

A STUDY OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY HEADSTONES  
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE WORK OF  
DENNIS CULLEN, MILES BRIEN & JAMES BYRNE.  
SITUATED ON THE WEXFORD, WICKLOW, CARLOW BORDERS

NOLLAIG CROMBIE

1985



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by

Nollaig Cromble

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

My thesis is not intended to be a fully comprehensive history of stone cutting in Ireland, a subject which unfortunately has been thinly covered, nor is it intended to be a history of the great tombs of our past which on the other hand has been widely written about. Instead I have chosen to research the work of eighteenth century Irish stonecutters which is to be seen in graveyards in every town and village but unfortunately is seldom noticed.

Forty years ago Mrs. H. G. Leask author and researcher travelled the country examining and recording the motives on eighteenth century headstones, a subject which at that time had never been written about. Her findings were recorded. Since then no further attempt has been made to research this folk craft. Our skilled craftsman is quickly becoming a figure of the past. My interest in stone carving and lettering has led me from graveyard to graveyard to examine and record the deteriorating and often forgotten products of the stonecutters of the 18th century.

To date studies have concentrated on the motives engraved on 18th century headstones. While also proposing to examine these motives I intend to examine the inscriptions that accompany them.



While realising that this folk art is very broad, one must recognise that at this time, each community lived within very definite geographic confines. For this reason I have chosen to deal specifically with the work of three stonecutters all of whom had similar styles and worked on the borders of County Wexford, County Wicklow and County Carlow. I have chosen this area because of the quality of stone cutting in this region. This fact has been carefully investigated by Mrs. H. G. Leask who states that most of the more elaborately ornamented headstones are located in the East. She goes on to say that on many of these stones the crucifixion scene is depicted in varying degrees of elaboration and is often signed by the carver.



## CHAPTER 11

In this chapter I shall deal with:-

- \* Factors affecting changes in the craft.
- \* My preliminary research.

### Factors affecting changes in the craft

Before the building of the canals at the end of the 18th century and the railways in the 19th century, it was very difficult to travel around the country. Family names in old graveyards occur over and over again, showing that people lived in the same place for long periods of time. If by chance or good fortune a member of a family did move to another part of the country, his birthplace would always be recorded and usually another stone would be erected to him in his home town. Often his trade would be recorded also, as I found in the old Whitechurch graveyard Co. Dublin. This graveyard is now under the care of Dublin Corporation who obviously believe it necessary to keep it locked at all times. For this reason I had to set myself the task of climbing the six foot wall in order to view what must be some of the oldest head stones in the country. Situated at the foot of the Dublin mountains, it was not surprising to find that nearly all the stones were granite. The site also accounts for the fact that many different trades were recorded. The many flowing rivers attracted industry during the 18th century. There were no less



than five paper mills by the end of the century, four cotton mills, two silk mills and a wollen mill.

The tradition of head stones only began in the late 17th. They took the place of footstones and wooden markers. This probably explains the manner in which the earliest recorded stones have been executed. Wooden monuments were cut in relief, so too are early stones. The carving of letters in relief in stone must have been an extremely laborious technique. The forms were very primitive. They consisted of either rather heavy letters, usually capitals, their strokes of almost equal weight with triangular terminations, too blunt to be dignified by the term serif. Often a few lower case letters were scattered among the capitals. Somewhat later the forms became a little more regular and rather truer serifs began to emerge. The proportions of the letters cannot yet be called truly Roman.

The most highly executed of the older memorials I have found have been at Glendalough, where on the walls of the ruined church, excellent examples of early letterforms are inscribed in slate stones. Slate is used in areas where it is most readily available. It is soft enough for cutting without undue labour and fine enough to allow the craftsman to use a more decorative style which appeared later. The only disadvantage as far as I have been able to discover has been its tendency to flake unless it is sheltered. Once started, the flaking continues until the outer layers on which the craftsman has spent so much time and labour has disintegrated.



Probably the most influential letter form to have been introduced to stone cutting was the English letter. It differs from what is thought of as the "normal" roman, a form given definitive shape in print by the great Venetian, French and Dutch printers, by somewhat different proportions of the letters relative to one another, and originally, heaviness and clumsiness of form. This later became greatly refined and grew into a letter which, compared to the "normal", usually has bolder thick strokes, finer thin strokes and a fairly abrupt transition from thick to thin. Capitals are the same height as the ascenders of the lower-case letters, unlike printers Roman letter forms where the capitals are slightly smaller. In the printing world, John Baskerville was the first to create the form in 1754. At this time, stone cutters adapted their own versions of the form depending on the stone and the manner in which he mastered his chisel. Cullen was indeed one of these masters.

The art of writing with a pen was considered to be an essential part of education during the 18th century. Writing masters taught sons and daughters of the wealthy how to write correctly. John Baskerville (as mentioned above) was one of the most famous of these masters in England. He also engraved headstones. He published copy-books which were engraved on copper plates for printing. From then on, the educated public were expected to write properly and they too expected to see quality letterforms in public. This trend also



reached the Irish shores.

It is important to note that the qualities which make stone good for carving, make it unsuitable for fine lettering and vice versa. Keeping this in mind it is indeed wonderful that Cullen succeeded in achieving such quality carving and lettering together. Nevertheless of all the natural materials available, stone is still the best for memorials. Iron is a natural material but it is not used in its original state. The other natural substance most frequently used was wood, but this didn't last as long. Most wooden memorials have long since rotted away. On some English wooden memorials inscriptions were painted on, this job was not done by the mason but by the sign painter.

The fact remains that the quality of the quarry is of the greatest importance when executing memorials. I visited the Old Leighlan Quarry last September (fig. 1). Situated some ten miles from Carlow town, it is the largest limestone quarry in the country. I met workmen there who had been there since they were teenagers. They told me amusing stories about the craft and the changing times. Quarries are wonderful places to visit. The manner in which the stone is stepped displays the years and the fossils and plant life which existed at that time. The practice of quarrying consists in uncovering a sufficient surface of the rock by removing superficial soil, sand, clay, and overlaying waste rock by sinking a shaft or slope, and then with proper tools removing large rectangular blocks which are hoisted



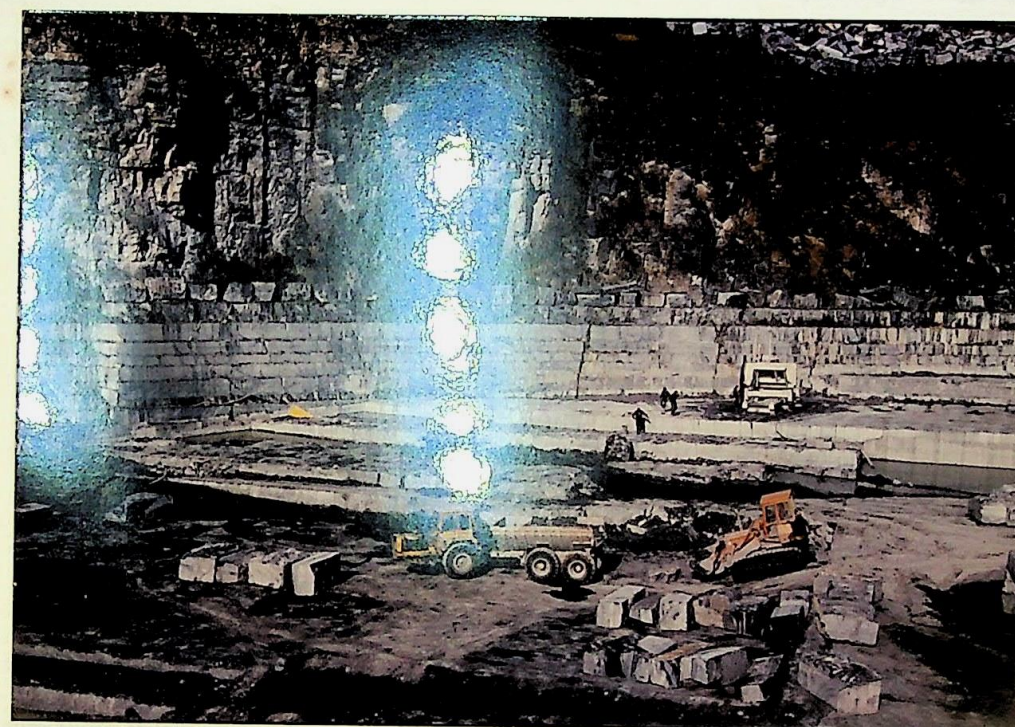


Figure 1. View of the Old Leighlan Quarry.



up to ground level and cut further to size. Approximately every three feet there is a layer of useless rock which must be removed. The distance between these layers determines the height of the block.

Old Leighlan is primarily a limestone quarry. In limestone and the softer sandstones, the channeling process is almost invariably employed. Channeling machines, driven by steam, compressed air, electricity or a combination of these are used, by which verticle grooves or channels can be cut with great speed to a depth of 12 feet. (fig. 2). A level bed of rock is cleared and on this are laid rails along which the machine moves opposite to the bottom of the channel cut, wedges are driven and the required blocks of stone are seperated from the ledge. Recently the owners of the Old Leighlan Quarry have bought a large revolving stone cutter from Holland. The diamond edged blade is the only one of its kind in the British Isles (fig. 3) - a far cry from the days when Seamus Murphy author of "Stone Mad" worked from quarry to quarry with hundreds of other "stonies" and indeed even further still from when James Byrne himself took stone from this quarry. It would be interesting to calculate the volume of the quarry, count up the steps and the years to the level at which they did work - another time !

The increased use of limestone in the early 19th century left the somewhat finer stones behind for a time. It was an easier stone to cut and so became more popular. Then the process of





Figure 2. The channeling process.



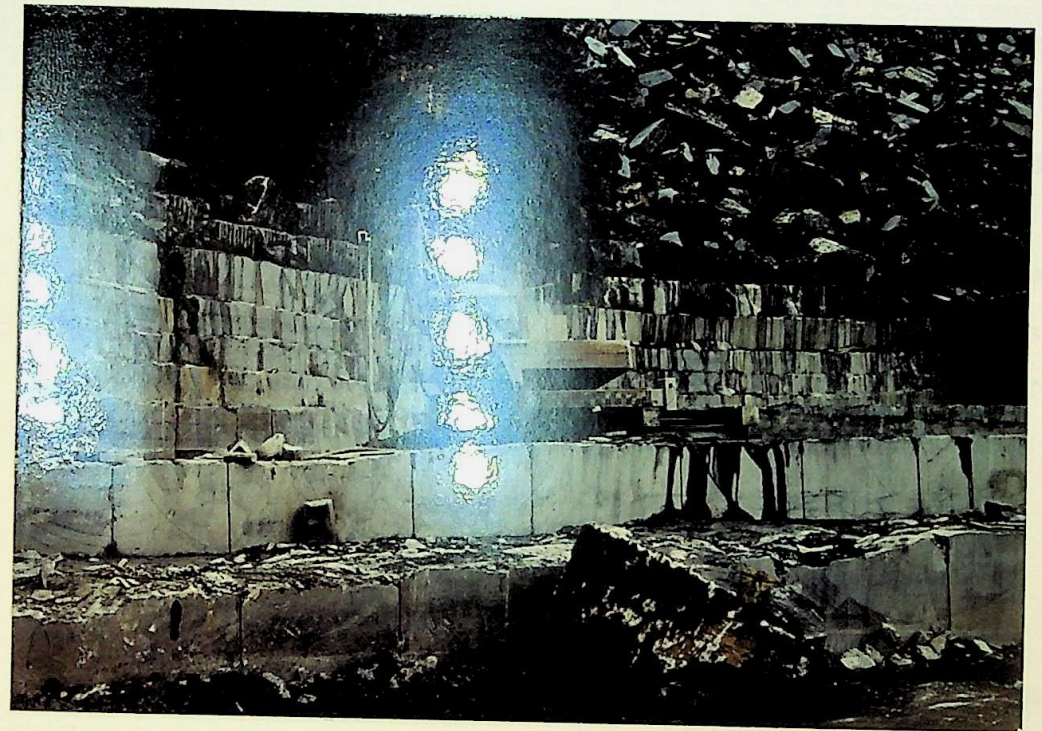


Figure 3. The diamond edged blade.



cutting in relief tended to be replaced by thin engravings. The Wexford stones of about 1830 that bear Pat Byrnes signature are a striking example of the change. There is no reason to suppose that he could do as good work as his father yet the majority of signed specimens are monotonous and boring.

The supposition that Byrne had comparatively few ideas is not quite true. Other factors must be considered. From the end of the 18th century onwards changes accrued rapidly in many spheres of industry. This all tended to increase uniformity and mass output and to decrease originality and individual craftsmanship. This governed the supply and demand of folk art products in remote parts of Co. Wicklow and Co. Wexford and must have affected the enthusiasm of the workers tremendously.

#### Preliminary Research

While rambling in the old graveyard of my home town of Carlow last summer, a patterned stone caught my eye which I had never noticed before. On it was a raised image of the crucifixion scene (fig. 4). I became totally fascinated by it and decided to look for other stones in that graveyard that might have been similar to it. Unfortunately there were no others and it, being unsigned, gave me little information. However, the date 1775 was interesting, and eventually it was going to lead me to many other burial grounds in the area in search of similarly executed headstones.





Figure 4. The Crucifixion scene at the old graves Carlow.



Being such an elaborate stone, I decided that the best place to start would be the private burial grounds on the many large landlord estates which surround Carlow town. Although my search was in vein as far as finding a parallel to the original crucifixion scene was concerned, I did enjoy it and I learned more about burial grounds from that period. The burial ground on these estates were important structures often surrounded by high walls where elaborate stones commemorate not only the members of the family but also the household pets. (fig. 5)

I feel it has been essential to familiarise myself with the historical and geological background of any region before examining headstones of that region.

In the middle of a field about five miles south of Carlow town, I was surprised to see a group of old cedar trees surrounded by a square stone wall. Curiosity encouraged me to investigate and having climbed over locked gates and warning signs that stated trespassers would be prosecuted, I plodded across the ploughed field. Inside the six foot high wall, I found just three granite crosses approximately four foot in height erected to a General Thomas who had fought at Waterloo and his family. After making enquiries I was informed that it was simply known as the Thomas burial ground of Belmont House. However, Belmont House had stood some six miles away from there and so I can only presume that this family bought the attractive plot. It had obviously been there long before the Thomas family as the nicely arranged cedar trees standing on





Figure 5. The Bruen burial ground Oak Park estate.



open land were at least two hundred years old, but the square stone wall was indeed a recent addition. Having visited all the large estates I began to explore old burial grounds just outside the town of Carlow. Although I found some interesting primitive inscriptions (fig. 6) I hadn't yet found a crucifixion scene. I made further enquiries at the National Library, Dublin. To my delight and great surprise I found that the librarian was not only from the district I had been exploring but also had a great interest in the subject. He kindly directed me to sources of information on stonecutting in the 18th century. Little though there was, he encouraged me to continue my research.

The more elaborately ornamented headstones are located in the east. On many of these stones, the crucifixion scene is depicted in varying degrees of elaboration and often signed by the carver. Most numerous of all are designs based on the emblems of the passion. It seems probable that these emblematic designs were initially inspired by what has been termed as "The Heraldry of Christ", so often displayed on the sides of the great alter tombs of the 16th and 17th centuries.

It is sometimes forgotten that the practice of erecting headstones in graveyards did not develop until the 17th century and that prior to this development, many graves were either not marked at all or were marked only by a low plain footstone. For this reason, you must understand that the work I have examined would have been considered a relatively new craft in its own time.



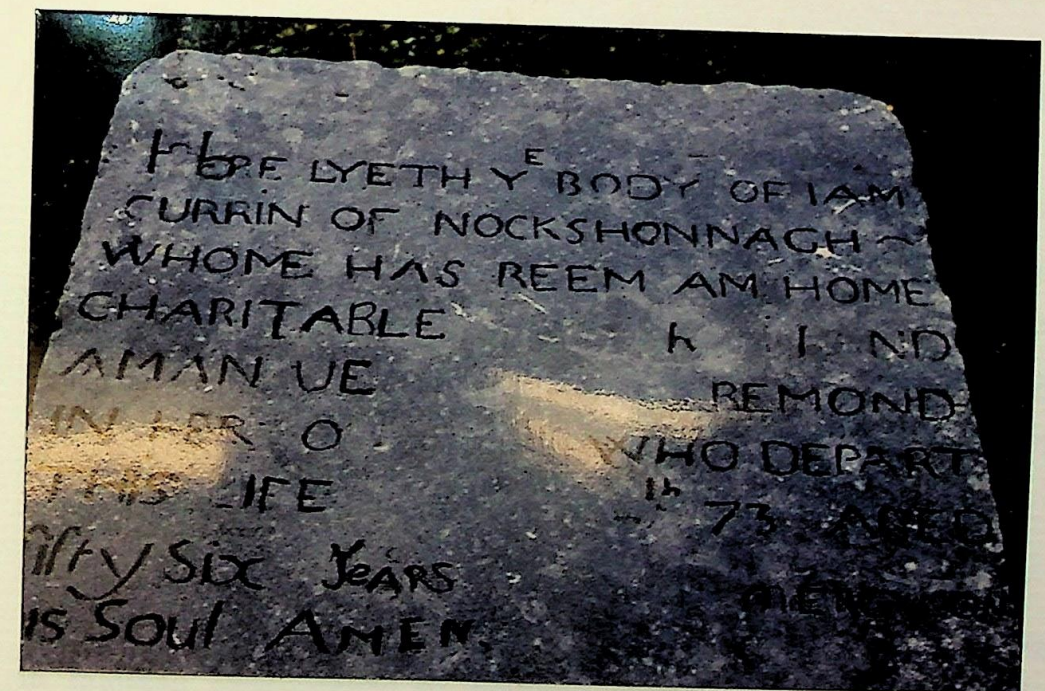


Figure 6. Inscriptions found in the old burial grounds in the Carlow area.



Stones signed by Dennis Cullen of Monaseed, Miles Brien of Rathduff, James Byrne and others indicate the growth of centres of distinctive work. Cullen was possibly the first to attempt these ambitious representations of the crucifixion scene, with the figures dressed in contemporary 18th century costume (fig. 7). It must have been quite humorous at that time to see an "up-to-date" crucifixion scene. Once Cullen's designs became popular, several local contemporaries developed similar styles. Two whom I have found most interesting have been Miles Brien and James Byrne. Their deeply-cut patterns are sufficiently related in technique to show that a kind of local school of monumental "Fold Art" existed from about 1760 - 1820. From that period onwards the quality of both decoration and lettering appear to have been on the decline. They were replaced by monotonous motives merely scratched in limestone, despite the suitability of that material to relief carving.

The tradition still exists that although the best carving was done on good stone near the quarries and was subsequently transported considerable distances, orders were also worked on poorer local materials. As regards the designs themselves, so far no source has been found to which they can be attributed. The obvious supposition that they developed either from illustrations in religious literature of the penal times or from some undefined foreign contact, still remains unsupported by practical proof.

A study of Canon J.E.H. Blakes account of certain tombstones in midland churchyards of England shows that although no imaginative connection existed between the styles, there were at least two con-





Figure 7. Eighteen century costume adapted by Dennis Cullen.



temporary schools of monumental art of a similarly limited and localised kind. Bearing this English parallel in mind, it is interesting to note that many of the more widely distributed signed and unsigned Irish stones have decorations that are almost entirely based on those emblems of the Passion which were either well known or easy to execute. Had visual inspiration been required, it could have been obtained from any of the elaborately carved series of emblems that are still to be seen on some of the ambitious 16th and 17th century monuments at Kilrea, Co. Kilkenny, or in St. Marys Abbey, New Ross, Co. Wexford.

The most common symbols to appear on 18th century headstones were the cross, crown of Thorns, spear, cup, pole, sponge and hyssop, ladder, hammer, pincers, nails, dice, pillar and ropes, cock on pillar, palm branch, sun and moon.

Only a selection of these emblems occasionally appear on headstones, where as on the great tombs, few were omitted. Some fashions took longer to reach some places than others, some cutters were more adventurous, some, more traditional. Local customs had their effects and local stone had its effect.

The schemes in which these symbols have been adapted have intrigued me but I have also taken a deep interest in the lettering of the 18th century stones which I will discuss later. My interest in this early style of lettering has developed greatly since submitting a paper on 14th and 15th century scripts used in illuminated manuscripts, last year.



However, it is to the stonecutters that I pay greatest tribute. With hammer, mallet and chisel their weathered hands have shaped and fashioned rough boulders, their greatest love, but sometimes their silent enemy. At times they may have wanted to curse their material but they always speak to it kindly, respecting its suggestions. It sometimes dictates to them and so they must learn to come to terms with it in order to master it.

The more interesting the stones became the more intrigued I became at how so many could have survived so long. Perhaps thanks is due to folklore which insists that the sensitive person may well encounter a spectre of some sort in a graveyard. These range from ghostly figures to horses and carriages. Even Shakespeare succeeds in setting an evil atmosphere in the play Hamlet:-

" 'Tis now the very witching time of night  
When churchyards yawn,  
And hell itself breathes out  
Contagion to this world "

Whatever the reason, it is wonderful that we can examine such aged specimens of one of the oldest crafts in the world, as, by the end of the eighteenth century the design and letterforms become monotonous and boring. The Victorians took monumental masonry out of the hands of the craftsmen, standardised designs and displayed them in catalogues for universal public use.



In this chapter I shall deal specifically with the work of three of the most noted stonecutters in the east of 18th century Ireland. The style adapted by all three stonecutters, Dennis Cullen, Miles Brien and James Byrne was very limited in influence and was virtually confined to certain parts of County Wexford, East County Wicklow and East County Carlow. These limitations however, are probably largely explained by the various geographical features of the district in question, and by problems of 18th century transport.

Roughly speaking, Dennis Cullen's work is to be found within reach of the Avonmore river basin, Miles Brien's along the river Barrow and James Byrne's distributed over the central Slaney section (fig. 8). There seems to be one focal point for all these productions on the Wexford - Wicklow border possibly within convenient distance of the quarries near Newtownbarry, where a good quality stone ideal for monumental work is available.

I shall deal with the work of these stonecutters in order of importance:-

- \* In the first section I shall deal with the work of Dennis Cullen of Monaseed, Co. Wexford.
- \* In section 2, the work of Miles Brien of Rathduff, Co. Carlow will be examined.
- \* In the final section I shall look at the work of James Byrne - thought to be from Monaseed, Co. Wexford.





Figure 8. Map of area where Dennis Cullen's work is to be found.



Dennis Cullen

It may now be of interest to examine Cullen's work. He came from Monaseed, Co. Wexford as I have seen inscribed on a stone at Glendalough. His work can be conveniently graded into three classes - roughly grouped according to the quality and elaboration of the design:-

Class "A" - would have three crucifixes and six or more subsidiary motives. They would be the most expensive as they could only be worked in the closer grained stone which had often been brought from quite a distance.

Class "B" - were those with a single crucifix and five or six accompanying motives. These are more common and possibly a more ordinary local material has been used. They can be assumed to be the average price.

Class "C" - would account for the very simple designs that are limited to three or four motives, the majority are unsigned and are possibly the work of imitators or apprentices rather than of Cullen himself.

Even though Glendalough is far from Monaseed, Cullen's work base, the largest collection of his work is there. This is probably due to the wealthy and appreciative patrons who would have been privileged to be buried within this famous ground.



I decided I would have to go there and examine these fine specimens for myself. The morning I set out, was bright and sunny. It was Sunday 10th March. The last time I had been there was about eleven years ago, an occasion which was very faint in my memory. I recall climbing the steep slopes surrounding the monastic site with my brothers but I'm sure I took little or no interest in the graveyard. For that reason, my return visit was somewhat special. The bus, having passed through remote and mountainous landscape arrived at its destination at noon. I reached the graveyard, (having being side tracked) after a short while, finding that I had missed the entrance and had to climb over a somewhat insecure wall. As in other graveyards I had expected a search before finding any of Cullens executions, but lo and behold, in less than five minutes found myself standing beside the famous signature stone itself. Having read descriptions of it from Mrs. H.G. Leask's notes in the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, Merrion Square, Dublin, it seemed unbelievable that I could actually now touch it. (fig. 9 ). On bended knees, I ran my fingers over the emblems and inscribed areas. American tourists taking pictures of the round tower looked on in amazement. Perhaps they thought I had found some sort of miraculous healing stone !

The signature stone erected to Elizabeth Roach who died in 1775, is signed as follows:- (fig. 10)



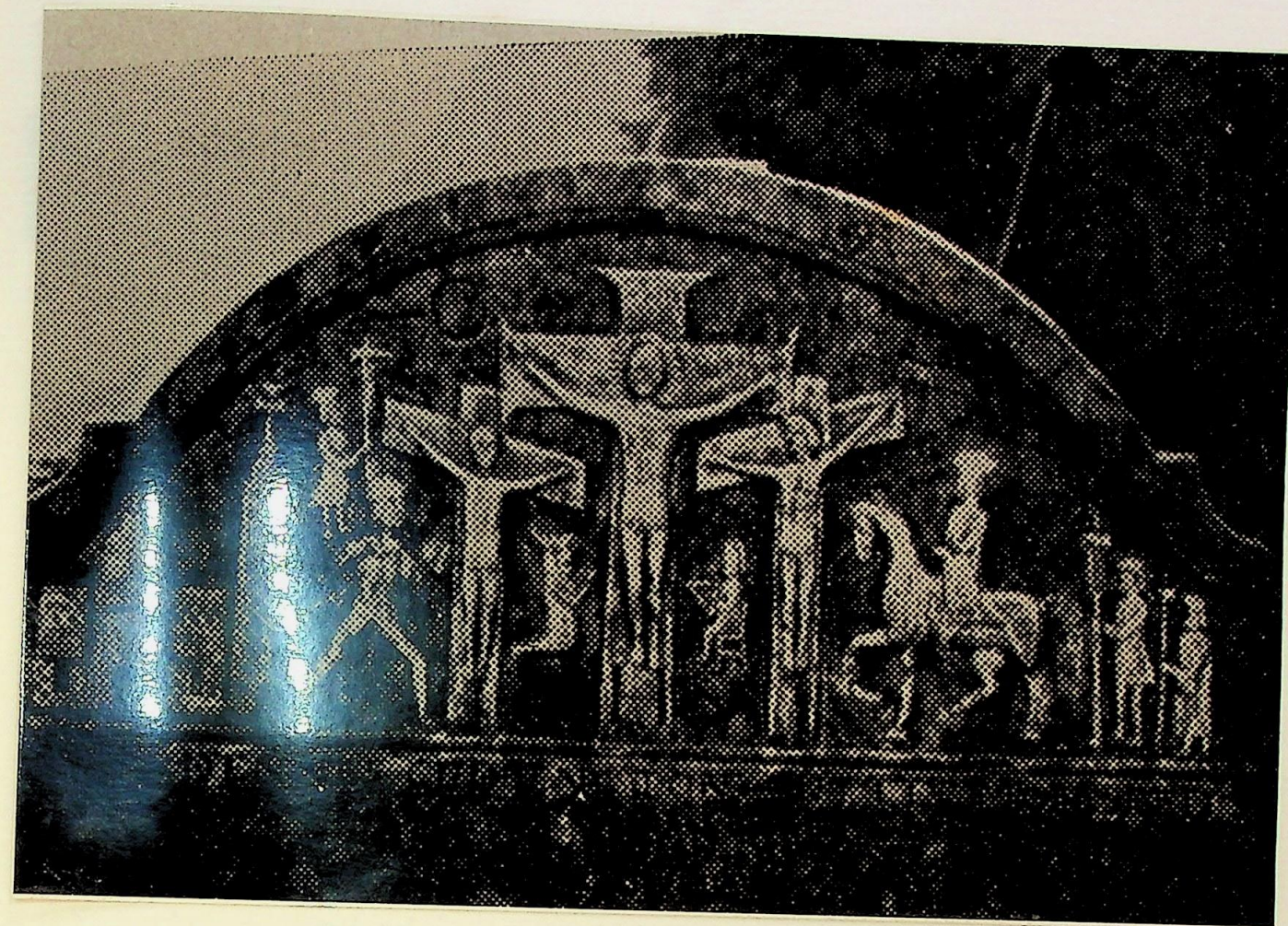


Figure 9. Dennis Cullens signature stone Glendalough.





Figure 10. Dennis Cullen's signature in detail.

It has many class "A" features and the figures are grouped in a careful and pleasing manner, although, certain emblems of the Passion (hammer, pincers and nails) which are near the top, seem to be less skilful additions.

The harpest and Virgin appear beside the central cross, but with some differences, their relative positions being reversed and while the former is clearly kneeling instead of standing as in most of his other executions, the harpest is definitely without wings. Of course the most amazing characteristics of this stone must be the manner in which he uses 18th costume, complete even to the flaps on the pockets and the patterned saddlecloth on the horse. By contrast the crucifixion figures are interpreted in a less imaginative way, though, 'as always in keeping with the older



tradition of the High Crosses. No other specimens of Cullen's is so fine and the fullness in which he has signed the stone suggests that he took pride in it himself. It is likely that this was the first of his work to be erected at Glendalough.

Of the five other signed stones at Glendalough, four are in poor condition and of what remains they are likely to have only ever been Class "B" works. All of them have been cleverly designed using a variety of symbols in different schemes. They include memorials to Thomas Grant 1773, various members of the Byrne family 1784 and 1785, to the brothers James and Patrick Malone who both died in 1786 and finally to Robert McCormick 1784 though unsigned bears the characteristics of Cullen's style.

Three stones at Kilnenor are obviously imitations. The schemes of decoration are similar but they are merely engraved on limestone and not in the least in the manner of Dennis Cullen although, that in memory of Dennis Whelan who died in 1798 is also clearly signed "D. Cullen" (fig. 11 ). The other two are dated too late to be those of Dennis Cullen himself but they could however be those of a younger member of his family.

At Ballintemple, near Woodenbridge, is another signed and really fascinating piece of good class "B" and one of his later pieces as the obituary notice to Owen Kinsley is dated April 1782 (fig. 12 ).



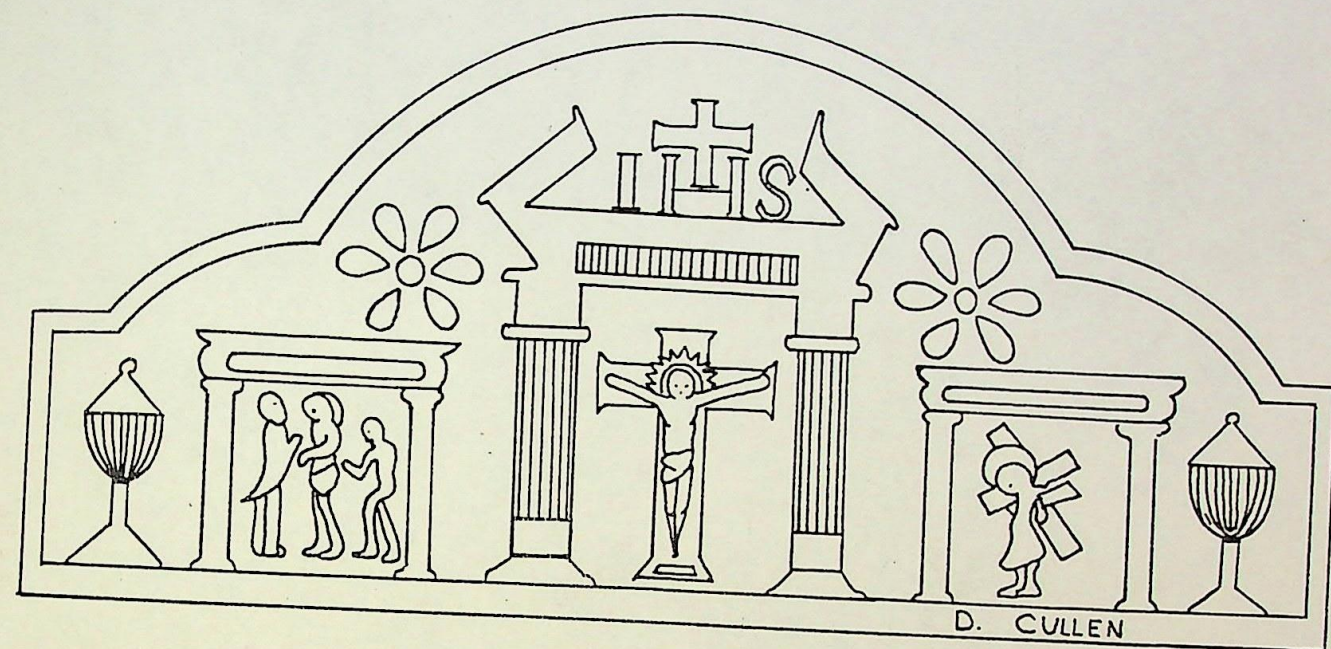


Figure 11. Stone commemorating Dennis Whelan at Kilnenore 1782.





Figure 12. Stone commemorating Owen Kensley at Ballintemple 1782.



The very deeply cut motives are placed in a symmetrical manner, the crowned figure of the Virgin and to one side an angel playing a small harp and seated in comfort on a chippendale style chair. While on the other side, David - symbolic of the old dispensation as opposed to the Virgin of the new. These figures frequently appear elsewhere though seldom so clearly as in this example. At Ennisboyne on the costal side of the river, there is nearly the same design, (including the Virgin, angel, harp and chair) on the signed stone to Alexander Ellis who died in 1783. It is possible that both stones were executed at that same time.

In a hillside graveyard at Kilcommon between Rathdrum and Glenealy there is an excellent stone signed "Dennis Cullen" dedicated to the Rev. Bryan Byrne who died in 1776 (fig. 13). This specimen is the only one recorded to have been dedicated to a priest. Although only one crucifix is illustrated we can still rank it as a Class "A" design. As much time and labour was undoubtedly spent on the many subsidiary features the most notable being the church with steeple and dome and two figures on the roof. The subsidiary motives are both numerous and rather poorly arranged for a Cullen pattern based on the single crucifixion style. The large motives, church, lance and sponge bearer, crucifix, horseman and ladder, suggest that the design originally consisted of these alone and that the smaller motives including, the cock and pot were fitted in to comply with the more ambitious requirements of a "Special order".





Figure 13. Stone commemorating the Rev. Bryan Byrne at Kilcommon 1776.

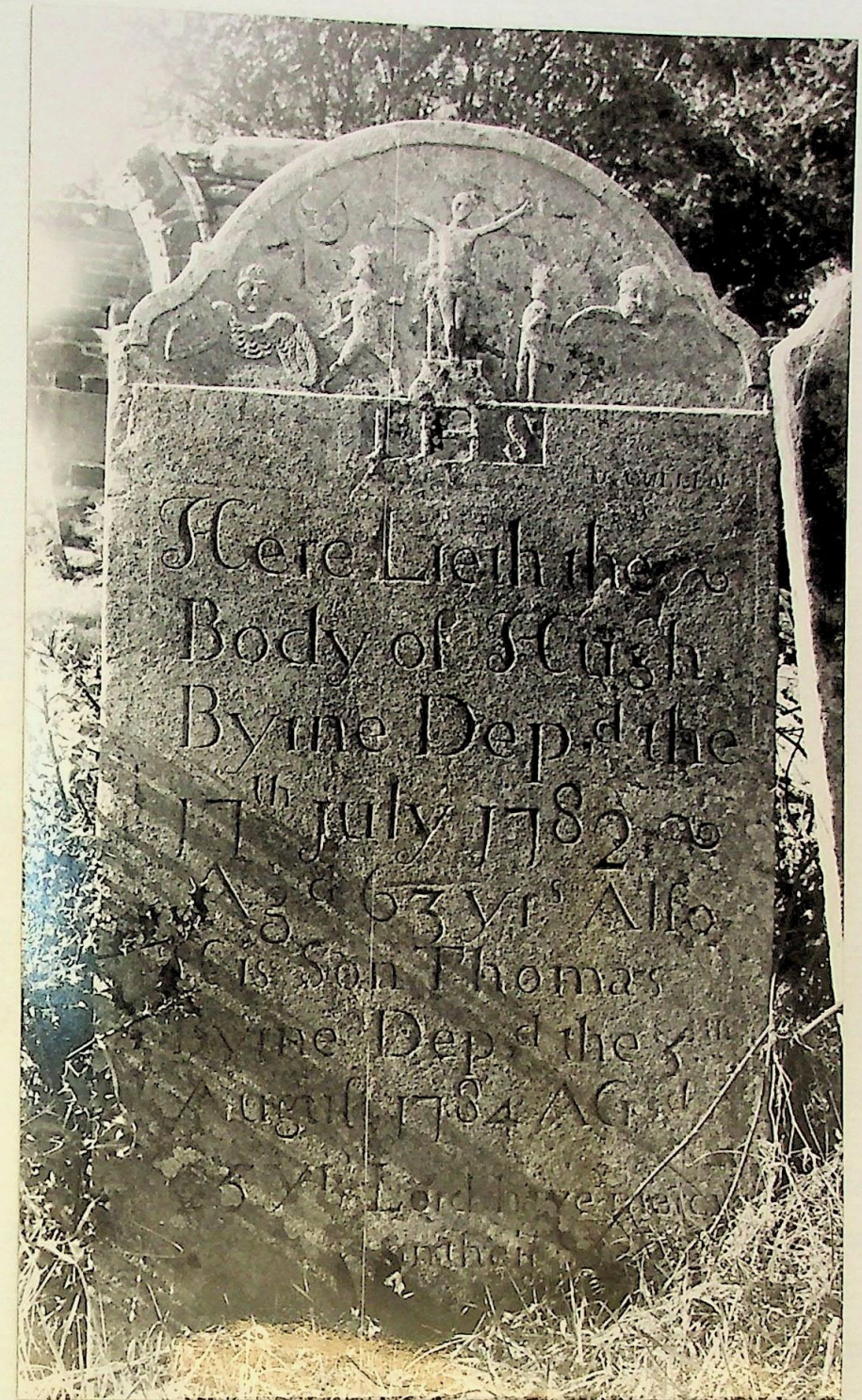


Such an explanation may seem outlandish, but whatever the reason may have been, the fact remains that the smaller details are not so well planned as in most of his designs. Most of the Cullen specimens which I have examined have been based in one way or another on the crucifixion scene, but there are also a few patterns so different in character and so limited in their symbolism that it can only be presumed that they were "Special Orders" for Protestants. These stones would usually have a simple church and flower or tree.

Probably the most interesting designs of this kind are to be seen at Hacketstown, Co. Carlow. There, there are two signed stones of 1770 and 1768 commemorating George White and James and Ann Jackson, respectively. Even in its rather broken condition, the white stone is really remarkable and it is still possible to trace not only the usual church, (this time with a tree, a man and a dog on its roof) but also a unique representation of a contemporary carriage with driver and horse. Above the horses head is a tree.

Much has been said about the destructive effects of weathering, growth of lichen etc., yet it must be remembered that most of Cullen's stones were erected over 230 years ago. All of them at least 200 years old. It says much for the quality of the material and of the work that any designs at all are still comparatively intact and inscriptions still legible.





**MONASEND**

Figure 14. Examples of Dennis Cullen's lettering.



Of the three cutters I have studied I have found that Cullen's style has been most elaborate. Not only in the motives, but also in the lettering (fig. 14).

During the 18th Roman art and architecture were greatly admired and it was the fashion to copy them. Fashionable people therefore expected their monuments to have inscriptions in good Roman letters. For this reason I have found excellent examples in private burial grounds of large landlord estates (fig. 15).

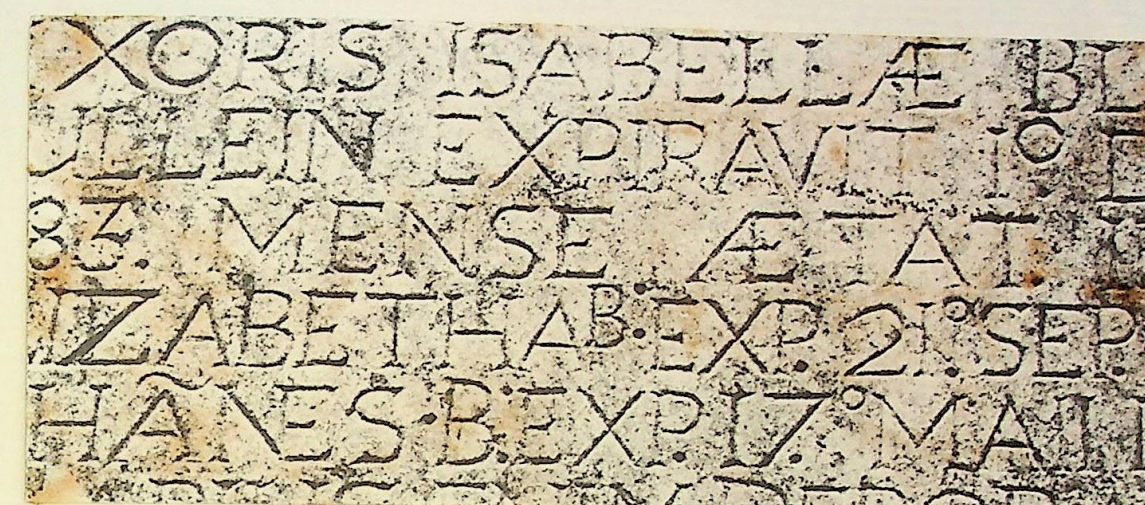


Figure 15. Similar Roman letters to be found elsewhere in Ireland.

Likewise Cullen has used the thick and thin strokes of the Roman alphabet and has added his own decorative endings to particular letteres, e.g. the rubbing of the "D" and the capital "H". It is also interesting to note that he has shortened the length of the words in places. (fig. 16).



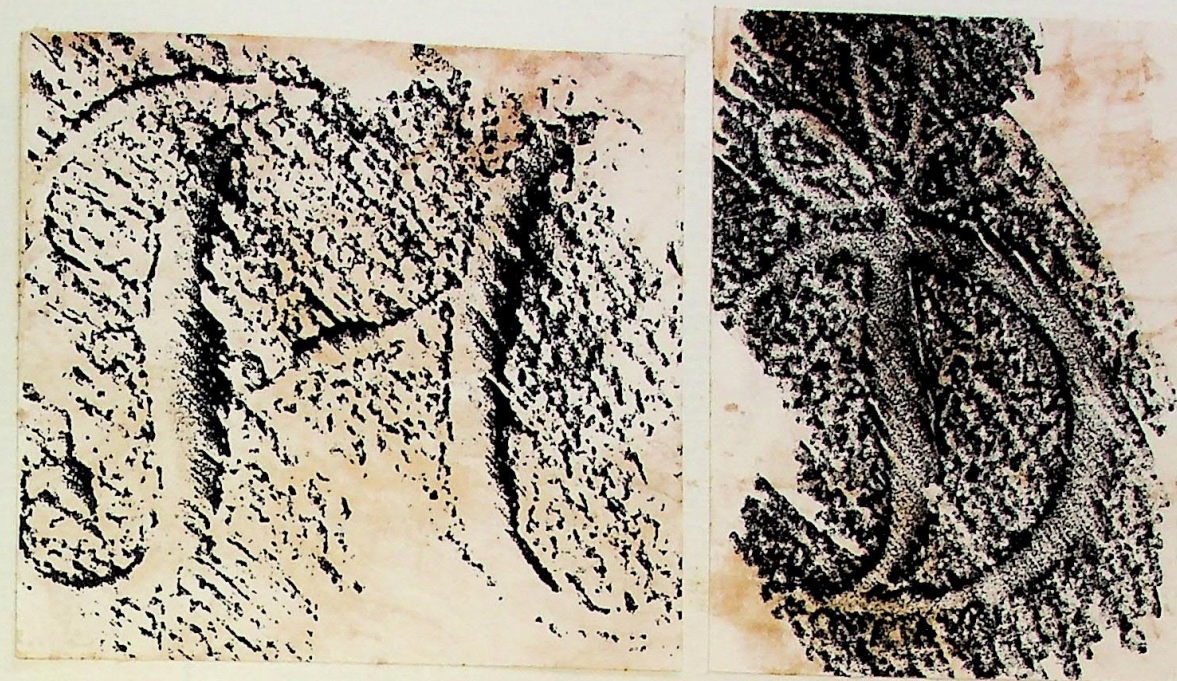


Figure 16. Examples of Dennis Cullen's ornate capital letters.

It appears to me that this Roman lettering was more popular on the east coast.

Overleaf is a copy of two stones in the remotely situated abbey of Corcomroe, Co. Clare. Note how on the left the older stone has the background cut away and the letters appearing in relief. (Also note how "N" is cut back to front, Soul has been broken up, on the first line and the "E" in "The" is a continuation of "H", a common feature in 18th stonecutting). Although the lettering in both stones appeal to me very much they certainly differ a lot from the "organized" style of Cullen (fig. 17)





Figure 17. Examples of 18th century lettering found in County Clare.



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Expense rather than lack of appreciation may have limited his employment locally, and this may explain why there are not more specimens of his better work near Monaseed while the existence of weathyer patrons may account for the numbers in distant centres.

The cost of producing one of these headstones in time and labour must have been reflected in their price. The question of price has been on my mind throughout my research. Although I have been unable to uncover records of burial or pricelists from this period in the south, a friend from Whitechurch, Co. Dublin believed that there were records from this time in the Church of Ireland in his parish. I made an appointment to meet the rector concerned and on the 9th March cycled out to meet him. It was a sunny spring morning, ideal for graveyard rambling. The Rev. H. McKinley was most helpful and apart from giving me the recorded pricelits (fig. 18), he also introduced me to the churchyard caretaker, Mr. Williams, an old man who had taken great interest and pride in the old churchyard. I felt he could be compared to the stonecutters of our past, whose love for the decorated stone remained silent but strong. Together we examined the handwritten records which have been kept under lock and key for so many years. Because these have been the only records I have been able to find, I can only assume that the prices were similar further south.

Although I have found it difficult to visit all the graveyards where Cullen's work would be likely to appear, I feel I have examined a sufficient variety of his excecutions to familiarize myself with his style.



	Minister	Clerk	Sexton	Bell-ringer
Marriages by Licence.	£1-0-0	5-0	2-6	-
Marriages by Bann.	5-0	2-6	1-0	-
Funerals of Parishioners.	3-0	2-6	-	-
Funerals of non-Parishioners.	6-0	3-6	-	-
Desk Service (additional).	10-0	2-6	2-6	-
Head stone for Parishioners.	10-0	2-6	-	-
Head stone for non-Parishioners.	£1-0-0	5-0	-	-
Flat stone for Parishioners.	£2-2-0	3-0	-	-
Flat stone for non-Parishioners	£4-4-0	6-0	-	-
Tomb for Parishioners	£5-5-0	10-0	-	-
Tomb for non-Parishioners.	£10-10-0	£1-0-0	-	-
Railing about tomb for Parishioners.	£5-5-0	10-0	-	-
Railing about tomb for non-Parishioners.	£10-10-0	£1-0-0	-	-
Vault for every 2 coffins it may be constructed to contain (Parishioners)	£2-12-6	10-6	-	-
Vault for every 2 coffins it may be constructed to contain (non-Parishioners)	£5-5-0	£1-1-0	-	-
Memorial stone within or without side of church for Parishioners.	£5-5-0	10-6	-	-
Memorial stone within or without side of church for non-Parishioners.	£10-10-0	£1-1-0	-	-
Churching.	-	1-6	-	-
Making a large grave.	-	-	2-6	-
Making a small grave.	-	-	1-8	-
When ordered to make one deeper than usual or to remove coffins.	-	-	7-6	-
For every Marriage or Funeral for which he tolls	-	-	-	2-0
The above fees to remain in force during the incumbency of the Reverend George Browne				

Figure 18. Scale of fees adopted by select vestry in April 1828.



Before discussing the work of Miles Brien I would like to list three points which help to summerize my research on the work of Dennis Cullen:-

- \* Most of his work was executed between 1765 and 1790, the largest number being worked between 1775 and 1785.
- \* Seldom does he repeat his designs. He had a set stock of motives and used them to adapt different schemes.
- \* There are stones dated later than those of Cullen, and signed Dennis Cullen, but these are thinly engraved rather than carved. Some of these are at Avoca, dated as late as 1840 and signed:-

" DENIS CULLEN, SCULPTOR, BALLINTOMBAY "

It may be presumed that there was another of the name who attempted to carry on the family traditions in Monumental art.



Miles Brien

Briens work is found in a great number of the older graveyards of central and northern Wexford, especially within the area from, Templeludigan to St. Mullins, Kilmyshall to Toome and Castle Ellis. Certain factors, however, help to indicate the region of his probable base. The tendency was to work as much near their original centre as possible. Miles Brien seems to have enjoyed working in the north west of Wexford and on the Carlow border. There are eight signed examples at Adamstown alone. This would indicate that his working base was in this region, probably near the quarries of the Newtownbarry area.

Signed stones are very valuable, from them we can trace others which have not been signed but have been treated similarly and so we can connect stone to cutter. Brien always achieved a graceful balance of motives even though he repeated his designs over and over again. Cullen never repeated his designs but Brien came later than Cullen working from approximately 1785 - 1805, during which time formal repetition rather than variation was more in demand. Apart from the occasional much simplified versions of certain patterns which were probably mainly a matter of price, I have discovered that his designs can be classified into two groups:-



A. Informal Patterns

A comparatively small number of these exist and are most certainly earlier in date. Each has very individual designs of its own.

B. Formal Patterns

These are more common and most likely cheaper. The schemes include some if not all of the motives surrounding the central crucifix.

One of the most elaborate designs in group A, occurs at Adamstown, a stone to Luke Bourke, 1790. His signature is very clear. It has three crucifixes, Christ and the two thieves. Perspective has been attempted.

The foreground includes;

The Virgin of the Rosary, a cone-shaped tree (the eastern tree of life), captain on horseback, a soldier, the lance, the sponge bearer, a domed church.

All bear a resemblance to Cullens work.

So much reverence and wealth is attached to St. Mullins, Co. Carlow, that it is not surprising that there are many group A, informal, and probably expensive stones there. It is situated so near the Wexford border that it would have been conveniently close to Briens base. The ruins of the ancient monastic settlement at St. Mullins are beautifully situated on the eastern band of the river



Barrow and stand on the site of great historic interest, which is associated in the ancient annals of our country with the events in the lives of two great men, Fin Mac Cumhaill of the Fianna and the great Ecclesiastic, who was once a prince, a patrist, an artist and a poet, St. Moling, whose names are still familiar to us. It is recorded in the Book of Leinster that in the third century, 400 years before St. Moling's time, having seen an apparition at St. Mullins, then "Ross Broc", predicated that;


"Even the household of the King of Heaven and Earth, and shavilings will come to this place",

meaning St. Moling and his community. I visited St. Mullins in September last. (fig. 19)



Figure 19. View of St. Mullins, Co. Carlow.





Surrounded by forest and hills, the air so peaceful and silent, broken only by running water. No doubt the wide river has had the greatest influence on the area, which was tidal at that time. The burial ground is surrounded by barren granite based soil, but it itself is situated on an extensive fertile "island" of limestone drift.

Most of the stones at St. Mullins are in good condition but there are some which lie half covered beneath the undergrowth, for example, that to Bryan Fougarty 1788 just shows traces of two of the three crucifixes, horse and rider, lance and sponge bearer, domed church, with the name "M. O'Brien" faintly legable across the doorway of the church. It must be remembered that all three crucifixes are by no means a constant feature of Briens designs at St. Mullins. An unsigned stone there commemorating Daniel O'Neal 1789 is a typical group B, formal, example (fig. 20 )

Somewhat similar schemes of much the same date are to be seen in other places, 1791 at Chapel, Co. Wexford, which is marked "M.B. " and one of 1788 unsigned in the neighbouring Ballybrennan graveyard. Unfortunately many of even these less ornate stones have also suffered badly from the effects of time and weather, for example on the stone to John Murphy 1788 at Old Monart near Enniscorthy, little can now be discerned except:- "Miles O'Brien" in cursive lettering and a cone-shaped tree on either side of the crucifix.





Figure 20. Stone commemorating Daniel O'Neill, St. Mullins 1789.



The same tree can be seen on two other unsigned stones, one at St. Mullins 1781 and the other at Templeludigan 1793. All Briens informal designs occur with in the St. Mullins - Templeludigan - Templeshanbo - Kilmyshall - Adamstown area, where he worked alone. (fig. 21 )

On February 17th I set out for the parish of Kilmyshall. Having finally found it outside the town of Bunclody, Co. Wexford my next problem was finding the old burial ground. After spending almost an hour in search of the familiar "cluster of trees", I met a man of the parish, a wealth of knowledge, who not only directed me to the spot but accompanied me and told me all the old stories of the district. The plot was situated in the middle of a ploughed field surrounded by trees and a slate stone wall. Laurels dispersed the afternoon sunlight in a magical way, casting dark shadows on the headstones, while darts of bright light displayed humming insects and other small creatures which thrive happily in this untouched and almost forgotten wilderness. (fig. 22). The man told me of how when he was a young boy, he would bring the cows through these parts and would often stop to read a headstone and absorb the beauty and stillness that make these sacred old grounds so attractive to every living creature. Apart from being totally enhanced by the atmosphere, my discovery of one of Miles Briens pieces made my journey even more worthwhile (fig. 23). The rising of 1798 transformed this small plot. The old man went on to tell me how during that troubled time, the small church was burned down and the priest hanged from a






Figure 21.  Map of area where Miles Briens work is to be found.





Figure 22. View of the old burial ground at Kilmyshall.





Figure 23. Taking a rubbing at Kilmyshall.




tall tree which still marks the tragic spot. Tradition brings people from around the parish to pray at this tree. They hand offerings from its bark and bless themselves in the bubbling stream below. He also showed me what is believed to be Eileen a'Ruan's grave - stone, the pretty Irish girl who's name is mentioned in Irish songs and folklore from the turn of the century.

The absence of any local tradition connected with Miles Briens name is unfortunate but the changing character of his work would seem to indicate that in his later years, he went further afield, came in contact with Byrnes ideas and developed more easily executed styles that suited the demands of the time and his apparently increasing orders.

The scheme of his Group B, or Formal patterns always included one mediievally-shaped broad crucifix showing Christ with inclined head, wig and perizonium. Surrounding figures and motives, such as robed personages, flying angels, Cherub's heads, palm and cone'-shaped trees, chalices, the sun and moon etc. These symbols occur again and again. Monotony is avoided by using different combinations but there are many exact copies, presumably most popular schemes. Example of these repeated designs include:-

- \* Mary Ryan at Castle Ellis 1795 signed M.B.
- \* A stone commemorating the Redmond family 1794 - fully signed, Miles Brien at Templeshanbo.



- 
- \* A stone to Mark Flood at St. Mullins who died in 1793 (fig. 24 )

All of the above three examples include:- two robed profile figures with halos, sprays of foliage behind them with a dove sitting on each.

In other areas, there are similar designs, some having,

- \* exactly the same, minus the doves,
- \* exactly the same, with the doves in a different position,
- \* the same without the sprays of foliage,
- \* the same scheme without either doves or foliage.

Another example of a repeated design occurs in the following executions by Miles Brien.

- \* A stone to Elizabeth Kavanagh 1794 at St. Mullins.
- \* M. Redmond 1788 - Adamstown.
- \* Nicholas Kennedy 1792 - Rossdroit.
- \* Ann Shanahan - 1794 - Toome.
- \* David Kavanagh 1794 - Whitechurch
- \* Michael Myrne 1796 - Castle Ellis.





Figure 24. Stone commemorating Mark Flood at St. Mullins 1793.



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The six stones listed have included in the design;

the facing figure of the Virgin with arms stiffly crossed and wearing a wig and charmingly executed panniered dress of the period. All six are fully signed. These are not whoever, the only examples of the "panniered dress theme". (fig. 25)



Figure 25. The panniered dress theme adapted by all three stonecutters.



There is a pattern quite similar where the two facing figures so clothed again appear but this time with arms upraised instead of crossed. Two of these appear at "Whitechurch" Co. Wexford.

More numerous, though less varied in accompanying detail are the patterns with two facing haloed figures dressed in distinctive "spiked" clothing. (fig. 26)



Figure 26. The spiked clothing adapted by all three stonecutters.



These figures are always placed standing beside the cross and are often attended by the two profile and plainly robed figure of previous designs, but this time without the halos. The two figures also carry five and six petalled sunflowers.

An exceptionally good but unsigned example is at Adamstown commemorating Judith Keaten 1801. (fig. 27)

Two similar stones appear at St. Mullins, the only difference being that they do not include the sunflowers. They are:-

- \* A stone to Robert Bealey 1801.

- \* A stone to David Murphy 1802.

Another variation of this design is as above, but this time the two figures have wings, for example,

- \* A fully signed stone to John Hiers 1797 at "Old Kilcavan" Co. Wexford.

- \* Another stone at Ballyhoge.

- \* And an unsigned stone at Carrig near Wexford.

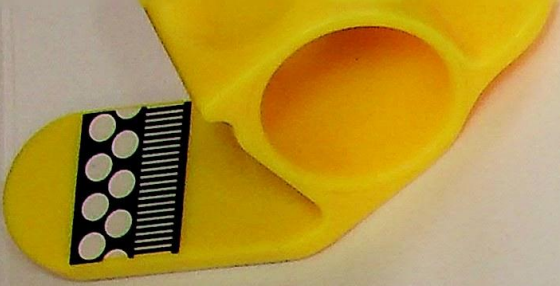
Sometimes the two figures are replaced by elaborate chalices.





Figure 27. Stone commemorating Judith Keaten at Adamstown 1801.





The formal patterns noted so far all fall into fairly well-defined groups but there are other variations besides those I have just described, for example, occasionally there are quite plainly robed facing figures beside the cross and sometimes the profile figures are kneeling. These minor variations are often cut in poor quality stone, presumably cheaper orders. They are of comparatively little importance, more interest attaches to more varied but still formal examples, obviously special orders. For example at St. Mullins appears a standard formal scheme with addition of a serpent beneath the cross, supporting two small trees. Nevertheless, neither of the last mentioned patterns is quite so curious as that to be seen at Whitechurch, Co. Wexford on the memorial erected to James Carty and wife. It bears the signature "M. Brien". Apart from the regular scheme the unique additions consist of:- foliage ornaments supporting medallions containing profile busts. Perhaps these are meant to be portraits of the deceased.

Although Miles Brien had imitators the style I have discussed in this chapter is indeed that of one man. Where this style is not usually constant it is probably due to varying stone, weathering and age.

It is important therefore that we make sufficient allowances for these differences.




James Byrne

James Byrne might be classed as the third most important in this particular form of "Fold Art". It has been obvious from the previous two cutters, they each did have a distinct style of their own and their work was confined to particular areas. James Byrne, on the other hand is quite different. It does not seem credible that any one man could really have had much to do with all the designs marked "James" or "J. Byrne". There is a very wide area of distribution. Stones are found as far north as Kilmyshall, Ballintemple and Ennereilly and as far south as Lady's Island, though the main concentration may be said to be within the Basin of the river Slaney. They are frequently found beside those of Cullens and Briens but in far greater proportions, sometimes as many as three or four to one. Therefore there are two points to remember about his stones:

- \* The divergent qualities.
- \* The unusually long range of obituary dates extending from about 1775 - 1819.

Nobody can say exactly why his work is so widespread but it can be presumed that Byrnes business was a family affair and while the elaborate and costly orders were probably undertaken by himself, the simpler patterns were entrusted to apprentices and relatives. No form of address occurs on the stones and so it





is very fortunate that James Byrne is still remembered in local tradition. The supplies of stones support this evidence. It is known that he was originally associated with Clone - a village not far from Enniscorthy and that many members of his family had long been connected with the quarries near Monaseed. He later settled in Enniscorthy and had at least one son who carried on the craft. It is highly likely, as there were a number of unfinished stones of his style found within the area, that he spent much of his early life near Monaseed and received most of his training there.

Formal patterns which could be easily executed on cheaper grades of material were on great demand. It is most likely that there was a school which specialized in this "simple formal style". Stones almost identical to those of Byrnes have been discovered with the signature "Martin" or "M. Kenny, Ballylough". These appear at Kilcavan near Gorey. Whether Byrne was the master and Kenny the apprentice, or vice versa, is unfortunately not clear but their styles are amazingly similar. Most of his designs conform to a number of related schemes.

There is one set of closely connected patterns showing:-

A central crucifix and Christ with a wig and perizonium, set either on a pedestal between two pillars or else triumphing over the serpent of evil and death, symbolised by Adams skull. Two simply dressed haloed female figures kneel or stand nearby.



these represent Mary and the Magdalene. Their positions vary. Sometimes both figures are facing, sometimes both are in profile but generally the Virgin, with crown, faces while the other kneels. The remaining space is normally devoted to the sun and moon, as symbols of the Passions and emblems of eternity.

This theme is so repetitive that it can only be presumed that it was the most requested, cheapest stock design. It therefore must be presumed that the hundreds of examples found throughout the Slaney area is the work of apprentices.

Almost as repetitive is another design which only differs slightly from the one mentioned above. For instance the sun and moon are occasionally replaced by cherub's heads or round-shaped churches, and palm branches to fill in corners !

Now that I have examined Byrnes " formal " work, it is satisfying to note that there is another area which includes his informal, more unique and possibly costly designs. Designs executed entirely by himself. An example of such a stone appears at Kilnenor, erected to E. Byrne 1779. (fig. 28 ). On it there are very decorative churches again the central crucifix, the ladder, sun, moon and the two kneeling female figures, but also, there are four, very detailed, leaning trees. It is fully





Figure 28. Stone commemorating E. Byrne at Kilnenor 1779.



signed "James Byrne". No replica so far has been found and so can be classed as "a special order". One could question in fact the symbolic value of the four trees. Are they merely ornamental or do they symbolize the four woods, cedar, cypress, palm and olive, from which it has been said, the cross on which Christ was crucified was composed ?

There is another design which includes winged busts in the place of the sun and moon. Examples of these appear at Ferns and Kilmyshall. Having been to Kilmyshall to examine the rare example of the signed stone to Catherine Nowlan, 1797, where an amusing little cherub's head is portrayed within the circle of the moon. (fig. 29).

I decided to visit Ferns where large numbers of his work appear. I set out for Ferns on March 2nd. On route I stopped at the picturesque village of Clonegal. Although I had never seen this district recorded, I decided to investigate anyway. As always I asked for directions to the "old" graveyard and as always, I received accurate directions from the towns people. It was outside the village on a hill below a church. Snowdrops sprinkled light on the damp, grey ground. The moist air helped my chalk to highlight the raised image on the stones surface. I made some interesting rubbings and was quite content, but then, an extra bonus, I found a stone executed by Byrne under a large





Figure 29. Stone commemorating Catherine Nowlan at Kilmyshall 1797.



laurel tree in the corner of the graveyard. His familiar signature was almost grown over but nevertheless, easily recognisable. (fig. 30 ).

Next stop was Kilrust (Co. Wexford) where I visited two burial grounds. Although I didn't find any of Byrnes this time, I found some interesting contrasting styles of lettering from the period in the older of the two graveyards. (fig. 31 )

On reaching Ferns it was cold and wet, but I couldn't complain. Every other day had been so fine and after all here was the largest display of James Byrnes work. The weather restricted the use of my camera but between showers I managed to take some interesting shots. The graveyard at Ferns is a wide spacious plot leaving the stones with little protection from the elements. Those which were slate were chippings and inscriptions on limestone were wearing. I found two interesting stones standing side by side. One which dated 1791 and was signed on the right hand side in bold roman style. The other, dated from 1795 was signed, again James Byrne, on the left hand side in a pen script style. This one must have been that of his sons as I had never seen any of Byrnes stones signed in this manner before. There was one well preserved and signed stone at Ferns commemorating John Kehoe 1791 which included winged busts in the place of the sun and moon. (fig. 32 ). An even more unusual specimen at





Figure 30. Stone commemorating H. Carty at Clonegal 1794.



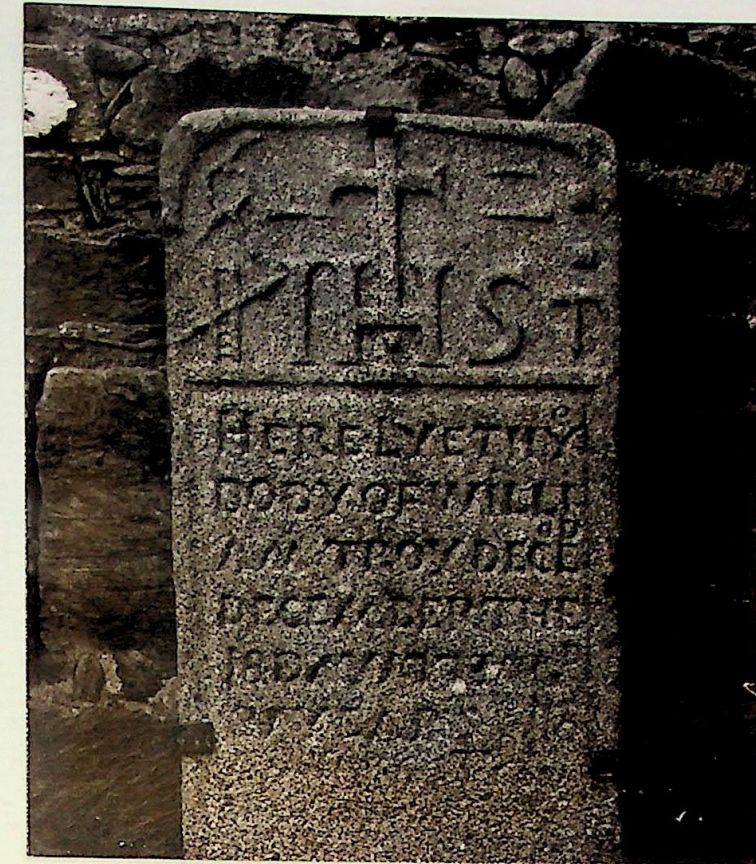


Figure 31. Contrasting styles of 18th century lettering.





Figure 32. Stone commemorating John Kehoe at Ferns 1791.



Mayglass to Joanna Furlong shows the conventional cherubic figure within the circle of the moon and two birds on foliated standards in place of Mary and the Magdalene.

At Ferns there is another stone which shows winged figures with short trousers (Elizabethan) and abbreviated tunics. (fig 33) It is erected to Moses Breen - 1790. There is another to John Quinn - 1790 at Kilcavan, near Gorey, which differs slightly. This one only depicts two angelic figures at the crucifix, a winged bust and the sun. All of these examples show the unusually stiffly draped Virgin and the pike-bearer. The pike-bearer is an easily recognisable echo of Cullens work to be found in Byrnes.

It must be remembered that the obituary date may be far from the time that the stone was cut. Thus it can be assumed that similar designs were executed at the same time and so represent a phase in the artists development as well as a phase in demand. For example, a stone at Kilcavan near Gorey, to J. Mernagh 1795 depicts a "vast temple" (fig. 34). The same temple appears on stones carrying obituary dates between 1791 - 1795. This is probably one of Byrnes most ambitious efforts.

Classification is less easy in most of the remaining designs where variety is mainly obtained by a combination of motives from several patterns, perhaps arranged by special request and sometimes





Figure 33. Stone commemorating Moses Breen at Ferns 1790.



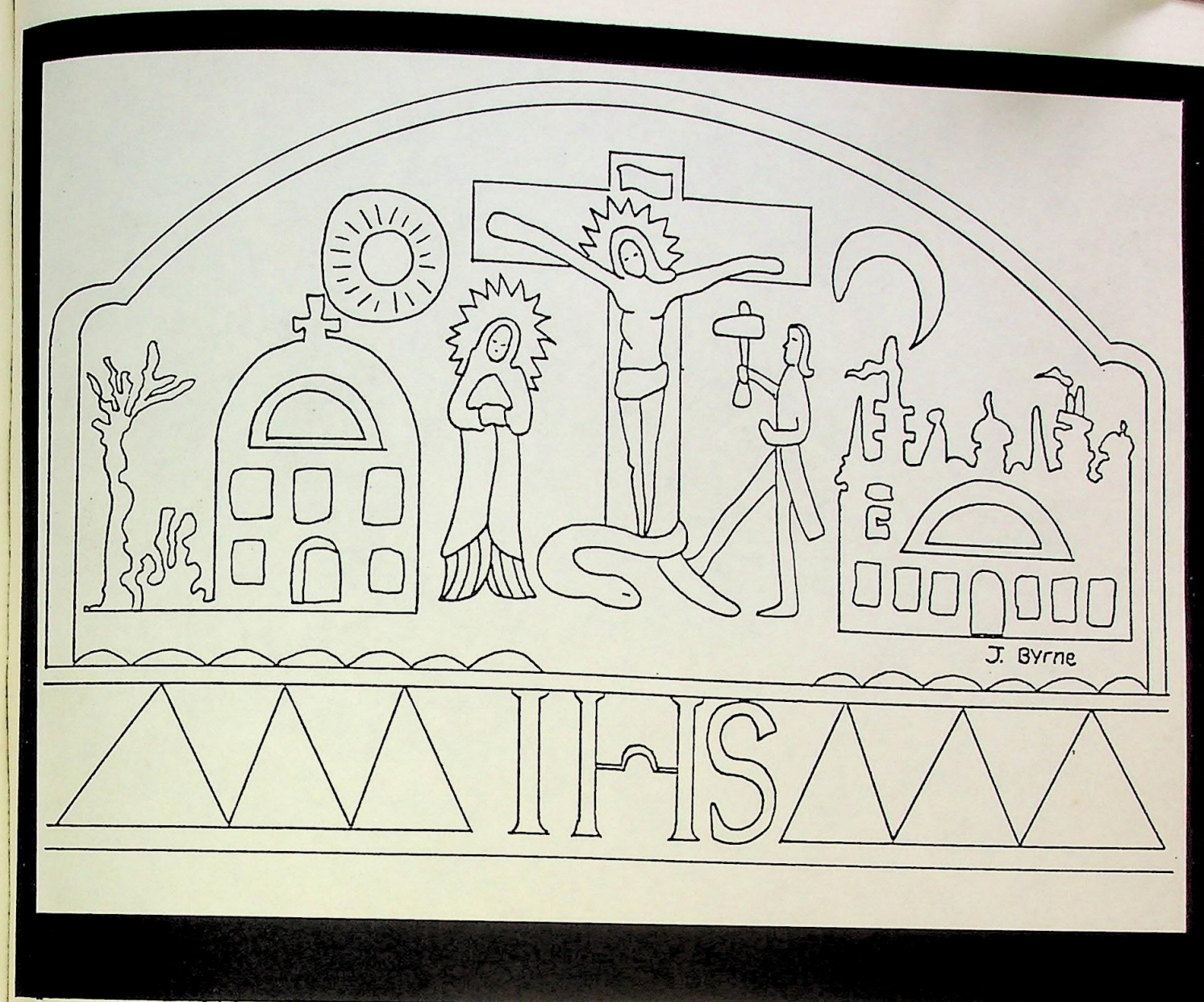


Figure 34. Stone commemorating J. Mernagh at Kilcavan 1795.



very confusing. This is especially noticeable in several schemes that include two small birds on sticks, for example, a signed stone at Carrig, Co. Wexford, to William Furlong of Coalcotts 1774. Here the birds are accompanied by a winged bust, one angelic figure holding a crown and a full complement of the visual motives. Another signed pattern to Catherine Kelly 1802 is similar to the Furlong stone, (fig. 35). Another likeness to the Furlong stone is that to Mary Coneley at Carrig which bears the date 1837. The accompanying signature J. Byrne on this stone must surely refer to a son.

Finally, just as one of the earliest and most remarkable "special order" was to be found at Kilnenor on the memorial to E. Byrne of 1779, so too is one of the latest and most unusual patterns. It commemorates James McConnell 1802. It is not as ornate as some others but it bears interesting features:-

- \* The facing Virgin with a cloak, like some of Briens work.
- \* The two tall male figures holding pikes and wearing 18th century costumes with rather more elegance than do Cullens soldiers.
- \* The elaborate detail of the foliage border with a bird on each end (fig. 36)



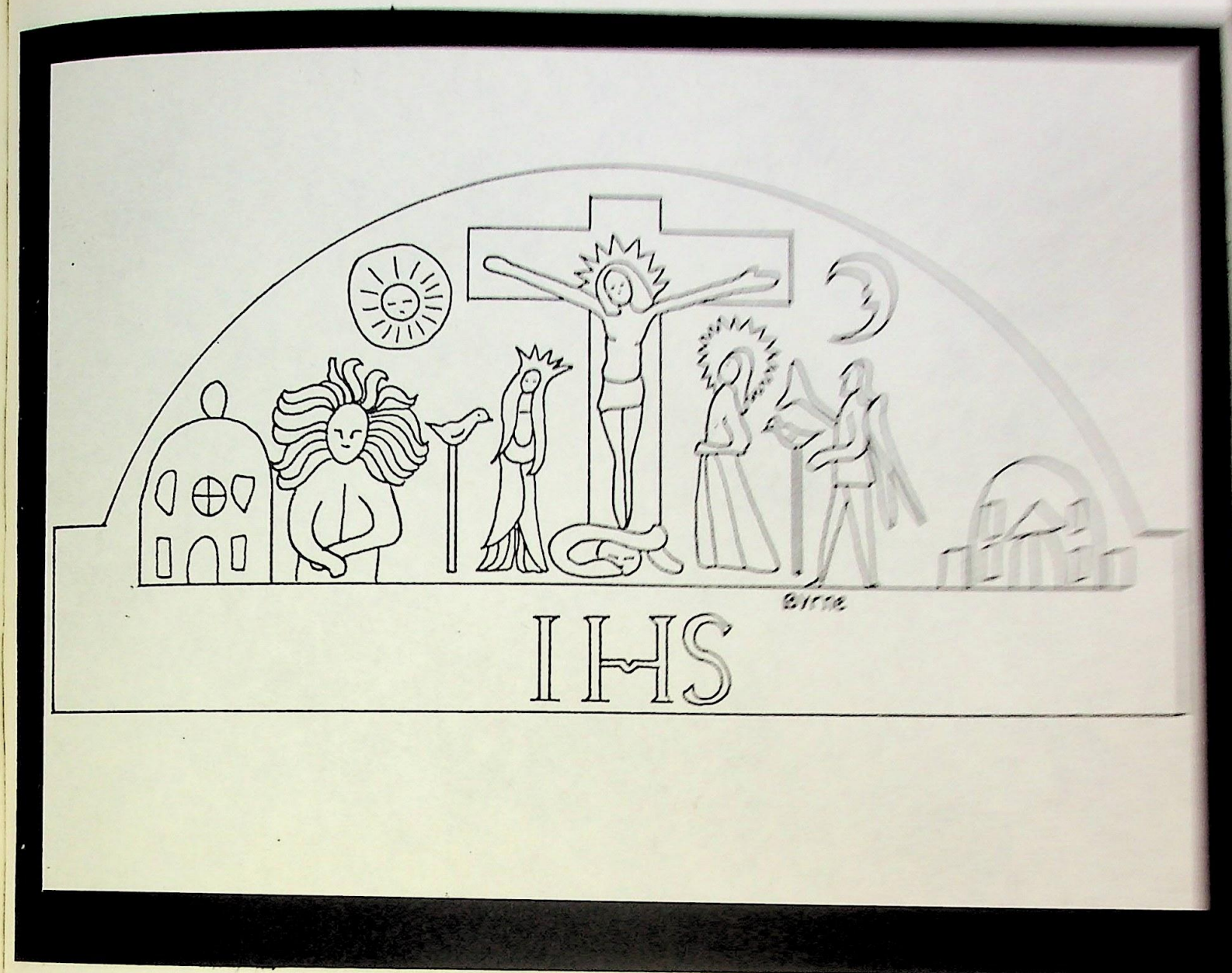


Figure 35. Stone commemorating Catherine Xeto at Church 1000.





Figure 36. Detail of foliage border.



Now that I have covered most of Byrnes own elaborate productions I feel it is necessary to make two important points about his work.

Firstly, it is obvious that he never portrayed more than one crucifix and except for a couple of exceptions, repetitiveness was a rule with him rather than the exception.

Secondly, the constant recurrence of his sternly draped figures of the Virgin and the Magdalene, for instance, scarcely compensate for the entire absence of the Virgin of the Rosary or the Harpest singer of the Old Testament.



The aims of this chapter are as follows:

1. To summarise the purpose of the study.
2. To draw conclusions.
3. To make recommendations.

#### Summary of Findings

- (1) The purpose of the study was to examine motives and inscriptions on 18th century headstones. The findings are as follows:-
  1. The designs of all three stonecutters were similar but the quality varied.
  2. All the inscriptions bear the characteristics of the roman type face. However, Cullen has adapted this typeface in an ornate manner.
  3. Most of the stones have been signed and those which are not are most likely the work of imitators.
  4. Cullen and Brien must be credited with considerable originality of their own.



(2)

### Conclusions

1. Cullen was most likely the first stonecutter to attempt such elaborate headstones. He also daringly adapted 18th costume to his figures.
2. Both the lettering and quality of motives deteriorated towards the end of the century.
3. It appears that both Cullen and Brien belonged to a school of perfectionists, while towards the end of the century as the demand became greater, the quality of the craft began to decline. This is evident in James Byrne's executions.

(3)

### Recommendations

1. There is a need to examine this craft in all areas of the country.
2. Photographic records should be kept of elaborate executions:
  - a. to enlighten the public,
  - b. in case of distruction.
3. Computerised recordings should be made to aid future researchers.



Besides reminding us of our natural roots, memorials can show us our historical roots. In Ireland we have thousands of plaques cut in stone, read by the general public with extraordinary fascination. Unfortunately the lettering is rarely worthy of its subject. It lacks emotion when in fact it should really be of visual as well as factual interest. After all, when you consider that people visit graveyards to examine the lettering of our past it is indeed sad that it cannot be a part of our present day. If we ignore our roots, we impoverish and deminish ourselves.

" For, winning in these ancient lands,  
Enchanted and lettered as a tomb,  
And scored with prints of perished hands,  
And chronicled with dates of doom,  
Though my own Being bear no bloom,  
I trace the lives such scenes enshrine,  
Give past examples present room,  
And their experience count as mine ".

Thomas Hardy.



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