



# Monthly eNewsletter

February 2021

Hi everyone,

Welcome to the first eNewsletter for 2021. A County Down theme seems to have developed in this issue, with a tour of tower houses in Lecale and a series of field reports about newly identified sites. We also have a selection of new books, some of which are freely available online.

In January, we successfully hosted our first virtual lecture. It is now up on our YouTube channel if you missed it. We have also put together a programme of lectures for the rest of the year, with some great topics. You'll also have received notice of the AGM in the last printed Newsletter and further details will be circulated by email. It would be great to see more members join us for our first virtual AGM.

Best wishes,

Duncan

*Editor*

## Lectures 2021

We now have a programme for lectures for 2021. Zoom links will be emailed out to members and anyone can watch on our public YouTube channel - [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC\\_axPKzQwK60Pm6VOQUgLTw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_axPKzQwK60Pm6VOQUgLTw)

29 March **Rethinking Early Medieval Whithorn and the Conversion to Christianity in Scotland**  
Dr Adrián Maldonado, National Museums Scotland

26 April **The Life and Times of Takabuti in Ancient Egypt and in Belfast**  
Professor Eileen Murphy, QUB

31 May **Take me to church. A look at two Early Medieval enclosed settlements in County Armagh and their associations with early church sites**  
Gavin Donaghy, Northern Archaeological Consultancy Ltd

28 June **An update on the findings of the 2018-19 Downpatrick Cathedral Hill excavations**  
Brian Sloan, QUB

27 September **Movements and connections between Ireland and Scotland (and beyond!), from around 4000 BC to around 1500 BC**  
Dr Alison Sheridan, National Museums Scotland

25 October **The transitory character of society in Gaelic Ulster**  
Dr Katharine Simms, Trinity College Dublin

6 December **Reconstructing Ireland's Castles: An Archaeological Interpretation of the Environs of the Irish Tower-House**  
Dr Michael O'Mahony, Queen's University Belfast

## A Tour of Tower Houses in Lecale

I mentioned in a previous eNewsletter that I was working on a few research projects and I'd share them with you in the future. One part of this has been putting together a small virtual tour of tower houses in Lecale. I hope to create more tours in the future. I had intended to include some videos, but the continuing lockdown has prevented me getting out to the sites to record videos or take more photographs. Hopefully I can add more images in the future.

As many of you will know, the Lecale area has a large number of tower houses in scenic locations. They form a very interesting group, as they are predominantly found by the coast and have a few unique architectural designs.

You can access the tour through my blog - <https://medievalbuildings.wordpress.com/2021/02/05/tower-houses-of-lecale-a-tour/>



# Recent Discoveries in County Down

What follows are three reports on recent field investigations carried out by David Craig. These are summary reports of sites identified while working around Strangford Lough and with the local communities.

*David Craig*

[HeritageNI.com](http://HeritageNI.com)

## **Ballymorran, Castle Field**

Irish Grid Reference: J 52639 59710

**Summary:** A field known as the Castle Field in front of Ballymorran House in the townland of Ballymorran near Killinchy, County Down was drone mapped using photogrammetry. The field contains a small hillock with a lower flat ridge extending to the East. Soil and crop marks were identified from Google Earth Pro that would indicate possible underlying structures. 2 square marks were identified in several flight datasets from Google Earth Pro. A halfpenny was found dating to 1190-1198. Two other later coins were also found. This is a possible site of Ballymorran Castle, which is known to have existed but is un-located. Many thanks to the landowners for their assistance and enthusiasm in compiling this project.

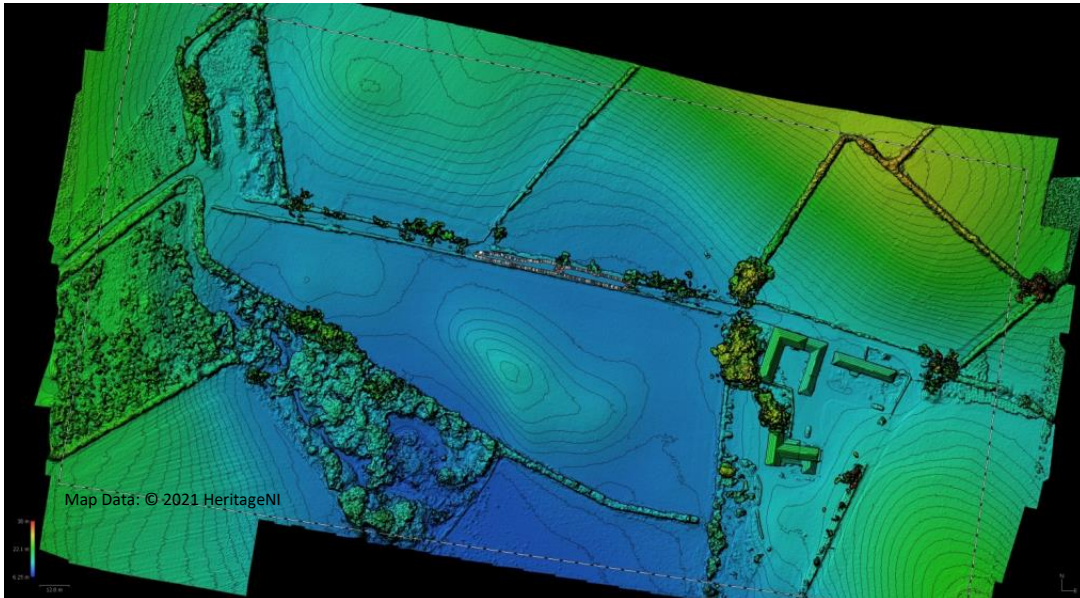
## **Description**

PlacenamesNI.org entry for Ballymorran states:

“Ballymorran lies east of Killinchy (church) townland, on the shore of Strangford Lough. The personal name Morand is well-known in early Irish literature from a legendary druid or judge who was credited with a list of maxims advising how a king should rule properly. No doubt because of this association with ‘natural’ wisdom, Morand, later spelled Morann, was also used by Christian clerics such as Morand, bishop of Nendrum who died in AD 684 and Morann mac Indrechtaig, abbot of Clogher, who died in AD

842 (AI). The monastery of Nendrum on Mahee Island is a short distance to the north of Ballymorran, and it seems likely that Ballymorran is named from the 7th-century bishop, especially as his name also appears in the full name of the parish of Kilmore 'big church of Morann' a few miles inland."

Hillshade created from DEM with 0.5m contours showing the hillock



0.5m contours superimposed on the Google Earth image



Map Data: Google, HeritageNI



Map Data: © 2021 HeritageNI, Mapbox

Field boundary wall. Well faced on both sides. 1.4m wide

This wall may be part of a building or associated with the existing farm building complex, however no mortar was observed.

An attempt was made to extrapolate the field boundary in order to ascertain if a 'parcel' of land or a carucate could be identified that may have been associated with the location of the Castle Field. The carucate was a medieval unit of land area approximating the land a plough team of eight oxen could till in a single annual season and approximated to 100-120 acres.

The photo was taken at the blue dot (below). The yellow line follows existing field boundaries. The red lines are the existing townland boundaries. Two possible carucates of land were identified that could be related to the Castle Field. The area north of the line is 126 acres while the area to the south of the line is 150 acres.

150 acre possible carucate south of the line



Map Data: © 2021 HeritageNI, Mapbox



Map Data: © 2021 HeritageNI, Mapbox

126 acre possible carucate north of the line

**The Coins:** Many thanks go to the landowners for allowing the coins to be examined. Thanks also to Randal Scott and Alan Dunlop for their assessment the coins.

Location of the coin finds and other known features



Map Data: HeritageNI, Mapbox, HERoNI

A halfpenny of John when Lord of Ireland; voided cross pommee and annulets; Dublin mint; moneyer Tomas; issued 1190 - 1198.



An interesting example and still subject to debate in Irish numismatics. This could well be the cut down centre of a Henry VI groat. These "coins" were valued as pennies and are known to have circulated in Ireland during the mid 15th century. Henry groats were issued in England from 1422 - 1461.

The thickness of the coin would be a pointer as to its origin. The "defacing" on one side is thought to result from die clash.



A cut penny (ie halfpenny) of Henry III; long cross; London mint; type V; may be moneyer Willem; issued 1247 - 1272. Multiple cut mark attempts are visible.



### Discussion

Burkes Peerage<sup>1</sup> has this entry "Walter Whyte with several of his brothers, accompanied Strongbow on his expedition to Ireland in 1170 and was knighted by Henry II in Dublin 1171. He accompanied John de Courcy to Downpatrick in 1177 and having taken a leading part in the subsequent conquest of Ulster was rewarded with large grants of land on the west shore of Strangford Lough. He was one of the five barons of Ulster created by de Courcy as Earl Palatine of Ulster. His descendants were known as the Lords of Duffrye and built castles at Ballymorran, Killinchy, Raynhaddy and Ring dufferin"

There is also a reference to Sir Walter Whyte's grandson Sir Balthazar Whyte who supported John during his expedition to Ireland when he stayed at Ballymorran Castle in July 1210.



In *The Vassels of the Earls of Ulster* Lawlor states "The territory of Ballymorrán, now merely one td., lies north of the barony of Dufferin; there is no sign of a mote-castle in the present td., but just outside it is a mote beside an ancient church-ruin, known as Rath Gorman. A castle, doubtless a wooden bretesche, still survived here in 1600, and it was apparently here that King John stayed a night on his return journey from Carrickfergus in 1210." (UJA 3, 1940, 16-26)

Until now there has been no other candidate for Ballymorrán Castle apart from the Motte at Rathgorman 2.7km to the south.

Ballymorrán townland may have once been larger than it is now.

The hillock in front of Ballymorrán house looks like it had a structural feature on it at one time going by the soil marks. There is no strong evidence for a ditch, however rainwater does lie around the base of the hillock in places in a slight depression.

In the 1960s the top of the hillock was levelled substantially to aid farming. The original height is not known.

### **Ballymorrán Multiple Linear Wooden Post Feature**

Irish Grid Reference: J 53026 59986

**Summary:** A clustered line of 120 posts between high and low water mark at approximately right angles to the shore.



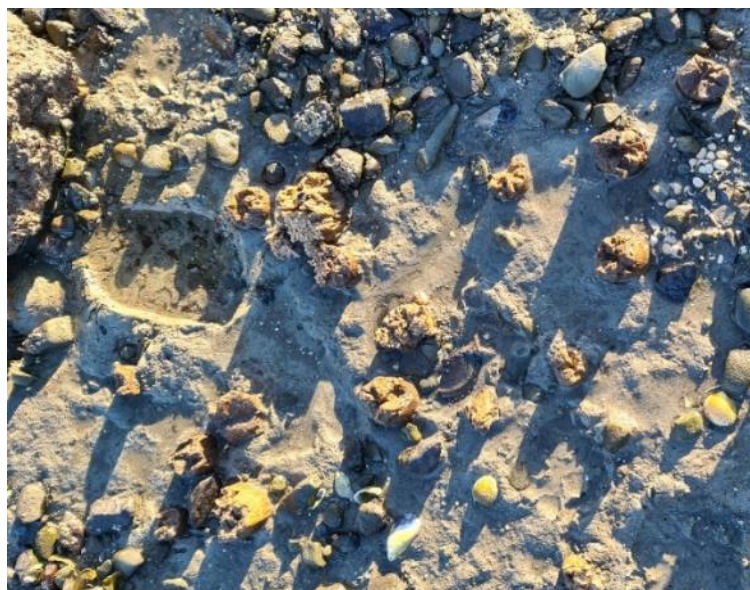
## Description

The length of the array of unworked posts extends to 13.57m and 0.94m at its widest. The mean diameter of the posts is 4.32cm. They start at approximately 18.8m from the high tide mark and extend to 38.2m from the high tide mark. In some cases there are 2 posts side by side. They do not appear to go beyond low tide mark. There is one other post 92m to the north and 2 posts to the south, 20m and 30m from the main feature. There is no corresponding field boundary in any of the Historical 6" maps. There is a small slightly raised 3m x 4m platform on the raised beach opposite the feature.

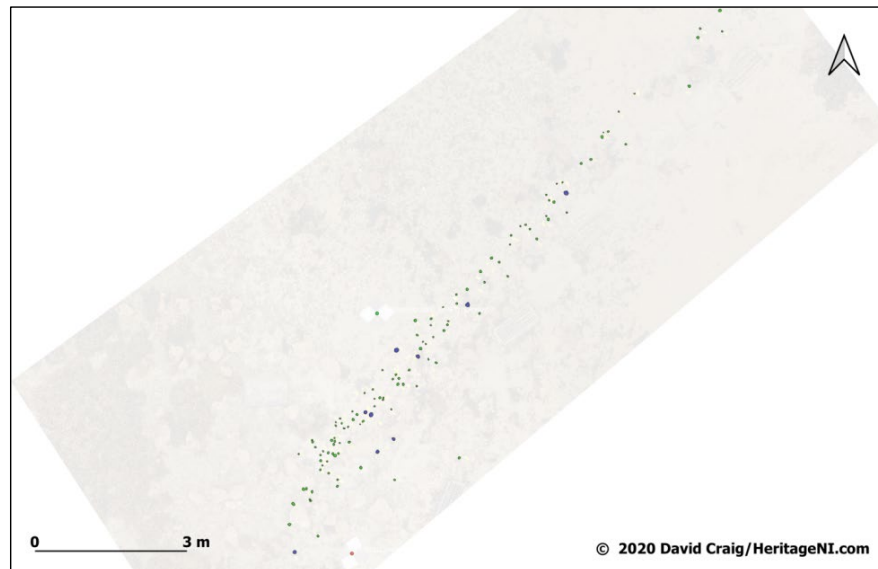
View of the locations of the posts, marked by yellow flags



Typical above surface view



Post distribution

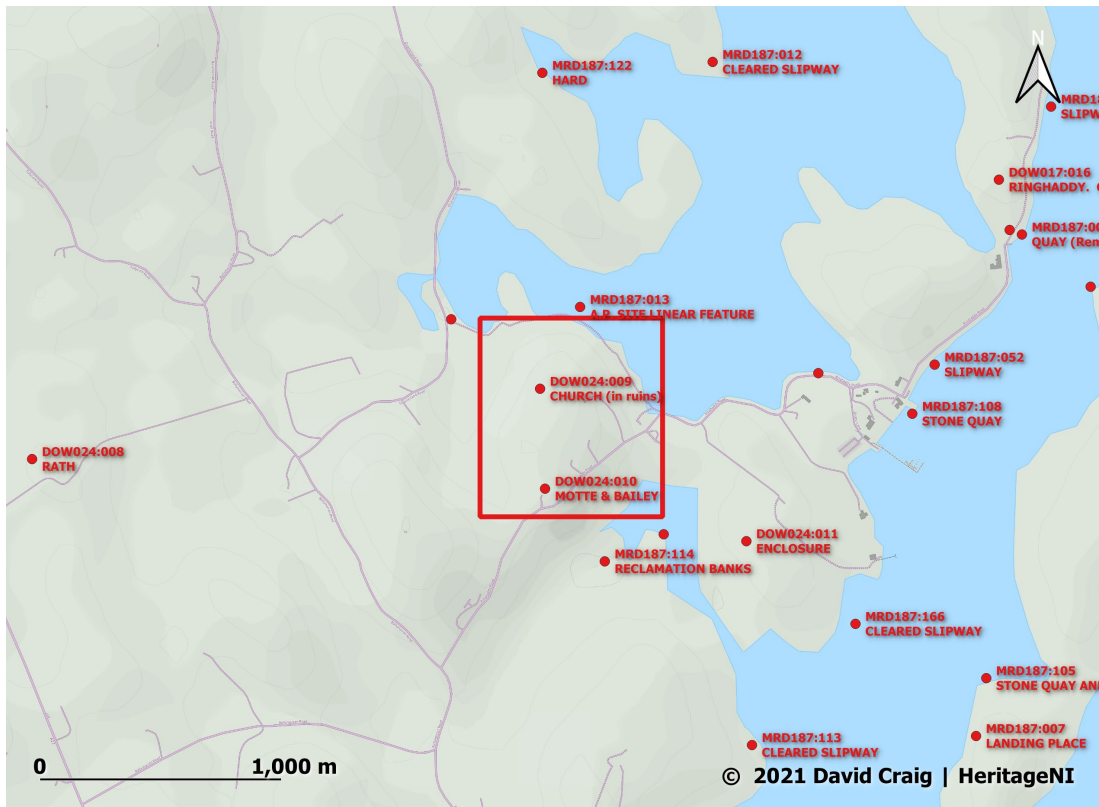


### Rathgorman, County Down

Irish Grid Reference: J 52718 58434

**Summary:** An area of the townland of Rathgorman was aerial surveyed to try and identify if there was any other features in the vicinity of the late medieval church (DOW024:009) and the Motte and Bailey (DOW024:010). Associated features were identified by using Drone photogrammetry to create a georeferenced orthomosaic, contours, and a multi-directional Hillshade from a Digital Elevation Model (DEM). Supplementary features were identified from grass/crop marks from Google Earth Pro imagery. The main new features identified was:

- The rath in the townland name was located along with possible associated field enclosures.
- A second larger circular enclosure was also identified in the field west of the church.
- An approach laneway leading up to the bailey from the West.



### Feature Identification

The aerial survey was undertaken on 30th Dec 2020 with kind permission from the landowner.

Two circular enclosures were identified from the georeferenced orthomosaic. The larger enclosure being 35m across and is on a westward facing slope. It is suggested that this is possibly a ring barrow although indeterminate as there is no feature topography. The smaller hilltop enclosure is suggested as the rath and is approximately 22.8m across. The field boundary to its north is respecting the curving edge of the rath. It is not easily seen in the orthomosaic but is more noticeable in the multi-directional hillshade below.

From the Multi-directional hillshade there seems to be a trackway (1) showing as 2 parallel banks leading up to the Bailey (DOW024:010). This heads off in a North-West direction.

At the northern end of same field there is a rectilinear platform 70m x 52m. At the southern end of the same field there is faint evidence of a ditch around the Bailey.

Orthomosaic showing rath and enclosure locations

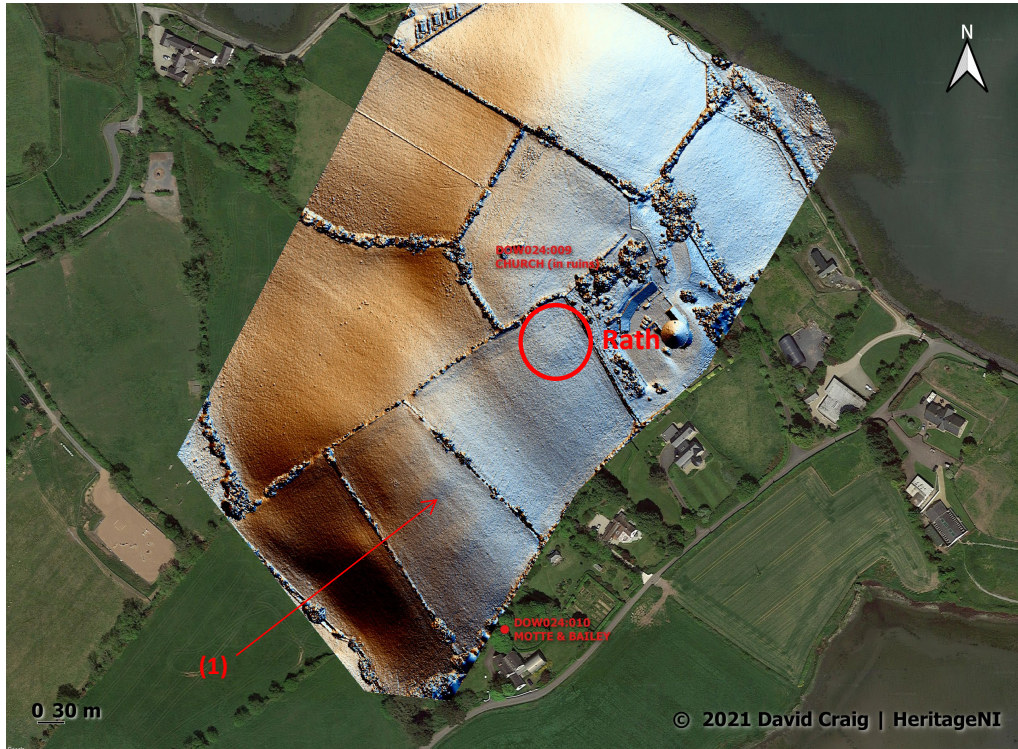


0.5m contours from the DEM overlaid on the orthomosaic



Below is an enhanced black and white image from a Google Earth Pro dataset from June 2010. The image has been specifically processed to show grass colour differentiation. The rath can be clearly identified. This field and the church field to the north also shows darker crop marks indicating other possible enclosures.

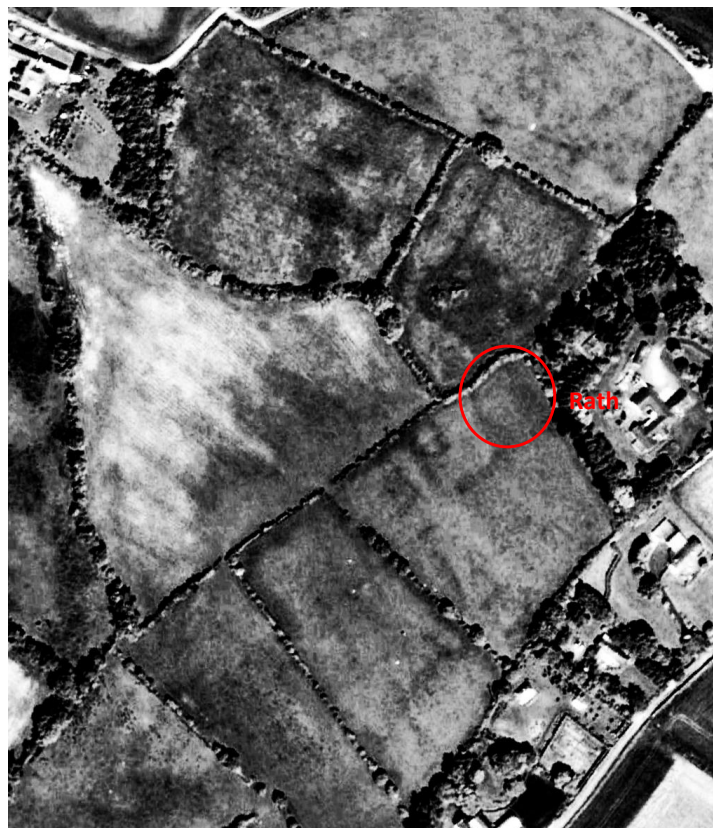
Multi-directional hillshade created from a DEM from drone acquired imagery showing the rath



None of these features correlate to any feature on the Historic 6" maps.

A rotatable 360 degree panorama taken from 120m (400ft) can be viewed at: <https://heritageNI.com/panos/rathgorman>

Grass colour differential showing additional enclosures and the rath (Google Earth 2010)



## Online Activities

This month I have two books to offer you as online activities. The first is: **Window to the West: Culture and Environment in the Scottish Gàidhealtachd**

This book asks whether there is anything distinctive about how the Gaels through the ages have looked at the world. The authors begin by considering how sight – and the lack of it – have been valued in Gaelic culture, how colour is represented in the language and how visual cues such as shape and pattern have generated Gaelic vocabulary. They investigate the stances embedded in Gaelic grammar and idiom and how these are made explicit in folklore, poetry and the thinking of Gaelic theologians. The recurrence of certain features is traced in the artefacts of the Gaels, in their buildings, metal-work, stone carving and manuscripts. These are seen to exhibit aesthetic trends towards abstraction, circularity, number symbolism, dynamism and interweaving – the same aesthetic that may be seen to underlie certain forms of poetry, dance and ceòl-mòr.

Can such structures be seen to relate to cultural attitudes expressed in the language? The authors believe that they can, and propose a tenacious ‘way of seeing’ among the Gaels, which shaped and in turn was shaped by fundamental perceptions of mankind’s position in the environment, of the shape of time, and of the relationship between the spirit and the material.

<https://pure.uhi.ac.uk/en/publications/window-to-the-west-culture-and-environment-in-the-scottish-gàidhe>

The second is: **Bog bodies: Face to face with the past**

The ‘bog bodies’ of north-western Europe have captured the imagination of poets as much as archaeologists, confronting us with human remains where time has stopped – allowing us to come ‘face to face’ with individuals from the past. Their exceptional preservation allows us to examine unprecedented details of both

their lives and deaths, making us reflect poignantly upon our own mortality. Yet this book argues that they must be resituated within a turbulent world of endemic violence and change, reinterpreting the latest Continental research and new discoveries in this light. The book features a ground-breaking 'cold case' forensic study of Worsley Man: Manchester Museum's 'bog head' and brings the bogs to life through both natural history and folklore, as places that were rich, fertile, yet dangerous. Finally, it argues that these remains do not just pose practical conservation problems but philosophical dilemmas, compounded by the critical debate on if – and how – they should be displayed, with museum exemplars drawn from across the globe.

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rskey=uWAQIU&result=2&fbclid=IwAR3M41e3q4EBd49vSXDZCCK  
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## New Books



### **Irish Country Furniture and Furnishings 1700-2000 - Claudia Kinmonth**

Cork University Press, £35

This is a beautiful book, with extensive illustrations of Irish furniture in a range of settings. Each chapter examines a different type of furniture within the home, from seats and beds to the smaller utensils and house shrines. The detailed discussion paints a vivid picture of how the Irish vernacular house would have appeared. But the book goes beyond this, giving us a social history of these houses and objects. The introduction discusses how society and environment shaped the vernacular house. Throughout the book, the form and use of furniture is explained in relation to its social, economic, and environmental context. A book covering the 18<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> centuries may seem a little modern to be considered archaeology, but this furniture has similarities to predecessors and it is a disappearing part of our history that needs to be studied. This book will be of great value to anyone interested in Irish rural society from the Middle Ages to the present.



### **The Plight of the Big House in Northern Ireland - J.A.K. Dean**

Ulster Architectural Heritage, £24

The big houses of Northern Ireland have been suffering decline and neglect for many years, and this book gives us an illustration of that loss. Organised by county, this is primarily a gazetteer of the big houses that have been lost or decayed. Each entry has some history and information about the house and most are illustrated. The introduction discusses the architectural styles of the buildings and the social context of their creation and decline. There are photos of how houses such as Downhill and Mount Panther appeared before they fell into ruin. It is also interesting to see images of places such as Belvoir Park and Castlewellan Cottage, which have now been lost but their demesne survives. This is a very interesting book and many readers will enjoy finding out about lost houses in locations they often visit and where they live.