FINDING OF A ST. BRIGID’S CROSS IN DOLMEN. (Pl. V, 2).

The fine dolmen on Dualty League Hill, Deerpark Townland (Ordnance Survey 6-in Sheet, Co. Limerick, No. 49) has been described more than once, (1) but beyond the statement that it is “called Leaba Dhiairmada agus Chráinne” by old people no further local tradition seems to be extant regarding the monument. On a visit for the purpose of seeing the dolmen last September, I found on the floor of the inner chamber of the megalith the St. Brigid’s Cross of rushes here shown (Plate V, Fig. 2). This had evidently been left in the dolmen quite a short time before my having found it and was partly burnt. With it was found a furze bush, which was also partly burnt and had evidently been used to provide the fire to burn the cross. A strange feature of the “find” was that when I spoke to the local people later none of them had previously seen a St. Brigid’s Cross. I could get no clue as to the reason for the burning of a St. Brigid’s Cross in the dolmen, and merely put this note on record in the hope that some reader may throw light in the way of parallels or further information on what is an interesting piece of folklore, and an example of the survival of traditions regarding a monument, the age of which may well be about 4000 years.

S.P.O.R.


EXCAVATIONS AT CUSH, 1934.

“...The excavations at Cush, near Killfinane, Co. Limerick, which began early in August, have just been concluded. The investigations on this, the reputed site of Teamhair Eileann, under the direction of Mr. Sean D. Ó Ríogóin, M.A., have yielded results which add considerably to our knowledge of conditions of life in Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age times, and the whole excavation, which is one of the major excavations under the new Government scheme, has shown the monuments to be of such interest as to justify further research.

“Here on the flank of the Ballyboura hills, between 700 and 800 feet above sea-level and overlooking the Limerick plain are a large and very complex series of forts, burial mounds and other earthworks. The finding of several burials, some of Late Bronze Age and others of Early Iron Age type, give a date for the main occupation of the site. Some of the urns discovered are particularly fine specimens, and the finding of a small cist, containing two food vessels with cremated burial, suggests that the date may be pushed back even as far as the Middle Bronze Age (say, 1300 B.C.).

“An aerial survey of the site was undertaken by the Army Air Corps, and the photographs taken have yielded some interesting results. Partly by means of these, and partly by a survey and excavation on the ground, an ancient field system has been revealed—a feature known in Great Britain, but not hitherto noted in Ireland.

“Another discovery unique in Irish archaeology was that of several of the pre-historic houses. These were varied in type, and in places one was super-imposed on the other in such manner as to show that habitation on the site must have been continuous and intense over a considerable period. This fact, together with the existence of fields and the evidence for the practice of agriculture given by the very numerous querns which every where came to light, present a valuable picture of the economic life of the Ireland of over 2,000 years ago.

“Besides the urns and burial remains, other finds were various objects of iron and bronze, very numerous bones, a small bone plaque with La Tène ornament, a stone axe, and several bracelets of jet. All finds will go to the National Museum.

“Each of the forts excavated contained one of those peculiar underground houses known to archaeology as souterrains, and the Killfinane excavations have given new knowledge regarding these puzzling structures, since it has, on this site, been possible to show that the type dates back to as early a period as Late Bronze Age times—a fact proved from the position of one of the urn burials.”

CUSH AND GALBALLY, 1935.

“The excavations conducted on behalf of the Commissioners of Public Works and the National Museum as a work for the relief of unemployment at Cush, near Killfinane, County Limerick, have just been completed. The investigations have yielded valuable results in relation to the known data about the type of earthen ringfort, which is so common throughout the country. No examples of these—previous to the Cush excavations—had been investigated on such an extensive scale.

“The present season’s excavations brought to light four new underground houses, one of which was of a complex type, quite different from those met with during last year’s work. The 1934 excavations proved that at least one of the souterrains and ringforts at Cush dated as far back as Late Bronze Age times—a fact hitherto unproven, and a valuable addition to prehistoric chronology. This year, the interesting fact came to light that others of the ringforts and souterrains on the same site continued in occupation until well up into Christian times, thus showing continuity in the association of the monuments at Cush over a long period.

“Further hause-sites were this year discovered, one of them similar in type to one of those found in 1934, having a compacted clay floor, the lower portions of the walls of stone and the upper portions evidently of wood, the post-holes for the wooden posts to support the structure having been found.
Plate V., Fig. 1.—Urna and bronze blade from Glenarue, Co. Limerick.

Plate V., Fig. 2.—A St. Brigid’s Cross.

Plate V., Fig. 3.—Monsell of Tervoe Shrine.
Another discovery, new to Irish archaeology on such sites, was that of the remains of wattle-and-daub houses—that is, houses of wicker with a clothing of clay. The perishable wooden structure had, of course, completely disappeared, but, by careful excavation, it was possible to trace the position of the small stake-holes and larger post-holes which supported the walls. These were revealed as deep pockets of soft material in the underlying hard boulder clay.

Among the finds of this season's excavations were—all articles of personal adornment, such as jet bracelets, glass beads, bronze brooches and pins; and articles of every-day use, such as querns, hones, spindle-whorls, loom-weights, and parts of bronze objects.

Large quantities of iron slag gave evidence of considerable iron working on the site. A series of very nice flint arrow-heads were found in association with one of the wattle-and-daub houses. All the finds, through the generosity of the landowner, Mr. J. Galvin, have been presented to the National Museum.

In addition to the excavation at Cash, other excavations were carried out about six miles away, in the Galbally area. In 1884 attention was drawn to a series of very low burial-mounts, each surrounded by a trench. These were found to be particularly numerous in the district, and were different from any type of burial-mount previously brought to notice in the country. One of them was excavated, and an urn with a cremated burial was found in it.

Further investigations this year revealed that the rites connected with the monuments were various: evidence that cremated burials without urns, had been placed in them, was found in some, while others had been unburnt burials. The area was evidently a prehistoric necropolis of considerable extent, containing numerous graves, most of the burials in which were, however, unaccompanied by urns.

The excavations were supervised by Mr. Seán Ó Ríordáin, M.A., of the National Museum, assisted by a staff of experts.

A full report of the excavations in the Galbally area has appeared meantime in J.R.S.A.I., June 1936.

EXCAVATIONS IN THE BURREN, 1934.

From July 11 to August 22 excavations were made at Poulaerwa, near Carran, Co. Clare, by Dr. Hencken, who was in charge, assisted by Messrs. H. L. Movius, Amory Goddard and F. L. W. Richardson, of Harvard; Mr. Joseph Hattery, of the National University of Ireland, and Mr. Gerard Brett, of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. 27 workmen were employed. This site was another Bronze Age burial mound on a high limestone plateau, but this time made of stones and much larger than the tumulus at Ballyglass," says the report. "It measured 50 feet in diameter and 3 feet in height. Just inside its base was a circular ring of slabs, and a little to the north was found a similarly shaped wall of dry masonry. In the very centre of these two circles were the remains of four skeletons in two coffin-like boxes of limestone slabs called cists. These cists were surrounded by a mass of large slabs on edge. Near them was another double cist, covered by an enormous cap-stone, one side containing a cremated burial and the other side an unburned skeleton. All these cists stood on what had been in the Bronze Age the bare limestone summit of the plateau.

They were accompanied by two others, both containing the remains of skeletons. Over these the great mound of stones or caign had been piled. Later on, however, another cist had been inserted in the edge of the mound, but it had been right before we excavated the caign. Also at some later date, a hole had been dug in the summit of the mound, and two other cists had been inserted, one containing a skeleton and the other a cremation. One other burial remains to be mentioned, a part of a skeleton, with no skull, found under the whole mound in such a position as to lead us to believe that its burial was older than the caign, and that the people that excavated the caign disturbed it. Altogether nine skeletons and two cremations were discovered. In connection with this site we are heavily obligated to Mr. John A. Wallace, who first brought Dr. Hencken to see the site as long ago as 1931, and to Mr. Thomas Macnamara, of Poulaerwa, not only for readily granting us permission to excavate, but for helping us with a vast number of the practical details connected with the work.

Dr. Hencken also conducted excavations at Cahercommaun, near Carran, Co. Clare.

"This site," the report states, "is a stone fort of much the same type, though on a smaller scale, as the famous ones in the Aran Islands, and proven to date from about the 7th to 10th centuries, A.D. They abound in the West of Ireland, but almost nothing had ever been done to excavate them. In connection with this excavation, we are again obliged to Mr. John A. Wallace, of Limerick, who took Dr. Hencken to see the site in 1931, and to Mr. Francis Cahill, Junior, of Buncranny, Ennis, for kindly granting permission to excavate. We are also most grateful to Mr. and Mrs. T. G. Studdert, of Clifden, Co. Galway, for much kindness and valuable assistance while we were excavating in their district.

"This stone fort occupies an impressive position on the edge of a gorse in the limestone hills of North Clare, and consists of three massive masonry walls, the outermost being 450 feet in diameter. The two outer walls are semi-circular, and end at each side of the face of the cliff, but the innermost wall which is in places 25 feet thick and 16 feet high, is circular. A massive entrance was found in the inner wall, connected with a paved and fortified passage-way leading through all three walls. The whole area between the first and third wall was evidently intended for cattle, for extensive digging revealed nothing. The living quarters of the fort were found, however, inside the inner wall, where a guard room and several irregular stone structures were uncovered, as well as several hearths. All these had been covered by three to five feet of stones, which had fallen from the ruined parts of the wall. Most interesting among the features of the interior of the fort were two souterrains, or underground passages, both approached by flights of steps. These are common features of early Irish forts, whether of stone or of earth, and very frequently they lead out by a small tunnel under the wall of a fort, as though to afford a secret means of entrance or escape."
"One of those at Caherconman was under the wall in this way, but was remarkable in that its tiny outer entrance opened directly on to the very steepest part of the cliff upon the edge of which the fort stood. A long vertical crevice in the face of the cliff led down from it, however, and it might have been possible for a skilful and daring climber to go up or down without a rope. The other souterrain was a much smaller affair—in fact, a mere underground chamber—but it contained the two most important features of the whole fort. One was a woman, buried upon her back, with her accompanying skeleton, among the two small whetstones of the floor of the chamber, and accompanied by a large iron hook and an iron knife. The presence of the hook suggests that it had been used to hang up the head before it was buried.

"The other was a very interesting brothel of the ninth century A.D. decorated with enamel and six fantastic animals. A tremendous quantity of other things were found in the fort which shed a great deal of light on life in the hills of North Clare during the time of the Danish attacks on Ireland. Spindle whorls, the small disc of bone or stone that served as flywheels of spindles, were very numerous, and indicate spinning in the fort, and hence, presumably, weaving as well. There were also two kinds of primitive hand-mills for grinding grain, which indicate a certain amount of agriculture, though in that locality it cannot only have been on a very small scale.

"The chief food of the occupants of the fort was meat and mainly beef. Twelve tons of animal bones, all of which were sent to Dublin, were found inside the fort, 90 per cent. of which were those of cattle. There were also some domestic sheep and pigs, but the fact that the people of the fort were to a large extent hunters is indicated by a considerable quantity of the bones of antlers and antlers of red deer. The tedious process of sorting these bones has been most kindly undertaken, as in previous years, by the Natural History Division of the National Museum, and Mr. A. W. Stelfox, M.R.I.A., and Miss Geraldine Roche, M.Sc., have actually done the work. To them we are most grateful for undertaking, in the same cheerful and unselfish spirit with which they have approached it in 1932 and 1933, this long and trying task.

"There were also a large number of tools of iron and bone and the antler of the red deer, and many of these tools were probably made at the fort; for not only were numerous pieces of antler found from which pieces had been cut to make antler points and other such objects, but an abundance of iron slag indicated a certain amount of iron working. Iron tools included a carpenter's axe, two small hammers, and a small bronze knife with ring heads. There were also a large iron hook such as might be used for hanging meat, a hinge for a door, and a small bell like those associated with the earliest Celtic saints.

"Besides these, there were found bone points, tools of various kinds, needles, pins, and even a bone top. Hammer stones, and especially whetstones, occurred in enormous numbers, and one of the latter was decorated with chevrons and other linear ornaments. The only weapon, however, was the point of a heavy single-edged iron sword. Three polished stone axes also occurred—a surprising feature, since they are a type of tool essentially connected with the end of the Stone Age, a period which had passed away 2,500 years earlier. Perhaps they were found accidentally and brought to the fort by its inhabitants as charms; the very same thing is done to-day among the farming populations on the Continent.

"The fort also contained a number of personal objects, chiefly ornamental. These included many bracelets of jet, glass beads and beads, mostly blue, and sometimes inlaid with white, green, and yellow glass, a bronze finger ring, bone combs, beads and buttons, a remarkable heavy heavily ornamented with chevrons and other geometric ornament, and a bronze bracelet ornament decorated with red and yellow enamel. There was no pottery whatever, but only traces of wooden vessels. In conclusion it may be said that this fort was occupied from about the seventh to the tenth centuries A.D., and that it was inhabited by a community, no doubt of Christian Irish Celts, who practised agriculture to a limited extent and who hunted a certain amount, but whose real livelihood depended upon a considerable herds of cattle. The space occupied by the two outer walls of the fort was plainly a place into which these cattle could be driven, and the massiveness of these walls and especially that of the huge one surrounding the actual living quarters recall the earliest Irish literature in which cattle raiding plays a prominent part."


A full report of the excavation at Poulawack has appeared meantime in the J.R.S.A.I., Dec. 1935.

CRANNOG AND BRONZE AGE FIND AT ROSROSE, CO. CLARE (O.S. 6 in. map, 42).

A few miles east of Newmarket, Co. Clare, are situated the twin lakes Fin Lough and Rosrose. The more eastern of these lakes, which at present has an area of about 1 sq. mile, seems from Bronze Age times to have been occupied by man. East of the lake on a hill, which is called Knocknalappa, is a dolmen, at or near which Mr. T. J. Westropp recorded the finding of a gold bracelet (Proc. R.I.A., Vol. XXIV., p. 163). Just below this hill and jutting out into the lake is the site of a crannog. Several of the stakes used in its construction are visible, standing up through the mud and water. Last June a bronze sword, a socketed gong and a stone axe were found lying on the surface of the mud. The sword, which is perfect but small, measures only 10 inches in length; it is of the leaf-shaped type, which was in use during the late Bronze Age. The gong, which is 2 inches long, is also seen for and of same age as the sword. The stone axe is 4½ inches long and of a common type of the use of which extended down to Iron Age times. These three objects may be observed round the lakes. We may also note the discovery of a bronze Age dug-out boat on the eastern shore of Fin Lough.

FRESCOES AT ULRANMORE CASTLE, CO. CLARE (O.S. 6 in map 51).

Early this year Sergeant Long, of the Garda Siochana, reported that he had observed some paintings on the walls of Ulanmore Castle, near Newmarket, Co. Clare. These paintings decorate the walls of a small room on the first floor of the castle, which is only accessible with the use of a ladder. The west wall..."
of the room is taken up by a hunting scene, representing a stag being attacked at the throat and hind legs by two hounds. The south wall, over the window, has a representation of the Virgin and Child, with other subjects on the right and left, but these are so decayed that it is quite impossible to make out the subjects or design of the paintings. The other walls were also decorated, but only traces of the paintings now remain. The colours used in the frescoes were red, yellow and black. “Edward White’s description of Connacht and Thomond in 1778” is preserved in the Record Office, London (S.P.I., Eliz. XIV., 25, 1); in that portion of the document relating to Thomond we find under the Baronies of Dunloy and Dunmore (Dunloy in the present time is municipally the home of the family of Donough and Tuite, held the castles of Clooneyhur and Baleneelagh respectively) (Journal North Munster Arch. Soc., vol. I. p. 76). In the Down survey map of the Barony of Bunratty the castle is called Orlangmore.

J.N.A.W.

SHEELA-NAGG AT BURRATNY CASTLE (O.S. 6 in. map 61).

To Sergeant Long we are also indebted for information which has led to the recording of another of these enigmatical figures for Co. Clare. It is situated in the top room of the south-west tower of the castle and is carved on a large stone set beside a window. This object must have escaped the notice of George M. Macnamara and Mr. T. J. Westropp, as no mention is made of it in their paper on Bunratty Castle in the Journal of the North Munster Archeological Society, vol. III., p. 226. This record must also be added to Dr. E. M. Guest’s valuable paper on Sheela-na-gigs in the current volume of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, as its discovery came too late for inclusion in that paper. (See Journal R.S.A.I., vol. LXVI., p. 107.)—J.N.A.W.

KILLEELY AND KILFINANE, THEIR PATRONS.

Killeely cemetery lies half a mile N.W. from Thomond Bridge, just within the Borough Boundary. Of the former church no trace now remains. It is described in that 17th century compilation, White’s List of Churches, as “the parish church of Killeely, whose patron is St. Leilis, Virgin, and sister of St. Munchin, as it is said, whose festival is celebrated on August 11th.” Among the Dalassian Saints in the “Genealogice Regum et Sanctorum Hibernie” (“Archivium Hibernicum,” vol. 6) there appears Liadhna, daughter of Diarmuid, and her feast day is given as August 13th. Diarmuid, according to the genealogy, was grandson to that Cearbhcanh whom St. Patrick baptised at Singland; like St. Munchin, Liadhna is descended from Cas, but the saints are not represented as brother and sister.

The Black Book of Limerick gives the oldest extant list of Limerick Churches, a list compiled soon after 1206. In that list (McCaffrey’s edition, p. 26) where we should expect to find Killeely, we read Killiedun. A recent inspection of the original manuscript (now in Maynooth College Library) shows that Killiediini is a possible reading. It may be fairly inferred then that St. Leilis of Killeely is Liadhna of the Dal Gáis.

Among the Eoghanacht saints in the “Genealogica Sanctorum” appears Pionán of Drum Abad, whose feast is kept on February 13th or December 8th. The place name puzzled O’Hallen, who writes “this denominaton of Dromhabrad does not appear to be recognisable under any existing form of name shown upon the Ordnance Survey Maps of Ireland.” It would seem that we should look for Drum Abad with Cenn Abad and Bealadh Abad among the Ballyhoma Hills in S.E. Co. Limerick. The range takes its name from Bealadh Abad (alias Bealadh Hebrat, from Feharn, who figures in the tales of the Erenn); and the Fenian story of the Gilis Deacair tells us Cenn Abad is the present Slieveraugh, the bold hill so familiar to visitors to the Cus excavations. “Ceann Amhra Sliabh Caoimh ris a radhastair an Slabh Ribhadh” (Drum Abad would be the hill of Kilfinne, the very name of which recalls the saint. Pionán of Drum Abad was third in descent from Ennia, from whom the Ui Enna, rulers of Eoghanacht Aine took their sept name. Their territory is clearly visible from Kilfinne Hill.

M.M.

THE MONSSELL OF TREVORIE SHROVE (Pl. V. 3).

Quite recently the ancient Celtic Shrine, which was known to have been in the possession of the first Lord Emily of Tervoe—but which since his death in 1804 has been missing—was found in a lumber room at Tervoe, Co. Limerick. It is a small house-like shrine with a hipped roof and measures 41 inches by 18 inches and 32 inches high and made of yew wood. The lower portion of the shrine is a small box-like receptacle. This is surmounted by a roof shaped cover, both box and roof being carved out of separate pieces of wood.

The front of the shrine is decorated with an inlay of metal. This pattern is quite characteristic of Irish shrines, though differing in detail and technique, and was in all probability originally gilded or slivered. Three circular plaques, fastened by studs through the wood, add to the decoration. These plaques are formed of concentric circles, the two outer spaces of which are further subdivided by radial bars of metal. These spaces are filled by a coloured substance which seems to be enamel, two colours being used. The centre ornaments of the plaques were in all probability either of some semi-precious stone, amber or enamel.

The edges of the shrine are protected by moldings of cast bronze, which are held in position by pins. The roof ridge, one end of which is now broken, was held in place by small plates which extended down the sides of the roof. Both ends are turned up and form animal-like heads, facing one another; they are keyed for enamel, which was of similar colours to that in the three plaques. In the centre of the ridge is another enamelled ornament, which is perhaps a miniature representation of the shrine itself.

M.M.
No other portion of the shrine is ornamented, nor does it show any sign of ever having been so treated. The wooden portion of the roof is complete, but of the lower portion the back is missing and only a small part of each side remains. The shrine was evidently repaired at some period or another and hinges fixed to it, perhaps to replace older hinges, in order that it might be opened and the relic it contained exposed to view.

The early history of the shrine is so far unknown. It was exhibited in 1872 by the Right Hon. Wm. Monseil, afterwards Lord Emily, at the Royal Irish Academy, and a replica of it was made at the time for that Society, but the records contain no information as to how and when it came into the possession of the Monseil family.

Eight of these house-shaped reliquaries are known, two of which—the "Breac Maodhog" and the Loch Erne Shrine—are in the Royal Irish Academy's collection in the National Museum. The shrine known as St. Jarlath's, which was formerly kept at Tuam is now lost, while the shrine of St. Manchan is preserved in the chapel at Boher, near Lemanaghan. This is the largest of the "house-shaped" shrines; it measures 23 inches and is 18 inches in height. Another shrine found in the Shannon is in the Edinburgh Museum, while two more were found in Norway; one of these in a Viking-age boat burial, the loot brought home by some Scandinavian adventurer. In addition to the shrines mentioned, the museum contains several parts of shrines of the same type.—("Journal R.S.A.I.," vol. LII, p. 74).

We are happy to say that this venerable and interesting relic has been deposited on loan by its present owner, Commander Monseil, R.N., of Tervoe, nephew of the late Lord Emily, in our National Museum in Dublin, thus adding one further gem to that unrivalled collection of early Christian art which represents Ireland's "Golden Age."

J.N.A.W.