

## Connolly, Pugin, and the Gothic in Ontario

To the Editor:

I would to make two points concerning Malcolm Thurlby's interesting article "The Church of our Lady of the Immaculate Conception at Guelph: Puginian Principles in the Gothic Revival Architecture of Joseph Connolly" (*SSAC Bulletin* 15, June 1990). After introducing the subject by outlining A.W.N. Pugin's influence on English Roman Catholic architecture, Thurlby goes on to say that Roman Catholic Gothic Revival architecture in Ontario fell far short of the Puginian ideal, until the arrival in the mid-1870s of the Irish-trained architect Joseph Connolly. Thurlby then discusses Connolly's designs for the Guelph church and for St. Peter's Cathedral in London, Ontario, and suggests that with these two buildings Connolly has earned the title the "Ontario Pugin." Although it is true to say that Connolly had a more sophisticated knowledge of Gothic architecture than architects practicing in Ontario in the 1830s and early 1840s, to suggest, as Thurlby does, that St. Michael's Cathedral, Toronto, shows less of an understanding of Puginian tenets than does the Church of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception in Guelph is to overlook both the needs and intentions of the Catholic Church, and the way in which the Gothic Revival style evolved in the second half of the 19th century.

Although Pugin, a converted Catholic, designed a number of Catholic churches in England and Ireland, the Catholic Church never fully accepted his insistence on using 13th and 14th century English models, and in almost every instance it modified Pugin's plans. As B. Little in his book *Catholic Churches Since 1623* has shown, Pugin, in his desire to recreate the mediæval Catholic church, failed to take into account post-Reformation liturgical needs. The majority of his plans called for an Early English or English Decorated style with a long chancel, a flat east wall, and compartmentalized spaces. By the 19th century, however, the sermon had become an important part of the Catholic mass, and two new rites of Exposition and Benediction were introduced, in which the monstrance is placed on a raised altar for the adoration of the congregation. Consequently, the practical need was for a compact building, in which the sermon could be heard by all members of the congregation and where the sanctuary was in close proximity to the main body of the church. As a result, the majority of Gothic Revival Catholic churches built in Britain, Ireland, and North

America following the passage of the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829 had a modified Puginian plan. St. Michael's Cathedral in Toronto, with its relatively short broad plan, shallow transepts and sanctuary, and high aisles, is a typical example in that it was influenced by an English Decorated model but was modified to suit Catholic usage. The plan of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception is similarly quite compact, even though its plan was influenced by Cologne Cathedral, which in turn had been closely modeled on an Ile-de-France cathedral.

Connolly's selection of a Continental rather than an English model was the typical choice for many 19th century Catholic churches. English Catholics had begun to adopt other church plans as early as the late 1830s and even Pugin himself looked to Continental mediæval models to satisfy his Catholic clients. Pugin's hold on the English architectural scene weakened in the 1850s as John Ruskin and Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc became the arbiters of architectural taste. By the 1840s, French 13th century models started to replace their 13th and 14th century English counterparts in Britain and in North America. St. Patrick's in Montreal and the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Ottawa are two 1840s Catholic churches which are examples of this shift.

The use of European models was reinforced by John Ruskin, who championed Italian mediæval architecture and, in so doing, brought about a discernible change in the aesthetic sensibilities of the day. St. Peter's Cathedral, with its French design, planar shapes, and abundant use of polychrome decoration, illustrates the influence of both Viollet-le-Duc and John Ruskin on the work of Joseph Connolly. In his detailed description of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, Thurlby shows how much Connolly was also influenced by the work of the Irish architect J.J. McCarthy. In short, Connolly was typical of many High Victorian architects in that his eclectic style represents a fusion of a number of influences. In the words of J. Mordaunt Crook, "the more one looks at the mediæval sources of High Victorian Gothic, the more one realises that inspiration is very rarely direct."

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