1. Travels through time

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Illus. 1—Lough Lanagh, County Mayo, on the route of the proposed N5 Castlebar–Westport Road Scheme. Route selection for national road schemes threads a way between human and natural features in an ancient landscape (Margaret Gowen & Co. Ltd)

Background

The archaeology profession in Ireland is changing in an attempt to balance the new realities of a contemporary Ireland taking daily shape within an ancient landscape. In the 1990s, archaeology in Ireland was going through a crisis. Emerging from the doldrums of the straitened 1980s, archaeological companies were few and far between, and work in archaeology was largely determined by or carried out by the State. The economic boom of the 1990s saw a sea change in this situation. The Government's tax incentive programmes saw development occurring in the depressed inner cities, which traditionally had evolved around and within medieval town cores. In this environment infrastructure was badly needed to cope with the needs of an accelerated economy. The national road building programme became a major priority for the State.

In the 1990s, there was little or no advance archaeological testing of road schemes. Known archaeological sites were avoided where possible. Archaeologists were employed to

monitor the large earth-moving machines and then to excavate sites found during the road construction process. Construction then continued all around the areas cordoned off for the archaeological work to proceed. This in retrospect can be seen to have been placing rescue excavations on road schemes under unacceptable pressures.

Changing techniques

Archaeological techniques in relation to road construction changed with the employment of Project Archaeologists in 2001 after the launch of the *Code of Practice between the National Roads Authority and the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands* in 2000 (NRA and DAHGI 2000). The National Roads Authority (NRA) now has properly thought out archaeological strategies devised by archaeologists. These archaeological strategies have involved more comprehensive archaeological input into the planning process and also the development of assessment strategies such as geophysics and test-trenching of known sites but also, more importantly, these strategies are applied in detecting previously unknown archaeological sites. It is now standard practice to carry out some level of archaeological assessment during the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) stage of a road scheme but also to comprehensively test-trench the entire route of a road scheme once the road has been approved by An Bord Pleanála. The work of the Project Archaeologist under the Code of Practice and the sorts of assessment techniques that have been evolving on recent national road schemes are described in more detail in the published proceedings of two previous seminars organised by the NRA in 2002 (O'Sullivan 2003).

Nowhere else in Europe is advance archaeological work for major public developments being carried out on such a scale. The purpose of the testing is to identify previously unknown archaeological sites and to allow ample time and resources to fully excavate these sites in advance of the main contractor for construction of the road being on site. The use of geophysical survey, which was once largely the preserve of research projects in the academic sphere, is now becoming more and more common on national road schemes. Different types of geophysics are employed, depending on the landscape potential and soil conditions. Geophysics is a useful tool in the assessment process but should not be viewed in isolation. The use of geophysics coupled with invasive testing strategies can provide the optimum testing regime to identify the archaeological resource in advance of excavation. (The investigation of a medieval hilltop enclosure at Johnstown, County Meath, as described below, is an outstanding example of early discovery by combined geophysics and test excavations.) It is the responsible way to identify previously unknown archaeological sites and monuments. This assessment regime must be developed to ensure that the landscape is being interrogated in a way that will benefit the archaeological record and can inform well thought-out strategies for the mitigation of impacts upon the archaeology of the area affected by a road scheme and its environs.

Previously unknown archaeological sites

Through this advance-testing programme we have now located many important archaeological sites, which have often survived in levelled or truncated form as a group of

buried features with little or no visible surface expression. The excavation of these sites, and the publication of the results, will add greatly to our knowledge of Ireland's past. The national road building programme has given archaeologists and, through our publications and seminars, the general public a unique and immeasurable opportunity to enhance our knowledge of the past. The following is a selection from among the significant archaeological sites discovered in recent years by archaeologists working on national road schemes. From new insights into the Bronze Age in County Tipperary, to late Iron Age milling complexes and Viking Age sites in County Waterford, to early medieval settlement sites in County Meath, we are now helping to rewrite the archaeology of prehistoric and historic Ireland.

The multi-period archaeological complex at Magheraboy, County Sligo, was discovered as part of the archaeological work carried out in advance of the construction of the N4 Sligo Inner Relief Road. The sites excavated by Archaeological Consultancy Service Ltd were not visible in the landscape (MacDonagh, this volume). The Neolithic causewayed enclosure, Iron Age settlement evidence and the early medieval ringfort, located on the ridge at Magheraboy, are all testament to a hidden archaeological landscape. The discovery and excavation of the 6000-year-old causewayed enclosure is perhaps one of the most important finds in Irish archaeology in recent years (Danaher 2004). The interpretation of the recorded information and the proposed publication will add immensely to our knowledge of the Neolithic period in Ireland.

Likewise the excavation of Neolithic houses in Granny townland by Joanne Hughes for Headland Archaeology Ltd as part of the N25 Waterford City Bypass scheme has raised questions in relation to the typology and structure of Neolithic houses in Ireland. This site, again, was only found through the advance testing. The identification of a new form of Neolithic pottery at this site with similarities to pottery in south-west Britain reveals possible long distance contacts across the Irish Sea (Hughes, this volume).

The site at Johnstown, County Meath, excavated by Linda Clarke for Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd as part of the advance archaeological works on the M4 Kilcock–Enfield–Kinnegad scheme, again had no surface expression (Clarke 2002). Archaeologists from Valerie J Keeley Ltd identified the site during the preparation of the EIS. Locally the site was known as a *cillín* (i.e. a traditional burial ground for unbaptised infants). Advance geophysical testing of the site indicated a large double-ditched enclosure. Excavations revealed three enclosures and two burial grounds all dating to the medieval period. The site was roughly 80 m in diameter. There was no settlement evidence on the site and Linda Fibiger's paper (this volume) describes the extensive skeletal remains which were uncovered during this project. From a locally known *cillín* site, the excavations at Johnstown revealed significant ritual, funerary and settlement evidence from the medieval period.

Perhaps the most noteworthy site to be discovered in recent years is the site at Woodstown, County Waterford, as part of the advance archaeological testing programme for the N25 Waterford City Bypass scheme. This site was tested and focused excavation was carried out by Ian Russell of Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd (O'Brien and Russell 2004; and this volume). Again no surface expression of the site was visible above ground. Despite this, the site is one of immense archaeological importance in that it may cover the period of the early Viking invasions and may provide a link with the development of urbanism. Its importance lies not only in its Viking occupation and associated finds but also in its role as an early Irish settlement that was subsequently settled by the Vikings, who

appear to have abruptly left the site around the mid 11th century. The archaeology of the site is explained in more detail in the papers by Richard O'Brien and Ian Russell (this volume), and Siobhán McNamara (this volume).

From a landscape viewpoint the archaeological site at Woodstown is also of great importance. It is bordered to the north by the River Suir and to the west by a wetland area approximately one hectare in extent. The site of Woodstown extends a maximum *c*. 60 m outside the landtake for the road. Geophysical survey has indicated where the extent of the site may lie to the south of the River Suir.

One of the questions to be answered is why the site at Woodstown is situated in this location? Is it because of the 'marsh area' bordering the site to the west, which would have offered a natural defence? Is it because the existing early medieval enclosed site, with its well-established craft industry and defences was the attraction? A vertical mill site excavated by Donald Murphy of Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd in Killoteran (also as part of the N25 Waterford City Bypass) is perhaps linked to the early medieval phase of occupation at Woodstown. Killoteran well and church site and the Old Court ringfort are also located close to Woodstown. The foundation of Waterford City in the 10th century has been well documented (Hurley *et al*. 1997). Waterford City lies a further 6 km downstream along the line of the River Suir. Is it possible that Woodstown ceased to be inhabited at the same time as Waterford grew to prominence, or is it possible that the two sites coexisted for a time? Only further excavation and research will answer these questions.

The above sites are all examples of extensive archaeological monuments, largely lacking a tangible presence above ground. Their presence is often long forgotten. Their place in the landscape has been superseded by later developments, such as field clearance, intensive agriculture and the spread of new settlements. The advance archaeological works for the roads programme have rediscovered these sites and their excavation, interpretation and publication will add greatly to the archaeological record.

Some sites affected by the roads programme have only indirect evidence for their existence. The significance of this evidence only becomes apparent once the site is excavated. A case in point is that of the moated site at Coolamurry, excavated by Grace Fegan, of Valerie J Keeley Ltd, as part of the advanced archaeological programme for the N30 Jamestown to Moneytucker scheme (Fegan, this volume). An acute bend in the existing road indicated a potential archaeological site that had been avoided in the past when the route was first established. This visible anomaly in the road coupled with an unusual arrangement of field boundaries and local knowledge, pinpointed the site as one of major archaeological potential. Investigations and further excavations revealed the site to be a defended settlement site dating to the medieval period.

Sites within the landscape

All of the sites mentioned above and indeed most of the sites published in these proceedings were not previously known archaeological sites. They were not identified in the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) maps, maintained by the National Monuments Service of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. They are new sites to the archaeological record, only rediscovered through the advance archaeolological works associated with the national road building programme.

Illus. 2—An early medieval enclosure at Coonagh West, County Limerick, being excavated as part of the pre-construction archaeological works on the Limerick Southern Ring Road Phase II. The enclosure was discovered during the testing of the route and backfilled test-trenches are visible in the adjacent fields (TVAS Ireland Ltd)

As with all sites, they should not be viewed in isolation. They form part of a wider archaeological landscape that largely lies hidden beneath the ground with little or no surface expression. The landscape of the Hill of Tara and the Hill of Skryne and the intervening valley comes immediately to mind, as it has lately been the subject of much public debate and associated media attention. The question is to realistically define valid criteria for assigning spatial and temporal limits to an archaeological landscape. Where landscapes are described as archaeological, literary or historic is it possible or viable to define characterisations for these landscapes that can fit easily into the 21st century? If we are to assign significance to archaeological or historic landscapes what do we include or omit? Is the early modern demesne as important as a group of prehistoric monuments? While prehistoric monuments and early medieval enclosures may form part of the same spatial landscape they may be culturally and temporally separate.

Today archaeology in Ireland is inextricably linked with the development process. It is crucial therefore that the concept of archaeological and historic landscapes are developed and included in State policy and decision making. It is important that such landscapes are defined so that they may inform the planning process and the review of local authority development plans, including especially land zoning. Landscapes in Ireland are multi-layered, comprising a myriad of spatial and temporal elements. The expert may be able to discern the Georgian city from the medieval, Victorian or 21st century elements or the

prehistoric rural landscape from the historic and modern landscapes. However, none of these landscapes exists in aspic. The challenge is to develop meaningful criteria in defining these landscapes and their extents while recognising that these landscapes are ever changing and require careful management.

Included in this debate should be the validity of certain aspects of the landscape. Is it accepted that a landscape may be living? Does this validity only pertain to the archaeological or historic aspects of that landscape? Does the visibility of monuments and between monuments in the landscape form the basis of relationships and interrelationships? Is the cut-off point to be in relation to new roads, housing or will the cut-off point be the 19th century, or 18th century, or 17th century? These are pressing issues that must be addressed if archaeological landscapes are to have more than an academic or research interest in today's Ireland.

Development-led archaeology and research

The NRA's archaeological policy follows that of the State's as outlined in *Frameworks and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage* (DAHGI 1999). The archaeological policy of the State in relation to development is threefold. The preferred option for a development is to avoid any previously known archaeological site, where possible. Where avoidance is not possible, preservation *in situ* by design change to a development is preferred. Where neither of these options is achievable, then the archaeological excavation and recording of the site is required. However, a new road cutting through any landscape will have an affect on that landscape. Previously unknown sites will be identified as part of the planning process or revealed as part of the testing phases of road schemes. None of these sites can be viewed in isolation. From an archaeological perspective the new road is providing an arbitrary record of the archaeological sites in the landscape it traverses. Their discovery is largely random. Their archaeological excavation, interpretation and publication as isolated features are useful. However, the development of an Archaeological Research Framework for a scheme that sought an understanding of these excavated sites, not in isolation, but in a wider context, would be of more benefit to the archaeological record and would ultimately be of more benefit to all those who have a use for that record, whether amateur or professional, public or private sector.

In Dr Michael Ryan's Presidential Address to the Royal Irish Academy (February 2005), he pointed out that one of the most interesting results of the roads programme is that it has provided archaeological transects through the Irish landscape, providing evidence of new site types and juxtapositions of sites hitherto unimagined by the archaeological profession. What is being generated is largely a random sample of previously unknown archaeological sites. In designing any Archaeological Research Framework it is imperative that this opportunity to understand the unexpected is not limited or lost. No Archaeological Research Framework should concern itself solely with pre-existing questions; otherwise potentially new and exciting information may be overlooked. Advances in archaeology are often made by those examining new questions or confronted by unexpected evidence.

It may be suggested that the development and application of Archaeological Research Frameworks for road schemes is untenable as the areas excavated are not chosen for archaeological purposes and do not constitute a purposeful sample of the landscape. This,

however, is short sighted. All new roads being built on 'green field' routes will try to work within the existing topography where possible. The road designers will try to avoid not only known archaeological sites (RMPs), Special Areas of Conservation and residential areas but also low-lying areas, boggy or wetland areas, and rugged or upland terrain, so that cognisance of existing topography is taken, albeit often for non-archaeological reasons. Hence, there is a potential bias towards particular landscape types, which may lead to a similar bias in site types uncovered. Such bias must be factored into any future Archaeological Research Framework.

Future prospects

The road building programme under the National Development Plan is set to continue for a number of years. This level of development will put more and more pressure on the fragile archaeological resource. It is imperative that techniques of detection, excavation and analysis are developed to ensure ample resourcing for the archaeological challenges that will continue to arise on national road schemes.

In the physical sense there will be a further extension to the archaeological record. Post-excavation designs and techniques are important to ensure that maximum information is attained and information delivered to the archaeology profession and the general public. The NRA is dedicated to the dissemination of information whether through publication, the Internet, or regional and national seminars and other events.

It is proposed to develop tailored Archaeological Research Frameworks for future road schemes. There is currently an overarching archaeological research design for the M3 Clonee to North of Kells scheme. The aims of the M3 Archaeological Research Framework are to place the newly uncovered archaeological data into its archaeological, palaeoenvironmental and historical context, and to maximise the knowledge creation from the information generated through wide dissemination. Meath County Council and the NRA has developed the Archaeological Research Framework in partnership with the archaeological consultancies carrying out the fieldwork on the scheme and those appointed to complete the work. The Archaeological Research Framework will be further developed and implemented under the guidance of a senior archaeological scholar who is monitoring its progress and providing advice at regular intervals.

The NRA is also funding a post-doctoral Newman Scholarship Programme in Landscape Archaeology in University College Dublin. The purpose of the current fellowship is to inform the NRA's archaeological policy and to feed into the development of archaeological landscape studies in Ireland. The project has two main research foci: to assess the effectiveness of the Authority's archaeological policies in providing knowledge about Ireland's past through its archaeological heritage, and to assess the character and significance of the wider archaeological landscapes impacted on by past, present and future NRA road projects. It is hoped that this work will begin by late 2005.

Archaeological research designs coupled with development-led archaeological excavations will make interesting bedfellows. However, the challenge for all concerned is to ensure this becomes a fruitful union.