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Date: March 2008

Client: Offaly County Council

Project code: NTB06

**N52 Tullamore Bypass:
Final Report on archaeological investigations at Site E2848, in
the townland of Screggan, Co. Offaly**

By: John Twomey

Ministerial Direction No: A033/000

Director: Linda Hegarty

Chainage: 955

NGR: 22895/22220



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ARCHAEOLOGY Ltd

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1 Executive summary

This report presents the results of archaeological investigations carried out on behalf of Westmeath County Council as part of the Advance Archaeological Works Contract for the N52 Tullamore Bypass. The work was undertaken under E2848, in the Townland of Screggan, Co. Offaly. The Minister for the Environment, Heritage & Local Government, following consultation with the National Museum of Ireland, directed that Linda Hegarty of Headland Archaeology Ltd should proceed with archaeological resolution.

Archaeological testing, E2493, carried out under Ministerial Direction Number A033/000 on this site in 2006 identified two pits and two linear features.

Full archaeological resolution was conducted on this site between the 15th and 17th of December 2006. This revealed one post mediaeval field boundary and two pits, the fills of which were sampled for dating and interpretative purposes.

2 Introduction

The scheme involves the proposed construction of the N52 Tullamore Bypass, between the townlands of Cloghanbane and Ardan in Co. Offaly. The proposed scheme will consist of the construction of a bypass around the town of Tullamore. It is to consist of 11.5 km of standard single carriageway and 2.5 km of wide single carriageway road. It will also involve the construction of seven at-grade roundabout junctions, priority junctions and seven new major structures, including four river crossings, one canal crossing and one railway crossing. The project is funded by the Irish Government and the European Union, through Offaly County Council/National Roads Authority and under the National Development Plan 2000-2006. Headland Archaeology Ltd. was commissioned by Offaly County Council to undertake the works.

An Environmental Impact Statement was prepared in 2004, with the Cultural Heritage Assessment for the route contained within Section 3.8. The EIS was prepared by Babbie Pettit.

3 Site description and location (Figure 1)

The site E2848 was located approximately 5.5 km south west of Tullamore town centre, in the townland of Screggan, at National Grid Reference: 22895/22220. The surrounding land was gently undulating and under pasture at the time of excavation. Two monuments were identified in Screggan in the Record of Monuments and Places. One of these was a series of linear earth works known in local folklore as 'Cromwell's Lines' (RMP Nr. OF016-038). There is no evidence to assign these a 17th century date. Geophysical survey, topographical survey and test trenching of the specified area in autumn 2006 did not identify any features of archaeological significance. A Holy well (RMP) Nr. OF016-036) was also identified in Screggan. This has been quarried out for sand and gravel, and is recorded as being neglected and poorly preserved.

4 Aims and methodology

The objective of the work was the preservation by record of any archaeological features or deposits in advance of the proposed road's construction.

Topsoil stripping of the site was conducted using a 360° tracked machine fitted with a 1.9 m wide ditching (toothless) bucket under archaeological supervision. A total area of 450 m² was exposed. The resulting surface was cleaned and all potential features investigated by hand. Archaeological contexts were recorded by photograph and on *pro forma* record sheets. Plans and sections were drawn at an appropriate scale. Registers are provided in the Appendix. Ordnance Datum levels and feature locations were recorded using penmap and an EDM. Environmental samples were taken on any deposits suitable for analysis or dating.

5 Summary of excavation results

An area of 450 m² was stripped in preparation for excavation to reveal the features uncovered in testing and any adjacent features. One post mediaeval field boundary and two pits were uncovered.

Field Boundary (Plate 1)

Orientated northeast – southwest across the site was a post mediaeval field boundary [9]. This had concave sides, a flat base, and had a length of 12 m, width of 0.8 m and depth of 0.2 m. This contained (8) a loose - moderately compacted, mid/dark brown silty clay with inclusions of pebbles.

Pits (Plate 2)

At the northwestern side of the site a large circular pit [7] was located which ran under the baulk. This had a length of 1.55 m northeast – southwest and a depth of 0.19 m; the section within the confines of the CPO land excavated. Its sides were near vertical except on the north- east side which had a gradual slope. The breaks of slope were sharp at top and gentle at the base which was rounded with a slight tapered point. It was filled by (6) a loosely compacted brown clayey sand containing inclusions of occasional angular stones.

A second pit [5] was located 8.2 m east of [7]. This was oval in plan with a length of 2.4 m northwest – southeast, a width of 1.27 m northeast – southwest and a depth of 0.24 m. This had vertical sides with sharp breaks of slope on top and gentle at the base, which was rounded with a slight tapered point. It had a fill (4) of loose - moderately compacted mid/dark brown silty clay which had frequent inclusions of stones, and occasional charcoal.

Finds

One piece of modern pottery (E2848:008:001) was recovered from the post-mediaeval field boundary [9]. A piece of red brick (E2848:004:001) was recovered from Pit [5], and a part of a nail/arrow was recovered from the topsoil (E2848:001:001)

Conclusions

The site E2848 consisted of two pits and one post-mediaeval field boundary. The finds and nature of the features on site would indicate the site was not prehistoric. Pit [7] contained some red brick which would suggest a post-mediaeval/ modern date, as would the sherd of pottery found in the field boundary [9]. The function of pit [7] is unclear. However its shape and the sterile nature of its fill (6) suggest this may be a tree bole.

6 Archive

The site archive is comprised of the following materials:

Item	Quantity
Context Sheets	6
Plans	4
Sections	3
Photographs	16
Registers	5
Notebooks	-

The archive material is contained within 1 box.

Storage of the archive in a suitable format and location is required in order to provide for any future archaeological research. It is proposed that in addition to the paper archive a digital copy is prepared. The archive is currently stored in the offices of Headland Archaeology, Unit 1, IDA Industrial Estate, Wallingstown, Little Island, Co. Cork.

7 Recommendations

No recommendations for further archaeological work to this site are proposed.

8 Bibliography

Bennett, I. 2003, *Excavations 2003*, Wordwell, Wicklow.

Bennett, I. 2002, *Excavations 2002*, Wordwell, Wicklow.

Bennett, I. 2001, *Excavations 2001*, Wordwell, Wicklow.

Appendix 1: Context Register

C	Type	Area	Fill Of	Filled By	D (m)	W (m)	L (m)	Description	Interpretation
1	Deposit		n/a	n/a	0.15 max			Dark brown silty clay	Topsoil
2	Deposit		n/a	n/a	0.15-0.65			Mid orangey brown sandy silt	Subsoil
3	Deposit		n/a	n/a				Mottled sandy pebbles	Natural
4	Deposit		5	n/a	0.24	1.27 NE-SW	2.40 NW-SE	Loose - moderately compacted mid/dark brown silty clay with an oval shape in plan. Frequent inclusions of stones, occasional charcoal and red brick.	Fill of pit [5]
5	Cut		n/a	4	0.24	1.27 NE-SW	2.40 NW-SE	Oval shaped pit rounded at the corners. Gradual breaks of slope at top and base, with concave sides and an oval shaped base.	Cut of pit Possible rubbish pit
6	Deposit		7	n/a	0.23	1.00 NW-SE	1.55 NE-SW	Loosely compacted brown clayey sand with a semi-circular shape in plan (Possibly circular but went under baulk). Inclusions of occasional angular stones.	Fill of pit [7]
7	Cut		n/a	6	0.19	1.00 NW-SE	1.55 NE-SW	Semi circular (Possibly circular but went under baulk) pit. Sides near vertical except NE where gradual slope. Breaks of slope sharp at top, gentle at base. Rounded base with a slight tapered point.	Cut of pit Possible tree bole
8	Deposit		9	n/a	0.2	0.80 NE-SW	12.00 NW-SE	Loose - moderately compacted mid/dark brown silty clay with a NW-SE orientation. Inclusions of pebbles.	Fill of linear [9]
9	Cut		n/a	8	0.2	0.80 NE-SW	12.00 NW-SE	Linear with concave sides and a flat base. Gradual breaks of slope at top and base.	Cut of linear

Appendix 2: Finds Register

Context	01			
Find No.	Material	NMI No.	Date	Description
1	Metal	E2848:001:001	unknown	Part of a nail/arrow

Context	04			
Find No.	Material	NMI No.	Date	Description
1	Brick	E2848:004:001	PM	Red brick

Context	08			
Find No.	Material	NMI No.	Date	Description
1	Pottery	E2848:008:001	Modern	Modern pottery
2	Pottery	E2848:008:002	Modern	Modern pottery

Appendix 3: Sample Register

Sample	Context	Description
1	4	Mid/dark brown silty clay fill of [5]
2	6	Brown clayey sand fill of [7]

Appendix 4: Photo Register

Shot	Type	Facing	Description
1	Mid ex	SW	Pit [7]
2	Working	W	Working shot of Screggan 2
3	Mid ex	SE	Pit [5], Section 2
4	Mid ex	SE	Pit [5], Section 2
5	Mid ex	NW	Pit [7], Section 3
6	Post ex	NW	Pit [7]
7	Mid ex	NW	Linear [9]
8	Mid ex	SE	Linear [9]
9	Mid ex	SE	Linear [9]
10	Mid ex	SE	Linear [9]
11	Post ex	SE	Pit [5]

12	Post ex	NE	Pit [5]
13	Post ex	SE	Linear [9]
14	Post ex	SE	Linear [9]
15	Post ex	NW	Linear [9]
16	Post ex	NW	Linear [9]

Appendix 5: Drawing Register

Dwg	Type	Area	Scale	Description
1	Plan		1:50	Site plan, showing linear [9], and pits [5] and [7]
2	Section		1:10	W facing section of pit [5]
3	Section		1:10	SW facing section of pit [7]
4	Section		1:10	SE facing section of linear [9]
5	Plan		1:20	Post ex plan of pit [7]
6	Plan		1:20	Post ex plan of pit [5]
7	Plan		1:50	Post ex plan of linear [9]

Appendix 6: Site Matrix

