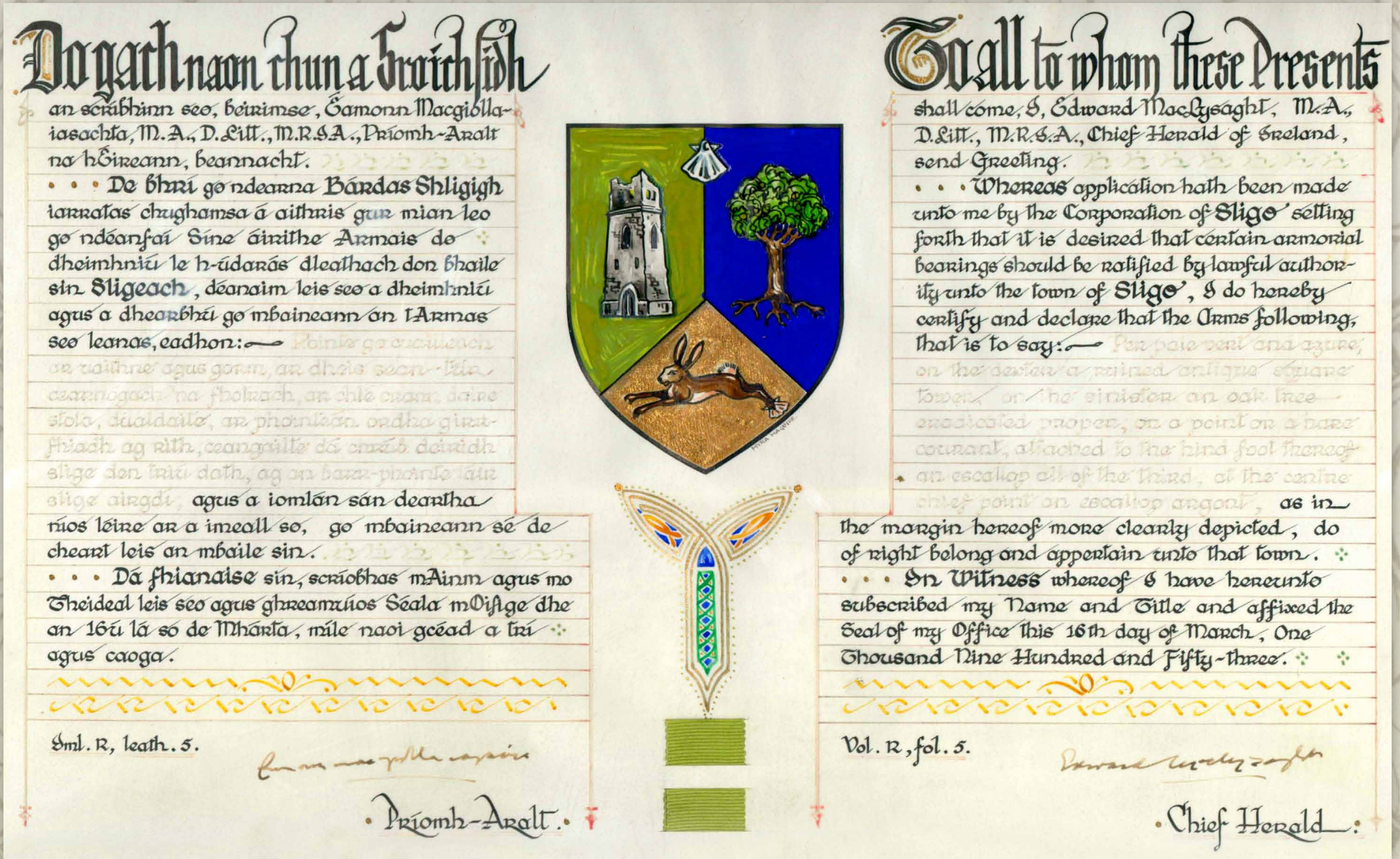


SLIGO'S ADOPTED COAT OF ARMS

A hare intuitively divining that Drumclffe is doomed to decadence, set out one fine morning from that ancient town to take up its quarters in Sligo, but was overtaken by Nemesis. Being in a hurry, the hare trod accidentally on an open oyster; the bivalve resented the intrusion and at once closed on the hind foot of poor puss.

Popular origin of Sligo's Coat-of-Arms – WG Wood-Martin



Coat-of-Arms adopted by Sligo Corporation in 1953.

In January, 1953 Sligo Corporation adopted the Borough's current Coat-of-Arms.

The Mayor, Councillor Leo Hunt presided at the meeting which adopted 'a comprehensive report' on the matter prepared by the then Town Clerk, Mr T. M. O'Connor.

Arising from 'conflicting opinions as to the origin and form of this device' an inquiry was sent to the Genealogical Office, otherwise known as the Office of Arms, in December, 1951, to secure 'authentic information about it' for the Corporation, as a new Coat-of-Arms was to adorn Sligo premises during the forthcoming An Tostal Festival.

Ireland's Chief Herald undertook the design and ratification of 'an heraldically correct form of the traditional Sligo arms', but warned that 'a difficulty then arose by reason of the fact that several different forms are on record'.

The report noted, the design was previously dealt with by Sligo's principal 19th Century historians, Very Rev Dr O'Rorke and Colonel Wood-Martin, 'but unfortunately their opinions conflicted'.

Wood-Martin's book included several forms of the seal with the two earliest forms on record 'entirely different' in design from the current seal – the early forms representing an animal with either long ears or antlers. Sligo's Royal Charters provided that the Corporation and its Guild of Merchants have one common seal to use and alter as desired. The earliest extant seal (dating from 1709 was used until September 1774) details not a hare, he claimed, but rather a species of deer, with its forefoot raised and the other resting on a piece of rock.

The 'comparatively new device', first appeared on the 25th of January 1775 and was used until the 5th of September 1783, with Wood-Martin stating 'anyone who carefully examines the Corporation books can perceive...this so-called seal is merely the ornamental device' cut from the Sligo Journal newspaper and pasted into the Corporation Minute book. This design transformed the animal into a hare by virtue of its minute scale when contrasted to the hitherto unknown Tower House/Castle and over-arching tree being added.

This seal was used until 1881 when the old Tower House was changed to Drumcliffe Round Tower by way of resolution of Sligo Corporation, which resulted in Col. Wood-Martin asserting this seal couldn't 'be admired for either its artistic or heraldic arrangement'. O'Rorke opined 'the round tower of Drumcliffe or any other round tower, has as little to do with the genuine arms of Sligo as the tower of Babel'.



1612 Crest

Both historians referred to the popular tradition associated with the Coat-of-Arms, the report stated, but in actual fact neither supported the theory. Wood-Martin doubtless treats the topic jokingly referring to the animal as 'poor puss' and as to the hare and shell theory, he added 'to the inhabitants of Sligo accustomed to the present armorial bearing...it may seem like heresy to throw even a doubt on the legend...'

In January 1951, Dr O'Rorke's theories found favour with the Corporation. He deduced the tree and brushwood represents the wood covering the site of the Abbey in St Patrick's time; the hare had an oyster on its foot from the Shelly River and it was either Benbulbin or Knocknarea in the backdrop.

'Whether the theory put forward by Very Rev. Dr O'Rorke has sufficient evidence to support it' the report continued, it was 'accepted as the basis to devise a shield to preserve these features and conform to orthodox heraldic standards.'

