

A Fulacht Fiadh at Firgrove near Inistioge

Ellen Prendergast

IN mid-September of this year (1975) a small eminence overgrown with furze and bushes was cleared and levelled in a field on the farm of Mr. Thomas Tennyson, Firgrove House, Inistioge. It was noticed that the exposed surface there was quite different from that in the rest of the field. Thinking that the place might be of archaeological interest, Mr. Tennyson's son, Michael, reported the matter to Mrs. Sheila Lane, the curator in charge of Rothe House Museum, who contacted the writer.

I visited the site on September 21 and found that it was the remains of a fulacht fiadh (an open-air cooking-place). In clearing the site the bulldozer had exposed an oval area, about 18 by 13 metres in extent, covered with blackened earth, ashes, traces of greyish marl and small fragments of burnt stone, mostly sandstone. The long axis of the site runs east-west and follows the slope of the field to the west towards the valley of the Arrigle River, some 120 yards distant. The terrain is generally marshy and partly wooded. In the vicinity of the fulacht there are springs, one near the north-east fringe and another near the south-west edge.

The site is in the townland of Firgrove, parish Inistioge and barony Gowran, Co. Kilkenny, Ordnance Survey 6" sheet number 32 where the co-ordinates of its position are 30.80 cm from the east margin and 15.50 cm from the south margin. It is on the 350 ft contour, while the river is at the 170 ft contour and the greatest height in the vicinity is 750 ft. It is not marked on either the 1837 or the 1903 edition of the map.

The Firgrove fulacht fiadh is another example of a type of field monument of which many have been recorded already for Co. Kilkenny¹ and in other parts, especially in the midlands

¹M. J. O'Kelly, Excavations and Experiments in Ancient Irish Cooking-Places, *Jour. Roy. Soc. Antiquaries Ireland*, 84, 1954, 105—155, with list of Irish sites in Appendix II.

E. Prendergast, Pre-historic Cooking Places in Webbsborough District, *Old Kilkenny Review*, no. 8, 1955, 1—10. Other Kilkenny sites listed there.

Subsequently a fulacht fiadh in which a wooden trough was found was examined by E. Prendergast on the lands of Mr. E. Brennan at Ballyhimmin near Castlecomer and further sites in the locality were recorded there with the assistance of Mr. T. Hoyne and Mr. T. Lyng.

Two fulachta fiadha in south Co. Kilkenny at Catstown were excavated last year by my colleague, Mr. Michael Ryan, and many such sites are being recorded in the area. I am grateful for this information in advance of publication.

and southern counties. Essentially a fulacht fiadh is an open-air cooking place or field kitchen associated with hunting. They have been mentioned in early Irish literature occasionally and an account of their use has been given by Geoffrey Keating in his *Forus Feasa ar Eirinn* (compiled in the 17th century) with particular reference to the activities of Finn Mac Cumhaill and the Fianna. After a hunting expedition the kill was prepared for the evening meal by roasting or boiling in lined pits in marshy ground. The roasting was done on spits or in stone-lined ovens. The boiling was done by dropping red-hot stones into the water-filled trough, bringing it to the boil and so cooking the meat, which was cut in joints and wrapped in straw. When the cooking was completed the stones were removed from the trough and piled up on three sides of the pit, leaving access from one side. It is the remains of these pot-boilers which form the mound, usually oval or kidney-shaped, by which these sites may now be identified.

Practical experiments have proved that these methods of preparing meat are quite satisfactory² and the grouping of sites in a locality indicates that a large number of persons were catered for on the occasion of these hostings. This system of out-door cooking was practised for many centuries in Ireland, perhaps from the Early Bronze Age to late Medieval times. Every fulacht recorded contributes to our understanding of their significance to country life in the past. Thanks are due to the Tennyson family for bringing this new site to notice.

²M. J. O'Kelly, *loc. cit.*

F. M. Fahy, A Hut and Cooking-Places at Drombeg, *Cork Jour. Cork Hist. and Archaeol. Soc.*, 65, 1960, 1—17.



INFORMATION WANTED

Mr. John Bradley is compiling a catalogue of all charters, indentures, deeds, etc., relating to Kilkenny in the period between 1200 and 1750. He would welcome information from anyone with manuscript material of this nature in their possession, or with transcripts, abstracts, etc. He is contactable at 28 St. Fiacre's Place, Kilkenny.