Some Further Sculpture in Ennis Friary

PETER HARBISON

In addition to the sculpture in Ennis friary already described by John Hunt, there are a few other pieces which are worthy of being made known to a wider public and which are published here for the sake of completion.

_Corbel heads of a King and a Lady (Turlough Mór O'Brien and his wife?) c. 1300_

At present cemented into position under the canopy of the Royal Tomb are two heads—one male and the other female—which presumably served originally as corbels. The male head bears a scarcely perceptible crown of at least three points, and must therefore represent a king (Plate II, 1). Despite the broken nose and chin, the head can be taken for an attempt at a portrait. The pupils of the eyes are damaged; they are encased by two sets of pointed oval lines in mild relief. The cheeks swell mildly, and the lips are gently pouting. Three ringlets of hair emerge from under the crown and fall around the ears. The lady’s head (Plate II, 2) is tilted slightly to one side, and is less damaged than the king’s. Her eyes protrude more than the present state of the king’s, but resemble his sufficiently in style to merit the conclusion that the two heads probably once formed a pair, carved at about the same time. The lady’s forehead is very prominent, her eyes recessed beneath deep arcs which curve around gracefully to expand into the now fragmented nose. The mouth is little more than a straight groove. The lady’s head-dress, of so-called “pill-box” type, consists of what was once an open-topped cap of linen, from beneath which emerges a narrow barrette of folded linen which is passed under the chin to hold the cap in position. Behind it, held in position by a net, is a boss of hair covering the ears. This “pill-box” type of head-dress was worn by ladies of high rank in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, as can be seen from a number of effigies of the period found in the east and south of the country. The lady’s head is somewhat smaller than that of the king.

The period of the lady’s head-dress strongly suggests that these two corbel-heads belonged originally to that part of the friary church built or completed by Turlough Mór O’Brien between 1287 and his death in 1306, though nothing appears to be known about where the heads were originally placed. Indeed, one could go further and

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2 It may be noted that the naturalistic and stylised foliate carving found on the Inchiquin tomb in the choir is not discussed here for, although not discussed by John Hunt, it has already been dealt with in T. J. Westropp, “Ennis Abbey and the O'Brien Tombs”, _J. Roy. Soc. Antiv. Ireland_, 25 (1895), 150-151.

3 Hunt, _op. cit._ (1974), plates 18, 24-28 and 32.

suggest that the crowned head may be that of Turlough Mór himself, an undisputed and renowned chieftain in his day, while the lady's head could represent his wife. If so, it is interesting to note how the chieftain's spouse was adopting the latest fashion worn by the wives of those Anglo-Norman lords against whom Turlough Mór fought. This copying of essentially English fashions can also be seen on the effigy clad in royal garb at Corcomroe, and said to be that of King Conor na Siudaine O'Brien. The treatment of the eyes and noses of the Ennis heads bears such a resemblance to that of the Corcomroe figure that all three carvings may well be products of the same school, if not of the same hand. If that were so, it would lend force to John Hunt's suggestion that the Corcomroe effigy was not carved shortly after Conor na Siudaine O'Brien's death in 1267, but at earliest some time around 1300, which must also be the approximate date of the two Ennis heads.

**Corbels on the Tower c. 1460-1470**

Corbels in various positions on the tower of the friary bear carvings which must be contemporary with the tower and also with the figure of St. Francis which John Hunt illustrated and dated to c. 1460-1470 in the 1975 number of this Journal. The side arches which are placed on a north-south axis at right angles to the main arch of the tower have corbels high up on each side. In the northern side arch, these are boldly carved on both sides with rams' heads (Plate II, 3 and 4), while in the southern side arch there is a bishop on the east face and a king on the west. The head of the bishop (Plate III, 1) is flanked by angels with spread wings and tonded heads, while the king (Plate III, 2) has a coronet with strawberry leaves and formal curling hair falling down on either side of the face. John Hunt noted that these heads may represent Church and State, and that the convention of their eyes, the trick of thin lips and the expression of the mouth may be compared to those found on the figure of St. Francis and the archbishop on the flamboyant canopy.

High up under the main arch of the tower there are two faceted corbels on each face, but it is only on the north side that the full decoration has been preserved intact. The point of the western corbel (Plate III, 3) develops into a two-stranded knot, the strands being devoured by two confronted beasts below the knot. These beasts have birds' bodies (though one of them would appear to have an ear), but they have long slender tails which interlock below the legs before curling around to end in what may be fleurs-de-lys, or what may also be seen as barbs. One of the powerful claws of the eastern beast is raised to scratch at the breast of its opposite number. The beasts are probably wyverns, fabulous monsters with two legs and the feet of an eagle, and the barb-like tail may be fashioned after that of the scorpion. Wyverns, which are known from approximately the same period at Temple na Griffin in Ardfert, Co.

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6 Ibid., p. 120.
7 Ibid., plate 246.
8 An earlier fleur-de-lys occurs on the interior of the westernmost of the row of windows in the south wall of the choir.
Kerry, and on the wooden choir-stalls in St. Mary’s Cathedral, Limerick, are derived from the medieval bestiary books and probably have some evil connotation. The barbed and interlocked tails are strangely reminiscent of the animal imagery of the Romanesque period in Europe, and these Ennis wyverns may well be another case of the revitalisation of Romanesque animal symbolism in the second half of the fifteenth century, as encountered in those animals with interlocked necks which are quite common in the West of Ireland at around the same period. The eastern corbel (bearing two identical tripartite mason’s marks) (Plate III, 4) develops below the point into two half palmettes which rise up on either side. The leaves are hollowed out, the topmost one being pointed, and in style obviously represent an intentional harking-back to the foliage carved west of the Shannon in the early thirteenth century.

Central pillar of the Arches of the South Transept c. 1460-1470

Foliage of the same character as that on the eastern corbel on the north face of the main arch of the tower is also found on the canopy above the figure of St. Francis and the chamfered corner above it, but it can be paralleled more exactly on the northwestern corner of the square pillar supporting the arches dividing the nave from the south transept. There, on the corner facet, we find the three-leafed half-palmette pointing both upwards and downwards (Plate IV, 1). Above it is a complicated cross-shaped interlace of three strands. The carving helps to verify that the south transept must have been added at the same time as the tower. It may also be noted that the plaster on the east and west faces of this pillar bears graffiti of a number of boats (one of them illustrated in Plate IV, 2) which, however, in the opinion of Dr. John de Courcy Ireland, must be considerably later than the stonework.

Miscellaneous Carvings

A drip-stone to the label above the inner arch of the second window from the east in the south wall of the choir is carved as a head with hair falling on either side of a wig-like coiffure (Plate IV, 3). It is likely to be of fourteenth century date. On the bottom of the eastern jamb of the recess on the interior face of the north wall of the nave there is an inverted head (Plate V, 1), with its outlines more hinted at than marked. Its clearest features are the eyes, composed of one pointed oval inside another. It is not easy to date this head; its eyes are closer in style to those of the first two heads discussed here, of c. 1300, than they are to the eyes of the heads carved c. 1460-70. But possibly their closest counterpart is on a head—also in an inverted position—

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11 Compare the griffins from the Castle of Lasson dating from the first quarter of the sixteenth century, placed back-to-back with their tails intertwined, illustrated in J. Baltrūšaitis, *Reveils et prodiges. Le gothique fantastique*, Paris 1960, p. 194, fig. 41.


carved on the bottom of the exterior of the western jamb of a former doorway near the western end of the south wall of the nave. This curious puffed head (Plate V, 2) with nose, eyebrows and mouth indicated by means of a thick ridge, a tongue stuck out to one side, and with a flat stylised ear shown on a flat stone surface at right angles to the face, is scarcely likely to be earlier than the sixteenth century, as suggested by the stone finish with its "tracer effect". Of all the heads discussed here, it is probably the last to have been carved.

In conclusion, it may also be mentioned that attached to the back wall of the reconstructed canopy of the Royal Tomb there is a fragment of a Crucifixion scene, showing the right arm of Christ on the cross (not illustrated). It may be compared to Crucifixion scenes known in Co. Tipperary,\(^1\) and is probably of sixteenth-century date.

\(^1\) Hunt, *op. cit.* (1974), plates 301 and 330.
1. Corbel with the head of a king (Turlough Mor O’Brien?) under the canopy of the old Royal Tomb. c. 1300.

2. Corbel with the head of a lady (wife of Turlough Mor O’Brien?) under the canopy of the old Royal Tomb. c. 1300.

[Photos: P. Harbison]

3 and 4. Rams' heads in the northern side-arch of the tower. c. 1460-1470.

[Photos: David Davison, PDI]

ENNIS FRIARY
PLATE III

1. Head of a bishop (representing the Church?) flanked by two angels in the southern side-arch of the tower. c. 1460–1470.

Photos: David Davison, PDI

2. Head of a king (representing the State?) in the southern side-arch of the tower. c. 1460–1470.

3. Western corbel on north wall of central arch of the tower, showing two wyverns biting a knot. c. 1460–1470.

Photos: P. Harbison

4. Eastern corbel on north wall of central arch of the tower, with point developing into half-palmettes. Note mason’s marks. c. 1460–1470.

ENNIS FRIARY
1. Half-palmettes and cross-shaped interlace on north-western corner of pillar separating nave and transept. c. 1460–1470.

2. Boat-graffito on pillar of arches dividing nave from transept. Late 16th century?

3. Head on interior of window in the choir. 14th century?

[Photos: P. Harbison]

ENNIS FRIARY
1. Upside-down head on a recess jamb in north wall of the nave. 14th century?

2. Upside-down head with protruding tongue at bottom of western jamb of doorway in south wall of nave. 16th century.

[Photos: P. Harbison]

ENNIS FRIARY