RESEARCH PAPERS

'Once Upon a Megalithic Time…': the Representation of Archaeology in Irish Tourism Literature

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This paper is drawn from postgraduate research which looked at the role and representation of archaeology in Irish heritage tourism. At issue is how archaeology and archaeological sites are represented in brochures and 'flyers' which have been produced in Ireland for the tourist market. The discussion centres on the relationship this representation may have with issues of Irish identity and the conservation, management and use of archaeology in modern Ireland. The portrayal of Ireland, both at home and abroad, has long been dominated by tourism images. In turn, prevalent within and among these images are archaeological monuments and artefacts, whose primary role seems largely to support a particular understanding of the Irish past (and present). Parallels are drawn between the language and imagery employed in the brochures, and that of 19th century Irish nationalism. Whilst archaeology's pivotal position in modern Irish heritage tourism is acknowledged, it is argued that the presentation and management of archaeology renders it intangible, static and 'otherworldly'. This not only pre-empts public engagement with the processes behind the formation of the archaeological record in the past (and present), but facilitates the unquestioned use of archaeology in economic and political spheres.

Introduction

During my time working as a tourist guide in Ireland, I have often been struck by the disparity between the explanations and descriptions of archaeological sites offered in tourism literature, and those to be gleaned from even superficial browsing of academic literature. After some years of formal study in archaeology during which I began to concern myself increasingly with the relationship between 'the public' and archaeology, I began to suspect a correlation between popular representations of archaeology and current issues in Irish archaeological resource management. Familiarity with, and easy access to, Irish tourism literature made this an ideal place to start. Initial research on the subject concentrated on the nature of the representation of archaeology in Irish tourism literature. This paper details the main findings and discusses, in particular, their implications in the areas of Irish national identity and archaeological resource management. The reader should note that throughout this paper the terms 'Ireland' and the 'Irish' refer to the whole island of Ireland when employed in reference to 19th century and early 20th century nationalism. However, when discussing the tourist brochures, tourism in general and current archaeological resource management practice, 'Ireland' and 'Irish' should be taken as referring to the Republic of Ireland, which has existed since 1949.

Some initial scepticism on the part of some readers as to the relevance of tourism literature over educational material or telecommunications media is expected. Whilst the British television programmes *Time Team* (Channel 4) and *Meet the Ancestors* (BBC) may be *the* five words invariably invoked in contemporary discussions of British public archaeology, this may not necessarily be the most fruitful of research avenues when dealing with Ireland, particularly rural Ireland. A more pertinent line of enquiry for an Irish context is suggested by Luke Gibbons, one of Ireland's more eminent cultural commentators, who states that "the absence of a visual

tradition in Ireland equal in stature to its literary counterpart, has meant that the dominant images of Ireland, for the most part, emanated from outside the country, or have been produced at home with an eye on the foreign (i.e. tourist) market" (quoted in O'Connor 1993: 69).

So began my study of Irish tourism promotional literature, ranging from brochures and flyers to guide books. It quickly became obvious how vital an element archaeological monuments and artefacts are to the presentation of Ireland as a tourist destination (Figs. 1 and 2). In deciding to research the subject further, I undertook a case study of brochures/flyers which were collected in the summer of 2001 from information displays at various venues. Those discussed in this paper are more or less 'official' publications of Regional Tourist Offices, Bord Fáilte (The Irish Tourist Board), the Heritage Service, or the visitor attractions themselves.

Figure 1. Source: *The Fáilte Business*. Courtesy of Bord Fáilte.

There has been much discussion on the nature and subject of tourism images of Ireland (most recently, in October 2002 at a conference on "Ireland's Heritages: Critical Perspectives: Consumption, Method and Memory"). This commentary is marked by a significant degree of consensus: that the view of Ireland represented veers heavily towards the romantic, taking little cognisance of the social and economic changes experienced in Ireland in the last decades. The Ireland represented is emphatically rural, traditional and undeveloped. There are few inklings of 'Celtic Tiger' Ireland with its technology-driven economy, mushrooming urban centres, and highly skilled, cosmopolitan population. World-wide, tourism marketing is characterised by the identification and promotion of 'unique selling propositions' (USPs), by which each tourism destination seeks to differentiate its 'product' from that of its competitors. This is particularly true for heritage tourism, which sets out to create an impression of unique cultural identity and achievements for the area or country being marketed. Although valuable in its ability to arouse awareness and appreciation of heritage assets among local and national populations, the danger of such 'constructed' heritage is its overtly static, contrived and prestigious nature.

Notwithstanding the pretty pictures and endless blue skies, the brochure study identified a number of characteristics as to the way in which archaeology, and the Irish

Figure 2. Source: *Live a Different Life*.
Courtesy of Bord Fáilte.
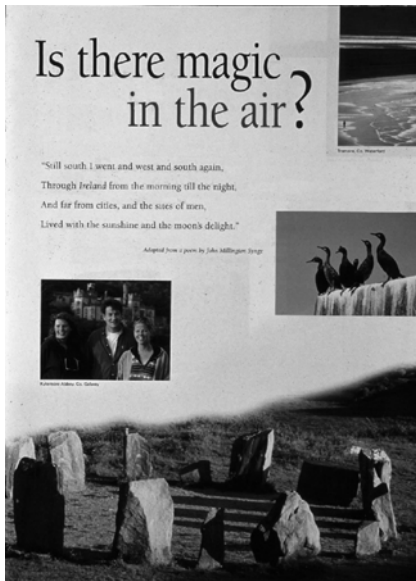
past through the use of archaeology, is repre-
sented. These can be summarised as follows:

- limitless archaeology
- curious chronologies
- selectivity
- archaeology 'without' context
- pre-modern versions of Irish history

Limitless Archaeology
Even a brief glance at the brochures demon-
strates that archaeology and archaeological
sites are being used to attract visitors to and
interest them in Ireland. Many, if not the ma-
jority, of general and introductory place de-
scriptions give the impression of a land rich in
archaeological resources. This is exemplified
in *A Guide to Ireland's Top Visitor Attrac-
tions*:

...the only difficulty in reinterpreting the
great resources of Irish heritage for today's visitor lies in the embarrass-
ment of riches. A long and turbulent history… has deposited such a
wealth of locations and artefacts of archaeological, [and] ...cultural inter-
est.

(Heritage Island 2001)

However, closer examination of the brochures revealed only sparse mention or de-
scription of individual archaeological sites. Indeed, archaeological sites are often not
mentioned or listed at all, and if they are *depicted*, this is very often without identifi-
cation. What is offered is listing after listing of heritage or interpretative centres, and
even where these do relate to nearby archaeology, the emphasis in the brochures is
often on the interpretative and visitor services, and not the archaeology itself (Fig. 3).
Such practice may be informed by the philosophy of 'developing the few to save the
many', and exemplifies the policy of Dúchas – The Heritage Service, which has, "as
its primary aim, the conser-
vation and preservation of
[the]...natural   and   built
heritage" (Department of
Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht
and the Islands 1998: 4).
However,   through   their
becoming   or   remaining
inaccessible, some seminal
archaeological sites are in
increased danger of being
forgotten about locally, and

Figure 3. Source: *Stätten des Kulturerbes in Irland*.
Courtesy of Dúchas – The Heritage Service.

thus being unwittingly destroyed or damaged. In addition, such predilection for 'prestigious' and 'nationally significant' sites does little to promote interest, appreciation or pride in lesser-known and less spectacular local heritage.

'Curious' Chronologies

Where descriptions of archaeological sites can be found, the terms and contexts used to position them in particular periods are often inaccurate and confusing. Whether this stems from simple carelessness or a lack of familiarity with chronological terms and/or sequence, the result is a very 'alternative archaeology' of Ireland to that which I learned as an undergraduate in Dublin. According to *Ireland South West – Major Visitor Attractions in Counties Cork and Kerry*, the visitor to the Millstreet Country Park in County Cork will be:

> ...reminded of many aspects of Irish history within the Park – the *4000 year old stone circle* and a Fullacht [sic] Fiadh, are evidence of man's existence here as far back as *Neolithic* times… Other interesting sites include a crannóg.
>
> (Cork Kerry Tourism, my emphasis)

Notwithstanding the fact that stone circles and *fulachta fiadh* (cooking places) are generally dated to the Bronze Age, not the Neolithic, the impression is given that the modern constructed stone circle in the park is 4000 years old. Another publication, *Top Visitor Attractions: the Heartland of Irish Culture: Galway, Mayo, Roscommon,* makes reference to "megalithic times" and "megalithic man", whatever they were, and whatever they mean...

It would be wrong to give the impression that all the information given is misleading or inaccurate; some texts (approximately a third of those examined) show evidence of thorough research. However, others demonstrate a perspective on Irish prehistory which, if not avant-garde, is quite comical; did you not know that "Ireland's Bronze Age people were great builders with stone" (Gems Publishing 2001: 9)? Another example describes the county of Roscommon as a place "steeped in history and rich in folklore" which "abounds in burial mounds, mythological tombs, ring forts and many traces of early colonisation" (Ireland West Tourism: 39). One may well ask: what *are* 'mythological tombs'? How early is 'early'?

Then there is Dingle's Celtic and Prehistoric Museum (Fig. 4), which seems to add untold millennia to human existence on the island of Ireland (currently estimated at c. 9000 years). It has, according to the brochure:

> ...six rooms telling the story of our earliest forebears both animal and human. It has real stone axes crafted by Neanderthal man, Bronze Age hoards and Celtic torcs. It has Millie, seven feet high with ten-foot tusks, the only fossil mammoth in Ireland.
>
> (Gems Publishing 2001: 86)

Even students of Irish archaeology might be forgiven for being confused, but what kind of impression of Irish prehistory could this create in the minds of those not so

well up on the sub-
ject?

Selectivity
While a certain level
of selectivity can be
expected of tourism
brochures, sites
which could be per-
ceived as being more
appropriate or repre-
sentative of a period
or area are generally
neglected or omitted
in the literature. A
good example of this
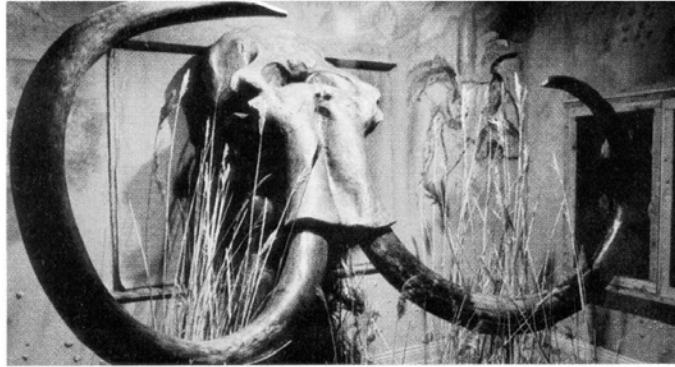
Museum with a mammoth collection

Figure 4. Source: *Kerry Gems*. Courtesy of Gems Publishing.

is the map of a cycle route purportedly following that taken by Queen Medb of Con-
nacht in her invasion of Ulster to steal the Brown Bull of Cooley. This cattle raid is
commonly known as the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* (or *Táin*), and is one of the oldest ver-
nacular epics in western Europe. When, or if, this raid actually took place is, of
course, unclear. However, some scholars believe that the story, although recorded
by monks in various manuscripts between the ninth and 12th centuries, could refer to
the period around the birth of Christ. In recent times, much has been made of the
perceived ability to track the actual route taken by the invading forces, and the vari-
ous places chosen by the hero and defender of Ulster, Cúchulainn, to challenge
Medb's progress (see Kinsella 1970).

According to the text of *The Táin Trail*, the cycle route "retraces their [Queen
Medb's and Cúchulainn's] steps *as closely as possible* and passes their resting sites
and battle sites" (Meath Tourism, my emphasis). However, giving some clues as to
the real purpose and design of this 'historic' route, it also "offers an opportunity to
visit many of the most important heritage sites and visitor attractions in Ireland",
which are on, or close to, the route. This would pose no problem except those sites
emphasised on the map, such as Norman castles (12th/13th century), mediaeval ab-
beys (12th century), stately homes (17th/18th century) and county museums did not
exist at, around, or even near, the time of Christ. Also mentioned is the Neolithic
passage tomb of Newgrange which, although now one of Ireland's two World Heri-
tage Sites, is not directly relevant to the story or events of the *Táin*.

This curious tendency holds true for other brochures, which prompted an enquiry as
to why. The reply, from a confidential source in a regional tourism authority, was
that regional and national tourism bodies are obliged to achieve "balanced regional
and national coverage" in their promotional activities. Such 'balancing' and equita-
bility has significant implications for the representation of archaeology, and indeed,
for Ireland's past. Notwithstanding any already existing bias in archaeological dis-
covery and recovery, the distribution patterns of archaeological sites shown in the
tourism literature would appear to have much more to do with political structures
and demographics, rather than their actual presence in the landscape.

Archaeology 'Without' Context

Whilst USPs are an essential part of product marketing, their effect in the brochure texts emerges as the tendency to represent certain attributes as unique to Ireland or to the region being promoted in that particular brochure. Kerry, for example:

> ...is noted for its literature - both in Irish and English. So it's hardly surprising that this was where writing happened in Ireland for the first time. That writing, in the Gaelic language, we know as ogham. Ogham was invented by the Corca Dhuibne, that tribe that inhabited what is now the Dingle Peninsula, around 300 AD. Ogham stones are most numerous on the Dingle Peninsula, but there are splendid ones all over Kerry.
>
> (Gems Publishing 2001: 25)

There are, however, 'splendid' ogham stones also in Cork, Mayo and even in Wales, Scotland and the south-west of England (Waddell 1998: 352). This tendency towards exclusivity is more reflective of administrative and artificial categories than historic and current natural, geographic, social and economic boundaries. It therefore serves to divorce the archaeological phenomena from a context in which they might be better understood.

Where sites *are* put in context, this is then often taken to absurdism:

> The great passage tomb at Loughcrew: magnificent, mighty and virtually unknown. This massive prehistoric mound is nothing less than the Irish equivalent of Egypt's pyramids; both are burial sites, both witness the passage of the dead from this world to the next. As with the pyramids, Loughcrew continues to puzzle, perplex and amaze even today. The burial complex in Meath possibly more so - it predates its desert cousins by 2000 years.
>
> (Meath Tourism)

In stark contrast to such hyperbole, the brochures carry only sparse allusions to archaeological research. Apart from a "When did you last discover treasure?" of the *Visit Waterford (Museum of) Treasures at the Granary*, and an explicit reference to artefacts of local provenance in the leaflet of the Clare Museum, there is no sense whatever of either the excitement or the painstaking process of archaeological excavation. Nor is there any mention of archaeologists. Indeed, the impression of archaeology given is one of mundanity, and a static process removed from the sphere of everyday life and experience, as exemplified in an unsurpassed fashion in *A Guide to Top Visitor Attractions in Ireland's South East*. There it is stated in relation to the town of Ferns, that "archaeological excavation revealed a rock cut ditch outside the castle walls" (South-East Tourism). Such exciting 'copy' is sure to invoke public interest in archaeological conservation or protection!

Pre-Modern Versions of Irish history

Distinctly lacking in any of the literature are references to the results of current research or debates in Irish archaeology. Instead what persists smacks of cultural historical Irish nationalist discourse, belonging more in the late 19th than the early 21st

century. This is typified in the persistence of the 'Celtic myth'. The long-standing yet still current debate as to whether 'Celtic peoples' ever invaded, never mind settled, in Ireland (James 1999; Raftery 1994) is simply ignored by tourism and other interests. The word and concept 'Celtic' sells. Indeed the 'Celts' have been elevated to such status that in some renditions they almost obliterate the rest of Irish prehistory: The *Celtic* Furrow Visitor Centre (my emphasis) offers information on "the festivals celebrated by megalithic man" despite the fact that megalithic tombs are generally dated to the Neolithic, some three thousand years before 'the Celts' could have arrived in Ireland, if indeed they did. Furthermore, the visitor to the Irish National Heritage Park is invited to "discover how the Celts, Vikings and Normans came together, intermarried and developed into the rich tapestry which forms Irish society today." This serves, in effect, to deny any earlier peoples a part or role in Irish history. More ominously, however, given recent changes in Irish demographics, it serves to deny ownership of Irish heritage to anyone not of this particular 'stock' and identity.

Parallels with 19th Century Nationalist Rhetoric
For many reasons, Irish identity has, in the past, depended greatly on England and Britain for definition. The terms 'Britain' and 'England' are used here deliberately: Britain, comprising of England, the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands, and Wales and Scotland, which are Ireland's nearest neighbours; England being the colonial power which dominated Irish affairs from the end of the 12th century to the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. As Ireland's nearest neighbour and coloniser of some five-hundred years, Britain and England have exerted a huge influence on Ireland's historic, social, political and economic development. It is to be expected, however, that Irish independence, and more recently, membership of the EU would have rendered such traditional parameters less significant.

While, officially, the tendency is now to look "beyond the Otherness of Britain" and to seek to "redefine and reorient itself as a modern European state" by stressing the diversity, openness and fluidity of Irish society (Graham 1997a: ix, 1997b: 199), those versions of Ireland and its history found in the majority of tourism brochures reviewed here, seem to owe their allegiance to other influences and eras. Indeed, they would not seem out of place with much of the Irish nationalist rhetoric of the 19th century.

Derived largely from a vigorous opposition to the 'Other', i.e. England, 19th century Irish nationalism was but one of many political and cultural movements that arose out of reactions to political, social and economic policies exerted on Ireland by England. Central to the nationalist discourse was an anxiety to demonstrate its independence from, and cultural superiority over, England. The ability to demonstrate a definable heritage would seem to be inextricably linked to the concept and representation of 'the nation', and has much in common with many other nationalist movements before, then and since (see Atkinson *et al.* 1996; Días-Andreu and Champion 1996; Meethan 2001). In Irish nationalism, archaeological monuments and artefacts of chosen eras and suitable resonance were employed as proof of a pre-conquest 'Golden-Age', and a 'glorious' Irish past (Crooke 2000). But not only was it crucial to be able to define and create the sense of a unique heritage, but also to be able to

lay claim to and, therefore, own, this heritage and the past it symbolised. This authenticated and secured the vision of the 'Nation of Ireland', represented as an entity distinct from, and independent of, England. It is not hard to see a direct parallel between this, and the tendency in the tourism literature to ignore the position of Irish archaeology within the context of the 'greater' British Isles (i.e. including Ireland) and, instead, to invent far-fetched and dubious links with other 'golden' and 'glorious' eras and civilisations. Indeed, the use of the term 'British Isles' to include Ireland is rarely, if ever, found in Irish archaeological or, indeed, other Irish literature. On the contrary, this term is glibly employed in many British publications, both academic and popular, and often in such a manner that implies British 'ownership' of, and cultural affiliation with, Ireland and the Irish.

As noted for the tourist brochures, Ireland's heritage and its related past were also exploited by 19th century nationalists. Even when political meetings took place on impressive archaeological sites, such as Daniel O'Connell's Monster Meeting at Tara in 1843, it was more the myths, legends and associated feelings that were important, rather than the archaeology itself:

> The imagination can be far more vivid than archaeological and historical
> sites, yet these, with their slight ambiguity, were ideal for moulding the
> concept of the nation.
>
> (Crooke 2000: 37)

Although Crooke is here discussing how and why archaeology was employed in Irish 19th century nationalism, this quote (if one substituted 'tourist product' for 'nation') would do well in accounting for the lack of 'real' and tangible archaeology at many of the archaeology-related visitor attractions featured in the tourism brochures.

Another characteristic shared with the tourism brochures is the impression given in nationalist writings of the 19th century of "vast accumulations of rich remains" (Crooke 2000: 47). Despite these images of abundance, "only a handful of artefacts were chosen to become political icons" (Crooke 2000: 34). In the concern to devise a nation-sustaining narrative, a simplified yet overtly politicised version of Irish history and prehistory was born. This has dogged popular perceptions of Irish identity and archaeology ever since, to the extent that it has limited the degree to which Ireland can be popularly conceptualised in its modern political and social contexts.

> Histories may get lost in the very act of being recorded and simplified
> into "narrative". Every interpretation is an imprisonment and an exclu-
> sion, an act of aggression against the multiplicity of life.
>
> (Kiberd 1996: 633)

Implications for Irish Identity
The implications of this brief analysis for Irish identity are indeed serious. A prerequisite of any definition of identity is the ability to place oneself in reference to one's surroundings; without this, identity lacks position or place (Strohmayer 1997). Both nationalistic and touristic versions of Irish identity and history deny the rele-

vance of Ireland's geographic and historical links with Britain, and, to a certain extent, even Europe. Furthermore, in portraying 'the Irish' as a relatively homogeneous race, the brochures gloss over the processes and effects of emigration and immigration in the past, and fail to acknowledge the growing percentage of today's population who are not Irish-born. The persistence and popularity of such selective and exclusive representations of Ireland and 'Irishness' beg the question as to what extent the present generation in Ireland is able to imagine Irish society as 'multiracial' and 'multicultural', if indeed, this generation is, as Fintan O'Toole supposes, "living in a media-saturated universe where reality and image are often indistinguishable" (O'Toole 1998: 161).

The 'sunburstery' and 'Celtic fire' prevalent in much nationalist rhetoric occasioned its critics even in its day. In *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It Up in Ireland*, Foster (2001: xix) quotes from a public letter written by an exasperated nationalist "proud of my Irish blood and descent and ready to join issue with any foreigner who would defame or belittle my people", who despaired at the talk of "harps, saints, heroes, martyrs, pikes, green isles, and brutal Saxons", and called for "a sharply realistic history of Ireland, exposing 'historical half truths' [which would show] how contending cliques obscured the real capacities and potential of a people too prone to mistake verbiage for eloquence, fanaticism for piety, and swagger for patriotism". His conclusion was, however, that "mine would not be a popular history". One suspects that neither his conclusion nor exasperation would be any less today.

Why nationalist versions of the Irish past persist despite the much changed nature of Irish society and economy, is a question that must be asked. Their value for tourism promotional purposes is readily apparent, but serious consideration must be given to the effects of this legacy of nationalist 'speak' on wider aspects of life in Ireland today. It does not do to discount economic and other factors, but can one surmise a connection between this rhetoric and the disturbing number of racist incidents in Ireland in the last decade (see Gillespie 2002 for examples)? Another issue, undoubtedly less alarming but no less pertinent, is the effect of this rhetoric on archaeological resource management in Ireland, in particular the appropriation of archaeology for tourism purposes.

Implications for Archaeological Resource Management in Ireland

> The tourist attraction of Ireland is firmly based on the heritage of the country. Tourists are attracted here to discover our distinctiveness – all those facets of the natural, human-made and cultural heritage which give us a unique identity. These features, reflecting character, authenticity and sense of place, all combine to create a distinctively Irish image.
>
> (Bord Fáilte 1994:5)

> Of the some IR£147 million received by Ireland from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) which was directed towards a range of infrastructure and attraction-related developments, especially those relating to the nation's heritage, some 40 percent has been "earmarked for the history and culture product".

(Hall and Page 1999: 208)

> Results of a recent study entitled Archaeological Features at Risk, in which 1,400 monuments were surveyed, show that over 34% of recorded historic monuments have been destroyed since the 1840s and that "the present rate of destruction could see Ireland's entire archaeology levelled by the year 2101".

(MacConnell 1999)

The above quotes demonstrate the paradoxical nature of archaeological resource management in Ireland today. Even while 'cultural heritage' is enjoying key status in the Irish tourism industry, large scale destruction of a part of that heritage, including a large proportion of the specifically archaeological heritage, is taking place. Furthermore, this destruction is happening despite Ireland having, as one commentator described it, "the most draconian antiquities legislation in the world" (Anon. 1995).

However, is the situation as contradictory as it first appears, or is there some hint of cause and effect? While tourism rhetoric would suggest that Ireland and the Irish are proud of, and anxious to show off, their cultural heritage, it may well be asked what do 'the Irish' of today actually perceive as being 'their heritage'. Indeed, a more relevant question might be "who are 'the Irish' today?". In such a context, to what extent does or can archaeology enter the equation, if at all?

In 2000 the results of the first ever heritage awareness study in Ireland were published (Heritage Council 2000). The survey was carried out by means of focus groups, and the method comprised both directed and non-directed questioning. It was particularly the open questions which proffered the most revealing insight into the participants' heritage awareness. For example, at the start of each session, each group was asked to discuss the current issues in their area. None mentioned heritage matters. When asked how they would define 'heritage', the common assumption among the participants was of heritage as "something old" as well as "those traits that are seen to differentiate the Irish as a race: language, music, dance..." (Heritage Council 2000: 11). As can be seen in Fig. 5, neither monuments, nor indeed heritage centres, were rated highly as heritage. Interestingly, 59% of those participating were in agreement with the opinion that Ireland's heritage "is aimed primarily at foreign tourists, rather than at the local population" (Heritage Council 2000: 23).

The results achieved (Fig. 5), may have been somewhat influenced by the structure of the survey, the identity of the participants (it is not clear as to the extent to which non-Irish-born citizens participated in the survey) and, not least, the use of the term 'heritage'. Nonetheless, the authors deduced from the results that "people do not consider heritage to be the everyday physical environment, of which they themselves are owners and which they could have a role in protecting ...they think heritage is something possessed by other people [and] managed by the state..." (Heritage Council 2001: 2). This perception of heritage, as inextricably linked with public ownership, meant that "individuals are not felt to be accountable or ultimately responsible" (Heritage Council 2000: 19). Furthermore, the whole area of how heritage is

protected was somewhat of an unknown entity. Reflecting this, only five percent claimed to be aware of the laws used to protect the national heritage (Heritage Council 2000: 20).
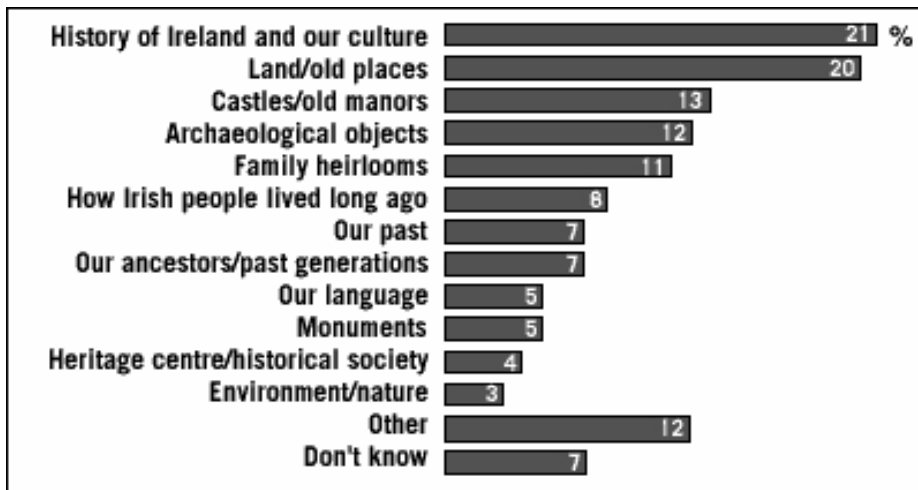

Figure 5. General public's perception of heritage – unprompted
        (from: http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/publications/awareness/awareness.html).

Against this background is the strong political wish "to promote public interest in and knowledge, appreciation and protection of the national heritage", as expressed in the Heritage Act 1995. The very recent Heritage Plan (2002) also lists among its priorities: "to place heritage at the heart of public life" (Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands 2002: 11-15), and "provide increased access to heritage sites and [...] moveable heritage" (ibid, 38). The barriers to these latter aspirations do not lie solely in heritage tourism, nor do they lie in 19th century nationalism.

Irish archaeologists have traditionally displayed "little or no desire to engage in discussion about the influence of politics or nationalism on their work" (Cooney 1994: 266). Perhaps their tendency to view archaeology as a 'neutral' scientific discipline was inspired by some of the 19th century cultural revivalists who were concerned to stress the 'non-partisan' nature of Irish archaeology, seeing prehistory as "a time prior to division" (Crooke 2000: 152). It is only relatively recently that such key debates in Irish archaeology as that of the two contrasting interpretations of court tombs, proffered on the one hand, by Ruaidhrí de Valera, and the other, by Estyn Evans has been formally interpreted (and, even at that, not by an archaeologist) within the nationalist/unionist dialectic (Crooke 2000: 4). It could be argued that it is the academic, and often reticent, nature of archaeological practice in Ireland which most precludes significant public (and even academic) engagement with archaeological discovery and developments (O'Sullivan 2002; see also Condit 2001; Cooney 1994: 273). Whilst personal experience of, and communication with, academics and professionals in Irish archaeology today suggests a greater and growing concern with theoretical, political and social issues, the persistent failure to communicate effectively about excavations and their results does little to counter the impression of ar-

chaeology as an exclusive, futile and somewhat tedious pastime indulged in by a select group of devotees and their 'minions'. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that many outside the discipline do not perceive archaeology as something of intrinsic relevance to understanding, or living, their lives.

Against such an account of Irish archaeological practice, the criticisms of the tourism literature presented here may seem petty and the concerns trivial – after all they *are* only tourist brochures. However, given the status of tourism imagery in visual representations of Ireland and Irish society, it can be argued that how archaeology is portrayed in this media also has serious implications for how it is managed and used today. In light of Gibbon's comment above, the extent to which such images or cultural representations may impact on a people's perception of themselves and their surroundings and/or landscape is a cause for concern. Could it be that the general perception of the public, like that of tourism interests, is that Ireland's landscape offers an unlimited quantity of archaeological and historical heritage? Could this also partly explain the habitually laid back and smug attitude towards its preservation, which may pertain even in archaeological circles (Cooney 1994; Lambrick and Doyle 2000)? Can this, combined with a general public alienation from the material remains of the past, go some way towards explaining the high rate of destruction made apparent by research such as the 'Archaeological Features at Risk' Project (O'Sullivan *et al.* 2001) mentioned above?

Precisely how the chronological 'blurring' that is characteristic of the majority of brochure texts affects people's understanding and appreciation of archaeology is uncertain. Nonetheless, greater accuracy must, of necessity, ensure a level of consistency in monument, artefact and period description, and thus enhance their intelligibility to those outside the discipline. In the majority of the brochures and leaflets analysed, the practice of including disclaimers to the effect that the publishers "cannot accept responsibility for any errors, omissions or misinformation" (Heritage Island) does little to recommend itself, or indeed, the content of the brochures. Neither does the persistence of a version of Irish prehistory which denies modern Irish history and negates recent archaeological research. Surely the purpose of archaeology is to add to our common knowledge of who and what we are (or aren't). Certainly, the discipline of archaeology in Ireland must share some of the blame: if new findings and the revision of established theories arising out of ongoing research remain largely inaccessible, then how is it surprising that they are completely ignored in these popular and powerful visions of Ireland?

However, much as archaeological monuments and artefacts have been used by nationalists to create a notion of unified space, and a sense of shared (but select) community identity and, in tourism, to emphasise the uniqueness of Irish identity, past and heritage, these same monuments and artefacts/symbols could be used today to position Ireland and its archaeology within its western or, indeed, greater European context. This would offer the public (local and visitor alike) the opportunity to recognise and explore intriguing economic, cultural and historical links, influences and individualities. That this can be achieved is demonstrated by such initiatives as the 1995/6 *European Year of the Bronze Age*. Such programmes could, I would argue, serve tourism industry interests as much, if not better than the current version of Irish

prehistory to be gleaned from Irish tourism literature, which does indeed 'puzzle, perplex and amaze'! The danger of such initiatives is that they are themselves resonant of particular political and economic ideologies and agendas: both the much lauded "I Celti" exhibition in Venice, and the above mentioned *Year of the Bronze Age* were criticised for explicitly using the image of a 'Celtic Europe' and a pan-European 'Golden' Bronze Age to "buttress the modern European project of unity" (Cooney 2001: 165; see also Champion 1996: 141-2; Pavković 1995).

The persistence of 19th century nationalist portrayals of Irish identity and culture heritage into the beginning of the 21st century may be partly indicative of a popular reaction to the perceived threat to national authority and sovereignty, and national and regional traditions, represented by EU social, political and economic policies. In support of this argument the instance of the initial rejection of the Nice Treaty by the Irish people in June 2001, which "was greeted with shock and dismay throughout Europe" can be cited (Brennock 2001: 1). By no means do all the reasons offered by voters, politicians and journalists for their dissatisfaction with the terms of the Treaty uphold this supposition. Nonetheless, concerns about political integration, threat to sovereignty, loss of neutrality and democratic accountability dominated in newspaper analyses of the reasons behind the success of the 'no' vote (see *Irish Times*, various issues June 2001). The second referendum on the Nice Treaty held eighteen months later, in October 2002, saw the Treaty being accepted by 62.9% of the poll. Nonetheless, concern continues to be expressed regarding the issue of Irish independence, neutrality and democracy. But whether this arises out of the prevalence of nationalistic imagery and sentiments in Irish popular culture, or is a cause of it, remains to be seen.

The persistently high rate of damage to Ireland's archaeological heritage, despite its significant symbolic role in both Irish nationalist and tourist rhetoric, suggests that there is something about how it is presented and managed, which is detrimental to the way the public is made aware of and perceives archaeology. There may have been some positive 'side-effects' in the past, when cultural and archaeological heritage was employed to celebrate Ireland's distinctiveness from England. Yet, even then the knowledge of the archaeological record thus generated was incomprehensive, biased and limited.

Today's relegation of those more ostentatious archaeological sites to a 'tourist puller' or cheap political backdrops (a perfect example being the 'Dawn of the New Millennium' winter solstice at Newgrange, December 1999, as shown live on Irish national television) has relieved archaeology of much of its local day-to-day, social and cultural value. Here once again, it does not do to ignore the complicit role of the archaeological discipline. Ronayne's (2001) 'exposé' on the creation of the *Brú na Bóinne* (Newgrange) World Heritage complex, demonstrates how academic archaeological discourse itself facilitates the commoditisation of archaeology and archaeological 'landscapes'. Many World Heritage Sites are the epitome of this process, whereby the sites' internationally significant heritage status take utmost priority over local traditional uses and values. Ironically, it is precisely those local uses and values which have, in many cases, sustained these sites to the point where World Heritage Status could be bestowed.

Irrespective of how it is defined, the word 'heritage' brings with it implications of self-conscious appraisal of culture and history, and hence ownership, interpretation and construction. Its deployment for the purpose of tourism has been both the cause and effect of more emphasis being placed on that which highlights the distinctiveness of the tourism product, i.e. "all those facets of the natural, human-made and cultural heritage which give us a unique identity" (Stocks 1996: 252) – a situation that is, of course, not exclusive to Ireland, and is now common practice in Spain, Sweden, Malta and many other nation states. "These features, reflecting character, authenticity and sense of place, all combine to create a distinctively Irish image" (Stocks 1996: 252). Interestingly, there is little to suggest that those sites which actually reflect regional or national idiosyncrasy are attributed a higher profile. Rather, one senses that those sites gaining the promotional limelight are those most modern and politically strategic heritage attractions, at times irrespective and/or regardless of any archaeological value. Real and considerable diversity is glossed over in favour of an overtly constructed national or regional identity.

'Once Upon a Post-Megalithic Time…': Conclusions

This paper has concentrated on the presentation of archaeology in tourism brochures, and considered the implications of the manner of its representation with respect to issues of Irish identity and archaeological resource management. The main conclusion is that although the tourism images and rhetoric serve to raise the profile and awareness of archaeology (as did those of the nationalists and cultural revivalists before them), the actual knowledge and understanding of the archaeological record generated, and the processes which produce(d) it, are narrow. Similarly, although such a representation of Ireland's past may ideally contribute to a sense of national identity, the inherent selectivity, decontextualisation and nationalisation serve to remove the archaeology from its immediate and local context, thus obviating local people's ability and/or need to take and develop 'ownership' of it. The manner in which the past is 'selectively imagined' to suit a political or economic end is rarely that which nourishes cultural and social enrichment, sustainability and stability. Through the nationalist appropriation of archaeology, people were at least reminded of their inheritance, their responsibility and the necessity of creating a political future both in imitation and worthy of the national past. However, the current manner in which archaeology is appropriated for tourism purposes serves only to remind the Irish people of their unique and abundant inheritance, but not of responsibility towards it or its relevance for comprehending and appreciating their place in the world.

While its role as a tourist attraction may have informed and, indeed, may continue to inform heritage management policy and practice in Ireland, this is but one of many ways in which archaeology is being interpreted, used and represented in contemporary Irish society. Irish archaeologists may be beginning to recognise and analyse the socio-politics of interpretation (Cooney 1994, 2001; Crooke 2000), but the onus is still on archaeologists and heritage practitioners to create and develop public awareness of the complexities and processes of the past, and how it is, and has been, presented. Fundamental research must now also be undertaken to ascertain how Ireland's archaeological heritage is actually understood and consumed *by* the public – the visitors and tourists – and most importantly, the people of Ireland, in order to inform future interpretation strategies. In addition, archaeological and heritage man-

agement strategies must together offer the means by which the various publics in Ireland can engage with the wealth of the archaeological resource. The importance of archaeology for academic research, in tourism and in politics should not be discounted, but as long as these discourses remain divorced from the everyman and the everyday, the richness and diversity of what archaeology can offer will not be fully realised.

Acknowledgements

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