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Native Enclosed Settlement and the Problem of the Irish 'Ring-fort'

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*ONE OF THE MOST sustained monolithic traditions of Irish archaeology is the classification of a wide variety of earthen and stone enclosures (*ráth *and* caisel*) as 'ring-forts'. This is an impediment to understanding the significant changes that native enclosed settlement underwent through time since it encourages archaeologists to fit their evidence to the category rather than to assess each enclosed settlement on its own merits. It also conceals differences between various forms of enclosed settlements inhabited from the 7th to the 17th century AD, occasionally later. The proposal is therefore that the 'ring-fort' is a chimera and that the use of that term should be discontinued so that study of native enclosed settlement can be liberated from its insular base and used to explore social change in Ireland. A field study from the Burren, Co Clare is used in support of this argument.*

The classification 'ring-fort' has the distinction of being at once the most enduring and least meaningful invention in Irish archaeology. Archaeologists have applied it for almost a century to a host of large and small, earthen and stone, simple and complex enclosures that enjoyed occupation arguably as early as the Iron Age and as late as the 19th century.[2] If scholars of prehistoric sepulchral and ritual monuments, or those investigating medieval castles and churches, had ignored the great variety, broad occupation dates and diverse cultural implications inherent in those monument types, archaeology would have atrophied as a humanity and science, and with it some considerable intelligence of human settlement on the island of Ireland. Yet, this is precisely what dogged adherence to the term 'ring-fort' has almost succeeded in doing to an understanding of native enclosed settlement. Locked into a nebulous category of 'roundness', and fiercely defended as the quintessential settlement form of early-medieval Ireland and exclusive to that period alone,[3] enclosed settlement has been a long-term prisoner of the 'ring-fort'.

Enclosed settlements of *ráth* and *caisel* type are the most ubiquitous, abundant and lesser understood features of the Irish cultural landscape. Over 45,000 have been identified.

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[2] Limbert 1996; Comber (ed) 1999, 68–9, 77.

[3] Edwards 1990; Lynn 1975a; 1975b; McCormick 1995; Proudfoot 1961; Stout 1997; 2000.

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DEFINITIONS OF 'RING-FORT'

The introduction of the word 'ring-fort' to archaeological parlance in the early 20th century gave a scientific name to the many and varied Irish native enclosed settlements. The apparent intention was to replace the colloquial Irish *ráth*, *lios*, *caisel* and *cathair* with a universally accessible descriptive term. As early as 1911, Westropp used 'ring-fort' in reference to the publication of his notes on the stone forts of NW Co Clare, but prior to that he had tended to use the generic term 'fort' and the more specific term 'ring-wall' to describe native stone enclosed settlements across N Clare.[4] Major works of the early 20th century, such as Macalister's *Ireland in Pre-Celtic Times* (1921), gave currency to the term 'ring-fort'. In Macalister's second edition (1949) of *The Archaeology of Ireland* he explained his preference for 'ring-fort' over the native names that he believed had 'the fatal disadvantage from which all vernacular terms suffer — they disregard the important fact that the Archaeology of any country is not the exclusive concern of that country'.[5] That type of rhetoric was symptomatic of the end of archaeology as an antiquarian pursuit and its early beginnings as a science in Ireland. Archaeology as science attempted to decode the past by replacing the vernacular inheritance with, paradoxically, sometimes more intractable nomenclature, thereby creating two pasts — that of the scholar and the layman. Other advocates of the scientific 'ring-fort', later in the first half of the 20th century, included Seán P Ó Ríordáin, Joseph Raftery and Michael J O'Kelly.[6] However, it was Ó Ríordáin's third edition of his *Antiquities of the Irish Countryside* (1953), a book designed for use by the scholar as well as the layman, that popularised the term 'ring-fort' and ensured its widespread use into the future. Ó Ríordáin also attempted a comprehensive definition of that monument type: 'we shall use the term "ring-fort" for the ordinary forts and shall indicate that certain larger examples (hill-forts) must be regarded as a separate class'.[7] He endeavoured to define the specifics of his 'ring-fort' explaining that:

> in its simplest form the ring-fort may be described as a space, most frequently circular, surrounded by a bank and fosse . . . In stony districts there may be a stone-built wall instead of an enclosing bank, and there is frequently no fosse in such case . . . the material does, however, provide a basis for segregating forts into two broad classes — earthen and stone-built — . . . but . . . this classification by material includes numerous variants in the matter of size, nature, and complexity of defences, shape, subsidiary structures, and other features.[8]

Despite his acknowledgement of the great diversity within enclosures, the reader was nonetheless persuaded to accept all variants as 'ring-forts'. Ó Riordáin also referred to the Old Irish words used of 'ring-forts'. He explained that '*lios* and *ráth* are usually applied to earthen forts while *cathair* and *caiseal* are used for stone-built examples', and he was careful to distinguish between the essential early meaning of *lios* as the open space between the bank and the house, and *ráth* as the enclosing bank.[9]

[4] Comber (ed) 1999, 1, 57, 134.
[5] Macalister 1949, 258–9.
[6] Ó Ríordáin 1942, 77–150; Raftery 1951, 29–36; O'Kelly 1946, 122–6.
[7] Ó Riordáin 1953, 1.
[8] Ibid, 1–2.
[9] Ibid, 2.

The Old Irish early-medieval terminology used of enclosed settlements exercised the minds of some archaeologists in the 1950s. For instance, in the *Archaeological News Letter* for 1952 Glyn Daniel wrote a short report on the analysis of Old Irish terminology for houses, with specific reference to the manner in which terms changed at a later period but with no new determination of meaning. His note was based on Shaw's literary evidence for the early Irish house in which he had demonstrated that the word *tech* means the house proper; Old Irish *less* (later *lios*) distinguishes the open green space between the enclosure and the house on all sides and, if a *ráth* is trivallate, the space between each enclosing bank and ditch is also called the *less*. The word *ráth* originally meant the surrounding earthen bank and its accompanying ditch, but in the later Middle Ages it represented not only the enclosing bank and ditch but also the enclosed space and the house within. Finally, the term *faithche* signifies the grassland surrounding the enclosed settlement.[10] Where the word *ráth* is concerned, it should be noted that its use in both early-medieval and later medieval contexts was not exclusive to what 20th- and 21st-century archaeologists call the 'ring-fort' but was in fact used of any earthen rampart enclosing a space. Thus one finds very large, non-domestic enclosures, such as the 1st-century AD Ráith na Ríg in the 'ritual' landscape of Tara (Co Meath) and the hillfort of Ráith Gaill (Co Wicklow) with four concentric ramparts and a diameter of c 320 m, have the root-word *ráth* incorporated in their place-names.[11] As late as the 16th century Tudor administrators in Ireland noted the term *ráth* in relation to the custom of the native Irish to hold their parleys and assemblies outdoors on hills. In 1596 Edmund Spenser wrote, 'There is great use among the Irish to make great assemblies together upon a Rath or hill', and Fynes Moryson writing in 1626 remarked on the 'plottes laid at private parleys and publique meetinges upon hills (called Rathes)'.[12] Those sites were not 'ring-forts' but for the most part enclosed mounds.[13]

Antiquaries exploring native enclosed settlements referred to them using a variety of terms. As early as 1821 Thomas Wood in his *Inquiry concerning the primitive inhabitants of Ireland* used the term '*ráth*' for the 'principal fort' and '*lios*' to describe subordinate ones in its vicinity. In more recent scholarship archaeologists writing about 'ring-forts' have tended to eschew the Old Irish terminology, though Ulster-based scholars are an exception. As early as 1928 in his *Archaeology of Ulster*, H C Lawlor used the term *ráth* in preference to 'ring-fort'; Chris Lynn referred in 1975 to the common usage of *ráth* over 'ring-fort' among Ulster archaeologists, and Thomas Kerr notes this preference still exists.[14]

In his influential study, *The Irish Ringfort*, Matthew Stout (1997) adopted Ó Riordáin's definition of 'ring-fort' because he believed it had a 'veracity forged during a life dedicated to fieldwork' and essentially could not be improved upon. The 'ring-fort', for Stout, is 'such a common and simple monument, and one so familiar to Irish fieldworkers, that a definition seems almost unnecessary'.[15]

[10] Daniel 1952, 73.
[11] Newman 2005, 379; Grogan and Kilfeather 1997, 42–3.
[12] Renwick (ed) 1970, 77; Kew 1998, 45.
[13] FitzPatrick 2004, 41–97.
[14] Lynn 1975b, 29; Kerr 2007, 1.
[15] Stout 1997, 14.

Other scholars have reinforced this view adding qualifying statements about 'ring-fort' function and chronology. Eamonn Cody refers to Irish 'ring-forts' as 'embanked or walled enclosures of round or sub-circular outline, built in great numbers throughout Ireland as defensive homesteads by free farmers in the second half of the 1st millennium AD'.[16] The respective authors of the Irish county archaeological inventories, conducted by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland, are uniquely placed to comment on large numbers of native enclosed settlements and while Ó Riordáin's definition of the 'ring-fort' obviously continues to exert a significant influence on their perceptions of enclosures in respective counties, some also break the boundaries of the orthodox definition. Michael Moore, for instance, in his inventory for Co Leitrim, observed some nuances in enclosed circular settlement. He found, for instance, a type of *ráth*, north-west of Lough Allen, that occur 'at the summits of the drumlins where the bank is almost flush with the interior', and evidence for a second outer wall at ten *caisel* sites, and some with traces of a fosse.[17] Paul Gosling writing about the 'ring-fort' in the W Galway inventory describes them as 'an area, usually circular but occasionally oval, D-shaped or rectangular, enclosed by one or more earthen banks and fosses (rath) or by stone walls (cashel)', thereby acknowledging variation in the shape of native enclosed settlement that tends to be more readily seen in the west of Ireland.[18] Denis Power, writing of E and S Cork *ráth* sites, notes that 'many sites in Co Cork have interiors raised by perhaps 0.8m–1.5m' and that 'also common is the raising of one side of the interior to compensate for a slope'.[19] The excavation record also reflects variation in the construction of native enclosures, particularly in respect of their entrances. Con Manning's excavation in 1984 at Cahirvagliair, Cappeen (Co Cork) revealed a remarkable stone-built lintelled entrance to an otherwise earthen construction or *ráth* and he concluded that the entrance was contemporary with the enclosure and erected between the 9th and 11th centuries.[20]

The reductive processing of enclosed settlement into the 'simple' 'ring-fort' masks a complex range of site types including earthen enclosures with banks and ditches, those that combine earth and stone in their construction, and stone enclosures without ditches. In addition, there are univallate, bivallate and multivallate forms, as well as platform and counterscarp enclosures. As early as 1975 Lynn remarked that the 'ringfort has too often been used uncritically as a portmanteau term', and Kerr in his 2007 study of *Early Christian Settlement in North-west Ulster* advocates that the differentiation of 'ring-forts' into univallate, multivallate, counterscarp and platform types is essential to the advancement of *ráth* studies.[21] To that advice, I add also an appreciation of the greatly nuanced features of *caisel* or *cathair* sites.

Another difficulty with the orthodox definition of the invented 'ring-fort' is that modern archaeologists view the Old Irish *caisel* (anglicised cashel, translated as a 'stone wall, rampart or stone fort') and *cathair* (anglicised caher; the west of

[16] Cody 2008, 1.
[17] Moore 2003, 53–4.
[18] Gosling 1993, 36.
[19] Power 1994, 77.
[20] Manning 1987–8, 54.
[21] Lynn 1975b, 29; Kerr 2007, 119.

Ireland word for *caisel* that has various readings as 'stone enclosure, fortress, castle and dwelling') as simply the stone variants of the *ráth*.[22] Although the structural differences between the *ráth* and *caisel* or *cathair* could not be more obvious, the general view is that they were erected in stony country where stone was the more plentiful building resource and where construction of an earthen enclosure would have been difficult.[23] It is also claimed that the *caisel* or *cathair* tends to be much smaller than the earthen *ráth*.[24] But this is not borne out, for instance, by the diameters of the former in the Burren (Co Clare), where most *cathair* sites (excluding the great western stone forts such as Cahercommaun that are more akin to hillforts) average 30 m in diameter internally, while some are as large as 37–40 m.

The opinion that the *caisel* or *cathair* is no more than a stone variant of the *ráth* is challenged by the occurrence of earthen enclosures near stone enclosures in west of Ireland rocky landscapes such as the Burren. The Ballyvaughan valley in N Burren, which is distinguished by several stone enclosures (attributed the regional term *cathair* rather than *caisel* in their place-names), also contains two substantial earthen enclosures in the townlands of Ballyallaban and Rathborney. Why, one must ask, do earthen enclosures exist in such rocky terrain with all of the inconvenience they entailed? Does a more meaningful explanation lie in consideration of the occupant, chronology or purpose of such settlements? Separating the *caisel* or *cathair* from its supposed counterpart, the earthen *ráth*, immediately allows us to raise questions about the social role and chronological implications of the former. The 14th-century battle-roll *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaigh* shows that some social distinction prevailed in relation to the use of different types of enclosed settlement,[25] referring to the peace that fell on the lordship of Thomond after the battle of the Abbey of Corcomroe in AD 1317:

> Every king in his *ríglongport* and every chief in their strong places, and hospitallers in their dwellings, ollaves (learned men) in their *raith*, coarbs in their respective churches, every 'son of a good man' in his own *dúnad*, every layman in his *lios*, and every bishop in his noble *cathair*.[26]

Kieran O'Conor has suggested that the *longport*, or *rílongport*, distinguished in this extract as a king's or chief's residence, is a term used by high-medieval Gaelic chroniclers for a lordly or high-status, 'well-defended ringfort', and he cites a wide range of instances in which the term is used of Gaelic lordly *capita*.[27] However, Tadhg O'Keeffe in response has stated that 'there is little hard evidence about the form that these [*longphoirt*] took, and we cannot assume them to be ringfort like'.[28] It is my opinion that the term *longport* or *rílongport* is generic and has no specific correlative on the landscape. However, it seems clear from O'Conor's careful research of the contexts in which the term is found that it relates to a residence of high status with the implication of superior defences.

[22] Quin (ed) 1990, 98:51, 103:88; Stout 1997, 16.
[23] Ó Riordáin 1953, 1–2; Barry 1987, 15–16; Cody 2008, 2.
[24] Stout 1997, 16.
[25] O'Grady 1929, 117.
[26] Ibid, 1, 134.
[27] O'Conor 1998, 93.
[28] O'Keeffe 2000, 22.

It has proven difficult to identify some of the *longport* sites mentioned in the chronicles, but O'Conor opened a whole new area of enquiry by drawing attention to the O'Flaherty *longport* of Iniscreamha on Lough Corrib (Co Galway). Paul Naessens has since determined this to be no ordinary island *caisel* or 'ring-fort' but a massive, circular, mortared masonry fortification constructed some time in the 11th or 12th century as the *caput* of the O'Flaherty kings of Magh Seola.[29] His detailed study of the site has borne out O'Conor's opinion that a *longport* is characterised by significant defences, and recognised yet another type of native enclosure.

For the last 30 years the 'ring-fort' debate has been dominated by a focus on the morphology and chronology of enclosure, and on analyses of 'ring-fort' distribution. However, the enclosure (no matter how complex) essentially marked the site boundary and, as Kerr has remarked, earthen enclosures in particular 'represent the most labour-efficient way of enclosing an area'.[30] The general emphasis on investigating enclosure has been at the expense of understanding the structures that they framed. There are significant variations in house plans and scales and in house construction materials and techniques within enclosed settlements of both *ráth* and *caisel* type. Lynn's excavations at Deer Park Farms (Co Antrim) revealed that the *ráth* enclosed a group of five contemporary wicker houses dating to c AD 700, while his excavation of a *ráth* that enjoyed four distinct phases of occupation at Rathmullan (Co Down) uncovered a late 9th- or 10th-century rectangular house, the walls of which were formed of large flat stones set on edge and externally supported by an earthen revetment.[31] Tom Fanning's excavation at Rinnaraw *caisel* (Co Donegal) uncovered a sub-rectangular drystone-walled house, 7 by 5 m internally, and broadly datable to the 9th century, with possible use as late as the 12th century, and a recent investigation at Coolagh (Co Galway) has uncovered a *caisel* containing a single large round house of drystone masonry.[32] The issue of enclosure remains the focus of enquiry despite the fact that the potential for perceiving change as well as variation in settlement forms is perhaps greater in respect of dwellings and buildings that occupied the garth of an enclosed settlement. Excavated sites such as Ballymacash (Co Antrim) demonstrate structural change approximately between the 11th and early 14th century.[33] Evidence of change such as late-medieval/early-modern buildings in the garths of ostensibly early-medieval *cathair* sites of the Burren is also significant and is discussed below.

With a greatly nuanced range of morphologies and a sometimes long period of use, how can all native settlements of *ráth* and *caisel* form be simply categorised as 'ring-forts'? The only thing they have in common is that they are roughly circular enclosures that frequently contain dwellings. It seems to be the case that archaeologists have allowed both early 'scientific' nomenclature and the reductive view to bind them, to the extent that this has all but arrested meaningful debate about native enclosed settlement.

[29] O'Conor 1998, 84–5; Naessens 2009, 57–68.
[30] Kerr 2007, 119.
[31] Lynn 1982, 86
[32] Comber 2006, 105–8; O'Sullivan 2007, 23.
[33] Jope and Ivens 1998, 101–23.

CHRONOLOGY, ORIGINS AND OCCUPATION

Reductionism has also ensured that enclosed settlement of both *ráth* and *caisel* type finds a very particular place in Irish settlement history in the second half of the 1st millennium AD.[34] In his work on the Irish 'ring-fort', Stout firmly concluded that the majority of Ireland's 'ring-forts' were 'occupied and probably constructed during a 300-year period from the 7th to the 9th centuries'.[35] He based this conclusion on 114 tree-ring and 14C dates from 47 sites, 71% of which were located in Ulster with 45% of that figure derived from excavated sites in Co Antrim.[36] While the dates in question are reliable, with an estimated 45,000 'ring-forts' identified across the Irish landscape, there is need for a more balanced, wider geographical spread of scientific dates and a greater appreciation of different types of native enclosed settlements as a valid premise for generalisation.[37] A cursory survey of <excavations.ie> — the online database of Irish excavation reports, published on behalf of the Department of Environment Heritage and Local Government — shows that approximately 156 *ráth* (147) and *caisel* (9) sites were excavated on the island of Ireland between 1970 and 2004 and that approximately 40% of those are interpreted by their excavators as early medieval in origin and occupation. About 10% of the sites excavated had evidence of high-, late-medieval or early-modern occupation activity and 50% of the 156 sites have no chronological interpretation for reasons ranging from lack of diagnostic finds to absence of structural and occupation evidence, and outstanding scientific dating.

It is not my intention to challenge the commonly agreed opinion that the *ráth* and *caisel* are primarily early medieval in origin, but to refute the view that their occupation was *exclusive* to the second half of the 1st millennium AD and that they experienced no change in that period or later. Lloyd Laing has recently acknowledged that native enclosed circular settlements show some sign of construction earlier than the 7th century and that others were occupied as recently as the 17th century. He has also remarked that 'such a long period of popularity causes problems in interpretation especially since the overwhelming majority have not been excavated at all'.[38] But problems of interpretation are not caused by the popularity of the enclosed circular settlement form but by the archaeologist's quest for homogeneity and strictly defined monument classifications. For Darren Limbert, 'many settlements have long and complicated structural histories, in which case it is difficult to justify classification'; he also criticises the 'casual' attribution of 'ring-forts' to the latter half of the 1st millennium.[39] He has made the astute observation that, 'if ringforts are an early medieval phenomenon, this remains a vast period of time which, potentially, could have accounted for a large number of changes in the morphology of enclosures and their associated structures'.[40] Kerr has challenged the method

[34] Edwards 1990; Mytum 1992; Stout 1997; Cody 2008.
[35] Stout 1997, 24–30; 2000, 91.
[36] Stout 2000, 91.
[37] I am indebted to Dr Finbar McCormick, Chronology of Irish Ringforts Project, QUB, for discussion about 'ring-fort' chronology.
[38] Laing 2006, 41.
[39] Limbert 1996, 243, 244.
[40] Limbert 1996, 277.

of recording 'ring-forts', urging field-workers to 'at least differentiate between different types of enclosed circular settlements because different sites have different functions and divergent chronologies'.[41] Taking this line of argument a step further, it is undoubtedly the case that the primacy given by archaeologists working in Ireland to the origin and first-phase occupation of habitation sites has been a distraction from observing social change in later modifications to and occupation of such sites. If Irish archaeology continues to be concerned only with the origins of things, as it appears to be in respect of native enclosed settlement, then it may well miss significant evidence for regional and local variation and, more importantly, for social change.

More recently, the 'ring-fort' has been examined as an indicator of social and political reorganisation in the 9th–11th century period, an era that, at once, heralded a significant change in the appearance of the *ráth* and, for some, the end of *ráth* construction.[42] Kerr in his seminal study of the platform *ráth* in NW Ulster has found a close correlation between them and arable soils, and has argued that they emerged as the seats of new elite, with unenclosed souterrains representing the sites of the dwellings of the lower classes of society, primarily during the 9th and 10th centuries.[43] Both historians and archaeologists view those centuries as a period of great change in Irish society, reflecting, as elsewhere in Europe, dynamic, unstable and changeable political organisation.[44] James Lyttleton and Mick Monk have also proposed a model of social reorganisation in the 9th and 10th centuries, linked with the emergence of raised 'ring-fort' sites, which seeks to explain the demise of the 'ring-fort' as a ubiquitous settlement form by AD 1000. They suggest that significant political changes, characterised by a shift from clientship to feudalism, led to the reorganisation of landholding denominations, with the consequent general abandonment of the 'ringfort' as a settlement type. The exception, they argue, were those 'ring-forts' associated with emergent dynasties. The need of such new dynasties for better defence led to the 'raising of the interiors of many ringfort sites', such as the 'rath mounds' at Big Glebe (Co Derry), Gransha and Rathmullan (Co Down) in Ulster, and Kilfinnane and Ballingarry (Co Limerick) in Munster.[45]

There are other signatures of gradual change in the period before 1000 in Ireland that seem to add weight to the opinions expressed by Kerr and by Lyttleton and Monk. The advent of the *damliac mór*, the large stone church or barn church and the round tower, with the implication of congregation and active royal patronage, are significant developments in the 10th century.[46] There was also an innovatory interest among emerging dynasties in adopting 'antique' landscapes for their inauguration and assembly sites, which had its most obvious expression during the 9th and 10th centuries.[47] The 200 years before 1000 apparently witnessed political shifts accompanied by evolving social change.

[41] Kerr 2007, 119.
[42] Kerr 2007; Lyttleton and Monk 2008.
[43] Kerr 2007, 118–19.
[44] Doherty 1998, 322–4; Urbańczyk 2001, 10.
[45] Lyttleton and Monk 2008, 17–19.
[46] FitzPatrick 2006, 65–6.
[47] FitzPatrick 2004, 52.

The progression of the 'ring-fort' debate to a point where *change* is identified as a proactive element in developing a profile of the course that native enclosed settlement took is significant. The new model that sees such major social transformation by the year 1000 challenges to a considerable degree the idea that the 'ring-fort' was a ubiquitous, standard and immutable monument on the Irish landscape from the 7th to the end of the 10th century and with it the implication that people had the same life-style for 400 years. The next step, however, is to challenge the general abandonment theory, advocated most recently by Lyttleton and Monk, and the hiatus implied by O'Keeffe in his commentary on the chronology of 'ring-forts'.[48]

In the 1970s and 1980s Ulster-based archaeologists, Gillian Barrett and Brian Graham, Chris Lynn, Nick Brannon and Tom McNeill were at the forefront of Irish 'ring-fort' studies, and through excavation and publication of discussion papers they advanced an all-island debate on the chronology and occupation of native enclosed settlements of *ráth* type.[49] Today, the School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast, continues that tradition and, with the emergence of a major project on the Chronology of Irish Ringforts, is effectively the home of 'ring-fort' studies.[50] In 1975, several papers were published on the dating of 'ring-forts'. The medievalists Barrett and Graham constructed an argument in favour of continuity of 'ring-fort' construction in those Gaelic lordships that remained untouched by Anglo-Norman settlement of the 12th and 13th centuries.[51] In response, Lynn's paper, 'The dating of raths: an orthodox view', unequivocally argued for an exclusive early-Christian date for the construction, and a largely early-Christian date for the occupation, of *ráth* sites, and in a second paper that same year declared that the 'medieval ring-fort' was an 'archaeological chimera'.[52] Barrett and Graham's view of medieval constructed 'ring-forts' has been somewhat discredited because 19 of 21 14C dates they set out to reassess proved unshakably early medieval: they relied too much on stray finds of high-medieval pottery to support their argument and several of their high-medieval 'ring-forts' had in fact by c 1200 been transformed into Anglo-Norman motte castles.[53]

Scholarly debate on the Irish 'ring-fort' in the last three decades has been dominated by arguments of varying intensity for and against its commonplace survival as a native settlement form into the 17th century.[54] Some scholars have attributed any survival of the form to a revival of 'an archaic mode of enclosure and construction' by Gaelic lords.[55] Others, while acknowledging particular examples of late occupied 'ring-forts', argue against their late construction.[56]

There is, to date, no unequivocal archaeological evidence to support any claim that native enclosed settlements of *ráth* and *caisel* type continued to be built

[48] Lyttleton and Monk 2008; O'Keeffe 2000, 24.
[49] Barrett and Graham 1975; Lynn 1975a and b; Brannon 1982; McNeill 1975.
[50] Directed by Dr Finbar McCormick and Dr Emily Murray, QUB.
[51] Barrett and Graham 1975, 43.
[52] Lynn 1975a; 1975b
[53] O'Conor 1998, 89.
[54] Barrett and Graham 1975; Barrett 1982; Nicholls 1987; O'Conor 1998; Brady and O'Conor 2005; Lynn 1975a; 1975b; 1983; Edwards 1990; Stout 1997, 2000; O'Keeffe 2000; Laing 2006, 44–5.
[55] O'Keeffe 2000, 24.
[56] Barry 2000a, 118.

anew after 1200. Etienne Rynne's published excavation report on what he believed was a near-contemporary bivallate *ráth* and house, Thady's Fort at Shannon (Co Clare) (Fig 1), which he dated to c 1600, has for some time been viewed as an anomaly.[57] Some archaeologists have declared problems with the interpretation and others support its claims.[58] The Ulster excavation evidence, which is predominantly from Antrim and Down, gives little support to any argument for high- and late-medieval and early-modern occupation of native enclosed settlements there. However, regional, and indeed quite local, variation in the use of native enclosed settlement forms of *ráth*- and *caisel*-type after the early Middle Ages must be factored into the debate, most obviously in relation to the residences of Gaelic elites in the high Middle Ages and in respect of the

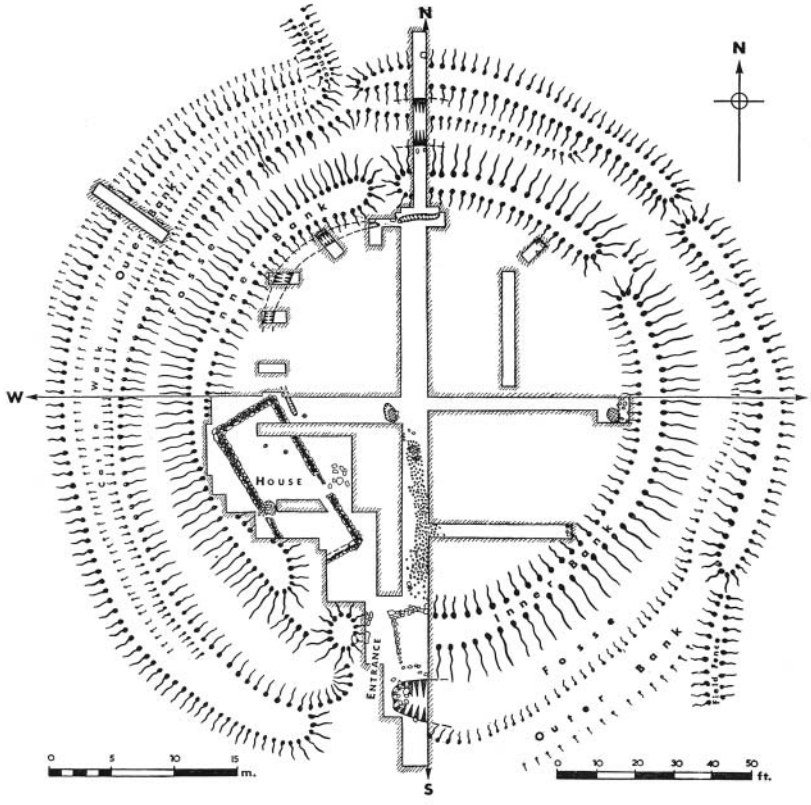

FIG 1

Excavation plan of 'Thady's Fort' — a bivallate *ráth* and house at Shannon Airport (Co Clare) (Rynne 1963).

[57] Rynne 1963
[58] Glasscock 1987, 228; Edwards 1990, 19; O'Keeffe 2000, 24; O'Conor 1998, 91.

non-tower-house-using classes of Gaelic society from the 15th century onward. Depictions of native enclosed circular settlements as 'living sites' in the Gaelic lordships of Ulster, on Tudor maps and map-pictures of the late 16th and early 17th century;[59] primary historical references to the occupation of *ráth* and *caisel* sites as late as the 17th century;[60] late structural features in the fabric of several upstanding *cathair* sites and late buildings within them; and significant late occupation evidence from the interiors of some excavated settlements; these all combine to confirm that native enclosed settlement did not become obsolete at the end of the early Middle Ages.

Some of the more recent evidence for late occupation of *ráth* and *caisel* sites is quite conclusive. Two *ráth* sites at Mackney and Loughbown I, excavated prior to the construction of a national road in the Aughrim–Ballinasloe district of Co Galway in 2006, produced late occupation evidence. At Mackney the excavation uncovered 'a long sequence of settlement and occupation activity' between the 8th and 17th centuries. At Loughbown I occupation ranged from the 5th to 14th centuries with evidence for both high-medieval ironworking and a possible early-modern forge.[61] Niall Brady's excavations at Tulsk (Co Roscommon), on behalf of the Discovery Programme's Medieval Rural Settlement Project, have begun to reveal later medieval levels within the secure context of a Gaelic *ráth* that also has a late-medieval tower-house and a substantial Elizabethan horizon.[62] Excavation of the gatehouse area of Cahermore in the townland of Ballyallaban, Burren, in 1999, proved that the gatehouse entrance to the innermost ring-wall of the *cathair* was built on top of the foundations of the *cathair* wall in the 14th or 15th century.[63] Erin Gibbons' excavation of Cathair Fionnurach in the townland of Ballynavenooragh (Co Kerry) revealed later activity with the recovery of two silver pennies of Henry III (1207–72) from a secure context in the garth.[64]

Reaching back in time to published and archival reports on 'ring-fort' excavations, there is a surprising amount of evidence (albeit piecemeal and in some instances in need of reassessment to make it usable) for later medieval and early-modern occupation activity at both *ráth* and *caisel* sites. Excavations by Barry Raftery at Ráith Gaill have proven that a *caisel* at the heart of an earlier hillfort complex may be a high-medieval construction that enjoyed substantial occupation in the late 13th and 14th century and was used into the 15th century, probably as the *caput* of the Gaelic sept of Uí Bhróin. He found over 2000 sherds of medieval pottery, including locally produced glazed ware and Leinster cooking ware within the *caisel* in association with coins of late 13th- and 14th-century date; also imported 15th-century Spanish pottery.[65] A *caisel* constructed at the centre of an earlier hillfort is seen too at Caherdrinny (Co Cork) where the garth contains a 15th-century tower-house and a group of

[59] PRO London, MPF 35, 36; NLI MS 2656 [5].
[60] Nicholls 1987, 405.
[61] Dillon, Johnston and Tierney 2007, 28.
[62] Brady forthcoming.
[63] Fitzpatrick 2001, 57.
[64] Gibbons 1998, 80:228.
[65] Raftery 1970.

possibly contemporary or near-contemporary houses.[66] Fanning's excavation at Bowling Green (Co Tipperary) uncovered evidence of early-medieval, high-medieval and early-modern occupation in the interior of the univallate *ráth*, with finds including high-medieval pottery and a 17th-century cast-bronze skillet pot.[67] The assumption that the earthen enclosure at Pollardstown (Co Kildare), also excavated by Fanning, must be a colonial ringwork castle rather than a native *ráth* because it is on an Anglo-Norman manor and only revealed evidence for possible high-medieval occupation, must remain open to interpretation.[68] Fanning noted that the finds from the site, which included iron stirrups, an arrowhead, a buckle and some horseshoe nails, were not 'typical of normal habitation material from the native ringfort'.[69] This analysis is, however, based solely on the view that occupation of the native 'ring-fort' can only be early medieval and that native Irish did not share the material culture of the colonist, even if they remained on as tenants on an Anglo-Norman manorial estate. Could it not also be the case that incoming manorial tenants adopted an existing *ráth*? After all, Pollardstown was part of the eastern extent of the Gaelic lordship of Offaly prior to Anglo-Norman colonisation in that area. Moreover, the interpretation of the finds as indicative of occupation, solely from the late 12th century into the 14th century, is somewhat contradicted by the excavator's suggestion that several of the finds could also date to the 15th century; a view shared by O'Conor.[70] This doubt compromises any firm opinion of the site as high medieval in occupation, let alone that it is an Anglo-Norman ringwork, and therefore this is another case where the material culture of the site needs to be re-examined to give veracity to any conclusions drawn.

Some of the excavations conducted at Ulster *ráth* sites in the 1970s and 1980s, such as those at Poleglass (Co Antrim) and Lisdoo (Co Fermanagh), produced high- and late-medieval finds that cannot be dismissed as stray finds: a silver penny of Edward I dated 1280–1 from Poleglass; and high- and late-medieval pottery and a silver penny of Edward I with a mint date of 1282–3 from Lisdoo, deposited according to the excavator later in the 13th or early 14th century.[71] Brannon suggests that all of the Lisdoo evidence indicates 'limited occupation of the site from the 14th to the 16th centuries.[72]

For the last decade O'Conor has been the leading proponent of the view that both the *ráth* and the *caisel*, and their lake-land counterpart, the *crannóg*, enjoyed continuity of use by Gaelic lords and, in some instances, new construction during the high and late Middle Ages.[73] In building his case, he has used a broad base of evidence from excavation results to primary documents, drawing upon the well-known map-picture of Tulach Óg (Tullaghoge, Co Tyrone) by Richard Bartlett, c 1602, which shows the dwelling of the O'Hagan stewards to

[66] O'Keeffe 2000, 24.
[67] Fanning 1970.
[68] O'Conor 1998, 35.
[69] Fanning 1974.
[70] O'Conor 1998, 35.
[71] Harper 1971, 6; Brannon 1982, 55–8.
[72] Brannon 1982, 55–8.
[73] O'Conor 1998, 73–94; Brady and O'Conor 2005.

the O'Neills of Tyrone as a single-banked *ráth* containing a large house and a cabin.[74]

The fact that the argument in favour of some late occupation of the 'ring-fort' has concentrated on the continuity or survival of an earlier tradition underscores a more critical problem — the portrayal of native enclosed settlements of the later medieval and early modern periods as either an attenuation of an archaic mode of enclosed dwelling or a minor revival of such settlement forms by certain Gaelic lords as a result of a renewed interest in Gaelic traditions after the decline of the Anglo-Norman colony.[75] Both views confer a culture of atavism on native society but, as this paper demonstrates, in Gaelic society innovation in enclosed settlement forms was as important as attachment to settlement traditions. In my view, to argue in favour of a late 'ring-fort' tradition rather than innovation in native enclosed settlement is to miss an opportunity to see the modernising tendencies of Gaelic society at work through time.

A lack of targeted, regional fieldwork of the kind conducted by Kerr for the platform *ráth* in Ulster and by Michelle Comber, who is currently directing a major field project on the landscape of Caherconnell in the central Burren uplands, hampers an understanding of later medieval and early-modern native enclosed settlement in Ireland.[76] The debate about later medieval and early-modern occupation of native enclosed settlements has become somewhat cyclical, devolving to the exasperated rationale that the Gaelic Irish had to have lived somewhere after c 1100. One of the main objectives of this paper is to redress this problem by presenting upstanding physical evidence from O'Loughlin's lordship of Burren for a thriving *cathair* tradition there in the late medieval and early modern periods.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION IN BURREN *CATHAIR* SETTLEMENTS

The Burren, from the Irish *Boireann* meaning 'stony place', is an upland karstic region of exposed Upper Carboniferous Limestone occupying 360 sq km of NW Co Clare (Fig 2).[77] The modern administrative divisions of the Burren region are the Barony of Burren and the Barony of Corcomroe, each of which are coterminous with the later medieval lordships of O'Loughlin of Burren and O'Connor of Corcomroe. In the early Middle Ages, prior to the formation of the two lordships, the Burren region was coterminous with the *mórthuath* or large kingdom of Corcu Modruad that incorporated six *tuatha* or petty kingdoms. Those *tuatha*, with the addition of three smaller parcels of lordly demesne land and mensal land, also constituted landholdings of various vassal families and cadet branches of the O'Loughlins and O'Connors during the late medieval and early modern period.[78] It is those minor elites and their residences that are the main concern here.

[74] NLI MS 2656 [5].
[75] Barry 2000a, 118; O'Conor 1998, 73–94; O'Keeffe 2000, 24.
[76] Kerr 2007; Comber has recently published (2008) *The Economy of the Ringfort and Contemporary Settlement in Early Medieval Ireland*.
[77] Whittow 1975, 149–54.
[78] Freeman 1936, 14, 21.

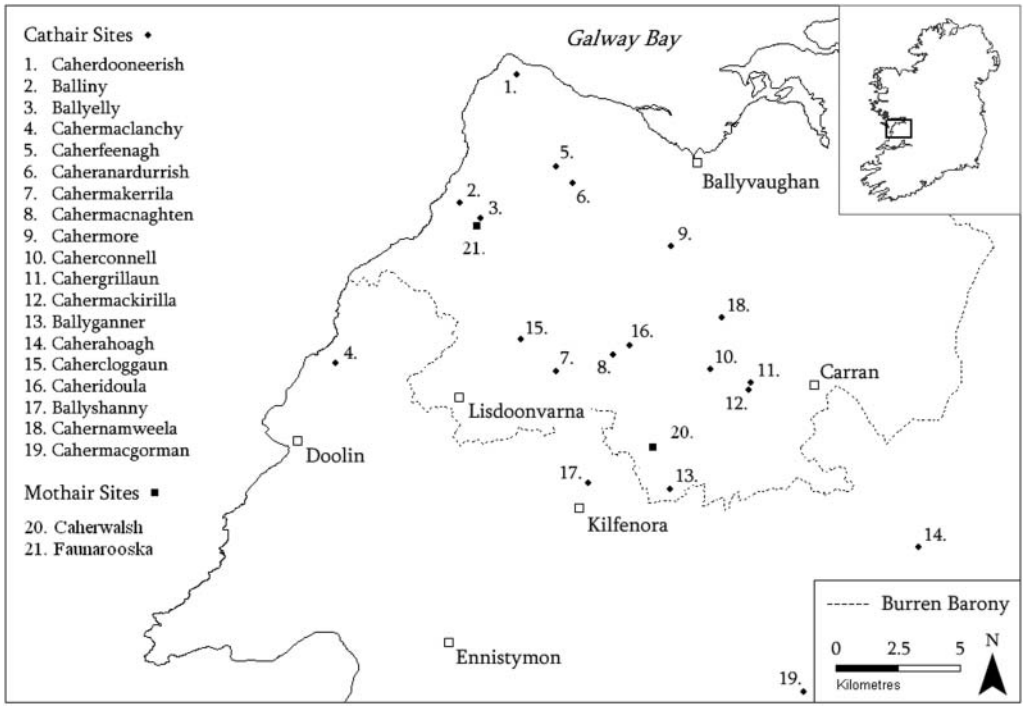

FIG 2

The Burren region showing location of *cathair* and *mothair* sites listed in Tables 1 and 2. *Drawing by Ronan Hennessy*.

There are an estimated 450 enclosed circular settlements in the Burren. The majority of these are designated *cathair* (pl *cathracha*), translated as 'stone enclosure'.[79] Earthen types are less frequent but present nonetheless. The Gaelic term ***cathair*** has been adopted in this paper because it has a range of meanings from 'stone enclosure' to 'fortress', 'castle' and 'dwelling' and does not have the layers of interpretation that pertain to the modern invention 'ring-fort'. The ***mothair*** is another common Burren stone-walled enclosure that is usually, though not exclusively, straight-sided or irregular in plan and occurs both with and without standing buildings in the garth (Fig 3). In the late 19th century, Westropp noted that the term *mothair* was 'used by the peasantry in the sense of enclosure rather than fort'.[80] In some instance *mothair* sites can be circular and lack the strength of the *cathair* sites. The term *mothair* had currency in the early 18th century, as recorded in leases of the 'mohers of Ballymahony in Burren granted by the O'Briens to the England family'.[81] As noted above, it is possible that it originated in the late Middle Ages and that new *mothair* sites may have been erected in the second half of the 17th century during the Cromwellian transplantation of local native families from their hereditary lands to new lands in the Burren.

[79] Quin (ed) 1990, 103: 88.
[80] Comber (ed) 1999, 47.
[81] Registry of Deeds 1725–6, B.51, 378, B.94, 445.

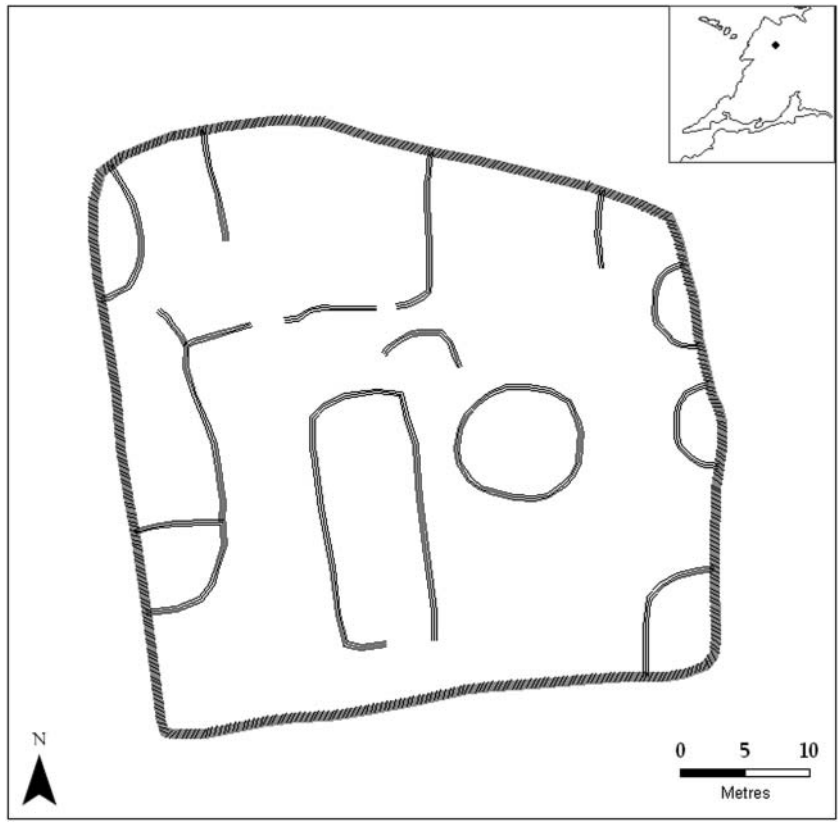

FIG 3
Typical *mothair* at Caherwalsh, Burren (Co Clare). After Westropp 1911 in Comber (ed) 1999. *Drawing by R Hennessy.*

I have investigated a sample of 19 *cathair* sites (Tab 1) and two *mothair* sites (Tab 2) as part of an ongoing project on the *cathair* of Cahermacnaghten and related late-medieval and early-modern *cathair* developments in the Burren. Thus far, the outcome is interesting.

Before entering the Burren to view the evidence for innovation at *cathair* sites in the later Middle Ages, it is important to stress that though the nature of its landscape is unique in Ireland, that peculiarity does not necessarily predicate a very specific building tradition distinct from that of other lordships in the west of Ireland (Iarchonnacht and Tír Conaill for instance) where stone quarries were plentiful, if not as conveniently accessible as the exposed limestone of Burren. What makes the Burren an interesting case study is the sheer scale of the survival of drystone and mortared masonry buildings that have degenerated in large numbers elsewhere. Thus, what one might think of as an unusual building in Burren might in fact have been more commonplace in the west *per se:* the surviving medieval and early-modern built landscape of the Burren is a showcase for what may also have been a reality elsewhere. The archaeology of later medieval Burren has for the most part been under-researched and therefore

TABLE 1
CATHAIR SETTLEMENTS WITH EVIDENCE FOR LATE ADDITIONS AND LATE OCCUPATION.

***Cathair* (nos refer to Fig 2)**	**Townland**	**RMP ref (a)**	**Modified wall fabric**	**Mortar**	**Late-med entrance or gatehouse**	**Late-med/ early-mod buildings in/adjoining garth**	**Tower-house in/adjoining cathair**	***Clachan* in garth**	**Focus of adjacent community settlement**	**Mention in primary historical document**	**Finds**
Balliny Caher (2)	Balliny North	CL004-01604						√			
Ballyelly (3)	Ballyelly	CL004-01613				√					
Ballyganner (13)	Ballyganner South	CL009-05965	√			√	√			√	
Ballyshanny Castle (17)	Ballyshanny	CL009-09302					√				
Caherahoagh (14) (b)	Caherbullaun	CL017-04401	√	√	√	?					
Caheranardurrish (6)	Formoyle East	CL005-012						√ (c)			
Caherclogaun (15)	Caherclogaun	CL004-07702					√				
Caherconnell (10)	Caherconnell	CL009-03010				√					√ (d)
Caherdooneerish (1)	Murrooghtoohy North	CL001-010	√								
Caheridoula (16)	Cahermacnaghten	CL009-0017							√		
Caherfeenagh (5)	Formoyle East	CL002-028							√		
Cahergrillaun (11)	Cahergrillaun	CL009-05304	√						√		
Cahermaclanchy (4)	Cahermaclanchy	CL008-01604								√	
Cahermacgorman (19)	Cahercorcaun	CL025-014								√	√ (e)
Cahermakerrila (7)	Cahermakerrila (Killeany)	CL009-00105				√					√ (f)
Cahermackirilla (12)	Cahermackirilla (Carran)	CL009-054						√		√ (g)	√ (h)

TABLE 1
Continued

***Cathair* (nos refer to Fig 2)**	**Townland**	**RMP ref (a)**	**Modified wall fabric**	**Mortar**	**Late-med entrance or gatehouse**	**Late-med/ early-mod buildings in/adjoining garth**	**Tower-house in/adjoining cathair**	***Clachan* in garth**	**Focus of adjacent community settlement**	**Mention in primary historical document**	**Finds**
Cahermacnaghten (8)	Cahermacnaghten	CL009-00110	√	√	√	√				√	√ (i)
Cahermore (9)	Ballyallaban	CL005-09402		√	√	√					
Cahernamweela (18)	Poulgorm	CL0005-154				? (j)					

(a) Record Monuments and Places, County Clare, 1996. Irish National Monuments and Historic Properties. **(b)** There are two cashels in Caherbullaun townland. Caherahoagh is the name given to the larger of the two sites by Westropp and he names the smaller one immediately west of the former as Caherbullaun (Comber (ed) 1999, 20). However, Robinson's (1977) map of the Burren ascribes the name Cathair an Bhulláin to the larger cashel. It is likely that Westropp's version is correct as he tended to collect the fort place-names locally while visiting them. **(c)** In 1901 Westropp noted that the garth was 'crowded with the ruins of modern houses (Comber (ed) 1999, 77). **(d)** A 15th-century date was obtained from faunal remains (Comber 2007). **(e)** Westropp remarked 'A coin of King John has also been found recently in the gateway'. The site is noted in the Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland for 1589 and it is also recorded as the property of Conor O'Brien in the Fiants for 1591 (Comber (ed) 1999, 166). **(f)** Westropp (1915) noted that 'wherever a facing block is removed, we can see that the inner filling is full of bleached and crumbled bones of animals; but whether these were built into the wall originally or slipped there in late times I cannot decide' (Comber (ed) 1999, 188). This question may be answered by a 14C date from an animal bone within the wall core. **(g)** Noted in the O'Brien Rental 1380; Property of Brian O'Loughlin in 1659 (Comber (ed) 1999, 45). **(h)** Westropp noted that 'base metal coins 'about as big as sixpences, with a cross and a head' were found in Cahermackirilla as well a 'sharp flints you could strike fire out of', but none were preserved. He also observed that a family named Kilmartin occupied the fort until 1862' (Comber (ed) 1999, 45).**(i)** During the winter of 2006 topsoil was unfortunately removed from the field immediately west of the cashel by a mechanical excavator in the aftermath of which a small collection of finds including shards of German stoneware, clay-pipe stems and butchered bone and molluscan sea shell consistent with a kitchen midden were recovered by Liam Hickey and the author. **(j)** Westropp noted a 'hut foundation' in the garth near the entrance (Comber (ed) 1999, 57).

TABLE 2
MOTHAIR SETTLEMENTS WITH EVIDENCE OF LATE USE.

***Mothair* (nos refer to Fig 2)**	**Townland**	**RMP ref**	**Late-medieval/ early-modern buildings in/ adjoining garth**	**Tower-house in/adjoining garth**
Caherwalsh (20)	Noughaval	CL009-05945	√	
Faunarooska Castle (21)	Faunarooska	CL004-01607		√

largely excluded from the conclusions drawn in general works on the archaeology of medieval Ireland.[82] As new Burren data becomes available, it should make an impact on understanding social change and contribute to determining more general patterns and trends for later medieval Ireland.

The question that this paper cannot yet answer is whether the group of modernised Burren *cathair* sites investigated had been in continuous use from the early Middle Ages. Nevertheless, there is no historical evidence for population movement out of the Burren that might account for a hiatus in *cathair* living. Indeed, there is no very good reason at all why the people of the lordship should abandon *cathair* dwelling after the early Middle Ages. There is also no reason why Gaelic lords or minor gentry should suddenly have decided to reoccupy long-abandoned sites as a sign of resurgence in the 14th and 15th centuries.[83] Such ostentatious expressions of revival were hardly necessary in a region that had not experienced Anglo-Norman colonisation. Based on the evidence presented here, it is very likely that the *cathair* was an enduring but not an immutable settlement form from its inception to its demise in the Burren and that it enjoyed consistent use by certain classes of Gaelic society.

Modern archaeological literature primarily defines and presents the *cathair* sites of the Burren, like most circular enclosed settlements of earth or stone, as the homesteads of an early-medieval farming society.[84] The presence of late-medieval building fabric at Cahermacnaghten has largely been interpreted as evidence of a somewhat anomalous survival of the 'ring-fort' tradition in the west of Ireland;[85] the possibility that it is but one indicator of a potentially more widespread practice of living in stone enclosures, after the early Middle Ages, has not been pursued. Many west of Ireland *cathair* reveal more recent occupancy in their building fabric, and a sojourn in the Burren, in particular, reveals that the *cathair* was probably a commonplace residence of Gaelic minor elites in the late medieval and early modern periods.

Carleton Jones suggests that certain *cathair* settlements in the Burren 'may have been continuously occupied up to the time when tower-houses came into vogue some time in the 15th or 16th century'.[86] This is a viewpoint expressed as early as 1896 by Westropp who also proposed that the 'straight-sided cahers [*mothair*] and the mortar-built gateways in circular forts' were 'transitional',

[82] Barry 1987; O'Conor 1998; O'Keeffe 2000.
[83] O'Keeffe 2000, 24.
[84] Jones 2004, 98–110.
[85] O'Keeffe 2000, 24.
[86] Jones 2004, 110.

occurring after the main period of *cathair* building and before the advent of the tower-house.[87] But it is clear from a closer scrutiny of *cathair* building fabric and the dwellings and buildings in their garths across the Burren that several of them continued to be used after Westropp's proposed 14th-century transitional phase, well into the 17th century. The tower-house did not replace the *cathair* as a settlement form. Within the Burren it was largely the lords, O Loughlin and O'Connor, and their overlord O'Brien, who built tower-houses, in some instances adopting an existing *cathair* as a bawn wall, while the Gaelic minor gentry more usually lived in stone houses, sometimes accompanied by additional buildings, within the walls of a *cathair* or *mothair*. In 1636–40, the compilers of the earliest plantation survey of Connacht, the Strafford Survey, still registered occupation of *cathair* sites by Gaelic landowners. The chronological and typological bias in the study of settlements types — that one type replaced another — is overly simplistic and precludes a broader understanding of the more fascinating complexity of dwelling types and settlement arrangements that co-existed in the Gaelic cultural landscape from the early Middle Ages through to the early modern period.

During two seasons of fieldwork to identify late building episodes at ostensibly early-medieval *cathair* sites, I found considerable evidence to suggest that enclosed settlements were adapted to new living circumstances in several different ways during the late medieval and early modern period. There is even an instance in which a *cathair* constituted the boundary for a small hamlet that was still inhabited as late as 1839. There is nothing particularly novel about this understanding because as early as the 19th century the methodical fieldwork of Westropp on the stone 'forts' of N Clare (which was heroic in scale and all published between 1896 and 1915) recognised the very real differences manifest in the stone enclosures of that region.[88]

The evidence for late-medieval and/or early-modern activity at *cathair* and *mothair* sites in the Burren region of N Co Clare takes a number of forms (Tabs 1–2):

(a) a modified late-medieval entrance and flanking wall wings with mortar present
(b) a rectangular stone building or group of such buildings, some quite large in size in the *cathair* garth
(c) adoption or construction of a *cathair* or *mothair* as a bawn wall defining a courtyard at a tower-house
(d) a clearly demarcated line of late building fabric above cyclopean courses in the *cathair* wall
(e) a *cathair* that became the focus of a late nucleated settlement (*clachan*) but did not enclose it, or one that may express long continuity of use in the presence of 19th-century buildings in its garth
(f) a *cathair* or a *mothair* mentioned as an occupied site in late-medieval/early-modern primary documents and from which late-medieval/early-modern finds have been recorded.

[87] Comber (ed) 1999, 8.
[88] Ibid, 7.

LATE-MEDIEVAL GATE-ENTRANCES AT *CATHAIR* SITES

Evidence for late-medieval alterations to *cathair* entrances assumes two forms in the Burren: the insertion of a gatehouse, as seen at Cahermacnaghten and Cahermore in the central Burren uplands; and the construction of a gateway with a cut-stone arch, punch-dressed jambs and door fixtures such as deep bar-holes, which can be seen at Caherahoagh in the south-eastern area of the Burren.

The *cathair* of **Cahermacnaghten** (Figs 2:8, 4–5) was the *ceann áit* or head place of the O'Davoren family who were the hereditary brehons or lawyers to the O'Loughlin chiefs of Burren at least as early as 1364 when the chronicles record that 'Giolla na Naem O Duib da Boirenn, ollav in Brehon Law of Corcumroe, died'.[89] While the *cathair* may be the location of the O'Davoren

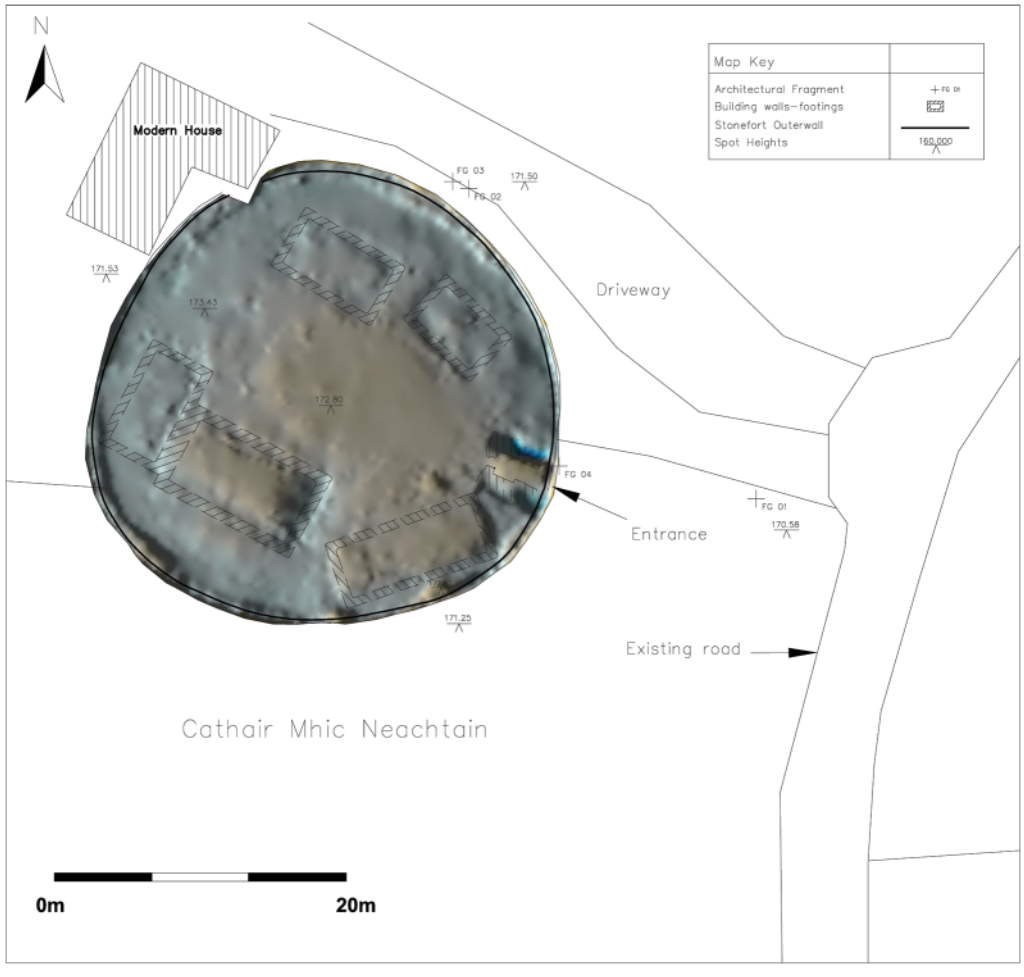

FIG 4

Plan of Cahermacnaghten and the buildings within it. *Drawing by Cormac Bruton.*

[89] Freeman (ed) 1936, 325.

brehon law school,[90] there is no present evidence to confirm this and it seems more likely that it was the residence of members of that family from the late 15th or early 16th century. The name Cathair Mhic Neachtain, anglicised to Cahermacnaghten, translates as the 'stone fort of the son of Neachtain'.[91]

The ground plan of Cahermacnaghten is almost of standard Burren *cathair* size with an internal diameter of c 30 m. Like most of the Burren *cathair* sites it is entered at the E cardinal point of the perimeter. The main architectural features of the *cathair* are focused on the entrance, which was constructed in the thickness of the *cathair* wall during the late Middle Ages. It consists of a small external lobby area that leads into the ground floor (2.55 by 2.50 m) of what was formerly a modest two-storey gatehouse. The gatehouse projects westward slightly beyond the internal line of the *cathair* wall into the garth of the site. Its walls are built of large and small, very roughly coursed blocks of flat-bedded facing stones with a rubble and mortar core that would have been standard in late-medieval wall construction. In Westropp's 1911 plan of the site (Fig 5) he indicates a small alcove no more than 1.50 sq m formed in the thickness of the S wall that possibly indicates the position of a short flight of stone stairs leading to the upper floor of the gatehouse, or perhaps a small guardroom that is not now visible.[92] Footings of the W wall of the gatehouse also remain in place. The

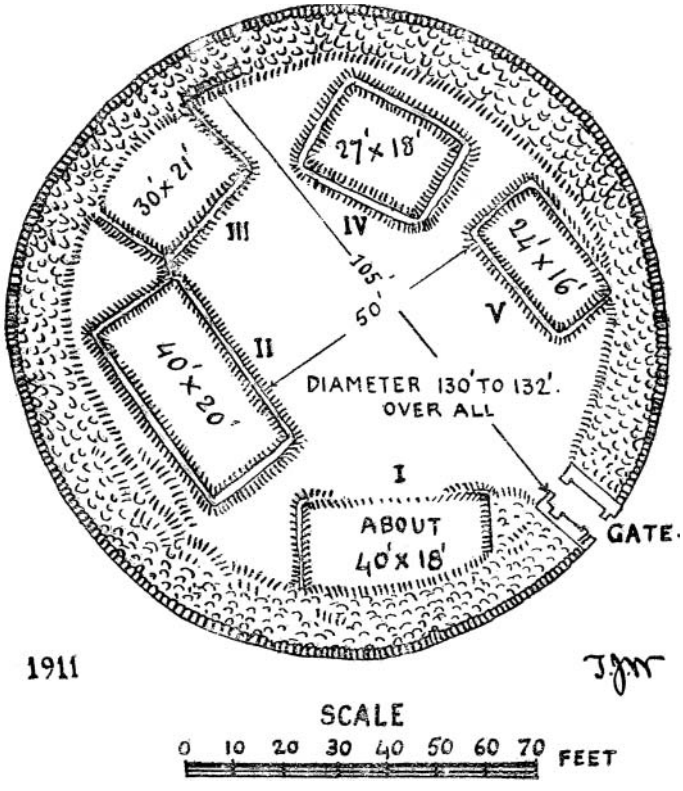

FIG 5
Sketch-plan of Cahermacnaghten (Westropp 1911 in Comber (ed) 1999).

[90] Breatnach 2005; Kelly 1988, n 83.
[91] O'Brien 1962, 255.
[92] Macnamara 1913, 68.

entrance can be securely dated to the late Middle Ages on the basis of some surviving cut-stone features that are integral to the fabric of the gatehouse walls. Two roughly hewn, punch-dressed corbels project out from the N wall (Fig 6). These and two former correspondents on the opposite S wall supported beams that carried a timber upper floor. On entering the *cathair*, immediately on the N side of the gatehouse entrance, there are two cut stones projecting out from the side wall that are clearly part of the frame of a former lobby doorway. A punch-dressed pivot-stone that held the stile of a door has collapsed from its original position and now lies at the foot of the entrance. My fieldwork has uncovered additional fragments of the gatehouse. A very large cut and punch-dressed bowed arch-stone, perhaps one of a matching pair that originally formed the head of the exterior entrance to the gatehouse lobby, is incorporated into the modern drystone property boundary that runs west to east from the N side of the *cathair* entrance. In 2006 clearance of topsoil from the field immediately west of the *cathair* turned up a pair of cut and punch-dressed arch-stones from a semi-pointed doorway (Fig 7). The arch-stones were perhaps originally positioned on the inner side of the gatehouse, leading into the courtyard, or alternatively they may have been part of a main doorway to one of the large rectangular houses that grace the garth of the *cathair*. The wing-walls of the *cathair* enclosure, either side of the entrance, appear to have been refaced during construction of the gatehouse. The evidence for this consists of a vertical break-line in the *cathair*

FIG 6

Elevation of the N wall of the gatehouse at Cahermacnaghten showing the cut-stone corbels that supported an upper floor. © *Cahermacnaghten Vertical Collection, NUI, Galway*.

FIG 7
Pair of cut-stone, punch-dressed late-medieval arch-stones, probably from the gatehouse or the 'big house' at Cahermacnaghten. © *Cahermacnaghten Vertical Collection, NUI, Galway.*

masonry that is visible in the wall south of the entrance. There are also traces of lime mortar in the interstices of the masonry in that wall face as well as late-medieval punch-dressing on the quoins of the *cathair* wall flanking the S side of the entrance passage.

If Cahermacnaghten *cathair* is early medieval in origin, the late-medieval entrance may have replaced a typical early-medieval, square-headed lintelled doorway and entrance passage. The elaboration of the *cathair* entrance in the 15th or 16th century indicates the modernising instincts of the professional legal family who occupied the site. It is quite likely, furthermore, that their decision to change the entrance was influenced by the gate-entrances in the bawns of the tower-houses that the O'Loughlin and O'Connor lords, and their O'Brien overlord, were constructing throughout the Burren during the 15th and 16th centuries. Cahermacnaghten has sometimes been cited as one of the few non-contentious examples of later medieval occupation or reoccupation of an early-medieval 'ring-fort',[93] but the occurrence of other newly built gate-entrances in the Burren suggests that the modifications made at Cahermacnaghten in order to accommodate new needs and fashions was not exceptional.

Cahermore lies in an upland position (Fig 2:9), c 5 km north-east of Cahermacnaghten, and also has a gatehouse entrance. This is more defensive and, based on excavation evidence, it appears to pre-date the Cahermacnaghten gatehouse by perhaps a century.[94] It should be noted that Cahermore, with its

[93] O'Keeffe 2000, 24.
[94] Fitzpatrick 2001, 57.

bivallate plan and radial divisions in the *lios* (area between the two enclosing walls), belongs to the class of 'great western stone forts' rather than to the standard single-walled *cathair* of the Burren.[95] Cahermore is very large and akin to Cahercommaun in the south-eastern area of the Burren, which has three concentric walls enclosing an area of almost an acre and, like Cahermore, has radial divisions in the *lios* of the outer enclosures. The commanding locations of both sites, their respective bipartite and tripartite concentricity and their strong inner citadels, has led to their interpretation as tribal centres, the *capita* of significant *tuatha* in the early Middle Ages.[96] It might also be said that the concentric arrangement of their enclosures and the use of radial divisions strongly mirrors the layout of the more prestigious Irish early-medieval monasteries such as St Patrick's at Armagh, and Nendrum (Co Down).[97] In other words, there may have been a common blueprint for the layout of significant ecclesiastical or tribal capitals in early-medieval Ireland.

Cahermore is not isolated on a strategic height in the landscape but surrounded by other stone enclosures and enclosed fields. North of it in the same townland there is an impressive bivallate earthen enclosure or *ráth* simply called 'An Ráth'.[98] The late-medieval features of Cahermore occur in its central enclosure which has internal dimensions of c 52 by c 46 m. The enclosing drystone wall, which consists of inner and outer facing stones with a rubble core, is a formidable structure, the western half of which stands c 3 m high and averages 2–3 m thick. The gatehouse was constructed at the E cardinal point of the inner ring wall and an impressive rectangular stone house was built in the southern half of the garth. Without excavation it is difficult to say whether the house is of high- or late-medieval date. The age of the gatehouse and the presence of the large house suggest that the *cathair* enjoyed continuity of occupation well into later medieval times and that the inner enclosing wall may have been refurbished or even rebuilt in that period. The gatehouse was excavated in 1999 and has since been reconstructed (Fig 8).[99] A survey of the upstanding remains in conjunction with the excavation results revealed it to be a rectangular structure of rubble masonry mortared throughout, with a squared-headed, lintelled doorway leading into a splayed entrance passage flanked on either side by a small guard-chamber. Prior to reconstruction it stood to a height of c 1.5 m and the punch-dressed lower jambs and threshold stone of the main entrance, in addition to the dressed limestone threshold and spud-stone of the S chamber, remained intact.[100] A pivot-hole that held the stile for a doorway was also found immediately inside the main doorway during excavation. No corbels were found in situ or during the excavation and no stairs in either chamber that might otherwise have indicated the presence of an upper floor. The excavator found that the original wall of the *cathair* had been lowered and the gatehouse built on its line sometime in the 14th or early 15th century.[101] The Cahermore gatehouse

[95] Cotter 1995, 10–11.
[96] Jones 2004, 98–107; Gibson 1995, 116–28.
[97] McErlean and Crothers 2007, 335–9.
[98] Robinson 1999.
[99] Fitzpatrick 2001.
[100] Ibid, 52.
[101] Ibid, 53, 56.

FIG 8
The reconstructed gatehouse at Cahermore. *Photograph by Elizabeth Fitzpatrick.*

is utilitarian and unsophisticated in terms of its architectural detail but the presence of two guard-chambers, combined with the funnel-shaped entrance passage, a deep socket for a door-bar and a stone-cut ditch that was uncovered just east of the lintelled entrance, suggests that defence was a major consideration in its construction.[102] This contrasts with the Cahermacnaghten gatehouse where attention to architectural detail and a generally more pleasing appearance were clearly of greater concern than defence, reflecting the rank of the occupants who were lawyers in the Gaelic court of O'Loughlin and not military men or chiefs.

In the south-eastern limits of the Burren the little-known *cathair* recorded by Westropp in 1913 as '**Caherahoagh**' lies in dense vegetation north-east of Ballyportry tower-house and the town of Corofin (Fig 2:14). It can still be reached today from the main road by a track called 'Boithrín na Cathrach' or the 'little road of the stone fort'.[103] The *cathair* is neatly round with an internal diameter of 30 m. The drystone enclosing wall has an inner and outer section and a rubble core between, and it is an impressive 3 m thick broadening to 3.5 m towards its base to form a batter similar to that at Cahermacnaghten. The inner wall face is stepped below the outer face forming a terrace that runs around the circumference of the *cathair* and which was reached by two flights of cut-stone steps in a wall recess at north and by four steps in the S side of the gate-entrance (Fig 9). The neat cut-stone steps fit comfortably into late-medieval masonry styles, as does the fabric of the entrance and its wall wings. The entrance to Caherahoagh is positioned at east and unlike Cahermacnaghten and Cahermore it is a gateway rather than a gatehouse. The entrance passage is shaped somewhat like an hour glass: the lobby area before the doorway splays inward from

[102] Ibid, 57–8.
[103] Westropp 1913, 253–4.

c 1.9 m to 1.35 m and widens again beyond the doorway towards the internal face of the *cathair* wall (Fig 9). The plan of the entrance is quite the opposite to that of Cahermore where the passage is very narrow externally and obviously designed to control access to the interior of the *cathair*. The remains of the doorway at Caherahoagh consist of two projecting cut-stone, punch-dressed jambs typical of late-medieval masonry (Fig 9). Immediately behind the door jambs there are deep rectangular bar-holes for a door bar. The narrow distance between the jambs and the door-bar holes suggests that the timber door was not very substantial. The head of the doorway is no longer in place but a single, cut-stone, punch-dressed arch-stone, similar to the pair (Fig 7) from Cahermacnaghten, lies in the collapsed masonry outside the entrance. There are traces of lime mortar in the interstices of the masonry courses along a 5 m

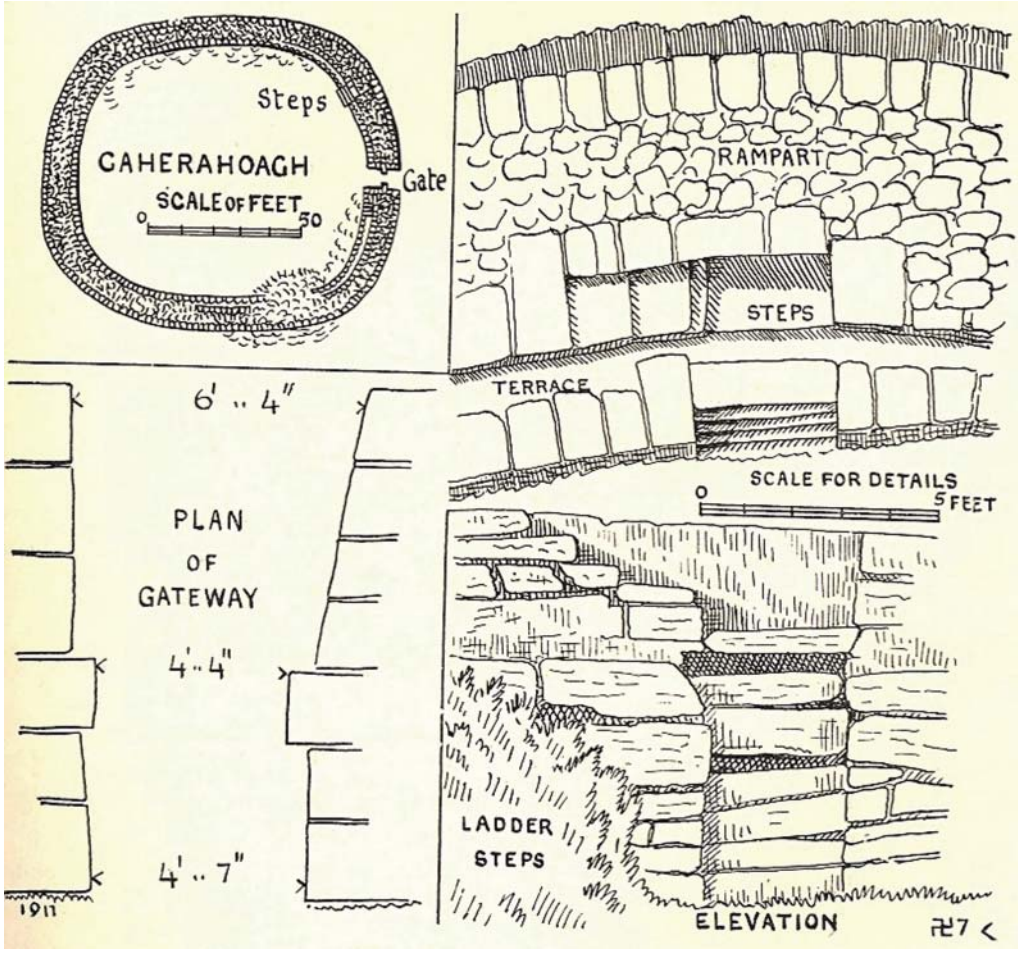

FIG 9

Plan and features of Caherahoagh, near Corofin in south-eastern Burren (Westropp 1913).

stretch of the wing wall, south and south-west of the entrance. A small stone-faced platform rests up against the *cathair* wall in the SE quadrant and there are remnants of a possible stone building in the northern half of the garth. Caherahoagh is similar in scale and strength to Cahermacnaghten and like the latter the entrance is not particularly defensive in design.

LATE BUILDING FABRIC IN *CATHAIR* WALL

In his Burren field work conducted between 1896 and 1915, Westropp revealed *cathair* wall construction to have many different styles, which he concluded must be a reflection of different periods of building.[104] Since Westropp's time very little progress has been made in terms of systematically recording and analysing the masonry styles of the Burren *cathair* sites.[105] The builders of *cathair* enclosures must also have been the builders of churches in the Burren, but as yet there have been no detailed studies of *cathair* masonry of the type conducted by Tómas Ó Carragáin on early-medieval stone churches and their habitual masonry styles.[106] I have examined the masonry of the *cathair* wall at **Cahermacnaghten** and a summary of the results are given here. The enclosing drystone wall (2.5 m thick; 3 m high) is constructed of roughly squared, large blocks of limestone, some of which, towards the base of the wall, are outwardly as large as 2 by 0.50 m, arranged in rough courses. However, massive blocks are the exception. Block-work is confined to the inner and outer faces of the *cathair* wall, the area between them filled with a substantial rubble core. The smoother face of the stone is turned outward which gives the *cathair* a pleasing external appearance. Smaller pieces of roughly squared limestone fill the gaps between the larger blocks and the interstices of masonry courses, and the overall impression is one of moderately well-fitted block-work. There is a noticeable batter to the wall that indicates (like Caherahoagh) that it was probably built at a slight angle springing from a broader foundation course erected at the butt of the wall. A notable feature of the wall, especially on the external face of the southern half, is the presence of two rows of very evenly coursed flat stones in the upper levels (Fig 10). This is an unusual feature and I speculate that these flat stone courses may have been added during a later period of construction, perhaps during the 15th or 16th century when the gatehouse was constructed, in order to create a level base for new masonry courses. If the poetic reference of Tadhg mac Dáire Mac Bruaideadha (1570–1652) to the 'limewhite fort' [*aolta lios*] of the O'Davorens, in his genealogical poem *Ní crann aontoraidh an uaisle*, is an accurate observation of the appearance of Cahermacnaghten in the late 16th or early 17th century, it could be conjectured that the *cathair* was harled and lime washed, or simply lime washed, as a result of which it would have stood out against the grey limestone of the surrounding landscape.[107]

[104] Comber (ed) 1999.
[105] Gibson 1995.
[106] Ó Carragáin 2005.
[107] Macnamara 1913, 204, 209.

FIG 10

Section of *cathair* walling showing flat levelling stones in upper courses at Cahermacnaghten. © *Cahermacnaghten Vertical Collection, NUI, Galway.*

BUILDINGS IN THE *CATHAIR*

Six of the 19 *cathair* sites treated in this paper have upstanding evidence of later medieval and/or early-modern stone buildings in their garths (Tab 1). The most impressive group survives at **Cahermacnaghten** where wall-footings of five stone buildings, not necessarily contemporary, can be seen in the interior of the *cathair* (Fig 4). An accumulation of occupation debris to a height of c 3 m, level in most places with the top of the *cathair* wall, vividly demonstrates that the site was inhabited over a long period. The buildings range around the inner face of the *cathair* wall leaving an open courtyard area at the centre. It is interesting to note that the information board at the site entrance suggests that the garth contained wattle huts (an evocation of the 'native' cabin), despite the presence of obvious masonry buildings, two of which are quite large and representative of a Burren stone house-type. This is nicely indicative of the unshakeable and exclusive relationship that some archaeologists draw between the 'ring-fort' and the early Middle Ages even in the face of glaring evidence for late-medieval activity.

The buildings, and their precise positions in relation to each other and the enclosing wall of the *cathair*, are mentioned as part of the inheritance of two members of the O'Davoren family in a land partition deed of 1606.[108] The houses within the *cathair* cannot have been built any later than the first half of the 16th century but the actual construction and subsequent occupation dates for each building can only be solved by excavation. The high degree of correlation between the descriptions of the buildings within the *cathair*, and the visible footprints of five buildings that remain in the garth, goes some way towards confirming the accuracy of the documentary details. The relevant extract from the 1606 document reads as follows:

> And this is the partition of the home division . . . [1] the place of the big house [*tighe móir*] of the *cathair* within, together with [2] the place of the kitchen house [*tighe na cisdionach*] to the said big house of the *cathair* within, and [3] the place of the graveyard house [*tighe na reilge*] on the western side of the cathair . . . And [4] the house [*tighe*] which is between the front of the big house and the door of the *cathair* and [5] the place of another house [*tighe*] at the north-western side of the *cathair* within; and [6] the big house which is at the eastern side of the door of the *cathair*.

In 1911 Westropp produced a sketch-plan (Fig 5) of the buildings within the *cathair*, which remains broadly representative of what can be seen there today and which was a revision of his earlier 1895 plan.[109] A more recent survey (Fig 4) of the five buildings within the *cathair* indicates that they are more sophisticated than those portrayed by Westropp. The *tighe móir*, referred to here as building [1], dominates the southern half of the interior of the cashel. The term *tighe móir* or 'big house' probably distinguishes the main residence. It has internal dimensions of 12 by 5 m and the long walls and gables are 1 m thick. An entrance is positioned towards the western end of the northern long wall. The *tighe móir* also appears to have somewhat rounded rather than strictly right-angled corners, a feature that can be more clearly seen on the houses within the *cathair* sites at Ballyganner, Caherconnell and Cahermore and in the *mothair* site of Caherwalsh (Fig 2:20) in the Burren. A small building [2] abuts the *cathair* wall, and adjoins the WNW gable of the *tighe móir* and must be the kitchen house mentioned as part of the big house. The 1606 partition deed also notes a house [4] positioned between the front of the *tighe móir* and the door of the *cathair*. This appears to be the small ill-defined building close to the *cathair* wall in the NE quadrant of the interior. A building of comparable size situated in the NW quadrant can be identified with building [5]. The final building listed in the partition deed is another *tighe móir* or big house [6] which can only be the building positioned nearest the entrance to the *cathair* that is best seen in winter as a long rectangular structure, c 11 by 6.2 m externally. Its dimensions are comparable to the principal house [1] of the *cathair* but unlike the latter the S long wall and E gable of the building appear to run into the *cathair* wall itself.

The partition deed of 1606 indicates the domestic nature of the *cathair* settlement through reference to the presence of a kitchen house. This allows for

[108] Macnamara 1913, 86–7, 90–1.
[109] Macnamara 1913, 68; Comber (ed) 1999, 28.

a working interpretation of the other four buildings as living and dining quarters and storage space. The buildings are arranged around the *cathair* wall leaving a courtyard area to the centre (Fig 4). Collectively, the residential space afforded by each unit, inclusive of the gatehouse, would have been comparable to a small tower-house. The Cahermacnaghten evidence points to an innovative modular settlement of the late Middle Ages. It is not an exceptional site in that regard but one of the better preserved examples of late-medieval and early-modern *cathair* living in the Burren.

Mention has already been made of the large house in the southern half of **Cahermore**. It is aligned E–W, and has internal dimensions of c 14 by 7 m. Built of roughly coursed rubble masonry, it has rounded quoins with no dressing and there is a batter at the NW and SW angles. The doorway was possibly at the E end of the N wall but nothing of its cut-stone architecture remains in situ. More of its fabric survives than of any of the other houses of its type in the Burren.

A *cathair* at **Ballyganner Castle** (Fig 2:13), also contains the foundations of a large stone house. It lies up against the *cathair* wall in the northern half of the site. With its rounded quoins and internal dimensions of 12 by 6 m it compares well with both of the big houses at Cahermacnaghten and with the house in Cahermore. There is also a large stone house, 15 by 6 m, in an irregularly shaped *mothair* in **Caherwalsh** townland (Fig 2:20; 3) and a somewhat smaller house, 8 by 5 m, but again with rounded quoins, in the garth of **Caherconnell** (Fig 2:10).[110]

The use of undressed rounded quoins appears to be a distinguishing feature of several Burren houses associated with *cathair* sites. At the foot of **Caheridoula** *cathair* (Fig 2:16) there is a group of houses that formed a small nucleated settlement of undetermined date. A field wall overlies the S wall of one of the houses in that cluster and it pre-dates the others. Its visible wall-footings indicate an E/W-aligned rectangular building, 6.2 by 4.4 m internally. It is smaller in scale than the Cahermacnaghten, Cahermore and Ballyganner houses and appears to have its entrance in the W gable, unlike the former, which have entrances in their long walls. The walls of the Caheridoula building are 1 m thick, constructed of flat-bedded masonry and have rounded quoins. Martin Fitzpatrick has suggested that the rounded quoins on the Cahermore house bear comparison with those of the 16th-century tower-houses of N Co Clare and S Co Galway,[111] but the tower-house quoins tend to be finer and often dressed. Also rounded were the three visible corners of the foundations of the large rectangular stone house, 13.4 by 6.2 m, excavated by Rynne in the bivallate *ráth* called Thady's Fort (Fig 1).[112] Rynne dated the house to c 1600 because of a clay pipe fragment found under a paving stone at the door of the building. However, rounded corners on stone rectangular houses are not necessarily

[110] Comber and Hull 2007.
[111] Fitzpatrick 2001, 57.
[112] Rynne 1963.

FIG 11

Enclosed fields and house foundations of a small nucleated settlement at the foot of Caheridoola in the E end of Cahermacnaghten townland. © *Cahermacnaghten Vertical Collection, NUI, Galway*.

a late-medieval or early-modern feature. For instance, House 1 excavated at Caherguillamore (Co Limerick) and dated to the high Middle Ages, had rounded corners.[113]

Archaeologists have excavated only two houses in the Burren. The Caherconnell excavation results are more significant for this study because the house lies in the *cathair* garth and was built and occupied sometime between the early 15th and mid-17th century. The *cathair* wall has not been dated but earliest occupation may have occurred sometime between the early 10th and mid-12th century.[114] The second excavated site was located adjacent to Noughaval graveyard. The **Noughaval** house, 8.75 by 6 m, was a two-roomed structure with a doorway midway along the S wall and possibly another in the corresponding position in the N wall. The fabric of the building consisted of dressed inner and outer facing stones with a rubble infill. There was evidence for two periods of occupation: the later one datable to the 17th century and the earlier one possibly 13th century.[115]

From the upstanding evidence it is clear that the Burren *cathair* houses were not placed at the centre of the garth but around the enclosing wall leaving an open courtyard area. This allowed maximum space for additional buildings and a small central courtyard for other activities. It perhaps also gave the buildings some extra protection from the elements. The position of the house in the SW

[113] Ó Ríordán and Hunt 1942, 37–63.
[114] Comber and Hull 2007.
[115] Ní Ghábhláin 1991, 15.

quadrant of Thady's Fort suggests this arrangement also extended to late houses in the garths of *ráth* sites;[116] as may the location of the two timber buildings illustrated by Bartlett within O'Hagan's *ráth* at Tullaghoge in 1602.[117]

The *tighe móir* or 'big houses' at the Burren *cathair* sites do not preserve any of their architectural details other than their rounded quoins, and without excavation it is impossible to determine anything about their features or material culture, or to ascertain their chronology. There can be no doubt, however, that their largely similar scale and plan, the manner in which they are placed in the garth, and the families associated with those sites, mark them out as an important building type — the dwellings of later medieval and early-modern Gaelic gentry class on their small Burren landholdings.

THE *CATHAIR* AND THE TOWER-HOUSE BAWN

Late medieval tower-houses are found in association with three *cathair* sites and one *mothair* in the Burren. The *cathair* sites are **Cahercloggaun**, '**Ballyshanny Castle**' and '**Ballyganner Castle**' (Fig 2:15, 17, 13) that, as noted above, also contains a large stone house. Ballyshanny was an O'Brien residence while Cahercloggaun and Ballyganner were O'Loughlin possessions, but it is important to note that they were not chiefry castles but the dwellings of cadet branches of the O'Loughlin and O'Brien septs.[118] The circular plan tower-house in the *mothair* at **Faunarooska** (Killonaghan) (Fig 2:21) may also have been an O'Loughlin residence. All four tower-houses are quite badly ruined structures. Like the stone houses they are not placed in the centre of the garth but generally adjoin the *cathair* wall. The association between the *cathair* or *mothair* and the tower-house may have a pragmatic but also a social function. It was undoubtedly a practical response to the need for a wall defining a bawn or courtyard of a tower-house. However, it could also be perceived as an expression of continuity of occupation on the same site by a leading family who had the resources to build a fashionable late-medieval tower at their *cathair*. After all, in Gaelic society great importance was attached to the pedigree of the site of a dwelling and to other buildings such as churches — in other words having demonstrable connections through time with the place where you lived was an essential social value.[119] Where the foundations of a large stone house are found in association with a tower-house at a *cathair* site, like Ballyganner Castle, the question also arises as to whether the house and tower-house were contemporary structures, with the house acting as a hall to the tower-house, or whether the house represents the pre- or post-tower-house occupation of the site. Again excavation needs to take place in order to determine the true nature of those relationships.

[116] Rynne 1963.
[117] NLI MS 2656 [5].
[118] Comber (ed) 1997, 61, 70.
[119] FitzPatrick 2006, 70–2.

CONCLUSION

The debate on the chronology of the 'ring-fort' is essentially flawed. It addresses the emperor's new clothes in the sense that the 'ring-fort' does not actually exist as a neatly classifiable and readily datable site type on the Irish landscape. The wide range of native enclosures that antiquaries and field archaeologists working in Ireland since the 19th century recognised, the fact that many such enclosures are not forts in the true sense of that word, and that their chronology in terms of occupation potentially spans a millennium, is evidence enough that the term 'ring-fort' is discredited as a meaningful definition of a native settlement form. The argument, therefore, is not whether 'ring-forts' continued to be built or occupied into the later medieval and early modern periods but whether there is demonstrable innovation in the enclosed settlements of native society between the 7th and the 17th century that indicates social transformation in different periods of time. Kerr has ably demonstrated innovation in enclosed settlement in NW Ulster in the 9th and 10th centuries,[120] and O'Conor has questioned whether the 'medieval ringfort' is a fiction and he has introduced the *longport* into the debate on high-status native enclosed settlement.[121] It is hoped that this introductory study of innovation and tradition in the *cathair* settlements of the Burren has shown that Gaelic gentry families in that region modified and occupied stone enclosures well into the 17th century. Moreover, the addition of new gate-entrances to *cathair* sites and the construction of houses and tower-houses within *cathair* and *mothair* settlements indicate modernising tendencies rather than a culture of archaism among their occupants.

A more detailed trawl of the evidence from excavated enclosures would enhance this case, but even with what is presented here, the idea that native enclosed settlements were abandoned by c 1000, and that thereafter the population below the level of kings and chiefs became essentially invisible, is no longer tenable. As modern archaeological scholarship reaches down the native social ladder from lords to minor gentry it is clear from the Burren evidence, at least, that vassal families in that region were for the most part living in stone houses in the courtyards of modified *cathair* and *mothair* sites.

Replacing the exclusive association traditionally drawn between the 'ring-fort' and 'early-medieval society' with the concept of 'native enclosed settlement' and 'innovation' might create a better medium to perceive social change in Ireland from the 7th to the 17th century.

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[120] Kerr 2007.
[121] O'Conor 1998.

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Résumé

L'habitat enclos indigène et le problème du « fort circulaire » irlandais *par* Elizabeth Fitzpatrick

L'une des traditions monolithiques les plus tenaces de l'archéologie irlandaise est la classification de toutes sortes d'enceintes de terre et de pierre (*ráth* et *caisel*) en « forts circulaires » (*ring-fort*). Celle-ci empêche de comprendre les changements significatifs subis par l'habitat enclos indigène au fil du temps, car elle encourage les archéologues à adapter les preuves à la catégorie plutôt qu'à évaluer chaque site selon ses propres mérites. Elle dissimule également les différences entre diverses formes d'habitats enclos occupés du VII^e^ au XVII^e^ siècle, voire plus tard. Il est par conséquent suggéré que le « fort circulaire » est une chimère et que le terme devrait être abandonné afin que l'étude de l'habitat enclos indigène puisse se libérer de ce carcan et servir à explorer le changement social en Irlande.

Zusammenfassung

Einheimische umwallte Ansiedlungen und das Problem des irischen "Ringforts" *von* Elizabeth Fitzpatrick

Eine der dauerhaftesten monolithischen Traditionen der irischen Archäologie ist die Klassifizierung einer großen Vielfalt von Erd- und Steinumwallungen (*ráth* und *caisel*) als "Ringforts". Dies behindert allerdings das Verständnis für die bedeutenden Veränderungen, die einheimische umwallte Ansiedlungen mit der Zeit durchliefen, denn es ermutigt Archäologen dazu, ihre Beweisstücke an die Kategorie anzupassen, anstatt jede umwallte Ansiedlung einzeln für sich zu bewerten. Diese Vorgehensweise überdeckt auch die Unterschiede zwischen verschiedenen Formen umwallter Siedlungen, die zwischen dem 7. und 17. Jahrhundert n.Chr., gelegentlich auch noch später bewohnt waren. Es wird daher argumentiert, dass das "Ringfort" eine Schimäre ist und man diesen Ausdruck nicht mehr benutzen sollte, damit sich die Untersuchung einheimischer umwallter Siedlungen von diesem insularen Ansatz befreien und statt dessen der Erkundung des gesellschaftlichen Wandels in Irland widmen kann.

Riassunto

L'insediamento recintato indigeno e il problema della cosiddetta fortezza ad anello *di* Elizabeth Fitzpatrick

Una delle tradizioni più durature e monolitiche dell'archeologia irlandese è quella di classificare un'ampia varietà di recinzioni in terra e in pietra (*ráth* e *caisel*) come 'fortezze ad

anello' (*ring-fort*). Questo impedisce di capire le importanti trasformazioni subite nel tempo dall'insediamento recintato indigeno, poiché porta gli archeologi a far rientrare i vari ritrovamenti in questa categoria, anziché a valutare ciascun insediamento recintato secondo i suoi meriti, e inoltre non lascia trasparire le differenze esistenti tra varie forme di insediamenti recintati abitati dal secolo VII fino al XVII d.C., e in qualche caso più tardi. Si sostiene quindi che la 'fortezza ad anello' non è che una chimera e che questa definizione deve essere abolita per far sì che lo studio dell'insediamento recintato indigeno sia liberato dalle pastoie di una visione limitata e serva a investigare le trasformazioni sociali in Irlanda.