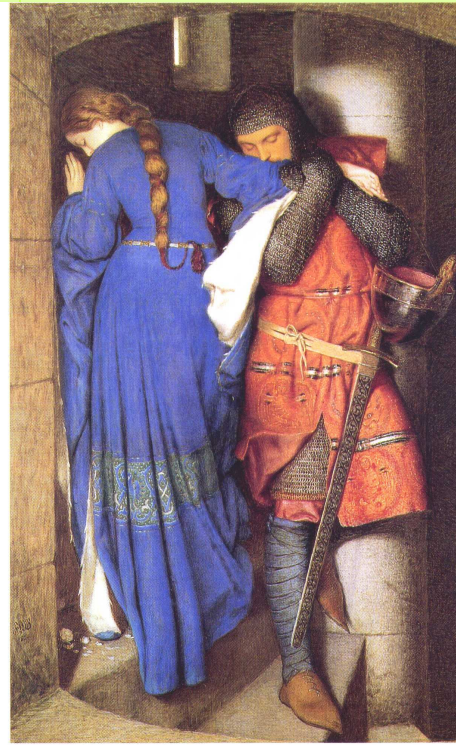


The Meeting on the Turret Stairs.
by
Frederick William Burton. 1864
Courtesy of the National Gallery



Ancient Sites & Buildings Bagenalstown Area, Co Carlow

1. Donore Rath
2. Dunleckney Urban (Ancient Settlement)
3. Kilcruit Cairn (Passage Tomb)
4. Dunleckney Rural (Norman Settlement)
5. Dunleckney Manor House
6. Carlow Medieval Walls
7. Ballyknockan Motte (Dinn Rígh)
8. Kilcarrig Rath (Abbatoir)
9. Duninga Rath (Co Kilkenny)

J.M.Feeley & J.Sheehan
Dunleckney. 2004/5

Introduction.

The authors have been conducting archaeological surveys for several years as a hobby and have built up considerable skill & expertise. A previous booklet covered medieval monasteries and churches in the county. Our findings to date have been the topic of lectures to the Old Carlow Society the Graignamanagh Historical Society and the Irish society of Diviners. Several articles have also been published in Carloviana in recent years.

Professional Archaeology as it has been practised in the 20th c is a scientific discipline applied to locating and examining remains from the past. This usually entails careful excavation on site, retrieval of any ancient remains found. A full site examination may take a season or even several seasons to complete. Findings are analysed both on site and in a laboratory. At present a heavy demand exists for archaeological investigation due to the construction of roads and buildings nationwide. Modern technology using electronic devices eg soil resistivity and ground radar testing enable relatively large areas to be searched fairly quickly for any anomalies or hollows underground. Metal detectors are only successful at shallow depths and of course only for metal objects.

Site Excavation License. According to Irish law at present; permission to excavate a site must be obtained in advance from the state. A site license is only granted to registered/professional archaeologists. All finds of value remain the property of the state, although a monetary reward may be given to the finders and landowner.

Divining. Our survey work uses a non intrusive technique known as divining or dowsing. Whereas divining for water is well known and dates back to our stone age ancestors, its application to finding remains of old buildings and structures is relatively unknown. We are aware of only one *published account of similar work in England conducted in the early 1980's. A team made up of professional archaeologists, diviners and an architectural draughtsman surveyed 45 churches in the North of England. Many of these buildings dated to Anglo-Saxon times, some dated back to the Roman period. In most cases the existing building had been built over an existing structure. Divining is a psychic ability which can be applied to a wide range of applications of which the authors' specialisation is archaeology. The technique gives rapid results for a small cost. However accuracy obtained may be questionable. Divining involves asking hundreds of questions in order to build up a mental picture of the past. It is also important to place oneself in the time at which the site was known to have been in use when tapping into the site memory. This data when combined with other information; eg known site history, topography, technology available at the time and large doses of common sense can produce a reasonably accurate and plausible picture in three dimensions. One of the disadvantages of divining is that answers are only obtained to the questions asked. However we have overcome this difficulty to some extent by a critical examination of results obtained and by rechecking on a return visit where necessary. A final point; the diviner must not attempt to *drive* the divining process ie by trying to confirm their personal preconceptions. Answers to questions should be recorded as they occur without demur. At no time have the authors actually excavated a site in order to validate our findings. Nevertheless many of our results have often been confirmed by the work of others, elsewhere. In many cases excavation is not possible eg the site is occupied by modern buildings, roads, a graveyard or is under water etc.

We trust our readers will find the following pages interesting and perhaps even controversial. However we leave validation to the experts of the future who will no doubt be better equipped for this task.

* *Dowsing & Church Archaeology.*
by R.N.Bailey

Joseph.M.Feeley
John.Sheehan
Dunleckney,
Bagenalstown. 2005

Introduction.

Construction of Earthen Field Structures

The circular form of construction prevailed in ancient Ireland and elsewhere because it offers the maximum ratio of area to perimeter. Consequently the ringfort or *rath* was always either circular or slightly oval. Likewise all buildings in the Neolithic period and throughout most of the 1st millennium of the Christian era were also round. A round structure requires the minimum of material, can be built in a shorter time and if a buildings heat loss is minimised. *[Incidentally the heat loss through the walls in the case of rectangular buildings Increases as the length/width ratio increases.]*

The following paragraph taken from the UKbased Parabow Internet site, while discussing crannogs (lakeside dwellings) equally applies to round timber structures of any kind.

‘As with African and North American Indian buildings, crannogs were round because as people all over the world discovered independently, a circle is a physically strong structural form for a building, with no part bearing more than another ie it is the perfect shape for even distribution of load. The adoption of this shape meant that the builder could select small diameter timbers and dispense with the need for exhaustive cutting. The timbers were supplied on a cyclical basis from “coppice” woodland and the need to select straight poles with minimal taper ,suggests that the woodlands were actually managed to get that type of wood. The coppicing also gives the “withies” for weaving walls. We could say that the crannog builders were also capable foresters and “silviculturalists”.

On the other hand churches in Ireland were always based on square or rectangular shapes whether of timber or stone construction. Not until the latter part of the 20th c did round, hexagonal or octagonal churches appear.

Ringfort construction.

Constructed on well drained soil.

Type A. Circular area enclosed by a bank

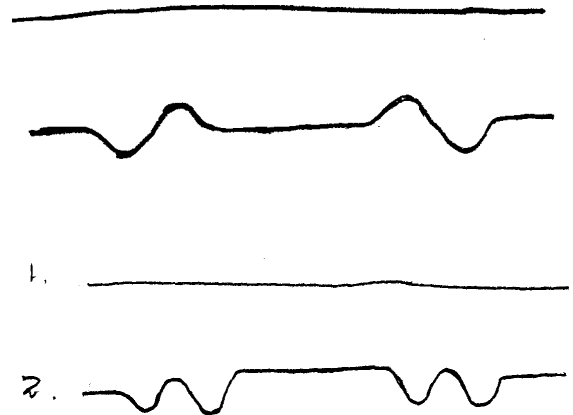
Work started with a completely flat area. A ring ditch was excavated and the clay transferred to build a bank inside it. The internal and external ground level remained unchanged. When used as a corral for livestock, a post & wattle fence was constructed atop the bank. Example at Kilcarrig, Bagenalstown.

[See Vol2, Site 8]

Type B. High central platform

Work started with a completely flat area. A deep ring ditch was excavated around the centre and the clay transferred to build the central platform. If a high platform was required a second and even a third ditch outside the first was needed to provide the necessary material. A strong fence enclosed the platform area if used as a ringfort. In certain this type of structure may have been used as a druidic ritual site. Examples of fortified sites formerly existed at Donore and Dunleckney.

[See Vol2, Sites 1 & 2]

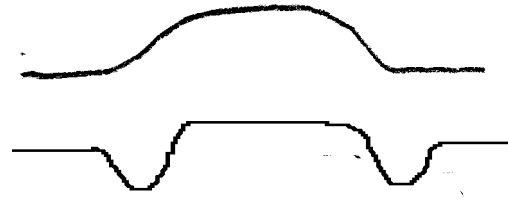


In both diagrams above the upper straight line represents the initial flat surface of a field or hill slope. The lower part represents a cross-section through the ringfort.

Type C. Circular raised platform

The material already existed as a natural mound usually a glacial deposit of boulder clay/gravel. A deep circular ring ditch was excavated and the clay transferred to raise the central platform. A strong fence enclosed the platform area, if used as a ringfort. In other examples it may have been used as a druidic ritual site. *This is the ancient Irish version of an amphitheatre.*

Examples at : Duninga, Co Kilkenny. & Ballyknockan (Leighlin Bridge) in pre Norman times [See vol2, Sites 7 & 9]



In both diagrams above the upper straight line represents the initial mound or promontory. The lower part represents a cross-section through the earthen structure

Type D. 12th c Norman Motte.

The Normans built mottes in all the countries that they conquered ;France, Italy, Britain and Ireland. They were intended as a first defensive position and were cheap and quick to build using unskilled labour. In the case of local examples a substantial mound usually a glacial deposit already existed. The central mound or motte was raised considerably by excavating a deep ditch or fosse all around it. A palisade of heavy timber stakes enclosed the small area on top with a watch tower at the gate. A narrow bridge was required to span the deep ditch and was sufficiently strong to accommodate horses as well as knights. The elevated position gave a view in all directions and gave their archers an advantage over any local attackers.

In some examples in County Carlow a bailey ie a fenced off area existed opposite the bridge. Dwellings for family and livestock were here. Eight examples are listed in the Carlow Inventory.

Examples at Ballyknockan (See Vol2,Site 7) and Dunleckney (Vol2, Site 4)



Full List of Carlow Sites at; <http://glasnost.itcarlow.ie/~feeleyjm/archaeology/index2.htm>