1 – Interior of the Honan Chapel, Cork, looking east
(all photos by the author)

The Honan Chapel, Cork: a shrine to the Irish arts and crafts movement

PAUL LARMOUR

In the history of the Irish arts and crafts movement, one building stands out for its unique fusion of architecture and the decorative arts, the result of a highly successful collaboration between patron, architect, artist and craftsman.[1] That is the Honan Chapel in Cork in which various preoccupations of the Irish Revival – the Celtic Revival in art,[2] the Hiberno-Romanesque revival in architecture, and a committed interest in the use of native materials – were combined to great effect (Plate 1). In a book published at the time of its opening in 1916, the building and its furnishings were described in some detail and the genesis of its design revealed, in what was clearly a hope that the example would be followed by others.[3] It is a story worth retelling, especially as the success of the Honan Chapel was not repeated elsewhere, and its valuable collection of the best Irish ecclesiastical art of the early twentieth century was to remain unique.[4]

The Honan Chapel was the conception of Sir John Robert O'Connell, a Dublin solicitor who was legal trustee of the Honan family bequest.[5] The Honan family, who had been active in the commercial life of Cork since the late eighteenth century, had established links with University College Cork in 1909 through the creation of the Honan scholarships. With the death in 1913 of Isabella, the last member of the family, O'Connell, who as executor under her will had power to distribute a portion of the estate for charitable and educational purposes, decided to offer up to £40,000 for the benefit of the college.[6] Part of it was used to acquire a building for use as a residential hall for male students at the college, to be known as the Honan Hostel, and the rest of the money went towards building a chapel for Roman Catholic worship in association with the hostel.

O'Connell's prime motivation in building a chapel was his conviction that a university was not complete without one. There was no chapel in University College Cork, as by university statute it was a secular college. By building a chapel, ostensibly for the use of the hostel residents, O'Connell was able to make good this deficiency, as the chapel would also provide an easily accessible and convenient

place of worship for the majority of students, being sited, along with the hostel, immediately adjacent to the original college buildings. In this he had the support of the college president, Sir Bertram Windle, who for some years past had wanted to secure a church in the locality where the Roman Catholic undergraduates could worship as a corporate body.[7] Having, thus, a clear conviction that a chapel should be built, O'Connell also had an equally clear vision of what form it should take.

In 'Some thoughts on church building', the opening chapter to his book on the chapel, O'Connell set out what he believed were some of the elementary principles involved in building a church, expressing his belief that it should be constructed of native and local materials, well wrought and plain, but good; that ornament should be sparingly used, and that where used it should be above reproach and display some quality worth looking at. In coming to these views he appears to have been influenced by Robert Elliott, a Dublin painter-turned-art-critic.[8] Elliott had written a number of articles critical of all branches of ecclesiastical art in Ireland, including architecture, which were published in both the Catholic and the nationalist press some years before, and had been gathered into a book titled *Art and Ireland*, published in Dublin in 1906. Elliott had been very critical of some Irish work of the recent past, for its inefficient waste, its vulgar ostentation, its monotonous use of cheap ornamentation, and its inappropriate styling, propounding instead an 'arts and crafts' philosophy of simplicity and fitness for purpose, ultimately derived from such figures in England as Pugin and Ruskin. It was this 'arts and crafts' philosophy which had clearly shaped O'Connell's thinking on the character and quality of chapel that was required.

As regards the specific form his chapel should take, O'Connell had a vision that was as clear as his general principles: 'This chapel must call into life again the spirit and work of the age when Irishmen built churches and nobly adorned them under an impulse of native genius.'[9] For him this meant a necessity to 'be faithful to those early Celtic forms to be found in so many places in this country, which for want of a better term, are known as Hiberno-Romanesque'.[10]

In his conviction that only the Hiberno-Romanesque (or Irish Romanesque) style would serve his purposes, O'Connell was following in the wake of a number of architects and patrons who had turned to the early Irish style to impart an especially native image to their buildings, from as early as the late eighteenth century, but particularly around the turn of the twentieth century. Indeed, the heyday of the revival of early Irish forms of architecture had already seen such examples in county Cork as the little oratory chapel at St Finbarre's Retreat, Gouganne Barra of 1900, and Timoleague Roman Catholic church of 1906, and, elsewhere in Munster, the Roman Catholic church at Quilty in county Clare of 1909.[11] In the second chapter of his book, O'Connell outlined the origin and development of the Hiberno-

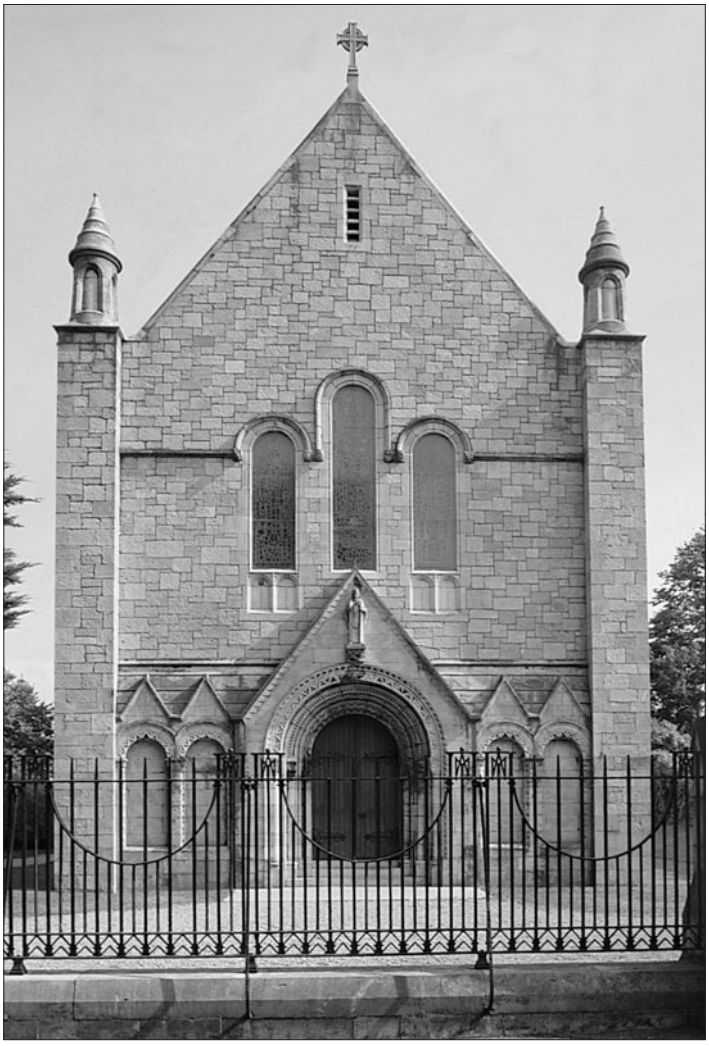
Romanesque style, building up a case for its credentials as a distinctly 'national' style in Ireland. In reality, his chosen form of Romanesque was no more distinctively native than a number of other styles which had appeared in Ireland, as the *Irish Builder and Engineer* observed:

> It is not clear why many writers rather gratuitously assume that because a well-developed Romanesque once flourished in Ireland, that therefore no other style was rooted in the country, whereas the sequence of styles followed pretty much the same course here as in other countries. Indeed, in this particular instance there is room for argument whether the more appropriate style would not have been some form or development of that much neglected, but characteristic phase, late Irish Gothic, in view of the architectural character of the surrounding college buildings.[12]

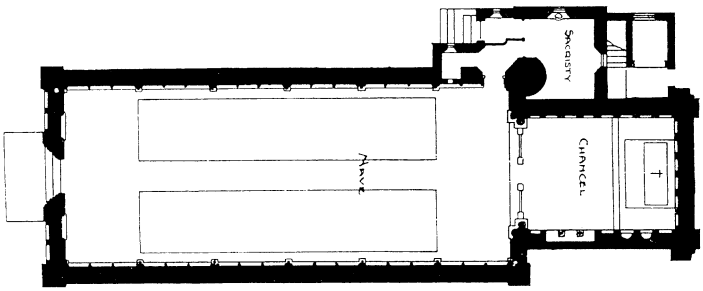
The Hiberno-Romanesque style of architecture preferred by O'Connell, however, held the popular nationalist appeal of conjuring up a vision of a supposed golden age from the past, and certainly it did relate to a particularly splendid period of art in Ireland. Thus, against a background of 'arts and crafts' ideology and romantic nationalist Celtic Revivalism, O'Connell not only decided to build the chapel in the Irish Romanesque style of architecture, but also to have all its fittings and furnishings 'designed and fashioned for it as parts of a thought-out scheme', an effort to make it 'an expression of the best work which can be produced in Ireland today'.[13] Among those to be recruited to the task were some of the leading figures in the Irish arts and crafts movement.

In the spirit of Irish Revivalism of the time, O'Connell was also keen to emphasise not only the national qualities of the architecture and its fittings and furnishings, but also its local character and relevance. The chapel was to be dedicated to St Finn Barr because it would stand on a site which was probably part of his original monastery. It would pay tribute to a number of other local saints in some of its decorative elements, while many of the artists, craftworkers and other personnel who were to be employed on it would come from Cork, and the main building material was also to be local.[14]

The chapel was designed in 1914, the foundation stone laid on 18 May 1915, and the building was completed in 1916, the official opening being on 5 November, although the last windows were not actually fitted until early 1917.[15] The architect was James F. McMullen of Cork, and the builders were John Sisk & Son of Cork. McMullen was a well-known public figure, having been High Sheriff for the City of Cork in 1907-08, and a prominent enough architect, having been involved in hospital and office design, but he appears to have had no special experience in ecclesiastical architecture; it may be assumed that his role was little more than that of



2 – The Honan Chapel: west front



3 – The Honan Chapel: ground-floor plan (from THE HONAN HOSTEL CHAPEL, CORK, *1916)*

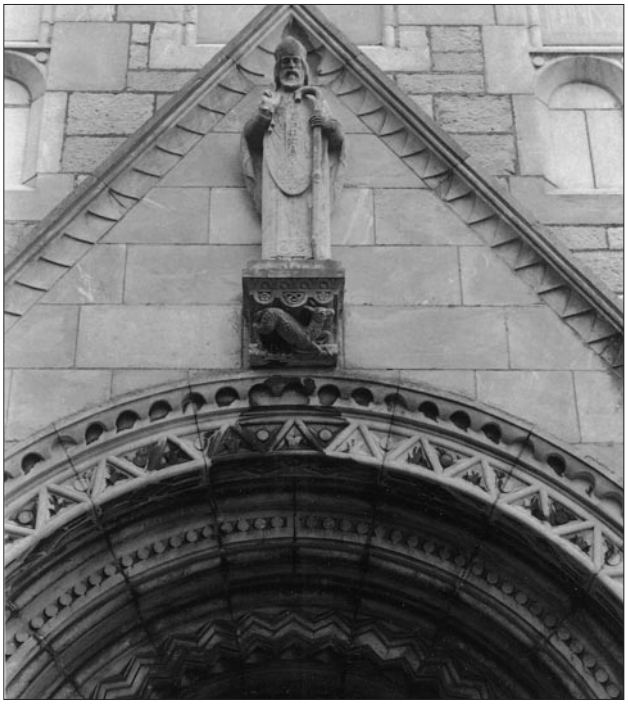
executant architect required to give substance to O'Connell's already well-developed ideas and bring them to reality.[16] Between the two of them, architect and patron, the Honan Chapel took shape.

The result of O'Connell and McMullen's collaboration was a building essentially in Hiberno-Romanesque style, in which a number of important early Irish churches were quoted, but the treatment was very free. There were a number of elements that were not archaeologically correct in relation to O'Connell's original vision, but the particular selection of details was skilfully welded together to create a fairly satisfying whole.

In plan the building comprises a long nave and a deep square-ended chancel, with a small sacristy on the north side and a small circular belfry rising from it (Plate 3). It thus followed the typical Irish Romanesque 'nave and chancel' type of plan of the twelfth century as found at the likes of Kilmalkedar in county Kerry. Built of white Cork limestone, the walls externally were faced with punched ashlar, mostly in random courses of squared rubble, but with some parts, such as the belfry, executed in coursed ashlar. In character the architectural treatment of the building was generally plain, relieved only by a corbel course to each side and chevron carvings to the west front arches, with ornamental elements confined to small carved label stops to windows and some more elaborate carved work at the western entrance.

The overall design of the west gable (Plate 2) was based on that of St Cronan's church at Roscrea, county Tipperary, as O'Connell acknowledged in his book.[17] It provided the model for an arcaded treatment of the west wall, with what are termed 'tangent' gables over both the central entrance and the flanking arcades, and what appear to be 'antae' at the extremities of the gable. The church at Roscrea also gave the idea for the inclusion of a sculpted figure in the gablet over the doorway of the new chapel. In the place of St Cronan at Roscrea we find St Finn Barr here at Cork, garbed in the raiment of a bishop, with Celtic interlacements decorating the vestment and the ornamented corbel on which the figure stands (Plate 4). The figure was carved by Oliver Sheppard (1865-1941), Professor of Sculpture at the Dublin School of Art and the leading sculptor in Ireland at the time.

To each side of the main doorway the capitals of the columns are sculpted as human heads, representing six well-known Munster saints: Colman, patron saint of Cloyne, Gobnait of Ballyvourney, Declan of Ardmore, Finn Barr of Cork, Ita of Limerick, and Brendan of Kerry. With their intertwining locks, they appear to have been based on the carved doorway capitals at the old Romanesque church at Killeshin in county Laois, and were carved by Henry Emery of Dublin, assisted by a band of young stone-carving apprentices selected by him from the Cork Technical School. The doors themselves, constructed of oak, are hung from large wrought iron



4 – Statue of St Finn Barr by Oliver Sheppard (1865-1941) over the west doorway

opposite
5 – View of the Honan Chapel from the north-east

strapwork hinges of a Celticised Art Nouveau pattern, made by the metalworkers J. and C. McGloughlin, of Dublin, and almost certainly designed by William A. Scott (1871-1921), Professor of Architecture at University College Dublin.[18] Scott had been commissioned to design a fine pair of wrought iron grille gates in a very freely treated Celtic style with interlaced panels and spiralled bosses, and incorporating a full-width Celtic cross motif. Hand-hammered by McGloughlin's, the grille gates were originally mounted in the doorway immediately across the face of the doors, and permitted a view of the interior through the open doors while keeping the chapel locked, but they have now been removed.[19]

Elsewhere on the exterior, the position of the belfry, in the angle between nave and chancel, and its form, a miniature Irish round tower, was clearly influenced by Temple Finghin at Clonmacnoise, county Offaly, an Irish Romanesque ruin of the twelfth century, while the small circular window, decorated by chevrons in the apex of the east gable, was presumably inspired by the restored remains of a twelfth century Irish Romanesque church at Freshford in county Kilkenny.

Notwithstanding the academic authority that its range of historical quotations seems to suggest, the building is not consistent in its adherence to Irish Romanesque precedent. The roof pitch is not quite steep enough to be archaeologically convincing, and the 'antae' at the west end are more in the form of clasping buttresses than

simple projections of the side walls beyond the gable, as found in genuine Irish early Christian and Romanesque buildings. The little angle turrets on the west front, in the form of conically capped arcaded drums of stone, are also not characteristic of the Irish Romanesque style, but they do respond here to a theme suggested by the gate piers at the front and expressed more fully elsewhere on the building, that is, in the belfry at the north-east corner. The form of the buttresses at the east gable also suggests a Gothic rather than a Romanesque model, and from a strictly archaeological point of view are therefore unsatisfactory. Otherwise the building is pleasing in its mass and compositional arrangement outside, not least when viewed from the north-east (Plate 5).

The main west doorway leads to a lofty interior laid out as a simple nave and chancel, its barrel-vaulted form of roof with transverse ribs, prominent chancel arch, and arcading to the side walls all inspired by Cormac's Chapel, the celebrated twelfth-century Romanesque church at Cashel, but whereas Cormac's Chapel is all of stonework, the ceiling here is of plaster and its transverse ribs are of timber (Plate 1). The arcading and other dressings of the walls are of the same fine grey Cork limestone as used on the exterior, set against plain white plaster, with the capitals to the nave arcade columns all carved differently and featuring birds and animals among the range of motifs. This arcading in the nave forms a framework to the sta-

tions of the cross made of *opus sectile*, literally 'cut work' of richly coloured glass embedded in the plasterwork of the wall, in the middle of each triple-arched bay (Plate 6). O'Connell was keen on this method of creating stations as it was a more permanent alternative to the conventional paintings that were usually used in Irish churches and often ended up hung or knocked askew, thus causing irritation to the more aesthetically minded worshippers. The method had been employed in Ireland as early as 1908 by Sarah Purser's studio, An Túr Gloine, or 'The Tower of Glass', who were actually working on a set of similar stations for Spiddal church in county Galway during 1916, but O'Connell seems to have been unaware of the fact that *opus sectile* could be made in Ireland, and went elsewhere with the commission for the Honan.[20] It was carried out for him by the firm of L. Oppenheimer Ltd, based in Manchester, and was one of only two elements within the chapel that were not executed by Irish firms; the other was the mosaic flooring, also carried out by Oppenheimer, although their role has never been publicised.[21] Although he enthused about the floor itself, O'Connell did not identify the firm responsible in his book in 1916, presumably because such recourse to an outside firm would not have been seen to be consistent with the aim to foster Irish arts and crafts.

Presumably as a result of O'Connell's reticence on the matter, other contemporary references also fail to identify the firm responsible for the mosaic work, and

6 – A 'station of the cross' by L. Oppenheimer Ltd

so, remarkably, the actual designer of the floor remains anonymous.[22] This is unfortunate as the floor is the most spectacular thing of its type in Ireland.[23] The entire scheme, covering both the nave and the chancel, dwells on 'the Creation and the works of the Lord'. On entering the chapel by the west door, one first sees a large circular panel at the west end depicting the sun, surrounded by signs of the zodiac, in roundels linked by zoomorphic Celtic interlace, with trees, plants and animals to each side (Plate 16). The central aisle depicts the 'river of life', containing fish and other creatures, flowing eastward, and at the east end of the nave in front of the chancel is a design depicting animals, birds, fish and trees, representing 'the work of God's Hands' (Plate 14). In the chancel itself is a multi-circled design showing such things as the sun and moon, stars and planets, wind and snow, rain and ice, trees and fruit, and birds and fish, arranged around a central circular panel depicting the earth. The entire floor of the nave and chancel, except for pewed areas and the sanctuary dais, comprises very colourful mosaic designs, vigorously drawn, and bordered with Celtic interlaced and zoomorphic ornament (Plate 15).

Originally the chancel was marked off from the nave by low arcaded communion rails of cut limestone, in the centre of which was an opening without a gate, but these rails have now been removed. The arcaded lower walls of the chancel differ somewhat from those of the nave, being more elaborately ornamented with chevron or zigzag carvings to the arches, and the pilasters have been cut with lozenge patterning directly inspired by nave arcading at Cormac's Chapel. There is also a small aumbry or recess on the south side, taking the place of a credence table, with a triple-arched sedilia, or seating recess, adjacent to it.

The altar consists of a large slab of limestone carved with a frieze of chevron ornament, resting on five rectangular piers which have each face carved with a different pattern of Irish cross, and on the slab or table itself stands the tabernacle which forms the focal point of the whole building (Plate 13). Constructed of limestone, the tabernacle takes the form of an early Irish oratory with a steeply pitched roof, its surfaces to the sides carved in relief with panels of Celtic ornamentation, while its front face contains a door and tympanum in coloured enamel designed and made by Oswald Reeves (1870-1967). Reeves was a talented graphic artist and a master of enamelled metalwork, which he taught at the Dublin School of Art.[24] The door panel depicts the Adoration of the Lamb, with the 'tree of life' and groups of angels bearing the implements of crucifixion, while the triangular panel over the door represents the Blessed Trinity, with attendant angels bearing in their arms the sun and the moon as symbols of 'the days of Creation' (Plate 9). Together they comprise a splendid conception carried out in brilliant and luminous enamels on repoussé silver, partially guilded, and set in a bronze surround – 'the finest thing of its kind in Ireland', adjudged the *Irish Builder* some years later.[25]

The chancel was provided with hangings made by the Dun Emer Guild, of Dublin, comprising an embroidered antependium designed by Katherine MacCormack (1892-1975) for the front of the altar, and a magnificent tapestry dossal which covers the lower part of the east wall.[26] The antependium represents in the centre the figure of Christ seated and encircled by a frame, flanked immediately to the left by St Patrick and St Columcille, and to the right by St Brigid and St Finn Barr, with kneeling figures of St Ita and St Colman occupying the outer panels. The groundwork is of dull gold, all worked over on canvas, on which the various figures and symbols were raised in silk thread of various rich colours.

The dossal is a splendid piece, of rich red colour divided into four panels, on each of which have been woven symbols of the four evangelists derived from examples in the Book of Kells, and rich borders of early Irish geometrical ornament. It was designed by Katherine MacCormack jointly with her aunt Evelyn Gleeson (1855-1944), the foundress of the Dun Emer Guild. The guild also provided specially woven hand-tufted carpets for the chancel, in which early Irish geometrical patterns were used for the borders, thus relating them to both the dossal and the antependium, an embroidered cope,[27] and an embroidered banner depicting St Finn Barr, with Celtic interlaced borders. Such richly worked textiles were calculated to give warmth and glowing colour to an otherwise austere and sombre interior (Plate 7).

The Celtic theme apparent in so much of the chapel's ornamentation was taken up very effectively in the splendid vestments, made of Irish poplin, and embroidered by a team of about thirty girls over a period of eighteen months in the workshop of William Egan & Sons in Cork.[28] The 'cloth of gold' set consisting of a cope, chasuble and dalmatic for High Mass, together with associated stoles and veils, was designed by Ethel Josephine Scally of Cork, who died in July 1915 before the work was completed.[29] The work for that set took nearly twelve months to make, the designs comprising medallions of the four evangelists, taken from the Book of Kells, set in bands of freely intertwining serpentine ornament. The other sets of vestments – red, white, violet, green and black, along with some miscellaneous examples in purple – were designed by John Lees of Cork.[30] They are covered with vigorous but well-controlled phytomorphic interlace designs carried out in richly coloured threads (Plate 8). Shields bearing the arms of the Honan hostel were incorporated on a number of the vestments, about which Sir John O'Connell wrote:

I am very happy to think that the making of these elaborate and beautiful sets

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7 – View of the sanctuary showing dossal, antependium, and carpets, all designed and made by the Dun Emer Guild

8 – Embroidered vestment, designed by John Lees and made by William Egan & Sons

9 – Tabernacle enamels by Oswald Reeves

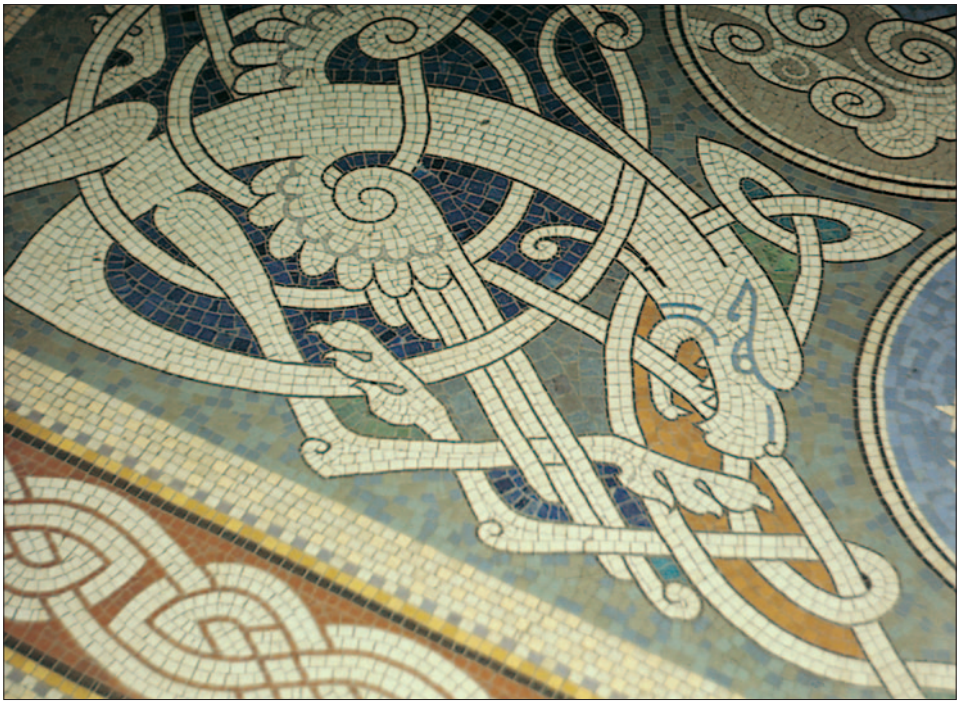
10, 11, 12 – Censer, sanctuary lamp and monstrance, designed by William A. Scott, made by Edmond Johnson Ltd

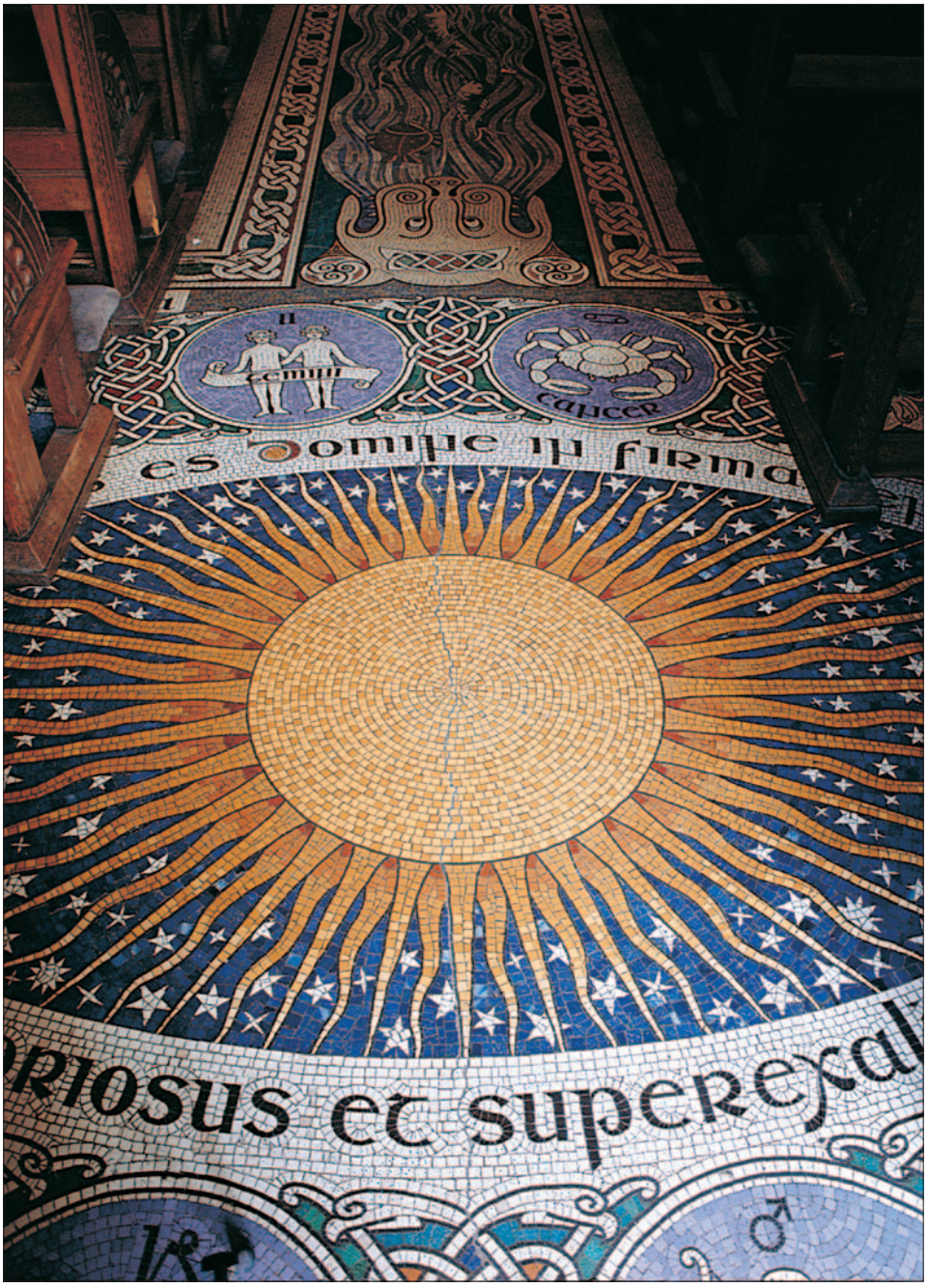
13 – View of the sanctuary with altar and east wall uncovered

> of vestments has given a lengthened period of much-needed employment to a considerable number of young women, who have shown much interest and acquired a high degree of technical skill in carrying to perfection these beautiful designs.[31]

Several of the embroideresses' names were recorded on the inside of some of the vestments.[32]

The firm of William Egan & Sons also made a chalice and ciborium for the chapel, both in silver-gilt, decorated with bands of Celtic interlace. Most of the altar plate, however, was made by the firm of Edmond Johnson of Dublin, most notably a set which was designed by Professor William A. Scott, the Dublin architect. It comprises a crucifix, six altar candlesticks, and a missal stand, all in brass, an incense boat, a censer (Plate 10), a pair of cruets, and a monstrance, all in silver-gilt, and a sanctuary lamp in silver (Plate 11). The sanctuary lamp bears a quaint neo-medievalising inscription, part of which reads 'Sir John Robert O'Connell Doctor of Laws ordered me to be made, William Alphonsus Scott first Professor of Architecture of the National University of Ireland designed me, Edmond Johnson of Dublin fashioned me AD1916'. All of the pieces in the set by Scott display his per-





16 – Detail of nave floor by L. Oppenheimer Ltd

opposite 14, 15 – Details of nave floor and chancel floor by L. Oppenheimer Ltd

sonal rendering of freely treated Celtic ornament, and show him to have been an inventive designer of rare individuality who could adapt and extend a comparatively limited historic convention well beyond the normal range of its applications. A particularly outstanding piece is the monstrance, a highly original conception, the design around the head symbolising a flight of doves treated freely in Celtic fashion (Plate 12).

Apart from the pieces designed by Scott, the firm of Edmond Johnson also provided other items, such as a ciborium and a chalice in silver-gilt, which were more conventional in their use of Celtic ornament, as well as a large processional cross in silver with semi-precious stones and enamel bosses, virtually a reproduction, in restored form, of the Cross of Cong, one of the most intricately ornamented examples of early Irish art.

In every detail the furnishing of the chapel was carefully considered. Eleanor Kelly of Dublin was responsible for the tooled bindings of the missals, including a 'Mass book of the dead' [33] for the commemoration of the chapel's founders, the design on the front cover of which was copied from the old Irish cross slab at Tullylease in county Cork. Another Dublin artist, Joseph Tierney, designed and illuminated a set of altar cards which are beautifully lettered and ornamented with colourful and very intricate Celtic designs. They were mounted in bejew-

17 – Altar card designed by Joseph Tierney, with frame executed by Edmond Johnson Ltd
18 – Carved oak pews, made by J. Sisk & Son

elled and enamelled silver frames made by Edmond Johnson's firm (Plate 17). Even the oak pews were specially designed in accord with the Hiberno-Romanesque and Celtic theme, with chevron ornamentation on the ends of the pews and on a pair of ceremonial chairs, with panels of pierced interlace on their associated kneelers (Plate 18). The oak furnishings were made by the builders Sisk & Son, presumably to designs by the architect James McMullen.

The chief glory of the interior, however, is the stained glass, all of it Irish. Eight of the nineteen lights were by members of Sarah Purser's well-established Dublin studio, An Túr Gloine,[34] and the remaining eleven were by the new young Dublin artist, Harry Clarke (1889-1931).[35] Initially O'Connell had approached Sarah Purser (1848-1943) with a commission for some windows at the chapel, and Purser, understandably enough, had formed the impression that her studio, which enjoyed a position of pre-eminence in Ireland, would do all of them,[36] but O'Connell's attention had also been drawn to the emerging artist Harry Clarke, and he had invited him to submit some designs. O'Connell was so impressed with the result that he extended the original order to Clarke until eventually his contribution outnumbered that of An Túr Gloine.

The windows comprise, in the chancel, the east window of Our Lord by Alfred Child (1875-1939), scenes from the Gospel of St John by Catherine O'Brien (1882-1963) in the north wall, and windows of Our Lady and of St Joseph in the south wall, both by Harry Clarke. In the nave is a series of windows depicting the patron saints of the dioceses which make up the province of Munster, and other saints closely bound up with Cork. These are Finn Barr, Albert, Declan, Ita, Brendan and Gobnait by Clarke; Ailbe, Fachtna and Colman by Child; Munchin and Flannan by O'Brien; and Cathage by Ethel Rhind (1877-1952). At the west end appear the 'Trias Thaumaturga', the three wonder-working saints of Ireland, Patrick, Brigid and Columcille, all by Clarke.

There is a great difference in style between the works of the two studios. The windows by Clarke are a blaze of rich, deep colours, and contain stylised figures in brilliant garments and bejewelled settings. Those by Purser's studio are, on the whole, characterised by the use of paler tints and by more naturalistic presentation of the human form.

Two of the windows by An Túr Gloine, those of St Ailbe (Plate 22) and St Colman, by Child, incorporate representations of architectural canopies of Romanesque type, with Celtic interlaced ornamentation to the borders and other elements, thereby conforming very overtly to the overall stylistic theme of the chapel's architecture, whereas the windows of St Flannan and St Munchin (Plate 23) by O'Brien, and St Carthage by Rhind, eschew conventional canopy-work for more closely integrated subsidiary scenes to both top and bottom. Together with the well-

19, 20, 21 – Details of the St Albert, St Declan and St Gobnait windows by Harry Clarke

considered iconography, which features crosses and croziers of Irish type, these illustrations of incidents from the saints' lives add interest to each composition.

The windows by Clarke, being the work of one individual, are more consistent in their treatment. Each one depicts a full-length figure surrounded by a wealth of symbolic and iconographical detail, exquisitely drawn and glowing with brilliant colour. Saints Patrick, Brigid and Columcille are fine harmonies in blues and greens, their rich and solemn colours blended with taste and skill. St Finn Barr is robed in a chasuble of rich red colour, and St Ita is garbed in deep royal blue, all of them set in a rich tapestry of symbolic emblems and names in Irish script, interspersed with scenes from their lives.

The St Albert window depicts the saint sitting enthroned, staring straight ahead and raising a green silk-gloved hand in blessing, above chequer-work detailed figures, with a crucifix behind him which bears the face of the artist himself (Plate 19), while the St Brendan window shows its subject standing imperiously, surround-

ed by borders of richly plumed birds, recalling one of the legends associated with him. The St Declan window stands out as a particularly jewel-like achievement of kaleidoscopic richness, in which the yellow-garbed saint stands above Celtic-spiralled waves, and holds in one hand a model of Ardmore Cathedral and round tower, and in the other a Celtic ornamented silver staff (Plate 20). The St Gobnait window is yet another brilliant example of its artist's inventive approach, with a decorative use of a honeycomb pattern – Gobnait being the patroness of bees – and her nimbus given the shape of a stone cross which was at one time associated with her cult (Plate 21). Meanwhile, in the two Clarke windows not representing Irish saints, those of Our Lady and of St Joseph, the subjects are drawn into the overall scheme by the incorporation of Celtic interlace at their feet.

The overall effect of Clarke's windows is a richly decorative one, in the manner of the best medieval glass. The amount of original and sometimes fantastic detail is astounding, whilst the depth of brilliance of colours is breathtaking. It was a remarkable achievement for a young man still in his twenties, and critics and connoisseurs were full of praise for Clarke's windows.[37] As Thomas Bodkin wrote at the time, 'Nothing like them has been produced before in Ireland. The sustained magnificence of colour, the beautiful and most intricate drawings, the lavish and mysterious symbolism, combine to produce an effect of splendour which is overpowering.' [38]

Meanwhile, Clarke's fellow artist at the Honan Chapel, Oswald Reeves, enthusiastically wrote of his contribution:

> These windows reveal a conception of stained glass that stands quite alone ... There has never been before such mastery of technique, nor such application of it to the ends of exceeding beauty, significance, and wondrousness. No one has ever before shown the great beauty that can be obtained by the leads alone, nor the mysterious beauty and 'liveness' that each piece of glass receives at the hand of this artist, nor the jewelled gorgeousness of 'pattern' that may be given to a window that teems with subject interest and meaning.[39]

Although the stained glass in the Honan Chapel was the work of different artists, and the design and technique differed, the overall result is nonetheless harmonious. There is an intrinsic artistic quality to each of the individual windows, whether by Clarke or by the Purser studio, and there is what looks like a fair degree of co-ordination of subject and treatment. All but one of the windows is a single-figure subject, with the scale of the figures reasonable in proportion to the overall size of the window, while the subsidiary subjects are not inharmonious in scale or treatment. The glass thus rendered the Honan Chapel not just remarkable amongst contemporary churches in Ireland, but of considerable interest in a wider context, as the *Irish*

Builder acknowledged:

> No other building of its size that we know of, possesses so complete and harmonious a series of modern glass of equal quality. Instances like Mr Christopher Whall's splendid glass at Gloucester Cathedral, the Burne Jones windows at Birmingham Cathedral, the works of the late Mr Charles Kempe and the many younger artists in England, of course, recur to mind, and in Ireland the chancel lights of Loughrea Cathedral, as well as other examples; but these are all in either much larger and more important structures, or else specimens interspersed amongst other glass. Cork is to be congratulated upon its acquisition of a unique collection of modern glass.[40]

Not alone the glass, of course, but all the furnishings and fittings of the Honan Chapel together contributed to what would turn out to be a unique record of the best Irish ecclesiastical art of the time. Its creator Sir John O'Connell had expressed the hope in 1916 that by its example 'the standard of perfection of design and art work in church building in Ireland may be corrected and improved',[41] while the *Irish Builder* shortly afterwards held it up as 'a very valuable and much-needed object lesson to those possessing patronage, and to the Irish public generally'.[42]

Although there were to be further instances in Ireland of enlightened patronage leading to some very fine examples of Irish ecclesiastical art in the decades that followed, the special achievement at the Honan Chapel was never repeated. The conditions that had led to its particularly successful collaboration of patron, architect, artist and craftsman, all working together to a common purpose, did not occur again, having not only arisen from the particular artistic values and cultural milieu that pertained at the time, but also having depended on a very personal visionary zeal, allied to what appear to have been plentiful funds. The Honan Chapel thus represents a unique achievement. In its characteristically Irish architectural form, combined with the largely Celtic ornamentalist manner of much of its furnishings, and its overriding preoccupation with unity of artistic expression and purpose, and high-quality craftsmanship, it stands today as both a remarkable expression of the Celtic Revival and a shrine to the Irish arts and crafts movement.[43]

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22 – St Ailbe window
by Alfred Child of An Túr Gloine

23 – St Munchin window
by Catherine O'Brien of An Túr Gloine

ENDNOTES

[1] See P. Larmour, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland* (Belfast 1992); and P. Larmour, 'Arts and Crafts Movement', in B. de Breffny (ed.), *Ireland: A Cultural Encyclopaedia* (London 1983) 36.

[2] See P. Larmour, *Celtic Ornament*, Irish Heritage Series, 33 (Dublin 1981); and P. Larmour, 'Celtic Revival', in de Breffny (ed.), *Ireland: A Cultural Encyclopaedia*, 58-9

[3] Sir John R. O'Connell, *The Honan Hostel Chapel, Cork: Some notes on the building and the ideals which inspired it* (Cork 1916).

[4] Descriptions of the building and its contents subsequent to O'Connell's account in 1916 include the following: *The Irish Builder and Engineer*, 31 March 1917, 150-2, 154; 28 April 1917, 198-200, 202; Rev Sir John R. O'Connell, *The Collegiate Chapel, Cork* (Cork 1932); M.J. O'Kelly, 'The Honan Chapel', *The Furrow*, vol 1, no 6, July 1950, 290-6; M.J. O'Kelly, *The Honan Chapel* (Cork 1966); P. Larmour, 'The Celtic Revival and a National Style of Architecture', unpublished PhD thesis, Queen's University of Belfast, 1977; N. Gordon Bowe, 'A Host of Shining Saints: Harry Clarke's Stained Glass in Cork', *Country Life*, clxvi, no. 4279, 12 July 1979, 114, 117; J. Sheehy, *The Rediscovery of Ireland's Past: The Celtic Revival 1830-1930* (London 1980) 118, 135-6, 142 et seq; N. Gordon Bowe, 'Honan Chapel', in de Breffny (ed.), *Ireland: A Cultural Encyclopaedia*, 108; Larmour, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland*, 84, 133-6, 160 et seq; E.W. Heckett and C.V. Teehan, *Treasures from the Honan Chapel*, exhibition catalogue (Cork 1995); P. Larmour, 'Honan Hostel Chapel', in A. Becker, J. Olley, W. Wang (eds), *20th-Century Architecture: Ireland* (Munich & New York 1997) 100-01.

[5] Sir John Robert O'Connell (1868-1943) was knighted in 1914 and was ordained a priest in 1929. For further biographical details and portrait photograph, see W.T. Pike (ed.), *Dublin and County in the Twentieth Century: Contemporary Biographies* (Brighton & London 1908) 182; and *Who Was Who, Vol IV, 1941-1950* (London 1952) 861. Following the success of the Honan Chapel he was elected to the council of the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland in February 1917, and wrote the foreword to the catalogue of the Society's exhibition that year.

[6] As recounted in Monica Taylor, *Sir Bertram Windle: A Memoir* (London 1932) 226.

[7] *ibid*., 228.

[8] In the revised edition of his book, published in 1932, O'Connell quoted passages from Elliott's writings at pages 11, 18-19.

[9] O'Connell, *The Honan Hostel Chapel*, 11.

[10] *ibid*., 21.

[11] For the development of Hiberno-Romanesque Revival architecture, see Larmour, 'The Celtic Revival and a National Style of Architecture'. See also Sheehy, *The Rediscovery of Ireland's Past*.

[12] *The Irish Builder and Engineer*, 31 March 1917, 150.

[13] O'Connell, *The Honan Hostel Chapel*, 55.

[14] Significantly, Sir Bertram Windle, president of University College Cork, was a keen advocate of Irish industrial development (it was, for instance, his idea to have an Irish National Trade Mark in 1906), and he had also supported Irish arts and crafts having commissioned the Celtic ornamented mace made for University College Cork in 1910.

[15] Contemporary references to the building at various stages are found in: *The Irish Builder and*

Engineer, 5 December 1914, 665 (contract secured by Sisk); 28 October 1916, 529 (chapel almost complete); *The Cork Examiner*, 23 October 1916, 4 (description of the building); 6 November 1916, 6 (report on opening); 7 November 1916, 3 (description of monstrance).

[16] For biographical details of McMullen, with a portrait photograph, see W.T. Pike (ed.), *Cork and County in the Twentieth Century: Contemporary Biographies* (Brighton 1911) 243.

[17] O'Connell, *The Honan Hostel Chapel*, 31. The Roscrea front had previously been used as the model for the façade of Rathdaire Memorial Church of Ireland church, Ballybrittas, county Laois, in 1887 by the architect James Franklin Fuller.

[18] For Scott, see P. Larmour, 'The Drunken Man of Genius: William A. Scott (1871-1921)', *Irish Architectural Review 2001*, 3 (Dublin and Cork, 2001), 28-41.

[19] The grille gates were removed sometime before 1969 and put in storage. Detail illustrated in Larmour, *Celtic Ornament*.

[20] Details of early work in *opus sectile* by An Túr Gloine are given in Larmour, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland*, 169, 225: note 50. An Túr Gloine went on to provide other sets of *opus sectile* stations of the cross at Loughrea Cathedral, county Galway, in 1929-32, and St Anthony's Roman Catholic Church, Athlone, county Westmeath, in 1934-36.

[21] The identity of the firm responsible for the floor was revealed by the late John Sisk, son of the original builder of the chapel, Richard Sisk, and grandson of the founder of their firm, in conversation with this author and Virginia Teehan.

[22] *The Cork Examiner*, 23 October 1916, 4, praised the floor but made no reference to the designer or firm responsible; *The Irish Builder and Engineer*, 28 October 1916, 529, merely stated that 'the floor is inlaid with mosaic', while the same journal's long description of the chapel in its issue of 31 March 1917 made no reference to the floor at all.

[23] Other examples of early twentieth-century Celtic-ornamented mosaic floors – such as at St Columba's RC church, Drumcondra, Dublin; the Roman Catholic cathedrals at Cobh in county Cork, Newry in county Down, and Armagh; and St Columkille's RC church, Ballyhackamore, Belfast (laid by Oppenheimer Ltd in 1928) – are either composed mainly of repetitive interlaced knotwork or are less ambitious in scope.

[24] For Reeves see P. Larmour, 'The works of Oswald Reeves (1870-1967) artist and craftsman: an interim catalogue', *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, 1 (Dublin 1998), 34-59.

[25] *The Irish Builder and Engineer*, 14 June 1924. See also 13 April 1918, 189, for a report on the work when it was completed and put on view at the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin.

[26] For the Dun Emer Guild, see P. Larmour, 'The Dun Emer Guild', *Irish Arts Review*, vol. 1, no. 4 (1984) 24-8; and Larmour, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland*, 151-62.

[27] As recorded in *The Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland catalogue of the fifth exhibition* (Dublin 1917) 43 (item 154). The Dun Emer Guild was commissioned to make a further vestment for the chapel in 1953.

[28] As recorded in a letter from O'Connell to Francis J. Bigger of Belfast on 12 November 1916. Letter inserted in the copy of O'Connell's book (1916 edition) held in the Bigger Collection, Belfast Central Library. The letter also reveals that Bigger had assisted O'Connell in the matter of the coats of arms which appeared on the windows of the patron saints and were also sculpted on the capitals nearest to those windows.

[29] Scally's death and her role as designer were recorded in an embroidered inscription inside the chasuble of the 'cloth of gold' set of vestments.

[30] Lees was not named in either edition of O'Connell's book, but his role was recorded in *The*

Studio, October 1917, 16, in which a white chasuble was illustrated, and also *The Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland catalogue of the fifth exhibition*, 42 (items 152, 153). Two chasubles (including the white one) and accessories for the Honan Chapel, to his design, were exhibited. A detail of the white stole is illustrated in Sheehy, *The Rediscovery of Ireland's Past*, 165, but the wrong designer's name is given, and similarly so for the black vestment, also designed by Lees, illustrated at page 166.

[31] O'Connell, *The Honan Hostel Chapel*, 57.

[32] They include M. Barrett, N. Ahearne, N. Harte, M. Countie, A. Calnan, K. Cramer, K. Allman, T. Good, M. Desmond, M.E. Jenkins, M. Twomey, N. Barry. Others named in *The Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland catalogue of the fifth exhibition*, 51, were M. O'Mahony, N. Spillane, N. Callanan, N. Good, K. Carter, M. Driscoll, K. Quirke, and J. De Raedt.

[33] As it was termed in *The Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland catalogue of the fifth exhibition*, 51 (item 228).

[34] For An Túr Gloine, see Larmour, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland*, 163-71.

[35] For Harry Clarke, see Larmour, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland*, 183-90; and N Gordon Bowe, *The Life and Work of Harry Clarke* (Dublin 1989).

[36] As recounted in J. White and M. Wynne, *Irish Stained Glass* (Dublin 1963) 13.

[37] See, for instance, *The Irish Builder and Engineer*, 11 March 1916. See also White and Wynne, *Irish Stained Glass* 13, for praise by Sir Bertram Windle and Professor Patrick Abercrombie.

[38] As quoted in *The Studio*, October 1917, 21.

[39] *ibid*., 21.

[40] *The Irish Builder and Engineer*, 28 April 1917, 198.

[41] O'Connell, *The Honan Hostel Chapel*, 60.

[42] *The Irish Builder and Engineer*, 28 April 1917, 198.

[43] The Honan Chapel collection remains almost complete, although a number of items, mainly some vestments, have deteriorated due to adverse environmental storage conditions, and other items are not in current use due to changed liturgical practice. There have also been some changes which have altered the original appearance of the interior, namely the introduction of further furnishings in the 1980s and 1990s, but essentially the chapel remains intact.

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