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FINAL REPORT on the  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION of  
*PREHISTORIC PITS*  
NEWTOWN MONASTERBOICE 5, Co. LOUTH  
NORTHERN MOTORWAY  
GORMANSTON to MONASTERBOICE  
00E0941



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Valerie J. Keeley Ltd  
Archaeological Consultancy  
February 2004

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION of  
*PREHISTORIC PITS*  
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GORMANSTON to MONASTERBOICE  
NORTHERN MOTORWAY  
00E0941



National Roads Design Office			
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24 FEB 2004			
ID	FILE No.		

Project Director: Valerie J. Keeley Ltd  
Site Director: Kieran Campbell

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## **SUMMARY**

This report details the final results of licensed archaeological excavations undertaken at Newtown Monasterboice 5, Co. Louth, on the route of the Northern Motorway, Gormanston to Monasterboice, on behalf of Meath County Council. The excavation was conducted by Kieran Campbell under Licence No. 00E0941, for Valerie J. Keeley Ltd., as part of the archaeological work preceding the construction of the Northern Motorway in Co. Louth. Newtown Monasterboice 5 was identified during licensed archaeological monitoring of topsoil stripping along the route. The site consisted of a linear feature and seven smaller deposits, all of which were severely truncated during topsoil stripping.

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**Plate 2**      Conjoined postholes 009, view looking east.

## INTRODUCTION

This report details the final results of the archaeological excavations undertaken at Newtown Monasterboice 5, Co. Louth, on behalf of Meath County Council. Archaeological monitoring of the initial programme of topsoil stripping preceding the construction of the Northern Motorway was recommended in *Archaeological Assessment, Environmental Impact Study, Northern Motorway, Co. Meath* (Valerie J. Keeley Ltd. 1998, 16). A potential site was identified on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2000 during archaeological monitoring of topsoil stripping conducted by Kieran Campbell, under Licence No. 00E0282, for Valerie J. Keeley Ltd. (2002). The site was excavated the day after its discovery under Licence No. 00E0941, held by Kieran Campbell.

The archaeological brief for the site included the following measures; to fully excavate all archaeological features discovered in the area, to record all archaeological features or deposits that became apparent during excavation, and to compile a report detailing all of the above.

## SITE LOCATION

*Townland:* Newtown Monasterboice  
*Parish:* Monasterboice  
*Barony:* Ferrard  
*County:* Louth  
*NGR:* 304430 280905  
*O.S. 6" Sheet:* Louth 21

The site was located on a new farm access lane being constructed 250m to the west of the motorway route (Fig. 1). The new lane runs north-south for 200m between the existing Knockmountagh Lane, which will be cut by the motorway, and the so-called New Line which runs east-west from the N1 Dublin-Belfast road to Nursery Cross on the R168 Drogheda-Collon road. Knockmountagh Lane runs along the top of a prominent east-west ridge and is shown on Taylor and Skinner's 1778 Map of County Louth as the public road leading west from the village of Newtown Monasterboice

before the construction of the 'New Line' on lower ground north of the ridge. The archaeological deposits were uncovered 34m from the southern end of the farm access lane, and were sited on the summit of the ridge with extensive views for one to two miles over low-lying ground to the north and south (Pl. 1). Other sites uncovered nearby, within the take of the motorway proper, were Newtown Monasterboice 4 (00E0479), 300m to the east, a site with pits of probable prehistoric date, excavated by R.M. Chapple, and *fulachta fiadh* at Newtown Monasterboice 1 and 3 (00E0796), 400-500m downslope to the southeast, excavated by C. Ó Drisceoil.

## EXCAVATION

Initially, a single linear deposit, 1.4m by 0.36m and aligned southeast to northwest, was noted on ground that had already been stripped to subsoil and where the laying of the hardcore for the road-bed was imminent. Archaeological monitoring has been in progress on the motorway route nearby but topsoil removal on the farm access road, detached from the main project, was not monitored as the monitoring archaeologist was not informed of the fact that it was taking place. The deposits were confined to an area measuring 6m (north-south) by 2m (east-west) at the eastern margin of the road-take. In addition to the linear deposit (001), which first drew attention to the site, a further seven smaller deposits (002-008) were found when the area was cleaned down (Fig. 2). All the deposits had been severely truncated during topsoil stripping, by up to 0.15m based on the evidence of the section at the edge of the road. The features, therefore, survived as shallow deposits 0.03-0.07m deep, filling the bases of cuts for postholes or small pits in the subsoil. Context numbers were given to these seven smaller deposits but not to the cuts due to their ephemeral nature. The linear feature (Deposit 001 in Cut 009) was more substantial with a surviving depth of 0.3m.

### *Deposit 001 in Cut 009*

Deposit (001), 1.4m by 0.36m, a soft dark grey silty clay with occasional charcoal inclusions, was revealed as the fill of four conjoined postholes or small pits, excavated to a depth of 0.32m into subsoil (Figs. 3, 4; Pl. 2). A small quantity of burnt bone was recovered towards the base of one of the postholes. The deposit had been truncated, but possibly not as severely as the other small features. The dark fill of the postholes

appeared as one deposit when first exposed. The individual postholes had diameters of 0.27-0.30m and the overall linear feature (009) measured 1.28m by 0.27m and 0.32m deep. The postholes had concave sides, generally undercut, and flat bases.

***Deposit 002***

A soft greyish-brown silty clay with occasional charcoal flecks, 0.55m by 0.35m and less than 0.03m thick, this was a thin deposit on the surface of the subsoil, with no evidence surviving for a cut.

***Deposit 003***

A soft greyish-brown silty clay with occasional charcoal flecks and small stones, this deposit measured 0.2m long and was 0.1m deep. It survived only in the section face at the edge of the road.

***Deposit 004***

A soft greyish-brown silty clay with occasional charcoal flecks, it survived in the section face at the edge of the road, 0.2m north of Deposit 003. It measured 0.18m long and was 0.07m deep in a shallow round-bottomed cut.

***Deposit 005***

A soft dark greyish-brown silty clay with small stones, it lay in a shallow scoop in the subsoil, 0.4m by 0.3m and 0.05m deep.

***Deposit 006***

This deposit filled a cut in subsoil 0.18m in diameter and 0.07m deep, and consisted of a soft dark greyish-brown silty clay with small stones.

***Deposit 007***

A soft dark greyish-brown silty clay with occasional charcoal, this deposit measured 0.14m in diameter and 0.03m deep.

***Deposit 008***

A soft greyish-brown silty clay with occasional charcoal and small stones, it measured 0.16m in diameter and 0.04m deep.

## CONCLUSION

The archaeological investigation at Newtown Monasterboice Site 5 was limited to a very small area and concerned deposits that had been truncated by the road works. No artifacts were recovered but the nature of the fills, with inclusions of burnt bone and charcoal, in addition to the hilltop siting, strongly suggest that the deposits are of a prehistoric nature. With so few features present it is difficult to attempt an interpretation of the site. If some of the features are indeed postholes it is possible that they represent the remains of a structure. Further investigation in the general area would be required before a fuller interpretation of the site could be arrived at. Two of the features were recorded only in the section face and it is clear that the site continues eastwards along the ridge beyond the limit of the road-take. The fields running east from the farm access lane to the motorway are currently in pasture and potentially contain further archaeological deposits. The results of specialist analysis of environmental and burnt bone samples are pending and will be presented as an Appendix.

What specialist  
analysis?

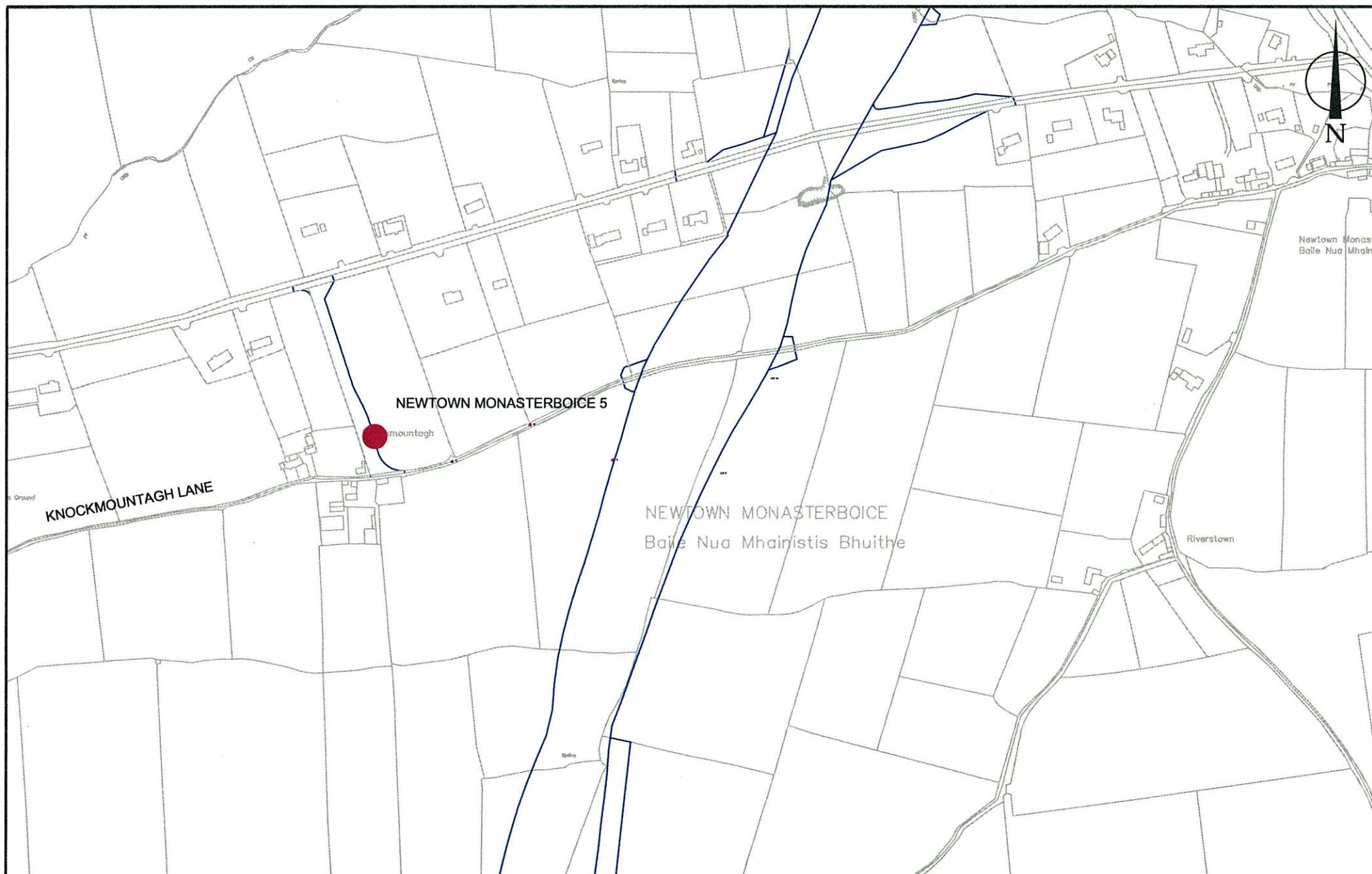
Environmental -  
Burnt bone -

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KEELEY, V.J., 1998, *Archaeological Assessment, Environmental Impact Study, Northern Motorway, Co. Meath*. Report for Meath County Council.

KEELEY, V.J., 2002, *Archaeological Monitoring Report, Northern Motorway, Gormanston to Monasterboice, Cos. Louth & Meath, 00E0282*. Unpublished report by Kieran Campbell for Valerie J. Keeley Ltd.

## **Figures and Plates**




<b>Title</b> NEWTOWN MONASTERBOICE SITE LOCATION ON ROAD	<b>Notes</b>	<b>Job/Exc No.</b> 00E0941	<b>Compiled by</b> DE/BK	<b>CAD reference</b> FIG1,2sitelocations.dwg  <b>Drawing No.</b> FIG 1	<b>Client</b> MEATH COUNTY COUNCIL  <b>Project</b> NORTHERN MOTORWAY, GORMANSTOWN TO MONASTERBOICE	<div> </div> <div> <p><b>Valerie J. Keeley Ltd.</b>            Archaeological Consultancy</p> <p>Brehon House            Castlecomer            Co. Kilkenny.</p> <p>Tel: 056-40236            Fax: 056-40237            vjkeeley@compuserve.com</p> </div>
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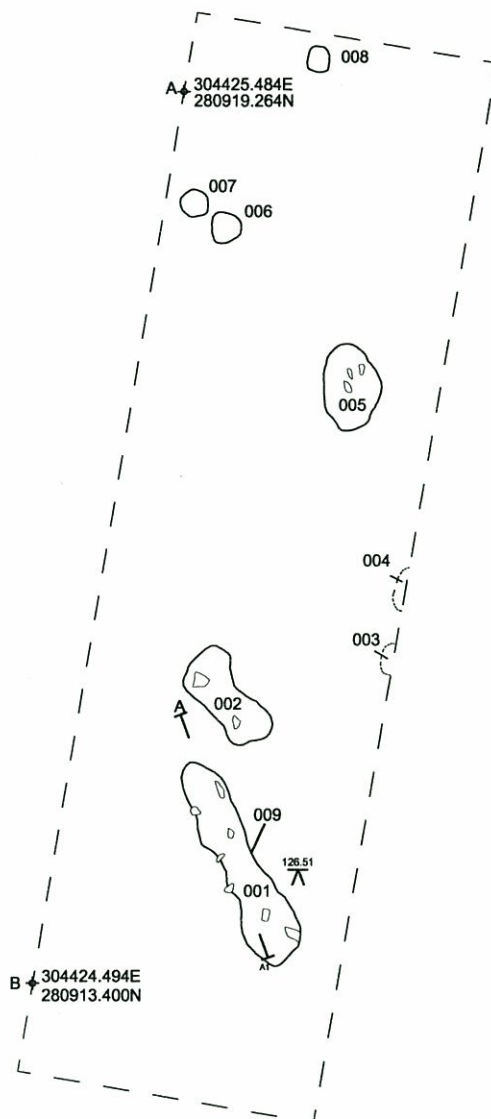
Tullyallen 5



Well

Obelisk Bridge

<b>Title</b> TULLYALLEN 5 SITE LOCATION AND EXTENTS	<b>Notes</b>	<b>Job/Exc No.</b> 00E0941	<b>Compiled by</b> DE/BK	<b>CAD reference</b> FIG1,2sitelocations.dwg	<b>Client</b> MEATH COUNTY COUNCIL	 <div> <b>Valerie J. Keeley Ltd.</b>  <i>Archaeological Consultancy</i> </div> <div>           Brehon House            Castleoomer            Co. Kilkenny.         </div> <div>           Tel: 056-40236            Fax: 056-40237            vjkeeleey@compuserve.com         </div>
		<b>Date</b>	<b>Scale</b> 1:1500	<b>Drawing No.</b> FIG 2	<b>Project</b> NORTHERN MOTORWAY, GORMANSTOWN TO MONASTERBOICE	



**Title**  
NEWTOWN MONASTERBOICE 5  
PRE-EX SITE PLAN

**Notes**

**Job/Exc No.**  
00E0941

**Compiled by**  
JM

**CAD reference**  
Fig2.dwg

**Date**  
18/01/02

**Scale**  
1:50

**Drawing No.**  
Fig 2

**Client**  
Meath County Council

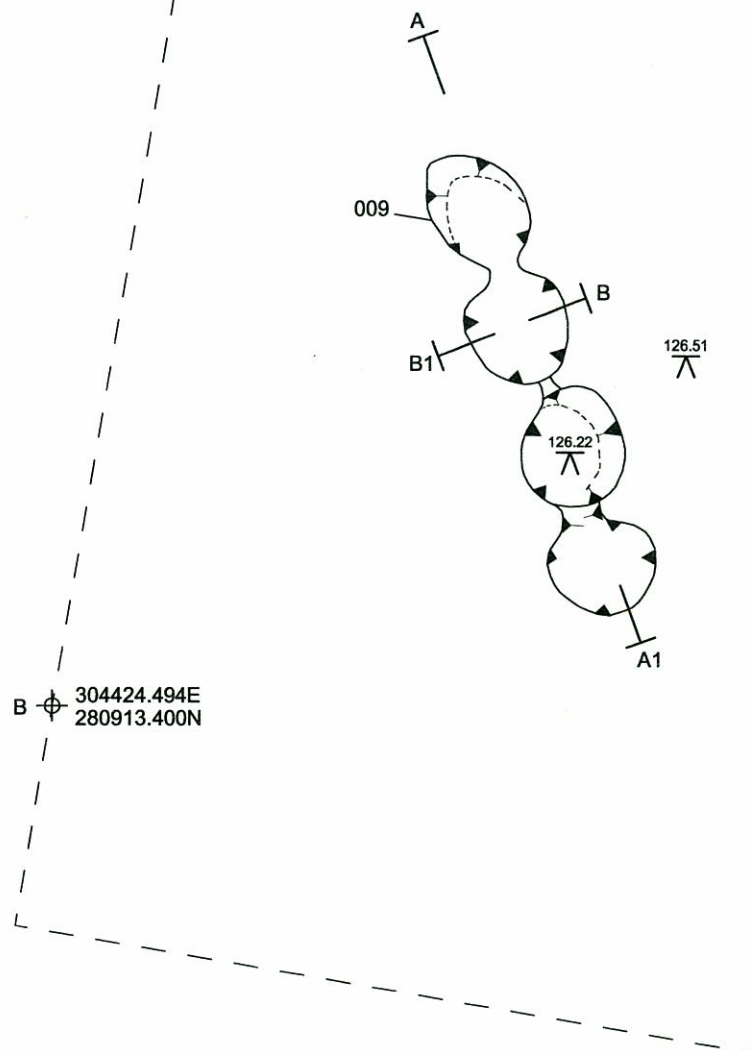
**Project**  
Northern Motorway, Gormanstown to Monasterboice



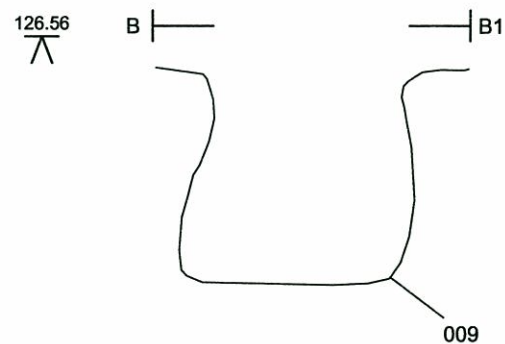
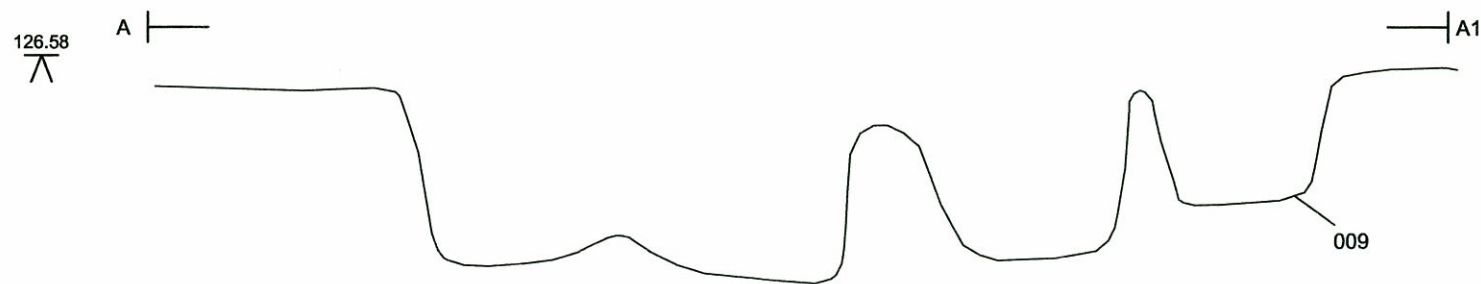
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<b>Title</b> NEWTOWN MONASTERBOICE 5 POST-EX. PLAN OF 009	<b>Notes</b>	<b>Job/Exc No.</b> 00E0941	<b>Compiled by</b> JM	<b>CAD reference</b> Fig3.dwg	<b>Client</b> Meath County Council	<div> </div> <div> <b>Valerie J. Keeley Ltd.</b>  <i>Archaeological Consultancy</i>            Brehon House            Castlecomer            Co. Kilkenny.            Tel: (+353) 056 4440236            Fax: (+353) 056 4440237            email: vjk@vjk.ie         </div>
		<b>Date</b> 18/01/02	<b>Scale</b> 1:20	<b>Drawing No.</b> Fig 3	<b>Project</b> Northern Motorway, Gormanstown to Monasterboice	



<b>Title</b> NEWTOWN MONASTERBOICE 5 PROFILES OF 009	<b>Notes</b>	<b>Job/Exc No.</b> 00E0941	<b>Compiled by</b> JM	<b>CAD reference</b> Fig4.dwg	<b>Client</b> Meath County Council	 <b>Valerie J. Keeley Ltd.</b> Archaeological Consultancy Brehon House Castlecomer Co. Kilkenny.	Tel: (+353) 056 4440236 Fax: (+353) 056 4440237 email: vjk@vjk.ie
		<b>Date</b> 18/01/02	<b>Scale</b> 1:10	<b>Drawing No.</b> Fig 4	<b>Project</b> Northern Motorway, Gormanstown to Monasterboice		



**Plate 1** Site location on a farm access lane, view looking north. Monasterboice Round Tower is on the horizon



**Plate 2** Conjoined postholes 009, view looking east.