

Excavations in Ballyoskill Townland County Kilkenny

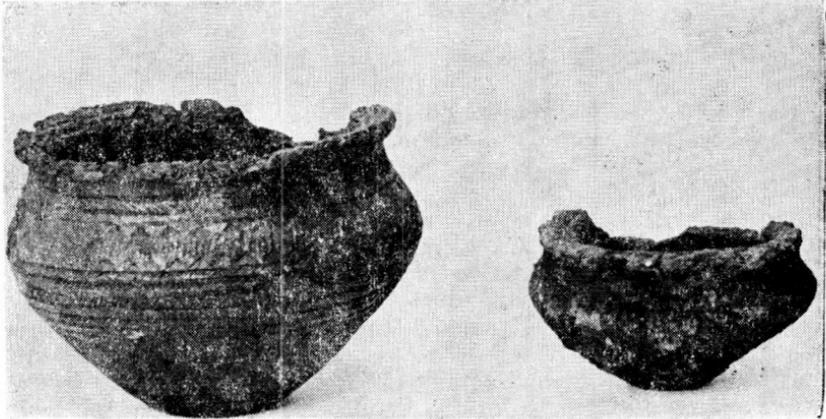
by Ellen Prendergast and Michael FitzG. Ryan

ON 23rd February 1971, bulldozing operations on the land of Mr. Patrick Brennan¹ in Ballyoskill townland² uncovered three prehistoric stone cists. Upon examination one of the cists proved to contain three almost intact pottery vessels. The matter was reported through Fr. S. O'Doherty, C.C., Jenkinstown, to the National Museum. The site was investigated by Miss E. Prendergast of the Irish Antiquities Division on the following day. It was decided to carry out an excavation in order to rescue as much information on the site as possible in view of its advanced state of destruction. The operations occupied the first 10 days in March. Five workmen were employed. No indication of the presence of an archaeological monument occurred on the O.S. 6" sheets of the area. The site, which was almost on the 1000' contour, lay at the edge of a modern quarry. Two bulldozer tracks had been driven across it causing extensive damage.

Three cuttings were opened and upon removal of the top sod the cairn material became evident. This consisted of a haphazard deposit of small stone laminae mostly in the range of 8-12cm. in width and 10-20 cm. in length. There was a tendency for some larger stones to occur at the base of the cairn deposit which was never more than 45cm. in depth. In all, five cists were discovered. They were all set into the old ground level which everywhere appeared as dull yellow-brown homogeneous soil composed in a large part of decayed sandstone. The cists were of simple slab construction and rectangular in shape, one being of miniature proportions. The evidence suggests that all were roofed with single slabs although in three instances *direct* evidence of this was lacking owing to the damage caused by the passage of the bulldozer. Efforts to establish the perimeter of the cairn proved fruitless in view of the extensive modern disturbance of the site.

Only one cist produced any finds; these were two Food Vessels, a Pygmy Cup and some fragments of cremated bone. It is assumed that Food Vessels and Pygmy Cups are most specifically a type of funerary pottery. These vessels would suggest an Early Bronze date ca. (1900-1400 B.C.). Interment in a cist (the body being either cremated or unburned) was normal burial practice over much of this island in the early part of the Bronze Age. These graves are often discovered singly but sometimes they occur in clusters occasionally in cairns. When

they occur thus, as at Ballyoskill, the monument may be referred to as a Multiple Cist or Cemetery Cairn.



Food Vessel and Pygmy Cup from Ballyoskill excavation.

At the conclusion of operations the excavation was left open pending a decision by the landowner on the future of the site.

- 1—The National Museum wishes to express its gratitude to Mr. Brennan for suspending bulldozing operations and for permission to excavate. The Museum is also grateful to Mr. Patrick Butler of Ballyragget, who made the discovery while operating the bulldozer.
- 2—Par. Attanagh, bar. Fassadinin, Co. Kilkenny, O.S. 6" sheet 5.



LETTER TO EDITOR

Dear Sir,

In the interest of historical accuracy if nothing else perhaps you could explain in a future issue of your excellent review how Sir. Cornelius Gregg comes to be described as "one of the founders of our State" (p. 56 Review 1971).

2 Asgard Road,
Howth.

JOHN W. KENEALY

[We feel that as chief architect of the fiscal policy of the new state, Sir Cornelius is not unentitled to the appellation. The contributor of Summer activities 1971 is adamant on the point.

—EDITOR]