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(CRAEB TELCHA), COUNTY ANTRIM

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF THE INAUGURAL LANDSCAPE OF CREW HILL (CRÁEB TELCHA), COUNTY ANTRIM

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An archaeological evaluation of the inaugural landscape of Crew Hill (Cráeb Telcha), near Glenavy, Co Antrim, which included some limited excavation, was carried out in 2007. The principal findings of the excavations were that the site of the Crew Stone had been heavily disturbed in an apparent episode of treasure hunting between the 17th and 19th century, and that the mound which had previously been identified as a feature associated with inauguration was the product of late 18th- or early 19th-century quarrying. Despite these negative results, the evaluation concluded that Crew Hill was a place of assembly which was probably used for the purposes of inauguration. The possibility of developing an archaeological approach to the study of medieval Irish inauguration, that will complement recent historical analyses of the subject, is considered.

INTRODUCTION

Crew Hill, Co Antrim (IGR J1870), is a broad, flat-topped hill (193.5m OD) with panoramic views, especially west across Lough Neagh and south to the Mourne Mountains. Analysis of the available place-name evidence demonstrates that Crew Hill can be identified with the probable inauguration site of Cráeb Telcha, which historical and literary evidence indicates was an assembly place of the Ulaid, as well as the site of a sacred tree. The hill is assumed to be the inauguration site of Dál Fiatach (Byrne 2005, 859), and may also have been an earlier centre of Dál nAraide prior to territorial contraction c 800 AD (Byrne 1973, 119). Its identification as a probable inauguration site is based on annalistic references, local tradition, place-name evidence and the presence on the hill's summit and its southern slopes of a glacial erratic known as the Crew Stone (SMR ANT 063:057), a chair-shaped monolith (SMR ANT 063:058), a bivalent rath (SMR ANT 063:020), and an apparently 'ancient' mound (SMR ANT 063:101) (Fig 1). All of these features have previously been identified, with varying degrees of probability, as elements of the inaugural landscape of Crew Hill. In addition, 19th-century accounts of the discovery of stone-lined burials (O'Lavery 1880, 295), and the partial excavation of an apparently Neolithic feature during a recent episode of evaluative excavation on the summit (Audrey Gahan, pers

comm), suggest that Crew Hill may have been the focus of other, potentially unrelated, episodes of prehistoric and early medieval activity.

Today, a compound on the summit of Crew Hill contains a subterranean reservoir, maintained by Northern Ireland Water (formerly the Water Service), as well as two cellphone masts. In order to facilitate the proposed expansion of these facilities, an evaluation of the inaugural landscape of Crew Hill was undertaken by the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork at the request of the then Environment and Heritage Service (EHS). The evaluation included both a review of the historic, literary, onomastic and folkloric evidence, as well as a small-scale programme of excavation (Licence No AE/07/36).¹ Both the assessment and excavations were directed by Philip Macdonald, the excavations being undertaken episodically between 12 February 2007 and 7 March 2007. The principal aim of the evaluation was to verify whether or not Crew Hill was a place of inauguration. Despite the methodological difficulties inherent in archaeological studies of essentially non-material subjects such as inauguration and kingship, from its inception the investigation was also intended to contribute towards developing an explicitly archaeological approach to the study of medieval inauguration.

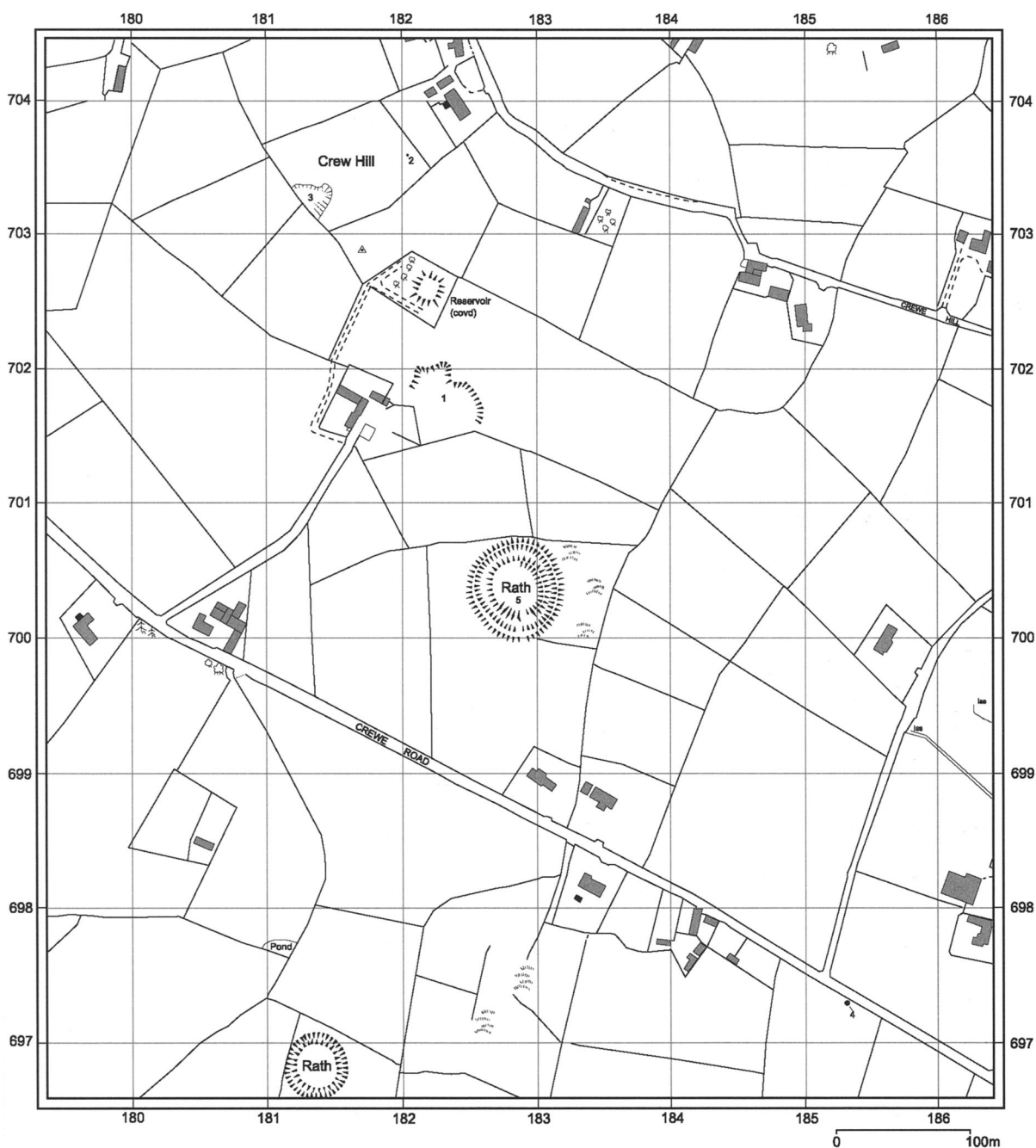


Fig 1 Location of sites mentioned in the text. 1 mound (SMR ANT 063:101; IGR J18237017); 2 Crew Stone (SMR ANT 063:057; IGR J18207035); 3 relict quarry possibly associated with burials noted by O'Laverty (SMR ANT 063:057; centred on IGR J18137033); 4 stone 'chair' (SMR ANT 063:058; IGR J18536973); 5 bivallate rath (SMR ANT 063:020; centred on IGR J18297004)].

RECENT APPROACHES TO MEDIEVAL IRISH INAUGURATION

Developing an archaeological methodology for investigating the subject of medieval Irish inauguration is problematic. Past studies of inauguration have given primacy to the historical and literary evidence, and this approach has been maintained in several important recent studies of the subject which have transformed our appreciation of inauguration and the character of Irish kingship. For example, Simms' landmark study *From Kings to Warlords* (1987), which draws upon her impressive command of the wide range of Gaelic sources, was key in demonstrating that the institution of Irish kingship, including the rites associated with inauguration, was not a static or timeless phenomenon, but was one which contained distinct regional variations and also changed and developed almost constantly as a result of both external political influences and events, as well as internal drivers-of-change inherent within the organisation of Gaelic society. McCone considered the reconciliation of the pagan origins of the early Irish concept of sacral kingship with a Christian ideology as reflected in narrative and other sources (1990, 107–60), whilst Doherty has used early Patrician texts to explore the process by which inauguration stones may have become Christianised (2005, 9–11). Jaski has usefully considered the subject of inauguration as part of a discussion of regnal succession and the sacral nature of Irish kingship, which he considers was essentially 'secularised' and integrated with Christian concepts of kingship by the historic period (Jaski 2000, 57–88). Most recently Lynn has persuasively demonstrated that at least some of the parallels between Irish inauguration rites and those practised in continental Europe were the result of the early medieval transmission of practices from Ireland to the Continent, rather than a reflection of vestigial survival of the ancient Indo-European foundations of the institution of Irish kingship (2007).

Given the difficulties inherent in archaeological studies of non-material subjects such as kingship (for example, inauguration and kingship are not addressed in Edwards' excellent survey (1990) of the archaeology of early medieval Ireland), the evidential bias towards historical and literary sources in the work of the scholars cited above is perhaps inevitable. Of the recent historical studies concerned with inauguration, however, the one which is methodologically closest to an archaeological approach is FitzPatrick's important 'cultural landscape' study (2004). FitzPatrick's study of various inaugural landscapes demonstrated

how they were often carefully chosen and exploited in order to bolster the authority of royal candidates by frequently appropriating or referencing ancient sites associated with an illustrious dynastic ancestor or legendary figure. Her concern with the physical appearance and topographical setting of inauguration sites has inspired and influenced several of the recent archaeological surveys of inauguration sites — including the present study (other examples of recent surveys of historically attested inauguration sites include Trick 2007; Trick *et al* 2007; and Waddell *et al* 2009). However, despite the appeal to archaeologists of FitzPatrick's 'cultural landscape' approach, historical evidence was still given primacy in the selection of the sites which made up the subject of her study. To identify with certainty an inauguration site, FitzPatrick argued that it must be explicitly described as a venue for inauguration in the early historic or literary records. In order to be able to confidently identify the specific location of the historically attested inauguration site, FitzPatrick considered it necessary to undertake a detailed study of the available place-name evidence and possibly an assessment of any surviving archaeological remains (for full details of her methodological approach see FitzPatrick 2004, 13–40).

Despite the sophistication of her approach, few sites can be identified with certainty using FitzPatrick's method. In her recent study of the subject only thirty inauguration sites were identified in the documentary sources and of these only twenty-three could be closely located (FitzPatrick 2004, 34, fig 1a). Given that during the early medieval period there are estimated to have been at least 150 kingdoms in Ireland (Byrne 1973, 7) and that by the 16th century there were approximately sixty Gaelic and thirty Gaelicised lordships (Nicholls 1972, 21–2; Duffy *et al* 2001, 39), the total of thirty definitely identified examples must represent only a fraction of the total number of inauguration sites (FitzPatrick 2004, 34). Identifying historically unattested inauguration sites presents a significant methodological challenge which FitzPatrick has argued is best met by using in conjunction a diverse range of historical, onomastic, folkloric, topographical, cartographic and archaeological evidence.

In the absence of an explicit historical reference to an act of inauguration, a number of factors can reasonably be assumed to be indicative of an inauguration site. These include: references in the early historic and literary sources to a royal site or place of assembly, place-name evidence (both in terms of site identification and the meaning of the name), a local tradition of inauguration at the site,

the proximity of a high-status settlement, and the presence of potential inauguration ‘furniture’ such as a mound, stone or even a stone ‘chair’. It is the qualitative assessment of these varying strands of often disparate evidence for any given site which can lead to its identification as a possible inauguration venue. By adopting such an approach FitzPatrick has identified a further thirty-eight possible inaugurations sites, including Crew Hill or Cráeb Telcha (2004, 37–8, fig 1b).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

The programme of research undertaken by the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork was intended to make a contribution to the general evaluation of the archaeological potential of Crew Hill in advance of development of the summit by Northern Ireland Water. Other elements of this general evaluation included a magnetometry survey undertaken in September 2004 by Geoquest Associates (funded by the then EHS: Built Heritage) (Noel 2004) and the mechanical excavation of four evaluative trenches immediately to the north of the subterranean reservoir in March 2007 by Gahan and Long Ltd (funded by Northern Ireland Water) (Licence No AE/07/61). The results of the magnetometry survey were of limited value, although two anomalies identified during the survey were selected for excavation (see below). The excavations undertaken by Gahan and Long Ltd uncovered a number of negative features of relatively recent date and the terminal of a possible constructional slot trench associated with a single sherd of possibly Middle Neolithic pottery (Audrey Gahan, pers comm). Whilst demonstrating the potential long duration of activity on Crew Hill, the results of the Gahan and Long Ltd excavations do not bear directly on the results of the evaluation of the inaugural landscape of Crew Hill by the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork. Consequently, they are not considered in any further detail in this paper.

The principal research aim of the evaluation was to verify whether or not Crew Hill was a place of inauguration. From their inception, the investigations were intended to make a contribution towards developing ‘an archaeology of medieval Irish inauguration’. In addition to a review of the historic, literary, place-name, folklore and archaeological evidence, four specific objectives, consisting of five separate sites, were identified for excavation. These were the Crew Stone (SMR 063:057), two of the geophysical anomalies identified by Noel (f4 and f5; Noel 2004, fig 4), the field quarry near the summit of the hill, and a mound located within an apparent quarry on the

southern slope of the hill (SMR ANT 063:101). These potential elements of the inaugural landscape of Crew Hill were situated within two general locations. Site A (SMR ANT 063:057; IGR J181703) is the sub-rectangular field on the summit of Crew Hill that contains the Crew Stone, the two geophysical anomalies selected for investigation, and the field quarry which had been identified as the possible site of the disturbed burials (Fig 2). Site B (SMR ANT 063:101; IGR J182701) included the mound located within an apparent quarry on the southern slope of Crew Hill which had been previously identified as a feature associated with inauguration (Fig 3). These sites were all investigated by excavating a number of small, manually dug trenches. The Crew Stone was excavated in three trenches arranged in a T-shaped pattern with arms to the south-west (Trench 1), north-east (Trench 3) and south-east (Trench 4) of the monument. A fourth trench (Trench 2) was laid out to the north-west of the stone; however, because of the relative uniformity of the stratigraphic sequences uncovered in the three other trenches it was decided not to undertake the excavation of this trench. Two of the linear anomalies (f4 and f5; Noel 2004, fig 4) identified in the magnetometry survey were investigated in separate trenches (Trenches 5 and 6 respectively) that were aligned perpendicular to the direction of the anomalies. The field quarry was investigated in two trenches, one located towards the base of the quarry (Trench 7) and the other on its southern edge (Trench 8). At Site B, the mound was investigated in a single cutting (Trench 9) which extended part-way across the north-eastern end of the feature.

The fields around the summit of the hill, which includes Site A, are currently used for grazing. Flanagan stated that Crew Hill had been cultivated across its top (1970, 31) and her observations were confirmed by the site’s landowner who recalled Site A being ploughed and cultivated for barley (George Adams, pers comm). Site B, which incorporates the mound investigated in Trench 9, is located within an apparent relict quarry on the southern slope of Crew Hill. Although previously identified as a possible ancient feature, the site is explicitly marked as a quarry on the first edition Ordnance Survey 6” map (surveyed 1832, engraved 1833) and excavation demonstrated that this was indeed the case (see below). With the exception of the mound, the entire area was planted with saplings in 2000 (Frank McCorry, pers comm). Prior to the establishment of this plantation, Site B had been waste ground.

The arrangement of this paper differs slightly from the usual format of an excavation report. The

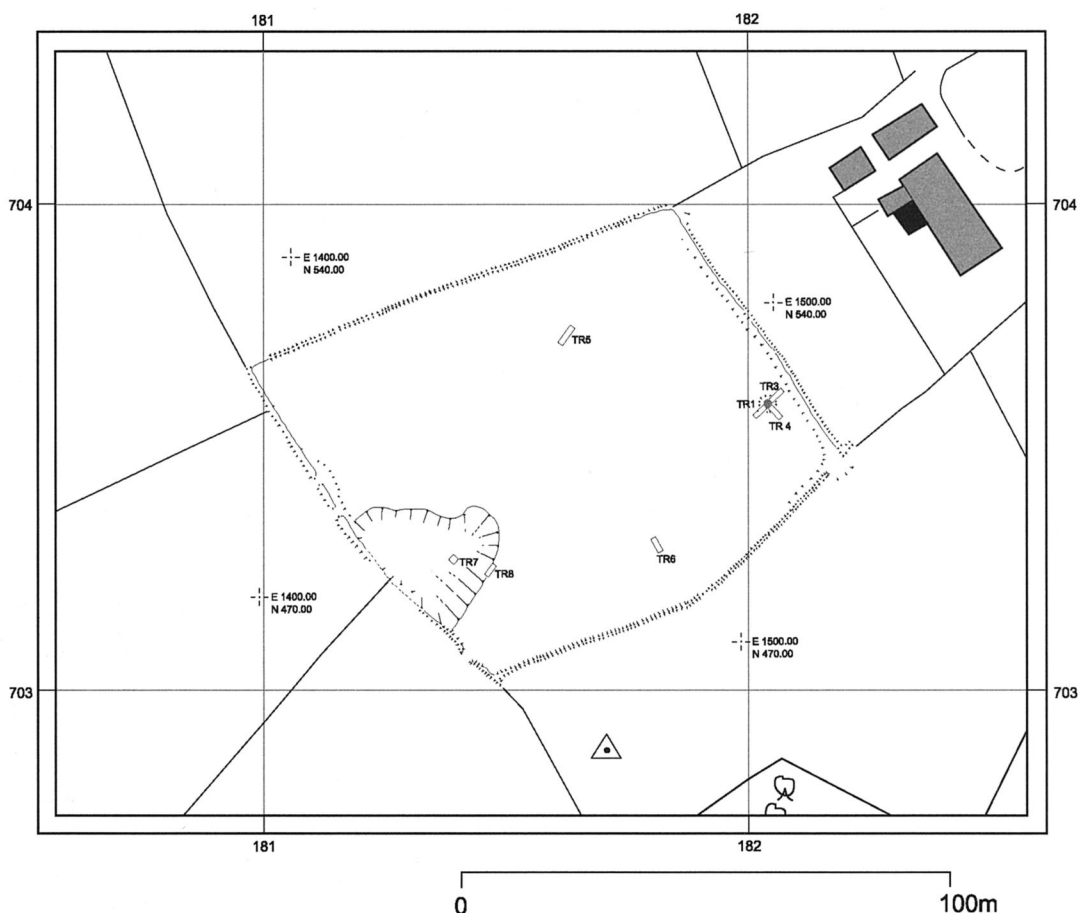


Fig 2 Location of Site A showing the position of Trenches 1, 3-8.

accounts of the excavated trenches are not presented as a single block of text, but are dispersed throughout the paper, having been incorporated into the relevant sections dealing with each particular strand of evidence relating to the inaugural landscape of Crew Hill.

HISTORICAL AND LITERARY BACKGROUND

None of the historical references to Crew Hill (Cráeb Telcha) contain a definite, unequivocal description of the hill being used as a venue for inauguration. The early references to Crew Hill were first summarised by O'Lavery (1880, 294–99), whose account has been repeated in various levels of detail by Watson (1892, 52–3), Beckett (1929, 11), Lucas (1963, 25), McKavanagh (1968, 9) and Warner (1991, 40); however, the most useful account of the early historic and literary

references to Crew Hill is in Flanagan's review of the place-name (Flanagan 1970). The available references reduce themselves to annalistic records of four historical events and a topographical sequence recorded in an earlier literary source. Collectively they indicate that Crew Hill was an important assembly site with royal connections during a period which extended from at least either the 9th or 10th century to the 12th century AD.

The earliest reference to the site is in a topographical sequence recorded in *Immacallam in Dá Thuarad* (*The Colloquy of the Two Sages*). This is a complex literary work, purportedly concerning a contest of poetical skill between the poets Néde and Ferchertne at the court of Conchobhar, but also containing a prophetic passage heavily influenced by the apocalyptic literature of later Christian tradition (Jackson 1934, 69). Although the tale is set at an earlier date, it was composed in the mid- to



Fig 3 Location of Site B showing position of Trench 9 across mound in relict field quarry.

late 8th century and is preserved in various 12th-century and later manuscript copies (Stokes 1905, 4–5; Carey 1994, 10, n 33; Kay Muhr, pers comm). The passage containing the topographic sequence places Cráeb Telcha (Crew Hill) *en route* to Émain (Navan Fort, Co Armagh) (Stokes 1905, 10–11; Muhr 1996, 54–5) and suggests that during the 8th century the site was of high enough status to be considered suitable to receive a poet of Néde's standing.

The earliest annalistic record dates to 1004 and records the 'battle of Cráeb Telcha', which was a significant defeat for the Ulaí. The translated account reproduced below is derived from the Annals of Ulster, but closely comparable accounts are also recorded in other annalistic sources (for a full bibliographical list of references to this event see Flanagan 1970, 29–30).

The battle of Craeb Tulcha between the Ulaí and the Cenél Eógain, i.e. on Thursday the 18th of the Kalends of October [14th Sept.], and the

Ulaí were defeated; and therein fell Eochaid, son of Ardgar, king of Ulaí, and his kinsman Dub Tuinne, and his two sons, Cú Duilig and Domnall; and there was also a slaughter of the army, both noble and base: Gairbíth king of Uí Echach, and Gilla Pátraic son of Tomaltach, and Cumuscach son of Flathrói, and Dub Slánga son of Aed, and Cathalán son of Étrú, and Coinéne son of Muirchertach, as well as the elite of the Ulaí; and the combat ranged as far as Dún Echdach and to Druim Bó. Thus in the Book of Dub dá Leithe. Moreover, Aed son of Domnall ua Néill, king of Ailech, fell there in the 29th year of his age and in the tenth of his reign, and others also; but the Cenél Eógain claim that he was killed by themselves (Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983, 432–35).

Warner noted that that such a significant battle was fought at, or near, a sacred spot such as Crew Hill is not unexpected (1991, 40). The place-names Dún Echdach and Druim Bó are usually identified as Duneight and Drumbo in Co Down (Hennessy

1887, 512, n 2–3), located approximately 13.5km and 15.0km respectively from Crew Hill. If correctly identified, this suggests that the ‘slaughter of the army’ was a significant rout which extended over a large area.

The next historic reference is recorded in the saga element of the *Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaibh* (*The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill*), which was probably composed in the first half of the 12th century (Hughes 1972, 289). The relevant extract, reproduced in translation below, describes the visit of the high king Brian Borúma (Brian Boru) to Craebh Tulcha as part of a circuit of Ireland in 1006.

Brian was then at Craebh Tulcha, and the Ulaídh with him getting him provisions there. They supplied him there with twelve hundred beeves; twelve hundred hogs; and twelve hundred wethers; and Brian bestowed twelve hundred horses upon them, besides gold, and silver, and clothing. For no purveyor of any of their towns departed from Brian without receiving a horse or some other gift that deserved his thanks (Todd 1867, 137).

The historical accuracy of this passage, written between approximately a hundred and a hundred and fifty years after the events it records, is questionable. Although the author of the saga element of the *Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaibh* probably followed a contemporary (and now lost) annalistic source, the text is prone to exaggeration and the emphasis on Brian’s honour and generosity reflects an observance of the heroic conventions (Hughes 1972, 290–91). If the account of the visit to Cráeb Telcha is not derived from a contemporary annalistic source, but is rather a later fictitious invention, then the passage indicates that the significance of the royal site at Crew Hill was still appreciated, if not maintained, in the first half of the 12th century.

The next annalistic reference to Crew Hill records an incursion into the territory of the Ulaídh by the king of the Cenél Eógain in 1099. Once again, the following translated excerpt is taken from the Annals of Ulster, but comparable passages also occur in several other annalistic sources (for references see Flanagan 1970, 30).

An expedition [was made] by Domnall ua Lochlainn and the North of Ireland over Tuaim into Ulaídh; the Ulaídh, however, were in camp at Craeb Telcha. Their two forces of horsemen meet, the force of the Ulaídh is defeated, and ua hAmráin is killed there. The Ulaídh then leave their camp and Cenél Eógain burn it and cut

down Craeb Telcha. Two hostages are given to them thereafter, and the successor of Comgall as surety for two other hostages (Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983, 535).

As a consequence of their unsuccessful engagement with the host of the Cenél Eógain, the incursion of 1099 had significant consequences for the Ulaídh when the settlement or camp at Cráeb Telcha was burnt and the sacred tree at the site was destroyed. The symbolic significance of the loss of the sacred tree cannot be overemphasised (Lucas 1963, 25). Indeed, the memory of this humiliation may have prompted the retaliatory attack, also recorded in the Annals of Ulster, against Tullaghoge, Co Tyrone, in 1111, during which the sacred trees at the Uí Néill inauguration site were destroyed (see the translated extract below). That the Ulaídh lost a thousand cattle in a swift reprisal for their retaliatory raid emphasises the scale of outrage provoked by such desecrations of inauguration sites.

An expedition [was made] by the Ulaídh to Telach Óc, and they cut down its [sacred] trees. A raid [was made] by Niall ua Lochlainn, and carried off a thousand or three thousand cows in revenge for them (Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983, 553).

The final annalistic reference to Crew Hill occurs in the Annals of the Four Masters. In the year 1149 a number of concerted incursions into the territory of the Ulaídh were made in support of their overking Cú Ulaídh, who had been expelled by Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn, the king of the Cenél Eógain. One of these incursions is described thus:

An army was also led by Tighearnan Ua Ruairc and Donnchadh Ua Cearbhaill into Ulidia, as far as Craebh-Tealcha; and they plundered the country, and placed Cuuladh in his kingdom again; however, he was immediately expelled by the Ulidians themselves (O’Donovan 1856, 1087).

Warner has argued (1991, 41) that this entry indicates that Cú Ulaídh may have been re-inaugurated at Cráeb Telcha during this episode. Although an interesting suggestion, such a reading is far from certain. The need for a ‘restored’ king to be re-inaugurated is not obvious and, given that an inauguration ceremony would have required Cú Ulaídh to have been acclaimed by the very people recorded as immediately expelling him, it seems unlikely that such an event did take place. Whatever events did occur during Cú Ulaídh’s brief



Fig 4 Representation of Crew Hill ('K: Crewhollage') on a map of east Ulster dated to the 1590s (National Maritime Museum P/49 (25); ©National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London).

restoration, the reference cannot be considered a definite description of Crew Hill being used as a venue for inauguration, although reference to the site indicates that it was still a well-known landmark in the mid-12th century.

PLACE-NAME EVIDENCE

The historic sources cited above contain the earliest place-name evidence relating to Crew Hill (Cráeb Telcha) (for the numerous Irish variants of the name see Flanagan 1970, 29–31). Although Crew Hill has long been identified in local tradition as a place of inauguration and assembly, O'Laverty was the first to explicitly identify the historic Cráeb Telcha with Crew Hill (1880, 294). He cited no conclusive evidence to justify this assertion, but more recently Flanagan has comprehensively reviewed the place-name evidence and demonstrated, with particular reference to cartographic evidence, the onomastic link between the Cráeb Telcha named in the Irish annalistic sources and the modern place-name Crew Hill (1970).

Cráeb Telcha has been variously translated as 'the spreading tree of the hill' (O'Donovan 1856, 750; O'Laverty 1880, 295), 'the tree of the mound' (Lucas 1963, 25), 'the tree of the small hill/hillock' (Warner 1991, 40), and 'the branch of the hill' (FitzPatrick 2004, 37–8). Lucas has shown that the place-name element *cráeb*, although literally meaning 'branch', is sometimes used as a synonym for *bile* (sacred tree) (1963, 19–20). In Modern Irish

the term *tulach* (of which *telcha* is an old alternative genitive) can also mean '(artificial) mound' as opposed to '(natural) hill' (Ó Dónaill 1977, 1286; Warner 1991, 40), however, the Old Irish *tulach/tilach* implies a 'hill of assembly' and is often found in legal phrases (Wagner 1970, 38, n 46; FitzPatrick 2004, 30–31).² The place-names of several inauguration sites contain the element *tulach*, or its anglicised variants 'tully' (from the dative/locative *tulaigh*) and 'tulla' (FitzPatrick 2004, 29–31; Kay Muhr, pers comm). Consequently, the place-name evidence suggests the potential presence of an artificial mound as well as sacred tree at Crew Hill, and is consistent with, although not definitive proof of, the site's identification as an inauguration site.

Interestingly, the representation of Crew Hill ('K: Crewhollage') on a map of east Ulster dated to the 1590s and plausibly attributed to Sir Ralph Lane (Andrews 2008, 39–40; contra Hayes-McCoy 1964, xiv), shows it as a two-peaked hill (Fig 4). Flanagan suggested that the second peak probably indicates Cairn Hill, north of Crew Hill (IGR J192715) (Flanagan 1970, 32, n 20); however, it is possible that the second peak is a representation of an inauguration mound.

THE SACRED TREE

As well as being implicit in the Irish form of the site's name, the presence of a sacred tree at Crew Hill is attested in the annalistic references to the site, where it is described as having been uprooted or cut down during a raid by the king of the Cenél Eógain in 1099 (see above). Lucas has reviewed the evidence for sacred trees in Ireland, including their apparent association with inauguration sites (1963, 25–6). FitzPatrick noted annalistic references to the destruction of sacred trees (*bileda*) at several sites in Ulster and Connacht which were also recorded as inauguration places (2004, 57–8). Although sacred trees are invariably referred to in annalistic sources only when they are destroyed, the known examples suggest a strong association between the sacred tree (*bile*) and inauguration venues. The precise relationship, if any, between the sacred tree and inauguration ceremonies is not fully understood. Citing an account of the inauguration of the king of Bréifne in the later, Irish version of the life of Máedóc of Ferns (Plummer 1922 i, 203; ii, 197), FitzPatrick has suggested that *slat na rígha* ('the rod of kingship') may have been cut from a *bile* growing at the inauguration site (2004, 58).³ FitzPatrick has further suggested that the absence of annalistic references to sacred trees specifically associated with inauguration and assembly sites after the first half of the 12th century may reflect a

change in the nature of inauguration rituals at this date (ibid, 148–9). However, that two early 17th-century bardic poems lament the cutting down by the English of venerable thorn trees associated with mounds of assembly (Simms 2004, 147) suggests that sacred trees may have retained their importance until the period of the Tudor reconquest.

The precise location and setting of the sacred tree at Crew Hill is not known. From annalistic references to the cutting down of a sacred tree at Roevehagh, Killeely, Co Galway, and the demolition of its stone fort (*caiseal*), Lucas suggested that the sacred trees at inaugural sites may have stood within specifically built circular dry-stone enclosures (1963, 25–6). The early 17th-century bardic poems cited by Simms (2004, 147) suggest that sacred trees may have been directly planted upon assembly and, by extension, inauguration mounds. That the two suggestions might not be incompatible is implied by a reference to ‘Ó Connachtáin who keeps the gate of the mound’ in a 15th-century tract on the inauguration of the kings of Connacht; this may draw on a 12th- or 13th-century original and suggests that at least some inauguration mounds may have been enclosed (cf Dillon 1961, 197; Simms 1980, 140–41). However, it does not necessarily follow that a similar arrangement would have been in place at Crew Hill. The sacred tree at Crew Hill could plausibly have been either located in an isolated position on the hill or associated with the Crew Stone (SMR ANT 063:057), with the burials recorded on the summit of the hill, especially if they were associated with a now destroyed mound (SMR ANT 063:057), or even with the nearby bivallate rath (SMR ANT 063:020).

THE CREW STONE

(Site A: Trenches 1, 3, 4)

O’Lavery recorded the local tradition that the large basalt boulder, known locally as the Crew Stone (SMR ANT 063:057; IGR J18207035), was used for the purposes of inauguration (1880, 295). Early literary sources suggest that standing on an inauguration stone (*leac*; Old Irish *lecc*) formed a significant part of the procedure of legitimising the authority of a king (FitzPatrick 2004, 99–100). The primary meaning of *leac* is a flat slab of rock, flagstone, paving stone or even bedrock, and inauguration stones probably had a variety of forms (ibid, 104–5). Inauguration stones probably embodied a range of symbolic meanings; the act of the king standing on a stone to be invested

was arguably symbolic of a relationship with an object of great antiquity and permanence, with nature, and also with the land from which his client-base earned their living. Part of the potency of individual inauguration stones was apparently derived from the belief that they had oracular and prophetic functions (ibid, 108–9). The use of inauguration stones is not restricted to medieval Gaelic societies (Simms 1987, 35; Airlie 2003, 126–31; FitzPatrick 2004, 107–8; but see also Lynn 2007) and FitzPatrick has argued that in Ireland the origins of the practice may be connected with wider concerns and taboos of a king not being able to touch the mundane earth in his royal condition (FitzPatrick 2004, 100). Regardless of the earlier symbolic functions of the use of hallowed stones in medieval Irish inauguration, by the 16th century their principle importance was probably as symbols of continuous and immemorial tradition (Simms 1987, 36).

The Crew Stone is a glacial erratic whose upper surface slopes markedly and which is set within a small but distinct hollow formed by cattle using it as a rubbing stone (Pl 1). The surface of the stone contains several areas of greasy polish consistent with its continued use by cattle, and a photograph published in 1980 shows that the hollow around the monument had not formed at that date (Totten 1980, 30). These observations suggest that the development of the erosional hollow is both of relatively recent date and still on-going.

Writing his parish history in 1892, Watson noted that the stone was no longer ‘in its original position’ (1892, 52); however, he did not record whether he meant that the stone had been moved a significant distance or had only shifted a short distance as a



Pl 1 The Crew Stone prior to excavation (looking north-east). Scales 2m.

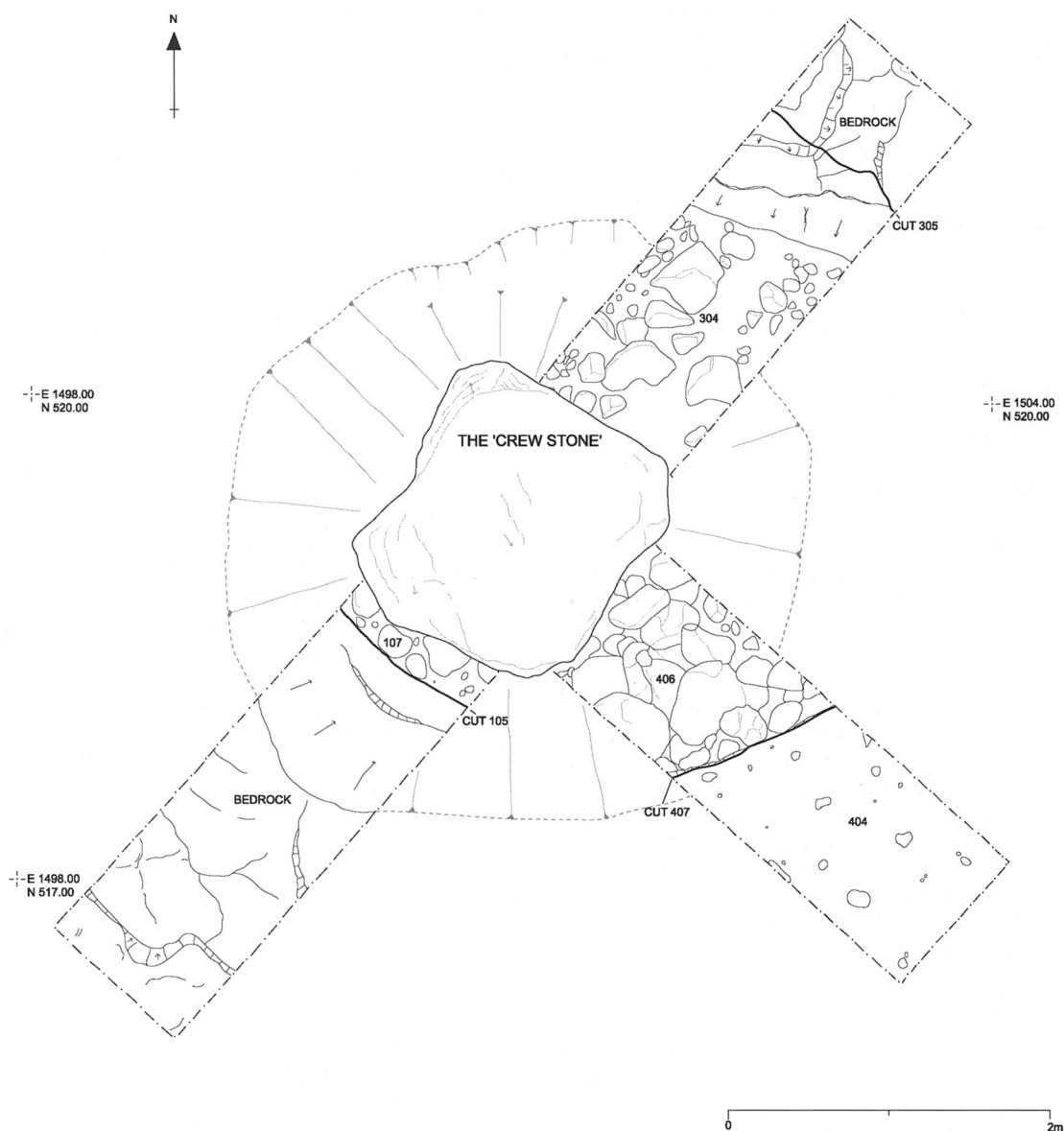


Fig 5 Plan showing the relationship between Trenches 1, 3 and 4, the Crew Stone and the erosional discontinuity surrounding the stone.

consequence of having fallen over. McKavanagh offered some explanation for Watson's comments, derived from an anecdote told to a Canon McEvoy by Francis McCorry in 1935. Apparently by 1880 the stone had sunk so much that little of it was visible. Consequently, a number of youths raised it and placed supporting stones underneath. Subsequently, youths from Stoneyford visited the spot and when they had left it was observed that the supporting stones had been removed (McKavanagh

1968, 8).

The Crew Stone was investigated in three narrow trenches arranged in a T-shaped pattern with arms to the south-west (Trench 1), north-east (Trench 3) and south-east (Trench 4) of the monument. A fourth trench (Trench 2) was laid out to the north-west of the stone, but because of the relative uniformity of the stratigraphic sequences uncovered in the three other trenches it was considered unnecessary to undertake excavation of

this trench. Figure 5 illustrates the relationship between the four trenches, the Crew Stone and the erosional discontinuity surrounding the stone.

Trench 1 was aligned approximately south-west/north-east with its north-eastern end adjacent to the Crew Stone. The trench was 3.0m long and 1.0m wide. Prior to excavation a number of small stones located underneath the Crew Stone were observed protruding from the topsoil (101) in a position which suggested that they may be examples of the ‘supporting’ stones placed under the monument and reported by Francis McCorry to Canon McEvoy in 1935 (McKavanagh 1968, 8) (Pl 2). A humic topsoil (101) extended throughout the trench and stratigraphically overlay a thin, compact light brown loam (102; maximum thickness 0.08m) that was located within the erosional hollow immediately adjacent to the Crew Stone. In terms of its compositional matrix this deposit was identical to the less compact, underlying soil (103) and it is interpreted as a product of the cattle trampling around the monument which created the erosional hollow.

Underlying the compact loam deposit created by cattle trampling (102) was a mid-brown loam deposit (103) that extended throughout the length of the trench (maximum thickness 0.24m). This deposit probably represents a cultivation soil. In the south-western part of the trench the deposit physically overlay bedrock; however, in the north-eastern part of the trench it overlay the upper fill

(104) of a rock-cut feature (105) which extended beyond the north-eastern edge of excavation and underneath the Crew Stone. The feature’s upper fill (104; maximum thickness approximately 0.30m) had a similar soil matrix to the overlying cultivation soil (103), and overlay a thin (thickness 0.02–0.03m) deposit of yellowish brown clay (106), which in turn overlay the lower fill (107) of the feature. This primary fill (107) consisted of large stones within a loose soil matrix of mid-brown loam that contained a large number of air voids (maximum exposed thickness 0.20m). The air voids between the stones indicate that the layer was rapidly deposited in the relatively recent past. The deposit is interpreted as the deliberate backfill of part of a pit (105) which was excavated from a distance 1.05m adjacent to the current position of the Crew Stone. The feature was not fully excavated within Trench 1 but demonstrably extended underneath the Crew Stone. Where exposed, it was cut through the bedrock to a depth of approximately 0.45m below the undisturbed surface of the bedrock. No evidence for tool marks was observed within the exposed part of the feature in Trench 1.

A similar stratigraphic sequence to that excavated in Trench 1 was recorded in Trench 3. Trench 3 was arranged upon the same south-west/north-east alignment as Trench 1, but with its south-western end located immediately adjacent to the Crew Stone. The trench was 3.0m long and 1.0m wide. Underlying the humic topsoil (301)

which extended throughout the trench was a localised deposit of thin, compacted loam (302; maximum thickness 0.08m) whose position immediately adjacent to the Crew Stone coincided with the erosional hollow created by cattle trampling around the monument. Underlying the compact trample deposit (302) was a mid-brown loam deposit (303) that extended throughout the entire length of the trench. This deposit is interpreted as a cultivation soil and overlay, in the north-eastern part of the trench, the uneven surface of the bedrock. Within the mid-brown loam (303) set in the area immediately adjacent to the Crew Stone was a concentration of small to medium sized stones which appeared to have been deliberately thrown on to the soil, presumably in an attempt to counteract the effects of erosion.



Pl 2 Area underneath the Crew Stone in Trench 1 following the removal of the turf and topsoil (101) (looking north-east). The small stones may be the ‘supporting’ stones placed under the monument in 1935. The deposit through which the stones are protruding is the compact loam (102) which is interpreted as a product of cattle trampling. Scale 0.25m.

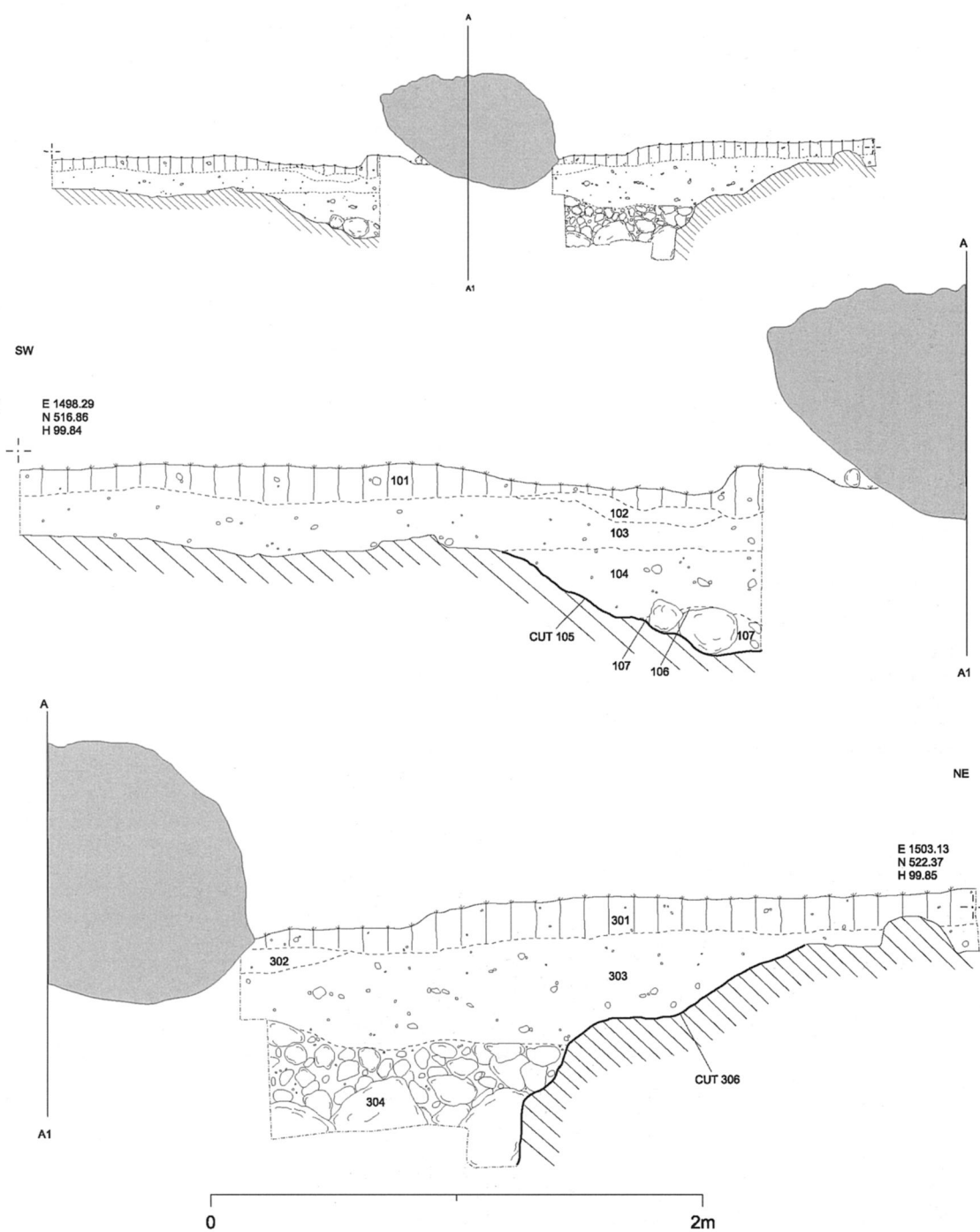


Fig 6 South-east-facing sections of Trenches 1 and 3 conjoined through a cross-section of the Crew Stone.

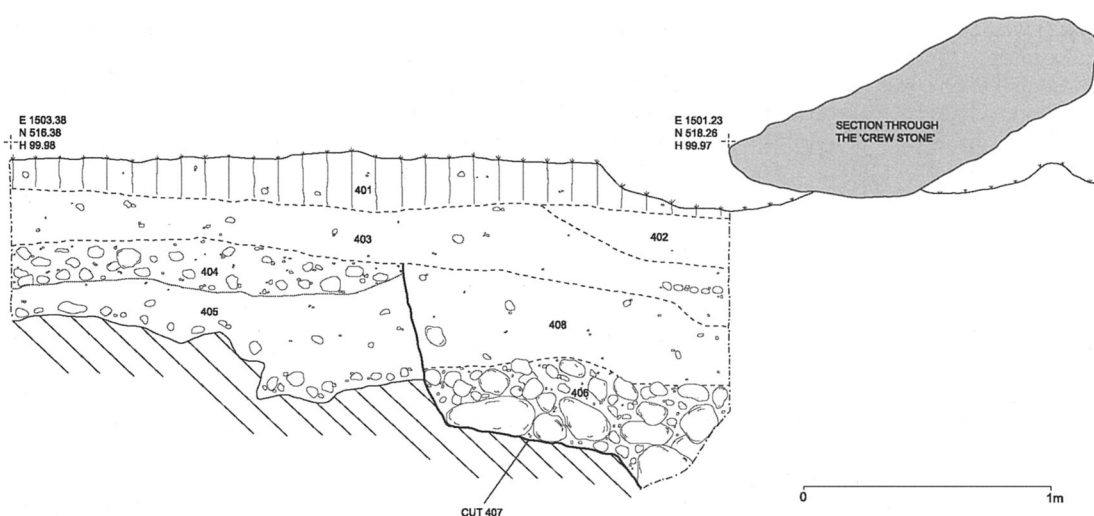


Fig 7 North-east-facing section of Trench 4 and cross-section through the Crew Stone.

In the south-western end of the trench the loam deposit (303) sealed the apparently sole fill (304) of a rock-cut feature (305) which extended beyond the south-western edge of excavation underneath the Crew Stone. The fill (304) consisted of large stones (maximum dimension 0.55m) in a loose soil matrix of mid-brown loam that contained a large number of air voids (Pl 3). The air voids and the near-vertical arrangement of some of the stones suggest that the layer was rapidly deposited, probably in the relatively recent past. The deposit is interpreted as the deliberate backfill of a pit which was excavated from a distance of 1.30m adjacent to, and underneath, the current position of the Crew Stone. The feature itself was cut through the bedrock to a depth of at least 0.5m below the undisturbed surface of the bedrock. No evidence for tool marks was observed within the exposed part of the feature in Trench 3. It was not possible to complete the excavation of the fill (304) as the stones which made up the deposit were too large to safely remove from the trench. Although it was not completely excavated the deposit appeared to be the primary fill of the feature (305). It is reasonable to assume

that the feature (305) and its fill (304) were part of the same pit (105) and its primary fill (107) observed in Trench 1.

Again, a similar stratigraphic sequence to that recorded in Trenches 1 and 3 was uncovered in Trench 4 (Fig 7). Trench 4 was arranged perpendicular to Trenches 1 and 3, extending in a south-easterly direction from the Crew Stone on a north-west/south-east alignment. The trench was 3.0m long and 1.0m wide. Underlying the humic topsoil (401), which extended throughout the trench, was a localised deposit of thin, compacted soil (402; maximum thickness 0.1m) whose distribution broadly coincided with the erosional discontinuity caused by cattle trample immediately adjacent to the Crew Stone. Stratigraphically underlying the localised deposit of compacted soil

Pl 3 Primary fill of large stones within a loose soil matrix of mid-brown loam (304) of cut feature (305) prior to excavation in south-western end of Trench 3 (looking north-west). A number of the air voids that defined the deposit are visible. Scale 2m.



(402) was a mid-brown loam cultivation soil (403; maximum thickness 0.3m) that extended throughout the trench. As in the comparable deposit in Trench 3 (ie 303), a concentration of small to medium sized stones within the loam, which appeared to have been deliberately laid down to counteract the effects of erosion, was located immediately adjacent to the Crew Stone. Excavation of the cultivation soil (403) exposed the upper fill (408) of a feature (407) that was located in the north-western part of the trench adjacent to the Crew Stone and cut through a sequence of loamy orange-brown subsoils (404, 405). The primary fill (406; maximum excavated depth 0.42m) of the feature consisted of medium sized stones (maximum dimension 0.35m) in a loose soil matrix of mid-brown loam that contained a large number of air voids. Again, the air voids and the near-vertical arrangement of some of the stones are consistent with the layer being rapidly deposited in the relatively recent past. Although cut through a sequence of loamy subsoils (404, 405), which were not present in the other two trenches (ie Trenches 1 and 3), the lower part of the feature was cut through the bedrock and extended beyond the north-western edge of excavation and passed underneath the Crew Stone. As with the comparable deposits in Trenches 1 and 3 (ie 107, 304) the lower fill is interpreted as the deliberate backfill of a pit which was excavated from a distance of approximately 1.30m adjacent to, and underneath, the current position of the Crew Stone. The loamy orange-brown subsoils (404, 405; maximum depth 0.6m) through which the pit (407) was cut were in part derived from the more organic overlying soil (403) and the weathered, near-horizontal surface of the underlying bedrock.

It is reasonable to assume that the negative features (105, 305, 407) partially excavated in all three trenches were all part of a single pit that extended below the current position of the Crew Stone. The character of the primary fills (107, 304, 406) suggested that it was deliberately backfilled, presumably with stone derived from cutting the feature through the bedrock. The relatively recent date of the feature was confirmed by the *terminus post quem* provided by the recovery of two sherds of 17th- or 18th-century pottery from the primary fill (304, 406) (Cormac McSparron, pers comm). The broken blade of an iron reaping hook, apparently deliberately placed in a near-horizontal position, was also recovered from within the primary fill (406) of the pit. Establishing the original dimensions and extent of the pit is difficult, but given the alignment of the edges in each of the trenches it appears to have been circular or elliptical. The Crew Stone was located physically

above the feature, in an off-centre position (Fig 5). Considerable effort would have been required to excavate the pit through the bedrock, only for it to be deliberately backfilled prior to the opportunity for any natural silting to apparently occur in its base. This suggests that the pit was possibly dug by people hunting for some type of treasure deposited beneath the Crew Stone. There is no other obvious reason for going to the trouble of digging such a pit through the bedrock only to apparently backfill it immediately afterwards. That the Crew Stone is physically located above the feature, and in an off-centre position, suggests that it is no longer in its exact original location. Presumably, the pit was dug in at least two parts and the Crew Stone was levered out of its original position, possibly slightly to the east of its current location, after the first part of the pit had been backfilled, in order to safely excavate beneath its former position. It may be this act of levering the Crew Stone to one side that Watson was referring to when he stated that the stone was no longer in its original position (1892, 52). Consequently, it may have been the settling of the pit's loose, primary fill (107, 304, 406) which caused the subsidence that prompted the local youths to raise the Crew Stone in 1880 (McKavanagh 1968, 8). Regrettably, the digging of the pit (105, 305, 407) would have destroyed any earlier archaeological layers or features associated with the Crew Stone that may have provided an insight into its use for either inauguration or other purposes.

GEOPHYSICAL ANOMALIES (Site A: Trenches 5, 6)

In 2004 GeoQuest Associates carried out a magnetometry survey of part of the summit of Crew Hill on behalf of the then EHS (Noel 2004). Unfortunately, the results of the magnetometry survey were disappointing. Magnetometry can be a difficult technique to apply over areas of igneous geology and subsoils of glacial origin which contain igneous erratics. Owing to the thermo-remnant magnetism of igneous rocks, these kind of geological conditions tend to produce survey results with 'noisy' background signals which dominate and obscure anomalies whose origins are of archaeological significance (Clark 1996, 92–4; Gaffney *et al* 2002, 8, 16; Gaffney & Gater 2003, 79). Prior to excavation it was considered probable that the anomalies detected in the 2004 survey were a product of the thermo-remnant magnetism of the underlying igneous rocks, rather than a reflection of any underlying archaeological features. Consequently, it was decided to select only two of the linear anomalies (f4 and f5; Noel 2004, fig 4;

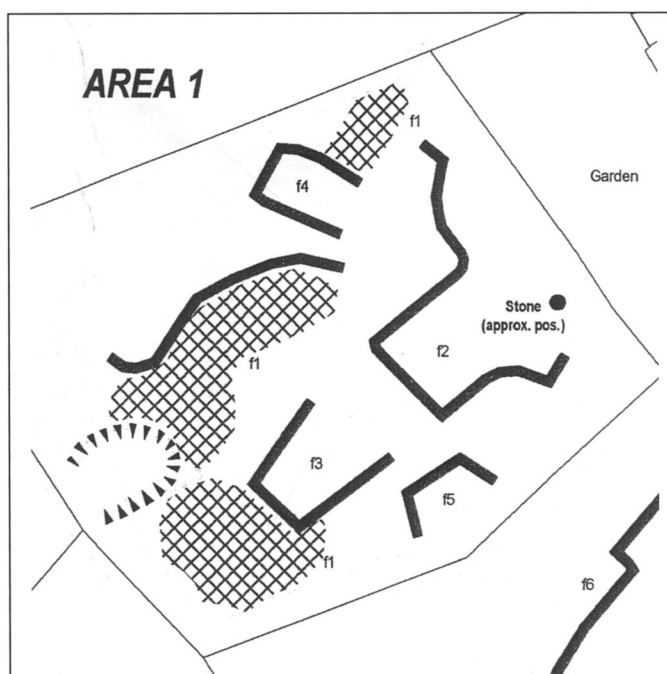


Fig 8 Results of magnetometry survey of part of the summit of Crew Hill (after Noel 2004).

see Fig 8) identified in the magnetometry survey for excavation. These anomalies were investigated using two separate trenches (Trenches 5, 6) which were aligned perpendicular to the direction of the anomaly. Excavation demonstrated that the anomalies were indeed the product of variations in the underlying geology rather than archaeological in origin. Although resistivity may prove to be a better geophysical technique to apply to the site and its immediate environs, given both the close proximity of the bedrock to the ground surface on Crew Hill and the bedrock's probable uneven surface, it is unlikely that a resistivity survey would produce particularly valuable results.

Trench 5 was laid out perpendicular to geophysical anomaly f4 (Noel 2004, fig 4). The trench was aligned approximately north/south and was 5.0m long and 1.0m wide. Removal of the humic topsoil (501; average depth 0.15m) revealed a mid-brown loam deposit (502) that extended throughout the length of the trench. This loam deposit was interpreted as a cultivation soil and excavation revealed that in the southern part of the trench it directly overlay the near-horizontal surface of the bedrock, whilst in the northern part of the trench it overlay a loose, orangey natural subsoil (503) which was derived from the weathered surface of the underlying bedrock. Excavation of this subsoil demonstrated that the surface of the

bedrock dipped down approximately 0.45m through a series of step-like graduations in the northern part of the trench (Fig 9). It is probable that it was this marked change in the level of the bedrock's natural surface which caused the geophysical anomaly (f4) recorded by Noel in 2004.

Trench 6 was laid out perpendicular to geophysical anomaly f5 (Noel 2004, fig 4). The trench was 3.0m long by 1.0m wide and was laid out on an approximate south-east/north-west alignment. Removal of the humic topsoil (601; depth 0.15m) revealed the top of a bedrock ridge running across the trench on a nearly south-west/north-east alignment which separated two areas of a mid-brown loam (602 in the south-east of the trench and 603 in the north-west) that probably represented a cultivation soil. These areas of cultivation soil varied in depth (both had an average thickness of 0.10m), but both overlay a sterile, loose, orangey natural subsoil (604 in the south-east of the trench and 605 in the north-west)

which was derived from the weathered surface of the underlying bedrock. Excavation of the natural subsoils in a sondage placed against the south-western edge of the trench further exposed the bedrock ridge, demonstrating that it formed a significant feature. The bedrock ridge was about 1m wide and was raised, through a series of natural step-like graduations on its south-eastern side, at least 0.5m above the height of the surrounding bedrock. It is reasonable to assume that this natural ridge in the bedrock was the cause of the anomaly (f5) in the magnetometry survey.

FIELD QUARRY

(Site A: Trenches 7, 8)

O'Lavery recorded that 'on the summit of the hill a few stone-lined graves belonging to the Pagan period have been discovered' (1880, 295) (SMR ANT 063:057). No evidence survives on the summit of the hill to indicate where the burials were located, and it is uncertain whether they were associated with a mound or formed part of a flat cemetery (FitzPatrick 2004, 38). Apart from not being associated with a known Christian site or cemetery, it is not clear why O'Lavery identified the burials as pagan — stone-lined graves of early Christian date are not uncommon in Co Antrim. It is possible that the burials may have come to light during either cultivation or during the quarrying

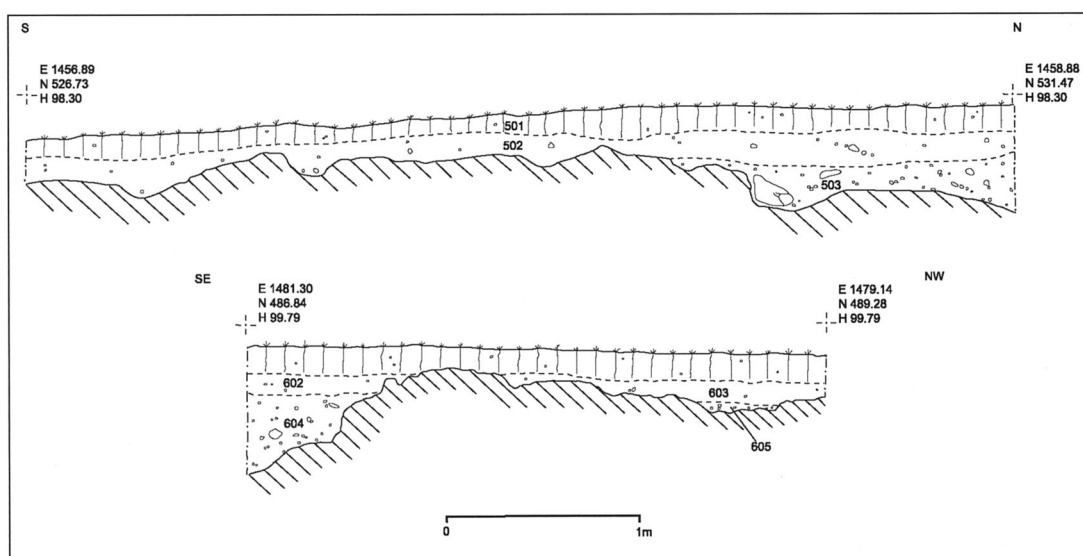


Fig 9 East-facing section of Trench 5 (above) and north-east-facing section of Trench 6 (below).

activity represented by the small, relict quarry at the western end of the field containing the Crew Stone (IGR J182703). The latter possibility was first noted by Claire Foley in 1978 (information derived from the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) SM7 File ANT 063:57) and reiterated by FitzPatrick (2004, 38). This relict field quarry is marked as a 'quarry' on the first edition Ordnance Survey 6" map (surveyed 1832, engraved 1833); however, that it is not featured on the revised 6" survey of 1859 suggests that it had been abandoned some time before the late 1850s. At the request of the landowner, a small trench (Trench 7) was excavated near the base of the field quarry. It was considered that excavation of the undisturbed edge of the quarry on the summit of the hill might uncover evidence of further, undisturbed burials. Consequently, a second trench was excavated on the southern edge of the field quarry (Trench 8). Neither of the trenches contained any deposits, features or finds of archaeological significance, and the precise location of the cist burials recorded by O'Lavery remains unknown.

Trench 7 was located near the base of the field quarry at the western end of the small field in which the Crew Stone is located. The trench was 1.5m square with its corners approximately aligned on the cardinal points. The poached surface of the dark brown humic topsoil (701; depth 0.10m) overlay a compact grey loam deposit (702; thickness 0.03 – 0.08m) that extended throughout the trench. This deposit in turn overlay a compact orangey brown loam (703; thickness 0.30 – 0.45m) that extended

throughout the trench, increasing in thickness towards the base of the field quarry. The orangey brown loam (703) directly overlay the quarried surface of the underlying bedrock. It is probable that the thin grey loam deposit (702) represents the leached surface of the underlying deposit (703). A sherd of blackware pottery of 18th- to 20th-century date and part of a clay pipe from the orangey brown loam (703) indicated that it was a silt of relatively recent date. These finds are consistent with the cartographic evidence, noted above, which suggests that use of the quarry was abandoned by around the middle of the 19th century.

Trench 8 was located on the southern edge of the relict field quarry, was 3.0m long and 1.0m wide and was laid out on a south-west/north-east alignment. Underlying the humic topsoil (801; maximum depth 0.15m) was a thin mid-brown loam (802; maximum thickness 0.10m) that extended throughout the trench and was interspersed with exposures of the underlying bedrock. The loam (802), which probably represents a cultivation soil, was removed to reveal an uneven bedrock surface. No archaeological features, associated with burial or otherwise, were present beneath the cultivation soil.

THE STONE 'CHAIR'

Local tradition maintains that a stone 'chair', consisting of a large monolith with a rough depression and now located in a ditch beside the Crew Road on the south-eastern slopes of the hill (SMR ANT 063:058; IGR J18536973), was

originally associated with the site (Flanagan 1970, 31) (Pl 4). The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) record on the monument (SM7 File ANT 063:058) states that following receipt of a request to remove the stone in November 1969, it was moved, under supervision, to its current location in January 1970. Although the file does not record precisely where the ‘chair’ was located prior to its removal, local informants suggest that it was not moved more than a couple of metres in 1970.⁴ For how long the ‘chair’ had been located by the side of the Crew Road, and whether it was originally associated with the summit of Crew Hill, is uncertain. O’Lavery did not explicitly mention the ‘chair’ in his account of Crew Hill (1880, 294–5) suggesting that the stone was not located on the summit of the hill in his day. FitzPatrick claims that the chair-shaped stone was originally situated on the ‘southeast downslope’ of Crew Hill (2004, 38), however, her authority for this assertion is not obvious. The compiler of the NIEA SM7 File suggested that O’Lavery’s references to the great stone on Crew Hill (1880, 295), usually taken to be the glacial erratic known as the Crew Stone, could actually be a reference to the chair-shaped stone, although this is unlikely. An old woman who formerly lived near Crew Hill recounted the story ‘that in the last battle fought there, the Ulidians were defeated and as the victors were taking the chair away they were surprised by another force and dropped it at the place where it remains today’ (Totten 1980, 31). This is apparently consistent with the tradition recorded by Flanagan that the ‘chair’ had been moved a little from its original site (1970, 31).

The tradition and original location of the stone ‘chair’ is relevant because during the medieval period crude stone chairs were an element of some Irish inauguration rites (Hayes-McCoy 1964, 8; Warner 1991, 41). A review of the evidence for inauguration ‘chairs’ in north-east Ireland and beyond suggests a frequent association with low mounds or earthen platforms (FitzPatrick 2004, 137–72). Chair-shaped rocks, both natural and modified, are more usually associated with the installation of ecclesiastics and poets, as well as judges and Otherworld figures, than with kings (FitzPatrick 2004, 132–7). The realisation

of the concept of a seat or throne as a symbol of power and sovereignty in Ireland, and in particular the open-air ceremonial throne, may be a relatively late development (*ibid*, 137–8). It is not obvious whether this apparent late date is genuine, or simply a product of the lack of detailed early historic references and the growing interest in, and concomitant recording of, Gaelic practices by the Tudor authorities in the second half of the 16th century. Interestingly, there are more alleged ‘coronation’ chairs in Ulster than any other part of Ireland (*ibid*, 138–9). FitzPatrick has suggested that the apparent replacement of an inauguration rite involving standing on a *leac* with one involving sitting on a ‘chair’, albeit one potentially incorporating a *leac*, combined with the northern bias in their distribution, may reflect a renaissance of kingship in Ulster based on the late medieval European model of the enthroned king. She plausibly suggests that the catalyst for this development, apparently first witnessed at Tullaghoge, Co Tyrone, might have been the vigorous pursuit of a kingship of all Ulster by successive O’Neill kings from the 14th century onwards (*ibid*, 154). If FitzPatrick’s suggestion is correct, and the stone ‘chair’ currently located on the Crew Road was associated with inauguration, then inauguration may have continued to take place at Crew Hill for a significant period after the last historical reference to the site as a royal centre in 1149 (O’Donovan 1856, 1086–87). Potential candidates for this speculative late use of the site for the purposes of inauguration would include Mac Duinnshléibe under the Anglo-Norman earls of Ulster and the Clann Áedha Bhuidhe (ie Clandeboy O’Neills) (Kay Muhr, pers comm).



Pl 4 The stone ‘chair’ (looking south-west).

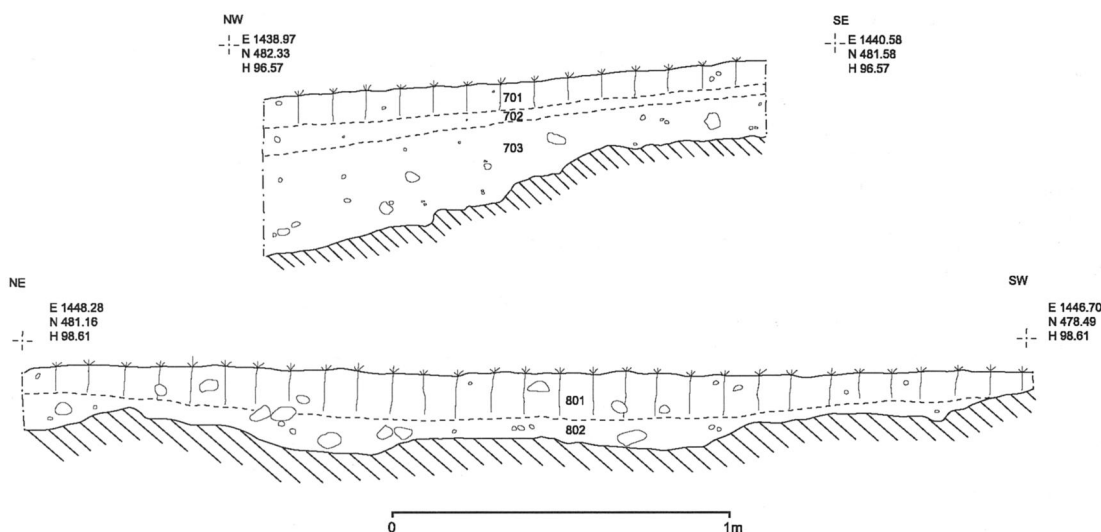


Fig 10 North-east-facing section of Trench 7 (above) and north-west-facing section of Trench 8 (below).

THE BIVALLATE RATH

On the southern slope of Crew Hill is a bivallate rath (SMR ANT 063:020; IGR J18297004), which is known locally as the Forth (Flanagan 1970, 31). Flanagan recorded that in 1970 the tree-lined rath was well preserved (1970, 31); however, today its form and state of preservation are difficult to assess as it is overgrown with near-impenetrable gorse. Multivallate ringforts are typically associated with high-status sites, and where they occur elsewhere in close proximity to places of assembly and inauguration, such as the trivallate ringfort or enclosure called the Rath of the Synods at Tara, Co Meath, or the 'O'Hagan rath' at Tullyhogue, Co Tyrone, they have been identified as the residences of the keepers or caretakers of the inauguration site (Warner 1988, 57; Ó Néill 1988, 36; see also Warner 1991, 41). The hereditary stewardship or guardianship of inauguration sites was a position of considerable prestige in medieval Irish society (FitzPatrick 2004, 141). The presence of a bivallate rath on the slopes of Crew Hill is consistent with there being an inauguration site in the vicinity; however, given the large number of multivallate raths in Ireland, it is far from being definitive proof of Crew Hill's status as a place of inauguration.

THE SECOND QUARRY / THE MOUND (Site B: Trench 9)

Located on the southern slopes of Crew Hill, approximately 180m to the south of the Crew Stone (SMR ANT 063:057) and approximately 190m to the north-west of a bivallate rath (SMR ANT 063:020), is a feature that is recorded (SMR ANT

063:101) as a circular enclosure which surrounds a mound and which has previously been identified as potentially being associated with inauguration rites. Identified as a suitable site for investigation, excavation demonstrated that it was a quarry of probably 18th- or early 19th-century date.

Today, the site consists of a low, flat-topped, oval mound (maximum height approximately 1.5m; maximum length approximately 15m), aligned approximately south-west/north-east, which is set within a fan-shaped area of level ground (approximately 45m by 35m) (located at IGR J18237017). The area of level ground is partly encircled to the north and east by an artificial, curved scarp slope (which extends from a maximum (estimated) height of 2.5m at its western end to a height of less than 0.1m at its eastern end). The site is marked as a quarry on the first edition Ordnance Survey 6" map (surveyed 1832, engraved 1833). A 'ramp', bordered on one side by a large thorn tree, forms a route of access down the scarp slope and into the northern part of the quarry's base. The scarp slope is bordered by a curving track whose far side is delimited by a wire fence. To the west and south the area of level ground surrounding the mound is bordered by field boundaries that are first depicted on the 1933 edition of the Ordnance Survey 6" map. A farmyard (marked on the first edition 6" map) lies immediately beyond the western field boundary. The area of level ground was planted around 2000 with a relatively dense covering of young trees, although the mound and the area immediately around it have not been disturbed by planting. The site is presently home to a colony of rabbits.

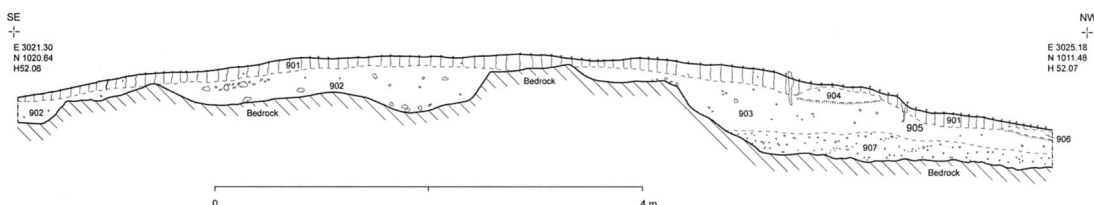


Fig 11 North-east-facing section of Trench 9.

Past study of an aerial photograph (Ordnance Survey H46A/29926–29927 [14.4.62]; not available to the author) suggested that the quarry may have been enclosed by a bank with openings to the north, east and west through which farm tracks ran (information derived from SMR SM7 File ANT 063:101). Although slight traces of a small length of earthen bank, which follows the line of a field division marked on the Ordnance Survey's third edition 6" map (1933), remain on the north-eastern edge of the site, no evidence for a bank which encloses the whole of the quarry survives to the present day. It is possible that the 'enclosure' recorded in the 1962 aerial photograph was destroyed during landscaping associated with the recent plantation of the site. As noted above, the feature is marked on the first edition Ordnance Survey 6" map (surveyed 1832, engraved 1833) as a quarry which appears to be conjoined with the adjacent farmyard. The second edition 6" map (1857) represents the feature as a small, irregular field or paddock planted with trees on its western side. The planted trees suggest that the quarry was no longer active by the mid-19th century. Only the feature's scarped western and northern edges are represented on the third edition 6" map (1933), which depicts it located at the western end of a rectangular field whose longest axis is aligned north-west/south-east.

The landowner, whose family have owned the site since the mid-19th century, has always understood the site to be a quarry, the stone from which was used, in part, to build the adjacent farm buildings (Frank McCorry, pers comm). This tradition is consistent with the annotation on the first edition Ordnance Survey 6" map and was confirmed by the results of the excavation. Although local tradition and the cartographic evidence indicated the site was probably a quarry, prior to excavation it was considered that the presence of a substantial mound within the feature, and the level character of the ground which immediately surrounded the mound, were not characteristics typical of a relict field quarry. Two authors had previously identified the central mound

of the feature as being associated with the inauguration rites at Crew Hill (Totten 1980, 30; FitzPatrick 2004, 38). FitzPatrick's identification of the mound as being 'the most significant monument on Crew Hill' was partly based on her appreciation that the place-name element *tulach* might signify the presence of an assembly mound in the immediate vicinity (2004, 38), although the place-name element almost certainly refers to the hill itself (Kay Muhr, pers comm). The mound is incorrectly recorded as having been destroyed in the Northern Ireland SMR and was apparently not visited by FitzPatrick, who presumably based her assessment on the contents of the site's SM7 file held by the NIEA. Although both local tradition and cartographic evidence suggested that the site was a quarry, given its identification as a potentially significant monument within the inaugural landscape of Crew Hill and the on-going threat to the site's integrity by rabbit disturbance and the plantation, limited archaeological investigation of the site was considered merited. In the event excavation of a single trench (Trench 9) demonstrated that the mound was almost certainly an area of relatively undisturbed ground within a relict field quarry.

Trench 9 was aligned approximately north-west/south-east and was 1.5m wide and 9.8m long. It was situated across the north-eastern end of the mound perpendicular to its long axis (Fig 3). The south-eastern end of the trench was located on the summit of the mound, whilst the north-western end of the trench extended beyond its base. Underlying the humic topsoil (901; maximum depth 0.15m) was a complex of deposits as well as two discrete exposures of the underlying bedrock, which demonstrated that the mound was not a cairn or artificially raised feature but formed by a block of upstanding bedrock. The most recent deposits sealed by the topsoil (901) were two localised layers of redeposited light grey clay (904 and 906) located in the north-western part of the trench and a small deposit of redeposited clay (908) at the south-eastern end of the trench. Of the two deposits (904 and 906) located on the slope of the mound in the

north-western part of the trench, one contained part of a brick (906) and both contained fragments of clay pigeon and sealed traces of a remarkably well preserved old turf-line. The presence of the clay pigeon fragments, the brick fragment and the preservation of a relict turf line, indicates that these were deposits of relatively recent date. The deposit of clay at the south-eastern end of the trench (908) was small in extent (dimensions 0.35m x 0.40m, thickness 0.08m) although it extended beyond the south-eastern edge of excavation. No artefacts were recovered from this small area of exposed clay (908). The deposits of clay are interpreted as dating to the episode of landscaping which immediately preceded the planting of the trees at the site around 2000 (Frank McCorry, pers comm). One of the patches of redeposited clay (904) had a maximum depth of 0.19m and extended across the trench on an approximately east/west alignment in a band, approximately 0.40m wide, located between 1.6m and 5.4m from the north-western end of the trench. The second spread of redeposited clay (906) was located in the north-westernmost metre of the trench, again on an approximately east/west alignment and had a maximum depth of 0.10m.

One of the two bedrock exposures, revealed by the excavation of the topsoil (901) and located towards the centre of the trench, separated two identical deposits of mid-brown gritty loam (902 in the south-eastern part of the trench and 903/905 in the north-western part of the trench). These deposits formed part of the soil profile overlying the upstanding ridge of bedrock which forms the mound and the adjoining base of the quarry. On the summit of the mound they directly overlay the uneven surface of the bedrock and had a maximum thickness of 0.45m. The bedrock face of the mound had an artificial, stepped character formed by drops of up to 0.3m in depth. On the mound's north-western slope excavation of the gritty loam exposed the quarried edge of the bedrock and in the north-western most 3.0m of the trench a deposit of gravelly silt (907) with inclusions of local stone chippings apparently derived from quarrying activity. The lack of humic material in this deposit suggests that it had accumulated relatively rapidly in the base of the quarry soon after it was abandoned as a site of extraction. Excavation demonstrated that the deposit had a maximum depth of 0.25m and overlay the horizontal quarried surface of the bedrock.

Directly dating the quarrying activity that formed the mound is problematic; stratigraphically the extraction of stone was only represented by the discontinuity represented by the quarried surface of the bedrock. However, given that the deposit of

gravel-rich silt (907), which directly overlay the quarry base and had accumulated against the quarried face of the bedrock, was probably nearly contemporary with the abandonment of quarrying at the site, then any artefactual material recovered from the deposit would provide an approximate indication of the quarry's date. A 100% sieving strategy resulted in the recovery of a relatively thick body sherd of red earthenware decorated with a light coloured slip underneath a yellowish glaze. Although not closely datable, this sherd of post-medieval pottery is consistent with the approximate late 18th- or early 19th-century date suggested by the cartographic evidence for the quarry's abandonment.

Combined, the cartographic evidence and the sherd of post-medieval pottery recovered from the gravel-rich silt (907) at the base of the quarry both suggest that the mound should not be considered a feature which forms part of the inaugural landscape of Crew Hill (*pace* Totten 1980, 30; FitzPatrick 2004, 38). The mound is almost certainly the product of differential quarrying at the site prior to the middle of the 19th century. Why an area should be left upstanding to create a mound within a field quarry is not clear, although two possibilities suggest themselves. The exposed surface of the bedrock within Trench 9 showed no evidence for tool marks, although the stepped character of the bedrock surface which formed the mound edge appears artificial. The exposed surface of the bedrock on the summit of the mound appeared flat and may have been subject to a limited degree of quarrying which was abandoned due to the poor qualities of the rock in this one area, which then led to the creation of the mound. Another potential explanation, based purely on cartographic evidence, is that the mound is the result of piecemeal development of the field quarry. Study of the 1933 Ordnance Survey 6" map suggests that the quarry and adjacent farmyard may have been superimposed over a junction of pre-existing field boundaries. The north-western scarped edge of the mound respects the line of one of the lost field boundaries. If the quarry was developed episodically then the mound may be a product of the piecemeal development of the quarry which respected the pre-existing field boundaries. Piecemeal development that respected no longer extant field boundaries, initially to the west and then the north of the mound, could have led to the creation of the raised feature within the base of the quarry.

DISCUSSION: TOWARDS AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF INAUGURATION

The evaluation of the different strands of evidence has significantly refined our appreciation of the inaugural landscape of Crew Hill, but has not provided any additional insights into our understanding of the site. To summarise, the historical and literary evidence indicates that Cráeb Telcha was a place of Royal assembly which was probably used for the purposes of inauguration, and Flanagan's analysis of the place-name evidence demonstrates that the historical Cráeb Telcha and modern-day Crew Hill are one and the same (Flanagan 1970). The elements of the place-name which indicate that the site was associated with a sacred tree and possibly a mound are consistent with it being used for the purposes of inauguration, although they do not prove it. The presence of the Crew Stone, stone 'chair' and a bivallate rath on either the summit or the slopes of Crew Hill are also all consistent with, but not definitive proof of, the use of the site for inauguration.

The excavation element of the evaluation has demonstrated that the archaeological identification of elements of an inaugural landscape can be a problematic exercise. Technically, the excavations were successful; closely datable artefacts from diagnostic contexts were recovered from relatively small trenches enabling a detailed understanding of the stratigraphic sequences on Crew Hill to be confidently produced. Historically, however, the results were disappointing in that no fresh insights were gained into the character of Crew Hill as a place of royal assembly and probable inauguration. Excavation around the Crew Stone confirmed the accuracy of Warner's observation that the stone 'has been much dug around' (1991, 40). The level of disturbance within the erratic's immediate environs was considerable; evidence of both the historically attested 19th-century re-setting of the stone and an earlier episode of destructive treasure-hunting was recovered. If any archaeological levels or features associated with the use of the stone for inauguration or other purposes had survived, these would have been destroyed in the act of digging the treasure-hunter's pit. No evidence was retrieved to cast any light on the use, or otherwise, of the stone during inauguration rites. Another example of the negative character of the excavated evidence is that the site of the mound, previously identified as being a possibly significant element of inaugural rites at Crew Hill, was demonstrated to be the product of relatively recent quarrying. Although this demonstrates that Totten's (1980, 30) and FitzPatrick's (2004, 38) identification of the mound as a possible element of the inaugural landscape of

Crew Hill is incorrect, it does not invalidate the identification of Crew Hill as a probable place of inauguration. The evaluative excavations also demonstrated the limited value of geophysical survey for the identification of features associated with inauguration, or other past activity, on Crew Hill. The evaluative mechanical excavation of parts of the summit undertaken by Gahan and Long Ltd, whilst uncovering some negative features cut into the hill's natural subsoil, also proved to be of limited value in identifying elements of the inaugural landscape.

The archaeological evaluation of Crew Hill can be considered a failure in as much as it was not possible to verify whether or not Crew Hill was a place of inauguration. As was recognised prior to the exercise, developing an archaeological methodology for addressing medieval Irish inauguration is difficult. The negative result of the Crew Hill evaluation is particularly disappointing as the site had already been identified as a probable site of inauguration on the strength of the available historic and place-name evidence. The scope for developing an archaeological approach to inauguration, or at least historically attested inauguration sites, appears to be limited. Although it is possible to add to our appreciation of known inauguration sites using archaeological methods, it would appear, at least from the results of the investigations at Crew Hill, not to be possible to demonstrate archaeologically whether a site identified on historical grounds as probably being used for inauguration, was definitely an inauguration site or not. Identifying inauguration sites which are not historically attested, even as places of assembly that may have been used for inauguration, presents an even more considerable challenge; however, FitzPatrick's view that identifying such sites on appearance alone is 'almost impossible' (2004, xiii) is perhaps overly dismissive of the potential of an archaeologically-led approach to supplement her corpus of closely located, known and probable inauguration sites. Although future excavation and survey of definite and probable inauguration sites will help to refine our appreciation of the archaeological 'signature' of medieval Irish inauguration, arguably the greatest potential that an archaeologically-led approach could provide is in the recognition of those inauguration sites that are not referred to in historical sources. Although the evidential basis upon which such an approach will be judged will be the less certain basis of archaeology, rather than the apparent absolutism of history, the challenge for archaeologists now is to develop a method, drawing upon the available cartographic, place-name and

folkloric evidence, to identify hitherto unrecognised places of inauguration within the Irish landscape.

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NOTES

- 1 All site records and finds are temporarily archived with the School of Geography, Archaeology & Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast.
- 2 Kay Muhr has kindly pointed out to the author that while this is true the *tulach/tilach* element is frequently used in place-names because the hill makes a good landmark or is inhabitable.
- 3 The version of the life of Máedóc of Ferns cited by FitzPatrick probably dates to the late 16th century (Gillespie 2004, 149–52). The section of the text relating to the inauguration of the king of Bréifne does not feature in either the earlier, Irish life of Máedóc (Plummer 1922 i, 183–89; ii, 177–83), or any of the early Latin versions of the saint's life (for full bibliographical references see Doherty 1987, 13), and has been plausibly identified as a late insertion intended to boost the prestige of one of the erenagh families of Máedóc's churches (Doherty 1986, 367). The date and origin of this inserted material is unknown.
- 4 The author is grateful to those members of the Killultagh Historical Society who discussed this point with him following a lecture he gave in March 2009 on the excavations at Crew Hill.

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