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**Figures known as Hags of the Castle, Sheelas, or Sheela na gigs.—**

A tabulated list, so far as yet ascertained, of the remarkable figures cut in stone, which are known to archæologists by the designation of "Sheelas," with the localities where they are preserved, or from whence they were removed to museums or private collections, appears worth being published. The information here recorded was collected from numerous detached Papers contained in Archæological Journals, or obtained from various private sources, kindly placed at the writer's disposal. Such a detailed list will be useful to those persons who may desire to investigate their probable age, and the intentions of their fabricators, about which various speculative opinions have from time to time been proposed, some even regarding them as the figures of heathen Irish Deities. It is not intended to enter at present into any discussion on such matters of a controversial nature; possibly the subject may admit of simple and satisfactory solution—but this is left an open question.

The figures themselves represent females. In many instances the entire figure is seen, cut in relief on stone. In the greater number the figure is seated, though some occur sculptured in an upright position. Some of these carvings display a considerable degree of artistic ability and skill in the workman who executed them, and the figures themselves are well modelled and finished. Others are of ruder execution, and, on superficial inspection, might be supposed intended as objects of disgust or repulsion, or even satirical in their nature, though any of these conclusions would appear to be without foundation if the entire group of figures be studied; for, as a rule, the two extremes of fine and coarse execution do not differ materially from many other figures carved on stone during the period commencing A.D. 1100, and reaching down to the middle or end of the fifteenth century. The idea that they were intended to represent Pagan Deities, worshipped by the inhabitants of Ireland before their conversion to Christianity, is not supported by any evidence that can be advanced in support of such a view. They are, as a rule, invariably obtained either from the sites of old churches, or from the walls of castles built after the fourteenth century.

The popular name by which, as a class, these figures are designated is attributable to a trifling and accidental circumstance originating in the reply of an uninformed man to Mr. R. P. Colles, who, when visiting the image which is still preserved at Rochestown, county Tipperary, and asking whether it bore a special name, was told it was "Sheela na gig." Without any attempt at corroborating the statement, or further investigation, the term was adopted, and indiscriminately employed for all objects of similar nature. In other localities, as the appended lists state, they are traditionally considered to represent special personages.

So far as our present sources of information reach, it appears most probable that all figures of this description were originally attached to ecclesiastical edifices, and in Ireland altogether, or, with few exceptions,

limited to districts held by Anglo-Norman invaders; or they were placed near the churches for some special decorative purpose. It may serve to fix their dates somewhat approximately to refer to the church at Poitiers, where they are still found, erected between A.D. 1100 and 1200; and also to an example found on the chancel-arch of the ruins of a chapel at Clonmacnois. Many of the earlier stone churches must have fallen into decay about the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, when the figures were appropriated by the builders of stone castles erected about that time, and transferred to their walls either for ornament, or under the idea of their possessing some occult and sacred influence, such as conferring good fortune or additional safety on the owner. On these castles they were built into the walls, or placed over the doorways, where some remain until the present time, though the castle, in its turn, may have become a ruin.

Since this was written the following note was observed in Windele's MSS., "Cloyne and Ross," p. 448, preserved in the Royal Irish Academy Library:—"At Barnahealy was found a brown gritty stone female figure, one of these old Fetish figures often found in Ireland on the fronts of churches as well as castles. They are called 'Hags of the Castle,' and when placed above the keystone of the door arch were supposed to possess a tutelary or protective power, so that the enemy passing by would be disarmed of evil intent against the building on seeing it." Barnahealy, or Castle Warren, is near Monkstown, Co. Cork.

Figures of this description are not limited altogether to Ireland. Examples are found within the walls of the Church of St. Radegonde, at Poitiers, and, at least two similar stone figures are now recorded from England in the subjoined list:—

LIST OF THE FIGURES, USUALLY DESIGNATED "SHEELAS," FOUND  
IN IRELAND.

1. From an old church (pulled down) in Co. Cavan.—The figure is 15 inches high and  $10\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide across the shoulders. It is preserved in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy. A seated figure.

2. Found on the top of a recently-erected (1844) entrance doorway to an old graveyard at Lavey Church. This church was almost destroyed, and the image probably removed from the ruins. It is preserved in the Royal Irish Academy Museum. A seated figure. (See *Proceedings R.I.A.*, vol. ii., p. 565.) Lavey lies fifty miles N.W. of Dublin on the mail-coach road.

3. IN ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY MUSEUM.—Figure  $14\frac{1}{2}$  inches high by 9 inches wide.

4. BALLYVOURNEY, Co. CORK.—A figure usually termed St. Gobonet. (From a sketch.)

5. OLD CASTLE OF LEMANAGHAN, KING'S COUNTY.—From a drawing belonging, in 1870, to Thomas Cooke, Esq., of Parsonstown.

6. CLOGHAN CASTLE.—This was an old castle of the O'Mores, three miles south of Banagher, King's County. Destroyed in 1548 for "fear of the English." (See "Annals of the Four Masters.") Seated figure. (From a drawing.) It is cut in a block of limestone, and measures 22 inches in height. This figure is preserved in a museum in the South of Ireland.

7. OLD CASTLE OF ROCHESTOWN, Co. TIPPERARY.—A seated figure. (See *Proceedings R.I.A.*, vol. ii., p. 575.) Discovered and described by R. P. Colles. The name popularly given to it of "Sheela na gig" has been applied to all similar objects.

8. CASTLE OF BALLINAHINCH, Co. TIPPERARY.—Mr. Clibborn stated that the person who examined it supposed it came from the ruins of a neighbouring church. (See *Proceedings R.I.A.*, vol. ii., p. 575.)

9. CASTLE OF BALLYFINBOY, Co. TIPPERARY (Parish of Finnoe, Lower Ormond, Co. Tipperary, about one mile N.W. of Borrisokane).—A seated figure. A drawing of the Castle and of the figure obtained from Mr. Cooke's collection, 1870.

10. LUSK, Co. DUBLIN.—A figure, called "An Idol," was buried here by the late Rev. Mr. Tyrrell. This was considered to be a Sheela by Mr. Clibborn. (See *Proceedings R.I.A.*, vol. ii., p. 575.)

11. LOUGH GARA, Co. SLIGO.—On the Barbican of O'Gara's Fortress in Lough Gara, Sligo. (*Teste* Mr. Wakeman, "Roy. Hist. and Arch. Assoc. Irel.," vol. v., 4th Series, p. 282.)

12. KILCARNE.—On a Font from ruins of old Church of Kilcarne, near Navan, Co. Meath, now preserved in a neighbouring chapel. Ditto.

13. FETHARD.—On the gable-end of a cottage between the Abbey and river.

14. BLACKHALL, Co. KILDARE (Parish of Davidstown, S.W. of Calverstown Demesne).

15. ROSNAREE, Co. MEATH.—Now built into the wall of a mill. (Photograph and drawing.)

16. BARNAHELY CASTLE, Co. CORK.—An erect figure. Drawn in J. Windele's Volume of Letters, preserved in Library of Royal Irish Academy.

17. DUNMANWAY PARISH.—A stone figure, described in J. Windele's MS. "Topography of Co. Cork, W. and N.W.," in the Library of Royal Irish Academy. He states "It is brought out occasionally for charms; the priest twice attacked it, but the people concealed it."

18. **DUNNAMAN CASTLE** (between Rathkeale and Croom).—On a panel over the doorway. (See “*Roy. Hist. and Arch. Assoc. Irel.*,” vol. iii., 4th Series, p. 17.)

19. **TULLAVIN CASTLE** (near Manister Abbey, not far from Croom).—On one of the quoin-stones. (Same reference as last.)

20. **RATH, Co. CLARE**.—On an ancient window-sill of highly decorated cut-stone, now set upside down in the south wall of Rath Church, near Corofin, Co. Clare. (From a photograph.)

This stone is figured in Keane’s *Work on Irish Architecture*, p. 272, and also by Mr. Westropp, in present issue of *Journal*, at p. 33.

21. **RATOO ROUND TOWER**.—Inside an upper window, the head and shoulders cut in relief on the length of a flagstone, and the remainder of the figure on part of the stone below. Length,  $11\frac{1}{2}$  inches, and  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches across the arms. (From a drawing.)

22. **OLD CHURCH AT DOWTH, Co. MEATH** (near New Grange.) (See *Proceedings R.I.A.*, vol. ii., p. 575.) Mr. Clibborn stated that the stone is different from that found in the walls of the church. The person who showed it to Mr. Clibborn called the figure “Saint Shanahan.”

23. **CLONMACNOIS**.—On a voussoir of arch of chancel of Lady Chapel; much injured; cut within a lozenge.

24. **ATHLONE**.—A figure is placed above a gateway, St. Peter’s Port. (From a drawing.) History unknown.

25. **WHITE ISLAND, LOUGH ERNE**.—A figure about 2 feet in length inserted in exterior of south wall of church. (See for details “*Kilkenny Archæological Society*,” Paper by G. V. Du Noyer, vol. iii., New Series, p. 69; and also see vol. v., 4th Series, p. 283, illustrated.)

26. **TIMAHOE CASTLE, QUEEN’S COUNTY**.—A strange figure in stone, at the doorway of this castle. Its claim to admission on the list is open to doubt; but it is figured in a series of drawings belonging to the late Thomas Cooke, Esq., of Parsonstown, in 1870, and now owned by a gentleman in the South of Ireland, who kindly lent them to the writer.

27. **SEIR KIERAN PARISH**, four miles from Parsonstown, Barony of Ballybrit, King’s County. In the chapel, projecting from west gable, probably removed from an older building. From a drawing in Mr. Cooke’s collection. (See Notice and illustration in *Dublin Penny Journal*, vol. iii., p. 114.)

28. **MOYCARKY CASTLE, Co TIPPERRARY**.—Set into south wall, a figure about 17 inches long. Drawn by G. V. Du Noyer, in the “*Ordnance sketches*” in Royal Irish Academy. This figure was called Kathleen Owen by the people in the vicinity. It may have come from the ruins of an old church near the castle. (See *Proceedings R.I.A.*, vol. ii., p. 575.)

29. **CASHEL CATHEDRAL.**—This figure is stated to have been buried for concealment.

30. Pillar of St. Adamnan, on Tara Hill, carved on eastern face; figure about 18 inches high.

31. A figure at present in a private garden, Ringaskiddy, Co. Cork, the history of which is not known to the writer.

32. **KILNABOY CHURCH, Co. CLARE.**—Over south door; considerably mutilated; figured by Mr. Westropp in present issue of *Journal*, at p. 27.

#### ENGLISH AND CONTINENTAL FIGURES.

**DUNRAVEN CASTLE.**—Projecting from the wall. (From a photograph and drawing belonging to Mr. Clibborn in Royal Irish Academy.)

**BINSTEAD, ISLE OF WIGHT.**—A seated figure, placed over the gate leading into the churchyard. (From a drawing owned, in 1870, by Mr. Cooke of Parsonstown.)

**CHURCH STRETTON, SHROPSHIRE.**—An erect figure, built into north wall of parish church. (From a drawing obtained through a gentleman in Belfast.)

**FRANCE (CHURCH OF ST. RADEGONDE, POICTIERS).**—An extensive series of seated figures above a corbel-table in this church, each about the size of a small child. The date assigned to the Romanesque choir is late in the eleventh century; it is raised on a very old crypt, partly excavated in rock. Other parts of the church are fifteenth-century work.

F. R. S. A. I.

**Irish Longevity.**—Looking the other day over Pue's "Occurrences," January 12th, 1758, I came across the following paragraph:—"Belfast, January 6th.—We hear from Connor, in this county, that on the 13th of last month, died at Glenwhorry, near that place, Catherine Giles, aged 122 years. She was between 15 and 16 years old, on the dark Monday 1651, and working on her father's land when the darkness came on. She was always employed in hard labour, and lived on the most simple diet, such as potatoes, greens, and buttermilk, and never drunk tea or strong liquor, and continued healthy all her lifetime, until a few days before her death, and till about two months ago continued to walk three miles on Sunday to church." Could any correspondent say whether there is any local memorial of this old woman, and explain what "dark Monday" was, or the nature of the darkness referred to?

In *Exshaw's Magazine* for 1761, p. 344, is the following:—"Deaths, 1761, July 23—At Mitchelstown, co. of Corke, John Newell, in the 127 year of his age: he retained his senses to the last, and was grandson to old Parr of England, who lived to be 152 years of age."—G. T. S.