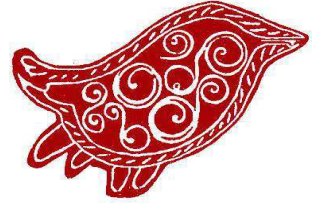


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Note on a Logboat from Comeenatrush Lough, Curragh townland near Millstreet, Co. Cork

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Ill. 1. Boat removed from lake

INTRODUCTION

A logboat (Ill. 1) was uncovered¹ in 1992 during landscaping works around Comeenatrush Lough, *c.* 5 km south-west of Millstreet. The lake is located on the north-facing slopes of the Derrynasaggart Mountain range and is surrounded by steep hills, except on the north side. The Comeenatrush River flows northeast-

wards, cascades into the lake and onwards to the Finnow River, which is a tributary of the Blackwater River.

The landscaping included dredging the lake shore, and a mechanical excavator removed the logboat. The find was reported to the Dept of Archaeology, UCC, following which the author inspected the site. The boat was infilled with lacustrine

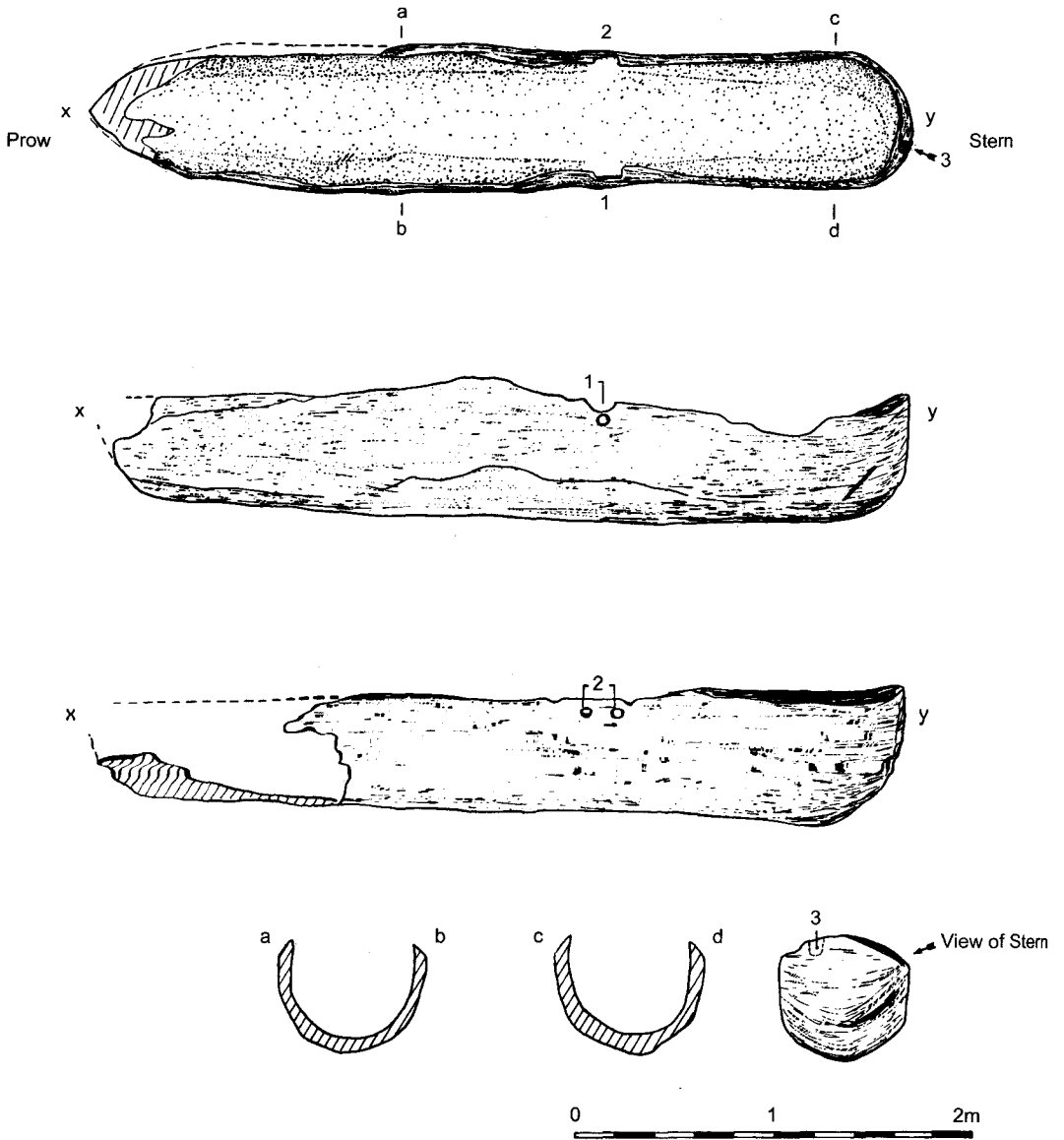


Fig. 1. Plan, elevations and sectional profiles of boat



Ill. 2. Infill cleared from boat

mud. This was removed from the interior and a plan and profile of the boat were recorded. The boat was fresh out of the water, and the measurements were taken prior to any shrinkage or distortion of the timber. The vessel was thereafter replaced in the lake in order to preserve the timber.

DESCRIPTION

The boat is 4.15 m long, 0.80 m wide and 0.75 m high (Fig. 1; Ills 1 and 2). The vessel wall thickness varies from *c.* 0.10-0.20 m, being thickest towards the prow and stern. The boat is hollowed out from an oak trunk. The stern is well preserved and the prow is damaged. This damage may have occurred in antiquity when the boat was in use and be due to mechanical

wear when the boat was pulled ashore. The profile is rounded, both internally and externally (Fig. 1: a-b; b-c).

The boat has two recesses in the internal frame and both are located diametrically opposed, at 1.45 m from the stern. These recesses are cut into the side walls and at depths of 50-60 mm. Perforations through the vessel wall have been drilled at the location of the recesses. The holes are 30-40 mm in diameter (Ill. 3). A single perforation occurs on the port side of the boat, and a double perforation is located on the opposite or starboard side. These holes may be the location of a thwart or bench, which extended across the boat for the paddler. The bench was probably secured in place by dowels fixed into



Ill. 3. Dowel holes for securing bench?

these holes or lashed onto the boat sides with rope, although there is no evidence of wear in the holes to suggest that rope was run through them. A third hole exists on the boat stern. This is off-centre, towards the port side. It is drilled into the timber to a depth of 50 mm. Its function is obscure (see McGrail, below), but it appears to have been a deliberate perforation rather than a distortion of the timber or the location of a knot, which had fallen out from the timber.

There are some marks and facets on the external sides of the boat, which may have been made during the manufacturing stage by an adze or axe used to dress the timber.

DISCUSSION

The boat from Comeenatrush Lough is a dugout canoe and powered by paddle. McGrail (1987) details the method of

manufacture of this type of boat and the boat was hollowed from either a single oak trunk or from a split log. The vessel was formed by reduction of the timber to the required shape. This example was fitted with a bench for the paddler.

The boat was recovered beside a small lake. The outflow from this lake is not particularly deep, but was probably of sufficient depth to allow the canoeist to paddle the boat downstream towards the Blackwater River.

The logboat is one of five known from the Cork area. Other examples have been recorded in the townlands of Pembroke,² in Mahon; Derreen Lower,³ near Adrigole; Kilbrennan, near Crookstown (Gillman 1897, Anon 1897), and Killalough,⁴ near Glanmire. The Kilbrennan and Killalough examples were associated with *fulachta fiadh* sites and this places them in a Bronze Age time frame.

A C14 date of 1605±35 BP was obtained from a sliver of wood that had become detached from the boat at Comeenatrush Lough. This is calibrated⁵ to two sigma at 393 CAL AD-537 CAL AD, and this places the boat in the late Iron Age/beginnings of the Early Christian period. Settlement evidence for this period in Munster is scarce, and this apparent dearth of material may be a matter of archaeological visibility rather than an absence of population. Enclosed settlements or ringforts are clearly visible in the landscape, but the construction of ringforts is a later phenomenon. Unenclosed settlements are difficult to locate except where there is large-scale ground disturbance, and the publication of many recent archaeological excavations in advance of developments may elucidate the settlement and burial types of this dark age in Irish prehistory. Some sites present little surface indication and are only visible as crop marks. Recent excavations of a site⁶ at Conva, near Fermoy, produced a seventh-century date for the site. This site is a ditched enclosure settlement only detected by aerial photography. These site types are perceived as atypical of the period, but in time and with on-going excavations, sites that are now seen as anomalous may in fact be more typical of Late Iron Age/Early Christian period settlements.

The dating of the logboats is generally broad and extends up to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries AD (Lanting and Brindley 1996). A recent radiocarbon dating programme has produced a series of logboat dates with a distinct peak in the period 1450-1700 AD and with a range extending back to the Bronze Age (*ibid.*). The association of some logboats with *fulachta fiadh* at Kilbrennan and Killalough in Co. Cork and at other sites in Ireland (*ibid.*, Table 1) places them in a Bronze Age context.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Exact location: townland boundary of Gneeves and Curragh; barony: West Muskery; parish: Drishane; O. S. 6" scale sheet No. 47, 0.10 cm from east margin, 26.5 cm from north margin, c. 760' above O. D.
- 2 National Museum files; Professor O'Kelly recorded this boat in 1965.
- 3 National Museum files; this was uncovered during land reclamation and was discovered during drain excavation.
- 4 This logboat was excavated from a *fulacht fiadh* site during the construction stage of the Glanmire-Watergrasshill bypass.
- 5 Calibration programme = Carl 25 Stuiver *et al.* 1998.
- 6 Enclosure 2 (Doody 1995).

NOTE ON THE BOAT MECHANICS

by Professor Seán McGrail
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It is unlikely that a boat of this size had a rudder. Oars are just possible, but unlikely, in view of the breadth of the boat, which is c. 2 ft. This would not allow for much leverage on an oar with only about fifteen inches inboard, even if rowing with crossed handles, as is sometimes done in a currach. If oars were to be used, a bench or thwart at the appropriate position relative to the oar pivots would be necessary for the oarsman to sit in, and there is no sign of this in the boat.

The boat was probably paddled, and holes 1-2 are probably where the bench or thwart was lashed to the boat for the paddler. Hole 3 might be where a steering oar (rather than a rudder) was pivoted, but I doubt that, as a steering device is unnecessary when paddling. A steering oar may be useful in an oared boat, but, in this particular case, there would not be much space between an oarsman using

oars at holes 1 and 2 and a steersman using a steering oar at hole 3. Furthermore, two people in the boat would not only make the boat trim by the stern, but also take up much of the useful space in it. Hole 3 could be due to accidental damage or deformation.

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