

Cromlech

From 4000 BC - 3300 BC or Neolithic era the majority of megalithic tombs were constructed. Several were erected into the Bronze Age. Standing stones were also constructed well into the Iron Age 500 AD. Archaeologists & researchers discovered that ritual practices occurred at various times during the year. Monuments were carefully positioned to consider the surrounding landscape with the sunrise, sunset, lunar position also the locations of rivers or springs that were deemed sacred by Ireland's early inhabitants. The Linkardstown burial mound is located on top of small natural ridge. Located west of St. Mary's Hospital in the Phoenix Park, north of the Upper Glen Road in Dublin it was dated from circa 3000 BC to 2500 BC. Discovered by Commissioners of Woods & Forest staff during 1838 when they removed an ancient tumulus that measured fifteen feet in height also one hundred & twenty feet in circumference. Excavated by Joseph Raftery during 1838. On 28th May 1838 George Petrie delivered a report to the Royal Irish Academy that concerned the discovery. It was known as 'Knockmaridhe,' 'Knockmary Dolmen.' 'Cnoc Maraidhe' or 'Hill of the Mariners' (PRIT page 187) It was marked on earlier maps as 'Cromlech.' (modern Ordnance Survey Maps as a 'Cist') The water - worn capstone is believed to have been from the River Liffey. It is 1.96 metres in length, 1.05 metres in width also 0.33 metres in depth. It is supported 0.35 metres above ground level by four slabs of 0.8 metres - 0.35 metre in width. It has a modern concrete pillar for stability. The underground chamber measures 1.2 metres in length by 0.6 metres in width with a floor of compacted clay. A small section of the capstone is missing, several cup - marks remain on top. Coordinates are 532103N, 620267 W. At the external part of the mound four small cists were discovered with a remaining tomb in the centre. J. W. Poe stated that the burial site was more like a 'cist' as it was the smallest to be seen in Co. Dublin. Perhaps more properly may be designated a 'Kistvaen.' It consisted of a long table - stone (*resembled a coffin in shape*) supported on several smaller stones set into the ground. [\[iii\]](#)

Tombs

Throughout Ireland are standing stones, stone circles, enormous graves & monuments in evidence. Most of these are in the northern half of the country. Court tombs are mainly concentrated in north Connaught & Ulster. Carrowmore in Co. Sligo is the largest megalithic cemetery within Ireland. That complex has more than eight hundred monuments that include: passage graves, chamber tombs, ring forts or cairns. It is overlooked by Meascan Maebha on Knocknara's summit. One of Ireland's finest example of passage tombs is the Polnabrone Dolmen. Portal tombs or dolmens are located in Counties Wexford, Waterford also from the Burren to Connemara in Connaught. Passage tombs such as the Boyne Valley complex may be viewed in the east of Ireland. Another type of grave is located further south with an example of the Linkardstown Graves in Co. Carlow. They have a polygonal chamber with stone slabs, lined with inward leaning large stones. Covered over with a capstone then covered with a mound. (Padraig Mac Donnchadha 2nd March 2020) [\[iv\]](#)

Brú na Boinne

From the ancient seat of the Celtic High Kings to the 'Mountain of the Witch' there are countless Irish mystical sacred sites. Brú na Boinne in Counties Meath & Louth contain some of the most historic monuments & sites within Ireland. These include the Legendary Hill of Slane, Hill of Tara also the massive, ancient passage tombs of Newgrange, Knowth & Dowth. Newgrange itself was constructed during 3200 BC to ensure the celebration of the winter solstice when a narrow beam of sunlight illuminated the chambers floor for about seventeen minutes at the end of the long passageway. The second great mound in the Boyne Valley complex was Knowth. Built over 5000 years ago it has two passages with entrances on both the east & west sides. Recent scientific data suggests that Knowth had a lunar function with ancient rituals enacted. An impressive large collection of Neolithic rock art comprises about a quarter of all known rock art monuments within Europe. Legend states that a noblewoman was interred at Knowth with 'a great hill' built over her to create the great mound. Dowth or 'Fairy Mound of Darkness' is the third monument within the Brú na Boinne Complex. It has two small passages with on the western side of monument. The southernmost passage is aligned towards

the setting sun of the winter solstice. The ancient seat of power in Ireland was the Hill of Tara. Over thirty visible ancient monuments on that site include the Mound of the Hostages & the Stone of Destiny. The former megalithic passage tomb is the oldest monument on the site. Engravings within the tomb are representative of the sun, moon, stars or indeed religious symbols. Possibly one stone was in use as a prehistoric calendar. [\[v\]](#)

Stone Circles

The Hill of Slane was King Sláine, King of the Fir Bolg's burial place. At the Hill of Tara in County Meath area an oval Iron Age enclosure called Raíth na Ríogh is located. A Standing Stone known as Lia Fail is located on the hills summit. On the site is a Neolithic passage tomb constructed circa 3400 BC. Loughcrew or '*The Storied Hills*' also known as '*The Mountain of the Witch*' is one of Ireland's major passage tombs. Dated to circa 3200 BC the site consisted of a cluster of cairns around several hills. The equinox sunrise illumination occurs at the site when the light hits the chamber's backstone on both the spring & autumnal equinoxes. Navan Fort is the historical royal fortress on Killylea Road in Co. Armagh. Fort was a stronghold of King Conchobar Mac Nessa along with his Red Branch Knights. The Kings of Ulster held their court within its centre circa 700 BC. The fort was surrounded by a bank with a ditch inside that suggested it may have been a ceremonial rather than a defensive site. One - mile west of Navan Fort lies the mysterious '*King's Stable*' created over 1000 BC as a ten - foot - deep manmade pool surrounded by a bank. Stone circles are spread across the Sperrin Mountains in Counties Tyrone, Derry also Fermanagh. It is believed those sites may date from 1600 B C, field walls, fireplaces & flint tools suggested perhaps 2900 BC. Sixty - one rings exist in Co. Tyrone. Within each area lies a consecration of sites formed with multiple stone circles. Site was composed of forty or more stones that were typically misshapen & of relatively small diameters. They occurred in pairs or multiples within one place. [\[vi\]](#)

Grianan Ailighis

The most famous monument at Breaghmore: ten miles west of Cookstown was accidentally discovered by men cutting turf during the 1940's. Excavation took four years to remove a thick layer of protective peat also one thousand sixty - nine stones at the seven - circle complex. Included were thirteen cairns, several rows of standing - stones with seven stone circles. (*It is believed that there are more yet undiscovered.*) Several archaeologists suggested that the complex was erected to record the movements of the moon & sun for the purpose of marking lunar or solar events. An Grianan Ailighis that sits atop a hill was a mystical circular stone fort in Co. Donegal that may be assessed on a road from Letterkenny to the Derry Road. It was dated to 1700 BC by the Tuatha De Danann as an interment plot. The fort became the seat of the Kingdom of Ailigh also a centre of culture & politics during the rule of early Irish chieftains. Its height was seven hundred & fifty feet above sea level. [\[vii\]](#)

Carrowmore Complex

Carrowmore with Carrowkeel are two Megalithic Monuments in Co. Sligo. Sites were joined by the Unshin river from Lough Arrow to Ballinsodare Bay that had been the main road during the Stone Age. The sacred Carrowmore Complex is the most extensive megalithic complex in Ireland with about thirty tombs (*it was believed there may have been one hundred in previous years*) to be viewed at this sacred site. It was created circa 6000 years ago; & is three hundred & twenty - seven metres above sea level in County Sligo. Tombs are dolmen circles, or single tombs built of three or more upright stones that supported a large flat horizontal stone surrounded by a circle of boulders. Perhaps thirty or thirty - five stones lie side by side within each circle. Most circles are forty feet in diameter with several up to one hundred & sixty - five feet. Within the Carrowmore Complex lies the '*Giant Cairn of Knocknacarra*' that is one hundred & ninety - seven feet in diameter. Carrowkeel on top of Bricklieve Mountain is an ancient site with equal significance to Carrowmore. It is the fourth largest Irish monument with a collection of some of the mysterious megalithic monuments within Ireland. The area contains fourteen passage tombs: one of which is a classic tomb the consists of a short passage one may

crawl through. Passageway leads to a central chamber with three equally spaced side chambers. Roof box above the entrance is unique also monument is aligned to the midsummer sunset. Rock of Cashel was the traditional seat of the High Kings of Munster prior to the Norman invasion. Numerous buildings atop the hill date from the twelfth or thirteenth Century. [\[viii\]](#)

Carbon Dates

Linkardstown Megalithic Tomb located south - east of Carlow town (W012 – 017) was discovered during ploughing in the 1940's. Subsequently it was excavated during 1944 by Joseph Raftery. These mounds were usually uniform in size; twenty - two metres or twenty-five metres in diameter. (*Knockmaree was thirty – five metres*) Generally those were placed in commanding positions on hill - tops or ridges. About nine or so other graves were believed to bear resemblance to the Linkardstown tomb. A low circular mound at the centre was usually a massive stone polygonal cist that was formed from large sloping granite blocks. Covered with a single or two over - lapping stones constructed on the old ground surface formed the grave's floor. Recent carbon dating has refuted the original date of the discovery from the late to the Middle Neolithic period. These sites were dated as follows: Ardcroney circa 2725 BC, Ashley Park circa 2815 BC (*both in Co. Tipperary*) also Ballintruer More circa 2850 BC in Co. Wicklow. Coordinates are 53 21 03.3 N, 6 20 26.7 W. [\[ix\]](#)

Polnabrone Dolmen

Megalithic Ireland is timeless with prehistoric monuments of ancient origin. The Promontory Fort Dun Aengus is a on the southern face of Inishmore largest of the Aran Islands. It is surrounded by walls on three sides. A sheer drop to the ocean from the site's centre formed part of the defences. The Hill of Tara, northwest of Dublin was a royal seat intricately connected with St. Patrick. (*The Hill of Tara has a visitor centre in a disused church*) Within the area are several earthworks for exploration. Navan Fort is one of the lesser - known prehistoric sites within Ireland. Queen Maeve's Grave is a well - known but an unexplored megalithic site with very impressive stones in Co. Sligo. Tombs of various sizes & shapes were constructed within the enormous megalithic graveyard. Polnabrone Dolmen is a typical example of the Irish dolmens. Several standing stones have a cap stone that rests atop them. Numerous external monuments are yet to be explored. Knowth in Co. Meath has two opposing passages both aligned to a solar event. Loughcrew Passage Tomb is situated south of Old Castle in Co. Meath with several passage tombs that have solar alignments also impressive rock art. Fourknocks Passage Tomb near Clonalvy in Co. Meath is different as the inner chamber is larger than others in relation to the mounds size. The Rock of Cashel was the seat of the High Kings of Munster prior to the Norman invasion. The buildings on top of the rock are dated to the twelfth or thirteenth Centuries. (*Bernd Beige 6/3/19*) [\[x\]](#)

Queen Maeve's Tomb

Landscapes around Tulsk & Athleague in Co. Roscommon are abundant with ancient monuments. There were documented in early Irish manuscripts. The Rathcroghan Complex has two hundred & forty archaeological sites with sixty protected national monuments within the area. From burial mounds to cairns also ring forts the evidence is of great importance. Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetery in Co. Sligo is one of the country's largest burial site. It comprised a series of satellite tombs that surrounded a central monument. Most of these were believed to be from pre - 4300 BC - 3500 BC Origin. The Listoghil Monument at the centre is marked with a cairn or stack of stones that is significantly larger than the surrounding tombs. Boa Island in Co. Fermanagh is located within the Caldragh Graveyard on Lower Lough Erne's Shores. An unusual two - faced stone sculpture stands seventy - three centimetres in height: it possibly depicted a Celtic deity. Dunbeg Stone Circle is a protected national monument. Excavated during the late 1950's an inverted pot was discovered at the circle's centre. The circle of standing stones spanned almost ten metres in diameter: believed to have dated from 1100 BC & 800 BC & aligned with the winter solstice sunset. The complex included two prehistoric huts also a fulachta fiadh. Polnabrone Dolmen in the Burren in Co. Clare is a portal tomb

from the Neolithic era. It consisted of a seven metres capstone secured in place by two stones. Ardroom Stone Circle is located on plains that overlook Kenmare Bay & mountain ranges. It is a huddle of jagged rocks that measured seven metres in diameter. The circle of eleven standing stones include two lopsided ones while it was believed several had been removed. Several uneven rocks are in situ one of which is two metres in height. Located in the Isle of Dnagh in Inishowen in Co. Dublin is a prehistoric rock art monument with cup & ring carvings. The site was dated to at least 3000 BC. According to legend the Isle of Donagh was believed to have been a sacred island. Queen Maeve's Tomb on Knocknara in Co. Sligo is an impressive Neolithic Cairn dated to pre 3000 BC. It is situated three hundred & twenty - seven metres above sea level. This gigantic mound is sixty metres in diameter with twenty - seven thousand tons of stones. Images of several of Ireland's monuments feature at this link. (Kate Phelan 7th September 2020) [\[xi\]](#)

Footnotes

[\[iii\]](#) Knocknaree (<http://www.megalithicmonumentsofireland.com/>) [Assessed 18th April 2020]

[\[iv\]](#) Megalithic Burial Monuments (<https://www.yourirish.com/>) [Assessed 18th April 2020]

[\[v\]](#) The best Mythological Sites in Ireland (<https://www.irishcentral.com/>) [Assessed 18th April 2020]

[\[vi\]](#) Ibid

[\[vii\]](#) Ibid

[\[viii\]](#) Ibid

[\[ix\]](#) Ibid

[\[x\]](#) Ireland's Best Megalithic & Pre Historic sites (<https://www.tripsavvy.com/>) [Assessed 18th April 2020]

[\[xi\]](#) 10 Prehistoric Sites (<https://theculturetrip.com/>) [Assessed 24th September 2020]