A Survey of the Earthworks in the District of Old Pallasgrean, Co. Limerick

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(continued)

In the first part of this survey\(^1\) we entered into a brief consideration of a type of earthwork common in our area and indeed in east Limerick generally—that is the circular platform structure, the surface of which is only slightly raised above the surrounding field level. Such sites usually have a continuous ditch and some of them show slight evidences that a bank existed on the edge of the platform. We now give a further group of comparable sites in the hope that by doing so we may contribute something more to the study of the Irish ring-fort in general.

As a result of two excavations which have taken place this year, the one directed by Professor Mårten Stenberger at Raheennamaddra near Knocklong, and the other by Professor M. J. O’Kelly at Knockae, near Limerick, we are already in possession of much new information in regard to this type of site. The full reports on these two excavations will be very welcome when they come to hand.

We are indebted to Professor O’Kelly for permission to give here a preliminary outline of his findings. His excavation at Knockae was done with the kind permission of Mr Patrick Power, the land-owner, who gave every facility during the investigation. The platform ring-fort here is one of the monuments in a complex of structures which covers an area of some ten acres and since the complex has been identified as the probable headquarters of the early historic people known as the Uí Fidhginnti, it is hoped that further excavation there will reveal much of interest about a site already known from a mention of it in the Tripartite Life of St. Patrick.

It was clear before excavation that the ring-fort had been largely destroyed at some time in the past; over half of it had been completely ploughed out and much of the remainder had been damaged from the same cause. It seemed possible however, that excavation of a strip lying along the base of a field wall which traversed the fort, might yield worth-while information. The results were even better than had been expected, for a considerable amount of structural detail was recovered.

Two phases of activity were clearly distinguishable, both belonging to the Early Christian Period. The first phase was an undefended habitation site over which had been built the platform ring-fort of phase two. The earlier habitation does not concern us here, but the later structure is of special interest because of the light it throws on the platform ring-fort problem in general and there is no doubt that the picture will become much clearer still when Professor Stenberger’s results at Raheennamaddra are published.

\(^1\) *N.M.A.J.*, VIII (1969), 70f.
The Knockae platform had been constructed from the material dug from a broad deep ditch of unusual sectional profile. This material had been thrown up to form a bank on the inner edge of the ditch. When the low broad base of this bank had been laid down as a sort of foundation, two concentric wooden palisades of large contiguous wooden posts were fixed on it, the annular space between them having been filled with the remainder of the material from the ditch. Thus the fort wall consisted of an earthen core faced on both sides with vertical timbers, the thickness of the whole being 2.5m (8’ approx). Because of the denuded condition of the site, evidence as to height is lacking, but from experiments at reconstruction made on the spot, it is unlikely that the height was less than 1.5m (5’ approx). Thus, what had appeared before excavation to be an almost un undefended site proved on examination to have been strongly fortified indeed.

Within the strong rampart, the foundations of a number of individual house plans were recovered and from the evidence of repairs to and rebuildings of these houses, it is clear that occupation of them was of some duration. It is interesting to note that several of the houses were built in the wattle and daub technique.

Even these brief details which we have given here enable us to see the east Limerick platform sites in a new light and this once again stresses the need for a concerted attack on the ring-fort problem as a whole. A major part of this problem will be the surveying of the sites and the recognition of regional groupings marked by structural differences. It is hoped therefore that the sites which we have recorded in these notes will fall into place in a general survey whenever this can be undertaken.

The sites dealt with in this part of the survey are all in the barony of Coonagh and will be found on two of the 6" scale O.S. sheets—Limerick nos. 24 and 33, 33a. The numeration of the sites has been continued from part one of the survey so that the first site here is numbered 40. As before, the co-ordinates given are measured from the nearest margins of the map.

6" Scale Sheet no. 24

40. Ballyvoneen. N.18.3; W.37.5cms. A platform 130 feet in diameter. It has a shallow ditch 33 feet wide. Double banks 15 and 12 feet wide encircle the ditch. The platform slopes gently upward from the edge to an elevated centre which may be the site of a house or other structure. Running E-W a deep trench cuts off a third of this earthwork. The portion to the north of the trench seems undisturbed.

41. Boheroe. S.19.5; W.6.9cms. A platform 126 feet in diameter; has a well preserved almost continuous bank on its edge. The ditch outside the platform is 11 feet wide, but is missing for a short distance on the west side. The platform which is 4 feet higher than field level, is crossed by a farm track. Locally known as "Caherconreefy."

42. Brackloon. S.19.9; E.13.1cms. Platform 78 feet in diameter. Modern fence cuts off eastern sector which is not as well preserved as the western part. Platform is 5 feet over field level.
43. Dromkeen South. N.18.5; W.2.5cms. Low platform with traces of a bank on its edge; it is slightly depressed in the centre. It is 90 feet in diameter and is 2 feet over field level. Named "Gortavally" on the O.S. map but this name is not now used locally.

44. Garryduff. E.0.5; S.7.3cms. Platform 111 feet in diameter; has traces of a bank on its edge and is 3 feet over field level on west side, and 6 feet on east side. A 15 foot wide shallow ditch with outer bank on the east side. This feature is missing on other sides.

45. Garryduff. S.14.0; E.1.4cms. Platform 213 feet in diameter and 4 feet over field level on east side, rising to 18 feet on the west side. There is a 33 foot wide ditch outside platform on south-west, west and north-west sides. There are traces of a wide bank outside ditch on same sides. On the south-east quadrant of the platform there is a group of three large and two smaller stones. The large stones lean against each other in a semi-upright position.

46. Kilmacogue. S.8.8; E.0.7cms. Platform 56 feet in diameter; 6 feet over field level on north-east side, falling to 2 feet on south-west. Traces of bank on portions of platform edge. Faint trace of ditch outside platform on north side.

47. Maedra. E.23.4; S.8.4cms. Platform 80 feet in diameter; has well preserved 12 foot wide continuous bank on its edge. Outside is a ditch 15 foot wide with a 6 foot wide outer bank. Platform is 6 feet over field level. Ditch and outer bank missing on north-east and north-west sides. Limestone quarry comes up to edge of platform on north-west side.

6' scale sheet no. 33/33a

48. Ballylahiff. S.16.5; E.19.3cms. Platform 90 feet in diameter; has traces of a bank on its edge. It is 5 feet over field level and has a continuous shallow ditch 5 feet wide. Ditch has a low 9 foot wide bank encircling it. A wide shallow ditch runs southward from the monument to the field boundary.

49. Gortakilleen. S.18.4; E.25.0cms. Smooth-surfaced grassy mound 80 feet in diameter and 18 feet high. Faint traces of wide shallow ditch with wide outer bank on south and east sides. Map name of "Rathcallaun" not known locally.

50. Knockderk. N.1.7; W.34.0cms. Not marked on map. Platform 72 feet in diameter; has a raised edge and a depressed centre. On west side, which is steep, it is 9 feet over field level. There is a wide shallow ditch outside the platform except on east side where it is not now visible.

51. Knockderk. N.2.0; W.34.2cms. Traces of a platform structure very much damaged by a field fence. Portion north-east of fence entirely missing.

52. Knockderk. N.1.5; W.34.0cms. Not marked on map. Earthen mound 48 feet by 39 feet; 4 feet over field level. Mound is flat on top.
Sectional profiles of the sites
53. Knockroe. N.3.5; W.20.4cms. Platform 30 feet in diameter; has 5 foot wide bank on its edge. A ditch 5 foot wide outside bank, and outside this ditch another 5 foot bank. Both banks and ditch have a 6 foot gap on the east side where there is a well-marked entrance running on to platform. The map name "Rathfooroge" is known locally.

54. Knockroe. N.3.8; W.20.2cms. Interior 36 feet in diameter. A five foot wide ditch is encircled by an outer bank 9 feet wide. On east side there is a gap which may denote entrance. Interior of this earthwork is lower than field outside.

55. Knockroe. N.3.0; W.20.8cms. Interior 60 feet in diameter; a shallow ditch encircles it with a 12 foot wide outer bank.

56. Shanaclogh West. S.21.9; E.20.4cms. One half of platform missing. Diameter of remaining part is 51 feet; 5 feet over field level. Has an 18 foot wide continuous ditch.