

THE MARBLE *of*
CLONMACNOISE

BY DECLAN RYAN

*Limestone Quarrying
at Clerhane (Clorbhane)
Shannonbridge,
Co. Offaly*

FOREWORD

As Cathaoirleach of Offaly County Council, I am pleased to welcome this in-depth focus on the Clerhane townland of West Offaly and the information collated and presented about the Rocks of Clerhane. This publication is a record of the industry that developed, peaked and declined and also the story of the people who were involved in the works. Many of those involved in working in the quarries have descendents still living in the area today. For generations to come they will know the story behind the area which is now hardly recognizable as an industrial site. The collation of the images from numerous sources greatly assists the understanding of what the site may have been like. While the area is known locally this publication will highlight the area to a wider audience.

Offaly County Council is keen to promote the recording and documenting of Offaly's heritage, this is a key action in the Offaly Heritage Plan 2012 – 2016 and we are pleased to be able to support this publication.

*Sinéad Moylan-Ryan
Cathaoirleach, Offaly County Council
November 2013*

The most enduring elements of the human landscape are fabricated in stonework: stone that is a cultural extension of the geological endowment of each place, and responsible for the unique character of its cultural fabric. We have a rich archaeological and architectural legacy in stone here in Offaly, but the quarries from which the stone was raised are silent and empty, and scarcely a trace of the skill and craft that hewed it from the ground and shaped it for building survives. Even less remains of the men in whose hands and heads that craft rested, and who's names and achievement are almost absent from the pages of the documentary record.

Of the many quarries that operated in Offaly during the centuries before stonework declined and almost ended with the arrival of modern concrete, few enjoyed greater prestige than Clerhane, whose crinoidal limestone is one of the most beautiful of Irish building stones. In his meticulous study of the stone industry at Clerhane Declan Ryan has painstakingly salvaged all that survives from oral record and tradition and the documentary record, and set this against the physical background of the quarries themselves and their geographical context. In highlighting the achievement of the quarrymen of Clerhane this lovely book will do much to draw appreciative attention to this aspect of the environmental heritage of one of the most remarkable places in Offaly, and stimulate comparable attention to other facets of that heritage.

John Feehan, Syngefield, Birr.

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The old and the new – Claffey's quarry with West Offaly Power Generating Station in the background.

INTRODUCTION

As we move into the twenty first century, we are well accustomed to large-scale industrial development in west Offaly, following fifty years of peat harvesting by Bórd na Móna and electricity generation by the Electricity Supply Board. However, long before the commercial exploitation of

the bogs, a vibrant industry in limestone quarrying existed in Clonmacnoise parish, at Clerhane,¹ Shannonbridge.

This was a major employer in the area, where a unique range of skills was required, both for the extraction and the carving of stone. While the origins of the quarries are lost in time, we can reasonably assume that the raw material for the major stone building projects in the area, which date from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was sourced locally. 'From the medieval period in Ireland onwards, building stones, owing to the cost of transportation, have been quarried locally.'² Indeed quarrying on a small scale probably existed here for more than a thousand years.

While their many monuments in stone will stand for hundreds of years, the memory of the quarries that produced them, their owners, the workforce and methods of operation are in danger of being totally forgotten. This, ironically, is at a time when there is a renewed interest in stonework, fuelled by changing fashions and increased prosperity.

This study describes Clerhane townland and the surrounding area and tells the story of the quarries, their owners and the craftsmen who worked there from early records, to their heyday, decline and eventual closure. The type of stone, the work of cutting and carving and the resultant output and the many fine buildings to which they contributed are also examined.

¹ Clerhane, also Clorhane, see p.5

² Rynne (2006), p.149

PREVIOUS STUDIES

A short article by Father Mike Egan published in *The Shannonbridge Star* in April 1982, detailed the history of the quarry and of the Egan family, including their involvement in the quarry and also provided a wider perspective on the social and political issues of the time. Fr. Egan was a native of Creevagh and an uncle of Michael Egan, of Egan Stone, Kilbeggan, Co. Westmeath. He was parish priest of Abbeylara and died in 1990. He was a good stone carver and he also donated the Stations of the Cross to the new church in Shannonbridge in 1965.³ *The Shannonbridge Star* was a monthly magazine published by a local committee on a voluntary basis. Concluding his account Fr. Egan wrote ‘soon they will be just a memory for another generation who may honour them with a little study’.⁴ This is one of the objectives of this account. Father Egan’s article has been used as a reference source in the intervening years, most notably by Mary Tubridy in the *Clonmacnoise Heritage Zone Project Final Report* (1987). Additional information is available in an article written by Kieran Kelly and Jimmy Mooney for the Clonmacnoise parish millennium book *Clonmacnois St. Ciaran’s People* (2001) and Val Trodd, in *Clonmacnois and West Offaly* (1998), sheds further light on the record. There are also references in *The Heritage of Clonmacnoise* (Tubridy, 1987) and in several publications by John Feehan, including *Farming in Ireland – History, Heritage and Landscape* (2003), *An Atlas of Birr* (Feehan and Rosse, 2005) and *The Geology of Laois and Offaly* (2013).

PLACE NAME

There are a number of spellings for the townland. The official name according to The Placenames Database of Ireland is Clorhane and, in Irish, An Cloithreán (a stoney place). It also lists other versions that were in use through history, including Clurhane, Clerenaun, Clorane and Clarane. The Ordnance Survey also uses Clorhane on maps etc. For the purpose of this study Clerhane (pronounced Clare-awn) is used because this is the version that is and has been, traditionally, in local use. Thomas Lee, in *Offaly Through Time and Its Townlands*, translates An Cloithreán as ‘the stepping stones’.⁵ A further variation, Clirnaun, appears on William Larkin’s map of King’s County published in 1809.⁶ The townland name exists in various forms throughout the country, one example being Cloghran in Co. Dublin.⁷ William Shaw Mason’s *Statistical Survey, or Parochial Survey of Ireland* gives the less probable translation of ‘the field of the clergy’ from ‘cléir = clergy and ‘ahawn’ = small field’.⁸ The ancient name of Tyroe, associated with the Clerhane area, arose from the colour of its soil: tír rua = red land or soil.⁹ The Down Survey map of 1650 describes the surrounding land as ‘Red Bog’.



An early Egan headstone
Patrick Claffey (1881) in Gallen Graveyard, Ferbane

³ Pat Killeen, conversation with author (2006).

⁴ Egan (1982), paraphrasing Seamus Murphy in *Stone Mad*, ‘We will go on till we become just a memory for another generation, and perhaps they will think of us occasionally – maybe honour us with a little study.’

⁵ Lee (2009), p.122

⁶ Horner (2006), p.7

⁷ Joyce (1869), p.415

⁸ Shaw Mason (1814–1819)

⁹ Tubridy (1987), p.103

LOCATION & DESCRIPTION

Clerhane is a townland in the west of Clonmacnoise parish, on the banks of the river Shannon and about two and a half kilometres north of Shannonbridge, Co. Offaly. (See Ordnance Survey Map overleaf). It covers an area of 630 acres (255 hectares), comprising arable, bog and rocky ground. It was described in the Ordnance Survey field name books of 1838 as:

*'T'land the property of Captn. Maguinness under a deed forever. This is Bishop land. It pays no cess.'*¹⁰

The county cess was a tax equivalent to today's rates and was collected by the Grand Jury to fund road maintenance etc. According to Mason's *Statistical Survey of Townlands and Proprietors*, compiled in 1816, the Bishop of Meath is listed as the owner of 178 acres in Clerhane.¹¹ In 1917, Clerhane, which was then part of the Williams Estate, was taken over by the Land Commission.

The Rocks of Clerhane, as the area is known, consists of the remains of two main quarries, both now flooded and a wooded limestone pavement area. Samuel Lewis, in his *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (1837), states, with regard to Clonmacnoise Parish: 'The substratum is limestone, which is quarried both for building and for agricultural purposes'.¹² The quarries consisted of two separate businesses, one operated by Egans and the other by Hughes and later Claffeys. The quarries are included in the 2003 *Inventory of Industrial Archaeology Sites in Co. Offaly*.¹³



Egan's Workshop at Clerhane

¹⁰ Ordnance Survey, *Field Name Books*, Co. Offaly (1838)

¹¹ Shaw Mason, (1814-1819), p.150

¹² Lewis (1837), p.367

¹³ Hammond (2003)



1838 Ordnance Survey Map showing (1) The Shannonbridge to Clonmacnoise road (now R444); (2) Egan's Quarry; (3) Claffey's Quarry; (4) Trackway No. 2 to Shannon; (5) Footpath to Shannonbridge; (6) River Shannon



Remains of lifting gear, Egan's Quarry



Ruins of Claffey's House 2009



Trackway No. 2 from Quarries to the River Shannon

The entrance is by a narrow lane-way on the left of the R444, Shannonbridge to Clonmacnoise road. The first quarry, Egan's, is on the right hand side of the lane. Buildings still standing here include Egan's quarry workshop, together with the remains of other outbuildings. The name Egan's Quarry can still be read on the workshop door, which also features a slot for letters. There are some quarried slabs lying about and redundant lifting gear almost covered in undergrowth.

Immediately west of Egan's are two small quarries, now completely overgrown. Another small quarry, Mannion's, adjoins Egan's to the north east. Just past Egan's the ruins of Claffey's house stand on the left of the lane amongst the bushes. Proceeding to the next fork in the lane, a turn to the

left leads to Claffey's quarry after about fifty metres. The rectangular structure, shown on the 1910 Ordnance Survey map (page 11), immediately to the south west of the quarry was the stonecutters' workshop. This building is no longer in existence. From Claffey's quarry a one kilometre rough roadway leads westwards to the Shannon ending at a short canal and the remains of a small pier. A second, parallel, track way, still visible today, also runs from the quarries to reach the Shannon a further two hundred metres upstream. This earlier track appears on the 1838 Ordnance Survey map and was used to transport stone via the river to Athlone. It is located upstream of the Clerhane shoal or shallows, a major problem for river transport until it was removed in the late 1840s.

The quarries area is heavily overgrown. The adjoining large expanse of limestone and rocky area of woodland has been described as a Burren in miniature. It is a Special Area of Conservation in the Clonmacnoise Heritage Zone and is in the care of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. It covers twenty two hectares (fifty four acres) comprising mostly hazel scrub and birch and is 'remarkable for its [spring flowers, including] primroses, violets, wild strawberry blossoms and early purple orchids'.¹⁴ The hazel was a plentiful source of scollops for thatching in the past.¹⁵ According to John Feehan 'The abandoned quarry [Egan's], now waterlogged, is an oasis of exceptional biological, geological and amenity value'.¹⁶

¹⁴ Trodd (1998), p.105

¹⁵ Dan Edwards, conversation with author, 28th March 2006

¹⁶ Feehan (2003), p.466



Egan's Quarry in 2006



Trackway No. 1 from Claffey's Quarry to Pier at Shannon in 2006



Disused canal Clerhane in 2006



1910 Ordnance Survey Map showing (1) The Shannonbridge to Clonmacnoise road (now R444); (2) Egan's Quarry; (3) Claffey's Quarry; (4) Trackway No. 1 to Pier parallel to and south of the canal; (5) The disused canal; (6) The Pier at Shannon; (7) The spoil heaps 1840s

GEOLOGY OF THE AREA

The limestone pavement stretches right down to the river Shannon and caused some considerable problems for the Shannon Navigation Improvement Scheme, as recorded in the Eight Annual Report of the Commissioners for the year 1846, when referring to the Clerhane shoal –

*The bed of the river in this pit presented, as the water was lowered, a very curious appearance, and unfavourable to the expectation of rapid execution. The upper end of the pit showed a surface of about 7,000 yards of solid rock, evidently an extension of the Clerhaun Quarry, which is situated at the Leinster side, at no great distance from the edge of the river, between which and the quarry lies a flat and poor-looking piece of Callow; the rock extended about two thirds of a yard of the distance from the upper stank, towards the deep water in the centre of the pit, when it dipped very abruptly, the stratification, which was not very regular, running north and south.*¹⁷

The work of clearing the shoal, originally estimated at £170.00, actually cost £8,000.00. The work took four years and 87,675 man-days at 1s. 3d. per day.¹⁸ Today two huge spoil heaps on the riverbank remain as evidence of this mammoth task.

Limestone is a sedimentary rock composed mostly of calcium carbonate and often full of fossils, including abundant sea-lilies.¹⁹ The limestone at Clerhane was formed

about 330 million years ago, during the Lower Carboniferous period, when Ireland lay close to the equator at a time during which tropical seas covered the area and is a very pure type of limestone in which the fossils of sea-lilies can be seen. Much later in the Tertiary period (65–2 million years ago), the ‘limestone was dissolved by acidified rainwater which led to erosion patterns called karren, clints and grykes on its surface – well developed at Clorhane’.²⁰ The quarry also contained a special seam which has been referred to as ‘Irish grey marble’.²¹ It is not a true marble, in the sense that it is a sedimentary rather than a metamorphic rock, ‘although the term [marble] is also used by the stone trade to refer to a limestone that can take a polish’.²² Strictly speaking ‘marble is metamorphosed limestone or dolomite. ... Many marbles show bands or streaks resulting from organic matter in the original sedimentary rock’.²³ The headquarters of the Office of Public Works, at 51 St. Stephen’s Green, Dublin, has forty panels of Irish marble which were placed in the foyer in March 1850. These include two panels from Clonmacnoise, one of pink and the other of grey marble.²⁴ The quarry produced ‘a fine fossil-fibred stone – easy to work and free of the demon white hoose [or horse] so disastrous in other quarries’.²⁵ According to one source, ‘the worst of all is the “white horse,” a thin white thready line in the stone...It splits like a carrot when you stick a tool in it, an’ half a ton might shear off without warning’.²⁶ John Feehan and Alison Rosse, in *An Atlas of Birr*, state:

In the nineteenth century a very special limestone was quarried at Clorhane between Shannonbridge and Clonmacnoise, from

*a bed about one metre thick which was a mass of fossil sea-lilies. This special stone was used for lintels and sills and can be seen in several houses in the town (it is more conspicuous when wet or polished).*²⁷

*Coloured limestone, or marble, was exploited on a small scale at a number of localities including Clonony, Clonmacnois and Cogran. The crinoidal limestone of Clorhane, near Shannonbridge – absolutely packed with bits of the skeletons of fossil sea-lilies – were very much in demand for threshold stones.*²⁸

The steps of Cumberland House, in Birr, are an excellent example of this stone.²⁹ A local example, the threshold stone of Greene’s house, Blackwater Lodge, is also of Clerhane stone.



Polished Clerhane Limestone

¹⁷ *Commissioners for the Improvement of the Navigation of the River Shannon* (1847). Eighth Annual Report.

¹⁸ Delaney (2008), p.150

¹⁹ Tubridy (1987), p.6

²⁰ *Ibid*, p.15

²¹ Trodd (1998), p.105

²² Wyse Jackson (1993), p. 62

²³ Hamblin (1991), p.108

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.56

²⁵ Egan (1982)

²⁶ Murphy (1966), p.195

²⁷ Feehan and Rosse (2005), p.6

²⁸ *Feehan, John; People and Landscape in Offaly*

²⁹ Feehan and Rosse (2005), p.6

A study completed in 1990 by Melanie Howes of the Geological Survey of Ireland for Offaly County Council describes Clerhane stone as follows:

'easily quarried crinoidal limestone with a grey matrix. Much used in the past, this is a good example of an Irish grey marble.'

The quarry operated until the 1950s. She suggested a potential use for Clerhane limestone as dimension stone.³⁰

According to Colin Rynne:

There were two basic types of quarry, those which supplied dimension or freestone (i.e. good- quality stone which could be freely cut in any direction or could be cut to any size) and rubblestone, this latter variety being used for walling and as a road building material.³¹

Long after their formation, the layers of limestone were lifted and tilted by movements of the earth to lie at an average angle of something like thirty degrees.³² This allowed rainwater to seep more easily between the layers.

The resultant beds of limestone vary in thickness from a few centimetres to more than half a metre.³³ Some of the beds were separated by a greyish coloured clay which was in great demand as poultices. It was applied to animals, including horses, suffering from ailments such as swollen legs.³⁴



Claffey's Quarry, limestone tilted 30 degrees.

³⁰ Howes (1990)

³¹ Rynne (2006), p.151

³² Tubridy (1987), p.7

³³ Rynne (2006), p.151

³⁴ Kelly and Mooney (2001), p.246



QUARRYING, PROCESSING AND TRANSPORT

An advantage of having the stone in layers was that it could be quarried by vertical cutting only. There was no requirement for a horizontal cutting also. This was important where speed of operations was essential in a constant battle to keep water incursion from springs at bay. Stone was cut by first boring a line of holes, about two feet apart, depending on the type of stone, with jumper bar and sledges. A split hollow oak dowel was then placed in each hole. A tapered oak peg was inserted into the dowel and tapped down in turn until the stone split. This is known as the plug and feather system. As described by Rynne 'half round iron bars (the feather) were inserted into a crevice in the rock face and a wedge (the plug) driven between them to cleave the rock apart'.³⁵ In places it was also called the 'feather and quill system'.³⁶ During severe frost, stone could be split by pouring water into drilled holes, where it would freeze and expand. Occasionally blasting of stone was required.³⁷ Blasting with gunpowder became relatively common in Ireland by the end of the eighteenth century.³⁸ A crane lifted the cut stone from the quarry floor, and it was then transported to the shed for carving. These sheds were open structures for maximum light, with their back walls to the prevailing wind, and they had earthen floors to prevent damage to the finished stone. Each carver had a stone block called a 'banker', on which to place the piece he was carving. The stone on the banker was rotated to make the best use of

the available light. '[Going] to the banker' was a popular slang for taking up the trade.³⁹ The carvers were sometimes referred to as 'bankermasons'.⁴⁰ The horizontal layers, or bedding lines, had to be taken into consideration when the finished stone was laid in a building. It was important that the stone mason ensured that its grain was laid running in the same direction as it was in the quarry, and in this way, the stone would be more resistant to weathering.⁴¹

All the heavy work in the quarries was carried out using horses. Claffeys had a team of three horses for their quarry. An example of how hard times were is recorded in an incident where a horse owned by one of their workers, Kieran Daly of Creevagh, was killed in the quarry. There was no insurance at the time, and he had to take the loss himself. This always afterwards upset Mike Claffey; presumably there were no funds to compensate.⁴²

WORKING IN THE DRY

As already mentioned water presented a problem in quarrying the stone. Constant inflow of water from springs and from the adjoining bog meant an effective pump was essential. In addition, the better stone was found deep in the quarry, 'the lower the stone in the quarry the better'.⁴³ Hughes / Claffey had their bucket conveyor, which when primed by water from a canal, would run until the quarry was empty.⁴⁴ Egans had a windmill for the same purpose,⁴⁵ which was superseded by a steam-powered water pump.⁴⁶

³⁵ Rynne (2006), p.152

³⁶ Gus Claffey, conversation with author, December 2005

³⁷ Sister Monica Claffey, Dublin, conversation with author, January 2006

³⁸ Rynne (2006), p.152

³⁹ Egan (1982)

⁴⁰ Rynne (2006), p.152

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.151

⁴² Padraig Turley, Dublin, letter, January 2006

⁴³ Murphy (1966), p.195

⁴⁴ Kelly and Mooney (2001), p.247

⁴⁵ Egan (1982)

⁴⁶ Hammond (2003)



Hornsby Steam Engine (1889) from Egan's Quarry



Pier at River Shannon, Clerhane

The water was pumped under Claffey's yard through a 'gullet' and across their land to the Shannon.⁴⁷ The pump, a Hornsby (Serial no. 6857) which was rated at three horse power, was manufactured in Hornsby's Grantham Works, England and was shipped to B.W. Fayle, Parsonstown (agents) in 1889. It was purchased by Egan's from Wallers of Hunston, c.1913, and installed at the quarry where it remained until 1981. It was then sold to P.J. Rourke, Moyclare and remains in his collection.⁴⁸

James (or Jimmy) Hughes, the quarry owner, was a craftsman and a good draughtsman, but he is best remembered for his engineering skills. He designed a pump that could remove all the water from the quarry in twenty-four hours.⁴⁹ The

basic mechanism was a wooden wheel fitted with buckets and driven by a series of gears and pulleys. Local carpenters and blacksmiths made the different components. The pump was primed with several tons of water, obtained by digging a drain on the opposite side of the road, about 200 yards long. The outlet was blocked to let the required amount of water build up and released to prime the pump. This drain ran at right angles to the Bord na Móna drains which were opened in the 1950s and was used by them as an outfall drain for some time. It was known as 'Terry Callery's outfall', after the last operator of the pump.⁵⁰ The remains of this pump, with its wooden 'mill-race', were still in position in the early 1950s.⁵¹

RIVER TRANSPORT

There is a small pier on the Shannon adjacent to the quarry which was built to transport the stone. It is probable that it was constructed at the end of the 1830s as preparatory work for the Shannon Navigation improvements. It does not appear on the 1838 Ordnance Survey map. In his 1833 report, Thomas Rhodes, Civil Engineer, proposed to erect a number of landing places, including 'Seven Churches; limestone quarries near this place'. Rhodes also states: 'Along both sides, and in the vicinity of the Shannon, abundant supplies of fine limestone, suitable for building purposes, are almost everywhere to be found, and can be produced in blocks of any convenient size, from one to ten tons weight, or even upwards'. The demand for stone at this time can be placed in context when just one job on the bridge at Shannonbridge was estimated to require '1955 cube yards masonry in underpinning the piers of the bridge, building abutments for proposed swivel bridge, and rebuilding wharf-wall'. The estimated cost of this work, at 13/6d per cube yard, amounted to £1,319.12.6. Incidentally, the estimate for the proposed cast-iron swivel bridge was £1,120.00.⁵² However, the quarries at Clerhane did not supply all the stone for the Shannonbridge works. According to the Seventh Commissioners Report for the year 1845 'The persons employed at Banagher between 1st January and 31st May were chiefly engaged at the quarry, preparing stone for Shannon Bridge, and for the Culvert and Weir at Meelick'.⁵³ In 1836 the newly appointed Commissioners were instructed (*inter alia*) 'To ascertain the

⁴⁷ Sister Monica Claffey, Dublin, conversation with author, January 2006

⁴⁸ PJ Rourke, Moyclare, conversation with author, 4 April 2006

⁴⁹ Sister Monica Claffey, Dublin, conversation with author, January 2006

⁵⁰ Kelly and Mooney (2001), p.247

⁵¹ Pdraig Turley, Dublin, conversation with author, January 2006

⁵² Rhodes (1833)

⁵³ Commissioners for the Improvement of the Navigation of the River Shannon, *Seventh Annual Report*

proper places for the formation of necessary havens, piers, wharfs and landing places'.⁵⁴ Pdraig Turley, who often fished from the pier, remembers a line of poles, like telegraph poles, which were used to erect cranes on site.⁵⁵ There are also the remains of a short canal, now mostly filled in. This was navigable by steamers for a distance of 300 metres for loading.⁵⁶ Stone, placed on rollers, was pulled by horses from the quarry to the riverbank, a distance of a quarter of a mile. According to Sr. Monica, the periodic sale of building stone to McGraths of Limerick was a major contract, with the stone being conveyed by steamer on the Shannon.⁵⁷ In 1840, the toll rate for the middle and upper Shannon, for second class goods including limestone, building stone, native marble and flags was one and a half pence per boat load per statute mile, with a maximum for any distance of four shillings per boat load.⁵⁸ Stone was also shipped from the quay at Shannonbridge and by rail from Ballinasloe railway station.⁵⁹ The workers involved in this part of the production were known as 'dray men'. In the latter years of production, most of the stone was transported by lorry. 'Lorry loads of stone leaving the quarry was a regular occurrence.'⁶⁰

An idea of the size of the operation at this time can be gauged from this extract from the Parliamentary Gazetteer of 1845, referring to Clonmacnoise:

*A quarry, about one-fourth of a mile from the Shannon, produces a shell grey marble, variously tinted, and of a sound useful description; and a few years ago, about 3,000 cubic feet of this marble was sent to the Killaloe works, - the principal mart and manufactory for marble, within the counties of Clare, Limerick, Tipperary and Galway.*⁶¹



Claffey's House 1953 with Pdraig Turley pictured in the yard (Photo: courtesy of Pdraig Turley)

⁵⁴ Letter from Whitehall, Treasury Chambers, 26th February 1836, and Copy of Treasury Minute 24th November 1835

⁵⁵ Pdraig Turley, Dublin, conversation with author, January 2006

⁵⁶ Sister Monica Claffey, Dublin, conversation with author, January 2006

⁵⁷ *Ibid*

⁵⁸ *Second Report of the Commissioners, Shannon Navigation*, Appendix Schedule A, 26 February, 1841

⁵⁹ Egan (1982)

⁶⁰ Sister Monica Claffey, Dublin, conversation with author, January 2006

⁶¹ Byrne (2007)

The Killaloe Marble Works was owned by William and William Richard Manderson.⁶² In 1832, Charles Wye Williams, founder of the Dublin Steam Ship Company, had constructed a water-powered marble cutting and polishing mill, using a 16 foot diameter water wheel, on the river Shannon at Killaloe. Here was manufactured 'such as mantelpieces, monuments and dairy slabs'. Substantial remains of the site, now used as a depot by ESB, still survive.⁶³

The close proximity to the River Shannon with its pier and connecting canal was a great advantage to the Clerhane quarries as 'access to navigable waterways also enabled stone to be transported, not only over considerable distances inland, but to destinations across the Irish Sea'.⁶⁴



Marble Cutting and Polishing Mill, Killaloe (Photo: Rynne, 2006)

⁶² *Slaters National Commercial Directory of Ireland* (1846)

⁶³ Rynne (2006), p.155

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.150

EARLY DEVELOPMENTS

Information on the early days of the quarries is, as one would expect, scarce. It would be wrong to assume that exploitation of this plentiful supply of good quality, easily-worked stone, with adjacent river transportation, did not commence until the eighteenth century. According to George Wilkinson, writing in the 1840s ‘This [Clerhane] stone has been quarried for the Shannon works and was extensively used in the old buildings at Clonmacnoise, both in the round tower [O’Rourke’s Tower built in 1124] and in various parts of the other buildings’.⁶⁵ The same criteria apply to Temple Finghin, built c. 1160-1170, where ‘the external ashlar masonry used in that tower is also of limestone and is very similar to that used in the main round tower’.⁶⁶ Clerhane stone may also have been used in the building of the castles in the immediate area. This assumption must be qualified by taking into account the existence of other quarries in the area, including one at Cloniffeen. The local castles included that of Raghra, built on the east bank of the Shannon at Shannonbridge and shown on the Down Survey map of 1650 and on William Petty’s map of King’s County in 1685. John O’Donovan states in his Ordnance Survey Letters ‘The Castle of Rachra mentioned by the Four Masters, and which was situated on the east bank of the Shannon near the Bridge of Shannon Bridge – no trace of the building at present’.⁶⁷ Paul Kerrigan states ‘There are no visible remains of this MacCoghlan



Egan's House at Creevagh, Shannonbridge with Martin Curley (Photo courtesy of Catherine Curley)

⁶⁵ Wilkinson (1845), p.231

⁶⁶ Manning (2003), p.91

⁶⁷ O'Donovan (1838), *Ordnance Survey Letters Kings County*, Vol.1, Index IV

castle today'.⁶⁸ It most likely became a victim to recycling in one of the subsequent adjacent military developments. Clonmacnoise castle was constructed of limestone in 1214. In the seventeenth century Bellaknaw, or Ballalanave, castle was built on the west bank of the Shannon to guard the ford just north of Devenish Island.⁶⁹ This location is less than a kilometre north of Clerhane. The ruins of Leitra Castle, a seventeenth century hall-house are also nearby.⁷⁰ The main stone building projects in the Shannonbridge area in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries included the bridge, built circa 1700 and completed in its present form in 1757, the Shannon navigation of the mid eighteenth century and the Napoleonic era fortifications of 1810-17. The Grand Canal was extended to Ballinasloe during the period 1824-28 and further major works were carried out on the Shannon navigation in the 1840's.⁷¹

'The general belief in the Shannonbridge area is that most of the stone for the bridge at Shannonbridge came from the nearby Clerhane quarry.'⁷² According to Fred Hammond's 2003 survey there were, 'quarries sited here from the eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries onwards'.⁷³ The Shannon navigation of the middle eighteenth century comprised the building of a canal and jetty on the east bank, at Shannonbridge. The Thomas Omer designed lock house, which is now the tourist information office, was also built in 1755.⁷⁴ In the navigation improvements of the 1840s the canal was removed. It is likely that Clerhane stone, as a local source of high quality architectural stone was used in these large scale projects.

A QUARRYING TRADITION

By the year 1854 one of the three quarries was being operated by the Egan family. Griffith's Valuation shows Kieran Egan (1831-1896) as occupier, with Arthur McGuinness as immediate lessor, of a quarryman's house and land totalling 4 acres, 1 rood and 38 perches. The total rateable valuation was £2.10s.0d, including 10s.0d for the quarry.⁷⁵ The Egans originated in Co. Wexford and arrived in Clonmacnoise via Cashel, Co. Tipperary where they opened a quarry and built a church shortly after Catholic Emancipation.⁷⁶ Kieran Francis Egan, master stone carver, is buried in Cashel cemetery.⁷⁷ Clerhane quarry was acquired by Kieran Egan around the middle of the nineteenth century. He was the great grandfather of the current owner Michael Egan, Kilbeggan. He married Annie Kelly from Clonfanlough and they had a family of three boys (Frank, Martin and Kieran Patrick) and seven girls who married and lived in Ireland, USA and Argentina.⁷⁸ One of the girls, Rose Anne, married Francis McGuinness, Cloniff.⁷⁹ Their home in Creevagh, a two storey house with pillars, now owned by Martin Curley, still stands.⁸⁰ This house, where apprentice stonecutters also stayed, was built by Egans and the last member of the family to live there, Martin Egan, left circa 1953.⁸¹ Kieran Egan is included in the list of rated electors for the Moystown Polling District in 1890, with an address at Creevagh and a valuation of £21-0-0.⁸² Kieran died in 1896 aged sixty-five years and the running of the quarry business was taken over by his son,

Martin. The 1901 Census for Creevagh records Anne Egan as head of the family, a widow aged sixty years, with her son Martin, a stonecutter, aged forty years and J.F Egan, nephew and also a stonecutter, aged seventeen years. Kieran Patrick, Martin's brother, is also recorded as living in Creevagh, where his occupation is described as a stonecutter, with his wife and the first four of their children.⁸³

The second quarry in Clerhane and the adjoining farm were occupied by James Hughes. The Hughes family were stone masons who originated in Newry, Co. Down and came south to work on the building of the bridge at Athlone in the 1840s.⁸⁴ They also established a 'coal, corn, potato and general merchants' business, trading as 'F.P. Hughes, The Quay, Athlone'.⁸⁵ James Hughes was married to a Brigid Menton.⁸⁶ When James died on 23 November 1883 his address was given in the parish records as Corrigeen, Shannonbridge. He was succeeded in the quarrying business by his son, also James Hughes. His daughter, Mary Anne, married Hubert McGuinness, Cloniff, on 13 February 1877.⁸⁷ The Hughes were also related to the Greene family; Ellen Hughes being the grandmother of Jerry Greene, Blackwater Lodge.⁸⁸ The parish records list the marriage of Martin Greene and Elenor Hughes on 31 October 1878.⁸⁹

⁶⁸ Kerrigan (1998), p.430

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.413

⁷⁰ Sweetman (1999), p.196

⁷¹ Delaney (1995), Appendix 5

⁷² Trodd (1998), p.104

⁷³ Hammond (2003)

⁷⁴ Trodd (1998), p.104

⁷⁵ *Griffith's Valuation, Union of Parsonstown* (1854), p.141

⁷⁶ Egan (1982)

⁷⁷ Michael Egan, conversation with author (2006)

⁷⁸ Egan (1982)

⁷⁹ *Clonmacnoise Parish Records* in OHAS, Tullamore

⁸⁰ Gus Claffey, conversation with author, Dec. 2005

⁸¹ Martin Curley, conversation with author (2013)

⁸² Wright (1989), p.204

⁸³ Census of Population (1901), Creevagh townland

⁸⁴ Jerry Greene, conversation with author, 23 Apr. 2006

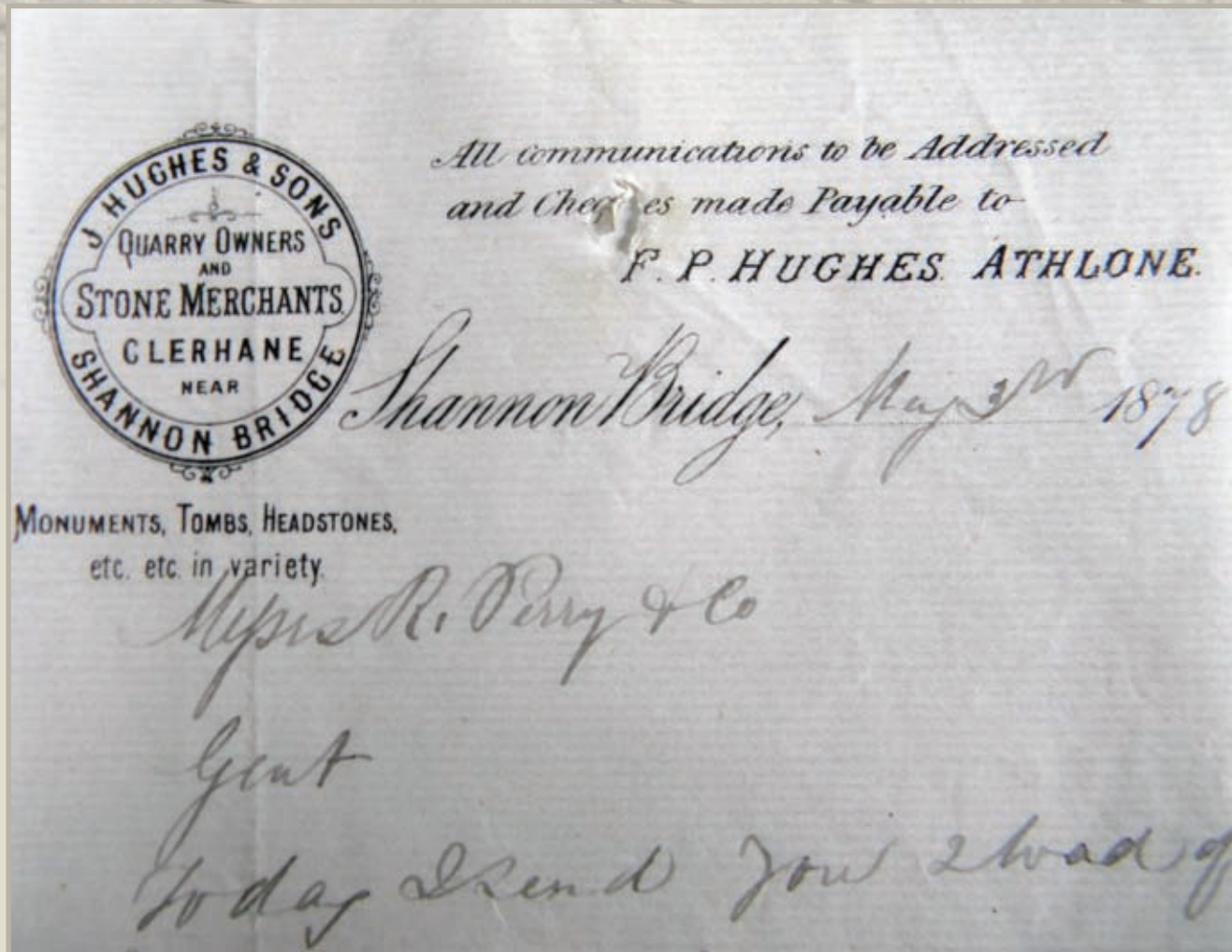
⁸⁵ FP Hughes, Invoice stamp, 26 Aug. 1880

⁸⁶ *Clonmacnoise Parish Records*, in OHAS, Tullamore

⁸⁷ *Clonmacnoise Parish Records*, in OHAS, Tullamore

⁸⁸ Jerry Greene, conversation with author, 23 Apr. 2006

⁸⁹ *Clonmacnoise Parish Records*, in OHAS, Tullamore



Letterhead, James Hughes & Sons, Clerhane 1878 from the Belmont Mill Archive (Courtesy of Offaly County Library)

Griffith's Valuation, in 1854, shows Hughes as occupier of a farm and herd's house, totalling 117 acres, 3 roods and 38 perches with a rateable valuation of £43.15s.0d including £3.0.0 for the quarry.⁹⁰ James Hughes Jnr. appears in the 1901 Census for Clerhane, described as a farmer and stonecutter, aged fifty and born in Co. Roscommon. He had married Mary Daly on 31 July 1884 and they had seven children, four boys and three girls. He appears on the list of rated Electors for the Moystown Polling District with an address at Clerhane and a rateable valuation of £43-0-0.⁹¹ The Hughes family sold their property to Michael Claffey and emigrated to the U.S.A. in the early 1900s.⁹² They do not appear on the 1911 Census, with the exception of James Hughes Jnr. He is listed as being at Hubert McGuinness's house in Cloniff, as a visitor, aged sixty four, stonecutter, unemployed.⁹³ Padraig Turley, Michael Claffey's grandson, remembers four ladies visiting from U.S.A. about 1950, members of the Hughes family, who visited the old homestead and drank water from the well there.⁹⁴ James Hughes traded as J. Hughes and Sons, Quarry Owners and Stone Merchants, Clerhane, nr Shannonbridge. They also supplied 'monuments, tombs, headstones etc. etc. in variety'.⁹⁵ A third quarry, Mannion's Quarry, is listed in Griffith's Valuation of 1854. John Mannion is recorded as the occupier of a house, offices and land covering four acres and thirty two perches. This property had a rateable valuation of £2.10s.0d of which 10s.0d referred to the quarry.⁹⁶ The quarry adjoins Egan's at the north-east corner and was

⁹⁰ Griffith's Valuation, *Union of Parsonstown* (1854), p.141

⁹¹ Wright (1989), p.204

⁹² Kelly and Mooney (2001), p.247

⁹³ Census of Population (1911), Clorhane townland

⁹⁴ Padraig Turley, Dublin, Conversation with author, Jan. 2006

⁹⁵ Hughes Company Letterhead, Belmont Mill Archive, Offaly Co. Library

⁹⁶ Griffith's Valuation, *Union of Parsonstown*, 1854, p.141



Mannion's House, Clerhane

partially filled in some years ago.⁹⁷ Patrick Mannion appears on the list of rated Electors for the Moystown Polling District with an address at Clerhane and a rateable valuation of £13-0-0.⁹⁸ Mannion's house in Clerhane is a fine example of local nineteenth century stonework, with the quoins being especially noteworthy.

TRAVELLING QUARRY WORKERS - 'STONIES'

The quarry workers largely consisted of two groups, local people and travelling stone cutters, known as 'stonies'. The lives and times of these itinerant craftsmen are brilliantly described by sculptor Seamus Murphy in his autobiography *Stone Mad* (1966). The stone cutters trade was closed, meaning entry was hereditary only, while the stone carver's was not.⁹⁹ The stonies would have been what were generally regarded as 'characters'. Many were men who kept to themselves, who travelled from quarry to quarry, working for a while and then moving on. They had a reputation for being tough, hard-working and hard-drinking, not surprising given the conditions in the quarries of the time. One of the 'perks' of the job was the entitlement to a daily jar of porter, badly needed in the dusty conditions! Indeed the trade was often referred to as 'the Dust'.¹⁰⁰ Stonies – who were not noted for their religious observance – tended to congregate at a rudimentary shelter in Clerhane on Sunday mornings. This shelter, known as the Sheep House, consisted of a natural vertical stone outcrop and an enclosing stone wall with a rough thatched roof; hence the phrase – 'he went to Mass in the Sheep House'.¹⁰¹ However, we can be in no doubt that these were highly skilled craftsmen, as a viewing of some of the carvings from the period will testify. They brought with them news of jobs in progress elsewhere, 'the kind of stone in various counties and methods of working it and, of course, most important

of all, the wages'.¹⁰² The downside was widespread demarcation, unreasonable wage demands, particularly if a major contract was secured and a propensity to move on without giving notice. This could leave the quarry owner short-handed and facing serious financial problems.¹⁰³ Sr. Monica Claffey remembered three travelling stonemasons who worked in the quarry and who stayed in John Egan's house in Cloniff.¹⁰⁴ The 1901 Census includes a stonemason, Patrick Moore, aged 51, a lodger at Henry's in Shannonbridge. Names in the 1911 Census include Patrick Silke, described as a stone breaker, visitor, aged 56 and a widower from Co. Galway, at Patrick Flannery's house, Creevagh. Also staying at Anne Kilmartin's was a boarder by the name of Patrick Higgins, a single 76 year old stonemason from King's County. Mick Flynn, a famous journeyman and John Travers, a carver from Gorey, worked in Egan's quarry.¹⁰⁵ Dan Edwards remembers travelling blacksmiths at his father's forge in Clonfanlough, who, like their 'stonie' counterparts, would not stay long as 'it was too far from the pub'. The odd journeyman, who would have worked in the quarries many years previously, still visited in the late 1940s and early 1950s.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁷ Noel Mannion, conversation with author (2013)

⁹⁸ Wright (1989), p.204

⁹⁹ Egan (1982)

¹⁰⁰ Murphy (1966), p.6

¹⁰¹ Noel Keena, conversation with author 2013

¹⁰² Murphy (1966), p.16

¹⁰³ Kelly & Mooney (2001), p.246

¹⁰⁴ Sister Monica Claffey, Dublin, conversation with author, January 2006

¹⁰⁵ Egan (1982)

¹⁰⁶ Padraig Turley, Dublin, conversation with author, January 2006



Noel Keena at The Sheep House, Clerhane, 2012

TERRY CALLERY

Terry Callery was a stonecutter from Oldcourt, Oldcastle, Co. Meath, who came to Clerhane and stayed, with the Claffey family, for over thirty years until his death in Tullamore hospital, on Pattern Sunday 1937.¹⁰⁷ He worked for both James Hughes and Michael Claffey.¹⁰⁸ Water ingress to the quarry was one of the main problems, and he is especially remembered for his expertise in dealing with it. His memory was recalled over fifty years later in a letter written by Sr. M. Imelda, Convent of Mercy, Doncaster (Breege Keena, Corrigeen, Shannonbridge),

My memories are more of people... And those who stood out as characters! Like Terry Callery who could make my hair rise with his ghost stories but who was absolutely scared when Pat Grady rattled the ass's winkers in the dark.¹⁰⁹

He is also remembered as a great Irish dancer, who wore clogs, was afraid of ghosts and who dug for gold at night. Claffeys had an orchard and Sister Monica recalled a story:

Terry Callery heard someone stealing apples, the man was up in the trees and he [Callery] took a gun and fired a shot over the tree and the man fell to the ground. It was a time that men wore very wide trousers – say 18 to 20 inches wide legs – the man had tied the trousers at the bottom of the legs and filled all the space with apples. He could not run so Terry caught him; he turned out to be one of our own workers.¹¹⁰

It was Terry Callery who inserted the window in the west wall of the Old Fort building in Shannonbridge for Frank Moran.¹¹¹

LOCAL QUARRY WORKERS

Only the names of local people who worked in the quarries in more recent times survive. These included Pat and Tommy Loughnane from Blackwater, Kieran Daly, Creevagh, Martin and Stephen Flannery and Sonny Keena, Aughinacabe.¹¹² Tommy Loughnane was foreman in Claffey's quarry and is remembered as a very skilful builder of stone chimneys.¹¹³ Kieran Joe Flannery, father of Johnny Flannery, Creevagh, also worked for Egan's.¹¹⁴ Jack Henry, Clonfanlough, also worked in Egan's quarry for a time, as he recalled, aged 98, for the Parish millennium book.¹¹⁵ The 1911 census for Creevagh townland shows Patrick Keena, a stone cutter, aged 72, and father of Mrs. Ellen Claffey.

At this time it is not possible to establish from records an accurate picture of the total numbers employed at the quarries. The figures would have fluctuated considerably with the rise and fall in demand. According to Fr. Mike Egan, 'over one hundred stonecutters and carvers worked in Clerhane. About fifty quarrymen and some thirty to forty draymen drew the finished products to the pier at Shannonbridge ... and to Ballinasloe railway station'.¹¹⁶ In a very labour intensive industry, these figures can be regarded as a good guide, during the boom years of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, particularly if much of the carving was done in the quarry workshops. It also indicates that the pier at Clerhane may not have been in use then. Certainly, local folklore has the number of quarry workers at around one hundred, particularly when large orders had to

¹⁰⁷ Pdraig Turley, note from his late mother's prayerbook; email of 19 Dec. 2006

¹⁰⁸ Kelly and Mooney (2001), p.247

¹⁰⁹ Sister M. Imelda (Breege Kenna), letter to D. Killeen, 6th August 1980

¹¹⁰ Notes prepared by Sister Monica Claffey, 20 Jan. 2006

¹¹¹ Sister Monica Claffey, Dublin, conversation with author, January 2006

¹¹² Pdraig Turley, Dublin, letter of 15 Jan. 2006

¹¹³ Kieran Kelly, conversation with author

¹¹⁴ Gus Claffey, conversation with author, June 2013

¹¹⁵ Kay Kelly (2001), p.272


¹¹⁶ Egan (1982)

be filled.¹¹⁷ Local men from Shannonbridge would be taken on and a path from the village, via Price's Lane, led to the quarry.¹¹⁸ The track is shown on the 1838 Ordnance Survey map. 'When the industry in the area was at its height approximately 100 men were employed.'¹¹⁹ The total employed would include those at Egan's other quarry, just across the Shannon, in the townland of Kidlawn, at Clonfad, Co. Roscommon.¹²⁰ Sr. Monica Claffey recalled that in the 1920s there was great demand for headstones, rough stone, pillars, rollers etc., and a good living was made from the quarry.¹²¹ However by the 1930s the combined workforce in the two quarries had fallen to about twenty.¹²²



Fr. Michael Egan (Photo courtesy Ardagh & Clonmacnois Diocesan Archive)

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K. P. EGAN & SONS,
MONUMENTAL WORKS, MARDYKE STREET
(Opposite Labour Exchange)
AND CORNAMAGH, ATHLONE.

Crosses, Tombs, Headstones, Tablets, etc. All Classes
of Cut Stone promptly executed. Designs and esti-
mates. Quarries and Works

Shannonbridge & Clonfad
Letterings and renovations punctually attended to in any
part of the county.

Advertisement K.P. Egan & Sons (1919)

¹¹⁷ Pat Killeen, conversation with author, February 2006

¹¹⁸ Noel Keena, conversation with author 2013

¹¹⁹ Kelly and Mooney (2001), p.245

¹²⁰ PJ Kelly, 14 Aug. 2013

¹²¹ Sister Monica Claffey, Dublin, conversation with author, Jan. 2006

¹²² *Ibid*



Gatepost, Clerhane from Williams Estate

PEAK PRODUCTION – THE STONE TRADE

The era of peak production can be taken as having lasted for about 100 years, from the beginning of the nineteenth to the early twentieth century. The quarries supplied a wide range of materials for infrastructural, architectural, industrial, residential, agricultural and monumental purposes. Bridge building was an important outlet for stone production, along with the construction of many fine nineteenth-century town houses. ‘Around 1845 ... stone was also brought ... and perhaps from quarries near Banagher and Shannonbridge’ for house building in Birr.¹²³ For such major building works material would often have been sourced from a number of locations. Monumental branches were opened by Egans in Athlone, Salthill, Portumna, Kilcormac and Mountbolus.¹²⁴ In addition, demand for stone in the area increased with the upgrading of the Shannon navigation. Stone from Clerhane and other quarries was used in the navigation works at Athlone in the 1840s, which included the building of the present bridge there.¹²⁵ The construction of the bridge began in May 1841. With regard to the supply of stone *two quarries had been identified, one at Cashel on the east shore of Lough Ree*

*where a ‘tramroad’ was laid to bring the ashlar the 300 yards to the lakeshore, and the other at Clerhaun, just below Clonmacnoise, where the deepening of the river was causing such problems.*¹²⁶

The building industry was responsible for 90% of stone sales. The extensive range of goods and services supplied was well illustrated in the *Industrial Directory* of the Department of Industry and Commerce (1939). K.P. Egan and Sons, Shannon Bridge, Co. Offaly are listed as suppliers of altars and altar rails, marble, church fountains, head stones, monuments etc, marble mantelpieces, marble pulpits, statues, limestone, stone balustrades, corbels, cornices, kerbs, lintels, window sills, door steps etc.¹²⁷ As well as the prestigious work of church building, wall capping, gate piers, land rollers and animal troughs were turned out.¹²⁸ Estate owners liked their pier cappings to be one-piece. ‘Seconds’ were used in the building of sheds.¹²⁹ The Williams Estate gave gate posts of Clerhane limestone to their tenants and these are still a feature on many local farms.¹³⁰

¹²³ Feehan and Rosse (2005), p.6

¹²⁴ Egan (1982)

¹²⁵ Delaney (1987), p.123

¹²⁶ Delaney (2008), p.121

¹²⁷ Department of Industry and Commerce (1939). *Industrial Directory*

¹²⁸ Kelly and Mooney (2001), p.246

¹²⁹ Gus Claffey, conversation with author, Dec. 2005

¹³⁰ Tubridy (1987), p.103



Belmont Mill

BELMONT MILL

While nineteenth century records are scarce, a number of letters survive in the Belmont Mill Archive, in Offaly County Library, that give an insight into quarry operations and trade at that time. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Robert Perry and Company, proprietors of Belmont Mill, were sourcing their stone requirements from both Egan's and Hughes' quarries, as well as from Molloy's quarry at Ballyduff, near Tullamore. A disastrous fire on 14 August 1879 led to the rebuilding of the flour mill. Cut stone and rubble stone for building were transported to the pier at Clerhane, sometimes with some difficulty due to flooding, for dispatch by boat to Belmont via Shannonharbour. Stone was also sent to Belmont directly by horse and cart.

The following correspondence gives details of the materials supplied, prices charged, delivery methods and some of the difficulties being experienced.

Letter 4 March 1878 from J. Hughes to Robert Perry & Co. Ltd:

Yours of 1st and 2nd to hand. Respecting price of Caps and Guardstones. Caps you can have at quarry at 3/= for pairs. Guard stones punched, round, say 3 ft over ground and 1 ft – 6 in under, 9 in thick at 7/6 each stone. I think these dimensions would do for guardstones. I am getting rubble stone drawn down [to Shannon], I think I will have a [boat] load down this week.

Letter 5 March 1878 from J. Hughes to Robert Perry & Co. Ltd:

Yours to hand respecting Rubble Stone. I intend to have a boat load drawn ready for Friday next. Water is very high here at present, so that I cant get stones to the edge of the quay. I will see to have the Guard Stones ready for to go with the Rubble Stone.

Letter 7 March 1878 from J. Hughes to Robert Perry & Co. Ltd:

Today I send you 1 horse load of Rubble which I am sure is more than 1 ton. Please say by return of car man or post will you draw much by horses, as I could leave some out of the bottom of the quarry for you with my own carts. Please have boat for stone down as soon as possible and oblige, as Rubble Stone is in my way for the future at Shannon.

Letter 28 March 1878 from J. Hughes to Robert Perry & Co. Ltd:

Yours to hand of 26th and 27th. Pier caps are dressed, 3ft 3ins square. As to price of rough stone you require for piers, I would like to know your dimensions, then I could give price exact. But I will say for quoins Rough Hammered from 2ft 6ins to 2ft long and from 8 to 12ins thick and 12 to 16ins wide, those you can have at 8d per square foot at quarry. With regard to Rubble Stone sent in boat I think no person could fault them for building. I will see to get Pillar Stones ready this week if possible and Guard Stones when ready I will let you know.

**Letter 3 May 1878 from J. Hughes
to Robert Perry & Co. Ltd:**

Today I sent you 2 loads of ____? stone, one more horse will bring all. Please say if you require any more quoins and how much. Also if you would want any more rubble as I could now draw some to Shannon, if you would require a boat load, or if you want any cut stone, I could now get it dressed.

**Invoice 6 November 1888 from J. Hughes
to Robert Perry & Co. Ltd:**

2 Stones 3ft x 9ins x 9ins, each punched, delivered at Belmont, 3/= each, 6/=, Paid.¹³¹

Kieran Egan was also supplying stone at this time and quoted as follows:

**Letter 10 November 1877 from Kieran Egan
to Robert Perry and Co. Ltd:**

Mr. Perry, Your letter to hand – my price for the 12 base stones 2ft square or oval, rough punched, 1/0d foot superfill (?) – delivered at Belmont.

**Letter 13 October 1879 from Kieran Egan
to Robert Perry and Co. Ltd:**

Mr. Perry, I will send over the rough punch blocks 2ft 6 in by 2ft 6in at 6/= each.

**Letter 22 April 1880 from Kieran Egan
to Robert Perry and Co. Ltd:**

Mr. Perry, Your letter to hand. About the cut stone, Coping 10ft 8in by 1ft 8in by 4 thick – I will deliver the 10ft 8 for 3/6 the foot.

**Letter 1 April 1881 from Kieran Egan
to Robert Perry and Co. Ltd:**

Dear Sir, Your letter to hand. In reply states the price of cut stone – Window sill 1/9 foot, Door sill 2/= superfill, Door blocks 4/6 each. Hoping to hear by return.

Typical prices included foundation stones for pillars at 6/6, window stools at 3/6, rubble stone for building at 2/6 per ton and rough stone for quoins at 10d per quoin.¹³² The quarries were busy and the trade was certainly good.

CHURCH BUILDING

After Catholic Emancipation in 1829 a veritable explosion of church building ensued and the Clerhane quarries were well placed to take advantage. A comparison between the Ordnance Survey maps of 1838 and 1910 shows a large increase in the area quarried during that period. Among the ecclesiastical buildings in which Clerhane stone was used were the Roman Catholic churches at Nenagh (1896), Ballinahown (1902), St. Mary's Athlone (1861), Kinnegad (1909) and Birr (1817), which interestingly was built prior to Catholic emancipation under the patronage of the Earl of Rosse.¹³³ The first stone for St. Colmcille's church, Ballinahown, was laid on 1 October 1896. The church was built of locally quarried sandstone and cut stone, in limestone, was supplied by Egan's, as well as by Ahernes and Sinnotts. The bulk of this stone came from Egan's, who received almost £800.00 in payments during the period of



St. Colmcille's Church, Ballinahown

construction. Most probably it came from their Clerhane quarry as crinoidal limestone is clearly visible in the threshold stones and door surrounds. The last entry in the Parish Disbursements Book for 30 January 1904 reads 'Egan, Stone Cutter, for six gate piers at road wall £15-0s-0d.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Belmont Mill Archive, Offaly County Library

¹³² *Ibid*

¹³³ Egan (1982)

¹³⁴ Ballinahown Parish Records



Ballinahown Church Gate Piers at road wall erected in 1904 by Egan's

Accounts for the new church in Pullough, built with local brick between 1906 and 1910,¹³⁵ record payments to Claffey in 1908 and 1909 for 'cut stone sills £6-0s-0d' and 'cut stone door steps, £0-14s-0d'.¹³⁶ These transactions along with the commemorative plaque in crinoidal limestone over the door, establish a very probable Clerhane link. The former Roman Catholic church at Shannonbridge, which was erected in 1858 by Fr. Farrell Duffy (PP 1857 – 1868), used Clerhane stone as evidenced in the surround of the main doorway, the commemorative plaque and the window sills, all in limestone. It is probable that local stone was also used in the building of the Church of Ireland church in Shannonbridge which was completed in 1877, under the



Dedication of graveyard at Cloniffeen, Shannonbridge on 21 September 2000. L to R. Colm Kenny, Jimmy Mooney, Mick Devine, Des O'Leary, Fr. Michael Campbell, C.C. Ferbane, Stephen Kenny, Fr. Francis O'Hanlon, P.P. Shannonbridge, John Price, John D. Carty, Kieran Kelly, Joe Egan (Photo Hugh Collins)

direction of the Rev. N. R. Brunskill, Rector.¹³⁷ In a present day link, Fr. Duffy's grave slab of Clerhane stone, that was removed from the inside of the church in the late 1970s, when the building was re-designated as the Community Hall, was reused as the altar stone at Cloniffeen graveyard in 2000. The uprights for the altar are from Clerhane gateposts and the plaque was executed 'gratis' by Michael Egan, Kilbeggan.¹³⁸

Rough stone was supplied to Pearses of Dublin and also to Harringtons, Glanvilles and other yards.¹³⁹ James Pearse was the English-born father of the patriots Pdraig and Willie Pearse and had built up a thriving stone-carving business at the time of his death in 1900.¹⁴⁰ The pulpit of St. Mary's Church, Athlone, in which it is believed Clerhane stone was



Door surround of former Roman Catholic Church, Shannonbridge (1858) in limestone

used, was designed by J.J. McCarthy of Dublin and executed by James Pearse, Brunswick St., Dublin. This pulpit was disassembled in 1974 by the Office of Public Works as part of the modernisation of the church, and was donated to the Pearse Museum in St. Enda's, Rathfarnham, where some of its panels are on display.¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ Devaney (2005)

¹³⁶ Ballinahown Parish Records

¹³⁷ *Kings County Chronicle*, 21 Jun. 1877

¹³⁸ Kieran Kelly conversation with author, 2013

¹³⁹ Egan (1982)

¹⁴⁰ www.ucc.ie (Department of History), 8 Dec. 2005

¹⁴¹ O'Brien (1989), p.140

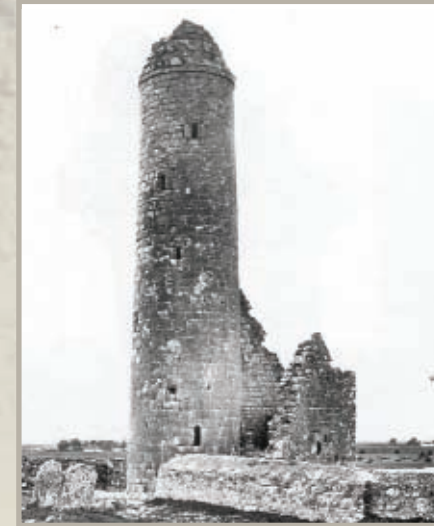


Pulpit, St. Mary's Church Athlone installed in 1878
(Photo: 'St. Mary's Church, A History (1989)')

THE KILKENNY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY AT CLONMACNOISE

With the exception of the round towers, Clerhane stone was not generally used in the building of the churches at Clonmacnoise, which mostly comprise Ballyduff, Bloomhill sandstone.¹⁴² However, it was used in the nineteenth century in the repair of the cap stone of McCarthy's Tower by Kieran Egan for the Kilkenny Archaeological Society (The Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland). In his report to the Society in 1868, the Secretary, Rev James Graves, stated:

A few years since the Society had expended to the amount of £109 in repairs and restorations at the famous Seven Churches there and what had been done at the time was already on record in their 'Journal'. However one necessary work had remained over, for want of means – the securing of the cap of the lesser Round Tower, which had at some remote period been stricken with lightning, and the action of the weather had been gradually disintegrating the shattered mason work, so that the courses of stone were, from time to time, falling off. Since then subscriptions had come in for the special work of securing the cap of the tower, and a contract for the purpose had been made with a builder of Shannon–Bride named Egan, whose tender was the most satisfactory. Scaffolding was the principal expense as some of the original stones were there for them to reset. It was arranged that any new stones necessary to be



McCarthy's Tower,
Clonmacnoise (1867)
(Photo: Office of Public
Works – Dunraven
Collection)



McCarthy's Tower; Clonmacnoise, today
Note herringbone masonry pattern

¹⁴² Tom Moore, conversation with author, Jan. 2006

*supplied should be of a different kind – the old were calcareous sandstone: the new were to be limestone. He had just returned from making an inspection of the work, as it was progressing at Clonmacnoise, and he was glad to be able to say that it was going on very satisfactorily. All the old stones that remained were already re-set in their former position, and what should necessarily be new was being done in a proper way. When this should have been carried out, he might safely say that everything had been done to put the ruins of Clonmacnoise in a safe state for centuries to come.*¹⁴³

Included in the subscriptions mentioned above, was one of £1.00 from Kieran Egan. A full list of contributors appears in Appendix 1.¹⁴⁴ The method of repairing masonry with a different type of stone from the original, so as to clearly differentiate the old from the new, was regarded as very advanced in the mid-nineteenth century.

A few years previously, in 1865, the Kilkenny Archaeological Society also carried out repairs at Clonmacnoise including those to the Nuns' Church. This work included rebuilding the west doorway and the chancel arch. Where original carved stones could not be found in the collapsed rubble of the church, they were replaced with plain voussoirs, in limestone, from Clerhane quarry. According to Jenifer Ní Ghrádaigh in her article on the Nuns' Church, in *Clonmacnoise Studies* (Vol. 2):

*The replacement of missing originals with plain blocks, although it may detract slightly from the overall aesthetic effect, is an immense advantage in allowing the modern art historian to take at face value those stones that bear carved detail.*¹⁴⁵



Repairs to Nuns' Church, Clonmacnoise undertaken in 1865

The work was carried out under the direction of Edward Kilkenny, a master mason, from Athlone. The amount expended on cut stone and stone cutters' wages was £14-11s-0d. Wages of masons, labourers and horse hire totalled £55-15s-4d. According to Rev. James Graves, in his report on the project 'it was with some difficulty that a sufficient number of skilled masons and stone cutters was procured'. Among the contributors to the restoration fund was Rev. Charles A. Vignoles, Rector of Clonmacnoise, who gave £2-00.¹⁴⁶

Thomas Lalor Cooke (1792-1869), in his *History of Birr*, had high praise for this restoration work:

*For the present state of preservation of the remains of Clonmacnoise – so different from heretofore; with the “nuns' church” of the lady Dervorgail, risen, as it were, phoenix like, from destruction; Irishmen are indebted to the “Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland,” and the exertions of the Rev. James Graves, their honorary secretary, zealously aided by the Rev. Charles Vignoles, rector of Clonmacnoise. These reverend gentlemen, by judicious renovations and repairs on the crumbling ruins, and by collecting into a place of safety on the spot, the interesting monumental stones and sepulchral slabs, which were scattered there, have rescued from destruction, and further dilapidation, these interesting memorials of long past times of which all Irishmen should be proud. For his own part, it is with feelings of pride and pleasure, the writer of this work mentions the fact of his having been elected a life member of the learned “Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland,” in acknowledgment of his humble exertions in assisting to preserve what yet remains, of the once renowned, and still venerable and interesting, Clonmacnoise.*¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Graves (1868), p.141

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁴⁵ Ní Ghrádaigh (1998), p.189

¹⁴⁶ Graves (1865), pp.364-372

¹⁴⁷ Cooke (1875), Chapter XXI (pp. 378-379)



Egan's Family Headstone, Old Graveyard, Clonmacnoise

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Frank Egan, son of Kieran, died aged thirty from wounds received in fighting for the Fenians against the British. Martin, who was also active in the Fenians and first to captain a King's County Football team, died from pneumonia at the comparatively early age of forty-eight in 1905.¹⁴⁸ His property was advertised for sale, by auction, in 1907 and in relation to the quarry, the advertisement stated:

On this holding there is a valuable limestone quarry, plant and machinery, worked with skill by the late Mr. Egan and on which a large turnover in cash has annually been made. His exquisite work of stone and cross, etc, may be seen the country over.¹⁴⁹

The property remained in the Egan family. Kieran Patrick who had emigrated to the United States, returned home to take over the business. While in America he founded monumental yards in Hartford, New Haven and at the gate of Calvary Cemetery, New York. This Long Island property was sold around 1980. 'He ran the business with outstanding success, his American experience standing him in good stead.'¹⁵⁰ Kieran Patrick is listed in the 1911 Census, living at Creevagh, as a farmer, aged forty with his wife Ellen and children; Francis (born in America), Martin, Peter, Kieran, Mary Angela, Ellen, Teresa and Michael. Kieran Patrick died on 21 January 1941, aged 71 years. The sculptor's address on the Egan family headstone in

Clonmacnoise graveyard, an elegant tapered column thirteen feet in height, complimented by the round tower in the background and crafted by Kieran Patrick, reads 'Quarries, Shannonbridge'. The quarry was then taken over by his son Kieran. Kieran also ran a monumental workshop at Main Street, Shannonbridge, until his death on 31 March 1977, aged 77 years.¹⁵¹ He was highly regarded for his lettering skills.¹⁵² This site is now occupied by Supermac's Diner. According to local historian, Tadhg Mac Lochlain, in his book, *Ballinasloe Inniu agus Indhe*, 'Frank Egan had a stone cutting business at Sarsfield's Road, Ballinasloe between 1930 and 1948 when he transferred his business to Clara'.¹⁵³ The quarry is now owned by Frank's son, Michael Egan, who continues to run a well-known monumental works in Kilbeggan, Co. Westmeath.

James Hughes sold his property to Michael Claffey for £850.00 in the early 1900s. Michael Claffey is included in the Census returns for 1911, where he is described as a farmer, single, aged forty-two. Also in the house are his sister Bridget, nephew James Duffy, a twenty year old stonecutter and a married couple Michael (agricultural labourer) and Lizzie Daly.¹⁵⁴ James Duffy was the father of Mary Bermingham, Dublin and Creevagh. He died in Dublin in 1947. The vesting of the title was done by fiat of the Land Commission on 28 February 1918.¹⁵⁵ The property, which extended to 126 acres and 1 rood was part of the estate of Edward W. Williams. This registration did not extend to mines or minerals. The property was subject to turbary rights in favour of local people. These rights were administered by Bog Trustees, of whom Patrick McGuinness,

¹⁴⁸ Egan (1982)

¹⁴⁹ Midland Tribune, Apr. 13 1907

¹⁵⁰ Egan (1982)

¹⁵¹ Clonmacnoise Cemetery Record

¹⁵² Curley, Martin, conversation with author, Jun. 2013

¹⁵³ MacLochlain (1971), p.83

¹⁵⁴ Census of Population 1911, Clorhane township

¹⁵⁵ Land Commission Reference E.C. 8152 L.R. 93/16493

Cloniff, was one. In 1962, 125 acres 2 roods and 20 perches were sold by Michael's son, Joe Claffey, for £1,400.00.¹⁵⁶ The potential for quarrying still existed at this time as per the auctioneer's advertisement 'Splendid stone for quarrying purposes is also available on this property'.¹⁵⁷ Michael Claffey's parents were Patrick Claffey (1825 - 1889) from Bloomhill and Ann Flannery (1832 - 1907) from Corrigeen. Michael was one of twelve children. He was born in 1868 and died in 1958 aged 90 years. He married Elizabeth Molloy, from Parkwood, Moate, Co. Westmeath. They had three children. The first was Margaret Mary (1914 to 1997) who married Paddy Turley and was mother of the present owner of Claffey's house, Padraig Turley, Dublin. Paddy Turley owned the public house next to Killeens, latterly known as the 'Bog Oak', for a time in the 1920s.¹⁵⁸ Second was Annie (Sr. Monica of the St. Joseph of Cluny Order) who was born on 1 August 1916 and died on 2 June 2011 in her ninety fifth year. Third was Joe who was born in 1918 and died in London in December 1976.



Claffey family and Terry Callery at Clerhane, c. 1935. L. to R. Annie Claffey (Sr. Monica), Ml. Claffey, Terry Callery, Mrs. Elizabeth Claffey, Joseph Claffey, Margaret Claffey (Mrs. Turley) (Photo courtesy Padraig Turley)

¹⁵⁶ Padraig Turley, Dublin, conversation with author, Jan. 2006

¹⁵⁷ *Midland Tribune*, 17 Sept. 1960

¹⁵⁸ Padraig Turley, Dublin, conversation with author, Jan. 2006

MONUMENTAL TRADE

Headstones for graveyards were a mainstay of the monumental business and remain so to this day. There was much competition between the quarries for this lucrative work. As designs evolved, they were quite ornate and featured fine carving, including inscriptions in relief and marble inserts. A twelve foot high, hand-carved headstone, with a Celtic cross, would have cost about £60.00 in the late 1920s.¹⁵⁹ This design can be regarded as the signature headstone of the time and examples crafted by Kieran Patrick Egan can be seen in the old graveyards of Clonmacnoise (for example, Annie Shine), Creagh, in Ballinasloe (John Coffey) and Kilrehan, in Ferbane (Patrick Keenahan). Headstones of similar design, crafted by Michael Claffey, include those of Dolans and Claffeys of Bloomhill, in the new graveyard at Clonmacnoise and Kennedys (Bloomhill), Patrick Moran (Clonaderig) and Thomas Daly (Bloomhill) in the old graveyard. Michael Claffey periodically received instructions from an Athlone firm of solicitors for cleaning the tombstone of the O'Donoghue of the Glens, situated beside Temple Connor, at Clonmacnoise.¹⁶⁰ Only the comparatively affluent could afford headstones, and the cost was often borne by relatives in America. Additional lettering to and cleaning of existing headstones were also carried out. It was not usual to inscribe the name of the monumental sculptor in the earlier days. Some headstones were moved to the new Clonmacnoise graveyard in the 1950s by the Office of Public Works after they had taken over the graveyard from the Representative Church Body. Over twenty such headstones



Headstone, Annie Shine at Clonmacnoise by K. P. Egan and details of the carving.



Headstone, Claffey family, Bloomhill at Clonmacnoise by Michael Claffey.

¹⁵⁹ Sister Monica Claffey, Dublin, conversation with Author, Jan. 2006

¹⁶⁰ Padraig Turley, Dublin, conversation with author, Jan. 2006



Headstone in Liss Graveyard of William Egan, land steward at Kilnagarna who died in 1877, by J. Hughes

were moved. The headstones were numbered, and the original location in the old graveyard was marked with the corresponding number.¹⁶¹

James Hughes also supplied headstones, including that of the Perry family in Moystown Graveyard. In a letter dated 3 September 1901, he sets out the pricing arrangements for their grave base:

Letter from J. Hughes to E.W. Perry Esq.

I have delivered at Moystown Graveyard this day your grave base as per sketch enclosed. The measurement is more than you calculated the eve you were at quarry. It shows 89 ft. 9 in. at 4/- per foot would be £17-19-0. I said 16£ for the lot but I will leave the difference to yourself to settle. 4/6 was the price first asked. You would oblige by letting me have your cheque for whatever you please.¹⁶²

However, this did not have the exact desired effect and he was writing again on 26 November 1901:

Letter from J. Hughes to E.W. Perry Esq.

Your note with cheque enclosed value 5£ in payment of curbe stone. You must be under a mistake as 16£ was what was agreed on. I made curbe to set on a square foundation and am satisfied I had enough stone. I am glad to hear that you liked it, which I would always wish my customers to be satisfied with stone and price. I cut as low a price as possible the day we made the agreement and you entered it down at same time. I now leave the matter to your own consideration but surely 16£ was for the size of the plot you gave me on paper and I was at a loss in squaring plot and working additional stone.¹⁶³



Grave base, Perry family, Moystown graveyard, by J. Hughes

Hughes carved the tombstone of the Claffey family of Endrim, one of two modern stones to be seen in Temple Hurpan, (MacLaffy's, or Claffey's Church) at Clonmacnoise. Headstones crafted by Hughes can also be seen in the graveyards at Liss, Ballycumber (William Egan, land steward at Kilnagarna) and Gallen, Ferbane (Clements family).

Martin (Dean) Flannery was a granduncle of Tony Quigley, who worked in Egan's and set up a monumental workshop at Clerhane in the 1940s/50s, sited where Stephen (Stiofán) Flannery's old house stood at the side of the road.¹⁶⁴ Dan Edwards remembers his father, a local blacksmith, pointing tools for Martin Flannery.¹⁶⁵ A stone cutter, Dick Flynn, worked with him. Some of his headstones can be seen in Clonmacnoise graveyard. While these were of simple design, it must be borne in mind that when the new

¹⁶¹ Tom Moore, conversation with author, Jan. 2006

¹⁶² Belmont Mill Archive in Offaly County Library, Tuillamore

¹⁶³ *Ibid*

¹⁶⁴ Sister Monica Claffey, Dublin, conversation with author, Jan. 2006

¹⁶⁵ Dan Edwards, conversation with author, Mar. 2006

graveyard at Clonmacnoise opened in the 1950s, strict criteria applied to headstone dimensions. These regulations were relaxed by the late 1960s.¹⁶⁶ A contemporary newspaper advertisement ran as follows:

*'Martin Flannery, Sculptor, all classes of monuments, with kerb in Limestone and Marble; also railings, letter cutting. Distance no object. – Clerhane, Shannonbridge & Banagher, Athlone.'*¹⁶⁷

Martin Flannery carved the fine Old I.R.A. Monument that stands in front of the courthouse in Moate.¹⁶⁸ This piece was transported to Moate by tractor and trailer, owned by his neighbour Jack Claffey¹⁶⁹ and he was assisted in its erection on site by Kieran Joe Mannion.¹⁷⁰ He also carved the memorial to United Irishman, Michael Conway, who was hanged in Ballycumber in 1798. This memorial, erected by 'local republicans' in 1934, stands in Liss graveyard. Martin Flannery died on 8 December 1976, aged 78 years.¹⁷¹ His brother, Kieran Pat Flannery, was also a noted sculptor, as reported by the Midland Tribune in his obituary notice in 1945: 'He was widely known as a monumental sculptor and many fine specimens, which may be observed in the various Midland cemeteries, are the product of his hands.'¹⁷² An example of his craftsmanship is the headstone of the Claffey family of Killogeenaghan in MacLaffey's (Claffey's) Church at Clonmacnoise. He also carved the fine Celtic cross headstone of Thomas Keena (Creevagh), with its inscription in relief that stands ten feet high, just in front of O'Rourke's Tower.

THE SCHOOLMASTER'S HOUSE

A glimpse into how to get work done, in the early twentieth century, can be seen from the following account. Master Patrick C. Molloy, a local teacher and principal of Clonmacnoise national school from 1922 to 1949, had his house built from Clerhane stone in 1930. This was a large two-storey building with a hipped roof. The stone was supplied free of charge and was transported to Clonmacnoise by parents of the school children on Saturdays. It is said that the children were treated at school in proportion to the amount of stone drawn by their parents. Unfortunately, the house was pebble-dashed after the fashion of the time. It was demolished to make way for the Visitor Centre in the early 1990s.¹⁷³ Sr. Monica, who attended Clonmacnoise school in the 1920s, remembered Master Molloy as a great teacher whose tours of the monastic ruins were a regular feature of school days.¹⁷⁴



House built by Master P. C. Molloy from Clerhane stone (1930)
(Photo courtesy of the Office of Public Works)

DECLINE AND CLOSURE

The decline of the stone industry could be attributed to many causes. Quarries were abandoned due to a combination of diminishing returns, increasing depth of workings, reduced demand, lack of space for the removal of waste rock and flooding.¹⁷⁵ As an example of the state of trade in 1931, the owners and stone cutters in Ballyduff quarry, near Tullamore, were lobbying Tullamore Urban District Council to use its influence to ensure that limestone from the diocese was used to build the new cathedral in Mullingar. The quarry deputation stated 'the quarries are idle and trade is hard hit'.¹⁷⁶ Granite and Laois limestone were eventually used in the construction of the cathedral. The introduction of concrete into the building industry was one of the main reasons for the decline in demand for stone. The building of two factories, at Drogheda and Limerick, by a new company, Cement Ltd., in the late 1930s, sounded the death knell for the stone industry as it then existed. These factories had a combined output of 225,000 tons of cement per year, which quickly became widely available and cheap.¹⁷⁷ Concrete was also an easy material to work with. The first concrete blocks were manufactured in the mid 1950s. Plaster and pebble dashing became the finish of choice, replacing the traditional white wash. Cost, changing fashions and the speed at which concrete buildings could be erected were the driving factors. The old problems of demarcation and high wage demands by the 'stonies' were suddenly bypassed. The impact of the Second World War also contributed to the quarries' demise, creating a shortage of both transport and labour.

¹⁶⁶ Tom Moore, conversation with author (2013)

¹⁶⁷ *Midland Tribune*, 14 May. 1960

¹⁶⁸ Martin Curley, conversation with author, Jun. 2013

¹⁶⁹ Gus Claffey, conversation with author, Jun. 2013

¹⁷⁰ Noel Mannion, conversation with author, Sept. 2013

¹⁷¹ Headstone in Clonmacnoise cemetery

¹⁷² *Midland Tribune*, 15th Sept. 1945

¹⁷³ Rosie Curley, as told to Gus Claffey, December 2005

¹⁷⁴ Sister Monica Claffey, Dublin, conversation with author, January 2006

¹⁷⁵ Rynne (2006), p.152

¹⁷⁶ *Midland Tribune*, 19th September 1931

¹⁷⁷ An Irishman's Diary, in *The Irish Times*, 27th March 2006

Before this, according to Fr. Egan, the Egan family had their own problems which had a serious impact in the running of the quarry. Up to the Easter Rising 1916 and subsequent War of Independence the business was thriving. The Egan brothers were members of Sinn Féin and had been active against the British forces. The Black and Tans visited the quarry, blew up the windmill and intimidated the workers. They also banned the use of bicycles, thus blocking people's main mode of transport in Co. Offaly.¹⁷⁸



Sr. Monica Claffey in 2006 with the Shannonbridge Star.

Production at Claffey's quarry came to a sudden end, one day in 1940. A spring broke through and flooded the quarry. There was no pumping equipment available with the capacity to cope with the situation. Sr. Monica (Annie Claffey) recalled vividly – nearly seventy years later – the morning when her father ran to the house from the quarry with news of the disaster.¹⁷⁹ Production at Egan's quarry finally petered out in the early 1950s.¹⁸⁰

The quarries made their contribution to the local economy in difficult times when just to survive was a constant struggle, with privations and hardships which are now difficult to comprehend. It was 'hard work but good business, no other work was available in the area and people were half hungry'.¹⁸¹ Sr. Monica recalled also 'three brothers who cycled several miles to work in the quarry. She met one of them years later who told her 'we would have starved but for the work'.¹⁸²

According to the Clonmacnoise Heritage Zone Project Final Report (1987) the quarries are now of potential interest to industrial archaeologists. In its evaluation, the report has rated 'one of the few outcrops of reef limestone in [the] midlands' as being of national importance and the 'location of [an] important quarrying industry as being of regional importance'.¹⁸³

The industry also made a significant contribution to the built heritage both in the immediate area and much further afield. More recent developments provide a link to those days, an echo of the quarries.

The fonts in St. Kieran's Church at Shannonbridge, built in 1965 by Fr. Masterson (P.P. 1957 – 1967), were carved by Kieran Egan from crinoidal limestone in which the fossils can



Holy Water Font, Shannonbridge Roman Catholic Church (1965) by Kieran Egan.

be clearly seen.¹⁸⁴ The grotto to Our Lady Help of Christians, built beside the church in Shannonbridge, in 1988, is also of Clerhane stone.¹⁸⁵ The building of the Clonmacnoise Visitor Centre in 1991/92 utilised limestone from Claffey's quarry for the exterior facing. The counter top in the reception area and some floor inserts in the museum are of polished crinoidal limestone from Egan's quarry. These quarried stones were extracted by Office of Public Works (O.P.W.) staff and transported to Portumna for finishing.¹⁸⁶ This may have been the last ever contribution from the Clerhane quarries, which have given so much to our heritage over the last two hundred years. Now silent, their legacy will long remain.

¹⁷⁸ Egan (1982)

¹⁷⁹ Sister Monica Claffey, Dublin, conversation with author, January 2006

¹⁸⁰ Hammond (2003)

¹⁸¹ Sister Monica Claffey, Dublin, conversation with author, January 2006

¹⁸² *Ibid*

¹⁸³ Tubridy (1987), P.104

¹⁸⁴ Gus Claffey, conversation with author, December 2005

¹⁸⁵ Todd (1998), p.120

¹⁸⁶ Tom Moore, conversation with author (2012)

APPENDIX 1

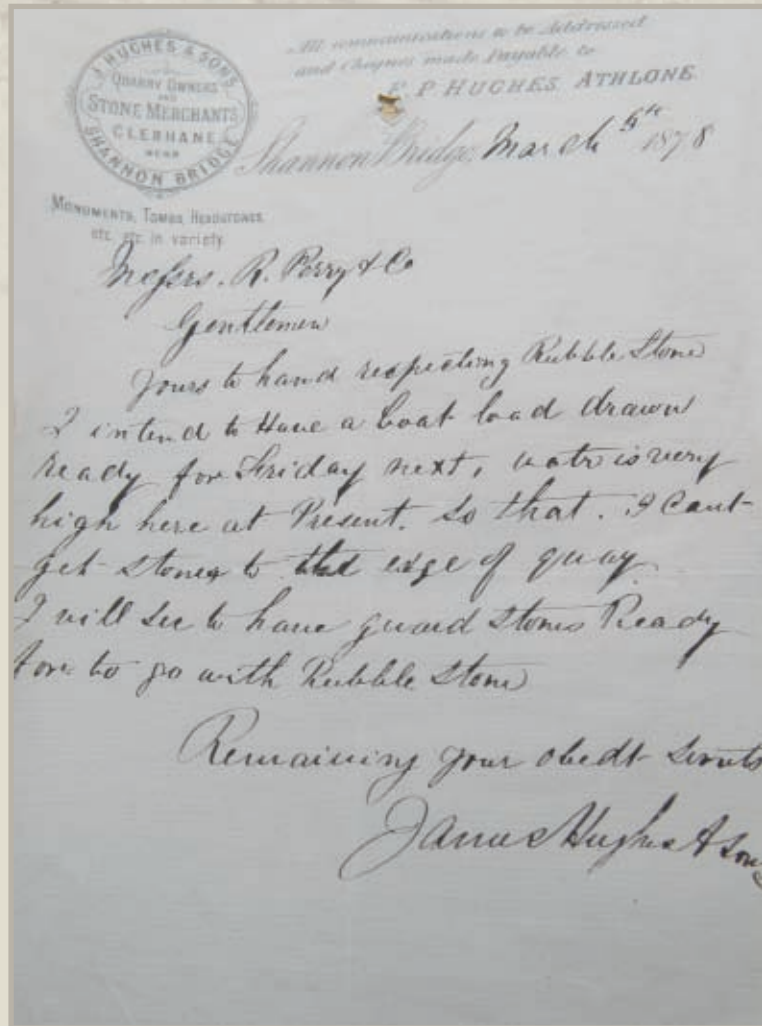
List of contributors to the repairs of McCarthy's Tower, Clonmacnoise, in 1868¹⁸⁷ -

The late Sir Arthur Magenis G.C.B.	£10-0-0.	Mrs. Moony, The Doon	£1-0-0.
E. Wilmot Williams Esq.	£10-0-0.	Rev. Kieran Egan P.P.	£1-0-0.
John Malone Esq. J.P.	£10-0-0.	Mr. Kieran Egan	£1-0-0.
Lord Castlemaine	£5-0-0.	Miss. Moony, The Doon	£1-0-0.
The Earl of Dunraven	£2-0-0.	Rev. Sir E. Armstrong, Bart.	£0-10-0.
The Bishop of Meath	£2-0-0.	Thomas Mulock Esq.	£0-10-0.
The Bishop of Limerick	£2-0-0.	W. Delaney Esq.	£0-10-0.
The Dean of Ossory	£2-0-0.	Henry Daly Esq.	£0-10-0.
The Dean of Westminster	£2-0-0.	George Daly Esq.	£0-10-0.
R.E. Moony Esq., The Doon	£2-0-0.	Captain Tarleton	£0-10-0.
Rev. Dr. Jebb, Peterstow, Hereford	£1-1-0.	Col. Bushe and Friends	£0-10-0.
Rev. C.A. Vignoles	£1-0-0.	J.H. Bracken	£0-10-0.
Charles H. Foot Esq.	£1-0-0.	Edward Maunsell Esq.	£0-5-0.
John D. Lauder Esq.	£1-0-0.	Edward Gray Esq.	£0-5-0.
Rev. M. O'Farrell P.P.	£1-0-0.		

¹⁸⁷ *Journal of the Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland*, Vol. 1, Third Series, Oct. 1868, Kilkenny, p.142.

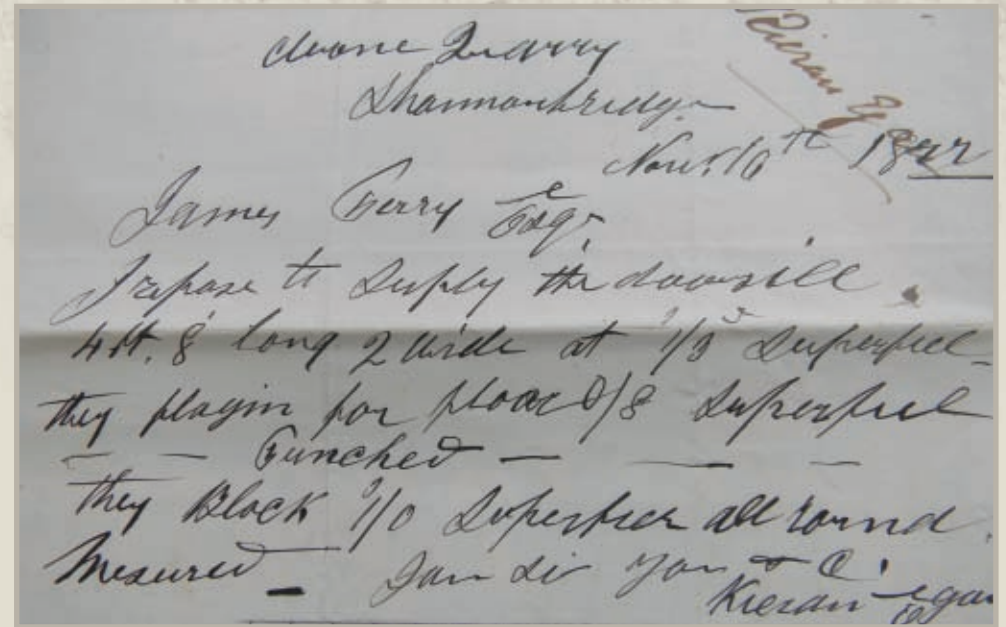
APPENDIX 2

Letter from James Hughes to Robert Perry & Co. Ltd. - 6th March 1878



APPENDIX 3

Letter from Kieran Egan to Robert Perry & Co. Ltd. - 10th November 1877



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Course Director: Mr. Martin Morris.

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Photographs at Clonmacnoise, courtesy of the Office of Public Works.

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