

ULSTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



Survey Report: No. 13

**Survey of Portal Tomb/Standing Stones, Castle Ward,
County Down
UAS/08/03**



In association with



JUNE WELSH

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1. Summary

1.1 Location

A site survey was undertaken at a feature known as the Standing Stones (possible Megalithic Tomb) at Castle Ward estate, County Down (SMR number: DOW 031:017), in the Barony of Lecale Lower, townland of Castleward, Irish Grid reference J5691 4991, 15.4m + OD. The site has also been given the reference NTSMR 131513 by the National Trust. This is a scheduled monument.

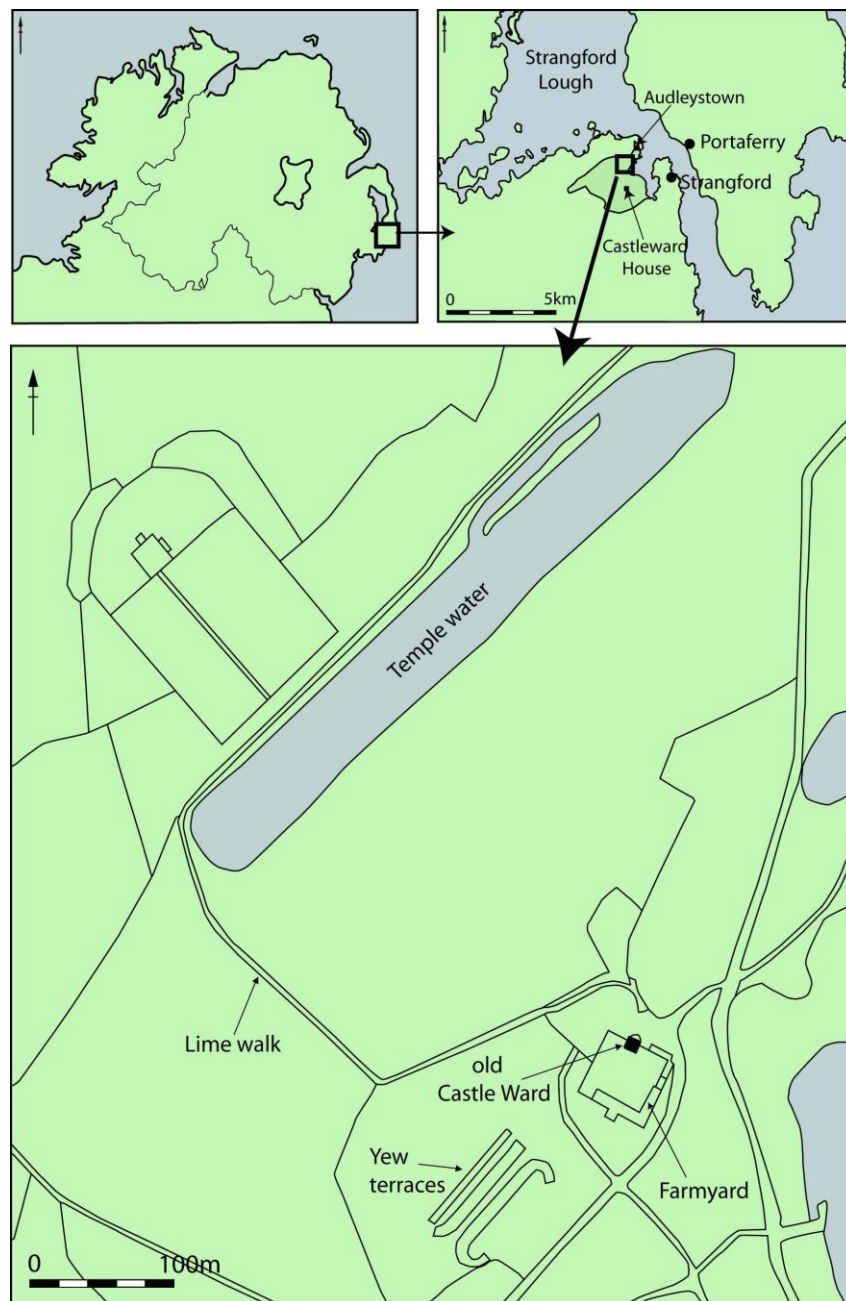


Figure 1: Location maps for Castle Ward, County Down

(Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, 2008)

The Standing Stones are situated within the grounds of the Castle Ward estate and form part of a wider landscape owned by the National Trust. The survey was the third in a series of planned surveys undertaken by members of the Ulster Archaeological Society during 2008.

1.2 Aims

In order to enhance the archaeological record of this site, the aims of this survey were to produce accurate plan, profile drawings of the monument and carry out a photographic survey. This information was compiled into a report and copies submitted to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, to the National Trust and to the archives of the Ulster Archaeological Society.



Figure 2: Standing Stone and recumbent stone at Castle Ward, looking north-west

2. Introduction

2.1 Background

The survey of the Standing Stones was undertaken on Saturday 28th June. It was carried out by members of the Ulster Archaeological Society 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. During discussions with Mr Malachy Conway, Survey Archaeologist of the National Trust in Northern Ireland, it was noted that many archaeological sites on National Trust property had not been subject to a detailed archaeological survey. It was therefore agreed that members of the society would commence a programme to survey these sites and the Standing Stones were subsequently chosen to be the thirteenth of these.



Figure 3: Standing Stone at Castle Ward, looking south-east

2.2 Previous archaeological surveys

Thomas McErlean and Terence Reeves-Smyth carried out an investigation of this site as part of a wider survey of the archaeological and historic landscape of the Castle Ward estate. Full details of this survey can be found in McErlean, T. and Reeves-Smyth, T. 1985. *Castle Ward Demesne*, (2 Volumes).

2.3 Cartographic Evidence

It is evident that the standing stones are not marked on the First Edition, 1835, map; nor are they marked on any subsequent OS maps.

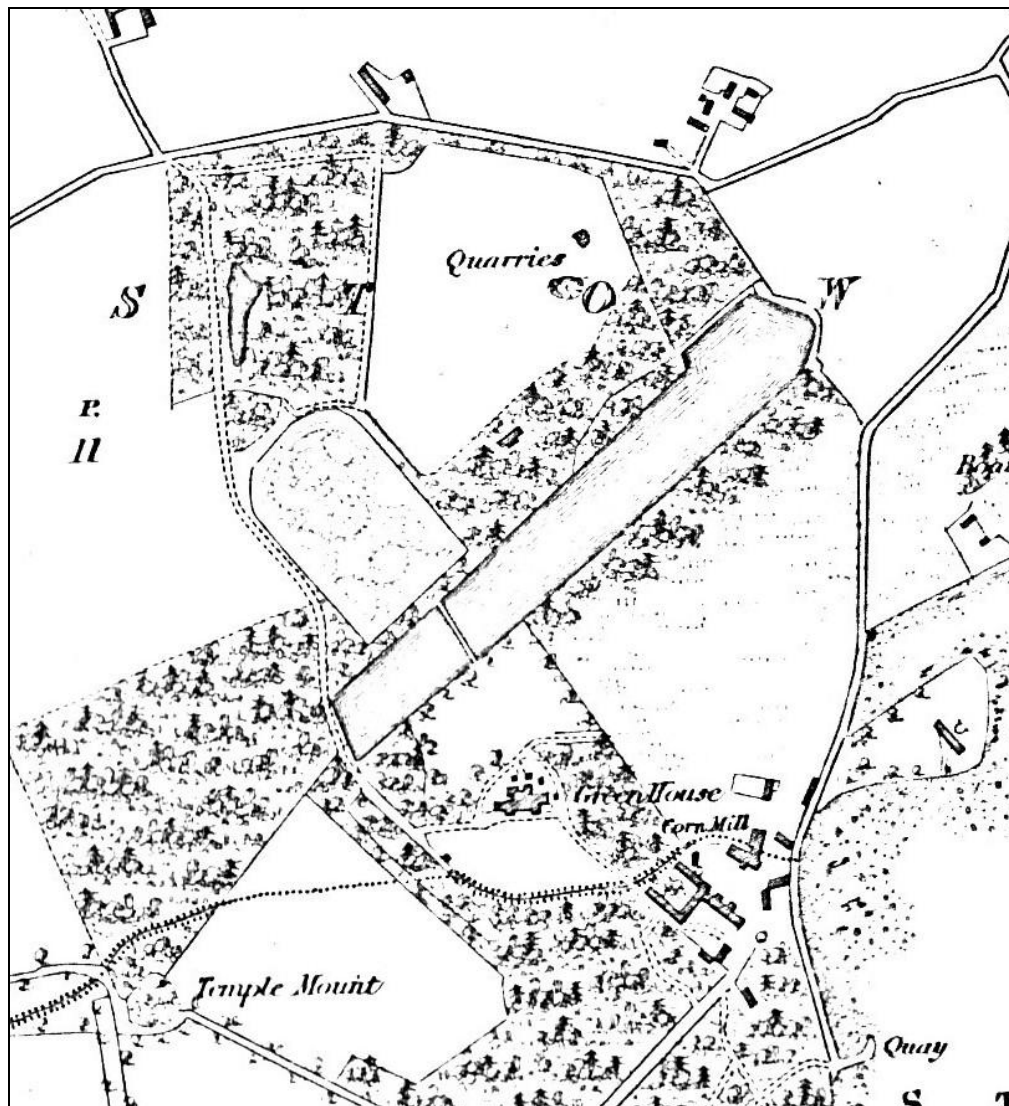


Figure 4: Ordnance Survey, First Edition, 1835

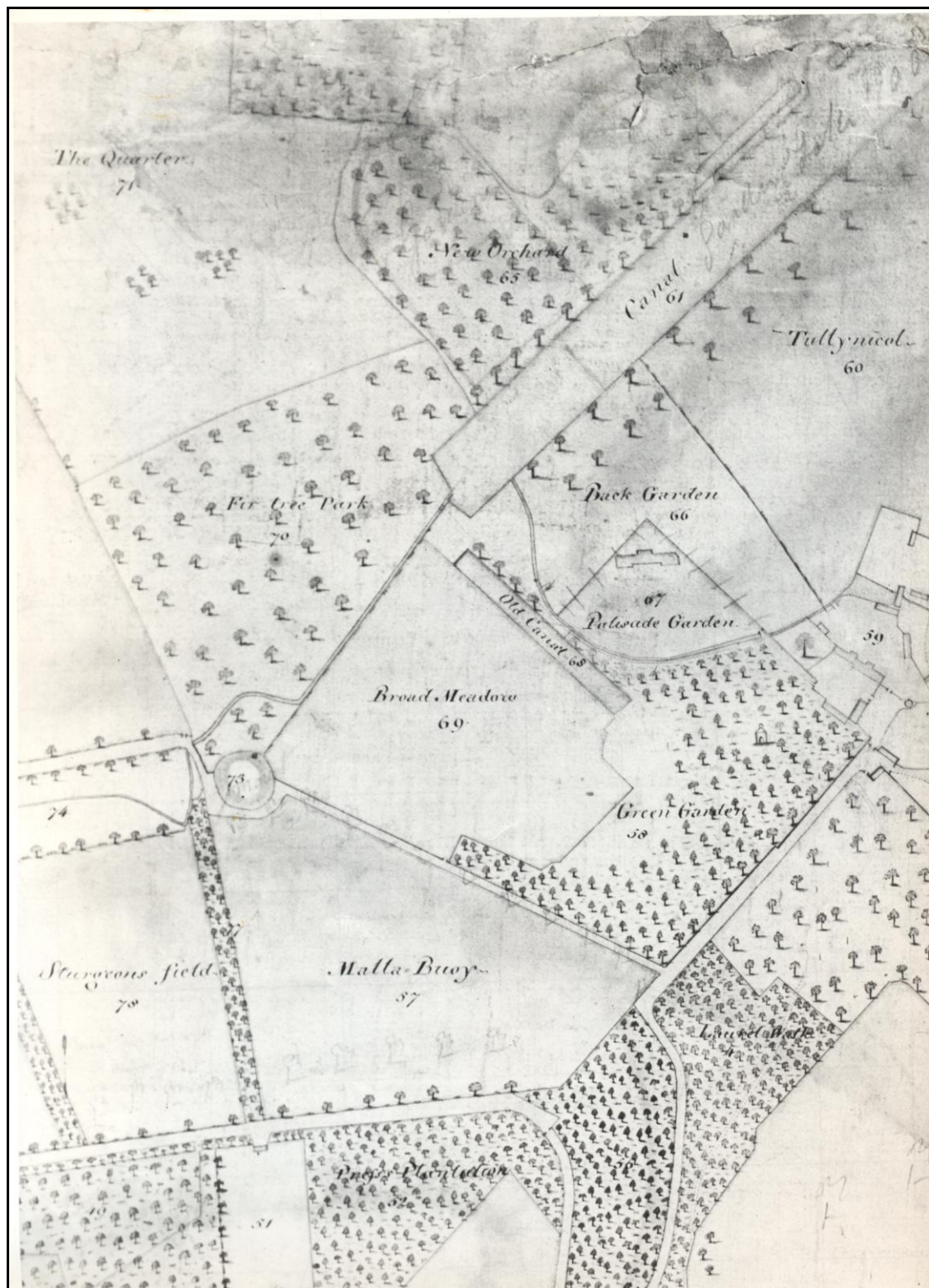


Figure 5: Castle Ward estate map, 1813

In Volume 2 of McErlean T and Reeves-Smyth T, 1985, Castle Ward Demesne, Fir Tree Park is referred to as the “stone park” in the early eighteenth century. This name is presumably derived from the standing stone within it. In the 1720s it was planted with “firrs” and in the early nineteenth century these Scots firs were replaced with oak, most of which still remain today.

2.4 Archiving

Copies of this report have been deposited with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, the National Trust and the Ulster Archaeological Society. All site records have been archived by the National Trust at Rowallane, Saintfield, County Down.

2.5 Credits and Acknowledgements

The survey was led by Harry Welsh and other members of the survey team were Michael Catney, William Dunlop, Graeme Heyburn, George Rutherford, Ruth Thompson, Janey Sproule, Laura McCool and June Welsh. The Ulster Archaeological Society is particularly grateful to Mr Malachy Conway, Survey Archaeologist of the National Trust, who worked closely with the survey team in choosing the site and facilitating access.

3. 2008 UAS Survey

3.1 Methodology

It was decided that the survey would take the form of the production of plan and profile drawings, accompanied by a photographic survey. This report was compiled using the information obtained from these sources, in addition to background documentary material.

3.2 Production of plan and profile drawings

Plan and profile drawings were completed, using data obtained from a field survey. Measurements were obtained by using the society’s *Leica Sprinter 100* electronic measuring device. Sketch plans at 1:200 scale were completed on site by recording these measurements on drafting film secured to a plane table and backing up the data on a field notebook for subsequent reference. Field plans were later transferred to a computer-based format for printing.

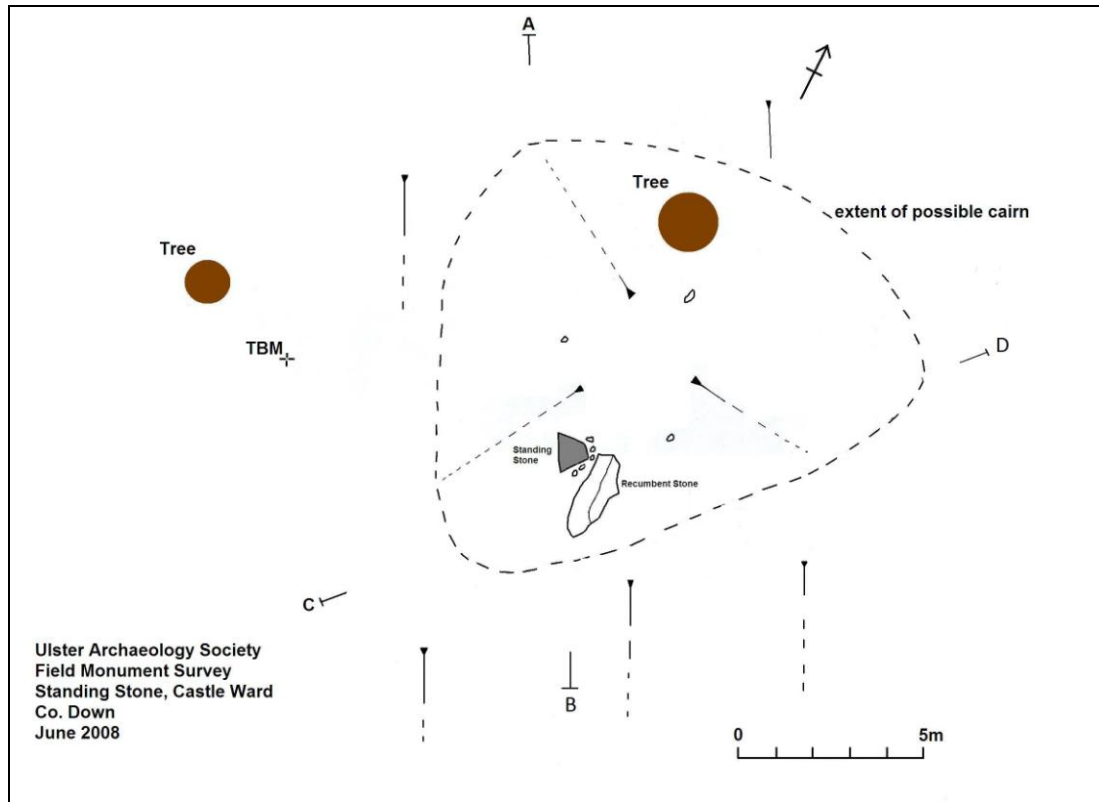


Figure 6: Plan of the Standing Stone, Castle Ward

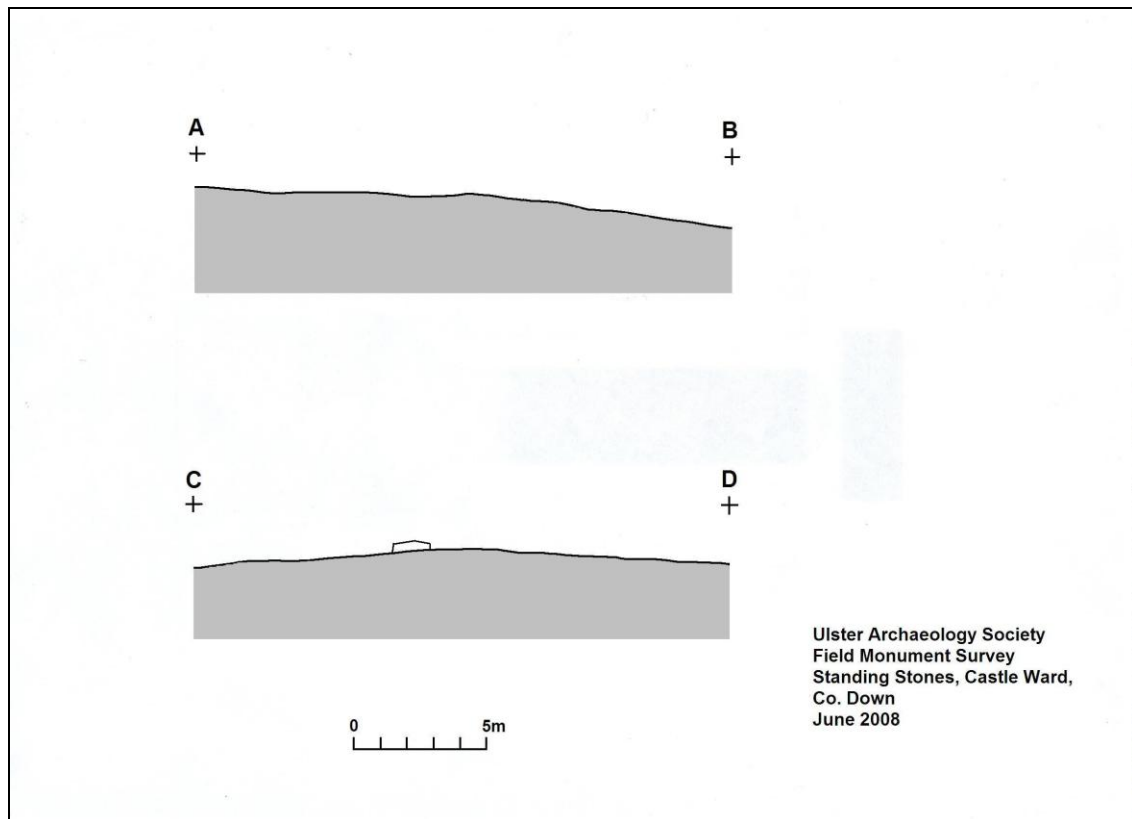


Figure 7: Profiles of the Standing Stones, Castle Ward

3.3 Photographic archive

A photographic record of the site was taken by using a *Nikon Coolpix S1 5.1* megapixel digital camera and a photograph record sheet was employed, corresponding to photographs taken during the site survey on 28 June 2008. The archive has been compiled in jpeg format and saved to compact disc.

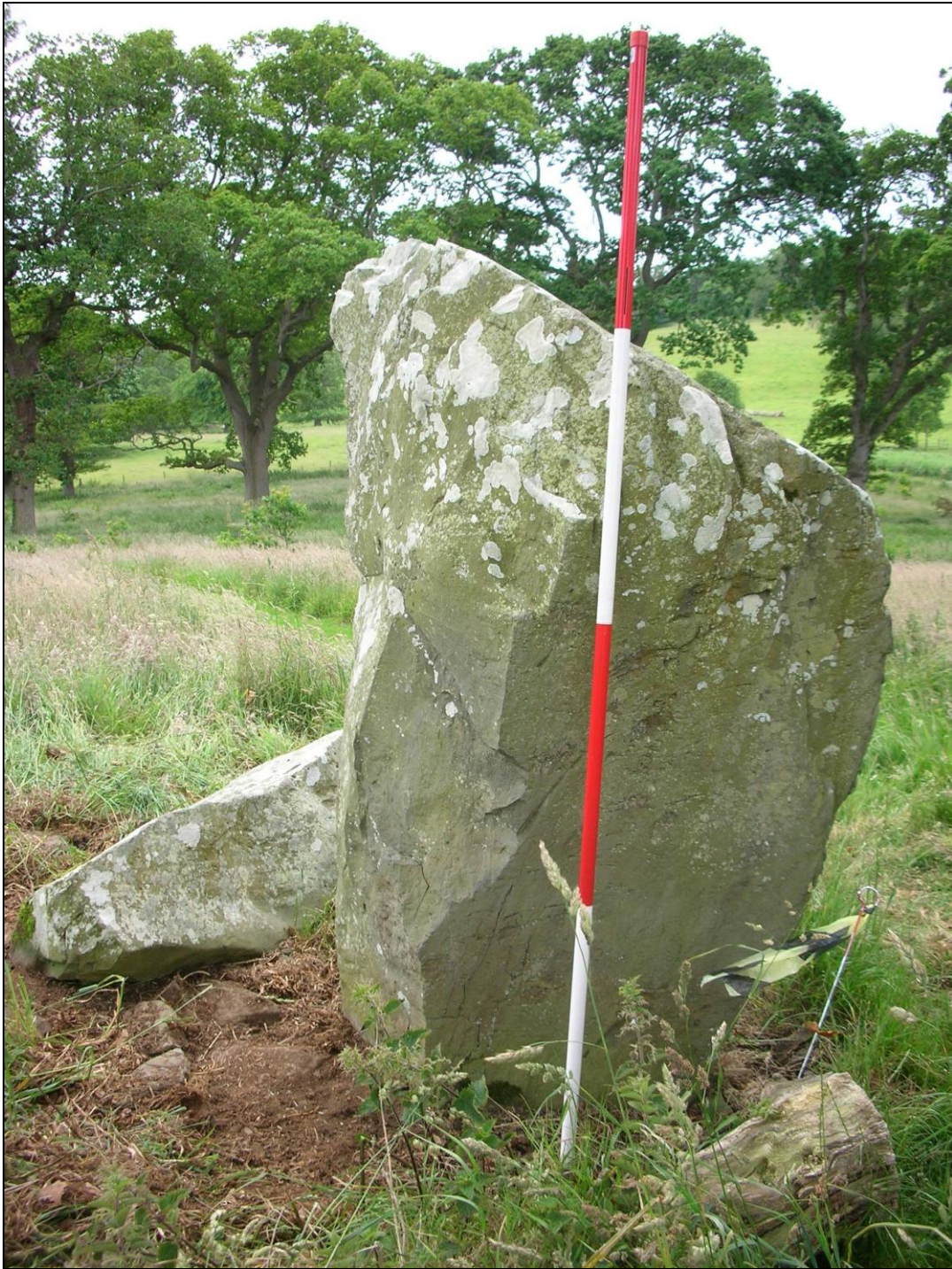


Figure 8: Standing Stone at Castle Ward, looking east



Figure 9: Recumbent stone at Castle Ward, looking south

4. Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The Castle Ward Demesne, currently composed of 840 acres, was purchased by the Wards from the Earl of Kildare in 1570 and was in the sole occupation of the Ward family from the early sixteenth century until 1950, when, following the death of the sixth Viscount Bangor, Speaker of the Northern Ireland Senate, it was accepted by the government in part-payment of death duties and presented to the National Trust with an endowment.

Throughout its long history, the demesne has been regularly altered and has become one of the most complete demesne landscapes to survive in Northern Ireland. One of the remarkable features of the Castle Ward estate is how it reflects the gardening fashions of several centuries, from the 1720s to the 1950s. The Yew Terraces, together with the Temple and Temple Water, form a major component of the formal garden layout. This landscape is one of the very few scheduled formal landscapes in Northern Ireland.

4.2 The Pre-seventeenth Century Landscape

Castle Ward is situated on the eastern edge of the extensive band of Silurian rock, which stretches through south Ulster from County Longford to east County Down. Glaciations sculpted the rock's surface, producing a varied terrain and deposited a mantle of boulder clay. In many places, bands of resistant rock outcrop, some forming prominent hillocks, are to be found. Some of these have been utilised for the positioning of eye-catching features which dominate the local scenery.

McErlean and Reeves-Smyth have stated that the land within the park is not of high agricultural value, if left unimproved. This is borne out by a survey of the townlands of the estate commissioned by Judge Michael Ward in 1707, where Castle Ward shares the lowest valuation per acre based on its agricultural potential of any townland on the estate. Its great natural advantage is its scenery, which was fully exploited by landscaping in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

4.3 The Standing Stone in the Fir Tree Park

McErlean and Reeves-Smyth also describe that a short distance north-west of the Temple Water and almost hidden among the oaks in the Fir Tree Park, is a standing stone approximately 1.5 metres high and beside it, lying on the ground, is a matching pillar-shaped stone approximately 2-3 metres long. Both are of local Silurian rock. It seems highly probable that they represent the remains of a Megalithic burial monument of Neolithic date, of the court tomb or portal dolmen type. In its original state, it would have had an accompanying cairn of stones. Such material may have long since gone into the making of roads and the building of walls around the demesne.

On the northern slope of the valley that runs from Temple Water in Castle Ward Park, there are two Silurian stones, one standing and the other recumbent c.0.5 metres distant from each other. The standing stone is a pillar-stone, rhomboidal in cross-section (0.85m square), 1.82 metres high, with the upper section wedge-shaped. The recumbent stone is 2.28 metres long, 0.7 metres wide and 0.54 metres thick. They could have formed two of the facade stones or the portal stones of a megalithic tomb

4.4 There are three possible interpretations of this site:-

- 1) It is a portal tomb. There is an obvious mound around the standing stones. This and other stones nearby could be possible cairn material. The profiles recorded (Figure 7) suggest that the ground is raised in the immediate area of the remains. In Northern Ireland there are forty-three known portal tombs, ten of which are to be found in County Down. This represents twenty-three per cent of all portal tombs within Northern Ireland.



Figure10: Standing stone, with possible cairn material, at Castle Ward, looking west

- 2) These are standing stones. Evidence often suggests that such stones are tall and thin. Only the recumbent stone could be described as such. Often such stones share an alignment or are orientated on a particular feature within the landscape. Eg. The standing stones at Greenan in County Down (known as the ‘Three Sisters’) are aligned north-west/south-east and the distance between them is considerably greater than the stones at Castle Ward, at 2.48m and 5.85m.

- 3) This monument is a folly. The Ward family had interfered with the landscape over several generations. Is it possible that the landed gentry chose to build such megalithic monuments? When we think of a folly, we imagine something usually highly decorative, vast in size and demanding immediate attention.



Figure 11: Folly at Belleek Castle estate in County Mayo

This photograph (Figure 11) is of such a folly, within the grounds of Belleek Castle estate, Ballina, County Mayo. This monument serves no practical purpose, but due to its ornate design and elevated location, attracts our attention. Estyn Evans suggested that

the old mapmakers perversely took notice of such standing stones because they were immediately recognizable, while ignoring more important remains such as chambered cairns. Yet not all standing stones are monuments of antiquity. Some are simply rubbing-stones for cattle, fashionable erections of a century or two ago: others of no greater age are the follies of romantic landlords. Still others are the

remains of stone walls, but though these served a purely practical purpose they may be truly prehistoric. They were erected at intervals as anchors in dry-stone walling; and when the walls decayed or were tumbled and smothered by the growth of peat the uprights remained, often to be mistaken for megalithic alignments...This does not exhaust the possible explanations, for some single stones are undoubtedly the last remnant of a chambered grave or stone circle: their destroyers superstitiously believed that no harm would come to them if they left a token unharmed. (Evans 1966, 20-21).

4.5 Portal Tombs in County Down

According to Donnelly (1997, 17-18), of the 174 known portal tombs in Ireland, the majority of them are located in the northern half of the country. He describes the imposing outline of portal tombs, making them striking features of the landscape and also a focus of attention and curiosity for four thousand years or more. In County Down there are ten known portal tombs, including this possible example in the Castle Ward estate. The others are at Ballynahattan, Goward, Greengraves, Kilfeaghan, Kilkeel, Legananny, Loughmoney, Slieve na Griddle and Wateresk.



Figure 12: Goward Portal Tomb [NIEA]

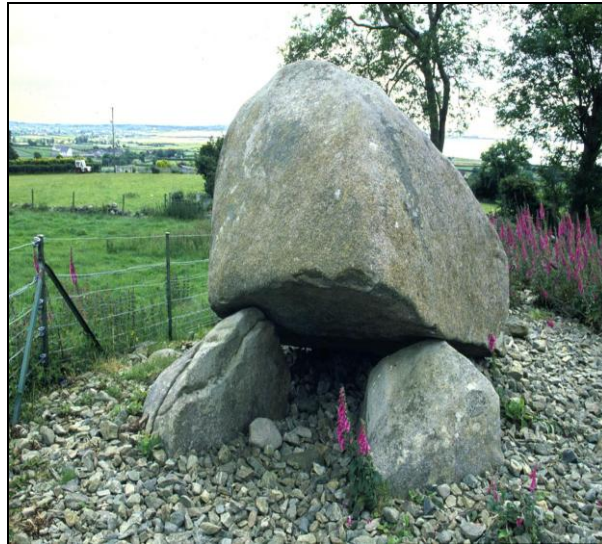


Figure 13: Kilfeaghan Portal Tomb [NIEA]

4.6 Conclusion

From present evidence, it would seem to be more likely that these stones are indeed prehistoric and that this monument was originally a portal tomb. Sadly, the capstone and remainder of the structural stones are missing, but perhaps they could still be found somewhere, within the vast acreage of the Castle Ward estate.

5. Recommendations for further work

As a scheduled monument within a National Trust property, it obviously enjoys a measure of protection, but there is cause for concern. One huge, mature oak tree is only a short distance (5.8m) from the monument and the potential for root and storm damage is very great indeed. Existing tree debris around the monument should be removed and information boards erected, to provide visitors with knowledge of this site. Detailed signs would be welcome generally within the Castle Ward demesne. Limited excavation could be invaluable, in locating the original socket of the recumbent stone and possibly the capstone, also providing possible dating evidence for period of use of this monument.



Figure 14: Oak tree in relation to scheduled monument, looking north-north-west



Figure 15: Tree debris around the standing stones, looking east

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APPENDIX A

PHOTOGRAPH RECORD FORM

Site: Standing Stone, Castle Ward, County Down

Date: 28 June 2008

| Film no. | B/W Print | Colour print | Colour slide | Digital image (m.pixels) |
|----------|-----------|--------------|--------------|-----------------------------|
| | | | | 5.1 |

Make and model of camera...*Nikon Coolpix SI & others*

| Frame no | Looking | Details |
|-----------|---------|------------------------------------|
| RIMG 0002 | NW | General view from gateway |
| RIMG 0003 | N/NW | Standing stones and oak tree |
| RIMG 0004 | N | Cairn material |
| RIMG 0005 | S | View of standing stones |
| RIMG 0006 | SE | View of standing stones |
| RIMG 0007 | E | Tree debris |
| RIMG 0010 | N | Tree debris |
| RIMG 0011 | W | Cairn material |
| RIMG 0012 | W | Standing stone |
| RIMG 0013 | S/SW | Viewpoint, within portal |
| RIMG 0014 | N/NE | Viewpoint, within portal |
| RIMG 0015 | N | Viewpoint, within portal |
| RIMG 0016 | S | Viewpoint, within portal |
| RIMG 0017 | NW | Top edge of Standing stone |
| RIMG 0018 | NW | Edge of Standing stone |
| RIMG 0022 | N | Recumbent stone |
| RIMG 0023 | SE | Standing stone |
| RIMG 0024 | S | Recumbent stone |
| RIMG 0025 | E | Standing stone |
| RIMG 0026 | SE | Standing stone |
| RIMG 0027 | NW | Standing stone and recumbent stone |