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Exploring traditions of professional practice in CRM geoarchaeology: home and away

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GSI Fulbright 2016-17 at University of
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- CRM = Cultural Resources Management
 - Professional practice of archaeology as part of the development planning process
 - Managed through federal (national/EU), state, county and local (e.g. urban) government agencies
 - Conducted to codes of best practice (defined by archaeological advisors), in addition to statutory regulations (defined by legislations/ordnance).
 - Codes of practice are usually more demanding than regulations.

Geoarchaeology

- Geoarchaeology comprises a group of approaches used to interpret and predict the archaeological record.
- Geoarchaeological approaches are focused on:
 - understanding soils, sediments and landform history (landscapes & environments)
 - exploring how people in the past used, understood, interacted with, and altered the earth
 - understanding geo-materials and the artefacts produced with them (e.g. stone, metal, clay)
 - predicting site locations, extent, and state of preservation
 - absolute and relative dating of archaeological sites based on geo-materials (e.g. K/Ar, U-Series, sediment chronology, stratigraphy)

Geoarchaeology in CRM

- Prediction of site status: used in early stage of planning ('desktop'); soil & sediment histories, topography & landform histories, hydrological situation. Q: Where are sites (or certain types/ages of sites) likely to be located? What state of preservation can we expect?
- Understanding site histories during intervention ('assessment'/'excavation'/'post-excavation'): soils and sediments make up most of each archaeological site (contexts). Q: What do the site contexts reveal about past activities, environments?

Fulbright project 2016-17

The Celtic Tiger and underdeveloped
geoarchaeology in Ireland:
issues arising from skewed applications
in CRM

Dr. Helen Lewis

University College Dublin School of Archaeology

SAA Meeting, Austin TX, April 2014

The 'Celtic Tiger'

- 1995-2007 - >17,000 CRM investigations, mainly on infrastructural developments and private construction projects (based on total number of reports – more than 90% are CRM)
- 2 archaeologists made the Times (UK) Rich List of the 100 richest millionaires in Ireland
- Hundreds of professional field archaeologists from all over the EU were working in Ireland



Despite a very high level of best practice during Celtic Tiger CRM, for some reason geoarchaeology – a standard practice in CRM in e.g. France, UK, Switzerland etc – was not carried out by Irish contract archaeology

Reports submitted (www.excavations.ie)

• 2011-14	no data	
• 2010	846	
• 2009	517	
• 2008	1320	Years of economic decline in red
• 2007	2065	
• 2006	2214	
• 2005	1729	
• 2004	1886	
• 2003	1825	
• 2002	1995	
• 2001	1378	Years of continued economic expansion in green
• 2000	1123	
• 1999	934	
• 1998	708	
• 1997	630	
• 1996	412	
• 1995	289	Official Celtic tiger years in orange
• 1994	233	
• 1993	231	

- Search on www.excavations.ie using 'geoarch' from all years brings up 3 results, all referring to a company name (geophysical assessments):

- 1997:469 Knoxspark (Co. Sligo) "Topsoil removed from the area was located and tested by GeoArch Ltd, using a metal-detector."
- 1998:009 Drumilly Demesne, Loughgall (Co. Armagh) "A geophysical survey was carried out by Martina McCarthy of Geoarch, within an area of c. 50m diameter of the displaced lintel."
- 2000:0910 Ballina (Co. Tipperary) "This work was carried out after a geophysical survey by GeoArch and an environmental impact statement by Celie O Rahilly."

- Search term 'micromorph' brings up 3 results:

- 2000:1047 Carrowreagh (Co. Wexford) "The moat had at least one episode of recutting after being backfilled and showed evidence of being periodically cleaned out. A series of soil micromorphology samples was taken to throw some more light on the use and maintenance of the moat."
- 2001:833 Balgatharan Site 4 "The nature of the trench fill might suggest that the trench was the foundation for a mud-walled building. Micromorphological analysis of the fill might provide a clue."
- 2004:1137 Belderrig Beg/Belderrig More/Glenulra – full suite of samples taken for soil micromorphology, soil lipids and other studies.

Search term 'geomorph':

- Search Results:
Records 1 to 9 from 9 (out of 17,000+)

Preliminary reading (55 full reports only, to date) has added 2 to these list.

HOW CAN THIS BE?

Why was geoarchaeology omitted?

- Initial consultations with NRA, advisory and CRM archaeologists suggested that there was no really good reason: 'there were no geoarchaeologists working in the country when we were putting together the best practice guidelines'