

The history of graveyard transcriptions in Ireland begins in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the foundation of the *Journal for the Preservations of Memorials of the Dead* (hereafter J.P.M.D.) in 1888 by Col. Philip Doyne Vigors, its first editor, and who was followed by Walter Fitzgerald. It published extracts of memorials from all over the island though not on any systematic basis as the stated purpose was to 'secure a record of existing tombs and monuments of interest', and it was sometimes the case that transcribers showed a regrettable elitist bias. The Journal continued until 1931 when it folded due to lack of subscriptions, mounting debts, and 'with changed conditions in Ireland' as is it was so carefully put. Obviously the subscribers were culturally out of step with changes in Ireland in the post Independence period. However they made an important contribution and helped to save many monuments from vandalism and carelessness at this time. After its demise graveyard transcriptions were published in genealogical and local historical journals on a scattered but ongoing basis, the defunct *Irish Ancestor* was prominent in this regard.

The next major breakthrough was the publication of memorial transcriptions of County Down by the Ulster Historical Foundation with R.S.J. Clarke as editor in 1966 and whose work is still continuing. In 1971 the Irish Genealogical Research Society formed a sub-committee to investigate the possibility of transcribing memorials on an island-wide basis and published their aims and methodologies in their Journal, 1972, volume 4, no. 5. As with the *J.P.M.D.* they are concerned with the preservation of memorials from the ravages of official and illegal vandalism, carelessness, attrition and erosion. They have published complete memorial transcriptions from some graveyards. Certainly the problem of erosion will grow exponentially over time especially with stone such as limestone and schist. The society has kept an ongoing index of graveyards transcribed and these, in the 1970s, were published on an annual basis, though they are dependent on being notified by the transcriber(s).

Probably the best-known founder member of this committee was Brian J. Cantwell F.R.S.A.I., F.I.G.R.S. (1914-92), the author's father, who published transcriptions for Cos. Clare, Dublin, Wicklow and Wexford; the latter two counties he completed in 1986 after 14 years of fieldwork.

Since the 1980s there has been a further explosion of interest as Local Historical and Genealogical societies, Libraries, Genealogical Heritage Centres, and many other individuals have become involved and island-wide coverage is now becoming a reality as Irish people have developed a more inclusive approach to their past.

In 1985 the author started transcriptions in western Cos. Mayo and Galway and this publication is the result of fieldwork from 1985-95 and 2001 (Islands of Inisturk, Inis More, Inis Maan and Inis Oirr). It is worth noting that local Historical and Genealogical societies in both counties have also conducted the same type of research and though these are more local, they are complete in that all memorials are transcribed.