

Three New Medieval Masons' Marks from Abbey Street, Ennis, Co. Clare

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Three new masons' marks were recently discovered in Abbey Street, Ennis; one in the boundary wall of Ennis Franciscan friary, a second in the *Seodin Eile* premises adjoining the stone wall, and a third on a reused quoinstone in Cruise's Hotel which abuts the latter building.

Several interesting masons' marks from Ennis friary¹ are already published and T.J. Westropp published some of the marks found on the cloister arcade in the 19th century.² Very many more have been published by Mary Kearns³ and the masons' mark on the canopied and traceried-tomb fragments relocated on corbels beneath the crossing tower has been published both by Westropp and Ó Dálaigh and Gilmore.⁴

No. 1. Boundary Wall Ennis Friary

The first new and unpublished mark is to be found on a reused architectural fragment, undoubtedly a fragment of a cut stone feature, from the friary buildings, which has been reused as a building stone in part of the modern boundary wall on the Abbey Street side of the friary. The stone is a rectangular block, which measures 30 to 31cms high, 51.5cms wide and is a minimum of 21cms thick. This ashlar block has the remnants of a narrow bevel or chamfer on its front, right hand side. This is obscured by mortar and only 1.5cms of width is now visible. The stone may well have come from the side of a window or doorcase. The tooling on the stone would suggest a late medieval date for it.

The masons' mark is thinly excised and takes the general form of two conjoined isosceles triangles. The presence of the stroke, which closes the outer end of the right hand triangle, looks unclear in some lights, but in others it seems likely that two complete conjoined triangles were intended. The mark measures approximately 14cms in maximum width, measured diagonally across, and is simply and crudely cut. The stone is located inside the Edwardian cast-iron post-box, which stands just outside the Abbey Street boundary wall at the friary.

No. 2 Seodin Eile, Abbey Street, Ennis

The building to the right of the same western boundary wall of the abbey mentioned above has a modern stone and red brick frontage. Both tooled and roughly shaped stone (some of medieval and some of 19th century and modern date) is used in the facade of this shop. The stones include some with possible 13th century tooling, as well as much

¹ For an extensive bibliography of the history, archaeology and art history of Ennis friary see J. O'Sullivan, J. Roberts and S. Halliday, 'Archaeological Excavations of Medieval, Post-Medieval and Modern Burials at Ennis Friary, Co. Clare', *N.M.A.J.*, 43 (2003) pp 21-42:41-2.

² T.J. Westropp, 'Ennis Abbey and the O'Brien Tombs', *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland*, 25 (1895) pp 135-54.

³ Mary Kearns, 'Masons Marks at Ennis Friary Sacristy', *The Other Clare*, 25 (2001) pp 23-4; 'The Cloister Masons Ennis Friary', *The Other Clare*, 27 (2003) pp 19-20; 'The Elaborate Headdress Ennis Friary', *The Other Clare*, 30 (2006) pp 53-4.

⁴ Brian Ó Dálaigh and Hilary Gilmore, 'Canopied Wall Tomb at Ennis Friary 1460-70', *The Other Clare*, 25 (2001) pp 38-9.



Fig. 1 Cat. No. 1 Ashlar block with a masons' mark in the boundary wall of Ennis Friary at Abbey Street.



Fig. 2 Cat. No. 2 Masons' Mark on a reused stone in the Abbey Street Facade of Seodín Eile.

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Fig. 3 Ca

more recent stonework. The masons' mark consists of an incised triangle. The sides of this triangle vary in length from between 7 to 7.3cms. No moulding or other carved feature occurs on this roughly dressed rectangular piece of ashlar. The stone itself measures 18.5cms in length by about 15.5cms in height though it is difficult to measure accurately due to the modern raised ribbon-pointing which occurs around it. Its thickness is unknown. The masons' mark is a prominent feature of the stone and it is possible that the ashlar block came from, either the abbey or some other medieval building nearby.

No. 3 Cruise's Hotel, Abbey Street

Further to the right and abutting *Seodín Eile* is the remnants of what was (until the 1990s) a fine, substantially intact, late-medieval house, now Cruise's Hotel. The late-medieval building was gutted in the 1990s and most of the facade was demolished. A plaque, now re-sited in the front of the building, records the construction of the large merchant's house as follows:

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In the left corner of the front of the building the original gable and a small section of the front survives. Most of the stonework of the building has been stripped of its render and



Fig. 3 Cat. No. 3 Medieval ashlar block reused as a quoin stone on the surviving part of the house of John Cruce of 1658, now part of Cruise's Hotel.



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Fig. 4 Close-up detail of Cat. No. 1.

among the stones, which are used as quoin stones for the corner of the late-medieval merchant's house, are some pieces of medieval ashlar.

The second exposed quoin, which rises above the adjoining building (*Seodin Eile*), is a reused block of medieval ashlar. This has 15th century tooling and a small but clearly discernible masons' mark is visible on it. The mark takes the form of the letter T and whether a craftsman's T-square or a letter T is intended is unclear. The broad-banded T has an incised outline. Three drill holes, which occur further down the stone, are probably modern fixings for a light or security camera. The dimensions of the stone and the masons' mark could not be measured. Again, it is likely that this piece of plain ashlar of medieval date was reused from the Franciscan friary when John Cruise's merchant's house was constructed in 1658.

Discussion

The interesting thing about the three masons' marks from the grounds of the Franciscan friary and from the *Seodin Eile* and Cruise's Hotel premises is that they are all of new types and do not repeat those already known or published from the Franciscan friary. Westropp noted and drew several of the masons' marks on the then-demolished cloister arcade in 1893 and published them in 1895.⁵ Kearns published five different marks from the cloister arcade of the Franciscan friary as well as foliate patterns on cloister and window fragments at the friary.⁶ She also recorded a number of masons' assembly or positioning marks.

⁵ T.J. Westropp, 'Ennis Abbey and the O'Brien Tombs', *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland*, 25 (1895) pp 135-54.

⁶ Mary Kearns, 'Masons Marks at Ennis Friary Sacristy', *The Other Clare*, 25 (2001) pp 23-4.

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In 2003, Mary Kearns published the masons' marks of the sacristy at Ennis friary. Westropp also shows the masons' mark on the 15th century canopied and tracerised tomb reassembled in the underside of the crossing-tower of the Ennis friary and the mark is also very well illustrated by Hilary Gilmore in her and Brian Ó Dálaigh's article on that tomb in *The Other Clare* (2001). Large *corpora* of masons marks have been published by Stalley in his work in the Cistercian monasteries of Ireland,⁷ those of the Archbishoprics of Cashel and Dublin have been published by Hourihane⁸ and those of Galway city have been published by the writer.⁹

The new Ennis marks described above are all on stones which are likely to have come from the Franciscan friary though none of the three marks are repeated in the *corpora* of marks already known from that site and published by Westropp and in great numbers by Kearns or among the masons' marks found in various other places in Co. Clare.¹⁰ The parallels for the previously known marks from Ennis friary are discussed in some detail by Kearns and only some brief comments will be made here on those and on the newly-discovered marks. The simple incised equal armed crosses found at the sacristy at Ennis friary is also to be found at least a dozen times at Claregalway abbey, Co. Galway on 13th century windows and a *piscina* niche as well as on other fragments reused on doorways, niches and loose fragments at the site.¹¹ The double triangle found in the boundary wall of the Friary can be paralleled with a similar 'double triangle' incised in stone at Holycross abbey, Co. Tipperary.¹² Like the then incised crosses at the Ennis friary sacristy the date of all the *in situ* and *ex situ* Claregalway fragments is 13th century. The triangular mark on the *Seodín Eile* premises is reminiscent of triangular marks from Galway but this does not mean that simple configurations such as triangles are all of the same date. The Ennis mark is much larger and deeper than the triangles found on Galwegian sculptures, which consist of 17th century chimney pieces.¹³ Many centuries can separate, similar-looking marks which are not necessarily of the same date. Interestingly however the triangular mark of 19th century date from the sacristy at Ennis friary published by Kearns (2001) may be paralleled on a 13th century stone from Christ Church cathedral, Dublin.¹⁴

The third new Ennis mark, the outline T-shaped mark on the reused medieval block re-sited as a quoin of John Cruise's merchant house of 1658, is of a type common in medieval context. The same T-shaped mark was found on a now lost stone from Claregalway medieval parish church, Co. Galway, The latter stone is unpublished. How the three Abbey Street stones came to be reused in three adjoining walls in Abbey Street is fortuitous but they are all in an area which was once part of the friary precinct.

The Cruce or Cruise house built by John Cruise in 1651 was located on friary lands. Ennis Corporation passed a by-law in 1683 which recognised its ancient status but '...the

⁷ Roger Stalley, *The Cistercian Monasteries of Ireland. An account of the History, Art and Architecture of the White Monks in Ireland* (London and New Haven, 1987).

⁸ C. Hourihane, *The Mason and his Mark. Masons' Marks in the Medieval Irish Archbishoprics of Cashel and Dublin* (B.A.R. British Series, Oxford, 2000).

⁹ Jim Higgins, 'Galwegian Masons at Work Part 1, Galwegian Masons' Mark, A Preliminary Catalogue and Discussion of Medieval and Post-Medieval Marks', *Galway's Heritage, Oidhreacht na Gaillimhe* 16-17 Spring/Summer (2008) pp 30-7; 'A New Medieval Masons' Mark at Lynch's Castle Galway', *Galway's Heritage Oidhreacht na Gaillimhe*, 39 (2014) pp 10-12.

¹⁰ M. Kearns, 'The Celtic Influence Carved on Stone', *The Other Clare*, 22 (2004) pp 69-70.

¹¹ Jim Higgins, 'The Medieval Masons and Their Work: Masons' Marks from Some Irish Monastic Sites' (forthcoming, 2015).

¹² See Stalley, *Cistercian Monasteries*, Fig. 7, p. 42 for an illustration.

¹³ Higgins (2008), Cat. Nos. 17 and 18).

¹⁴ Rachel Moss, "'A Medieval Jigsaw Puzzle'. The Ancient Stones of Christ Church', *Archaeology Ireland*, No. 52 (2000) pp 20-3, Fig. 3.



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court did think it fit and did allow of, that the said Thomas Bonfield, his house and tenement which he now holds under John Cruise, should be a place of free liberty of and from all arrests and summons at the action or suit of any persons.¹⁵ According to Seán Spellissy very little is known about John Cruce / Crowes or Cruise:

He is referred to several times in the manor court rolls for Clonroad and Ennis as an officer of the court, a juryman, and on one occasion a defaulter on attendance, for which he was fined four old pence. There is some indication that his family settled in Ireland before 1600. John was a merchant of Ennis at the time of the Great Rebellion of 1641 ... In 1653 he testified before the Cromwellian authorities of Limerick regarding the 'crimes' committed by the confederate forces ... In 1658 John Crowes of the City of Limerick, merchant returned to Ennis and built the house ... (in Abbey Street).¹⁶

Spellissy also states that 'the building was divided into two separate houses in 1687 ... Maurice Craig, once described it as a three-bay, two-storey house which looks "architecturally very interesting." Much of the original structure was demolished in the early 1990s when the nearby Queen's Hotel was extended.'¹⁷

The newly discovered masons' marks are very interesting additions to the *corpus* of such marks already published by Kearns and others and it is hoped that further more detailed fieldwork will lead to the discovery of further examples and help to add to our knowledge of the masons and their work at various buildings around Ireland.

¹⁵ Seán Spellissy, *The Ennis Compendium. From Royal Dún to Information-Age Town*, (Ennis, 1997) p. 70.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 70.