

Ancient Sites & Buildings.

Bagenalstown Area

Duninga Rath

Duninga or *Dun Inga* in Co Kilkenny is located on the road connecting the Royal Oak and Goresbridge. The rath or ringfort which gives the townland its name is in a wooded area where the road curves around it.

According to ¹ John.O'Donovan who accompanied the initial ordnance survey of Co Kilkenny in 1839: the rath is one of a chain of forts on the Raduff Trench locally called the *Gripe of the Pig* and shown by Mercator on his Map of Idrone and also the 1839 Ordnance Survey Map. This trench stretched from the River Barrow to Kellymount and in ancient times formed the boundary between the territories of Gabhan and Idrone. However whereas it's location is known to local landowners there is no visible traces. Between Duninga Rath and the River Barrow the trench forms the modern boundary between counties Kilkenny and Carlow.

² *Frontiers were extraordinarily important in early medieval Ireland and the location of a large rath on a political border probably added to its significance, as one population group displayed a symbol of their power to their rivals.*

³ The original 1839 ordnance 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 (in common with many of our other ancient field monuments locally and nationally) has been 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 which would have been hewn from this existing material was originally approx' 88 m diameter N/S & 81 m E/W . The material excavated from the circular trench or fosse was used to form the enclosing outer bank and to raise the central platform. Traces still remain of the rampart which once backed up the post and wattle fence..

To date a library search has failed to reveal any historical information or even folklore about this site.

When talking to local people , we formed the impression that the rath itself was not regarded as of any major importance . However all considered the Rathduff Trench to be the main noteworthy feature locally.

⁵ Extract from O'Donovan's notes in 1839.

The Rev W.K.Boroughs states that two small graves were, some years 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" long and 14" high, the other 3' by 18". In each was found an earthen vessel of baked clay, which was broken by the carelessness of the diggers. The bones were not charred by fire.'

Editor's note; These burials likely to be pre-christian cist burials uncovered during quarrying.

Our survey was conducted during the months of May & June 2005. Our first task was to identify the centre and to map the site. Since about half of the original ringfort had been quarried away, the original extent of the site is 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. (Figs 1 & 1a).

Buildings

The list of buildings (all of timber) shown at Tables 1 & 2 includes not only dwellings but also small huts, some of which were to house geese, an ancient and efficient alarm system. The largest building found was at the northern end measuring 22' x 11' (6.7 x 3.4m) and dated to the 7th c. .

Duninga Rath. Buildings on the site.

<u>Century</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
4th	4	<i>Buildings marked out</i>
5th	5	
6th	5	Fosse constructed
7th	3	
8th	3	<i>Buildings marked out</i>
9th	3	Family burials marked with 3 boulders
10th	5	
11th	5	
12th	5	Fosse deepened
13th	5	Site abandoned

Table 1



410 FENNISCOURT

OS 15:16:6 (896,65) OD 200-300 26804,15944

Ringfort Circular area (Diam 60m N-S) enclosed by substantial bank (H 3m above fosse; max W 7-8m) with external fosse (W 2.5 - 4.5m; D below field 1.4m). Entrance (W 2m) with causeway at SSW. Slight external bank is probably not ancient.

15:24 21-9-1987

411 FENNISCOURT

OS 19:1:2 (95,577) OD 100-200 26935,15846

Ringfort Oval area (Dims c. 30m x 25m) enclosed by gravelly bank (H c. 1m) best preserved from N-E-SW. Modified by adjacent lane and field boundaries.

19:1 12-9-1989

In the immediate vicinity of Duninga Rath are two others on the opposite side of the ancient boundary line, which are now in Co Carlow. ⁶ Sites 410 and 411 as described in the Archaeological Inventory of Co Carlow. (OPW). See panels to left.

Graves;

The landowner Mr Mullins kindly showed us three large embedded boulders at the Northern end of the site, none of which have markings or inscription of any kind (Fig 3) Two the boulders are about 2 m apart. In the space between them a large hollow has been excavated.

Our readings indicate that the boulders mark the location of a family grave plot dated to the 9th c AD

Table 2

List of buildings which once existed. These are mainly located at the existing section of the ringfort.

Buildings are all timber framed with thatched roof

Century		Dimensions	Remarks
		(feet)	
4th	1	15 x 9	
	2	14 x 10	
	3	14 x 10	
	4	10 x 9	
7th	1	22 x 11	banqueting hall
	2	6 x 4	
9th	1	6 x 5	animals
	2	12 x 7	dwelling



Fig 3.

Duninga Rath, Reconstructed

Shape oval.

Diameter; 81/ 87 m.
 Depth; Top of bank to bottom of ditch=5 m
 Bank gradient; 1:1
 Platform; 60 m

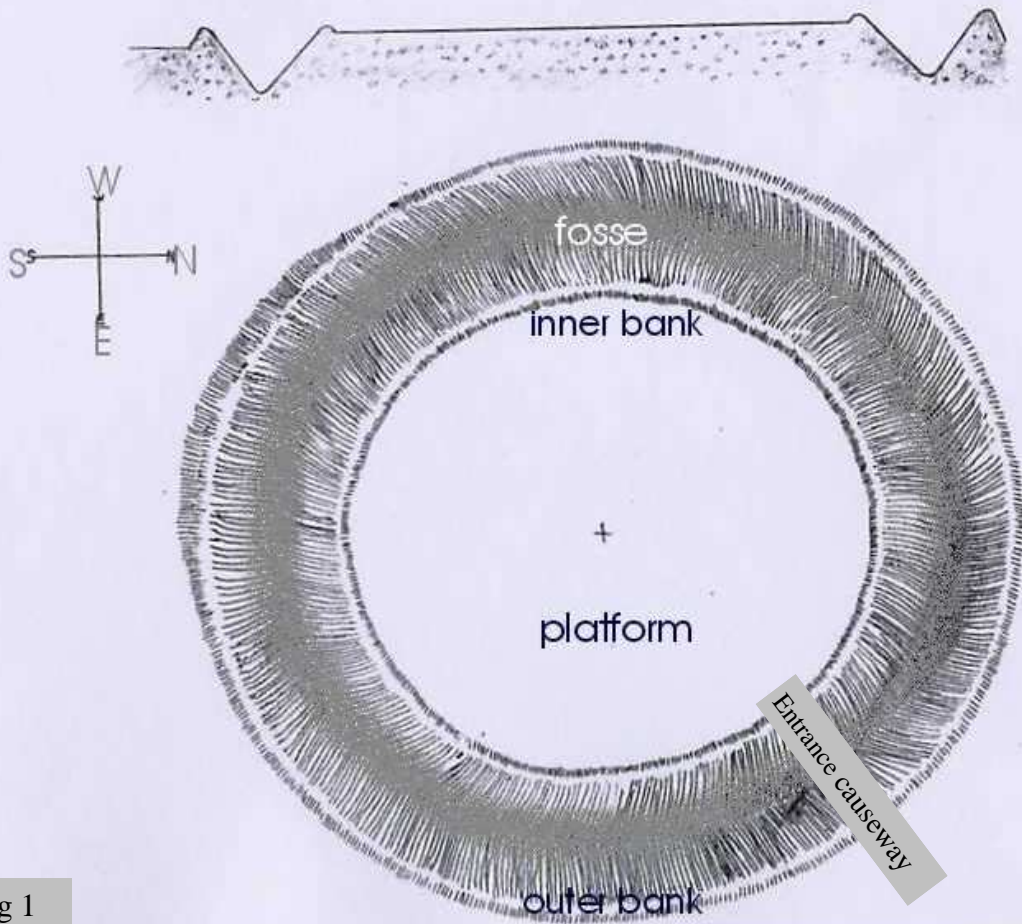
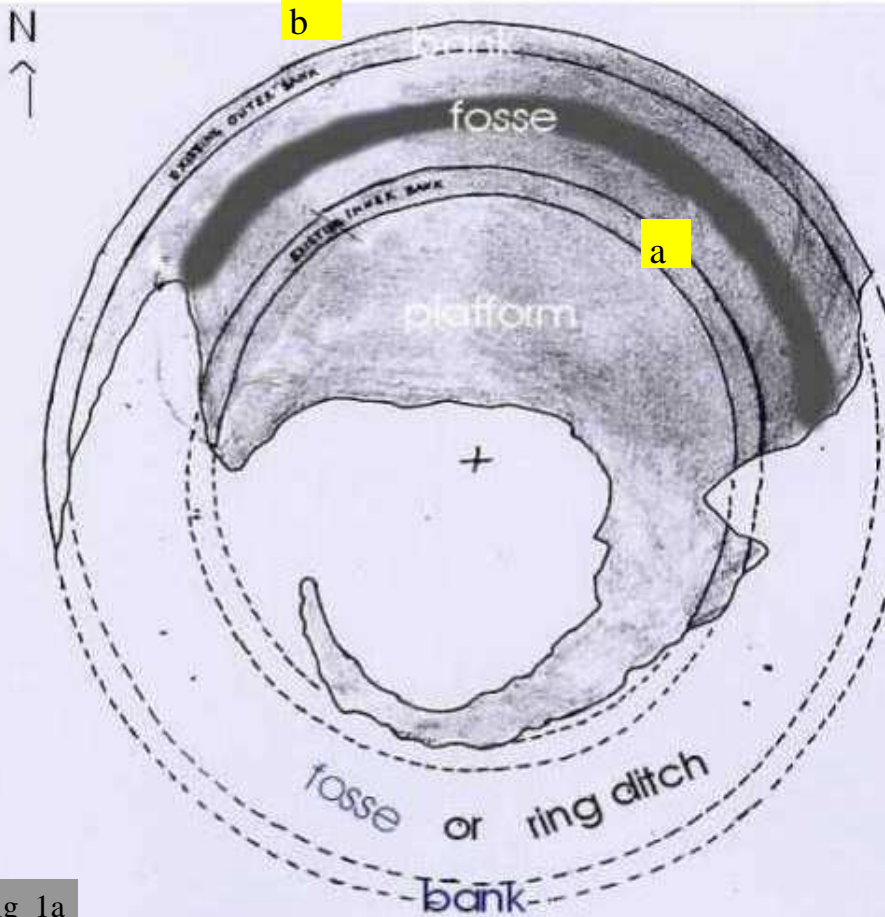


Fig 1



Duninga Rath as it is today

Shaded areas are what remain of the original rath after extensive quarrying {for road and yard making } in the 18th c. The public road between Royal Oak and Goresbridge also cuts into the structure at the right hand side of the diagram.

The inner bank (a) enclosing the platform once supported the timber palisade.

There is a small causeway (b) over swampy ground on the NNW tip of the rath leading to a gap in the outer bank. Whether ancient or modern is difficult to determine.

Fig 1a

Conclusions

This site has many puzzling features which we are at present unable to solve. Our readings indicate that the site was active for 900 years in total. During the 4th & 5th centuries it was a quiet settlement. In the 6th c the site was fortified with an outer ring ditch and palisade and remained so for several centuries. The outer ditch was deepened again in the 12th c, presumably in response to some immediate threat.

All of the buildings on the site were timber and square or rectangular in plan. This was at a time when most contemporary buildings were *round or oval* in plan. Most of the buildings located were in the existing N section. *It was not possible to determine details on the S section by divining as so much material has been removed off site.*

If the site were to have supported a small garrison enclosed by a defensive palisade and ring ditch, then they would have to be self sufficient.

Most likely a small number of dwellings and huts or sheds for livestock. The remaining space would presumably be used for grazing or vegetable growing.

Another feature not experienced at any other site surveyed previously was that all activity ceased suddenly early in the 13th c. *Normally site activity has a gradual beginning, followed by a period of continuous use and finally a period of fade out.*

The lack of any reference to Duninga in the historical or folklore records would seem to support O'Donovans view that the site was a frontier post rather than a chieftains *óún* or dwelling.

References

- ¹ Ordnance Survey Letters, Kilkenny. Editor; Michael Herrity MRIA. Published by the Four Masters Press, Dublin 2003
- ². UCD Connections. Coolure Demesne Crannog. Pp18/19
- ³. Ordnance Survey 1839. Map 21. Reference section Kilkenny Co Library
- ⁵ Ordnance Survey Letters, Kilkenny. Editor; Michael Herrity MRIA. Published by the Four Masters Press, Dublin 2003
- ⁶. Archaeological Inventory of County Carlow. OPW

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Mr Byrne, Duninga

Other sites surveyed are archived at: <http://glasnost.itcarlow.ie/~feeleyjm/archaeology/index2.htm>