

Sorn in Abbeyfeale, Co. Limerick, Michael J. O'Kelly obtained his secondary education at Rockwell College, Tipperary, before entering University College, Cork, as a student of engineering in 1934. A year later he switched to architecture and became an articled pupil in a Cork office.

Fate intervened in the considerable person of Seán P. Ó Ríordáin, the energetic Professor of archaeology at UCC. Ó Ríordáin was looking for a surveyor as he engaged in the excavation of the ring-fort at Garranes, Co Cork. Michael J. began work there in the spring of 1937 and later that year moved on to the neolithic site of Lough Gur with Ó Ríordáin.

Ó Ríordáin's infectious enthusiasm wooed many to the cause of archaeology and in that summer of 1937, Michael J. proved to be a ready convert. The new recruit returned to UCC that October, as a student of Ó Ríordáin's, in the faculty of archaeology.

By the time Michael J. had graduated (in 1940) with a first class honours degree in archaeology (quickly followed by a first class M.A.) he had trained as an engineer, surveyor and architect and had taken courses in Irish, geology and geography, all of which uniquely qualified and equipped him to take on the challenges that Irish archaeology would present in the second half of the 20th century.

In 1946 he replaced Ó Ríordáin as head of the Department at UCC, a position he held for thirty-six years. For O'Kelly ,'teaching was an integral part of his zest for humanity and scholarship', and demanded and received whole-hearted student

Michael or Brian? Classifying the archaeologist

Michael J. O'Kelly

participation.

By the 1960s O'Kelly was the most highly qualified archaeologist in the country, armed as he was with twenty five years of practical experience – having excavated continuously every summer – and by virtue of being the only recipient of the D.Litt. Degree awarded on foot of published works.



Irish archaeology







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Partnership



he O'Kellys met for the first time as students at UCC



Cork Public Museum



in 1939 in the Department of Archaeology, "I was only there for the craic", Claire later admitted, "as I already had a teaching qualification, but Brian was a serious student. In fact, the star of the show". As students both Michael J. and Claire worked on Seán P. Ó Ríordáin's excavation at the neolithic site of Lough Gur in County Limerick. It wasn't long before a working relationship turned to something more serious. With their students years behind them and a position for Michael J. as curator of Cork Public Museum, they married in 1945.

The times dictated that they should honeymoon in Ireland and it was in Dingle that a long and fruitful partnership in archaeology and prehistory began. Together they spent their honeymoon checking the accuracy of R.A.S. Macalister's records of ogham inscriptions which had just been published in *Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum*.

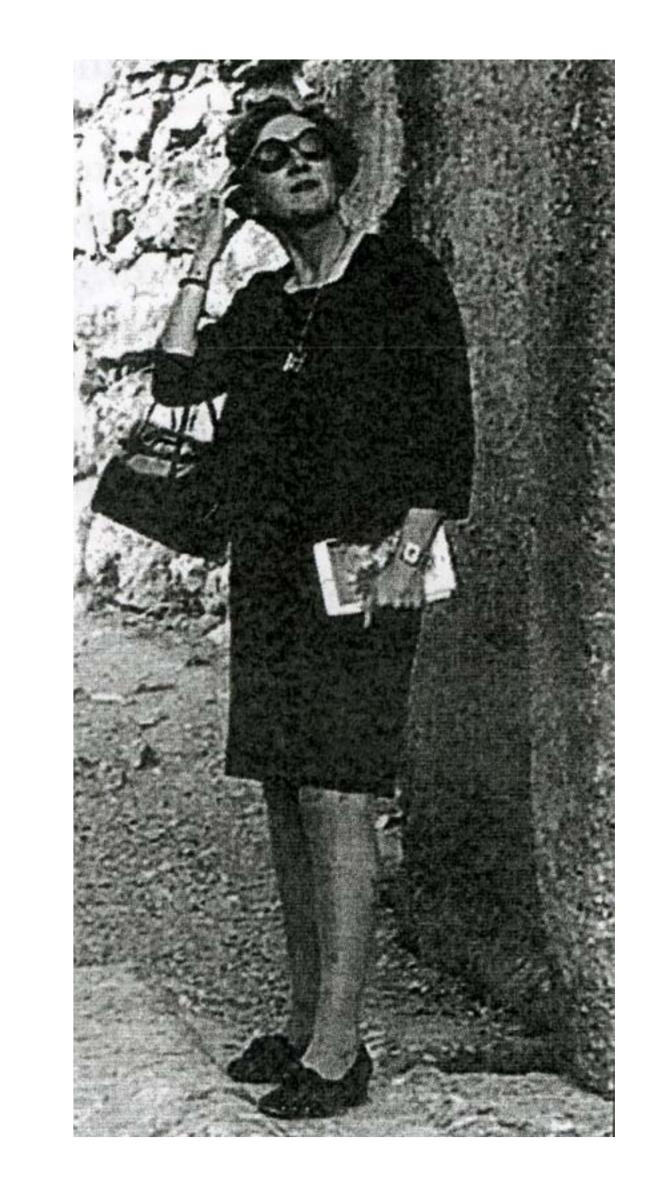
Every summer thereafter was spent excavating at sites,"ranging from megaliths to ringforts, from west Kerry to north Tipperary". Much of this work was ground-breaking with scientific application and experimental archaeology being introduced for the first time. Together this unique partnership would change the face of Irish archaeology.



Kilmalkeadar, 1945







laire was born in Cork in 1916 and lived on the banks of the Lee for most of her life. She qualified as a national school teacher and while working as a teacher decided to study archaeology at night in University College Cork under the late Séan P. Ó 'Riordáin.

Her working career in archaeology began alongside her future husband at Ó



Claire O'Kelly

Ríordáin's Lough Gur excavation. These were remarkable times, when the foundation of modern Irish archaeology were laid with the uncovering of settlements dating to the neolithic and the hitherto unknown beaker period.

She married in 1945, and was forced by the dictate of the time to retire from her teaching post. She now devoted her time to rearing her three children, but as soon as possible was helping out, particularly during the regular summer season excavation. Her role spanned the practical, managerial and domestic all in one day. Often she could be cataloguing finds in the morning, filing accounts in the afternoon and feeding the volunteers by the day's end.

Amongst her greatest interests was the Irish language which found practical application when she created many of the archaeological terms for the English/ Irish dictionary edited by Tomás de Bháldraithe. Her interest in Irish language and literature led her to research the references to Brú na Bóinne in early Irish literature, going back to the original sources and reaffirming its identification as Newgrange.

During the Newgrange campaign Claire developed other research interests, publishing papers on the Roman finds at the site and the megalithic art of the Boyne Valley. She painstakingly traced all the carved stones at Newgrange, thereby creating the first complete corpus of the decorated stones.

She also published together with Michael J., a detailed survey of Dowth, the result of countless hours below ground in the cold and damp, working by candle light and lantern. Her own publication, *Illustrated Guide to Newgrange*, was the first of its kind in ireland, aimed as it was at the intelligent layperson.

As if this were not enough, she undertook to feed and house the army of archaeologists, distinguised visitors and international students who arrived every season to work on the excavation at Newgrange, as well as looking after her own three children.

In the years following her husband's death, she embarked on the task of preparing for publication his unfinished manuscript 'Early Ireland, An Introduction to Irish Prehistory', while also ensuring that his papers and excavation archives were put in order and deposited in the relevant institutions.

In recognition of her work she was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquities of London in 1984.

Dining out – with the ancestors



Re(11) p 2 I have hardly thought of
this since due to pressure of the work, but
I don't see any reason why I shouldn't take
on this dig. I feel that it will probably be
very dull in itself, but it would give me a
chance to become more familier with the sites
in the area than I am now.

The O'Kellys at Newgrange

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1st Nov:

6th Nov:

9th Nov:

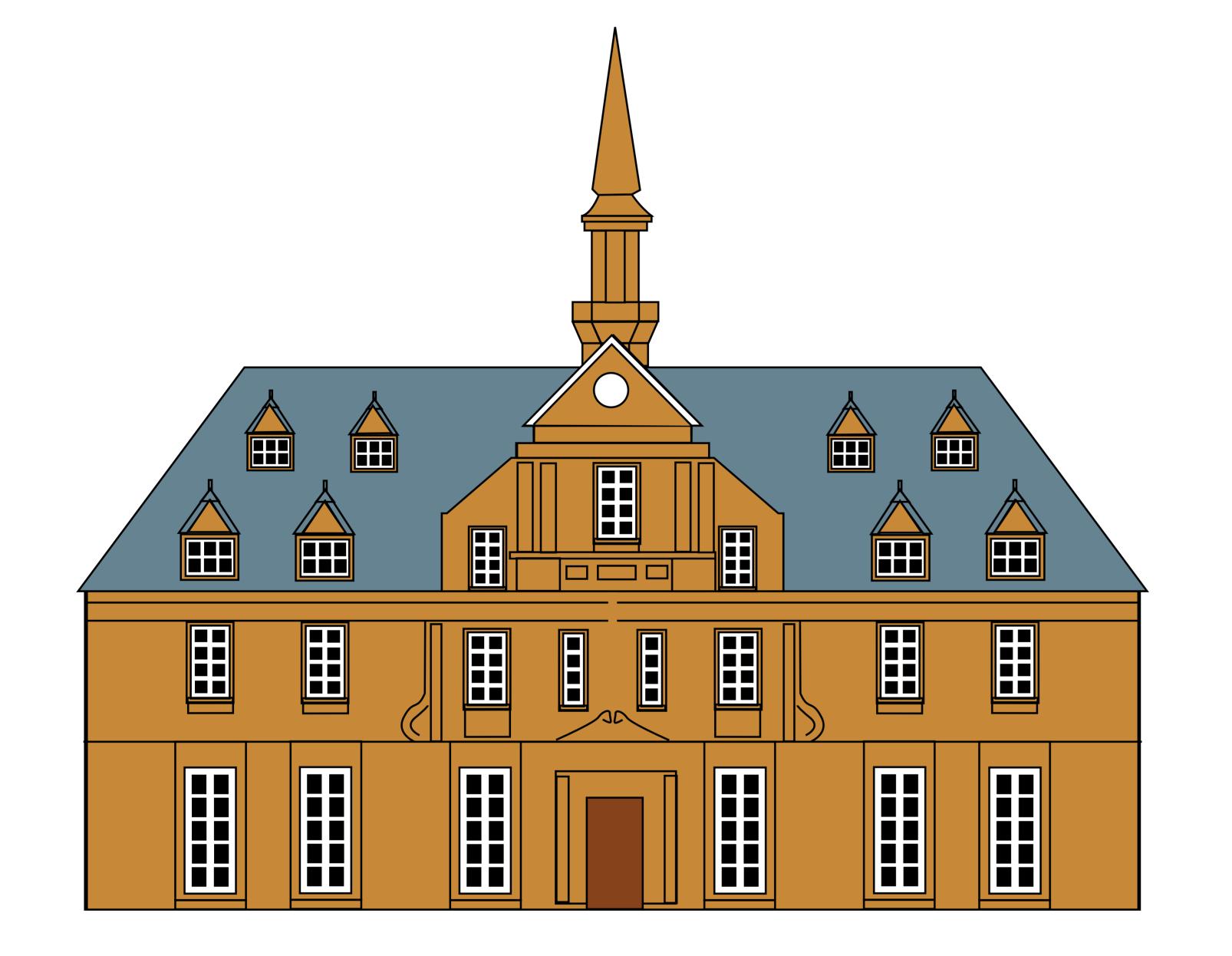
13th Nov:

15th Nov:



It was the unanimous wish of the meeting that Professor O'Kelly should undertake the direction of the excavation, being the acknowledged expert on archaeological excavation and exploration in Ireland. In the end he took the excavation on, reluctant as he was given his work load and the great distance from his base in Cork,'not because I chose this site for myself in the normal

colleagues, I was the one best qualified to direct the excavations'.





The science of 'New archaeology'

Michael J. O'Kelly was the father of 'New archaeology' in Ireland. He was the first Irish archaeologist to incorporate specialist studies into his excavation strategy.



Mollusc analysis

Prof O'Kelly had the leading British environmental archaeologist and author of 'Land Snails in Archaeology', J.G. Evans from the Department of Archaeology, University College Cardiff examine the snails found amongst the cairn. Snails are important indicators of different habitats. O'Kelly hoped to reconstruct the type of environment Newgrange was originally built in using this evidence.

Excavation 1962-1975

Dental analysis

Various departments in Prof. O'Kelly's own University College Cork were called on for expert advice. The Department of Anatomy, University College Cork examined in forensic detail the human skeletal and dental remains found in the chamber of Newgrange. From the smallunburnt fragments they were able to identify two skeletons, from the burnt remains three or more.



Bone analysis

All the animal remains were examined by Louise Van Wijngaarden–Bakker,
University of Amsterdam. Her two reports on the animal remains from the Beaker settlement at Newgrange, Co. Meath were the first comprehensive animal bone reports from an excavation ever published in Ireland She is considered the mother of archaeozoology (faunal studies) in Ireland.

Radiocarbon

Prof. O'Kelly produced the first scientific
dates for Newgrange using the relatively
new technique of Radiocarbon dating.
We can be 95% certain that Newgrange
passage tomb was constructed sometime
between 3,370BC and 2,920BC.

Pollen analysis

During the excavation Prof. O'Kelly systematically took soil samples for pollen and seed analysis. This provided significant information about the landscape and it was possible to reconstruct how the countryside would have looked when Newgrange was built. It was open, grassland dispersed with areas where cereal crops were grown.

Guides office



Committee meeting at Newgrange. Prof. O'Kelly nominated as excavator.				First observatior of the winter Istice phenonem by Prof. O'Kelly					Last season of O'Kellys' excavation
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The last year of excavation

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The finds









The north cutting



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This area (5 acres) bounded by a
hedge was purchased for the state
on the recommendation of the 1961
Committee. This large area now
controlled by the OPW, enabled free
access for large-scale works to begin.

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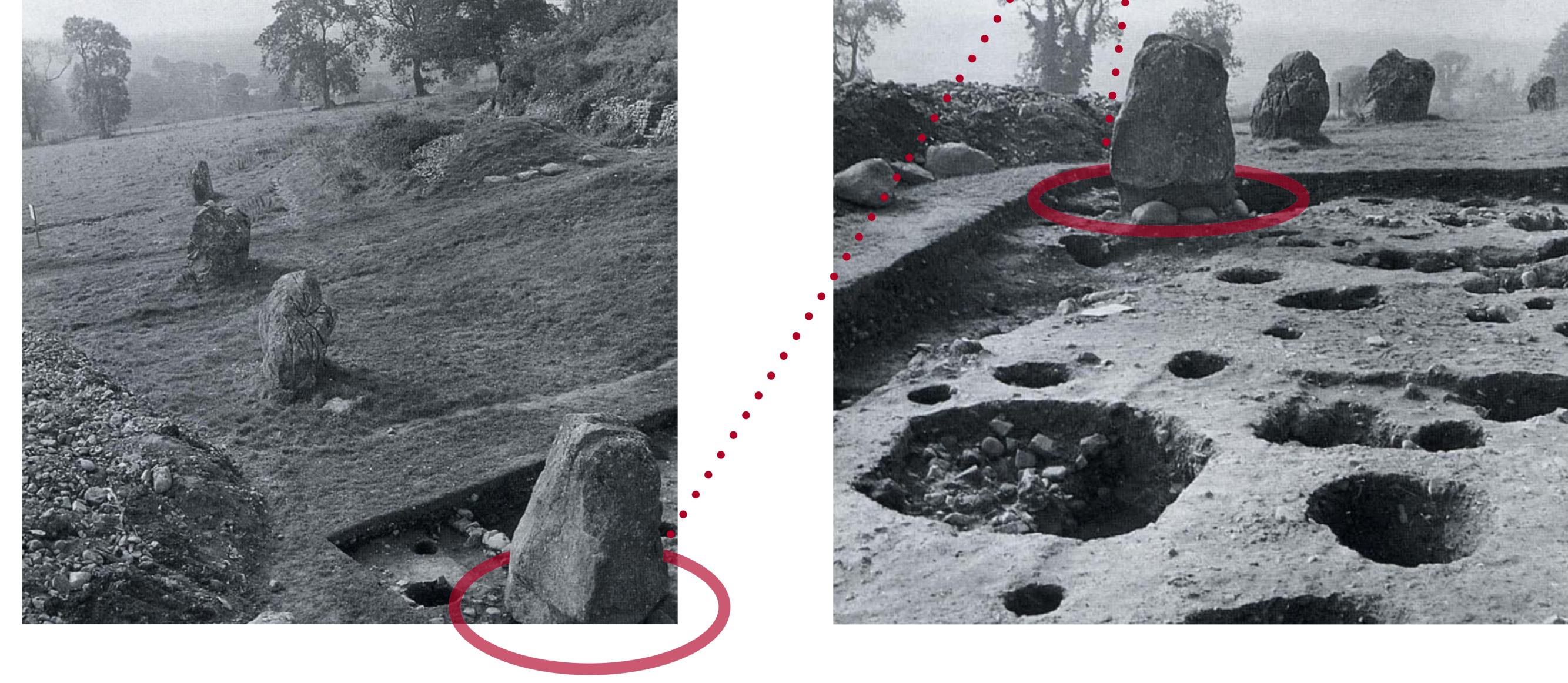
The aerial view of the excavation in 1967?

Area excavated between 1962 and 1975 by Prof. M.J. O'Kelly The original excavation radius was considerably exceeded in the southeast by the discovery of the satellite tomb (site Z)

Site Z

The Great Circle

The great circle contains twelve surviving orthostats with a diameter of 103.6m.





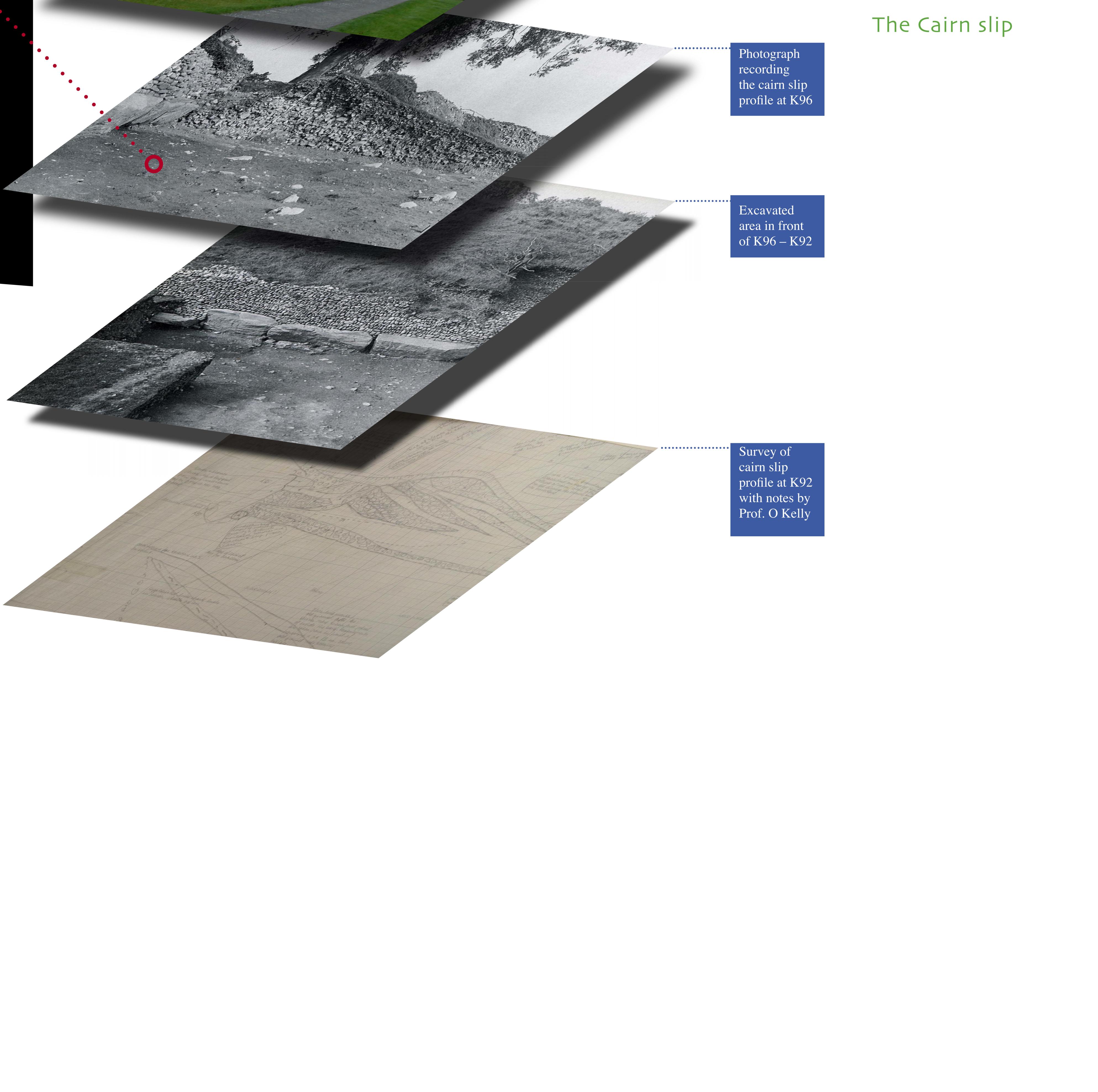




Restoration

The passage and chamber

Quartz wall





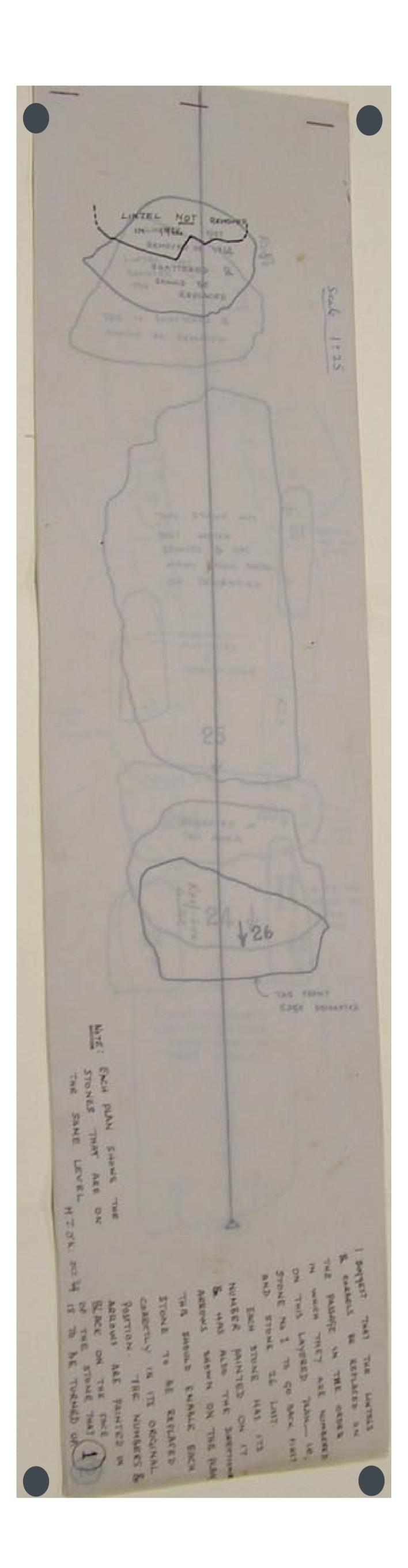
























Winter Solstice 1967














Surveying and recording

