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Author: Somerville, Boyle T.

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DRUMBEG STONE CIRCLE—GENERAL VIEW.

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Journal of the Cork Historical and Archæological Society.

Notes on a Stone Circle in County Cork.

BY CAPTAIN BOYLE T. SOMERVILLE, R.N.

IN *Nature* of December 24th, 1908, a paper by Mr. J. Gray on "Who Built the British Stone Circles?" contains the remark that he is under the belief that there are few, if any examples of these monuments in Ireland. Since then there has appeared in *Nature*, on Feb. 14th, a photograph of one circle, near Culdaff, County Donegal, sent by Mr. W. E. Hart; and on May 20th there is a note of a meeting of the Royal Anthropological Institute (with Mr. J. Gray in the chair), when Mr. A. L. Lewis described several large circles in the neighbourhood of Lough Gur, County Limerick. I have recently made a survey of a stone circle in County Cork, which contains a "recumbent" stone in the southern part of the circle; and the accompanying plan, photographs, and description may prove of interest, especially as no circle of this type has ever before been found outside of Aberdeenshire. Its occurrence in the south-western part of Ireland—as remote from the north-eastern part of Scotland as it is possible to be in the British Isles—is a decidedly remarkable fact.

The Circle stands on a small level part of a hillside, about 200 feet above the sea, which it faces, the shore being distant about three miles. The view over the intervening country towards the Atlantic ocean is one of great beauty. Above the Circle the land rises to a somewhat conspicuous hill-top named Drumbeg; and this is the name of the surrounding farm land. It is situated about two miles eastward of the village of Glandore, at the head of the harbour of that name in the West Carbery of County Cork.

The Circle, which is named locally "Druid's Altar," or as simply the "Ring," is formed of stones either naturally or artificially smoothed on one or both sides, and varying in height from 6ft. 6in to 3ft. 4in., the recumbent stone being 2ft. 6in. I have lettered each stone on the plan for convenience of reference. The circle appears to be fairly complete, though with perhaps a stone missing between D and E, L and M, M and N. The large stone southward of J appears to have fallen alongside of its original position midway between J and K. The two stones of most prominent

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and massive appearance in the Circle are those lettered I and J; each has a roughly pointed top, which, though not marking the centre of the stone, forms a sharp apex. There is now no trace of any sort of mound, sepulchral or otherwise, in the centre of the Circle (supposing that one formerly so existed, as in the regular "Aberdeenshire" type); but there is a heap of largish stones, roughly piled outside the north-eastern part of the Circle, which may perhaps have once been the surrounding stones of such a mound, removed by some treasure-hunter in former days, though there is otherwise no sign nor tradition of digging or disturbance. Two loose flat stones lie on the surface within the Circle, but appear to have been thrown there quite recently. They are both easily lifted about.

A feature of considerable interest in the surroundings is the fact that the plateau on which the Circle stands is partly artificial, its edge being marked by a low "dead wall" (if so it may be termed), though the "masonry" is of the most primitive description. It is from about six to eighteen inches in height, and is traceable without difficulty for a distance of about 160 feet. There is a "Cove" midway along this plateau-edge, defined in a similar manner, running nearly up to the Circle itself.

That this plateau is an original feature of the monument seems to be certain from the fact that its edge is aligned in the direction of the May sunrise (or November sunset), while the north-eastern side of the "Cove" (almost the best preserved of the whole) directs to the Midsummer sunset, thus demonstrating ancient astronomical purposes.

The centre line of the "Cove" itself is directed broadly towards the centre of the Circle, where the burial mound, if such ever existed, would have been placed; and this may have been its intention, forming, as it were, a sort of "chancel" towards the grave of the person in whose honour the Circle may have been founded. I have found recently, in County Donegal, a similarly built Cove, directed on the summer solstitial sunset line towards a large dolmen near by, which was, no doubt, once a burial monument, with, as usual, an additional astronomical purpose.

Other surrounding features of interest to be noticed are a large outlying stone to the north-eastward; a group of stone heaps, or ovals, in a straight line to the south-eastward; and a rough circle of large stones at some distance to the south-westward. Of these, the first-mentioned is nearly, but not quite, on the summer solstitial line from the recumbent stone. This outlying stone is merely a large untrimmed boulder, and its position is possibly fortuitous. It stands on a slight elevation, however, and is a prominent object against the skyline as seen from the recumbent stone.

The stone heaps, &c., to the south-eastward are probably ancient burials, and, as will be seen, are on a line nearly parallel to the plateau-edge, and therefore to the May sunrise alignment, no doubt considered to be an "auspicious" aspect for the dead. The circle of rough stones to the south-westward may be either the foundation of a hut circle, or more probably it marks another burial. It is noteworthy that the centre of this circle, E stone, and the outlying boulder are on the May sunrise alignment, with horizon elevated 2°. As to the main Circle itself, its Point of Observation appears to be the recumbent stone. From it the summer

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DRUMBEG STONE CIRCLE FROM NORTH-EAST.
Recumbent Stone seen between G & H Stones.
(Photo by Sir Egerton B. Coghill, Bart.)

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solstitial sunrise is observable over I stone, the skyline elevated 3° 40′; and the May sunrise over J stone, with the skyline of the hills behind it elevated 2° 20′ (these two stones being, as before remarked, the most important in size and appearance in the group, and having sharply defined tops). The winter solstitial sunset is also observable from the recumbent stone in a very conspicuous notch (though it does not appear as such in a photograph) in the hills, distant about a mile, at an elevation of 2° 43′, and this line produced passes over the centre of the Circle.

The top of a stone in the line of the Circle is just visible at the ground level at the position indicated between D and E stones; and the line of the True Meridian (North) from the centre of the recumbent stone goes over it.

All the stones comprised in the Circle are flat, and smooth-faced on the inner side; several are so on the outer side as well The top of the recumbent stone appears to have been trimmed to a flat surface; but to none of the others has this been done, though some are naturally flat on top.

The following is a table of the heights of all the stones; their other dimensions are drawn to scale on the plan:—

A	stone (recumbent)	2ft. 6in.		H	stone	6ft. 6in.
B	,, ...	4ft. 8in.		I	,, ...	6ft. 4in.
C	,, ...	3ft. 10in.		J	,, ...	5ft. 7in.
D	,, ...	3ft. 5in.		K	,, ...	4ft. 8in.
E	,, ...	4ft. 10in.		L	,, ...	4ft. 10in.
F	,, ...	3ft. 4in.		M	,, ...	4ft. 6in.
G	,, ...	5ft. 5in.		N	,, ...	5ft. 0in.

I have not been able to detect any alignments to stars, by which the date of the construction of this Circle might have been discovered; nor am I able to obtain a date from the solar alignments, as the (true) azimuths I give are derived from the Magnetic North of the compass needle of a theodolite. They are thus not sufficiently accurate for working out the sun's declination with the necessary refinement, though amply so for indicating the general purpose of each alignment. I may remark, however, that as the May year alignments are provided for both in the Circle and in the plateau edge, it is likely that it was erected between the second and fifth centuries of our era, as it is stated in the *Book of Rights* that the May-year worship was introduced into Ireland by King Tuathal the Acceptable, who instituted the feast of Bealltaine (May Day), at the hill of Ushnagh, in Westmeath (*Irish Names of Places,* page 200, by Dr. P. W. Joyce). This monarch reigned in the first century and as Christianity was fairly general in Ireland by the end of the fifth, it would appear as if all Irish monuments, which include "May-year" alignments, must be placed as being erected, or at all events adapted for them, between these dates.

[This Glandore Stone Circle, it should be mentioned, was briefly described and a photographic illustration of it supplied, by Mr. Denham Franklin, J.P., in the *Journal* for January-March, 1903.—EDITORS.]

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