

## SOUTH KILKENNY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



### Knockroe Passage Tomb

There was something special about the hill country south of Coolagh. Beyond modern Windgap a series of megalithic tombs had been constructed on the foothills. The most obvious of these was Baunfree on the summit of Coonan's Hill (Kilmacoliver), the most prestigious nestled near the Lingaun in the townland of Knockroe. They belong to the Passage Tomb class, the mainstream European tradition.

Megalithic tombs are remarkable monuments. They are built of massive stones - quite an achievement without modern equipment - and they consist essentially of an artificial cave built on ground level using massive boulders, covered by a mound of soil or stones or both. They were places of burial above all else but it is likely that in the minds of Stone Age people they are shrines at which the rituals of life and death were played out.

The megalithic tomb in Knockroe was designed from the beginning to be an impressive monument. For some reason which remains to be explained the design of the structure is very similar to that of Knowth, a famous megalithic tomb in the Boyne Valley, county Meath. On the other hand it incorporates features that are unique to itself. The whole unwieldy structure was assembled in such a way that when finished the western tomb was aligned directly onto the setting sun on midwinter day. Megalithic artwork was applied to about thirty of the structural stones (some experts think the art was created by people in some kind of a trance).

Knockroe was a prestigious place of burial for hundreds of years afterwards. In the Early Bronze Age, long after the site was built, an unburnt body seems to have been placed on the bed of cremated bones surviving from earlier burials in the western tomb. This burial was accompanied by a pot known as a Food Vessel.

*(Extract from Muiris O'Sullivan, Dept. of Archaeology, University College Dublin, '5000 Years of Unwritten History', Coolagh History & Heritage.)*