

Turlough O'Connor's Influence

During the reign of **Turlough O'Connor (1114-1156)**, his influence on the **church of St. Coman** was sufficient enough for it to be named an independent See and named as the Diocese of Roscommon at the Synod of Kells in **1152**. After Turlough's death the sphere of influence rested in Elphin. It is significant that many cut stone fragments from an early period abound in the ancient burial ground and also the find in recent years, of what the famous antiquary George Petrie stated, was an inscribed slab of a very early horizon in the early Christian period at Roscommon. A fine **cross slab** with Romanesque decoration (**12th century**) has also been located. Here presumably at this spot, too, in **1170**, the Annals tell that **St. Coman** was disinterred and his temporal embodiment enshrined in a silver and gold repository to be used as a sacred relic which in those days was all powerful and a common phenomenon to satisfy the religious needs of the early medieval Roscommon populace. This is related in the Four Masters for that year and the excavator was **Giolla Jarlaithe Ua Carmacain, Abbot of Roscommon**.

Of the few remaining shrines in the National Museum and elsewhere, St. Coman's is not one of them and has either been broken up or lost in antiquity.

At this period, also in **1123** we must indulge our delight in the beauty of the **Cross of Cong**, made as the inscription says, at Roscommon and amongst others credits inscribed on the Cross, praises "**Donal Mac Flanagan O'Duffy**, successor of Coman and Ciaran". The articular was a McEgan, a common Roscommon name. It may very easily have been used as a **processional cross** used at the **Church of St. Coman**. It was made to house a relic of the **true cross brought from Rome** at the behest of **King Turlough** and displays intense Hiberno-Norse style ornament, then current in Ireland. At that time a Continental congregation of clergy, the **Canons Regular of St. Augustine** were at Roscommon and the **Franciscans** are also mentioned as being here, but for a short trial.

The site of the **mid eighteenth century church** founded by **Father Matthias O'Connor** and later a **National School for boys and girls** run under the National Board of Education in **1838** is noteworthy as is the introduction of the **Mercy Nuns from Limerick** to Roscommon about **1853** and they taught there for many years until their own **convent** was built at the western end of the town some years later. **James Reynolds**, Principal, had 140 pupils under his care at **Chapel Lane** in **1826**.

These sisters challenged the male dominated establishments of the time such as the Workhouse, the Infirmary and the New Jail where they made valuable educational and nursing inroads for the poor and orphaned in these institutions at a very traumatic stage of Ireland's history in the aftermath of the Famine.

By influence, an historical article in a Roscommon Town Gazzateer for **1920**, and drawing from an earlier work, maintains that a **carved slab** was taken from **St. Coman's Well** in the interests of safety presumably, and re-erected in the soft shadow of the **school wall in Chapel Lane** thereby rescuing a cherished link with the past and exhibiting it in a very public way in the school yard where every child could view it and absorb one of the great corner stones of Christian faith, the **Crucifixion of Our Lord**. Also carved on the stone is what probably are St. John and the Mother of Jesus. The **original foundation stone of the Church**, inscribed in Latin, along with a translation in English and the **date-stones** of the school have been preserved by the County Council and exhibited at the site.