

**Title:** Responding to Change: medieval and early modern agricultural systems and landscapes in Ireland, c.1100 – 1800AD.

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In what was more or less a critique of contemporary research into Irish medieval field systems, Butlin (1978) called for ‘detailed regional and local investigations which are badly needed for medieval Ireland...’ Thirty-five years later, where do we stand? Mainstream research into the development of Irish agricultural systems, by and large, has not moved beyond the traditional narrative of a ‘native – Norman’ dichotomy wherein invading colonists stamped an ‘English midlands’ agricultural & tenurial structure onto a native Irish canvas of infield-outfield, largely pastoral landscapes. This arable-driven medieval economy then, according to the narrative, turned to favour large-scale pastoralism in the face of later medieval social, political and climatic upheaval. This shift was then reversed and repeated at several stages over subsequent centuries. Also implicit to this narrative is the idea that the division of Ireland into two agro-climatic zones – south and east vs. north and west – reflected corresponding divisions in cultural identities and behaviours across the Irish landscape. There are a number of issues with this narrative. First of all it lacks the necessary resolution required to explore local-scale agricultural decision-making and response to changing environments. However, more pressing is the basic lack of evidence throughout. For example, while the survival of medieval strip fields and fossilised plough headlands has long been recognised, remains of medieval ridge-and-furrow such as one finds in England have generally remained elusive. Moreover, there has been no systematic attempt to date what evidence we do possess for ploughing. Also, there has been no careful study of land-enclosure patterns in areas of former medieval manorial settlement and therefore no basis on which to argue that arable became less common after 1300 as land was enclosed to facilitate a rise in pastoral farming. Finally, there has been no systematic study of arable patterns and their landscape manifestations in the late 1700s, despite the abundant historical sources.

This paper will outline an ongoing PhD research project being undertaken by the author in the School of Archaeology, University College Dublin, supported by and in cooperation with Teagasc. The aim of this research is to address some of these issues and to create a more accurate profile of changes in Irish agricultural practice, from the pre-Anglo-Norman late twelfth century to the peak period of corn production and exportation in the nineteenth century. This project will use a combination of landscape archaeological survey and study of historical documentary and cartographic sources, focusing on specific study areas on both sides of agro-climatic divide. The landscape survey component will adopt a multi-layered approach, observing landscapes using techniques such as airborne laser scanning (ALS), local area and site-specific mapping using GIS and sampling of material from specific locations for palynological analysis. This paper will explore the use of these techniques as well as examining the overall methodology. Finally, some preliminary findings will be presented, and the expected outputs and potential benefits of this research will be discussed.

#### References:

Butlin, Robin A. 1978. Some observations on the field systems of medieval Ireland. *Geographica Polonica* **38**, 31-36.