Current research and future directions in medieval rural settlement in Ireland[1]

Aktueller Stand und zukünftige Richtung der Forschung zur mittelalterlichen ländlichen Siedlung in Irland

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Abstract
Die Erforschung der mittelalterlichen ländlichen Siedlung ist in Irland eine junge, aber dynamische Disziplin. Die Dynamik der interkulturellen Entwicklung zwischen den Kolonisten und den altansässigen Iren stellt ein Hauptthema der gegenwärtigen Forschung dar. Es gibt ein aktives Studium von Landschaften, bei dem Archäologen, Historiker, historische Geographen und Umwelthistoriker zunehmend zusammenarbeiten, indem sie einen festen Rahmen für interdisziplinäre Studien schaffen. Aus einem solchen methodologischen Paradigma heraus beginnen die Forscher, sich der „Gesamtwirtschaft" (total economy) anzunähern. Das wird im Laufe der Zeit zu komplexeren und letztendlich lohnenden Beobachtungen der menschlichen Dynamik quer durch Irlands mittelalterlichen ländlichen Bereich und seine sich entwickelnden Stadtlandschaften führen. Irlands reiche archäologische Hinterlassenschaft, kombiniert mit der Anwendung komplexer Datenanalysen bietet ein Modell für andere Gebiete, die nur über eine relativ bescheidene Anzahl zeitgenössischer Schriftquellen verfügen.

Schlüsselwörter
Archäologie – ländliche Besiedlung – Irland – Kulturidentität – Landwirtschaft – Anglonormannen

Keywords
Archaeology – rural settlement – Ireland – cultural identity – agriculture – Anglo-Norman

Background

It is a characteristic of different academic disciplines to make headway in common areas of research at different times, and this has certainly been true in the study of the medieval countryside in Ireland. At an early stage, historians led the field and focused on the records of the Anglo-Normans, whose conquest of Ireland began in 1169 when Strongbow, the earl of Pembroke, landed in the southeast of the country at Bannow Bay, Wexford. In 1171, the invasion got underway more fully with the arrival of King Henry II. The Anglo-Normans succeeded in subduing much of the east and south of the country, while the west remained predominantly in native Irish hands. In addition to various chronicles, their documents included manorial accounts and estate inventories

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which have engaged social and economic historians' interests. Such sources do not survive for Gaelic Ireland, whose historical study is founded principally on genealogical and literary enquiry. This inevitably led to a situation where the fullest attention given to understanding the development of the medieval countryside was focused on the records of the colonizer (for example, *Otway-Ruthven 1951*). The details revealed innovation in agrarian technique and the presence of large-scale arable husbandry which in Ireland was associated with a colonially-motivated group of barons, working on their own behalf and in the interests of their King (*Down 1987*). Similar "efficiencies" were observed among the substantial ecclesiastical holdings. More generally the patterns echoed the growth and economic vitality witnessed across much of the medieval world in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which in England is characterized by "high farming". Just as one detects reorganization and contraction in England in the wake of the fourteenth century challenges, in Ireland there is also ample indication for change and reorientation at this time. Historians did not ignore the study of Gaelic Ireland, but it has taken the hard work of certain individuals to make the case that the native Irish deserve to be studied in their own right (specifically *Nicholls 1972*; *Simms 1987*). In doing so, the enquiry has opened up a much wider field of interest and has established the study of cultural identity as one of the principal current themes of medieval research in Ireland.

From a settlement perspective, the challenge is presented by the absence of suitable estate records to reveal the nature and extent of native Irish settlement. Historical geographers were first to see what use could be derived from the study of landscape. By examining settlement form across regions, certain distribution patterns were observed that suggested the basis for further enquiry. In particular, their research highlighted the native enclosed settlement form known as the ringfort as a possible key for unlocking wider questions associated with the cultural visibility of the native Irish (*Barrett – Graham 1975*; *Barrett 1982*; *Graham 1988*). Ringforts are small areas measuring c. 30–40 m in diameter which are enclosed by an earthen bank and external ditch, or a series of concentric banks and ditches (*Fig. 1*). They are thought to represent the residences of freemen,

Fig. 1 A raised or platform ringfort at Tulsk, Co. Roscommon. Raised ringforts are distinguished from ordinary ringforts by having their interior raised or elevated so that it is presented as a platform. In several excavated instances, as is the case in Tulsk, it is clear that this elevation process occurs as a late stage in the use of the site, which may have originated as a simple enclosure. The site at Tulsk is located at what becomes a chiefry centre of the O'Conors in the high medieval period. Beneath the grassy mound, archaeologists have also discovered a late medieval masonry tower (*Brady 2009a*). Source: the Discovery Programme.

and the more complex and visually impressive sites are associated with noblemen and lords. Some 40,000 sites are thought to have existed across Ireland, and they represent one of the most numerous settlement forms to survive from any pre-modern archaeological period. However the suggestion that ringforts and related settlement forms were used by the Gaelic Irish in the high and late medieval periods was not universally accepted. It ignited a substantial debate principally among archaeologists (*Lynn 1975*; *Stout 2000*; *Kerr 2007*). Early medievalists were vehemently opposed to suggestions that these settlements continued in use after *c*. 1000 AD. Yet it seemed entirely logical to some later medieval scholars that this could be so (*McNeill 1975*). Throughout the 1980s and into the '90s, there remained little support among archaeologists for the suggestions made by Barrett and Graham, and it was not until the large-scale excavations of the last decade that it was possible to test the various perspectives by acquiring new data.

Settlement archaeologists instead spent the 1980s recognizing the validity of studying the later middle ages in their own right, and the publication in 1987 of *The Archaeology of Medieval Ireland* represented the first substantial attempt to assemble all of the evidence into a single coherent narrative (*Barry 1987*). Barry's work put a structure on what had been approached as individual items previously. In effect it marked the birth of Medieval Archaeology in Ireland. There was a lot of material that everyone agreed with in terms of dating. There was a series of monuments and structures surviving above ground and all in need of detailed study. Archaeologists have come to expect castles, monasteries, villages, and an orderly managed medieval landscape as a demonstrable indication of medieval settlement. Barry's work followed the tendency among historians to focus on the Anglo-Norman material. While comparison with English exemplars is readily possible, closer inspection reveals slight distinctions. Right across the material cultural spectrum one can observe discrete differences that make the Anglo-Norman and related sites and features somewhat unique in a wider English context. Economic historians today see indications of regionalism and areas of particular enterprise in the sources they study across Britain (*Campbell 1997*). It will be an area for archaeologists to pursue as well, to assess whether slight changes referenced in the material culture speak to economic changes over space and time.

Cultural visibilities in high medieval Ireland

At present such nuances will provoke an interest more exclusively in cultural distinctions, and most specifically with identifying the material expression of native Irish lordship. The focus has been such that similar attention is not being given to understanding the cultural nuances of the colonizer, whose Cambro-Norman origins are of interest in their own right. It is very probable that this will become mainstream research again in due course. The archaeological awareness of cultural identity in the later medieval period was prompted by work in the '90s led by Ireland's national institution for archaeological research, the Discovery Programme (*O'Conor 1998*). Conscious of being able to invest significant long-term resources to tackle questions that needed fresh enquiry, the Programme highlighted the subject of Gaelic identity as that which was most deserving of investigation. Led in part by Nicholls' innovative thinking in the early '70s, and guided by the ideas advanced by Barrett and Graham in the '80s, O'Conor set his sights on establishing beyond doubt the basis for understanding settlement form and development in Gaelic territories. It is the case that when one separates the medieval monument assemblage chronologically, the twelfth-thirteenth centuries of the high medieval period is dominated by Anglo-Norman constructions. The issue is not problematic in the eastern and southern parts of the island, as this is where the Anglo-Norman settlements existed. The apparent sudden appearance of this new spectrum of site types continues to inspire those who are interested in the processes of conquest and colonization. However, when one considers the large tracts of lands that lay beyond the King's hand and continued to be held securely by Gaelic interests, there are very few sites that can be identified at this time. It is not to say that these lordships were unoccupied, or that their inhabitants had abandoned their residences in the face of colonial ambitions. The Gaelic lands were not exclusively on

marcher lands or other borders. The challenge is more basic. Archaeologists simply did not know what to look for, and the problem resonated around the issue of the ringfort. O'Conor revisited the discussion and pointed out where archaeologists could reassess their opinions on a site-by-site basis. Since he wrote, series of large-scale infrastructural projects have taken place, generating significant quantities of new information.

A small but consistent body of new data is emerging to give credence to the concept of the "medieval ringfort". One excavation has occurred where the high medieval construction is very close to that of a ringfort site. Indeed the excavator only steps back from calling it a ringfort because the thirteenth-fourteenth century foundation date lies "outside the generally accepted date range for ringforts" (*Molloy 2010*, 155). The site is located on lands held by the Gaelic lords the Mac Gilla Mo Cholmóc, a little south of Dublin in north Co. Wicklow at Charlesland. The Mac Gilla Mo Cholmóc were one of few large Gaelic landowners to retain much of their estate in the Dublin region following the arrival of the Anglo-Normans. It is consequently entirely fitting that tenancies on their holdings should continue much as before. The excavation project at Charlesland revealed a series of phases of occupation and activity over a very large development site, and prehistoric as well as early and later medieval levels were exposed where the excavation of the medieval enclosure occurred. The enclosure replaced a small penannular-shaped site, measuring 26 m in diameter, which was dated by material from its lower ditch fills to between the fifth and seventh centuries. The medieval enclosure was larger; it measured 42 m in diameter, had a 1.7–2.15 m wide external ditch, and featured an entrance in the southwest quadrant. The entrance may have been furnished with a gate-tower feature, while occupation material was concentrated within the northwest quadrant of the site's interior.

In many respects the large enclosure at Charlesland is a most suitable candidate for consideration as a medieval ringfort. Charlesland reflects conscious construction to create a new agricultural homestead based on a traditional model in the thirteenth-fourteenth century. A similar case may be presenting itself in the interpretation of an enclosure excavated at Woodlands West, Co. Kildare (*Janes 2010*). The site consisted of an original ditch feature enclosing a circular area measuring 51 m in diameter. The ditch measured 4.5 m wide and 1.2 m deep on average. A smaller outer ditch also survived that was not quite centred on the primary ditch and was somewhat narrower and shallower, at 80 cm and 40 cm respectively. The absence of a bank is explained by the fact that the land area has been cultivated intensively in the modern period. The range of features observed included two burials, an array of post holes, pits and a grain-drying kiln. These are very much in character with those expected from a ringfort, but the dateable small finds, which include a long cross penny and pottery sherds, indicated a medieval association with the site rather than an early medieval one. Prior to detailed post-excavation analysis, the excavator interpreted the chronological indications to infer that the site "does not represent the remains of a ringfort, but possibly an Anglo-Norman ringwork". As earth-built fortified defensive structures usually circular in shape, ringworks share many similarities with existing ringfort enclosures, and identification can be supported by contemporary records which refer to the construction of a castle or defensive work in that location. Where such records do not survive, as in the present instance, the excavator's argument can be reversed; if the site looks and feels like a ringfort, it surely cannot be denied this recognition simply because the dates suggest a somewhat later usage. In the present instance, the post-excavation analysis is eagerly awaited.

The detail in relation to medieval strata on ringforts is much clearer today, and the findings support some of the earlier arguments made by Barrett and Graham. Most recently, a call has been made to review the use of the term ringfort, as it is seen to hide a range of distinctions that add further weight to the sense of continued use of such earth and stone enclosure sites into the later period (*Fitzpatrick 2009*). In tandem with the discussions relating to the later usage of ringfort sites, there is general acceptance that other components of the early medieval settlement assemblage continued in use as well, including the high status crannog, or manmade islands, and fortified island settlements which are widely distributed across the northern half of the island (*O'Sullivan 2001*; *Brady – O'Conor 2005*; *O'Conor et al. 2010*).

Spatial organization and economic activity in Gaelic lordships

The current research issues are less concerned with clarifying the variety of settlements which existed on the Gaelic lands during the high medieval period, than with exploring how Gaelic territories were organized and the extent to which it is possible to discern the economic activities pursued. In many respects this task is much easier to achieve on Anglo-Norman manors in the east of the country, where inventories allow the boundaries to be charted and annual accounts reveal the investments and returns. The wealth of such information has allowed medievalists whose interests focus on the Anglo-Norman lands to begin to consider larger-scale analysis. As observed in the '80s, sites in the area around Dublin preserve a wealth of archaeological and documentary evidence that lends itself to integrated approaches (*Edwards et al. 1983*; *Simms 1983*; *Hall et al. 1985*). The Discovery Programme has taken this study to a further level by examining the Dublin region as the natural economic hinterland to the city which lies at its core (*Brady 2003*; *Murphy – Potterton 2010*). It represents the first baseline statement that provides a factual account which seeks ultimately to explore questions associated with provisioning. These observations will be empowered in the future when more projects absorb environmental investigations as part of standard excavation. So much of the information that exists is based on the rich deposits from urban excavations within Dublin, and far fewer projects have been conducted across the city's natural hinterland, leading to an imbalanced contribution from micro- and macro-faunal analyses.

The absence of detailed manorial records in Gaelic territories forces a different approach, where the importance of archaeological fieldwork cannot be over-emphasised. The genealogies which do survive often retain information that permits some sense of the territorial divisions, and this can present a framework from which to work and apply the results of fieldwork. The Discovery Programme has elected to study the Gaelic lordship of the O'Conors in north Roscommon (*Brady 2003*; *Discovery Programme Reports 2005*). The lordship is retained today largely within the boundaries of the modern barony of Roscommon. It represents the heartlands of one of the chief Gaelic lords during the later medieval period. The ambitious 50-year rule of Turlough O'Conor's kingdom of Connacht in the twelfth century (1106–1156) has been seen as representing a conscious effort to become the dominant military and political force in Ireland (*Barry 2007*). In imposing his authority over neighbouring dominions in Meath, Leinster and Munster; by having bridges built in Athlone across the great Irish river, the Shannon; and by diverting the River Suck to protect his interests, O'Conor demonstrates the strength of his authority and rule as a significant twelfth-century lord in Europe. However, during the course of the thirteenth century, O'Conor influence contracted in the face of advancing Anglo-Norman interests (*Finan 2010*). They retained control of their ancestral homelands, which formed a discrete topographical area, known as *Magh Aí*. It was bounded on the east by the Shannon, and on the west by enveloping boglands that extend over from neighbouring Mayo (*Fig. 2*). The ancient royal site of *Cruachan* lies in the centre of the O'Conor territory, itself within an area of raised land which is still renowned for providing excellent grazing potential. Cruachan compares with Tara in the east, Emain Macha in the north, and Cashel in the south, and represents the cultural heart of the ancient kingdom of the west of Ireland, Connacht. The English King's interests stopped short of this O'Conor heartland, but are represented in Ballintober to the southwest, where Richard de Burgh, earl of Ulster, built a very large castle in the first decade of the fourteenth century. It is the only significant Anglo-Norman fortification to be constructed within the lordship. Within a hundred years the castle had fallen to the O'Conors, its lands returned to Irish hands, and it has become the centre of the O'Conor Don line ever since.

The landscape of the lordship preserves extensive relict field boundaries, and the potential for some of these boundaries to be medieval in date was suggested previously (*Herity 1988*). The Programme's work has taken their study further. A much larger area has been mapped in detail, amounting to an area some 140 km^2 in size, and limited investigations have been conducted (*McNeary – Shanahan 2008*). The boundaries themselves are a palimpsest of generations of land

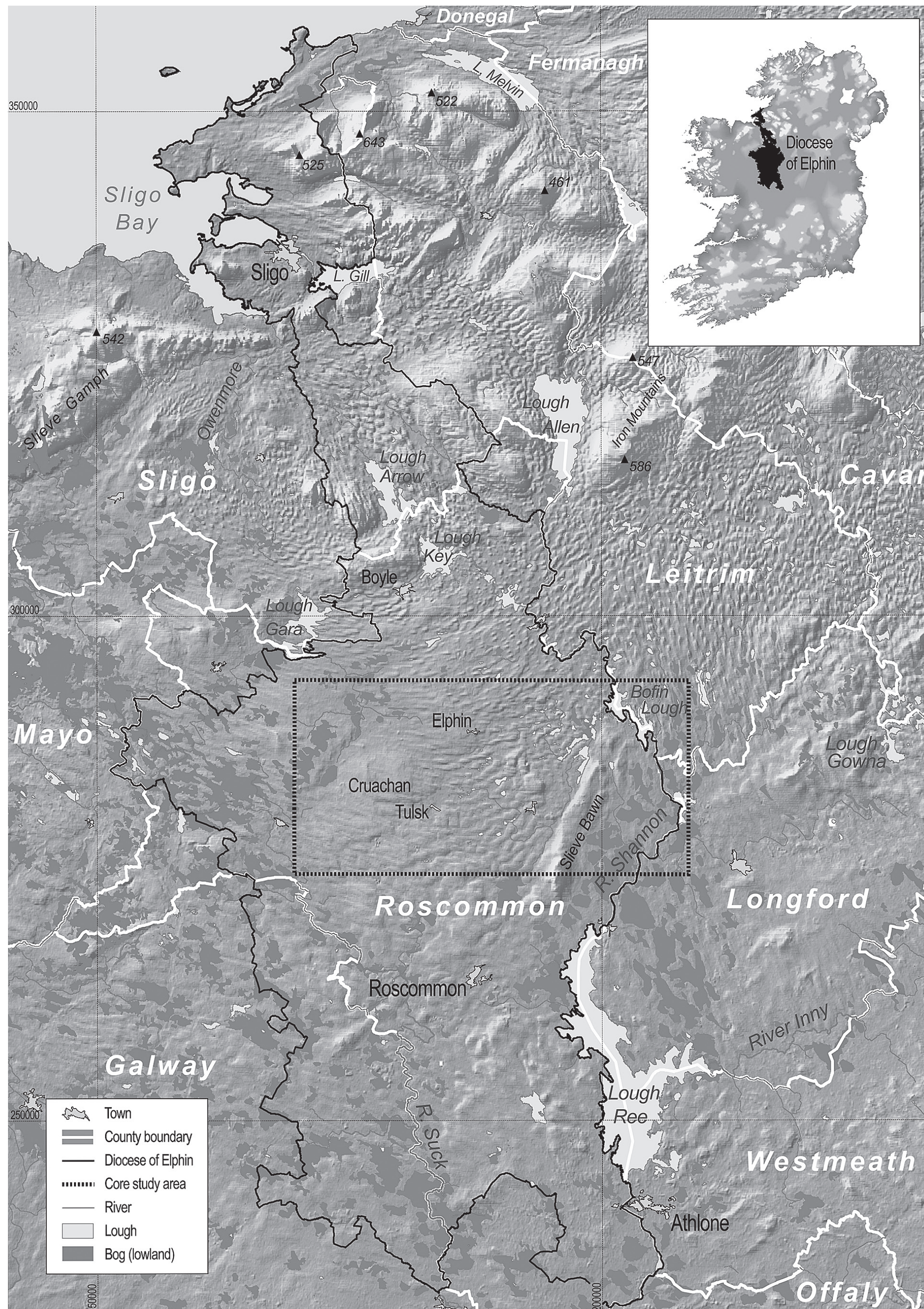

Fig. 2 Map showing a part of Ireland's northwest, focused on Co. Roscommon and highlighting the location the O'Conor lordship study area. Source: the Discovery Programme.

division, so it is important to try to separate the different phases of usage. This in turn allows one to see that the boundaries can reveal changing land use, as well as the progressive enclosure of the land. It can be charted as a gradual process whose origins lie in the early medieval period and still earlier, with small garden plots extending around known settlement enclosures in an otherwise largely open landscape. The fieldwork evidence can also be studied in conjunction with what can be discerned from the genealogies and related documentary sources, to identify land ownership patterns. There are obvious shortcomings with this as the records are not complete,

but it is nevertheless possible to chart overall patterns by combining both sets of information with a clear appreciation of topographical variables. The net result is beginning to reveal the extent of occupation and the nature of that occupation within the lordship and how it changed over time. It is the first occasion that a Gaelic lordship has been studied in such detail to reveal its internal dynamic.

It is hoped too that the Discovery Programme's research will be able to contribute to the wider understanding of economic activity within the O'Conor lordship. The role of cattle features significantly in contemporary documents relating to Gaelic estates, both in terms of tribute and with reference to moveable assets and their protection or theft by cattle-raiding (*Nicholls 1972*; *Finan 2010*). Without doubt the role of livestock in the Gaelic world was significant, but the dominance of the representation of cattle has led to a neglect of the role of arable husbandry, and has perhaps also misrepresented the nature of economic activity. There is in some sense a romantic aspect of a cattle economy or, to put it more critically, the portrayal of Irish lords as wandering pastoralists feeds a colonial perspective that is ultimately harshly critical of Gaelic life.[2] It is the case that the new research is discovering far greater evidence for arable husbandry. In addition to carbonized remains of grains, excavation at a chiefry centre of the O'Conors in Tulsk, for instance, has recovered a plough pebble, which is the clearest indicator of enterprising arable husbandry in thirteenth-century Ireland (*Brady 2009b*). Plough pebbles – used as part of an anti-wear device on wooden ploughs – are only associated in Ireland with highly developed ploughs of this date and have previously only been observed in the east and south of the country, associated with Cistercian and Anglo-Norman lands. In its singular way, the discovery of a plough pebble at a central Gaelic site in the west of the country is a clear indictment of the O'Conor's interest in and ability to invest in the latest agricultural technologies. The fact that the Cistercians had an interest in Tulsk as well may suggest the conduit for such innovation. Far from being old-style heroic kings of an ancient past pursuing an "uplands economy", it allows us to see something of the rational economic mind of the high medieval Gaelic lord. It is not a perspective that we have had too much opportunity to see previously, and it is a very exciting development that will surely be explored in more detail in the near future.

The use of space in the late medieval period

There remain many questions to pursue in relation to the high medieval period. As researchers explore issues associated with cultural identity, others continue to examine and understand more closely the morphology of sites, and the nature and scale of constructions. It is still the case that consideration of the wider non-noble settlement is in its infancy. The possibility to make significant progress in this area lies in the study of the deserted medieval village sites associated with the colonized east, but most researchers are still celebrating the fact that such sites can be discerned. Archaeologists have yet to examine the sites in detail to look for social distinctions that might be suggested in the size and disposition of particular plot sizes, or by the distribution of ceramics across a complex. This remains a subject for the future.

In contrast to the imbalanced picture of settlement for the high medieval period, by the fifteenth century the gradual metamorphosis associated with long-term proximity and interaction had occurred, and both Gael and Gall – native and foreigner – were building similar structures and shared many aspects of daily life. The questions of cultural invisibility do not apply at this time. It is one of inter-visibility. There is an abundance of structural remains in terms of small well-built masonry castles known as tower houses. It is thought that some 3000 were built across Ireland between c. 1400 and 1650. They represented the residences of local lords and their immediate households, and are often associated with outer enclosed and defensible precincts known as

[2] This view continued in English scholarship and motivated Michael Duignan to write his formative essay on early Irish agriculture to show that such views were erroneous and derived largely from the writings of non-Irish chroniclers and commentators who had participated in various colonizing episodes in Ireland (*Duignan 1944*).

bawns. Comparison with continental exemplars is clear. These sites have a long history of study, and a lot of interest has considered the sites as buildings in their own right, filled with structural detail that warrants its own study (*Sweetman 1995*; *MacNeill 1997*). More recently, scholarship has begun to think of other functional attributes. On the one hand, attention has looked at the immediate surroundings of the towers, both the space between the tower and its bawn, and the larger lands which surround the towers (*Barry 2006*). For this writer, those sites which are located on headlands that overlook the sea hold a particular interest because they relate to a new sub-discipline that is concerned with maritime research. The wider observations can of course be applied equally to more terrestrial sites. The coastal examples are no longer regarded as isolated towers, divorced from the bulk of the landholdings associated with a given lord. There is an awareness of the associated maritime interests. A fine tower house castle, for example, was built to the south of Dublin city, at Bullock Harbour, where the Cistercian house of St. Mary's Abbey in Dublin claimed rights over a fishery (*Fig. 3*). Bullock and its more immediate neighbour Dalkey had become an important port area for the city in the late medieval period, and it was clearly intended to protect the fishery. The tower house remains a confident reminder to all of who held authority over this important resource. Similar examples are seen around the Irish coast; from those that protect the many maritime interests around Strangford Lough in the northeast, to examples dotted along the Connemara coast in the west, where Gaelic lords sought to control exploitation of the abundant Atlantic fisheries and the coastal trade in wine and other continental imports (*McErlean 2002*, 108–115; *Naessens 2007*).

Fig. 3 The tower house castle at Bullock Harbour, Co. Dublin, built by the Cistercians of St. Marys, Dublin, to protect their fishery in Bullock. The original foreshore is reclaimed and now serves as the modern road which runs below the tower house, but the medieval harbour would have extended outwards to include the present quay area. Source: the Discovery Programme.

Another line of enquiry has considered the design of these structures. Tower houses were built over a long period of time and vary in size and complexity across the country. Their details provide useful opportunities to study the social use of space over time. Tower houses have proved to be sensitive to social transformations; where analysis of their internal layout can reveal the progressive appearance and development of private space (*Sherlock 2010*). This is being used to study changes in social behaviour and the growing sophistication of lordship in medieval Ireland, where the interests of the immediate biological family are gradually seen to replace those of the extended kin group. The more traditional heroic-based communal existence of the *comitatus* with its focus on the hall gives way to the individual, and with it the developing sense of social hierarchy. In this, Ireland clearly shares much in common with the development of medieval society more generally.

Looking Forward

In what has been a very brief consideration of current research on medieval rural settlement in Ireland, this essay has touched on a selection of topics to indicate a sense of the vibrant nature of current work. There is still tremendous opportunity for new discovery. In certain areas there remain illogical gaps in the study, which could be filled easily and shed much new insight by doing so. One such gap lies in ceramics. Great work has been achieved on the imported wares (*McCutcheon 2006*). One can clearly see connections with foreign ports that inform questions of trade, and it is possible too to consider the limited extent to which imported wares penetrated inland. The study of local wares is another matter however. Across large tracts of the country, medieval Ireland is considered to be aceramic. The Gaelic Irish did not make pottery to any great extent. There was a limited tradition of hand-made domestic pottery, known as Souterrain Ware and Everted Rim Ware. It is found especially in the north midlands and south Ulster, but it has been quite some time since it was studied in detail (*Ryan 1973*). The suggested regionality associated with this crude pottery is deserving of its own enquiry, and it could help to distinguish internal differences that surely existed across Gaelic society.

In a related approach, there is merit in the further study of local wares made by the Anglo-Norman migrants who came over to Ireland to find new opportunities and settle on the manors acquired by their lords. This pottery forms broad groups which tend to be specific to the towns or principal settlements with which it is associated. One tradition, Leinster Cooking Ware, is spread more diversely, and takes its name from the province in which it was first observed in large numbers (*Ó Floinn 1988*). Today, Leinster Cooking Wares are known from a much wider area of Anglo-Norman settlement and have been recovered from excavations in considerable numbers (*McCutcheon – Meenan 2010*). It is a stock-type of manorial settlement and deserves fresh consideration that is embedded in landscape analytical approaches.

The possibility of employing archaeology to discern social stratification on manorial centres has been raised above. There has yet to be a large-scale excavation of a deserted medieval village in Ireland to compare with, for instance, Wharram Percy, Caldicot or indeed the more recent work at Whittlewood or Shapwick in England (for example, *Beresford 2009*; *Jones – Page 2006*; *Gerrard – Aston 2007*). It could permit comparison also with continental sites, such as the street villages of Germany. Limited excavation has occurred at Piperstown, Co. Louth, and recent infrastructural schemes have on occasion encountered portions of village areas, as occurred at Phoenixtown, Co. Meath (*Barry 2000*; *Lyne 2008*). There are sites that present themselves for study in the future. At Castlemore, Co. Carlow, the manor of Forth has been revealed through geophysical survey to be preserved beneath the modern fields as a series of clearly defined streets and properties, with house platforms and out-buildings (*Fig. 4*). The manor came to be a part of the Bigod Earls of Norfolk estate in Ireland, and a series of annual accounts extending across the 1280s reveals the pattern of investment and income generated from what was a profitable working asset focused on arable

Fig. 4 Plan showing results of geophyscial survey conducted at Castlemore, Co. Carlow, the site of the medieval manor of Forth. An earthen motte castle with its degraded bailey and a small graveyard represent the manor above ground today, but geophysical survey has revealed the linear pattern of a main street and a lesser street, with property boundaries extending at right angles from the roads. House platforms representing residences and out-houses populate individual plots, which are also clearly sub-divided by small cross-boundaries. A series of earlier features underlie the medieval stratum, and reveal the presence of various prehistoric period burial barrows and related features. Source: the Discovery Programme, based on geophysical survey data acquired by Paul Gibson, National University of Ireland Maynooth.

husbandry.[3] A considerable proportion of the manorial centre is still under constant cultivation today, and this has permitted a programme of field-walking to be carried out, which has revealed extensive ceramic remains. It is possible to trace the development of the centre through the expansions of the thirteenth century, and also its contraction in the subsequent century before it was finally abandoned in the sixteenth century. Castlemore is but one of many examples that survive in Ireland, but researchers have yet to approach the matter of the medieval village in detail.

To do so will also permit consideration of Gaelic identity within the Anglo-Norman lands. It is accepted that the Irish lived amongst the new settlers, and the documents refer to them as *betaghs*. Placename evidence helps to observe the presence of the indigenous population, with examples such as "Betaghstown" being the most obvious. Yet we remain quite ignorant of their material expression. We are used to considering the *betagh* as an indentured class which was subservient on Anglo-Norman manors. However, a new study of settlement in the wider Dublin region reminds us that the *betagh* could also be quite a substantial peasant land-holder (*Murphy – Potterton 2010*, 184–189). Archaeologists could usefully go in search of the *betagh* more directly. It is possible that they are represented at the enclosure excavated at Charlesland, Co. Wicklow, mentioned above. It has also been suggested that a rather less well-defined settlement area at Attyflin, Co. Limerick,

[3] The manor is being studied by the writer in association with Margaret Murphy as part of the Discovery Programme's Medieval Rural Settlement Project, and some assessment of the documentary sources has been made previously (*Down 1987*).

was a betagh site (*Eogan 2009*). The work that is being achieved in north Roscommon and elsewhere which shows the later medieval usage of ringforts and related sites in Gaelic areas will no doubt in due course progress to the next stage, which is to apply this logic to the landscapes of the Anglo-Norman manors. Ringforts occur on Anglo-Norman lands but we have tended to assume that they are exclusively early medieval in date. Perhaps this is not entirely the case.

We conclude this essay with a set of open-ended ideas and speculations. The large amount of data derived from excavations across Ireland in recent years, coupled with the methodical researches by medievalists, is presenting new opportunities. Scholars across the disciplines are coming together to examine particular sites and project areas. The data demonstrates that our previous paradigms are based on simplistic assumptions about where people lived and how they engaged with their environment. The current information suggests that the reality was far more complex. In recognizing the continuation of an indigenous culture alongside the presence of a new and external identity, we cannot ignore the fact that continuities would have coexisted alongside innovation. The application of these thoughts to landscape study helps us to see this vivid and dynamic countryside. The landscape is at once populated and busy, and this observation will in time allow researchers in Ireland to gauge the degree to which it is possible to discern the "total economy" in its myriad forms across the island.

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