

ANTIQUITIES

Abbeys, Castles, Fortresses, Round Towers, Early Churches, Sculptured Crosses, Stone Circles, Ogham Stones, Cairns, Souterrams, Pillar Stones, Cromlechs, Forts, Rathes, Moats, Tumuli or ancient monuments of any kind. Exact location of each with short description, noting condition, etc. Relate local legend or tradition associated with building or object. State if in charge of Office of Public Works. Right of way to public? Admission charge (if any). Name and address of caretaker, or where key is kept.

Cross Abbey.

Two miles west of Binghamstown, the ruined abbey stands on a slight eminence at the brink of the sea which has caused considerable damage to the cemetery in which the abbey stands and it is believed that the action of the waves has washed away portion of the abbey walls. The monastic history of the abbey has been lost and the origin is apparently a mystery. Set amid pretty surroundings in one of the loneliest parts of the peninsula, the abbey faces across the sea towards Inishglora, the isle of saints and legends. There is now no trace of the other monastic buildings but of the church itself, the east gable and south wall are still in a fair state of preservation. The west gable has disappeared and the north wall has collapsed in parts; at the western end of the north wall portion of the wall of what appears to have been a belfry, still stands. The inside measurements of the church would have been about 18' in width and 50' in length and the south wall is 10 to 11 feet high. In the east gable is a window, 9' high and 4' across with a pointed splay arch, ~~on the outside the window is pointed and measures 3' 6" by 8"~~. At the western end of the south wall there is a window, rectangular inside and 5' high, the light being 2' 9" by 5" and arched outside. There is another smaller window in this wall. A large flagged tomb covers the entire width of the western end of the church and at the eastern side of this stands a seven foot high flagstone, apparently of great age. In the northern wall, a low, arched doorway has been blocked up, seemingly in the erection of the tomb. A feature of the church is the grey-black stone used in the building. The abbey is not in the care of the O.P.W.

Dairbhile's

Dairbhile

St. Derible's Church and Well, Fallmore.

St. Derible's church at Fallmore is 15 miles from Belmullet (main road) and is situated in the cemetery there. St. Derible, the foundress, was a 6th century nun and it is recorded that she attended the reception to St. Columba at Ballisodare, organized by St. Faraman after the Synod of Drumceat and prior to Columba's return to Britain, in 590.

~~It is related in legend that Derible had erected her church at Termoncarra in the north-western portion of the peninsula and was journeying to Fallmore to erect her church there when one of her male disciples confessed to being in love with her. Asked by the saint what it was that he loved in her, the man admitted that her beautiful eyes had first attracted him whereupon the saint immediately extracted both her eyes; she miraculously regained her sight some time later.~~

The little church is badly preserved and the west gable is partly demolished whilst the walls have almost disappeared. The outside measurements are 47' X 22' and in the west gable is a small doorway. The doorway is 6' 6" high, 2' 6" wide and 2' 9" deep, the top being roundly ~~having a~~ ^{round} arched ~~and~~ carved from one large stone which bears on both sides, faintly distinguishable incisions or inscriptions. Four stone steps lead downwards from the outside and two steps upwards on the inside.

Near the eastern gable, a square walled enclosure is considered to be the grave of St. Derible on which it is claimed, no grass or weeds can or will grow. A headstone in this grave measures 2½' by 1' and is inscribed with a cross 15 inches long and six inches wide in the arms.

A broken skull which may be seen lying in the church is held in great awe by local people who say that it has been buried several times inside and outside the church but that it always reappeared miraculously within the church and over the surface of the ground.

Cont'd page 4.

(Plain sheets of foolscap paper to be used, if necessary, for recording additional information).

ANTIQUITIES.St. Derible's Church and Well cont'd.

~~St. Derible's church and grave are not preserved by the O.P.W.~~

A short distance from the church and a little to the right of the road which leads to Surgeview, the Blessed Well of St. Derible may be seen amid the sandhills.

Throughout the summer and particularly on August 15th when a pattern is held here, many pilgrims come to perform the stations at the well.

Under the care of the O. P. W.

Termoncarra - ruined church.

Near Frenchport and about six miles from Belmullet, is the old burial ground in which there is now hardly a vestige of the ancient church, the erection of which is ascribed to St. Derible. ~~I found it impossible to procure precise information regarding this church which must have been a very small building.~~

Inishglora.

The island of Inishglora, a three miles currach journey from Cross, is now uninhabited, the families who had resided there had been entirely dependent on their fishing hauls, ^{and} were removed to the mainland by the Government about a decade ago. The island is small and bleak and the remains of the monastic settlements which have made it famous are clustered closely together near the south-eastern shore and facing the mainland, or rather, the Mullet Peninsula.

The little stone buildings are in a disappointingly bad state of preservation, neglected and uncared, ^{and} many of the stones have been removed from them, ~~and one is inclined to look with suspicion at the stones from which the rude huts which are still used to shelter the fishermen, are constructed.~~ The cashel which once surrounded the three churches and three beehive cells was demolished by the last family to leave the island (Gaughans, now living at Cross) when they built a new house nearby. It is still possible partly to trace the foundation of the cashel.

The principal church on the island is St. Brendan's Church, a little oratory measuring 12' by 8' and this remains the most perfect of the ruins. St. Brendan, born near Ardfert in Kerry about the year 484, achieved considerable fame as a mariner in addition to his great efforts for the propagation of the Faith, and many romantic legends have been woven around his many sea adventures, it even being suggested that he visited America.

The once corbelled roof of the oratory has disappeared and now the walls are beginning to collapse inwards. A short narrow passage with a low, rough-stone wall at each side, leads to the doorway, passing through which one must stoop to enter.

Teampul na Naomh (Church of the Saints, also known as Teampul na bhFear or Church of the Men) and Teampul na mBan (Church of the Women), each almost twice the size of St. Brendan's church, are both in very bad condition. Less than twenty yards from the door of St. Brendan's Church is the sadly dilapidated ruin of St. Brendan's Cell but the corbelled roof has collapsed and only about half the circular wall remains. The cell was of beehive shape and 19' 6" in diameter. There were two other cells of like design but they are now unrecognisable. ~~It is believed that these cells were used as bakehouses and there is mention of an old custom whereby the visitor was expected to "break bread" with the islanders. It is believed also that the cells were inhabited by the saints and disciples.~~

A little to the south of the Cell is the Blessed Well of St. Brendan. The well is walled round and some eight steps lead downwards to the water. No woman must remove water from the well for there is a traditional superstition that should one do so, the water will be transformed into red maggots, or as some say, it will change to a blood-red colour. A man must remove his headgear before removing any of the water.

ANTIQUITIESInishglora cont'd.

Quite close to the front of the oratory several tombstones in irregular formation rise to a low height over the ground and are pointed out as the burial place of the Swan Children of Lir. The legend of the Children of Lir is so well known that it hardly needs to be related here, ~~but it is remarkable that no effort has been made to preserve or lend distinction to this spot which is so highly exalted in our national folklore.~~

Nearby is a small cairn on which is a standing flag-stone. This, I was told, is the grave of Bolageen but I was unable to ascertain the identity of Bolageen who may have been some local king or chieftain.

Throughout the island several cairns or monuments of stones have been erected as station monuments. The performance of the island stations is a very arduous task, occupying from two to three hours.

Sand from Inishglora possesses some remarkable qualities and it is claimed that where this sand is sprinkled, no rat can live. Certain it is that no rats exist on the island itself and several instances of their banishment from the mainland houses are quoted. The sand must (according to local belief) be removed only by some person who has performed the stations on the island.

There is another remarkable legend of the island that the finger and toe nails and the hair of the dead buried on the island will continue to grow after death but this of course, is disproved by the many decomposed skulls and bones which are frequently found, the entire island being a burying ground for the dead of countless ages.

Inishglora is now vested in the Irish Land Commission and rented to Messrs John and Patk. Gaughan, Cross, Binghamstown, members of the last family to reside on the island. There is no charge for admission but Messrs Gaughan require from £1 to 30/- for the trip from Cross which is accomplished in calm weather, in an hour or less. ~~The duration of a longish visit would be about four hours and whilst the beetmen complain if they receive less than ten shillings each for this work, they are constantly clamouring for work with the County Council from whom they get about 5/6 for nine hours of hard work.~~

An old custom among mariners was to dip the top-sails when passing Inishglora as a mark of respect to the memory of St. Brendan.

Inishkea Islands

The trip to these islands is usually commenced at the pier at Surgeview (Belmullet 13 miles) where a currach may be engaged for the six miles sea journey. Owing to bad weather conditions I did not visit the islands but I understand that on the North Island there is the ruin of a church erected by St. Columba and measuring 16' X 12' and on the South Island, a foundation of St. Derible, a Holy Well and Watch Tower.

Duvillaun Islands.

Duvillaunmore is about four miles from Surgeview and is said to contain a killeen and a curious narrow cross on which the Crucifixion has been inscribed in very cramped manner; on the other side of this stone, a Greek cross has been inscribed within a circle. It is believed that a large stone found on the island and left there, bears Ogham inscription.

Bingham Castle.

The present ruin which stands on a most advantageous site, overlooking Elly Bay and commanding a splendid view of Blacksod Bay, is a comparatively modern structure, about one and a half centuries old and situated about eight miles from Belmullet, a little to the left of the main road to Blacksod.

In 1925 the Bingham family evacuated the mansion, the Land Commission acquiring and distributing the lands. The ruin is now on the lands of Mr James Fallon who lives nearby. The Castle, it appears, was at that time in an excellent state of preservation but wanton hands have laid waste this handsome residence, the only one of its type in the entire Barony of Erris.

ANTIQUITIES.Bingham Castle cont'd.

The Castle has no remarkable architectural features and visitors will be admitted free of charge.

Leacht air Iorruis etc.

On the golf links near Binghamstown and only a few hundred yards northwest of the road leading to Cross, the 15 foot high cairn, variously described as Leacht air Iorruis, Leacht ar Iorruis and Leacht an Iorruis, raises its pointed head amongst the sandhills overlooking the sea and within a very short distance of the shore. This monument is regarded as having been erected to commemorate a major battle between the armies of Queen Maeve and a Munster King who was defeated and slain in combat. The stones are partly covered by short grass and the diameter of the cairn at the base is over thirty feet.

Roughly one hundred yards northwest of the Leacht, the ever-drifting sands have revealed two irregular circles of stones, the larger being 36 yards in diameter. Close to these are what appear to be kitchen middens in quite fair condition.

It is believed that half a mile northwest of the Leacht is Trunnc na Caillighe, a square dolmen of large stones, said to be the tomb of the enchantress step-mother who transformed the Children of Lir. I could not trace this dolmen and presume that the sands have covered it once more.

Grave of Ancient Warrior - King of Munster ?

About one and a half miles from Binghamstown, in a field to the right of the road leading to Cross Abbey, a prominent mound is reputed to be the grave of the King of Munster, killed in the battle at Leacht air Iorruis. I have been informed that the tomb was excavated in recent years and the body of a warrior, over seven feet tall, discovered in a standing position. The mound is on the lands of Miss M. Walsh, Cross and is in front of Mr Michael Healy's house.

Promontory Forts etc.

For the archaeologist and antiquarian, there are many places of interest on the Mullet Peninsula but many of the ancient forts and settlements and monuments have been demolished by the local people or by the ravages of time whilst some are obscured by sand.

Doonamoo Point, a mile or so north of Scotchport, was in ancient days, a strongly fortified headland but to the inexperienced eye, all that remains is a strong wall, about ten feet high and perhaps seventy yards long; stretched across the landward end of the promontory, the wall has been almost completely torn down in parts. I am informed that this destruction was perpetrated by local people who needed stones for building. The headland is littered with loose stones and it is very difficult to identify the sites of stone huts said to have existed here. It is also said that there were three stone huts built in the wall but I could not trace these.

On the landward side of the wall, a great number of stones raise their sharp ends over the ground, obviously a form of defence against attack.

Near Scotchport, a small promontory, now cut off from the mainland, bears the low, well-preserved walls of a stone fort. The local name on this cliff headland is Oheancilean (no confirmation of spelling). On the verge of the mainland cliff, under the side of the fortress and within a few feet of it, an arrangement of large stones is called the "Giants Grave". The grave measures about 12' X 4' and is on the land of Mr Pat Williams, Scotchport.

Spinkadoon and other cliff fortresses on the northwestern coast of the Mullet are awkwardly situated and in a bad state of preservation. I was unable to identify Dun Fiachra, another and probably similar rock fort and supposedly the resting place of the Maiden Swans, Children of Lir.

ANTIQUITIES.Glun an Asail.

On the summit of Termon Hill, about twelve miles from Belmullet, a large stone flag is reputed to have been the resting place of St. Derible when on her way to build the little church at Fallmore. The resemblance of the mark made by an ass's knee is pointed out on the surface of the stone which has thus earned the name, "Glun an Asail" (The Ass's Knee). Tradition maintains that St. Derible's ass knelt on the stone. I learnt of this stone only on the day of my departure from the district and so did not have an opportunity of investigating a report that the stone bore an Ogham inscription.

Watch Towers.

At Tipp, Termon Hill and Inishkea Island, Watch Towers were erected at the beginning of the last century when fears were rife of an attempted invasion of Britain by Napoleon. The towers are now neglected and in some cases, beginning to crumble.

The Furnace.

A couple of hundred yards past the cross-roads at Barhauve, on the road to Glenlara, the ruin of an old stone building will be seen to the left of the road, by the stream. This was erected by Sir Arthur Shaen probably in the eighteenth century as an iron foundry but for some reason, the project was found impracticable and abandoned after a short time.

*C. B. Shaen
Surveyor
4/9/43.*