

Cambridge University Press

0521336872 - Early Ireland: An Introduction to Irish Prehistory

Michael J. O'Kelly

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Early Ireland

Cambridge University Press
0521336872 - Early Ireland: An Introduction to Irish Prehistory
Michael J. O'Kelly
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Early Ireland

An Introduction to Irish Prehistory



Michael J. O'Kelly

Prepared for the press by
Claire O'Kelly



Cambridge University Press
0521336872 - Early Ireland: An Introduction to Irish Prehistory
Michael J. O'Kelly
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521334891

© Cambridge University Press 1989

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1989
Reprinted 1993, 1995, 1997, 2001

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

O'Kelly, Michael J.
Early Ireland.
Bibliography.
Includes index.
1. Man, Prehistoric – Ireland.
2. Ireland – Antiquities.
I. O'Kelly, Claire. II. Title.
GN806.5.038 1987 936.1'5 87–10961

ISBN-13 978-0-521-33489-1 hardback
ISBN-10 0-521-33489-6 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-33687-1 paperback
ISBN-10 0-521-33687-2 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2006

Contents

List of illustrations vii
Preface by Glyn Daniel xi
Acknowledgements xiii

1 The Ice Age

Palaeolithic man 5 Late Glacial and Postglacial stages 6 Pollen zones 7

2 The Mesolithic period

Early Mesolithic 19 Later Mesolithic 24

3 The Neolithic period

The first farmers 33 Material equipment in the Neolithic 37 Settlement 48
Ancient field systems and enclosures 65

4 The Late Neolithic/Beaker period

Beaker pottery 69 Settlement 72

5 Megaliths

Megalithic tombs 85 The megalith builders 122

6 Single burials and earthen and stone enclosures

Neolithic single burials 127 Earthen and stone enclosures 132 Ritual enclosures 136
Stone circles 137 Anomalous sites 142

7 The Bronze Age

Chronology 147 The conventional framework of the Irish Bronze Age 149
Technology 151 Bronze objects 159 Gold 173 Gold objects 178
Hoards 184 Other materials 186

Contents

8 Bronze Age burial

Cist burial 189 Pit and Urn burial 193 Cinerary Urns 195 Flat cemeteries 200
Cemetery mounds 200 Barrows 205 Late Bronze Age burial 210

9 Bronze Age settlement and stone monuments

Occupation sites 217 Cooking places 223 Stone monuments 228
Rock art 239

10 The Iron Age

The European Iron Age 245 The Celts 247 Language 248
Early Irish literature 252 The archaeological evidence 256 Technology 259
The artefacts 262 Carved stones 284 Human representations 289

11 Later prehistoric settlement

Lake settlements 298 Enclosed sites 306 Hut circles 308
Hillforts 309 Other excavated sites 325

12 Iron Age burial

Burial mounds 329 Inhumation 333 Long stone cists 334
Intrusive burials 335

Appendix A Radiocarbon dating 341

Appendix B Dendrochronology 343

Appendix C Pollen analysis 345

Appendix D Calibration of radiocarbon dates 347

Bibliography 353 Index 371

Illustrations

Bold numerals indicate photographs

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 The counties and provinces of Ireland <i>page 1</i> | in Ireland and Britain <i>page 44</i> |
| 2 Location map showing limits of last glaciation and glacial and postglacial sites <i>page 4</i> | 21 Neolithic ware <i>page 46</i> |
| 3 Giant Irish deer <i>page 9</i> | 22 Early Neolithic house at Ballynagilly, Co. Tyrone <i>page 49</i> |
| 4 Location map of Mesolithic sites <i>page 12</i> | 23 Map of the Boyne passage-grave cemetery, Co. Meath <i>page 51</i> |
| 5 Techniques of flint working <i>page 14</i> | 24 Aerial view of Ballyglass, Co. Mayo <i>page 54</i> |
| 6 Distribution map of Mesolithic sites and find-spots <i>page 18</i> | 25 Plan of Ballyglass house <i>page 55</i> |
| 7 Lower River Bann near Coleraine, Co. Derry <i>page 20</i> | 26 Aerial view of Lough Gur, Co. Limerick <i>page 58</i> |
| 8 Mount Sandel (Upper), activity areas <i>page 20</i> | 27 Map of Lough Gur area <i>page 59</i> |
| 9 Mount Sandel (Upper), hut site <i>page 21</i> | 28 House A, Lough Gur <i>page 60</i> |
| 10 Flint microliths <i>page 23</i> | 29 Circles J and K, Lough Gur <i>page 62</i> |
| 11 Later Mesolithic flints <i>page 25</i> | 30 Field systems at Behy/Glenultra, Co. Mayo <i>page 66</i> |
| 12 Location map of Neolithic sites and of Late Neolithic/Beaker sites <i>page 32</i> | 31 Distribution map of Beaker find-spots <i>page 68</i> |
| 13 Pollen diagram from Scragh Bog, Co. Westmeath <i>page 34</i> | 32 Beaker ware <i>page 70</i> |
| 14 Örup elm forest in southern Scania, Sweden <i>page 35</i> | 33 Area excavated at Newgrange, Co. Meath, from 1962–75 <i>page 73</i> |
| 15 Technique of pressure flaking <i>page 38</i> | 34 One of the Beaker squatting areas at Newgrange <i>page 74</i> |
| 16 Neolithic flint artefacts <i>page 39</i> | 35 Site 1 at Knowth, Co. Meath, and 'satellite' passage tombs <i>page 78</i> |
| 17 Original wooden handle of stone axe, Maguire's Bridge, Co. Fermanagh <i>page 40</i> | 36 Location map of megalithic sites <i>page 84</i> |
| 18 Rough-outs of porcellanite axes from Rathlin Island, Co. Antrim <i>page 42</i> | 37 Distribution map of court tombs <i>page 86</i> |
| 19 Hoard of porcellanite axes, Malone, Belfast <i>page 43</i> | 38 Court tomb at Creevykeel, Co. Sligo <i>page 87</i> |
| 20 Distribution map of porcellanite axes | 39 Court tomb at Annaghmare, Co. Armagh <i>page 88</i> |
| | 40 Conjectural reconstruction of court tomb at Shanballyedmond, Co. Tipperary <i>page 90</i> |

List of illustrations

- | | |
|--|--|
| 41 Distribution map of portal tombs
<i>page 93</i> | <i>page 121</i> |
| 42 Portal tomb at Kilmogue, Co. Kilkenny
<i>page 95</i> | 64 Location map of Neolithic single burials and earthen and stone enclosures
<i>page 126</i> |
| 43 Portal tomb at Poulabrone, Co. Clare
<i>page 95</i> | 65 Baunogenasraid, Co. Carlow, cairn and burial
<i>page 128</i> |
| 44 Chambered cairn, Dyffryn Ardudwy, Merionethshire, Wales
<i>page 96</i> | 66 Distribution map of Linkardstown-type and related burials
<i>page 129</i> |
| 45 Distribution map of passage tombs
<i>page 98</i> | 67 Decorated pot from Baunogenasraid
<i>page 130</i> |
| 46 Decorated slab from Clear Island, Co. Cork
<i>page 99</i> | 68 Aerial view of Newgrange area
<i>page 133</i> |
| 47 Standing stones in front of the Newgrange cairn
<i>page 100</i> | 69 Grange stone circle (B) at Lough Gur
<i>page 138</i> |
| 48 Hilltop cairn at Carrowkeel, Co. Sligo
<i>page 101</i> | 70 Conjectural reconstruction of Beaker pot from Grange stone circle, Lough Gur
<i>page 139</i> |
| 49 Plan of the Newgrange monument
<i>page 102</i> | 71 Circle O, Lough Gur
<i>page 140</i> |
| 50 Newgrange after conservation
<i>page 103</i> | 72 Millin Bay, Co. Down, after conservation
<i>page 143</i> |
| 51 Passage-tomb of Gavrinis, Larmor Baden, Brittany
<i>page 103</i> | 73 Location map of Bronze Age weapons, tools and ornaments
<i>page 146</i> |
| 52 Plans of Irish passage tombs
<i>page 104</i> | 74 Distribution map of west Cork/Kerry copper mines
<i>page 153</i> |
| 53 Newgrange at the winter solstice
<i>page 107</i> | 75 Entrance to one of the Mount Gabriel copper mines, Co. Cork
<i>page 154</i> |
| 54 Grave no. 7, Carrowmore, Co. Sligo, with Knocknarea Mountain in the background
<i>page 108</i> | 76 Stone mould for axeheads from Doonour, Co. Cork
<i>page 157</i> |
| 55 The Entrance Stone, Newgrange
<i>page 112</i> | 77 Bronze halberd and bronze axes
<i>page 160</i> |
| 56 Kerbstone 52, Newgrange
<i>page 113</i> | 78 Copper and bronze axeheads
<i>page 161</i> |
| 57 Knowth, decorated stone at entrance to western tomb
<i>page 114</i> | 79 Decorated bronze axeheads
<i>page 162</i> |
| 58 Knowth, decorated stone in kerb near entrance to eastern tomb
<i>page 114</i> | 80 Bronze daggers
<i>page 163</i> |
| 59 Distribution map of wedge tombs
<i>page 116</i> | 81 Bronze halberds
<i>page 164</i> |
| 60 Wedge tomb at Island, Co. Cork
<i>page 118</i> | 82 Bronze tools and weapons
<i>page 166</i> |
| 61 Conjectural reconstruction of Island wedge tomb
<i>page 119</i> | 83 Late Bronze Age swords
<i>page 168</i> |
| 62 Wedge tomb at Baurnadomeeny, Co. Tipperary
<i>page 120</i> | 84 Bronze flanged sword from Co. Offaly
<i>page 169</i> |
| 63 Baurnadomeeny after conservation | 85 Bronze shield from near Lough Gur
<i>page 170</i> |
| | 86 Bronze cauldron, Castlederg, Co. Tyrone
<i>page 171</i> |

List of illustrations

- 87 Bronze Age trumpet horns *page* 172
- 88 Late Bronze Age objects *page* 174
- 89 The Gleninsheen gold collar, Co. Clare *page* 176
- 90 Late Bronze Age gold ornaments *page* 177
- 91 Gold lunula *page* 179
- 92 Schematic representation of lunula ornament *page* 180
- 93 Gold torc *page* 181
- 94 Gold dress fastener and wooden box, Killymoon, Co. Tyrone *page* 184
- 95 Location map of cist and pit burials and barrows *page* 188
- 96 Cist grave, Clonickillvant, Co. Westmeath *page* 190
- 97 Distribution map of Bronze Age cists *page* 191
- 98 Bronze Age funerary ware *page* 194
- 99 Urn burial, Coolnahane, Co. Cork *page* 196
- 100 Detail of Coolnahane Urn *page* 197
- 101 Cist and pit burials at Labbamolaga, Co. Cork *page* 199
- 102 Moneen, Co. Cork, primary and secondary phases *page* 202
- 103 Pottery from Moneen *page* 203
- 104 Ballyveelish 3, Co. Tipperary, central burial *page* 208
- 105 Barrow profiles from Carrowmore, Co. Sligo *page* 209
- 106 Late Bronze Age burial complex at Rathgall, Co. Wicklow *page* 211
- 107 Burials 1 and 2 at Rathgall *page* 212
- 108 Location map of Bronze Age settlements; also stone monuments *page* 216
- 109 Dwelling site at Carrigillihy, Co. Cork *page* 220
- 110 Scale model of Carrigillihy *page* 221
- 111 Cooking place at Ballyvourney I, Co. Cork *page* 224
- 112 Ballyvourney I, conjectural reconstruction *page* 226
- 113 Cooking experiments: the joint of mutton *page* 226
- 114 The meat wrapped in straw *page* 227
- 115 Boiling the water *page* 227
- 116 Lifting out the cooked joint *page* 226
- 117 The carving *page* 226
- 118 The eating *page* 227
- 119 The Long Stone, Punchestown, Co. Kildare *page* 229
- 120 Seisreach alignment, Co. Cork *page* 230
- 121 Beaghmore, Co. Tyrone *page* 233
- 122 Distribution map of west Cork/Kerry stone circles *page* 235
- 123 Recumbent-stone circle at Drombeg, Co. Cork *page* 236
- 124 Axes of west Cork/Kerry stone circles *page* 237
- 125 Boulder dolmen, Bohonagh, Co. Cork *page* 238
- 126 Distribution map of stone circles *page* 240
- 127 Decorated rock outcrop at Derrynablaha, Co. Kerry *page* 241
- 128 Location map of Early Iron Age weapons, tools and ornaments *page* 244
- 129 The Ogam cipher *page* 250
- 130 Ogam stone, Keel townland, Co. Kerry *page* 251
- 131 Block-wheel, Doogarymore, Co. Roscommon *page* 256
- 132 Three-link bronze horsebits; pendant *page* 257
- 133 Artefacts showing Hallstatt influence *page* 264
- 134 La Tène-type swords *page* 266
- 135 Scabbard plates and chapes from Lisnacrogher, Co. Antrim *page* 268
- 136 Spearbutts *page* 270
- 137 Clonoura wooden shield, Co. Tipperary *page* 272
- 138 Loughnashade horn, Co. Armagh *page* 273

Cambridge University Press

0521336872 - Early Ireland: An Introduction to Irish Prehistory

Michael J. O'Kelly

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*List of illustrations*

- | | |
|--|---|
| 139 The 'Petrie Crown' <i>page 274</i> | 156 Cullyhanna Lough, Co. Armagh
<i>page 305</i> |
| 140 Cork helmet horns <i>page 275</i> | 157 Hillfort at Freestone Hill, Co.
Kilkenny <i>page 311</i> |
| 141 Safety-pin brooches <i>page 276</i> | 158 Aerial view of Rathgall hillfort, Co.
Wicklow <i>page 314</i> |
| 142 Ring-headed pins <i>page 276</i> | 159 Central habitation complex at
Rathgall <i>page 315</i> |
| 143 The Broighter hoard, Co. Derry
<i>page 277</i> | 160 Hillfort of Dún Ailinne, Co. Kildare
<i>page 316</i> |
| 144 The Broighter collar <i>page 278</i> | 161 Central area, Dún Ailinne <i>page 318</i> |
| 145 Bone flakes from Loughcrew, Co.
Meath <i>page 282</i> | 162 Navan Fort, Co. Armagh, overall
view <i>page 321</i> |
| 146 Location map of carved stones, lake-
side settlements, enclosed sites and
hut circles <i>page 283</i> | 163 Site B, Navan Fort, after removal of
turf mound <i>page 322</i> |
| 147 The Turoe stone, Co. Galway
<i>page 285</i> | 164 South-west quadrant of Site B, Navan
Fort <i>page 323</i> |
| 148 The Killycluggin stone, Co. Cavan
<i>page 287</i> | 165 Clogher, Co. Tyrone <i>page 324</i> |
| 149 The Tanderagee figure, Co. Armagh
<i>page 291</i> | 166 Aerial view of Hill of Tara, Co.
Meath <i>page 326</i> |
| 150 Janus figure, Boa Island, Co.
Fermanagh <i>page 293</i> | 167 Long stone cist at Hoddersfield, Co.
Cork <i>page 330</i> |
| 151 Three-faced head, Corleck, Co.
Cavan <i>page 293</i> | 168 Finds from Lambay Island, Co.
Dublin <i>page 337</i> |
| 152 Stone head from Beltany, Co.
Donegal <i>page 294</i> | 169 Disc brooches of Romano-British
type from Newgrange, Co. Meath
<i>page 338</i> |
| 153 Location map of hillforts and Early
Iron Age Burials <i>page 296</i> | 170 Diagram of overlapping tree-rings
<i>page 343</i> |
| 154 Conjectural model of a crannog at
Craggaunowen, Co. Clare <i>page 299</i> | |
| 155 Lough Eskragh, Co. Tyrone <i>page 303</i> | |

Cambridge University Press

0521336872 - Early Ireland: An Introduction to Irish Prehistory

Michael J. O'Kelly

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

Professor Michael J. O'Kelly (known to his family and friends as Brian) was born in County Limerick in 1915. I first met him in the late thirties when he was a student of Seán P. Ó Riordáin's in the Department of Archaeology at University College, Cork. When Ó Riordáin moved in 1946 to the Chair of Archaeology in University College, Dublin, his old pupil and friend succeeded him in Cork, an appointment O'Kelly held with distinction until his retirement. He died suddenly in October 1982, the day before the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society was giving a special dinner to celebrate his retirement.

For nearly forty years Brian O'Kelly had worked in the field and in the academic world of Irish archaeology to its lasting benefit. He could never be described as an insular archaeologist. He travelled extensively outside Ireland, went to all the main international conferences, was internationally minded and saw the ancient Irish past in a wide European context. A brilliant and painstaking excavator, he worked on a wide variety of sites from the Late Stone Age to medieval times and was meticulous and prompt in publishing them. The extent and range of his interests and achievement is well reflected in his Festschrift, *Irish Antiquity*, published in 1981.

For fourteen years he excavated the great Neolithic burial mound of Newgrange in the Boyne Valley and was able to date its construction to before 3000 BC. In reviewing his *Newgrange: Archaeology, Art and Legend* (1982), Professor P. R. Giot wrote: 'O'Kelly was a man of the field, an expert excavator, an experimental archaeologist, not at all involved in pseudo-marxist, pseudo-freudian, or pseudo-structuralist interpretations. He was an archaeologist, not an ethno-archaeologist' (*Antiquity*, 57, 1983, 150).

In the preparation of his Newgrange book, as in all his work in the field and in the study, he was most ably helped by his wife Claire. They had been students together and theirs was a marriage of great happiness and scholarly co-operation. Mrs O'Kelly, an archaeologist in her own right, has made a special study of the monumental art of the Boyne tombs which is summarized in concise form in her invaluable *Illustrated Guide to Newgrange and the other Boyne Monuments* (1978).

For many years I and others had been urging Brian to write a general synthesis of Irish prehistory and he had in fact completed it in draft before his death. The manuscript has now been edited, referenced and fully updated by his wife. Claire O'Kelly has completed what Brian started, and it is a pleasure to write this

Cambridge University Press

0521336872 - Early Ireland: An Introduction to Irish Prehistory

Michael J. O'Kelly

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

prefatory note to a book which will take its place as the definitive work on Ireland in pre-Christian times for many years to come. It is a work of scholarly love and reflects the greatest credit on both.

Glyn Daniel

Acknowledgements

Since, sadly, the author of this book was unable to see it through to its final stages, acknowledgements will have to be confined to those who helped me to accomplish it in his stead. I must confess that there are very few archaeologists at present working in Ireland, as well as experts in related disciplines, to whom I did not have recourse at some stage or other, whether to read sections of the manuscript or to provide illustrations, information, advice, and so on. The list is a very long one and while I thank them with all my heart I can only single out those on whom the burden fell heaviest.

At University College, Cork, Rose Cleary, Robert Devoy, Mick Monk and Peter Woodman; at University College, Dublin, George Eogan and Barry Raftery; at University College, Galway, John Waddell; at the National Museum of Ireland, Mary Cahill; at the Office of Public Works, Dublin, Ann Lynch; at the Historical Monuments and Buildings Branch, DoE (NI), Chris Lynn; at the University of Pennsylvania, Bernard Wailes.

On what was for me the thorny question of how best to present and calibrate the radiocarbon dates I was extremely fortunate to have the expert guidance of Mike Baillie and Gordon Pearson of the Palaeoecology Centre, The Queen's University, Belfast, as well as that of Jan Lanting of the University of Groningen. In addition, Dr Pearson gave permission for the use of the Belfast 1985 radiocarbon timescale calibration curve, and Richard Warner of the Ulster Museum most kindly calibrated the radiocarbon dates used in the text.

Grateful thanks are due for permission to reproduce copyright photographs as follows (line drawings are acknowledged in the text as they occur): A. M. ApSimon 22; Cambridge University 158; Commissioners of Public Works, Ireland 48, 54, 55, 56, 123, 147; Crown Copyright (NI) 19, 72, 121, 149, 150, 162, 163, 164; G. Eogan 57, 58; Fairey Surveys of Ireland Ltd 68; H. Göransson 14; The Green Studio Ltd 38; C. T. Le Roux 51; The National Museum of Ireland 3, 17, 18, 77, 80, 84, 85, 86, 89, 91, 94, 96, 131, 139, 143, 144, 151, 169; W. O'Brien 75; B. Raftery 148; Shannon Development Authority 26, 154; L. Swan 24, 166; P. Woodman 7. Nos. 34, 42, 43, 46, 47, 50, 53, 63, 93, 99, 100, 110, 112–20, 127, 130 are by M. J. O'Kelly.

Finally I must express my gratitude to my friend, Glyn Daniel, for his constant support and help.

Claire O'Kelly



1 Map of Ireland showing provinces and counties