



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS *from the*
ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY FORUM

ARCHAEOLOGY IN IRELAND:
A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

14 – 15 September 2006

ESTABLISH a national archaeological research fund to stimulate co-operative research, mobility and partnership across the consultancy, state and university sectors.

DEVELOP a specific national archaeological archive to ensure the preservation and accessibility of resources accruing from archaeological excavations.

DEVELOP additional mechanisms to enable and enforce regulation of the requirement to publish archaeological work.

INCORPORATE changes to the regulatory framework within the consolidation of the National Monuments Acts.

ESTABLISH a bureau for archaeological publication to assess the scale of the publication backlog, recommend appropriate forms of publication and oversee the implementation of a systematic publication programme.

CONSIDER the resource needs of the state sector: the National Monuments Service and the National Museum of Ireland. Assign responsibility for the management of planning applications to archaeologists in local authorities.

CONDUCT development-led archaeological projects in the context of a research design.



ARCHAEOLOGY IN IRELAND: A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

In September 2006 the Royal Irish Academy held a forum to discuss the current state of and future prospects for archaeological research in Ireland. The focus of the forum was a series of presentations from invited speakers and directed discussion sessions with active, non-attributed participation from an invited audience of archaeologists from across the profession.

KEY FINDINGS:

- ◆ The current rate of development and landscape change is placing considerable pressures on the archaeological resource and its enabling and supporting structures.
- ◆ The very significant increase in development-led archaeology is central to current debates. Ireland is at the international forefront of investment in the discovery and recording of archaeology in development-led projects.
- ◆ The dual roles of development-led archaeology—as service and knowledge provider—should be fully recognised; but development-led archaeological projects must be conducted in the context of a specified research design.
- ◆ The disconnection between the level of data generation and the slowness with which publication is produced was identified as a key weakness, followed by curating and archiving problems, and the fragmentation of research capacity.
- ◆ Maximising the knowledge return of archaeological activity requires active collaboration and partnership between the consultancy, state and higher education sectors—supported and stimulated by a national archaeological research fund.
- ◆ New mechanisms are necessary to enforce the regulation of publication requirements; there is a clear and specific responsibility to tackle the publication backlog and an appropriately resourced National Archaeological Archive should be established to manage and store primary data resources (the paper and digital archive of excavations), complementing the curation in the National Museum of Ireland of all finds from excavations.

1. BACKGROUND: RECOGNITION OF THE PROBLEM

The forum was an initiative of the President of the Royal Irish Academy. It was held in the context of current difficulties within the Irish archaeological profession. These have arisen for a number of reasons, including:

- ◆ The rapid pace and major scale of development that has taken place in recent years, with the resultant major growth in the archaeological consultancy sector.
- ◆ The debate about the role of archaeological research and the pressures that the current rate of development and landscape change are placing on the archaeological resource, and the structures which are in place to protect that resource.

1.1 The three main stakeholders—the commercial sector, the state sector and the universities—all recognise that a critical point has been reached. There is a need to develop a strategy for the profession at large, and for a future in which all stakeholders will have constructive working relationships.

1.2 It was in the context of taking this long term, strategic view that the deliberations leading to the recent publication of a Foresight Report on Irish Archaeology (*Archaeology 2020: Re-positioning Irish Archaeology in the Knowledge Society*) were held.

1.3 The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has tasked the Heritage Council to carry out a review of archaeological research in Ireland as an input into the formulation of a strategic plan for archaeology. As an interim response, the Heritage Council submitted to the minister and circulated for consultation an interim report on *Research Needs in Irish Archaeology: Framework for a National Archaeological Research Programme*. The final report will be submitted to the minister in January 2007.

The Forum brought the profession together in a private setting to begin dialogue with the aim of agreeing a way forward on some of the key issues.

2. ARCHAEOLOGY IN IRELAND TODAY: ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Archaeology in Ireland today has many positive attributes that can be drawn on in developing archaeological policy and strategy. There are also a number of key concerns, including the interaction and inter-relationships of the various sectors within the archaeological profession. A focus on these concerns can be a catalyst for a strategy to provide a better sense of direction.

2.1 Archaeology in Ireland has changed enormously over the last decade. Currently, over 1,000 archaeologists work in Ireland. Around 2,000 archaeological licences are issued in the Republic each year. Over 75% of the profession works in the consultancy sector. A significant number of consultancy companies have developed. Others work in a related capacity, such as in the National Roads Authority.

2.2 Change has taken place in the state sector and the university departments/schools, but these changes are largely a result of institutional and state policies. Directed responses to the major increase in archaeological activity have focused on the short-term rather than being strategic in character. The state services are over-stretched and struggle to deal strategically or effectively with the current scale of activity.

2.3 The establishment of the Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland (IAI) was an important development for the profession. However, the rapidly changing composition of the profession has led to a perception that the IAI predominantly represents the position of the consultancy sector (and particularly the senior professionals in that sector) and that it is not representative of the profession at large.

2.4 The rate of archaeological publication has not kept pace with the increase in activity. There is a similar level of archaeological publication now as there was ten years ago. On the other hand there is a greater level of public dissemination of information through web sites, lectures and site visits. Public awareness of the wide range, diversity and time depth of archaeological discoveries has increased. But the profession has not sufficiently differentiated and addressed the types of audiences that it should be engaging with.

2.5 There is a disconnection between the level of data generation and the creation of knowledge through publication and dissemination. The pressure of development and the regulatory structures have led to a focus on excavation, recording methodologies and data retrieval. Hence, there appears to be a

disconnection between development-led excavations and research issues and strategies.

2.6 The amount of data being generated has created, and continues to create, significant storage capacity problems. There is a major curation and archiving problem, a need for a coherent archival strategy and for the development of regulated archival standards.

2.7 A number of recent high-profile cases have indicated that there are different views within the profession on appropriate methodologies and approaches to development-led mitigation projects in archaeology. We need to explicitly recognise and debate the different roles that archaeologists have in relation to the planning process.

2.8 The diversity of perspectives held and expressed by individuals and institutions has led to a situation where there is currently a lack of communication and trust between different sectors of the profession. All sectors are also under enormous pressure, which leaves little time for dialogue and reflection or capacity for strategic, long-term thinking.

2.9 The capacity to carry out research does not reflect the scale of activity within the profession. Research is fragmented across higher education institutions, the state sector and commercial companies. There is an under-developed and poorly resourced research infrastructure. This both impedes collaboration across institutions and makes it difficult to develop a strategy to build a coherent national research programme.

2.10 There seems to be little doubt that the pace of economic, societal and landscape change will continue for the foreseeable future, certainly for the duration of the next National Development Plan, 2007–13.

2.11 The public and political perception of archaeology is important and is changing. The amendments to the National Monuments Act of 1994 and 2004 could be seen as a development of the legislative framework, but the recent (2004) amendment also indicates a changing political climate. It can no longer be assumed that archaeology is recognised as having a social and cultural value. Given the level of spend on archaeological excavation and recording, establishing this value has to be a central aim of the profession.

2.12 Colleagues from Northern Ireland who attended the Forum indicated that, with respect to the different legislative framework, the range of issues that the profession faces there is very similar.

As well as facing enormous challenges in changing the current situation and planning a better future, there are currently a number of developments that provide important opportunities, particularly for the funding of research.

- ◆ To benefit from these opportunities we need agreement that the real value of archaeology has to be measured in research and knowledge terms: what it tells us about the past. Collaboration and partnership, across all sectors of the profession, and of course beyond it, is the best way to achieve that. The knowledge gained has to be disseminated to be of benefit to Irish society.

- ◆ The principles of collaboration and partnership are strongly expressed in:

 - The National Development Plan

 - The National Research Plan (*Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2006–2013*)

 - HEA Strategic Investment Fund in 4th level Ireland

 - Cross-border (North–South) co-operation and initiatives

 - The EU 7th Framework Programme.

- ◆ These programmes provide sources of potential research funding that could transform Irish archaeology.

3. THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FORUM

The focus of the forum was a series of presentations from invited speakers and directed discussion sessions, with very active, non-attributed participation from an invited audience of archaeologists from across the profession. A wide range of issues and topics were brought up for discussion and debate, but there were a number of recurring themes. Below is an overview of the findings and recommendations arising from the discussion.

Finding: The need for collaboration and partnership to achieve the best knowledge return.

Maximising the knowledge return of archaeological activity requires active collaboration and partnership between the three major professional sectors: consultancy, state and higher education. This is directly aligned to state research policy as set out in the *Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2006–2013*, where the focus is placed on academic, industry and state sector linkages and synergies, particularly at graduate or fourth level.

Research is ongoing in the universities, in the commercial sector, in the state institutions and in development-led projects, but it needs far greater integration. Doctoral and postdoctoral positions are one of the keys to providing the necessary research bridge between the universities and other third-level institutions and the consultancy and state sectors. But other initiatives are required to create mobility and foster partnership between the sectors of the profession. These could include:

- ◆ Modules on professional development to attract practitioners and develop the ethos of research and dissemination
- ◆ Career-breaks for personnel in the consultancy and state sectors along the lines of what is available in the higher education sector
- ◆ The creation of career structures for archaeological researchers linked, where appropriate, to the consultancy sector

The collaborative partnership process is one that also revolves around open-handed discussion and engagement. It is in this context that research-led archaeological frameworks can be developed for development-led projects. Increased discourse and engagement also has the potential to lead to technological innovation and methodological improvements and inspire best practice across the profession.

Recommendation: The establishment of a National Archaeological Research Fund.

The *Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation* and the *National Development Plan* provide a national context for emphasising and delivering the results of investment in archaeology as a contribution to Irish society today. Potential mechanisms to achieve this are set out in *Archaeology 2020: Repositioning Irish Archaeology in the Knowledge Society* and in the Heritage Council's *Review of Research Needs in Irish Archaeology* for the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

To bring about collaboration, co-operation and improved capacity in archaeological research, and to gain the maximum research value from the major investment (public and private) in archaeology over the last decade, a research funding scheme is required, similar to those already established in some areas of scientific research.

The focus of this research fund would be on competitive application to resource collaborative research programmes, with the aim of achieving the real, durable co-operation that is necessary to create a critical mass of expertise. In a European context, Ireland is at the forefront of investment in the discovery and recording of archaeology in development-led projects. It can also be a leader of archaeological research internationally, if we match this investment with appropriate research capacity.

It was agreed that the Heritage Council and the Royal Irish Academy have a key role to play in the effective promotion, conduct, delivery and dissemination of such collaborative archaeological research programmes.

Finding: There is a critical shortage of capacity for the proper storage of and access to archaeological archives.

The objects, environmental and other samples, and the associated archive, along with the primary paper, drawing and digital archives are the major resource accruing from archaeological excavation.

In the National Museum of Ireland the space allocated to store excavation finds has reached capacity. There is a plan in place to provide additional storage at Collins Barracks, but no decision has been made on its implementation. Finds from excavations are now largely held by licensed directors or commercial companies. Current staffing levels in the National Museum of Ireland make management of the store, access for and supervision of researchers extremely difficult. This situation can be addressed only by the provision of adequate res-

ources; these include staff and suitable space. The National Monuments Service (NMS) has estimated that the number of excavations for which records will need to be archived is in the region of 12,000.

Recommendation: The development of a National Archaeological Repository/Archive.

The publication of the results of excavations cannot, of course, be achieved unless the primary archives are available and accessible. Information technology—through the digitisation of key databases and their inter-operability—has the potential to deliver a ‘virtual’ archive. Such an archive might encompass a number of physically distinct but accessible spaces, but there is a pressing need to develop a National Archaeological Archive for the paper-based excavation archive and to augment the National Museum facilities for the curation of finds from excavations. The lack of a national archaeological archive is the most pressing need in Irish archaeology today, and one which will have a continuing, long-term impact on the quality of archaeological research.

It will require an initiative at government level if an appropriate facility is to be provided and staffed. The next phase of structural funding is about to commence with the National Development Plan 2007–13. Now is the time for the archaeological profession to set out the requirements, and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) has indicated a willingness to move the project forward.

Finding: Publication and dissemination of results is a key requirement of regulation.

A key problem is a lack of conformity with the requirement to publish archaeological work. There are principles for regulation in both European (*European Convention on the protection of the Archaeological Heritage (the Valletta Convention)*) and national legislation (*National Monuments Acts*) that require the publication of all archaeological excavations. In published national heritage policy documents (notably the *Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage* (1999)), this requirement to publish archaeological excavations is emphasised. One of the stated conditions of every excavation licence is the obligation to publish the results.

There was widespread agreement that ensuring publication comes down to enforcement. It was also widely recognised that, for a number of reasons, there are problems currently with a lack of rigorous enforcement of the regulations. One reason is that developer funding, however generous, rarely underwrites the

cost of publication. This is largely because it is not part of the regulatory requirement for a commissioning client and they rarely have a stakeholding in such an outcome. In short, the servicing of the regulatory mechanisms does not require mandatory publication. This also means that in many cases publication has to be funded in isolation and does not add significantly to the career prospects of archaeologists in the consultancy sector.

Recommendations: A) Mechanisms should be put in place to enable and enforce regulation and publication. B) The forthcoming consolidation of the National Monuments Acts provides a legislative context for any proposed changes in the regulatory framework.

Enforcement entails refusing further licences to those who, without justification, fail to publish the full results of their excavation. This will require an appeals process to be enshrined in the National Monuments legislation.

There was widespread agreement that these enforcement measures (covering post-excavation report submission and publication) should be put in place. It was felt that, notwithstanding the issues that would arise in terms of addressing the requirements of fieldwork, the commercial market would respond to the new conditions of enforcement for report submission and publication. It was agreed that solutions would come from a partnership approach, with commercial companies actively working to deliver the appropriate publication of work. In becoming a condition of the market, the enforcement measures would also provide the necessary incentive for licensed archaeologists to view the publication of excavation results as a requirement for career progression.

It was also recognised that this will require an active and on-going assessment of what type and form of publication each project merits. This assessment will be facilitated by the forthcoming provision for all excavation reports to be placed on-line on a National Monuments Service website.

Finding: There is an urgent need to deal with the publication backlog.

As a result of our inability to conform to regulation regarding publication of the results of excavation and research, much of the archaeological work generated by the major expansion in activity over the last ten years remains unpublished. Complementing the recommendation regarding regulation and enforcement, which will ensure publication of all future work, there needs to be a retrospective engagement with what is often referred to as the publication backlog. It should be emphasised that in many cases un-published excavations

are not ready for publication but require significant input of time and resources to bring them to publication.

Recommendation: The establishment of a Bureau for Archaeological Publication.

It was agreed that there is now a requirement for a bureau for archaeological publication that would:

- ◆ Provide an up-to-date assessment of the scale of the problem
- ◆ Recommend appropriate forms of publication depending on the nature of the results
- ◆ Develop a systematic publications programme with different audiences (professional and public) in mind
- ◆ Implement and manage the process

It was felt that such a bureau could be established in the context of existing structures.

Finding: Changes in departmental structures have not led to regulation being more effective.

It was agreed that the changes that resulted from departmental alteration after the 2003 general election have made co-operation between the regulatory agencies less effective. The split between the DEHLG and the Office of Public Works in terms of the management of the National Monuments in state care has the potential to cause enormous difficulties in years to come.

In the case of the National Museum, while there has been some re-organisation of the structures there has been no additional staff appointed in the Irish Antiquities Division over the last twenty years, despite the major expansion of archaeological activity and the museum's statutory responsibilities.

Recommendation: The need to consider resource needs and strategic allocation of resources in the state sector.

There is a need for additional resources in the National Monuments Service and the National Museum of Ireland.

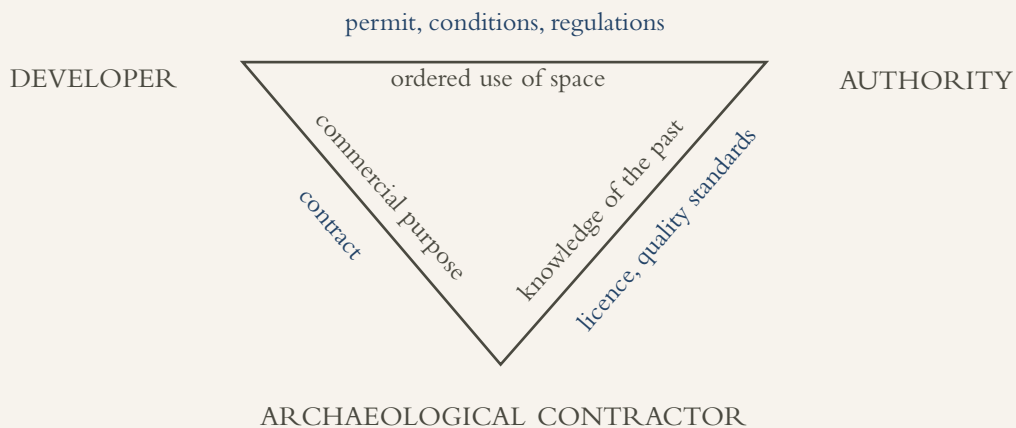
In the case of the NMS, could a re-allocation of resources could be considered? The largest number of archaeologists work in the planning and licensing section,

but the managing of planning applications on a day-to-day basis may be best dealt with at a Local Authority level. Responsibility for the setting of policy and national standards and national infrastructural schemes would remain with the NMS. This would create a network of archaeologists in local authorities working alongside other staff with heritage responsibilities, linked by a strong spine of central policy and standards through the NMS, where staff would be released to attend to other pressing issues.

Finding: Development-led archaeology is both a service and knowledge provider.

Development-led archaeological work in Ireland operates largely in the context of planning mediation, development control and cultural heritage management. It has to be seen as providing both a service and an assessment and better understanding of the archaeological heritage. Private companies offer their services in a competitive commercial context. These services are commissioned by private or public developer clients when legal provision requires archaeological assessment and mitigation of the impact of development on the cultural heritage. These commercially commissioned results now exist on such a scale that they are crucially important for understanding the national archaeological heritage. This is, after all, the fundamental reason why the work is seen as having a social and knowledge value and why archaeology is embedded in the planning and development process.

Therefore, market principles will operate best in tandem with establishing the necessary parameters governing the quality of the work to be undertaken. Quality assurance can be developed in the free-market system; however, a system of quality assurance for archaeology has to be linked to the legal framework for the protection of monuments, the provision of the excavation licensing system and in terms of compliance with the planning and development legislation.



Recommendation: Development-led projects should be conducted in the context of a research design.

It is necessary to balance the requirements of both providing a service and assuring the quality of the work being carried out in terms of contributing to archaeological understanding. All development-led excavation contracts should therefore take place within a specified research framework and to a research design that indicates the research context of the work, the efficacy of the proposed methodologies and clearly defined research objectives.

The nature of the record we now possess suggests that many development-led excavation contracts carried out since the beginning of the 1990s were conducted with an over-reliance on the assumed quality of recording methodologies and a focus on quantification and data retrieval. From a research perspective, this means that such excavations often took place without reference to or enquiry about research context. Furthermore, the excavation record preparation was frequently data-focused and conducted without sufficient analysis or study. On the other hand, what we have amassed is an unpublished record of enormous importance, variety and complexity from early prehistory to the modern period. This and other key background information needs to be urgently and thoroughly assessed as the background context for new projects. In a development control context, with an open commercial market, this does not in any sense detract from the unequivocal state requirement for either *preservation in situ* or so-called *preservation by record*. This requirement ensures an even-handed ‘polluter pays’ response to development impact. However, the work must be carried out in the context of value as defined by knowledge return. It is only in this way that a truly valuable *preservation by record* can be achieved.

The *Review of Research Needs in Irish Archaeology* by the Heritage Council, which includes a Framework for a National Archaeological Research Programme, provides a broad, indicative research context.

ABOUT THE FORUM

The Forum was an initiative of the President of the Royal Irish Academy, Professor James A. Slevin. It was organised by a working group whose members were Professor Slevin; Professor Howard Clarke, Honorary Secretary of the Royal Irish Academy; Professor Gabriel Cooney (chair), UCD School of Archaeology; Dr Eamonn P. Kelly, Keeper of Irish Antiquities, National Museum of Ireland; Dr Ann Lynch, Senior Archaeologist, National Monuments Service, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government; Margaret Gowen, CEO Margaret Gowen and Co Ltd; Dáire O'Rourke, Senior Archaeologist, National Roads Authority and Dr Brian Williams, Assistant Director, Environment and Heritage Service, Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland.

This briefing was written by Gabriel Cooney. Thanks to Professor Willem Willems for the diagram on p.11.

For more information

The full report on the proceedings of the Forum, *Archaeology in Ireland: A Vision for the Future*, edited by Gabriel Cooney, will be published by the Royal Irish Academy on <http://www.ria.ie>



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