

# Archaeology Research Grant 2021

## Rena Maguire\_ Interim Report

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1. Title: Dr
- First name: Rena
- Surname: Maguire
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3. Grant programme **Archaeology Research Grant**
4. Year awarded **2021**
5. Title of project **A preliminary investigation of the materiality of equestrian culture in early medieval Ireland**
6. Summary of report (Minimum allowed 100 words) **The project schedule has been affected by COVID-19 restrictions and the relocation of faunal collections in the NMI. Upon completion a full report will be submitted to the RIA. This preliminary report describes work carried out to date. This project has sought to provide the first ever overview of early medieval equestrianism and associated equipment. Examining the 'big picture' of Irish early medieval horsemanship has allowed observation of unexpected trends, such as possible Saxon influence, where future work is needed in a more focussed and detailed way. Examination and comparison of equine teeth and skulls will complete this phase of the project.**
7. Please provide two appropriate images
- A photograph of a metal bit, likely a snaffle bit, with a ruler for scale. The bit has two rings and a central mouthpiece. The ruler is marked in centimeters and millimeters. The text "KF01107" and "Q-CONNECT" is visible on the ruler.
- A photograph of a curved metal object, possibly a bit or part of a bridle. It has a circular opening at the top and a curved end. The metal appears to be a dark, possibly oxidized, color.
8. Please outline the objectives of the project
- The principal aim of this project was to examine all equestrian artefactual evidence of the early medieval period in Ireland, and by doing so, formulate an overview of the use of the horse in that period.
- The objectives were to record and collate, via visits to museums and post excavation staff of commercial archaeology units, a catalogue of objects which could confidently be said to be a. equestrian and b. early medieval. These could be compared to the now 'known knowns' of Late Iron Age equipment to assess how use and manufacture had changed. This has been accomplished.
- The other objective has been to examine the skulls of equids which are of likely early medieval dates and gain information about what kinds of bits they were using, along with their physiology and any other information the remains may tell. Work commences on this by late 2021, with completion in early 2022.
- When both objectives are accomplished, their combination will inform on early medieval transport and animal husbandry, producing a major contribution to a new area of research

- Dimensions
- Material
- Decoration
- Use-wear.

Use-wear, repairs and manufacturing technique signatures have been noted, as these provide functional 'living' biographies. So too, styles of bits used have proved valuable to define chronology and prevalent cultural influences

2. This information has been recorded, collated and catalogued with illustrations in preparation for website entry and promotion on social media. This phase of work is now complete.

3. The next phase is to examine equid skulls of the early medieval period for dental wear produced by metal or organic biting on the premolars, along with any other indications of domestic employment, such as pressure on the head and nose, associated with bitless bridles. This will be done by a robust, non-intrusive examination of the skulls by both Dr Ruth Carden, a zooarchaeology specialist, and myself. This will produce estimates of age, size and health of the animals along with the desired information on dental wear. In particular, two of the skulls have not been examined since 1908 and are expected to prove of exceptional interest.

4. The results of the examination of the skulls will be compared to the data collected from the examination of bits. This can show if metal or fabric biting was more commonly used, as each carry different use-wear signatures. Other information can be gained as well.

- Sizes of the horses can be estimated by the length of head and palate measurements
- 2. Ages of horses can be easily discovered from assessing the Galvayne Groove markings on the teeth.
- 3. Condition of teeth can also reflect the general care the animals received in life.

These analyses are chosen to examine about the jobs which equids were used for. By looking at the practicalities of the equipment used, a more realistic understanding of early medieval life can be delivered and compared with early medieval texts to assess if the ideals set out were indeed just that, or actual reflections of real life

5. Interpretation of the data will allow for completion of the papers already in preparation and subsequent submission to peer reviewed archaeological journals

10. Please outline the findings of your research and/or milestones achieved

The key milestones completed to date are identification, examination and recording of material for analysis, as well as the preparatory work for analysis of the skulls.

Results to date are very promising, with some surprises, showing socio-economic influences and interactions every bit as complex as those of the Late Iron Age, although with different nuances. The examination of bridle components has allowed ready comparison with similar in early medieval period in Scotland, and Saxon England. The Lagore snaffle has a unique biography, incorporating the unmistakable cheek-piece styles of the Saxon 'axe head' design, but with facets of Late Iron Age Irish design in the production of the mouthpiece, indicating it may have been made by a local craftsman, rather than imported. It is very much a boundary object, with a direct parallel in a snaffle from Lochlee Crannog in south-west Scotland.

The bit from Killeevan is equally unique, making the case for the recycling of earlier copper alloy tack, being made up of at least three different bits, from different periods of time. It has been noted that copper alloy is not represented in the manufacture of early medieval tack, with iron prevalent as the metal of choice, very different from the Late Iron Age (40BC to AD 450). Chronological phases have been indicated due to equestrian styles, such as the distinctive full-cheek snaffle, very typical of Viking tack, at Togherstown. The ringfort has evidence of multi-period activity, so this find reinforces an early medieval/Viking period phase of the 9th-10th century AD.

There is also an indication of a different kind of bitless bridle in metal, which requires further examination

The use of vernacular organic biting, rather than metal on high-status sites such as Ballinderry is a trend requiring comparative analysis with the equid skulls. This is the area in which the assistance of Dr Ruth Carden, adjunct Research Fellow in UCD, has been sought, as organic biting and bitless bridles are being used, specific pathologies are to be expected. Some indication of this has already been informally observed from photographs, but a full examination is required.

11. a) Please provide details of the dissemination of the outcomes from this project (inc. publications, presentations, outreach, media etc.) including details of any social media/web platforms used to publicise this project

Full dissemination has been slowed down by the unavoidable delays of COVID and relocation of faunal remains. However, some output has commenced, with much more anticipated.

1. One paper which incorporates aspects of the Lagore Crannog snaffle and compares it with the Lochlee crannog specimen in Scotland has been peer reviewed and is now awaiting publication in Cheiron journal, spring 2022.

2. An exclusive analysis of the Lagore snaffle is currently in preparation, to be submitted to PRIA in 2022.

b) No. of Academic Papers/articles published:

0

c) No. of Lectures given/outreach events involved in:

0

d) Media Coverage (article in local newspaper, feature on University website

0

etc.):

e) How will you continue to communicate the results of your project and what are your publication plans?

Dissemination will continue until the next phase of research via the details shown in planned publications. This also is when social media strategy steps in, to supply a regular feed of information pertaining to academic publications and updates on research.

1. A paper focussing on the pathological trends of the equid skulls is planned with Dr Ruth Carden, as is a detailed analysis on the Craigywarren stallion, a skull which has not been examined since 1908. As the original was in PR1A by Scharff, the modern examination will be
2. Summary papers of general interest to be submitted to popular journals.
3. Social media accounts will be activated and used to disseminate details when the project is complete, or nearing completion, drip-feeding snippets of information, thus adding longevity to the results of the project.
4. The web platform is currently under construction, and awaiting the full results of the project to be uploaded by early 2022, after a full report is given to the RIA.
5. Conferences are planned once confident they will not be affected by COVID restrictions. I would very much welcome the opportunity to present final results at any RIA- organised event.

15. How did the award enhance your professional development (e.g. in terms of specific opportunities, opportunities for enhancing skills, collaborations with others etc.)?

It has given me a chance to grow my research past the Iron Age, and metallurgy, and also an opportunity to work with Dr Carden Her reputation on the NMI Cave Bones project is superlative, having discovered evidence of pre-Mesolithic human activity. I am extending my own knowledge of zooarchaeology and adding to my skill set.

16. What plans (if any) do you have to further your proposal/project?

I will be drafting an application to RIA Radiocarbon dating funds to date the equine skulls, along with isotopic analysis to identify where the animals may have come from. This would place equitation changes within a secure timeline and indicate if equids were imports or home-bred, as the Saxon influence on tack raises questions about trade contacts. This has already been discussed with the NMI, as to how best to proceed.