

Conference Report: Early Medieval Settlements in North-West Europe, AD 400-1100

Michael Rienti, Jr., Jennifer Shaffer Foster and Kathryn Whalen

The conference *Early Medieval Settlements in North-West Europe, AD 400-1100* took place from 26 to 28 November 2010 in the Clinton Auditorium on the Belfield Campus of University College Dublin (UCD). Organized by the INSTAR Early Medieval Archaeology Project (EMAP), this international event brought together academics from across Northern Europe and the United States to explore and discuss the current state of settlement archaeology with a focus on the Early Medieval Period in the British Isles.

The majority of the twenty lectures focused on Ireland; however, there were also several talks discussing research in Scotland and Anglo-Saxon England, as well as one presentation discussing early medieval settlement archaeology in Wales. Three of the lectures emphasized research on the Viking Period (8th-12th centuries) in each of these areas, including the first ever publication regarding the recently discovered and excavated Viking *longphort* of Linn Duachail at Annagasson, County Louth given by Eamonn P. Kelly, Keeper of Irish Antiquities at the National Museum of Ireland.

Within the eight sessions of the conference, three broader topics permeated the lectures. On the first full day of the conference there was an emphasis on the construction, development and change of Early Medieval Settlements. One of the more intriguing talks of the first day was that of Dr. Simon Gilmour, which suggested a possible link between the peoples of what are now Western Scotland and Eastern Ireland based on settlement patterns and construction. Although close relations between these two geographic areas have long been suggested for the entirety of prehistory, Gilmour presented new evidence that lent additional credence to this theory. The second day's presentations were dominated by religion, with the vast majority of the lectures describing archaeological and historical research on early medieval ecclesiastical settlements and burials. A secondary theme of the day was Viking *longphorts* in Ireland, both the aforementioned *longphort* at Annagasson and the Viking settlements in Dublin, famously uncovered in the 1960s at the Wood Quay site, and periodically investigated along the River Liffey in years since.

Irish archaeology is relatively new to the table of Anglo-American theoretical perspectives, and the desire to break from past cultural-historical models of research and analysis was evident at this conference.

Many of the presenters emphasized that over the last decade, archaeologists have made considerable progress in moving beyond many older, general and universally applied beliefs regarding Early Medieval settlements. This trend was further encouraged by Martin Carver, researcher at Sutton Hoo, who ended his lecture with a call for increased emphasis on understanding Early Medieval settlements within their broader spatial and temporal contexts.

On the whole, the conference was both enjoyable and very informative, with both a large amount of overview of Early Medieval settlements that could be helpful for beginning graduate students planning on working in this region; as well as some specific and detailed case studies that might aid a more advanced student in the process of focusing their research. Two excellent resources now available to students are the lecture of Lorcan Harney and Thom Kerr, which provides a detailed historiography of ecclesiastical investigations in Ireland since 1920, and the publications of EMAP, which over the last several years has assembled an immense bibliography of articles and site reports of many Early Medieval investigations.

Presenters and Topics

Chris Loveluck, University of Nottingham

Keynote Lecture

Early medieval north-west Europe: settlements, behavioural settings and social identity, AD 600-1100.

Finbar McCormick, Queens University Belfast

Aidan O'Sullivan, University College Dublin

INSTAR Early Medieval Archaeology project (EMAP): Exploring early medieval dwellings and settlements in Ireland.

Simon Gilmour, Society of Antiquaries of Scotland

Early Medieval Settlement across the Atlantic Seaways: contacts, development and change in Scotland, AD 400-900.

Mark Redknap, National Museum of Wales

House and home in early Medieval Wales.

Michelle Comber, National University of Ireland Galway

The Landscape of Early Medieval Settlement as preserved in the Burren region of western Ireland.

Micheál Ó Droma, Freelance Archaeologist

Jonathon Kinsella, EMAP, University College Dublin

Early medieval ringforts and enclosures in Ireland: a case study of the evolution of two enclosure sites in Co. Tipperary.

Sally Foster, University of Glasgow

Editor, *Medieval Archaeology*

Revisiting the residence of Pictish power in early medieval Scotland.

Gareth Davies, University of Nottingham

Early medieval settlement morphologies and material culture: The changing rural elites of Anglo-Saxon Norfolk.

John Barber, AOC Archaeology, Scotland

Anne Crone, AOC Archaeology, Scotland

Early medieval architecture and engineering: the construction of secular and sacred wooden structures.

Helena Hamerow, University of Oxford

The Anglo-Saxon house: form, function and life-cycle.

David Griffiths, University of Oxford

Viking Age buildings, landscape and status – from Orkney to the Irish Sea.

Lorcan Harney, EMAP, University College Dublin

Thomas Kerr, EMAP, Queens University Belfast

Living and working with God: crafts and economy on early medieval church settlements and archaeological excavations in Ireland.

Matthew Seaver, EMAP, University College Dublin

Living with the dead in early medieval Ireland – settlement enclosures with human burials AD 400-1100.

Tomás Ó Carragáin, University College Cork

Early medieval settlement on ecclesiastical estates: The INSTAR Making Christian Landscapes Project.

Martin Carver, University of York, editor *Antiquity*

Early Insular Monasteries and Prehistory – some tentative relationships.

Chris Lowe, Headland Archaeology

Early historic monastic settlements and their use of space: case studies from Hoddom and Inchmark.

Gabor Thomas, University of Reading

Settlement Dynamics and Monastic Foundation in pre-Viking England: New Perspectives from Excavations at Lyminge, Kent.

Paul Stevens, Valerie J Keely, Ltd.

Excavation and experimental archaeology at an early medieval monastic site at Clonfad, Co. Westmeath.

Rob O'Hara, Archer Heritage, Ltd.

Digging through the Celtic Tiger boom archaeological excavations of early medieval settlements in Co. Meath Ireland.

Eamonn P. Kelly, National Museum of Ireland

Viking longhorts in Ireland and the recent discovery and archaeological excavation of the longhort of Linn Duachail, in Co. Louth.

Linzi Simpson, Margaret Gowen & Co., Ltd.

The Viking longhort at Dublin: insights from recent discoveries.