

ANCIENT CUSTOMS: THE "CRUSHEENS."

The Croisini, or Crusheens, may be termed a revival of the ancient custom of erecting monuments to the dead at places other than their death or burial. The practice at Cong of erecting these memorials dates from 1542. Hitherto it had been the custom for the Canons of the abbey to bring the processional Cross of Cong to a certain point on each road to meet all funerals bound for their hallowed cemetery. In that year the monastery of Cong was suppressed & the Lord Abbot, Aeneas MacDonnell, meeting a funeral on its way to the abbey burial grounds, formed a cross of branches of a tree, which he placed on a wall, saying: "Thus let it be done for all time."

The precedent established by the pious abbot has been faithfully followed throughout the past four hundred years & no funeral ever enters the abbey grounds, no matter how short or long the journey, without halting at the old Crusheens sites, even though this may sometimes necessitate an inconvenient detour. The regard of the local people for this old custom is so great that they will brook no interference from any quarter that will in any way hinder the observance of the practice. An instance of their insistence was provided in the last century when Lord Ardilaun, in extending his estate, closed the old east road on which route lay one of the Crusheens sites. The people objected so strenuously that the potentate Ardilaun was forced finally to agree to a right of way for funerals entering the abbey from this side. This passage, the old eastern approach to Cong, runs inside the boundary wall from the Grand Entrance on the Galway road towards the village. Under a big ash tree at the side of the old road will be seen a collection of small crude wooden crosses, lying on the wall & overhanging branches. At each funeral passing along this route, a friend or relative of the deceased person leaves a cross under the tree when the procession halts to pray.

Proceeding up the hill from Cong, past the schoolhouse, an assortment of small cairns of stones will be seen inside the low wall amidst the trees, some couple of hundred yds from the school. These are the Drumsheel or Cregaree East Crusheens, differing from those first mentioned in that they consist of a mound of rough stones, usually surmounted by the crude wooden cross. Some of these cairns are upwards of 7' tall.

The third Crusheens are at the side of the Clonbur road, about 1/2 ml W. of Cong. Here, also, piles of loose stones are heaped in the form of miniature cairns, each topped with a crude wooden cross. These are the Cregaree West Crusheens.

The most remarkable monument of this kind, however, is the Joyce Memorial. This is on a high ridge of limestone rock at the side of the road, alongside the Cregaree West Crusheens, & is a most singular memorial which attracts the attention of all passers-by. It is a rectangular slab, built-in with rough stones that form a sloping "roof". Under a crude incised cross, & the letters "I.H.S." is the following inscription:-

"PRAY FOR YE S
OULES OF JO
HN JOYCE &
MARY JOYCE
HIS WIFE WHO
DYED YE 6th OF
AUGUST 1712."

The slab, which is of limestone, measures approximately 2'3" by 1'10" & is about 6" thick, but the entire monument, which Hayward described as resembling a massive gate-pillar in form, is about 7' in height by about 5' square.

John and Mary Joyce, whom the monument commemorates, resided locally & were murdered in their home one night when they resisted a neighbouring family who came to abduct their daughter that one of them might marry her. The three brothers who took part in this raid were subsequently hanged

ANCIENT CUSTOMS, etc. (cont'd.)

at Ballinrobe.

ST. CECILIA'S WELL & CARVED SLAB: This well, on the edge of one of those uprisings of the subterranean streams, at Drumsheel, almost 1 ml. N.E. of Cong, was greatly venerated by the people in former years. On the 15th of August & 7th of September, large numbers of pilgrims visited the well to hold an all-night vigil. Tents were set up in the little field nearby & candles were lighted in honour of the saint. The pilgrimage has fallen off almost completely in latter years. Alongside the well is a slab of limestone about 20" square, on which a skull & cross-bones are carved in relief. There is no tradition regarding this stone, though it is, apparently, of considerable age.

HISTORIC SITES: THE BATTLE OF MOYTURA - Sir William Wilde has established firmly in the minds of the people hereabouts, as well as ~~as well as~~ in those of many credulous writers who have accepted his theories & assertions without question, that the great pre-Christian Battle of Moytura, between the Tuatha de Danaan & Fírbólgs, took place inside the triangular area bounded by Cong, Cross & The Neale. There is ample evidence that at least one major battle took place here in ancient times, the profusion of stone monuments, sepulchral mounds & cairns, is sufficient proof of that. But the great encounter which Wilde describes is now generally acknowledged by historians & antiquarians alike as having taken place at North Moytura, in the county Sligo. Those who prefer to believe Wilde's fanciful narration will shift ground to say that the northern battle took place at a later date & that the first battle was that of Moytura South. So now there were two battles & the names applied to the great monuments & sites of engagements, etc., were, by strange coincidence, identical, & the same men to whom these monuments were erected after death, died a second time in Sligo, after exactly similar struggles.

O'Donovan was, probably, largely responsible for Wilde's confident belief & he also, in his Ordnance Survey Letters of Co. Mayo, Vol.2, renders an account of the battle & he states that local tradition placed the site of the battle here but he was unable to obtain any traditional account of the battle whatever in the locality & his version is derived from written sources which, apparently, could be applied only to the Sligo battlefield.

A great many of the names of sites & monuments mentioned by the ancient authority, on whose writings Wilde based his story, do not appear in the southern battlefield. To correct that he often christened a fort or monument with the name of a similar construction described in the old writings. The giant cairn at Killower is an instance of this. No other name had ever been known for it, but Wilde promptly decided that it was the burial mound of the Fir Bolg King, Eochy, & called it Carn Eochy, even though the location of that carn could not be other than near Ballysodare in Sligo, if the ancient manuscripts are faithfully interpreted.

Amidst all this confusion, the fact clearly emerges that a great battle did take place here, probably in pre-Christian times too, but there seems to be no account of when it occurred or of the contending parties. There was a lively engagement on this very site in the year 1230 A.D. in which Anglo-Normans under one of the Burkes & Irish under Felim O'Connor invaded this territory, & advancing towards Inishmaine to "cordon-off" the isthmus, routed the mighty army of the Connachtmen.

HEDGE SCHOOL: During the Penal Days a Hedge School flourished under one of the arches of Cong Bridge, that