

## The Munster Sweathouse Project

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The structure, function and date of Sweathouses generally are discussed. The specific study detailed here of these structures in the province showed that there are more examples than have hitherto been recognised or recorded but that there is no distinctive Munster type. The possibility that they may represent a migration from the north is suggested based on comparisons with sites there. No examples are currently known from counties Limerick or Waterford.

### Introduction

Sweathouses are quite common in the northwest of the country and in some instances there are two or more such structures per townland. In contrast, the Record of Monuments and Places registers just nine sites in Munster, constituting only 3.8% of the total 237 known Sweathouses in the Republic of Ireland. Seemingly isolated from the main core area of Sweathouse use, these Munster sites raise a number of issues, but also provide an opportunity to improve our understanding of Irish Sweathouses generally. *The Munster Sweathouse Project*<sup>1</sup> sought to investigate these enigmatic structures where they could be located across the province.

The Irish Sweathouse is a stone-built structure, which was heated to allow people to 'sweat' for curative purposes. The structures are usually small, with a single narrow entrance and a covering of earth or sod. In addition to this, they are generally circular in plan, of corbelled construction and some have a smoke-outlet flue or chimney. These diagnostic features are the result of the function which these sites performed; however as functionality is of primary concern, variants in design do occur. A drystone masonry technique was usually used but there are exceptions, as at Legeelan, Co. Cavan where the masonry was clearly mortared.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the roofs of these structures are sometimes formed by flat lintels or barrel-vaulted, as at Kilmore, Co. Galway.<sup>3</sup> The entrances are only rarely found to be wider than 0.7m and sometimes as narrow as 0.4m as at Tullynafreave, Co. Cavan.<sup>4</sup> Entrances that measure between 0.5m-0.6m in width and 0.6m-0.7m in height are common across the northern counties. A covering mantle of earth provided insulation to the structure for heat retention. To this end, Sweathouses are often found built into banks or field boundaries, which also provided privacy during use.

The practice of using a Sweathouse has been well documented since the late eighteenth century<sup>5</sup> and many of the subsequent accounts complement one another. Firstly, a fire was set within the Sweathouse and allowed to burn for several hours, after which time the stone walls became heated. The fire was then raked out and green rushes

<sup>1</sup> The project was funded by the Heritage Council under the Archaeology Research Grant Scheme 2009.

<sup>2</sup> R. Sherlock, *Northwest Co Cavan Survey. An Archaeological Survey of Northwest Cavan: The Other Burren* (Dublin, 2007) p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> O. Alcock, K. de hÓra and P. Gosling, *Archaeological Inventory of County Galway, Volume II: North Galway* (Dublin, 1999) p. 433.

<sup>4</sup> P.F. O'Donovan, *Archaeological Inventory of County Cavan* (Dublin, 1995) p. 242.

<sup>5</sup> De Latocnaye, *A Frenchman's walk through Ireland 1796-7* (1798, republished 1984, Belfast).

or a 'scrah' were placed inside, as protection against the heated floor. Then the 'patient' undressed and crept inside. The entrance was blocked (sometimes with the patient's own clothes) and in some cases the heat was regulated by closing the smoke-flues. The patient remained inside until they were sweating profusely and became weakened by the heat. The duration of this seems to have varied. On exiting the Sweathouse, the final act involved plunging into cool water at a nearby stream, pond or well. It is known that superstitions existed about using a Sweathouse alone<sup>6</sup> but most could not have accommodated many people. There are references to an itinerant bath-master<sup>7</sup> and others which state that an attendant would wait outside to see that the patient did not stay in too long or faint.<sup>8</sup> The accounts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also indicate that Sweathouses were at that time predominantly used to cure chills and rheumatic pain.<sup>9</sup>

The date range during which the Irish Sweathouses were built and used is somewhat problematic.<sup>10</sup> However, they do seem to have fallen into disuse largely due to medical advancements and the spread of local dispensaries during the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> The practice did survive into the twentieth century and the last recorded use took place in 1924.<sup>12</sup> The date at which the practice commenced in Ireland must be earlier than the first written reference made by Latocnaye in the 1790s. However, only one stone Sweathouse has been excavated in Ireland and the radiocarbon dates obtained were deemed unreliable.<sup>13</sup> A number of recent excavations of *fulachta fiadh* have shown that a tradition similar to that of Native American Sweat-Lodges may have been in Ireland as early as the Bronze Age.<sup>14</sup> However, the indigenous development of the practice has not yet been fully explored and most commentators have suggested it was introduced from Scandinavia, Russia or the Roman Empire.<sup>15</sup>

### Munster Sweathouse Project

*The Munster Sweathouse Project* aspired to highlight the presence of these unusual structures in Munster so that further examples might be discovered, appreciated and protected. From the outset, it was clear that there were more Sweathouses in Munster than represented in the official records. In order to assess the widest number of possible

<sup>6</sup> W.T.Latimer, 'Sweat-house, near Eglis, County Tyrone', in *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. v, fifth series (1894) p. 180.

<sup>7</sup> H.G.Tempest, 'Sweat House at Ravensdale', in *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society*, vol. ii, no. 4 (1911) p. 440.

<sup>8</sup> D.B. Mulcahy, 'An Ancient Irish Hot-Bath, or Sweathouse, on the Island of Rathlin', in *Proceedings and Papers of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. I, fifth series, part 2, no. 7 (1891) pp 589-90:589.

<sup>9</sup> De Latocnaye, *A Frenchman's walk through Ireland*; S.F. Milligan, 'The Ancient Irish Hot-Air Bath', in *Journal of the Royal Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland*, vol. ix, fourth series (1889) pp 268-70; Mulcahy, 'An Ancient Irish Hot-Bath, or Sweathouse, on the Island of Rathlin'; W.T. Latimer, 'Sweat-house, near Eglis, County Tyrone', in *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. v, fifth series (1894) p. 180.

<sup>10</sup> A. Harte, 'A Sweathouse at Caherlehillian, Co. Kerry', in *Journal of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society*, series 2, vol. 8 (2009) pp 114-25.

<sup>11</sup> O'Donovan, *Archaeological Inventory of County Cavan*, p. 239.

<sup>12</sup> A. Weir, 'Sweathouses and Simple Stone Structures in County Louth and Elsewhere in Ireland', in *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society*, vol. xix, no. 3 (1979) pp 185-196:187.

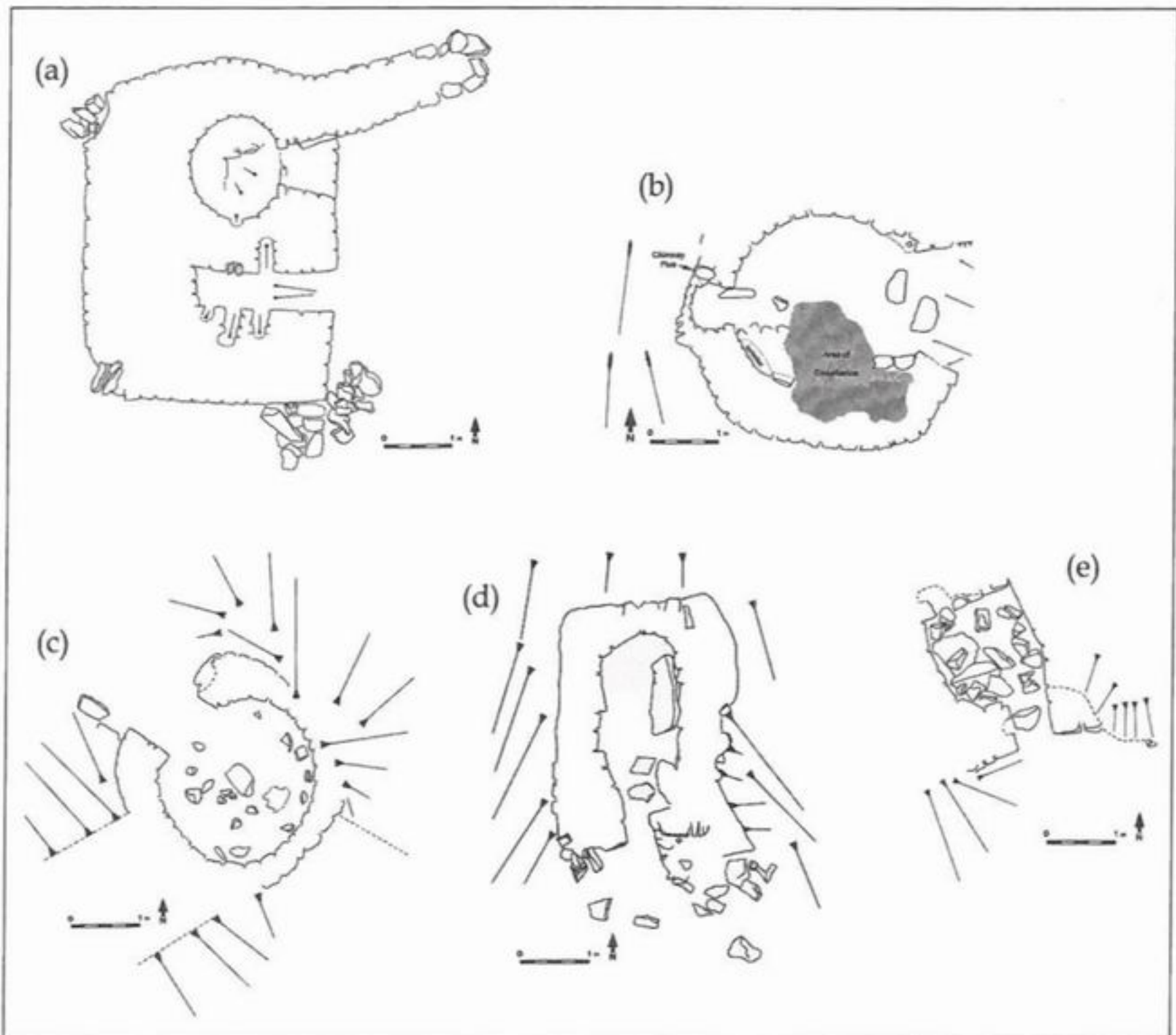
<sup>13</sup> B.B. Williams, 'Cornacully', in I. Bennett (ed.), *Excavations 1988: Summary Accounts of Archaeological Excavations in Ireland* (Dublin, 1989) p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> T. O'Neill, 'Final Report on Archaeological Excavation of Scartbarry 1. ACS (unpublished, 2006); E. Danaher and L. Cagney, 'Report on the Archaeological Excavation of Fulacht Fiadh at Ballinaspig More 6, Ballincollig, Co Cork. ACS' (unpublished, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> A. Weir, 'Sweathouses: Puzzling and Disappearing', in *Archaeology Ireland*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1989) pp 10-13; A.McL. May, 'Sweathouses (Toigthe Alluis) of County Londonderry', in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vol. I, third series (1938) pp 44-5; J. Buckley 'An Ancient Hot-Air Bath-House, near Schull, Co. Cork', in *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, vol. xix, no. 97 (1913) pp 1-8.

sites, a number of local historical societies were contacted, brief lectures given and a dedicated web-page set up. Amateur historians, landowners and archaeologists suggested several sites, some that have not yet been thoroughly investigated. Nevertheless, one definite Sweathouse (Teeromoyle, Co. Kerry) has been newly identified through these means and the process has certainly raised awareness of such sites amongst landowners and other interested parties.

Another objective of the project was to assess the classification of those previously recorded. It was found that all those currently listed were indeed definite or probable Sweathouses.<sup>16</sup> However, due to the ambiguities surrounding the period from which these sites originate, not all Sweathouses in Munster have yet been included in County Archaeological Inventories. Therefore, each Sweathouse is recorded here to a comparable standard, and the specific details (such as dimensions etc.) are given in Appendix A. Almost every Sweathouse surveyed displayed interesting characteristics and these are summarised below.



**Fig. 1** Plans of Sweathouses (a) Ballyourane, Co. Cork, (b) Hermitage, Co. Cork, (c) Cloghkeating, Co. Tipperary, (d) Boolatin, Co. Tipperary, (e) Knockacarhanduff Commons, Co. Tipperary.

<sup>16</sup> More correctly, all such sites in Munster are 'likely' Sweathouses; none has been excavated and there is no recorded tradition of them having been used in this way.

The Sweathouse at Ballyourane, Co. Cork, (Fig. 1 a) proved to be the most complex site found in the survey. Built into a field boundary, it housed two chambers. The first was entered from ground level and had a relatively large and simple 'doorway', from which a straight passage extended. This passage had three flues exiting from the south side (to the exterior) and two flues that travelled towards the second chamber. This second chamber was entered through a small doorway at a higher level than that of the first and was also recessed back from the frontal façade. The small circular chamber was filled with debris but had a corbelled ceiling formed of tightly fitted masonry. It can be assumed that the first chamber had contained a fire which heated the second chamber. Despite its overall size, the capacity of the Sweathouse was reduced due to its intricate design and could only have accommodated one patient at a time.

The other example from Co. Cork, at Hermitage, is also unusual (Fig. 1 b). The collapsed remains indicate a very large, sub-circular, partially corbelled structure with a fireplace constructed on the east wall. Both the internal area and the fireplace indicate that the purpose here was different to that of Ballyourane. It might have accommodated up to ten people at any one time and it is questionable whether the intensity of heat emanating from a fireplace in such a large structure would be sufficient.

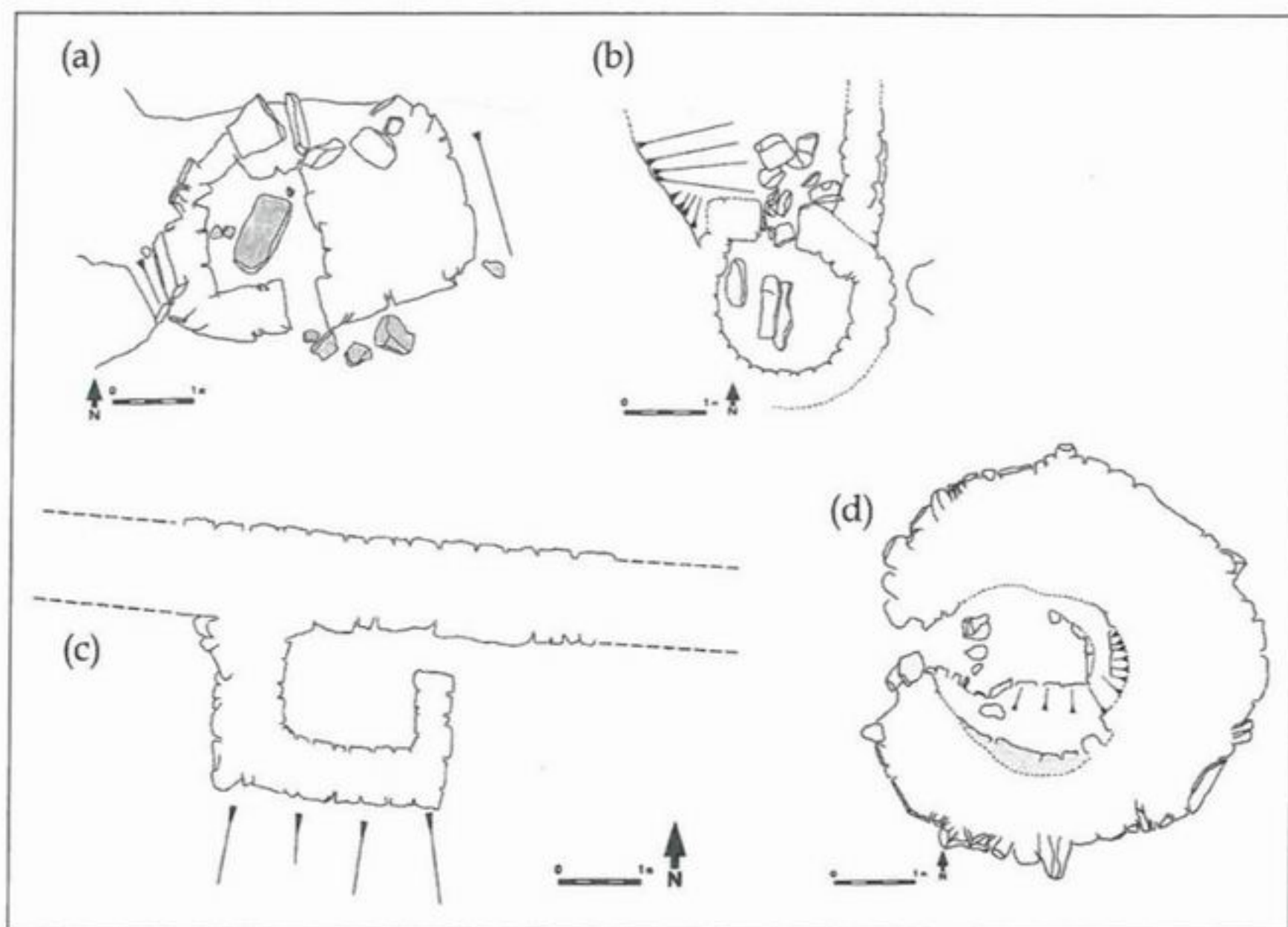
Similarly, an example in Co. Tipperary, found on the townland boundary between Cloghkeating and Mertonhall, is an atypical Sweathouse (Fig. 1 c). The structure is built into the bank of a conjoined ringfort and is therefore well insulated. However, the masonry is mortared and the ceiling is vaulted. Both are deviations from the norm which are compounded by the height of the ceiling and the large size of the damaged entrance. Other sites in Co. Tipperary, at Boolatin and Knockacarhanduff Commons, are built into hillsides and have small interiors and entrances (Fig. 1 d, e). These are both of drystone construction with partial corbelling of the roof in the case of Boolatin.

In Co. Kerry, three sites were surveyed (Fig. 2 a, b, c). The Sweathouse at Coomura is recorded on the RMP and is found in an isolated position behind a corrie lake over 2.5km from the nearest roadway. Interestingly, from the exterior the entrance appears central to the structure but opens into the corner of the square interior space. Therefore, the eastern half of the structure is a mass of stacked stones and appears to be an original feature. The Sweathouse at Caherlehillian was discovered by the author in 2002. This lies adjacent to a mountain stream where it was built into the bank. Sub-circular in plan with a corbelled roof and small entrance, this site meets all the criteria of a Sweathouse.<sup>17</sup> Finally, during the course of this project, a third Sweathouse was located at Teeromoyle. This was found built against a field boundary, with a small entrance and interior. It is rectilinear in plan both internally and externally, has a sod-covered roof and is near a stream. Therefore this structure features many of the diagnostic elements of a Sweathouse, and so was included in the survey.

Co. Clare has a single recorded Sweathouse at Creevagh, on the shores of Doo Lough (Figure 2 d). It is situated on a small rock outcrop and, unlike the rest, is quite exposed. It is circular in plan with thick walls but the roof has collapsed and the entrance is damaged. It is therefore difficult to assess. Notably however, it is the only free-standing example in Munster.

Of these nine sites, seven had previously been noted on the RMP. The Archaeological Survey of Ireland hold records on two more at Derryriordane South, Co. Cork and Clonmurrigha, Co. Tipperary but there are no known co-ordinates for these sites. The

<sup>17</sup> Harte, 'A Sweathouse at Caherlehillian, Co. Kerry'.



**Fig. 2** Plans of Sweathouses (a) Coomura, Co. Kerry, (b) Caherlehillian, Co. Kerry, (c) Teeromoyle, Co. Kerry, (d) Creevagh, Co. Clare.

landowners at Derryriordane had no recollection of having ever seen such a structure.<sup>18</sup> Clonmurrage has been visited by Weir but as yet has not been surveyed. Since the end of this project a further possible example at Gloun, Co. Cork has been suggested<sup>19</sup> along with another potential site near Ballinskelligs, Co. Kerry. Several structures along the Blackwater valley are also possible Sweathouses, but as yet these have not been assessed by the author. Nevertheless, the total number of Sweathouse sites has increased from 9 to 11, with potential for at least 15 such sites within Munster. The details of the two newly identified sites have been relayed to the ASI to be added to the RMP in due course.

### Discussion

The Munster Sweathouses can be clearly divided into sites where interior floor space is limited ( $\leq 3\text{m}^2$ ) and those with larger interiors ( $\geq 4\text{m}^2$ ). The first group could only have accommodated 1-2 people at any one time and also display characteristics consistent with Sweathouses in the north-western counties. All presented elements of corbelling in their construction, with low internal heights ( $\leq 1.62\text{m}$  when Boolatin is discounted) and narrow entrances (0.43m to 0.55m in width). Although in this group, Ballyourane is more complex as it has two chambers and a network of flues – the only such case in Munster. The second group, with larger interiors, represented by Cloghkeating and Hermitage, are those which could easily have contained four or more patients. They both display features

<sup>18</sup> The O'Sheas, (*pers. comm.*, Sept. 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Buckley, 'Ancient Hot-Air Bath-House, near Schull'.

that are atypical (though not unique) to Irish Sweathouses. It has been suggested that Sweathouses can easily be mistaken for kennels and duck-houses, and *vice versa*, but these Sweathouses at Cloghkeating and Hermitage might equally be interpreted as follies or hunting lodges. It is also noteworthy that Cloghkeating is the only Munster Sweathouse that does not have an obvious water source nearby, thus suggesting a variation in practice. Where they are found in the north of Ireland, the larger Sweathouses are interpreted as communal structures e.g. Ballydonegan and Rathlin Island.<sup>20</sup> However, the internal size of the majority of Sweathouses in Ireland is small and more likely limited to the treatment of the sick rather than the relaxation of the many.

The isolated positions in which these structures stand is often cited as a defining characteristic and holds true in the case of the Munster Sweathouses. While advantageous in terms of privacy, it surely caused hardship for the genuine patient. The marginal locations may represent neutral ground and thus equal access to all members of the community. This also raises the question of ownership. It would seem logical that large 'communal' Sweathouses were not privately owned. It was reported that in Cavan 'every four or five families once shared a sweat-house.'<sup>21</sup> However, the proprietorship of individual Sweathouses is unknown, although at least one example from Co. Cavan was owned by a farmer who had it purposely built so that his sick wife need not travel to the Sweathouse in the hills.

Assessing the sites in this survey against the wider corpus of Irish sites, it was clear that there is no apparent Munster type and therefore, cross-comparisons should be made with those found in other provinces. County by county sub-classifications are difficult to construct but it does seem that certain areas have specific features. For instance, Sweathouses in counties Leitrim, Sligo and Donegal do not have flues, while those in Co. Tyrone have simple smoke outlets, similar to those from Rathlin Island. Distinctive flue arrangements are seen in Co. Derry and also in some of the Co. Cavan examples.

The structure at Creevagh is similar to those found at Gubnaveagh, Co. Leitrim<sup>22</sup> and Port, Co. Cavan<sup>23</sup> – the latter site is also very close to a lake. Ballyourane Sweathouse, with two chambers, is paralleled by that found at Anavera, Co. Louth and the flues correspond well with those found at Termons, Co. Cavan, where they exit the side walls.<sup>24</sup> The sweating chamber at Ballyourane is also comparable with Kilmore Sweathouse in Co. Leitrim which has a chamber diameter of just 1.3m and was built into a masonry wall not far from Parke's Castle.<sup>25</sup> Hermitage Sweathouse can be compared to one regularly referenced site at Ballydonegan, Co. Derry which 'could accommodate at least eight people ... had a fireplace at one end, with a chimney hole above it.'<sup>26</sup> The Caherlehillian Sweathouse has the same smoke outlet feature at the top of the roof as is common in Co. Tyrone, while other sites in Co. Kerry have many of the characteristics of the simple Sweathouses found throughout counties Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal. Boolatin and Knockacarhanduff have features which correlate with sites from counties Derry and Tyrone in every way apart from the absence of a flue at either site. The Sweathouse at

<sup>20</sup> Weir, 'Sweathouses and Simple Stone Structures in County Louth', p. 186; Mulcahy, 'An Ancient Irish Hot-Bath, or Sweathouse, on the Island of Rathlin', p. 589.

<sup>21</sup> E. E. Evans, *Irish Folk Ways* (London, 1957) p. 124.

<sup>22</sup> M.J. Moore (compiled), *Archaeological Inventory of County Leitrim* (Dublin, 2003) p. 222.

<sup>23</sup> Sherlock, *Northwest Co Cavan Survey*, p. 182.

<sup>24</sup> O'Donovan, *Archaeological Inventory of County Cavan*, p. 242.

<sup>25</sup> Moore, *Archaeological Inventory of County Leitrim*, p. 223.

<sup>26</sup> Weir, 'Sweathouses: Puzzling and Disappearing', p. 12.

Cloghkeating is paralleled by a site at Kilmore, Co. Galway where the structure has a barrel-vaulted roof, a high doorway (1.1m) and the masonry is also mortared.<sup>27</sup> The latter is indicated on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map as a 'Sweat Kiln', reinforcing the suggestion that sites like Cloghkeating functioned in a slightly different way to usual Sweathouse forms.

While there are clearly comparisons between them, it is possible that the Munster Sweathouses are divided from the majority of northern sites in date, as well as geographically. The nearest archaeological monuments cannot be used as a guide to the period in which a Sweathouse was constructed. Cloghkeating, built into the bank of a conjoined ringfort, is surely not early medieval in date, as it damages the earthworks by its very presence. Therefore it post-dates the ringfort, a fact that might have been inferred from its architectural style. Similarly, at Ballyourane the Sweathouse is only 30m from the site of a ruined castle and only 100m from a children's burial ground. Once the castle fell into ruin, it is likely the area became occupied by these two site types usually found at peripheral points in the landscape. As a relative dating technique, this method has its limitations, and at Coomura, Co. Kerry, the Sweathouse appears to have been associated with a house. This extremely isolated site may have necessitated accommodation for the patient or attendant, though the sweathouse here may not be contemporaneous with the house at all. From examining all of the Munster Sweathouses in this way, it can be speculated that these structures originate some time during the late medieval or post-medieval periods, but their disconnection from local knowledge and traditions suggests that they have not been used since at least the mid-nineteenth century.

The general location of Sweathouse sites in Munster is far from cities and towns but also largely absent from areas of good agricultural land. It is plausible that those that remain are peripheral surviving elements of a practice that was once far more widespread within the province. There is the possibility that differential preservation has manipulated the known distribution nationally and that this distribution now only reflects where Sweathouses were in use until relatively recently. More Sweathouses probably exist among the vast numbers of sites considered as *clocháns*, hut sites and animal shelters along the western seaboard and in mountainous areas.<sup>28</sup> However, the most notable void in the spread of Sweathouses across Ireland is a portion of the east midlands. Again, there may be an explanation for this, as Evans refers to accounts where Sweathouses were constructed without the use of stone. These structures were cut into turf banks and finished with sods.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the survival of such sites would be poor. Nevertheless, the distribution map appears entirely representative by the time of the earliest documented record by Latocnaye. Here, he states, 'I had heard of a peculiar practice of the inhabitants of this part of the country [Ulster]'.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, this eighteenth-century tourist had not witnessed the practice elsewhere even though he had travelled in a clockwise direction from Rosslare in the southeast.

Without datable evidence from these sites we cannot know when Sweathouse use peaked in Ireland. As they are more numerous in the northern counties, Sweathouses elsewhere could be viewed as outliers. This does suggest that the idea was adopted sporadically or possibly on a 'trial basis' by Munster people, or perhaps indicates small

<sup>27</sup> Alcock *et al.*, *Archaeological Inventory of County Galway*, p. 433.

<sup>28</sup> Harte, 'A Sweathouse at Caherlehillian, Co. Kerry', p. 123.

<sup>29</sup> Evans, *Irish Folk Ways*, p. 125.

<sup>30</sup> De Latocnaye, *A Frenchman's walk through Ireland*, p. 192.

numbers of migrant people from the north settled in these marginal areas. Price recognised that the sole Sweathouse in Co. Wicklow lay within a parish which was settled by 'galloglasses brought from the north of Ireland' at the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>31</sup> A similar date for the introduction of Sweathouses into Munster would not be out of place. Still, it should not be discounted that Sweathouses were once common throughout the island as Buckley, almost a century ago, stated:

it would seem to be more correct to speak of them as belonging to a long period rather than to a particular date, for the accessories of social comfort change but little in the course of the centuries, and those which are necessary always remain in one form or another.<sup>32</sup>

### Conclusion

It is hoped that the number of Sweathouses identified in Munster, and elsewhere, will increase further in the next few years and reignite the debate on these intriguing structures. If the Munster examples are indicative of migrants or even refugees from the north, then these sites might be the only remaining record of such events. Munster has an abundance of *fulachta fiadh*, which if not utilised as sweat-lodges then at least represent a deep understanding of 'hot-stone technology'. Furthermore, in the nineteenth century it was a Corkman, Dr Richard Barter, who re-invented the hydropathical vapour bath only to export it as the *Romano-Irish bath* in Germany and elsewhere.<sup>33</sup> Although tenuous, it remains to be seen whether the Irish Sweathouse forms a link between the bathing practices of prehistory and those of the modern age.

### Acknowledgements

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### Appendix A

#### Co. Clare

**Creevagh** (111047, 172266; RMP CL039-037002-; Inventory: No)

Near the N shore of Doo Lough, on marshy terrain, built on rock outcrop. Circular in plan, the structure is now unroofed. A relict field boundary extends from the site to ENE but does not connect with the structure. Externally, the walls survive to a max H of 0.8m and max W of 1.5m. The most likely the original entrance location is through a gap in the wall at WNW (W: 0.55m), but there are no definable jambs. The internal area is sub-circular and measures 1.96m N-S by 2.2m E-W and is also 0.6m lower than external ground level. Overhanging slab-like stones are found near the top along the southern wall, suggesting that the roof may have been corbelled. Otherwise, the walls are almost vertical. The southern half of the interior is filled with collapse but this has likely been accentuated by the possible presence of a stone shelf or bench along this side. There is no evidence of burning on the stones within the interior. The nearest water source is of

<sup>31</sup> L. Price, 'Sweat House, Co. Wicklow', in *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquities Ireland*, vol. 82 (1952) pp 180-1.

<sup>32</sup> Buckley, 'Ancient Hot-Air Bath-House, near Schull', p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> T. Breathnach, 'For Health and Pleasure: the Turkish Bath in Victorian Ireland', in *Victorian Literature and Culture* (Cambridge, 2004) pp 159-75:160.



course the lake, Doo Lough, to the south. The water-level here has been raised, owing to its use as a reservoir, but earlier maps indicate that the lake would have been 115m from the Sweathouse during the nineteenth century.

### **Co. Cork**

**Ballyourane** (107771, 41629; RMP CO132-00902; Inventory: Yes)

A well-preserved Sweathouse built into N-S boundary in grassland pasture. The structure is sub-rectangular in external plan and is fully roofed. The walls stand almost vertically (H: 1.4m) before sloping to the roof which is covered with a mantle of earth (T: 0.1m - 0.3m). The S half of the structure is lower in height by approximately 0.4m. The field boundary to S post-dates the structure. The N side of the Sweathouse curves outwards to facilitate the internal chamber and extends E, joining a field boundary. The masonry walls consist of sandstone rubble in rough courses (T: 0.9m-1.6m). Two entrances both on the E side, lead to two separate chambers. The firing chamber (S) is rectilinear in plan and is entered from ground level through a simple flat-lintel opening (W: 0.63m; H: 0.6m). The lintel at this entrance continues into the chamber to form part of the ceiling, which remains at the same level as that of the entrance. Internally (L: 2.1m; W: 0.63m; H: 0.6m), the floor of the chamber rises from the entrance. Five flues (W: 0.24m; H: 0.25m) exit the chamber sides, curving upwards; 3 on the S wall and 2 on the N wall. The flues are in varying condition, some having collapsed or become blocked with debris from above. The S flue outlets are not visible externally and those on the N wall lead towards to second chamber. The 'sweating' chamber (N), circular in plan, is entered by a doorway which is recessed (0.83m) back from the external facade and also raised above ground level (H: 0.4m). The doorway (H: 0.5m; W: 0.46m) is flat-lintelled with clearly defined jamb stones and sill-stones. The internal ground level is only slightly lower than that of the doorway although it is clear the chamber has filled with debris. Internally (Int. dia. 1.4m E-W; 1.42m N-S), the walls corbel to form a ceiling (H: 0.93m). At the base of the S wall there is a recess, (W: 0.26m) that may be the remnants of a flue. Some large stones at the present floor level may represent a shelf/bench along the north and west sides of the chamber. There are no scorch marks evident on the masonry. The nearest archaeological site, situated 30m to the N, is the site of Ballyourane Castle (CO132-00901). The nearest water source is a stream 250m to NE, but a well may have been associated with the Castle. There is no local tradition of the sweathouse having been used.

**Hermitage** (173529, 76710; RMP CO064-049; Inventory: Yes)

This Sweathouse is within the grounds of Hermitage Lodge, in woodland and on a slight terrace near the base of a steep slope on the Butlerstown River. A number of trees have fallen on the remains which are now in a poor state of preservation. The Sweathouse is sub-circular in plan and its N edge is nestled into the hillside. While the walls remain, (Max. H: 1.44m; T: 0.8m) the roof does not survive. The masonry consists of, undressed, sub-angular, sandstone flags. No doorway survives, only one break in the wall along the E side (W: 1.8m). The uppermost course of stones along the interior SW wall indicate that the wall would have corbelled inward, suggesting at least a partial stone roof. On the W side of the interior (Int. Dim: 3.12m E-W; 2.8m N-S) a fireplace is set into the wall and in some places it has been mortared. The sides of the opening (H: 0.9m; W: 0.58m) are straight until the final jamb-stone on each side which are pitched upwards to a flat lintel. The floor of the hearth area is 0.44m lower than the interior. The fireplace (D: 0.65m; W: 0.75m) is wider than the opening which accesses it. It narrows slightly to a chimney flue

exiting from the N side of the closing slabs at the top of the fireplace. The oval chimney flue (0.3m x 0.2m) curves N as it travels upwards and opens out near the external face of the wall, which is now at ground level, and there is no trace of a chimney stack. The interior walls bear no evidence of burning. The river below the sweathouse, to the S, is only 15m away. The structure is isolated from any known settlement sites beyond that of the eighteenth-century house and the only other archaeological features with the townland are two standing stones (CO064-047/48) a substantial distance to N. The current landowner had presumed the Sweathouse to be a 'cell' associated with an early monastery, as the townland name might suggest.

### **Co.Kerry**

#### **Caherlehillian** (57654, 83979; RMP: n/a; Inventory: No)

This Sweathouse is found on the western bank of a tributary of the Ferta River, surrounding by rough mountain pasture. The structure is well preserved and sub-circular in plan although there is a D-shaped element to it; the frontal façade being straighter than the other walls. To the N of the structure, a sub-rectangular area is defined by a low wall (H: 1.1m; W: 0.55m) built against the western bank/scarp, with an entrance gap facing the river (W: 0.68m). The sweathouse forms the southern boundary of this enclosed area of 17m<sup>2</sup>. The enclosing wall was built subsequent to the Sweathouse. The drystone corbelled structure (T: 0.5m) is built into the bank/scarp on its W side. No covering of earth or sod remains. The entrance is at N opening into the enclosure. The simple flat-lintelled doorway (H: 0.62m; W 0.46m) narrows slightly towards the top lintel. At the entrance the wall is 0.5m in maximum thickness. Internally, (Int. Dim: 1.62m E-W; 1.48m N-S; H: 1.4m) the final stones of the corbelled roof are currently not closing the roof, but the medium sized slabs indicate the ease at which this smoke outlet could have been opened or closed. There are no scorch marks evident on the internal walls. The water source used with this Sweathouse would logically be the adjacent mountain stream and this is further testified to by the fact that the enclosure opens out in this direction. The nearest archaeological sites are hut sites (KE070-37/38/39) found on both sides of the stream. The nearest post-medieval houses are over 115m to the west and the stone cashel (KE070-042) and early ecclesiastical site (KE070-043) are further west again.

#### **Coomura** (67126, 75276; RMP KE081-043003; Inventory: No)

Sweathouse structure is located to the south of a corrie lake on rough terrain, near a hut site. This Sweathouse was associated with the nearby domestic building (KE081-043001) as both appear to have once been enclosed by the surrounding walls and they are only 8m apart. The sweathouse is built into slightly raised ground at the foot of the N side of a ridge. The structure is roofed and in a good state of preservation. Externally, the structure is sub-rectangular in plan. It is constructed in a drystone method using angular grey sandstone rubble. Vertical walls (H: 0.8m) corbel inward to form the roof. The W half of the front wall uses more tightly fitted masonry than that seen on the E. The roof uses large slabs and is highest on the W and covered by a mantle of earth (T: 0.1m). The entrance (W: 0.43m; H: 0.82m) faces S and is closed by a single flat lintel. The interior is roughly square in plan (Dim: 1.45m E-W; 1.3m N-S), although the W wall curves slightly and the rear wall is somewhat irregular. The walls are vertical (H: 0.75m; T: 0.64m) to where they begin to corbel inwards (Int. H: 1.23m). There are no smoke outlets. There is a void capped by a lintel in the northwest corner (W: 0.7m; H: 0.45m; D: 0.3m). A large stone within the interior (0.9m x 0.4m) may have been used to block the entrance (as the

sizes are comparable). The internal walls show no signs of burning. The rubble filled E side of the structure (1.95m E-W; 2.40m N-S) appears to have been an original feature. A stream runs 60m to the E.

**Teeromoyle** (57873, 81996; RMP: n/a; Inventory: No)

This previously unrecorded site is a very probable Sweathouse. Positioned on the lower gentle slopes of Teeromoyle Mountain, it is well preserved. Externally, the structure is rectangular in plan and built against a field boundary (H: 0.9; W: 1.2m; orientated W-NW/E-SE) which forms the N wall of the structure. The masonry of the structure consists of drystone grey sandstone slabs (T: 0.48m-0.9m). The external walls are almost vertical (H: 0.9m) to where they meet the roof (max H: 1.4m), which is sod covered (T: 0.15m). The entrance opens to the E-SE. It is of simple flat-lintel design (H: 0.75m; W: 0.48m) and uses the field boundary as its N jamb. The interior of the structure is sub-rectangular in plan (Int. Dim: 1.38m N-S; 1.7m E-W; H: 1.1m) and the ceiling is formed by a single large slab. There is no smoke outlet, although there is a breach in the rear wall where it has collapsed. It is unlikely however, that this was originally a smoke outlet. The interior walls show no signs of having been heated. A stream flows 35m to the E of the entrance to the Sweathouse. The structure is not found in close association with any other archaeological monument although the townland is rich in archaeological remains. Local landowners were aware of the structure but had never known of its use.

**Co. Tipperary**

**Boolatin** (Doonane) (178732, 165403; RMP TN032-010; Inventory: Yes)

This Sweathouse is located within the Doonane Forest Recreation Area on a S-facing slope. It is in generally good condition. It is built into the hillside and is sub-rectangular in plan. The masonry consists of drystone sub-angular sandstone blocks. The roof has collapsed, except for three roofing stones at the N end - two of these are angled so as to raise the central stone, and so, it is corbelled but not in the truest sense. The roof is covered with a mantle of earth (T: 0.15m). The entrance opens to the S (W: 0.43m; H: 0.97m) and is closed by a single flat lintel, over which up to four courses of stone survive. The E side of the doorway has a measurable thickness of 0.7m near the top but if the inner wall (recessed back slightly) is included the thickness of the wall is 1.05m. This inner wall (H: 0.85m) does not reach roof height. The interior is a narrow sub-rectangular space (1.15m E-W; 1.86m N-S; H: 2.1m) with a rounded back wall. The walls, although warped/buckled, stand vertically until the top 0.4m, where they begin to corbel. The roof covers 0.8m of the N end of the interior. The height of the wall at the entrance is 1.6m. There are no smoke outlets. A collapsed roof slab lies against the E wall and the internal masonry has been heat-effected. The structure is just 8.5m from a braided stream that may have been managed to form a deeper pool. The next nearest archaeological site is in Doonane townland to the W, over 750m away, and consists of a possible burial mound (TN032-009).

**Knockacarhanduff Commons** (199420, 157100; RMP TN040-043; Inventory: Yes)

This Sweathouse is found to the south of Knockalough Mountain, just below the crest of a ridge. The structure survives in a fair condition, although a large section of the frontal façade has collapsed. The exterior is largely hidden, the rock face having been quarried to facilitate the Sweathouse. What remains of the front wall (H: 0.58m; T: 0.7m) indicates a drystone technique using grey-sandstone rubble. The sections of wall on each side of the

frontal façade continue into the soil build-up at either side. The roofing slabs can clearly be seen to be covered with a mantle of earth (T: 0.2m). The entrance is a narrow opening to the SE (W: 0.54m). The sides remain to a maximum height of 0.56m as the top has collapsed. The interior is sub-rectangular in plan (Int. Dim: 1.44m SW-NE; 1.6m SE-NW; H: 1.62m) – almost hexagonal – and the SW wall curves slightly. The plan is likely due to the shape of the area which had been quarried into the bedrock. The walls stand vertically to two courses from the ceiling where large slabs begin to corbel inwards. Three large slabs form the ceiling. There are no smoke outlets. The floor of the interior is littered with collapsed stone. The internal upper courses and the ceiling slabs have a mottled-reddish hue, indicating intense heat, testifying to this sites use as a Sweathouse. There are mountain streams 530m to the N and a Holy Well (TN040-029) 600m to the S. However, a large, deep depression is found 40m to the N of the Sweathouse, which may have functioned as a well. There are no other recorded archaeological sites in the immediate area.

**Cloghkeating/Mertonhall** (193378, 190268; RMP TN010-047002-; Inventory: Yes)

This Sweathouse is located at the intersection (W) of a conjoined ringfort (TN010-047001) on the crest of a low ridge. The structure is fenced from the surrounding agricultural landscape and remains in fair condition. Externally, the structure is built into the ringfort bank and is circular in plan. The walls appear vertical (H: 1.2m) to where they meet the domed-shaped vaulted roof. Throughout the structure a lime mortar has been used and the masonry consists of roughly coursed rubble sandstone (T: 0.68m). The vaulted roof has a covering of earth (T: 0.21m). The entrance faces NW and its upper section has collapsed. (H: 1.56m). It may have been headed by a segmental-arch. Using the jambs the doorway was at least H: 1.32m and W: 0.96m. The jambs are not directly opposite each other. Internally (Int. Dim: 2.3m N-S; 2.25m E-W; H: 1.8m), the side walls incline slightly and four corbel stones project from the W wall at about 0.75m above floor level. A small break in the ceiling at W (0.3m by 0.35m), where the vaulted stones have fallen inwards, is not an original smoke outlet. There are no scorch marks on the stones of the interior. The nearest stream lies 900m to the NW but the ‘castles’ at Mertonhall and Cloghkeating (both over 500m away) must have had wells. It is clear that the structure was inserted into the bank after the ringfort had been built. The next nearest sites are the aforementioned castles.