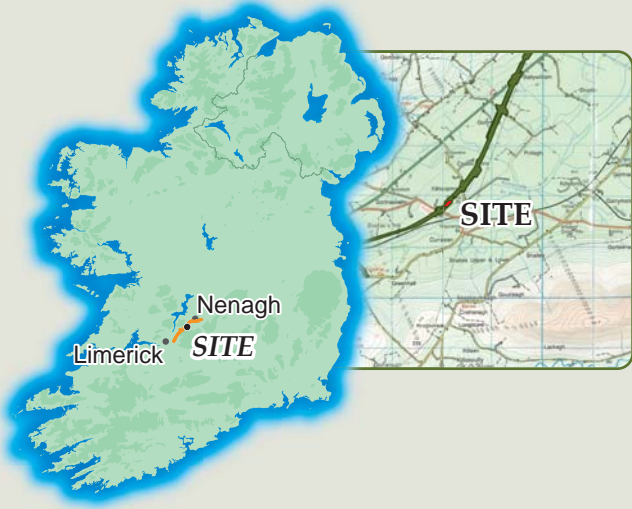


Shifting Shapes: Excavations of an enclosure site in Co. Tipperary

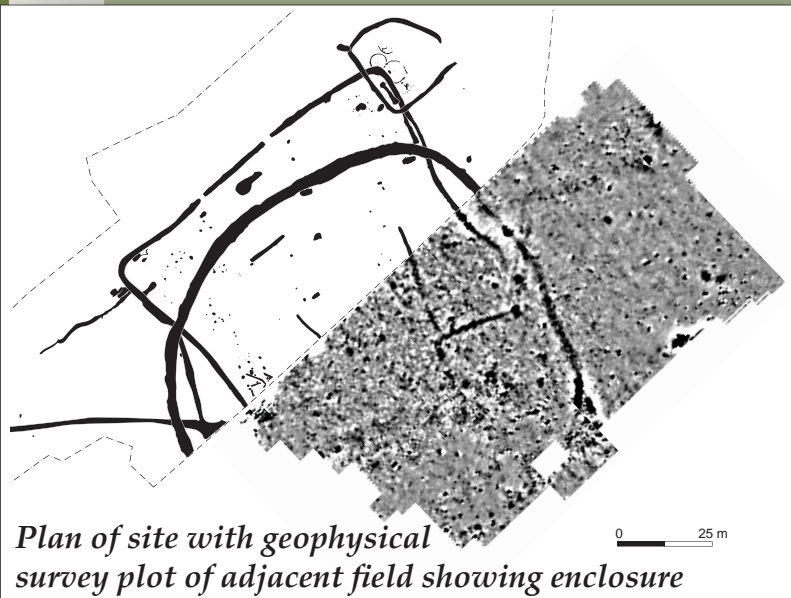


Kilnacrana Site 1 was situated on arable land overlooking the Kilmastulla river, in the shadow of the Silvermine Mountains of North Tipperary. Excavations in advance of construction of the N7 Nenagh to Limerick HQDC revealed a series of three enclosures, each one a different shape, overlying a series of earlier cremation pits.

A Rectangular Residence?

The earliest settlement on the site consisted of a sub-rectangular enclosure. Two dates from the upper fill of the ditch produced 2 sigma dates of 542-644 AD and 574-657 AD, in the Early Medieval Period. The ditch went through at least three phases, but due to its shallow nature it was clearly not defensive. Within this area a possible sunken house and rectangular structure were uncovered, suggesting that this sub-rectangular boundary may have demarcated a settlement.

Shape Shifting I: A Circular Settlement



Plan of site with geophysical survey plot of adjacent field showing enclosure

The rectangular ditch was truncated by a later circular enclosure. This was built on much the same alignment as the sub-rectangular one, but with deeper and more impressive ditches. There were no major indications of habitation within the excavated area, though at least 60% of the site lay outside the road take.



Shape Shifting II: A Plectrum Pad

Across the north-eastern corner of the sub-rectangular enclosure another, sub-triangular or 'plectrum' shaped enclosure was sited. This was of a significantly smaller size (364m²) than either the sub-rectangular or circular areas, and although it post-dates the sub-rectangular enclosure its relationship with the circular enclosure has not yet been ascertained. There were three hut circles and a corn drying kiln identified in the interior.



Sunken building

The finds from the site reinforced its interpretation as a settlement, and included a copper alloy buckle, a pin, a portion of lignite bracelet, spindle whorl and a fragment of a rotary quern.



Preliminary Conclusions

Although post-excavation work is still at a preliminary stage, it is clear that there is an interesting shift in the settlement types at Kilnacrana 1. All the enclosures have been provisionally dated to the Early Medieval Period; the fact that settlement and industry were the main focus of activity on the site is illustrated by the habitation areas, corn drying kilns, and metal working pits. The principal question is, what led to the alteration of the settlement from a sub-rectangular to circular one, and what role does the 'plectrum' shaped enclosure play? Does it illustrate changing fortunes for one family group, or is it indicative of new arrivals? It is to be hoped that further work can shed some light on these intriguing questions.

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