

**Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork
School of Geography, Archaeology and
Palaeoecology, QUB**



CAF Data Structure Report: No. 093

**Investigations at Knockavally Mound (DOW 045:010),
Killough, Co. Down**

AE/12/37

27th February 2015

On behalf of





Knockavally, County Down

Excavations carried out on behalf of
The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA)

by

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CAF DSR 093

SMR: DOW 045:010

NGR: J53153614

Excavation Licence No.: **AE/12/37**

Dates of fieldwork: 26th March – 3rd April 2012

Report date: 27th February 2015

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1 Summary

Knockavally mound (DOW 045:010) is a circular mound of earth and stone (approx. 15m x 19m in diameter; 1.5-2m in height) located on the summit of a ridge half a mile west of the village of Killough, Co. Down. O'Lavery (1878) recorded the site in the late nineteenth-century which he described as 'the old cemetery of Knockavally' with 'a few stones marked with crosses'. Only one cross-carved stone was observed in accounts of the site from the 1950s, '60s and '70s and the stone was subsequently lodged in Down County Museum. In March 2012 a small evaluative excavation of the mound was undertaken (two small trenches: 15m² in total) to try and recover some dating evidence and/or indication of function of the mound but no finds or features of archaeological significance were found. The date, history and function of the monument therefore remain unresolved although it is suggested here that the Knockavally cross-carved stone may have originated from the nearby medieval church site of St Bryde's (Kilbride). A topographical survey of the mound was also conducted alongside the excavation in 2012.

2 Introduction and historical background

2.1 Introduction

A small research excavation (Ex. Lic. No. AE/12/37) was undertaken from 26th March to 3rd April, 2012 to investigate Knockavally mound which is located just outside the village of Killough, Co. Down (Figures 1 and 2). The grass-covered mound is sub-circular in plan, approximately 15m by 19m, and 1.5m - 2m in height. The site has been briefly described in a number of accounts by O'Lavery (1878), Davidson (1958), in the Down survey (Anon 1966) and Hamlin in her 1976 thesis (Kerr 2008) but has otherwise not been investigated. The 2012 excavation was run as a training excavation for postgraduate archaeology students from Queen's University, Belfast (QUB). A topographical survey of a 40m by 40m area, centred on the mound, was also completed concurrently under the direction of Sapphire Mussen (CAF).

2.2 The site

Little if anything is known about Knockavally mound that might give an indication as to its date, history and/or function. A single cross-carved stone from the site (1ft 5" long, 6" wide and 5-5" thick – Kerr 2008, 305) is described and illustrated by both Davidson (1958, 90 and pl. XI) and Hamlin (Kerr 2008, 304-5 and pl. 68C). The photo of the stone accompanying Davidson's account (Plate 1) shows it standing and apparently *in situ* while it is described as 'lying loose on mound' by both Hamlin, in her thesis of 1976 (Plate 2), and in the Down survey (Anon 1966, 197). It was subsequently lodged in Down County Museum where it is now on display (ACC No. DB176 1986-423). Davidson, Hamlin and the Down survey note the presence of just one stone with a cross while O'Lavery (1878, 156) refers to the existence at the site of "a few stones ... marked with crosses".

O'Lavery (1878, 156) also makes the suggestion that the mound may be associated with burials as he refers to it as "the old cemetery of Knockavally". Reverend William Reeves (1847), writing slightly earlier than O'Lavery and of the same jurisdiction (Down, Connor and Dromore), does not refer to the site. O'Lavery (1878, 76) also identified Knockavally as the church site that gave its name to the village of Killough which McKay (2007, 87) supports as the origin of the placename.

The site is not marked on the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1835 (Figure 3) but appears on all the subsequent editions, including the final edition (1931) though it is not highlighted as an antiquity (Figure 4). The site was visited by an NIEA inspector in 1992 and was described as a circular mound measuring 16m by 16m with "some indication of a buried stone revetment in an arc around the perimeter from E-S-SW" (NI-SMR SM7 files: accessed online 22/03/12). The record of the site in the Down survey (Anon 1966, 197), also describes it as having stones "piled against the sloping sides. Some erosion on the NW reveals fairly large angular stones within the substance of the mound. There are traces of old digging into the top". There are no previous recorded archaeological investigations of the site.

3 The 2012 excavation

3.1 Introduction

The main aim of the 2012 excavation was to try and establish the function and date of the mound whilst also providing the QUB MSc students with an opportunity to manage a small-scale excavation, under supervision, from start to finish. One of the main objectives was to recover securely stratified datable material, either cultural objects or organic materials suitable for radiocarbon dating.

3.2 Methodology

The context records for the excavation were created using the standard context recording method and for each trench the trench number was incorporated into the register of numbers allocated to contexts (i.e. Context numbers 101, 102 for Trench 1; 201, 202 for Trench 2). Features were photographed both prior to, and following, excavation. No features of archaeological significance were encountered and as a result no plans were drawn. A single section drawing, across the two trenches, and a topographical plan were the only two measured drawings made on site and both are reproduced here (Figures 6 and 5 respectively). In addition to photography and illustration, the principal site records consist of context sheets and a field notebook. The register of context numbers is detailed in Appendix 1, the Harris Matrices in Appendix 2 and the finds are catalogued in Appendix 3. The trenches were backfilled, and the site reconsolidated, on completion of the excavation.

3.3 Archiving

Copies of this report have been deposited with the NIEA and the landowner. All site records and finds are temporarily archived within the School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, QUB.

3.4 Account of the 2012 excavation

Two trenches were opened (Figure 5 and Plates 3 and 4): Trench 1 on the top of the mound (6m x 2m) in the north-east quadrant and Trench 2 at the base of the mound (3m x 1m). Both were orientated east west and the southern sides of the two trenches were aligned which allowed a running section-drawing to be recorded on completion of the excavation. In the excavation licence application a single trench running from the edge of the mound towards the centre was originally proposed. However, given the steepness of the mound and potential difficulty in reconsolidating it, it was decided against opening a single trench across the slope and instead to open two separate trenches (Plate 3). The trenches were orientated east-west given the possibility of encountering (Christian) burials which, if present, are more likely to be on the same orientation and not perpendicular to the trench.

Trench 1

In Trench 1 the sod and topsoil (C.101: 6.5cm in depth) were removed to reveal a stony brown organic loam C.102 (6cm thick; Plate 5). A handful of corroded modern iron objects (including an iron chain-link chain, probable bits of farm machinery, bottle tops and other modern material– not retained) were present along with some occasional small marine shells (flat winkles, small periwinkles and topshells) including a perforated dog whelk (Plate 6), animal bone, a few plough-scratched stones (Plates 7 and 8) and sherds of post-medieval pottery (described below by C. McSparron).

Excavation of this deposit (C.102) exposed two shallow clay-rich lenses, one with charcoal (C.104: 11cm thick) and the second a loose sterile stony loam with lumps of clay (C.105; 7.5cm thick). These both overlay a deeply stratified sterile stony orange clay (C.103) which appeared to be redeposited subsoil. Other patches and lenses of clay were observed within this deposit and were initially assigned context numbers (C.106 and C.107) but as excavation continued it was clear that these represented natural variation within the primary deposit, C.103. The trench was stepped-in at arbitrary depths which allowed the excavation of a sondage within the trench to a depth of 1.9m (Plate 9). This was lower than the height of the ground surface external to the mound and excavation ceased at this depth (see Figure 6).

Trench 2

In Trench 2 (Plate 3) the same basic sequence of deposits was encountered – the sod (C.201; 10cm thick) overlay a loose stony loam with charcoal flecks (C.202; 26cm thick) which produced some

modern glass, corroded iron objects (discarded) and sherds of pottery (described below by Cormac McSparron). This overlay a sterile dark brown stony loam (C.203) which was stratified above the subsoil, a stony orange glacial till encountered at a depth of 0.36m. A dark-grey clay sub-circular lens (C.204) was observed within C.203 which was initially thought may have been a posthole. However, it was shallow and sterile and is more likely to represent a stone-hole. A slight slope at the base of the mound was observed which is reflected in the profiles of the excavated layers in Trench 2 but this was insignificant and not indicative of a meaningful scarp (Figure 6).

4 The finds

A small assemblage of finds (Appendix 3) was recorded from the excavation – the modern debris and corroded metalwork was not retained. The other finds comprised a single fragment each of shell (dogwhelk – *Nucella lapillus*), clay pipe (stem 64mm in length of 17th- or 18th-century date – R. Ó Baoill pers comm) and bottle glass (modern). The dogwhelk (C.101; length 24.4mm) had a smoothed worn surface and the main body-whorl was perforated with an oblong hole (12.5mm x 9mm) suggesting that it may have been sewn to or suspended from something (Plate 6). The pottery comprised ten sherds and they are described below by Cormac McSparron. The animal bones were poorly preserved and fragmentary and comprised fragments of a cattle molar, the ulna of a brown rat (*Rattus norvegicus*) and other unidentifiable mammal longbone fragments (probably cattle).

All of these finds were recovered from the sod and topsoil (contexts C.101, C.102 and C.202) and can be interpreted as material most likely incorporated through middening and ploughing. The seashells recorded in Trench 1 were probably introduced through the application of sand or coarse lime to the soil.

Pottery report by Cormac McSparron, CAF

There were ten pottery fragments found during the excavation at Knockavally and these are described by trench below.

Trench 1 - C.102: one piece of glazed red earthenware, a possible piece of glazed red earthenware, a fragment of blackware and a tile.

One sherd from C.102 was a fragment of red earthenware with a yellowish external glaze. Red earthenwares were commonly produced in local pottery kilns in Ireland in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A sherd with a grey core fabric but orange/red margins was also recovered from this context. It had a yellowish exterior glaze over traces of a brown slip. The glaze is very similar to the red earthenware sherd found in C.102 but the fabric was somewhat different, with a reduced core and some slightly larger angular inclusions. Microscopic examination appears to indicate, however,

that the smaller inclusions (not added temper) are similar to the red earthenware vessel indicating that it is just a fragment of the same which has simply been fired in a reducing environment.

The sherd of blackware had a deep red fabric a very dark purple / black glaze. Utilitarian blackwares were imported into Ireland through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Meenan 2007, 398). The single fragment of tile had a deep red fabric, with black, probably iron II oxide, inclusions. The glaze is reddish brown on one side but variegated on the other with a reddish brown zone and a golden brown zone with dark spots possibly caused by the glaze reacting with the iron oxide inclusions protruding through the surface of the tile.

C.202: One piece of pearlware type pottery, three fragments of creamware type and two sherds of white stoneware.

The pearlware sherd is a fragment of the rim of a small vessel, probably a cup. When viewed from above the curve of the rim undulates slightly, apparently a decorative feature. The sherd is decorated in blue and white Chinese type decoration, although only a tiny fragment of the pattern can be seen. Two of the pieces of creamware were small and in poor condition and neither had any decoration. The third, a rim sherd, was equally small but somewhat better preserved. It had mauve under glaze decoration painted on half of the exterior surface. It was probably a cup fragment. Creamware production started in mid-eighteenth century in Staffordshire (Francis 2001) as an English copy of fine Chinese porcelain. By the late eighteenth century Belfast had a pottery industry producing both creamware and pearlware with blue under glaze decoration (Francis 2001, 5) and it is possible that the sherds in this assemblage may be its product. The two white stoneware sherds are small but well preserved. Numerals are impressed into the surface of these sherds. A “2” and an “8” are visible on one sherd, a numeral, although fragmentary and illegible, is also visible on the second sherd. White stoneware was first produced in England at the end of the seventeenth century but did not begin to be produced in large quantities until the 1720s (Draper 1984, 37). It is likely that these sherds date to this time or a little later. By the mid-eighteenth century stoneware had been replaced by creamware as the fashionable tableware.

Conclusions

The Trench 1 sherds are all earthenwares - red earthenware, blackware and a tile. These could have been produced any time from the late seventeenth century through to the nineteenth century, although an eighteenth to nineteenth century date range seems more likely. The Trench 2 sherds seem to have a narrower date range. The pearlware is hand painted, as is the decorated creamware sherd. These date to sometime from the latter decades of the eighteenth century through to about 1830 in date. White stoneware, while in its heyday in the early to mid-eighteenth century it did not completely cease

production with the commencement of the first pearlware production in the later eighteenth century and it is possible that these sherds also may be later eighteenth century in date.

5 Discussion

Knockavally is a prominent mound on a ridge, rising to a little over 1.5m in height with relatively steep sides (Plates 3 and 4; Figure 2). Its isolation and profile indicate that it must be artificial in origin and analogies can be drawn with Knockast cemetery cairn in County Westmeath for example (Hencken and Movius 1932-34) or the Viking mound-burials of the Isle of Man (Wilson 2008, 27-38).

Clearance 'cairn'

The Knockavally excavation, although limited in extent, shows that the mound is largely made-up of sterile deposits and there is no evidence for a surrounding ditch or scarp. The ground does, however, fall away significantly to the southwest (Plate 4) which may be artificially scarped and the source of the material for the mound. The arrangement of stones on and around the mound appears to be random and the presence of a kerb, as suggested in an account from 1992 (see above), cannot be substantiated. Excavation determined that this is not a cairn (i.e. mound of stones) but the discovery of a number of plough-scratched stones (Plates 7 and 8) would suggest that the mound was partly used as a 'clearance cairn', i.e. when large stones were hit and grubbed-up by the plough they were thrown up onto the mound. This, however, can be identified as a secondary use.

Artificial mound for a windmill

The ruins of two windmill towers survive in Killough (IHR 0347700000 and IHR 0347800000; Figure 1) dating to c. 1823 and the eighteenth century respectively, and both are listed by Green (1963, 52-8) in his inventory of windmills in county Down (No. 104). Neither Green nor McCutcheon (1980) make any mention of Knockavally even so, it could be speculated that the mound was created as the base for a windmill tower which was never built. The majority of windmills in Ireland were built after 1784 when legislation was passed to encourage the growth of corn in Ireland (Rhodes 1962, 1). Over one hundred windmills are recorded on the 1830s OS maps of county Down (McCutcheon 1980, 229) which in 1900, was described as the 'great wheat-growing district' of Ireland producing nearly one fifth of the total Irish crop (Green 1963, 37). Green's inventory of windmill sites makes no reference to the existence of towers built on artificial mounds (Green 1963, 52-8). Examples are, however, known from Scotland (Donnachie and Stewart 1964-66, 277) though these often housed vaulted chambers or cellars.

Burial mound

No human remains were found in either of the two excavation trenches which might have been expected given O'Laverty's late nineteenth-century description of the site as 'an old cemetery'. This

would suggest that this is not a burial mound. The absence also of bones in the eroding sections along the north face of the mound (Plate 10) would also support this proposition. It is of course possible that the mound was erected over a burial, placed either in a cut feature or in a cist, as in the case of Viking burials on the Isle of Man (Wilson 2008, 27-38), but which was missed by the excavation trench.

Cross-carved stone

Hamlin records a total of 61 cross-carved stones from County Down (Kerr 2008, 115) not all of which still survive and she acknowledges the difficulty in dating simple cross forms (Kerr 2008, 115-6 and 119) such as the Knockavally example – a simple Latin linear cross in relief. There is an indication of a base where the stone is unworked (see Plate 2) which would suggest that it originally stood upright rather than being recumbent. Hamlin (Kerr 2008, 115) lists a number of reasons why free-standing crosses and cross-carved stones were employed (erected or recumbent) which includes the marking of burials, dedicatory, recording an event, marking a boundary or route and/or serving as a focus for outdoor worship. One other suggestion is that crosses were carved onto standing stones to Christianise them for which Hamlin argues context is of particular importance (Kerr 2008, 130) – those found on or near ecclesiastical sites are unlikely to be pre-Christian in origin.

The small size of the stone from Knockavally and level of the work executed suggests that it is unlikely to fall into this latter category while the results of the excavation, albeit limited, would also rule out its use as a burial marker. Other possibilities therefore are that it was dedicatory, that it records an event or marks a boundary or route, or, that it served as a focus for outdoor worship.

Inspection of the Knockavally cross-carved stone, now on display in Down County Museum (ACC No. DB176 1986-423) in Downpatrick, shows that it has plough marks across the surface of the cross. It is debatable, however, as to whether this represents a plough-scratched stone that was subsequently carved, or, a cross-carved stone that was buried and then scratched and overturned by a plough. If the latter, which seems more likely, it is possible that when it was hit by the plough that the carving was recognised and was erected and displayed by the finder on top of the mound. Whether it originated on the mound is another question.

Kilbride Church

O'Laverty, writing of the Diocese of Down and Connor in the late nineteenth-century, refers briefly to the medieval church of Kilbride (DOW 045:015) in a townland of the same name adjacent to Killough (Figure 1). It is listed as '*Kelbride*' in '*Lethcathel*' in the de Courcy dower charter of c. 1180 (Otway-Ruthven 1949, 79; McKay 2007), as '*capella de Kilbride*' in Pope Nicholas' 1306 taxation (Reeves 1847, 34) and was 'appropriate to the priory of Regular Canons of Down' in the early sixteenth century (*ibid.*). 'S. Brydes' is marked with a church symbol on an Elizabethan map (c. 1580) of the

county Down coast, close by 'Killoghe' (Muhr 2005) though Knockavally and/or the mound are not illustrated. In the 1609 grant of James I to the Cathedral of Down, the church was annexed to the deanery of Down "by the name 'Kilbriditche'" (Reeves (1847, 34) while in a 'Terrier' (i.e. register of landed property) of 1615 it is listed as "*Ecclesia de Killbreid (church of Kilbride) of the abbey of Gallagher, or Monasterium Hibernorum (Priory of Regular Canons), pays in proxies, 1s; in refectiois, 1s, in synodals, 2s*" (cited in O'Lavery 1878, 77).

Reeves (1847, 34) notes that the church of Kilbride formerly stood in a field called 'the Church Park', located about three-quarters of a mile south-west of Killough but which had been razed by the 1830s while O'Lavery (1878, 75) states that it was a ruin by 1622. The only thing then surviving (i.e. 1830s) according to Reeves "was an ancient tombstone, having a cross traced on it, which is now built into the neighbouring stile" (Reeves (1847, 34). However, by the time of O'Lavery's account of the site in the 1870s, this stone had just lately been 'carried off by some ignorant tourist' (O'Lavery 1878, 155). He goes on to note that 'stone lined graves are found around the site of this church, its cemetery was very extensive, but it is now under cultivation' (O'Lavery 1878, 75). Notes on the site held in the NI-SMR record that the site was then (i.e. in 1992) marked 'by a silage pit' but that human bones were found by the landowner during ploughing which were described as being covered with small stones and seashells. The SMR record also notes that the two gateposts which were said to mark the church entrance (within living memory) had been recently removed and that nothing was known of the cross-carved stone that Reeves had reported. Kibride or 'St Brydes' is not mentioned by either Hamlin (Kerr 2008) or in the *Archaeological survey of county Down* (Anon 1966).

Given the close proximity of the two sites, Kilbride and Knockavally (Figure 1), it is not inconceivable that the two cross-carved stones may be one and the same and that the Kilbride stone somehow made its way to Knockavally (by an 'ignorant tourist' *pace* O'Lavery - or some other means). This could explain the presence of the cross at Knockavally, and rationale for the absence of historical ecclesiastical references to the site, but not the origin of the mound. The date of the reported removal of the Kilbride stone is not given but must have occurred sometime in the latter half of the nineteenth-century, i.e. between Reeves and O'Lavery's accounts of 1847 and 1878 respectively. If the Knockavally and Kilbride cross-carved stones are the same it does, however, leave a short window of time for the 'tradition' or association of the site with burials to develop as suggested by O'Lavery. There is also the issue of the presence on the mound of 'a few stones marked with crosses' also noted by O'Lavery (1878, 76).

6 Conclusion

The date and function of the mound has not been established by the excavation. The few finds recovered from the upper horizons are uninformative and unfortunately the absence of securely stratified finds from within the matrix of the mound and absence of a buried soil horizon, does not allow the application of radiocarbon dating. The lack of human remains would, however, suggest that the origin and function of the mound was for something other than human burial. It is also conceivable that the cross-carved stone formerly present on the mound in the late nineteenth century and into the latter half of the twentieth century, before its removal to Down County Museum, may have originated at the nearby medieval ecclesiastical site of Kilbride for which there are numerous historical records.

7 Recommendations for further work

It is recommended that a short article on the excavation is published in *Lecale Miscellany*. No further analysis on the archive or the finds recovered is recommended and unless the landowner wishes to retain these finds, it is suggested that they are discarded as they are of no archaeological significance.

8 Credits and acknowledgements

The topographical survey was conducted by Sapphire Mussen, CAF, who also prepared the site illustrations (Figures 5 and 6) included in this DSR. The QUB MSc crew were Samantha Clayden, Conor Hill, Conor McCann, Ian McCullough, Laura Rainey, Hannah-Ruth Rehbein, Derek Rushe and Francis Woods. I would also like to thank the landowner, Mrs Kitty Stewart, for permission to excavate at the site.

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On-line Sources

- NIEA SMR <http://apps.ehsni.gov.uk/ambit/Default.aspx>
- NIEA Mapviewer <http://maps.ehsni.gov.uk/MapView/Default.aspx>

10 FIGURES

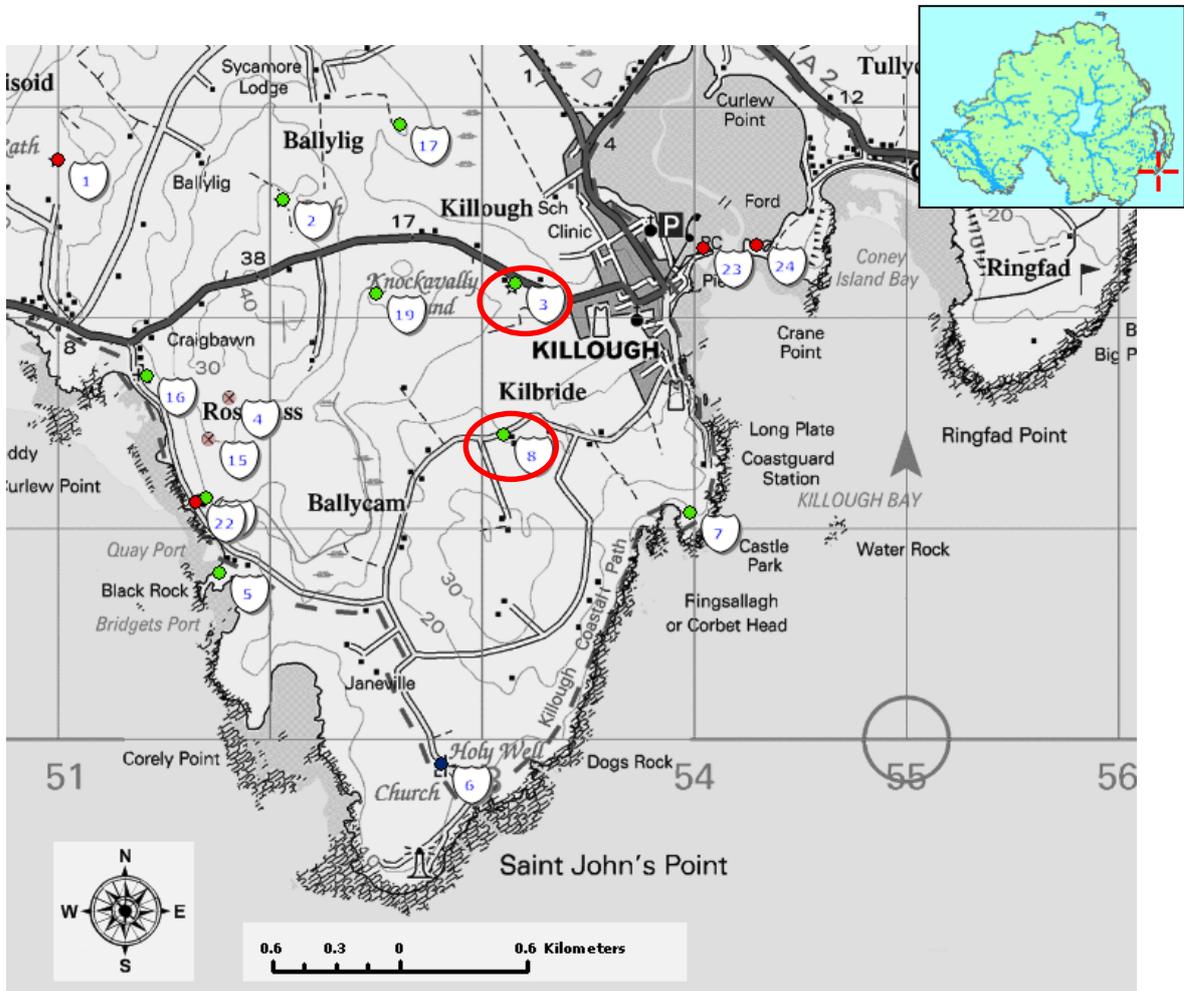


Figure 1 Location of Knockavally mound (No. '3' on the map) just west of Killough, Co. Down and the site of the church of Kilbride (No. '8' on the map). The location of the ruins of the two windmill towers in Killough are also marked with 'tower' symbols.



Figure 2 Google-maps satellite image of the mound – located towards the centre of the photo. Killough village is on the right.

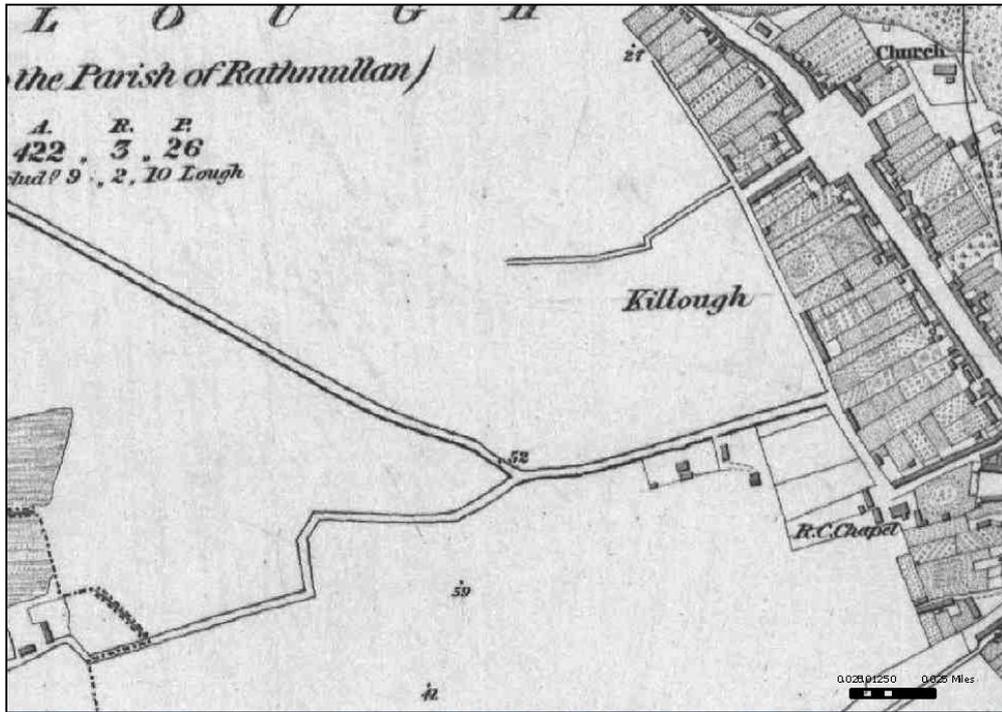


Figure 3 Extract from the first edition OS 6` inch series map (Co. Down Map 45) showing Rossglass road heading west from Killough but with Knockavally mound not marked (accessed online – NIEA Mapviewer).

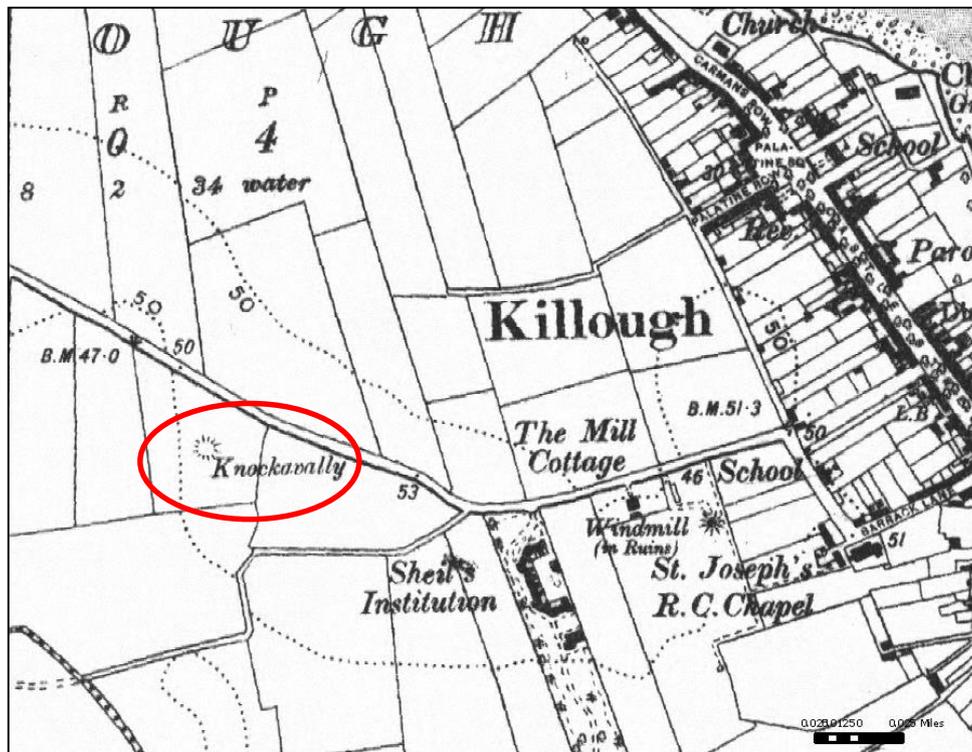


Figure 4 Extract from the 3rd edition OS 6` inch series (Co. Down Map 45) showing Knockavally mound west of the village of Killough. The contour lines highlight the mound's location on a slight ridge (accessed online – NIEA Mapviewer).



Figure 5 Topographical survey of the mid and immediate vicinity. The locations of the two trenches excavated in 2012 are also shown.

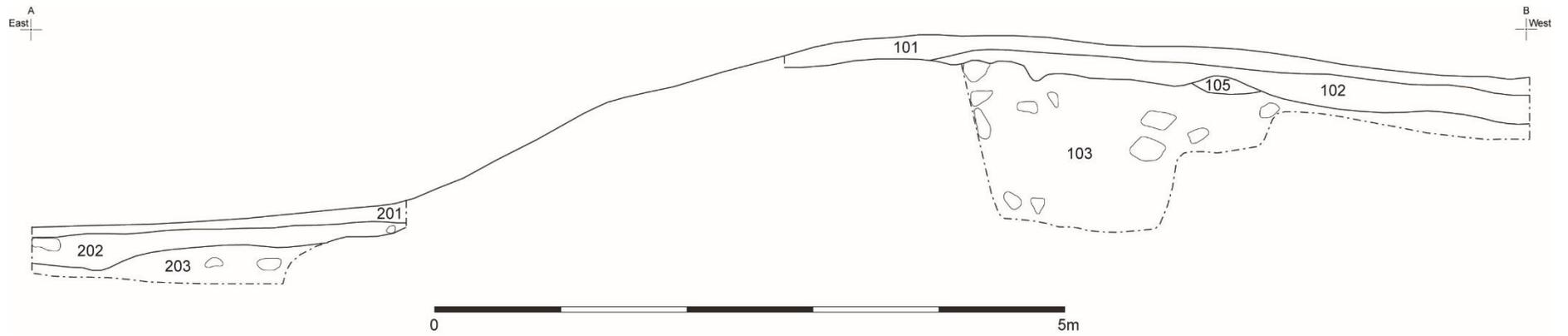


Figure 6 North-west facing section and profile through the mound and two trenches, Trench 1 (at the top of the mound) and Trench 2 (at the base of the mound).

11 PLATES



Plate 1 Reproduction of the photo of the cross-carved stone from Knockavally mound as published in Davidson (1958, pl. xi). This is now on display in Down County Museum (acc. No. DB176 1986-423).

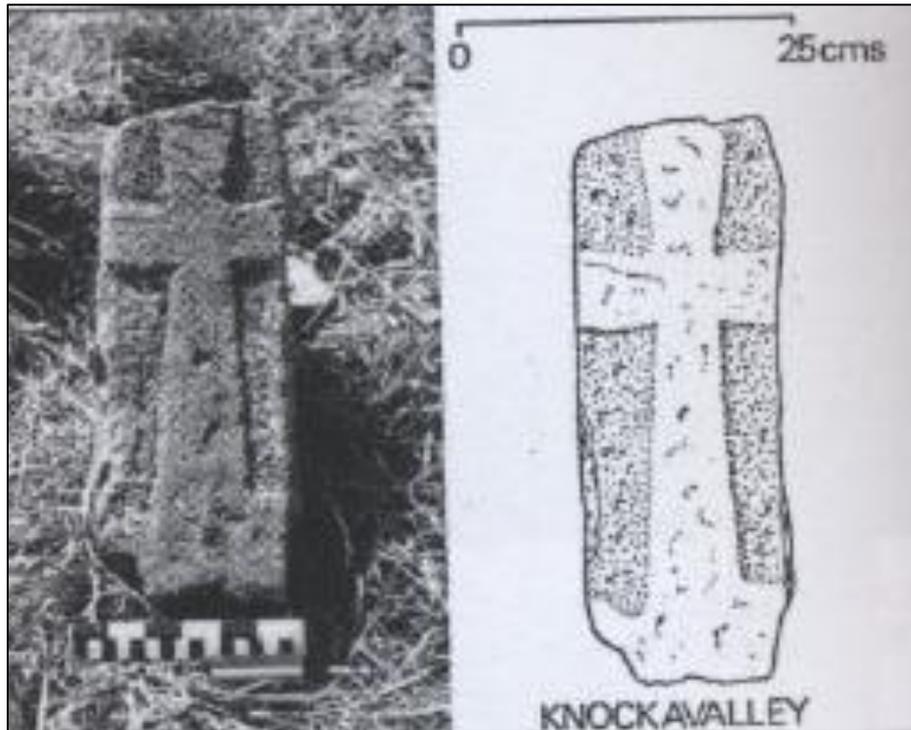


Plate 2 Reproduction of the photo and illustration of the cross-carved stone from Knockavally mound as published in Hamlin (Kerr 2008, 304).



Plate 3 Knockavally mound during excavation with arrows pointing to the location of Trenches 1 and 2. The Mourne Mountains are just visible on the horizon in the distance (right hand side of the photo).



Plate 4 The mound viewed upslope from the south-east.



Plate 5 Trench 1 (looking west) after the removal of the sod (C.101) across the eastern two-thirds of the trench showing the surface of the stony brown loam layer (C.102).



Plate 6 Perforated dogwhelk (*Nucella lapillus*) from Trench 1 (C.101).



Plate 7 Plough-scratched stone from Trench 1.



Plate 8 Plough-scratched stone from Trench 1 (C.102).



Plate 9 Trench 1 (facing north northeast): stepped box section within the trench to a depth of 1.9m.



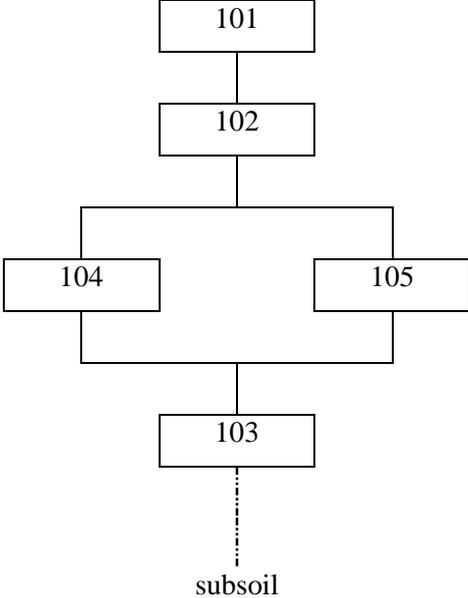
Plate 10 Eroded edges along the northern side of the mound.

APPENDIX 1: List of contexts

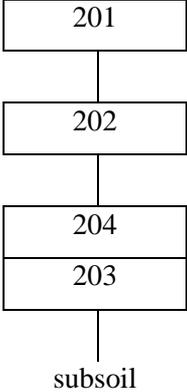
Context	Description
101	sod & topsoil; stony dark-brown loam (modern finds discarded)
102	loose dark brown stony loam with plough-scratched stones
103	orange-brown stony clay-loam; redeposited subsoil; below 105 & 104
104	grey silty clay deposit with charcoal
105	dark grey-brown loose sterile loam
106	<i>discarded [natural variation: light-brown silty-clay lens within 103]</i>
107	<i>discarded [natural variation - light yellow-brown silty-clay lens within 103]</i>
201	sod & topsoil; firm dark-brown clay-loam
202	loose stony loam with charcoal & modern finds (discarded)
203	dark-brown stony loam
204	dark-grey clay sub-circular lens within 203

APPENDIX 2: Harris matrices

Trench 1



Trench 2



APPENDIX 3: Catalogue of finds

Trench	Context	Type	Number	Weight
1	101	Glass	1	6.4g
1	101	Shell	1	2.6g
1	102	Bone	5	5.1g
1	102	Clay pipe	1	4.5g
1	102	Pottery	4	45.4g
1	102	Slag	23	161.9g
2	202	Pottery	6	3.7g