



Acadamh Ríoga na hÉireann Royal Irish Academy

1. Title: Dr

First name: Geraldine

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Amount awarded €5713

3. Grant programme Directed Research for World Heritage

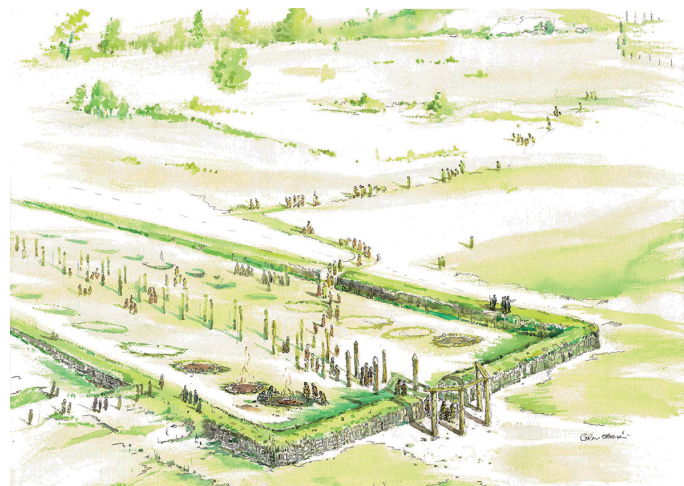
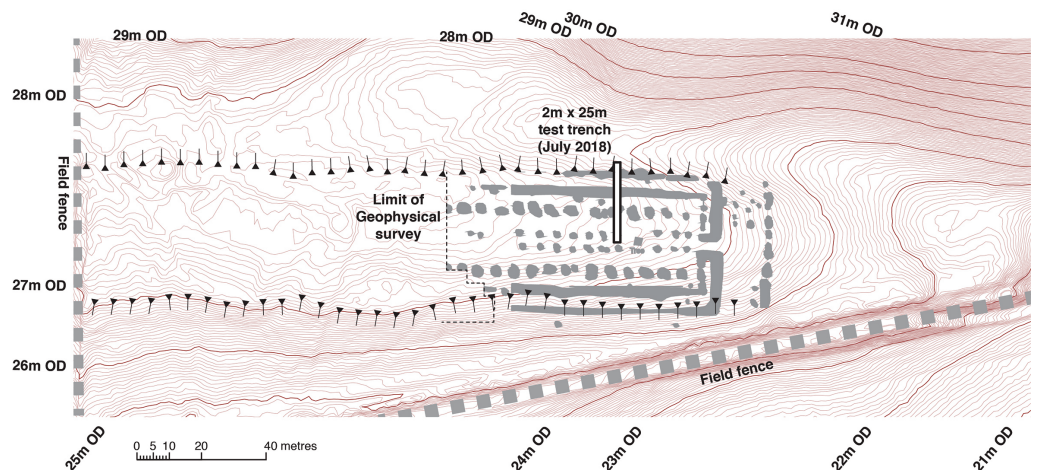
4. Year awarded 2019

5. Title of project Newgrange Farm Research Excavation: post excavation stage

6. Summary of report (Min. allowed 100 words) This report outlines the post excavation phase of a research excavation that took place in July 2018 at Newgrange Farm, Co Meath on a massive, rectilinear, ditched enclosure with a central corridor and rows of great pits. A charcoal sample from the outer ditch produced a radio carbon date of between 2632BC and 2472 BC. To complete a final report for this excavation the lithic assemblage was assessed; stratified charcoal samples were identified and the faunal remains examined. Field drawings were brought up to publication standard and reconstruction drawings prepared. Comparative research was undertaken to inform discussion of the results.

7. Date the report was submitted 31-10-2019

8. Please provide two appropriate images which can include photographs of team on site, aerial view, objects found during excavation etc and which can be used by the RIA in grant publications, website etc



9. Please outline the objectives of the project

1. Undertake comparative research in the library of the Society of Antiquaries, London
2. Obtain charcoal identification report from Dr Susan Lyons
3. Obtain final lithics report from Dr Conor Brady
4. Obtain faunal remains report from Dr Fiona Beglane
5. Prepare finished excavation drawings and other illustrative material for publication
6. Obtain topographical/close contour survey from Dr Steve Davis
7. Visualise the monument through reconstruction drawings by artist Colm O'Brien

10. Please describe the methodology used in conducting the research

In a preliminary report of the results of the first season of excavation at Newgrange farm in 2018 an hypothesis was presented that the Newgrange Farm site was a hybrid cursus monument. I was aware that there was a huge body of research on Cursus monuments in Britain and considered that a literature survey for comparative sites would be best done in the Society of Antiquaries, London, taking advantage of my FSA status and the excellent collections of regional and national British journals and monographs which they hold. This research was focused on identifying sites with a similar morphology, associated material culture and links with a similar range of public ceremonial monuments such as henge monuments and timber/pit circles.

It was a key objective of the Newgrange Farm excavation to determine the date and function of the monument. In order to optimise the results of a limited one season excavation. It was crucial to obtain specialist reports on the finds and stratified samples extracted from the excavation. The main artefacts from the excavation were lithics and these needed to be assessed by a lithics expert Dr Conor Brady to determine the type of activities going on the site, the materials used, the relative date of these activities based on the identification of diagnostic tools and comparison with other lithic assemblages in the Boyne Valley.

During the excavation an on-site environmental archaeologist Dr Penny Johnston took 25 bulk soil samples for environmental analysis. When processed there was charcoal in most of these. I believed that further charcoal identification by Dr Susan Lyons would help comparison with cursus monuments including timber examples from Scotland.

In the basal and upper fill of the great pit at Newgrange Farm excavated in 2018 faunal remains were discovered. These needed to be examined by expert Dr Fiona Beglane in order to identify the animals present, their age profile and any evidence for butchering. Evidence for chopping, cutting and sawing were recorded, as was gnawing by canids and rodents. Burnt material was classified as singed for bone with only partial blackening, burnt for blackened bones or calcinated for those bones that were predominantly white/blue-grey in colour. I believed that further faunal identification would assist comparison with other late Neolithic sites in the Boyne valley and cursus monuments in Britain.

The close-contour /topographical survey was undertaken to determine if there was any above ground evidence for the monument, its positioning on the terrace and in relation to other monuments in the immediate area. It was thought that this would provide further morphological information which could be used for comparative purposes with other cursus monuments.

Given the hidden nature of this monument it was considered important to be able to visualise the monument combining the evidence gained from survey and excavation and so Colm O'Brien, artist was provided with a detailed brief to produce a series of reconstruction drawings.

11. Please outline the findings of your research and/or milestones achieved

Comparative research in the Society of Antiquaries, London, established that Newgrange Farm fulfils the criteria for its classification as a Cursus monument within the British tradition. The relative scale of Newgrange Farm places it at the lower range of this monument type and its radio carbon date of c. 2,632 BC puts it at the end of the British tradition. Newgrange Farm is an exceptional monument and there are no exact parallels for the site. However, this research identified British parallels within the Cursus tradition for distinctive features of the Newgrange farm site such as its squared terminal, axial mound, revetted bank and inner pits. Like Britain it formed part of a ceremonial complex of Late Neolithic monuments.

The Lithics Report by Dr Conor Brady identified an assemblage of 88 lithic artefacts of flint, chert, quartz and silicate. This includes a scraper, a fragmentary barbed-and-tanged arrowhead which is likely to be diagnostic of a Late Neolithic/Beaker period and two cores. The later indicates that some knapping activity was carried out on or close to the site. An interesting aspect of the assemblage is the number of expedient or ad hoc tools present. This indicates a desire to maximise the utility of the available raw material even though the quality of the pieces being used is not optimal. Each of the chunks identified seems to represent a single intense episode of use. This suggests that the Newgrange Farm site is not a settlement site and that people were moving through it probably for ceremonial purposes.

The Charcoal Identification Report by Dr Susan Lyons recorded three wood species; oak, alder and willow. Oak dominated the charcoal assemblage by far accounting for 98% of the remains. Alder made up just 1.5% of the overall remains, while willow (*Salix* sp.) accounted for 0.5%. The charcoal fragments were largely the remains of heartwood from mature trees, with the exception of the willow charcoal identified from a pit which were classified as young branchwood (5 years max.) based on the curvature of the annual growth rings. Oak is the main wood used in construction works from contemporary Neolithic sites. Therefore, the trend emerging is that oak woodland was plentiful during the early Neolithic period, and as such was widely used in both construction work and as a fuel source. This is comparable with cursus monuments that have been investigated in Britain.

Dr Fiona Beglane produced a report on the 145 fragments of bone coming from the basal and upper fill of the great pit. The remains were dominated by adult cattle with (probable) pig also identified. Bones of both species showed evidence of butchery in the form of filleting.

The close contour survey highlights the careful positioning of the monument on a natural terrace above the River Boyne right on the break in slope and the presence of a slight axial mound. The reconstruction drawings provide a valuable opportunity to visualise the original monument based on all the evidence accumulated from the excavation and surveys.

12. a) Please provide details of the dissemination of the outcomes from this project (inc. publications, presentations, outreach, media etc.) including details of any social media/web platforms used to publicise this project

A) We have our own blog site for the excavation that has been viewed by over one thousand people in 11 countries <https://newgrangefarmexcavations.wordpress.com/> and there were numerous interviews on local radio and with Irish and international journalists. B) There was a piece in Archaeology Ireland and a detailed report on the excavation published in *Riocht na Midhe*. A third comparative study of the cursus phenomenon in Britain and Ireland will follow. C) I delivered the Knowth Inaugural lecture Series in May 2019 on the subject of the Newgrange Farm cursus and participated in the RIA Revealing the Past Biennial Seminar in October 2019. D) There have been numerous pieces in the local and national newspapers on the Newgrange Farm site. E) Prepare academic paper for submission to the Society of Antiquaries, London on Newgrange Farm cursus monument and related sites in Ireland and Britain.

How will you continue to communicate the results of your project and what are your publication plans?

Prepare academic paper for submission to the Society of Antiquaries, London on Newgrange Farm cursus monument and related sites in Ireland and Britain.

This provided an opportunity for me to share research into Cursus monuments with my colleagues in the Archaeological Survey of Ireland and to have an informed discourse on the subject with other researchers working in the same area.

When the comparative paper on the Newgrange Farm Site is submitted I would like to put together a research strategy for further excavation of the site.