

THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF St PATRICK, KILLALA

THE BUILDING & GROUNDS

I

Excerpt from the 2005 Conservation Report by Nicholas Prins, MA (Oxon) MSc (Lond)

The Cathedral is located in the centre of the small coastal village of Killala,¹ on a prominent corner site, bordered on two sides by Church Street. The building, which is aligned east/west, consists of a long rectangular four-bay gable-ended nave (32m x 10m) with a square tower and spire at its west end and a gable-ended vestry, like a transept, to its north elevation.

The tower

The single-stage tower of rubble limestone construction is flanked by dressed limestone diagonal buttresses and surmounted by dressed limestone spire and a crenellated parapet with a dressed stone pinnacle at each corner. There are small round-arched, dressed stone belfry openings with white painted timber louvres in the north and south elevations of the tower, with a circular dressed stone belfry opening with slate louvres in the tower's west elevation. There is a large single-lancet gothic arched window with simple timber geometric tracery in the tower's west elevation. A round-arched dressed limestone doorway in a simple Romanesque style in the north elevation of the tower is the entrance to the Cathedral. Inside the entrance door, a staircase gives access to the gallery in the nave. Above the gallery level, there is ladder access to three further timber tower floors; the second is at the level of the nave attic space; the third forms the belfry floor, and the fourth floor is at the level of the tower's parapet and forms the drip tray for the brick-line masonry spire.

The nave

The nave's walls are of uncoursed rubble stone. The base of the east gable wall has a pronounced batter. There is a blocked gothic arched dressed stone doorway in the south wall. The nave is lit by round-headed windows with elemental timber tracery and leaded clear glass, four in the south elevation and three in the north elevation. In the east gable there is a large clear glass circular timber rose window above a wide single-pointed gothic arched window with reticulated (net-like) stone tracery and some coloured glass of indifferent quality.

Internally, the nave is bare-walled with a large detached gallery at the west end on which stands a fine [1838] Telford organ. The gallery is lit by two small windows in the west gable wall flanking the tower. The aisle is lined with wainscoted and partitioned timber-panelled box pews with doors. There is a bishop's throne placed in an adapted box pew along the nave's south wall. There are some fine early 18th C memorials on the walls.

The vestry

The vestry is a square, gable-ended wing (7m x 7m) attached to the north elevation of the nave. Its gable end is flanked by dressed limestone diagonal buttresses surmounted by dressed stone pinnacles with a corbelled stone chimney stack at its apex. There is a large single-lancet gothic arched window with simple timber geometric tracery in this gable. A round-arched dressed limestone doorway in a simple Romanesque style in the vestry's west elevation provides [external] access. Internally, the vestry's walls are bare stone. There is a large blocked fireplace opposite its [external] entrance door.

Evolution chronology

St Patrick's Cathedral is described in Samuel Lewis's *Topographical Dictionary* (publ. 1837) as follows:-

'The cathedral, which is also the parish church, is an ancient structure with a spire; it was repaired in 1817, for which purpose the late Board of First Fruits granted a loan of £1061.10.9

¹ Ordinance Survey Map Number: 24; Grid Reference G 204 299

and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners have recently granted £600 for its further repair.’ (Vol 2; p. 120)

The Diocese of Killala was established at the Synod of Raith Bressail in 1111 and corresponded to the territory that came to be dominated by the Gaelic lordship of the O’Dowds (Roslee Castle, beside the shore at Easky, is the most prominent relic of this clan’s lordship whose power was eventually ended by the arrival of Cromwell’s army in 1652).

There is no record of the appearance of the medieval cathedral, although Bishop Thomas Orwell (1390-98) obtained a grant of indulgences for those who visited the cathedral and gave alms for its repair. Probably wrecked in the troubles of the 16th C, it was in ruins by 1611 as proposals for its re-edification were laid before the Irish parliament in that year. Francis Kirwan, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Killala (1645-1651), gained possession of the cathedral in 1645 during the Confederate War of 1641-1651 and recorded that the cathedral church was ‘quite tumbled to the ground.’²

The cathedral was not rebuilt until the episcopate of Thomas Otway (1672-1680) when settled conditions brought about by the Restoration began to prevail in Ireland. The nave is essentially this late 17th century structure with the blocked ‘Dean’s Door’ in the south as the only connection to the building’s medieval origins.

The tower and its spire, its flanking west gable wall, and the vestry were added to the building in 1817 by the architect James Paine of the Board of First Fruits.³ [see his floor plan below]

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In the mid 19th C, during the deanship of James Collins (1844-1871), the roof was re-built. The eaves were raised by approx 0.75m and the ridge lowered giving the new roof a lower pitch. The original profile of the roof showing its right height and pitch can be clearly seen on the east elevation of the tower above the present roof. The added eave height and raised east gable can clearly be seen in the different coloured stone used to construct these changes. Internally the ceiling was replaced by ornamental exposed timber trusses.

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Sometime during the 20th C the lime mortar render on the walls of the cathedral was replaced by a hard Portland cement dash render which weathered into a hard and drab appearance.

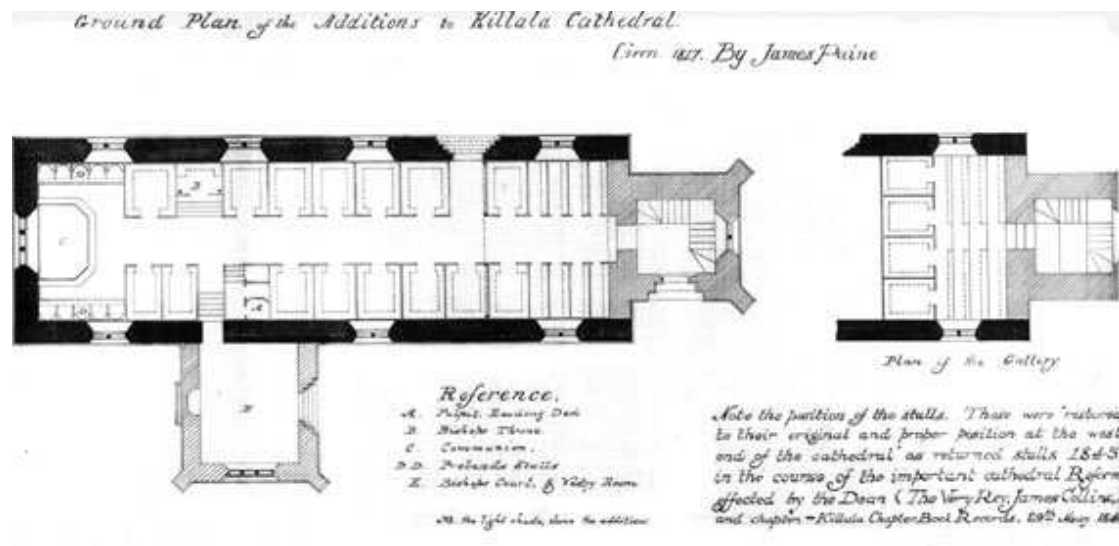
In 1991 a major restoration of the cathedral commenced. Externally this involved removing all the cement render from the walls of the building and pointing the stone with a hard cement mortar. The windows were all replaced. The roof was re-slatted with artificial slate on the south slope of the nave and east of the vestry on the north slope, and [with] natural Blue Bangor slates on the vestry roof and the remainder of the nave roof. Gray plastic rainwater pipes and folded sheet metal gutters attached by top nails replaced the existing rainwater goods.

Internally, all the original lath and plaster studding above the wainscoting in the nave and vestry was removed and the walls were pointed with a hard cement mortar. A heating system consisting of a large flue-less propane gas burner attached to the centre of the tie beam of three alternate king-post trusses was installed. A new staircase was built in the tower to give access to the gallery.

² Peter Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, (The Institute of Irish Studies, QUB, 1992, p. 136)

³ Ground Plan of Additions to Killala Cathedral circa 1817 by James Paine (framed document on wall of cathedral vestry) [included in this document]

The Board of First Fruits was a church body set up in the early 18th C due to the efforts of Jonathan Swift to fund the construction of glebes and churches for the Anglican Church in Ireland. Its activity peaked in the second decade of the 19th C following a massive injection of funds by the Westminster parliament after the Act of Union.



II

Restoration work done since this report and according to its recommendations, 2005–2009

- Replacement of tower drip tray and rotting tower timbers. Replacement of porch ceiling. New ladders for upper stories of tower. Repair of leaks in the parapet gutter.
- Removal of plastic storm covers from all windows, installation of bottom-hinged inward opening window ventilators, and installation of protective metal grilles.
- Replacement of plastic rainwater pipes on tower with cast-iron black-enamelled ones.

III

Projected works

- Replacement of damp-proof courses at chancel and vestry gable ends. Replacement of nave rain-water goods with traditional ironware to match the tower.
- Re-pointing and re-rendering of the building exterior with lime mortar.
- Replacement of the present heating system with a wood pellet boiler and radiator system to provide both background heating controlled by a humidistat and boosted heating for Sundays and other occasions when the building is in use. The building of a mezzanine floor in the vestry to accommodate present vestry use and the ground floor converted to boiler room and accessible toilet.
- Organ restoration work – soundboard and loose keys.

IV

The Graveyard

Under the guidance of landscape architect, Henry Shaw, the existing pea gravel is being removed or mixed with soil. To date, the lower area has been grassed and the plan is to do the same with the upper area, which will need to be sodded with ready-turf to avoid damaging archaeological features. Appropriate small ornamental tree and shrub plantings, including hedges, will be planted. The sloping front lawn will be planted with scattered daffodils this autumn (2009) and possibly later with primroses. We are grateful to FAS for work on the lawns and paths and the Killala Rural Social Scheme and Tidy Towns Committee for their assistance with maintenance, clearance and planting (see photo gallery for graveyard photos).