



Cranmore House and Giant's Ring

Commemorative field meeting 11th May 2013



Appropriately dressed BNFC members in 2013

Ballynahatty Ceremonial Landscape.

To commemorate the special field meeting of 13th June 1863 to the **Giant's Ring** and the Club's repeat visit of 1913 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of its foundation, a good number of members, some in period costume, attended this outing to **Cranmore House** and the Giant's Ring in blustery, rainy weather. **Barrie Hartwell** had agreed to be our leader for the day as he has directed the archaeological excavation at Ballynahatty adjacent to the Giant's Ring from 1990 to 2000 and has more recently done a special study of Cranmore House and its occupants.

At Cranmore House Barrie, who turned out in historic costume, distributed copies of a well - illustrated handout. He thought that the house may pre-date the 1641 rebellion as a one-storey rubble-built structure similar to the **White House at Ballyspurge**, Co. Down and that it may have been burnt out at that time along with nearby **Newforge** and **Moses Hill's Fort** at Malone. He believes that the rebuilding after the rebellion involved adding the upper storey in brick and the **Hearth Money Rolls** record a **Mr John Eccles** resident here by 1690.

A legend has **King William** sheltering here from heavy rain on his way to the Boyne and that the house was renamed **Orange Grove** to commemorate this. A drawing of c.1850 and a Green photograph of 1888 illustrate the enlargement of the ground floor windows on the south side and a later (undated) painting shows the addition of an elaborate gabled front.

The naturalist **John Templeton** laid out the 13 acre garden around the house in 1793 and many of his rare trees and shrubs may still be found here in mature condition. In 1810 he renamed the house **Cranmore** (big tree) and it was known as 'The Big House' by elderly local residents in the early 19th century, with Templeton family members living on here until the 1880s. About 1900 it was bought by **John Henry Wilson**, a partner in **Harland and Wolff**, who converted it to a fernery by the removal of floors and the addition of pipework and cement render to the interior walls.

(contd)



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The house is now in the ownership of **Royal Belfast Academical Institution** and the remains of the 13 acre garden were entered into the Northern Ireland Heritage Gardens Inventory in 1992. The house was entered into the Schedule of Historic Monuments in 1996 and a programme of conservation to remove ivy, consolidate the wall tops and provide oak window heads was carried out in 2006.

The field trip continued to the **Giant's Ring henge monument** where the visit was interrupted by several dramatic hail showers. Barrie provided a detailed account of the construction of the earthwork around the megalithic tomb and the various excavations which have taken place here; **Henry C. Lawlor** in 1917; **Ian Richmond** in 1929; **Pat Collins** in 1954 when he established that there was no actual internal ditch but that the material for the bank had been scraped from a wide area of the interior and that a boulder revetment had been built on the inside to retain the bank. The purpose of the monument was probably as an assembly site for crowds drawn from far afield at particular times of the year and parallels were drawn with similarly large henges in the Boyne Valley, Co Meath.

Barrie's own excavation was conducted on the nearby ridge where he had photographed from the air the cropmark of an oval site 100 metres in length. This discovery has led to a greater understanding of this large ritual landscape. The crop-mark proved to be a timber enclosure defined by pairs of post-holes each 2m deep which would have held posts the size of telegraph poles. A square setting of less deep post-holes within it was interpreted as a platform for exposing the remains of the dead prior to cremation or burial. The scientific dating of samples from the site provided a central date of around 2700 BC.

A record photograph of the group in front of the megalithic tomb, taken by our President between challenging hail showers, reflects a similar photograph taken in 1913. The turnout of members in period costumes was exemplary and we were grateful for the shelter offered by the National Trust at nearby Minnowburn to complete the day with a very elegant picnic.

Claire Foley