

# CROMLEACS IN CO. LIMERICK.

No. IV.

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## LOUGH GUR.

The Cromleacs illustrated in the present number of the Journal are from the Lough Gur group. The ancient name was Loch Gair; it is also spelled Guir in some old leases and other documents.

Apart from its natural beauty, Lough Gur is of special interest to the Antiquary—its shores and the surrounding hills are rich in memorials of a prehistoric past, while the district is identified in ancient legends and folk-lore with many of the heroes of our Celtic mythology. In more recent times it was one of the strongholds of the Desmonds; and 'tis said the great Earl, Garrett, rides over the lake every seven years on a steed with silver shoes.

The district must have been colonized in very early times, for the plain of the County Limerick from Lough Gur westwards towards Croom, is called Magh n' Asail, from Asail a Firbolg leader in the first century; and in the mythical tale of the Battle of Ventry Harbour, the legion from Lough Gur was the first to meet the enemy.

In the history of the Cemeteries it is stated that the men of Munster were buried at Enach Chuli. In the grant of land to the Abbey of Manister, a townland called Aenach Chuli in Corballi is mentioned. Father Begley in his History of the Diocese of Limerick (p. 20) mentions that in an old document Corballi is given as lying near Knockaney. One side of Lough Gur is in the parish of Knockaney, and an outlying portion of the parish of Manisteranenagh bounds the Lough, so that it is probably the site of the ancient cemetery, and Aenach or fair, which was always held at the cemetery. (1)

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(1) If this Aenach was identical with the Aenach Clochair of East Limerick, then I would not say that Clochair or Clogher was the townland in Dromin parish, as Father Begley supposes. It is too far removed.

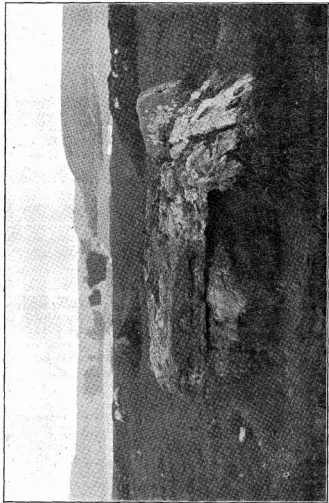


Photo 4\*

LEABA-NA-MUICE—view from the south-west.

(G. Fogarty, R.N)

This was the eastern boundary of the territory of Hy Fidhgente, the royal seat of which was at Bruree. (2) In later years, O'Donovan, King of Hy Fidhgente, became closely allied by marriage with the Danes, who were very powerful in Limerick, and having incurred the enmity of the Dal Cas, his territory was invaded by Brian Boromhe, A.D. 978, and O'Donovan was slain. His ally, Harold the Dane, was also killed, and the power of Hy Fidhgente destroyed. After this, the old chroniclers inform us, Dun Gair and other forts in Hy Fidhgente, were fortified by Brian.

In the Book of Rights, Dun Gair is mentioned as one of the Munster seats of the Kings of Cashel. Dun Gair was said to be on the summit of Knocadoon which was an island before the lake was drained. No trace of this fort exists, but in Carriggalla, east of it, are the remains of a massive, stone fort, of an area sufficient to justify the title of a royal dun. About a mile to the south-west of the lake, at Rockbarton, was Cathair Chin Chon, another of the seats of the Kings of Cashel, and A.D., 639, (3) a battle was fought there between King Aengus Leathana and Maelduin, son of the Arch-king of Munster. This place is now known as Cahirguillamore. In the "wars of the Gaedhel and the Gall," there are frequent references to this district; and, doubtless, the Norse men at one time occupied it.

The preceding notes connected with this famous battlefield of the ancient races and contending clans of Erin, have been collected with a view to explaining why so many interesting memorials of the dead are to be found in the district. However, vandalism in its worst form, appears to have run riot at Lough Gur, castles have been removed to build modern mansions, and stone circles and cromleacs destroyed to provide gate piers and lintels for improving farmers.

The remains to be seen are all very fully shewn on the new Ordnance map. It would be difficult to define a "stone circle" now, in some of the places marked as such; however, it is better to have all the remains noted, and leave it to the Antiquary to work out the problems. In ancient times, the resting places of heroes were marked in various

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(2) For a history of Hy Fidhgente see "Diocese of Limerick, Ancient and Medieval." Rev. J. Begley.

(3) Chronicon Scotorum, p. 87.

ways, either by standing stones, stone circles, or raths, cairns, *tumuli*, or cromleacs, but as it is with the latter only we are concerned, we must for the present pass over the many other ancient monuments at Lough Gur.

On Ordnance Sheet 32, Co. Limerick, there are five cromleacs, or "giants' graves," shewn in the immediate vicinity of Lough Gur. Two of these are in the townland of Ballynagallach, one is marked Leaba-na-Muice (illustrated); the other marked giant's grave now consists of but one stone. A giant's grave is close to the last in Grillagh townland, and consists now of two stones, one resting on the other. One is shewn in the townland of Ardnareigh, and one in the townland of Lough Gur. The latter is also illustrated in our present number.

Borlase in his *Dolmens of Ireland*—see this Journal, Vol. II., p. 283, (4) falls into some errors in describing these cromleacs, some of which were due to defects in the old Ordnance Maps, and others to his never having visited Lough Gur. He gives a sketch as of the "Ballynagallach cromleac," taken from a drawing made by Miss Stokes "before its destruction." The sketch and description of it from O. S. letters, are of the Lough Gur cromleac which is the subject of our illustration.

The cromleac described by Borlase as the Lough Gur cromleac, is Leaba-na-Muice, in Ballynagallach. It was not so named on the old Ordnance Map, and the name must not have been known to the writer of the O. S. letters, so Borlase lost that interesting piece of information (5) in connection with the Dolmens. There were other cromleacs here but there is now no trace of them. In a communication to the *Limerick Chronicle* in 1901, Rev. J. F. Lynch, Rector of Caherconlish,

(4) I find the list of the Cromleacs in the County Limerick, copied from Borlase in that number of the Journal is incomplete. I had left Ireland before the Journal appeared, and had no opportunity of reading the proofs, which explains some typographical errors that appear in the text, as well as the omission of one page of my MSS., the following should be added to the list of Cromleacs given in Co. Limerick, Vol. II., p. 283:—

**IN THE BARONY OF COSHLEA.**—In the townland of Ballyfroota and parish of Ballingarry, is a Dolmen marked Cromleac in Ordnance Survey Map, No. 49. In the townland of Barna and parish of Galbally, a Cromleac is marked in Ordnance Survey Map, No. 50.

**IN THE BARONY OF COSHMA.**—In the townland of Grilla and parish of Tullybracky, is one of the two "giant's graves" named together in Ordnance Survey Map, No. 32.

(5) See Note at end.

mentions that he was informed that some of the Lough Gur cromleacs were destroyed "to improve" the stone circle of Ronadh Crom Dubh. This was, certainly, a refined type of vandalism.

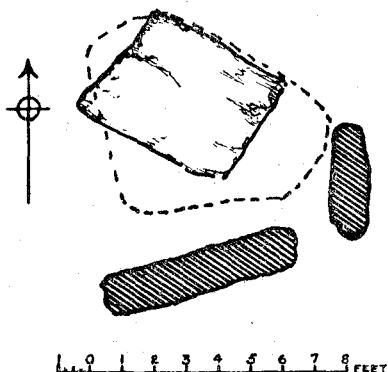
### LEABA-NA-MUICE.

Leaba-na-Muice means "bed of the pig." Stories in which black pigs, wild boars, and swine-herds, occupy a prominent place, enter largely into the folk-lore of Ireland. Swine were numerous in ancient Ireland. Giraldus states that in no part of the world are such herds of boars and wild pigs to be seen; and the *cultus* of boar sacrifice which was of Norse origin, is associated by some writers with the Firbolg race in Ireland. The legend of the two Swine-herds of Bodb is one of the oldest of our Irish folk tales. Swine-herds of the king were held in honour in ancient Ireland. (6) Whether the name in this case has any connection with swine-herd folk-lore, or, as others would suppose, has reference to the boar *cultus*, is a matter of conjecture. In the story of Dermot and Grania, Dermot is killed by a wild boar; the boar also dies, and Grania overcome with grief, falls dead when she hears of the tragedy, and was buried in the same grave with Dermot. The place is pointed out in the Co. Sligo, and known as Dermot and Grania's bed. Probably, some local Shanachie in olden times, recounting a variant of the tale with the final scene laid beside Loch Gair, would point to the larger cromleac, known doubtless as Dermot and Grania's bed, as their final resting place, and complete the narrative by identifying the other monument, a short distance away, and of different construction, as the bed of the pig. However we may question the strength of the reasoning of our ancient chroniclers, their imagination was always vigorous.

This cromleac consists of one covering stone about 7 ft. 4 in. by 6 ft., and 1 ft. 4 in. thick (see dotted lines on plan). This stone rested on three other stones, or possibly four. One stone, north and south, stands about 2 ft. 3 in. high, 3 ft. 6 in. wide, and 1 ft. thick. The second stone to the south, though shewn as if standing on the plan—the better to explain the construction—leans against the covering stone as may be seen in the photograph. It is about 6 ft. 9 in. long, 2 ft. 9 in.

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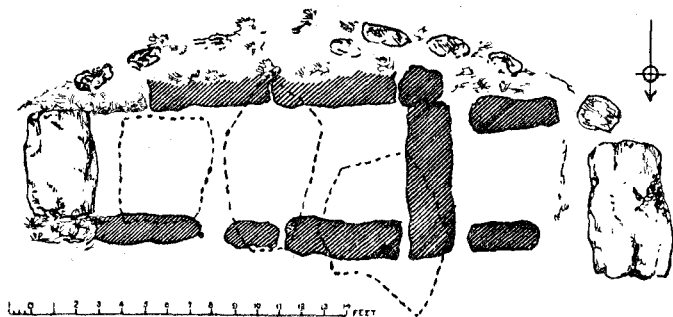
(6) Joyce's Social History. Vol. I., p. 61.



PLAN OF LEABA-NA-MUICE.

high, and 1 ft. thick. The third stone lies on flat (evidently fallen in) under the covering stone; it is about 1 ft. thick. Cromleacs covered by a single stone as this was, are of a distinct type, differing in construction from the long, grave-like structures illustrated by the Lough Gur cromleac, and probably represent a different race of builders. It may be that the single stone in most cases covered a chamber for cinerary urns, while the others were generally prepared for carnal burials (7).

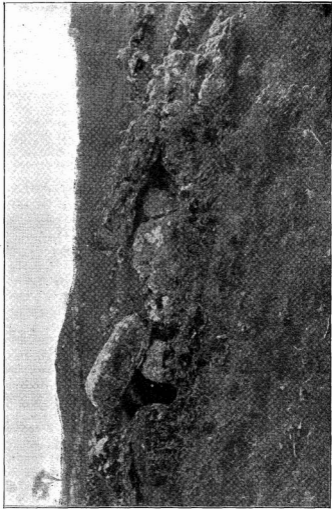
#### LOUGH GUR (TOWNLAND) CROMLEAC.



PLAN OF LOUGH GUR (TOWNLAND) CROMLEAC.

The photograph gives a good idea of the ruinous condition of this cromleac. The plan shews the construction. It consisted of

(7) The lake appears in the photograph, and, in the distance, Knockadoon to the right and Knockfennel to the left.



*Photo by*

LOUGH GUR (TOWNLAND) CROMLEAC—view from north-east.

*(G. Figgery, R.N.)*

two chambers lying east and west. The western, or smaller chamber, measured about 4 ft. wide by 4 ft. 6 in. long, the end stone, measuring 5 ft. 9 in. by 3 ft. 6 in., is now prostrate. The longer chamber was about 4 ft. 10 in. wide at western end, and reduced to something less than 4 ft. wide at the eastern end, which is filled up. It would require a good deal of spade work to arrive at the true dimensions of this cromleac in detail. There are four covering stones to the larger chamber shewn by dotted lines; two have been displaced. The western stone measures about 7 ft. by 5 ft. 6 in., and 1 ft. 4 in. thick; the next is 8 ft. by 4 ft., and 1 ft. 3 in. thick; the others are smaller. The side stones stand at present about three feet over the surface inside. This cromleac was at one time covered over with clay. In my opinion most, if not all of our cromleacs, were originally covered over by either clay or stones. The filling still remains on the south side. The mound was oval in shape, and is, in part, marked by a peristyle of small stones which can be traced on the southern side; others are disturbed around the cromleac. This peristyle or circle of stones at the base of the mound is a common form of construction. I have seen them around cromleacs, where the original mound had not been disturbed, in the Isles of Scilly and other places.

#### NOTE.

The confusion by Borlase with reference to these cromleacs, is not confined to what has been previously explained, for I find a plan and sketch of this Lough Gur cromleac taken from Windele's notes, and included with the Dolmens of Co. Cork. At page 27 (Co. Cork) he states:—

“In the townland of Coolaclevane and parish of Kiilmichael, at Carriganaffrin, near Knockadoon, is a Dolmen called Leaba-na-Muice, or Carrig-na-Gat. Windele places it in his Notes on Kerry by mistake. It is not marked on the Ordnance Survey Map, No. 82.” Then follows the details of the cromleac from Windele's notes, which exactly correspond with the existing stones at Lough Gur. He adds— “There is a square filled cist or septum between the terminal stone at one end and the stone of the enthronment. It measures 4ft. 0in. x 3ft. 6in.”



This is shewn on Windele's plan, which is identical with the plan supra. There is a Carriganaffrin, or "Mass rock," in the parish of Kilmichael, and this may have been the reason Borlase fixed on Cork for Windele's sketch, but Knockadoon is not there. Carriganaffrin at Lough Gur, though not correctly marked on the old Ordnance Sheet, is close to this cromleac, and it is under Knockadoon. This and the similarity of the plans should settle the question of the identity of this cromleac with the Lough Gur one. It is the next cromleac south-west of this that is known as Leaba-na-Muice. I failed to obtain information as to a Leaba-na-Muice in Kilmichael, Co. Cork. The mistakes and confusion discovered in this case would show the necessity for some revision of the lists of cromleacs in each county as found in Borlase.

