SECTION EIGHT

ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPACT

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SECTION EIGHT

8. ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPACT

Section 1: Introduction

Background

As a result of contacts on 19th January, 1994, with Mr Michael Garrick of *Patrick J. Tobin & Co. Ltd, Consulting, Civil and Structural Engineers,* the writer was commissioned to prepare an archaeological report on the proposed waste water treatment plant at Soldiers Point, Dundalk, Co. Louth. The report is to form part of an environmental impact statement on the proposed plant.

Brief and Scope

The report is based on a written brief received from Mr Garrick of *Patrick J. Tobin & Co. Ltd,*. This included a set of three drawings of the proposed development, as follows:

a) a 1:1,000 scale drawing entitled 'Solder's Point Site Survey', prepared by Dundalk Urban District Council, dated February, 1992;

b) a 1:1,000 scale drawing entitled 'Dundalk EIS Sewage Treatment Works, drawing no. 1', prepared by *A. & D. Wejchert, Architects,* Dublin, dated October 1993;

c) a 1:200 scale drawing entitled 'Hydraulic Section Through Proposed Works: Preliminary Units to Outfall', prepared by Dundalk Urban District Council, dated June 1993.

In scope, the report is restricted to a consideration of the archaeological impact of the proposed development on the actual site as outlined in drawing a), above. However, account was also taken of the visual impact of the development on the human heritage of the immediate hinterland.

The report is based on a search of the archaeological, topographical and historical literature, coupled with a detailed inspection of the proposed site. The latter was carried out on Sunday, 30th January, 1994.

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Section 2: Description of the Site

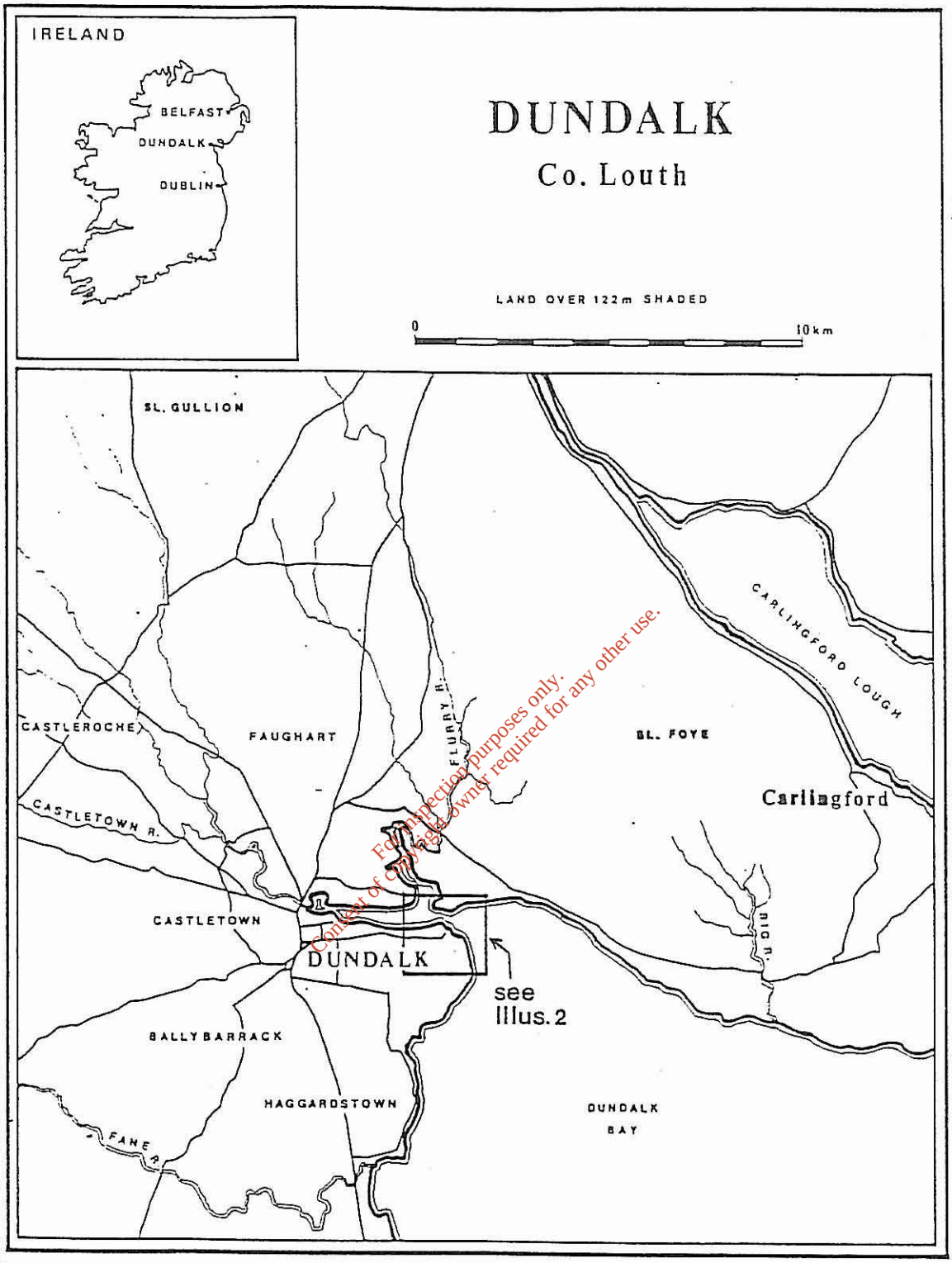
Soldier's Point lies at the outer reaches of the Castletown River estuary (Illus. 1). The proposed new waste water treatment plant is being designed as a replacement for an existing sewage works which lies immediately to the E of the Point. The new plant will occupy the same site as the existing one. However, it will cover an area of *c.* 117,000 sq m as opposed to the *c.* 6,500 sq m occupied by the existing plant.

The site for the new and existing plants is situated on an area of reclaimed land immediately to the W of Soldier's Point itself (Illus. 2). The land is flat and is at present used as pastureland. It is protected from the sea by a massive embankment known locally as "the Naavy Bank" which delimits the N side of the site. On the S, it is bounded by the Point Rd. This long straight by-road runs E-W along a low postglacial ridge which terminates at Soldier's Point. The land to the S of the Point Rd is also largely reclaimed pastureland. The land-use is principally agricultural, fringed by tidal salt marshes, though there is quite a lot of new piecemeal residential development along both sides of the Point Road. Soldier's Point itself is occupied by a the Old Coastguard Station, now converted into a terrace of private houses, as well as the site of an old boat-building works.

The whole area is today regarded as a quiet backwater of the E outskirts of the modern town of Dundalk. However, the Naavy Bank is much frequented as a recreational walkway offering unparalleled views northwards across the estuary to the hills of south Armagh and the Cooley Peninsula.

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ILLUS. 1: Map of the Dundalk area showing the location of the proposed Waste Water Treatment Plant.

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Section 3: Archaeological and Topographical Features

Geological History

Soldier's Point marks the eastern termination of a low, but narrow postglacial ridge which runs E-W from the town centre of Dundalk. Its line is preserved today in the axes of Jocelyn St, Seatown Place, Quay St and Point Rd. As the numerous scars of quarrying along both sides of the Point Rd suggest, it is composed largely of sand and gravel.

A recent study by Penney (1983) on the postglacial sediments of Dundalk suggests that this ridge was formed initially as a storm beach by changes in sea-level and 'wave climate' during the postglacial period (*c.* 8,000-4,000 BC). Prior to this, the Castletown River appears to have entered the sea *c.* 1.5km to the S of its present outflow.

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Documentary and Topographical Evidence

Neither the Sites and Monuments Record for Co. Louth (Mc Cabe and Buckley 1984), or the more recent 'Archaeological Inventory' or 'Archaeological Survey' of the county (Buckley 1986; Buckley and Sweetman 1991), refer to any archaeological monuments in the vicinity of Soldier's Point. The only evidence for human activity in the area in prehistoric times (pre- AD *c.* 400) comes in the form of a small number of worked flints recovered from a gravel pit at Soldier's Point (Hodgers 1973, 57; see below, page 10). These include a flint core, but all the material found to date displays evidence of 'rolling'. This suggests that they, and the possible midden deposits in which they were found, have been disturbed by wave action. The Soldier's Point finds are one of a number of 'flint scatters' recorded around Dundalk (Gosling 1991, ch. 4), and indicate the presence of stone using communities there in the late Mesolithic and/or Neolithic Periods (*c.* 6,000-2,500 BC)

As might be expected, the pre-Norman sources do not contain much in the way of information on the Soldier's Point area. The ford known as *Áth Lethan* (Broad Ford) in the early epic tale *An TÁin Bó Cuailgne* probably ran across the mud flats to the east of Soldier's Point itself (Kinsella 1969, map III). There is also a strong tradition of a ford connecting Soldier's Point with Bellurgan on the opposite shore (Enda 1905, 35; Swan 1970, 76), but this was evidently removed in the course of the 19th century dredging operations to improve the channel. In

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ILLUS. 2: Extract from the OSI six-inch map Co. Louth, sheet 7, edition of 1939, showing the Soldier's Point area.

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the Early Christian Period (AD *c.* 400-1100), Soldier's Point would have been considered part of *Traigh Baile Mac Buain*, Baile's (son of Buain) Strand, which may have stretched from Rockmarshall to Blackrock (see Gosling 1991, 247-8).

It is not until post-medieval times that we get any specific allusions to the Soldier's Point area in the documentary sources. The name 'Soldier's Point' is likely to derive from the use of this area in 1689, as an embarkation point for troops being shipped out of Dundalk to Carlingford and Carrickfergus. General Schomberg's Williamite army had encamped in and around the town in the autumn of that year, but his men has suffered terribly from sickness resulting in the death of hundreds. He eventually ordered the retreat of the army to winter quarters at Carrickfergus, and many of the hospital and transport ships appear to have been moored at Soldier's Point. Prior to this, the area was known simply as 'Point' and is marked as such on the Down Survey barony map (see Gosling 1991, fig., 31a).

The suitability of Soldier's Point for the mooring and loading of ships is also underlined by a number of 18th century accounts of Dundalk port. Writing in 1738, just as the first improvements to the port were being carried out, a Mr Harris recorded that 'when the ships are come within a point of land called the Soldiers Point, they lie as safe as in a dock' (Swan 1970, 67). Before the construction of the embankment (the Naavy Bank) from the present quays to Soldier's Point in the 1840s, the river channel followed a more southerly course than at present. Just inside (*i.e.*, west of) Soldier's Point itself, it looped sharply to the S before taking up a westerly course again just to the N of the present Point Rd (see Illus. 4). In so doing it must have afforded a safe harbourage for ships bound upstream for Dundalk or just seeking shelter from the elements.

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On the basis of these late-17th and 18th century accounts, the area directly to the W and SW of Soldier's Point must be considered as a significant loading/unloading area for shipping, particularly for large vessels or those not prepared to await the tide. And though we have no direct evidence for its use as a harbour in medieval times, the topographical and circumstantial evidence would strongly suggest such.

One piece of topographical evidence which reinforces this theory, is the recent identification of the Point Rd as site of the 'Balagh Carbyt' mentioned a number of times in 16th century deeds from the Dowdall family collection. This name is a corruption of the Irish *Bealach Carbad*, meaning 'the way of the wagons', suggesting the passage of wheeled traffic (Gosling 1991, 331). Given the cul-de-sac character of the Soldier's Point area today, this may seem an odd name for the only road leading to it. However, when viewed in the context of traffic

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coming to and from the ford connecting Soldier's Point with Bellurgan, and the probable harbourage inside it, it takes on a new significance.

Site Inspection

As stated in the introduction, a detailed inspection of the site was carried out on 30th January, 1994. In the course of this, the following archaeological and topographical features were noted:

1. Shell Horizon (Illus. 2, point A): The E boundary of the existing Sewage works is defined by a water filled drain running roughly N-S. Masses of sea shell are visible intermittently in the faces of this drain, particularly along its E side where trampling by livestock has eroded the bank. At the N end of the drain where the shell is exposed in section, a relatively clean profile of these deposits is visible (Illus. 3).

Depth	Description	Interpretation
0-20cm	estuarine silt with many flecks of shell	?redeposited
20-25cm	black organic horizon	reclamation surface
25-30cm	shell horizon	pre-reclamation surface
30cm +	estuarine silt	natural water borne silt

ILLUS. 3: Table showing stratigraphy of deposits as exposed in E face, at extreme N end, of the drain which forms the E boundary of the existing sewage works.

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The shell horizon is made up of a number of species of mollusc, principally oyster, whelk, mussels, and cockle. Stratified amongst them are fragments of clinker and slag, as well as one or two shards of 19th - 20th century drainage pipe.

As outlined in the above table (Illus. 3), the shell horizon is almost certainly a naturally formed layer. It probably represents the old surface of the tidal flats prior to their reclamation. In fact, the area immediately to the E of the existing Sewage works is still shown on the OS maps as unreclaimed tidal flats as late as 1939. Though it does contain a number of edible species of mollusc, the absence of other habitation evidence (charcoal, burnt stone, etc.) is notable. The clinker and pipe shards are probably derived from the dumping of domestic and /or industrial (shipping) waste.

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2. Old Shore Line (Illus. 2, point B): Approximately 40m to the W of the entrance of the existing sewage works a low scarp line/bank is discernible running westwards on a WNW-ESE axis. This is traceable for a distance of *c.* 325m at which point it curves gradually to the W before continuing on a new WSW-ENE axis. For the first *c.* 100m it takes the form of a low scarp which varies in height from 0.5m at the E end to 1.25m elsewhere. Thereafter, its line is continued by an intermittent, low earthen bank, topped in places by a hedgerow. This feature is shown in some detail on the 1:1000 scale 'Site Survey' drawing prepared by Dundalk Urban District Council (see Section 1, a)).

This scarp/bank almost certainly marks the old S shore line of the Castletown River estuary prior to the re-routing of the channel in the early 19th century and subsequent land reclamations. Traces of extensive gravel quarrying are visible in the area between this scarp/bank and the Point Rd, particularly in the SW corner of the proposed site. This quarrying has undoubtedly removed any archaeological features which might have existed here. However, at a point *c.* 125m E of the sewage works entrance and *c.* 40m N of the Point Rd, a small pocket of mussel shell was noted exposed in section in the low N face of the quarry. It lies *c.* 1.2m below the old ground surface and is now sheltered by a large aging whitethorn bush. The deposit itself is composed of a dense concentration of mussel shell fragments measuring *c.* 0.2m in maximum dimensions which lies directly above a small boulder protruding from the quarry face.

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3. Shell Horizon (Illus. 2 , point C): Another shell horizon was noted in the trampled ground surface around a gateway along the W boundary of the site. This was very similar in character to that noted at no. 1, above, including the presence of clinker fragments.

4. Medieval Roadway (Illus. 2, point D): The present Point Rd almost certainly follows the line of an old medieval roadway leading from Dundalk to Soldier's Point (see above, page 8). A portion of this roadway runs along the S boundary of the site. Though no archaeological features associated with this old road are at present visible, it is possible that remains of it lie concealed beneath the present road.

5. Flint Artifacts (Illus. 2, point E): A small number of 'rolled flakes' of flint and a 'fresh but battered flint core' have been found by the prolific flint collector, Mr Don Hodgers, at Soldier's Point (1973, 57). According to the finder, they were recovered from possible 'shell mounds' exposed in one of the faces of the disused quarries to the S of the Point Rd close to Soldier's Point (pers. comm. D. Hodgers, Febr., 1994). The exact find spot of the flints was not determined but it definately

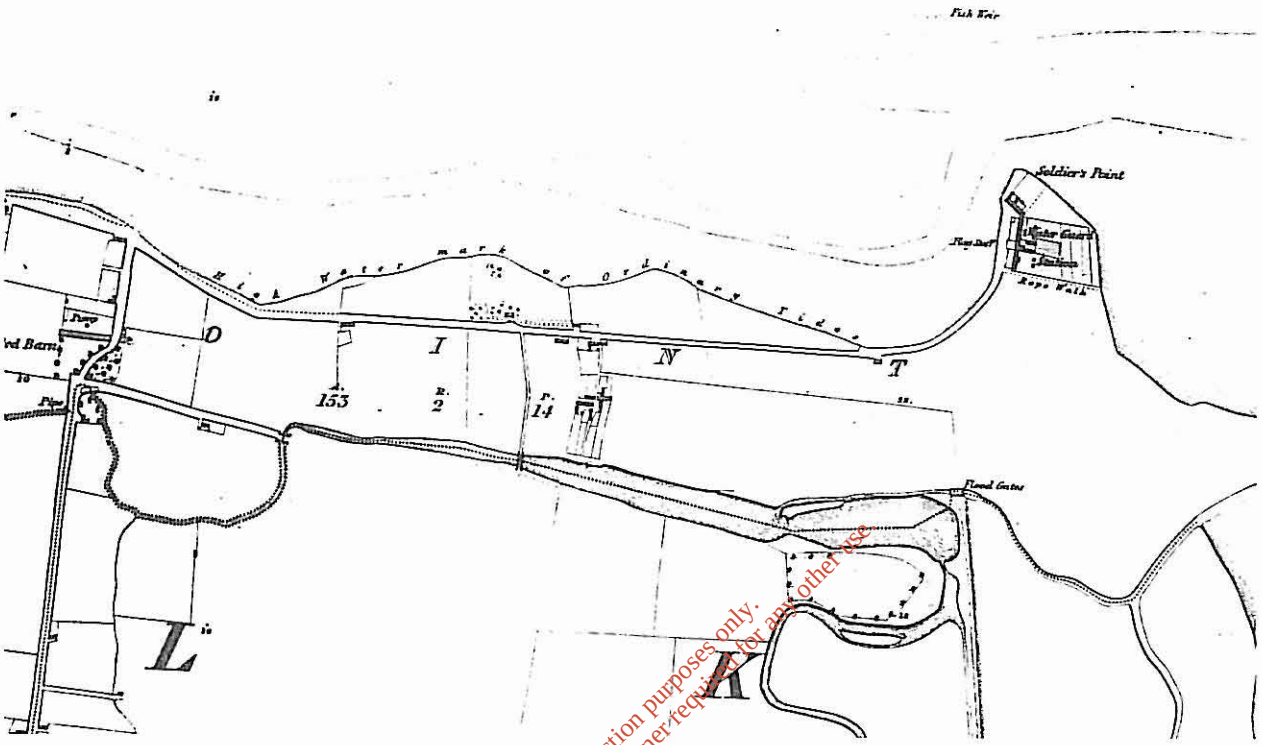
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lies outside the confines of the site. Moreover, these 'shell mounds' are now considered by Hodgers to be more than likely of natural origin.

6. Coastguard Station Houses (Illus. 2, point F): This terrace of houses lies just outside the E limits of the development site. They once formed part of the Coastguard Station at Soldier's Point which was established in the late 18th century. The houses themselves date from *c.* 1811 (pers. comm. Miss M. Wilson). They are now in private ownership, and the original facades of an number of them have been tastelessly altered through the insertion of horizontal windows. However, they still form a striking and attractive topographical feature on the otherwise flat open landscape of Soldier's Point. Moreover, they are listed for 'Protection' in the current development plan for the urban district (Dundalk UDC 1989, List 2, item 59).

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ILLUS.4 Extract from OSI six-inch map Co. Louth, Sheet 7, edition of 1836, showing the Soldier's Point area.

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Section 4: Recommendations

On the basis of the assessment offered in Sections 2 and 3 above, a number of observations and recommendations are made regarding the proposed waste water treatment plant.

Observations

Firstly: though a number of archaeological and heritage sites have been identified in the vicinity, no structural remains or other features of archaeological interest are known within the confines of the site.

Secondly: the S part of the development site is the most archaeologically sensitive area. This is because it straddles the old pre-reclamation channel and shoreline and lies adjacent to the line of the medieval road now occupied by the Point Rd.

Thirdly: while taking the above points into consideration, the overall environmental impact of the proposed development will be minimal from an archaeological viewpoint. This is based on the fact that the location of the new plant will largely occupy a reclaimed area formerly occupied by tidal flats.

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Recommendations

1. The advice of the National Mouments Section of the Office of Public Works be sought as to whether a professional archaeologist should be retained by the developer to monitor the site excavations phase of the development.
Reason: to record any archaeological features which may be recovered in the course of the sheet piling and excavations.

2. At least one month in advance of the commencement of the development, the developer should supply to the archaeologist details of any excavations necessary for the connection of the new plant to existing waste water services along the line of the Point Rd. The developer should liaise with the archaeologist regarding any such excavations and allow such access as is reasonably possible for the monitoring of same, having regard to to the constraints of the construction programme and any specific requirements of the National Monuments Section of the Office of Public Works.
Reason: to protect, and allow for the recording, of any possible remains of the old medieval roadway which may underlie the present Point Rd.

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3. The extreme southern part of the site, which will be occupied by the 'screening mounds', be infilled at an early stage of the development.
Reason: to protect any possible archaeological features which may lie in the pre-reclamation channel or along the old shoreline.
4. In designing the landscaping for the new plant, cogniscence should be taken of the visual attraction of the terrace of early-19th century Coastguard Houses at Soldier's Point
Reason: to protect the topographical context of these houses, particularly the views of same as one approaches from the west along the Point Rd.

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Section 5: Summary

This archaeological report was commissioned by *Patrick J. Tobin & Co. Ltd, Consulting, Civil and Structural Engineers* as part of an environmental impact statement on a proposed waste water treatment plant at Soldier's Point, Dundalk, Co. Louth. The report outlines the topographical history of the site as well assessing the physical and documentary evidence for human activity in the area.

Prior to the harbour improvements of the early 19th century, the area immediately to the west and south-west of Soldier's Point was considered a safe harbourage for shipping. On the basis of recent research, it is now thought that it may also have been a mooring and off-loading area for ships trading in and out of Dundalk in medieval times. The postglcacial ridgeway along which the Point Rd now runs, is also considered to have been an important routeway for traffic coming to and from this harbourage as well as from the ford connecting Bellurgan to Soldier's Point. Prior to the development of the road network in the 17th century, this ford may have carried much of the traffic between Cooley and Dundalk.

On the basis of the above findings, the report concludes that from an archaeological viewpoint, the environmental impact of the proposed development will be minimal. This is based on the fact that the location of the new plant will largely occupy an area formerly occupied by tidal flats. However, a number of recommendations regarding the site excavations phase of the development are offered. These involve the monitoring by a professional archaeologist of the site excavations, particularly those involving any excavations necessary for the connection of the plant to existing waste water services along the Point Rd. It is also suggestedthat the southern part of the site, where the old pre-reclamation shore has been identified, be infilled at an early stage of the development. Finally, it is recommended that, in the landscaping of the new plant, the topographical context of the terrace of late-18th century Coastguard Houses at Soldier's Pint itself be preserved, particularly the views of same as one approaches them along the Point Rd.

Any alternative Treatment Process or Plant Layout proposed at Tender Stage would be required to have equal or lesser impact on the Archaeological heritage of the Soldiers Point Area.

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Sources

Abbreviations used:
CLAHJ County Louth Archaeological and Historical Journal

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Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the following people for assistance in the preparation of this report: Mr Michael Garrick of *Patrick J. Tobin & Co. Ltd*, for his o-operation with the prepartion of this report; Mr Paul Clancy, Town Architect, Dundalk Urban District Council for information regarding OS maps and the Development Plan for Dundalk; Miss Maureen Wilson, of the Old Dundalk Society, for information on the Coastguard Station at Soldier's Point; and finally, Mr Don Hodgers, Avenue Rd, Dundalk, for additional information on the find spot and archaeological context of the flint artifacts from Soldier's Point.

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