

AN INTRODUCTION TO DISPERSED AND NUCLEATED MEDIEVAL RURAL SETTLEMENT IN IRELAND

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This paper will serve as an introduction to the two themes of the conference: nucleated and dispersed rural settlement and how examples of both types of settlement were found on the medieval Irish landscape. It will mainly concentrate upon rural settlement in the Anglo-Norman areas of medieval Ireland, as my other Irish colleagues will be examining Gaelic-Irish rural settlement in other published papers of this conference.

The great difference between the Anglo-Norman or English intervention into Ireland in 1169-70 and the Norman Conquest of England some hundred years or so before, in 1066, is that the whole island of Ireland was never fully conquered by these Anglo-Normans. Although by the first quarter of the thirteenth century over two-thirds of the country had been overrun there were large tracts of land in the North East in Ulster and Connacht, and also in south-western Munster, which remained in effective Gaelic-Irish control throughout the middle ages. At first sight, the rural landscape of Ireland in the middle ages, especially along its eastern seaboard, appears similar to that of contemporary lowland England, with its deserted medieval villages (DMV) and moated sites, but when it is examined in more detail it is possible to detect many differences in the pattern of that settlement. One of the main reasons for this difference is this fact that the Anglo-Normans never controlled all of the rural settlement pattern of Ireland. Before the Anglo-Normans arrived the indigenous Irish rural landscape was dominated by dispersed settlements such as the many thousand ringforts or cashels, which were the defended farmsteads of the free element in pre-Norman society, and crannógs, or lake dwellings, of which over a thousand are known to have existed. Although the pattern of these major settlement types was obviously considerably modified by the new Anglo-Norman settlers there is no doubt that some examples of both types were still being occupied throughout the middle ages.

One of the major differences between Ireland and the English or Welsh homeland of these Anglo-Normans is that when the question of dispersed settlement within their Irish Lordship is examined it soon becomes apparent that the moated site, often the defended farmsteads of the lesser Anglo-Norman aristocracy, was a major component (*Fig. 1*). This is different to the contemporary situation in medieval England where many of the moated sites were located either within or very close to medieval nucleated settlements. The great majority of Irish sites are located more than 3 km away from the nearest known medieval nucleated settlement, and are also found concentrated along the periphery of the Lordship where the Anglo-Norman settlers obviously felt the need for additional security against the Gaelic Irish, especially in the period of their resurgence from the early fourteenth century onwards (*Fig. 2*). All the admittedly limited archaeological evidence suggests that these moated sites mainly date from the late thirteenth to the early fourteenth century, and that the excavated examples on the periphery of the Lordship only had very limited site occupation before they were over-run by the Gaelic Irish. More recently there is some interesting fieldwork evidence to indicate that the Gaelic Irish were also building some moated sites as well, because some possible examples of the site type have been found in areas that were always under the control of Gaelic lords in the middle ages. O'Connor (1998) has completed some useful research on one such moated site with a large oval enclosure attached to its north-eastern side which is located on Inishatirra Island in Drumharlow Lough, County Roscommon.

It has been estimated by Glasscock (1970, 164) that there are at least 750 examples of these moated sites to be found on the landscape so they represent a major class of Anglo-Norman rural settlement sites. Again, this is probably the minimum number for these sites, as Kieran O'Connor has more recently suggested that

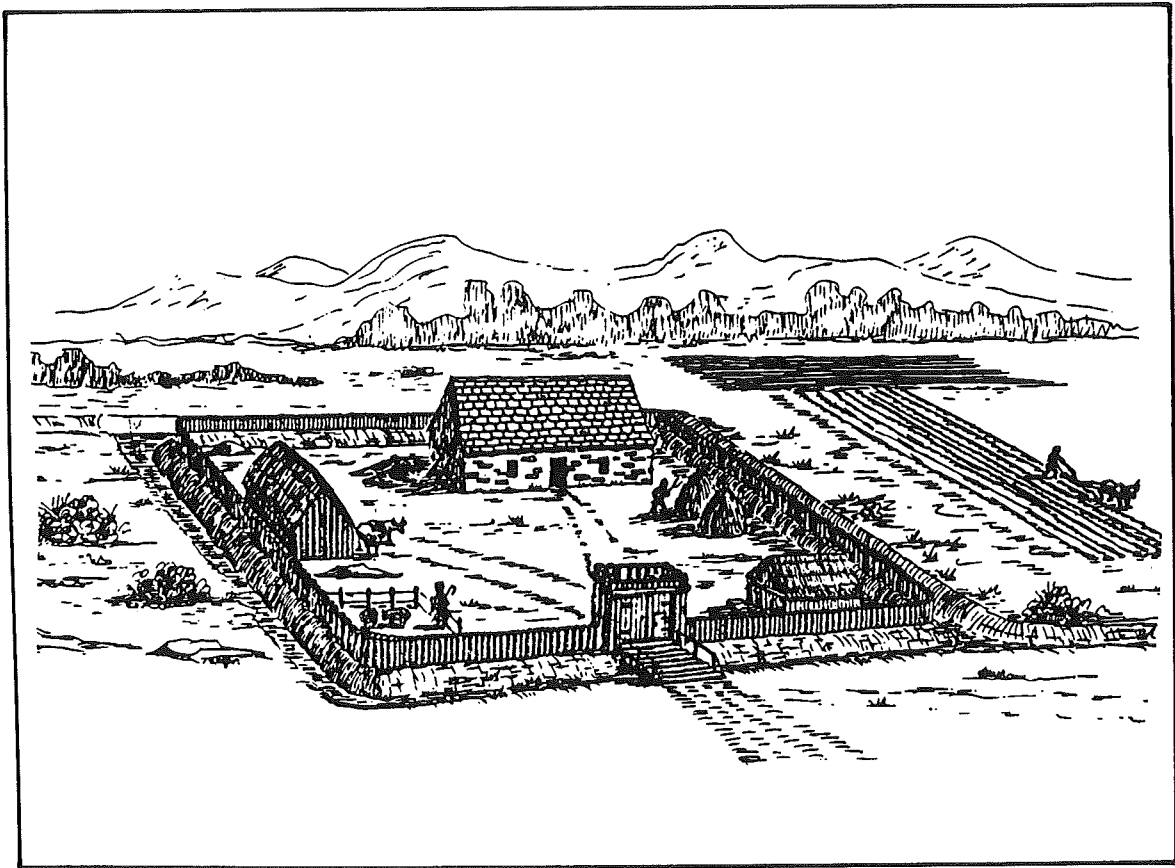


Fig. 1. Reconstruction of a moated site(after B. Colfer).

there were probably in excess of 1,000 moated sites in Ireland (*O'Connor 1998*, 63). Indeed, they still far outnumber the identified examples of nucleated settlements within the Lordship, which has been put at about 350 by Graham. Also, if you remove the large numbers of so called 'rural boroughs' from the equation it only leaves a small number of deserted medieval villages, with the Archaeological Survey of Ireland's total running currently at c.102 examples. Of course this may not be an entirely fair comparison because it is easier to identify moated sites on the landscape than the low-lying and often degraded rectilinear earthworks of Anglo-Norman nucleated settlements. It is also possible to argue that there was greater continuity of site occupation with these nucleated settlements than for the more isolated moated sites, and thus many of the earlier medieval villages are probably hidden beneath their more modern successors.

If we examine more closely the Anglo-Norman rural settlement pattern in areas that straddled the borders of the Lordship, such as *Meenan (1985)* did for the deserted medieval villages of County Westmeath, we find that it was probably more dispersed than would originally have been anticipated. She was only able to locate possible house remains at 13 of the 150 possible DMV sites in that county, and she also found that their layouts were much more irregular than those found in either County Kilkenny or Tipperary, two counties within the heartland of the Anglo-Norman colony. Her explanation for this apparent difference was that the major Anglo-Norman landholders here located their manorial centres at pre-existing population concentrations, and that especially on the borders of the Lordship the pattern of settlement was particularly dispersed. These conclusions would fit in well with those of *Simms et al*, who wrote that the pre-existing townland system was 'most likely the reason why the medieval settlement pattern of Ireland was more dispersed than its contemporary counterparts in England and on the continent.' (*Edwards -Hamond - Simms 1983*, 364). Therefore, in the future it may be useful to closely examine the pattern of settlement along the peripheries of the Lordship to see whether there is a greater predominance of dispersed sites in these areas, as well as in some locations within the heartland of the colony, such as at Newcastle Lyons in County Dublin.

The second part of this paper will concentrate on nucleated settlements, and villages in particular. In an earlier paper (*Barry 1998*) I discussed some of the findings of my 1987 archaeological excavation at the de-

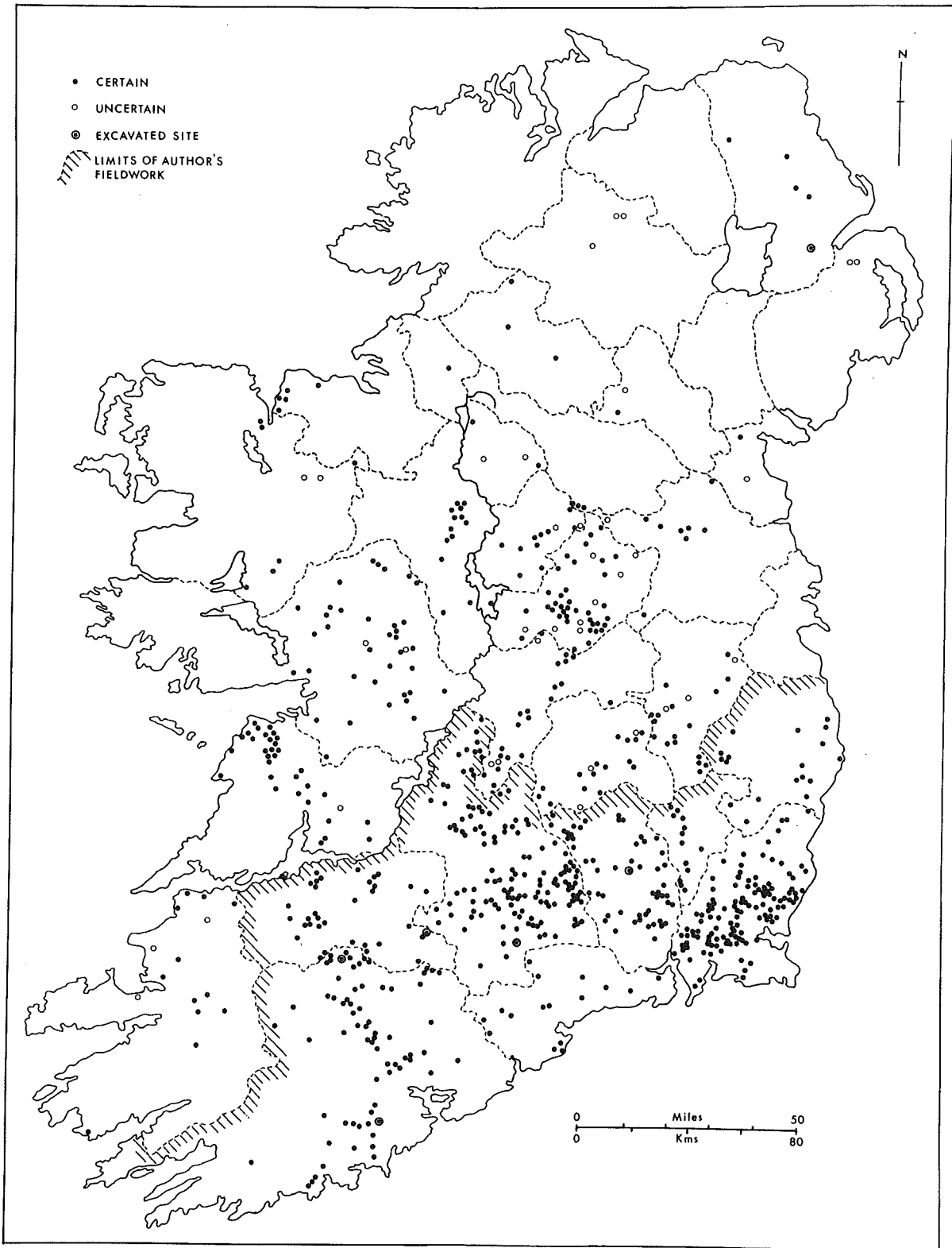


Fig. 2. Distribution map of moated sites in Ireland.

serted medieval village of Piperstown, and now I would like to discuss its context somewhat more broadly. Piperstown is still the only known deserted medieval village in County Louth, the smallest county in Ireland, and was identified as such by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland as late as 1974. One of the reasons that it was only positively identified relatively recently as such a settlement was the lack of a church or graveyard site there, and the failure to identify the much degraded mound to the east of the village site as a possible motte (*Fig. 3*). Over the last twenty years there has been a growing interest and debate upon the major forms and patterns of both dispersed and nucleated settlement in medieval Ireland. But unquestionably within the area of the Anglo-Norman Lordship there developed a hierarchy of nucleated settlements in the lowland zone. Apart from the towns with a significant urban character there were established many small boroughs which were no larger than the medieval villages of contemporary lowland Britain, but whose inhabitants were given all the rights of burgesses to attract them to Ireland. These included the fixed annual rental of one shilling or less, and the right to tax and govern themselves outside the largely repressive feudal regime that existed in the rest of the country. These freedoms were much sought after, and so it is scarcely surprising that so many of these 'rural boroughs' were set up in Ireland (*Glasscock 1970, 171; Graham 1993*).

The archaeological excavation at Piperstown concentrated upon arguably the best identifiable house platform (House 3 in *Fig. 3*) and one large rectilinear earthen bank. No larger area could have been excavated in the 1987 season given the small size of the budget, and there is the possibility that a further larger scale excavation may elucidate much more of the origins, development and decline of this village. Archaeologically this house platform and bank were some of the most obvious surface features among all the surviving village earthworks. Nevertheless, with hindsight, these features did not produce any really startling artefacts or constructional evidence to revolutionise the study of medieval settlement desertion in Ireland. It was, however, a valuable addition to the limited excavation evidence of well under ten sites that is at present available for these settlements here in Ireland. This is especially the case given the site's location close to the eastern seaboard of the country, as most of the excavations of medieval nucleated settlements have been located in the south and west of the island (*Barry 1994, 72-84*).

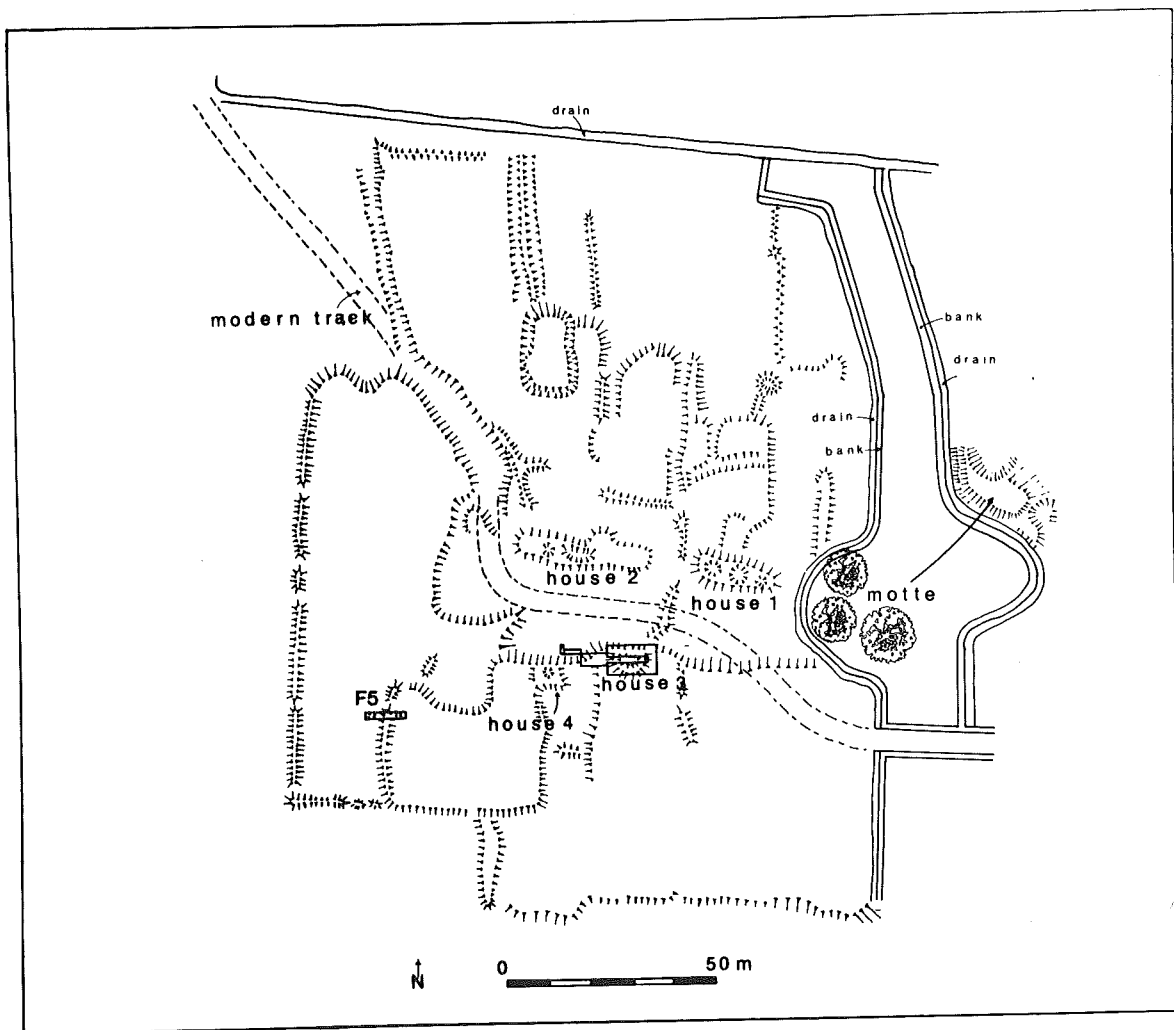


Fig. 3. Plan of Piperstown deserted medieval village, County Louth.

Chronologically the artefactual evidence would suggest that the settlement was in existence from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, as is shown by the medieval pottery sherds and the medieval iron artefacts that were located during the excavation. However, the greatest number of sherds were from post-medieval pottery types and this assemblage can be dated to the first half of the eighteenth century. This is mainly based on the absence of any groups of pottery sherds from the middle or later eighteenth century and also the patchy and uneven glazing on the black ware pots, which is typical of the period before c.1750. The glass assemblage also dated mainly to the period from the end of the seventeenth to the early eighteenth century.

Like so many other archaeological excavations of rural nucleated medieval settlements only a very small proportion of the entire earthwork complex has been investigated, and therefore it would be dangerous to be too certain in arguing that this one house platform is necessarily typical of the settlement as a whole. Nevertheless, it probably does reflect both the general chronology and the socio-economic development of the village. The artefacts would strongly indicate that the village was founded sometime in the thirteenth century, probably in the latter half of that century. Some kind of settlement continued here, according to the finds evidence, until the early eighteenth century when it would seem that it was finally deserted. It is possible that this desertion might have been associated with the re-organisation of the Piperstown estate at about this time, but without any direct evidence this is really only speculation.

As already discussed above the desertion evidence from Piperstown gives added weight to the idea that the main period of village desertion in medieval Ireland was much later than that experienced in the English Midlands where most research in these islands on deserted medieval villages has been undertaken (*O'Conor 1998*). There the archaeological evidence would indicate that the height of village desertion was associated with the switch from arable to pastoral agriculture in the fifteenth century (*Beresford - Hurst 1971*). In Ireland the evidence is building to show that most village desertion is much later than this, and most often linked with the effects of the Cromwellian Wars on the Irish landscape and in the post-medieval period generally (*Barry 1996*). For instance, at Newtown Jerpoint in County Kilkenny the contemporary sources for the settlement end in the middle of the seventeenth century and the earthworks, as mapped in the 1840s by the Ordnance Survey, were so sharp as also to suggest a late desertion (*Barry 1994, 76*). It is to be hoped that the Discovery Programme will soon do an up-to-date survey of this important site utilising all the latest techniques of surveying, for which the State-funded archaeological research company is rightly famous. Other as yet unexcavated sites such as Kiltinan in County Tipperary also possess very good rectilinear earthworks which suggest that they were not finally deserted until the post-medieval period.

Like other comparable medieval houses, such as the two excavated at Caherguillamore, County Limerick (*O'Riordan - Hunt 1942*), this Piperstown house survived the vicissitudes of several hundred years as the finds evidence associated with it would indicate. Obviously over the centuries different portions of the house were replaced as they decayed but the plan of the house itself did not change appreciably. This was unlike the situation at Wharram Percy in Yorkshire in England where the archaeological evidence showed that the medieval peasant houses in Area 10 changed their orientation throughout the middle ages (*Hurst 1979, 28*). What is needed in the future is a programme of total excavation of a selected number of deserted medieval villages in Ireland. This may be seen as almost an impossible goal, but it should, nevertheless, not be lost sight of as an aspiration by Irish medieval archaeologists.

The future looks very bright for medieval rural settlement studies in Ireland with the two new long-term research projects led by Dr Kieran O'Conor and by Aidan O'Sullivan for the Discovery Programme. In particular, O'Conor's research programme will, no doubt, immensely add to our knowledge of the Gaelic-Irish rural settlement pattern in medieval Ireland. By the time of "Ruralia IV" therefore there should be a great deal of progress to report in the area of medieval rural settlement studies in Ireland.

UNE INTRODUCTION DE STRUCTURE DE L'HABITAT RURAL MÉDIÉVAL, GROUPEMENT ET DISPERSION EN IRLANDE

Dans ce discours je vais introduire le thème principal de cette conférence-colonisation groupée et dispersée médiévale et rurale à l'égard particulier de l'Irlande. D'abord j'examinerai brièvement le paysage rurale dans l'Irlande avant 1169-70 avec l'intention de montrer que c'était un Irlande dominé largement par un modèle dispersée de "ringforts" et "crannogs". Ensuite j'analyserai le modèle complexe de l'époque après les Normans avec la colonisation dispersée toujours dominante dans les endroits de l'ouest et du nord qui sont restées "Gaelic Irish" - pendant que dans les endroits du sud et de l'est Irlande du 'Anglo-Norman Lordship' colonisation groupée était établie au même temps que les colonisations dispersées comme des maisons-forte (*Trans. E. Barry*).

EINFÜHRUNG ZUR WEILER- UND STREUSIEDLUNG IN DER LÄNDLICHEN BESIEDLUNG IRLANDS WÄHREND DES MITTELALTERS

In diesem Vortrag möchte ich das Hauptthema der Konferenz "Weiler- und Streusiedlung im mittelalterlichen Siedlungsbild" mit besonderem Hinweis auf Irland vorstellen. Zuerst möchte ich kurz auf das ländliche Landschaftsbild in Irland vor der normannischen Eroberung hinweisen (vor 1169-1170), um zu zeigen, dass zu dieser Zeit die Besiedlung zum grössten Teil aus einem verstreuten Gewebe von "ringforts" and "crannógs" bestand. Danach werde ich das komplexe Bild der nach-normannischen Zeit analysieren, wobei in den gälisch-irischen Gebieten des Westens und Nordens die Streusiedlung weiterhin dominiert, während in den Gebieten der anglo-normannischen Herrschaft über Irland im Süden und Osten auch Weilersiedlung neben Streusiedlungsformen, wie etwa wasserumwehrte Höfe, etabliert hatte (*Trans. K. Aberg*).

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