

Archaeology Research Excavation Grant Scheme, 2022

Final report- Elaine Lynch

Submission Date	Oct 17, 2022
1. Title:	Mrs
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2. Email:	
3. Grant programme	Archaeology Research Excavation Grant
4. Year awarded	2022
5. Title of project	Excavation of Enclosure/House Site/Hut Site CL009-270---- at Lismoher, Co. Clare (Phase 1)
6. Summary of report (Min. allowed 100 words)	<p>The excavation of an enclosure/house site/hut site CL009-270---- in the townland of Lismoher, Co. Clare was undertaken from 25 April to the 13 May 2022. A single trench measuring 10m by 4m was excavated through the center of the site which exposed the wall of the structure and number of archaeological contexts.</p> <p>A total of 11 archaeological contexts were uncovered which were associated with a circular stone structure and habitation layers within the interior of the structure. A number of artefacts including a blue glass mount/toggle, an antler point/pin, two possible worked animal bones, iron finds, a metal droplet, a copper piece, whetstones and a few chert pieces were found during the excavation. Burnt and unburnt animal bones were also found and a possible human tooth. Charcoal was recovered from the site and appropriate samples were identified for radiocarbon dating. It is possible the site represents light industrial and agricultural activity dating to the Early Medieval period. Post-excavation analysis and radio carbon dates will provide a more specific date range.</p> <p>The excavation involved the local community and local volunteers from the Burren Programme (BP) farmers and Burrenbeo Trust Conservation Volunteers (BCVs) including some past NUIG archaeological students. The excavation provided useful training on all aspects of archaeological excavation and the value of 'best practice' recording of archaeological features. An open day was held on the site during the excavation to enable locals to visit the excavation. The licence holder is involved in the Field Monument Adviser (FMA) programme for Co. Clare, through which, the results of the excavation were disseminated to the local community and wider public. This excavation will play a major role in raising awareness of the Burren archaeology among the local and farming community.</p>

8. Please provide two appropriate images:



9. Please outline the objectives of the project

This small enclosure/house site is one of numerous similar sites, both recorded and unrecorded, in the Burren. Those recorded are usually described as hut or house sites without reference to age. Due to the excellent survival of monuments from all ages in the Burren it is often not possible to associate these small enclosures/house sites with certainty to any of the nearby diagnostic monuments.

The main objectives of the project are:

- To identify the function of these sites.
- To date the activity on these sites.
- To provide researchers with answers to some of the questions on the prolonged habitation of the Burren.
- To establish the relationship of these lesser known sites to the better known monuments on the Burren.
- To reach out to the local community by having local volunteers partake in the excavation.
- To enhance the preservation of these sites by raising the awareness of them.
- To provide training in all aspects of archaeological excavation, including 'best practice' recording of archaeological features, to the volunteers.
- To disseminate the findings of the excavation to the local community and wider audience through social media, presentations and outings.

10. Please describe the methodology used in conducting the research

A single trench measuring 10m x 4m was excavated which incorporated the wall and centre of the enclosure/house/hut site. The trench was divided into grids (1m by 1m) to record the location of artefacts and animal bone. A single context method of archaeological recording was employed on site. Records were kept in Registers (context; drawing; photography; finds); context sheets; drawings (permatrace for scanning at post-ex stage); and digital photos.

The extent of the excavation area was fully surveyed and recorded at pre-ex, mid-ex and post-ex stages. All excavation work was done using hand tools and all contexts excavated were sieved on the site with the aim to uncover artefacts, animal bone and organic material which may have been missed during excavation. Levels were taken on the excavated layers and artefacts which were found in situ.

Digital photos were taken of all individual contexts. Record shots and those suitable for future publication were also taken throughout the excavation. A UAV ('a drone') was used to provide vertical aerial images of the excavation as it progressed and upon completion. All contexts and features were planned and the site plans were digitised after the excavation. All the site registers, plans and photos were converted and saved digitally for archival purposes.

A number of samples were taken of the archaeological layers during the excavation to ascertain information on the nature and extent of archaeology, or for dating purposes. All secure contexts were bulk sampled and processed off site at post excavation stage.

All finds recovered were bagged and recorded according to the licence number, context number, and unique identifier number from that context e.g. 1-infinity. All finds requiring conservation have been stored as per specialist advice and packaged as per National Museum of Ireland guidelines.

After the excavation the site was backfilled and covered in. A preliminary report on the findings was completed within one month of the excavation and submitted to the NMS.

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

A total of 11 archaeological layers were excavated at the site of Lismoher, Co. Clare. A trench was excavated measuring 10m by 4m with a north-west/south-east orientation. The topsoil was removed by hand and below the topsoil the top of the stone wall forming the structure was exposed. It was evident that the wall had collapsed and there was a layer of loose stones/rubble on either side of the wall. The wall on the south side was 0.9m wide and had a max depth of 0.6m. It consisted of a drystone wall which was constructed of larger boulders along the external face with smaller stones set along the internal face. The wall was built directly on top of the natural parent material.

The internal and external face of the north wall was difficult to define, as the wall had collapsed at this end and stood 0.25m in height. The wall was built directly on top of the natural parent material.

Within the interior of the structure below the topsoil was a layer of dark greyish brown silt. Below this layer was the natural parent material which consisted of a limestone gravel and loose eroding bedrock.

Artefacts from the site consisted of four whetstones, a possible worked bone point/pin, a blue glass toggle/mount, two pieces of worked bone, a copper fragment, shale flakes, chert pieces and flakes and a range of iron finds consisting of a possible ring brooch, 3 possible pin fragments and 2 fragments of knives. One possible human tooth was also found. Quantities of burnt and unburnt animal bone were found throughout the layers on the site. Charcoal and animal bone was collected for radiocarbon dating. A small number of heat shattered stones were also uncovered.

Initial interpretation of the structure is that it was a habitation site that may have only been used over a short period of time. It is likely that the site represents light industrial and agricultural activity possibly dating to the Early Medieval period. However, some of the artefacts, such as the blue glass mount/toggle, indicate that an Iron Age date cannot be ruled out at this point in time. Post-excavation analysis and radio carbon dates will provide a more specific date range in the near future.

The preliminary report has been completed and a number of quotes/invoices have been sought with the aim to send material to the specialists for post-ex analyses in the next couple of weeks. A single charcoal sample has been sent for radiocarbon dating. The animal bone has been sent to Ruth Carden and the metal artefacts are currently with Susannah Kelly for conservation.

The excavation has been exceptional in achieving the raising of awareness of the archaeology of the Burren amongst the local community. By involving local farmers and Burrenbeo Trust volunteers in the project the awareness of these lesser known monuments has been enhanced. Also, valuable training on all

aspects of archaeological excavation including 'best practice' recording of archaeological features was provided.

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 short video was created during the excavation. This was shared on Burrenbeo Trust Facebook page and is available on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KiJFwm8wHo>).

One online presentation was given during Heritage Week (17th August) which discussed the initial findings from the excavation. The presentation is currently available on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xD-jYi0OI2o&t=1s>).

d) Media Coverage (article in local newspaper, feature on University website etc.):

The Field Monument Advisor Programme has a Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/FMAProgramme>) which published numerous posts on the excavation. Also, a number of posts about the excavation were created by the Burrenbeo Trust (<https://www.facebook.com/BurrenbeoTrust>).

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

I will continue to share any updates on the excavation through social media (FMA facebook and Instagram page) and continue to give presentations on the excavation such as the Killinaboy XPO group in November 2022. I am due to give a talk to the Shannon Historical and Archaeological Society next year and proposed to give a talk on the finds from the excavation at IAI next March 2023. Once the post-ex report has been completed, a publication on the excavation will be submitted to the Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy if appropriate. Also, articles will be submitted to The Other Clare and/or The Journal of IAI.

14.. How did the grant enhance your professional development (e.g. in terms of specific opportunities, opportunities for enhancing skills, collaborations with others etc.)?

The grant gave me an opportunity to excavate a previously unexcavated site in the Burren and to broaden the excavation into a project with the aim to understand these lesser known monuments.

It has also given me the opportunity to enhance my professional development by directing a research excavation. My skills in training the volunteers in most aspects of archaeological excavation/recording and in communicating with the local community have also been enhanced.

What plans (if any) do you have to further your proposal/project?

The artefacts recovered to date have already provided opportunities to communicate and collaborate with specialists and researchers in several areas. The excavation would not have been possible without the support of the RIA.

I intend to continue investigating further 'hut sites' in Phase 2 of the project to get a better understanding of the use and date of these monument types within the Burren landscape. It is proposed to excavate a trench through two nearby 'hut sites' in 2023. By comparing these two sites to that already excavated in 2022 our knowledge of this site type will be greatly enhanced. The post-ex on both excavations will aim to be completed in Phase 3 in 2024. Further excavation in 2023 will provide an opportunity to build on the excellent relationship already established with the local community through the excavation in Phase 1 and will further raise awareness of the archaeological monuments in the Burren.

