

# Caldragh Graveyard, Dreenan Townland, Boa Island, Lower Lough Erne Fact Sheet



## Background

In 1744, Issac Butt wrote of Boa Island: "An island near ye north shore of ye lough which is called ye Bow Island, on which several villages are, whose inhabitants, as it is said, seldom come on shore but live in silent retreat, marry amongst each other and are blest with all ye common necessities of life." The early history of the site here at Caldragh remains much of a mystery. The present graveyard, named Caldragh, in Irish Cealtrach, meaning old graveyard. Nothing of the original church remains in the Caldragh graveyard in Dreenan. A fine font is in a private garden close by. The original cemetery was larger, than the now enclosed, graveyard. It contains a large number of what must be assumed to be either unbaptised infants' graves or paupers' graves, or paupers' graves.



## Stone Statues

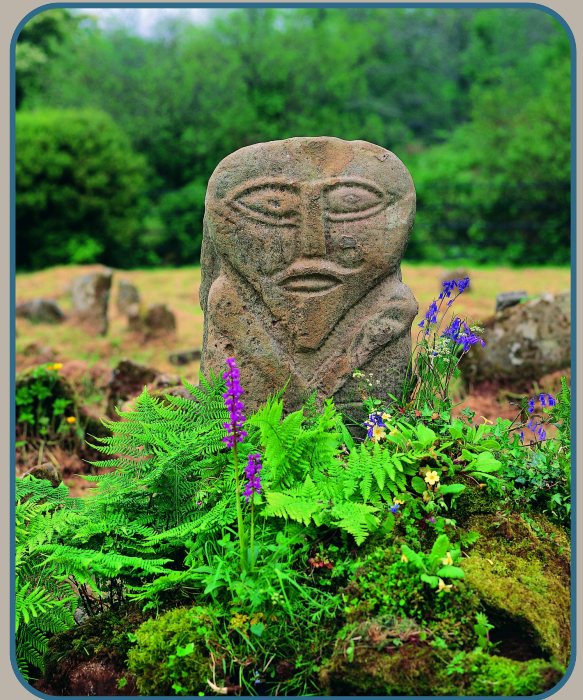
This exceptionally well-known stone figure has been sitting in the rural graveyard at Caldragh, since at least 1841, when it was drawn by the antiquarian George Du Noyer. In 1933 the first scholarly paper to take notice of it was written by Lady Dorothy Lowry Corry of Castlecoole.

For many years, the accepted opinion was that it belonged to the pagan Iron Age.

As Lanigan Wood highlights "The statue has often been described, wrongly, as a Janus figure - Janus being a Roman god who could look in many directions. But this is not a figure with two faces but two complete, more, or less identical, figures placed back-to-back. Until recently the statue was missing its lower portion, and some of the 'pagan' suggestions stemmed from the uncertainties caused by its incompleteness. Some years ago, a large boulder was uncovered - it was a carved hand! The missing lower portion of the statue had been found.

It can now be said that the two figures each has crossed arms ending in spidery hands held at their sides. Each appears to be wearing a full-length garment with a front-seam, and a wide belt. The balance of opinion has been swinging for some time towards an Early Medieval/Early Christian date and now it can be said that this is virtually certain. It probably represents an unpleasant and frightening figure of mythology and folklore, identifying with the war-goddess Badhbh - the hooded crow. This view, based on the appearance of the figures, is given extra credibility by the fact that the name Boa Island comes from the Irish Inis Badhbha - 'Badhbh's island.'

The second, smaller figure now in the churchyard, on the Boa Island, was formerly on Lustymore Island. It stands to the south-east of the larger figure. The OS Revision Name Book, 1857, recorded that it had been removed from its original site in 1855. In the 1930s the stone was brought to Caldragh. The stone is carved from the same type of stone as the Boa Island figure with similar features. It is carved only on the eastern side. Perhaps it represents an abandoned attempt to replicate the larger figure?



## Preservation

The figures on Boa Island, White Island, the high crosses spread throughout the county, along with many other significant stone carvings, have deteriorated over the course of time. This begs the question as to whether we leave them in situ or remove them to protect them. Removing them means we lose all sense of local association and context. Leaving them just as they are, allows their story to evolve, as it has done so for centuries.







St Patrick's  
Purgatory,  
Lough Derg

# LOUGH ERNE — PILGRIM WAY —



Lough Erne is home to many religious sites, places of gathering, learning, worship, and burial. Today, we can trace these places along the lough as they quietly sit as timely reminders of a once thriving early Christian community.