

### 3.6 Battle of the Boyne landmarks

The site of the Battle of the Boyne, which took place in 1690, lies within the area of the Boyne valley which we know as Brú na Bóinne today. Numerous landmarks are associated with the battle including Oldbridge, Caillémote's Grave, Donore church and Stalleen miller's house.



▲ This commemorative stone marks Colonel Caillémote's grave. It can be found just behind the gate lodge at the entrance to Oldbridge House.

### 3.7 Demesne landscapes

There are three well-documented eighteenth-century estates with their mansions, parklands, farms and fields within the protected area: the Netterville estate at Dowth, the Campbell-Caldwell estate at Newgrange and the Coddington estate at Oldbridge. Many of the structures on these estates are now listed as protected under the Meath County Development Plan (Appendix 2) (see 3.9 below).

### 3.8 The Boyne Navigation

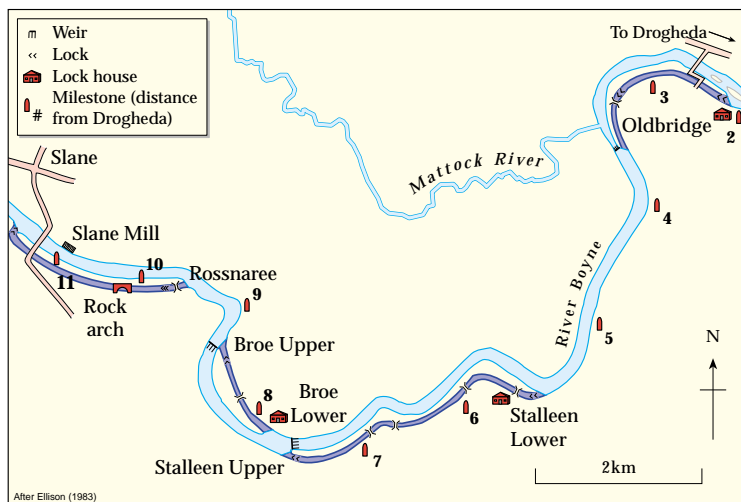
Part of the Boyne Navigation, the earliest navigation scheme in Ireland, lies within Brú na Bóinne. The Boyne was canalised between 1748 and 1790 in order to encourage trade with the Dublin market and to transport corn to the port at Drogheda from inland markets. Eight locks were built between Drogheda and Slane, six of which lie within Brú na Bóinne, i.e. Oldbridge, Stalleen (2), Roughgrange (2) and Newgrange (Fig. 9).



▲ Boyne Navigation canal features include this bridge over the lock at Oldbridge.

## 3.9 Architectural heritage

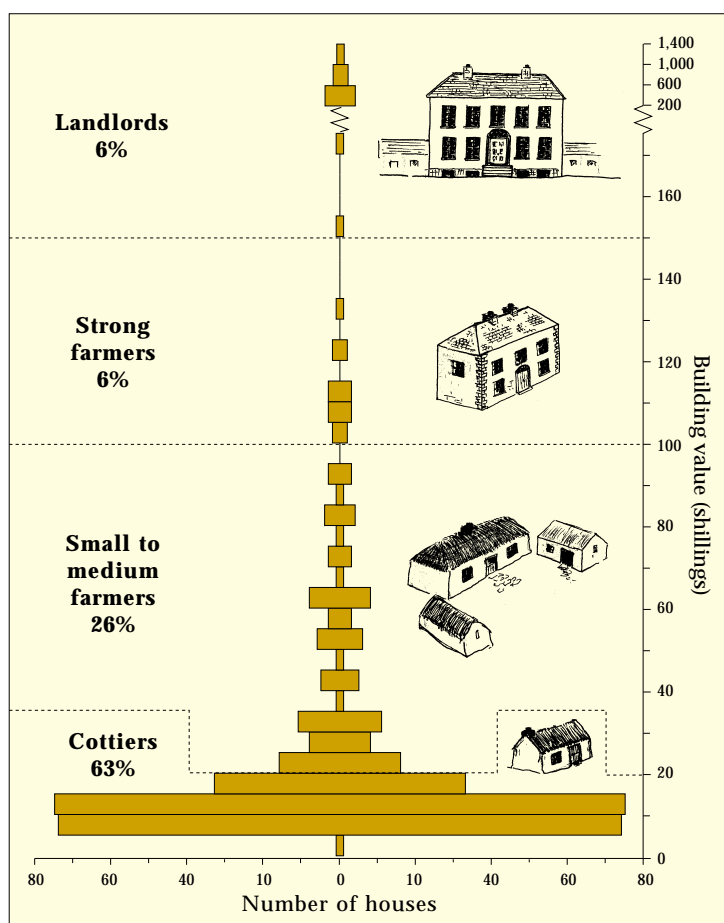
**3.9.1** An interim inventory of the architectural heritage of County Meath is being carried out by Dúchas the Heritage Service as part of the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH). The NIAH is a nationwide survey of the built environment identifying buildings of significance. The buildings recorded in the Meath Interim County Survey will be recommended by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government for inclusion in the local authority Record of Protected Structures (RPS). As well as being available for sale, it is intended that this survey will be circulated to local libraries, schools and other public institutions. When published, it will be an important tool for creating an awareness of the architectural heritage of Brú na Bóinne and the county in general.



▲ *The Boyne Navigation.*

**3.9.2** The tiered social structure of rural society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Brú na Bóinne is reflected in the dwellings that survive from that period. These range from elegant mansions and farmers' houses to the mud-walled houses of the cottiers and farm labourers (Fig. 10).

**3.9.3** The largest mansions in the area are Oldbridge House (in State ownership as part of the Battle of the Boyne site) on the former Coddington estate and Dowth Hall on the former Netterville estate. Oldbridge House is a three-bay, three-storey block



▲ *Nineteenth-century housing in Brú na Bóinne.*



with low single-storey wings, built in the first half of the eighteenth century and redesigned c. 1832. The layout of the estate's farmyards and labourers' houses is of a high standard. Dowth Hall is a plain rectangular block with one show front and a very impressive interior.



▲ The grounds of Oldbridge House enclose the fields which played the major role in the Battle of the Boyne, 1690.

**3.9.4** Nineteenth-century strong farmers of Brú na Bóinne lived in solid, modest-sized houses designed in a Classical style. These are detached properties on private planted grounds. Knowth House, which is in State ownership, epitomises such a house.

**3.9.5** Nineteenth-century small farmers/cottiers in eastern Ireland typically lived in vernacular buildings, i.e. houses with a rectangular plan, central hearth and lobby entrance and thatched roof. There are a small number of such houses in Brú na Bóinne.

► Knowth House epitomises the strong farmer's house of the nineteenth century. It is now in state ownership.



### 3.9.6 Labourers' cottages, built as

part of a major public rehousing scheme from 1893 to 1919, form a distinctive house style within Brú na Bóinne. The scheme aimed to provide suitable dwellings and half-acre (0.22ha) allotments for landless labourers who were inadequately housed. It was a joint

venture between the State and local authorities, and the

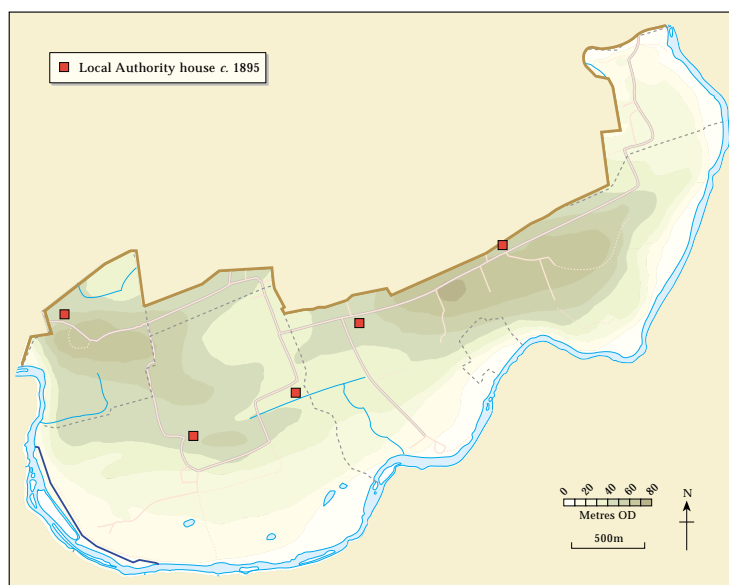
earliest concerted public housing initiative in Britain and Ireland. A local architect, P. J. Dodd of Drogheda, designed the Boyne cottages. For the most part they are detached dwellings, one and a half storeys high, with unplastered stone walls, dressed quoins and slated roofs. They have a brick finish on the window and door surrounds, which in modern times is customarily painted in bright colours. These houses are remarkably well preserved (Fig. 11).



▲ In the nineteenth century this was a small farmer's cottage on a holding leased from the Crawford estate at Stallen. It is one of the very few vernacular buildings in the Bend of the Boyne that is still lived in (Tom Byrne).

3.9.7 A large number of churches were built throughout Ireland in the first half of the nineteenth century after Catholic Emancipation. The earliest and strongest Catholic communities emerged in areas with Catholic landlords, such as

east Meath. Three Catholic chapels within Brú na Bóinne, Cruicerath (Donore), Monknewtown and Rossnaree, date from this period. Fortunately, all three survive in their original form with unchanged interiors. These churches reflect the strength of faith in post-Emancipation Ireland and are very important for their historical, aesthetic and architectural value. Appropriately, two of these churches, Monknewtown and Rossnaree, are listed in the County Meath Development Plan (Appendix 2)



▲ Local authority housing in Brú na Bóinne.



▲ The terrace of labourers' cottages at Sheephouse is a nineteenth-century improvement on the Oldbridge estate.



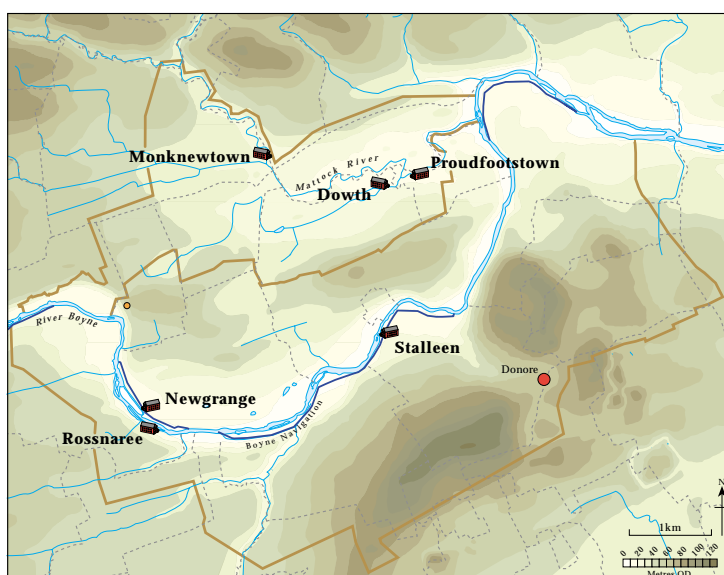
▲ Local Authority labourers' cottages form a distinct housing style within the Bend of the Boyne (Tom Byrne).

**3.9.8** Netterville Charitable Almhouse, built, as a plaque records, in 1877 following prudent management of funds by the charity trustees, is an imposing seven-bay, two-storey block built of red brick with limestone trim. It was designed by George Ashlin and is listed as a Protected Structure in the Meath County Development Plan (see Appendix 2). The institution was closed in the 1960s.

**3.9.9** A number of nineteenth-century National Schools in the Brú na Bóinne area, including two in Donore village, were established by the Education Act of 1831. The roofless remnants of the schoolhouse at Dowth are associated with the Fenian and patriot John Boyle O' Reilly and evoked in his poem 'The Old School Clock'.

**3.9.10** There are a number of mills in the area of both industrial and vernacular style, including those at Rossnaree, Stalleen and Monknewtown. The latter is still an impressive industrial complex. The principal block is a slate-roofed, seven-bay, four-storey structure of limestone with cut stone door and window surrounds. Flanking this are a red-brick chimney and a four-storey storehouse (Fig. 12).

**3.9.11** During the Emergency (1940s) the main planned line of resistance against a threatened overland invasion by British forces based in Northern Ireland was formed by the rivers Boyne and Blackwater. A line of fortifications, comprising blockhouses and machine-gun pits concentrated along the riverbanks, was built. Thirteen of these structures lie within Brú na Bóinne (Fig. 13).



▲ Mills in Brú na Bóinne.



## 3.10 Natural resources.

### 3.10.1 Wildlife habitats.

Brú na Bóinne contains a number of important nature conservation sites, including the Boyne River Islands and the River Boyne Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). The Boyne River Islands is a proposed candidate SAC (Site Code 001862) owing to the presence of residual alluvial forests (*Alnion glutinoso-incanae*) and a 'Priority Habitat' listed in Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive (1992). The River Boyne is a proposed candidate SAC (Site Code 002299) owing to the presence of salmon, a species listed in Annex II of the Habitats Directive (1992).

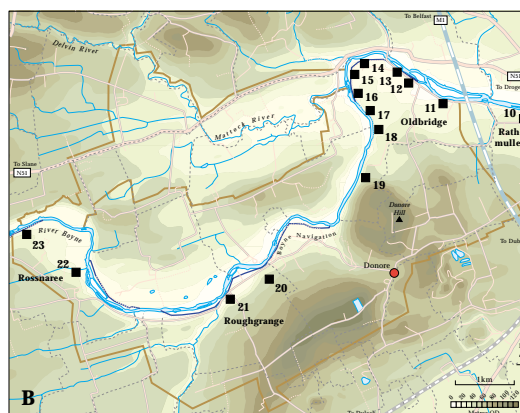


▲ The ruins of the mill at Monknewtown. This picturesque pile on the banks of the Mattock is silent testimony to a time when the Irish rural landscape was greatly industrialised.

There are also a number of proposed Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) in the Brú na Bóinne area. These are Crewbane Marsh, Rossnaree Riverbank and Dowth Wetlands (Fig 14).



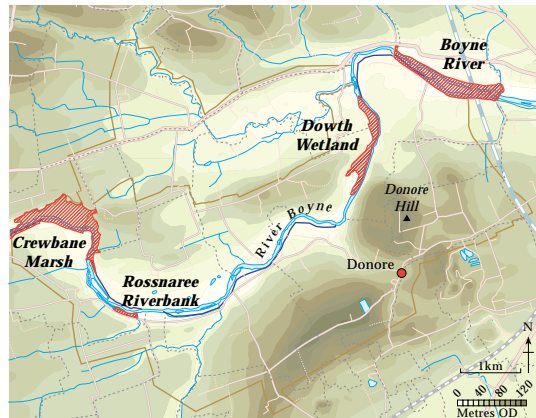
▲ Pillbox along the towpath at Oldbridge.



▲ Emergency fortifications in Brú na Bóinne.

### 3.10.2 Birds.

The Irish Wetland Birds Survey (IWEBS) has been recording data for this stretch of the river since 1994. The Survey lists 21 different wetland bird species for the River Boyne at Newgrange (Appendix 3). Several species occur in the general area, including cormorant, grey heron, mallard, snipe, moorhen, black-headed gull, great black-backed gull and herring gull (Delany 1996; 1997). Other notable bird species found in the area include whooper swan, common buzzard and kingfisher.



▲ Proposed Natural Heritage Areas in Brú na Bóinne.

### 3.10.3 Mammals.

Otter have been identified within the Boyne River Islands site together with several mammals including badger, stoat, mountain hare, brown long-eared bat and the common pipistrelle (National Parks and Wildlife 2000). There is a large herd of deer at Dowth Demesne.

### 3.10.4 Amphibians.

The common frog and the smooth newt have been identified in the Oldbridge area (National Parks and Wildlife 2000).

### 3.10.4 Fish.

Atlantic salmon, brown trout, perch, pike and roach are all present in the River Boyne (National Parks and Wildlife 2000).



▲ Crewbane Marsh, below Knowth passage tomb, is a nationally important habitat for flora fauna containing some of the last remaining examples of flood plain marsh on the banks of the Boyne, and the best deciduous woodlands in the valley.



▲ A badger (*Meles meles*) found refuge in Newgrange when it was closed to the public during the 2001 outbreak of foot and mouth



▲ A large herd of red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) grazes on Dowth Demesne. They are descended from the herd established in the eighteenth-century deerpark.



## 3.11 Land use: past and present

### 3.11.1 *Willow.*

The Boyne River Islands willow has been used to make baskets, mats and currachs in the Oldbridge area. The Boyne currach is a skin-covered boat designed specifically for salmon-fishing.

### 3.11.2 *Angling.*

According to tradition the mythological figure Fionn McCumhaill gained his great wisdom after tasting a magic salmon from the Boyne. Wild salmon-fishing is a seasonal activity running from February to September. However, the traditional quality of the salmon fishery has been badly affected by arterial drainage and water pollution. The Eastern Regional Fisheries Board is the statutory body responsible for the management, conservation, protection, development and improvement of this inland fishery. The Boyne has been designated a Salmonoid River under the EU Freshwater Directive (see 4.11.3).

### 3.11.3 *Farming in the past.*

Arthur Young, the famous traveller, visited the Slane area in 1776 and reported that the farms were relatively large by eighteenth-century standards. The main seed crops were barley and oats and the yields were quite high; poultry, pigs and cows were plentiful. Cottagers grew potatoes in six-foot-wide lazy-beds. The Famine did not affect the lower Boyne Valley as severely as other parts of the country: statistics for that period show a net population decline of 14% compared to 20% for the whole of east Leinster.



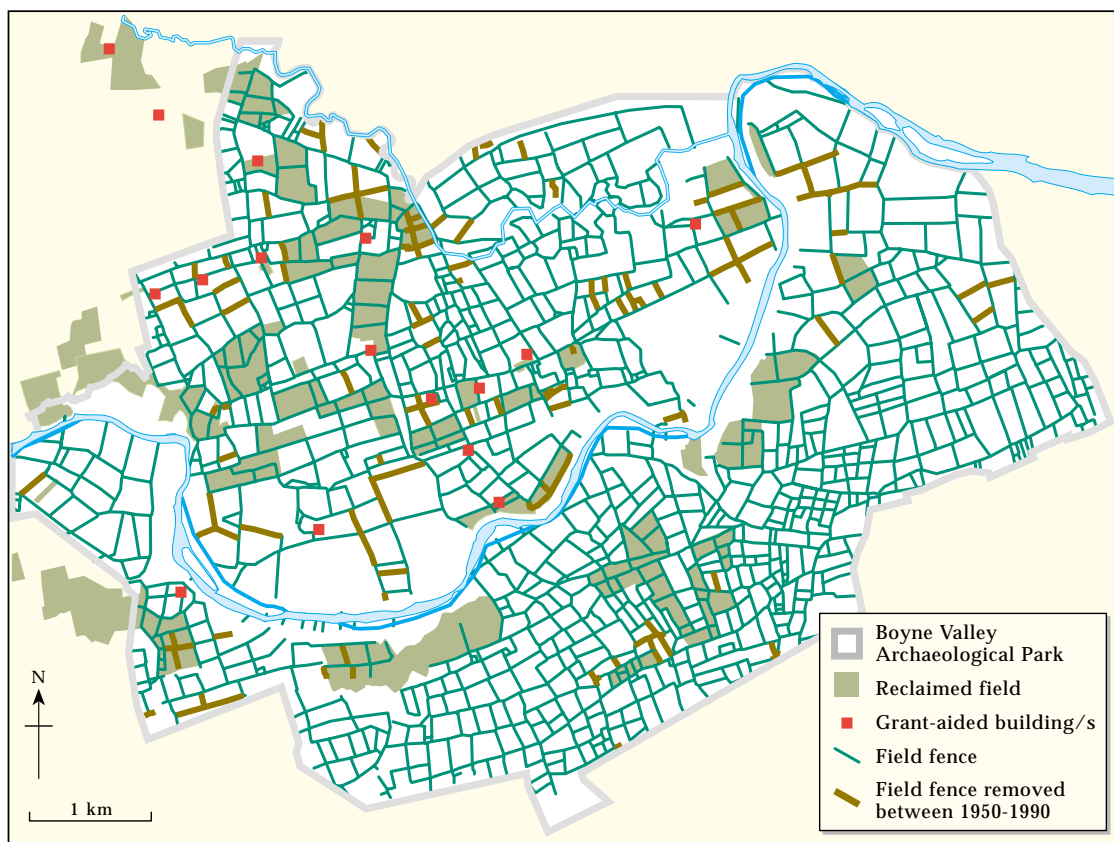
▲ Land under tillage and pasture at Newgrange



#### 3.11.4 *Twenty First-century farming.*

Brú na Bóinne lies in a premier farming area with some of the best-drained and most fertile soils in Ireland, providing a strong economic base for the local rural community. Currently, 97% of the land is farmed, with 58% of the holdings below 20ha and 10% over 60ha. Many of the smaller holdings are derived from Land Commission subdivisions given to migrant families from Mayo in the late 1930s and 1940s. These smaller holdings have proved inadequate in today's farming market and many are leased and used for dry stock. The larger farms practise intensive dairying, dry stock and tillage.

3.11.5 The grant aid available in the last forty years has dictated the type of farm development taking place in the area. There has been considerable restructuring of farms, with investment in both land improvement and buildings. Between 1950 and 1990 an estimated 12.5% of the land within Brú na Bóinne was reclaimed with grant aid (Stout 1993) (Fig.15).



▲ Farm development in Brú na Bóinne.