



Pugin Foundation

A Guide to Saint Patrick's, Colebrook

Architect: Augustus Welby
Northmore Pugin

Brian Andrews

About this guide

You are about to embark on the tour of a remarkable church which, in purely art-historical terms, can lay claim to being the most significant building in Tasmania.

A background to the design of the church and its significance is followed by a tour of its exterior, including the churchyard, and then its interior. Numbered plans and images are provided, keyed to the text.

Because many of the terms used are technical or specialised in nature, and perhaps unfamiliar to you, a glossary has been placed at the end of the guide. Terms to be found in the glossary are printed in italics.

Throughout the guide extra material has been placed in highlight boxes for those of you wanting more detailed background information.

Design background

St Patrick's Church was designed in 1843 by Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812–52), England's greatest early-Victorian architect, designer and theorist, for his close friend Robert William Willson (1794–1866), first Bishop of Hobart Town.



In a tragically short working life Pugin conjured up over a hundred buildings and untold thousands of designs for metalwork, furniture, ceramics, textiles, wallpaper, stained glass, jewellery, book illustrations and flat decoration. He is best known for a series of books which irrevocably altered the course of nineteenth-century architecture and design. Pugin's inexhaustible creativity was fuelled by a passionately-held belief that the moral, social and spiritual condition of his time could only be improved through a complete revival of the physical and religious fabric of medieval England.

Normally, Pugin provided architectural plans for his buildings. These were often not developed in great detail because, for a majority of his English buildings at least, he could rely on the skills and experience of his favoured builder George Myers to fulfil both the letter and the spirit of his design intentions. Detail from a typical Pugin design drawing is given below.



Bishop Willson had been given to understand that sophisticated skills to interpret architectural drawings might not be available in Van Diemen's Land (later re-named Tasmania). Pugin therefore adopted an approach to the realisation of his three small church designs for Willson which would be unique in his entire oeuvre. Instead of handing over the drawings to Willson he gave them to George Myers. From these, Myers' men

constructed accurate detailed scale models which could be taken to pieces to reveal the detail inside, as well as full-size exemplars in English limestone of the more complex stonework like *gable* crosses. Armed with the models and exemplars for copying, local craftsmen could, it was confidently anticipated, accurately construct Pugin's churches without his supervision or the skills of an English builder.

Illustrated below is Pugin's design for an exemplar alphabet to be carved in stone and copied onto Tasmanian buildings.



The building you are about to experience shares with its two Tasmanian sister churches the extraordinary approach outlined above, one which is not to be found in any other Australian buildings regardless of their design origin.

Pugin stressed in an 1844 letter to his munificent patron Lord Shrewsbury that his Tasmanian designs were for 'simple buildings that can be easily erected'. And indeed they were. St Patrick's is, in fact, the most stripped down and pared back church design of Pugin's entire oeuvre. As such it represents the most extreme application of the key rules of design which appeared in his revolutionary 1841 book, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*, a work of fundamental influence upon the course of nineteenth-century design.

Pugin would design ground-breaking furniture too, in which the construction was revealed rather than hidden, and his

'structural tables' are seen as a turning point in design reform.



St Patrick's is the 'structural table' of his church designs, demonstrating his revolutionary design principles like no other of his buildings. That is why it is of international significance in the context of the evolution of nineteenth-century design.

Pugin's 'great' design rules as set out in his 1841 work, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*:

'1st, that there should be no features about a building which are not necessary for convenience, construction, or propriety; 2nd, that all ornament should consist of enrichment of the essential construction of the building.'

'In pure architecture the smallest detail should have a meaning or serve a purpose.'

One other point should be borne in mind as you explore St Patrick's. Although it was designed in 1843 it was not constructed until 1855–57 because of the poverty of Tasmania's Catholic population. By then Pugin's design revolution had borne fruit across the English-speaking world and beyond, but that fact doesn't diminish this building's great importance.

Environs

The approach to St Patrick's Church from the centre of Colebrook village looks very different now from what it did at the end of the nineteenth century. At that time the church and its cemetery stood in a setting of mature deciduous trees enclosed by a picket fence with wrought iron gates. All this has disappeared, leaving the building standing starkly on the hillside above the railway line.

The sloping site has had an impact on the construction of the church and its orientation. On the positive side the site has given St Patrick's a commanding position above the town, making it visible on the main approaches to the village from the north and the south.



The site is a difficult one, but was not of Bishop Willson's choosing. In the early 1850s he moved to make permanent provision for the local Catholics. He was granted two parcels of crown land by the Colonial government for a church reserve on the south side of Maconochie Street (now Yarlinton Road) and situated on either side of Arthur Street. On the larger, more westerly, of the two parcels he determined to erect a church and cemetery. Willson himself purchased the adjacent parcel on Arthur Street.



The church exterior

St Patrick's is constructed of local sandstone quarried across the other side of the Coal River valley. If you stand on the landing in front of the porch and look straight out it is still possible to see evidence of the long-disused quarry site to the right of a group of farm buildings.

Pugin had no idea where his design would be used, so in order to adapt it to the sloping site the supervising architect Frederick Thomas was obliged to construct a substantial sub-floor structure (1) of *random rubble* to level the church. Indeed, there is a fall of some two metres diagonally across the church footprint. Sandstone for this structure was salvaged from the demolished perimeter wall of the former Jerusalem convict probation station buildings. (Jerusalem, the original name for Colebrook, was changed in March 1894.)

Frederick Thomas (1817–1885) was sentenced to transportation to New South Wales in 1834 for swindling. He was further sentenced in 1842 to fifteen years in a penal settlement for stealing and arrived in Hobart Town in February 1843. While still on probation he was assigned as an unqualified draftsman and clerk to the Public Works Department on 1 July 1847, being later promoted to Senior Draftsman and eventually Clerk of Works. He evidently had the right to private practice because Bishop Willson entrusted Pugin's church models to him.

The difference between the substructure and the actual wall of the church is easy to see, the building itself being constructed from blocks (2) which rise in regular courses with a height of 30.5cm (actually built in 12 inch courses under the old Imperial measurement system).

The Probation System was an experiment in penal discipline unique to Van Diemen's Land. Introduced in 1839, it was modified several times from 1846 until it was abandoned altogether following the abolition of transportation to the colony in 1853. More than eighty probation stations operated in various locations, for varying periods, throughout the settled districts. Often hastily and poorly built, few remain, and most of those in ruins. (Source: www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/P/Probation%20system.htm) The Jerusalem probation station complex was disposed of in 1855 and the walls taken down. Several of the buildings associated with the station survive, including the barracks, the commandant's cottage and the remains of the penitentiary chapel, now serving as a barn.



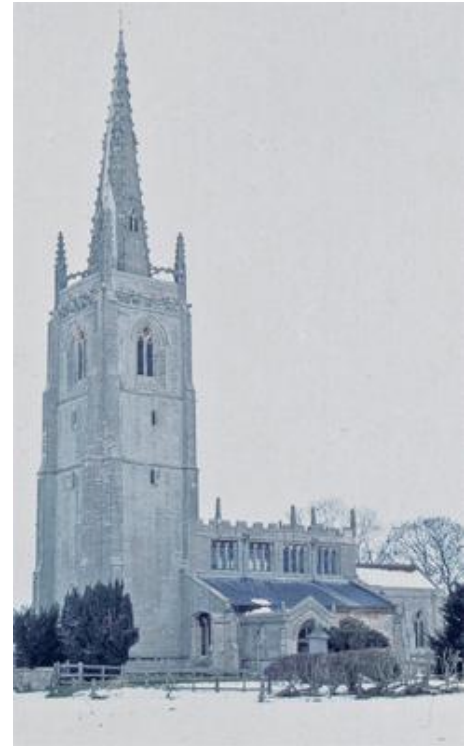
Originally, the church was roofed with locally split shingles but this was changed to corrugated iron around the turn of the twentieth century.

Let us now look at the form and composition of the building. Like Pugin's other two Tasmanian designs this church is a scholarly yet completely original evocation of an English medieval village church, in this case from c.1320. For his time Pugin had an unrivalled knowledge and understanding of the grammar and vocabulary of medieval Gothic, and this is reflected in St Patrick's.



It has a three-*bay nave* (3), side aisles (4), a separately articulated *chancel* (5), a *clerestory* (6), a *sacristy*, a porch (7) and a tall three-opening *bellcote* (8) which stands on the nave east *gable* and completes an elegant composition characteristic of Pugin. Such a group of elements is rare to find in a small Australian country church, particularly the aisles and clerestory which impart to the interior space something of the character of a pocket cathedral. But, as Pugin well knew, it is not uncommon in small English medieval village churches, even if the bellcote here is replaced by a steeple over there.

Despite its prodigious steeple, Asgarby Church, Lincolnshire, depicted here, has seating for a mere forty people.



Because of the sloping site Frederick Thomas had to create a flight of steps and a balustrade outside the porch door. The balustrade is coarse in design, but nonetheless a part of the original construction and therefore worthy of respect.

The building is almost entirely devoid of decorative elaboration, relying for its beauty on Pugin's excellent composition and massing.

Pugin normally followed the ancient custom of orienting his churches, that is, they were so placed that the altar was against the east wall of the chancel. In this guide, directions will be given as if the church were oriented. In fact, because of the exigencies of the sloping site, the main axis of the church is aligned more south-east to north-west.

In England medieval churches had their entrance porch on the south, or sunny, side of the building, sheltered from the cold north winds. In his Australian designs

Pugin, for the same reason, reversed his porch position to the north side as can be seen here.

Note that the porch entrance archway has a *dripstone* moulding. This is for the very practical reason of preventing rain falling on the porch front face from dripping onto those entering the church, hence its name. The church only has one other dripstone moulding, over the chancel east window, but that is so placed for what Pugin termed propriety. In this latter case it was an expression of Pugin's view that the chancel should be the most highly elaborated part of the church because it was, in his view, the most solemn and sacred part of the edifice.

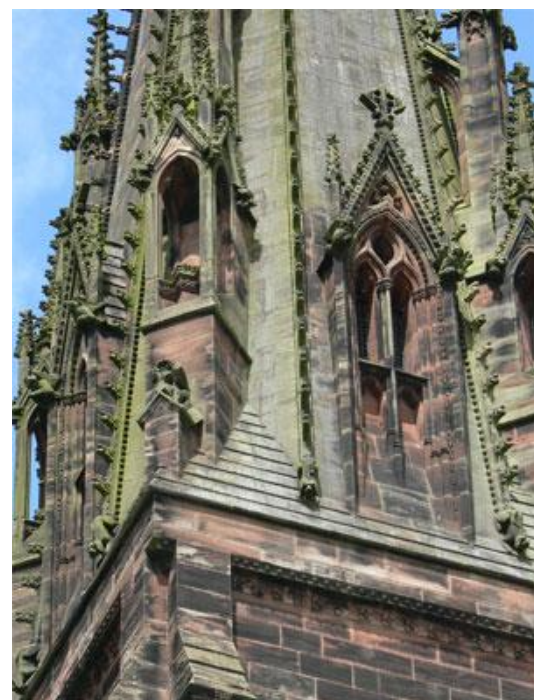
Pugin's definition of propriety as given in his *True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*:

'What I mean by propriety is this, that the external and internal appearance of an edifice should be illustrative of, and in accordance with, the purpose for which it is destined.'

St Patrick's also has a west door, reserved in Pugin's designs for ceremonial usage such as processions or the visit of a bishop.



Notice above the front door a blind *cusped* triangle sunk into the facade, containing a *foliated* cross and an inscription. The inscription was copied from one of Pugin's stone exemplar alphabets and reads 'AMDCCLV' [in the year 1855], the date when construction of the church was started. Along with the dripstone moulding over the chancel east window this is the only decorative detail on the whole building, making a dramatic contrast with Pugin's most structurally and decoratively elaborated church, St Giles', Cheadle, Staffordshire, a detail of which is shown below.

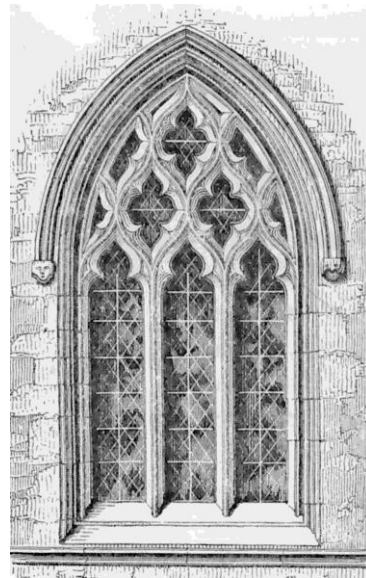


Other elements on the exterior which were copied from exemplar stonework brought out from England in 1844 by Bishop Willson are the gable crosses.



We should mention in passing that the *buttresses* on St Patrick's are there solely for structural reasons and not as decoration.

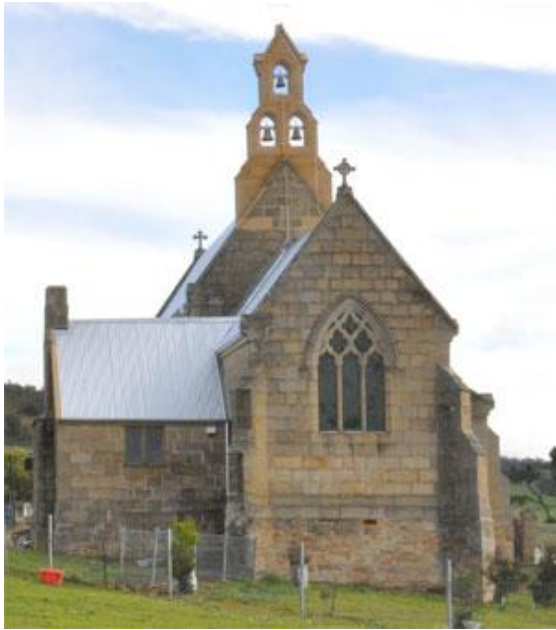
The most elaborate element of the building's exterior, again for reasons of propriety, is the three-light *Flowing Decorated* chancel east window. Its reticulated—or net-like—*tracery* is a type much admired and very widely used in churches built around 1320. Despite the elegance of such windows there was always an awkward junction between the net cells and the edge of the window, resulting in a number of part cells, as shown in the following illustration of a north aisle window in Great Milton Church, Oxfordshire.



Pugin most elegantly solved the problem in his design by distorting the net cells and setting them under an *ogee* sub-arch, then filling the space above with pairs of dagger tracery elements.



Abutting the chancel south wall is the sacristy. In common with Pugin's other two Tasmanian church designs, yet unlike any of his others, it has no external door. This was most probably a security measure, the result of Bishop Willson's understanding from his colleague Fr (later Archbishop) William Bernard Ullathorne OSB concerning the convict element of the Van Diemen's Land population. Ullathorne had experience dating from the 1830s.



We now turn to the dominant element of St Patrick's Church, its tall elegant triple bellcote.

This was only reinstated in 2007, having been destroyed by a tornado in 1895 and not replaced, presumably out of fear for its stability. For over 110 years the church looked like the image below, deprived of the essential element which completed Pugin's splendid composition.



The Monitor, 20 September 1895

JERUSALEM. Your readers will feel interested in news about our church here, as, no doubt, they were grieved to read a brief account of it being wrecked by the terrific storm of Sunday last. I am glad to be able to say that the damage due is not near so bad as we feared, the sanctuary being the only part that has suffered much damage, at least as far as we can judge at the present. The storm rushed in all its fury at a few minutes after 11 a.m., its force being in a line a few chains wide. Unfortunately, St. Patrick's beautiful church was in the course. It brought down the bell turret, which was about 18 feet high, and placed over the sanctuary arch. This crashed on the sanctuary, bringing down the whole roof and a large portion of the walls with it; the concussion cracked part of the main building, but, I think, not much injuring the stone work. Two very large statues (of the Blessed Virgin and St. Patrick) at either side of the altar were completely smashed. The altar, a very fine one by Mr. P. Sheehy, Hobart, escaped; and the rood screen, with its fine crucifix above, is also uninjured. It was a providential thing that it was not our Mass Sunday, else the priest and the altar boys would have been killed.

The reinstated bellcote has stainless steel reinforcement which is carried down deep into the nave east wall, and the entire church has been substantially stiffened so as to prevent a recurrence of the 1895 disaster.

Three new bronze bells, Patrick, William and Ave Maria, which were cast in France make up a chime that automatically sounds the Angelus each day at noon and plays one of ten old French belfry melodies at 3pm on a rotational basis.

The largest bell, PATRICK, sounds note C and tolls for funerals. It is named for Saint Patrick. The middle bell, WILLIAM, sounds note D and tolls before the commencement of Mass. It is named for Bishop William Willson who obtained the church design from Pugin and for Fr William Dunne, the priest in charge of Richmond Parish, who built the church. The smallest bell, AVE MARIA, sounds note E and plays the Angelus.

The cemetery

The earliest burial dates from 1856, before the church was opened, and the cemetery is still in use.



Most Tasmanian Catholic cemeteries from Campbell Town southwards have one or more headstones copied from one of the several simple exemplar headstones brought out from England in 1844. Colebrook is no exception. Our Pugin headstone is to be found just down the slope from the large monument with the Celtic cross.



Dominating the cemetery is the grave of Fr William Dunne, the Richmond pastor who built St Patrick's. Having spent most of his priestly life in Tasmania he ended his working days in charge of Coburg Parish in Melbourne, Victoria.

He had expressed a wish to be buried in Colebrook alongside the church he greatly loved, so after his death in 1883 his mortal remains were brought back to Tasmania. He lies in the plot dominated by the large, elegantly carved Celtic cross and surrounded by a wrought iron railing.



The entire Dunne monument was manufactured in Victoria. Indeed, the Hobart architect Henry Hunter applied to have the memorial cross admitted to the Colony of Tasmania free of customs duty. The wrought iron railing was manufactured by the Brunswick Foundry in Melbourne, and both the cross *plinth* and the base supporting the railing are of basalt quarried in Victoria.

Fr Dunne was greatly loved in Tasmania. After his funeral in St Joseph's, Hobart, on 15 March 1883 a procession of some 2,000 people followed the hearse to the railway station. A special train with around 250 mourners conveyed his remains to Jerusalem (Colebrook), hundreds lining the high ground of the Hobart Domain to wave their farewell. Upon its arrival the hearse was drawn up the hill to St Patrick's by twenty strong young men of the district. Around 400 people gathered around the graveside for his interment.

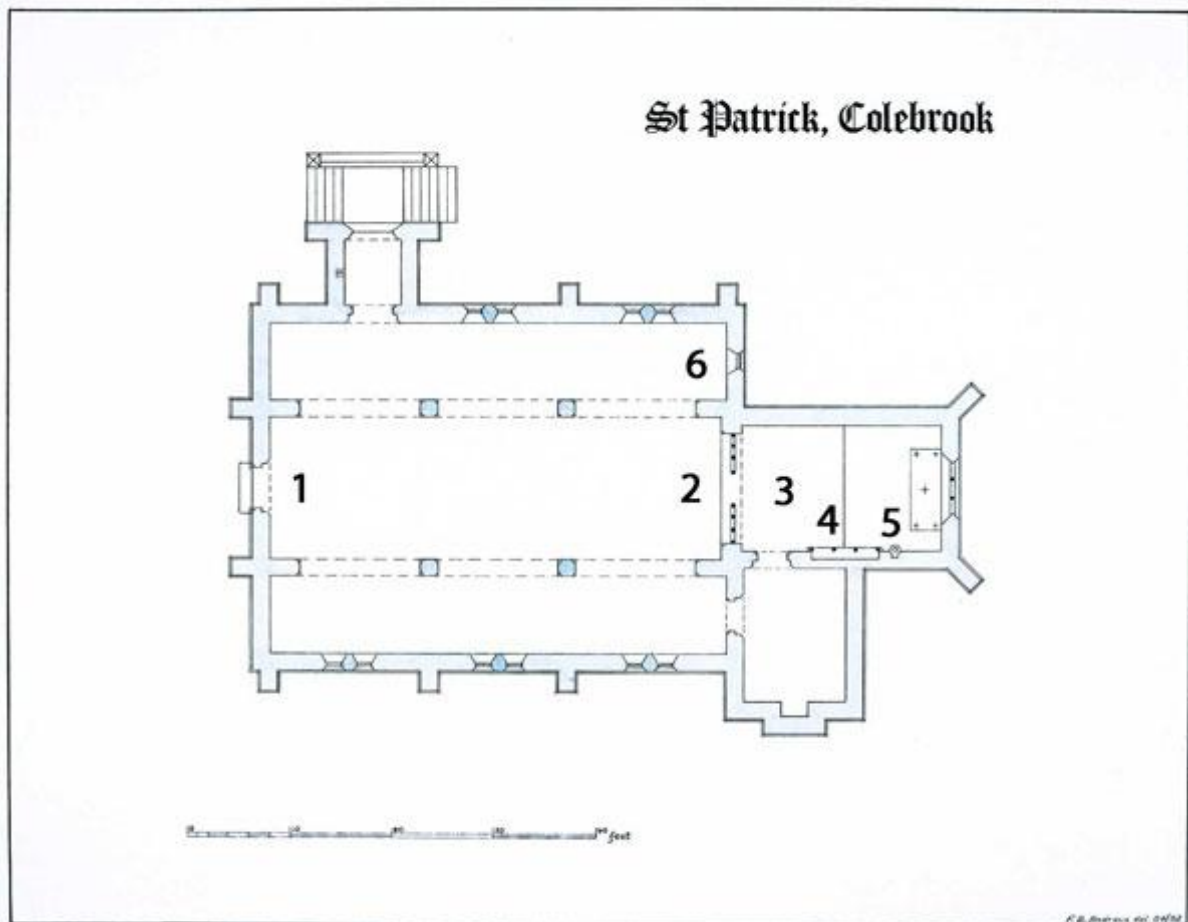
In his May 1841 article for the *Dublin Review*, 'On the Present State of Ecclesiastical Architecture in England', with regard to churchyards Pugin observed: 'It is customary to erect a stone cross, raised on steps, on the south-western side of the church, to mark the hallowed ground.' This was his own practice, followed by Bishop Willson at Colebrook where a Pugin-designed churchyard cross was erected.



Most regrettably, this cross was destroyed by vandalism in December 1997, but the base can still be seen. The fragments have been stored and it is hoped one day to restore this characteristic part of a typical Pugin churchyard setting.

The church interior

A numbered ground plan of St Patrick's is given below.



After entering the church may we suggest that you walk to the centre of the nave near the west door (1) and look east. From here it is possible to take in the superb proportions and composition of the interior, revealing the sure hand of Pugin the master designer. This little village church, with its aisles and clerestory giving it a remarkable sense of soaring spaciousness, has the feeling of a pocket cathedral. It is thoroughly faithful to Pugin's vision, as set out in his writings, for 'a complete Catholic parish church for the due celebration of the divine office and administration of the sacraments, both as regards architectural arrangement and furniture'. Note how the rhythm of the nave arcade draws the eye beyond the rood screen (2) to the altar within the chancel.

As with the exterior, the interior is devoid of all ornament or decorative detail which, combined with the predominantly clear glass in the windows, imparts a feeling of lightness, airiness and astringency more normally associated with the interiors of early medieval Cistercian monastic architecture.

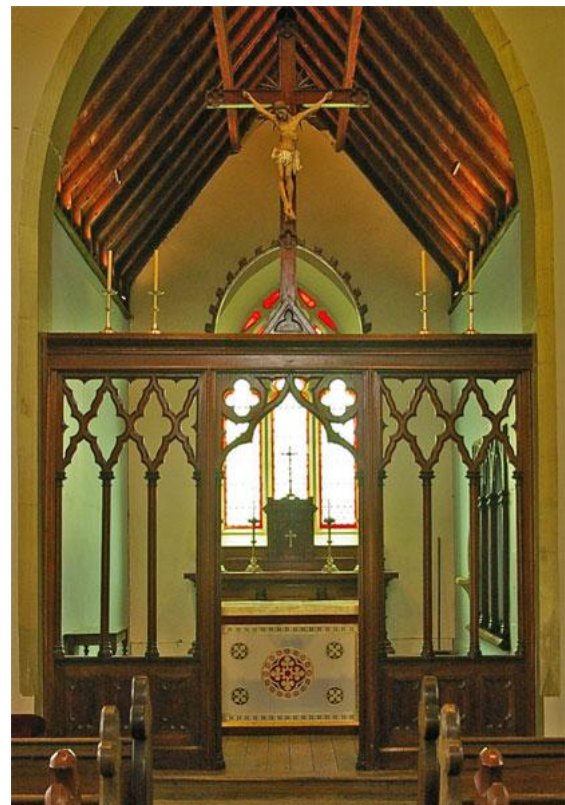
This impression is further enhanced by the extreme simplicity of the nave arcade. The arch mouldings consist of a plain chamfer which is carried down the octagonal *piers* to pyramidal stops that serve as a transition to the square bases. There are no *capitals*, something which no Colonial architect would dare to do. But Pugin knew that such columns are to be found in late medieval churches, particularly on the Continent, and his designs were always archaeologically correct.



The eye is drawn upwards to the fine open timber roof resting on moulded corbels. These latter are a good example of the limitations associated with Pugin's approach for his Tasmanian church designs. The corbels were too small to copy accurately from the model so they are a little crude and over-scale, being Thomas' best interpretation.

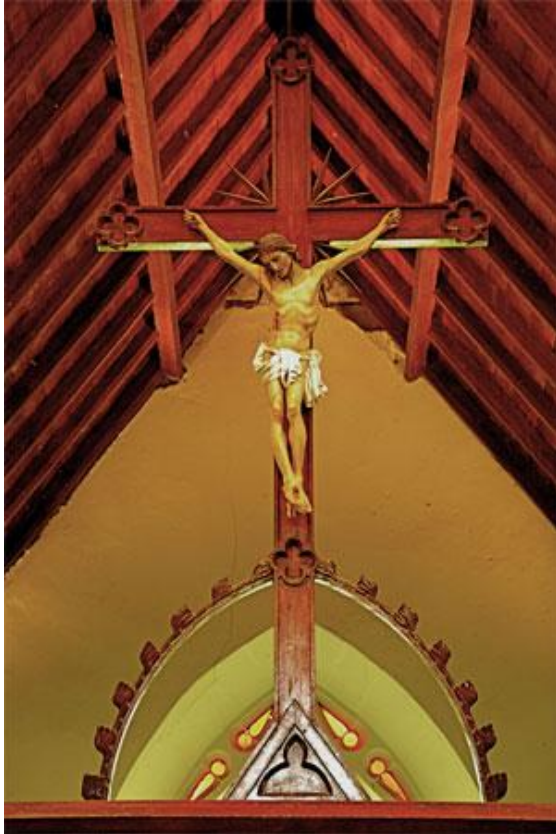
Spanning the chancel arch is the great glory of St Patrick's interior, its rood screen (2). Pugin regarded this English medieval furnishing as essential in his church designs, but only seven of his screens have survived in situ. Two of them are in Tasmania, the other being in Pugin's St Paul's, Oatlands, but most have been demolished.

This screen, constructed from Colonial Cedar, nearly went the way of many others in the twentieth century and just survived, but with major parts missing. It was fully restored by the Pugin Foundation in 2007 and is a vital element in conveying the essential character of a Pugin church interior as set out in his writings.



The figure of Christ on the rood screen cross was designed by Pugin in 1847 and is one of at least fourteen copies of varying sizes brought back to Tasmania in that

year by Bishop Willson for use on rood screens. They were carved from White Pine (*Pinus Strobus*) by George Myers' craftsmen, coated with gesso and then polychromed. Only two such superbly modelled figures from this design are known to exist in England.



We will now draw your attention to several furnishings in the chancel, but ask you not to enter this area out of respect for its sacred purpose.

Just inside the chancel is the forward altar (3). It is the fourth altar to be placed in St Patrick's and was constructed in 2007. In common with all the early churches constructed during Bishop Willson's time in Tasmania, St Patrick's original altar was a painted and gilded wooden design by Henry Hunter, its decorative repertoire copied or derived from illustrations in Pugin's highly influential 1844 work, *Glossary of Ecclesiastical Ornament and Costume*. This was replaced in 1883 by another wooden one which was badly

damaged by the fall of the bellcote in 1895. The altar presently against the chancel east wall replaced the 1883 one in the 1930s.

The new forward altar looks back to the original Colebrook altar and is based on Hunter's idiom, being painted and gilded. Its decoration is a copy of elements from a *tabernacle* by Hunter, formerly in his church at Swansea, and again derives from Pugin's *Glossary*. The five main decorative elements on the face of the altar represent the Five Wounds of Christ, and the bright primary colours are typical of Pugin's palette.



Built into the chancel south wall are two of Pugin's essential furnishings which, along with the rood screen and—frequently in his work—an *Easter sepulchre*, equipped his churches for the celebration of the *liturgical* rites according to the practice of the English medieval church. This furnishing arrangement which Pugin sought to implement, unless specifically prevented from so doing, was for the Sarum Use. It was a key part of Pugin's vision, shared by Willson, to resuscitate

the full liturgical, sacramental and theological life of medieval England.

The Use of Sarum was an English variant in non-essentials—one of a host of such variants—of the Roman Rite which prevailed throughout late medieval Western Christendom. Before the English Reformation it was widespread throughout southern England, Scotland and Ireland.

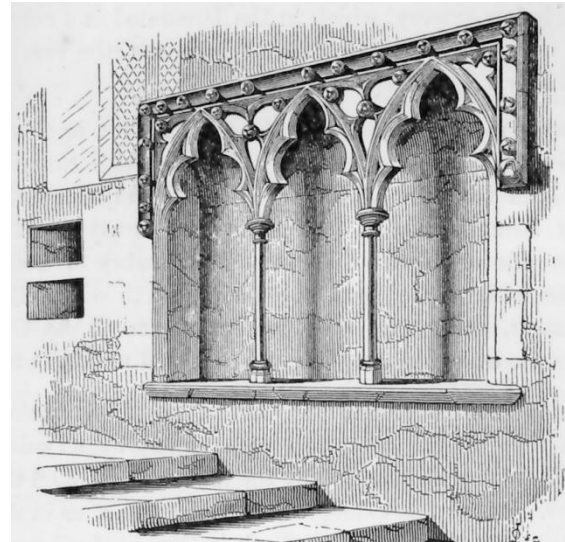
Pugin and Willson were amongst those who were working towards the re-establishment of the Use of Sarum in the English Catholic church following the removal of centuries of persecution and legal restriction in the first third of the nineteenth century.

In the event, the first Synod of Westminster of the newly restored English Catholic hierarchy ruled against its re-introduction in 1852.

Closest to the rood screen are the *sedilia* (4), or seats for the ministers. In the Use of Sarum the priest occupied the easternmost seat, then the *deacon*, with the *sub-deacon* in the westernmost seat.



These sedilia are typically medieval, despite their simple design to facilitate construction in wood, and are quite similar to a c.1320 carved stone set in Chesterton Church, Oxfordshire, illustrated below.



They were carved by Patrick Lynch, the builder of St Patrick's, who also carved the rood screen and constructed the pews, presumably to his own design.

Patrick Lynch (1804–1889) arrived from Ireland as an assisted migrant in 1854. He was a skilled cabinetmaker who had been engaged on the wooden furnishings of Pugin's decorative program at Lismore Castle, County Waterford, for the Duke of Devonshire. By the time of his engagement as builder for Colebrook he had already carved the pews and rood screen in St Paul's, Oatlands.

East of the sedilia is the *piscina* (5). It was copied from one of the two full-size exemplar piscinas brought from England by Bishop Willson in 1844. Another copy of the same exemplar is to be found in St John the Evangelist's, Richmond, the chancel of which was added in 1858 by Frederick Thomas based on details copied from Pugin's third church model.

At the eastern end of the north aisle is the Shrine of Our Lady of Colebrook (6). Installed in 2008, it replaces a plain but over-scale wooden side altar dating from the 1930s.



Our Lady of Colebrook was carved in 2008 by contemplative nuns belonging to the Monasteries of Bethlehem of the Assumption of the Virgin and of St Bruno at their monastery near Mougères in the south of France. The statue is in French oak, polychromed and gilded, based on work of the later Middle Ages but entirely original. It takes the ancient form of a *Sedes Sapientiae* or Seat of Wisdom, one of Our Lady's titles, likening her to the Throne of Solomon, and referring to her status as a vessel of the Incarnation, carrying the Christ Child.

The bird in the Infant's hand is an allusion to a medieval legend, wherein as Christ

was carrying his cross to Calvary a bird alighted on his shoulder and pecked at the crown of thorns.

The wrought iron candelabrum is based on one in Downside Abbey, Somerset, beside the Shrine of the Irish martyr St Oliver Plunkett.

As you leave St Patrick's Church you may like to read the interpretive panel located on the west wall of the north aisle.

Glossary

Terms used in the definitions which are themselves defined in this glossary are printed in italics.

Arcade: a series of arches supported by columns.

Bay: the principal vertical architectural division or compartment in the arrangement of a building. It may be marked by windows, *buttresses*, roof principals or a combination of such elements.

Bellcote: a small structure, generally situated at the peak of a building's *gable*, in which bells are hung.

Buttress: a local thickening of, or projection from, a wall to provide extra strength and support.

Capital: the head of a column.

Chancel: the eastern part of a church used by those who officiate at the services, and generally differentiated by architectural or decorative means from the body or *nave* of the building.

Clerestory: an upper storey of the main walls of a church, above the *nave arcade* in the case of one with side aisles, generally provided with windows so as to provide an increase in light in the body of the building.

Corbel: a projection from a wall to support an arch, beam or other load.

Cusp: a projecting point in *tracery*.

Deacon: the chief minister serving the priest at the altar at a solemn Mass and other solemn functions.

Dripstone: the hood-like, undercut moulding over a door or window, designed to throw water clear.

Easter sepulchre an alcove in the north wall of a *chancel* where, during the Middle Ages in England, the consecrated *host*, wrapped with a crucifix, was placed from Good Friday until Easter Sunday.

Flowing Decorated: the style of Gothic architecture which spanned the period from around 1307 to around 1377 was termed Decorated. In its earlier form its *tracery* was made up of simple geometrical forms such as circles and part circles, hence the term Geometrical Decorated. Later its *tracery* made much use of sinuous reverse curves, hence the term Flowing Decorated.

Foliation: decoration with leaf-work.

Gable: the triangular upper part of a wall conforming to the slope of the pitched roof which abuts it.

Host: the bread consecrated during Mass and becoming, in Catholic belief, the body of Christ.

Liturgy: public worship, especially the official worship of the Church, such as the Mass.

Nave: the part of a church where the congregation assembles.

Ogee: a reverse curve, that is one made up of a convex and a concave part.

Pier: the solid mass of supporting masonry in a wall, frequently used as a term for pillar in Gothic architecture.

Piscina: a stone basin with a drain built into the wall near the altar in a church.

Plinth: a horizontal projecting course built at the base of a wall.

Random rubble: walling material comprising irregular shaped stone or roughly squared stone, laid by matching the shapes of the stones.

Rood screen: a screen between the *nave* and *chancel* of a church, surmounted by a crucifix.

Sacristy: a room attached to a church in which vestments, church metalwork and *liturgical* books are kept and in which the ministers and servers put on their robes.

Sedilia: the seats, generally set into the south wall of the *chancel* for the priest, *deacon* and *sub-deacon*.

Sub-deacon: The third of the sacred ministers, to serve at solemn functions, ranking below the *deacon*.

Tabernacle: a secure receptacle in which the Blessed Sacrament is reserved.

Tracery: the ornamental infill stonework in the upper part of a Gothic window, or equivalent decoration on the surface of walls, etc.