

what we found

in brief:

Some of the findings at Carrickmacross.

1. Neolithic building

Aerial view of Neolithic houses uncovered at Monanny. (Photo StudioLab)

2. Neolithic building

Archaeologist excavating the threshold of Neolithic Building 2 at Monanny. (Photo IAC Ltd.)

3. Stone axehead

Stone axehead found during excavations at Monanny. (Photo Claire Phelan)

4. Monanny building

Reconstruction of cut-away building detail of Monanny Building 3. (Figure Niall Roycroft)



background



Aerial view of Lisanisk ringfort overlooking the crannóg in Lisanisk Lough with Carrickmacross in the background. (Photo StudioLab)

The N2 Carrickmacross Bypass, Co. Monaghan, consists of an 8.1 km road realignment to the east of Carrickmacross.

This part of Monaghan lies within a drumlin belt, so the landscape is dominated by steep hills, swampy bottoms and inter-drumlin lakes with few rivers passing through the landscape at ground level

Advance archaeological testing and resolution works were carried out on the scheme in 2003 by Irish Archaeological Consultancy Ltd (IAC Ltd) on behalf of the National Roads Authority and Monaghan County Council.

South County Monaghan is an area of predominantly early medieval ringfort and crannóg (lake dwelling) sites and Carrickmacross is recorded as the site of an early medieval monastery. Less evidence for prehistoric occupation exists in the area, although Neolithic and Bronze Age sites are known.

Carrickmacross remained little affected by the Anglo-Norman invasion, and by the 14th century AD the MacMahons, the Gaelic lords of this part of Monaghan, had established forts nearby.



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archaeological DISCOVERIES

front cover images

LEFT: Archaeologist excavating an early medieval burial at Cloghvalley Upper.
RIGHT: Lisanisk ringfort with Carrickmacross in the background. (Photo StudioLab)
MIDDLE: Archaeologists excavating Neolithic Building 3 at Monanny. (Photo IAC Ltd)

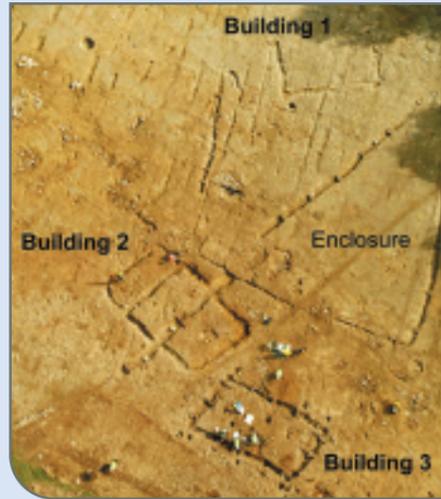


neolithic buildings at monanny

Three Early Neolithic buildings, dated by thousands of pottery sherds to 4000 – 3700 BC, were located at **Monanny**.

The south-facing site is adjacent to a broad valley base beside one of the few streams in the area that eventually flows to the sea. The buildings display subtly different architecture, but all were rectangular with walls internally faced with vertical oak planks placed in a slot trench, braced by post-holes. The standard construction was a frame of posts set in the slot trench, linked by horizontals at eaves level. The bulk of the walls were probably of turf sods to give weather-proofing. The buildings were likely to have been thatched. In the slot trenches, silt clay was first put in to fix the planks loosely. This was followed by packing stones and then a further layer of earth. Through repairs and building use, the upper slot trench fills had become full of charred remains, burnt bone and pottery fragments. Entrances were seen in all three buildings.

Building 1 measured 10 m by 7 m and was a simple rectangle with large corner posts. Access was via a door on the north-west side. Next door a group of post-holes probably indicate another structure, but this time without a plank-lined wall.



Vertical view of the Neolithic buildings at **Monanny**. (Photo StudioLab)

Building 2 measuring 13.5 m by 8 m, and with walls braced by corner and intermediate posts appears to have been of similar plan to Building 1 but later clearly extended to the east. The entrance was via a door on the northern side and access to the small room was from the large room.

Building 3 measured 12 m by 7 m and was partly divided into two rooms. The walls consisted of a slot trench. Regular posts paired with external, partially driven uprights which probably supported the ends of

neolithic buildings at monanny

the roof eaves as they extended over the wide turf wall. The entrance was on the short (eastern) side. A line of stake-holes on the northern and western sides of this building suggested a possible gated annex.

In terms of disuse, Building 1 was partly burnt and dismantled, Building 2 was thoroughly dismantled, possibly after being burnt, and Building 3 was completely burnt to the ground.

A polished stone axe of porphyritic dolerite was found placed vertically in a post-hole of Building 2. It appears the axe had been deliberately smashed with successive blows to its cutting edge, but was it used as a simple piece of post-hole packing or deliberately placed there?



Stone axehead found during excavations at **Monanny**. (Photo Claire Phelan)



Archaeologist recording external post-holes of Neolithic Building 3 at **Monanny**. (Photo IAC Ltd.)

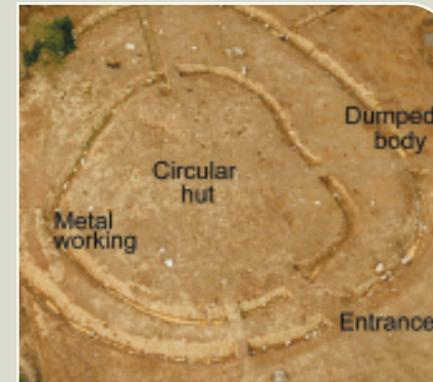


Burnt post (*in situ*) in wall of Neolithic Building 3 at **Monanny**. (Photo IAC Ltd.)

Neolithic emmer wheat, naked barley, barley and wheat was found scattered in sealed contexts across the site. Also found were an impressive 978 identifiable sherds of Neolithic pottery representing at least 82 (perhaps more than 143) vessels. The assemblage represents a minimum of 76 carinated or grooved bowls, two un-carinated vessels, one short-necked pot, five small cups and one Neolithic globular bowl.

Subsequent occupation on and around the Monanny site focused on the nearby stream where three burnt mounds (*fulachta fiadh*) were found, two of which contained waterlogged, planked, timbers in their troughs. Fragments found from two Late Bronze Age coarseware pottery vessels suggest domestic activity.

early medieval ringfort at lisanisk



Vertical view of the double ditched ringfort at **Lisanisk**. (Photo StudioLab)

An early medieval monastery was built at Carrickmacross in the lands of the *Fir Fearnmhaighe* 'Men of Farney'. The lakes around Carrickmacross contain many crannógs, or small man made islands, and one in Lisanisk Lough was protected by a huge, double ditched ringfort on the nearby high ground. **Lisanisk** ringfort was 57 m by 50 m externally and 35 m wide internally. The space between the inner and outer ditches was irregular with the inner enclosure slewed east to overlook Lisanisk Lough. The fort was entered by a causeway on the southern side. Internally there was a small, centrally placed circular hut.

During the seventh century the inner enclosure ditch was deliberately infilled, perhaps because the inner-outer enclosure arrangement was not very effective defensively. Soon after, a sunken metal-working space was dug into the backfilled inner ditch, where on the floor were the remains of a furnace and possibly sockets for bellows. Due to a lack of hammerscale it is possible this site was primarily used for melting metals into ingots. From the accumulated metal-working debris a massive amount of slag and more than 30 whole or fragmented tuyères (bellow nozzle holes to the furnace) were recovered. Radiocarbon dates show this metal-working occurred at the end of the seventh century; perhaps coinciding with unrest that resulted in the documented burning of the Carrickmacross monastery in AD 685.

Burial ground at Cloghvalley Upper

Also dating to the seventh century AD was a small, 'family' cemetery of fewer than 20 individuals at Cloghvalley Upper. The articulated remains consisted of 12 adults and three sub-adults but the cemetery probably also lies beyond the road take lands. Of the adults, six were male, five were female and one was of indeterminate sex. The graves were part stone lined to support wooden covers over the dead - turning the graves themselves into coffins. Burial markers must have been used to allow multiple use of graves, seen in two cases.

post-medieval lisanisk



Reconstruction drawing of **Lisanisk** ringfort in the early seventh century AD. (Figure Niall Roycroft)

County Monaghan was formed in 1585 from the five ancient baronies of Truagh, Dartrey, Monaghan, Cremorne and Farney.

Farney was leased back to the MacMahon family and in 1590 the MacMahon moved their headquarters to the main crannóg on Lisanisk Lough. Around this time the Lisanisk Ringfort appears to have been strengthened.

On the night of the 23rd October 1641, rebels overran the towns of Monaghan, Castleblayney and Carrickmacross, making the English garrisons prisoners. Colla Macbrian MacMahon of Lisanisk, Carrickmacross, was the leader of the uprising in County Monaghan. Six years later, Colonel Monke ended the 1641-7 uprising by attacking the Lisanisk crannógs at Carrickmacross on Friday 15th October, 1647. Under fire from shot and artillery the last



Archaeologists excavating the double ditch at **Lisanisk**. Partial revetting in stone was located adjacent to the entrance.

rebels were forced to yield to superior force.

To capture the islands in **Lisanisk** Lough it would have been vital to take Lisanisk ringfort on the adjacent high ground. Once this ringfort was taken, the crannógs in the lake would be under attack from a height and must fall. Evidence for the 1647 battle of Lisanisk ringfort was perhaps found in the shattered body of a mid-17th century man tossed into the ringfort ditch. Perhaps this person was one of the Gaelic defenders of the ringfort. The ditch was probably full of weeds as the corpse was rolled in and it was then forgotten or deliberately left.

The Lisanisk ringfort was utterly flattened at the end of the 17th century, probably connected with land redistributions after the Williamite Wars of 1690-1. The razing of the ringfort is dated by a coin of 1692 found in the outer ditch.