

Fig. 1. St. John's, Newfoundland, St. Patrick, interior to E (2003).

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## St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church, School, and Convent in St. John's: J.J. McCarthy and Irish Gothic Revival in Newfoundland

On 9 April 1853, it was announced in The Builder that

A new church, convent and schoolhouse are to be erected at St. Johns for the Roman Catholic Bishop, Dr. Mullock. The plan consists of three sides of a quadrangle, the church occupies one side, the schools the opposite, and the third is taken up with the convent. The church consists of a nave with aisles, a chancel and Lady Chapel on its north side, a north porch, and a tower surmounted with a broach spire at the west end of the north aisle. The convent is designed to accommodate a community of six nuns, and contains the requisite community, reception and private rooms, chapel, refectory, choir and cells. There are four schools, each 30 feet square, attached. The dimensions of the church are 100 feet by 40 feet in the clear. The style of all the buildings is Early English. Mr. J.J. McCarthy of Dublin is the architect.

In a letter of 6 June 1853, McCarthy informed Bishop Mullock that he had forwarded, in three parcels, "the remainder of the drawings of the Church, Convent and School House for St. John's, Newfoundland."2 He added that there was a "perspective view in a flat wooden case, and I have sent two models, which I think may be required." McCarthy estimated the cost of building the church, convent, and school at £5,000 and his architect's fees at 2.5 percent would be £125.3 On 17 September 1855, the foundation stone of the church was laid by Archbishop Hughes of New York in the presence of Bishop Mullock and the dignitaries who had attended the consecration of the Basilica-Cathedral of St. John the Baptist eight days earlier, along with other highranking clergy.4 Work progressed slowly; on 9 September 1860, the fifth anniversary of the consecration of the cathedral, Bishop Mullock dedicated the Provisional Church of St. Patrick which had been constructed, pending the completion of the projected structure, to the south of the present church.5 In his sermon, Bishop Mullock he stated that the Gothic construction and great spire of the projected church "would compare with the old churches, now in ruins, which lie on the banks of rivers and rest on every



Fig. 2. St. John's, Newfoundland, St. Patrick, interior to E (1986). (Photo: Malcolm Thuriby)

Fig. 4. St. John's, Newfoundland, St. Patrick, exterior NW (SW).



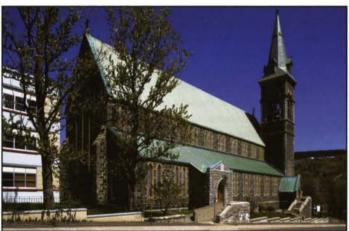


Fig. 3. St. John's, Newfoundland, St. Patrick, exterior NE (NW). (Photo: Malcolm Thuriby)



Fig. 5. St. John's, Newfoundland, Roman Catholic Basilica-Cathedral, interior to E.

piece of rising ground in the fatherland." Shortage of funds resulted in a protracted building programme; it was not until 26 June 1864 that the cornerstone of the church was laid. Eventually, on 28 August 1881, "the stately Gothic Church that graces the west end of the City of St. John was formally opened for Divine Worship and dedicated to the service of God under the invocation of the Great Apostle of the Irish Race." Even then the church was still without the belfry and spire, which were only built in 1912 and 1914 respectively.

In spite of the prolonged period of construction, it appears that the only changes made to McCarthy's design are the omission of the Lady Chapel and modifications to the belfry and spire. The internal measurements of the church–157 feet 9 inches by 65 feet 3.5 inches–are considerably larger than the 100 feet by 40 feet reported in *The Builder*; either the measurements were reported incorrectly or the scale of the plan was increased with the

application of Golden Section proportions of 5:8. That may have been achieved in direct consultation with McCarthy. Two letters from McCarthy to Bishop Mullock on 3 and 5 October 1853 were written in St. John's. In form and detail St. Patrick's stands as a fine example of the early work of James Joseph McCarthy (1817-1881). It serves to emphasize his role as the "Irish Pugin," as he is so often called, in that details throughout the church reveal his reference to the work of Augustus Welby Pugin (1812-1852) in Ireland, and his study of Irish medieval sources. However, far from being the product of a mere copyist, it is a work attuned to the requirements of a modern Catholic church.

The design of St. Patrick's church comprises a continuously roofed nave and chancel flanked by single aisles, with eleven arcaded bays and one blind bay to the east for the chancel and chapels that terminate in a flat east (north) front (figs. 1-3)." A porch projects from the ninth bay of the north (west) aisle

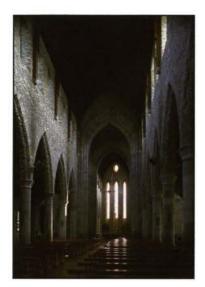
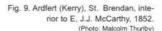
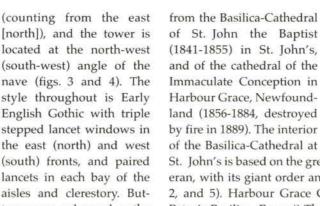
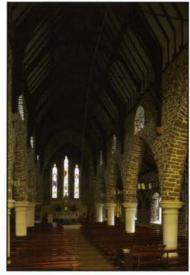


Fig. 6. Killarney Cathedral, nave, interior to E, A.W. Pugin.

(Photo: Malcolm Thurlby)







St. John's is based on the great Roman Basilica of St. John in Lateran, with its giant order and florid Corinthian capitals (figs. 1, 2, and 5). Harbour Grace Cathedral was loosely based on St. Peter's Basilica, Rome.<sup>12</sup> The change from the classicism of the Roman Baroque to the simplicity of early Gothic is most significant in showing the influence of Augustus Welby Pugin (1812-1852), for whom any classicising style of architecture had pagan associations, something quite unacceptable for the house of God. In 1843 Pugin announced:

[i]f the clergy and gentry of Ireland possessed one spark of real national feeling, they would revive and restore those solemn piles of buildings which formerly covered that island of saints, and which are associated with the holiest and most honourable recollections of her history. Many of those were indeed rude and simple; but, massive and solemn, they harmonized most perfectly with the wild and rocky localities in which they were erected. The real Irish ecclesiastical architecture might be revived at a considerably less cost than is now actually expended on the construction of monstrosities; and an apathy of the clergy on this most important subject is truly deplorable."<sup>13</sup>

Pugin set a good example in Ireland by practicing what he preached. At Killarney Cathedral–commenced 1842, the sharply pointed arches of the nave arcade follow Irish Gothic precedent as in the thirteenth-century Cistercian Abbey church of Dunbrody (Wexford) (figs. 6 and 7). The rough stonework of the arcade arches at Killarney–which was exposed in the controversial renovation of 1972-73 when the plaster was removed–shows that the masonry technique follows Irish medieval precedent as in the arches to the transept chapels at Dunbrody (figs. 6 and 8). The roofs truthfully express the use of wood as in medieval practice.

The nave elevation of Killarney Cathedral is followed in principle, if not in exact proportion, in McCarthy's St. Brendan, Ardfert (Kerry) (1851-53) (figs. 6 and 9). There the interior elevation uses columns with moulded capitals to carry the pointed, chamfered main arcade. Above there is a squat, pointed clerestory and the roofs throughout the church truthfully expose the use of wood. Proportionally, the elevation of St. Patrick's church at



Fig. 7. Dunbrody Abbey (Wexford), S nave aisle to E.
(Photo: Malcolm Thurlby)

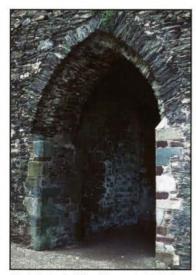


Fig. 8. Dunbrody Abbey, N transept, detail of arch to chapel. (Photo: Malcolm Thurlby)

[north]), and the tower is located at the north-west (south-west) angle of the nave (figs. 3 and 4). The style throughout is Early English Gothic with triple stepped lancet windows in the east (north) and west (south) fronts, and paired lancets in each bay of the aisles and clerestory. Buttresses are only used on the east (north) front to mark the division between the sanctuary and side chapels. The walls are of random ashlar with precisely squared stonework for the quoins, windows, doorways. The internal elevation comprises a pointed main arcade with broad chamfers and a hood mould on foliage stops carried on massive columns with moulded capitals. There is a moulded string course above the main arcade and then a clerestory in which the inner order of each arch is carried on inverted bell-shaped corbels. Wall posts on corbels just above the clerestory string course support the arched braces of the roof, which in turn carry a tie beam, the king post, and curved struts. The aisles are also wood-roofed with wall posts on corbels carrying the struts and principal rafters.

St. Patrick's marks a radical departure in style



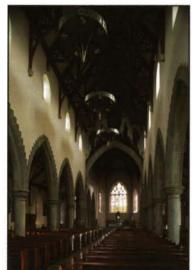


Fig. 11. Ballinasloe (Galway), St. Michael, interior to E, J.J. McCarthy and A.W. Pugin, 1846/1851.



Fig. 12. New Ross (Wexford), St. Mary, S transept, W arcade.

(Photo: Malcolm Thurlby)

St. John's reads as a fusion of Killarney Cathedral and St. Brendan's, Ardfert (figs. 1, 2, 6, and 9). The combination of the column with a simple, moulded capital, and pointed, chamfered arches is presaged in A.W. Pugin's St. Alphonsus at Barntown (Wexford) (1844-51) (fig. 10). In St. Michael at Ballinasloe (Galway), a church designed by Mc-Carthy in 1846 and modified by A.W. Pugin in 1851, columns and moulded capitals carry a main arcade of two chamfered orders (fig. 11).17 This is interesting in that it not only documents a close connection between McCarthy and A.W. Pugin, but also provides a typological link to medieval design precedents like the thirteenth-century south transept west arcade in St. Mary's at New Ross (Wexford) (fig. 12). It is also worth noting that columns with moulded capitals are used in the nave arcades in both the cathedral and friary churches at Ardfert, just a few hundred yards from McCarthy's church of St.

Returning to St. Patrick's, we witness the truthful use of timber in

Brendan (fig. 13).

Fig. 10. Barntown (Wexford), St. Alphonsus, interior to E, A.W. Pugin, 1844 (Photo: Malcolm Thurlby)

Fig. 13. Ardfert Friary, interior to E. (Photo: Malcolm Thurlby)



roof of nave and aisles. However, it is a great pity that the appearance of the wood at St. Patrick's has been marred by the white paint of the 1991 renovations by Jerrett and Associates (figs. 1 and 2). The inclusion of hood moulds for the main arcades and windows, and moulded capitals for the inner order of the clerestory at St. Patrick's differs from the parallels cited so far. This enrichment deviates from the notion of simplicity of early Irish Gothic, but is paralleled in McCarthy's



Fig. 14. Dublin, St. Saviour, interior to E, J.J. Mc-Carthy, 1852. (Photo: Malcolm Thurlby)

church of St. Saviour in Dublin (1852) (fig. 14) where, however, the quatrefoil piers, rich main arcade mouldings, and vertical articulation are all much more lavish than in St. Patrick's (figs. 1 and 2). Medieval precedent for that may be found in both Christ Church Cathedral and St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. One suspects that the embellishment was included in St. Patrick's to impart an element of richness that could at once be associated with a city church and even a cathedral. While in the Dublin churches such details are all carved in stone, at St. Patrick's the hood moulds and stops and clerestory capitals are of plaster. Of course, this is something quite alien to medieval and Pugin's principles, and almost certainly represents a deviation from Mc-Carthy's specifications.

The composition of the triple lancet windows in the east (north) wall of St. Patrick's, surmounted by a small sexfoil, reads as a plain version of the west front of thirteenth-century parish church of Gowran (Kilkenny) (figs. 1 and 15). A similar

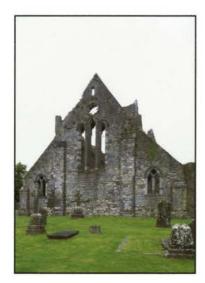


Fig. 15. Gowran (Kilkenny), parish church, exterior from W. (Photo: Malcolm Thurlby)

Fig. 17. Wexford, Immaculate Conception, interior to E, J.J. McCarthy, 1858. (Photo: Malcolm Thurlby)



Fig. 16. Thomastown (Kilkenny), St. Mary, interior to E, J.J. McCarthy, 1858.

(Photo: Malcolm Thutby)

composition was employed by McCarthy in the east front St. Mary's, Thomastown (Kilkenny) (1858), where, like St. Patrick's, there is no chancel arch and the roof continues at the same height over both nave and chancel (figs. 1 and 16).20 Earlier, Mc-Carthy used a similar scheme for St. Saviour's, Dublin (1852) (fig. 14), but with a polygonal apsidal east end. Later, McCarthy adapted the St. Patrick's design with the flat east front and integrated nave and chancel under a single roof in the twin churches of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption in Wexford (1858-60) (fig. 17), and in St. John at Tralee (1859).21 A move in that direction is already witnessed in A.W. Pugin's church of St. Alphonsus, Barntown,

where there is no architectural division between nave and chancel and the roof continues over both at the same height as at St. Patrick's (figs. 1 - 4, 10, and 18). Moreover, Irish medieval precedent for the absence of a chancel arch and the use of a single roof over nave and chancel is found at Ardfert Cathedral and Ardfert Friary (Kerry) (fig. 13). Neat as this typology appears at first sight, there is something missing. In the Ardfert churches and in Pugin's Barntown, wooden screens originally separated nave and chancel, whereas in St. Patrick's and the related McCarthy churches, there were no screens. That was conditioned by the recent liturgical development of Oratorian Ecclesiology which stated "that the appreciation of the Real Presence of the body of the Catholic Church exists now as it never has done before, and has eliminated chancels, screen etc., and that consequently altars, in place of being reverently guarded, should in these enlightened times be obtruded into the congregation with no separation between them."22





Fig. 18. Barntown (Wexford), St. Alphonsus, exterior from S, A.W. Pugin, 1844.

St. Brendan's, Ardfert, offers a parallel for the angle tower on the façade of St. Patrick's albeit at the southwest rather than the northwest corner (figs. 3, 4, and 19). For the latter, there is St. Michael's at Ballinasloe (Galway) (1852) and precedent once again in A.W. Pugin's churches of St. Wilfrid's Hulme (1839-42) and St. Peter at Marlow (Bucks) (1845) (figs. 3, 4, 20, and 21).<sup>23</sup>

The north (west) and south (east) exterior elevations of St. Patrick's appear very progressive in the ab-

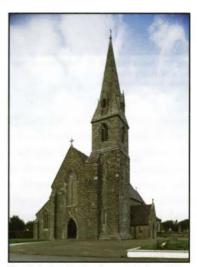


Fig. 19. Ardfert, St. Brendan, exterior from SW, J.J. McCarthy, 1852.

sence of buttresses, a feature regularly associated with High Victorian design. McCarthy and Pugin had already done this at St. Michael's at Ballinasloe (figs. 3 and 22), and in Pugin's churches at Tagoat (Wexford) (1845-48) and Barntown (figs. 18 and 23).

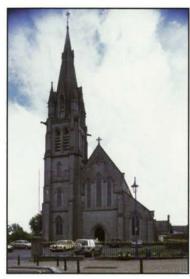


Fig. 21, Marlow (Bucks.), St. Peter, exterior from

W. A.W. Pugin, 1845-48.

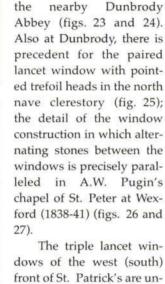
miles south of Killarney.24

Fig. 20. Ballinasloe, St. Michael, exterior from W, J.J. McCarthy and A.W Pugin.

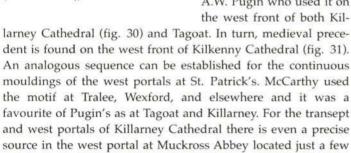
(Photo: Malcolm Thurliby)

Once again there is a regional medieval source, in

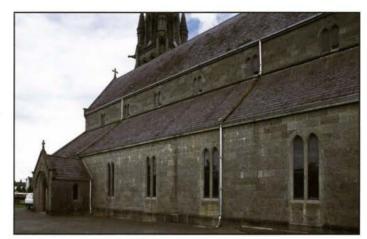
Fig. 22. Ballinasloe, St. Michael, exterior from S. (Photo: Malcolm Thurlby)



The triple lancet windows of the west (south) front of St. Patrick's are unusual in that the sill of the central light is higher than the flanking windows (fig. 28). That was also used by McCarthy at Thomastown (fig. 29), and once again he derived the motif from A.W. Pugin who used it on the west front of both Kil-



The porch on the north (west) side towards the west (south) end of St. Patrick's was a standard medieval feature that had been adopted by Pugin at Barntown and Tagoat (figs. 10 and 23). McCarthy was to include the side porch in many of his churches, including St. Senanus at Foynes (Limerick) (1868), where he even repeated the roundels in the side walls used at St. Patrick's.<sup>25</sup>



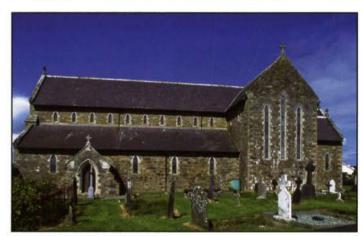


Fig. 23. Tagoat (Wexford), Roman Catholic Parish Church, exterior from S. (Photo: Malcolm Thurlby)



Fig. 24. Dunbrody (Wexford), Cistercian Abbey, exterior from SE. (Photo: Malcolm Thurlby)

St. Patrick's convent and schoolhouse also appear to have been constructed according to McCarthy's plans, but between 1880 and 1882 the convent was replaced by the present Second-Empire edifice. <sup>26</sup> An old photograph shows a two-story rectangular building with paired pointed windows with slim central mullions to the upper story that fit well with McCarthy's oeuvre. <sup>27</sup> The schoolhouse has undergone much modification; the



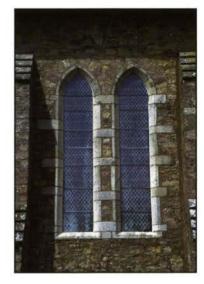
(Photo: Malcolm Thurlby)

Fig. 25. Dunbrody Abbey. N nave clerestory window

Fig. 26. St. John's, Newfoundland, St. Patrick, exterior N (W) nave.



Fig. 27. Wexford, St. Peter's College Chapel, detail window, A.W. Pugin, 1839. (Photo: Malcolm Thuriby)



ground-floor windows have been replaced, and concrete buttresses added (fig. 32). The single and paired windows with shouldered lintels of the second story seem to be original and may be paralleled with the windows with

shouldered lintels in McCarthy's convents of St. John at Tralee (Kerry) (1859) (fig. 33).

To sum up, in applying Pugin's principles and referring to Irish medieval sources, McCarthy's church of St. Patrick in St. John's, Newfoundland, creates a specifically Irish-Catholic symbol in the city, in contrast to the ultramontane image of the Basilica-Cathedral that emphasizes the Roman-ness of the Roman Catholic church. St. Patrick's stands as a worthy rival to the English medieval-inspired Anglican Cathedral, and, as a symbol of national pride, it is an excellent example of the trend in the new world to create architectural reminders of the homeland.28 At the same time, it must be emphasized that McCarthy, like Pugin before him, was not a blind copyist of medieval models. Pugin claimed that architects should be "not... servile imitators of former excellence of any kind, but men imbued with the consistent spirit of the ancient architects, who would work on their principles, carry them out as the old men would have done, had they been placed in similar circumstances, and with similar wants to ourselves."29 In other words, the architect was to follow the principles of Gothic design and adapt them according to the circumstances of the present. Thus for St. Patrick's the abandonment of the division between nave and sanctuary, either architecturally or with screens, was a response to oratorian demand to do away with hierarchical separation of the high altar. Moreover, the use of a single roof to cover nave and chancel gave the silhouette of the church great, even cathedral-like, monumentality, and concomitantly happy association with the best High Victorian Town Churches.

As a postscript, it should be recorded that five Roman Catholic churches built in Newfoundland under the direction of Bishop Mullock continued the stone-built tradition established at St. Patrick's. Of these, Blackhead (nr. Cape Spear), Kilkbride, Torbay and St. Kyran's are no longer extant, but Holy Trinity (formerly Holy Family) at Ferryland (1863-65) survives albeit with its west tower truncated into a low porch, and a reworked interior (fig. 34).<sup>30</sup> Like St. Patrick's, the walls at Ferryland are without buttresses and the windows are single lancets in the early Gothic tradition of Ireland.



Fig. 28. Thomastown, St. Mary, W front. (Photo: Malcolm Thurlby)

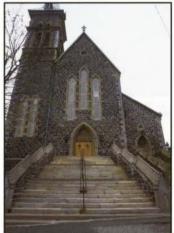


Fig. 29. St. John's, Newfoundland, St. Patrick, W front.
(Photo: Malcoim Thurlby)

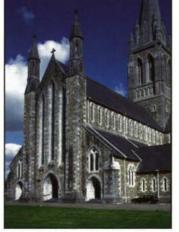


Fig. 30. Killarney Cathedral, exterior from SW. (Photo: Malcolm Thurlby)

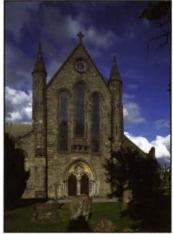


Fig. 31. Kilkenny Cathedral, W front, c. 1250. (Photo: Malcolm Thurlby)

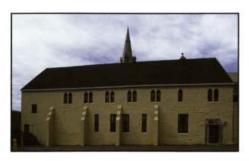


Fig. 32. St. John's, Newfoundland, St. Patrick's Roman Catholic School, exterior from E. (Photo: Malcolm Thurlby)

Fig. 34. Ferryland, Newfoundland, Holy Trinity, exterior from S, 1863-65. (Photo: Malcolm Thurlby)





Fig. 33. Tralee (Kerry), St. John's Convent, exterior from E, J.J McCarthy. (Photo: Malcolm Thurlby)

## Notes

Travel in Ireland was funded in part by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Shane O'Dea introduced me to St. Patrick's church and has freely shared his vast knowledge of the Gothic Revival in Newfoundland. Larry Dohey, archivist of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. John's, kindly guided me through the resources at his disposal. Thanks are also due to Peter Coffman and John FitzGerald for advice on various aspects of this paper.

- 1. The Builder, XI, 9 April 1853, p. 238, col. 1. I owe this reference to Shane O'Dea.
- 2. Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Newfoundland, 104-1-7(2).
- 3. Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Newfoundland, 104-1-7(5).
- 4. The Newfoundlander, 18 September 1855; Singleton, Richard C., 1981, St. Patrick's Church: One Hundred Years, 1881-1981, St. John's, Newfoundland, St. Patrick's Parish, p. 28.
- 5. Singleton: 29.

- 6. Daily News (St. John's), 11 September 1860.
- 7. Singleton: 32.
- 8. The Newfoundlander, 30 August 1881, p. 2; The Times, 31 August 1881, p. 2-3.
- 9. Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Newfoundland, 104-1-7-(6) and 104-1-7-(7). The letters document McCarthy as responsible for the lathing and plastering of Bishop Mullock's "Residence on Cathedral ground." The second letter refers to the residence as "New," which may imply that McCarthy designed the residence but it could simply mean that Mullock employed him just because he was in town.
- 10. On McCarthy, see Sheehy, Jeanne, 1977, J.J. McCarthy and the Gothic Revival in Ireland, Belfast, Ulster Architectural Heritage Society; Richardson, Douglas Scott, 1983, Gothic Revival Architecture in Ireland, New York and London, Garland, p. 292-294, 488-492. On A.W. Pugin in Ireland, see Stanton, Phoebe, 1970, Pugin, London, Thames and Hudson, p. 67-76, 117-120; Richardson: 253-305; O'Donnell, Roderick, 1995, "The

Pugins in Ireland," in A.W.N. Pugin, Master of the Gothic Revival, Paul Atterbury, ed., New Haven and London, Yale University Press, p. 136-159.

- 11. Directions are given according to the liturgical compass determined by the high altar at the east end. The actual direction is given parenthetically.
- 12. Exterior view from the liturgical north-west in Harvey, Moses M., 1894, Newfoundland illustrated: "the sportsman's paradise; a collection of views, with short descriptions of the beautiful scenery, prolific sporting grounds, old historic spots, and healthful summer resorts, in England's oldest colony." Concord, N. H., T.W. and J.F. Cragg, p. 91. Reproduced in http://www.heritage.nf.ca/society/cath\_immaculate.html. The west front is reduced to a simpler temple façade with pilasters, twin towers, a dome on substantial drum over the crossing, transepts, and regular basilican nave with clerestory and single aisles.
- 13. Pugin, Augustus Welby, 1843, An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England, London, John Weale, p. 23, note 13.
- 14. On Dunbrody, see Stalley, Roger, 1987, *The Cistercian Monasteries of Ireland*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, p. 96-103, 244, with further bibliography.

- 15. For the interior of Killarney Cathedral prior to the removal of the plaster, see Richardson: fig. 159.
- 16. Sheehy: 43.
- 17. Sheehy: 35-36.
- 18. Sheehy: 43-44.
- 19. Stalley, Roger, 1971, Architecture and Sculpture in Ireland, 1150-1350, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, pls. 27 and 30.
- 20. Sheehy: 48.
- 21. Sheehy: 51 and 54.
- 22. The Address of the Irish Ecclesiological Society (1849) reported in *The Ecclesiologist*, X (1850), p. 322-323.
- 23. St. Wilfrid's is illustrated in Hitchcock, Henry Russell, 1954, Early Victorian Architecture in Britain, New Haven, Yale University Press, fig. III 19.
- 24. Richardson: 281.
- 25. Sheehy: 64, figs. 36 and 37.
- Singleton: 48.
- 27. Illustrated in Singleton: 47.
- 28. The Anglican Cathedral at St. John's is being studied in detail by Peter Coffman as part of his research on "The Gothic Revival in the Atlantic Provinces" for a Ph.D. dissertation, Queen's University.
- 29. Pugin: 22.
- 30. I owe this list to the ever-generous Shane O'Dea.