

The Irish Iron Database

Brian.Dolan@ucd.ie

School of Archaeology, UCD

Summary

The Irish Iron Database is being compiled as part of a PhD project focusing on the social and technological role of Iron in the Irish Iron Age and Early Medieval periods. The database aims to incorporate all published sites with evidence for iron production or working and also a significant number of unpublished sites. When complete, the database will allow sophisticated analysis and extensive evidence for early iron in Ireland.



The Project

The Irish Iron database forms one element of a PhD currently being carried out at the UCD School of Archaeology.

The research is attempting to understand the role of iron as both a material and an industry in early Ireland. It is examining the evidence from a social perspective; considering how iron, a material critically important in societies reliant on iron weapons and tools, was intimately bound up with people's ideologies, identities and everyday social practice.

Very little work has been published in Ireland specifically relating to early ironworking and Scott's influential monograph *Early Irish Ironworking* published almost two decades ago remains the only major work in the area. There is now a pressing need for an assessment of the latest evidence. New methodologies and new theoretical approaches are being employed to bring a fresh perspective to the material.

Scope

Geographically the database will cover the entire island. This is an ambitious and comprehensive target that will only be possible through careful management of the level of detail involved. The database will only incorporate data directly relevant to ironworking processes. It will not record iron artefacts, unless they are particularly noteworthy (e.g. anvil, tongs), and sites with potentially relevant evidence but no ironworking remains (e.g. charcoal production pits) will not be included.



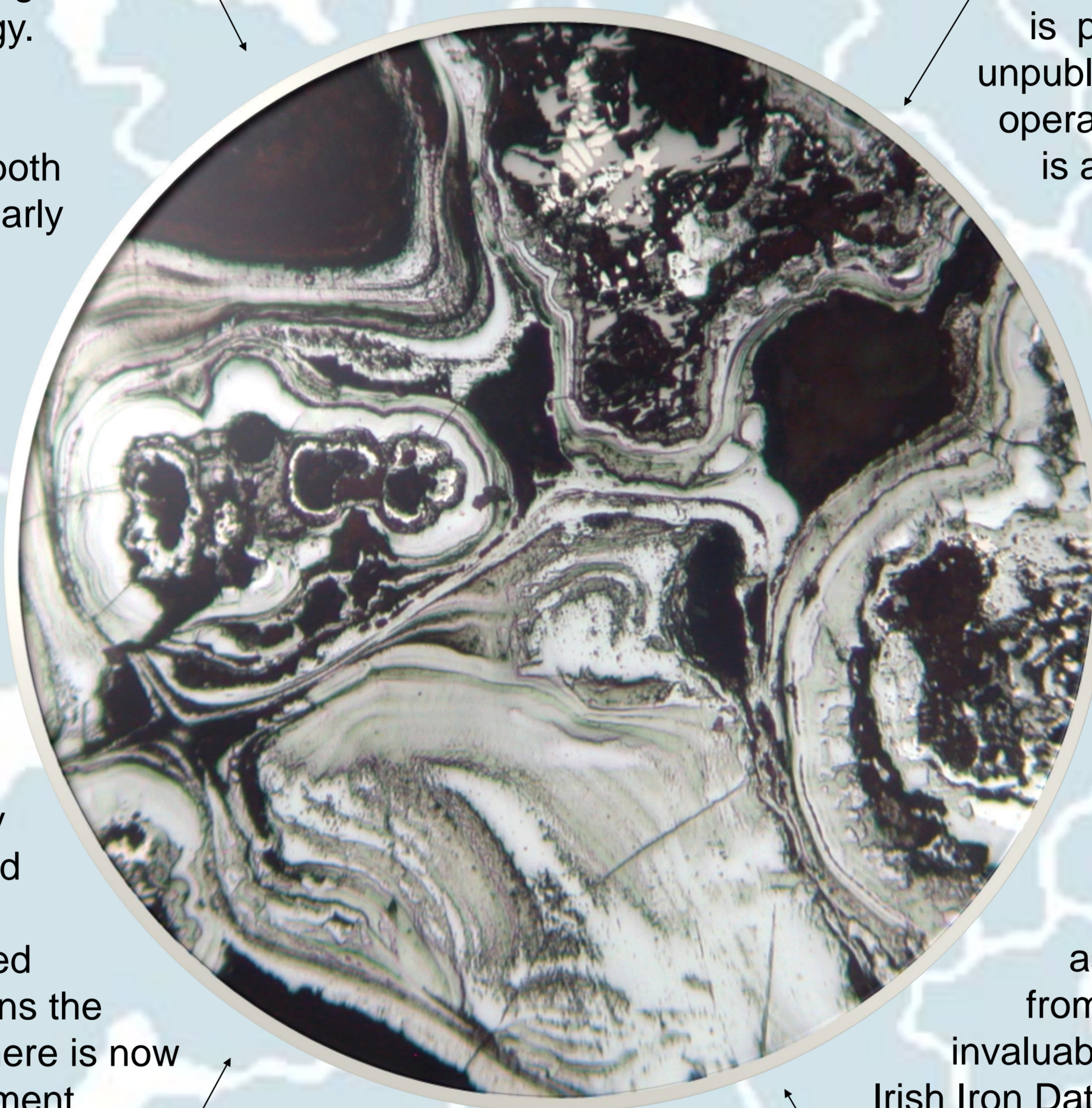
Chronologically the database will incorporate evidence from the earliest use of iron in the Late Bronze Age up to the coming of the Vikings and different ways of working the metal in the late first millennium AD (Scott's Early Iron Age A to Late Iron Age A). Experience so far suggests the vast majority of the evidence collected will date to the second half of the first millennium AD.



Resources

A number of key sources provide the database. Scott's sites provided a baseline design (design is Government websites the NRA

will provide information for (1990) database of published and was used for the initial ongoing). New data from including excavations.ie and Database (<http://archaeology.nra.ie>) is particularly important for finding unpublished information. The co-operation of companies and directors is also very important.

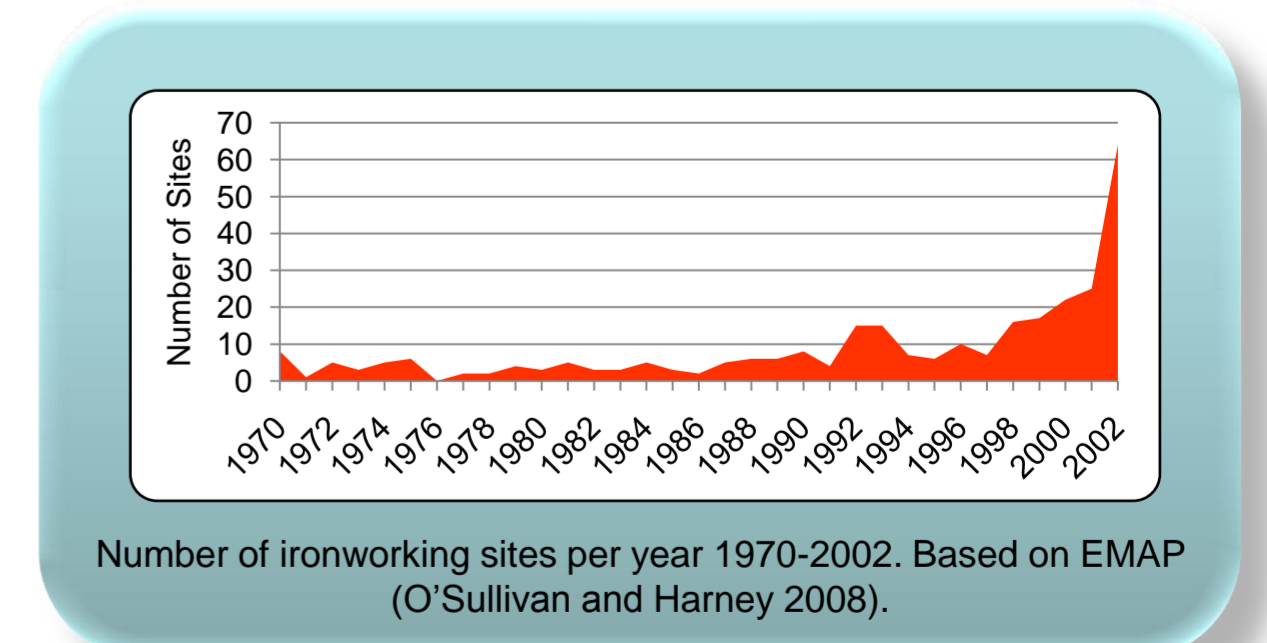


Within UCD, the Early Medieval Archaeology Project (www.emap.ie) has completed its first phase assessment of Irish Early Medieval sites, including a specific assessment of ironworking evidence (O'Sullivan and Harney 2008). The 'Iron Age Ireland: Finding an Invisible People' project is a similar synthetic database also being compiled in UCD (Becker *et al* 2008) aimed at assessing excavated evidence from the Iron Age. Both projects are invaluable sources of information for the Irish Iron Database

Aims

The database interpretation will provide a solid basis for analysis and both for this doctoral research and will also stand as a significant tool for analysis between Irish sites and future projects. It will provide a solid basis for analysis and both for this doctoral research and will also stand as a significant tool for analysis between Irish sites and comparative also internationally. It is hoped that in the long term it will be possible to make the database available to other researchers on a formal basis, possibly through internet publication. Finally, it can serve as a model for studies of other materials as yet neglected.

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Number of ironworking sites per year 1970-2002. Based on EMAP (O'Sullivan and Harney 2008).

Acknowledgements

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References

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