

A House for Bishop Willson

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The close friendship between Robert William Willson (1794–1866), first Bishop of Hobart Town, and Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812–1852) was a particularly fruitful one. In 1859, writing to Dean John Fitzpatrick, a Melbourne clerical colleague, Willson recalled Pugin's reaction some seventeen years earlier upon hearing the news of his appointment to the nascent Hobart Town diocese: 'Poor Pugin ... rubbed his hands, and smiling, said with great energy: "only think, the right thing will find its way at the antipodes"!'.¹ When Willson was preparing to depart England for Hobart early in 1844 Pugin wrote to his munificent benefactor the Earl of Shrewsbury:

Bishop Willson has gone down to Plymouth to join his ship. he takes out a great deal with him. 40 Large chasubles!!! Several tombs 2 altars compleat, fonts &^c. & 3 *models of small churches* all to take to pieces with the roofs &^c framed. simple buildings that can be easily erected. It is quite delightful to start in the good style at the antipodes. It is quite an honour.²

Willson more fully described Pugin's contribution when addressing a meeting of his clergy in Hobart on 23 October 1844:

Knowing that I was coming ... to a *new country* where Church furniture *could not be produced*, I determined upon making the greatest exertion and obtain whatever might be useful, or rather requisite for the service of AG. I therefore procured not less than 40 sets of vestments—linen of every description for several churches—such as albs, surplices, amices, Altar cloths, Chalice linen etc. common cloths ... Crosses, Chalices, Ciboriums, Pixes, holy oils stocks ... a portable Altar for use of the Bp when travelling—and in order to introduce the proper church style in this distant land, I also procured a font rightly constructed and fitted which will serve as a model for all other churches, also stone picinas, stone crosses, models of churches constructed on proper scales all by the great restorer of Church architecture and church furniture Mr. Pugin, together with a variety of things which I hope will tend & promote God's glory and your salvation.³

And he added that this had been achieved through the 'zeal talent and *unpaid* [author's emphasis] exertions of Mr. Pugin.⁴

The three church models, which took forty-eight days to construct, and the pattern stone carvings, including gable crosses, sacrariums and holy water stoups, had all been made by craftsmen in the employ of George Myers, Pugin's favoured builder.⁵ This means of furnishing the information to build churches in Tasmania in lieu of the usual plans was a consequence of Willson's understanding that the requisite skills to read and interpret architectural drawings were lacking there, thus obliging Pugin to solve the problem in a manner which would be unique in his career. Willson's belief was more than likely the result of conversations with Fr (later Archbishop) William Bernard Ullathorne

¹ Willson to Fitzpatrick, Shrove Tuesday [1859], Melbourne Diocesan Historical Commission.

² Pugin to Lord Shrewsbury, 30 January 1844, Margaret Belcher, *The Collected Letters of A.W.N. Pugin*, vol. 2 1843–45, OUP, Oxford, 2003, p. 161.

³ Draft of a speech by Bishop Willson on 'the state of church temporalities', given to a meeting of the clergy and others, Hobart, 23.10.1844, Archdiocese of Hobart Archives, Willson Papers, CA.6/WIL.12.

⁴ *Idem*.

⁵ Details of the items planned for Tasmania and of their costs are given in a document entitled 'Dr Willson things for Hobart Town Vandemansland', prepared by Pugin and Myers, Myers Family Trust.

OSB in 1842. Ullathorne's view of Tasmania dated from visits there in the early 1830s and it was a rather bleak one, as evidenced from the dismissive tone about it in his memoirs.⁶

On 25 January 1847 Willson arrived back in England armed with almost three years' experience of life in Tasmania, including the nature of its climate and the sophistication of its colonial architecture, the latter proof that builders and artisans there were perfectly capable of reading conventional architectural drawings. His visit to Europe was 'for the purpose of procuring more priests for his Diocese, and of promoting at head-quarters the cause of the free and bond in the island'.⁷ Towards the end of his time away Willson travelled down to Pugin in Ramsgate. On 14 November 1847 Pugin wrote to John Hardman setting out a long list of items which he intended to provide for Willson. He started the letter with the news that: 'Bishop Willson is here & is much delighted with all here. I am very anxious about his Diocese—he is so anxious to do all right ...', and concluded it by telling Hardman that: 'I am very anxious to establish a regular correspondence with Bishop Willson—so as to keep him supplied with such things as he may require.'⁸ Writing again to Hardman the following day he finished with the exhortation: 'think of everything you can for Bishop Willson. it is a good work in which he is engaged.'⁹ On 16 November Pugin wrote to Hardman with further thoughts on Willson: 'I have a great mind to give him the annunciation in glass we were going to send to Barn town & make another—but even in that case I should like the *heads* repainted. what do you say to this?'¹⁰ Two days later Pugin again wrote to him, saying: 'I will give him the glass—so repaint the heads—it will be considered a treasure over there.'¹¹ The Annunciation lights sent to Barntown in 1847 were similar to those sent instead to Hobart, but not identical (Figure 1 overleaf). On 10 December Pugin again wrote to Hardman regarding the window for Willson: 'I want the size of the window that was done for ushaw which I have given to Bishop Willson—as Myers is to make a stone window to put it in & I think there should be a bit of tracery for the top.'¹² He included a thumbnail sketch of the tracery in the letter. The building referred to was St Cuthbert's College Chapel, Ushaw, which Pugin had designed, and the window was a south window in the Lady Chapel (Figure 2 overleaf). Three days later Pugin was able to inform Hardman: 'I send you the tracery for Dr Willsons window, you will do it in no time.'¹³ And so it was.¹⁴ The Annunciation glass and Myers' stone window setting, along with vestments, carved stonework, church metalwork, brass rubbings, stencils and much more, were carried on the same vessel as Willson, departing England on 9 January 1848 and arriving in Hobart Town just over fourteen weeks later on 19 April. This two-light window had a unique entreaty across its base: '*Orate pro bono statu Augusti Welby de Pugin*' (Pray for the good estate of Augustus Welby de Pugin), and Pugin intended that this entreaty would literally be before Willson's eyes each day for the rest of his life (Figure 3).

⁶ See, for example, Ullathorne's description of the only Catholic chapel on the island in 1833, in Leo Madigan (ed.), *The devil is a jackass*, Gracewing, Leominster, 1995, pp. 67–8.

⁷ T. Kelsh, "*Personal recollections*" of the Right Reverend Robert William Willson, D.D. (first Bishop of Hobart Town), with a portrait of His Lordship, and an introduction on the state of religion in Tasmania, prior to the year 1844, Hobart, 1882, p. 54.

⁸ Pugin to Hardman, 14 November 1847, Margaret Belcher, *The Collected Letters of A.W.N. Pugin*, vol. 3 1846–48, OUP, Oxford, 2009, pp. 310–11.

⁹ Pugin to Hardman, 15 November 1847, *ibid.*, p. 313.

¹⁰ Pugin to Hardman, 16 November 1847, *ibid.*, p. 314.

¹¹ Pugin to Hardman, 18 November 1847, *ibid.*, p. 315.

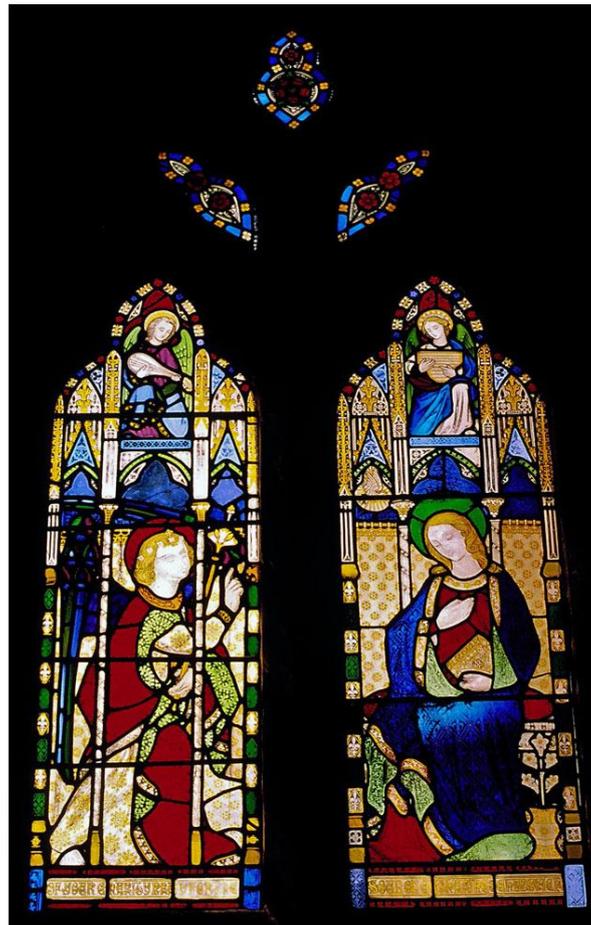
¹² Pugin to Hardman, 10 December 1847, *ibid.*, p. 333.

¹³ Pugin to Hardman, 13 December 1847, *ibid.*, p. 345.

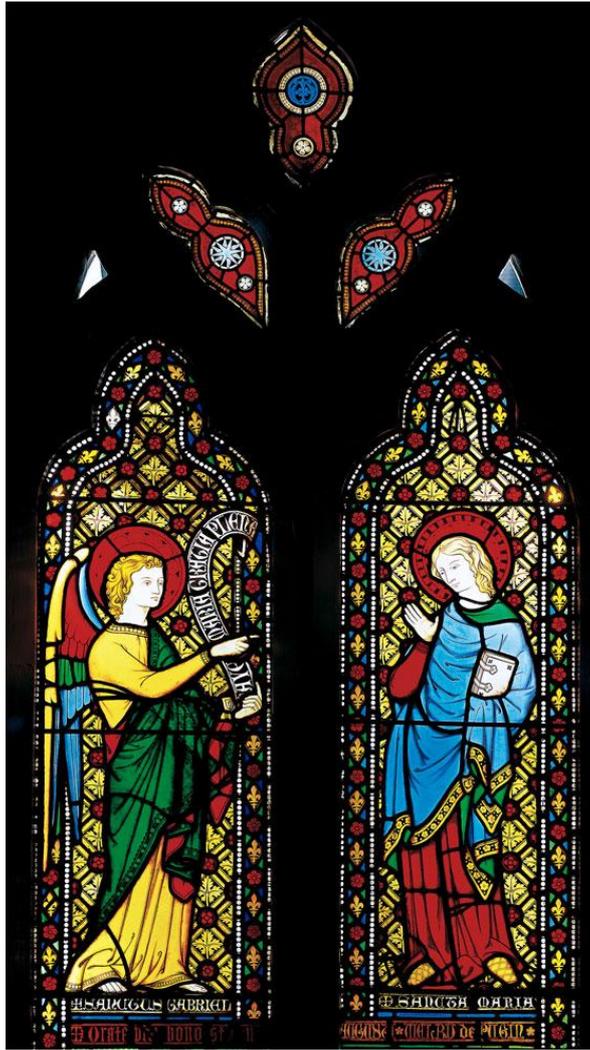
¹⁴ Birmingham City Archives, Hardman Archive, Glass Day Book 1845–54, Hobart Town, 1845–21: 'Bishop Willson Dec 13 [1847] A window for church of 2 lights with figures 3 small tracery pieces'. The only price recorded is 5/- for the case and packing.



Fig. 1. A detail of the chancel east window, St Alphonsus', Barntown, Wexford (Brian Andrews)



The Annunciation window, Ushaw College Chapel, Durham (Brian Andrews)



The Annunciation window, St Joseph's, Hobart (Private collection)

Pugin's intentions for the Annunciation window were spelled out in a set of plans with an accompanying letter which he sent to Willson towards the end of December 1847.¹⁵ The first part of that letter reads as follows:

My dear Lord Bishop

I send you the working drawings of the house & church.

I think you will find it perfectly convenient & suitable for your purpose. I have kept tracings of the drawings so as to be able to send you the fixtures for doors locks hinges &c.

I am very anxious to have this sort of church adopted which I send you. it will be very useful & not costly. & as your Lordship takes out parts worked by Myers of my Patern. I fully expect it will be easily erected. I have referred to the different parts worked by writing on the drawing.

- Mr. Hardman will send up the stained glass window & I have introduced it in the *oratory* in the house – there will be folding doors opening into it from the upper corridor

¹⁵ Copies of the plans, letter and supporting provenance documentation were supplied to me by Peter Cheney, custodian of the material for around forty years. He kindly gave permission for their publication.

so many persons would have access there if necessary I have also made a door opening from your Lordships bed Room into the oratory. which will be both a comfort & convenience. I hope and trust to get up to town & see your Lordship before you sail. & I would explain everything more perfectly but the drawings are very clear & I have taken great pains with them.¹⁶

The complete set of six sheets of drawings for Bishop Willson's house has passed through eight hands in the 165 years since it left Pugin, miraculously surviving with all its associated documentation, and is now in the preliminary stages of conservation at the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office. Its remarkable provenance trail is set out at the end of this article.

Four of the sheets are labelled 'Bishops House', one is labelled '+ Bishops house' and one is unlabelled. All have the familiar '+ AWPugin' monogram/signature over the date '1847' in the lower right-hand corner. On sheets measuring 325mm by 530mm the designs are executed in pencil and pen with some wash as follows, the sheet titles being Pugin's:

- 'front Elevation towards East' (Figure 4)
- 'Plan of Ground floor' (Figure 5 overleaf)
- 'Plan of upper story' (Figure 6 overleaf)
- 'plan of attics & roofs' (Figure 7 overleaf)
- No title, sections and details (Figure 8 overleaf)
- No title, sections and details (Figure 9 overleaf)

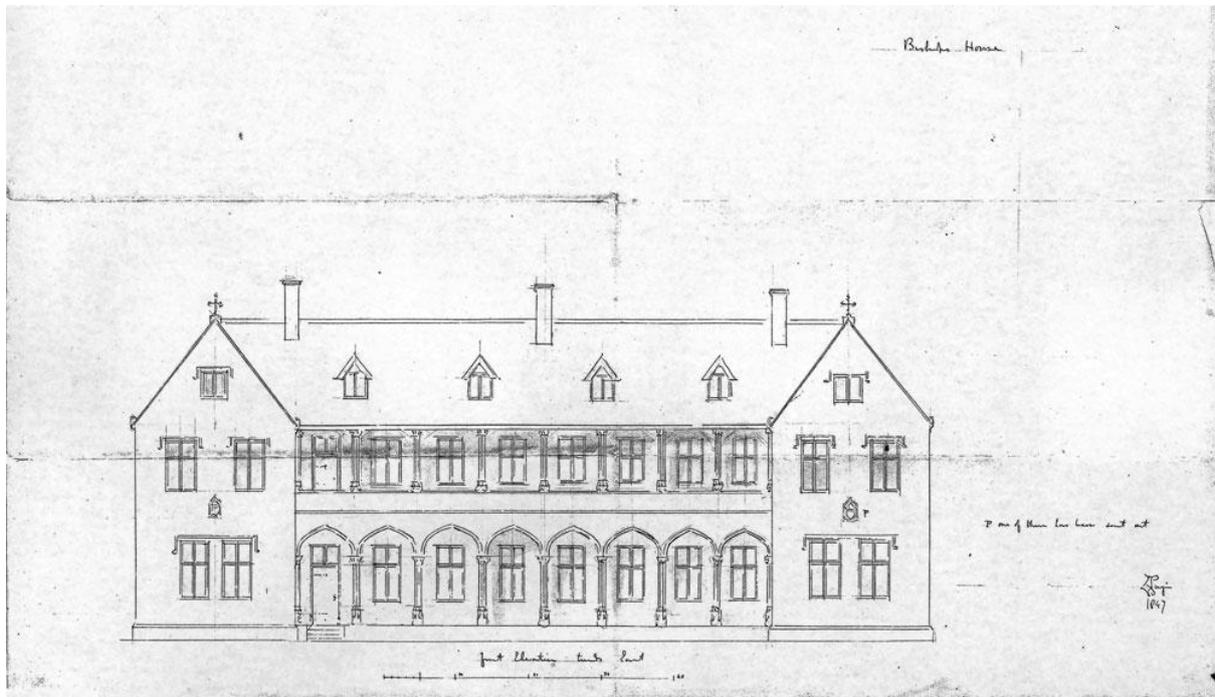


Figure 4. Front elevation (Courtesy: Peter Cheney)

¹⁶ Pugin to Bishop Willson, [late] 1847, Peter Cheney.

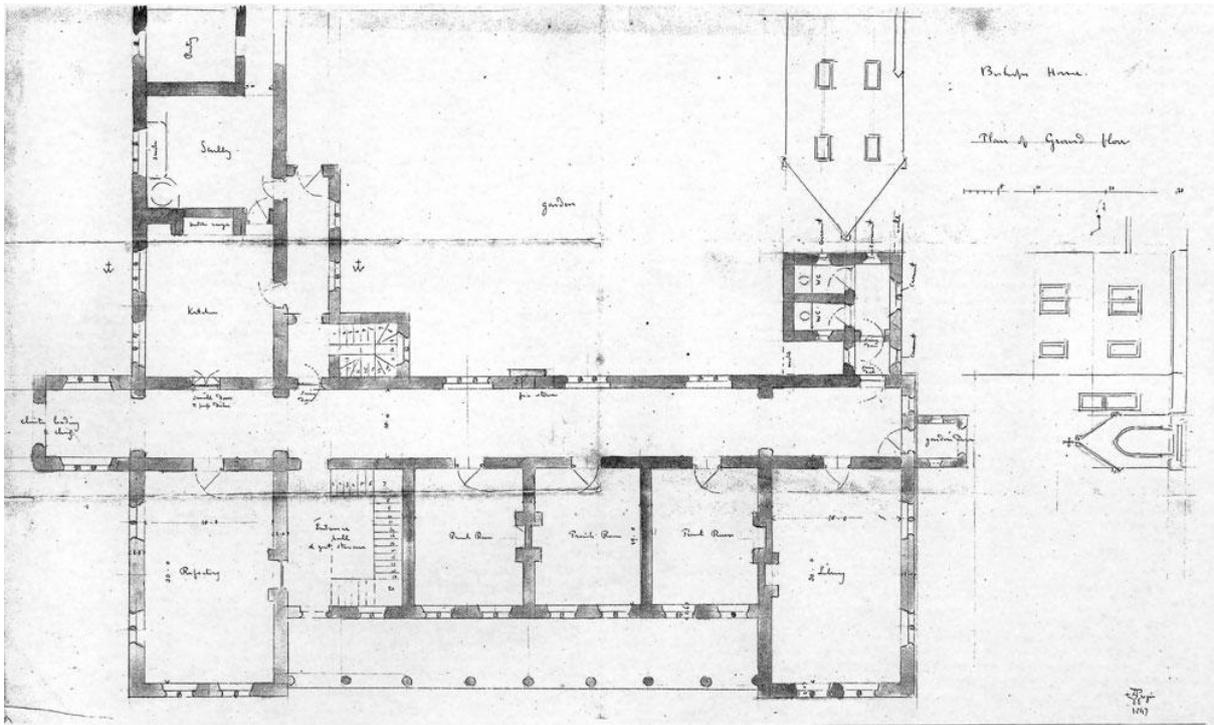


Fig. 5. Ground floor plan (Courtesy: Peter Cheney)

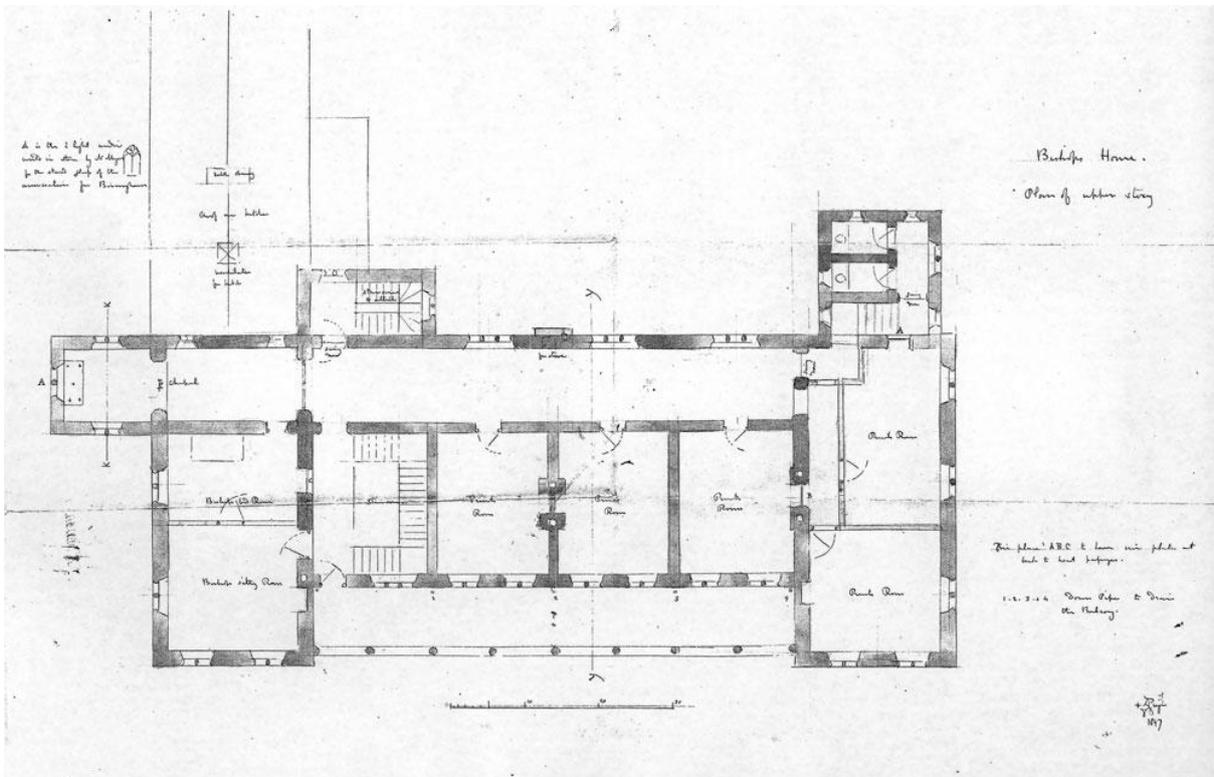


Fig. 6. First floor plan (Courtesy: Peter Cheney)

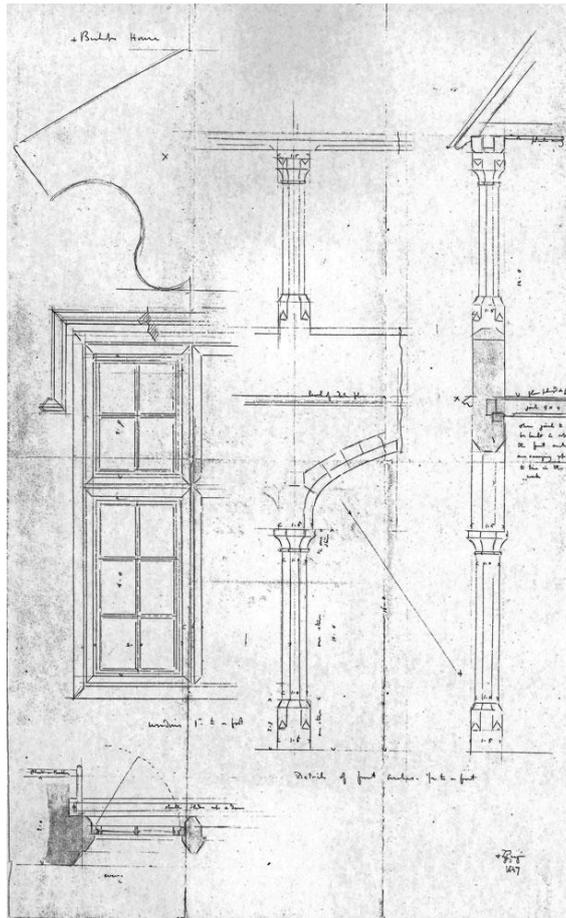


Fig. 9. Sections and details (Courtesy: Peter Cheney)

One is immediately struck by the near-complete symmetry of the facade, the only exception being the entrance door at the left-hand end of the central section. It is clear from the plans of the ground and first floors that this location would give Bishop Willson the most direct access to his living quarters. But the most significant aspect of this composition was Pugin's insertion of verandahs—or, as he labelled them, an 'open gallery' over an 'open cloister'—between the projecting gabled end elements. There is, to the author's knowledge, no other instance where he designed verandahs, indeed 'there is some evidence that he disapproved of them'.¹⁷ The most likely reason for their inclusion is that 'he must have had quite precise instructions from Willson',¹⁸ and that must surely have been the result of his friend's three-years' experience of the Tasmanian climate. At the centres of the gabled ends were inset carved stone elements labelled 'P' for which Pugin had written the note, 'P one of these has been sent out [to Hobart]'. This referred to a pattern stone-carving produced by Myers' men, similar to one comprising a mitre over a monogrammed shield which he had designed for the facade of the Nottingham house abutting his St Barnabas' Church (later Cathedral) for Bishop Walsh, Vicar Apostolic of the Central District (Figure 10 overleaf). The detail to the plain facade was very late, with four-centred arches to the ground floor veranda and square-headed inwards-opening casement windows with mullions and transoms, dripstones being only applied to those windows directly exposed to the weather, and hence not for decorative effect. In the roof space were no less than ten attics.

¹⁷ Private communication from Timothy Brittain-Catlin.

¹⁸ I am indebted to Sandra Wedgwood for this observation.



Fig. 10. Bishop Walsh's mitre and shield carving, Nottingham Cathedral presbytery (Nicholas Callinan)

The ground plan did not adhere to the facade's symmetry, being dictated by a thoughtful disposition of the functional elements. Its spine was a broad transverse corridor at the rear of the principal rooms. The refectory occupied the long left-hand room, its fireplace having an iron back giving directly onto the 'Entrance hall & great staircase'. Pugin followed this practice throughout the house for spaces without fireplaces, explaining it in a note on the first-floor plan: 'Fire place A B C to have iron plates at back to heat passages'. For the same reason he made provision 'for a stove' midway along the ground and first-floor corridors. Pugin's practical concern for warming stone houses was recalled in later years by John Hardman Powell when, in describing the oratory in *The Grange*, he mentioned 'a small stove always burning in cold weather' and Pugin's reason: "most people pray better when warm"¹⁹. Across the corridor from the refectory lay a single-storey range comprising kitchen, scullery and pantry with two 'small doors to pass dishes' to and from the kitchen. Access to these areas was via a pent-roof passage on their right flank, reached through a swing door and the ground floor of a stairwell reaching up to the attic spaces in the roof. This latter was set in a rectangular tower with pyramidal roof, the main vertical element in the house's composition. The central section of the ground floor had three priests' rooms and the long right-hand room was the library. Opening off the corridor at this end, and thus furthest from the kitchen, was a gabled two-storey projection entered via swing doors and housing two WCs on each level. The right-hand end of the corridor was accessible from outside via a gabled porch labelled 'garden door' while the left-hand end abutted the first bay of a projected 'cloister leading to church'. Pugin noted on a sectional elevation on another sheet that: 'This arch [opening onto the cloister] will be walled up at present but it will eventually lead to cloister & church'.

¹⁹ Alexandra Wedgwood (ed.), '*Pugin in his home*': A memoir of J.H. Powell', reprint from *Architectural History*, vol. 31, 1988, p. 8.

On the first floor were five priests' rooms and Bishop Willson's suite comprising 'Bishops sitting Room', 'Bishops bed Room' and 'Chapel'. The sitting room was entered via a door opening off the first-floor stair landing, conveniently adjacent to a door giving onto the verandah. The chapel, situated above the left-hand end of the ground floor corridor, was closed off from the upper corridor by folding doors so that, as Pugin described in his accompanying letter, 'many persons would have access there if necessary'. The letter 'A' beside the chapel east window referred to a note on this sheet: 'A is the 2 light window worked in stone by Mr Myers for the stained glass of the annunciation from Birmingham', just as described in the letter, and there was a thumbnail sketch of the window's elevation. Pugin's aforementioned entreaty was thus a little above eye level and Willson would face it every day as he celebrated his mass. Further proof of Pugin's thoughtful planning can be seen in a note beside the sectional elevation of the chapel and corridor below it (see Figure 8): 'Double floor under chapel to prevent noise'.

From the time of his arrival in Hobart in 1844 Willson had designated the 1841 Gothick St Joseph's Church, Macquarie Street, as his pro-cathedral.²⁰ By 1856, with no funds available to erect either a cathedral or a residence, he arranged for the chancel of St Joseph's to be renovated in accordance with Pugin's and his ecclesiological ideals, and largely at his own expense. The Annunciation window was built into the chancel south wall facing Willson's episcopal chair against the north wall.²¹ Despite this, Willson did not abandon his intention of having the house built. In 1860 he forwarded Pugin's plans to the Melbourne architect William Wardell, recently engaged to design a cathedral for him following a financial windfall, and sought his professional opinion of them.²² Wardell's interesting response, dated 21 April 1860, is reproduced below:

My dear Lord

I have looked through Mr Pugin's plans for your Lordship's House – which I think will be very convenient but I am not quite sure about the Rooms in the Roof – here they would be uninhabitable – but perhaps with you the heat is not sufficient. The arrangement also for the Bp's Bed Room seems to be a little undesirable It is a small room & no fire place – I would recommend that yr lordship should appropriate as a Bed Room one of the adjoining Rooms & so let these two be thrown into one.

In all other respects it seems everything you could desire – but I would suggest that the Floor of the Upper Verandah should be made watertight, and well drained.

I return your Lordship by Post – the Plans for the House – How characteristic they are of their gifted author – the Letter which accompanied them I enclose²³

Wardell's 1860 working drawings for St Mary's Cathedral, Hobart, bear further evidence of Willson's undiminished desire to have Pugin's house built. The east elevation (Figure 11 overleaf) shows a door at the south end of the sacristy east wall, opening onto a covered way shown in section, surely intended to lead to the house.²⁴

²⁰ Willson's Tasmanian experience and his relationship with Pugin are comprehensively addressed in Brian Andrews, *Creating a Gothic paradise: Pugin at the antipodes*, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, 2002.

²¹ In 1877 the window was moved to the nave north wall in consequence of an archway being opened in the chancel south wall from a side chapel for the Sisters of Charity in the adjacent convent.

²² William Wilkinson Wardell (1823–1899) was a leading early follower of Pugin in England, migrating to Australia in 1858 for health reasons. Pugin designed furnishings for his Church of Our Lady Star of the Sea, Greenwich (1846–51). For his Australian career see Brian Andrews, *Australian Gothic: the Gothic Revival in Australian architecture from the 1840s to the 1950s*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2001, pp. 76–83.

²³ William Wardell to Bishop Willson, 21 March 1860, Peter Cheney.

²⁴ The principal entry to the sacristy was in its west wall.

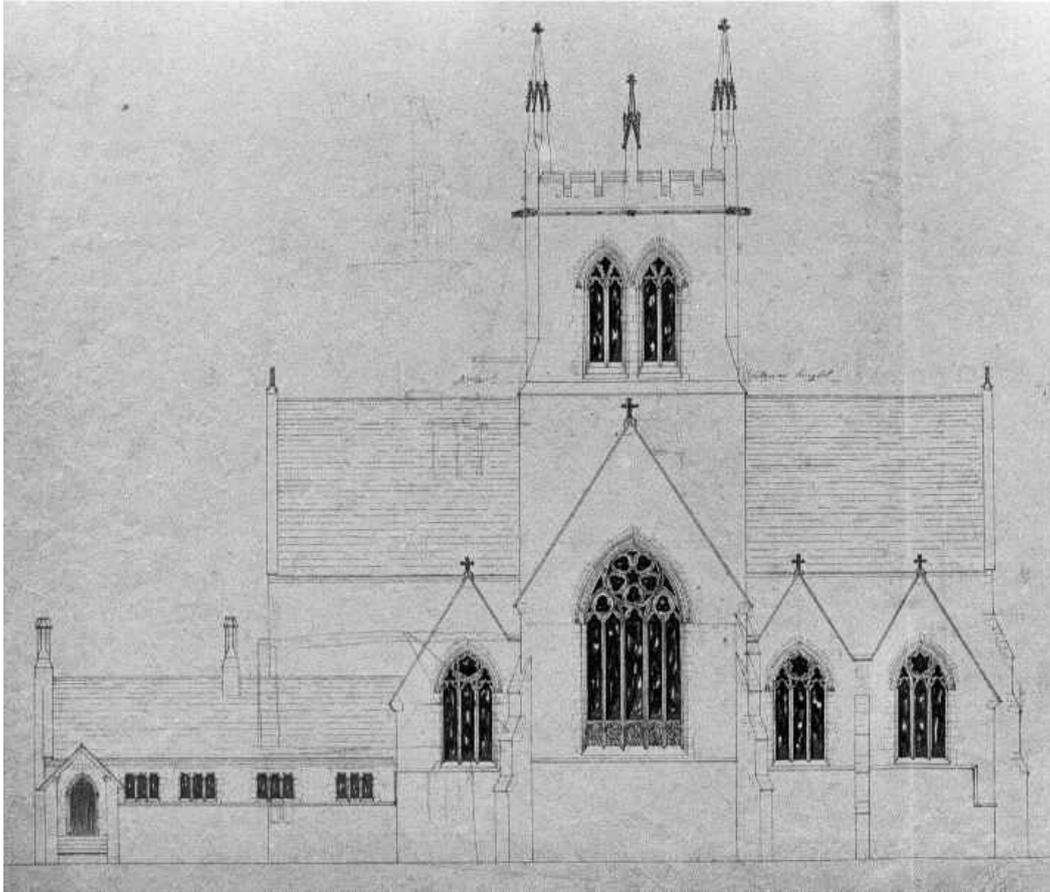


Fig. 11. The east elevation of St Mary's Cathedral, Hobart, drawing by William Wardell
(Courtesy: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery)

On 27 February 1865 Willson left Hobart on what was planned to be his last trip to England, having entrusted the Pugin plans and associated documents to his protégé architect Henry Hunter.²⁵ On the large envelope containing all this the bishop had written: 'It is my hope / and desire, that / this plan may be / carried out / + RW Willson / Bp of Hobart / 3 Feb 1865'. But this was not to be. Ten days out on the voyage he suffered a severe stroke, lingered on in England and died in Nottingham on 30 June 1866, just one day before the first stage of Wardell's Hobart cathedral was opened.

Yet, in some ways the house design did take root in Tasmanian soil through the agency of Hunter, a devoted disciple of Pugin 'of whom he was a great admirer, and of whom he was ever fond of talking'.²⁶ He had copies of the pattern mitre and shield carving bearing Willson's 'W' monogram built into the sacristy south walls of three little Puginesque churches built under his bishop's watchful eye: St Michael's, Campbell Town (1856–7), St John's, Glenorchy (1858–9) and St Thomas', Sorell (1863–4) (Figure 12 overleaf). Then, when tasked in 1866 with designing a convent for a community of Presentation Sisters on the same site as Wardell's St Mary's Cathedral and just a few paces from its east end, he turned to the Willson house plans and produced a building which in its overall composition and much of its plan form followed Pugin's design (Figure 13 overleaf).

²⁵ For Hunter's career as a church architect under Willson's patronage see Andrews, *Gothic Paradise*, *op. cit.*, pp. 142–59.

²⁶ Alan Walker, 'Henry Hunter and his work', *Proceedings of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science*, vol. 19, 1989, p. 421.



Fig. 12. Bishop Willson's mitre and shield carving, St Thomas, Sorell (Brian Andrews)



Fig. 13. St Mary's Convent, Hobart (Brian Andrews)

By moving the main roof back he was able to cover the entire central section without the need for Pugin's double roof with valley gutter (see Figure 8), and having eliminated the verandahs he placed a simple gabled porch over the main entrance. Beyond this, the principal elements of Pugin's layout were retained. Thus, a transverse corridor was situated against the rear wall of the ground and first floors, and the refectory and kitchen block remained as per Pugin. So did the two staircases; 'a handsome massive staircase' in the entrance hall and a rear one in an offset rectangular tower giving access to the attic rooms.²⁷ Hunter added one final touch of Pugin's house design by installing another mitre and shield carving, in this case on the gable of a porch at the left-hand end of the ground floor corridor, but now it bore a detail from the arms of the new bishop, Daniel Murphy, and his episcopal motto (Figure 14).

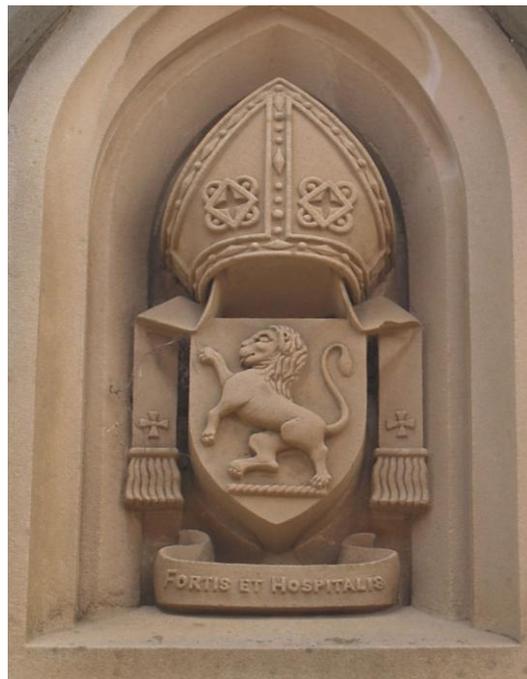


Fig. 14. Bishop Murphy's mitre and shield carving, St Mary's Convent, Hobart (Brian Andrews)

In recalling Pugin's huge output of architectural drawings, this small remnant and its provenance trail, set out below, are a sober reminder of just how fragile is the survival of such precious ephemera.

1847	Pugin sends the house plans to Bishop Willson
1855	Henry Hunter commences as an architect under the auspices of Willson.
Between 1855 & 1865	Willson entrusts the Pugin house plans to Hunter.
1888	Hunter moves to Brisbane, taking the plans with him, and enters into partnership with a former pupil Leslie Corrie.
1892	Hunter dies, and his library (including the Pugin plans) is purchased by Corrie.
1918	Corrie dies and his estate is inherited by his widow Christina.
1922	Christina marries Queensland politician Hon. Andrew Thynne whose wife had died in 1918.

²⁷ C. Verrier (ed.), *St Mary's College founded 1868, celebrating 125 years*, Hobart, 1993, p. 6, here quoting from an 1868 account describing the new convent. The 'handsome massive staircase' was later removed in one of many alterations to the building's interior.

- 1927** Andrew Thynne dies.
- 1928** Christina passes the plans to Brisbane architect Theo Thynne, a son from Andrew Thynne's first marriage.
- Early 1970s** Peter Cheney, a Brisbane architect and head of the Charles Fulton School of Architecture, Queensland Institute of Technology (QIT), writes a brief article on Pugin for the 'Chapter News' of the Queensland Chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. As a result, Theo Thynne contacts him and shows him the plans. With the plans he has some papers to do with their provenance including a letter from Pugin to Willson
- Early 1980s** Howard Lawrence, a QIT final year architecture student takes for his thesis topic, on Cheney's suggestion, the question of how the plans for Old St Stephens Church came to Brisbane. Cheney thinks that there just might be a clue in the papers that were with the Pugin plans. Theo Thynne has passed away by this time so Cheney asks the son John Thynne if he still has his father's papers. John gives the plans and other papers into Cheney's keeping with a view to having them preserved.
- 2012** The plans and associated documentation are deposited with the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office.
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