

# STONE FINDS REPORT

By Paul Stevens

This report describes the two stone artefacts recovered from archaeological excavation and monitoring at Kilmanman Church and Graveyard, Clonaslee townland, Co. Laois (Licence No.: 19E0490). One item was identified as a quernstone fragment, interpreted as part of an upper decorated disk quern stone of probable early medieval date and origin, and representing domestic and/or agricultural activity. The second item was a fragment of architectural fabric, interpreted as a jamb of a stone window frame of late medieval/post-medieval origin, and representing building material.

## Discussion

### *Quernstone:*

The first of the two objects was recovered during excavation from a residual context and comprised a decorated upper rotary quernstone fragment. Although much of the millstone was absent, the central perforation, dressing on the reverse face and decoration of two circular motives on the obverse face, provides sufficient evidence for the original use and function of the object. This artefact was originally part of a set of two millstones, these were operated by hand and were common to the early medieval period. The external diameter of the rotary quern could not be established due to a lack of extant fabric, however contemporary examples nationally vary in diameter from 1m to 550mm. The diameter of the eye measured 85mm, which is below average when compared to other examples nationally, which range from 150 to 64mm (12.86mm Av.) (McErlean 2007, 192-4, Table 7.1).

In addition, two tiny fragments of residual mortar attached to the underside of the quernstone reveal important evidence that this stone was reused as building material in the church gable wall.

Finds of rotary quernstones on early ecclesiastical and church sites are not uncommon in Ireland. Two rotary quernstones were recovered from excavation of the ecclesiastical cemetery at Ballykilmore, Co. Westmeath (Channing 2012). This included a close parallel comprising of an upper rotary sandstone quernstone, decorated with curved lines and concentric circles, recovered from rubble collapse inside an early medieval church, dated between cal AD 711–942 to cal AD 1017–1206 (Find E2798:32; Channing 2012, 88, 92 & 105; Illus. 7.7).

### *Architectural Fabric:*

The second object is a damaged window jamb fragment that was incorporated into the gable wall, either as part of the original architectural fabric or as repair. The dating of the jamb fragment does not appear to be contemporary with the late medieval features extant, suggesting the latter. The window fragment may have been part of a separate building or brought in to the site with building rubble.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The two stone finds from the relatively limited scale of this keyhole excavation are exemplars of two different periods of origin. Both were used as building rubble and were recovered from masonry

collapse and are therefore residual in context, these may represent two separate phases of activity, from two separate periods, demonstrating the complex use-life cycle of this potentially early church site.

The quernstone fragment may have been used as part of domestic activity on an early medieval ecclesiastical settlement, either on the site or adjacent to the site, or alternatively be a residual find brought in with other reused stone. The architectural stone fragment is likely to represent part of the original building fabric on the site and may have been damaged during construction or demolition/remodelling.

### **Recommendation**

Both finds are archaeological objects and as such represent items of local importance in the historical narrative of the site. The finds are inert and stable, and therefore no additional conservation or stabilisation measured is recommended. Finds should be deposited with the statutory body – the National Museum of Ireland for permanent curation.

### **Catalogue:**

**Find: 4:1** (Illus. 1–2). Decorated upper rotary quernstone fragment.

Hand-carved, coarse-grained old red sandstone decorated upper quernstone fragment, originally part of a set of two hand-operated millstones, later reused as building material. The stone fragment is decorated on one face by two incomplete incised circular motives, indicating it was the upper stone rather than the lower or base stone, which are undecorated. The fragment is approx. 29-30% complete, which includes the in-tact upper and lower surfaces and part of the damaged central perforation (eye). The majority of the stone is missing, including the outside edge, therefore there is insufficient surviving evidence to calculate the external dimensions of the millstone. The upper face of the stone was flat and decorated with two recessed circular motives; one surrounding the eye and the other decorating the main body of the stone—and possibly one of a set of four. The central perforation, where-surviving, has a rounded profile and was originally circular in plan with an extrapolated internal diameter measuring 85mm—if complete. Part of the underside of the perforated was damaged. The object tapers in width, from 34.20mm (at the central perforation) to 41.38mm+ (at the surviving edge); a design feature which allows both centrifugal and gravitational forces to move the milled grain away from the centre towards the exterior. The underside or milling face was coarsely puckered but it also contained two small lumps of lime mortar, indicative of later reuse within a mortared limestone wall—as early medieval walls were not mortared this must have been during a later medieval phase.

Length: 133.96mm+; width: 128.19mm+; depth/thickness: 34.20–41.38mm.

This object was recovered from rubble (context: C04) from the collapse of an adjacent mortared limestone rubble wall, originally part of the late medieval church and located at the southern end of the eastern gable wall core.

The basic design and style, of a hand-operated with circular motives decoration, are consistent with a c. 5<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup>-century date range for this object (early medieval period). The object was later reused as a rubble fragment in the wall of the late medieval church.

**Find : 2:1** (Illus. 3). Window jamb fragment.

Hand-cut, fine-grained limestone, window jamb fragment, originally part of the side of a glazed window, interrupted by a recessed slot for window furniture (glass pane) and flanked by curving chamfered border detail. Fragment approx. 60% complete that includes the fully in-tact base, and partially surviving obverse face (facing into the window), internal and external borders; the top side is missing, part of the inner border is missing. The jamb face measured 89.50–91.44mm in width and contained an asymmetrical recessed slot (squared in profile) measuring 10.68mm in width and 10.50mm in depth. The face was flanked by chamfers, measuring 49mm in width; curving by a radius of 38mm. The back maybe split along a natural fracture during removal, whereas the upper portion removal scar is diagonal, which suggests the jamb was broken *in situ*, from an upright position. The architectural detail was hand-cut with large roughly regular puck-marks visible on all carved surfaces. No traces of mortar were extant.

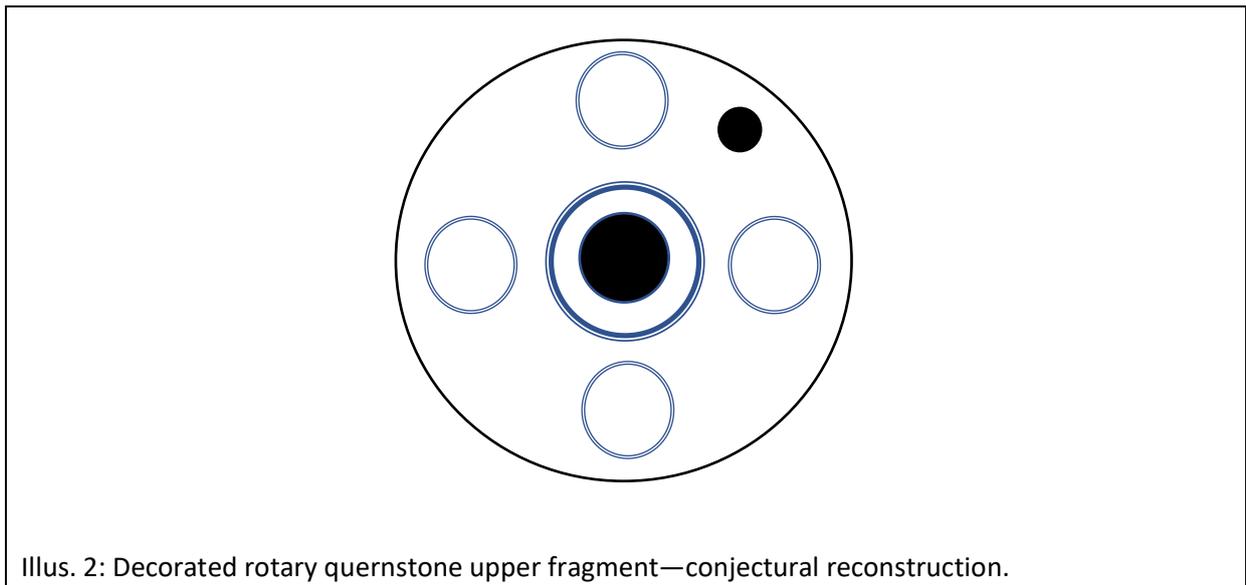
Length/height: 260.00mm+; width: 165mm+; depth/thickness: 61.77mm.

This find was recovered from rubble (context: C02) from the collapse of an adjacent mortared limestone rubble wall, originally part of the late medieval church and located at the southern end of the western gable wall, on the outer eastern face.

The style and lithology are consistent with a c. 14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup>-century date range for construction (Late Medieval/Post-medieval period).

Illustrations





## Bibliography

Channing, J. 2012 'Ballykilmore—Living with the Dead, the development and continuity of an early medieval graveyard', in P. Stevens and J. Channing *Settlement and Community in Fir Tulach Kingdom*. Westmeath County Council: Dublin, 81–107.

McErlean, T. 2007 'The Millstones and Millhouses', in T. McErlean and N. Crothers *Harnessing the Tide*. EHS: Belfast, 183–206.