

INCHAGOILL - Inis a' Ghaill Chraibhthigh, "The Island of the Devout Foreigner (or Stranger)", almost 5m. to the S.W. of Cong in Loch Corrib.

(Note: This being the busiest fishing season on the lake, I could not conveniently visit the island since every available boat is engaged by anglers. This description of the island & its archaeological treasures is, therefore, compiled from Sir Wm. Wilde's "Loch Corrib", Hayward's "The Corrib Country", Fr. Neary's booklet, the narrations of local persons, & other sources. O'Donovan treated of Inchagoill under Galway, in which county it is situate, in Vol. III, p.46.)

It is readily apparent that Inchagoill is easily the most interesting island on the lake, not merely historically, but also for prettiness & for the lovely views of lake, mtn & woodland which it affords. An ancient burial ground, situated near the narrowing centre of the island contains two small early-Irish churches & a monumental stone bearing what is acknowledged to be one of the first Christian inscriptions in Ireland.

Teampull Phadraig, St. Patrick's Church, is that on the N.E. side & is small & plain &, in size, construction & appearance, obviously of the primitive type. Dr. Petrie, referring to this bldg in "Round Towers" says "That this church is of the age of St. Patrick, as is believed in the traditions of the country, & as its name would indicate, can, I think, scarcely admit of doubt."

It consists of nave & chancel, but without trace of an arch or other dividing feature, which, it may be assumed, it did not ever have. Internal dimensions are 29'7", the chancel occupying a space 11'7" by 8'8", the nave 17'11" by 11'10". The little church is in a very ruinous condition, with no trace of window openings remaining, but the massive character of the Cyclopean walls is still evident, with signs of mortar on the interior only. The narrow primitive doorway, square-headed & having inclined jambs, is in the W. gable & is surrounded by a massive lintel, 4'8" wide. The jambs, formed of squarish uncut stones, incline inwards from a width of 24 $\frac{1}{2}$ " at the sill to 22 $\frac{1}{2}$ " at the lintel.

A few paces from the doorway of St. Patrick's Church is the celebrated Lugnaedon Stone, one of the most valuable early Christian stone monuments of its kind in Ireland. Wilde's description, which still applies, says: "It is a single four sided obelistical pillar, of hard, greyish Silurian stone, unhewn, slightly cambered, broad at the base, where it measures 10", & gradually decreasing from 6 to 5 inches on the inscribed side".

It rises to a height of about 2'4" over the ground,

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acting as headstone to a grave, but Wilde says that this was manifestly not its original position & that it had "all the appearance of having been one of those corbel stones so often seen projecting in old Irish churches, & of which there is an example in the N.E. angle of the gable of the neighbouring "Church of the Saints". Crosses, with "fish-tail" extremities, are carved on the four faces of the stone, near the top - two, one above the other, on the west, two on the east, two on the south & one on the north face. These "may be regarded as examples of the most ancient carvings of that sacred emblem now to be found in the British Isles, or perhaps, if we except those in the Catacombs of Rome, anywhere in Europe." (Wilde). On the west face is an inscription in the "Uncial or Old Latin character", which, reading perpendicularly towards the ground, was translated by Dr. Petrie as "LIA LUGNAEDON MACC LIMENUEH", "The Stone of Lugnaedon, Son of Limenueh".

The stone has been the subject of much heated controversy, but it appears to be established that Lugnaedon was a nephew of St. Patrick, seventh son of Patrick's sister, Liemania or Limanin, & of Restitutus the Lombard, & that he was the saint's presbyter & navigator. Lugnad is said to have been given land between Lochs Mask & Corrib. by Duach, King of Connaught, in 496 A.D. It also seems agreed that the carving & inscription dates from the 5th or very beginning of the 6th century.

Teampull na Naomh, "The Church of the Saints" may have been named after Lugnad & perhaps he also was the "Devout Stranger or Foreigner." An ancient flagged pathway, about 80 yds long, connects it with Teampull Phadraig. It appears to be of later date than St. Patrick's Church & measures 38' in length, comprising nave & recessed chancel. The beautiful W. doorway is the most singular feature of the bldg & certainly is some few centuries later than that of the other church, though it has been suggested that it was introduced some time after the original construction of the building, the masonry of which is partly laid in courses & contains several dressed stones & quoins, though portion of the south wall is in the massive Cyclopean style. The doorway is round-arched, with cluster-pillars & lovely ornamentation, & may definitely be regarded as an excellent creation of Hiberno-Romanesque art, of a date prior to that of the Anglo-Norman invasion. It is placed in the W. gable, 5'11" from sill to lower edge of the arch, 2'2" wide at the sill & narrowing to 2' at the top. It is constructed in reddish coloured limestone which has yielded considerably to the actions of wind & rain, the surface being worn & pitted. Fortunately, Sir Benjamin Guinness, when proprietor of the island, did much to restore & preserve this architectural gem, with the aid of skilled technicians. Smaller & humbler than the more famous examples at Clonfert & Cashel, it is, nevertheless, a charmingly-contrived & neatly-finished specimen of the really native art, probably dating from the start of the 12th century. "The jambs are formed by Columnar pilasters, which are crowned by human face capitals, from which springs the arch, the middle portion of which is carved into deep, horizontally projecting chevrons, over which is a row of faces, each differing from the other . . ." "The impost capitals are of exceeding interest, as they show a form of beard plaiting & knotted hair work . . ." (Wilde). The doorway consists of three arches and the heads (ten) are on the outer one.

The chancel arch is low & semicircular & without any decoration whatever. It has a span of about 8½' & the greatest height over floor-level is about 9½'. In the E. gable is a small round-headed single light, deeply splayed inwards & under this is a stone altar, which Wilde described

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as still perfect in 1865, when two remarkable indented stones, bullauns, rested upon it.

In the W. corner of the S. wall of the nave is a flat unevenly-dimensioned reddish stone on which is carved a Greek cross. The Stone is about 4' wide by 2' high & is set in the masonry of the Cyclopean wall. Wilde said that the carving is similar to that on the stone of St. Breacan at the Seven Churches in Aran More & on many Irish tombstones, & he regarded the carving as amongst the most remarkable on the island.

There are several inscribed stones in the vicinity of Temple-na-neeve, including some with incised Greek crosses. The most remarkable monument, however, apart from that of Lugnad, is the ten-foot memorial slab marking the grave of an early Archbishop of Tuam. The inscription, according to Hayward, is in Middle-Irish & reads:-

"Aois Criost
Mile ced' fice a hocht
Muirgead Ui Nioc
Comorba Iarlaite
Tuma de Gualain
Decc in Inis in Goill."

Translated:-

Age of Christ
One thousand One hundred Twenty and Eight
Maurice O Nioc
Successor of Jarlath
of Tuam de Gualain
Died on Inchagoill.

Archbishop O Nioc's tomb is near the northeast angle of Temple-na-neeve, beside the flagged passage.

O'Flaherty, writing of Inchagoill in 1684, says: "Inis a'Ghaill, so called of a certain holy person who there lived of old, known only by the name of An Ghaill Craibhtheach, i.e. the devout foreigner; for Gall (i.e. of the Gallic nation) they call every foreigner. So Inis an Ghaill, or the foreigner's island, between Ross & Moycullen Barony on Loch Orbsen, contains half a quarter of pleasant land belonging to Cong Abbey, & hath two chapells, the one dedicated to St. Patrick, the other to the saint of whom the island is named, which admits not the burial of any body, but in the first it is usual to bury."

There are now no inhabitants on Inchagoill - the last, Mr. Tom Nevin, having recently returned to live on the mainland, at Cong. It is owned by the Irish Land Commission & the churches & monuments are in the care of the O.P.W. There is a small landing pier at the E. side of the island. Mr. Huggard, Ashford Castle Hotel, has shooting rights on the island & organises picnic parties there.

INISHMAINE: The Life of St. Cormac, translated into Latin by Colgan from the Leabhar Lecan, relates that Cormac came to the palace (fort) of Owen Beul, King of Connacht, about 525 A.D. & was badly & inhospitably received by Owen. Cormac foretold that at a future day the royal dun of the King would be levelled & that a community of the servants of Christ would build a monastery on the site. O'Donovan suspected that Owen's fort was that which may still be seen on adjoining Inishowen & that the topographical facts were contorted by Chroniclers in order to effect a fulfilment of the saint's prophecy.

Inishmaine, about 5 mls. by rd., N. of Cong, is no longer an island, since, about 100 yrs. ago the waters of

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Loch Mask were lowered on the construction of the "canal", leaving Inishmaine, Inishowen and Inishcoog connected with each other & with the mainland. It is, as its name implies, the middle island: first is Inishcoog, then Inishmaine, &, jutting farthest out into the lake, Inishowen, the highest island on Loch Mask.

Near the water's edge is a curious vaulted stone bldg which is, apparently, the outer castellated gateway of the abbey as mentioned by Wilde. In the field behind this stand the ruins of Inishmaine Abbey, visible for some distance when traversing the track which leads from the main road (branches left 1m. N. of Loch Mask House).

There is no record whatever of the founder or date of erection of the abbey, though O'Donovan held that it was later than the Anglo-Norman invasion. It was quite probably built during the period 12th to 14th century & it is suggested that it was built on the site of a 6th century church of St. Cormac. It is also supposed that Turloch Mor, who built Cong Abbey in the 12th century, may also have erected the abbey of Inishmaine some time later.

As it stands, the church is recognisable, in its stately & graceful form, as belonging to that period & is, in the main, constructed in the Hiberno-Romanesque style, though there are ample signs of transitional reconstructions in later ages. The nave measures 41' x 21' to the chancel arch columns & thence the church narrows eastwards in the chancel, which is about 20' x 15'. An amazing feature, amidst the floridly decorative architecture of the bldg as a whole, is the small, square-headed doorway in the N. wall of the nave. This trabeated doorway, with inclined jambs & massive lintel, over which there is no arch & which must surely belong to the 8th century at latest, & an early window in the N. wall of the chancel, possibly belonged to Cormac's or some other primitive church & may have been inserted in the later bldg for preservation. Against each side wall of the chancel there is a roughly square structure; possibly these were dwelling or domestic apartments. The Gothic E. window of the chancel comprises two narrow, round-headed lights, deeply splayed. The outer mouldings, inside & outside, terminate in well-carved grotesque figures, the most interesting being that of a man on horseback & two animals, of fabulous appearance & with floriated tails, fighting.

Clustered columns of four orders at the entrance to the chancel testify to the former existence of a beautifully-wrought arch. The capitals are decorated carved floral designs that display a high standard of artistic skill & conception.

The Annals of the Four Masters contain only two short passages relating to the Abbey at Inishmaine:

The first, under the date A.D. 1223 barely mentions the death of Maelisa, Prior of Inishmaine, Son of Turloch O'Connor, High-King of Ireland.

The second tells of the burning of Inishmaine in 1227 by Hugh, son of King Roderick O'Connor, & William Burke. It says that they marched into north Connacht with a great army, plundering the country & taking hostages as they went along. There was an abbot at Inishmaine in the 16th century & the bldg was used as a parish church in 1306

The Abbey, on Mr. Browne's lands, is in the care of the O.P.W. & the public are admitted free.

The "Sweat-House" or Penitentiary: About a quarter-mile W. of Inishmaine Church is the so-called "Penitentiary" which Sir Wm. Wilde & others found so puzzling. It is a square unmortared bldg, 12½' high & 15' long & wide, of undressed stone, solid but for the cells which open on the W. side.

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The two cells, or chambers, are about 3' wide inside & their side walls rise perpendicularly for about 2', at which height narrow stone slabs slope inwards at an acute angle from both sides, to meet in the high-pitched apex of the roof. The spaces in the roof between these slabs are filled with layers of large slabs well-fitted in horizontal order. The floor is made of long slabs, placed crossways & a few inches apart, with hollowed crevices under & between them which allow the passage of air. The crypts, or cells, are about 5' high in the centre & the dividing wall is also of stone, though surprisingly thin.

Wilde & his son, Oscar, "discovered" this structure in 1866, when, as he says, there was no tradition whatever relating to it & when no local person had ever seen or heard of it. He invented a theory that it might have been a penitentiary resorted to by the monks of the nearby abbey; but admits of no doubt as to its antiquity, remarking that the masonry of the outer wall strongly resembled that of some of our most ancient churches. Others have since thought it to be an 18th centy "folly, built to puzzle posterity."

Robert Gibbings in his book "Lovely is the Lee" relates, however, how he extracted a "very definite legend that the place was once a sweat-house, a primitive form of the more elegant Turkish bath of to-day" - all for an ounce of tobacco which he presented to some local oracle. He took a sample of the soil from between the floor stones & had it analysed. The result, quoted from his book, was: "Charred fragments of rushes & straw impregnated with crystals of sodium chloride, which latter could only be from sea water or human sweat."

These old sweat-houses, though never on so elaborate a scale as this, are frequently met with throughout Ireland & it appears that they were quite common in olden times. The patients lay on a bed of rushes or straw over roasting hot stones, hoping that this treatment would cure their complaint, often rheumatics. It may be assumed that Mr. Gibbings' theory is correct, especially in view of his rather pointed evidence & legend, though experts may question the matter of doors, of which there are none, ventilating arrangements, apart from the ground apertures, etc.

Fort: Among the rocks which sprawl all over the ground, the remains of an ancient stone fort are seen on the way from the abbey to the sweat-house. The circle is about 60' in diameter & a number of long pillar stones, like those of a "druid circle", rest against the walls of the fort. The enclosure is used as a sheep-pen.

INISHOWEN: The much-discussed fort on Inishowen is about 1 ml W. of the sweat-house. It occupies a commanding site on the highest point of the peninsula, about 140' over the lake. The outer ring, 420' or so in circumference, is almost levelled on the east side & is separated from the raised centre by a ten-ft ditch. The inner ring, about 250' around, is about 12' high & 10' broad, in good condition though much overgrown. The only unusual feature of this fort is that at one time the inner rampart was topped with a great number of flagstones which, apparently, surrounded the rampart in the form of a 7' high palisade. Only four of these flagstones are still erect &, of these, two are broken; others are scattered about & Mr. Hayward, on viewing the fort & making rough calculations, estimated that there must have been 80 or more of them in all, originally - certainly a formidable barrier in those days when battle implements were crude & close fighting prevailed.

Sir Wm. Wilde seized on the account of an incident in

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the Battle of Moytura, when the two sons of the De Danaan Cailchu were pursued & slain by the Firbolg King's son, Slainge Finn, at the margin of a lake, as substantiating his theory that the great battle took place within a few miles of Inishowen. The victorious champion was said to have erected seventeen flagstones in the ground to commemorate his victory & Wilde points to the palisade of flagstones on the dun with great certainty as the ancient Moytura monument - disregarding the fact that in its complete form this circle surely comprised several times seventeen stones. He implies that the fort of Owen Beul was that on which Inishmaine Abbey was built - slight traces of a circular rath may still be noticed at the W. end of the church - thus reverting to the legendary belief which O'Donovan had discarded as a probable twisting of facts to conform with the prophecy of St. Cormac.

O'Donovan was puzzled very much by the remains of this fort, which, he said, was not very unlike Dun na Sciath at Loch Ennell in Westmeath, but he appears certain that it was a royal dun or palace & does not suggest it to have been a monument. He described the inner ring as a raised moat & believed it to have consisted of a beehive-shaped souterrain.

Owen Beul was a great grandson of King Dathi & reigned over Connacht in the 6th century. He was compelled to engage in almost continuous warfare with the marauding Northmen who eyed his lands with greed & when, in 537 A.D., he fell mortally wounded in a battle with his enemies, near Sligo, he spent his last three days counselling his chieftains on the defence of their province. He directed them to bury him in an upright position with spear & shield in hands, facing the Northern foe, & assured them that so long as he stood thus on guard the Northmen would never be victorious over the men of the West. His instructions were followed, & the promised security obtained until the wily enemy, learning of the "stratagem", stealthily removed Owen's body which they brought across the Sligo River & buried again, head downwards, in low ground. The spell was broken & thereafter, Connacht was subjected to many defeats & persecutions at the hands of their old foes. Such was the end of the great warrior, as told by his son, St. Ceallach, but the Annals of the Four Masters say that the Northmen carried off his head, with many rich spoils, from the field of battle.

OTHER ANCIENT CHURCH RUINS: "Cong", wrote Colgan, in the 17th century, "was celebrated for divers churches." The truth of this observation is visible in the numerous church ruins which are found everywhere about Cong & The Neale. Fr. Neary, in "Notes on Cong & The Neale", says: "Cong & The Neale are remarkable for ten old churches erected here from the 6th to the 18th century: Teampuill Phadraig, Teampuill-na-Neeve, Killarsagh, Cross-East, Kilmolara, Ballinchalla, Kilfrachaun, Inishmaine, Cong & Cahirnacole." He mentions, as reasons for their present ruinous state, the destruction caused by Danish raiders in 835 and 925 & by combined Irish & Anglo-Irish forces in 1204, as well as other frequent attacks. But even though most of these bldgs are now almost completely ruined, they still reveal architectural styles ranging from the simple primitive to the beautifully elaborate.

KILLARSAGH: This ruin, in Ballymagibbon townland, between Cong and Cross & about 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ m. from the former, is of a tiny bldg, about 24' by 16'. In Wilde's time (middle 19th centy) this had a beautiful small round-arched window, now much reduced. The founder, St. Fursa, is celebrated as founder