

ST. JOHN'S ANGLICAN CATHEDRAL AND THE BEGINNINGS OF ECCLESIOLOGICAL GOTHIC IN NEWFOUNDLAND

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The Anglican cathedral of St. John the Baptist in St. John's, Newfoundland (fig. 1), is a quintessentially English Gothic building of the thirteenth century, built six hundred years later and three thousand miles from England. Notwithstanding its remote location in one of the most impoverished corners of the British Empire, it was designed by the most famous and prolific architect of Victorian England, George (later Sir George) Gilbert Scott. The existence of such an extraordinary monument in such an unlikely place is due to the convergence of a number of social, religious, economic, and architectural factors that have never received scholarly attention. The goal of this paper is to redress that neglect by examining events leading to and including the cathedral's first building campaign, which occurred from 1847 to 1850.

As late as 1836, there was only one Anglican church in the city of St. John's. That church (fig. 2) was an extremely modest affair that would later be described as "a wooden shed of the most monstrous description."² The process that eventually led to its replacement by Gilbert Scott's cathedral was triggered by a growing sense of crisis in the Established (i.e. Anglican) Church with respect to its colonial affairs. That sense of crisis was a central theme of the 1838 annual meeting of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), which had been founded at the beginning of the eighteenth century to serve the interests of the Established Church abroad.³ According to their annual report of 1838, Britain had planted colonies in places as

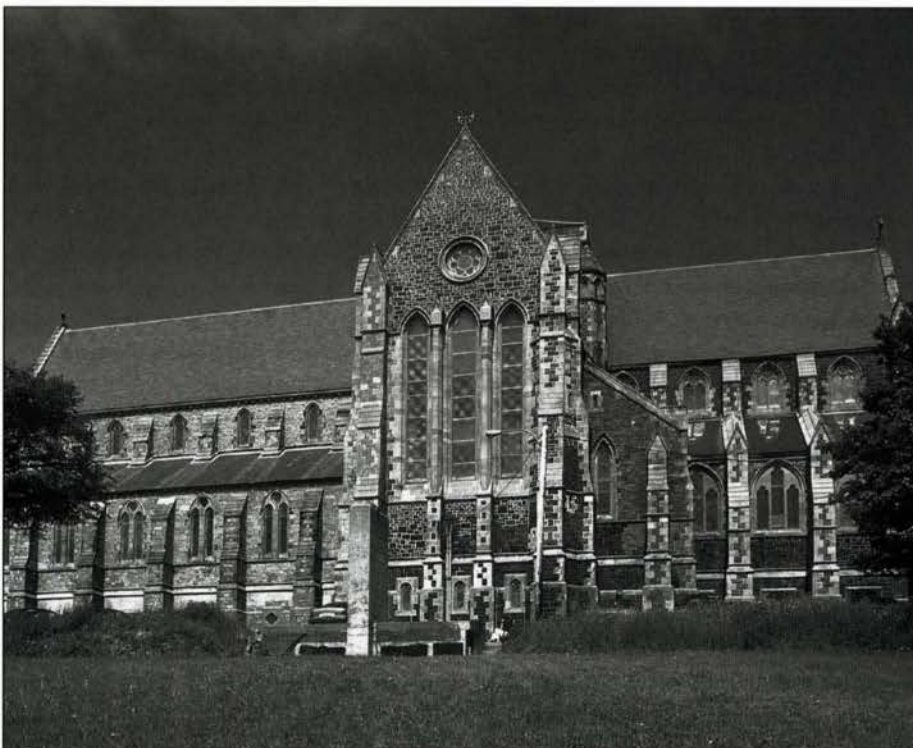


FIG. 1. ST. JOHN'S ANGLICAN CATHEDRAL. FROM THE SOUTH. | PETER COFFMAN

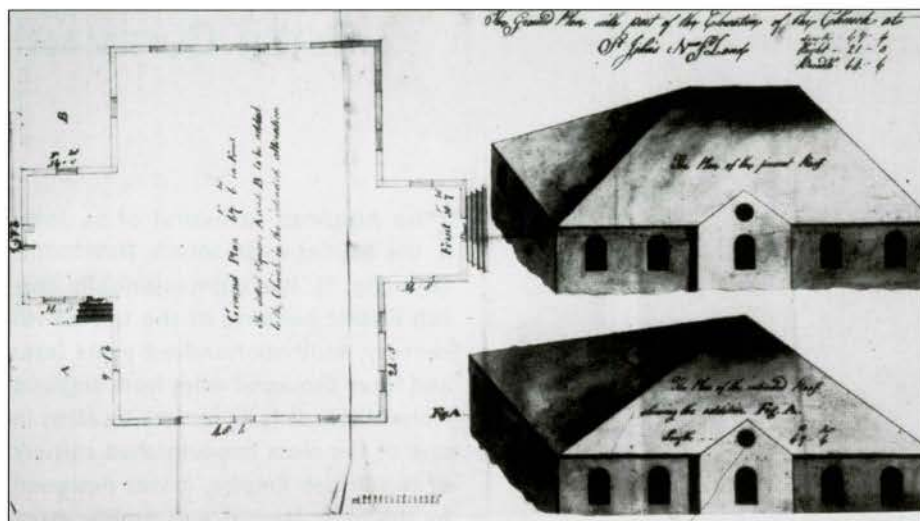


FIG. 2. ST. JOHN'S, ANGLICAN CHURCH BEFORE 1846. | C. FRANCIS ROWE

remote as America, Australia, and India, but, while enjoying the fruits of her success, had neglected her spiritual duties:

[...] she seems almost to have forgotten that she was a Christian nation; that the emigrants whom she sent out were children of Christian parents, and had need of instruction in God's Holy Word [...] [and] that by the acquisition of authority over heathen tribes she contracted a sacred obligation to impart unto them the saving truths of the Gospel.⁴

Particularly discouraging was the situation in the Canadas, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and, most desolate of all, Newfoundland. Ample evidence of the spiritual destitution of Newfoundland was cited from the travel journal of Newfoundland Archdeacon Edward Wix (1802-1866), who had toured the island's outports in 1836 and published his experiences the following year.⁵ According to Wix, the spiritual wretchedness of the outports was bad enough, but the capital city of St. John's was no better. In dedicating his *Journal* to his wife, Wix observed: "[...] you were living in a town, which, for the lawlessness of a large portion of its

inhabitants, who are excited to frequent breaches of the peace by a most seditious Romish priesthood, is as little desirable a place of residence as many of the disturbed townships of Ireland."⁶

The reference to the "seditious Romish priesthood" goes straight to the heart of Newfoundland's "crisis." According to the 1836 census, the St. John's area was populated by 772 Protestant Dissenters, 2623 Anglicans, and 11,551 Roman Catholics.⁷ The Catholics' spiritual leader was the charismatic and formidable Bishop Michael Fleming, who remains one of the most controversial figures in Newfoundland history to this day. To his biographer J.B. Darcy, he was a champion—indeed, the only champion—of the poor and downtrodden of Newfoundland.⁸ To historian Patrick O'Flaherty, he was an agitator who had almost single-handedly imported the unrest of Ireland to Newfoundland, regardless of whether they belonged there or not.⁹ Both views can be supported—the distinction is really one of emphasis rather than of fact—but it can be said with some certainty that Wix would only have acknowledged the latter position.

To Wix, Fleming and his clergy were dreaded spiritual predators. Inter-marriages between Catholics and Protestants were, he reported, "lamentably frequent," and the Romanist clergy used "every means in their power to encourage the natural superstition of the people [...]."¹⁰ They spared no effort in their attempts to gain converts: "A nunnery has been established, where a variety of fancy work is taught, to induce the Protestant children to attend the school attached to the establishment; and no scheme of allurements or intimidation is omitted to ensnare the poor and ignorant into the trap laid for them."¹¹

Unfortunately for Wix, the Romanists seemed to be winning the battle for the souls of St. John's—and winning in the most visible, public way possible: architecturally. In the preface to his *Journal*, Wix noted: "[...] a second Popish chapel is soon to be erected in our capital—and this in a colony where the state of society equals, if it do not exceed, in ignorance, superstition, and insubordination, the worse parts of Ireland."¹²

Fleming's church was to be quite formidable. The origins of the design are murky—it may have been designed by John Philpot Jones, an Irishman, or by a rather mysterious M. Schmidt, who was likely German.¹³ It still stands today, having escaped damage from two later fires that destroyed most of the rest of St. John's (in 1846 and 1892). In fact, it totally dominated the skyline of St. John's until the twenty-first century (fig. 3).¹⁴ Situated well up the hill north of St. John's Harbour, its twin-towered (liturgical) west end faces south and the harbour, immediately commanding the attention of anyone arriving in the city by water. Following in the tradition of the Roman Church unbroken since the Renaissance, the church is classical in style.¹⁵ The

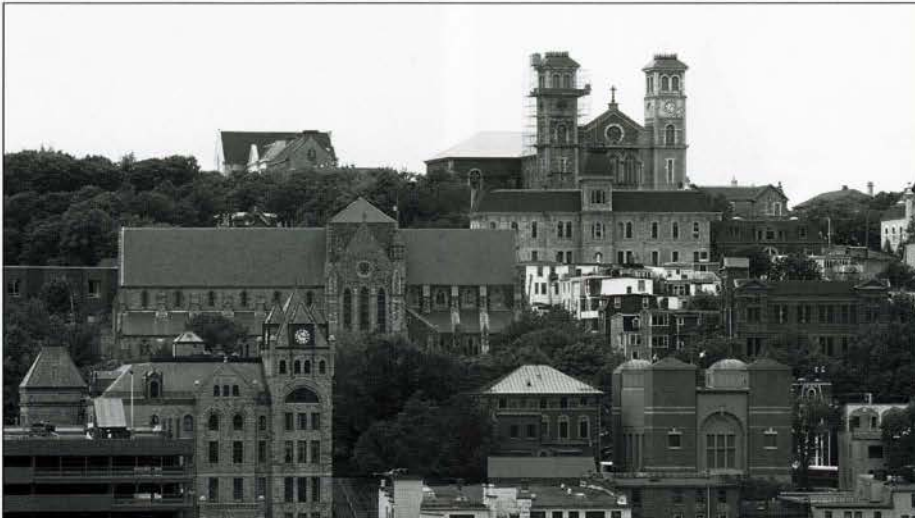


FIG. 3. ROMAN CATHOLIC BASILICA AND CITY OF ST. JOHN'S. | PETER COFFMAN

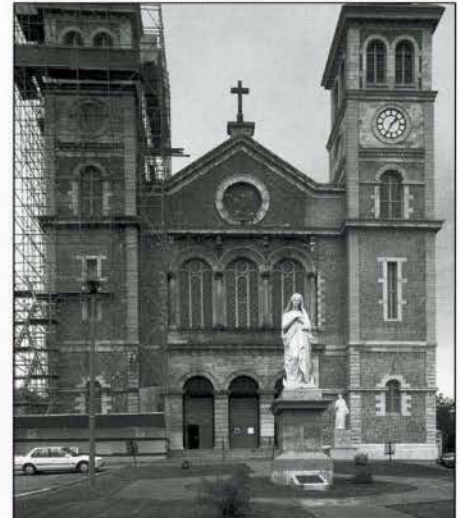


FIG. 4. ROMAN CATHOLIC BASILICA. FROM THE (LITURGICAL) WEST. | PETER COFFMAN

exterior, while relatively austere decoratively (presumably due to the extremes of weather experienced in St. John's), is immensely impressive (figs. 4-5). The interior is richly adorned with a massive, flat, coffered ceiling above an elaborate cornice supported by a variation on the Corinthian order (fig. 6). In its style and monumentality, it is linked to some of the most important churches in the Roman Catholic world, such as St. Peter's in Rome and St. John in Lateran (the latter, like Fleming's church, uses a giant order in the interior), two churches with some of the deepest, oldest roots in the Roman Catholic tradition. Monumental and majestic, loudly announcing its affiliation to Rome, and towering above everything else in the city, the basilica would have seemed to Wix and his contemporaries the very embodiment of the Catholic menace.

The lone church building that the Anglicans of St. John's could offer as an architectural rebuttal to Dissent and Romanism was a wooden church (fig. 2) on the site of the present cathedral.¹⁶ Extremely anxious to build a second Anglican church in St. John's, Wix issued a challenge to readers of his *Journal* to make donations towards that goal:



FIG. 5. ROMAN CATHOLIC BASILICA. FROM THE (LITURGICAL) SOUTH. | PETER COFFMAN

"You will, at least, contribute your mite towards the erection of a second church in the capital of this island, where, taking his stand upon the world to come, the Christian missionary may effect a moral, a spiritual movement, in the mass of ignorance, superstition, idolatry, and various wickedness by which he is surrounded."¹⁷

At their 1838 annual meeting, the SPG cited Wix's *Journal* as well as several touching stories of spiritually starved fishermen told by Nova Scotia Bishop John Inglis (whose

diocese at that time included Newfoundland) as growing evidence of the Church's scandalous neglect of her colonial duties. The time for action had come:

[...] there is a strong and growing conviction that something must be done; that things must not be suffered to remain where they are; that this country will be deeply sinful before God if it permits the dependencies of the empire to grow up in practical atheism, and in all the wickedness necessarily resulting from such a state [...].¹⁸



FIG. 6. ROMAN CATHOLIC BASILICA. INTERIOR. | PETER COFFMAN

By the time that alarm was sounded, the Church had already begun taking action. Wix's campaign for a second church in St. John's had been successful, resulting in the building of St. Thomas Church in 1836, which still stands (fig. 7).¹⁹ More dramatic action followed with the creation of the diocese of Newfoundland in 1839, and arrival of the first bishop, Aubrey George Spencer, the following year.

A bishop requires a cathedral, and it was immediately apparent to Spencer that the "wooden shed" he had inherited was not up to the job. Given that he was "surrounded by a Roman-Catholic population numerically superior, and of a most proselytizing spirit," Spencer thought it advisable that any new church "partake of a cathedral character" in order to project the right image to the public.²⁰ Such a building, he believed, could be built for around £4000, a quarter of which the colony might be expected to raise itself. As the church of St. Thomas had absorbed some of the numbers formerly trying to fit into the original church, Spencer recommended that a smaller building constructed from durable materials (i.e. stone) would be preferable to a bigger

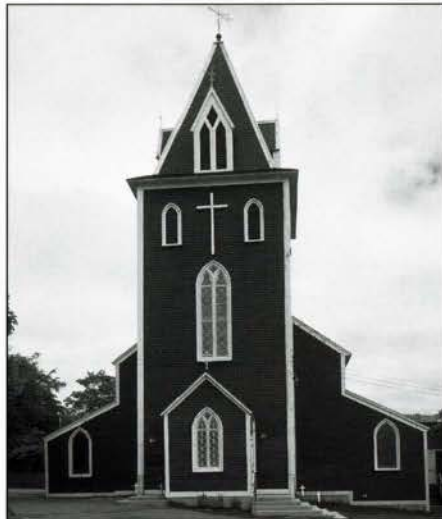


FIG. 7. ST. THOMAS ANGLICAN CHURCH, ST. JOHN'S. | PETER COFFMAN

one that would be vulnerable to fire and "the deleterious qualities of these hyperborean climates."²¹

The resulting design (fig. 8), commissioned from a Cork native working in Newfoundland named James Purcell, is an example of the historically inaccurate Gothic idiom popularized by the Church commissioners in England, who, in 1818, had been granted one million pounds to alleviate the shortage of Anglican church space throughout Britain.²² That by 1840 the so-called "commissioners' Gothic" was already considered out of date in England matters little, since Spencer's church was never built. Stone was purchased, the cornerstone was laid, and the project languished—as did, evidently, its patron, who found the Newfoundland climate too rigorous for his delicate health. His transfer to the See of Jamaica in 1843 was "welcomed as a relief from a burden under which he was evidently sinking."²³

The man selected as Spencer's successor was the Rev. Edward Feild (1801-1876). Born in Worcester, Feild had received his B.A. and M.A. from Oxford,²⁴ the birthplace of the Tractarian ideals of the Oxford Movement.

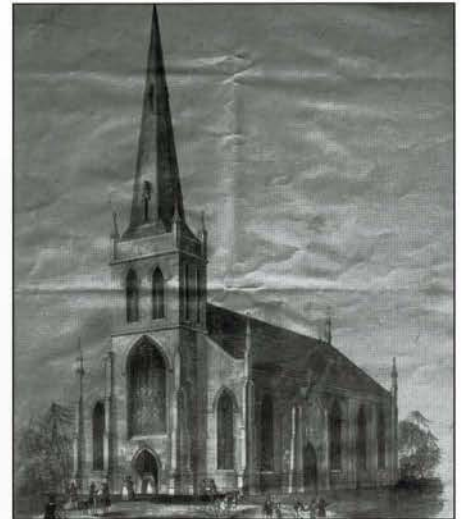


FIG. 8. DESIGN FOR ANGLICAN CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN'S, BY HENRY PURCELL. | CATHEDRAL ARCHIVES

That movement, and its architectural equivalent, the Cambridge Camden Society, had had a profound impact on Feild—and they were about to have a profound impact on Newfoundland.

Feild was steeped in the architectural theories of the Cambridge Camden Society (later renamed the Ecclesiological Society), which had been formed by a group of Cambridge undergraduates in 1839. Their aim was to promote precise, "scientific" study of English Gothic church architecture in order to facilitate the creation of worship spaces that would be appropriate to the High Church liturgy advocated by the members of the Oxford Movement (also known as "Tractarians"). According to the Cambridge Camden Society, the Church of England was the true, holy "Catholic" Church (by which they meant "universal," as originally intended; thus the frequent references to Roman Catholics as "Romanists" or "Papists," rather than "Catholics"). Gothic—which was understood to be a native English style—was its natural and correct architectural expression.

One of the Society's goals was to establish appropriate guidelines for the building of churches in the colonies. They began addressing the issue with a series of articles published between 1847 and 1850 entitled "Colonial Church Architecture" in their periodical, *The Ecclesiologist*. The series began in response to a request from the bishop of Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), for aid in adapting Gothic for a cathedral in a tropical climate. In addition to Ceylon,²⁵ articles in the sporadic fourteen-part series discussed churches proposed, planned, and built in Tasmania,²⁶ Adelaide,²⁷ Guiana,²⁸ Calcutta,²⁹ Sydney,³⁰ Newfoundland,³¹ Fredericton³², and Cape Town.³³ The articles are a series of *ad hoc* case studies rather than a systematic exploration of the topic, but certain general principles do emerge. That the style must be Gothic was a premise, rather than a point of argument. "Middle pointed" (better known today as "Decorated" Gothic) was preferred, although "first pointed" (Early English) was certainly acceptable if that was all that funds would allow. While English Gothic models had to be adhered to as strictly as possible, allowances could and indeed should be made for local climatic conditions (especially in extreme instances like Colombo) and the availability of (or lack thereof) local building expertise and craftsmen. Stone was the preferred material, but alternatives such as brick or even wood could be used when necessary. If local building traditions offered any useful lessons in building for local circumstances, such lessons could be adopted.

Feild arrived in St. John's in 1844, full of missionary zeal for the High Church liturgy and its Gothic architectural expression. Like Spencer, he found the existing wooden church hopelessly inadequate, and prospects for re-building seemed bleak. "With respect to our Cathedral," he wrote to his close friend and fellow

clergyman William Scott in England, "the prospects are dark and disheartening."³⁴ The main problem, unsurprisingly, was money. A considerable sum had already been spent by Bishop Spencer on materials. According to Feild, £3,764.14.3 [3746 pounds, 14 shillings, 3 pence] had been paid for cut stone, with a further £500 still owing on the last instalment.³⁵ The stone—already cut into windows, doors, pinnacles, and buttresses according to James Purcell's design—had been imported from Ireland.³⁶ At that stage, Purcell was still under contract as cathedral architect, a position that he maintained until October of 1844.³⁷ By that time, both money and will seemed to have evaporated. "The fact is there are no more means to complete or proceed with it," Feild wrote to Scott, "and I can see no disposition on the part of the people to come forward with additional subscriptions at all adequate to the object."³⁸ Or, as Feild put it rather more colourfully to the SPG, "Our projected Cathedral seems to have died a natural or unnatural death through want of funds, and of love. The subject now is never raised even in talk."³⁹

While Feild doubtless regretted the want of funds, he wholeheartedly shared in the want of love. As a high churchman and supporter of the Cambridge Camden Society, Feild found Purcell's design to be scarcely better than its wooden predecessor, and lamented to William Scott: "No pillars are contemplated, but a flat roof of 100 ft. by 50! no chancel or choir, no font, no tracery in any windows."⁴⁰

Feild appealed directly to the Cambridge Camden Society for architectural advice, sending them drawings of Purcell's design in 1845. Their response is now lost, but the crux of it is clear from a letter Feild wrote to William Scott:

I have now to beg you to convey my respectful and earnest thanks to the Committee of ye Camden Society, who made and forwarded the report on the drawings of our Cathedral by Mr. Purcell. I of course anticipated ye sentence. No one who had ever seen a decent church could tolerate such an abortion.⁴¹

Purcell's drawings had apparently been assessed by Benjamin Webb himself, one of the founding members of the Cambridge Camden Society.⁴² Instead of pursuing Purcell's design, Webb suggested that Feild adopt the church of St. Michael, Longstanton, as a model (a standard recommendation of the Camdenians when faced with the question of churches in the colonies). Feild doubted that they could even afford to emulate that modest model, and expressed increasing frustration at the Society's inability to assist on the question of how to make use of the existing building materials in a more ecclesiologically acceptable church:

The information which I received from the Camden Society was nothing more than I myself knew before I consulted them—viz that the plans were in every respect abominable. This was the sum and substance of all ye information I got—and this I needed not; but what I might do or attempt with the materials (which I desired to know) on this point I got no information or advice at all.⁴³

Many other obstacles stood between Feild and the church he desired. His High Church vision, and its Gothic architectural manifestation, while vigorously supported by the SPG and the Cambridge Camden Society, met with considerable resistance in the colony of Newfoundland, both from his flock and even his own clergy. His association with the Cambridge Camden Society was regarded with deep suspicion in Newfoundland. His appointment—without his

consent or even knowledge—as a patron of that society filled him with dismay:

You know how shamefully and perseveringly that Society is attacked in the Newspapers which are ye authorities here, and do all ye mischief [...]. I hear that I have been attacked in the Record Newspaper for having a regular Tractarian Curate [...] and that charge alone would alienate I know how many of these ignorant and excited fishmongers from me and ye Church.⁴⁴

In a subsequent letter, Feild reminded Scott: “We are dealing remember here with cold, coarse, calculating, covetous colonists—a race of men not seen or understood in England.”⁴⁵

By October of 1845, Feild reported to the SPG that the feelings in St. John’s were so negative towards the Church and himself that the only viable option seemed to be temporary withdrawal to that most remote (at least from Newfoundland) part of his diocese, Bermuda.⁴⁶ Although Feild found the Governor of Bermuda uncooperative, he had had enough of the opposite problem in Newfoundland: “Here the Governor is my warmest friend and the people generally despise or dislike me.”⁴⁷

By that time, any dream of an ecclesio-logically correct Anglican cathedral in St. John’s must have seemed hopeless to Feild. In an extraordinary plot twist, Feild’s opportunity arrived by stealth, cloaked in a social, economic, and material disaster unparalleled in the history of Newfoundland. On June 9, 1846, at approximately 8:00 a.m., a fire was started by an overflowing glue pot in the shop of a cabinet-maker named Hamlin, on George Street.⁴⁸ The fire quickly spread to Queen Street, where the wooden buildings served as ready kindling. A brisk west wind spread the flames to “Bennett’s and Stewart’s

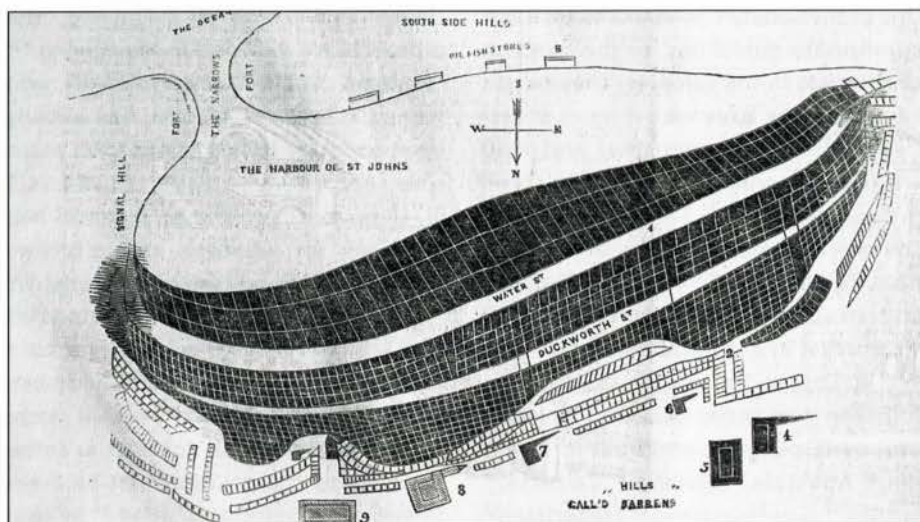


FIG. 9. AREA OF ST. JOHN'S DESTROYED BY 1846 FIRE. | THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS

oil vats,”⁴⁹ at which point it was realized that virtual annihilation of the city was inevitable. Attempts to create firebreaks by blowing up buildings were unsuccessful. By nightfall, the city of St. John’s was largely destroyed (fig. 9), although coincidentally neither the Roman Catholic cathedral nor Wix’s church of St. Thomas was damaged. Remarkably, the only deaths were one artilleryman and two civilians who perished attempting to blow up a house as a firebreak. The human toll was otherwise colossal; it is estimated that 12,000 people were left homeless, and forced to huddle together out of doors on the Barrens until temporary shelters could be erected. Fortunately, the weather was warm.

Initially at least, Feild felt the enormity of the calamity as strongly as anybody. “Is it a judgement for our sins? he asked Scott. Alas! how well deserved.”⁵⁰ Both Feild’s wooden cathedral and the building materials for Purcell’s cathedral were totally lost in the fire. Inept and inadequate as both seemed to Feild, they were an embarrassment of riches compared to what was left.

The silver lining for Feild was that he could start planning a new church unencumbered by his predecessor’s intentions. To do so would cost money, and, considering the scale of the destitution in St. John’s, there was no reason to believe that there would be much available. Feild set his sights correspondingly low:

What I mean to attempt is a mere oblong building (without tower, or bell turret) from 120 to 125 ft. long and from 58 to 60 wide inside—a clerestory and two aisles: with a large arch in ye East end for a chancel at some future time. I think the Church of St. Wilfred in Pugin’s book is nearly what I should attempt—minus the tower, chancel, etc.⁵¹

The book by Pugin that Feild refers to is *The Present State of Ecclesiastical Architecture in England*, published in 1843 and containing three illustrations of St. Wilfrid, which Pugin was building at Hulme, near Manchester.⁵² Feild also made reference to St. Wilfrid in correspondence with the SPG, stating that its ground plan and elevation seemed to him “the best adapted to our purpose of any I know.”⁵³ St. Wilfrid (figs. 10-11) is a modest but meticulously correct Gothic

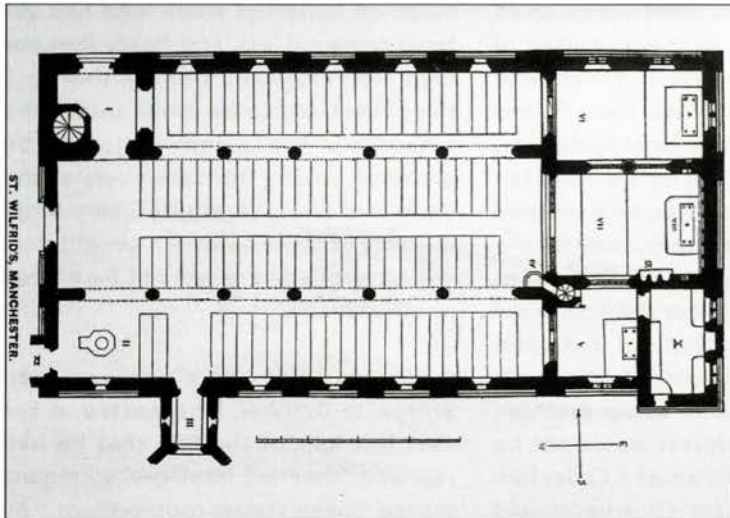


FIG. 10. A.W.N. PUGIN, ST. WILFRID'S CHURCH. PLAN. | PUGIN, *ON THE PRESENT STATE OF ECCLESIASTICAL ARCHITECTURE IN ENGLAND*

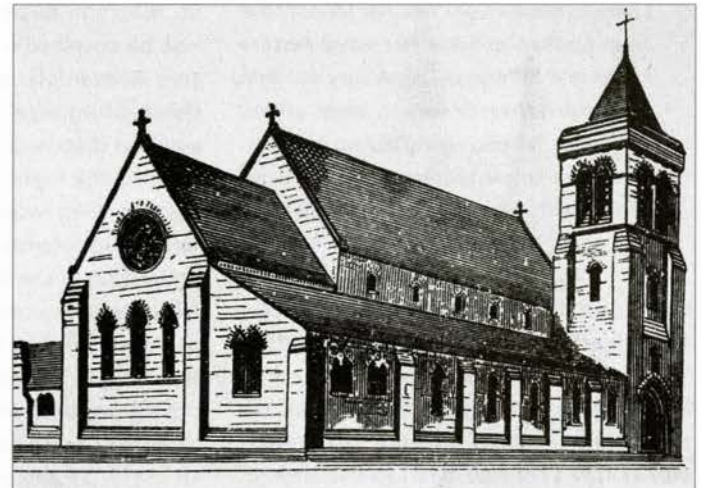


FIG. 11. A.W.N. PUGIN, ST. WILFRID'S CHURCH. EXTERIOR. | PUGIN, *ON THE PRESENT STATE OF ECCLESIASTICAL ARCHITECTURE IN ENGLAND*

parish church with nave, aisles, clerestory, chancel, and a tower on the northwest corner. The style is Early English Gothic. While not at all cathedral-like, St. Wilfrid did have the virtue of being built, according to Pugin, for only £5000. Feild estimated that, due to the scarcity of skilled labour and materials in Newfoundland, costs would be double what they were in England.⁵⁴ Considering Feild's immediate plan was to build a version of St. Wilfrid without a tower or chancel, his fundraising expectations were obviously (and understandably) quite modest.

Some help, however, was forthcoming. *The Record* reprinted a letter from Feild to the SPG in which he speculated that at least £8000 would be necessary to build a plain church in stone. It was announced that the SPG had, in response, opened a "Special Fund for the rebuilding of the parish church of St. John [sic]."⁵⁵ It was subsequently announced that the Standing Committee of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) had placed £2000 at Feild's disposal for the rebuilding of his church, the one condition being that at least one third of the seats in the new church be set aside for the poor "in

such a manner as the Bishop may deem most expedient."⁵⁶ The archbishop of Canterbury, William Howley, also made a "most liberal donation" towards the building of new church.⁵⁷

With such modestly encouraging developments, Feild continued to consider the question of how the new cathedral ought to be built. He appealed to the SPG for "an experienced, honest architect or builder, who can understand our difficulties, modify plans, and adapt our materials."⁵⁸ For the funds available, which were expected to be less than £10,000, Feild envisaged being able to create "a plain oblong building, 50 or 60 feet by 120 or 100."⁵⁹ The exterior, he concluded, would have to be "of a simple and severe character," but the interior must still be meticulously adapted for the High Church liturgy.⁶⁰ At some point in the summer of 1846, the SPG sent drawings to St. John's for consideration as designs for the cathedral. The drawings do not survive, but the response to them of Archdeacon Thomas Bridge, who was acting on Feild's behalf while the latter was on a visitation, does: "The plans are in themselves pretty, but, if I may give an opinion, the style of the

churches represented in them is too rural for a metropolis (and such St. John's is) which may reasonably be expected to be much improved in respect of the character of church buildings, on its being restored."⁶¹

That seems to strike a discordant note with the modesty of Feild's expectations, which consisted of an incomplete version of Pugin's St. Wilfrid. Bridge had, however, reason to believe that the financial prospects of the project might be brighter than he, or Feild, or anyone else, had dared to believe. Rumours of a financial windfall had reached St. John's, and Bridge was very cannily positioning the Church such that they might catch it.

Shortly after the fire, a Committee for the Relief of the Sufferers at the late Conflagration at St. John's, Newfoundland, had been formed in London, headed by Lord Mayor John Johnson. On July 27, the Committee sent a petition to Queen Victoria, asking her to "command that a collection be made in all churches and chapels for the relief of the sufferers."⁶² On September 3, Earl Grey, Secretary of State for the Colonies, wrote to the Government of Newfoundland:

I have to acquaint you that Her Majesty has been pleased to issue Her Royal Letters to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, authorizing their Graces to adopt proper measures for promoting subscriptions in their respective provinces for the relief of the sufferers by the recent fires at St. John's, Newfoundland.⁶³

Word of the Queen's letter reached Newfoundland while Feild was on a visitation. The initial response came from Bridge, in the letter cited above to the SPG. His argument touched a nerve apparently still as raw as it had been in the time of Edward Wix:

It is believed here that there is to be a Queen's Letter [...]. I hope it may be possible to make some arrangements for the disposal of the Collections under it, by which a portion of them may be applied to the restoration of the church. That, I think, would be right and just, seeing that the great bulk of those who will share in the Relief supplied for those who have suffered temporal loss by the late fire, will not belong to our Communion, whilst all the contributions under a Queen's Letter will, of course, come from members of it.⁶⁴

In short, that was Anglican money, and there was a limit to how much of it should go to Roman Catholics, however destitute.

One month later, Bridge wrote again to the SPG to express his disappointment that the Queen's letter had been issued without a stipulation that a portion of it be set aside for the rebuilding of the church. He reiterated his main argument—that the funds raised would be entirely contributed by members of the Church of England, while the vast majority of the St. John's residents who stood to benefit from them would be Roman Catholics.⁶⁵ Moreover, Bridge pointed out, the Board of Commissioners appointed in

St. John's to dispense relief money could not be counted on, as they consisted of two Romanists, one Presbyterian, and three Congregationalists. Even if they were so disposed to do what Bridge considered the right thing by the Anglican Church, they would be equally inclined to appropriate an equivalent sum for the rebuilding of the Roman Catholic convent, which was the only other religious building destroyed in the fire. On that point there could be no doubt: "I presume it would not be agreeable to our Brethren at home, and I confess it would not be to me, that any portion of a Collection made exclusively in our Churches should be so applied."⁶⁶

Bridge concluded:

Would it be possible since the Queen's Letter has been issued, without the stipulation in it which is so desirable, for some steps to be taken, before the Collections get into the hands of the "Philistines" here, that a portion of them shall be appropriated to the restoration of our church? The Romanists among us suppose that the Queen's Letter is to be altogether for the Church; many have said so to me.⁶⁷

Feild, meanwhile, had returned to St. John's, and, having doubtless been informed by Bridge of the magnitude and urgency of the opportunity, decided to travel to England.⁶⁸ While still in St. John's, Feild drew up a memorial to be sent to Earl Grey, in which it was argued that the only place of worship destroyed in the fire was the Anglican church (technically true, if one does not consider a convent a "place of worship"), that the subsequent destitution of the Anglican community in St. John's made it impossible for them to fund a replacement building themselves, that the special appeal made in England on behalf of the church was undermined by the larger appeal being

made on behalf of those who had suffered temporal loss, and finally (but perhaps most importantly of all), that "[...] the collections to be made under the authority of the Queen's Letter will be gathered wholly from members of the Church of England, whilst a very large majority of those to whose benefit they will be applied here will not be of that communion."⁶⁹

Promising news had already reached Bridge. In October, he reported to Earnest Hawkins of the SPG that he had received "cheering intelligence" regarding the Queen's letter contributions.⁷⁰ By mid-December, Bridge was rejoicing that Lord Grey had determined that a portion of the Queen's letter funds should go towards the church, and that while he would leave it to the Government in Newfoundland to determine the amount, he would recommend that a portion not exceeding one third of the total be so used.⁷¹

The final deal was struck during Feild's trip to England. No official record of the meeting between Feild and Grey exists, but a letter of December 21 informed Feild that, while Lord Grey was "very much engaged" that day, he would be happy to meet with him at 3:00 p.m. the following afternoon.⁷² A subsequent letter from Grey to Feild, dated December 22, states:

[...] under the circumstances, as I am aware that the parties who applied for the Queen's Letter did mention the rebuilding of the church as one of the objects for which the collection was desired, and also that it was one particularly referred to by many Clergymen in their Sermons preceding the Collections, I shall think it right to direct the Governor to reserve for this purpose one half of the total amount of the Collections.⁷³

It is difficult to assess to what degree the arguments given may be taken at face value. It is clear from Bridge's letters that the Queen's letter itself contained no stipulation regarding the rebuilding of the church. Indeed, the one surviving transcription of the original petition to the Queen by the mayor's committee does state that the collection was needed "for the relief of the sufferers, and for rebuilding the Episcopal church."⁷⁴ That would seem unequivocal, but the issue is muddied by the fact that the petition is inserted into the *House of Commons Papers, Reports &c* not in its proper chronological place, which would be July 1846, but in November of that year—immediately *after* the memorial to Grey that pointed out the non-Anglican affiliations of the majority of the fire sufferers. This is not to say that the original petition was tampered with retroactively in order to support an argument that had suddenly grown heated, but it would be reassuring to have earlier corroborative evidence on record. As for the claim that many of the clergymen who raised the funds had mentioned the rebuilding of the church in their sermons, it is impossible with existing documents to get to the truth of that matter. One wonders how much closer Feild and Grey came to that truth from inside the latter's London office.

One thing that can be ascertained for certain is that some citizens of St. John's did not find the arguments convincing. Among the first to voice his displeasure was the Roman Catholic bishop, Michael Fleming. In a letter to a Mr. J. O'Connell, which was subsequently forwarded to Lord Grey, Fleming pointed out that the Anglican building that had burned was to be replaced anyway, and that it "was not intrinsically worth £200." In return, Feild was to be given half of the Queen's letter funds, which at that point (May, 1847)

totalled £29,000 and was still climbing (thus making Feild's share £14,500).⁷⁵ Lord Grey instructed the Governor of Newfoundland (by then Sir Gaspar Le Marchant) "to ascertain [...] to what extent the information received by Bishop Fleming [...] is accurate or erroneous," and to "afford the Bishop of Newfoundland [i.e. Feild] every necessary opportunity for controverting or correcting Bishop Fleming's statements."⁷⁶ Feild replied that, while it was true that a new church had been planned, the fire had wiped out the means of those whose subscriptions would have built it. Moreover, Feild argued:

It is not true that our old church was not worth £200. This statement is very far indeed from being a correct one. To prove that it is not correct, it may suffice to say that the church was accommodated with decent and sufficient pew sittings for 800 persons, and was supplied with all usual and necessary appendages and furniture.⁷⁷

It is a mystery why Feild failed to make the potentially more compelling argument that the building materials from the planned church could not have survived the fire, and thus all the project's assets were effectively wiped out. However, his remarks seem to have satisfied Lord Grey, who raised no further objections.

The Relief Committee in St. John's, however, still had objections. It was "with feelings of much regret" that Governor Le Marchant was required to forward to Lord Grey another objection to the appropriation, which he then proceeded to undermine by explaining that only eleven of forty members of the Committee had been present to draft it, and only nine of those eleven had supported the petition, and all of those nine were either Romanists or Dissenters.⁷⁸ The petition attempted to argue that the Queen's

letter monies would be better spent on those made destitute by the fire, and that a "building in every way adequate may be erected for a reasonable sum" of £5000-£6,000.⁷⁹ Grey's perfunctory reply was that he found no argument that "requires or would justify a change in the decision which I have already communicated to you [...]."⁸⁰

The committee tried one more time, sending a memorial to Lord Grey that seethed with indignation. Entitled "The memorial of certain of the Middle Class in St. John's, Sufferers by the Conflagration of 9th June," the precision and vigour with which it presented its objections merit its quotation at length:

[...] Your memorialists now have the unpleasant task of remarking upon the extraordinary procedure of the Episcopal Bishop of St. John's, in reference to the monies raised under the Queen's Letter [...] [T]hat the replacing of an old wooden building overvalued at 500 £., which was to have been taken down within a year or two, by a stone cathedral, the foundation-stone of which was laid nearly three years before the fire, at which time Bishop Spencer returned thanks to the Almighty for inclining the hearts of his church to contribute the means for its erection, the materials of which were paid for and on the spot; that Bishop Feild, should, under these circumstances, have placed the distress of 12,000 persons in equal balance with the object of his ambition, is a matter of surprise to all, of injustice to many of his own denomination, and of serious injury to the cause of religion he is sworn to protect.⁸¹

Lord Grey politely acknowledged receipt of the memorial, saying that he had laid the petition before the Queen, but for reasons previously stated, was not able to advise her Majesty to comply with it.⁸²

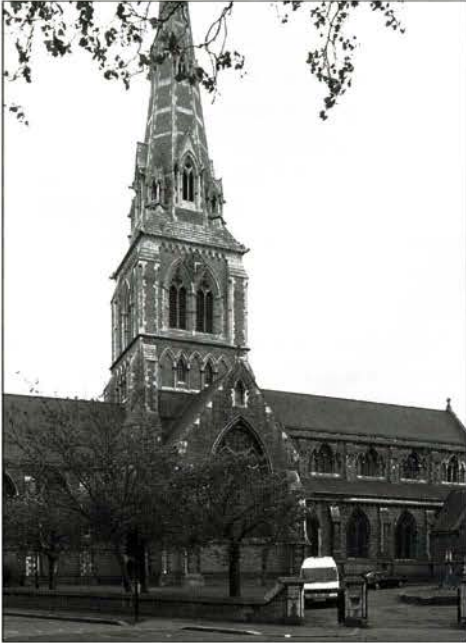


FIG. 12. ST. GILES, CAMBERWELL,
BY GEORGE GILBERT SCOTT. | PETER COFFMAN

Doubtless, the issue was beyond argument by that time. The final decision had been made almost a year earlier, during a private meeting between Lord Grey and the bishop, in the first dark afternoon following the winter solstice. All subsequent dialogue was diplomatic showmanship. Where all else had failed, fire would at last succeed. Edward Feild would get his Gothic cathedral.

Having procured funding for a reasonably ambitious building, Feild needed an at least equally ambitious architect. He found one in George Gilbert Scott (1811-1878). How Feild made the acquaintance of Scott is not known (he was no relation to William Scott⁸³), but it was probably through mutual contacts at the Cambridge Camden Society, which at that time viewed Scott as an architect of considerable promise. George Gilbert Scott opened his independent architectural practice in 1835.⁸⁴ Much of his early work, including St. John's Cathedral, was done in partnership with William Moffat, whose

expertise was primarily in planning and building rather than architectural design. The firm enjoyed fair success as builders of workhouses, although Scott—the son, grandson, nephew, brother, cousin, and uncle of clergymen—became increasingly attracted to ecclesiastical commissions. His first church commission was for a parish church in Lincoln, about which he would later observe, “I cannot say anything in its favour, excepting that it was better than many then erected.”⁸⁵ It was built in 1839, the same year that the Cambridge Camden Society was founded, leading Scott to reflect “I only wish I had known its founders at the time.”⁸⁶ Six more church commissions followed—“all agreed [...] in the meagerness of their construction,” Scott later confessed—before he was stirred to a more serious contemplation of Gothic by the work of the Cambridge Camden Society and the writings of Pugin: “Pugin’s articles excited me almost to a fury, and I suddenly found myself like a person awakened from a long feverish dream, which had rendered him unconscious of what was going on about him.”⁸⁷

Scott’s newly learned devotion to Gothic brought him the commission for the Martyr’s Memorial in Oxford (1842-1844), resulting in a design that he later found imperfect, but still believed “was better than any one but Pugin would then have procured.”⁸⁸ In the same years, Scott built what he considered to be his first truly good church: St. Giles, Camberwell (fig. 12). A lithograph of the design was sent to the Cambridge Camden Society, which deemed it (in *The Ecclesiologist*) a “magnificent” design.⁸⁹ Their praise was not unqualified: they objected to the shortness of the chancel, remained unconvinced of the appropriateness of the hexagonal apse (Lichfield being the only English medieval precedent), and objected to the placement of the transept doors, the size of the windows in

the north porch, the pitch of the roof, the pinnacles at the base of the spire, the arrangement of the spire lights, the belfry windows, and the placement of the flying buttresses. By the standards of *The Ecclesiologist*, however, that was a glowing review.

Scott’s reputation as a Gothic designer was consolidated by his triumph in the competition for the Nikolai-Kirche in Hamburg (1844). It established him as the foremost Gothic architect of the day (save for Pugin), but it also got him into trouble in *The Ecclesiologist*:

[...] Now this building, as designed for the worship of one of the worst sections of an heretical sect [...] hardly comes under our notice. Mr. Scott’s lithograph presents a north-west view, and we are bound to confess that the spire is beautiful, and well managed [...]. But the question arises, how must we characterize the spirit that prostitutes Christian architecture to such an use?⁹⁰

That stinging rebuke—entirely on ideological grounds, not architectural ones—introduced a note of tension between Scott and the Ecclesiological Society that never disappeared. In fact, as Gavin Stamp has observed,⁹¹ Scott was held in particularly high regard by the Society, but he was always hypersensitive to criticism—and there was also some truth to Scott’s complaint that the Ecclesiologists represented an uneasy mix of constantly shifting ideals and unshakable belief in their own infallibility. In spite of the fact that they frequently changed their minds in matters of taste and propriety, they were always equally convinced that they were right. “There was no class of men”, Scott wrote, “whom the Cambridge Camden Society held in such scorn, as those who adhered to their own last opinion but one.”⁹²

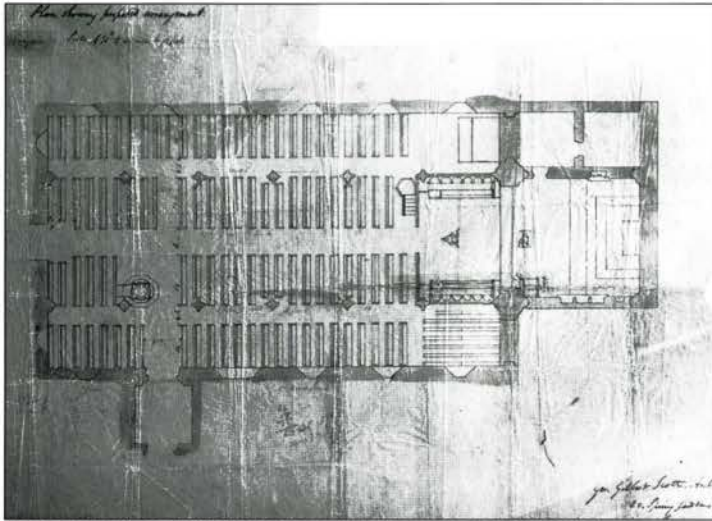


FIG. 13. ST. JOHN'S ANGLICAN CATHEDRAL. EARLY PLAN, BY GEORGE GILBERT SCOTT. | CATHEDRAL ARCHIVES

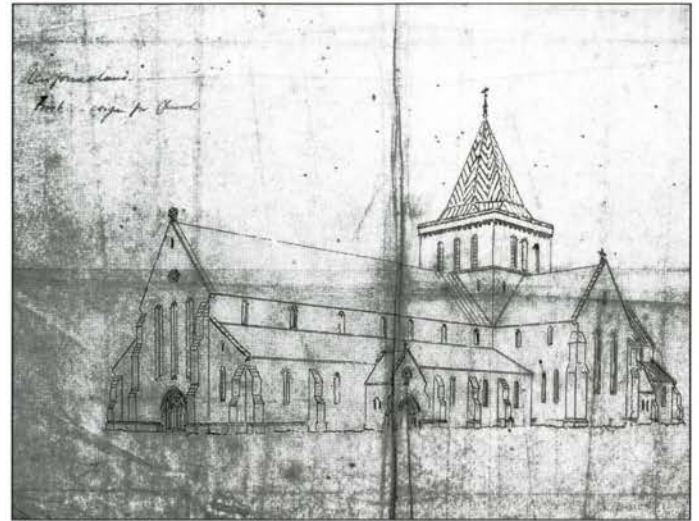


FIG. 14. ST. JOHN'S ANGLICAN CATHEDRAL. FIRST DESIGN, BY GEORGE GILBERT SCOTT. | ROYAL INSTITUTE OF BRITISH ARCHITECTS

Scott's views on the national and denominational meanings of Gothic were ideally suited to the situation in Newfoundland. What that colony needed was an emphatic visual statement of England and its Established Church, and, for Scott, that was precisely what Gothic provided. Scott was a prolific writer throughout his career, and his encyclopaedic knowledge of medieval architecture left him in no doubt that England, primarily through the Church, had developed its own distinct Gothic idiom, and that this idiom was the national style. "England produced a style of her own," wrote Scott (quoting E.A. Freeman), "inferior to none in purity of Gothic principle, and surpassing every other in the matchless beauty of its detail."⁹³ Indeed Gothic was, for Scott, "the only [style] which we can, as Christians or as Englishmen, call our own [...]."⁹⁴ In *Remarks on Secular and Domestic Architecture* (1857), Scott observed that the Gothic Revival was "the revival of our own national architecture,"⁹⁵ and that it had brought church architecture "back to our true national type,"⁹⁶ and was "essentially national" (his italics).⁹⁷ Of particular interest is an essay entitled *On the claims of Romanists (as such) upon Pointed Architecture*.⁹⁸ Published in 1850,

it must have been written some time in the late 1840s, making it exactly contemporary with the construction of Scott's cathedral in St. John's. Thus, it is a reflection of Scott's ideas at the very moment his first cathedral was being built. In it, Scott argued that, contrary to the impression that may be formed by the superficial observer, Gothic was not the style of the Roman Church. Admittedly, Gothic arose during the Roman Church's greatest period of domination, but Scott was "not [...] shaken in [his] conviction that it arose rather in spite of, rather than as a consequence of, that usurped domination and its accompanying errors."⁹⁹ Gothic, after all, was a product of countries north of the Alps, and it was Rome herself that set up a "Pagan standard before the eyes of the world"¹⁰⁰ by replacing old St. Peter's Basilica, an act that completed the "unchristianizing" of art begun in the Renaissance. In England, by contrast, that "paganization" of art was much slower to take hold, and: "[...] we accordingly find, at Oxford and elsewhere, buildings designed in medieval taste dating down to the Great Rebellion [...] clearly showing that it was still held by many to be the architecture of our own church [...]."¹⁰¹

Finally, Scott concluded:

I think, then, it can hardly be denied, that the influence of Rome had no concern in the rise of pointed architecture; that the increasing corruption of the Roman Church was accompanied by a decline in the purity of our Northern architecture; and that its final extinction was brought about directly by the example and influence of Rome herself.¹⁰²

As a piece of polemics, that is not perfectly convincing. Indeed, one merely has to disentangle Scott's apparently wilful conflation of "Rome" as the geographical seat of the Popes and "Rome" as an ideologically unified belief system, and the whole argument begins to unravel. In the tortured ingenuity of its arguments, not to mention the sheer unlikelihood of its premise, Scott's essay parallels a sermon that had been delivered and published a few years earlier by Newfoundland Archdeacon Thomas Bridge, entitled *The Two Religions; or, The Question Settled, Which Is the Oldest Church, the Anglican or the Romish?*¹⁰³ As the title implies, the argument was that the Anglican Church, rather than the Roman, was the "original"



FIG. 15. ST. JOHN'S ANGLICAN CATHEDRAL. FIRST DESIGN, BY GEORGE GILBERT SCOTT. | ROYAL INSTITUTE OF BRITISH ARCHITECTS

Church in that its authority was based in scripture rather than in generations of subsequent Church teaching and tradition. True venerability, according to such argument, belonged to the Church of England; that gave it a prior claim to authority just as Scott had argued it had a prior claim to Gothic. That similarity of outlook is one of the things that made Scott the perfect architect for Feild's cathedral. Gothic, to Scott, was *not* the architecture of Rome: it was the architecture of England and of the English Church, and had stood historically in direct opposition to Rome. That was precisely the statement that needed to be made, in visual, architectural terms, by the Anglican cathedral in St. John's—particularly in light of the lengthening shadow of the Classical, "pagan" Romanist cathedral that continued under construction unscathed by the fire of 1846.

Analysis of Scott's design for St. John's Cathedral is made more difficult by the building's complicated history of building and rebuilding campaigns. Construction was begun in 1847 and the nave, which was to serve for thirty years as the entire church, was consecrated in 1850. There was no further activity until

1880, by which time both Feild and Scott were dead. By 1885, the crossing, transepts, and choir had been completed under the direction of George Gilbert Scott Jr., the original architect's son. The younger Scott's work appears to have followed his father's plans quite closely. The nave, meanwhile, was destroyed in a fire of 1892, eventually to be rebuilt by C.P. Hopson of Toronto in 1902-1903. Once again, Sir Gilbert Scott's original plan seems to have been followed quite closely, although not in every detail. Thus, the cathedral as it stands today is very much a building in the spirit of Sir George Gilbert Scott, but, to gain a better understanding of the letter of his intentions, it is necessary to examine some of his surviving drawings of the building.

What may be one of Scott's earliest designs for the cathedral in St. John's is shown on a floor plan labelled "New-foundland. Plan showing proposed arrangement" (fig. 13). It is signed "Geo. Gilbert Scott. Architect. 20 Spring Gardens, London." Undated, it is a modest oblong with aisles, chancel, vestry, and south porch. Its strong resemblance to Pugin's St. Wilfrid suggests that this

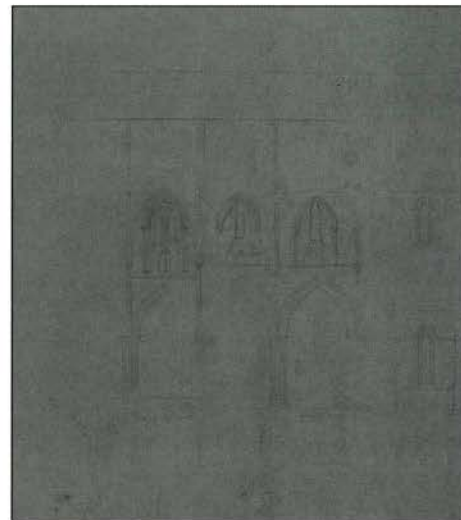


FIG. 16. ST. JOHN'S ANGLICAN CATHEDRAL. INTERIOR CHOIR ELEVATION, BY GEORGE GILBERT SCOTT. | ROYAL INSTITUTE OF BRITISH ARCHITECTS

model was still in Feild's mind—which, in turn, suggests that this drawing may date from before December 22, 1846 (the date of Feild's momentous meeting with Lord Grey). It is probably safe to assume that the aisles, chancel, and vestry would have been clearly articulated on the exterior, as the Ecclesiologists would have demanded and as they are at St. Wilfrid's. There appears to be little in the way of elaborate articulation. The nave piers consist of round cores with four attached shafts. The most intriguing feature of the drawing is the relatively massive compound piers of the chancel arch. Immensely bigger than the nave piers, they would seem to be intended as support for a tower, although there are no corresponding piers at the opposite corners of the chancel—and in any event that would be a very odd location for a tower, completely without medieval authority. Most likely, those piers reflect the plan explained by Feild to Scott: "What I mean to attempt is a mere oblong building (without tower, or bell turret) from 120 to 125 ft. long and from 58 to 60 wide inside—a clerestory and two aisles: with a large arch in ye East end for a chancel at some future time."¹⁰⁴ Thus

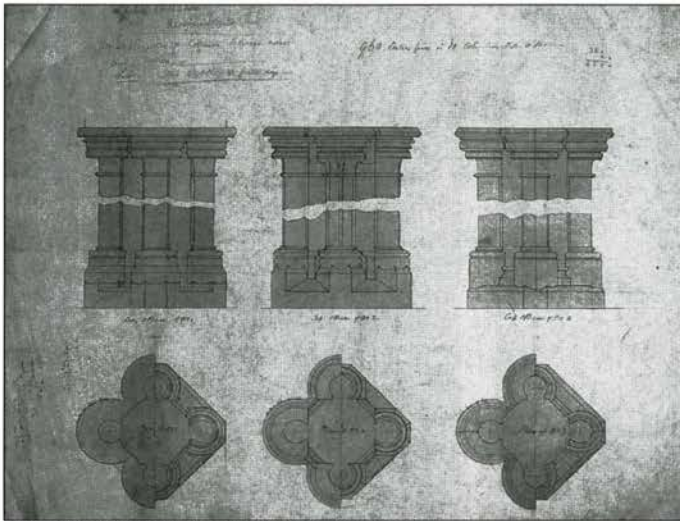


FIG. 17. ST. JOHN'S ANGLICAN CATHEDRAL. NAVE PIERS, BY GEORGE GILBERT SCOTT. | ROYAL INSTITUTE OF BRITISH ARCHITECTS



FIG. 18. SOUTHWELL MINSTER, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE. NORTH CHOIR PIER. | PETER COFFMAN

the main function of the massive piers is probably not to support the chancel arch, but to become the western crossing piers of a future eastern arm.

Other drawings by Scott, preserved in the Drawings Collection of the Royal Institute of British Architects, show increasingly ambitious plans. A drawing entitled “St. John’s Newfoundland. First Design for Church” (fig. 14), shows a long nave, with aisles and south porch, apparently aisleless transepts of full height, a monumental crossing tower with a squat spire, and a choir with what may be aisles (or may more likely be a vestry). Substantial buttresses articulate the bays and corners of the building. The style throughout is Early English Gothic.

Additional drawings show some of the details that Scott planned for the cathedral. Figure 15 is an exterior elevation of the north side. Details are suggested rather than explicitly rendered, and were evidently still in the process of being worked out. The choir is substantially more elaborate than the nave (this is in strict observance of Ecclesiological principles), with cusped and multi-light windows as opposed to the latter’s lancets.

The transept façade boasts a four-light window with three quatrefoils above—very Decorated (that is, dating from the middle phase of English Gothic) in conception but still using plate tracery.

A similarly imprecise drawing (fig. 16) shows Scott’s intention for the choir, which was a two-storey elevation with the second storey subdivided so as to suggest a third. Two-storey elevations, while rare in English medieval Gothic, can be seen at Pershore Abbey and Southwell Cathedral. That was the basic configuration adopted by George Gilbert Jr. in the 1880s, and can still be seen in the choir today.

In a much more precisely rendered drawing of the nave piers (fig. 17), it is possible to get a clearer idea of exactly what Scott’s building was to look like. The most striking characteristic of the piers is their unmistakable Englishness. The capitals are moulded, which Scott considered to be one of the great features of English Gothic.¹⁰⁵ More interestingly, each capital’s profile is subtly different from every other, in a textbook display of the love of variety so often seen in English medieval

design.¹⁰⁶ The same is true of the piers themselves. The basic configuration—an octagonal core, with four attached shafts—is common enough, but the real ingenuity lies in the variety of forms, one pier having round shafts, the next filleted ones, and the third nibbed ones. The filleted shaft is interesting too in that the fillet runs not only up the shaft but also through the necking of the capital and the lower part of the moulded capital itself. That is another quotation from Early English Gothic, but the geographical range is narrowing: that feature is most likely to be found from Lincolnshire northwards, and is ubiquitous at, for example, the choir of Southwell Minster (begun ca. 1234, fig. 18). Scott’s piers demonstrate an exquisitely precise grasp of Early English Gothic, both in overall conception and in detail. While not all of his refinements were incorporated into the present nave (fig. 23), photographs taken before the 1892 fire show that Scott’s nave as built followed that drawing.¹⁰⁷

Surviving photographs of the interior of Scott’s nave (fig. 19) reinforce the sense of the “Englishness” of the design. The proportions are low and broad, rather



FIG. 19. ST. JOHN'S ANGLICAN CATHEDRAL. NAVE INTERIOR BEFORE 1880. | CATHEDRAL ARCHIVES

than high and upright. There is no continuous vertical articulation: the shafts of the piers end at the capitals, and the shafts marking the bays of the clerestory are corbelled out. The main arcade is thick and richly moulded. Fortunately, all of those features are retained exactly in Hopson's 1902 rebuilding, so the present nave is as decidedly English a space as its predecessor.

That strongly English quality is equally evident on the exterior of Scott's design (fig. 20). The east end (not built until after Scott's death) is a sheer, cliff-like mass, reminiscent of northern models like Lincoln and York Minster. The graduated lancets of the west end recall northern English prototypes such as the famous "Five Sisters" windows in the north transept of York Minster (fig. 21). The deeply recessed but relatively diminutive west door is also an English type, seen at such places as the cathedrals of Wells, Ripon, and York Minster.

The Englishness of the design needs emphasizing for two reasons. First, it is precisely the solution required by the situation that so troubled Wix and other

Newfoundland clergymen who found themselves isolated in a sea of popery. The Roman Catholic cathedral might have been rising longer and higher, but at last the established Church had a strong public symbol and identity—a visual brand, if you will—that was demonstrably English and Anglican. Second, St. John's Cathedral stands at the tail end of a phase of ecclesiology that was heavily antiquarian—copyist, in the language of the day—rather than innovative. Scott's nave was finished in 1850, the same year that William Butterfield would begin work on All Saints, Margaret Street, a building that would vastly enlarge the formal palette of the Ecclesiological Society and the Church of England. Both Italian and Early French Gothic would soon leave a strong mark in the designs of such Gothic Revival architects as Butterfield, George Edmund Street,¹⁰⁸ and even Scott himself.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, in one of the very few scholarly references to St. John's Cathedral, David Brownlee has referred to "French spirit" of Scott's design.¹¹⁰ Such a characterization, however, can only be rooted in an imperfect knowledge of the medieval models upon which the building is based, and of the social, religious, and

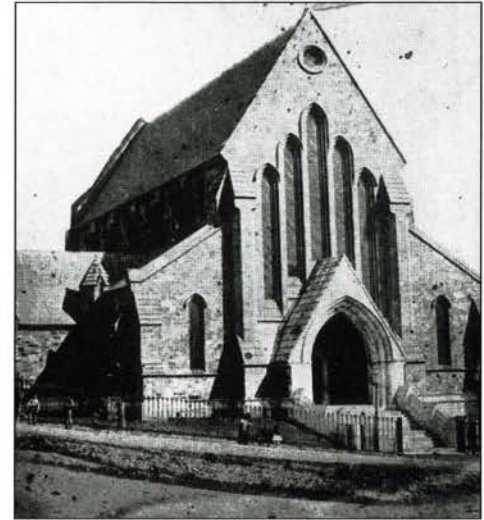


FIG. 20. ST. JOHN'S ANGLICAN CATHEDRAL. NAVE EXTERIOR BEFORE 1880. | CATHEDRAL ARCHIVES

political circumstances that caused it to be introduced into Newfoundland. Scott was confused about neither. According to him, adaptability was a hallmark of Gothic, but it should never lose its national and spiritual essence:

Our architecture should everywhere be both *English* and *Christian*, but should have in it that intrinsic principle of life which would admit of its ready adaptation to the climate of the torrid or the frozen zone, to the scorched plantations of Jamaica or the icy rocks of Labrador. The style should be essentially *one*, but it should possess an elasticity which would render it suitable to the most varied external conditions.¹¹¹

Scott apparently regarded St. John's Cathedral as something of a showpiece in his portfolio. It was displayed in the Architecture Room at the exhibition of the Royal Academy in 1848,¹¹² exhibited again at the Free Architectural Exhibition in 1849,¹¹³ and also appeared in the *Illustrated London News* on June 23, 1849 (fig. 22). That illustration is perhaps the best surviving impression remaining of Scott's plans for the whole cathedral. The pure Early English of the earlier drawing

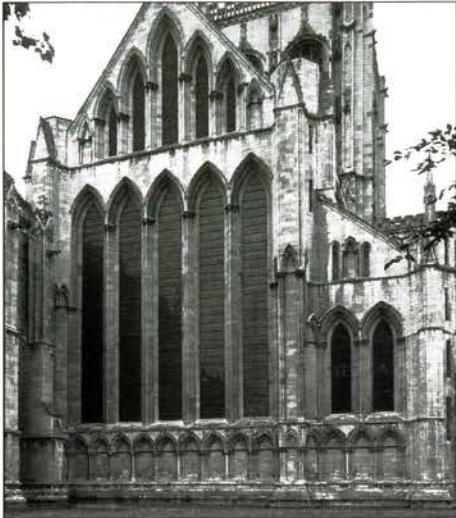


FIG. 21. YORK MINSTER. NORTH TRANSEPT EXTERIOR. | PETER COFFMAN



FIG. 22. ST. JOHN'S ANGLICAN CATHEDRAL. | THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS

(fig. 14), while perhaps appropriate for the rugged, hyperborean environment of Newfoundland, had been transformed into a more complex arrangement of tall lancet windows (the definitive characteristic of Early English) and more expansive windows in the east end inspired by Decorated Gothic models such as the east window of Lincoln Cathedral. Scott's design, admittedly, is not "pure" Decorated: the tracery is of the heavy "plate" type rather than the more slender "bar" variety—possibly a concession to the rigours of the Newfoundland climate.

In 1848, Scott's design was the subject of a lengthy article in *The Ecclesiologist*¹¹⁴ that began with a brief summary of the history of Anglican church buildings in St. John's. The original church, which had become the cathedral in 1839, had been "a wooden shed of the most monstrous description."¹¹⁵ Archdeacon Wix had been responsible for the building of another wooden church (St. Thomas), "of somewhat better form [...] though the intention was certainly better than the effect."¹¹⁶ After the creation of the diocese of Newfoundland, a cathedral was commissioned, "piously, we own, rather

than decorously, by Bishop Spencer."¹¹⁷ It was, unfortunately, "a sham Gothic conventicle a few degrees worse than the church in [...] S. Pancras"¹¹⁸ (also illustrated and ridiculed in Pugin's book *Contrasts*). The far superior church under construction in the aftermath of the fire of 1846 was "a remarkable illustration of the actual value of severe temporal visitations."¹¹⁹ After the fire, half of the money from the Queen's letter had been "quite properly" apportioned by Lord Grey for the cathedral, "yet not without sundry reclamations, especially from the noisy Hiberno-Romanists, who form the majority of the Newfoundland colonists."¹²⁰

The Ecclesiologist then proceeded to analyze and comment upon the design itself. "The style, they noted, is First-Pointed [Early English] of the latest phase in the nave and transepts: transitional towards Middle-Pointed [Decorated] in the choir."¹²¹ That stylistic combination had, in fact, come about initially at the urging

of William Scott, as G.G. Scott explained in a letter to Feild in 1847:

Subsequent to your Lordship's departure some little discussion arose as to the style, Mr. William Scott thinking that a somewhat more advanced period of Gothic Architecture might with some modification have been preferable, and I was led to take more trouble in designing the architectural features of the choir from a wish to show how a progression in point of ornamental character might be obtained in the parts not now undertaken, and that though the present portion of the work might be more simple and less developed than could be wished, this object might be avoided in proceeding eastward.¹²²

For Scott (i.e. the architect, not the clergyman), that blend of Early English and Decorated probably represented an ideal synthesis rather than a compromise. While he considered Decorated the apogee of Gothic (as indeed did Pugin and the Ecclesiological Society), Early English



FIG. 23. ST. JOHN'S ANGLICAN CATHEDRAL. NAIVE INTERIOR. | PETER COFFMAN

was, in his view, a style that “may well be the pride of Englishmen.”¹²³ Thus, Scott concluded, “it may be reasonable to wed the grandeur of one with the elegance of the other.”¹²⁴ Scott would also have been well aware that an earlier medieval nave joined to a later east end was by no means an unusual arrangement in English cathedrals, Lincoln being perhaps the most notable example (in addition to the one closest in design to Scott’s cathedral at St. John’s).

The review in *The Ecclesiologist* was generally favourable, although they expressed disappointment in the design’s lack of originality—a criticism that would have been unimaginable just a few years earlier while the *Ecclesiologists* still favoured copyism over innovation (Scott’s complaint of the Society’s contempt for anyone who “adhered to their own last opinion but one” evidently had some justification). The Society concluded: “The walls are of immense thickness: and the church by its durability and solid size, as well as by its unmistakable English and authenticated character, will, when it is completed according to the present designs, fully and very creditably represent our Church in one of the most cheerless of its seats.”¹²⁵

Be that as it may, completing the cathedral to Scott’s designs was never going to be an easy matter. Scott himself never set foot in Newfoundland. To act as clerk of Works, he sent the Scotsman William Hay (1818-1888), who had trained under John Henderson in Edinburgh. Hay would remain for several years in British North America, and have a very successful career that would include work in Newfoundland, Ontario, Bermuda, and his native Scotland.¹²⁶ He was also a committed Gothickist who would contribute a heartfelt obituary of Pugin to the *Anglo-American Magazine* in 1853.¹²⁷

Feild reported to the SPG in 1847 that Hay had arrived in St. John's, "but single handed except for his wife—no mason or labourer."¹²⁸ Hay and Feild seemed to maintain a good working relationship throughout the building campaign. "His ambition, I believe", wrote Feild, "is to do the work well."¹²⁹

Although Scott produced drawings for the whole cathedral, the intention from the start was to complete the nave only and leave the rest to another generation.¹³⁰ That the cathedral was thus "commenced in faith" was warmly praised by *The Ecclesiologist*.¹³¹ Even on the nave, however, progress was halting. By January of 1848, Feild reported to the English clergyman Cecil Wray that the south aisle walls, although they had been built to a height of some fifteen feet, still only reached the level of the nave floor due to the steep southward slope of the site.¹³² Moreover, the climate was proving a formidable challenge: "I am sorry to say that the frost has already done considerable damage by splitting many stones, which it seemed impossible could ever break or split [...]. The builder who is a clever sensible Scotch man would not be persuaded the frost would have the power and effect which he now witnesses and deplores."¹³³

By the spring of 1849, money was running out. Feild believed that the day would soon come when he would have to dispense with William Hay's services, "merely because I cannot pay him."¹³⁴ By late 1849, Feild reported to Earnest Hawkins that the walls were complete, the aisle roofs finished, and that the nave roof would be done "in about three weeks."¹³⁵ Money remained a problem, and more fundraising was needed: "I have told Mr. W. Scott I should try to send you a sketch; will not our walled up aisles, and boarded tower arch, and no more money awake sympathy?"¹³⁶

By that time, the entire share of the Queen's letter money (in excess of £16,000), as well as donations from numerous sources such as the SPG and SPCK (and very possibly several others whose records are lost) had produced not a cathedral but a nave—and an incomplete one at that.

In June of 1850, *The Ecclesiologist* triumphantly reported: "We are happy to be able to announce the great forwardness of the cathedral of Fredericton, and the nave of S. John's Cathedral, Newfoundland, which is to be fitted with a temporary choir at its east end for immediate use."¹³⁷

Finally, in October of 1850, Feild was able to report to Lord Grey that the cathedral in St. John's (or more precisely, its nave) had been consecrated on St. Matthew's Day (September 21), and was now "in constant use."¹³⁸ The cost had been great, and indeed Feild had only been able to complete the task thanks to recent donations of considerable sums by private friends and the SPCK. Feild assured Lord Grey that all the funds had been "faithfully (I dare not say in every case wisely) spent."¹³⁹ He enclosed an account of the consecration from *The Times*, which boasted that, were the church ever to be completed according to its architect's plans, "no ecclesiastical edifice in British North America could rival it."¹⁴⁰ In reply, Lord Grey declared that it afforded him "much satisfaction to learn that the cathedral church at St. John's has been consecrated, and that the building, though not completed, is now in constant use."¹⁴¹

Officially satisfied Lord Grey may have been, but unofficial opinion in the office of the secretary of State for the Colonies appears to have been less than universally impressed with the process by which

Feild established his Gothic foothold in Newfoundland. In January of 1850, Newfoundland Governor Le Marchant sent a letter to Lord Grey accompanying Feild's report on the nearly ready, yet still cash-strapped cathedral. Included was a report from William Hay, detailing £1446 worth of work remaining to be done.¹⁴² On the back of Le Marchant's letter is a hand-written internal memo from Arthur Blackwood, Senior Clerk, to H. Merivale, under-secretary of State for the Colonies. It reads:

Mr. Merivale

It would seem that the £16000 which has been spent on the Cathedral is insufficient to complete the Building, & that the Bishop does not know where the rest of the money is to be found to finish the interior & make it serviceable. Two good Stone Churches might have been built for that money.

Acknowledge?

ABⁿ 23/1/50¹⁴³

To a civil servant comfortably ensconced in Victorian London, the job of building a thirteenth-century English cathedral on a rocky, remote, windswept, impoverished North Atlantic island must have looked fairly easy. This study has, hopefully, demonstrated otherwise.

NOTES

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2. « Colonial Church Architecture, Chapter VI: St. John's Cathedral, Newfoundland », *The Ecclesiologist*, no. 65, April 1848, new series no. 29, p. 275.
 3. See *Report of the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts for the year 1838*, London, SPG, 1838.
 4. *Idem* : 22.
 5. Wix, Edward, 1836, *Six Months of a Newfoundland Missionary's Journal from February to August, 1835*, London, Smith, Elder.
 6. Wix : 6.
 7. *Population Returns*, 1836 (Centre for Newfoundland Studies).
 8. Darcy, J.B., 2003, *Fire upon the Earth: The Life and Times of Bishop Michael Anthony Fleming, O.S.F.*, St. John's, Creative Publishers.
 9. O'Flaherty, Patrick, 1999, *Old Newfoundland*, St. John's, Long Beach Press.
 10. Wix : X.
 11. Wix : X.
 12. Wix : IX.
 13. See O'Neill, Paul, 1993, « Who Designed the Roman Catholic Basilica? », *Newfoundland Quarterly*, vol. LXXXVIII, no. 1, p. 7-13.
 14. It now shares that distinction with "The Rooms," a combined provincial art gallery, museum, and archives.
 15. The building, erroneously in the present author's view, has also been labelled "Romanesque Revival." See Ricketts, Shannon, Leslie Maitland, and Jacqueline Hucker, 2003 [2nd ed.], *A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles*, Peterborough, Broadview Press, p. 94.
 16. See Rowe, C. Francis, 1989, *In Fields Afar: A Review of the Establishment of the Anglican Parish of St. John's and its Cathedral*, St. John's, Seawise Enterprises Ltd.
 17. Wix : 257.
 18. *Report of the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts for the year 1838*, London, SPG, p. 23-24.
 19. See *History of St. Thomas' Church, 1836-1961*, based upon "The History of St. Thomas' and its Rectors," by the late H.W. LeMessurier, C.M.G., published in 1928. As amended and added to by the Centenary Historical Committee, R.G. MacDonald, Chairman (1936).
 20. Spencer, Aubrey George, 1842, *The Church of God: A Sermon on Acts XX. 28, preached in the Parish Church of St. John's, Newfoundland, on Good Friday, 1842, by Aubrey George, Lord Bishop of Newfoundland*, St. John's, p. LXX, J.W. Mcoubrey.
 21. *Ibid.* : LXXI.
 22. On the Commissioners Churches, see Port, Michael, 1961, *Six Hundred New Churches*, London, SPCK; Liscombe, Rhodri Windsor, 1979, « Economy, Character and Durability: Specimen Designs for the Church Commissioners, 1818 », *Architectural History*, vol. 13, p. 43-57; Carr, Gerald, 1973, « Soane's Specimen Church Designs of 1818: A Reconsideration », *Architectural History*, vol. 16, p. 37-54; Clark, Kenneth, 1928, *The Gothic Revival: An Essay in the History of Taste*, London, chap. V.
 23. Tucker, H.W., 1877, *Memoir of the Life and Episcopate of Edward Feild, D.D. Bishop of Newfoundland 1844-1876*, London, W.W. Gardner, p. 29.
 24. Rowley, Owsley Robert, 1928, *The Anglican Episcopate of Canada and Newfoundland*, Milwaukee and London, A. R. Mowbray & Co., p. 217.
 25. *The Ecclesiologist*, 1847, vol. 7, p. 168-171; 1847, vol. 8, p. 88-92.
 26. *The Ecclesiologist*, 1847, vol. 8, p. 86-88.
 27. *The Ecclesiologist*, 1847, vol. 8, p. 141-142.
 28. *The Ecclesiologist*, 1847, vol. 8, p. 142-147; 1848, vol. 9, p. 181-187; 1849, vol. 10, p. 193-194.
 29. *The Ecclesiologist*, 1848, vol. 8, p. 265-271; 1849, vol. 10, p. 193.
 30. *The Ecclesiologist*, 1848, vol. 8, p. 271-274; 1850, vol. 10, p. 327-330.
 31. *The Ecclesiologist*, 1848, vol. 8, p. 274-279; 1849, vol. 9, p. 215-217.
 32. *The Ecclesiologist*, 1848 vol. 8, p. 361-363; 1849, vol. 10, p. 192-193.
 33. *The Ecclesiologist*, 1849, vol. 10, p. 101-102.
 34. Letters of Bishop Edward Feild to the Rev. William Scott, Diocesan Archives of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador (DAENL), 100.43, box *Six Hundred New Churches 2*, file 4. Transcribed by Tim Power under the direction of Shane O'Dea. Letter dated July 11, 1844.
 35. DAENL, Feild to William Scott, August 22, 1844.
 36. DAENL, Feild to William Scott, August, 1844.
 37. Thomas Bridge to Ernest Hawkins, secretary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador (PANL), "G" Series: letters Read before the Society: reel 249. Letter dated August 24, 1846.
 38. DAENL, Feild to William Scott, August, 1844.
 39. DAENL, Feild to Ernest Hawkins, June 19, 1845.
 40. DAENL, Feild to William Scott, August, 1844.
 41. DAENL, Feild to William Scott, May 20, 1845.
 42. *Ibid.*
 43. DAENL, Feild to William Scott, March 10, 1846.
 44. DAENL, Feild to William Scott, May 20, 1845.
 45. DAENL, Feild to William Scott, June 5, 1845.
 46. DAENL, Feild to Earnest Hawkins, October 9, 1845.
 47. *Ibid.*
 48. Prowse, D.W., *A History of Newfoundland*, originally published St. John's, 1895; re-published Portugal Cove, Boulder Publications, 2002, p. 458.
 49. That account is taken from the *Newfoundlander* of June 18, 1846; quoted in Prowse : 458-459.
 50. DAENL, Feild to William Scott, June 23, 1846.
 51. *Ibid.*
 52. A.W.N. Pugin, 1843, *On The Present State of Ecclesiastical Architecture in England*, London, St. Barnabas Press. St. Wilfrid is illustrated in plates III, VII and XIV.
 53. DAENL, Feild to Earnest Hawkins, June 12, 1846.
 54. DAENL, Feild to William Scott, June 23, 1846.
 55. *The Record*, July 13, 1846, no. 1,965.
 56. *The Record*, August 13, 1834, no. 1,972.

57. *Report of the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, for the year 1848*, London, 1848. Feild was offering this recollection as a tribute to the recently deceased Howley.
58. DAENL, Feild to Hawkins, June 12, 1846.
59. *Ibid.*
60. DAENL, Feild to Hawkins, August 7, 1846.
61. PANL, Bridge to Earnest Hawkins, August 24, 1846.
62. *House of Commons Papers, Reports &c*, vol. XXXVI, no. 54, p. 59.
63. *House of Commons Papers, Reports &c*, vol. XXXVI, no. 30, p. 43.
64. PANL, Bridge to Earnest Hawkins, August 24, 1846.
65. PANL, Bridge to Hawkins, September 7, 1846.
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.*
68. PANL, Bridge to Hawkins, September 10, 1846.
69. *House of Commons Papers, Reports &c*, vol. XXXVI, no. 35 enclosure, p. 45.
70. PANL, Bridge to Hawkins, October 26, 1846.
71. PANL, Bridge to Hawkins, December 16, 1846.
72. DAENL, no. 668, box 4, file 4, letter 9.
73. *Idem* : letter 10.
74. *House of Commons Papers, Reports &c*, vol. XXXVI, no. 54 p. 59.
75. *House of Commons Papers, Reports &c*, vol. XXXVI, no. 59, p. 63.
76. *Ibid.*
77. *House of Commons Papers, Reports &c*, vol. XXXVI, no. 76 p. 84-85.
78. *House of Commons Papers, Reports &c*, vol. XXXVI, no. 79. p. 88.
79. *House of Commons Papers, Reports &c*, vol. XXXVI, enclosure 1, no. 70, p. 95.
80. *House of Commons Papers, Reports &c*, vol. XXXVI, no. 80, p. 96.
81. *House of Commons Papers, Reports &c*, vol. XXXVI, enclosure 2, no. 81.
82. *Ibid.*
83. The architect had a brother, also named William Scott, also a clergyman. The two William Scotts are, however, different people—George Gilbert's brother was vicar of Abthorpe, while Feild's friend and colleague was vicar of Christ Church, Hoxton.
84. Strangely, no recent, comprehensive monograph has been written on Scott. The standard reference is Cole, David, 1980, *The Work of Sir Gilbert Scott*, London, The Architectural Press. Basic data on Scott and his descendents can be found in Fisher, Geoffrey, Gavin Stamp & others, *Catalogue of the Drawings Collection of the Royal Institute of British Architects: The Scott Family*, p. 13-16. As Gavin Stamp has said, the best biography on Scott remains the architect's own (Scott, George Gilbert, 1995 [1st ed. London, 1879], *Personal and Professional Recollections*, new ed. Stamford, Paul Watkins).
85. Scott, 1995 : 85.
86. *Idem* : 86.
87. *Idem* : 88.
88. *Idem* : 90.
89. *The Ecclesiologist*, 1942, vol. 1, no. 4, p. 68.
90. *The Ecclesiologist*, 1845, vol. 4, p. 184.
91. Stamp, Gavin, 2001, « George Gilbert Scott and the Cambridge Camden Society », in *A Church as it Should Be: The Cambridge Camden Society and its Influence*, Donnington, Shaun Tyas.
92. Scott, 1995 : 206.
93. Scott, George Gilbert, 1850, "On the Question of the selection of a single variety of Pointed Architecture for modern use, an of which variety has the strongest claims on such selection," *A Plea for the Faithful Restoration of our Ancient Churches... to which are added some Miscellaneous Remarks on other subjects...*, London, p. 95-96.
94. *Idem* : 112-113.
95. Scott, George Gilbert, 1857, *Remarks on Secular and Domestic Architecture*, London, J. Murray, p. 10.
96. *Idem* : 12.
97. *Idem* : 16.
98. From Scott, 1850 : 39-51.
99. *Idem* : 40.
100. *Idem* : 43.
101. *Idem* : 44.
102. *Idem* : 44.
103. Bridge, Thomas, 1841, *The Two Religions; or, the Question Settled, Which Is the Oldest Church, the Anglican or the Romish?*, London, Gilbert and Rivington Printers.
104. DAENL, Feild to Scott, June 23, 1846.
105. See Scott, George Gilbert, 1878, *Lectures on the Rise and Development of Gothic Architecture*, London, J. Murray, p 157-158.
106. On the theme of variety in English medieval architectural design, see Thurlby, Malcolm, and Yoshio Kusaba, 1991, « The Nave of Saint Andrew at Steyning: A Study of Variety in Design in Twelfth-Century Architecture in Britain », *Gesta*, vol. XXX, no. 2, p. 163-175.
107. Several such photographs are now available online from the Centre for Newfoundland Studies at Memorial University. One that clearly shows the fillet is: Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Coll – 137, 2.02.012. See [<http://www.library.mun.ca/qeii/cns/photos/geogfindaid.php#Arrange>].
108. On G.E. Street, and on the influence of Early French Gothic on the English Gothic Revival more generally, see Brownlee, David, 1984, *The Law Courts: The Architecture of George Edmund Street*, New York, Cambridge, Mass.
109. At, for example, the polychrome stone and brick Midland Grand Hotel, St. Pancras.
110. Brownlee, David, 1993, « Victorian Office Practice and Victorian Architecture: The Case of Sir Gilbert Scott », *The Artist's Workshop: Studies in the History of Art 38*, Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art, p. 156-173.
111. Scott, 1850 : 115.
112. *The Ecclesiologist*, vol. 8, 1848, p. 360, comments: "We cannot conceive why the hanging committee should have placed this design in the highest row, while so many works of far inferior merit and interest occupy advantageous positions."
113. That was apparently an exhibition set up by and for architects to the exhibition of the Royal Academy, which was widely considered by the profession not to do architecture justice. See *The Ecclesiologist*, 1849, vol. 9, p. 303.
114. *The Ecclesiologist*, 1848, vol. 8, p. 272-279.
115. *Idem* : 274.
116. *Idem* : 275.
117. *Idem* : 275.
118. *Idem* : 274.
119. *Idem* : 271.

120. *Idem* : 276.
121. *Idem* : 277.
122. G.G. Scott to Feild, August 3, 1847.
123. G.G. Scott, 1850 : 96.
124. *Idem* : 98.
125. *The Ecclesiologist*, 1848, vol. 8, p. 278.
126. On Hay's work in Ontario, see MacRae, Marion, and Anthony Adamson, 1975, *Hallowed Walls: Church Architecture of Upper Canada*, Toronto, Clarke, Irwin. On his work in Bermuda, see Magrill, Barry, 2004, « 'Development' and Ecclesiology in the Outposts of the British Empire: William Hay's Gothic Solutions for Church Building in Tropical Climates (1840-1890) », *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada*, vol. 29, nos. 1-2, p. 15-26.
127. Hay, William, 1853, « The Late Mr. Pugin and the Revival of Christian Architecture », *Anglo-American Magazine*, January-July, p. 70-73.
128. DAENL, Feild to Hawkins, May 10, 1847.
129. DAENL, Feild to Hawkins, July 25, 1848.
130. A certain amount of confusion seemed to occur over that, but was cleared up in a letter from G.G. Scott to Feild on August 3, 1847.
131. *The Ecclesiologist*, 1848, vol. 8, p. 278.
132. Lambeth Palace Library, MS 1604, Edward Feild to Cecil Wray, January 26, 1848.
133. *Ibid.*
134. DAENL, Feild to Hawkins, May 21, 1849.
135. DAENL, Feild to Hawkins, October 17, 1849.
136. DAENL, Feild to Hawkins, November 15, 1849.
137. *The Ecclesiologist*, 1850, vol. 11, p. 54.
138. *House of Commons Papers, Reports &c*, vol. XXXVI, enclosure, no. 101.
139. *Ibid.*
140. *The Times and General Commercial Gazette*, Saturday, September 28, 1850, no. 78.
141. *House of Commons Papers, Reports &c*, vol. XXXVI, no. 102.
142. *House of Commons Papers, Reports &c*, vol. XXXVI, no. 99.
143. Public Records Office, no. 548, January 3, 1850, « Erection of New Cathedral ».