Holmpatrick Graveyard
—an introduction to the Information Panel

Officially launched at Skerries Mills

by

Dr Eoin Grogan

Centre for Irish Cultural Heritage
School of Celtic Studies
Maynooth University

on behalf of Skerries Tidy Towns

Saturday 4th February 2017
I would like to thank the Skerries Tidy Towns for the singular honour to ‘launch’ the Holmpatrick panel (if ‘launch’ is the correct term for a panel) created by Dr Frank Prendergast of the Dublin Institute of Technology.

Can I first offer my congratulations to the people of Skerries on being crowned the National Tidy Towns Winner in 2016! This is a wonderful achievement but the accolade goes well beyond the criteria of tidy or visually appealing as is shown by other important developments in, for example, the local pride shown in the area of Cultural Heritage though the Holmpatrick project and the Historic Walk, the town sculptures and information panels. As someone who personally needs to mind their health, and their waistline, I am also impressed by the wonderful Slí na Sláinte.

While there is much talk in Ireland about the importance of Cultural Heritage and, by extension, Cultural Tourism, in far too many instances this has resulted in only a very casual linking together of disparate cultural highlights and are suited to marketing a product rather than celebrating and sharing our unique cultural heritage. Even more so, there is too often a careless reliance on the simple existence of the physical evidence and the uninterested exploitation of this in a commercial world. In contrast, the community of Skerries is exploring, researching and sharing its heritage in an attractive and accessible fashion. This particular project at Holmpatrick Graveyard manages, in a simple but knowledge-laden way, to celebrate the deep history of the town and its landscape, from the Patrician associations with Inis Pádraig (‘Holmpatrick’; Ryan et al. 2004), and the early medieval monastic phase, its glancing reference to the Viking raids, the medieval monastic period with a long association with the Augustinians, first on the island and, after 1220, at Holmpatrick itself, into the later medieval and modern worlds of a bustling and prosperous harbour town with a rich maritime tradition.

It is fitting that the earliest identified grave stone of 1520 should be linked to the Augustinian phase commemorating Peter Mainn (or Manne), one of the last Priors before the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1537 and the confiscation of the order’s extensive properties. Dr Prendergast has combined historic reference and detailed photography to re-establish the origin of this slab. In this regard I should refer to the poignant discovery by my colleague Christine Baker (2002) of medieval floor tiles from the Augustinian Priory of Holmpatrick during work on the family plot for burial of her beloved grandmother Kathleen Caffrey in 2003.
Like the medieval tiles, the discovery of the 1587 de La Hoyde grave stone in the graveyard in 1856 indicates the rich history and archaeology of Holmpatrick that still remains to be recovered while the recording of the ‘wart-stone’ cure associated with a natural flaw in this memorial reflects another important area of cultural heritage—the folklore of the post-medieval period. I doubt that the de La Hoydes would have been amused by the use of their family memorial by *hoi polloi* to cure their warts!

There are memorials for other noble families associated with Skerries. The grave slabs of Elizabeth Finglas (1577), Richard de La Hoyde (1587) and possibly that of Richard Tool (1719) recall a growing fashion to commemorate the dead and flatter the surviving family. Graveslabs of this period are very rare in Ireland and Skerries should be justly proud of their preservation here.

In several instances—those of 1756 for Thomas McClerey and William Murehead, wrecked in Skerries harbour, and of Tolver Silvers (1831, in the sinking of the *June of Yarmouth* off Shennock (Shenick)) Island, and the ‘Wherry Stone’ with its wonderfully simple depiction of the famous boat type associated with the port of Skerries, dedicated to William Cornwell and erected by his son-in-law John Kelly in 1785—the headstones vividly recall the strong maritime connections and associated prosperity of Skerries. But, in the case of the Wherry Stone, for example, we are also struck by the poignant reminder of more personal stories as William Cornwell died less than three weeks after his wife Jane (née Doyle). They were of the same age (63) and we can wonder at their story—had they been childhood sweethearts who could not bear to be parted? The touching, and amusing, poem (whether cherished by William himself or added generously by John Kelly) on the Cornwell stone also recalls a strong maritime tradition:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Boreas blasts and Neptune\textsuperscript{8} Waves hath tos\textsuperscript{d} me to \& \text{ fro}} \\
\text{In Spite of both by God\textsuperscript{9} s decree I anchor here below} \\
\text{I Station here and lie secure with many of our Fleet} \\
\text{In hopes once more for to set sail our Saviour Christ to mee}\text{t}
\end{align*}
\]

All of this information has been wonderfully illustrated by Frank Prendergast’s innovative and attractive panel. Dr Prendergast is, as some of you will have already recognised, a
Renaissance Man – a person versed in many disciplines. Until this morning I was not aware of Frank’s early career as a mining surveyor in East Africa. Frank subsequently had a very distinguished career as a lecturer and scholar in the College of Engineering & Built Environment in the DIT, Bolton Street as many of us abbreviate it, and he is now an Emeritus Research Fellow in the Institute. But Frank has also followed another remarkable career as Ireland’s leading archaeoastronomer who has produced ground-breaking work on, for example, the great passage tombs of the Neolithic period and, more recently, for the extraordinary Iron Age sanctuary complex at Lismullin in County Meath. Now I see that he has branched out into yet another area of scholarly endeavour: the cultural heritage of funerary memorials!

Give his background it is not surprising that, with his impeccable attention to detail, he has accurately determined the exact orientation of the tower (c. 1790) that stands within the oldest part of the graveyard. I have perhaps read as many as two hundred descriptions and surveys of Irish churches and this is the first occasion I have come across this precise measurement!

It is this feature of his work that has really impressed me: Frank’s presentation of so much fascinating detail in such an innovative, accessible and visually appealing way. For example, the mason’s marks, a sign of the increasing pride that artisans were showing especially in the nineteenth century, the simple devotional references such as the symbols of the crucifixion (the hammer, nails, whip and the crowing cock), and, of especial local importance, the folk-art of lozenges and spirals on the headstone for James Martin (1736) and several others close by remarkably reflecting what was then the recent (1699) re-discovery of Newgrange and its megalithic art dating to around 3300 BC. All of this is part of the clever use of layered illustration that provides a broad overview of Holmpatrick with so many additions of detail, insight and delight.

While the panel itself is an exciting and imaginative creation, the further development of internet access is an additional element of innovation that makes this valuable knowledge available to the visitor and global tourist alike. It is this element of added-value to the cultural heritage of Skerries that is so important and projects the image of Skerries as an attractive and welcoming place for the cultural tourist. Once again, Skerries Tidy Towns are to be warmly commended for their commissioning and support for this and associated cultural heritage initiatives.
Dr Prendergast’s exciting and knowledge-full panel also provides the foundation of a whole series of other studies, by school goers or university students, in, for example, local genealogy, the emergence of a distinct ‘middling class’ identity and artisan skills in the eighteenth century and the development of new traditions in folk art. Frank’s creation will also, I am certain, become the model for future presentation of both on-site and internet accessible cultural heritage, able to present quality information in a layered and exciting format.

It gives me great pleasure, therefor, to formally ‘launch’ this marvellous project!

Dr Eoin Grogan  
Centre for Irish Cultural Heritage  
School of Celtic Studies  
Maynooth University

References
