

The Field Monument Advisor Scheme

The Heritage Council, in partnership with Sligo, Clare, Meath, Louth, Donegal, Wicklow and Galway County Councils, has initiated the Field Monument Advisor Scheme which is aimed at preserving archaeological monuments located on privately owned farmland.

The objective of each advisor programme is to support landowners in the care of archaeological monuments in their ownership. An advisor in each County helps farmers by providing information on the archaeological field monuments of their land and by contributing to farmer training programmes. Information provided by Field Monument Advisors includes how to care for archaeological sites in farmland as well as details on the type and known date of a site.

So, if you farm or own land in Counties Sligo, Clare, Meath, Louth, Donegal, Wicklow or Galway and require information on archaeological monuments contact your Field Monument Advisor via your County Council Heritage Officer or check www.heritagecouncil.ie for contact details.

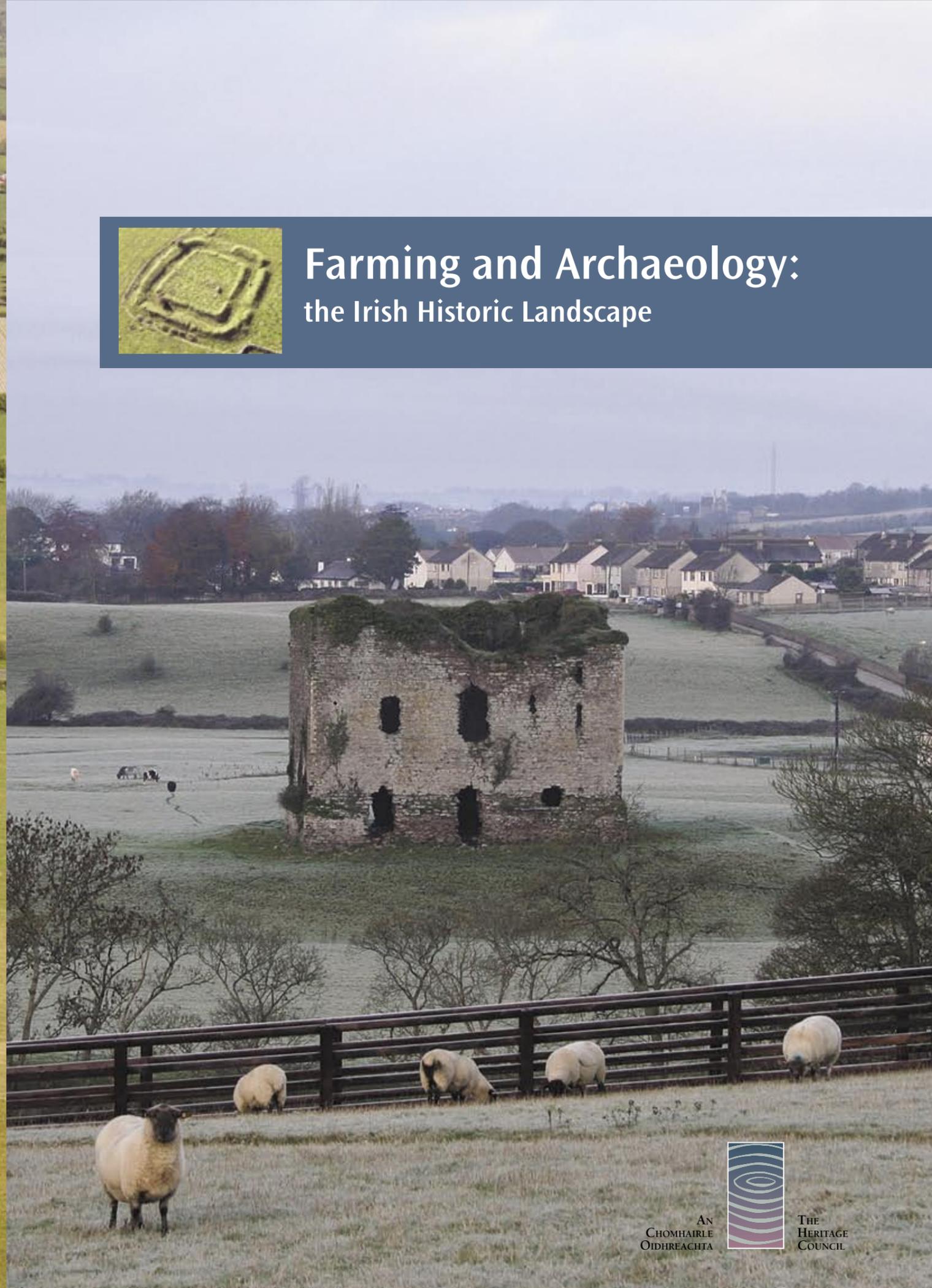


THE HERITAGE COUNCIL

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Farming and Archaeology: the Irish Historic Landscape



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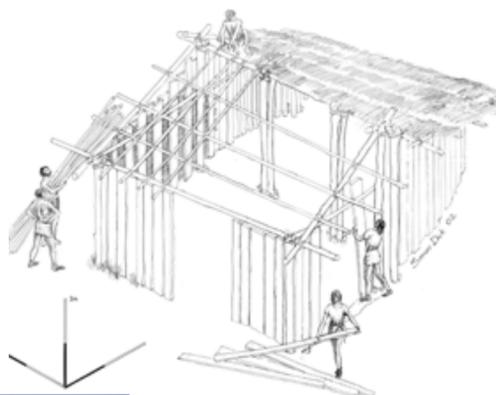
Farming and Archaeology: the Irish Historic Landscape

Farming in Ireland

Farming in Ireland began during the Neolithic period of the Stone Age circa 6000 years ago. After woodland clearance wheat and barley were initially cultivated and cattle and sheep were allowed to graze. Evidence for field systems during this period is known from Céide Fields, in north Co Mayo, where cattle farming was carried out. Changes in climate sealed these fields beneath a layer of peat which preserved them intact and allowed the fields, tombs and houses of this landscape to be revealed today. Throughout Ireland houses from the Neolithic are known and have been excavated by archaeologists. In many cases the remains of cereal grains and animal bones have been found in such houses and have shown what the diet and living conditions of the time were like. Megalithic tombs, burial mounds and graves from this period are also prominent features of the rural landscape. During the Bronze Age (2000 BC – 500 BC) farming became more intensive and monuments such as cairns, barrows and fulachta fiadh (cooking places) were constructed. Standing stones and stone alignments were also erected during this period. Wild pigs were native to Ireland but were gradually domesticated. Cattle came to be of great importance during the Iron Age (500 BC to 500 AD) and Early Medieval periods (500 AD to 1100 AD) and cattle became the accepted unit of currency until the widespread introduction of coinage in the medieval period (1100 AD to 1500 AD). The wealth of a family was frequently judged by the number of cattle owned during the Early Medieval period or by the size of the ringfort or rath (enclosed farmstead) occupied. In the west of Ireland circular stone enclosures known as cashels were constructed. Cereals were also grown during this time as shown by the discovery of corn-drying kilns, horizontal mill sites and quern stones for grinding grain. It is thought that dairy farming originated during the Early Medieval period.



A megalithic structure at Achonry, Co Sligo. Considerable time and effort would have been invested by early farmers in such structures (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government).



The oldest known house in Co Dublin: drawing of the Neolithic house from Kishoge during its construction (by Simon Dick of M Gowen & Co Ltd)

Where can I find out about archaeological sites?

Details of all known archaeological sites are published in the Record of Monuments and Places. This shows upstanding monuments and levelled sites, cropmark sites and other areas of archaeological potential for each county marked on to maps. The Record of Monuments and Places is available for examination in County Libraries, County Museums, Teagasc Offices and Farm Development Service Offices.

For a large number of counties an Archaeological Inventory or Survey has been published. These books provide short descriptions of known archaeological sites and contain photographs and maps, as well as an introduction to the different types of archaeological monuments. Copies of county archaeological inventories are available in County Libraries. To date Archaeological Inventories are available for the following counties: Carlow, Cavan, Cork (4 volumes), Galway (2 out of 3 volumes), Laois, Leitrim, Louth, Meath, Monaghan, Offaly, Sligo (1 out of 2 volumes) Tipperary North, Waterford, Wexford and Wicklow. Volumes relating to other counties will be published in the near future. Parts of Co Kerry and all of Donegal were also published by locally based archaeological survey teams.

Much of the information from the Record of Monuments and Places and the Archaeological Inventories should feature on the Farm Plan drawn up for the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPS). The information contained in these sources is important to assist the careful management and operation of farming in such a way that monuments are not harmed.

Following the Anglo-Norman invasion in 1170 AD ringforts largely went out of use, although in many cases the new settlers constructed earthwork castles as well as enclosed rectangular settlements known as moated sites. During the medieval period peas, beans, celery and onions were grown, rabbits and doves were farmed and elaborate fish traps or weirs were built on rivers and streams. Tillage reached a new intensity in southern and eastern Ireland with the introduction of crop rotation, while the religious orders, such as the Cistercians, were noted as conscientious land managers and farmers.

During the post-medieval period (1500 AD – 1800 AD) the Irish farming landscape began to take on its present appearance in so far as many of the current field systems or boundaries were laid out. Many of these field boundaries incorporated the remains of earlier monuments or sometimes earlier field systems. As part of this re-organisation demesnes and landed estates were developed in association with large houses. Many of these estates included special planting features such as deer parks and tree-rings, or architectural features such as ice houses, walled gardens, and follies. With the decline of the 'big house' during the twentieth century many of these estates entered agricultural usage, although many of these demesne features survive in the present day landscape.



This towerhouse at Neigham, Co Kilkenny, is a fine example of a late medieval fortified residence. Towerhouses such as this were built throughout Ireland from circa 1300-1600 and were the residences of strong farmers and minor lords. This Kilkenny example is partly enclosed by a ditch, showing that sometimes the area immediately around the monument is equally important (The Heritage Council).



This square moated site at Killaraght, Co Sligo, dates from the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries AD. Sites such as these are thought to be associated with Anglo-Norman settlement and were farmsteads enclosed with a bank and ditch, probably with a timber palisade and gatehouse (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government).



This hillfort at Coolgrange, Co Kilkenny, survives as the faint outline of a circular ditch surrounding the crest of the hill. Archaeological excavation revealed activity at this site during the Bronze Age and Iron Age. Hill top sites such as these are vulnerable to tree planting and the regeneration of gorse or scrub (The Heritage Council).



These cropmarks in a field of ripening cereal at Jerpoint West, Co Kilkenny, indicate the presence of below ground archaeology. The remains of two circular enclosures and what look like field boundaries can be seen in the crop as unripe growth (The Heritage Council).

How do I prevent damage to archaeological sites?

All archaeological sites are vulnerable to damage whether they are constructed of earth or stone or are set in pasture or arable land. Farmers should be aware of the locations of monuments on their land and should ensure that any contractors employed know the position and size of sites and are aware not to damage them. Grassland provides the best conditions for the safeguarding of monuments however:

- Correct stock levels should be maintained to prevent poaching or erosion on ancient monuments
- Feeding troughs, land drainage works, and access tracks for livestock and machinery should be sited away from the monument
- Historic buildings such as castles and churches should not be used to shelter livestock
- Control the growth of gorse, scrub or woody plants on the monument. These should be cut at the base and the stump treated to prevent re-growth. Trees should not be uprooted as this may cause ground disturbance
- Avoid removing field boundaries or historic farm buildings and gate posts

Cultivation adjacent to archaeological sites requires care and attention to lessen the chance of damage. Several steps can be taken to safeguard such archaeological sites:

- Upstanding monuments should be left as islands of uncultivated ground within cultivated fields and should be protected by an unploughed margin of at least 7 metres around the edge of the monument. Control the growth of gorse, scrub or woody plants on the monument
- Minimise plough depths where there are known levelled sites or cropmark sites in cultivated land
- Fields with levelled monuments or cropmark sites should be excluded from tillage and put into pasture if possible
- If trees are being planted keep well away from ancient monuments

A ringfort set within farmland in Ballintotty, Co Tipperary (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government).



The medieval church at Moy More, Co Clare. It is important to keep livestock outside of historic buildings and not to use such buildings as shelter or feeding points (Michael Lynch, Clare County Council).

How can I recognise the presence of archaeological sites?

Many sites can be identified by examining the Record of Monuments and Places or a county archaeological inventory. However, many archaeological sites have yet to be discovered. Such discoveries are frequently made by farmers observing subtle differences in the landscape such as earthworks or scatters of finds (pottery, flint, human and animal bone) brought to the surface by ploughing, patches of stoney ground or blackened stones suggesting burning, or differences in crop growth caused by buried archaeological features. Differences in cereal growth are known as cropmarks and are caused by crops growing better over archaeological features like ditches or pits because the soil is wetter or deeper. Other cropmarks are caused by the stunted growth or early ripening of the crop growing over the reduced soil depth caused by stone walls or stone surfaces.

Where can I get further information?

Further information on archaeological monuments on the farm is available from the National Monuments Service of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Dun Scéine, Harcourt Lane, Dublin 2, phone 01-8882000 (www.enviro.ie). If you discover a previously unknown monument on your land report it to the National Monuments Service.

If you find an archaeological object on your land report it to the National Museum of Ireland, Kildare St, Dublin 2, phone 01 6777444. Further information and advice is also available from the County Council Field Monument Advisor in Counties Sligo, Clare, Meath, Louth, Donegal, Wicklow and Galway (see over).



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Farming today: Why is Archaeology important?

Ireland has been occupied by humans for the past 10,000 years and this has left us with a rich legacy of archaeological monuments. These sites are important as they are often the only record left by past generations of their achievements and daily lives, much of which was lived in a time without written records. Archaeology is about studying the human past through the monuments and physical traces in our landscape as well as through the artefacts left behind by past generations.

Ireland has over 120,000 known archaeological monuments and many of these are found in the countryside. Farmers and land managers play a vital role in protecting and preserving our heritage. Only a small number of these monuments are in State care or ownership. The remainder are protected under the National Monuments Acts but the care and preservation of these features depends upon the interest and co-operation of each landowner.

Archaeological sites are one important element of the historic landscape which has been handed down to us from past generations. Other elements of this include homesteads and settlements, field boundaries and field patterns. The whole of the Irish landscape can be seen as historic, as human activity in the form of farming, transport, quarrying and settlement has shaped its development for thousands of years.

Modern farmers are the direct successors to the generations who worked and lived on the land in previous times. Archaeological monuments such as moated sites and ringforts are the former homesteads of previous farming communities. Farming has been a vital force in developing our heritage and modern non-intrusive farming practices continue to preserve and shape our historic landscapes. This valuable legacy is something we should try to understand, cherish and protect for ourselves and for future generations.



A portal tomb at Haroldstown, Co Carlow. This would have been erected by a Neolithic farming community as a funerary monument (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government).



This large mound at Knockadoo, Co Sligo, which is possibly a barrow or burial mound dating from the Bronze Age, is preserved in pasture. A circular ditch is at the base of the mound (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government).



A black spread on the surface of a field at Cushenstown, Co Wexford, is all that remains from a fulacht fiadh or ancient cooking site. Such spreads of heat shattered stone and charcoal are indicators of levelled fulachta fiadh. Such spreads are highly visible during ploughing and topsoil removal (The Heritage Council).



A ring barrow at Cooga, Co Tipperary. A ring barrow is a burial mound, frequently with a circular ditch, constructed between the Neolithic and the Iron Age. Human remains are often found in the centre of these monuments (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government).



This ringfort or rath at Ballyara (Knox), Co Sligo, dates from the Early Medieval period. Sites such as these were the homesteads of prosperous farmers. Houses, corn drying kilns, souterrains (underground shelters), byres and barns are known to have been within such enclosures (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government).



Even though overgrown it is possible to recognise this rectangular site at Courtnaboghila, Co Kilkenny, as a moated site dating from the medieval period (The Heritage Council).