

### 13. Reporting, publication & dissemination

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*Multi-phased early medieval enclosure with burials and industrial activity at Killickaweeney, County Kildare, on the M4 Kinnegad–Enfield–Kilcock scheme (Irish Archaeological Consultancy Ltd)*

#### **The best of times, the worst of times**

A visitor to Irish archaeology might conclude that we live in the best of times, and this might appear especially so of archaeological publishing. True, the resources of Dúchas the Heritage Service are limited, yet it boasts some fine achievements in recent years, especially in the production of its county inventories and its database of excavation summaries on the Internet (at [www.excavations.ie](http://www.excavations.ie)). From the academic community — in the widest definition of that group — there has been a steady flow of publications too, mostly in the form of regional, period or artefact studies. The Discovery Programme is now more or less established as a national research institute and is setting benchmarks with its monographs and annual reports. The Irish Wetlands Archaeology Unit has also begun to generate a valuable corpus of monographs and reports. The Irish Association of Professional Archaeologists has lately reinvented itself as the Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland and proposes to launch or adopt a periodical of its own. In the field of popular publishing, the Irish Treasures series offers tasty appetisers to the curious reader dipping into archaeology

for the first time (e.g. Manning 1995; Condit 1997; O'Sullivan 2000), while *Archaeology Ireland* magazine is a sparkling example of sustained success in popular publishing. Not least, the NRA itself is committed to archaeological publishing in a variety of media. Clearly, there is much to celebrate.

Yet this is also the worst of times. We are starved of the raw data essential for new ideas and writing. This is an extraordinary situation, given that each year we investigate more and more new sites. Strict heritage legislation, rampant development and a burgeoning archaeological private sector have combined to produce a tenfold increase in licensed fieldwork in the last decade. Yet there has been no corresponding increase in published excavation reports. In fact, as a proportion of licensed work, the number of published excavations is in sharp decline.

It must be conceded that much of the additional licensed work in recent years relates to monitoring or testing and would not warrant full publication. Also, larger projects can have a long period of gestation — sometimes several years — before they are brought to print. Yet whatever special pleading is allowed there can be no escape from the conclusion that fieldwork is outstripping publication at a dismaying rate.

This situation is disheartening for Irish archaeology and a breach of faith with our public, colleagues and sponsors alike. The 'grey literature' which is the routine product of licensed fieldwork (i.e. unpublished preliminary and final reports to Dúchas and the National Museum of Ireland) does represent a kind of preservation by record of the excavated sites or monuments it describes, but it hardly constitutes effective dissemination of knowledge. It may fairly be argued, therefore, that digging without publishing is not rescue or research, but merely an expensive and self-indulgent form of destruction.

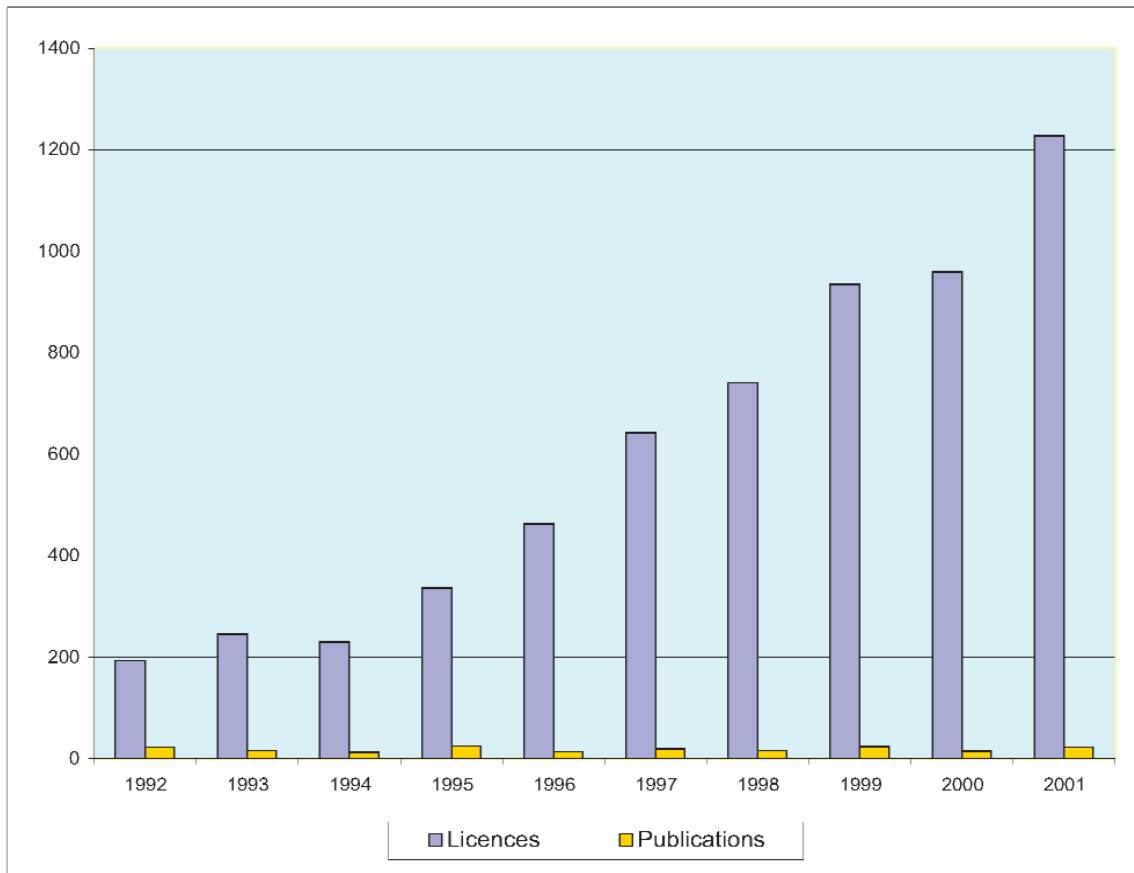
This is not a new issue. The cry for prompt and full publication of Irish excavation results has been raised several times before (e.g. Woodman 1992; Condit 1999; O'Sullivan 2001; Doyle *et al.* in press), but the problem is now of such an extent that it must be regarded as a crisis for our discipline.

### **Why do we fail to publish excavations?**

Why has the wellspring of published fieldwork reports run dry? There is a quagmire of factors at work here, rooted in current market forces, in the professional culture of Irish archaeology, and in the absence of effective regulation by the State. Probably no two commentators would agree on a definitive list of reasons, but I am confident that at least some of the following are key factors.

#### *1. Archaeologists' clients do not value publication*

Almost all licensed archaeological work undertaken in Ireland today is developer-funded. Its purpose is not to gain knowledge but to make some land or an historic building available for development. The clients who typically pay for this work do not much care about the content of the resulting report, or its dissemination to a wider audience. They chiefly care about satisfying the conditions of a planning consent and achieving the mitigation of an archaeological problem within a given time and budget.



*Numbers of excavation licences issued in Ireland in the years 1992–2001 compared with numbers of published reports of excavations in the same period (based on BAB 1992–1996, BIAB 1997–2001, the review pages of Archaeology Ireland magazine 1992–2001 and the annual Excavations gazetteer 1992–2001).*

### *2. Competition by archaeological contractors militates against publication*

Archaeologists work in a hothouse of competition for developer-funded fieldwork contracts. In this environment they strive to present competitive costs to prospective clients. In bidding for work, the cost of fieldwork is usually declared from the outset — after all, this will make immediate and substantial demands on the project budget — but the likely cost of a full programme of post-excavation work leading to publication is often omitted from the statement of costs. The result is a contract with no commitment from the client to fund the endgame. A project initiated like this is unlikely to reach its ideal conclusion, in print.

### *3. Digging is more profitable than writing*

Profit in archaeological fieldwork is most easily won by deploying large numbers of fieldworkers on big projects, but this depends entirely on the availability of licensed excavation directors. (Profit in itself is no bad thing and is the lifeblood of any company hoping to develop its resources and personnel.) The current archaeological licensing system effectively limits the number of available directors and, furthermore, makes the director

solely responsible for all aspects of a fieldwork project. In consequence, the licensed director has become a highly valued commodity — much more valuable in the field, directing the work of 20 or 30 other archaeologists on some new excavation, than in the library, working alone to draft a publication on the last one.

*4. Archaeological project management fails at post-excavation stage*

In the current regime, applicants for an excavation licence are required by Dúchas to submit a detailed method statement for the proposed fieldwork. This is a good measure. A thorough method statement will have obliged the applicant to think hard about the aims of the work, the potential difficulties and the necessary resources. Setting all of this down on paper — so that others can understand and agree — is an elementary building block of good project management. No such measure governs the completion of the work at post-excavation and publication stage. A post-excavation design and publication plan are not required by the State. Neither have they become established elements of professional practice in managing fieldwork. Yet some such procedure is essential to good project management if the heap of finds, samples and records brought home from the field is to be distilled into a useful suite of analyses and reports fit for publication.

*5. Field archaeologists fear writing*

Many of us fear writing — or at least fear the critical scrutiny of our peers if we appear in print. I believe this applies especially to young project directors when faced with the task of writing for publication for the first time. An illustrated stratigraphic report with specialists' appendices may be well within the competency of the fledgling excavation director. (This would correspond with the unpublished 'final report' required by the terms of an Irish excavation licence.) Sadly, producing a more concise version of this for publication, with a scholarly discussion of the significance of the excavation results, may seem a flight too far for some young and inexperienced excavation directors.

*6. The State requires publication but does not enforce this*

I believe this last point to be the single most important one. Archaeological excavation is licensed by the State under the *National Monuments Acts 1930 to 1994*. Reporting on excavation results is a requirement of the licence and the excavator is enjoined by Condition No. 6 'to make every effort to have the report published' (DAHGI undated). This requirement is underscored at several points in the heritage policy paper *Policy & Guidelines for Archaeological Excavations* (DAHGI 1999b). This asserts that competent licence holders must have publication skills (at 2.3 (b) vi); that the licensee is solely responsible for publication (at 3.2.1); and that full publication must always follow excavation except where Dúchas agrees otherwise (at 3.6.2). This insistence is curiously absent, however, from the recently published consultative document on *New Initiatives for Procedures and Practice in Archaeological Licensing* (DAHGI 2001a). Indeed, non-publication does not feature at all among the shortlist of 'core problems' identified by the task group which generated this document. In its commentary on the conditions attached to the excavation licence, the task group offers the following explanation (*ibid.*, 21).

This is a difficult condition to implement. The results of an excavation may also contain a significant amount of research which stretches over and beyond the

excavation process itself. The format and standard of the publication of an excavation can be dependent on the publisher's as well as the author's requirements. Furthermore, there can be significant costs involved in publication. While the department may recommend publication, it is unreasonable to expect, without hosting the publication of the excavation, that Dúchas can insist on or implement this condition.

Allegedly then, Dúchas cannot enforce national policy in the matter of archaeological publication because the State does not supply the means to this. Yet this argument is not consistent with its approach to other necessary resources. The State does not offer to arrange for personnel, tools, survey equipment, cameras, vehicles, accommodation, laboratories, conservation facilities or other post-excavation equipment, storage, office space and office equipment, or any of the other resources which the licensee must supply from an excavation budget (whether research or developer-funded). Of all these requirements, why should the State burden itself with the responsibility to supply the means to publication alone? It seems to me that Dúchas should simply enforce national policy in this instead, and allow the profession and the market to sort out the rest.

There is no shortage of outlets for publication. Dozens of periodicals appear in print each year at national, regional, county and even local level. Yet a glance through their contents pages makes glum reading for the archaeologist. They contain little or no news of recent fieldwork and are quiet simply starved of contributions by excavation directors.

In response, some archaeologists may complain that existing periodical outlets cannot accommodate the kinds of reports they would like to publish — especially data-rich reports on large excavations. In reply, I would simply draw attention to some of the fine excavation reports in monograph form produced by a variety of authors and publishers in recent years (e.g. Collins & Cummins 2001; Conway 1999; Hurley 1995; Hurley & Sheehan 1995; Hurley *et al.* 1997; Simpson 1994, 1995 & 1996). The moral seems to be that those who wish to see their work in print can find a way.

Aside from monographs, additional page-space would quickly be found in the local and national journals if excavation reports were submitted with an accompanying contribution to publication costs. Indeed, the private sector would soon enough create its own journal(s) where there was money to be spent and gained. Again, the remedy is strict enforcement by the State of its declared policy on publication of excavation reports. The market will soon enough sort out the rest.

### **Initiatives by the NRA in archaeological publishing**

What of the NRA's own policy in the matter? At the time of writing, a series of guidance notes for all aspects of archaeological work on national road schemes is in preparation and a publications policy has already been drafted for internal discussion. Foremost among the aims of the publications policy will be a) the dissemination of all significant excavation results for the public benefit and b) forms of communication which recognise the diversity of public needs. Following from this the NRA will embrace more than one solution to the historic problem of non-publication. For instance, although we envisage publication of an NRA archaeology series on the Internet, yet that will not entirely supplant contributions

to other, existing periodicals, or occasional monographs, magazine articles, posters, booklets and exhibitions, both on site and off.

In addition to this new range of publication styles and media, the unpublished reports already routinely produced by excavation directors can also be made to work harder in the public interest. An illustrated stratigraphic report with specialist appendices (or 'final report') is required within twelve months of excavation by the licence conditions. But in general, apart from the client or sponsor, Dúchas and the National Museum alone receive copies of these potentially useful reports. Henceforth, the NRA will encourage the distribution of these reports to local, national and university libraries where they will be more accessible to scholars and local field-club members.

How are these aims to be achieved? The question may be re-framed by asking how the NRA intends to address the obstacles to publication which were listed above.

### *1. Valued publications*

The NRA will be a principal sponsor of archaeological fieldwork in Ireland for the duration of the *National Development Plan 2000–2006* (NDP 2000). In this role it recognises several responsibilities to publish archaeological results: a) as a form of mitigation of the impacts of road construction (i.e. preservation by record); b) as the life-blood of archaeology as an academic discipline; and c) as a contribution by a State agency to the cultural life of the Irish people as a whole. Thus the NRA is one client which does value archaeological publication.

### *2. Creative competition*

The NRA has a responsibility to the public to seek best value for money in all aspects of its schemes. But cheapest is not always best. Happily, NRA procurement procedures do not bind us to the lowest price and the organisation recognises that value for money lies in the quality of the products as much as in the cost of the work. Mindful of this, the NRA proposes to offer contracting archaeologists a new kind of competition. Perhaps for the first time, archaeological contractors in Ireland will find in the NRA a client that is as much interested in their ability to deliver imaginative, well-researched publications to a high standard, as in their availability and fee costs for the work. (For more on NRA procurement procedures see M MacDonagh, elsewhere in this proceedings.)

### *3–4. Managed projects*

As every fieldworker knows, excavation is to some extent a journey into the unknown. The likely quantity and character of artefacts, samples and field records that will be accumulated by the end of the fieldwork phase can be estimated but not predicted. This is time to pause and review the project design. A good publication is not trampled energetically from raw data like the first wine from a mass of bruised grapes. It results from an ongoing assessment of aims and resources, and above all from good documentation.

The NRA intends to extend this principle to all phases of the archaeological project by introducing two new documents to be agreed at key stages: a) the post-excavation design and b) the publication plan. The first is the milestone at which to assess the field data, samples and finds as an interpretative resource and formulate a thoughtful approach to their analysis. The second is the means to direct the results of that analysis, from an early stage, towards the finished, published product of the work.



*A party of local school children visiting an excavation at Carrowreagh, County Wexford, on the N25 Rathstillagh to Harristown Little scheme (Eachtra Archaeological Projects)*

#### *5. Supportive collaboration*

The relationship of the Project Archaeologist and the contracting archaeologist will bear most fruit through collaboration and support. This is enshrined in the *Code of Practice* (NRA & DAHGI 2000) for the archaeology of NRA road schemes and will be expressed not least in the role of Project Archaeologist as proxy editor and referee. This will be of special value for first-time or inexperienced project directors with no track record of publications. Our challenge will be to participate as sympathetic but critical readers, to offer suggestions and information at draft reporting stage and, from that point, to shepherd the work through to print.

#### *6. Resourced projects*

Dúchas pleads that it cannot enforce publication because it does not directly facilitate this. I have already described the value the NRA will place on archaeological publishing and the range of outlets we envisage for this. I need only add that time and costs will be factored into our project planning as a matter of course and would stress, again, our policy of treating publication, from the outset, as the desired end-point of a managed project.

## **Conclusion**

Communicating, not digging, is the archaeologist's *raison d'être*. Traditionally that communication has been delivered by writing, in books, journals, magazines and even on posters or exhibition boards. Excavating has always been great fun. Now it is profitable too. But writing is hard, lonely and sometimes boring; and unlike digging it is largely profitless. Yet converting a medieval earthwork into a spoil-heap without publishing the results of the work is neither research nor rescue. It is merely the destruction of the cultural landscape at others' expense.

There has been a dramatic rise in the volume of licensed work of all sorts in the last decade in Ireland, but no corresponding increase in publication of the results. Most digging is now done by private-sector archaeologists in the context of pre-development works, but this new market contributes very little to archaeological writing. In fact, in proportion to licensed fieldwork, the rate of publication is in sharp decline. This is a bad situation.

The NRA enters this scene as the biggest prospective client for developer-funded fieldwork in Ireland, resolved to do the right thing and happy to see publication as a desirable end. The *Code of Practice* provides for a collaborative relationship between the Project Archaeologist and the Consultant Archaeologist acting as excavation director. This should ensure that project momentum is maintained beyond the fieldwork phase, towards publication in a range of media, appropriate to the magnitude of the results and the diversity of public need.