Stone Axehead from Currahchase, near Adare

About 30 years ago Mr. Patrick Shanahan, of Curragh Chase, Adare, discovered a fine axehead of polished greenish stone. This axehead later came into the possession of the Hon. Secretary of this Society, Mr. Thomas Pierce, who has recently presented it to the National Museum (reg. no. 1965: 43).

The axehead (Fig. 1) was found in the townland of Currahchase, Co. Limerick (O.S. 6" maps 11 and 20) and is in perfect condition. It is polished all over but its butt half appears to have been deliberately roughened with small pecks after polishing, presumably in order to seat the axehead more firmly in its wooden handle. It has a pointed butt, a rounded cutting-edge, and is oval in cross-section. It measures 11.4 cm. (4 4/8 ins.) in length, 5.3 cm. in width at the cutting-edge, and 3.5 cm. in maximum thickness.

The chief interest in this axehead is the greenish stone of which it is made. This stone appears frequently among the many whole and fragmentary axeheads found during the excavations at Lough Gur (see S. P. O’Riordáin, PRIA, 56C (1953-54) 405) and seems to be peculiar to Co. Limerick in so far as is yet known. Although samples of the Lough Gur specimens were petrologically examined (ibid. and PPS, 17 (1951), 99-158, item 647), the source of the material was not ascertained.

The Currahchase axehead was examined by Mr. Francis Synge, of the Department of Geography, University of Leicester, a geologist who has worked extensively in the Limerick area, and was identified by him as "Fine-grained volcanic ash which could loosely be referred to as greenstone, but the rock is pyroclastic, not igneous. Lower Carboniferous volcanics (the Limerick Volcanic Group)." Of great interest and importance, also, is Mr. Synge’s suggestion that the source is probably somewhere in the neighbourhood of Pallasgreen, in south-east County Limerick.

Etienne Rynne
Souterrain at Boolareagh, Co. Tipperary

Early in September, 1964, a souterrain consisting of the end of a passage abutting on to a creep which leads to a small chamber was discovered at Boolareagh, about five miles south-east of Roscrea. The site is in the north-western corner of a large field and is at the highest part of one of several low rises in the area.\(^1\) There are no surface indications of any associated structure and no excavation was undertaken.\(^2\)

The souterrain (Fig. 2) was built in very sandy soil and no trace of the trench that must have been dug to accommodate it could be found. The walls of the souterrain are mainly orthostatic, combined with very little dry-stone walling. They are also unusual in that they slope appreciably outwards from bottom to top, rather than the much more usual inward corbelling. The roofs of the passage and chamber were missing at the time of investigation but were probably lintelled in much the same manner as is the creep.\(^3\)

Both the passage and the chamber were incomplete at the time of investigation, not only because of the disturbance at the time of its recent discovery but also, apparently, as a result of discovery at an earlier period. Bones of "a young ox, probably not long buried"\(^4\) were found in the disturbed part of the chamber, suggesting that at some time within the last couple of centuries the chamber was discovered and used as a handy place in which to bury this animal. Whether or not the passage continued much beyond the limits surveyed is not certain as it was blocked at its southern end by collapsed material or deliberate filling and a cutting made about 1$\frac{1}{2}$ m. farther to the South failed to prove it either way.

The surviving portion of the passage which runs in a N-S direction is about 1 m. in length. As its roof and western side-wall are entirely missing and its floor covered with rubble debris, it is impossible to estimate its original width or height with accuracy, although about 65 cm. and 60 cm. respectively may not be far wrong.

The creep is only differentiated from the passage by its SSW-NNE alignment and by being at least 20 cm. narrower. It is 2 m. long, of which 1.60 m. is still roofed by four lintels. The average width at floor level is about 40 cm. Clearing the rubble debris at one point revealed that the original floor consisted of a darker, grittier material than the surrounding sandy soil, as if mixed with clay and small pebbles. The height of the creep at the place where the floor was exposed is 58 cm., and the depth of the floor below the present ground surface is 1.10 m.

Portion of the western wall of the chamber was entirely missing, but the impression given was that the chamber probably was originally roughly hexagonal in plan. It measured 1.10 m. long and the same in width. The only parts of the walls of the souterrain which are completely of dry-stone walling are in the chamber, and these

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\(^1\) Td: Boolareagh; par: Bourney; bar: Ikerin; Co: Tipperary; O.S. 6" sheet 18 (1.4 cm. from S.; 8.3 cm. from W.); about 590 ft. above O.D.

\(^2\) The discovery was made by Mr. Michael Fogarty, the owner of the field, and was reported to the National Museum of Ireland by Mr. Andrew Dowling, of Clonmeen, Grogan, Co. Laois. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking both Mr. Dowling and Mr. Barry Raftery, of Dublin, for considerable help in the actual investigation.

\(^3\) Samples of some of the stones were identified by Dr. John S. Jackson, Keeper, Natural History Division, National Museum of Ireland, as "Medium-grained quartzite flagstone, sensibly monomineralic but with subordinate quantities of iron now weathered to limonite. Some quartz grains are amethyst. The facies is of local Old Red Sandstone type."

\(^4\) Identified by Miss G. Roche, M.Sc., Natural History Division, National Museum of Ireland.
Fig. 2. Souterrain at Boolarcagh, Co. Tipperary.
consist of two short lengths, hardly more than the space which an orthostatic slab would have taken up. The orthostats at the back of the chamber were uprooted after surveying and found to extend to a depth of about 1.10 m. below the present ground surface, thus suggesting that the original floor of the chamber was roughly level with that of the creep.

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Although none too common in Co. Tipperary there are some 800 to 1,000 known souterrains in Ireland, not all of which date from the same period or served the same purpose. They seem to date from the Late Bronze Age to the Medieval Period, but the main floruit appears to be during the first thousand years after Christ. Several suggestions as to their purpose have been mooted, the most probable for the majority of souterrains being that they served as places of temporary refuge and/or as storehouses. The small size of the Boulareagh souterrain, as known, suggests that it may have been constructed primarily as a storehouse or sort of larder for a dwelling on the surface which has now disappeared, although the difficulty of passage through the narrow, low creep hints at a defensive purpose also.

ETIENNE RYNNE

5 Mr. Francis Sheedy, of Boolareagh, has, however, informed me of two other souterrains said to have been discovered not far distant from the above described example. One, found about 20 years ago, is also in the townland of Boolareagh (O.S. 6' sheet 24, about 4.5 cm. from N. and 8 cm. from W.), and the other is in the townland of Cullahill (O.S. 6' sheet 24, about 10.7 cm. from N. and 14.2 cm. from W.).

Carved Stones at Kilnanare, Co. Kerry

Some years ago during a visit by members of the Co. Kerry Field Club to the old churchyard at Kilnanare, just under three miles east of Castlemaine, in county Kerry (O.S. 6' map 47, 9.5 cm. from the eastern margin and 26.5 cm. from the southern margin), some interesting carved stones were noticed. One of these is a mitred bishop's head carved almost in full relief, another is the head of a youth (?) also in very high relief, a third is a rectangular block of stone bearing a low relief pattern of interlaced five-strand bands [Mr. John C. O'Sullivan, National Museum of Ireland, who visited the site at the end of July, informs me that this stone is now broken, only about two-thirds of it remaining. Editor.] (see Fig. 3 for these three carvings), a fourth is a similarly decorated stone (known popularly as the "True Lovers' Knot") used as a grave-marker within the ruined church, and lastly a human head set in the external face of the wall above a window in the church. The type of heads and the style of workmanship suggest a date somewhere about the 15th century for these carvings. It seems reasonable to presume that they all belong to the early pre-Reformation church, the ruins of which still stand in the old churchyard.
These stones seem to have been carved for various purposes. The bishop's head probably was inserted in the church wall above a window like the head (possibly a corbel not in its original position) in the wall of the building, a very common fashion in the churches of the time, or it may possibly, although with less likelihood, have been built into the main doorway of the church. The youth's head is carved on what appears to have been a corbel used to support the ceiling or roof of the church. The purely ornamental nature of the other two carved stones makes their decorative purpose obvious but gives no clue as to their probable original position in the church. These two carvings are interesting in that their design appears at first glance to consist of interlocking, crossed, pointed ovals, but a closer examination reveals that these crossed ovals are not separate entities but are themselves connected to one another. The fleeting impression of circles and semi-circles in the design is also worthy of note.

James McDonnell

(Hon. Sec. The Co. Kerry Field Club.)
Fig. 4. Hearth Tax roll, Askeaton area.

(Photo: Nat. Mus. Ire.)
An 18th Century Hearth Tax Roll

The item illustrated herewith (Fig. 4) is a charred fragment of a 1737 Hearth Tax collector’s return for areas in county Limerick. It is in the collections of the National Museum of Ireland (EW 237 loan [d]) and was alleged to have been found in the Four Courts after the Insurrection of 1916. This seems questionable as the Four Courts were not set on fire during 1916 and very little damage to documents occurred there. Books were used as barricades at the windows (see photograph in The Daily Mirror, 4th May 1916) and it is probable that the containers of wills, etc., were similarly used but beyond that there is little record of damage to historical material there.

It would seem more likely that the Tax Roll is a fragment which survived the very great damage done, not only to the building itself but also to its contents, during the Civil War in 1922.

Such information as can be elicited from the fragment, underlines the loss to historians of the documents in buildings like the Four Courts which were badly damaged during and after the War of Independence.

This roll gives, on one side, summaries of the Askeaton area returns for 1736 and 1737, arrears for 1735, the name of the collector (Peter Peacock), and interesting statistics relating to the numbers of hearths in relation to the number of houses.

On the other side the fragment shows the number of houses in five named areas (Mongrett, Crecora, Croome, Killenoghton, and Killanahan) and the number of hearths in each of those areas, the number of newly chargeable hearths over the previous year’s return, the total tax due (at two-shillings per hearth), the amount collected, the amount of the arrears and the number of defaulters. The first column of figures 54, 56, 57, 58 and 59 are simply the numbers allotted to the areas on the collector’s “Walk”.

Oliver Snoddy

The Battle of Collooney: Some Footnotes

(see pages 117-122)

Some other accounts of the 1798 Battle of Collooney have carried illustrations of James Brush’s medal awarded to the Limerick City Militia.

None of these accounts is based on original research and the first is an example of the cannibalising by one writer after another of uncritical, one-sided and undocumented accounts which gave the early adulation of Vereker a longer innings than it deserved. This, in the appendix to Rev. James Dowd’s Limerick and Its Sieges, (Limerick, 1890), pp. 186-189, is taken in turn from a sketch of the regiment in the Limerick Chronicle, 13 May 1882, which again relies heavily on Lenihan’s History of Limerick.
This same illustration is later used by J. P. Dalton in an extensive review, of Robert S. Rait’s *The Story of An Irish Property* (Oxford, 1908), which appeared in *JGAHS*, 6 (1909-1910), 52-63. The Irish property concerned is Loughcutra Castle and estate near Gort to which Vereker succeeded in 1817 on the death of his uncle, John Smyth. J. P. Dalton’s account of the battle is very brief and uncritical. He does give interesting information about the estate which in 1854 was bought by the first Viscount Gough whose father (a captain at the age of 13 !) had been in the Limerick City Militia under Vereker. His fourth son was the Hugh Gough to whose memory the equestrian statue in the Phoenix Park—blown up some years ago—was raised.

A different illustration of the medal was on page 77 of *NMAJ*, 4 (1944-1945), to illustrate R. Hayes’ good, short but undocumented account of the battle where he deals with the unquestioning repetition by one writer after another of the biased accounts of the skirmish which had led to Vereker being hailed as the Irish Leonidas.

One further reference to the medal might be dealt with here. Lot 215 in the *Sale Catalogue of the Robert Day Collection*, Sotheby, Wilkinson and Hodge, (London), April 1913, is one of the medals in silver but named to an “Arthur Vincent, Capt. L.C.B.” This reference suggested to one Irish medal collector, O. D. Cresswell (letters to the writer dated 30 Nov. 1964 and 9 Dec. 1964), that the medal was never struck in gold (the argument here being that if a captain was awarded a silver medal the sergeants could not have been awarded medals in gold). There is precious little space on the medal for the engraving of an individual’s name, such engraving as may have been done on one medal could have been done at any time afterwards and since the medals were not awarded to the commissioned officers of the unit one can only assume that the engraving on the medal in the Day collection was simply Vincent’s mark of ownership of an interesting souvenir. The contemporary accounts are quite clear as to who got what type of award. The award to the commissioned officers took the form of “a suitable piece of plate for the Officers’ Mess” while the “non-commissioned officers and privates of the regiment as were engaged in the action of that day” were to be given “proper medals” (*Dublin Evening Post*, 18 October 1798). The contract for the medals was placed with James Brush and when completed the medals were put on display at his Dublin premises. The medals shown were in gold and silver: “The Gold medals are for the Sergeants, the Silver for the Privates” (*Free-man's Journal*, 24 August 1799).

Finally it might be mentioned that while the illustration of the medal used by Dowd and Dalton omits Brush’s name, the silver medal from which the drawing was taken and which is now in the Limerick City Museum, still shows the last three letters of his name, USH, although even these are now only barely decipherable (Miss M. Lanigan, Curator, to the writer 31 May and 3 June 1965). It would appear that these authors were not aware of the identity of the artist who struck the medal.

**Oliver Snoddy**

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**A Source for Nineteenth Century Clare History**

The *Dunboyne Newscuttings* in the National Library of Ireland are a very useful source of information on activities in county Clare during the 19th century. They
are a set of almost 140 volumes of newspaper extracts and various other printed items compiled by Theobald Butler, 14th Baron Dunboyne, who died at Knopogue Castle, Co. Clare, in 1881.

There are 59 volumes (NL9 MSS 3321-79) on county Clare, covering the periods 1824-28 and 1842-79). The material is arranged chronologically, and many of the volumes carry tables of contents. The newspapers chiefly drawn on were The Limerick Chronicle, The Clare Journal, and The Clare Freeman; there is no file of this last paper in the National Library and the sets of the other two papers are incomplete.

From 1864 to 1878 there are two or three volumes covering each year. There is great emphasis in the extracts on hospitals, unions, church affairs, trials, and town commissioners; auctions and lettings, railways, elections, drainage schemes, the Clare Militia, the R.I.C., births, marriages and deaths are also well covered.

The volumes covering the relevant years have some information on the effects of the Great Famine in Clare and, later, on Fenian activities in the county. MS 3375 consists of newcuttings on William Smith O’Brien between 1865 and 1874. MS 3376 covers a number of law trials from 1863 to 1876; a case involving the will of Sir Edward FitzGerald, Bart., of Carrigor, is very fully covered in this volume and also in MS 3349. MS 3377 includes election addresses, notices and circulars on a wide variety of subjects between 1853 and 1875. MS 3378 has material relating to the Church of Ireland diocese of Killaloe between 1869 and 1878. MS 3379 reports on trials between 1853 and 1875, and also includes material on political meetings and freemasonry in county Clare.

MICHAEL HEWSON

An "Orange" Street in the 'Bridge

While carrying out renovation work on the front of O'Regan's public house in Sixmilebridge, on Wednesday, Mr. Michael O'Gorman uncovered a square stone with the legend "Orange Street 1733" carved on it. Although the place is known locally as The Square, it is evident that in 1733 the street was named after William of Orange.

Sixmilebridge had at one time in its history quite a number of streets with imperialist sounding names. Another plaque on the Arch Cinema reads "Hanover Sq."; one on the house of Mr. Tom Fitzgerald reads "George's Street" and another outside the house of Mr. Donal Keane reads "Frederick Sq." All the plaques have the same date (1733) on them.

—From The Clare Champion, 14/8/1965