



ULSTER  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
SOCIETY

# Newsletter

Summer 2019

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## From the Editor

This summer has seen the appearance of the latest volume of the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* and it is a special issue, being a Festschrift in honour of Dr Chris Lynn. Hopefully all members will have received their copies by now and will have read the wide variety of interesting papers. We held a launch for the Journal in June, which was well attended by members and friends of Chris.

This summer has not had the same prolonged heat wave as 2018, which in some ways has made it more comfortable. But it does mean we are unlikely to see any new discoveries through crop marks. Instead we will have to look forward to the results of a second season of excavations at Down Cathedral. They are hoping to

discover more of the medieval monastery uncovered last year.

As we are concerned about our environmental impact as well as the significant cost of postage, we would ask members to consider receiving the Newsletter and other communications electronically. If you would support this, then please get in contact with the Secretary at the email address below.

**Duncan Berryman**  
Editor

If you would be happy to only receive the Newsletter by email, please email Ken - [ulsterarchaeolsoc@gmail.com](mailto:ulsterarchaeolsoc@gmail.com)

### **Subscriptions were due on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019**

If you still have not paid, please send cheques for £20 (full) or £7.50 (retired/student) to the Hon. Treasurer, Lee Gordon, at the address on the cover of the Newsletter.

You can use PayPal on the website - [www.qub.ac.uk/sites/uas/JoinUs/](http://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/uas/JoinUs/)

# Diary Dates

## Lectures

Monday 7.30pm, Elwood Building, QUB

16 <sup>th</sup> September	Professor Dan Bradley (Trinity College Dublin)	Ancient Genomics and Irish Human Prehistory
28 <sup>th</sup> October	Dr Dirk Brandherm & Dr Cormac McSparron (QUB)	Knocknashee: Results from fieldwork on Knocknashee Hill, Co. Sligo
9 <sup>th</sup> December	Dr Roisin Ní Reilly- Brennan ( <i>Independent</i> )	The Archaeology of Folklore

## Field Trips

17<sup>th</sup> August – Day trip to Slieve Gullion area

24<sup>th</sup> August (3-4pm) – Afternoon fieldtrip to Cathedral Hill, Armagh  
(please not the change of date)

Contact Ken Pullin for info on [ulsterarchaeolsoc@gmail.com](mailto:ulsterarchaeolsoc@gmail.com)

### **Discovery 2019! Third Annual Review of Archaeological Discoveries in Ulster – Bookings open!**

This conference will take place at QUB on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> November with a full day of lectures in the main lecture room of the Geography Building. All are welcome! As before, this conference is being organised by the UAS and the Centre for Community Archaeology at QUB. More information will be placed on the website, where you can already book your place - <http://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/uas/Conference/>

## Survey Group News

Our 2019 survey season began on 7 March with the geophysical survey of an enclosure at Gordonall townland, to the south of Mount Stewart, in County Down. Our next survey took place at Derrymore in County Armagh, where we carried out further work at the remains of a Second World War military camp. This included another geophysical survey, designed to identify any remains of paths, trackways and building foundations adjacent to the walled garden there. These are not visible on the ground surface, but the geophysical survey was able to identify several features, which added to our understanding of the layout of the camp in this area. As the Survey Group continued their work to the east and south of the property, several interesting features were recorded, including two ponds that were thought to be the remains of fire dams, an essential feature in areas where water supplies were not reliable. While this was going on, David flew his drone across the site and produced spectacular images of the pattern of roads, paths and hut foundations that are invisible at

surface level. This information is being added to that gathered at a previous visit to the site in 2009 and indicates that very little of the site was not incorporated into the wartime army base. While there, the members of the group were given admission to Derrymore House and had their lunch in one of the spectacular rooms there. In April, we made our way to Mount Stewart, where we were asked to take part in filming for the BBC programme Home Ground, which was broadcast as a three-day live event from the property. The programme was largely devoted to the wild life on the estate, but it is hoped that they will return in the future to focus on the history and archaeology there, which as we all know is much more interesting! In May, we made our way to County Londonderry to survey a claghan at Avish, near Downhill. We had surveyed two stone enclosures there in 2014, but had not investigated the nearby claghan. There are ruins of around ten structures there, along with two conjoined booley huts further to the east. There are also suggestions that the site contains the remains of a 'castle', a

prehistoric burial cairn, a standing stone and another stone enclosure. It is another of those sites that few people have heard of, or visited, but when some time is spent studying it, keeps revealing fascinating archaeology.

Perhaps the best thing to happen to the Survey Group yet is our designation as a volunteer group by the National Trust. As such, we are being issued with National Trust volunteer cards, which allow us to visit National Trust properties free (usually to check some details of a previous survey). The cards also allow us to claim travel expenses and discount in National Trust shops. These benefits are very much appreciated by the members of the group and we have to thank Malachy Conway for all his hard work to set this up for us.

**Harry Welsh**  
**Fieldwork Co-ordinator**

## Launch of UJA 74

Members and friends of the Ulster Archaeological Society gathered at Queen's University Belfast on 14th June in celebration of the life and work of Dr Chris Lynn, one of the

most eminent Irish archaeologists of his generation. The occasion was the launch of a Festschrift in his honour, a project long delayed but now at last realised in print in the form of the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 74 (2017–18).

Chris Lynn is famous in the annals of Irish archaeology, having spent decades as a government archaeologist with the Historic Monuments and Buildings branch of the DoE in Belfast and having excavated widely - most famously at Deer Park Farms, the raised rath in the Glenarm Valley, Co. Antrim, that he published definitively with Jackie McDowell in 2011.

Chris has been a supporter of the UAS for over 50 years. He has served as President, Vice-President, and editor of the *Ulster Journal*, among other roles. So it is fitting to honour his contribution to the archaeology of Ulster (and further afield) with an issue of the *Journal* dedicated to him.

This special volume of the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, besides listing all of Dr Lynn's publications, runs to 270 pages and contains 27 papers ranging in their subject

matter from the Mesolithic to the 18th century. Most of the papers deal with aspects of the Iron Age and the early Middle Ages and- appropriately in the context- steer clear of excavated detail in favour of discussion and reflection. The new Ulster Journal of Archaeology was part-funded by the Historic Environment Division, Department for Communities, through the Heritage Environment Fund.

Ruairí Ó Baoill

## March Lecture

The Society's March lecture was given by Prof. Jim Mallory. It was based on his recent book *In Search of the Irish Dreamtime*.

Mallory uses the term Irish Dreamtime to describe the native account of Ireland's past and its origin legend. The Irish national memory is one of the longest in the world, with the Annals of the Four Masters recounting events from the Neolithic to the Iron Age.

The Annals of the Four Masters list every year. In most years nothing happened, but occasionally they record environmental or social events. Most of the social events

are not dated well, but there is a record of a causeway constructed in 142 BCE and a causeway has been discovered in Longford dated to 148 BCE.

The king lists might reflect some historical fact. There is a significant amount of detail recorded. There are 132 kings recorded before Niall of the Nine Hostages. All the names are Irish and many mean horseman, but some are before horses are known to have appeared in Ireland. The lists are often alliterative, but individual lists do not repeat names. Over the full list, there is a 47% rate of repetition, by comparison there is a 49% repetition in the names of the previous 50 English kings.

Some of the recorded events have parallels in European texts, such as Eusebius (260-340 CE) or Isadore (556-636 CE). Only the eruption of lakes or rivers and the clearance of plains do not have parallels elsewhere. Some events, such as the second battle of Mag Tuired, reflect wider cultural stories, in this case the Norse idea of Ragnarök. Much of the material culture that is described can be dated to the

early medieval period. The swords appear to have been Viking swords and the types of monuments described are indicative of the early medieval period. The Homeric stories were written down about 1,000 years after the events and describe Mycenaean artefacts that were not familiar to the audience; the Irish stories were probably written a similar amount of time after the events.

The only monuments that were not early medieval are the royal sites. The monuments date to the Iron Age rather than the early medieval period. They are described as large circular enclosures made out of oak. Early medieval houses were circular, but there are few examples of other circular structures. The rath at Lissue (Lisburn) is one of the largest in Ireland and believed to have been a single house about 40m across. This was an early medieval royal site that may have provided the inspiration for the descriptions in the texts.

The first settlement of Ireland is reported to have been by Cesair, the granddaughter of Noah. She came to Ireland with three men

and fifty women. They divided into three groups. The burial sites of the three men appear to have been prehistoric burial mounds (one may have been turned into a Norman motte). The landing site of the fleet has been identified as Dun na mBarc (ford of the ships) at Ballinskellig or, more probably, Bantry Bay (both Co. Cork). The group is divided into three at the confluence of three rivers, known as Miledach. This has been associated with a ringfort near Wexford. Of course, these stories were created as an origin myth. But it is interesting that Cesair was meant to have come from the Sudan, the most southernly place on Ptolemy's map of the world, and settled in Ireland, the most northernly location.

Stories have been picked up and changed depending on locations. For example, the story of the red hand of Ulster changes its location depending where it is told, and it is often learnt from the street or family rather than at school. The landscape also has stories associated with it, such as Slieve Gullion being the home of the brown bull and Mag Tuired the

location of the battle at the end of the world. The dreamtime stories also influence modern culture, with Queen Medb on Irish currency, a statue of Macha (a war goddess) outside Altnagelvin Hospital, and the children of Lir depicted on the Irish garden of remembrance. There may only be scant archaeological evidence of dreamtime, but it has a lasting impact on Irish culture.

**Duncan Berryman**

## April Lecture

The Society's April lecture was given by Michael Gibbons, an experienced field archaeologist and director of Michael Gibbons Archaeology Travel. His lecture was titled *The False Lintel of Newgrange and the making of a Global Heritage Icon*.

The earliest images (both illustrations and photographic) we have of Newgrange depict the lightbox above the entrance. The lintel of the lightbox was always shown as a slab with decoration on its front face. An early photograph of a Belfast Naturalist Field Club trip to Newgrange shows a path

leading up to the lintel and on up to the summit. There is reported to have been finds of a Roman coin on the summit and a Roman ring in the chamber. Some of the early illustrations place a standing stone on the summit, but later images and excavation show no evidence of this.

In the 1960s the Irish state decided to make the monument more accessible to the public and appointed Prof. Michael O'Kelly to oversee the excavation and restoration. During excavation, pit circles were uncovered in front of, and under, the monument; showing that this was a multi-period site. However, O'Kelly's report indicates that it was a single phase. Gibbons also noted that most of the mound was excavated by mechanical digger.

The quartz façade is a highly controversial feature. O'Kelly believed that the stratigraphy of the collapse was due to a vertical wall. He claimed to carry out an experiment to show this, but there are no records of it. He also claimed that the fragments of quartz were due to shattering

during the collapse; Gibbons thinks quartz would be too hard for this to happen. There is no record of the volume of quartz excavated, but Gibbons does not believe there was sufficient quartz in the photos to create the wall, resulting in the quartz/granite mix we see today.

While excavations were ongoing at Newgrange, Gerald S. Hawkins published *Stonehenge Decoded*. This, Gibbons claims, influenced the discovery of the solstice alignment. However, it had been noted in 1908 by Norman Lockyer, who was working on Bryn Celli Duhn. Several attempts had been made to find a chamber behind the lightbox. Gibbons believes the reconstruction of the passage after excavation raised the lintels along the passage, creating a gap at the lightbox that had not been there previously. He notes that there were two quartz blocks in the lightbox (now lost), O'Kelly claimed they were used to block the box and were moved to let light in. Gibbons claims that the excavation archive is not complete and that some of O'Kelly's photos are misleading, i.e. they are meant to

be during excavation but are actually during reconstruction as concrete walls are visible.

The roofbox may not have been contemporary with the passage. It is possible that it was added later, possibly a cist burial reusing decorated stones. There was a wall at the front of the box that was removed. O'Kelly's instance that it was a single phase monument may have prevented him seeing the evolution of the structure. The date of the lightbox is unknown and probably unknowable.

**Duncan Berryman**

## May Lecture

The Society's May lecture was given by Dr Patrick Gleeson of Queen's University Belfast. His lecture was titled *Cult and Kingship: Framing religious transformation in the first millennium AD*.

Gleeson began by reflecting on the identification of religion in the archaeological record elsewhere in Europe. If religion can be recognised there, why not also in Ireland?

Our understanding of pre-Christian religions is generally based on texts written after the religions had disappeared. We use the texts to create a framework for these religions, but we are not always right. The Mayan temples were thought to represent the Mayan belief of the cosmos, but it has been discovered that they are not a single phase of construction and that there was an evolution of the complexes. Figurines found in excavations are often associated with gods we know from the literary pantheons, but they may equally represent myths that were never written down. The stories of fairy forts across Ireland have no literary record, but there are strong oral traditions.

Understanding of Irish ritual landscapes may be lacking due to the fact that there are not the structures seen in Roman Britain. Burial is one method of looking at ritual. Work on Scandinavia and England has focused on remembrance and structured deposition in graves, this leads to thinking about burial landscapes rather than just a grave or graveyard. The Anglo-Saxon poem

Beowulf mentions that there was ten days of burial rituals. Cremation is generally seen as a practice in the Bronze and Iron Ages, but there is evidence from Ask (Wexford) for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century cremations, one was buried with a cross. It has also been noted that some grave cuts are much wider than necessary, possibly allowing for an element of display during the funeral.

Female burials appear to be the first to have Christian iconography. There are also a number of unusual female burials. These have parallels elsewhere in Europe, where women have been buried with objects. One example, the seeress of Fyrkat (Denmark), was buried with makeup to make her look pale and she had ingested cremated bone before death. Such women are believed to have been ritual specialists. There are no clear seeress burials in Ireland but there are some objects that may have been ritual and there is an ogham inscription referencing a druid. Female burials are also often the focus of cemeteries.

The wider landscape is often neglected when considering

religion. In Sweden, the ritual centre at Lund has been extensively investigated. The name means scared grove and excavations have revealed a hall at the centre with animal and human bones scattered across the hillside. There are also many carved stone heads in the surrounding area. In Ulster, there is evidence for the increase in tree growth around Loughnashade from 100 BCE; this may indicate a regrowth of the sacred grove.

Recent survey work at Navan has revealed large enclosures around sites A and B and possible burial mounds in the north east of the main complex. The figure-of-eight structures at sites A and B were enclosed by massive figure-of-eight enclosures. To the north east of site A is an L-shaped enclosure; this has a parallel at Kilmainham, where it has been interpreted as a shrine. To the south of Navan is Lisbanoe, a large stepped mound with a funnel entrance; this indicates that Navan was part of a much larger ritual landscape.

Armagh itself has a number of early medieval features and, most importantly, a collection of

sculpture. These appear to have originally been displayed on plinths. They also have parallels with the stone heads at Lund.

Lagore crannog has prehistoric origins and is a significant royal site. During the 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> centuries there was deposition of women and children, but only the backs of male skulls from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. There was also significant amounts of animal bones deposited in the lake. Similarly at Ballinderry there were deposits of animal bones and human skulls, one of which had had the face removed.

It seems that around the North Sea traditions of kingship and ritual developed side by side. Sites like Tiso (Denmark), and possibly Navan, were initially ritual centres that later became sites of kingship. This suggests that there was a fluid line between kings and gods and that over time they became closer. Therefore, rather than thinking of gods or kings, we should think of gods and kings as one.

**Duncan Berryman**

# Launch of the Ulster Journal of Archaeology, vol. 74

