PUGIN FOUNDATION
FRIENDS OF PUGIN

Newsletter

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Welcome to the twenty-third Friends Newsletter.

You may like to know of a recently published book by noted English Pugin scholar Michael Fisher. It is the story of Hardmans, the famous Birmingham firm that made Pugin's metalwork and, from 1845, his stained glass.

Stonemason Edrei Stanton hammers a wedge between a joist and one of the new beams beneath the floor of St Patrick's, Colebrook (Image: Brian Andrews).

The title is *Hardman of Birmingham, Goldsmith and Glasspainter*, published in 2008 by Landmark Publishing. The ISBN is 978-1-84306-362-9.

We can highly recommend this profusely illustrated book, which has good coverage of Hardman's Australian works. The Foundation's Executive Officer Brian Andrews assisted Michael in sourcing photos of the latter.

The floor strengthening of St Patrick's Church, Colebrook is now completed and is detailed in this issue. We hoped to have the next major works, namely, re-wiring, new lighting, structural strengthening and re-roofing completed by the end of August. However, building and related firms in Tasmania have been having difficulty responding to the present high level of demand and so our work has been delayed. The electrical contractor is due on site on 1 September and the builder expects to begin work shortly after the middle of that month. We now anticipate completion of these works around the end of October or early November.

We are presently looking into ways of re-fencing the Colebrook property. The Tasmanian firm Lester Franks Survey & Geographic, through the good offices of Michael Guidici, has recently completed a re-survey of the boundaries as an in-kind contribution to this project. We will let you know of the progress in a forthcoming issue.

We hope that you enjoy the August issue.

Every best wish,
Jude Andrews
Administrative Officer

The Renaissance of St Patrick's, Colebrook

Work continues on the conservation of St Patrick's, the most recent being strengthening of the nave and aisle floors to enable them to support the weight of scaffolding and a vertical lift machine. These latter will facilitate re-wiring of the church, installation of new lighting and certain structural strengthening measures.

As we have mentioned before, this church was constructed from an accurate detailed scale model by supervising architect Frederick Thomas and builder Patrick Lynch. Because of this there were not the usual foundation drawings, so the architect and builder were left to their own devices in choosing the supporting structures for the floors. In the case of the nave and aisles a dwarf wall was constructed down the nave centre-line, the floor joists being supported at one end by the aisle walls and at the other by the dwarf wall. This was a relatively long span and the floor was quite 'springy'. To add to this problem the joist landings on the walls had deteriorated over a century and a half. In our project engineer Peter Spratt's estimation the Colebrook floor was quite simply the worst he had encountered in his many years working as a structural engineer in the field of historic buildings conservation. His solution was to have longitudinal timber beams installed under the joists along the line of the nave piers, effectively halving the span.

Stonemason Edrei Stanton and his colleague Ronnie O'Neill installed the beams, hammering wedges between the joists and the beams so as to tighten up the connections. They also repaired the joist landings on the aisle walls. Because of the building geometry this work has effectively strengthened the floors by a factor of eight times.

One of the new underfloor beams bolted to a nave pier footing (Image: Brian Andrews).

Floor joists wedged tightly against one of the new underfloor beams (Image: Brian Andrews).

Metalwork Marvels

Each issue we bring you an exquisite example of Pugin's astonishing creativity in reviving the spirit of medieval metalwork.

Altar crucifix: designed early 1840s, made by John Hardman & Company, Birmingham, 1846; base metal, with blue enamel to cross and base, red enamel to nimbus of corpus; 66.0cm high.

Pugin's Designs

Baptismal Fonts (Part 7)

In this series we are looking in detail at Pugin's designs for buildings, furnishings and objects. In this issue we continue an examination of his baptismal fonts.

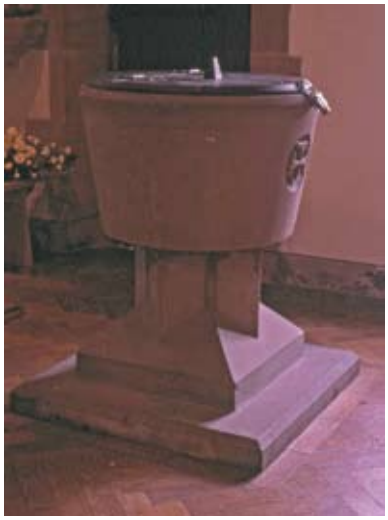
Pugin designed some superb fonts and font covers, most notably those in St Giles', Cheadle, and St Augustine's, Ramsgate, both paying brilliant and original homage to the medieval fonts of East Anglia. But arguably the most dramatic of all was the 1844 font for his St Mary's, Brewood. In the purity of its line and form and the bold simplicity of its volumes this extraordinary font anticipated William Butterfield's better known High Victorian fonts by a decade or more.[1]

The bowl is of tapered cylindrical form with chamfered top edge seated on a square column with vertical Vee notches at the centre of each face. This column is interpenetrated by a pyramidal base set at 45 degrees to the column so that the edges of the pyramid terminate inside the Vee notches. The whole is supported by a square plinth with chamfered upper edge. Of the utmost simplicity, these dramatic volumes are only relieved by two carvings sunk in circular recesses on opposite sides of the bowl. The carvings consist of an Agnus Dei and a cross moline, the latter form of cross being a favourite of Pugin's for handles on the lids of ciboria.

This font, unlike many others by Pugin, still retains its original flat circular wooden lid with its typical foliated metal hinges and hasp. The lid is hinged at roughly its quarter point. When opened, the larger part rests upon the truncated metal pyramid at the centre of the lid. Its interior is lead-lined with a larger and a smaller compartment, one for the baptismal water and the other to carry away the drippings to a drain.

Pugin was insistent that 'even the poorest church should be provided with a regular stone font', observing with a touch of his trademark sarcasm: 'It is a lamentable fact, however, that this most essential piece of church furniture is seldom to be found in modern Catholic churches,—a jug and a basin, such as might be used by puritans and fanatics, being often the only substitute, and these in places where silver tea services are being subscribed for the clergyman.'[2]

Originally sited in Pugin's normal position at the west end near the entrance, the font is now in the south aisle.



Left: The Brewood baptismal font (Image: Brian Andrews).

Above L. The font cover (Image: Michael Fisher).

Above R. The cover open (Image: Michael Fisher).

Footnotes

[1] William Butterfield (1814–1900) was a major architect of the High Victorian phase of the Gothic Revival, a movement which favoured massiveness and simplicity of detail often derived from Continental Gothic sources.

[2] [A. Welby Pugin], 'On the Present State of Ecclesiastical Architecture in England', *Dublin Review*, vol. X, May 1841, p. 323.

Pugin's Irish Works

Pugin's Australian works are best understood in the context of his many designs for buildings in England and Ireland. To this end we are running an occasional series, initially, on his Irish buildings in south-east Ireland. We continue in this issue with a note on St James' Church, Ramsgrange.

South-west elevation of St James', Ramsgrange (Image: Brian Andrews).

Introduction

St James', Ramsgrange, County Wexford, is amongst Pugin's least well known churches. Over the years its authorship has been questioned, assessments ranging from key parts of the building probably being not by Pugin to its simply being derived by another hand from his St Peter's College Chapel, Wexford.[1] Dr Roderick O'Donnell in his 1995 essay, 'The Pugins in Ireland',[2] cited documentary evidence to prove that the Ramsgrange church was by Pugin. It is the purpose of this note to prove from the internal evidence of the building's fabric that Pugin had to be the designer and to show that it was not copied from St Peter's College Chapel.

The north-west elevation (Image: Brian Andrews).

Ramsgrange is a small village situated on the east side of Wexford Harbour in the south-west corner of County Wexford. In 1838 it was part of the Parish of The Hook, of which Fr George Murphy was parish priest.[3] Fr Murphy had been able to obtain in that year plans for a church in Ramsgrange. The circumstances were reported in the *Catholic Directory*: 'J. (Hyacinth) Talbot Esq., MP, had the kindness to procure from Mr. Pugin a plan of a church at Bree which is now in a state of forwardness and will be completed next summer' and 'to him the Revd. George Murphy and his parishioners are indebted for the plan of the church of St James at Ramsgrange'.[4] The Talbot connection with Pugin came from his being related to Pugin's great patron John Talbot, sixteenth Earl of Shrewsbury, and was to influence a significant proportion of Pugin's Irish commissions.

The Design

This large church, in a thirteenth-century idiom, consisted of a rectangular plan encompassing a nave and chancel in one space with no separate external articulation of the chancel. In this regard it was like several contemporary but much smaller churches of Pugin's, including St Mary's, Uttoxeter, and St Augustine's, Solihull, both also designed in 1838.[5] The nave was six bays long and the chancel was one bay in length, that bay being longer than the nave ones. There was a central west steeple, at least one side porch, and a large sacristy against the chancel north wall. Each nave bay was lit by a tall lancet window and the chancel east wall had a trinity of lancets. The tower likewise had narrow lancet lights and the belfry stage openings had what was in effect

a two-light plate tracery configuration comprising lancets surmounted by an oculus. There were statue niches to the tower west face and the porches. Internally, the church had an open timber roof to the nave and a ribbed wood and plaster ceiling to the chancel, its profile following that of the curved arch braces of the nave trusses.

It is most probable that the design included a broach spire surmounting the tower, but this was never built. In this regard Pugin was to write in 1841:

> *A tower to be complete should be terminated by a spire: every tower during the finest periods of pointed architecture either was, or was intended, to be so finished; a spire is in fact an ornamental covering to a tower; a flat roof is contrary to every principle of the style, and it was not till the decline of the art that they were adopted. The vertical principle, emblematic of the resurrection, is a leading characteristic of Christian architecture, and this is nowhere so conspicuous or striking as in the majestic spires of the middle ages.*[6]

Interior looking east (Image: Brian Andrews).

Let us now examine the building's component parts to prove their Pugin origin and to show that the church was not derived from St Peter's College Chapel, Wexford.

The nave roof trusses consist of an arch-braced collar tie with curved braces, the arches landing on wall plates comprising attached columns with moulded capitals and bases terminating in carved corbels having thirteenth-century stiff leaf foliation. Between the trusses were two levels of curved wind braces in the plane of the purlins. This is precisely the form of the Wexford roof, but there is a reason other than copying. Documentary evidence shows that Pugin re-used elements from other of his Irish designs in his works there. Thus, for some elements in St Michael's, Gorey, he directed the Wexford builder Richard Pierce to earlier designs for which Pierce had the drawings. Relevant excerpts from the letter of 22 June 1839 to Pierce which accompanied the Gorey plans are as follows (with Pugin's spelling):

> *as the roof over nave is precisely the same in framing and scantling as one which I Last sent you I have not drawn it out to a Large scale. the pillars and arches are also the same as Father Barden's church of which you have the working drawings for This church.*
> *...The doors are to be put together Like those of St Peter's Wexford.*
> *...The cross on the west gable is the same as that I have drawn for Father Bardens church.*[7]

The church for Fr Barden that Pugin referred to was intended for Tintern parish but never constructed.

We can conclude that either Pugin himself recycled the roof details in the drawings for Ramsgrange or that Pierce was the Ramsgrange church builder and was following instructions from Pugin analogous to those provided for Gorey. Note too that there are no other common elements between the Ramsgrange and Wexford churches. That Pierce was prepared to work on buildings so removed from Wexford town is shown by his possession of the Tintern drawings.

The differing, more elaborate, treatment of the chancel roof is a textbook example of Pugin's concept of propriety, which he defined as follows:

'the external and internal appearance of an edifice should be illustrative of, and in accordance with, the purpose for which it is destined'.[8]

For churches this meant that the chancel should be the most highly elaborated part of the building because it was, in Pugin's view, 'the most sacred part of the edifice'.[9] Such a treatment was not to be found in contemporary Irish churches.

The triple lancet windows in the chancel east wall display a subtle refinement of proportions to be found in medieval thirteenth-century work and in Pugin's own designs,[10] but again not in Irish churches designed in the 1830s, namely, that the central light is slightly wider than the flanking ones.

We turn now to the exterior of the church. The precise forms of the gable copings and their kneelers on the porches and sacristy are specific to Pugin and indeed to his earliest designs, being found on his Irish churches at Bree, Gorey, Ramsgrange and Wexford, as well as at Reading, Keighley, Solihull, Dudley, Macclesfield and Uttoxeter in England. Also characteristic of these early details is that the supporting corbels are at least one course below the kneeler.[11]

We note other sophisticated details on this building that were only within the knowledge and competence of Pugin at that time, particularly mouldings. The chamfer to the sides of the statue niche on the tower is a good example, being quintessentially thirteenth century. The upper end has a fillet moulding at the transition to the chamfer stop and the lower end terminates in a pyramidal stop. This is a world away from the naïve Gothick of contemporary Irish architects and builders,[12] pointing to Pugin's magisterial grasp of the grammar and vocabulary of medieval architecture.

The west door mouldings are another example. The form of the moulding profile was one widely used by Pugin for his simpler buildings and is to be found inter alia at Berrima, Oatlands and Ryde on the Early English parts of those churches. Also of note are the sophisticated stops to the bases of the mouldings, again utterly

The south porch (Image: Brian Andrews).

Statue niche in the tower west face (Image: Brian Andrews).

unknown in other Irish work of the period. Pugin's use of a Y-shaped central support to divide this, the principal door, is a far cry from its frequent use as window tracery in contemporary Irish Gothick churches.

Construction

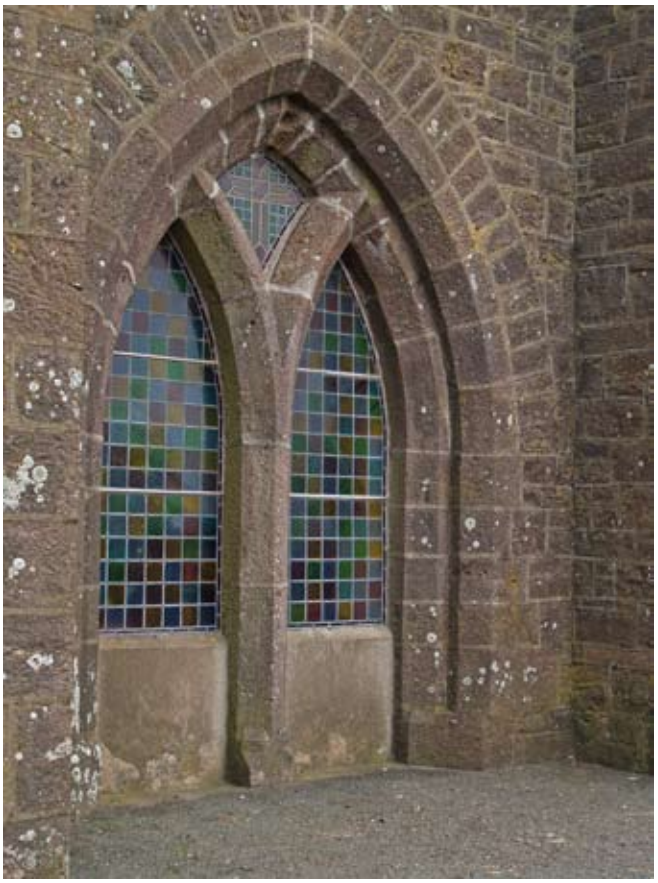
Work began on 25 July 1838 and progressed slowly, being completed except for the steeple in 1843.[13] The tower was not constructed until 1870 and the spire never erected.[14] Instead, the tower was terminated by an ungainly flat capping with ludicrously under-scale spikes at the corners, underscoring by their evidently inferior hand the authenticity of the tower itself as having been erected from Pugin's original drawings.[15]

Later changes

It is now not possible to envisage Pugin's chancel arrangement and furnishings because all has been swept away since the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s. Severe damp problems have led to the nave and chancel exterior wall surfaces along with their buttresses being coated with cement render, obliterating the small-scale articulation of the random rubble wall plane. Apparently for the same reason much of the interior has been faced with sheeting.

The west door has been blocked up and converted into a window, and the south porch has become a shrine, its door also blocked up and made into a window.

Despite these changes St James', Ramsgrange, remains a significant, if largely overlooked, early example of Pugin's efforts at creating a cheap capacious church.



Blocked-up west door (Image: Brian Andrews).

Footnotes

[1] See, for example, Phoebe Stanton, Pugin, Thames & Hudson, London, pp. 37, 198, and [Diocese of Ferns], *Churches of the Diocese of Ferns: Symbols of a Living Faith*, Booklink, Ireland, 2004, p. 117.

[2] Roderick O'Donnell, 'The Pugins in Ireland', in Paul Atterbury (ed.), *A.W.N. Pugin: Master of Gothic Revival*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1995, pp. 141–3.

[3] *The Catholic Directory and Annual Register, for the Year 1839*, Simpkins and Marshall, London, 1839, p. 130. This large parish was divided in 1863 into two separate parishes, one being Ramsgrange with Duncannon as its curacy. Ramsgrange was further divided in 1972, with Duncannon being constituted as a separate parish (*Churches of the Diocese of Ferns*, op. cit., p. 70).

[4] Quoted in O'Donnell, op. cit., pp. 141, 156. The Assumption, Bree, was opened in 1839.

[5] Pugin designed other churches with externally undifferentiated chancels earlier and later than the abovementioned examples, but with more complex plan forms, including St Marie's, Derby (1837), and St Alphonsus', Barntown (1844).

[6] [Pugin], 'Present State', op. cit., pp. 317–8.

[7] Pugin to Pierce, 22 June 1839, reproduced in facsimile in Walter Forde, *St. Michael's Church, Gorey, 1839–1989*, Gorey, 1989, pp. 76–7.

[8] Pugin, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*, John Weale, London, 1841, p. 50.

[9] Present State, op. cit., p. 330.

[10] For example in his chancel east window of St Francis Xavier's, Berrima, designed in 1842.

[11] His mature—and more sophisticated—treatment of this detail had flat-topped coping stones often terminating in a gablet, with the corbel generally directly below the kneeler. For details of both types see *Friends Newsletter*, no. 13, August 2007, pp. 4–5.

[12] See, for example, *Churches of the Diocese of Ferns*, op. cit.

[13] *Churches of the Diocese of Ferns*, op. cit., p. 117.

[14] ibid.

[15] It is fair to say that we can dismiss the possibility of an Irish architect in 1870 deliberately emulating Pugin's tough rendered-down thirteenth-century style and its vocabulary to design this tower.