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NORTHERN MOTORWAY
ROAD PROJECT
CONTRACT 7
GORMANSTOWN – MONASTERBOICE

FINAL REPORT
ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT
OF BALGEEN 1, CO. MEATH.

Licence: 01E0674

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Project Details

Site: Northern Motorway – Contract 7. Balgeen 1,
Co. Meath.

Client: Meath County Council, County Hall, Navan,
Co. Meath.

Planning Ref. No: N/A.

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Archaeologists: Ian Russell.

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Abstract

One test pit and four test trenches were excavated within the site of four machine cuts at Balgeen 1, County Meath. These were first identified as a potential archaeological site in an aerial video taken in March 2001 along the route of the Northern Motorway, Contract 7. A field walk survey conducted in June 2001 failed to identify any features to suggest the presence of an archaeological site. This was followed by a geophysical survey to determine the presence / absence of archaeological stratigraphy but no features were identified. Consequently, an archaeological assessment was carried out following recommendations from *Dúchas* The Heritage Service in order to clarify the presence / absence of archaeological stratigraphy through hand excavation.

The machine cuts were identified following strimming of the site and this was confirmed through testing following consultation with *Dúchas* The Heritage Service. Further testing was carried out in order to follow and identify a potential feature in the corner of one of the test trenches. This was later identified as a post-medieval field drain. Two further field drains and one modern test pit were also exposed. No archaeological features or deposits were exposed. Three modern finds (01E0674:001:1–3) were recovered from the topsoil.

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Final Report on Archaeological Assessment at Balgeen 1, Northern Motorway Contract 7, Gormanstown–Monasterboice, County Meath.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report gives an account of the archaeological assessment carried out on a potential site at Balgeen 1, County Meath (OS six-inch sheet number 27, 819mm from the west margin and 327mm from the south margin, NGC 269301, 310620, *Figures 1 - 3*) between the River Nanny and Dardistown Lane at chainage 17300, Northern Motorway, Contract 7, Gormanstown–Monasterboice. The assessment was carried out on behalf of Meath County Council, County Hall, Navan, County Meath between the 12th and 14th July 2001 under licence number 01E0674 issued by *Dúchas* The Heritage Service, Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands.

2. 0 THE DEVELOPMENT

2.1 The Site

The site was revealed as a potential archaeological site following an aerial video of the motorway taken by Mr. Ben Corcoran in late March 2001 and seen by A.C.S. Ltd. some months later (*Plate 1*). The video showed two very visible dark concentric circles or rings on the surface of the field in rough pasture measuring c.13.0m and c.22.0m in diameter respectively. A site visit in late June 2001 failed to identify any ridges, depressions or features to suggest the presence of an archaeological site. A geophysical survey was carried out on the 27th June under licence number 01R057 in order to determine the presence / absence of archaeological deposits. However, this did not indicate the presence of archaeological features or stratigraphy (*Figure 6*).

Consequently, an archaeological assessment was carried out on the site in advance of topsoil stripping associated with the construction of Contract 7 of the Northern Motorway following recommendations from *Dúchas* The Heritage Service in order to clarify the presence / absence of archaeological stratigraphy by hand excavation. The archaeological assessment was carried out between the 12th and 14th July 2001 under licence number 01E0674 issued by *Dúchas* The Heritage Service, Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands to Ian Russell.

Prior to this testing, the area was strimmed to remove the long grass which revealed four circular machine cuts in the ground forming two concentric circular ruts. It was clear that these concentric ruts were the overgrown remains of what had originally been fresh machine cuts recorded in the aerial video of March 2001. This was confirmed by a photograph of the machine cuts taken by the local landowner, Mr. Frank Teeling, in February / March (*Plate 2*). In consultation with *Dúchas* The

Heritage Service, it was proposed to confirm this identification through test excavation.

2.2 Proposal

Meath County Council in association with the National Roads Authority intend to construct a new motorway linking the existing M1 at Gormanstown to Contract 6 of the Northern Motorway at Yellow Island.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

3.1 Archaeological and Historical Background by Bryn Coldrick

Prehistory

The earliest settlers in Meath are thought to have arrived around 7,500BC in a period known as the Middle Stone Age or Mesolithic. These people were hunter-gatherers whose existence was based almost entirely on a foraging economy. As this culture tended not to produce the kinds of permanent structures which later cultures would build, it is difficult to find evidence for Mesolithic settlement. One of the only Mesolithic structures known in Ireland is a hut site at Mount Sandel in Co. Derry. The main indicators of Mesolithic activity in Ireland take the form of flint scatters and shell middens which have been identified at several locations along the east coast. Given the nature of the Irish landscape at the time, covered as it was in dense primeval forests, the Mesolithic peoples tended not to venture very far inland. Instead, they remained largely confined to the coasts and river valleys where they would fish for their survival, only making expeditions into the thick forests for roots, berries and for the wild animals that roamed there.

During the Neolithic or New Stone Age period (c. 4000BC–c.2400BC), as the country's forests were being cleared to make way for the new farming culture which had emerged in Ireland, it became apparent that the central plain of which the future County Meath would form a part, was one of the most fertile areas of the country and in time, this area became the most coveted. In addition to its economic advantages, the topography and strategic location of the Meath area made it the ritual and political centre of Ireland as well as its economic heart (Brady 1956).

The spiritual and economic importance of Meath and of the Boyne Valley in particular, is forever enshrined in the Boyne Cemetery on the north bank of the river. Now a UNESCO world heritage site, the Bend of the Boyne which includes the townlands of Newgrange, Knowth, Dowth and several others, contains some of the most important passage tombs in Western Europe. A passage tomb is an oval or circular stone and earthen mound retained at the base by kerbing. This mound or 'cairn' contains a stone-lined passage often terminating in a chamber in which cremated burials were placed. The great tombs of the Boyne Valley are amongst the largest and most elaborate Neolithic passage tombs in the world. The cemetery as a

whole comprises around forty known passage graves ranging in date from c.3260BC to c.3080BC. The cluster of around eighteen tombs at Knowth contains the largest concentration of Neolithic art in Western Europe with some of its finest examples. The great tombs of Knowth, Newgrange and Dowth were all constructed on a height overlooking the Boyne in rich fertile farmland which had been cleared for up to five hundred years before the building began (Stout 1997).

Seed and pollen analysis has shown that the early Neolithic people of the Boyne Valley practised both pastoral and arable farming techniques, probably using bramble and crab apple as a hedging material to separate fields. The fertility of the land allowed a stable and wealthy community to develop gradually. These people lived at first in ephemeral rectangular timber houses but their architectural achievements culminated in the building of permanent stone tombs which testify not only to their religious dedication but also to their in-depth knowledge of engineering and astronomy. By the late Neolithic, from around 2,855BC onwards, the tombs became the focus of renewed ritual devotion with large enclosures (or henge's) being erected using stone, timber and earth to form arenas for long forgotten ceremonies. Although the general location of the rituals remained the same, the actual burial practices of these so-called 'Beaker People' were much less elaborate than their tomb-building forebears with stone-lined cists, such as those discovered at Monknewtown and Oldbridge, being used (Stout 1997). From around 1,800BC to the first century AD, there appears to have been a period of virtual inactivity in the Boyne Valley. One of the few indications of human activity in the area during this time is the recent discovery of several *fulachta fiadh* in the townland of Sheephouse on the south side of the Boyne (Stout 1997). *Fulachta fiadh* are Bronze Age cooking sites characterized by a crescent-shaped mound of burnt stone. Groups of these monuments are often found in damp areas where the trough used for cooking would naturally fill with water. Stones were heated on a fire and then thrown into the trough until the water was hot enough to cook with (although alternative uses such as bathing have also been suggested for these monuments). After use, the stones were removed from the trough and placed around its edge until the characteristic crescent-mound was formed.

Iron Age and Early Christian Period

During the first century AD, Ireland was divided into five ancient kingdoms known as 'the Five Fifths of Ireland'. These kingdoms corresponded roughly to the modern provinces of Ulster, Munster and Connacht with Leinster divided into North and South. By the end of the first century, the tribes of Connacht had crossed the Shannon and had begun to occupy lands around present-day Mullingar, making Uisneach their royal seat. Thus, the new kingdom of Meath was born and the name perhaps signifies its geographical location in the centre of the country. Brady suggests that it derives from the Latin Regia Media or 'the middle kingdom' but it could also derive from a Gaelic word with the same meaning (Brady 1956).

By the third century AD, Tara, the former capital of North Leinster, had been adopted as the capital of Meath and as the kingdom's power grew, it assumed the status of a High Kingdom, exercising authority over the entire island. The first High King of Meath was Cormac Mac Art who is said to have reigned from AD226 to 266 (Callary 1955). The first High King of Ireland was Niall of the Nine Hostages and from AD402

to 1169, his descendants or those of his brothers are said to have reigned uninterrupted except for a short period from 1002 when the title was usurped by Brian Ború. By the sixth century, resistance to Meath's supremacy in Leinster had evaporated. The kingdom of Meath was divided into seventeen sub-kingdoms with the kingdom of *Dál Fiachach* corresponding to the medieval barony of Duleek and that of North Brega corresponding roughly to the barony of Slane (Brady 1956).

The Early Christian period was one of population growth and the most common settlement type at the time was the ringfort. These monuments remain the most common archaeological site type in existence in Ireland today with around 30,000 examples recorded. They are characterised as a circular area defined by banks and external ditches and excavation often reveals the remains of dwelling houses within their interior. The banks are generally constructed of earth except in stony areas where they may be of stone. Those with earthen banks are sometimes referred to as 'raths' while those with stone banks are known as 'cashels'. Most ringforts are enclosed by a single bank, but it is also quite common for them to have two sets of banks (a 'bivallate' ringfort) or even three ('trivallate').

Ringforts are usually situated on gentle slopes with good views of the surrounding countryside and although they tend to have a dispersed distribution in the landscape, they are occasionally found in pairs or even joined together to form a 'conjoined ringfort'. At one time, it was believed that ringforts served a military function. It is now more widely accepted, however, that they were merely farmsteads, the fortifications of which were designed more to keep livestock in than to keep enemies out. In local tradition, ringforts were the dwelling places of fairies and it was often said that at night, lights could be seen emanating from their interiors. Such superstition encouraged people to keep a safe distance, but now, as superstition dies out, the monuments are coming under increasing pressure from development and intensive agriculture. Many have been partially or completely destroyed since the 1960s and often the only indication of the former presence of a ringfort is preserved in placename elements such as *Dún* or *Rath* or *Lios*. The townland names of Donore, Lisdornan and Rathmullan, therefore, all owe their origins to Early Christian farmsteads.

Often found in association with ringforts and cashels are souterrains. The term 'souterrain' derives from the French *sous terrain* meaning 'underground'. In archaeological terms, souterrains are artificial underground structures cut into bedrock or, more commonly, built into dug-out trenches with drystone walling and large stone lintels. The primary function of souterrains seems to have been food storage as they maintain constant temperatures (c.10°C). Souterrains vary in extent with some examples being short and simple affairs while others, such as those at Knowth, can be intricate, extending for many meters and leading to several underground chambers.

Souterrains were entered through narrow openings which were often concealed and it is believed that, as well as being used for storage, some souterrains were used as places of refuge during times of attack. Considerable mythology surrounds these monuments and stories are often told about tunnels linking one place to another. In reality, however, they are almost always self contained with only a single entrance. By their nature, souterrains can go undetected for long periods and are often discovered

dramatically when ground collapses during silage cutting, ploughing, and quarrying (Power & Lane 2000). Isolated souterrains are known to exist in Rosnaree, Oldbridge and Sheephouse (Stout 1997).

Throughout the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries, the kingdoms of Meath were, like many other parts of Ireland, subjected to harassment by the Norse which may be one explanation for the existence of souterrain networks. The *Annals of the Four Masters* record that a Viking fleet was stationed on the Boyne at Rosnaree in AD841 and the souterrains of Knowth and Dowth were pillaged in 863. The traditional agricultural wealth of the area must have been a major factor in its repeated selection as a target for raids (Stout 1997). At first, the attacks took the form of sea-borne raids but were later launched from the permanent Viking settlement in Dublin. The majority of the raids were aimed at monastic houses of which Duleek was one of the most important in Meath. These church raids were also recorded in the annals and had a very serious impact on church organisation in Ireland. Only the most resilient monasteries (such as Duleek, Kells, Clonard, Fore and Durrow) could survive against the repeated onslaughts (Brady 1958).

Medieval to Post-Medieval Periods

The landscape of the Boyne Valley between Slane and Drogheda, north and south of the river, was to undergo another agricultural revolution during the twelfth century. In 1142, the Cistercian monks established their mother house at Mellifont and were granted huge tracts of farmland by the local Gaelic king. Their new style of European monasticism differed immensely to that traditionally practised in Ireland since the time of St. Patrick in the fifth century. Their land management techniques represented the most revolutionary landscape change the Boyne Valley had seen since the forests had been cleared in the early Neolithic period. At the dissolution of the monasteries in the mid-sixteenth century, Mellifont Abbey held up to 11,000 acres including estates and rights over much of the area under study in this report (D'Alton 1844; Graham 1974). Mellifont divided the land into independent monastic farms or 'granges' which were managed by teams of lay brethren. The granges of Mellifont included not only obvious examples such as Newgrange, Sheepgrange and Roughgrange but also townlands such as Oldbridge, Rathmullan, Sheephouse, Fennor and Rosnaree. The grange began as a small group of farm buildings but in most cases it eventually developed into a nucleated settlement similar to a manorial village. A good example of this evolutionary process is Monknewtown or 'the New Town of Monkland' (Graham 1974).

The monastic economy, like the Early Christian and Neolithic economies before it, was based entirely on agriculture and the potential of this area to produce wealth had more than proven itself in the past. The granges became the focus of a kind of agriculture so different from what had gone before that it can perhaps be compared to the industrial agricultural practices which are carried on in certain places today. Grain cultivation, cattle breeding and sheep rearing were conducted extensively in the Boyne Valley under the patronage of the monks at Mellifont. Grain is known to have been exported from here to England in the thirteenth century while archaeological evidence from Balfaddock, Knowth, Townley Hall and Donore all indicate intensive ploughing (Stout 1997).

In addition to increasing the intensity of the agriculture conducted in the Boyne Valley, the Cistercians also revolutionised its milling and fishing industries. Twelfth-century documents make numerous references to the mills and millponds of the Boyne and the mills probably took the form of vertical mill wheels. By the time the monastery was dissolved in 1539, the Cistercians were operating mills at Stalleen and Rosnaree (where vernacular mill buildings still exist today) and at Newgrange where the only evidence for what was known as Broe's Mill is an extensive millrace. In addition to its mills, Mellifont possessed several fishing weirs along the Boyne including those at Rosnaree, Knowth, Stalleen, Oldbridge and Rathmullan (Stout 1997).

Although the Boyne Valley in this area was unquestionably dominated by its religious landowners, the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1169–70 reintroduced secular settlement, in particular to Dowth. Having been granted the liberty of Meath by Henry II in 1172 in return for the service of fifty knights, Hugh de Lacy subdivided it into smaller areas which he himself granted to subtenants by a process known as subinfeudation. The liberty of Meath comprised not only that county, but also Westmeath and parts of Longford and Offaly. Much of Meath de Lacy retained for himself and administered as seigniorial manors. His grantees also subdivided their holdings into manors. Upon receipt of a land grant, it was the responsibility of the grantee to ensure that his holding was adequately defended with fortifications such as a motte-and-bailey castle. The next step was to encourage immigrants from England and Wales to settle the land and make the manor an economically viable unit. At the time, the only urban settlements in Ireland were the Norse walled towns such as Dublin and Limerick. The native Irish were still living in ringforts dispersed across the landscape and sometimes in nucleated rural settlements. Their churches were isolated establishments as the parish system was only slowly emerging following the Synod of Cashel in 1171–72. The only pre-Norman settlements of note in Meath were the larger monastic foundations such as those at Kells, Slane, Duleek, Skreen and Clonard (Graham 1974).

The majority of the new settlements established by the Anglo-Normans are either still in existence today or their sites are visible in the landscape. Many are characterised by the initial fortifications used by the local lord to secure his land grant, usually a motte. A motte is a truncated conical earthen mound originally surmounted by a wooden tower or *bretesche*. The circumference of the motte was protected by a wooden palisade or fence. Associated with the motte was a forecourt or bailey, usually rectangular in shape, in which livestock and retainers could live alongside the lord's hall. The motte and bailey were usually connected by a wooden drawbridge. Around forty mottes are known to survive in County Meath and at least nine are known to have been replaced by stone castles (Graham 1974). There is an example of a motte in Lisdornan townland (ME028:013).

The first mottes to be established in the area were mainly built in strategic places such as at river crossings and are referred to as 'primary mottes'. These stood 9–12m in height and date to the period of initial consolidation (i.e. 1175–85) and were built on de Lacy's seigniorial manors, including Trim, Ratoath, Dunshaughlin, Kells, Clonard, Duleek and Drogheda. The leading grantees during the process of subinfeudation built similar mottes in Navan, Nobber, Slane, Skreen, Galtrim, Kilbeg, Castlecór,

Dunboyne and Lower Duleek where a motte was probably erected in Dollardstown. Other likely primary motte sites include Athboy and Rathkenny (Graham 1974). Secondary mottes are almost entirely associated with the process of subinfeudation and were built to secure manorial grants. They were often smaller than primary mottes and had no bailey. Most were built before the close of the twelfth century and all formed the focus of initial settlement. Examples of these occur at Scurroughstown, Ardmulchan, Knowth (where the Neolithic cairn was adapted for the purpose), Drumcondra, Derver, Castlerickard, Dunsany, Greenoge and Laracor. Once the lord felt secure in his holding, he set about replacing his motte fortification with a more permanent stone castle. These were often simple tower houses built next to an existing church and were the Irish equivalent of English manor houses, though of a more military nature in consequence of the unwelcome environment (Graham 1974).

The next phase of the manorial process was the establishment of churches, villages and monastic settlements. Augustinian houses became especially numerous in consequence of their popularity around the time of the invasion. The twin houses of Llanthony Prima (in Monmouthshire) and Secunda (in Gloucestershire) were granted extensive tracts of land in the vicinity of Colp and Duleek respectively (Graham 1974). The wealthiest abbey in the area, Mellifont, was already well established by this time.

The primary form of settlement in medieval Meath was the manorial village. Generally, this comprised a castle (i.e. a motte and later a stone tower house), a manorial church (which could either pre-date or post-date the castle), and a number of dwellings. A total of ninety-eight villages from this period had been identified in Meath by 1974. The majority of these became abandoned from around the seventeenth century onwards and in most cases the only upstanding indications of the village site today are the more endurable remnants such as the castle or church. Dwellings constructed of mud and wattle have long since disappeared leaving little or no visible trace above ground level. Earthworks, as at Dowth, have been known to preserve the line of former streets or property boundaries but in the majority of cases, these too have been ploughed out by centuries of intensive agriculture (Graham 1974).

In many cases, hamlets grew up in close proximity to the manorial villages. These comprised a nucleated grouping of dwellings without a church, though many, especially in the west of the county, included a stone house or tower house and a bawn (i.e. an enclosure for livestock etc). Such hamlets were occupied by servile tenants known as 'betaghs' as opposed to the free farmers who occupied the village. As they were made up mainly of ephemeral houses, most of these hamlets are now gone and even their field systems have disappeared since the enclosure movement of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Graham 1974).

As stated above, other than a small number of Norse towns, urban life did not exist in Ireland prior to the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in 1169. Almost all of the most important towns in existence today started life as an Anglo-Norman borough, i.e. a settlement with its own corporation and privileges as set down in a charter from the king or from a powerful local lord such as Hugh de Lacy. The earliest borough from the post-invasion period was 'Drogheda-on-the-side-of-Meath' which was granted its charter by William de Lacy in 1194. This was followed by Kells and Trim (1194-99)

and by Ratoath which was incorporated before 1200. The medieval boroughs of Meath can be divided into three categories: the walled towns such as Trim, Athboy, Kells and Drogheda; the unwallled towns which were usually baronial capitals, monastic sites or market centres such as Slane, Nobber, Skreen, Duleek and Ratoath; and finally, those boroughs which had their own charters but which never managed to develop beyond the level of a manorial village. Boroughs of the last category are often termed 'rural boroughs' and include Greenoge, Drumcondra, Newtown Trim, Syddan, Colp and Marinerstown or Mornington (Graham 1974).

At the height of their power in the first half of the thirteenth century, the Anglo-Norman conquerors held no more than two thirds of the country. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, their authority was in continuous decline until they effectively controlled only the area occupied by the modern counties of Dublin, Louth, Meath and Kildare. In 1495, this area was designated 'The Pale' under an Act of Parliament and it became the area in which English dress, customs, language and political power flourished most in opposition to the native Gaelic culture all around it. In terms of agriculture and settlement patterns, the impact of the Anglo-Normans in The Pale was revolutionary and apart from Dublin, Meath became the most intensively settled part of Ireland (Graham 1974).

Unlike the true castles of the early medieval period (e.g. Trim, Limerick, etc) which were complex military fortresses designed to protect the most important members of the early conquest establishment, the majority of 'castles' in Meath from the later medieval period were no more than fortified towers. The tower house as it emerged in the fifteenth century was a relatively plain structure of three or more storeys in height which became the principal dwelling type for the wealthy Anglo-Irish landowning class of The Pale for the next two hundred years. The tower house was a response to the increasing harassment suffered by the Anglo-Irish gentry at the hands of dispossessed Gaelic clans intent on reclaiming their traditional territories and status. In 1429, Henry VI passed a statute granting the sum of £10 to anyone who built a stone tower 20ft long, 16ft wide and more than 40ft high. Many castles of this period, therefore, are known as 'ten-pound castles' and among the more elaborate examples are Dunmoe and Liscarton near Navan and Dardistown Castle near Drogheda (Galway 1985-68; Graham 1974).

The Civil Survey of 1654-56 recorded 170 tower houses in Meath but by the time of the 1884 edition of the Ordnance Survey maps for the county, that number had fallen to only seventy-two upstanding remains or known sites. Most of the tower houses in the county date to the fifteenth century and were almost exclusively built on high ground near to a river for strategic and transport reasons. The tower house was the focal point of the lordship, representing a source of employment and protection for the local peasant community. When a tower house was under construction, all men within the lordship were obliged under a statute of 1431 to work eight days of the year for three years on the castle. Thereafter, their working lives would centre around the castle economy (Galway 1985-86).

Post-Medieval to Modern Periods

The present landscape of County Meath owes its origins to the nature of late seventeenth and eighteenth-century landholding arrangements and agricultural practices. The medieval villages were gradually deserted as people gravitated towards the towns. The amount of pasture land steadily increased (especially in the second half of the nineteenth century), slowly replacing the medieval tillage economy (Graham 1974). One of the most decisive factors in the nature of the local landscape was the Battle of the Boyne fought between William of Orange and James II on July 1st 1690.

During the battle, the opposing armies manoeuvred over an area stretching from Tullyallen in the north to Duleek in the south and as far west as the village of Slane with the most intense engagements taking place at Oldbridge (de Buitléir 1998). The Protestant king, William, had a force of around 36,000 men comprising Dutch, English, German, Huguenot, French and Irish troops. His Catholic father-in-law, James II, had around 25,000 troops including Irish, English, French and German. Early on the morning of July 1st, a detachment of around 10,000 Williamites made their way under the cover of dense fog from what is now called King William's Glen, through Monknewtown and Newgrange, towards the ford at Rosnaree. On hearing of this, James made the classic mistake of dispatching the cream of his army to intercept them, leaving his Oldbridge defences dangerously weak. William capitalised on James's error and sent the bulk of his army to cross the river at Oldbridge. Fierce fighting took place during most of the day as the Williamites struggled to establish a bridgehead on the south bank in the face of heavy resistance. When they had achieved their objective, the Williamites forced the Jacobites to retreat to the Hill of Donore and then on to Duleek. The initial retreat was highly disorganised as troops began to panic at the Williamite advance. The Jacobite cavalry eventually secured a bridge over the River Nanny and facilitated a more orderly retreat.

The Battle of the Boyne ended James's hopes of regaining the Crown from his Protestant son-in-law and the war finally ended on October 3rd 1691 with the signing of the Treaty of Limerick. This paved the way for the confiscation and resettlement of land, the introduction of the Penal Laws, and for two hundred years of Protestant Ascendancy. History would prove it to be one of the most important and controversial battles in Irish history and the landscape changes that had begun in the aftermath of the Dissolution were copper fastened by the Williamite land settlement. The gradual enclosure of monastic grange lands after 1539 was formalised during the eighteenth century by regular hedgerows which divided the land into farms of various sizes.

The eighteenth century also witnessed tremendous advances and improvements in land management and agricultural practices. Farms were leased to tenants who often sublet their holdings to subtenants. This created a social pyramid in which local farmers spanned almost the entire range of the social spectrum from the numerically-superior small cottiers with their mud-walled houses, through the middle and strong farmers with their more comfortable and more durable stone houses, to a handful of major, usually Protestant, landlords (such as the Coddingtons of Oldbridge who were the wealthiest landowners in the entire area) whose dwellings reflected their social, political and economic standing (Stout 1997).

Balgeen

Balgeen in the parish of Kilsharvan takes its name either from *Baile Caoin* meaning 'Beautiful Town' or from *Baile Uí Ghaoithin* meaning Geelin's Town. It is bound on the north by Shallon; on the east by Dardistown townland; on the south by the parishes of Duleek and Moorechurch; and on the west by Newhaggard townland. By the 1830s, it comprised 379 statute acres (OS Name Books). On Down Survey maps of the mid-seventeenth century, the townland is labelled 'Balgeene' and 'Bollgeen' and in the Civil Survey of the same period is referred to as 'Belgine' and 'Bolgin' (Ward 1967).

3.2 Archaeological Assessment

One small test pit and four test trenches were excavated within the area of the circular machine cuts using a machine with a grading bucket under strict archaeological supervision (*Figure 5*).

Small Test Pit

The test pit was excavated by hand to the northeast of the machine cuts in order to assess the depth of the topsoil. It measured 1.7m in length, 1.0m in width and extended to a depth of 0.25m (33.338m O.D.). Two sherds of white glazed chinaware (01E0674:001:1–2) and a fragment of red brick (01E0674:001:3) were recovered (*Plate 9*).

Trench 1

Trench one was excavated northeast–southwest through the eastern part of the machine cuts and measured 20.0m in length, 3.0m in width and a maximum of 0.56m in depth (33.098m O.D.). The sod and mid-brown loam topsoil (**F001**) extended to a depth of 0.26m and had been cut from above by four circular machine cuts (**F012**) measuring c.0.14m in width and a maximum of 0.11m in depth. The sod and topsoil lay above a layer of compact light-brown coloured sandy clay subsoil (**F003**) that measured 0.2m in thickness and lay directly above the compact mid-brown–orange coloured sandy boulder clay, stone and gravel (**F002**, *Plate 5*). Only a small portion of the field drain (F008) was visible in the southwest corner of the trench and was not fully exposed until further testing was carried out (see 3.2.1. below). No archaeological deposits or features were exposed.

Trench 2

Trench two was excavated northeast–southwest through the western part of the machine cuts and measured 14.0m in length, 3.0m in width and a maximum of 0.48m in depth (33.452m O.D.). The sod and mid-brown topsoil (**F001**) extended to a depth of 0.25m and overlay the compact light-brown sandy clay subsoil (**F003**) that measured 0.23m in thickness. This lay directly above the compact mid-brown–orange coloured sandy boulder clay, stone and gravel (**F002**). The machine cuts (**F011**) were

clearly visible in section within the sod and topsoil. No archaeological deposits or features were exposed and no finds were recovered.

Trench 3

Trench three was excavated northeast–southwest through the area adjacent to the machine cuts, 16.0m south of trench two. It measured 12.0m in length, 3.0m in width and a maximum of 0.49m in depth (34.679m O.D.). The sod and mid-brown topsoil (**F001**) extended to a depth of 0.3m and lay above the compact light-brown sandy clay subsoil (**F003**). This layer measured 0.19m in thickness and overlay the compact mid-brown–orange coloured sandy boulder clay, stone and gravel (**F002**). No archaeological deposits or features were exposed and no finds were recovered.

Trench 4

Trench four was excavated northeast–southwest through the area adjacent to the machine cuts, c.15.0m south of trench one. It measured 24.0m in length, 3.0m in width and a maximum of 0.48m in depth (33.754m O.D.). The sod and mid-brown topsoil (**F001**) extended to a depth of 0.25m and lay above the compact light brown sandy clay subsoil (**F003**). This layer measured 0.23m in thickness and overlay the compact mid-brown–orange coloured sandy boulder clay, stone and gravel (**F002**). No archaeological deposits or features were exposed and no finds were recovered.

3.2.1 Extended Testing

Following the initial testing, a large open area incorporating both trenches one and two was opened up in order to expose and define the feature exposed in the southwest corner of trench one (*Figure 5*). The large open area was roughly T-shaped in plan with two additional test trenches to the north and south. A total of three post-medieval–modern field drains (**F005**, **F008** and **F010**) were exposed as well as one modern test pit (**F011**). No archaeological deposits or features were exposed and no finds were recovered.

Field Drains

The field drain (**F005**) was orientated northwest–southeast across the site and had been cut into the sandy boulder clay (**F002**). It measured 0.21m in width and had been filled with a large number of round stones and clearly represented a nineteenth–twentieth-century field drain. It was clearly visible in the drainage channel excavated along the southwestern edge of the motorway and during archaeological monitoring of topsoil stripping within the motorway corridor. The second field drain **F008** ran east–west across the site and was also post-medieval in date. It had been cut into the sandy boulder clay, stone and gravel (**F002**) and had been filled with a light-brown–yellow coloured silty clay (**F004**) measuring a maximum of 0.48m in width and 0.24m in depth (*Plate 6*). The third post-medieval–modern field drain/ditch (**F010**) ran north–south across the site and appeared to cut the two northwest–southeast field drains **F008** and **F005** (*Plate 7*). It had been cut into the sandy boulder clay, stone and gravel and measured a maximum of 1.1m in width at the top, 0.75m in width at the base and

0.85m in depth. It had been filled with a compact light-brown–orange silty clay (F006) measuring 0.61m in thickness and overlay a large number of round stones (F009) at the base. The base of this feature flooded immediately upon excavation indicating that it had been used as a field drain or field ditch (*Plate 8*).

Modern Test Pit

The modern test pit (F011) was rectangular in plan and measured 2.5m in length by 0.65m in width. This feature was clearly modern in date as it had been backfilled with a dark-grey sticky clay containing frequent amounts of dried grass of hay stalks within the fill (F007). It is likely that it represents a modern engineering test pit or agricultural soak pit (*Plate 7*).

No archaeological deposits or features were exposed. All the features uncovered were associated with drainage and were post medieval–modern in date.

3.3 List of Contexts

F001	Sod and mid-brown loam topsoil.
F002	Compact orange coloured sandy boulder clay.
F003	Sandy light-brown subsoil.
F004	Silty clay fill of field drain F008.
F005	Modern stone filled field drain.
F006	Silty clay fill of field drain / ditch F010.
F007	Dark-grey clay and dried grass fill of rectangular pit F011.
F008	Post-medieval field drain filled with F004.
F009	Round stone fill at base of field drain F010.
F010	Large north–south field drain / ditch.
F011	Rectangular test or soak pit filled by F007.
F012	Circular machine cuts.

4. CONCLUSION

The two aerial photographs were taken in March 2001 and clearly show the four machine cuts (F012) as two concentric rings within the motorway corridor. These machine cuts became clearly visible on the ground when the site was strimmed and also in section following the testing in trenches one and two. Further large-scale testing was undertaken in order to fully expose and follow the feature uncovered in the corner of trench one, which was identified as a post-medieval field drain (F008). Two further post medieval-modern field drains (F005 and F010) were also exposed and identified.

The rectangular pit F011 is clearly modern in date as it had been backfilled with a dark-grey clay (F007) containing frequent amounts of dried grass that had been mixed with the spoil when it had been excavated, possibly during the late summer of 2001. In conclusion, the cut visible in both aerial photographs were clearly modern machine cuts caused by the teeth of the machine bucket digging into the ground when the machine spun around its axis. These were not visible during the site visit or geophysical survey and were only exposed when the long grass was removed before the assessment. All the features exposed during the assessment were identified as post-medieval-modern field drains and no archaeological deposits or features were exposed. The three finds recovered from the topsoil were modern in date.

5. LIST OF FINDS

01E0674:001:1

Rim sherd of white glazed chinaware bowl. Twentieth-century in date.

01E0674:001:2.

Rim sherd of white and blue glazed willow pattern bowl or plate. Twentieth-century in date.

01E0674:001:3.

Fragment of red brick. Twentieth-century in date.

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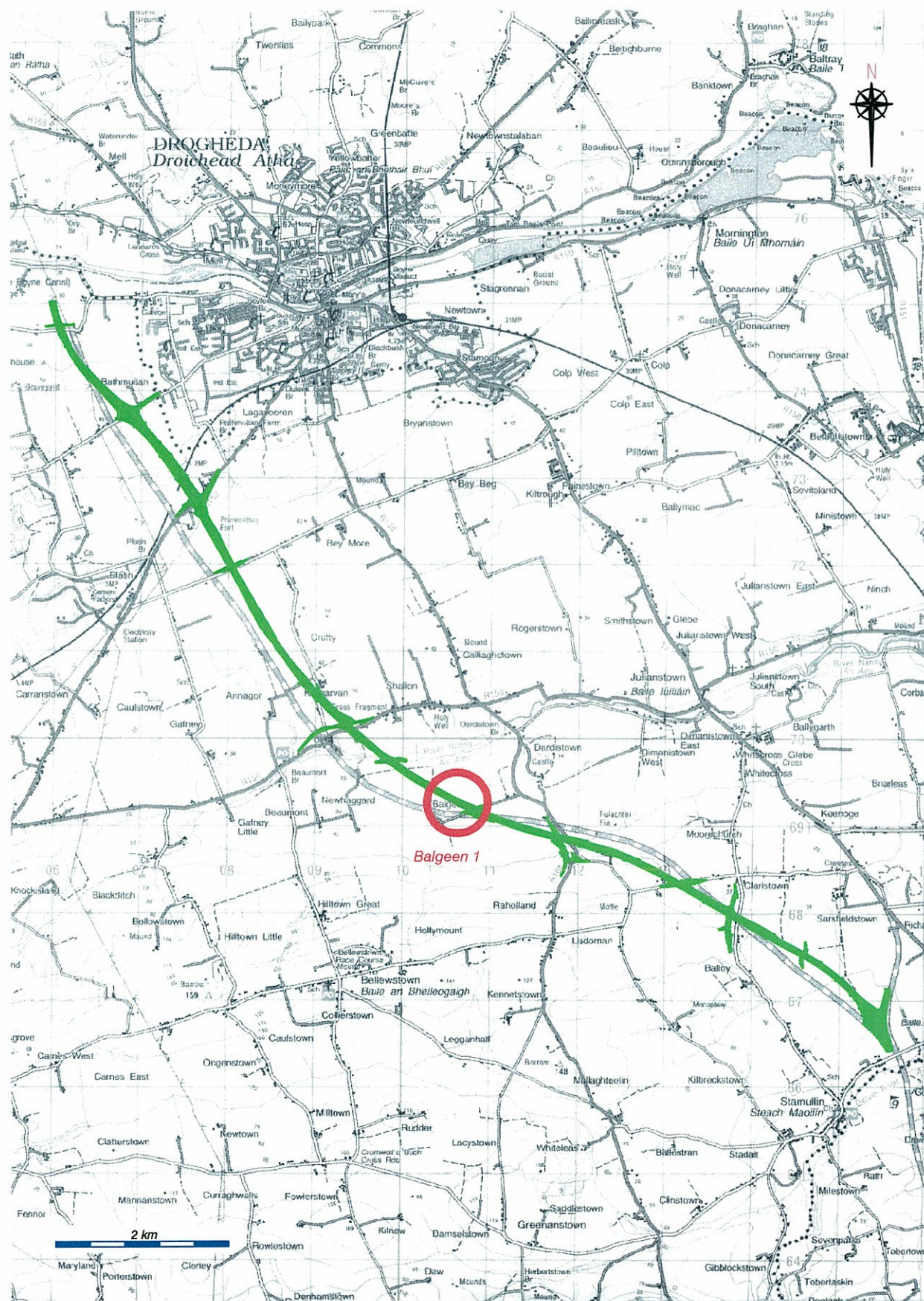
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Signed:



Ian Russell.
Archaeologist.

Date: 01.02.02



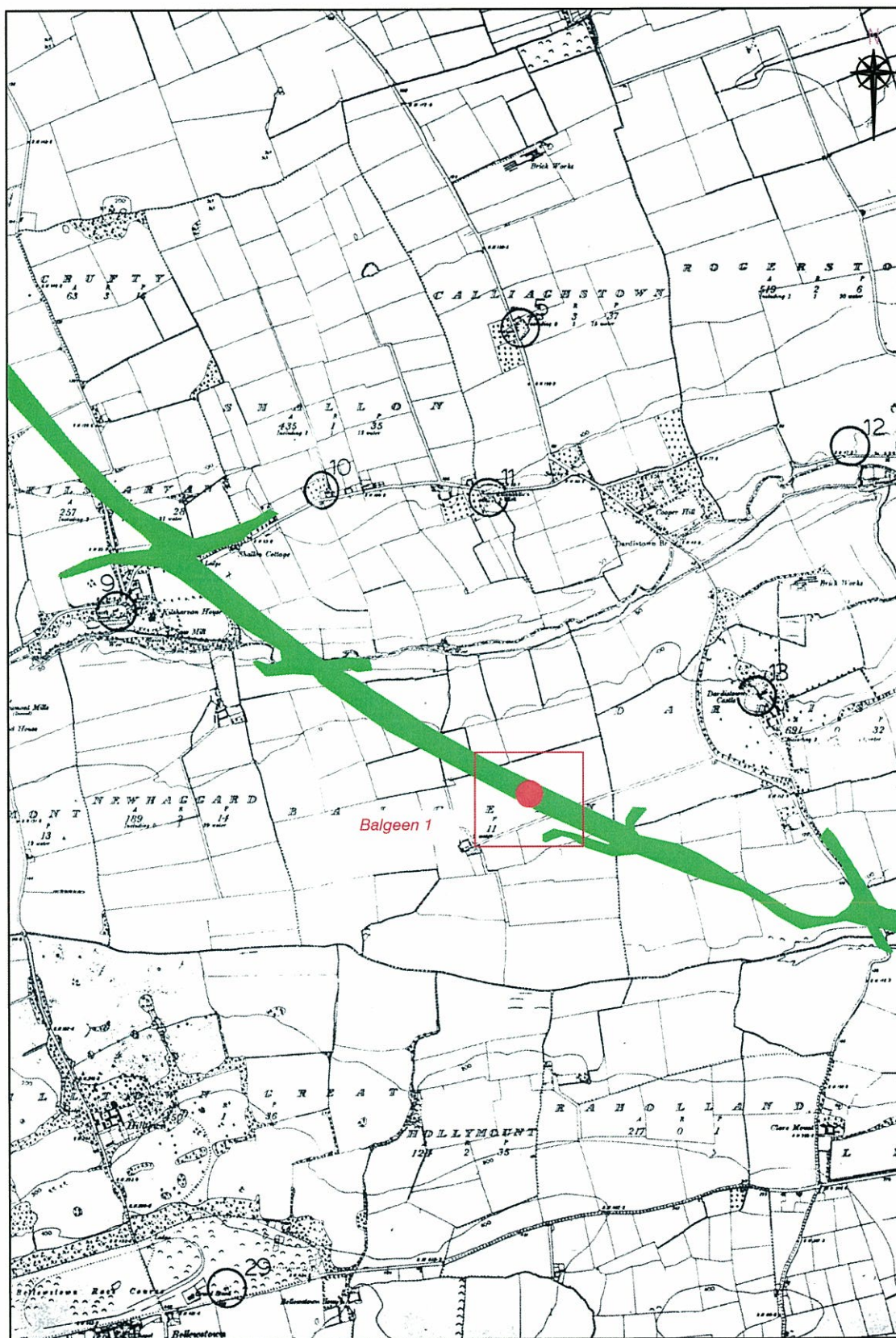
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Client:
Meath County Council

Scale:
1:65000 A4
Date:
28 Jan '02

Map ref.:
43 Discovery Series
Drawing No.:
00_86_C70

Figure 1: Location of site



**Archaeological Consultancy
Services Ltd.** Unit 21, Boyne Business Pk.,
Greenhills, Drogheda, Co. Louth

Site Location:
Balgeen 1, Northern Motorway
Client:
Meath County Council

Scale:
As scalebar
Date:
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Figure 2: Location of site showing local SMR sites.

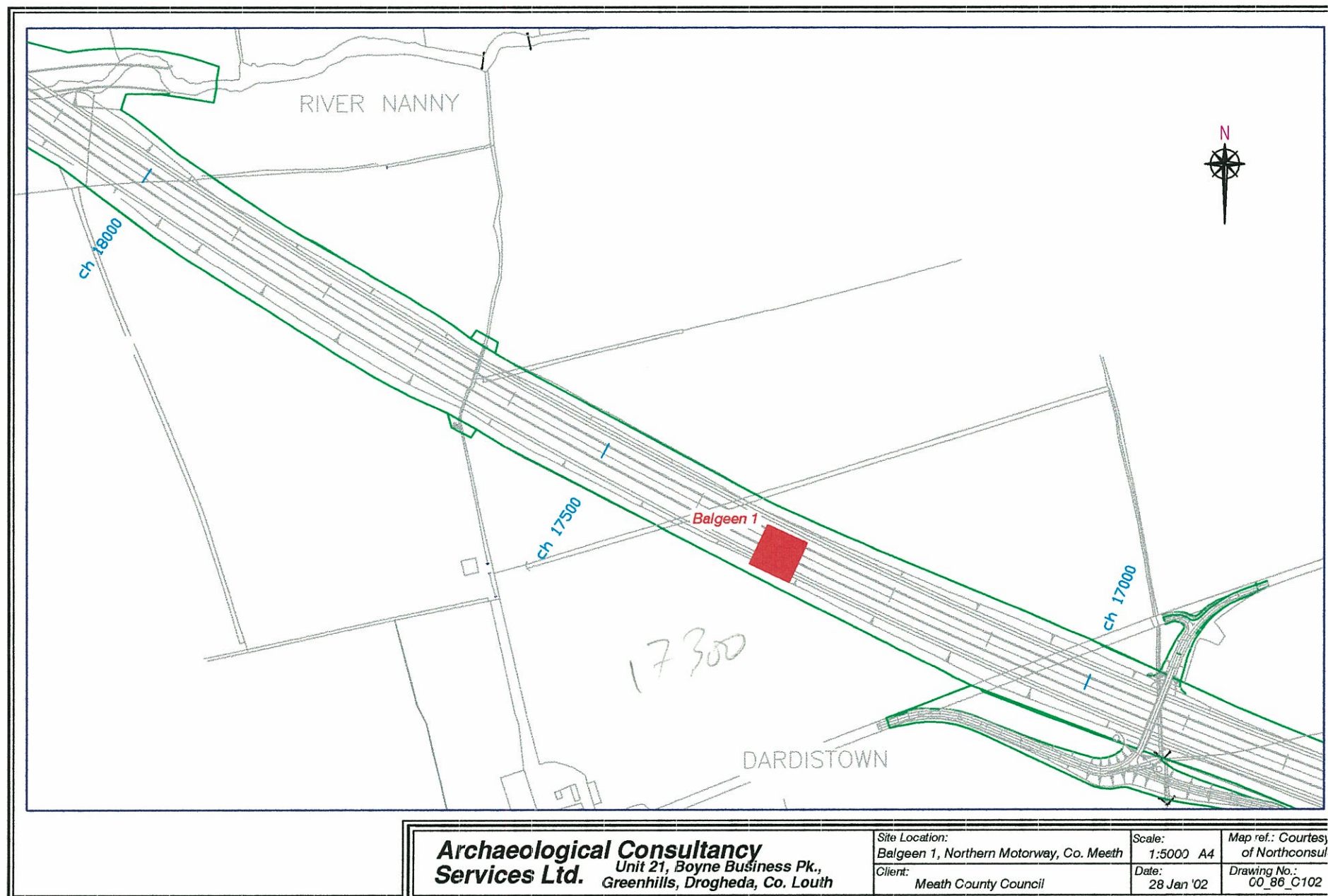


Figure 3: Location of site within route of proposed motorway

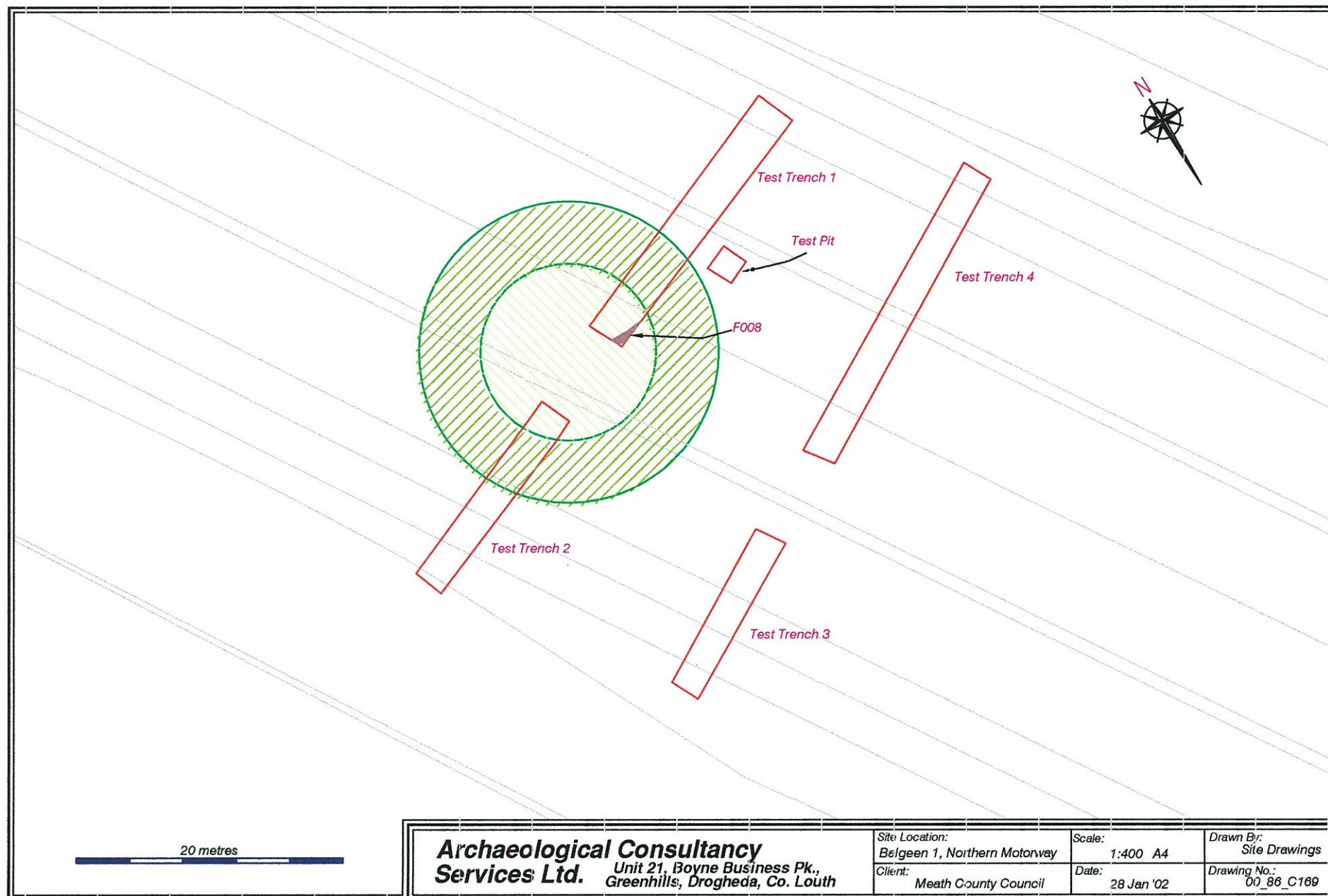


Figure 4: Detail of site showing location of test trenches 1-4

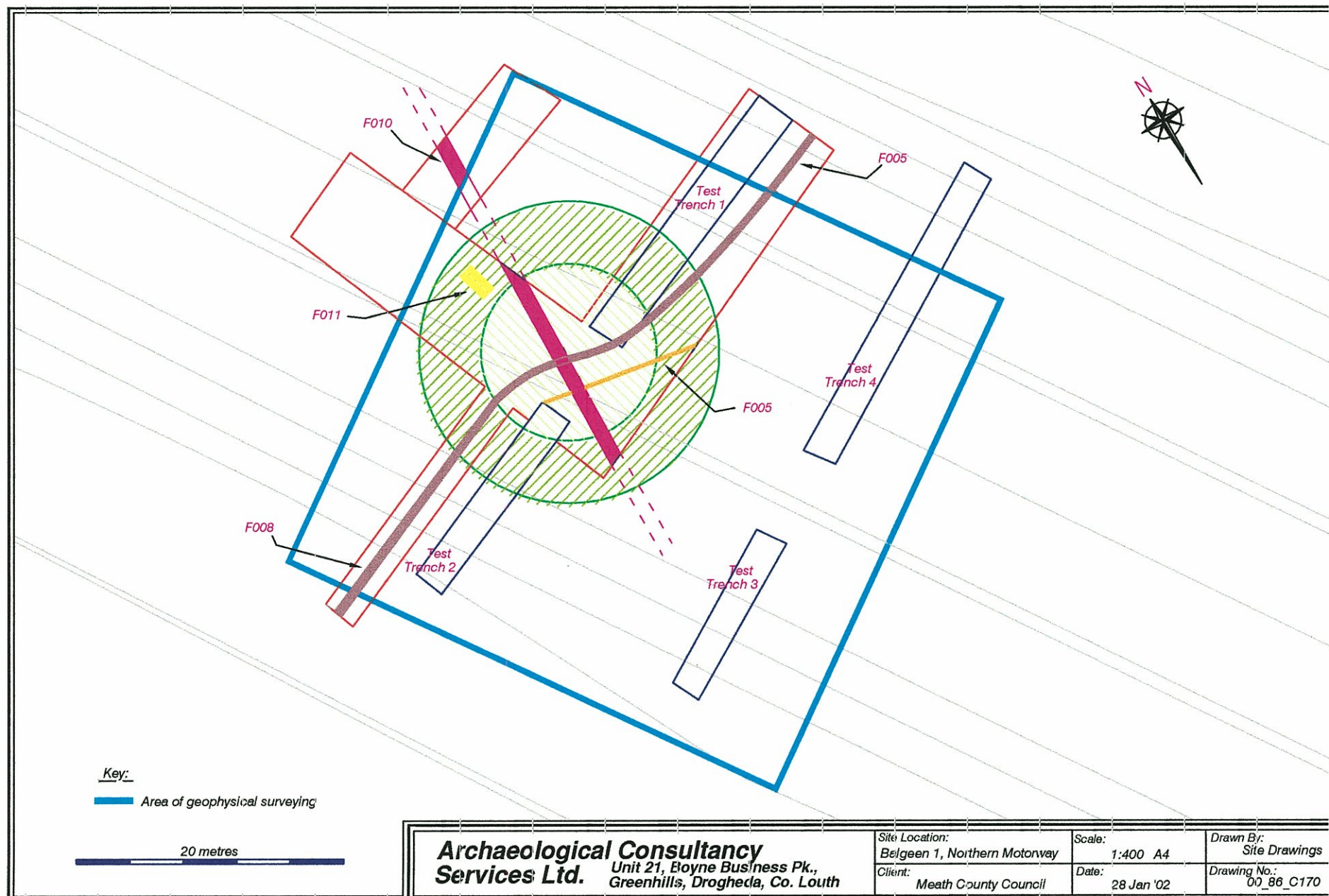
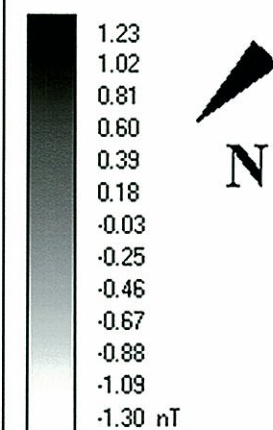
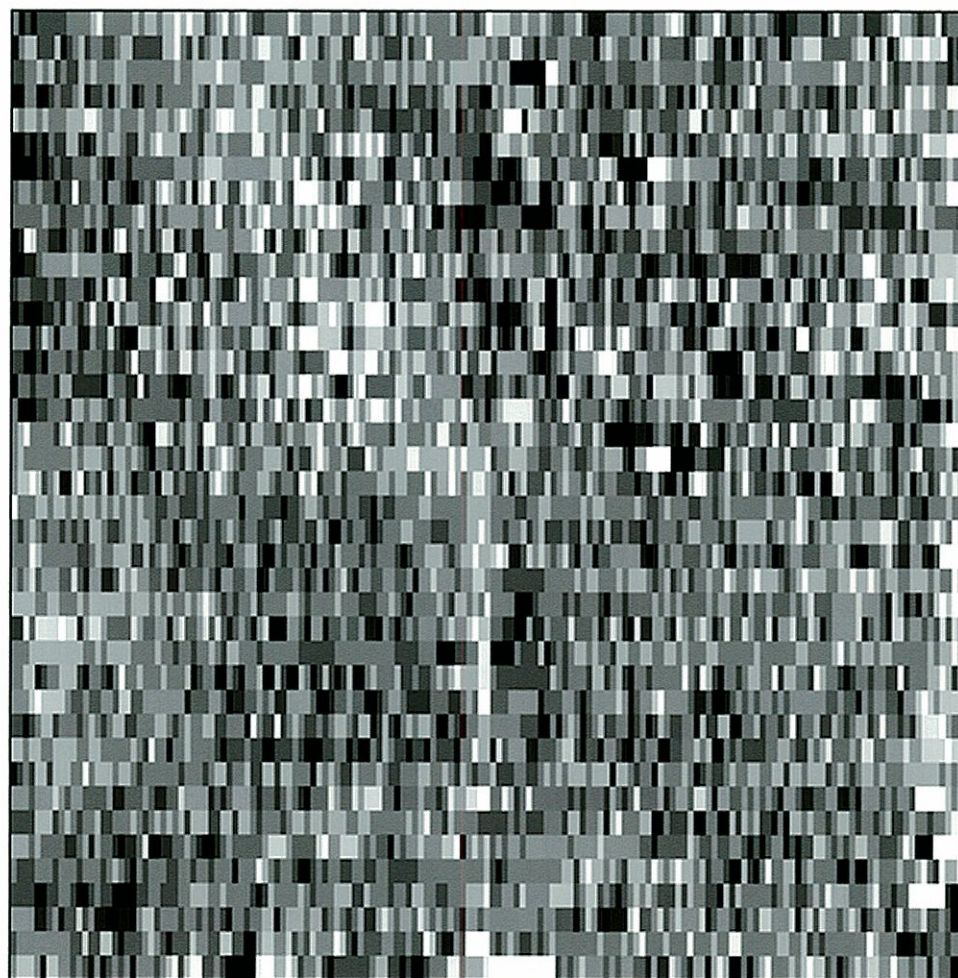
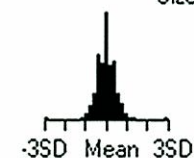


Figure 5: Detail of extended testing showing location of exposed field drains.



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Figure 6: Geophysical survey results.



Plate 01: The townland of Balgeen from the air showing Dardistown Lane to the left foreground, Teeling's farm in the top foreground and the machine cuts within the line of the proposed motorway in the right foreground.



00 86:Balgeen1:CP 4: 01

Plate 02: General view of the motorway corridor to the north showing the machine cuts as slightly raised features within a light snow covering.



00 86:Balgeen1:CP 1:15

Plate 03: View of the outer ring of the machine cuts (F012) to the north.



00 86:Balgeen1:CP 1:16

Plate 04: Close-up view of the machine cuts (F012).



00 86:Balgeen1:CP 1:20

Plate 05: View of the southern section of trench one showing the relationship between the machine cuts (F012) and the sod and topsoil (F001).



Plate 06: View of field drain F008 and field (F004) to the east.



Plate 07: General view of field drain / ditch F010 and truncated modern field drain F005 to the north. The modern test pit F011 is visible in the top right of the picture.



Plate 08: View of the round stone (F009) at the base of the field drain / ditch F010 to the north.



Plate 09: Modern finds 01E0674: 1-3