

# Battlefields Project

Alluding to Winston Churchill's wry observation that battles are 'the punctuation marks of history' Mr. Dick Roche, T.D., Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government said, "If this is so, then battlefields represent the very pages on which these marks of history are to be found - where they were written in the blood of the combatants".

"Certain battlefields are sites with iconic status in the public's minds as crucial turning points in the nation's history such as the battles of Kinsale, the Boyne, Aughrim and Vinegar Hill. There is a growing awareness of, and interest in, battlefield sites not just in Ireland but worldwide. The success of the current "Soldiers and Chiefs" exhibition in the National Museum of Ireland is clear testament to the public's abiding interest in Irish battles and warriors. There is, therefore, a significant educational and recreational aspect to this project as well as the further strengthening of protection for significant aspects of our heritage. The reputations of great political and military leaders were often built on their success on the battlefield. Many battles display evidence of developments in tactics, armaments and skills that have resonance and relevance in modern warfare. Moreover, battlefields are the final resting grounds for numerous unknown patriots, soldiers, chiefs and camp followers whose lives were given in the defence of their beliefs and country" said Minister Roche.

The research project is being undertaken against the backdrop of on-going planning and development issues that affect the way in which battlefield sites are managed. Most battlefield sites have evolved into their present-day usage ranging from agriculture, to dwellings, industry, etc. and have been fragmented by boundaries, differing land ownerships and infrastructure. Battlefields, therefore, are a complex and intriguing area for study. These issues need to be identified in the context of the archaeology of each battle site. There is recognition of the need to be careful about development within 'battlefield' areas. Equally there is a need to provide information and to promote the conservation and interpretation of these sites. Battlefields rarely have identifiable remains as such. This is because the land on which many battles took place was often farmland at the time of the battle. The landscape has continued to evolve over time. The project will ultimately assist in identifying the appropriate statutory protection for relevant battlefield sites under the national monuments legislative code.

The Minister said, "Continued management is both desirable and necessary to support sustainable development in these areas. It is important, therefore, to identify the issues of concern and it is in this context that the project brief has been designed to be tightly focussed on key finite deliverables that can be managed and measured within a clear timeframe. The inaugural meeting held today brings together for the first time a panel of recognised experts in the fields of military history, archaeology, and mapping and one which is academically and geographically representative of various national and educational institutions".

Of the panel itself Minister Roche said, "It was appropriate for a study such as this that the Department sought out the very best advice available. I am very grateful to

the various expert panel members present here today, who have generously agreed to give of their time and expertise". In particular, the Minister welcomed Mr. Ken Neil, the nominee from the Environment and Heritage Service, in the Department in Northern Ireland and he also thanked the two guest speakers, Dr Paul Stamper (English Heritage) and Dr Lesley Macinnes (Historic Scotland) who made presentations on similar work in their jurisdictions. "Considerable interdisciplinary study combining historical documentary and archaeological evidence has been undertaken in both England and Scotland", said the Minister, "This has proven increasingly effective at accurately placing the action within the contemporary terrain of the battlefield. This approach is also reflective of the composition of the Irish panel of experts assembled today".

However, the Minister sounded a note of caution that "Building on the work of notable historians in Ireland, this project presents the panel members with a very challenging agenda, not least of which will be the refining of the definition of battle 'site' itself. The project will investigate the reliability of the detailed evidence for each battle with documentary evidence being supplemented as necessary by archaeological, topographical and landscape studies. The eventual aim of this project is to assist in identifying the appropriate statutory protection under the National Monuments Acts 1930 – 2004 that should be extended to battlefield sites within the ongoing consolidation and modernisation of this legislative code".

Minister Roche looked forward to the results of this project and to his Department working with the expert panel to deliver a clear vision on how to protect and sustain this element of the historic environment, both for today's and future generations. He said "This study will give us a greater understanding of each battle site. It will also assist in the development of strategies in the areas of protection, education and recreation. There is an undoubted and sustained interest in this topic. It has historic resonance and relevance within the All-Island dimension. Most importantly, the results of this study will help our citizens to understand and better appreciate the history that has shaped our nation".

### **Battlefield Project Expert Panel List**

*\* Primary skill Historical -Dr Harman Murtagh (School of Business Studies, Athlone Institute of Technology): Recognised expert on Irish military history and battlefields (especially the Jacobite period 1689-91). Adviser to the OPW on the Battle of the Boyne project, he has just published a book The Battle of the Boyne 1690. A guide to the battlefield (2006).*

*\* Primary skill -Historical -Dr Katherine Simms (Dept. Medieval History, TCD): She has written on the military history of medieval Ireland and would bring extensive knowledge of medieval sources to the panel.*

*Primary skill -Historical -Dr Pdraig Lenihan (Department of History, University of Limerick): He has a keen interest in military history and is an expert on 17th century battlefield sites having published books and numerous articles on the topic.*

*\* Primary skill -Historical -Dr Hiram Morgan (Department of History, University College, Cork): He has a keen interest in late medieval military history and has published extensively on this topic. Has edited a book on the Battle of Kinsale (2004).*

*\* Primary skill Military Historical- Colonel Donal O'Carroll: Retired member of the armed forces and current president of the Military History Society. He has considerable knowledge of Irish battlefields and would bring both the military, topographical and historical perspectives to the panel.*

*\* Primary skill Archaeological- Prof. Gabriel Cooney (School of Archaeology, University College, Dublin): He oversaw the archaeological assessment of the Battle of the Boyne site for the OPW. He would bring both archaeological and practical landscape management skills to the panel.*

*\* Primary skill -Archaeological- Dr. Kieran O'Connor, (Department of Archaeology, National University of Ireland, Galway). He has a keen interest in battlefields as archaeological landscapes and an established expertise in archaeological management.*

*\* Primary skill Mapping History- Mr Muiris de Buitléir (GIS Unit, DEHLG): Has both a keen interest in battlefields (having published on same) and would provide expertise on mapping for GIS.*

*\* Primary skill Administrative Management -Mr Eugene Keane (AP, OPW): Responsible for management of the Battle of the Boyne site. Apart from extensive knowledge of battlefields built up over years in dealing with the management of the Boyne site, he would bring practical management skills to bear on this element of the reports.*

*\* Primary skill Archaeological objects History -Lar Joy, Curator, National Museum of Ireland. Extensive knowledge of Irish military history.*

*\* Primary skill Archaeological -Mr. Ken Neill, Directorate of Built Heritage of the Environment and Heritage Service of the Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland. Experienced archaeologist of 20 years with a particular interest in medieval period focusing on aspects of post-medieval conflict including Elizabethan warfare and associated fortifications and the 1798 Rebellion*