

# The Wheeled Cross Headstones of West Ulster

## Towards a Definition of the Type

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*A distinctive form of external commemorative monument occurs in a relatively restricted area of West Ulster. The most visible portion of these memorials is circular, with three extensions indicating a cross form. This has led to the attribution of this as the wheeled cross headstone. Two main types can be identified, those with false relief lettering on the front and sometimes symbols on the back, and those with incised lettering on the front and usually mortality symbols on the back. Particular attention is directed towards the second of these types.*

### Introduction

Only some parts of Britain and Ireland have numerous examples of stone external memorials in the first half of the 18th century, and in most regions it is only later in the century that the 'graveyard boom' takes place (Tarlow 1999; Mytum 2006). One of the regions with an early appearance of a monumental tradition is that of West Ulster, and here three main types of monument are found. The first of these are ledger slabs, the earliest with false relief lettering but later with incised texts. The second are slab headstones, roughly rectangular in shape but with a variety of profiles. Both these types tend to have been erected by Protestants, though examples of both types occur when commemorating Catholics. The third type is the wheeled cross, similar in height range to the slab headstones but sometimes thicker, and always commemorating Catholics. These stones are the focus of this paper, though some comparisons with the other forms will be given where relevant.

A full study of all the wheeled cross headstones would be a major undertaking, and would probably never be complete; detailed graveyard surveys have often led to the discovery of broken, fallen, and buried examples. The purpose of this paper is to attempt to define some of the main characteristics of the wheeled cross form, and explain its selection as a type in West Ulster during the first half of the 18th century. The variability of a sample of those with the incised texts will then be explored, and particular attention will be

given to those with mortality symbols on the back.

The monument form was first widely brought to the attention of those interested in sculpture through the publication of some photographs by Hickey (1976), though no detailed discussion was provided. Others were published as small illustrations in articles largely focused on gravestone transcriptions (Mulligan *et al* 1982). It was only with more recent, archaeologically-driven, surveys that the type has become more clearly defined (Mytum 2004a). Recorded using a standard methodology (Mytum 2000), each memorial has a site code and number; these numbers are used for reference throughout the paper. The form has been discussed in relation to others in terms of date ranges at Killeevan and Galloon (Mytum & Evans 2003), has been illustrated in other case studies (Mytum & Evans 2002; Mytum 2004c), and used briefly as a comparative study in relation to another contemporary Irish regional type (Mytum 2004b). There has not, however, been a clear definition of the form and a consideration of its development and meaning, although Thomson (2006) has recently drawn attention to these memorials.

The analysis is based on a sample derived from a range of sites in south County Fermanagh and mainly the north of County Monaghan, though with some sites in northern Fermanagh. First the shape and size of the monument type is defined, its nomenclature clarified, and the reasons for this form's adoption are discussed. Second, the chronology of the wheeled cross is described and the reasons for its rise and fall

considered. The detailed characteristics of the southern type are elaborated in the third section, and finally the range of stylistic variation of the mortality monuments is indicated, suggesting a variety of carvers in operation; the products of two carvers are used to illustrate this.



Fig 1 – A: Short arms, Donagh 51  
B: Long arms, Killeevan 85

### *Defining the wheeled cross headstone*

The wheeled cross monuments demonstrate their cross form by the arms that protrude from the top and sides (Fig 1 A, B). These arms are always rectangular, and though are sometimes very small they are always sufficiently large to be unmistakable. There is no clear chronological trend in the size of the cross arms, so it is neither the case that earliest stones have minimal arms, nor the reverse. Certain sites such as Killeevan, County Monaghan (and perhaps carvers whose work is well represented there) have a preference for small arms, but other sites (and carvers) tended to provide arms that extended further. The wheeled cross description comes from the circular area which comprises the main part of the headstone and which on the reverse is often defined by a ring within which false relief mortality symbols are carved (Fig 1). Some monuments have a ringed cross carved on the reverse.

Given the role of the cross in Catholic iconography, and its avoidance by Protestant, especially Presbyterian, churches in Ireland at that time, it was a highly significant shape to be chosen. Moreover, some texts on the stones further emphasise the cross feature.

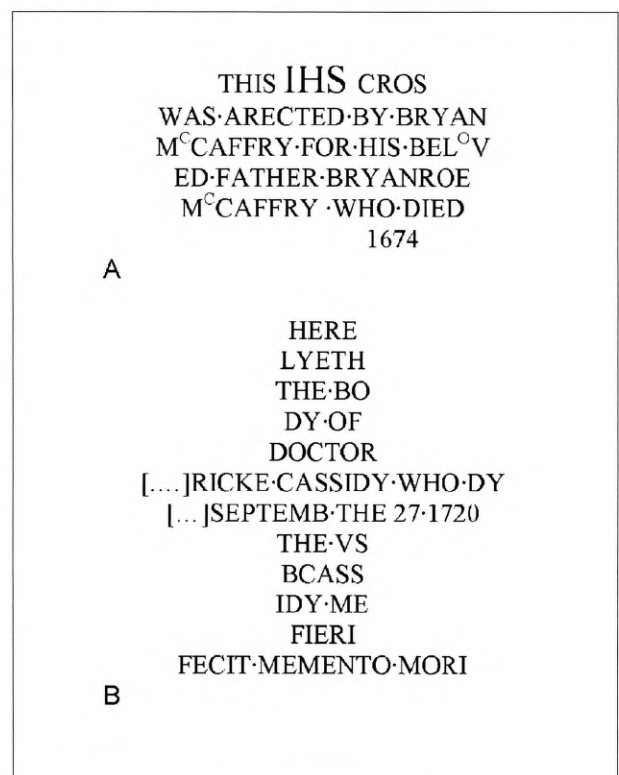


Fig 2 – A: Aghalurcher 115  
B: Devenish Island 49

Thus the stone with the earliest death date in the sample (Aghalurcher 115) has an explicit reference to a cross in its inscription (Fig 2 A), demonstrating that the cross shape was intended and recognised by those erecting and visiting these memorials. Other examples at Aghalurcher that begin the text with *'This cross'* are, in chronological order, 183 (1727), 419 (1729), 195 (1737), 155 (1740), 100 (1745), 46 (1746), 191 (174), though this phrase does not occur elsewhere in the sample. All the memorials with the *'This cross'* phrase have incised stones, and these tend to have the smaller protruding cross arms. Those wheeled cross stones with false relief texts tend to have larger arms protruding, and many of these crosses have texts that fill a complete cross shape that is defined on the face of the stone and which extends onto the arms. The remaining parts of the inscribed face of the memorial are left blank though text can extend across the whole width of the base. These design features emphasise a cross form, despite the problems of creating very short lengths of text that would be difficult to read. For example, Devenish Island 49 (Fig 2 B) has its text set out in the shape of the cross and moreover the front of the stone emphasises the shape by a raised edge to the circle; the reverse of this stone further indicates the cross form by carving the wheeled cross form. This monument demonstrates the wheeled cross emphasis, and others at Devenish display the same characteristics. Other raised text wheeled cross monuments in County Tyrone place the text around the wheel ring of the monument on the text face of the stone (Thomson 2006), which further shows the importance of the cross in the design.

All these strands of evidence clearly indicate that the discoid term used by Thomson (2006) is inappropriate. Although some early British discoid stones have some superficial similarities to the wheeled cross headstones with small arms, this is purely coincidental. Many of the British discoids have sunken panels for text and are not decorated on the reverse; none represent a cross in their shape. Discoids of the British type do not occur in West Ulster, and if any were erected in Ireland they were extremely rare. There is no reason to assume that the discoids provided the inspiration for the wheeled cross form.

Why would a cross form be developed by Catholics in West Ulster in the early 18th century? Firstly, a cross strongly indicates a Catholic rather than Protestant faith at this time. The choice of the wheeled cross can be considered appropriate for two reasons. The most important is that this shape of cross is clearly a native

form, visible on monuments standing in some of the churchyards of the region. It is notable that the high cross set up in the Diamond at Clones (Harbison 1992) was restored at this time, with the top 'arm' of the cross being restored with an element carved with a skull identical in style to those used on contemporary graveyard memorials. Such examples of early medieval sculpture could be linked back by the native population to a time when the Irish church was powerful, supporting native Irish power structures, and clearly Catholic. The Clones high cross clearly did not carry the same Catholic associations to the Protestant planters who also used the mortality symbols on their monuments, and it may have been placed in the Diamond to emphasise continuity of place for this new settlement. The ambiguity of meaning for the high crosses may be why the wheeled cross form was tolerated in the multi-denominational community graveyards. The other reason for choosing the ringed cross shape rather than a simple cross form for a mortuary monument is that it provides larger surface areas for text (though not always utilised on the raised text forms), and a more stable shape as long unsupported arms would be easily broken. Indeed, some wheeled cross shapes were carved onto slab headstones, showing how the slab form could itself be used to indicate the role of the cross. These are discussed further in relation to the chronology of the form (see below).

Thomson (2006) suggests that the circular shape relates to ancient interest in the sun, arguing that this is displayed later on stones with a prominent semi-circular profile in which the design is set. This is an unfortunate misunderstanding of the radiate IHS symbol that is widespread in Catholic art, though particularly popular in Jesuit contexts (Smith 2002). The radiate IHS becomes a common motif on late 18th- and 19th-century monuments as part of standard, Christian, Catholic iconography. Whilst its earliest origins in late Roman contexts may have linked Christianity with ancient interests in the sun, or with wreaths, these had no bearing on meanings associated with the radiate IHS in Ireland in the 18th century.

Whilst the wheeled head part of the headstone has attracted most attention so far, it is important to appreciate that the base of the monument is also of interest. The base of the headstone shows greater variation than the top, with a wide range of moulded shoulders occurring. These may well relate to carver preferences; for example the stones at Killeevan and





Fig 3 – A: Simple base profile, Killeevan 75  
 B: Complex base profile, Donagh 104

Magheraveely have relatively simple profiles (Fig 3A), whilst many of those at Donagh and Aghavea have more complex outlines (Fig 3 B). Some monuments have a simple, narrow and parallel-sided cross shaft base (see the ‘puppy skull carver’ below); these are more common on those stones with lettering in false relief than on the incised examples, but they do occur amongst the southern monument form.

**Measurements**

Most headstones of the early 18th century are much smaller than later monuments, and this is also the case with the wheeled cross headstones. Three key

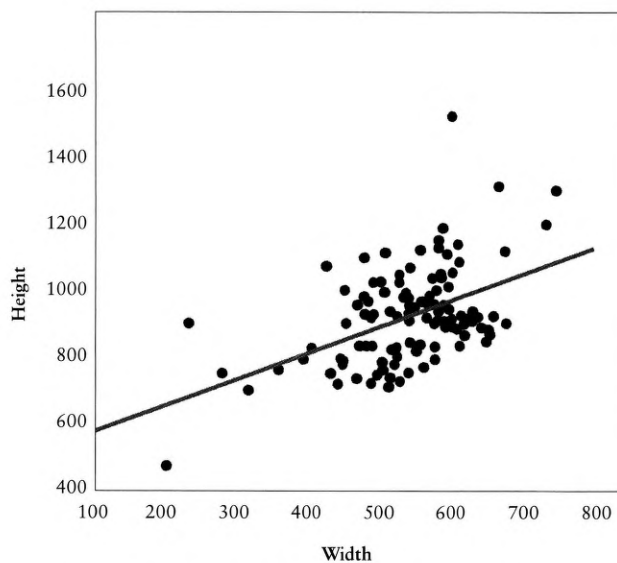
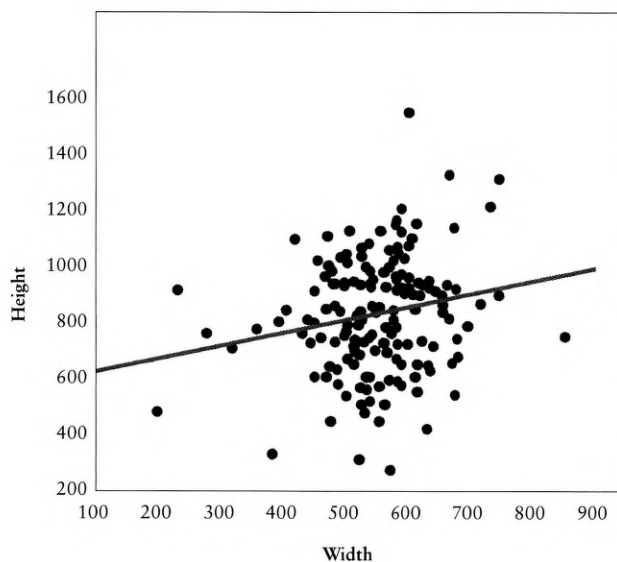


Fig 4 – A: Scatterplot of raw height data vs width  
 B: Scatterplot of adjusted height data vs width



measurements have been made on these stones, though each requires some discussion.

The height of the monument has been recorded for the majority of headstones (176 out of 180 in the data set), though it is likely that some will have sunk significantly into the ground since their erection, and others have broken off. Some would appear to have been re-erected, and others have been removed from the ground and now lie flat with the part that would have been buried now visible. These examples are important for indicating the overall size and shape of the monuments prior to erection, and they demonstrate that the buried portions were not carefully shaped, and whilst some have smooth front and back surfaces, one from Clones Abbey burial ground (71) shows the moulded visible base and that part that would have been buried with roughly tooled surfaces. This, and the numerous other stones with a significant amount visible, shows that all stones had a base on which the wheeled cross element was carved that was at least 0.20m high, and could be significantly more. Therefore two graphs for height have been produced: one with all the data, and the second with only stones with heights that were at least 0.20m greater than the width. This removes those clearly either partly buried or broken. Stones have their weakest point where they are narrowest – where the lower part of the wheeled cross joins the base – and a significant number have broken at this point. Many of the other stones may also have sunk – it is evident from the graphs that many stones were much taller than their width – but at least this removes the most obviously skewed data. Interestingly, the graphs are not too dissimilar, and even the raw data shows a statistical correlation between height and width that is significant at the 0.01 level (Fig 4 A, B). Most headstone types have a clear relationship between height and width, though width is also linked to the dimensions of burial plots. Given that the shape of the main part of the headstone is based on a circle, it is not surprising that there is a relationship between height and width for the wheeled cross headstones, but as the base height varies considerably, this does lead to some variation.

The height of the monuments varies chiefly between 0.50m and 1.20m, with only few likely outliers. When height is compared with date, there is a general trend towards larger stones over time (Fig 5). With raw data the graph is steeper than with those with the selective data, which probably only demonstrates that the older stones had more time to be broken or buried to a greater depth over time, making them appear even

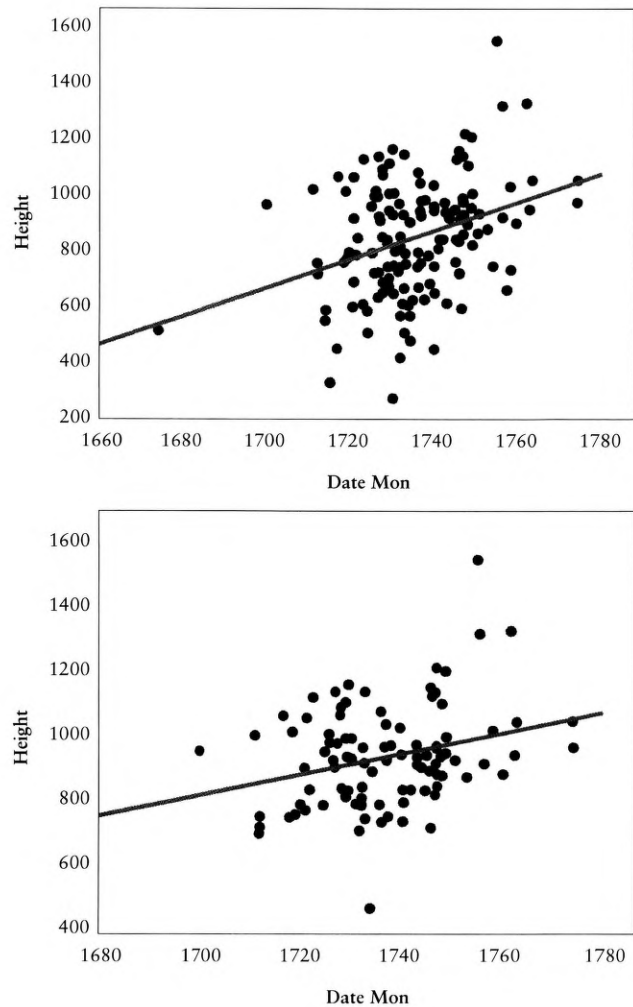


Fig 5 – A: Scatterplot of raw height data vs date of death on memorial  
B: Scatterplot of adjusted height data vs date of death on memorial

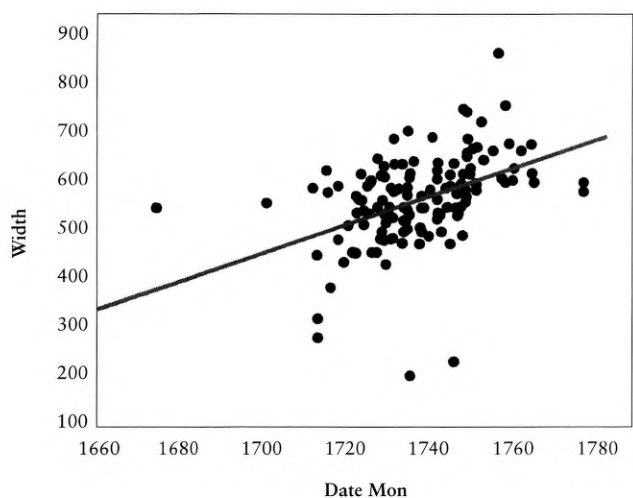


Fig 6 – Scatterplot of width vs date of death on memorial

smaller. The raw data again shows a high correlation, significant at the 0.01 level.

The width has been measured across the widest part of the stone, the arms of the cross. For most stones the maximum base width is the same, but for some monuments the base is narrower. Most stones lie between 0.40m and 0.70m, with a few outliers (Fig 6). There was no problem with collecting data for width, so no second graph is required. The width of stones evidently increased over time, and there are no problems with the reliability of this measurement. Once again, there is a high correlation, significant at the 0.01 level.

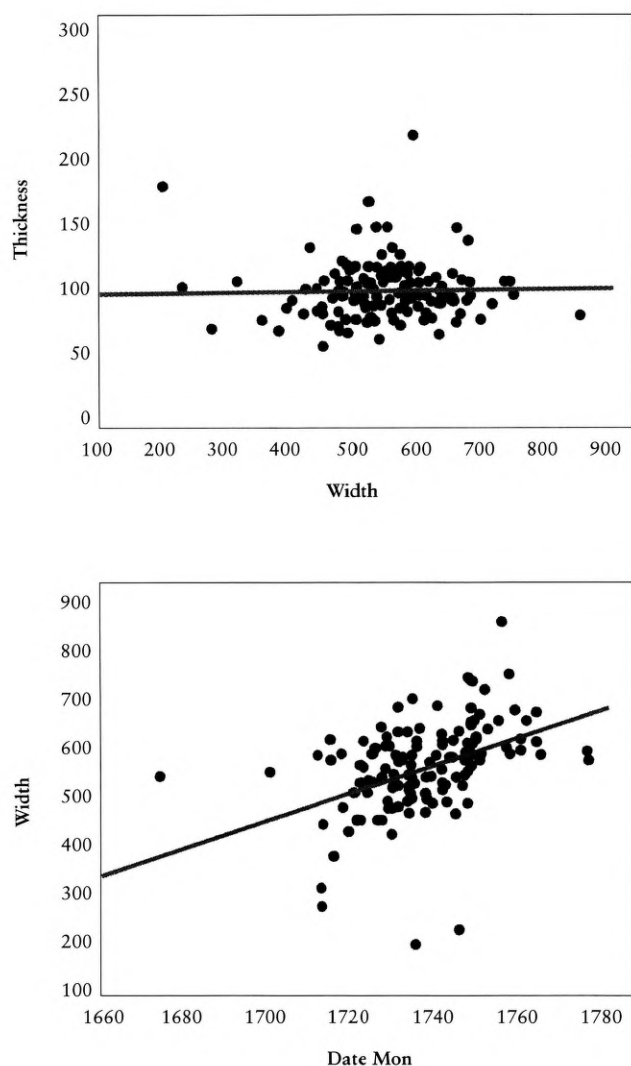


Fig 7 – A: Scatterplot of thickness vs width  
B: Scatterplot of thickness vs date of death  
on memorial

Thickness of headstones is often closely linked to the geology of the rock selected for carving. There is a variety of thickness in the wheeled cross type, but most lie between 0.07m and 0.13m. There is no significant correlation between width and thickness (Fig 7A). Although there appears to be a slight rise in thickness over time, this is not statistically significant (Fig 7B). The headstones normally have the same thickness for the full height of the stone. Although no detailed geological study has been undertaken, the various sandstone sources vary slightly in colour, granulation, and weathering characteristics. Thus Donagh, County Fermanagh, has less well preserved inscriptions than Magheraveely only a short distance away, and in County Monaghan the Killeevan stones survive in a much fresher condition than those at the various graveyards in Clones. This is due to geological differences, not environmental conditions in the graveyards.

### Chronology

Almost all the headstones can be ascribed a date based on the death of the individual commemorated. In most cases there is only one deceased celebrated on each monument, though a small number have two commemorations. The problems of dating gravestones are well recognised, and these are greater with those of the 18th century than those that are later (Mytum 2002). It is certainly the case that such misleading dates occur most frequently when stone monuments first appear in a region or start to be used by a particular social group within that region. This applies to the wheeled cross headstones, and therefore outliers need to be treated with particular caution. Thomson (2006) notes the earliest stone as 1679 from Magherculmonee, County Fermanagh, but one example from Aghalurcher (115) has a date of 1674. However, only a few stones are from any of the decades of the 17th century, and it may be that they were all made subsequently, commemorating family members who had died some time previously (Fig 8).

A number of Irish monuments state not only the date of death of the deceased but also the date of erection of the monument. No example of this has been identified in the sample of wheeled cross types considered here, but a memorial with the wheeled cross carved in relief on a slab monument with vertical sides, Aghalurcher 159, has such a text (Fig 9). The very layout of this text reflects the shape of the stone, with the wording completely covering the face

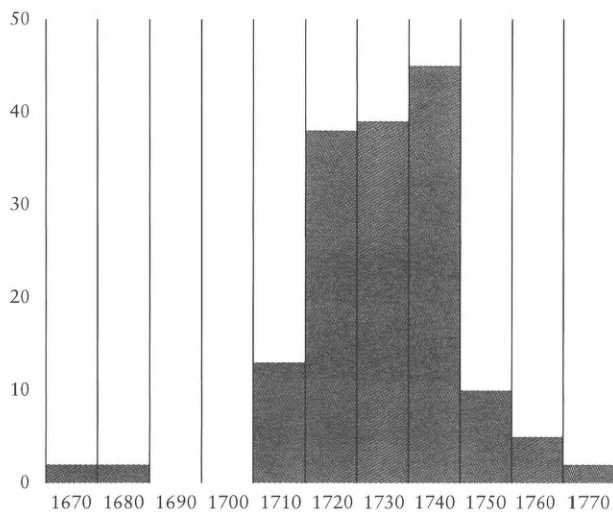


Fig 8 – Bar chart of wheeled cross headstones by decade of death on memorial

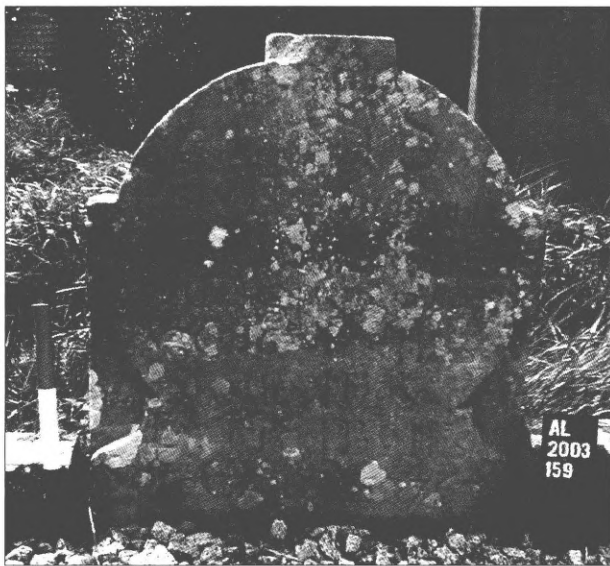


Fig 9 – Aghalurcher headstone 159 with wheeled cross shape on a slab headstone

of the wheeled cross element and extending onto the base. This stone would, without the erection date, be considered to date to 1740, but was in fact erected nearly a quarter of a century later. It is thus possible that all the monuments from the last quarter of the 17th century were carved in the early years of the 18th century as the opportunity for permanent commemoration became available and the descendants wished to take advantage of this.

Bearing in mind the problems of dating the spread of monuments in the sample cover a plainly defined

time span. The overwhelming majority of stones commemorate deaths in the 1720s, 1730s and 1740s (Fig 8). It is likely that most, if not all, the earlier death dates were placed on stones erected in either the late 1710s or even later; the few late stones indicate a continuing desire for the form after it had fallen out of wider fashion. Indeed it is noticeable that the majority (9 out of 15) of the late memorials come from Killeevan, and several have unusual symbolism on the back; the one at Galloon is of a more rectangular shape. This suggests that fresh demands were leading to innovation, and that the changing functions and meanings of the monument types led to the abandonment of the wheeled cross form completely. The latest stone in the sample is an extreme southerly outlier at Carrickmacross, County Monaghan, and this may explain its late date.

Memorials from Clones St Tierney's (81) and Aghalurcher (159) had the part between the side arms and the base cut back to show the wheel-headed shape but giving vertical sides to the stone, though the characteristic shape was still visible at the top (Fig 9). At Aghavea (114, 115), in contrast, the whole wheel-headed shape was carved onto rectangular slabs. Three of these four stones are relatively late in the sequence, and the other of 1731 may form a pair with one definitely dated 1762, and so may be really that late in terms of its production. These slabs with wheel-headed forms may be part of the transition away from this distinctive form, as slabs of more traditional and widespread forms had always been a minority choice for Catholics during the earlier 18th century.

Whilst there appears to have been a significant group of carvers in operation, the chronology of production does not suggest multi-generational workshops producing this form, though of course they probably continued with different products. Indeed the relationship between wheel headed crosses, slab gravestones and ledgers will be better understood once more individual carvers have been further identified, and the changing traditions of monument shape, lettering and symbolism are investigated.

### *The Southern form*

In the sample considered here, the vast majority are of the southern type with incised text and IHS on one face, and with symbolism on the back. Consideration will first be given to the texts, and then to the symbols.

An analysis of texts on early gravestones can be extremely detailed and reveal many aspects of the local



contemporary social structure: the commemorative emphasis of the memorials, patterns in the layout of text, choice of abbreviations, letter styles, and variation in technical competence (Mytum 2004b). There is not space here to provide this level of analysis, but the main trends are outlined.

The introductory phrases on the southern types are limited, with three forms being most common. The two most common phrases are *'Here lyeth the body of'* and *'Pray for the soul of'*. *'This cross'* has already been noted, and others referring to the memorial also occur, such as *'This stone'* and *'This monument'*. The name of the deceased is normally given with a single Christian name and surname; the death date is given with day, month and year, followed by the age of the deceased in years. Many memorials also state the person who had it erected and their relationship with the deceased. Fathers, husbands and sons are the most common erectors of these monuments. There are no epitaphs, nor other details about the deceased such as occupations, place of residence or cause of death. As stated above, most memorials commemorate only one death, though a small number give details of more; these are not likely to have been added at a later date but rather the memorial was erected after the second death.

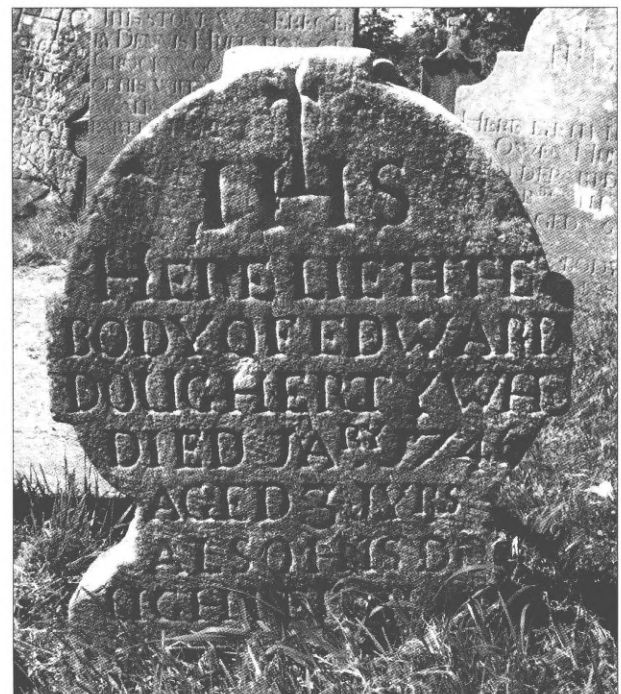
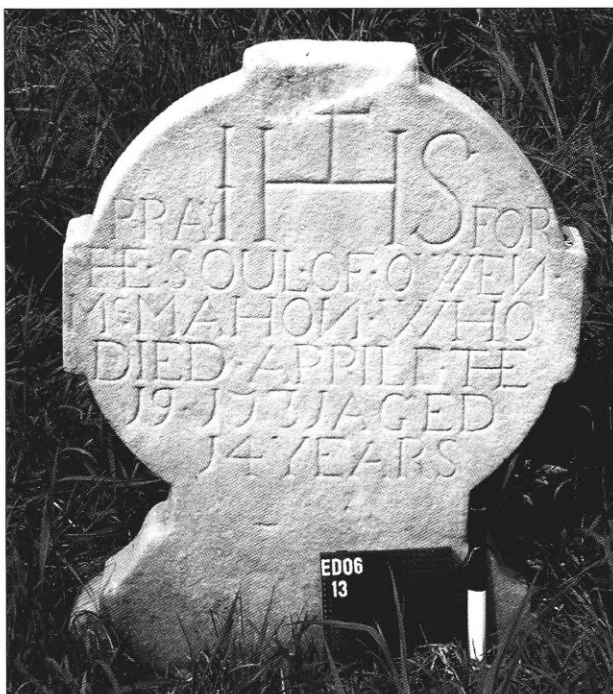
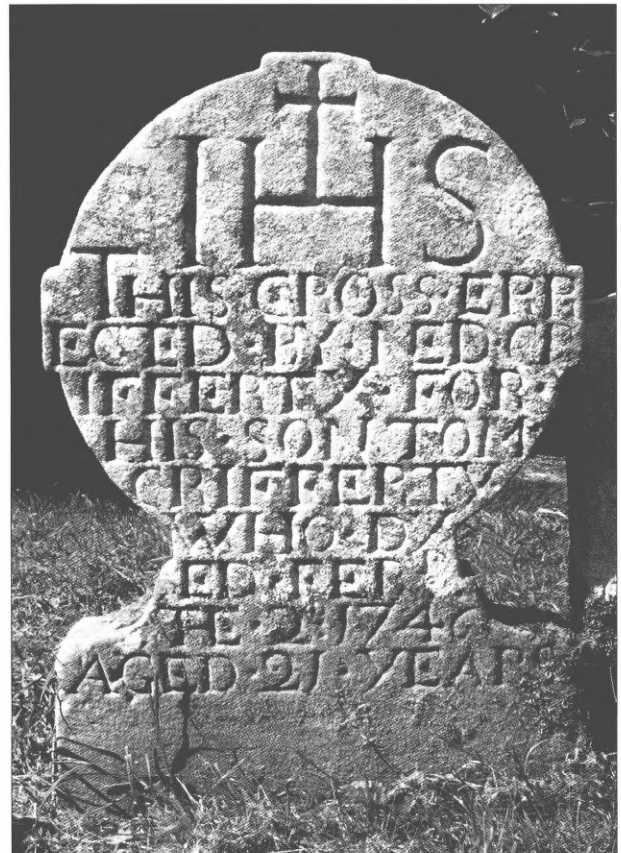


Fig 10 – Incised lettering on examples of the southern form of wheeled cross headstone

- A: Aghalurcher 46
- B: Aghalurcher 175
- C: Edergole 13

Texts can be completely in capitals or a mixture of upper and a few lower case letters. Those with mixed lettering can either be well laid out or there can be erratic use of the cases, with lower case often being used in superscripts. Some memorials are well thought out in terms of text layout, with appropriate abbreviations if required in the centre of lines, and may have an initial larger letter (Fig 10 A). Others have irregular word breaks, variable letter sizes to make text fit, and the use of superscripts or subscripts at the ends of lines. Few inscriptions are centred, though this would indeed be rare at this date, and the few that appear so may be largely fortuitous. Some word spaces are marked by a single incised dot (Fig 10 A,C), but in other cases not (Fig 10 B). Words may be poorly spaced. Lettering quality varies from some beautifully carved serif letters to irregular simple incisions. Texts may be relatively short but can continue down to ground level on the base below the cross shape (Fig 10 A,B). There are many examples of ligatures, especially in words such as 'THE', and reversed strokes on letters such as 'N' are also frequent.

The IHS can be very large and dominates the front of the stone (Fig 10 A,C) or can be rather smaller, though still prominent (Fig 10 B). It is normally incised though where the rest of the text is incised the IHS can be in false relief. Both the relative size and treatment indicates how this symbol has a distinct role compared with the commemorative text, and one that at this time and place was redolent with Catholic associations.

The southern wheeled cross headstone type normally has symbols carved on the reverse (Fig 1). The overwhelming majority are of mortality symbols, which are discussed below, but it is important to note other symbols. A small number display heraldic style devices. For example, at Killeevan Terence McCafry had a hatchment design carved on his wife's monument (138, 1750), and another member of the same family, Con McMahan, had heraldic elements carved on the reverse of his wife's stone. A third stone at Killeevan displays traditional heraldic symbols of a hand and a rampant lion in the most competent manner (Mytum 2004a), on the stone commemorating James Maginnins (132, 1754). Another example at Aghavea is again on a woman's stone, that of Isabella Dee (199, 1726). Astronomical symbols also occur, sometimes with mortality symbols, but also on their own as with Killeevan 84 (1758), curiously erected close to the upstanding church ruin wall but with a crescent moon and two stars on the rear.

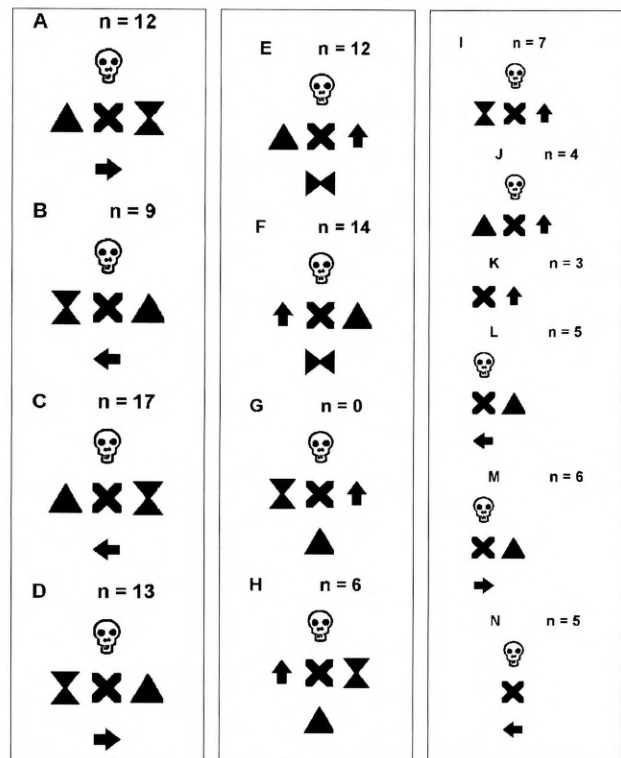


Fig 11 – Frequent arrangements of mortality symbols with the coffin horizontal

Fig 12 – Frequent arrangements of mortality symbols with the coffin upright

Fig 13 – Frequent arrangements of two, three and four mortality symbols

Mortality symbols used on the wheeled cross headstones are extremely limited, comprising just five symbols. These are the skull, long bones (usually a crossed pair), coffin, hourglass and bell. These occur on the Protestant Planter grave slabs of an earlier date (McCormick 1983), and indicate a transfer to Catholic use (Mytum forthcoming a). Other mortality symbols such as the sexton's spade can occur rarely on Protestant ledgers but the variety is not as great as those in Scotland (Willsher & Hunter 1978). The popularity of these particular symbols, and their arrangement on stones in a similar manner to those on Ulster ledgers is mirrored in part of eastern Scotland (Mytum forthcoming b), suggesting an origin for at least one of the first carvers to bring this style to Ulster. However, the creative use of the form within the wheeled cross headstone tradition was a local one, though the carvers would seem to have fulfilled commissions for both religious traditions, and their own beliefs remain unknown.

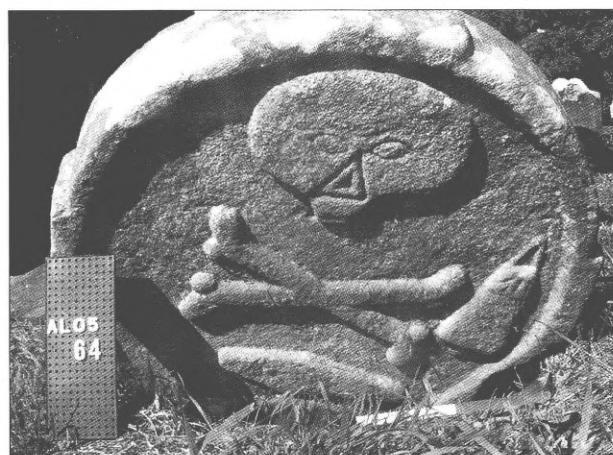


Fig 14 – A: Unusual arrangement with three mortality symbols in a row beneath the crossed bones, Galloon 5  
 B: Arrangement L, Aghalurcher 64  
 C: Arrangement K, Galloon 43

Within the circular shape of the stone, the most common designs are those with the crossed bones in the centre and the other symbols arranged around them. The skull is almost always above, the coffin below, and the bell and hourglass to the sides. There are four particularly common arrangements that comprise mirror-image designs, with the bell and hourglass to right or left, and the coffin head to right or left (Fig 11). The next most popular sets of designs have the coffin vertical, and placed to one side of the crossed bones. Whichever symbol is displaced by the coffin is placed at the bottom; whilst the bell is still depicted upright in this position, the hourglass is shown horizontal (Fig 12). A minority of stones have all five symbols, but in an irregular arrangement (Fig 14A), but the use of four or fewer symbols does occur in a number of combinations that seem to have been significant (Fig 13). On stones with three or four symbols it may be the coffin, hourglass or bell that is omitted (Figs 3B, 16B, D). The skull seems to remain indispensable until only two symbols are present, and then the coffin and crossed bones are chosen (Figs 13, 14C). With three or four symbols, asymmetrical designs seem to have been acceptable, though much of the space within the circular space could be utilised through the placement of the symbols.



### Stylistic variation

Although the repertoire of symbols was surprisingly limited, the stylistic representation of each of these symbols is very great indeed. Some can be certainly linked to particular producers but only a more intensive study could identify many of the individual carvers or the schools to which they belonged.

The skull may be facing outwards, but often is depicted at a slight angle. It is normally heavily stylised, but some are very naturalistic (Fig 14 A); the teeth of the upper jaw are often depicted (Figs 15A, 17B,C,), but on many the lower jaw is not indicated. Other skulls are shown with an incised line representing a mouth, and these look more like faces than skulls (Figs 3A, 15 C, 16B, D). In some cases, the eyebrows are shown (Fig 15A). The noses are often triangular, but vary greatly in their treatment, with deeply cut shapes (Figs 1A, 3 A, 14A) and double (Figs 14B, 15 B) and single incised lines (Fig 3 B) being the most frequent. Forms of the eye sockets vary as greatly, with circular representations sometimes indicated (Figs 1A, 17B,C), though lentoid shapes

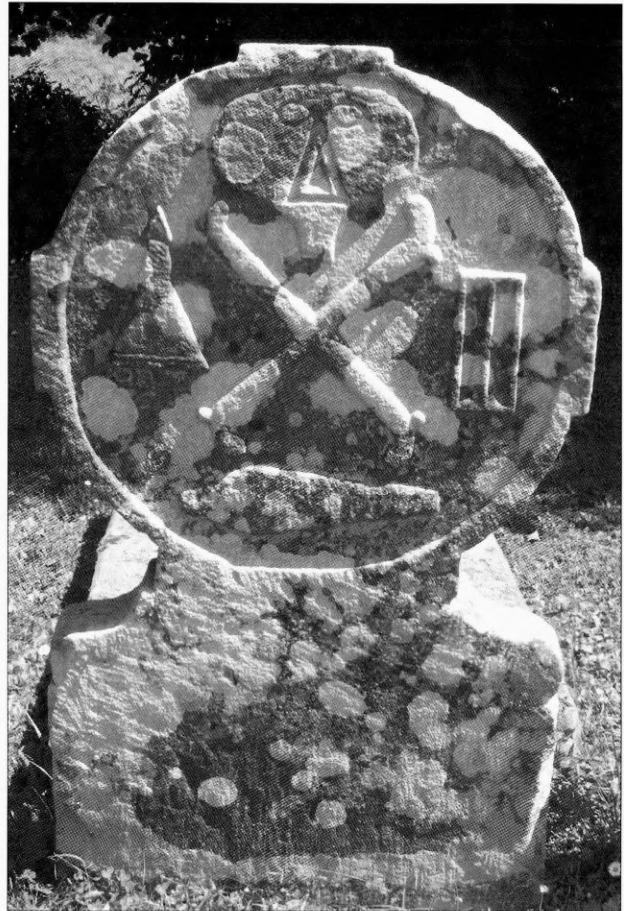


Fig 15 – A: Overlap visible on crossed bones and eyebrows on skull, Aghalurcher 194

B: Skull with triangular double incised nose, Aghalurcher 23

C: Hearts and boat-shaped motif, Killeevan 24

predominate. The eyes may be incised outlines (Fig 14B) or deeply cut forms (Fig 14A); the former may have pupils indicated with dots. The long bones have varied anatomical accuracy, and only rarely is it clear which bone is shown lying over the other (Fig 15A).

Bells and hourglasses have even greater variation than the human remains. The bell can have a small (Fig 15A) or very large curved (Fig 15C) or triangular (Fig 15B) loop at the top, and the bell itself can be decorated (Figs 14B, 17B, C). The clapper may be visible (Figs 1A, 15A), and some are shown as if looking slightly up into the bell (Fig 14A). The shape of the bells is normally with straight sides (Fig 15B), but curved profiles are also found (Figs 14A, 15A), and even irregular shapes occur (Fig 3A); the bottom of the bell may be horizontal (Figs 3B, 14B, 15B, 17B, C) or concave (Fig 1A, 3A, 15A, C). The hourglass can be extremely detailed, or simply schematic. Often, only the frame is well represented (Fig 15B), but in some cases the glass elements are emphasised (Fig 15A). Other representations show both elements (Figs 1A, 3A, 14A, 15C, 17B, C). The coffin has the fewest variations, and it is always a single-break, six-sided form that is shown, though sometimes the carving (or subsequent erosion) makes the shape look rounded. In some cases it is clear that the gable-lidded coffin form is depicted (Fig 17C).

Whilst the mortality symbols dominate designs other symbols can be added within the ring such as circles or stars. Moreover, the base may have more elaborate treatment with the sun, moon or stars, the cross, or hearts being amongst the most frequent (Figs 1A, 15C).

Besides the variation in form of the symbols, there are also significant differences in the manner in which they are rendered. Some are in full, well-rounded relief, and these often do not have the enclosing wheel to the edge of the stone (Fig 14 A, C). Most are in relief, but with relatively flat surfaces, but others are incised or in very low relief (Figs 3A, 15C).

The wheel edge to the stones varies both in width and depth, and this also affects the visual impact of the stone (Fig 3A, B). There are thus numerous variables that affect how any one wheeled cross stone might appear, even though the number of symbols commonly used is very small, and the format and content of the texts is relatively restricted.

### *A Southern form with incised lettering – the ‘lozenge nose carver’*

A clear group of stones utilising four mortality symbols, and always in the same relative positions, has been identified at several sites in County Monaghan. These stones have a skull at the top, crossed bones in the centre that reach near to the lowest point of the circular area, an hourglass to the left and a vertical coffin with head at the top to the right (Figs 16B, D). None of these stones depict bells. Though not numerous, they are clearly produced by the same carver. Examples have been identified to date at Tednavet north of Monaghan with two examples, one each in two different graveyards in the town of Clones 20 km to the southwest, and with the greatest concentration of four in the nearby rural graveyard at Killeevan.

The earliest commemorated death is ODGHER CONNOLL, 1723, with others in 1729, 1733, 1738 and 1740 and two in 1743; one date could not be read. There is no link between sequence and the location, suggesting that the whole area was served by the carver throughout. Most of the wheeled crosses have very visible arms and all have a simple vertical-sided base shaft where this is not buried. They are not all made with the same stone, but the material common at the particular graveyard is used. This indicates that the carver probably travelled to the locale, or was at least provided with local stone, rather than producing the stones in advance at the workshop and then adding an inscription.

The uniting features are the layout of mortality symbols (Figs 16A, C) and the treatment particularly of the skull and crossed bones. The skull always sits adjacent to, if not touching, the raised wheel rim of the stone. Skulls have a characteristic shape with a slightly convex top, though the chin varies from quite pointed-to-rounded in form. All the features on the skull are marked by incised lines and no elements are deeply carved: the mouth is indicated by a single horizontal line, whilst the nose is shown with a lozenge; the eyes are lentoid shapes. The other consistent feature is the crossed bones: long bone shafts are of even thickness with fairly flat top surfaces, and with simple terminals expanded on the inner sides. However, the angle of the cross varies; in some cases it is possible to see the overlap of the bones whilst in others this is not indicated. The coffins shown are relatively short and fat, but with sharp angles and flat tops. Most variation comes with the hourglass, though this is always

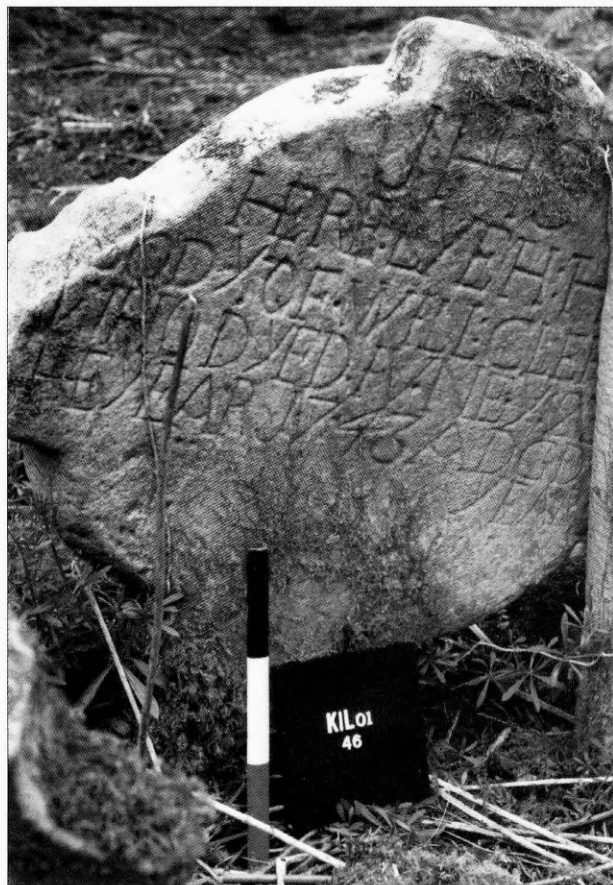


Fig 16 – The ‘lozenge nose carver’

A, B: Killeevan 46

C, D: Killeevan 48





Fig 17 – The ‘puppy-skull carver’ stones  
 A: False relief IHS and memorial text  
 B: Mortality symbols on the reverse, Edergole 37  
 C: Identical arrangement and treatment of symbols, Edergole 23

defined by a clearly carved rectangle. Three types have been noted: a waisted shape with and without a horizontal division (Fig 16B), and a fatter, parallel-sided form with a small horizontal rib (Fig 16D).

The variation within the treatment of the skull and the crossed bones, and the variable proportions of the coffins and distinct variety in the hourglasses shows that a template was not used to lay out the design, despite the consistency of arrangement. This is also suggested by the varied size of the crosses produced by the carver, with the smallest being 0.466m wide, and the largest 0.695m, both at Killeevan. This variation in size may have caused the carver some problems in layout, as some of his arrangements are not evenly spaced, especially where the fatter form of hourglass is used.

The quality of the inscription lettering is not as high as many other carvers. The IHS is variable in its proportions, depending on the size of the stone, but is always indicated with incised lines of the same size or only slightly taller than the rest of the text. The ‘I’ usually has a small horizontal line midway down the vertical stroke (Fig 16B), it could be carved like a ‘J’, as used on the stones for the number ‘1’ (Fig 16A). All the inscriptions begin ‘HERE·LYETH’ with ligatures on the ‘HE’, and on the ‘TH’ to such an extent that the ‘I’ is almost unnoticed. Where the stone is in good

enough condition to be certain, the words are all divided by single incised dots, and all the lettering has serifs indicated by short incised lines of even thickness. The letter 'A' always has a V-shaped cross bar, and sometimes the 'N' has a reversed diagonal. Both 'THE' and 'YE' occur, the former with ligatures on the 'TH'. The layout of the text varies depending on the width of the stone, with only 'HERE-LYETH' on the first line, or with all or part of the definite article also included. The second line may have the Christian name of the deceased or that may have to be placed on the third. The carver always manages to keep each name complete on a line, and copes with limited space lower down the stone by various forms of abbreviation for the month of death (Fig 16).

The 'lozenge nose carver' may have been in operation over several decades, unless all the earlier stones were commissioned some time after the deaths commemorated. All the identified stones have a similar layout, but other combinations may yet be discovered, and other monument types may also have been produced by the carver.

### *A Southern form with false relief lettering – the 'puppy skull carver'*

A small group of stones can be identified that are clearly the product of the same carver, with the design elements of text layout and mortality symbols that are typical of the southern wheeled cross headstone, but which have false relief text. All the stones so far identified commemorate individuals who died in the 1720s and 1730s.

Thus far, this group have been identified at two County Monaghan sites of Edergole and Killeevan, under 9 km apart. The two earliest stones are at Edergole, with monuments to Mary Reily who died in 1724 (Fig 17A, B), and Philip McMahon who died in 1726 (Fig 17C). A slab headstone with a semi-circular top is in the same style and was made for an even earlier death in 1722. A larger group of six stones is known from Killeevan. One could not be dated because it was not possible when making the survey to remove the moss that covered the inscription, but those that could be read were for deaths in 1732, two for 1733, and two for 1734. Thus all the stones were carved to commemorate deaths in about a decade.

These wheeled cross headstones have particularly pronounced cross arms, extending c 7cms away from the circular shape. Most of the stones have broken off

(Fig 1B) or had been buried up to the base of the wheeled cross shape, but where the base is visible it is a simple parallel-sided shaft the same width as the other cross terminals. This narrowness may explain why so many of these monuments have broken. The Killeevan stones all have an incised line emphasising the wheeled cross shape that runs round the whole edge of the text face and down the shaft. This feature is not present on the Edergole examples (Fig 17A), perhaps because they are earlier in the development of the style.

The IHS with a cross with extended terminals extends vertically from the horizontal bar of the 'H'; the 'S' has noticeably incurved terminals, almost touching the central diagonal line of the letter, and the top appears to be leaning to the right (Fig 17A). All the examples so far identified have false relief horizontal lines separating the lines of text. The text runs across the whole face of the stone, extending into the arms, but is always sufficiently short to end well within the area. All the stones begin with the phrase 'HERE:LYETH:THE:BODY:OF', with ligatures often used with the 'TH' in both 'LYETH' and 'THE'. Most of the stones were of a width that meant that 'LYETH' was partly carved on the second line of the main inscription, but the three widest stones were able to accommodate the whole of the word. Many other words would be split between lines as necessary, including names of the deceased or the month of death. Although sometimes not very discernible, every word is separated by a colon rather than a space. The letters are well defined, with large serifs, and the letter 'A' has a V-shaped cross bar. All inscriptions have exactly the same word order, none mention who erected the monument, and only one stone has been used to commemorate two individuals; Killeevan 60 records James Winter and the last part of the visible line states 'ALSO HIS BROT'; the rest of the inscription is buried.

The reverse of the stones is similarly highly characteristic. All have the mortality symbols carved in low relief within a sunken circular area, leaving a wide rim of the wheel that joins the cross arms (Fig 17B, C). The definition of the circle is further emphasised on the Killeevan stones (as was the shape of the whole stone on the front) by a concentric incised line, though here it seems that this was more worked as a moulded feature (Fig 1B). At the base where this part of the stone is visible a V-shaped feature extends down towards the shaft, in effect providing a drainage route for any rainwater that might otherwise accumulate in

the recessed areas, though it is probably inspired by the earlier triangular shape to the inset panel for mortality symbols on a slab headstone for a death in 1722 (see below).

Despite the variety of arrangements of mortality symbols on the wheeled cross headstones as a whole, this group are all consistent in their placing. The skull is located above with the top of the skull resting against the edge of the wheel rim. Crossed bones are in the centre with the bell to the right and upright coffin to the left. A horizontal hourglass is placed below the long bones. Each symbol is consistently depicted, though because they are not absolutely identical in proportions or size no physical template appears to have been used; this is confirmed by the different dimensions of each stone. The only exception to the consistency is the coffin symbol; some depictions seem to have more rounded surfaces suggesting that they represent gable-lidded coffins whilst others are clearly flat.

The skull is a particularly noticeable feature of this group of monuments (Figs 1B, 17 B, C). It is an unusual shape, facing straight out at the viewer, but with incised lines giving the impression of a puppy-dog face, hence the name given here to this anonymous carver. The eyes are shown as circular indentations and the nose is lentoid. A clear line of teeth is depicted in the top jaw, and the crossed bones are all well defined and accurately depicted, although even greater attention was given by the carver to the bell and hourglass. The bell has an inverted 'V' loop attached to a ribbed top, the whole bell being a triangular shape. The hourglass has a clear rectangular definition, with a raised cross shape; the exact form of glass element varies slightly, but these are minor differences in final treatment. The single slab headstone from Edergole that can be attributed to the craftsman appears not to have had IHS at the top, but is weathered at this point so its absence is not certain; the surname appears to be Wood, and so this may be a Protestant stone. The reverse has a more angular shield-like recess with a clear moulding, and this may have been the inspiration for the recessed shape on the wheeled cross forms and the treatment of that kind at Killeevan. However, the portrayal of the mortality symbols is identical.

With so many features all showing such internal consistency – the overall shape of the wheeled cross monuments and the text and mortality symbols – there can be little doubt that these eight stones all represent the products of a single carver. It would appear that he

worked for Catholics and Protestants, and probably more of his products may yet be identified in the region, though none were found in Clones.

### *Conclusions*

The wheeled cross headstone is a distinctive and culturally important element of folk art of West Ulster. These monuments were important indicators of Catholic identity in the early 18th century, but show significant cultural though not ideological links with the Ulster-Scots Protestant community. This suggests more complex relationships between migrants and natives in Ireland than has been hitherto appreciated. The wheeled cross form was not derived from the discoid form found in England from the medieval period onwards, being represented in the 16th and 17th centuries. Rather, the circular shape and the cross arms indicate an association with Early Christian monument types, both high crosses and inscribed slabs. These were linked in native eyes with the traditional Catholic faith, and were both nationalistic and denominational symbols. As such they were powerful indicators within mixed-denominational community burial grounds, further emphasised by the ubiquitous use of the IHS with cross on the inscribed face of the monuments and the frequent use of overtly Catholic phrases.

The wheeled crosses with raised lettering cover a more northern area of County Fermanagh but incorporating significant parts of County Tyrone, whilst the incised lettering is concentrated on southern Fermanagh and northern Monaghan. The analysis here concentrates on the chronology and stylistic variability within the second group, and demonstrates within this regional cultural unity there was considerable diversity that can be most easily explained by production being dispersed across a number of different carvers, of which one, the 'lozenge nose carver' has been identified. A small number of the southern carvers chose to use false relief lettering with mortality symbols on the rear, and the products of one, the 'puppy-skull carver' has been identified. Many other carvers will probably be identified as more analysis of the designs and inscriptions continues.

The presence of so many Catholic monuments of such an early date in one region, and one with Protestant elites, can be explained by the success of the linen industry within which Catholics could participate. The desire to compete in some form with the dominant Protestant commemoration in the form



of ledgers led to the development of this distinctive headstone form, utilising a borrowed repertoire of mortality symbols, and occasionally emulating the concept of heraldic representation, though with unofficial designs. A small number of wheeled cross headstones also display folk art symbols such as sun, moon and stars. They may have eschatological significance as used in Revelation, and may show the Second Coming without the need for more complex Resurrection scenes as depicted on some English and Scottish stones (Burgess 1963; Willsher 1985; Willsher & Hunter 1978).

Overall, these monuments are visually impressive and vibrant examples of folk culture made for a group otherwise poorly represented in both documents and known material culture. They throw light on religious priorities, particularly in a Counter-Reformation context in a religiously divided community. The improving socio-economic circumstances of entrepreneurial Catholics as the linen industry expanded allowed the craft production of a distinctive item of material culture. The wheeled cross headstone was commissioned by only one section of the population but was produced by carvers who also worked for others of different class and religion. The wheeled cross has yet to reveal all its secrets, but research thus far has indicated its rich potential.

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