Miscellanea.

BULLA OF BONIFACE VIII. FROM CO. LIMERICK CHURCHYARD.

A lead Bulla of Pope Boniface VIII. (1294-1303) was picked up last October in a sandpit outside the west wall of Knockannahola graveyard in the parish of Adare. The churchyard crowns a gravelly hillock above the junction of the Grianach and Cullaceach streams a mile west of the point where their joint waters enter the Malgue. As human bones have frequently been uncovered in the sandpit, we may conclude that this area was formerly part of the cemetery and that the seal probably came from a grave. The disc is a little larger than a half crown piece and has raised work on both faces. It is now in the Limerick City Museum.

Such leaden seals (Bullae) were used to authenticate documents even in Roman republican times. Since the sixth century at least, the Popes have used them for such purposes: with the passing of the centuries popular usage applies the term Papal Bull not so much to the seal as to the document (grant, decision, privilege or whatever it may be) to which the seal is attached with strings. About 1160 the Bulls assumed their present form showing the heads of SS. Peter and Paul on one side, and the name of the reigning Pope on the reverse. The heads are in low relief and are surmounted by the indications S.PE and S.PA respectively. The Pontiff's name appears in raised capitals—in the present case:—

BONI
PATRIS
PP VIII.

A seal, similar in all respects, except that it bears the name of Innocent IV. (1243-1254), was found with a coin of Thurl and Mary on the top of the Belfry tower at Ballybeg Priory, near Buttevant, during Board of Works repairs in 1932. The house was founded by the Barrys for the Augustinian Canons: the evidence of documents and the masonry indicate that the Priory was actually built in the decade preceding Pope Innocent’s reign. When we seek for foundation dates for the oldest religious houses at Adare, we are in the midst of conflicting statements. Ware says the Trinitarians came in the reign of Edward I. (1272-1307). López gives an earlier date, but the Trinitarians do not accept him as a reliable source. The house certainly existed before the end of Pope Boniface’s reign, for it is mentioned in the Taxation of 1302. The same source shows the Knights Hospitallers had claims at the time on the parish revenues; possibly they had a foundation, too. According to the charter of Thomas, second Earl of Kildare, the Augustinians were introduced to Adare by his father, the date usually assigned is 1269, but John, the father of Thomas, was lord of Adare from 1287 to his death in 1316, so the Augustinian Priory may well date from Boniface’s pontificate or slightly earlier. One or other of the communities existed in the place in 1292 as the Calendar of Documents mentions a land grant to Adare convent that year.

Westropp mentions Knockannahola as a cemetery in his R.I.A. paper on Limerick churches: the name does not appear in any medieval church list nor in White’s seventeenth century compilation. Dinneen’s dictionary, under ‘ualadhi’ (m and f); ‘ula’ as a variant gives “an ula, a monument, especially a square altar of dry masonry surmounted by a cross, chiefly found in the Gaelic fringe at centres of pilgrimage, a station in doing rounds . . . .” He quotes examples of the use of the word at Ballyvourney and Cenman oscill. The lower courses of such a masonry altar as he suggests are still discernible at Knockannahola. This may explain the name of the churchyard—Chocan na h-Ula.

SOME NOTABLE LIMERICK DOCTORS: Thomas Arthur’s Papers.

Edward Mac Lysaght, who was working on the Arthur MSS. in the British Museum, in a letter to Dr. Richard Hayes with regard to the latter’s paper in this Journal (1938) calls attention to the following points:—

1. Dr. Arthur’s fee book goes on till 1668, not 1663.
2. Only a very small portion of the Diary was published in the Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland. There are 285 folios (over 500 pages) in the original. The part published was a section—about one third—of the fee and case book, itself less than one third of the whole. All or most of the MS. is to be published by the Manuscripts Commission.

HOLY WELL AT CURRAGH CHASE.

Last summer I asked the gardener at Curragh Chase if he ever heard the name of the Patron Saint of the Holy Well there, and if he knew what complaints it was supposed to cure or benefit. (I knew that his Grandmother, who lived to a great age, was supposed to have much local lore). He said his grandmother told him that “in the old days it was frequented by the Lepers,” and it was called “Siven” with an accent on—een.

But he never heard a Saint’s name coupled with it.

I wonder if any of our readers can throw any light on this curious name, and if any other Holy Wells were supposed to benefit Lepers.

EXCAVATIONS AT LOUGH GUR, 1939.

For four consecutive seasons archaeological excavations have been carried out in the vicinity of Lough Gur, Co. Limerick, under the State Employment Schemes. During these four seasons many sites have been excavated, including three stone circles, and some Neolithic houses. Each season’s work has
produced important results, but those obtained during the 1939 campaign have been of outstanding significance for Irish archaeology. The work has been conducted throughout by Dr. Sean P. O’Riordain, Professor of Archaeology at University College, Cork. During this year’s excavations Professor O’Riordain has had the assistance of a number of university students, in addition to his ordinary staff. About twenty-five students took part in the investigations for periods varying from a few days to over a month, and this new development is looked on as a very healthy one for archaeology in this country. Some of the student helpers is the earliest and best of field work that it is hoped that the Lough Gur excavations will prove a training ground for a new school of excavators in Southern Ireland, and thus supply a much-felt want in Irish archaeology, where the work to be done is so much in excess of the available experts.

The workmen, recruited from the local unemployed, numbered about thirty, and were employed for about three months, during which three sites were excavated.

SITE I: STONE CIRCLE.

The principal site dealt with this year was a large stone circle on the western side of the lake, near the Bruff-Limerick road, the best known monument in the Lough Gur area, and, probably, the finest stone circle in Ireland. Permission to excavate was kindly granted by the owner of the monument, the Count de Sala. The fine state of preservation of this circle is due at least in part to the care devoted to it by the de Salas family, as owners, and by their tenants, the Fitzgeralds. This monument consists of a circle of large stones backed up by a huge bank of earth, with a smooth level, open interior space, having a diameter of about 155 feet, while the bank outside the stones varies in width between 20 and 40 feet.

Most of the stones are large—a few of them being exceptionally so. The largest measures fourteen feet high, by seven feet wide, and is four feet thick. The stone, in common with the other large ones, is of a volcanic breccia obtainable from a hilltop outcrop about three miles from the site. The enormous labour must have been expended by the builders in bringing it from the source of supply. Most of the other stones are of limestone, which is the characteristic rock in the district.

The entrance, a passage lined on each side with flat slabs of stone, is on the east. It has a floor of hard-packed gravel and cuss through the bank, passing to the interior through a portal formed by two very large stones. The grass level inside the circle is approximately two feet higher than the grass level of the surrounding fields. Excavation showed that this difference in level was artificially produced; the ancient builders had packed small boulders against the bases of the circle slabs and then raised the interior level to cover these and give an even floor.

Almost all the finds came from the original top level, recognizable under the two-foot layer of filling. They consist of tools and weapons of flint and very many fragments of pottery. Of these it is mainly on the pottery finds that conclusions as to the date of the monument are based. The pottery consisted of Neolithic (Late Stone Age), Early Bronze Age and “Beaker” wares. Since Neolithic pottery has hitherto been found only very sporadically in Ireland, except in the north-east of the country, the finding of a considerable amount of it of various types, in the stone circle, opens up quite new possibilities in Irish Pre-history. What is known as “Beaker” pottery, of the Early Bronze Age, is a type well known in Britain and the Continent, but its almost complete absence in Ireland has long been a maxim of the text-books. Recent excavations, including that at Lough Gur in 1938, have produced some “Beaker” fragments. This year the stone circle produced parts of several pots of this class, including one which the excavators were able to reconstruct, and which it may be claimed is the first normal beaker, similar to those found in Great Britain, yet got in Ireland.

The stone finds included flint scrapers, blades and arrow heads, as well as some stone axes. A fragment of a bronze bracelet was also found. On the evidence of the finds a date of about 1700 B.C. is suggested for the erection of the monument, and the evidence obtained goes to show that it had a ritual purpose; that it was a pagan religious centre; a prehistoric temple.

SITE II: NEOLITHIC HOUSES IN KNOCKADOON.

The second site, excavated by kind permission of Mr. R. Ryan, T.D., was a group of Neolithic houses situated at Knockadoon, on an island, now a peninsula in the lake.

Two house-sites were excavated. The finds consisted of Neolithic pottery, flints, stone axes, and other implements. Since some of the pottery fragments came from the actual material of the walls, there can be no doubt that the houses date from the Late Stone Age times.

One of the houses was of exceptionally fine construction. Its walls, if roughly built, were perfectly straight, and still remained to a height of about two feet. There were four rows of seven post-holes each in the interior, and corresponding post-holes immediately outside. These held the supports of the roof. The house was 22 feet long and 18 feet in width. It is clear that the lower parts of the walls were stone-built, the upper structure being of wood and thatch. The posts divided it into a long central space, in which the fire was placed, and side aisles, which were evidently the sleeping compartments. When it is remembered that this house dates from about 4000 years ago it will be realised how astounding is the discovery. It is the earliest house ever found in this country, and since the type is one known in various periods in Northern Europe, its discovery reveals a new chapter in the matter of Ireland’s rôle in the early cultural connections.

While it was possible to excavate only two houses on Knockadoon, there are indications of the existence of many others, and it is possible that further work there may show that the site is really a Stone Age village.

SITE III : EARLY CHRISTIAN PERIOD DWELLINGS.

The third site, on a plateau on the eastern side of the lake, was another group of houses, within
small, early fields—the fields of the ancient farmers who lived there. This investigation was carried out on the land of Mrs. M. Connolly, who very kindly gave permission for the excavation.

Two of the houses were stone built, one being circular and one rectangular. The circular house was approached by a fine paved causeway. Other houses nearby were built of wood. In the houses were found the objects of everyday life possessed by the inhabitants—bone scoops, ornamental bone combs, flints, whet-stones, bronze pins, querns, glass beads.

The site is an interesting example of an unfortified farmstead. (The best-known dwelling sites in this country are those enclosed by forts of earth or stone). It may be said that the site represents the ancient "Farm by Lough Gur," and it is interesting to note that it stands on the lands of its modern successor, so well known from the recent book of that name.

The Lough Gur district is far from being archaeologically exhausted, but the work done in it so far tends to present us with an archaeological history of Ireland in miniature.

LIMERICK PRINTED BOOKS.

I am at present compiling a bibliography of Limerick-printed books, up to the year 1900, and would be very grateful to receive from members particulars of any book, pamphlet, newspaper, broadsheet, song-book, chap-book, poster, handbill, etc., printed in Limerick before this date. The following particulars would be suitable:—1. Transcript Title-page. 2. Size (in inches or centimetres). 3. Pagination. 4. Binding. 5. Imprint at end (if any). 6. Any other interesting details.

R. HERBERT,
City Library.