Archaeological Monitoring
at Johnstown, Enfield,
Co. Meath.

By
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Client
High Degree Construction

June 2001
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1. INTRODUCTION

Archaeological monitoring was a requirement of planning permission on the site of the proposed residential development at Johnstown, Enfield, Co. Meath. Topsoil stripping along the route of the surface water drainage pipeline for the scheme was carried out between the 14th of May and 21st of June 2001. Archaeological monitoring was conducted by Mr. Damian Finn and Ms. Ruth Elliott. This report comprises the results.

2. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site at Johnstown, within the former lands of Johnstown House, lies close to the southern border of Co. Meath (Fig. 1). To the north is Innfield, a village on the Dublin to Galway road, which was given the misnomer of Enfield by the old Midland Great Western Railway Company (Killanin & Dugnan, 1967).

Johnstown Bridge, within Co. Kildare, lies over a kilometre to the south and is the site of a former abbey. A stone cross (KL04-01) is the only surviving evidence of this establishment and is described by Lewis as “a curious old relic” (Lewis, 1837). The cross is set on a pedestal and inscribed with the date 1412. A relief carving of a cherub and a rope-like scroll decorate the front (Dúchas) and it is recorded that the “Wayside Cross…[was]…known as ‘suppression cross’, having belonged to a religious order, the existence of which is forgotten” (Fitzgerald, 1891-5, 207). Also in Johnstown Bridge are two armorial slabs (KL04-02), which were built into the gateway piers of a field entrance and later re-erected in two special buttresses at the local school gates (Dúchas) (Fig. 2).
Approximately 500m northwest of the site in Posseckstown is a ringfort (ME48-19) known as “Boyne’s Rath”. This is a large oval shaped ringfort, 82 by 48.5m in dimensions and surrounded by a well preserved bank and ditch. The original entrance was either at the east or southwest, where causeways remain in the bank. A kilometre south of this lies a small rectilinear earthwork (ME48-20), consisting of an earthen platform with slight traces of a bank and ditch. Less than two kilometres to the east, two further enclosures were identified through aerial photography (ME48-21 and ME48-22), however, no traces of these remain on the ground (Dúchas) (Fig. 2).

A motte and the remains of a medieval church lie in Cloncurry, east of the site, where Cornelius, Bishop of Kildare was buried in 1223. In 1347 a Carmelite friary was founded there by John Roche but no remains of this survive. To the south in Dunfierth churchyard, fragments of the altar tomb of Sir William Bermingham, the first Baron of Carbury (dating to the mid 16th century) were built into the Hamilton Vault. (Killanin & Duignan, 1967). Dunfierth is also the location in which a gold lunula and two lunula fragments (W4, 8 & 9) were found and these now reside in the National Museum of Ireland (National Museum).

3. THE MONITORING

All topsoil stripping was carried out mechanically using a flat grading bucket. Between the 14th of May and 8th of June, two areas of archaeology were identified by Mr. Damian Finn. Area 1 was situated near the entrance road to Johnstown House on the route of the surface water drainage pipeline. Area 2, located circa 250m southwest of this, consisted of two sites, Area 2A and Area 2B. These were 15m apart and situated outside the route of the surface water drainage pipeline (Fig. 3). Soil stripping between the 12th and 21st of June did not reveal any further archaeological finds, features or deposits.
3.1 SITE STRATIGRAPHY

Stratigraphy to the south of the site consisted of a sod layer, 0.1 to 0.15m deep, overlying 0.2 to 0.25m of topsoil. The topsoil was a mid brown, silty clay with moderate small to medium stone inclusions and overlay a hard, yellow subsoil. This stratigraphy remained consistent as the soil stripping progressed north. However, where the route of the surface water drainage pipeline crossed the line of the proposed Enfield relief road (Fig. 3), the land became boggy and the stratigraphy changed dramatically. The sod layer here-after, was a dark brown to black peat, 0.05 to 0.1m deep and overlay up to 0.6m of mid brown peat. The underlying subsoil was a waterlogged, soft, yellow clay (Pl. 1).

3.2 AREA 1

Area 1 was situated on the route of the surface water drainage pipeline (Fig. 4) and, as it would be directly impacted by the development, rescue excavation was conducted (Licence No. 01E0561). The site was that of a fulacht fiadh and was comprised of a rectangular trough and two circular pits. Full details of the excavation can be found in “Excavation of a Fulacht Fiadh in Johnstown, Enfield, Co. Meath” (Elliott, 2001).

3.3 AREA 2

As Area 2 was located outside the route of the surface water drainage pipeline (Fig. 4), preservation in-situ was possible. Areas 2A and 2B were cleaned back and recorded in plan. A sheet of terram was then spread across the area and covered by re-deposited topsoil (Pl. 4).
3.3.1 AREA 2A

Area 2A (Fig. 5 & Pl. 2) contained two irregular shaped patches of in-situ burnt soil (0.7 by 0.8m and 0.5 by 0.7m) which lay 0.2m apart from each other. One of these was overlain by a small spread (0.32 by 0.45m) of dark grey, clayey silt with moderate inclusions of charcoal. Two charcoal filled stakeholes (0.07 and 0.08m in diameter) overlay this and represented wooden stakes that had been burnt in-situ. Extending from the spread across the burnt area was a line of mid grey, clayey silt, 0.5m long and up to 0.12m wide.

There were thirteen stakeholes in the surrounding area, one to the south and the rest to the north and northeast. The majority of these contained dark brown to black, clayey silt with frequent charcoal inclusions and represented stakes that had been burnt in-situ. Three in the northeast, however, were filled by mid brown, clayey silt and may have rotted in-situ. The stakeholes varied from 0.05 to 0.24m in diameter. No datable artefacts or finds were retrieved from the site.

3.3.2 AREA 2B

Area 2B (Fig. 6 & Pl. 3), 15m north of Area 2A, was 2m² and contained a number of small spreads. The largest of these was irregular in shape (0.42 by 0.96m) and consisted of mid grey, silty clay with moderate charcoal flecks and occasional inclusions of burnt stone. South and southeast of this were five smaller spreads of similar composition. These varied in dimensions from 0.08 by 0.08m to 0.24 by 0.28m. Two stakeholes within the area were filled by dark grey, silty clay with frequent charcoal inclusions and represented wooden stakes burnt in-situ. These were 0.06 by 0.08m and 0.04 by 0.1m respectively. No datable artefacts or finds were retrieved from the site.
4. CONCLUSIONS

Archaeological monitoring of groundworks associated with the proposed residential development at Johnstown, Enfield, Co. Meath, revealed two areas of archaeology.

Area 1, situated near the entrance road to Johnstown House, lay on the route of the surface water drainage pipeline. As it would be directly impacted by the development, rescue excavation was conducted under Licence number 01E0561. The site was that of a *fulacht fiadh* and was comprised of a rectangular trough and two circular pits. Full details of the excavation can be found in “Excavation of a *Fulacht Fiadh* in Johnstown, Enfield, Co. Meath” (Elliott, 2001).

Area 2 was located *circa* 250m southwest of Area 1. It was comprised of two sites, Area 2A and Area 2B, which lay 15m apart from each other. Area 2A consisted of an area of burning and a number of charcoal filled stakeholes. Area 2B contained a number of small spreads of burnt material and two charcoal filled stakeholes. No finds were made with which to date either site. As it lay outside the route of the surface water drainage pipeline, Area 2 was preserved *in-situ*.

No further archaeological finds, features or deposits were uncovered on the site.
5. REFERENCES


National Museum. *Topographical Files*. 
Figure 1: Site Location. After Discovery Series, Map No. 49.
Figure 2: Site Location. After RMP Constraint Map, Co. Meath, Sheet No. 48.
Figure 3: Site Plan. After DBFL Engineers.
Figure 4: Areas of archaeology. After DBFL Site Plan.
Figure 5: Plan of Area 2A.

LEGEND
- *In-situ* burnt soil
- Light grey, silty clay
- Light grey, silty clay with charcoal inclusions
- Charcoal filled stakeholes
- Possible stakeholes

Edge of cutting

75.752m OD

75.689m OD
Figure 6: Plan of Area 2B.
Plate 1: Soil stripping in peatland area to north of site.

Plate 2: Area 2A viewed from the south.
Plate 3: Area 2B viewed from the south.

Plate 4: Area 2 being covered with *terram*. 