

# SLIGO'S OLD CEMETERY



A WALK THROUGH HISTORY





## A tour of Sligo Old Cemetery

*“In all- Ireland there is not a more beautiful burying ground”*

Cemeteries serve both functional and emotional purposes. They provide for the safe disposal of the dead, but far more importantly, they provide a place to commemorate and in some way, communicate, with the community of the dead. Thus they embody both the sacred and profane. We, the community of the living, use these places to express our hopes of immortality, and alleviate our human anxiety and fear of death. Cemeteries are part of a cultural, funereal, landscape with spiritual and mystic overtones. They offer special places for quiet, reflection and contemplation and a welcome refuge for nature.

Sligo's Victorian-era cemetery is picturesquely situated on the slopes of the historic Cairns Hill, almost a mile from the town centre, with extensive views over Ben Bulbin. It has frequently been noted for the beauty of its setting, still undiminished today, 170 years after its opening. A walk around this cemetery is a lesson in the history of politics, business and social life of Sligo Borough.

The great Cholera Epidemic of 1832 highlighted the need for a new municipal cemetery. During this epidemic, Sligo Abbey, the traditional burial ground for the town, was overwhelmed, and complaints were made about the stench from the decomposing bodies. In order to prevent the spread of the highly contagious disease, over 500 bodies were hastily buried in the Cholera Field, to the rear of the Sligo Fever Hospital.

The onslaught of the Famine in 1846-7, highlighted the lack of a proper place of burial, and in December 1846, the Corporation leased four Irish acres of 'The Commons', known as the 'Widow Tuohy's Field', for a burial ground. The cemetery was operated under a Board of Trustees until 1884 when it was transferred to Sligo Corporation. Col. Owen Wynne donated the entrance railings and ornate gates in 1848, and the Caretakers' Lodge was erected about 1854. Space was running out in the burial ground by 1922, and an extension was added to the south. However,



internments continue to take place in the Old Cemetery wherever family plots are still usable.

The new municipal cemeteries of 19th century Ireland were a break from the traditions of the past; even their name symbolises change. They were not attached to any place of worship, being standalone places of burial, laid out in a regular manner, and administered by the local authorities. Graveyards, on the other hand are always around a church, be they medieval or early Christian sites, or the post-Reformation Anglican parish churches, and had little in the way of official regulation until after the 1878 Sanitary Act. These sites still dot the countryside today, and are distinctive and important places.

Graves of the Victorian period were much more ornate and extravagant than modern headstones. Frequently made of cut and dressed granite, limestone and marble, they were seen as a statement of class and social status. Victorian cemeteries were filled with symbolism that communicated the bond of love beyond the grave, signified by the motif of clasping hands, depicted in a last embrace. Evergreen plants and flowers were carved in stone and crafted in iron, to remind the living of the promise of a new life in eternity. This symbolism was very different from the grim hollow-eyed skulls and hourglasses of the 17th and 18th century, warning the faithful of their mortality. This new gravestone iconography emphasised love, hope, and comfort, and many cemetery motifs suggested solace after death.

The Old Cemetery has unique examples of this 'funerary art', reflecting the various tastes and elaborate styles of the age. There are many different types of monuments, including tall granite pillars, obelisks, Grecian urns, and decorated Celtic crosses. In addition, there are several outstanding mausoleums, box tombs, table-top memorials, and sorrowful female figures. Symbolism abounds, with crosses, angels, anchors-of-hope, laurel wreaths, birds, and the IHS monogram. The graves of wealthier Protestant families tended more towards the allegorical and neo-classical style, as befitted the religious thought of the time, with urns, pointed obelisks, idealised mourning female figures, and a white dove,



representing the Holy Spirit. Quotations from the psalms, and the gospels are common on protestant graves, with often a simple epithet to the deceased.

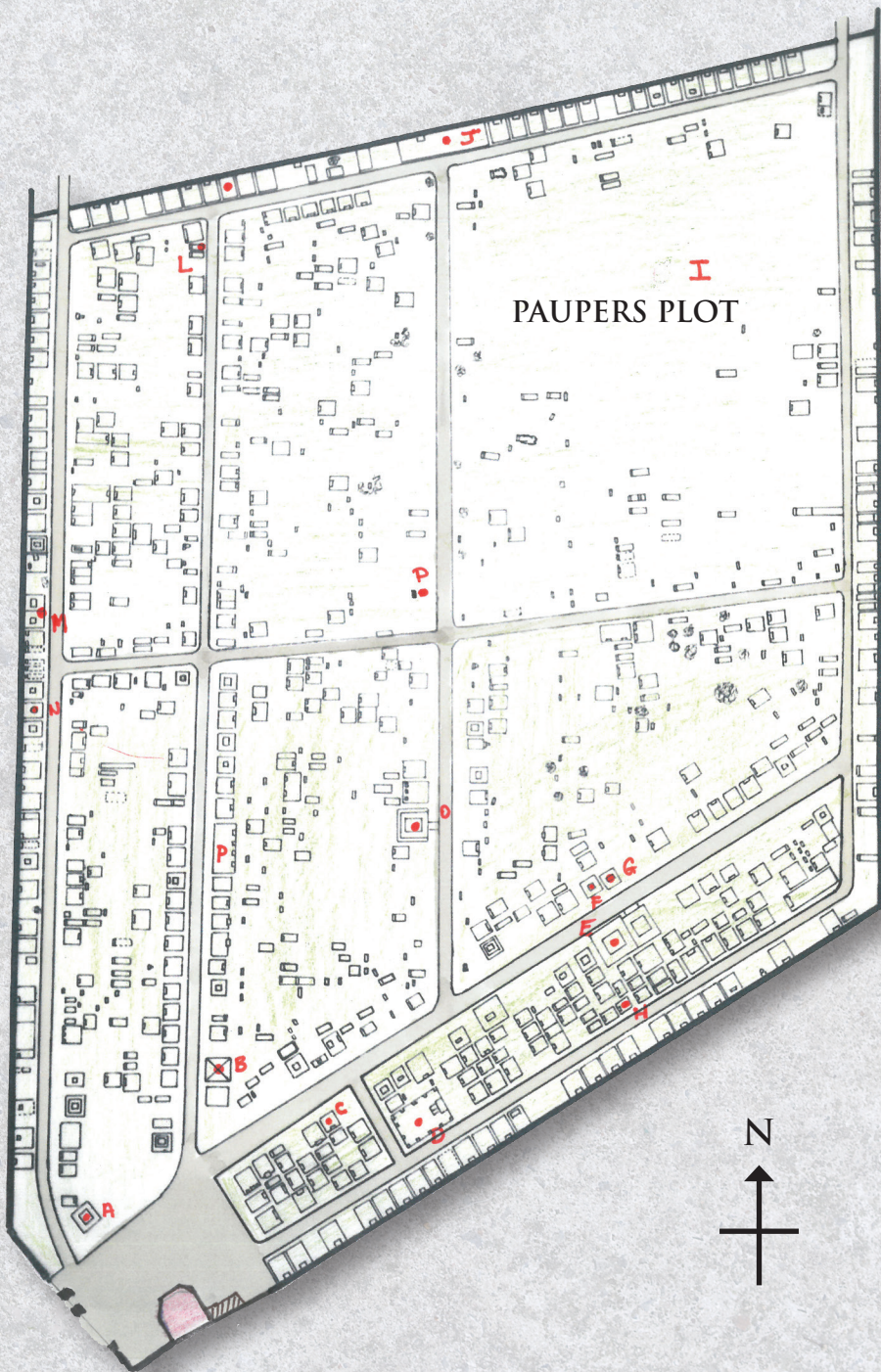
Catholic graves had more in the way of crosses, particularly from the 1880s, with the emergence of decorated Celtic-revival high-crosses. Catholic headstones frequently had a request for a prayer for the souls of the departed, a belief that was not shared by most Protestant denominations. However, there were no hard and fast rules, and the main distinction is really between the graves of the wealthy and the less well-off. Clearly the larger tombs reflect the financial and social status of the various families, with a notable concentration of wealthy Catholic merchants towards the southern end of the cemetery. As was common practice in the 19th century, the burial ground was divided into denominational areas; the paths along the western side being the Protestant section, the remainder being Catholic. All the graves face east, with the exception of a few graves of some Catholic priests, who were interred facing the west, where their parishes lay.

The 19th century Romantic Movement, created a cult of death, beautified cemetery landscapes, and sentimentalised attitudes towards death. Cemeteries in the Victorian period were designed to be landscaped, attractive places, and were in fact, a sort of public park, which memorialised the community of the dead. This can still be seen in the fact that cemeteries such as Glasnevin, or Highgate in London, draw thousands of visitors every year. Historic cemeteries deserve our respect and attention, as they are of aesthetic and architectural value, often preserved in a time warp. Sligo Old Cemetery in particular is a combination of architecture, sculpture, landscape, wildlife, and indeed poetic reflection, as inscribed on the various memorials. This makes the cemetery like no other place in the historic environment.

Take a walk around this place, remember those who lie there, admire the handicraft of a generation of stonemasons, and see if you can spot some of the more interesting memorials that we record in this small publication.



CEMETERY ROAD



GATE LODGE



## **A brief history.**

Until the opening of Sligo Cemetery, there were two burial grounds in the town. Sligo Abbey, a medieval Dominican foundation, was the main traditional resting place, mostly for Catholics, but for quite a number of long-standing Protestant families as well. St. John's, the Anglican parish church, had a smaller graveyard surrounding it, and was the burial place for many of the Protestant parishioners. By the 1830s however, both resting places had become overcrowded, and Sligo Abbey was considered to be insanitary, its grounds overflowing with bones.

Matters were brought to a head by the devastating visitation of the cholera in August 1832, which resulted in the deaths of at least 700 – 800 townspeople in the space of a month; it has been suggested that the final death toll may have been up to 1,500 people. This epidemic put enormous stress on the ability of the existing medical services of the day. The Sligo Fever Hospital, on The Mall, was simply overwhelmed, as was the adjacent County Infirmary. These small institutional buildings were the only hospitals in Sligo in 1832, and couldn't possibly hope to cope with such a pestilence as the Asiatic cholera. Sligo was the worst hit provincial town, and the eventual number of deaths in Ireland was estimated at between 40,000 and 50,000. Cholera is an acute disease, spread through contaminated water, which infects the small intestine, and is characterised by severe diarrhoea. For a victim of the disease in 1832, it was nothing short of catastrophic, and the result was almost certain death. At the height of the epidemic, in the last week of August 1832, over 50 deaths a day were being recorded.

In an attempt to avoid contamination, over 500 people were hastily buried in the 'Cholera Field', a series of long trenches dug behind the Fever Hospital. Sligo Abbey was overwhelmed by the number of the dead, and 'there was scarcely enough clay to cover a coffin,' according to one contemporary source. Soil had to be brought in so that burials could take place, but the low walls around the Abbey resulted in overflowing. By the winter of 1832, there were complaints about the stench from the grounds of the Abbey, and effluent from the decomposing bodies continued to seep into the Garavogue river for some time afterwards. In St. John's



churchyard, over 80 burials are recorded for the four weeks at the height of the epidemic. Notable among the victims was William Middleton, the maternal great-grandfather of W. B. Yeats.

In the decade following this calamity, the local health officer and several concerned committees sought to have a new municipal burial ground designated for Sligo. It was obvious to all that the situation as it existed was desperate. With an expanding population of 14,000 people in 1841, Sligo needed a new and sanitary burial place for its people. A public campaign in 1839 had little results. However, the onslaught of Famine focused minds sharply. At the Summer Assizes meeting in 1846, a deputation headed by the Mayor and the local Health Officer, formally appealed to Sligo Grand Jury, emphasising the overcrowded state of the town's burial grounds, and the 'injury, and damage caused to the health of the general public'. The necessity for abandoning the old graveyards became so apparent, and the nuisance so intolerable, that the need for a new cemetery could 'no longer be resisted'.

So on 1st December 1846, Sligo Corporation decided to 'let a portion of the Commons townland, consisting of about 4 Irish acres', as a burial ground for the public of all denominations. A portion of this area, called 'The Widow Tuohy's Field' was designated for a municipal cemetery on 7th January 1847, and a deed was submitted to the clergymen of all denominations. The Lord Commissioners of the Treasury granted permission and monies to the sum of £250 for the proper layout and arrangement of a new burial ground. The location of the cemetery, at a distance of mile from the town centre, was deliberate, in an attempt to avoid the problems of contamination from decaying corpses filtering into the town's water supply.

A Board of Trustees was set up in August 1848, at the height of the Famine, which transferred the operation of the Cemetery to a board comprised of the Protestant and Catholic Rectors of the town, a number of Aldermen of the Corporation, and prominent local businessmen and merchants. These included the Hon. John Wynne, Hazelwood, Andrew Walker, of Rathcarrick, J.P., Peter O'Connor, Carinsfoot, J.P., Alderman Henry Lyons, J.P., and the Mayor of Sligo, Robert



McBride. This committee was to administer the Cemetery as a trust, and to ensure the proper and hygienic operation of the grounds.

Some burials took place in 1847-8 at the height of the Famine; this area can be seen at the north-eastern end of the old cemetery, notable due to its lack of headstones. William A. Woods, Mayor, and member of the cemetery committee, recollected in 1883, that in 1846, people in town were dying by their hundreds, and he had seen many burials, 'very near the surface in what is now the cemetery grounds, without as much as a protecting wall; the dogs tore up the dead bodies and devoured them'.

In 1849, the cemetery was divided into four sections, and charges for interments were set out.

<b>Section 1</b>	<b>Pauper internments –</b>	<b>Free</b>
<b>Section 2</b>	<b>A single internment , If retained for the same family</b>	<b>1s 6d 7 shillings</b>
<b>Section 3</b>	<b>A Single internment If retained for the same family</b>	<b>2s 6d 20 shillings</b>
<b>Section 4</b>	<b>A Single Internment If retained for the same family</b>	<b>5 shillings 40 Shillings</b>

By 1854 the Board, had managed to enclose the grounds with a stone wall. The entrance gates and a caretakers lodge were added at a sum of £417 4s 8d, aided by a gift of cut stone from Rt. Hon. Col. Wynne, of Hazelwood, valued at £200. Wynne had also gifted the cast iron entrance gates, worth £150; these gates had been removed from his estate in 1848, and gifted to the Trust, in lieu of a financial contribution, as tenant rents remained unpaid during the Famine.

In 1861, the committed printed deeds or 'Scripts' for purchasers of plots, and made a map to show the location of plots. The committee also tendered for 100 pieces of iron to be used as plot markers in 1861, but these seem to have never been



manufactured. Plans and tenders were invited for a Mortuary Chapel in 1882, but never executed. By 1883, the cemetery had become somewhat run down, as a report by the visiting committee recommended the removal of debris, the levelling of paths, and the pruning of trees and shrubs. The salary of the gatekeeper was to be increased to £20 per annum, and his duties more clearly specified. A dry toilet had been installed at the Caretakers Lodge.

Controversy arose on the Board of Trustees in the mid 1880s, as to the legality of the position of the Trustees under the 1847 Deed, and the impact of the Public Health Act of 1878. Tensions revolved around finances and missing documents, and the issue of whom was legally responsible for the debts of the Trust, or entitled to sit on the committee. The chairman of the Trust, Moses Monds, onetime Mayor, came in for much criticism, as he had unlawfully spent funds belonging to the Trust on purchasing government stock, without authorisation, and had effectively conducted meetings without any quorum or constitution. Following a special meeting of the cemetery committee in December 1883, chaired by the Mayor, W.A. Woods, moves were made to make an application to the High Court of Justice, in order to have a properly constituted committee appointed, and a proper Cemetery Board constituted. In December 1884, the interim managing committee handed over the Cemetery to Sligo Corporation, who were the urban sanitary authority. It was hoped, according to the committee, that, 'this move will put an end to the very unsatisfactory condition of the affairs which has so long prevailed, both financially and otherwise'. The transfer took effect in September 1885, when all documentation and minute books of the Trust were handed over to the Corporation, and the Trust dissolved itself. Both Moses Monds and Peter O'Connor, long-standing Trustees, were ordered to hand over the government stock, bought without authorisation over the previous number of years. This seems to have brought an end to the long running dispute.

Since that date, Sligo Corporation, and its successor, Sligo Borough Council has been in charge of the Old Cemetery. Burial space ran out in the 1920s, and a further plot to the north was opened in 1921. A third plot opened in 1980, and the final portion of The Commons is currently being laid out as a burial ground.



Few new internments take place in the Old Cemetery today, although family plots are occasionally used or re-opened after a long period. Maintenance is a difficult task, as the graves remain privately owned, even though many families have since died out. Remedial work is badly needed on many of the tombs in order to stop them falling apart. This type of funerary sculpture, a unique product of the Victorian age, is unlikely to be seen again, and we need to preserve it for future generations.





## **A selection of monuments and memorials**

**Chosen for interesting people, architecture and ease of access.**

### **GRAVE A**

#### **The Lynn Vault**



A robust square-shaped vault, composed of dressed limestone, with a pyramidal roof, and interestingly, no memorial inscription. This fine tomb is the final resting place of John Lynn, (1774-1863), builder and architect, of Sligo town. Lynn was an Ulsterman originally, but by 1810 was clerk of works on the construction of Rockingham House,

at Lough Key. His key architectural contributions to Sligo are the imposing Sligo Gaol, the old Congregational Church, (now Sligo Library), Ballymote Courthouse, and the Pollexfen building in Wine Street. Lynn lived in a large residence on the quays, a short street called 'Lynn's Place'. He developed 'Lynn's Dock', a large dry dock on the quays, later filled in by Sligo Corporation, but which survives today as a place name. He designed and built the gaol at Downpatrick, (1831), and the first eight-mile section of the railway between Belfast and Lisburn, retiring to Sligo in 1839 on its completion. Active in his retirement, he died at his home at the advanced age of 91. About six other members of the Lynn family are interred here, including his son, Dr Robert Lynn, grandfather of Dr Kathleen Lynn, (1874-1955), Captain and Chief medical Officer of the Irish Citizen Army in 1916.

### **GRAVE B**

#### **Noblett St. Legers Tomb.**

Noblett St. Leger, (c. 1810-1872) County Surveyor for Sligo for 35 years, and before that County Surveyor for Leitrim. He was a native of Cork and son of Heyward St Leger (1771-1847). He worked on the harbour project in Waterford in 1835, before being transferred to Manorhamilton, where he was married in 1836, to Elizabeth

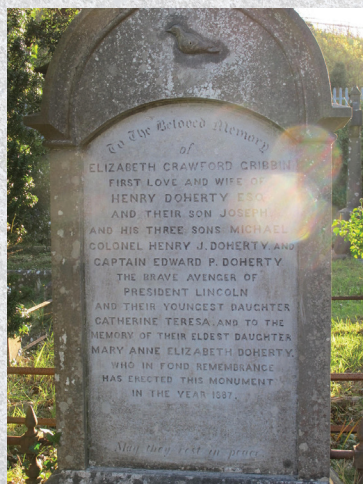


C. Cullen. He was chief engineer for Sligo Corporation from about 1848 to his death, and responsible for the efficient new sewer system laid out between 1850 and 1872. St Leger died suddenly on 8th April 1872. He is buried in this imposing chiselled stone mausoleum along with his wife (d.1897) and their only child Hewyard, who died in infancy. He was described as ‘a reliable and congenial man, who came from a musical family, and sang himself in a pleasing manner’. The mausoleum is of cut-limestone, with a pyramidal roof, a popular neo-classical design of the period



## GRAVE C

### Edward P. Doherty - ‘The Brave Avenger of President Lincoln’



While Cpt. Edward Doherty is not buried here, this is the resting place of his grandparents. The connection between Sligo and the ‘Avenger’ of Lincoln is a curious one. The Henry family were from Castle Street, Sligo, trading as Ironmongers. Their son, Joseph, emigrated to Quebec in 1828, where Edward P. Doherty was born. In 1861, he enlisted in the 71st New York Militia, and saw action at the first Battle of Bull Run. On 14th April 1865, he was on duty in Washington when Abraham Lincoln was shot. Ten days later, Doherty was Commander of a patrol which

tracked down the assassin, John Wilkes Booth, to a farm in Virginia, where he was shot, refusing to surrender. Henry family tradition has it that Edward P. Doherty fired the fatal shot, thus avenging Lincoln. Other reports dispute this, instead recording that another soldier, Corbett, shot Booth. Doherty, did, however, deliver the body of Booth to his commanding officer.



Later in his military career, Doherty was involved in the Indian campaigns, and reputedly engaged Buffalo Bill Cody, as his military scout in Wyoming. His colourful life in the army came to an end in 1871, when he was mustered out. He was buried with full military honours in Arlington Cemetery, Washington DC, in 1897. The inscription on the family headstone is said to have been added in the 1890s, when a former officer from Doherty's Virginia unit in 1865, may have visited Sligo, and requested that the word's 'The Brave Avenger of President Lincoln' be added to the inscription.

## GRAVE D

### **The Dominican Third Order Burial Plot**

This interesting plot is the resting place of numerous lay Dominicans, often called 'Tertiaries' or Third Order. Ordinary men and women, married or single, they chose to live their lives according to the rule of St. Dominic, without taking holy orders, but practicing much of the same spiritual discipline followed by the ordained. Lay Dominicans were often buried in the secular habit of the order.

The Sligo Tertiaries were active in the 1850s, but almost died out after the 1890s, with only a few women remaining in the chapter. They managed to fund a pilgrimage to the Third Order Congress in Rome in 1934. The chapter was re-established in 1937, and a hall built for their use behind the Dominican Friary. This large burial plot is of cut limestone with a fine marble statue of St Dominic, set in a pilastered niche, and surmounted by a carved rose-cross. The names of the Tertiaries are inscribed around the limestone kerb, which is neatly fenced off with an iron railing.





# GRAVE E

## The O'Connor Chapel-tomb

The unique O'Connor tomb, was erected by the prominent 19th century merchant Peter O'Connor, J.P. (1802-1893).

The style of the tomb, made of dressed limestone, is often called a 'vestibule mausoleum', as there is a door, with a very small ornate window on the opposite wall. Inside, there tends to be small crypts, or shelves onto which the coffins are placed. The O'Connor tomb also has an under-crypt, reached via cut-stone steps, and is surrounded by cast iron railings.



Scion of the great O'Connor clan, Peter was born at Edenbaun, Calry youngest son of Dennis O'Connor, and grandson of Connel O'Connor, a family of well-established merchants. Peter became a wealthy ship-owner landowner, and importer. By the 1850s, his fleet was sailing from Sligo to the Baltic, Mediterranean and the Americas. He married Ellen O'Connor of Sligo in 1848; they had one child, a daughter named Mary Ellen who died unexpectedly in 1872 aged just 21 years old. Prominent on local bodies, including the Trustees of Sligo Cemetery, Peter was also a very generous benefactor of the poor, and personally erected a new primary school on Forthill in 1869. He donated the lands for the Mercy Convent and its associated primary schools in Sligo, and in 1848 erected numerous small houses on George's street, for his employees in the adjacent Sligo saw mills. A devout Catholic, he was a magnanimous patron during the building of Sligo's new Catholic cathedral in 1870, donating the bells and the high altar in memory of his beloved daughter. This family vault contains her coffin, which, was reputed to have been made of glass; tradition says that Peter would come to the vault each evening to pray alongside the remains of his daughter, who had been embalmed, a rare event at that time. The mausoleum was built for her; here she lies with her companion, Alice Carroll. Peter died in 1893, and was himself interred there with his wife, Ellen.





## GRAVE F

### Michael Milmoe Memorial

A guardian angel surmounts the resting place of Michael Milmoe, a prominent merchant in 19th century Sligo. Scion of the Milmoe clan, originating from the Riverstown area, the family have produced many men of note, including the Mexican financier, Don Patricio Milmo, and his brother Daniel, a Texan banker. Also of the same lineage was Sir Helenus Patrick Milmo, DL, noted for his role at the Nuremburg trials after WWII.

Michael Milmoe, (1822-1895), was a successful merchant in High Street, and a liberal nationalist in politics. His son Michael Jnr, became a member of Sligo Corporation, and was elected Mayor in 1908, adding a gold link to the mayoral chain. The beautiful marble angel with a star on her forehead, stands guard over the vault, and was carved by T. Ryan of Dublin.

## GRAVE G

### Grave of Alderman Bernard Collery (1838-1907)

This wonderful figure of a weeping woman, wrapped around a cross, and carry a circular garland, representing eternal life, is the final resting place of the prominent Sligo merchant, Bernard Collery. Born in 1838 in Kilvarnet, near Balliancarrow, he was apprenticed at 16 to the bar and grocery trade in Sligo town, and after a number of years of hard work he established a successful commercial business at Knox's street; Collery's Wine and Sprit merchants. His public house is now known as 'Hargadon's Bar', renowned for its traditional pub décor. A supporter of the





Home Rule MP, PA. McHugh, he entered politics in 1873, being elected to Sligo Corporation, a seat he held for 34 years without a break. He was elected Mayor in 1881, and donated £125 towards a chain of office, and garnered the support of former mayors to contribute towards the cost. All of Sligo's mayors wore this chain until the dissolution of the Corporation in 2014. Collery was elected Mayor again in 1884, and in 1891 was elected MP for North Sligo, and held the seat at Westminster for nine years. A man of 'noble character', Collery died at his residence, Cregg house, in July 1907, and was buried with his late wife, who had predeceased him by 25 years.



## GRAVE H

### **Alderman John Jinks (1871-1934)**

John Jink's name is synonymous with his mysterious disappearance from the Dáil chamber on 16th August 1927, when a crucial vote of no confidence was being held in the Executive Council, of the Irish Free State.

Jinks was a publican, and auctioneer with a funeral director business in Stephen Street, Sligo. A career politician, he was a staunch supporter of John

Redmond, and was first elected to Sligo Corporation in 1899 as a Home Ruler, and also held positions on the county council, and several other local bodies. He had a strong political base in Sligo, particularly amongst ex-servicemen, and shopkeepers, and like many former Home Rulers, was morally opposed to DeValera. He was elected Mayor of Sligo in 1914, 1915 and 1916. He was re-elected to Sligo Corporation following the 1919 local election, as an Independent, subsequently becoming Mayor again in 1921, defeating the Sinn Féin candidate.

In June 1927, he was elected TD for the newly created constituency of Leitrim-Sligo, as a member of the National League, a Redmondite pro-treaty party. His party subsequently backed a motion of no-confidence in the government, tabled by the Labour party, as part of a political plan championed by the newly-formed Fianna Fáil to oust Cosgrove. This took place against a backdrop of high political



tensions, following the assassination of the Minister for Home Affairs, Kevin O'Higgins, a month previously.



This vote, with Jinks in absentia, resulted in a tie, (71-71), and the sitting government, led by W. T. Cosgrave survived due to the casting vote of the Ceann Comhairle. Wild rumours abounded as to the cause of Jinks' disappearance; he had left the chamber just before the vote was called, and could not be located by anxious party colleagues.

One account of his disappearance, claims that Jinks was inveigled to go for 'a drink', by two Independent TDs, both pro-Cosgrave, and along with R.M Smylie, later editor of the Irish Times, all three aimed to persuade him to vote against the motion. Worst the wear with drink on the afternoon of the vote, Jinks was apparently deposited on the Sligo train, arriving into the town at midnight, to be met with by vocal crowds. Jinks' absence attracted world headlines, as many of the other Dominion countries anxiously watched the political situation in the post-civil war Free State. 'DeValera Jinksed!', roared the Irish Times. Jinks's own explanation was that he decided to abstain in order not to split his party.

The Cosgrave Government clung to power until September 1927 when another General Election was called. Alderman Jinks went forward as an independent, but was defeated. The National League was destroyed by the affair, and the Labour leader also lost his seat. Alderman Jinks died on September 11th 1934.



## GRAVE I

### The Pauper's Plot

This large area to the north-east of the cemetery, is notable for its absence of headstones. It is commonly known as the Paupers plot, but was probably also used for Famine burials, as noted by W.A. Woods,



reminiscing in the 1880s. It is estimated that there may be 5,000 or 6,000 burials in this area alone; records exist of the burials, but it is difficult to ascertain plots. From the 1850s onwards, the area was used to bury the very poor, who were unable to purchase a plot. In recent years, part of this area has been given over as an Angels plot.

## GRAVE J

### St Laurence's Orphanage plot.

St. Laurence's Orphanage for girls, formerly located on Chapel Hill, was run by the Sisters of Mercy. Opened about 1874, it continued in operation until 1952. This headstone commemorates those children who died during that period, and are interred in this plot. Originally operated as simply an orphanage, the industrial school was added about 1894, under the Reformatory Act of 1868. These schools were originally intended to prevent orphaned and abandoned children from falling into criminality. By the 1930s, there were about 50 of these institutions throughout Ireland, both Catholic and Protestant.





## GRAVE K

### Lyons Grave- Anchor of hope

This beautifully carved headstone, shows a cross anchored to a rock, and is a common Victorian allegorical symbol for Christ, our anchor in the storm, and shows steadfastness of faith. The grave is the resting place of Jane Warren Lyons, and Henry Lyons, scion of the prominent Lyons merchant family of Wine street, whose fine store still graces that street.



## GRAVE L

### The First Cremated remains. – John Cumming Macdona MP (d. 1907)



Until the early 20th century, cremation was forbidden for Christians of all denominations, in accordance with the core belief of the resurrection of the body. Opposition from the Anglican church continued up until 1920, when it was gradually permitted. The Catholic church allowed cremation after 1966. The first cremated remains to be brought to Sligo cemetery in 1907 were those of John Cumming Macdona, MP. (1836-1907). An eclectic character, he was a descendent of Bryan MacDonagh, the 'restorer of Sligo Abbey', and was ordained

in the Church of England, but renounced the clerical life in 1883 in favour of breeding St. Bernard dogs, golf, canoeing and a career as a Barrister. He was a founding member of the Kennel Club, and instrumental in the formation of the Irish Guards.

Macdona had been a Conservative MP for Rotherhide, London, from 1892-1906. When he





was cremated in 1907, he wished his ashes to be interred in Sligo Abbey, but this was met with opposition from the Board of Works, and the urn was instead buried in the Cemetery. In January 1912, Macdona's grave was desecrated, the marble urn disinterred, and his ashes scattered. The motive was believed to have been robbery, as a rumour had circulated that the ashes were enclosed in a gold casket. Local clergymen from St. John's supervised the re-interment. No perpetrators were ever found, despite Sligo Corporation offering a reward of £50 for information. MacDona is notable for having introduced the Women's Suffrage Bill to Westminster in 1885.

## GRAVE M

### The Denning Plot



This beautiful memorial along the western boundary wall is notable for the pair of very fine cast iron urns, surmounting ornately decorated iron pedestals. The iron has long since turned a fiery rusty colour, but the funerary urns, with their draped sheets are a testimony to the industrial craftsmanship of the 19th century. Cast iron memorials and railings were manufactured in Britain, and imported through the port of Sligo. This memorial commemorates

the children of Charles and Kate Denning, all of whom died very young. Amelia, aged 14 months, died in March 1863. Maryanne, aged 4 years, Ellen Vernon, aged 10 months, and Lilia aged 10 days, all died between April and December 1864, an indication of the high infant mortality rate of the period. Charles Denning was a doctor and an apothecary, and operated out of 'The Medical Hall' on Knox's street, a business established in 1815. Denning was the apothecary for the Sligo Fever hospital in 1852; he died before 1878. The business was then run by Francis Denning, presumably his son, who also practiced as a physician and chemist, until 1917. The business then became Young's Medical Hall, a mainstay of O'Connell Street for over 80 years. The adjacent identical cast urn memorial commemorates



the Gilchrist family, including the former Borough Engineer W. Fawcette Gilchrist, and his father Rev. William Gilchrist, the Wesleyan minister for Sligo in the 1860s.

## GRAVE N

### **The Wood's Memorial Column**

This fine column is the resting place of William Abbot Woods, J.P. (1816-1890), his son Arthur F. Woods, and several members of the extended Woods family. A prominent import merchant and retailer throughout the 19th century, Wood's large store in Castle Street, was a Sligo landmark until 2008. W.A. Woods was a long-time member of Sligo Corporation, Sligo Harbour Board, Mayor in 1865, and resided at Marymount until his death in 1890. Woods was also an instrumental member of the Sligo Cemetery trust, and served on its board for several decades. It was he who witnessed the awful conditions of the cemetery in 1847, at the height of the Famine.



The column is of highly polished granite, with highlighted gold inscriptions, and tapers to a carved funerary urn at its top. Sometimes called an obelisk, this term more correctly refers to a tapering stone pillar with four sides, and both types of pillar were a feature of neo-classical architecture and later Victorian grave memorials.

## GRAVE O

### **Higgins & Keighron Monument**

This large Obelisk-type memorial was erected in memory of Patrick F. Keighron, JP, and his son-in-law, and business partner, Francis Higgins. Constructed of limestone, and surrounded by an ornate balustrade, it contains an underground vault. Keighron ran a successful grocery business on The Mall from the 1850s, as well as corn and flourmills. A member of Sligo Corporation and Harbour Board,





he was also a builder. His son Patrick was Mayor of Sligo in 1909-1911, and carried on the business. Francis Higgins, a Riverstown native, was also a merchant, marrying Patrick Keighron's daughter Mary, in 1877. An active member of the GAA from its earliest days, and a Nationalist Alderman of Sligo Corporation, in 1892 he was elected Mayor of Sligo. He took over the firm of Higgins & Keighron in the 1880s, moving the premises to Grattan Street where it traded as F. Higgins up until the 1950s.

This fine tomb was built by J. Clarence, Ballisodare, the noteworthy firm of stonemasons, whose works included Sligo and Ballaghderreen Catholic Cathedrals, Collooney church and the Bank of Ireland in Sligo. Several members of the extended Higgins family are buried in this vault including Dr Thomas Rouse, MD, a notable dispensary doctor and coroner for north Sligo for thirty years.

## GRAVE P

### **The Wynne family of Hazelwood**

These simple crosses make the final resting place of several members of the Wynne family, the predecessors of whom are buried in the family plot in St. John's churchyard. Owen Wynne, the VI, (b. 1843), had succeeded to the Wynne estates at Hazlewood in 1865. His wife, Stella F. Gore-Booth of Lissadell, was tragically





killed in a carriage accident in 1867. Owen Wynne saw the diminution of the great family estate, 15,000 acres in Sligo, and 14,000 in Leitrim, held since the 17th century, which were broken up and sold during the Land League campaign of the 1880s and 90s. Wynne died in 1910, and since he had no male heir, with his death, the line of the Hazelwood Wynne's came to an end. The great Palladian house at Hazelwood was sold in 1937.

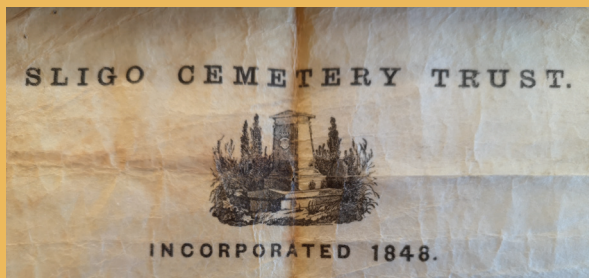
## GRAVE Q

### Docker Patrick Dunbar

This is a modern memorial to Docker Patrick Dunbar, killed as a result of riots at Sligo Quay during the acrimonious Sligo Dock Strike of 1913. Lasting 56 days, this strike for better wages, predated the Great Dublin Lockout by six months, and had a significant effect on it. Sligo was a busy port in this period, and also the most unionised in Connacht. Seamen on the SS Sligo went on strike on March 8th, seeking better conditions; five workers were arrested, and this sparked a more general strike involving most of the port labourers. In an attempt to break the strike 'scab labour' was brought in by other Sligo docker families not involved in the dispute. Thirty port workers were sent from Liverpool and fights erupted between the two factions. During the skirmish, Dunbar was hit over the head by a shovel, and killed. This escalated tensions between the different docker factions, and also with the Sligo Steam Navigation Company, the main employers at the docks. Eventually, on May 6th, after much negotiation by several parties, the strike ended with an acceptance of unionised labour. The Sligo Dock strike is regarded as a pivotal event in Irish labour history.







Compiled and Researched by Fíona Gallagher, for Sligo Tidy Towns  
With thanks to Mr. Brian Scanlon, Caretaker, Sligo Cemetery

For information taken from individual Headstones please visit  
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