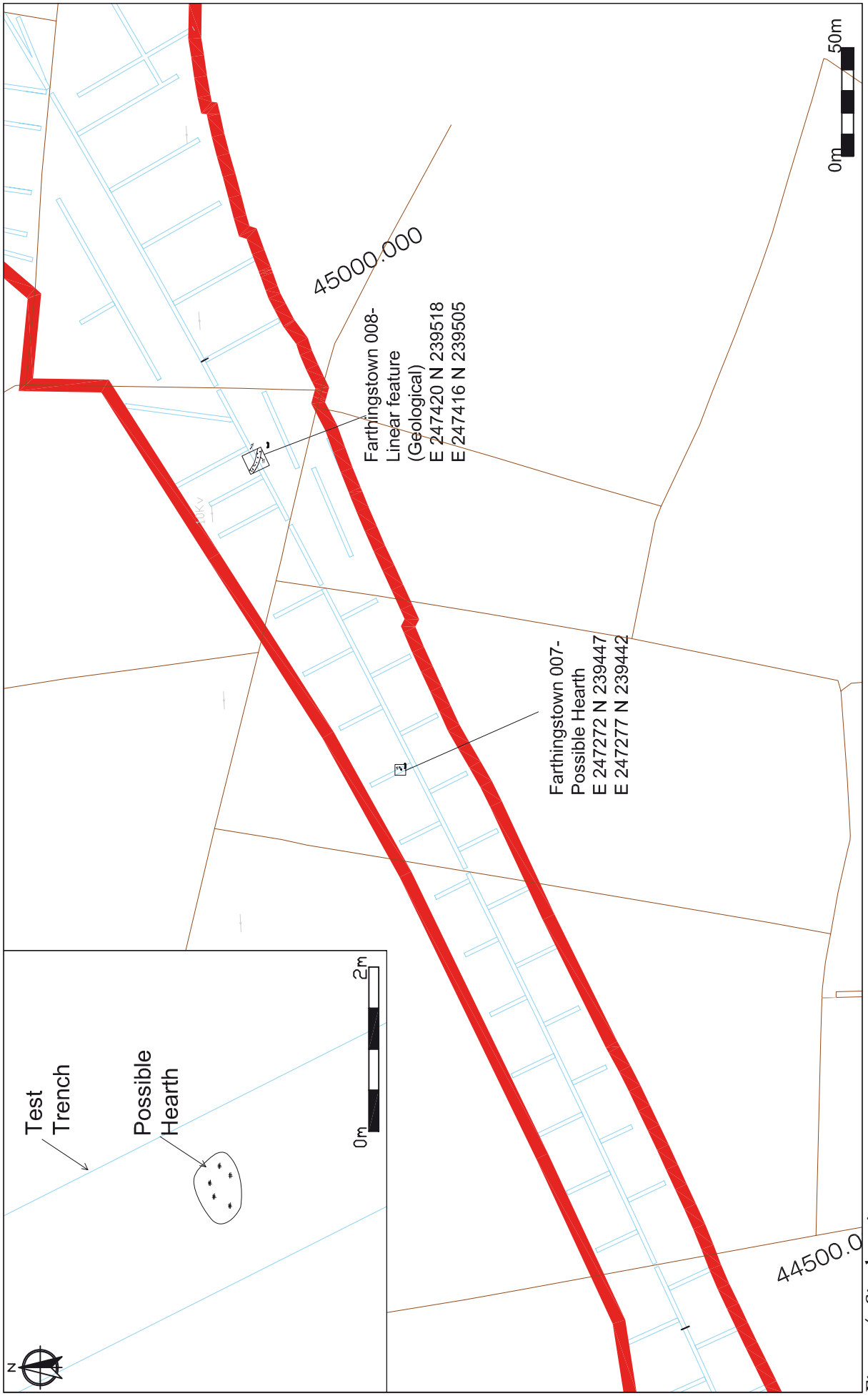

Figure 4: Site location map