

MISCELLANEA

THREE UNRECORDED MEGALITHIC TOMBS IN EAST CLARE

Following a period of fieldwalking by the author in the townland of Killanena in East Clare, two unrecorded wedge tombs and an unclassifiable megalithic tomb-like structure have been discovered. These three tombs are all located on high ground with prominent views over the surrounding area. This area is quite rich in megalithic tombs, with two in nearby Corbehagh, one in Fahy, and three in Ballycroum.¹

Tomb 1 (Illus.1)

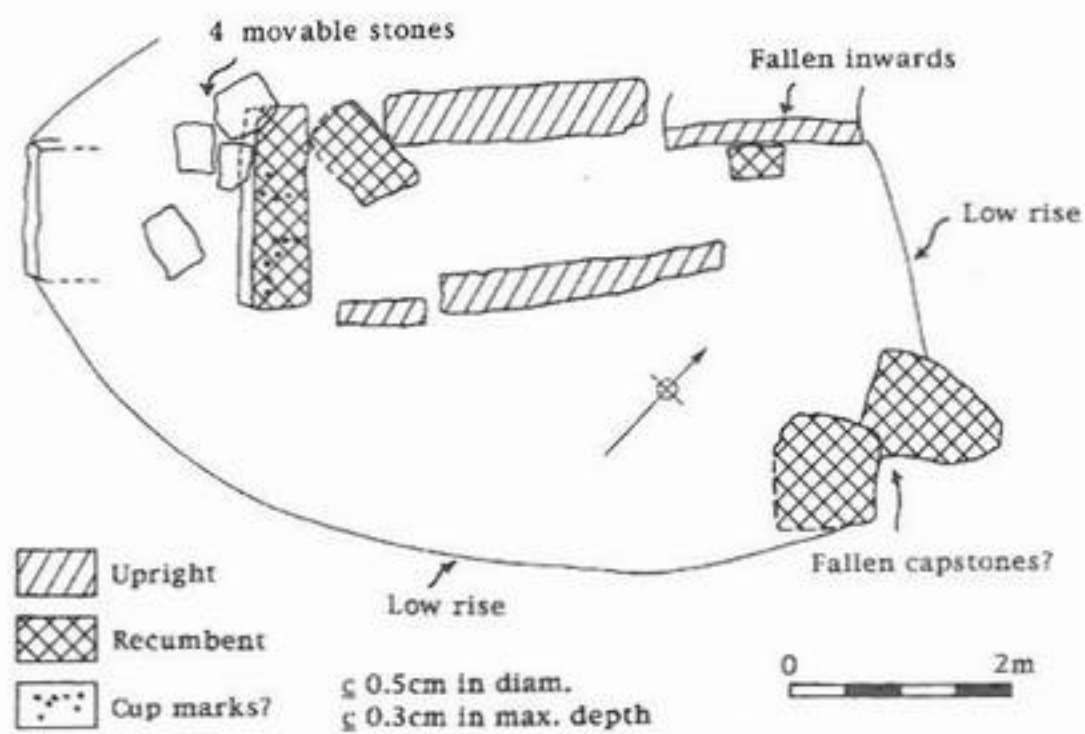
This tomb was discovered near the head of a small river valley which descends to the church in Killanena (OS 6-inch Sheet 19, 6.3cm from the western margin and 4.2cm from the southern margin). It lies in a field which straddles the transition between pasture and rough upland grazing. It is of the Wedge Tomb class, and has a NE-SW orientation with the wider end to the South-West. It is in a good state of preservation, although the capstone(s) have been displaced. Two recumbent slabs southeast of the tomb might be displaced capstones. This tomb has commanding views over much of East Clare. It has a long axis of 3.6m while the interior width is 1.2m at the eastern end, widening to 1.5m at the western end. There are two upright orthostats on the southern side measuring 2.55m and 90cm in length respectively. There is a recumbent stone, possibly a sill-stone, at the western end measuring 1.84m long and 60cm wide. This slab has markings on its surface in a series of hollows that resemble small cupmarks. It is difficult to ascertain if this is a result of human activity or water erosion, but the presence of rock carving close to the wedge tomb at Corbehagh, 3km away², might suggest further investigation. The owner of the field, Mr John Moroney, informed me that when he purchased the field many years ago the original owner told him not to move any of these stones "as there are people buried underneath them." There obviously was a long local tradition of the tomb being associated with a burial place.

Tomb 2 (Illus. 2)

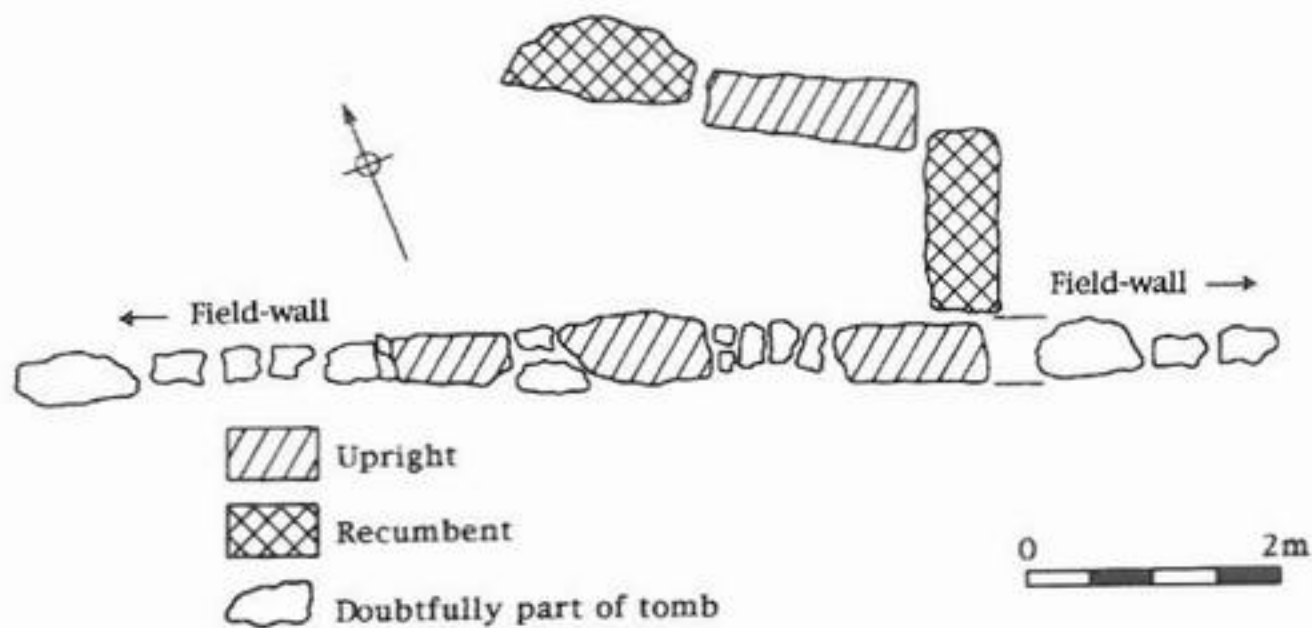
This tomb is located 1 km north-west from the previous tomb in land owned by Mr Pat O'Neill. It can be plotted on OS 6-inch Sheet 19, 6.66cm from the western margin and 5.17cm from the southern margin. It is very much destroyed and only the general outline remains. The southern side has been incorporated into a stone field-boundary. There is a recumbent stone measuring 1m long and 55cm wide, plus an upright orthostat measuring 1.3m long and 50cm high, on the northern side, while a recumbent slab measuring 75cm long and 31cm wide, closes the eastern end of the tomb. The average interior width of the tomb appears to be 1.6m and the interior length appears to be at least 2.6m. The tomb is well sited, with commanding views over Lough Graney and, like the other wedge tombs in the area, it has an East-West orientation; the surviving orthostats and ground plan would suggest that the wider end is the western end. The chamber is defined by the upright and recumbent stones on

¹De Valera, R. and Ó Nualláin, S., *Survey of the Megalithic Tombs of Ireland, Vol. 1: Co. Clare*, Dublin 1961, pp.69-73, and Mac Mahon, M., *J. Galway Archaeo. Hist. Soc.* 37 (1979-80), pp. 94-95 for the second Corbehagh tomb.

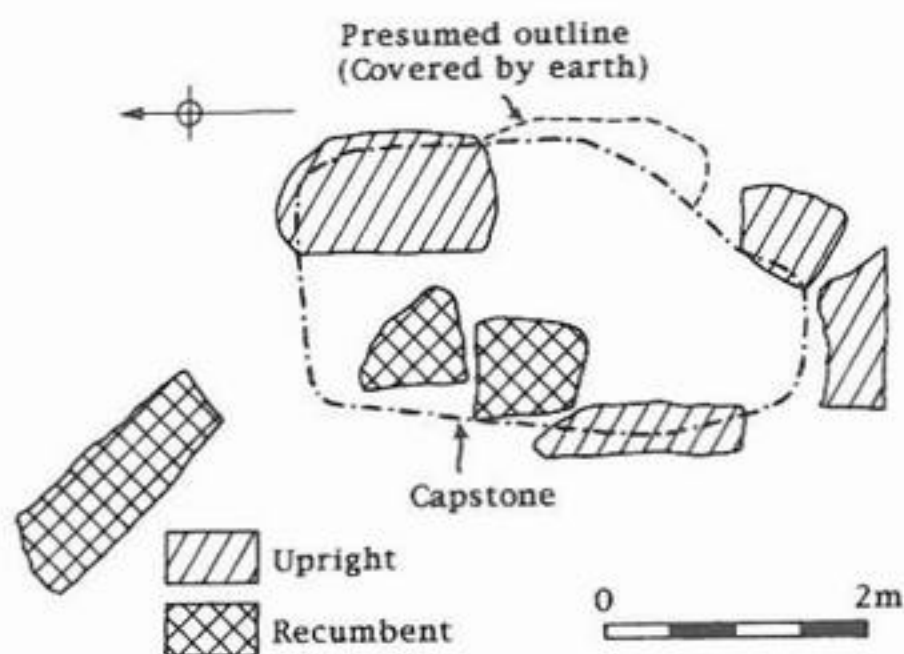
²Westropp, T.J., "Distribution of Clomlechs in Co. Clare", *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, 20 (1896-98), 546.



Illus. 1. Wedge Tomb 1, Killanena, Co. Clare.



Illus. 2. Wedge Tomb 2, Killanena, Co. Clare.



Illus. 3. Unclassifiable megalithic tomb-like structure, Tomb 3, Killanena, Co. Clare

the northern side and by three upright orthostats incorporated into a field-wall on the southern side, with the recumbent slab closing the tomb at the eastern end.

Tomb 3 (Illus. 3)

This tomb is located about 350m north-west of Tomb 2, and can be plotted on OS. 6-inch Sheet 19, 6.74cm from the western margin and 5.34cm from the southern margin. It consists of large capstone 2.74m long, 1.6m wide and up to 1.2m thick. This rests on one inward sloping orthostat on the western side, measuring 1.5m long and 86cm high. The capstone has tilted down to the eastern side, giving it the appearance of a boulder dolmen or portal tomb. There is an amount of rubble within the chamber, but there is about 1.6m clearance underneath the capstone. It stands in what used to be a small field, but which now has been enlarged by the field clearance of some field-walls and glacial erratics. The owner, Mr Pat O'Neill, informed me that when he commenced field clearances he deliberately avoided touching any stones in this structure as he felt there was history associated with it. The long axis of the tomb is North-South and the large capstone tilts upward to the West. There are two recumbent stones in the chamber, one of which possibly came from the western side while the other lies in a position which would suggest that it might possibly have been a closing stone from the northern end. There are traces of a mound on the western, northern and eastern sides. The land falls away to the North, and the tomb is prominently situated with views of the Burren, South Galway, East Clare and the Slieve Aughty mountains.

Acknowledgements

The writer wishes to thank the Hon. Editor, Professor Etienne Rynne, for assistance with the surveying of these monuments, and also Angela Gallagher for so admirably redrawing the plans to publication standard.

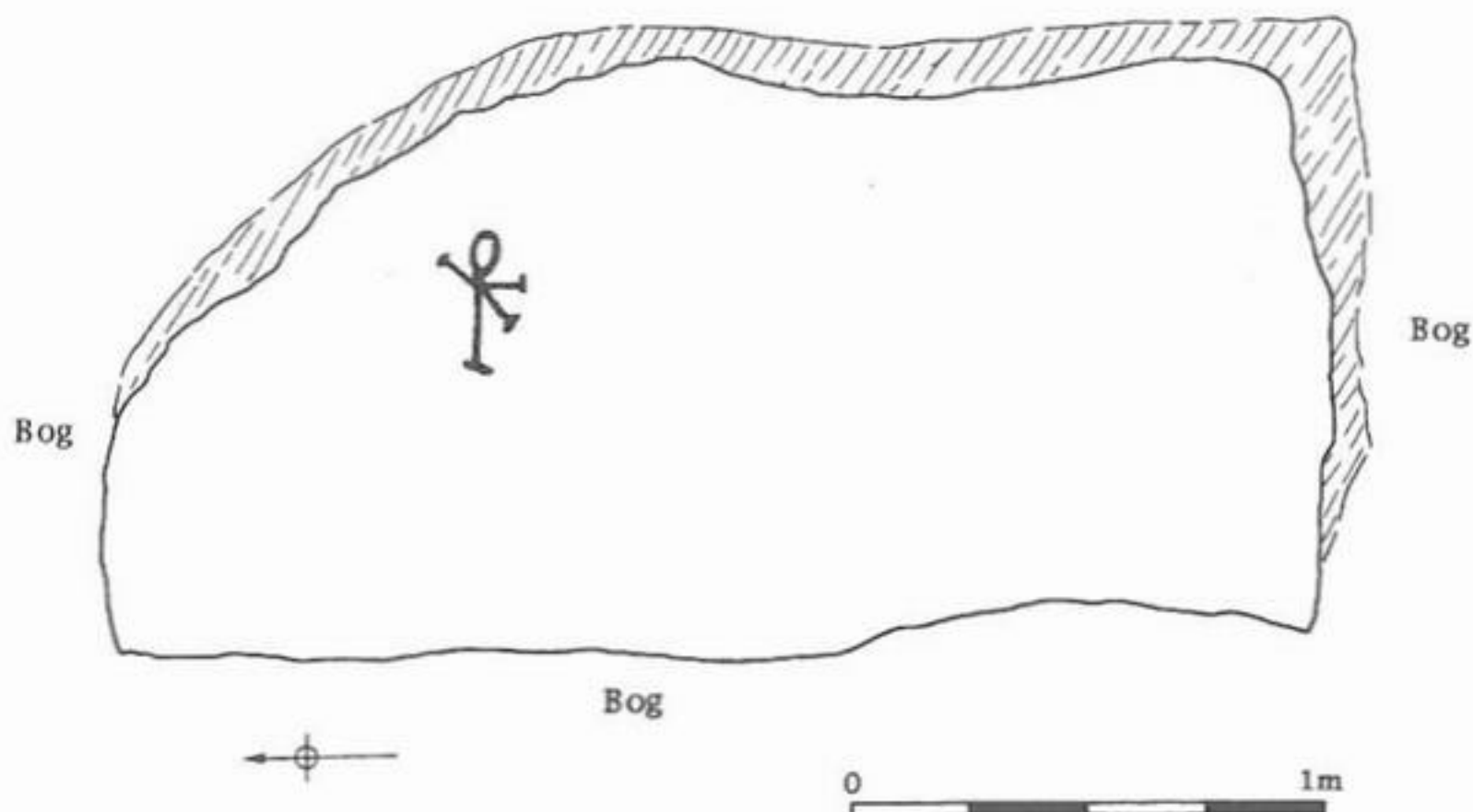
KEVIN MC DONALD

AN EARLY CHRISTIAN CARVING FROM NEAR FEAKLE, CO. CLARE

A carving of what appears to be a chi-rho symbol was found recently by the author in the townland of Ballycroum, barony of Tulla Upper, Co. Clare. The carving is on a slab of conglomerate rock which measures 1.86m in length, 88cm in width and at least 36cm in thickness (it is partly buried in bog). This slab is on a mountain plateau 2.5km NW of the village of Feakle, and can be plotted on OS 6-inch Sheet 19, 8.8cm from the western margin and 9.8cm from the southern margin. The carving initially appeared to be a sort of ankh symbol, but a closer look would suggest that it is perhaps more likely to be a mishapen Chi-Rho symbol. The overall length of the carving is 19cm and it is 16.5cm at the widest part. The termination of each arm is T-shaped, and the ovoid 'head' is very slightly askew (Illus. 4).

What is interesting about this carving is its proximity to three megalithic tombs, CL 92, 93 and 94¹, which have all been given a Christian dedication over the years. CL 92 is noted as

¹de Valera, R. and Ó Nualláin, S., *Survey of the Megalithic Tombs of Ireland Vol. 1 : Co Clare*. Dublin 1961, pp. 69, 70, 93, 94.



Illus. 4. Possible Chi-Rho symbol on slab, Ballycroum, Co. Clare.

'Tober Grania' on Sheet 19 and is known locally as a holy well, no doubt helped by the fact that the tomb is slightly submerged into the bog and the interior of the tomb generally has about 10cm of water in it. There is a tradition, dating back into the last century and which still continues today, of placing coins and rosary beads on the capstone of the tomb. CL 93 is marked as 'Altoir Ultach' on the same map and is said to have derived its name from a priest who fled from Ulster to the area in order to be able to say Mass where the Penal Laws were less stringently enforced. CL 94 was known in earlier times as 'Dermot and Grania's Bed' and is now almost completely overgrown and sunk into the bog. It is not marked on Sheet 19. This was regarded as a saint's tomb rather than the resting place of the famous lovers: Westropp notes that this Dermot and Grania were known locally as saints, connected to Saint Mochonna of Feakle, and some locals believed them to have built the church in Feakle². At the turn of the century Westropp also noted that the significance of the christianisation of these three megalithic tombs "*rehabilitated the character of the dolmens and their traditional builders, for their paganism is forgotten, which is far from the case elsewhere in the country*"³. Since that report appeared in 1900, the memories and traditions associated with these tombs has almost been forgotten. 'Tober Grania' has now become the mass rock as opposed to 'Altoir Ultach', possibly because it is the best preserved of the tombs and has two large capstones. The continued deposition of religious items such as rosary beads, etc, from the period when it was known as a holy well no doubt helped its transformation into becoming known as a mass rock.

The carving on the slab is located about 350m east of these tombs, and if the slab was raised on its long axis then the carving would face directly at 'Tober Grania'. The proximity of this carving to these tombs possibly suggests a link with their christianisation. Rededication of megaliths by christians is documented. Hamlin and Hughes note that a cross has been carved on one of the kerb-stones of the passage grave at Loughcrew, and on a

²Westropp, T.J. "Dolmens at Ballycroum, near Feakle Co. Clare," *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, 24 (1900-02), 88-89.

³*Ibid.*, p.91.

multiple-cist cairn at Knockane, and also remark how a sixth century British saint Sampson, when finding pagans dancing round a stone in Cornwall, converted them and marked a cross on the stone to commemorate the event⁴. For a discussion on other crosses carved on megalithic tombs see Rynne⁵. It is therefore quite possible that this slab may have been associated with these megalithic tombs. A wedge tomb recorded in 1980 by Mac Mahon in nearby Corbehagh has a single standing-stone 50m to the south and a pair of standing-stones 400m to the southeast⁶. There is therefore, an association in the area between standing-stones and megalithic tombs, but whether this chi-rho inscribed slab was originally upright or not would require excavation. It is, nevertheless, an interesting example of an Early Christian Period carving in a context that associates it with christianised megalithic tombs.

⁴Hamlin, A. and Hughes, K., *The Modern Traveller to The Early Irish Church*, Dublin 1977, p. 84.

⁵Rynne, E., "The Decorated Stones at Seefin", *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland*, 93 (1963), 85-86.

⁶Mac Mahon, M. "A Wedge Tomb and Other Monuments near Lough Graney in N.E. Clare", *J. Galway Archaeo. Hist. Soc.*, 37 (1979-80), 94-95.

KEVIN MC DONALD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE SITE OF A STAR-SHAPED FORT AT SINGLAND, GARRYOWEN, LIMERICK CITY

Archaeological investigations were undertaken at the location of a fortification known as 'Cromwell's Fort' in Singland Townland, on the east side of Limerick city¹. The excavations were carried out over a three week period, from July 8th - 26th 1996, in advance of a housing development in the Pike Avenue area of Garryowen.

The site is recorded on several maps² that show the existence of a fortification at the location of the excavation. The site, known locally as "Cromwell's Fort", may have been constructed during Ireton's 1651 siege of Limerick when the city was held by Hugh O'Neill. In preparation for the siege, Ireton constructed two forts "about half a mile east and south east of the walls of Irish Town" (Kerrigan, 1995, p. 93) The eastern fortification appears to have been located on the site of the present excavation. Lenihan (1991, p.750) describes Cromwell's fort as follows "can be distinctly traced and may be roughly squared at 100 yards a side. It is a star fort". The cartographic evidence, excluding a map of 1752 by Will Eyres, corroborates this description and the fortifications on the east side of Limerick city are shown as star-shaped structures. Lenihan (p. 749) also recorded that the site of Cromwell's Fort had "its natural elevation raised with turf taken from the hollow grounds; and when dug up [presumably within Lenihan's lifetime] several balls, pieces of arms and armour were found". The Will Eyres map of 1752 shows the site as having bastions only on the south-west and south east and differs from the other cartographic representations of the fortifications.

¹Exact Location: Td. Singland; Par. St. Patrick's; County Limerick; O.S. 6-inch sheet 5; (34cm from the east margin; 13.5cm. from the south margin) : National Grid Ref. R592564; SMR Li 005-028.

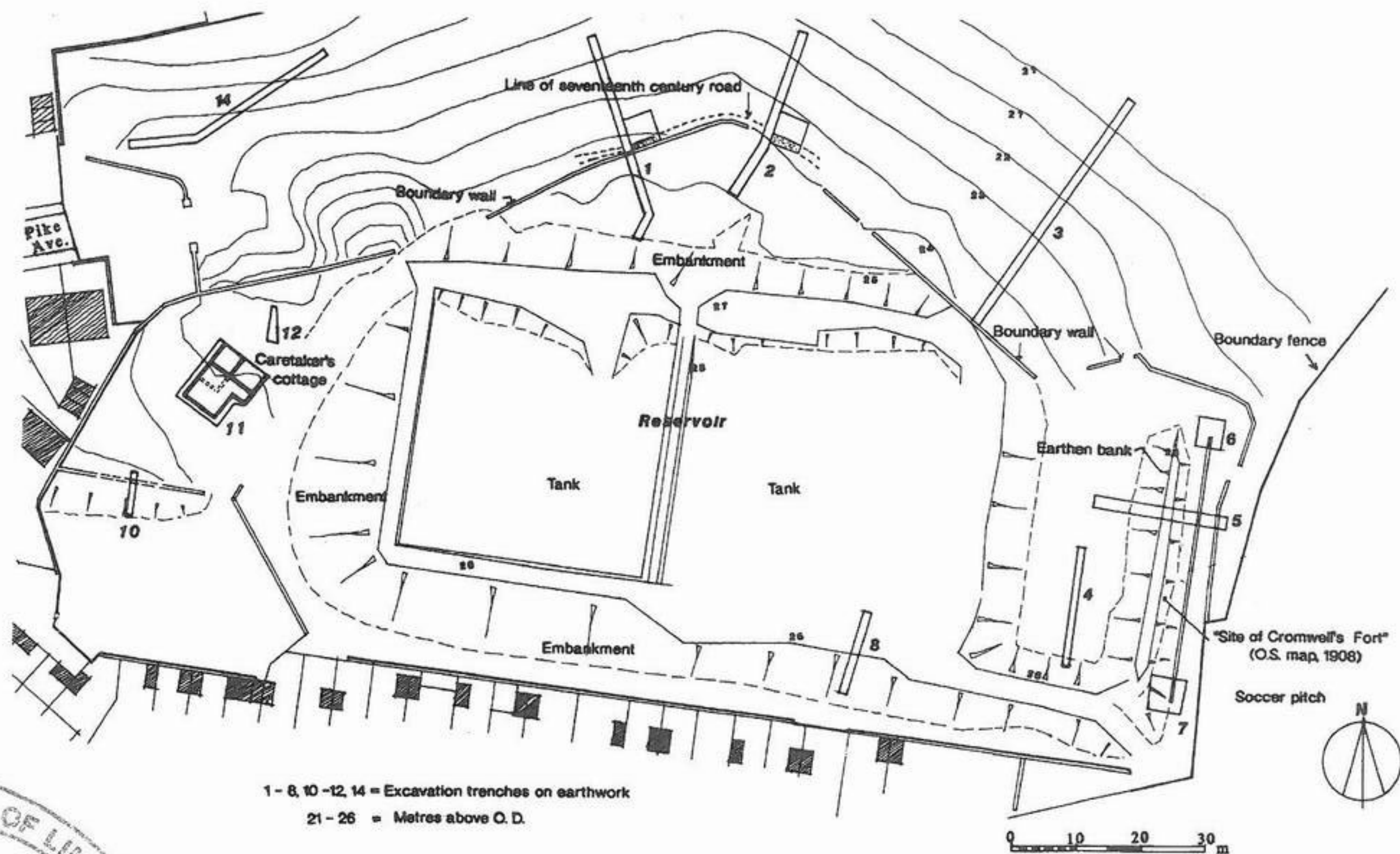
²A list of cartographic sources is appended to the full excavation report submitted to 'Dúchas', The National Monuments Service, Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht, Dublin.

The site was however, the location chosen for a water reservoir that was built in 1825 to supply the city's water needs. The reservoir had a capacity of 600,000 gallons and is described as "two reservoirs of masonry" (Lenihan, *op. cit.*, p. 477); it was extended in 1859 but details of this extension are unknown (*ibid.*, footnote p. 477).

The fort is located to the south-east of Limerick city and affords a commanding view over much of the countryside to the east and of the city to the west. The reservoir (not in use) extended over a total area of 150m (east-west) by 90m (north-south), inclusive of a boundary wall on the north (Illus.5). The reservoir tank on the west side was stone-faced internally with limestone blocks and was c.40². An intermediary wall divided this tank from a second to the east, and the upper level of the wall included some red brick. The eastern tank encompassed an area of c. 49m x 45m but was probably originally of similar proportions to the west tank, *i.e.* 40m². The walls of the eastern tank were partially removed and the embankments had slipped inwards towards the original reservoir water containment area. The tanks were embanked with earth and this extended around the periphery of the reservoir for distances of -c. 15-20m. The embankment sloped more steeply on the south than the north. Cast iron water pipes were visible on the surface of the north side of the embankment and these carried water from the reservoir to the city. Water pipes were not visible on the surface of the south embankment. A water main pipe was visible on the eastern embankment. A substantial bank continued eastwards along the line of the southern reservoir embankment for a distance of c. 20m west of the western edge of the reservoir and this bank linked to a second bank which is on a north-south axis. These banks are recorded on the Ordnance Survey maps (1830, 1871 and 1908) as "Site of Cromwell's Fort". At the time of the excavation, the upper levels of a limestone wall were visible within the north-south bank towards its eastern edge. This area of the site appears to have been altered since the Ordnance Survey of 1908, which clearly shows a triangular-shaped projection, possibly delimited by a wall, on the south-eastern corner of where the earthen embankments were joined. On cartographic evidence, the projection appears to have been c. 45m northeast-southwest by 18m north-south. This projection no longer exists and may have been removed in the recent past during the construction of housing and the levelling of a playing field for a soccer pitch.

A boundary wall around the reservoir varied in extant height from 50cm to c. 1.5m and was on average 80cm wide. The wall was constructed from fairly large (c. of 50cm x 40cm x 25cm) cut and roughly dressed limestone blocks, mortared and laid in regular courses, with smaller stones and chips filling the interstices between the courses. The wall was more substantial on the south side where it stood to a height of 1.7m and was up to 1.2m wide. The line of the wall along the north end of the reservoir was unusual in that it appeared to delimit a projection on the north end of the site and consequently it was investigated to determine if this projection was a residual part of the original fortification. This projection apex was also in line with the intermediary division of the reservoir. The wall was of modern construction and that the interior (south side of the wall) did not retain any stratigraphy pre-dating the nineteenth century.

A road (see below) was recorded on the north side of the boundary wall and this may have been a factor in determining the line of the boundary wall. The road skirted the wall and it appears to be, on cartographic evidence, an ancient route dating to at least the late seventeenth century. The road is shown on maps of 1691 (General Ginkel's siege, map by



Illus. 5. Plan of Site of 'Cromwell's Fort', Singland, showing excavation trenches.

Edward Jones); on seventeenth century maps in the Bodleian library; on a map of 1752 (Will Eyres') and on the first edition map of the Ordnance Survey of c. 1830. The road is not indicated on the second edition of the Ordnance Survey map (1908) though the boundary of the reservoir is.

The road was recorded at a distance of c. 50cm north of the boundary wall in trenches 1 and 2. The road was laid over naturally occurring stony soil. The metalled surface was 15cm deep and comprised small rounded limestone pebbles with occasional larger stones. The excavated width was 4.3m with a central area, approximately 2m wide, that had a very compacted surface with two ruts (c. 30cm wide) set 90cm-1m apart. There was some evidence of road repair and filling in of the rutted surfaces, where stones had been set in a matrix of boulder clay.

Conclusions

The excavation of sections through the embankment designated "Cromwell's Fort" clearly showed that this embankment around the reservoir is of modern origin and included modern objects within the layers forming the embankment. The excavation also showed that no remains of the original seventeenth century fortification survived.

The results of excavation to the west of the site showed that the walls in that area were part of a modern cottage, which was used by the caretaker on the site and was only recently demolished.

The road that was recorded on the north side of the excavation appears to have been on the same line as a road recorded on some of the seventeenth century maps. This road surface was cobbled, with indications of repair.

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ROSE M. CLEARY

HOW THE BIRR STONE WAS BROUGHT TO CULLAUN

The *Journal* For 1970 contains a note by Gerald O'Connell on the Birr Stone, which was then in the grounds of the ruined Cullaun House. In 1974 it was brought back to Birr where it can now be seen in the Courthouse grounds. It is hoped that this note will shed further light on some of the points raised by Gerald O'Connell.

The circumstances under which Tom Steele originally took the stone from Birr are described in *The Clare Journal* of 9 January 1834. Steele had set up a Catholic oratory in his house for the use of Daniel O'Connell. When he heard that the Seffin Stone near Birr had been used as an altar in penal times he decided to get it for his oratory. The newspaper continues (quoting a report of 31 December):

With this view he proceeded to Birr, towards the close of last week, and obtained the permission of Mr. Hudson Rowe, the owner of the field where the rock lay, to take possession of it. As an appropriate equivalent for it, Mr. Rowe and his son received from Mr. Steele a ribbon of the Order of Liberators. On the day of his arrival Mr. Steele was entertained by a large party, and in the course of the afternoon he addressed a large crowd assembled, explaining the object of his extraordinary mission. On the day following a number of quarrymen, stone cutters, labourers, & c., were employed in raising the rock from its bed, when an individual, said to be an under driver to the Earl of Ross, lord of the soil, came and warned them off the ground. Hereupon an altercation took place, Mr. Steele insisting on his right by the authority of the tenant, the driver still persisting, when at length Mr. Steele sent forth a volley of imprecations, which, with the formidable appearance of the crowd, soon frightened off the driver. After two days labour the rock was detached, and with the aid of six horses and fifty men, with ropes and handspikes, was conveyed to the town of Birr, the crowd cheering all the way. A rude timber carriage was prepared to place the rock on board the canal boat at Portumna, by which it was to be transmitted to Killaloe or Limerick, and from thence to Lough O'Connell.

This carriage, however, was broken by the immense weight, and some carpenters were employed by Mr. Steele to repair it. Whilst they were doing so, Mr. Steele addressed the people from the hotel, and after denouncing Whitefeet, and adverting to other topics, spoke in no very flattering terms of Lord Oxmanstown, son of the Earl of Ross. From this moment a strong opposition was given to Mr. Steele, and a regular row soon took place, in which sundry heads were broken, and other injuries inflicted upon the respective combatants. The fall of night terminated the fight, but early in the morning a crowd collected to oppose the removal of the rock; but Mr. Steele exhibited a bold and determined front, stating his resolution, at all hazards, to take away the rock. He again haranged the mob, and eventually succeeded in carrying away the prize, amidst tremendous cheers for O'Connell and the repeal of the Union. As the carriage passed along the High-street, on its way to Portumna, Mr. Steele wearing an orange and green scarf, stood upon the carriage, which he designated his triumphal car, and congratulated his fellow labourers upon the great work they had achieved.

Mr. Steel subsequently returned to the town, and, having called at the residence of the residence of the Rev. M'Causland, the Protestant rector, learned from that gentleman, who had applied to Lord Oxmanstown by Mr. Steele's desire, that his lordship had given no orders whatever with regard to what had occurred in the town that morning. The fact was, that Lord Oxmanstown was ignorant of the entire transaction. Mr. Steele then proceeded to meet the canal boat, and take charge of its extraordinary burden.

After stone arrived in Limerick it was kept in the Canal Stores there for several months and then brought to Cullaun in late April, when the roads were sufficiently dry. *The Clare Journal* of 1 May 1834 which gives us information also noted that "part of the base was taken off with the wedges in Birr to facilitate its removal".

By the time the stone arrived in Cullaun, Steele had had a row with O'Connell and left the stone lying in the grounds of the house. Before the row was patched up Steele had lost

Cullaun and did nothing further about the stone.¹ Writing in 1867 Maurice Lenihan commented:²

With all respect for Steele's intentions, I would express an opinion that so notable a remnant of antiquity, so historical an object, ought to be conveyed back, at the public expense, to the spot from whence it was taken..... From what I know of Steele's sentiments with regard to his successors in the ownership of Cullane, I should say that it is one of the last places on earth he would have the coronation stone of Fion Macoul remain - at least, in an unhonoured position. It is worthy of remark that in none of his conversation with me did he ever revert to his dealings with the Umbilicus Hibernia [*sic*]; whatever the cause of his reticence, he never for one moment alluded to it, nor did I dream of questioning him on the subject. The whole affair was regarded by the country people with something akin to wonder; by others it was ridiculed outright; by himself it was thought to be one of the memorable deeds of his political life.

In June 1974, thanks mainly to the energetic efforts of our late member, the Very Rev. Martin Ryan, the Birr Stone was returned to its place of origin, Birr, Co. Offaly.

† IGNATIUS MURPHY

¹*The Clare Journal* of 9 January 1834 noted that Steele was tenant under the Court of Exchequer of a small portion of his estate, including the house.

²*Limerick Reporter & Tipperary Vindicator*, 1 February 1867.