

IV.

NOTICE OF A CASHEL, AN EARLY CHRISTIAN SETTLEMENT AT KILPATRICK, ARRAN. By J. A. BALFOUR, F.R. HIST. S., F.S.A. Scot.

The Situation.—This cashel is situated on the northern shoulder of the Leaca Bhreac (the speckled hill-face) that terminates at the hamlet of Kilpatrick. The site is a plateau of fairly level ground at an elevation of about 300 feet above sea-level. From the site an extensive view is obtained of the Vale of Shisken; it commands, too, the entire length almost of Kilbrannan Sound; and a few yards towards the west in advance of the cashel, the coast of Ireland is seen to the southward during clear weather. It is doubtful if a finer site could have been obtained on the whole island of Arran.

The Structure.—The cashel, or enclosing wall (fig. 1), is composed of earth and stone; its total length is 1180 feet, and its direction is more or less curvilinear, as will be seen from the plan. The average thickness is 5 feet 1 inch, the greatest thickness noted being 7 feet 9 inches. Its existing height is slightly under 4 feet. The area enclosed by the cashel amounts to 2 acres 1 rood 31 poles 22 yards.

The gateway seems to have been at the point marked with a cross on the plan; but unfortunately this is the one part of the cashel that has been damaged; this was caused by the erection of a shooting-butt that intersects the cashel, and has been built out of it. The reason for believing this to be the gateway is the fact that attached to the cashel at this point, but without, are traces of some stone-building, the shape of which is now indefinite, but indicating some form of guarded entrance. No building of any sort was found on the outward side attached to the cashel at any other part. The existing remains of the entry could quite conform to the example referred to by Petrie,¹ at the establishment of St Molaise on Inishmurray, as being quadrangular and measuring

¹ Petrie's *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland*, Dublin, 1845, p. 450.]

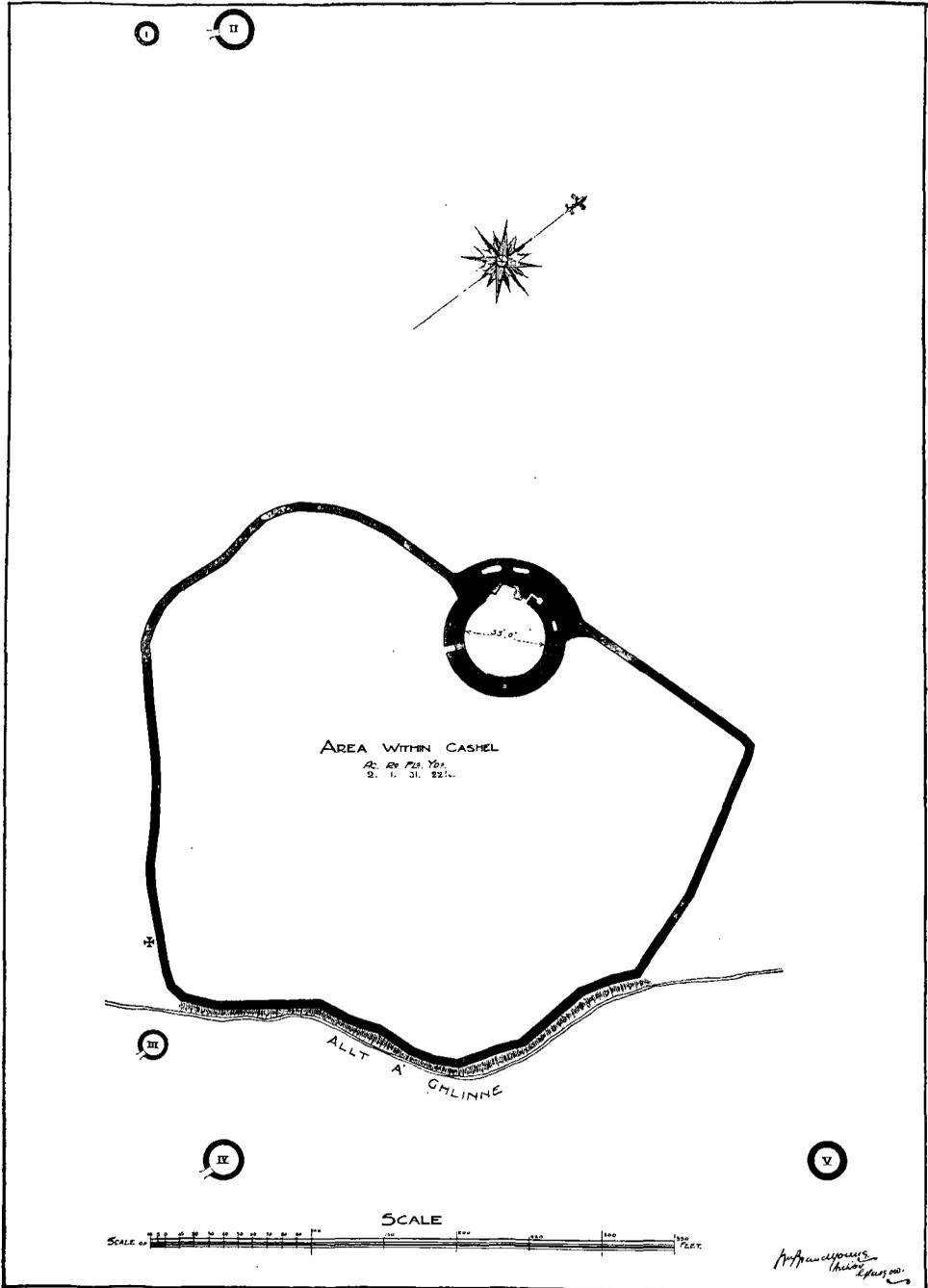


Fig. 1. Ground-plan of Cashel and adjacent Hut Circles.

4 feet in breadth and 7 feet 6 inches in its jambs, and which he states "is the usual size and form of gateways found in such buildings." I think it but right to mention that though the injury to this gateway is a most regrettable circumstance, no blame can be attached to those responsible for the erection of the butt on the ground of vandalism, as the structure had passed quite unnoticed till the present archæological survey was being made of the island; traditionally even the natives know nothing concerning it.



Fig. 2. General view of the Cashel.

The cashel (fig. 2) is now overgrown with heather, and the luxurious growth of it within and beyond rendered it impossible during the periods of examination to procure a satisfactory photograph of the cashel through lack of contrast.

Within the cashel there remains only the foundations of a circular building; this is incorporated with the cashel at the northern side of it. This building (fig. 3) has a court measuring 55 feet in diameter, and the surrounding wall measures 12 to 14 feet wide, except where it becomes part of the cashel; here the width of 27 feet is attained. The wall is built with an inner and an outer casing of

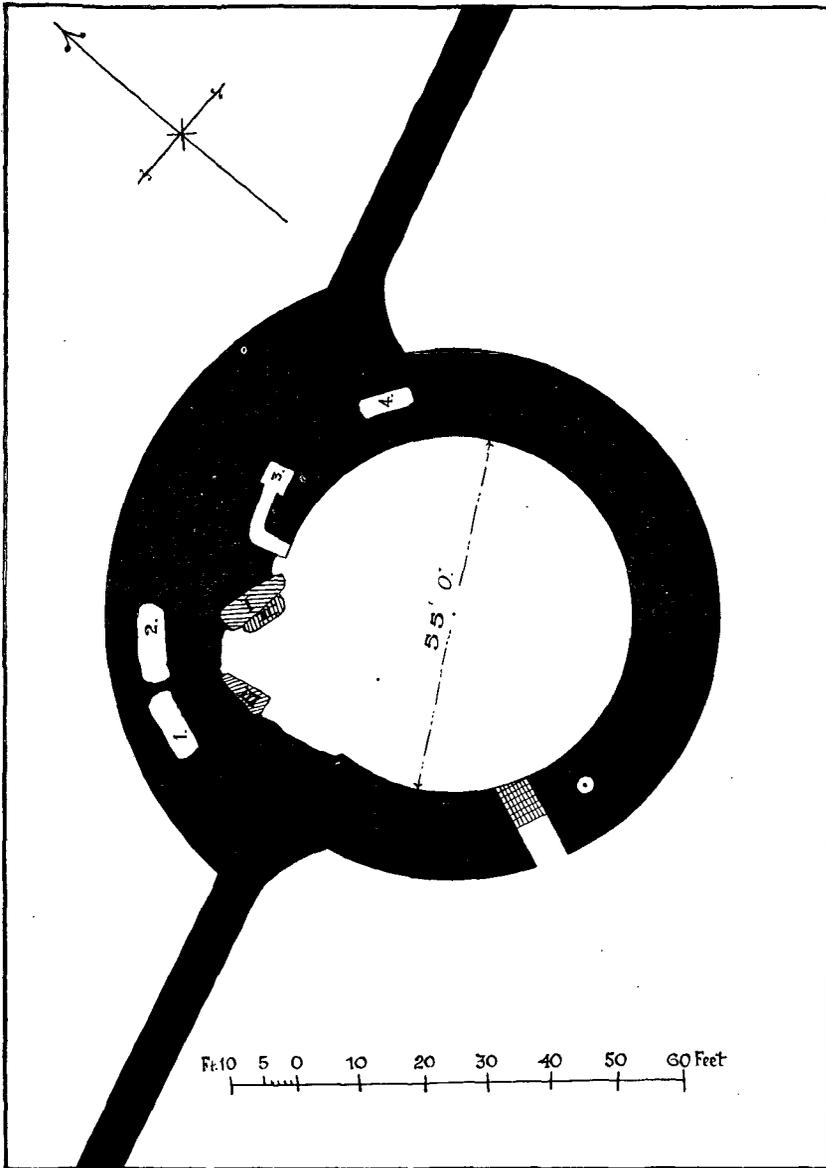


Fig 3. Ground-plan of the Circular Building within the Cashel and abutting on its enclosing wall.

stones formed to the round by the use of stones of varying length, the space between being filled with rubble-stones. At the north and north-east within the thickness of the wall are four chambers; they measure as follows, and as numbered on plan:—

1. 6 feet long, $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide, 3 feet deep.
2. $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet long, $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide, $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep.

Chambers 1 and 2 are only separated by the thickness of a single stone.



Fig. 4. View of Wall of circular structure.

3. 13 feet long, 4 feet 3 inches wide at square termination. This enters from the court.

4. 6 feet long, 4 feet wide, 2 feet deep.

These chambers are all paved on the floor. Access to chambers 1, 2 and 4 must have been obtained through passages in the thickness of the wall. At this part the masonry is of fairly large stones, rubble only being employed at intervals, and mostly beyond the chambers.

The most striking feature of the court is the presence of three large blocks of stone, as shown in the shaded portions of the plan (fig. 3).

Stone No. I. is 10 feet long and averaging 3 feet 10 inches broad. This rests on the top of No. II., which measures 6 feet long and 2 feet

9 inches broad. Small stones are wedged in between the two blocks ; at the back of No. I. is another slab embedded in the surrounding masonry. No. III. is 7 feet long and with an average of 3 feet in width. I am unable to offer opinion as to their use, unless it be that I. and II. are steps of a stair originally leading to passages within the wall (fig. 5).

The seeming portal is at the south-west. This portion has been



Fig. 5. Large Stones ten and seven feet in length.

quarried, and there is in consequence some confusion at this part. On being dug, a paving was reached which extended for over half the distance between the outer and inner points at the inward side. The breadth of the passage at the paved part is 4 feet, and the walls are of very large stones (fig. 6). If this is the true entry, then it has apparently been checked before the outside was gained, as is seen in broch structures, as at the end of the paving to the outward side the existing remains indicate that the passage contracted. On first reflections I was inclined

to the idea that the paved portion was part of a chamber, but I am now of opinion that it is the portal.

Short-cist Burial within the Walls.—The merit of the discovery of a cinerary urn within the walls of the circular structure was entirely due to the observations and interest of Kilpatrick friends. A day or two



Fig. 6. View of Stones forming one side of the portal.

after I left they noticed a line of large stones intersecting the rubble, a few feet from the assumed portal; they were curious as to why the stones had thus been placed; they dug down beside this line of masonry and came upon a flag. On lifting the flag an urn came into view. With thoughtfulness, they again covered without disturbing it, and telegraphed to me of the find, that I might see the urn *in situ*. On returning the day

following the receipt of the information I was enabled to get a photograph of the urn in its position as shown in fig. 7. On examination it clearly could be seen that the builders of this structure had come upon the burial, and had run a line of building alongside of it to protect it from the falling in of the rubble. The compartment was 1 foot broad, and



Fig. 7. Cist with cinerary Urn within the wall of the Cashel.

the side stones measure: west, 1 foot 2 inches; east, 1 foot 4 inches; the long axis is north and south, 10 degrees off north. The distance between the covering flag and the stone on which the inverted urn rested is 8 inches. The height of the urn when found was 6 inches. It is broken, and 2 inches would not have let it clear when whole. Therefore it seems a reasonable deduction that the urn was broken at or before the building of the structure. It is certain a considerable portion of it was not in the compartment: there being little room for soil round about

it, and such as was being carefully searched. The urn is of the plain cinerary type, without decoration of any kind. The rim is flattened through the urn having been laid when still plastic, previous to being burnt, in an inverted position. The urn was full of human bones, many of them being but indifferently calcined.

Ground within Cashel.—The ground enclosed by the cashel was carefully examined, but without being dug, except where a few stones were showing. The search revealed nothing in the way of additional structures. It was noted, however, that throughout the area there were distinct marks of the ground having been under cultivation. If the additional buildings in the cashel were of the usual simple type either of drystone building or of wood, that they have disappeared is not a cause for surprise, seeing that the area has been used for agricultural purposes.

Building Material.—The stones used in the erection of the cashel and for the circular building were the blue-grey porphyry that abounds in great blocks over the hill, and which has earned for it in consequence the name of Leaca Bhreac (speckled hill-face). The rocks were examined higher up on the hill than the cashel, and here was observed a large boulder evenly split into two parts, and a stone wedge dropped between the sections to keep them apart. Still higher was seen a place that had apparently been used as a quarry. This quarrying may have been for the cashel; as for the other building, the stones, of which there are hundreds of tons, would likely have been taken from the lower slopes.

The Type of the Cashel.—The cashel is of that type peculiarly belonging to the Celtic Church of Ireland during its monastic period. The cashel having degenerated from being a wall of defence, as in the pagan structures, had become rather a screen from the outer world. The circular structure no doubt served for protection in case of need; like the Round Tower of the ninth to twelfth century, of which perhaps it was the prototype. It in many respects resembles the one in Bute, described by Dr Anderson, associated with St Blane's chapel.¹

¹ *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries for Scotland*, vol. xxxiv. p. 308.

Who was its Patron?—Captain White in his volume on Kintyre says¹: “See what a hold the associations of this celebrated Western saint (St Brendan) have got in the locality, and there being apparently no other ecclesiastical site in Arran or Bute which would account for the name of the Sound, we are forced to bring home these associations to the neighbourhood of Skipness.” Captain White’s deduction is somewhat doubtful: in the first place he confessed regarding the chapel he was describing that it was designated by charter as St Columba’s though locally known as Kilbrannan Chapel; but let that pass; the chapel is one of no outstanding character and of thirteenth-century origin, and very unlikely to have given the name to Kilbrannan Sound. Secondly, we have to remember that Brendan of Clonfert planted monasteries, not churches, and that probably it was a monastery site that gave the name to the Sound, of the Church of Brannan. Skene² also found a difficulty in accounting for the association to such marked degree of St Brendan with Arran and Bute, in that of old the people were known as “the Brendanes,” and at the designation given to the Sound. There has always been a certain degree of doubt as to where Brendan planted the monastery of Aileach (the stone house), though it has been assigned to one of the Garveloch Isles (Eilean na Naomh). May this cashel not be the monastery of Aileach? May it not be the ecclesiastical settlement that gave the name to the Sound? If the circular building that is within the cashel stood originally to any height, and the width of base would indicate it had, it must have been a conspicuous object for almost the length of the Sound, the whiteness of the stone of which it was built aiding this. The monastery may have had an importance of which we have now no knowledge, which led to the people who received instruction at it being known as Brendanes. The cashel could have been constructed in 545 A.D., for no features it now possesses indicate a later period. Whether we can accept St Brendan of Clonfert as the actual founder of this monastic establishment or not,

¹ *Archæological Sketches in Scotland, Kintyre*, Captain J. P. White, p. 182.

² *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 77.

I think there is justification for believing it gave the name to the Sound.

Hut Circles without the Cashel.—In more or less close association with the cashel are five hut circles; two to the west of it, and three to the east. The western are distant by about 100 yards, the eastern are only distant a few yards.

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|---|----------|-----|------|------|-----------|-----------|--------|-----------|--------|---------|-----|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| 1 | measures | 32 | feet | in | diameter, | with | no | visible | entry. | | | | | | |
| 2 | „ | 48½ | „ | with | portal | extending | beyond | circle. | | | | | | | |
| 3 | „ | 45½ | „ | in | diameter, | with | portal | extending | beyond | circle. | | | | | |
| 4 | „ | 45 | „ | in | diameter, | with | a | chamber | in | wall; | the | portal | extends | beyond | circle. |
| 5 | „ | 42 | „ | in | diameter, | with | no | visible | entry. | | | | | | |

The portals open to the south-east in those having them. Circles 2 and 4 were partially dug, but nothing of interest was obtained either in structure or relics. 2 had a quantity of stones at the north side that may have been the remains of an interior hut, but they were in such confusion as to prevent any satisfactory conclusion being arrived at. These circles may have been for the accommodation of lay dependants attached to the monastery.

The Chapel of St Patrick.—The site of the chapel of Patrick that gives the name to the hamlet is situated at the foot of the Leaca Bbreac, and beside the way usually taken to reach the cashel. Of the chapel all that now remains is a small fragment of masonry near the modern entry to the enclosure; this and a “holy water stoup.” The “stoup” is an ordinary sea-worn stone, with an oblong depression chiselled out of it. Human bones have frequently been dug up in the enclosure; and the farmer pointed out a corner that was never dug, on account of the great number of bones that were in it.

Concluding Observations.—It perhaps should have been mentioned that when the circular building was first seen within the cashel it was so overgrown with heather as to render work impossible until it had been burned. The large stones and the chambers were got after excavation. Almost the entire court was dug up, but this was com-

paratively easy, as the covering soil amounted to as little as 3 or 4 inches on the average above the hard natural till; only upon the actual walls were there any great accumulation of débris. It was fortunate that the cashel was of earth and stone mixed, and therefore of no value for using as a quarry; a fact that doubtless has preserved it for us, as great quantities of stone must at some time have been removed from the circular structure.

An abundant water supply was available for the community of the monastery. A small stream, the Allt a Ghlinne, flows along the eastern side of the cashel, and evidence of a spring perhaps having formed a well, is within the cashel at the south-east.

It is perhaps also of interest to note that one of the hills beside the monastery is known as Tòrr an Dàimh—the Hill of the Church.