

Cashel Antiquities Rediscovered – Standing Stones

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This article is the first in a series of articles to highlight some forgotten or neglected sites in, and around Cashel town. The impetus for such a series is the knowledge that many areas in Cashel are being developed without regard to prior archaeological or historical awareness. A clear manifestation of this was attempts to build housing estates in the 'Major's Field' and 'Camp Field', on Palmer's Hill, in direct view of the Rock of Cashel itself. Considering the wealth of archaeological sites discovered during the excavations on the Cashel Bypass in 2003, where every townland investigated produced archaeological sites, mainly of Bronze Age date, it is obvious that a rich, hidden landscape exists around Cashel, a landscape rapidly disappearing.

Location and Local Information

A potential signature of this prehistoric landscape is represented by a number of standing stones found north east of Cashel town. The standing stones consist of single orthostats, found in the townlands of Palmer's Hill, Corralough and Ballyknock respectively. The stones are known to Cashel people with an interest in history and archaeology but outside of this small coterie, the stones are unknown. The local belief is that the stones are 'scratching posts' for cattle, and therefore merit little attention¹.

None of the Cashel antiquarians such as John Davis White, Andrew Finn and Francis Phillips mentioned the stones. The Ordnance Survey Letters and Namebooks are silent but, this is hardly surprising, given the wealth of ecclesiastical architecture to describe in Cashel; as the medieval town wall itself was not described, a few upstanding stones would not warrant inclusion. In the early 1990's Joe Barry, Cashel recorded the Corralough standing stone, part of an unpublished survey of Cashel sites for a U.C.C. local studies course². Aside from this work the stones have not been studied.

General Information on Standing Stones

Standing stones are generally assigned to the Bronze Age period, third millennium BC, and excavation has shown continued use into the Iron Age period (Waddell 1998, 174). Standing stones served, and still serve a multiplicity of functions: grave markers, territorial markers, commemorative stones, animal scratching stones or landscape features. They generally survive best in less-heavily agriculturalised lands, often uplands. The Archaeological Inventory of North Tipperary lists forty-six single standing stones of which twenty-eight are not indicated on any Ordnance Survey mapping (Farrelly & O'Brien 2002, 15-21). By comparison 136 single stones are listed in the County Waterford Inventory, with the greatest

number, and finest examples, found in east Waterford (Moore 1999, 20). The County Carlow Inventory lists twenty-seven single stones, including eight so-called grooved stones, of natural origin and one holed-stone (Brindley & Kilfeather 1993, 11). The County Laois Inventory lists ten single standing stones (Sweetman 1995, 3-4).

Information on Standing Stones for County Tipperary

In County Tipperary a concentration survive on the south-facing slopes of the Silvermines Mountains, between Rearcross and Hollyford, already in antiquity an important region in the Neolithic. The criteria for County Tipperary standing stones includes a height range between 0.57m to 2.6m, varied settings, including hilltops, hillslopes, valley bottoms, with varied orientation, generally NE-SW; the defining characteristic of the Tipperary stones is possessing an extensive landscape view in at least one direction (Farrelly & O'Brien 2002, 15). According to the Irish Excavations Bulletin no County Tipperary standing stones have been excavated³.

Recorded Standing Stones around Cashel

The Archaeological Survey of Ireland, Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) includes two standing stones within approximately a ten mile radius of Cashel. These stones are both from townlands called Ballinree; stone T1060-119 found southwest of Cashel, and the now recumbent stone T1053-01602 north east of Cashel, in Ballinree (Ballysheehan parish)⁴. The Ballinree standing stones were mentioned by O'Donovan in the Ordnance Survey Namebooks, but were not described (O'Flanagan 1931, 128, & 146). O'Donovan translated Ballinree in St. Patrick's Rock parish, as 'Baile an rí_' or 'town of the king' (ibid, 128). Ballinree in Ballysheehan parish is translated by Meskell as 'Baile an Fhraoigh' or 'the townland of the heath or heather' (Meskell 2001, 121).

The standing stones described here begin with the Palmer's Hill example, located closest to Cashel town (Figure 1).

The Palmer's Hill Standing Stone

This stone is located on Palmer's Hill on the left side of the old Killenaule road, or locally known as the 'Hilly Road'⁵. It is accessed via a field gate opposite the rear of Hill House at the top of the hill. The stone is sited on the north-facing slope of the hillside, around the 490ft contour (NGR 156010, 126348), with unobstructed views north, and northwest, across the 'plains of Cashel' (Plate 1).

The stone overlooks what is now the old Dublin road but due to the dense undergrowth of furze along the lower slopes of the hillside, the stone is hidden from view from this road. The stone is not visible from the old Killenaule road, being obscured by the slope of the hill. From the Boherlahan road the stone is visible, but from a distance, is easily mistaken as a fence post. The Ballyknock standing stone (see below) and Ballyknock ringfort T1061-008 are clearly visible to the northeast (Plate 2).

To the north the stone directly overlooks T1061-022, the linear earthwork called Dhuvclloy, which is incorporated as a Cashel boundary feature on some maps⁶. It is mentioned by Davis White when describing the 'Lands of Monecurialy' for Cashel, dated 1668, where the highway into the town was formed on the south side by '...the blacke ditch commonly called Doochy...' (Davis White 1863, 5).

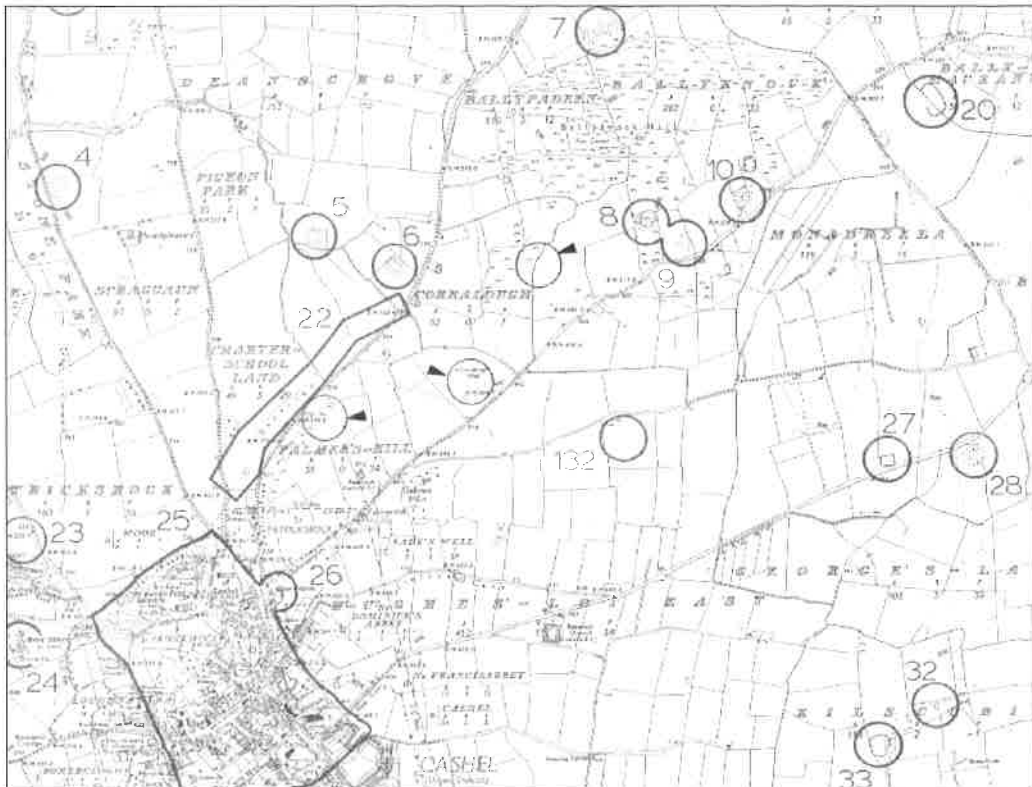


Figure 1: OS Sheet No. 61, Cashel County Tipperary, Map Edition 1952-4, SMR Detail 1997. Location of Standing Stones marked.

The stone is a limestone with lichen growth across its faces. It is set into a hollow circa 3m in diameter, and leans at a pronounced angle to the west. The movement of animals around the stone may have caused the hollow; horses were in the field at the time of survey. The edges of the stone are smooth and the east and west sides are relatively flat; the north and south faces being more uneven. The stone measures 1.90m high, at the base 0.28m x 0.34m in diameter. The top is 0.25m wide, flat for 0.10m across and sloping to the west. Approximately 1.30m from ground level the stone narrows by 0.04m on its east side, creating almost a thin ledge. On the east side, the corner at the base was broken off in antiquity. The orientation is northwest/southeast.

One small stone is visible in the grass at the north side, the exposed portion measures 0.18m x 0.23m in diameter. It is likely that other stones lay at the base and are obscured by grass. Approximately 10m upslope and to the south, is a low sod bank running east west, probably a remnant field boundary (Plate 3).

In the field directly to the west, separated by an interesting clay and stone field boundary, another stone was discovered (NGR 155027, 123423). This stone appears to have been partially quarried out of the hillside, as it is a rough limestone block about 1.20m wide, and 0.80m high (Plate 4). The quarry area measures 2m x 3m across. A portion of a rectilinear stone or, a portion of the outcrop is partially visible behind the stone; this rectilinear stone measures 0.24m x 1.05m. A number of other outcrops are apparent under

the sod. The 'quarry' stone is only visible down slope of where it lies, as the heavy grass on the hillside makes it almost invisible. The stone is different to the other stones under discussion here, and is not considered a true standing stone, or even a recumbent example of one. It is included here as it was discovered during the survey on Palmer's Hill. Down slope from the stone a recent tree plantation covers the hillside and further down to the old Dublin road, the hillside consists of dense furze, practically impenetrable.

A map of Palmer's Hill dated 1790 names the standing stone field as 'the Coursefield', and the field of the rock outcrop is called, appropriately enough as it is west-facing, 'the Windy Field'. Both fields belonged to the Vicars Choral of the Rock of Cashel in 1790'.

The Corralough Standing Stone

This stone is located in the same field as Corralough Well, adjacent to the old Killenaule road, circa 72m in from the road boundary. The stone is 62m south of Corralough Well, sited slightly off the 400ft contour, and is the lowest of the three stones here described, NGR 162568, 127967^o. The stone is a squat limestone, bulbous in appearance and lacking the defined lines of the preceding example (Plate 5). It is set within a hollow with a number of small stones both fully and partially exposed around the base, but none appear to represent packing stones. The stone is covered with lichen and is irregular in appearance, with one crack running from the top at the west side, and a quartz vein apparent on two faces. The stone measures 1.24m high, 0.34m x 0.39m in diameter at the base. The top is 0.30m x 0.36m in diameter, sloping from north to south; the orientation is unclear, but appears to be east/west.

The stone lies at the foot of the east slope of Palmer's Hill and the western slope of Ballyknock Hill, in a low-lying area between the two (Plate 6). There are unobstructed views to the north toward the Devils Bit Mountains and the rock outcrop containing T1061-I3201 (Enclosure site), and T1061-I3202 (Enclosure possible) lie to the southeast, beside Croke's Lane. The aforementioned map of 1790 lists 'Corrilough' as belonging to one 'Thomas Hughs Esq'. O'Donovan translated Corralough as 'Lake of the Cranes' (O'Flanagan 1930, 110). It is spelt Curraghleigh by Davis White in his *Sixty Years in Cashel*. Sometime in the early 19th century Corralough townland witnessed a murder, when a Nicholas Bibby, a Protestant blacksmith was murdered near the house on the left side, going down the hill road. Of interest to the present study, Davis White remembered people commemorating the man '...a large heap of stones or a "cairn" was upon the spot where the man was killed, each passer-by adding a stone to the heap' (Marnane 2002, 216)^o.

The Ballyknock Standing Stone

This stone is located in a field adjacent to the old Killenaule road, and is prominent in the landscape, sited between the 550-600ft contours. The setting is on the southwest-facing slope of Ballyknock Hill, not on the highest point of the hill, NGR 165824, 133045. Ballyknock fort T1061-008 is the closest monument in the vicinity, upslope, and to the east of the stone. There are unobstructed views to the northwest, south and east, and the Cashel forts of Windmill T1061-072, Rathordan T1061-074 and Rathnadrinna T1061-089 all sited above 400ft, are conspicuous in the landscape. The upper levels of the buildings on the Rock are clearly visible to the west, with Gallows Hill a prominent landscape feature lying between the two ancient route ways into Cashel, from Killenaule. Distant horizons are framed by

Slievenamon, the Comeraghs and the Galtees. Of the three standing stones the Ballyknock stone is the only example that is inter-visible from the other stones, being directly uphill from the Corralough stone (Plate 7).

O'Donovan translated Ballyknock as 'baile an chnuic', the hill town (O'Flanagan 1930, 129). On the 1st Edition OS Map a house and garden plot are shown in the same field, east of the stone, near the field boundary; another field boundary (now relict) ran east/west across the hillside from this house toward the stone. A pathway ran through the middle of the field from the present field gate by the road, turning sharply before it would have met the stone, and continued to the top of the hill where a quarry is depicted. The quarry is now covered by furze and all traces of the house, pathway and other dwellings depicted by the roadside are gone.

The stone is a limestone, and as with the other examples it has lichen growth on the faces. It is set within a hollow measuring circa 2m in diameter, located approximately 39m from the western boundary of the field. This hollow is probably derived from animals gathering around the stone¹⁰. The stone leans at a pronounced angle to the north, and the orientation is northwest/southeast. The sides are generally flat with the east facing side more undulating. The stone measures 1.55m high, 0.37m x 0.48m in diameter at the base. The top is 0.28m x 0.30m in diameter, concave, perhaps suggestive of the upper portion having broken off in antiquity. There is a narrow crack across the south face half way down the stone.

At least a dozen small stones lie scattered around the base some loose but many protrude above the surface. At the north side is a potential box-like cist, measuring 0.40m x 0.50m in diameter, formed by two short side stones and one long stone, with the base of the standing stone forming the back. These stones protrude above the surface and are well lodged in the ground. It is likely they could also represent packing stones (Plate 8).

Discussion

These standing stones fall within the criteria listed for such monuments in the County Tipperary Archaeological Inventory, described above, in terms of dimensions, orientation and setting. In particular the Palmer's Hill and Ballyknock stones are impressive examples of this monument-type, given their commanding setting in Cashel's landscape. Where do these 'new' standing stones fit in to the prehistory of Cashel? Until excavation confirms one must presume the stones are Bronze Age in date, as the weight of general evidence would imply. Such a date places these monuments within an emerging Bronze Age landscape around Cashel, the high-status potential of which has long been recognised. Illustrative of this point is material from the Bronze Age discovered in Cashel, now found in the National Museum of Ireland. Here three socketed bronze axe heads, two flat bronze axe heads, two decorated bronze axe heads, one bronze spearhead and three bronze javelin heads were deposited with the Museum between 1936-8, while in 1968 alone two Bronze spearheads and one bronze spearhead/javelin head, were deposited. When the Bronze Age settlement, burial and ritual sites from the Cashel Bypass are added to this, sites generally found within 2km of the town, (O'Brien 2003; NRA 2005) an emerging picture of an intensive Bronze Age landscape surrounding Cashel emerges, a landscape well-rooted in what became known as the Golden Vale. These standing stones may represent a surviving manifestation of this landscape, and the potential of further such discoveries at Cashel is clear.



Plate 1 Palmer's Hill standing stone, looking northwest over the 'Plains of Cashel'.



Plate 2 Palmer's Hill standing stone, looking northeast. The Ballyknock standing stone and ringfort T1061-008 are visible on the horizon.



Plate 3 Palmer's Hill standing stone, looking uphill to the south. The low sod bank is visible behind the stone.



Plate 4 Palmer's Hill rock outcrop.



Plate 5 Corralough standing stone, looking north.



Plate 6 Corralough standing stone, looking northeast. The Ballyknock standing stone & ringfort T1061-008 are visible uphill, and to the rear.



Plate 7 Ballyknock standing stone, looking west toward Cashel. Windmill Fort T1061-072 (at left), and the Rock (at right) are clearly visible. The Corralough standing stone is partly obscured but Corralough Well is visible (with tractor beside it).



Plate 8 Ballyknock standing stone, looking east. Note the stones at base and plateau of the hill.

Areas around Cashel to concentrate future research and fieldwork on should include Killough Hill, Mount O'Meara and the Kill Hills. The potential of finding other low-lying standing stones is there, such as the Corralough stone. If readers know of other stones whether recumbent, or removed from their original location they should contact the Archaeological Survey of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Other standing stones, which may be discovered in the Cashel area, will be included in a follow-up article.

Conclusion

The old Killenaule road retains memories of events, some of which only survive in the pages of books: for instance the murder at Corralough, and the use of a stone cairn to commemorate the victim, and to commemorate this singular event. The Palmer's Hill, Corralough and Ballyknock standing stones mark memories, events from a much older era. Their survival has been by chance, but by studying, and protecting such monuments, we can begin to unravel what memories they may retain.

References

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References

- ¹At the inaugural meeting of the Old Cashel Society in the early 1970s the stones, or some of them, were considered of archaeological interest (Tom Ryan, Ballinree, pers comm.).
- ²The Barry survey can be found in the Archaeology Department, U.C.C.
- ³This sole example was at Ballybritt, near Roscrea and involved excavation within the SMR zone of the standing stone, but not of the stone itself. (Excavations.ie Database; Tipperary, 2000:0963, SMR 43:6, 43:5 OOE0746). On this database twenty six excavations of, or near standing stones are listed for the entire country, up to the year 2000.
- ⁴The Ballinree standing stone T1060-119 can now be seen in the Cashel Folk Village.
- ⁵This road was the main road from Kilkenny into Cashel until the 'New Line' portion of the Dualla road was constructed in the early 20th century.
- ⁶This linear earthwork was uniquely incorporated into the boundary limits of the City, and Corporation of Cashel until the boundary revision in the early 1830's, best illustrated in the proposed new boundary limits of 1836. The original boundary at the northeast ran from the Rock Circular road out along the Dhuvclay before turning sharply along the old coach road to Dublin, and into Cashel at the Charter School. The same source lists 'Bohin Ranuker' as the name for the road known as the 'Rian'. Municipal Corporation Boundaries

(Ireland) *Report on the City and Borough of Cashel; with a Description of the Proposed Boundary, 1831. Report upon the Proposed Municipal Boundary of the Borough of Cashel, 1836.* Both sources courtesy of Local Studies, Tipperary County Library, Thurles.

⁷A *Map of Palmer's Hill in the Parish of the Rock of Cashel in the Barony of Middlethird and County of Tipperary distinguishing the Parts thereof which belong to His Grace the Arch. Bishop of Cashel from those which belong to the Vicars Choral of the Cathedral of Cashel...* Surveyed and laid down by a Scale of 20 Perches to an Inch Plantation Measure by order of His Grace the Arch Bishop of Cashel in November 1790 by me, Wallis (?) Laffan'. Source courtesy of Local Studies, Tipperary County Library, Thurles.

⁸Corralough Well is marked on the 1st Edition OS Map. At the time of survey the well was largely destroyed, with a cattle grill across it, and stones scattered about.

⁹ The ruins of this house survive beside the road. The 'cairn' does not survive, perhaps removed when the road drainage was being improved. Again, of interest here a commemorative plaque and stone on the left side of the road marks the spot where young Tony Nolan, Garraanmore was tragically killed in 1988.

¹⁰In autumn 2005 cattle grazed the Ballyknock fields. The cattle moved across the hillside east west during the day, often gathering around the standing stone by early evening. The standing stones described here are in fields used by animals, and are on private property.

Acknowledgements

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