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Stone Monuments of Louth

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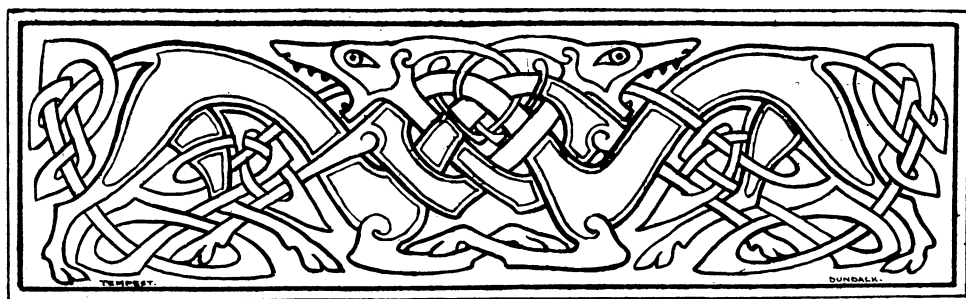
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Stone Monuments of Louth.

THE GIANTS' GRAVES AT GRANGE, CARLINGFORD, FROM MAJOR-GENERAL STUBBS' MS. HISTORY OF LOUTH.

ANTIQUITIES.

The northern end of the county is that which is richest in prehistoric remains. The boulder-strewn surface of the ground readily afforded the materials for the lithic structures which marked a period anterior to the advent of Christianity. But the destroying hand of man has obliterated nearly all of them. Even within this century, when history formed part of the education of children at village schools, men careless of what they did and thinking only of a paltry gain, broke, rooted or dug up remains which might have given us information on many of the most interesting points connected with the ancient religion of the Irish.

Wright in his *Louthiana* has preserved all that we now can learn of some of them, in the plates that illustrate his work. Unfortunately, the descriptions that accompany them are so meagre, and an acquaintance with Irish history and the Irish language is so completely wanting,¹ that his antiquarian zeal, great as it undoubtedly was, would have been quite thrown away without them. But they luckily give a very good idea of what they represent.

CROMLEACS.

The cromleac in the townland of Proleek, and close by the grounds of Ballymascanlan House, three miles north of Dundalk, is a well-known object to all tourists in those parts. A name once given to it,² the Cloch an Bhodaigh, Clown's Stone, has no known origin. "The Giant's lift," or "load" by which it is better known, takes us into the region of legend and of stories repeated in other counties besides Louth, of the distance to which giants were capable of throwing these huge boulders. It is of granite and supported on three blocks of the same rock. Fionn MacCumhail is, or used to be, the giant who threw this stone. According to Dr. Keating, Hector Boetius who wrote a history of Scotland said that Fionn was 15 cubits high.

The ordnance map³ marks another cromleac not far off in the townland of Aghnaskeagh, but upon what authority I have been unable to discover. It is not

1.—In describing the remains at Killin, which he calls "Killing-Hill," he says, "The name rather speaks . . . as signifying slaughter" (Killin = a little church, or a white church), and he quotes an Irish story (Plate V., Book III.) about a giant called Parrah bough M'Shagjean.

This is the same as the Scotch giant quoted by Messrs. O'Keefe and O'Connor (Ordnance Letters, Louth, Ballymascanlon) as buried in Proleek.

2.—Ann. Q.M., A.D. 1452.

3.—Sheet No. 4 Six inch scale.

(The map (1911 edition) marks two cromleacs, one in the grounds of Annaskeagh House and one at the north end of the T. L. near Slieve Feede.—ED.)



STANDING STONES AT BALTRAY,
(Photo by Mr. Magrath).



Recess in southern wall showing thurible cover found during excavation.



**General view of east end of Church while excavation was in progress, showing position of altar.
RUINS OF OLD CHURCH AT BALLYBARRACK, DUNDALK,
Where Blessed Oliver Plunkett officiated.**

mentioned in the ordnance letters or name books, and no one now living seems able to say that there was one. The spot is thickly covered with granite boulders which may have been collected there for many purposes. But in the small townland of Killin in the parish of Kane there was one associated with other remains which will be presently described.

STONE CIRCLES.

There were six of the stone circles commonly supposed to have been places of druidical worship, all of them north of Dundalk, for five of which we must refer to the plates in Wright's *Louthiana*. They are:—

Balregan T.L., parish of Castletown.

Bally na Hattin, parish of Dundalk.

This is described by Mr. Wright as being in the plain of Ballynahatny.

Carrickbroad, is in Co. Armagh.

Killin T.L., parish of Kane.

There were two stone circles here on twin eminences close to the house now belonging to J. D. Bell, Esq.

Lurgankeel T.L., parish of Faughart.

Ravensdale Park.

On the right of the avenue leading up to the house from which it is distant only 400 yards south by east. Eight upright stones form the inner circle or rather oval with interior diameters of 24 and 14 feet. Five other stones, of which two are lying down, would seem to have been part of an outer oval, if completed, of about 76 by 60 feet; but as the slope of the hill on which it stands falls rapidly on the western side, its original shape is uncertain.

KISTVAENS—GIANTS' GRAVES.

Close beside the Proleek cromleac is one of those sepulchral cairns or kistvaens which are sometimes found beside cromleacs. They are often termed from their size "Giants' graves." Another remarkable one is "Calliagh Virra's House" in the townland of Paddock, parish of Monasterboice, described and figured by Mr. George V. du Noyer in the *Journal of the Kilkenny Archæological Society*, Vol. V, Second Series, p. 497.

There are several of these "Giants' Graves" in the County Louth. They all consist of an oblong space from twelve to fifteen or even seventeen feet in length, enclosed with flagstones or flattened boulders set on edge. About three feet wide at one end and enlarged at the other to four or four and a half feet; some have been covered over with flagstones like Calliagh Virra's House. Others, like the Proleek one, have only a single slab covering the larger end.

At the east end of the Carlingford range there are two groups of these kistvaens, one in the townland of Grange, which lies east of Grange Cross about 700 yards. Two of the kistvaens lie close together on the 500 feet contour line and are very interesting ones, but, like the others, have been sadly dismantled. They are separated by a loose stone wall, in the construction of which doubtless damage was done to both; one is 16 feet long by about 6 broad. At the north end of it lie several large slabs and smaller stones which certainly seem to have been arranged as a cromleac. The other one lies at right angles to the first, and is complete. The

breadth of the existing end is $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet. About 300 yards N.E. of these is a third one, also a good deal dismantled, and so covered up with weeds and rubbish as to be somewhat difficult to find. Its dimensions were about 17 by 5 feet.

About 1,000 yards due north of this group is another between 600 and 700 feet above the sea, just outside Grange Irish and within the Commons of Carlingford. It consists of two, lying end to end in a NN.W. direction, but so dismantled and covered with grass and ferns that with all the boulders lying about they are not easy to find. Their interior dimensions seem to have been 15 by $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet.

Whose tombs are they? Chiefs who fell there in some plundering raid, or defending their possessions? Or do they mark the graves of kings who were gathered to their fathers after years of peaceful rule. I fear the pleasant thought must be dismissed, and the other put in its place. Then when were the dead warriors laid there? Probably before it became the custom to raise up a lofty cairn over the deceased. The cromleacs with some of these kistvaens are associated with that megalithic age which are linked in our thoughts with an era when as yet druids were not known. But for the tumuli, of which some were apparently sepulchral monuments, one can hardly help connecting the earlier ones with the dying wish "Let me be buried standing with my arms in my hands and facing the foe." As enquiry picks up facts it may be found that at the time when the masculine queen of Rath Cruachan made her celebrated raid into Louth, earthen barrows had become customary marks of the place where some chief found the rest he had never during his life sought for.

