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A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY HOUSE AT DRUMLUMMIN, TUBRID

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Introduction

This site was excavated in advance of the construction of the Cork-Dublin gas pipeline in 1981. The proximity of the site to a nearby, now levelled, castle necessitated an excavation, though there were no visible surface remains of the house or castle prior to the excavation. The site of the excavation lies in the valley between the Galtee and Knockmealdown mountain ranges at an altitude of c. 240 feet above O.D.*

History of site

Since the castle adjacent to the excavation was levelled in the 1950s, it was not possible to date it from architectural details. The territory in which the castle stood was one of the later areas of settlement of the Anglo-Norman colonization. In 1654 the castle at Drumlummin is described as 'a stumpe of an old castle' (Simington 1931, 366), and must have been abandoned at a much earlier period. Although no bawn wall survived at Drumlummin or may ever have existed, a deep defensive ditch was recorded to the north of the castle site within the area excavated for the gas pipeline route.

The excavated house site, which was within the gas pipeline corridor, is mid-17th century in date. The history of the townland of Drumlummin for this period is well illustrated by the Civil Survey of 1654 - 5, the Census of Ireland 1659, and the Hearth Tax records of 1665 - 7. The Civil Survey records the townland 'Dromlomane' (Drumlummin), which was part of the parish of 'Tubrid' (Tubrid) and owned by Thomas Lord Baron of Cahir, an Irish Papist.

The house excavated at Drumlummin is not recorded in the Civil Survey (1654) — 'noe cabbins or other improvements'. The Hearth Tax money records for 1665 record four houses in Drumlummin. Only one had two hearths, and the occupant was William Sheppard. The results of the excavation show that the house had two fireplaces, and the evidence shown from the artifact assemblage indicates a mid-17th century date context. It is probable that the house excavated at Drumlummin was the same as that noted in the Hearth Tax records of 1665 and that the occupant was William Sheppard. The impression from the remains of the house is that it belonged to a fairly substantial tenant farmer. The Hearth Tax records and Civil Survey indicate that the house of W. Sheppard was built between 1654 and 1665.

Excavation of the house

The house (Fig. 1 and Plates 1-2) lay within the area excavated for the pipeline construction corridor. The plan of the house was T-shaped, with three rooms on a north-south axis and two rooms on the west side of these. A well-set paving abutted on to the east side of Room III. The overall maximum length (east-west) of the house was 18m, and the width was 14m.

* The exact location is: O.S. 6" scale, Sheet No. 87, Co. Tipperary; barony of Iffa and Offa West; townland of Drumlummin; parish of Tubrid; grid reference: 15.5 c.m. from west margin, 15cm from north margin.

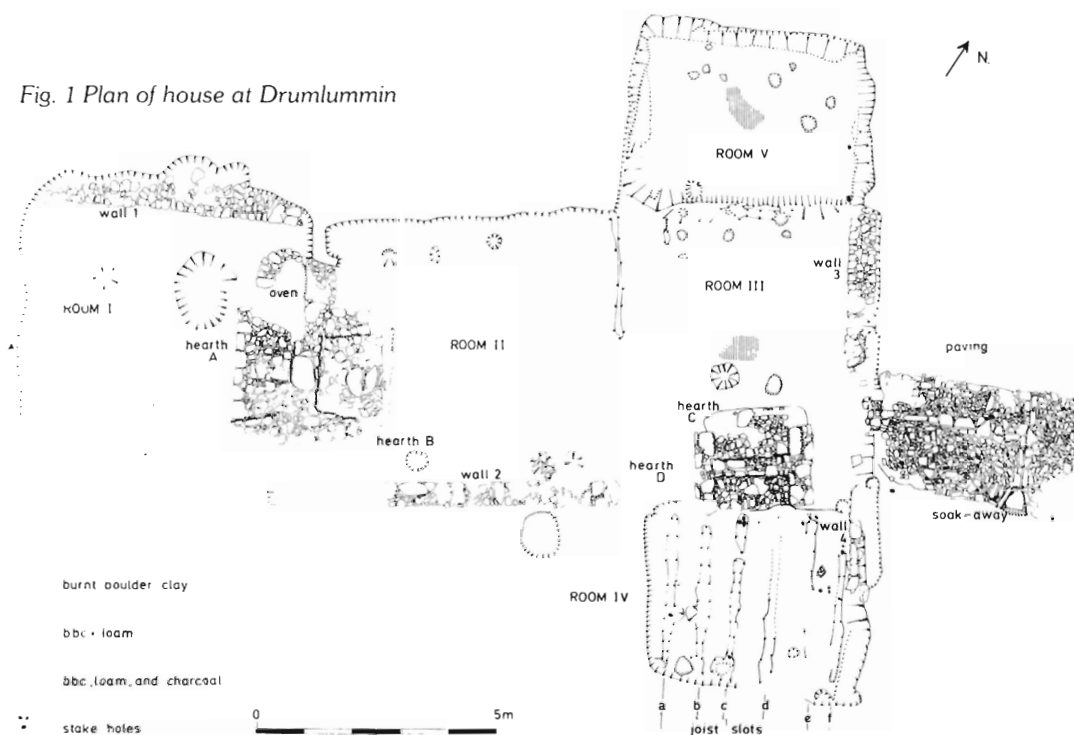


The superstructure of the house must have been in both wood and stone. The method of construction of each room appears to have been as follows: A foundation was dug which varied from being square in plan (i.e. Rooms I-IV) to rectangular (Room V). This foundation was cut at varying depths below the boulder clay level of between 20cm (Rooms I-IV) to 60 cm (Room V). The walls of the rooms were then erected along the sides of the foundation, and the base of the wall was then flush with the floor level.

Only Room IV produced any evidence that a timber floor was then placed over the boulder clay floor level. It may be that the remaining rooms did not have any more than an earthen floor, but the soil within these rooms did not appear particularly compact due to constant treading-on. It is possible that the floor levels of Rooms I-III and V were covered with flagstones, none of which survived. Since much of the stone from the walls seems to have been removed from the site after the house was abandoned, it is also possible that any floor (flagstones) were also removed for use elsewhere.

The walls of the house survived only to heights 3 - 4 courses and were constructed from limestone blocks. No clear evidence survived as to the site of the original doorway. However, the paved area and the post holes on the west side of Room III suggest that a doorway led from the paved area into Room III (Plate 1).

Fig. 1 Plan of house at Drumlummin



The type of roofing of the house was probably thatch. No fragments of slate were recovered from any area of the entire excavation. The form of roofing remains somewhat speculative. The roof may have been composed of coupled rafters, with the A-shaped couples standing on the side walls and joined by cross ties. This frame would in turn be covered by a layer of fitted sods (scraws), and then by the thatch covering of either straw or reeds. Oaten or wheaten straw is a likely covering for houses of this period in south Tipperary.



The presence of postholes within the floor areas of the room allows for various interpretations. The postholes along the north and south walls of Room II may have been for roof supports. If the floor in this room was of earth, it is possible that posts were set into it as an additional form of roof support. Peate (1946) cites examples of roofs being strengthened by the use of upright supporting posts in Wales. Quoting S.W. Williams, Peate describes a house in Strata Florida, Cardiganshire, in 1888, as having the roof principals 'spring direct from the ground instead of from the tops of the walls'.

Two large postholes recorded north of Hearth C remain something of an enigma. These may have been part of an apparatus that was used for cooking, e.g. a 'crane'. The shaft of the 'crane' itself was fixed only at the heel while the arm pivoted on the heel. The crane is 'almost invariably hung on the left side' (Danagher 1975, 66-67). The posthole on the east side of Hearth C may have been for a 'crane'.

Two double fireplaces occurred within the house. Hearths A and B formed part of the wall dividing Room I from Room II (Plate 2). Hearths C and D formed part of the partition between Rooms III and V. The fireplaces consisted of two hearths placed back to back with a dividing wall between. The floors of the hearths consisted of well-set stone paving.

The house site at Drumlummin must have had windows in the walls. However, the walls did not survive to sufficient heights to indicate where these had been. Strips of lead from Room III and from the topsoil may indicate that glass had been used in the windows. One lead strip retained a fragment of yellow tinted glass.

A feature of the house was the presence of a roughly circular oven, which was built on the north side of Hearth A (Plate 2). The oven consisted of a semi-circular wall which was 40-50 cm wide, 1.7 m in diameter and built from unmortared limestone and sandstone blocks. The oven wall survived to a height of three courses of 20-30 cm on its western side.

Summary

The house at Drumlummin is unusual in plan. The closest parallel for the house type is Site J, Lough Gur, county Limerick, which was L-shaped in plan (O Ríordáin and Danagher, 1947). Both houses had similar dimensions, wall construction and hearth sites. The absence of other close parallels for the house at Drumlummin may be more apparent than real, since so few houses of this date have been excavated in rural Ireland.

The house is dated to the mid-17th century. This date has been provided by several independent factors, viz. The Civil Survey (1654); Census of Ireland (1659); Hearth-Tax money records (1665); a money token from Room IV; the pottery; the clay pipe assemblage and the morphology of the house. The historical data gives a date of between 1659 - 1665 for the construction of the house.

The money token from Room IV indicates that the house was in use in the 1650s and 1660s. This corroborates the historical data. The amount of pottery — at least 52 vessels — from the site suggests that the site was occupied for some time. The absence of the stone upper course of the walls and the nature of the rubble which was recorded over Rooms I-IV suggest that any suitable building material was removed from the site when the house was abandoned.

The pottery assemblage from the site provides a good range of native domestic wares. The vessel types — storage jars, dishes, drinking vessels, a chafing dish and pitcher — are probably typical of the household of a strong tenant farmer. The vessels are sturdy earthenware pots and are likely to have been used for ordinary domestic purposes, e.g. storage and cooking.





PLATE 1: Paved Area (looking west)

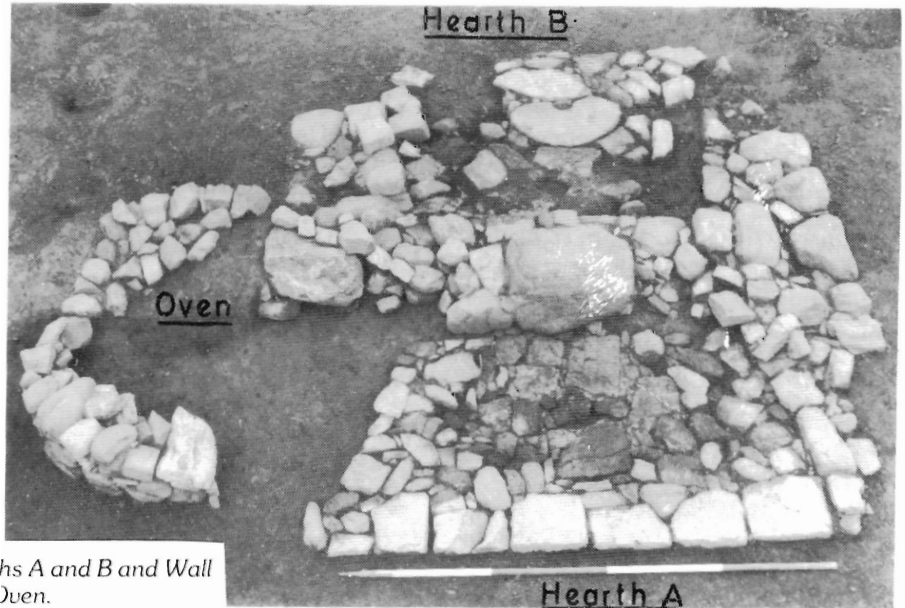


PLATE 2: Hearths A and B and Wall
Oven.

The iron objects from the site are poorly preserved. The range of iron objects is virtually undatable. Similar objects have been recovered from sites as early as Garryduff ringfort, county Cork (C'Kelly, 1962) to the 17th century star shaped fort at Dunboy, county Cork (Gowen, 1978). An iron key from Room II can be dated to as early as the 13th century, but this type may have continued in use up to the post-medieval period.

The clay pipe fragments date from 1600 - 1640: three are of Dutch origin, and two are British. The pipes fall within an early-mid 17th century date range, and in general fit in with the dating of the house.

The bone assemblage from Drumlummin provided little information on the meat diet of the mid-17th century inhabitants. Both sheep and cattle were eaten. The diet of the inhabitants was also elucidated by studies of the charred plant remains from the site. This showed that both oats and wheat, and to a lesser extent barley, as well as pulses, beans and peas, were being used.

The morphology of the house is probably typical of the late medieval and post-medieval period. The house was mainly stone built and probably had a thatched roof. The double hearth sites are comparable to those of Site J, Lough Gur, county Limerick (Ó Ríordáin and Danagher, 1947). These types of hearth sites are also common in the vernacular architecture of Wales (Peate, 1946), and may have been introduced by Welsh settlers in Ireland in the post Norman invasion period. The wall oven survived in Irish vernacular architecture into the early years of the 20th century (Ó Ríordáin, 1943).

The excavation at Drumlummin provided an insight into daily life of a farming family in South Tipperary in the period around 1660. The excavation was also virtually unique in that few sites of this period are archaeologically recorded in rural Ireland. A full report on the Drumlummin site and others excavated during the gas pipeline construction is available in *Archaeological Excavations on the Cork-Dublin Gas Pipeline (1981-82)*. Copies of this are available (at £12.00 plus £2.00 p.&p.) from the Department of Archaeology, University College, Cork.

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