

Murder, robbery, war and hair-dressing

Objects found during archaeological excavations at Caherconnell in 2007 and 2008 have told some interesting and exciting stories:

Elizabeth I silver groat (four pence)



This coin was minted at the Tower of London in about 1583. One side has been hammered from a die (an engraved stamp) dated 1560/1 the other from a die dated 1582/3 which was probably an error by the coin-maker. The writing on the coin translates from Latin as *Elizabeth by the grace of God, Queen of England, France and Ireland* and on the reverse her motto *I have made God my helper* – both somewhat grandiose claims.

The coin was hidden under a rock and this suggests that the owner, probably living in the stone fort in the 1590s, was afraid that it would be stolen. Because the O'Brien Earl of Thomond sided with the Tudor Crown, the Ulster chieftain Red Hugh O'Neill raided County Clare in 1599 and 1600 and ravaged the Burren as well as burning Ennis town. The hiding of the coin – that was very valuable at the time – is likely to be linked to this historical event. The fact that the coin was never recovered indicates that something unpleasant may have happened to the owner.

North Devon pottery



A fragment of a chamber-pot or bowl tells us that the inhabitants of the fort in the 17th century were using household items imported from south-west England.

The coin was eventually found over 400 years later by archaeologist Tim Dean and his daughter Faye.

It should be remembered that all archaeological objects found in Ireland are the property of the State and that the use of metal detectors to search for archaeology is subject to licence.



Medieval iron arrowhead



This finely made weapon has barbs to make removal from flesh more difficult. The question is: was it human or animal flesh? Hunting and warfare were both common pursuits of medieval aristocrats. This type of arrowhead is seemingly unique in the archaeological record from Ireland and Britain and given the presence of iron slag (waste) in the stone fort it might be that the artefact was made here.

Skeleton



Sometimes archaeological finds pose more questions than they answer. The remains of this teenager who died about 400 to 500 years ago were found in a corn-drying kiln (or a re-used prehistoric burial chamber – we're not sure yet). The body was partial and disarticulated suggesting that the bones were brought here from elsewhere.

Why? There was a perfectly good churchyard less than 1km away and burial outside consecrated ground was unusual. Possible explanations include murder, warfare and deliberate desecration.

Bone comb



Life for the O'Loughlin lords that we think were living at the fort (cashel) between AD 1000 and 1650 was not always violent. This comb was made from three pieces of worked bone held together by iron rivets. The teeth (now broken) were cut using a fine saw. The comb may have been used for just that or may have been worn as hair decoration.

Excavation at Caherconnell will continue in 2009 and we hope to find more information that will help tell the stories of the people who lived here in the past.

Pin-mould



This sandstone mould was probably used for making copper alloy dress-pins and tells us that medieval Gaelic aristocrats were making and wearing high-quality fashion accessories.

The excavations at Caherconnell are a joint undertaking of TVAS (Ireland) Ltd, National University of Ireland, Galway and Burren Forts Ltd.

Further information at:
www.tvasireland.ie
www.burrenforts.ie
www.nuigalway.ie/archaeology

