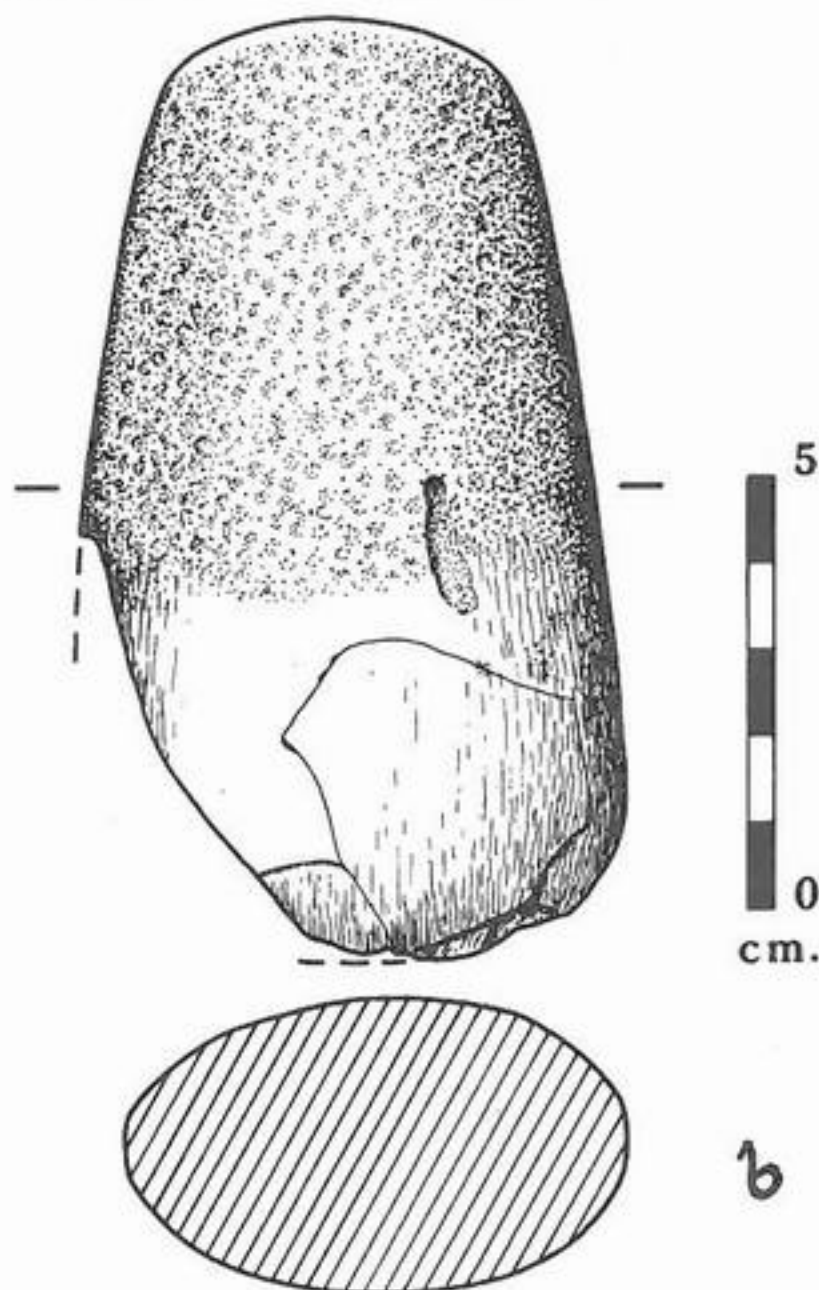
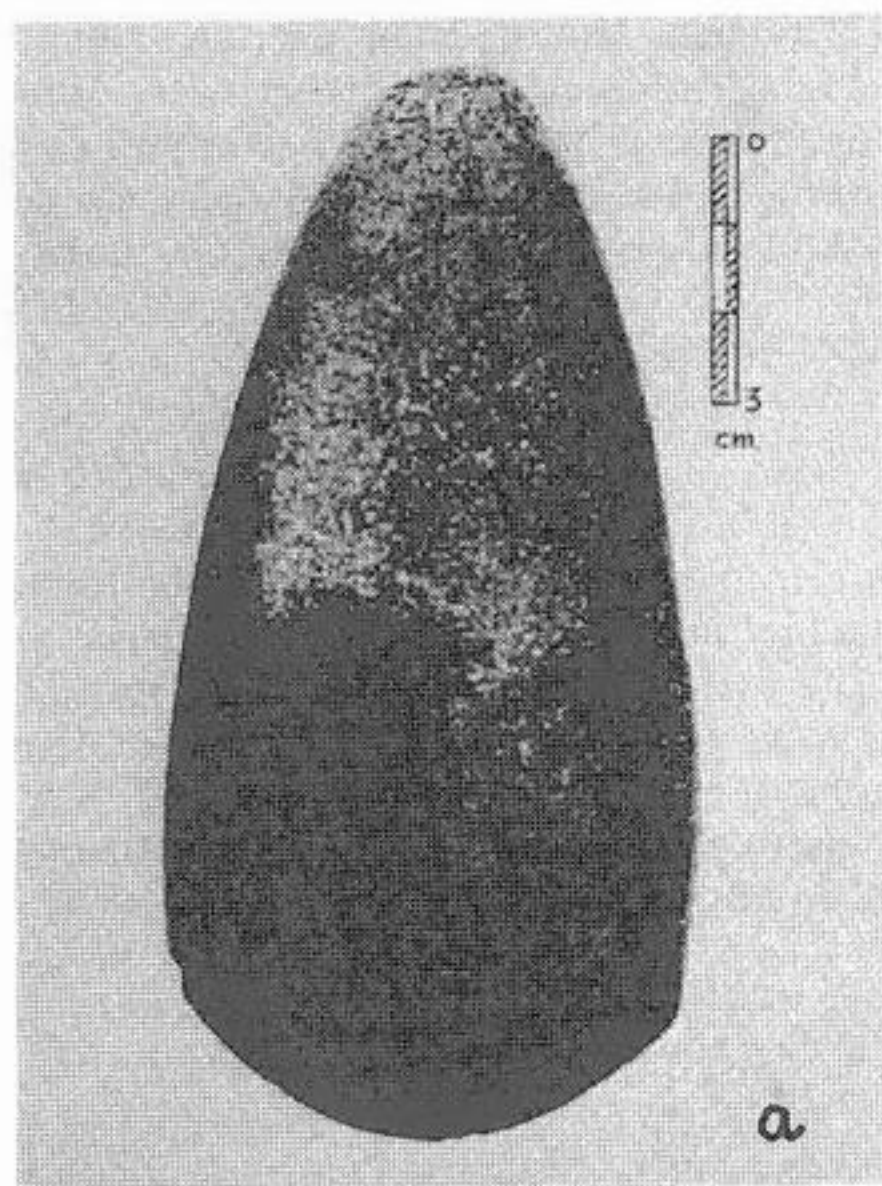


## MISCELLANEA

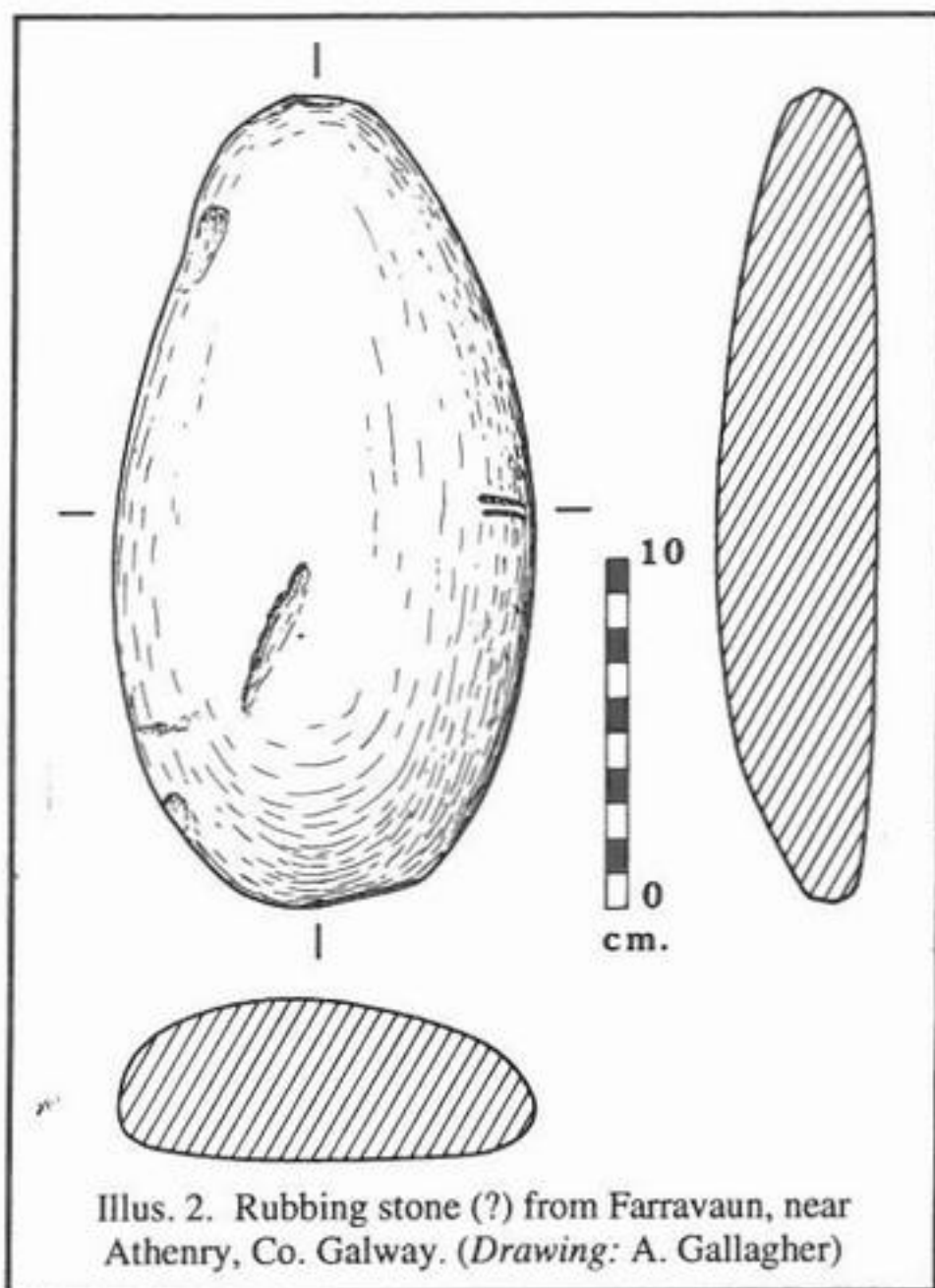
### ADARE, ATHENRY AND THE ISLE OF MAN – COINCIDENCE OR A LATE NEOLITHIC CONNECTION?

In the 1965 number of our *Journal* (vol 9:4, p. 187) the writer published a short note on an unusual polished stone axehead from Currachase, near Adare, Co. Limerick. At the time it was believed that "The chief interest in this axehead is the greenish stone of which it is made", and some comments were made on that fact, including the suggestion of a possible geological source for the stone in the neighbourhood of Pallasgreen, in south-east County Limerick. The axehead (*Illus. 1a*) had a more individual interest however, in that its butt half had been deliberately roughened with small pecks, apparently in order to provide a firmer grip for its wooden handle. At the time the uniqueness of this feature in Ireland was not apparent to the writer, nor were parallels sought elsewhere. Some years later, however, the rareness of this feature began to be more fully appreciated and more interesting, as possible parallels in the Ronaldsway Culture of the Isle of Man were noted.

This re-awakened interest in the Currachase axehead was further encouraged when, in 1991, a similarly fashioned polished stone axehead was presented to the teaching collections of the Department of Archaeology, University College, Galway. It had been found in the



Illus. 1. Polished stone axeheads with roughened butt-ends, from (a) Currachase, Co. Limerick, and (b) Farravaun, near Athenry, Co. Galway.  
(Photo: Nat. Mus. Ireland; Drawing: A. Gallagher)



Spring of 1988 by Mr. Seán Branelly, of Belville, Athenry, Co. Galway, when ploughing a field in the townland of Farravaun (locally pronounced as if the Irish for 'only one man': *fear amháin*), at a spot which can be plotted on O.S. 6-inch scale sheet no. 71 for the county, at a point 33.2cm. from the western margin and 20.7cm from the southern margin. About fifty metres from where it was found Mr. Branelly also found another stone artifact, a rubbing-stone(?), which he also kindly donated to the University's teaching collections.

This latter object (*Illus. 2*) is a large flattish, ovoid, greyish stone, roughly of axehead shape, which has one face virtually flat and the other gently convex. It is smooth all over, though whether this is due to human agency or to water-rolling is uncertain. It shows signs of wear, as if from use as a rubbing-stone, at the thick, rounded 'cutting-edge' end, and somewhat less obviously at the narrower, rounded 'butt' end. The material has been identified

by Dr. Mike Williams, of the Department of Geology, University College Galway, as "siltstone? Carboniferous". It measures 23.5cm. in length, 13cm. in width, 4.4cm in maximum thickness, and weighs 2.395 lbs.

The Farravaun axehead (*Illus. 1,b*) is of stone of a dark brown colour, and a large portion of the cutting-edge on one face is missing due to spalling in antiquity. The top of the rounded butt-end and the side-edges are highly polished, as is the cutting-edge portion of the axehead; the other two-thirds of the main faces are smooth but are roughened by fine pocking. The stone has been identified by Dr. Williams as "Iron concretion typical of those found in Carboniferous Shales", who also comments that the "nearest exposure of this material to the findspot would be in north-west Co. Clare". The axehead is 11.05cm long and its cutting-edge would originally have been about 6cm. wide; it is 4cm. wide at the butt, 3.4cm. in maximum thickness, and weighs 1.070 lbs.

The deliberate roughened butt-portions of these two axeheads was clearly intended to provide a firmer grip for their handles. No other polished stone axeheads from Ireland with such roughening are at present known to the writer. A few rare examples are, however, known from northern England and south-western Scotland, while over forty have been found in the Isle of Man. There, they are closely associated with the Ronaldsway Culture (seven were found at the type-site, a Late Neolithic house-site scientifically excavated in 1943 during war-time extensions to the runways of Ronaldsway Airport) and are regarded as characteristic of it. They are slightly different from the two Irish axeheads in that they do not appear to have been polished before the roughening was executed, and in that the roughening was sometimes so heavy that a marked thinning of that part of the axehead is noticeable; furthermore, the actual butt-end of the Ronaldsway axeheads is generally deliberately



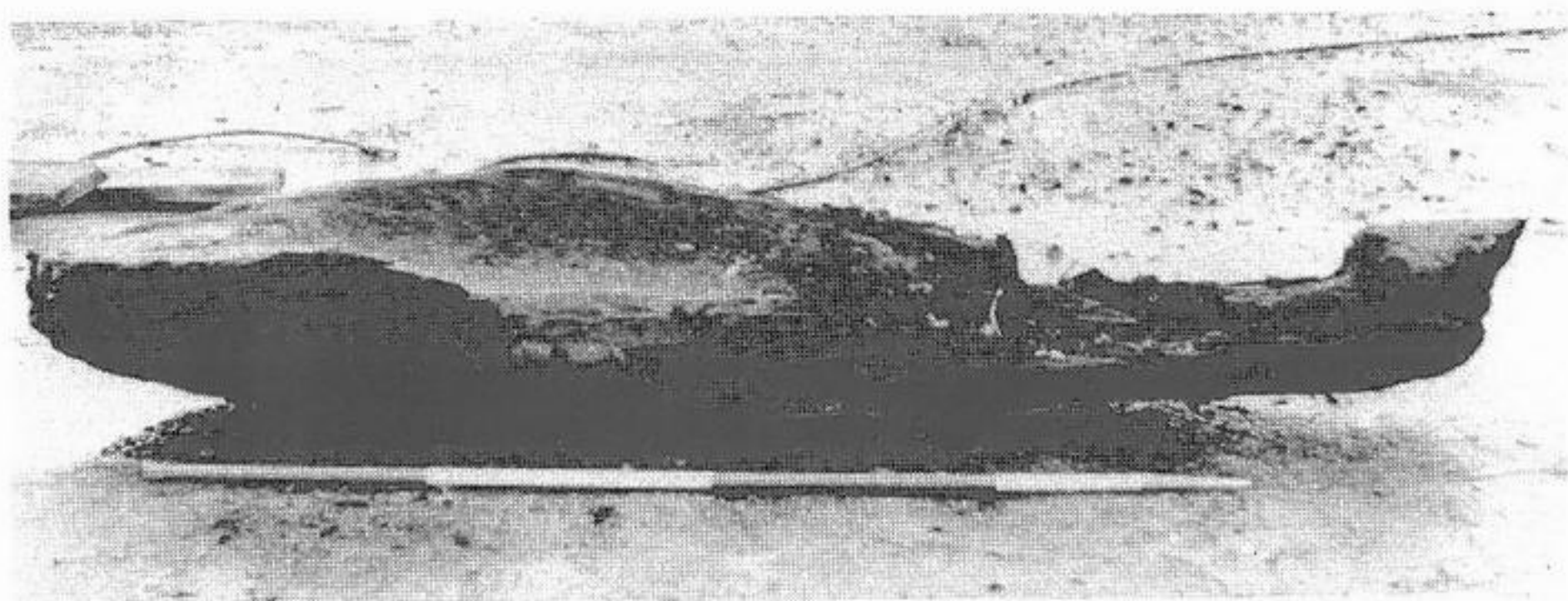
truncated. Despite these differences, the initial appearance is superficially, at least, comparable, and the purpose of the feature no doubt was similar. Regrettably, however, one should perhaps do no more than note the parallels while regarding them, until further information is available, as coincidental rather than as evidence of a Late Neolithic cultural connection.

ETIENNE RYNNE

### DUG-OUT CANOE FROM NEAR ARDAGH, CO. LIMERICK.

On July 3rd 1989, a dug-out canoe was discovered at Ballyvaghan<sup>1</sup>, 2 miles west of Ardagh village, Co. Limerick. The find was made during the drainage work of Mrs. C. Mulcahy's farm<sup>2</sup>.

Dan O'Sullivan, traxcavator owner and operator, was deepening and widening a watercourse when he stuck a solid obstacle which he thought was a tree stump. Eventually he lifted out what appeared to be a old log and placed it on the bank. Pat O'Hanlon of An



Illus. 3. Dug-out canoe (fragment) from Ballyvaghan, near Ardagh, Co. Limerick.  
(Photo: M. Cahill, Nat. Mus. Ireland).

Teagasc was present and saw that the log had been "worked on" and was some kind of raft or boat. He contacted me and I telephoned the National Museum.

Within 24 hours Mary Cahill, of the Irish Antiquities Division, was on the site, and confirmed that it was a dug-out canoe, often nowadays perhaps more correctly called a log-boat. She spent several hours measuring, plotting and photographing the find and its location. The canoe (*Illus. 3*) measured 3m. in length and 70.5cm. in width. It was extensively damaged during the recovery because it had lain at right angles across the watercourse, with both the prow and the stern firmly embedded under five feet of silt, gravel and soil. The prow and most of the gunwales were almost completely destroyed; just 1m. of the stern section escaped unscathed.

The canoe, with its many bits and pieces, has since been reburied.

About a year later Mary Cahill informed me that the radio-carbon dating report from Holland gave a Middle Bronze Age date of c. 1310 B.C. for the sample from the canoe, and had confirmed that the timber was oak.

JERRY McMAHON

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<sup>1</sup>Townland: Ballyvaghan; Parish: Rathronan; Barony: Shanid; Co. Limerick; O.S. 6-inch sheet 28 (30.5cm from western margin; 17.5cm. from northern margin).

<sup>2</sup>Listed in the Tithe Applotment Book as Ballynahown and also known locally to this day by that name. 700m. to the S.E. from the site, the square tower of Rathronan Parish Church (now deconsecrated) can be seen. In the adjoining cemetery the Young Ireland leader, William Smith O'Brien, lies buried.

## THE ABSENCE OF BODY-SNATCHING IN LIMERICK'S HISTORY

When the Anatomy Act became law on the first of August 1832 it sounded the death-knell for the old profession of body-snatching - the stealing of corpses to supply the anatomical teaching needs of medical schools. The principal feature of this Act was that it permitted the supply of as many bodies as would be necessary for dissection in these schools, prior to which the main source of supply had been via the infamous body-snatcher. A recent book by Fleetwood<sup>1</sup> chronicles the story of the Irish branch of this trade, which seemingly enjoyed an export market in the neighbouring British Isles. Of particular interest to the Thomond region is the mention by Fleetwood that his enquiries concerning this trade in Limerick drew a blank<sup>2</sup>.

The absence of body-snatching in Limerick during the early years of the nineteenth century is clearly accounted for by Lenihan who mentions that the new County Infirmary, which opened on June 15th 1811, had "A large room in the rear for the reception of the bodies of executed murderers, who by Act of Parliament (since repealed) were ordered to be given to the several County Infirmaries of Ireland for dissection"<sup>3</sup>. Lenihan does not indicate what facilities for dissection were available prior to the opening of the County Infirmary. This may well be because the hospital accommodation of Limerick was similar to that of Galway - small and primitive, concentrating on medical care mainly. However, it must be noted that Surgeon John Wilkinson performed "the wonderful operation of taking off the whole upper part of the skull of a woman named Burke" - the woman survived to become "the mother of children"<sup>4</sup>. The surgical skills required for such an operation could not have been obtained by reading alone. If Wilkinson was in practice in Limerick before the building of the County Infirmary then, in all probability he had honed his surgical skills by dissecting the corpses of executed criminals.

Scattered through his yearly notes listed as "Progress of Events etc.", Lenihan mentions a number of executions in the city. With the exception of Matthew Kennedy and Owen Ryan, he does not mention what became of the corpses. Kennedy and Ryan were executed on the "new bridge" (Matthew Bridge) and their bodies interred in "the yard of the intended new jail" in June 1798<sup>5</sup>. It is tempting to think of these two unfortunates as being both completion sacrifices - for the new bridge - and foundation sacrifices - for the new prison. However, it should be borne in mind that a new bridge was then (and indeed still is) a focal point for attention in any community and therefore was an ideal locus for public executions. Their burial in the prison yard can easily be explained by the lack of either a resident surgeon in the



town or the need for corpses for dissection at that time: there was a glut of executions in the Limerick region at this period - many for involvement with the United Irishmen.

That dissection took place after execution in the North Munster region is attested to by Fleetwood. He mentions several executions in Tralee where dissection took place afterwards in the County Infirmary in that town. One of these unfortunates was held in Limerick Jail for a period prior to his trial<sup>6</sup>. Fleetwood also mentions what would appear to be the last person to be sentenced to death and subsequent dissection - Michael Moloney, executed on March 7th 1832. His body was dissected at the Ennis County Infirmary<sup>7</sup> - only two weeks before the passing of the Anatomy Act (see above).

Given the prevalence of the sentence of death and subsequent dissection in the region, it is hardly likely that the need for body-snatching services arose. Certainly, the provision of a dissecting room in the new County Infirmary of Limerick is concrete evidence of the readily available supply of corpses. With the opening in 1845 of the new universities - the Queen's Colleges - in Galway, Cork and Belfast, with their medical faculties, the need of local surgeons to have corpses available for dissection slowly eased: the new crop of medical graduates would have gained sufficient anatomical skills from their Anatomy classes and practicals while still students.

PAUL DUFFY

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<sup>1</sup>J. Fleetwood, *The Irish Body Snatchers*, Dublin 1988.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>3</sup>M. Lenihan, *History of Limerick*, Limerick 1866, p. 415, notes.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 429, notes.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 403, notes.

<sup>6</sup>Fleetwood, *op. cit.* pp. 35-36.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 62.

## EDWARD FITZGIBBON, LIMERICK-BORN ANGLING EXPERT

Edward Fitzgibbon, the son of a land agent, was born in Co. Limerick in 1803. He went to London at the age of fourteen and at sixteen he was articled to a surgeon, but quit after two years to become a classical tutor. Tiring of this work, he spent six years in France interesting himself in the French language and literature. On returning to England, he worked in the *Morning Chronicle* and began to write a long series of articles on angling for a sports magazine called *Bell's Life in London*. Over the next twenty years he wrote a large number of articles in his own attractive style, which were widely read. He also often wrote for the *Observer*, and was an acute theatrical critic.

Fitzgibbon was a passionate angler, and it is for his many articles and books on the subject that he is best remembered. His angling articles gave a marvellous impulse to the art of fishing, and caused a great improvement in the manufacture and sale of fishing tackle - as well as being responsible for the large increase in rents for fishing rights by river owners. Apart from his many articles he wrote two books, both under the pseudonym 'Ephemera'. These were *A Handbook of Angling*, London 1847, and *The Book of the Salmon*, London 1850. He furthermore edited the 1853 edition of *The Complete Angler* by Izaak Walton and Charles Cotton (*Illus.* 4).

In his *Book of the Salmon* (*Illus.* 5), a classic of nineteenth-century salmon literature, we get a good account of the elaborate fly-tying in Ireland. Their bright and gaudy flies took Britain by storm. In fact, many of the modern classic fly patterns are consequently thought to



ROUTLEDGE, WARNES, & ROUTLEDGE, FARRINGTON STREET.  
NEW YORK: 36, WALKER STREET.

Illus. 4. Title-page of 1853 edition of *The Complete Angler*, edited by Edward Fitzgibbon



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OF INVERSHIN, MANAGER OF THE DUKE OF SUTHERLAND'S  
SALMON-FISHERIES.

LONDON:  
LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, AND LONGMANS,  
PATERNOSTER-ROW.  
1850.

Illus. 5. Title-page of *The Book of the Salmon*,  
by Edward Fitzgibbon.

have originated at Castleconnell, Co. Limerick. He describes a tying for the Shannon Fly, the standard Spring fly for the river. It is a most complicated pattern, which even the most dedicated salmon angler will find difficult to visualise and still more difficult to tie. The following is his description of the fly:

"Body half light orange, half white silk, to be ribbed with broad silver tinsel and gold twist a lightish blue hackle, striped on one side; over body; blue jay under shoulder; seal fur dyed yellow; tag, orange silk; above it another tag of fur of deeper orange hue; tail, large toppings, sprigs of the leading tail-feather of the golden pheasant, and four long feelers of blue and yellow macaw."

A most unusual man, he was subject to periodical fits of drinking, yet in the frequent intervals between these his life was one of strict abstemiousness and refined tastes. He was a genial character with a host of friends - too many. He died prematurely on the 19th of November 1857, and was buried in Highgate cemetery, London.

PADDY LYSAGHT

### THE LOOP HEAD LIGHTHOUSE: a footnote and a correction

The following extract from *The Irish Times* of the 28th of March 1991, might usefully be printed here as a footnote to Dick Robinson's note on the Loop Head lighthouse published in our *Journal*, 30(1988), 55-57.

#### LIGHTHOUSE LOSES KEEPER.

Loop Head, on the northern side of the Shannon Estuary in Co. Clare, yesterday became the last lighthouse on the west coast to go automatic. Mr. Brendan Garvey, the lighthousekeeper who took up duty there 38 years ago, retired yesterday morning.

Mr. Garvey said that in future, the lighthouse will depend on the microchip for its operation and there will be nobody on the lookout. He admitted, however, that the navigation equipment will be even better and will be monitored directly from Irish Lights in Dun Laoghaire.

The opportunity should also be taken to point out that regrettably the captions to the two illustrations used in Mr. Robinson's note were inadvertently transposed.

HON. EDITOR.