

The Rathduff Trench.

The Gripe of the Pig

J.M.Feeley

It is said that “*good fences make good neighbours*”.

Artificial barriers have been constructed for millennia to define a territorial boundary, and are often accompanied by guard posts as an integral part of the structure or situated alongside it. Gateways where they exist are garrisoned. Sections of many ancient barriers still exist throughout the world: examples are; the Great Wall of China (originally 4,000 Mls), built over 2000 years ago to keep out the Mongol hordes. Hadrian’s Wall (74 Mls long, 20’ high. Newcastle to Carlisle), built by the Roman Army to keep out the Picts,

Offa’s Dyke (the longest linear earthwork in Britain) to prevent raids by the Welsh into Saxon England.). In modern times we had/have the infamous Berlin Wall and the Israeli Wall.

Less well known but far more numerous are structures built of earth and stones known as *linear earthworks*, that can be traced sometimes for miles across the countryside and in Ireland; have legendary names; such as the Black Pig’s Race or Dyke or the *CLΔρθ Dūbh*. They appear to have formed territorial boundaries and/or impediments to cattle raiding. Some may date from the Iron Age. These earthworks are usually not visually very impressive and in modern times are often indistinguishable from other field boundaries nearby. In many cases an ancient barrier can be inferred from field and townland boundaries. The original 1839 ordnance maps are a useful reference for this purpose.

Then as now their construction would indicate a period of social unrest, territorial disputes etc. These earthen structures were not massive enough to resist a full scale territorial invasion. The bank was usually topped by a thick prickly hedge which would certainly have discouraged wandering livestock or casual rustling.

Ireland’s longest linear structure once separated Ulster from the rest of the island. Surviving sections can still be seen in counties Leitrim, Longford and Cavan.

Other surviving examples are found in Co Cork (at Carrigleagh), and at Fethard in Co Tipperary.

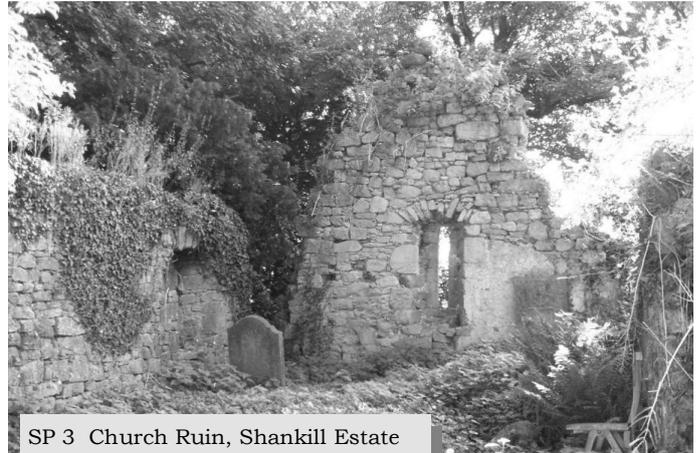
Incidentally the latter structure inspired a 17th c dance known as ‘*Δη Τριμηρε μορι*’ popular at the Elizabethan court.

In England examples of three types still exist;

- i) Linear boundaries with a single bank & ditch.
- ii) Linear boundaries with a single ditch between two banks, and
- iii) Linear boundaries with two or more ditches and banks.

In some cases the ancient structure still forms the boundary between townlands and or parishes or to separate pasture from tillage land. Typical dimensions for a ditch is; Width- 1.5 to 6m, Depth; 0.4 – 2m.

The banks are typically between 0.5m in height and a width of 3m



SP 3 Church Ruin, Shankill Estate

Our research is based on;

1. Notes from the Ordnance survey of 1839.
2. Historic Map, 25” scale, Ordnance Survey.
3. Satellite Photographs of the area. Geographical Information System. Kilkenny Co Co.
4. Divining at selected locations.
5. Internet Sources.

The Rathduff Trench or Dyke

This local example of a linear earthwork was originally 5 km (3 mls) long and separated the ancient territories of Idrone and Gabhran. It ran from the Barrow River at Duninga through Shankill Demesne to Kellymount.

Portion of the boundary lying NE of Duninga Rath is marked on the 25” OSI Map as; ‘*Site of the Rathduff Trench*’. No further trace is found until we approach Kellymount, where another section is designated as protected monument KK016.006. The linear earthwork coincides with the Kilkenny/Carlow boundary between Duninga Rath and the River Barrow. Otherwise it lies entirely in the Co Kilkenny. The ancient trench can be traced in the field boundaries from Kellymount in a SE direction until it intersects with the railway. After this the pattern breaks up completely. Over the last 150 years the trench has been breached by: the railway (1850s), the gas pipeline (1980s) and now the new motorway.

At the time the dyke was in use the present field boundaries were not part of the landscape. Most likely it was an open landscape with a mix of woodland, pasture, with marshy or boggy areas in some places. The trench would then be a very prominent feature. It is our view that the ditch was constructed from the Idrone side, beginning at the River Barrow.

Buried Objects. It is known that chieftains often buried precious objects and human sacrifices adjacent to their territorial boundary. Eamonn P. Kelly, Keeper of Irish Antiquities, National Museum of Ireland, thinks that the occurrence of bog bodies generally coincides with territorial boundaries."Bodies are placed in the borders immediately surrounding royal land or on tribal boundaries to ensure a good yield of corn and milk throughout the reign of the king," Kelly said

Duninga Rath

Duninga Rath in Co Kilkenny lies on the border between counties Kilkenny & Carlow and close to the River Barrow. The site is located on the road connecting the Royal Oak and Goresbridge. The rath or ringfort which gives the townland its name is in a wood where the road curves around it. The original 1839 map of the area shows Duninga Rath as a half circle (the northern half) exactly as it is today. We may conclude from this that the southern half had already been quarried away. In common with many of our other ancient mounds and monuments locally and nationally, this site was pillaged for gravel for road & yard making. Originally this site would have been a glacial deposit consisting of clay/gravel running north south. The rath or ringfort which would have been approx 200 m diameter and was hewn from this existing material. The material excavated from the circular trench or fosse was used to form the enclosing outer bank. Material was simultaneously cast inwards to form a low bank atop the central platform. This bank then formed a rampart behind the post and wattle fence which enclosed the inner platform. Our readings indicated that the site was in use from the 4th to the 12th c when it was suddenly abandoned. A guarded gateway was probably located close to the river bank, which admitted traffic in either direction.

Our survey in 2005 established that about half of the original layout had been quarried away making the original scale of the site difficult to visualise for the casual viewer. The quarry entrance was at the south west side and accessed via the present track through the wood. Our readings indicate a date of late 18th and 19th c for quarrying activity.

100 ORDNANCE SURVEY LETTERS COUNTYKILKENNY VOLUME II

Extract from letter of John O'Donovan of the Ordnance Survey.

-----There is nothing else worthy of attention in in this Parish but the ruins of Lord Galmoy's Castle in the townland of Upper Grange and the fort of Duinge on the very boundary of the County of Carlow. This is one of the chain of forts on the trenche of Raduffe locally called the Gripe of the Pig, shewn by Mercator on his Map of Idrone. See Shankill parish. [24]

The Rev'. W.K. Boroughs states that two small graves were, some year ago, discovered at this rath about two feet under the surface, beside each other, the one that of a child, the other that of a full grown man. These graves were neatly flagged at the bottom and sides, one was 18 inches long and 14 high, the other 3 feet by 18 inches. In each was found an earthen vessel of baked clay, which were (was) broken by the carelessness of the diggers. The bones were not charred by fire.

This is a fine fort and formed one of a chain which seems to have separated two important ancient territories. If, however, this chain of forts connected by the gripe of the pig or the trench of Raduffe formed the boundary between the territories the fact that in forming the Diocese of Ossory the Parish of Shankill was not made a part of it, for this trench certainly formed its east boundary.

Ordnance Survey Letters. County Kilkenny.
P211. Ed Michael Herrity. MRIA. Four Masters Press Dublin 2003

Shankill.

Old Church within Mr Elwards Demesne within one and a quarter miles of the Royal Oak. Vault in SE corner belonging to the family of Aylward.

The Raduffe Trenche, A remarkable trench so called by Mercator on his Map of the Barony of Idrone, and shown as immediately to the East of this Church, extending from a hill on the boundary of Idough to the Barrow, S^W, l. 254. Assumed by Mr. O'Donovan to have formed the boundary between the Counties of Kilkenny and Carlow, and *in ancient times between the Territories of Idrone and Gabhran*, l. 254.

Such a trench said by tradition to have existed about 100 years ago, called the *Gripe of the Pig*, l. 255. Legend accounting for the origin of the 'Gripe', l. 257. A fragment of it remaining at the 'Mile Bush' in Kellymount. l. 256, 257, 258. Forts which were on the trenche, and would now serve to mark its outline, 256, 257, 258. Donye (now Duninga) and Court Fenour (now Finner's Court) shown immediately to the East of this trenche by Mercator, l. 254.

Rathduffe, in the Townland of Wells from which the trenche took its name, & Whitefield Rath, .

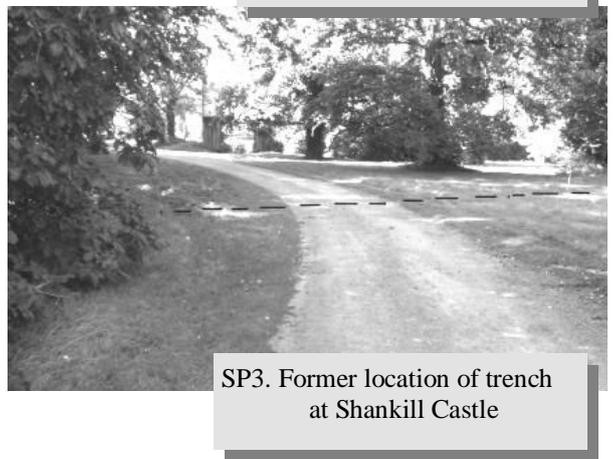
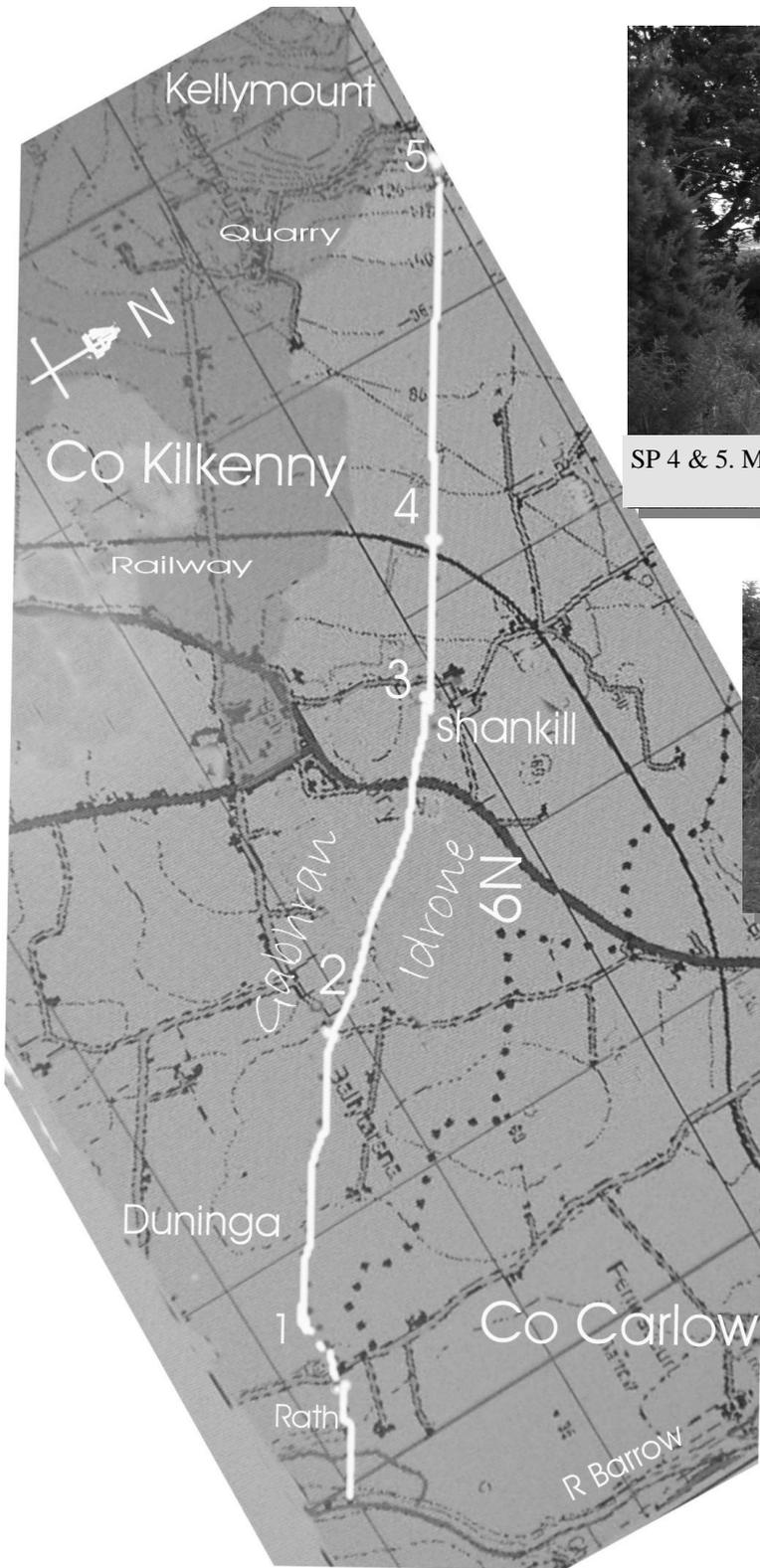
Extract from Kellymount Quarry Development Plan, 2006

Recorded Monument KK016:006 (Linear earthwork) forms part of the northeast boundary of the proposed quarry development site. This monument is preserved in the line of field boundaries which extend for a distance of approximately 2km to the southeast of the development site. Indeed the existing heavily overgrown field bank may be associated with the monument. It was suggested by Jeremy Milin from Cardiff University that this linear feature could be part of the **Rathduff Dyke** or trench. A section of this 2 km earthwork was excavated in conjunction with the Dublin-Cork gas pipe-line. The results of Lynne's excavations (Lynn 1982) support the theory that it may be associated with the Iron-Age hillfort at Free-stone Hill. However, this remains to be demonstrated. The applicant recognises the importance of the monument and *has provided an adequate buffer zone around it to ensure its protection*. There will be no impact on the monument as long as the buffer zone is adhered to.

--- It is further recommended that appropriate fencing should be erected to delineate the buffer zone around Recorded Monument KK016-006 prior to any development works.

At Shankill Demesne (by divining); Originally Ditch 6' (2m) deep, with a bank 4' (1.22m) high. Total width of ditch & bank; 17' , (5.2 m). Location; close to ruined church at NE side. Period of use ; 4th to 7th c.

At Kellymount Quarry (actual measurements); Height; 3' (1 m). Width at base ; 4' (1.2 m). Field drain at NE side.



Further reading:

- <http://www.physorg.com/news9676.html> (Kelly)
- Ordnance Survey Letters. Kilkenny. Ed Michael. Herrity MRIA. Published by Four Masters Press Dublin. 2003.*
- Linear Boundaries (Prehistoric) -1 Definition. -*
- [-http://www.eng-h.gov.uk/med/lin1.](http://www.eng-h.gov.uk/med/lin1)
- <http://glasnost.itcarlow.ie/~feeleyjm/archaeology/9-duninga.pdf>
- Grateful thanks to: -An tAth. Sean O Laoghaire. Paulstown
- Patrick Feely. CEO, Kellymount Quarries
- Co Kilkenny Reference Library.
- Geoffrey & Elizabeth Cope, Shankill Castle.
- Jack Sheehan. Dunleckney, Bagenalstown,
- Turlough Feeley, Dunleckney, Bagenalstown

SP1 to SP5 are sampling points