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# A Carved Stone & Other Late Medieval Fragments in Clonmel

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In July 1984 Tipperary S.R. County Museum was informed that a carved stone had been found in a premises in Clonmel. The report was investigated, and the stone was identified as a piece of late medieval carving with portion of a coat of arms and a date.

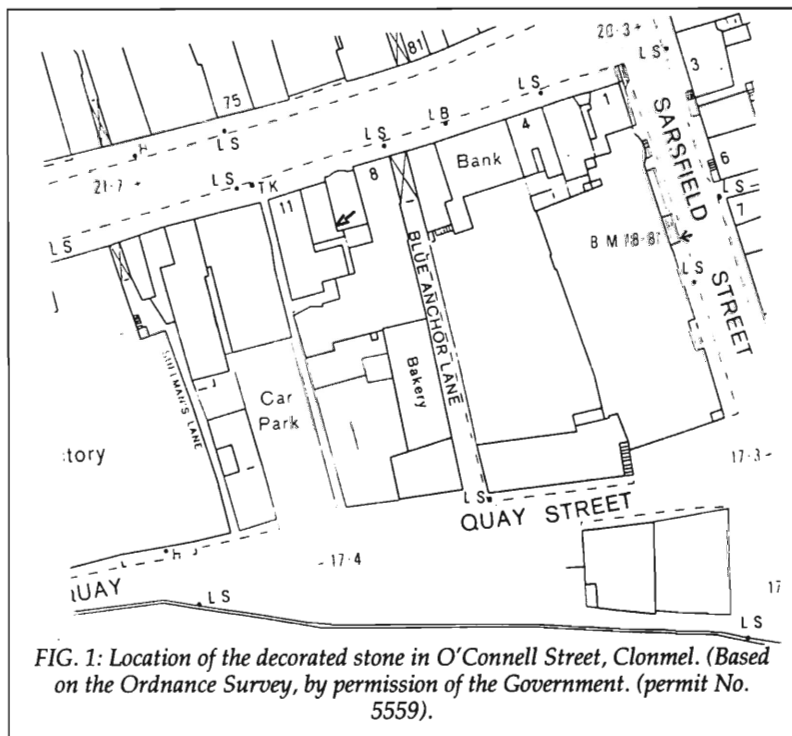
The stone is located (fig. 1) in the eastern face of the western side-wall of 9 O'Connell Street, Clonmel. It is at waist height close to the southern end of the wall where a stairs rises to the first floor. It had been found while the wall was being stripped of its plaster and has fortunately been left uncovered.

The stone (fig.2, plate 1) is a rectangular limestone block measuring c 24cm by 31.5cm. It is obviously re-used. The design is broken and incomplete and the stone is placed sideways in the wall. It bears the major portion of a coat of arms with, above it, the incomplete date '162', the capital letter 'D' on the left side and, below it, a small portion of decoration or a letter.

The arms and other features are carved in false relief with a smooth surface in contrast to the rougher, dressed, surface of the block. The arms, which are without crest or helmet, consist of a shield charged with a chevron between three roses, each of two rows of five petals. The chevron has

a series of tri-lobed motifs along its upper edge with one below the apex. These may be intended to represent *fleurs de lys*. These arms can be identified as a version of those of the White family, 'Argent a chevron engrailed between three roses gules' (Crotty 1990, per. comm.). The stone would appear to be a commemorative one, dating from the 1620s and erected by or for a D. White.

The White family was especially prominent in Clonmel in the 17th century, before the Cromwellian and Williamite dispossession—though they can be linked with the town from the fourteenth century onwards (Burke 1907, 345). They



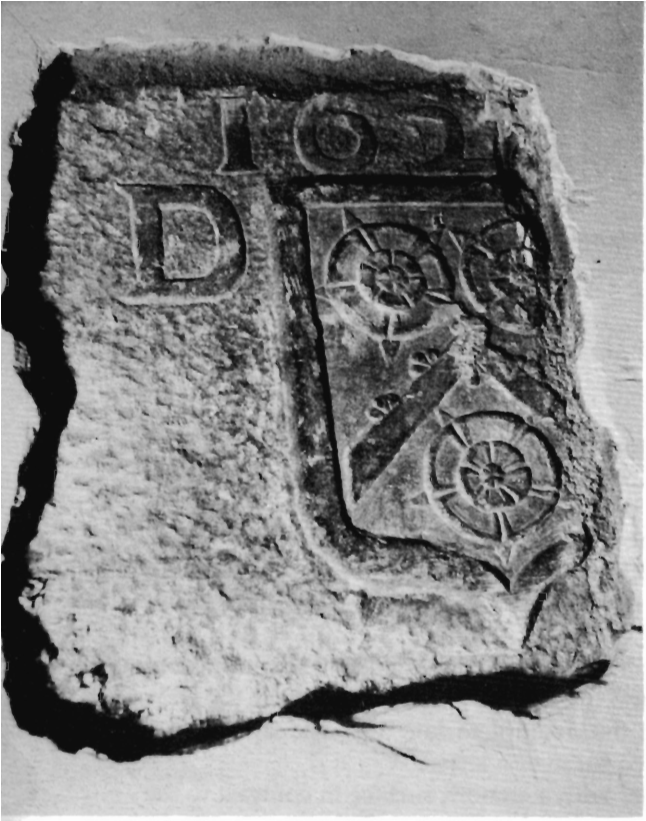


PLATE 1: *The decorated stone.*

—PHOTOGRAPH BY MR. T. DONNELLY

provided the town with several mayors (*ibid*, 229).

Christian names beginning with D are not unknown in the White genealogies (*ibid*, 342-4). Burke has noted three branches of the family; the second, descended from Pierce White, has two Davids in it. One, the son of Pierce White, had a brother, Thomas, who was born in 1558 and died in 1622. David's son, Solomon, died in 1638 and his nephew's will is dated 1622. He could therefore have been alive in the 1620s. The other David was the son of the Solomon mentioned above; he probably lived later than the 1620s. A David White of Russelstown is mentioned in the Civil Survey as a burgess of Clonmel in 1640 (Simington 1931, 386). He could be the first David noted above.

A David White held a "house slated, backside court and garden" in Lough Street, now Gladstone Street, before the confiscation recorded in the Settlement of 1666 (Burke 1907, 258). He could, in turn, be

the second David noted above, the son of Solomon — though Lough Street was apparently associated with the senior branch of the family.

Finally the will of John White, the first mayor of Clonmel, *obit* 1615, notes a James White fitz David (*ibid*, 343). A more precise attribution than this list of possible candidates is impossible; but it is interesting to note that at least one of these David Whites held a slated — and presumably stone — house. Such a house might well have been decorated with armorial carvings.

Several other White coats of arms have been noted in Clonmel. They are:

- (a) on the tombstone of John White, first Mayor of Clonmel, *obit* 1615. In 1909 this tombstone was at St. Mary's Church, Irishtown, Clonmel (Morrissey 1909, 253-4). It was then located in 'Canon Spratt's garden' (Anon. 1909, 304) immediately to the east of the church.

It was probably brought there from Old St. Mary's church, the medieval parish church of Clonmel and the site of the White family mortuary chapel (Burke 1907, 265-8) though Burke (*ibid*, 302) thought that it had come from the Friary because of a reference to there in John White's will (*ibid*, 343, Shee and Watson 1975, 42). The stone seems to have been at St. Mary's in 1950 (O'Connell and Darmody 1950, 55), when it was incorrectly described as the 'tomb of John Butler'; but it cannot now be located.

The garden and the adjacent houses have been cleared away and new parish houses and a car-park have been built on the site in recent years. Fortunately the stone and the arms were illustrated by Burke (1907, 344) in his *History of Clonmel* published in 1907 and reproduced again by Morrissey in 1909 (Morrissey 1909, 254).

The arms are supported by two angels and there is a helmet, indistinctly shown (and perhaps originally so carved), a crest of a demi-archer and a flowing mantling. The arms are of the chevron and roses, with the chevron being engrailed, i.e. with a series of running cusps, both above and below.



PLATE 2: The structure at the rear of Nos. 31-32 O'Connell Street, Clonmel.

- (b) A third White coat of arms is on a slab from the White mortuary chapel at Old St. Mary's Church, which was built by Nicholas White's widow, Barbara, in 1622-23 (Burke 1907, 265-6). It, like the example which follows, is now inside the church at St. Patrick's Well, east of Clonmel. It was moved there, along with other fragments, in 1805 by Simons Sparrow of Oaklands when the mortuary chapel was demolished (O'Connell 1976, 32), and is now sited against the inner face of the eastern gable wall of the church. Both O'Connell (1976, 34) and Burke (1907, 267) have described the arms in similar terms as "a chevron engrailed between three roses, two and one. Round the shield is a stiff conventional foliage, the tendrils pendant at the sides being wound into double true-lovers knots. The crest is a dexter arm in armour, coupé at the shoulder, grasping a branch with three roses" (Burke 1907, 267). The points along the chevron are sharp and close-set and the chevron could be described as indented. There are two parallel lines incised along the junction of the chevron and the base of the points. There are no supporters and the White motto is underneath. Morrissey (1909, 265-6) recorded recent damage and followed Burke's description.
- (c) The pieces of carved masonry at St. Patrick's Well, and originally from the White mortuary chapel, were first sited against the gable wall of the church (Burke 1907, *illus. facing p. 270*). A railing was erected to protect the stones in 1913 (O'Connell 1976, 42) and was still present in the 1940s (Drohan 1991). Several of the fragments were reassembled in the restorations of 1967-9 (O'Connell 1976, 32, Shee and Watson 1975, 52) to form a tomb-like rectangular structure, though Burke's reconstructive description (Burke 1907, 265-6) would appear to indicate a different form. The present end slab of the "tomb", facing the doorway, has the White coat of arms with, below it, the skull and cross-bones, the words *Memento Mori* and the

date '10 Mai 1623' (O'Connell 1976, 37). The arms are similar to those of (b) above, with the points along the chevron being sharp and close-set. There are two parallel incised lines along the chevron. There is no crest or supporters.

- (d) The fifth White coat of arms is on the burial slab of John White, *obit* 1643, which is lying in the south aisle of Old St. Mary's Church. The slab has a cross with a crown of thorns, the symbols of the Passion and two shields. One, on the left, has the White coat of arms with three roses and a chevron which, although badly rubbed, is almost certainly not engrailed. The other coat of arms, presumably his wife's, is on the other side of the cross's shaft and is also badly rubbed, but seems to have been a lion passant gardant with the initials T.C. (Burke 1907, 268). Kearney's report (Graves 1857, 360) of a similar and third coat of arms cannot be confirmed because of the state of the stone, and the reported initials 'IW' on the White coat of arms (Burke 1907, 268) are also unclear.
- (e) The sixth coat of arms is found on the western one of two burial slabs lying against the outer wall of the north aisle of Old St. Mary's. It is of Geoffrey Baron and his wife Beale White and was erected in 1605. The White arms are on a simple shield and the chevron is without engrailment. The other coat of arms is of two lions passant. There are no supporters or crests. The second slab, that of Terence O Donel and his wife Ellen White (Burke 1907, 368-9), has two blank shields.

With the exception of the O'Connell Street stone, all of the coats of arms noted above are to be found on funerary monuments and all date to the first half of the 17th century. While the White coat of arms is normally provided with an engrailed chevron, a number of variations can be seen in these examples. Two - (d) and (e) - have plain chevrons. Two other - (b) and (c) - have rows of sharp, straight-sided points which are more indented than engrailed.

Only the John White slab (a) seems to have an engrailed chevron, while the O'Connell Street stone has very different *fleur de lys* motifs. These variations could perhaps be attributed to differences between various branches of the family or to the sculptor's personal preferences or his indifference to minor details.

While the O'Connell Street fragment might have come from the White mortuary chapel, its size and design are not compatible with the other examples, and it seems likely that it came from a domestic context. The Civil Survey of 1655 records several stone houses in the town (Simington 1931, 387). Several fragments of medieval houses survive in Clonmel. The building ("McInerneys") at No.12 O'Connell Street, immediately beside Flag Lane (Shee and Watson 1975, 22, quoting an 1841 map) is a tall high-gabled building with thick walls and a hood-moulding over a rear window.

Further to the east, immediately adjacent to the river behind No. 31-32 O'Connell Street (The Emerald Garden Chinese Restaurant) and at the end of Collet's Lane (Shee and Watson 1975, 22) or White Friars' Lane (Lyons 1954-5, 26) is the fragmentary remains of a long rectangular late medieval structure, possibly of first-floor hall type (Plate 2).

Only one long wall (the southern) and one gabled wall (the western) survive. They are built of a well mortared rubble, rendered externally and with a slight external batter. The ground floor of the building appears to have had four vaulted embrasures in its southern wall. The embrasure vaults are segmental headed with rough stone voussoirs.

A row of corbels is present above the embrasure with, in places, later joist holes nearby. One of the embrasures, that nearest the south-eastern corner, has a cut-stone window hood on the exterior. The first floor seems to have had four windows in the southern wall, all of which have either lost their cut stone or are totally obscured by vegetation.

The most easterly opening in the southern wall is a slightly trapezoidal ashlar doorway leading to



FIG. 2: The decorated stone.

an intra-mural latrine. A small window lit the short right-angled passage. The latrine discharged down an internal chute to a square ashlar dressed opening in the wall beside the eastern corner of the building and into the adjacent river. The chute opening has bar holes.

There are remains of a line of corbels above the windows on the interior and, on the exterior at the same or a slightly higher level, a row of five drip stones, presumably to drain the roof and parapet. The end (western) wall is totally overgrown and inaccessible, but appears to have had a large fireplace at first floor level.

We can tentatively interpret all these remains as being those of a late medieval urban dwelling, related in its features to a tower house, with two storeys and possibly a garret, a first-floor hall with large windows, a fireplace, a latrine and a ground floor for storage.

Lyons (1954-5, 26) records a popular tradition that this building was associated with a monastic order. Further up the lane, on the eastern side, are the remains of a two-light window of late medieval date, with window bars, situated in a gable wall. Lyons (1936, 292, n. 128) notes this as the "remains of an ancient building" as well as other features in the town.

All these remains suggest that substantial stone buildings existed in Clonmel in the late medieval period. While their carved decorative features were, apparently, not as rich as in Galway, for example, we should expect to find several others in the future. The decorated fragment from O'Connell Street has therefore a significance beyond its size.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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