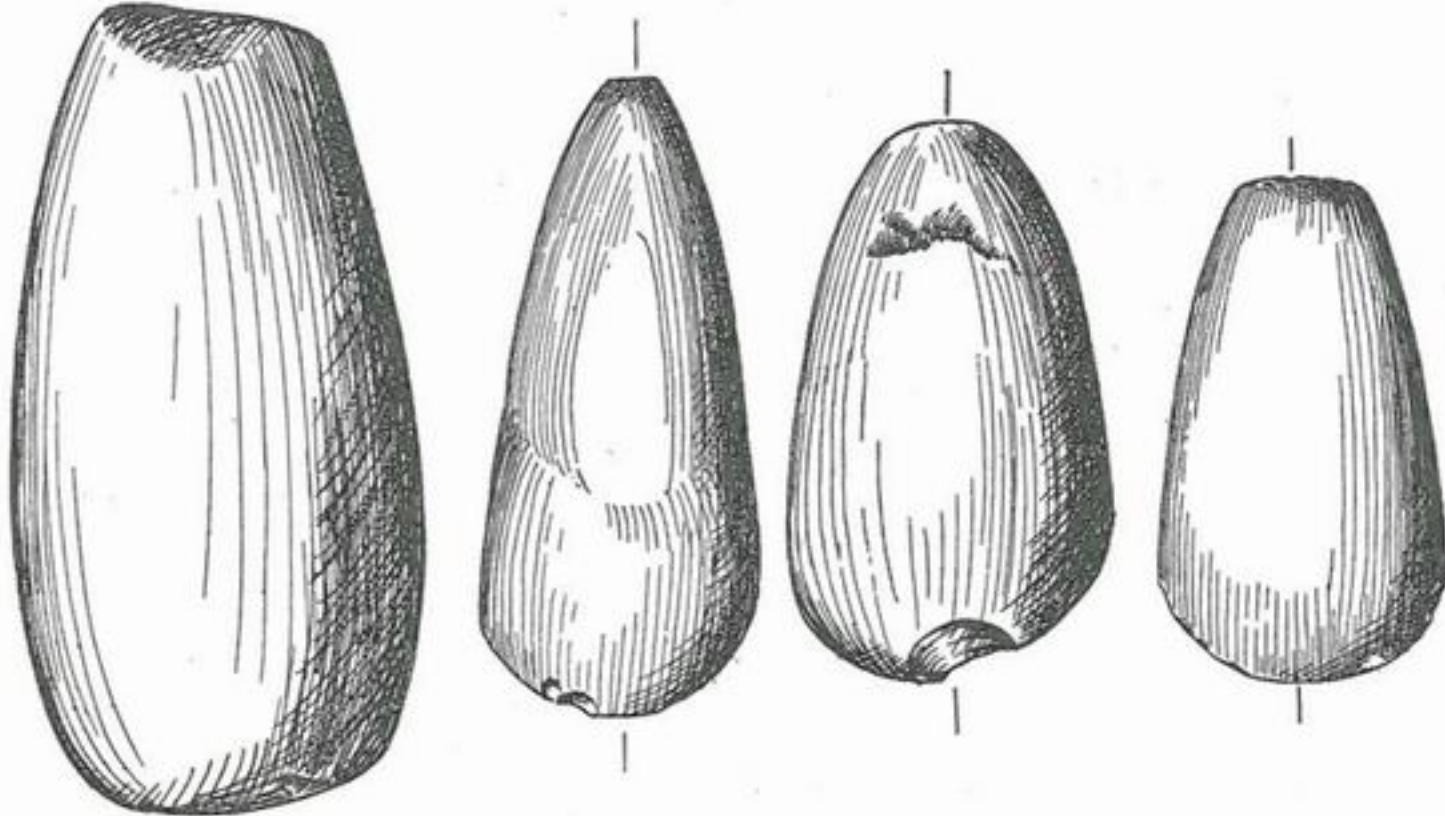


Miscellanea.

STONE AXES FROM RATHJORDAN.

Our illustration shows four stone axes found about 1918 in Rathjordan townland, near Herbertstown, Co. Limerick, and acquired from the landowner and finder, Mr. P. Malachi Fogarty, for the Museum of University College, Cork, by Professor Sean P. Ó Riordain, who has been conducting excavations at Lough Gur in the same neighbourhood. While stone axes of this type are frequently found, those from Rathjordan acquire a special interest because of the circumstances of their discovery. All were found in the same field, and this field, during a period of four years when it was under tillage, produced dozens of stone axes. Mr. Fogarty insists that it is not an exaggerated estimate to state that almost a ton of axes was found. There can be no doubt that the find place was a centre of prehistoric habitation, and it is to be regretted that the finds did not come to notice sooner, as only these few implements have been preserved of the many found there.



EXCAVATIONS AT LOUGH GUR, 1938.

The third season's excavations began in June and continued to October, under the supervision of Professor S. P. Ó Riordain, assisted by other archaeologists.

Last year one of the two stone forts on Carrigally Hill, on the eastern side of the lake, was investigated; this season the principal monument excavated was the second (southern) stone fort and a series of attached house-sites. This fort, though appearing much less imposing than the northern one before excavation, proved in many respects to be more interesting. The fort walls, which had become almost completely covered over, were found to be about fifteen feet thick and built of massive well-shaped blocks of stone, and the space enclosed was roughly circular with an internal diameter of 120 feet approximately. The entrance was found on the eastern side and is an interesting feature, being particularly well-built. It is five feet wide and at either side is a recess in the stone work into which were slid the two halves of the gate, which closed the entrance.

Outside the entrance is a paving of large stones which covered also one side of the approach through the walls. The other side was not paved with large stones, but was cobbled with river pebbles at a lower level. It would appear that when the fort was in use the cobbled surface was used for the horses of the fort dwellers, while the paved path was that used by the inhabitants themselves.

Within the fort, stone paving was found in various places. This represents the floors of the ancient houses and it, as well as such remains of the walls as are available, shows that the houses consisted in general of a series of rectangular rooms which were placed together to give an irregular plan. In some of the rooms hearths were found, while outside the houses were traces of other fires in various places, there having been one very large fire just inside the rampart on the eastern side of the fort. A long rectangular house stood also immediately outside the southern side of the rampart, and had evidently been so built that the face of the fort wall was used as one wall of the house.

On the northern side of the fort and lying between this fort and the one excavated last year are the remains of a group or houses with attached yards which give evidence of a settlement attached to the fort. The discovery of these houses is of importance for the study of early economic and social conditions in Ireland, because almost the only habitations known hitherto are found within fortified sites and it is probable that these Lough Gur houses are only the first of many early houses yet to be discovered in various parts of the country and situated outside forts or completely unattached to such fortified sites. The houses are of different types. All had stone walls and at least one had a series of wooden posts, of which the post holes were discovered inside the walls; these posts evidently served as additional supports to which were affixed the timbers of the roof, which rested on the tops of the stone walls.

The "finds" consist mainly of implements and ornaments of every day use: iron knives, spear-head, nails, rings, hooks, stone spindle whorls, whet-stones, querns, stone mortars, stone axes, hammer stones, loom weights, flint scrapers and knives, bone pins and needles, bone spindle whorls, bone comb,

scoops, bronze fragments of vessel, pins and brooches, rings, glass beads. Outstanding finds are a brooch of silvered bronze with interlaced ornament; a bronze animal-head (zoomorphic) mount, a bronze pin of the type known as a hand-pin. One of the bone combs bears a pleasing ornament of animal heads. A coin found in one of the houses has been identified by a British Museum expert as an imitation of a Roman coin of the reign of Constantius (4th century). Such imitation coins remained in use to a much later date than that to which the original must be assigned.

A find of considerable interest and importance is a small hoard of Viking silver ornaments, consisting of seven pieces: three fragments of bracelets, a ring and three ingots. The ingots show that the hoard was, or had been, the property of a metal-worker, and the fragments of bracelets were obviously intended to be melted down for re-working. The hoard was found in a space among the stones of the inner face of the rampart.

The fort and house sites may be dated by the finds to the Viking period—9th and 10th centuries.

A megalithic tomb, known as the Giant's Grave, situated on the lands of Mr. David Barry, south of the lake, was excavated during September under the supervision of Mr. G. Ó h-Iceadha.

The structure, which is of limestone, extends in an almost east and west direction, is 25 feet long, 12 feet wide, and has five capstones, four of which cover the main chamber and rest on the large stones which compose its walls, while the fifth capstone, now fallen, originally covered a small chamber at the western end. Secondary or outer walls, of thin flags, extend parallel to the main walls along the north and south sides and are separated from the main walls by a filling of small stones closely packed. This feature has, unfortunately, almost completely disappeared on the north side where the ground slopes down to the lake.

Excavation of the western chamber revealed a stone filling with a burial and pottery fragments in its upper layers, the skeleton having been placed in the chamber after the disintegration of the body. At a slightly lower level in this chamber a neatly constructed cist measuring 18 inches by 15 inches, and containing cremated bones and potsherds was uncovered.

The main chamber produced an extensive charcoal layer at the west end, while at the eastern end two burials with pottery fragments were found extending along and close to the north and south walls respectively.

The filling in the intact south wall yielded potsherds and bones at various levels. Pottery fragments were also found scattered over a considerable area around and outside the monument, and several small hearths containing cremated bone and potsherds were revealed on the south side.

The numerous potsherds recovered from the site included specimens of various dates from Neolithic to Late Bronze Age, and some beaker fragments. Other finds include a flint scraper and flint knife.

The work at Lough Gur, as in 1936 and 1937, was carried out as part of a Government Employment Scheme.