

Title Travels through historic time—the medieval archaeology of the M3

Speaker Jonathan Kinsella

Jonathan Kinsella is currently a research archaeologist with Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd (ACS Ltd), a role that he has held since December 2005. He has prior excavation experience with ACS Ltd and a number of other archaeological consultants. He is a graduate of archaeology, at both BA and MA, from University College Dublin and his MA dissertation, entitled *Locating the poor and unfree of early medieval Ireland*, won the Medieval Settlement Research Group's John Hurst Memorial Prize in 2005 for the best Masters dissertation on any theme in the field of medieval settlement and landscape in Ireland and Britain. His PhD proposal, which will examine the archaeological settlement landscape evidence of early medieval Brega, was recently accepted by the School of Archaeology, UCD. He hopes to begin this research in the coming months.

Organisation Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd

Road Scheme M3 Clonee to North of Kells

This brief presentation will investigate the settlement landscape and burial evidence for early and later medieval activity along the M3. I will begin with an assessment of cemeteries discovered at Ardsallagh 1 and Collierstown. This will be followed with a comparative analysis of the settlement evidence from early medieval enclosures at Roestown, Dowdstown, Castlefarm, Baronstown, Ross and Calliaghstown. It will be demonstrated that they cannot be viewed as homogeneous entities but that all displayed varied functions and were resided in by families of differing status who were involved in a range of domestic, industrial and farming activities. It will become apparent that development-led archaeology, and in particular road schemes, has added considerably to our knowledge of landscape or off-site archaeology and this will be briefly discussed in relation to the discovery of cereal-drying kilns and field systems. Archaeological evidence for the high-middle ages is not as abundant but I will examine the comparative settlement evidence at Boyerstown and Trevet. These sites are themselves very important due to the lack of previously excavated rural late medieval settlements in Ireland. I will dip in and out of early medieval sources, notably the law-texts, and will also incorporate previously excavated sites where they have relevance, be it proximal or chronological, for example, which furthers our understanding of medieval activity along the M3.

Burial rites can inform us greatly about both the people who were buried and, importantly, about the people who buried them. We can learn about how a family or community perceived itself in relation to surrounding communities and we can develop insights into the religious, political, social and possible ethnic structures of past societies. With this in mind, I will examine the archaeological evidence and landscape context from the cemeteries at Ardsallagh and Collierstown.

Early medieval enclosures, variously known as ringforts, raths and cashels, are commonly viewed as the homesteads of wealthy farmers and their families engaged in small-scale domestic, industrial and farming activities. It is argued that the majority date to AD 600–900 and were occupied for 100–200 years by the initial family and their subsequent generations. Archaeological evidence from the enclosures excavated on the M3 diverges from this oversimplified and static view of early medieval society. I will investigate various aspects of the comparative archaeological settlement landscape evidence to demonstrate this.

Traditionally, research excavations have tended to focus exclusively on archaeological sites whilst ignoring aspects of their related landscape. Much of what we know about the surrounding landscape during the early

medieval period has come from historical research and pollen analysis. Archaeological features, notably cereal-drying kilns and field systems, discovered in advance of the M3, and other road schemes, have forced archaeologists into rethinking the previously accepted view that crop husbandry was a secondary activity to pastoral farming. The implications of this will be briefly explored.

The archaeological evidence associated with the Anglo-Normans is extensive (e.g. stone and earthen castles), yet much of what we know about this period is derived from the historical sources. The few excavations that have taken place have tended to focus on urban centres. Rural settlement has especially been neglected with only a handful of sites excavated. This is why the discovery of rural house sites at Boyerstown and Trevet is so important because it allows for comparative studies. I will briefly discuss who may have lived in both these dwellings, which produced considerably different archaeological evidence in terms of their structural and material remains and their landscape setting.