

Predevelopment Archaeological Testing
Kiltamagh Emigrant Park
Kiltamagh
Co. Mayo

Sue Zajac

Archaeologist
Mayo County Council

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1. Summary

Archaeological pre-development testing took place between the 23rd and the 25th of February 2021 in Kiltamagh, Co. Mayo, under licence number 21E0099. Fifteen test trenches were mechanically excavated to assess the archaeological potential of a 0.915 Ha. greenfield site, prior to Part VIII planning, for Kiltamagh Emigrant Park. Nothing of archaeological significance was recorded. The testing concluded that the development should proceed without further archaeological mitigation.

2. Site Location

The development site is located between Thomas Street and James Street (formerly Georges Street), in the centre of Kiltamagh town, Co. Mayo (Fig 1). The townland is also Kiltamagh, Parish of Killedan and Barony of Gallen. It is found on Mayo OS six-inch Sheet 80 (ITM E534420/N789200). The development site is irregular in plan and now covers two green fields, divided by either dry stone walls, that are collapsed and overgrown or open, water-filled drains. The narrower sector of the development site at north and north-west is high, dry ground. The remaining areas are low-lying bog. Both are covered by rough to marginal grassland. Residential or industrial units back onto the development site in most areas (Fig 2).



Fig 1 Centre of proposed Development Site between James Street and Thomas Street.

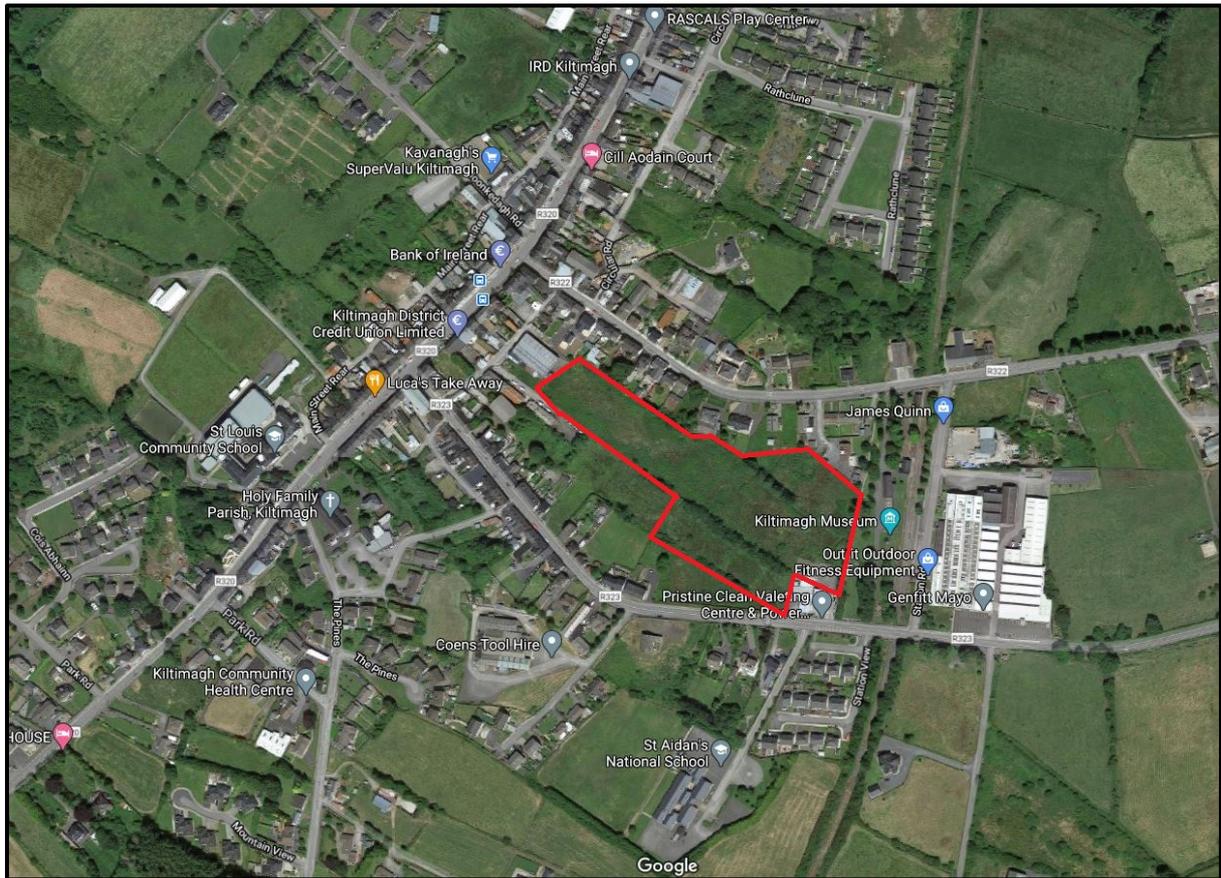


Fig 2 Aerial view with proposed development site outlined in red.

3 Description of Proposed Works

The proposed development is the construction of an Amenity Park within a green field site 0.915 Ha. in size and owned by Kiltamagh Amenity Park Ltd. The development design is themed as an Emigration Park connecting with the existing Railway Museum, that borders the eastern edge of the development. As well as a Multi Usage Games Area the site will also be given over to allotments and wildflower areas. A small lake is planned for the north-eastern corner of the site. Mechanical excavation for the lake will cover a sub-circular area of approximately 20m x 30m. Otherwise large parts of the central, north, and north-eastern sectors of the development site will be left untouched in order to provide a natural habitat for biodiversity. On the higher ground at north-west a mock ringfort is planned (Fig 3).



Fig 3 Design of Emigrant Amenity Park proposed for Kiltamagh.

4 Archaeological Background

Cartographic analysis, literary research and a walkover field survey were undertaken as part of the background to the archaeological pre-development testing. The walkover survey took place on 22nd January 2021.

Archaeological sites are known from Kiltamagh townland. These are a ringfort and souterrain (MA080-032 and MA080-032001) 0.3km to the north-north-east of the development site and a second ringfort (MA080-030) 0.3km to the north-west (Fig 4). No archaeological sites are designated within the area of proposed development and no new archaeological sites were identified above ground during the walk over survey. A small building is shown on the 1838 OS six-inch edition near the southern boundary of Field 2 and the overgrown foundations of this are still visible.

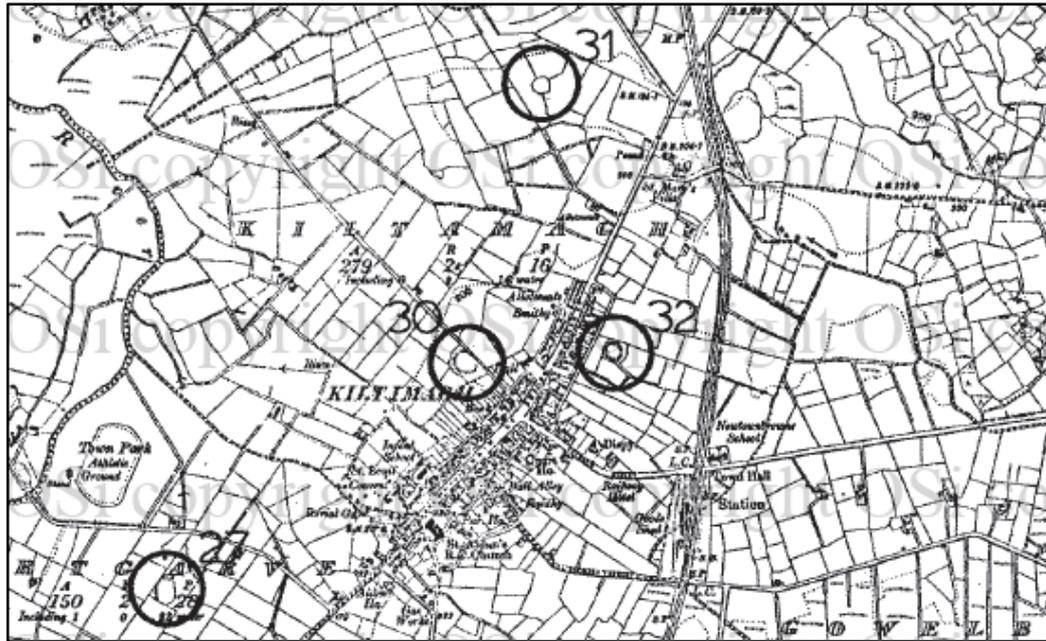


Fig 4 Extract from the Sites and Monuments Record showing the archaeological sites in the vicinity of Kiltamagh town including those 0.3km to the north-north-east and north-west of the proposed development.

5 Aim of Archaeological Testing

Nothing of archaeological significance could be seen within the development site prior to the start of archaeological testing. Predevelopment testing was recommended however, due to the size of the site (0.915 Ha.), which for archaeological planning purposes, is considered large-scale. As such the aim of the predevelopment testing was to establish if sub-surface archaeological deposits or features were present prior to the proposed development proceeding (Raftery and Halpin, 1999, 25-6).

6 The Predevelopment Testing

The archaeological, pre-development testing was carried out over three days from the 23rd to the 25th February 2021. During this time fifteen test trenches were mechanically excavated under licence number 21E0099. The testing took place in two fields. The field at south, closest to Thomas Street (Field 1), is level and low-lying. Testing in the second field (Field 2), to the north of Field 1 took in an area of higher ground that sloped down from north to south. Testing did not take place in the central and eastern sectors of Field 2 as the only planned disturbance here was for a small, artificial lake 20m x 30m in diameter. Eight test trenches were excavated in Field 1 and seven in Field 2. A total of nine contexts were recorded, six in Field 1 and two in Field 2. All test trenches were 2m wide and set 15m apart. They were aligned north-north-east x south-south-west and were mechanically excavated using a toothless grading bucket (Fig 5).

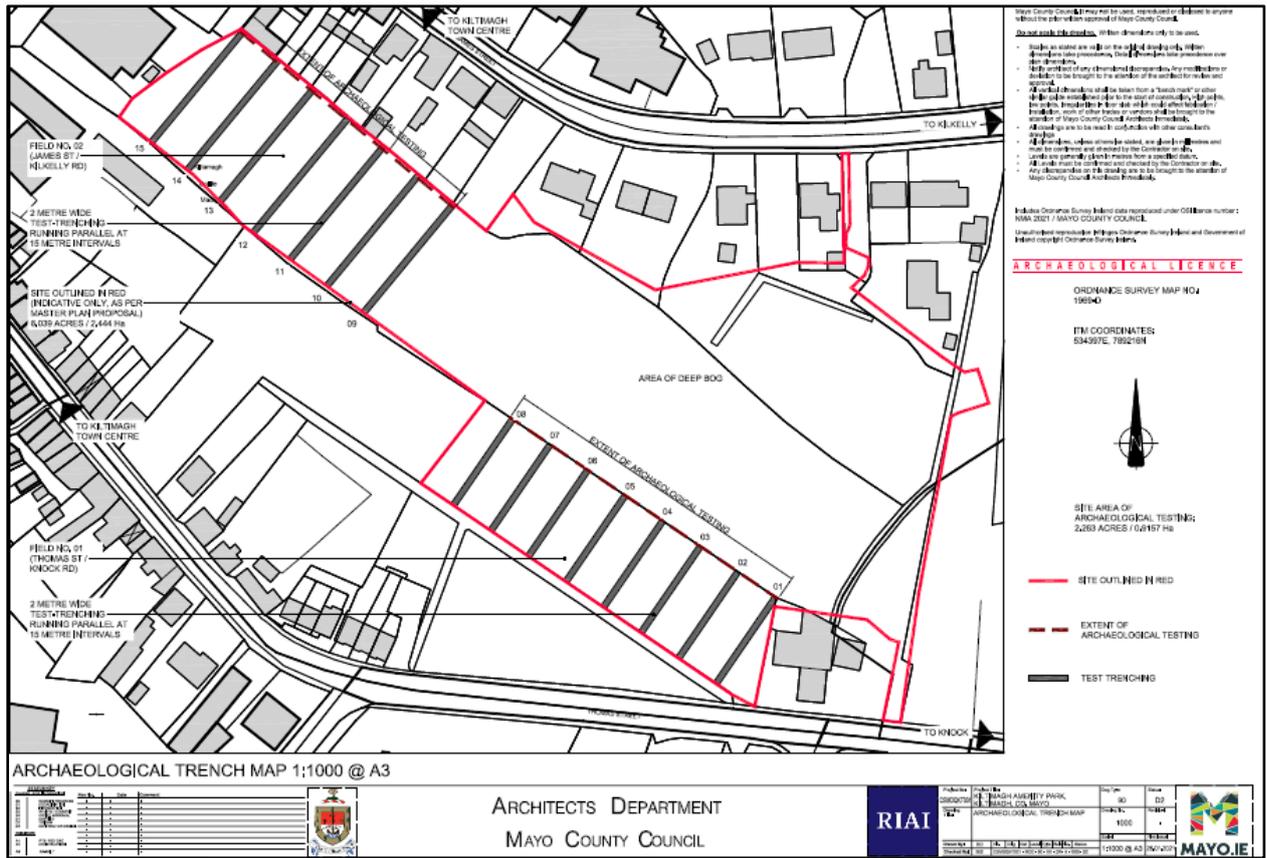


Fig 5 Development site outlined in red showing location of archaeological test trenches.

Test Trenches 1-8 (Field 1)

The test trenches in Field 1 were between 30m and 33m in length. The stratigraphy was consistent with topsoil (C1& C2) overlying peat (C3 & C4). The test trenches were excavated to between 1.8m and 2.2m deep. Natural subsoil was not reached at these depths. A small pit was excavated at the base of Trenches 7 and 8 but the natural subsoil was not reached in either pit, even at depths of up to 4m. The west section of Trench 5 collapsed in with the weight of the excavated peat overlying it. For safety reasons, further digging, below 2.2m did not occur.

Test Trench 1

Located on the west side of a service station fronting onto Thomas Street. A fine, loose topsoil (C1) between 0.6m and 0.7m deep, overlay compact peat (C4), with a natural layer of silver birch at a depth of 1m. A land drain (C5) ran through the centre of the trench on an east-west axis, on top of the peat, for 9m before it ran into the east facing section of the trench. The trench was excavated to a depth of 1.8m and the peat was seen continuing (Plate 1).



Plate 1 Looking east to excavation of peat (C4) in southern end of Test Trench 1.

Trench 2 & 3

A fine, loose topsoil (C1), reached an average depth of 0.4m above compact peat (C4). Traces of fill (C6) were seen running through the topsoil in both Test Trenches 2 and 3. A piped drain (C5) was seen running across Trench 2 on a north-south axis for 4m. Both trenches were excavated to a depth of 2m and silver birch wood was seen as a natural layer at 1.8m deep.

Trench 4

A heavy clay topsoil (C2) overlay compact peat (C4) to a depth of 0.3m. Stony fill (C6) occurred as a layer covering almost the width of the trench just north of centre and running for 5m. The fill did not extend into the east section face of the trench but was seen continuing into the west section face where it was followed for 4m. The fill seemed to have been used to level up a low area of the field and to help with drainage. Within it were broken sherds of modern pottery. The trench was excavated to a depth of 1.8m and began to fill with water at this depth (Plate 2).



Plate 2 Looking north to general view of Test Trench 4.

Trench 5

A compact clay topsoil (C2) overlay peat (C4) to a depth of 0.3m. Trench 5 was excavated to a depth of 2.2m and the west section face at the northern end of the trench collapsed in due to the unstable nature of the ground and the weight of the excavated peat (Plate 5).

Trench 6

A very shallow layer (0.15m deep), of compact, clay topsoil (C2), with shallow land drains at 2m intervals running east x west across the trench. The clay overlay peat (C3) which was 0.7m deep. Below this was a deeper more compact deposit of peat (C4). The testing did not reach the base of this peat deposit. A stone-lined drain was seen running for approximately 6m within the trench on a north x south axis. This trench was excavated to a depth of 2m and silver birch wood occurred as a natural layer at 1.8m deep.



Plate 3 Collapse in Trench 5.

Trench 7

A layer (0.4m deep) of compact, clay topsoil (C2) overlay peat (C3) which was 0.5m deep. The interface between the topsoil and the dark brown peat was uneven and they formed a mixed horizon above a deeper more compact deposit of peat (C4) with silver birch wood occurring as a layer within it at 1.8m deep. Stone filled drains were seen at intervals of 2m running across the trench on an east-west axis within the topsoil and upper peat layer. The drains reached a depth of 0.3m and were 0.4m wide on top. Generally, this trench was dug to between 2m and 2.2m in depth. A pit was dug at the base of the trench to see if the bottom of the peat could be reached but at a depth of 4m natural subsoil was still not visible.

Trench 8

A very shallow layer (0.15m deep), of compact, clay (C2) with land drains running through it at 2m intervals on a north-south axis. In the centre of the trench there was a layer of stone fill (C6) measuring 2m x 2.4m. It formed a base for an access track across an open drain that led into an adjoining field, not included in this development. The clay overlay a deposit of peat (C3) which was 0.7m deep. This in turn overlay a more compact deposit of fibrous peat (C4) containing a substantial layer of silver birch wood at a depth of 2m. The trench was excavated to between 1.8m and 2.2m deep and the peat was seen continuing with no indication of natural subsoil. A pit was dug at the base of the trench to see if the bottom of the peat could be reached but at a depth of 4m natural subsoil was still not visible.

Summary (Field 1)

Topsoil in Field 1 was either a loose black till (C1) or a heavy, grey clay (C2). The clay was confined to the western edge of Field 1 and the black till along the eastern and central areas. Fill (C6) had been used in places to level up and possibly stabilize the otherwise low-lying ground. Drainage pipes or stone-filled, drainage channels (C5) were also seen within the topsoil across Field 1, suggesting the upper levels of the development site had already been disturbed prior to archaeological testing. Peat occurred below the topsoil in all areas. An upper level of relatively loose, wet peat (C4) was seen in places overlying a lower more compact, fibrous peat (C4) which appeared to be undisturbed. Within it, at a depth of between 1m and 1.8m, a deposit of naturally occurring wood was consistently located across Field 1, consisting of small tree trunks, branches, and twigs, all identified as silver birch.

The only small finds were sparse inclusions of modern crockery associated with fill (C6) in Test Trench 4. Nothing of archaeological significance was uncovered in any of the Test Trenches numbered 1-8 in Field 1.

Test Trenches 9-15 (Field 2)

The test trenches in Field 2 were between 45m and 47m in length. The stratigraphy was consistent in each case with clay topsoil (C7) overlying either natural boulder clay (C8) or peat (C9). The northern end of Test Trenches 9-15 was excavated on higher ground and reached a maximum depth of 0.4m. At south they encountered peat as seen in Field 1 and natural subsoil was not reached at excavated depths of 2m.

Test Trenches 9-12

A shallow layer of clay topsoil (C7) between 0.15m and 0.25m deep overlay a natural boulder clay (C8) on the higher ground at the northern end of Test Trenches 9-12. The topsoil becoming slightly deeper as the testing moved west across the site (Plates 4 & 5). For the final 15m of Test Trenches 9-12 an abrupt fall off the hill gave way to deep peat (C9) containing some large tree trunks. (Plates 6 & 7). The peat was again overlain by a shallow layer of clay topsoil (C7). Modern crockery sherds were found in the topsoil, particularly where it overlay boulder clay (C8) on the higher ground at north.

Test Trenches 13-15

The stratigraphy in Test Trenches 13-15 was the same as that in Test Trenches 9-12. Clay topsoil (C7) now reached an average depth of 0.4m however, on the higher ground where it again overlay natural boulder clay (C8). The peat (C9) only occurred for the final 6m at the southern end of Test Trenches 13-15 and the fall, off the higher ground, was more gradual (Plate 7). Modern crockery sherds were again found in the topsoil, particularly on the higher ground at north.

Summary (Field 2)

Clay topsoil (C7) was seen to overlay natural boulder clay (C8) to a depth of between 0.15m and 0.4m. At the southern end of the test trenches topsoil was seen to overlay a deposit of peat (C9) for an average depth of 0.3m. This peat was similar to that already seen in Field 1 (C3). Natural mineral soil was not reached at the southern end of any of the test trenches in Field 2. Some small finds of modern crockery sherds were found in the topsoil on the higher ground but nothing of archaeological significance was uncovered in the Test Trenches numbered 9-15

in Field 2. A further expanse of bog was seen in the east and central area of Field 2. This sector of the site was being left as a natural habitat except for a 20m x 30m excavation for an artificial lake. Taking this into account and given the negative results of the pre-development testing elsewhere, further trenching in this area was not carried out.



Plate 4 Looking north to Test Trench 9.
Shallow layer of topsoil (C7) above boulder clay (C8).



Plate 4 Looking north-east to Test Trench 10.
Rock coming through boulder clay (C8) in foreground.



Plate 5 Looking north to general view of Test Trench 11.



Plate 6 Looking south to large tree trunk from excavation of peat (C9) in Test Trench 12.



Plate 7 Looking south to gradual fall from natural boulder clay (C8) into pocket of deep peat (C9) in Test Trench 13.

Contexts Field 1 & 2

Context 1 A fine, loose till seen as topsoil (10YR 2/1 black) in Test Trenches 1, 2 and 3 and between 0.4 and 0.7m deep. Has sparse inclusions of sandy gravel and cobbles, seen elsewhere in Field 1 as a layer of modern fill (C6). Found near the centre and eastern edge of Field 1 only. The material may have been imported suggested by the sparse inclusions of fill going through it. The topsoil had also been disturbed by the construction of land drains (C5).

Context 2 A shallow layer of compact, wet clay topsoil (10YR 3/2 very dark greyish brown) between 0.15m and 0.3m deep. Found near the centre and western edge of Field 1 in Test Trenches 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8. The topsoil had been disturbed by the construction of land drains (C5).

Context 3. Natural deposit of peat (10YR 3/1 dark brown), loose with no inclusions. Located below topsoil (C2) and reaches depths of 0.7m with no inclusions. Seen in Test Trenches 6, 7 and 8.

Context 4 Natural deposit of compact, fibrous peat (5YR 3/4 dark reddish-brown) found across all areas of Field 1. It has a consistent deposit of silver birch wood at depths of 1m to 1.8m. Appeared to be undisturbed. In places it was overlain by Context 3 above.

Context 5 Drainage channels located in most trenches consisting of either plastic or ceramic piping or u-shaped hand dug drains 0.4m wide on top and 0.3m wide at the base that were filled with cobbles. The range of drain types suggests the Field 1 had been improved on various occasions for agricultural purposes.

Context 6 Sandy gravel fill, with pebbles and cobbles used to level up the ground in the vicinity of Test Trench 4 and provide an access trackway across an open drain running beside Test Trench 8. Also seen as sparse inclusions throughout the topsoil (C1) along the eastern edge of the site. In Trench 4 also contained sherds of modern crockery.

Context 7 Coarse sandy, clay topsoil (5YR 4/2 dark reddish grey) averaging 0.3m deep. Contains moderate inclusions of modern crockery sherds. It overlays Context 8 and 9.

Context 8 Relatively shallow layer of naturally occurring boulder clay with a distinctive, mottled colour (5YR5/6 yellowish red and 5YR6/1 grey). The excavation did not proceed through this level but boulders and gravel, that formed the hill, were seen in places coming up through this layer.

Context 9 Natural deposit of loose, wet peat (10YR 3/1 dark brown) similar to Context 3 above but contains very large tree trunks. Found at the southern end of the test trenches in Field 2.

7 Conclusion

Fifteen test trenches were mechanically excavated in a greenfield site on behalf of Kiltamagh Amenity Park Ltd. prior to a Part 8 planning application to develop Kiltamagh Emigrant Park in the centre of Kiltamagh town, Co. Mayo. Nothing of archaeological significance was uncovered in any of the excavated test trenches. As such this report recommends that the development should proceed without any further archaeological mitigation.

8 Bibliography & Online Resources

Raftery, B and Halpin, A., Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage 1999, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2.

www.archaeology.ie/historicmonumentviewer

Sue Zajac,
Archaeologist,
Mayo County Council.

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