



Lesson Plan 5: Threecastles Ringfort & Motte

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council



This lesson is part of a series of 8 lesson plans based on the “Explore the Nore” poster and River Nore Heritage Audit. It is aimed at 4th, 5th & 6th classes in primary schools. The project is an action of the Kilkenny Heritage Plan, and is funded by the Heritage Office of Kilkenny County Council and the Heritage Council. For further information contact dearbhal.ledwidge@kilkennycoco.ie. Tel: 056-7794925. www.kilkennycoco.ie/eng/Services/Heritage/

■ Learning objectives

HISTORY

Strand: Local studies; Strand unit: Buildings, sites or ruins in my locality;

Strand unit: My locality through the ages

Strand: Early people and ancient societies ; Strand unit: Early Christian Ireland

Strand: Life, society, work and culture in the past; Strand unit: Life in Norman Ireland

Content objectives

- develop an understanding of chronology, in order to place people, events and topics studied in a broad historical sequence
- use imagination and evidence to reconstruct elements of the past
- develop a sense of responsibility for, and a willingness to participate in, the preservation of heritage

Skills and concepts to be developed

- time and chronology
- change and continuity
- using evidence

■ Learning activities

Threecastles Ringfort and Motte

Lesson plan: visual cues from the poster photograph. Get students to answer a series of questions on the Threecastles ringfort photograph. Consult wider resources to answer some of the questions. Relevant to Early Medieval Ireland (500-1200 AD) and the start of the Anglo Norman period (1200-1400 AD)

Can you see the ringfort at Threecastles?

It is the bullseye in the brown field in the middle of the poster. The monument is not visible at ground level. A farmer ploughed it out probably over 200 years ago. The monument is identified only thus by a cropmark.

What are crop marks? How do they form?

The ringfort is in a field of wheat. When the summer is dry the soil will be dry and not much water will be fed to the crops growing in the field, and they may look parched. However, where there is a place for lots of water to store up where the soil is deeper, such as in the ditches of a ringfort after they have been backfilled with soil, the crops will appear lush. Arable land elsewhere in the River Nore valley is good for looking at cropmarks.

Are there any crop marks where you live? See for yourself on Google Earth!

Google Earth is a great exploratory tool for kids. Get them to look at their homes from above!

What are ringforts and when were they built?

Ringforts are defended farmsteads. They were built from 500-1000 AD during Early Medieval times before the arrival of the Normans. They are one of the most commonly found monuments in Ireland. The defences were normally made of a high earthen bank and deep ditch. The forts may have been used to keep cattle in. Cattle were very important for farming in early medieval times.

Can you identify an ancient castle in the photograph?

When the Norman came to Ireland they often built monuments beside or sometimes on important monuments of the Irish people, as a way of making their mark in the landscape, and showing who was now in control. The first castles built by the Normans were not of stone like you might imagine. They were actually constructed of timber and were positioned on large artificial circular mounds of earth with a defensive ditch (moat) around the base. These types of castles are called mottes. The timber buildings have long since rotted away, but the mounds still appear across the landscape and are often disguised within clumps of trees. *Now can you see the motte at Threecastles?*

Can you see the River Nore in the photograph?

The river is in the very top right of the picture. One of the key reasons that the ringfort and the motte are located near to the river is because the river was very important for getting around in those days – there were no good roads – only tracks – and there were certainly no cars!! Boats carried people and supplies.

What is a river floodplain? Can you see this in the photograph?

The floodplain is low-lying adjacent land to the river which frequently floods. Farmers would not normally grow crops in these fields in case they became flooded. People would not build houses right beside the river for the same reason. This is also why the motte and the ringfort are set back from the river, where the land was higher and drier!

Can you see the different patterns in the shapes of the fields on either side of the main road? Why are they different?

The different shapes in the field reflect different field systems. Hedgerows were mostly used to mark the boundaries of these field systems. The square and rectangular shaped patterns to the left of the main road are from the seventeenth century onwards when organised divisions of land took place thanks to the systematic recording of the lands and properties of all the people of Ireland during the time of Cromwell (Down Survey). The more varied shapes of the fields on the right of the main road are from more ancient times. See the old map of Grange Demesne on the poster for more on this topic.

Many fields have local names- names that the farmer has given them to distinguish one from another.

Do you know of any fieldnames in your area? (see Lesson Plan 8 Rivernames for links to this)

■ Linkage and Integration

GEOGRAPHY

Strand: Natural environments

Strand Unit: The local natural environment

Maps, globes and geographical skills

VISUAL ARTS

Strand: Drawing

Strand Unit: Making Drawings

Strand: Construction

Strand Unit: Making Constructions

■ Differentiation

- Compare how people farmed then with today
- Construct a model of a ringfort to see what it would have looked like.
- Link to Lesson Plan 4 "Hedgerow" exercise

■ Resources

River Nore Poster

Nore Heritage Audit Vol. 1, pages 14-18, 36-39

Nore Heritage Audit Vol. 2, pages 66-67, 69-71

External references:

<http://www.itsabouttime.ie/primary/pdfs/M2.pdf> p38-40

[http://www.archaeology.ie/media/archeologyie/PDFS/Irish Field Monuments.pdf](http://www.archaeology.ie/media/archeologyie/PDFS/Irish%20Field%20Monuments.pdf), p3, 18-19

<http://www.townlands.net/a-field-name-research-handbook/> How to record fieldnames.

<http://www.logainm.ie/> Placenames of Ireland database (includes educational resources)

■ Evaluation