

Caves of Carrigtwohill  
By Thomas Crofton Croker 1829

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**MISCELLANEOUS TRACTS**  
RELATING TO  
**ANTIQUITY.**  
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VI. *Account of some subterranean Chambers discovered near Carrigtwohill, County of Cork, and at Ballyhendon, near Fermoy in the same County: Communicated by THOMAS CROFTON CROKER, Esq., F. S. A., M. R. I. A., in a Letter addressed to NICHOLAS CARLISLE, Esq. F. R. S., Secretary.*

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Read 17th December, 1829.

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Barnes, Surrey, December 15, 1829.

MY DEAR SIR,

WHEN at Cork, in the early part of the present year, I was informed that some subterranean Chambers had been recently discovered on a farm named Garranes, in the parish of Carrigtwohill, about nine miles east of that city.

By the kindness of Mr. Cummins, the proprietor of the ground, I was afforded an opportunity of examining these Chambers, in company with Mr. Robert O'Callaghan Newenham, whose pencil has so skilfully illustrated the picturesque antiquities of Ireland. They are situated within one of those circular entrenchments, popularly (but I am inclined to think incorrectly) termed "Danish Forts." The diameter of this entrenchment is one hundred and twenty feet; and at the third of that space from the south side appeared a circular pit, about seven feet in depth, and measuring five feet and a half in diameter.

From this pit (which probably had been a chamber, the roof having fallen in) two holes, resembling the entrances to fox-earths, descended at an angle of about twenty degrees into Chambers of a depressed beehive-like shape, excavated from the soil, which is a stiff clay mixed with gravel. These holes or passages (in size barely sufficient to allow a

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## *Account of some subterranean Chambers*

man to creep through them) respectively led to a Chamber formed, as I have just described, without any masonry, and from each of these a like communication led to a third Chamber, from which there was a similar passage into a fourth. Here terminated our examination, in consequence of finding that the passage into a fifth Chamber was blocked up with large stones, two or three of which we removed, but from the confined space the workman was placed in, it would have been impossible for us to have opened this communication without more time and labour than we had it in our power to devote to the investigation.

The dimensions of the Chambers varied from seven to eight feet in diameter, and in form they were between the oval and the circle. I annex a Plan,<sup>a</sup> as it will convey at a glance a better idea of their relative situations than can be done by description; and also a section of the entrenchment, with measurements.<sup>b</sup>

When the discovery of these Chambers was made, a considerable quantity of charcoal was found in them, and the fragment of a quern or hand-mill.

It may not be irrelevant to mention, that on Mr. Cummins' farm at Garranes there are five circular entrenchments or forts, all of which we visited. At the distance of about fifty yards from one of these, on the descent of a hill, a spot was pointed out to us, as the entrance of a passage or tunnel leading into chambers beneath the fort; but it had been closed up for many years by the falling in of the earth. Our informant, who was an old man, stated, that when a boy he remembers to have gone some way into this passage, and that the sides were lined with very large stones, upon which great flags rested and formed the roof.

We caused an excavation to be made here for a short time, but we were obliged to abandon the undertaking, without discovering the entrance, although from the vast quantity of charcoal turned up, there appeared to be little doubt that the information given to us was correct.

Within a circle of five miles round Garranes there are no less than

<sup>a</sup> Plate X. Fig. 1.

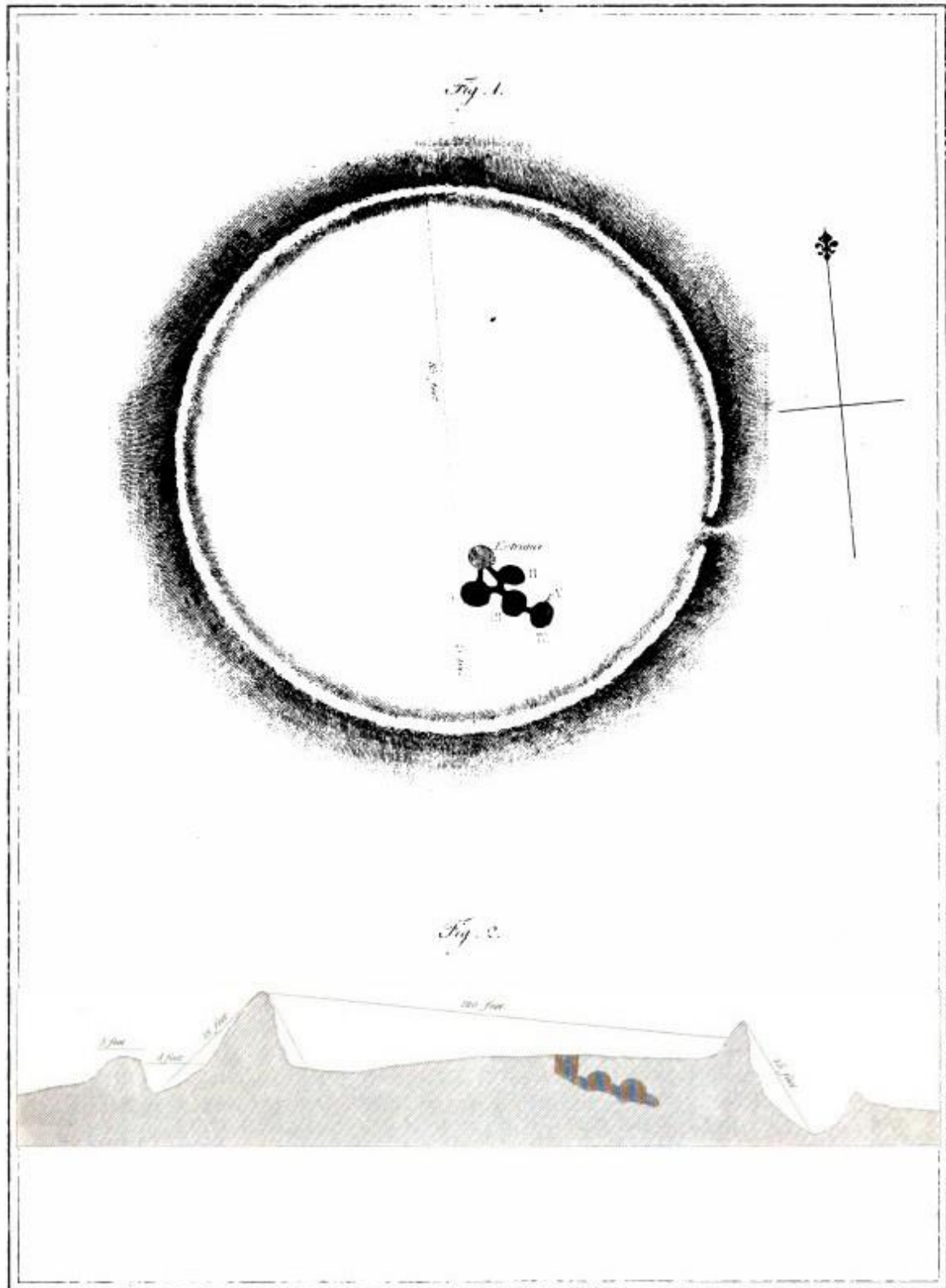
<sup>b</sup> Plate X. Fig. 2.

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Plate X.

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*Plan and Section of Subterranean Chambers at Carrigtwohill near Cork.*

James Allison del.



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*at Ballyhendon, near Fermoy.*

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fourteen circular entrenchments remaining. They are called by the country people, when speaking of them in Irish, as far as I can perceive, indifferently "Lis" and "Rath," and in English, "the Danes' Fort," or "the old Fort." The tradition of the peasantry is, that the Irish, after the battle of Clontarf, when the Danes retreated to these subterranean Chambers for security, kindled large fires at the entrance, the smoke of which either suffocated those within or compelled them to crawl forth; and thus were the invaders destroyed. Another popular notion is, that by means of these forts, which are said (and with some foundation) to have been constructed within view of each other, a communication was kept up by the Danes throughout the country. This was effected by means of fires, one or more of which were lighted to convey certain pieces of intelligence.

I have repeated these traditions because they are so general, and have no doubt originated from the frequent discovery of charcoal in and about the entrenchments. To me it appears probable that these works were thrown up by the native Irish around their little wigwam settlements, as a defence against any sudden attack from an enemy or from wolves, and that subterranean chambers or cellars were formed for granaries, or as secure depositories in time of danger for their rude property.<sup>c</sup> That so many of these entrenchments should remain in nearly a perfect state, is to be attributed to the gross superstition of the peasantry, who regard them as "Διμῖδ" (haunted) places, inhabited by "sheoges," "good people" or fairies, and believe that some severe misfortune is sure to befall the person who meddles with them.

I beg to add the copy of a letter which I have received from Mr. Newenham, containing some further particulars respecting the subterranean Chambers of the south of Ireland :

<sup>c</sup> This conjecture is supported by the following passage in Tacitus, who describes a similar practice among the old Germans : "Solent et subterraneos specus aperire, eosque multo insuper fimo onerant, suffugium hiemi, et receptaculum frugibus, quia rigorem frigorum ejusmodi locis molliunt : et si quando hostis advenit, aperta populatur, abdita autem et defossa, aut ignorantur, aut eo ipso fallunt, quod quærenda sunt." Cap. 16.

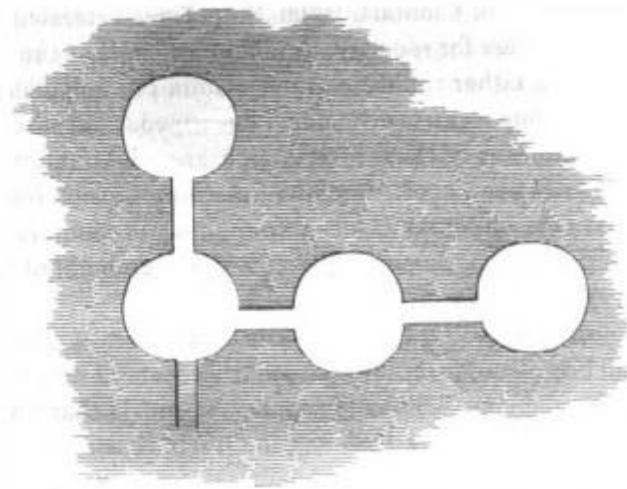
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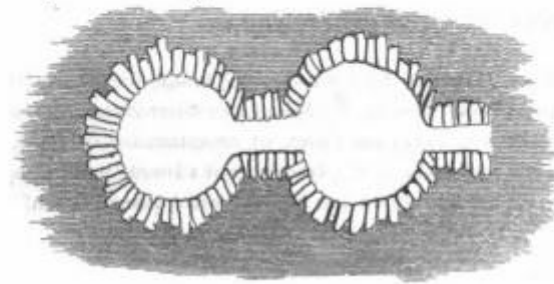
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## *Account of some subterranean Chambers*

“ Since writing my last letter I have been exploring under-ground Chambers by the dozen, and find them, to my surprise, much more frequent than even we had imagined. My first dive was into one set



on the lands c. Ballyhendon, within two miles of Fermoy, precisely similar in formation to those we examined near Carrigtwohill. On coming out I gave my guide a couple of shillings, which so pleased his numerous friends, that they flocked round me, each offering to lead me to others; so that you would have thought the whole country resembled a bee-hive. I chose out a few of the most intelligent, and followed them. In the course of an hour I visited five sets, within a circuit of two miles, those on Mr. Joyce's farm



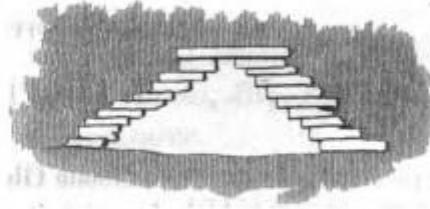
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*at Ballyhendon, near Fermoy.*

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as well as a set at Kilcrumpher,



differ from the others in being built or lined with stone. We had candles and spades, so that every corner was explored, but no discovery made, except decayed bones and charcoal. The bones appeared to be those of the ox, but little remained except the joints. In the inner Chamber of those on Mr. Joyce's farm, I perceived a small square aperture, as if to admit air: it did not rise perpendicularly, but sloped upwards at an angle of about seventy degrees. A fourth excavation, near the third at Kilcrumpher, consisted of long galleries only; at least we could discover no Chambers. The fifth at Ballyhooly was too much choaked up to admit of examination. None of these were connected with ancient entrenchments or forts, though there appeared several in the immediate neighbourhood, and the remains of two cromlechs. There were also three natural caverns in which there were marks of fire.

“Some of these excavations had been discovered forty years ago; others recently and accidentally. The country people say that they discover new chambers every year, all of the same shape and size. They are impressed with a belief that the Danes used them to hide in, when the Irish wished to drive these invaders out of the country. Finding the accounts given me of those I had visited so correct, and having ascertained that these Chambers were all so nearly alike, and that no-

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thing was to be found in them, I did not think it worth while to visit more."

Believe me to be, my dear Sir,

your very humble servant,

T. CROFTON CROKER.

P. S. I have just received a Letter from Doone Glebe, in the county of Limerick, giving an account (which I regret is conveyed in such general terms) of the levelling of a "Danish Fort" in the neighbouring mountains, on some ground belonging to Mr. White. "About fourteen feet from the surface, in the centre of the Fort, a number of silver Coins were found, and a Spur of gold, which is said to be in Mr. White's possession. Several stone Jars were also discovered in subterranean Chambers, but they were all broken or lost by the falling in of the earth, except one, which Mr. White sent to Mr. Coote. This is of a light brown mottled stone-ware, highly ornamented, and a drawing of it, with the measurements, has been forwarded to the Gentleman's Magazine. One of the broken jars was described as "a beautiful royal purple Vase, resembling very fine China."

To NICHOLAS CARLISLE, Esq.  
&c. &c. &c.