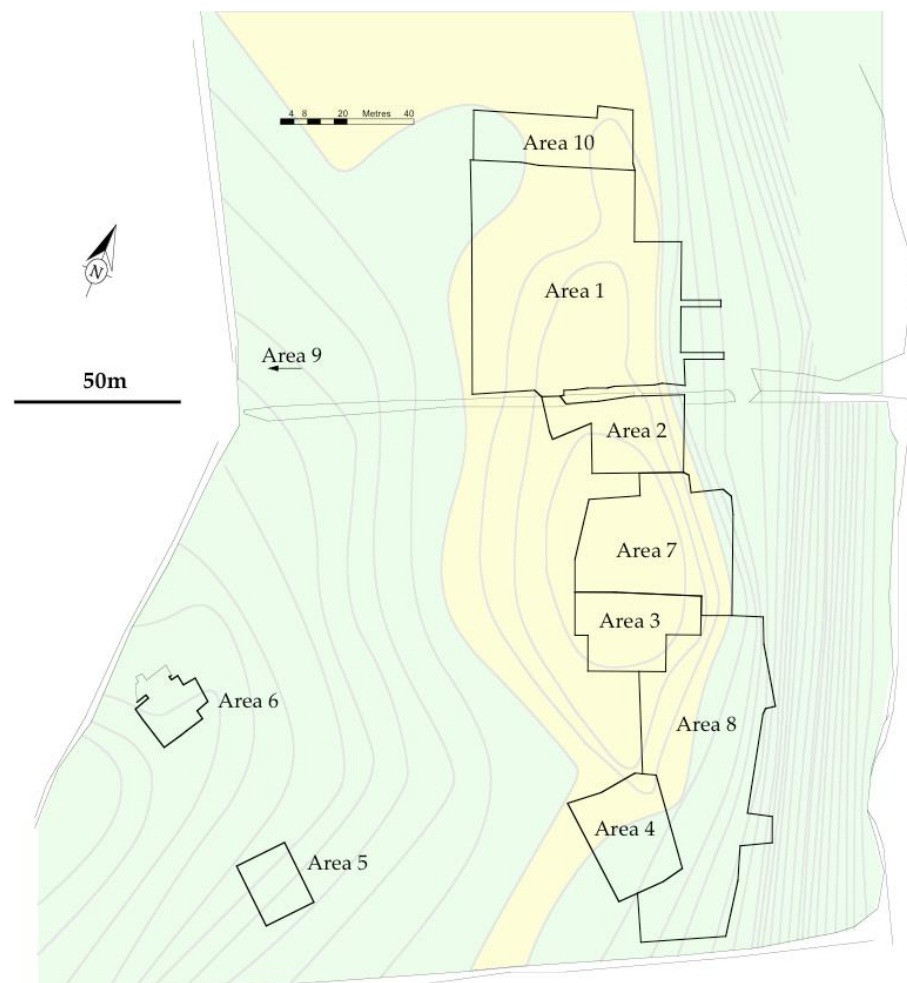


A Prehistoric Ritual Landscape at Donacorney Great, Bettystown, Co. Meath

Antoine Giacometti

Introduction

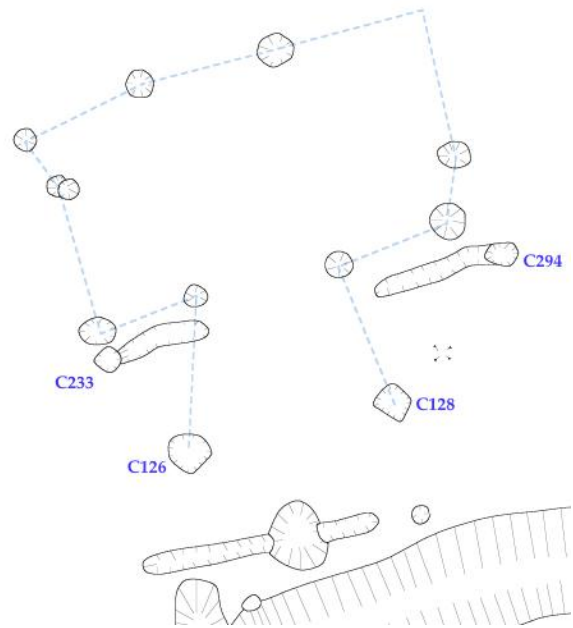
An archaeological excavation took place over three fields to the northwest of Bettystown, Co. Meath during September 2009 to January 2010. The dominant topographical feature on the site was a ridge of high land orientated northwest-southeast, on which all of the significant archaeological remains were located. The ridge was the focus of the archaeological excavations, and was almost completely stripped of topsoil, forming a contiguous archaeological site measuring 250m in length and 40m-60m in width, and covering over 1 hectare in area.



Early prehistoric period: 4000 – 2300 BC

Two butt-trimmed flint blades resembling late Mesolithic (5500-4000 BC) Bann Flakes were found on the site. In advance of their formal identification by a specialist, however, and in the absence of any features of the site dateable to the period (both flakes came from later prehistoric contexts), there is not enough evidence here to speculate on Mesolithic activity.

The earliest firm evidence for occupation on the site came from fragments of Early Neolithic (3900-3600 BC) pottery from a spread of material at the low-lying western end of the site (Area 5), and possible early/middle Neolithic (3900-2900 BC) pottery from Structure 1 (Area 1). The exact form of Structure 1 can be reconstructed in more than one way, but I have proposed that it comprised a rectangular roofed structure 5.5m by 3.5m across formed by postholes and a slot-trench, with two larger postholes forming a protruding entrance centrally along the long side to the southeast. The protruding entrance may have been a roofed porch, or simply two large freestanding poles 2.2m apart, but either way their staggered position in relation to the gap in the front wall would have restricted views into the left-hand corner of the interior of the structure (something seen in other Neolithic structures, particularly court tombs, for example Cooney 2000, 59). The NW-SE alignment of the structure did not match other features on the site, but did follow the natural contours of the ridge. The two large entrance postholes were filled with Neolithic pottery and other artefacts, and one of them appeared to have been formally 'terminated' by the placement of a broken saddle quern upside-down over the top of the disused and backfilled entrance posthole. These special deposits are discussed in more detail below and are interpreted as representing deliberate ritual deposition related to the dismantling of the structure. The intentional deposition of saddle querns, sometimes in structure postholes and sometimes grinding-side down, has been noticed at other sites, for example Stamullin, Co. Meath (Ní Lionáin 2008, II, 37), Sheephouse, Co. Meath (Nelis 2002), Ballyveelish, Co. Tipperary (Doody cited in Cleary 2005, 28), Caltragh, Sligo (Danaher 2007, 84) and Rinnaraw, Co. Donegal (Connolly 1994, 29), albeit in Bronze Age rather than Neolithic contexts. Saddle querns do, however, appear in



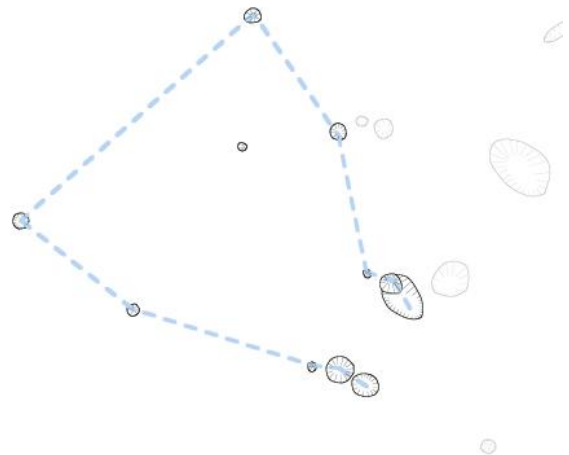
Neolithic contexts, for example at Ballygalley, Co. Antrim (Cleary 2010).

This building does not conform to typical Neolithic 'house' plans found at other sites (e.g. Grogan 1996, 4 and Armit *et al.* 2003, 146-187), and the closest parallel found by the author is with Structure 2 at Granny, Co. Kilkenny (Hughes 2005, 33), an irregularly-shaped middle Neolithic structure with a protruding southern entrance formed by two large postholes almost 2m apart, which was interpreted as a possible unfinished storage facility or animal shelter. A second post-defined Neolithic structure at Inch, Co. Down (McManus 1999, 16) also bears close comparison in terms of the measurements of the main room or chamber

(3.5m by 5.5m) and the presence of an external porch to the south. There is no evidence (except perhaps for the saddle quern – and see further discussion below for a different interpretation) that Structure 1 had a specifically domestic function or that it functioned as a dwelling. If it had been constructed as a dwelling, its function (and meaning) was certainly transformed after its dismantling and during the placing of the special deposits within its postholes. The marking of the structure (or at least of the entrance postholes of the structure) does not appear to have been limited to underground deposits alone: the later Bronze Age enclosure to the south appears to have respected the layout of Structure 1 (or at least of its entrance), so it seems likely that some sort of above ground marker of the building was also erected. This suggests that the structure was transformed from a building (of uncertain use) into a monument during the mid-Neolithic, and that the monument continued to have relevance into the Bronze Age.

Middle Neolithic (3600-2900 BC) pottery was identified in the south of the site (near Structure 9 in Area 4), where 'Whipped Cord' Ware was intermixed with late and final Neolithic pottery, and in an isolated stone-lined pit or posthole (C160 in Area 3) near the crest of the ridge. The pottery found in this latter feature included Carrowkeel ware, and was mixed with burnt bone, and the feature has been tentatively interpreted as a small burial cist or a support for a large timber post that marked an important location close to the highest point along the ridge.

The focus of late Neolithic (2850-2650 BC) activity was a cluster of postholes forming a possible rectangular structure (Structure 9 in Area 4) measuring 5m by 4m across. Fragments of Grooved Ware (as well as mid-Neolithic and Beaker pottery) and flint debitage appear to have been intentionally deposited in some of the postholes during or after the abandonment of the structure. It was surrounded by further postholes, pits and curving slot-trenches that were probably contemporary. Grooved Ware is often encountered in ritual contexts (Sheridan 2004, 26-37; but Carlin *et al* forthcoming notes recent evidence showing more widespread presence), for example at the timber circle excavated at Bettystown close to the site. The final excavation report will include a discussion of this latter site (from Eogan, J. 1999, IAPA newsletter 30,9), which is undoubtedly of relevance here. No evidence for a timber circle was identified in or around Structure 9, however the size and form of the structure with four main postholes forming a square and a defined double-set of postholes forming an entrance is suggestive of the four central post-settings often seen in timber circles (Sheridan 2004, 28-9; Waddell 2000, 112). The flint assemblage in and around the structure might contain a type different from the local flint on the rest of the site, and it will be interesting to see if evidence is found for the importation of Antrim flint as at the Knowth timber circle (Sheridan 2004, 27). Variations of timber circles found in England include sub-circular structures with larger entrances and internal post-settings and more ephemeral external stake-built walls (Type E LN post-framed buildings, in Darvill 1996, 92-4). Darvill's circular-shaped reconstructions of Structure F at Redgate Hill, Norfolk and Structure D at Willington, Derbyshire in particular (*ibid* Fig. 6.8, 5-6), based on a rectangular arrangement of six postholes like that at Structure 9, may be relevant in this case.



Structure 9 also contained small amounts of Beaker pottery, as did the spread in Area 5, suggesting that these areas were in use until the end of the Neolithic period (2450-2300 BC). The presence of Beaker pottery in the Grooved Ware timber structure (Structure 9) is rare

but has been noted at other sites, for example at Armalughey, C. Tyrone (Carlin pers. comm. 2010). Larger quantities of Beaker pottery were found in Structure 3 (Area 1), a cluster of small pits and postholes that appeared to have been stuffed with Beaker pottery following the abandonment of the structure. A ditch that led westwards from the later prehistoric enclosure (Area 1) also contained possible Beaker pottery, but in this case the pottery is presumed to be from an earlier feature truncated by the ditch, and perhaps associated with Structure 8 (Area 1) just to the south.



Overall, there is evidence for early prehistoric occupation and activity on the site from 4000 to 2300 BC. It could be argued that the type of pottery found in the Area 3 pit and in Structure 9 (Grooved Ware and Carrowkeel Ware) may indicate a predominantly ritual function for these features, and I have suggested that Structure 1 was transformed into a monument, but this should not imply that early prehistoric activity on the site was not domestic in nature. This issue is addressed in detail in the conclusion of the report. It is interesting to note that early prehistoric activity on the site was situated in a similar topographic position: on the lower west-facing slopes of the spine of high land that ran through the site. This contrasts with the distribution of later prehistoric activity (along the centre and highest points of the ridge) and of early medieval activity (along the east-facing slopes of the ridge) (compare Figs. 21-23).

Early prehistoric 'special deposits': unsettling times for settled folk?

A common feature of the early prehistoric (i.e. Neolithic) structures on the site was the presence within postholes of seemingly intentional artefact-rich deposits. This does not appear to have occurred with later prehistoric structures, however it should be

noted that all dates are provisional and this pattern may turn out to be more complex than suggested here. In any case, it seems likely that special deposits were placed in Structure 1 during the early/mid-Neolithic, in Structure 9 during the late and final Neolithic, and in Structure 3 during the final Neolithic. Similar deposits have been noted at other sites, and, where they are found to post-date the destruction or dismantling of the structure, they have been termed 'closing deposits' (Bruck 1995, etc.). They are generally viewed as the result of

ritual actions, and indeed it is often noted that ritual tends to occur (or at least be emphasised) at liminal places and times of flux, stress or uncertainty (Cleary 2005, 33; Dowling 2006) such as moving house (a traumatic experience at the best of times), or terminating the use of a structure. Could these deposits have accumulated accidentally into the empty posthole without intentional deposition? This is unlikely, as only certain postholes in each structure had these deposits, in some cases the deposits appeared to be internally organised (Structure 9), and in one case the deposit was sealed by an upside-down saddle quern (Structure 1). We should therefore assume that the deposits were intentionally placed.

Not every posthole in these three structures exhibited these special deposits. In the case of Structure 1, although small quantities of artefacts were present in all of the postholes and slot-trenches, the five most southerly postholes at the (presumed) front of the structure contained a much higher density of artefacts and environmental remains. The two features that contained the richest deposits were the two largest postholes, and these appeared either to support a large doorway into the structure, or else to support two free-standing timbers just outside the entrance. The post on the right-hand side (as one would have entered the structure) contained the highest frequency and greatest variety of artefacts. In the case of Structure 9, artefacts were once again noted in every feature, however one posthole had a notably greater variety and quantity of artefacts: the posthole marking the right-hand side (as one would have entered) of the entrance to the structure (once again it is unclear whether this would have supported a doorway or a free-standing timber; indeed it is unclear if the timber structure of Str. 9 was ever roofed). In the case of Structure 3, two of the six postholes contained a large quantity of artefacts. These were the most easterly of the postholes, but it was unclear which part of the structure they represented, and it seems unlikely that they formed the entrance postholes considering the large distance between them. In all three cases, therefore, it appears that specific parts of the structure were selected for special deposition, and that these parts often represented the entrance or front of the structure, and in particular the right-hand side of the entrance (this is mirrored at other sites – Carlin pers. comm.). Special deposits in entrances is a notable feature of prehistoric ritual, and is often discussed in terms of liminality (e.g. Cleary 2005, 29). Cooney (2000, 59) has noted considerable evidence for the differential treatment between the right and left sides of Neolithic structures in Ireland and elsewhere.

At what stage in the life of the structures did these deposits enter the postholes? The artefacts in one of the Structure 9 postholes showed differential deposition, with flint often situated around the edges of the feature, in contrast to pottery which was deposited flat and centrally throughout the upper half of the posthole fill, possibly suggesting that the flint had been deposited around an upstanding post (or in advance of the insertion of a post), whereas the pottery must have been deposited following the removal of the post. Such differentiation was also noted at Structure 1, where one fragment of pottery was noted at the edge of a posthole tucked in behind a side post-packing stone. Nevertheless, in all three of the structures the vast majority of artefacts were situated in the centre of the fill of the postholes, and their deposition must post-date the removal of the post, or its disintegration by burning or rotting. This was particularly clear in the case of Structure 1, where a large broken fragment of a saddle quern sealed the top of one of the postholes. No evidence in any of the three structures were found for the burning in situ of posts within postholes. Where charcoal-heavy deposits were present in postholes, these were usually restricted to the upper portion of the fill, and did not line the base and sides, suggesting they did not represent burnt-down posts; in any event no posthole contained enough charcoal to represent even a small post, and the charcoal was mixed with artefacts. It is also clear that the postholes had not been left to silt-up naturally for any length of time, which would have happened rapidly in all three structures as they had been dug into loose sand. No evidence for cleaning out or re-cutting of the postholes was noted (with the possible exception of Structure 9). Judging from the amount of time that the postholes took to silt up following their archaeological excavation, the postholes cannot have been open and exposed for longer than one or two months before the special deposits were placed within them.

In the case of Structure 9, however, artefacts appear to have been deposited in and around the postholes over a considerable amount of time, judging from the Whipped Cord Ware, Grooved Ware and Beaker pottery which was occasionally found in the same posthole, and the use of which spans some five centuries. In this case it seems likely that postholes were being recut and backfilled with artefact-rich deposits. Carlin (pers com) has identified similar deposits elsewhere, and suggested that they relate to commemorative acts of deposition long after the construction of the building. Not all of these deposits can thus be interpreted as 'closing deposits' (which is why the term is not used here). This suggests that the meanings of these ritual actions are likely to have changed as the use of the structure/monument evolved through time, and that the use of these three early prehistoric structures did not end with their dismantling or destruction. In the case of Structures 1 and 9, the incorporation of the special deposits may have marked times relating to their transformations from building to monument, and the subsequent evolution of the monument. Just as the role of these structures changed following their dismantling, they may also have had changing roles during their upstanding lives.



Structure 1 appears to have been deliberately dismantled prior to the placing of these special deposits. The entire structure need not have been dismantled: it is possible that only the front walls and entrance features were removed, leaving the sides and rear still standing. The complete or partial dismantling of a walled and roofed structure opens up a previously restricted area, allowing a larger audience to take part or view actions carried out in and around the structure.

The artefacts and environmental remains forming these special deposits have not yet been analysed, and it will be interesting to address a number of questions regarding the deposits. In the case of the pottery, does the material represent small fragments of numerous vessels, as is supposed by the author? What types of vessels (in terms of vessel form and function)

are represented – and what types are absent? This last question might address a more complex issue: to whom did the deposited vessels belong? – a single household (in which case we might expect the full domestic range of vessels without redundancies) or several households (in which case we might expect numerous similar vessel-types that would be redundant in one household). If the assemblage originates from several households, it may suggest it derived from a common midden, or else that vessels or vessel fragments were brought by spectators and participants to the ‘closing ceremony’. Do the different sherds show signs of being differentially worn or eroded, suggesting that they may have been collected from a midden that built up over a period of time (as suggested by Carlin in the case of Beaker deposits - Carlin pers com)? Or do they show no erosion at all, suggesting either that vessels were smashed just before the deposition, or that broken vessels had been deliberately curated in anticipation of their deposition. Similar questions can be asked of the flint assemblage and perhaps of the environmental remains. Clearly we cannot assume that the material forming the special deposits are directly representative of the use of the structure, or even representative of the last use of a structure which could have been constructed with another role entirely in mind. Comparisons between the three structures may identify changes in the practice of these special depositions during the middle, late and final Neolithic, and a comparison between these and later prehistoric structured deposits (e.g. from the late Bronze Age pit near Structure 5) will also be interesting.

Although analysis is at an early stage, it is possible to propose a hypothesis: that the material forming the special deposits does not originate from an ordinary domestic midden, and instead has been specifically selected for special deposition. Not only does rooting around a general midden sound smelly and disgusting, but also the flint within the deposits are not similar to the material found in the ‘flint scatters’ throughout the lower-lying portions of the site. The latter include numerous tools and carefully shaped blades (even controlling for the fact that such material is more likely to be collected from topsoil), in contrast to the flint from the special deposits.

I would therefore suggest (and this can be supported or refuted by the assemblage analysis) that the special deposits are related to new ways of eating and cooking that emerged during the Neolithic period. This is not a suggestion that the material represent a specific gender, or a domestic rather than ‘ritual’ sphere. Instead, I propose that the material culture handled during the special depositions is concerned with new foods (grains and domesticated beef) and new ways of eating (certain types of pottery vessels) and processing food (specific ‘kitchen’ flint tools and grinding stones). Absent from the special deposits are axes, arrowheads and fancy stone tools. Although small fragments of cremated bone that are frequently identified in Neolithic structures can be shown to represent the incorporation of cremated human remains as part of a ‘closing deposit’ (Cleary 2005, 27-28), I am hypothesising that the tiny amounts of heavily burnt bone present in almost all of the early prehistoric postholes at this site will turn out to belong to domestic animals (noting, however, that it is unlikely that the ongoing osteological analysis of the material will be able to confirm this). If these ideas are correct, the special deposits would be made up of new artefacts associated with (and seen by prehistoric people as being associated with) the new farming economy, and perhaps with permanent settlement. Interpretative approaches of this sort emphasising the relationships between Neolithic individuals, social networks and material culture have become increasingly common in Britain (Edmonds 1995, 1999, Thomas 1988, 1991, 1996a), but less so in Ireland (Cooney 2000a, 35-36; but see Cooney 2003, 48 & 2000b, 54-6, 60).

This is interesting to consider in light of recent arguments regarding the persistence of foraging/nomadic (and pastoralist?) lifestyles during the Neolithic and the possibility that such peoples lived alongside farming settled groups (Cooney 2003), the two perhaps inhabiting the landscape in a sort of uneasy co-existence. Such groups would have shared some cultural traits, but one difference between them is likely to have been the use of specific material culture utilised in the eating and cooking of grains and possibly of domesticated animals. The handling of these special new types of pottery, flint and food-

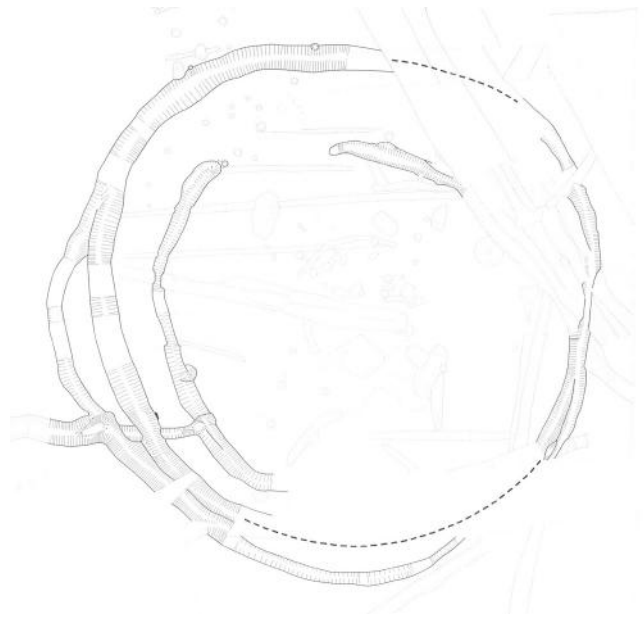
stuffs during a 'closing ceremony' may have served to emphasise the differences between the farmers and the foragers. Although I have not argued that the three early prehistoric structures at this site were homes (Structure 9 probably is not, the other two may be), it is possible that similar 'closing ceremonies' did take place in houses (and this has been suggested in previously excavated sites), and the use of these specific artefacts in this ceremony may have derived from farming households abandoning their homes and moving – thus emphasising their 'settled' nature at precisely the time when they have become nomadic, and unsettled. Foraging/nomadic lifestyles may have died out by the Bronze Age, and it is interesting to note that these special deposits are absent from later prehistoric (Bronze Age and later) structures on the site.

Later prehistoric period: 2300 BC – 500 AD

Later prehistoric activity involved a much greater emphasis on the enclosure of the landscape, in contrast to earlier prehistoric settlement evidence, and this is reflected on the site by the large ditched enclosure (Area 1) and linear land boundaries (Areas 1-3 & 10). Curving ditches, containing no dateable material, in the southern portion of the site (Areas 3, 4 & 8) may represent a second very large circular enclosure.

Ditched enclosure.

The large ditched enclosure in Area 1 (c. 30m internal diameter) is likely to date to the later Bronze Age, and to form part of a wider tradition of enclosed ridge-top settlement seen at other middle and late Bronze Age sites in Meath (Lagavooreen, Stamullin, Kilsharvan, Sheephouse and Rath, of which admittedly only the former two are situated on ridge-tops) and beyond (Chancellorsland, Co. Tipperary, Haggardstown, Co. Louth, and also extensively in Great Britain). These sites were usually univallate enclosures, but in many cases have evidence for the recutting of the enclosure ditches along slightly different lines, and in some cases (e.g. Cotter 2005, 39) possible bivallate or partially-bivallate enclosures have been noted.



Two possible phases have been suggested for the ditched enclosure in Area 1: an early partially bivallate phase; and a later univallate phase with a centrally located round structure that was partially encircled by a series of large pits.

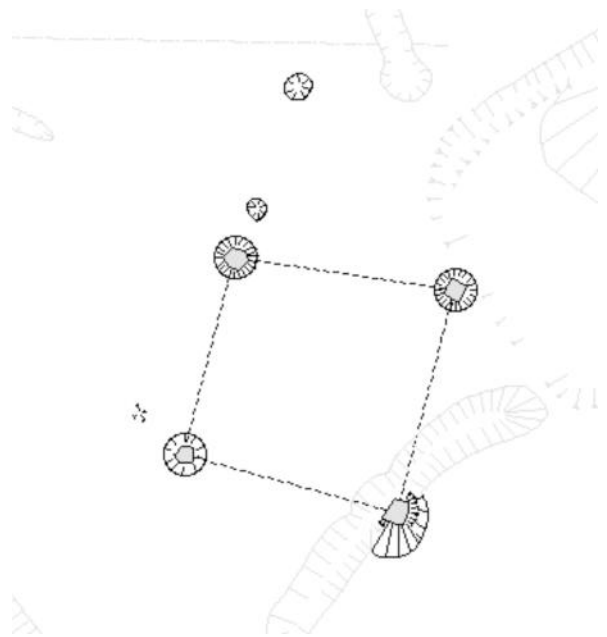
Entrances defined by causeways (i.e. an undug section of the ditch) are the usual in Bronze Age ditched enclosures, however Raftery (in Waddell 2000, 270-1) suggested that the unbroken circular late Bronze Age enclosure at Rathgall was crossed by a timber bridge. The location of the enclosure entrance at Donacarney was not established, as the (later phase) outer ditch was continuous except where it had been truncated by later activity to the northeast and southeast. A causewayed entrance may have been situated at one of these locations, which would line up with the possible eastern entrance suggested for the central circular structure (Structure 5), however the termini of the inner enclosure ditch (earlier phase) suggest a northwest-facing entrance to the enclosure, which might have been accessed by means of a timber bridge. A cluster of postholes (Structure 7) situated at the northwestern edge of the enclosure may have supported a palisade fence and gate-like structure. It is possible, of course, that the entrance to the enclosure was from the northwest in its early phase, changing to the east in its later phase. A northwest-facing entrance is

particularly interesting to consider in relation to the probable entrance of the earlier Neolithic building (Structure 1), just outside of the enclosure, which lines up almost perfectly with it. The special deposits incorporated into the entrance postholes of the Neolithic structure have been interpreted (see above) as the transformation of the structure into a monument, and it seems likely that this was also marked above the ground in a way that would still have been visible in the Bronze Age, some two millennia later.

Three structures were tentatively identified within the enclosure: the aforementioned gate/fence (Structure 7) to the northwest, a circular structure in the exact centre of the later phase of the enclosure (Structure 5), and a smaller square structure (Structure 6) to the southwest. Structure 5, though truncated to the south, appeared to be defined by a curving gully enclosing an area c. 7.8m in diameter. Twenty-five features clustered in and around the gully formed no obvious pattern, although stone-lined postholes tended to be located nearer to, and often just outside of, the curving gully (walls of the structure?), in contrast to pits which tended to be located (unsurprisingly perhaps) closer to the presumed centre. A possible entrance to the east measuring 2.2m in width (the same width as the Structure 1 entrance) can be suggested, however the southermost of these possible entrance features may also have been a hearth. Similar sized structures have been noted in the several of the late Bronze Age ditched enclosures noted above (Kilsharvan, Lagavooreen and Stamullin). The structure was precisely centred in relation only to the later phase of the enclosure, and is off-centre to both the earlier outer ditch and the inner enclosure ditch, suggesting that it was constructed only in the second phase of the enclosure.

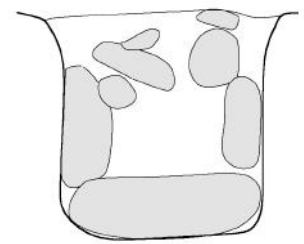


Structure 6 was defined by four very large stone-lined postholes forming a square structure 2.6m-2.7m across. The size and depth of the postholes, together with their careful stone lining and large post-pads, suggest that they supported a significant and heavy structure, such as a platform, which could have been used as a lookout, for excarnation, drying or grain storage. Comparable structures on British Bronze Age sites have been interpreted as raised granaries (Moore & Jennings 1992, 27), and similar structures were documented at Stamullin Co. Meath (Ní Lionáin 2008, 28), Haggardtown Co. Louth, and Lismullin I, Co. Meath (O'Connell 2009, 34). The similarity in the situations of the four-post structures at Lismullin 1 and at Donacarney in relation to both an inner circular feature and an outer enclosure is particularly striking.



A number of large pits were found within the ditched enclosure, and appeared to be spatially organised between the central circular structure, and away from Structure 6. In one case a pit was cut through the backfilled inner enclosure ditch (early phase), suggesting that the pits belong to the later phase of the circular enclosure. The pits varied in shape, size and content, but one of these (pit C194) contained a large quantity of prehistoric pottery. This pottery was briefly examined by Eoin Grogan and Helen Roche, who remarked that it seemed to be late Bronze Age (1000-800 BC) pottery of the finest quality – a remark which forms the basis of the present interpretation of the entire enclosure as dating to the late Bronze Age. Pits with similar ‘structured deposits’ are common on prehistoric sites, and several authors have argued convincingly that they should be interpreted as the ‘planting’ of intentional and meaningful deposits, rather than as storage or rubbish pits (Cleary 2005, 24-5; Gibson 2003, 141; Waddell 2000, 107).

Thus far, the function of the circular enclosure has not been addressed. Assigning a single specific function to multi-period spaces is problematic. Similarities between the shape and overall structure of the enclosure complex with later defended farmstead sites (ringforts) could lead us to a reconstruction along the lines of the Bronze Age enclosure at Chancellorsland, Co. Tipperary (Doody 2000, 150) in which structures equate to houses, and enclosures to dispersed farmsteads. This is a comfortable interpretation that sits well with modern notions (Gibson 2003, 136), however such interpretations may underplay the ‘otherness’ of prehistoric lives (Thomas 1996, 1-12).



Moving away from this kind of interpretation, it is also possible to envisage the enclosure complex as a space for public assembly. In this light the large centrally located circular structure (Structure 5) is seen as something beyond a house – indeed the identification of several prehistoric structures containing hearths outside of the enclosure, some of which might have been contemporary with the enclosure, suggests that living areas (houses) could have been situated around the enclosure, rather than within it. The enclosure can then be interpreted as a means for the integration and interaction of a wider community, through its construction, maintenance and the assemblies held within it. The possible raised platform (Structure 6) within the enclosure is interesting in this context, as is the possible evidence that the enclosure was at least partially bivallate at one point, and its dramatic ridge-top location. A further point of interest is the possible relationship between the enclosure and the system of prehistoric ditched boundaries that enclose and sub-divide the surrounding landscape; complex systems of land division and organization may have required periodic meetings of unrelated groups or of large landholding lineages (Cross 2003).

Such an interpretation is not necessarily incompatible with the enclosure forming the core of a dispersed farmstead. The difference is one of emphasis rather than of function, and the idea that relatively ordinary spaces can be transformed into special places is explored in the conclusion. This sort of interpretation may also be advantageous in that it avoids attempting to differentiate between domestic and ritual deposits, a differentiation which is unlikely to be useful on most prehistoric archaeological sites (e.g. Cleary 2005, 24-5 in an Irish Bronze Age context). Another interesting point are the uncanny similarities between the overall structural elements of the enclosure complex and the much larger (and possibly later) ceremonial post-enclosure recently excavated as Lismullin 1 (O’Connell 2009): both comprise a large enclosing feature with a central circular structure and adjacent (but off-centre) large four-post platform structure, and both truncate or are truncated by prehistoric co-axial field boundaries. It may be interesting to examine these two sites by interpreting these recurring architectural and spatial patterns as representative of a shared prehistoric ‘grammar’ used at two very different scales on two quite different sites.

Structures to the north of Area 1.

Two further structures (Structures 2 & 12) were identified to the north of the site (Areas 1 & 10), just inside of the bend of the boundary ditch, and outside of the circular enclosure. Their liminal locations are interesting, as are their situations at local high points, which is clearly visible on the contour map and mirrors the situation of Structure 11 far to the south. Neither structure produced dateable material. The complex of postholes and pits forming Structure 12 may have been an unroofed activity area rather than an upstanding structure. Structure 2, by contrast, had a clearly circular shape defined by postholes, measuring a fairly small 3.2m in diameter, and has parallels with previously excavated prehistoric structures (e.g. Doody 2000, 138). Two phases of construction have been suggested for this structure, whereby a ring of six outer postholes surrounded a hearth, which was later modified/ repaired by the addition of a new central posthole in the (now-defunct?) hearth and replacement of two damaged postholes.



The possible southern enclosure.

The evidence for a very large (50m diameter?) circular enclosure to the south of the site (in Areas 3, 4 & 8) is very tentative, and comprises two similar but unconnected small curvilinear ditches which were cut by early medieval and later activity. No artefacts were recovered from the ditches. A single structure (Structure 11) defined by a cluster of five small postholes was situated at a high point within this possible southern enclosure. The four smallest postholes formed a perfect square 2.45m across, which matched both the size and orientation of the four much larger postholes forming Structure 6 in Area 1.

The boundary ditch.

The most extensive feature identified on the site was formed by two contemporary ditches running at right angles to each other, which extended for 150m in length through Areas 1, 2, 3, 7 and 10. It did not run quite north-south, instead varying from 10-19 degrees west of magnetic North, but it was aligned with the ridge of high land and ran right across the highest parts of the landscape. Small fragments of coarse pottery within the ditch suggest it was in use during the late Bronze Age. At its southeastern end (in Area 3) the ditch terminated suddenly at a location which would later be used for Iron Age burial. At its northern end (in Area 10), the ditch curved sharply to the west, and continued along that orientation. The ditch appears to have marked the edge(s) of a parcel of land, which may have had particular ownership, or which may have been utilised for a specific practical and/or ceremonial function.

Prehistoric field systems or land boundaries have been noted elsewhere, most famously at the Céide Fields, Co. Mayo (Caulfield cited in Waddell 2000, 36), but also at other locations like Roughan Hill, Co. Clare (Jones & Gilmer 1999, 31) and at Lismullin 1, Co. Meath (O'Connell 2009, 29-30). These boundaries are similar to the one at Donacorney in that they form a regular co-axial pattern, a pattern that Cooney (2003, 50) believes 'clearly indicate[s] a co-ordination of activity at a level above and incorporating individual households' (*contra*. Waddell 2000, 36). Cooney (*ibid*) also points out that 'the organisation [of landscape into fields does not necessarily] indicate long-term sedentism', recalling an argument by Peter Woodman that Neolithic boundaries on the Antrim Plateau may relate to the control of animal movements during the seasonal use of uplands. While a Neolithic origin has been proposed for some of these large co-axial systems, the integration of pre-existing

monuments into extensive field systems of the earlier Bronze Age has also been noted, a pattern that occurs across Britain and Ireland.



Unfortunately, the relationship between the boundary ditch and the circular enclosure could not be established during the excavation, as early medieval and later boundary ditches truncated both of the junctions between the two. Whilst this might be put down to sheer bad luck (as the relationship between the two seems to be of great importance for an understanding of the site as a whole), it seems significant that the same locations were being continuously re-dug to mark the edges of fields or properties over three millennia. Despite this, it seems highly unlikely that the two were constructed at the same time, and the author hypothesises that the boundary post-dates the enclosure (both phases). The distinct bend westwards by the boundary at the point where it passes through the ditched enclosure suggests that the enclosure was still visible in some way when the boundary ditch was constructed. A short-running double-line of ditches (described as the 'double-ditch' in the Area 1 stratigraphic report above) oriented perpendicular to the boundary may form part of the ditched (field?) system. This double-ditch is situated almost exactly at the mid-point between the northern and southern end of the longest axis of the boundary ditch system, and also runs through the central axis of the (earlier?) circular enclosure, bisecting it in two. The boundary system thus appears to be making reference to the earlier circular enclosure which, though no longer used in the manner intended when it was initially constructed, was still very much part of the utilised landscape.

The fulachta fiadh.

Two fulachta fiadh were identified in the low-lying western part of the site (Areas 6 & 9), both sited on the edges of old watercourses. One of these (Area 9) was heavily truncated but the other (Area 6) was well preserved and comprised a large circular well connected by a narrow gap (which no doubt could be opened and closed by means of a wooden sluice or similar) to a circular trough, with a small kiln nearby.

Somewhat unusually for fulacht fiadh sites, a very large quantity of flint debitage in and around the fulacht indicated extensive prehistoric flint knapping in this area. Fragments of a possible Cordoned Urn-type pottery vessel recovered from the upper fills of the well suggested a date of c. 2000-1200 BC for the use of the fulacht, which is broadly consistent

with dates of other fulachta fiadh excavated in the country. If the specialist analysis of the pottery suggests it is an early Bronze Age funerary rather than domestic vessel, then its deposition may have been part of a ritual termination of the fulacht and/or burial act (Grogan *et al.* 2004, 94-5). Fulachta fiadh associated with large wells are not uncommon, and have been previously noted at Muckerstown, Co. Meath (Moore 2007, 328), Clonee, Co. Meath (McCarthy 2009a), Ballynakelly, Co. Dublin (McCarthy 2009b), Clogh East (Taylor 2004, 263-4), and possibly Ballycorick (Halpin 2004, 171). Three of the above sites (Muckerstown, Ballynakelly and Clogh East) had possible evidence for votive termination depositions within the wells.

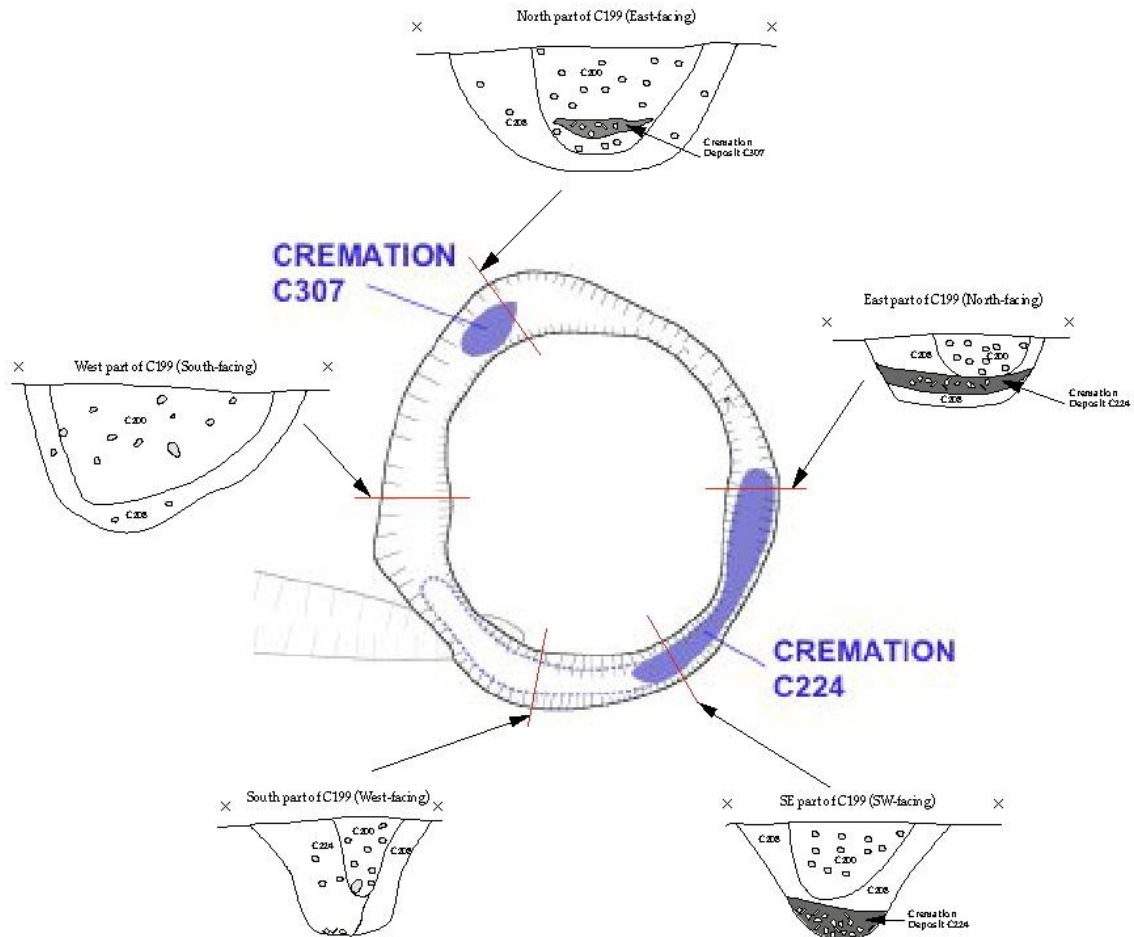


Iron age ring ditch.

The latest phase of prehistoric activity on the site comprised an Iron Age ring-ditch. The ring-ditch measured 4.4m in internal diameter, and became very shallow to the northeast, perhaps marking an entrance. Two distinct areas of cremated bone remains were noted in the ring-ditch: a smaller deposit to the northwest which was situated over the uppermost ring-ditch fill (and was therefore a later addition to the monument); and a larger deposit directly opposite to the southeast, which was situated along the base of the ring-ditch. A preliminary assessment of the heavily burnt bones suggests that the larger southeastern deposit represents human bone, whereas the origin of the bone from the smaller deposit is unclear (i.e. it may be animal or human). It seems probable that the ring ditch was constructed specifically for the southeastern burial, and such monuments are often seen as primarily funerary in function.

The southeastern cremation deposit contained a variety of artefacts, including fragments of iron and copper representing a possible fibula or brooch, and a number of glass and bone beads. There were eight undecorated spherical polished bone beads, twenty tiny light blue-green annular beads and one larger decorated glass bead (the beads were examined by Judith Carroll and the following discussion is based on her report). This last bead was almost spherical (13mm x 14mm in size) of dark blue translucent glass. It was decorated around its outer surface with six roughly cut concentric circular/oval motifs that were each

enameled with a roundel of yellow glass surrounded by what was probably a field of red glass (now completely deteriorated as white powder). In the middle of each inner yellow roundel was a blue dot. Carroll suggested that the glass and bone beads might have formed part of a single object such as a necklace or bracelet. The beads showed signs of heat damage consistent with being laid upon a corpse in a pyre prior to burial of the ashes in the ring ditch. The beads from Donacarney Great are closely comparable to assemblages found in a number of Iron Age burial contexts throughout the country, in particular from cremation burials in ring ditches.



Carroll suggests that the glass beads date to the 1st or 2nd century BC, and that Britain was the principal source of origin, rather than the Continent. She notes similarities with beads being produced in southwest Britain, for example at factories such as those at Meare, Somerset, but also points out that all beads may not have stemmed from the one area and it is possible that other known Iron Age glass bead-making centres such as Culbin Sands in east Scotland could have been a source of manufacture. There is no evidence for similar bead production factories in Ireland and the fact that the majority of sites at which beads are found are coastal, or are fairly close to main rivers, increases the likelihood that they were traded by water. The connection with Britain implied by the beads may be mirrored by the possible fragmented fibula, as fibulae are sometimes considered to reflect British influence (Waddell 2000, 313). Carroll draws particular attention to an intriguing feature of the Donacarney Great bead assemblage: that all three of its bead types have their closest comparisons in Iron Age burials in Co. Galway. The comparisons for the all the beads (bone and glass) from Donacarney are those from the four Galway sites at Ballyboy (1 & 2) Grannagh (the latter three are less than 3km in distance from each other) and Carrowbeg North.

Although the southeastern cremation deposit has not yet been examined by an osteologist, it seems likely that it will turn out to represent a single human individual. The individual appears to have been cremated with at least two ornaments: a necklace or bracelet of beads and a metal brooch of some sort, and it is probable that these would have been worn during their life. These ornaments suggest an individual who considered themselves connected to the wider world – and here the parallels with southwestern Britain and Galway are interesting. They may also suggest someone of higher than usual status or rank, and with access to a range of imported and fancy, perhaps expensive, items.

Following their death, the individual was cremated. In recent years there has been increasing work on cremation in prehistory, and it is hoped that the osteological and environmental analysis of the cremation deposit will provide further information. The location of the cremation is not known, but this is likely to have been a highly-visible and public act. No evidence for where the cremation might have taken place was found, and the numerous fire-pits situated just to the southwest are likely to be early medieval corn-drying kilns and not cremation pyres. This is a common problem with cremation deposits on archaeological sites.



Somebody (or somebodies - and who this may have been is an interesting question) then decided to bury the individual at this spot, assuming that the ring ditch was constructed specifically to hold this individual. This is fascinating, as the results of the excavation suggest that this location was charged with meaning. The construction of ring-ditches over pre-existing monuments and places of significance has been noted at other sites, for example at Kilmahuddrick, Co. Dublin (Doyle 2005, 59-61) and Ardsallagh 2, Co. Meath (Clarke and Carlin 2009, 3-8) and with other prehistoric monument types (e.g. at Knowth, Newgrange and Ballyglass – Grogan 1996, 41-2; Cooney 2000b, 54; Jones & Gilmer 1999, 31). The ring ditch was constructed near the most prominent part of the ridge of higher ground that formed a long-lived and continuous focus of prehistoric settlement. In the early prehistoric period, structures had been erected on the lower slopes of the ridge to the north and to the south, but the only early prehistoric feature identified at this high location was a single isolated stone-lined posthole, which contained a fragment of Carrowkeel ware and other decorated pottery sherds, and which appeared to hold a large free-standing marker post. In the later prehistoric period, the lower slopes of the ridge to the north and south continued to be occupied with structures and ditched enclosures (admittedly tentative to the south), but this high location seems to have still been utilised in a different way.



When the probable later Bronze Age expansive co-axial field/property system was established over this landscape, this location appears to have been an organising point, as it is here that the only definite terminus of the boundary ditches was identified. The ring ditch was constructed at the exact point that the earlier boundary ditch terminated, and although the ditch had been infilled when the ring ditch was built, the boundaries that it marked must have still been in use and may have been in the form of a hedge running along the northern bank of the former

ditch, and thus oriented exactly towards the centre of the ring ditch. The western end of the boundary (formerly the ditch terminus) could also have been specifically marked, perhaps by a tree, bush or large stone. This feature would have been identifiable as the origin-point

of the 'field'-system, and it is around this that the ring ditch appears to have been constructed. Indeed, it is possible that this origin/centre point feature formed a focus of the subsequent burial ceremony. As a purely speculative example, if it took the form a tree-stump the cremated remains could have been placed on the stump, and only later been pushed or blown into the bottom of the ring ditch.

The selection of this location and the construction of the ring ditch around this earlier feature or point in the landscape can thus be seen as a highly charged decision, and action, by the living. The very fact that such an important location could be used for the burial place suggests that either the dead individual or the organisers of his/her burial had considerable influence in the community. This decision to re-use this area drew on and reinforced the past, and also implied change and transformation into the future. The selection of this spot for the monument reinforced its earlier importance as a special location and as the origin of the system of organisation of land – and the organisation of land was almost certainly bound up with control of land – and thus the ceremony would have emphasised and entrenched existing systems of status in the view of the participants. At the same time, the transformation of the space into a burial monument associated with a single individual, and thus perhaps with a single kin group or corporate group (whether newly established or not), crystallised existing (and perhaps competing) land or status claims into the historical landscape - and in this way perhaps intentionally subverting an earlier more fluid system of land organisation and ownership.



One of the peculiar aspects of about these ideas regarding the Iron Age ring ditch is the absence of any other evidence for Iron Age settlement on the site, in general terms of utilising the land for any purpose at all. This is a general Irish problem, and is not specific to this site, and is likely to be at least partially a result of archaeological mis-interpretation, rather than any actual absence of people during the Iron Age. Indeed, increasing numbers of Iron Age sites are being identified in Ireland on infrastructural projects where radiometric dating programs are employed (e.g. Carlin, Clarke & Walsh 2009; Deevy & Murphy 2009). A number of radiocarbon dates will be obtained for the site, and these may reveal more extensive Iron Age settlement than has been identified at present.

Early medieval and later periods 500-1950 AD



A cluster of activity on the southwest-facing slopes of the ridge (Structure 10, Area 8) may be broadly early medieval (500-1150 AD) in date. This comprised four corn-drying kilns with some indication of at least two phases of use, adjacent to and either side of a field boundary that may have defined the crop fields themselves, or land holdings, and evidence for four structures that may have been houses, kiln screen or sheltered ateliers/stores. A fifth early medieval kiln was also identified in Area 1, again close to a contemporary field boundary. The location of the settlement contrasts with the locations selected during the early and late prehistoric settlement (compare Figs. 21-23).



The structures were defined by curving slot-trenches, which were deep enough to have supported planks or posts, and which enclosed oval areas 5m-8m in diameter. One of the slot-trenches appeared to curve around a large key-hole shaped kiln, and may have supported a structure that provided the kiln with shelter. Carbonised plant (especially seed) remains from these slot trenches and four adjacent cereal-drying kilns suggest they were broadly contemporary.

Two of the kilns were small and figure-of-eight shaped in plan. A third small figure-of-eight shaped kiln was also found in the northern part of the site (Area 1), and also contained seeds. The other two kilns were much larger (7-8m in length) and at the largest range of known kiln sizes. One of

these (C618) was a partially stone-lined keyhole-shaped kiln which was directly comparable to several other recently excavated corn-drying kilns (Monk & Kelleher 1995, 77-85). The other kiln (C501) was an enormous (7m long and almost 1m deep) figure-of-eight shaped

kiln that contained two sawn antler craft off-cuts. This latter kiln also contained a large fragment of a human skull, which seems to have been intentionally placed centrally at the bottom of the deeper bowl. It is anomalous in size, but a similar possible kiln has been excavated at Mashanaglass, Co. Cork (Monk & Kelleher 1995, 104). Some tentative stratigraphic evidence for the keyhole-shaped kiln being later than the figure-of-eight shaped kilns was identified, whereby kiln C501 could have been constructed into the northern slope of the bank of an early medieval field boundary (C515)

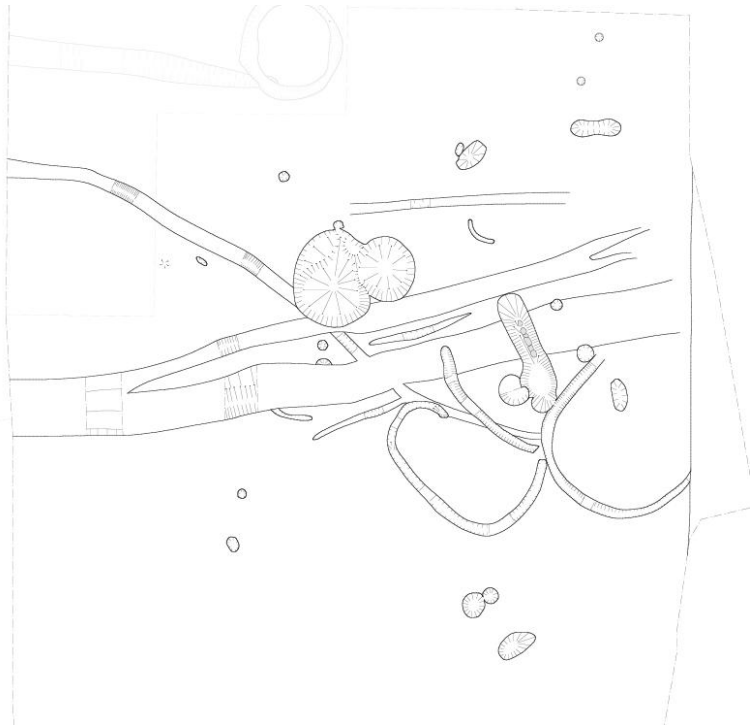


The field boundary was later re-cut (C517) to the north and a new kiln (C618) constructed to the south of the boundary, cut into the south-

facing slope of the old partly levelled bank of the original ditch. This sequence of events would support a hypothesis put forward by Monk & Kelleher (*ibid*) regarding the relative antiquities of the two kiln types.

A thick (10m) band of silt running diagonally through the northern part of the site (Areas 1, 2 & 10) was found to be the result of at least six cutting and re-cuttings of a ditched boundary, each one shifting slightly towards the northwest. A number of smaller ditches ran at right angles into this band of ditches, and presumably the ditch pattern reflects early medieval field divisions, however the exact layout is difficult to reconstruct and appears to respect neither earlier prehistoric land divisions nor later post-medieval field systems.

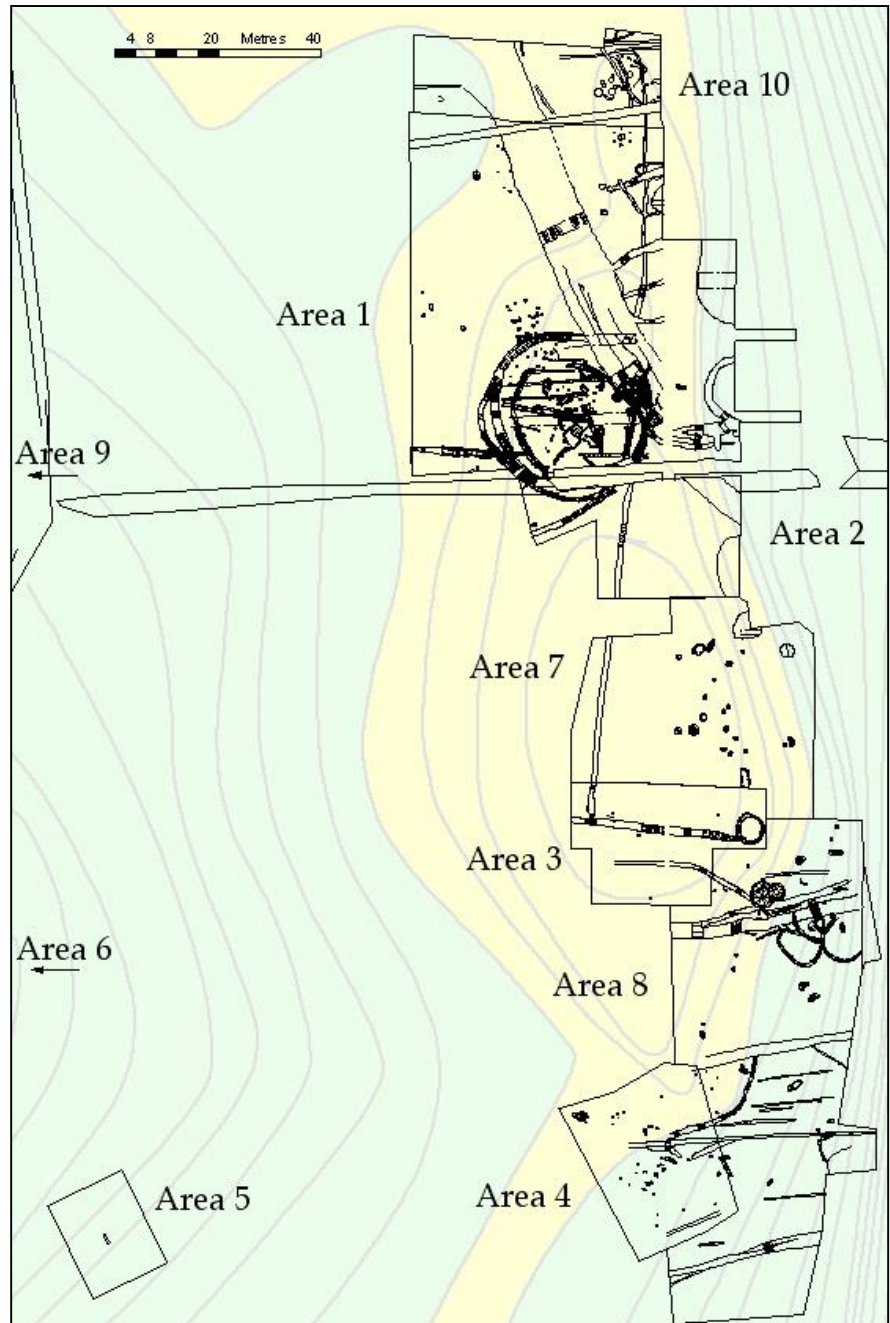
Evidence for activity on the site during the later medieval period (1150-1550 AD) and during the post-medieval periods (1550-1750 AD) was almost non-existent, comprising only of a single pit in the northeast of the site (Area 10) containing a fragment of 14th century pottery. Four east-west running ditches or field boundaries (in Areas 1, 2, 8 & 10) may date to the 17th century or later. Activity from these periods is commonly encountered on archaeological sites, and is usually easy to identify and date due to the volumes of distinctive material culture, but at Donacarney it appears that no such activity was present. Extensive industrial period (1750-1930) and modern (1930+) features were encountered all along the steeply sloping eastern sides of the ridge, probably the result of quarrying for sand and gravel.



Conclusion: Understanding the prehistoric landscape at Donacarney Great

Sporadic vs. permanent occupation.

Material culture from a wide range of time periods was found on the site – with artefacts dating from the early Neolithic (3900-3300 BC), and perhaps even earlier, all the way into the Iron Age (c. 100 BC). Artefacts dating from every intervening period were identified on the site, in contexts that implied intentional human deposition. The nature of the archaeological remains indicate that activities on the site from the late Neolithic onwards took into account earlier activities, for example the construction of the Iron Age ring ditch appears to have built on an understanding of the late Bronze Age landscape, which itself ultimately developed from the mid-Neolithic landscape (see discussions above). This is also clear in the case of Structure 9 (in Area 4), where a Grooved Ware timber structure appears to have been the focus of later activity at the end of the Neolithic and beginning of the Bronze Age. This is in contrast with the early medieval activity, which cuts across the prehistoric archaeology and does not seem to reflect the historicity of the landscape in the same way.



These two points (the absence of any evidence for settlement 'gaps' during the prehistoric period, and the evidence for continuity of understanding of landscape during this same period) suggest that people continuously inhabited this area from the early-mid Neolithic through to the Iron Age: some three millennia of occupation, and that the landscape was

either never completely abandoned, or that any abandonment was relatively minor. Note that occupation here is defined very loosely as landscape utilised by people, whether as a place to build monuments, or homes, or to graze cattle and grow crops, or to forage for food.

Extent of the occupation.

If the site was continually inhabited, did this occupation cover the full area of the site during the whole prehistoric period; or were there changes over time, with the focus of occupation and settlement waxing and waning, or shifting in space? This is a very challenging question to address, as it involves defining what the edge of a settlement might look like, but it would be remiss to ignore it completely.

Methodological approaches dealing with this topic were a feature of the 'New Geography' during the 1960s and '70s, from where they filtered into the 'New Archaeology', and these have been heavily criticised for using models which are overly-abstract in their quest for universalities (e.g., critique in Tilley 1994). One such approach involves using 'hailing distance', a supposedly cross-cultural distance of c. 150m corresponding with the distance one person can call out and be understood by another (Roberts 1996, 24), which is considered to be of particular relevance to the organisation and extent of pre-industrial small rural communities. I have settled on this approach as it relies on using the experienced human body as a starting point – indeed this was a notable feature of many early 'New Geography' and 'New Archaeology' theories (eg. anything by Binford in the '70s & '80s), and it is intriguing to consider that, had these been developed further by later processual archaeologists, it may have led to a sort of phenomenology without the verbosity.

As an exercise, a 150m radius circle can be drawn on the site plan around every feature securely dated to one of five prehistoric phases: the early/middle Neolithic, late/final Neolithic, the earlier and later Bronze Age, and the Iron Age. The resulting phased circles overlap heavily, and it is interesting that the highest point of the site (which revealed no evidence for any structure at any period) is covered by the circles in all six phases. The ridge of higher land running N-S across the site is fully within 'hailing distance' for five of the phases (the earlier Bronze Age phase only includes part of the ridge), and the lower lying ground to the east of the ridge is also within 'hailing distance' for all six phases. This experiment may be somewhat ridiculous, however it does serve to illustrate an important point that is not immediately apparent from the post-excavation site plans: that occupation in any one part of the site involved an engagement with the landscape of the entire site, and that no single part of the site could become 'abandoned' if people continued to inhabit other parts of it. These conclusions are not dissimilar to Cooney's (2000, 77) concept of 'social landscapes'. We should conclude, I would argue, that the entire site (both the ridge to the west and lower-lying ground to the east) was inhabited from the early to mid-Neolithic through to, and into, the Iron Age.

Internal organisation of occupation.

Nevertheless it is clear that the nature of this occupation took different forms in different places. The nature of the occupation along the ridge in the north, centre and south of the site differed from each other (as suggested above in the discussion of the Iron Age ring ditch), but a more significant distinction can be seen between the nature of archaeological remains along the ridge-top, which comprised structures, enclosures and boundaries, compared to those along the lower-lying land to the west, which comprised flint scatters, occupation deposits and fulucht-fiadh sites. The difference cannot be explained by post-depositional disturbance (there is no reason why structural evidence would have survived better on the ridge-top), nor in terms of pure functionality (whereas the fuluchta-fiadh were positioned to take advantage of water sources, there is no fundamental reason why structures should be found on the ridge-top rather than in the lower-lying ground – and indeed the opposite is the case today).

This difference in archaeological remains might be explained in terms of homes (on the ridge) versus farmland (on the lower-lying ground to the west), but this ignores or underplays the archaeological remains on the lower-lying ground. A related question is: to what extent do the archaeological remains of prehistoric structures reflect the amount of actual structures previously erected on the site? Based on the above discussions, and assuming continuous and extensive prehistoric occupation, it follows that the single early Neolithic structure identified on the site (in Area 1) may not have been the only structure erected hereabouts during the early Neolithic: further construction that left no archaeological trace may have been carried out around, for example in Area 5 where a spread of early Neolithic material was identified. This small spread of occupation material including charcoal and pottery from the early Neolithic to the final Neolithic (Beaker) suggests long-lived recurring activity of a sort that can leave few or almost no traces. Such areas of frequent and long-lived use do not have the same archaeological visibility because the activity they represent was not as structured or formalised.



I would suggest that the differences between archaeological remains in distinct areas of the site at least partially reflect conscious decisions by prehistoric individuals to emphasise or mark certain areas or certain structures above others in specific ways. It is notable that many of the identified prehistoric structures have evidence for deliberate decommissioning and 'closing' rituals, and also that in many cases their locations seem to have been remembered, and respected, in later constructions. The pattern of archaeological remains can therefore be seen as a real one, articulated through recurring highly-structured formalised actions (i.e. ritual) involving the construction and transformation of the landscape through the prehistoric period. We can thus distinguish between an occupied lower-lying western part of the site, and an occupied eastern ridge-top part of the site, which together (partially) encapsulated prehistoric daily lives; but it was only the ridge-top occupation that was the focus of repeated ritualised action that left a distinct landscape imprint. This is not to imply that we can read the landscape like a text: there is no overall pattern, or single answer, and each stage of the evolution of the landscape is dependent and

contingent on the phase before. Nevertheless, I argue that it is precisely those prehistoric features that were especially commemorated or marked in some way that have become archaeologically visible along the spine of the ridge.

A ritual landscape.

The identification of the ridge as a focus of ceremonial activity is not the same as suggesting that these remains formed a 'sacred landscape', which implies a degree of exclusion of the profane. In fact, although there is evidence for the deliberate construction of monuments along the ridge-top, in many cases it appears that monuments were created out of ordinary-looking structures, rather than being built especially: for example the early Neolithic structure in Area 1 may have been built as a simple home, one of many, but its decommissioning and subsequent remembering transformed it into something else (the orientation of its entrance appears to have been marked in some way for many years after its collapse, as evidenced by the arrangement of the later Bronze Age enclosure(s) to the south); and also in the case of the Iron Age ring ditch, the construction of which involved the transformation of an earlier place that might have been marked by something as simple and un-monumental as a tree. The landscape is therefore constantly being 'ritualised' through the act of living, commemorating and remembering.

Existing definitions of ritual landscapes imply that these were created as such. This can be seen even in the most minimal definitions, for example Kinnes (1998, 184) following Harding & Lee (1987) in defining a 'ritual landscape' as a place where monuments 'lie in close proximity though the degree of association between them, if any, is unknown', where 'sites were constructed with their neighbours in mind'. Such a definition might apply to the most well-known and significant ritual landscapes in the country, such as Brú na Bóinne, however they do not apply to Donacarney Great, where monuments were being created and transformed from non-monumental features, and where the line between a monument and a building shifted over time. Over the last few decades prehistoric archaeologists, particularly in Britain, have been heavily influenced by the work of modern sociologists (e.g., Giddens 1984) that emphasise actors who do things with intention and knowledge, but often the unintended consequences of actions are underplayed. These unintended consequences, however, are particularly significant when dealing with a scale of time measured in millennia rather than years, and where landscapes are being transformed and passed down from one generation to the next, with the meanings of old house sites, field boundaries and monuments being constantly reinterpreted (e.g. Shennan's [1989, 341] 'transmissible environments').

In this discussion I have explored how the prehistoric inhabitants of the site constructed a ritual landscape along the spine of the ridge over several millennia. This landscape was created through the actions of individuals, responding to stress in times of flux, a desire to define themselves from other groups of people, to celebrate and remember important people and places, and to subvert or reinforce systems of land ownership and control. Through these actions, which were a direct consequence of living here, the people at Donacarney Great gradually altered their landscape over time, with each change built over and dependent on what had gone on before, but not in a predictable or deterministic way.

Conclusion

Overall, the excavation exposed a long period of prehistoric settlement along the spine of a ridge. The ridge was clearly a focus of ceremonial activity, but not to the point where 'profane' activities were excluded. Rather, it appears that domestic or practical structures and features were selected for special commemoration and transformed into monuments that, over time, formed part of the landscape. When dealing with a period of time measured in millenia rather than years, landscapes undergo constant transformation as they are passed down from one generation to the next, and the meanings of old house sites, field boundaries and monuments are interpreted in new ways.

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