

# MY VILLAGE

**Bru na Boinne 3200 BCE**

**We built an Bhrú  
The greatest monument the world has ever seen  
Thirty years of toil and dedication  
This is our story**



*Druids, stone-masons, builders, stone-carvers, boat-men, carpenters, bards:  
Each tells his own story in verse*

**This book is an attempt to get inside the minds of those who built Newgrange  
and recover some of their Neolithic imagination, courage and belief.**

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**X01 Sunrise on the River**

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## DEDICATION

To the unknown people who built Newgrange

*By their fruits ye shall know them*

- Matthew 7:16-20

## APPRECIATION

The writer wishes to express his appreciation to the members of Deansgrange Library Writers Group for their valued and incisive critiques and suggestions made in the course of compiling the material for this book.

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## PREFACE

When I enquire about the people who built Newgrange, I am often told that we know very little about them: where they came from, how they lived and what became of them.

Yet we know a lot about them. Their legacy speaks for them.

*'By their fruits ye will know them'*

We know their courage, skills, dedication, and the power of their beliefs.

We know they had a multi-dimensional vision of the cosmos, much wider perhaps than our present one-dimensional view. Perhaps they can help us to recover some of the magical vision of reality that illuminated their world.

They were not an isolated people. They were in contact with many peoples along the Atlantic coast and shared their technical skills and beliefs.

Part of them no doubt still resides deep within ourselves. We need to know them better. There is much to be learned from them.

Theirs was a time when Ireland was at a cusp, leaving behind an era of primitive tribes vying for supremacy, to embrace the vision of a new cohesive nation.

Ireland is again at a cusp, leaving behind an era of vying nation states, to embrace a vision of a new and cohesive Europe.

To make the leap, ancient Ireland needed the vision and leadership of the men of Tara and Bru na Boinne. The present time calls for equal vision and leadership.

Therein lies the challenge for modern Ireland. There is no reason why Ireland within Europe cannot become a new beacon of light, as compelling as the fire lit on Tara Hill. The foundations are there. Our legacy should be more than just hills of rubbish. For inspiration we need to look no further than the mounds of Meath.

As Chieftain Conor says: *Do not fear, do not flinch, do not spare.*

This book is an attempt to get inside the minds of those who built Newgrange and recover some of their Neolithic imagination, courage and belief.

## NOTES TO THE READER

This book is entirely fictional, populated with fictional characters. It is *not* intended as a historical document, although every effort has been made not to breach known archeological and academic findings.

Its aim is to stimulate the imagination of the readers and to invite them to think of the daily lives of our great ancestors and the powerful beliefs that drove them to great deeds.

### Format

The stories are presented as story-poems. They are essentially narrative but are written in verse form. The olden stories were meant to be memorised and recited, and the verse form greatly assisted this process. It also permits the occasional poetic excursion.

The language used is of necessity modern, but the reader is invited to imagine it as archaic. These ancient peoples were in many ways extremely sophisticated and were well used to handling complex and abstract ideas.

### Use of first names

We don't know what form of naming was used in these ancient times. Here, for simplicity, old Irish first names are used to identify the characters.

### Place Names

The place names used today are of modern origin, but many have deep roots in the past. Here old celtic names, still recognisable, are used where possible.

The area within the bend of the Boyne is referred to as Brú na Boinne.

The Newgrange mound itself is referred to as An Bhrú.

## **NEWGRANGE – BACKGROUND**

For those unfamiliar with the background history of Newgrange a short briefing is given here.

In the valley of the Boyne there is an impressive cluster of monuments dating back to the Stone Age some 5000 years ago.

In the period 3500BC to 2000BC some thousands of monuments were built across Ireland. Some 1500 monuments have been identified. They range from simple tombs of a few large standing stones to enormous passage graves.

In addition to Newgrange, there were significant clusters at Carrowmore Co. Sligo, Carrowkeel Co. Sligo, Loughcrew Co. Meath, and Croaghan Hill Co. Donegal.

They are deemed to be related to similar clusters found in Iberia, Brittany, Scotland and England.

It is thought that the monuments were built by a people who migrated to Ireland many hundreds of years earlier and established rich farming communities along the banks of the rivers. They travelled in ships along the Atlantic coast, heading mostly north.

They remained in contact with their places of origin. There is evidence of a shared culture along the Atlantic coast. They seemed to have shared practices, beliefs and cosmology.

The most imposing monuments were passage tombs - large scale mounds with a stone-lined passage leading to a chamber or series of recesses at the back of the tomb. They were initially associated with a strong cult of the dead, but are now known to have been used as well for ceremonial and ritual practices, connection with the other-world, and as centres for powerful social and religious events.

They were typically sited near a river and on a hill commanding the local terrain. The orientation of the entrance to the tomb was of great significance, Many had a sun orientation, facing the rising or setting sun on special days of the year. Some pointed to other tombs or to a local feature such as an imposing mountain.

The cluster in the Boyne Valley contains some 37 tombs, including three monumental passage graves: Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth. Newgrange has achieved an international recognition on account of the splendour and scale of its architecture, its magnificent Neolithic art, and its cultural significance.

Its most notable features are:

Its scale: The mound measures 80m across and 15m high. It is estimated that it contains in all 200,000 tons of stone. There are 150 large structural stones, each weighing 2-10 tons. These had to be transported from as far away as Wicklow and Clogherhead, the smaller stones being carried from the bed of the river. It contains an 18m passage leading to an imposing ceremonial chamber. It is estimated that it took three hundred workers thirty years to complete the mound.

**Its orientation:** On the morning of 21 December – the day of the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year – the rays of the rising sun enter the mound through a specially designed roofbox over the door. They creep along the floor of the passage, and eventually illuminate a large ceremonial bowl located in the heart of the mound. Then it retreats slowly. It is thought that the bowl contained the bones or ashes of the dead. This is now a world famous annual event.]

**Its art:** Many of the large stones are adorned with beautiful patterns of abstract art - spirals, cupmarks, zigzags, lozenges , and ovals - carved with primitive stone hammers and chisels. The cluster of mounds at Newgrange are among the most important Neolithic sites and contain the largest collection of megalithic art in Western Europe. In 1999 it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The whole concept and construction speaks of a well-organised community, with a wide vision of the cosmos and of their place within it, and with the technical skills to accomplish a monument of this scale and complexity.

Newgrange now has an imposing visitor centre visited each year by over 200,000 people. New monuments are still being found within the cluster and excavation will continue for many decades to come.

For further reading there is an excellent website by Meath County Council, [meath.ie](http://meath.ie) – Discover the Boyne Valley. See also REFERENCES.