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Dun Dealgan and Its Opening

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Dun Dealgan and its Opening.

The purchase of Dun Dealgan and its dedication as a national monument is a work of which the members of the Archæological Society feel duly proud. Yet the Society was only fulfilling its proper functions in acting for the County in this matter. Louth would have been unworthy of its inheritance if when the opportunity offered, it allowed this, one of its grandest monuments, the traditional home of its greatest hero, and the site, from which so much of the romance of our earliest literature radiates, to remain in danger of neglect or destruction.

Henceforth the Mount will not merely be securely preserved as a relic and illustration of the ancient life of our country, but the knowledge of its legends and of its chief will be diffused and perpetuated, and the museum will continue to gather together the various antiquities of the district and any which may be discovered in the future, and will at the same time foster interest and study for these memorials of the past. In addition to its romantic associations Dun Dealgan is a splendid example of the ancient earth forts of our ancestors—it's stout enclosing ditch and fosse, still deep enough after all these centuries of disuse to check the entrance of an enemy, its towering mass and steep sides, which it is even now a difficulty to climb, and which no attacking party of ordinary strength could scale in face of a garrison on the top, and the broad level summit affording space for the chief's residence and the quarters of his guard.

The discovery of a souterrain or cave in the side of the Mount by Mr. Bigger and Major Berry a couple of years ago adds another ancient feature and a most interesting object of speculation to the fort. Whether the cave had some purpose as a place of retreat in danger or a storehouse for the occupants of the fort or whether it would have been constructed in somewhat later times is a matter on which competent opinion has not yet expressed itself.

The house on the summit, built by the Pirate Byrne in 1780, is a comfortable, well laid-out dwelling-place, save for the inconvenience of getting up water and all necessaries. Its rooms suit admirably for the museum.

The idea of having the Mount purchased by the Archæological Society originated with Mr. Redmond Magrath and Mr. H. G. Tempest, when it came into the market. The exertions of our President in collecting subscriptions from a wide circle made the project a success, and the generous sums given in response to his appeal by so many Irishmen who had no personal ties with Co. Louth shows a patriotism and an appreciation of Ireland's heroic traditions which puts to shame the comparative lack of interest and support of the majority of our people at home.

It was Mr. William Tempest who first proposed that the house should be used as a museum, and those who thought this impracticable are surprised and delighted at the large and very instructive collection which has already been brought together there and the great numbers who visit it. In the charge of the reliable caretaker whom the Society has secured, the valuable articles are as safe, or perhaps safer from danger of fire or pilfering as they could be in a town and probably receive as much inspection. For the walk from Dundalk is an agreeable outing in itself and often appeals to those who might never think of turning in to examine a museum at their own doors.

The place is especially appropriate for such an exhibition on the summit of what is itself one of the most remarkable of all our antiquities. The fine collection of Mr. Redmond Magrath and Mr. Henry Morris, which they have lent, form a good series for study in themselves as well as the exhibits presented by Sir Henry Bellingham and many others.

The cist found at Tankardsrock last year has been set up in the grass border near the entrance gate in its original form, and the urn and bones which it contained are on view in the museum.

When the house had been repaired and a caretaker installed, the Mount was thrown open to visitors, and became a popular resort from early summer.

A public opening ceremony was first suggested by the President, Sir Henry Bellingham, and a suitable programme was arranged by the Dun Dealgan Committee and its Secretary, Mr. H. G. Tempest. August 15th was chosen as the most suitable summer holiday, and a great attendance of visitors, their interest in the place on the occasion, a spirited address from Mr. Bigger, a picturesque pageant, and a bright sunny afternoon, made the celebration a most gratifying success.

Mr. Tempest secured the presence of the Oireachtas pageant troupe—fifty in number—of the Dublin Gaelic League Branches, and their rehearsal of "the Return of Emer and Cuchullain" made a most attractive spectacle. The wide fosse gave room for the full movement of the procession, and its ramparts and walls were thronged with the onlookers. The long lines of the youths and maidens of Ulster at Cuchullain's court, in their many tinted flowing robes, and their easy but graceful march,

the arrival of the chief and his bride on horseback, and the festivities in their honour, the choruses, dances, and songs performed before them would have a charm of originality even in commonplace surroundings, but here, on the slope of Cuchullain's dun, under the shady trees and lit by an occasional slanting ray that penetrated the leafy shelter, the display was most romantic. The stalwart Cuchulainn War-Pipers of Whitecross playing stirring marches led a great procession of visitors out from the town, and they, with Mr. Callendar's fine pipers from Dublin in Irish dress, who had preceded them, made the old Dun resound to music which it is probable it had not heard for eight or nine centuries. On the arrival of Mr. Bigger, heralded by his pipers, Sir Henry Bellingham declared the Dun formally open, and the flag was hoisted on the top of the castle tower. No one else could have been at all so fitting to deliver the congratulatory address as the exponent, in his historical lectures and in his own personality, of Ulster's part in Ireland's life. Mr. Bigger reviewed in fervid language the career of Muirtheimne's champion and the early glories of the province, and exulted in the fortifying anew of this Ford of the Watching to guard the fame of our ancient kingdom and its legends. The pride and loyalty that he kindled in his listeners for their native memories was warmly acknowledged by Mrs. Whitworth and Fr. Lyons in speaking everyone's appreciation of his stirring words.

But he did not mean a complete parallel in the beautiful lines of Ferguson with which at the end he applied to that day's function, Ossian's forecast of the "children of the waning days" coming to venerate Aidien's grave. It is not "in shadow of the gathering night" of forgetfulness that the people of Louth had met to visit Cuchulainn's home, but in the growing glow of a newly recovered knowledge and joy in their heroic past, and in the hope "for still 'tis only dawning day"—of a full light of national culture nourished by much of the spirit and influences of our old Irish traditions.

JOSEPH T. DOLAN, M.A.

DUN DEALGAN FUND.

Since our last report, the Museum—the second stage in the scheme—has been successfully started, and we are glad to say that both fort and museum have attracted large numbers of visitors.

In order to provide a suitable home for the collections, the Committee removed the dilapidated wallpaper from hall, staircase and two of the rooms, replacing it by a plain washable distemper. The woodwork was also repainted.

In two places, trees were removed from the slope of the mount and the rampart, to afford views towards the bay. More shrubs have been planted and grass seed sown, but the extreme dryness of the year was greatly against our horticultural efforts. The thinning of the trees has already resulted in a new growth of grass at these two spots, binding the loose soil and making the place more sightly. It is intended to carry out this thinning process much further, so that the shape of the earthwork will not be so masked as it is at present. The remaining trees will also have a better chance of growing, the grass will preserve the mount from denudation and magnificent views from the commanding position will be offered to visitors.

The largest gift to the museum is the collection of Mr. Redmond Magrath, and for variety and interest it would be difficult to equal it in a provincial town. The next most numerous and very valuable collection is that lent by Mr. Henry Morris, the first Secretary of the County Louth Archaeological Society. Sir Henry Bellingham, Bart., presented a fine pair of elks-horns, several pairs of deer horns, and many other objects connected with the district and with foreign lands. He has also given several glass cases, &c. During the summer we had on loan 12 exhibition cases from the National Museum in Dublin, the Ardee Corporation Maces and Minute Book lent by Mr. Joseph T. Dolan, M.A., and a small collection of old Dundalk-printed chap-books and leaflets from Mr. E. R. M'C. Dix, M.R.I.A., of Dublin. Other exhibits have been very kindly presented by Miss Watters, Carrickmullen, Miss Comerford, Mr. P. L. Macardle, Mr. John Taaffe, Church Street, Captain Edward Sharples, Mr. Patk. Mathews, Mr. Owen Gernon, Master Trevor Tempest, and others.

The formal opening took place on August 15th in glorious weather. Over fifty of the Dublin Oireachtas pageant performers came down specially without any fee, and in the natural stage formed by the deep fosse, they gave a very large and enthusiastic audience a vivid representation of the return of Cuchulainn and Emer to Dún Dealgán. A contingent of pipers in national costume from Dublin under Mr. Brian Callendar and the Cuchulainn Pipers from Whitecross, Co. Armagh, played stirring airs, which were echoed by Mr. Bigger's personal pipers perched on the parapet of the highest turret. After the pageant had been performed a second time, Sir Henry Bellingham, Bart., read a statement of the finances of the Fund, and when Mr. F. J. Bigger, M.R.I.A., delivered an address and declared

Photo by]

[H. Kwiatkowski

THE OPENING CEREMONY AT DUN DEALGAN.

Emer and her Attendants in the Pageant.