

# THE CHURCHES OF CLONAKILTY: AN ARCHITECTURAL DISCUSSION

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This article considers the architecture of five nineteenth-century churches in Clonakilty within their historical context. Clonakilty began as a Norman foundation (Tuipéar 2015, 27-8), eventually receiving a charter in 1613; by the early nineteenth century it had grown into a prosperous town with a diverse population (Lewis 1837, 347-8). The linen trade, local agriculture, brewing and malting were all industries that contributed to the development of the town (Dickson 2005, 285, 385, 389, 396-7), and were serviced by the growth of local ports on the eastern end of the town and at Ring (Townsend 1815, 331; O'Flanagan 1993, 438). Various churches were needed in Clonakilty to allow the different strands of the growing community to worship, as well as to consolidate and give expression to their cultural and social identities. Accordingly, the town played its own part in a major programme of church building undertaken by all denominations nationwide in the nineteenth century (Hurley 1989, 79). This article considers the architecture and history of five extant churches dating to the nineteenth century in Clonakilty town: the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Oliver Plunkett Street; Kilgarraiffe Church of Ireland, Patrick Street; Clonakilty Methodist Church, Kent Street;

the former Presbyterian church, now post office, Bridge Street; and the chapel of the former Convent of Mercy, Scartagh. Due to its architectural complexity, the Church of the Immaculate Conception is considered in greater detail. Architectural description of the exterior and interior of each structure is followed by discussion of the significance of the building as well as its history.

The below descriptions are informed by site visits as well as various other sources. Much of the description of the exteriors draws on the detailed surveys published online by the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (hereafter NIAH). All five of the churches considered, like many other historic buildings in Clonakilty, are included in the Record of Protected Structures (RPS), which grants them statutory protection.<sup>1</sup> It is hoped that this article will highlight some of the architectural and historic factors that have led to their recognition as highly significant monuments as well as places of gathering and worship.

## **Church of the Immaculate Conception, Oliver Plunkett Street/Bridge Street**

### **Architectural Description**

The survey published by the NIAH outlines the external architectural features of the structure in detail, and is drawn upon below.<sup>2</sup> A detailed pamphlet produced by Monsignor O'Brien and available in the church itself is amongst the other sources referenced below. Drawings by the architects Ashlin and Coleman held in the Irish Architectural Archives (hereafter IAA) in Dublin also provide information on certain internal features in the church.<sup>3</sup>

The church is situated at the junction of Bridge Street and Oliver Plunkett Street, in a yard that includes a small graveyard, all of which is enclosed by a plinth wall with cast-iron railings. There are two main entrances having cast-iron gates set between stone piers, as well as two pedestrian gates. The church is free-standing, double-height and gable-fronted, with a three-bay front (west) elevation. The nave is flanked to north and south by eight-bay side-aisles, gable-fronted transepts and side-chapels. There is a two-stage tower at the southwest corner and a three-stage spired bell-tower at the northwest corner. The chancel terminates to the east in a canted apse (Fig. 1). Records from 1911 show that a mortuary chapel was also designed but never built (Dictionary of Irish Architects, hereafter DIA).<sup>4</sup>

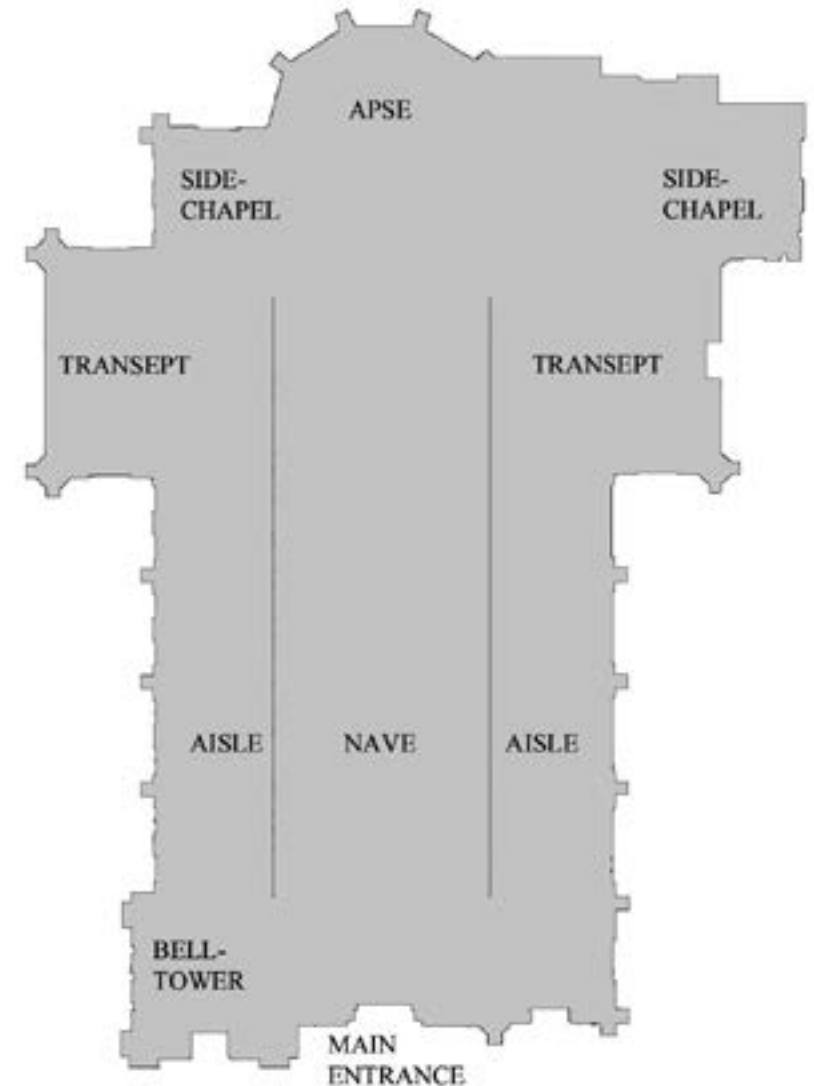


Fig. 1: Plan of Church of the Immaculate Conception, after O'Brien (n.d.).



Fig. 2: Church of the Immaculate Conception, viewed from west (Photo: author).

The roof to the main body of the church is pitched slate with cast-iron ridge cresting; there are cut limestone copings and cross finials as well as octagonal corner turrets. There is a hipped slate roof to the apse having ashlar limestone gablets with crosses topping each bay. There are single-pitched slate roofs to the side-aisles, and a hipped slate roof to the southwest tower, having lead flashing, a wrought-iron cross and cut limestone parapet wall with corner turrets. The side-chapels have single-pitched slate roofs with cast-iron ridge cresting and limestone coping topped with crosses. There is a pitched slate roof to the sacristy with cast-iron ridge cresting, limestone copings and an ashlar limestone chimneystack. There are cut limestone eaves courses throughout the church as well as cast-iron rainwater goods. The spire of the bell-tower is highly decorative in true Gothic spirit (Fig. 3). It is an octagonal cut limestone spire with decorative panels topped by a wrought-iron cross, also having square-profile turrets with spires and wrought-iron crosses at its base; there are also blind gabled single-arch arcades to the spire's north, east, south and west pitches. The bell-tower and spire were added on by the firm John Sisk and Sons in the 1890s according to a design by Ashlin and Coleman. The stones of the spire were carved, numbered and dowelled into each other in Sisk's yard in Cork, then dismantled and transported to Clonakilty by train where they were re-assembled and erected; the bell, from the Fountain Head Bell Foundry, Mary Street, Dublin, was later installed in 1898 and Daniel Coakley of Western Road was the first Clonakilty man to ring it (McRoss 1959, 27). A photo by Robert French shows the exterior of the church prior to the tower and spire being erected.<sup>5</sup> Immediately below the spire is an arcaded balustrade with decorative corner turrets.

The walls are of snecked green sandstone that had been quarried nearby at Youghals (O'Brien n.d, 3). They feature many cut and tooled stone details such as chamfered plinths, sill courses, string courses and buttresses with chamfered gabled caps, as well as limestone gargoyles to the third stage of the bell-tower. Various window and door dressings were tooled in Wicklow granite (*ibid.*, 3). There are pointed arch window openings with granite sills, surrounds and hood mouldings to the nave, chancel, transepts, side-chapels and southwest tower. The rose windows to the nave and transept display reticulated sandstone tracery with trefoil-headed lancets and multifoil roses. Other stained-glass windows to the chancel feature geometric granite tracery



Fig. 3: Spire to Church of the Immaculate Conception  
(Photo: author).

with lancets and trefoil roses. Those to the side-chapels have reticulated granite tracery with lancets and trefoil roses. The side-aisles feature paired lancets with granite sills, block-and-start surrounds and hood-mouldings, containing windows having granite mullions, trefoil-headed tracery and lead-lined quarry glazing (Fig. 4). Above these are oculus window openings to the clerestory with granite trefoil tracery. The sacristy features square-headed window openings with timber sliding sash windows, a more secular form of window, which are nonetheless decorative, having granite pointed arch

tympana featuring St Lazarus's cross with hood mouldings over them. The bell-tower features lancets with block-and-start surrounds as well as oculus window openings with trefoil plate tracery, and paired pointed arch openings with block-and-start surrounds to reveals having engaged columns. There are oculus vents with cinquefoil tracery to the dormers in the roof.



Fig. 4: Detail of northern side-aisle of Church of the Immaculate Conception (Photo: author).

The main west entrance is set in the front of the nave within a pointed-arch Venetian opening with block-and-start-surrounds. It features engaged pink columns of polished Aberdeen granite (O'Brien n.d., 3) and square-headed door openings with double timber battened doors and wrought-iron strap hinges. There is a decorative tympanum over with angels carved in relief, flanking an engaged white marble statue of Mary of the Immaculate Conception, which was the work of P. Scannell of Cork Marble Works and was given free of charge (*Cork Examiner*, 26 July 1880; Fig. 5). There are further pointed-arch door openings to the towers and transepts, the latter having

polished granite engaged columns, while the sacristy has a square-headed door opening; all have timber battened doors with wrought-iron strap hinges.



Fig. 5: Detail of main entrance to Church of the Immaculate Conception including statue by P. Scannell (Photo: author).

There are niches to the walls throughout the exterior of the church, holding various statues. The decorative tympanum over the main entrance is flanked by two trefoil-headed niches that feature statues of St Patrick to the left (north) and a bishop holding a crozier with a shamrock-head and a book to the right, probably St Fachtna, patron of the Diocese of Ross. A niche to the southwest side-chapel features a statue of John the Baptist. Niches to the bell-tower feature Peter and Paul, the apostles. Five niches to the bays of the chancel feature five statues, from left (south) to right these are probably Columba (a monk with quill and book; the saint was a scribe), Brigid, the Sacred Heart, Brendan the Navigator and another bishop saint holding a shamrock-headed crozier and a book (probably Ciarán of Saighir, who was associated with this general area, or also possibly Finbarr, patron of the Diocese of Cork).



Fig. 6: Interior of Church of the Immaculate Conception, viewed from west (Photo: author).

Internally the height from the floor to the ridge of the roof was described as being 80 feet (*Freeman's Journal*, 26 July 1880). The barrel-vaulted timber ceiling is ribbed, with carved bosses where the ribs cross and carved limestone corbels

supporting the timbers. Carpentry throughout the church was carried out by Cotter of Cork (*ibid.*, 7). The ceiling over the altar is plastered and painted, its rib vaulting culminating in a representation of the Holy Spirit (O'Brien n.d., 5). The ocular windows of the clerestory are separated by engaged pink columns of polished granite; beneath these are statues of the twelve apostles running the length of the nave with carved hood-mouldings and pedestals. The columns to the nave arcade are of Aberdeen polished granite with granite capitals and bases, while a column separating the side-chapels from the sanctuary on each side was described as being of Sicilian marble supporting a tympanum filled with tracings of Caen limestone; the window dressings throughout the church were reported as being of Ballyknock granite (*Freeman's Journal*, 26 July 1880). A gallery to the west end of the church features a fine recent organ, designed to allow a clear view to the rose window above. When the church was first opened a smaller organ by John White of Dublin was moved there from the older church (*ibid.*, 7). The gallery, resting on an arcade of polished granite columns, has a painted stone balustrade with trefoil-headed openings and engaged polished red and green granite columns having limestone bases and capitals; there are carved limestone angel corbels beneath (Fig. 7).

There are marble fountains with limestone bases to the entrance porches. The original baptismal font is to the right on coming in the main entrance. It is surrounded by an elaborate cast-iron railing that bears the maker's mark of John Perry and Sons, Patrick Street, Cork. There are carved timber confessionals to the side-aisles. The high altar is of white marble and was erected by Earley and Powells, Camden Street, Dublin; it features a Last Supper scene carved in alabaster as well as a bas-relief of a pelican feeding her young from her bleeding breast (O'Brien n.d., 4). The ornate wrought-iron rail running the length of the altar was created by Callinane, a local craftsman, and funded by a Mr Canty (*Freeman's Journal*, 26 July 1880).<sup>6</sup> The north side-chapel has an altar dedicated to the Sacred Heart which was erected by James Pearse, Patrick Pearse's father, at a cost of £250; the side-panels depict the Agony in the Garden and the Crucifixion while it also features a further sculpture of a pelican feeding her young (*Cork Examiner*, 26 July 1880; O'Brien n.d., 11). The Altar of the Blessed Virgin to the south, also known as the Lady Altar, was erected by J. P. Scannell, Cork, and its side-panels depict the Annunciation



Fig. 7: Carved corbel to organ gallery in Church of the Immaculate Conception (Photo: author).

and Nativity. Originally, the apse was painted and decorated by Hodgkinson of Limerick (*Freeman's Journal*, 26 July 1880). Later in the 1920s, under the supervision of Monsignor Hill, elaborate mosaics were added to the walls of the apse and side-chapels with gold leaf details. These were executed by Oppenheimer, the German firm that also created those in the Honan Chapel, Cork (DIA).<sup>7</sup> Those to the apse, behind the high altar, depict the angelic choirs (O'Brien n.d., 6; Fig. 8). There is a shrine to St Joseph in the north arm of the transept, designed by Monsignor Hill in the 1920s with the firm of Ashlin and

Coleman (IAA, Ashlin and Coleman 76/1.25/10). The pendant lights hanging from the ceiling, date to the same period, if not earlier. Designs for the lights are among the architectural drawings surviving in the Ashlin and Coleman collection (*ibid.*, 76/1.25/17-18). Interestingly, the lights are described as ‘electric pendant’ in the drawings, indicating that the church was electrified at a relatively early date. There was formerly a pulpit on the south side of the nave but it appears to have been removed in the twentieth century. Designs for the pulpit survive in the Ashlin and Coleman collection (IAA, 76/1.25/14) and a similar pulpit is visible in Robert French’s late nineteenth-century photo.<sup>8</sup>



Fig. 8: Detail of mosaics to sanctuary in Church of the Immaculate Conception (Photo: author).

The stained-glass windows above the high altar were by Mayer & Co., Munich, and present scenes from the life of the Blessed Virgin (O’Brien n.d., 6). The northern rose window depicts saints associated with the Franciscan order as well as a depiction of St Anthony’s vision of the Child Jesus in the central rose window, surrounded by angelic designs (*ibid.*, 10). The southern rose window depicts scenes from the life of the Virgin in the lower windows, including an unusual scene of the betrothal of Mary and Joseph, while the death of St Joseph forms the central rose, surrounded by images of angels (*ibid.*, 7). The great rose window above the main entrance has a dove representing the Holy Spirit at its centre surrounded by angelic and floral designs, while the seven windows below depict Sts Patrick, Brigid, Ciarán of Saighir, Fachtna, Columba, Ita and Lawrence O’Toole.

### Discussion

Ethnic and religious differences often tied in with occupation and social position in Cork towns of the earlier nineteenth century: doctors, legal men, agents, merchants and clothiers tended to belong to Protestant denominations; Catholics tended to figure more largely in brewing and malting while many skilled cloth-workers were of a Protestant persuasion (O’Flanagan 1993, 420). In practise the divisions were not necessarily clear-cut, and certainly by the later nineteenth century the rise of the Catholic middle class following emancipation (1829) led to more Catholics attaining greater social and economic influence (O’Ferrall 1985). This is evident in Clonakilty, as reflected by *Slater’s Directory* for 1870. For example, Wolfe, Bennett and Son, Millville, who were Church of Ireland/Methodist, are listed as millers (*Slater’s Directory* 1870, 33). The other miller listed is Patrick Hurley, Castleview, who was Catholic (*ibid.*; Clíodhna O’Leary pers. comm.). The cathedral-sized Church of the Immaculate Conception testifies to the wealth and ambition of the town’s Catholic population in the later nineteenth century. An article from the *Cork Examiner* (5 Sep. 1876), written when the church was under construction, reported that £15,000 had already been spent on the work and that at least another £5,000 was needed, appealing to the generosity of all of the Diocese of Ross.

There were earlier Catholic churches in Old Chapel Lane and later on the site of the boys’ national school in Western Road (McRoss 1959, 21); the site for

the new church was located nearby to the east of the school, and immediately north of the Fealge river (1<sup>st</sup> ed. Ordnance Survey, hereafter OS). Fr Matthew O'Donovan, former parish priest, was an instrumental figure in the building of the church and choice of its design, though he died in 1875 before he could see it open in 1880 (McRoss 1959, 22; *Freeman's Journal*, 26 July 1880). Drawings by the architects, including sketches for the design of the side-chapels and chancel, attribute the initial designs to Fr O'Donovan (IAA, Ashlin and Coleman 76/1.25-26). Later on, his successor Fr O'Leary was involved in the addition of the tower and spire in the 1890s, while Monsignor Hill who succeeded O'Leary was involved in the decoration of the sanctuary, erection of statues and installation of some of the stained-glass windows (McRoss 1959, 28). For example, the tracing for the design of the shrine to St Joseph names Monsignor Hill as the designer (IAA, Ashlin and Coleman 76/1.25/10).

Many of the new large Catholic churches in Irish towns and cities following emancipation were of a classical or Gothic Revival style (Hurley 1989, 79), and Clonakilty, described as being of an early French Gothic style (McRoss 1959, 22), is amongst one of the most elaborate in Cork, if not nationally. The architectural firm awarded the project in 1869 were Ashlin and Coleman. George Coppinger Ashlin, born in Dublin to a father from Surrey and a mother who was one of the Cork Coppingers, was described as being 'of a quiet and retiring disposition ... with a certain inherent shyness' (DIA).<sup>9</sup> He was nonetheless a prominent figure in Irish architecture, and a pupil of Augustus Pugin, 'the most important exponent of the Gothic Revival in English Architecture' (O'Dwyer 1989, 62), who died prematurely in 1852. Ashlin opened an office with Pugin's son Edward W. Pugin on Stephen's Green, Dublin, in 1861, and subsequently undertook many commissions for Catholic churches including Sts Peter and Paul's, Cork, Cobh cathedral and the convent chapel in Clonakilty discussed below.<sup>10</sup> Forming a new partnership with his pupil Coleman in 1869, the year Clonakilty church was commissioned, Ashlin continued to perpetuate the Irish legacy of Pugin, turning out churches of a Gothic Revival style for the next forty years until he eventually embraced the Romanesque, nationalist style, in the early 1900s (O'Dwyer 1989, 62). A Catholic convert, Pugin had argued that pointed or Gothic architecture was a more honest form, containing no feature that was not convenient or enriching, and therefore indicative of propriety and holiness (*ibid.*, 55).

The opening of the church in 1880 after over a decade's work was a major event in Clonakilty and Cork as a whole, with a diversity of people from surrounding regions coming to stay in the town and partake in the associated festivities. An article published in the *Freeman's Journal* described a range of people travelling from Cork and the surrounding country by foot and hoof:

A great many visitors came out from Cork on Saturday, and that evening there was not a spare bed to be had in the town ... Long lines of decently dressed country people trooped into the town, car loads of their better circumstanced neighbours passed under triumphal arches and festoons of evergreens and flags and decorations ... wagonettes and brakes brought their scores to swell the already overcrowded streets (*Freeman's Journal*, 26 July 1880).

The reporter also describes an elaborate High Mass held in the church with a range of clergy and impressive choir as well as a large crowd in attendance. To this day, the church continues to draw a substantial gathering at weekends, while its intricate and aesthetically pleasing design still impresses externally and internally as a work of major architectural merit. It forms part of a wider complex of ecclesiastical buildings that includes the nearby parish hall as well as the presbytery.

## **Kilgarriffe Church of Ireland, Patrick Street**

### **Architectural Description**

The below description draws on both a visit to the site and the architectural description of the exterior recorded by the NIAH.<sup>11</sup> This church sits in an elevated location overlooking the town within a graveyard enclosed by a rubble limestone wall with soldier coping. The church is accessed via a path leading from cast-iron gates set between ashlar limestone gate piers with pointed caps. Fronted by its bell-tower, the church presents a striking silhouette on approach (Fig. 9).

A freestanding, gable-fronted double-height structure, the church has a three-bay nave with a square-plan two-stage bell-tower to the west (front), one-bay transepts to north and south and a one-bay chancel with lean-to





Fig. 9: Entrance to Kilgarriffe Church of Ireland church (Photo: author).



Fig. 10: Kilgarriffe church, viewed from south (Photo: author).

vestry to the east (Fig. 11). There are pitched slate roofs throughout having limestone eaves courses and cast-iron rainwater goods, with limestone brackets to the transepts. The bell-tower has an embattled parapet wall with limestone pinnacles and exhibits cut limestone string-coursing. The walls to the church

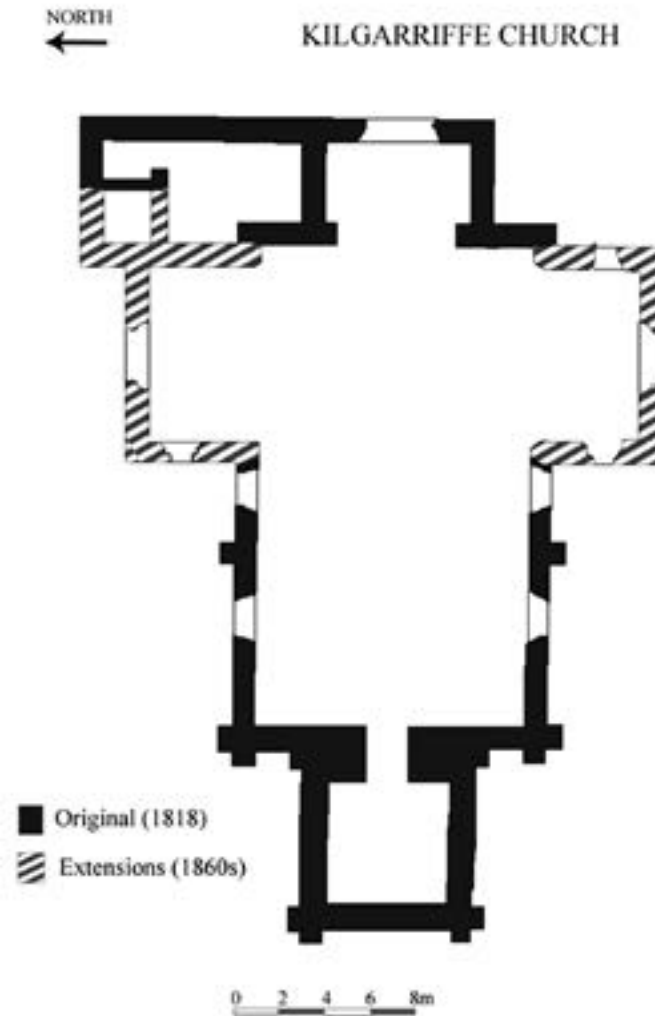


Fig. 11: Plan of Kilgarriffe church, after an architectural drawing of the Ecclesiastical Commission, 6 Aug. 1860 (<https://archdrawing.ireland.anglican.org/items/show/2041>).

are of dressed limestone, having stepped limestone-capped buttresses to the corners and block-and-start quoins to the transepts. There are pointed-arch window openings with chamfered limestone sills and ashlar block-and-start surrounds, limestone relieving arches, and cut limestone tracery in single, double and trefoil arrangements. The window openings to the nave and tower feature cut limestone hood-mouldings with label stops. Some of the windows are quarry-glazed while others have stained glass. To the rear of the vestry is a segmental-headed window opening. The upper stage of the bell-tower features pointed arch louvre openings with slate louvres.

There are two pointed-arch door openings, one to the tower and one to the north elevation of the vestry, having limestone block-and-start surrounds and carved limestone hood-mouldings. The doors are timber and battened, and there are limestone steps on approach to the main entrance. There is also an OS trigonometric mark carved to the left of the main doorway.

Works were ongoing at the time of the site visit but some salient features of the interior were noted. The ceiling is barrel-vaulted over the nave (Fig. 12).

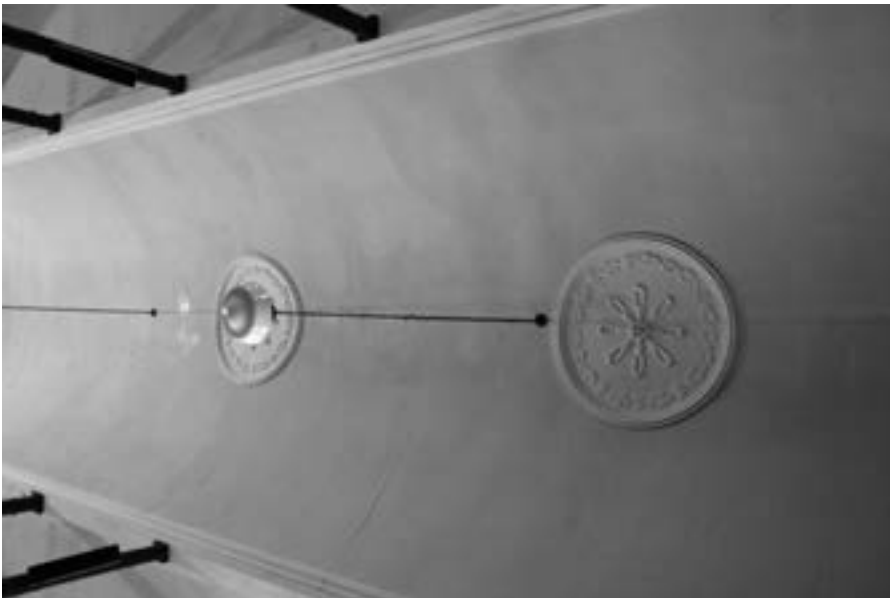


Fig. 12: Ceiling of Kilgarriffe church (Photo: author).

It features moulded plaster roses that appear to have formerly supported gas-lights, while there are early twentieth-century pendant lights hanging nearby. There is a timbered gallery to three sides of the nave with panelled front (Fig. 13), supported on timber columns having carved rosette ornament. Columns extend from the top of the gallery to the ceiling. There is a c. 1880 organ on the gallery (Pádraig O'Donovan, pers. comm.). The carved timber pews are in twin aisle layout and there is also a finely carved timber pulpit. Judging by architectural tracings surviving in the Representative Church Body Library, these pews and the pulpit date from the 1860s.<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 13: Organ gallery in Kilgarriffe church (Photo: author).

Some of the windows display fine stained glass, the scenes of which have been identified by Dr David Lawrence.<sup>13</sup> Three of the windows date to 1923 and were produced by the studio of Watson & Co., Youghal. These depict Christ as Light of the World, the Parable of the Good Samaritan and the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Another window dating to 1935 depicts the Parable of

the Talents (Fig. 14); it was produced by Mayer & Co., Munich, who also produced stained-glass windows for the Catholic church in Clonakilty. The carved pulpit stands nearby.



Fig. 14: Pulpit and window depicting Parable of the Talents in Kilgarriffe church (Photo: author).

## Discussion

Kilgarriffe graveyard was the site of a seventeenth-century church built under the auspices of Richard Boyle (Webster 1932, 272-3). The extant church was

built in 1818, possibly incorporating material from the older church, and the bell-tower was added in 1826 (Clonakilty Town Council 2009, 3; Tuipéar 2015, 31-3). The design of the church is typical of 'Board of First Fruits' churches. Established in 1711, the board served to maintain and fund the Church of Ireland, buying glebe lands for benefices, and building or improving churches and glebe houses throughout the island; many 'First Fruits' churches are recognisable as rectangular-plan structures in a simple vernacular Gothic Revival style with western towers having pinnacled tops (Brooks and Saint 1995, 134), like Kilgarriffe. The result of this massive building programme was that by the middle of the nineteenth century, Church of Ireland churches with square towers and pointed windows could be found all over the country (Hurley 1989, 79). According to Lewis' *Topographical Dictionary*, Kilgarriffe church was built 'at an expense of £1300, of which £500 was a loan from the late Board of First Fruits, and the remainder was contributed by the Earl of Shannon and the Rev. H. Townsend' (1837, 348).

The Board of First Fruits was replaced by the Board of Ecclesiastical Commissioners in 1833. The north and south transepts of Kilgarriffe were built by the firm Welland and Gillespie of Dublin c. 1860-65 according to the plans of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners when the interior was also rearranged, and new pews, pulpit and reading desk inserted (DIA).<sup>14</sup> The supervising architect is believed to have been Henry Hill (*ibid.*). Architectural tracings for these works survive in the Representative Church Body Library.<sup>15</sup>

A well-preserved and aesthetically pleasing church, Kilgarriffe continues to function as a centre of worship for the Anglican community. An associated hall, located on Oliver Plunkett Street, built in 1880 is still used for parochial functions and is also a protected structure.<sup>16</sup>

## Methodist Church, Kent Street

### Architectural Description

Description of the exterior of this building draws on the record by the NIAH as well as a site visit.<sup>17</sup> Facing north onto Kent Street, this is a gable-fronted double-height three-bay church with a former school attached to the west and a recent lean-to to the south (Fig. 15). Both church and school have pitched slate roofs with cut limestone coping and ashlar pinnacles to the gables. The walls

are of snecked sandstone with a plinth and there are buttresses at the corners of the north (front) elevation. A limestone plaque to the north elevation of the church reads 'WESLEYAN CHURCH A.D. 1860' while another to the school reads 'WESLEYAN SCHOOL A.D. 1860'. Over the church date-plaque is a small pointed-arch opening with a chamfered block-and-start surround and rendered hood-moulding. There are two pointed-arch window openings with chamfered limestone block-and-start surrounds and sills to the front elevation, that to the church also having a rendered hood-moulding; both windows feature reticulated tracery with quarry-glazed windows. The east side-wall features pointed-arch windows having quarry-glazing while the rear elevation features an oculus window opening with timber-framed stained glass (Fig. 16). The main entrances to the church are a pair of pointed-arch doorways, each having a limestone block-and-start surround and hood-moulding. Each features double-leaf timber battened doors with wrought-iron strap hinges and a limestone step. Another pointed-arch doorway leads to the school. The front of the site is enclosed by a rendered wall with limestone coping and



Fig. 15: Methodist church, Kent Street (Photo: author).

cast-iron railings. Two entrance gateways have square-plan limestone gate piers with pointed caps and feature double- and single-leaf cast-iron gates respectively.



Fig. 16: Oculus window of Methodist Church, viewed from interior (Photo: author).

Internally the church is a simple gabled hall having a king-post timber truss roof, the feet of the trusses resting on carved stone corbels, some decorated with book motifs. Early twentieth-century pendant lights hang from the ceiling. The walls have timber panelling running along their base and the heating system includes late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century copper pipes and radiators. There is a blind pointed-arch opening to the east side-wall. Finely carved nineteenth-century panelled timber pews and a timber pulpit as well as an organ dating to c. 1900 (Pádraig O'Donovan, pers. comm.) have been retained (Figs 17-18). Wall-plaques commemorate John Bennett and Thomas Bennett.



Fig. 17: Pulpit in Methodist church (Photo: author).

## Discussion

Around 1796, Methodists started meeting in the home of a weaver called William Abbot, Main Street (now Rossa Street); as numbers grew a room was rented in Myrtle Grove House, on Oliver Plunkett Street (Bennett 1959, 84). A Methodist church was built in 1811 and opened by 1812 on the same site as the current church, though it was aligned west to east and set back further from the street than the present church (*ibid.*, 84). Kent Street was then known as Meeting-house Lane (Bateman n.d.).<sup>18</sup> This church is indicated on the c.



Fig. 18: Organ in Methodist church (Photo: author).

1840 first edition OS map. A three-bay two-storey house on Kent Street was used as a temporary church while the new one was being built (Bennett 1959, 85; NIAH).<sup>19</sup>

The current church with an adjoining hall was opened on 25 November 1860, and the architect was a James Fitzpatrick (Bennett 1959, 84-5; MHSI). The hall was used as a classroom, and continues to be used for educational and community purposes today. A new school and teacher's residence was built on Western Road in 1885 but due to falling numbers the school closed in

1907, though it continued to be run privately until 1945 (Bennett 1959, 84-5).<sup>20</sup> Rev. Andrew Hamilton was the first resident minister, and various houses on Square Street (now the western section of Kent Street) and in the Square were utilised as the minister's residence until no. 3 Shannon Square was acquired in 1867 (*ibid.*, 84).

Thomas Walsh was one of the few early examples of Irish Catholics who became a Methodist preacher. At nineteen, having listened to Robert Swindells and Thomas Williams preaching in Limerick, he was moved to form his own society. His death at the young age of twenty-eight has been attributed to overwork (Cooney 2001, 42). Walsh is said to have travelled to Clonakilty on 11 July 1752 where he was refused permission to preach in the town hall and instead preached to locals at a nearby strand; he was ultimately imprisoned in the town but is said to have had the sympathies of locals who provided provisions and bedding (Bateman n.d.).

The Bennetts were a key family in the practise of Methodism in Clonakilty. A wall-plaque in the church commemorates John Bennett, preacher, who died in 1832 aged fifty-three. He was a mill manager in Rosscarbery who walked to Clonakilty every Sunday for twenty-seven years to preach morning and evening. After moving to the town in 1805, he played a major role in building the first church in Kent Street (Bateman n.d.). Thomas Bennett, who acquired Shannonvale Mills in 1852, converted an outhouse in Shannonvale into a small church (Bennett 1959, 85); he is commemorated in the Clonakilty church by a wall-plaque. Edward Bennett was a prominent Clonakilty minister, noted as one of the few Methodist ministers serving in West Cork in 1920 who was a Corkonian himself (Fitzpatrick 2014, 200). The Batemans have been another prominent Methodist family in the Clonakilty region (*ibid.*, 233).

Today the Methodist community in Clonakilty continues to meet for service every Sunday. They have retained the church in excellent condition and are also known nationally for their eco-aware approach.

## Former Presbyterian Church, Bridge Street

### Architectural Description

Description of the exterior of this former Presbyterian church, now post office, draws on the survey published by the NIAH,<sup>21</sup> as well as a site visit. The

structure is located at the corner of Bridge Street and Kent Street (Fig. 19). It comprises a freestanding gable-fronted double-height church facing west with a bell-tower to the south side. There is a recent lean-to addition to the rear.



Fig. 19: Former Presbyterian church, viewed from southwest (Photo: author).

The roof is of pitched slate with cast-iron ridge cresting, projecting gable-fronted louvre openings and carved sandstone eaves courses. There is stepped coping to the gables with decorative capped corbels, also having a decorative gable finial to the front (west) gable. The tower has an ashlar broach spire with quatrefoil and projecting gable-fronted louvre openings, and an eaves course that has carved angel and eagle projections (Fig. 20). It is topped by a lightning rod.



Fig. 20: Tower to Presbyterian church (Photo: author).



Fig. 21: Front gable to Presbyterian church, including date-plaque (Photo: author).

The walls are of dressed sandstone with a plinth having chamfered coping. There is a carved date-plaque above the main entrance to the front (west elevation) bearing the date 1861 and reading 'NEC TAMEN CONSUMEBATOR' (Fig. 21). There are stepped buttresses to the corners and to the tower. Pointed-arch window openings have chamfered sandstone sills, block-and-start-surrounds, mullions and tracery. The window opening to the west elevation is tripartite, having a sandstone hood-moulding with decorative label stops, reticulated tracery and quarry-glazing (Fig. 21). The nave also features paired lancet window openings with quatrefoil overlights

to north and south. There are two lancet windows having cast-iron quarry glazing to the rear wall as well as a trefoil louvre opening above. The bell-tower features pointed arch louvre openings with block-and-start surrounds and hood-mouldings having decorative label stops.

There is a pointed-arch door opening to the front elevation with a relieving arch, limestone block-and-start surround and a carved hood-moulding with decorative label stops that continues across the elevation on both sides as a tooled stringcourse. There is a diminishing sandstone surround to the pointed-arch door opening to the tower, with a timber battened door and limestone step. The rear wall features a shouldered square-headed door opening having a block-and-start surround and timber battened doors. There are cast-iron railings running north and south of the church, with a gateway having trefoil ornamentation to its cast-iron posts.

While the interior of the former church has been modified, the roof preserves its timber scissors truss with decorative carved stone corbels to the feet of the trusses.

## Discussion

This church, as the date-plaque proclaims, was built in 1861. The wording on the date-plaque is the motto of the Church of Scotland, which can be translated as ‘Yet it was not consumed’, taken from the Book of Exodus when Moses encounters the burning bush.<sup>22</sup>

The first Presbyterians of the Clonakilty region were mainly land-stewards who themselves became land-owners as the years passed; Law, Irwin, Ronaldson, Shiels and Jeffreys were all noted as prominent Presbyterian families (O’Rourke 1959, 91). Formerly these families worshipped in Bandon but a local congregation was organised in 1859, leading to the construction of the church; the first minister was Dr Dill who died the following year in 1862 (*ibid.*, 91), and the second Dr Thomas Croskery, who was a noted theologian and reviewer (Kirkpatrick 2006, 314). The church was constructed on a plot leased by the Earl of Shannon (NIAH).<sup>23</sup> Like other churches in the town, it is built in a Gothic Revival style and the gargoyle-like projections from the spire are particularly attractive while high-quality stone carving is evident throughout the building. While most earlier Presbyterian churches

were relatively plain structures, as the nineteenth century progressed their construction was influenced by the popular Gothic Revival (Hurley 1989, 79).

The former Manse where the ministers lived is located to the north of the town on Old Chapel Lane at the top of Patrick Street (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. OS). There were twenty-six Presbyterians recorded in Clonakilty in the 1870s (O’Rourke 1959, 91), but by 1917, as the modern plaque fronting the site indicates, the church was closed and the post office opened in 1924.

## Former Convent of Mercy Chapel, Scartagh

The former convent and chapel are now closed to the public and the site was not visited. The below architectural description draws on the survey published by the NIAH,<sup>24</sup> as well as other sources cited below.

## Architectural Description

This chapel is situated in the former convent complex of the Sisters of Mercy in Scartagh, northeast of the town. The structure comprises an east-facing attached gable-fronted double-height five-bay chapel with a single-storey three-bay sacristy to the side (north) and a recent addition to the rear (west). The roof is pitched slate with limestone coping to the gables, having cross finials and cast-iron rainwater goods. The walls are of snecked sandstone with a plinth having chamfered ashlar limestone coping. The walls feature sill-coursing and string-coursing. The sacristy has a central gable-fronted breakfront and a white marble memorial plaque to its west elevation that marks the entrance to the vault of Frs Morgan Madden and Patrick Madden. There are round-headed window openings throughout, having limestone block-and-start surrounds and tracery. Some have limestone hood-mouldings, some have leaded latticework windows, some have paired round-headed stained-glass windows with an ocular light over, while some have a single round-headed window with an ocular light over. There are various ocular window openings with limestone surrounds, including one rose window to the front (east) elevation with a hood-moulding and quatrefoil tracery, having leaded stained glass. There are round-headed door openings with tooled limestone surrounds and steps to the front and side elevations, having tympana with cross inscriptions.





Fig. 22: Convent chapel, viewed from southwest (Photo: Clíodhna O'Leary 2017).

Internally, the chapel preserves its timber scissors truss roof, the feet of the trusses resting on carved corbels.<sup>25</sup> Sadly, much of the original interior has been removed or plastered and painted over in recent times. Photos by Robert French held in the Lawrence Collection in the National Library of Ireland, probably taken in the 1880s or early 1890s, show the glory of the chapel in its heyday.<sup>26</sup> The area between the windows to the east wall of the chapel was painted with crosses intertwined with foliage, two of the crosses featuring Lamb of God motifs and two others, IHS motifs. The panelling on the ceiling was also painted with foliate motifs. Beneath the windows to the east wall behind the altar, Latin script was painted, reading 'QUAM DILECTA TABERNACULA TUA DOMINE VIRTUTUM', the first line of Psalm 83/84 ('How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts'). The doorways on either side of the altar with hood mouldings over were formerly painted with IHS, quatrefoil and cross motifs. There was originally an altar of carved Caen

stone and marble while there were two further marble altars dedicated to the Immaculate Conception and Our Lady of Dolours in the Chapel of Mary to the north (right) of the high altar (Anon. 1959, 49). The sanctuary was divided from the nave by a carved stone balustrade having metal gates that featured zoomorphic decorative bosses.

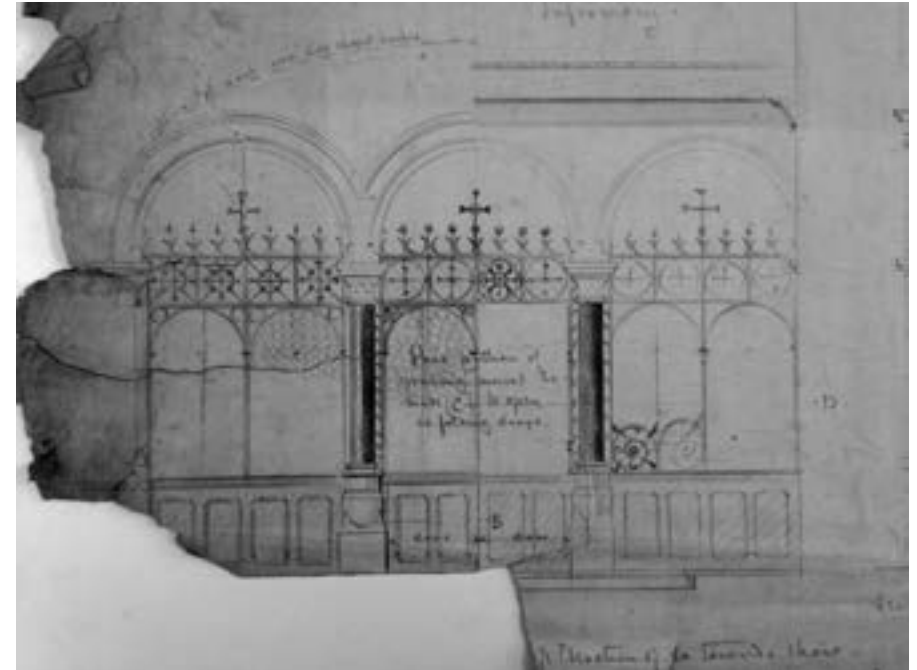


Fig. 23: Detail of architectural tracing showing design for grid to arcade dividing sanctuary from choir in Convent of Mercy chapel (Ashlin and Coleman Collection 76/1.26/3. Copyright: Irish Architectural Archive).

The choir is separated from the sanctuary by arches supported by columns of red marble. Between the arches there was formerly a decorative metalwork grille. Drawings of Ashlin from 1869 survive amongst the papers of the Ashlin and Coleman collection in the IAA.<sup>27</sup> These show working designs for the nuns' stalls and prie-dieux in the choir, as well as the arcade separating the

choir (Fig. 23). The stalls, composed of finely carved timber, have survived judging by a photo of 2010.<sup>28</sup> The choir also contained individual chairs for more senior Sisters of Mercy, as indicated by Robert French's photo, while a large round-headed doorway provided access to the convent from the choir so that the nuns did not need to enter the chapel via the public entrance to the east.<sup>29</sup> The timber pews to the nave survived into the modern period, as did the original decorative tiling to the floor and the white marble altars to the side-chapel, though their current condition is unknown.<sup>30</sup> The three stained-glass windows over the altar represent Sacred Humanity, Our Blessed Lady and St Joseph, while those to the side-chapel represent the Annunciation, the Pieta and the crowning of Our Lady (Anon. 1959, 49); these windows were produced by Earley and Powells who also produced the high altar in the Church of the Immaculate Conception (Archiseek);<sup>31</sup> another window was added in 1956 representing Our Lady of Lourdes (Anon. 1959, 49). The altar visible in French's photo was reportedly inserted by Ashlin in 1872 (Archiseek).

## Discussion

This chapel is a fine example of the work of E. Pugin and G. C. Ashlin, the firm discussed above that designed St Colman's Cathedral, Cobh. Not only is the chapel remarkable for having been constructed by this talented partnership, but it represents a departure from their usual Gothic Revival mode, which Ashlin continued to purvey with Coleman, as evidenced by the Church of the Immaculate Conception. The convent chapel was designed in a Romanesque or 'Lombardic' style so that it would be in harmony with the existing convent complex (DIA).<sup>32</sup> The sculptor P. Scannell of Cork Marble Works was contracted for the project (DIA),<sup>33</sup> who appears to have also been involved in works in the Church of the Immaculate Conception, as discussed above. Fr M. Madden who is buried with his brother under the side-chapel was involved in the design and construction of the chapel but died before it was completed in 1866 (*ibid.*, 52). The choir containing the nuns' stalls, formerly separated by a metal grille, serves as a reminder of not only the need for the nuns to keep a distance from the lay public at services, but also of their elevated social status in the wider community.

While it would appear that features of historic and aesthetic importance have survived into the present day which it is hoped will be preserved, photos

of the interior of the convent chapel in recent years indicate how much was lost since Robert French photographed it. The fine carpentry and frescos in the convent chapel were undoubtedly expensive and involved a great deal of skilled labour. This highlights an issue with many buildings included on the Record of Protected Structures (RPS); some only have their exterior protected so that internal fittings, carpentry and masonry are vulnerable to the whims of modern contractors. It is vital that when renovating churches, whether consecrated or deconsecrated, architects and builders respect the historic and aesthetic integrity of buildings as a whole.

## Conclusion

The churches of Clonakilty are not only of considerable architectural, artistic and archaeological interest, but are also a testament to the social history of the town. The Catholic church represents a major part of Ashlin's legacy, while the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist churches are also fine examples of the Gothic Revival style in varying and attractive forms; interestingly, the convent chapel designed by Pugin and Ashlin is in a Romanesque style. All of these projects were major ventures on the part of their separate communities and formed part of a general island-wide programme of church-building throughout the nineteenth century. It is hoped that these churches will continue to function through the twenty-first century as living buildings while preserving their historic fabric both internally and externally.

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### (Endnotes)

- 1 The version as of 2009 is available to view at <http://corkcocoplans.ie/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2016/07/Clonakilty-T.C-RPS-2009-2015.pdf>.

- 2 NIAH, no. 20846160, <http://www.buildingsofireland.ie/niah/search.jsp?type=record&county=CO&regno=20846160>.
- 3 Irish Architectural Archives, Merrion Square, Dublin: Ashlin and Coleman Collection, 76/1.25-26. These tracings include the designs for a conduit, the chancel, Lady Altar, St Joseph's shrine, communion rail, pulpit, organ gallery and electric pendants.
- 4 Available to view at [http://www.dia.ie/architects/view/1123/ASHLIN+%26+COLEMAN#tab\\_works](http://www.dia.ie/architects/view/1123/ASHLIN+%26+COLEMAN#tab_works).
- 5 This photo is held in the National Archives, Dublin, and is available to view at <http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000323913>.
- 6 Designs for this communion rail, and an earlier rail which was not created, survive in the IAA, see Ashlin and Coleman 76/1.25/13; 76/1.25/16; 76/1.25/19. The name 'Callinane' appears on the wrought iron in the church. An obituary appearing in the *West Cork People*, Nov. 1905, attributes the 'very fine altar railings' to Timothy Cullinane, who died on 3 Nov. 1905; he is believed to have been from Oliver's Lane (now Casement Street), Clonakilty (Tuipéar 1988, 28; McRoss 1959, 23).
- 7 Available to view at <http://www.dia.ie/architects/view/4230/OPPENHEIMER%2C+LUDWIG%2C+LTD+%2A%23>.
- 8 Available to view at <http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000323914>.
- 9 Available to view at <http://www.dia.ie/architects/view/72/ASHLIN-GEORGE-COPPINGER>.
- 10 Available to view at <http://www.dia.ie/architects/view/72/ASHLIN-GEORGE-COPPINGER>.
- 11 NIAH, no. 20846159, <http://www.buildingsofireland.ie/niah/search.jsp?type=record&county=CO&regno=20846159>.
- 12 Available to view at <https://archdrawing.ireland.anglican.org/items/show/2044> and <https://archdrawing.ireland.anglican.org/items/show/2045>.
- 13 Research carried out for the Representative Church Body, available to view at <http://www.gloine.ie/gloine/search/window/location.2583/iconography>.
- 14 Available to view at <http://www.dia.ie/works/view/5852/CO.+CORK%2C+CLONAKILTY%2C+CHURCH+%28CI%2C+KILGARIFFE+PARISH%29>.
- 15 These can be accessed by searching 'Kilgariffe' [with a single 'r'] on the library website.
- 16 NIAH, no. 20846162, <http://www.buildingsofireland.ie/niah/search.jsp?type=record&county=CO&regno=20846162>.
- 17 NIAH, no. 20846135, <http://www.buildingsofireland.ie/niah/search.jsp?type=record&county=CO&regno=20846135>.
- 18 Notes by Margaret Bateman, available to view at <http://homepage.eircom.net/~wesleyardfallen/WCCircuit/Clonakilty.html>.

- 19 NIAH, no. 20846184, <http://www.buildingsofireland.ie/niah/search.jsp?type=record&county=CO&regno=20846184>.
- 20 It is now the West Cork Regional Museum, see NIAH, nos 20846168 and 20846193, <http://www.buildingsofireland.ie/niah/search.jsp?type=record&county=CO&regno=20846168> and <http://www.buildingsofireland.ie/niah/search.jsp?type=record&county=CO&regno=20846193>.
- 21 NIAH, no. 20846157, <http://www.buildingsofireland.ie/niah/search.jsp?type=record&county=CO&regno=20846157>.
- 22 Church of Scotland. 'The history of the emblem', [http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about\\_us/how\\_we\\_are\\_organised/church\\_emblem](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about_us/how_we_are_organised/church_emblem).
- 23 As noted in survey at <http://www.buildingsofireland.ie/niah/search.jsp?type=record&county=CO&regno=20846157>.
- 24 NIAH, no. 20846197, <http://www.buildingsofireland.ie/niah/search.jsp?type=record&county=CO&regno=20846197>.
- 25 Photo of the interior in 2010 by Dr Michael O'Brien, available to view at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/mpobrien/4516232895>.
- 26 Available to view at <http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000323916>, <http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000323917> and <http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000323918>.
- 27 This document (76/1.26/3) shows designs for the nuns' stalls and prie-dieux, the arch and rail dividing the choir from the sanctuary, and a design for one of the side-chapels.
- 28 Photo of the interior in 2010 by Dr Michael O'Brien, available to view at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/mpobrien/4516232895>.
- 29 <http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000323917>.
- 30 <http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000323917>. Also see photos at [http://www.sistersofmercy.ie/news/article\\_display.cfm?article\\_id=688](http://www.sistersofmercy.ie/news/article_display.cfm?article_id=688) and <http://www.thepuginociety.co.uk/convent-chapels.html>.
- 31 Entry on 'Archiseek' available at <http://archiseek.com/2016/1866-chapel-convent-mercy-clonakilty-co-cork/>.
- 32 Available to view at <http://www.dia.ie/works/view/14083/building/CO.+CORK%2C+CLONAKILTY%2C+CONVENT+OF+MERCY>.
- 33 Available to view at <http://www.dia.ie/architects/view/4760/SCANNELL%2C+PATRICK+%2A>.