



**Archaeological Desk Report on a proposed Development site  
at Mell, Drogheda, Co. Louth**

**For Lagan Homes Ltd  
Alan Hayden  
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82 Melvin Road, Dublin 6w. Phone 087 2651541, 087 2491102  
Email: [clairewalsh27@outlook.com](mailto:clairewalsh27@outlook.com) [alanrhayden@icloud.com](mailto:alanrhayden@icloud.com)  
Directors: Claire Walsh & Alan Hayden VAT 6549543F

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## Introduction

Lagan Homes Ltd. are seeking planning permission for the development of a small area to the south of a large residential development already in progress (ABP-311678-21, 21/1283) at Mel townland on the Old Slane Road, Drogheda, Co. Louth.

Archaeological resolution of the large site was completed in 2023 (excavation licence no. 23E1032). Archaeological excavation revealed the presence of a number of prehistoric pits and a ringfort close to the new road at the north end of the larger site, but nothing of archaeological interest survived elsewhere on the larger site.



Fig. 1. Location of site.

## The subject site

The additional area to the larger area measures approx. 150m. N-S by 100m E-W and is presently in use as a builders yard, car-park, house and garden. This smaller area has largely been previously stripped of topsoil and partly scarped.

Cartographic sources and satellite imagery show that from the twentieth century the site has been a green field with a house and garden occupying its southeast side.

## Archaeological and historical background

The site lies on a slope on the north side of the River Boyne in an area that is rich in prehistoric remains dating from the Mesolithic to Iron Age. The higher ground c.500m north of the site contains a number of later Neolithic to Iron age settlements and possible ritual sites, while the area on which the site lies and the lower ground to its south is devoid of such known sites.

There are several known fording points which may be of ancient origin on the River Boyne south of the site.

Early medieval activity in the area is evidenced by several ringforts, enclosures, a possible early ecclesiastical site and a souterrain.

The site lies 2km east of the area where the Battle of The Boyne was fought in 1690. This location falls within an area demarcated by Map 5.11 of the Louth County Development Plan relating to the Battle of the Boyne. The battle took place on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1690 between William of Orange and James II. Around 60,000 men, in two multinational armies, met in this location. James's army counted 25,000 and included Irish, French, Germans, Walloons and British Jacobite exiles. The Jacobites were camped at Oldbridge, west of the site, where they sought to halt William's march to Dublin. William's 35,000 troops included British, Dutch, Danes, French Huguenots, Germans, Irish Protestants, Latvians, Poles, Swedes and Swiss.

There are conflicting accounts of the position of William's army prior to the battle. Tuite placed the Williamite encampment, marked on Storey's sketch of the battle site, at Killineer. From here, William's forces marched 'first towards Drogheda, then along a narrow lane' (Cloughpatrick Lane) as far as the fording point at Drybridge. The generally accepted view has the Williamite encampment at Tullyallen, from where William's forces advanced southeast as far as the Drogheda-Slane Road. Both accounts would appear to place Williamite forces in close proximity to the subject site on the old Drogheda-Slane Road. It is most likely that they passed by the southern boundary of the subject site. However, their main focus was on fording the River Boyne further south and it cannot be determined if there were any associated encampments located within the subject site.

On the day of the battle, 10,000 Williamite troops were sent westwards as a diversionary tactic to cross the Boyne at Rosnaree. Subsequently, the Boyne was forded at five separate locations in the course of the battle, including the ford at Drybridge. However, the main crossings took place at Oldbridge and, after a short period of relatively intense battle here, the Jacobite forces fell back and retreated towards Dublin.

## Cartographic Representations

OS maps from the first 6" edition of 1836-41 to the last 12" edition of 1911 show the site as an open field.

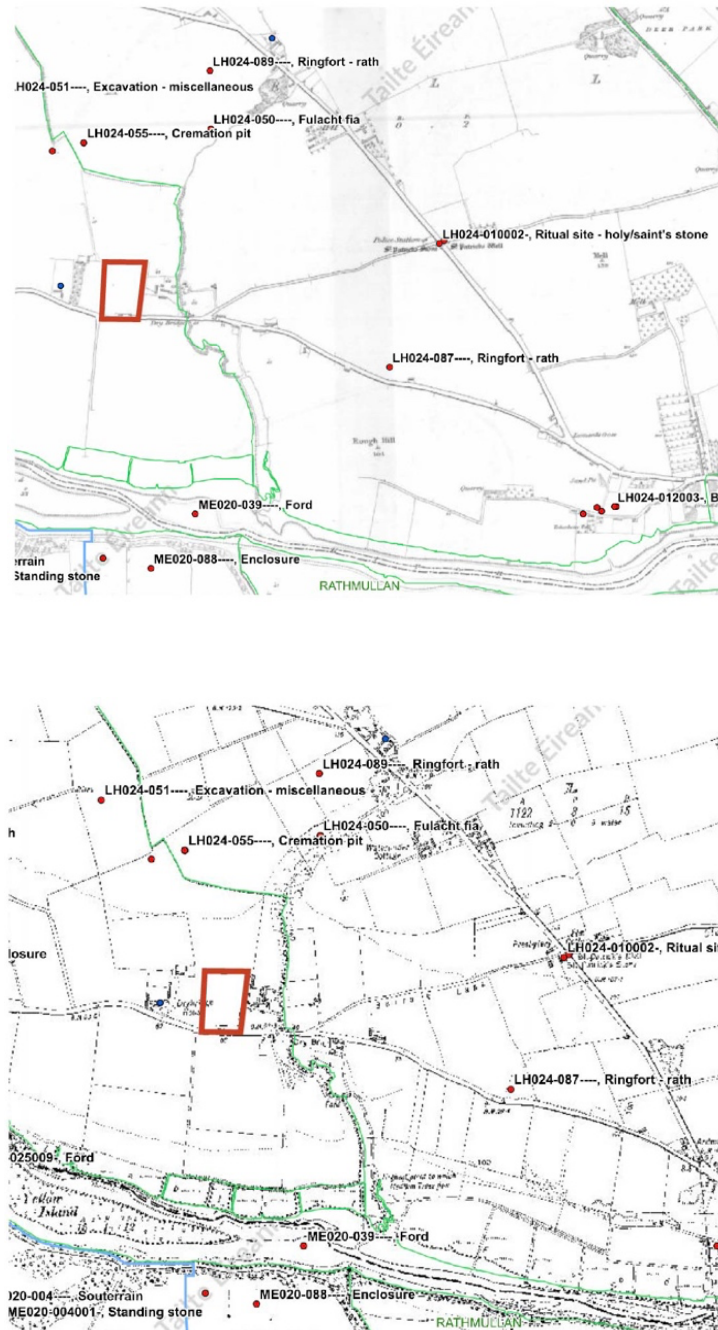


Fig. 2. (top) OS first edition map (bottom) OS final 12" edition map

## Satellite Imagery

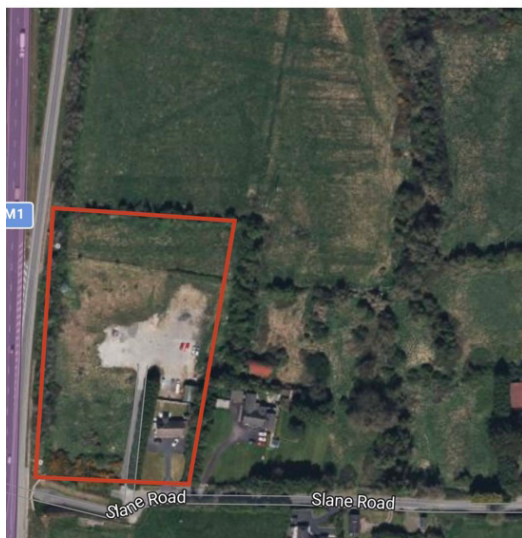
Satellite images show the site as a greenfield up to c. 2001, with a house and garden occupying its east side. After that they show the builder's yard on the northeast corner of the site and its access from the south. Present day satellite images show the builder's yard and surface carpark facilities on the west half of the site



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

Fig. 3. Satellite images of the site: (a) and (b) 1996-2001 , (c) Bing maps image (c. 2005), and (d) present Google maps image.

## Record of Monuments & Places

The Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) is a statutory inventory of archaeological sites protected under the National Monuments Acts 1930-2004 compiled and maintained by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland (ASI). The following sites in the area are listed in the RMP:

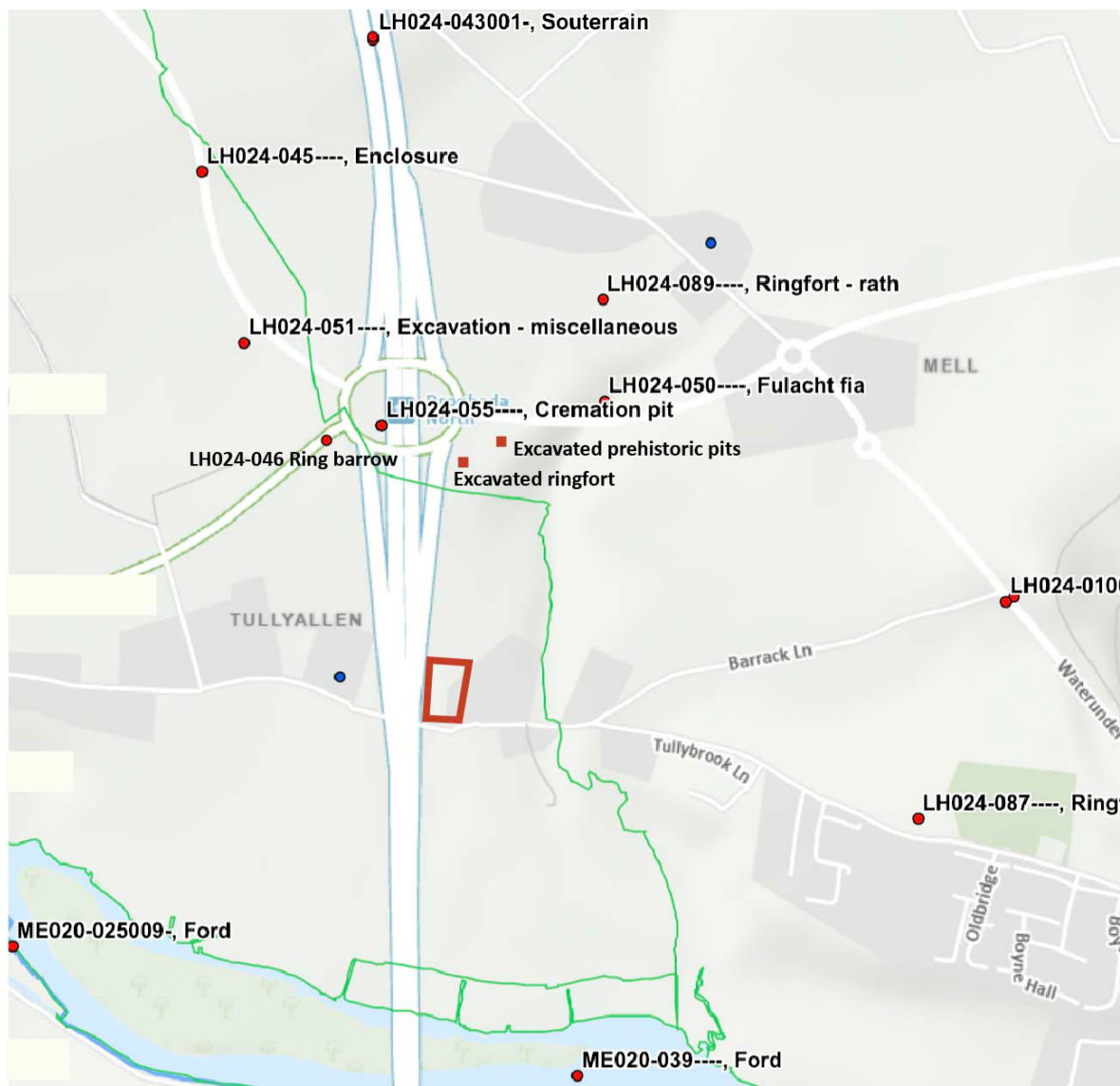


Fig. 4. RMP map showing site and known archaeological sites.

**LH024-043001- : Souterrain : MELL**

An L-shaped souterrain with a collapsed beehive chamber at one end was uncovered in 2000 prior to construction of the M1 motorway (Excavation Licence 00E0631). The walls were of drystone construction. The total length of the souterrain was 36.88m and its roof (of lintels) was intact for almost one third of this. The average width of the passage was 0.72m and its height was 1.1m. At about mid-length there was a step c. 0.45m in height. A number of sherds of Carrowkeel ware pottery were recovered from the souterrain together with a bronze mount decorated with openwork interlace. Six sections of earthworks (LH024-043002-) were excavated in the vicinity.

**LH024-045---- : Enclosure : TULLYALLEN**

A complex of ditches, pits and spreads were excavated here in 2000 prior to construction of the M1 Motorway (Excavation Licences No. 00E0282 and 00E0832). The exact function of these features is not certain. Flints, slag and burnt bone were recovered in association with the features.

**LH024-089---- : Ringfort : MELL**

Located at the top of a small, low W-E spur. It overlooks a curve to the E of a small N-S stream that is c. 170-200m distant. The cropmark of a circular enclosure (diam. c. 30m) defined by a single fosse is visible only on Google Earth (21/07/2021). This is within an outer oval enclosure (dims c. 60m NE-SW; c. 50m NW-SE) defined by single fosse, but the perimeters of both appear to coincide NW-N.

**LH024-046---- : Ring-barrow : TULLYALLEN**

A multi-phase ring barrow (external diam. c. 13.2m), with a centrally placed cremation contained within a pottery vessel, was uncovered here in 2000 prior to construction of the M1 Motorway (Excavation Licence No. 00E0429). The ditch (max. D c. 1m; Wth 1.9m) displayed three distinct phases of activity and at least six token cremations were discovered in the SE quadrant of the final phase.

**LH024-063---- : Enclosure : MELL**

Discovered prior to road construction (Excavation Licence No. 00E0430). Consisted of an annular ditch (average width 2m; D 1.65m) with parallel sides and rounded ends, measuring 19.26m E-W x 11.91m N-S (externally). A number of re-cuts were noted and a large number of finds recovered including burnt bone (human and animal), Bronze Age pottery, struck flint and a decorated glass bead. A shallow linear feature cut into the SE of the ditch and ran diagonally across the interior of the site terminating in a pit just a short distance from the enclosing ditch at the NW. Sixteen postholes were cut into the base of this linear feature, two of which displayed evidence of in-situ burning.

**LH024-050---- : Fulacht fiaidh : MELL**

Discovered prior to road construction (Excavation Licence No. 00E0946). A small spread of burnt material (10.8m x 3.2m) was initially exposed (this was not the full extent of the spread but all that was exposed to facilitate the development). Removal of the burnt material uncovered three pits cut into subsoil. One was sub-rectangular (1.5m x 1.2m; D 0.8m), the second was sub-circular (diam. 1.5m; D 0.41m) and the third was irregularly shaped and lined with charcoal, however its full extent was not established as it extended beyond the road take.

**LH024-087---- : Ringfort: MELL**

Located towards the top of a S-facing slope. An arc (int. diam. c. 20m E-W; ext. diam. c. 25m) of two fosses curving SW-N-ENE is visible only on Apple Maps.

**LH024-010002 & -010002- : Ritual site - holy/saint's stone & holy well : MELL**

Marked 'St. Patrick's Stone' on the 1835 and 1938 'OS 6-inch' maps. A large natural boulder with three circular depressions, which, according to tradition are the prints of St. Patrick's knees and staff. The well was covered over with a public pump when inspected in 1966.

**ME020-0025009---: Ford : OLDBRIDGE**

No information available.

**ME020-039---- : Ford : OLDBRIDGE**

No information available.

## Evidence from archaeological excavation

### Prehistoric Pits & Ringfort

A well preserved, annular ringfort with 2m deep ditch, four-post entrance structure and evidence of metal-working in the interior, and several pits containing late-Neolithic flints, polished stone axehead, Grooved Ware ceramics and sherds of stone bowls were uncovered by excavation in 2023 by the writer on the northern edge of the large residential development adjacent to the north side of the site.

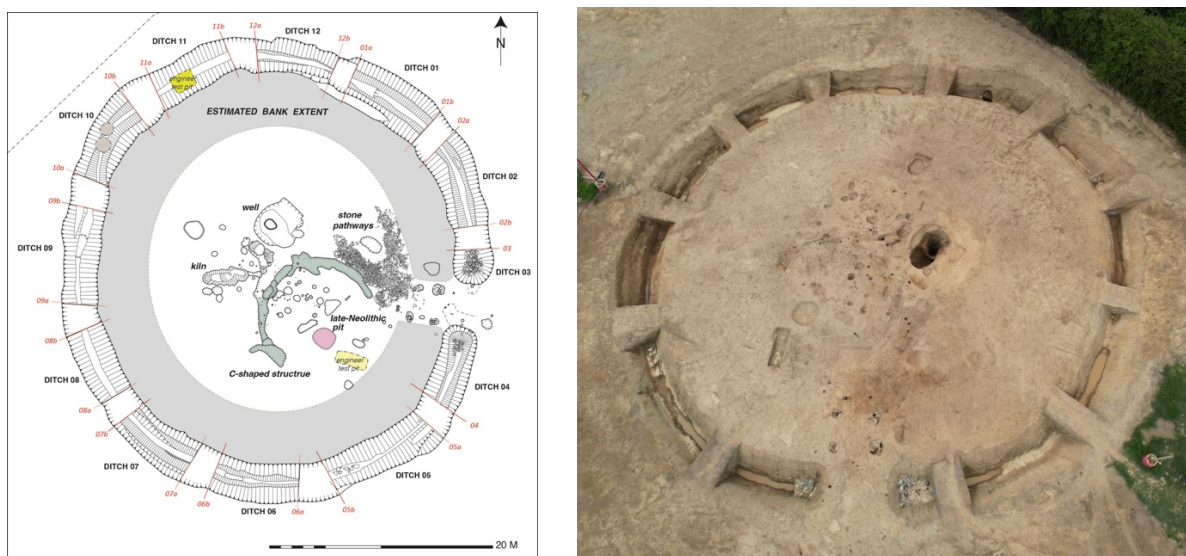


Fig. 5. Plan and aerial photograph of the recently excavated ringfort.

## Conclusions and suggested mitigation

No known sites of archaeological or historical interest survive on the site and no sites or features of archaeological interest were uncovered close to the site in the large area developed to its north side.

The known prehistoric sites in the area tend to cluster on the higher ground well to the north of the site.

The majority of the site has been extensively stripped and scarped to form a builder's yard and car parking areas while its east side is occupied by a twentieth-century house and garden.

The probability of structures or features of archaeological interest surviving on the site appears, therefore to be low.

However, given the location of the site within the Boyne Valley, it is recommended that archaeological test trenching and / or monitoring of ground reduction / stripping should be carried out as a condition of planning.

The recommendation will be issued by the Planning Authority after consultation with the statutory bodies and their response.