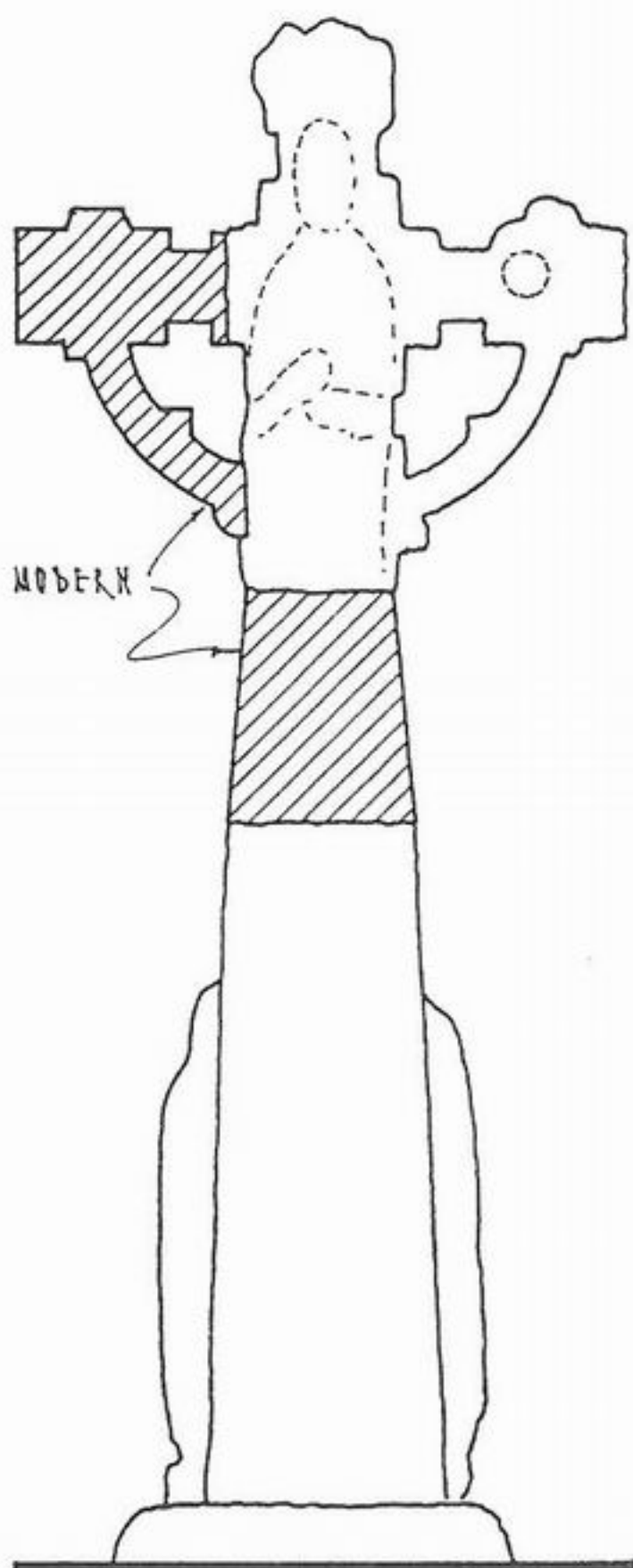
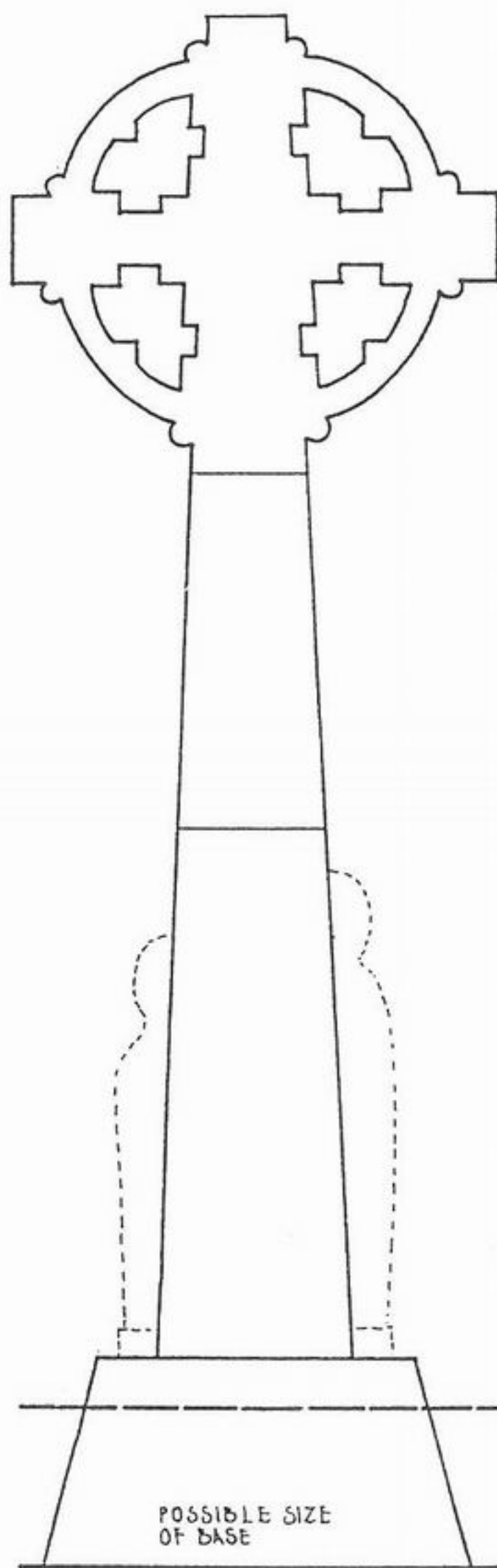


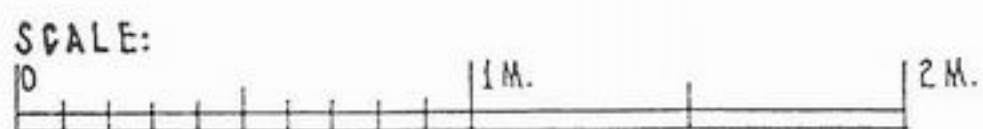
# ROSCREA.



ELEVATION OF EAST FACE OF THE  
ROSCREA CROSS SHOWING THE EXISTING  
FRAGMENTS AND MODERN  
RECONSTRUCTED SECTIONS.



ORIGINAL HEIGHT OF ROSCREA CROSS.



Illus. 1.

## MISCELLANEA

### A NOTE ON THE RECONSTRUCTED HIGH CROSS AT ROSCREA, CO. TIPPERARY

A fine high cross, of 12th century date, can be seen beside the remaining Romanesque facade of the church at Roscrea. At present the structure of this cross consists of four stones. The southern side of the cross-head and the section of shaft below the cross-head are modern, concrete additions. The other two stones which comprise the rest of the cross-head and the lowest section of the shaft are part of the original cross and belong to the twelfth century. It has been taken for granted that what we see today provides us with a view of the cross as it would have been in its complete form, but closer examination shows that its proportions are now incorrectly represented by the modern, concrete part of the shaft. If the size and form of the surviving original portion of the shaft are considered, it can be calculated that the entire cross was once much taller and of more impressive and harmonious proportions. This lower stone is 1.68m. high. It is 61cm. wide at its base and tapers to a width of 49cm. at its upper edge. The lower edge of the cross-head itself measures 41cm. in width. It can be calculated, therefore, that if the rate of taper is to be continued evenly up the entire height of the cross-shaft then the missing upper part of the shaft would once have been approximately 1.12m. high. This means that the present concrete insertion is only about half as high as it should be. (Illus. 1 shows the present cross in its reconstructed state and the corrected version showing its original height.) It can also be noted that at present most of the base of the cross is sunk into the ground. Re-instating this would add to the height of the cross, although the suggested form of the base, as seen in the drawing, is conjectural. It would be interesting to excavate this base as the shapes of twelfth century cross-bases vary considerably and often include decorative and figurative carving. The cross is unlikely to have ever had a capstone as this feature of the earlier crosses seems to have vanished by the twelfth century. Taking the various factors into consideration it can be estimated that the original height of the cross was about 4.45m. and if the conjectural base is added it would have reached a height of about 5.00m.

The reconstructed part of the cross-head is simply a mirror image of the part that survives. It therefore presents no problems in assessing the form of the original. However, on the actual twelfth century part of the head there is a circular depression in the east face of the arm and a square one at its end. These holes are approximately 10cm. wide and deep. Similar holes occur in various places on several of the twelfth century crosses and perhaps indicate that a practice had developed of keying-in to the main form additional carvings. If this was the case then it must be remembered that the appearance of the Roscrea cross-head might have been radically changed, together with its proportionate relationship to the shaft and base.

There are still questions left unanswered in this re-assessment of the original form of the Roscrea cross. However, what can be gathered from calculating the original height of the shaft, based on the existing measurements, is that this cross was once even more imposing and gracefully proportioned than it now appears. Within the corpus of extant twelfth century Irish high crosses its design and its decoration are quite unique.

SUSANNE MCNAB



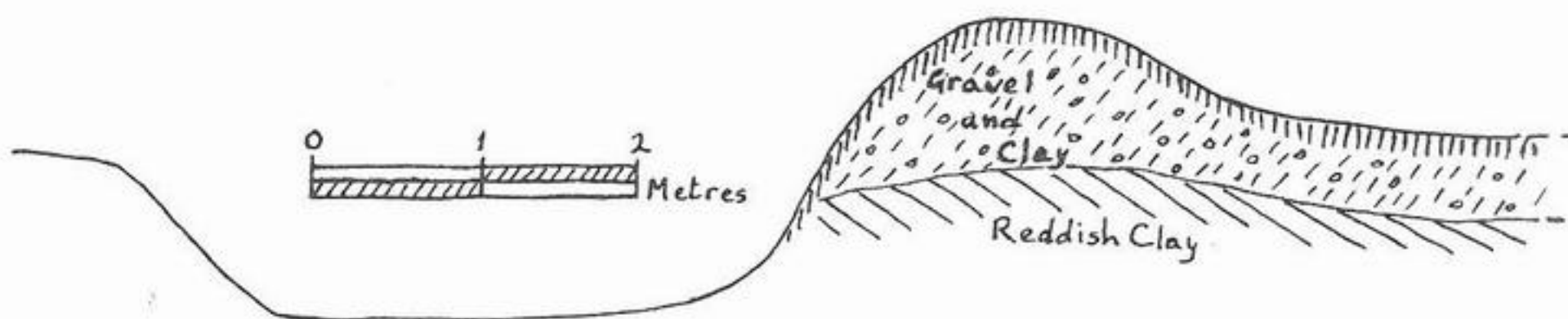
## A DESTROYED RATH AT KILSCANNELL, NEAR ARDAGH, CO. LIMERICK

In August 1985 a rath, or earthen ringfort, near Ardagh, Co. Limerick, was destroyed during land reclamation. Though the Ordnance Survey 6-inch scale map shows the bank and surrounding fosse as surviving only in its north-western segment, one of us (J. McM.) remembers the western half of the site still there in 1980, though very overgrown with hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel, briars and three or four ash-trees. This made measuring both the ditch and bank very difficult, but the former was estimated at about 16-20ft. in width and 3-4ft. in depth; the bank was about 9ft. wide and 3-4ft. above the level of the interior of the rath. Measuring across the site from the outer edges of the bank, it was 140ft. in diameter.

The site is in the townland of Kilscannell, parish of Kilscannell, barony of Connello Lower, and can be plotted on O.S. 6-inch sheet no. 28 for Co. Limerick, 20cm. from the eastern margin and 30.5cm. from the southern margin, Nat. Grid Ref. 13098 13934; about two miles east of Ardagh.

The traxcavator used to level the remaining portions of the rath first stripped it of the overgrowth, reducing the height of the bank by up to 2ft., pulling it in towards the interior of the site. The top 9-12 inches of the bank was seen to be of dark humus and the next foot or so below that of yellow clay. Next, the machine was used to pull the bank from the outside into the fosse. From the top downwards the bank was seen to consist of alternate layers of dark top-soil, yellow clay, reddish soil and more yellow clay.

When the site was visited by both of us, we found that the southern, some of the western and all of the eastern portions of the site had been destroyed, leaving only a short length in the north, and that in poor condition; this had survived because it formed part of a field-boundary between two farms. Nonetheless, it was possible to make a rather rough-and-ready measured sketch (Illus. 2) showing that the outer fosse was 4.0m. in width and



Illus. 2. Sketch-section through bank of rath at Kilscannell, Co. Limerick.

1.0m. in depth, that the bank was 2.90m. in width, rose 1.60m. above the bottom of the fosse and about 50cm. above the interior of the site; the interior was measured at about 35m. in diameter.

It is regrettable that this rath, albeit somewhat incomplete for a long time previously, should have been destroyed before being properly surveyed and exploratory trial excavations undertaken. One would have thought that its presence just east of Rearasta, the rath in which the Ardagh Chalice was found in 1868, would have made it more worthy of respect.

JERRY MCMAHON and ETIENNE RYNNE

## BURIALS AT STRADBALLY NORTH, CASTLECONNELL, CO. LIMERICK

In 1974 trenching for a new sewer revealed human remains in a field in the townland of Stradbally North, adjacent to Chapel Hill, Castleconnell (O.S. 6-inch scale sheet 1; 8.3cm. from S. and 31.3cm. from W.), and the site was visited by Dr. Elizabeth Shee of the Department of Archaeology, University College, Cork, at the request of the National Museum. The remains were orientated east-west but there was no definite dating evidence for them and, in her report, Dr. Shee recommended that future work in the field should be monitored. In March 1990 the writer undertook trial-trenching, in advance of proposed redevelopment of the field, to determine the extent of the burials.

Three parallel trenches were excavated by machine on a north-south line across the field. The first trench produced nothing of archaeological interest but in the second trench a single shallow burial was uncovered with a possible second grave adjacent to it. The skeleton was orientated East-West but there were no finds to date the burial. The third trench revealed no burials but at a depth of c.80cm., under a c.45cm. thick layer of what was initially believed to be boulder clay, was a thin spread of charcoal containing iron slag. Nothing was found to date this iron-working but its position within the trench suggests that it could be of some antiquity and it certainly appears to pre-date the burials. A sample was taken of the slag, and this constitutes the only find from the excavation.

These trial excavations seem to have localised the burial ground to the south-western corner of the field. The problem of the date of the burials remains, though their East-West orientation suggests Christian practice and there is a local tradition that the field was used as a Famine plot. The iron-working is a potentially important discovery and any future work in the field should aim to establish its date.

The site records, full report and finds are deposited in the Limerick Museum.

B. J. HODKINSON

## A MISSING HISTORY OF LIMERICK CATHEDRAL

Limerick Museum holds a large collection of the papers of, and letters addressed to the Hon. Robert O'Brien, fourth son of the twelfth Lord Inchiquin and younger brother of William Smith O'Brien. In the late 1850s and '60s O'Brien was heavily involved in the restoration programme at St. Mary's Cathedral in Limerick and most of the correspondence, etc., is connected with this work but, at the same time, he was also gathering information about the history of the Cathedral and diocese.

There is a series of letters concerned with the "Liber Niger" or *Black Book of Limerick* which was, at the time, in the library of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. O'Brien wrote for permission to consult it, and the request was granted by Dr. Russell in his reply, dated January 1863, with the stipulation that it could only be consulted in the library (Museum accession number: LM4893). In a later letter (LM 4895) dated December 1863, Dr. Russell states that Lord Dunraven was also interested in the manuscript and that he, Dr. Russell, intended placing it in the hands of Dr. Todd of Trinity College for a term (presumably James Henthorn Todd, the Irish scholar and member of the Irish Archaeological and Celtic



Society). In January 1964, Dr. Todd wrote to O'Brien suggesting that permission should be sought for a transcription to be made (LM4896) and this was evidently acted upon because there is an estimate, dated August 1864, from M. H. Gill of the University Press Office, for the printing of the book (LM4955). This estimate was, however, not taken up and the *Black Book* did not finally appear in print until 1907 (MacCaffrey).

O'Brien drew the strands of his researches together into a "History of Limerick Cathedral" which he attempted to publish. The Museum collection contains two rejection letters, one from an English publisher (LM4956) dated May 1863 and one from an Irish publisher dated June 1864 (LM4799). The latter was not entirely dismissive, and the publishers offered to reconsider their position if a subscription list was successfully filled, but the manuscript was never published. It was some forty years later that the first substantial history of the Cathedral appeared (Begley 1906), coincidentally about the same time as the *Black Book*. There is nothing in the Museum collection to indicate why O'Brien's work failed to appear, but it is possible that he became disillusioned with the rejections and saw no purpose in continuing when it became evident that Maurice Lenihan was about to publish his monumental *History of Limerick* (1866). O'Brien's name appears in Lenihan's subscription list.

What became of O'Brien's manuscript is not known. It is not part of the Museum's papers, but there is one letter which may refer to it, dated July 1866 and signed R.C. Dublin (LM4964). It reads:—

"I have this day put the box as you desire into the care of Mr. Dawson. I earnestly trust that the information so full, so curious and so carefully got together will not be allowed to remain to the end withdrawn from the world!"

It may be no coincidence that this was written in the same year that Lenihan's history appeared.

O'Brien died in 1870 and a two-light window was inserted into the south wall of the Cathedral chancel, "in memory of his services in the restoration of this church".

### Acknowledgement

My thanks to Mr. L. Walsh, Curator of Limerick Museum, for permission to consult O'Brien's papers.

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B. J. HODKINSON

## SOME GAELIC PLANT-NAMES UNTIL RECENTLY USED IN NORTH KERRY

Since penning my note on "Some Gaelic Words still used in the Listowel District" [see this *Journal*, 29(1987), 96] I have been reminded of some further examples, this time words used for plants of the type generally regarded as weeds.

In the 1930s and early 1940s the following plants were known only by their Irish names in North Kerry, and possibly farther afield as well. For instance, everyone knew what *slánus* looked like, but no-one knew that it was called *Ribwort plantain* in English. All these were plants common in meadows, and were in flower when "cutting the hay". They were all very important plants in a negative way, for if any one of them was dominant it impaired the quality of the hay. Thus their names survived in Irish while meadows were a kaleidoscope of colour and until they were almost killed off by fertilisers, leaving our pastures a monotonous dull green.

Recently I asked a young farmer in the parish if he recognised the following plants and their Irish nomenclature. He had never hear of any of them, with the exception of *buachalán* which he recognised as *Ragwort*.

These are the plants with Irish, English and botanical names:

Buachalán—Ragwort—*Senecio jacobaea*.

Feochadán—Thistle—*Cirsium* spp.

Fionnán—Moor-grass—*Molinia caerulea*.

Gabhal-Luachair—Jointed Rush—*Juncus articulatus*.

Mínscoth—Knapweed—*Centaurea nigra*.

Slánus—Ribwort plantain—*Plantago lanceolata*.

PADDY LYSAGHT