

Standing stones and stone circles

Single standing stones were erected for different purposes at different times in the past. Some marked burials; others marked boundaries or served some commemorative or ritual function. Some standing stones have Ogham inscriptions dating from the fourth to the seventh centuries AD, which commemorate individuals of that time. Ogham is an alphabet formed of strokes carved on the edge of a stone and these inscriptions are the oldest record of the Irish language.

Stone circles of five or more upright stones, found in certain parts of the country, were used for ritual and/or burial purposes, were sometimes aligned on important astronomical events and date from the Bronze Age.



A stone circle at Bohonagh, Co. Cork.



An Ogham-inscribed standing stone at Derrynane, Co. Kerry.

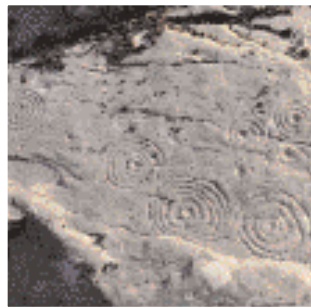
Tógadh clocha seasta singil ar chúiseanna éagsúla ag amanta difriúla san am atá caite. Combarthaí adhlactha a bhí i gcuid acu; léirigh cinn eile teorainneacha nó bhíodh feidhm chomórtha agus dheasghnách ag baint leo. Tá Ogham greanta ar chuid de na clocha seasta a bhaineann leis an tréimhse idir an ceathrú agus an seachtú haois AD, agus comórann siad daoine áirithe ón tréimhse sin. Is aibítir í Ogham de linte greanta in imeall cloiche agus is iad na scríbhinní seo an tairfead is sine den Ghaeilge.

Tá ciorcail chloiche le cúig chloch sheasta nó níos mó le fáil i gceantair áirithe sa tír. Bhaintí úsáid astu do chúiseanna deasghnácha agus/nó adhlactha. Amanta dhéantait iad a ailiniú ag ócáidí tábhachtacha réaleolaíocha agus baineann siad leis an gCré-Umhaois.

Stone Rows and rock art

Standing stones can also be found in pairs or in rows of three or more closely set stones. These latter are often aligned on a point such as a gap in the hills where the sun or moon rises or sets at important points in the year. Stone rows, like the stone circles, were used for ceremonial purposes during the Bronze Age.

Certain earth-fast boulders or outcrops of rock in some parts of the country were carved with cup-and-circle motifs, concentric circles and other designs. Not being part of a built structure, these are difficult to date and while they were formerly believed to belong to the Bronze Age, arguments for a Neolithic date have more recently been put forward.



Rock art on a boulder at Kealduff Upper, Co. Kerry. (Photo: C. Manning).



This stone row at Maughanavilly, Co. Cork, contains five stones and was constructed around 1500 BC.

Bíonn péirí cloch nó sraitheanna de thrí chloch nó níos mó le feiceáil ina seasamb an-ghar dá chéile. Is minic a bhíonn na sraitheanna ailínithe in áit cosúil le bearna sna cnoic mar a n-éiríonn nó mar a dtéann an ghrian nó an ghealach faoi ag amanta tábhachtacha sa bhliain. Cosúil le ciorcail chloch, bhaintí feidhm dheasghnách as sraitheanna cloch i rith na Cré-Umhaoise.

I gceantair áirithe sa tír, bíonn dearadh cupáin-agus-ciorcail, ciorcail chomhlárnacha agus dearthaí eile le feiceáil greanta i mulláin atá sáinnithe sa talamh nó i bhfreagairtí carraigeacha. As siocair nach bhfuil siad mar chuid de struchtúr tógtha, bíonn sé deacair dáta a lua leo. Mbeastaí gur bhain siad leis an gCré-Umhaois ach tá argóintí á geur chun tosaigh le déanaí a cheanglaíonn leis an Aois Neoilíotach iad.

Fulachtaí Fia

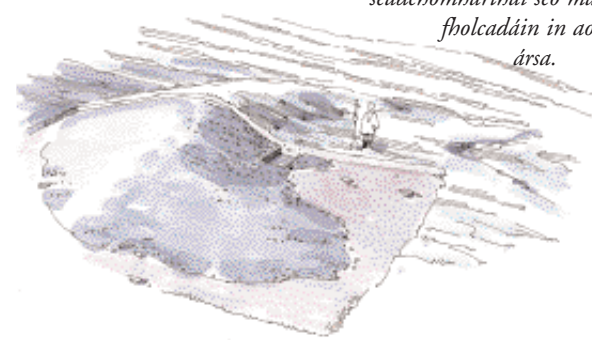
Also known as burnt mounds or ancient cooking places, these small grassed-over mounds of fire-cracked stones are very common in some counties. They are usually found in boggy land or close to a water supply. When excavated, a pit lined with wattle, timber or stone is usually found, in which water was heated by rolling in hot stones from a nearby fire. Meat could have been cooked in the boiling water and the mound was formed of shattered stones shelved from the pit after each use. There is also some evidence that these sites were used for bathing in ancient times.



A fulacht fia close to a stream at Rathlogan, Co. Kilkenny. This is a good example of a crescent-shaped mound.

Cairn dhóite nó áiteanna ársa cócaireachta is ea iad seo. Tá na cairn bheaga seo de chlocha atá scoilte ag tine an-choitianta i gceantaetha áirithe. Bíonn siad clúdaithe le féar. De ghnáth, bíonn siad le fáil ar thalamh portaigh nó cóngarach do sholáthar uisce. Nuair a thochlaítear iad, tagtar ar pholl línithe le caolach, adhmaid nó cloch de ghnáth. Rinneadh uisce a théamb suas trí clocha teo ó thine gar dó a chur isteach ann. D'fhéadfai gur cócaladh feoil san uisce bruite. Dhéantai an carn trí clocha briste a ghlacadh ón bpoll gach uair a bhaintí úsáid as. Tá roinnt fianaise ann freisin go mbaintí úsáid as na séadchomharthaí seo mar fhólcadáin in aoiseanna ársa.

The drawing below shows a Fulacht Fia being excavated with the mound of broken stones and the trough uncovered. (Drawing: D. Pollock).



Linear earthworks & roadways

Linear earthworks are ancient earthen banks that can be traced sometimes for miles across the countryside and have names, reminiscent of legends, such as the Black Pig's Race or the Claidhe Dubh. They appear to have formed territorial boundaries and/or impediments to cattle raiding. Some date from the Iron Age.



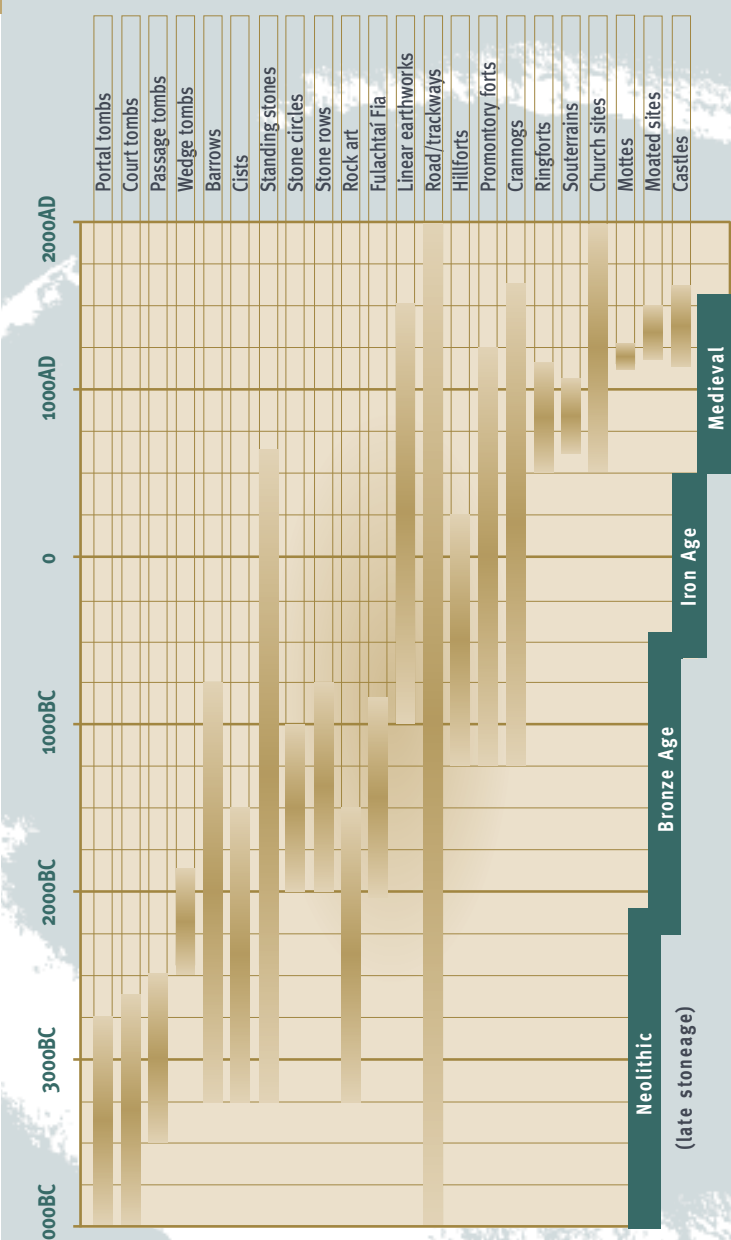
A section of the linear earthwork called the Black Pig's Race around the townland of Aghmagarron, Co. Longford.

Is bainc chré ársa iad crébhógálacha lineacha. Amanta bíonn a rian le feiceáil ag síneadh na mílte trasna na tuaithe. Bíonn siad ainmnithe as finscéalta cosúil le Rás na Múice Duibhe nó Claidhe Dubh. Is cosúil gur léirigh siad teorainneacha díochí agus/nó go raibh siad mar chos ar chreacadóireacht bheithíoch. Baineann cuid acu leis an Aois Iarainn.

Is minice a bhíonn bóthair nó cosáin ársa le fáil mar ar thrasnaigh siad portaigh. Bhí siad comhdhéanta d'adhmaid nó craobhacha a chuirte síos chun an talamh faoi chois a dhéanamh níos daingne. Le himeacht aimsire, chlédaigh an portach an t-adhmaid agus chaomhnaigh sé é agus go minic nuair a bhítear ag baint móna, tagtar ar iarsmaí caomhnaithe na mbóthar portaigh nó na dtóchar, a bhaineann leis an gClochaois suas go dtí an seachtú haois déag.



At Carrowkeel, Co. Longford, a roadway formed of massive oak beams was found during peat harvesting. It was subsequently excavated and dated by dendrochronology (tree-ring dating) to 148 BC. A section of the road is now preserved in a visitor centre on the site. (Photo: B. Rafferty)



Introduction

The Irish countryside is unique in Europe in the number of upstanding ancient monuments that survive from past ages. These range from 6,000-year-old megalithic tombs to earthen ringforts, of early medieval date, to castles, churches and other buildings of more recent date. They are a wonderful link to the past and are to be found in almost every townland in the country. Often a monument has given its name to the townland and many are imbued with local history and tradition. They are important features in the cultural landscape and when a monument is destroyed part of our history and identity is destroyed with it. This valuable legacy from the past is something we should all strive to understand, cherish and protect.

The emphasis in this exhibition is on monuments likely to be found on farmland and in private ownership around the country rather than on National Monuments in state care.

All photographs by Con Brogan, Senior Photographer, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government unless otherwise indicated. Text by Con Manning, Senior Archaeologist.

Tá tuath na hÉireann éagsúil ó gach áit eile san Eoraip maidir leis an méid séadchomharthaí seasta ársa a mhaireann ó aoiseanna atá imithe tharainn. Ina measc tá tuamaí meigilíotacha atá 6,000 bliain d'aois agus rábanna cré a bhaineann leis na méanaoiseanna, caisleáin, séipéil agus foirgintí eile nach bhfuil chomh sean céanna. Is ceangal iontach iad leis an am a chuaigh thart agus tá siad le fáil i mbeagnach gach baile fearainn sa tír. Go minic, bíonn bailte fearainn ainmnithe as séadchomharthaí agus bíonn go leor de na séadchomharthaí fite fuaithe sa stair agus sna traidisiúin áitiúla. Is gnéithe tábhachtacha iad sa tírdhreach cultúrtha agus nuair a dhéantar séadchomhartha a scrios, déantar scrios ar chuid dár stair agus dár bhféiniúlacht freisin. Is oidhreacht luachmhar iad ón am atá caite agus ní mór dúinn go léir ár ndícheall a dhéanamh iad a thuisint, a chumbdach agus a chosaint.

Sa taispeántas seo cuirtear béim ar shéadchomharthaí atá ar thalamh feirmeacha agus ag úinéirí príobháideacha ar fud na tíre, seachas Séadchomharthaí Náisiúnta atá faoi chúram an stáit.

Megalithic Tombs

The oldest archaeological monuments in Ireland are megalithic (large-stone) tombs, in which the remains of our remote ancestors were buried together with pottery and items of flint, stone and bone. There are four main classes of megalithic tombs but the oldest two, dating mainly from c. 4000 to 3000 BC, are the portal tombs and the court tombs. Portal tombs have been so named because two tall portal stones flanked the entrance to the chamber.

Court tombs derive their name from an open court in front of the tomb entrance. These tombs were normally covered by long cairns (mounds) of stone and are mostly confined to the northern half of the country.



Some court tombs have a central open court with burial chambers opening off the narrow ends as here at Deer Park or Maghenaghansh, Co. Sligo. The loose stones of the long cairn have been robbed in this case, leaving only the larger structural stones of the court and rectangular burial chambers.



Portal tombs, with their large capstones, can be very striking, like this example at Kilknooney More, Co. Donegal.

Is tuamaí meigilíotacha (clocha móna) iad na séadchomharthaí seandálaíochta is sine in Éirinn. Chuirte iontu taisí ar sinsear i bhfad amach in éineacht le potaireacht agus rudaí déanta as cloch thine, cloch agus cnámha. Tá ceithre phríomhchineál tuamaí meigilíotacha ann ach is tuamaí ursanacha agus tuamaí cúirte iad an dá chineál is sine. Baineann siad go príomha leis an tréimhse c. 4000-3000 RC. Tuamaí ursanacha a thugtar orthu mar gheall ar an dá chloch arda ursanacha a bhíonn ar dhá thaobh an bhealaí isteach chun an tseomra.

Tá tuamaí cúirte ainmnithe as an gcúirt oscailte chun tosaigh ar bhealach isteach an tuama. De ghnáth bhíodh na tuamaí seo clúdaithe le cairn fhada de chlocha agus tá siad le fáil go mór mhór ó thuaidh.

Megalithic Tombs

Some of our best-known megalithic tombs are passage tombs such as Newgrange and these often remain fully buried beneath circular cairns of stones, with a passage leading to the burial chamber. They are found often on hilltops and generally occur in groups, known as cemeteries. One of the oldest surviving forms of art or decoration in Ireland is found on structural stones in some of these tombs, which date from around 3500-2500 BC.

Wedge tombs get their name from the fact that the chamber is frequently wedge-shaped in both plan and profile. Excavation has shown that these tombs date from the transition period between the Stone Age and the Bronze Age in Ireland (2500-2000 BC).



This wedge tomb at Altar, Co. Cork illustrates well the wedge-shape of these monuments. The townland name in this case is derived from the tomb, referred to in the past as an altar.

Barrows and cist burials

A barrow is a burial mound and these were constructed and/or used at different times between the Neolithic and the Iron Age. Many had a ditch and external bank around them and these are known as ringbarrows. In some cases the area enclosed is flat or only slightly raised. The burials within them can be either cremated or unburnt and are found in cists (box-like constructions formed of stone flags) or pits beneath or within the mound.



Small ringbarrows, such as this example at Cooga, Co. Tipperary, could be difficult to recognise in long grass and virtually impossible to spot from the ground if they have been ploughed over.

Cist burials can also be found individually or in small cemeteries without any mound or enclosing element and often contain pottery vessels dating from the Early Bronze Age.



A cist discovered at Liscooley, Co. Donegal, with the capstone removed to one side. The remains of a crouched burial can be seen within the cist.

Is éard atá i gceist le barra ná carn adhlactha agus thógtaí a leithéid agus/nó bhaintí úsáid astu ag amanta difriúla idir an Aois Neoilíotach agus an Aois Iarainn. Bhíodh diog agus banc cré eachtrach thart ar chuid mhór acu. Barraí fáinneacha a thugtar orthu. I gcásanna áirithe tá an talamh atá timpeallaithe cothrom nó ardaithe beagáinín. D'fhéadfadh gur taisí créamtha nó neamhdhóite atá curtha iontu agus bíonn siad i gcistí (rudaí cosúil le boscaí déanta as leacacha cloiche) nó i bpoill thíos faoi nó taobh istigh den charn.

Bíonn adhlacthaí cisti le feiceáil ina n-aonar nó i reiligi beaga gan aon charn nó aon rud eile timpeall orthu agus go minic bíonn soithí potadóireachta iontu ón gCré-Umhaois Luath.

EARTHEN BANKS AND BROKEN WALLS

OUR LEGACY OF ANCIENT MONUMENTS