

THE COUNTY LIMERICK METEORITES

On September 10th, 1813 a number of meteorites fell in County Limerick. Details can be found in a paper by H. J. Seymour in the Scientific Proceedings of the Royal Dublin Society, Volume 24, No. 18, p. 157, 1947 and the following information is taken from that paper.

Some account of the falls appeared on the day following the Shower in the local newspaper, the Limerick Chronicle, but the first account in a scientific journal is a paper by W. Higgins in the Philosophical Magazine, Volume 51, p. 355, 1818. Included in this paper is a letter from Mr. George Tuthill of Faha House near which the shower occurred. In this letter we are informed that there were three large meteorites weighing 65, 24 and 17 pounds. In addition, there were six or seven smaller meteorites. All the falls were within a radius of about three miles. He mentions that the 24 pound one was in his possession. In Linehan's "Limerick and its Antiquities", published in 1866, it is noted that one of the meteorites weighing four stones is in Mr. Tuthill's possession. Thus the two largest meteorites were once owned by him.

The smaller meteorites have been distributed among several British, Irish and Continental Museums. The 17 pound one is in the Oxford University Museum. The 65 pound one had been lost sight of by scientists until in 1945 it was recognized by a Mr. J. A. Morrison of the Irish Land Commission in the house of a Limerick farmer, Mr. John Collins. According to Mr. Collins it had passed from the Tuthill family to a neighbouring Taylor family, related by marriage to the Tuthills. The Collins family had worked for generations for the Tuthills and Taylors, and, at an auction some seven or eight years previously, Mr. Collins bought it for purely sentimental reasons. It was one of a miscellaneous collection of articles. It was purchased from him by the National Museum of Ireland where it now is. It is known as the "Brasky" mass after the Briska Townland in Limerick in which it fell (locally Briska, pronounced as Brisky). It is the largest and heaviest meteorite known to have fallen in Great Britain and Ireland and is a veined grey bronzite chondrite. A list of meteorite falls in Great Britain and Ireland since 1795 is included in Seymour's paper.

What prompted this note is the fact that, through the kindness of Dr. J. S. Jackson, Keeper of the Natural History Division of the National Museum, an excellent cast of the Brasky Meteorite has been presented for display in the Astronomical Museum incorporated in the Armagh Planetarium.

There are two interesting points to note. Firstly, where is the 24 pound meteorite? There seems to be no clue as to its whereabouts since Mr. Tuthill's letter of 1818. The second point is of a personal nature. The Brasky meteorite fell just north of the Faha Demesne, the home of George Tuthill; the 24 pound one fell in the Faha Demesne. About 9 miles due south of this is the Kilmore Demesne. It was the home of Mr. John Tuthill. His eldest daughter Katherine Hannah, born in 1847, was married in 1875 to Dr. Dreyer, Director of Armagh Observatory 1882-1916. A meteorite is not usually so considerate as to fall in an astronomer's garden. But the Limerick meteorites might be regarded as a near Miss!

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