EXCAVATION OF TWO STONE CIRCLES AT LOUGH GUR (1936).

The district around Lough Gur, Co. Limerick, has long been a centre of archaeological interest because of its large number of megalithic monuments and of the large number of finds which have come from the lake. The megaliths were described in the Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy (33, 1912. Section C. No. 10) by Sir Bertram Windle but, excepting a small excavation carried out by Professor Harkness and described in Windle's paper, no systematic investigation of the remains had hitherto been made.

Two of the stone circles were investigated during this season's excavations under the supervision of Dr. S. P. O'Riordáin, assisted by Miss G. Hayes. A maximum of twenty-two men was employed during the period of excavation from the 17th August to 20th September. The circles which were examined are those called "O" and "P" in Windle's paper.

Circle "P" is 36' in diameter and consists of a continuous kerb of twenty-nine stones of various sizes, the small stones being reinforced by a banking of clay on the outside. None of the stones were well bedded in the underlying clay. The circle had a filling of clay and stones, the surface of which was level with the top of the kerb. Its excavation was carried out by means of the quadrant method. The stones in the filling, some of which were very large, were found to be concentrated immediately inside the kerb, while the centre of the monument was filled with clay. Scattered bones of animals were found through the filling and also a single human bone, which has been identified as part of a child's skeleton.

Post holes found in the original underlying ground did not make any intelligible plan, although they may have had to do with some structure used to lift the stones into position. One of the holes, at the exact centre of the monument, may have been occupied by a post from which the circle was set cut.

Two cremated burials were discovered under the original ground surface. One of the urns was complete but of the other only the base and portion of the body remained. The disturbance would appear to have arisen from the second burial. Both urns, which may be ascribed to the latest phase of the Late Bronze Age, were unornamented and made from a dark gritty paste.

Circle "O," not completely excavated this season, consists of an outer earthen bank with a kerbing or facing of large stones on both sides of it and an inner stone circle of continuous stones. The over-all diameter is about 180'. On excavation the central area was found to have a paving of small stones everywhere under the turf and humus layer. On the eastern side, along the circumference of the inner circle, was an accumulation of large stones, which may be a collapsed megalith, but the investigation of this feature had to be postponed.

At several points under the outer bank were found traces of a paving of small pebbles (smaller than those in the central area). It is doubtful if the paving was intentional since a similar feature is noticeable elsewhere in the same field at points where the trampling of cattle has caused the pebbles to come to the surface. Cremated bones lying on this ancient pebble paving were found under the bank but it is not yet clear whether they are human or animal.

An unexpected structural feature revealed by the sections cut across the area between the outer bank and the inner circle was that concentric with them there was a ditch now completely silted in. No causeway could be found to this ditch. There were at one point on the western side indications that suggested a wooden gangway, but this feature was not fully examined. On the southern side a causeway of large stones was found to cross the ditch, but this was obviously a late feature since it lay on the silting of the ditch.

EXCAVATION OF STONE CIRCLE AND TWO FORTS AT LOUGH GUR (1937).

The site was excavated under the supervision of Dr. S. P. O'Riordáin, assisted by Mr. M. J. O'Kelly. The first fort, oval on plan, with internal diameters of 61 and 112 ft. had stone walls 18 ft. in thickness and an entrance on the eastern side. No parts of the walls remaining were over 6 ft. in height but the existence of the steps built against them on the inside indicated that they must originally have been much higher. The first inhabitants did not level off the interior surface but took advantage of its uneven rocky nature, as at least one rock hollow bore evidence of having been hacked away to make it more suitable for habitation. The fort was obviously built for military purposes and when it ceased to be useful as such it continued to be occupied by a peaceful people who levelled the ground surface and erected stone houses therein. The finds include combs and ornaments of bone, fine glass beads, querns, hones, spindle whorls, iron knives and pins, bronze pins and six stone axes: a date in the 7th or 8th centuries being suggested. Considerable quantities of animal bones were also found.

A trial excavation was made in the second fort, which bears evidence of having had a series of enclosures which contained houses with yards attached.

The excavation of the large circle ("O" of Windle, Proc. R.I.A., Vol. 33) begun in 1896 was completed. The centre of the small inner circle contained a paving of small pebbles and it had at one side an arrangement of large stones, since collapsed, which must have formed a platform or rostrum. No burial was found, but the existence of a slotted-in ditch or fosse concentric with the outer bank and inside it suggests that the whole had a ritual use.
KNOCKNALAPPA CRANNOG, CO. CLARE.

A crannog on the edge of Rosscar Lake, townland of Knocknalappa, Co. Clare, was excavated in August and September, 1937. The work was one item of the Government Relief of Unemployment Scheme, and was undertaken under the auspices of the National Museum and the Board of Public Works.

The site was first brought to notice by Mr. J. N. A. Wallace, of Limerick, and Sergeant Seamus Long, of Newmarket-on-Fergus, who, in June, 1936, found, lying on the foreshore of the site of the crannog, a bronze flange-hilted sword, a bronze socketed gouge, and a polished stone axe.

The excavation showed that the site was an artificial island, having as it base a shoal in the marl of the lake-bottom. The lake must then have been more extensive, but not necessarily higher in level than it is to-day. The area to the landward side of the crannog was then rather deep water, as is shown by a secondary deposit of marl against the artificially-deposited peat of the crannog itself.

It was about 40 m. long, and 15-20 m. wide, the long axis of the oval lying approximately east and west. The main body of the crannog was formed by a deposit of peat, over which were laid down layers of small, sharp stones, mixed with a great quantity of animal bones, of charcoal, and, on top of the latter, of marl (artificial). Practically all the finds, which were very few in number, came from the stone layer. No definite traces of any structure remained, nor was there any evidence of post-holes, sod-buts, etc. That, and the small number of finds, lead one to believe that it was only temporarily used, perhaps as a fishing-station in the summer months. It was not a refuge, and two saddle-urns demonstrate its domestic nature. Save for the sword, weapons were entirely absent. Several amber beads (one 5 cms. diameter), a bronze ring, a length of bronze wire, a degenerate bronze sunflower-pin and part of a lignite bracelet were the chief finds of small objects. As well, the remains of four vessels came to light. They were made of a good, though gritty paste, well-fired, black throughout, and with a thin slip on the outside. The shape is the same in all cases—about 30 cms. high, with a spayed neck, and a slightly bulbous body with everted foot. The bottom was flat. The shape is reminiscent of early Continental Hallstatt forms.

The general contents of the crannog point to a Late Bronze Age date. The sunflower-pin and the pottery both tend to place the site in Mahr's Late Bronze Age B, though a later date is not excluded. Its importance lies in the facts (a) that it is the first definite Late Bronze Age crannog in these islands; and (b) that it has produced the first domestic pottery of the Irish Bronze Age.

Associated with the writer of this short note were Miss Helen M. Roe, M.A.; Miss Ellis MacNeill, and, for a shorter period, Miss Elizabeth Curran, B.A., and Mr. Brendan O'Connor, B.Arch.

LIMERICK IN THE LOST RECORDS.

The lamentable destruction of national records in the Four Courts during the Civil War of 1922 included several hundred cartons of letters and documents relating to 18th century Ireland. These dealt with such interesting matters as Franco-Irish relations, Jacobity, Transportation, Secret Service, Proscribed Priests, &c. A few calendars, which had been prepared shortly before the civil troubles, were saved, however, and these contain a brief summary of the contents of the lost documents. A year or two ago I had occasion, for a particular purpose, to examine the Calendars; and at the time I extracted from their pages the following entries regarding Limerick, which, though but a mere outline of the originals, as has been said, may be of interest to some readers of the Journal.

In the Calendars entitled British Departmental Correspondence (1714-1749) were the following:

"14 July, 1714. Colonel Ullick Browne petitions that the case of James FitzGerald of Owney, Co. Limerick, whose estate was forfeited although he came within the Articles of Limerick, might be reconsidered."

"London, 22 July 1714. The Duke of Shrewsbury to the Lords Justices (of Ireland). Sends petition of Colonel Ullick Browne praying for a Bill to relieve him against seizure of the estate of Mr. James FitzGerald of Owney, Co. Limerick, as having married Mr. FitzGerald's daughter and heirress."

"12 June 1722. The Duke of Grafton (Lord Lieutenant) to the Lords Justices (of Ireland). His Grace thinks it proper that endeavours should be used to apprind John Begley, the pretended V.G. (of Limerick) whose testimonial letter, found upon O'Connor, their Excellencies likewise sent his Grace a copy of."

"Arlington St., 3 April 1729. Lord Carteret to the Lords Justices. Callaghan O'Callaghan, a priest in the gaol of Limerick, charged only, as it would seem by his committal, with celebrating mass, to be released if it should appear that he has not been guilty of any treasonable or seditious practices."

Another Calendar has these entries:

"Petitions of Roman Catholics for licenses to carry arms. From the following:—"

Edmund Forrestal, Gurteen, Co. Kilkenny.
Garrett Barry, formerly of Cullen, Co. Cork.
Daniel Hayes of Glenogra, Co. Limerick.
Lieutenant Michael Fay of Dublin.
Captain Edmund Bely of Conlin, Co. Cavan.
Major Christopher Palles.
Colonel John White of Rathgownane, Co. Limerick."
51 Dec. 1711.

"August 7, 1742. Francis Bourke (or Rourke) attests that John McGuire had professed in the convent of Galbally."

And still another, entitled Presentments, Affidavits, &c., contains the following summaries of original documents:

"Limerick City and County.

"25 July 1714. Richard Roche, one of H.M. Commissaries who mastered the army in the garrison, accused by the Right Hon. George Lord Forrester of being a friend to the Pretender and his cause."

"Limerick City and County.

"25 August 1724. Representation from Grand Jury and Lord Justices as to James Butler of Ballyneety keeping a surprising number of firearms and going about the country attended by a clan of disorderly and desperate young fellows."

Jany. 1725. Limerick City and County

"Information against Richard Roche, Town Clerk of Limerick, for riotous conduct and cursing the Governor and all arbitrary powers."

"Limerick City and County.

"Information of John Waldron of Tantstown as to Silvester O'Sullivan (alias Timothy O'Sullivan) being transported and after returning to the kingdom."

"Limerick City, 31 Jany. 1712. Information of Dr. Zachary Ormsby as to a printed paper called 'The Lord knows what &c.' reflecting on Her Majesty and Her administration, being found in Mr. John Boucher's Coffee House, who stated that he received it from William Waller Esq., of County Tipperary."

"Limerick, 9 March 1746. Presentment of Grand Jury at Assizes under Tory Acts against Michael Mullaney, late of parish of Rathkeale, for enlisting men for foreign service and for marrying a Protestant to a Catholic.

"Three informations enclosed—before Wm. Bury, Henry Southwell, Wm. Massey and John Monsell."

"Limerick, 14 July 1746. Before William Massey. Information of Darby Collins, late of Glin, as to various parties being Papists and carrying arms."

R.H.

THE CASTLE AND MANOR OF DROMINEER. The issue by the Irish Mss. Commission of Vol. IV. of the Cal. Ormond Deeds edited by Dr. Curtis, enables me to add something to what I have written on this subject in the 1935 issue of our Journal. At p. 206 (No. 357) will be found two O'Kennedy Deeds which clear up the position as to the ownership of the Castle and Manor in the first half of the 17th century, and incidentally explain the relevant extract which I gave in a note to p. 24 (of our Journal) from Inq. p.m. of James the 9th Earl of Ormond. This, owing to either a misreading or a transcription error sets out that Conor MacShane "dispossessed" Earl James of Dromineer on the 10th April, 1546. Actually it appears from two Deeds in No. 357 that Conor MacShane granted Dromineer to Earl James by Deed of the 23rd July, 1546, here set out and in return was appointed with his heirs male by the Earl to "the office of Constable of his Manor or Castle of Dromynynne, receiving the ancient fees, commodities, customs and profits as do the Earls other Constables of his manors at Nenagh, Corkebyrne" (i.e., Templemore) and Thurles, and paying to the Earl such services as they are accustomed to render."

There is a further provision that the Earl should be entitled to place some of his own servants in the Castle for defence at Conor's expense, and "if Conor or his heirs resign the office half the crop and implements shall remain to the Earl." Conor MacShane is here also identified to be "Conor O'Kennedy, son of John Kennedy of Agha in Ormond"; Agha, per the Civil Survey, was the old parish name of the united parishes of Nenagh, Dromineer, and Mosea or Moree. There are in this area more than one place name into which "Agha" enters, such as "Carraignagh"; and "Agha McThomas." The latter—now gone as a place name, but formerly situate near the townland of Ballycommon—is the probable place of origin of "Conor MacShane."

DERMOT P. GLEESON.
THE DANISH KINGDOM OF LIMERICK AND MAN.

The following is an extract from a paper by Dr. H. O’Neill Hincken on a “Gaming Board of the Viking Age,” which appeared in the “Acta Archaeologica,” Vol. IV., 1933, Copenhagen. The publication is not available to many of our readers and brings together many interesting details of early Limerick history.

“It will be well then to examine the history of Limerick to see what connection it may have had with the Isle of Man. ... Man was at least from time to time in early Viking days included among the Sudreys or Hebrides, as they are now called. Somewhat later Man, and at least part of the Hebrides, formed one rather unstable and turbulent realm, but the first fairly well authenticated ruler of this scattered domain was a prince of Danish Limerick, Magnus Haraldson, who is mentioned as king of the Isles in 973, and who died about 977. The accession of this Limerick Viking to the control of the Sudreys is an event to be associated with the very definite connection that had existed through much of the tenth century between the islands and Danish Limerick. Among other events that point to this may be mentioned the death of Morann, son of Counra, a Gaill-Gheascail chief from Lewis, who was killed about 953 fighting for the Danes of Limerick against the Irish, and the raid on Scattery Island in the Shannon in 974 by Ivar, King of Limerick, and Magnus Haraldson, the new ruler of Man and the Hebrides.

Now that a connection between the Isle of Man on the one hand, and Danish Limerick and the Shannon on the other, has been shown, further information in the history of the short-lived Scandinavian kingdom must be sought. Established in 920, its capital was sacked and destroyed in 968 by the Irish under Brian Boru with tremendous looking. Ivar, the Danish king escaped, however, but was soon back again and fortified the islands of the Shannon. He evidently returned with considerable force, for, as has already been mentioned, he and his kinsman, Magnus of Sudreys, were raiding up the Shannon in 974. But in 977 Brian and the Irish captured the Shannon forts and again took much plunder, though evidently less than in the sack of Limerick nine years before. Ivar and two of his sons fell by the hand of Brian on Scattery Island, when they had taken sanctuary in the monastery of St. Senan. This blow put an end to the Danish kingdom and its territories were thenceforth in the hands of the Irish. With 977, therefore, the direct connection between the Shannon and Man ceased.

It will also be well to mention the importance of Limerick in the 10th century as a port. It is well known that the Scandinavian towns along the Irish coast were always chief centres of foreign trade, and in this “Limerick of the Ships” took a prominent part. The rich plunder that fell to Brian and his Irish warriors in 968, and even in 977, gives some indication not only of its wealth and far flung commerce, but of the vigour with which it was re-establishing itself between the defeat of 968 and its final destruction nine years later. ... It is important to remember, however, that the Viking was a trader as well as a pirate, for in reading of the hurly-burly of raiding and rapine which the Irish annalists record this is apt to be forgotten. Also, it appears, as is quite natural, that the Shannon was frequented by the ships of the Limerick Vikings. The raid on Scattery in 974 is only one instance of their expeditions, some of which carried them as far as Lough Ree.

After 977, Limerick remained a Danish town—there are still Danes there two centuries later—but the river and the old Scandinavian territories were now firmly in the grasp of the Gaels, the feuds that now sailed up the Shannon were Irish and there is little indication that the people of the once prosperous port still maintained the rich commerce that had brought them wealth. Limerick is mentioned as being captured and destroyed now and again in the eleventh century in the course of the fighting that was continually springing up, but after 977 it is not spoken of as a place of much importance until the king of Cashel moved his residence there about 1100. Unlike the story of its capture by Brian, the later tales of its burning are not accompanied by mention of rich booty, which we now hear of in connection with Dublin and Kincora.”