

**HISTORIC SITES: THE BATTLE OF MOYTURA** - Sir William Wilde has established firmly in the minds of the people hereabouts, as well as ~~as well as~~ in those of many credulous writers who have accepted his theories & assertions without question, that the great pre-Christian Battle of Moytura, between the Tuatha de Danaan & Fírbólgs, took place inside the triangular area bounded by Cong, Cross & The Neale. There is ample evidence that at least one major battle took place here in ancient times, the profusion of stone monuments, sepulchral mounds & cairns, is sufficient proof of that. But the great encounter which Wilde describes is now generally acknowledged by historians & antiquarians alike as having taken place at North Moytura, in the county Sligo. Those who prefer to believe Wilde's fanciful narration will shift ground to say that the northern battle took place at a later date & that the first battle was that of Moytura South. So now there were two battles & the names applied to the great monuments & sites of engagements, etc., were, by strange coincidence, identical, & the same men to whom these monuments were erected after death, died a second time in Sligo, after exactly similar struggles.

O'Donovan was, probably, largely responsible for Wilde's confident belief & he also, in his Ordnance Survey Letters of Co. Mayo, Vol.2, renders an account of the battle & he states that local tradition placed the site of the battle here but he was unable to obtain any traditional account of the battle whatever in the locality & his version is derived from written sources which, apparently, could be applied only to the Sligo battlefield.

A great many of the names of sites & monuments mentioned by the ancient authority, on whose writings Wilde based his story, do not appear in the southern battlefield. To correct that he often christened a fort or monument with the name of a similar construction described in the old writings. The giant cairn at Killower is an instance of this. No other name had ever been known for it, but Wilde promptly decided that it was the burial mound of the Fir Bolg King, Eochy, & called it Carn Eochy, even though the location of that carn could not be other than near Ballysodare in Sligo, if the ancient manuscripts are faithfully interpreted.

Amidst all this confusion, the fact clearly emerges that a great battle did take place here, probably in pre-Christian times too, but there seems to be no account of when it occurred or of the contending parties. There was a lively engagement on this very site in the year 1230 A.D. in which Anglo-Normans under one of the Burkes & Irish under Felim O'Connor invaded this territory, & advancing towards Inishmaine to "cordon-off" the isthmus, routed the mighty army of the Connachtmen.

**HEDGE SCHOOL:** During the Penal Days a Hedge School flourished under one of the arches of Cong Bridge, that

HISTORIC SITES: HEDGE SCHOOL (cont'd.)

over which one passes on entering the town from the east. The arch is the one nearest the village.

DISTINGUISHED PERSONALITIES; Sir William & Oscar Wilde:

Sir William Wilde spent his youth & a great deal of his life on the south-eastern shore of Loch Corrib, where, in 1865, he built Moytura House. Amongst his many celebrated works, his "Loch Corrib" is outstanding as a monumental, but often historically inaccurate, guide to this part of the West. The house is a plain though handsome residence, hardly distinctive in style. He chose the name to commemorate the great pre-Christian Moytura Battle, which he firmly believed to have taken place within view almost of the site selected for his dwelling. "This house", as he himself says, "commands a magnificent prospect to the West, south & east, & can be seen from most parts of the middle lake." It is approached by a long avenue, now much neglected, leading from the right side of the Cong-Cross road, about 2 mls from Cong. Sir William's intertwined initials, & the date, 1865, are carved in a small circular plaque over the front of the house. Here, too, Oscar Wilde, & undoubtedly, his mother, "Speranza" lived for a time. Oscar accompanied his father on many of his archaeological expeditions in the distr., as Sir William mentions in his book.

The house is now owned by Mr. Thunder, who permits visitors to see it, without charge. A stand for flowers, or plants, at the front of the house, is said to have been made in remembrance of a daughter of Sir William's.

In a field at the back of the house is a peculiar tower of rough stones - windmill shaped. This is probably the tower which Wilde said he had built on an ancient fort called Caher Gearoid.

Captain Boycott: This notorious gentleman lived at Loch Mask House now occupied by Mr. Patrick Daly. The house, a sizeable square-fronted bldg., stands beside Loch Mask Castle, on the S.E. shore of the lake & about 3 1/2 mls. N. of Cong. It is a solid stone bldg without any pretensions to architectural beauty or interest, & is approached by a long avenue. It was erected early in the 19th centy by the Elwoods of Strandhill area.

Boycott was agent for the Earls of Erne & Kilmaine, & the harshness with which he treated the poor tenants & others under his charge soon earned for him the hatred of all with whom he came in contact in the course of his duties.

In the summer of 1880, Parnell propounded his policy for the complete isolation of rack-renters, brutish landlords, land-grabbers & others of that class who were persecuting the peasantry of the country. In the following October, the plan was put into effect against Boycott & the staunch tenants simultaneously took up a determined stand against the petty tyrants, ignoring his ejection processes & threats. Then his groom, Martin Brannigan, left his employment without notice, to be followed immediately by Dick Higgins the herd, his cock, maids, workmen & all others who tended the house & lands or were in any way engaged in helping to run the huge property. Immediately too, he found it impossible to get a local farrier to shoe his horses & he could procure no goods, food, or other requirements, from shop or store. With amazing spirit & cohesion the people withstood his pleas as they had his bullying threats & soon he was stranded in a state of complete & thorough ostracization.

The rigid attitude of the people was now a subject of discussion all over the country & newspaper headlines drew public attention in other countries also to the situation & developments. Lord Erne sent 40 "Orange" workers from the north of Ireland to aid Boycott in his duties & it was