

# Roscommon - Comán's Wooded County – Project Information

## Project Part 1 - Native Tree Planting:

The Tree Council of Ireland has committed to the Roscommon LEADER Partnership Rural Men's Group's project a native tree for every primary school in Co. Roscommon. Your school is invited to plant a native tree at your school along with members of a local Rural Men's Group. Where it is not possible to have one of the Rural Men's Group attend, we suggest you invite a senior citizens group from your community to become involved. If your school would like to participate in this element of the project, the tree should ideally be planted during **National Tree Week** which occurs in the first week in March. In the event of adverse weather, trees can be planted later.

How does this work?

- The native trees for this project have been kindly sponsored by the Tree Council of Ireland and given to the Rural Men's Groups.
- It is anticipated that the tree can be delivered to your school on either Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> or Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> March.
- Where possible we will give schools a variety of tree they would like to sow but in all cases this may not be possible.
- If your school does not have space for a tree then perhaps it could be planted somewhere in your community.
- All trees are native (Ash is not on offer because of ash die back disease).
- We suggest that your tree be dedicated to a missionary/saint associated with your school/ community.
- The first year following the planting of a tree is important to it becoming properly established. If you need advice on tree care please visit [www.treecouncilofireland.ie](http://www.treecouncilofireland.ie)
- If it is not possible to plant trees during National Tree Week, then please store the tree in a dark, cool place so as to protect the root system and plant it as soon as possible.
- We have included more information about trees in the section 'Features of a monastic site'.
- For schools participating in the 'Green Flags Programme' this tree planting project should be of interest.
- **If you would like to plant a tree at your school please confirm your interest by email at [rmg@ridc.ie](mailto:rmg@ridc.ie) on or before Tuesday February, 11<sup>th</sup> 2014. Alternatively, you may also contact us by phone at 090 6630252 or 086 0415785.**

## **Project Part 2 -Colouring Competition:**

The second part of this project involves a colouring competition which recognises the monastic tradition associated with Early Medieval Ireland. Please note the reason for an outline of the County map as part of the drawing is to denote that this is a County wide project as many features of monastic settlements are to be found all over Co. Roscommon.

How does this work?

- An A4 colouring sheet is supplied, to be copied in school for each child participating in this project.
- We suggest the colouring competition is more suitable for 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> classes.
- On each entry please include details specified(see poster).
- Please ask pupils to colour in the entire page. It would also be nice if they included another feature of a monastic site, examples which are given in the information pack.
- The class teacher then chooses the best colouring sheet from each class and forwards it to the address below, stating which class the pupil is from on the back of the envelope.
- **Entries to be returned by Friday, March 14<sup>st</sup> to: Colouring Competition, Roscommon Leader Partnership, Curraghboy,Athlone, Co. Roscommon.**
- When all the entries countywide have been submitted, the best overall entries as Judged by a panel including Men from the Men's Groups from each class level will receive a €40 book voucher. In addition to this, the Heritage Office of Roscommon County Council will also sponsor half day visit from a local 'Heritage in Schools Scheme' expert for the winning schools.
- Winning entries will be notified by Friday, 28<sup>th</sup> March.

*We hope that this information, though brief, may be of use to teachers in helping to explain to pupils not only features associated with sites of the Early Christian Period, but also their functions. The information should also be beneficial in helping pupils to understand what life was like at this time.*

### **Monastic sites in Co. Roscommon.**

- From historical, archaeological and physical remains we know that in County Roscommon today numerous Christian sites existed. This period of time is known as the Early Medieval Period, from 400AD to 1200AD. Some examples include sites in and near Ardcarne, Baslick, Boyle, Clontuskert, Cloonburren, Drum, Elphin, Fuerty, Kilbarry, Kilmore, Kiltreevan, Kilronan, Oran, Roscommon and Termonbarry.
- County Roscommon owes its origin to the founding of a monastery by St. Comán on a 'Ros' or a wooded point amid marshes, hence the name, Roscomáin – *The Wood of Comáin*.
- This monastery was originally situated in Roscommon town on the site of the present day St. Comán's Church of Ireland, *see photo*.
- There are two dates associated with the establishment of this monastery, the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century.
- This monastery was an important place of pilgrimage.
- The cross of Cong, one of Ireland's greatest national treasures, was made for this monastery in 1123.
- A holy well associated with St. Comán is today marked by a stone on the site of Dunnes Stores in Roscommon town. The name Comán is inscribed on the stone, *see photo*.
- St. Comán's monastery was closely associated with the renowned monastery of Clonmacnoise.
- Our county crest is comprised of four parts with one part denoting St. Comán's monastery.

A good resource for information about archaeological sites in County Roscommon is found at [www.archaeology.ie](http://www.archaeology.ie)

### **Features of monastic sites:**

- During the period 400AD-1200AD monastic settlements were prevalent in the Irish landscape. A number of features made up Early Irish Monastic Sites, though not all necessarily seen on one place. Some sites were bigger than others and they all played an important role in the economy.
- The outline of the colouring sheet shows the following features of monastic sites:
  - **Church:** The Church was the focal point and was built in the most sacred part of the site. They were initially built of timber and gradually replaced by stone buildings which were generally orientated east west.
  - **High Cross:** A high cross marked an important ritual place and many that survive depict beautiful carvings from the bible. Some crosses had the name of the person who had it made inscribed on them.
  - **Round Tower:** Round towers which are free standing circular stone structures are another feature of monastic sites. They were located close to the church and in some sites the door of the church and round tower faced one another. They are believed to have many functions and probably symbolised wealth and status.
  - **Bullaun Stones:** Bullaun stones are a real puzzle as there are no written records to tell us what their function was at this time. They are found at monastic sites and appear as a stone with one or more hollows on its surface. To date, twenty eight Bullaun stones have been found in Co. Roscommon.

Other features associated with monastic settlements include:

- Vallum – the circular enclosing feature around the monastery, usually a wall, hedge or ditch.
- Cemeteries
- Shrine or founder's tomb
- Inscribed cross/slab
- Sundial
- Holy Well
- Clochan or Stone Cell

Circular wattle huts, as depicted on the colouring sheet are also characteristic of Medieval Irish settlements.

A series of articles about history and archaeology in County Roscommon by the Rural Men's Group were originally published in the Roscommon People and a full copy of these texts are available at [www.rosleaderpartnership.ie](http://www.rosleaderpartnership.ie) please click on downloads.

### **Trees/ Woodlands**

- The colouring sheet has some trees included and though not always a feature of such places, trees were important at this time.
- During the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries trees were scarce and as a result, valuable. Trees species at this time have been referred to as 'The Great Nobles of the Woods'.
- Trees provide many resources such as:
  - Food for people and wildlife.
  - Firewood.
  - Timber was also used as a building material for churches, houses, household utensils and in agriculture for making fences and handles for ploughs.
  - Trees/ woodlands are often mentioned in early texts and in saint's lives.
  - Woods/ Forests were homes to many wild animals we see today such as deer, foxes and badgers while other animals such as wolves and boar are now extinct in the wild.
- The tree council website, [www.treecouncilofireland.ie](http://www.treecouncilofireland.ie) offers more information about trees/ woodlands.

### **Land/ Agriculture/ Animals.**

- Ireland was rural by nature in the early centuries of our historical period.
- Monastic settlements had internal divisions comprised of areas for the following:
  - Habitation.
  - Craftwork.
  - Vegetable Gardens and small fields use for agricultural purposes.
- Some examples of farm animals were cattle, sheep, pigs, horses and oxen; the latter were used for ploughing.
- Pasture farming was also prevalent and hay was not saved until the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.
- There was also another form of settlement, known as the Ringfort, in Ireland during the period in question of which there are 1,883 examples in our County today.

## Did you know St. Comán is associated with the following sites around Roscommon Town?

### Dunnes Stores



This monument marks the site of St. Comán's Well. This site was a holy well or ritual site which was venerated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when a rag bush stood beside it. A rag



bush was a tree/shrub that had strips of rags and other offerings tied to it as an offering for good luck, or tied by people who bathed in the Holy Well looking for a cure to their illness and probably dates to pre-Christian times.

### **St. Comán's Church of Ireland Church, Roscommon**



On this site, long before this Church of Ireland was built, St. Comán founded a monastery in either the 6<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> Century.



A Cross Slab decorated with the stem of a cross, traces of ring, with a panel of interlace and roundels at the edge of the stone was also found in the graveyard at St. Comán's Church of Ireland. This slab is now displayed against the southern wall of Church of Ireland Church.



This Cross Slab to be found in the graveyard at St. Comán's Church of Ireland Graveyard is a clue to the Early Christian association of the site, around the time of St. Comán.

Do you know if there are Cross Slabs in your Parish?

Did you know that there is another Inscribed Cross Slab, originally from this graveyard now kept in Roscommon Museum, The Square, Roscommon?

**Did you know? St. Comán's feast day is on 26<sup>th</sup> December!**