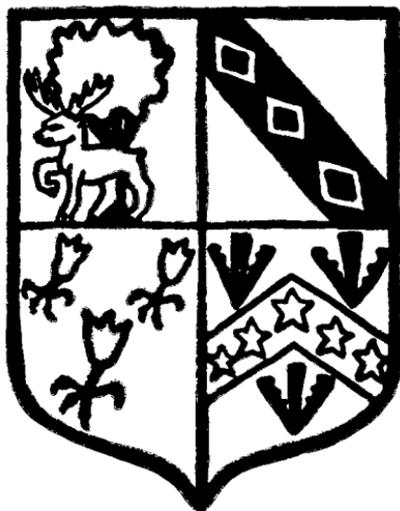


Six Coats of Arms at St. Mary's

GERARD CROTTY

SET in the wall on the right as one enters the grounds of St. Mary's Old Church are six slabs bearing the coats of arms of Kilkenny families. On stylistic and genealogical evidence they can be assigned to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The purpose of these notes is to attempt an identification of the coats of arms, giving the tinctures where these are known, along with other incidental information. I have not been able to identify the individual members of the families involved.



SLAB 1: ARMS OF ROTHE

The first slab on the left shows the arms and crest of Rothe. The shield has four coats borne quarterly: (1) Or a stag trippant argent attired of the first, in front of an oak tree proper; for Rothe. There should be a mount vert in the base of this quarter; (2) Argent on a bend sable three mascles of the field, for Waring; (3) Argent three eagle's legs erased at the thigh gules membered

sable (there should be a black chevron between them) — for Chamberlain; (4) Argent on a chevron gules between three pheons sable five mullets or — for Archer. I am not certain of the tinctures in this last quarter.

Above the shield is an esquire's helmet, and as is typical of the period, it is far too small for the shield. All these carvings date from a time when helmets and shields had long passed out of use, and artists were not familiar with such things. This often led to unrealistic rendering of the helmet.

The mantling is quite elaborately carved. The crest is a stag trippant argent, which should be shown in front of an oak tree as in the arms. Below the shield the motto "virtute non vi" (by virtue, not by force) appears on a scroll. The usual motto of the Rothes was "Sola Salus Servire Deo" (The only salvation is to serve God).

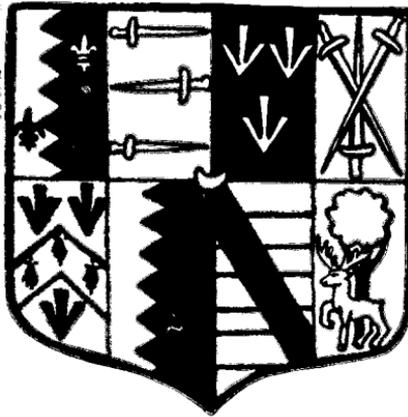
We cannot consider this shield without mentioning the arms of John Rothe FitzPiers at Rothe House. There the same arms occur twice; once on the street front and once near the well in the second courtyard. In the latter example, the four quarterings mentioned above are found impaling the arms of Archer for John's wife, Rose Archer. The Waring, Chamberlain and Archer quarterings represent marriages of earlier Rothes with heiresses of those families. In the Rothe House examples the Chamberlain chevron has not been omitted.

According to a pedigree at Rothe House, which purports to have been copied from the handwriting of J. G. A. Prim, Thomas Roth (sic.) of Ballyraglan (no dates given) married Ellen Purcell, sole heiress of her mother, Rose Warring (sic) daughter and heir to Adam Warring of Kilkenny. This would certainly have entitled the Purcells of Ellen's generation to quarter the Waring arms, but she could not pass them on to her Rothe descendants unless she was also heiress to her father, in which case the Purcell arms would have to be shown in the Rothe shield as well. The use of the Waring quartering seems irregular to me.

Kennedy's Books of Arms gives these same arms as those of Waring of Co. Down. It may be noted in passing that identical arms were borne by the English family of Carleton, and may be seen on their monument in St. Paul's Chapel, Westminster Abbey.

Thomas Roth's son, John Rothe of Ballyraglan, brought the Chamberlain quartering into the family by his marriage to Lettice, daughter and heir to John Chamberlain. I do not know when the Archer quartering was acquired.

This stone has many fossils, mainly brachiopods and corals. Its height is 80cm, and it is 59.5cm in width.



SLAB II : ARMS OF SHEE

The second slab bears the arms and Crest of Shee. The shield is quarterly of eight: (1) Per pale indented, two fleurs de lys, one in sinister chief the other in dexter base. This is an error of the carver. The correct arms are per bend indented azure and or two fleurs de lys counter-changed; (2) gules three swords barwise in pale, that in the centre pointing to the dexter proper; (3) Sable three pheons argent; (4) gules a sword in pale, the point in chief and surmounted by two others in saltire, the points in base, proper. All these quarterings refer to four brothers, respectively Odoneus, William, John and Edmond O'Shee who lived c.1381. Odoneus was the ancestor of the Shees of Kilkenny; (5) Argent a chevron ermine between three pheons sable — for Archer. These tinctures are given for this coat in Fox-Davies' "Armorial Families." Although the stone is worn, I feel there are three ermine spots on the chevron. Definitely it is not five mullets this time, so we are dealing with a different branch of the Archers from those in the first slab; (6) Per pale indented or and gules for Bermingham; (7) Argent three bars gules, overall a bend sable for Delahyde; (8) Rothe as in slab I, and again the mount is missing.

In the centre of the shield is a crescent, a cadency mark indicating either that the arms belong to a second son or to a descendant of a second son. In this instance I am tempted to take the simplest interpretation and say

that this slab commemorates a second son. Cadency marks were very much in vogue at the time, as we see on the slab in the monument room commemorating William, son of Caspar Shee, which bears a mullet charged with a mullet, to indicate the third son of a third son.

The crest, a swan rousant sable, stands on a wreath of the colours and above it is a scroll now illegible, but which may have borne the Shee motto "virtutis praemium honor" (honour is the reward of virtue). The helmet is ridiculously small — even worse than the Rothe example. Anyone small enough to get his head into it could not possibly lift the shield! The mantling is treated rather less well and less elaborately than in the previous slab. There is no motto under the shield.

The Shee arms were granted by Robert Cook, Clarenceux King of Arms on the 7th August, 1582. This information comes from a fragment of an early nineteenth century heraldic manuscript which the Rev. James Graves saw in use as the pattern for the upper leather of a shoe, in a Kilkenny shoemaker's shop. This fragment and the remaining pages were bought by Graves who had them bound into a book. The book was later acquired by Sir Arthur Vicars, Ulster King of Arms. It was eventually bought from a Belfast bookseller by Mrs. Margaret Phelan, who presented it to Kilkenny Archaeological Society. Returning to the subject of the Shee arms, it is very difficult to see how Clarenceux could grant arms to a Kilkenny family, as his jurisdiction was confined to England south of the Trent.

The Bermingham quartering came in when Robert Shee, grandson of Odoneus already mentioned, married the heiress, Ellen Bermingham. Their son, Richard, married Rose Archer. If this lady was an heiress it would account for the Archer quartering, but we then have the difficulty of explaining why the Archer quartering comes before that of Bermingham. Robert's father, Thadeus O'Shee, had married Magaret Britten, who was also an heiress. Thus it is strange that the Britten arms do not appear, and that the Archer quartering seems out of place. Clearly, there is room for further research here.

The first Shee in Kilkenny was Robert (d.1500), son of the above Richard. He married Catherine Sherlock and had a son, Richard who married Joan, heiress of Elias Archer and Marion Delahyde. If the Archer quartering is intended to refer to this marriage, then the quarterings should be in the sequence: 1, 2, 3, 4 Shee; 5 Bermingham; 6 Archer; 7 Delahyde; 8 Rothe. Yet the marshalling on the

slab is the form which consistently occurs on the numerous renderings of this coat of arms in Kilkenny.

It remains for me to suggest a reason for the Rothe quartering. The last-named Richard was father of Robert Shee, twice Mayor of Kilkenny. This Robert married Margaret Rothe, and they were the parents of Sir Richard Shee, founder of the Shee Alms House. There is a coat of arms near Sir Richard's tomb, which differs from the one under discussion only in that the Delahyde bend slopes the wrong way (yet another carver's error) and the Odoneus O'Shee quartering is repeated instead of Rothe in the eighth quarter. We may surmise that something like the following happened: Margaret Rothe may not have been an heraldic heiress during Sir Richard's lifetime, but her second son may have survived till all her brothers had died without male issue. The Rothe quartering would then pass to the Shees. This would explain the appearance of the Rothe arms here, and not on Sir Richard's coat, either near his tomb or on what is definitely his own shield on the Shee Alms House.

I am fully aware that all this is conjecture, but as it would fit the observed facts, I offer it in the hope that some reader will be prompted to investigate the genealogical background more fully.

The dimensions of this slab are 95.5cm in height and 68.5cm in width. The quality of the carving is not very fine, as the stone is full of small crinoid fossils which make minute details impossible to carve.

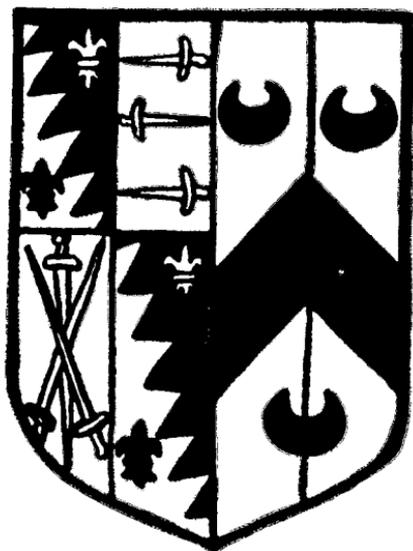
SLAB III: ARMS OF SHEE IMPALING PEMBROOKE

Here we have the arms of a married couple. The Shee arms occupy the dexter side indicating the marriage of a male Shee to a Pembroke lady.

The Shee coat is quarterly; (1) and (4) per bend indented azure and or two fleurs de lys counterchanged, for Odoneus O'Shee; (2) gules three swords barwise in pale proper for William O'Shee, but here they point the opposite way to those on slab II; (3) gules three swords, one in pale and two in saltire proper for Edmond O'Shee, and again they point the opposite way to those in the second slab.

The Pembroke arms as given in Burke's General Armory are per pale argent and or a chevron between three crescents gules. The per pale division line has not been shown on the slab.

The helmet and mantling are superior in execution to the miserable efforts on the second slab, and again the



ARMS OF SHEE IMPALING PEMBROOKE

swan crest is shown. The swan extends up into the frame. The initials PS and MP appear beside the arms, and the more usual Shee motto, "vincit veritas" (truth conquers) appears on a scroll beneath the shield.

Another feature of the design here is that the shield has a convex surface.

Height of slab 91.7cm; width 74cm.

SLAB IV : ARMS OF CUSACK IMPALING SHEE

This slab on the other side of the arched doorway was mistakenly identified by Carrigan as the arms of Crispe impaling Shee. The arms on the dexter side are those of Cusack — per pale or and azure a fess counterchanged. They could hardly be confused with the arms of Crispe — ermine a fess chequy argent and sable. The latter coat is impaled on the shield of William, son of Caspar Shee, already referred to, as his wife was Mary Crispe. The Shee arms on the present slab are exactly like those on No. III.

As the husband was a Cusack this time, the crest is the black mermaid of that family. She holds a mirror in her right hand, and a comb in her left. The comb is not clearly seen in the carving. As is usual in heraldry, the mermaid is left-handed. It is interesting to note that one exception to this is the right-handed mermaid crest of

Lord Byron. The Cusack mermaid's hair, and the mirror and comb, would be gold in a coloured representation.

A rather ungainly feature is the crest-wreath, which is too big. The motto, "meliora spero" (I hope for better things) is underneath the arms, and the initials IC and MS appear under the base of the shield. Again the shield has a convex surface.

The height of this slab is 85cm and the width 68.5cm.

SLAB V: ARMS OF ARCHER IMPALING DENN

This is the only slab in the series which shows the shield alone, without the other accessories. The shield is richly garnished around the edge. The dexter side shows the chevron and pheons of the Archers. The chevron is charged with five mullets. The probable tinctures are red for the chevron and black for the pheons on a silver ground, while the mullets may be gold as on Richard Rothe's monument in the monument room — the tinctures I have suggested above for the Archer quartering on the Rothe slab (I).

There is another carver's error here. One pheon is in chief and two in base, instead of the other way round.

The sinister side shows three lions rampant, which Canon Carrigan identifies as the arms of Denn. The General Armory gives the arms of Denn of Drenan, Co. Kilkenny as argent three lions rampant, two and one sable. This may be an example of canting, or punning arms, the shield representing a den of lions. Such an origin for these arms seems far more likely to me than the story that they were granted by a French king to a Denn ancestor, himself a scion of the French royal house, who had fallen into a pit of lions while hunting.

Dimensions: height 105.5cm. width 72.5cm.

SLAB VI: ARMS OF KELLY IMPALING GRACE

The dexter side shows the beautiful arms of Kelly (or O'Kelly); azure a tower triple turreted between two lions rampant combattant argent, as many chains descending from the battlements between their legs or. On the sinister side a lion rampant has been incised but not carved in relief. This is probably the lion rampant per fess argent and or on a red ground of the Grace family.

The helm, wreath and mantling are rather cramped, which has led to the very distinctive O'Kelly crest being rendered quite small here. This is an enfield statant vert. The enfield must surely be the most elaborately hybridised of all the mythical beasts in heraldry, with the head of a

fox, chest of a greyhound, talons of an eagle, body and hind legs of a lion, all rounded off with a very elaborate wolf's tail! Unfortunately the carving does not show all this in detail.



ENFIELD : CREST OF O'KELLY

Along the bottom of the slab in incised Roman lettering which may have been added later is the motto "turrus (sic) fortis mihi Deus" (To me God is a brave tower — i.e. God is my refuge).

This slab is 72cm high and 59.5cm wide.

Just above the sixth stone is the upper half of another armorial slab. It is unfinished. The part of the shield which can be seen is blank, and there is an uncarved area awaiting the addition of the crest. The helm and mantling, being standard equipment, have been carved. We can imagine a stonemason's workshop in seventeenth century Kilkenny with the blank shields, complete with helm, wreath and mantling awaiting the order of some well-to-do armigerous customer. The abundance of armorial slabs in Kilkenny points to a brisk trade in heraldic memorials at that period.

On the evidence of the wide variation in type and abundance of fossils in the stones, we may conclude that the materials were not all of the same provenance. This could be taken to indicate the survival of the workshops for a considerable period.

I should like to record here my grateful thanks to our society's president, Mrs. Kenealy for valuable information on the Shees, and to Mrs. Phelan for much help and encouragement in compiling these notes.