



CITIES IN CIVILISATION: CRUCIBLES OF CULTURE  
MEGALITHIC & EARLY CHRISTIAN IRELAND  
THE VALLEY OF THE BOYNE

Tuesday 17 - Friday 20 April 2018

The sacred landscape of the Boyne Valley north of Dublin constitutes the core of Megalithic Ireland. Long before Babylon or Dynastic Egypt, long before Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, a thousand years and more before Stonehenge, a technologically advanced society settled amidst the fertile plains and hills carved by the fast flowing River Boyne. It was from here that the High Kings of Ireland ruled the country. At Newgrange, in the heart of the region, we find archaeological remains of one of the world's best-preserved prototypical 'cities'. Evidence of their societal complexity can be seen in one of the world's oldest 'buildings': a massive heart shaped-cairn, a heap of water-rolled stone set in a 90 meter diameter with a ring of 97 large kerbstones around the base. At sunrise on the winter solstice a beam of sunlight enters through a small hole flooding its inner chamber with light. Its age is indicated by a hand-chiselled tri-spiral design on the entrance stone, probably the most famous Irish Megalithic symbol. Though often referred to as 'Celtic', it was actually carved at least 2500 years before the Celts reached Ireland. A complex of structures no longer visible but indicated through aerial photography, as well as those still standing -the megalithic passage tombs of Knowth and Dowth- reveal a large site of enormous astrological, spiritual, religious and ceremonial importance. Small, scattered family groups were drawn there to live near sacred burial sites just as later cities grew up around Christian cathedrals, monasteries and cemeteries all across the British Isles.

We visit Loughcrew Cairns where precisely at equinox, when day and night are of equal length, a beam of sunlight penetrates the chamber before moving across a series of astronomical symbols inscribed on a large stone. To the south rises the Hill of Tara documented in the I l c as the Seat of the High Kings of Tara from Fir Bolg onwards with its Lia Fail, the stone of destiny, the inauguration stone of the Kings of Tara. Finally to the west is the town, or early city, of Kells with many of its architectural remains dating back to the time of St Columba in the 6c. A few miles away at Monasterboice are the finest early Christian crosses in all of Ireland- Muirdeach's Cross and the West Cross- the tallest in Ireland. We have invited the archaeological researcher, Dr Robert Hensey from Ireland's Office of Public Works, to lecture at the hotel as well as on site. We will be in one of the most appropriate and stunning places in the world at which to begin our in-depth examination of cities as what made possible the union of art, technology and organised thought, 'Cities in Civilisation, Crucibles of Culture.'

## TUESDAY 17 April

- 10.35 Suggested British Airways flight departs Heathrow Airport
- 12.05 Flight arrives Dublin
- 1.30 Opening Group Lunch at One Pico, Dublin
- 3.00 Depart for the National Museum of Ireland
- 3.15 Tour of Prehistoric material removed from the Boyne Valley and elsewhere
- 4.30 Tea in Museum
- 5.00 Leave Dublin for hotel
- 6.00 Arrive Boyne House Hotel, Slane
- 7.30 Group Opening Dinner in sister hotel, Conyngham Arms

## WEDNESDAY 18 April

Dr Robert Hensey

- 10.30 Coffee in hotel
- 11.00 Lecture by Dr Robert Hensey: Prehistoric Ireland
- 12.30 Group lunch in Hotel
- 2.00 Leave for tour of Newgrange and environs with Dr Robert Hensey
- 3.30 Chambered tombs of Knowth and Douth
- 5.00 Return to hotel for free time and rest
- 7.30 Group dinner

## THURSDAY 19 April

- 09.30 Lecture by Nicholas Friend: Early Christian Ireland
- 10.30 Coffee
- 11.00 Leave for Monasterboice High Cross ('the finest in Ireland') via Hill of Slane for important early Christian religious centre, 12c castle moat and bailey
- 1.00 Group Lunch at Maguires Restaurant, Hill of Tara
- 2.30 Hill of Tara
- 3.30 Leave for Bective Abbey ruins and Trim Castle, the most impressive example of an Anglo-Norman castle in Ireland
- 5.00 Return to hotel
- 7.30 Group Dinner in Conyngham Arms

## FRIDAY 20 April (check out please)

- 09.00 Bags to lobby please
- 09.15 Leave for Loughcrew for 5000-year-old burial chambers with petroglyphs
- 10.00 Arrive Loughcrew
- 11.00 Leave for Kells (Great Fort) one of the most important monastic sites in Ireland
- 11.30 Arrive Kells Abbey, Round Tower and crosses
- 12.10 Leave for Navan
- 12.30 Group Closing Lunch at The Central Bar Restaurant, Navan
- 2.00 Leave for Dublin International Airport
- 3.00 Arrive Dublin airport
- 5.00 Flight to London Heathrow departs
- 6.20 Arrive London



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We stay in Slane, a prehistoric settlement, now a beautiful Georgian village, where the mythical High King of Ireland Fir Bolg was buried, and where, in 495 AD, St Patrick burned a fire in defiance of the High King Laoire. Civilising forces eventually succeeded in Slane: there is evidence of an 11c castle, a 16c Franciscan priory built partly with the standing stones of some forgotten mesolithic monument, and, slowly over time, other early purpose-built structures.

Formerly Cillghrian Glebe, now Boyne House Slane, this former rectory built in 1807 is in the heart of historic Slane Village. Beautifully restored to offer luxury accommodation in 10 guest bedrooms, it is full of character with many original features, a tree-lined avenue and a magnificent 200-year-old cedar. Tucked away behind the village garden and beside a small woodland, the property is directly across the road from its sister property Conyngham Arms Hotel, though The main entrance and driveway to Boyne House Slane is located on Church Street, while a pedestrian walkway is provided for guests to conveniently access the Conyngham Arms where we will be served our fine meals.

£1295 Members, £1345 non-Members, £150 single room supplement, includes three nights accommodation with breakfast, two coffees, all lunches with wine, all dinners with wine, tea, lectures by Nicholas Friend, all visits and all travel during the tour. Please contact the office on 0208 566 7539 if you would like help booking the flights online, Please note certain parts of this tour may not be suitable if you walk with a stick, but the excursions are optional and the tour is not otherwise physically demanding. Please note we regret that this tour must be limited to 12 participants. Excludes flights to and from Dublin.