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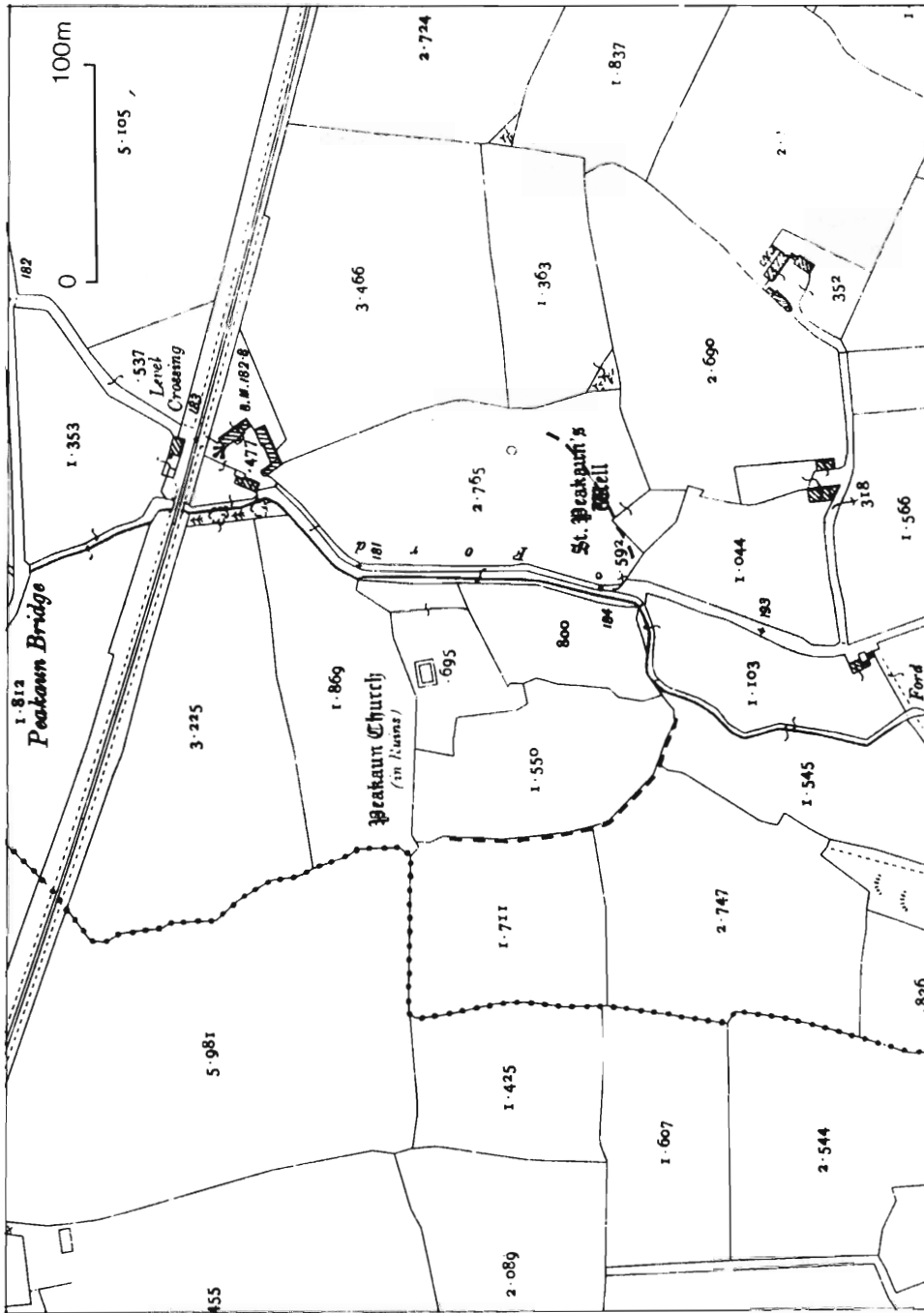


Fig. 1. A section of the 25" map, Co. Tipperary, sheet 75/6, showing the site of Toureen Peakaun. Based on the Ordnance Survey by permission of the Government (Permit no. 5431). The dashed line indicates roughly the remnants of the enclosure that are visible on the ground.

Toureen Peakaun: Three New Inscribed Slabs

by Conleth Manning

Introduction

The church of Peakaun in the townland of Toureen⁽¹⁾, some four-and-a-half miles west-north-west of Cahir, Co. Tipperary is undoubtedly the *Cluain Aird*⁽²⁾ or *Cluain Aird Mo-Becóc* of the annals and martyrologies (Hogan 1910, 255, 553, 607.) Beccán, the saint after whom the site was named, is mentioned in the life of St. Abbán, where it is claimed that Abbán founded the church at *Cluain Aird* and left Beccán in charge of it (O'Donovan et al. 1864, 139).

He may be Beccán the recluse to whom, along with Segéne, abbot of Iona, Cumian addressed his famous letter on the Easter controversy in about 633 AD (Moloney 1964, 101-2; Walsh and Ó Cróinín 1988, 15). If so, he would certainly have been an old man when he died in 690 according to the Annals of Ulster (Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983, 153).

He is mentioned in the martyrologies under his feast day, May 26, and the Martyrology of Oengus states that his abode was at *Cluain Aird* (Stokes 1905, 126, 137). *The Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* records that *Cluain Aird* was burned and spoiled by the Norsemen c. 800-20 (Todd 1867, 6). Keating, in his History of Ireland, refers to the place both as *Cluain Aird Mobheadhóg* and as *Cill Bheacáin*, though the story he relates about Beccán refers to another Beccán associated with Emlagh, Co. Meath (Dinneen 1908, 66-9, 157, O'Donovan et al 1864, 95-7).

On the Ordnance Survey 6" map the church is simply called Peakaun, and this is what the site is known as locally. It is referred to sometimes as Kilpeacan in modern archaeological literature (Macalister 1949, 100; Lionard 1961, 154; Henry 1970, 147); but as this is not used by the Ordnance Survey and is similar to the name of a townland and parish in Co. Limerick, its use for the site at Toureen can only lead to confusion.

The church ruin and cross were taken into State care in 1935 and some minor archaeological excavations were carried out at the site in 1944 by Duignan in connection with conservation works (Waddell and Holland 1990). The few inscribed slabs, known from the site prior to this work (Macalister 1949, 100-1), were greatly increased in number as a result of it (Duignan 1944, 227; Macalister 1949, 213). The excavation in 1944 consisted of a cutting on the rise above the church to the west and two trenches close to the east cross, which was set within a rectangular platform of stone (Waddell and Holland 1990, 166, 181).

The Site (Fig. 1)

It is located in the valley of a small stream at the foot of the Galtee mountains, which rise sharply above it to the south. The conserved ruin of the church and the two crosses are situated in a field close to the west bank of the stream. In the field to the east of the stream is St. Peakaun's Well, and 70m north-east of it is a bullaun stone with a small protective wall around it which has mistakenly been identified as a *clochán*.

There are clear traces of a large enclosure which would have enclosed all of these features. It survives as a large bank and external ditch, which serves as a field fence curving across a ridge which rises sharply from immediately west of the church. Its line then follows a short kink in the stream, and it can be seen again as a low earthwork on a rising slope to the south-east of the well. It cannot be traced on the north and north-east sides where the ground is low-lying and wet but, in all, sufficient survives to indicate an enclosure up to 200m in diameter.



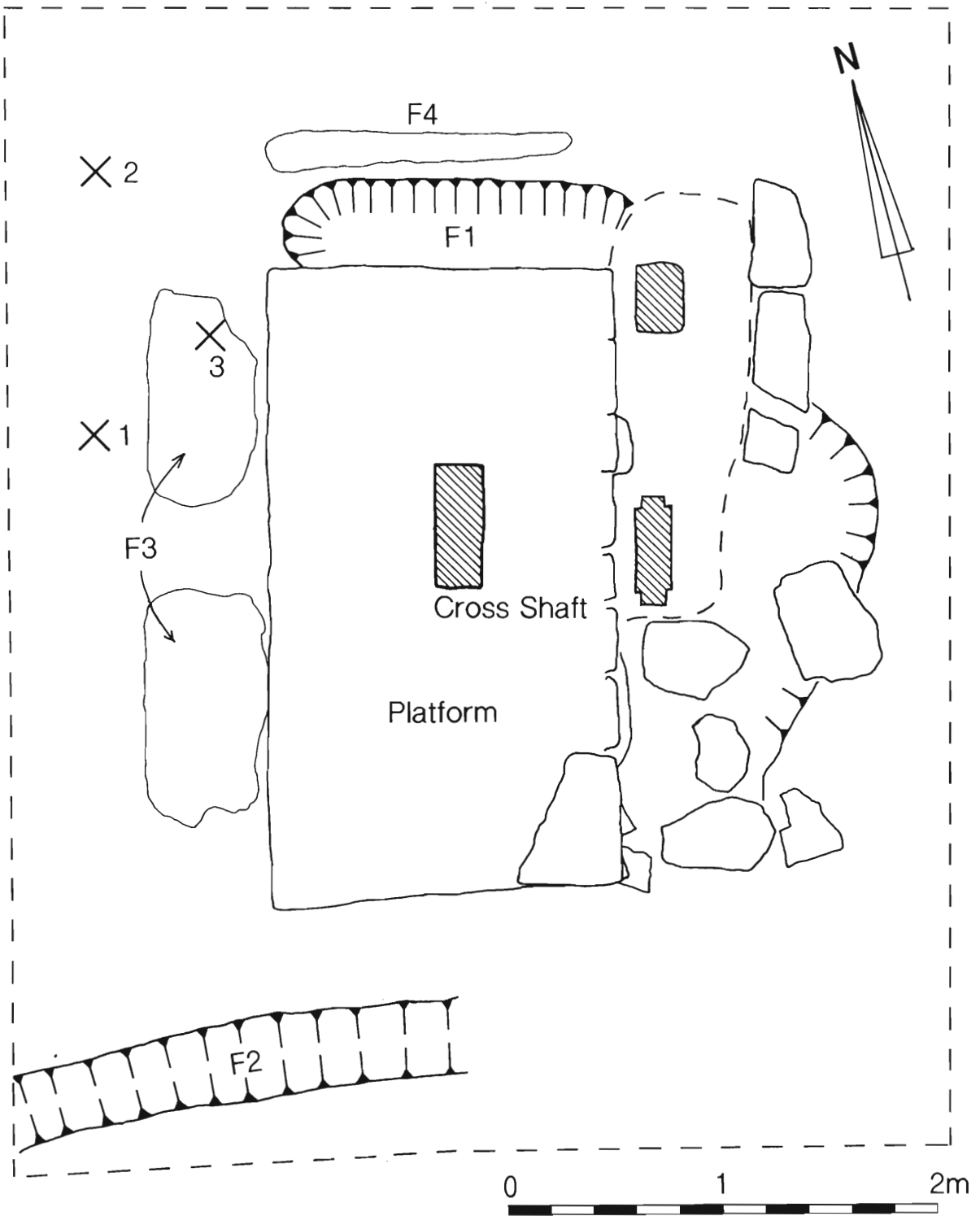


Fig. 2 A plan of the excavated area, showing the features uncovered.



Pl. 1. A view of the area excavated from the east on completion of excavation.

The Excavation (Fig. 2, Pl.1)

In November 1987 a minor excavation⁽³⁾ was supervised by the writer so that a cattle grid could be installed around the east cross and its stone platform. A strip 1.20m wide immediately around the platform on all sides was excavated to a depth of 0.60m. On the east side, where part of the cross and two cross pillars had been set in the ground against the platform in 1944, the area excavated extended to a line 1.55m from the platform itself.

On this side there was evidence for considerable modern disturbance, with large stones and concrete thrown into a long irregular hollow along the edge of the platform to support the three upright stones (Fig.2). It would appear from this that Duignan dug his trenches on the east sides of the platform, rather than on the west side as indicated in the recently published posthumous report (Waddell and Holland 1990, Fig 1, p. 181).

The section in Fig. 12 of the same report also indicates that digging was done on the east side of the platform. The stratigraphy encountered in the remainder of the area excavated was a mixed light brown stoney soil below the sod and humus, and overlying the undisturbed yellow stoney clay at around a depth of 0.60m. More recent features cut into the brown stoney soil were a shallow trench (F1) some 0.40m wide and 0.10m deep with dark fill cut along the north end of the platform (possibly connected with the work in 1944), and part of an east/west cultivation furrow (F2) to the south-west of the platform, which was 0.30m wide and 0.20m deep.

Slabs 1 and 2 were found in the brown stoney soil on the west side of the platform 0.15m and 0.20m

below the surface, respectively. This is added evidence that Duignan did not dig here on the west side of the platform. At a depth of 0.60m two spreads of charcoal-flecked dark soil (F3) were found here, and Slab 3 was found in the northernmost of these. On the north side of the platform, again at a depth of 0.60m, a ridge of yellow boulder clay (F4) survived between two possible grave pits.

The last remnants of bone in the northernmost of these were too decayed for identification. For drainage purposes a hole was dug in the north-east corner into the boulder clay to a depth of 1m below the surface. No finds were recovered apart from the three slabs.

The Slabs (Fig 3., Pl 2)

1. A small naturally shaped sandstone slab forming a rough parallelogram measuring 0.27m by 0.23m and 0.05m thick and inscribed on one face, with a plain outline Latin cross above an inscription which reads *FINÁN PUER*.
2. A small sandstone slab measuring 0.34m by 0.21m and 0.05m thick with an inscription on one face above a plain outline Latin cross. Unfortunately parts of the surface of the stone have flaked away, resulting in the loss of some of the inscription and part of the cross. With gaps the letters appear to be as follows: —ARASS with *D-E* on the second line.



Pl. 2.





3. A small broken portion of a sandstone slab with the last four letters of an inscription and no cross surviving on it. The sharply incised letters read - *CANI*. This fragment measures a maximum of 0.18m by 0.10m and 0.03m thick.

Discussion

It is difficult to come to any conclusions about the nature of the platform as it had been rebuilt during the work carried out in 1944 but, as no large base stone survives, it is possible that the platform is the remnants of a stone structure built originally around the cross to keep it upright.

The slabs found are a significant addition to the collection known already from the site (Waddell and Holland 1990, 169-175). The plain outline Latin cross is paralleled on a number of the previously known slabs (Ibid. Fig. 4), though with some of these the arms expand slightly. Slabs with small simple crosses like this are generally thought to be early and could date from the 7th or 8th century (Lionard 1961, 105, 108-9).

The mixture of Irish and Latin on the first slab is a rare feature, with only a few occurrences recorded by Macalister on slabs (1949, nos 564, 809, 897, 965). It is difficult to reconstruct the inscription on the second slab because of damage to the surface.

Could the second line of the inscription be a replacement for the first three letters of the first line where the surface may have flaked during carving? Or maybe this second line is a contraction (*DNE*) for the Latin invocation *DOMINE*, as found on the Reask pillar stone (Fanning 1981, 140). There appear to be very few names ending in *RAS* or *ARASS*, but there are a few such as *ECOMRAS*, *FORAS*, and *MARRAS* (O'Brien 1962, index). However, none appears to fit easily.

As to the reading of the letters on the third slab, there can be no doubt; but unfortunately only part of a word survives - *CANI*. Nevertheless, on the analogy of a slab from Temple Breacan on the Aran Islands, which reads *SCI BRECANI* (Macalister 1949, no. 531), and taking into account the patron of the site, Beccán, this inscription can with a good degree of probability be restored as [*SANCTI BEC*] *CANI* (of holy Beccán), or a similar inscription ending in the genitive Latin form of Beccán's name.

FOOTNOTES

1. Toureen is in the parish of Killardry, barony of Clanwilliam, Co. Tipperary (6" sheet no. 75: 318mm from west; 392mm from south, National Grid reference: S 005 283).
2. This is not to be confused with Clonard in Co. Meath, which has a different derivation, being derived from *Cluain Iraird*.
3. The excavation was carried out by the National Monuments Service of the Office of Public Works.

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