

14. An introduction to the Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland

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Excavation of the enclosing ditch at Johnstown, County Meath, on the M4 Kinnegad-Enfield-Kilcock scheme (Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd)

The Institute and its aims

The purpose of the paper is twofold. It will provide an introduction to the Institute as a body and to its aims in engaging with government and other organisations. Furthermore, a number of initiatives will be introduced which are of direct relevance to the topic under discussion — archaeology and the NRA.

Archaeology is a significant and non-renewable component of Irish heritage, both in terms of landscape and culture. Ireland has a rich and diverse archaeological inheritance, and one which 'is becoming more and more recognised as one of the country's greatest assets' (Condit 1991, 11). Archaeology in Ireland has a long and auspicious tradition which, for a considerable period of time, remained within certain sectors, especially those of State and academic institutions. The development of archaeology in the country both as an academic pursuit and an independent profession is well documented (e.g. Ryan 1991; Byrne 2000). From the mid 1980s onwards changes in attitude among the general public and legislators with regard to the appreciation and protection of the archaeological heritage have led to major transformations within the archaeological profession generally.

The variety of organisations employing archaeologists to undertake work on their behalf has grown considerably in the last fifteen years or so. Allied to this are the work opportunities which now exist for individual practitioners, especially those in the private

sector. Such changes and opportunities have led directly to a growing sense of confidence within the archaeological profession. This in turn has led to an awareness among archaeologists that the profession also requires changes, especially with regard to the areas of standards, career structures and the role of archaeologists in society as a whole.

Debate on the development of the profession has been ongoing for a number of years within the former Irish Association of Professional Archaeologists (IAPA) and was frequently reported in *IAPA News* (e.g. Halpin 1998; Hurley 1999; Carroll 2000). The Institute has its genesis in IAPA, whose members recognised the need for the development of a strong and independent body that would promote the concept of ‘best practice’ in archaeology and would better represent the needs and objectives of the profession as a whole. In addition, such an organisation could better ensure that archaeological standards are maintained to a high degree and in a fair and effective manner. Furthermore, it was agreed that the formation of an Institute would better regulate the profession in a more independent and transparent manner than currently exists, especially in the Republic of Ireland, where the profession is wholly regulated by the State. Such an organisation would allow a move towards a situation where the profession could actively engage with State institutions, within the entire island, for a sharing of responsibility and accountability.

The Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland held its inaugural meeting on 29 September 2001 and its first AGM on 8 March 2002. The Institute is a company formed by guarantee. It currently represents almost 400 members and, for most, it is the single representative body for archaeologists working throughout the island of Ireland. Among the objectives for which the Institute was established are:

- to express corporate professional opinions on archaeological matters throughout the island of Ireland
- to improve archaeological standards throughout the island of Ireland by adoption of a code of practice and guidelines on professional practice, and the promotion of the continued professional development of members
- to promote by discussion and action the solution of practical and academic problems of archaeology on the island of Ireland.

A key role of the Institute is to engage with State and semi-state bodies and other representative groups — such as those promoting various development agencies or organisations — to ensure that the profession of archaeology influences the development and implementation of policies for the protection and management of the archaeological heritage.

Another role for the Institute is the promotion of a better career structure within the archaeological profession. The Institute is in the process of establishing a working group to define job descriptions for the various positions in the profession, especially for those employed within non-academic areas such as private companies, State and semi-state organisations or local authorities. Coupled with this, it is intended to define such positions with reference to other cognate professionals such as, for example, engineers or architects, with a view to the implementation of salary scales commensurate with such positions.

A proposal to establish a professional accreditation system by the Institute is seen by many members as a core aspiration of the organisation. Such accreditation systems operate



Possible Bronze Age agri-industrial feature at Rossan, County Meath on the M4 Kinnegad–Enfield–Kilcock scheme (Westmeath National Roads Design Office)

within other, similar organisations, such as The Institute of Engineers of Ireland, The Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland and the Institute of Geologists of Ireland. A discussion paper on professional accreditation, by Judith Carroll, was published in *IAPA News* in November 2000. It is the intention of the Institute to use this document for the basis for further study and debate with a view to initiating such a system in the near future.

Linked to this is the promotion of a scheme of continuous professional development (CPD). At present, a study of the profession is being undertaken in conjunction with the Heritage Council and the results will inform the Institute on the members' needs in this regard. The concept of CPD is becoming widespread in professions and it is likely that it may be introduced by the Institute on a phased basis.

The Institute and the NRA

The Institute broadly welcomes the *Code of Practice* (2000) agreed between the National Roads Authority and the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands, and also welcomes the subsequent appointment of archaeologists both by the NRA and the local authority National Road Design Offices. However, we feel that the Code is focused on the procedures and concerns of the parties most immediately involved with no sense of partnership with other interest groups, such as the Institute. The Code must not be seen to operate, nor give the appearance of operating, in isolation from the archaeological

Ringpin from the early medieval enclosure at Johnstown, County Meath, on the M4Kinnegad– Enfield–Kilcock scheme (Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd)



profession. In this regard we wish to signal our intention to enter into discussions with the NRA. We believe that the Institute can play a role in the formulation of the various guidance notes that are currently in preparation for archaeological contributions to road schemes. (We understand that these will address all phases of the work from desk-based studies at route selection stage to publication of completed rescue excavations.) The work of the Institute's committee on job descriptions and rates of pay will have a bearing on the documentation associated with the procurement of archaeological services for future road projects. In this regard, it should be noted that rates previously recommended by IAPA, which are cited in some recent tender documents for NRA schemes, date to 1999 and should be increased to acknowledge subsequent inflation. We also envisage the formulation of specimen tender documents for the various sorts of archaeological intervention needed for development work. Obviously, in relation to road projects, this would best be done by consultation between the Institute and the NRA.

The *Code of Practice* does not give recognition to the role of private sector companies or consultancies within the structure of the archaeological profession. This is especially evident in its provisions for the relationship

between the Project Archaeologist and the 'Consultant Archaeologist (Licence Holder)' in the conduct of archaeological excavations, as defined in Appendix II of the Code. This lack of recognition is also true of the recent consultation document issued by Dúchas the Heritage Service on *New Initiatives for Procedures and Practice in Archaeological Licensing* (DAHGI 2001a). According to the consultation document (*ibid.*, 30), up to 60% of licensed archaeologists are employed by private companies. The responsibilities of companies to employees who, in effect, hold excavation licences on behalf of these organisations, as well as the reciprocal responsibilities of the employees to the companies is a complex matter and this is not the forum for its discussion. However, the formulation of codes of practice by Dúchas with the NRA and other development agencies (i.e. Bord Gáis Éireann and the Irish Concrete Federation) has, in effect, created a third party to the licensing system and considerably reduces the prerogative of the licensee. Suffice to say that such concerns form part of the overall response to the consultation document by the Institute and it is our intention to follow up our response with detailed discussion with Dúchas.

The Institute's own proposed code of practice and accreditation system (above) will encourage members to declare their competence and commitment to best practice. By this

means the Institute seeks to bolster the professional standards and ethics of its members. It is envisaged that such a system will apply to individual practitioners as well as to private sector companies, who may subscribe to corporate membership of the Institute. (The system of Registered Archaeological Organisations operated by the Institute of Field Archaeologists in Britain may serve as a model in this regard.) This will offer overall benefits, not only to practitioners in archaeology, but also to the contracting agencies such as local authorities and the NRA.

In all these matters the Institute seeks a partnership approach with the NRA. It is anticipated that such an approach will be of benefit to both parties and will serve to ensure that the differing aims and responsibilities of each organisation are mutually respected.

