

Two Bronze Age Burials from Reardnogy More, Co. Tipperary

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The two burials to be described were found in 1959 and 1969 respectively in Reardnogy More townland, near Rearcross, Co. Tipperary.¹ The site of the burials is on the south-eastern slope of Barnarhu Hill at an elevation of about 700 feet above O.D. In the next townland, to the east, lies Baurnadomeeny wedge-shaped gallery grave, excavated in 1959 by Professor M. J. O'Kelly,² and to the north, in the neighbouring townland of Bealaclave, a small cist-grave was found in 1963.³

Burial 1, the first to be discovered, was found when a large, recumbent, oblong stone projecting above the surface of a field was removed. Beneath it was found a stone slab which proved to be the covering stone of a pit containing a cremated burial.⁴ The slab was approximately rectangular in plan, 57 cm. long, 54 cm. wide and 6 cm. thick. The pit had been dug to a depth of 44 cm. into yellow clay which lay below approximately 20 cm. of humus (Fig. 1). It was flat-bottomed, of approximately circular shape, 50 cm. in diameter at its mouth and 47 cm. at bottom. The pit contained cremated human bones,⁵ with which were mixed a number of fragments of charcoal, of oak (*Quercus*) and ash (*Fraxinus*).⁶

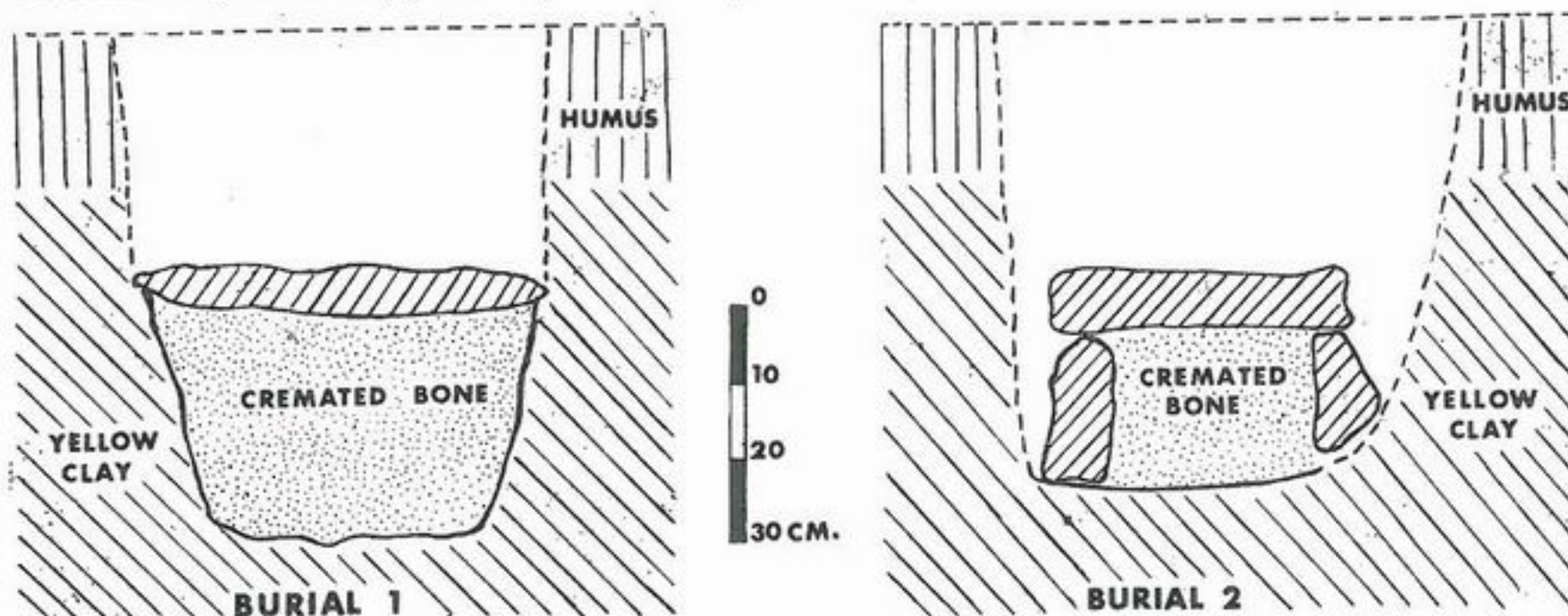


Fig. 1. Cross-sections of pit-burials at Reardnogy More, Co. Tipperary

¹ Par. Abington; Bar. Owey and Arra; Co. Tipperary; O.S. 6-inch sheet 38 (32.3 cm. from N. and 28.4 cm. from E.); Nat. Grid Ref. R.843.592.

² *NMAJ*, 8 (1958-61), 62a-63; *JCHAS*, 65(1960), 85-115.

³ E. Rynne, *NMAJ*, 9 (1962-65), 89-93.

⁴ This burial was investigated by Miss E. M. Prendergast, M.A., National Museum of Ireland. The Museum authorities are grateful to Mr. Michael Carey, Rearcross, who kindly donated the bones, and to Sergeant P. Fitzpatrick, then of Rearcross Garda Station, who reported the discovery.

⁵ Reg. No. 1959:16. Professor E. Keenan, Department of Anatomy, University College, Dublin, kindly reported that the fragmented and warped condition of the bones did not permit any estimate of the number of skeletons nor could any physical characteristics be recognized.

⁶ Kindly identified by Miss Maura Scannell, B.Sc., Natural History Division, National Museum of Ireland.

The original position of the large oblong stone, which had projected above the surface, could not be ascertained. When removed, it was found to overlie the covering slab of the pit and it may have been meant to provide additional protection for the burial. It measured 170 cm. in length, 84 cm. in maximum width, and 29 cm. in average thickness, and being so large, it is not inconceivable that it once stood upright to mark the place of burial.

Burial 2 was found approximately 10 metres to the west of Burial 1. It was discovered in January 1969 when a portion of the field was being cut away with a mechanical excavator. This, unfortunately, resulted in considerable disturbance to the cremated remains and to the pit which contained them. However, the accounts of those who witnessed the discovery provide a reasonably clear picture of the burial. A pit, approximately 45 cm. deep, had been dug into the yellow clay which lay beneath approximately 20 cm. of humus. It contained a deposit of cremated bones accompanied by a bronze blade.⁷ The cremated bones were protected by three small

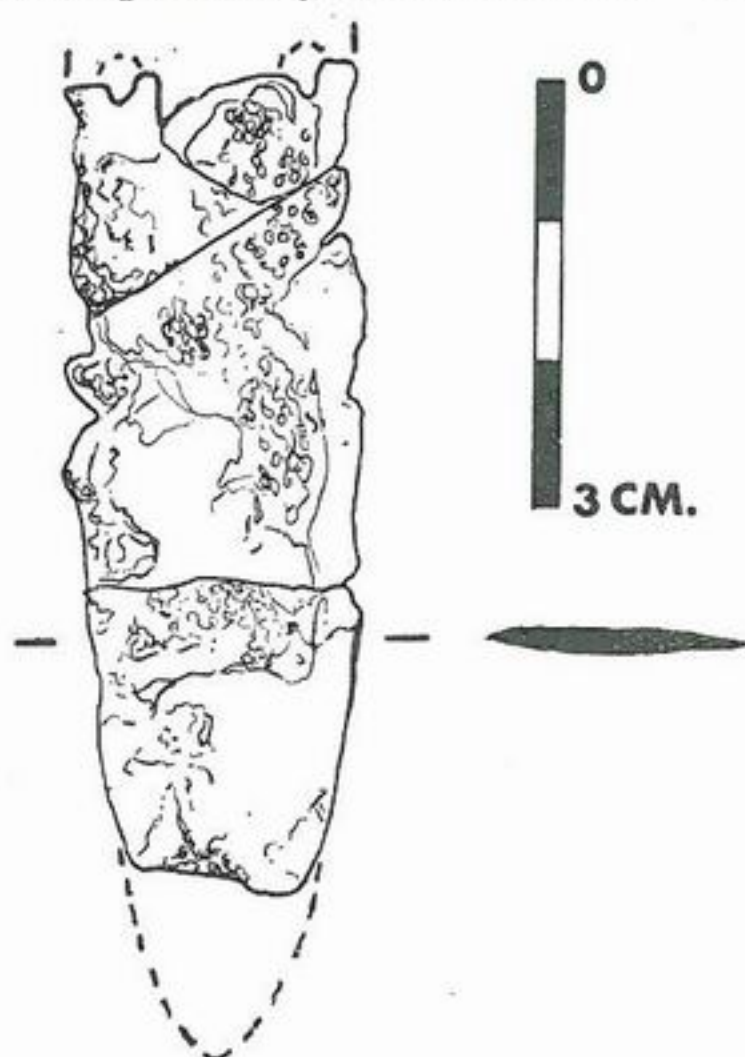


Fig. 2. Bronze blade from Burial 2, Reardnogy More, Co. Tipperary

stone slabs (Fig. 1). The largest was triangular in shape, 40 cm. in maximum length, 24 cm. in maximum width, and 7 cm. in maximum thickness; it lay on top of the bones and rested on two smaller stones placed at opposite sides of the pit; these stones measured 20 x 17 x 7 cm. and 16 x 16 x 9 cm. respectively. Only portion of the bottom of the pit survived and its outline, shown in Fig. 1, is conjectural.

The cremated bones are those of an adult, probably female, of small to average build.⁸ The four fragments of bronze which were found among the bones represent the greater portion of a small bronze double-edged blade of flat oval cross-section. It is slightly twisted, perhaps as a result of burning, and somewhat corroded. The sharp, clean edges of the fractures suggest that it was broken on discovery; the extreme tip was not recovered. The end of the hafting-plate is also missing, but in this case it would appear that the loss occurred in antiquity because the fractured edge is as

⁷ This burial was investigated by the writer. The Museum authorities are grateful to Mr. Edmond Nolan, Reardnogy More, who kindly donated the bones and fragments of bronze (Reg. Nos. 1969:2 and 3 respectively), and to Sergeant Noel Egan, Rearcross Garda Station, Mr. Dermot Fogarty, Newport, and Mr. J. Armshaw, P.C., Bauradomeeny, for their assistance in various ways.

⁸ Professor C. A. Erskine, Department of Anatomy, Trinity College, Dublin, who examined the bones, kindly reported: "This collection, comprised of a large number of small (up to 2-3 cms.) pieces of cremated human bones, belongs to one individual. Among about 20 larger pieces of 3-4 cms. are parts of skull—orbital region, mandible (including head and neck), teeth fragments; and also long bones, fragments of phalanges and vertebrae. These indicate an adult, probably female, of small to average build. No pathological changes were found."

corroded as the surfaces of the blade; traces of two rivet-holes survive. The present maximum length of the blade is 6 cm., maximum width 2.1 cm., and maximum thickness 2 mm.

Discussion

Pit-burials are a well known feature of the Irish Bronze Age and may contain unburnt or cremated remains,⁹ the latter frequently contained in a cinerary urn.¹⁰ Pits containing only a deposit of cremated bone are known from a number of flat cemeteries, e.g. at Scarawalsh, Co. Wexford.¹¹ Isolated pits containing only cremated bones are known, for example, from Dunmore, Co. Donegal,¹² and Clonickilvant, Co. Westmeath,¹³ and are relatively rare. However, their rarity may be more apparent than real, due to the fact that they, more than any type of grave, are most liable to escape detection in the course of ploughing or gravel-working. Pit-burials are frequently protected by a single flat slab as in Burial 1; the arrangement of stones in Burial 2 is unusual but finds a parallel in an ill-recorded flat cemetery at Gortnacor, Co. Antrim, where a number of cinerary urns were each protected "by two upright and one covering stone."¹⁴

The small bronze blade found with Burial 2 is of a type generally referred to as 'razors,' of Early to Middle Bronze Age date, and the subject of a recent study by Eileen Binchy in *North Munster Studies*.¹⁵ Miss Binchy modified Butler and Smith's twofold sub-division of Class I razors, her terms 'razor-knives' and 'razors' corresponding approximately to their Class 1A and Class 1B. The Reardnogy More specimen is a 'razor-knife' and when complete probably resembled the example from Rahinashu-rock, Co. Westmeath.¹⁶ It is noteworthy that it should have been found with the remains of a woman because until now, in those Irish burials where it has been found possible to determine the sex of an individual accompanied by a razor, all such remains have proved to be those of males.¹⁷ It is quite possible that the Reardnogy More blade was used as a razor by a woman; its association with a cremation might reflect the practice in the Wessex Culture of south-eastern England of depositing depilatory bone tweezers with such burials.¹⁸ It represents a welcome addition to the growing number of razors from North Munster.¹⁹

⁹ R. A. S. Macalister, *The Archaeology of Ireland*, London 1928, p. 110.

¹⁰ For example the two urn-burials at Cush, Co. Limerick, reported by E. Rynne and J. C. O'Sullivan in *NMAJ*, 10 (1966-67), 103-107.

¹¹ E. Rynne, *JRSAI*, 96 (1966), 44-45.

¹² *JRSAI*, 92(1962), 152.

¹³ R. S. Vandeleur, *Ríocht na Midhe*, 3 (1963-66), 256-7; *JRSAI*, 97 (1967), 11.

¹⁴ S. F. Milligan, *JRSAI*, 36 (1906), 43.

¹⁵ E. Binchy, "Irish Razors and Razor-Knives of the Middle Bronze Age," *North Munster Studies* (ed. E. Rynne), Limerick 1967, pp. 43-60.

¹⁶ P. Danaher, *Ríocht na Midhe*, 3 (1963-66), 228, fig. 2; Binchy, *op. cit.*, p. 60, fig. 3, no. 36.

¹⁷ Binchy, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

¹⁸ F. K. Annable and D. D. A. Simpson, *Guide Catalogue of the Neolithic and Bronze Age Collections in Devizes Museum*, Devizes 1964, p. 25.

¹⁹ Glenaree, Co. Limerick (Binchy, *op. cit.*, p. 56), and two examples from Cush, Co. Limerick (Rynne and O'Sullivan, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-107).