



## Clocha na hÉireann . . . STONES OF IRELAND

This collaborative sculpture was crafted by stonemasons from each of the nation's counties using native Irish stone as part of the *Tír Chonaill Stone Festival* in Glencolmcille, County Donegal in 2016.

It was erected to honour the events of 1916 in Ireland—the Easter Rising—launched in that year to end British rule in Ireland and establish an Irish Republic.

The Festival Committee wished to mark the centenary year with a project using Irish skills and strengths in stone to celebrate the comradery of Irish people.

Our vision was to bond the nation's stone together into one composite image. The Irish stone industry has suffered from being inundated with imported material, so the use of native Irish stone was key to this project.

There are 32 counties in Ireland so we imagined it would be difficult to find enough stone carvers to volunteer their time and skill to take part but when we broadcast the idea the response from carvers was emphatic. Generous donations of stone were received from quarries all over Ireland and the Donegal County Council issued a grant to finance the project.

A 14 foot tall image of the map of Ireland was created by attaching a basic projector to the ceiling of a workshop. The outline of the map was cast upon a section of linoleum on the floor and the borders of the counties were carefully traced with markers. Templates for each county were then cut from plastic overlays. These were rolled up, placed in cardboard containers along with a set of guidelines and posted to every corner of Ireland.

The guidelines were simple: Each stone was to be 3 inches (75 mm) thick. Power tools could be used for roughing out but the finished surface had to be hand cut. Lettering was to be in the Irish language with Irish script. Carvers were asked to draw on motifs which have a direct relationship to their county and the use of historic, heritage and mythological imagery were encouraged. Portraits were prohibited but otherwise any design was acceptable.

Complex shuttering was created for the concrete pour to make the blank base of the monument which was a work of art in itself. Local masons set about cladding the structure in the native schist of Glencolmcille.

One spring day a photo arrived by email with the image of the 'Salmon of Knowledge' leaping out of a slab of limestone. We were blown away and began to have an idea of how exceptional this project would be.

By early summer the pieces were collected in the course of a nation-wide road trip, and assembled on the workshop floor.

Nobody knew how it would pan out, but the pieces jigsawed together nicely. Onlookers were overwhelmed with surprise in those last days of assembly, seeing it take shape so handsomely.

This monument was made to honour those who gave their lives for the cause of Irish Independence. It is dedicated to the ordinary people of Ireland who worked hard to survive in fields and in cities, at home and all over the world. And finally, it celebrates a spirit of unity for Ireland's children and their shared future.

Louise Price

