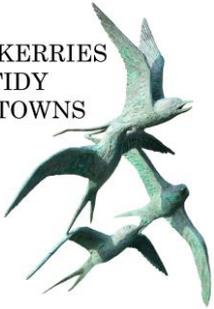


Holmpatrick Graveyard —a description

SKERRIES
TIDY
TOWNS



Comhairle Contae
Fhine Gall
Fingal County
Council



Skerries Historical Society



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Holmpatrick Graveyard—a description

Frank Prendergast

College of Engineering and Built Environment
Dublin Institute of Technology
frank.prendergast@dit.ie

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The term ‘graveyard’ describes a burial ground attached to a church, and ‘historic graveyard’ describes any graveyard or burial ground in use prior to the early twentieth-century. In such places, communities connect with their own history and ancestry, and identify with their place of origin. They have cultural and heritage significance too and, for these reasons, their conservation and interpretation are necessary.

Holmpatrick Graveyard is situated in the centre of Skerries, a small coastal town 27 km north of Dublin City. An archipelago of three small islands fringes the local coastline. One of these is locally known as Church Island although it is named St. Patrick’s Island on all Ordnance Survey maps. The placename ‘Holmpatrick’ derives from the Old Norse term for an island, ‘*holmr*’, and the forename Patrick. The equivalent in the Irish language is *Inis Pádraig*¹, emphasising the strong historical connection of the area with St. Patrick who came to Ireland in the fifth century AD. The placename also links with the Norsemen who reputedly raided the seventh-century stone tomb-shrine of St. Do-Chonna on the island in AD 798²⁻³. The ruins of a twelfth-century church and related structures still exist there.

The Heritage Council (<http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/>) provides guidelines for the protection and sustainable management of all culturally significant places. In the case of a graveyard, this includes an understanding of its cultural, historic, religious and secular importance⁴. Holmpatrick Graveyard, with its dominant bell tower built in c. 1790, and numerous centuries-old gravestones, has meaning and symbolism that may not be immediately apparent to visitors. Many of the oldest stones are deteriorating due to weathering and their inscriptions are now difficult to read in the majority of cases. Importantly, four are recorded by the National Monuments Service, giving them added protection and status (<http://webgis.archaeology.ie/historicenvironment/>). Historical sources also indicate that the medieval Augustinian Priory of Holmpatrick was sited here and, with the discovery of medieval floor tiles east-northeast of the bell tower, this attests to the antiquity of the place⁵.

The committee of Skerries Tidy Towns (www.skerriesca.com/hom/tidy-towns/) has commissioned this panel as part of its wider mission to enrich the built and natural environment for the local community and tourists alike. The aim here is to capture and present some of the skilled work of past masons as portrayed in the commemorative art and verse, all beautifully recorded in stone. Notably, Holmpatrick Graveyard is one of a small number in north County Dublin having gravestones which exhibit a distinct ‘local design repertoire’ and a ‘regional style of folk-art’ created

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in the eighteenth-century⁶. Eleven of these, with their characteristic clockwise-spirals, nested lozenge motifs and central dots, typify this style. While such ornamentation is universal, and can occur spontaneously in many art forms, there is an obvious similarity with elements of the megalithic art tradition first discovered in 1699 in the nearby Boyne Valley (37 years before the James Martin gravestone was inscribed). It is plausible, given the geographical proximity and chronology of both styles, that this local cluster of folk art was conceived by a mason(s) aware of, or influenced by, this prehistoric art tradition. Adding to the site's interest, the stories portrayed on many of the engraved stones are poignant and describe grief, loss and local maritime tragedies.

The illustrated panel which accompanies this introduction includes a high-resolution aerial image flown by Mark Broderick (<http://markbroderick.ie/>). The annotations show the location of the bell tower and 13 featured gravestones and grave slabs. All are located in the historic section of the graveyard and are described and partially interpreted. Where necessary, Digital Imaging Processing techniques were used to improve the clarity of the entities. In some cases, digitally-created facsimiles more clearly reveal the carved detail now largely obscured by erosion and lichen growth.

A print of the panel is on permanent display at the graveyard entrance. A digital version is freely available from DIT's online research repository ARROW under the author's name, or directly at <http://arrow.dit.ie/beschreoth/65/> . A link to ARROW is also hosted on the Skerries Tidy Towns webpage of the Skerries Community Association website (www.skerriesca.com). Once installed on a mobile phone, or other hand-held device, the panel can be used as a digital field guide for site exploration. Being portable, the user can exploit the high resolution imagery, engage onsite with the featured monuments in an interactive and more informed way, and bring a modern focus on the hidden history of Holmpatrick Graveyard, Skerries.

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