

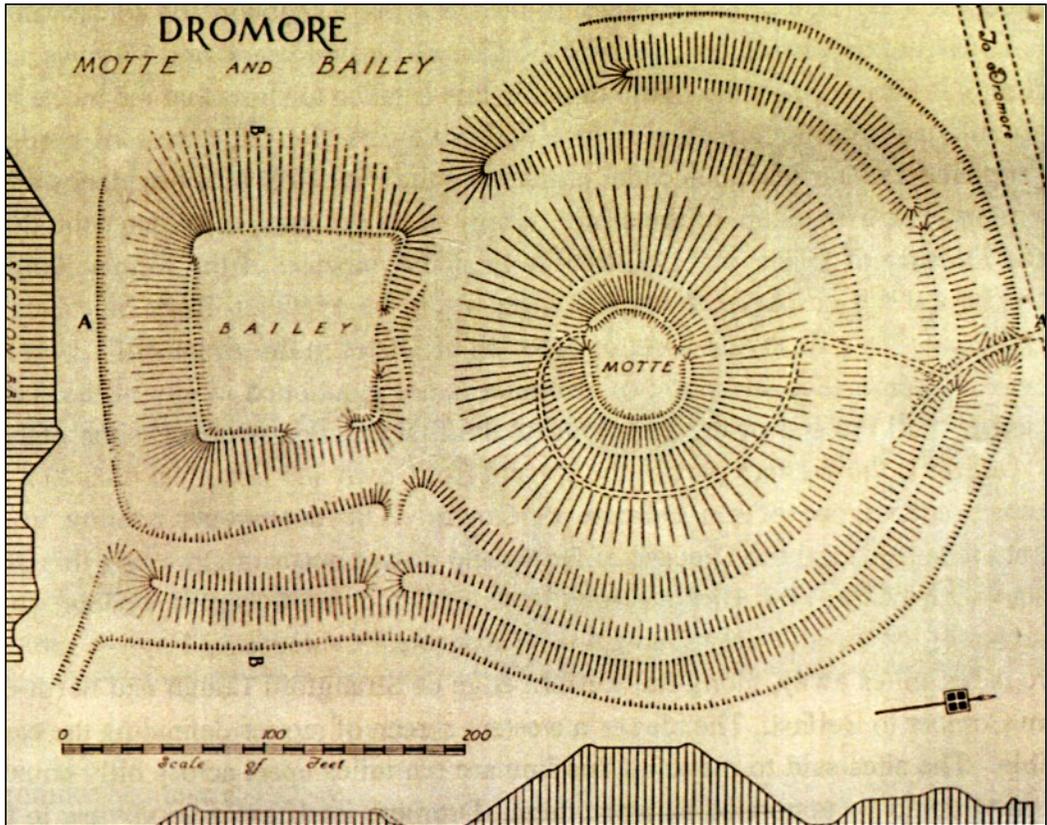


Dromore motte. View from the north. In terms of the size of its motte (200 ft diameter at its base), this is one of the most impressive in Ireland.

Dromore Motte & Bailey, County Down

In terms of the size of its motte, the preservation of its earthworks and its siting on a bank above the River Lagan, this is one of the most impressive mottes in Ireland. While the motte is large, the bailey, like many Irish examples (where it is present at all) is small, here only 30m² at most. Excavations by Waterman in 1951 of about one quarter of the area on the top of the motte uncovered two sets of layers. The perimeter bank consisted of re-deposited till lying on what he described as two phases of occupation: a lower one on the surface of the motte which covered two lines of fairly small posts (3-5" in diameter driven into the motte); this was covered by a layer of till (3" deep) with a further deposit containing burned timbers, over which was the main bank material. This may not represent two periods as he thought, but may be, in line with Higham & Barker's reinterpretation of the bank at Clough, a clay wall revetted or reinforced by timber. Within the perimeter he recorded a shallow hollow about 2ft deep; the deposit lying over the fill of this hollow merged with the bank material.

There are two accounts of who built Dromore motte. The first relies on the information in the Pipe Roll of 1211-12. This records the spending of the quite small sum of £4-18-2 on a new hall, a bridge, four bretasches and other buildings. At the same time £1 1-13-6 went on food and clothing for a garrison of two knights, 16 men at arms, a chaplain and six servants, along with 240 cows sent to 30 soldiers guarding the district for two years and 80 cows sent to 40 men guarding it for three months. Traditionally, this is taken to show that the motte was built by the English and that it formed part of a defensive line along the western border of the English settlement. The second account argues that the Pipe Roll is not evidence of English authorship, or even ownership, of the castle, simply of its occupation. When John de Courcy seized the lordship of Ulster in 1177, he did so at the expense of the former Kings of the Ulaid, but he did not eliminate them; the King whom he expelled, Rory MacDunleavy is found fighting as his ally, styled King of the Irish of Ulster in the Annals of Ulster in 1196. Where was his land? The Bishopric of Dromore is not mentioned in any of the records the



Dromore motte & bailey. From Jope, 1966. Whilst the motte is large, the square bailey, like many Irish examples (where it is present at all) is small, here only 30m² at most.

Irish dioceses until the end of the 12th century; the first mention is of a Bishop of Iveagh in 1197. Iveagh was the western part of the present Co. Down and this must refer to a Diocese of Dromore, carved out of the Diocese of Down. The documents relating to English settlement are confined to the Diocese of Down and do not occur in Dromore; this must be a bishopric established to look after the Irish lands of Ulaid, not occupied by John de Courcy but presumably by his ally MacDunleavy. The nearest evidence of English settlement to Dromore is ten miles away, along the western edge of Strangford Lough and north-east of a line from Comber to Belfast. The idea of a western screen of mottes defending the earldom is impossible. The sites said to make up this line are ten miles apart across hilly country; any raiding party could go

unnoticed between them. Dromore itself has a good view to the east, not the west. It was built at the likely chief place of the remnant Irish kingdom of Rory MacDunleavy.

Further Reading

Davies, O., & Quinn, D. B., 1941. 'The Irish Pipe Roll of 14 John', in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 4, supplement. See also Quinn: Index and corrigenda to the Irish Pipe Roll of 14 John, in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 6, 1943.

Waterman, D. M., 1954. 'Excavations at Dromore motte, Co. Down', in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 17, 164-8

Jope, E. M., (ed.), 1966, *An Archaeological Survey of Co. Down*, HMSO, Belfast, 203-4