

Chipping into niche market for hand-carved memorials

**Michael
Hoy**

Company:

ErneStone

Position: Founder

Location:

Fermanagh

By James Enright

As a skilled stonemason with a young family, Michael Hoy wanted a change of career that would allow him to work from his home in Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh.

He identified a niche market for hand-carved memorials and headstones and set up ErneStone two months ago, using traditional masonry skills and locally-sourced materials.

“I used to make headstones for relatives and friends in my spare time. Every time I finished one, I got a thank you card. People appreciate the work you do and are more involved in the process. I realised I could make a decent living from it and I am taking it from there,” said Hoy.

This personalised approach means Hoy’s clients can commission entire headstones to their own specifications. They can choose the stone type and shape and request a carving of



Michael Hoy, founder of ErneStone

JOHN MCKITTY

a symbol or a message to commemorate the deceased.

“Walking into any cemetery or graveyard, we see thousands of grave stones looking almost identical or similar. It is lovely for a family to add an image or inscription to their memorial that their loved one held dear,” said Hoy.

Hoy said customers often visited his workshop to explain the significance of their chosen design. “We encourage participation at all stages, and some even have a hand in the work. This can be of great benefit, particularly where children are involved,” he said.

ErneStone’s prices vary, depending on the type of stone used in the headstone, the number of letters required and the extent of the decoration. Hoy said simpler designs typically cost about £1,250 (€1,385).

With more than 20 years’ experience in the masonry industry, Hoy’s impressive portfolio includes altars, tabernacles and baptismal fonts for churches throughout Ireland, including the entire stonework for Carlow Cathedral.

Although it is early days, he has plans to expand ErneStone. He intends to hire an apprentice stonemason and a general

operative in the next 12 months, which will give him more time to develop the business.

He has also applied to the South West Rural Development Agency for grants, which will fund new machinery, promote the business and upgrade facilities at his workshop.

“Fermanagh has a fantastic tradition of stone carving, but the invention of concrete has seen the number of stonemasons dwindle. Thankfully, the headstone will never be superseded, but it is now the only outlet for the likes of myself to make a living,” said Hoy.