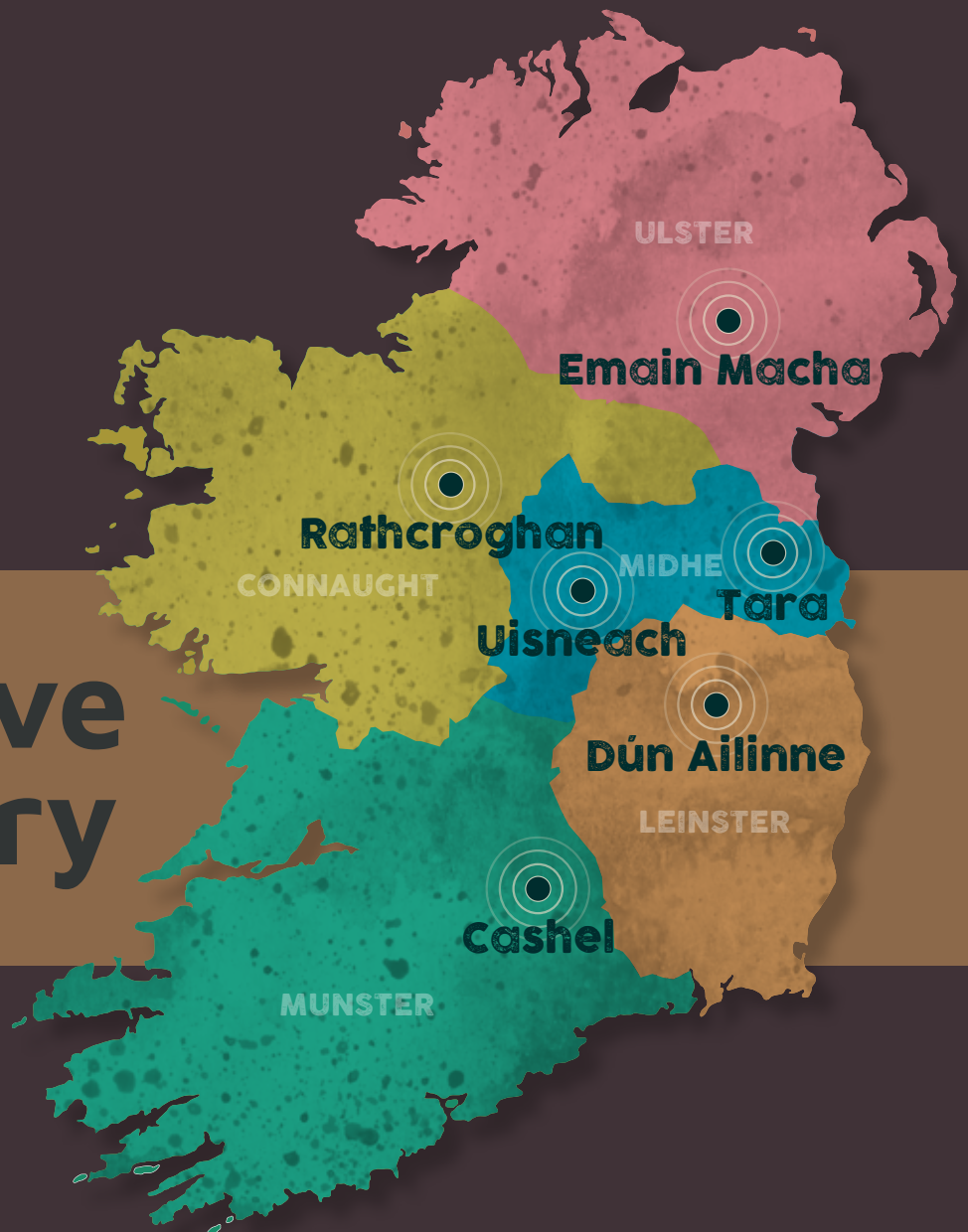


# THE ROYAL SITES OF IRELAND

## Executive Summary



# The Royal Sites of Ireland Application for inclusion to Irelands UNESCO Tentative List

## World Heritage

World Heritage properties are places of outstanding importance to all people no matter where they live, and form a common inheritance for humanity. They are recognised by UNESCO as having such Outstanding Universal Value that their conservation is important for current and future generations.

The World Heritage Convention was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in 1972. Currently, 194 countries (known as "States Parties") have ratified the Convention, including Ireland in 1991. The Convention established the World Heritage List as a means of identifying that some places, either natural or cultural, are of such significance as to be the responsibility of the international community as a whole. By signing up to the Convention, States Parties pledge to conserve not only the World Heritage Properties in their territory but also to avoid deliberate measures that could damage World Heritage Properties in other countries. As such, the World Heritage List serves as a heritage conservation tool. At the moment there is 1121 designated sites.

The Convention is overseen by the World Heritage Committee, composed of 21 countries elected by the States Parties. The Committee decides which places shall be added to the World Heritage List. It has three Advisory Bodies to advise on professional issues and is supported by UNESCO's World Heritage Centre in Paris. The Centre advises States Parties on the preparation of site nominations, organises technical assistance on request and coordinates reporting on the condition of sites. It also coordinates emergency action to protect threatened sites and administers the World Heritage Fund.

## Nomination process

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage acts on behalf of Ireland as a State Party to the World Heritage Convention. It submits nomination documentation to UNESCO for inclusion of properties on the World Heritage List and reports to UNESCO on the state of conservation of our World Heritage properties. No site in Ireland can be nominated for World Heritage status without first being placed on Ireland's Tentative List.

In January 2019, the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht invited applications for Ireland's Tentative List of properties for potential future nomination to the World Heritage List 2020-2030.

## The Royal Sites

The Royal Sites of Ireland are being proposed as a serial nomination for Irelands Tentative List. The Royal Sites of Ireland are a group of six unique collectives of largely prehistoric monuments and sites associated in early medieval (AD 400-1200) and medieval (AD 1200-1600) texts as the principal ancient sites of royal inauguration in Ireland.

Spread throughout the island, four of the sites represent the ancient Kingdoms of Ireland and its current provinces of Ulster (Emain Macha), Munster (Rock of Cashel), Leinster (Dún Ailinne) and Connacht (Rathcroghan). Tara was the seat of the High Kings of Ireland situated in the ancient 'fifth' province of Meath (Midhe) while the Hill of Uisneach was the 'omphalos' or centre where the 5 kingdoms met.

Each site is on a prominent or hilltop location with a commanding view of the surrounding area. The sites collectively illustrate significant stages in Irish prehistory and medieval history stretching from the Neolithic period (c.6000-4500 years ago) and Iron age (c 2500-1600 years ago) into the early Medieval period and are also linked through a strong body of myth and legend in both written and oral traditions.

While each has an individual topography and its own sense of place and identity, they all contain similar types of earthwork monuments and elements which reflect their ritual/ceremonial use and association with kingship.

The Neolithic was characterised by burial mounds and burials were prominent in the Bronze Age on some sites. In the Iron Age, there tended to be large enclosures with internal ditches, figure-of-eight enclosures, and many wooden structures. The Rock of Cashel, the latest of these sites uniquely continued into the Medieval period and was given to the Church so that it is characterised by stone-built churches and associated structures

## Emain Macha-Navan Fort



Navan is believed to take its name from Emain, twin, and Macha, a goddess, whose name is also incorporated in Armagh (Ard Macha) 2.5km to the east. In the Táin Bó Cúailgne, Navan is portrayed as the seat of Connor Mac Nessa, the legendary king of Ulster, leader of the Red Branch Knights, and protector of the youthful hero Cú Chulainn, who single-handedly caused the retreat of the Connacht forces.

## Dún Ailinne



At the south-east end of the Curragh of Kildare is Dún Ailinne, which in historic times was a symbol of Laigin or the Leinster kingship. At this time Leinster consisted of the south-east of Ireland and its northern-most border with Midhe (Meath) was defined by the River Liffey. During this period the Leinster men were rivals of Uí Néill of Midhe who were creating the myth that the Hill of Tara was the seat of the Irish High Kings from time immemorial. Not to be outdone, the Leinster men developed Dún Ailinne as the symbol of Leinster kings.

## Rathcroghan



Crúachain or Rathcroghan, the traditional royal seat of Connacht, is in Roscommon near the village of Tulsk, overlooking the rolling pasture lands of Mag nAí. The site is best known as the royal seat of the legendary Queen Maeve, and her consort Ailill, King of Connacht, and the place from where the great Cattle Raid of Cooley, the Táin Bó Cúailgne, was initiated. It is also sometimes described as the location of a great cemetery where many warriors are buried, as well as the inauguration site of kings. To the south-west of the mound is the cave known as Oweynagat (cave of the cats), a fabled entrance to the Otherworld. It is a natural limestone cave, but its entrance is artificial, and incorporates a stone with an ancient Irish ogham inscription which reads VRAICCI MAQI MEDVVI (Fraic son of Maeve).

## Cashel



Cashel in Munster is different from the other provincial royal sites in that traditionally it was regarded as Christian from its foundation. Indeed, the very name is an early borrowing from the Latin castellum (fortress). The Eóganacht dynasties, who were associated with Cashel from the start, may have descended from returned emigrants of the 4th or 5th century from Wales who would have been exposed to Christianity and Rome rule. It seems that several of the kings of Cashel in this period were also ecclesiastics. In the later 10th century the Dál Cais, of whom Brian Boru was the most famous king, ousted by Eóganacht from the kingship of Cashel and in 1101 Muirchertach Ua Briain handed over the Rock of Cashel to the Church. It then became the archiepiscopal seat for the ecclesiastical province of Munster.

## Tara



During the 7th century the Uí Néill dynasty rose to power in the territory of Míde, the area today called Meath and Westmeath. The Uí Néill saw the Hill of Tara as their royal centre, and developed the legend that the High Kingship of Ireland was traditionally associated with Tara. The biographer of Patrick, Múirchú, writing about AD680, described Tara as 'the capital of the Irish'. The royalty of the site is evoked by names attributed by medieval poets to the various monuments, such as the Rath of the Kings, the Banqueting Hall, the Rath of the Synods and Cormac's House, after the legendary king Cormac Mac Airt. The Banqueting Hall captured the imaginations of medieval scholars who described it as a hall with seven opposing doorways, at the top of which the king of Tara presided over his court.

## Hill of Uisneach



The Hill of Uisneach in Westmeath is renowned in early Irish tradition as the centre of Ireland and meeting point of the ancient provinces. The iconic Cat Stone (a large glacial erratic) on the western slope of Uisneach, is also known as Ail na Mireann ('The Stone of Divisions'). Uisneach also has mythological associations as the domain of gods and goddesses, among them Lugh, the sovereignty goddess Ériu, and the Dagda, the great sun god and 'father of all'. The 'Assembly of Uisneach' is mentioned in various sagas and legends and, according to medieval tradition, the god Lugh was killed during an assembly at Uisneach. There is also a tradition that the primeval fire was lit at Uisneach by the druid Midhe.

Uisneach was the royal seat of one of Ireland's most powerful medieval dynasties - the (southern) Uí Néill.

## Progress so far

**The Local Authorities of Tipperary, Kildare, Roscommon, Meath, Westmeath and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council have been working collectively on this project for the last number of years and are keen to move forward with the process.**

An application to Ireland's Tentative List for World Heritage Sites will be compiled and submitted by 30 June 2021. As a serial site, the application will reflect the sites as a collective. Navan Fort (Emain Macha) is included but as it is situated in Northern Ireland it will also be the subject of an application to the U.K government for inclusion on their Tentative List.

Given the current challenges posed by Covid-19 public meetings were not possible so a website was set up in 2021 to keep stakeholders and the general public informed about the application process and to gather feedback.

A survey went live for the month of May to engage with locals and interested parties further afield. Over the course of the month we got 1559 responses from people in the counties with Royal sites and from those without as well as from further afield such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Europe and South America. Of those surveyed 94% would support the inclusion of the Royal Sites of Ireland on the Tentative list (in the counties with Royal Sites this rose to 96% in favour) Overall 95% felt that the impact of World Heritage Status for the sites would be desirable. A summary of a report and its findings can be found on [www.royalsites.ie](http://www.royalsites.ie) Going forward the website will be updated with information about the Tentative List application process and highlight and promote the significance of this collective of sites.