

**HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE**  
**CLANE LOCAL HISTORY GROUP**



**CHURCH OF ST. MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS, CLANE.**

Originally, the Church of Ireland congregation of Clane and its environs worshipped in the Parish Church in the village which was located on a raised, circular site overlooking the green at the southern end of the main street. However, in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the old church fell into disrepair. The expense involved in a major renovation was prohibitive and because of site restrictions and lack of space for expansion, it was decided to move the church to a greenfield location about a mile from the village. A local landowner, Thomas Cooke Trench donated a site for the new church on his estate in Millicent townland. He also undertook to build the new church at his own expense and submitted the plans to the Select Vestry for, “acceptance or rejection but not for amendment.” The Church of St. Michael and All Angels was built in the Hiberno-Romanesque style of architecture as exemplified by Cormac’s Chapel, on the Rock of Cashel, and was consecrated on Michaelmas Day in 1883 by The Most Rev. R.C. Trench, Archbishop of Dublin. It occupies an elevated site from which there are splendid views of the Wicklow Mountains not far from Millicent crossroads. Pedestrian access to the church and churchyard is through a well-appointed and well-proportioned lych gate – a rare feature in Irish churches.

Externally, the Church of St. Michael and All Angels is a very attractive and appealing building of moderate size. It’s constructed of local, grey limestone and is a fine example of the Hiberno-Romanesque style with its rounded door and window arches of red sandstone. The main entrance at the western end is especially attractive with a typical Romanesque arch, of several orders, over the door, executed in red sandstone. The ground plan is cruciform, and part of the south transept forms the base of an imposing tower with a pyramidal roof which provides a dramatic view of the surrounding landscape.

Internally, the church is most impressive. On entering the nave one is surprised to discover a mirror image of Cormac’s Chapel, Cashel, the greatest example and best preserved of all 12<sup>th</sup> century Hiberno-Romanesque buildings in Ireland. Most striking is the highly decorated chancel arch of three orders, embellished with Romanesque motifs of zig-zags and chevrons, which divides the nave from the chancel. Another outstanding feature of the interior is the magnificent cloisonné and sgraffito artwork. The cloisonné art is the work of Clement Heaton (1861-1940) and involved decorating the end walls of the nave with sheets of enamelled copper. Cloisonné is prominent in two places, viz. on the west end wall and on the wall above the chancel arch. On the west wall, to the left of the exquisite Rose Window, Archangel Michael (the great protector) is depicted, while on the other side Archangel Gabriel (the special messenger of God) is portrayed. Above the chancel arch is a majestic depiction of the Ascension of Our Lord, accompanied by two angels who are witnesses to this great event. The sgraffito artwork, a unique plastering technique, was designed by Heywood Sumner (1853-1940). It is mainly concentrated in the sanctuary near the altar and depicts the Baptism of Jesus and the Resurrection of Jesus.

The Church of St. Michael and All Angels is one of the most beautifully decorated churches in Ireland. For tourists and locals alike, who are interested in and appreciate church art and architecture, a visit to this gem of a church will prove a most rewarding experience.