Putting local history on the map

By JIMMY WOULFE

ANCIENT SITES and monuments in County Limerick have been included in the official Sites and Monuments Records which now contain archaeological details on 24 counties.

The completed survey of County Limerick was presented at a ceremony in Dublin Castle by Minister of State at the Department of Finance, Noel Treacy.

Limerick County Council Chairman, Cllr Jim Houlihan, accepting the County Limerick Sites and Monuments Record on behalf of the Council, said they recognised the importance of these sites and this policy had been set out and incorporated in the county development plan, adopted by them.

He added: “These records which indicate the location and extent of such sites are the most welcome addition to the store of knowledge presently available. Indeed full use is already being made of the urban archaeology survey which was also commissioned by the Office of Public Works.”

He said these records could also be used internally by the council’s different departments when making plans for roads and other infrastructure changes.

“This is very important, for while one might normally be alerted to the sites of national and international importance, the lesser-known sites which could ultimately be very important may not be visible as most or all the material could be underground,” he said.

The County Limerick Sites and Monuments Record was prepared for the Office of Public Works by a team of archaeologists based in UCC between December 1989 and May 1991.

The completed record consists of a handbook containing a numbered list of the known archaeological sites and monuments in the county arranged according to an Ordnance Survey six-inch map, together with a bound set of slightly reduced six-inch maps for the county on which the sites and monuments listed in the handbook have been numbered.

The entries for each monument in the handbook contain location information and a classification of the monument type. The information in the handbook is derived from a computerized database, and there is an archive of source material to back this up.

Both the archive and the database can be updated in the future to take account of further archaeological research in the county.

The introduction to the record states: “There is a long tradition of research on prehistoric material in County Limerick going back into the last century. Work in the Lough Gur area and during the construction of the Bord Gáis pipeline has been of major importance in understanding Irish prehistory as a whole.”

“Neolithic houses dating back to the early fourth millennium BC were found at Tunkardstown by the excavation team led by Margaret Gowan during the construction of the pipeline in 1966. The series of excavations on the Knockadooda peninsula at Lough Gur by Sean P. O’Riordan in the late 1940s and 1950s provided evidence for houses and settlements ranging in date from Neolithic into the Bronze Age, and Lough Gur has been a continuing focus for research and excavation.”

“Sites which can be regarded as generally dateable to the late Neolithic and early to middle Bronze Age (2,500-1,500 BC) form the bulk of the currently identified prehistoric monuments in the county. Although Limerick cannot be described as being especially rich in megalithic tombs there are present seven known wedge tombs, located generally in the centre and east of the county.”

“Also of note are the three stone rows currently known, one of which in south-central Limerick was identified during the course of fieldwork being carried out by the Limerick SMR team.”

Kings in Conflict

WHEN THE much-acclaimed “Kings in Conflict” exhibition was held in Belfast over 40,000 people attended. Yet since last October only 4,000 have gone to City Hall in Limerick to view it.

Is it that we don’t care about our history? Do we prefer to sit in front of our televisions and go to pubs to drink pints of beer?

Well, Joan McKernan, community arts co-ordinator with Limerick Corporation thinks not.

“I think that a lot of people don’t realise that it is still on and don’t realise the extent of this fine exhibition,” she says.

With funds at an all time low it is not surprising that the Corporation were not able to come up with a major marketing campaign to let us know all about “Kings in Conflict.”

It is a real shame that more people, especially schools, have so far ignored this excellent effort.

The most modern of technology is used which enables to bring Patrick Sarsfield back from the dead.

“It not only gives life to Patrick Sarsfield but also tells the story, with the aid of prints, maps, models, paintings and artifacts of the warring conflict between the two monarchs James 11 and William of Orange,” Ms McKernan explains.

Limerick in the 1690’s was the scene of an international battle with the two Kings fighting for supremacy on the walls and streets of Limerick.

Large realistic models capture the Limerick of that time, a thriving port, and the intense fighting of the assaults on the city is re-enacted in model form from eye-witness accounts of the day.

“Anyone who goes to the exhibition can ride out with Patrick Sarsfield on that fateful night at Ballyhackum with the aid of a giant sized three-dimensional map and voice-over that has one fording the Shannon at Killaloe, round the hoy and avoiding the enemy camp enthruses the community arts co-ordinator.

Perhaps the highlight of the exhibition is, after eventually going from Europe to England you end up at General Ginkel’s tent where you can hear the singing of the Treaty. It has enthralled many visitors via Patrick Sarsfield that breathes, and an eyebrow, wets dry lips.

Ms McKernan says that “Kings in Conflict” is designed in such a way that the visitor can take in main points on a short visit, spend many hours in detailed study.

It provides a unique opportunity to learn about the people and events which have had the greatest impact on the folk memory of the city, and for which it is internationally famed.

The exhibition is open from Monday to Friday from 10am to 4.30pm. Admission £1 for adults, 50p for children, unemployed and old age pensioners.

The Signing of the Treaty... Patrick Sarsfield in Ginkel’s tent is perhaps the highlight of the Kings in Conflict exhibition.

One of the magnificent paintings on display in City Hall.