

INSTAR Funding in Ireland - the Irish National Strategic Archaeological Research programme 2008

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council



December 2008 saw the completion of the first year of ministerial funding for archaeological research in Ireland that is specifically aimed at collaborative approaches between universities, state institutions, and private sector consultancies. Of the fourteen projects funded last year, five were focused on medieval matters, and we can expect reports on each of the projects in the course of this year's Newsletters. **Mapping Death: People, Boundaries & Territories in Ireland 1st to 8th Centuries AD**, where the lead investigator is the UCD Mícheal Ó Cléirigh Institute will be reported on in the September issue, along with **EMAP, the Early Medieval Archaeology Project**, led by the School of Archaeology, UCD; see: www.emap.ie. We also look forward to **Medieval Dublin City Archaeological Research Agenda**, led by Dublin City Council. The INSTAR projects receive their funding through the Heritage Council; see: www.heritagecouncil.ie. Proposals for 2009 funding are currently being reviewed.

INSTAR 1: Revealing the *Faire City*: The Kilkenny Archaeological Project

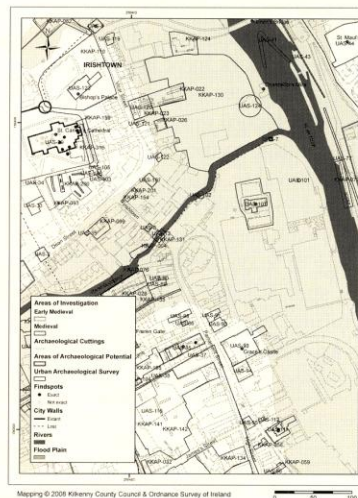


Panorama of Kilkenny (photo: C. Ó Drisceoil)

Kilkenny is a compact, walled riverside city in the south-east of Ireland whose surviving castle and cathedral, abbeys and churches, town walls, townhouses and streets all shape the only example of an Irish medieval city to remain wholly intact. This legacy is complimented by a long and important tradition of research and scholarship that has for over 150 years delved into the rich vein of documentary and archaeological material which the city has fashioned. Like most other Irish towns, investigations

arising from redevelopment within Kilkenny's historic centre have produced an abundance of new archaeological data, all of which has a very important role to play in allowing the origin, development and ultimately the historic character of the city to be appreciated. However, the results of most of these discoveries have never been made public; without their benefit it is impossible to understand the total history of life in Kilkenny during the past millennium.

In 2008 the Kilkenny Archaeological Project (KKAP) was instituted as a partnership between Kilkenny Archaeology (archaeological consultants) and the National University of Ireland Maynooth and it received INSTAR funding and the support of Kilkenny Borough Council to collate and assess the archaeological record for the city with a view to producing a strategy for its public dissemination. KKAP has collated records for all known recording 'events' in the city between 1845-2006 onto a specifically designed database integrated with GIS, the 'Kilkenny Urban Archaeology Database'.



An example of the GIS mapping produced for the Kilkenny Urban Archaeological Database

The database covers the present Kilkenny Borough Council area and its immediate environs and was modelled on similar schemes that had been completed for a number of historic towns in England, such as Lincoln and Canterbury. At present the

database contains 429 individual entries, of which 212 relate to archaeological investigations that occurred between 1968 and 2006. The location for each recording 'event' has been plotted and there now exists comprehensive mapping for a wide range of material, including each archaeological cutting that has been opened within the city, historically recorded findspots and listed buildings. The database is capable of being constantly updated and will be an invaluable tool for providing rapid and concise archaeological data as well as access to primary material such as site reports, journal publications and a host of relevant records, all of which have been scanned into the database as pdfs. It is also now possible to produce with relative ease thematic maps which can be related to a range of queries.

The second major undertaking for the project was the production of a substantial report on the archaeology of the city. Thirty-eight years of excavation in Kilkenny has amassed the largest collection of archaeological material from any Irish inland town: 212 sites were investigated in the city in 277 individual recording 'operations'. Given its relatively small size, only Dublin and Cork have greater numbers of excavation licences issued. Kilkenny's archaeological record ranges in date from the late Mesolithic to the 20th century AD, with the medieval (c. 1169-1550) and post-medieval (c. 1550-1900) periods being particularly well represented. The archaeology of trade, exploitation of natural resources, specialisation, technology, manufacturing, social differentiation, religious aspirations and death and burial are all included in the city's archaeological dataset.

What is clear is that Kilkenny's archaeology is distinctive to the city, yet because it has consistently absorbed international influences it may also be seen within the context of wider European patterns of urbanisation. In particular, Kilkenny's progress over the past millennium has been punctuated by periods of major expansion (in the 9th-10th century, 13th century, and 16th-17th century respectively) which mirror developments in

Britain and on the continent, and it is this dynamic blend that defined the ancient city and whose legacy continues to this day in its built form.



Archaeological excavations at Highhayes, MacDonagh railway station 2006. A previously undocumented artisan's quarter of the medieval city was revealed, including a pottery production centre and a baker's yard (photo: C. Ó Drisceoil)

Of 115 investigations that can be considered worthy of publication because of their relative importance, only 10 have been published. This produces a huge information deficit at a local level and for urban archaeology in general. What KKAP has revealed above all else is that we still know very little about the fundamentals of past life and society in the city. The city's fabric through the ages is poorly understood and there are major problems in tracing the development of its topography and material culture. Yet KKAP reveals the enormous wealth and range of the city's archaeological record and a unique opportunity exists now to explore it in detail and address these challenges. Application is being made to the Heritage Council to conduct a second stage of KKAP, which advocates for the production of a synthesis and analysis of the material that is grounded in a research agenda. If successful, the KKAP will represent the first time such a methodology has been used in Irish urban archaeology. See: www.kkap.ie for more information, and download a pdf of the report detailing the findings to date.

Cóilín Ó Drisceoil, John Bradley, Richard Jennings, Leah McCullough, John Healy
www.kkap.ie