



CONTENTS

08 The wreck of the iron clipper *Tayleur*

12 Archaeology, Tara and the M3 road scheme

16 Post-medieval archaeology.
It hasn't gone away, you know

18 Know your monuments: Lime kilns

23 Industrial lives—social archaeology of
the industrial period

26 A townland called Nevitt

32 Bronze Age cemetery

36 An Insular dance—the dance of the
Fer Cengail?

04 News

07 Obituary

41 Events

42 Book News

49 Hindsight

50 Letters



Mind the gap!

Archaeologists are often asked how many sites there are in Ireland. Often they reply that there are 150,000, but quickly follow this up with the qualification that there are many other sites yet to be discovered. The interesting thing about this reply is that it is a genuine attempt to quantify and describe the extent of the archaeological resource. The second portion of the reply represents one of those caveats or disclaimers so often employed in archaeology to cover the speculative nature of the discipline. The reply tends to horrify those who see this apparently large number of sites as an obstacle to progress and development. But the variability and variety of site types that we have at our disposal is ignored. Not all archaeological sites are of the same value; each site may contribute something small or something large to the sum total of knowledge.

Another oft-repeated question is 'How much do we know about the past?' This enquiry, of course, is not so easily handled. One could say politely that we know an awful lot—hardly a satisfactory answer. Some would say that it is likely that we know something for every century or so of human settlement in Ireland, and in some instances we may know something for every decade. This merely indicates that our knowledge of the past is by definition imperfect—because it *is* the past. Stuart Piggott in his book *Ancient Europe* put it nicely: 'Many persons . . . feel that it only needs enough people working hard enough for long enough to accumulate all the available "facts" about the past'.

Prehistory and our archaeological past 'speak to us' through sites and objects. The nature of the evidence, our own character, our resources and the priority of the research questions limit what they tell us. Even the views we have formulated through documentary history can be enhanced, developed and, in some instances, contradicted by physical archaeological evidence. We can never know everything there is to know, and there are things that could be known about which we are not even beginning to speculate.

Archaeological research carried out in connection with building developments, road construction, pipelines, quarrying and peat extraction continues to highlight the archaeological potential of the Irish landscape. It would appear that there are many, many things to be discovered in the empty gaps between the sites that are in the archaeological record. These gaps in the physical archaeological landscape seem to mimic the undoubtedly enormous gaps in our knowledge. Of course, for the time being, the data, archives and records of the results of these excavations expand at a rate that is difficult to keep up with.

Around a century ago the renowned archaeologist and antiquarian T.J. Westropp, unapologetic about taking a descriptive approach to archaeological evidence and keen to hand on information useful to future scholars, stated: 'Would that we could utilise our pride in the past, whose glories we exaggerate, to the more practical purpose of preserving its relics, which we are helping, by direct injury or inexcusable apathy, to sweep with unsparing hands into the limbo of forgetfulness'. While we can reject the existence of Westropp's archaeological limbo, we should mind the gaps in our knowledge. One thing that we do know and should be mindful of is that the management and care of the discipline of archaeology is as important as the preservation of the sites and objects themselves.

Tom Condit