



ULSTER
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SOCIETY

Survey Report

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Author: Henry Welsh

Location:

In association with:



**Surface Artefact Collection
Ballygarvan
County Down**



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c/o School of Natural and Built Environment

The Queen's University of Belfast

Belfast BT7 1NN

Cover illustration: Later Mesolithic flint flake recovered from the Ballygarvan site

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1. Summary

1.1 Location

A site survey and surface artefact collection were carried out at Ballygarvan Townland, County Down, in the Parish of Inishargy and Barony of Ards Lower, Irish Grid reference J 5900 6445 at an altitude of 5m + OD on 21 April 2012.

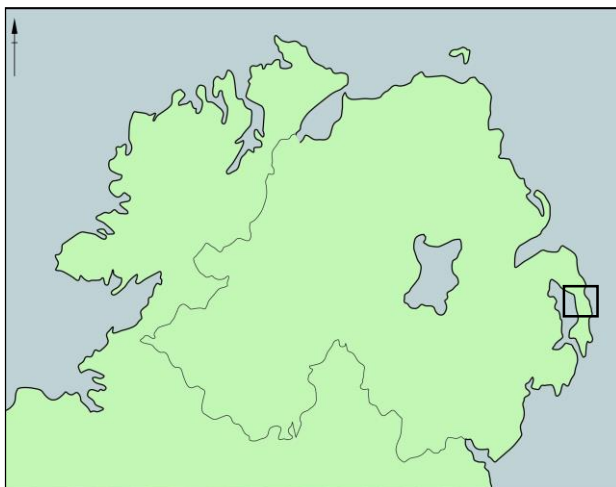


Figure 01: Location map for Ballygarvan, County Down

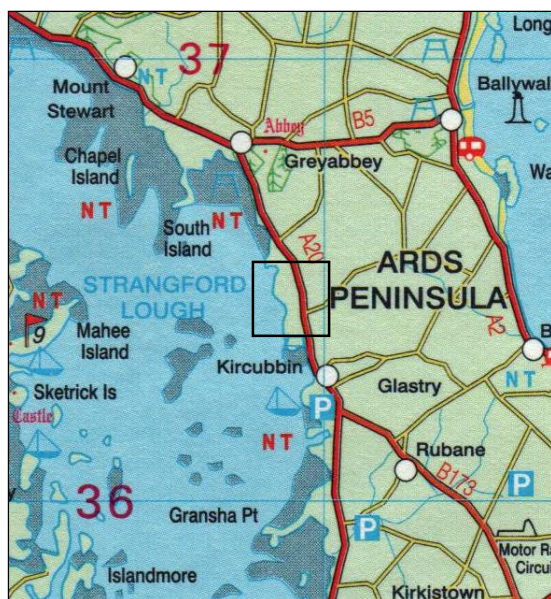


Figure 02: Location of Ballygarvan site *Ordnance Survey*

The site of the possible flat cemetery is situated within private farmland, owned by Mr Leslie Finlay. The survey was the second in a series of planned surveys undertaken by members of the Ulster Archaeological Society (UAS) during 2012 and has been previously reported (Welsh 2012)

(a) and (b). The site has recently been added to the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record as DOW 018:038.

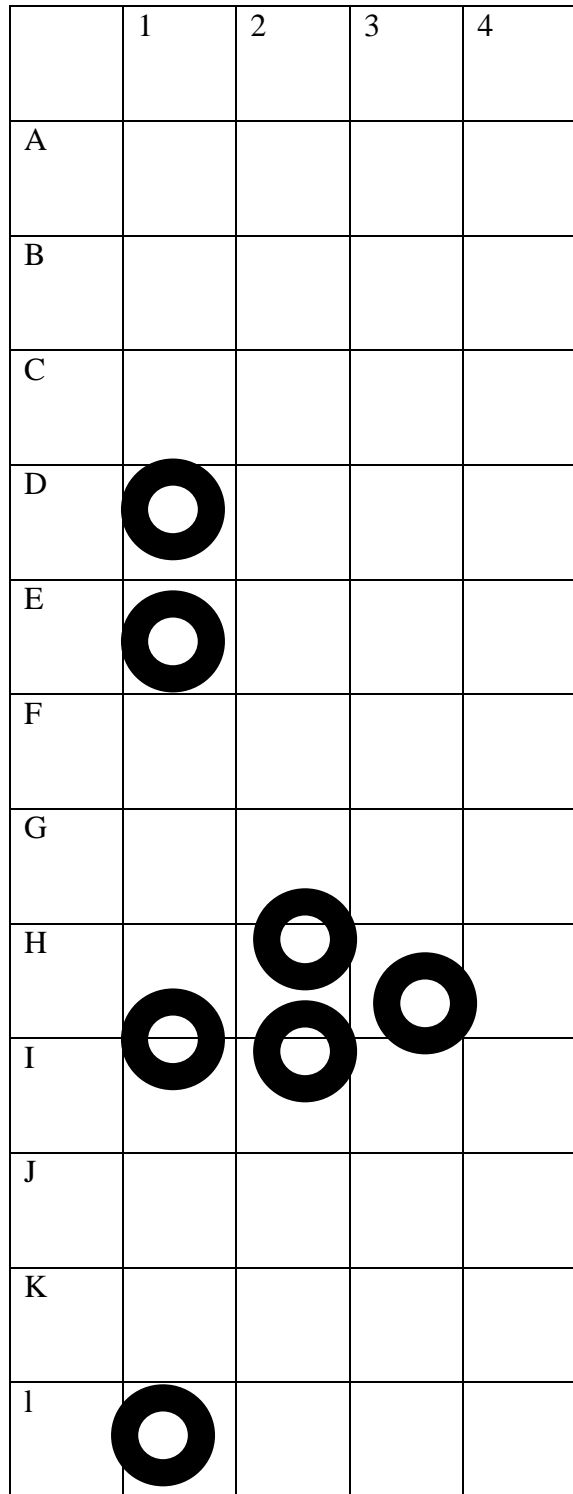


Figure 03: Grid plan and orientation of the survey site

A search area, 40m east/west by 120m north/south, was divided into 10m by 10m grids to identify any clustering of artefacts. The approximate position of ring-ditches is also shown (Figure 03). The search area and grids were plotted with the society's hand-held *Garmin E-Trex* GPS device.

2. Post-survey work undertaken

Following the recovery of artefacts, an application was made to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency: Built Heritage (now Historic Environment Division) for funding to permit specialist analysis. This was subsequently granted and the flint items were examined by Brian Sloan of the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, Queen's University, Belfast. His report is appended below.

It was found that the flint assemblage recovered during the surface artefact collection was predominantly natural in origin (77.8%) and the remainder, while indicative of Neolithic and Bronze Age activity in the area, did not appear to be specifically associated with the circular features identified in the aerial photograph.

Perhaps the most significant item recovered during the surface artefact collection was a stone tool, located at grid square H3. The tool was analysed by geologist Dr Ian Meighan, who confirmed it to be greywacke, but not simply a beach-rolled stone, but instead having been fashioned against the natural grain, indicating that it was an artefact rather than a naturally-occurring item. The tool was 137mm in length, 42mm in maximum width and 15mm in maximum thickness. It had the overall shape of a stone axe, with a bevelled edge at one end and a rounded point at the other (Figure 04). Both edges were uniformly rounded. There was evidence of chipping damage at both ends and all surfaces displayed minor scores and abrasions.

The tool was later identified by Emeritus Professor Peter Woodman as an Elongated Pebble Tool dating to the later Mesolithic. These are also known as *Elongated Bevelled Pebbles* and *Bevel Ended Tools* and have been recovered at other Mesolithic sites, including Mount Sandel in County Londonderry and Ferriter's Cove in County Kerry (Woodman 2015, 153-156). It is not clear what these tools were used for, with suggestions ranging from flint knapping to hide processing. However, it seems likely that they were used as limpet hammers and 'that fact that bevelled forms were found on sites where limpets had been collected in some numbers must also weigh in favour of these implements being mostly used in rocky shore environs where limpets could be collected' (Ibid., 154). Of particular interest is that as far as is known, this is the only such artefact recovered from the Strangford Lough area. The tool along with one flint flake, also of probable later Mesolithic origin, should probably be considered along with the other Mesolithic material found in this area to indicate a significant human presence during this period.

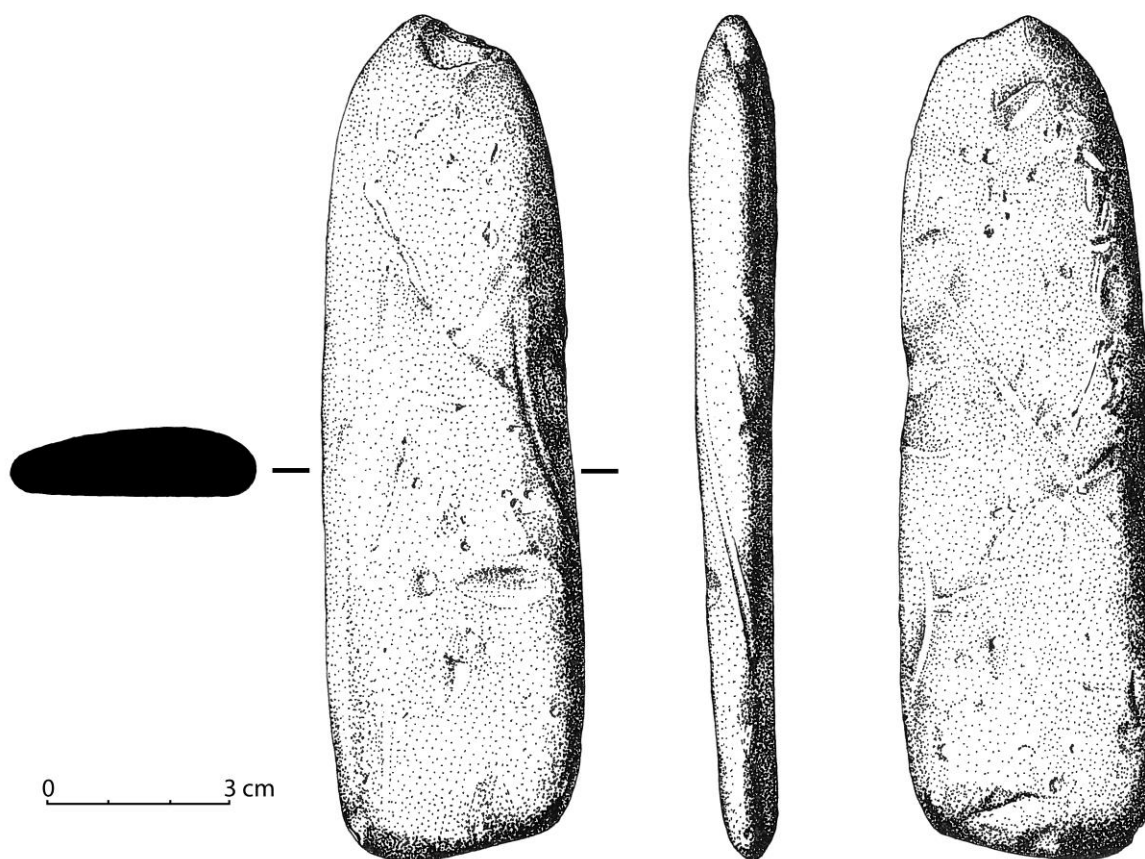


Figure 04: Elongated pebble tool. *Libby Mulqueeny QUB*

This, combined with a lack of prehistoric pottery or any other evidence of habitation within the survey area, would seem to support the proposal that the circular features observed from the air are likely to be a Bronze Age flat cemetery, rather than a settlement cluster. However, there seems to be sufficient material dating to the later Mesolithic to suggest that this area was also the location of a significant and much earlier settlement. Only further investigation, including small-scale excavation, may confirm this.

3. Recommendations for further work

If this is indeed a Bronze Age flat cemetery, it may be one of the largest such monuments yet discovered in Ireland and has the potential to add significantly to our understanding of prehistoric burial, particularly during the Bronze Age. It is strongly recommended that the Historic Environment Division considers the site for statutory protection.

4. Bibliography

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APPENDIX



The Lithics recovered during field walking at Ballygarvan, Co. Down

Brian Sloan

April 2015

Analysis of the lithic assemblage recovered during a fieldwalking exercise at Ballygarvan townland, Co. Down

Introduction

An assemblage of lithic artefacts, totalling 1291 pieces, was presented for identification and quantification following their recovery during field walking in April 2012. The field walking exercise was undertaken by members of the Ulster Archaeological Society (UAS) with participation from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). The site was identified through aerial photography following a private aeroplane flight over the Ards Peninsula. The site is located on the western shore of the Ards Peninsula (Grid ref. J59006445). The vast majority of the assemblage is comprised of thermally shattered naturally derived pieces or indeterminate pieces (77.8%) with little of archaeological significance noted. The archaeologically significant component of the Ballygarvan assemblage comprised 22.2% although is in itself relatively undiagnostic being dominated by cores and flake debitage.

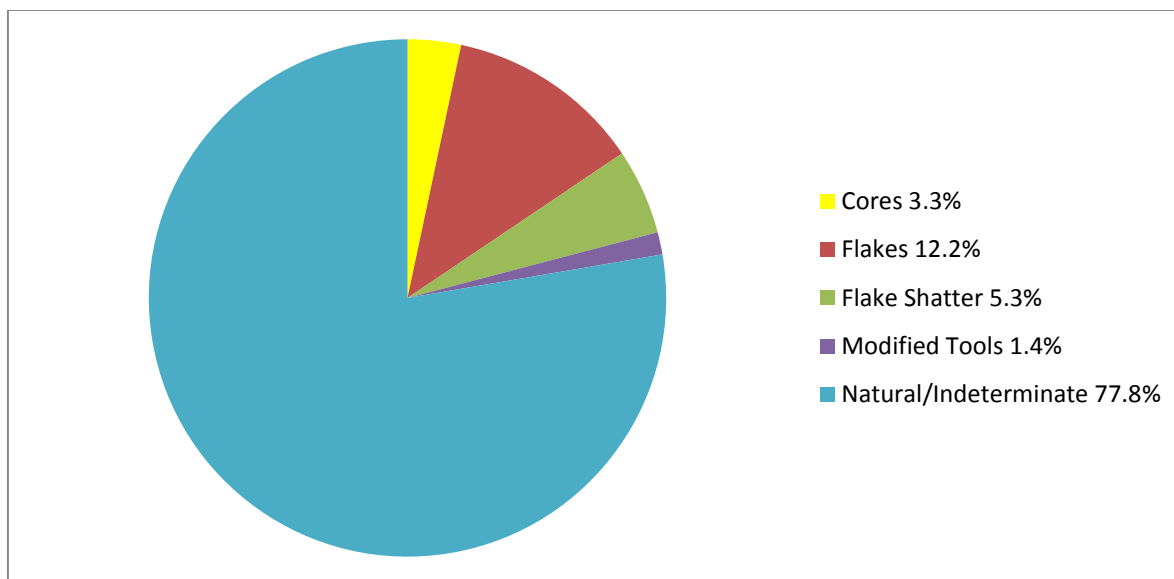


Figure 1: Overall composition of the lithic assemblage

Assemblage composition

The Ballygarvan assemblage is comprised entirely of flint artefacts. In short, the lithic assemblage comprised of: Cores and core fragments (43/1291 pieces: 3.3%), complete flakes and blades (158/1291 pieces: 12.2%), flake and blade shatter (69/1291 pieces: 5.3%), Modified tools (18/1291 pieces: 1.4%) and Natural/Indeterminate (1003/1291 pieces: 77.8%) (Figure 1). On the whole the assemblage displayed a high degree of patination, abrasion and edge damage,

consistent with post-depositional disturbance. Where patination was present, it was mostly of a whitish grey colour consistent with exposure to weathering. Some pieces exhibited a yellowish brown patination that may be related to the presence of iron minerals in the soil. Rolled and smoothed edges and surfaces are also a common trait amongst the Ballygarvan assemblage suggesting exposure to seawater and sandy soils.

Primary technology

Cores and core fragments accounted for 3.3% of the overall assemblage (43/1291 pieces; 3.3%). The majority of these are tested pebbles whereby a flake is detached from one end of a natural flint pebble to test the quality of the raw material. The discarding of the tested pebbles without further reduction suggests that the raw material was either flawed or was considered inferior in a flint rich area. Tested pebbles are common occurrences amongst lithic assemblages dating to the Neolithic with a potential emphasis on Early Neolithic activity (Nelis and Sloan 2005) although their presence in a flint rich area renders them undiagnostic as nodules could be selected and discarded with ease. The other cores are either comprehensively reduced multi-directional cores or are too fragmentary for formal identification.

Flake debitage (i.e. complete and shattered flakes and blades) together accounted for 17.5% of the overall assemblage (227/1291 pieces; 17.5%). Complete flakes and blades (i.e. pieces exhibiting an intact proximal and distal end) accounted for 12.2% of the overall assemblage (158/1291 pieces; 12.2%).

This component of the assemblage exhibited relatively simple reduction strategies, with planar platforms and feathered terminations being the norm suggesting the production of flakes using a hard hammer stone and direct percussion. Platform preparation does not appear on the majority of the flake debitage, suggesting that they were produced in an ad hoc fashion with little effort to produce blanks for formalised tool forms. The complete flakes and blades in the assemblage are rather squat, with the length ranging between 18mm – 70mm and the widths between 10-40mm. The bulk of the completed flakes and blades are diminutive in size, suggesting that the raw material originated as small pebbles. The flake debitage component of the assemblage is relatively undiagnostic, save from elements recovered from Grids A2 and L3 which exhibit bi-polar reduction (crushing of the proximal and distal surfaces suggesting the use of an anvil stone). This technique is generally associated with Bronze Age activity although it can be present

amongst earlier assemblages where the nodules are diminutive in size or the raw material is flawed in some way.

Secondary technology

Modified tools account for 1.4% of the assemblage (18/1291 pieces). On the whole these exhibit minimal, non-invasive retouch along a single dorsal lateral, and could have held a number of possible functions but were most likely utilised as cutting implements (although not formal knives). This tool form is undiagnostic, having been used throughout prehistory. A small number of scrapers were recovered which all exceed 35mm in length; with very few falling in the dimensions ascribed as 'thumbnail' scrapers. Traditionally this is seen as representing Neolithic rather than Bronze Age activity when small forms of this tool become more prominent. However, the size of scrapers is just as likely to be functional rather than chronological (Nelis 2004, 168) so using this tool form to suggest a site chronology must be considered tentative at best. Retouched flakes and blades were also present amongst the modified tool component of the assemblage. This tool form is undiagnostic, having been used throughout prehistory.

The modified tool component exhibits minimal retouch with no effort to produce formalised tool forms, suggesting that they were acquired in an ad hoc fashion as and when needed.

Natural/Indeterminate pieces

The vast majority (1003/1291 pieces: 77.8%) of the assemblage is natural in origin. These pieces exhibit varying degrees of rolling, patination and edge damage and are of little archaeological significance. They lend little to the interpretation of the site as they are present amongst the natural subsoil across this area.

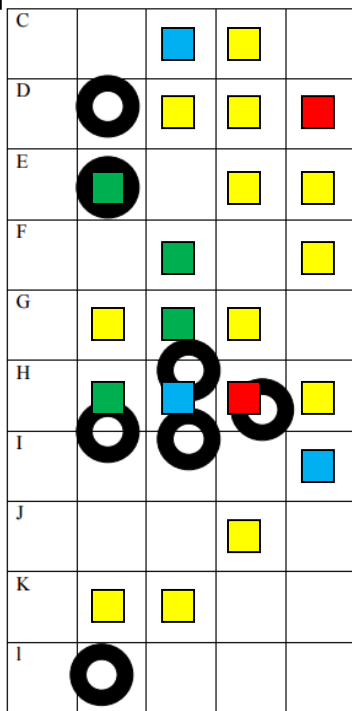
Distribution

Lithics were recovered throughout the grids on site (Figure 3) with no obvious distribution pattern evident. It is possible that there is a concentration centered on Grids G1-4, H1-4 and I1-4 which corresponds with four of the circular crop marks identified through aerial photography. However, the majority of the assemblage is natural in origin, with the modified pieces being undiagnostic, so the assemblage lends little to the interpretation of the circular features. It is only through excavation that an understanding of what the circular features represent can be achieved.

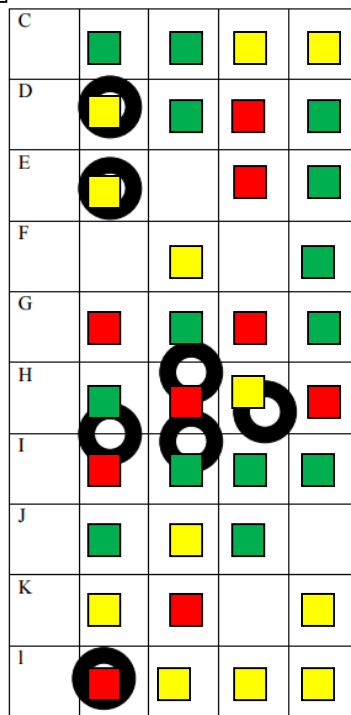
Grid	Core	Flake	Flake Shatter	Modified Tool	Natural/indeterminate	Total
A1	\	\	1	\	14	15
A2	1	6	1	\	31	39
A3	1	2	\	\	17	20
A4	\	4	6	\	14	24
B2	\	4	1	\	24	29
B3	\	7	5	1	10	23
B4	4	3	6	1	39	53
C1	\	4	\	\	27	31
C2	3	3	1	\	16	23
C3	1	2	1	\	14	18
C4	\	\	2	\	11	13
D1	\	1	\	\	32	33
D2	1	2	3	\	34	40
D3	1	6	4	\	29	40
D4	4	2	2	1	15	24
E1	2	2	1	\	29	34
E2	\	\	\	\	5	5
E3	1	5	2	\	21	29
E4	1	4	2	\	56	63
F1	\	1	\	2	28	31
F2	2	2	\	\	21	25
F4	1	4	2	\	\	7
G1	1	10	2	\	47	60
G2	2	4	1	1	19	27
G3	1	6	4	1	49	61
G4	\	5	\	\	14	19
H1	2	3	1	1	33	40
H2	3	7	1	2	24	37
H3	4	1	\	\	11	16
H4	1	6	1	1	19	28
I1	\	4	4	\	48	56
I2	\	3	1	\	24	28
I3	\	3	3	2	10	18
I4	3	2	2	\	15	22
J1	\	5	\	1	19	25
J2	\	1	\	\	23	24
J3	1	4	1	\	20	26
J4	\	\	\	\	6	6
K1	1	1	\	\	21	23
K2	1	5	2	\	32	40
K4	\	1	2	1	22	26
L1	\	7	1	\	19	27
L2	\	2	1	1	11	15
L3	\	3	\	\	8	11
L4	\	2	\	\	17	19
Unlocated	\	9	2	2	5	18
Total	43	158	69	18	1003	1291
%	3.3	12.2	5.3	1.4	77.8	100

Figure 2: Composition of the Ballygarvan assemblage.

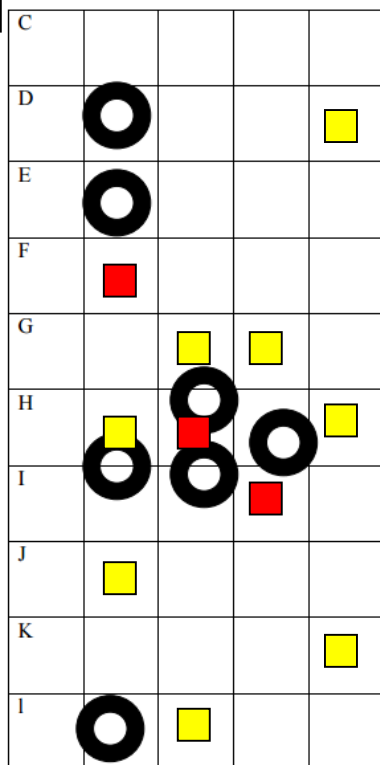
A



B



C



A: Cores

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4

B: Flake Debitage

■ 1-3 ■ 4-6 ■ 7-10

C: Modified Tools

■ 1 ■ 2

Figure 3: Distribution of the lithic artefacts by grid.