Kilteel

Feature Sets (4)

- Exterior Features
- Interior Features
- Loose Sculpture

Description

Ruined church, with unaisled nave and chancel and the remains of a Romanesque chancel arch. The building has a complex history. It began as a pre-Romanesque single cell building, probably of 10th–11thc date, to which a chancel was added in the mid-12thc. The building was enlarged in the later middle ages: the nave was extended to the W, the chancel to the E. By 1575 the church was apparently ruinous, but it was renovated during the 17thc. At some point in the late 17th or early 18thc, the building again became derelict and the stone was used as a quarry by local builders. By the 20thc the only part of the building visible to any extent above the ground was the S wall.

During the 1930s many pieces of Romanesque carving from the chancel arch were identified in neighbouring farm buildings, from which they were removed shortly after. The late Harold Leask excavated the base of the chancel arch, finding the lowest stones still in position (1935). The jambs of the arch were then reconstructed, the missing elements being filled in with brick. Further pieces of Romanesque sculpture were discovered in 1977–8, when comprehensive excavation of the church was undertaken by Kildare County Council under the direction of Mr Conleth Manning.

A number of moulded stones from the church are now stored in Kilteel Castle. These include voussoirs from the chancel arch, each decorated with a large roll moulding flanked by fillets; there are two types, one with a roll where the diameter is 0.08 m (2 pieces) and the other where the diameter is 0.06 m (5 pieces). Also stored at the castle is a trapezoidal shaped stone (0.14 m x 0.11 m high), evidently from the side of a gable; decorated with small rolls on each side.

Features

Exterior Features
- Exterior Decoration
- Miscellaneous
  - Reset sculpture, chancel
  - Reset sculpture, nave

Reset sculpture, chancel

A Romanesque voussoir, reused as a piece of rubble, is built into the S wall of the late medieval chancel. Only one face of the voussoir is visible, enough to show that it came from a relatively small opening, probably a window. It is decorated by a shallow roll moulding, flanked by fillets.

Reset sculpture, nave

The late medieval extension of the nave contains several reused fragments:

Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N wall, fragment height</td>
<td>0.21 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N wall fragment visible width</td>
<td>0.38 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S jamb fragment depth</td>
<td>0.25 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S jamb fragment height</td>
<td>0.13 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S jamb fragment width</td>
<td>0.53 m</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
N wall
Built into the N wall, approximately 0.6 m above the ground, is a stone from the inner jamb of the chancel arch, S side. The stone is flanked by two vertical roll mouldings, the space between being decorated with a standing horned figure. This figure is bearded, has prominent animal ears as well as horns and carries a staff or crozier in its left hand. It is evidently a zooanthropomorphic depiction of the evangelist St Luke, as found occasionally in early Irish art.

S jamb
Built into the S jamb of the W door is a piece of chamfered abacus.

W wall
In the W wall there are two jamb stones, decorated with chevron, from the middle order of the chancel arch.

Interior Features

Arches

Chancel arch/Apse arches

Chancel arch

This consisted of three orders, the lowest stones of which were found in situ, but most of the jambs were rebuilt in 1935. The arch itself has not been reconstructed. The width of the arch, measured from the bases of the inner orders was 2.17 m.

First order, N side
The order has two large rolls at each angle, that on the W side projecting 0.05 m beyond the adjoining W face and flanked by shallow, narrow rolls. The space between the roll mouldings, measuring approximately 0.15 m, is adorned with various figural carvings. The base is designed as a series of upturned scallop capitals, without further decoration (height 0.20 m). A horizontal incised line runs below the scallops. An irregular vertical break, 0.04 m wide, seems to be original, for without the additional 0.04 m the base would not be wide enough to support the jamb stones above.
The jambs are decorated as follows: course 1: (two stones) a figure walking to the right, dressed in a knee-length tunic and carrying a pole with a head affixed to the top (usually interpreted as David carrying the head of Goliath); course 2: a dancing figure or acrobat with a half-marigold above and below; course 3: a coupling couple, seated on a half-marigold; course 4: (two stones) a horn blower, with ankle length tunic, walking to the right. The block with the figure is badly damaged.

Only the NW angle of the capital survives. The block includes 0.15 m of the roll moulding of the jamb, plus the necking and a chamfered impost. The capital itself is carved with a head on the angle: the beard and moustache flow into looped interlace patterns on either side. The necking is carved with a series of shallow horizontal rolls. The impost is decorated with circular floral patterns. The exact cutting of the blocks in course 4 and the base of the block, which constitutes the capital, confirm that they were fitted together in the original building.

**First Order, S side**

The base has the same design as the N side.

The jambs are decorated as follows: course 1: the subject is not decipherable; possibly a standing beast with its head bent backwards; course 2: a human figure, badly defaced; course 3: two wrestlers, dressed in long cloaks, with their arms clasped around each others' backs. They stand on a half-marigold and the outer legs of the figures are pushed down the side of the flower; course 4: (two stones, E block missing) a standing ecclesiastic, holding a crozier.

The general design of the capital is similar to the N side. Two stones, both mutilated: on the E side the necking is defaced and on the W the lower part of the stone is completely removed. There are heads on each angle, similar to that on the N side. The high cheekbones are prominent; the hair ends in a series of curls.

**Second order, N and S sides**

The vertical surface of the base is decorated with scallops, like an upturned scallop capital. The jambs have an undefined roll at the angle with lateral chevron on both face and soffit, forming a simple edge chevron; the chevrons are of a roll/hollow profile. Three blocks remain on the N side, five on the S. There are two further fragments from this order built into the W wall of the church. The capitals are missing.

**Third order, N side**

The third order consists of a rectangular projecting pilaster, set forward from the adjacent wall plane. Apart from the two lowest blocks on each side, which were discovered in situ in the 1930s, the order has been rebuilt in brick. Two further Romanesque blocks have been incorporated.

The N base is formed of upturned scallops at each angle.

The jambs have one original rectangular block, with vertical angle rolls, at the base. The space between is undecorated. On the E side the roll is defined by flanking fillets, but on the W side only the E side of the roll has such a fillet.

There is a second original block further up the jambs: the space between the angle rolls contains a carving of the Fall of Man, with Adam and Eve standing either side of the Tree of Life. This block is slightly different from the one below. It lacks a fillet on the S side, but has one on the N side: it may have been intended for the S jambs.

**Third order, S side**

The base is similar to the N side. The jambs have an original rectangular block at the base, without sculpture. The edge has a slightly different moulding from that used on the corresponding block on the N side: the flanking roll is not continued around the SW angle.

A second original block survives at a higher level: a narrow fragment, 0.135 m high. This is carved with a crouching figure grasping the jaws of a lion, presumably David or Samson. The S angle of this block is roughly dressed, as if it was once bonded into the adjacent wall of the nave.

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**Loose Sculpture**

Moulded stones
A number of moulded fragments are built into the gate piers of the farmyard. One such stone, originally a moulded voussoir from the chancel arch, was at the time of recording lying loose beside the gate.

**Comments/Opinions**

Kilteel provides one of the rare occasions in which Romanesque figure sculpture is found in an architectural context, Ardmore (Waterford) being the other principal example. The existing reconstruction reveals many anomalies and Dr McNab has suggested that the carved stones may have belonged to a doorway rather than a chancel arch. She has suggested that the stones of the doorway were reused in the later middle ages when the chancel was extended to the E. The argument is supported by the fact that no foundations for a 12thc. chancel were found during excavations.

Some of the figure sculpture is well preserved, revealing delicate details, which are remarkable as the carvings were executed in granite. Dr McNab has pointed out similarities with the sculpture at Ely, particularly in the case of the acrobat and the coupling couple. The scene of David/Samson and the Lion also has parallels outside the country. Yet these English influences are incorporated into a programme which shows many distinctively Irish traits: the zoo-anthropomorphic version of St Luke's symbol, for example, or the Fall of Man, the latter following a formulae well established in the earlier high crosses.

The head capitals, with their high cheek bones and interlaced moustaches, belong to a widespread Irish type; it is likely that the same sculptor was employed at Killeshin (Carlow).

The sculpture appears to date from the third quarter of the 12thc.

**Bibliography**


### Location

**Site Location**
Kilteel

**National Grid Reference**
N 98 21

**Boundaries**
- now: Kildare
- pre-1994 traditional (Republic of Ireland): Kildare

**Dedication**
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<th>medieval:</th>
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<tr>
<td>now:</td>
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**Type of building/monument**

- Church (ruin)

**Report authors**

- Roger Stalley

**Visit Date**

- May 1992