

## **Human Skeletons unearthed near Foynes**

During the last week of January and the first week of February 1964, over thirty skeletons were discovered, buried in a low gravel-ridge in the townland of Robertstown, near Foynes, Co. Limerick. The site can be located on sheet 10 of the O.S. 6" maps for the county, 39.5 cm. from the western margin and 5.8 cm. from the southern margin.

The National Museum was informed of the discovery and the site was investigated by the writer. Unfortunately, most of the skeletons had been removed by this time. Also, the surface of the ridge had been stripped by a bulldozer prior to the discoveries, and it was impossible to ascertain if there had been any surface indications of the graves. However, a further seven skeletons, all of adults, were uncovered during the investigation. These were in four separate graves, close to one another and all orientated East-West, with head to the west. In two instances the skeletons lay in shallow graves which were at a depth of approximately 90 cm. below the original surface. They were extended and rested on fine gravel. A third skeleton lay in a shallow grave at an approximate depth of 60 cm. This burial did not appear to have taken place at the same time as the other two. In a fourth grave, at a depth of approximately 90 cm. below the original surface, four skeletons were found together.

From the investigation it would appear probable that these burials were not prehistoric. Their E-W alignment and the absence of any grave goods suggest that they date from the Christian Period. Several similar groups of burials have been discovered over the years in various parts of Ireland, but seldom has it been possible to arrive at a closer date for them than that suggested for the Foynes group. Such burials in apparently unconsecrated ground may well be the result of a plague or famine in the area.

PETER DANAHER

## **"The King's Grave" at Glennagross, Co. Clare**

Sunday strollers past Glennagross to the Windy Gap are often intrigued by the story of the ambitious king whose grave is said to be sited on the hilltop. According to the tale in the 12th century *Acallam na Senorac* King Crimthand of Cashel and Tara was poisoned by his sister in the interest of her sons and expired on his way back to Munster over the Cratloe Hills. The place-name that recalled his tragic end, Sliab Uide an Riog, appears as the northern boundary of Limerick diocese in the Rath Breasil decree of 1111. Until the present century nobody seems to have set down the exact position of the monument.

The *Onomasticon*, edited by Fr. Edmond Hogan, S.J., and published in 1912, is still the standard work on Irish topography. Father Hogan came to Limerick in 1859 on the first foundation group of the present Jesuit house. Later during his years at the Catholic University he used the services of Limerick graduates like George Clancy to check the local references for his great work. In his old age Fr. Hogan set out one day



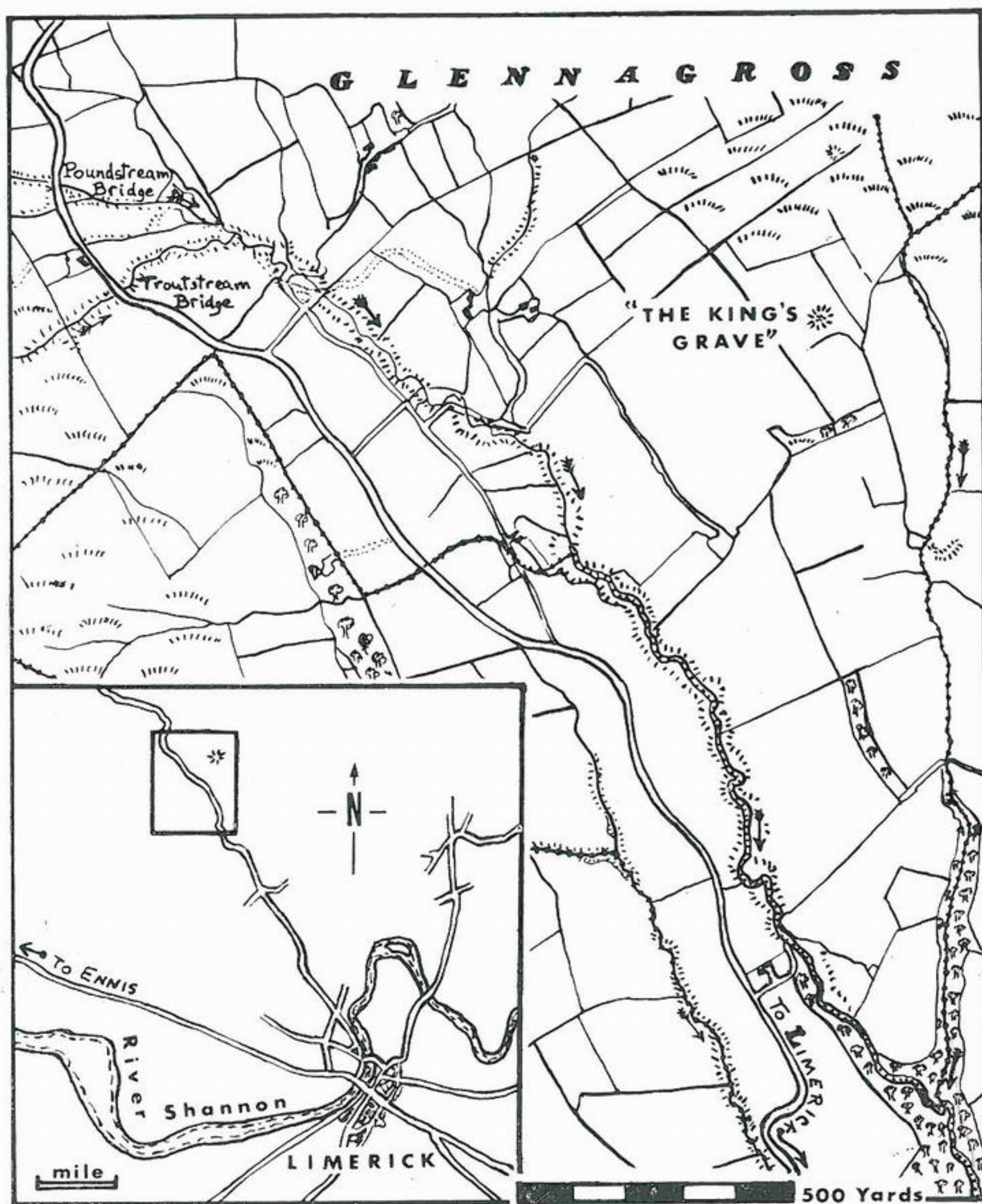


FIG. 1. Map showing position of "The King's Grave," Glennagross; inset: map showing position relative to Limerick. (Based on Ordnance Survey maps, by permission of the Minister for Finance).



towards the Windy Gap to locate the traditional site of the " King's Grave " and he succeeded in his task.

The modern wayfarer will notice a double gateway on his right about a mile and a half beyond Cappanteemore Bridge. A long passage leads from it to Spaight's farmhouse. From the farmyard there is an easy climb up two sloping fields to a wire paling showing on the skyline near the summit of the hill. Beyond the wires the climber will come immediately upon the object of his quest. Among the heather and bracken he will notice a circular enclosure like a small ringfort. The bank is about two feet above field level and about 8 feet wide. The fosse or ditch is about 3 feet wide and is inside the bank, not outside as is usually the case, suggesting that this site may be a ring-barrow. At the S.E. there is an entrance, ancient or modern, which links the field with the circular interior which is no more than about ten yards in diameter. About 18 yards S.W. of the ring are the scattered remains of a cairn with three very small standing-stones forming a non-concentric arc outside its S.W. edge. The cairn is about 10 yards in diameter and 3 feet in maximum height. About 5 yards north of the ring-barrow is an embedded standing-stone square in cross-section, about two feet across and three feet high.

The site is marked on the O.S. 6-inch map<sup>1</sup> but is not named (Fig. 1). It is not yet listed as a national monument. The late Professor Seán P. Ó Ríordáin was much impressed when brought to the site by local antiquarians some years ago. Perhaps the spade of the excavator will one day reveal some of its secrets. And it is hardly a secret that the monument, or great part of it, dates from an age long before the fourth century in which King Crimthand is supposed to have reigned. Just as elsewhere, similar prehistoric memorials came to be linked with names of Fionn and Oisín, with Cuchullainn, or Maeve, so the men of Thomond thought the Cratloe cairn a fit resting place for a tragic king.

M.M.

<sup>1</sup> Td : Glennagross ; Par : St. Munchins ; Bar : Bunratty Lower ; O.S. 6" sheet 52 for Co. Clare, 0.7 cm. from E. and 20.4 cm. from S.