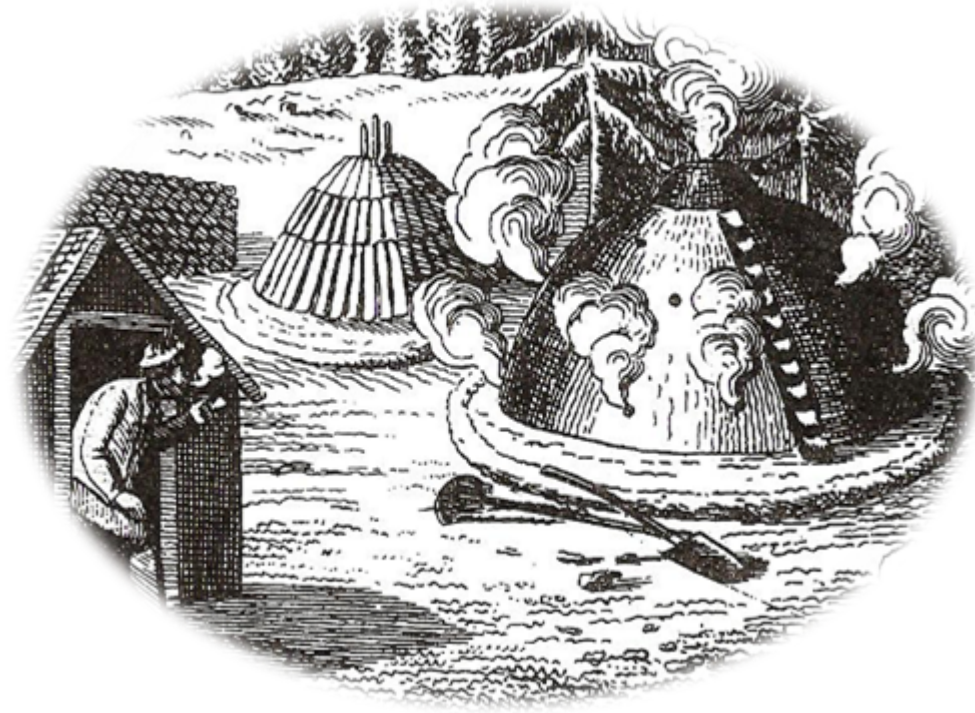


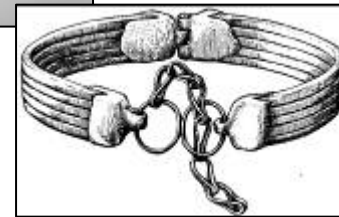
Wood charring and fuel production in early and late medieval Ireland – revelations from recent excavations



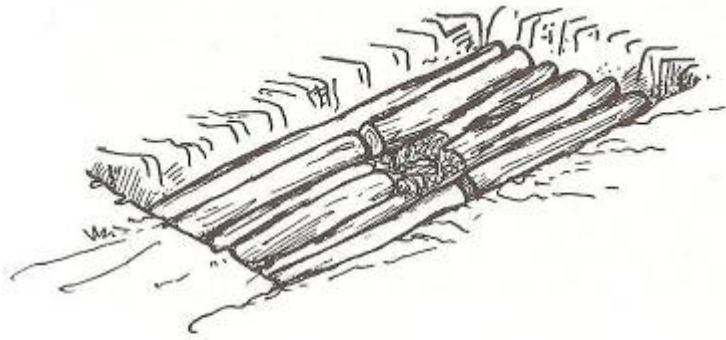
*By
Niall Kenny*

The importance of charcoal and charcoal production in early and late medieval Ireland

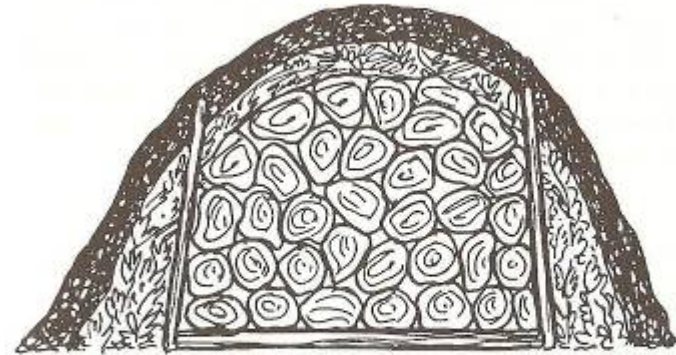
- Charcoal production was integral to the success of high temperature industrial activities such as ironworking, non-ferrous metalworking and glass and enamel working etc
- The 8th century law tract *Crith Gablach* mentions ‘a sack of charcoal for irons...’
- Charcoal was an important fuel for cooking in the domestic area
- Charcoal is a commodity; it burns longer and at higher temperatures; it is easier to transport and it is far less bulky than wood fuel
- Evidence for the trade of charcoal in early medieval times



Traditional Earth Kilns



1. Traditional pit kiln
(Charcoal Production Pit)



2. Traditional Mound Kiln
(Charcoal production mound/ clamp)

The Archaeological Evidence for charcoal production in early and late Medieval Ireland

- Charcoal appears to have been predominantly produced in pits
- The traditional mound method of charcoal production was also most likely in use in E and L Medieval Ireland
- Charcoal production pits: earth-cut pit features which can be circular, oval or rectangular in shape
- Larger rectangular shaped pits
- In situ burning usually evident on the base and sides of the pits
- Basal fills of the pits tend to be charcoal rich
- Use of oak, willow, ash, hazel and many other wood species for charcoal production



Who were the charcoal producers (Colliers) in early and late medieval Ireland?

- Charcoal production doesn't involve the use of specialised tools
- It can be undertaken by any farmer with access to wood
- It is likely that early medieval farmers (especially the lower grades of farmers) produced their own charcoal for small-scale metalworking activities and domestic use
- It is also likely that charcoal was produced by the early ironworkers e.g. On ironworking sites such as Derrinsallagh 4 and Aghamore
- More full-time colliers/ charcoal producers may have been needed to meet the demands of large secular metalworking sites and ecclesiastical metalworking needs

