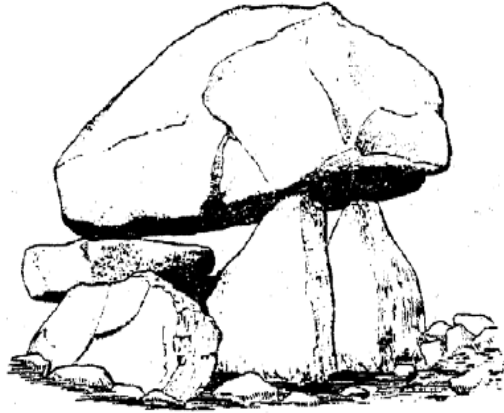


# ULSTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



**Survey Report: No. 7**

**Survey of Scheduled Rath:- DOW 009:011**

**Lisnabreeny Townland, Castlereagh, Belfast**

**UAS/07/01**

**In association with**



**MICHAEL CATNEY**

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Ulster Archaeological Society

c/o School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology

The Queen's University of Belfast

42 Fitzwilliam Street

Belfast

BT9 6AX

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## **1. Credits and Acknowledgements**

The survey was led by Harry Welsh and other members of the survey team were June Welsh, Anne MacDermott, Arlene Ginn, David Ginn, Billy Dunlop, Ian Gillespie, George Rutherford, Robin Collins, Harry Porter, Julie Hanse and Michael Catney.

Chris Lynn, President of the Ulster Archaeological Society (UAS) visited the site and provided us with his advice and expertise on Early Christian enclosures, and his experience in excavating the Deerpark Farms site which may have had some similarities to the present survey site.

For their help and guidance on the chronology and presentation of the Northern Ireland Ordnance Survey (OS) mapping system we wish to thank Drew Ferris and Derek McKinley of that organization

The UAS and the survey team in particular is grateful to Malachy Conway, Survey Archaeologist of the National Trust, who worked closely with the survey team in choosing the site and facilitating access. Malachy paid a site visit on the first day of the survey and gave valuable assistance and advice. A considerable amount of work was carried out by the National Trust ground staff in clearing the monument to provide reasonable and safe access before the survey could be carried out. A special word of appreciation is given to the National Trust Volunteers who give of their time to maintain National Trust property, sometimes as individuals on a daily basis, and whose efforts in maintaining this particular monument was much in evidence during the survey.

Thanks is also given to the staff at the Public Records Office, Northern. Ireland (PRONI).

## **2. Aims and objectives**

The aim of this survey was to produce an accurate plan and profile drawings of the monument, carry out a photographic survey and complete a Condition and Management Survey of the Archaeological Resource (CAMSAR) report in order to enhance the archaeological record of this site.

In 2006, Northern Archaeological Consultancy Limited completed a survey for the National Trust of the Lisnabreeny area including Lisnabreeny House and three raths or ringforts on their property. That survey contains extensive information on the history of the Lisnabreeny area and a survey of Lisnabreeny House. Malachy Conway, Survey Archaeologist of the National Trust in Northern Ireland, considered Dow: 009.011, a scheduled monument, to be worthy of a more detailed examination for addition to the National Trust archaeological record of this particular site.

This report is based on the findings of the site survey.

Copies of this report were submitted to the Environment and Heritage Service and the National Trust. The report will also be made available in PDF format and placed on Ulster

## **Lisnabreeny Rath, Belfast, 2007**

Archaeological Society web site. All site records and relevant material were archived with the National Trust.

### **3. Introduction**

The survey of Lisnabreeny Rath DOW: 009:011 is a continuation of work based on a decision taken by the committee of the Ulster Archaeological Society in 2005 to extend an opportunity to members to participate in practical surveys of archaeological monuments that had not previously been recorded. This followed a bequest to the society from the late Dr Ann Hamlin, from which the items of equipment used in this survey were purchased. The survey commenced on the weekend of Saturday and Sunday 28 - 29 April 2007 with a third visit on 26 May 2007 to complete the work. In view of the fact that at one time there was upwards of 42,000 raths in Ireland and that a substantial number of these have, for a variety of reasons, been removed from the landscape over many years and indeed centuries it is important to record and where possible preserve from destruction examples of historic activity so that the information such monuments can provide is recorded for future generations. The data obtained can provide us with an opportunity to gain a basic insight into the building techniques and, to some extent, living conditions in the first millennia and as such gives us a meaningful link to the past.

### **4. Summary**

Lisnabreeny Rath, although average in size, has provided some very interesting points worthy of note. The location of the rath in this elevated site in the Castlereagh Hills south of Belfast overlooking Lagan Valley together with the specific positioning of the rath into a gentle sloping round top hill and a south facing perspective is worthy of note, consequently, a more in depth examination could give an insight into the possible architecture and construction techniques used.

The name *Lisnabreeny* appears to suggest a close association with hospitality and by implication with *fairy* mythology which again is another avenue which could be explored to give a fuller understanding of this particular site.

Over the past two hundred years the surveyed site has undergone a number of changes to the approaches and seen the enclosure change from being an integral part of a farmyard in c.1800 to being separated and protected in terms of Statutory Protection. With the National Trust having ownership of the land on which this monument stands it is likely the monument will hopefully be maintained, protected and presented to the wider public for many years to come.

### **5. Location of Lisnabreeny Rath: DOW 009:011.**

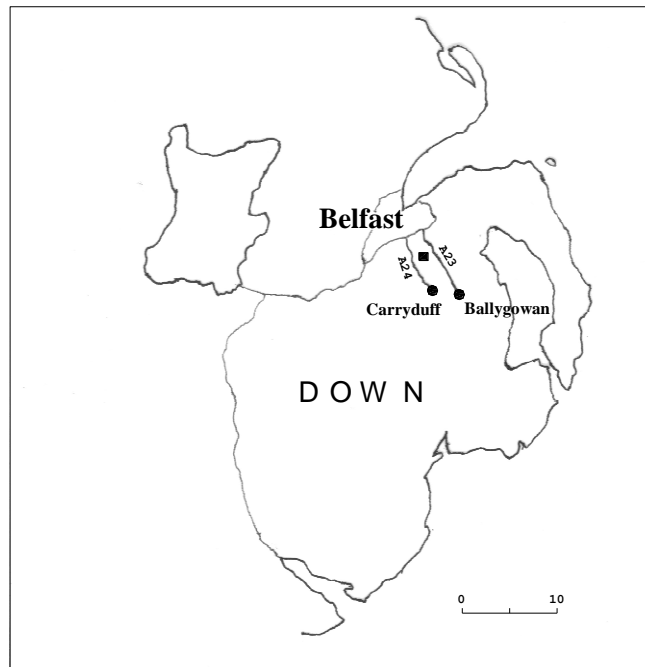
The surveyed rath (DOW 009:011) is a scheduled monument on National Trust property in the townland of Lisnabreeny, which is situated on the Castlereagh Plateau to the south-east of Belfast. The rath is on the south facing slope of a round topped hill at approximately 170 m above sea level.

## Lisnabreeny Rath, Belfast, 2007

The Irish Grid reference for the rath is J37276946. The rath can be viewed on *Google Earth<sup>tm</sup>* by entering the polar co-ordinates 54 33' 17.57" N 5 52' 44.22" W

The monument is accessed via a path from a small National Trust car park on the Lisnabreeny Road. Lisnabreeny Road runs between the Manse and Knockbreckan roads in the Castlereagh Hills. Both of these roads can be approached from either the A23 Belfast to Ballygowan road or the A24 Belfast to Carryduff road. See Figure 1.

The path leading up to the monument is part of the Ulster Way, a meandering circular route some 900km long which explores many of the rural areas of Northern Ireland including rivers, loughs and farming land. A "kissing gate" at the west side of the rath site allows the Ulster Way rambler to proceed around the perimeter of an adjoining field downhill towards the other National Trust landmarks of Lisnabreeny House and Cregagh Glen before going on towards Belfast.



**Figure . 1 General location of Lisnabreeny Rath DOW 009:011**

**Lisnabreeny Rath, Belfast, 2007**



Figure 2. Lisnabreeny rath viewed from the east



Figure 3. Lisnabreeny Rath viewed from the north





Figure 4. UAS Survey Team in action at Lisnabreeny Rath

## 6. Survey

### 6.1 Methodology

The survey was carried out in accordance with the procedures set out in the National Trust, *Archaeology and the Historic Environment, Historic Landscape Survey Guidelines* (Cirencester, 2000). As part of the procedure the following activities were completed and are available as follows:-

- Condition And Management Survey of the Archaeological Resource ( CAMSAR) report. Appendix 1
- A Photographic Survey. The UAS, Photographic Record Form. Appendix 2

The survey was completed by the production of plan and profile drawings taken from a topographical survey with this report being produced following research of existing records and related historical information.

### 6.2 Production of Plan and Profile Drawings.

A sketch was made of the site indicating the main features such as bank, ditch, site perimeter, location of trees and anomalies such as breaks in the bank, scarping of bank at one location and ditch obstacles.

The measured survey took the form of the production of plan and profile drawings from data obtained using the society's *Leica Sprinter 100* electronic level. The level was positioned close

## Lisnabreeny Rath, Belfast, 2007

to the highest point of the site which was on the top of the bank at a north-north-east location. Using a field mapping compass the azimuth zero for the level was set to magnetic north with azimuth 90° being due east. A Bench Mark was set at a point close to north on the inner slope of the bank. Four sets of measurements were taken to produce the plan drawing, these were, rath bank inner, top of rath bank (inner), ditch inner, and ditch outer. A number of cross check measurements were taken of the rath bank top outer edge. The plan view taken from the data is shown in Figure 5. An additional two set of measurements were taken diagonally roughly north-south and east-west to produce the rath profiles as shown in Figure 6. All Survey results were recorded in a Site Log Book.

Using drafting film on a plane table, initial plan and profile drawings to a scale of 1:200 were drawn up on site to validate the measurements as they were taken. A final set of print quality drawings for publication were produced during the compilation stage of this report.

### 6.3 Survey results and analysis.

Referring to the plan drawing in Figure 5 it can be seen that the rath was laid down in an almost true circle albeit with a bulge on the east side of the structure. The mean interior diameter of the enclosure was found to be 33m. Considering Stout (1997, 15) in which he states that in the midlands of Ireland 'Ringforts with enclosed areas between 20m and 44m account for 84% of all surviving sites', and that 'Comparable ranges of internal measurements have been found elsewhere in Ireland', then the Lisnabreeny rath could be taken as being of average size. The plan view shows two notable breaks in the bank, one at the south end which may have been the original entrance and a more pronounced opening at north-north-east which is thought to have been more recent. In Figure 6, the Profile A-B (north to south) shows the platform to have an incline of 1 in 20 from south to north and that the Profile C-D (east to west) is essentially horizontal.

At the north end of the enclosure the rath floor is more or less in line with the field on the other side of the ditch. The field to the east falls gradually lower than the rath floor where it tapers off to meet the path on the south side whereas to the west the field is much lower from north to south. It is difficult to estimate what the original slope on the east side of the rath might have been since this area has been backfilled after the removal of a farm building at that location (see chapter 7 - Cartographic History).

From the above it is clear that work has gone into positioning the rath to face south presumably to maximize on light and heat of daylight hours and to ensure that drainage was effective within the enclosure and the ditch. It is worth noting that the position of the rath on the south slope of this hill would also have given some protection against north winds coming across from Belfast Lough

# Lisnabreeny Rath, Belfast, 2007

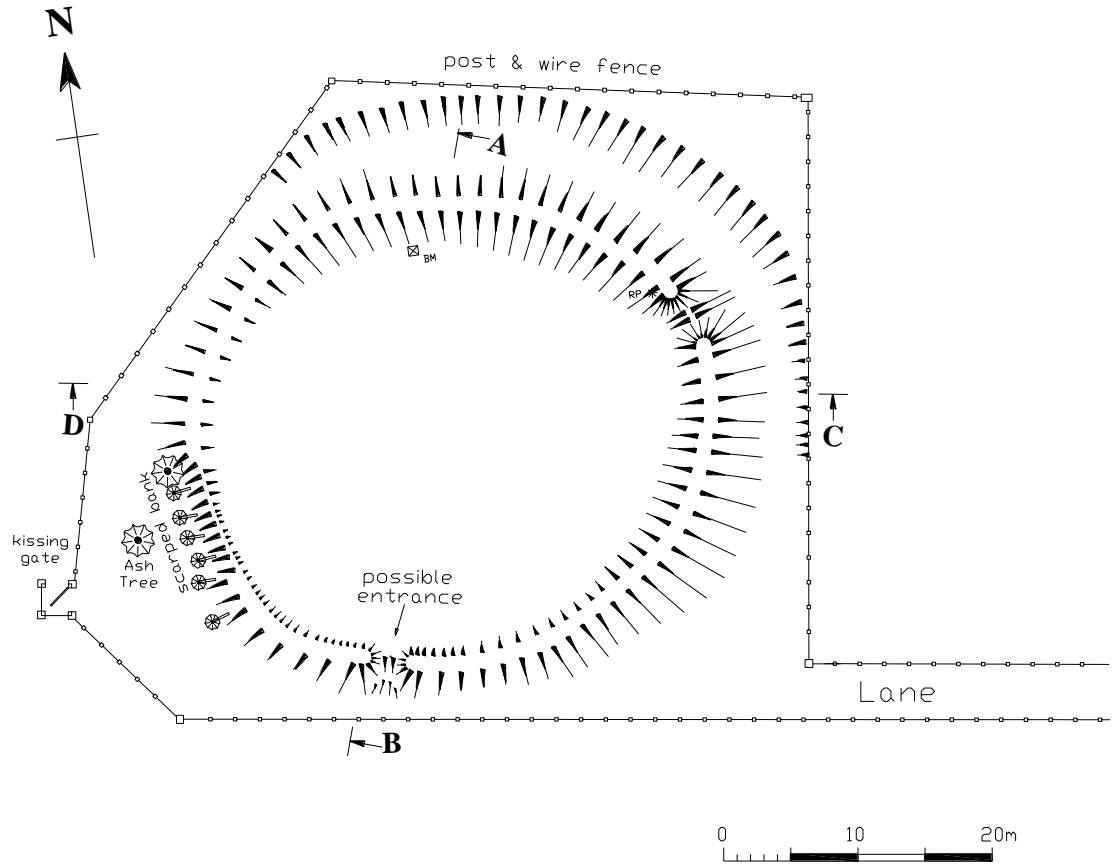


Figure 5. Plan view of Lisnabreeny Rath

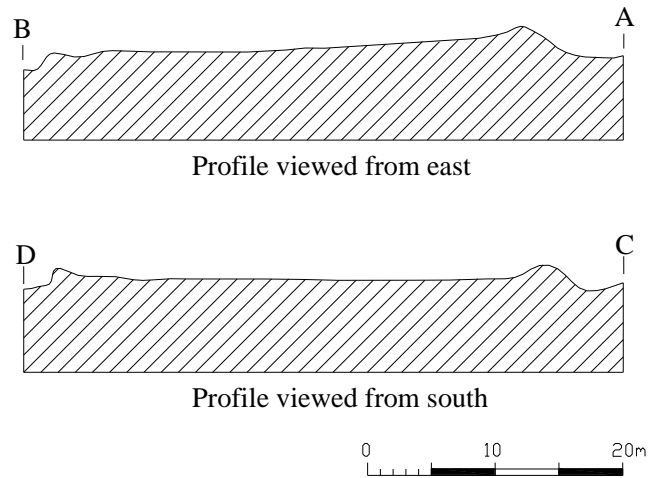


Figure 6. Profiles A-B and C-D of rath

## Lisnabreeny Rath, Belfast, 2007

There is some evidence of a raised section of the field at the north end ditch boundary which may be a counterscarp ridge. A counterscarp ridge would have had a practical purpose in that it would have deflected rain and melt water coming off the hill away from the ditch. However, this external counterscarp bank may not represent an event contemporary with the construction of the rath, but may actually relate to later maintenance of the ditch, whether during occupation of the rath or at a more recent date (Kerr 2005, 6).

Today mature ash, sycamore, beech and a single oak are established in the bank and ditch in an arc north-east to east to south with tree plantation encircling the remainder of the rath being mainly low level hawthorn. There is a single ash tree in the ditch and one in the bank at west-south-west. This is contrary to the tree position shown in the original 6" Ordnance Survey of 1834 when significant conifers were shown to be positioned in an arc north to west to south-east and nothing around the rest of the site. See Figure 7.

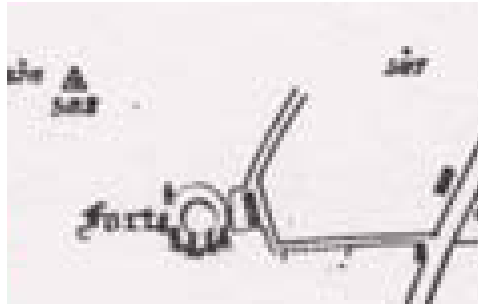


Figure 7. Rath DOW 009:011 in 6" 1834 Ordnance Survey

From 1860 onwards these conifers were not recorded. After the Second Edition of the 6" map in 1860 the Ordnance Survey system of double concentric circle convention for depicting raths was replaced by a hachure format and from 1860 onwards trees associated with this rath were not shown.

A 10 metre scarping of the ditch wall is evident on the west side of the bank as shown in the plan view in Figure 5 with the ash tree referred to above located in the ditch at this point. A main limb of this ash tree has come away and fallen across the ditch which, with a build-up of bank debris and moss, gives rise to water logging of the ditch from west to north-north-east. A raised section of the ditch floor at the north-north-east break in the bank adds further to this problem.

It was observed that the enclosure bank is much reduced in height spanning the circumference from north to west to south-east coincident with the position of the conifers that occupied that area in the original Ordnance Survey of 1834 as shown in Figure 7. Whether or not there was an alteration in the bank when these larger trees were replaced with arboreal planting of mainly hawthorn trees in that section is, at present, unknown.

From within the banked enclosure commanding views are available ranging from North Down, the Ards Peninsula and Strongford Lough to the east, southwards to Lagan Valley with the Mourne Mountains visible in the distance. Continuing in a clockwise direction the view

## **Lisnabreeny Rath, Belfast, 2007**

continues to the hills north of Belfast ranging from White Hill to Divis and Black Mountains, Squires Hill and on to Cavehill, Carnmoney Hill, Knockagh and on to Carrickfergus on the north side of Belfast Lough. Some 150 metres due north across the field on the north-west side of the enclosure the Castlereagh Hills are seen to sweep down to meet the Holywood hills on the south side of Belfast Lough with a panoramic view of Belfast Lough and the Lagan Basin. This latter north facing view is available, within its own embankment, to rath DOW 009:010. DOW: 009:010 and DOW: 009:011, being only 350m apart and occupying north and south facing positions of the same high elevation round top hill, have a particularly commanding view of most of the townland and the sea and river approaches to Belfast.

### **7. Lisnabreeny Townland : Cartographic History**

The cartographic record since c.1800 shows that a number of changes have taken place in the immediate area of the rath site. In the initial 1834 Ordnance Survey 6" County Map of the area the rath was shown adjoining a farmyard with the only approach to the enclosure being through the farmyard. The rath may well have been used by the farmer, to pen cattle for example, which would go some way to explaining the existence of the larger break in the bank at north-north-east. The yard, which was on the east side of the rath, contained a farm building estimated to have been approximate 25 x 6 m with an entrance lane from the Lisnabreeny Road, more or less in line with the existing approach lane to the site. A second short lane ran to fields at north-east. This short lane was directly opposite the larger break in the rath bank referred to earlier which would further support the view that the larger break in the bank was used to access the rath from nearby fields. (See Figure 7.) On the 1860 Ordnance Survey map a well was located close to the south side of the approach lane at approximately 50 m from the rath entrance. Sometime between 1860 and 1901 a lane some 40 metres in length was installed as shown in Figure 8 running tangentially from the west side of the rath due south and terminating in a field. It is possible that the scarping of the rath bank mentioned above was a result of this activity. In the 6" 1920 Edition of the Ordnance Survey map this path was joined to a footpath (F.P.) likely to have been a forerunner to the present Ulster Way leading to Lisnabreeny House and the Cregagh Glen. The route of this footpath is easily recognizable today. In the 1971 Irish Grid Ordnance Survey the farmyard, buildings and short lane to north-north-east were removed. The Ulster Way was shown to leave the site and to continue on a pathway skirting the boundary of the adjoining field to the west of the rath.

The cartographic evidence shows that whereas in the 1834 Ordnance Survey map there was a total of nine raths recorded in the Lisnabreeny Townland, by the time of the 1971 Ordnance Survey this had fallen to five. Today there only three that are recognizable on the ground as raths. These are DOW:009:010, DOW:009:021 and this scheduled rath DOW:009:011.

Figure 8 shows the location of the 9 raths known to exist in townland of Lisnabreeny when the 1<sup>st</sup> Ordnance Survey 6" County Maps were issued in 1834 and also highlights the 5 raths which survived until the 25" Irish Grid 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey of this area was issued in 1971.

# Lisnabreeny Rath, Belfast, 2007

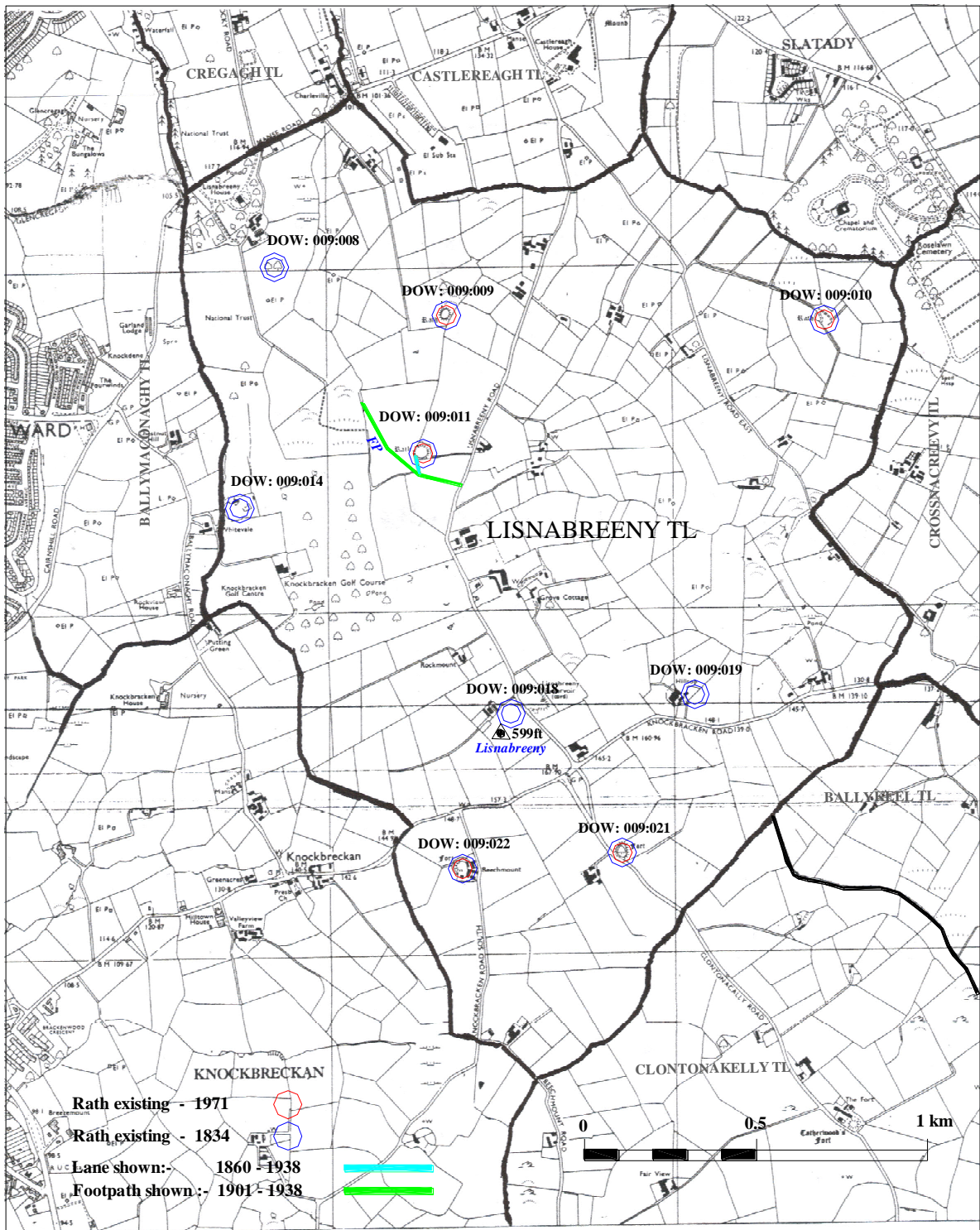


Figure 8. Location of Raths in Lisnabreeny Townland

## **8. Recommendations for further work**

DOW: 009:011 rath is one of only three remaining in such a condition that little effort would be needed to preserve them in their present condition and make them more accessible to the general public. Consideration should be given to improve the drainage from the west ditch. The bank on the south east side has been worn in two places most likely caused by visitors to the rath mounting the bank at this location therefore a low level sign, with information plate, directing visitors towards the larger break in bank at north east would help to reduce this problem. The approach to the larger break in bank would need some remedial work to be done to facilitate this method of entry to the rath.

This monument is in such good condition and representing a physical link to the past that it and earthen monuments in general could be presented in the form of an educational packet similar in style to that prepared by Alan Gailey, Victor Kelly and James Paul on Rural Housing in Ulster in the mid-nineteenth century.

The local farmer Mr. B. Gill who rents fields adjacent to the rath has expressed concern that visitors to the site and Ulster Way ramblers tend to make their way across what are working fields with the obvious danger of people coming in contact with animals and farm machinery. He would therefore like to see steps being taken to direct people round the perimeter of the fields.

Situated as it is on hills overlooking Belfast, Lagan Valley and approaches from Strangford it may have been in a position to witness the arrival of the Vikings towards the end of the first millennium and possibly the advance of John De Courcy towards Carrickfergus on the north shore of Belfast Lough at the beginning of the second millennium, it therefore begs the question did either of these two parties become aware of this place? This and other questions relating to the history of DOW: 009:011 can only be answered by a fuller archaeological investigation which is something which might prove fruitful

**APPENDIX 1**  
**Ulster Archaeological Society**

page 1 of 2

**CAMSAR(NI)****Field Survey**

<b>NISMR No.</b>	<b>DOW: 009:011</b>	<b>Grid Reference:-</b>	J3735769459	<b>Townland:-</b>	Lisnabreeny
<b>Landuse Cat.</b>	36	<b>Structural Cat.</b>		<b>Site Type</b>	
		<b>Protection:-</b>		<b>Altitude (m):-</b>	174
<b>Field Boundaries (e.g. contemporary/intrusive later/owners attitude towards monument i.e. dis/regard)</b> Wire Fences and Hawthorn Bushes					
<b>Site Description/notes:-</b> Rath with earthen Bank (1) ; External Ditch - (Single bank)					

<b>Landuse - Site Specific On Site</b>			Comments:-
Previous Cat.	Present Cat.	% Site	

<b>Landuse - Site Specific Around Site</b>			Comments:- Trees and Bushes in Bank  Trees : Sycamore, Beech, Ash and Single Oak Bushes: Hawthorn
Previous Cat.	Present Cat.	% Site	
	31 / 32		

<b>Fencing</b>	Site Fenced?	Y/N	<input type="text" value="Y"/>
	Condition (e.g. recent/broken)		
	Type of fence	Pig Net and Barbed Wire ( Top 2 Strands)	
	Distance of fence from edge of monument	<input type="text"/>	metres

<b>Remains</b>	Is the site visible?	Archaeological Site?	Survival	Condition
	1 2 3 4	Y/N/?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6
	<input type="text" value="1"/>	<input type="text" value="Y"/>	<input type="text" value="1"/>	<input type="text" value="2"/>
Comments (e.g. human interference and management)				



**CAMSAR(NI) continued**

**Field Survey**

**Surface Problems (e.g. ploughing, trampling, planting, scrub growth: localized/widespread)**  
Trampling

**Sub-Surface Problems (e.g. rabbits, badgers, subsidence: localized/widespread)**  
Rabbits and Badgers

Damage Sustained :-						Observations:-
Past		Recent		Future Risk		
Category	% Site	Category	% Site	Category	% Site	
						Relatively little damage

**Notes**

Photographs			Recommendations:-
Reel No.	Frame No.	Caption:-	

Map Evidence		
1st Ed.	2nd Ed.	3rd Ed.

<b>Last Visit:-</b>	date:-	
Deteriorated since last visit?		

Recorder :-

Date:-

## APPENDIX 2

**Ulster Archaeological Society**  
**PHOTOGRAPH RECORD FORM**

<b>Site:-</b>	<u>Lisnabreeny Rath - DOW:009:011</u>	<b>Date:</b>	<u>28/04/2007</u>
<b>Photographed by:-</b>	<u>Arlene &amp; David Ginn</u>		

<b>Film no.</b>	<b>B/W Print</b>	<b>Colour print</b>	<b>Colour slide</b>	<b>Digital image (m.pixels)</b>
				5.1

<b>Make &amp; Model of Camera:-</b>	Nikon CoolPix
-------------------------------------	---------------

<b>Frame no</b>	<b>Direction viewed from</b>	<b>Details</b>
1	Centre N	Lowest point of Bank ( 2/29)
2	Centre NE	Progression of Bank
3	Centre E	Progression of Bank
4	Centre SE	Bank begins to rise
5	S	Rising Bank with 'U' depression
6	SW	Highest point of Bank (7/29)
7	W	Main Entrance , high Bank (8/29)
8	NW	Reducing Bank -Trees on Top (9/29)
9	NNW	Small depression on Bank (10/29)
10	SE	Deepest Part of Ditch (11/29)
11	SSE	Deepest Part of Ditch (12/29)
12	SSE	Deepest Part of Ditch
13	SSE	Range Pole - Horizontal (13/29)
14	E	Ditch not evident (14/29)
15	S	Ditch re-appears (15/29)
16	W	Ditch and bank - Bluebells (16/29)
17	W	Ditch and Bank North side (17/29)
18	E	View of Rath - South Side (18/29)
19	E	View of Rath <i>continued on frames 20 - 47</i>

20	ESE	View of rath
21	E	Main gap in Bank
22	S	Gap in Ditch with Wooden Steps
23	SE	Gap in Ditch with Wooden Steps
24	SSE	Path up to Ditch
25	N	Rath
26	W	Across Path from Top of Bank
27	W	Across Path from Top of Bank
28	S	Across Path from Top of Bank
29		
30	W	Main Entrance from inside of Rath
31	E	Main Entrance from Outside of Rath
32	NW	Entrance - Lowest disturbed part of Bank - from Inside
33	SE	Entrance - Lowest disturbed part of Bank - from Outside
34	SE	Entrance Steps - wood lowest one
35	SE	Entrance Steps - wood highest one
36	W	Looking along the Bank-destroyed trees- ( raised from thorn hedge) Pole marking entrance
37	SW	Bank with trees showing on left - where trees stop
38	SW	To right of 37 - trees stop and hawthorn begins
39	W	As 37 - from different angle
40	W	As 38 - from different angle
41	E	Bricks in cut down stumps of thorn.
42	N	Bank on North side from Ditch
43	S	Outer Bank across Ditch - North side.
44	W	Bank (outside) on West side
45	NW	As above
46	W	weathered out vertical slope on West side
47	S	Wide part of Ditch - West side.

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