



Ancient Sites & Buildings.

Bagenalstown Area

Vol 2 , Site 2

**Dunleckney
Urban Area**

Dunleckney. *Dun Leicne. The fort of the flags.* The townland is situated to the north of the modern town of Muine Bheag, founded by Walter Bagenal in 1790 and known locally as Bagenalstown. This is one of the few Irish towns to be laid out on the street/avenue system, quite common in North America and Australia as most colonial towns date from 1800. The Bagenal family owned large estates not only in this townland but farther afield also.

The area surveyed in the summer/autumn of 2003 stretched from the Barrow to slightly beyond the railway bridge. The survey found evidence of a small community living close to the river from the 5th century BC to the 7th c AD. All of the buildings found were simple huts (round and sometimes oval in plan) with a clay/wattle wall and roof of thatch. Only one example of a building with a dry-stone wall was found.

Possible reasons for choosing this location is

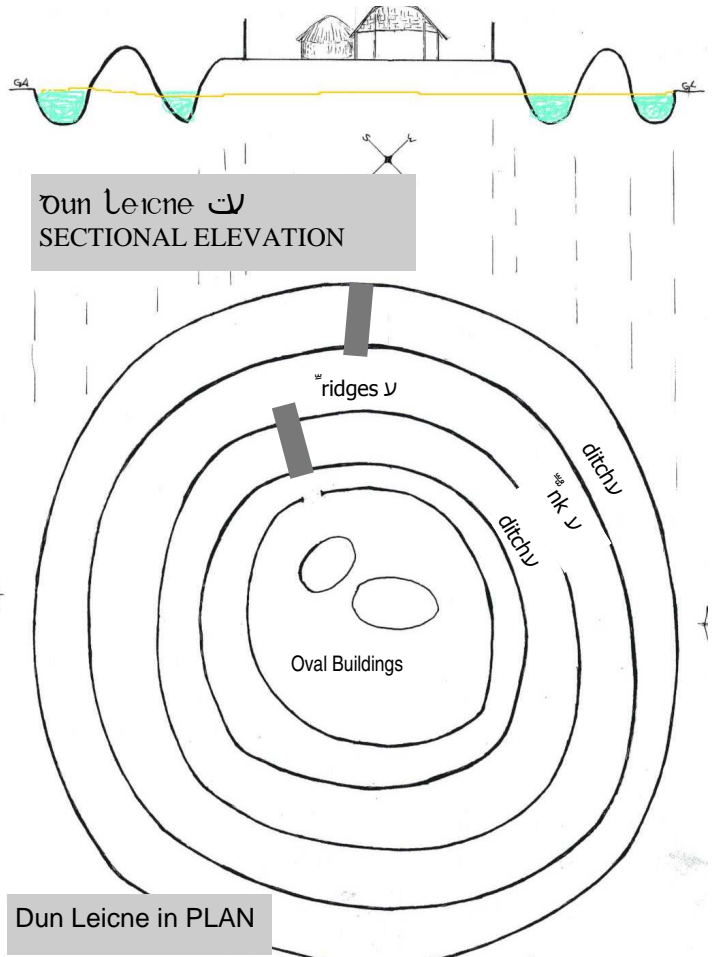
a) proximity to the Barrow for fishing and transport and b) a stream once flowed from farther north past the settlement and into the Barrow. This stream is no longer visible but can be traced underground, beneath the present Mc Grath Park and pitch & putt grounds.

Another discovery was that the river was at various times in the 1st millenium much higher than present highest levels. The low lying areas adjoining the present canal ie the malting plant, Bagenalstown House, lower end of The Parade and the roadway between, was underwater for long periods.

The area between the tennis courts and the McGrath Park is at present occupied by a mound of earth with trees planted around the periphery. The present feature probably dates from the early 19th c. In the 4th century however this was the site of a double ringed fort or rath. On examination it proved to have two timber pallsades around a raised central platform. Beyond the pallsades was a high bank with water filled ditches on either side.

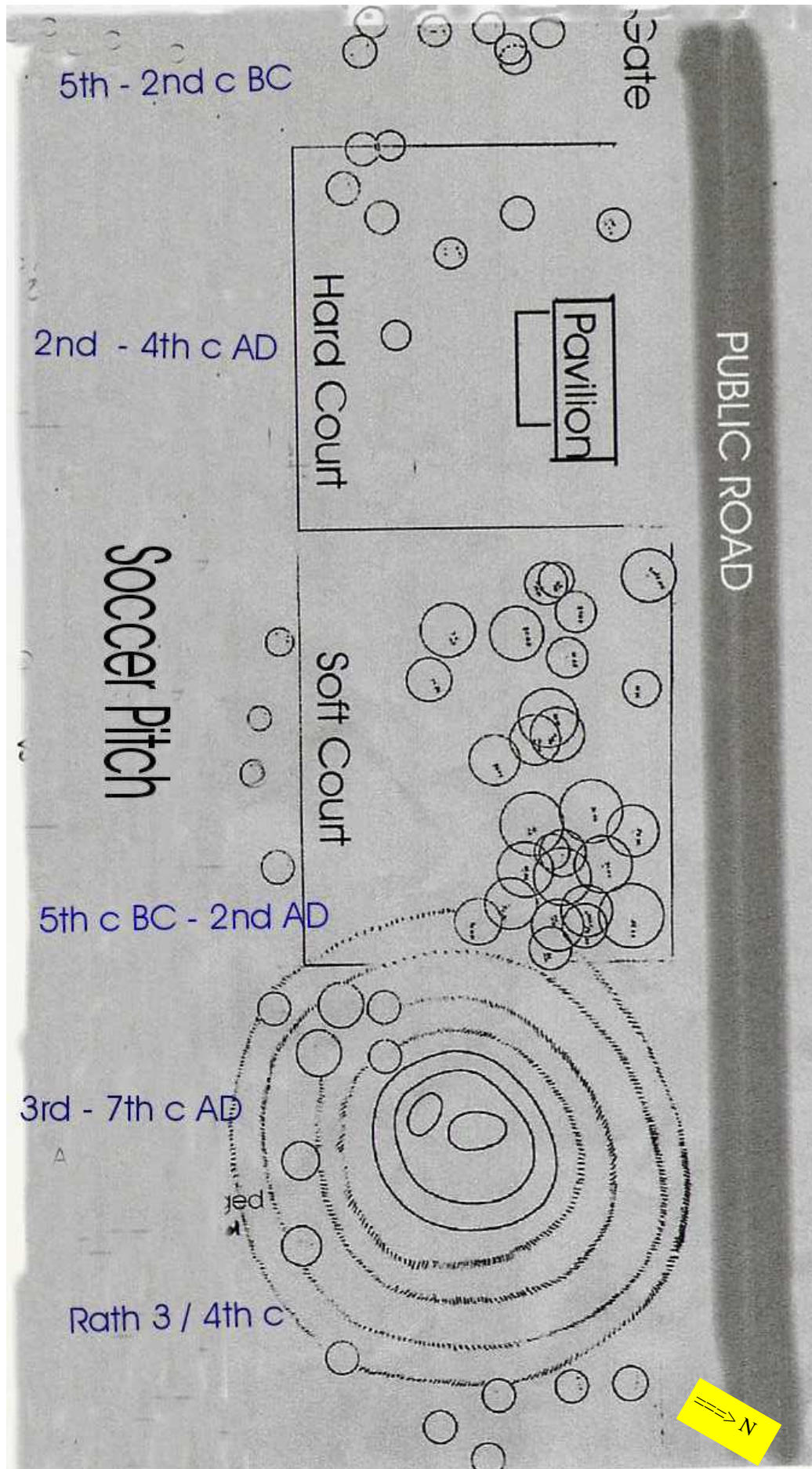
Access to the fort was by two offset bridges spanning the water filled ditches. Inside the rath were two oval buildings, one large and one small. The fort was used for defensive purposes for about 200-300 years after its construction.

This would suggest the home of a local chieftain or person of wealth/influence. The construction of the rath required the demolition of several existing huts. *Plus ca change!*



- Inner Palisade; 36' (11 m) in diameter
- Outer Palisade; 42' (12.8 m) in diameter
- Outer diameter (edge of ditch); 85' (26 m) *varied between 82 min and 89' max*
- Inner palisade has a clay bank against it on the inside running around the periphery (except at gates).
- Inner palisade height; 8' (2.4 m). Outer palisade height ; 10' (3 m)
- Two buildings within the fort;
 1. Dwelling;
 2. Unknown Purpose;

Ancient Settlement at Sportsground. Dunleckney, Muine Bheag



Summary Chart for Survey Area. (from River Barrow to Railway Bridge at Dunleckney)

Century	Number of buildings	Type	Diameters	Remarks
5 BC	3	round	9,18,18	
4 BC	2	round	18,20	rafters extend to ground
3 BC	4	round	10,12,16,18	
2 BC	4	round	10,11,14,16	mix of ext rafters & free ended
1 BC	3	round	16,20,26	
1 AD	2	round	12,14	
2 AD	8	round	12,12,12,16,18 + 1 oval 13/15	
3 AD	8	round	10,10,12,12,14,15 + 1 oval 11/13	
4 AD	7	round	8,9,9,12 + 3 oval 10/14,10/15,12/20	
5 AD	1	round	12	
6 AD	6	round	5 @12', 1 @15'	
7 AD	1	round	13	

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Round Timber Framed Buildings

Buildings of the first millennium and earlier were normally round or oval in plan, timber framed, with walls of clay and wattle and a roof thatched with pond reeds. Builders used raw materials available locally, which were capable of being worked by hand tools such as broad axe and adze. (Similar buildings still remain the dominant type in 3rd world countries today.) The life of this type of building could hardly exceed 200 years. We found that 150 years was a more typical figure. This type of structure was not capable of being extended so the owners simply moved a few meters away and constructed another hut in the same forest clearing.

Frame: Posts of native hardwood were placed in previously dug holes, while the wood was still green.

Construction: Long tree branches formed the rafters. Shorter and stouter poles formed the uprights. Wall of clay & wattle. A gap between top of wall and thatch of roof allowed light to enter from all directions. This also facilitated ventilation for the centrally placed open fire. An alternative arrangement is to close up the wall/roof gap and ventilate through the door with smoke exiting via an opening at the roof apex

Three different roof designs were found at this site: a) All rafters join at the apex and have the other end embedded in the ground. b) The rafters rest atop the vertical posts and extend a short distance beyond. c) A mixture of both a & b.

Timbers were assembled into simple prepared joints and tied with ropes of flax or hemp. Pegs into holes may also have been used in later times.

Wall construction:

Wattle (willow, hazel or ash) was interlaced between thin vertical members. To this surface several coats of daub (red clay) was applied on both sides simultaneously, to a final overall thickness of about 4"-8" (10cm). The wall was finished by applying several coats of lime mixed with a plasticiser (typically fresh cow dung). The lime wash in addition to having a pleasant bright finish also repelled fungus growth and repelled moisture uptake. Internally the whitened surfaces reflected available light effectively.

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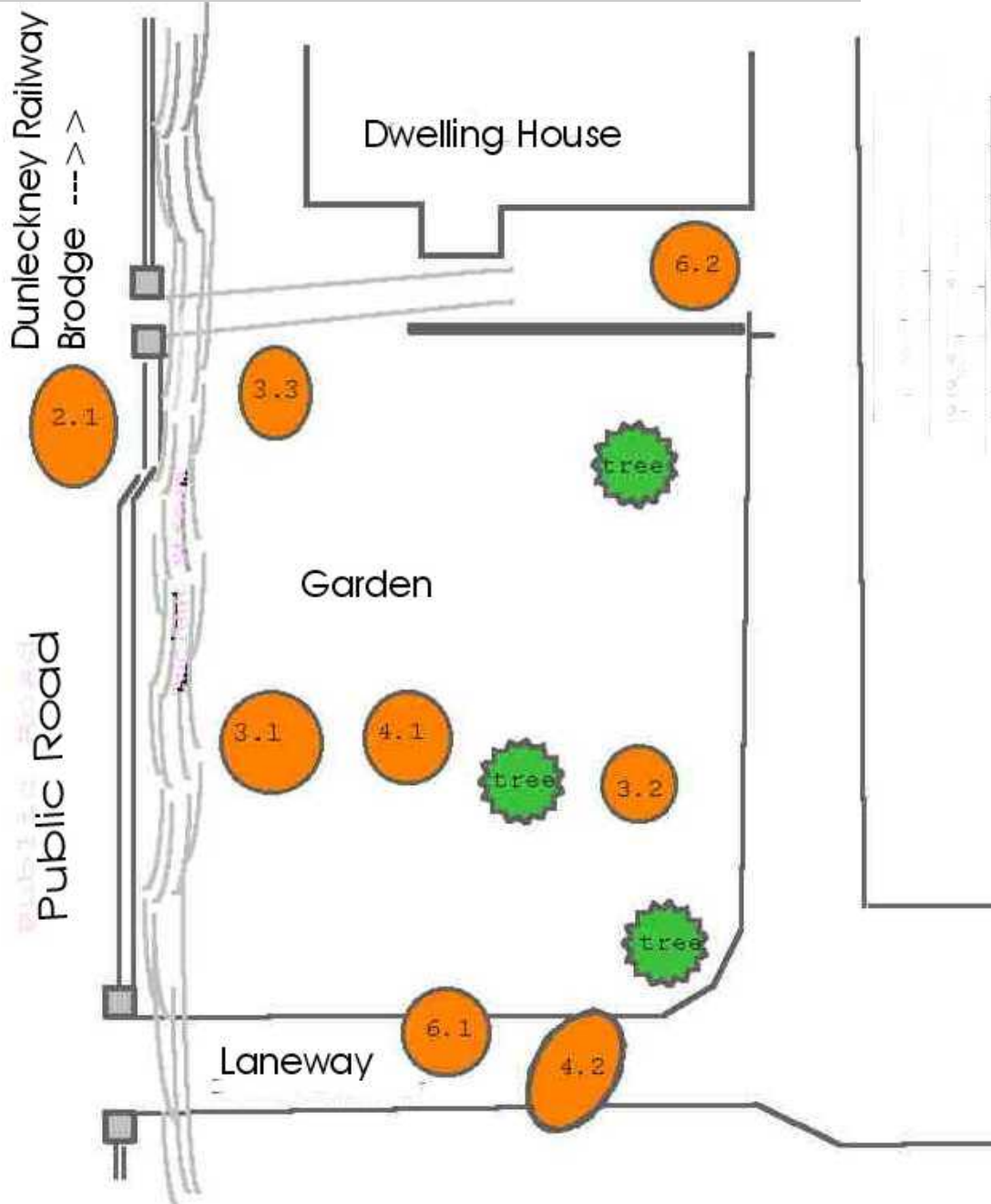
Doorway.

Round huts then and now had a single doorway, usually facing to the southwest or west.

It is quite likely that the occupiers did most of their work out of doors ie cooking & eating, tending livestock, craftwork etc and only used the hut during inclement weather and at night. Their sole source of light and heat was the centrally located wood fire. They rose with the birds in the morning and retired for the night at sunset.

Reconstructed versions of buildings of this period can be seen at

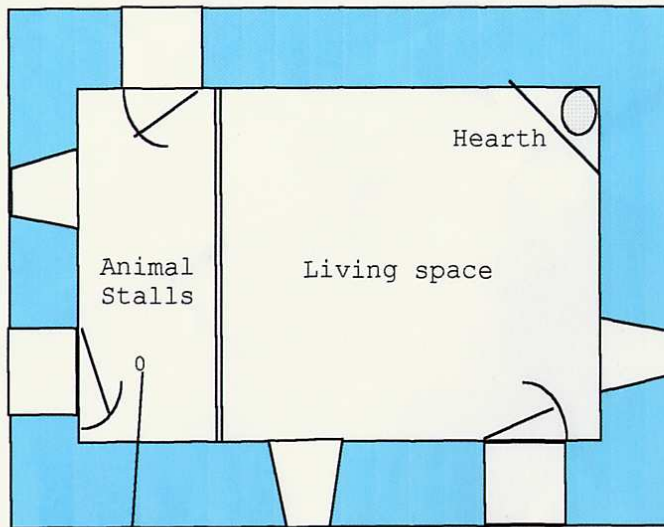
Group of Buildings at Site South of Railway Bridge



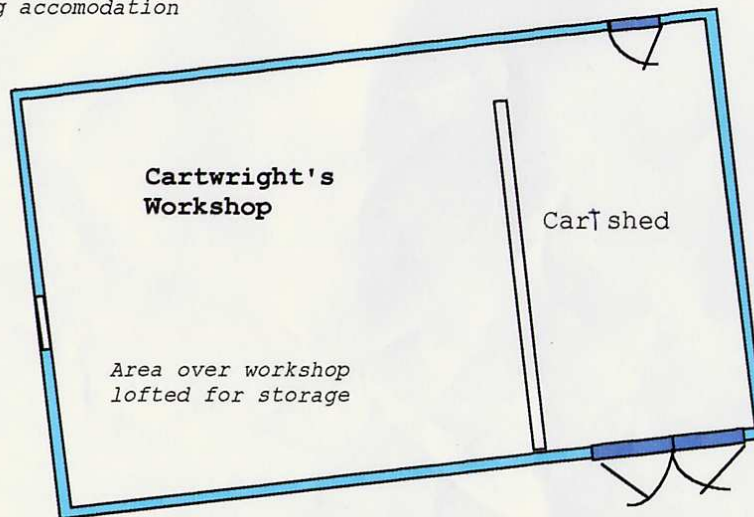
Num	Shape	Dia feet	Wall Height	Apex Height	Door faces to;	Remarks
2.1	oval	13/15	5	20	W	A shed with 9 vert posts & 5 rafters extending to ground
3.1	round	15	5'-6"	21	W	7 rafters extending to gnd
3.2	round	10 int	4	18	SW	Dwelling with dry stone wall
3.3	oval	11/13				Dwelling ,7 vert posts, 7 rafters
4.1	round	12	5	20	SW	Dwelling with central hearth
4.2	oval	10/14	4	20	SW	Dwelling
6.1	round	12			SW	Shed
6.2	round	15	7	22		Dwelling



17th C Dwelling and Shed to South of Railway Bridge



*Lofted overhead for 5'.
Sleeping accomodation*



Dwelling house of English style.

Internal dimensions;

17' (5.2 m) L x 10' (3m) W.

Walls; 13' (3.9 m) high, 3' (0.9 m) thick, masonry.

Hipped roof, 18' (9.5 m) to ridge

Cartwrights Workshop.

Internal dimensions; 26' (7.9 m) L x 12' (3.6 m) W.

Timber construction with vertical posts 6' (1.8 m) apart.

Wall height 12' (3.6 m). Height to ridge 20' (6 m)

Parts/assemblies completed in workshop before final assembly in Cart Shed