

## Maura Coyle



*Dysart Church*



*Late 12<sup>th</sup> century  
romanesque doorway*

### **Dysart Church, Cummeen, Co Roscommon**

Dysart old church is a monument of the early medieval period. It is sited in Cummeen Townland, Dysart Parish, Co Roscommon. This was a place of worship for the best part of twelve hundred years until the 17th century. The site comprised a church, an irregular shaped graveyard bounded by stone walls. A late medieval commemorative cross, dated 1639 is located approximately one hundred and sixty metres south of the graveyard.

The church is a multi-period one with 12<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> century, medieval and post-medieval fabrics in evidence. The presence of some stone surviving beneath parts of the southern boundary wall along with the place name 'Dysart' suggests the presence of an Early Christian Period foundation. Dysart derives its name from the Irish word *Dísert*, meaning hermitage or hermit's church. This is probably a reflection of the contemplative nature of the early church. Its name is derived from this medieval church ruin in Cummeen townland which was the Hermitage or Hermit's church. Some of the monks in the larger monasteries wished to live in less public surroundings and these were often accommodated on monastery land away from the main monastery where they supplied pastoral care to the surrounding area. Such places came to be called 'deserta' to distinguish them from the crowded monasteries. This was the way the Irish Church was organised till the formation of dioceses. With the formation of the dioceses, monastic lands were divided and so the monastic land at Dysart went to the Dioceses of Elphin.

A FÁS scheme in 1993 under the direction of an archaeologist, Dr Jim Higgins carried out conservation work on the church ruins. This revealed the different phases of the church build. It has a well preserved 12<sup>th</sup> century round topped window while the eastern gable is predominately a rebuilding of the late 15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century. The western gable has 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century doorway and a window that maybe from an earlier period.

This church ruin is a testament to the craftsmanship of the original builders and the restoration/conservation work carried out in the 1990s. It attracts many visitors, both Irish and foreign, who are interested in Irish culture and heritage.