



The Memorials of St. Coman's Church of Ireland Graveyard, Roscommon



St. Coman's Graveyard

Roscommon town has been the administrative centre for the county since Robert d'Ufford built a castle here in 1269. St. Coman's graveyard began as an Early Christian ecclesiastical site in the 6th century; it was attacked by the Vikings in 802 and burned by Munster forces in 1134. The county name comes from St. Commán. The Cannons Regular of St. Augustan built a monastery here 1140-1148. The present Church of Ireland church was built in 1775. The monuments, to Protestant and Catholic, wonderfully reflect the pre-20th century social and economic history of Roscommon town.

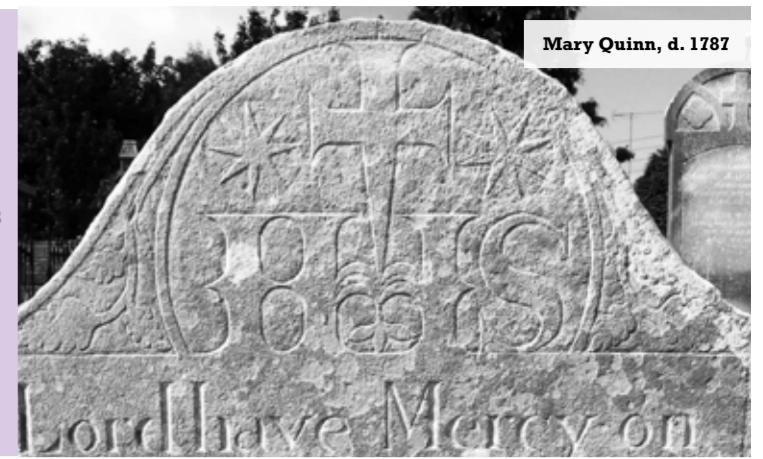
The good quality Roscommon limestone brought skilled masons to the area. This combined with people who had the finance and the desire to commemorate their families lead to this significant collection of memorial stones.



Elnr. McDermott, d. 1769

IHS

The collection of the various shaped and well designed headstones with the IHS, with or without a cross or sunburst, is outstanding. This motif was used here from the 1720s to the 1890s. The IHS is an abbreviation of the Greek form of Christ's name. One stone, that to Elnr. McDermott, d. 1769, has the H and cross but no I or S; another to Neable O'Bryn, d. 1767, has I and S but no H. The masons were using the IHS without fully understanding its meaning. The letters INRI on the headstone to Catherine Farrell, *alias* Byrne, d. 1816, stands for Jesus, of Nazareth, King of the Jews, in Latin.



Mary Quinn, d. 1787

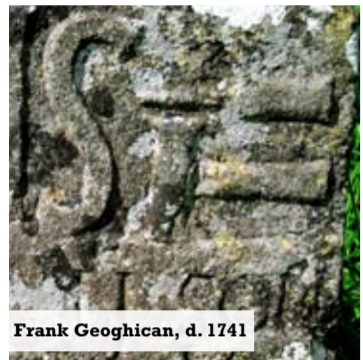
Passion Symbols and Crucifixions

Co. Roscommon has a rich tradition of use of the Passion Symbols on 18th century headstones. The headstone to Honor Highins, *alias* Burke Shee, d. 1724, has the crucifixion with hammer, pincers and ladder, fifteen coins representing Judas' thirty pieces of silver, the cock on the pot representing Judas' guilt, two flails and a lantern (front cover). John Hanly's headstone, d. 1724 aged 4 years, has the Symbols including Longinus with a spear. The headstone to Frank Geoghican, d. 1741, has five coins, and a hammer and awl, leatherwork symbols.

There are four crucifixion scenes, two with kneeling figures on either side: Hugh Guff, d. 1761, and Thomas Keogh, d. 1784, one with standing figures; Elnr. McDermott, d. 1769, and one with Christ alone; Neable O'Bryn, d. 1767.



Hugh Guff, d. 1761



Frank Geoghican, d. 1741

Mortality Symbols

The headstone to Patrick Teriney, erected 1755, has Death spearing a shrouded corpse and an hourglass, both reminders of death. The coat of arms with a bird pecking a shrouded corpse on the headstone to Andrea Keogh, d. 1721, is a mortality symbol, not a heraldic one. The Keogh coat of arms is a lion rampant with a crest of a boar. The stone to Peter Hannon, d. 1818, is coffin-shaped. The stone to Marcus Kelly, d. 1829, has a skull and cross bones.

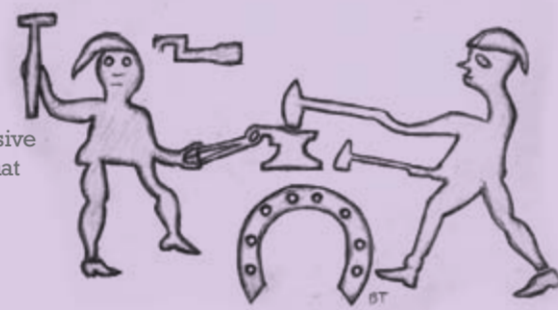


Marcus Kelly, d. 1829

Trade Symbols

There are many wonderful tradesmen's symbols. Farmers: Dall Cullane, d. 1736, Catherin Dury, d. 1741, and Michl. Leaneahan, d. 1758; builder: John Neary, d. 1790; shoe maker: Michael Kinneally, erected 1737; glove makers: Cormock Muliuhill, d. 1719, and Edmd. Norlin, d. 1784; blacksmith, Catherin Murphy, d. 1720; leather worker: Frank Geoghican, d. 1741. These stones establish family - "We were here, we are here and we will be here" and proclaim themselves as progressive farmers and craftsmen. The two stones commemorating women show that it is family that is being commemorated and not just the individual.

The more recent headstone to Rodger McDermott, d. 1865, has a butcher's knife and sharpening stone; McDermotts are still butchers in Roscommon. The set square and dividers on the headstones to Willm. Johnston, d. 1762, and Hubert Farrell, d. 1834, could be Freemasonry symbols or those of a carpenter.



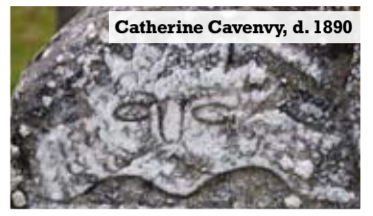
Catherine Murphy, d. 1720



Mr. Patrick Kelly, d. 1738

Winged Figures

The broken stone with the Archangel Michael blowing the trumpet, announcing the Resurrection, lacks an inscription. Winged heads represent the soul or an angel. That on the headstone to George Norris, d. 1735, is sombre looking. Many stones with the IHS and sunburst have a pair of winged heads. One of the two winged heads on the headstone to Catherine Cavenry, *alias* Brannon, d. 1890, has a moustache.



Catherine Cavenry, d. 1890

Coat of Arms

A fine coat of arms, crest and feathering is on the 18th century stone to Elizabeth Sandys. The headstone to Mr. Patrick Kelly, d. 1738, has the Kelly coat of arms of a castle with a lion rampant on either side, a crest of a greyhound, feathering and the motto *Turis Fortis Mihi Deus*, God is my Tower of Strength.

Doves

The dove with an olive branch is on two headstones, one erected by Edward Igoe in 1813, and the other to Judith Fallon *alias* Kenedy, d. 1815. Also the headstone to Edmd. Norlin, d. 1784, has the dove with olive branch on the thumb of a glove, the dove bringing sanctity to the glover's work. A dove, representing the Holy Spirit, holds the host on the headstone erected by Edmd. Igoe in 1789.



Judith Fallon, d. 1815



James McClvey, d. 1761

Sun, Moon & Stars

The sun, moon and stars represent the universe, the creation of God. The sun and moon appear with facial expressions on the headstone to James McClvey, d. 1816. The stars appear with the IHS and full sunburst on many headstones: Mary Quinn, *alias* Flood, d. 1787.



James McClvey, d. 1761

Stone Masons

It is not until the late 19th century that memorials are signed here. Exceptions are two 18th century headstones: Agnes Hannon, erected 1804, signed H.C., and Elnr. McDermott, d. 1769, signed F.M.

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Inscriptions

Lettering is mainly incised, cut into the stone. Raised lettering is where the background is cut back leaving the letters standing out, as on headstone to Muren McCormick, d. 1730. All except two inscriptions are in English, one in Irish, that to Seagain Mic Riada, d. 1920, and another in Latin.

Dates

Many of the 18th century stones, in an unusual local fashion, give only the last two figures of the year: Elnr. McDermott d. 1769, is inscribed as 69.

Memorials can be erected before death with the dates of death being inscribed later, though most people are commemorated shortly after death. The earliest inscribed headstone noted is to Chaush Branon, d. 1715, the stone with the earliest inscribed date is to Alexander Irwin, d. 1621, but was not erected until 1733. The most recent inscription is to John Ward, d. 1923. The majority of people buried here are not commemorated with an inscribed stone and many have no marking stone at all.

Not all memorials are of stone; there is a wrought iron cross, a local blacksmith's work, to Eddie Cooke (front cover).

Church Monument

St. Coman's Church has a remarkable classical early-18th century wall monument to Bryan and Katherine Gunning of Castlecoote. The monument is surmounted by the Gunning coat of arms and crest, vases, skulls and has a winged head under it.



Gunning: Bryan, d. 1717, and Katherine, d. 1715

For further information, illustrations and definitions

See the many excellent articles by Albert Siggins in *Co. Roscommon Historical and Archaeological Society Journal*, particularly "Some Headstones with Symbols of Death and Resurrection in Co. Roscommon" in Vol. 10 (2006), *Had Me Made, A Study of the Grave Memorials of Co. Sligo from c. 1650 to the Present*, by Mary B. Timoney and www.roscommoncoco.ie for the inscriptions and photographs of the memorials in St. Coman's.

If planning to record memorials please contact the Heritage Office, Roscommon County Council for more information on recording memorials in Co. Roscommon graveyards and for a copy of the Memorials Database.



Lydia Shea, d. 1857



Robert Goff of Carrowroe Park, d. 1838



Jane Geraghty, d. 1877



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Headstone to John Hanley, d. 1724, with Crucifixion, Passion Symbols and scroll work.



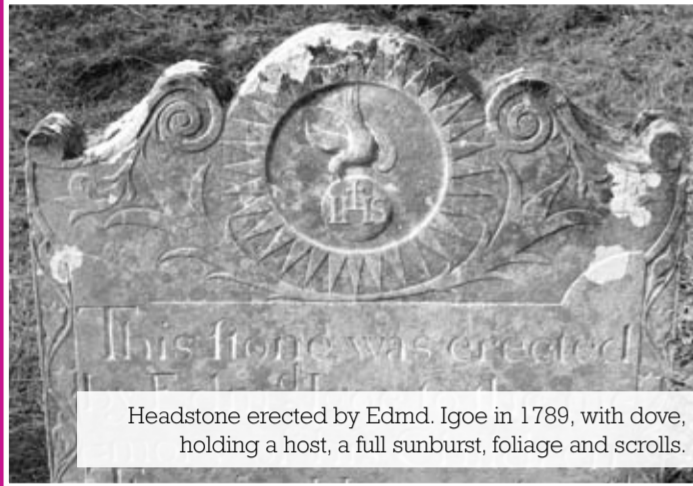
Headstone to George Norris, d. 1735, with winged head.



Stone to the Hon. Mrs. Elizabeth Sandys, with the Sandys coat of arms, crest and feathering.



Headstone to Dail Cullane, d. 1736, with well-dressed farmer with horse and plough, winged head & two winged figures.



Headstone erected by Edmnd. Igoe in 1789, with dove, holding a host, a full sunburst, foliage and scrolls.



Headstone to Catherine Farrell, d. 1816, with IHS, INRI, flowers and foliage, and scroll work.



Headstone to Francis Muliuhill, d. 1712, with glove and scissors.



Winged head on headstone to Michael Carey, d. 1852.



Headstone to Bryan Cullane, d. 1727, with IHS and leaves.



Coffin-shaped stone to Peter Hamon, d. [18]18.

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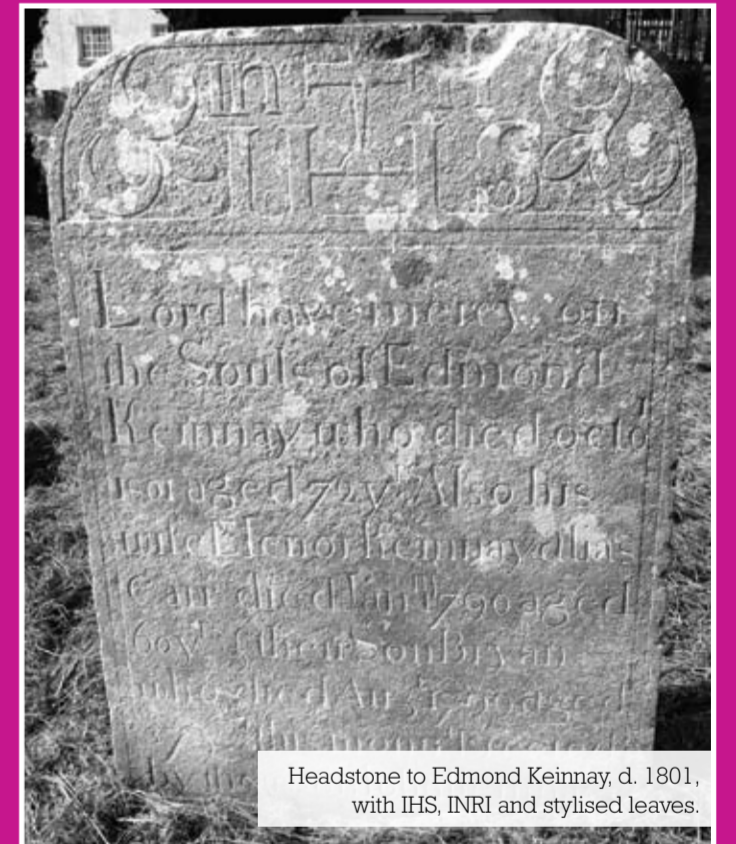
Recumbent stone to Anne Roper, alias Kelly, d. 1777, with crest of a lion rampant holding a crown, and feathering.



Marking stone incised with a cross, initials P L and M L and date of 1817.



Headstone to Andrea Keogh, d. 1721, with pseudo coat of arms, a crest, feathering and scrolls.



Headstone to Edmond Keinnay, d. 1801, with IHS, INRI and stylised leaves.



Headstone to Michael Kinneely, erected 1737, IHS, with foliage, shoes and a man's head.



Michael the Archangel blowing a trumpet.



Headstone to Willm. Johnston, d. 1762, with dividers, set square, flowers, leaves and 3 letter As.



Headstone to Patrick Teriney dated 1765, with IHS, 2 winged heads, an hour glass, death, a shrouded figure & scrolls.