1 – Baltinglass Abbey, Co Wicklow, built in 1815: view from the nave eastwards to the tower with the south aisle arcade on the right   (all illus by the author unless otherwise stated)

The large medieval churches of the dioceses of Leighlin, Ferns and Ossory: a study of adaptation and change

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THIS ARTICLE SETS OUT TO EXPLORE, THROUGH THE EXAMINATION OF THE HISTORY of twelve churches, a particularly Irish building typology: namely, large medieval churches which have survived as places of worship but have undergone many, often extreme, changes and alterations. The purpose of this study is twofold: firstly to document this particular building typology and the historical context from which it arose, and secondly to examine the conservation problems presented by such churches. The first part of this study examines the main agents of change that affected the churches, while the second part, to be published in the next volume of *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, looks at the legislative context of conservation issues alongside the individual history of each church.

The twelve churches selected all share a number of common characteristics in terms of their history, distribution and development. The history of the churches extends back through almost eight hundred years. The two pre-Norman foundations are St Laserian's, which dates from the early Christian period, and Baltinglass, which was a founded in 1148 by Diarmait MacMurchada. The other ten churches were founded by the Anglo-Normans during the thirteenth century. All twelve churches were of a similar large size and scale, and located within the three dioceses of Ossory, Ferns and Leighlin (Plate 2).

However not all the buildings have been in constant use for worship. In many cases, the buildings were in ruins for long periods or used for a secular purpose. The
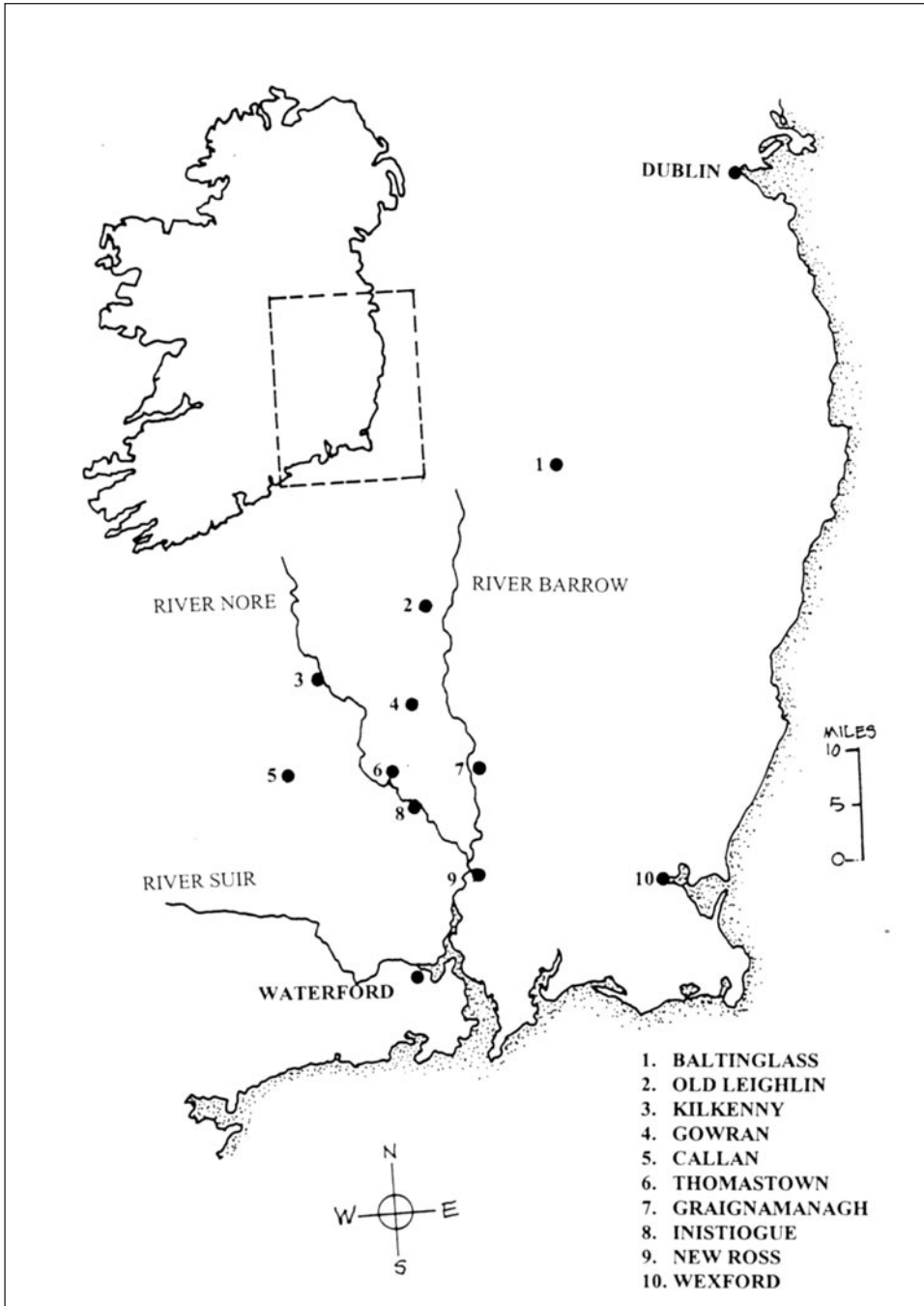
2 – Location map of the case-study churches in the south-east
*(all drawings by the author)*

first five are the great medieval parish churches erected in the centres of the towns built by the Anglo-Norman: St Mary's in Callan, Gowran, Kilkenny, New Ross and Thomastown. St Laserian's in Old Leighlin, Co Carlow, was the cathedral of the dioceses of Leighlin. The final six churches are all monastic foundations. The first three – Inistioge, St John's in Kilkenny, and St Selskar's in Wexford – are Augustinian foundations. The next two – Duiske Abbey in Graiguenamanagh and Baltinglass Abbey in Co Wicklow – are Cistercian foundations. The Black Abbey, Kilkenny, is a Dominican foundation.

It is accepted that there is a marked contrast between the histories of peaceful England, which has hundreds of intact medieval churches still in use, and the wars and misfortunes of Ireland, all of which is reflected in the general dilapidation or demolition of many of the Irish churches. However, the explanation is not as simple as it might first appear. As we shall see, a number of alterations to the buildings are the by-product of radical changes in the restructuring of the organisation of the Church, in addition to changes in the liturgy and in the requirements of the clergy and congregation. At the Dissolution, the decisions made by the jurors about the fate of the monastic churches (whether it was deemed 'parochial' or not) had a profound effect on the subsequent history of the use of the church. Similarly, in the post-Reformation period, the numbers of the congregations of the Church of Ireland continued to reduce, and the changing needs of a small but well-endowed congregation would have a profound impact on the church buildings. The destructive effects of the abundant resources of the Board of First Fruits is also a significant factor. Clearly any understanding of the cultural significance of the churches, as they stand today, depends on an appreciation of their historical evolution in a world that was changing dramatically.

MONASTIC OR PARISH CHURCH

One of the keys to understanding the development and history of the large medieval churches is the difference between a parish church and a monastic foundation. The written history can provide the pedigree of a monastic foundation, but the surviving architecture and layout of the church alone will not provide the answer.

Before the twelfth century, the larger Irish churches and monasteries consisted of a collection of small, separate buildings within an enclosure. Clonmacnoise provides an important example of the layout of an early monastic site, with several churches arranged on an east-west axis without any overall order (Plate 3). The surviving stone architecture of the early Christian ecclesiastical sites is characterised by its simplicity and rudimentary construction. The largest pre-Romanesque church,
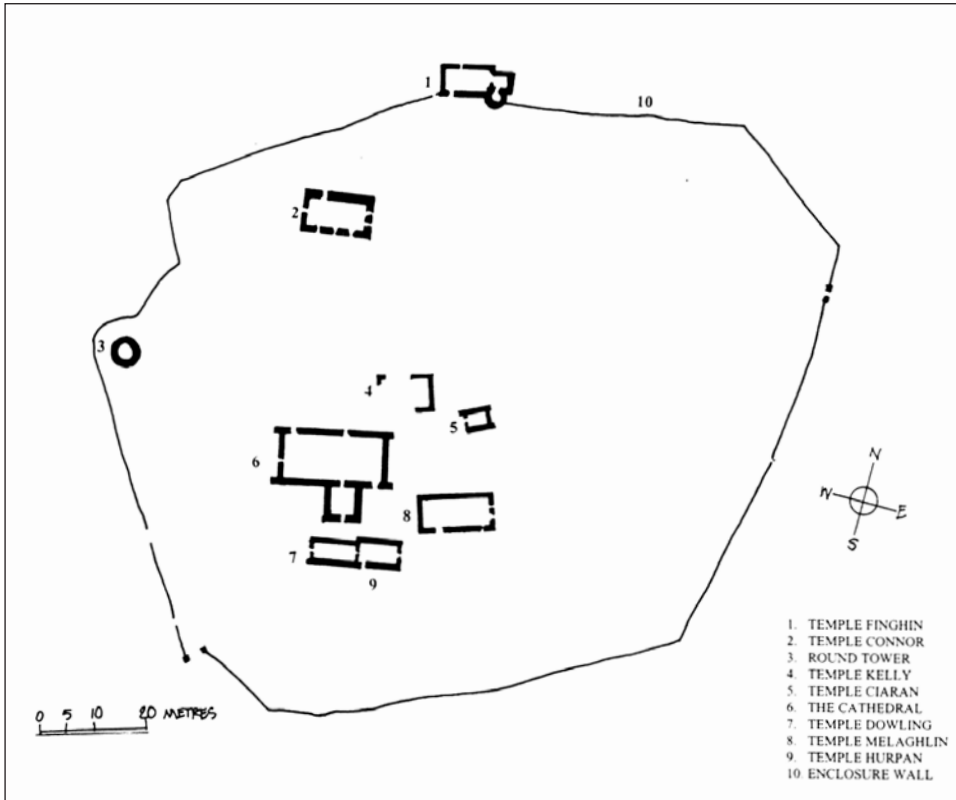
3 – Clonmacnoise, Co Offaly:
an example of an early Christian monastery contained within a circular enclosure

which was at Clonmacnoise, was a plain rectangular structure measuring 18.8 metres by 10.7 metres internally. The reform of the early Christian church began with the synod of Rathbreasil, held in 1111. The synod introduced a diocesan system, with Armagh holding the primacy, and this system largely survives today.

One of the leaders of the reform movement was St Malachy, and he is credited with the introduction of both the Cistercian order and the Augustinian canons to Ireland. The Cistercian Irish mother house of Mellifont was founded in 1142. The Cistercians were instantly successful at Mellifont, with several other monasteries founded in the next ten years. Bective was founded in 1147, Baltinglass, Inislounaght and Monasteranenagh in 1148, Boyle in 1148-61, Kilbeggan in 1150, and Newry in 1153. By the time of the Anglo-Norman invasion, eleven Irish monasteries belonged to the affiliation of Mellifont.[1] The other principal pre-Norman foundations belonged to the Augustinian Canons who had sixty-two monasteries. The arrival of the Anglo-Normans in 1169-72 brought a new wave of foundations,

including the two military orders, the Knights Hospitallers and the Knights Templars.

The Irish monastic tradition of a random arrangement of single-cell units around a small stone church was gradually changed to one of communal life lived in a complex building, laid out according to a specific exact formula. The architectural character of the churches was dictated by the particular rules of the order. The monasteries of the strict Cistercian order conform closely to a preordained plan laid down by the mother house. The Augustinian canons were not, strictly speaking, monks, although they lived communally according to the general principles of the Benedictine rule. They dedicated their lives to teaching and evangelism, and had a more relaxed attitude to the arrangements of the parts of the monastery. The Augustinian canons, as ordained priests, were subject to episcopal supervision, and were naturally the popular choice of the bishops. Indeed, the bishop occupied the position of abbot in the case of all the most important Augustinian houses.[2] The canons represented a middle ground between the extremes of a monastic life of prayer, fasting and obedience – as lived by the Cistercians – and the secular life of the parish clergy, who were often married and lived among the congregation.

One of the unifying links between all the orders was the presence of the church as the most important building in the monastic complex; consequently the greatest care and expense was lavished on it.[3] The church was the dominant architectural feature of the complex, and the members of the community would spend the largest part of their waking hours in worship. It was also the building in which the founder might expect to be buried.[4] The church was seen as a symbol of the dedication of the founder to his or her faith. A large, impressive, richly ornamented structure showed the strength of the devotion of the order and its founder to the religious life, and there was a clear hierarchy and separation of space within the church. The church was generally divided into three main parts. The eastern part was the chancel, which contained the altar and was richly decorated. To the west of this was the choir, which was lined with stalls on both sides. This is where the brethren spent the majority of their day in prayer. A rood-screen separated the choir from the rest of the church or nave. The nave might have a purely ceremonial function, or it was used by lay brothers, or it could serve as a parish church.[5] This subdivision of the church was be an important factor in the later development and adaptation of the building. The standard plan of the church was cruciform in shape, consisting of a nave with aisles, a chancel, and transepts with chapels.

Diarmait MacMurchada's expulsion from Ireland in 1166 set in train a series of events which, within ten years, saw large parts of the south-east fall into the hands of the Norman barons. The arrival of Strongbow in 1171 marked the beginning of the military supremacy of the invaders, and the campaign north from the

coast. By the autumn of 1171, Strongbow was the master of Dublin, Waterford and Wexford.[6] Although the military struggle would continue for many centuries, by the end of the twelfth century the Anglo-Normans were strongly entrenched. If the twelfth century was a time of initial conquest in the south-east, the thirteenth century was a time of consolidation and expansion. The wealth and success of the colony is indicated by the impressive building programme of great castles, new towns, monasteries, manorial houses and churches undertaken by the new arrivals. While the churches were not as large or as complex as contemporary works undertaken in Dublin or in England, they still indicate a confident and prosperous region. The Irish Romanesque style of architecture, previously used for most church-building, was gradually replaced by the Early English Gothic style.

During the thirteenth century, one of the principal changes to the landscape of the south-east of Ireland was the establishment of many new towns. The towns were located along river valleys, which were used by the Anglo-Normans as a route into the interior of the country. The borough towns, with their high defensive walls and towers, were founded at strategic locations on rivers and became the military, commercial and administrative centres of the new lands. A total of thirteen new towns were located on the rivers Suir, Nore and Barrow, all easily accessible from the sea at Waterford. Some towns, like Kilkenny, date back to pre-Norman times, where the cathedral was the centre of an early monastic site within an enclosure. The separate Hightown in Kilkenny was founded in 1202 when it received a charter from William Marshal, one of the most important Anglo-Norman lords in Ireland during the thirteenth century. The town of New Ross, also founded by William Marshall, dates from between 1192 and 1207. Thomastown and Callan date from the mid-thirteenth century.

A characteristic feature of the newly founded Anglo-Norman town was the presence of a single parish church, erected by the inhabitants of the town. The church was an essential part of the medieval fabric of the walled towns, and occupied a prominent and central location. The size and scale of the church was an important indication of the wealth and power of the founder of the town and its inhabitants. Whether a church is of a parochial or a monastic origin can usually be determined by its location in the town. The large parish churches that form part of this study – St Mary's in New Ross, St Mary's in Kilkenny, Callan, Thomastown and Gowran – are situated within the walls of the towns and in prominent locations.

The newly founded monasteries and their churches were also a feature of the medieval towns. The mendicant orders, which includes the Dominicans, Franciscans and Augustinians, are usually to be found just outside the town walls, where they would not be subject to the rule of the Corporation. The contemplative orders, such as the Cistercians in Baltinglass, were usually located away from the walled towns
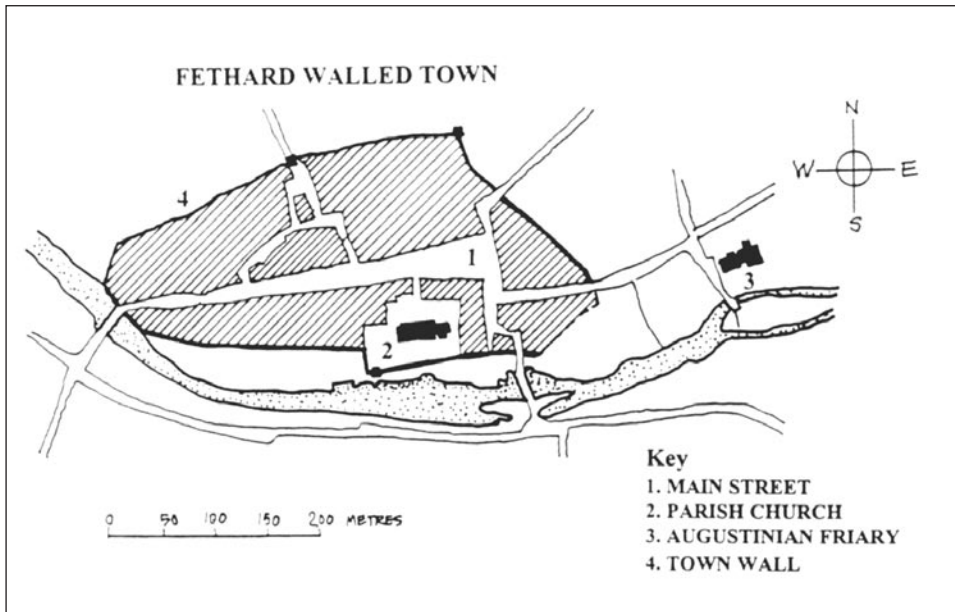
4 – Fethard, Co Tipperary: an example of a walled town

5 – St Canice's Cathedral, Co Kilkenny, c.1791
(Grose, Antiquities of Ireland, *ii)*
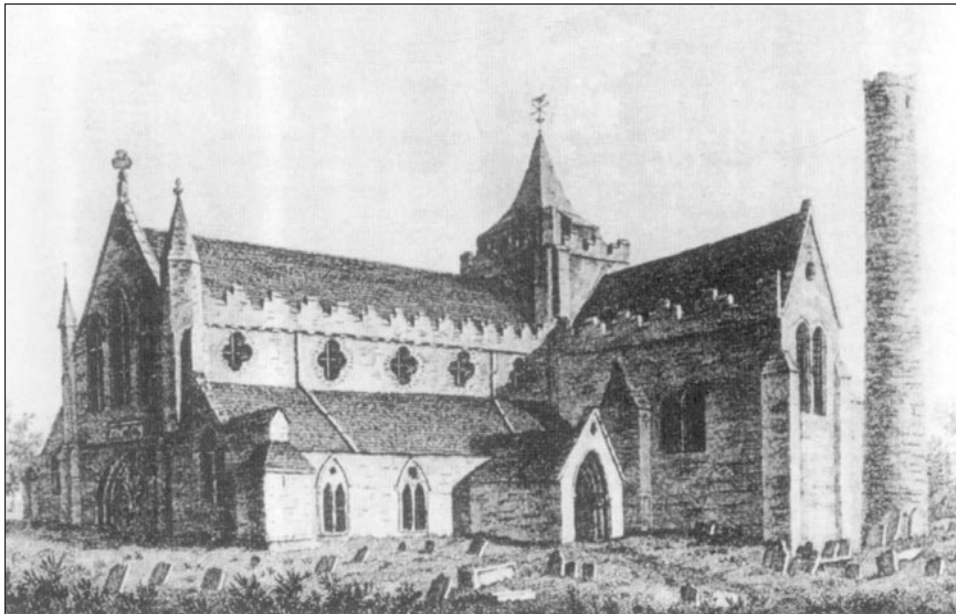
in rural areas. Fethard, Co Tipperary, strategically located on the river, shows the relationships between the churches and the walled town (Plate 4). The medieval parish church is centrally located within the walls in a convenient position just off the main street. The Augustinian friary is shown just outside the walls to the east of the town. The relationship between the church and the town walls is an important indication of whether the church is of parochial origin and erected by the inhabitants of the town, or erected by an independent authority or foundation, in which case it is outside the walls.

As a consequence of the turbulent history of this country, medieval churches that have retained their original features and layout are very rare indeed. However, before examining the plans of the twelve churches selected as case studies, it is worthwhile to look at one such survivor. The most intact example of this type of church, built by the Anglo-Normans, is St Canice's cathedral in Kilkenny, which largely dates from 1202 to 1218 (Plate 5). Of the many fine buildings erected by the Anglo-Norman invaders, St Canice's is one of the few which has survived virtually intact, having escaped destruction, decay, and over-zealous restoration.[7] This cathedral church is described as

> cruciform with a central tower. It has aisles to the nave of five bays and the peculiar, almost Cistercian feature, of transept chapels en echelon. The longer chapels adjoin the choir and are open to it through arcades of two arches. In effect they are choir aisles and extensions of those of the nave though a little wider than the latter. Open to the transept only is the smaller north chapel. It is balanced on the south side of the choir aisle by a large, many windowed Lady Chapel of later thirteenth-century date.[8]

The plan of the church provides an intact layout of a medieval church, which will serve as a contrast to the many variations to the basic form which are illustrated by the case-study churches (Plate 6). The arrangements of the parts are all different, but some general typology can be suggested. This typology is based on the arrangement of the church, where known, prior to the Dissolution. In some cases, the original arrangement of the church is not known prior to fifteenth or sixteenth century alterations. In one instance – St John's in Kilkenny – the original form of the church is not known, although the chancel and Lady chapel survive.
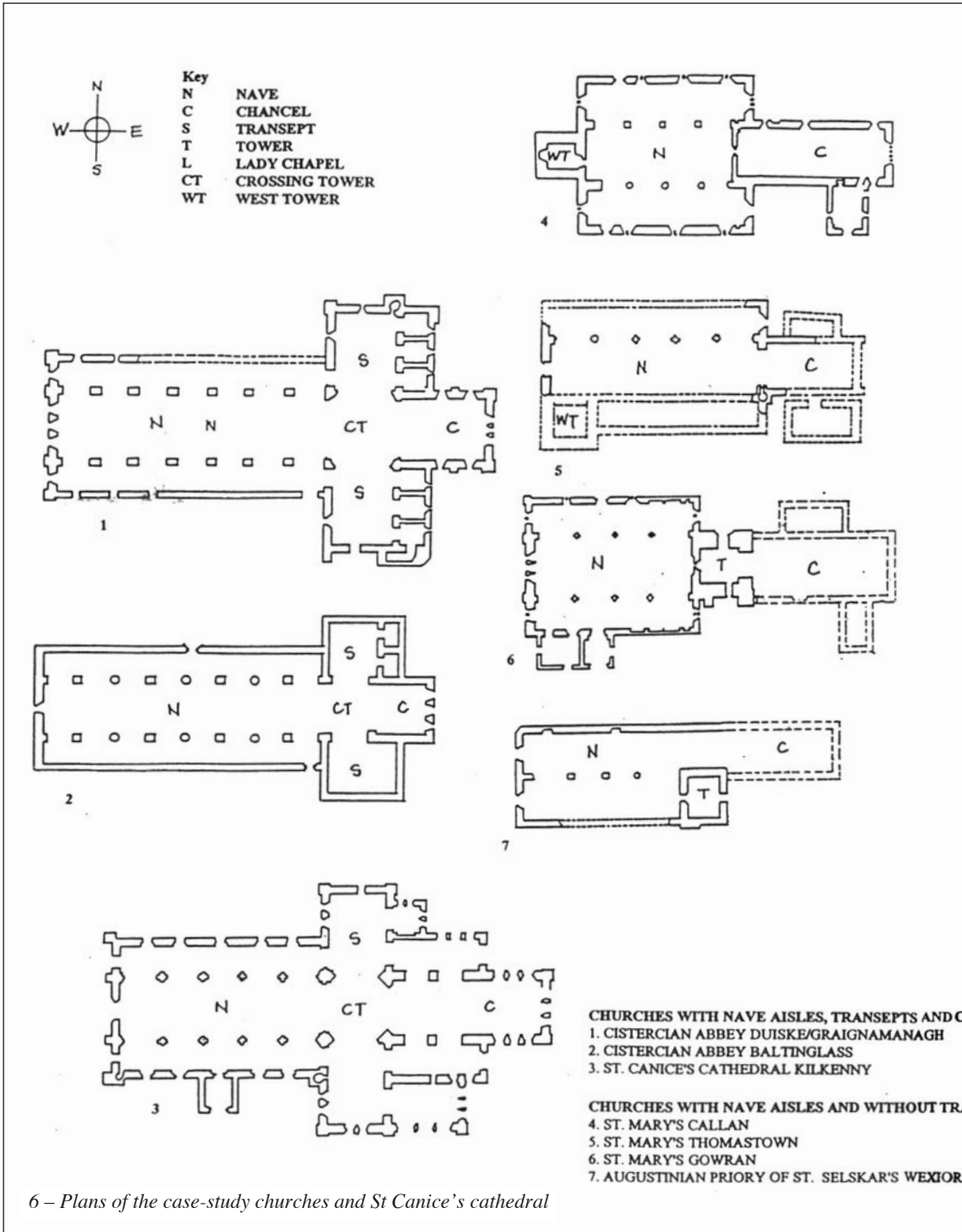
The churches which most closely resemble St Canice's are the great churches of the Cistercian order – Duiske Abbey and Baltinglass Abbey. Both of these churches have long naves with aisles on both sides. Baltinglass has an eight-bay aisled nave, while Duiske has a seven-bay nave. St Canice's has a five-bay nave. Duiske was originally built on an impressive scale, with a crossing tower carried on enormous high arches. The more modest tower at Baltinglass was a later insertion.

Both have transepts with chapels. Duiske has six neatly arranged side chapels, while Baltinglass has two or more. In both cases, enough evidence has survived of the cloister garth and the other buildings arranged around the other three sides to provide the formal layout adopted by the Cistercian order. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, large churches were built to a standard plan, which was used for both the Cistercian abbey churches and the cathedral of the diocese. The most common plan form of the twelve churches has a chancel and nave with aisles, but is without transepts.
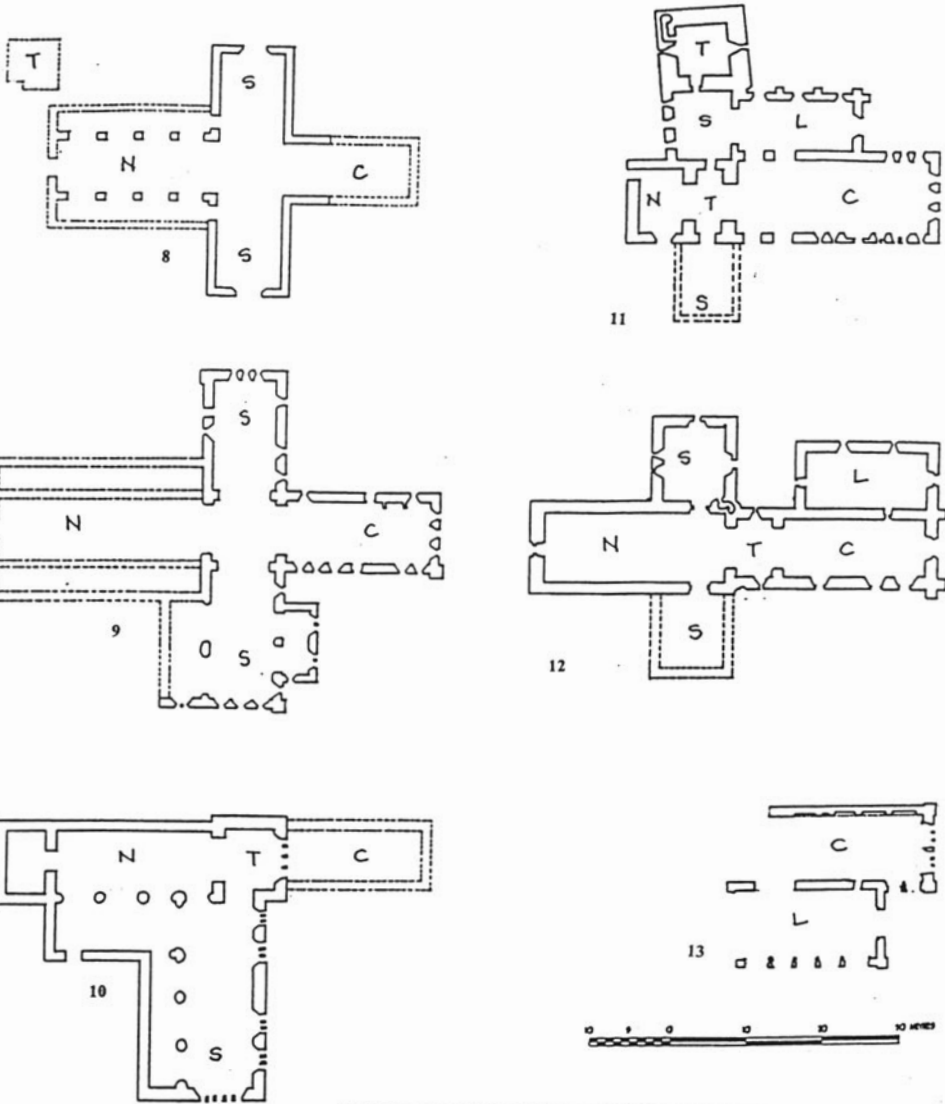
The parish churches at Callan, Thomastown, Gowran and St Selskar's Augustinian Priory in Wexford do not show the same uniformity of plan which is present in the previous typology. The location of the tower is the principal difference, with four different locations shown. At St Mary's in Gowran, the tower, which is possibly the earliest part of the building, lies between the nave and the chancel. The tower at Callan is on the west gable of the nave, and pre-dates the main body of the church. At Thomastown, the tower is located in the west gable of the south aisle. The original plan of St Selskar's is difficult to determine, but the tower is now located at the eastern end of the south aisle of the church. St Selskar's is probably an inserted tower, built in the fourteenth century.

The two great parish churches, both named St Mary's, have cruciform plans with transepts and aisles. St Mary's in Kilkenny had a detached tower to the northwest of the nave. The location of the tower at St Mary's, New Ross, is not known. New Ross also has an aisle on the south transept. The churches which have transepts but no aisles are St Laserian's and Inistioge. St Laserian's has two transepts to the nave and a later inserted tower. The tower is not located at the junction of the nave and transepts, but to the east, between the long chancel and the nave. Inistioge has an extremely short nave, possibly never completed, with a crossing tower and one slightly askew transept. There is evidence of a south transept, provided by a roof scar on the tower, but further details are not known. The final category is a friary church, with a single asymmetrical transept with an aisle, a nave with a south aisle, and a central tower.

The twelve churches display a variety of different plans, ranging from the ordered arrangements of St Canice's, Duiske and Baltinglass to the idiosyncratic arrangements of the Black Abbey and Inistioge. The one constant feature is the division of nave and chancel which is always present. The layout of the medieval churches in Ireland did not conform to a strict plan, irrespective of a monastic or parish origin. Over the centuries, buildings were changed, with towers inserted, Lady chapels added, and entire sections rebuilt.

Key

N	NAVE
C	CHANCEL
S	TRANSEPT
T	TOWER
L	LADY CHAPEL
CT	CROSSING TOWER
WT	WEST TOWER

CHURCHES WITH NAVE AISLES, TRANSEPTS AND C
1. CISTERCIAN ABBEY DUISKE/GRAIGNAMANAGH
2. CISTERCIAN ABBEY BALTINGLASS
3. ST. CANICE'S CATHEDRAL KILKENNY

CHURCHES WITH NAVE AISLES AND WITHOUT TR.
4. ST. MARY'S CALLAN
5. ST. MARY'S THOMASTOWN
6. ST. MARY'S GOWRAN
7. AUGUSTINIAN PRIORY OF ST. SELSKAR'S WEXIOR

6 – Plans of the case-study churches and St Canice's cathedral

CROSSING TOWERS

ANSEPTS

D

CHURCHES WITH NAVE AISLES AND TRANSEPTS
8. ST. MARY'S KILKENNY
9. ST. MARY'S NEW ROSS

CHURCH WITH ONE NAVE AISLE AND ONE TRANSEPT WITH AN AISLE
10. DOMINICAN ABBEY/BLACK ABBEY KILKENNY

CHURCHES WITH TRANSEPTS AND WITHOUT NAVE AISLES
11. AUGUSTINIAN PRIORY OF INISTIOGUE
12. ST. LASERIAN'S CATHEDRAL OLD LEIGHLIN

CHURCH WITH ONLY THE CHANCEL AND LADY CHAPEL SURVIVING
13. AUGUSTINIAN PRIORY OF ST. JOHN'S KILKENNY

THE SUPPRESSION OF THE MONASTERIES AND THEIR TITHES

The two major upheavals experienced by the church in the sixteenth century were the Dissolution of the monasteries and the Reformation. The impact of these two events is revealed by an examination of the complex structure of the church in medieval times. The Church possessed abundant power and wealth, but for a number of reasons was ineffectual as a religious organisation. The term 'Church' covered a wide range of different structures, which were often in open competition with each other.

The diocesan structure was under the control of the bishop, who could also – as in the case of the Augustinians – be the head a separate monastic structure. However, many of the monastic foundations, such as the Cistercians, were independent of the bishop, and governed from the mother house located in Ireland or overseas. The main framework of the non-monastic church administration was based on the diocesan structure. The bishop was the head of the diocese, and his throne was kept in the principal church of the diocese, which was the cathedral. The revenue of the bishops was derived from the land attached to their sees, and the bishop was often the largest and most powerful landowner in the district. Each diocese had a cathedral chapter, which usually consisted of a dean, precentor, chancellor, treasurer, archdeacon, prebendaries and canons. The dean and the chapter had the right to elect the bishop, and their income was derived from rental of land, if they possessed any, and from the tithes of certain parishes which had been allocated to them. The members of the chapter usually functioned as parish priests. The parishes were a separate organisation to the chapter, and were served either by beneficed clergy who had a permanent income, or by curates who held temporary appointments.

The income of the parish was derived from the tithes, which amounted to one tenth of the income of the agricultural produce of the parish. The tithes were subdivided into rectorial tithes, or greater part (two thirds of the total), and vicarial or lesser tithes (one third the total). Either all the tithe or one of the subdivisions could be allocated to a monastery or to the cathedral officers, who then provided the parish with a temporary curate. By this practice, the duties and finances of the parish was intertwined with that of the monasteries. Paradoxically, parishes were poorest and had the least share of the tithes in the wealthiest parts of the country, where the monasteries had been established. The three dioceses of Leighlin, Ferns and Ossory are in areas where the land is fertile, and consequently there was a concentration of monastic foundations. It was common practice that the rectorial tithe, or perhaps all the tithe, was annexed to the cathedral chapter or a monastery.

Tithes which were paid to other churchmen were described as 'appropriate'. A parish could have tithes which were appropriate (partly annexed) or wholly

appropriate (the entire sum was paid elsewhere). The different organisational strands of the church were interwoven to form a complex and unwieldy structure. Before the Suppression of the monasteries, this structure functioned in a haphazard way, with parish duties carried out by a combination of vicars, canons, friars and curates. When the monasteries were suppressed, the tithes which had been appropriated by them passed largely into lay hands. If the tithe was paid to individuals or corporations outside the church, the tithe was described as 'impropriate' or 'wholly impropriate', depending on how much was assigned away. In the case of a wholly appropriate or wholly impropriate parish, the parish clergyman faced the unhappy situation of being assigned a parish with almost no revenue, one probably unable to support either the church therein or a resident clergyman.[9]

In the parish there were several different grades of permanent clergy, ranging from a rector who held all the tithes of the parish, a vicar who held a portion of the tithes, and finally the unfortunate perpetual curate who was without any income. Irrespective of their title or finances, the different types of clergy all performed the same duties. The effect of this system was that although a substantial tithe might be collected in a parish – depending on the allocation of the funds as dictated by ancient agreements – there was no guarantee that the funds would be spent on either the church or local clergy. As a system it was unjust, with parishes of substantial wealth side by side with penniless ones. If the tithes of a parish were paid to the local monastery, the monastery church was likely to function as a parish church.

The wealth of the monasteries was not only based on the tithes of the local parishes, but also on the vast tracts of land which were accumulated during earlier centuries. The office of abbot or prior was a desirable one for members of local land owning families. During the early part of the sixteenth century, the superior of the monastery was often more interested in the monastic possessions and lands than the pursuit of a spiritual life. The superior of the monastery could not sell off any land, but could grant long leases at very low rents to members of his or her family, who increased their wealth at the expense of the monastery. The immense wealth of the monasteries was undermined by this practice, monastic buildings were rarely maintained in good condition, and dilapidation was a common problem. The juries of inquisition in 1537 made charges of dilapidation against the superiors of Inislounaght, Athassel and St Katherine's, Waterford, the first two of whom, were immediate members of the Butler family, and the third related by marriage. As a result of the increasing secularisation of the monasteries, the numbers of new disciples declined. Several monasteries, which had declined to the point where dissolution appeared to be the best option, were deliberately kept open in order to secure the interests of the local leaseholders. The pension lists after the Dissolution must be taken as an indicator of the size of the communities. Apart from the great monas-

teries of St Mary's and St Thomas Court in Dublin, Mellifont in Co Louth, and Jerpoint in Co Kilkenny, communities rarely exceeded a half-dozen and were often less.[10]

The Dissolution of the monasteries did not happen overnight, but was a gradual process. The monasteries belong in spirit to medieval times, and by the sixteenth century many churchmen as well as laymen felt that monasteries had outlived their usefulness. They had ceased to carry out their varied tasks of providing education and libraries, caring for the sick, providing hospitality for travellers, and dispensing both employment and charity in the parish. The Renaissance brought a new age of enquiry and criticism, and the monasteries were soon replaced by new specialised organisations such as colleges and hospitals.

The Dissolution was not carried out as a concession to Protestantism, but rather as a reform of the Catholic Church. It was an important step towards the Reformation, as the redistributed church lands were now in the hands of laymen who ensured that any reversal of the Dissolution would be vigorously opposed. In 1524, the Pope approved the suppression of forty-two monasteries by Cardinal Wolsey in order to fund Christ Church College, Oxford.[11] The Act of the Suppression of the Lesser Monasteries of 1536 was presented as a reform, and transferred to the Crown all the lands and property of the monasteries with an income of £200 a year. The Suppression Act passed through parliament without delay, due to its moderate nature. By 1537 there was a significant shift in government policy, and reform was no longer enough. By 1540, through a combination of coercion and persuasion, the remaining houses had all surrendered.[12] In Ireland, the three dioceses of Leighlin, Ferns and Ossory were all in the lands under Crown control, and were dissolved within a similar time frame.

The fate of the monasteries was determined by the Crown jurors who carried out inspections between 1539 and 1541. The dioceses of Leighlin, Ossory and Ferns contained approximately forty-nine monastic foundations of various size and importance. In one exceptional case, a monastery survived the Suppression with minimum disruption: Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin was dissolved as an Augustinian priory in 1539, but it continued as a cathedral under a dean and chapter.[13] The allocation of the monastic possessions did not follow any particular pattern, although only the churches, if found to have been used by the parish, were retained for worship.

The rural churches, which were often contemplative orders and not surrounded by rival churches, were likely to be declared parochial. If the church was not declared to be parochial, it was granted, together with the rest of the possessions, to the farmer or retained for defensive purposes, like Dunbrody and Tintern. The urban churches which were in competition with the parish church, if not declared to be parochial, were likely to be granted to the local corporation or into lay hands. The

remaining possessions of the monasteries, which included vast tracts of land, houses, orchards, mills, and the tithes of many parishes, were granted to the local lord or corporation in return for his continued loyalty to the Crown.

Before the Dissolution, the monastic churches and buildings of the 'dissolute houses' were under considerable pressure from neglect. After the Dissolution, the churches which had been monastic but declared parochial, and those which had always been parochial, shared a common fate. Parishes which had struggled to maintain one church now had another equally large one added to their responsibilities. Small rural communities were allocated large neglected churches without any resources to support them. The parishes, whose tithes had passed into lay hands, simply did not have the resources to sustain the large medieval buildings. The churches that were not declared parochial passed into lay hands, and many, especially those in urban areas, disappeared completely. Many of the monasteries, especially in the west of Ireland, were outside Crown control, and remained open for many more years. Monks continued to occupy the buildings, but their numbers gradually dwindled and ownership passed into lay hands.[14]

The most comprehensive source of information relating to the tithes is *The Fourth Report of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners*, which dates from 1833. Although three centuries had passed since the Dissolution, and some reform and improvements had taken place, the detailed information contained in the report shows how these allocations of tithe income endured into modern times.

Of the twelve churches studied here, ten are included in the report. The parish with the highest income was Callan, with £2415 per annum, of which £2348 belonged to the incumbent. The poorest parish, St Laserian's, had one of the largest churches and an income of £100 per annum. An additional sum of £361 per annum was appropriated to the parish of Leighlin. There were a number of large 'unions', where groups of parishes combined resources in order to form a viable unit. The parishes of New Ross, St Selskar's, Callan, Inistioge, St John's, St Mary's and Thomastown all formed part of a union. St Selskar's in Wexford was in the largest union, with fourteen parishes in all. Only Baltinglass, Gowran and Old Leighlin were not in unions, with incomes of £618, £531 and £100 respectively. A number of the tithes of the parishes were still 'impropriate', or paid to laymen. Caesar Colclough was paid £12 per annum from the tithes of St Selskar's. The tithes of New Ross, a union of nine parishes, amount to £1,148 per annum, but £220 belonged to the Corporation of Kilkenny and £100 to the Marquise of Ely. Inistioge Union had an annual income of £580, but £200 of this was paid to Caesar Sutton of Co Wexford. St John's Union in Kilkenny had an annual income of £884, but of this, £553 belonged to the Corporation of Kilkenny. Many of these financial arrangements survived until the introduction of reform in the Irish Church Act of 1869.

THE REFORMATION

The Reformation, begun in 1534 when Henry VIII declared himself the 'supreme head of the Church of England', changed Britain from a Roman Catholic country to a largely Protestant one. In Ireland, where most of the population remained Catholic, the Reformation separated the majority of the people from their churches. One of the new beliefs which was to have an impact on the fabric of the churches was the reformer's rejection of the doctrine of the 'real presence' during communion. A cornerstone of the Roman Catholic faith is that during the Eucharist, the bread and wine on the altar is actually changed into the body and blood of Christ. Only an ordained priest could perform this miracle during the celebration of the Mass, and this belief ensured the clergy and the Church retained a special position in society. The rejection of this doctrine was to undermine the central importance of the chancel in the internal hierarchy of the church building.

During the reign of Henry VIII, the first English translations of the bible were published. The translations showed that many of the Church's accepted teachings and practices, such as confession and purgatory, had no basis in the bible, and that the worship of 'graven images' – interpreted as statues and representations of the saints – was specifically forbidden in the bible. During his lifetime, Henry VIII kept the reformers in check, but during the reign of Edward VI, the rate of change increased. In 1541, chantry chapels and memorial Masses were prohibited by law. Three years later, all images, crucifixes and 'Popish books' were ordered to be burned or 'otherwise defaced and distroyed [sic]'. 'Idolatrous altars' were ripped out and replaced by movable communion tables.[15] The bishops and clergy began to avail of the permission to get married. The old Latin service was abolished, and the publication of the Book of Common Prayer in 1551 marked another step in the movement away from Rome.

The reforms came to an abrupt halt in 1553 when the Catholic Queen Mary restored the old Latin service and removed all married clergy. However, she did not go so far as to restore property taken during the Suppression, or give up Royal Supremacy. The service in the parish churches returned to the old ways, with Mass celebrated as before. St Mary's in Gowran was held by the Protestants in 1546, but Catholic priests regained possession in the time of Queen Mary. Mary's persecution of Protestants and her marriage to the King of Spain damaged the cause of Catholicism in England. Her death in 1558 and her replacement by the Protestant Elizabeth brought a return to the ban on the Latin service and the Mass. The images briefly set up under Mary's reign were once again removed. The fixed Catholic altars were removed, and replaced by movable communion tables, set altar-wise, at the east end of the church. Elizabeth sought to adapt traditional church interiors to

Protestant worship, based on the Book of Common Prayer, thus creating the 'prayer book' church.

Before the Reformation, the Mass was celebrated by the priest in the chancel, with the congregation either standing or kneeling in the nave. The nave and chancel were separated by the barrier of the rood-screen. The congregation's only contact with the service was during the consecration when the screen doors were briefly opened. From 1650 onward, the Protestant service was based on worship according to the Book of Common Prayer, with the congregation expected to participate in and to understand the service.

'Prayer book' churches are of two basic types: medieval buildings adapted for the new Protestant service, or new churches, purpose built between the sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Prayers were said communally, interspersed with readings from the bible, and concluded by a sermon. The Holy Communion, with its connection to Roman Catholicism and the Mass, was seldom celebrated. As the clergy and congregation had to be close enough to worship together, the ceremony was often moved to the nave, thereby rendering the chancel unnecessary. The pulpit was erected in a prominent and central location so that everyone could see and hear the minister.

At this time, sermons could last for several hours, so the congregation needed somewhere to sit. To this end 'box pews' were installed, each designated to a particular family. The closer the location of the pew to the pulpit, the more important the position of the family in society. Galleries were often installed around the walls of the nave to provide more accommodation. The chancel was no longer the ceremonial focus of the church, and became redundant.

The chaos of post-Dissolution times is demonstrated by the life of Archbishop Magrath from Lough Derg in Co Donegal. Our first record of his clerical life dates from 1565, fifteen years after the Dissolution, when he was a Franciscan friar who has been provided by the Pope with the bishoprics of Down and Connor.[16] At this time, the Pope and Elizabeth I had begun to appoint rival bishops to the same see. Bishop Magrath survived for two years as a fugitive Roman Catholic bishop in his devastated diocese. In 1567, in response to Magrath's 'humble submission',[17] Elizabeth I appointed Magrath to the post of Archbishop of Cashel. The Pope did not deprive Magrath of the dioceses of Down and Connor until 1580, so that for thirteen years he managed to be both a Roman Catholic and a Protestant bishop. This ambivalent state of affairs was further compounded by the fact that Magrath's wife, whom he married in 1575, was a devout Catholic. She had nine children with the Archbishop, and was reported to be constantly surrounded by priests and friars. Throughout her married life, she 'feared the fires of hell for coming to bed with a friar'.[18] Magrath lived to be almost a hundred years old, dying in

1622. His clerical life began in the final days of the medieval monasteries, and in his role as a Protestant bishop, he was, not surprisingly, described as 'marvellously careless of his flocks and given to confiscatinge, sellinge and resellinge of benefices, uncharitable handling of causes of matrimony, gamyng, musicks and carrousings'.[19] His plural dioceses were a 'plague spot' in the life of the church, until his generally hoped for death at the age of one hundred allowed the reorganisation of the diocese.[20] He died in the early seventeenth century, when a new generation of professional bishops dedicated to the Protestant cause had begun to emerge from Trinity College.

REPOSSESSION

After the accession of Queen Mary, in Ireland there was widespread repossession of churches by the Roman Catholics who had not given up hope of recovering their previous arrangements. Where rival bishops were appointed to the one see, possession of the diocesan cathedral showed continuity with the past and legitimacy to the occupier. St Nicholas' in Galway was regained by the Roman Catholics in 1553, but under Elizabeth I the church returned to Protestant hands. In 1603, when news arrived of Elizabeth's death, the Roman Catholics seized the major churches and celebrated Mass on the altars. The strength of the Roman Catholic community in the Anglo-Norman towns of the south-east is demonstrated by their repossession of the churches at this time. The Black Abbey and St Mary's in Kilkenny and Waterford Cathedral all were briefly used to celebrate Mass.

Under the rule of the Stuarts, the Roman Catholic community continued to grow in confidence. During the time of the Confederation of Kilkenny, in the 1640s when the city was in open rebellion, the churches were once again used by the Roman Catholics. In the city, the flight of the Protestant bishop Griffith Williams and his clergy soon after the outbreak of the rebellion placed St Canice's cathedral and the adjacent complex of ecclesiastical buildings at the disposal of the Roman Catholic Bishop Rothe. He set about entirely renewing it, before having it rededicated the following year, an event which he had recorded on the elaborate monument intended as his last resting place.

St Mary's church in Kilkenny was reconsecrated and used for all solemn religious ceremonies during the Confederation. The pulpit in St Mary's was broken into pieces as an expression of distaste with the changes which had been undertaken in the church. Bibles and prayer books were to be seen used as wrapping-paper in Kilkenny's shops.[21]

During those years, St Canice's cathedral was the venue for important synods

and meetings connected with the Confederation. Masses and other services were celebrated with great solemnity. In November 1645, Rothe gave a liturgical reception in St Canice's cathedral for Rinuccini, the papal legate, on his arrival in the city. There were many of these services, particularly in St Canice's cathedral and St Mary's church: solemn high Masses and exposition of the blessed sacrament; holy week ceremonies with sung high Mass in the cathedral; public ordinations in the Black Abbey on the 19 December 1646; elaborate Christmas celebrations with first vespers in St Mary's church; matins, lauds and midnight Mass with the Jesuits in St John's; and pontifical high Mass in the cathedral at midday on Christmas Day. Many churches throughout the country were repossessed, restored and rededicated. Some of the church revenues were also regained by the Roman Catholic clergy. Parish priests were appointed by Roman decree to Erke, Thomastown and Gowran, and James Phelan was appointed chancellor of the diocese in April 1647.[22]

Following the collapse of the Confederation of Kilkenny and the arrival of Cromwell, the Catholics were ejected from the cathedral and all the other churches. Neither the Catholics nor the Protestants would recover the churches until the Restoration. During the Cromwellian occupation of 1650, no ceremony or ritual of any kind was tolerated. There was widespread destruction of churches. Bishop Williams vividly describes the condition of St Canice's:

> ...utterly defaced, and ruined, thrown down all the roof of it, taken away five goodly Bells, broken down all the windows, and carried away every bit of Glass, that they say was worth a very great deal; and all the doors of it that hogs might come, and root, and Dogs gnaw the Bones of the dead.[23]

Some of the old parish churches were used as 'meeting houses', but many were ruined, stripped of their fittings, without doors or windows.

The desire to possess the ancient places of worship and their enduring symbolic value is again illustrated in the period of the Jacobean Restoration. When James II was setting out his parliamentary programme, Disestablishment was not proposed, as he was determined that the established church should not be formally deprived of its position. It was decided to maintain the existing policy of leaving vacancies unfilled, and using the money to subsidise the Catholic clergy. Later in the year 1687, James made the Act for Liberty of Conscience the basis of a proclamation forbidding the seizure of Protestant churches by Catholics, including those which had been abandoned by their clergy. In the countryside, there seems to have been widespread seizure of churches, and James's proclamation was disregarded. There is an order from James directing the return in proper condition of a Wexford church which had been seized, and the pews and altar broken, but the church was never restored while the Jacobite regime lasted.[24] The incumbents were put out of

their livings, and their churches were taken over by the Roman Catholics. The parochial tithes were sized in the name of the king. Churches were reconsecrated.[25]

James's efforts to prevent such seizures were often unsuccessful. In September 1689, while he was out of Dublin, Christ Church was taken and consecrated to Catholic use, apparently on the grounds that it was traditionally the Chapel Royal. James incurred some Protestant criticism when, in spite of the proclamation, he himself attended Mass in Christ Church. The churches were the focus of the power struggle between the armies, with the victor celebrating in the principal church with his preferred service. William arrived in Dublin in triumph after the battle of the Boyne on the evening of 4th July. The next day, he 'rode in great splendour to St Patrick's cathedral where the *Te Deum* was sung and Dean King preached an excellent sermon'.[26]

In less than seven years the wheel had turned full circle. The Protestants, whose ascendancy was now restored, were embittered by the humiliations and deprivations inflicted on them by the Jacobite government and by the losses suffered in three years of war. They were determined that these experiences should not recur. Religion had become the principal dividing line in Ireland. The English interest was identified with Protestantism; Catholics, of whatever origin, were regarded as Irish, by themselves as well as by others.[27]

ASCENDANCY: THE CHURCH DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The reign of Queen Anne (1702-1714) is associated with the introduction of the Penal Code. The code sought to deprive the Catholics of their clergy and limit the number of priests in the country. Restrictions were also imposed on education, the right to carry arms, the right to own, lease or work land. Catholics were unable to trade or enter the professions, and finally, in 1728, were denied the right to vote. The penal laws excluded Catholics from the political sphere, and hindered their economic advancement.[28] The penal laws were less effective in religious life, and the majority of the population in Ireland, whether of Gaelic or Anglo-Norman descent, did not convert to the Protestantism of the Established Church, but remained Roman Catholic. The Penal Code and the Sacramental Test both served to decrease the numbers of the Established church. The old churches were serving a small percentage of the overall population – that is, the new english settlers and those who had conformed.

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, in response to the new service, a new distinctive church architecture began to emerge. The champion of the new style was Sir Christopher Wren, and he built 'auditory' churches, designed so that every-

one could see the minister as well as hear him. Many new Protestant churches in Irish towns were built in the new style. These churches were smaller than their predecessors, and composed of one principal 'room', usually with a gallery on three sides. Many of the new churches, such as St Peter's in Drogheda, were built on the site of demolished medieval churches, which, with their complex subdivision of interiors, were unsuitable for this new approach. During this time, the nave of St Mary's in New Ross was demolished and replaced by a new church with a gallery on three sides, while St Mary's in Kilkenny had the nave aisles and half the chancel demolished and new galleries inserted (Plate 7). According to Rev. J.B. Leslie, the Kilkenny church was rebuilt before 1731. The rebuilding consisted of taking down the side-aisles and the walling-up of the arches on either side. The chancel was shortened and a new east wall was built.[29] Carrigan dates this to 1739 when the vestry books record that '£20 be sessed and levied for ye filling up the arches in ye church and making passages to the two side doors with bricks and plastering and finishing same to make the church warm and staunch'. The intention was not to make the church smaller, but to arrange the interior so that everyone could hear the preacher. The same record states that 'Mr. Wm. Watters shall have liberty to erect a gallery at ye north side of the church joining Mr. Lewes' gallery.' In 1748 it is agreed that the chancel 'be pulled down within twenty-one foot of the pulpit'.[30]

7 – St Mary's parish church, Kilkenny: view from the north of the north wall of the nave showing windows inserted into the blocked aisle arcade

The Georgian era of the eighteenth century is generally regarded as the high point of the Protestant ascendancy. This was the period in which the 'Protestant Nation' established its identity and developed a sense of colonial nationalism. The landowners set about building themselves grand Palladian mansions and landscaped demesnes, building roads, canals and ideal estate villages. The cities were transformed with broad straight avenues, elegant squares and fine public buildings.

The structure of the Church of Ireland, established many centuries earlier, was not easily modernised. Apart from the upheaval of the Dissolution, the diocesan organisation remained unchanged from medieval times. The bishops derived their incomes mainly from the land attached to their sees, and, as with all such incomes, there was a steady rise throughout the eighteenth century.[31] However, the church buildings were often in ruins as a result of the turmoil of the previous century. Despite the improvements and advances associated with the eighteenth century, the clergy were impoverished, the buildings in ruins, and the tithes impropriated to laymen. The Established Church, which remained outside the general air of improvement associated with the eighteenth century, experienced a serious decline. The fabric of the churches continued to deteriorated as a result of the separation of the responsibility for the upkeep of the church from those who used the churches.

DIVIDED RESPONSIBILITY: CHURCH AND CHANCEL

An examination of the plans of the typical Irish parish church shows that the simplest churches consisted of a single cell. One of the first developments of the plan was the division of the interior into two parts: nave and chancel. In Ireland, chancels were added to churches as early as the eleventh century, and were integral parts of newly built churches from the twelfth century on.[32] Traditionally, the chancel was the charge of the rector, a division of parts reinforced by the building of a barrier or rood-screen between the separate sections. Before the Reformation, the nave of the church was without seats, and could be used for secular purposes, like a church hall today. Although the laity could hear the services, they could not see what was happening on the other side of the screen, except at the elevation of the host when the screen doors were briefly opened. While some rectors took their duty seriously and embellished the chancel with handsome sedilia and piscina, the majority neglected their duties to maintain the fabric.

The visitation books of the bishops are a useful record of the condition of the churches during the seventeen and eighteenth centuries. Archbishop King, who presided over the archdiocese of Dublin from 1691 to 1729, visited the diocese of Ferns in 1712. The clergy are described as very diligent, but miserably maintained:

'Some have eight, nine, nay ten parishes and not forty pounds per annum out of them.' The diocese had no bishop, dean or archdeacon residing in it. Ferns possessed 131 parishes, seventy-one were impropriate in lay hands, twenty-eight appropriate to the bishop, dignitaries and prebendaries of the cathedral, and only thirty-two in the hands of the clergy that serve the cures. The bishop was resident in his other diocese of Leighlin, for 'in view of the interest of the Crown, the lay patrons, and the appropriators, he did not see how he could order the cures better than he has done.'[33] In Dublin, Archbishop King took Christ Church cathedral to task, as the chapter had appropriated twenty-seven parishes and either failed to supply the cures or did so badly. They would not agree to rebuild ruined churches as they would then be obliged to supply curates. Archbishop King succeeded in building churches in several of the parishes, and the chapter was greatly put out.[34]

During the visitation, the bishop would travel through his diocese and record the condition of the churches, as well as other matters. The 'church' or nave is generally recorded separately to the chancel, and the condition of each is noted. This division of responsibility led to the widespread condition of ruins and well-kept portions existing side by side. The Rev. James Leslie's account of the diocese of Ossory is representative, and most of the examples there are of small parish churches. The problems associated with the larger medieval churches, as will be seen in the case studies, were greater. The church at Burnchurch was appropriate to the Vicar's Choral of St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. In 1615 'the chancel was ruinous but the Vicar's part in good condition.' In 1781 the church was in good repair, but by 1799 it was 'in extremely bad repair, nearly falling'. A new church was built in 1810 using the materials from the old church.[35]

The church at Castlane or Whitechurch had the benefit of a wealthy and concerned bishop. The church was the responsibility of Archbishop Cox of Castletown Cox ,and in 1799 the church was described as 'in repair and there was never any cess laid on for the repair of the church. It has always been repaired by Mr. Cox who keeps it in the most elegant order.'[36] Another parish church fortunate enough to benefit from a wealthy patron was Dunmore parish church. After the Reformation, Lord Ormond was impropriator of the rectory. In 1615 the church was 'down'. In 1731, the bishop reported that it was 'the neatest church for pews and paving in the diocese'. In 1781 the church was in repair.[37]

The Abbey of St John's in Kilkenny had appropriated the living at Castlecomer before the Dissolution. By 1612 it was impropriate to the Corporation of Kilkenny, to whom it was granted by the Crown jurors. The church was 'down' in 1615; only the vicar's part of the chancel was 'up'. In 1731 Bishop Tennison reported the 'body of church in ruins' and requiring 'trees growing on the buttress on the east end to be removed', while there was 'no font and no other than a linen

cloth for the communion table'.[38]

At Kilfane in 1615 the church and chancel were 'well', but by 1731 the 'chancel ceiling [is] open to the air and needs repair, [with] slating of body of church to be mended'.[39] At Odogh Union, it was reported in 1615 that 'the church was a ruin and waste but the chancel was in good repair'. Again, by 1731, the church was in ruins. At Rathbeagh, in 1615, the report stated that 'the chancel is slated, [and the] church indifferent well'. The deplorable state of the impoverished curates was described in 1732 when Bishop Tennison ordered the churchyard at Rathbeagh to be enclosed, and reported that

> ...a thatcht building of a very inconsiderable value, is joined to the west end of the church, it is said to be erected in the time of Deane Story, without licence from the bishop, to afford a shelter for a poor Scottish man that was curate with a poor salary of £10 a year.[40]

These examples show the way that the repair of the churches was divided between various bodies, some of whom had no connection at all with the parish other than to appoint a curate at the lowest possible wage. The churches were reorganised and changed over the years according to the demands and resources of the parish, but at any one time, some portion of the building was likely to be derelict. The practice of church attendance amidst partly ruined buildings was widespread. Over the years, the congregation frequently withdrew into the chancel, which, as the smaller space, was more easily maintained.

The earliest comprehensive visual picture we have of the Irish countryside is provided in Grose's *Antiquities of Ireland*, published in 1791. The subject matter was the churches, castles and ancient monuments of the countryside. The work was in two volumes, and fully illustrated with desolate views of the ruinous state of rural and urban buildings. In the first volume, a total of fifty-four churches are illustrated as well as other antiquities. Of these fifty-four, twelve churches are shown to be partly used as parish churches, with derelict sections beside roofed sections. Only two of the churches are entirely in repair and forty churches are totally ruined. In the second volume of *Antiquities*, a total of thirty-seven churches are illustrated, fourteen are partly used as parish churches, four are in repair, and twenty-nine are totally ruined. This practice of roofing one portion of the building reduced the church to more manageable proportions, and provided it with a walled yard.

The view of Lanesborough, Co Longford, from Grose's *Antiquities* shows a tall, derelict tower with a roofed church attached (Plate 8). The image of Duleek Abbey, Co Meath, shows a ruined tower and church with a small roofed part attached, probably the chancel (Plate 9). A casual attitude to the layout of the church internally is illustrated by a plan of St Patrick's Cathedral from Grose's *Antiquities*,
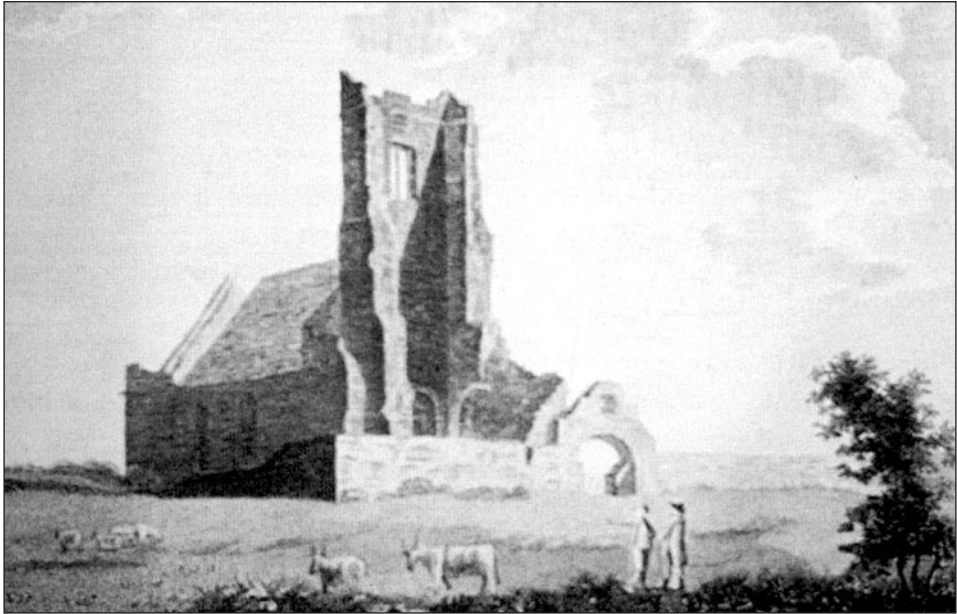
8 – Lanesborough Abbey, Co Longford, c.1791
(*Grose*, Antiquities of Ireland, *i*)

9 – Duleek Abbey, Co Meath, c.1791
(*Grose*, Antiquities of Ireland, *ii*)
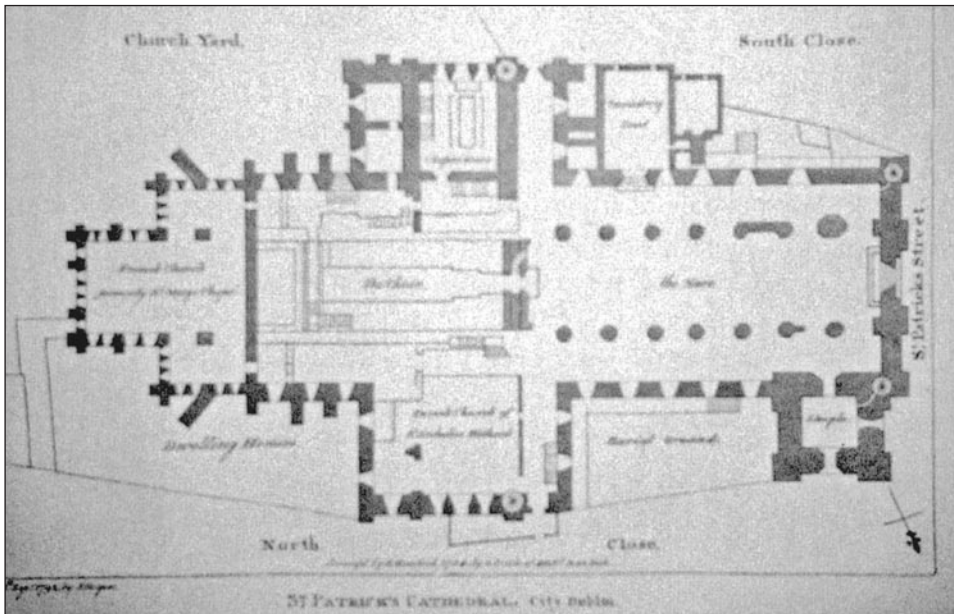
10 – St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, plan c.1791
(Grose, Antiquities of Ireland, *ii)*

which shows how the space inside the church was subdivided without regard for the original arrangement of the church (Plate 10). The cathedral was obviously too large for the requirements of the chapter. A wall was erected across the centre of the chancel to divide it into two sections. The eastern end of the chancel was used as a 'French church' by the Huguenot community, with church services conducted in French. One of the transepts was used as the parish church of St Nicholas Without, and the other transept was divided into a number of smaller rooms, including the chapter house. Only the nave and choir were used by the cathedral chapter.

RECONSTRUCTION: THE BOARD OF FIRST FRUITS

The origin of the First Fruit dates back to before the Reformation. The First Fruit, also known as the 'annates', represented the first year's revenue of a benefice, dignity or bishopric. Before the Reformation, this tax was remitted to Rome, but after 1534, the payment was transferred to the English Crown. Because of the difficulties faced by the Irish Church due to lack of proper churches and glebes, the clergy resisted the payment of the First Fruits. In 1711 they successfully negotiated the setting up of the Board of First Fruits, composed chiefly of members of the Hierarchy

who had the use of the First Fruits for buying up impropriations, the building and repairing of parish churches, and to aid in the purchase of glebes and glebe houses.[41] An examination of the activities of the Board of First Fruits shows that they were hindered by the smallness of their resources, and on occasion, the Board sought voluntary contributions. By 1780, the board had purchased glebe lands for sixteen benefices at a cost of £3,543, had assisted the building of forty-five glebe houses at a cost of £4,080, and had bought impropriate tithes for fourteen incumbents at a cost of £5,855 – a useful but not expensive philanthropy.[42]

The decline of the Church of Ireland in the late eighteenth century is indicated not only by the number of parishes required to provide a single benefice or living for a clergyman, but also by the number of benefices without a church. The diocese of Ossory contained 136 parishes united into fifty-six benefices which had a total of thirty-six churches. Ferns and Leighlin, which had been united into one diocese, contained 232 parishes united into seventy-nine benefices with a total of seventy-one churches.[43] The 1777-78 session of the Irish parliament brought about a change, when a grant was made to the Board of First Fruits. Thereafter this grant was annually awarded. The parliamentary grants were considerably larger than the actual income from the annates, but the name continued to be used despite the fact that the Board was, in reality, an agency for the distribution of government funds.

From 1791 to 1803, the Board of First Fruits granted the sum of £500 – the standard amount – for the building of churches in eighty-eight cases, representing an expenditure of £44,000.[44] To keep the demand for churches in line with the resources, the grant of £500 could only be made if the benefice was without a church for at least twenty years. Following the Act of Union, the parliamentary grants continued at £5,000 per annum until 1808 (Fig. A). In this year the church received £46,000 as compensation for the loss of the ecclesiastical boroughs of Clogher, St Canice and Old Leighlin. The parliamentary grant was also increased to £10,000 per annum until 1810, when it was increased to £60,000 per annum.

The Board of First Fruits had no restriction on the utilisation of the funds except that it was to be used to encourage church-building and glebe-construction.[45] The Board was now able to be much more generous in its grants, and the requirement that a church had to be derelict for twenty years in order to receive a loan was no longer applicable. Outright gifts could now be given instead of loans, or alternatively a gift and a loan together. More than one million pounds passed through the hands of the Board of First Fruits between the Act of Union and the end of the year 1822. Of this, £149,269 was in the form of gifts for churches, and £281,148 was in the form of loans for churches. The remainder of the money was spent on glebe houses and lands and other requirements. A total of 697 churches were built, rebuilt or enlarged by the Board of First Fruits up to 1829.[46]

Year	Parliamentary grant
1777-78	£6,000
1779-80	£1,500
1781-82	£6,000
1783-84	£3,000
1785-1800	£5,000 per year
1801-08	£5,000 per year
1809	£10,000
1810-16	£60,000 per year
1817-21	£30,000 per year
1822	£10,000
1823	£10,000

A –Parliamentary grants to the Board of First Fruits, 1777-1823

*B – Relationship between the grants and loans from the Board of First Fruits
and the destruction of parts of the church*

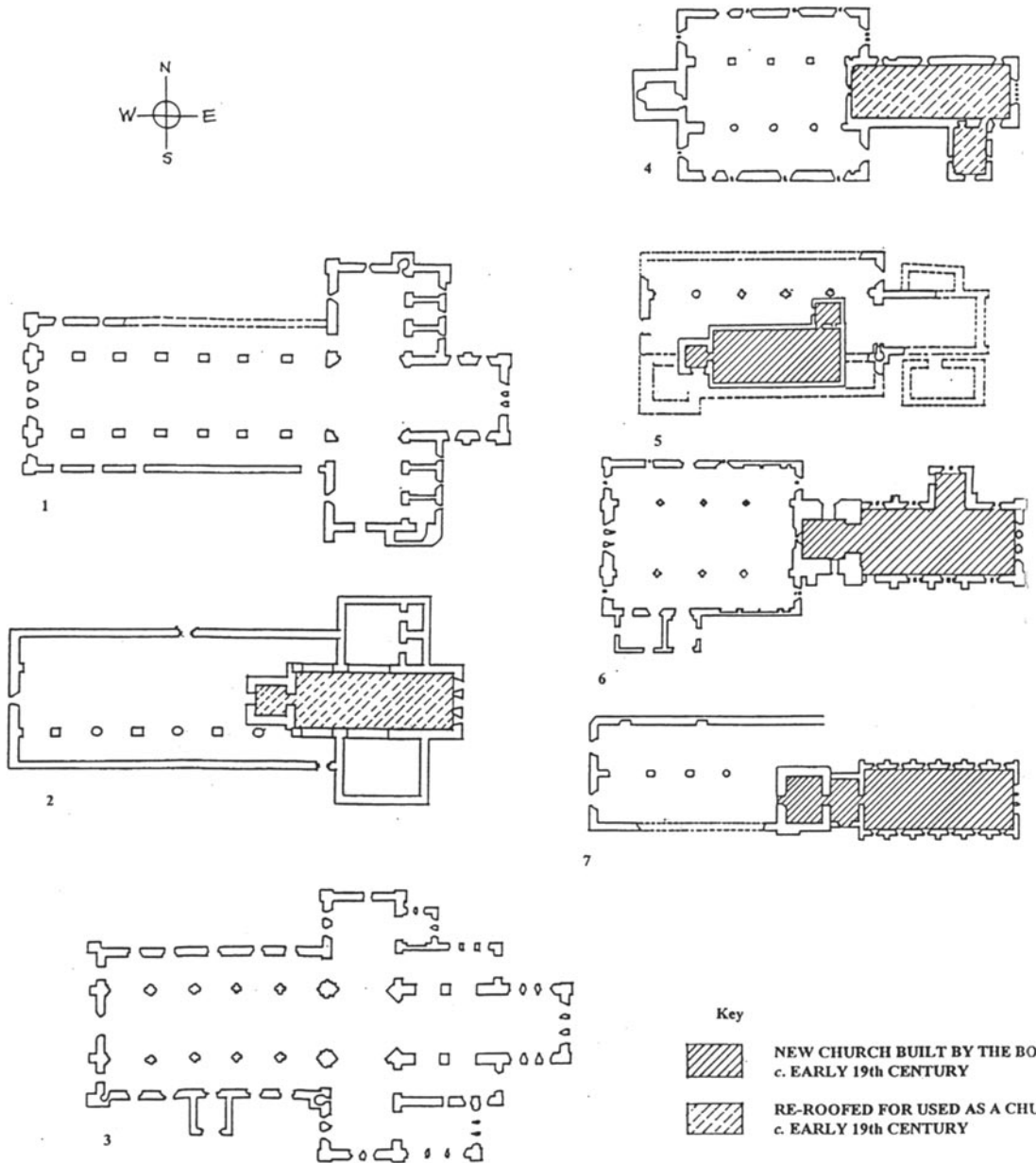| Church	BFF grant or loan (total cost of project)	Part of church demolished
St John's, Kilkenny	£925 (£1,246)	Lady chapel, rebuilt in 1813
St Mary's New Ross	£2,676 (£5,538)	nave and aisles in 1813
St Mary's Thomastown	£1,168 (£1,168)	nave and chancel in 1817
Inistioge Priory	£1,106 (£1,384)	chancel in 1825
St Selskar's, Wexford	£1,384 (£1,384)	chancel in 1826
St Mary's, Gowran	£531 (£531)	chancel in 1827
St Laserian's, Old Leighlin	----------	south transept
Duiske Abbey, Baltinglass	----------	crossing tower and one aisle
St Mary's, Kilkenny	----------	nave aisles and part of chancel
St Mary's, Callan	----------	no major demolition

The activities of the Board of First Fruits resulted in widespread destruction of medieval buildings. Of the twelve churches examined, ten were eligible for grants from the Board of First Fruits. Duiske and the Black Abbey were in private ownership. Six of the churches received funds from the Board. The table shows the relationship between the amount of the loan or grant and the destruction of the medieval fabric (Fig. B). The four churches that did not receive a grant or a loan also suffered losses, but the scale and type of demolition was less.

The most common type of demolition was the destruction of the chancel, with a new church built on the footprint of the demolished part. A drawing of the plans of the case-study churches shows the new buildings built in the nineteenth century within the earlier structures (Plate 12). Baltinglass was a wealthy parish, and did not receive a grant from the Board of First Fruits. The crossing tower had survived until 1793 when Grose published an illustration of it in his *Antiquities*. In 1815 a new tower was built at the west end of the church, which occupied the chancel and part of the nave (Plate 1). St Mary's in Callan was completely derelict by 1813. In 1837 the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who were the successors of the Board of First Fruits, granted £393 for re-roofing the chancel (Plate 11). The chancel of the medieval church of St Mary's in Thomastown was in use as a church in 1791, while the remainder of the building was derelict. In 1817 a new church was built on the site of the nave and south aisle (Plate 14). St Mary's in Gowran had a new church built on the site of the chancel in 1827. William Robertson was the

11 – St Mary's parish church, Callan, Co Kilkenny:
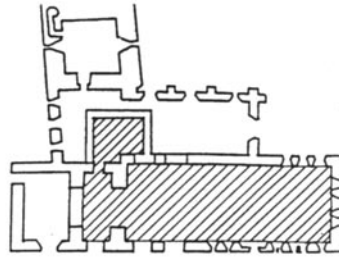*view from the south-west showing the roofless south aisle with the re-roofed chancel behind*

12 – Plans of the case-study churches showing
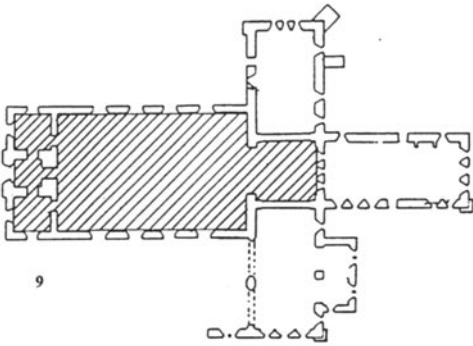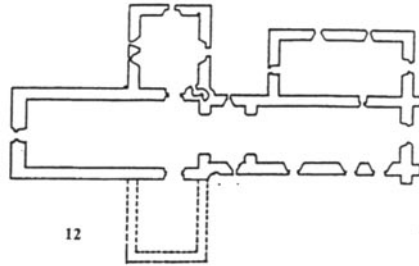*early nineteenth-century alterations*
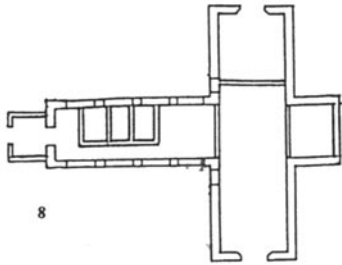
Key

NEW CHURCH BUILT BY THE BO
c. EARLY 19th CENTURY

RE-ROOFED FOR USED AS A CHU
c. EARLY 19th CENTURY

ARD OF FIRST FRUITS

URCH
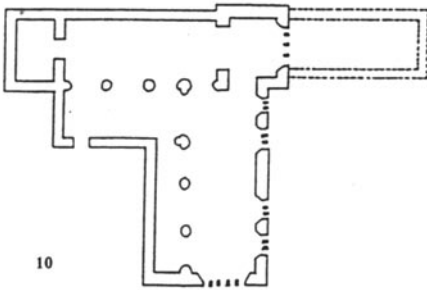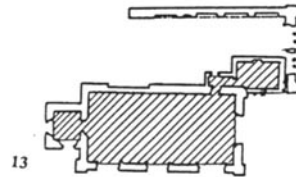
1. CISTERCIAN ABBEY DUISKE/GRAIGNAMANAGH
2. CISTERCIAN ABBEY BALTINGLASS
3. ST. CANICE'S CATHEDRAL KILKENNY
4. ST. MARY'S CALLAN
5. ST. MARY'S THOMASTOWN
6. ST. MARY'S GOWRAN
7. AUGUSTINIAN PRIORY OF ST. SELSKAR'S WEXFORD
8. ST. MARY'S KILKENNY
9. ST. MARY'S NEW ROSS
10. DOMINICAN ABBEY/BLACK ABBEY KILKENNY
11. AUGUSTINIAN PRIORY OF INISTIOGUE
12. ST. LASERIAN'S CATHEDRAL OLD LEIGHLIN
13. AUGUSTINIAN PRIORY OF ST. JOHN'S KILKENNY

architect for the new church, and his plan shows the new church, complete with box pews and central pulpit, on the left. The tower, with its massive walls, is in the centre, and the early church is on the right (Plate 13). St Selskar's in Wexford had been completely derelict in 1791, but in 1818 a new church was built beside the demolished chancel (Plate 15). The stone from the demolished chancel was reused in the lower sections of the new walls. The new church was the work of John Semple, the architect for the Board of First Fruits in south Leinster. In New Ross, a new church was built in 1813 on the site of the nave and aisles (Plate 16). The demolished church probably provided stone both to block the transept and aisle arches, and to build the new church. At Inistioge, the new church was built on the footprint of the demolished chancel, with the vestry inserted into the north transept (Plate17). The chancel and Lady chapel of St John's priory in Kilkenny had survived until 1815 (Plate 18). The Lady chapel was taken down and rebuilt, and the vestry and coal store of the new church were built in the chancel of the original church (Plate 19).

The principal years of the reconstruction of the churches, with the assistance of the Board of First Fruits, were from 1777 until 1834. Although the activities of the Board of First Fruits span the early years of the nineteenth century, the spirit of improvement and progress is firmly rooted in the eighteenth century. The churches that were built in almost every town and village in Ireland are remarkable in their uniformity. The plain rectangular box was ideally suited to the needs of a miniature prayer book church; a square tower was attached, topped with vaguely medieval 'romantic' pinnacles. Not all the churches conformed to the standard plan. In

13 – Plan of St Mary's church in Gowran, drawn by William Robertson c.1827.
The new church, with box pews and central pulpit, is on the left.
(courtesy of Dúchas, the Heritage Service)
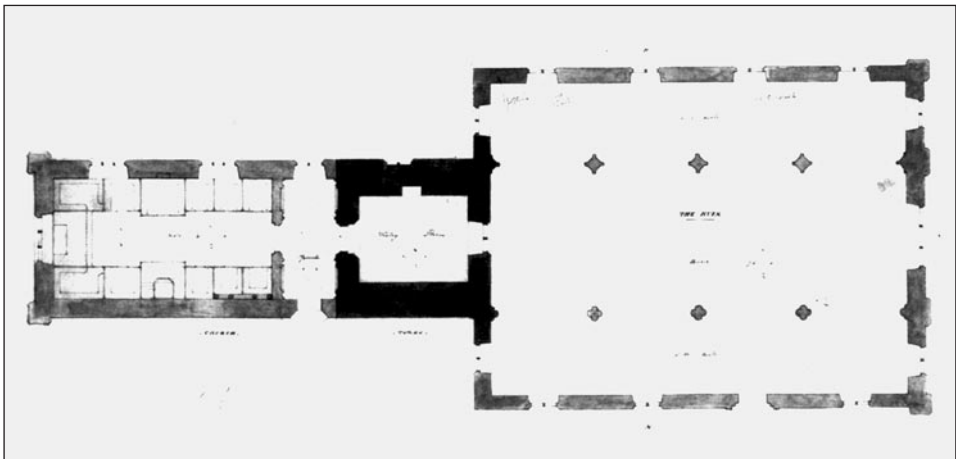
14 – St Mary's, Thomastown: view from the north showing the north aisle arcade with the new church and vestry in the nave

15 – St Selskar's, Wexford, showing the new church (attributed by the author to John Semple), built in 1826. The paler stone from the demolished chancel is reused in the walls.

16 – St Mary's, New Ross:
view from the south transept
showing the blocked arches of the
transept arch and the south aisle,
with the later church on the left

17 – Inistioge Priory:
view from the south showing the
roof scar of the south transept, and
to the right, the new church built
on the site of the chancel

18 – William Robertson's illustration of the interior of the chancel of St John's Priory in Kilkenny (c.1813) showing the east window (The Antiquities and Scenery of the County Kilkenny, *reproduced courtesy of Boethius Press)*
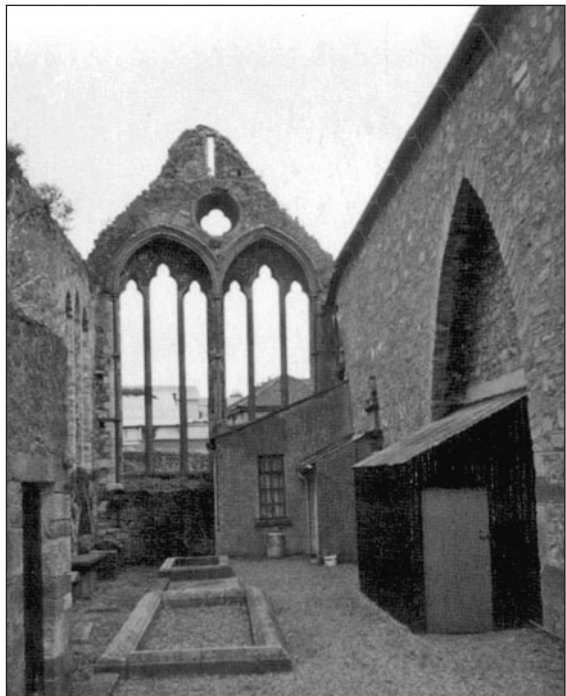
19 – The same view today showing the coal store and vestry, built in 1815. The rebuilt Lady chapel, still in use for worship by the Church of Ireland, is on the right.

Ireland, some of the churches built by the Board of First Fruits represent the beginning of the later Gothic Revival proper. The work of John Semple, who built fourteen churches for the Board (fifteen, if St Selskar's is included) is known for his remarkable interpretation of Gothic style. However, the serious study and appreciation of the medieval churches belongs to the second half of the nineteenth century.

THE GOTHIC REVIVAL

Within the Anglican church, the Gothic Revival began with a desire to turn away from politics and society and to regain a lost spirituality and simple faith. This new emphasis on sacraments, ancient music and ritual, rather than preaching, was part of a general interest in the 'romantic'. Along with an interest in the rituals of the earlier church came a new appreciation of the architecture of the earlier buildings and a vogue for all things 'medieval'. The chief prophet of the movement was the architect A.W.N. Pugin, an enthusiastic convert to Catholicism in 1835, who died in 1852. He saw the practice of architecture as akin to religious devotion, and abhorred the practice of architecture as a business. Classicism was considered to be pagan and debased and unsuitable for church architecture. Pugin advocated that the principles of conviction, sincerity and propriety were the cornerstones for a truly Gothic architecture. Honesty of construction and use of materials were important, with structural members visible within and without. Gothic represented more than just a style of architecture, but also a spiritual and pure approach to life.

Many pre-Reformation practices were revived over the period, such as weekly Holy Communion, bowing and genuflecting towards the altar, candles and crucifixes on the altar, elaborate vestments for the clergyman, and the practice of kneeling during parts of the service. These practices would have been regarded as 'Popish' and idolatrous at the time of the Reformation. The churches were also subjected to 'restoration' to bring the interiors in line with the new emphasis on the altar rather than the pulpit. The churches used for worship by the Church of Ireland in the present study were all reordered internally in the years following 1870.

The archive of the Representative Church Body (RCB) retains a set of drawings of the interiors of the churches that show the adaptation of the interior layouts to conform with Gothic Revival policy. In an attempt to introduce the medieval divisions of nave and chancel, the altar was elevated by the introduction of a series of steps. Altar rails were introduced to divide the 'nave' from the 'chancel'. The pulpit was moved to the side to a less prominent location, and the box pews were replaced by benches facing the altar. There is a drawing of St Mary's in Gowran which shows the original layout of the Board of First Fruits church with the box pews. The

church was reorganised internally in 1872 by the English architect Thomas Henry Watt. At the same time, Gowran had its external walls altered to conform to the Gothic ideal. Buttresses, with a medieval appearance to match those in the thirteenth century nave, were attached to the external walls but not bonded to the walls behind. Little regard was paid to the Gothic ideal of truth or honesty in construction.

Roman Catholicism made considerable progress during the second half of the eighteenth century, with fervent support from the majority of the population. Catholic Emancipation was granted in 1829, and throughout the century, the Roman Catholic population gradually gained in wealth and power. The Church of Ireland continued to occupy the ancient church sites amidst the fear that if they went elsewhere, the Catholics would return to the location. The attraction of the old sites to the Catholics, regardless of whether or not the church survived, is demonstrated at Kilcormac, Co Meath. The church was part of a Carmelite abbey that had been declared 'parochial' by the jurors at the Dissolution. It had fallen into disrepair during the seventeenth century, and the Protestant population abandoned the church and attended the nearby parish church at Birr. The roofless ruin was later totally demolished. In 1838, the Catholics built a new Roman Catholic church on the site of the now vanished Carmelite abbey.[47] A very fine sixteenth-century pieta was discovered during the building works, and proudly displayed in the new church.

The significance of the monastic sites is further demonstrated by the two case-study examples of Duiske and the Black Abbey in Kilkenny. At the Dissolution, Duiske was granted to James, Earl of Ormond, and was used subsequently used as a residence. The Black Abbey was granted to the Corporation of Kilkenny, and converted for use as a courthouse. By the end of the eighteenth century, both churches were totally derelict. The strong Roman Catholic community in Kilkenny managed to regain both churches during the nineteenth century, and gradually restore them for use.

The reform of the Church of Ireland during the nineteenth century was the result of many years of agitation by the Catholic community. The State Church and its ecclesiastical organisation was maintained by the entire population through the tithes. The census of 1861 showed that out of a total population of 5,798,564, Roman Catholics numbered 4,505,265, while there were 693,357 members of the Established Church.[48] Earlier in the century, the Irish Church Temporalities Act of 1833 had provided for the suppression of ten sees of the Established Church. The act set out to rationalise the position of the Church of Ireland: the number of dioceses and cathedrals was reduced to eight, and all other churches had the status of parish church. The surplus revenue was administered by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for the purposes of the Established Church only. This provision was unpopular with the Catholics, who wanted a more equitable situation. The pressure

for reform became more persistent, and the census information underlined the need for a change that carried the authority of legislation.

In the second part of this article, to be published in the next volume of *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, the complexities and difficulties of the evolution of legislation relating to ecclesiastical buildings will be examined, as well as the individual case-study churches.

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ENDNOTES

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