



MEDIA RELEASE

DISCOVERY OF HUMAN SKELETAL REMAINS IN NEWMARKET ON FERGUS, CO. CLARE

County Clare, IRELAND, 2nd April 2007 – The skeletal remains of what appears to be at least six individuals, possibly dating back to pre-Christian times, have been discovered during the archaeological monitoring of improvement works to a local water network in County Clare.

The remains and up to four further possible burials have also been detected during archaeological monitoring of ground works for a water reservoir at Barnhill, near Newmarket-on-Fergus. Clare County Council confirmed that it had suspended work on the affected part of the site subject to the issuing of an excavation licence by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, expected to be issued this week.

According to Eoghan Kieran, of the Moore Group (Monitoring Archaeologist for the project), *“A brief assessment of the area has been undertaken by osteologist Camilla Lofqvist to determine the nature and extent of the discoveries. Results of this osteoarchaeological analysis concluded that the remains appeared to represent at least six articulated skeletons with another four possible burials.”*

“Animal bone was also detected in connection to the burials but no datable finds were recovered. Some of the burials were laying in an East-West direction, which may indicate Christian burial. However, burials in all different directions were represented on the site, possibly indicating a pre-Christian date”, Mr. Kieran added.

The archaeological landscape around Barnhill wood and Newmarket-on-Fergus exhibits several features from the Bronze Age, Early Christian period and onwards.

There are several Fulachta Fiadh, ringforts and Anglo-Norman castles in the vicinity, as well as the largest known hillfort in Ireland, Mooghaun hillfort. This trivallate fort is located in the grounds of Dromoland Castle and is dated to 1260-930BC.

“This discovery was as a result of a careful archaeological monitoring procedure of the site in question, and as commissioned by Clare County Council. It represents an exciting and potentially significant archaeological discovery, and Clare County Council looks forward to further investigation of the site but we do not anticipate that the discovery will result in any delay to the completion of the scheme within the stated 12 month contract period”, stated Hugh McGrath, Water Services, Clare County Council.

“However the remains do constitute archaeological artefacts and final decisions regarding their disposal or curation rest with the National Museum of Ireland”, he added.

Mr. McGrath confirmed that the site, an area of approximately 20 X 30 metres, had been cordoned off pending completion of the archaeological excavation and to prevent additional disturbances.

He continued, *“ This particular contract involves the provision of improvement works to the local water network in Newmarket-on-Fergus and commenced early last month after Clare County Council signed a EUR3 million contract with Ward & Burke Ltd, Co. Galway. In addition to this new reservoir construction, the contract involves bringing treated water to Newmarket-on-Fergus from Castl lake Water Treatment Plant, near Sixmilebridge in conjunction with upgrading works at the Water Treatment Plant.”*

In a 2003 report commissioned by the Heritage Council, entitled ‘*Human Remains in Irish Archaeology*’, it was estimated that some 15–20,000 individuals were excavated from archaeological sites in Ireland in the period from 1989 to 1998. The Newmarket-on-Fergus find is somewhat different, however, as the burial site was not marked.

To archaeological specialists all such skeletal discoveries constitute a valuable historical and scientific resource, inscribed with evidence of the working life, living conditions, diet, traumas and diseases of past generations.



Above: Bones and remains of skull at Barnhill, Newmarket on Fergus.