



National College of Art and Design
Visual Communications

Michael Biggs - A Life of Letters and Stones

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CATALOGUE OF LETTERING WORK: in this catalogue the illustrations/photographs are numbered LETCat.No. 1 - 42.

CATALOGUE OF CHURCH WORK: in this catalogue the illustrations/photographs are numbered CHCat.No. 1 - 23.

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I endeavour to put together the story of the life and work of the late Michael Biggs (1928 - 1993). English-born, Michael Biggs spent most of his life in Ireland and was an artist-craftsman whose main activity was working in stone, both as a letter-cutter and as a sculptor of sanctuary furnishings for both new and re-ordered churches following the changes of the Second Vatican Council. In this thesis I have written a biography of Biggs' life, catalogued both his inscriptional work in all media and his sculptural church work and written a short analysis of his lettering. With no documentary work done into his life or work I was starting from scratch. Letter-cutting in stone falls outside the mainstream of craftwork and is not included in the area of graphic design or even commercial art as it would have been called in the '50s. So Biggs' work has gone, if not unnoticed, at least unrecognised. His sculpture, being church centred, suffered like many other ecclesiastical artists, from a sad lack of interest from the mainstream of art criticism. As I discovered, Michael Biggs was well-known and respected amongst his fellow artists but not considered important as a sculptor because he did not exhibit in galleries or in public shows. As an anonymous critic noted in 1975:

It is a telling symptom of the times how seldom it is, either in 'salon' or in the press, that you will find a critique of that army of artists who fulfil commissions for the church: either a commendatory comment or an intelligible appraisal of the situation for which these artists work and how their work might fail in its setting. Critically they work in a vacuum. (Introspect, 1975, p. 17)

As there has been no other documentary work done so far on Michael Biggs and his work, I felt that this thesis must include all aspects of his life - a short biography, the cataloguing of his work and some analysis of that work.

1. BIOGRAPHY OF BIGGS: METHODOLOGY

In part one I endeavour to put together a biography of Biggs from his early days at school through to his study of stone carving in England and his career in Ireland, both as a letter-cutter and sculptor, along with his associated, if minor, work of book illustration and typeface design up to his death in 1993 at

the age of 65. This proved very much of a detective job. His family, especially his daughter Fiona, helped a lot considering the difficulties associated with finding out facts of a parent's life before you were born. Contact with friends and acquaintances gave me some facts and indeed every meeting or letter yielded at least two but usually even more contacts. The web got wider and wider. This was most interesting but also time consuming as up-to-date addresses and telephone numbers had to be found and followed up, with letters to be written and contacts made. I started with letters to other artists who had worked with Biggs on the church projects mentioned in the book Contemporary Irish Church Architecture. I also contacted the two authors of this book, Richard Hurley and Wilfred Cantwell. Early contact with art historian, Dr. James White, artists Bernadette Madden, Patrick Pye and Richard Enda King all gave me some ideas about Michael and his working life and directed me to other contacts. Richard King has sadly died since. Both artist Imogen Stuart and architect Richard Hurley agreed to see me and provided interesting information. Hurley gave me an article which was a tribute to Biggs by sculptor Cliona Cussen, and she replied to my letter and gave me a few more facts. Biggs seems to have been universally liked and respected so this helped a lot. Everyone wanted to help with whatever they knew. Bernie O'Leary, from The Arts Council, gave me details about being elected to Aosdána, which Biggs achieved in 1989.

Researching Biggs' third level studies brought me to the Manuscripts Department of Trinity College Dublin. I got more information about his time in Sussex training in stone from letterers John Skelton and Michael Harvey, who had both worked in the same workshop as well. Bill Bolger of the Visual Communications Faculty in NCAD told me that Biggs had done some work for Liam Millar of The Dolmen Press including his Gaelic Alphabet. Millar's DOLMEN XXV - AN ILLUSTRATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE DOLMEN PRESS 1951-1976 gave me a list of this work. Finding copies of some of these limited edition books for the Dolmen Press that Michael illustrated with wood- and lino-

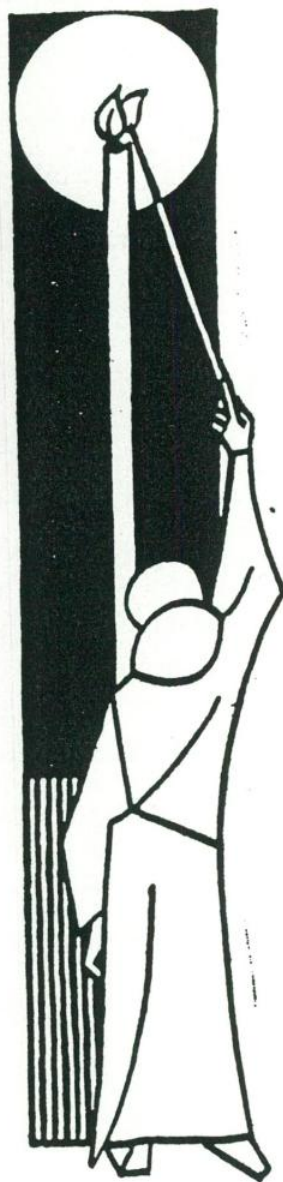
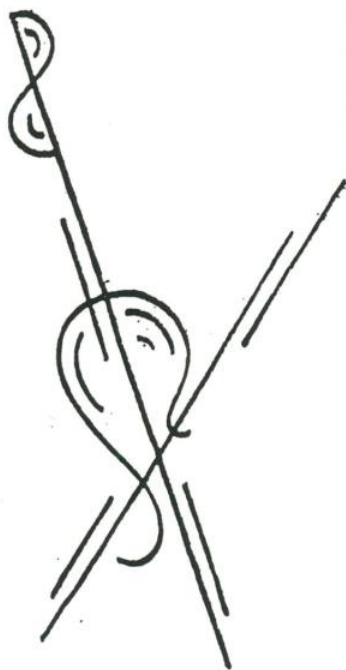
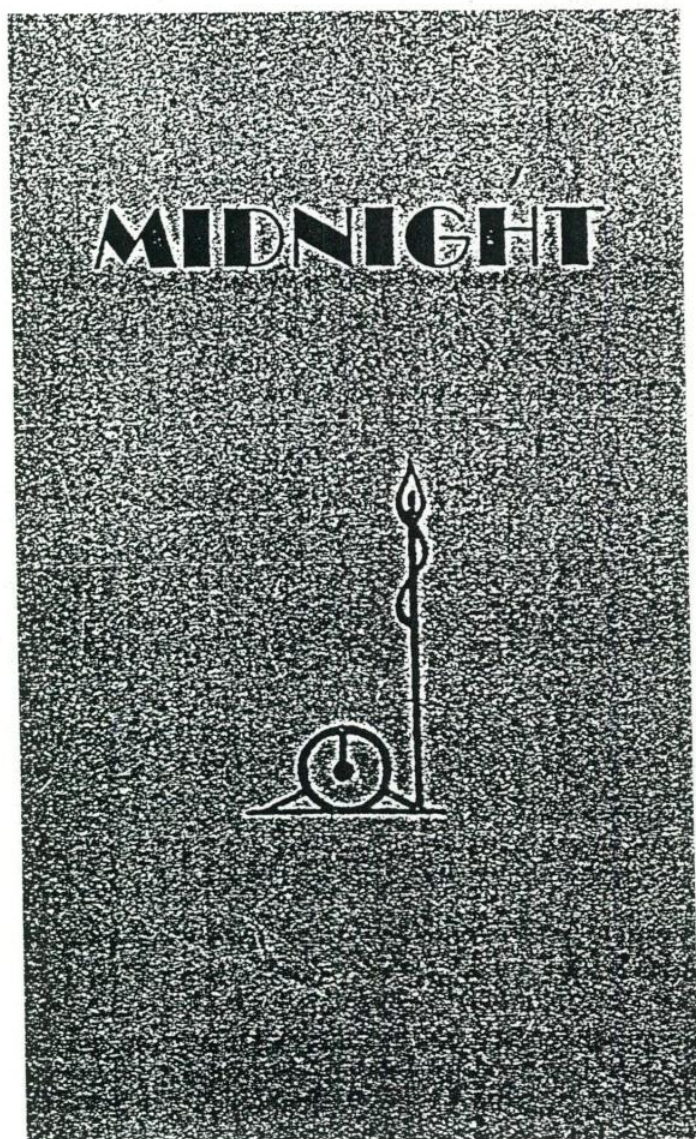


Fig.1 - Illustrations from Brian Farrington's book of poetry - 'Midnight'.

cuts brought me to the Early Books Department of Trinity College.

A number of visits to his old secondary school, St.Columba's, along with the help of school historian and teacher Ninian Falkiner, supplied names of actual or near contemporaries who responded to my letters in great length and most promptly, in spite of the fact that nearly 50 years had passed since their time in school together. Most of these letters or telephone replies, from schoolfriends Douglas Sealy, Michael Hamilton, Thomas Bewley, Henry Bloodsmith, Nigel Pratt, Eric Earle, Ruarc Gahan and schoolmaster Norman Lush, confirmed Biggs' interest in art at school and also told me something of the liberal ethos of St. Columba's which allowed boys who had artistic interests to pursue them. Some sent me copies of the school magazine WHY NOT containing cartoons by Biggs. Another friend from school, Trevor Cox, who is now better known as the writer William Trevor, helped with more facts. He remained a friend of Biggs' during his lifetime. Through these contacts I managed to garner a lot of interesting material about influences on Biggs. I received a lovely long handwritten letter from the eminent musician Brian Boydell, who was Michael's first Art Teacher in school. Through Ninian Falkiner I also discovered the Biggs' plaque in the College Chapel and his hand-lettered boards of past Wardens and School Prefects in the Dining Hall. I also contacted the Farrington brothers, Brian and Conor, who had both known Biggs at St. Columba's. Brian had been a member of the School Printing Club, as was Biggs, and he kindly sent me some illustrations that Michael had done over fifty years ago for a book of his poetry.(Fig.1)

The 1973 RTE TV programme MICHAEL BIGGS - ARTIST IN STONE coincided with the rebuilding of St. Michael's Church in Dun Laoghaire after the fire that destroyed the old one. Joe Mulholland, the director of that programme and now Head of News, kindly sent me a copy of it and this helped a lot to give a general impression of Biggs himself, both at work and in thoughtful mood

when speaking about art in Ireland, the stone trade and his philosophy of life.

I finally got to meet Biggs' wife, Frances, in January 1996 and she was a great help with even more of her husband's work and their life together. She was able to fill in many gaps in my knowledge of his working life.

2. CATALOGUE OF INSCRIPTIONAL WORK: METHODOLOGY

In Part Two I photographically documented and catalogued as much of Biggs' inscriptional work as I could find. The listings of the work was started with help from Fiona Biggs and her mother Frances, who told me about the inscriptions that they could remember him doing. Fiona then directed me to the SHELL GUIDE TO IRELAND, compiled originally in 1962 by Lord Killanin and the late Michael V. Duignan and revised and updated by Peter Harbison in 1989. In response to my request Harbison sent me the letter that Biggs had sent to him during this revision and this yielded more work. Contact with friends and associates yielded more information. Biggs' one-time assistant, Tom Glendon helped a great deal, especially with the location of the early grave-stones and the attributions of the work - which pieces were designed and worked by Biggs himself and those that were designed by him but worked by others.

The documenting of the catalogue required travel all over the country, to twelve counties at the last count. All the different pieces of work were located, measured and photographed. Unfortunately a few pieces of the jigsaw fell into place after visits to distant parts of the country so not all the the catalogue entries are accompanied with my photos, but a large percentage are. A lot of this work was outdoors so there was no problem photographing it. Thanks are due to those who helped with the indoor work - Dr. C. J. Smyth of the Moyne Institute and Jennifer Gill of the Buildings Office, both at TCD, who went to a great deal of trouble to try and find out more about the Biggs'

plaque in the Moyne Institute, and John and Eamon in the Gate Theatre. Help was given to me by Joan Murphy of the Historic Properties department of the Office of Public Works. Also included in this catalogue are Biggs' book illustrations for the Dolmen Press including his 'Gaelic Alphabet', as well as his type-face design for a set of Irish Banknotes.

3. ANALYSIS OF LETTERING WORK.

Due to my particular area of area of study, graphic design, I have tried to analyse Biggs' lettering work in Part Three. I have looked at his use of letter styles, his standard of work, what influenced his work and what legacy he left to others. This proved more difficult because although everyone who knew Michael Biggs praised his work, they could not give specific reasons for this. Imogen Stuart, the sculptor, said in effect "I know he was the best, but I don't know why !" There is also a need to be careful to keep the critique in the context of the time. The criteria used in of lettering criticism of the 1990s is of some help but does not take into consideration the constraints of stone. I had some contact with stonecarver Ken Thompson and calligrapher Tim O'Neill who helped with this area. I also met with Tom Glendon, who was Biggs' only assistant in the late 'sixties and early 'seventies. Tom showed me some of Biggs' work in Deansgrange Cemetery in Co. Dublin and he also gave me an impromptu lesson in lettering in the sand during a walk on the seafront at Bray at our first meeting.

4. CATALOGUE OF CHURCH WORK: METHODOLOGY

In part four I have put together as full a catalogue of Biggs' church work as I have been able to find, record and photograph. The book CONTEMPORARY IRISH CHURCH ARCHITECTURE by Richard Hurley and Wilfrid Cantwell included the names of the artists that worked on the new churches in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s and those projects with which Biggs was associated, and these were added to the list. Both Hurley and Cantwell helped with extra

details about these particular projects. Cantwell sent me a comprehensive list of new churches with details of the artists and architects involved. He also sent me Biggs' drawings in connection with the Parish Church in Falcarragh on which Cantwell had worked as architect. Again, there was much travelling around the country to locate and document all this work. Extra help with details, locations and addresses was given by The Catholic Press Office and Rev. Kingston of St. Maelruins in Tallaght. I also have to thank the religious communities of the Convent of Mercy, Cookstown; Presentation Convent, Kildare Town; Father Brian Magee of St. Patrick's College in Drumcondra; Fr. Staunton of Terenure College and the staff at Gonzaga College, Ranelagh for giving me access to Biggs' sanctuary furnishings in chapels not usually open to the public. I was fortunate that most of the rest of the church work is in Roman Catholic churches which are open most of the week. This made the photographing and recording easier. Brother Finbar McLaughlin at Portglenone Abbey, Antrim, took photographs for me of their foundation stone - one of the places I was not able to visit. At a late date in my research I discovered that Biggs had also done some graphic work for the church and this is included at the end of this catalogue.

The furthest churches I visited were in Donegal and Tyrone and these were recorded during a family trip during the summer of 1995. Others, including Kennedy Park in New Ross and the Cathedral in Monaghan, were visited on a succession of Sundays and here I must thank my husband, Louis, not only for the many miles of driving, but also for the time and patience to help with this extensive work which I would not have been able to complete without his assistance.

BIOGRAPHY

I liked alphabets and wanted to carve stones, so I became a letter-cutter and (most inscriptions being commemorative) a gravestone-maker. (Biggs, 1975, p.7)

This modest quote from Michael Biggs - artist, sculptor, stone carver and more importantly, letter cutter, was made in 1975. But it certainly does not tell the full story. Not only did he cut gravestones but he also created some of Ireland's most important memorials to her nationhood and her national heroes, including the memorial wall at Arbour Hill Cemetery, the final resting place of the executed Leaders of the 1916 Rising. On this wall is carved the 5000 letters of the 1916 Proclamation in both English and Irish- a feat which took Michael Biggs four years to cut. Other similar projects include the inscriptional plinth of the Yann Goulet sculpture to those who had died in the battle for the Custom House in 1921 and black marble inscriptions in the General Post Office in Dublin about the 1916 rising. The quality of these monumental works put him way above ordinary artisan stonemasons because, however skilled they are, they would not be called artists and Michael Biggs **was** an artist. In a letter to me a past Director of the National College of Art and Design, Jonah Jones, took up this point:

There is a great deal of difference between the work of monumental masons who mostly haven't the slightest idea of design or taste or real tradition....But some sculptors DO take an interest in lettering on stone - like Eric Gill in England.....A sculptor will look at historic precedent, going back as far as the Trajan inscription....(Jones, 1995)

Jones also talks about the late Professor Domhnall O Murchadha, a past Professor of Sculpture at NCAD who "did fine lettering on granite...But again, as an artist he had the advantage of taste, which is the final element in design, after function, and in lettering, legibility." (Jones, 1995). Biggs was able to undertake the complete job from initial concept through the design stages to the actual execution of the work itself. He did not, however, believe in the division between Art and Craft. His was a very holistic vision and not very fashionable. In the 1973 RTE television programme telling the story of the making of the sanctuary furnishings for the rebuilt St. Michael's Church in Dun

Laoghaire, Biggs says:

I think there was a time when there was, for most purposes, no great distinction ... made between Arts and Crafts. And, for instance, I believe Socrates said, simply, that the artist is the man who knows how to make something useful. Not something beautiful but something useful, so that it is rooted in this business of making stuff and doing it properly and knowing how to do it. And again, a bit later, Thomas Aquinas says that 'Art is a virtue of the practical reason'. This is an approach to Arts quite opposite from what we have. Arts to us is really an extra, no matter how desirable an extra. (Mulholland, 1979,)

As well as his inscriptional work in stone and cast bronze Biggs also was involved in the explosion of new church art both for new churches and the re-ordering of old churches following the work of the new liturgical movement and Vatican II. He became both designer and sculptor of this work, sometimes making the actual pieces themselves, but more often overseeing the entire project for sanctuary furnishings from design concept and drawings to the making of maquettes and the organisation and supervision of the work to completion. Although one of the catalogues of this thesis will include his sculptural church work, the analysis will concentrate on his lettering and graphic work. Analysis of his sculptural church work is beyond the scope of this thesis and has to be left to further study.

Michael Biggs was born in 1928 on the 26th August in Stockport in Cheshire, England. He was the son of the pianist and organist Claude Biggs who, when Michael was two years old, moved to Ireland from the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra to take up a position with the Radio Orchestra for the young Radio Eireann. Michael Biggs' mother Marjorie (née Markham) was very creative in her own way, especially at needlepoint. A cushion designed and worked by her is in the Musician's Gallery in St. Paul's Cathedral in London. His father also taught in the Royal Irish Academy of Music where he became a Board member. Indeed, there is still a music prize awarded every year called the Claude Biggs Memorial Prize for piano. This cup was designed by his son,

Michael Biggs, who also did the lettering on it. The General Manager of the Liverpool Philharmonic was a son-in-law of the famous English sculptor and letter cutter, Eric Gill. Through him Claude Biggs had contact with the Gill family, and Eric Gill's younger brother, Evan became Michael's godfather. This was to lead to Michael Biggs' later study in Gill's community in Ditchling, Sussex. Biggs' interest in the writings of Eric Gill influenced his own philosophy of working life at an early stage due to this family connection. One of his near contemporaries at St. Columba's, Douglas Sealy, believes that Biggs had read Gill's books before he started secondary school: "even then I think he had read Eric Gill's autobiography and for him Eric Gill was next to God, and the Golden Section!" (Sealy, 1995).

When his family arrived in Ireland they lived in Rathgar where Biggs went to a local National School. From there he was sent to Aravon School in Bray, a preparatory school from where he won a Lefroy Music Scholarship to St. Columba's College, in the foothills of the Dublin mountains. Michael Biggs is remembered with fondness by all of his schoolfriends who contacted me. One of them, Nigel Pratt, said "as a youth Michael was tall, cheerful, slightly self-absorbed and serious with a ruddy complexion and reddish hair." He is remembered for his intelligence, popularity and "his very mature outlook on most aspects of life" (Pratt, 1995). There he came into contact with sculptor and teacher Oisín Kelly who became a life-long friend. His first Art teacher in St. Columba's, however, was Brian Boydell, who was a great inspiration to young boys especially those who believed that they could not draw. In an article which Boydell wrote for the school magazine, The Columbian, in 1943, entitled "The Teaching of Art in Public Schools" he said:

I attempt to lead them nearer to the true nature of Art by several methods: lectures on the appreciation, aesthetics and the history of **all** the Arts, free imaginative drawing, and semi-abstract pattern painting. The last of these, being a new experiment in this country, based on the work of Johnston in London, has met with considerable success in persuading boys that most people have a certain natural ability to draw. (Boydell, 1943, p26)

Although Oisín Kelly was to become a bigger influence on Biggs in later life, it is fortuitous that he also had Boydell as a teacher so as to encourage his already deep interest in Art at that young age. It is so easy to stunt creative talent at that age by bad or non-existent art teaching. As one of Biggs' near contemporaries, Michael Hamilton, said in his letter to me: "Boydell could make an artist out of a porpoise" (Hamilton, 1995).

Boydell, an artist in his own right, exhibited with the White Stag Group. This group held its first exhibition in April 1940 and also had regular meetings to discuss international modern art movements. The group was formed by returning Irish artists and some foreign artists who came to Ireland to escape the war in Europe. They attracted a number of native artists who were open to the modernist ideas of art. Those Irish artists who had travelled abroad and artists from other cultures brought a fresh approach to the Irish art scene and the White Stag Group was interestingly because it encompassed many influences such as cubism, expressionism, surrealism and symbolism. Through Boydell Biggs would have known of the Group's activities and their interest in ideas of abstraction and the use of line. Interestingly another member of the White Stag Group who, in fact, exhibited more than Boydell was an old Columbian, Patrick Scott. His paintings of that time showed an interest in using abstraction and linear form on a flat plane. Brian Kennedy, in his book Irish Art & Modernism 1880-1950 says of Scott's work at the first White Stag exhibition that "birds, fishes and other creatures are reduced to symbols;the flatness of the picture plane is acknowledged" (Kennedy, 1991, p.98) and also of Boydell painting The Return of the Wood Kennedy says that "Colour...is less important than the linear design in these works" (Kennedy, 1991, p.105).

This contact with these modernist ideas may have influenced Biggs. His early

line illustrations and also his later religious motifs on his sanctuary furnishings certainly show an understanding of symbolic abstraction and the use of the flat plane. His abstractions of the loaves and fishes, the tree of life, and the dove of peace on the furnishings in Gonzaga College chapel are a case in point. (See LETCat.No.3).

Michael was equally fortunate to be at Columba's during the period Oisín Kelly was there as an extract from "A History of St. Columba's College" relates:

Until 1935, "Art" was confined to pedestrian drawing, but after that imaginative painting was encouraged and developed by a succession of teachers, among whom the longest service was that of Oisín Kelly. (1943-64). It is no intolerable reflection on the others to say that he was also the most distinguished artist among them and second to none as a stimulator of creative activity. To painting he at once added wood-carving, and some years later pottery...(Falkiner & Wyse-Jackson, 1993, p.76)

This was Biggs' first contact with Oisín Kelly and although he would not have been formally taught by him they developed a friendship which lasted a lifetime. Biggs won the Earl of Meath's Prize for art in 1943 and, although formal art classes ended for boys in St. Columba's after the Junior cycle, he was still painting as a senior student. He exhibited alongside the young Patrick Pye (now a painter) and Trevor Cox (now William Trevor, the writer) at the school exhibition of 1945. An unknown critic wrote in The Columbian that year:

"Biggs, while lacking, I think, the power of the others, exhibited the most likable pictures in the exhibition. His preoccupation is with the problems of light and he achieved charming affects from his subtle use of juxtaposed related colours".¹

This interest in light shows itself very much in Biggs' later sculptural work for the Church and he indeed talked about it in his Introspect article 'Altar and Sculptor' in 1975. More relevant, however, in relation to his later life is his graphic work both for the school printing club and as Art Director of the boys' magazine Why Not. He got an early grounding in handling metal type on a hand printing press as all the school magazines plus menus, sports score cards,

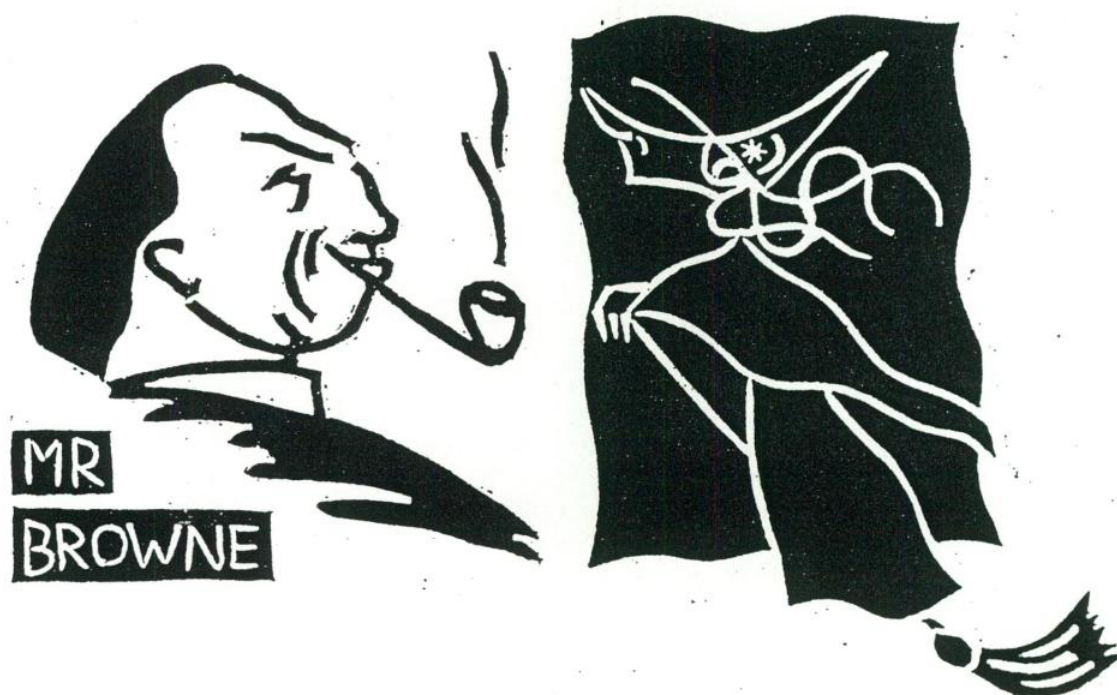
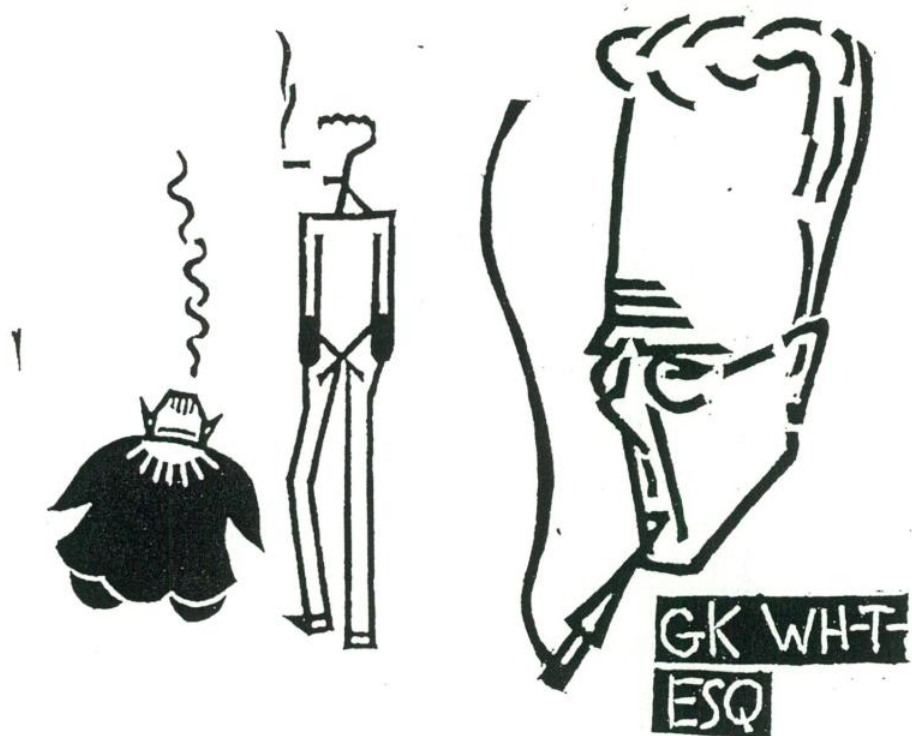


Fig.2 - Some of Biggs' cartoons from issues of the school magazine 'Why Not'.

etc., were printed by the Club. And with the community based spirit of a school like St. Columba's, it is likely that all the members would have mucked in together to get the jobs done. Michael not only set type but was also responsible for the illustrations, mostly lino-cuts (Fig.2), which gave him early training in relating type and image. A lot of his illustrations were caricatures which show a great sense of humour and although friends say this quiet humour continued throughout his life, it is a pity that this skill of humourous drawing did not fit in with his later commissioned work such as the grave-stones and memorials or indeed the church sculpture.

A public school like Columba's was more than a place of learning; it was also a close community. It had a liberal attitude to the boys' development. An ex-teacher of the school, Norman Lush, who taught Michael Biggs says, "That was, and is, the great thing about St. Columba's - pupils could develop at their own pace and in their own way and the talented boy was always admired." (Lush, 1995). The boys not only helped to run a self-sufficient farm but also took part in simple building projects together for the good of the school. This may have prepared Biggs for his later sojourn at the community at Ditchling although, as we will see, a lot of the sense of community had disappeared by the time he arrived there.

From Secondary school Biggs applied to Trinity College for a Sizarship - an entrance scholarship for people of reduced circumstances which required passing a very stiff set of examinations. He was elected to a Sizarship in Modern Languages in 1946. He appears in the Dublin University Calendars in 1947, 1948 and 1949 as a Rising Junior Freshman, a Rising Junior Sophister and a Rising Senior Sophister but does not appear as a graduate. He would have reached his eighteenth birthday in 1946 and sometime around then he was called up to serve in the British Army. Because he had been born in England he

would have been obliged to do Military Service even though the war had been over since 1945. Military Service did not end for all young Englishmen until later than that. His old schoolfriend William Trevor Cox thinks he did his Military Service sometime around 1947/48 (Trevor, 1995).

During my meeting with his wife Frances, she told me that although he enjoyed Modern Languages, which is what he was studying at Trinity, he did not want to be a teacher, which was the usual outcome of that particular course. He, therefore, missed a lot of lectures and was eventually asked to leave the course. He wandered the streets of Dublin and one day came across Greene's Bookshop where he found a copy of Edward Johnson's book Writing & Illuminating & Lettering. He claimed that it changed his life. The last chapter of that book, 'Inscriptions in Stone', was written by Eric Gill. Biggs then decided that he would take up stone carving and lettering as his life's work, and he used his family connection with the Gill family to get to Ditchling to study lettering and stone carving. (Frances Biggs, 1996).

Evan Gill, Biggs' godfather, introduced him to the Guild of St. Joseph and St. Dominic in Ditchling, Sussex. This had been set up by Eric Gill and others in the early 1920s. Gill had moved out of London to the village of Ditchling in 1907 and was followed over the next few years by printer Hilary Peplar, calligrapher Edward Johnston and artist Desmond Chute. They later moved outside the village to Ditchling Common. They wished to follow the life of a self-sufficient community of craftsmen. The Guild itself seems to date from 1920 with the addition to the group of a Dominican, Fr. Vincent McNabb. Through his teaching nearly all of them became members of the Third Order of the Dominicans. Johnston was never a member of the Guild because of its religious leanings and he eventually moved back to the village. From that time onwards the Guild members all had to be Dominican Tertiaries and follow the common

goal of functional craftsmanship to the glory of God. This strong religious emphasis seems to have lapsed after Gill's departure and Biggs' Protestant background does not seem to have caused any problems when he went there. Although Gill himself had left in 1924 and had, in fact, died in 1940, the Guild still continued on until 1989. Biggs seems to have arrived in the early 1950s and stayed for about one year. He went there to study and learn stone carving and letter-cutting under Joseph Cribb. Cribb had been Eric Gill's first apprentice and had stayed on in Ditchling after Gill left for Wales. In a personal letter to me his friend and fellow letterer John Skelton gave some details about this period in Biggs' life at Ditchling:

He was never an apprentice but an assistant learning on the job and probably unpaid. He worked on headstones, memorials, and lettering and must have had a natural talent for he picked things up very quickly..... The guild was never a school - it was a collection of workmen held together by common faith and purpose, ie., to make a living from their crafts and live in peace with their families and in the words of Gill himself, to find a 'cell of good living'. (Skelton, June 1995)

The Guild by this time, however, seems to have lost some of its impetus on the spiritual side. Michael Harvey, an eminent English letterer and type designer, spent the summers of 1954 and 1955 at Ditchling, which is just after the time Biggs was there. He recalls with disappointment:

I went there because Gill was my hero and I wanted to follow in his footsteps. I wore my Gill-tinted spectacles.....I had expected the community on the common to be as Gill described it in his "Autobiography" but was disappointed to find it full of old men just going through the motions (it seemed to me).....The community was still called the Guild of St. Joseph and St. Dominic, but I don't recall any special feeling of community. The chapel wasn't used daily as it had been in Gill's time....I'm glad I went there but felt rather let down. Expecting heaven I found it quite mundane. (Harvey, October 1995)

So it would appear that what Biggs would have gained here was mostly skills in carving and letter-cutting in stone but with his family connection with Gill he still felt strongly about Gill's ideas and philosophies as many of his friends have attested to.

After the time spent doing military service and gaining the stone carving skills in Sussex, Biggs decided that he did not like England enough to stay and work there and so decided to return to the country where he had grown up. When he returned to Ireland he set himself up in the lettering and sculptural business. His wife, Frances told me that his main concern then was to improve the standard of monumental lettering in Ireland which he felt had become very bad during the early part of the twentieth century. He knew that there had been very good work done in Ireland during the nineteenth century and wanted to be instrumental in bringing those standards back. (Frances Biggs, 1996) In 1949 he had discussed setting up a partnership with Trevor Cox, his old pal from St. Columba's, as letterers but this never came to anything and Trevor went on to become the well-known writer William Trevor. (Trevor, 1995) At this time Biggs lived in a series of flats in Dublin and did whatever work came his way. He appears not to have advertised but was helped by school contacts in the business world for his early work, although he was not always aware of this help. An interesting letter from Oisín Kelly to the architect Desmond Fitzgerald was found for me in the archives of the Provost of Trinity College, Dublin. Fitzgerald was at that time in charge of the building of the new Moyne Institute at Trinity and was looking for somebody to carve a memorial plaque to Lady Normanby, the donator of the building. Although there is no date on the letter from Kelly, its existence with the rest of the papers about this project suggests that it had arrived with fortuitous timing for Biggs.

A pupil of mine - Michael Biggs, is trying to make a living as a sculptor and letter-cutter....His lettering is excellent. I know that he is hard put to live. I admire his gesture in choosing a path not followed by many Columbians, and I have a paternal interest in his career - hence my presumption in writing to you. He is not, of course aware of my being his impresario. (Kelly, c.1953)

Fitzgerald obviously took note of the letter and Biggs got the job. With a number of successful projects like this under his belt more work would have come

through word-of-mouth. Dublin was a small place then, in fact it still is, and if your work is of a high enough standard, as Biggs' was, word soon gets around about you. At this time he was living in a flat in Waterloo Road with his old schoolfriend Patrick Pye and had a studio in Pembroke Lane.

Michael met and married Frances Dooly who was a violinist in the Symphony Orchestra. They met at a party in 1953 and got married the same year. Pye moved out of the flat and the young couple lived there for a while and then moved out to a cottage in Howth owned by Michael MacLiammoir and Hilton Edwards. Here Frances started painted drawing, encouraged by Michael, and she later went on to do tapestry and design stained glass. The Biggs worked together on a number of projects later on. They moved back into a flat in a different house in Waterloo Road and looked around for a house for their growing family. They then moved to Dundrum where Frances still lives. Fiona Biggs, his daughter, thinks that her father took some classes in the College of Art and indeed, there is a brief mention of him in the college registers of 1947/48. She also thinks both her parents attended drawing classes in the College in the 1950s.

Biggs' early work was mainly inscriptional, memorial stones and plaques and inscriptions to accompany sculptures and statues. His first altar was carved for the Convent of Mercy's new chapel in Cookstown, Co Tyrone in 1965 and over the next three decades he did much religious work - stone sanctuary furnishings, some metalwork and designs for slate stations of the cross in Falcarragh in Donegal, although he did not cut these himself. In a telephone conversation with the Cork based letter-cutter Ken Thompson, he told me that stone letterers usually need another form of creative expression in stone and for Michael Biggs this was his church sculptures. (Thompson, 1995) Biggs had a purpose-built workshop at the bottom of the garden. This consisted of three sections - one

for stone cutting, another for lettering and an office. Because of the dust from the stone cutting the lettering had to be done in a separate area.

Biggs took on an assistant, Tom Glendon from 1968 to 1974. Glendon was studying stone carving at the National College of Art under the tutelage of Domhnall O Murchadha, who knew Biggs and also knew he was looking for an assistant at that time. O Murchadha was a stone sculptor who was also very interested in lettering and recommended Glendon to Biggs. Taking on an assistant allowed Biggs to concentrate more on the design work and he would often set out the lettering for Glendon and indeed others to cut. As time went by and Glendon's skills increased he was allowed to do not only the cutting but also the drawing out himself on the stone following Biggs' designs. This also coincided with the increase in demand for his sanctuary work for churches which took him around many outlying areas of the country and probably accounts for him taking on an assistant.

At this time in Ireland there were a great number of new churches being built to cater for the shifts in population, especially from the countryside into the capital city and elsewhere. Also much work was being done on the re-ordering of older churches to take into consideration the ideas of Vatican II. In both of these areas there was a need for free standing sanctuary furnishings because the spirit of the new liturgical movement to bring the sanctuary out into the body of the church away from their more traditional position at the back wall of the chancel. This meant a lot of work for sculptors like Biggs to make altars, ambos, sedilias, fonts and the base pillars for tabernacles.

As well as his work in the areas of sculpture, stone carving and 3-D lettering, Biggs also did 2-D graphic work for Liam Millar and his private printing press, Dolmen Press. This work consisted of a wood engraved frontispiece for the

Dolmen Press edition of the Nativity from the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke in September 1953 and hand lettering for the limp vellum covers of a limited edition of hand coloured copies of the Faeth Fiadha (St. Patrick's Breastplate) in 1957. Like Eric Gill, he did woodcuts/linocuts for other Dolmen publications. The Bird that Flew Away by Gudrun Tempel, in 1958 and Bryan Merriman's The Midnight Court in 1966 were two of these. This illustrative work follows on from his school illustration.

Through Biggs' friendship with Liam Millar many young Irish artists were introduced to the business of book illustration. All these people helped with the printing work and this helped forge a close working group. As Millar said in the introduction to Dolmen XXV - An Illustrated Bibliography of the Dolmen Press, "through meeting Michael, we met many young artists then working in Dublin" and then these "visitors...were pressed into service to set type or pull the press or cut and fold the sheets".(Millar,1976,p.8) Biggs' printing experience gained at school, must have been very useful in addition to his illustrative work.

From a typographical point of view, his most interesting work for the Dolmen Press was A Gaelic Alphabet for which he designed and cut two-inch-high line blocks of the fifteen characters that make up the gaelic alphabet. This came about at the instigation of Liam Millar. Unfortunately this was a bad time in Ireland both for the Arts and the economy and there were no developments from this project, although Biggs may have used the lettering style in some of his own projects in stone. It certainly shows his grasp of the Irish characters.

Biggs was also a member of Servicon Planning and Design, a group that was formed in 1969 to provide a design service to the construction industry. This was a very loose consultation group made up of the artist and designer Patrick

Hickey, architects Brian Hogan and Richard Hurley, engineer Sean Mulcahy and Michael Biggs, who was the typographer on the team. (Hurley, 1995) Servicon entered and won the competition in 1972 to design a new set of Irish Banknotes for the Central Bank. Being the letterer in the team Michael looked after the lettering on the new notes. In contrast to some other countries who used standard typefaces, it was decided to use a completely original typeface which would not be commercially available to try and counteract forgery. Biggs designed a bold face adapted from the classical Irish letter-form. To the large denominational characters on the notes, Patrick Hickey superimposed design motifs "because you may not have a wide area of ink" for security reasons. (Hickey, 1979, p.22) This typeface is very similar in style to the inscription that Biggs went on to design for the Garden of Remembrance.

Although Biggs' work might have identified him as only a craftsman, he was much more than that. It must be remembered that he closely followed Eric Gill's philosophy of life and work. Gill believed that the Industrial Revolution had damaged a man's ability to have pride in his work and that people should reclaim their skills and be able to do a complete job from start to finish and be responsible for the whole thing. Michael Biggs certainly did that. He was, indeed, a master craftsman first and foremost but was also a designer, sculptor and artist. This fact was confirmed when he was elected to Aosdána by his artistic peers in 1989. To be elected to Aosdána you are first nominated by two members. You are then contacted to see if you wish to be considered and this is followed by a series of ballots, by the Executive, a postal ballot of the members of your disciplinary arts and then, if those have a successful outcome, a ballot at the General Assembly. So it is a great honour and there is also a yearly stipend called the *cnuas* for each member. Biggs was very proud of this honour.

Michael Biggs became ill with a rare illness called Crest Syndrome which affects the nervous system. In Biggs' case it badly affected the nerves in the tips of his fingers and therefore his ability to work. He had to work with gloves on to try and improve the circulation but it was very painful. It became very bad and he ended up in a wheelchair, suffering from an understandable depression of being incapacitated and he eventually had to go into hospital for treatment. He died in November 1993, at the early age of sixty-five, a few days after converting to Catholicism. He was cremated after Requiem Mass in the Chapel of Gonzaga College, where he had designed the sanctuary furnishings and his wife, Frances had designed all the stained-glass windows. He is buried in the lovely peaceful graveyard of St. Patrick's Church in the village of Enniskerry in Co. Wicklow.

ENDNOTE:

1. Report of the school Art Exhibition in The Columbian Magazine, published by the College in 1945.

**CATALOGUE OF
INSCRIPTIONAL WORK**

Catalogue of Inscriptional Work

Introduction

This Catalogue is probably not a complete list of the inscriptional work of Michael Biggs but I have endeavoured to make it as full as possible. The entries are as comprehensive as possible and I have tried to personally visit each and every location but due to the time constraints this has not always been possible. However, I have personally seen over ninety percent of the works.

SOURCES

The list was put together initially following a discussion with Biggs' daughter, Fiona Biggs, who gave me the list of inscriptional work that she knew about. I followed this up with a correspondence with historian and writer, Peter Harbison. He sent me a photocopy of part of the letter that Biggs had sent to him on the occasion of the revising and updating of The Shell Guide to Ireland. This augmented the list and helped with locations and other details. A copy of the letter from can be found in the appendices. The list was further added to during my discussions with Biggs' one-time assistant, Tom Glendon, and Ninian Falkiner, my contact in Biggs' old school, St. Columba's, was also able to add the two pieces of work which are in the school itself.

LOCATIONS

The general locations are given on the Maps at the beginning of the catalogues and more details given in each entry. I have not included actual road numbers which are subject to change but I have tried to indicate the route taken from the nearest town to help with locating the actual work itself. If the work is located within a particular part of an institution or location I have added that information. Also, if it is not normally open to the general public I have noted that fact.

DATING, LAYOUT AND NUMBERING OF CATALOGUE

I have laid out the Catalogue, where possible, in chronological order by date. The Shell letter proved useful as well as Tom Glendon. Where the date of a work is not known it has been added into the most appropriate place, dated by the content of the inscription itself. Where this was not possible it has been added in at the end. In the case of gravestones, where the actual date is not known, I have used the date carved on the stone although this may not be the date of the actual work itself. All the works in this Catalogue are numbered LETCat.No.1 - 42.

ATTRIBUTION OF THE WORKS

I have taken the view that all work done before Biggs was joined by his assistant, Glendon in 1968 is the work of Biggs alone. Otherwise, I have noted the attribution, where known, as follows:

- Those pieces designed, set-out, worked and signed by Biggs.
- Those pieces designed, set-out and worked by Biggs but not signed.
- Those pieces designed and set-out by Biggs but cut by Glendon or others.
- Those pieces designed by Biggs but set-out and cut by Glendon.

There are very few signed inscriptions. They number only five.

PHOTOGRAPHY

All the photographs in the Catalogue have been taken by me in the last year unless otherwise indicated in the text.

MEASUREMENTS

All measurements throughout the Catalogue are in inches which is the system Biggs would have used himself. The size of the lettering is given again in inches. All overall measurements of the inscriptions are given by width followed by the height unless otherwise stated. Leading measurement is the size between the baseline of one line and the baseline of the next.

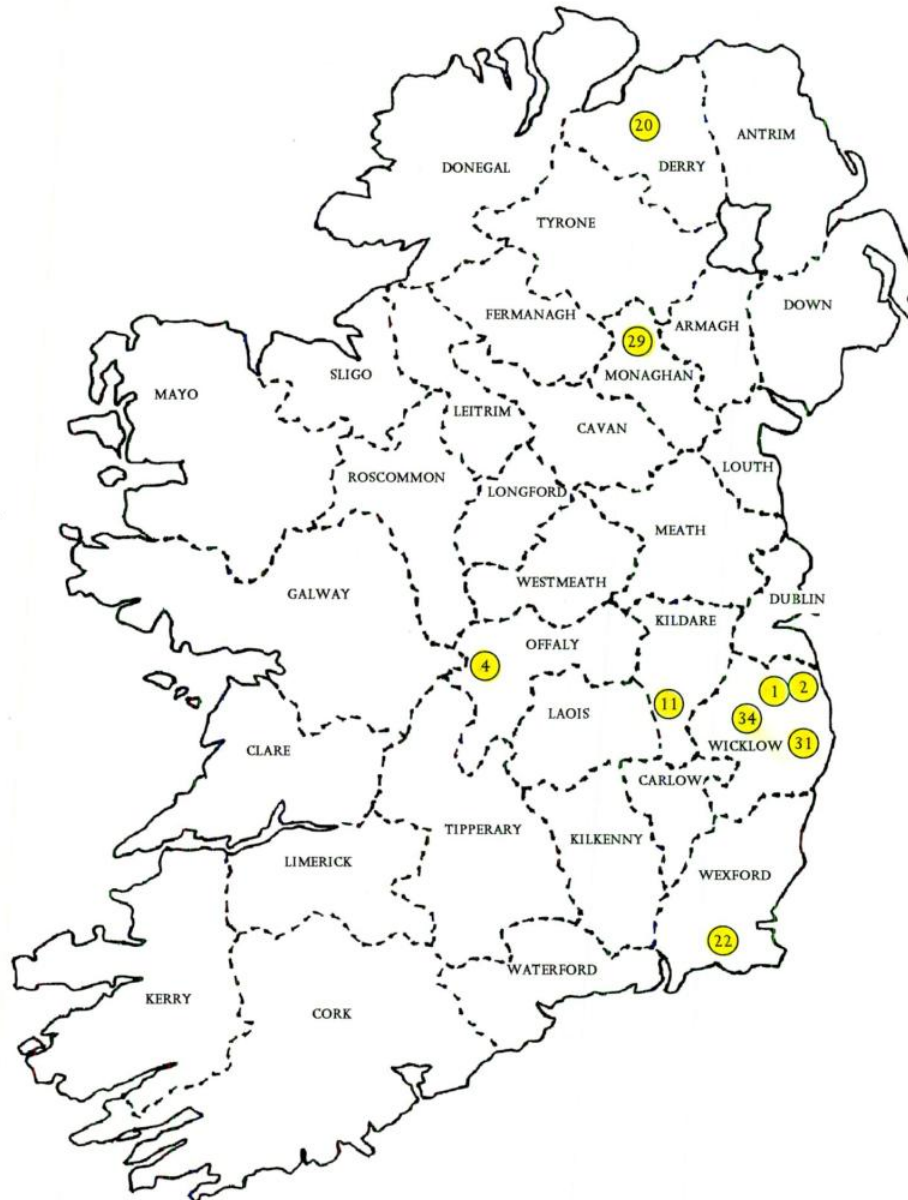
MEDIA

Where it is known I have included the details of the medium of the works. Although Biggs' favourite stone was granite it is not much good for inscriptional work and very few pieces are made from it. There are also a number of cast bronze plaques and painted inscriptions as well as the graphic work.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Where possible I have added any additional information which is of interest about a particular piece of work - whether, for instance, it has been changed since it was originally executed. Stone inscriptions have sometimes been gilded at a later date. Where necessary the names of other artists or the architect concerned have been added when the project was a joint one in which Biggs was involved in only one aspect of the whole.

MAP LOCATIONS (COUNTRYWIDE)

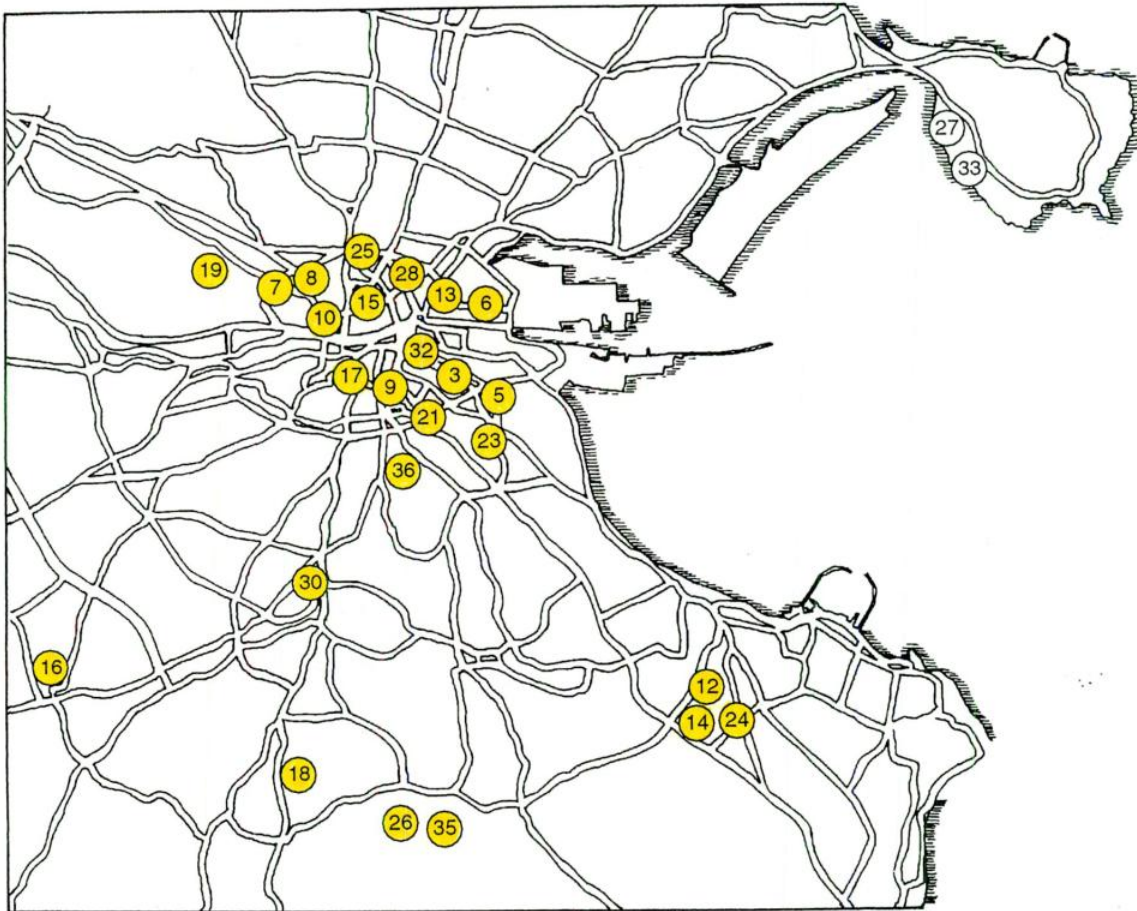


- LETCat.No.1. Christchurch, Bray, Wicklow
- LETCat.No.2. St. Paul, Bray, Wicklow
- LETCat.No.4. Birr, Co. Offaly
- LETCat.No.11. Curragh Camp, Kildare
- LETCat.No.20. Portglenone Abbey, Antrim
- LETCat.No.22. Kennedy Park, New Ross
- LETCat.No.29. Monaghan Cathedral, Monaghan
- LETCat.No.31. Meeting of the Waters, Wicklow
- LETCat.No.34. Luggala, Wicklow



MAP LOCATION (DUBLIN AREA)

- LETCat.No.3. Moyne Institute, Trinity College
 LETCat.No.5. Connelly Plaque, Merrion Square
 LETCat.No.6. Custom House
 LETCat.No.7. Arbour Hill
 LETCat.No.8. Arbour Hill
 LETCat.No.9. Grafton Arcade
 LETCat.No.10. Fishamble Street



- LETCat.No.12. Deansgrange, Simms
 LETCat.No.13. Liberty Hall
 LETCat.No.14. Deansgrange, Farrell
 LETCat.No.15. General Post Office
 LETCat.No.16. Tallaght, Rivers
 LETCat.No.17. Thomas Davis statue, Dame Street
 LETCat.No.18. Whitechurch, Gwynn
 LETCat.No.19. Garda, Phoenix Park
 LETCat.No.21. Henry Moore, St. Stephen's Green
 LETCat.No.23. Wilde Plaque, Merrion Square

- LETCat.No.24. Deansgrange, Curran
 LETCat.No.25. Garden of Remembrance
 LETCat.No.26. St. Columba's, Chapel
 LETCat.No.27. Sutton, MacLiammoir & Edwards
 LETCat.No.28. Gate Theatre, MacLiammoir & Edwards
 LETCat.No.30. Terenure College Chapel
 LETCat.No.32. Harp Bar, O'Connell Bridge
 LETCat.No.33. Sutton, Colum
 LETCat.No.36. St. Columba's, Dining Hall
 LETCat.No.36. Gonzaga College Chapel

TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN
 AFFECTIONATE MEMORY OF
 THE REV. GEORGE DIGBY SCOTT
 M.A. CANTAB. CHANCELLOR OF
 CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL
 HE SERVED UNDER HIS FATHER
 ARCHDEACON SCOTT AS CURATE
 ASSISTANT IN THIS PARISH AND
 SUCCEEDED HIM AS RECTOR.
 A MINISTRY OF FIFTY YEARS—
 1893-1943. THIS TABLET IS ERECT-
 ED BY HIS PARISHIONERS AND
 FRIENDS AS A TRIBUTE TO A HOLY
 AND HUMBLE MAN OF GOD

Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle?
 Even he that leadeth an uncorrupt life:
 and doeth the thing which is right,
 and speaketh the truth from his heart

1893-1943. THIS TABLET IS
 ED BY HIS PARISHIONERS
 FRIENDS AS A TRIBUTE TO
 AND HUMBLE MAN OF

Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tab
 Even he that leadeth an uncor
 and doeth the thing which
 and speaketh the truth from

DATE: 1951

LOCATION: Christchurch Church of Ireland, Church Road, Bray Co. Wicklow

MEDIUM: Hopton Wood Stone

SIZE: Overall: 32" x 23"

Inscription: Lettering: 1"

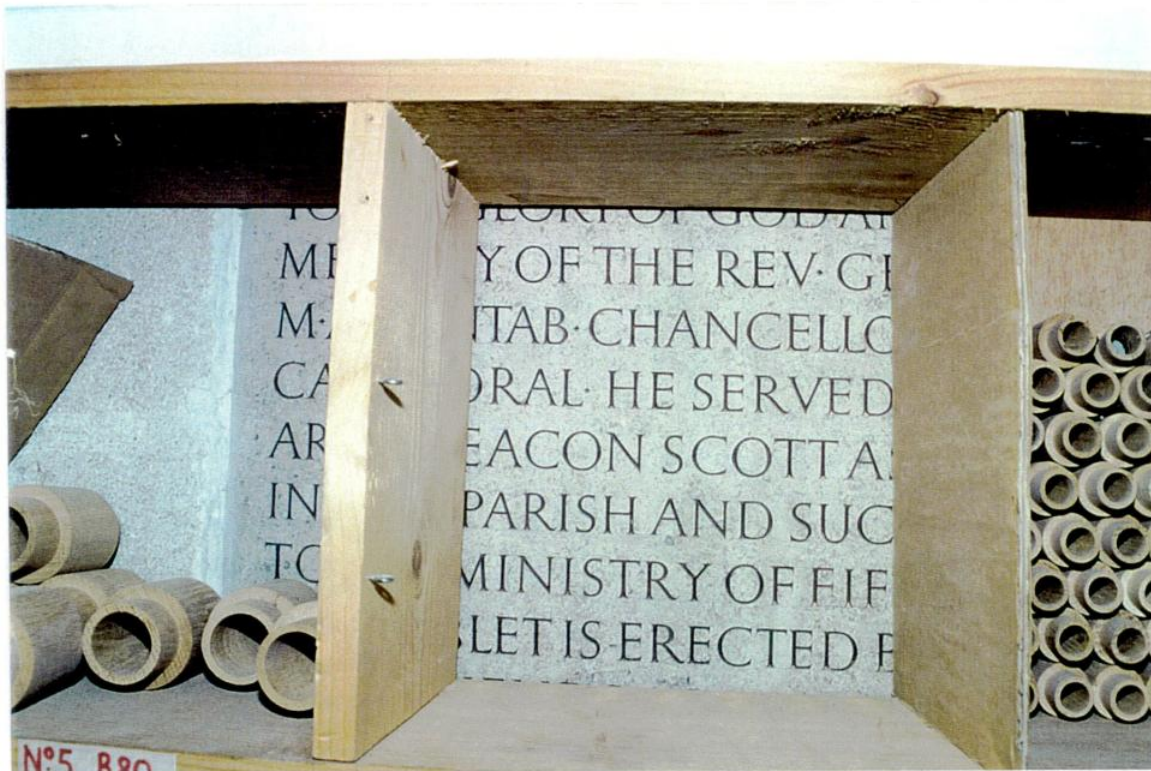
Leading: 1.75"

Quote: Lettering: 1"

Leading: 1.5"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: The plaque is up in the chancel of the church on the right hand side. The church is normally locked during the day except for services.





LETCat.No.2 Inscribed Memorial Stone, St. Paul's, Bray, Co. Wicklow.

Inscribed Memorial Stone to Canon Scott, Bray, Co. Wicklow

LETCat.No.2

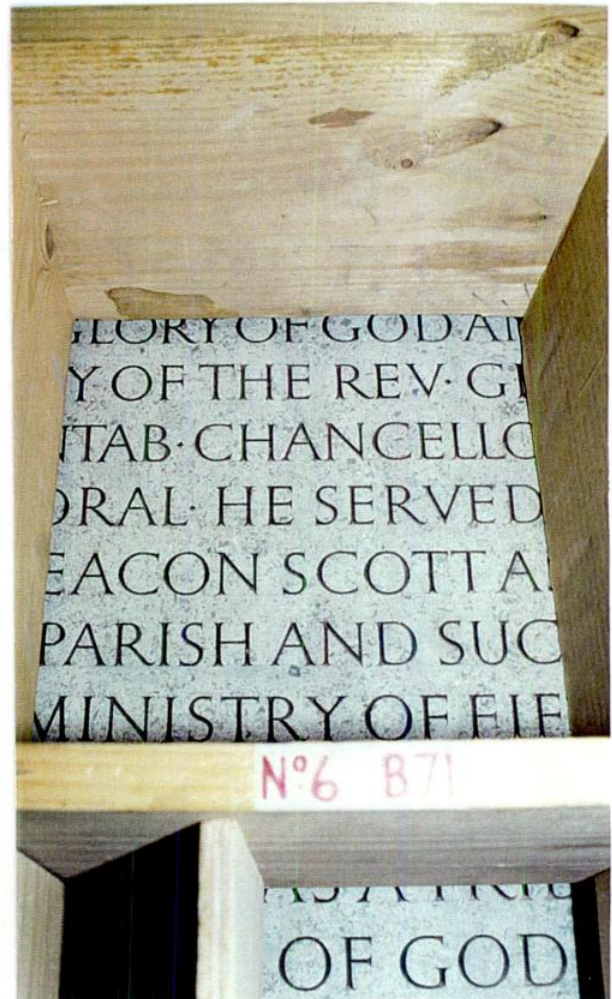
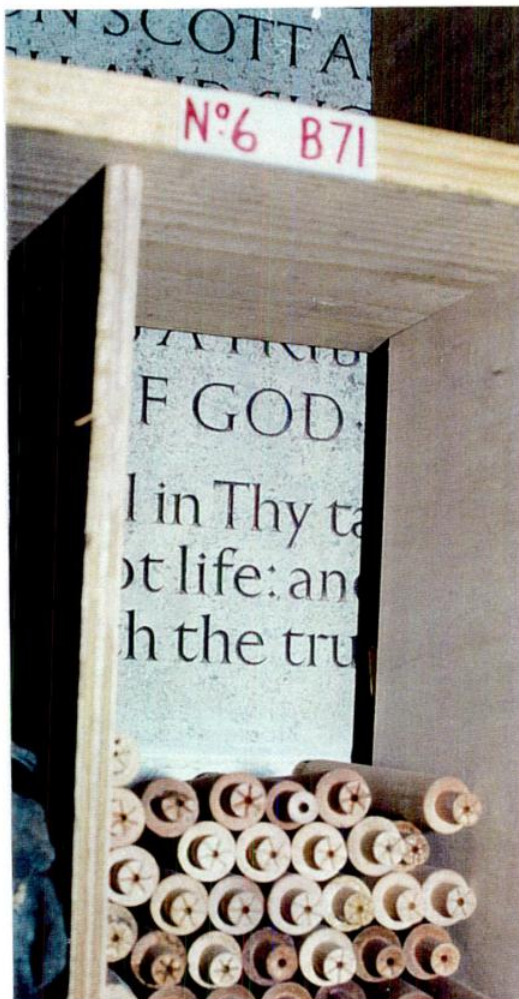
DATE: 1951

LOCATION: St. Paul's (ex Church of Ireland) Church which is now the Kenneth Jones Organ Works, Bray. Co. Wicklow.

MEDIUM: Hopton Wood Stone

SIZE: Unknown (see note below).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: The plaque in this building is unfortunately now almost hidden behind the storage shelves of the organ works. From what little can be seen it seems that this plaque is essentially the same as the one in Christchurch (LETCat.No.1). But although the letters are the same size as Christchurch closer study may prove that this plaque may be in a landscape format rather than the portrait format of the other one. The quote at the bottom is again the same wording but laid out in only three lines instead of four and many of the lines in the inscription begin with different ones to the lines on the Christchurch plaque.





Inscribed Memorial Panel, Moyne Institute, Trinity College Dublin

LETCat.No.3

DATE: 1953

LOCATION: In the foyer of the Institute which is situated in the corner of College Park between Nassau Street and the School of Pathology looking out onto the sports fields.

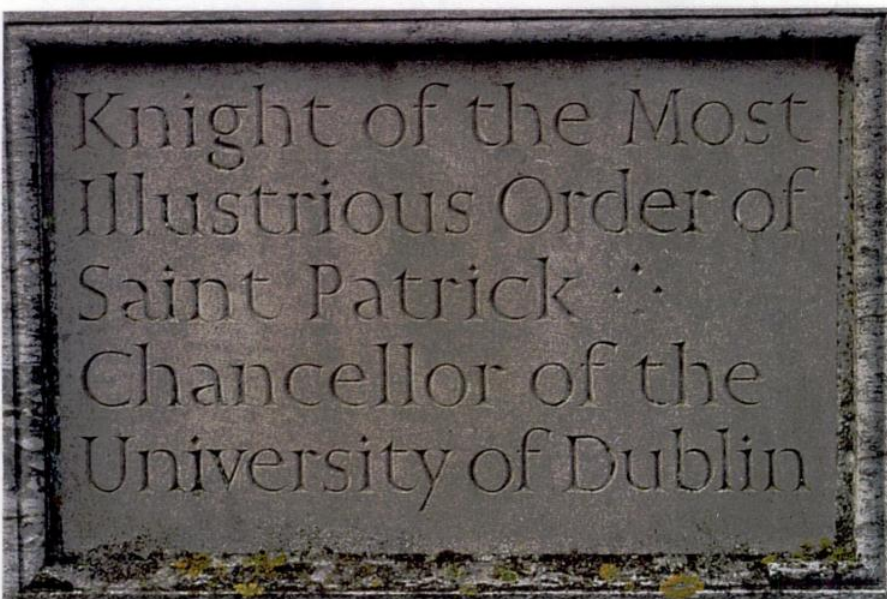
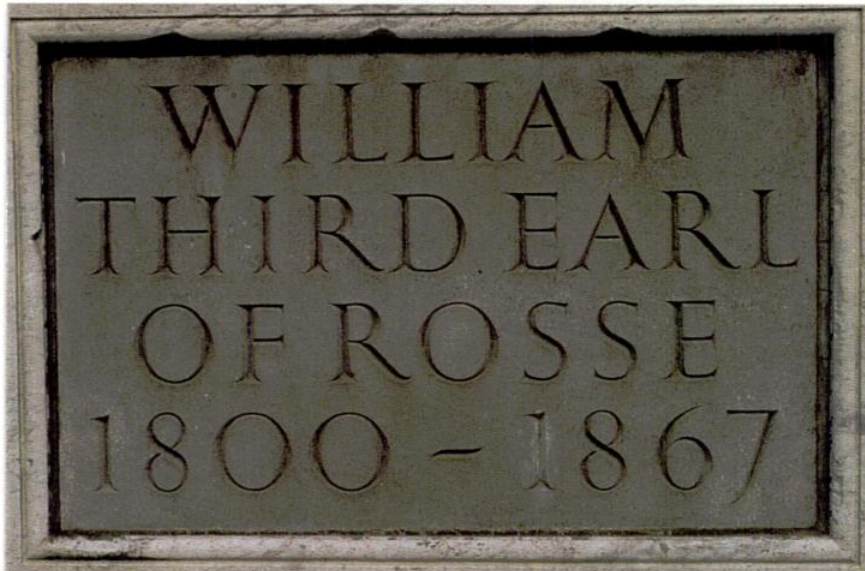
MEDIUM: Portland Stone

SIZE: Overall 80" x 53"
Lettering 3"
Leading 6.25"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: The letters were re-painted in September 1990 for an Institute celebration. There were traces of dark red paint on the original and this was recreated as closely as possible.

There are some very interesting details about this plaque in the Provost's archives in TCD.





Inscribed Panels around statue, Birr, Co. Offaly

LETCat.No.4

DATE: 1956

LOCATION: The statue of William Parsons, 3rd Earl of Rosse (constructor of the great telescope).

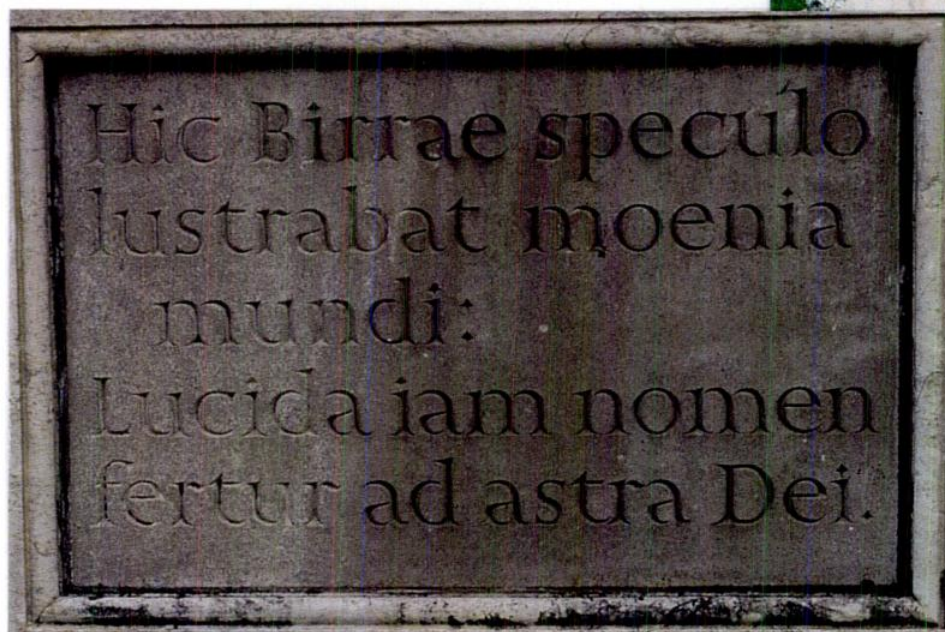
MEDIUM: unknown

SIZE: Panels: 18" x 12"

Front panel: Lettering: 2.5"
Leading: 3.5"

Other three panels: Lettering: 2"
Leading: 2.75"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:





LETCat.No.5 Oval Nameplate, Merrion Square, Dublin

Oval Nameplate for Sybil Connelly Merrion Square, Dublin

LET Cat.No.5

DATE: 1956

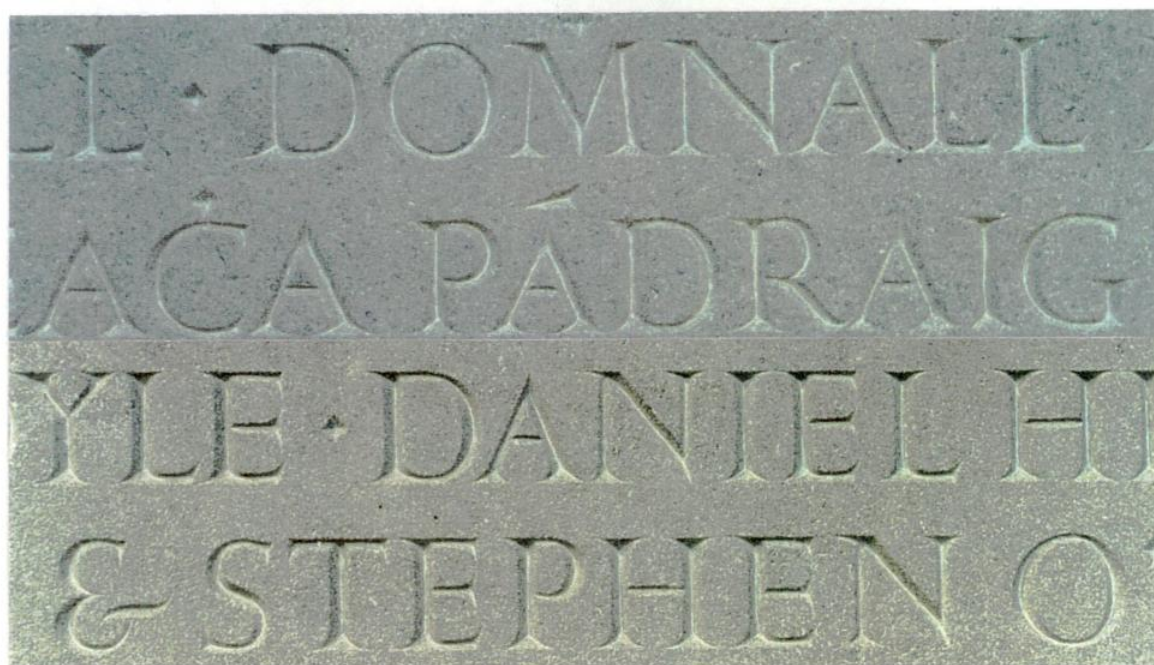
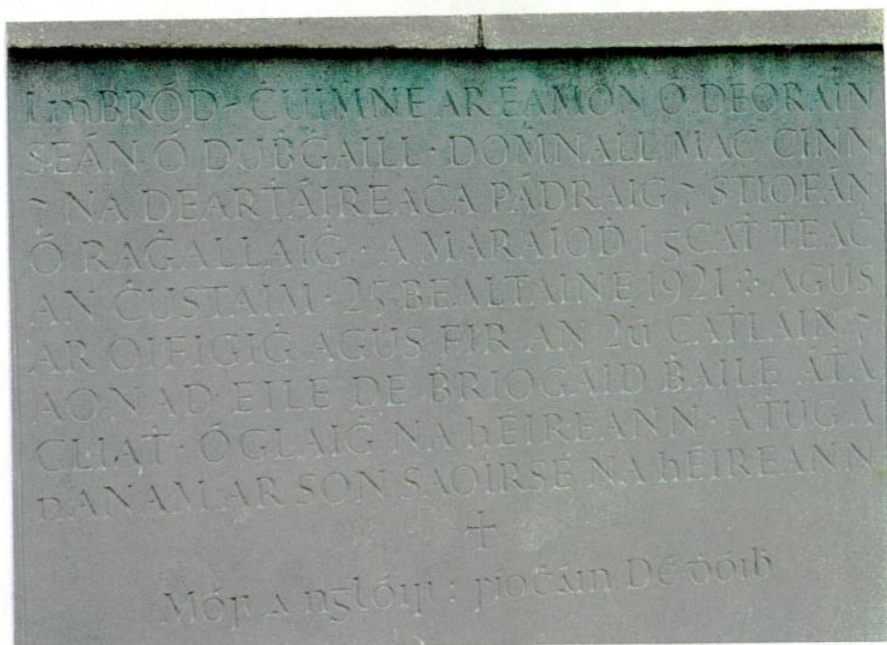
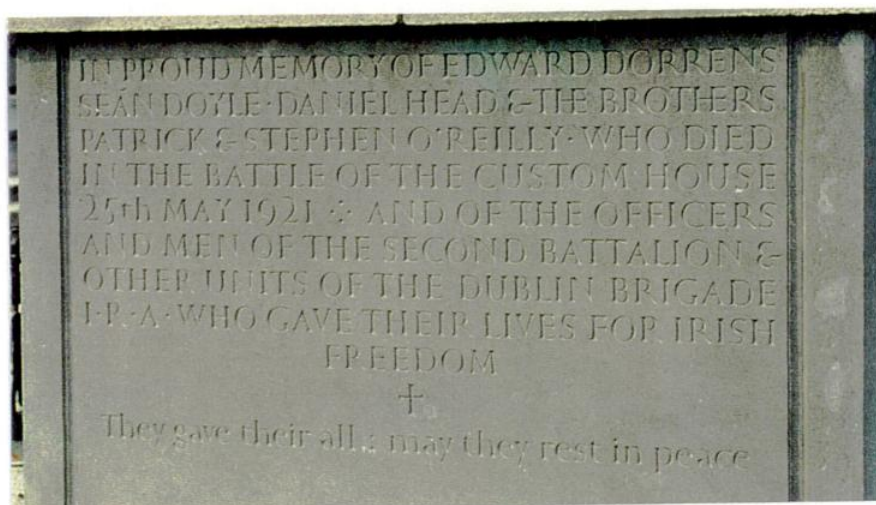
LOCATION: 71 Merrion Square, Dublin 2

MEDIUM: Portland Stone

SIZE: Overall 22.5" x 15"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: The border on this plaque was copied from those in Hatch Street, Dublin.





Inscribed Pedestal Panels for sculpture, Custom House, Dublin

LETCat.No.6

DATE: c.1957

LOCATION: The statue in in the grounds of the Custom House looking out onto Busarus.

MEDIUM:

SIZE: Panels - Overall Size 54.5" x 30"

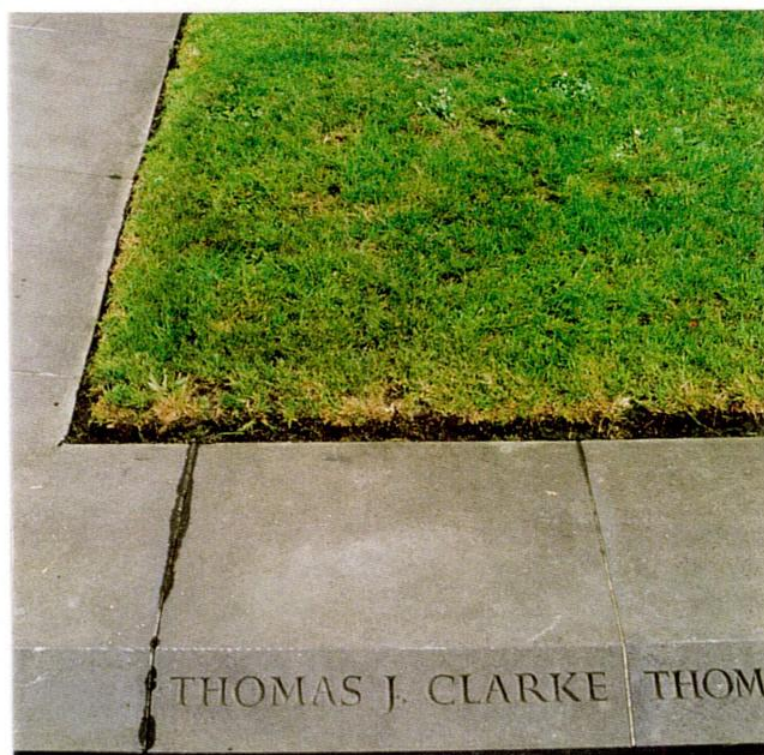
Lettering 3.25" (English) 1.75" (Irish)

Leading 2.25" (English) 2.5" (Irish)

6" - bottom line (Both languages)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: All the lettering is in Capitals except for the last line which is Upper/Lowercase. The statue is by sculptor Yann Goulet.





Inscribed Gravestones for Leaders of 1916 Rising, Arbour Hill, Dublin

LETCat.No.7

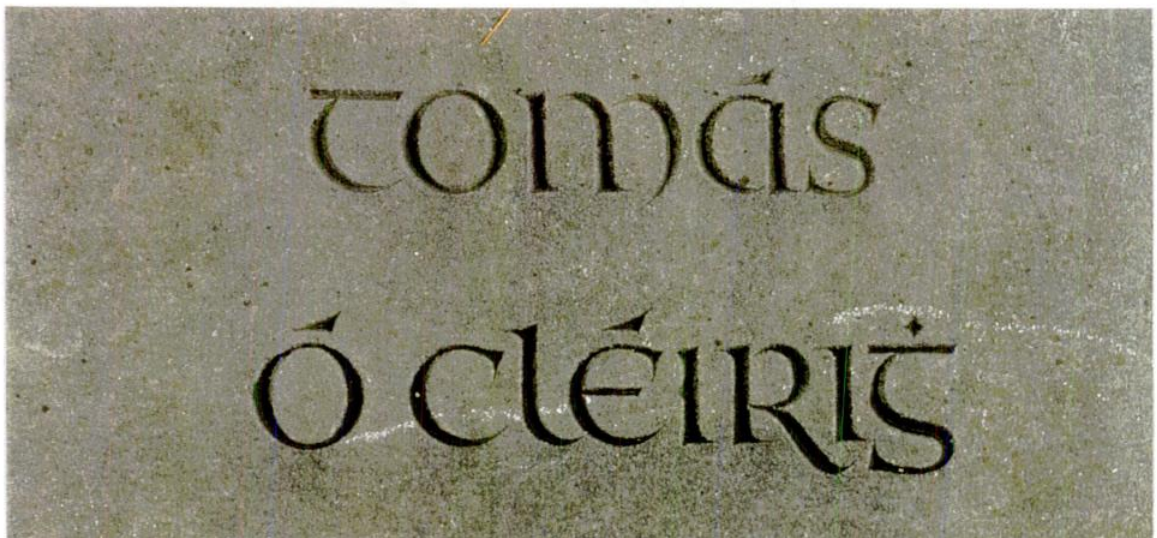
DATE: 1958

LOCATION: The Arbour Hill Memorial Garden in the ground of the Arbor Hill Church and Military Prison. The entrance in off Arbour Hill Road.

MEDIUM: Limestone surround blocks inscribed in Irish at the head and English at the feet of the graves.

SIZE:

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: The grave was moved to its present position when the Memorial garden was being made. It was originally the grounds of the Arbour Hill Detention Barracks and Church. The grounds were divided into the Garrison Cemetery for deceased soldiers, a playground and an exercise yard for the prisoners. In the North-East corner of the exercise yard a large grave was dug after the Easter Rising of 1916 and the Leaders of that Rising were buried there after their executions. The Prison Sergeant-Major put a numbered brick at the head of each corpse and kept a note of who was buried with which number. When the grave was moved to a central position in front of the Memorial Wall it was known who was buried where and so the stones could be cut in the correct order. The garden is now controlled by the Office of Public Works. Approval for the Memorial was given in 1951 and a contract for the erection of the memorial was given at an estimated cost of £20,000. The whole project was finished in 1963 and on 28th June of the same year it was visited by John Fitzgerald Kennedy, President of the United States of America.



name of God she receives and, through and strikes and trained revolutionary brotherhood, isations, the army, having a resolute of itself, she is led by her unt allies in strength, y: We de to the own control of feasible, reign peo the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty; six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms. Standing on that fundamental right & again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades-in-arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and of its exaltation among the nations: The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman & Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights & equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a past: Until our moment for National Government people of Ireland all her men & hereby constitute the affairs of We place the protection of we invoke up who serves the ice, inhuman the Irish nation and by the themselves of the assigned on St Thomas, Clon R.H. Pearse, For

agus éilíonn
hÉireann.
noirse cre
agus cor
carbóinn
The Irish Republic
ns, the allegia
The Republic
equal rights &
ns, and declar
ss and prospe
parts, cheris
qually and ob

Mural Inscriptional Wall, Arbour Hill Memorial, Dublin

LET Cat.No.8

DATE: 1959 - 1963

LOCATION: See Arbour Hill Gravestones, page 41.

MEDIUM: Ardbracon Limestone (now unavailable)

SIZE: Overall 117" x 109"
Lettering 2.5"
Leading 5.5"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: This Memorial Wall is slightly curved with a large simple gold cross in the centre with the 1916 Proclamation carved in English and Irish on both sides. There are approximately 5000 letters altogether and took four years to cut.



Fascia Lettering for Grafton Arcade, Grafton Street, Dublin

LETCat.No.9

DATE: 1958

LOCATION: At the Trinity College end of Grafton Street in Dublin City.

MEDIUM: Black Granite

SIZE: unknown

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: At the present time this lettering is covered by a hoarding due to the Marks & Spencer reconstruction of what was previously the Brown Thomas building beside it.



Plaque commemorating first performance of Handel's Messiah, Fishamble Street, Dublin

LET Cat.No.10

DATE: 1959

LOCATION: Fishamble Street , Dublin is at the side of the Dublin Corporation Civic Offices between Wood Quay and Christchurch Place. (now missing)

MEDIUM: Cast Bronze

SIZE: unknown

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: This was a cast bronze plaque to commemorate the first performance of Handel's Messiah on Tuesday April 13th 1742 but it is now missing. The original wood block that Biggs cut is still in the family's possession. The plaster cast was made from this block and then the plaque was cast from this.



LETCat.No.11 Font inscription, Curragh Camp, Co. Kildare.

Inscriptions around font, St. Brigid's Church, Curragh Camp, Kildare

LETCat.No.11

DATE: 1959

LOCATION: The church is just inside the main entrance to the Curragh Army Camp.

MEDIUM: Black Marble

SIZE: Overall 39" high
36" diameter
Lettering 1.5"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: The font is situated in a small baptistery at the rear left-hand corner of the main body of the church. the full inscription reads:

+ FONTS AQUAE SALIANTIS IN VITAM AETERNAM +





**Gravestone , SIMMS,
Deansgrange Cemetery, Co. Dublin**

LETCat.No.12

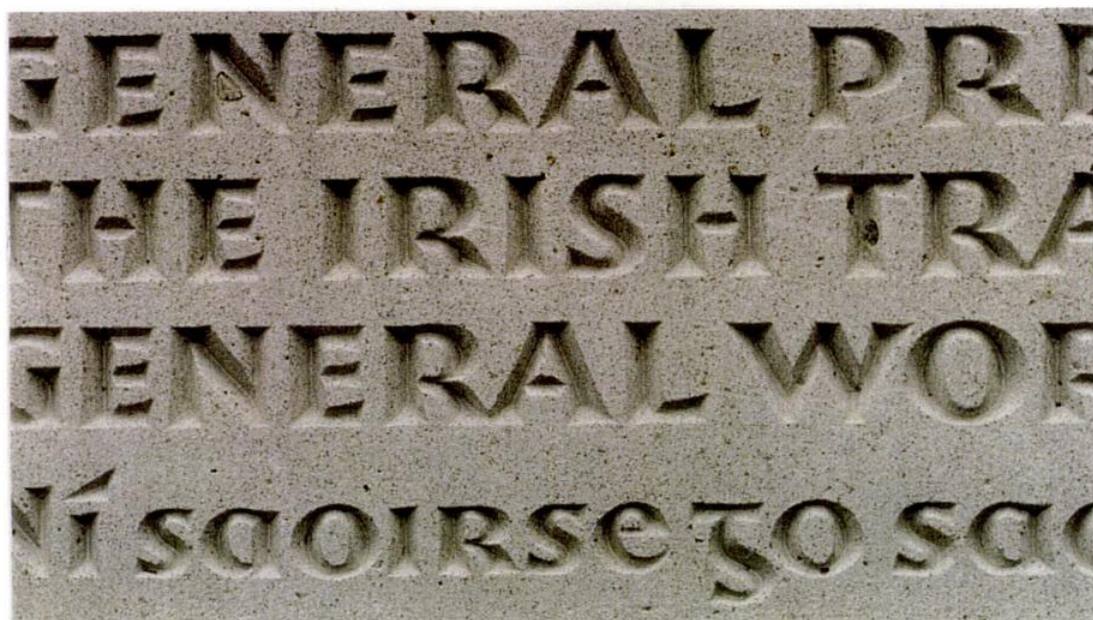
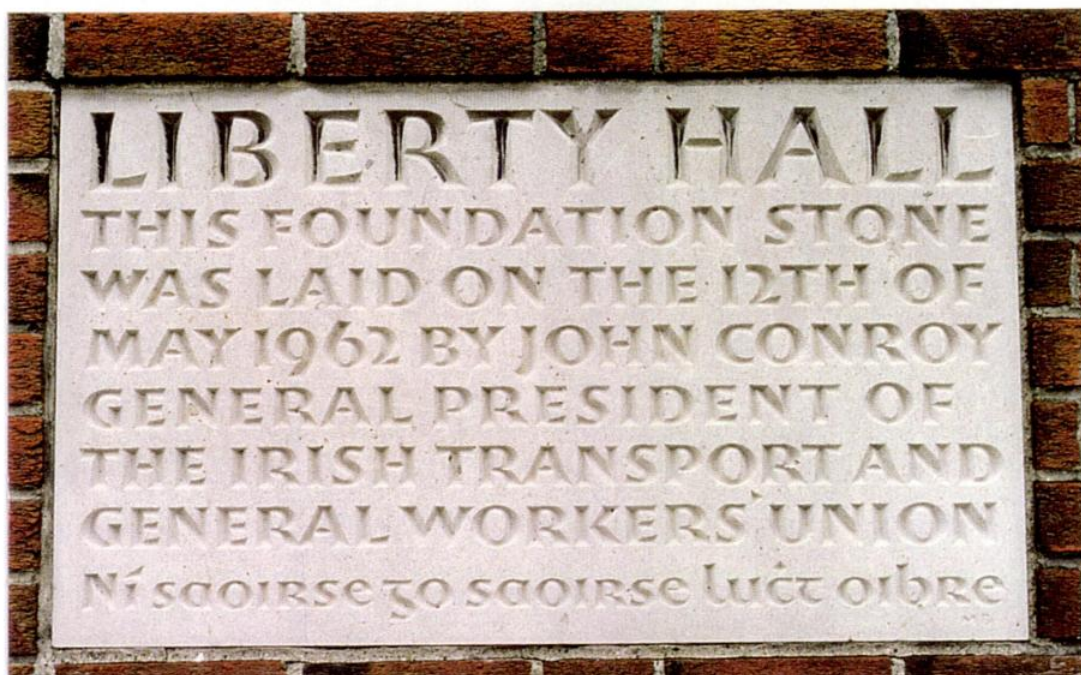
DATE: c.1960

LOCATION: In the St. Nessian's section of the cemetery which is situated off Deansgrange Road, Deansgrange, Co. Dublin

MEDIUM: unknown

SIZE: Overall: 50" x 24"
Lettering 2.5"
Leading 4"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: The top inscription was set-out and cut by Biggs but the bottom one was set-out by Biggs but cut by Tom Glendon,



Foundation Stone for Liberty Hall, Dublin

LET Cat.No.13

DATE: c.1962

LOCATION: On the outside wall of Liberty Hall facing the Custom House. Liberty Hall is on the corner of Eden Quay and Beresford Place, Dublin.

MEDIUM: unknown

SIZE: Overall: 36" x 21"
Lettering 3"
Leading 2.25"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: This foundation stone was signed MB in the bottom right-hand corner.



LETCat.No.14 Gravestone, Farrell, Deansgrange, Co. Dublin.

**Gravestone , FARRELL,
Deansgrange Cemetery, Co. Dublin**

LETCat.No.14

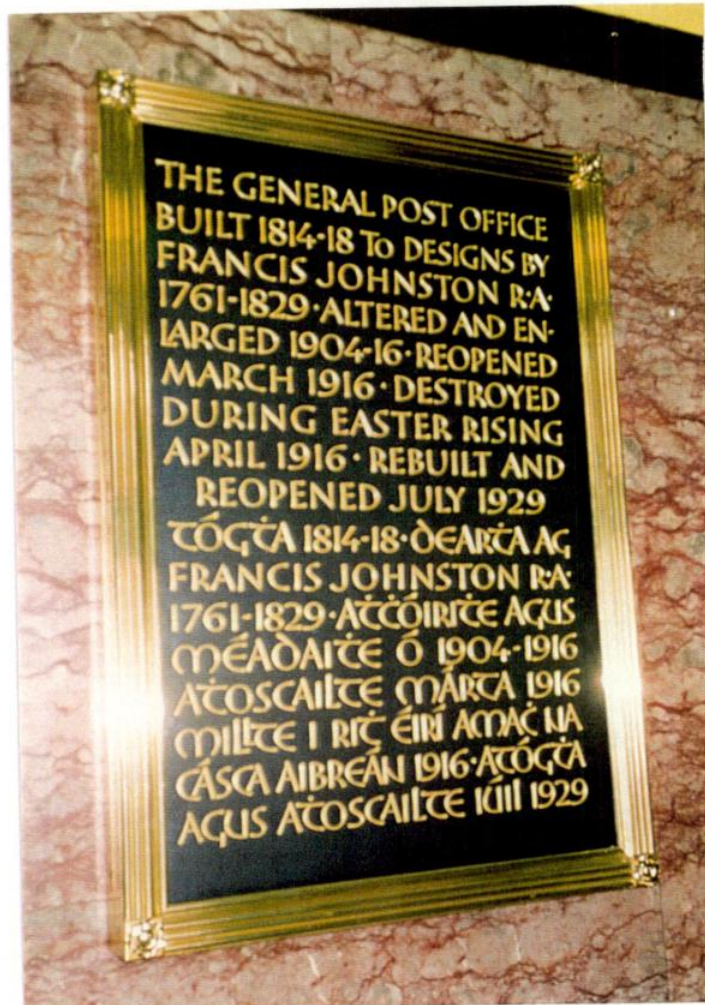
DATE: c.1962

LOCATION: At the beginning of the St. Mary's section of the Cemetery, Deansgrange Road, Co. Dublin.

MEDIUM: Granite

SIZE: Overall: 60" high x 24" wide
Lettering 2"
Leading 3.5"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: It is a pity that the placing of another gravestone behind it diminishes the effect of the cut-through celtic type cross at the top.



Inscriptional Plaques for 1916 Rising, General Post Office, Dublin

LETCat.No.15

DATE: c.1964

LOCATION: In the two separate foyers of the General Post Office, O'Connell Street, Dublin.

MEDIUM: Black Marble

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: These plaques used to be inserted in the windows of the GPO but seemed to have been moved into the foyers when the Death of Cuchulainn statue by Oliver Sheppard was placed inside the window in 1966.

The plaques have now been placed behind glass with rather hideous gold plastic-looking frames which do nothing for them. Placed as they are on the back walls of the foyers opposite the doors, they are very difficult to read with the light shining on the glass.





LETCat.No.16 Gravestone, Rivers, St. Maelruin, Dublin.

**Gravestone, RIVERS,
St. Maelruins, Tallaght, Dublin**

LETCat.No.16

DATE: c.1964

LOCATION: Near the Square Shopping Centre, Tallaght is the C of I parish church of St. Maelruin and the gravestone is near the little gate in the surrounding graveyard.

MEDIUM: Granite

SIZE: Overall: 68" x 30" x 10"

Lettering: 2"

Leading: 4"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: This was designed by Biggs but made and carved by Glendon. Elizabeth Rivers was an Irish painter and stained-glass artist of some note.



Pedestal Inscription for Thomas Davis Statue, College Green, Dublin

LETCat.No.17

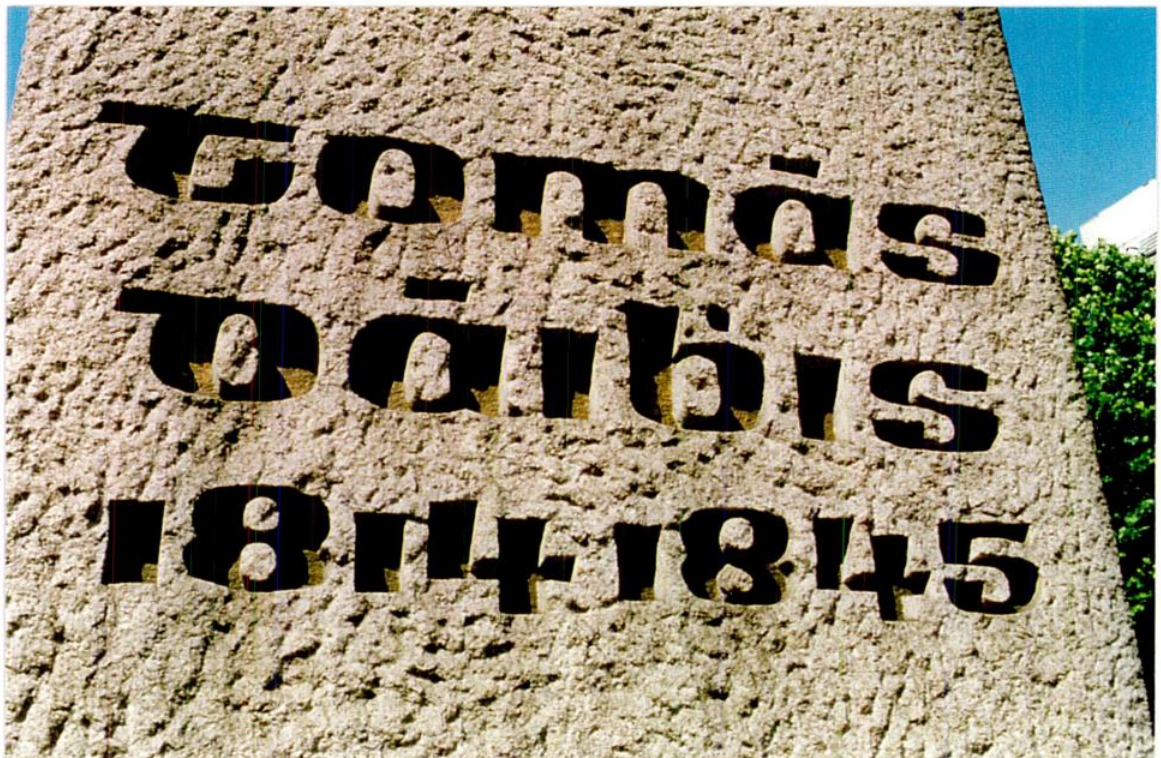
DATE: c.1965

LOCATION: At the bottom of Dame Street looking towards the front of Trinity College Dublin.

MEDIUM: Rough hewn granite.

SIZE: Base of statue: 43" wide
 Lettering: 6.25"
 Leading: 8"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: The letters are cut very deep, 1", and seem to have been painted with a dark paint that glints a gold colour when the sun shines on it.





LET Cat.No.18 Gravestone, Gwynn, Whitechurch, Co. Dublin.

Gravestone, GWYNN, Whitechurch Graveyard, Co. Dublin

LETCat.No.18

DATE: c.1965

LOCATION: Whitechurch C of I Graveyard, Whitechurch Road, Whitechurch, Co. Dublin.

MEDIUM: Granite

SIZE: Overall: 72" high x 17" wide x 9" deep
Lettering 2.25"
Leading 3"

Plaque in ground" 21.5" x 15"
Lettering: 2"
Leading: 2.25"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: The raised inscription on this gravestone is not easy to read. The accompanying stone set into the ground at the foot of the grave is even more difficult to read due to the growth of lichens and mosses on it. Robert Gwynn was a Warden of St. Columba's College.





LETCat.No.19 Garda Memorial and Roll of Honour, Dublin.

Garda Memorial and Roll of Honour, Phoenix Park, Dublin

LET Cat.No.19

DATE: 1966

LOCATION: At the entrance to Garda Headquarters just inside the Park Gate of the Phoenix Park, Dublin

MEDIUM: Granite and Limestone

SIZE: Memorial: Inscribed blocks: 84" x 48"
Lettering: 3.5"
Leading: 6"

Rolls of Honour: Lettering: 1.25"
Leading: 1.75"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: The lettering on the memorial was not painted when originally done but was added at a later (unknown) date. The Garda badges, which form the basis of the decorative circular motifs, were slightly re-designed by Biggs and were carved by Paddy Roe and Phil O'Neill.



The original Garda badge on left with the re-designed carved badge on both sides of the Memorial.



Commemorative Plaque, Portglenone Abbey, Co. Antrim

LET Cat.No.20

DATE: 1967

LOCATION: At eye level on the east wall outside the Church at Our Lady of Bethlehem Abbey, Ballymena Road, Portglenone, Ballymena, Co. Antrim

MEDIUM:

SIZE: Overall: 45" x 17.5"
Lettering 1.5"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: The architect was Pádraig O'Muiredagh from Dublin. This plaque was a commemorative one while another foundation stone was laid under the building itself in 1962 which was not done by Biggs.



LETCat.No.21 Plaque, Henry Moore statue, Dublin.

Plaque for Henry Moore Statue, St Stephen's Green, Dublin

LETCat.No.21

DATE: 1967

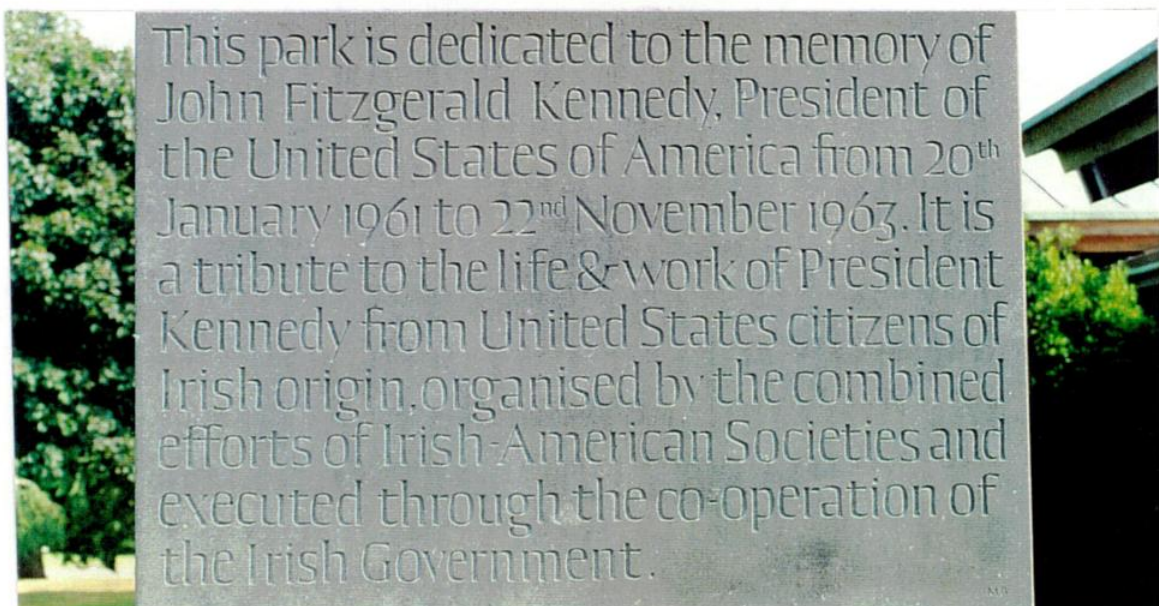
LOCATION: The statue, to W.B. Yeats by British artist Henry Moore, is situated in a secluded raised garden area in St. Stephen's Green. The Plaque is mounted on a low stone wall close to the actual statue.

MEDIUM: Cast Bronze

SIZE: Overall: 33" x 12.75"
Lettering 2.5"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: The inscription was provided by the W.B. Yeats Memorial Committee. The Committee was established in 1953 under the chairmanship of Lennox Robinson. Members of the public were invited to contribute towards the cost of the memorial.





Fountain and Inscription, Kennedy Memorial Park, New Ross, Wexford

LETCat.No.22

DATE: 1967 - 1968

LOCATION: Four and a half miles south of New Ross, the fountain and the inscription are situated at the Visitors' Centre in the John F. Kennedy Arboretum.

MEDIUM: Granite fountain and granite pillar with Limestone Plaque

SIZE: Fountain: Overall Diameter: 160"
Lettering 2.25"
Leading 3"

Inscription: Overall: 96" x 48"
Inscriptiional Plaque: 48" x 33"
Lettering 1.75"
Leading 3"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: The decision to commission the fountain and inscription here was reached between May 1967 and September 1967. They were to acknowledge the contribution of the Irish-American Society to the Establishment of the Arboretum. They were chosen by a working group of officials from the Department of Forestry, Department of Agriculture (Botanic Gardens) and OPW (Architectural Division, Mr. S. Maskell).

The inscriptiional plaque is signed M.B.





Memorial Plaque to Sir William Wilde Merrion Square, Dublin

LETCat.No.23

DATE: c.1972

LOCATION: 1 Merrion Square, Dublin, at the junction of the North-West corner of the Square and Merrion Street, Lower.

MEDIUM: Portland Stone

SIZE: Overall: 31" x 20" (Oval)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: This plaque commemorates the life and work of Sir William Robert Wills Wilde 1815 - 1876 who lived in this building. The building, which is now The American College Dublin, also has a plaque to the playwright Oscar Wilde, who was Sir William Wilde's son.





Gravestone, CURRAN, Deansgrange Cemetery, Dublin

LET Cat.No.24

DATE: c.1972

LOCATION: In St. Patrick's section of Deansgrange Cemetery, Deansgrange Road, Co. Dublin.

MEDIUM:

SIZE: Overall: 48" high
30" wide
10" deep
Lettering: 2.5"
Leading: 3.5"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: An unusual gravestone, this one has decorative motifs cut into each side of the Stone as well as the inscriptions on the front face.



radh den gheir
 daoirse.
 ar azaibhse m
 nígí orainne, g

na haislinze.
 Liam mac uistín

Mural Inscription in Garden of Remembrance, Parnell Square, Dublin

LETCat.No.25

DATE: c.1980

LOCATION: Situated at the back of the Garden of Remembrance at the North side of Parnell Square, Dublin.

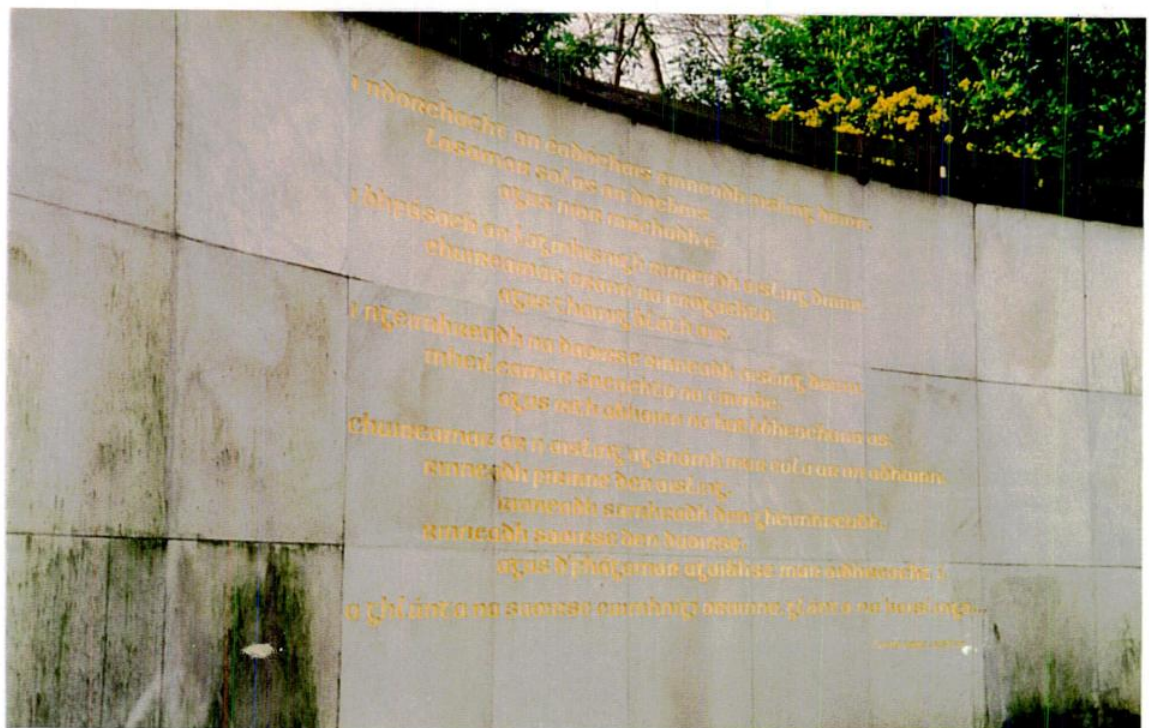
MEDIUM: White Marble

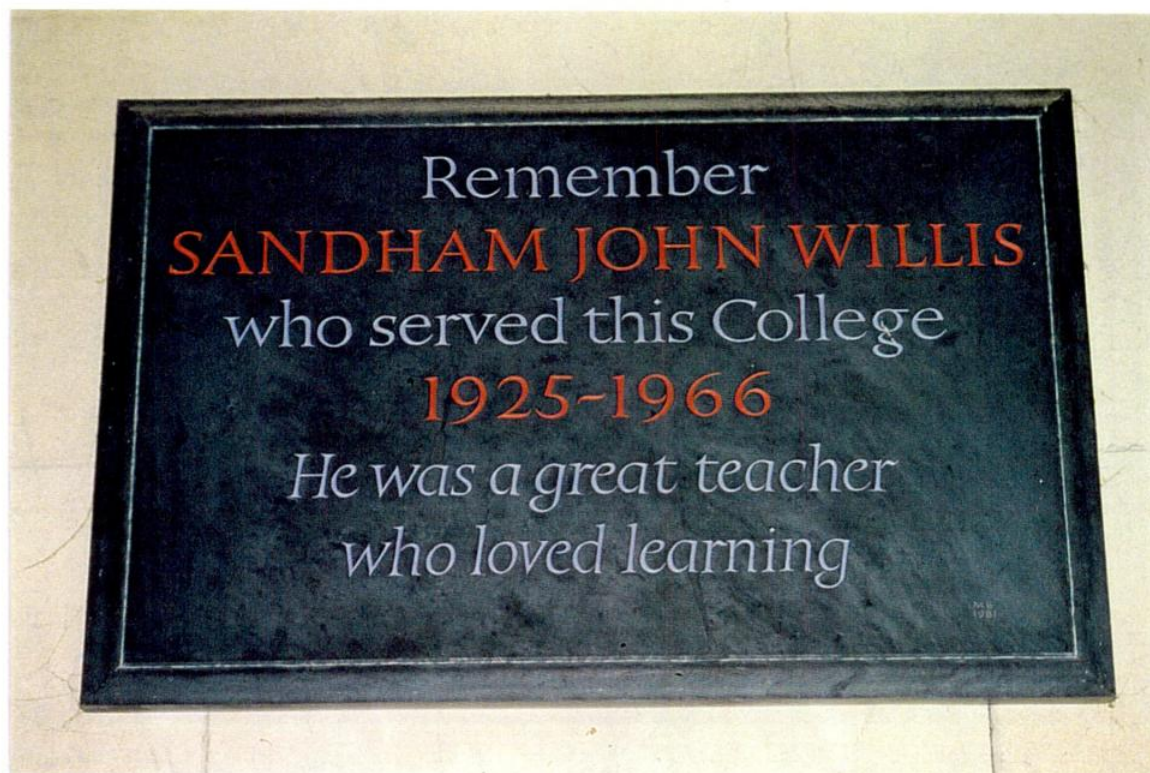
SIZE: Overall size of inscription: 15' x 12'
 Lettering 3.25"
 Leading - between lines: 5"
 - between verses 7"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: The inscription was cut into the curved white marble wall at the rear of the Garden. Although the Garden was opened in 1966 neither the Oisín Kelly statue or the Biggs' inscription were done at this time. The statue was dedicated on Sunday 11th July 1971 by President de Valera but the inscription was not completed until 1980, although both inscription and statue had been part of the original plan.

This inscription was set-out by Biggs and cut by Glendon.

The original architect of the Garden was Dáithí Hanly.





Plaque in Chapel of St. Columba's College, Co Dublin

LETCat.No.26

DATE: 1981

LOCATION: The College Chapel of St. Columba's College, Whitechurch, Dublin 16.

MEDIUM:

SIZE: 24" x 16"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: This plaque relates to the subject of one of the early cartoons Biggs did while at school - that of the two Masters, Willis and White. The plaque is to remember Willis' time at the College and Biggs was asked to do it by the other Master, White.

It is signed MB 1981.



Gravestone, MacLIAMMOIR & EDWARDS, St. Fintan's Lawn Cemetery, Sutton, Co. Dublin

LETCat.No.27

DATE: c.1982

LOCATION: In St. Assam's section of the Lawn Cemetery, the new part of St. Fintan's, Sutton - Row K, beside the grave marked 2, close to the path.

MEDIUM:

SIZE: Overall: 24" x 36"
Lettering: 1.75"
Leading: 3.5"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Due to the fact that all these gravestones are lying flat on the ground this must be located using the Row figures and the number markings as it is difficult to find. Michael MacLiammoir and Hilton Edwards founded the Gate Theatre in Dublin.





Plaque to MacLiammoir & Edwards, Gate Theatre, Parnell Square, Dublin

LETCat.No.28

DATE: unknown

LOCATION: In the small foyer bar of the Gate Theatre which is on the south-east corner of Parnell Square, Dublin.

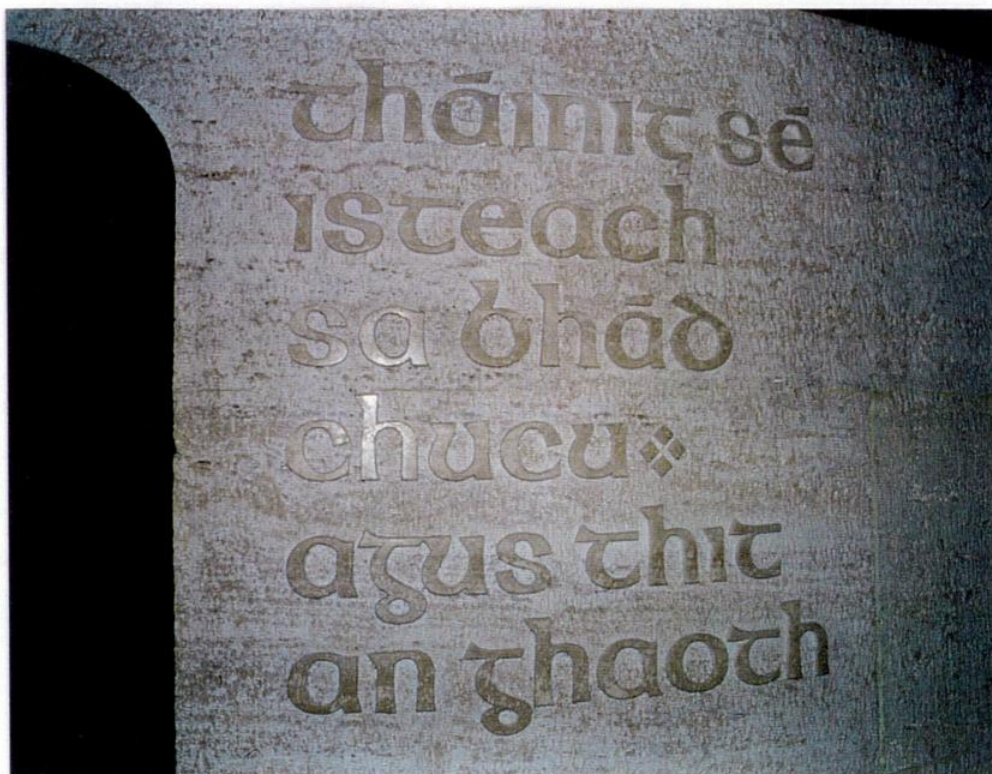
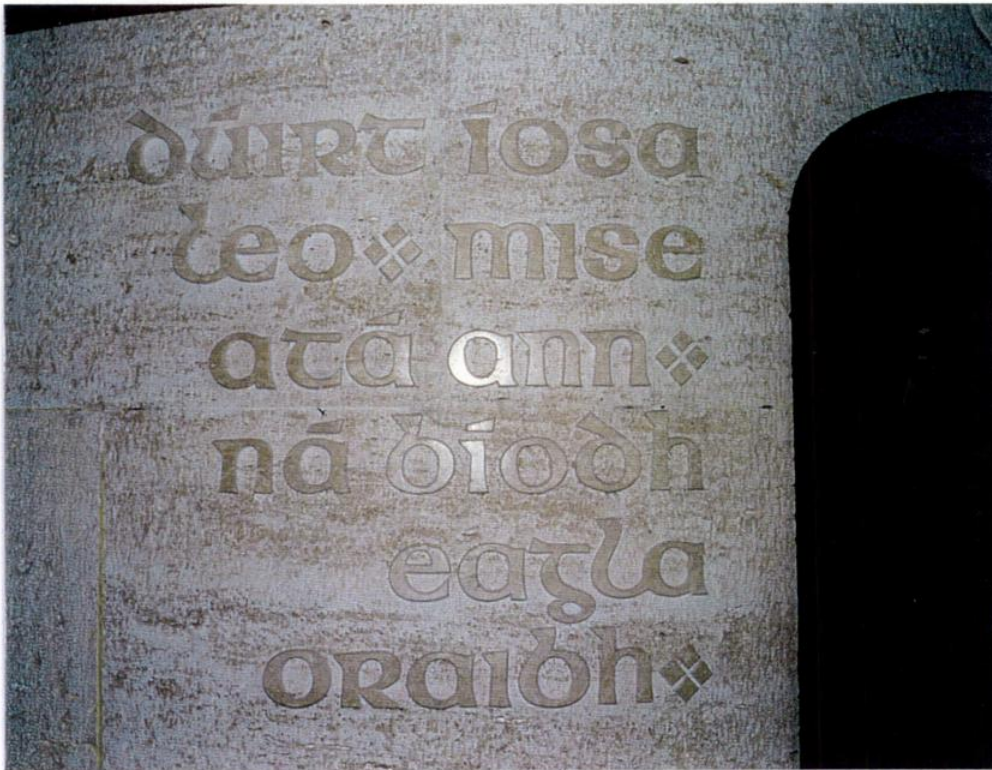
MEDIUM:

SIZE: Overall: 27" x 12"

Lettering: 1"

Leading: 1.75"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: The plaque is to be found over the entrance to the foyer up the stairs but you will have to turn around to see it over the rather ugly but necessary EXIT sign. It is not known whether Biggs executed the low-relief portraits or not.



Inscriptions on Chapel of Reconciliation & Bishop's Seat, Monaghan Cathedral,

LETCat.No.29

DATE: 1982

LOCATION: Monaghan Cathedral is situated on a hill overlooking the City on the main road from Dublin.

MEDIUM: Travertine Marble and cast bronze.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Chapel of Reconciliation: This is a raised inscription divided into two parts located on either side of the door into the beehive-like Chapel of Reconciliation in the corner of the South Transept of the Cathedral. It is a raised inscription in Irish and is a translation from Mark 6: 50-51:

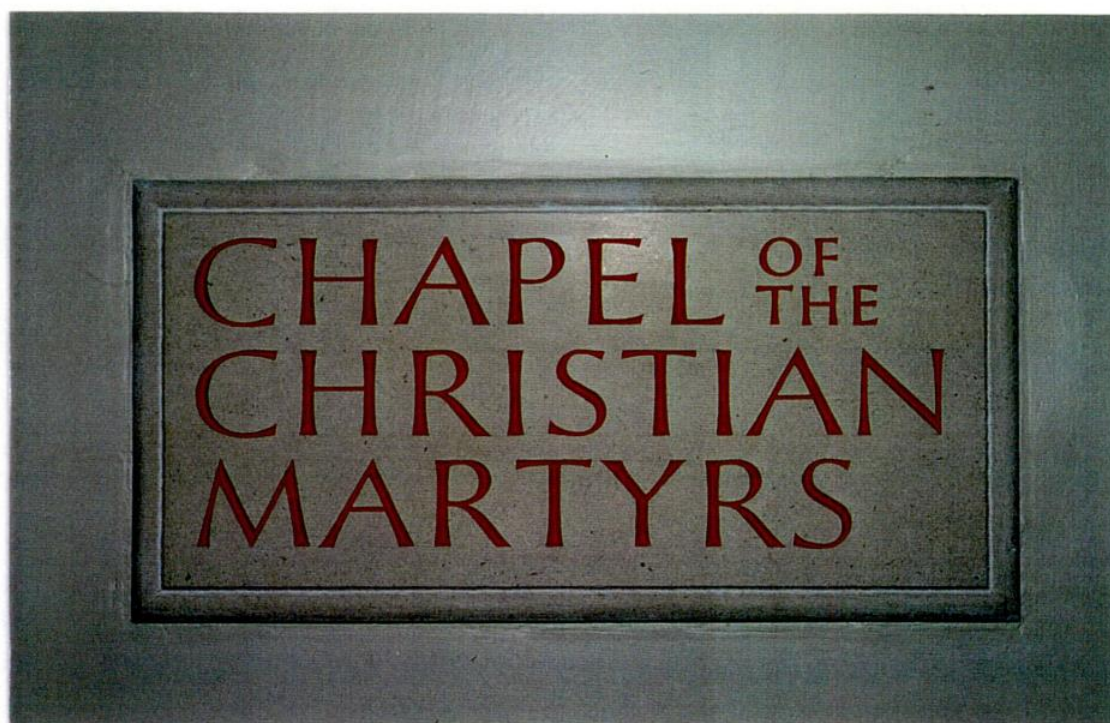
"Jesus said to them: It is I. Do not be afraid. Then he got into the boat with them, and the wind dropped"

Bishop's Seat: This is a metal cast plaque set onto the wooden back of the Bishop's Seat in the chancel of the Cathedral.

The complete re-ordering of the Cathedral was done by Biggs. The tapestries were done by his wife Frances Biggs. It was the biggest job he did in any Church - See also the Catalogue of Church Work.



Inscription on Bishop's Seat, Monaghan Cathedral, Monaghan.



Inscriptions in Chapel, Terenure College, Dublin

LET Cat.No.30

DATE: 1986

LOCATION: In Chapel of the Martyrs in the Main Chapel of Terenure College,
Templeogue Road, Terenure, Dublin.

MEDIUM: White Marble

SIZE: Main Plaque: 38" x 17"

Lettering: 1"

Leading: 2"

Small Plaque: 16" x 8"

Lettering: 1.5"

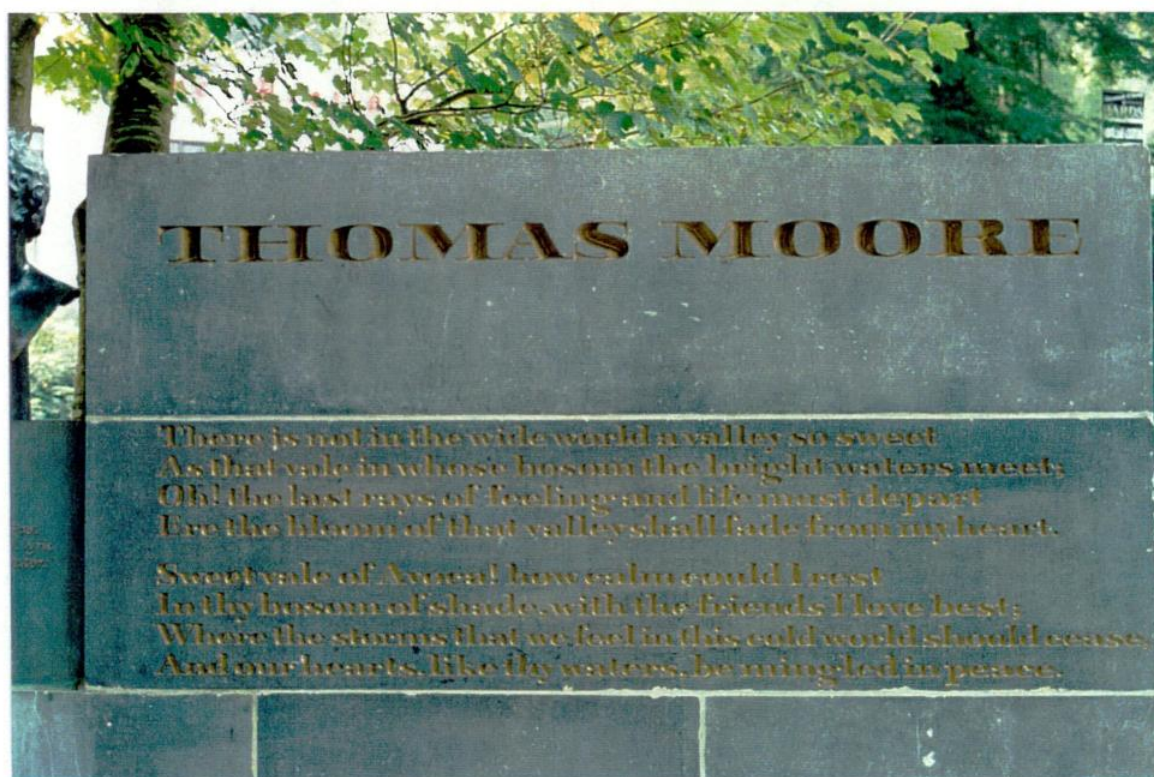
Leading: 2"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: The chapel being in the school is not generally open
to the Public.

TITUS BRANDSMA · EDITH STEIN
DIETRICH BONHOEFFER · MAXIMILIAN KOLBE
MARIA SKOBTSOVA · MARTIN LUTHER KING JR
JANANI LUWUM · OSCAR ROMERO
JERZY POPIELUSZKO



Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his holy ones



LETCat.No.31 Memorial to Thomas Moore, Meetings of the Waters, Avoca, Co. Wicklow.

Memorial to Thomas Moore, Meetings of the Waters, Avoca, Co. Wicklow

LETCat.No.31

DATE: unknown

LOCATION: On the road between Rathdrum and Woodenbridge in Co. Wicklow at the Meetings of the Waters.

MEDIUM:

SIZE: Overall: 66" x 120"

Lettering: THOMAS MOORE: 2.5"

1779 - 1852: 1.75"

Poem: Lettering 2"

Leading - 2" between lines

- 3" between verses

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: This is the spot where the poet, Thomas Moore, is said to have meditated and written some of his best work. There is still the remains of a bare stunted dead tree under which he is said to have sat at the convergence of the Avonmore and Avonbeg rivers. The lettering on the original memorial was not gilded. This might have been done after the memorial was rescued from the river where it had been washed away during Hurricane Charlie in the mid-eighties.





LETCat.No.32 Fascia lettering, The Harp Bar, Dublin.

Fascia lettering for The Harp Bar, O'Connell Bridge, Dublin

LET Cat.No.32

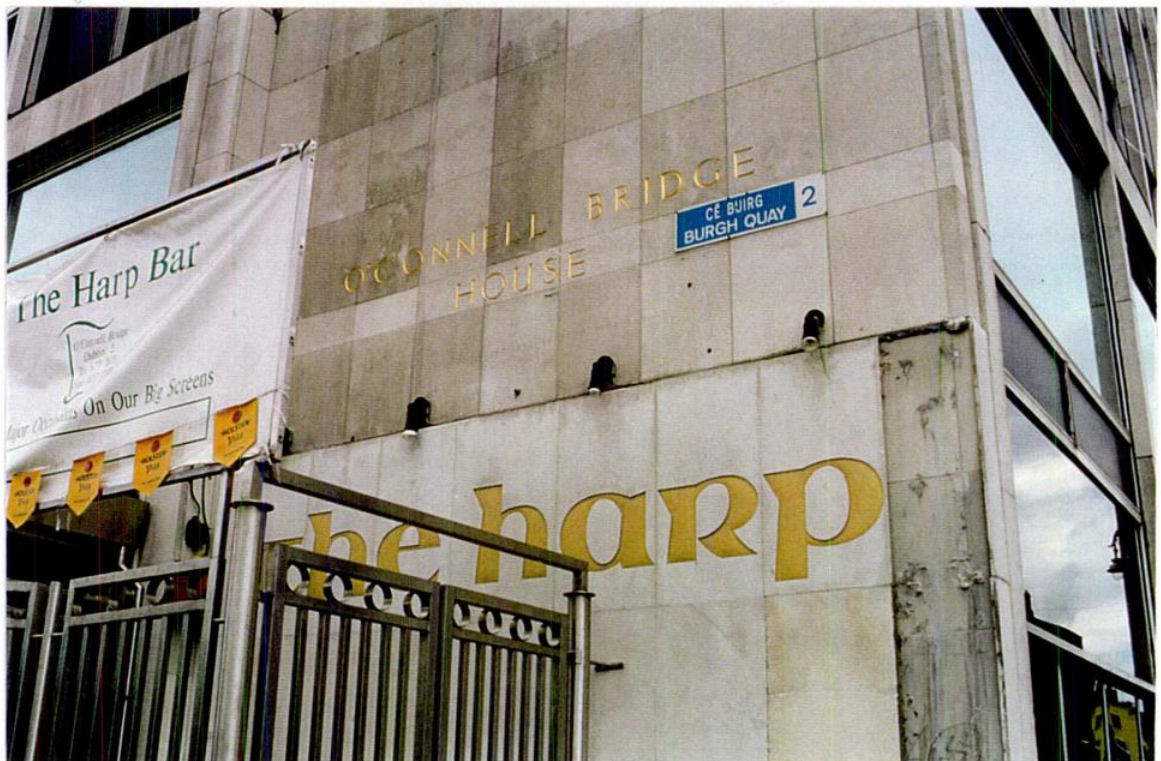
DATE: unknown

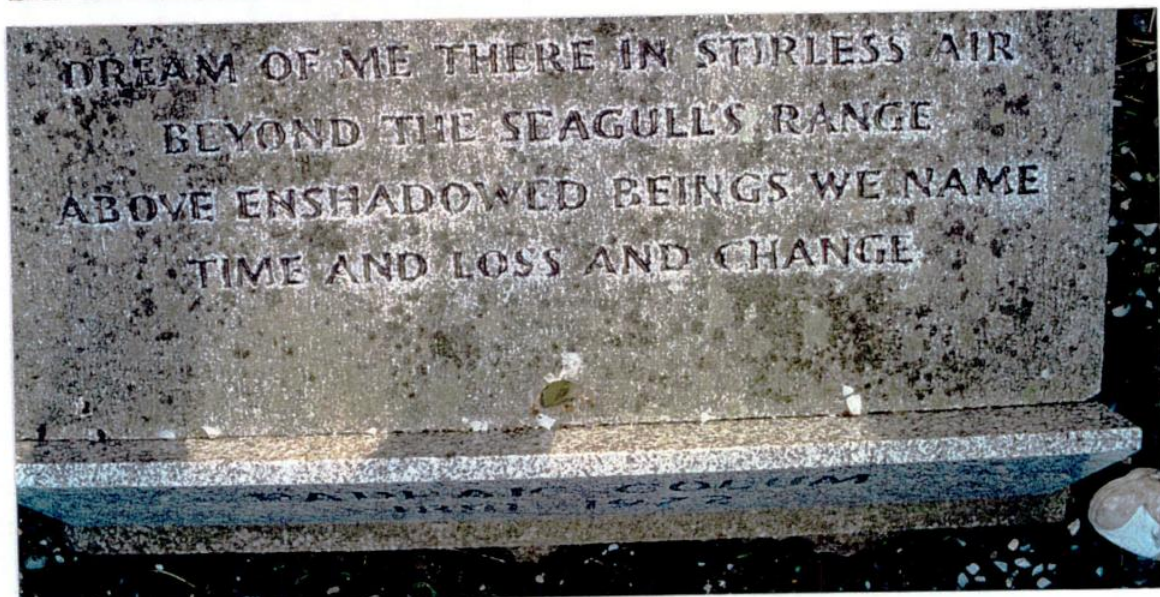
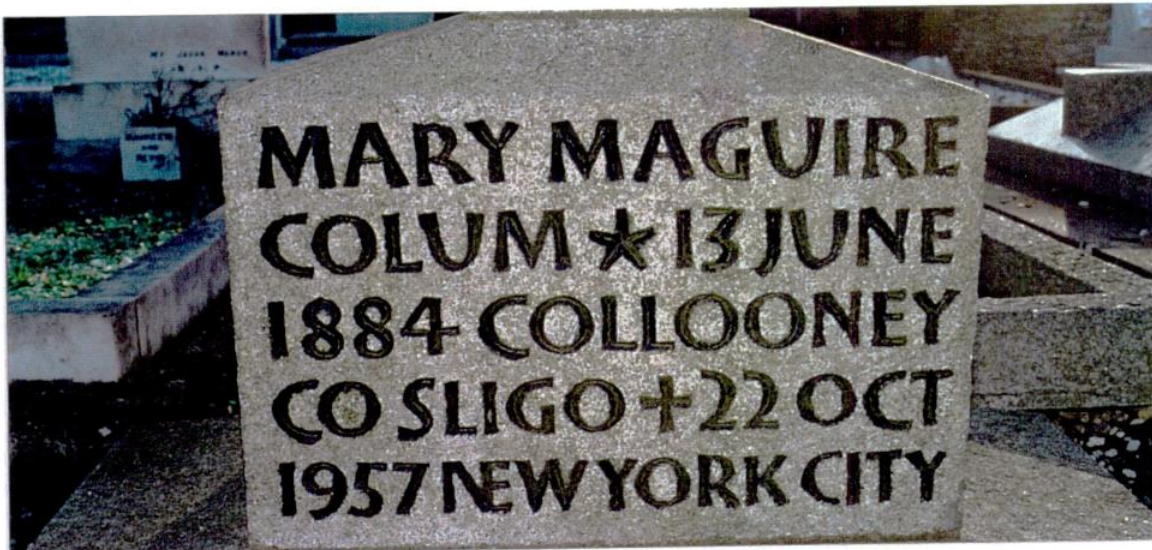
LOCATION: The Harp Bar is at the corner of Burgh Quay and D'Olier Street, Dublin.

MEDIUM:

SIZE: The letters are not very accessible due to the surrounding high railing but are roughly 14.5" high.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: This inscription was set-out by Biggs and cut by Glendon





Gravestone, COLUM, St. Fintan's Cemetery, Sutton, Co. Dublin

LETCat.No.33

DATE: unknown

LOCATION: St Fintan's Lawn Cemetery, Sutton, Co. Dublin.

MEDIUM: Granite

SIZE: Base of cross: Lettering: 2.25"
Leading: 3.25"

Flat bed of grave-Top: Lettering: 1.75"
Leading: 4.5"

Additional slab: Lettering: 2"
Leading: 3.5"

Flat bed of grave-Bottom: Lettering: 1.25"
Leading: 3.5"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: As the different dates on this stone are so far apart I have put it towards the end of the catalogue. Padraic Colum was an Irish poet.



Memorial in grounds of Luggala Lodge, Roundwood, Co. Wicklow

LETCat.No.34

DATE: unknown

LOCATION: Down by the lake in the grounds of Luggala Lodge off the road from Roundwood to Sally Gap.

MEDIUM: Sculptural stones with inset slate tablets

SIZE: unknown

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: I received no reply to my request to document this memorial so I have no more information than appears above.



Roll of Honour Boards, Dining Hall, St. Columba's College, Co. Dublin

LETCat.No.35

DATE: unknown

LOCATION: In the Dining Hall of St. Columba's College, Whitechurch, Dublin 16

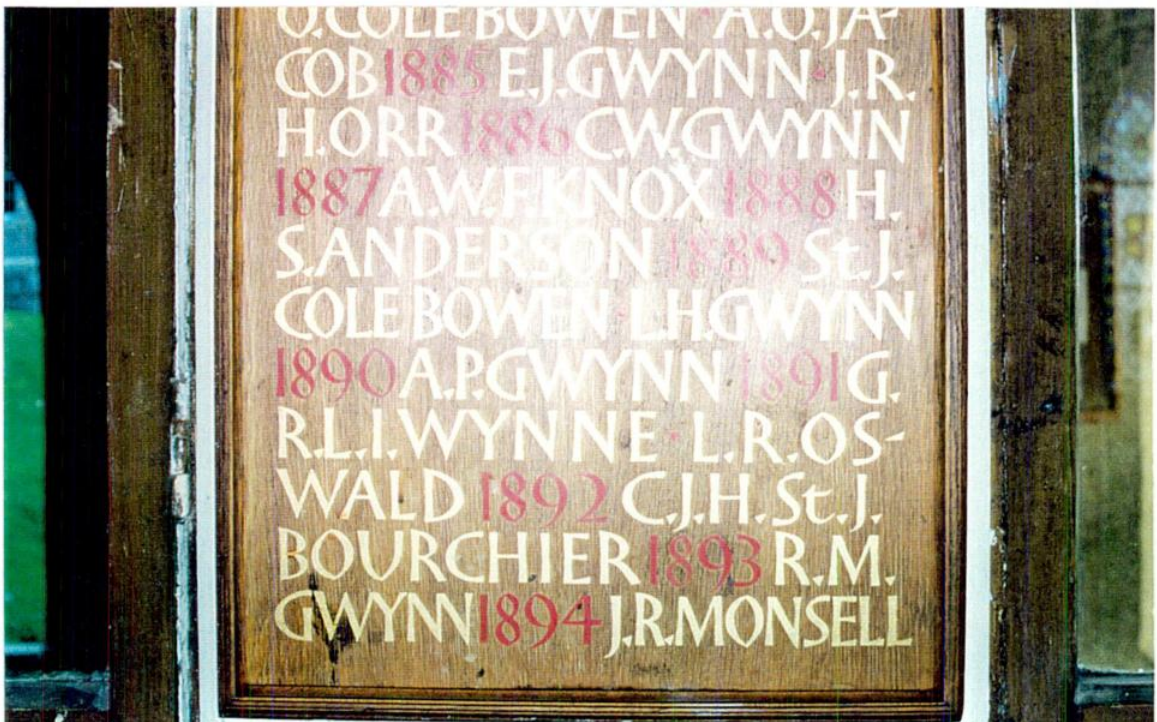
MEDIUM: Gold Paint on Wood backing

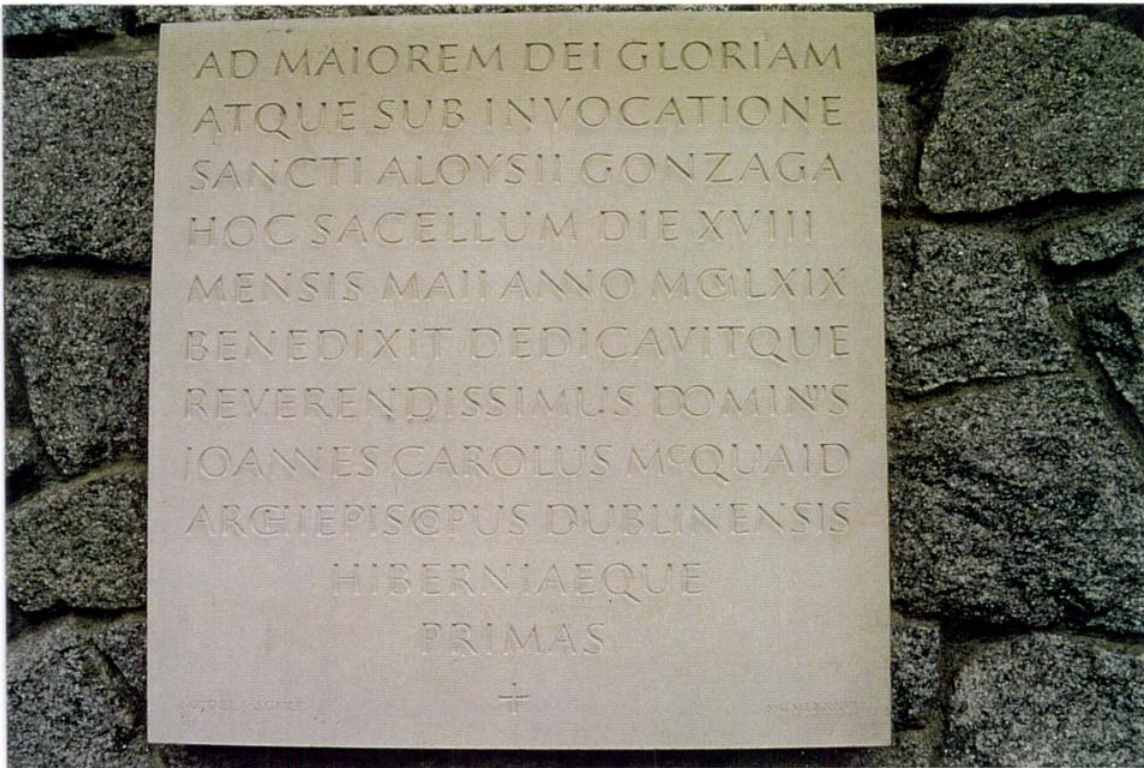
SIZE: not documented

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: In the letter I received from Norman Lush, one of Biggs' teachers, he mentions these boards:

The Senior Prefects' boards were rather controversial as some did not appreciate the flow and divisions of names - they preferred a line by line list & in fact Bursar Holmes in the 1970's would not send the boards to Michael for updating as he disapproved of the style. (Lush, October 1995)

Note that the last two entries on the Wardens' board seem to have been done by someone else with gold Letraset type letters - something the College is trying to rectify at present!





Plaque, Gonzaga College Chapel Ranelagh, Dublin

LETCat.No.36

DATE: 1967

LOCATION: Gonzaga College, Ranelagh, Dublin 6.

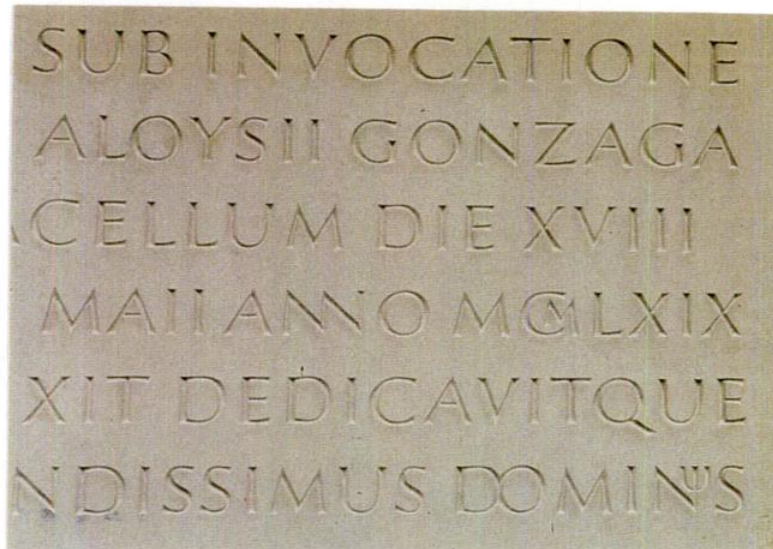
MEDIUM: unknown

SIZE: Overall: 28.5" x 28.5"

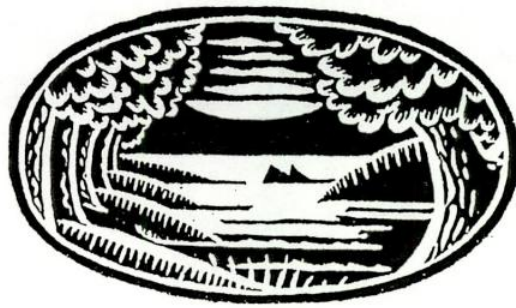
Lettering: 1"

Leading: 2.25"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: This piece is signed by Biggs: MB DEL & SCULP in the bottom left-hand corner and dated MCMLXXXVI in the right-hand corner.



THE FIRST PART



THE SECOND PART



THE THIRD PART



THE FOURTH PART



Linocuts and Colophon, The Midnight Court, Dolmen Press

LETCat.No.37

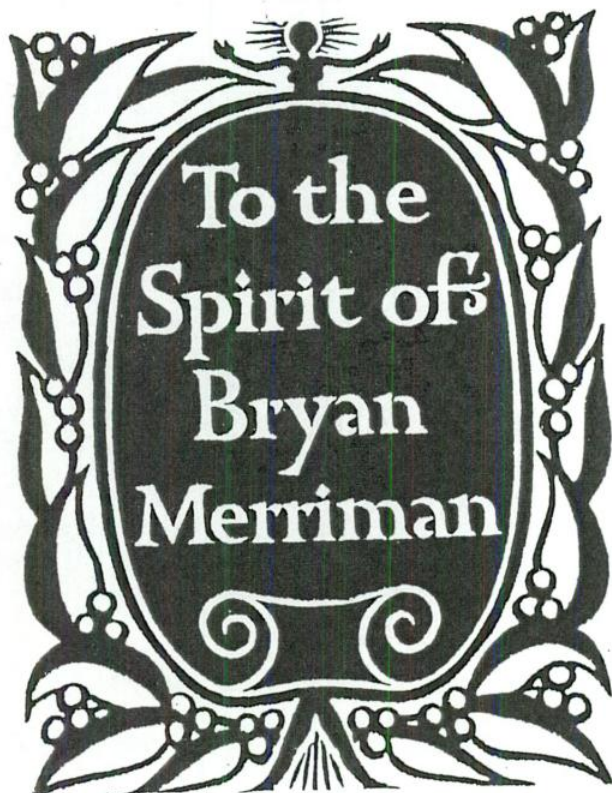
DATE: April 1953

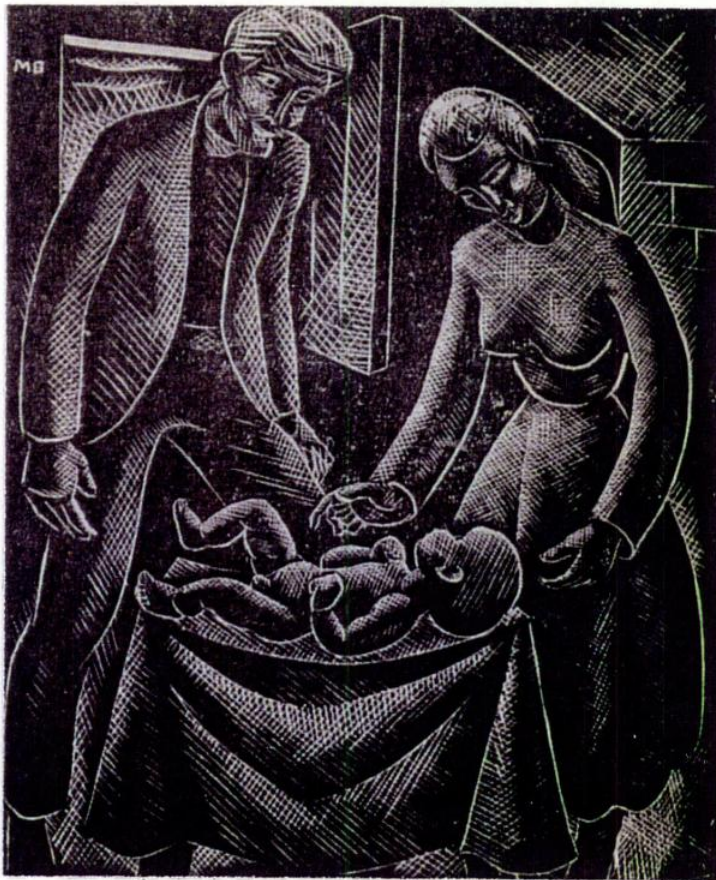
MEDIUM: Linocuts

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Published by The Dolmen Press The Midnight Court
is a poem by Brian Merriman.



Michael Biggs: Colophon
for *The Midnight Court*.





Wood engraving (Frontispiece), Nativity, Dolmen Press

LET Cat.No.38

DATE: September 1953

MEDIUM: Wood Engraving

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Published by the Dolmen Press as a limited edition of 500. The full title is The Nativity from the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke. Biggs' wife Frances told me that the engraving is said to be very close to a family portrait by those who knew Michael and Frances and their baby, John-David at that time.



THE
BREAST
PLATE OF
SAINT
PATRICK

Hand lettered vellum covers, Faeth Fiadha, Dolmen Press

LET Cat.No.39

DATE: February 1957

MEDIUM: Hand-lettered vellum covers.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Published by The Dolmen Press in a limited edition, only ten of which had hand-lettered covers by Biggs.

The Faeth Fiadha is better known as The Breastplate of St. Patrick. This translation is by Thomas Kinsella and the illustrations are by Gerrit Van Gelderen.

Cuts, The Bird that Flew Away, Dolmen Press

LET Cat.No.40

DATE: November 1958

MEDIUM: Cuts

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Published by The Dolmen Press in a limited edition of 300 copies. The Bird that Flew Away is by Gudrun Tempel. I was not able to find a copy of this so there are not further details other than those contained in Liam Millar's Dolmen Press - An Illustrated Bibliography.

a b

A AILM The Pine-Tree B BEITH The Birch-Tree

e f

E EADHADH The Aspen-Tree F FEARN The Alder-Tree

c o

C COLL The Hazel-Tree D DUIR The Oak-Tree

s i

G GORT The Ivy-ree I IDHO The Yew-Tree

l m

L LUIS The Quicken-Tree M MUIN The Vine

p r R

P PETHPOC The Dwarf Elder R RUIS The Elder-Tree

n o

N NION The Ash-Tree O ONN The Broom

s t

S SAIL The Willow-Tree T TINNE Furze

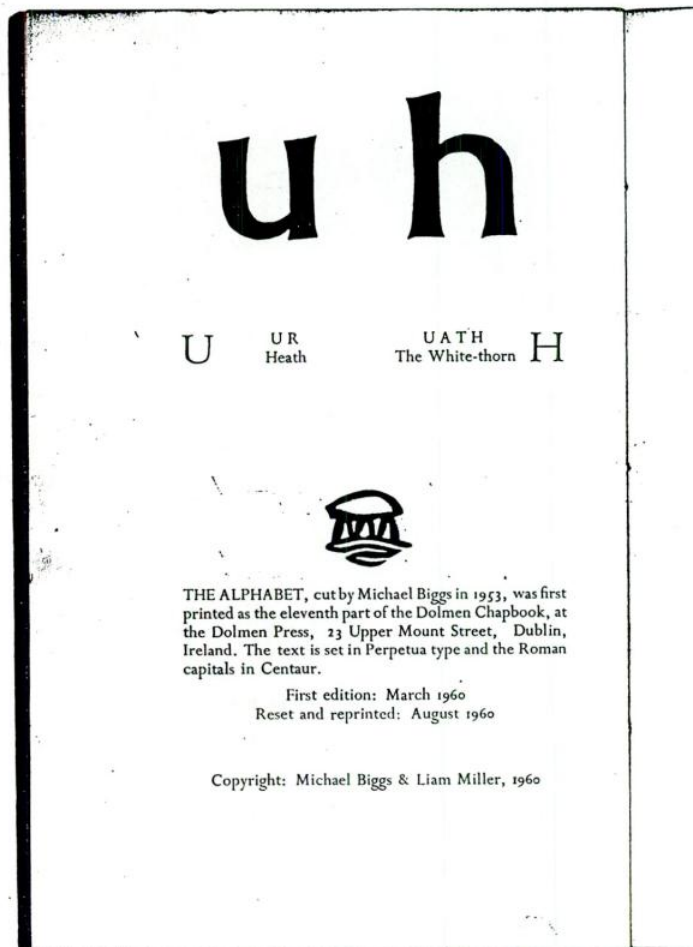
Typeface design, A Gaelic Alphabet, Dolmen Press

LETCat.No.41

DATE: March 1960

MEDIUM: Cut Wood block prints

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Published by The Dolmen Press as part of their Chapbook Series -Part XI and a special edition of same of 50 signed copies, signed by Liam Millar and Michael Biggs. It was first issued in a very small number of proof copies in 1954.



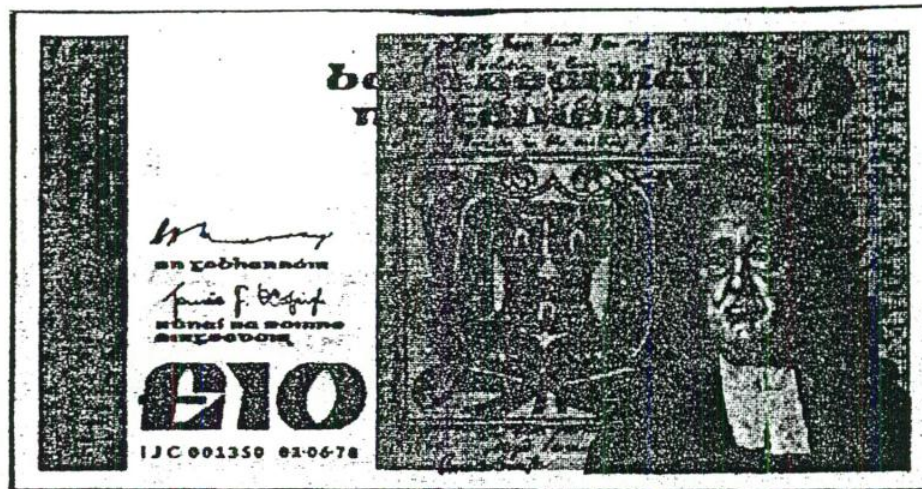


Typeface design, Irish Banknotes

LET Cat.No.42

DATE: 1976 - 1984

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: This typeface design was used on the new set of Irish Banknotes which began to be issued in November 1976. The complete project was the work of Servicon - artist Patrick Hickey, architects Richard Hurley, Brian Hogan, engineer Seán Mulcahy and typographer Michael Biggs.



**ANALYSIS OF
LETTERING WORK**

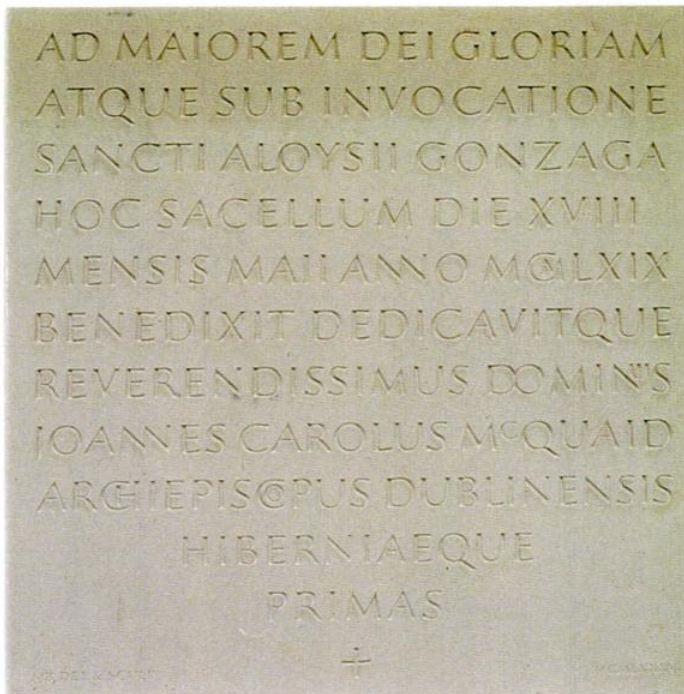


Fig.3 - Latin inscription from Gonzaga College chapel, Dublin

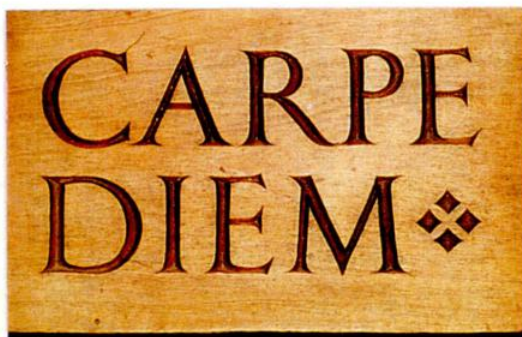


Fig.4 - Bigg's first piece of carving.

Michael Biggs claimed that the moment that changed his life was the chance finding of Edward Johnston's book Writing & Illuminating & Lettering in a Dublin bookshop. He had just given up his university course and was at a loose end about his career. He decided to become a stone cutter after reading the book. But it would seem that the Gods had already been working in this direction. His family connection with Eric Gill through his godfather, Eric's younger brother Evan, allowed him to realise his ambition of going to Ditchling to learn the necessary skills. It was not a school to which one could just apply. Also his was the good fortune at having been sent to a solid, well-run and liberal school like St. Columba's where his artistic talents were encouraged and where he met another big influence, sculptor Oisín Kelly. It was a school where he got a good grounding in the classics and this helped later in carving inscriptions in Latin.(Fig.3) His first piece of carving, CARPE DIEM, is still in existence in the family home.(Fig.4) When he arrived at Ditchling it also soon became obvious that he had a natural talent for cutting stone. Having been brought up in Ireland instead of his country of birth also gave him a love of the Irish script a fact which brought him back to this country to work. He had a wish to bring the standards of Irish inscriptional work back to the high standards of the 18th century. A past Director of NCAD, Jonah Jones talking about 18th Century inscriptional writing in England and Ireland noted that it was:

..often very beautiful, but in the 19th century, mass production and simple money making and a complete loss of taste, debased the whole trade. It took artists like Edward Johnston and Eric Gill to restore it, with first of all incised lettering, but also design for type....The tradition has carried on with people like myself and David Kindersley, trained in the Eric Gill workshops, and now a third and fourth generation carrying on. Michael Biggs....is in that tradition. (Jones, November 1995).

Biggs also showed his mastery of the Irish hand and his knowledge of its history and these are obvious in the quality of his work in this area. His other natural talent which came out in school was his ability to show, with very few lines, a sense of form. His cartoons of his teachers often hit the nail on the head with a few swift strokes, as did his beautifully simple illustrations.(Fig.5)

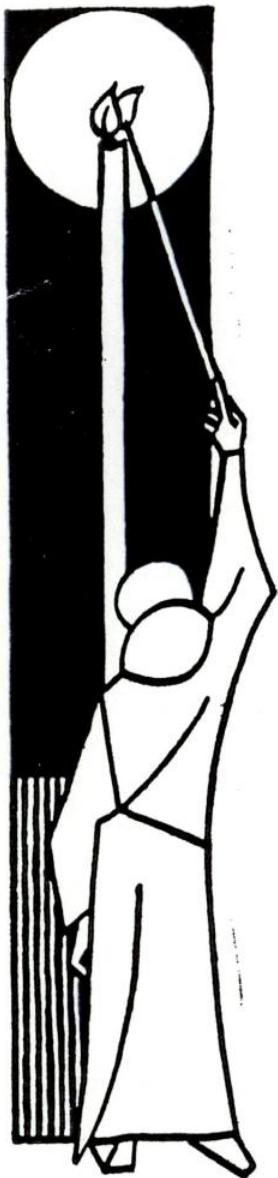


Fig.5 - Line block illustration from 'Midnight'.

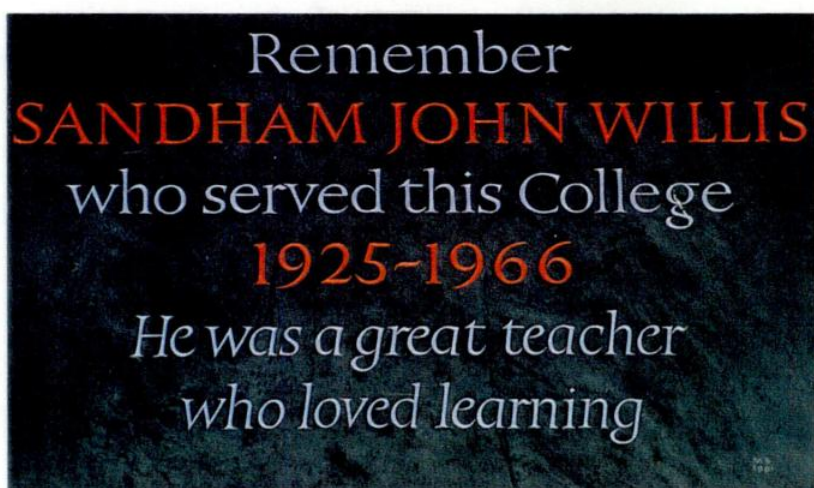


Fig.6 - Plaque from St. Columba College.

This quality followed on in the simple yet powerful motifs that he used on some of his church pieces. Along with the chance find of the book, his natural talent and his good fortune he also brought a love of hard work and a dogged determination to his work.

STYLE OF LETTERING

His work shows that he quickly mastered the classic Roman alphabet but not just in one form. He had a deep knowledge of the bones of it and so could use it in many ways. In the final chapter from Writing & Illuminating & Lettering called 'Inscriptions in Stone' written by Eric Gill, the three forms of the Roman style are set out. These are the ROMAN CAPITALS, the Roman small-letters (normally called 'lowercase') and *Italics*. Gill, himself, used these three forms when designed his own serif typefaces, Perpetua and Felicity. That Biggs mastered all three forms can clearly be seen in his plaque in St. Columba College's Chapel. (Fig.6).

In his following of Gill's philosophy Biggs believed in the legibility of lettering. That's what lettering was for, to get the message across as easily and as quickly as possible. He thought the way to do that was to lay it out in simple ways and that's where the beauty came. If we look first at his gravestone work and compare it with what was going on around him the quality of his work is in no doubt. The Otilie Sophie Simms gravestone is a good example. Biggs carved the top inscription and his assistant, Tom Glendon, carved the bottom one which Biggs had set-out on the stone.(Figs.7&8) Looking carefully you can see the difference in the two hands, but it is one of confidence rather than of technical skill. Glendon said that he was young and relatively new to carving and you can see the lack of confidence in his cutting. Biggs' quality is still there. The Glendon letters look thinner due to the lack of depth in the cut and this causes the spaces between the letters to look slightly too big. This also means that the visual difference between the customary thick and thin strokes



Fig.7 - Simms gravestone - top.

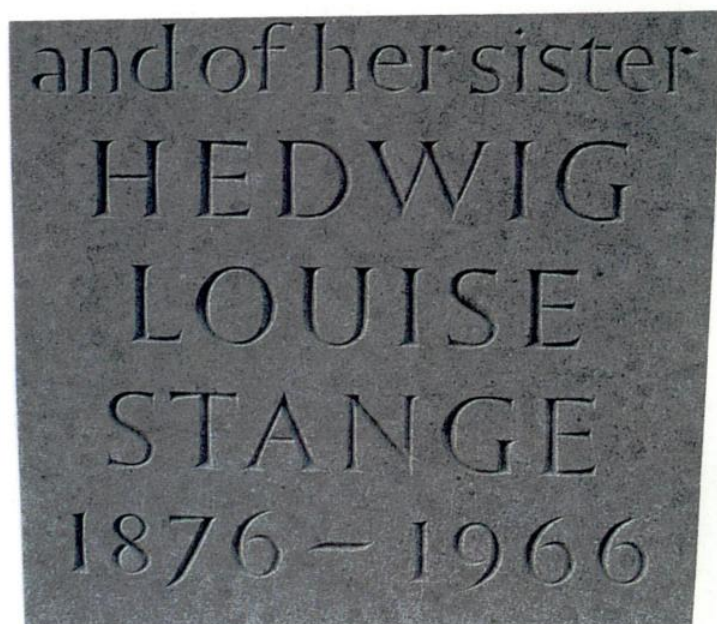


Fig.8 - Simms gravestone - bottom.



Fig.9 - Webb gravestone

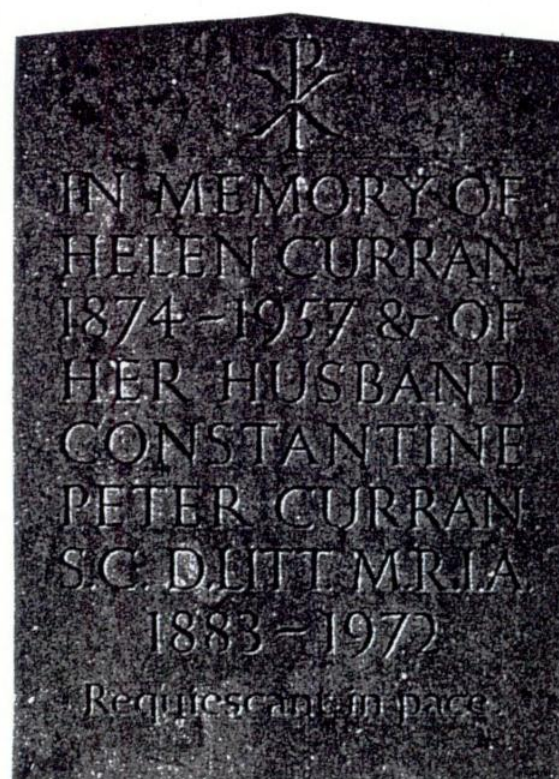


Fig.10 - Curren gravestone.

are someway lessened. This can only be seen with close inspection. The overall effect is still one of lovely laid out inscriptions. Compare that with another stone, very near this one in the same cemetery. Just look at what a mess can be made without skill and aesthetic sensitivity.(Fig.9) A look at this other stone also shows Biggs' mastery over the layout of the inscriptions. Not for him was the fitting in of additions any old way: he used the whole stone to set out the inscription. This comes across in the use of the whole of the face of the Curren gravestone.(Fig.10) It is interesting to read what Biggs' ideas were about gravestones:

A gravestone is hardly a useful object: in so far as the identification of a grave may be called a useful purpose, a standard numbered marker would do very well. It may occasionally be beautiful, but it is not there for beauty's sake; it is not made, first and foremost, to be looked at. Here is something, more or less useless and not necessarily even handsome, for which people will pay good money: what can be their motive?

It is, I am sure, a rhetorical one: the impulse to a momentous event. The act of setting up a stone to mark a grave -to mark, if you like, the ending of a human life - is, in itself, poignantly expressive; all the more so if the stone is inscribed with a name. This motive needs no justification: without rhetoric, the eloquent word or sign, we are less than human. The real significance of a gravestone is its mere presence, a witness to this human impulse.

Does this make art irrelevant to the job of making gravestones? On the contrary, with that gesture we are already committed to it: 'art is a rhetorical activity'. No specific style or format is implied, no particular degree of skill even, so long as it is the maker's best; only that such things as gravestones are appropriate 'work of human hands' and not the product of a factory, for their meaning resides in the living quality of the thing made, not in the elegance or otherwise of a design projected into three dimensions by more or less automatic means. (Biggs, 1975, p.7).

THE IRISH HAND

Some of Biggs' early works were inscriptions using both English and Irish where he used the same style of lettering for both languages. They show clearly that the Irish language is best written in Irish characters rather than trying to use a stiff formal roman style. The pedestal inscriptions on the Yann Goulet statue at the Custom House are a good example of this.(Fig.11) The English inscription looks fine but the Irish one looks a bit forced and is not easy to read. Liam Millar, quoting in his preface to A Gaelic Alphabet, the thoughts of E. W. Lynam who said in 1924:

Anyone who is familiar with Irish in the Irish character will not find not only difficulty but

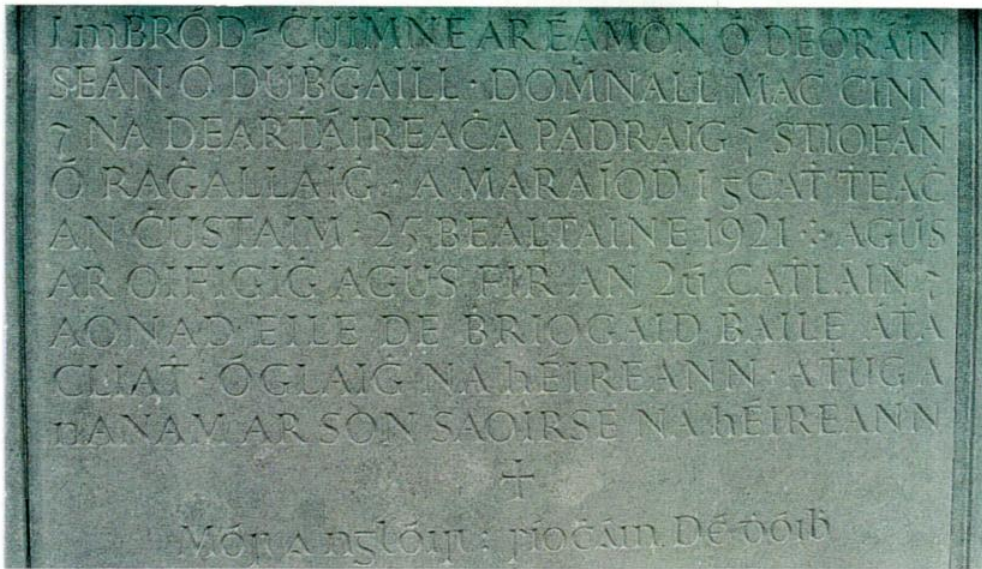
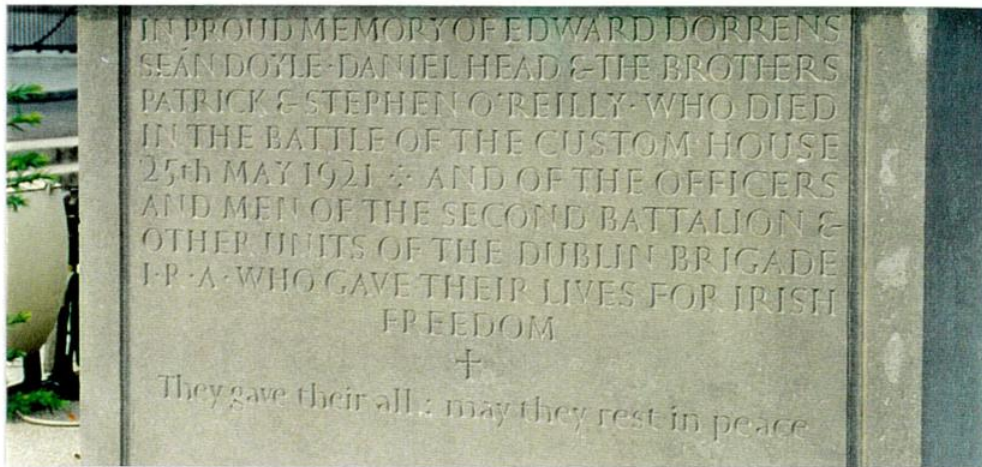


Fig.11 - English and Irish inscriptions on Yann Goulet sculpture.

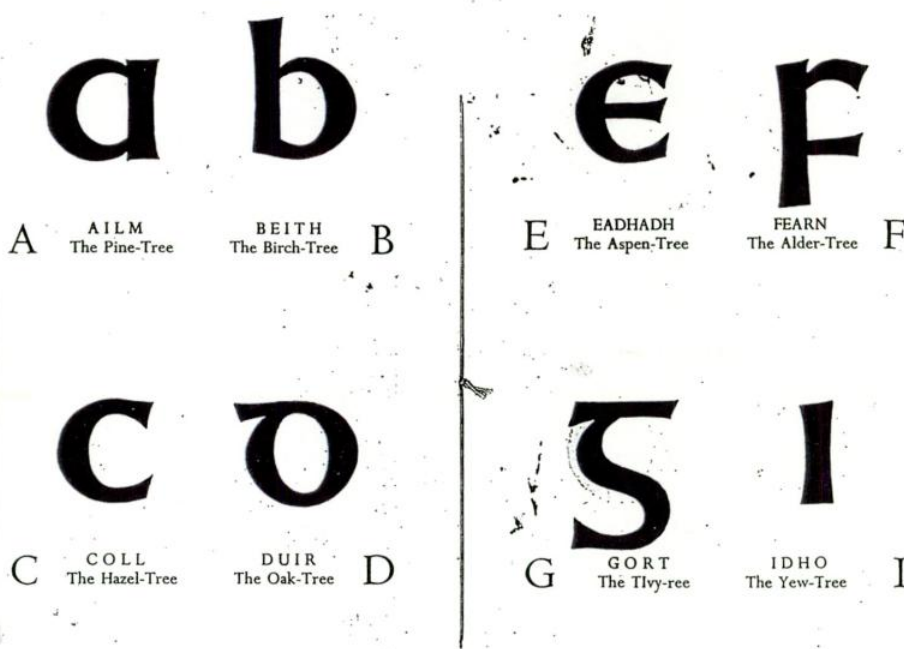


Fig.12 - Letters from A Gaelic Alphabet.

annoyance in reading it in Roman type. The language loses much of its individuality, just as Greek does in Roman type. The sounds of Irish, not well conveyed by Irish spelling are still worst conveyed by a character which has alien and very definite phonetic associations. (Millar, 1960).

The problem is also aggravated by the words being written in capitals as Irish always looks more natural with no distinction between upper and lower case. The work of the old Irish scribes, who used the majuscule style of writing did not use capital letters in their manuscripts. Calligrapher Tim O'Neill writing about this in his book The Irish Hand says that "Majuscule, as the word suggests, looks majestic, round and solid and without distinguishing between capitals and lower case gives a strong horizontal appearance to a page." (O'Neill, 1984, p.57) O'Neill also says that in this country "the allied disciplines of typography and lettercutting evolved from a study of the work of the early scribes." (O'Neill, 1984, p.59)

The memorial wall at Arbour Hill is somewhat similar; it is a very powerful piece of work but lacks the flowing beauty of Irish script. (See LETCat.No.8) This is not so much a direct criticism of Biggs but may have something to do with the taste of the client who commissioned the work. In the case of Arbour Hill, Biggs was angry that the powers-that-be wanted the Irish on the left hand side, as he felt this would be considered to be the more important. And as the original Proclamation was actually written in English he felt that the memorial should be true to this fact. But the client, however, foots the bill. In later work we will see Biggs getting over the problem of the dual language inscriptions.

With other projects where he was allowed to use the Irish character on its own, however, Biggs' mastery of the style is obvious. His early typeface design for Liam Millar's Dolmen Press, A Gaelic Alphabet shows his deep knowledge of the subject. For this he designed and cut the 2" high blocks to print the book. (Fig.12) These appear to be a bit heavy handed but his later work such as the Stations of the Cross for Falcarragh Church, the Garden of Remembrance and the Irish Banknotes show the development of his skill and how he was able



Fig.13 - Falcarragh Slate Station.

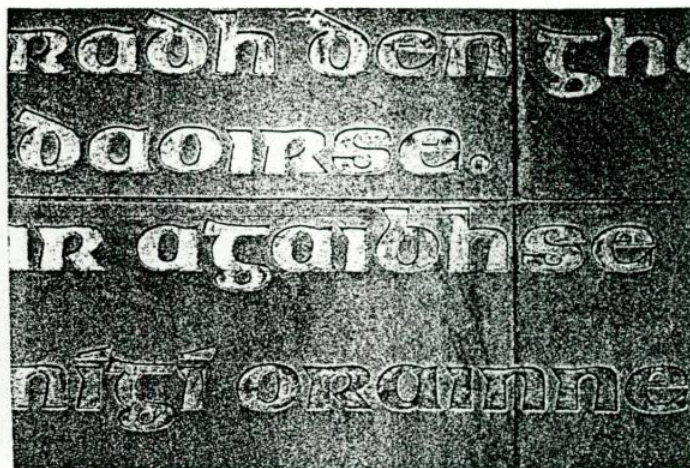


Fig.14 - Letters from the Garden of Remembrance



Fig.15 - Lettering from Irish Banknotes.

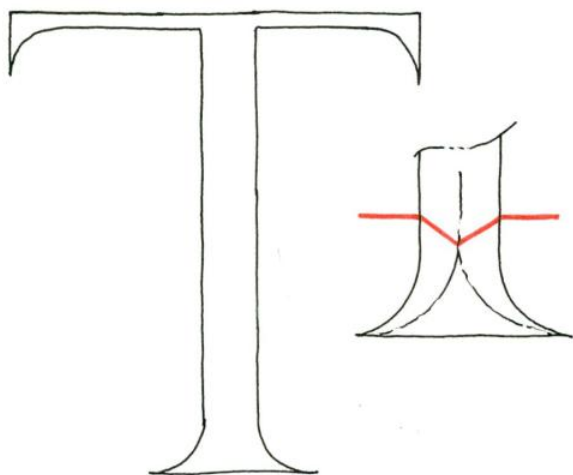


Fig.16 - A serif made with a chisel.

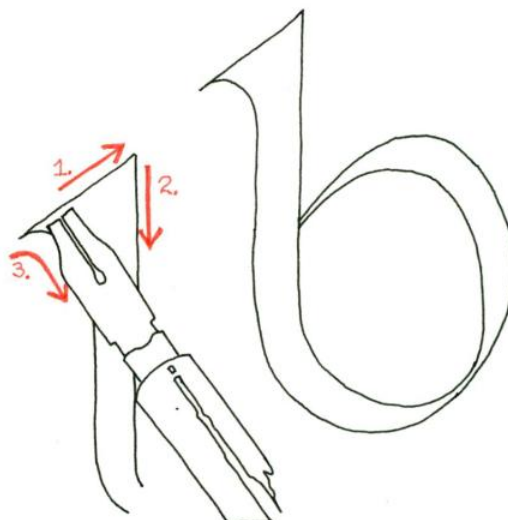


Fig.17 - A serif made with a pen.

to use these ancient letterforms even in a modern context.(Figs.13,14&15) The banknote typeface is a wonderful adaptation of the Book of Kells type with its triangular quill-inspired serifs. Tim O'Neill, the calligrapher, remembers Biggs work and says:

His work is unique. Few have succeeded in adapting historical letterforms as well as he.....Michael had an extraordinary grasp of letters, no doubt influenced by his training in the Eric Gill tradition. He was equally happy and competent carving Greek uncials and Roman capitals as he was adapting insular majuscule to cut into granite. (O'Neill, October 1995).

The carver who works with both classical Roman letters and Irish letters has a problem insofar as these two types of lettering have two different roots.

Classical Roman letters were developed as incised letters in stone with the now familiar serifs being the result of the end stroke of the carver's chisel. Irish majuscule was developed in written form only by the early scribes using pen and ink.(Figs.16&17) Unless the carver has a knowledge and skill of pen lettering it will be very difficult to carve and adapt successful majuscule lettering in stone. A look at Biggs' everyday handwriting will show that he had as great a skill with the pen as with the chisel.(See Appendix I)

Biggs' mastery in all kinds of letters allowed him to be able to adapt them to suit the situation, using italics and condensed letters. Unless one knows about the construction of a letter one cannot hope to be able to adapt it without it looking wrong, that is to say, too thick or thin. It is not a skill learned without knowledge and Biggs kept up his research throughout his life. Two of Biggs' most beautiful inscriptions, those of St. Columba's College Chapel and Terenure Chapel, show a marked influence of the Perpetua and Felicity typefaces, Eric Gill's 20th Century adaptations of the Roman style. Biggs' own development of a distinctive semi-serif letter style is very reminiscent of the early 20th Century faces like Optima or Albertus.(Fig.18) This style is used on his commissions for the Garda Memorial Roll of Honour in the Phoenix Park, and the General Post Office amongst others.(Fig.19)

ABCDEFGH
 abcdefgh

The Optima typeface.

ABCDEFGH
 abcdefgh

Upper- and lower-case letters from the Albertus typeface.

Fig.18 - Optima and Albertus typefaces

THE GENERAL POST OFFICE
 BUILT 1814-18 TO DESIGNS BY
 FRANCIS JOHNSTON RA
 1761-1829 ALTERED AND EN-
 LARGED 1904-16 REOPENED
 MARCH 1916 DESTROYED
 DURING EASTER RISING
 APRIL 1916 REBUILT AND
 REOPENED JULY 1929
 TÓGTA 1814-18 DEARTA AG
 FRANCIS JOHNSTON RA
 1761-1829 ATCÓIRITHE AGUS
 MEADAITHE Ó 1904-1916
 ATOSCAILTE MÁRTA 1916
 MILLTE I RÍE ÉIRÍ AMAC NA
 CÁSCA AIBREÁN 1916 ATÓGTA
 AGUS ATOSCAILTE IÚIL 1929

Fig.19 - Lettering from the GPO.

HENRY PHELAN, G
 JAMES WOODS, SE
 PATRICK JOSEPH O'H
 THOMAS GERALD C

anraoi ó faoláin, t
 séamas ó caoilte,
 pádraig ó hallmura
 Tomás ó trífin, sá

Fig.20 - Lettering from the Garda Roll of Honour

The Garda Roll of Honour is interesting because here Biggs has solved the problem of doing inscriptions in two languages. The English version, done in this semi-serif rounded style, is sympathetic to the use of the equally rounded majuscule form. Both are easy to read and don't look out of place together even though the English part is done in all capitals and the Irish is all in lower case. This is due in part to the similar slightly widened ends to the letter strokes. (Fig.20)

USE OF MATERIALS

The right materials were very important to Michael Biggs and he did not like what he saw of society's lack of taste and knowledge in this area. During the 1973 TV programme Michael Biggs - Artist in Stone Biggs said:

We have lost the feeling of the material itself. The loss of that contributes a little to the world we have where we hardly feel the materiality of the world. It's called a materialistic age and perhaps that is true and one of the symptoms of that, paradoxically enough, is that people don't have, any more, the feeling of the solid material reality of things. It's a throw away age, a disposable age. I think if things are to have a spiritual quality they must first of all have a material quality and you feel that character in the thing.

That is the difference between a good plank of wood and a piece of chipboard the same size which is ultimately made of wood. But it has been pulped and ground until it isn't any longer itself. It is simply a kind of entity which has weight and hardness, durability and so on but it is not a material. It is not a thing that the mind grasps. And you can never say that I've got a lovely piece of chipboard, a really beautiful piece. (Mulholland, 1979, Video).

Biggs had a great knowledge of all kinds of different types of stone. He used Portland Stone, Hopton Wood Stone, Slate, White Marble and Limestone to great advantage. However, his favourite stone was granite and he made brilliant use of its qualities with many of his sculptural church pieces, although it does not lend itself easily to the cutting of lettering. Some of his less successful lettering pieces are cut from granite such as the Gwynne gravestone and the fountain in Kennedy Park, Wexford. (Figs.21&22) The Gwynne stone is striking to look at but is not easy to read and the lettering on the Kennedy Park fountain is equally difficult when the stone is wet as it is when the fountain itself is on. Another material that is better suited to mass sculpture rather than inscriptional

work is Travertine marble. The low light in Monaghan Cathedral makes the raised lettering on the Chapel of Reconciliation difficult to see even though the faces of the letters are polished with the background left natural. It is perhaps saved by the contemplative nature of the setting insofar as it does not need to be read quickly by passers-by. (Fig.23) However, the selection of the material may be the wish of the client rather than the decision of the artist which is sometimes the bane of the designer. Biggs himself said that "such a stone as granite, invaluable for its brightness and texture, does not lend itself to small detail". (Biggs, 1975, p.10).

LAYOUT AND FORM

In her tribute to Michael Biggs in 4-D magazine a year after he died, the sculptor Clodna Cussen says of Biggs' work:

In the huge amount of lettering he did, as in his sculpture, form was all-important as was the depth of the line and the angle of the cut. Clarity, simplicity and gracefulness are the hallmarks of a Michael Biggs job.....He belonged to a generation that had no feeling for the use of patterning or decoration, line and form were all" (Cussen, 1995)

While this is mostly the case, I feel that Biggs did not altogether reject decoration although that might not have been what he called it. The strong yet simple motifs that he used in his sanctuary furnishings are very powerful statements of purpose, such as the tree of life and the loaves and fishes in Gonzaga College Chapel and Presentation Convent, Kildare, but it is true that he did not believe in unnecessary decoration or pattern for their sake alone. (Fig.24)

For his skill at layout you just need to look at his plaques in St. Columba's and Terenure as well as the lovely use of space on the Curren gravestone.

(See LETCat.No.24) Another interesting layout of letters which Biggs used on the Senior Prefect boards in the Dining Hall of St. Columba's College is to my mind better than just a plain listing with each name and year under each other. Biggs' solution is more reminiscent of the flow of school life, although not to everybody's taste. The writing on the boards is continuous with the yearly divisions

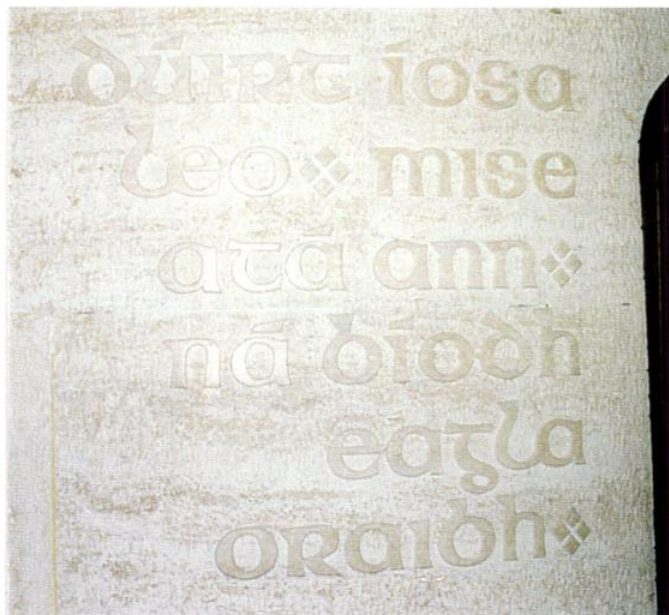


Fig.23 - Lettering from Monaghan Cathedral.



Fig.24 - Tree of Life from Gonzaga College.



Fig.24 - Loaves and fishes from Presentation Convent, Kildare.

indicated by using a different colour for the numbers and the names.(Fig.25)

Biggs himself said of layout and the work of the lettercutter:

An alphabet is a set of abstract signs, various in shape but unified by a common formal principle. Arrangement, spacing, endless coaxing are all part of his day's work, the object being a certain clarity, breadth and simplicity, nothing cramped or uneasy, everything finding its right place within the pattern; the whole thing an exercise in combinations and relationships, worked out on a single slab of stone. And all because there is something to be said - not stridently but effectively, as if it was worth saying. (Biggs, 1975, p.10)

Cussen also said that "Michael understood abstractions," and for the sheer simplicity of a celtic cross look at the Farrell gravestone.(see LETCat.No.14)

HIS LEGACY

Directly Biggs influenced both Tom Glendon, his assistant, and Tom Little, who was one of the pupils who attended the classes that Biggs ran in Kilternan in the early 1980s. They are both still working and Glendon's recent jobs for the Dublin Corporation in Wood Quay and RTE in Donnybrook both used Biggs' Irish alphabet. Indeed there is a sample granite alphabet that Biggs cut in the family home in Dundrum. Biggs' wife Frances, said that Michael felt it should have been copied and put in all workshops in Ireland and used to teach the next generation and improve standards. Unfortunately it is probably too late. As Glendon told me when we first met that he felt Michael Biggs was the last of a generation of stone cutters and that he, himself, was therefore a bit of a dinosaur when it came to hand-cut stone lettering. There may be others who went to Biggs' classes who are still working, but Tom Little is the best known. Little worked in Biggs' workshop on and off over the years helping out with some of Biggs' projects but now lives in Cork. His great skill is carving slate and you need to look no further than the slate Stations for Falcarragh to see the beautiful outcome of the marriage of Biggs' lettering and Little's skill.(See page 116) It is such a pity that these are no longer in the church and it is hoped that the local rumour that they were moved to the church on Tory Island turns out to be true and that they are still in existence.(See Fig.13) Many others working in the area of lettering and design know of Biggs' work, including cal-

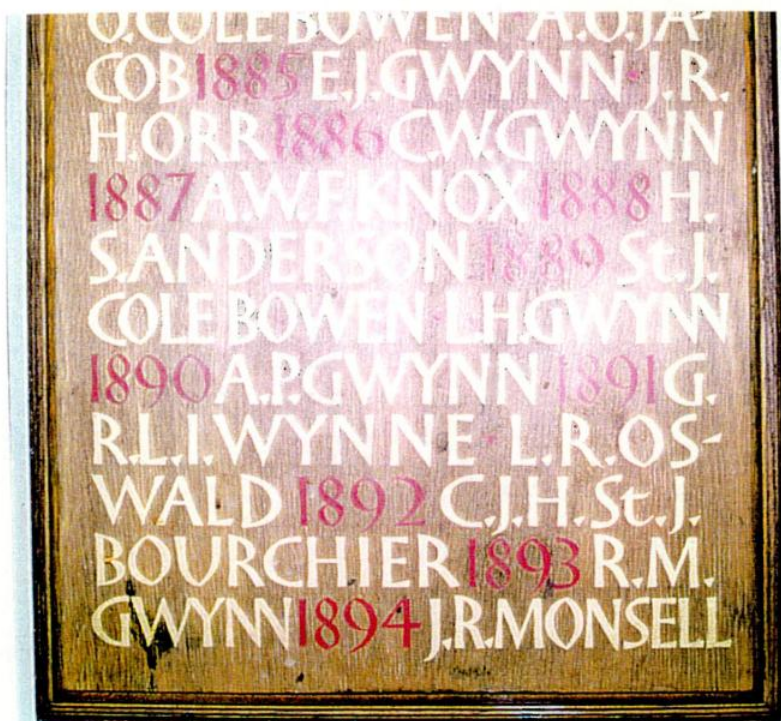


Fig.25 - Dining Hall boards from St. Columba College.

ligraphers Denis Brown and Tim O'Neill, both of whom regard his work very highly. Biggs had a philosophy of hard work and perfection and whoever he taught, whether in formal classes or just by informal contact, would have gained much for their own lives. As Cussen says that:

Michael looked for perfection. You could not imagine him walking away from a job saying 't'will do'. He finished everything with dedication, no half measures, no rushed jobs, only the most exact - ing criteria for everything. (Cussen, 1995)

**CATALOGUE OF
CHURCH WORK**

Catalogue of Church Work Introduction

This Catalogue is as complete a list as possible of the church sculptural work and the church graphic work of Michael Biggs. The entries are as comprehensive as possible and I have tried to personally visit each and every location but due to the time constraints this has not always been possible. I also tried to locate as much of the graphic work as possible and record it, in photocopy form, in the catalogue.

SOURCES

The list was put together initially from the book CONTEMPORARY IRISH CHURCH ARCHITECTURE by Richard Hurley and Wilfrid Cantwell. Both of these architects also helped on a personal basis with details of other jobs and some of Biggs' drawings. The other artists who worked on many of these churches often added to the list in their replies to my letters. My correspondence with historian and writer Peter Harbison and the photocopy of part of the letter that Biggs had sent to him on the occasion of the revising and updating of The Shell Guide to Ireland helped with locations and other details. A copy of this letter can be found in the appendices.

LOCATIONS

The general locations are given on the Maps at the beginning of the catalogue and more details given in each entry. I have not included actual road numbers which are subject to change but I have tried to indicate the route to be taken from the nearest town to help with locating the actual work itself. If the work is located within a particular part of an institution or location I have added that information as well. Also, if it is not normally open to the general public I have also noted that fact.

DATING, LAYOUT & NUMBERING OF CATALOGUE

I have laid out the Catalogue, where possible, in chronological order by date. The Shell letter proved useful here. Where the date of a work is not known it has been added into the most appropriate place. Where this was not possible it has been added in at the end. All the works are numbered CHCat.No. 1 - 23.

ATTRIBUTION OF THE WORKS

I have noted the attribution, where known, as follows:

- Those pieces designed and worked by Biggs.
- Those pieces designed by Biggs but worked by others.

There are very few pieces actually made by Biggs himself. They are very large stone pieces of work and are cheaper being made by stonemasons rather than by the designer himself. (See note on page 3 of the Shell letter in Appendix I)

PHOTOGRAPHY

All the photographs in the Catalogue have been taken by me in the last year unless otherwise indicated in the text.

MEASUREMENTS

All measurements throughout the Catalogue are in inches which is the system Biggs would have used himself. All measurements are given by width, depth and height. Overall sizes are given, fractions excluded.

MEDIA

Where it is known I have included the details of the medium of the works. Although Biggs' favourite stone was granite the architects concerned may have had some say in the materials used so not all the church sculptures are made from granite but from other types of stone. There are also a few pieces made from wood.

TERMINOLOGY

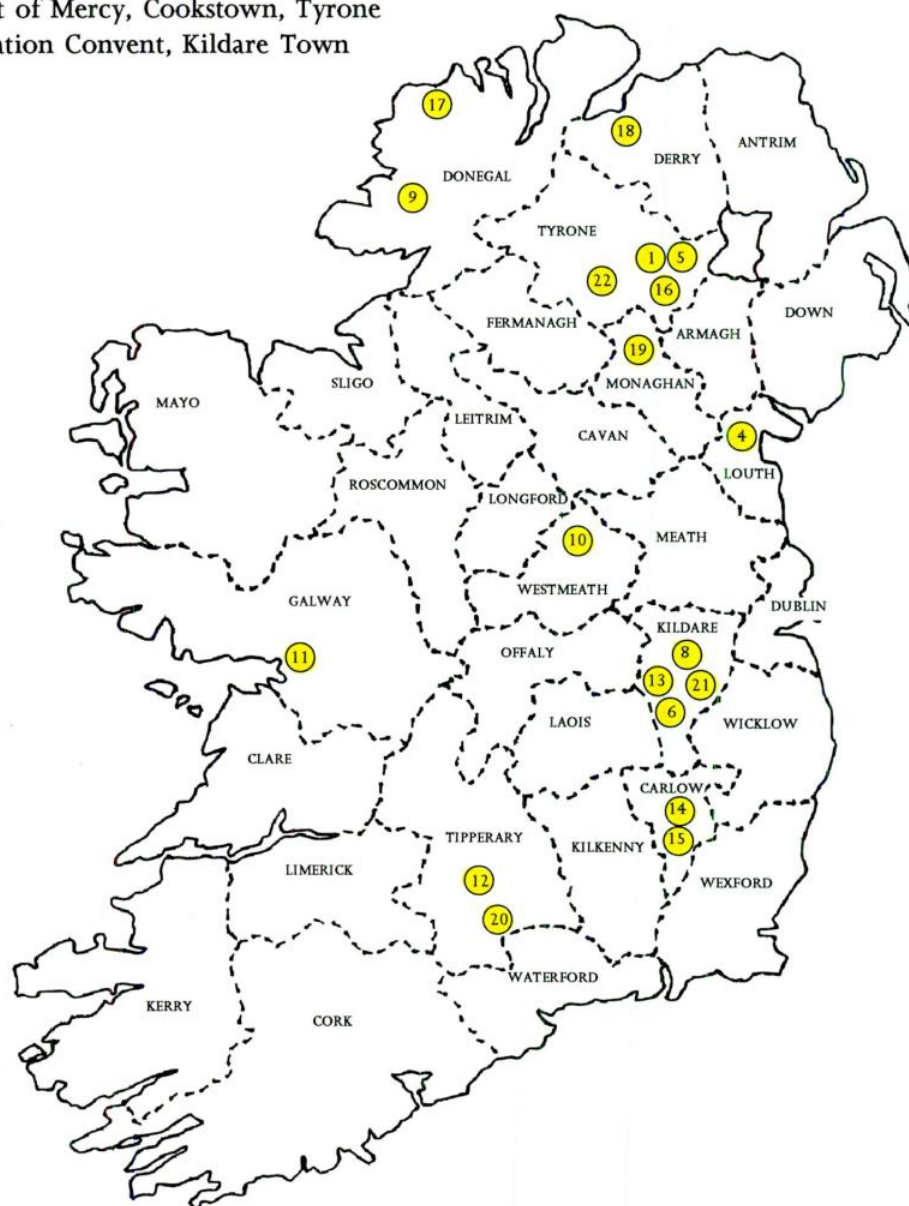
Sanctuary furnishings usually consist of an altar, an ambo, a sedilia, the base or shelf for the tabernacle and the font. An ambo is a type of pulpit or lecturn and the sedilia is a seat for the celebrant of the Mass. In Monaghan Cathedral there is also the Bishop's throne, the Chapel of Reconciliation, which is a small round free-standing confessional and an aumbry, a recess for church vessels.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Where possible I have added any additional information which is of interest about a particular piece of work - whether, for instance, it has been changed since it was originally executed. Where necessary the names of other artists or the architect concerned have been added when the project was a joint one in which Biggs was involved in only one aspect of the whole.

MAP LOCATIONS (COUNTRYWIDE)

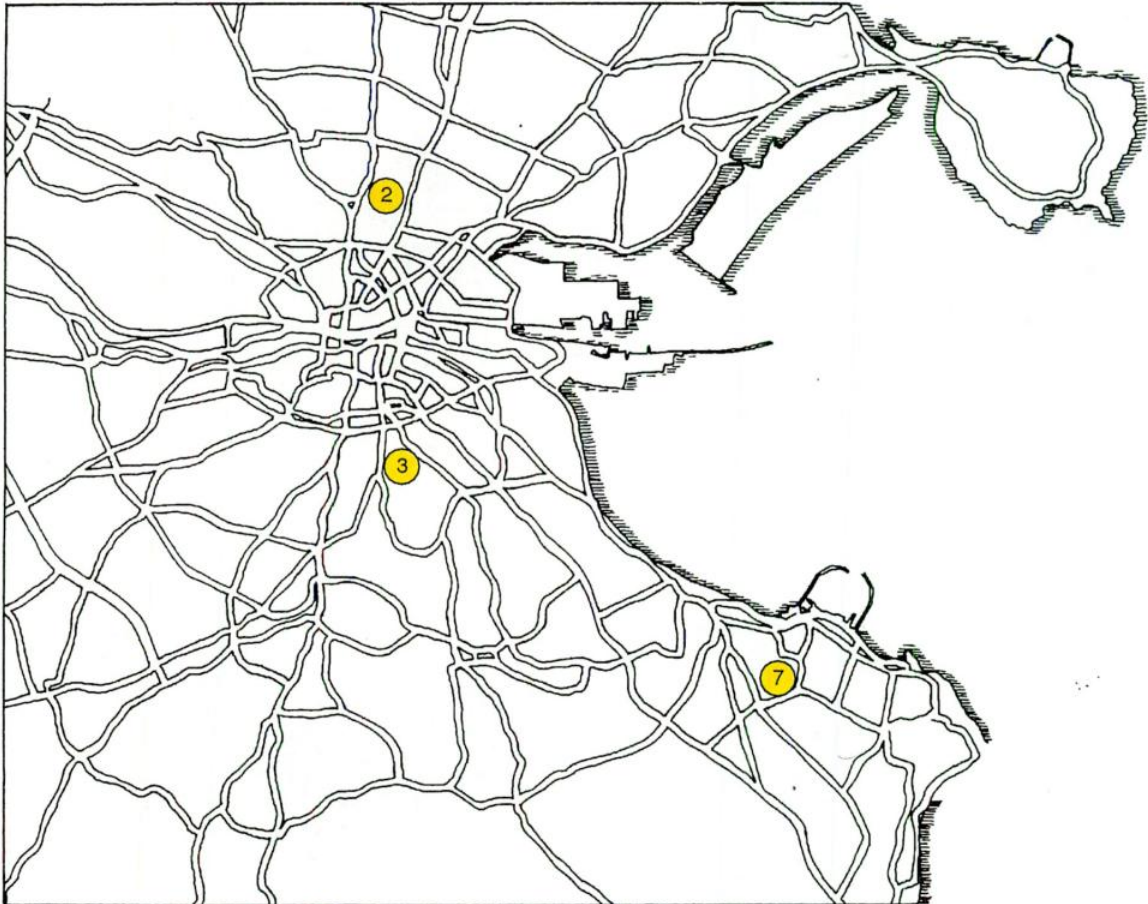
CHCat.No.1. Convent of Mercy, Cookstown, Tyrone
 CHCat.No.4. Holy Redeemer Church, Dundalk, Louth
 CHCat.No.5. Convent of Mercy, Cookstown, Tyrone
 CHCat.No.6. Presentation Convent, Kildare Town



CHCat.No.8. Nativity Church, Newtown, Kildare
 CHCat.No.9. St Conal's Church, Glenties, Donegal
 CHCat.No.10. St. Fechin's Church, Fore, Westmeath
 CHCat.No.11. St. Oliver's Church, Renmore, Galway
 CHCat.No.12. Holy Cross Abbey, Thurles, Tipperary
 CHCat.No.13. Parish Church, Rathangan, Kildare
 CHCat.No.14. Benny Kerry Church, Carlow
 CHCat.No.15. Ballinkillen Church, Carlow

CHCat.No.16. Trinity Church, Coalisland, Tyrone
 CHCat.No.17. St Fionan's Church, Falcarragh, Donegal
 CHCat.No.18. St. Oliver's Church, Clady, Derry
 CHCat.No.19. Monaghan Cathedral, Monaghan
 CHCat.No.20. St. Mary's Church, Clonmel, Tipperary
 CHCat.No.21. SS Mary & David Church, Naas, Kildare
 CHCat.No.22. St. Davog's Church, Dromore, Tyrone
 CHCat.No.23. Miscellaneous church graphic work

MAP LOCATION
(DUBLIN AREA)



CHCat.No.2. St. Patrick's College Chapel, Drumcondra, Dublin

CHCat.No.3. Gonzaga College Chapel, Ranelagh, Dublin

CHCat.No.7. St. Michael's, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin



CHCat.No.1 Altar in the Chapel in the Convent of Mercy, Cookstown, Co. Tyrone

Altar, Convent of Mercy Cookstown, Co Tyrone

CHCat.No.1

DATE:1965

LOCATION: On the left side of the Main Street of Cookstown - about half way up -
Co. Tyrone

MEDIUM: Granite

SIZE: ALTAR: 39.5 x 92.5 x 46

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: This Altar was the first one designed by Biggs for the architect Laurence McConville who was adding the Chapel and a number of separate cells to the original convent. Biggs designed and carved the decoration himself. The Chapel is not open to the public.

Other artists: Patrick McElroy, Benedict Tutty and Patrick Pye.



CHCat.No.2 Sanctuary furnishing in St. Patrick's Training College, Drumcondra, Co. Dublin.

Sanctuary furnishings, Chapel at St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Co. Dublin.

CHCat.No.2

DATE: 1966

LOCATION: St. Patrick's Training College Chapel, Drumcondra Road Upper, Dublin

MEDIUM: Granite

SIZE: ALTAR: 36 x 89 x 53

AMBO: 43 x 26 x 17

TABERNACLE BASE: 36 x 62 x 39

SIDE ALTARS: 36 x 62 x 32

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: architects: Robinson, O'Keefe and Devane. Other artists: Nell Murphy, Gabrielle Loire, Patrick Pye, Benedict Tutty and Christopher Ryan.





CHCat.No.3 Sanctuary furnishings in Gonzaga College Chapel, Co. Dublin.

**Sanctuary furnishings,
Gonzaga College Chapel, Co. Dublin**

CHCat.No.3

DATE: 1967

LOCATION: Gonzaga College, Ranelagh, Dublin 6

MEDIUM: Polished Limestone

SIZE: ALTAR: 36 x 45 x 30

AMBO: 40 x 18 x 15

TABERNACLE BASE: 45 x 18 x 12

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Other artists: Frances Biggs and Patrick McElroy.



CHCat.No.4 Baptismal font, Church of the Redeemer, Co. Louth

Baptismal font, Church of the Redeemer, Dundalk, Co Louth

CHCat.No.4

DATE: 1968

LOCATION: To the West of the town of Dundalk in an area call Ard Easmainn.

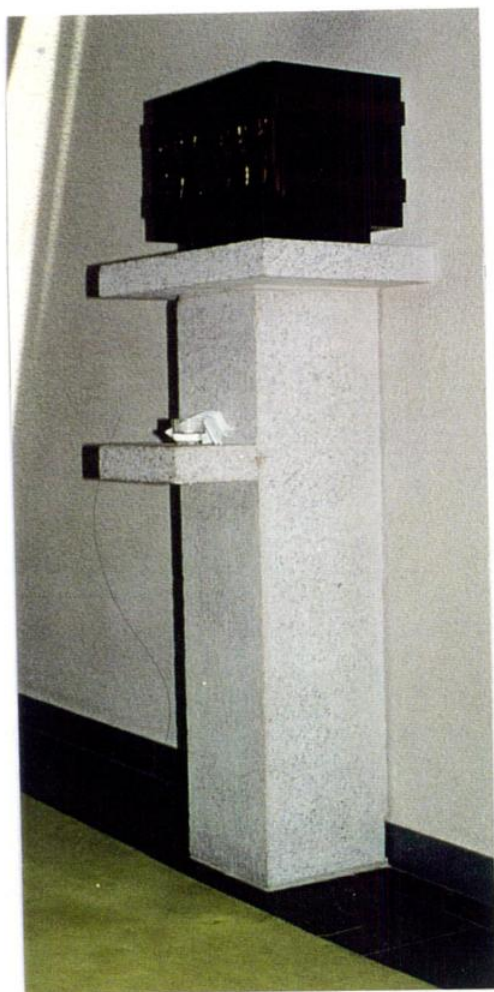
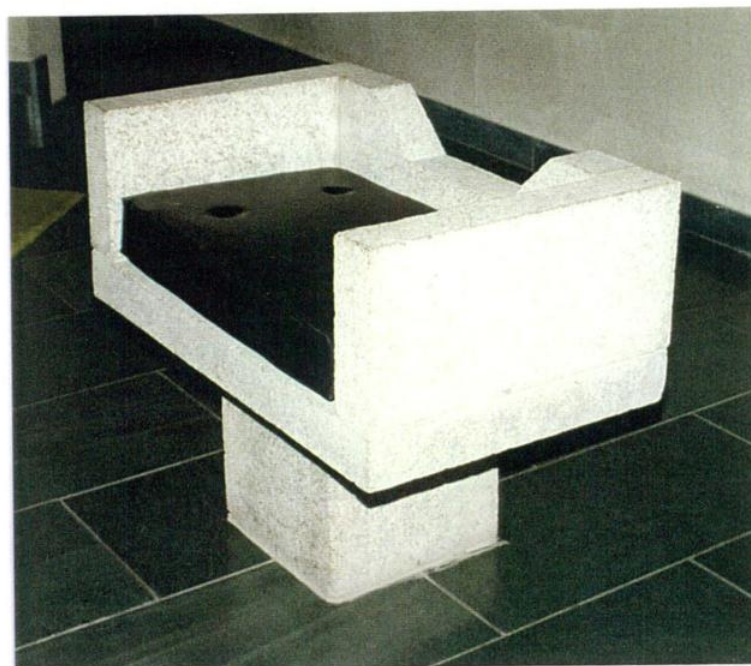
MEDIUM: Granite and mosaic

SIZE: FONT: 36 x 66 x 66

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

This was a joint project with his wife, Frances who did the mosaic lining for the font and also the mosaic around the skylight over the font. It is located in the round foyer at the front of this unusual oval shaped church. The font itself was designed and made by Michael. Architects: F.M. Corr & Associates. Other artists: Imogen Stuart, Frank Morris, Gabriel Loire, Ray Carroll and Oisín Kelly.





CHCat.No.5

Additional sanctuary furnishings, Convent of Mercy, Co. Tyrone.

Additional Sanctuary furnishings Convent of Mercy, Co. Tyrone

CHCat.No.5

DATE: 1970

LOCATION: On the left side of the Main Street of Cookstown - about half way up - Co. Tyrone

MEDIUM: Granite

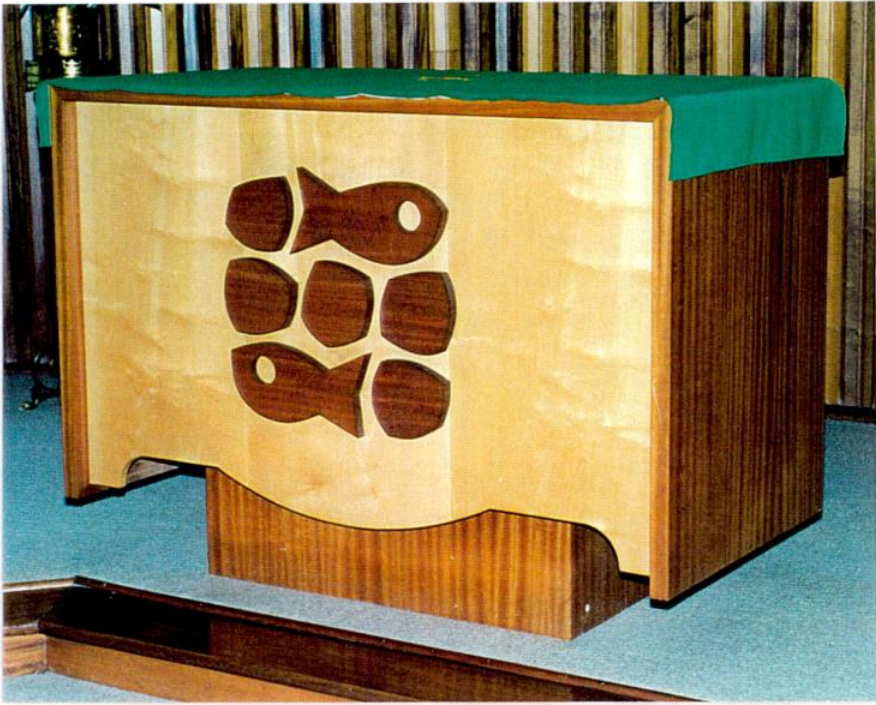
SIZE: AMBO: 51.5 x 24 x 28

SEDILIA: 27 x 34 x 21

TABERNACLE BASE: 54 x 28 x 17

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Biggs designed the pieces but only carved the decorations.





CHCat.No.6 Sanctuary furnishings, Presentation Convent, Kildare Town.

Sanctuary furnishings, Presentation Convent, Kildare Town

CHCat.No.6

DATE: 1972

LOCATION: Coming into Kildare town from Dublin take the road between the Hotel and the Petrol Station. The Convent is located just beyond the school buildings.

MEDIUM: Wood

SIZE: ALTAR: 40 x 55 x 27.5AMBO: 45 x 21 x 17SEDILIA: 17 x 27.5 x 17

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: It is not known whether Michael actually made these pieces or just designed them but it is probable that he carved the wooden decorations himself.





Sanctuary furnishings, St. Michael's' Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin

ChCat.No.7

DATE: 1973

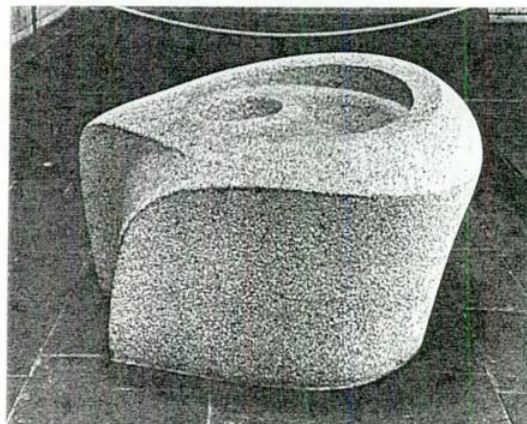
LOCATION: Located at the corner of George's Street Lower and Marine Road.

MEDIUM: Granite

SIZE: I was unable to measure these pieces .

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: These pieces were made for the reconstruction of the church after a fire that destroyed all of the old church except for the bell-tower. They were the main subject of the 1973 RTE programme: Michael Biggs - Artist in Stone. These pieces were designed and worked by Biggs.

Architect: Pearse McKenna. Other artists: Richard Enda King, Imogen Stuart, Yvonne Jammet and Patrick Pye.





CHCat.No.8 — Sanctuary furnishings for the Church of the Nativity, Co. Kildare

Sanctuary furnishings, Church of the Nativity Newtown, Co Kildare

CHCat.No.8

DATE: 1974

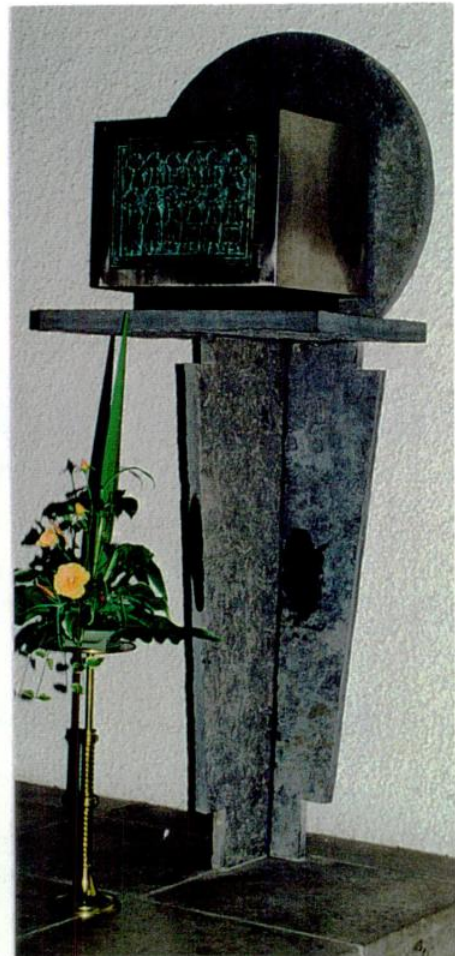
LOCATION: Four miles west of the town of Kilcock, close to the area of Newtown.

MEDIUM: Granite

SIZE: ALTAR: 37 x 60 x 60AMBO: 46 x 26.5 x 21.5SEDILIA: 18 x 39 x 32.5TABERNACLE BASE: 54 x 25 x 25FONT: 21 x 42 x 42

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Architects: Tyndall, Hogan & Hurley. Other Artists: Bernadette Madden, Patrick McElroy, Benedict Tutty. This new church replaced the old one which had fallen into total disrepair with only the tower being retained and the new church built close-by.





CHCat.No.9 Sanctuary furnishings for St. Conal's Church, Co. Donegal.

Sanctuary furnishings, St. Conal's Glenties, Co. Donegal

CHCat.No.9

DATE: 1974

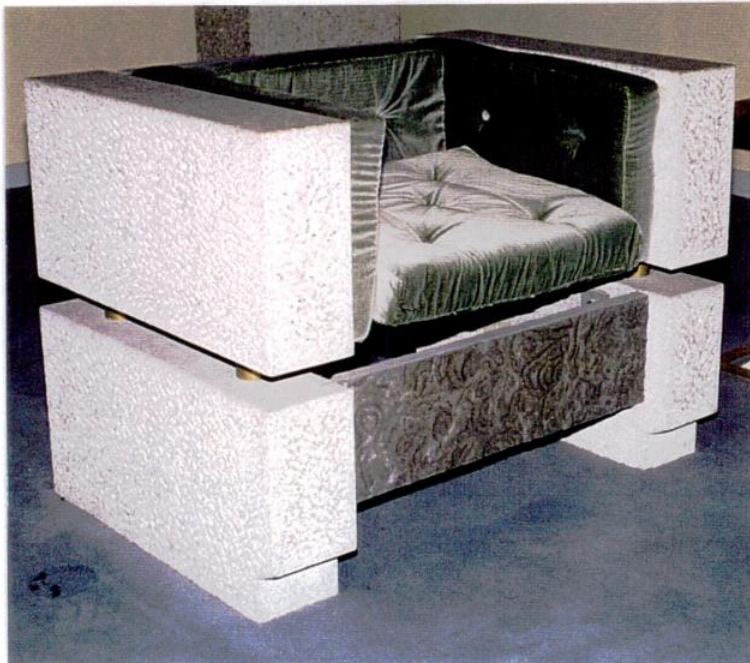
LOCATION: On the outskirts of the town of Glenties which is one the Ardara to Ballybofey Road, Co. Donegal

MEDIUM: Liscannor Stone Slabs

MAIN CHAPELSIZE: ALTAR: 36 x 72 x 36AMBO: 53 x 30 x 24.SEDILIA: 24 x 29 x 29FONT: 33.5 x 37 x 57LADY CHAPELSIZE: ALTAR: 36 x 60 x 36AMBO: 44.5 x 24 x 18SEDILIA: 18 x diameter 25TABERNACLE BASE: 83 x 32 x 20

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Architect: Liam McCormick. Shows Biggs' knowledge of stone because Liscannor cannot be carved like granite and slabs are the best way to use it to create 3-D form. Other artists: Imogen Stuart, Ruth Brandt, Nell Murphy.





CHCat.No.10 Sanctuary furnishings for St. Fechin's Church, Co. Westmeath.

Sanctuary furnishings, St. Fechin's Church Fore, Co. Westmeath

CHCat.No.10

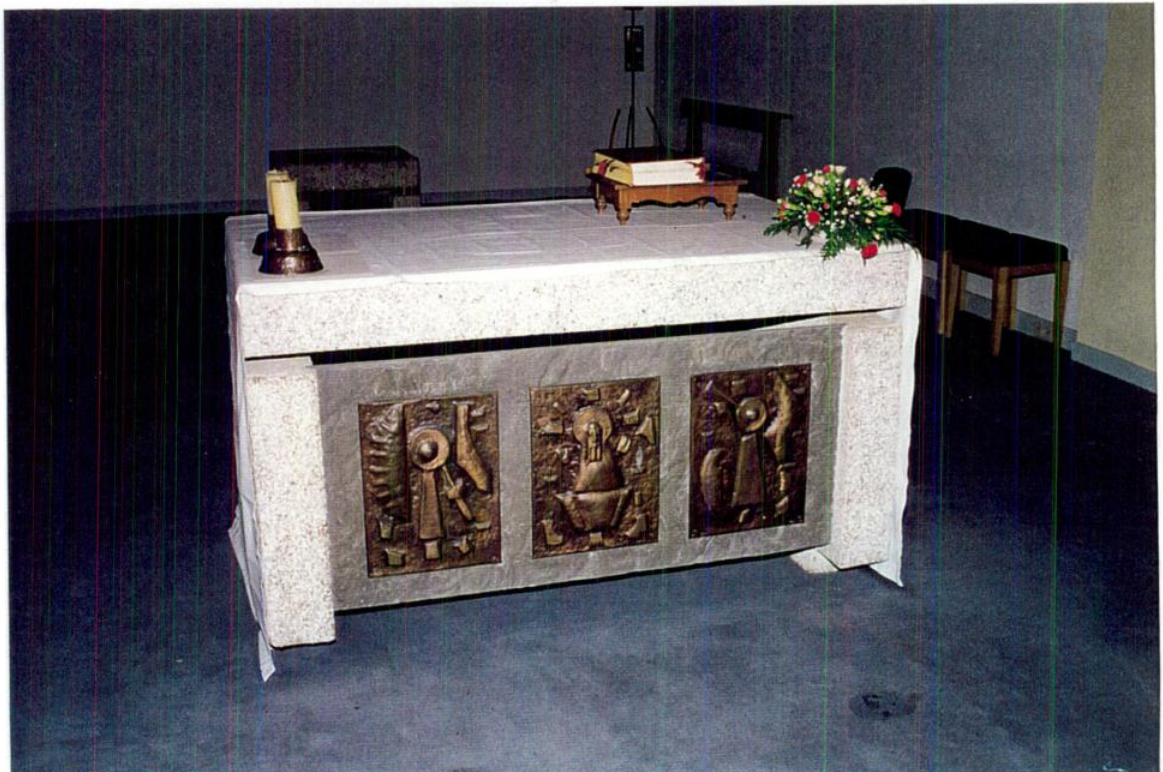
DATE: 1975

LOCATION: To the east of the village of Fore in Co. Westmeath.

MEDIUM: Granite Slabs with inset rough Slate

SIZE: ALTAR: 35 x 59 x 36AMBO: 45 x 24 x 18SEDILIA: 29 x 40 x 28TABERNACLE BASE: 48 x 24 x 13FONT: 20 x 30 x 30

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Architects: Tyndall, Hogan & Hurley. Other artist: Patrick McElroy.



Sanctuary furnishings, St. Oliver's Church Renmore, Co. Galway

CHCat.No.11

DATE: 1975

LOCATION: One mile North-east of Galway City in the town of Renmore.

MEDIUM: unknown

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Architect: Patrick Sheahan. Other Artist: Frances Biggs. I was unable to visit this church so there are no photographs or dimensions.



CHCat.No.12 Sanctuary furnishings for Holy Cross Abbey, Co. Tipperary.

Sanctuary furnishings, Holy Cross Abbey Thurles, Co. Tipperary

CHCat.No.12

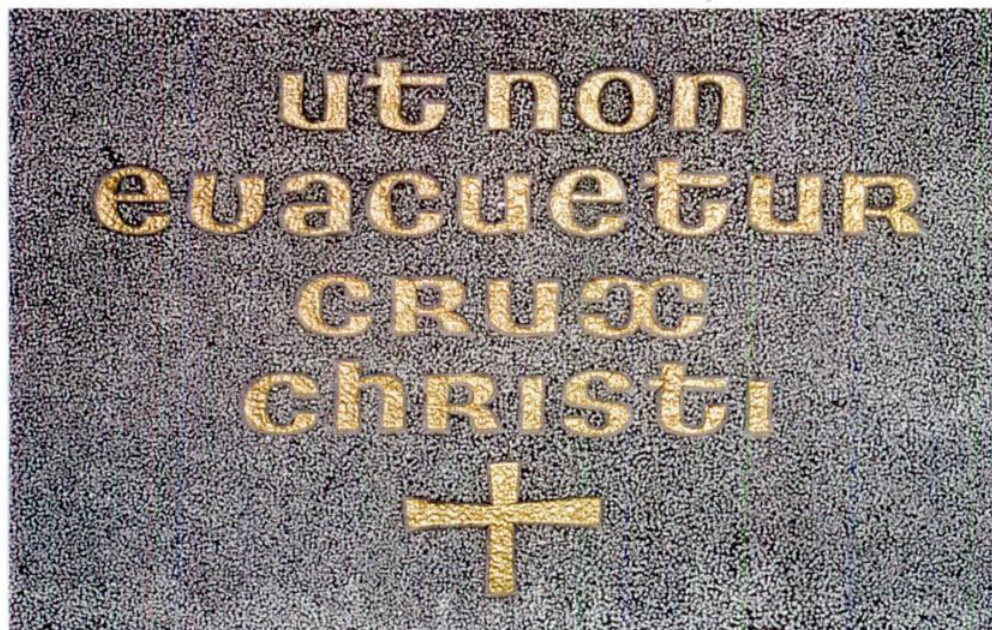
DATE: 1975

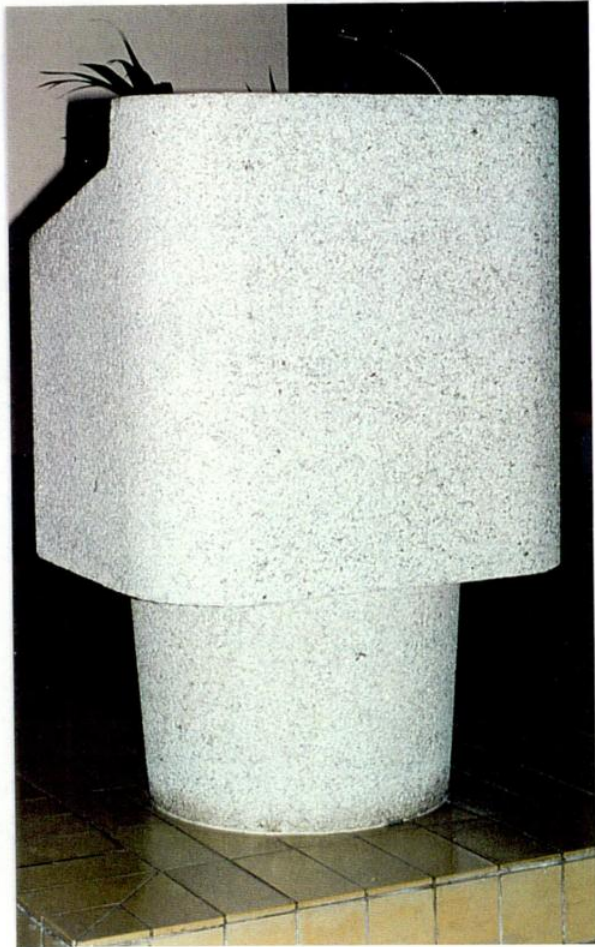
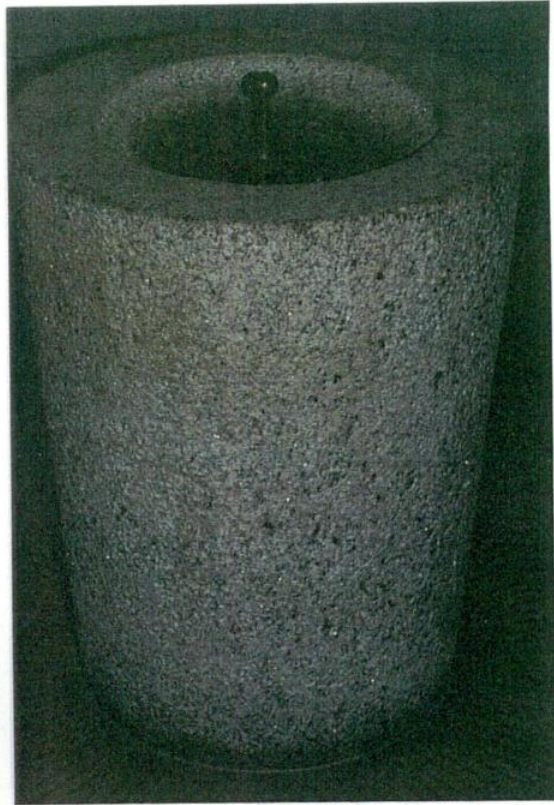
LOCATION: Close to the town of Thurles, Tipperary on the banks of the river Suir off the main road from Thurles to Cashel.

MEDIUM: Limestone

SIZE: ALTAR: 66 x 38 x 41AMBO: 25 x 17 x 50SEDILIA: 33 x 22 x 28TABERNACLE BASE: 33 x 28 x 42

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: The Abbey was re-ordered after the restoration of 1969-1975. Biggs designed the pieces but only cut the decoration himself. Architect: Percy le Clerc. Other artists: Richard King and Bernadette Madden.





CHCat.No.13 Sanctuary furnishings for the Parish Church, Rathangan, Co. Kildare.

Sanctuary furnishings, Parish Church Rathangan, Co. Kildare

CHCat.No.13

DATE: 1976

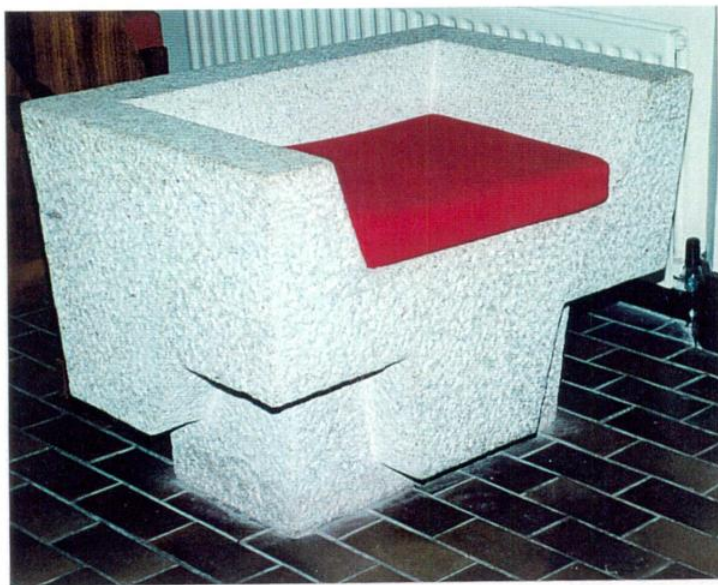
LOCATION: In the town of Rathangan, Co. Kildare.

MEDIUM: Granite

SIZE: ALTAR: 37 x 78 x 35.5AMBO: 47.5 x 31 x 26TABERNACLE BASE: 53 x 31.5 x 25.5FONT: 32 x diameter 25.5

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Other artists: Patrick McElroy and Bernadette Madden.





CHCat.No.14 Sanctuary furnishings for Bennekerry Church, Co. Carlow.

Sanctuary furnishings Bennekerry Church, Co. Carlow

CHCat.No.14

DATE: 1978

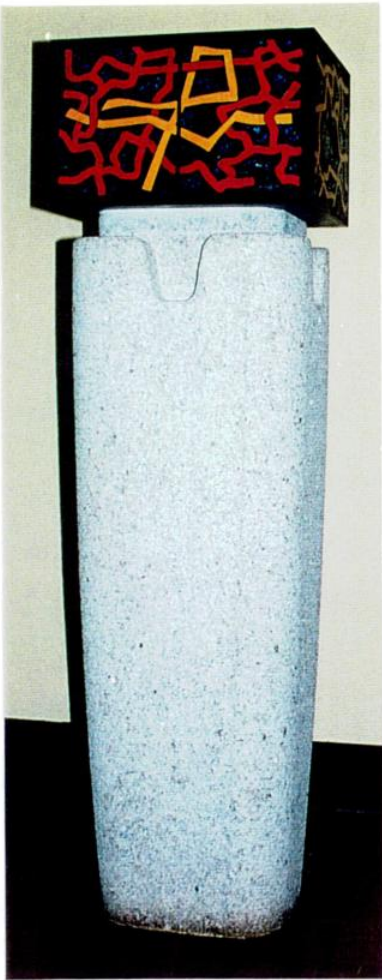
LOCATION: Benny Kerry is signposted, 1 mile off the road from Tullow to Carlow.

MEDIUM: Granite

SIZE: ALTAR: 36 x 60 x 36AMBO: 84 x 30 x 23SEDILIA: 25.5 x 36 x 24TABERNACLE BASE: 4 x 48 x 8 (Shelf)FONT: 33 x 27 x 27

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Other artists: Patrick McElroy and Bernadette Madden.





CHCat.No.15 Sanctuary furnishings for Ballinkillen Church, Co. Carlow.

Sanctuary furnishings Ballinkillen Church, Co. Carlow

CHCat.No.15

DATE: 1980

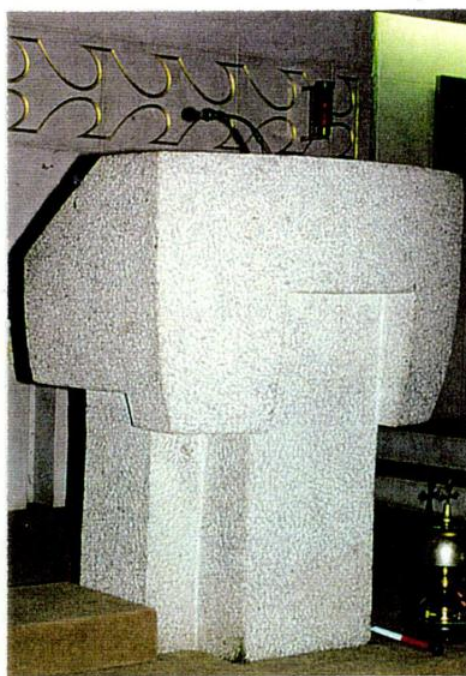
LOCATION: Two miles south of Muine Bheag, Co. Carlow

MEDIUM: Granite

SIZE: ALTAR: 36.5 x 55.5 x 27AMBO: 44.5 x 24 x 19.5SEDILIA: 20.5 x 23 x 23TABERNACLE BASE: 57 x 15.5 x 16.5FONT: 26 x diameter 27.5

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Other artist: Richard King.





CHCat.No.16 Sanctuary furnishings for the Church of the Holy Family, Co. Tyrone.

Sanctuary furnishings, Church of the Holy Family, Coalisland, Co. Tyrone

CHCat.No.16

DATE: 1980

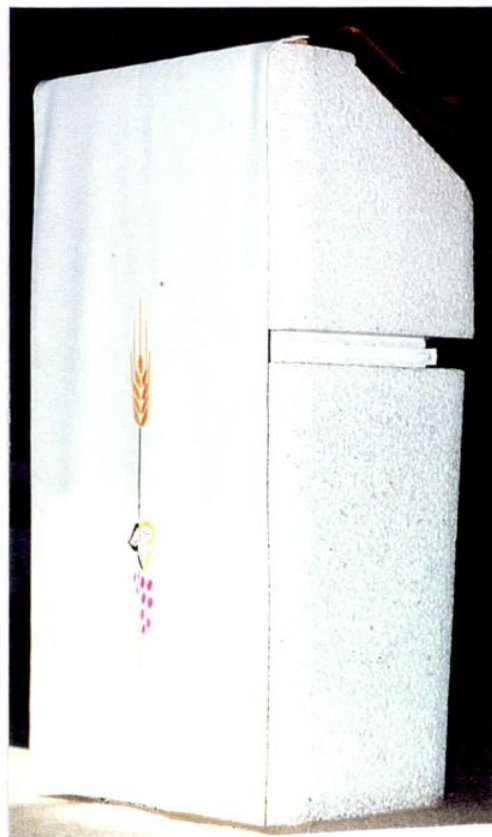
LOCATION: In the town of Coalisland, Co. Tyrone.

MEDIUM: Granite

SIZE: ALTAR: 40 x 89 x 51AMBO: 51 x 41 x 33SEDILIA: 27 x 48 x 32FONT: 31.5 x diameter 57.5

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Architects: Rooney & McConville. Other Artist: Elizabeth Ryan.





CHCat.No.17 Sanctuary furnishings for St. Fionan's Church, Co. Donegal

Sanctuary furnishings, St. Fionan's Church, Falcarragh, Co. Donegal

CHCat.No.17

DATE: 1981

LOCATION: In the village of Falcarragh, Co. Donegal

MEDIUM: Granite and wood

SIZE: ALTAR: 36 x 55 x 33AMBO: 46.5 x 24 x 20SEDILIA: 21 x 34 x 23.5TABERNACLE BASE: 57 x 20 x 20FONT: 26 x diameter 34

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Architect: Wilfrid Cantwell. Other Artist: Patrick McElroy.

The Slate Stations of the Cross which were designed by Biggs and cut by Tom Little are now missing from the Church. Local rumour has it that they are now in a Church on Tory Island off the coast of Donegal close to this area.

Biggs also designed the wooden altar in the Lady Chapel.



Sanctuary furnishings, St. Oliver's Clady, Co. Derry

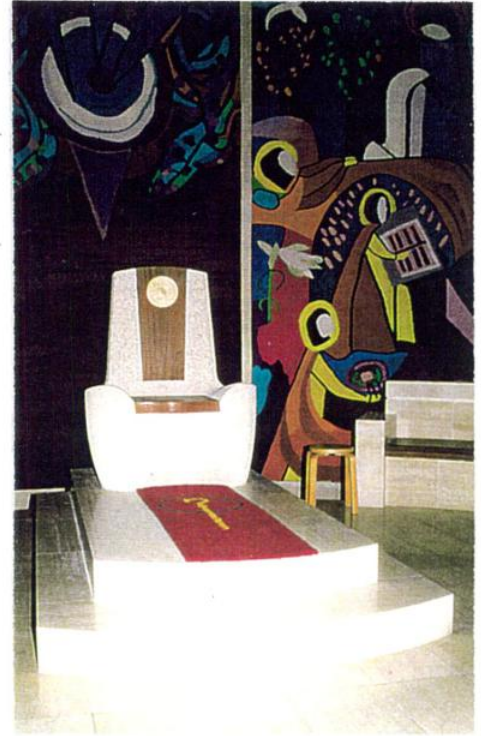
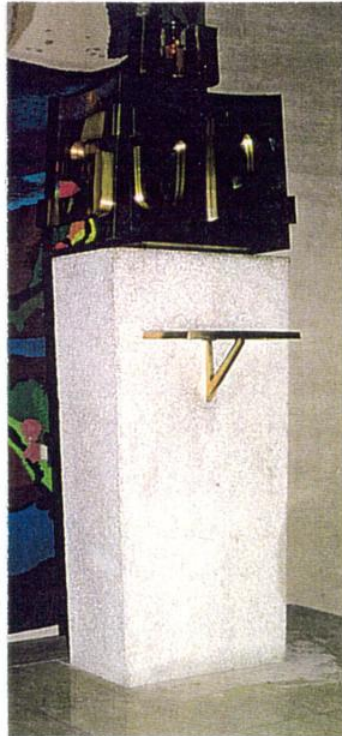
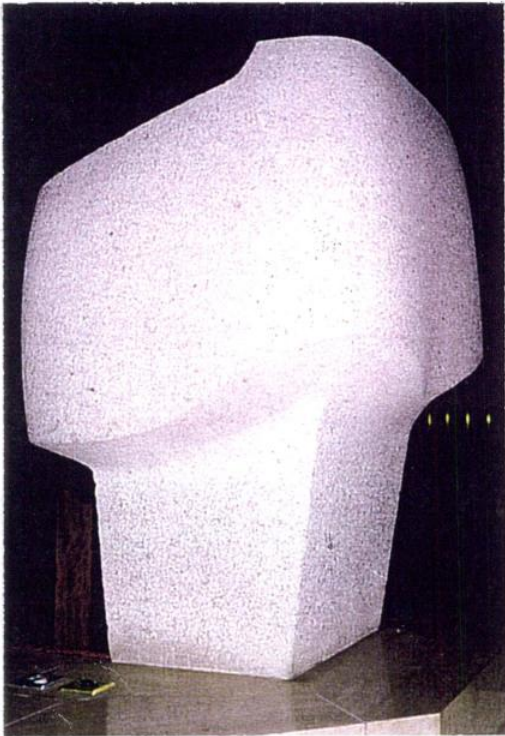
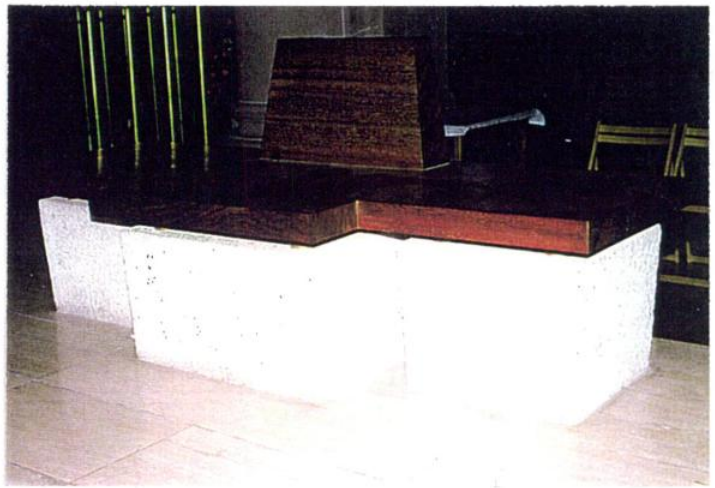
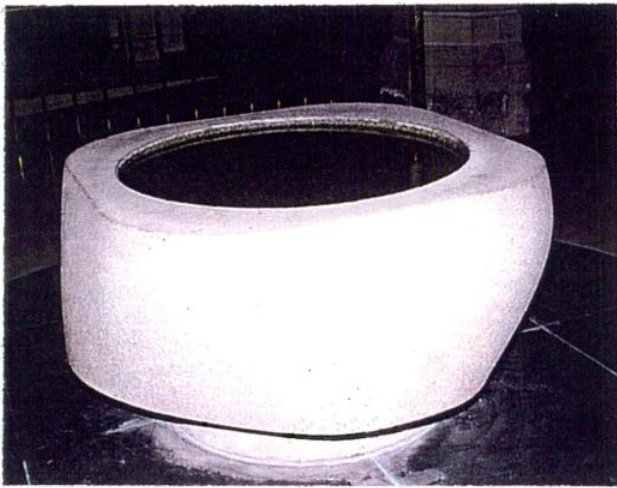
CHCat.No.18

DATE: 1981

LOCATION: unknown

MEDIUM: unknown

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: This church appears in the Shell Letter from Biggs to Harbison. I discovered this information after my trip to Ulster and so I have no photographs or dimensions. I was unable to obtain an address from the Catholic Press Office and came up blank in my other enquiries.



CHCat.No.19 Re-ordered furnishings for Monaghan Cathedral.

Re-Ordering of Monaghan Cathedral Monaghan

CHCat.No.19

DATE: 1982 - 1988

LOCATION: Monaghan Cathedral is situated on a hill overlooking the City on the main road from Dublin.

SIZE: ALTAR: 41 x 88 x 50

AMBO: 52 x 40 x 34

SEDILIA: 30 x 70 x 28. (Multiple)

SEDILIA: 17 x 28 x 28 (Single)

CANTOR: 49 x 21 x 17

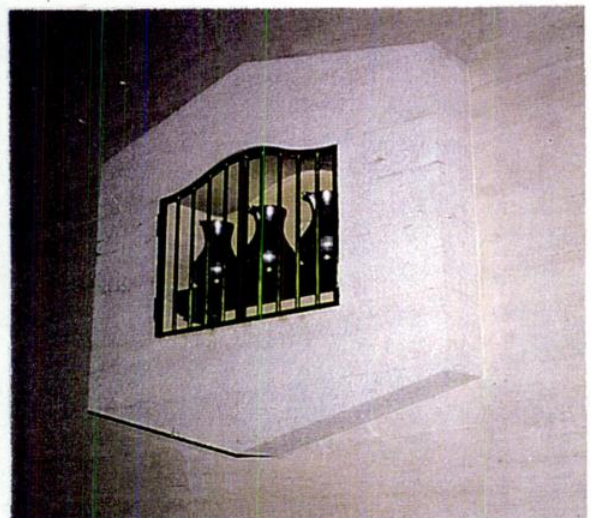
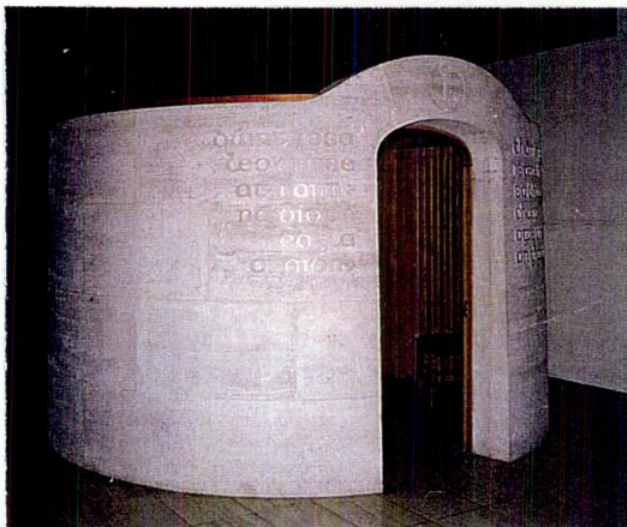
TABERNACLE BASE: 55 x 28 x 17

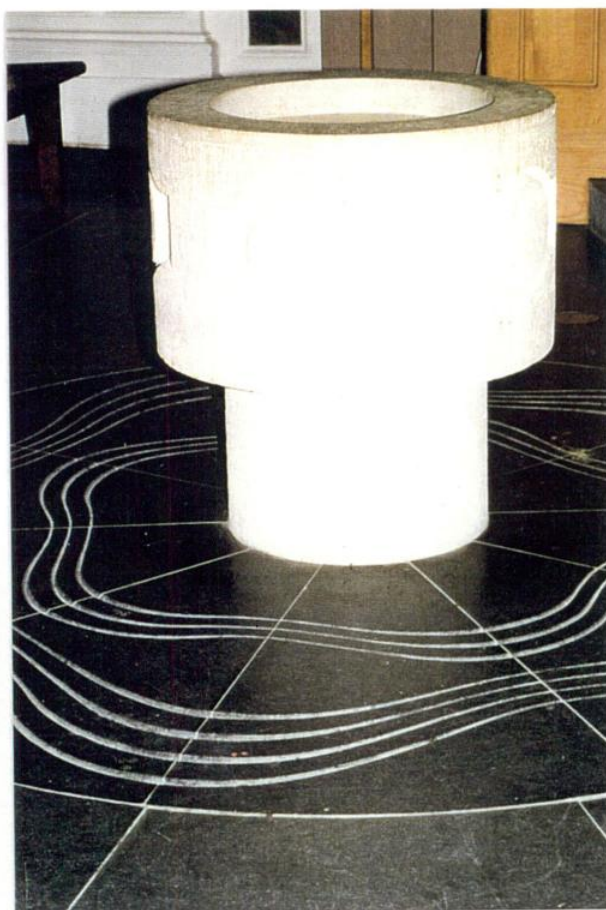
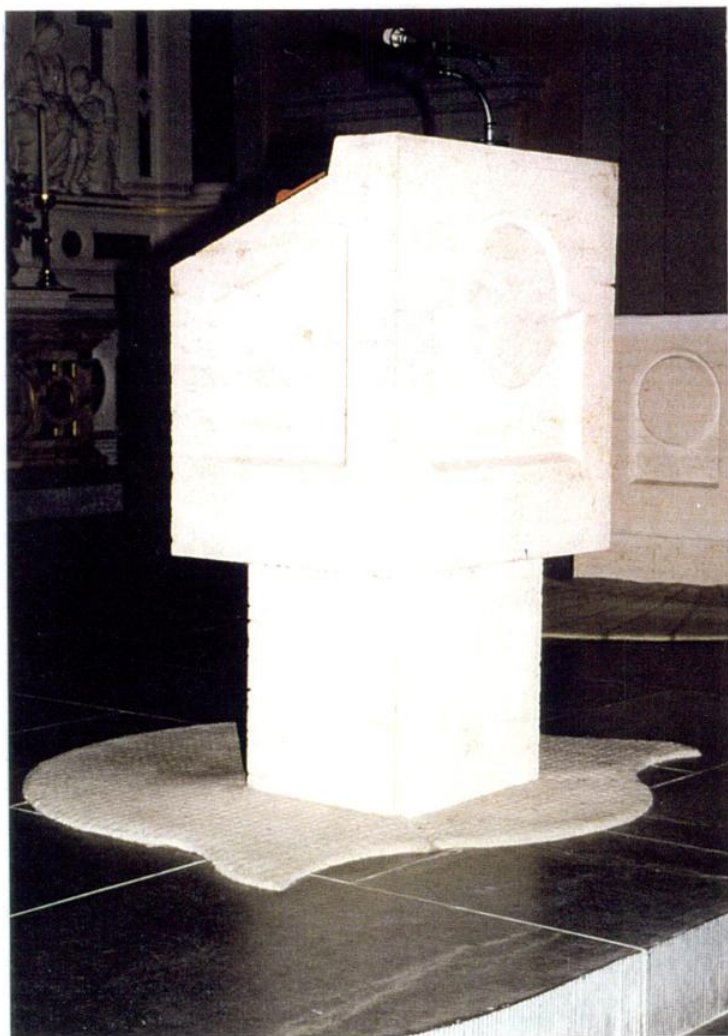
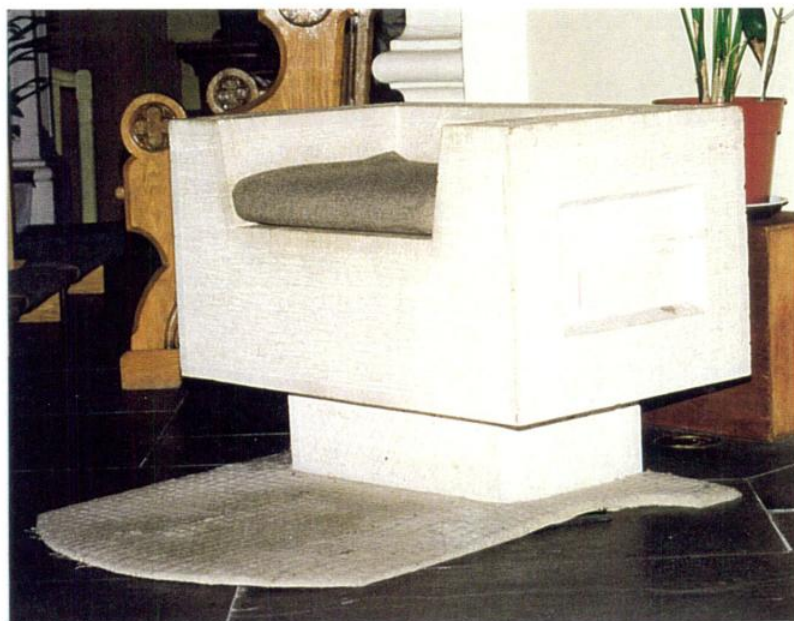
FONT: 26 x diameter 54

AUMBRY: 47 x 55 x 7

BISHOP'S THRONE: 53 x 41 34

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: This was Biggs' biggest project as he was in complete charge of the re-ordering of the Cathedral. The Bishop's Throne was the last piece of sculpture he completed before his illness and early death. Other Artists: Frances Biggs and Richard King.





CHCat.No.20 Sanctuary furnishings for St. Mary's Church, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary.

Sanctuary furnishings, St. Mary's Clonmel, Co. Tipperary

CHCat.No.20

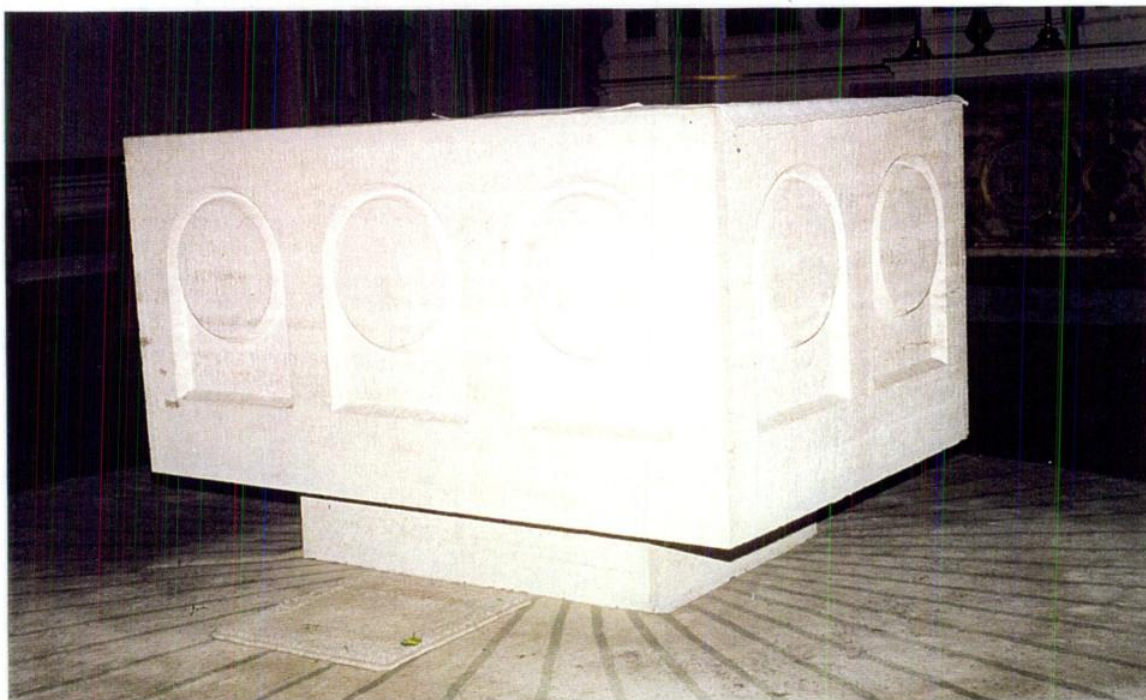
DATE: 1983

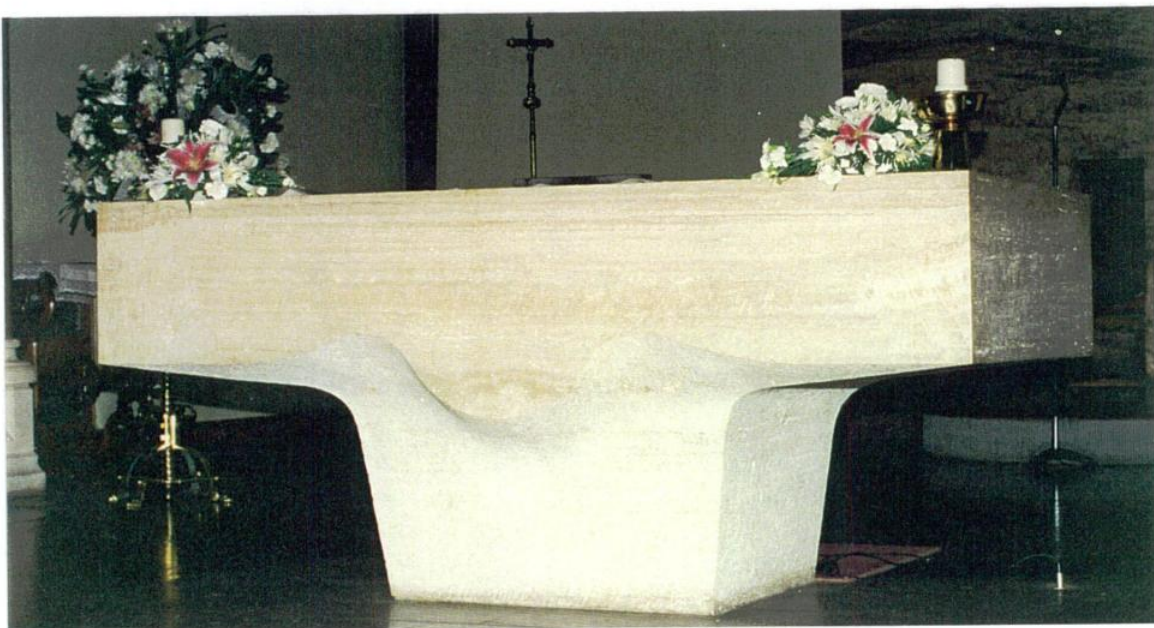
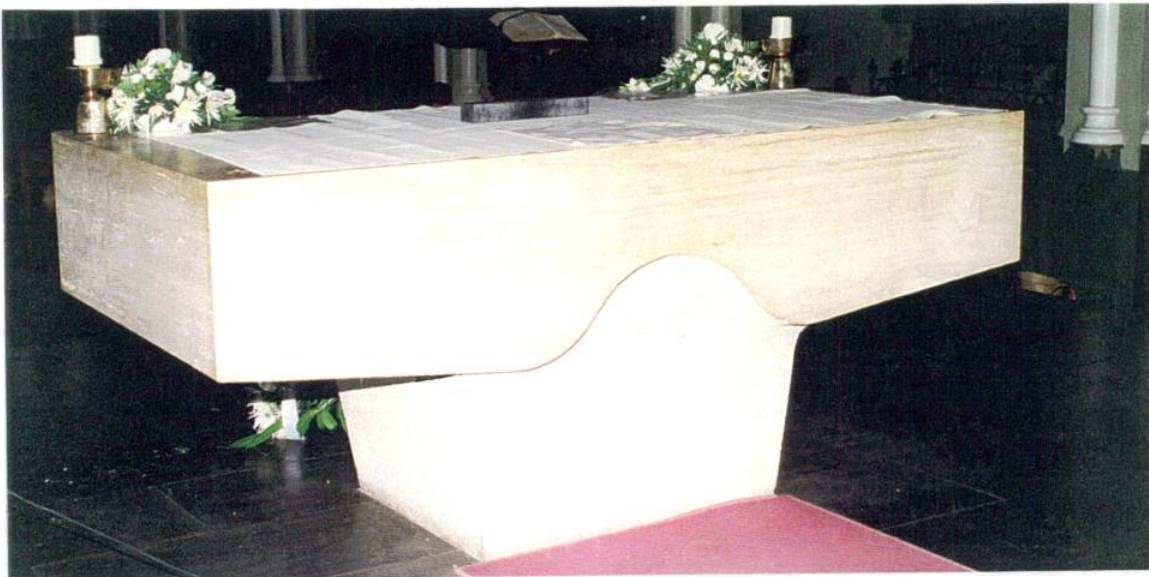
LOCATION: In the town of Clonmel, Tipperary near the West Gate.

MEDIUM: Travertine Marble

SIZE: ALTAR: 60 x 41 x 38AMBO: 27 x 21 x 48SEDILIA: 34 x 23 x 26FONT: 33 x diameter 30

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: A Classical building of 1837-50, it was re-ordered in 1983. The high altar was retained at the rear of the chancel and is quite ornate with circular motifs which Biggs has echoed in his more modern furnishings.





CHCat.No.21 Altar for SS Mary & David's Church, Co. Kildare.

Altar, SS Mary & David Church Naas, Co. Kildare

CHCat.No.21

DATE: 1985

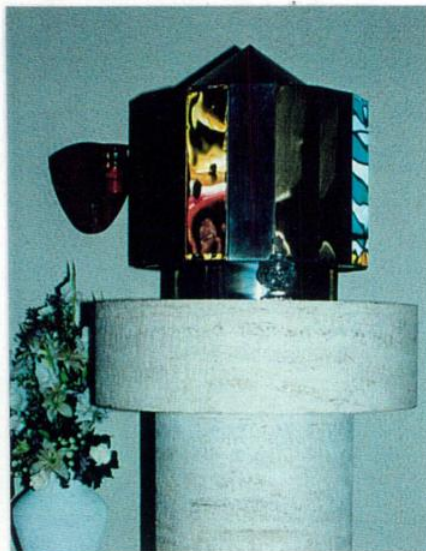
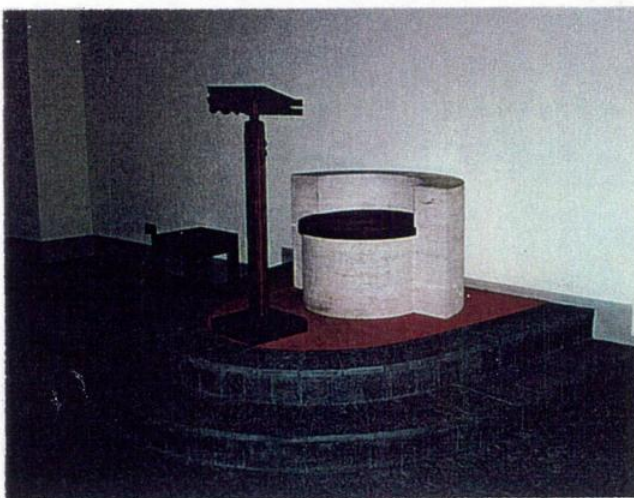
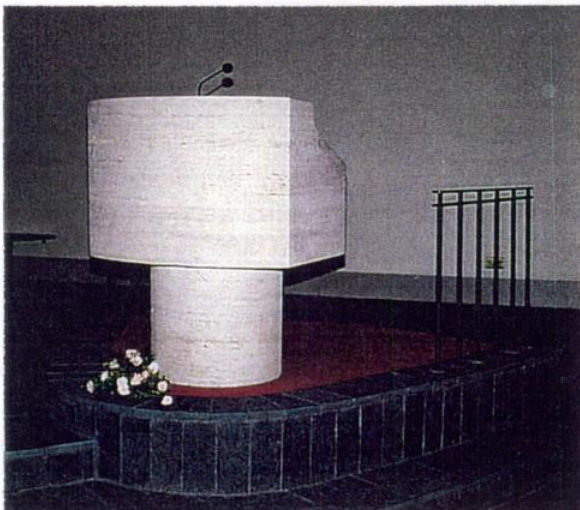
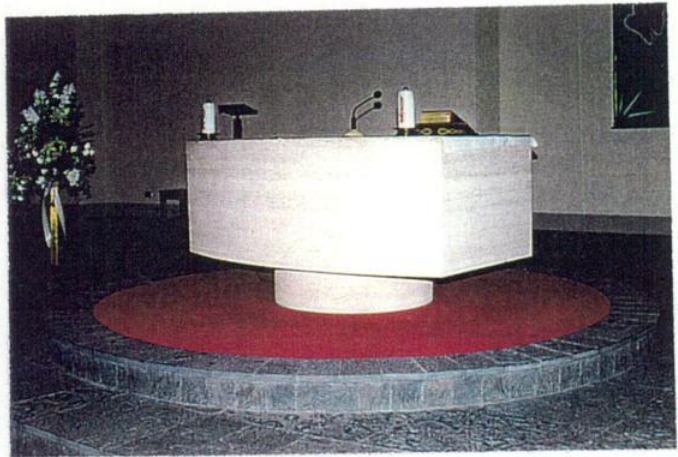
LOCATION: On the Sallins Road, Naas, Co. Kildare

MEDIUM: Travertine Marble

SIZE: ALTAR: 40 x 89 x 44.5LECTURN BASE: 36 x 18 x 18

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Architect: Richard Hurley. Other artists: Benedict Tutty, Bernadette Madden and Lua Breen. The Shell Guide says that Biggs only did the altar here but he made also have done the Lecturn Base.





CHCat.No.22 Sanctuary furnishings for St. Davog's Church, Co. Tyrone.

Sanctuary furnishings, St. Davog's Dromore, Co. Tyrone

CHCat.No.22

DATE: 1987

LOCATION: Overlooking the town of Dromore, Co. Tyrone.

MEDIUM: Travertine Marble and Stainless Steel.

SIZE: ALTAR: 38.5 x 76 x 55

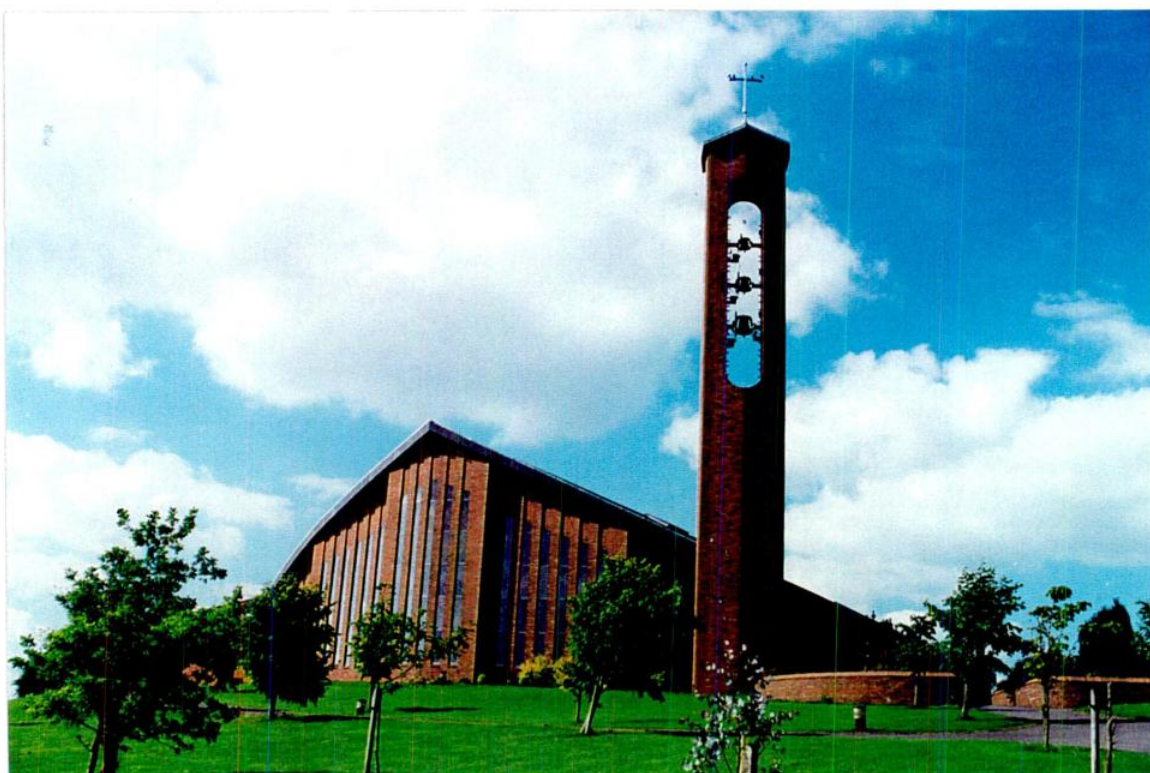
AMBO: 49 x 38 x 35

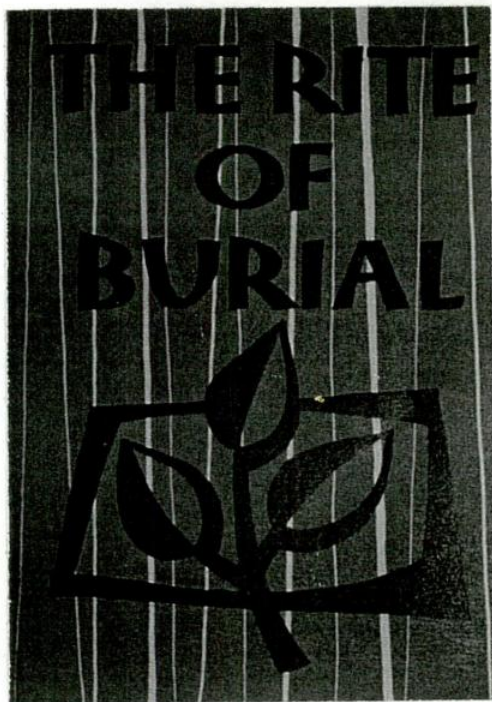
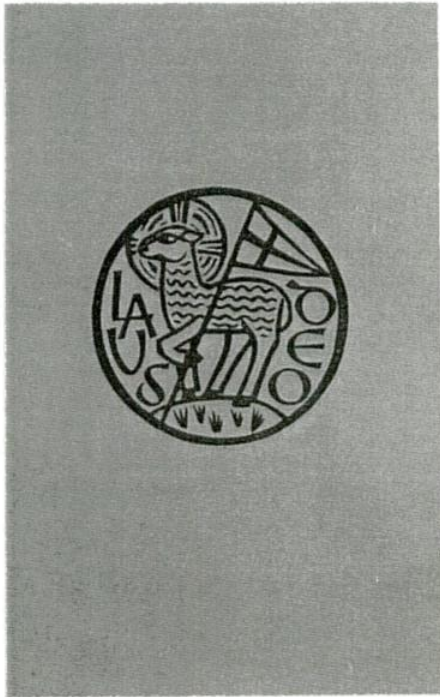
SEDILIA: 28 x 45 x 45

TABERNACLE BASE: 55 x diameter 32

FONT: 21.5 x diameter 55

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Here Biggs also designed the stainless steel multi-sided tabernacle. The Foundation Stone was carved by Tom Glendon





CHCat.No.23-1

CHCat.No.23-2

CHCat.No.23-3

A graphic sign for the Lamb of God from the Collectio Rituum, the cover for The Rite of Burial and the logo for the New Liturgy magazine.

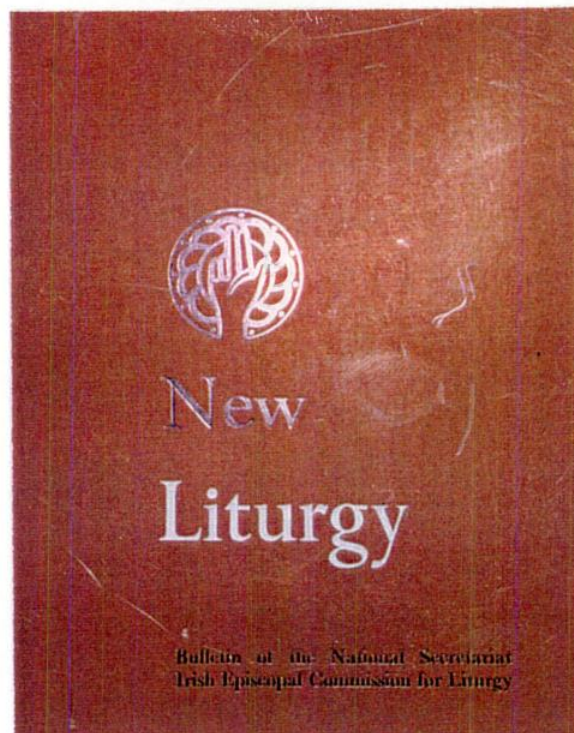
Miscellaneous Church Graphic Work

CHCat.No.23-1

CHCat.No.23-2

CHCat.No.23-3

1. Title and Headings for the COLLECTIO RITUVM published in 1960 by M.H. Gill and Son Ltd, Printers, Dublin. This book is used by every Roman Catholic Priest and contains the rites of the Church.
2. A number of small booklets of parts of the Collectio Rituvm for use of the general public. Each one contains one Rite such as The Rite of Burial .
3. The logo for the magazine New Liturgy.



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The Monotype Corporation Ltd, The Monotype Recorder commemorating an Exhibition of Lettering and type Design by Eric Gill Vol. XLI, No.3, London, Autumn 1958.

VIDEO

Mulholland, Joe MICHAEL BIGGS - ARTIST IN STONE Dublin: RTE. 1973

INTERVIEWS

Bewley, Thomas, interview with Daphne Whelan, 25 October 1995

Biggs, Fiona, phone interview with Daphne Whelan, 24 April 1995

Biggs, Fiona, phone interview with Daphne Whelan, 20 November 1995

Biggs, Frances, interview with Daphne Whelan, 3 January 1996

Brown, Denis, phone interview with Daphne Whelan, 15 August 1995

Falkiner, Ninian, interview with Daphne Whelan, 14 October 1995

Falkiner, Ninian, interview with Daphne Whelan, 21 October 1995

Farrington, Brian, phone interview with Daphne Whelan, 15 October 1995

Farrington, Conor, phone interview with Daphne Whelan, 28 October 1995

Glendon, Tom, interview with Daphne Whelan, 10 October 1995

Glendon, Tom, interview with Daphne Whelan, 19 October 1995

Hurley, Richard, interview with Daphne Whelan, 22 August 1995

King, Richard, phone interview with Daphne Whelan, 17 July 1995

O'Leary, Bernie, phone interview with Daphne Whelan, 19 October 1995

Stuart, Imogen, interview with Daphne Whelan, 25 July 1995

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CORRESPONDENCE

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- Kelly, Oisin, correspondence with Desmond Fitzgerald, undated c.1953
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- Lush, Norman, correspondence with Daphne Whelan, 25 October 1995
- Madden, Bernadette, correspondence with Daphne Whelan, 19 July 1995
- McLaughlin, Br. Finbar, correspondence with Daphne Whelan, 11 October 1995
- Murphy, Joan OPW, correspondence with Daphne Whelan, 8 November 1995
- O'Neill, Tim, correspondence with Daphne Whelan, 7 October 1995
- Pratt, Nigel, correspondence with Daphne Whelan, 30 October 1995
- Pye, Patrick, correspondence with Daphne Whelan, 16 July 1995
- Sealy, Douglas, correspondence with Daphne Whelan, 24 October 1995
- Skelton, John, correspondence with Daphne Whelan, 15 June 1995
- Trevor, William, correspondence with Daphne Whelan, 10 November 1995
- Tutty, Dom. Benedict, correspondence with Daphne Whelan, 8 August 1995
- White, James, correspondence with Daphne Whelan, 5 April 1995

APPENDICES

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The letter that Biggs sent to Peter Harbison when he was revising and updating the Shell Guide to Ireland	
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Some of the letters sent to me about Biggs and his work	

APPENDIX I

① Stone sanctuary furnishings by Michael Biggs, and stained glass windows and tapestries by Frances Biggs.

- Carlow 1978 Bennekerry Church.
1980 Ballinkillen Church.
- Derry 1981 St. Oliver's, Clady (nr. Portglenone, Co. Antrim).
- Donegal 1974 St. Conal's, Glenties.
1982 Falcarragh Church. (also Stations in the form of inscribed slate crosses, designed by me and cut by Tom Little).
- Dublin City 1966 * St. Patrick's College Chapel, Drumcondra (nothing by Frances here).
1967 Gonzaga College Chapel, Sandford Road, Ranelagh.
East window by F. B.
~~1969 St. Laurence's, Kilmacud - not by me at all but Frank Morris.~~
1973 * St. Michael's, Dún Laoghaire.
~~1980 Gonzaga College Chapel: all remaining windows by F. B., depicting the Creation; the story of the Society of Jesus; Annunciation, Nativity & Flight into Egypt; Last Supper, Crucifixion & Resurrection; and some decorative glass in the sanctuary. (Public Mass at 12.00 every Sunday during school term).~~
1986 Carmelite College Chapel, Terenure: 5 windows by F. B., two inscriptions in stone by M. B. (Two small glass panels by Eric Hone; sanctuary & furnishings Ray Carroll). Public Masses: weekdays 5.40 pm, Sundays 9.30 am, 10.45 am, 12 noon.
- Galway 1975 St. Oliver's, Renmore.

(2)

- ~~Galway 1980 St. Oliver's, Renmore: Stations of the Cross by F.B.~~
~~1988 " " " : two tapestries in the~~
~~sanctuary by F.B.~~
- Kildare [1972 Presentation Convent, Kildare town: sanctuary
and timber furnishings for oratory].
1974 Church of the Nativity, Newtown.
1976 Parish Church, Rathangan.
1985 Parish Church, Naas (altar only).
- Limerick [1987 Crescent Comprehensive School, Dooradoyle:
~~window (Emmans) in prayer room by F.B.~~].
- Louth 1968 * Church of the Redeemer, Dundalk:
granite baptismal font only (mosaic lining
of bowl by F.B.).
- Monaghan 1982-88 * The Cathedral (St. Macartan's).
Design of new sanctuary and all stone and timber
furnishings (including the circular confessional
in the south chapel and inscription thereon, and
the ambry for holy oils in the north chapel. Note,
by the way, the existing beautiful pewter jars).
Altar, ambo, font & bishop's chair in granite,
carved by M.B. Three tapestries by F.B.:
~~water of baptism and tree of life; scenes from the~~
~~life of St. Macartan; confection of the Host.~~
~~Silver & gold plated tabernacle by Richard King.~~
~~1984 Clontibret Church: wall hanging in sanctuary by F.B.~~
- Tipperary 1975 * Holy Cross Abbey.

(3.)

Tipperary 1983 St. Mary's, Clonmel.
Tyrone 1965 Chapel, Convent of Mercy, Cookstown: * altar
(my first!)
1970 Ditto, further stone furnishings.
1980 Church of the Holy Family, Coalisland.
1987 St. Davog's, Dromore: stone and metal
furnishings. (Foundation stone by Tom Glendon).
Westmeath 1975 St. Fechin's, Fore.

[] : not accessible to the public. (I don't include the convent at Cookstown because the nuns are so proud of their chapel that I think they would show it to anyone).

* : means worked and not simply designed by myself - a sharp distinction in my own mind. There are not many asterisks, because, considered as granite sculptures, these things are pretty large, and extremely subtle and precise to boot! Apart from Holy Cross and Cookstown, where the asterisk denotes simple carved decoration, there are only, as I reckon, twelve such pieces extant. They are very costly to the client, you see, and at the same time not at all lucrative from my point of view. (This bit is not meant for inclusion in the Guide, of course...)

— I have left out Portlennone Abbey because all I did there was a foundation stone; likewise St Brigid's, Curragh Camp, where I did some simple decoration around the door, and an inscription round the font. Of greater interest is Oisín Kelly's figure of St. Brigid (in wood) on a corbel over the entrance.

(5)

Inscriptions &c. by Michael Biggs.

- 1951 Christchurch, Bray and St. Paul's, Bray: inscribed memorial tablets to Canon Scott (Hopton Wood stone).
- 1953 Moyne Institute, T.C.D. Inscribed memorial panel in Portland Stone.
- 1956 Birr, Co. Offaly: inscribed panels round pedestal of statue of William Parsons, 3rd Earl of Rosse (constructor of the great telescope).
- 1956 ~~At~~ 71 Merrion Square: oval nameplate in Portland stone for Sybil Connolly (moulding after Hatch St. nameplates)
- c.1957 - Custom House: inscriptions on pedestal of Yann Gowlet sculpture.
- 1958 Fascia lettering in black granite, Grafton Arcade, Grafton St.
- 1958 Arbour Hill: names on graves of leaders of Rising.
- 1959 Fishamble Street: bronze inscription commemorating first performance of Handel's Messiah (Tuesday April 13th 1742). Unfortunately, badly cast and badly sited.
- 1959-63 ~~Arbour Hill~~ Arbour Hill: mural inscription (5000 letters) and cross. (Ardbraccan limestone, now unobtainable).
- c.1964 G.P.O.: inscription in black marble.
- c.1965 College Green: inscription on pedestal, Thomas Davis statue
1966 - SWL

⑥.

- 1966 Phoenix Park, Garda Memorial: inscriptions in granite and limestone. Garda Síochána badges in limestone, slightly re-designed by me (!) and carved by Paddy Roe and Phil O'Neill.
- 1967 Stephen's Green: bronze inscription for Henry Moore figure.
- 1967-8 J.F. Kennedy Memorial Park, New Ross, Co. Wexford: Granite fountain with raised inscriptions, and separate inscription in limestone.
- c. 1972 1 Merrion Square: memorial tablet to Sir William Wilde, in Portland stone.
- c. 1980 Parnell Square, Garden of Remembrance: mural inscription.

APPENDIX II

John Skelton · Sculptor & Designer · MBE FRBS FRSA
BLABERS MEAD · STREAT · HAS SOCKS · SUSSEX BN6 8RR

Tel. 01273 890491 & Fax. 01273 890839

The Guild finally folded up in about 1989 when a fine exhibition was mounted by Hove Museum. An excellent book was published full of good artists. "Eric Gill and the Guild of St Joseph & Dominic" by I. Sargent you write to Tim Wilcox Hove Museum. 19 New Church Rd Hove. BN3 4AB. They might still have a copy.

Dear Daphne Whelan Michael Biggs 15 June 95
I hope these notes will be of some help. I first met Michael in the early 1950's at the workshop of Joseph Cribb who had been Eric Gill's last apprentice & who had stayed on at the Guild of St Joseph & Dominic when Eric Gill left in 1924. The Guild did not really develop much after their leader left and during my time there always had a sad aura of decay. The Guild was never a school, it was a collection of workmen held together by a common faith and purpose i.e. to make a living from their crafts and live in peace with their families and in the words of Gill himself, to find a "cell of good living".

Michael was introduced to the Guild by his godfather Evan Gill, Eric's younger brother.

Clare Biggs, Michael's Father was a pianist with the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Eric Gill's son in law was the General Secretary.

I started work on my own some 3 years after the army and Joseph Cribb gave me part time work and allowed me to do my own jobs in his workshop. I had worked for Cribb as an assistant for some 2 years following the termination of my apprenticeship with Gill due to ^{his} premature

Fellow of the Royal Society of British Sculptors · Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts

death in 1940. Michael and I immediately became friends & we had many a workshop joke. Joseph Libb was an amusing man to work for, full of jokes & verbal gymnastics. He was not a man of wide vision like Eric Gill but a very intense vision none the less. Michael used to come to our home for supper & baths in those frugal post war years. After his formal schooling his parents moved to Ireland since Claude Biggs had regular work with Radio Eireann. Michael eventually married Frances a violinist with the radio orchestra.

I should think Michael came to Joseph in about 1951 and stayed about a year. He was never an apprentice but an assistant learning on the job and probably unpaid. He worked on headstones, memorials and lettering and must have had a natural talent for he picked things up very quickly. He had digs in Burgesstown some 2 miles distant and used to cycle daily. The working day was about 8.30 - 5.30. Michael was over 6ft tall with a shock of red hair - he was affectionately christened "The Chrysanthemum" by one of the older Guild members.

Michael, although English, had a droll sense of Irish humour. I do not know of any artists who would have known him at this time. We got fonder & fonder of each other throughout the years, by work interests, mutually respecting each others efforts, by letter, long phone calls and rare visits. During the end of my last

During my last visit to him in hospital during the last week of his life - he was still explaining the Golden Section proportion to me - his brain crystal clear. At the end as I left Asl departed, never to see him again, he held up his hands saying, "These have been such good hands John - you take over now".

I do not know how you get on with your thesis
Yours sincerely
John Shedd

St. Benildus College,
Upper Kilmacud Rd.,
Dublin 14.

Telephone: 986539. Residence: 981110.



Coláiste Benildus,
Cill Mochuda,
Baile Átha Cliath 14.

Telefón: 986539. An Mhainistir: 981110.

Dear Daphne Whelan

7.X.95

Sorry for the delay in replying to your letter.

1. Yes I know Michael's work
2. His work is unique. Few have succeeded in adapting historical letterforms as well as he. ~~His~~ Only Colin D. Hodder in the field of typography comes close (cf. Deanot McGuinness Irish Type Design)
3. Michael doesn't have students. He only taught one course (that I've heard of) Tom Little was on this course. He

could tell you more (he lives in Co. Cork
- but works a lot for D.P.W.).

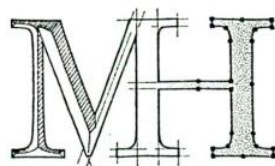
Michael had an extraordinary grasp of letters
no doubt influenced by his training in the
Eric Gill tradition. He was equally happy
& competent carving Greek uncials &
Roman Capitals as he was with adapting
Insular majuscule to cut into granite.

(See how he adapted forms to suit materials!)

4. I knew him quite well for 15 years. He was
a great critic & very supportive.

Every good wish

Michael



MICHAEL HARVEY

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14 October 1995

Dear Daphne,

Your letter has been on my drawing board for months, but I've been too pre-occupied with a book I am writing to reply until now. I hope I'm not too late for your thesis.

Well, I made two visits to Ditchling to spend my holidays working in Joseph Cribb's workshop, first in 1954 and again in 1955. I had expected the community in the common to be as Gill described it in his 'Autobiography' but was disappointed to find it full of old men just going through the motions (it seemed to me). I went there because Gill was my hero and I wanted to follow in his footsteps. I wore my Gill-tinted spectacles! Cribb was kind but grumpy. He had wanted to go to Wales with Gill, but his wife wouldn't let him. I think he resented that. He kept up Gill's original workshop, which had an upstairs office where he made drawings for headstones, statues of the cross, and sculptures. Downstairs his younger assistants, Kenneth and Noel, did most of the stone work. Joseph must have been in his mid-sixties.

ps. The Kilbride's grandson, Ewan Clayton, grew up in Ditchling and knows a lot about the community. You could write to him at: 5 Sillwood Road, Brighton BN1 2LF

The community was still called the guild of St. Joseph and St. Dominic, but I don't recall any special feeling of community. The chapel wasn't used daily as it had been in Gill's time.

Joseph lived in a house nearby, but Kenneth and Noel travelled in each day, Kenneth from Brighton. I don't remember Michael Biggs being mentioned.

The most interesting man there was Philip Haggren, the wood-engraver. Enormously tall, he rode around on a very high bicycle. He had worked with Gill and held some very odd views - lino-cuts were evil because lino was evil because it was made to cover up bad workmanship... (I had foolishly praised a lino-cut).

The youngest man, Edgar Holloway, had been a gifted painter, but now, brain-washed by Gill's example and ideas, had taken up lettering, especially signwriting. How stupid to deny a talent like that, I felt.

The Kilbride's weaving shop was busy, and the woodworker George* still ran his business in an old army hut. Dunstan Pruden was either ill or dead, so his wife did the silver smithing work.

So that's it really, a not very inspiring tale. It's all so long ago now, too. Another world. I'm glad I went there but felt rather let down. Expecting heaven I found it quite mundane.

Sorry I can't tell you anything about Michael B.

Best wishes,

Yours, Michael

* Maxwell

Turloch Thormanby Rd Howth

24 October 1995

Dear Daphne Whelan,

I was not an exact contemporary of Michael Biggs, he was a year ahead of me, I think, and a year, in school, was then an almost impassable gulf - perhaps things have changed now - so I was acquainted with him but not an acquaintance. I do remember that he was extraordinarily gifted artist. He exhibited large colourful oils of scenery, of an unusual maturity, in the school exhibitions and his later concentration on lettering seemed at the time a wilful limitation of his gifts.

His greatest impact on his school fellows was in the cartoons he did in lino-cut for the little magazine Why Not 1942-^{46?}~~1946/47~~ written by pupils and printed by the school's printing club. I enclose a number, the last I think, so you can see what I mean. Please return when you have made use of it.

The cover is a clever combination of the school crest (of St Columba) and the apoplectic little clergyman (English) who was head (Warden) at the time. It dates from 1944. G L was the science master. (1943) Mr Browne was chaplain, an unusual mixture of aesthete and athlete who loved rugby poetry and

of enquiry
Dostoevsky. The cartoon sums up his rough bonhomie. JSL was a genial greyhaired teacher of simple subjects (1943). Mr Wigham a rather unsuccessful teacher of biology (1943). GK White a dried-up pedantic teacher of classics (1943). "Put that flaming trunk" is GL in action. The witch on the broomstick is the Warden's wife. By concentrating on the upturned nose and dishevelled hair he has got a speaking likeness. This is probably the most brilliant of the cartoons. The back cover shows SJ Willis (Maths) and GK White (classics) the grey eminences of the school.

Biggs also did elegant and serious linocut decorations for a book of poems by Brian Farrington (called Midnight I think) also printed on the school press. I don't have a copy.

I would say that Biggs must have been very talented when he arrived at school, would have been greatly encouraged by Boydell, but was probably more influenced by Oisín Kelly. Even then I think he had read Eric Gill's Autobiography and for him Eric Gill was next to God, and the Golden Section! Gill, and Kelly's leaning towards religious art, must have given him a shove which in the end led to his conversion to Catholicism. I did not keep in touch with Michael — school is something one has to escape from! — so I think the best person to tell you more would be Patrick Pye (The Studio, Piperstown, Tallaght) Another religious artist, also from St Columba's and a

near contemporary
yes sincerely
Douglas Sealy