Recognition at last for last of Limerick's Ogham stones

By LEADER REPORTER

THE ONLY standing Ogham* stone in Co. Limerick, dating at least to the beginning of the Christian era, has finally been listed as an ancient monument, thanks to the initiative of a Garryspillane farmer.

Mr. Kevin Hanly said that he had to threaten to draw the stone away with a tractor, after it had been knocked by cattle, before he could gainise the Office of Public Works into action.

"I had no intention of doing any such thing, but I wanted to have the monument examined," said Kevin, a dairy farmer in Garryspillane.

Never listed

The stone, according to Crawford, in the "1980 Journal of Antiquities of Ireland", was then the only one standing in Co. Limerick. Yet it was never listed as an ancient monument for preservation.

According to Crawford, the Ogham inscription on the 5 foot rectangular pillar of fine red sandstone reads "maclagu maggi Ginnant", which Professor Rhys, writing in the same journal, has translated as the stone of "Maelgun Mac Gobhaidh".

Archaeologists are yet unsure whether the stones are in fact on the land or erected on ancient monuments. Many have been found on the east and west coast, particularly in Dingle, but it is unusual to find one so far inland.

Mr. Hanly said that cattle rubbing against the stone over the years had finally knocked it. He realised its significance only after he heard a radio programme about Ogham stones, he said, "so I then contacted the Office of Public Works. But nothing was done until I threatened to draw it away with a tractor."

Excavation

Archaeologists from the Office of Public Works did a three-day preliminary excavation of the site, re-excavated the stone, and listed it as an ancient monument.

A full excavation is expected to be undertaken as soon as funds are available.

The Ogham inscriptions, he said on the Roman alphabet, are still very clear.

Incidentally, the only other known stone with Ogham inscriptions in Co. Limerick had been removed from its original site in Ballingarragh and located at Abelow, Co. Tipperary. The Ogham stones are located in the same area, and is strongly enough known also as Ballingarragh house.

Kevin Hanly points to the Ogham inscriptions on the 1,500-year-old stone on his farm.

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