

WITHIN WITHOUT

the ARCHAEOLOGY of PARTITIONS

NATIONAL MONUMENTS SERVICE
8th ANNUAL ARCHAEOLOGY CONFERENCE

18 October 2025
Edmund Burke Theatre, Trinity College, Dublin



NMS

Seirbhís Séadchomharthaí
Náisiúnta
National Monuments Service



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Within | Without: the archaeology of partitions

Most archaeological sites and monuments contain boundaries—ditches, walls, fences or banks. Space on either side of such dividing features can have its own significance or meaning. As well as obvious physical divisions, conceptual and social divisions such as inclusion and exclusion, privacy or social standing can be more challenging to identify but are no less significant. This conference examines those socially and physically constructed partitions and the spaces they divide to offer insight into how they were used and what they meant to the people who used them.

This conference is presented by the National Monuments Service of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and organised by Wordwell | Archaeology Ireland.

Acknowledgements

The organisers are especially grateful to Michael MacDonagh, Chief Archaeologist of the National Monuments Service of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and the staff of the National Monuments Service, who contributed to the organisation of this day. We would also like to thank Ciara Power, Trinity College conference and event manager, who has made our organisational path as smooth as possible.

Dr Sharon Greene developed the conference programme, and we are delighted to have a great line-up of speakers to illuminate these constructed social and physical partitions and the spaces they divide.

We are grateful for all their efforts and for those of Wordwell | Archaeology Ireland staff, particularly Helen Dunne, who have been key to the administration of the day and without whom it would not be possible to hold such an event. We hope you will enjoy the conference.

Dr Una MacConville
Conference Organiser



Minister's Foreword

Dear Conference Attendees

You are all very welcome to our 8th National Monuments Service Archaeology Conference.

This conference has become an annual heritage milestone in our diaries. Over the last few years we have explored many fascinating themes around community connections and change, bringing research of the highest calibre to public attention in an accessible way.

Last year we explored traces of heritage, the senses and the smallest of things to tell us of past lives and communities. This year we take a look at boundaries and division. Most archaeological sites and monuments contain boundaries—ditches, walls, fences or banks. Space on either side of such dividing features can have its own significance or meaning. Apart from the obvious physical divisions, conceptual and social divisions such as inclusion and exclusion, privacy or social standing can be more challenging to identify but are no less significant. This conference examines those socially and physically constructed partitions and the spaces they divide to offer insight into how they were used and what they meant to the people who used them.

We again thank Wordwell | *Archaeology Ireland* for bringing this conference together and for the lasting partnership with our National Monuments Service. We are extremely grateful to all the speakers for sharing their wonderful research with us, to those who are chairing sessions and to all of you for attending, in person and online.

Our national heritage plan, *Heritage Ireland 2030*, commits to making heritage accessible, and through our conferences we do just that, our lives enriched and enhanced by exploration and understanding of the past.

Our thanks to Trinity College Dublin for the use of their lecture venue this year, and our thanks to all of you for joining us. I hope you have a wonderful conference.

Christopher O'Sullivan TD
Minister of State for Nature, Heritage and Biodiversity

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Chris O'Sullivan'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large 'C' and 'O'.



Réamhrá an Aire

A Thoscairí Comhdhála, a chairde,

Tá fáilte mhór romhaibh go léir chuig ár 8ú Comhdháil Seandálaíochta bhliantúil de chuid Sheirbhís na Séadchomharthaí Náisiúnta.

Tá an chomhdháil seo anois ina cloch mhíle oidhreacht inár ndialanna uile ag an am seo den bhliain. Le roinnt blianta anuas, tá iniúchadh déanta againn ar go leor téamaí suimiúla maidir le naisc phobail agus athrú, agus taighde den chaighdeán is airde curtha chun suntais os comhair an phobail ar bhealach inrochtana.

Rinneamar iniúchadh anuraidh ar rianta oidhreacht, na céadfaí agus na rudaí is lú le hinsint dúinn faoi shaol agus faoi phobail san am a chuaigh thart. I mbliana, caithimid súil ar theorainneacha agus ar deighilt. Bíonn teorainneacha ag formhór na suíomhanna agus na séadchomharthaí seandálaíochta – díoga, ballaí, fáлта nó bruacha. Is féidir a thábhacht nó a bhrí féin a bheith ag spás ar an dá thaobh de ghnéithe deighilte den sórt sin. Chomh maith le deighiltí fisiciúla soiléire, d'fhéadfadh deighiltí coincheapúla agus sóisialta amháil cuimsiú agus eisiámh, príobháideachas nó seasamh sóisialta a bheith níos dúshlánaí a aithint, ach níl níos lú suntais ag baint leo. Scrúdaíonn an chomhdháil seo na deighiltí sin a tógadh go sóisialta agus go fisiciúil agus na spásanna a roinneann siad chun léargas a thabhairt ar an gcaoi ar úsáideadh iad agus cad a bhí i gceist acu do na daoine a d'úsáid iad

Gabhaimid buíochas arís le Wordwell | Seandálaíocht Éireann as an gcomhdháil seo a thabhairt le chéile agus as an gcomhpháirtíocht bhuan le Seirbhís na Séadchomharthaí Náisiúnta seo againne. Táimid thar a bheith buíoch de na cainteoirí ar fad as an taighde iontach atá déanta acu a roinnt linn, díobh siúd atá ag déanamh cathaoirleachta ar sheisiúin agus díbh go léir as a bheith i láthair, go pearsanta agus ar líne.

Tá ár bplean oidhreacht náisiúnta, Oidhreacht Éireann 2030, tiomanta d'oidhreacht a dhéanamh inrochtana, agus trínár gcomhdhálacha déanaimid é sin go díreach, ár saol a shaibhriú agus a spreagadh ag taiscéalaíocht agus tuiscint ar an am atá thart.

Ár mbuíochas le Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath as úsáid a bhaint as a n-ionad léachtaí i mbliana agus ár mbuíochas libh go léir as a bheith linn. Tá súil agam go mbeidh comhdháil iontach agaibh.

Christopher O'Sullivan TD
An tAire Stáit don Dúlra, don Oidhreacht
agus don Bhithéagsúlacht



8th Annual National Monuments Service
Archaeology Conference organised on behalf
of the National Monuments Service by
Wordwell | Archaeology Ireland.

Edmund Burke Theatre, Trinity College, Dublin, 18 October 2025

08.30–09.10 Registration

09.20–09.30 Opening address: Michael MacDonagh, Chief State Archaeologist,
National Monuments Service

SESSION ONE: Delineated landscapes

Chair: Dr Ros Ó Maoldúin, Chair of Institute of Archaeologists of
Ireland

09.35–10.10 *Where power lies: rethinking Ireland's Iron Age linear earthworks as
territorial oppida*
Cóilín Ó Drisceoil

10.15–10.50 *Dykes as deeds? Re-evaluating linear earthworks from early medieval
Britain*
Professor Howard Williams

10.50–11.00: Q & A

11.00–11.25 TEA/COFFEE

SESSION TWO: Bounded

Chair: Eimear O'Connell, Project Manager of the Irish Walled Towns Network

- 11.30–12.05 *Do fence me in: boundaries, liminality and transgressions in early medieval Ireland, AD 400–1100*
Professor Aidan O'Sullivan
- 12.10–12.45 *Inside, outside and through town walls: urban–rural relationships in late medieval Ireland*
Dr Margaret Murphy
- 12.45–12.55 Q & A
- 13.00–13.50 LUNCH
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SESSION THREE: Within and without

Chair: Rob Goodbody, Historic Building Consultant

- 13.55–14.30 *Behind the façade: materiality, craft and display at the Provost's House, Trinity College Dublin*
Dr Melanie Hayes
- 14.35–15.10 *Becoming American: the archaeology of enslavement and racialisation at the Isaac Royall House, an eighteenth-century Massachusetts slaveholding estate*
Dr Alexandra Chan
- 15.10–15.20: Q & A
- 15.20–15.40 TEA/COFFEE
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SESSION FOUR: Partitions

Chair: Dr Sharon Greene

- 15.45–16.20 *The Liminal Point: Broadboyne Bridge, Finn mac Cumail, and the Barony Boundaries of Co. Meath*
Paul Gosling
- 16.25–17.00 *Crossing boundaries, challenging divisions: integrating archaeology into post-Troubles conflict transformation*
Professor Audrey Horning
- 17.05–17.15 Q & A
- 17.15–17.25 *Close of conference*
Michael MacDonagh, Chief State Archaeologist, National Monuments Service

CONFERENCE TOPICS AND SPEAKERS

Almost all archaeological sites and monuments include a ditch, a wall, a fence or a bank—something that divides space physically and sometimes symbolically. The space on either side of these dividing features, whether enclosed or separated, can have its own significance or meaning. Conceptual divisions like inclusion and exclusion, privacy or social standing can be more challenging to identify but are no less significant. Using archaeology to examine socially and physically constructed partitions, and the spaces they divide, can help to give us insight into how spaces were used and what they meant to the people who used them.



Where power lies: rethinking Ireland's Iron Age linear earthworks as territorial *oppida*

This lecture reconsiders Ireland's enigmatic Iron Age linear earthworks—most notably the Black Pig's Dyke—not merely as boundary markers or defensive structures but as part of the broader European *oppida* phenomenon. Drawing on old and new excavations, scientific dating, geophysical surveys and comparative European models, the lecture proposes that these massive dykes, some extending over 10km and originally crowned with substantial oak palisades, represent tribal centres that embedded ritual, ceremony and symbolic power in the landscape. Case-studies from the Black Pig's Dyke (Co. Monaghan), the Dorsey (Co.

Armagh) and the Doon of Drumsna (Co. Roscommon) highlight striking parallels with English and Continental territorial *oppida* in terms of scale, structure, setting and chronology. This re-evaluation challenges long-standing assumptions and offers a novel framework for understanding settlement and society in Iron Age Ireland.

C  il  n    Drisceoil is an archaeologist with the National Monuments Service. He has directed major excavations of prehistoric and medieval urban sites and has published widely on the archaeology of late prehistoric, medieval and post-medieval Ireland. He is the co-author (with Aidan Walsh) of Materialising power: the archaeology of the Black Pig's Dyke, Co. Monaghan (Wordwell, 2021).



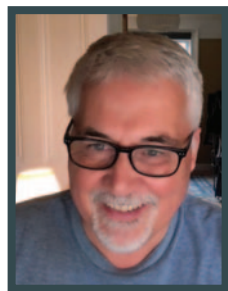
Dykes as deeds? Re-evaluating linear earthworks from early medieval Britain

Can we consider early medieval dykes as 'deeds'—monumental marks on the landscape and memorable land-claims? This paper presents a new framework for interpreting the significance and mnemonics of dyke-building in early medieval Britain, focusing on the process and placement of rampart construction, their appropriation of striking landmarks and ancient monuments, and strategies of place-naming. Together, this evidence questions whether dykes operated either as primarily military or territorial constructions or else as symbolic statements of authority and power.

Instead, I suggest that linear earthworks controlled and transformed mobilities for people, animals and things, but also fostered social memories through their construction, monumental presence and perception as famed 'deeds'. I argue that dykes articulated and projected their creators' identities and ideologies over the early medieval landscape far beyond core political territories into contested frontier zones. Simultaneously, dykes as deeds projected the stories of their construction, of building barriers, through time and thus over centuries long after their building. As a case-study, I consider in

comparative terms the building of Wat's Dyke and Offa's Dyke in what was to become the Anglo-Welsh borderlands.

Professor Howard Williams has over 27 years of experience in academic teaching and research. He joined the University of Chester in 2008 and was appointed to a personal chair as Professor of Archaeology in 2010.



Do fence me in: boundaries, liminality and transgressions in early medieval Ireland, AD 400–1100

Imagine an early medieval king out on his royal crannog, highly visible but made usefully remote by shoreline, water and palisades. Imagine the saint standing waiting on that shoreline, growing increasingly impatient and contemplating miraculous violence. Imagine the householder hearing a call from the rath gate, a stranger who knows not to enter without permission, or to look in the house door without permission, or to walk in that door without permission. Imagine the early Irish cleric thinking, 'Our monastic vallum enclosure is now too small—we could fill the ditch in'. People in early medieval Ireland were familiar with boundaries; through social status, role, gender, age, kinship and ideas of neighbourhood, they understood and negotiated boundaries every day. This lecture will explore the nature and role of boundaries and how you could, and could not, cross them in early medieval landscapes and in people's imagination, inspired by early Irish law, narrative literature (adventure and voyage tales), saints' Lives, and the archaeology of ringforts, crannogs, cemeteries and monastic enclosures.

Professor Aidan O'Sullivan is Head of School and Professor of Archaeology at University College Dublin. His research interests are early medieval Ireland in north-west Europe, AD 400–1100; wetland archaeology and environments globally; and experimental archaeology and material culture. He is co-author of *Early medieval Ireland, AD 400–1100: the evidence from archaeological excavations* (Royal Irish Academy, Dublin) and is currently co-PI of the 'Early Medieval People and Things (EMPAT)' project.



Inside, outside and through town walls: urban–rural relationships in late medieval Ireland

A large number of Ireland's medieval towns were walled in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Town walls performed a multiplicity of functions, and this paper will consider some of these, particularly with regard to relationships between towns and their hinterlands. Walls and their gateways structured economic exchange. Food, fuel, building materials and other commodities required by urban dwellers came in through town gates, while manufactured goods and imported items were sent out. Walls also functioned as barriers, keeping undesirables out and providing a sense of community and privilege for those within. These barriers were porous, and suburbs often developed outside town gates. Noisome industries, leper hospitals and entertainment sites were frequently found in the areas outside the town walls. These extramural settlements highlight the limitations of the wall as a social divider and underscore the fluidity of urban–rural interaction.

Dr Margaret Murphy is a medieval historian specialising in the social and economic history—in particular agriculture, settlement patterns and urban–rural dynamics—of Ireland and Britain, 1200–1500. She is Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Registrar at Carlow College, St Patrick's. She is the co-author of *The Dublin region in the Middle Ages* and co-editor of *Agriculture and settlement in Ireland*.



Behind the façade: materiality, craft and display at the Provost's House, Trinity College Dublin

The Provost's House at Trinity College Dublin, built between 1759 and 1762, is a remarkable of eighteenth-century domestic architecture. From its richly articulated entrance façade to its finely decorated interiors, it readily attests to the skill and ingenuity of Irish architectural craft and use of materials. And yet, despite its prominent location in the heart of the south city, there is a duality to this building, being at once visible yet largely removed from public access—a tension between the boundaries of public and private, between seen and unseen elements. Drawing on archival material relating to its original construction and close examination of the surviving building fabric, this paper will investigate these divisions, moving from the robust granite gateway and high iron rails, which demarcate the boundary with the city, across the

sheltered courtyard to the limestone façade, where it will pause to consider the construction of this outer layer, which is little more than skin-deep, and then step beyond the threshold to discover the richly decorated surfaces of its interiors in timber, stone and plaster. It will consider the importance of outward show and display, and the often-illusionistic nature of materiality and the crafted surface in eighteenth-century architecture.

Dr Melanie Hayes is an architectural historian and research fellow of the European Research Council Advanced Grant project STONE-WORK at Trinity College Dublin. Her recent research has explored the collaborative nature of work practice within the eighteenth-century building industry, contributing to a burgeoning new direction in the study of architectural labour and agency in the period.



Becoming American: the archaeology of enslavement and racialisation at the Isaac Royall House, an eighteenth-century Massachusetts slaveholding estate

Three seasons of excavation at the last standing slave quarters in New England offer a look at the experiences of master and slave on a large eighteenth-century Massachusetts estate. Material culture of early African Americans in New England contains powerful insights into the 'contested spaces' of slavery, master-slave relationships and the eighteenth-century 'racialisation' of American society. In the material we find evidence of both the definition and the expression of 'race' in a given time and place, as well as how those categories of 'white', 'black' or 'other' might have been forged and negotiated in the first place. While race, as a biological category, has no scientific validity

and is, in fact, 'not real', racism is very real. The people and societies who operated within its paradigm had tangible effects on the world, the landscape and the people who lived—and live—within it, and these can be retrieved archaeologically. We will examine artefacts, landscapes, architecture, floral/faunal remains and the documentary record at this site as uniquely social objects, actively engaged in communicating messages, advertent and inadvertent, about who was 'within' and who was 'without' in colonial American society.

Dr Alexandra Chan taught historical archaeology, archaeological ethics, comparative colonialism and the archaeology of early African America at Vassar College, and worked for many years as a principal investigator in cultural resource management. She directed excavations at the Royall House and continues to serve on the Academic Advisory Council of the museum.

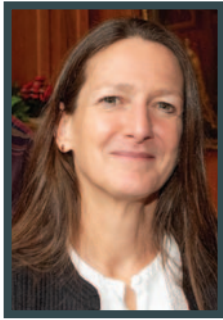
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The Liminal Point: Broadboyne Bridge, Finn mac Cumail, and the Barony Boundaries of Co. Meath

The bridge spanning the River Boyne between Stackallan and Ardmulchan in County Meath is striking for having four names. One of these — Brayford Bridge — links it to Finn mac Cumail, the celebrated hero of the Finn Cycle of Irish literature who, according to the Annals, was killed at Áth Brea in CE 283. The convergence of four barony boundaries at the same point on the river indicates that the scene of Finn's death was no ordinary fording-place. Rather it was a significant liminal point between two pre-Norman territories, the *trícha céts* of Tuascirt Brega and Laegaire.

Paul Gosling is an Adjunct Lecturer in the Dept. of Heritage and Tourism on the Galway City campus of the Atlantic Technological University, and is a member of the Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland. His recent research is on the intersection between toponymy and archaeology with particular emphasis on historic river-fords.



Crossing boundaries, challenging divisions: integrating archaeology into post-Troubles conflict transformation

Negotiating the politics of the present while staying true to the evidence of the past is the central challenge of responsible archaeological practice.

Drawing from ongoing efforts to engage archaeology as an integral part of peace-building in post-Troubles Northern Ireland, I address both the risks and the rewards of collaborative cross-community practice. Artefactual, architectural and textual evidence from the plantation period confound the simplistic narratives of division that have long underpinned the sectarian divide by highlighting the incomplete nature of plantation, the necessity of pragmatic daily engagements and the realities of hybridised practices, thus—arguably—providing the basis for discourses over a shared future. As an

archaeologist working with local groups across the community divide, the need to balance issues of evidence, ethics and respect for individual and community narratives is the subject of constant negotiation but is core to the development of an empirically informed, ethically engaged archaeological practice.

Professor Audrey Horning is the Forrest Murden Professor of Anthropology and Vice-Dean for Research and Graduate Studies at William & Mary (USA) and (Hon.) Professor of Archaeology at Queen's University Belfast, where she is also a fellow of the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security, and Justice. She is president of the Society for Historical Archaeology.



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A wide range of archaeological and historical publications are also available at www.wordwellbooks.com including publications by the **National Monuments Service**.

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**Seirbhís na Séadchomharthaí Náisiúnta
National Monuments Service
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