

## 5. The role of the Project Archaeologist and the Code of Practice

*Ken Hanley*



*Aerial view of extensive test trenching on the N22 Ballincollig Bypass (Cork County Council National Roads Design Office)*

### **Introduction**

The nature of archaeological fieldwork has changed dramatically over the last two decades. This is immediately apparent in the near total eclipse of ‘research’ excavations by ‘pre-development’ excavations. The uneven distribution of archaeological work, favouring hotspots of new roads and housing, is another indication of development as the driving force behind current archaeological fieldwork. Despite a wider distribution than in previous years, licensed testing or full excavation in the 1990s continued to occur with greatest frequency in urban areas and their rural hinterlands (for a database of Irish excavation summaries see <http://www.excavations.ie>). Unprecedented growth in development has necessitated a refinement of the legislation governing issues of heritage and the combination of increased development and tightened legislation has brought the work of archaeology and engineering inextricably together.

A major roads development programme is projected by the government in the National Development Plan 2000–2006 (NDP 2000). This will be managed by the National Roads Authority (NRA). It involves the development of approximately 730 km of major inter-urban routes (including the M50), 383 km of national primary routes in the Border/North-West region, 299 km along a new Western Corridor (via Sligo and Limerick ultimately to Rosslare), and 339 km in the South and East region. This intensive and ambitious roads development programme aimed at the outset for a rapid delivery time of 3.5 years for each scheme, from initial planning stage to completion of construction works.

The NRA fully accepts its legislative responsibilities where heritage is concerned, but it has experienced difficulties in the past in how resources were spent on archaeology in its roads programme and, in particular, a perceived lack of control in the management of archaeological work during construction. This was particularly acute in instances where archaeological work led to substantial delays and subsequent compensation claims by the main contractor for the construction of the road.

In June 2000 a Code of Practice was agreed between the NRA and the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands. This paper will outline the role of the Project Archaeologist as defined by the Code and its application at each stage of a road project.

### **The Code of Practice**

The aim of the Code is to ‘help safeguard our archaeological heritage as the government embarks on a major programme of road developments as part of the National Development Plan 2000–2006’ (NRA & DAHGI 2000, 1). It provides a framework, within existing legislation and policies, to enable the NRA to honour its commitments within the National Development Plan, while carrying out appropriate archaeological mitigation with regard to a set of principles and actions agreed with the Minister.

The Code is guided by twelve agreed principles which act as parameters for the agreement and underline the need for a partnership approach between the NRA and the Minister. The baseline principles are the NRA’s responsibility to secure the provision of a safe and efficient network of national roads, and the Minister’s responsibility to protect the archaeological heritage. Specifically highlighted is the mutual benefit and importance of ‘site avoidance’, but the Code recognises that the national roads programme may still have considerable archaeological implications and acknowledges that these must be addressed. The NRA accepts that it will finance archaeological mitigation on the basis of the ‘polluter pays’ principle. The Code acknowledges the need for a balanced and cost-effective approach to archaeological mitigation given a) the aim to reduce project time-scales to a maximum of 3.5 years; b) the need to adhere to project deadlines; and c) the need for an acceptable level of ‘preservation by record’ of archaeological sites. Learning from difficulties in the past, it was agreed that mitigatory planning should be carried out at the earliest opportunity in the project life-cycle; that development should not be used to prospect for archaeological sites (i.e. outwith the area to be affected by a road); and that every possible effort should be made to ensure that appropriate archaeological investigation would be carried out between route identification and the commencement of road construction. Finally, it was agreed that the Code should be the subject of regular reviews.

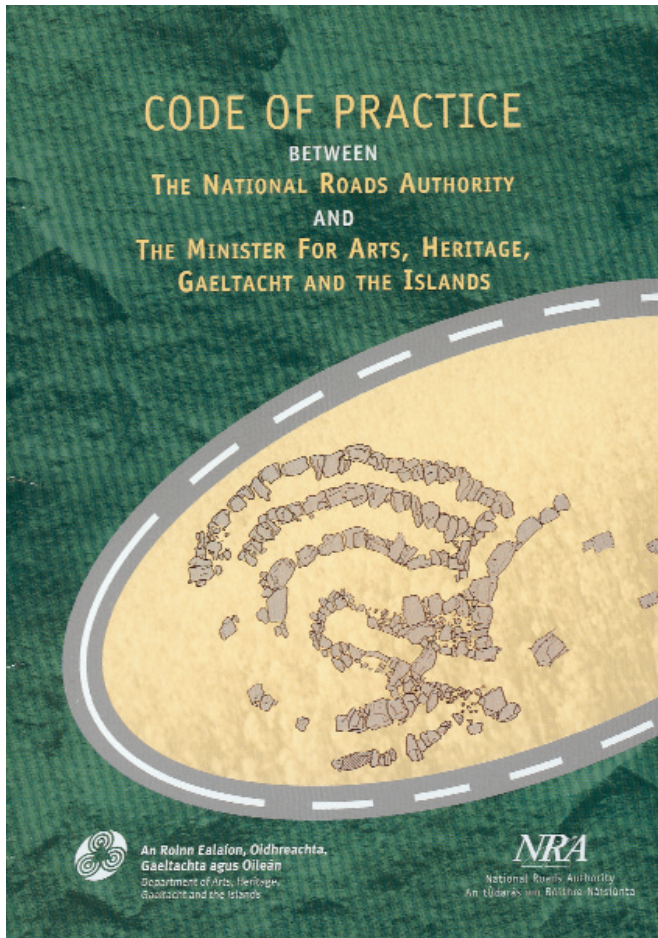
Having set out their respective stalls, the NRA and the Minister agreed a series of actions. The NRA agreed to ensure the appointment of Project Archaeologists, as full members of the Road Project Teams. The principal duties of the Project Archaeologists would be to assess archaeological implications at route selection stage and to oversee the smooth running of all subsequent archaeological work. The NRA also agreed to preserve by record all archaeological sites known to be threatened by proposed construction works and any other site of an agreed importance that might be discovered during construction works.

From the archaeological perspective, the Minister agreed to re-assess current practices. To this end, the time required by Dúchas the Heritage Service to process archaeological licence applications for excavations on road schemes would be reduced from three weeks to two weeks. For on-site emergency cases a further reduction from two weeks to 48 hours was agreed. These measures would enable archaeological excavations to commence earlier on any one site, thereby reducing potential delays to construction. The Minister also promised to agree with the Project Archaeologist, through Dúchas, appropriate programmes for archaeological monitoring and excavation; to introduce flexibility in the number of licences required during excavation works (reducing the number of licences required for groups of sites/features in close proximity or which form part of a discrete complex); to set up a high level review mechanism to deal with decisions on licence applications; and to agree criteria regarding the extent of archaeological investigations required. The Minister also agreed to avail of the existing project consultation procedures operated by the local authorities and the NRA and to arrange for a review of post-excavation reporting.

### **Role of the Project Archaeologist**

Since the Code of Practice was agreed, Project Archaeologists have been employed by the local authorities that host National Roads Design Offices throughout the country. (See 'Directory of NRA archaeologists', below, for details.) The Project Archaeologist is defined as the local authority employee who ensures that all archaeological elements of a national road project are managed effectively and in line with the principles and actions agreed in the Code. The Project Archaeologist's key areas of responsibility are to:

- work with consultant engineers at route selection (pre-planning) stage
- advise on archaeological implications of route selection and ensure minimal impact on known archaeological sites or areas of significant potential
- prepare a specification for the Consultant Archaeologist at Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) stage and ensure that the EIA and the mitigations recommended by this conform with best practice and policies as determined by Dúchas
- determine the level of archaeological excavations required for the scheme to progress, based on guidelines issued by Dúchas



*Code of Practice between the National Roads Authority and the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and Islands*

- ensure that mitigations are carried out satisfactorily
- certify all relevant costs
- and ensure that reports are of the highest standard.

The Code recognises the key relationship between the Project Archaeologist and an archaeological excavation director contracted for the road scheme, who it identifies as the ‘Consultant Archaeologist (Licence Holder)’ (NRA & DAHGI 2000, 7). The Code also defines their respective responsibilities in the conduct of an excavation. The Project Archaeologist will oversee the conduct of the excavation and ensure that the work is conducted in accordance with an agreed method statement and within agreed time-scales. The Consultant Archaeologist will be responsible for the conduct of the excavation, as per the method statement, and should comply with any reasonable instructions from the Project Archaeologist. The Code specifies that both the Project Archaeologist and the Consultant Archaeologist should confer in drafting the method statement and should ensure that licence applications are in order prior to submission, and that both will share responsibility for ensuring that good standards of excavation are maintained.

## **Role of the Project Archaeologist in operation**

The application of the Code has commenced in earnest. To date the NRA has appointed fourteen Project Archaeologists at various National Roads Design Offices throughout the country. In addition, two archaeologists have been appointed to the NRA headquarters at St Martin's House, in Dublin, to oversee the archaeological aspects of the schemes, and to develop a coherent and consistent approach in this. The Project Archaeologists are involved in every stage of the road project, as summarised below.

- At Constraints Study stage, the Project Archaeologist ensures that all archaeological features (known or potential) that may act as constraints on route selection are identified and afforded full weighting when route options are being assigned.
- At Route Selection stage the Project Archaeologist again ensures that all archaeological features potentially affected by route options are identified; that features which can be considered key constraints are highlighted; that the predicted impacts of each route option are assessed and compared with the impacts of the other options.
- Once a preferred route has emerged the Project Archaeologist must oversee the archaeological component of the Environmental Impact Assessment. At this stage the aim is to assess likely significant impacts on the archaeological heritage and propose adequate mitigations where these impacts cannot be avoided by the design of the scheme. In the course of this a wide range of site detection methods may be employed.
- Prior to construction, the Project Archaeologist helps to prepare specifications for the archaeological services contract and ensures that due attention is given to best practice and value for money. S/he will then oversee the subsequent programme of archaeological testing, monitoring and full excavation.
- On completion of the fieldwork phase of this work, the Project Archaeologist oversees all post-excavation analysis, reporting and publication.

In summary, during the life-cycle of a national road scheme the Project Archaeologist must work closely with the Road Project Team and Consultant Archaeologists, draw up specifications for each archaeological component of the project, and certify all related costs.

## **Adjusting to the Code**

The application of the *Code of Practice* on all active national road schemes in recent months has already introduced some new working practices for all concerned. The NRA, via the local authorities, has assigned Project Archaeologists to their Road Project Teams. These teams now incorporate sensitivity to the archaeological heritage in each stage of their

decision-making processes. They have fully accepted their responsibilities regarding the need for a balanced and cost-effective approach to archaeological mitigation. They recognise the differences in approach that may be required for archaeological mitigation in a variety of circumstances and are committed to making all reasonable allowances to ensure that mitigation needs are adequately addressed, while adhering to agreed project deadlines and time-scales.

The Minister, through Dúchas the Heritage Service, has shortened the processing time for archaeological licence applications. Dúchas has accepted the role and responsibilities of the Project Archaeologist, as defined by the Code, has engaged with Project Archaeologists in agreeing programmes of archaeological mitigation, and has introduced some flexibility in terms of the numbers of licences required for testing and excavation programmes.

Archaeologists in the private sector have also had to make adjustments in response to the Code. This is particularly true in relation to the management of archaeological excavations. Project Archaeologists represent the client (i.e. the local authority in tandem with the NRA) but also have a limited degree of authority delegated by Dúchas. Thus their responsibilities include overseeing the conduct of all archaeological excavations and the certification of all costs. Consultant Archaeologists have had to adapt to the working practices introduced by Project Archaeologists to fulfil these responsibilities. These include more intensive liaison, close review of method statements and reports, and continuous critical review of the strategy and methods applied to each project. These new practices aim to optimise the results of archaeological investigation and to achieve best value for money on behalf of the client and, by extension, the public.

### **Some myths dispelled**

The application of the *Code of Practice* may be seen as a positive development for all concerned. It firmly recognises the need to protect our archaeological heritage on one hand while acknowledging the need for a safe and efficient network of national roads on the other. It also affirms that these aims need not be mutually exclusive.

The publication of the Code and, more particularly, the appointment of Project Archaeologists, have generated much interest amongst those in public sector archaeology, private sector archaeology and members of the engineering profession involved in road schemes. As with any initiative of this sort, however, there have been some early misconceptions about the implications of the Code. To clear the air some prevalent myths are addressed here.

#### *Myth No. 1: all our problems are solved by the Code*

The Code of Practice is a framework document only — in effect a working model. Teething problems are expected and a settling period is ongoing.

#### *Myth No. 2: the Code interferes unnecessarily with established archaeological practice*

The application of the Code has forced us to question our working practices. This means shining bright lights on areas where money was being wasted and where work practices have been inefficient, unproductive or unimaginative. This is not mere interference but an attempt to achieve improvements. Many of the newly introduced practices have been



*Detailed recording of features on the N22 Ballincollig Bypass (Cork County Council National Roads Design Office)*

welcomed, both by archaeologists, as improvements to professional standards, and by engineers, as reductions in archaeological risk during road projects.

*Myth No. 3: Project Archaeologists have usurped Consultant Archaeologists*

There has been some confusion regarding the authority of the Project Archaeologists to co-write and/or amend method statements. In the past the local authorities were not privy to the method statements agreed between the Consultant Archaeologist and the licensing authorities — principally Dúchas the Heritage Service and also the National Museum of Ireland. Inevitably, this led to misunderstandings between the archaeologist and the local authority, as client. Method statements co-produced by the Consultant Archaeologist and Project Archaeologist should mend this problem. The Code clearly states that changes to the method statement can only be instructed by the Project Archaeologist in compliance with guidelines issued by Dúchas. In practice, it is likely that changes will only be made where the need is obvious. Other instructions by the Project Archaeologist to the Consultant Archaeologist will normally involve issues of efficiency. Partnership and common sense should prevail.

*Myth No. 4: archaeology will become a lower priority in road schemes*

The principal aim of the Project Archaeologists will be to spend more time and resources at the earlier design stages of each road project so that costs incurred at the latter end of the project will be lowered exponentially. This strategy will involve a greater range of research and site detection methods than hitherto used during the Constraints Study, Route Selection, Environmental Impact Assessment and subsequent pre-construction stages. It will involve a greater use of geophysics, aerial reconnaissance, underwater archaeological assessment and more intensive testing strategies. It will involve more focused excavation and

environmental sampling strategies. It will strive to eliminate inefficient work practices and compensation claims arising from delays to construction. It will also involve streamlining and close management of post-excavation analyses and reporting. Finally, it will aim to ensure that all significant results of excavation and analysis are published, in some form, for the benefit of archaeologists and the general public.

*Myth No. 5: limitless money is available for archaeological work on road schemes*

This is a popular myth yet is grossly untrue. Financial accountability and transparency will apply to all archaeological contracts. The procurement of archaeological contracts will also be more competitive. All means of achieving value for money in the conduct of archaeological work for national road schemes must be examined.

*Myth No. 6: it's 'us and them' all over again*

This is another popular myth. The *Code of Practice* forces us to acknowledge the problems archaeology can create for the delivery of a new road and *vice versa*. The old 'us and them' syndrome persists but is slowly beginning to break down and there is an emerging pattern of new relationships. The appointment of city or county archaeologists, heritage officers, conservation officers and national roads project archaeologists by numbers of local authorities has greatly helped in this regard, as archaeologists now encounter each other quite often as client and contractor. Furthermore, engineers and archaeologists work together in the planning and design stages of every road project, to minimise the impact of the road on the cultural landscape and, reciprocally, to evaluate archaeological risks in the construction programme. Where the positions of archaeologist and engineer potentially become polarised is during the archaeological resolution stage, when excavations are got underway preceding or during road construction. At this point the role of the Project Archaeologists is crucial in ensuring that archaeological problems are resolved within agreed time-scales and budgets. At post-excavation stage it is in the interests both of the local authority and the archaeologist to ensure that all data gathered in the course of fieldwork is analysed, reported and presented to the public as early as possible. At the end of any road project all parties have much to celebrate: the delivery of a safe and efficient road scheme within an agreed time-scale, coupled with analysis and reporting on the new archaeological discoveries that were made.

## **Conclusion**

The appointment of Project Archaeologists is a clear and unambiguous acknowledgement that our cultural heritage is a key consideration in all major road projects. The *Code of Practice* is implicitly a framework document. Its inbuilt flexibility allows the NRA and the archaeological community to find common ground. On this common ground the Project Archaeologist acts as a facilitator, promoting the partnership approach advocated by the Code. There is still much work to be done. Project Archaeologists are working hard with their counterparts in both private and public sector archaeology, as well as with their newfound colleagues in the engineering profession, to assess current work practices, to address existing difficulties, and to find a formula for the smooth running of the archaeological components of national roads projects in Ireland.