Togthers in Littleton Bog, Co. Tipperary

By ETIENNE RYNNE, Member

In June 1960, writing from his home in Croom, the late David Cantwell, well-known to members of the Thomond Archaeological Society, reported the discovery of two toghers (wooden trackways) in Littleton Bog, near Littleton, Co. Tipperary. Acting on this report to the National Museum, the writer visited the site and investigated the discoveries.

The toghers are all in the northern portion of Baile Dhaith (Littleton Bog) which has been drained and is being worked by Bord na Móna for machine-won turf (Fig. 1). The two toghers (A and B) reported by Mr. Cantwell were investigated in some detail, a third one (C) could be noted but not examined as it was too deep in the bog and, consequently, covered with water, while the possible presence of a fourth (D) was reported by the workmen on the bog but as it only appeared in one place it must be treated as very doubtful. The toghers could be traced across the bog where they had been cut through by the very wide machine-made trenches (50 to 75 m. in width) and by the drains and sub-drains (1 to 2 m. in width). These ran in a NNW-SSE direction in the northern extension of the bog, and in a NE-SW direction in the main portion of the bog.

Togher A

This togher ran in a SW-NE direction across one of the narrowest parts of the bog, close to the main Dublin-Cork road which runs almost in the same direction about 100 m. to the north of it. It apparently served as a causeway between the high ground in Leigh townland and the marshy but less boggy ground in Longfordpass North and may even have continued beyond this latter spot to the high ground in Longfordpass South, but it was not found possible to examine the bog for this.

Trench 6 did not extend as far north as the line of this togher, but the presence of the togher could be verified in a narrow drain extending northwards from that trench. The position of the togher at this point (marked T.6 on Fig. 1) can be plotted on O.S. 6" sheet 42 for Co. Tipperary, 23.2 cm. from the southern margin and 32.2 cm. from the eastern margin.

This togher could only be properly examined in the centre of Trench 7 (marked T.7 on Fig. 1), but its course could be traced elsewhere across Trench 7 by the manner in which the peat at the togher was left uncut, the turf-cutting machines being raised by the workers as they passed it. The togher did not run in a perfectly straight line across the trench but seemed to change direction very slightly, although not significantly, about midway across. The position of the eastern end of the togher in this trench can be plotted on the same O.S. map at a point 25.3 cm. from the southern margin and 29.8 cm. from the eastern margin.

Where the togher could be most easily examined a small length of it, somewhat over 1 metre, was excavated. It was seen to consist of roughly hewn planks laid
Fig. 1. Map showing toghers in Littleton Bog.

(Based on Ordnance Survey, by permission of the Minister for Finance).

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transversely across several "runners", some of which were not parallel to the line of the togher, but which may, possibly, have been displaced by the machine having cut through the togher at this point (Fig. 2). The two outer "runners" were plank-like but the others were round-sectioned beams. The transverse planks of the togher at this point were not only supported by these "runners" but also by two short bits of planks and by small stones and what looked like gravel (decalcified remains of limestone blocks) which extended for an average depth of about 15 cm. below the planks. Most of the transverse planks uncovered had square holes cut vertically through their ends and in some cases long pegs, averaging about 50 cm. in length, passed through these. The togher at this point averaged a little over 3 m. in width. It was 40 cm. under peat, but before cutting it must have lain about 1.80 m. below the surface, while it probably was about 2.50 m. to 3 m. below the surface before the bog was drained. Samples of three of the transverse planks were identified as oak (Quercus); two of the pegs as willow-poplar (Salix-Populus) and a third peg as ash (Fraxinus); of the "runners" two were of oak (Quercus), two of cherry or blackthorn (Prunus) and one probably of alder (Alnus), while a sample from this togher sent up by Mr. Cantwell before the investigation was identified as birch (Betula).

Togher B

This togher ran in a WSW-ENE direction across the bog where it begins to narrow between the high ground in Leigh townland near the Liathmore Churches and the high ground in Longfordpass South. It was possible to examine this togher cursorily at eight points along its length and to make a small excavation at one point. It ran in a perfectly straight line everywhere it could be observed except at its western end where it changed its direction to an E-W one. The position of the westernmost part of this togher observed can be plotted on O.S. 6" sheet 42 for Co. Tipperary, 12.8 cm. from the southern margin and 32 cm. from the eastern margin; that of the easternmost part at a point on the same map, 14.6 cm. from the southern margin and 27.3 cm. from the eastern margin.

In the western face of Trench 8 (marked T.8 on Fig. 1) this togher could be seen to be about 8 m. in width (only 6 m. of which is substantial) and to consist of brushwood and much gravel (decalcified remains of limestone blocks), anchored in position by a few pegs. At this point the togher was about 1 m. below the surface of the bog (i.e. about 1.80 m. to 2 m. prior to drainage). In the eastern face of Trench 8 the togher could be seen to be about 8 m. in width and to consist of brushwood anchored in position by a few pegs.

In Sub-drain 8 (marked S-D.8 on Fig. 1) the togher was about 7.50 m. in width and 1.20 m. below the surface (i.e. about 2 m. or more prior to drainage). A length of about 1.50 m. of it was excavated at this point, revealing that it consisted of long rounded beams laid side-by-side, transversely across the line of the togher (Fig. 2). These beams were supported at their northern ends by a brushwood layer and at their southern ends by two short "runners". Between these "runners", and also at about the middle of the togher, some gravel (decalcified remains of limestone blocks) was noticed, but not in really significant quantities. Four pegs were uncovered, one (1 m. long and 4 cm. in diameter) at the southern side and the others at the northern side. The southern peg was alongside the end of one of the longer of the transverse beams while the northern pegs were placed between the ends of the beams and driven
Fig. 2. Plans of excavated portions of Toggers A and B, Littleton Bog; inset: schematic cross-sections.
through the underlying brushwood layer. Only one plank was noted and this was very rough and featureless; it rested on top of two of the transverse beams, but did not seem to have any particular significance. Samples of four of the beams were identified as ash (*Fraxinus*), one as oak (*Quercus*) and another as birch (*Betula*); a sample of the plank was identified as of oak (*Quercus*); one peg as birch (*Betula*) and another as hazel (*Corylus*); the two runners as ash (*Fraxinus*), and two samples of the brushwood as hazel (*Corylus*).

In the western face of Trench 6 (marked T.6 on Fig. 1) the togher was not clearly visible. It appeared, however, as if it may have been about 8 m. wide and to consist principally of brushwood with, possibly, some pegs and transverse beams. The togher is also indistinct in the eastern face of Trench 6, but appeared to be of similar width and construction there.

In a narrow drain running between and parallel to Trenches 6 and 7 (marked D. 6-7 on Fig. 1) the togher could also be seen. It was about 6 m. in width at this point and consisted of transverse beams and strong supporting planks with, apparently, little brushwood and no gravel.

In the western face of Trench 7 (marked T.7 on Fig. 1) the togher was, apparently, of brushwood alone, and about 8 m. in width. It was about 1.50 m. below the surface (i.e. about 2.30 m. to 2.50 m. before drainage) and at this point it was possible to see that there was at least 2 m. depth of peat (probably more) below it. In the eastern face of Trench 7 only the barest traces of the togher were discernible and no constructional details could be observed.

**Togher C**

This togher ran in a NW-SE direction, apparently connecting the high ground in Leigh with that in Bawnreagh and crossing the bog near the source of Derheen River, a small rivulet which seems to have its source in the middle of the bog itself. The position of the observed north-western end of this togher can be plotted on O.S. 6" sheet 42 for Co. Tipperary, 8 mm. from the southern margin and 27 cm. from the eastern margin and that of the south-eastern end on O.S. 6" sheet 48 for Co. Tipperary, 7 mm. from the northern margin and 22.4 cm. from the eastern margin.

As already mentioned, it was not possible to investigate this togher in any detail, but it was possible to note its whereabouts in Trench 1 (marked T.1 on Fig. 1) and in both the north-western and south-eastern faces of Trench 3 (marked T.3 on Fig. 1). In the former face of Trench 3 a plank, a stake (identified as birch (*Betula*)) and a peg were noticed, and in the latter face of the same Trench it was possible to measure the togher as being about 3.50 m. below the surface of the bog (i.e. about 4 m. or more before drainage).

**Togher D (?)**

The evidence for the existence of this togher is very doubtful. Signs of a wooden structure were reported as having been noted at one point in Trench 3 at a depth of about 4 m. below the surface, in the townland of Clonoura, but it is possible that the wood encountered could have been an isolated occurrence.
DISCUSSION

Each of the three togthers is at a different depth in the bog and the two which it was possible to examine in detail were of very different size and construction. One might argue from this that the togthers date from very different periods, which is quite probable but which can by no means be taken as certain as it is possible that the growth of the peat may have differed in the different parts of the bog, that the recent drainage may have caused greater shrinkage in some places than in others, or that different methods of construction may have been used contemporaneously for different purposes. Bearing all these unknown or uncertain factors in mind, it is not possible to suggest even an approximate relative or absolute date for any of the togthers on stratigraphical or typological grounds alone.

Many objects of archaeological interest have been discovered in Littleton Bog since Bord na Móna started work there. These objects cover a long period in time and include an Early Bronze Age decorated flat axehead, a Late Bronze Age spearhead and portion of its wooden shaft, an Early Iron Age leather-covered wooden shield, all from Clonoura townland, in the southern part of the bog; three Late Bronze Age swords (apparently not a hoard) from the townland of Derrynoghan, in the southwestern corner of the bog; a hair hurling ball of probably not more than about two hundred years ago from Bawnreagh townland; a Late Medieval leather shoe of Type 5 from the southern part of Leigh townland, in the central portion of the bog; the remains of a man who was, presumably, drowned accidentally in a bog-hole in Leigh about 100 m. south of Togher C, some time in the 15th or 16th century A.D.; a finely decorated wooden weaver's sword, dated to about 1000 A.D., also found in Leigh, about 200 m. south of Togher B, and a pointed wooden stake found near the sword; a second leather shoe, also of Type 5, was found in the central portion of the bog, apparently in the townland of Longfordpass South. In the north-eastern part of the bog, a portion north of the Dublin-Cork road which is not worked by Bord na Móna but by Pope Bros. Ltd., in the townland of Longfordpass North there were found a small hone pierced for suspension, a wooden vessel containing bog-butter, two leather shoes of Type 5 and the other of Type 5, and a spade-like wooden

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1 All the objects here listed, except the last one, are now preserved in the National Museum of Ireland.
2 Reg. no. 1959 : 27; see JRSAI, 91 (1961), 74, fig. 14 : 1.
3 Reg. nos. 1956 : 430 and 431; unpublished.
4 Reg. no. 1960 : 661; see JRSAI, 92 (1962), 152, Pl. XVII.
5 Reg. nos. 1955 : 60 and 121 (see JRSAI, 88 (1958), 122) and 1965 : 67 (unpublished).
6 Reg. no. F1960 : 47; unpublished, but see JCHAS, 57 (1952), 99-104 and 59 (1954), 78-79 for similar discoveries.
7 Reg. no. 1955 : 36; unpublished.
9 Reg. nos. of his garments, 1955 : 93 and 94; see McClintock, Handbook on the Traditional Old Irish Dress, Durdalk 1958, p. 15.
10 Reg. no. 1954 : 17; see PRIA, 57B (1956), 197-8, Pl. X, b.
11 Reg. no. 1954 : 49; unpublished.
13 Reg. no. 1960 : 78; see JRSAI, 92 (1962), 155.
15 Reg. no. 1962 : 121; see JRSAI, 94 (1964), 103.
16 CLAJ, 13 (1956), 277-8.
17 CLAJ, 13 (1956), 278-9.
implement which almost certainly is to be interpreted as the stilt-and-share of an early ard or plough. As none of these finds was made on or significantly near any of the toghers, it would be unwise to suggest that any of them help to date the trackways, although the fact that the weaver's sword was found about 70 cm. below the present surface of the bog while Togher B not too far distant was about 50 cm. deeper suggests that that togher, at least, probably antedates the year 1000 A.D.

All of the toghers were probably laid down to provide passages across the narrower portions of the bog. Their approximate alignment with any particular feature, such as the Liathmore churches or the apparent rath in the case of Togher B (see Fig. 1), is probably purely fortuitous—the presence of this togher may, in fact, account for the siting of the churches and/or the rath rather than vice versa if, as is possible, the togher was in use about the same period as those monuments.

Samples of the peat were taken both above and below Togher A and above Togher B, at the points of the excavations, for the purpose of pollen analytical dating, and samples of wood from Togher A, B and C were retained for use in radiocarbon dating. Unfortunately, it has not been found possible, as yet, to have either the pollen samples analysed or the wood samples dated and, therefore, all we can do is point to the fact that other toghers in Irish bogs have been dated by the radiocarbon method to as early as 1640 ± 170 B.C. and to as late as 780 ± 80 A.D. Radiocarbon dating for toghers in English bogs suggests that there they appear to fall into one or other of two distinct phases, the Neolithic (2800-2000 B.C.) and the Late Bronze Age (900-450 B.C.). Although many of the toghers found in various parts of continental Europe go back to Neolithic times, it is important to remember that there are good historical records there for the use of wooden trackways, some very similar to those in Littleton Bog, even as late as the early 17th century, A.D.24

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18 Information from the finder, Mr. John English, Uirlingford, Co. Kilkenny.
19 See Seymour, JNMAS, 2 (1911-13), 127-133; Lynch, JNMAS, 3 (1913-15), 73-91; and Leask and Macalister, PR1A, 51C (1946), 1-14.
20 This apparently much disturbed earthwork and the nearby "cave" (probably a souterrain), neither of which is marked as such on the O.S. map, were reported by the late Mr. Cantwell and briefly inspected by the writer in 1960.
22 Mitchell, op. cit., p. 65—corrected according to Waterbolk, loc. cit.
24 See, for instance, Halbertsma, "Veenbruggen . . ." ("Trackways and their Uses; with Reference to a Description of 1619"), Berichten van den Rijksdienst voor het Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek (=Proceedings of the State Service for Archaeological Investigations in the Netherlands), 12-13 (1962-63), 193-208 with brief summary in English on page 200.