Correspondence from Dowdall to Leask (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government).

Dear Sir,

The last week has been bad. Monday and Wednesday were frosty, Thursday and Sunday were wet with hard black frost on this snow. The frosty weather, down the river rock any good as it was saturated with wet.

Yours sincerely,

[Name]

Other Clerks of Works were also employed in similar capacities during the period of time. For a four-year period, between 1932 and 1939, C. F. Fogarty was employed by the NMS. He was responsible for the restoration work at the Casino in Martello, Clontarf, and, like Dowdall, submitted brief and to-the-point memos to Leask, revealing little or nothing about himself in the process.

T. O'Driscoll worked as a Clerk of Works from 1944 to at least 1948, and possibly after Leask's retirement. The entries in the files from O'Driscoll are longer and more informative than any others, apart from O'Toole's, though his Christian name is not recorded. O'Driscoll's home was in Ballyvourney, Co. Cork. Although it is not clear whether he was originally from there, it was to Ballyvourney he returned in October 1945 after suffering an accident in Kells Priory, Co. Kilkenny. He was married with at least one daughter. From his memos he appears to have been very interested in his work and in history in general, as indicated by his reading material, and he also carried out surveys and drawings for Leask. Leask forwarded some books and journals to him, and in his correspondence O'Driscoll would mention any new material that he had been told about or had read himself. He was unique among the Clerks of Works in that he compiled very detailed timetables of works, which were colour-coded to indicate different weeks as well as different tasks. Leask commended him highly on his timetable for the works at Kells Priory, saying that 'your chart of progress impresses me very much and I think it will prove exceedingly useful along with your earlier analysis of costs in estimating and checking works. I am only afraid that it will be difficult to get some Clerks of Works to use it... in fact no other man before you has achieved anything like it.' O'Driscoll was also very diplomatic regarding local unrest in Kells, Co. Kilkenny. Following the proposed removal of a bell alley from the priory, and he did not penalise the local workers who were reluctant to be involved in demolishing it. John Lynch, Daniel Conway and William Jones had short tenures towards the end of Leask's time, running at most from 1946 to 1948. The correspondences between them and Leask are quite functional and do not give a strong impression of the men or of their circumstances. Lynch obtained other employment in 1948, and Conway also left in that year. There was only one letter relevant to William Jones.

One of Leask's important motives in the preservation of monuments was quite simply to prevent them from falling down. The Clerks of Works assisted his work as best they could, with the limited resources available. The lack of adequate supervision that allowed O'Toole's idiosyncrasy to develop cannot escape criticism, but in general the enormity of the task faced by the tiny, understaffed National Monuments Section should not be understated. The removal of many years' growth of ivy from ruined stone buildings revealed extensive decay and structural instability, and what intervention could be afforded was carried out. When the work carried out under Leask is viewed in comparison with modern conservation projects it appears limited and piecemeal, but it must be remembered that it was carried out in relative isolation with poor funding, while modern conservation methods have also benefited from large budgets, trained conservation specialists and a multi-disciplinary approach. Though not aesthetically pleasing, the insertion of concrete piers, lintels, mullions, jambs and underpinning probably ensured the survival of much of the endangered masonry until a time when greater resources were available.

Dedication

This article is dedicated to the memory of Mr Willie McElraine, Dungannon, Co. Tyrone, stonemason and steeplejack, who died on 8 October 2009. His work enhances many ancient monuments throughout Ireland, and his professionalism, good humour and courtesy will be long remembered.

Acknowledgements

The writer would like to thank the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government for access to the works files of the National Monuments Service.

MEGALITHIC ART IN COUNTY TIPPERARY

Muiris O'Sullivan and Blaze O'Connor on an important piece of megalithic art unearthed during excavations prior to the new Cashel bypass

A decorated stone was unearthed in 2003 during archaeological investigations in advance of the construction of the N8 Cashel bypass and the associated N74 link road, directed by Jeanne Hughes of Judith Carroll Network Archaeology Ltd. It was located in the townland of Owen's and Biggs's Lot at the south-eastern edge of the 400ft contour around Windmill Hill, a prominent landmark 2km south of the Rock of Cashel in County Tipperary. An unidentified hilltop enclosure occupies the apex of the hill.

The Windmill Hill complex is a cluster of 24 charcoal-rich pits averaging 0.4m in diameter with depths of up to 0.4m. One of these pits contained a cremation enclosed within a small, cist-like structure, on the capstone of which some interesting pick-marks occur. The stone measures about 0.55m by 0.33m, with a maximum thickness of 0.18m, and its flat, now freshly exposed face was inverted over the cremation deposit. From the cemetery, the summit of Slenamanna is visible more than 20km away to the south-east, and Golseamore lies approximately the same distance to the south-west. The underside of the capstone is decorated with pick-marks, an idiom more normally associated with passage tombs. For the most part the pick-marks are loosely distributed across the surface, forming an oval cluster measuring c. 0.3m by 0.2m. They are more concentrated towards the edge of the cluster, with suggestions of a broad framing ribbon c. 5–6cm wide. Near the narrower end of the stone, the ribbon of picking runs along the rim of a natural hollow, and a few additional pick-marks highlight the continuation of the rim. Large flake scars indicate that the stone has been shaped for its role as a capstone. Like the picking, which is not for any obvious aesthetic effect, this was presumably an aspect of the burial ritual.

This stone forms part of a very small but growing corpus of carved stones from cist and burial contexts in Ireland, the majority of which probably post-date the height of the passage tomb art tradition. The Irish material includes examples from known or probable burial contexts at Hengistow Commons, Co. Kildare, Moryna, Co. Sligo, Ballymawly, Co. Meath, and the sites of Above Looking west towards Windmill Hill, showing the hilltop enclosure above the housing estate and the Galtees Mountains in the distance. The decorated stone lies between the large shed and the edge of the photograph on the extreme left.

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Cromlin and Carn More in County Louth. As Elizabeth Shoe Twigg has noted more than once, the motifs incorporated in the few decorated burial cists in Ireland are predominantly closer in form to those of megalithic art than to the in situ rock art tradition.

The Irish corpus in turn can be understood in terms of its relationship to the wider corpus from across Britain, but particularly between Pembrokeshire and Derbyshire, a phenomenon that has been referred to as the 'northern' tradition. Pottery associations at these British sites represent a chronological spread across the last centuries of the late Neolithic through to the end of the early Bronze Age, and possibly into the middle Bronze Age. What is notable is that so few examples are known from late Neolithic-early Bronze Age burials in Ireland compared to Britain. Although evidence from some burials suggests that the decorated stones represent the quarying and reuse of what were formerly in situ rock art panels, it is clear that other panels were sourced and decorated specifically for use in burial monuments. A key characteristic of these stones is their idiosyncratic, highly individual nature. As a group they exhibit little sense of a unifying style or motif range of the type seen across both megalithic art and rock art traditions. Instead, almost every stone is different, and particular design elements seem to have been borrowed, often in abbreviated form, from the predominantly earlier carving traditions of megalithic and rock art. Despite this sense of uniqueness, however, some specific parallels for the Windmill Hill stone are worth noting.

From the funerary art corpus, surface picking representing an oval and other less regular forms is visible on the Hemptown Commons stone. In addition, the large side panel from the Cromlin cist features light, dispersed pecking and shallow, poorly defined cupas. Looking to megalithic art, a closely comparable motif can be seen on stone M15 from the Millin Bay monument in County Down, which features an oval area (0.15m by 0.3m) of light pecking or brushing with a fringe of deeper pecking. In general, the lightness of the picking technique employed on the Windmill Hill stone has more in common with megalithic art than with the more deeply carved forms of in situ rock art. It is interesting, too, that the Windmill Hill artwork occurs on a sandstone slab in what is considered to be a limestone area (megalithic art usually occurs on sandstone).

The placing of the carved surface over the Windmill Hill burial is reminiscent of much of the British material, where the carvings are frequently placed face down over burial cists, thus addressing the dead. It also echoes the placement of small cup-marked stones, including small collared bowls exhibiting just a single cup, face down inside or over cists and in the body of cists. Although there may be a functional aspect to this practice (the flat face suit this face-down position for structural purposes), the wider evidence suggests that it may also have had a symbolic dimension.

The use of artificial markings to embellish natural characteristics of the stone is a common feature of rock art and megalithic art alike, natural hollows frequently becoming the 'cup-mark' excavated by an artificial pecked circle. Dispersed pick-marks are solated as part of the rock art repertoire, although this may be a result of weathering and the lichen-encrusted condition of the panels. In instances where panels have been covered by soil or silt, pick-marks are sometimes visible owing to the stone surface having been 'cleared' of micro-vegetation via burial. Examples of rock art panels incorporating picking include those at the Giant’s Ring at Ballymacnaghty, Co. Down, in both cases cremated bone was deposited in small, chamber-like stone settings. Both complexes are aspects of the passage tomb tradition, and the artwork on the Windmill Hill capstone points to the same conclusion. While megalithic art has previously been encountered on cists attributed to the early Bronze Age, it is difficult not to consider the Windmill Hill stone in the context of the regional passage tomb tradition that flourished along the tributaries of the Suir around 3000 BC.

Acknowledgements
Dr Blaze O’Connor contributed significantly to this article prior to her death in August 2009. The final product is a pale reflection of her meticulously referenced section. I would like to thank Joanne Hughes, who directed the excavations, and Richard O’Brien from the National Roads Authority, who facilitated this study of the artwork and provided the photographs reproduced here, apart from the drawing of the decorated stone. I am indebted to Frank Prendergast for information on the passage alignment.

References

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Standard megalithic art (and rock art) in Ireland focuses on the depiction of recognisable geometric shapes. In the Boyne Valley, this standard artwork is overlain by a variety of new approaches that collectively focus more on decorating the stone than on representing shapes. At Knowth, notably among the kerb of the large tumulus, the developed artwork often takes the form of pick-marks clustered along natural edges between individual facets, or forming the rim of a natural hollow. One of the rare examples of this approach outside the Boyne Valley has been recorded at Knockroe, Co. Kilkenny, where a cluster of picking on a roofstone of the eastern tomb focuses around a natural cup-mark in the stone. Knockroe, which has about 30 decorated stones, is the best known of a small group of passage tombs overlooking the Lingsua River in the countryside to the east of Slieveramon, including the cairns at the summit of the mountain itself. The Lingsua flows from the slopes of Slieveramon and joins the Suir a short distance downstream from Carrick-on-Suir. Upriver from the confluence and some 10km from Knockroe, a second group of passage tombs overlooks the Alver River, another tributary of the Suir. These two sets appear to be linked, a point emphasised by the orientation of Bantriee in the Lingsua group and Shrough in the Alver group, both of which are aligned towards the summit of Slieveramon. It is interesting, then, that Slieveramon is also visible from Windmill Hill, which, although isolated from the two clusters of megalithic tombs, is less than 4km from the Suir. With the Alver and Bartrine groups, it forms a bone neckline of sites around Slieveramon.

This is written without the benefit of radiocarbon dates from the cremated bone in the cist. Statistically, it is likely to be from the early Bronze Age or possibly the later Neolithic, if of Neolithic date, its obvious parallels would be the perimeter burials at the Mound of the Hostages, Tara, and the small, cist-like tombs located near the Giants' Ring at Ballymahatty, Co. Down. In both cases cremated bone was deposited in small, chamber-like stone settings. Both complexes are aspects of the passage tomb tradition, and the artwork on the Windmill Hill cistpse points to the same conclusion. While megalithic art has previously been encountered on cists attributed to the early Bronze Age, it is difficult not to consider the Windmill Hill stone in the context of the regional passage tomb tradition that flourished along the tributaries of the Suir around 3000 BC. [Footnote]

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Reference

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