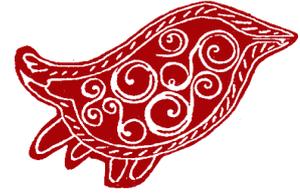


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AN ALTAR-STONE FROM CARRIGTWOHILL.

During a visit of the Society to Carrigtwohill in May, 1941, Mr. Maurice O'Connell, Main Street, drew my attention to a decorated stone which he had in his possession. The stone, actually a fine-grained, greenish-grey slate of a type which is quite common in the neighbourhood, was discovered

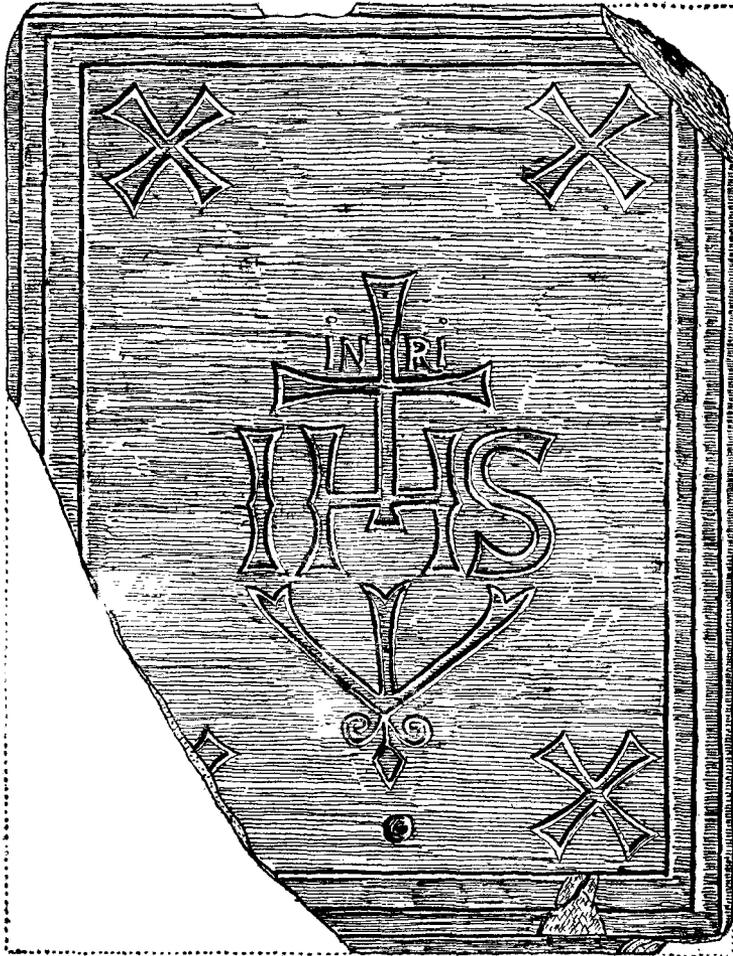


Fig 5.

in 1940 by workmen engaged in making a pathway in a garden near Mr. O'Connell's house. It was found at a depth of about 12 inches. The owner very kindly lent me the stone so that I could have it examined and drawn, with a view to contributing a short note on the find to the *Journal*.

The object is oblong in shape, 207 by 157 mm. It is 8 mm. in thickness, but bevels symmetrically to 2 mm. at the edges. Both faces are polished smooth. When found, one corner had been broken, and some pieces chipped off at the edges—all ancient fractures. The engraving on the stone was apparently done with a pointed tool, and a careful examination of the

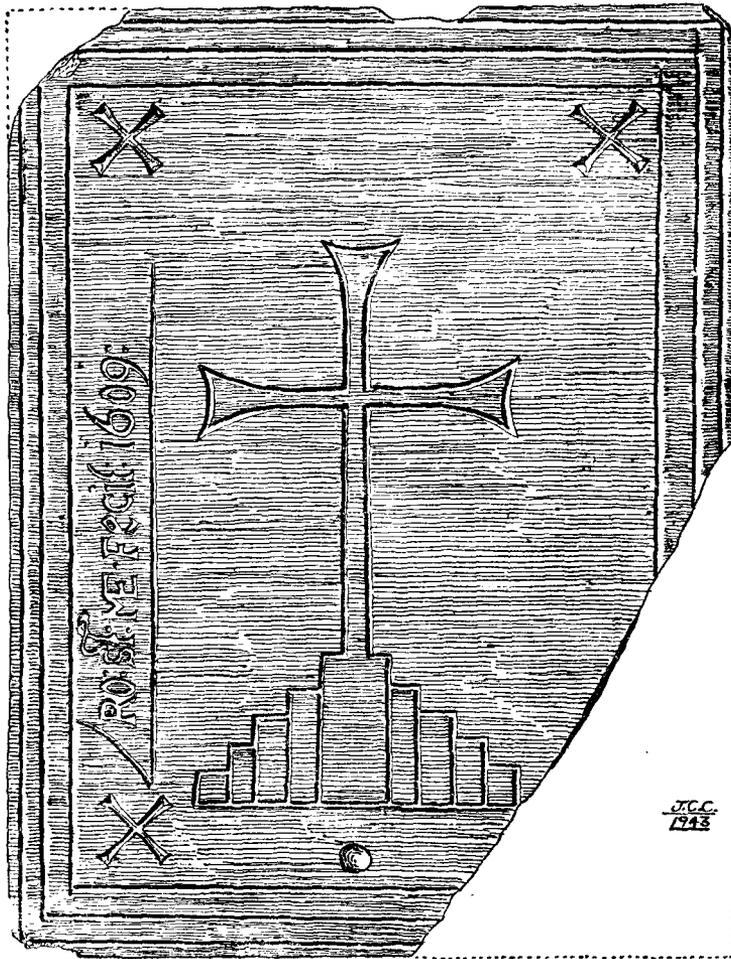


Fig. 6.

surface shows the faint guide lines of the geometrical framework from which the artist evolved his pattern. The letters and crosses are outlined by pairs of shallow incised lines which leave a central ridge, thus giving a false relief effect.

An arrangement of three parallel, U-shaped grooves forms a border for

the central ornament. On the obverse side this ornament consists of the letters I H S; the cross bar of the H supports a Latin cross, the limbs of which splay outwards at the ends, with incurving terminations. The nails of the Crucifixion are shown, indicated by four dots, one at each extremity of the cross: the letters I N R I are grouped above the arms. At each corner of the stone is a saltire with expanded and curved terminals similar to those of the central cross. (Fig. 5).

On the reverse side is a "stepped" or Calvary cross (Fig. 6). In order to put in the "steps" the engraver, as can be seen from his construction lines, built an isosceles triangle and ran uprights from the base at spaced intervals. The intersections of five parallel horizontals with these, and with the sides of the triangle, gave him the "steps," five¹ on either side. Four small incised cross saltires, with splayed ends, occupy corner positions corresponding with their counterparts on the obverse side. A Latin inscription runs along the left side of the stone and reads:

R O : S (T ?) : M E · F E C I T : 1 6 0 9 :

Underneath the base of the "stepped" cross is a bowl-shaped cavity, 6 mm. in diameter, and 3 mm. deep. This feature is duplicated on the opposite side; but the borings do not coincide, as one would expect had the intention been to pierce the stone through. It has been suggested that these cavities may have contained the relics.

Rev. Canon Power, to whom I sent a tracing of the stone, is of the opinion that it is an altar-stone. Dr. Power writes: "An owner's name on an altar-stone may seem incongruous, but I have seen, at least, one such. . . . Altar-stones of the Penal times are generally, or very often, relicless. The present specimen is also remarkable in having ornament (and crosses) on both faces. The duplicated cavity suggests relics on both faces to, perhaps, facilitate use on either surface." He thinks it likely that the object is of Continental (Spanish?) origin, brought home by some returning Irish missionary.

In the hope that it might be possible to identify the individual

R O : S (T ?) ,

I sent rubbings of the inscription to two members of our Society—Rev. Fr. Cahalane, St. Finbarr's West, Cork, and Rev. Fr. Rice, Castlemartyr. The list of priests in the Diocese of Cloyne for 1613 contains no name that would correspond with the initials on the stone. A Fr. Roger Skiddy appears on a list around 1609, but I think he can safely be ruled out as the second pair of letters is certainly not SK—more likely ST, if we ignore the connecting link between the two letters and compare the form of the second one with that of the T in F E C I T.

It is unfortunate, though not surprising, that the 17th century owner of this interesting stone cannot be identified. When we consider that the Church had just passed through a phase of violent persecution, for the moment eased by the accession of the Catholic James I, gaps and omissions in diocesan and parochial records are quite likely to have occurred. Perhaps the stone was the property of some wandering friar? In this connection

¹The Calvary cross usually has three steps.

the likelihood of its Continental origin, as pointed to by Dr. Power, will be recalled, but I would add the qualification that the stone, though, perhaps, designed by a returned missionary, need not necessarily have been an actual import. The fragile nature of the material, and the fact that it is common in the district, certainly suggest local manufacture: on the other hand, this type of slaty rock has a very wide distribution. And, finally, there is the possibility that the letters R O : S (T ?) may stand, not for the name of the priest owner, but for that of a layman who fashioned the stone.

In conclusion, I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the reverend gentlemen who furnished me with essential data for this note, and to Mr. J. C. Coleman for the drawings which illustrate it.

P. J. HARTNETT.

OLD LETTERS.

Old letters, salvaged as waste paper, may include correspondence containing information of interest to writers of history and helpful as local records. The following extract from a personal letter written in 1925 by a native of the city, now deceased, may be offered as an example of what is worth preserving or copying:

“ Poor old Cork is full of history and has been making it all the time . . . My earliest recollections of Cork are sad. I remember seeing from Bellvue (Lower Glanmire Road) the crowds of emigrants going down the river, and their poor relatives following the boat from the “ Brickfields ” wailing piteously—that was in 1855. Those sad howls have always been in my ears. I, of course, also remember the troops being taken down the river in 1854–55 and the awful snow of that winter. I also remember the old watchman who used to parade from Belgrave Place along the Wellington Road to the Hill and up to Audley Place, crying “ Past twelve (or one, etc.) o’clock, wet night, all’s well.” That was in 1865.

I remember going to meet my father at the old Blackpool railway station, then the terminus. The two approaches and a bit of the old station are still left.

In my day there were three dockyards in the Brickfields, viz. :—Pike’s, Robinson’s and Wheeler’s. I saw old Patrick’s Bridge after it was washed away, that must have been in 1854 or 55. But my earliest recollection is the International Exhibition of 1852. Cork endeavoured to emulate the Hyde Park Exhibition of 1851—at any rate it was the first city to copy London. It was held in the old Corn Exchange, afterwards the Town Hall. I remember seeing Father Mathew’s funeral, and in after years the public ceremony when his statue was unveiled by John Francis Maguire, who had as helpers Father MacNamara and the Reverend Mr. Dunscombe.”

M. HOLLAND.