



Uncovering the history below the

A26 Dual Carriageway



Drumadoon in the Early Medieval Period

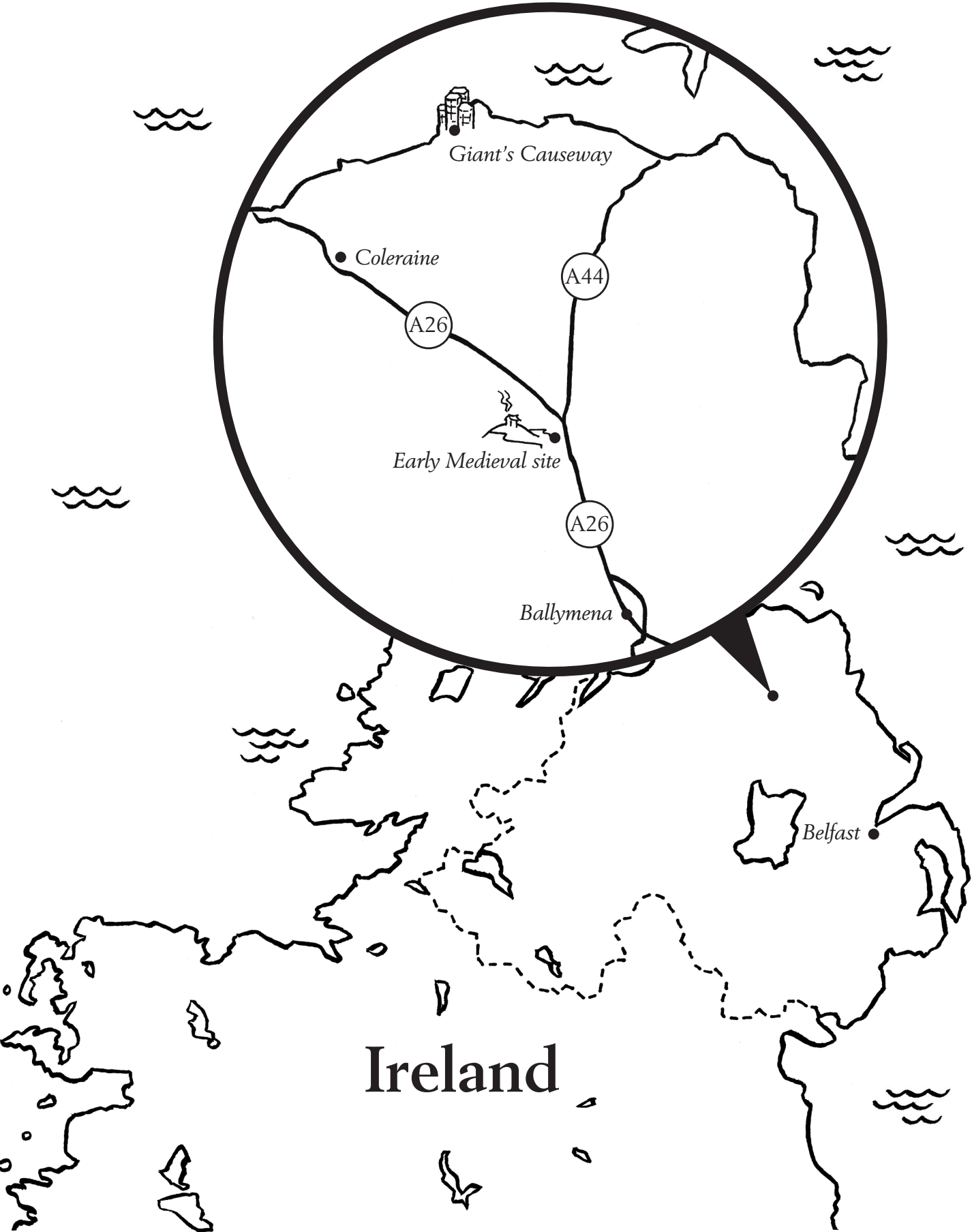
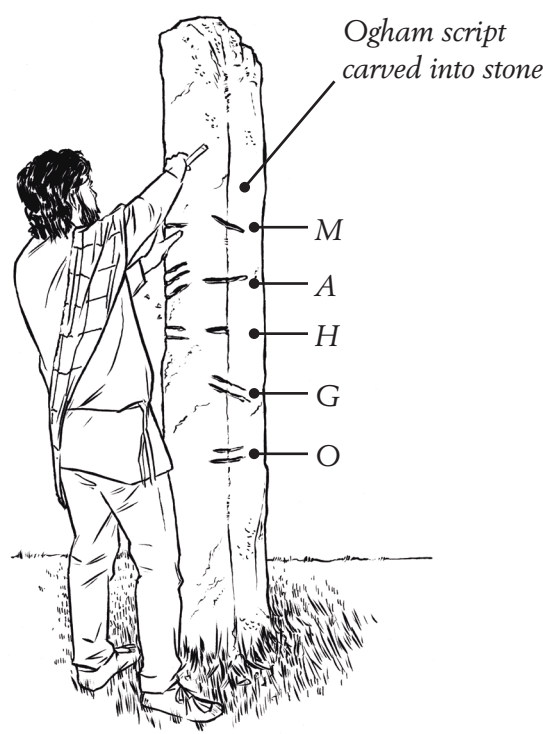
Welcome to the Early Medieval Period

In 2014 work began on building a new dual carriageway, the A26 from Glarryford to the Drones Road, near Ballymena in County Antrim, Northern Ireland. Archaeologists who were working on the road discovered an early medieval farm and souterrain (a type of underground tunnel) on top of a hill at Drumadoon, just outside Cloughmills. The farm dated to the year AD 800, making it over 1,200 years old.

The medieval period began about 1,600 years ago and lasted for about 1,100 years. Medieval means ‘middle age’ and it is called this because it is a period that lies between the Ancient period, sometimes called the Stone Age, and the Modern period, the world we live in today.

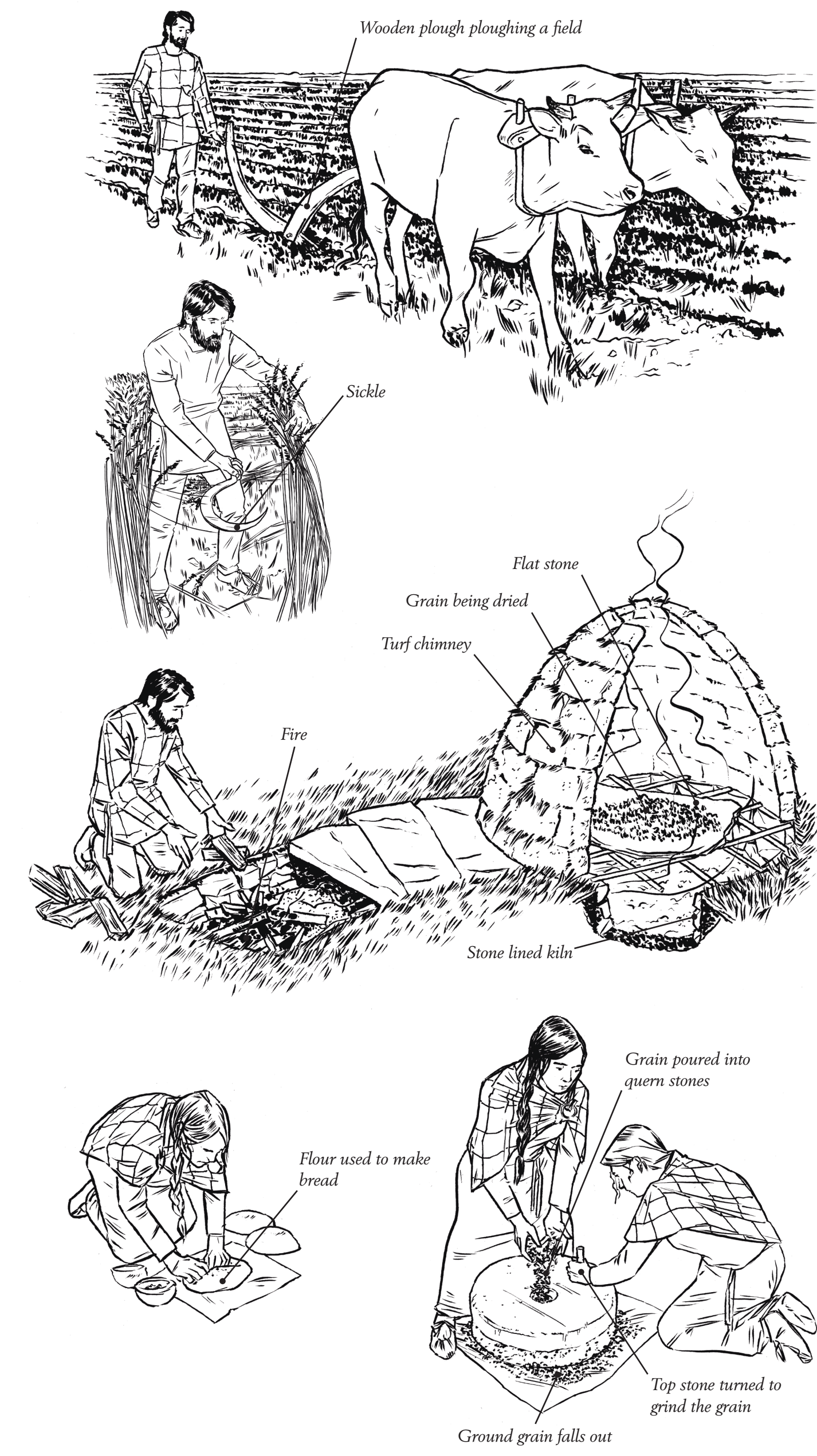
Archaeologists found that the site at Drumadoon dates to the early medieval period. The name ‘early medieval’ is given to the start of the medieval period from AD 400 to AD 1150.

The early medieval period was a time of change. St Patrick arrived in Ireland at the start of the period and began to create churches and monasteries and spread the word of Christianity. It was also during this time that people began to write, something that had never happened before in Ireland. The earliest form of writing is known as Ogham and is very different from writing today. It’s a simple form of writing made up of different straight lines. By the end of the early medieval period writing had advanced and some of the very decorative manuscripts, like the Book of Kells, were being written.



Life on the Farm

Life on an early medieval farm would have been quite different to how we know it today. We know that the people would have kept some animals, with pigs, sheep and cattle the most common, they would also have kept goats, horses and chickens. The land surrounding the farm would have been divided up into fields. The fields would have been enclosed using banks and ditches or wooden fences, a bit like fields today. There were no tractors or machines to help out and most of the work would have had to have been done by hand. Fields still needed to be ploughed before sowing could take place. Instead of the machines used today, pairs of oxen would have pulled a wooden plough. Once the field had been ploughed it was time to plant the crop. They would have grown cereal crops like barley, oats and wheat. When it came to the harvest it all had to be done by hand. Sharp hooks, known as sickles, were used to cut the stalks. Before the grain could be ground down into flour it had to be dried out. Drying the grain meant that it wouldn’t spoil and could be ground more easily.



The Farm House and Souterrain

The house that was excavated on this site would have looked quite different from the house that you live in today. The walls were probably built using pieces of turf or stones, which were piled up to make a wall. These walls would then have been covered with daub, a mix of mud, straw, hair and animal poo. Once the daub had dried it would have helped keep the rain and wind out. The roof was built using wooden beams, and the roof covered in turfs or reeds. This house only had one door and probably would not have had any windows. Light, and heat, would have come from the hearth which had been made in the centre of the house on the floor. The house wouldn’t have had a chimney so it would have been quite smoky inside. Archaeologists found some small postholes within the house. These would probably have helped to hold wooden screens which would have allowed the people to divide the house up into rooms. There was no electricity or plumbing so there wouldn’t have been any lights, running water or a toilet. Water would have to be carried up from the river and you would have to dig a hole in the ground outside when you wanted to go to the toilet.

One of the biggest features that the archaeologists excavated was the souterrain. A souterrain is a type of man-made tunnel, dug underground. In the early medieval period people used these to store things in as it was cooler underground like a fridge. They could also use them to hide in and even as a means of escape if their home was being attacked.

The souterrain at Drumadoon was large, over 18m long, 2.50m wide and as much as 1.50m deep. It had two sections, the main large tunnel and a second narrower tunnel which was designed specifically for escape. The souterrain had to be dug by hand, which would have taken a lot of people many weeks to dig, then they had to line the walls with wood or stones and create a roof, probably from logs, and then cover the whole thing over in soil so that it was hidden and no one would know it was there. You didn’t want people to know that you had a souterrain. The souterrain had an entrance and an exit. The entrance was a simple pit with a couple of steps and was located beside the house, like a basement. The exit was at the far end of the escape tunnel section.

