

HERITAGE PROTECTION ALLIANCE of IRELAND

CHARTER May 2007

The Heritage Protection Alliance of Ireland is being founded in May 2007 to seek the repeal of the National Monument Act of 2004. This Act extended the powers of the Minister of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, to allow for the destruction of archaeological remains. The alliance seeks a strong National Monuments Act which would ensure that real protection is afforded to what remains of our archaeological heritage.

The past ten years have seen an unprecedented number of sites being subjected to unnecessary destruction. Poor identification and research at the planning stage have cost the taxpayer millions of euro through unnecessary excavations which could and should have been avoided.

The alliance members include professional archaeologists, historians, senior academics and other experts and community leaders, including Professor Donnachadh O' Corrain, Dr. David Edwards, Dr. Muireann Ní Brolacháin, Dr. Padraig Lenihan, Rev. Brian Kennaway, and Senator David Norris. Their combined professional experience and expertise has led them to the conclusion that Irish archaeology and protection given to heritage is in crisis. This is an issue which needs an immediate response by any new government. The National Heritage has been unnecessarily downgraded to facilitate development pressures and this must be revisited.

During the past 10 years over 10,000 sites of archaeological potential have been investigated in the Republic of Ireland under licence to the Department of the Environment and Heritage. Approximately 70% of these sites have tested "archaeologically positive", a phenomenal number by any standards. To put this number in perspective, it should be recalled that in 1989 a mere 101 sites were excavated.

In a period of rapid change, the cultural heritage of the country has been subjected to an unprecedented policy of what is, essentially, rescue archaeology. Sites which should have been protected, have been perfunctorily excavated and reduced to "preservation by record" – so frequently that this has almost become an acceptable practice in itself. This in many cases should be re-named "destruction by documentation".

Immediate reform is needed to halt this perfunctory excavation and destruction of sites, monuments, and their curtilages - which has now become almost a matter of routine. The current situation is totally unacceptable.

There is now an urgent need to protect what remains.

The policy which has allowed the present situation to arise is fundamentally flawed and unsustainable. It must be remembered Archaeology is a finite resource, and the duty of the National Government is to offer the utmost protection to this irreplaceable resource.

Prior to this government's ill-advised amendment to the National Monuments Act in 2004, the presumption was that "destruction by recording" was an extreme measure that should be avoided. Since the

failure of the government of the time to prevent the destruction of Wood Quay, Ireland's track record on the protection of our heritage has been poor. The 2004 Act has reduced the status of archaeology to the point where there is a development assumption, with lamentably few worthy exceptions, and that now, excavation and recording is the norm rather than the rarity.

The impact of the amendment has been devastating effect to local communities, where resources which should have been used to develop Heritage Tourism and Environmental Education have had to be diverted into long and costly Court Cases and Bord Pleanala hearings. It is to the credit of the community as a whole that, in so many areas, strong and effective participation has prevented some of the worst excesses of the current policy, and the community has been at times supported by An Bord Pleanala in their efforts, often overruling the local authorities' initial grants of permission.

The 2004 amendment must be repealed for the sake of the cultural integrity of this island. A new policy must be formulated, and this Alliance is seeking to place this issue on the agenda as a priority for the next government.

The Monuments & Antiquities Committee of An Taisce welcomes the formation of an alliance of professional experts and academics, in partnership with local communities, and has offered a support role in the development and co-ordination of the Alliance. A spokesperson from An Taisce said that they fully accord with the need for a new and effective policy in the National Interest:

"Individual communities have seen the erosion of the local vernacular sites which define their towns, villages and landscapes, without little recognition of their local knowledge or research. A common experience is that when local knowledge indicates that a site is important, it has not been sufficiently acknowledged by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, or the local authority. This situation has served no one.

Developers have been subjected to astronomical costs in "resolving" archaeology, which is then passed on to the public and business sector – while communities have struggled to raise funds to hire archaeologists, lawyers, and planners to try and do what is the state's responsibility – to identify and protect our heritage.

National infrastructure projects have been delayed because archaeology becomes an issue late in the day, because basic research has not been conducted and routes for roads which were ill advised in the first place are at great expense and delay, eventually re-routed or built at a price that is no longer acceptable. It is sad but true that taxpayers are paying for the destruction of heritage they wish to see protected, in the name of progress."

Some sites have been totally destroyed through lack of proper planning at initial design phase. Consultant archaeological companies are perceived to be "developer-led", and are believed by many communities to have "fast tracked" excavations. Local Area Plans and re-zoning issues have proved, in many instances, to have been developer-led, and failed to include local history organizations reasoned submissions in relation to heritage.

A solution, where appropriate, would be to create a levy on new

development which provides an archaeological process independent of the developer, and prior to any planning application. A strong independent National Monuments Advisory Body should be reinstated. Permanent protection to the archaeological heritage and landscape must be enshrined in new legislation. We cannot undo the destruction that has occurred, but we can seek to end it.

Non-intrusive techniques and the historic record alone could have protected many sites which now exist as a paper record only. The establishment of a robust register of sites of vernacular importance in each settlement area, to augment the power of the present Sites and Monuments Register/County Development Plans is long overdue. It is the landscape and history of each town and village which gives it its unique identity, and it is this that has been lost in many instances.

It has been a pattern in Irish life and politics that abuse is recognised only in retrospect. Our capacity to deal with it is hindered by the lack of decisive intervention even after it has been acknowledged. We are asking our future political leaders to take responsibility and pledge commitment to a protection of our now very damaged archaeological heritage landscape and support the thousands of individuals who want reform.

We are looking for a government that recognises that what has happened is disgraceful, and that takes the time to explore and cherish what is essentially Irish.

CASE STUDIES

The Heritage Protection Alliance of Ireland has identified the following sites as case studies where the policy as defined by the Planning Acts has been inadequate and in need of further protection. The various organizations who have identified and defended these sites, and their professional experts are committed to a reform of the planning acts to provide an integrated policy for the protection of the archaeological heritage and landscape of Ireland.

Alliance membership includes professional archaeologists, architects, academics and local community groups who are or have been instrumental in protecting or attempting to protect the following sites:

TEMPLE SITE, TARA-SKRYNE VALLEY, CO. MEATH

The discovery of a sacred Temple site at Tara (of the High Kings) is one of the most significant archaeological discoveries in these islands in the 21st Century. The public was not informed for a month after its finding, and no attempt has been made to involve the international archaeological community in this extraordinary development. The circular enclosure has a remarkable diameter of 80 metres.

A wooden post circle is reminiscent of discoveries at Emain Macha (seat of the ancient Kings of Ulster) and Dun Ailinne (seat of the ancient Kings of Leinster); a National Monument without question, and one totally deserving of preservation. This site should have been identified prior to any road plans being drawn up. It is incomprehensible, given the technologies available, that it was not. An appeal by An Taisce awaits hearing in the Supreme Court.

VIKING LONGPHORT SITE, WOODSTOWN, CO WATERFORD

A Viking longphort site - in essence the site of early Waterford city. National Monument belatedly declared. Intrusive archaeological testing led to the destruction of large parts of the site, and contrary to all best practice, Viking objects were found and removed from soil dump. The alarm was raised only when young archaeologists expressed concern. The opportunity to place this site in the research corpus of international Viking sites was lost.

KILLSALLAGHAN HISTORIC LANDSCAPE, CO. DUBLIN

Complex of sub-surface monuments at the heart of a largely intact prehistoric into medieval landscape. Proposed super-prison, (the largest in Europe), combined with the Central Mental Hospital. Decision to buy land based on "incomplete, inaccurate, and misleading information". Lack of proper impact study undertaken prior to the purchase of the site. Local residents ignored and deemed not worthy of consultation by the relevant Minister. This coupled with new legislation, designed to allow the government to build no matter what the retrospective Environmental Impact Assessment uncovers. High Court proceedings have been re-initiated.

BATTLE OF THE BOYNE SITE, CO. LOUTH/ MEATH

A site, which under international heritage conventions, would have been preserved intact. However at present there is a proposal to build a so-called "eco-friendly" hotel immediately adjacent to the place of King William's wounding during the battle! A "strongly worded" letter sent by the OPW to Co. Louth planners (February 2006); How about outright refusal? An Taisce has filed an objection.

TRIM CASTLE, CO. MEATH

A proposal to build a hotel immediately across the narrow street from the perimeter wall of Ireland's most impressive castle. Despite the views of Department of Environment archaeologists, and other concerned professionals to reject the proposal, the experts were over-ruled and the hotel was built by consent of the Minister for the Environment of the day.

ROUND TOWER, CLONDALKIN, CO. DUBLIN

Proposal to build a bar/restaurant immediately adjacent to the Early Christian Round Tower! Resisted successfully thanks to the efforts of the local residents and the cross-party co-operation of the elected representatives(2005).

AUGHRIM BATTLEFIELD SITE, CO. GALWAY

Major battlefield in the 1690s Williamite/ Jacobite war, the Aughrim battle site is under threat from the proposed motorway which cuts through the left flank of the Irish position to the north of Aughrim village. The integrity of the rest of the site and especially the Jacobite lines on Aughrim Hill has been and is being degraded by house building. Galway County Council refuses to recognise the need for any controls over building in the core of the battle site. The contract to build the road was agreed last month (April 2007).

HILLFORT AT RAHALLY, CO. GALWAY

A trivallate hillfort of exceptionally rare form. Diameter of 400

metres. Omitted from Environmental Impact Assessment. Topsoil within perimeter mechanically removed, which is contrary to best practice; hardly any topsoil finds! This is part of the route for the proposed M6.

BLACK PIG'S DYKE, CO. CAVAN & ULSTER

An ancient defensive barrier believed to have once stretched from Armagh to Donegal, dating from around 100 BC and, according to Professor Donnachadh O' Corrain of UCC, is "monumental evidence to the type of accounts given in the Tain Bo Cuilleanna," - the ancient myths which feature Cucullen and the saga of the Brown Bull of Cooley. Last year Cavan County Council considered an application by a quarry company to expand their operation at an area in which the last surviving section of the dyke in Cavan is sited. The company has already destroyed a 220 metre section of the dyke since they began quarrying there in the mid-1970's; the only arrest on this environmental brutality has been through the efforts of local voluntary heritage interests.

PREHISTORIC-MEDIEVAL LANDSCAPE, RATHDOWN, CO. WICKLOW.

This landscape includes Rathdown Castle and St. Crispin's Cell; continuous settlement from prehistoric times, with a complex multi-period series of sites and remains. One of the few landfall sites remaining in the country intact, on the slopes of Bray Head, and one of the most important deserted Medieval sites in Ireland. Located in the Barony of Rathdown, home of the MacGillaMcolmogs and other Leinster Chieftains, its landscape has survived almost intact on the coastal strip. Gave its name to present administrative area of Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown.

The protection of the Rathdown site has been ongoing over the past 17 years, involving the local community in numerous planning appeals. Most of the site has been preserved, but some unnecessary loss occurred, after trial trenching failed to identify significant prehistoric settlement (Beaker period) and an Early Christian corn-drying kiln.

The present proposals for a Marina and c.350 apartments now with An Bord Pleanála, has confirmed substantial archaeology on the 'Castle Bawn' field to the south of the present 24 acre National Monument. The developers propose to use almost all of the field for a merely temporary industrial facility to facilitate the works. The original planning application by Wicklow Co. Council disregarded the wealth of information about the site already on their files, and objections on heritage grounds were ignored. The destruction of national heritage to serve temporary works is incomprehensible.

CARRICKMINES CASTLE & MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENT, CO. DUBLIN

Unique revetted fosse with a well-documented history. Declared a National Monument only after Court action. Destruction directed by the Minister for the Environment after the National Monuments Act had been downgraded in 2004. All future major discoveries are accordingly put in jeopardy. The unanswered question posed by Judge Flood in the Tribunal – "who decided to move the site of the interchange onto the known castle site?" Answer by the relevant authorities was "can't remember"; an answer described by Judge Flood as "unimpressive". It is believed this junction, the 4th in a 9 kilometre stretch of the

M50, was designed, and specifically the roundabout, to facilitate the opening up of the rezoned lands that belonged to Jackson Way.

CARRIGAPHOOCA CASTLE, MACROOM, CO. CORK

Carrigaphooca Castle; until now one of Ireland's best kept Hiberno Norman Tower-houses, sited in an outstanding setting. This demesne is listed in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage category on historic gardens and designed landscapes. It was from this castle that Justin MacCarthy, Lord of Muskerry and Carrigaphooca, led the first Irish brigade to France. WB Yeats included a story from the castle in his collection of Irish Faerie Tales.

The current plan for Carrigaphooca Castle, manor house, and nearby pre-historic stone circle, is to slice through this demesne by placing a four-lane highway and two flyovers less than 200 metres from the castle door - thus obliterating the entire setting of the castle, the remnants of its bawn, and manor house. An outrageous proposal that should never have been considered in the first place.

The Alliance is concerned at the dilapidation and possible destruction of a number of heritage buildings, their settings, and historic and architectural potential:

16 MOORE STREET, DUBLIN CITY

The location of the last documented headquarters of the 1916 Provisional Government. Twice scheduled in the City Development Plan for protection – and yet the roof was being let collapse in on what is now a derelict building. As with Clondalkin, the only reason the building is being saved is through the voluntary efforts of community response – and as such there are yet uncertainties as to the ultimate fate of the building in question, with the designation of it being a National Monument under challenge.

12 DORSET STREET, DUBLIN CITY

The remainder of the birthplace of the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan, who authored "The School for Scandal", amongst other works. In the last few months Dublin City Council has granted permission – currently being appealed – to demolish and replace this supposedly "protected structure" with a block of flats.

1 MOUNTJOY SQUARE, DUBLIN CITY

A house of significant cultural importance. Left neglected and empty with deadbolts on the front door, this house had been in the charitable hands of a religious institution until it was sold a decade ago. Subsequently sub-divided and let out in multiple occupancies, a fire occurred at the house last Christmas (December 2006). This was a location of Dail Eireann which met here during 1919 and 1920 when owned by Alderman Walter Coles, who also let Michael Collins use of the address as a safe house during The War of Independence. Previously it had been the residence of Home Rule MP T.M. Healy, and prior to that had been residence to Archbishop Hawksley.

GREYSTONES HARBOUR, CO. WICKLOW

The department of the Environment has conceded the destruction of the 19th Century South Pier in Greystones harbour, and acceded to proposals which will open up development possibilities on every soft shoreline in the country. Wicklow Co. Council has refused - despite strong local objections to re-zoning and planning - to accord Architectural Conservation Area status to the harbour area, one of the finest Victorian landscapes on the East coast, which includes 14 protected buildings whose setting will be irretrievably damaged by the Marina Proposals.

CONCLUSION

In every corner of this island, there are concerned citizens involved in protecting what is essentially our collective identity. The Heritage Protection Alliance of Ireland seeks to provide a platform and a forum in defence of the history, cultures, and integrity of the island.

In the context of a general election in the Republic it is of great interest and concern to a sizeable proportion of its citizens to know just where exactly the respective political parties stand in relation to heritage and more importantly its protection.

It is the intention of the Heritage Protection Alliance to seek formal meetings with the relevant spokespersons of the respective parties. The individual reactions/ pronouncements of the parties shall then be made public.

There has been a consistent pattern to date, which is no longer acceptable. The scale, losses and destruction of our built and rural heritage has reached a point where it is vital that a new policy is devised which protects the fragile remains of our settlements and architectural and archaeological landscapes.

The pattern is one of systematic destruction of the physical manifestations of our collective history and cultures on the island of Ireland. In the cause of citizenship and democracy, it is time to re-instate the onus back upon the taxpayer-funded state bodies to protect the physical heirlooms of our unique and shared cultures.

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