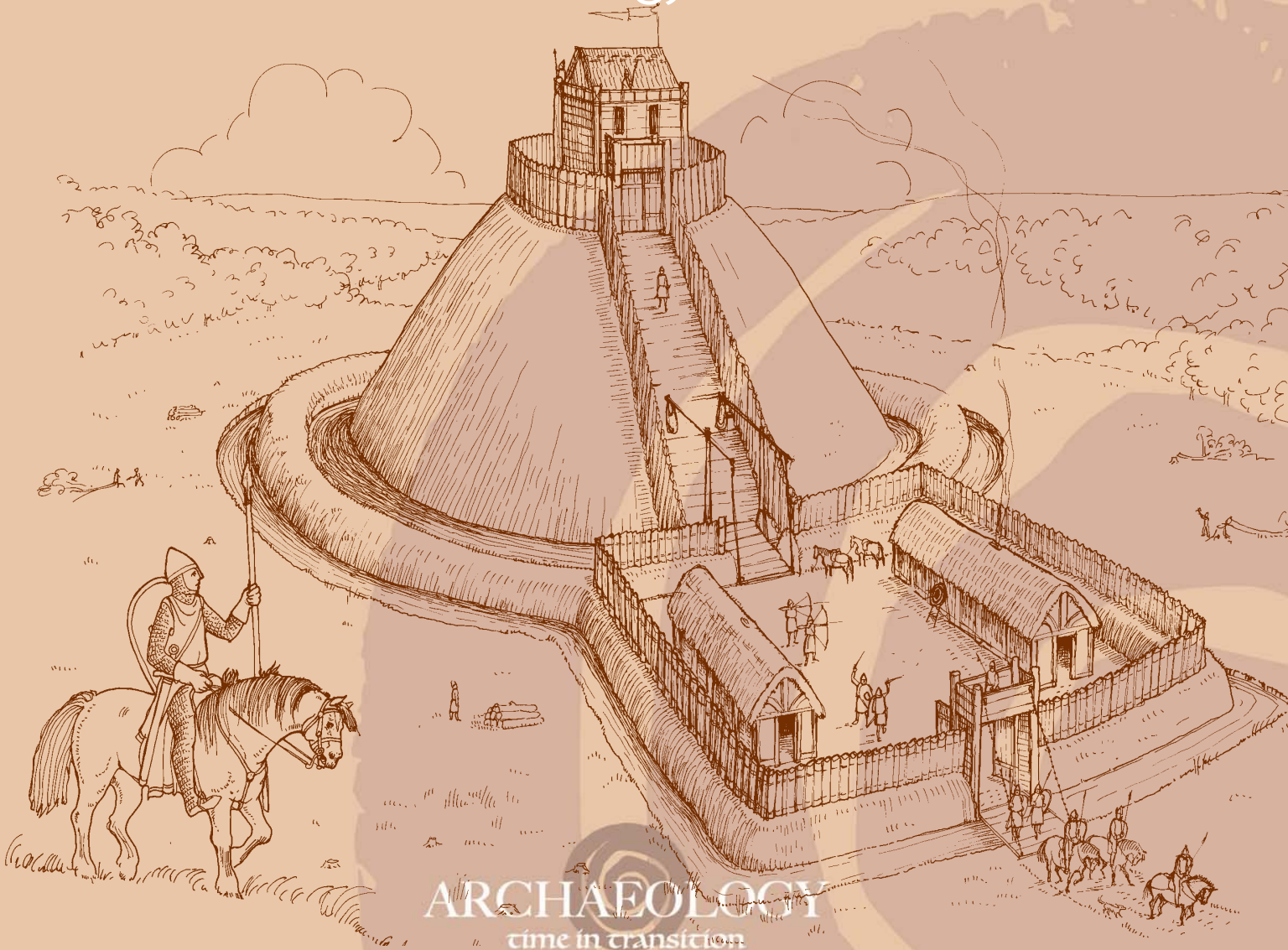


Defence

LESSON 1

The Archaeology of Defence



ARCHAEOLOGY
time in transition

IT'S ABOUT TIME 2

**Aim(s)**

To explore the different ways people have protected and defended themselves in Ireland since the Stone Age.

**Objective(s)**

To show how, working with archaeological evidence, you can arrive at an understanding of how people in the past defended themselves by constructing specific types of fortification.

**Time Period**

Bronze Age to the 17th century (2,000 BC - 1700 AD)

**KEY INFORMATION****Lesson**

- Settlements are being protected by earthwork enclosures in the Bronze Age.
- Defence becomes a more serious issue in the Iron Age with the construction of promontory forts and hillforts.
- In Early Christian times settlements are protected by ringforts.
- A new type of fortification is introduced into Ireland by the Normans—the castle.
- Castle building continues in 15th/16th centuries—the tower house.
- The introduction of cannon brought an end to the period of castle building.
- Star-shaped forts—purpose built fortifications for artillery (17th century).

Context

- The need for security is a universal concern.
- There is a wide variety of archaeological monuments and artefacts associated with defence.

**METHODOLOGY & MEDIUM**

- Instruction
- Active participation
- Discussion
- **Worksheet 1** Defensive Monuments Throughout the Ages
- **Worksheet 2** The Best Defence?
- **Student Handout** The Archaeology of Defence

**SECTIONS**

Section 1 Protecting Ourselves Today

Section 2 Defence in The Past

Section 3 The Fosse

Section 4 Form, Fabric and Function



Key Question(s) How do we protect ourselves today?



Teacher Instruction

Brainstorm with the students the various ways we protect ourselves today in our everyday lives.

- Locks
- Alarms
- Guard dogs
- Security firms
- Fences/walls/gates (electronic)
- Weapons

What are we protecting?

- Ourselves
- Our possessions
- Places of residence, business, etc.

What are we protecting against?

- Attack
- Theft
- The elements (storms, etc.)

On a wider scale societies and countries also have to protect themselves. In Ireland today The Garda Síochána and The Defence Forces play a vital role in providing us with this protection.



Teacher Instruction

Ask the students if there are countries in the world that have been invaded recently? Discuss.



Today, most countries have professional armies to protect themselves from invasion. But if we travel back to ancient times we find tribal societies having to defend themselves against whatever threat they faced. There were no national, federal (European Union) or international (United Nations) forces to protect them—they had to defend themselves and safeguard their possessions, settlements and territory.

Are we likely to be invaded in Ireland in the near future?

- Invasions have been, and continue to be, a feature of human history and are a major cause of world wars.



Key Question(s) What is the earliest evidence for defence in Ireland?

The Bronze Age: the appearance of new types of monuments and artefacts in the Bronze Age indicates a profound change in the nature of society. New and more lethal weapons, like bronze swords and axes, indicate a more war-like society than had previously existed. How are people defending themselves in the Bronze Age?



Though there is some slight evidence for defence in the Neolithic (see Supplementary Information) it is in the Bronze Age that we meet settlements which are clearly located within a defensive enclosure. This conforms with the general perception that the Bronze Age was a more war-like period than the previous Neolithic.



Teacher Instruction

Distribute **Worksheet 1: Defensive Monuments Throughout The Ages**. Ask the students to look at the first picture and describe how this Bronze Age settlement is defended using the three headings: form, fabric and function.

Enclosures are built around settlements to protect them. These evolve and become more sophisticated over time as technology develops.

Form: Shape is important for defence. **What shape is the enclosure?** The most natural defensive form is circular because it has no corners which are difficult to defend.

Fabric: What is it built of? In the case of enclosures like this the defences are formed by the material which is excavated out of the ground and piled up on the inside to form a bank. Timber palisades, built on top of the bank, further improve the defence.

Function: This enclosure is defensive in function but not strongly defended. It would function to protect against theft, wild animals etc. but not against a military attack.

- This drawing is based on an enclosure at Chancellorsland, Co. Tipperary which was excavated in the 1990s. This consisted of an oval area (60m x 50m), containing a number of wooden houses, which was surrounded by a fosse (ditch) with a palisade on a low bank directly inside it.

Fosse/Ditch

These terms are interchangeable in describing the linear depression/channel left in the ground by digging out material to form an enclosure. The excavated material, piled up to one side, is termed a **bank**. A **palisade** is a wooden fence built on top of the bank.

Not all Bronze Age settlements that have been excavated were defended like this, but the fact that some are indicates a rising need for defence.



Key Question(s) What does the relative positions of the fosse and the bank tell about an enclosure?



Teacher Instruction

Distribute **Worksheet 2: The Best Defence**.

Ask the pupils to work out which one of the three arrangements of bank and fosse/ditch is the most effective for protection. Discuss the results.

Which is the most effective?

c. Is the most effective as you have a fosse, with an internal bank and a wooden fence (palisade) on top. The attacker has to go down into the fosse, climb up the bank and go over the timber fence to get in.

Which is the least effective?

a. The bank is on the outside with the fosse on the inside. Not alone is the fosse on the wrong side in terms of creating a difficulty for the attacker but it also hinders the defender in trying to withstand attack from outside.



This distinction between an internal fosse and an external fosse is essential in determining the nature of an enclosure. Archaeologists use this as a rule-of-thumb in distinguishing between a defensive (fosse outside bank) and a ritual (fosse inside bank) enclosure. During the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age, large enclosures were constructed with their fosse on the inside e.g. The Giant's Ring, Co. Antrim. These are regarded as ritual in function for this reason. Certain types of Bronze Age burial monuments (e.g. ring barrows) have an internal fosse with an external bank—this shows that they are not defensive enclosures.

SECTION 4 Form, Fabric and Function



Key Question(s) What do defensive monuments tell us about how people lived in the past?



Teacher Instruction

Divide the students up into groups of 2/3 and give each group one side of **Worksheet 1**. Ask the students to describe the defensive monument depicted in the pictures using the three headings: **form**, **fabric** and **function**.

Form: What shape is the enclosure? The most natural defensive form is circular. This is because it has no corners and therefore does not present an attacker with any obvious weak spot. In the medieval period form is determined by the principles of castle building. By the 17th century a star-shaped plan is used for defence against cannon.

Fabric: What is it built of? In the case of most ancient defensive enclosures the material used is that which is excavated out of the ground and piled up on the inside. Timber palisades are used to enhance the defences of an enclosure. Stone is used along the western seaboard where the ground is rocky and wood scarce. Stone and mortar for building is introduced by the Normans.

Function: These enclosures are all defensive in function but they fulfil this function in different ways depending on the threat which they faced and the technology available to the builders of the defences.



Teacher Instruction

Ask each team to report back their findings.

Picture 1

Monument: **Bronze Age Settlement** (2,000 BC - 500 BC)

Form: Circular, enclosed by fosse with a timber palisade along its inside edge.

Fabric: Fosse is cut out of the earth; palisade is made of wood.

Function: Enclosing element is little more than a boundary fence. It would keep wild animals out and prevent casual attack and theft but would hardly withstand a serious assault. The enclosing element would also function to define the area of the settlement in terms of social space. It would have been an effective wind break, and have prevented small children and domestic animals from straying away.

Picture 2

Monument: **Coastal Promontory Fort.** The date of these monuments is still a matter of debate amongst archaeologists but some may date to the Iron Age (500BC - 400 AD).

Form: A natural promontory projecting out into the sea with a narrow neck (the shape of the enclosed area is determined by the shape of the promontory itself). Across the narrow neck are two high banks, each with an external fosse.

Fabric: Earthen banks.

Function: Earthen banks and external ditch/fosse across the narrow neck of land provides good protection on the landward side. These are much higher than those on the Bronze Age settlement and so make a more formidable defence. The other sides are well protected by the natural sea cliff.

Picture 3

Monument: **Ringfort.** This is an enclosed farmstead of the Early Christian period (400 AD to 900 AD)

Form: Circular area (diameter circa 20-40m) enclosed by a bank with an external fosse/ditch.

Fabric: Earthen bank with external earth-cut fosse/ditch. Timber palisade on top of bank.

Function: Very similar to the Bronze Age settlement (above) but with the addition of a high earthen bank. The entrance is defended by a stout wooden gate. Hit-and-run cattle stealing was endemic in Early Christian Ireland (*Táin bó Chuilne*) and such an enclosure is probably sufficient to protect a farmstead.

Picture 4

Monument: **Stone Castle** built by the Normans (circa. 1180 AD).

Form: The shape was determined by the lay of the ground. The enclosing walls ran along the bank of the river on one side and followed the watercourse elsewhere, to allow for a moat to be constructed at the base of the wall.

Fabric: Massive masonry walls built of quarried stone bonded with a lime mortar.

Function: Protection, defence, administrative centres, political centre. Symbol of power and might. (This illustration is Trim Castle, Co. Meath)

Picture 5

Monument: **Moated Site** (late 13th /early 14th centuries)

Form: Rectangular or square area enclosed by a bank with an external fosse/ditch, with a palisade on the top of the bank. very similar in form to ringforts except for shape.

Fabric: Earthen bank with an external fosse, often filled with water (moat), a timber palisade on top of the bank, and a strong wooden gateway with a drawbridge and a watch tower.

Function: These were the defended farmsteads of minor landowners. They reflect the troubled nature of Ireland from the mid-13th century as the Norman colonies comes under attack from Gaelic clans.

Picture 6

Monument: **Star-shaped Artillery Fortification** (17th century)

Form: 'Star-shaped' plan featuring pointed bastions at the corners

Fabric: Massive earthen core with stone-built facing walls.

Function: These are specially designed to withstand attack from, and defence by, cannon. The basic core of the walls is earthen to absorb cannon balls. The bastions are shaped to allow defenders the best field of fire against attackers. Building defensive structures is now a scientific discipline practiced by trained engineers.
Examples: Charles' Fort and James' Fort, Kinsale; Dunboy Castle, West Cork.



Look up www.archaeology.ie for examples of these monuments in your area.

See Projects section: Build your own Castle

WEB LINKS

WWW.

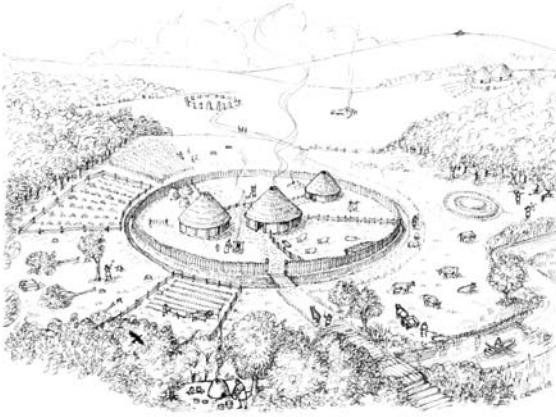

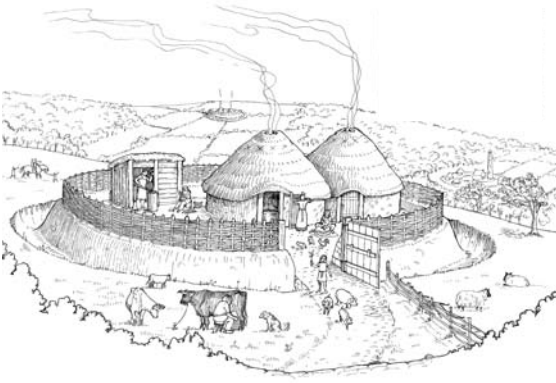


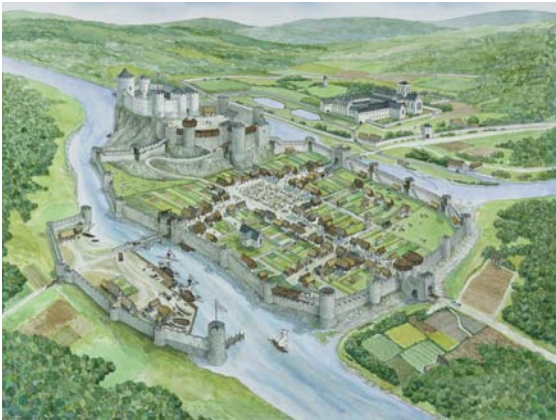
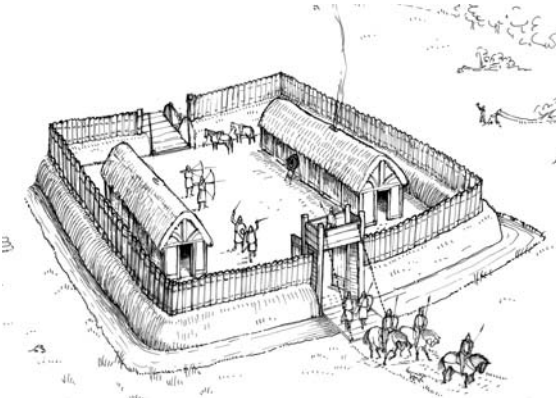
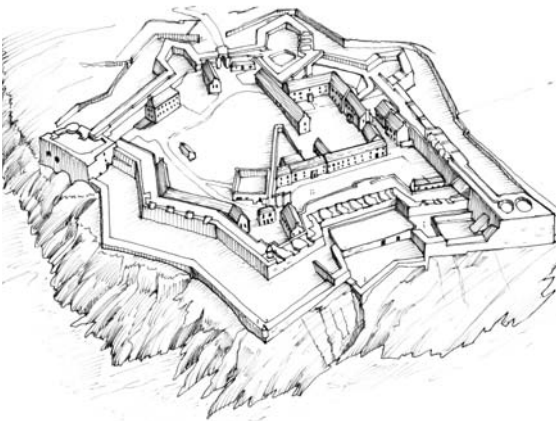
National Monuments Service

www.archaeology.ie/

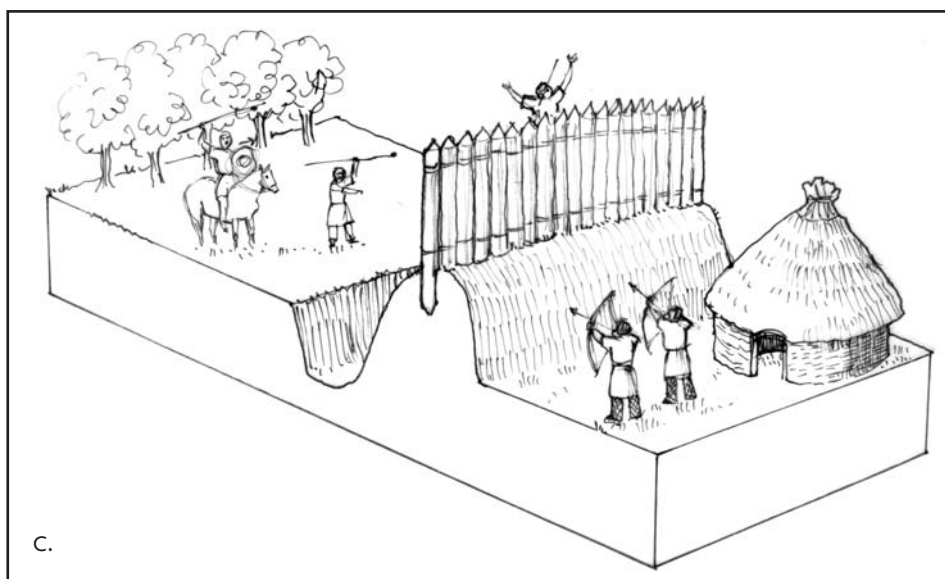
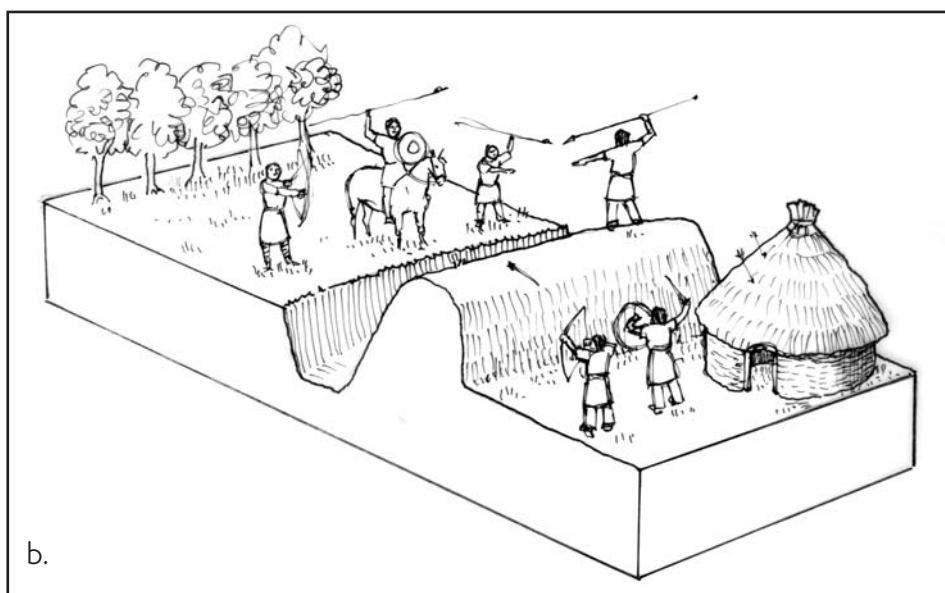
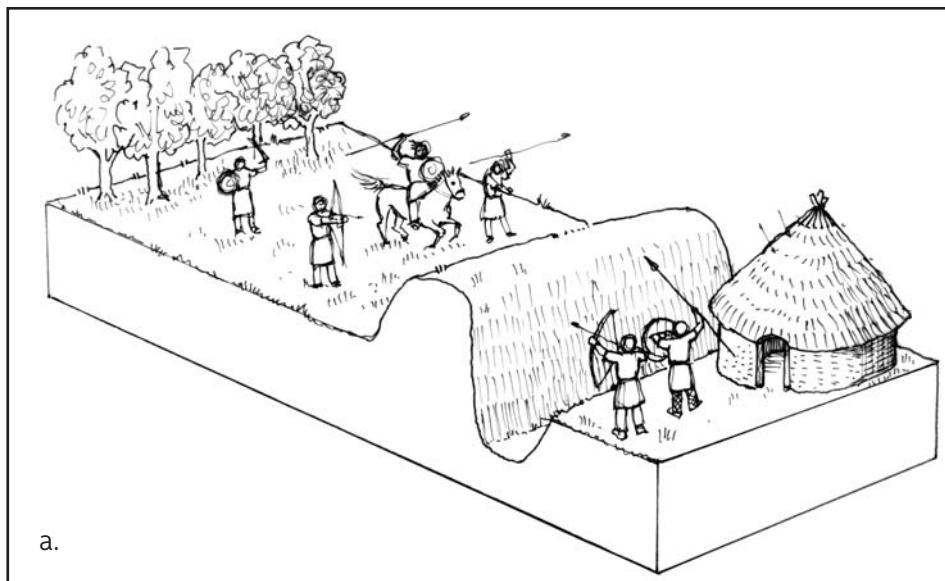
National Inventory of Architectural Heritage

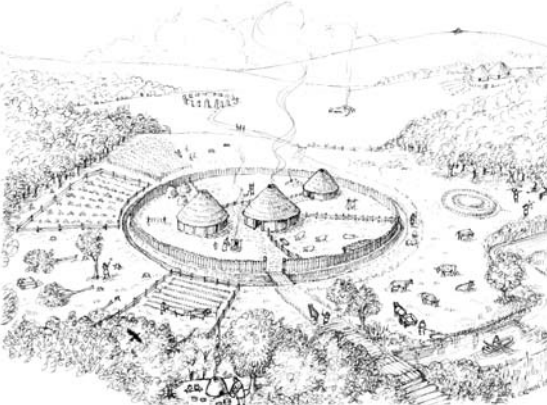
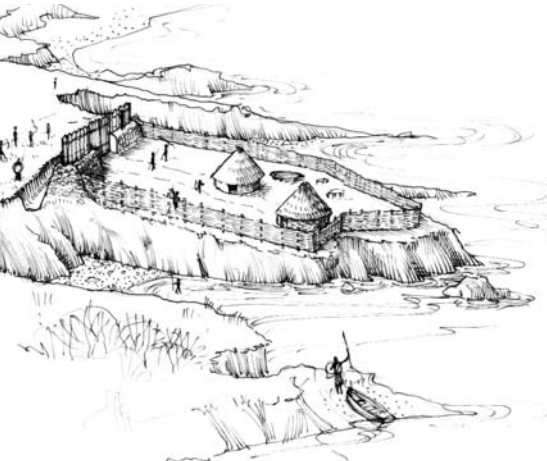
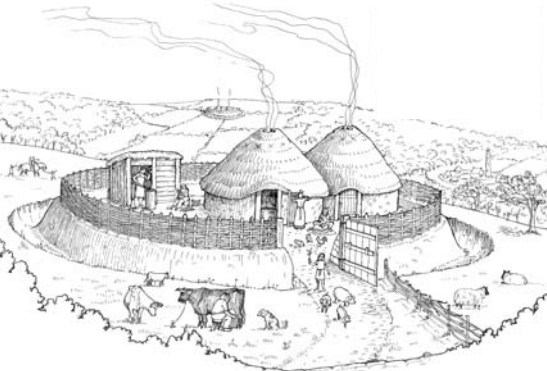
www.buildingsofireland.com/

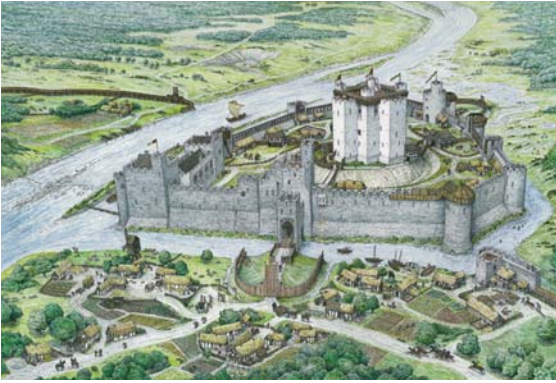
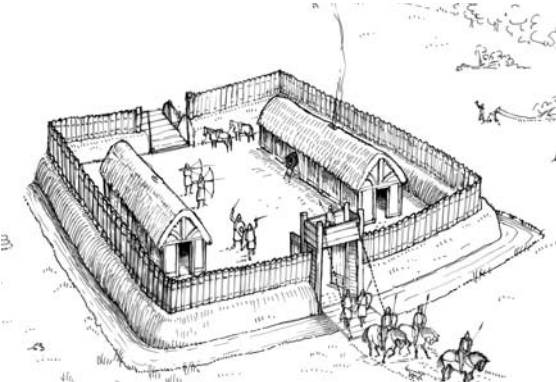
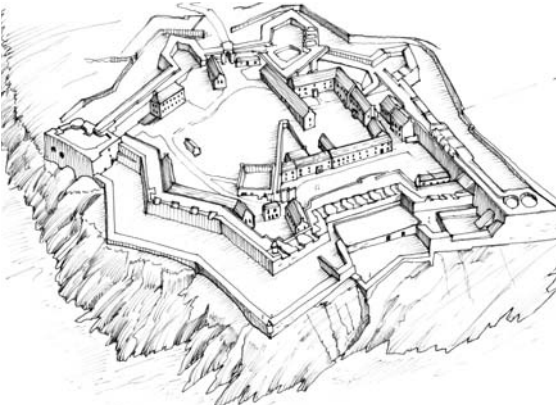
Monument	Description
<p>Bronze Age Settlement 2,000 BC - 500 BC</p>  <p>1.</p>	<p><i>Form</i> _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>Fabric</i> _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>Function</i> _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>Promontory Fort 500 BC - 400 AD</p>  <p>2.</p>	<p><i>Form</i> _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>Fabric</i> _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>Function</i> _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>Early Christian Farmstead 500 - 1000 AD</p>  <p>3.</p>	<p><i>Form</i> _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>Fabric</i> _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>Function</i> _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

Monument	Description
<p data-bbox="405 226 809 259">Norman Castle 1180 - 1250 AD</p>  <p data-bbox="344 763 379 808">4.</p>	<p data-bbox="906 280 975 313"><i>Form</i></p> <p data-bbox="906 398 986 432"><i>Fabric</i></p> <p data-bbox="906 517 1018 551"><i>Function</i></p>
<p data-bbox="419 846 794 880">Moated Site 1250 - 1350 AD</p>  <p data-bbox="344 1413 379 1458">5.</p>	<p data-bbox="906 913 975 947"><i>Form</i></p> <p data-bbox="906 1032 986 1066"><i>Fabric</i></p> <p data-bbox="906 1151 1018 1184"><i>Function</i></p>
<p data-bbox="387 1496 826 1529">Star-shaped Fort 1600 - 1700 AD</p>  <p data-bbox="344 2027 379 2072">6.</p>	<p data-bbox="906 1547 975 1581"><i>Form</i></p> <p data-bbox="906 1666 986 1700"><i>Fabric</i></p> <p data-bbox="906 1785 1018 1818"><i>Function</i></p>

Which of these three options forms the best defensive arrangement? Why?
Which is the weakest from a defensive standpoint? Why?



Monument	Description
Bronze Age Settlement 2,000 BC - 500 BC  <p><i>Number of examples: c. 25</i></p>	<p>Monument: Bronze Age Settlement (2,000 BC - 500 BC)</p> <p>Form: Circular enclosure, enclosed by fosse with a timber palisade along its inside edge.</p> <p>Fabric: Fosse is cut out of the earth; palisade made of wood.</p> <p>Function: Enclosing element little more than a boundary fence. It would keep wild animals out and prevent casual attack and theft but would hardly withstand a serious assault.</p> <p>The enclosing element would also function to define the area of the settlement in terms of social space, would have been an effective wind break, and prevent small children and domestic animals from straying away.</p>
Promontory Fort 500 BC - 400 AD  <p><i>Number of examples: c. 350</i></p>	<p>Monument: Coastal Promontory Fort</p> <p>Form: A natural coastal promontory of land projecting out into the sea with a narrow neck. The shape of the interior area is determined by the shape of the promontory itself. Across the neck two high banks have been constructed each with an external fosse.</p> <p>Fabric: Earthen banks and fosse/ditches.</p> <p>Function: Earthen banks and external ditch across the narrow neck of land provides good protection of the landward side. These are much higher than those on the Bronze Age settlement and so make a more formidable defence. The other sides are well protected by the natural sea cliff.</p>
Early Christian Farmstead 500 - 1000 AD  <p><i>Number of examples: c. 25,000</i></p>	<p>Monument: Ringfort. This is an enclosed farmstead of the Early Christian period (400 AD to 900 AD).</p> <p>Form: Circular area (diameter circa 20-40m) enclosed by bank with external fosse/ditch.</p> <p>Fabric: Earthen bank with external earth-cut fosse/ditch. Timber palisade on top of bank.</p> <p>Function: Very similar to the type of enclosure around the Bronze Age settlement (above) but with the addition of a high bank. The entrance is defended by a stout wooden gate. Hit-and-run cattle stealing was common in Early Christian Ireland and such an enclosure probably was sufficient to protect a farmstead though it would not withstand a concerted military attack. The enclosing element would also function to define the area of the settlement in terms of social space.</p>

Monument	Description
<p data-bbox="284 264 699 295">Normans Castle 1180 - 1250 AD</p>  <p data-bbox="316 719 671 757"><i>Number of examples: c. 150</i></p>	<p data-bbox="794 264 1326 295">Monument: Stone Castle built by Norman lords.</p> <p data-bbox="794 327 1358 483">Form: The shape was determined by the lay of the ground. The enclosing walls ran along the bank of the river on one side and followed the watercourse elsewhere, to allow for a moat to be constructed at the base of the walls.</p> <p data-bbox="794 515 1305 582">Fabric: Massive masonry walls built of quarried stone bonded by a lime mortar.</p> <p data-bbox="794 613 1374 680">Function: Protection, defence, administrative centres, political centres.</p> <p data-bbox="794 712 1241 743">This illustration is Trim Castle, Co. Meath.</p>
<p data-bbox="308 880 675 911">Moated Site 1250 –1350 AD</p>  <p data-bbox="308 1402 679 1440"><i>Number of examples: c. 1,000</i></p>	<p data-bbox="794 880 1070 911">Monument: Moated Site</p> <p data-bbox="794 943 1337 1010">Form: Square area enclosed by bank with external fosse/ditch, palisade fence on top of bank.</p> <p data-bbox="794 1041 1422 1131">Fabric: Earthen bank with external fosse/ditch, filled with water (moat), timber palisade on top of bank. Strong wooden gateway with drawbridge and watch tower.</p> <p data-bbox="794 1162 1406 1296">Function: These were the defended farmsteads of minor landowners. They reflect the troubled nature of Ireland from the mid-13th century as the Norman colony comes under attack from Gaelic clans.</p>
<p data-bbox="284 1529 699 1561">Star-shaped Fort 1600-1700 AD</p>  <p data-bbox="316 2018 663 2056"><i>Number of examples: c. 60</i></p>	<p data-bbox="794 1529 1326 1561">Monument: Star-shaped Artillery Fortification</p> <p data-bbox="794 1592 1305 1659">Form: 'Star-shaped structure' featuring pointed bastions at the corners.</p> <p data-bbox="794 1691 1358 1758">Fabric: Massive earthen core with stone-built facing walls.</p> <p data-bbox="794 1789 1385 2013">Function: These are specially designed to withstand attack from cannon. The basic core of the walls are earthen to absorb cannon balls. The bastions are shaped to allow defenders the best field of canon fire against attackers. Building defensive structures is now a scientific discipline practiced by trained engineers.</p>

See archaeology.ie for these monuments in your area