

6

A CENTURY OF PROGRESS
IN
IRISH ARCHAEOLOGY.



EXHIBITS COLLECTED
BY
THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF IRELAND

A CENTURY OF PROGRESS IN IRISH ARCHAEOLOGY.

SCIENTIFIC archaeology is a plant of fairly recent growth and its emancipation from purely historical or philological pursuits is intimately linked up with the rapid development of Natural Science which took place with unprecedented speed in the period of European peace after the Napoleonic wars.

Archaeology in its present conception is truly a child of the "Century of Progress" and it is a consoling fact that its progress was very little checked by the World War and its aftermath. In time and in space it has since widened its scope and is rapidly embracing the unwritten history of all peoples of the earth. Archaeology and Ethnology are to-day gradually merging into one, and the most distant parts of the world are being linked up by archaeological discoveries which throw light on the difficult problem of the origins of human civilisation and of its world-wide ramifications.

In the contest of universal civilisation archaeology is thus an eminently humanising factor in that it tends to mitigate prejudices and aggressive nationalism. On the other hand archaeology is a great force in the shaping of a sound self-consciousness in a nation because knowledge of its own past and of the achievements of former generations adds to a proper appreciation of national growth and of the cultural heritage for which we are indebted to former generations.

Hence the educational value of archaeology is being more and more recognised by leading authorities whilst the ready international co-operation of archaeologists is a thing frequently envied by other branches of learning.

In this noble contest Ireland plays a comparatively important role. During two periods in its past the island outshone many other countries of much greater size in cultural activities which influenced wide tracts of the European mainland: these "Golden Ages" of Ancient Ireland were the Early Bronze Age (B.C. 2000 to 1500) and the Early Christian Period (especially from A.D. 600 to 850). In the earliest Bronze Age Ireland formed the connecting link between the European West and North and the splendid "megolithic" stone monuments (tombs erected from huge stones, called "dolmens," also stone circles and other alignments, etc., etc.) still testify in a most impressive manner to the strength and vigour of this civilisation for which the name "the monumental period" has been coined. (22)

Ireland was one of the first countries outside the Mediterranean area to develop a metal—using civilisation (as opposed to that of the preceding Stone Age), and in doing so she exercised a very strong influence upon the Teutonic peoples. Exactly when Ireland became inhabited by the Celts is still a somewhat disputed question, but it is a fact that she was about the only stronghold of free Celtic culture when Roman power had subjugated one after the other the different branches of the widespread Celtic family of Nations. Ireland, like the extreme north of Scotland, never became a Roman province and by that she saved the unblended genius of the old Celtic race for the imposing

The numbers in brackets refer to the exhibits. The numeration is the same which has been followed in packing the material despatched to Chicago by the National Museum.

development which was to take place simultaneously with the downfall of the Roman Empire; for the imposition of the Christian faith on the high spiritual qualities of an eminently religious, vigorous and yet tolerant nation.

By the sixth century A.D. the Irish Church became one of the strongest civilizing factors in a ramshackle world and from A.D. 600 to 850 the Great Irish Mission laid many of the most important foundations of mediaeval Europe. In doing so Ireland may claim to have saved a great portion of Europe from a relapse into complete barbarism.

Incidentally the foundation of the historic kingdom of Scotland, as an Irish colony, took place at the same time, with all the political consequences implied in this foundation.

Such, then, are some of Ireland's claims to a share in world history and it is obvious that archaeological research can make important contributions to a better understanding and appreciation of these historic events.

The exhibits sent to the "Century of Progress Exhibition" by the Irish Free State Government, and which focus, as it were, round the National Museum of Ireland, can give only an inadequate conception of the world-wide appeal possessed by Irish archaeology. But they will bring home to the visitors that investigation, excavation, research, preservation and restoration are carried out actively and that the noble work of the pioneers in the nineteenth century stimulates the present government, its branches, and the public opinion at large, so that they do not fall short of the endeavours of their predecessors in such activities and that they re-assert the all-European, and indeed, universal importance of Irish archaeology.

Foremost amongst the learned bodies which worked in the field in the nineteenth century stands the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin, founded in 1782, and still to-day an all-Irish institution. The output of literary work, periodical (17, 18, 19, 20) as well as occasional (14, 15, 16, 30) which the Royal Irish Academy has contributed to international research redounds to its credit. The work of the Royal Irish Academy comprises Science (19, 20, 16) and "Polite Literature and Antiquities" (18, 14, 15, 30), the latter "Class" covering all research which has a bearing upon Irish antiquity, language and kindred subjects. The facsimile editions or text editions of ancient Irish Manuscripts, *e.g.*, the famous "Book of the Dun Cow" (14), the "Book of Ballymena" (30) and many others, are of inestimable value to international research in philology and connected branches of learning.

The "Book of Kells" (in Trinity College, Dublin) which is said to be the most beautiful book in the world, is the most famous representative of a class of manuscripts of which Ireland has many (and had still more). It is certainly the most elaborate production in penmanship and two exhibits (7, 23) are displayed in order to bring home to the visitors something of the amazing beauty of the Book of Kells, the Book of Durrow, and other illuminated manuscripts.

The Royal Irish Academy always financed and otherwise encouraged excavations, the results of which have been carefully recorded (17, 18). From its foundation the Academy took upon itself the creation and maintenance of an archaeological museum. This museum, known in the past as "The Royal Irish Academy Museum," forms to-day, after amalgamation

with several other collections of minor importance, the Irish Antiquities Division of the National Museum of Ireland and it may truly be claimed that the existence of this Museum furnished very eloquent evidence of the public utility of the institution which inaugurated this world-famous collection.

The Irish Antiquities Division of the National Museum is one of the great treasure houses of international art, its gold collection is unique, and its early Christian antiquities are of the strongest appeal to Christian European people. The original bell of St. Patrick (replica see 41; shrine see 33), the precious relic of one of the founders of European Christianity, is to be seen in the Dublin Museum, along with its elaborate shrine, with the world-famous Ardagh Chalice (44), the Tara Brooch and many other invaluable artistic treasures.

The Dublin Museum will be mentioned again at page 9 of this guide, but it is necessary to direct attention here to the Academy's Catalogue of the Gold Collection (21).

On the transfer of the Irish Antiquities Division of the Museum to State control the Academy was relieved of the onerous burden which the maintenance of such a valuable and extensive collection implies and it was enabled to devote its limited means exclusively to research, publication, and the development of its library.

Even with this transfer the onus of the work to be done in Irish archaeology would be very considerable, were it not relieved by the enthusiastic help which has been forthcoming from private societies.

The "Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland," founded in 1849, commenced its activities with work

which covered practically the whole field of Irish antiquity. Not only can this Society boast of a Journal (3) which appears now in its 63rd volume in uninterrupted succession, but of various special publications (2, 4, 5, 6) which have been issued prolifically. The Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland has enlisted the support of the general public and catered admirably for the public interest, and its well-attended excursions to places of archaeological importance are a particularly popular feature of its activity. Such excursions are not only directed to Irish sites but also to such sites abroad as have a bearing upon Irish archaeology. The Excursion Guides (2, 6) *e.g.*, for the excursions to the North Western and Southern Islands of Ireland or to the Western Islands of Scotland, rank occasionally among well-known works of reference and are always of permanent value.

Other special publications deal with such subjects as the history of the County of Dublin (5), a serial publication, and special aspects and problems (4). Amongst the latter H. S. Crawford's brilliant "Handbook of Carved Ornament," Dublin 1926, deserves particular mention.

The Society occupies a stately old residential house in Dublin and its headquarters (1) are a rallying point for antiquaries.

There are also several local Antiquarian Societies, co-operating more or less closely with the Dublin institutions and bodies, *e.g.*, in Cork, Galway, Limerick, Louth, etc. The Co. Louth Archaeological Journal (12, 13) indicates amply the great contribution which well-conducted local societies can make to the international progress of learning.

One Society has not yet been mentioned: the Royal Dublin Society. Its contribution to the establishment of progress of learned work in Ireland is well known and hence it is not surprising to learn that the present National Museum, especially its Science and Art Sections, owes its origin mainly to the Royal Dublin Society. Therefore, Irish archaeology is, too, under a great debt of obligation to the Royal Dublin Society.

During the century to which this exhibition is devoted a fundamental change took place in the attitude of governments towards ancient monuments and the significance of such monuments in the spiritual life of a nation. It is now recognised that ancient monuments and other relics of the past generally are a precious heritage which are held as it were in trusteeship for future generations. Archaeological work became increasingly one of the cultural functions of the State and the Government of the Irish Free State willingly shouldered the financial burden imposed by the preservation of an enormous wealth of archaeological monuments of all kinds in a thinly populated country of limited resources.

The activities of the Government are mainly concentrated on two institutions: the National Museum, and the National Monuments Preservation Service of the Office of Public Works.

The National Museum comprises three Divisions: (1) Irish Antiquities and connected collections for comparative archaeology and ethnology; (2) Art and Industrial collections (especially famous for the splendid collections of Irish Glass and Silver); (3) Natural History.

The Museum which is annually frequented by some 400,000 visitors is one of the centres where

research in Celtic archaeology naturally focusses and its gold collection (21) shares with the famous "Book of Kells" in Trinity College, Dublin (7, 23), the claim to be of the greatest interest in the domain of Celtic art. Of the contents of the Museum the new post cards (8, 11, 9, 10) give only an inadequate idea. Replicas of recent acquisitions (31, 10a, 40, 38, 39) are, however, included in the exhibition, merely to exemplify the treasures that visitors to Ireland may see in the National Museum. Some of the most recent acquisitions, *e.g.*, the Gaming Board (10a) and the Ecclesiastic Lamp (40) are absolutely unique and rank among the finest archaeological discoveries in recent years. The latter two objects were donated by the Harvard University Archaeological Mission to Ireland, 1932, referred to below.

The annual accessions of finds, as shown by the recent reports (25) is very large, evidencing the practically inexhaustible archaeological wealth of the country and incidentally justifying the great attention which the government gives to archaeological work.

Special Museum publications (24, 21, 32, 26) are intended for the use of the public. Excavation work is carried out by the Museum itself (25, 26) and in co-operation with other bodies, *e.g.*, the Royal Irish Academy, Harvard University, etc.

Details of other activities, educational, etc., are given in the Annual Reports (25). It goes without saying that research in Celtic Art and history is not only one of the main functions of the Museum but that the Museum also takes a very active part in enabling scientists from other countries to carry out their investigations with such assistance as can be afforded by the professional staff and by access to the collections. The amount of books and papers which

are wholly or partly based on museum material preserved in Dublin is so large that it is naturally impossible to represent it adequately in an exhibition of a general character. As a matter of fact nearly all the books, etc., shown here have in some way a connection with the Dublin Museum. From recent publications, however, a few have been chosen (24, 44, 42) which show that the Museum staff as well as other workers in the field are engaged in the task to render the Museum treasures more and more the spiritual property of all lovers of art and history.

The Museum is most anxious to help in the dissemination of useful knowledge in Irish archaeology and the Keeper of Irish Antiquities, National Museum, Dublin, hopes to find still more general support in the national work which the Museum endeavours to perform.

The Museum is the store house for moveable antiquities, but the policy in Ireland as elsewhere amongst enlightened communities is concerned with the preservation, in situ, of existing monuments throughout the country. This preservation, a particularly onerous task in a country which is so rich in relics of the past, was urged throughout the past century by the Royal Irish Academy and the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, and the National Monuments Act, 1930 (27) crowned a very protracted series of legislative measures. The Irish Free State has now one of the most up-to-date acts for the protection of monuments of every kind.

The preservation of field monuments: important prehistoric dolmens, stone circles, mounds and stone forts, etc.; of Early Christian oratories and Round Towers, High Crosses, churches, abbeys, castles, etc., is under the charge of the Office of Public Works and

its Inspector of National Monuments, who, together with the Keeper of Irish Antiquities in the National Museum, acts as Secretary to the Ancient Monuments Advisory Council. The "List of scheduled monuments in the care of the Commissioners of Public Works" (29) is constantly growing.

The official "descriptions" of national monuments in the Annual Reports of the Office of Public Works (28) cover such famous sites as Glendalough, Clonmacnoise, the Rock of Cashel, etc., and a beginning was also recently made with popular guides to places of interest and importance as *e.g.*, Newgrange (27), which is perhaps the most fascinating Bronze Age tumulus in Europe.

Ireland's ambition towards becoming a favourite tourist resort is to a considerable degree supported by its numerous and beautiful monumental relics. The Album (22) containing a selection of the photographs by Mr. T. Mason, M.R.I.A., the well-known Dublin optician and antiquarian, gives a good idea of the architectural beauty and the not less attractive natural setting of sites like Newgrange and Dowth (chambered cairns), the imposing stone fort of Dun Angus on the Aran Isles (over which the "Bremen" flew on its successful flight over the Atlantic), Skellig (an island monastery off the Kerry coast), Glendalough, Monasterboice, Clonmacnoise, etc., etc., whilst other exhibits (*e.g.*, 42) give due pre-eminence to the famous Irish High Crosses.

Ireland has undergone comparatively rapid change during the last decade and it is not likely that such survivals from a dim past as, *e.g.*, the hide-covered round fishing boats (photos in exhibit 22) which are in use on the River Boyne up to the present day and

which are called curachs, will still be seen by the next generation. It is a relic of prehistoric watercraft, far more primitive than other elegant and efficient type of curach—the canvas-covered and sea-going canoe-shaped boats of the Irish West (photo in 22). The round leather curach finds its exact counterpart in the Mandan buffalo boat.

The recording of such arts and crafts, already bygone or disappearing under the influence of the machine age, has become a very important function of the Museum, whilst the spiritual heritage and oral tradition, in the beauty and wealth of which Ireland surpasses probably all other European countries, provide a field of activity for the Irish Folklore Institute and its ally, the Irish Folklore Society (34 to 37). The Journal of the Society ("Bealoideas") (34) is the only periodical in which Celtic folk-stories, legends, proverbs, etc., are being systematically recorded in the vernacular.

Much of this oral tradition is collected amongst the people of the Atlantic fringe of Ireland, in Kerry, Donegal, Galway, etc. There a very fine and hardy race (inhabiting a country well known for its beauty and grandeur) has preserved for us the spiritual tradition of past centuries.

Mr. Mason's Album (22) contains many pictures showing this background, which incidentally will also form the natural setting for a great film which is shortly to be produced. Through the courtesy of Gainsborough Pictures (1928) Ltd., London, England, we are enabled to show many prints (exhibit 43) which are connected with the film "*Man of Aran*," a Gainsborough Picture, directed by Mr. Robert J. Flaherty (of "*Nanuk*," "*Tabu*," etc., fame) which will be on

the screen in the autumn of the present year. This film will again be in a class by itself and will, no doubt, gain friends for Ireland all over the world.

The interest which Americans always took in Irish matters is further exemplified by two other exhibits (10a, 40). Harvard University, in 1932, embarked upon a learned enterprise which forms a new scientific link between the New World and the Old: it is a sociological, ethnographical and archaeological survey of Ireland, planned to occupy five years, and the archaeological part of the survey met with immediate and remarkable success. The archaeological mission was conducted by Dr. H. O'Neill Hencken, Assistant Curator of European Archaeology, Peabody Museum, Harvard University, and a large "crannog" (artificial island in a bog, inhabited in the Early Christian period, a very typical settlement site of the period in question) was systematically excavated by the expedition last year. The results were most satisfactory. The Bronze Ecclesiastical Lamp (40) and the wooden Gaming Board (10a) are absolutely unique and there were many other finds. They all form a very welcome addition to our knowledge of ecclesiastical art, of everyday life and even of the pastimes of the period (800 to 1014 A.D.) during which Ireland was under the sway of the Scandinavian Vikings.

These two valuable objects have been generously presented to the Irish nation by Harvard University.

This short leaflet could not possibly attempt more than to give to the visitor to the "Century of Progress Exhibition" a very inadequate notion of what he may expect to see if he visits Ireland in person.

The National Museum of Ireland will be pleased to render to visitors interested in Antiquities such assistance as it can reasonably be expected to give. For information relating to tourist traffic visitors are advised to get into touch with the Irish Tourist Association, 15 Upper O'Connell Street, Dublin, who have an exhibit at the "Century of Progress Exhibition."

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