

A PREVIOUSLY UNRECORDED MEGALITHIC STRUCTURE AT FENNOR, CO. MEATH

by Conor Brady*

Introduction

The monument, at National Grid Reference N 957 729, stands on a hill in the townland of Fennor, on the southern side of the river Boyne approximately 1km south-south-west of the village of Slane. The site is not included in the Archaeological Inventory for Co. Meath, nor is it marked on either the first or second editions of the Ordnance Survey 6" sheet. The site lies approximately 4km west of the Bend of the Boyne cemetery, which is situated on the northern side of the river. The local soil is grey brown podzolic, similar to that on which the passage tombs of the Bend of the Boyne cemetery are built. This overlies carboniferous limestone.

The site is located c. 150m north west of the highest point on the hill. The hill has steeply sloping sides to the east, west and especially the north, is quite flat-topped and does not rise much higher than the 60m contour. As a result the monument does not stand out in the local landscape nor are there good views from it to either the river or the immediate vicinity. It is possible, however, to see the monuments at Knowth, Newgrange and Dowth clearly across the river. The Hill of Slane is also clearly visible and it is interesting to note that there is a Norman motte on its highest point, built in 1175 by Richard le Fleming (Lord Killanin and Duignan 1989) which might have a

prehistoric monument at its core. (fig. 1)

Description

The cairn is delimited by an incomplete kerb consisting of sixteen stones ranging in size from 1.2 x 1.5 x 0.5m to 0.5 x 0.2 x 0.3m. Stones of similar size and shape were noted in the ditch of the adjacent field boundary. The cairn within this kerb measures c. 8m in diameter and stands c. 1m high. It is composed of a mixture of soil and stones of average dimensions 0.15 x 0.1 x 0.1m. Most cairn stones were rounded or sub-rounded and a small number of red brick fragments were noted on the surface of the cairn. A scatter of stones extended between two and three metres beyond the kerb. At one point inside the kerb, protruding 1.3m from the surface of the cairn is a standing stone. Two other stones were noted in line with this one leading to the kerb but which did not protrude above the surface of the cairn. These are firmly bedded and are also much larger than the cairn stones and are thus possibly structural. There were a several other stones outside the kerb but these may have been displaced. (fig. 2)

Discussion

The monument appears to be quite disturbed. Although the kerb stones are quite solid in the ground and appear to be *in situ*, they may have been rolled in from further out in the field. The integrity of the cairn

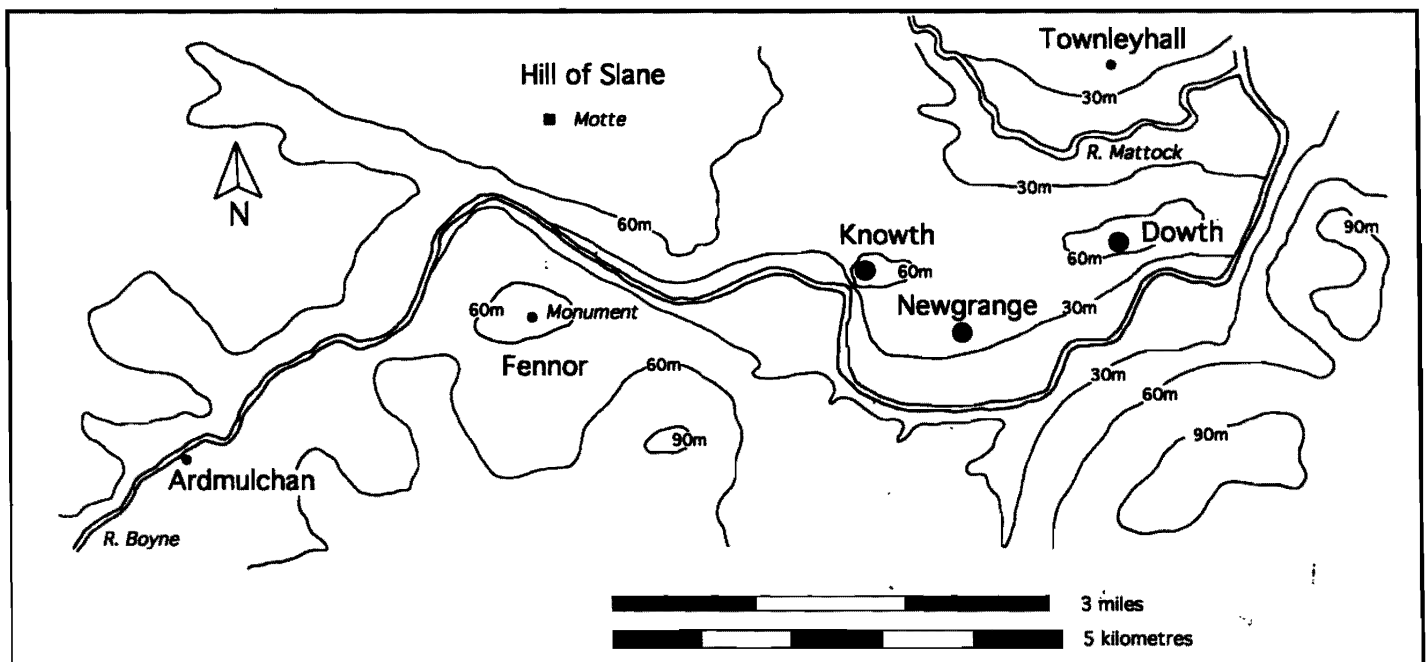


Fig. 1: Location map

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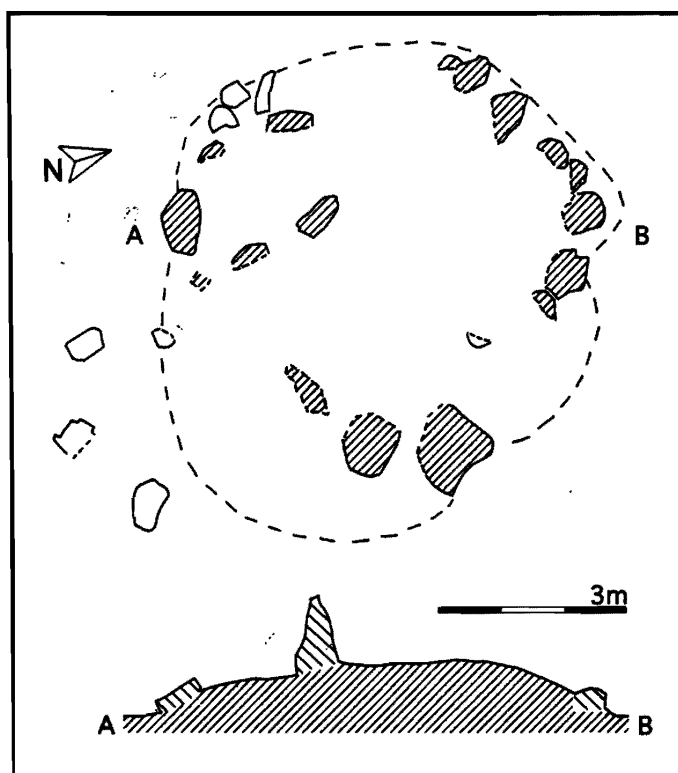


Fig. 2: Plan and section

material must also be questioned because of the presence of the pieces of red brick. Perhaps the standing stone is original and is a monument in its own right like sites C and D downslope of the main passage tomb at Newgrange (cf. Coffey 1912; Shee and Evans 1965) and a clearance cairn gradually developed around it. However, because of its prominent location - on top of a hill - and its proximity to the Bend of the Boyne passage tomb cemetery and the presence of what could be interpreted as the stumps of passage/chamber orthostats, this monument may be the remains of a passage tomb. Indeed, outliers to this cemetery are known, e.g., the probable site, with two decorated stones at Ardmulchan, Co. Meath (Eogan 1983) and the site at Townleyhall, Co. Louth (Eogan 1963). Unfortunately, no art was visible on any of the stones of the structure at Fennor, so it is not possible to classify it with any certainty. A number of passage tombs with cairn diameters of less than 10m are known and include mound 3 at Bremore, Co. Dublin - 9m; Ballynasorney Upper, Co. Dublin, (Herity's Du 12) - 9m; Lackan, Co. Wicklow - 9m; Cornafunshin, Co. Longford - 9m (Herity 1974).

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the landowners Mr & Mrs Hirmskirk for their permission to carry out the survey and also to Prof. George Eogan, who was first to examine the site, for time spent discussing it with me and to Niamh O'Broin who helped me to survey the site.

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