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Understanding Sweathouses in Ireland with special reference to County Leitrim

Katie Kearns

This thesis is submitted to University College Dublin in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Archaeology

School of Archaeology

Supervisor: Professor Tadhg O' Keeffe

August 2016

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Abstract

Sweathouses are small, dry-stone structures that are common in the North-West of Ireland. They are single chambered, with a low doorway and corbelled roof. Often, they are layered over with earth, which creates an impression of a grassy mound. As their name suggests, sweathouses were used in a similar fashion to a modern day sauna. These structures were primarily used to procure relief from various aches and pains. Their use is defined in written records, however they may have served different functions at one time.

Sweathouses are mostly found in rural areas such as fields, on the slopes of mountains or tucked away in wooded areas. Sweathouses are unevenly distributed throughout Ireland, with a sparsity in the south and an unusually high number in the North-West. They don't appear to be constructed beside any other built features, with the exception of occupied/abandoned farmhouses.

Archaeological evidence indicates that people have been perspiring in these drystone buildings since the Early Medieval period, at least (Williams, 2014). There is no consensus as to the origins of sweathouses. Unless more archaeological excavations are carried out, this question will remain unanswered.

It is widely agreed that people stopped using sweathouses in the latter half of the 19th Century (Feehan, 2003, p. 272). It is probable that several socio-economic factors influenced the gradual decline of this tradition.

Sweathouses no longer serve any purpose in modern Irish society, they have been left to decay, crumbling under the weight of age and neglect. However, they can still serve to educate the public today about Ireland's rich archaeological and cultural heritage.

Sweathouses may be unique in an Irish context, however they have global counterparts that have the same basic principles at their core. This type of shared cultural phenomenon lives on in many cultures today and was part of civilisations that have since collapsed.

Introduction

Dotted around the Irish landscape are little grassy mounds built into hillsides that look quite unassuming. Each mound has a little doorway, where one has to get on their hands and knees to enter. They are very often found in secluded areas where paths are less travelled. One could be forgiven in thinking they were inspired by an Irish fairy-tale or a J.R.R Tolkien novel. These structures are not the work of the fairy-folk, however. They are a type of rural sauna known as a sweathouse, one of the many different field monuments found in Ireland. These sweathouses are not just an archaeological phenomenon, but an important component of cultural heritage both nationally and internationally. They are slowly vanishing from the landscape, taking with them a tradition that has been on this island for over a thousand years (Williams, 2014).

The name for these structures in the Irish language is '*teach alluis*', which translates roughly as house of sweat (Bolton, 2013). A few variations of this translation exist, for example they are known as '*toigthe alluis*' in Co. Derry and '*ty falluish*' in Co. Tyrone (May, 1938; Mulcahy, 1891, p. 589).

There is a certain degree of homogeneity in the appearance and size of sweathouses. Weir argues that their design is very functional that there is not a great variation in their design (1979, p. 186). Sweathouses are often described as having a 'beehive' shape (Danaher, Lucas, 1885). They are single chambered, with a low doorway and lintelled entrance passage. Their chambers mainly have corbelled rooves, but there are many lintelled examples too (Weir, 1989, p 12). They are built using the drystone construction method and many are covered over by organic materials, such as earth and clay (Richardson, 1939, p. 33; Weir, 1989, p. 11).

Sweathouses share similarities in materials and size with other simple stone structures, such as lime kilns and clocháns. These are built using the same drystone technique and clocháns have corbelled rooves (Evans, 1957, p. 115). Lime kilns are used to create quicklime for construction while clocháns had various roles, such as transhumance buildings, in the Dingle Peninsula at least (Aalen, 1964, pp. 39-40; Evans, 1957, p. 115).

Sweathouses are sometimes referred to as the Irish version of 'Turkish baths' and perform a similar role to a sauna (Evans, 1957). First, they had to be heated to a suitable level, then the person(s) using them would crawl inside, sweat profusely and follow this by immediate immersion in cold water (Richardson, 1939, p. 32; Latimer, 1894, p. 180). It is generally accepted that people would use sweathouses to procure relief from various aches and pains, such as rheumatism (Lockwood, 1901, p. 82).

There is the possibility that these structures had a ceremonial or ritual function, or perhaps they were used for relaxation. Cultures from all over the world have similar structures that are used for the same purpose. Finland has the *sauna*, Native American culture has the *sweat lodge*, Japan has the *onsen* and Turkey has the *hammam* - so many different cultures have their own unique variant (Sood, 2012). In some parts of the world they are used as a platform for spiritual cleansing and purification, such as the sweat-lodge ceremonies in Native American culture (Garrett, et. al., 2011).

What is curious about these little stone structures is that their origins remain something of a mystery. It is still up for debate whether the *teach alluis* was introduced into Ireland by settlers or if they are a unique Irish invention.

There is a particular concentration of sweathouses in the North-West of Ireland. Leitrim, Roscommon, Cavan, Sligo and Fermanagh have the highest concentrations respectively. There are two hundred and forty sweathouses listed in the Republic of Ireland, according to the Sites and Monuments Record (Dept. of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, 2016). Henceforth, this shall be referred to as the SMR. The Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record (NISMR) contains data of thirty seven (definite) sweathouses, which brings the total listed in Ireland to two hundred and seventy seven. Further discussion of their distribution and related issues can be found in Chapter 3.

Another interesting aspect about these structures is that people ceased to use them. This did not happen overnight, of course, but by the latter half of the 19th Century, the demise of this tradition had well begun (Grogan, Kilfeather, 1997, p. 204). The reason behind this is not widely agreed upon.

Teach alluis form part of Ireland's cultural landscape and built heritage, yet there is scant attention paid to them in academia and other spheres of contemporary Irish

society. The fact that so many still exist indicates that they formed an important part of people's lives, otherwise, one could argue that they would not have been built at all.

Literature review

One of the issues arising from studying sweathouses in Ireland is that some of the pieces were written over a century ago, meaning that some of the content is outdated. That aside, every contribution to the study of sweathouses is valuable as it contributes to the small corpus of data that currently exists about these monuments.

The author that has probably contributed the greatest quantity of material to sweathouse literature is Anthony Weir, who wrote three articles of decent length on these structures. He combined historical sources, local knowledge gathered from people living in the vicinity and his own original research. Weir surveyed several sweathouses and created sketches, plans and drawings of them. Whilst Weir's accounts are mostly accurate, his online article is on a website that contains lots of information that cannot fully be verified.

In his 1979 article, Weir discusses not only sweathouses in Co. Louth but also further afield in counties Leitrim, Cavan and Sligo, thus giving due consideration to their geographic distribution in Ireland. Several examples are discussed in detail, both ones in a well-preserved state and those which have fallen into ruin. He describes their dimensions, then uses the measurements gathered to make a reasonable argument against these structures being used as sweathouses. Weir describes the drystone structure at Creevybaun in Co. Galway and makes the point that it is simply too large to have been a sweathouse, also, the doorway is too tall and would not have been conducive to keeping the heat within the structure. Thus, Weir can discern clearly what the characteristics of sweathouses are.

In Weir's article 'Sweathouses: Puzzling and Disappearing', he gives a decent description of sweathouses, their distribution and their function. Weir quotes the French author de Latocnaye in full, as he did in the above article also. Much of what is written in this article can be found in Weir's other articles – the function of sweathouses, their style, size & materials and distribution are outlined. Black and white photographs of two preserved sweathouses are included on the title page, however there is no title for these images. Weir does consider many aspects about the use of sweathouses and raises some interesting questions. For instance, he states that he finds it curious that Irish people were living in great poverty and were

demoralised during the Penal times and during the Great Famine, yet still devoted so much of their time and resources to building, maintaining and using sweathouses. The possibility that sweathouses may have been used in conjunction with wild mushrooms that cause hallucinations (*Psilocybe semilanceata*) is given due consideration in this piece of writing also. There is scant mention of this particular topic elsewhere in the literature.

'*Irish Sweathouses and the Great Forgetting*' is the most recently written article by Weir that can be found online. This article echoes much of what Weir has stated before about sweathouses. If Weir could back up some of his claims via references, perhaps the content of this article may appear more reliable. For instance, he states that sweathouses resemble the 'small caves' that people used to dwell in during the 17th century, but no further information of these 'caves' is provided. Overall, it is clear that Weir is genuinely interested in the archaeological imprint of these structures and their cultural significance.

The earliest reference found thus far concerning sweathouses is by de Lactocnaye, a writer from France who described Ballytra sweathouse, Co. Donegal. This description is in his 18th Century work titled '*A Frenchman's Walk through Ireland 1796-7*'. The account is generally accurate and seems to correspond with many accounts about sweathouses, however some details may have been exaggerated. For instance, de Latocnaye states that the people using the sweathouse stay there for up to five hours (1918, p. 193). De Latocnaye also says that some people return to work after using the sweathouse, an action which has not been mentioned elsewhere in any of the literature.

Several accounts mention alternative activities to water immersion after sweathouse use. One such reference is in Ciaran Parker's 2009 article in the Leitrim Guardian titled '*Sweathouses*'. An interesting aspect of Parker's article that is striking is that he refers to sweathouses as being unisex instead of being used separately by men and women. Although, another extant reference to sweathouses being unisex has not been found. The theory within this article as to why sweathouses stopped being used refers to the introduction of indoor plumbing. In effect, people who performed personal hygienic activities outdoors could do this in their home instead. Whilst this is an interesting suggestion, it is unclear what sources Parker used to obtain such an

idea. The idea that people stopped using sweathouses due to indoor plumbing facilities becoming available does not mean that all social groups in Ireland had immediate access to the latter. However, perhaps a newspaper article is not a suitable platform for such a debate.

A record of sweathouses that is more than a century old is from 1885 by W.F. Wakeman. This is one of the shortest accounts of sweathouses, as it is merely a paragraph in length and contains a basic overview of *teach alluis*. Another short piece about sweathouses is contained in a 1965 paper by A.T Lucas. Lucas' account echoes much of what has already been said about sweathouses, albeit in a more condensed form.

F.W Lockwood wrote an article about sweathouses in Donegal and Leitrim in 1901. Lockwood's account not only describes sweathouses but includes information and drawings of megalithic structures in Tullaghan, Co. Leitrim and stone circles at Bundrowse, Co. Donegal. The inclusion of prehistoric field monuments in an article about sweathouses is interesting when one considers their contrasting functions and dates. Detailed but somewhat blurred pencil illustrations are included of the sweathouses at Assaroe, Co. Donegal and Kinlough, Co. Leitrim, respectively. These drawings also features people, which could be construed as reconstructive drawings. This account is valuable in a historical sense because both structures at Assaroe and Kinlough are no longer visible within the landscape, are not marked on any of the OSI maps, nor are they included in the SMR. The Assaroe sweathouse is mentioned in the National Folklore Collection, however (NFSC, Vol. 1028, p. 5).

W.T Latimer made a short but significant contribution to the corpus of sweathouse literature in 1894. This is not an extensive account, but due to the fact that it is focussing on one sweathouse in particular, Latimer gives a detailed description of the structure, its style, dimensions, aesthetic quality and building fabrics. Unfortunately no pictures, drawings or plans are included of this structure.

Fallagh Glen in Co. Tyrone has a sweathouse that is described in an article written in 1952 by Kevin Danaher and A.T Lucas. It is well written and describes the structure in an excellent amount of detail. This piece includes two concise ground plans of the structure and an image, showing the hole in the top of the roof used as a crude chimney. There is rather grainy photograph of the structure also and is not as

detailed as one would desire. However, this image was taken over half a century ago, when technology was not as well developed in this regard.

P. Richardson wrote of several sweathouses in Co. Cavan in a 1939 article. He states that he has visited and surveyed 25 sweathouses in the county, which is quite comprehensive considering that there are a total of 27 listed in the SMR for Co. Cavan. A catalogue of each sweathouse that the author visited is given at the end of the account, which is useful as a historical resource. Within the first paragraph of the account, the author alludes to sweathouses being introduced by the Vikings, then points out that sweathouses are in isolated locales and were thus protected from foreign influence. No references or date were provided for this mention of Vikings, however. Richardson believes the sweathouse tradition died off due to medical dispensaries being set up countrywide. His ideas for the origins and disappearance of sweathouses seem to lack substance – they require more than a few lines of discussion, in order for the reader to fully consider them.

In 1938, A. McL. May wrote a short but informative article about *teach alluis*. In this rather short, but detailed account, the author discusses the origins of sweathouses with reference to the use of similar structures in Scandinavian countries during the 9th Century. May draws interesting comparisons with the Russian 'Banya'. The underlying theme in this article appears to be the international context of these structures and the practices attached to them.

Seaton F. Milligan wrote a general account of sweathouses in 1889. The fact that the author refers to sweathouses as 'hot air baths' is uncommon throughout the literature for this topic and one could be forgiven in thinking that the author was discussing a different structure entirely. Included on the second page is a wonderfully detailed ink drawing of the sweathouse in Leegelan. It is clear from the outset that Milligan considers these structures to be of cultural significance and correctly points to the fact that sweathouses are not dealt with in literature concerning Ireland's social history.

In 1891, D.B. Mulcahy also wrote a piece with a title that refers to the sweathouses as a 'hot air baths'. The author had no prior knowledge of sweathouses and upon seeing one for the first time, set out to investigate them. Thus, the article is refreshing to read as it reminds one of how easily these structures can blend into the

countryside, unbeknownst to the people that pass through it. The author also communicated with several local people on the island to obtain information, which seems to be fairly standard practice, considering that Weir, Richardson, Milligan and Latimer do this also.

Baile, the Journal of the Geography Society in University College Dublin, contains an informative piece on sweathouses by George McClafferty. This was written in the 1970's, thus it is from the same era as Weir and Logan. The article is a rather detailed introduction to sweathouses and places them in an international context. The article includes a map titled 'Sweathouses in Ireland', however, in the light of more contemporary research, the map is now outdated.

Jason Bolton's online blog has a piece titled 'The sweat houses of Leitrim'. This is a decent addition to the corpus of sweathouse data, with descriptions of form, use and their place within the framework of Irish built heritage. One small detail that is debatable is Bolton's assurance that there is 'no definitive sweathouse' in terms of plan and scale. One could argue that while there are variations, there are essential characteristics that are found in sweathouses that ensure that they perform their function efficiently.

In 2013, the Irish Times published an article by Ronan Foley called 'Picture of Ireland'. This piece is a short, simplified introduction to sweathouses along with a distribution map (the accuracy of which cannot be verified). Such a short piece in a prominent newspaper underlines the issue that there is not sufficient widespread knowledge about this portion of Ireland's built heritage. The other newspaper article on the subject is also in the *Irish Times*, this time by Seamus Martin. This is roughly the same length as Foley's article, but it is more broad and informative, with a touch of humour. Judging by the reference to de Latocnaye, followed by the mention of Siberian sweathouses and use of psychedelic mushrooms in sweathouses, it seems likely that Martin solely relied on Weir for his information.

Patrick Logan briefly outlines the subject of sweathouses in his 1972 book on Irish folk medicine. In terms of the tradition surrounding sweathouses, Logan is accurate in his provision of information. However, due to the fact that this was written over four decades ago, it is slightly outdated. For instance, Logan says that there are no

traditions of sweathouses in Mayo, Kerry and Clare - yet all three counties have at least one sweathouse, according to the SMR (DAHG, 2016).

Several 'community' books had information on sweathouses, although the contents of each book had merely a page or two dedicated to the subject. These are so called as they are written and published by interest groups and members of local communities, with the aim of celebrating the heritage of a particular area and its people. *Killargue History and Heritage*, published by the Killargue Development Group, had one page with a decent description of *teach alluis*. Unusually, the sweathouse located in Killargue was not mentioned, but the author gave a brief general overview of sweathouses. The author of the piece also alludes to the origins of sweathouses as being brought in by Christian missionaries, but there is no further elaboration on the subject. *Killavoggy 2002* is another publication with a generic piece on the subject of sweathouses. It follows, again, in the almost formulaic manner in which sweathouses are written about (description, distribution, use, not always in that order). *Glenfarne, A History* was compiled and written by the Glenfarne Historical Society. The piece on sweathouses in this book is relatively short, but is informative nonetheless. Similarly to the entry in *Killargue History and Heritage*, the author states that there are fourteen sweathouses in Glenfarne, yet there is no mention of the sweathouse at Cloonaghmore. A useful but now outdated map of sweathouses in the area is included in the text. *Kilronan ~Then and Now* is a book written about the parish of Kilronan, Co. Roscommon. It includes a small section about the *teach alluis*. Echoing the latter three texts, the attributes and use of sweathouses are outlined. The last paragraph states, with almost too much surety, that the reason why people stopped using sweathouses was due to the availability of medical dispensaries.

With regards the information conveyed in these community books, in general, it is to a satisfactory and accurate level. It is also worth noting that these pieces were written before the compilation of county inventories by the *Archaeological Survey of Ireland*.

Several Archaeological Inventories by the *Archaeological Survey of Ireland* did have pieces on sweathouses. Not every county inventory contained information on sweathouses, but only a handful of inventories were available at the time of writing

this dissertation. The Archaeological Inventory of County Leitrim was compiled by Michael J. Moore in 2003. Preceding the individual entries was a basic introduction to sweathouses and reference to recent research, such as the results of the excavation at Cornacully, Co. Fermanagh. It is positive to see an up to date record of sweathouses in an inventory. The *Archaeological Inventory of County Wicklow* was compiled in 1997, by Eoin Grogan and Annaba Kilfeather. This has a decent introductory piece on sweathouses, despite the fact that only one sweathouse is located within the borders of Co. Wicklow. The authors are perhaps too confident as to the origins of sweathouses and the reasons of their disappearance. This is conveyed in the first sentence of this piece, in which the authors state that sweathouses were used from the Early Christian period to the 19th Century, without any mention of possible prehistoric use. The *Archaeological Inventory of County Cavan* contains a considerable amount of entries on sweathouses, along with a more detailed introduction on the subject. It was compiled by Patrick F. O' Donovan in 1995. The sweathouses herein are discussed alongside 'duck houses', which are strikingly similar in size and form. There are four remaining sweathouses in Co. Tipperary, three in the north and one in the south. The former three are discussed in the *Archaeological Inventory of County Tipperary: Vol. 1 – North Tipperary*, compiled by Jean Farrelly and Caimin O' Brien in 2002. As with all the authors above, a detailed introduction to the topic was provided by the authors, with much emphasis not just on the archaeology of sweathouses but how they were used and what role they played in helping to cure certain symptoms. All of these inventories are a great field guide to sweathouses, however all these entries are available on the SMR website's Historic Environment Viewer (HEV).

The SMR AND NISMR were extremely useful in obtaining information on individual sweathouses and their distribution. However, they both have their discrepancies. For instance, many sweathouses listed in the SMR are no longer visible on ground level due to decay. Also, some structures that are categorised as sweathouses may not have been used as sweathouses at all. This results in the figures being skewed. Leitrim may not always have been the county with the most sweathouses, it is impossible to know the true extent of their distribution at this point in time. Due to the fact that these two cataloguing systems are entirely different, it is more difficult to pool the data together effectively. The SMR's ArcGIS web application is far more

advanced, with a basemap gallery, a 'query data' option to show layers of specific monument types only, as well as up-to-date site descriptions. The NISMR website is more basic with limited search options and no means of creating a hyperlink of the list of all the sweathouses in Northern Ireland. Each entry is accompanied by recent photographs, descriptions and a bibliography. There is an attached file with each entry that contains more useful information on structures such as academic records, accounts from archaeological surveys, ground plans and photographs.

John Feehan includes a considerable amount of information on sweathouses, condensed into two pages in his book titled '*Farming in Ireland: History, Heritage and Environment*'. This work encompasses all aspects of farming in Ireland and is of a considerable length. The mention of sweathouses within this context is interesting as it highlights their role in society. Feehan is, however, of the opinion that sweathouses are derived from a Scandinavian tradition - a rather outdated idea in light of recent research (see Chapter 5).

With all the sources, it is suffice to say that the authors discussed sweathouses in a generally satisfactory and informative manner. However, there does seem to be a formulaic manner in which these authors describe *teach alluis* - perhaps this is true for any subject, to a certain degree. The journals consulted were written from four decades to over a century ago, making them inevitably outdated. That being said, they also provide a valuable snapshot in time, especially in the cases where the sweathouses discussed within have since disappeared from the landscape.

The National Folklore Collection

The Irish Folklore Commission was created in 1937 by the Department of Education and the Irish National Teachers Organisation. The aim of this project was to collect stories, customs and traditions from Irish school-children. The children in turn collected folklore from their relatives and people in their localities. This project was of considerable size - the Commission collected stories from 100,000 children, across 5,000 schools, over the course of six months (University College Dublin, 2016). The Collection has recently been digitised via the online repository 'Duchas.ie'. Thus far, 80% of the data from the National Folklore Collection is online.

Of the twenty six counties included in this collection, only seven have information on sweathouses - Galway, Donegal, Cavan, Leitrim, Sligo, Westmeath and Tipperary. In total, there were thirty one entries about sweathouses. Given that the authors discussed above communicated with local people and gathered information on sweathouses, the School's Folklore Collection made for interesting comparison. One can read the exact words of the people themselves, without as much likelihood of an author's interpretation and/or biases.

Several sweathouses mentioned here are no longer visible in the landscape, such as the one at Assaroe Abbey (NFSC, Vol. 1028, p. 5). Some sweathouses had disappeared at the time these accounts were written, but the memory of them was still extant people's collective memory (NFSC Vol. 730, p. 4). Real historical figures are mentioned in the folkloric accounts and one has an association with a particular sweathouse. 'Collier the robber', an infamous robber and folk hero, was reported to live in the sweathouse at Aghameen, Co. Louth (NFSC, Vol. 660, p. 73). Collier was indeed a real person native to Co. Louth, who was a notorious criminal in the early 19th Century (Drogheda Millmount Museum, 2013).

Generally, the folklore accounts have the same type of information regarding the *teach alluis*. They describe their shape and size, the materials used to construct them, how they were used and the reason why they were used. As with the written descriptions found in the more academic sources discussed above in this literature review, there is a slight generic nature in the manner in which sweathouses are described. This may be due to the fact that an abundance of knowledge about these

structures was not available at this time. The very nature of the folklore itself is that it is part of an oral tradition, the people who wrote these accounts did not have written sources with which to base their statements on.

Some interesting perspectives on the relationship between Irish people and sweathouses are present in the folklore accounts.

The accounts vary from a mere sentence to more than a page in length (NFSC Vol. 1027, p. 77; NFSC, Vol. 205, p. 368). When reading these folkloric accounts, one must give due consideration to the fact that the people writing these accounts ranged in age from school children to elderly people and all ages in between. Thus, the accuracy and quality of information is variable and to a degree must not be scrutinised too heavily, nor taken to be the absolute truth.

The folkloric sources add another dimension to the study of sweathouses, by way of allowing one to get a better sense of how people perceived them at that point in time.

Methodology

In order to successfully complete this dissertation, various different methodologies were employed. To commence the research for this dissertation, all the written sources about sweathouses that are currently available were consulted, compared and contrasted.

Many of the written sources read for this dissertation were accessed at UCD Library's online catalogue or at UCD Library itself. Online sources were also obtained via Google search. The National Folklore Collection is digitised online and proved to be a repository of valuable information. These sources are discussed in detail in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. Leitrim County Library was visited also, which had sources that were unavailable elsewhere, such as the Leitrim Guardian volumes and various community books.

To gain further insight into sweathouses, an informal interview was conducted with a man from Keadew, Co. Roscommon. This was a unique opportunity, as not many people who survive today can recall the use of such structures. The man's name was Peter McNiffe and he granted permission to record the conversation and use the information for research purposes.

Maps were the next resource that were consulted, as they provide not only geographical information concerning sweathouses, but information about the landscape as a whole. The National Monuments Service (NMS) website has a program called 'Historic Environment Viewer' (ArcGIS Web Application). This proved to be quite a useful tool as it allows one to see the distribution of sweathouses in Ireland and those located in any given county.

Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSI) offer an interactive service online that allows users to look at a range of different maps and aerial photographs. One can use the 'MapGenie' to view the OSI Historic 25" and 6" editions of the OSI collection. In many cases, sweathouses are only included in certain editions of the OSI maps and not in others.

Due to the time constraints of the deadline for this dissertation, the number of sweathouses successfully visited and recorded was twelve. To widen the scope of

the research, the chosen sweathouses were located across counties Leitrim, Cavan and Roscommon. It is hoped that this small sample of sweathouses will convey appropriate information on the size, scale and materials of sweathouses, as well as their relationship to features within the landscape.

The process of identifying suitable sweathouses, allocating landowners and individuals willing to accompany one to the site, travelling to sites, as well as recording the structures, was a time consuming process.

Landowners were identified by consulting the Land Registry and purchasing land folios, which contain the name and address of a given landowner. The facilities can be accessed online via www.Landdirect.ie.

Two Land Folios were purchased to gain access to the sweathouses at Lisgorman and Cloonaghmore, respectively. For the other ten sweathouses visited, landowners were identified and contacted via personal contacts. The sweathouses at Lurgaboy, Kilmore, Keadew west and Cleighran More are situated in public amenity areas. Thus, access by the public was evidently permitted.

The sweathouses chosen to be visited were primarily based on realistic ease of access, followed by their location and state of repair. To gain an insight as to their imprint on the landscape, some sweathouses chosen for this survey were intact, whilst others were in disrepair. For this reason, it was not possible to survey all the structures in the same manner. Cleighran More, Coppanaghbane and Mountallen were the only three that were suitable for tape and offset survey.

At Coppanaghbane, the primary baseline set up was 3 metres in length and ran in a South-North direction parallel to the face of the structure. Several points of interest were then identified, such as facing stones which help to identify the outer chamber amidst vegetation. Tape and offset measurements were taken from these points. A subsidiary baseline was set up at a right angle to the primary baseline, in order to measure the internal chamber. The secondary baseline ran directly through the entrance passage to the wall at the opposite end of the chamber. Tape and offset measurements were then taken from this as well. The same approach was adopted when surveying the sweathouse at Cleighran More. The primary baseline was 4 metres long and ran in a North-South direction, the subsidiary baseline was 2.6 metres long.

Mountallen sweathouse was sufficiently flat from just outside the entrance passage to the opposite end of the chamber. However, due to the presence of an earthen bank to the north of the outside entrance, it was not feasible to set up two baselines as there was not sufficient flat ground. Instead, one baseline was set up that ran in a North-South direction, from outside the entrance, through to the end of the opposite wall. This baseline was 2.5 metres in length.

The measurements taken were then written down and plotted to create three basic field drawings.

With regards the other structures, some were quite derelict and barely recognisable, such as the ones at Cloonaghmore and Lisgorman (see Pl. 1 and 2). The internal chambers of others were inaccessible on the grounds of health and safety, such as both sweathouses at Gubnaveagh and at Crosshill (see Pl. 2-5). Upon arrival at each site, the structure was surveyed firstly by simply walking around it; noting the approximate scale of the site and surrounding topographical features. Photographic accounts of each sweathouse were then created. OSI and SMR online resources were then consulted to obtain maps of each site.

Research Questions

The following questions have been asked for this dissertation:

- I. Did sweat houses have a ceremonial function, were they medicinal or were they for recreation?
- II. Are sweathouses located beside any specific utilities or places of historical significance?
- III. Is there a reason for so many sweathouses being built in Leitrim?
- IV. Why did people stop using sweathouses?

The form, materials and size of sweathouses

As previously mentioned, sweathouses are fairly generic in terms of size, materials and style. May describes them as 'primitive structures', which perhaps is a less direct way of saying that these structures lack architectural sophistication (1938, p. 44). As briefly outlined in Chapter 1, sweathouses are single-chambered, shaped like a beehive and are built using stone. Sandstone and limestone seem to be the most commonly used building material. They are constructed using a drystone technique, which means that they did not require the use of mortar (Latimer, 1894, p. 180). The shape of the chamber within is generally sub-circular, oval or rectangular (Weir, 1979, p. 190). There are exceptions, such as the polygonal chamber at Cornacully and the square chamber at Tullysrnadeega, both in Co. Fermanagh (NIEA, 2007).

At Gubnaveagh A & B, the outside shape is roughly conical (see Pl. 3-4). These are the taller variety of sweathouse and differ greatly from more low, circular mounds, such as the structure at Tirkane, Co. Derry.

Very often, sweathouses are either fully or partially built into the sides of slopes, such as Gubnaveagh A & B and Crosshill (Pl. 3-5). Some *teach alluis* are nearly free-standing, such as those at Annagh Upper and Cornamore, Co. Leitrim.

Legeelan sweathouse is almost free-standing and is pictured on Pl. 6.

As briefly discussed, earth/clay is often layered over the structure after its initial construction for various reasons. The organic material helps the structure retain heat and control drafts. Sometimes, the intervening spaces would simply be filled up with smaller stones (Latimer, 1984, p. 180). Deliberately layering earth over sweathouses will invariably encourage the growth of trees and vegetation on top of the structures, which can lead to damage of their structural integrity over time, which is evidently the case at Lisgorman sweathouse (see Pl. 2).

Sweathouses require, in some form at least, a means with which the smoke from the fire can escape. A simple hole in the apex of the roof can sometimes function as a crude chimney. This allows the smoke to leave the structure efficiently and also keeps the heat from escaping when the sweathouse is being used, by way of blocking it with a suitably sized stone (Danaher, Lucas, 1952, p. 180; Milligan, 1889,

p. 269). The sweathouses at Fallagh Glen and Lurgaboy have chimney holes, the latter can be seen on Pl. 7 and Pl. 28 (Danaher, Lucas, 1952, p. 179). Purposely built gaps in the stonework would also allow the smoke from the fire to percolate out, which is most likely the case at Gubnaveagh A, shown on Pl. 3.

As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, the most common roof type of roof is a corbel style (Weir, 1979, p. 186). There are sweathouses that are roofed by a single slab, such as Leegelan, Co. Cavan and Tirkane, Co. Derry (Richardson, 1938, p. 33). Many sweathouses also have lintelled roofs, such as Lurgaboy and Keadew west, both in Co. Roscommon (DAHG, 2016).

In terms of height, the average figure for a sweathouse is approximately one and a half to two metres in height (Richardson, 1938, p. 33-34).

All sweathouses have an entrance passage and these vary in length, but not considerably. They are usually lintelled, less than a metre in length and are usually half a metre in height, or thereabouts (Richardson, 1938, p. 34). The sweathouse at Annagh Upper (B), Co. Leitrim is described by Weir as having alternate narrow and wide courses with a beautifully preserved entrance porch and is 'worthy of a passage tomb' (Weir, 1979, p. 198).

The floor of sweathouses generally comprise of tamped earth, flagstones or are coarsely paved (Weir, 1979, p. 186; Danaher, Lucas, 1952, p. 180; Feehan, 2003, p. 271; NFSC, Vol. 190, p. 258; NFSC Vol. 206, p. 31).

Twelve sweathouses were visited across Leitrim, Cavan and Roscommon over the course of this dissertation. It is hoped that these will provide a small representative sample of sweathouses in the North-West of Ireland, with an emphasis on Co. Leitrim. A map showing the locations of these sweathouses is shown on Fig. 1.

The sweathouse at Kilmore is on the site of a national monument. Parke's castle is a restored 17th Century plantation castle, built on the grounds of an earlier Irish tower house. This sweathouse is outside the bawn of the castle and is built very close to the shore of Lough Gill. An image of the entrance can be seen on Pl. 8. This sweathouse has been restored and has been built into the side of a wall that faces the lake shore. This limestone structure has a roughly circular chamber of 1.3m diameter and it is just over one and a half metres in height internally (DAHG, 2016).

The entrance passage is 0.7m high and 0.65 wide, with a south-west orientation and roofed by a lintel (DAHG, 2016). There are sweathouses in two townlands called Kilmore, the SMR number for this structure is LE010-037003. This Sweathouse was rebuilt as part of restoration work that was carried out by the Office of Public Works at the Parke's castle in the 1980's. Kilmore sweathouse is not marked on the 1912 edition of the OSI historic 25" maps or the 1836 edition of the historic 6" series (see Fig. 2-3).

The sweathouse at Keadew west, Co. Roscommon, has been restored as well. This structure is mostly free-standing, built partially against a wall that rests on a field bank. The site is located in the village of Keadew within a public amenity area, similar to Kilmore and Cleighran More. Brambles, ferns and grass cover the chamber, to almost render it as an unrecognisable mound, save for the entrance (see Pl. 9). The height of the west-facing entrance is 0.7 metres and its width is roughly 0.5m, which is quite narrow (DAHG, 2016). The chamber has a lintelled roof with an internal height of 1.5 metres (DAHG, 2016). The diameter of the internal chamber is 1.3m. This sweathouse was marked as disused in the 1913 edition of the OSI historic 25" map series (see Fig. 4). This raises the question of whether other sweathouses in this edition were still in use when these maps were made.

Situated near the Eastern shores of Lough Allen at 70m above sea level is the well-preserved limestone sweathouse at Cleighran More. This is located just paces away from a stream and is located in a public amenity area, in the same complex as St. Hugh's well (see Pl. 10). Due to its decent state of repair and ease of access, this sweathouse was deemed suitable for a basic tape and offset survey. This sweathouse was partially built into a gentle west facing slope and the exterior of the structure has not been layered with earth to a great degree, so there was little vegetation growth on the exterior of the chamber (see. Pl. 11). On the outside, the structure appears to be roughly rectangular and square-shaped inside. However, Moore (2003) describes the structure as D-shaped. Internally, the chamber has a height of 1.5m and a diameter of. The entrance passage has been rebuilt in recent times (Moore, 2003). A ground plan of this structure is shown on Fig. 5. A photograph of the interior lintel roof is shown on Pl. 12. This sweathouse is marked on the 1910 edition of the OSI historic 25" maps and is not included in the 1837 6" map series (see Fig. 6).

A well preserved sweathouse is present at Coppanaghbane, which is in a secluded location beside a river bed, just down-river from a waterfall. This sweathouse is 190m above sea level, surrounded by vegetation, marshy uneven terrain and past several barbed wire fences (see Pl. 13).

The sandstone chamber and entrance passage are intact, hence it was considered suitable for tape and offset survey. This is a sandstone construction with the outer chamber covered in vegetation such as briars, ferns, grasses and mosses (see Pl. 14). A holly tree is growing on top of the chamber. Internally, the chamber is roughly circular with a diameter of 1.65m and a height of 1.7m. An image of the corbelled interior roof is shown on Pl. 15. The north-east facing entrance passage is 0.7m high, 0.5m wide and is 0.5m in length. The facing lintel over the entrance is 0.55m. A basic ground plan of this structure is shown on Fig. 7. This sweathouse has no chimney and there are two flues on the left side of the entrance passage, now barely visible (Richardson, 1939, p. 34). Coppanaghbane sweathouse is only marked on the 1910 edition of the historic 25" OSI maps (see Fig. 8).

Mountallen was the final sweathouse to be surveyed with tape and offset measurements for this dissertation. This structure is marked on the 1914 edition of the historic 25" OSI maps (shown on Fig. 9) but is not included in the 6" maps from 1837. This is located a few metres to the west of Mountallen house and is built into a small grassy ridge with an east-facing entrance. This is a roofless limestone structure, with the internal walls and inner chamber mostly intact (see Pl. 16). The top of the exterior walls are completely covered by grass. The maximum height of the western portion of the inner chamber wall is just over a metre high. The diameter of the chamber is slightly over 1.3m. The lintelled north-east facing entrance is 0.4 in length, 0.5 in height and 0.5m in width. The lintel above the entrance is 0.7m in length and 0.4 in width. The ground plan is shown on Fig. 10.

Roughly four kilometres away at Crosshill, there are three sweathouses in close proximity to one another. One of these is an excellent example of a double-chambered sweathouse (see Pl. 5). This limestone structure is built into the scarp of a grass-covered slope in pastureland, less than 10 metres from a roadside, with a south-facing entrance. For reference, the SMR number for the two conjoined chambers is RO002-024. There is a wall between the two chambers and they are

connected by an open hatch, which is roughly 0.8m wide, 0.2m high and is 0.7m long (Moore, 2010). The western chamber has the general traits of a sweathouse – it is roughly D-shaped, with a corbelled roof and internal height of 1.2m (Moore, 2010). The diameter is 1.2m N-S and 0.8 E-W. The lintelled entrance for this chamber is 0.4m wide, 0.5m high (0.8 high closer to the entrance) and the passage extends for 1.15m. The eastern chamber is roughly rectangular and has a lintel roof. This chamber is 1m high and its internal diameter is 1.25m x 1.1m (Moore, 2003). The entrance to the eastern chamber has now collapsed. No measurements are present in the SMR's description, so one cannot refute Weir's observation. Both chambers have flagged floors, covered with a thin deposit of earth. Due to the fact that the western chamber has more traits of a typical sweathouse rather than the lintelled rectangular eastern chamber, it was considered briefly that the eastern chamber was a later edition. The historic 25" OSI maps mark this as Sweathouses, indicating that the eastern chamber was present in 1914 (see Fig. 11). The structure, typically, is not marked on the 1837 6" edition.

There is another double-chambered structure at Anaverna, Co. Louth that is listed as a sweathouse in the SMR. Weir argues that this was too small to function as a sweathouse and was apparently used to house poultry (1979, p. 189).

Located approximately two kilometres from Crosshill, the limestone sweathouse at Lurgaboy is built between two boulders on the slopes of Kilronan mountain, pictured on Pl. 17. This is situated on blanket bog and is 260m above sea level. The site is on the popular tourist walking route known as the Miner's Way. This is highly well-preserved also, but was not surveyed over the course of this dissertation due to previous time commitments. The sweathouse has a clearly defined and well-preserved chimney, complete with a stone near the top to block it when the sweathouse was being heated (see Pl. 7 and 18). The chamber appears to be roughly circular, however, Moore described in 2010 as being D-shaped (DAHG, 2016). The internal height is 1.7m, with a diameter of 1.3m x 1.35m (DAHG, 2016). The floor of this sweathouse was paved, with some vegetation growing within due to the chimney being left uncovered for some time. This sweathouse is not marked on the 1914 edition of the OSI historic maps, shown on Fig. 12.

The sweathouse in Legeelan is mainly free-standing and conical (shown on Pl. 6). The entrance at the south-west is considerably small (0.45m high and 0.5m wide) with considerable growth of weeds about the entrance also. It was deemed unsuitable for tape and offset survey on health and safety grounds. The internal diameter of the chamber is 1.7m and its height is 1.4m. This structure is roofed by one slab and has a chimney on top of the chamber, which is now obscured (DAHG, 2016). This sweathouse is marked on the 1910 edition of the OSI historic 25" maps and is denoted by a circle on the 1835 OSI historic 6" map (see Fig. 13-14). This structure is located in a field on semi-grazed pastureland, approximately 500m from a roadside where there is a signpost for a *Teach alluis*.

The least preserved sweathouse was at Cloonaghmore, which is now barely a recognisable feature in the landscape (see Pl. 1). It is on the bank of a stream and is 190m above sea level. This sweathouse is located three fields in from the nearest road (more similar to a trackway at present) in marshy, damp terrain, with the vegetation underfoot largely consisting of rushes. An aerial photograph is shown on Pl. 19, which will illustrate the remote nature of this sweathouse. This structure has a collapsed chamber with a whitethorn tree growing on top of the chamber, as well as grasses, brambles and various other types of vegetation (shown on Pl. 1). The entrance is east-facing, but is largely collapsed, the lintel being barely visible. This sweathouse is included in the 1909 edition of the historic 25" OSI maps.

At Lisgorman, the sweathouse is situated on a field bank and is in an advanced state of decay. This is mostly above ground and only partially built into the hillside. The limestone chamber is collapsed and roofless, with several trees growing through the middle of the structure. The east-facing entrance has been reduced to a pile of scattered rocks, shown on Pl. 2. On the western side of the walls are partly intact, so as to provide an approximation of the external height (1.5m).

Lastly, the two sweathouses at Gubnaveagh were visited. Both structures are shown on Pl. 3-4. For convenience, they are known as Gubnaveagh A (SMR no. LE021-001) and Gubnaveagh B (SMR no. LE021-002). Due to health and safety concerns, it was not deemed advisable to enter the chambers in either structure. The stonework above the entrance appeared to loose and both chambers were overgrown. Both structures are similar in that they have both have a roughly conical

shape. Gubnaveagh A has a maximum height of 2.6 metres while Gubnaveagh B's maximum height is 3 metres. The chamber at Gubnaveagh A was described as collapsed by Moore and a young mountain ash tree is currently growing on top of the structure (see Pl. 3). The east-facing entrance was considerably small however and cannot presently fit an adult of average build, in any measure of comfort. There was no measurements for this chamber provided in the SMR as it was described as collapsed by Moore. To get a rough indication of the chamber width, a ranging rod was placed horizontally and fitted exactly from the beginning of the western side of the entrance passage to the opposite wall. The entrance passage measures roughly 0.4m in length, which means that the chamber width is approximately 1.6m. The diameter of Gubnaveagh B internally is 3.25m N-S and 2.6m E-W. The lintelled entrance faces east and measures 0.65 in width and is 1m high. It remains unclear what type of roof Gubnaveagh A has, but Gubnaveagh B has a corbelled one (Moore, 2003, p. 222). In terms of their surroundings, Gubnaveagh A is situated in a grassy meadow, partially built into an east-facing hill. The sweathouse is now separated from the nearby stream by a hedgerow. Gubnaveagh B is built in a slope close to the bank of the same stream, but is approximately two and a half kilometres away. It is 50m from a roadside and is situated in damp, grassy ground abundant in rushes (see Pl. 4). Both sweathouses are marked on the 1910 edition of the OSI historic 25" maps. An aerial photograph showing their proximity to each other is displayed on Pl. 20. These structures may have been built and used contemporaneously, due to their similar design, spatial relationship and state of repair at present.

The distribution of sweathouses in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland

In order to obtain information on the distribution of sweathouses on a local and national level, the Sites and Monuments Record was consulted, which shall henceforth be known as the SMR, for convenience. The SMR belongs to the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, which shall be known as DAHG from this point onwards. The Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record (NISMR) was also consulted, which is within the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA).

There are two hundred and forty sweathouses listed SMR for the Republic of Ireland. They are mainly centred on the North-West, however there are several clusters in the East and to the South as well. A map showing all the listed sweathouses in the SMR can be seen in Fig. 15. Co. Leitrim has ninety eight sweathouses within its borders (Moore, 2010). A significant amount of *teach alluis* are located around the shores of Lough Allen and also in the North-East of the county (see Fig. 16). The fact that so many are in the county of Leitrim is fascinating and the reason for this, if any, remains quite uncertain. Thus, Leitrim is arguably a logical place to conduct an investigation of sweathouses and this is why it was chosen to be the main study area for this dissertation.

Counties that border Leitrim also have high numbers of sweathouses. Roscommon has forty six, Sligo has twenty eight, Cavan has twenty seven and Fermanagh has twenty three (DAHG, 2016; NIEA, 2007). Thus there will be some discussion of sweathouses from these counties as well.

Co. Donegal has merely five sweathouses listed in the SMR, however only three have descriptive records (DAHG, 2016).

Six sweathouse are listed in the SMR for Co. Mayo, however four of them do not have descriptive records, which most likely means that they no longer exist. Of the remaining two, one of them is at Inismaine and it is unlikely that this structure functioned as a sweathouse (1979, p. 190). In Co. Galway, there are four sweathouses listed in the SMR, however three of them do not have descriptive records and one of them is most likely not a sweathouse, either (Weir, 1979, p. 190).

In terms of Leinster, Co. Louth has the highest concentration, with nine sweathouses listed for the county (DAHG, 2016). County Wicklow has but one sweathouse and in Wexford there are two (Grogan, Kilfeather, 1997; DAHG, 2016). Westmeath has two sweathouses listed, however the SMR cannot supply descriptive details of them, which probably means that they have completely fell into ruin and are no longer visible on ground level (DAHG, 2016). Carlow and Kilkenny have one sweathouse respectively - the latter is 'unlocated' and the former lacks any descriptive record (DAHG, 2016). Dublin, Offaly, Longford, Kildare, Meath and Longford do not have any sweathouses listed in their respective SMRs.

In Munster, the number of sweathouses is rather sparse. In Co. Tipperary, four sweathouses are listed, Co. Cork has three whilst Co. Clare and Co. Kerry have one each (DAHG, 2016).

The Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record (NISMR) contains nearly fifty descriptions of sweathouses in Northern Ireland. There are some issues with this list, as some entries are for structures that may not even be sweathouses, there is also one entry of a lime kiln in this list, for whatever reason. Some entries are for dry-stone structures that are possible sweathouses, but are collapsed and ruinous, so there is no definite way of identifying them. Included also is a souterrain that has since reportedly been reused as a sweathouse, however this has not been located. In light of all these inaccuracies, the definite number of sweathouses in Northern Ireland at presently stands at thirty seven.

There are also seven entries of 'unlocated' sweathouses, meaning that they were once the sites of sweathouses that have since disappeared. Some, such as one in Roonivoolin, Co. Antrim, was discovered by Estyn Evans. However it was not located during fieldwork conducted there in the 1980's and there is no mention of the structure in any editions of the OSI maps (NIEA, 2007).

There are five sweathouses listed for Co. Antrim with only three being definite; one is 'unlocated' and another is recorded as a sweathouse but is described as being too big to have functioned as one. Fermanagh has the most sweathouses in Northern Ireland, with twenty seven entries in the NISMR (excluding the entry for a lime kiln). Of these, three no longer exist, two are unlocated, two are classified as dry-stone structures that are 'possibly sweathouses' and one was, unfortunately, cleared away by the land

owner (NIEA, 2007). This leaves the definite number of sweathouses currently in Fermanagh at nineteen. Co. Armagh has but one sweathouse listed for the entire county, which is categorised as a sweathouse, but not confirmed as one. Co. Derry has seven sweathouses, with one being a souterrain that was reused as a sweathouse, which is 'unlocated'. Tyrone has ten sweathouse, one of them being 'unlocated' and another most likely being a lime kiln (NIEA, 2007).

Of the thirty seven (definite) sweathouses listed in the NISMR, fourteen are scheduled for protection under the law. Unfortunately, the Early Medieval sweathouse at Cornacully, the first ever sweathouse excavated in Ireland, is not scheduled for protection. As with the Republic of Ireland, there is one sweathouse that is currently in State Care in Northern Ireland, which is in Tirkane, Co. Derry (NIEA, 2007).

However, this most likely is not representative of the true distribution of sweathouses in Northern Ireland; as with the Republic, there may have been many more that fell into neglect or were knocked down. Foley asserts that there are forty six sweathouses in Northern Ireland (2013). However, Foley does not provide information as to where he obtained this information, so one cannot take his figure to be the result of genuine research.

Sweathouses are invariably found in the same type of location, in terms of topographical features. Almost all of them have been purposely built in close proximity to a stream, river or lake; for the purpose as per discussed in Chapter 3. The sweathouses at Cleighran More, Cloonaghmore and Gubnaveagh B were all in close proximity to streams.

Sweathouses are often found in isolated locations, such as glens, mountains and fields (Weir, 1979, p. 186). Many are built into the sides of slopes and require proximity to a body of water nearby, thus there is some consistency regarding natural features surrounding sweathouses in any given area.

In terms of man-made features, there appears to be no definite relationship between sweathouses and other sites within the historic and the archaeological landscape. There is one exception, in that most sweathouses are located within 100-200 metres of a dwelling or farmhouse, most of them are deserted but there are exceptions, such as Lisgorman and Mountallen (DAHG, 2016). The same could be true of the sweathouses in Northern Ireland, however the NISMR does not include that

information in the descriptions. Of the sweathouses visited and surveyed, all of them were located beside either occupied and abandoned dwellings, save for Kilmore which is located beside a castle that is a tourist attraction (see Pl. 8). To illustrate this point further, the following sweathouses listed in the SMR for Co. Leitrim are all located within the stated distance of dwelling places: Killadiskert, Kilnagarns Upper, Doolargy Glebe (both sweathouses), Derrintawny Glebe, Corraweehil Glebe, Kiltyfeenaghty Glebe, Annagh Upper, Rossmore Rossbeg Glebe, Drumristin, Cuilta, Sradinagh, Urbal and Corglass and many others. To list any more would labour the point, but this pattern exists in the sweathouse distribution across the country and can be seen if one were to consult the SMR. This most likely indicates that the people who lived in the house owned the sweathouse and had it for personal use. The fact that the houses are deserted means that, naturally, the sweathouses were abandoned, too.

The function of sweathouses

In terms of the cure that a sweathouse would provide, the most commonly attributed ailment that they provided relief from is rheumatism (Richardson, 1939, p. 33). This ailment is known in the Irish language as '*peanta fuar*' which roughly translates as cold pains (Mulcahy, 1891, p. 589). According to Peter McNiffe, the sweathouses provided relief from the pains of rheumatism for up to eight weeks.

Other ailments that the sweathouse apparently cured the symptoms of vary from soreness of the eyes, gout and lameness to impotence and infertility, as well as pleurisy (Bolton, 2005; Danaher, Lucas, 1952, p. 180). One of Richardson's informants stated that sweathouses were also used to cure the symptoms of 'grippe', a form of influenza (Merriam-Webster, n.d). In some instances, in the late 19th Century at least, it is recorded that women who were travelling to the Great Lammas Fair in Ballycastle, Co. Antrim would use a sweathouse as they believed that it improved the quality of their facial complexions (Mulcahy, 1891, p. 589; Evans, 1957, p. 125). Finnish saunas are sometimes referred to as the 'poorman's pharmacy', which indicates that they were used to cure ailments as well (Bosworth, 2013).

The efficacy of the sweathouse in combating all these ailments will remain unconfirmed, especially since the sweathouses are no longer used to cure such illnesses and have not been used in this manner for quite a long time.

In order to produce heat for sweathouses, a turf fire lit was lit in the centre of the chamber (Lockwood, 1901, p. 84). If turf could not be acquired, alternative fuels could be used, such as wood, brambles and heather (Weir, 1979, p. 186). The length of time that the fire would be allowed to burn ranged from several hours to two days, in which time someone would tend to the fire consistently (McClafferty, 1979, p. 34). According to Richardson, five loads of turf were required to produce enough heat for the sweathouse in Corrakeeldrum, Co. Cavan (1939, p. 32). In certain parts of the country, it is recalled that women, in particular, had the role of procuring turf and tending to the fire each day (Richardson, 1939, p. 32). According to Peter McNiffe, one person would enter the sweathouse and start to build a fire, with another person passing the turf in to them. This would result in a fire of considerable size and would take hours to heat (pers. comm.)

Another interesting method of heating a sweathouse is found in Co. Monaghan. This involves gathering bricks and heating them on a fire, then putting them beneath a creel, the person utilising the sweathouse would then wrap themselves in a blanket and proceed to sit on the creel, thus covering the creel; the person would sit there and sweat until they had obtained the desired effect of the sweathouse (McClafferty, 1979, p. 33).

Sprinkling water on the stones in a heated sweathouse produces a 'steam effect' (May, 1938, p. 44; Richardson, 1939, p. 31). In the interview with Peter McNiffe, he stated that a piece of heather was dipped into water from a bucket and it was shaken on the stones in the sweathouse to create steam (pers comm.). This specific type of heat combined with humidity creates a different type of experience. This draws an interesting comparison with the Finnish sauna. The 'kivas' is a special type of stove designed specifically for saunas, which channels heat to stones which store and radiate heat. Water is poured over the kivas periodically, thus creating a steam effect known as the 'löyly' (Edelsward, 1991, pp. 22-24). The very fact that a name has been given to this act and the effect it produces conveys the special relationship that Finnish people have with saunas. This also signifies a shared cultural phenomenon between Ireland and Finland, which is elaborated on in Chapter 7.

Once the fire had sufficiently heated the sweathouse, the leftover ashes were swept out and then the floor was covered in rushes, straw or bracken (Richardson, 1939, p. 33; Weir, 1979, p. 186). This was necessary due to the extreme of the stones within the sweathouse (pers. comm.). Rushes and bracken tied into bundles to function as seats, as well as sods of turf scraw (Richardson, 1939, p. 32). The ashes were swept out using a long piece of timber with a flat-piece of metal welded on to it (pers. comm.). It is universal that everyone using the sweathouse would take off their clothes and sit within the chamber perspiring for thirty minutes to one hour (Richardson, 1939, p. 32). Once ready, the sweathouse stayed hot enough to use for approximately two hours, but this does not mean that people stayed within for two hours (pers. comm.). The process of heating and preparing the sweathouse had to be repeated separately for every person that wanted to use it, perhaps for hygiene reasons (pers. comm.).

In order to preserve the internal heat within the structure, the doorway was covered or blocked up, using either a person's clothes, sods of turf or a makeshift door (Logan, 1972, p. 144; Parker, 2009, p. 135). In cases where a 'chimney hole' was present, a stone would be placed over the hole with the aim of preserving the heat inside the structure (Danaher, Lucas, 1952, p. 180).

It is mentioned in some sources that a person was allocated to remain outside the sweathouse whilst people were using it, in the event of someone falling ill or fainting inside (Weir, 1979, p. 186).

After using the sweathouse, most accounts state that people would immediately immerse themselves in cold water in a lake or river nearby and then return home afterwards (Lockwood, 1901, p. 83; Milligan, 1889, p. 270). Sometimes people would make a pool in a river by damming the water in certain places (pers. comm.). The plunge in water is not always part of the sweathouse 'cure' as some people would wrap themselves with blankets and return home afterwards (Parker, 2009, p. 135; NFSC, Vol. 217, p. 91). In Native American culture, people would take a plunge in cold water after a sweat lodge ceremony, then they would rest and reflect upon their experiences together (Garrett, et al., 2011, p. 231).

It seems apparent that sweathouses were primarily used during the summer/autumn months; in some cases, certain sweathouses were used only in summer and some used only in autumn (Weir, 1989, p. 12; Richardson, 1939, p. 32). According to Peter McNiffe, sweathouses were seldom used more than once or twice a year (pers. comm.). This could be for a variety of reasons. If the structure took up to two days to heat, perhaps a season with abundant daylight would be favourable.

Ireland is well-known for being rich in folklore, customs and the tradition of storytelling. Folklore, until relatively recently, was a part of everyday life for many people across the island. There were customs and superstitions about almost all aspects of life – from churning butter to burying the dead. It is strange then, that there is not more customs and superstitions about sweathouses. Latimer's account mentions that the sweathouse in Eglisish, Co. Tyrone, was always used by groups of people as there was a superstition about doing this alone (1894, p. 180).

The fact that turf was used indicates that people heating these sweathouses were willing to spend a significant amount of money to use them, but also in some cases,

people were willing to resort to cheaper alternative methods of heating should turf not be available or affordable. In some cases, people would pay to use a sweathouse. The owner of the sweathouse at Cloonfannon, Co. Leitrim, would charge people ten penny pieces each to use the sweathouse (NFSC, Vol. 217, p. 91). This contrasts with the sweathouse in Cloon, also in Leitrim, that was owned by a man who let anybody use it without charging them money (NFSC, Vol. 191, p. 252).

Aside from the medicinal purposes of sweathouses, it is possible that they could have been used for rituals and ceremonies. Due to their small size and lack of ornamentation, it is doubted by many that sweathouses served a ceremonial purpose. Indeed, there is scant mention in the literature and folklore accounts of sweathouses having a spiritual role in people's lives. It is widely known that the use of structures may evolve over time and assume different roles. Perhaps *teach alluis* were once used for rituals and rites, but this custom may have perished.

If sweathouses had a ceremonial or ritualistic function, then perhaps people ingested the Irish variant of hallucinogenic mushroom as part of the ritual process. There is little consideration of this in the literature. Weir points out that sweathouses were used often in autumn, which coincides with the time that *Psilocybe semilanceata* begin to grow abundantly in the Irish countryside (1989, p. 13). Many cultures around the world use hallucinogenic plants and mushrooms for ceremonies, from Siberian shamans to indigenous tribes in South America (Wasson, 1972, p. 188). As there is a lack of written records regarding this subject, the possibility will remain uncertain. A 2006 survey by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction revealed that Irish people aged 15-24 were ranked fifth out of twelve countries surveyed in Europe for consumption of magic mushrooms for recreational purposes (Healy, 2006). It will never truly be known how widely used these mushrooms were before the 21st Century in Ireland, whether taken for ritual or recreational purposes. Sale and possession of magic mushrooms has been outlawed in Ireland as of January 2006 (Misuse of Drugs Act, 1977).

The last reported use of a sweathouse in Ireland was in 1934, in which a man from county Longford was injured in a motor vehicle crash and used the sweathouse to

relieve his pain (McHugh, 2002, p. 21). Unfortunately, the location of this sweathouse is not provided in this source.

In terms of the use of these structures, it should be noted that they may have been converted to sweathouses and previously served another purpose entirely. In Co. Derry, a souterrain was reused as a sweathouse, according to the Ordnance Survey memoirs (NIEA, 2016). Unfortunately, no trace is left of either structure. In Tyrone, a sweathouse was built into the north-west corner of a court tomb, in the townland of Granagh (NIEA, 2007). Due to their disuse, sweathouses also provide shelter for wild fowl (NFSC, Vol. 37, p. 161; Weir, 1989, p. 11).

Sweathouses may no longer be used to fulfil their original function, but they still serve as silent testaments to the lifeways of people who inhabited this island for the last millennia, if not more. *Teach alluis* can still be utilised today, but in a different way. They add to the rich tapestry of Ireland's archaeological landscape and can serve to educate the wider public about Ireland's cultural heritage.

The origins and disappearance of Irish sweathouses

It is still up for debate whether *teach alluis* were introduced into Ireland by settlers who brought new customs with them, or if they are an Irish invention themselves. A few theories have been put forward as to where the sweathouse tradition came from, however some are more logical and informed than others.

It was previously considered, by some writers at least, that the sweathouse tradition had its roots in Scandinavian customs that were brought ashore to Ireland with Viking raiders (Richardson, 1939, p. 32). Richardson points out that the sweathouses in Co. Cavan that he discusses are in remote regions, thus the influence of foreign invaders would not be quick to spread (1939, p. 32). This possibility was discussed in earnest, until it became evident that sweathouses were even older than previously thought, as will be discussed below.

Another hypothesis is that Christian missionaries that were used to the Roman style of bathing brought the idea over to Ireland with them in the Early Medieval period (Evans, 1957, p. 124; Cullen, 1998, p. 23). There are only two known sweathouses that are located on early ecclesiastical sites – Innismurray, Co. Sligo and Assaroe, Co. Donegal. The sweathouse at Assaroe no longer exists, but is marked on the OSI historic 25" maps and is referred to in the School's Folklore Collection (NFSC, Vol. 1028, p. 5; NFSC, Vol. 1027, p. 83). If Christian missionaries transported this idea of bathing with them from the Roman Empire to Ireland, they brought merely the basic principles and left behind the communal element and the architectural sophistication.

In 1988, a fascinating and historic discovery was made in Cornacully, Co. Fermanagh. As part of the *Archaeological Survey of Co. Fermanagh* by the Historic Monuments and Buildings Branch (Northern Ireland Environment Agency), the sweathouse at Cornacully was excavated over two days in May of that year. It must be noted that this was the first sweathouse ever to be excavated in Ireland and this fact alone is historic in its own right. The sweathouse was reported by a local man who said it was used as a cure for rheumatism, which resonates with the extant literature (Williams, 2014). The excavation report provides an overview of the structure and its surroundings, which also fits the general description of

sweathouses. This sweathouse is still intact and is shown on Pl. 21. The archaeologists uncovered the paved floor, remains of a turf fire, the entrance and, most significantly, a piece of charred wood that was carbon dated to 1456 ± 40 B.P (Williams, 2014; NIEA, 2007). This sweathouse dates roughly to AD 484 and thus, one can say with a degree of certainty that it dates to the Early Medieval period, also known as the Early Christian period (Aalen, 1964, p. 39). This structure collapsed due to the growth of a hazel tree on top of it, which is evident in the image on Pl. 21.

Either way, the fact that this tradition has been on the island of Ireland for more than a millennium is truly fascinating. Until the excavation report of the sweathouse at Cornacully was published, nobody knew with any certainty what date the sweathouses of Ireland originated from. They could not be compared to any structures with similar functions in Britain or Europe, thus ascertaining a date was near impossible. However, until more excavations are completed of sweathouses, a definite chronology cannot be established.

Burnt mounds are an archaeological monument type in abundance in Ireland, with thousands of examples nationwide. They are identifiable as low, grassy mounds that are roughly circular or crescent shaped. These sites are most often attributed to the Bronze Age, however there are examples which date as far back as the Neolithic period and as recently as medieval times (McLoughlin, 2012). It must be noted that burnt mounds are not yet fully understood – their dates and exact function are somewhat contested. They are characterised by a heap of heat-shattered stones and large spreads of charcoal beside a rectangular trough dug into topsoil. Many troughs are wooden lined, however the ones that lack a wooden lining are more difficult to identify in terms of function. Burnt mounds are commonly known as ‘fulacht fiadh’ and were traditionally thought of as having a culinary function. The term ‘fulacht’ has appeared in Irish literary sources since at least the 9th Century AD, which describe an outdoor trough filled with water for the purpose of cooking meat (McLoughlin, 2012). In Geoffrey Keating’s 1634 work ‘Foras Feasa ar Éirinn’, he recalls witnessing people filling the trough of a fulacht fiadh with water, then heated stones from a fire were placed into it for the water to boil and then meat was cooked in the pit (Keating, 1634). Oddly, the larger of two dug troughs were used for cooking. The smaller of the two was used for people to wash and bathe in, thus

adding weight to the hypothesis that fulacht fiadh had a wider range of functions apart from cooking food (Keating, 1634).

According to Sloan, only 5% of excavated burnt mounds date from the historical period, the rest are predominantly middle to late Bronze age in date (2007, p. 19). In any case, it is difficult to assess whether these burnt mounds/fulacht fiadh were used for washing and bathing since the Bronze age, but they were certainly used to do so by the 17th Century.

One of the features associated with two fulacht fiadh, discovered at Rathpatrick, Co. Kilkenny is of particular interest to this discussion. This structure is interpreted (at least provisionally) as having a function similar to that of a sweathouse (Gleeson, 2014). The feature consisted of a sub-circular cut into the subsoil in the approximate middle of the mound and was 5m in diameter at its widest point. At the internal perimeter of the cut, there were roughly even spaces between stake-holes and the south-eastern part of the feature led to a round trough (Gleeson, 2014). There were several flakes of flint recovered from close proximity to the mound, but there were no other finds of archaeological interest either on the mound or the related features, thus it is difficult to date this site. Charcoal from environmental samples may be suitable for carbon dating, for the time being, this site remains undated. .

For centuries, people endeavoured to gather materials, to build these structures and prepare them for their purpose. This was a considerable effort, which signifies that using the sweathouse was quite important to people. It is strange then, that after all the time that this tradition had been kept alive, that it suddenly disappeared from the Irish cultural landscape. If sweathouses were deemed so efficient at providing relief from pain, then why were they left to languish in forests and fields?

Various factors may have contributed to this collective shift in attitude towards sweathouses. The period of time that people ceased to maintain and use them is estimated at being between the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century (Grogan, Kilfeather, 1997, p. 204; Feehan, 2003, p. 272).

The cessation of sweathouse use across Ireland would most likely have been a gradual process. As with the origins of sweathouses, a few suggestions have been made by authors who have written on the subject.

An interesting observation by Milligan is that sweathouses fell into disuse in areas where settlers from Britain were in the majority and survived where the Irish-speaking population remained a majority (1889, p. 268). It remains unclear whether Milligan's point is verifiable or not, as no references were provided with this statement.

When asking questions such as these, it is advisable to investigate the socio-historic backdrop of a given period in time, as this may provide some relevant information. Some sources state that the introduction of medical dispensaries from 1851 onwards meant that fewer people sought the 'cure' that the sweathouse provided (O'Donovan, 1995, p. 239; Richardson, 1939, p. 32; Daly, 2010, p. 181). Indeed, if one looks at the OSI historic 25" map of Keadew west, Co. Roscommon, the sweathouse here is marked as 'disused' in 1912, yet the medical dispensary marked appeared to still be in use (see Fig. 6). The sweathouse has since been rebuilt and is described further in Chapter 2.

However, Ireland at that time was still reeling from the aftermath of the Great Famine that occurred from 1845-1849, which is one of the most tragic and well-known episodes of Irish history (Duffy, 2005, p. 157). Not only was there large-scale starvation due to the failure of the potato crop, hundreds of thousands of people emigrated and thousands more were evicted from their homes in the years that followed (Duffy, 2005, pp. 163-165). The Famine also exacerbated the dwindling use of the Irish language, as the areas that were worst affected were also places where use of the language was at its strongest (Duffy, 2005, pp. 164). Henceforth, the same was probably true of traditions and customs. Lastly, there was an agricultural depression during the 1870's, which saw many more people being evicted from their homes due to not being able to afford their rent, as well as another failure of the potato crop in Connacht (Duffy, 2005, p. 171).

One folklore account recalls a doctor advising a man against using a sweathouse as he perceived it to be damaging his health; but another tells of a doctor who actually built a sweathouse for his aunt, as he believed it would help her to deal with the symptoms of her rheumatism (NFSC, Vol. 206, p. 31). Another hypothesis put forward is that the introduction of indoor plumbing meant that people didn't see it as necessary to perform personal hygienic practices outside (Parker, 2009). This may

have been true for some places, as with medical dispensaries, but not for the entire country. Also, as use of the sweathouse dwindled over time, it has been suggested that they may have become unfashionable among younger generations (Parker, 2009).

There is curious similarity between Irish sweathouses and the rudimentary prototype of the Finnish sauna, known as the '*savusauna*' (Edelsward, 1991, p. 22). A fire was lit inside for several hours to heat up the structures and then the fire & ashes were cleared out so that people could begin to use the *savusauna* (Edelsward, 1991, p. 22). Due to the labour, time and materials required, this form of sauna ceased to be used by the people of Finland and was replaced by the 'traditional' wooden sauna, which is still in use today (Edelsward, 1991, p. 22). An important difference is that the Irish sweathouse tradition was fully abandoned, whereas the Finnish sauna was redesigned to be more efficient.

The postulation by some authors that sweathouses were introduced into Ireland by Christian missionaries who came from Rome cannot be confirmed. It may be mere coincidence that the one excavated sweathouse in Ireland dates to the same period in time as the arrival of these missionaries. The presence of burnt mounds and fulacht fiadhs certainly predates the arrival of Christianity into Ireland, but it is not safe to assume that people used these to bath and wash as they did in the early modern period.

With regards the disappearance of sweathouses, it was most likely not the result of a single event that led to the demise of such a long-standing tradition, but a combination of factors and circumstances. Social and political upheaval, famine, emigration and agricultural depression may all have influenced why people no longer sweat at the *teach alluis*.

The international context of sweatshouses

The form, materials and size of sweatshouses may be distinctive to Ireland, but similar structures that perform the same function for people exist in many cultures across the globe. The act of bathing, sweating and cleansing in a purpose-built structure is a shared cultural phenomenon that comes in many unique forms. This 'bathhouse' culture has existed for thousands of years, illustrating that it is one of the most enduring of human traditions. This chapter is intended as a brief introduction to bathhouse culture on a global scale.

There is a structure known as the 'Great Bath' in the ancient citadel of Mohenjo Daro, situated in the Indus Valley, modern-day Pakistan. This is a large, watertight pool constructed with baked bricks, on top of a large mound of organic material (Roach, 2016). There are no visible palaces, temples or monuments at Mohenjo Daro. The Great Bath is one of the largest mounds in the complex, it has been suggested that it is a structure that most closely resembles a temple or sacred place (Roach, 2016). The existence of the Great Bath, combined with adequate sanitation and washing facilities across the citadel, is interpreted by scholars to mean that the people who lived here shared a common ideology on cleanliness, to the point of revering it (Roach, 2016). The site is dated to approximately 4,500 to 1,900 BC, thus making the Great bath one of the oldest public bathing structures in the world (Roach, 2016). In 1980, Mohenjo Daro was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

In terms of archaeological sites in Europe, an intriguing site on the island of Westray has opened up a new perspective on Bronze Age social practices. Westray is part of the Orkney Islands, which are situated north of the Scottish coast. The site is on the edge of the Links of Noltland, an archaeological complex that contains the remnants of Neolithic and Bronze Age settlements. In the Bronze Age section of the site, archaeologists discovered a feature that has been interpreted as a 'sauna'. This 'sauna' is not a standalone feature, rather it is a set of individual cells. These cells are within a large stone building that are attached to a central water tank, presumably used to heat water for the purpose of bathing and washing (Pina-Dacier, 2015). This structure may well have been used for cooking, washing and perhaps

served a ceremonial purpose as well. Initially, it was presumed that this structure was a simple 'burnt mound' (discussed in Chapter 5). However, after much deliberation on the restrictive nature of access to the site, it is now widely believed that this structure may have had a more symbolic, specialised function (Swerling, 2015).

Another tentative Bronze Age 'sauna' was discovered in 2012 in Assynt, within the Scottish Highlands. This is a more simple structure than the one in Westray and is more similar to a burnt mound. The structure was described as a crescent shaped mound. When excavated, a pit was uncovered beneath layers of clay. This pit was 1m deep and was a 1.5m square, with a channel dug with which to feed the pit with water from a nearby stream. Three slabs of stone were discovered as well, indicating that this pit was stone-lined (BBC News, 2012). In the absence of any animal bones at the site and the large size of the pit, it is now considered by researchers that this structure may have functioned as a sauna or sweathouse (BBC News, 2012).

A comparison was made in Chapter 5 between the Irish sweathouse and the Finnish 'savusauna', which has since become replaced with a more modern structure. At present, a Finnish sauna is a dimly lit wood-panelled room, fitted with benches and a stove, known as a 'kivas' (Edelsward, 1991, p. 14). Using a Finnish sauna requires a similar protocol to heating an Irish sweathouse – first, the stove or kivas is heated up (wood is the main type of fuel used), then once the sauna is heated to approximately 70-100°C. People enter without clothing, then they sit, relax and perspire for as long as is deemed necessary (Edelsward, 1991, p. 14). Periodically, water is poured over the stones in the kivas to produce the 'löyly' or steam effect, which is described further in Chapter 4. It is commonplace to gently beat oneself with a 'vasta' or 'vihta', the Finnish word for a bunch of birch branches tied together. This is done after the löyly evaporates and the point of this is to stimulate blood circulation (Edelsward, 1991, p. 27). To cool off, people often immerse themselves in a nearby river or lake (Edelsward, 1991, p. 21).

It is difficult to ascertain just how far back the sauna tradition dates to in Finland. A 12th Century account written by an Apostle called Andreas describes the use of saunas in Finland and details how people would beat themselves with switches (birch branches) in the hot steam (Edelsward, 1991, p. 28). Thus, saunas as they are

known today and the practices attached to them have been a part of Finnish culture for a considerable length of time. It is probable that saunas have earlier origins within the Finnish archaeological record, however, due to lack of available sources for this particular subject, it simply cannot be given further discussion in this dissertation.

Many Finnish people go to the sauna once a week at least, which is in contrast to Irish people using a sweathouse once or twice a year in the summer/autumn months (Weir, 1989, p. 12). Until the latter half of the 19th Century, men and woman in large groups in Finland used to use the sauna together. This new practice of segregation may not have had just one influencing factor and it may have been due to various social changes that occurred around that particular point in time (Edelsward, 1991, pp. 98-99). Much of the literature does not explicitly mention whether men or women used the *teach alluis* separately or not, with the exception of Parker's account (2009, p. 135).

The sauna is an integral component of Finnish society, so much so that it is present in most social institutions, from people's homes, schools and workplaces, to hospitals, prisons and even parliament (Sood, 2012). There is specific social etiquette that is observed within the sauna, in which people must stay silent and conduct themselves as if they were inside a church (Edelsward, 1991, p. 90). The sauna is used in Finland for more reasons than to merely relax, it is described as a platform for social transformations, a place for a person to cleanse, purify, renew and heal themselves (Edelsward, 1991, p. 83). It is considered a place for quiet meditation, a place where someone can think clearly and contemplate life (Edelsward, 1991, p. 84).

Emphasis on ritual cleansing and purification is also evident in the Native American sweat-lodge ceremony. This ritual is performed by a group of people who sit within the sweat lodge in a circle. Silence precedes the ceremony, then a mixture of water and herbs is poured over the rocks in the central hearth to create steam, after which people pass around a pipe filled with tobacco or other herbs; this is repeated several times. During this time, people say prayers for their families and friends (Garrett, et al., 2011, p. 321). After the ceremony, people cool themselves off by plunging in a natural water source and reflect on their experiences with each other (Garrett, et al., 2011, p. 321). The sweat lodge itself and the accompanying ceremony is steeped in

symbolism. The very act of crawling through the door of the sweat lodge on one's hands and knees is symbolic of returning to the womb of Mother Earth. The darkness within represents ignorance, but after one has been cleansed by the ceremony they re-enter the world of light that symbolises the truth (Garrett, et al., 2011, p. 321). A typical sweat lodge in the Native American context consists of wooden posts driven in the soil to create a frame around which animal hides, organic materials or textiles are layered on top, with a central hearth and a low doorway.

The many different types of landscape in which bathhouse culture is found can help to shape what form, materials and size these structures will be. The climate of an area will also help to determine the structure's features as well. In countries that receive warmer weather and little precipitation year round, an outdoor bath is a convenient and efficient choice. In countries that receive colder weather and more precipitation, it is simply not practical to build great outdoor structures.

The manner in which they are built will affect how people perceive these sites and interact with them as well. The fact that Mohenjo Daro's Great Bath is situated on one of two prominent mounds in the centre of the citadel and was so finely constructed, it has been interpreted that this was a site of special significance to people.

Due to the fact that sweathouses are no longer widely used in Ireland, it is difficult to assess the relationship that people had with them. Perhaps the literature and folklore references alone do not effectively illustrate this relationship. Judging from more contemporaneous accounts of the Finnish sauna and the Native American sweat lodge, one may be able to obtain a glimpse into the relationship between different cultures and their respective bathhouse variants. It is clear that the sauna is central to the identity of Finnish people, it is not just a steamy, wooden-panelled room, but a sacred place. Sweat lodges are an integral part of the religious and spiritual ceremonies of Native American people, it heals people both physically and spiritually. The people of Ireland do not share the same collective emotional attachment towards the *teach alluis*, they are not part of the household fabric or the weekly routine, at least not in modern times.

The sauna and the Native American sweat lodge are similar in that using them is a group activity. Saunas and sweat lodges are built to facilitate more people, as people

attend them to bond socially. They are both platforms for cleansing and purification rituals, sacred places that command respect. These attributes contrast with the solitary activity of attending an Irish sweathouse, whose chamber can fit one person comfortably and three people at the very most. Perhaps the very fact of sweating inside the *teach alluis* alone as opposed to doing this in a group alters the perception people have of this activity. Perhaps the group activity helps to cement the tradition through the association of strengthened social relationships. Although, from a practical point of view, heating a sweathouse chamber that would fit a large group would require far more than five cartloads of turf.

For thousands of years, people who were thousands of miles apart built houses, lodges and baths, to purify themselves, to relax, to socialise and alleviate their physical and spiritual pain. Irish sweathouses can now be seen as part of a global tradition and not just as a collection of isolated huts on the fringes of Atlantic Europe. They signify Ireland's long-standing connection with the wider world, breaking a common misconception that Ireland was disconnected culturally, as well as physically, from Europe and the wider world.

Conclusion

Sweathouses may not be used in modern society to fulfil their original function, but they continue to remind people in contemporary times of the customs that Irish people once had. Sweathouses may eventually be used to help promote public interest in archaeological heritage and to encourage further conservation of structures that are falling into decay. Sweathouses can also play a part in promoting the tourism of the areas where they are located and in turn this may bring socio-economic benefits for the people who continue to inhabit these landscapes.

Their distribution nationwide is disproportionately centred in counties Leitrim, Roscommon, Cavan and Fermanagh. This may not have always been the case, it may have been that they simply survived better in some locations and fared worse in others. Also, the Sites and Monuments Record for both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland contain several entries each for structures that are designated as sweathouses but most likely did not fulfil this function. Thus, the true distribution of sweathouses is practically unattainable and the existing figures are somewhat skewed.

It is now known that sweathouses in their current form have been in Ireland since the early medieval period, but it remains a tantalising possibility that they could date back further to prehistoric times. Burnt mounds and fulacht fiadhs are ubiquitous in the Irish archaeological record and interpretation of their use has broadened from cooking sites to places where people may have washed and bathed. Geoffrey Keating's 17th Century account recalls people washing in fulacht, thus there is some corroborating evidence for this hypothesis. A structure at Rathpatrick, Co. Kilkenny, has been provisionally construed as a form of sweat house. While it is quite different in form to the *teach alluis*, the underlying principle of utilising heat to bath and sweat is much the same.

Teach alluis have endured on this island for so long, yet their functionality and variation in size and form has remained relatively unchanged. The fact that they were built of stone illustrates their physical permanence within the landscape but also their permanence as a cultural phenomenon. Many sweathouses have fallen

into ruin and are blending into the ferny green of the Irish landscape, taking their history with them.

Whilst all the literature states that sweathouses were used to relieve people of rheumatic pains and other ailments, this may not have always been the case. Sweathouses may have been used for rituals and ceremonies.

The sweathouse tradition belongs to the past now and the cessation of use can most likely be attributed to social, political and economic changes that shifted cultural attitudes toward this type of folk medicine.

The relationship between the Irish people and the sweathouse differs greatly from the reverence afforded to the sauna by Finnish people and the sweat lodges to Native American people. Perhaps that is why it did not survive the various social and cultural changes in Ireland at the end of the 19th Century.

Whilst sweathouses symbolise the lifeways of people that inhabited this island long ago, they also serve as a symbol of Ireland's links with the wider world. Whether it is a large sophisticated bath in the sun-baked Indus valley, or a wood-panelled room in a frozen Finnish forest, it seems to be intrinsic in human nature to crave the various sensations produced by different types of bathing.

It is hoped that sweathouses shall become more widely appreciated as part of Ireland's cultural and built heritage. As noted by Weir, they are puzzling and disappearing. Further education about these bee-hive shaped links with Ireland's past may prevent them from falling further into the abyss of decay. Whilst there is knowledge in literary accounts about the *teach alluis*, there is so much more that remains unknown about them. Perhaps their mystery is part of what makes them so fascinating. However, the mystery of these humble structures must be unravelled in order to preserve them for future generations, before they fade from the landscape and become lost forever.

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Appendix 1 – Plates



Plate 1. The west-facing side of Cloonaghmore sweathouse, Co. Leitrim. The collapsed, overgrown chamber is barely visible (image taken by the author).



Plate 2. The collapsed east-facing entrance of the sweathouse at Lisgorman, Co. Leitrim. The possible entrance lintel is still visible in the centre right of the photograph. Tree and vegetation growth have contributed to the deterioration of this structure (image taken by the author).



Plate 3. The conical shaped mound of the sweathouse at Gubnaveagh A, built into a slope which is visible in the background. The east-facing lintelled entrance is considerably low. Gaps in the stonework above the entrance and on the top right may have allowed smoke to escape in the stead of a chimney hole. Growing on top of the structure is a young mountain ash tree (image taken by the author).



Plate 4. The grassy, overgrown conical shaped chamber of Gubnaveagh B sweathouse is pictured on the left middle-ground. The east-facing lintelled entrance passage is still intact but much of the stones on the eastern side of the structure appear rather loose. This image illustrates how sweathouses can sometimes blend into the wider landscape (image by the author).



Plate 5. The partially collapsed, overgrown double-chambered sweathouse(s) at Crosshill, Co. Roscommon. The roof and entrance have collapsed in on the eastern chamber. The western chamber is intact, but is structurally vulnerable. Both south-facing entrances are lintelled (image by the author).



Plate 6. The free-standing sweathouse at Legeelan, Co. Cavan. The lintelled south-west facing entrance is made slightly smaller by an accumulation of earthen deposits (image by the author).

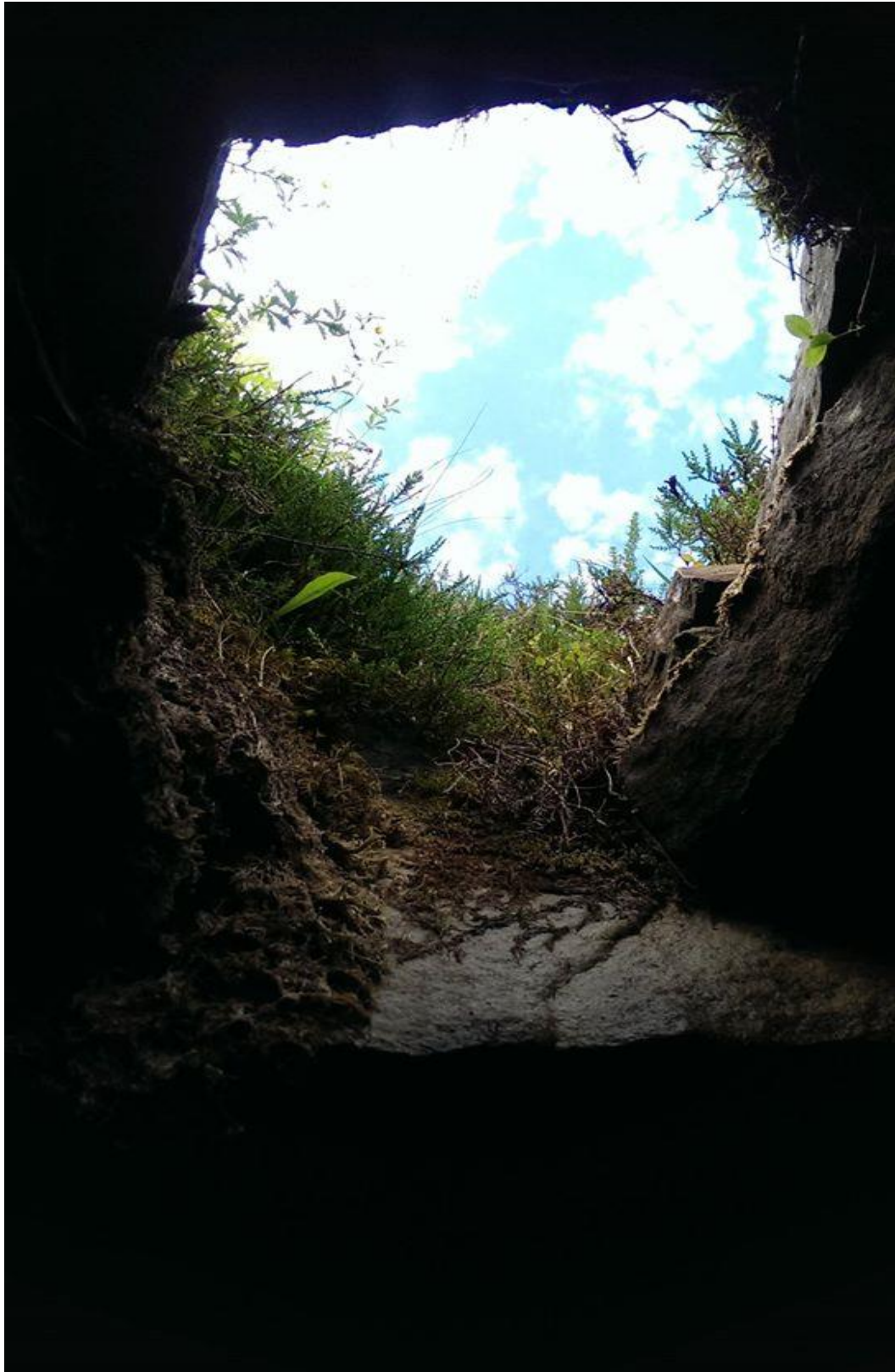


Plate 7. Internal view of the roughly oval shaped chimney hole in the apex of the roof of the sweathouse at Lurgaboy, Co. Roscommon (image by the author).



Plate 8. View of the south-west facing lintelled entrance of the restored sweathouse at Kilmore, Co. Leitrim. This is on the site of Parke's castle, a national monument in State care. (Image by the author).



Plate 9. The sweathouse at Keadew west, Co. Roscommon. This structure has been rebuilt and is situated in a public park in the village of Keadew. It is a visibly overgrown chamber with a wooden lintelled entrance. (Image by the author).



Plate 10. Public amenity area roughly 500m from the sweathouse at Cleighran More, Co. Leitrim, which is signposted on the right. Cleighran More is one of only a handful of sweathouses that are properly exhibited to the public as an accessible and adequately signposted attraction (image by the author).



Plate 11. Exterior view of the sweathouse at Cleighran More, Co. Leitrim with a ranging rod for scale. The lintelled entrance faces west.



Plate 12. An interior view of the lintelled roof of the sweathouse at Cleighran More, Co. Leitrim (image by the author).



Plate 13. The route to the sweathouse at Coppanaghbane, Co. Cavan. The sweathouse is situated on a riverbed, which is obscured by deciduous growth at the right background (image by the author).



Plate 14. Exterior view of the sweathouse at Coppanaghbane, Co. Cavan with its east-facing lintelled entrance. An abundance of vegetation as well as a holly tree have begun to grow atop this structure (image by the author).



Plate 15. The interior corbelled roof of Coppanaghbane sweathouse, Co. Cavan
(image by the author).



Plate 16. The roofless circular chamber of Mountallen sweathouse from a slightly
elevated perspective. The north-east facing lintelled passage is in the middle
background. (Image by the author).



Plate 17. Exterior of the sweathouse at Lurgaboy, Co. Roscommon. Slightly overgrown, but intact internally with a well-preserved lintelled entrance which faces south to south east. (Image by the author).



Plate 18. Exterior chimney hole of the sweathouse at Lurgaboy, Co. Roscommon. On the left foreground is a stone used to block air-flow and retain heat while the sweathouse is being used.



Plate 19. Aerial image with a yellow tack symbol showing the location of Cloonaghmore sweathouse and its surroundings, Co. Leitrim. (Google Earth, 2016).



Plate 20. Aerial image of the two sweathouses at Gubnaveagh, Co. Leitrim, denoted by yellow tack symbols. Notice their proximity to one another. (Google Earth, 2016).



Plate 21. Exterior view of the sweathouse at Cornacully, Co. Fermanagh. The entrance faces south-west and is not entirely intact (NIEA, 2007).

Appendix 2 – Figures



Figure 1. Map showing the twelve sweathouses that were visited in counties Leitrim, Cavan and Roscommon for this dissertation (Google Earth, 2016).

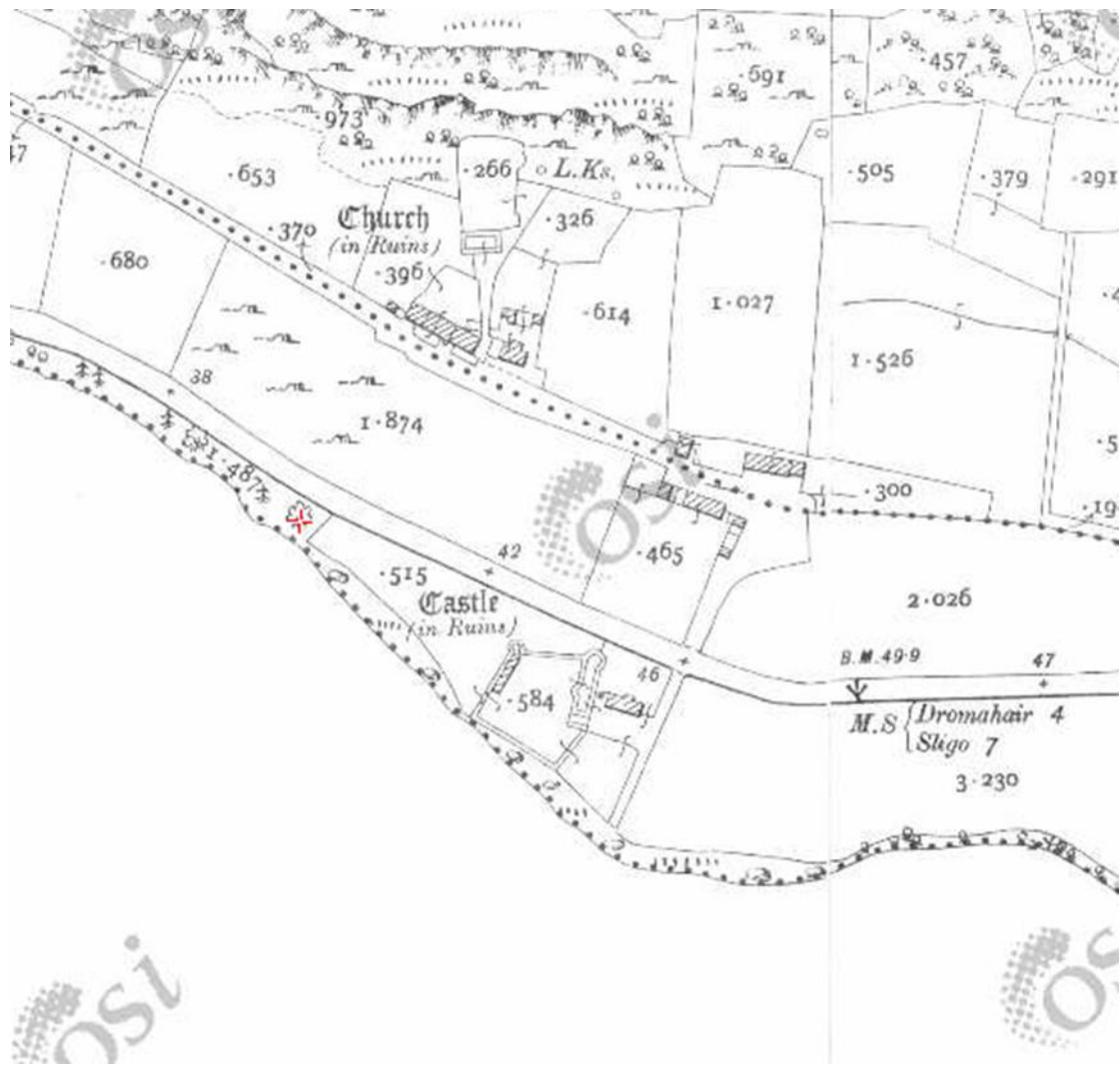


Figure 2. Extract from the 1912 edition of the historic 25" OSI map. The red 'cross' in the middle left shows the site of Kilmore sweathouse, Co. Leitrim. Parke's castle is marked 'in Ruins' on the right, with the bawn, gatehouse, forge and defence tower included (Ordnance Survey Ireland, 2016).

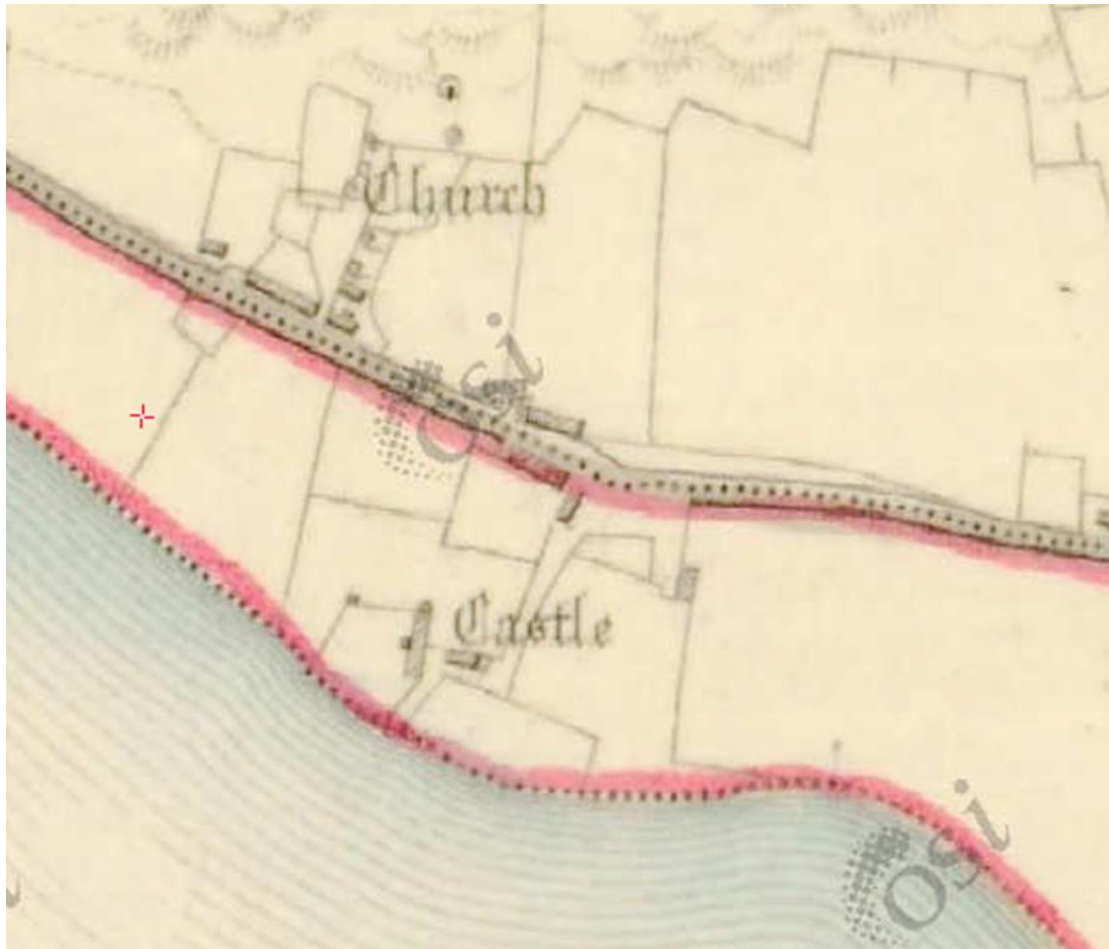


Figure 3. 1836 edition of the OSI historic 6" series, the red 'cross' symbol on the left showing the site of the sweathouse. Notice the difference in the land division compared to the historic 25" map on Plate 10. The bawn of Parke's castle is visible to the right, but is not as detailed an inclusion as the later historic 25" map from 1912.

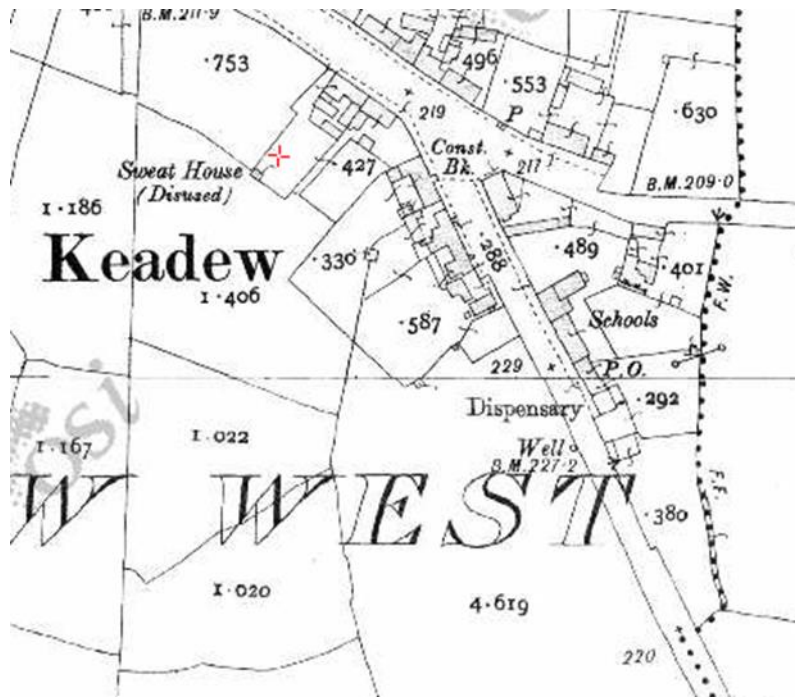
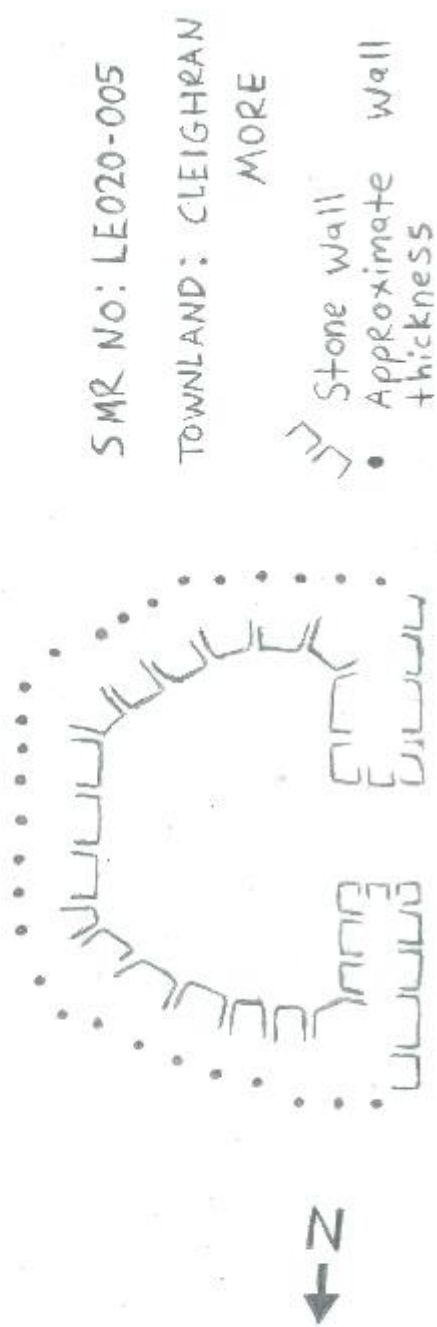


Figure 4. Historic 25" map of the sweathouse at Keadew west, Co. Roscommon, 1912 edition. It is marked as disused on the top left background. In the right middle-ground there is a medical dispensary marked (Ordnance Survey Ireland, 2016).



Site of Cleighran More Sweathouse

Figure 5. Ground plan of Cleighran More sweathouse, based on the measurements from the tape and offset survey, at a scale of 1:20.

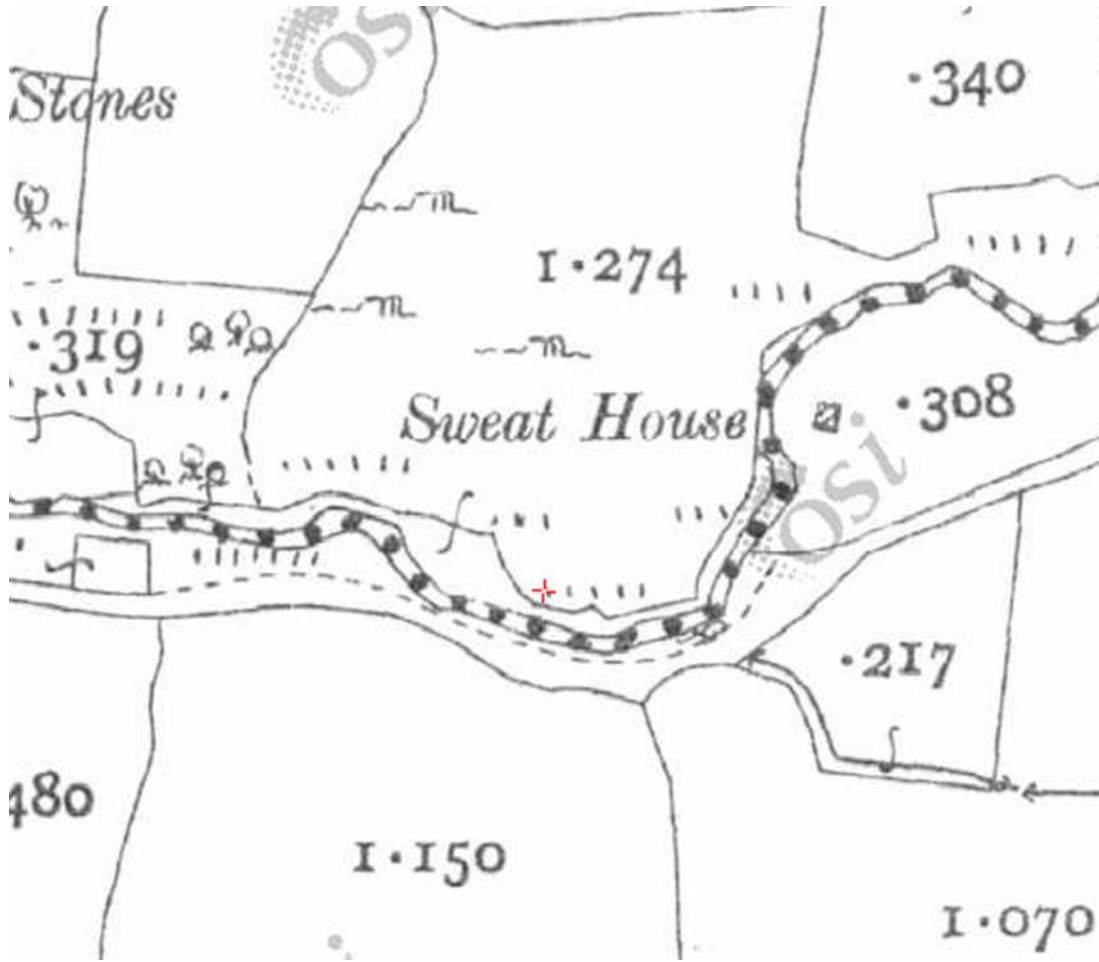


Figure 6. 1910 edition of the historic 25" OSI map showing the sweathouse at Cleighran More, marked as a square on the right, with the adjacent stream marked to the left of the structure.

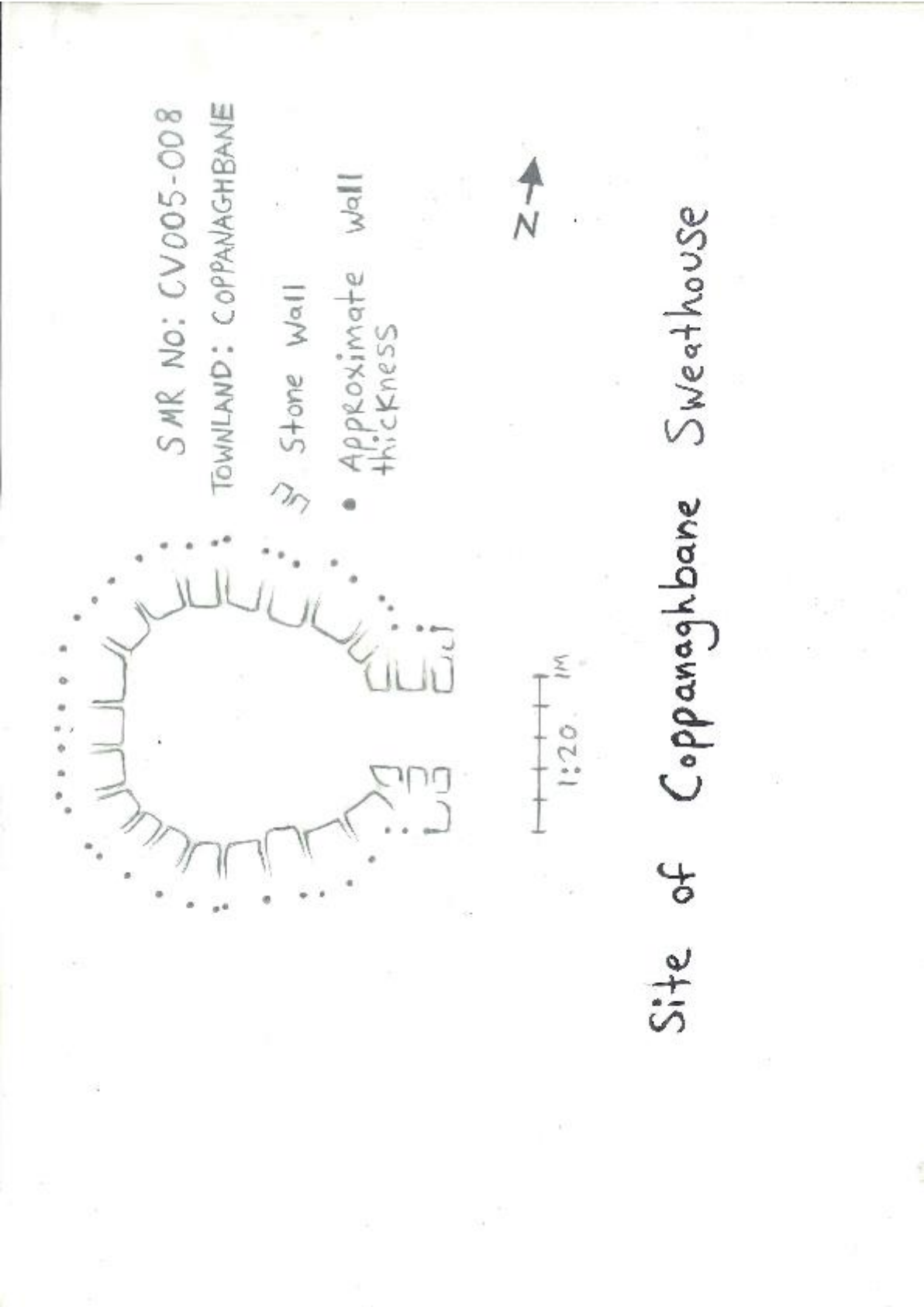


Figure 7. Ground plan of Coppanaghbane sweathouse, Co. Cavan. Based on measurements from the tape and offset survey and was drawn at a scale of 1:20.



Figure 8. 1910 edition of the historic 25" OSI map with the sweathouse at Coppanaghbane, Co. Cavan marked in the centre. The adjacent river is shown to the right of the river. Two abandoned farmhouses can be seen at the top left and immediately below the sweathouse on the right (Ordnance Survey Ireland, 2016).

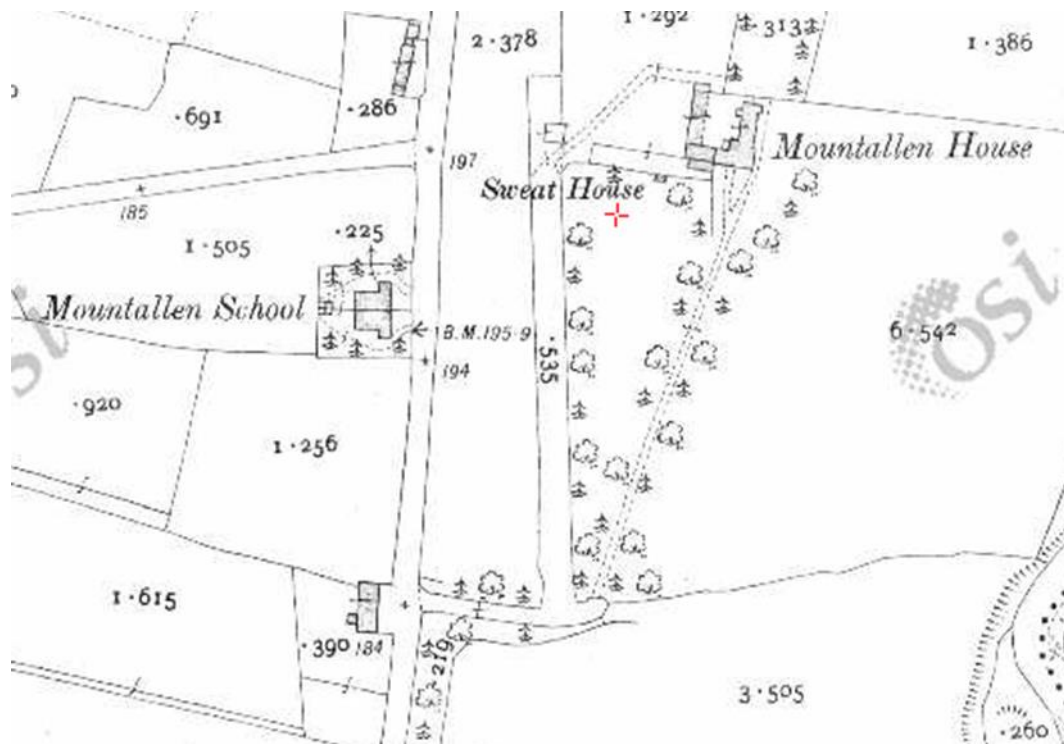
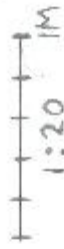
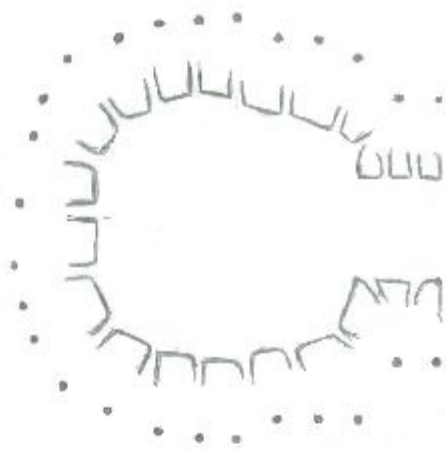


Figure 9. Mountallen sweathouse, marked on the 1914 edition of the OSi historic 25” map series. Mountallen house is still occupied. The road to the immediate left of the sweathouse is no longer used and is overgrown.

SMR NO: R0002-027
TOWNLAND: MOUNTALLEN

- Stone Wall
- Approximate Wall thickness



Site of Mountallen Sweathouse

Figure 10. Ground plan of Mountallen sweathouse, Co. Roscommon. This is based on the measurements from a tape and offset survey.

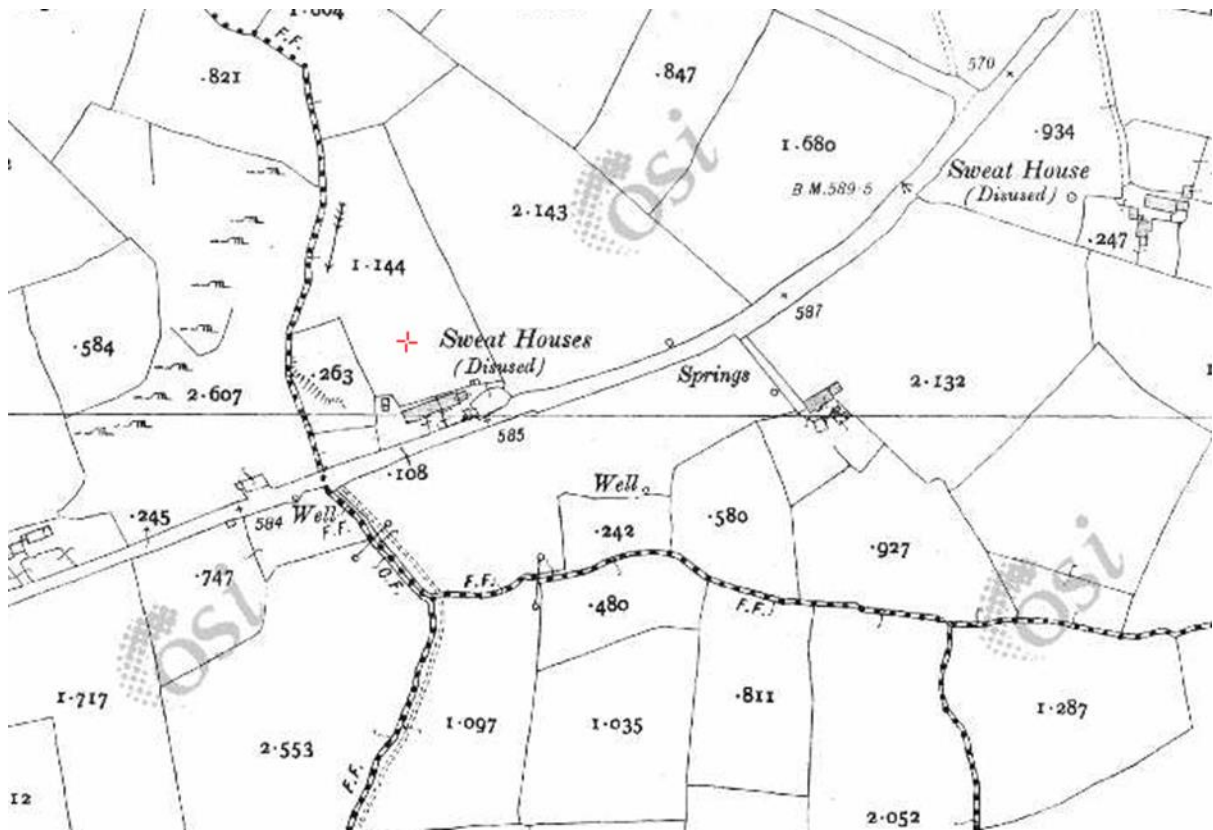


Figure 11. 1914 edition of the historic 25" OSI map. The conjoined chambers of the sweathouse(s) at Crosshill can be seen in the centre, with two wells to the left and right of the structure, as well as another sweathouse in the top right background (SMR no. RO002-025) (Ordnance Survey Ireland, 2016).

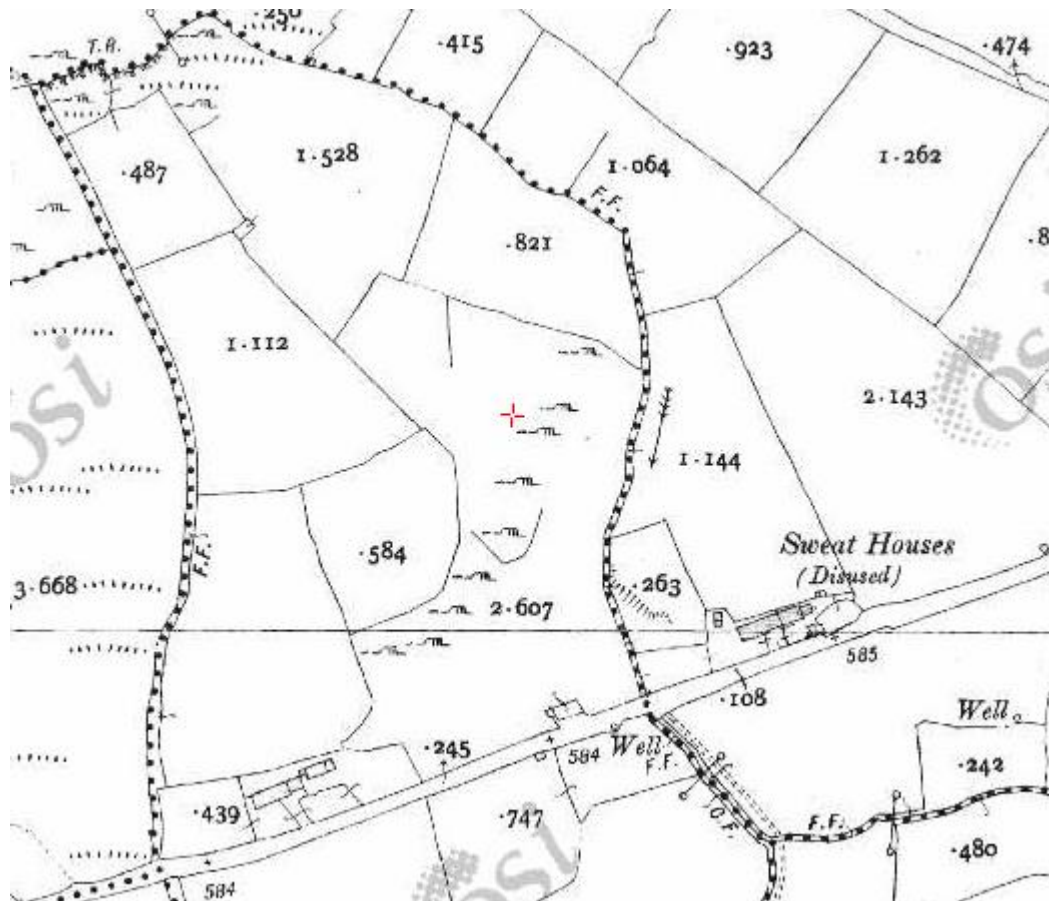


Figure 12. Extract from the 1914 edition of the historic 25" OSI map series. Lurgaboy sweathouse is not marked on this edition, but is presently located in the field parcel marked '.487' in the top left corner. The double-chambered sweathouse(s) at Crosshill are marked on the right foreground (Ordnance Survey Ireland, 2016).

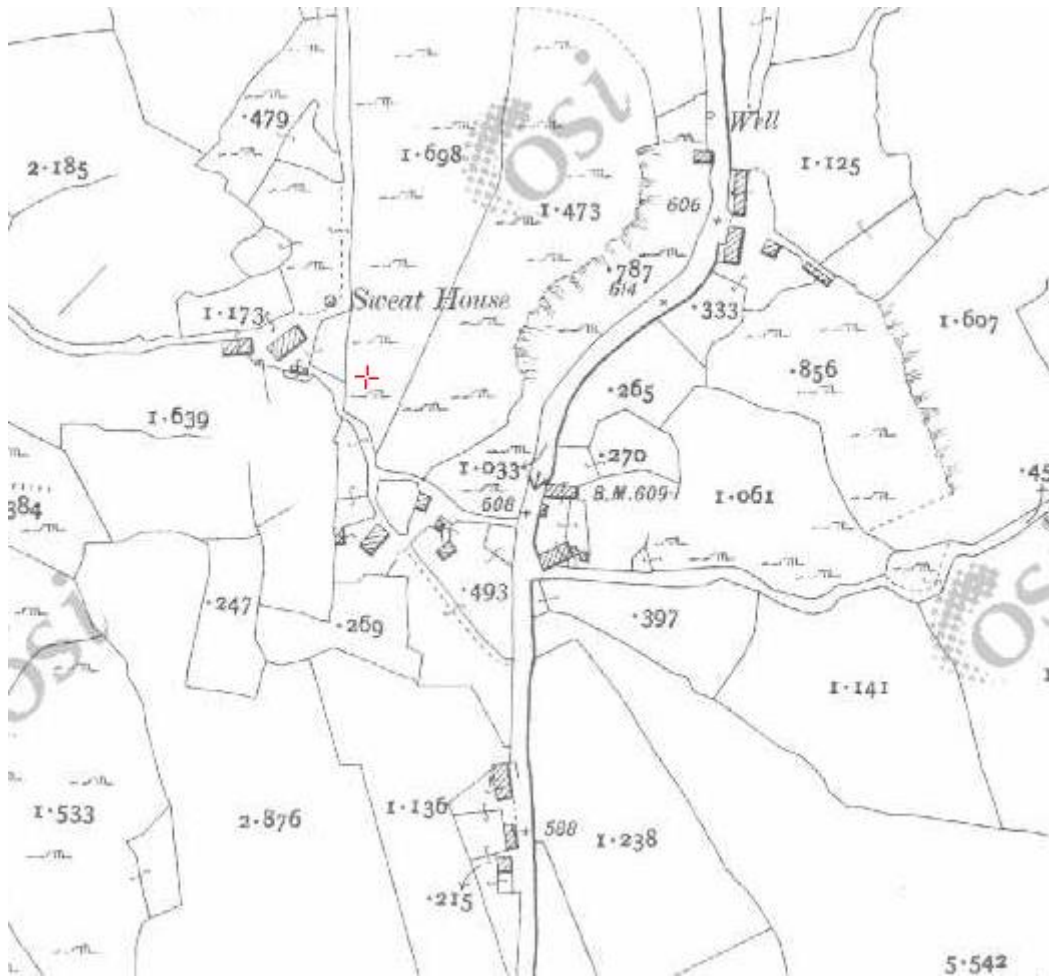


Figure 13. 1910 edition of the OSI historic 25" map showing Legeelan sweathouse, Co. Cavan. There is an indication of an adjacent stream above the structure, but the stream was not visible when the site was visited in July 2016.

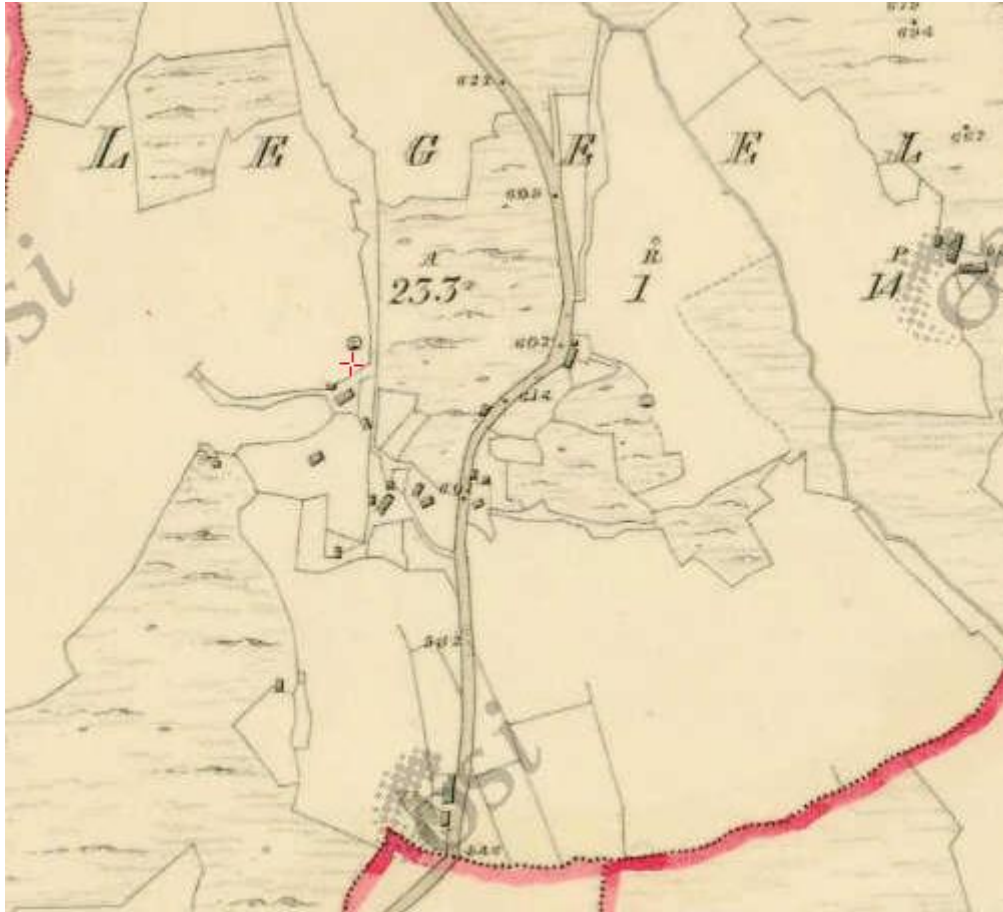


Figure 14. 1835 edition of the OSI historic 6" map, with Legeelan sweathouse, Co. Cavan, situated immediately above the red cursor in the left middle-ground.

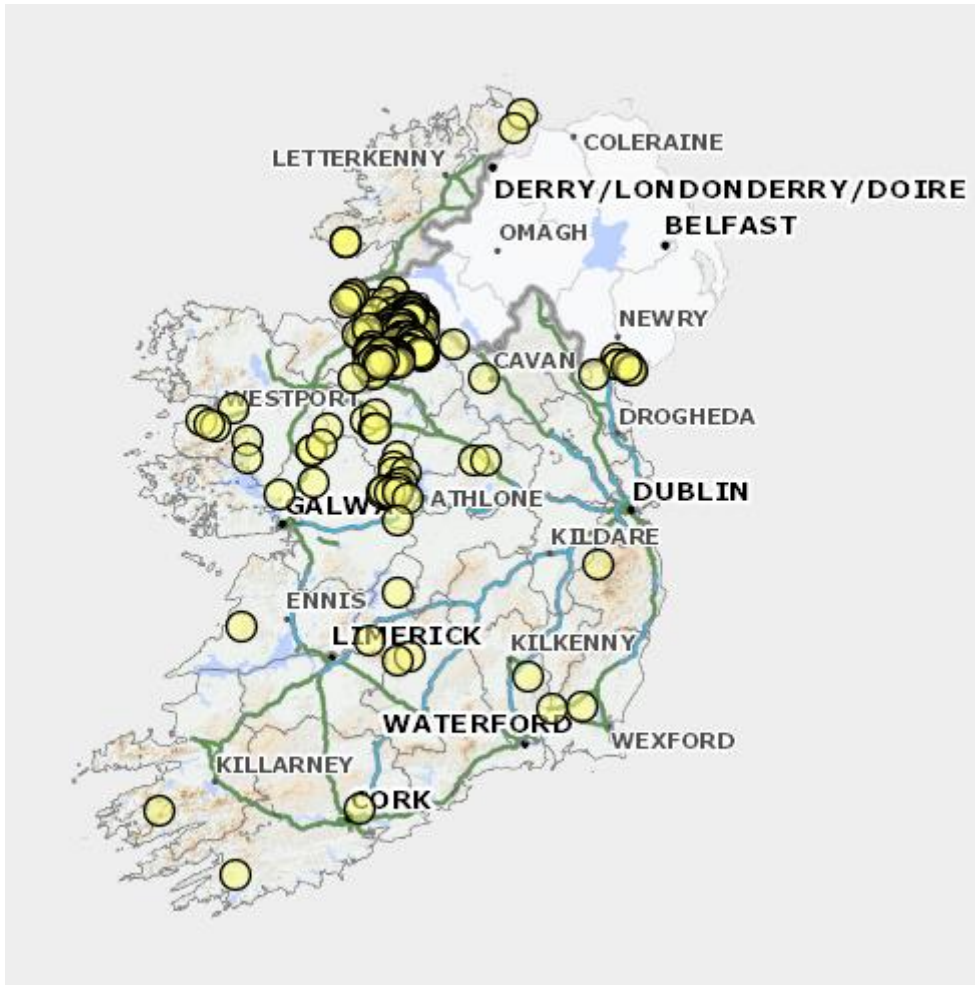


Figure 15. Map showing all the entries for sweathouses in the Republic of Ireland according to the Sites and Monuments Record. Notice the distinct concentration in Co. Leitrim. (DAHG, 2016).

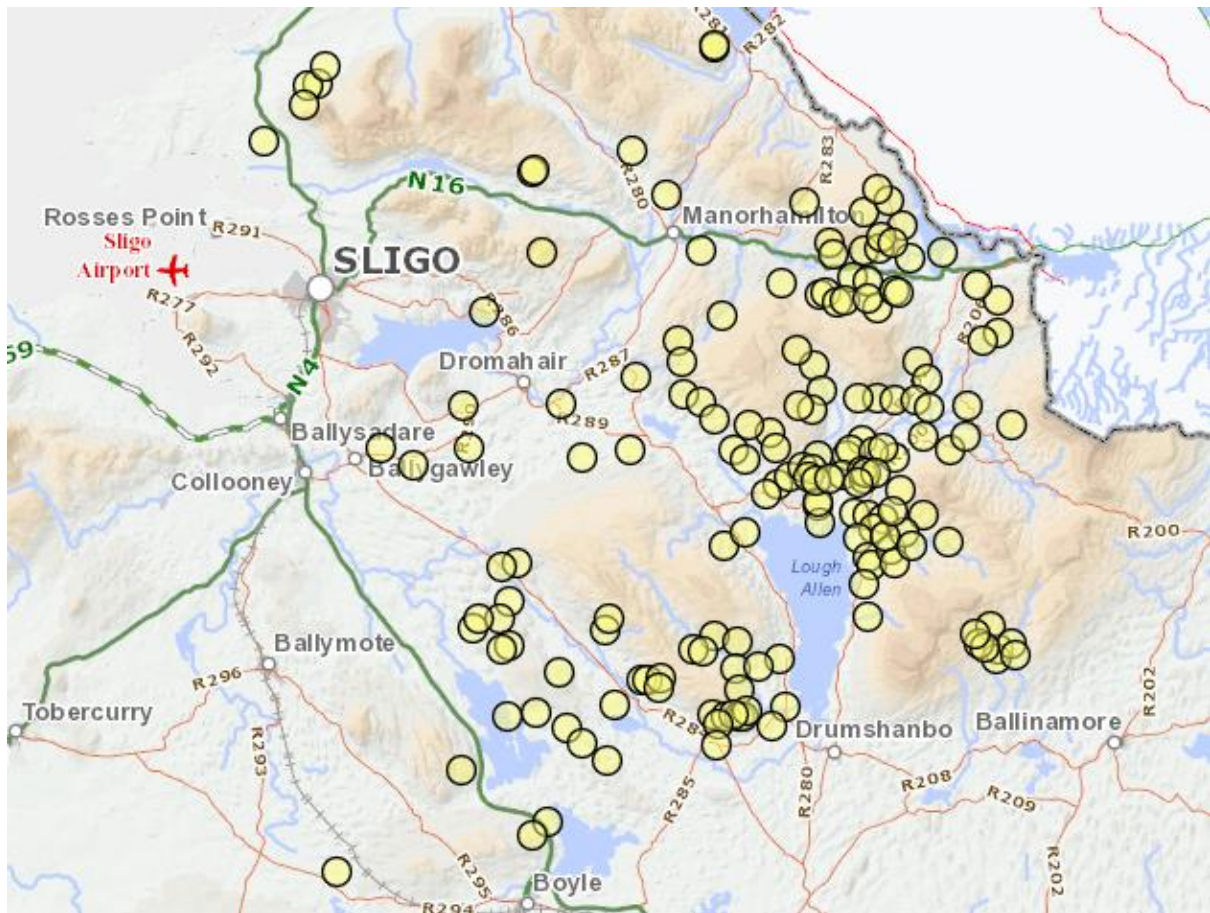


Figure 16. The Leitrim distribution of sweathouses included in the Sites and Monuments Record (DAHG, 2016).