

County Louth Archaeological and History Society

Dundealgain: Tomhas-na-luinge

Author(s): N. Lowless and Enda

Source: *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological Society*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Oct., 1910), pp. 301-304

Published by: [County Louth Archaeological and History Society](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27727903>

Accessed: 14/06/2014 18:46

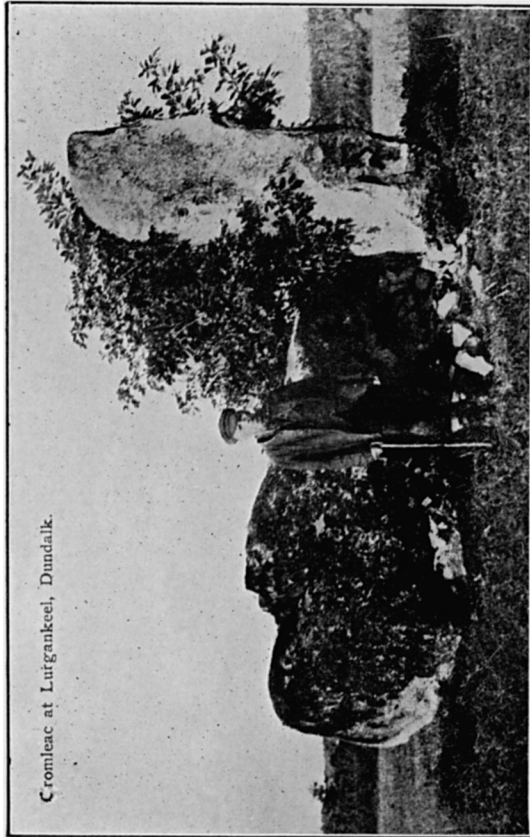
Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



County Louth Archaeological and History Society is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological Society*.

<http://www.jstor.org>



Cromlech at Lurgankee, Dundalk.



Dundealgain : Tomhas-na-luinge.



HE thoughtful question was put lately : Where was the material got to build Dundealgain ? Its own ditch supplied part, but only a small part. Perhaps an answer may be found in "Tomhas-na-luinge" = the measure of the ship, that remarkable depression like the hull of a ship in the field behind the Cottage at the lower cross of Castletown. The late Peter Wade, of Castletown, gave the name in Irish and the incorrect English—"shape of the ship." He scouted the idea of the place having ever been a gigantic sand pit, and told that when he was a small lad—some seventy years ago—swinging on the gate of the field, a clergyman rode up on horseback and asked him was not "that" Tomhas-na-luinge. On being told it was, the visitor said he had read of it in a book and came to see it.

The thought struck the present writer that Tomhas-na-luinge got its name, not from its likeness to a mammoth ship, but from having been the harbour of Dundealgain. Though the idea seems impossible now, it must be remembered that in ancient times the river was higher ; and on more closely examining Tomhas-na-luinge it is plainly seen that the depression extends across the road through the field opposite in which is a pillar-stone, and into the corner field beyond the pump there, thus having stretched towards the river.

In a note taken with the cryptic reference "Cruach Conall," p. 176, I find a corrupt form of Dundealgain was "Cuan Dealb."¹ Cuan means a harbour, but it has other meanings. "Cuan=a troop, cuani=hosts, bands."² Inquiring of Mr. Andrew Markey about Ath Luan, which should be near Dundalk, he said Cuan da Luan is west of the Black stone ford and got its name from two lambs—really banshees—that used to sit on stones in the ford and cry before the deaths of Os and Macs in the locality. In answer to the remark that Cuan meant harbour, he said it was used by the old people to signify a ford or the narrow part of a river.

Another name of Dundealgain tells against the harbour idea. "Cend Coraiss, or Dun Cend Coross—i.e., the Delga of Muirtheimni." This is plainly the weir near Ronan's well, the low-lying lands about being known as Stra-na-carry, or as in the Louth Name Books (O.S.) "Sranacarrew, Strancarry ; J. O'D. Struath, or holm of the weir."³ So that in ancient days as now Tomhas-na-luinge would seem cut off from deep water by the weir, though it might join the river lower down. Could

-
1. Cuan Dealb=empty harbour.
 2. *Battle of Ros-na-righ* (Hogan), gloss. index.
 3. *Name Book, Castletown*, p. 13.

N

Tomhas-na-luinge be the pit from which Dundegalain "was digged," "the rock from which it was hewn." This idea was suggested by the following extract: "now, 'long' means house; . . . and hence a village where people dwell is called a longphort or embankment of the houses."⁴ Could it, after all, be the "measure" of Dundegalain fort and not of the ship? Its convenience as a source of supply for the builders and the difficulty of pointing out any other makes the idea likely enough. The ironical name—empty harbour—may describe the failure of some attempt to make the place a harbour, after it had been digged to build the dun. At any rate Tomhas-na-luinge is worthy of a visit and the perpetuation of its so suitable name.

The traditional account of the pillar-stone on Dundegalain was given in the last number of the *Journal*; but it throws no light on that monument's history. The fact of its surviving when everything else disappeared except the dun itself would point to its being held in special reverence.

"But this tomb be here alone
The only melancholy stone."

Can it be the monument of Cuchullain and Emer? Lady Gregory's *Tain*, p. 346, says that Emer "brought Cuchullain's body to Dundegalain." She said to Conall Cearnach "O Connall lift me to the grave of the hound . . . and her life went out from her and she herself and Cuchullain were laid in the one grave by Conall, and he raised one stone over them and he wrote their names in Ogham."

Of the Ogham there is no trace now.

Perhaps Dundegalain's greatest day was when King Con Chobar was feasted there on his march to Ros-na-righ. "I will make a banquet," said Cuchullain, "in wait for and in preparation for Con Chobar at the bright faced castle of the Delgga" . . . And that banquet was served to the nobles of Norway until they were drunk and right merry. When a chief was mightier than men. . . . They were put in their apartments and in their couches and in their sleeping rooms;" or "when beer was stronger than men;"⁵ or, better still, as the same writer translates it on p. 4: "When strong ale was mightier than men." Not so long ago, one opines! Those chiefs from Norway were Con Chobar's auxiliaries who had landed "at the stream of Inis Oiliolla," at Dundalk.⁶ So the Northmen came to Ireland ages before the dates given in history. Dundegalain then was the real starting point of Con Chobar's army to Ros-na-righ. The Ulstermen's victory there gave their province its greatest extension to the south, a fact often forgotten when discussing our great provincial boundaries. "They had beaten the men of Leinster in the battle of Ros-na-righ, and extending the boundaries of the Northern province from the River Boyne Southwards to the Righ (or river Rye, the boundary between the present counties of Meath and Dublin)."⁷

But the glories of Dundegalain are gone!

"Ah, woe unbounded! where the harp once sounded
The wind now sings;
The grey grass shivers where the mead in rivers
Was outpoured for kings;
The min and mether are lost together
With the spoil of spears:
The strong dun only has stood dark and lonely
For a thousand years."

4. *Keating* (Dincen), p. 37.

5. *Battle of Ros-na-righ* (Hogan).

6. *ibid.*, p. 67.

7. *O'Curry MS. Materials*, p. 266.

But, even so, let us stand beside Cuchullain and enjoy with him the outlook from his dun :

“ On a day that Cuchullain the brave, the beautiful and the noble (of the variegated colours) was on the green before his palace (dun) and his good dwelling—namely the royal and populous Dundalgain, he looks towards the four quarters of the globe, that is, West and East, North and South, and saw the beautiful and fair country of Cuailgne, and that was the country in the world best beloved by Cuchullain, because that country [is ?] thus situated—viz., the loquacious (garrulous), foaming (booming) murmuring ocean, and the proud, fierce moving briny sea on one side and lofty proud happy mountains abounding in sweet crystal springs (streams) in beautiful (agreeable) green-sided valleys, fringed with smooth (unknotty) even (of equal height) woods on the other side. And numerous were the long-horned wild cows (bulls), badgers, wild boars, and other herds which inhabited that country, and abundant was her fish and her beautiful white-bellied salmon, and wonderful was the abundance of every species of hunting and fishing in like manner.”⁸

The place names connected with Cuchullain's deeds are innumerable, but, alas ! some of the most interesting seem to be completely unknown. Who would not long to discover Glean-na-Bodhar—the Deaf Valley, whither Niamh coaxed “ The Hound,” at the suggestion of Con Chobar, to his credit, that he might not hear the thunders of Meave's army or face it alone ? “ Bring him away with you to Glean-na-Bodhar, the Deaf Valley,” said Con Chobar. “ For if all the men of Ireland were letting out shouts and cries of war around it, no one that would be in that valley would hear any sound at all.”⁹

The daughters of Callatin, his fairy foes, found him there at last. But although they showed him fairy armies and filled the air with war shouts and cries of the wounded they failed to disenchant the hero. But Badb, taking the form of Niamh, roused him with a bugle blast that would have recalled him from the very grave.¹⁰ “ Rise up Cuchullain, Dundalgain is burned, Muirthemne is destroyed and Conaille Muirthemne.”

It would be hard to find a despatch from Cæsar or Napoleon to surpass this false message of Badb.

“ The ancient inhabitants [of Louth] were called Conaille Muirthemhne from the descendants of Conall Cearnach.”¹¹ Conall Cearnach was the foster-brother of Cuchullain, his avenger, and successor as King of Cuailgne.¹² Glen-na-Bodhar is in the Armagh Mountains, and there may be acoustic deficiencies to account for the name.

Though Cuchullain had enemies amongst them, still he was the curled darling of the fairy hosts. The legend given above by O'Donovan goes on to say : “ For there was not a fairy or a fairy company in Ireland and particularly in Ulster that was not his friend and his companion, because they all gave him their love and their lasting affection.” It goes on to tell about the principal fairies of Ireland—their names are given—on Cuchullain being wounded in a foreign war :—“ When they learned (through necromantic knowledge) that Cuchullain was in this great predicament they gathered from all parts and met at Fion-cairn-na-forfaire—that is, the white watching cairn on Sliabh Fuaidh, where they were joined by Finghin Faidhliagh (the wise surgeon-physician), Cuchullain's own physician.”

Nor were the fairies his only fair admirers, as appears from a realistic description

8. Legend quoted by O'Donovan, *Louth Extracts*, p. 123.

9. *Lady Gregory*, p. 327.

10. Dowered as he was with “ The clearer hearing of the wave-washed shell.”

11. O'Donovan, *Book of Rights*, pp. 22-166 nn.

12. The family of Kearney seems still to perpetuate his name in Louth.

of a strange incident. After the fight at the great Breach, Cuchullain showed himself in his beauty. "It was then the maidens prayed the hosts of the men of Erin to lift them up on the hollows of their shields over the shoulders of men and young warriors to see the appearance of Cuchullain, and because they were surprised of the beautiful comely form in which he appeared to them on that day in comparison with the hideous, barbarous, druidical appearance in which they had seen him before on the previous night."¹³

Cuchullain's "druidical appearance" or distortion in battle is a feature of the *Tain*. "This is why the men of Olnechmacht (Connaught) gave Riasthartha as a name to Cuchullaind."¹⁴ Riasthartha; pronounced "Reestara," means an angry man. "Riastrad = fearg = anger."¹⁵ "Riasthartha—that is, the angered man, the man whose face became distorted with anger as Cuchullain was accustomed to do."¹⁶

Riasthartha is a participle—not a noun.

ENDA.

13. *O'Looney*, p. 184.

14. *O'Looney*.

15. *O'Reilly*.

16. *Sick Bed of Cuchullain*, n. 37 (O'Curry).

