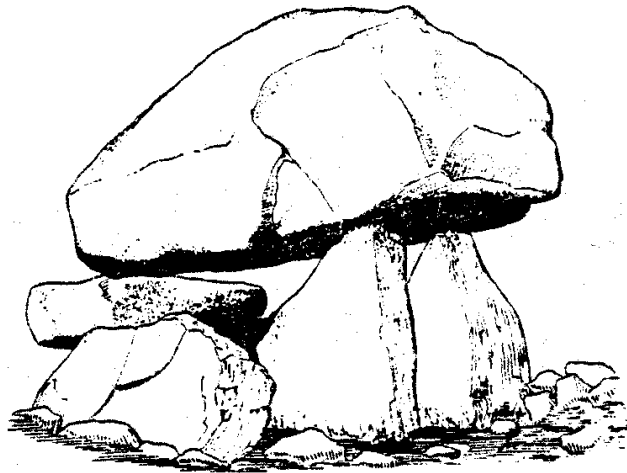


# **ULSTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY**



**Survey Report: No. 36**

**Survey and surface artefact collection at a possible  
prehistoric flat cemetery at Ballygarvan, County Down  
UAS/12/01**

**HENRY WELSH**

© Ulster Archaeological Society  
First published 2012

Ulster Archaeological Society  
c/o School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology  
The Queen's University of Belfast  
Belfast BT7 1NN

---

## CONTENTS

---

	page
List of figures	4
1. Summary	5
2. Introduction	6
3. 2012 UAS survey	10
4. Discussion	14
5. Recommendations for further work	16
6. Bibliography	18
Appendix: Photograph record form	19

## LIST OF FIGURES

---

Figures	page
01. Location map for Ballygarvan, Ards Peninsula	5
02. Location of Ballygarvan townland	5
03. Aerial photograph of the possible flat cemetery site, March 2010	6
04. Crop marks to north of site	8
05: Third Edition County Sheet 18 (part of) 1900	9
06: UAS Survey Group at work at the possible flat cemetery site	10
07: Grid plan and orientation of the survey site	11
08: Inventory of items recovered	12
09: Example of artefacts recovered - flint flake	13
10: Example of artefacts recovered - possible elongated pebble tool	13
11: Example of artefacts recovered - stone with inscribed circular feature	13
12: Flat cemeteries in Northern Ireland	15
13: Altitude of flat cemeteries (in metres above Ordnance Datum)	15
14: Distribution of flat cemeteries in the area of the Strangford Peninsula	16

## 1. Summary

### 1.1 Location

A site survey and surface artefact collection were carried out at the site of a possible flat cemetery at Ballygarvan Townland, County Down, in the Parish of Inishargy and Barony of Ards Lower, Irish Grid reference J 5900 6445. The site is located at the western shore of the Ards Peninsula, 2 km north-north-west of Kircubbin at Bloody Burn Bay.

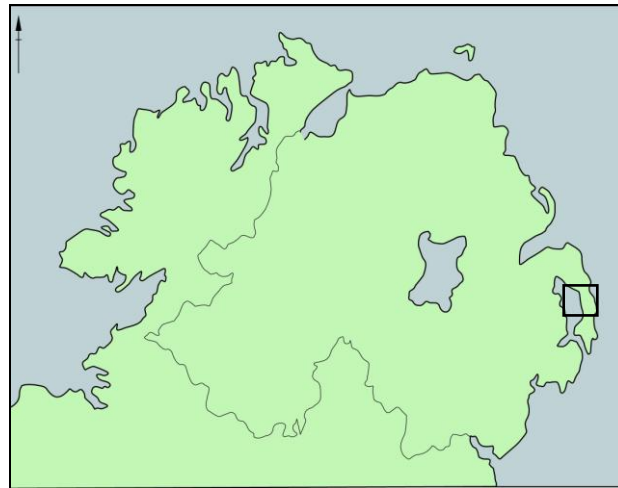


Figure 01: Location map for Ballygarvan, Ards Peninsula

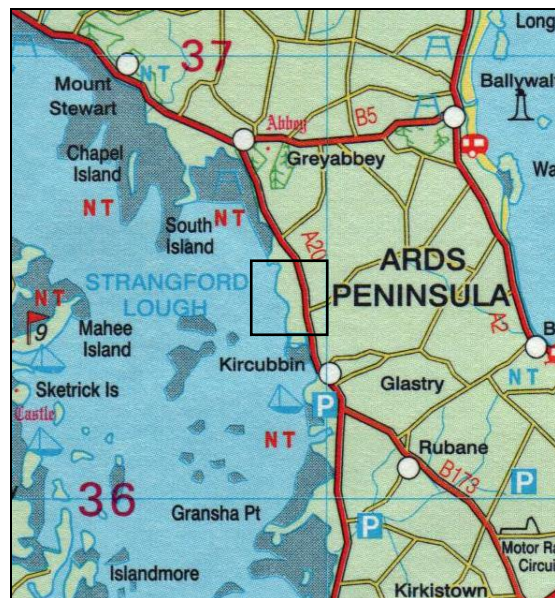


Figure 02: Location of Ballygarvan townland *Ordnance Survey*

The site of the possible flat cemetery is situated within private farmland, currently owned by Mr Leslie Finlay. The survey was the second in a series of planned surveys undertaken by members of the Ulster Archaeological Society (UAS) during 2012.

## 1.2 Aims

In order to enhance the archaeological record of this site, the aims of this survey were to produce a plan of the site and carry out a photographic survey and surface artefact collection. This information was compiled into a report and copies submitted to the landowner Mr Finlay, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency: Built Heritage (NIEA) and to the archives of the UAS. A copy of the report was also placed on the website of the UAS.

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Background

This site was initially identified during a private flight in a light aircraft over the area of the Ards Peninsula in March 2010, after a prolonged period of dry weather had resulted in two distinct clusters of ring ditches becoming visible in adjacent fields. Subsequent research identified the fields in question and the find was reported to the NIEA and Centre for Maritime Archaeology at the University of Ulster. A surface artefact collection exercise was suggested and this was undertaken on Saturday 21 April 2012, following information from the landowner, Mr Finlay, that the field had been ploughed in preparation for sowing bird cover. The surface artefact collection and associated survey was carried out by members of the UAS in response to a decision taken by the committee of the society to extend an opportunity to members to participate in practical surveys of archaeological monuments that had not previously been recorded. This followed a bequest to the society from the late Dr Ann Hamlin, from which the items of survey equipment were purchased. It was therefore agreed that members of the society would commence a programme to survey these monuments and the possible flat cemetery site was subsequently chosen to be the thirty-sixth of these.



Figure 03: Aerial photograph of the possible flat cemetery site, March 2010

On the aerial photograph (Fig. 03), ring ditches are visible in two fields immediately adjacent to the eastern shore of the Ards Peninsula. In the field to the left of the photograph (the south), 10 ring ditches are distinctly visible along with less distinct indications of others and in the field to the right of the photograph (the north), 31 ring ditches are distinctly visible, along with less distinct indications of others. It is estimated these ring ditches are 7m in diameter and several seem to be located in pairs. An area of beach stones appears to have been cleared to the west of the site and may be associated with use of the lime kiln referred to at 2.3. below. A further, but less distinct, cluster of approximately 25 ring ditches is visible in the Google Earth image (Fig. 04), approximately 600m to the north.

## 2.2 Previous archaeological surveys

### 2.2.1 Ballygarvan Townland

Four monuments are currently recorded in Ballygarvan townland on the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) maintained by the NIEA. One of these (DOW 018:027) is an aerial photograph site described as:

On the summit of a hill that rises gently from E & falls more steeply to W with commanding views of the whole of Strangford Lough & across to the Mourne to W. The site appears in an AP as a dark, circular cropmark projecting from W from a field boundary running N-S. There are other probably cropmarks of smaller enclosures abutting the main circular enclosure at S. The enclosure has been ploughed out & the field boundary from which it projected has been removed. The site is now just S of the centre of a large field. There is the faintest suggestion of a level platform projection W towards the Lough from the summit. The landowner confirmed that he has noticed at the site a dark circle, c.30m in diam., appear in the barley crop (NIEA 2012(a)).

This site is located some 200m to the east of the possible flat cemetery site and may, with this possible flat cemetery, form part of what is an extensive prehistoric burial landscape.

Also recorded in the SMR is a shell midden (MRD 168:181).

Woodman report the former existence of a small shell midden in a coastal field in this townland (Woodman, 1978, 298). Nothing was visible at time of survey (NIEA 2012(b)).

However, the grid reference given for this site is J 58700 54100, which is located at the townland of Priest Town, some 6.5miles [10km] to the north. This is may be the shell midden (DOW 018:029) referred to below. Other recorded monuments in this townland include a scheduled kelp grid (MRD 168:087) and a cleared slipway (MRD 168:086).

In June 2012, a further series of circular crop marks were observed by Dr John Martin on a *Google Earth* image (fig. 04). These crop marks are located along the shore line, some 600m to the north and appear to be spread along raised beach deposits.



Figure 04: Crop marks to north of site *Google Earth*

### 2.2.2 Adjacent Townlands

Some 150m to the south, in the adjacent townland of Nunn's Quarter, lies the find spot of a Mesolithic midden (DOW 018:029). During the survey of April 2012, the landowner of this property, Mr Gilmore, visited the site and stated that during the construction of his house, many flint objects had been uncovered. These had been inspected by a representative of the Ulster Museum and details provided to him. The flints were now on display at his house. He further stated that a shell midden had also been found, confirmed by the NIEA SM7 file:

In a raised beach on the shores of Bloody Burn Bay on the E coast of Strangford Lough. During the excavation of a building site a large amount of Mesolithic material was unearthed. The Ulster Museum carried out an archaeological excavation on the site and declared it to be a midden. The site is now revetted by a modern stone wall (NIEA 2012).

### 2.3 Cartographic evidence

The possible flat cemetery is not marked on any Ordnance Survey maps, although cartographic evidence indicates the presence of a lime kiln in the survey field. No evidence of this was visible during the survey, but the scarp to the east of the survey field would have been suitable for the construction of such a feature, as many lime kilns are located against steep slopes to facilitate loading before firing (Welsh 2011). Numerous small pieces of chalk were observed in the northern part of the south field during the 2012 survey. The lime kiln is not recorded on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map (County Series, Sheet 18, 1833), but is recorded as **L.K.** on the Third Edition map of 1900. This lime kiln is not recorded on the SMR.



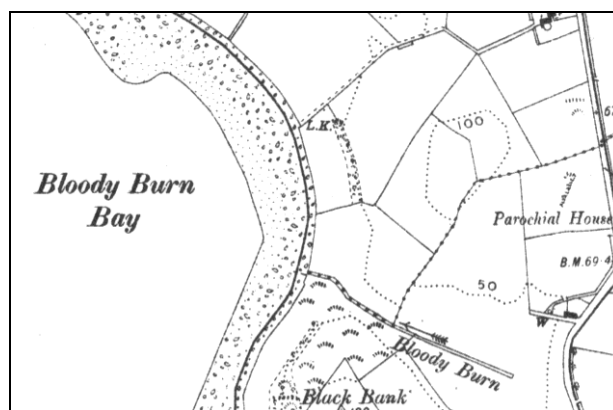


Figure 05: Third Edition County Sheet 18 (part of) 1900 *Ordnance Survey*.

## 2.4 Archiving

Copies of this report have been deposited with the landowner, Mr Leslie Finlay, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency: Built Heritage, and the Ulster Archaeological Society. All site records have been archived by the Ulster Archaeological Society and artefacts are currently stored at the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, Queen's University, Belfast.

## 2.5 Credits and Acknowledgements

The survey was led by Harry Welsh and other members of the survey team were James Bamford, Stephen Bates, Michael Catney, Robin Collins, Amanda Fieldhouse, Ian Gillespie, Joel Goodchild, Lee Gordon, Yvonne Griffiths, Julie Hanse, Neil Harris, Michael Harris, Alan Hope, Grace McAlister, Anne MacDermott, Janna McDonald, Liz McShane, Heather Montgomery, Noel Mulholland, Pat O'Neill, Ken Pullin, George Rutherford, Janey Sproule, and June Welsh. The Ulster Archaeological Society is particularly grateful to the landowner, Mr Leslie Finlay, for allowing access to the site and accommodating the survey group. Also, Liam McQuillan of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency: Built Heritage, for identifying and making initial contact with Mr Finlay. Barrie Hartwell, President of the Ulster Archaeological Society, provided the survey group with an artefact identification course prior to the survey. Janey Sproule kindly provided facilities for the Survey Group to process and catalogue the items recovered during the surface artefact collection.



Figure 06: UAS survey group at work at the possible flat cemetery site

### 3. 2012 UAS Survey

#### 3.1 Methodology

It was decided that the survey would take the form of a surface artefact collection, the production of an associated plan drawing and a photographic survey. The surface artefact collection was designed in accordance with guidance issued by the Cambridge Archaeology Field Group (2011). This report was compiled using the information obtained from these sources, in addition to background documentary material.

#### 3.2 Production of the plan drawing

A plan drawing was completed, based on the search area of 40m east/west by 120m north/south, divided into 10m by 10m grids to identify any clustering of artefacts. The approximate position of ring-ditches is also shown (fig. 07). The search area and grids were plotted with the society's hand-held *Garmin E-Trex* GPS device and later added to a map based on the Ordnance Survey six-inch County Series for the area (Down 18).

	1	2	3	4
A				
B				



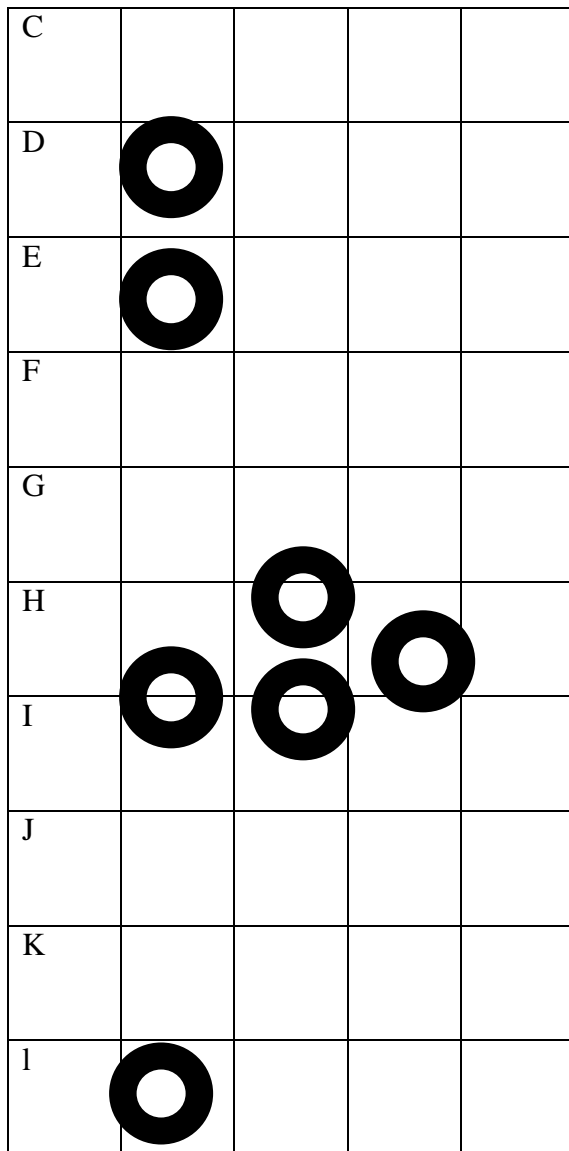


Figure 07: Grid plan and orientation of the survey site

Grid No	Ceramics	All Flint	Metal	Glass	Quartz	Stone	Bone	Shell
A1	3	12	0	0	0	1	0	3
A2	3	33	0	0	1	2	0	1
A3	0	20	2	2	16	10	0	0
A4	3	28	1	0	1	3	2	0
B1	0	65	1	1	15	0	0	0
B2	3	33	1	0	13	0	6	5
B3	0	60	1	0	23	1	0	0
B4	1	47	0	0	0	0	0	0
C1	2	31	1	0	4	19	0	0
C2	0	25	0	0	9	0	1	0
C3	1	17	0	0	4	0	0	0
C4	0	17	0	0	0	5	0	1
D1	3	47	0	1	37	28	0	1

D2	2	43	1	1	25	33	0	1
D3	3	48	0	0	45	18	0	1
D4	0	23	0	0	6	0	0	0
E1	2	44	1	0	8	4	0	0
E2	0	17	1	0	7	3	0	0
E3	0	41	0	0	8	2	5	0
E4	1	72	0	1	46	5	0	0
F1	2	31	4	0	7	0	0	0
F2	0	26	1	0	15	0	0	0
F3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
F4	0	8	0	0	7	1	0	2
G1	3	61	2	0	42	4	3	1
G2	1	28	0	0	34	24	1	0
G3	1	64	0	0	94	5	0	0
G4	0	17	0	3	10	0	0	0
H1	2	20	0	0	17	7	3	1
H2	0	54	0	0	42	2	0	1
H3	0	17	0	1	0	1	0	0
H4	0	13	0	0	1	0	0	0
I1	2	55	1	0	0	12	0	0
I2	0	50	0	0	0	41	0	0
I3	1	18	0	0	8	1	0	1
I4	0	28	0	0	0	7	0	0
J1	0	26	0	2	6	4	1	1
J2	0	30	0	0	35	4	0	3
J3	1	26	0	0	21	3	0	0
J4	0	6	0	0	1	0	0	0
K1	5	26	0	0	0	6	2	1
K2	2	45	0	0	23	2	0	0
K3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
K4	1	28	1	0	13	2	2	2
L1	1	28	0	0	20	0	0	2
L2	0	15	2	0	2	0	0	1
L3	1	11	0	0	1	0	0	0
L4	2	22	0	0	4	1	0	0
Stray	1	19	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>1495**</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>671</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>29</b>

Figure 08: Inventory of items recovered\*

\*All finds awaiting specialist analysis

\*\*Unsorted total and includes natural flint



Figure 09: Example of artefacts recovered - flint flake



Figure 10: Example of artefacts recovered - possible elongated pebble tool



Figure 11: Example of artefacts recovered - stone with inscribed circular feature (or limpet mark) (scale 0.25m)

### 3.3 Photographic archive

A photographic record of the site was taken by using a *Ricoh Caplio 600G Wide* 8 megapixel digital camera and a photograph record sheet was employed, corresponding to photographs taken during the site survey of 21 April 2012. The archive has been compiled in jpeg format and saved to compact disc.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Introduction

The presence of clusters of ring ditches is consistent with features that might be expected at a prehistoric flat cemetery or village. A Middle Bronze Age settlement site was excavated in 2002 and 2004 at Ballyarnet Lake in County Londonderry and finds included heat-shattered stones, pottery, flint and stone tools (Ó Néill et al 2007, 39-49). The lack of such artefacts recovered during the surface artefact collection seems to militate against the Ballygarvan site being a settlement. While there is little artefactual evidence to confirm the exact nature of the site, the presence of a number of burned flint flakes would appear to suggest cremation was taking place in the area, which may be consistent with the presence of a prehistoric flat cemetery. Other materials that have been recovered from excavations at flat cemeteries include burnt bone and funerary pottery, but no evidence of this was observed at Ballygarvan. A flint flake (fig. 09) and elongated pebble tool (fig. 10) appear to be of Mesolithic date and are probably associated with the nearby site (DOW 018:029) referred to above. If the stone tool is confirmed as such, it may be the only such object yet recovered from the Strangford Lough area (Woodman et. al 1999, 81).

### 4.2 Flat cemeteries

The term flat cemetery is one that is not universally employed by archaeologists. Instead, they are referred to by a variety of terms, such as cremation cemeteries, unenclosed cemeteries or urn fields. This lack of standard terminology also applies to other monument types and makes it very difficult for researchers to identify and collate statistics. However, the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government in the Republic of Ireland have addressed this issue and have published a list of classifications with regard to ancient monument types. Their definition for flat cemeteries is as follows has been employed in this document:

Three or more individual burials related to one another by rite, grave goods or simply by their close proximity to one another. These are not covered by a mound and are dated to the Bronze Age (DoEHLG 2009).

### 4.3 Flat cemeteries in Northern Ireland

There are 69 known or possible flat cemeteries in Northern Ireland, distributed as follows:

County	Number
Antrim	31
Armagh	1
Down	13
Fermanagh	3
Londonderry	11
Tyrone	10

Figure 12: Flat cemeteries in Northern Ireland (Welsh and Welsh in preparation)

The greatest concentrations (45%) of flat cemeteries in Northern Ireland are situated in County Antrim and Counties Armagh and Fermanagh are poorly represented. Of the 55 monuments for which altitude data is available, there is a clear preference for the location of flat cemeteries at lower altitudes, particularly up to 100m above sea level.

	0-50	51-100	101-150	151-200	201-250
Antrim	6	9	3	2	1
Armagh	0	0	0	1	0
Down	7	2	2	0	0
Fermanagh	0	0	1	1	0
Londonderry	4	3	3	0	0
Tyrone	2	6	0	1	1
	19	20	9	5	2

Figure 13: Altitude of flat cemeteries (in metres above Ordnance Datum)

Flat cemeteries are often found near (within the same townland) to other prehistoric burial monuments, such as megalithic tombs and standing stones. About a quarter of flat cemeteries are also found near to burial cairns or mound barrows.

#### 4.4 Flat cemeteries in the area of Strangford Lough

There are nine known flat cemeteries in the area around Strangford Lough, including the possible site at Ballygarvan (fig. 14).

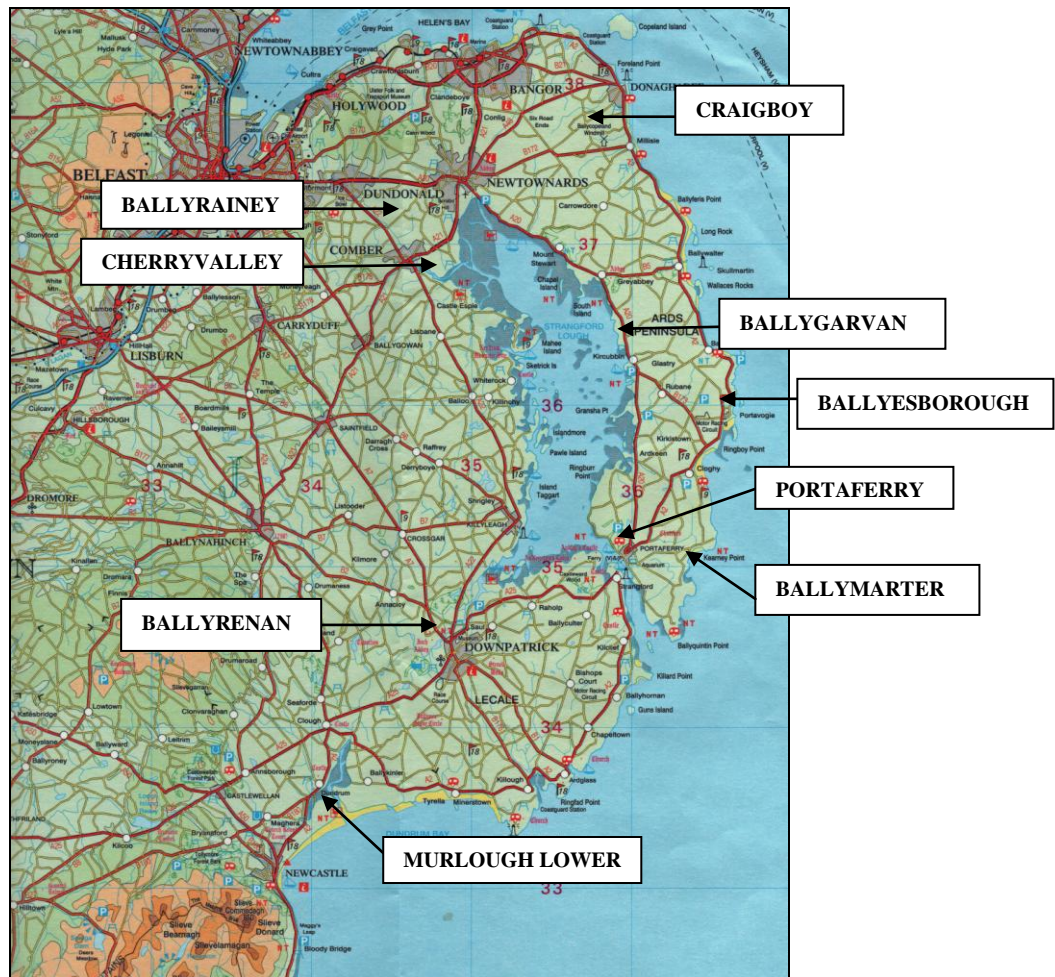


Figure 14: Distribution of flat cemeteries in the area of the Strangford Peninsula

Of the known flat cemeteries in the Strangford Lough area, all are situated between 5m and 20m above sea level and many are on raised beach deposits. This ground is usually very stony and unsuitable for agricultural use and may have been one of the reasons for its selection as a burial ground. In the Strangford Lough area, flat cemeteries are usually found in isolation, that is, not associated with other prehistoric burial monument types. About a quarter are found to have a standing stone present in the same townland.

At Ballyrainey, reported in the Archaeological Survey of County Down (62) four urns were discovered, 'maybe several more...some mouth upward, some mouth downwards...two cordoned urns (Kavanagh 22 and 64) survive' (Waddell 1990, 76). The site at Ballyesborough was described as an urn field with 'crops almost a foot high with remains of human bones in' (NIEA, SM7 file). At Ballyrenan, excavated in 1998, the area excavated was found to contain Neolithic and Bronze Age settlements and a fulacht fia. This is unusual, as settlement sites and burial sites seem to be generally mutually exclusive. At Ballymarter, a series of ring ditches have been observed but not yet investigated. A single inhumation was also found in a cist burial in this townland. At Cherryvalley, O'Laverty (1878-1895, cited in NIEA SM7 file) reported that in 1882 several urns containing human ashes were found in a field. At Craigboy, a site was excavated by Pat Collins in 1960 (Collins 1961-62, 116-118). Cremated human bone was found in three pits and the site was described as some



form of Bronze Age cremation cemetery. At Portaferry, the precise location of the site remains unknown, but a biconical cup containing cremated human bones was reported in the Archaeological Survey of County Down (61). Eight other vessels were recorded and a radiocarbon date of  $3530 \pm 40$  BP [1963-1745 BC, cal. 2 sigma] was obtained from a male cremation covered by an inverted vase urn on a slab, in a pit (Brindley 2007, cited in Waddell 1990, 80). In the sand dunes of Murlough Lower, ten urns containing cremated human bone were discovered in 1858. Other sites in the townland include five cist burials, also containing cremated human bones (Collins 1952, 2-26).

#### 4.6. Summary

Aerial photography has indicated the presence of a significant archaeological site at Ballygarvan, County Down and this is likely to be a flat cemetery, consisting of ring barrows. It may also be the remains of a large collection of hut sites, similar to the site at Corrstown in County Londonderry, although the survey and surface artefact collection of 2012 failed to locate any evidence of prehistoric settlement. Further investigation will be required in order to establish the nature of the site, but if it is a prehistoric burial site, it may be one of the most extensive yet found in Ireland.

### 5. Recommendations for further work

The presence of so many ring ditches in the fields along the eastern shore of Strangford Lough at Ballygarvan must indicate the site of an extensive ring barrow cemetery, perhaps one of the largest yet discovered in Ireland. The fact that so many of these ring ditches have been observed, in very stony fields would indicate that the underlying state of preservation is very good.

If the landowner is agreeable, it would be hoped to carry out a further surface artefact collection in the field immediately to the north, which could contain around 31-36 ring ditches. This would have to be undertaken when the present crop is removed and the ground ploughed. It is recommended that a geophysical survey be carried out in the two fields where the ring ditches are present, in order to establish the number of features present. It is further recommended that a small-scale excavation be carried out across one of the ring ditches in order to confirm the type of monument present and obtain dating evidence.

The investigation of 2012 has confirmed the commitment of the Ulster Archaeological Society to be at the forefront of efforts to extend opportunities for members of the public to engage in archaeological fieldwork and research. The Ballygarvan site should provide further such opportunities in the future as the search area is extended and more information obtained.

## Bibliography

### *Documents*

- Archaeological Survey of Northern Ireland. 1966. *An Archaeological Survey of County Down*, Belfast: HMSO.
- Cambridge Archaeology Field Group 2011. *What is Fieldwalking?* Version 1.0. Cambridge
- Carruthers, G.A. 1858. 'Cinerary Urns, Discovered near Dundrum, County Down', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 1: Vol. 6, 164.
- Cleary, K. 2006. 'Irish Bronze Age Settlements: More than Meets the Eye?' *Archaeology Ireland*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Summer 2006), 18-21.
- Collins, A.E.P. 1952. 'Excavations in the Sandhills at Dundrum, Co. Down, 1950-51', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 3: Vol. 15, 2-26.
- Collins, A.E.P. 1961/1962. 'An Earthwork at Craigboy, Co. Down', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 3: Vol. 24/25, 116-118.
- Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government [DoEHLG]. 2009. *Classification of Archaeological Sites (Scope Notes)*, Dublin.
- O'Laverty, J. 1878-1895. *An historical account of the Diocese of Down and Connor, ancient and modern* [5 vols.], Dublin: Duffy.
- Ó Néill, J, Plunkett, J. and Whitehouse, N. 'The archaeological and palaeoecological investigation of a Middle Bronze Age settlement at Ballyarnet Lake, County Derry' *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 3: Vol. 66, 39-49.
- Waddell, J. 1990. *The Bronze Age burials of Ireland*, Galway: Connaught Tribune.
- Welsh, H. and Welsh, J. Survey of Prehistoric Burial Sites in Northern Ireland (in preparation).
- Welsh, J. 2007. *Survey of Lime Kiln at Murlough Bay County Antrim*, Survey Report No. 17, Belfast: Ulster Archaeological Society.
- Woodman, P.C., Anderson, E. and Finlay, N. 1999. *Excavations at Ferriter's Cove, 1883-95: last foragers, first farmers in the Dingle Peninsula*, Bray: Wordwell.

### *Websites*

- Northern Ireland Environment Agency.2012 (a)  
[Apps.ehsni.gov.uk/ambit/Details.aspx?MonID=6860](http://apps.ehsni.gov.uk/ambit/Details.aspx?MonID=6860). Accessed 22 April 2012.
- Northern Ireland Environment Agency.2012 (b)  
[Apps.ehsni.gov.uk/ambit/Details.aspx?MonID=13580](http://apps.ehsni.gov.uk/ambit/Details.aspx?MonID=13580). Accessed 22 April 2012.

## APPENDIX

## PHOTOGRAPH RECORD FORM

**Site:** Ballygarvan, County Down

**Date:** 21 April 2012

**Make and model of camera...***Ricoh Caplio 500G wide*

Film no.	B/W Print	Colour print	Colour slide	Digital image (m.pixels)
				8

Frame no	Direction viewed from	Details
001(2)	East	Artefact collection, looking west
005	South-east	Artefact collection, looking north-west
RIMG0038	South-east	Aerial photograph of site
RIMG0057	North	Artefact collection, looking south
RIMG0058	North-west	Artefact collection with scarp on left
RIMG0059	South	Field to north, also with ring ditches
RIMG0061	North	View of raised beach material
RIMG0062	North-east	Round gate post at seaward entrance to fields
RIMG0070	South	View of scarp to east of raised beach, looking north
RIMG0083	North-west	View of scarp to east of raised beach, looking south
RIMG0105	North	Location of Gilmore house (Mesolithic midden site)
RIMG0004	N/A	Stone with inscribed circular feature or limpet mark
RIMG0009	N/A	Flint flake
RIMG0010	N/A	Possible stone axe-head/shellfish tool



001(2) Artefact collection, looking west



RIMG0059 Field to north, also with ring ditches



005 Artefact collection, looking north-west



RIMG0061 Raised beach material



RIMG0057 Artefact collection, looking south



RIMG0062 Gate post at field entrance



RIMG0070 View of scarp to east of raised beach, looking north



RIMG0083 View of scarp to east of raised beach, looking south



RIMG0105 Location of Gilmore house (Mesolithic midden site)