

Kilteel—How Relics Are Lost

IN the late 1920's, while examining Kilteel Castle, Harold G. Leask, M.R.I.A., discovered some carved stones built into the chimney breast of a roofless dwelling in a range of farm buildings adjoining the castle. These buildings were erected about 200 years ago.

Mr. Leask was head of the National Monuments section of the Board of Works. He immediately took steps to have the castle and other buildings and ruins considered as an ancient monument, taking care to let the occupier know that the carved stones should not in any way be damaged.

The owner very willingly agreeing, Kilteel Castle and other buildings became a National Monument in 1934.

During further examination by excavation it was discovered that the carved and moulded stones were part of a chancel arch in five orders, the bases of which were discovered *in situ*. It is suggested that a primitive church was replaced by a more elaborate one of which the chancel arch was a later feature.

With the repairs carried out by the Board of Works the once buried treasures of carved and moulded stones are now revealed to fascinate the many tourists who visit this hallowed scene.

The forms of decoration on the orders of the Arch are mainly conventional. On the inner order on the wider side face between the columns are some of the carvings referred to.

THE CARVINGS

The top picture shows the inner pillar of the chancel arch as reconditioned during repair work.

At the top are the remains of the capitals of the inner order and show a distinctive feature of Irish Romanesque capitals. They show the angular heads with the hair and moustaches carried on to form intricate interlacings. The clearness of the profile and the rather indeterminate character of the interlacings make the Kilteel capitals stand out as examples of the Romanesque capitals.

The head bands of the capitals are fine examples of natural floral motif.

The interlacing on the left side of the capital is much damaged while the one on the right shows a very elaborate pattern where strands intermingling with zoomorphic motifs.

The mouldings on the neck show a bead design.

OPPOSED VIEWS

Below the capital is a figure of an abbot or bishop, with his staff

held with both hands. Below this are two fully dressed figures wearing cowls or hoods.

These figures appear to me to be embracing rather than wrestling as suggested by Mr. Leask. In wrestling I suggest even allowing for the sculptor's difficulties, the faces would not be in this position neither would they have such a serene appearance; the costumes or habits worn would hardly be appropriate to such vigorous exertion.

As this panel appears in a number of the High Crosses, I suggest some other explanation beside wrestlers, e.g. the ecclesiastical embrace of two monks. Whatever the explanation these panels are most intriguing and evocative of further research.

Other carved panels on the chancel arch not shown here are Adam and Eve; a bearded figure carrying over the left shoulder a spear bearing a bearded head; an acrobat bal-

ancing on hands; a seated figure holding a drinking horn.

The remains at Kilteel suggest a primitive church to which the chancel was added in mediaeval times containing carved and moulded stones with probable inspiration from the illuminated manuscripts; where no human figures are depicted we find the conventional chevron, floral or animal motifs.

A good vantage point, the site attracted the Norman builders of the castle.

In the second picture we have a general view of the site. In the foreground is a plain uninscribed cross of modern design.

Mr. Leask gives a late date in Irish Romanesque to the site, 1150 to 1180.

The history of the site by the late Lord Walter Fitzgerald in the *Kildare Journal*, Vol. VIII, throws no light on the church at the early period to which the carved stones belong.

B. J. K. B.

