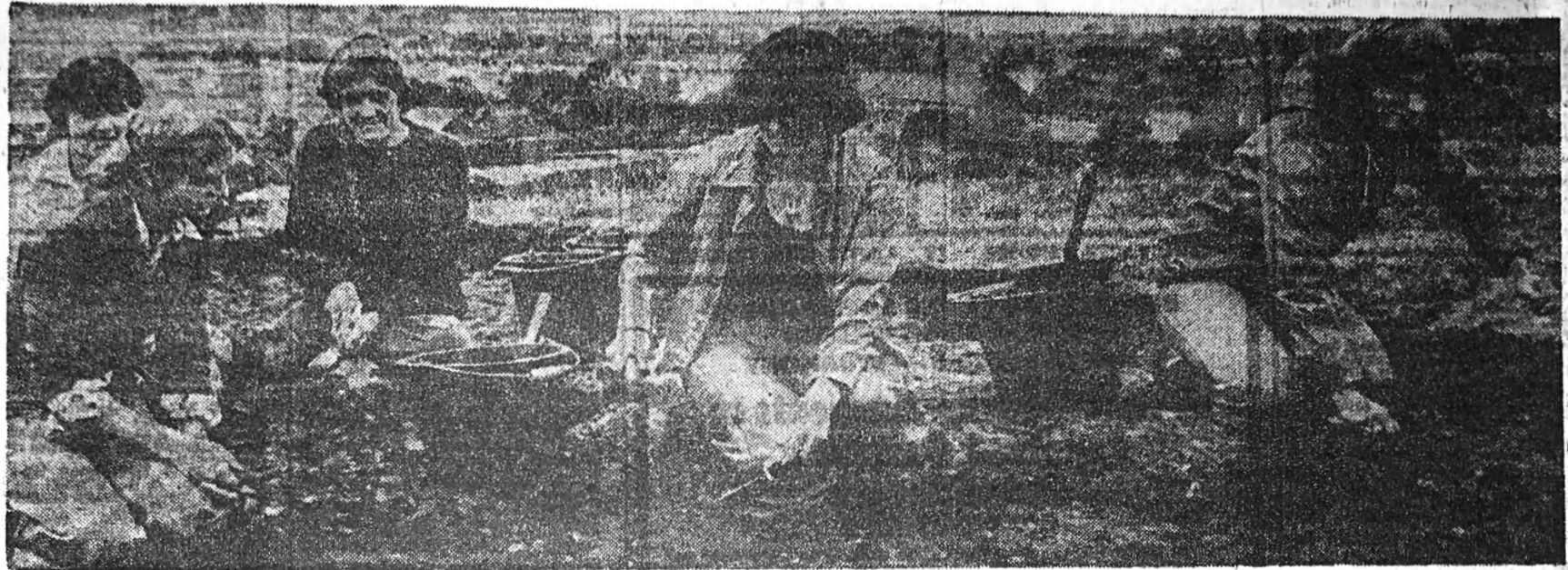


IN BALLYMURPHY THEY ARE DIGGING UP WHAT WENT DOWN IN HISTORY



Scratching the ground of the Black Mountain are (from left), Geraldine Donaghy, Michelle Savage, Kay Lambkin, Jacqueline Quinn and Maureen Hughes.

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By OLIVER MCGUCKIN

A SMALL band of young people is hard at work in the foothills of the Black Mountain, delving deep into Ulster's past.

The team is employed by Enterprise Ulster in conjunction with the Department of the Environment and is engaged in an archaeological dig on a large mound in the hills above the Ballymurphy estate.

Supervised by Mr. Cris Lynn, an Inspector of Historic Monuments, the group of about a dozen workers — most of them

students — have already come across several museum pieces, including bits of souterrain pottery, blue glass beads and part of lignite bracelets.

The beads are hand-made and date back to between the eight and eleventh century," said Mr. Lynn. "But generally we are trying to trace the outer lines of what structures may have been built here."

The mound itself is called a rath or ringfort and is

believed to have its origins in medieval times.

"This is the last intact site of its kind in the Belfast area and as its likely to be levelled during the construction of the proposed outer ring-road, we decided to tackle it now before it was too late," said Mr. Lynn.

Apparently, quite a few locations with possibilities of buried remnants of the past have been lost to the shovels of re-development diggers and archaeological work-

squads are constantly engaged in a battle against time.

"The Department has really only managed to see a fraction of the sites which are destroyed every year and we will really have to become more selective," said Mr. Lynn.

So far the workers have excavated only a few inches, but already they have determined several patches of dark soil which indicated areas of occupation.

"We hope to dig down about four or five feet before we leave in about a month's

time for another site in Armagh," said Mr. Lynn. "It is now thought that enclosures such as these were around farmsteads and often you find the outlines in stone, clay or wood of a house or outbuildings. Sometimes we come across the holes where the corner-posts of structures had been placed."

Soon the general public will have a chance to view the buried treasure of medieval Ulster — all the items found will go on show in the Ulster Museum, Botanic Gardens.