

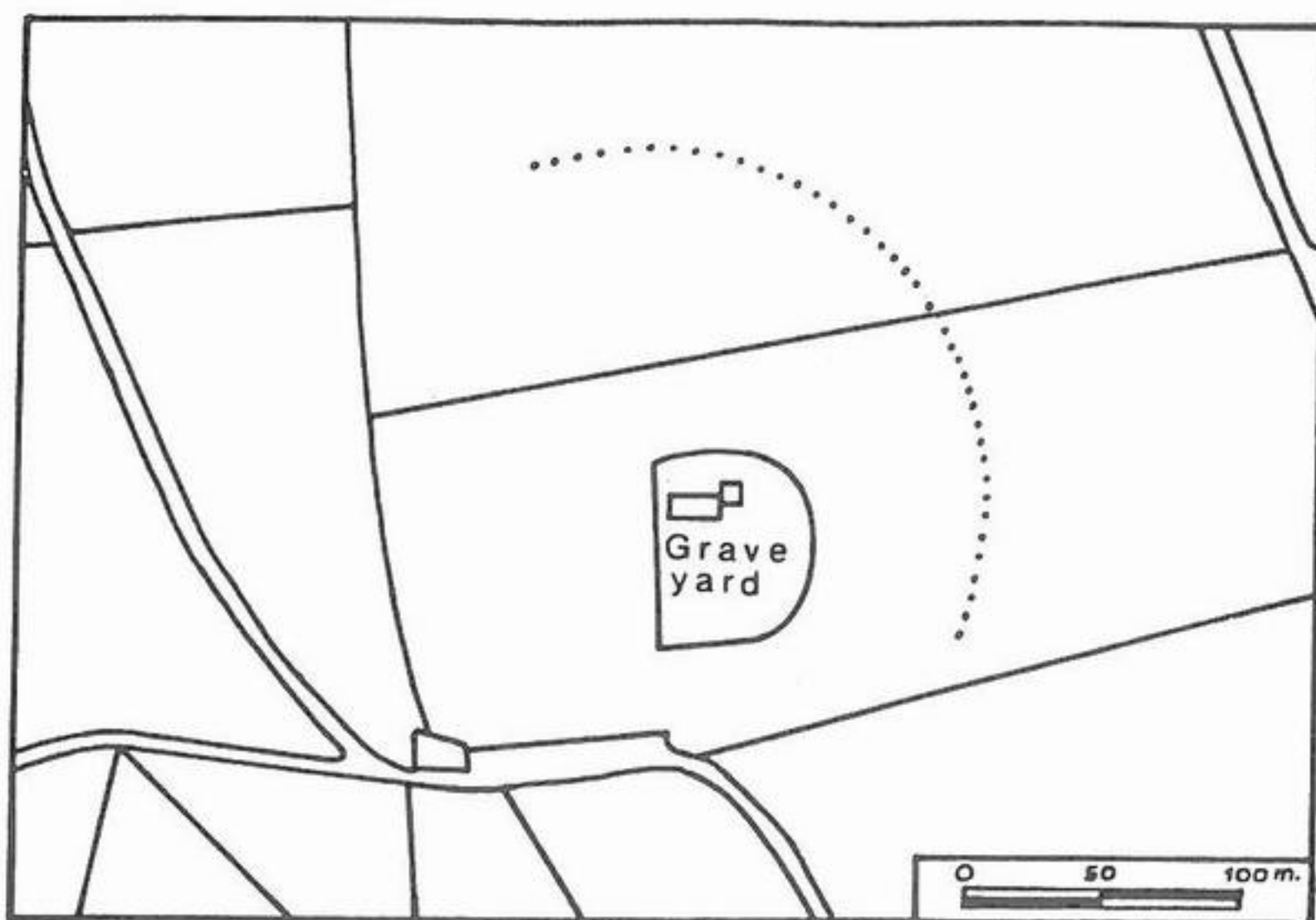
# Romanesque Carvings at Killodiernan, Co. Tipperary

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*An account of an interesting medieval church which incorporates Romanesque fragments. The place of these in the development of Irish Romanesque sculpture is discussed, and a date, in the latter part of the twelfth century, is proposed for them.*

\* \* \* \*

Situated in the townland of Johnstown,<sup>1</sup> near Puckaun, Co. Tipperary, the former Parish Church at Killodiernan is now in ruins and in danger of collapse. The history of the site is obscure. Killodiernan in its Irish form is *Cill Ó dTiarnán*—the Church of the O'Tiarnans. This name is a local one and may refer to the medieval erenagh family.<sup>2</sup> The incorporation of *Cill* in the placename probably indicates an Early Christian foundation. Although there is no historical evidence for Killodiernan being of this antiquity, in the adjoining fields to north and east, the low remains of a circular enclosure are clearly visible (Illus. 1). This feature, though not recorded on the Ordnance Survey maps nor mentioned in previous descriptions of the site,<sup>3</sup> further supports the suggestion that Killodiernan was originally an Early Christian foundation.

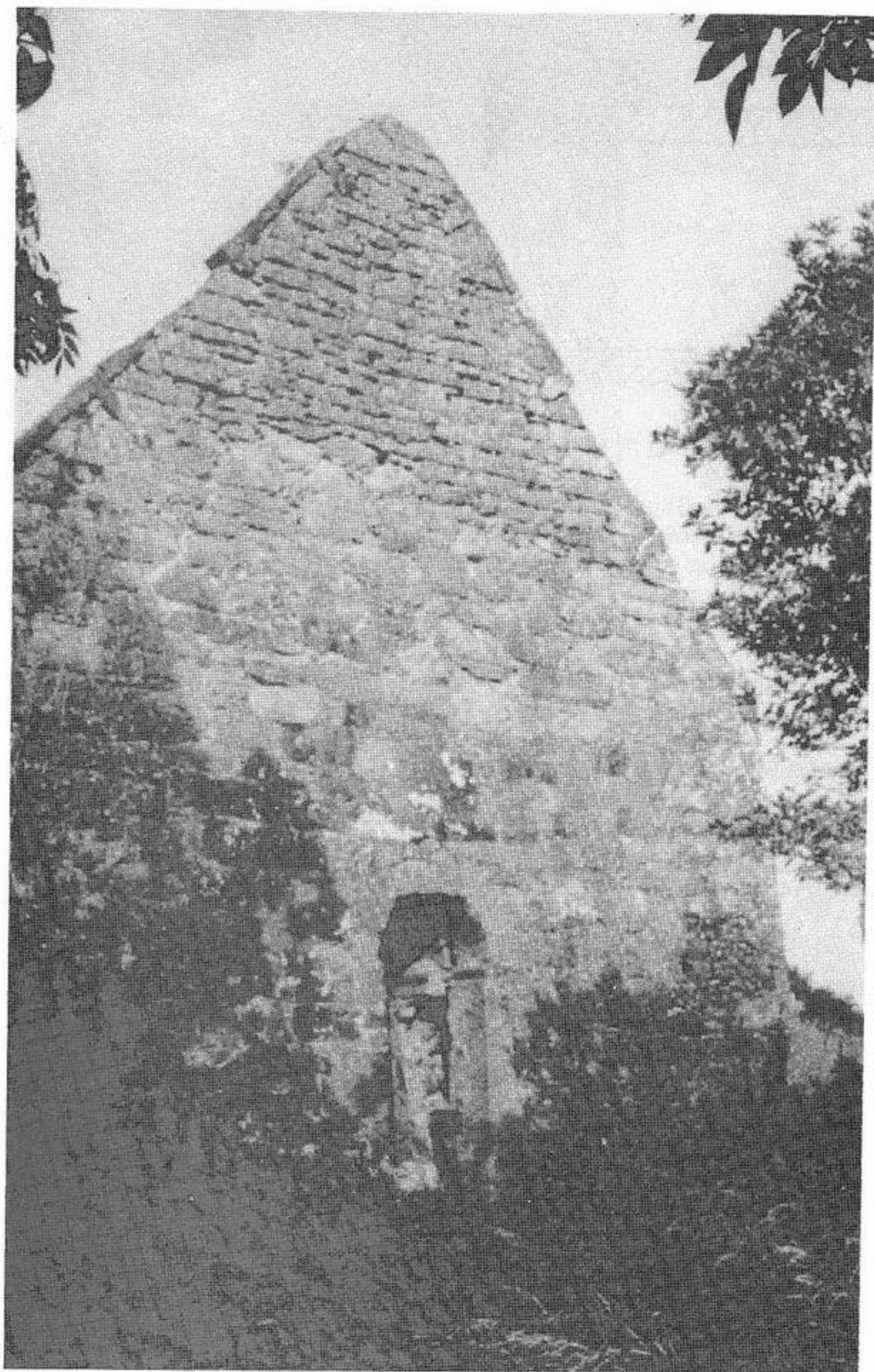


Illus. 1. Sketch-map showing Killodiernan Church, Co. Tipperary; the remains of the circular enclosure is marked as a dotted line.

<sup>1</sup>Par: Killodiernan; Bar: Lower Ormond; Co. Tipperary O.S. six-inch scale sheet 9 (3 mm. from southern margin, 53.1 cm. from western margin); Nat. Grid Ref: R.832.887.

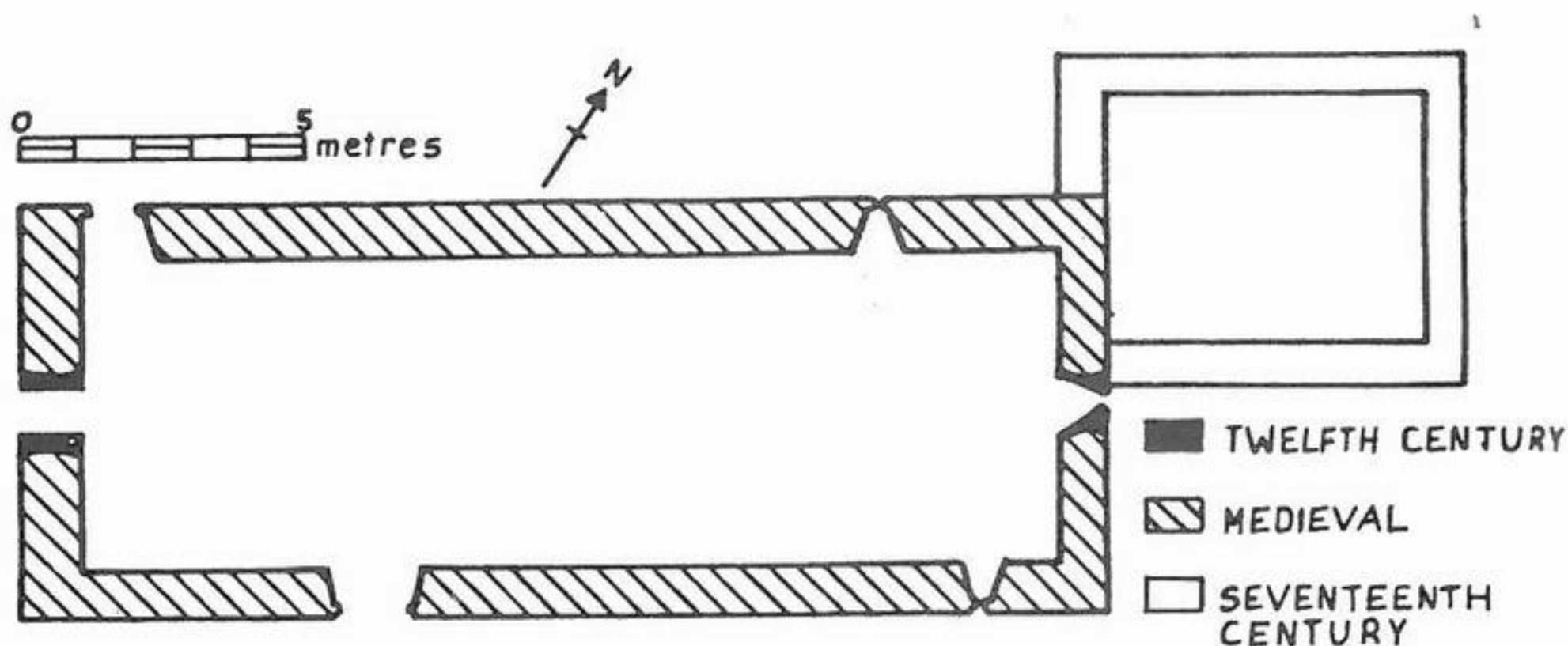
<sup>2</sup>A. Gwynn and D. Gleeson, *A History of the Diocese of Killaloe*, Dublin n.d., p. 88.

<sup>3</sup>*Ordnance Survey Letters, Co. Tipperary*, Vol. 2, 1840. *Ordnance Survey, Co. Tipperary, Killodiernan Parish Name Book*; D. F. Gleeson, "Churches in the Deanery of Ormond", *Nth. Munster Antiq. J.*, 6:3 (1951), 100.



Illus. 2. Killodiernan: west gable of church.





Illus. 3. Killodiernan: plan of church.

Killodiernan Church (Illus. 2 and 3) is a single-chambered unroofed medieval structure, built of rough uncoursed limestone masonry with a random scatter of red sandstone. It measures 17.25 metres East-West by 5.60 metres North-South internally. There are three doorways, a Romanesque one in the west gable which is the subject of this paper, and two others in the north and south walls; the north doorway is lintelled, and the south doorway is bluntly pointed with punch-dressing indicating a fifteenth/sixteenth century date. There are also three windows, the east one is Romanesque and is described in detail below, whilst the north and south windows are narrow flat-headed openings which splay inwardly. At the east end of the south wall there is a rectangular ambry. Built on to the north-east of the church is a mortuary chapel, in which is a slab with a Latin inscription, dated 1667, commemorating Doctor Denis Harty, Vicar Apostolic of Killaloe. To the south of the church there is a graveyard, still in use; burial has also taken place within the church. Killodiernan church is bounded by a graveyard wall, curved on its northern and eastern sides, the curve perhaps indicating the line of an earlier inner Early Christian enclosure.<sup>4</sup>

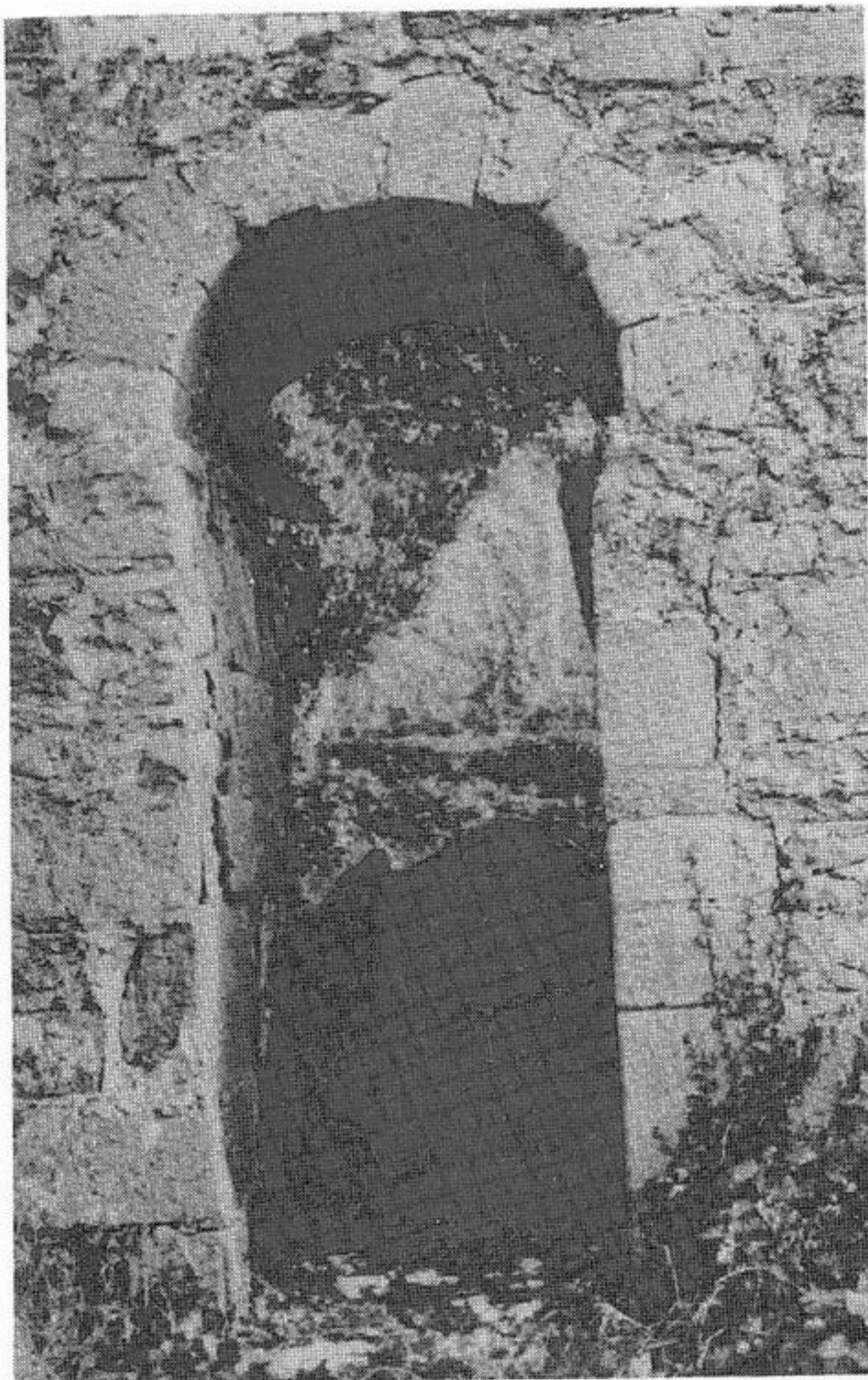
### THE ROMANESQUE FRAGMENTS

Romanesque carvings, all in low relief 3-5 mm. high, occur in the west doorway, and in the east and north windows.

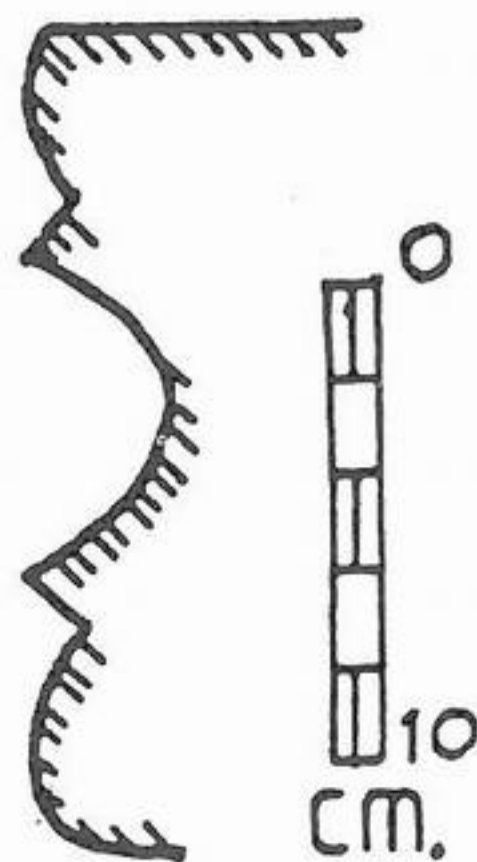
The doorway, built of red sandstone ashlar blocks, has been reconstructed and incorporated into the west wall of the medieval church (Illus. 2). An interesting architectural detail not known from elsewhere to the author, is the raking coping on the gable, of long- and short-work. The doorway (Illus. 4)<sup>5</sup> pierces a 1.09 metres thick wall, is 2.23 metres in height and has a span of 85 centimetres. Externally there is a single arch order of plain voussoirs. Below the arch are moulded imposts (Illus. 4 and 5). There are no capitals or bases, and only five of the jamb-stones have carvings. The south jamb has two blocks with plant patterns and two horizontally-laid blocks at the bottom with scroll-work (Illus. 6). The north jamb is undecorated except for the lowermost block which has worn carvings,

<sup>4</sup>I am grateful to Dr. Leo Swan for drawing my attention to the possibility of this inner enclosure, and for advice and information on Early Christian enclosures in general.

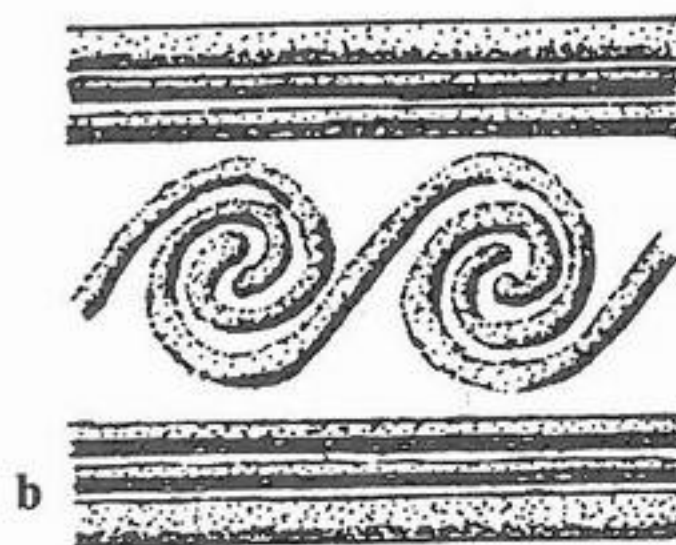
<sup>5</sup>This photograph was taken in 1980, but since then the jambs of the doorway have partially collapsed.



Illus. 4. Killodiernan: west doorway.

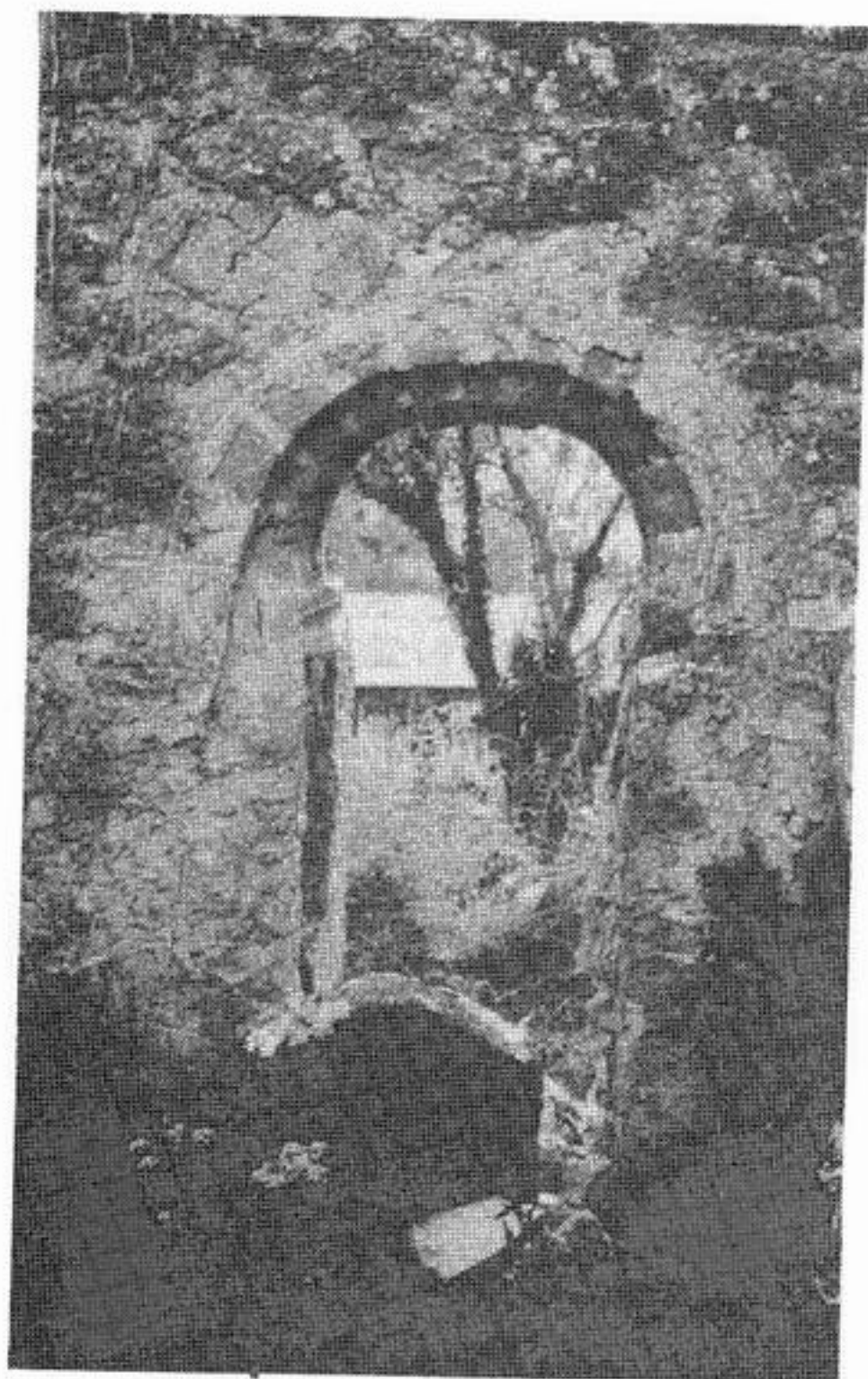


Illus. 5. Killodiernan: profile of impost moulding, West doorway.

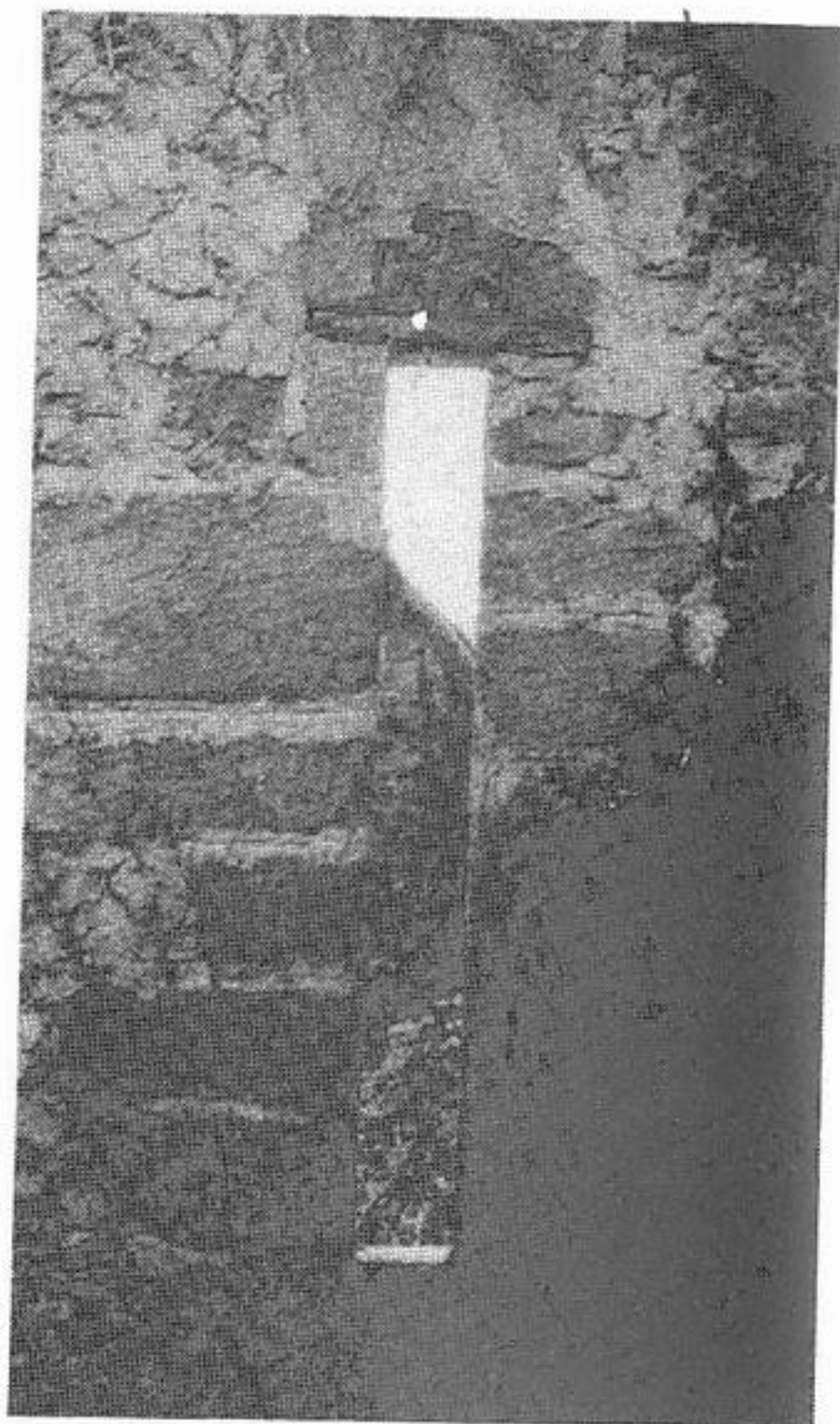


Illus. 6. Killodiernan: plant pattern and scroll-work, west doorway.

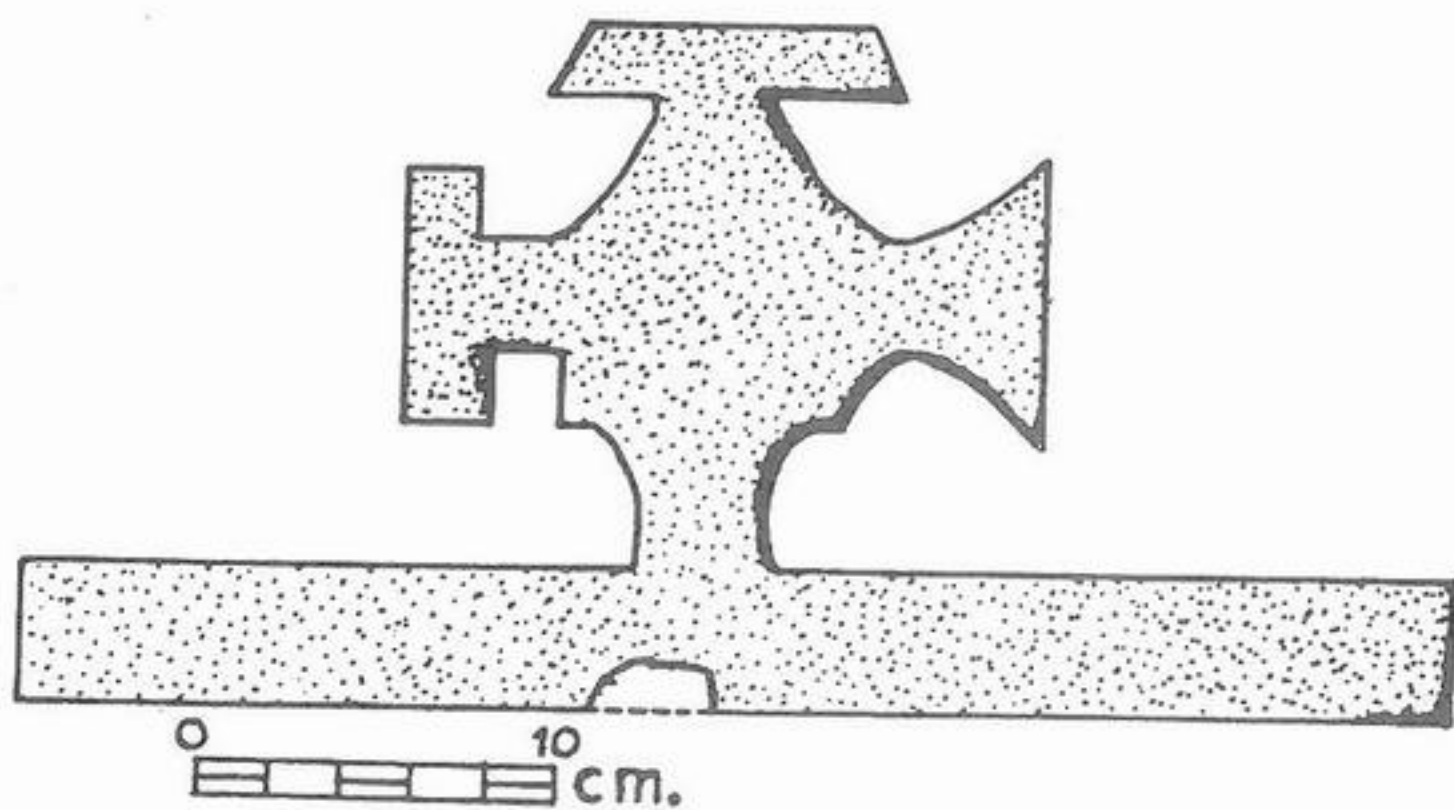




Illus. 7. Killodiernan, interior of west doorway.

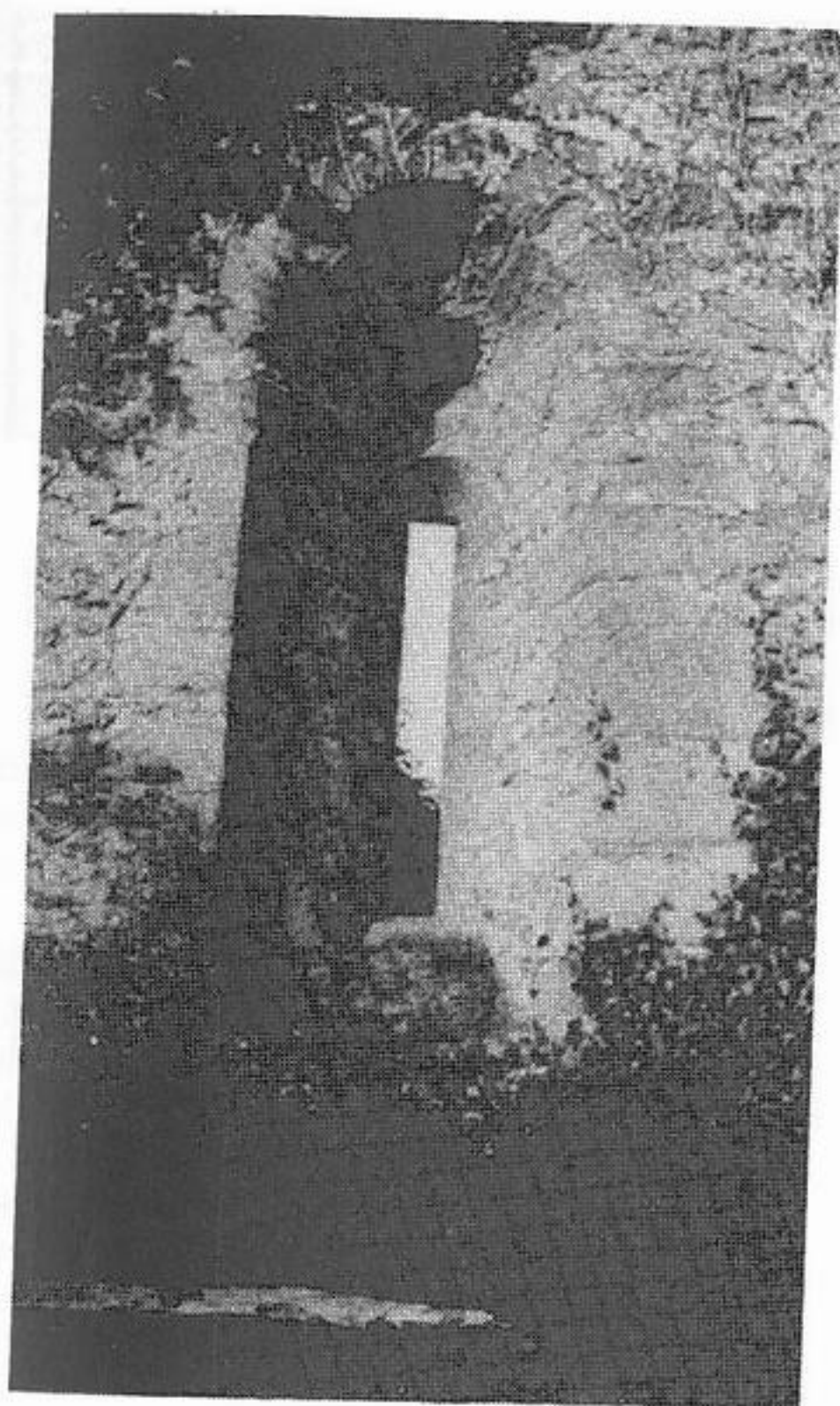


Illus. 8. Killodiernan, exterior of east window (cross inked in).



Illus. 9. Killodiernan, low relief cross on east window.





Illus. 10. Killodiernan, interior of east window.



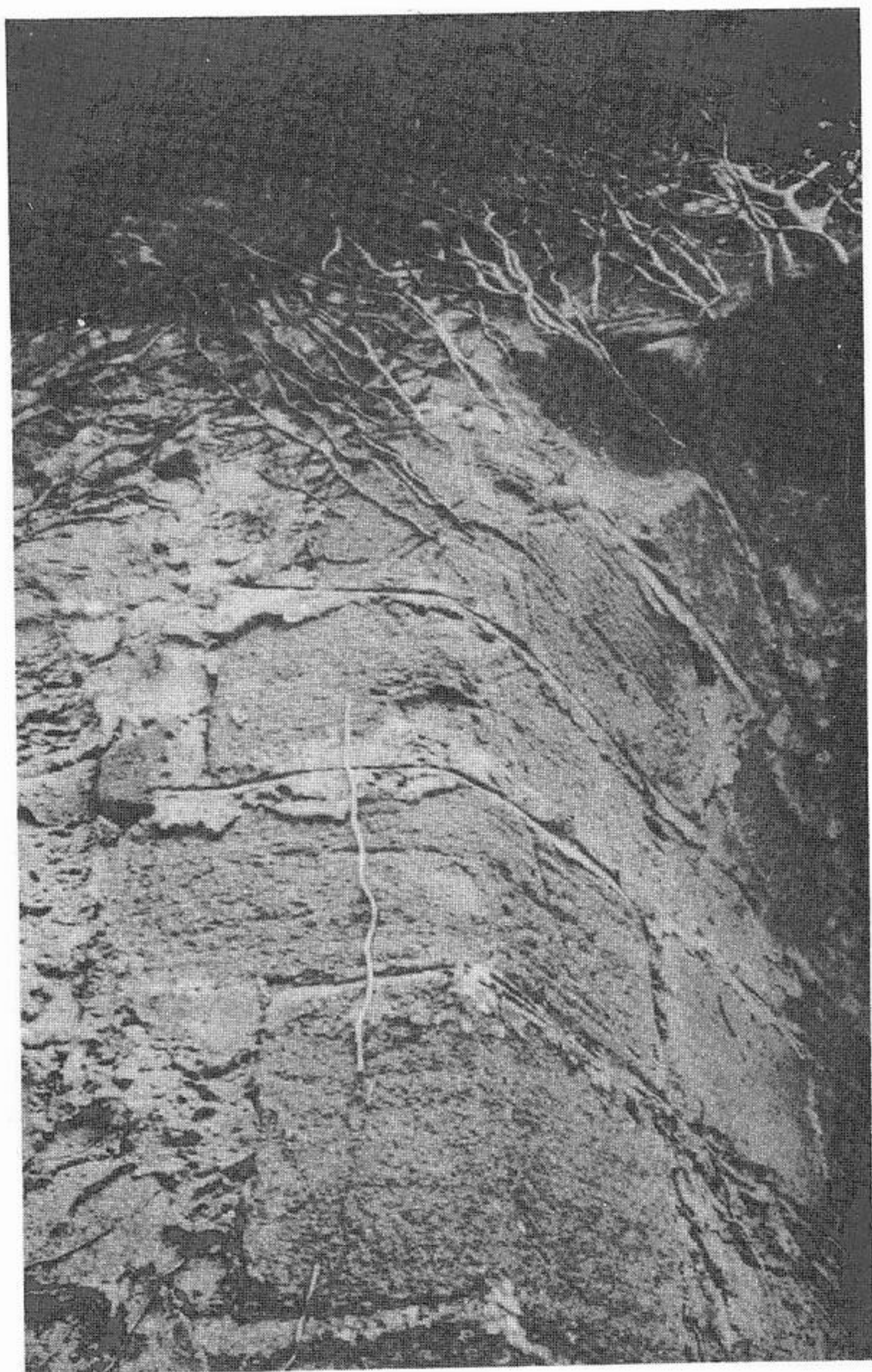
Fig. 11. Killodiernan, interior of east window showing decorated head of opening.

no longer identifiable. The interior (east face) of the doorway has two orders of plain ashlar voussoirs (Illus. 7).

The single-light Romanesque east window is of red sandstone. Like the west doorway it, too, has been reconstructed and incorporated into the medieval church. Externally, it has a flat-headed narrow opening, 1.21 metres high and 13 centimetres wide, with a chamfer on the sides and bottom; the top is rebated. Above the opening there is a carving of a cross on a broad base (Illus. 8 and 9). Internally, the east window, measuring 2.30 metres high and 83 centimetres wide, is round-headed and splays inwards (Illus. 10). The opening is off-centre and the bottom edge of the stone forming its flat head has three rounded mouldings in low relief (Illus. 11). The voussoirs have worn chevron decoration on the outer and splayed faces (Illus. 12). The blocks immediately below the springers have weathered carvings, but the remainder of the jambs are undecorated.

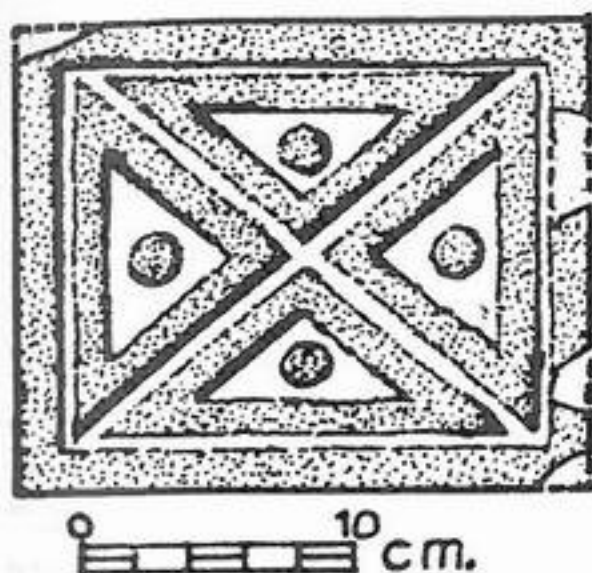
Incorporated into the medieval north window is a well-preserved red sandstone block with Romanesque carving, consisting of a rectangular frame containing four triangles with a centrally-placed pellet in each (Illus. 13).





Illus. 12. Killodiernan, chevrons, east window.





Illus. 13.  
Killodiernan, Romanesque  
carving inserted into the  
north window.

## DISCUSSION

The plant ornament at Killodiernan (Illus. 6a), consisting of a main undulating stem with attached foliate motifs, is typical of that found elsewhere in Irish Romanesque sculpture where such patterns are common. Similar patterns carved on the doorways at Dysert O'Dea (Clare),<sup>6</sup> Clonfert (Galway)<sup>7</sup> and Monaincha (Tipperary),<sup>8</sup> and on the chancel arch and east window, St. Mary's Cathedral, Tuam (Galway).<sup>9</sup> In Transitional carvings, there is a similar pattern on a capital in the Cistercian Abbey at Baltinglass (Wicklow).<sup>10</sup>

Scroll-work, like that at Killodiernan (Illus. 6b) is carved on other Irish Romanesque buildings. It is found for example at Liathmore (Tipperary),<sup>11</sup> Tuam,<sup>12</sup> and Killeslin (Laois).<sup>13</sup> In St. Mary's Cathedral, Tuam, the scroll-work

on the north impost of the chancel arch is bordered by plain hands in a very similar manner to the Killodiernan pattern. Scroll-work continues into Transitional carvings and occurs in the Cistercian Abbey at Mellifont (Louth) on a twelfth century window fragment.<sup>14</sup>

The chevron motifs on the east window, carved on both the front face and splay, form lozenges on the arris (Illus. 12). Although the lozenge spandrels originally contained carvings they are now too defaced to accurately decipher. Similarly arranged patterns are common elsewhere in the Irish Romanesque, for example at the Nun's Church, Clonmacnoise (Offaly),<sup>15</sup> St. Saviour's, Glendalough (Wicklow),<sup>16</sup> Monaincha<sup>17</sup> and Killaloe (Clare).<sup>18</sup>

The three small rounded motifs on the head of the east window (Illus. 11) and the fragment with triangles incorporated into the north window (Illus. 13) cannot be paralleled in other Irish Romanesque carvings.

<sup>6</sup>See F. Henry, *Irish Art in the Romanesque Period (1020-1170 A.D.)* London 1973, pl. 72.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, pl. 81.

<sup>8</sup>H. G. Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings Vol. 1 The First Phases and the Romanesque*, Dundalk 1977, Fig. 74.

<sup>9</sup>Unpublished; a detailed publication of the Romanesque at Tuam is in preparation by the author. See R. Stalley, "The Romanesque Sculpture of Tuam", in *The Vanishing Past: Studies of Medieval Art, Liturgy and Metrology presented to Christopher Hohler*, ed. by A. Borg and A. Martindale, BAR International Series 111 (1981), pl. 13.19.

<sup>10</sup>See H. G. Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings Vol. 2 Gothic Architecture to A.D. 1400* Dundalk, 1967, Fig. 5.

<sup>11</sup>P. Harbison, "Tipperary Romanesque", *Tipperary Remembers*, Freshford 1976, p. 57.

<sup>12</sup>See footnote 9.

<sup>13</sup>See H. S. Crawford and H. G. Leask, "Killeslin Church and Its Romanesque Ornament", *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, 55 (1925), pl. 2b.

<sup>14</sup>R. Stalley, "Mellifont Abbey: A Study of its Architectural History", *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, 106, C (1980), 315 and Fig. 20.

<sup>15</sup>See F. Henry, *op. cit.* (1973), pl. 78.

<sup>16</sup>H. G. Leask, *op. cit.* (1977), Fig. 50 and 51.

<sup>17</sup>H. G. Leask, *ibid.*, Fig. 77.

<sup>18</sup>H. G. Leask, *ibid.*, Pl. 17.

<sup>18</sup>H. G. Leask, *ibid.*, Pl. 17.



The cross on the exterior of the east window is unusual in that each of the terminals is a different shape (Illus. 8 and 9). Parallels for this cross are not readily to be found in Irish Romanesque sculpture. However, crosses resembling that at Killodiernan do occur in Ireland, but are generally dated to the Early Christian period: carved above the trabeate doorway at Clonamery (Kilkenny), there is a cross with triangular terminals,<sup>19</sup> while crosses carved on early Christian pillar-stones, though generally encircled, are also reminiscent of the Killodiernan cross.<sup>20</sup>

The impost mouldings on the west doorway (Illus. 4 and 5) can be compared elsewhere in Irish Romanesque and Transitional buildings. Similar Romanesque mouldings can be found built into the north window at Liathmore<sup>21</sup> and on the chancel arch at Tuam.<sup>22</sup> There is a related moulding on the Monaincha doorway.<sup>23</sup> In transitional architecture impost mouldings on the north doorway at Cong<sup>24</sup> and on the west doorway at Temple Conor, Clonmacnoise,<sup>25</sup> are close to Romanesque examples.

Arch orders in the Irish Romanesque are usually profusely carved. However, plain voussoirs like those on the west doorway (Illus. 4 and 7), occur for example on the chancel arches at St. Caimin's, Inishcaltra (Clare)<sup>26</sup> and the larger church Rahan (Offaly),<sup>27</sup> and on the south doorway at Ballyhay (Cork).<sup>28</sup>

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The romanese west doorway and east window have been poorly reconstructed and incorporated into a later medieval parish church. The carved blocks, some of which are not in their original positions, represent only a portion of the original sculpture.

The principal motifs employed at Killodiernan are plant, scroll-work and chevron which are typical of the repertoire of Irish Romanesque sculptors. However, the cross is reminiscent of an earlier Irish Art tradition. The repertoire of carved motifs at Killodiernan is limited, and conspicuously absent is zoomorphic interlace and also human and animal heads and figure carving.

The building phase for Irish Romanesque architecture appears to be a relatively short one. L. de Paor's arguments for viewing Cormac's Chapel, Cashel as the earliest Romanesque building (1127-1134) in Ireland are convincing.<sup>29</sup> If the final stages of this style are to be seen at Killaloe and Annaghdown, occurring *circa* 1200,<sup>30</sup> then the complete building phase for Irish Romanesque architecture must have taken place between these dates.

<sup>19</sup>H. G. Leask, *ibid.*, Fig. 31b.

<sup>20</sup>For example a pillar-stone at Glendalough in F. Henry, *La Sculpture Irlandaise pendant les douze premiers siècles de L'ère Chrétienne*, Vol. 2, Paris 1933, pl. 6.

<sup>21</sup>Noted by P. Harbison, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>22</sup>H. G. Leask, *op. cit.* (1977), pl. 16.

<sup>23</sup>See F. Henry, *op. cit.* (1933), pl. 159.

<sup>24</sup>H. G. Leask, *op. cit.* (1967), pl. 7b.

<sup>25</sup>Illustrated in G. Petrie, "The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland, anterior to the Anglo-Norman invasion, comprising an essay on the origin and uses of round towers of Ireland", *Trans. Roy. Irish Acad.*, 20 (1845), 273.

<sup>26</sup>H. G. Leask, *op. cit.* (1977), Fig. 47.

<sup>27</sup>A. C. Champneys, *Irish Ecclesiastical Architecture*, London 1910, pl. 52.

<sup>28</sup>H. G. Leask, *op. cit.* (1977), Fig. 100.

<sup>29</sup>L. de Paor, "Cormac's Chapel: the Beginnings of Irish Romanesque", *North Munster Studies*, ed. E. Rynne, Limerick 1967, pp. 133-145.

<sup>30</sup>T. Garton, "A Romanesque Doorway at Killaloe", *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 134 (1981), 53-54.



Certain churches have sculpture which is particularly close to Killodiernan, and this is useful when determining the possible chronological position of Killodiernan within the Irish Romanesque. The plant carvings are very like those at Monaincha which T. Garton dates prior to 1185-1186.<sup>31</sup> Both the plant patterns and scroll-work can be closely compared with those in St. Mary's Cathedral, Tuam, which has been dated to the late twelfth century, after an earlier building collapsed in 1184.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps the most convincing evidence for a date late in the Irish Romanesque for the Killodiernan carvings is supplied by the impost mouldings, for which comparisons can be made with Monaincha and Tuam and also with related mouldings on thirteenth century Transitional buildings.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>32</sup>See footnote 9 and R. Stalley, *op. cit.*, 1981, pp. 181 and 191.