

One of archaeology's core functions is the generation of public knowledge of our past and we're all well aware that providing for this is one of the key challenges for Irish archaeology at the moment.

So I thought I would focus on my own experience of grappling with the issue of archaeological publication, mainly from the perspective of my recent work on the INSTAR Kilkenny Archaeological Project but also from a number of other angles.

There are three key questions that I will deal with:

1. Firstly, do we actually really understand the depth of the publication crisis we are currently in?
2. Do we fully understand what has caused the problem?
3. And finally will the practice and policy changes that are being proposed here ensure that the issue will be dealt with effectively and will they ensure this never recurs again under a new regime?

I'm well aware that there are people here far more expert on this matter than me but I do hope you might find what I have to say useful for your discussions today.

Question 1: What is the depth of the publication crisis?

The big problem is that we have no up to date nationwide statistics on where we stand at present *viz a vis* publication, which is not surprising given the flood of compliance-related archaeological investigations that have been carried out throughout Ireland.

We are still at the stage where we are lacking even the most basic information on

How many archaeological investigations have taken place in Ireland?

How many of these are actually worth publishing?

How many sites are at the stage of post-excavation where they could be published?

We do have some scattered data from a number of sources though it has to be said its scope and quality varies greatly:

2002 Unpublished Excavations report by Ian W. Doyle, David Jennings, and Jackie MacDermott – assessed sites excavated between 1930-1997 and came to the conclusion that there were 81 sites of national significance that required publication.

2006 Foresight 2020 report which estimated there were 3,000-4,000 unpublished excavation reports for Ireland as a whole, and that it is 'unlikely that many of these will ever be published'. Figures weren't put on the amount that would actually be worth publishing however.

Most recently there is the monumental EMAP project – 887 'significant' Early Medieval sites excavated between 1930-2004, of which about 50 or so have been relatively well published. In the urban context Waterford, Dublin, Galway and Cork have been all fairly well served with publications

We have figures from a number of heritage council unpublished excavation assessments:

Drogheda where between 1968-2003 118 licenced excavations of which there are 5 substantive publications.

Limerick 135 excavations between 1978-2003, 8 publications.

My own project, the Kilkenny Archaeological Project (KKAP), has looked in detail at the situation in Kilkenny City

We've collected and managed all of the 'raw' data on the city's archaeological record using

the well established methodology of database and GIS

– this involved **429** individual archaeological discoveries, **212** of these were excavations, surveys etc. that had been made between 1968-2006.

Also information on the corpus of **c.37,000** artefacts, **1,300** human skeletons and the excavated palaeobotanical material is also included.

One of the most important purposes of the project was to figure out how many of the city's investigations would be worth publishing

54% (113) of the 212 modern investigations had produced results that were clearly worthy of publication and Now it can be said that Kilkenny, Ireland's best-preserved medieval city also one of Ireland's longest and most important urban archaeological records.

However, just 10 of these have to date been published and there are another 6 expected out in the next couple of years.

The methodology which we used allowed us to go into greater depth than might normally be the case and we were able to quantify exactly what needs to be done in order to get the material published .

So, for instance we were also able to find out exactly how many significant sites were at the final report stage - 73%

With specialist reporting – surprisingly high 88% of excavated material has been subjected to specialist analysis

- So whilst there are some positives I think you can get a general sense from all of these figures that we are in a very deep hole in terms of archaeological publication.
- It's difficult to put an accurate figure on it but the publication rate is certainly less than one out of every ten for significant sites.

- I should say that I don't have figures for national roads projects though my impression is at present it would be something similar.

Second question – do we actually fully understand what has got us to this point?

Again we have very little reliable information on this but there are some obvious anecdotal reasons I've come across over the years and these are backed up to a certain extent by surveys from the UK.

These are the key ones:

- Lack of resources
- Lack of time
- Lack of confidence to publish
- Lack of relevant support structures
- High costs involved in publication
- A common reason also is where the developer simply will not pay the post-excavation costs.
- And then there's the large cohort of site directors who directed excavations for the larger archaeological companies and who have never been given the resources to finalise their sites.
- Which brings me to my work on the M1 motorway, which I would suggest has to be one of the most intractable cases in Irish archaeology over the past couple of decades

Firstly between 1999-2001 I excavated 13 sites on the M1 motorway outside Drogheda

- Two schemes

Dunleer-Dundalk motorway

Drogheda Bypass

Included Whiterath major Early Medieval settlement enclosure with some spectacular finds

Coolfore

Balgatheran – one of a handful of Late Neolithic Grooved ware settlements in the country.

- To date there have been no final reports issued for any of these sites, and as I understand it, for the 120 or so sites along the course of the two schemes
- Nearly a decade has passed and not even preliminary reports have been issued for Whiterath and the other sites excavated along the Dunleer-Dundalk road.

All this despite many of these sites being associated with the Bru na Boinne world heritage site, a fact alluded to in its recently published Research Framework

- I've been trying to make progress on this for years now and I won't go into all the details because I've already been threatened with legal action by the archaeological company for discussing the matter with the NRA and the local authorities involved.
- I've written 19 times to the archaeological company - they say there was not adequate funding given for post-excavation
- I've written to the NRA and they are clear that funding was provided but essentially it is a matter between the county councils involved and the archaeological company because the projects were carried out prior to the NRA Code of Practice
- Meath and Louth County councils simply regard the matter as closed but will work with the NRA to progress the matter

- I've also written to the National Monuments Service about it on a number of occasions and they clearly do not wish to get involved in what is a contractual matter, other than to say that essentially the buck stops with me as the licence holder and 'The National Monuments Service still wishes to see final reports as per the licensing conditions issued with the original licenses'.
- I wrote to the National Museum August 2008, pointing out that I cannot bear responsibility for safeguarding the artefacts indefinitely and I have received no response other than an acknowledgement.
- As things stand the NRA are providing assistance to the local authorities and have on a number of occasions attempted to resolve the matter with the archaeological company

To date however there has been no substantive progress and it is difficult to see how it will ever be resolved.

So all of this I think gives us some indication of the types of practical obstacles that are put in the way of communicating archaeological discoveries to the public

and it is clear that there have been key failures at all levels:

- In the private sector there have been failures to properly resource and manage post excavation programmes
- To make matters worse we now have an 82% drop in contract archaeologists, many of whom were the directors of the sites that have yet to be published we have a bizarre situation now where site directors who are on the dole bear the legal responsibility for delivery of final reports as per their licence to excavate.
- State bears large proportion of responsibility – in my experience there has been no effective regulation of the post-excavation process and likewise little or no enforcement of the licencing requirements as they pertain to reporting
- In addition the state has also not funded publication and post-excavation for state sponsored projects – from Kilkenny the two largest excavations to have taken place in

the city have both run into the sand. The OPW flood relief scheme publication funding was pulled and according to Minister Mansergh in reply to a letter from Kilkenny Archaeological Society that they have no 'commitment to producing a ..final publication'. Funding for the post-excavation phase of the Kilkenny castle excavation project has also ceased. And I should add all this happened well before the current economic collapse.

Let's look at it from a purely economic standpoint – what would 'An Bord Snip Nua' think of it all? :

- Research Needs in Irish archaeology identified a figure of about 30 million a year being spent on compliance archaeology and for Kilkenny we estimated a figure of €15 million euro has been spent over the past 15 years.
- It was estimated in the UK that every square metre of finds retrieved cost in the region of £120,000. It is probably a lot more for Ireland.

So what is there to show for all this money?

- Some are questioning the ethical basis of 'for profit' archaeology - can we really continue as a profession to amass greater and greater amounts of data at enormous cost to the general public without giving anything of substance back in return?

As Chris Tilly put it 'The number of pieces of information we collect about the past may increase incrementally – our understanding does not'.

- So this leads to the third question: Will the practice and policy changes that are being proposed here ensure that the publication crisis will be dealt with effectively, and critically, will they ensure such a scenario never recurs again?

The only new provisions that I can see, and maybe I'm wrong here, which have specific regard to reporting and publication are

- The inclusion of post excavation requirements within conditions of planning
- Bonds being lodged with the local authority to ensure the completion of projects
- Certification requirements to cover post-excavation
- Possibility of extending licencing requirements to companies

Is this an adequate response to the issue?

I would suggest that sorting out the publication crisis and ensuring such a situation never happens again needs, in my view, to be at the core of all future policies regarding Irish archaeology

- Post-ex should be regulated to the same extent as excavation – this can I believe be legislated for and is surely the only way to ensure that excavation is not just seen as site clearance with a disconnect to post-excavation works.
- Publication and not just final reporting should be made a condition of planning, where appropriate
- In the absence of publication after a set period of time jurisdiction of the data reverts to the Department to do with it as they see fit.
- Throughout the world it has been clear that it is only the state that can adequately resource publication programmes – (this has been done very successfully for the 1970s ‘rescue’ boom sites in Britain – Chepstow, Hull, Norwich, Trowbridge, Usk, the Greater London Archaeological Publication Programme. Likewise in the United States of America - National Archaeological Database (National Park Service USA))

In this regard should we put the recommendations in the 2020 Foresight report to establish the Bureau for Archaeological Publication in there somewhere?

As archaeologists we need to get rid of the notion of a disconnect between excavation and post-excavation and with that in mind I borrowed for the title of this talk from Christopher Tilley's important 1988 paper *Excavation as Theatre* (revised and published in the 2008 Heritage Reader):

'the current state of archaeology can be compared to baking a cake. The end product – the cake itself – rarely, if ever gets baked...more and more cooks obtain more and more ingredients for the cake, the flour of artefacts, the eggs of structures, the spices of bone residues... in a frantic attempt to accumulate more and more information 'because it is there', in the erroneous belief that someday the cake will bake itself. What actually happens to the data accumulated has been a secondary issue. The secondary issue needs to become primary'.