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Archaeological Testing at Dromod, Co. Leitrim

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1 Introduction

This report presents the results of an archaeological assessment including testing for a proposed development and associated works at Dromod, Co. Leitrim. This report was undertaken to fulfil a further information request.

Research included an examination of the Record of Monuments and Places; buildings of Ireland, Excavations Bulletin; historic maps; aerial photographs; place names and historic books and journals. A field inspection and archaeological testing of the proposed site was also undertaken.

John Purcell BA undertook this report.



Figure 1: Location of the development

2 Assessment Methodology

2.1 Study Methodology

This assessment consists of a paper survey identifying all recorded sites within the vicinity of the proposed development and a site inspection. The methodology has been conducted based on the guidelines from the Department of Culture, Heritage and Gaeltacht (D.C.H.G.).

2.2 Desktop Survey

The desktop survey undertaken consisted of a document and cartographic search utilising a number of sources including the following:

- **Record of Monuments and Places (RMP);** The RMP records known upstanding archaeological monuments, the original location of destroyed monuments and the location of possible sites identified through, documentary, cartographic, photographic research and field inspections. The RMP consists of a list, organised by county and subdivided by 6" map sheets showing the location of each site. The RMP data is compiled from the files of the Archaeological Survey
- **County Development Plans;** The Development plan was consulted in order to ascertain if any structures listed in the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) and/or any Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs). The Record of Protected Structures lists all protected structures and buildings in Longford. This includes structures of architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, social, scientific or technical importance.
- **Cartographic Sources;** The following maps were examined: 1st edition Ordnance Survey Map of the County Leitrim (1836-1846) and 2nd edition Ordnance Survey Map of the County Leitrim (1908).
- **Literary Sources;** Various published sources, including local and national journals, were consulted to establish a historical background for the proposed development site. Literary sources are a valuable means of completing the written record of an area and gaining insight into the history of the environs of the proposed development. Principal archaeological sources include:

  The Excavations Bulletin; Local Journals; Published archaeological and architectural inventories; Peter Harbison, (1975). *Guide to the National Monuments of Ireland; and* O'Donovan's *Ordnance Survey Letters.*

  A comprehensive list of all literary sources consulted is given in the bibliography.

2.3 Site Inspection

An archaeological field inspection survey seeks to verify the location and extent of known archaeological features and to record the location and extent of any newly identified features. A field inspection should also identify any areas of archaeological potential with no above ground visibility.

3 The Receiving Environment and Proposed Development

The proposed site in Drumod More Townland, located off the L1601 in Co. Leitrim, is situated within a rural landscape characterized by a mix of residential and agricultural land and natural features. The L1601 road forms the eastern boundary of the site. A dwelling is located at the southeast of the site, this will be renovated. The area to the west of this site is disturbed with a septic tank area visible. The remainder of the site has been disturbed.



Plate 1: Looking southwest over the site

4 General Archaeological and Historical Summary

4.1 Archaeological Background

Prehistory

The Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) lists a number of prehistoric sites in this part of Co. Leitrim. The earliest recorded archaeology in the area dates from the Neolithic (4,200-2,500BC). At this stage communities became more stable with the introduction of agricultural practices. The more permanent settlement allowed communities to construct large ceremonial sites. These megalithic sites are visible across the county.

The bronze age marks the introduction of metal working to Ireland. This allowed for more efficient farming and hunting techniques. It also allowed for small industry and trade to take place between communities. Barrows are a common form of monument across in this area from this period. These are associated with the Bronze/Iron Age burial tradition (c. 2400 BC - AD 400) and are defined by an artificial mound of earth or earth and stone, normally constructed to contain or conceal burials. These sites vary in shape and scale and can be variously described as bowl-barrow, ditch barrow, embanked barrow, mound barrow, pond barrow, ring-barrow and stepped barrow. The incidence and frequency of these sites in the area attests to the extent of prehistoric settlement in this area from earliest times. Prehistoric settlements sites are generally not visible at ground level and can only be uncovered as a result of ground works.

Iron Age to Early Medieval Period

In late Bronze Age Ireland the use of the metal reached a high point with the production of high quality decorated weapons, ornament and instruments, often discovered from hoards or ritual deposits. The Iron Age however is known as a ‘dark age’ in Irish prehistory. Iron objects are found rarely, but there is no evidence for the warrior culture of the rest of Europe, although the distinctive La Tené style of art with animal motifs and spirals was adopted. Political life in the Iron Age seems to have been defined by continually warring petty kingdoms vying for power. These kingdoms, run on an extended clan system, had their economy based on mixed farming and, in particular cattle. Settlement was typically centred on a focal hillfort.

Another more domestic site common to the Bronze Age is the *fulachta fiadh*. These are located along the edges of streams or in damp areas. They consist of

a mound of charcoal enriched soil with fragmented burnt rocks. They usually are accompanied by a wooden or stone lined trough. These were used seasonally possibly for cooking or may have been used for recreational purposes.

Settlement in the Early Medieval Period is defined by the ringfort. The country was a patchwork of competing Kingdoms during this period numbering up to 150. Ringforts were a farmstead surrounded by one or more earthen banks. These are the commonest monument across the country and have frequently been recorded in Longford. They are generally located in areas with commanding views over the countryside.

Ecclesiastical Settlement

The introduction of Christianity to Ireland in the fifth century had a profound impact on Gaelic society, not in the least in terms of land ownership and the development of churches and the development of a large number of religious houses. The earliest churches were constructed of wood and mortar and wattle walls. By the ninth and tenth centuries these were being replaced by stone structures including the construction of Round Towers. These settlements became very important around the country and became small towns. Many of these sites were surrounded large earthen enclosures.

Historic Period

Following the Norman Conquest of the country a series of tower houses and boroughs were built across County Leitrim. A series of medieval parish churches were also constructed to service the growing populations. A large number of tower houses and fortified houses were constructed to protect and consolidate settlement in the area.

Post Medieval Ireland

Seventeenth century Ireland saw massive upheaval a result of the Confederate wars, the Cromwellian response and the Wars of the two kings. The impact on the country was profound. Long established settlements in the area were affected by the Cromwellian Restoration and land settlements. All catholic property owners were affected, and large land and property confiscations took place. It has been estimated that up to a third of the population was wiped out

because of famine, disease and war. Soldiers were given land as payment resulting in further upheaval of the local population and the establishment of large estates. These came to dominate the landscape from this period onwards. Religious intolerance in other parts of Europe resulted in the expulsion of the Huguenot from France which were welcomed by the English Crown into Ireland.

Industrial Period

The eighteenth century saw considerable industrial growth across the country. Industry arrived across the country and utilised streams and rivers to create mills. Agriculture was also intensified and goods were exported across the country.



Figure 2: RMP extract with the proposed site marked

4.2 Recorded Archaeological Monuments

There are no recorded archaeological monuments located within the footprint of the proposed development or its immediate environs. This is the site of a fortified house on the banks of Lough Bofin, the details of this site are detailed below:

LE035-030---- : House - fortified house : AUGHRY

Situated in pasture on a gentle S-facing slope c. 40m from the shore of Lough Bofin, which is on the River Shannon. Built by the Scottish family of Nesbitt c. 1640, it was

captured, and probably burnt, during the Confederate wars. It might have been abandoned then as the Nesbitts made Derrycarne, about 3km to the NW on the River Shannon, their home until the last of the family died without heirs in 1854. The ruins as depicted by Francis Grose c. 1820 consist of two separate walls, each probably a gable of a two-storey house with an attic. Each wall has a large chimney stack, and one has a corner-turret supported on corbels in the Scottish style (Stalley 1991, 155-7). The remains have been removed, and no feature is visible at ground level in pasture.

4.3 Previous Excavations

There are no entries in the database of Irish excavations in the immediate vicinity of the proposed scheme (Excavations.ie). The nearest entry is from 2006 and is located 250m to the north west. This entry consisted of archaeological monitoring no remains were recorded (Licence 06E1035).

4.4 Cartographic Evidence

The first edition 6-inch OS map (1837- 1842) provides the first accurate historic mapping coverage of Drumod and the area containing the proposed development. This shows the site as two fields with a dwelling in the field at the north. No archaeological or architectural features of note are visible on this map.



Figure 3: The development area overlaid on First Edition OS Map (1829-1841)

Second Edition Ordnance Survey Maps (1871-1875) and subsequent 25-inch Ordnance Survey Maps (1888-1913) illustrate minor changes to the fields surrounding the proposed development, a structure is visible at the northeast of the site, this is still visible at the site.



Figure 4: The development area overlaid on 25-inch Maps (1888- 1913)

Aerial photographs were assessed for the site, this has shown widespread excavation and removal of hedgerows in the recent past.



Figure 5: Current google maps image for the site

5 FI Request

4. Due to the scale of the proposed development area, pre-development testing as described below shall be carried out on site and a report of the testing submitted as further information. Archaeological test excavations shall be carried out as follows:

- You are requested to engage the services of a suitably qualified archaeologist to carry out an archaeological assessment of the development site. No sub-surface work should be undertaken in the absence of the archaeologist without his/her express consent.
- The archaeologist shall carry out any relevant documentary research and inspect the site. Test trenches shall be excavated at locations chosen by the archaeologist, having consulted the site drawings.
- The archaeologist is required to notify the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in writing at least four weeks prior to the commencement of site preparations. This will allow the archaeologist sufficient time to obtain a licence to carry out the work.
- Having completed the work, the archaeologist shall submit a written report to the Planning Authority and to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Where archaeological material/features are shown to be present, preservation in situ, preservation by record (excavation) or monitoring may be required.

Figure 6: FI Request



Figure 7: Test trenches overlaid on the site plan

6 Archaeological Testing

An FI request for the site requested a programme of archaeological test trenching in advance of the development (Figure 9). This testing aims to determine, as precisely as possible, the location, extent, date, character, and condition of any archaeological remains that could be affected by the proposed development. This process will enable the formulation of mitigating strategies to minimize or offset the impact of the construction. These strategies may include redesigning the proposed development, preserving remains by record, or implementing archaeological monitoring of the works at the site.

Test trench 1-3

Test trenches 1-3 were located along the proposed development and ran northeast to southwest. The trenches were approximately 60m in length and 1.8m in width. The trench was excavated through rough pasture. The topsoil which measured 0.2-0.25m in depth, this was a mid-brown loamy soil. This overlay the natural subsoil. No archaeological finds or features were noted.



Plate 2: Test trench 1, looking southwest



Plate 3: Test trench 2, looking southwest



Plate 4: Test trench 3, looking southwest showing sewer manhole

Test trench 4-5

Test trenches 4-5 were located along the proposed development and ran northeast to southwest. The trenches were approximately 60m in length and

1.8m in width. The trench was excavated through rough pasture. The topsoil which measured 0.2-0.25m in depth, this was a mid-brown loamy soil. This overlay the natural subsoil. No archaeological finds or features were noted.



Plate 5: Test trench 4, looking southeast



Plate 6: Test trench 5, looking southeast

6 Impact on the Cultural Heritage Landscape

The proposed development is not located in the vicinity of any archaeological remains. No previous excavations have been recorded in the area.
To assess the potential for subsurface archaeological remains, test trenching was conducted along the dwellings and associated works. Five trenches were excavated, at the northeast of the test trenches a public sewer runs through the site.
The results of the testing revealed only topsoil (0.25m deep, mid-brown loamy soil) overlying natural boulder clay, with no archaeological features or finds identified. These findings confirm the absence of archaeological deposits within the development area.
Given the negative results from testing and the distance from the nearest recorded monuments, the proposed development is assessed as having a low potential for impact on archaeological heritage. As a result no further archaeological input is required.

7 Conclusion

The archaeological assessment of the proposed development in Dromod, Co. Leitrim, confirms that the site poses no risk to archaeological heritage. Test trenching conducted across the development area—including five trenches near—revealed only topsoil (0.25m deep, mid-brown loamy soil) overlying natural boulder clay, with no archaeological features or finds identified. Given the absence of recorded monuments in the vicinity, the negative results from testing, and the distance from known archaeological sites, the proposed development is assessed as having no potential for impact on archaeological remains. Consequently, no further archaeological input is required.