

## Miscellanea

### A WEDGE-TOMB AT GARRANBANE, MURROE, CO. LIMERICK

This megalithic tomb (Illus. 1) is situated on the lands of Mr. Seamus Keane, near Murroe, Co. Limerick. It is quite well known locally but does not appear to have been recorded in the archaeological literature. A note written by Prof. M. J. O'Kelly on the 6-inch scale map collection in the Department of Archaeology, University College, Cork, dated 24 February 1958, records some correspondence between Prof. O'Kelly, the National Museum of Ireland and Mr. O'Riordan of the Glenstal Archaeological Society on the subject of the tomb, but the matter does not appear to have been followed up and nothing was entered in the topographical files of either the National Museum or of the Department of Archaeology, University College, Cork.

The tomb lies about 1.2 km north-west of Murroe Village and 0.75 km north-west of Glenstal Abbey.<sup>1</sup> It is situated on rough pasture land, just below the 600 feet (183 m.) contour on the western foothills of the Slievefelim Mountains.

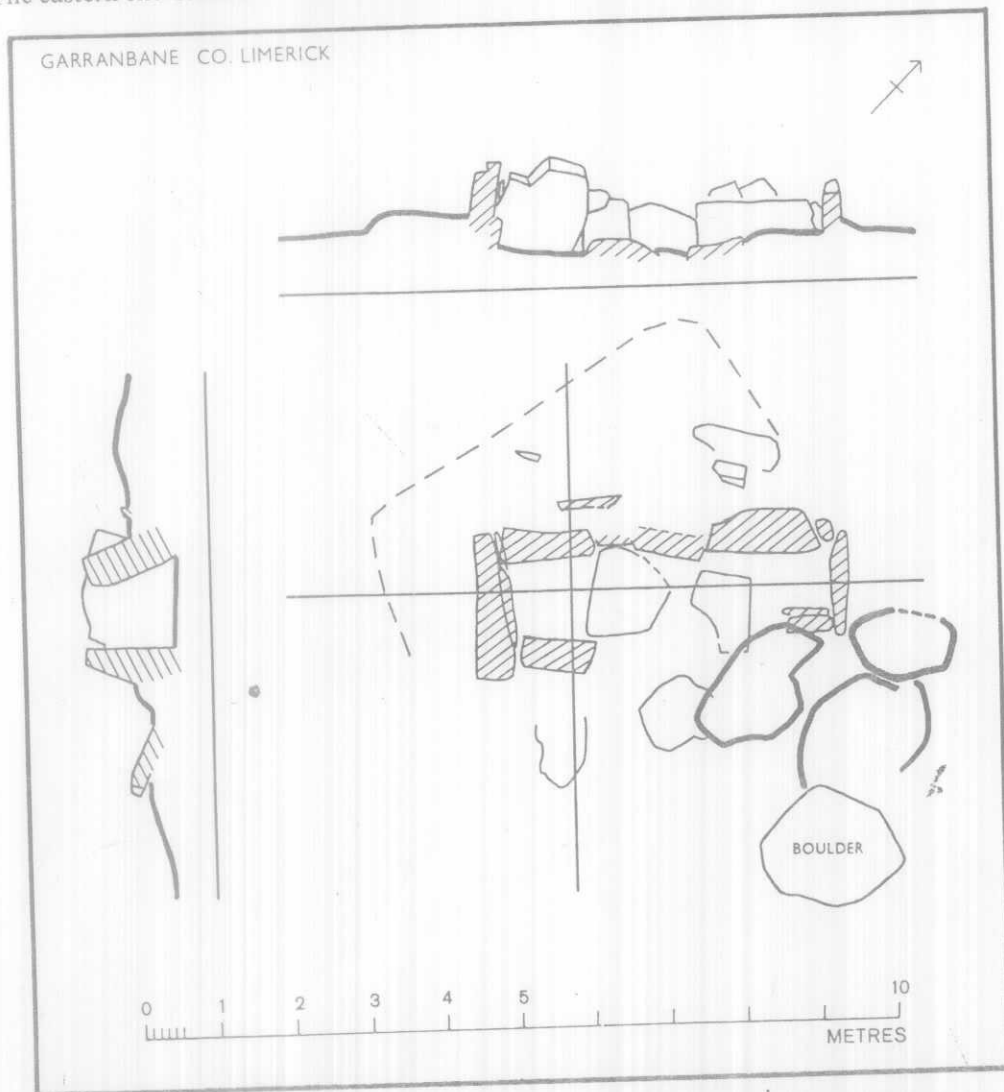
The tomb is of wedge-tomb type and consists of a single chamber or gallery measuring just over 4 m. long internally. It lies north-east south-west (Illus. 2). The north side of the gallery is complete and comprises four orthostats. The south side of the gallery has one orthostat in place at each end; two stones lying across the chamber are probably displaced sidestones so originally there were probably four orthostats on this side also. Two stones running parallel with and outside the north side of the gallery probably mark an outer line of orthostats



Illus. 1. View of the tomb from the south-west. (Photo: E. Shee Twohig)

but only the tops of these two stones are visible above the cairn material which encloses the tomb. Three large stones just south-east of the tomb are almost certainly displaced capstones. Local informants report that the tomb was dug out and the capstones displaced by farm workers on the Barrington estate of Glenstal Castle in the early decades of this century. The south-western end of the tomb has been dug out to a depth of over 1.0 m. below the tops of the orthostats in this area.

It is not clear which end of the gallery was the entrance way. Most wedge-tombs seem to have been open to the west but here the stone closing the western end of the gallery is one of the highest and most substantial stones in the tomb (1.10 m. high, 0.40 m. thick). The eastern end-stone is lower and only 0.17 m. thick (see section, Illus. 2) and could more



Illus. 2. Plan and Sections of the tomb (courtesy Archaeological Branch, Ordnance Survey).

easily have been moved to allow access to the tomb. Several other wedge-tombs in this area of the lower Shannon estuary (in east Limerick, east Clare and west Tipperary) have a similar arrangement, often with the eastern end open, the best known examples being at Baurnadomeeny, Co. Tipperary, and Lough Gur, Co. Limerick.

In general this tomb is a good example of the wedge-tomb group of megalithic tombs. Its situation on relatively high ground is typical of these monuments. Approximately 470 wedge-tombs are now recorded in Ireland. They are widely distributed, but there are concentrations in the Burren area of Co. Clare, in mid Cork and around Kilmacomma in west Tipperary. This particular monument lies about 10 km west of the Kilmacomma group, being separated from the group by the Slievefelim Mountains. About seven wedge-tombs are recorded in east Limerick including one, now destroyed, which would have been just over 3 km north-west of the Garranebane monument at a site called Tuamanirvore in Cappanahanagh townland.<sup>2</sup>

Excavation in wedge-tombs has been singularly uninformative in terms of burial ritual, dating, etc. Over twenty sites have been excavated, and cremated human bones have been found in the majority of sites while a few have yielded inhumation burials. Pottery has been found in a number of tombs but it is often difficult to ascertain if the pottery was placed in the tomb when it was first built and used or if it was deposited there much later. The dating of the tombs is thus problematic, but they certainly seem to have been the latest of the four types of megalithic tombs to have been built in Ireland, dating to somewhere in the period 2800-200 B.C.

#### Acknowledgement

I am grateful to Dr. Seán Ó Nualláin, of the Archaeological Branch, Ordnance Survey Office, Dublin, for supplying the plan of the monument which illustrates this paper.

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<sup>1</sup> Garranebane Td.; Abington Par.; Ownybeg Bar.; National grid ref. R.749.628; O.S. 6-inch sheet 7 for Co. Limerick (25.5 cm from western and 23.0 cm from southern margins).

<sup>2</sup> De Valera, R. and Ó Nualláin, S., *Survey of the Megalithic Tombs of Ireland, Vol. IV*, Dublin 1982.