

The Later Medieval Usage of Crannogs in Ireland

Die spätmittelalterliche Nutzung von Crannogs in Irland

Le rôle des Crannógs en Irlande au Bas Moyen Âge

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Abstract

The traditional appreciation of crannogs in Ireland is that these substantial high status lake dwellings on manmade islands functioned during the period before c. 1100 AD. More recently, a changing view argues for their continued usage and indeed construction during the period after 1100, when much of Ireland was under the central authority of the Angevin crown. This paper sets out the baseline information upon which the alternative appreciation is founded, and considers the implications that emerge for the broader understanding of ethnicity and lordship in later medieval Ireland. A selection of key sites is made, including Island MacHugh in Co. Tyrone, Cró Inis, Co. Westmeath, Ballywillin, Co. Longford, and Ardakillen, Co. Roscommon. In each instance, significant later medieval occupation horizons have been identified above those levels of pre-1100 AD activity. Such sites are not exclusive to the traditional Gaelic areas of later medieval Ireland, and occur within the Anglo-Norman colonial zone as well. The paper concludes that the acceptance of such evidence as an integral part of the later medieval material culture of Ireland will in turn present a situation where scholars can begin to understand more clearly and more constructively the ways in which Gaelic lordship was manifested and displayed. The Discovery Programme is currently working on this issue in Co. Roscommon, and over the next few years will seek to contribute to broader discussions of the indigenous cultures within and alongside the Angevin empire in other parts of Europe.

Introduction

The general tendency amongst Irish scholars over the last century or so has been to view crannogs as being primarily a feature of the early medieval landscape of Ireland (for example, *Edwards 1990*, 34–41; *Kelly 1991a*; *1991b*; *Lynn 1983*, 50–51; *Ó Riordáin 1942*, 89–99; *De Paor – De Paor 1958*, 84–86). Yet the first major study of this lake-based, man-made, palisaded and dispersed settlement type in Ireland was published by Colonel Wood-Martin of Sligo in 1886, and this work clearly indicated that many crannogs continued to be occupied and even built by Gaelic Irish lords throughout the high and late medieval periods (*Wood-Martin 1886*, 146–156). However this post twelfth-century usage of crannogs was ignored or

downplayed for much of the twentieth century. Scholarly emphasis was placed instead on the supposed origins and roles of crannogs in the early medieval period (see *O’Sullivan 1998*, 207; *2001*, 397). More recent work by archaeologists has reminded Irish archaeology that crannogs continued to be used long after the end of the early medieval period right down to the seventeenth century (*O’Conor 1998*, 79–85; *O’Sullivan 1998*, 152–155, 167–176; *Fredengren 2002*, 265–276, 282, 287). Yet despite this work, we have noted a tendency amongst certain of our colleagues, particularly settlement historians but also some archaeologists, to downplay this evidence for the usage of crannogs in Gaelic-dominated parts of both high and late medieval Ireland. For example, an analysis of Tadhg O’Keeffe’s generally excellent book *Medieval Ireland – an Archaeology*, published in 2000 and used today as a textbook by Irish universities, shows that he devotes only one single sentence in it to the later medieval usage of crannogs by Gaelic dynasts (*O’Keeffe 2000*, 24). Instead, much space is devoted to the Gaelic Irish adoption of castles during the high medieval period, particularly their supposed usage of mottes (*O’Keeffe 2000*, 26–29). O’Keeffe also states but does not prove (admitting that there is little archaeological evidence at present to support his views) that the high medieval Gaelic Irish also had large open fields (implying large-scale arable agriculture) and built and lived in English Midlands-type nucleated villages (*O’Keeffe 2000*, 25–26, 62).

To answer this question about the reluctance of some scholars to discuss the high and late medieval usage of crannogs in Gaelic Ireland, let us look at the intellectual framework within which we believe the whole question of the nature of settlement in high medieval and indeed late medieval Gaelic Ireland has taken place (c. 1100–1380 and c. 1380–1600 AD respectively). It is clear that there was one school of historical thought in the last century that tended to see high medieval Ireland, both before and after 1169, as conservative, insular, chaotic, tribal and backward – far removed from the contemporary, and so-called ‘feudal’ (to use that now-questionable term in its most general sense; *Reynolds 1994*) lands of the Anglo-Norman dominated parts of eastern Ireland and England which were regarded as developed and civilized. These historians, who included Goddard Orpen as author of the ground-breaking *Ireland under the Normans*,

published early in the last century, were often Unionist in politics and Anglo-Irish in culture (see *Orpen 1911–20*; *Otway-Ruthven 1968*). These scholars clearly believed that the arrival of the Anglo-Normans to Ireland during the late twelfth century was of primary importance to the development of society on the island (see *Duffy 1997*, 4–5; *2000*). Simply put, such scholars saw England’s domination of Ireland for 800 years or so, starting in 1169, as positive, bringing with it such things as prosperity, common law, centralized government and a better infrastructure.

In reaction to all this, another school – in origin really a nationalist one, always there but particularly dominant since about the early 1970s, believes that the differences between Gaelic Ireland on the one hand and the Anglo-Normans, England and Western Europe, both before and after 1169, have been widely exaggerated. It is central to the beliefs of this school that high medieval accounts of Ireland written by men like Giraldus Cambrensis and Stephen of Lexington cannot be trusted because they display a deep anti-Irish bias and were clearly used as propaganda to justify England’s involvement in Ireland (see *Topographia Hibernica 1982*; *Lexington 1982*, 112; *Flanagan 1989*, 1–3). The scholars of this second school would argue that pre-1169 Ireland was developing along broadly similar lines to England and the rest of Western Europe, having taken on many facets of that lordship model. They note that trends observed elsewhere in Europe after 1000 or so, such as the growth in lordly or royal power, and a rise in urbanism and increased trade, are also seen in Ireland. In all, it is suggested by these scholars that Ireland in the twelfth century was not a backward, underdeveloped and stagnant place, but instead had taken on many of the features of contemporary society elsewhere (see *Doherty 1980*; *1985*; *Duffy 1997*, 7–56; *Flanagan 1989*; *O Corrain 1972*; *O Croinin 1995*, 291–292).

It is generally accepted by archaeologists and settlement historians, either implicitly or explicitly, that the settlement forms and material culture used by a particular group will in some way reflect the belief-systems, ideology and stage of social and economic development current in that society. In this respect, certain scholars who adhere to the second school of historical thought described above, and who have yet to carry out intensive field survey, during the last thirty years or so have argued that certain iconic settlement forms, in particular and most especially the castle, should have existed in the landscape of high medieval Gaelic Ireland, both before and after 1169, as a physical expression of the modernizing trends in native Irish society at that time (for example, *Graham 1988a*, 20–21; *1988b*, 111–118, 125–126; *O Corrain 1974*; *O’Keefe 2000*, 26–29).

One can indeed go further: certain Irish scholars have failed to discuss the high medieval and indeed late medieval usage of crannogs meaningfully, and have instead stuck rigidly to the belief that Gaelic lords commonly and regularly built and occupied castles during the former period, despite overwhelming field evidence to the contrary (see *McNeill 1997*, 157; *O’Co-*

nor 1998, 75–77; *2001*, 344–345). The castle has perhaps become a physical symbol to these scholars of the non-insular and, indeed, the cosmopolitan nature of high medieval Gaelic Ireland. Its presence (argued for if not realized) demonstrates how Gaelic Irish society during this period was developing along general west European and especially Angevin lines, and was not a conservative backwater.

This also helps to explain why Tadhg O’Keefe, for example, refused to meaningfully discuss in his recent book the Gaelic Irish usage of crannogs right up to the seventeenth century: to accept that crannogs were a regular choice of habitation site by Gaelic lords would be an admittance that high medieval Gaelic Irish society had conservative and archaic features, and was in fact less developed and different to contemporary Anglo-Norman Ireland, England and Western Europe.

The corollary to this is that anyone who argues that castles were not a common feature of the landscape of high medieval Gaelic Ireland and that such apparently archaic settlement forms as crannogs, cashels and ringforts continued to be occupied lays himself or herself open to the charge of being a latter-day advocate of the view that Gaelic Ireland was undeveloped during the whole medieval period. One could be seen as a fellow traveller with the school of thought that regarded English rule in Ireland as ultimately beneficial and a necessary stage in the development of society on the island. In this respect, it is easy to see why some scholars might want to downplay, ignore or reject the quite substantial historical and archaeological evidence for the continued occupation and even construction of crannogs in Gaelic Ireland during the high and late medieval periods.

We would contend that it is useful to identify the nuance of the information that is to hand. Rather than ignore evidence, or downplay the implications of its presence, it is more interesting to examine the complexity of human interaction that the existence of such information reflects. Indeed, the continuation of settlement forms of the pre-1100 period into the later medieval period is surely indicative of a strong and vibrant cultural identity that continued throughout a period marked by colonization. It is our suggestion that Gaelic society was very much in tune with developments in greater Europe, and chose itself those elements which it found attractive from the wider trends, as and when it wanted them, more or less.

The Evidence for Later Medieval Usage of Crannogs

A portfolio of evidence for the later medieval usage of crannogs has been building in recent years, catalysed in 1998 by Kieran O’Conor’s survey of rural settlement in later medieval Ireland, and Aidan O’Sullivan’s survey of lake settlement, both studies being carried out for the Discovery Programme (*O’Conor 1998*, 77–84; *O’Sullivan 1998*, 150–177). More recently, Christina Fredengren has made the argument in particular for crannogs in the area of Lough Gara, Co. Sligo (*Freden-*

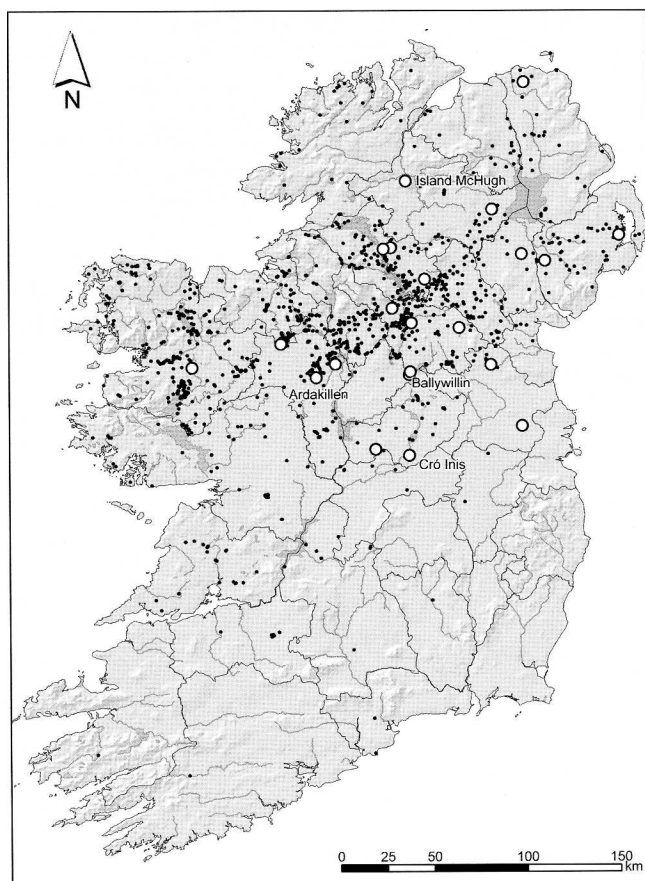


Fig. 1. Distribution of crannogs in Ireland based on SMR database, with later medieval sites highlighted, as mentioned largely in O’Sullivan (2001).

gren 2002, 272–276). The evidence comes from a wide range of sources, including the recovery of later medieval artefacts and occupation horizons from crannog sites; the citing of lake-based strongholds in contemporary sources, and the representation of these sites in active use on early seventeenth-century maps. Such evidence for late usage occurs across the national crannog distribution, which is focused in the northern half of the country, and particularly in the lake areas (Fig. 1). Although the number of sites identified so far with late material is small (in this paper we recognize some 45 from a present total of c. 1500 sites nationwide, not all of which can be located on the ground), the distribution is not restricted to a particular area or areas that could be regarded as being remote or marginal during the later medieval period. Certainly the sites are ranged within those areas that remained dominated by Gaelic lords and culture, but the sites occur within the Anglo-Norman culture zone as well. Whether this is in the north of the country in counties Antrim and Down, or traversing the midlands counties of Meath, Westmeath, and Galway, the distribution extends to non-Gaelic dominated areas. In essence, wherever lakes existed, so crannog users found a reason to occupy these sites in the later period as they had during the early middle ages. The study of later medieval crannog usage will consequently inform the understanding of cultural interaction across Ireland, including the so-called heartlands of the Anglo-Norman colony.

In this paper, we wish only to discuss a small selection of sites, to show the nature of the evidence that underlies the debate, and to consider how to move forward. Four crannogs are chosen: Island McHugh, Co. Tyrone; Cró Inis, Co. Westmeath; Ballywillin, Co. Longford; and Ardakillen, Co. Roscommon. All four sites fit the classification of ‘high cairn crannog’ proposed by Fredengren to identify later sites, insofar as they appear today as circular/sub-circular mounds of stone that rise in excess of 2 m in height and form the core of a larger area defined by timber post palisades (Fredengren 2002, 83–86).

Island McHugh, Co. Tyrone

The ‘crannog’ of Lough Laoghaire is mentioned directly in 1436 in the Annals of Ulster. These annals, in common with those of the Four Masters and of Connacht, are contemporary Gaelic records of the high profile events that occurred in Ireland, and such mention carries with it an automatic association of status and dramatic event. In 1436, the crannog of *Locha-Laeghairi* was the subject of a dispute between different branches of the O’Neills of *Tir Eogain*, and the attackers laid siege to the island and were constructing ‘cots’ to attack it (AU 1895, 141). The crannog is referred to again in 1500 when it was burnt by Hugh Roe O’Donnell (AFM 1848–51, 4, 1255). Crannogs are also called *inis* or ‘island’ in the various documentary sources up to the early seventeenth century, and the use of this simple word provides another opportunity for observing their mention in the historical sources (O’Conor 1998, 82–84). So it is that the *inis* or ‘island’ of Lough Laoghaire in *Ard Sratha* is mentioned in 1150 (AFM 1848–51, 2, 1093). A poem lamenting the death of Brian O’Neill, king of *Tir Eogain* and the most powerful Gaelic leader of his day, in 1260 at the Battle of Downpatrick refers to him as *Briain Locha Laoghaire* or ‘Brian of Lough Laoghaire’ (Mac Con Midhe 1980, 151). Another O’Neill dynast died at Lough Laoghaire in 1325 (AFM 1848–51, 3, 531). These two latter references seem to be indirect references to the use of the crannog as an O’Neill residence during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (O’Conor 1998, 80–81). Lough Laoghaire can be equated with the crannog of Island MacHugh on Lough Catherine in Co. Tyrone and lies close to the present Duke of Abercorn’s residence at Baronscourt (Davies 1950, 57; O’Conor 1998, 80–81; O’Sullivan 1998, 153–154).

The historical evidence, therefore, suggests that the crannog at Island MacHugh was occupied throughout the later medieval period, functioning from the thirteenth century onwards as an important O’Neill residence and high status estate centre. This estate was lost to the O’Neills at the time of the Plantation of Ulster in the early seventeenth century, when it was granted to an ancestor of the Abercorns (Ivens – Simpson – Brown 1986, 99–100). Island MacHugh is also interesting, however, because the site has been extensively excavated at two times during the twentieth century. Oliver Davies, the great Ulster archaeologist, began excavations here in 1937, which were interrup-

ted by World War II, and concluded in 1947. The results of this excavation were published in 1950 (Davies 1950). The site was revisited by a team of archaeologists from the Queen’s University, Belfast, in 1985 and 1986. This excavation was never fully published but an interim report does exist (Ivens – Simpson – Brown 1986). Although the crannog had its ultimate origins in prehistoric times and was extensively occupied and revamped during the early medieval period, the excavation produced evidence for the occupation of the site from the thirteenth century through to the sixteenth century when a tower house was built on it (Davies 1950, 45–56, 92; Ivens – Simpson – Brown 1986, 99). The prehistoric levels were associated with foundation timbers, cobbled surfaces, and (during the Bronze Age), two timber structures. While pre-1100 levels are present, a significant proportion of the historic remains dated from the thirteenth century, and occurred in levels that lay beneath and under the sixteenth-century tower house, whose foundations were constructed on the hearth deposits of the medieval crannog. The stratigraphy clearly distinguished between the crannog levels and the site’s later encastellation.

Island MacHugh, therefore, is an example of a crannog where there is considerable historical, archaeological and even literary evidence for its occupation throughout the later middle ages and right up to the sixteenth century, when the site was turned into a tower house. The evidence also shows that the site was one of the principal Gaelic Irish centres in later medieval Ulster and, indeed, Ireland. While archaeologists have been happy to equate earlier medieval crannogs, such as that at Lagore, Co. Meath, with lordly settlements of that period, the evidence from Island MacHugh makes the same case for the later period. This was a crannog that acted as an important lordly, even royal, residence in the later middle ages, when Gaelic Irish lords of the first rank, such as the O’Neills of *Tír Eogain*, were happy to have this island site as their centre in the period before c. 1400. Such successful lords were not really concerned with demonstrating their status in terms of complex buildings and castles, and this distinction sets them apart in some measure from their stone-building Anglo-Norman, English and Continental contemporaries (O’Conor 2002, 206–208; Finan – O’Conor 2002, 83–86).

Cró Inis, Co. Westmeath

Cró Inis lies on the western shore of Lough Ennell, a modestly-sized lake that is at the very centre of the country close to the modern town of Mullingar. The lake has produced two significant silver hoards in the past, belonging to the Viking Age, and weighing 31.192 kg and 3.1 kg respectively (Ryan *et al.* 1984). Such discoveries are a clear reflection of the wealth of the surrounding landscape in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and give credence to the argument that this central zone of the country was within the trading and/or tribute orbit of Dublin (Bradley 1988). It was a region under the direct control of the *Clann Cholman* of the southern *Uí Néill* dynasts (as opposed to the northern

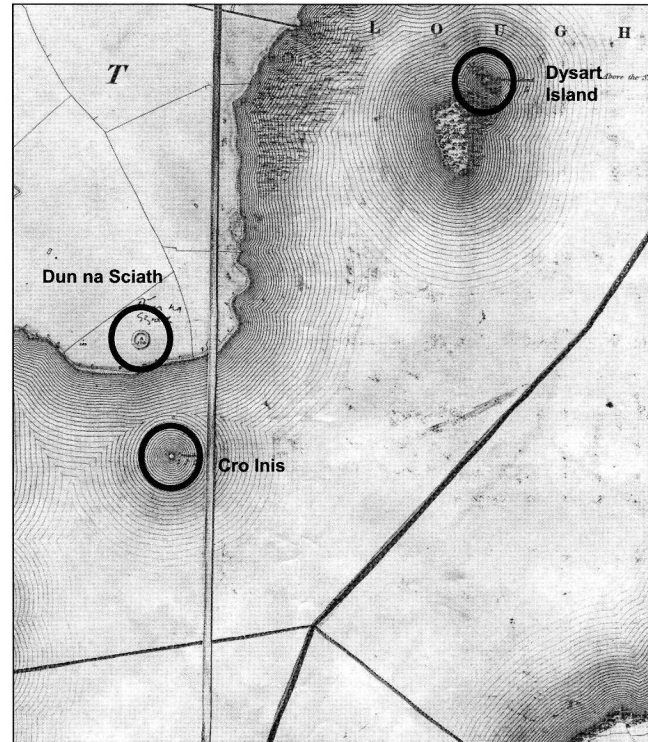


Fig. 2. Extract from First Edition Ordnance Survey map for Lough Ennell, Co. Westmeath, highlighting the location of Cró Inis crannog and associated sites.

Uí Néill who ruled at Island Mac Hugh), and this same family is remembered as having captured the Viking lord *Turgesius* in 845, and drowning him in Lough Owel, on the other side of Mullingar (Kelly 1991a). After the twelfth century the power of the *Clann Cholman* rested in its island fortress of *Cró Inis* and its associated double-banked earthwork enclosure on land, known as *Dún na Sciath* (Fig. 2).

The Crannog Archaeology Survey (CAP) during the 1980s, under the direction of Robert T. Farrell, examined the lake area in detail, and while the agenda was focused on the period before 1100, there was no escaping the later period. When R.A.S. MacAllister visited the lake in the 1920s, he noted a stone building on *Cró Inis*, which he interpreted as a folly (Macalister 1938). CAP’s survey, coordinated by Eamonn Kelly of the National Museum of Ireland, suggested otherwise (Farrell – Buckley 1984; Kelly 1991a) (Fig. 3). The parallels with Island McHugh are striking. The building is in fact the base of a squared tower, and may be regarded as a tower house. Clearance around the tower has identified a series of avenues focused on the tower house among the rocky cairn that makes up most of the surface area. The avenues lead down to the lake edge where, below the water’s surface, a series of two penannular circuits of palisade posts is revealed. Only a small-scale dating programme was possible here because so many of the timbers were birch and therefore unsuited to dendrochronological dating. However a range of dates was observed, with the outer palisade suggested as ninth century in date, and the inner plank palisade dating to the early twelfth century. When looked at from its landscape

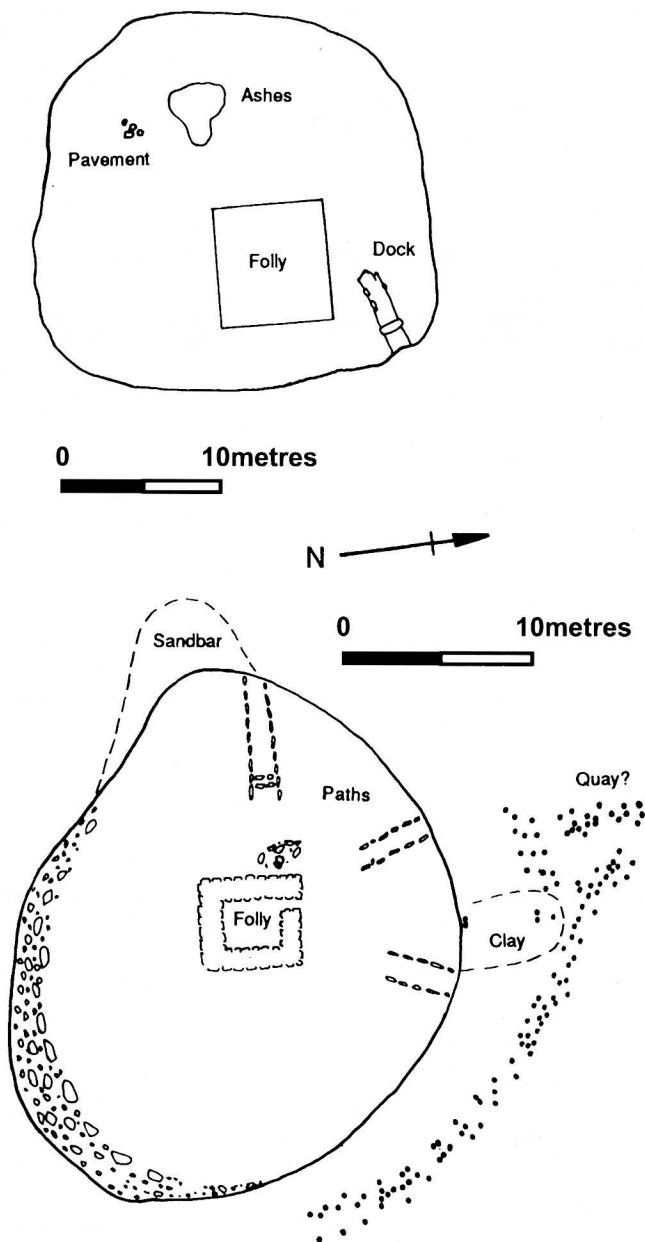


Fig. 3. Summary plans of survey results on Cró Inis by Macalister (1938) (top) and the Crannog Archaeology Project (Farrell – Buckley 1984) (bottom).

perspective, the association with the powerful bivallate ringfort on land and an enhanced natural island fortress area of Dysart to its north, the collective grouping commands the southern end of the lake and its ingress/egress to the river Brosna system. While this was undoubtedly of fundamental importance in the early period, the full realization of its later medieval role requires a dedicated programme of research to appreciate it most fully. The historical narrative in the meantime, composed of the essential contemporary chronicles for the period, only serves to tease: in 1022 the Annals of the Four Masters recorded that Mael-sechlainn II, king of the *Clann Cholman* died there (AFM ii, 80), while the poet Domnall Ó Cobthaig and his two sons were treacherously killed in Mael’s own house on Cró Inis in 1446.

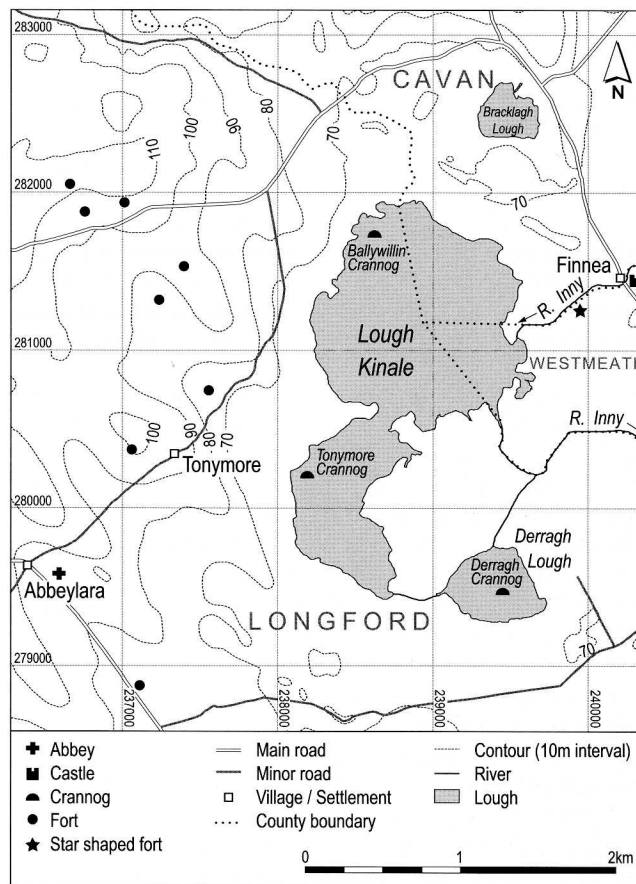


Fig. 4. Early and later medieval monuments in and around Lough Kinale, Co. Longford, highlighting Ballywillin crannog. Source: The Discovery Programme.

Ballywillin, Co. Longford

As part of the Discovery Programme’s Lake Settlement Project, attention has recently returned to Lough Kinale, Co. Longford, the find spot of a now famous eighth-century book shrine recovered in the 1980s by illegal treasure hunters, who were diving close to crannog sites (Fig. 4) (Kelly 1994). Other finds recovered by the treasure hunters include a liturgical chalice and a Viking Age silver hoard. The Discovery Programme’s work has included systematic survey of the lakeshore, its adjacent land area, and the various crannog features within the active water body. The results are being brought together as a monograph publication under the primary authorship of Christina Fredengren, with contributions by the palaeo-environmental team from Exeter University and Ingelise Stuijts, who have extracted and studied a series of pollen cores from there.

One of the crannog sites, that of Ballywillin, lies at the north end of the lake, and the authors wish to thank Dr. Fredengren for reviewing the following paragraph. It is an oval-shaped crannog, measuring c. 64 m E/W by 52 m N/S in greatest extent, and c. 37 m by 45 m within an encircling reed bed (Fig. 5). Timbers are exposed mainly in the northwest sector, but also in the southeast, some of which lie radially and horizontally, while others are vertical. The interior of Ballywillin is

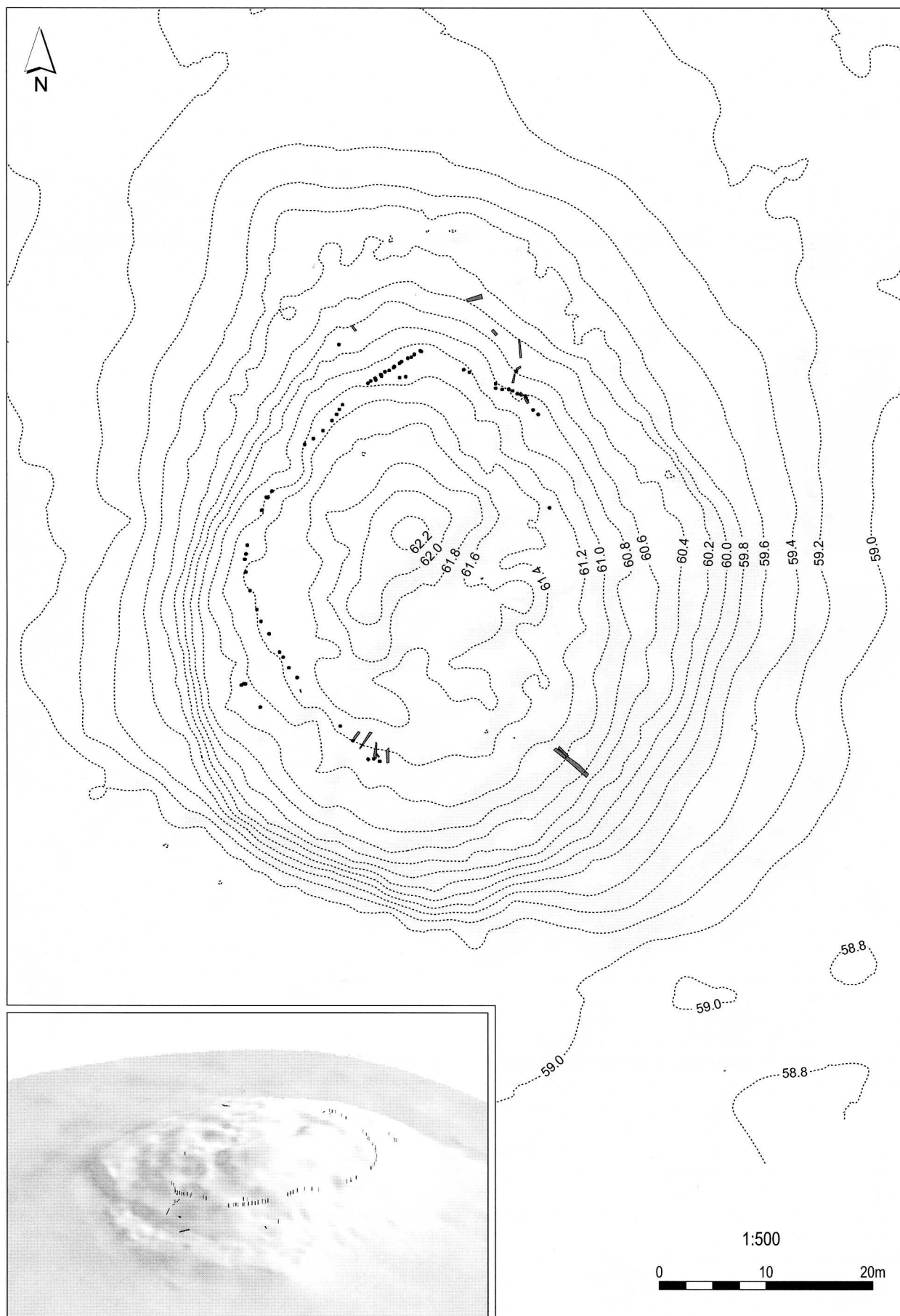


Fig. 5. Digital terrain model showing Ballywillin crannog, Lough Kinale, Co. Longford, in plan with oblique inset. Source: Discovery Programme.

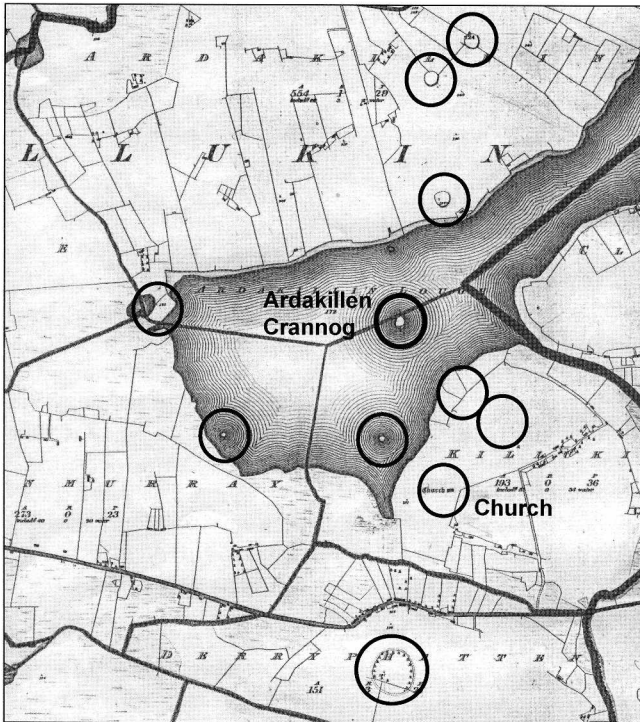


Fig. 6. Extract from First Edition Ordnance Survey map for Ardakillin Lough, Co. Roscommon, highlighting the location of Ardakillen crannog and associated sites.

formed by a cairn or mound of stones that rises c. 2.5 m from a sandy lakebed. The stone today presents itself as a tumbled mass that does not easily indicate whether there are clear arrangements or settings buried below. To all intents and purposes, Ballywillin is a classical early medieval site. However, once the timbers were dated, the picture became still more interesting. A range of dates has been established that do indeed indicate an early foundation: pollen-derived samples indicate a horizon of the fifth-sixth century, while a dendrochronological sample yielded a date of 785 ± 9 A.D. Other timbers, and now also seed remains, also reveal a significant late horizon that has been dated by Carbon-14 determinations to 1390–1470, 1435–1484 A.D. and 1020–1200 A.D. respectively. The nature of this evidence is not fleeting or incidental. Rather, and like that at Island McHugh, it reflects a conscious commitment to occupation during the later medieval period, and as such it extends the chronological importance of the lake area beyond that of the earlier period.

Although the contemporary chronicle information does not highlight Ballywillin in the way that it is hard to escape the high status of Island MacHugh and *Cró Inis*, the context of this third site is revealing in its own right. On the one hand, Ballywillin's early levels compare with those of Tonymore crannog in the same lakebed, where the lavish and prestige bookshrine was discovered, c. 1500 m to the south. On the other hand, the later horizons beg the question of continuity in a powerful region, particularly as preliminary dating of timbers at Tonymore suggest a twelfth-century horizon there (Fredengren, pers. comm.). Indeed, the Cistercians were granted permission by Sir Richard Tuit,



Plate 1. View northwards across the now drained lakebed to Ardakillen Crannog. Source: Discovery Programme.



Plate 2. View of drainage trench cut through Ardakillen crannog as it survives in 2003. Source: Discovery Programme.

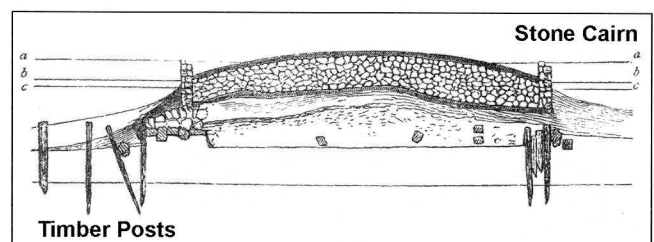


Fig. 7. Cross-section of drainage trench through Ardakillen crannog, as recorded by the nineteenth-century drainage engineers (after Wood-Martin 1886).

Anglo-Norman lord for the area, in 1210 to found an abbey close to the lakeshores in Abbeylara, where a fine stone-built ruin still stands today (Fig. 4) (Gywnn – Hadcock 1970, 124). The monks arrived in 1214 from St. Mary's in Dublin, but gained something of a reputation for haranguing the indigenous peoples: in 1318 Gaelic princes complained to Pope John XXII that the monks hunted the Irish with spears and sang Vespers in the evening. To broaden the scope of this enquiry

may lead to a discourse on the Cistercian estates in Ireland, to say nothing of the competing issues of Gaelic versus English identity in the fourteenth century. Although fruitful tasks in their own right, and ones that can be usefully revisited from an archaeologically-driven perspective, the present context is not the place to do so. It is sufficient to observe the strands of information that emerge. As at *Cró Inis*, further research would undoubtedly complement the archaeological contribution presented by the crannog levels, and suggest the complexity of inter-cultural relations during the later medieval period which, in this instance, lie within an Anglo-Norman manorial area.

Ardakillen, Co. Roscommon

The final site to be considered in this paper is one that was extensively excavated during the nineteenth century by engineers, as they conducted a programme of arterial drainage across the drumlin landscape of Roscommon in the north central area of the country (Fig. 6). Ardakillen crannog sits in a now changed lake-bed that includes a variety of other monuments, as well as a church and other settlements on the adjoining shorelines. The site is referred to in the historical sources, and once again its lordly status is clear from the damage wrought upon it (O’Sullivan 2001, 401–402). The Annals of Ulster, for instance, note in 1388 that Domnaill O’Conor burned both the fort of *Ard an Choillin* and the adjacent islands of Lough Cairrigin (Ardakillen Lough), while the Annals of Connacht record in 1467 that the islands of Loch Ardakillin were taken from the garrison left there by the ruling O’Conor Don (Plate 1).

The work of the drainage engineers in the nineteenth century has produced a very rich archaeological record to complement the historical narrative (Wood-Martin 1886, 236–239). The pragmatism of the engineers to lower water levels in the large lake area resulted in their cutting a trench across a large islet towards the centre of the lake that was impeding water flow (Plate 2). This operation exposed the core to the island to be a crannog with a complex stratigraphy (Fig. 7). A large assemblage of artefacts was also revealed. Figure 7 shows a basal level of soft organic deposit that is defined by a timber post palisade or revetment, in much the same way as the early medieval crannog at Moynagh Lough, Co. Meath, was constructed (Bradley, *this volume*). However, and above this level, the section reveals a distinct and different phase of construction that lies on top of and also within the circuit of the underlying palisaded perimeter. The upper level was built by importing a considerable core of stone to create a central cairn or mound, and building a stone wall around its perimeter. The picture revealed by this much published cross-section suggests at least two distinct and separate phases of construction and use, in a similar manner to the archaeological levels identified on Island McHugh and at *Cró Inis*. This is borne out by the range of small finds recovered, whose study is complicated by the fact that so much of the collection was dispersed almost immediately by various col-

lectors and interested parties (Whitfield 2001, 66). Nevertheless, the association of a silver groat with this crannog that was minted in London during the second reign of Edward IV (1471–83) and dating to the end of the 1470s, compares well with the chronicled interest and activity on this site during the 1460s and 1470s.

As with Island MacHugh, *Cró Inis* and Lough Kinale, the existing knowledge of the medieval narrative at Ardakillen, while very suggestive, requires a programme of formal investigative research that will delve more deeply into the substance of the evidence, and also expand the scope of enquiry to assess the roles of crannogs in the later medieval landscape as a whole. It is likely that such a piece of research will be achieved for Ardakillen. In its wider context, the lake is part of a larger territory within the later medieval Gaelic lordship of the O’Conor Don that occupies the present day barony of Roscommon for the most part. The Discovery Programme’s Medieval Rural Settlement project has identified this region as a study area in which to research the material expression of Gaelic lordship (Brady 2003, 7–21). That work includes both dryland and wetland environments in what is an archaeologically rich and relict landscape. It is hoped that this research will be able to move along the discussion of the later medieval usage of crannogs, and other sites, within the context of a focused multi-disciplinary study of a Gaelic lordship. The study is driven by archaeology but includes a specialist historian and the contributions of a palaeo-environmentalist. Collaboration with the Lake Settlement Project within the Programme is anticipated.

Concluding remarks

We have selected here a small few of the sites where later medieval remains occur on crannogs. While it is undoubtedly the case that usage and occupation was incidental and fleeting on numerous crannogs after c. 1100, as was the case apparently at Moynagh Lough (reported on in this volume by its excavator, John Bradley) where only a handful of pottery fragments suggest a brief presence at this time, there is a body of information that exists which indicates that crannogs were still an active part of the settlement forms in use during the later medieval period. The exploitation of a wetland environment for settlement and for status remained an important aspect of life in later medieval Ireland. Assessments and reviews of the archaeological and historical narrative between 1100 and 1600 should no longer ignore this, and the challenge is perhaps addressed best as an interdisciplinary endeavour. A significant inroad can be achieved over the next few years by re-examining the crannogs in Roscommon within the context of their wider landscape, both archaeologically and historically. As part of a wider research agenda that seeks to identify and appreciate the material expression of Gaelic lordship, such work will not be an excuse to champion the contributions of the Anglo-Normans to Irish culture. Nor will it dwell on mis-conceived notions of Gaelic inadequacies. Rather it aims to understand more fully the great and exciting

complexity of life in later medieval Ireland, complete with the interactions and the exclusivities that are part and parcel of competitive groups. Perhaps, and hopefully, the result will help to inform other areas of the Angevin world and its immediate neighbours.

Zusammenfassung

Die traditionelle Einschätzung bezüglich Crannogs in Irland ist, dass diese grossen im See gelegenen Wohnstätten auf künstlichen Inseln während der Zeit vor 1100 n. Chr. genutzt wurden. In neuerer Zeit spricht sich eine veränderte Ansicht für eine kontinuierliche Nutzung und Konstruktion auch nach 1100 n. Chr. aus; eine Zeit in der ein großer Teil Irlands der zentralen Autorität der Angevin-Krone unterstand. Dieser Text stellt die grundlegenden Informationen vor, auf die sich die neuere Meinung stützt, und geht auf die auftretenden Auswirkungen für das weitere Verständnis von Ethnizität und Herrschaft im spätmittelalterlichen Irland ein. Eine Auswahl wichtiger Fundplätze, unter anderem die Insel MacHugh in der Grafschaft (County) Tyrone, Cró Inis, County Westmeath, Ballywillin, County Longford und Ardakillen, County Roscommon wird vorgestellt. Jedes der Beispiele zeigt bedeutende spätmittelalterliche Siedlungshorizonte über den Schichten, die Aktivität vor 1100 n. Chr. zeigen. Solche Plätze finden sich im spätmittelalterlichen Irland nicht ausschließlich in traditionell gälischen Gebieten, sondern auch in der angelnormannischen Kolonialzone. Im Text wird der Schluss gezogen, dass die Annahme dieser Beweise als integraler Bestandteil der spätmittelalterlichen Sachkultur Irlands eine Situation schaffen wird, in der Gelehrte beginnen können, die Art und Weise, in der sich gälische Herrschaft manifestierte und zeigte deutlicher und konstruktiver zu verstehen. Das Discovery Programme arbeitet derzeit zu diesem Thema in der Grafschaft Roscommon und wird in den nächsten Jahren versuchen, sich in die breite Diskussion über indigene Kulturen innerhalb und entlang des Angevin Reichs in anderen Teilen Europas einzubringen.

Résumé

Il est de coutume d'associer les crannogs irlandais, ces habitations – à haut statut – bâties sur des îles artificielles au milieu des lacs, à la période d'avant 1100. Plus récemment, une opinion différente s'est faite quant à la date de leur utilisation et même de leur construction qui s'étendrait après 1100 période pendant laquelle une bonne partie de l'Irlande était sous le joug de la couronne angevine. Ce point de vue est le sujet de cette dissertation qui s'applique à considérer les implications sur les connaissances ethniques et seigneuriales au bas Moyen Age. Pour illustrer cet argument, des exemples ont été choisis, y compris Island McHugh dans le comté de Tyrone, Cró Inis, dans le comté de Westmeath, Ballywillin, dans le comté de Longford et Ardakillen dans le comté de Roscommon. Dans chacun de ces exemples, on découvre un nombre considérable de preuves dans les horizons archéologiques datant du bas Moyen Age, prouvant l'occupation de ces sites après 1100. Ce type d'habitation n'est pas nécessairement associé aux régions traditionnelles Gaéliques du bas Moyen Age mais peut aussi être présent dans la région occupée par les Anglo-Normands. En intégrant cette thèse parmi la connaissance générale du bas Moyen Age en Irlande, il est possible d'élargir la conception du seigneur Gaélique.

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