MISCELLANEA

ICE HOUSES AT GLIN

In the days before electrical refrigeration the storage of perishable food was a major problem. People had to use seasonal produce or preserve food through drying, smoking, slating or pickling. It had long been known in the West that ice did not melt if insulated from heat but it was the Chinese who developed the first ice houses. It was not until 1660 that the first known ice house in the British Isles was built, on the orders of King Charles II who had apparently seen some in France.¹ This was soon imitated by many aristocrats, both in Britain and Ireland, who had ice houses erected on their estates to store food for their great houses. Essentially all that was needed was a large lake nearby and frosty winters. When the frost created a thick sheet of ice it was cut with saws and collected by horse and cart. It was then stored in the ice house for use in warm weather. These ice houses were built mainly underground with a door near ground level for access. Some of the large ice houses had double doors to help the insulation process. The doorway usually faced north away from direct sunlight and was best surrounded by trees for shelter. Quite often there was also a doorway at the bottom of the icehouse and a drain to take away melted ice.² When the ice was being used it was usually crushed with a hammer and placed in containers to cool bottles of wine, milk and butter and other perishables.

It was not until the nineteenth century that ice began to be imported. A Boston merchant named Tudor is credited with having inaugurated the ice trade when, in the summer of 1805, he began to ship ice from Labrador to Martinique. In 1833 American enterprise carried supplies of ice to India, gaining a monopoly, which was maintained until the invention of refrigeration machinery. The first cargo of ice brought to the British Isles arrived in the Thames, from Norway in 1822, but it was allowed to melt while English customs officers debated the question of the rate of duty applicable to the cargo. As a result the experiment does not seem to have been repeated until some decades later.³

Little has been written on ice houses in Ireland.⁴ Most surviving examples are brick built with domed or vaulted roofs and occasionally interesting entrances. Good examples survive in the grounds of Dublin Zoo, Hillsborough Castle, Co. Down and Castle Blunden, near Kilkenny.⁵ Glin was one of the earliest locations of ice houses in Ireland for commercial rather than personal use. Four ice houses were erected in the village by the Pegums. The Pegum family is reputed to have migrated from Scotland to Glin before the famine. They became the main fish merchants in the Glin area for nearly a century. In the 1850s Stephen Pegum established a fish wholesaling business in the village which was greatly helped by the establishment of the Foynes Railway nearby in 1858. He could now transport his perishable product much more quickly, which enabled him to expand his customer base. He even dealt directly with the Billingsgate market in London and thus earned a higher margin of profit by cutting out the middleman.⁶ The Glin ice houses were located in “Meade’s yard”, Ballinamuddagh⁷ where the road from Glin to Tarbert veers south away from the Shannon.

¹ R. G. David, “The Ice Houses of Cumbria”, Transactions of the Cumbria and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, NS, vol., 81, p.137
³ The Irish Times, 19 July 1929.
⁷ OS 6 inch map, 1840: because of its relative proximity to Glin Castle this icehouse was probably used mainly for food preservation for the Knight of Glin’s household.
Ballyculhane near the entrance to the “Scenic View” guest house and the fourth at Kinard opposite Hanrahan’s house. They were used mainly for the fish industry. In May 1851 twenty tons of the cargo of ice imported to Limerick was sold to one weir owner on the Shannon, for the purpose of packing up salmon for the English market. This was undoubtedly Stephen Pegum as the only place capable of storing that much ice was at Glin. At the height of the fishing industry on the Shannon estuary large quantities of ice was required to pack the fish in timber boxes, mainly for export to London.

In order to meet the demand, farmers built artificial lakes and the remains of one are still visible in Costello’s farm in Killeany, Glin. The water for the lake was diverted from a stream by means of an open drain through the farm to a suitable hollow. Once the lake was formed a harsh winter would provide a thick bed of ice and generate a handsome profit. Large horse cartloads could earn five shillings in the 1920’s so it was an important income supplement. The late Patrick Conway remembered a line of carts drawn by horse and donkeys lining up with lots of ice for this icewhose. The ice was tipped into a timber funnel, which led to the icewhose door at Lower Main Street. When the demand for ice could not be met locally it was imported in blocks from Scandinavia. Ships travelling to the Baltic with cargos of coal brought back loads of ice. With the growth in the cooperative movement in the late nineteenth century there was an increased demand for ice for butter and cheese processing and people came to Glin from as far away as Newcastle West for supplies.

The decline of the fishing industry on the estuary in the late nineteenth century not only meant the loss of livelihoods of fishermen, box and churn makers but with the consequent decline in the demand for ice the farmers also were deprived of an important supplement to their meagre winter incomes. The Ardnacrusha hydro-electric scheme in 1928 marked the end of salmon fishing as a commercial enterprise and in 1930 the Pegum family were forced to sell their interest to the ESB under a compulsory purchase order. One of the Glin ice houses still survives, at the lower end of the town, serving as a reminder of an important resource in an earlier age.

Tom Donovan

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Example of an ice house

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8 The Limerick Chronicle, 28 May 1851.
10 Unpublished recorded interview with Patrick Conway, Glin, by Brid Kearney.
11 Interview with David Cahill, Newcastle West.
TWO UNRECORDED STANDING STONES NEAR SHANAGOLDEN

Standing Stone 1 (Plate 1)
This stone is situated in Cloonty on the southern end of the valley of the Glashanaskee River, a tributary of the Owvaun. It is situated on the top of a hillock in a pasture field in an area of good farmland. (OS 6-inch Sheet 18, 775 mm from the western margin and 352 mm from the southern margin.) The stone is 137 cm in height and 39 cm in width and 28 cm in thickness. It is aligned west-southwest by east-northeast towards the hill of Mount David (OD 122 metres). The stone is off perpendicular falling to the west which is likely the result of use as a scratching post by cattle. From this stone there are considerable views of the surrounding countryside particularly to the west and north.

Standing Stone 2 (Plate 2)
This is situated half a kilometre southeast of Standing Stone 1 in the townland of Shanid Lower. It is situated on top of a hill in a meadow. (OS 6-inch Sheet 18, 792 mm from the western margin and 299 mm from the southern margin.) The stone is 145 cm in height, 25 cm in width and 16 cm in thickness. It is orientated west-southwest by east-northeast towards the hill of Knockourha (OD 159 metres). On this hill there is also a triwallate ringfort that has a diameter of over 100 metres. According to local folklore the hill at Knockourha and that at Shanid, situated one kilometre to the south were the power base in the late Iron Age/early Christian era of the clan Ui Conaill Gabhra who held sway in west Limerick up to the twelfth century. From this stone there is a considerable view of the ringfort at Shanid Upper and Shanid Castle to the south and to the east the Limerick plain beyond Shanagolden.

Discussion
Neither of the standing stones is recorded on the Ordnance Survey 6-inch Sheets or the Discovery Series Map No. 64 (1996) nor have they been previously noted. The possibility that they are merely scratching posts for cattle erected by farmers in the nineteenth century must of course be considered. However there is evidence that the Ordnance Survey missed a number of other standing stones in the hill country of West Limerick such as in Tooraree Lower and Killacolia (OS 6 inch Sheet 18). They are located in good farmland, similar in situation to the prehistoric monuments at Tinnakilla (OS 6-inch Sheet 18) six kilometres to the west. Here a portal tomb and a probable stone alignment are situated in a similar agricultural area. The Bronze Age peoples that erected these stones were farmers and therefore

1 Thomas Johnson Westropp, 'The Ancient Castles of the County of Limerick (North-Eastern Baronies) in Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy; vol. 27, section C, (1906-07), p. 59; folklore collected from Denis Nolan, Cloonty, Shanagolden by the author.
settled land suitable for agriculture. Like the monuments at Tinnakilla the standing stones described here have commanding views of the surrounding countryside. In particular they are aligned in the general direction of topographical features that may have had some ritual significance to those who erected them. Studies of prehistoric stone rows in the south Kerry-southwest Cork region has shown that many were orientated towards prominent features such as hills and mountains.

Gerard Curtin

A FRENCHMAN IN LIMERICK

Jacques Louis de Bourgenet; Chevalier de Latocnaye; is famous for the account he wrote of a tour in Ireland at the end of the eighteenth century. His description of his Irish journey, undertaken in 1795-6, was published initially in French (in 1796-7) under the title Promenade d’un Français en l’Irlande. It was translated into English by John Stevenson and published in Dublin in 1917 under the title, A Frenchman’s Walk through Ireland.

De Latocnaye was actually Breton, an aristocrat and émigré, one of the thousands of Frenchmen who sought shelter in England from the French Revolution. His first travel book was on England and Scotland and its success led to his decision to produce a similar work on Ireland. Since he had, as he himself said, “a genius for observation” and was keen to meet and converse with the ordinary Irish peasants we get some revealing glimpses into their lives which are missing from most travellers accounts. He journeyed on foot and talked to people in their homes or as he passed them on the road. We find him going along at his own pace, stopping to look at anything that takes his fancy. He so likes the countryside that he expresses the wish that he could just “jump over” the towns on his way though in fact he wrote very well on urban areas also. Ireland at that time was pretty lawless but there is no suggestion that he was ever waylaid or robbed, and though his knowledge of the Irish was very limited he managed to communicate successfully with the ordinary people. His simple style of narration is varied and attractive, peppered with the mint of his quaint humour.

One should form a mental picture of this rather quixotic Breton Frenchman, speaking English with a Scottish accent, travelling everywhere on foot, his whole baggage in his ever so many pockets and also in two silk stockings slung over his shoulder on the end of a combined sword-stick cum umbrella. No wonder he “excited everyone’s curiosity and made the girls laugh.” He had many introductions to the aristocracy and stayed in their “houses of consequences” as he calls them. Before he enters these he has to change into his best clothes, and so we find him on the road to Waterford sheltering behind a fence to change back into his travelling clothes. He travelled about the country for six months. As a catholic, he was in sympathy with the Irish and their aspirations and believed, mistakenly and usually for the wrong reasons, that Ireland would shortly flourish and live in harmony with its neighbours, the British.

He devotes twenty-two pages of his narrative to describing his stay in Limerick. On entering the county by way of Tarbert, he was so fatigued after a long walk and the great heat that he decided to find lodgings in Glin. He was directed to an eating-house by a local priest where:

I passed the night defending myself from the monsters [fleas] who regarded me as their lawful prey and when the sun rose it was a bloody scene. I had the appearance of having- taken part in a battle, as really I had. Happily the sea was not far off; to it I fled quickly to drown unwelcome guests, and that operation finished, I saw my friend the big priest himself going to the water. I told him of my miserable hap, but this he took to be merely an everyday matter and made light of it - in fact, he laughed very heartily.

From Glin he went to Newcastle West and from there to Rathkeale, where he visited the Palatine settlements. He has some interesting observations to make about them:
Until now, they have always married among themselves, and have preserved the customs of their country. At the time of my visit there was only one man living of the original members of the colony. There is no doubt that they were received on very advantageous conditions, each family receiving, in perpetuity, ground for house and garden, as well as several acres of farm land... their houses are of a comfortable character, and so clean that they look like palaces in comparison with the poor cabins of the Irish. ...The natives hated them cordially at the beginning, and do not love them much better now. ... Naturally, I suppose, the Palatines will finish by becoming Irish like their neighbours."

Between Adare and Limerick city he attended, as he had elsewhere, an Irish wake. One can only surmise what those present thought of their unusual visitor. His description is of interest:

It was Sunday and the women do not shout so loudly on that day but the scene was, nevertheless, a rather singular one. The dead lay on a table, and the house was so full of women sitting on their heels that a bullet dropped among them would not have touched the ground. The men were outside on the road, to the number of about two hundred, on foot and on horseback and a great number prudently waiting at a neighbouring inn until it would please the dead to move.

In Limerick he found the town full of people, as there was horseracing there. There was confusion everywhere and nobody seemed to be working. There were bullies from Cork and Youghal about the town, with the intention "of putting lead into the brains of the Limerick folk." They went about saying to anyone they met: "Do you want powder and ball for we can give it?" Apparently during the eight days of racing, there were ten or twelve duels, and, an officer of the Irish Brigade was killed. Unfortunately he adds little further which might augment our knowledge of pre 1798 Limerick. He did however while there meet one Doctor Mansell who had invented a new method of growing potatoes, which discovery, the Rev. Doctor thought, when it would become generally known and practised "promises fair for feeding the lower orders of the people with food at a cheap rate." The method, it seems, consisted in cutting out the eyes or shoots and planting them, thus leaving the tubers available as food. De Latocnaye, who objected to either giving or receiving patronage, did not advertise or promote Mansell's discovery, which never, unsurprisingly, came to anything.

He found Castleconnel, with its mineral water springs, a charming place. "The Limerick Iddlers" he writes "pass the summer in the village and drink every morning of their stay a glass of the water". He notes that rich strangers attract beggars and that there are already more in Castleconnel than elsewhere in Ireland. Here he interjects some very pertinent thoughts on the Irish situation as he saw it. Since he stayed usually with members of the aristocracy, he often heard the Irish peasants criticised by them for idleness and drunkenness. But de Latocnaye had a mind of his own and he shrewdly observes that "when one is reduced to the danger of dying from hunger ... is it not natural to drink when one can, a drop from the waters of Lethe, in order to forget one's misery?" But he adds, "If the poor man could really feel that work would ameliorate his situation, he would quickly abandon that apathy and indifference which are born of despair."

At O'Brien's Bridge he had a swim in the Shannon as was often his practise. Before he said goodbye to this area, he spent an idyllic few hours in the calm Shannon with a Mr Waller in a little boat "for which my umbrella served as sail" - the same umbrella presumably which caused so much mirth to the young girls he had met earlier in his long and fascinating tour in an Ireland soon to be convulsed by the horrors of the 1798 rebellion.

Paddy Lysaght
A NOTABLE LIMERICK PRIEST IN SCOTLAND

The important role of priests from the Diocese of Limerick in the development of the Catholic Church in Scotland is a subject that has been very much neglected. Over the past two hundred years, ninety-eight Limerick priests, either on temporary loan from the diocese or incorporated in Scottish sees, have ministered there. This year marks the centenary of the death of one of those who made a particularly significant contribution to his adopted country.

Michael Condon was born 23 September 1817 at Craves in parish of Coolcappa in West Limerick. He received his basic education at a local hedge school where he discovered that he had a vocation to the priesthood. He later recorded walking to Derrynane to elicit help to pursue his studies from Daniel O’Connell. However the Liberator refused to see him and he ruefully recorded that all he had to show on his return to Limerick were the blisters on his feet from the journey. However this rebuff, far from deterring him, seems to have intensified his determination to become a priest. He eventually enrolled at St. Mary’s seminary which had been opened at Yougahl in the 1830s by a local priest, Fr John Foley, and which received papal approval in 1841. Condon taught Latin, Greek, French, English and Geometry to other students from February 1842 until the sudden death of Fr Foley in March 1844. The seminary was then closed. Condon eventually succeeded in gaining admission to All Hallows College in Dublin where he continued his studies. He was ordained for the Scottish mission in Glasgow, 6 October 1845, where he was to minister for the rest of his life.

His first posting was to the parish of St. Mary’s, Calston, which is regarded as the cradle of Catholicism in Glasgow. In 1847 he moved to St. Kieran’s Campbeltown where he erected a new church and two years later to St. Mary’s Hamilton where he remained for ten years. His success there led to his appointment as the founder of the new parish of St. Lawrence at Greenock where he served until 1885. His final parish was at Anderston, Glasgow where he died in 1902. He organised the building of a new church there, dedicated to St. Patrick. In 1878 Pope Leo XIII restored the Scottish Hierarchy and Glasgow became an Archdiocese. Fr Condon became a Canon of the first Glasgow Cathedral Chapter on its establishment in 1884.

Michael, Canon Condon was a complex and multi-talented man. He was a devoted pastor, church builder and parish founder. He was also a philanthropist, poet, protagonist and controversialist. His most valuable writings were his diaries which, in addition to providing insights into his own life and work, are a very useful source for the history of Catholicism in nineteenth century Scotland. He compiled detail on priests, their dates of birth, places of education, when and where ordained and listed the parishes in which they served. He also collected photographs of many of them which he organised in albums. While not all of these photographs have survived, those that have are in excellent condition and are an invaluable source for parish history of the period. He wrote movingly on his view of the priesthood:

A priest has to be the head, heart, soul and sense of his flock, must necessarily know much, fear deeply, hope largely and spare neither eye, ear, tongue, hand or foot. The missionary’s motto must be ‘either do or die’, it certainly was mine.

This dedicated Limerick priest who played an important role in the revival and expansion of the Catholic Church in Scotland died 17 June 1902 and is buried in St. Peter’s cemetery, Dalbeth, Glasgow.

V. Rev. Bernard J., Canon Canning, FSA Scot.