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Cover image: Currach
under construction with
Newgrange rising above
the mist.



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SUMMERTIME AND EASY LIVING

'Mental torpor' sounds like something best avoided. Robert Macalister, in his book *The archaeology of Ireland* (second edition, 1949), used the phrase to describe the condition induced by inaccurate and often colourful descriptions of Ireland's past glories. For Macalister this torpor 'rests amid dreams of an imaginary past, or else a futile waste of energy, seeking to materialize that dreamland past amid the incongruous realities of the present . . .'.

The only advantage of the Irish summer with its rainy, grey and overcast weather (factors that contribute to our island's green appearance) is the ample time to reflect on things around us. Inevitably one's thoughts stray to the joys and delights of previous summers. Nostalgic thoughts of summers past (birdsong, pleasant odours of the countryside, the sound of people enjoying themselves) tend to evoke a sense of well-being and fond memories. This, in turn, leads to a comparison of our remembered experiences with those currently available.

Summer is also the time for the self-imposed journalistic 'silly season'. Our news bulletins bring us stories of festivals, gatherings and special events—races, music festivals, heritage events, agricultural shows, commemorations, and even the remnants of archaic beauty contests. At least some of these celebrations have their roots deep in our prehistoric past, deriving from summer leisure time and an associated carefree attitude to life. The promotion of a feel-good factor seems to be a high priority on the news menu—a worthy intention but crudely executed.

Unfortunately, the news reports from each venue featured that fell upon my ears this summer comprised cosmetic details of the events accompanied by a crude subtext that dealt with the question of how much the overall event was worth to the local economy of the area. Various multiples of millions—the usual speculative figure mentioned—are awkwardly and obnoxiously crowbarred into the report. In the middle of an economic recession such figures may have appealed to the sensibilities of some self-satisfied bean-counter somewhere.

The message of this type of propaganda seems to be that if you spend lots of money it will contribute to the local economy and we will all be better off. It's not the value of the event itself that's important but how much lolly is circulated. This emphasis on alleged accountancy and the perceived profit-making aspects of these summer gatherings can only provoke a spine-shivering harmonic reaction in those interested in the cultural assets of our country. The result is amusement, aggravation and anger—sentiments that combine to induce the equivalent of Macalister's definition of mental torpor.

What chance does our archaeological heritage have in an increasingly money-led evaluation of virtually every asset that we have? Not much, probably. It is worth remembering, however, that the price of access to most of our archaeological heritage, whether in museums or the countryside, is nominal. In most cases there is no charge at all, only the cost of getting there. So, if you can, avoid the torpor, get out there, experience and enjoy it.

Tom Condit