



Provided by the author(s) and University of Galway in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite the published version when available.

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Title | Memorialising Gaelic Ireland: the curious case of the Ballyshannon fragments and the Irish monuments at San Pietro in Montorio, Rome |
| Author(s) | FitzPatrick, Elizabeth |
| Publication Date | 2010 |
| Publication Information | FitzPatrick, Elizabeth (2010). Memorialising Gaelic Ireland: the curious case of the Ballyshannon fragments and the Irish monuments at San Pietro in Montorio, Rome. In D. Finnegan, M.C. Harrigan, & E Ó Ciardha (Eds.), <i>Imeacht na n-Iarlaí Derry</i> : Guildhall Press. |
| Publisher | Guildhall Press |
| Link to publisher's version | http://ghpress.com/ |
| Item record | http://hdl.handle.net/10379/15182 |

Downloaded 2024-05-15T01:46:29Z

Some rights reserved. For more information, please see the item record link above.



Memorialising Gaelic Ireland: The curious case of the Ballyshannon fragments and the Irish monuments at San Pietro in Montorio, Rome

Elizabeth FitzPatrick

The burial place of the exiled Irish at San Pietro in Montorio, Rome (Pl. 1), is perhaps the most iconic Irish diaspora funerary site in Europe, not least because the community interred there (1608–23) are found in the company of Bramante's *Tempietto* (1502) and Bernini's chapel to the Raymondi family (1640) with his Ecstasy of St Francis Baratta on the reredos. For all that, the Irish past at the site has received remarkably little scholarly attention since the last record made of the memorials at San Pietro in Montorio by Gasparo Alveri in 1664.¹ The historiography of the Irish burials is slight, commencing with Tadhg Ó Cianáin's chronicle reference to the funerary rites of Rory O'Donnell in 1608,² continuing with a seventeenth-century registry of the parish church of San Pietro in Montorio which records some of the Irish burials up to 1613,³ with the most detailed and accurate record of the inscriptions on the memorials in the church floor made by Alveri during his great project to record the modern inscriptions from the churches of Rome in the 1660s. It was the nineteenth century before any further attention was directed to the seventeenth-century exiles buried on Gianicolo.

One of the more significant if not always accurate, and sometimes elusive, commentators on the afterlife of the Irish burials in the nineteenth century was C. P. Meehan who was born in 1812 in the diocese of Dublin, attended the Irish College in Rome 1828–35 and was installed in the parish of St Michael's and St John's, Dublin in 1835.⁴ As a seminarian in Rome he developed an interest in the memorials of the Irish earls at San Pietro in Montorio and he included his observations on them in three editions of *The fate and fortunes of Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone and Rory O'Donel, Earl of Tyrconnel*, published in 1868, 1870 and 1886. With Meehan, the Irish Catholic clerical ownership of the history of 'the flight' and San Pietro in Montorio was established, and subsequently pursued by Patrick Francis Moran, vice-rector of the Irish College in Rome (1856-66),⁵ and in publications such as that of John Healy, archbishop of Tuam, on 'Some Irish graves in Rome' (1908).⁶ This tradition continued with Tomás Ó Fiaich,⁷ whose investigations with Fearghus Ó Fearghail into the memorial inscription to Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, has been recently documented.⁸ The Rome episode of 'the flight' and the use of San Pietro in Montorio as the parish church of the exiled Irish community is, of course, not simply a Catholic Irish or Ulster story but a

¹ G. Alveri, *Della Roma in ogni stato* (2 vols, Rome, 1664), ii, 313–4.

² *The flight of the earls by Tadhg Ó Cianáin*, ed. P. Walsh (Record Society St Patrick's College Maynooth, Dublin, 1916), 241.

³ L. Cipriani, *Memorie storiche del convento di S. Pietro in Montorio* (Rome, 1986), 151, 152.

⁴ PICR Archives. The entry for Patricius Meehan in the registry of seminarians, Irish College, Rome, notes 'Presbyter 8th Feb 1835 and Discessus 26th Feb 1835.

⁵ P. F. Moran, *History of the Catholic Archbishops of Dublin since the Reformation* (Dublin, 1864), 466.

⁶ J. Healy, *Irish essays: literary and historical* (Dublin, 1908), 36–51.

⁷ P. de Barra and Tomás Ó Fiaich (eds), *Imeacht na nIarlaí* (Dublin, 1972).

⁸ F. Ó Fearghail, 'The tomb of Hugh O'Neill in San Pietro in Montorio in Rome' in *Seanchas Armhacha*, xxi–xxii (2007-8), pp.69–85.

political event that has much broader European significance, aspects of which have been portrayed, for instance, by Micheline Kearney-Walsh,⁹ and more recently by Clare Carroll.¹⁰ San Pietro in Montorio became part of the exilic cultural landscape of Gaelic Ireland, and its interpretation in that context makes it less exotic and better understood in both its contemporary seventeenth-century world and in the nineteenth-century awakening of interest in that past.¹¹

The Irish Memorials at San Pietro in Montorio

A visitor to San Pietro in Montorio today will find two large marble slabs and a commemorative stone in the floor of the nave next to Cappella San Giovanni Battista (Pl. 2). The small commemorative plaque, often mistaken for O'Neill's original memorial stone, marks the approximate position of Hugh O'Neill's burial place (d. 1616) and was commissioned by Tomás Ó Fiaich in 1989 following research into O'Neill's memorial inscription by Fearghus Ó Fearghail.¹² The original memorial to O'Neill, with its simple Latin inscription, '*DOM HUGONIS PRINCIPIS ONELLI OSSA*' (To God the Best and Greatest, the bones of Prince Hugh O'Neill), as recorded by Alveri, has been missing since at least the mid-nineteenth century. It has been suggested that because C. P. Meehan, who made frequent visits to San Pietro in Montorio between 1828 and 1835, does not refer to seeing O'Neill's memorial in the church in that period, and because in an appendix to his first edition of *The fate and fortunes* (1868) he suggests that 'there can be no doubt that the flag-stone has either been reversed or removed in repairing the floor of the church'¹³ – O'Neill's memorial had disappeared before the damage inflicted on the church during the Risorgimento of 1849, perhaps as early as the French occupation of Rome (1798–1809).¹⁴ But Meehan did not publish the first edition of *The fate and fortunes* until 1868 and therefore he could well have been referring to the fate of the memorial after San Pietro in Montorio was damaged by the French and Garibaldi's forces during their battle on Gianicolo that continued throughout the entire month of June 1849. Meehan also provided a reading of O'Neill's epitaph as 'D.O.M. HIC. QUIESCUNT. UGONIS. PRINCIPIS. O'NEILL. OSSA' which is a version not found in Alveri or in any other source, and therefore it could be concluded that it was his attempted reading of a worn inscription before the renewal of the inscriptions on the Irish memorials by Restaldi in 1844 (see below).¹⁵ The principal damage to the church in 1849 was to the apse, belfry, roof and floor.¹⁶ With the Irish memorials and

⁹ M. Kearney-Walsh, *'Destruction by peace': Hugh O'Neill after Kinsale* (Armagh, 1986).

¹⁰ C. Carroll, 'Turas na nIarlach as Éire: international travel and national identity in Ó Cianán's narrative' in *History Ireland*, xv (2007), pp. 56–61.

¹¹ E. FitzPatrick, *San Pietro in Montorio and the exiled Irish in Rome, 1608–23* (forthcoming).

¹² Ó Fearghail, 'The tomb of Hugh O'Neill'.

¹³ C. P. Meehan, *The fate and fortunes of Hugh O'Neill, earl of Tyrone and Rory O'Donel, earl of Tyrconnel: their flight from Ireland, and their exile* (1st ed., Dublin, 1868), 477.

¹⁴ Ó Fearghail, 'The tomb of Hugh O'Neill', pp. 76–7.

¹⁵ Meehan, *The fate and fortunes* (1st ed., Dublin 1868), 446.

¹⁶ P. L. Vannicelli, *S. Pietro in Montorio e il tempietto del Bramante* (Rome, 1971), 44; L. Cipriani, *Studio storico-giuridico di Luigi Cipriani: S. Pietro in Montorio & il tempietto del Bramante* (Rome, n.d.), 107.

burial vault situated just two meters from the apse it is to be expected that they were disturbed too at that time. The post-Risorgimento restoration work to the church in 1851 apparently involved repaving the church floor with marble slabs,¹⁷ at which time broken memorials would have been discarded or cut up for re-use as paving, as appears to have been the case with the inscribed slab to Eugene Matthews, Archbishop of Dublin (d. 1623).

The extant Irish memorials commemorate Hugh O'Neill's son, Hugh, Baron of Dungannon (d.1609) and the other marks the resting place of both Rory O'Donnell, Earl of Tyrconnell (d.1608) and his brother Cathbharr (1609). The slabs lie side by side and share an ornate border. Nearly identical in size at c. 2.70m by 0.95m, it is probable that they were contrived as a set piece. The design of the slabs fits comfortably into the canon of Italian memorials of the period, especially in terms of the use of coloured marble inlay for family arms, crests, *memento mori* and border ornament. It is their inscriptions, however, that establish them as more than just memorials of the dead, and it is because of the inscriptions that such large rectangular slabs of marble were required. The O'Donnell memorial consists of a main slab carrying an inscription and distinguishing arms, two side borders decorated with rhombus, circle, half-circle and cruciform inlays, and top and bottom border strips inlaid with bright yellow *memento mori*. A thirty-seven line Latin inscription in bold Roman script extols the Earl of Tyrconnell and his brother Cathbharr as defenders of the Catholic faith, and openly associates them, the Earl of Tyrone and their cause with Philip III of Spain and Pope Paul V. It also refers to Red Hugh O'Donnell, Rory and Cathbharr's eldest brother, who died at the castle of Simancas in September 1602 and was buried in the Franciscan church at Valladolid in north-west Spain. Below the inscription there is a jewelled coronet and the arms of O'Donnell – a shield held aloft by a lion and bull rampant, and within it a sleeved right arm, bent at the elbow, the clenched hand holding upright the cross of Columcille. The style, detailing and execution of the memorial to Hugh, Baron of Dungannon, closely resemble that of Rory O'Donnell. It carries a twenty-three line Latin inscription, a jewelled coronet and the arms of the Baron of Dungannon: a scrolled shield or cartouche decorated with two lions rampant holding aloft the Red Hand of Ulster. A body of water, represented by blue-grey marble inlay at the base of shield, is incised with the ichthus or Christian fish symbol.

The nineteenth-century restoration of the Irish memorials

In 1843 James Molyneux Caulfeild (1820-92), 3rd Earl of Charlemont, Lord Lieutenant of Co. Tyrone and later, MP for Armagh (1847-57), travelled to Rome to inspect the condition of the Irish memorials at San Pietro in Montorio. Finding the 'inscriptions much defaced, and the precious marbles and inlayings broken and removed', he 'procured copies of the originals from the archives of the convent' and subsequently raised a subscription among

¹⁷ Vannicelli, *S. Pietro in Montorio*, 45.

the Irish in Rome to pay for the restoration of the memorials.¹⁸ The wear and tear to the Irish memorials may have been in part inflicted by damage to the fabric of San Pietro in Montorio in 1798 and again in 1809 during the French occupation of Rome (1798–1814)¹⁹ but it should also be noted that the tread of feet on inscribed marble slabs over two centuries would have considerably reduced the quality of the inscriptions and inlays irrespective of one or two episodes of specific damage.

Caulfeild's direct involvement in that project was regarded in some quarters as novel for a member of the Protestant aristocracy and was commented upon in the 20 December 1845 issue of *The Nation* – 'It is still more delightful to find that one of the Protestant aristocracy of the country, in whose veins runs the princely blood of O'Donel [*sic.*], feels pride in so noble an ancestry, and cares to preserve the memory of our illustrious dead'. The newspaper was referring to the fact that the earl's mother – Elizabeth Browne (d. 1878) the second daughter of Dodwell Browne, of Rahins Co. Mayo – was a lineal descendant of the O'Donnell Earl of Tyrconnell through her mother's line.²⁰ The reporter in *The Nation* apologised for having previously attributed the costs of the restoration of the epitaphs on the Irish memorials, 'which had become nearly illegible', to the 'patriotic exertions of Mr Dominick O'Reilly', and duly credited James Molyneux Caulfeild with having defrayed more than half the cost. Dominick O'Reilly was one of the subscribers to the restoration work at San Pietro in Montorio. He was a patron of monumental sculpture, subscribing to Hogan's 1839 marble sculpture at Carlow cathedral of James Warren Doyle, Catholic bishop of Kildare and Leighlin (1786-1834) and champion of Catholic Emancipation. In 1843 O'Reilly commissioned his own marble bust from Hogan. He also travelled on the Continent in 1844 (the year that the Irish memorials at San Pietro in Montorio were restored) and a letter, dated November 24, from him to the Rector of the Irish College in Rome, describes his journey through the Alps that year.²¹

Caulfeild commissioned the Irish neoclassical sculptor, John Hogan, who was based in Rome (1824–49), to undertake the work on the Irish memorials.²² It was executed during Hogan's fourth period in Rome (1843-44) when his main project was the O'Connell colossal marble figure for City Hall, Dublin.²³ With his full attention on O'Connell, he delegated the project at San Pietro in Montorio to his assistant, Restaldi, whom he describes as *scalpellino* (stone-cutter) in his 'account book'.²⁴ Restaldi travelled between Ireland and Rome with Hogan – in

¹⁸ *The Nation*, 20 Dec. 1845, p. 152.

¹⁹ Vannicelli, *S. Pietro in Montorio*, 50.

²⁰ *Burke's peerage and baronetage* (London, 1980), 525, 1484.

²¹ PICR Archives KIR/ 1844/319.

²² J. Turpin, *John Hogan: Irish neoclassical sculptor in Rome 1800–1858* (Dublin, 1982).

²³ Turpin, *John Hogan*, 87-8, 144-5.

²⁴ John Hogan's account book, entries for 26 Nov 1842 and 21 Jan 1843 (N.L. I., MS 4179).

1841 for instance he was 'roughing out' William Beamish's marble bust.²⁵ When Hogan returned to Ireland for good in August 1849 Restaldi remained with him and he is again documented in Hogan's 'account book' where he is described in 1852 and 1853 as 'roughing out' new works in Hogan's Dublin studio.

Precise details of the work that Restaldi conducted on the Irish memorials are not given in Hogan's 'account book' but the posthumous report in *The Nation*, 20 Dec, 1845 implies that his principal task was to renew the inscriptions and to repair the inlays. According to the same report Caulfeild had sought out documentation on the epitaphs at San Pietro in Montorio in order to aid Restaldi, which suggests that the inscriptions must have been partly illegible. It is perhaps the case that the memorials after their considerable restoration in 1844 had more the appearance of the nineteenth-century neo-classical style than the work of the early seventeenth-century funerary sculptor who had produced the originals. A close examination of the inscriptions reveals nuances in re-cutting and in the hand. Restaldi spent approximately three months on the project. In his 'account book' Hogan notes an initial payment of ten *scudi* on April 20, 1844 for the work, eight interim payments and a final payment on June 22 of that year. In total, Hogan paid Restaldi seventy *scudi* and he praised Restaldi 'for said work which he executed with honor and credit to himself meeting the approbation of all who have seen and examined the Monuments of O'Neill and O'Donnell in San Pietro in Montorio'.²⁶ Significantly, neither he nor *The Nation* reporting on Caulfeild's involvement, mention that the earl of Tyrone's memorial was missing – it is likely that it was there and that its inscription was renewed by Restaldi.

The Ballyshannon fragments

That the nineteenth-century Catholic interest in the 'earls' bordered on the hagiographical is borne out by Meehan's involvement with the Irish memorials at San Pietro in Montorio which led to an interesting event at St Catherine's Convent, Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal during the 1880s. In a footnote to his second edition of *The fate and fortunes* (1870) Meehan remarked that discarded marble fragments from the Irish memorials at San Pietro in Montorio were 'in the possession of the Hon Mrs Caulfeild, Lord Charlemont's mother'.²⁷ He later added in a footnote to his third edition (1886) – 'that lamented and venerable lady directed the writer of this work to send the precious fragments to the nuns of Ballyshannon, and have them inserted in the altar of the convent recently erected in that town'.²⁸ The convent concerned was St Catherine's of the Mercy Order, the construction of which began in 1877 a year before Mrs Caulfeild's death. It was officially opened in 1884. Nine letters and a small

²⁵ Turpin, *John Hogan*, 153.

²⁶ John Hogan's account book, entry for April 20, 1844 (N.L.I. MS 4179).

²⁷ Meehan, *The Fate and Fortunes* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1870), 511; Meehan makes no reference to the existence of the fragments in the first edition of *The Fate and Fortunes* published in 1868.

²⁸ Meehan, *The Fate and Fortunes* (3rd ed., Dublin, 1886), 340.

fragment of marble among the Ballyshannon papers in the Provincial Archives of the Sisters of Mercy at Bessbrook, Co. Armagh uncover the somewhat curious background to the realisation of Mrs Caulfeild's alleged wish. The correspondence is between five parties – Miss Shiel who was the Mother Superior of Ballyshannon Convent of Mercy; C. P. Meehan, parish priest in the Dublin parish of St Michael and St John; Daniel McGettigan, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland; M.L. Stronge, the sister of James Molyneux Caulfeild, 3rd Earl of Charlemont; and Sydney Sheil, sister of the Mother Superior. Their correspondence, which is sometimes tetchy, spans the period 25 April to 6 December 1880 and concerns the whereabouts of marble fragments from the Irish memorials in Rome and plans to have them incorporated into the new altar that was then being planned for the convent at Ballyshannon.

In Meehan's opening letter to Miss Shiel he suggested that 'some one ought to write to Lord Charlemont for the marble fragments which he brought from Rome'. He continued – 'His mother told me that she had them ... and that they should be inserted in the altar of the convent of Ballyshannon, and Lord Charlemont should be told this. He will not, I presume, refuse to see his mother's request realised'.²⁹ A month later, Meehan wrote again to Miss Shiel suggesting that the Primate might have the fragments, and failing that he urged her again to contact Lord Charlemont. He also vowed to 'take care of the fragments and see them properly inserted in the altar'.³⁰ That particular letter also reveals that Meehan advised on the design of the altar for the new convent. He suggested that the antependium or altar frontal should carry a motif executed on the entrance to the choir of the Irish Dominican church of San Clemente in Rome. Drawings of the proposed later extension and new chapel at St Catherine's in 1929 show the altar of 1880 in situ with a Latin cross on the antependium (Pl. 3).³¹

The third letter in the sequence, dated 4 August 1880, is from the Primate to Miss Shiel. He explained that Mrs Caulfeild had in fact twice promised that she would send the tomb fragments to him but never did and that she had since died leaving the family residence, Hockley Hall in Armagh, to her daughter, Mrs Stronge. The Primate was sure that Mrs Caulfeild's daughter would 'carry out her mother's intentions'.³² The next two letters, dated 6 and 8 August 1880 are from Mrs Stronge to Miss Shiel and they are quite strained in tone. Mrs Stronge wrote – 'I remember that the tomb of the Earls was repaired under the direction of my brother Lord Charlemont when he was at Rome by my mother's desire'.³³ She 'pleaded that there were no marble fragments at Hockley Hall and

²⁹ Letter from C. P. Meehan to Miss Shiel, 25 April, 1880 (Provincial Archives, Bessbrook, MS BN. L. 1A.)

³⁰ Letter from C. P. Meehan to Miss Shiel, 16 May, 1880 (Provincial Archives, Bessbrook, MS BN. L. 1B.)

³¹ Convent of Mercy Ballyshannon: proposed extension and new chapel, W.H. Byrne and Son Architects, Dublin (Provincial Archives, Bessbrook, MS BN 192 [2])

³² Letter from Daniel McGettigan to Miss Shiel, 4 Aug, 1880 (Provincial Archives, Bessbrook, MS BN. L. 2.)

³³ Letter from, Mrs Stronge to Miss Shiel, 6 Aug, 1880 (Provincial Archives, Bessbrook, MS BN. L.3)

furthermore that her brother Lord Charlemont had ‘never sent any marbles to Ireland’ and that ‘if any fragments were ever brought to this country, they never came into my mother’s possession. Believe me’.³⁴

On 12 August 1880, Meehan wrote to Miss Shiel to tell her that the new altar for the convent was packed and ready to go to Ballyshannon. He regretted that ‘the valuable reliques must be lost, as Lord Charlemont seems to know nothing about them’.³⁵ It is difficult to clearly ascertain Charlemont’s position in this matter, but he may have considered the project irksome, especially since 36 years had elapsed since his involvement in the restoration of the Irish memorials at San Pietro in Montorio. It is clear that both he and his sister were unaware of their mother’s intentions in respect of the ‘relics’ from the Irish memorials. In the meantime, Miss Shiel’s sister, Sydney Shiel, had been doing some research on the Rome fragments. Writing sometime in the autumn of 1880, she mentioned that she had sent ‘all the documents I have about the relics from Rome’. She adds an important detail to this cat and mouse tale – information that Lord Charlemont’s brother, Henry Caulfeild may, before his untimely death in 1867, have delivered the fragments to Meehan.³⁶

By November of 1880 the marble fragments had materialised. Writing to the Primate on the 20th of that month, Meehan briefly informed McGettigan that ‘The marble fragments from the Tombs of the Earls, which the late Hon Mrs Caulfeild destined for the altar of Ballyshannon Convent, have been for some time in my possession’.³⁷ Meehan gives no explanation as to how he had acquired the fragments or who had been keeping them. It may be the case that they were recovered among the possessions of the earl’s brother Henry. However, it may also be of some interest that Meehan was on the continent in September 1880 – perhaps the fragments had never been returned to Ireland in 1844, as Lord Charlemont maintained, and Meehan had acquired them in Rome in September 1880? The Primate subsequently wrote to Miss Shiel in early December suggesting that she ‘may know some friend going to Dublin, who will call on father Meehan and bring the Relics to Ballyshannon’.³⁸ The correspondence about the tomb fragments ends there.

A piece of marble inlay with an accompanying note in the Provincial Archives at Bessbrook confirm that the ‘relics’ from the restoration work on the Irish memorials at San Pietro in Montorio were incorporated into the altar of St Catherine’s convent sometime before the convent officially opened in 1884. In 1929 during renovations to the convent, the 1880 altar was replaced with the exception of the reredos which was incorporated into the 1929

³⁴ Letter from Mrs Stronge to Miss Shiel, 10 Aug, 1880 (Provincial Archives, Bessbrook, MS BN. L.4)

³⁵ Letter from C. P. Meehan to Miss Shiel, 12 Aug, 1880 (Provincial Archives, Bessbrook, MS BN. L.5)

³⁶ Letter from Sydney Sheil to Miss Shiel, Autumn 1880 (Provincial Archives, Bessbrook, MS BN. L.6)

³⁷ Letter from C. P. Meehan to Daniel McGettigan 20 Nov, 1880 (Provincial Archives, Bessbrook, MS BN. L.7)

³⁸ Letter from Daniel McGettigan to Miss Shiel, 6 Dec, 1880 (Provincial Archives, Bessbrook, MS BN. L.8)

altar.³⁹ One of the marble fragments from Rome was also transferred to the new altar at that time while a second fragment was placed in St Catherine's archive. That piece of marble inlay, now housed in the Provincial Archives, is in fact a small corner piece (7cm x 4cm) of a rhombus inlay from the border of the tomb of Rory O'Donnell at San Pietro in Montorio (see Pl. 4a). It exactly matches the colour of the marble in the O'Donnell border and if one looks closely at the rhombus inlay (Pl. 4b) the approximate former position of the broken fragment can be seen where it was replaced by a slightly larger piece of marble.

Conclusion

The seventeenth-century Irish memorials at San Pietro in Montorio enjoyed a renaissance in the nineteenth-century principally because of Elizabeth Caulfeild's concern to maintain her O'Donnell family interests. The restoration of the memorials in 1844, which she directed her son, James Molyneux Caulfeild, 3rd Earl of Charlemont, to initiate at Rome, took place at the height of O'Connell's Repeal Association. The commission to restore the memorials was given to John Hogan at the time when the Repeal Association, which 'had taken its proper place as the patron of nationality in art',⁴⁰ had also commissioned him to carve a colossal statue of O'Connell for City Hall. Hogan became a participant in nationalist politics through the creation of monumental sculpture of Catholic subjects. At O'Connell's monster meeting on the hill of Mullaghmast in 1843, as the apogee of his involvement in nationalism he placed the green velvet 'Repeal Cap' on O'Connell's head.⁴¹ The restoration of the seventeenth-century Irish memorials at Rome became part of that nationalist landscape. They were the subject of report in national newspapers – such as *The Nation* – in 1844 and 1845, and the subscription list for the work on the monuments included names, such as Dominick O'Reilly, who were also subscribers to other sculpture commissions of nationalist Catholic persuasion.

It was again Elizabeth Caulfeild's reputed concern to have broken fragments from the Irish memorials and more specifically from the O'Donnell monument (1608-9) at San Pietro in Montorio incorporated into the altar of St Catherine's convent at Ballyshannon that brought the Irish monuments back into focus in the 1880s. Although McGettigan and Meehan both referred to the Rome fragments as 'relics' it is unclear whether they were regarded as semi-religious or simply as objects of patriotic value because they were associated with O'Donnell. The ambiguity on Meehan's part about the location of the fragments, and Lord Charlemont's denial that they had ever existed, suggests that the Ballyshannon project was problematic.

³⁹ Convent of Mercy Ballyshannon: proposed extension and new chapel, and plan of new altar, 1929 W.H. Byrne and Son Architects, Dublin (Provincial Archives, Bessbrook, MS BN 192 [2] and [3]); When St Catherine's convent closed, the 1929 altar was transferred to the parish church in Ballyshannon.

⁴⁰ Turpin, *John Hogan*, 81.

⁴¹ Turpin, *John Hogan*, 82.

Bn. L.1A

St. Michael & St. John April 25

Dear Miss Shiel [Sheil]

Accept my grateful acknowledgement of your said note. I never forget an evening I spent in the bridge of Ballyshannon close beside the site of the Castle of the O'Donnells. I knew no one in the town and amused myself looking at the dolmen and the ruins of the Cistercian monastery. If I can I will visit the historic town about which so much has been written since first I saw it. Rest assured that I will not fail to call on you.

Permit me to suggest that some one ought to write to Lord Charlemont for the marble fragments which he brought from Rome. His mother told me that she had them and continued that they should be inserted in the altar of the convent of Ballyshannon and Lord Charlemont should be told this. He will not, I presume, refuse to see his mother's request realised.

Now as to the altar, you may commend me in any way you like. I will not leave Dublin for the continent 'till early in September. As I live so near to Mrs. O'Callaghan I can see her frequently and keep you au connait about the progress of the work. With best regards to Mrs. Barrett I remain gratefully yours

C.P. Meehan.

Miss Shiel [Sheil]
Ballyshannon

BN. L 1B

St. Michael and St. John, Dublin
May 16 1880

Dear Miss Shiel [Sheil],

I delayed writing till Mrs Callaghan sent me the design for the altar. 'Tis very good, but I object to the monogram on the _____ simply because the letters are hardly ever well executed. If I dare make a suggestion I'd have you substitute for the M., (designed, I presume by some of Mr 'Callaghan's people) the carved ornament which graces the entrance to the choir of the church of St Clement in Rome. I now have a title for that. St Clement's is one of the most ancient churches in Christendom. I would willingly send a copy of the ornament to Mrs O'C who would have it copied relevant to you in approbation. Rest assured that I will look after the work, as I will not go abroad before September. Touching the marbles of the tombs of the Earls _____ it be well to write to the Primate who may have them. If such be not the case application should be made to Ld Charlemont who, I presume, may have received them from his amiable mother. Enlighten me on this subject about which I am very greatly interested. I write to his grace at once. I will take care of the fragments and see them properly inserted in the altar.

Many thanks for your kind invitation . I 'd like to see Ballyshannon and Donegal once more. If possible I will gratify that cherished desire some time before sus mea ____ .
I am totally at your command. With best respects to Mrs B.

Ever faithfully yours

C.P. Meehan.

Miss Sheil, Ballyshannon

Bn. L.2

Armagh
4 August 1880

My dear Miss Sheil,

I thank you very cordially for your most interesting letter. You are the only one that seems to understand me and pity me.

The Honble Mrs Caulfield, twice before her death, told me she had the fragments or relics of the tombs of the Irish princes in Rome, and promised to send them to me. They did not come however. Her daughter, Mrs Stronge has been left Hockley where the old Lady lived and died and it is probable the Relics are there still. I do not know Mrs Stronge, but there will be no difficulty in making known to her, the old Lady's wishes and she will be sure to carry out her mother's intentions.

I am not sure that the Stronges have yet taken possession of Hockley.

I fear I must forego the great pleasure of being with you on the 2 September. I am due in Maynooth on the first, when a concurus for a vacant Chair of Theology will be held and the meeting of the Bishops will come off immediately after.

I cannot tell you how delighted I am to learn that you are all so well, including Laputa and the ever dear Doctor.

I hope you will have some better news from Fr Spence.

Tell Miss Caroline I received her kind letter and did not fail to comply with her pious request.

I am going to Belfast on Saturday for the Dedication of a new church there on Sunday the 8th.

I expect to meet Dr Logue at the Dedication. Thank God, the poor people of Donegal got through the trying season without any of the horrors of 1847. This year, the prospect is good. Before winter sets in, I may have leisure to pay you a visit, and I need not say that I know the road and will travel it with a right good will and light step.

With most grateful respects to all and wishing you every happiness

I remain

My Dear Miss Sheil
Your faithful servant
+ Daniel McGettigan

Bn. L.3

Hockley, Armagh
6th August /80

Dear Madam,

There are no marble fragments here. I never heard that any were brought here. I remember that the tomb of the Earls was repaired under the direction of my brother Lord Charlemont when he was at Rome by my mother's desire. This was, I think, in 1846. I will write at once to Lord Charlemont to enquire whether he has any fragments such as you speak of. Believe me.

Yours very sincerely,
M. L. Stronge

Bn. L.4

Hockley
Armagh
10th August 1880

Dear Miss Sheil,

I have today heard from my brother Lord Charlemont. He says, "I never heard of any marbles being sent to my mother. It was I who got the Tombs restored and I never sent any marbles to Ireland". This is quite clear as regards what was done and not done by Ld Charlemont. And I feel satisfied that no such fragments were sent here by any one else. My mother and I were in almost daily correspondence and she would surely have told me if she had received them. The butler now here was many years with my mother and has no knowledge of any thing of the kind being here. There must be a mistake and if any fragments were ever brought to this country, they never came into my mother's possession. Believe me.

Yours very truly,

M. L. Stronge

Bn. L.5

August 12

Dear Miss Sheil: They are packing the altar; but the inscription is not yet cut.

As to the marble fragments Hon Mrs Caulfield told me exactly what she stated to His Grace, the Primate. I fear the valuable reliques [relics] must be lost, as Lord Charlemont seems to know nothing about them. You will, I hope, be pleased with the manner in which Mrs O'Callaghan has executed the work.

Ever gratefully yours,

C.P. Meehan

Bn. L.6

Dearest Revd Mother,

I send you all the Documents I have about the Relics from Rome – Mrs Barrett tells me she thinks it was Ld Charlemont's brother who brought them to Fr Meehan – he died to the great grief of his Mother but I could learn all this from Fr Meehan and will *D.G.* some day soon.

On the other side I give the names which you can get regulated as you wish – Give orders only new and well for them to have you to order – Gladly wd I have the study had _____ took all responsibility off me – you know enough of this to merit further comment.

I hope you are nothing the worse of all my gab yesterday and that improved weather may do you good service when we meet on Easter Sunday.

I am yours
Sydney

Friday

Bn. L.7

St Michael & St John, Dublin

Nov 20 . 80

My Reverend Lord Primate:

The marble fragments from the Tombs of the Earls, which the late Hon Mrs Caulfield destined for the altar of Ballyshannon Convent , have been for some time in my possession. I will send them to your Grace by some of your clergy who may happen to be in Dublin, if you find _____ and to direct one of them to call on me.

I have the honour to remain your Grace's obedt [obedient] servant –

C.P. Meehan

His Grace the Primate

Bn. L.8

Armagh

6 December 1880

My dear Miss Sheil,

Some time back I received the enclosed note from Fr Meehan regarding the fragments from the tombs of the Earls in Rome. You may know some friend going to Dublin who will call on Father Meehan and bring the Relics to Ballyshannon. I never saw them, nor have I any notion of their size. I wrote a few days ago to the Rev Gentleman stating I would communicate with you on the subject.

It is full time for me to express my profound gratitude to you and to all the family for the princely hospitality shown and so cordially given on the occasion of the Collection for the New Convent. The trip to Donegal was the most delightful I ever enjoyed. We had a lovely day for the journey thro' the Gap and arrived safe in Letterkenny in time for Dinner, which we did not need, after taking the sweet and plentiful Lunch we carried with us in the big Basket.

During that week I explored the parts of Donegal that Mr Childers left untouched; and on Saturday morning, left Rathmullan for Dublin to be present at the celebration of the 7th century of St. Laurence O'Toole, which was a splendid ceremony.

I am only settling down into my right senses after such a round of Dissipation, and that is the reason you are left so long without a line of grateful acknowledgement for your many Benefactions. Miss Caroline sent me a very kind and most welcome letter a few days ago, which I will not fail to answer.

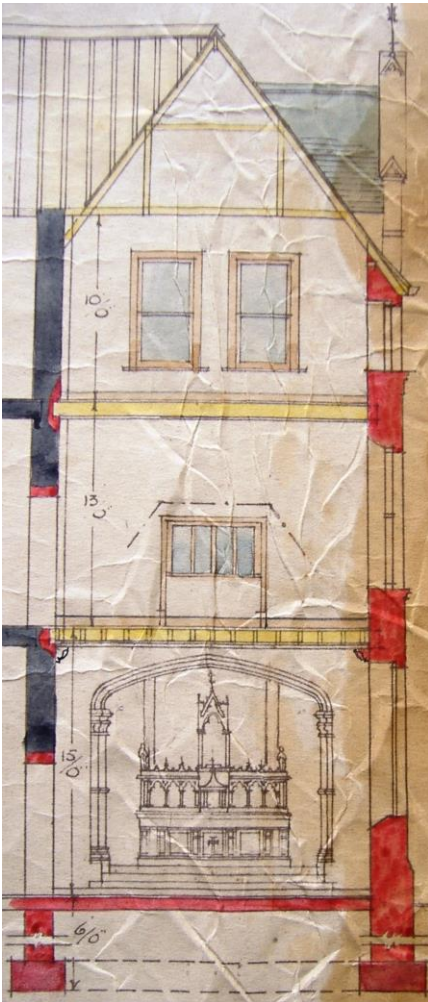
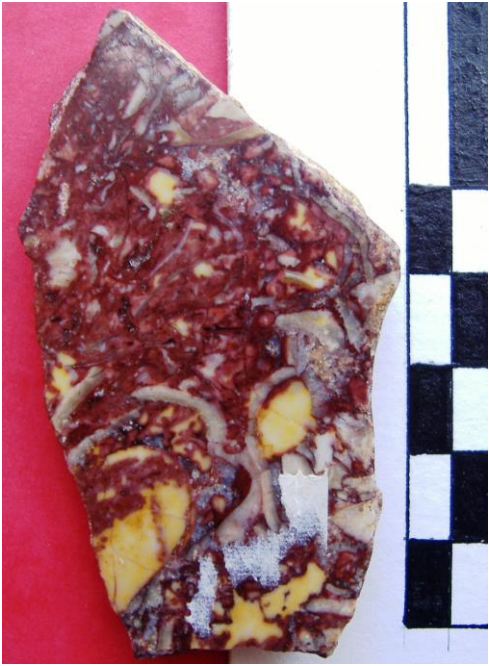
With most cordial respects to the ever kind and good Doctor and to Miss Sheil, and wishing you all every happiness and all the joys of the coming Xmas.

I remain

My Dear Miss Sheil

Your faithful & grateful servant

+ Daniel McGettigan







Acknowledgement

Thanks to Sr. Helena Doherty, Archivist of the Provincial Archives, Bessbrook, for her assistance.