



A Standard Realised: the Ecclesiastical Commission churches of James Pain

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THE ARCHITECT JAMES PAIN (c.1779-1877), ASSISTED BY HIS BROTHER GEORGE Richard Pain (c.1793-1838), had been the Board of First Fruits' official architect for the ecclesiastical province of Cashel, responsible for the construction of Church of Ireland churches in Munster from 1823 until the establishment of the Ecclesiastical Commission in 1834. Though he was retained as one of the Ecclesiastical Commission's official architects until 1843, when Joseph Welland became the Commission's sole official architect, Pain appears to have been relatively inactive in official church construction immediately after the termination of the Board of First Fruits in 1834. Indeed, though he produced some designs of proposed churches, and may have had an input into churches built by his brother George Richard, it is difficult to conclusively assign any Ecclesiastical Commission church constructed up to 1840 to James Pain alone.¹ However, between 1840 and 1842, towards the end of his time as official architect, Pain designed a number of churches that were built for the Ecclesiastical Commission. The form and layout of these churches, when compared with the earlier churches that had been built for the Board of First Fruits, draw attention to a change of direction in the treatment of Anglican worship space in Ireland at the beginning of the 1840s.

CHURCH CONSTRUCTION IN EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY IRELAND

THE BOARD OF FIRST FRUITS – A BODY ESTABLISHED BY QUEEN ANNE IN 1711 IN ORDER to build and improve churches and glebe houses in Ireland – had its origin in the medieval annates. The annates was the first year's revenue of a benefice, dignity or bishopric, and was remitted to Rome. In Britain, in the wake of the Reformation,

*1 – Church of Ireland church, Clonbeg, county Tipperary – west gable
(all photos by the author, 2009-2010)*

the annates went to the Crown, the monarch now being the head of the Established Church. From 1711, the collection and spending of the annates came under the control of the Board of First Fruits. The Board lacked resources and, in 1777, the Irish parliament took over the responsibility of funding provision. However, the Irish parliament granted funds only for the repair or construction of churches in parishes that had been without a church for at least twenty years. A grant of £500 each, from 1791 to 1803, was made for the building of eighty-eight churches. The 1800 Act of Union was to have a profound and positive effect on the activities of the Board of First Fruits; the British government took over the funding of the Board and provided further momentum to church-building activities. Of the approximately £1m spent by the Board from 1801 to 1832 – principally on the construction and repair of churches and glebe houses and the purchase of glebe lands – £149,269 was given in gift and £281,148 was given in non-interest loans for the construction of churches alone. By 1830, 697 churches had been built, repaired or enlarged throughout Ireland by the Board of First Fruits.²

In 1834, following the findings of a parliamentary commission on the state of the Established Church and the passing of the Irish Church Temporalities Act, the administration of the Church of Ireland was restructured. This reorganisation included the reduction of the number of ecclesiastical provinces from four to two, together with the suppression of ten sees. The Act also facilitated the termination of the Board of First Fruits and the establishment of the Ecclesiastical Commission for Ireland. The Ecclesiastical Commission replaced the Board of First Fruits in the management of funding for the building and repair of churches and glebe houses. Unlike the Board of First Fruits, the Ecclesiastical Commission could no longer rely on the British Parliament for funding. The work of the Ecclesiastical Commission was to be financed by the revenues of the suppressed sees and a newly introduced yearly tax on all benefices and dignities valued at over £300. By 1861, a total of over £3 million had been made available to the Ecclesiastical Commission for the repair and building of churches and glebe houses.³

BOARD OF FIRST FRUITS CHURCHES

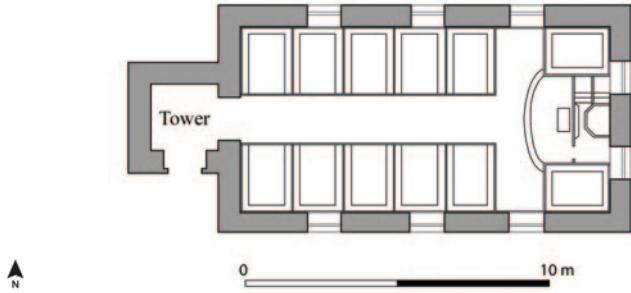
THE FIRST FRUITS CHURCH, AS A RESULT OF A WIDESPREAD AND RAPID CHURCH-building programme up to 1834, has become a readily identifiable landmark, occupying prominent positions in most of the towns and villages of Ireland. This extensive church-building programme of the early nineteenth-century was a physical manifestation of the reformation of the Church of Ireland, which, as was perceived at the time, had been in spiritual and temporal decline in the previous century. The Church of Ireland's Board of First Fruits funded this church-building programme, and 'First Fruits' is a term that has come to define the architectural style and form of these churches.

These churches, best described as restrained gothic in style, have been almost exclusively considered in the context of their introductory role in the development of

2 – Church of Ireland parish church, Timoleague, county Cork – plan

(courtesy RCB Library, Dublin; MS 138, vol. 3, no. 73/1)

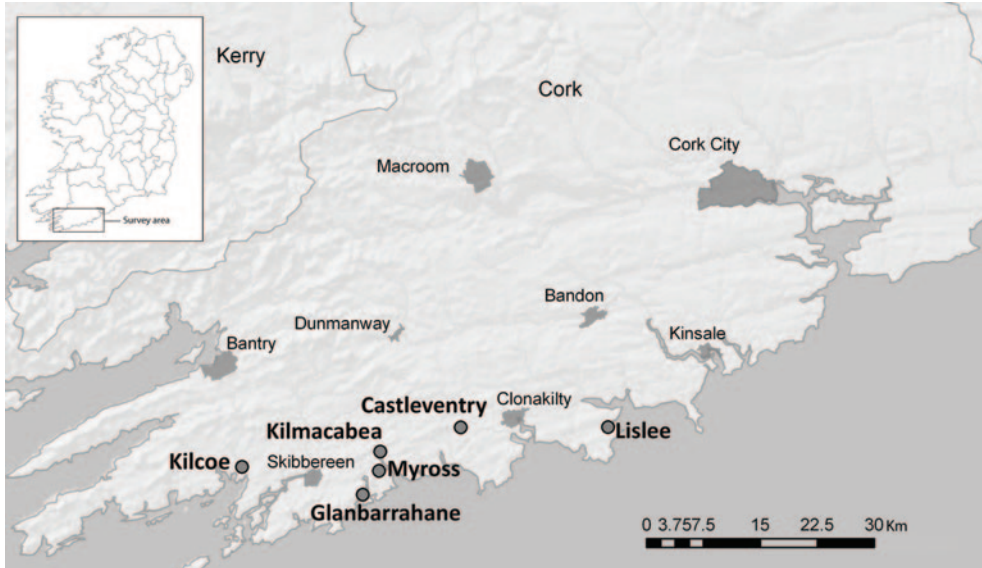
(all plans have been redrawn by the author)



mid-nineteenth-century Victorian neo-gothic church design. They are almost invariably portrayed as simple and standard in form, comprising a rectangular preaching box or auditory hall with attached western tower, a chancel, vestry or transept being regarded as desirable if not strictly necessary.⁴ Timoleague parish church in county Cork, built in 1811, is a good example of the simple First Fruits ‘hall and tower’ form (Plate 2). The interior was arranged for emphasis on the auditory relationship between the congregation and the combined pulpit/reading desk at the east end. The altar was in a railed area in front of the pulpit/reading desk. The use of box pews throughout, with congregants facing into the empty central space of each pew, would have restricted views to the altar. This layout ensured that, except for during communion when the altar would have been a focal point, the priority during the regular service was on upholding the primacy of the sermon and the reading. Selected individual variations on this standard form have been presented as examples of the architectural dexterity of individual architects, an approach that has ensured that the stimulus for and effect of any complexity in form, particularly in relation to the prevailing Anglican attitudes to worship space in Ireland, has not been considered to date to any satisfactory degree.

However, the drawings, plans and elevations for James Pain’s First Fruits churches, as originally constructed in the ecclesiastical province of Cashel, provide a valuable resource for reassessing the received notion of a standard First Fruits church form.⁵ Pain’s drawings also provide an opportunity to examine the relationship between any variation from the standard form and the internal layout of the First Fruits church. This article will consider six churches constructed in a limited geographical area in south-west county Cork (Plate 3) in order to highlight the experimental nature of church design in the closing years of the Board of First Fruits’ building programme.

The drawings for the parish churches of Myross (Plates 4, 10), Glanbarrahane (Plate 5), Lislee (Plate 6), Kilmacabea (Plate 7), Castleventry (Plate 8) and Kilcoe (Plates 9, 11) indicate that the simple hall and tower First Fruits church was by no means a standard form, and that this inconsistency, evident in the late 1820s, was mirrored in the layout of church interiors. Furthermore, the drawings highlight how the increasing importance of the altar as a liturgical centre affected the arrangement of worship space, and also how the additional presence of a transept and/or chancel and/or vestry hindered the development of a standard interior layout.



*3 – Locations of surveyed First Fruits churches in south-west Cork
(drawn by the author)*

This aspect of First Fruits church design is noticeable in the form and layout of the churches of Myross and Glanbarrahane. In these churches, the position of the combined pulpit/reading desk was dictated to a large degree by the location of the transept, the location of the altar being fixed by the traditional west-to-east liturgical axis at one step above floor level in the east-end chancel. The layout of Myross would appear to be something of a compromise (Plate 4), and the impression is of two distinct interior spaces in the one building, each with a different point of focus – firstly, the benched seating at the west end facing the altar in the chancel, and the pulpit/reading desk in the north transept as an auditory focal point for the box pews in the south transept. This arrangement represents a compromise between a focus on both liturgical centres while preserving a more direct association between the transept and pulpit/reading desk. The vestry was located in the north transept, a position, it seems, influenced by the need to create the shortest route possible between the vestry and the pulpit/reading desk. A compromise is also evident at Glanbarrahane, where the link between the pulpit/reading desk at the south side of the nave and private pew in the north transept created a north-south aisle across the centre of the nave (Plate 5). The rest of the interior was arranged with benched seating facing this central north-south aisle, suggesting that the pulpit/reading desk was given prominence. On the other hand, this layout ensured that the benches to the west of the north-south aisle faced the east end, creating a visible focus on the altar. The vestry was located in the north transept and the route to the pulpit/reading desk was across the north-south aisle.

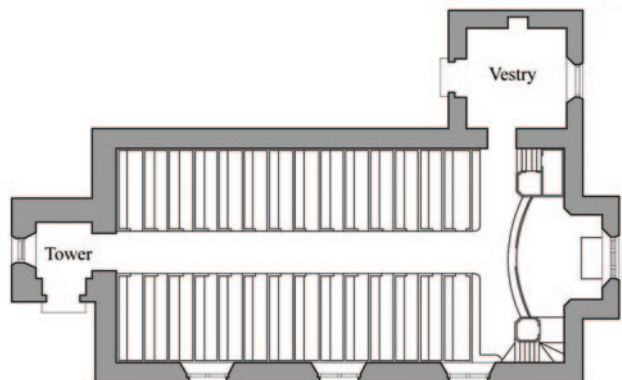
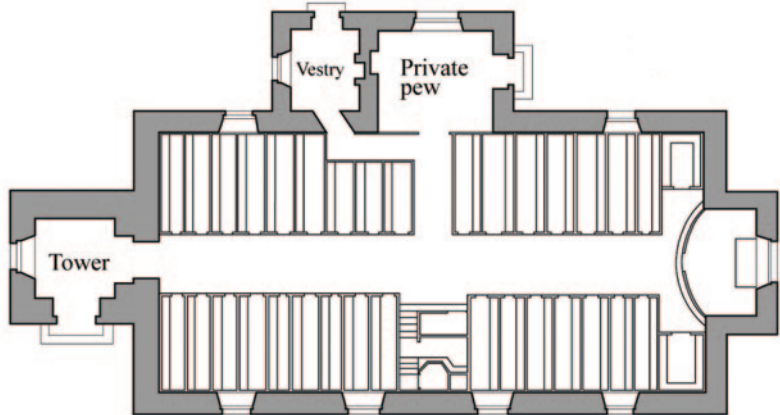
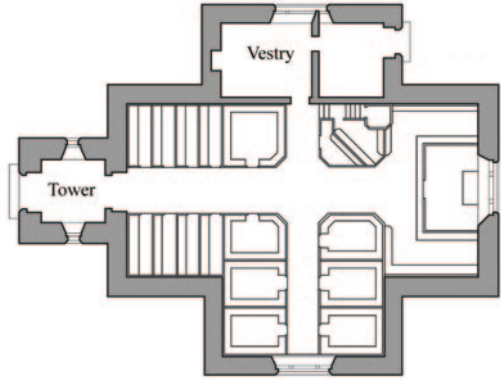
Even at churches where transepts were lacking, there appears to have been a similarly high degree of variety in the treatment of interior space. Though the location of the

4 – Plan of Church of Ireland parish church, Myross, county Cork (MS 138, vol. 3, nos 57/1 and 57/3)

5 – Plan of Church of Ireland parish church, Glanbarrahane, county Cork (MS 138, vol. 3, no. 15/1)

6 – Plan of Church of Ireland parish church, Lislee, county Cork (MS 138, vol. 3, no. 50/1)

(all illus courtesy RCB Library, Dublin)



eastern altar was fixed, there was a distinct divergence in the position of the pulpit/reading desk throughout. Of the four churches where a transept was not present, the altar was the point of focus for the whole congregation in only one, Lislee (Plate 6). This focus was reflected in the eastern-facing seating throughout, and the separation of pulpit and reading desk to either side of the entrance to the chancel. The altar was raised one step above floor level and visible from all areas of the church, forming the centrepiece of the three liturgical centres. The vestry was located at the east end of the north side of the nave with direct access to all three liturgical centres.

In a similar approach to that at Lislee, the separation of the pulpit to the south side and the reading desk/clerk's desk to the north side of the altar at the east end was also preferred at Kilmacabea (Plate 7). The absence of a chancel brought the altar into the nave, and all three liturgical centres were located in a single worship space against the east wall of the nave. The seating was arranged on both sides of a west-east central aisle, and was entirely east-facing on the western side of the nave. The seating towards the east end alternated between east- and west-facing benches in the manner of rectangular pews, ensuring that a number of the congregation would have faced west. The east end of the nave appears to have been reserved for liturgical activities, with all three liturgical centres separated from the rest of the church by an enclosing rail. The altar space was further demarcated by a smaller railed area under the eastern window. The vestry was attached to the east end of the south side of the nave, with direct access to the three liturgical centres.

The pulpit/reading desk remained the prominent liturgical centre in yet another church without a transept, at Castleventry (Plates 8, 12). All seating was in box pews, restricting views to the interior of both spaces. Views of the altar were also obstructed by the combined pulpit/reading desk, located at the east end of the nave immediately west of the chancel. The church was arranged almost as a single unit, with the entire focal emphasis on preaching in the nave. The chancel, though attached, appears to have been a somewhat detached space set behind the prominent pulpit/reading desk. The vestry was located on the north side of the chancel, creating the shortest route possible to the pulpit/reading desk.

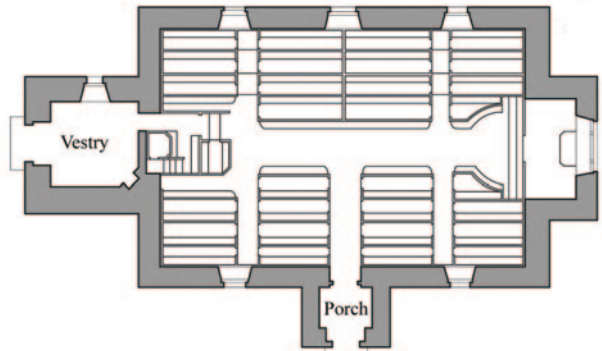
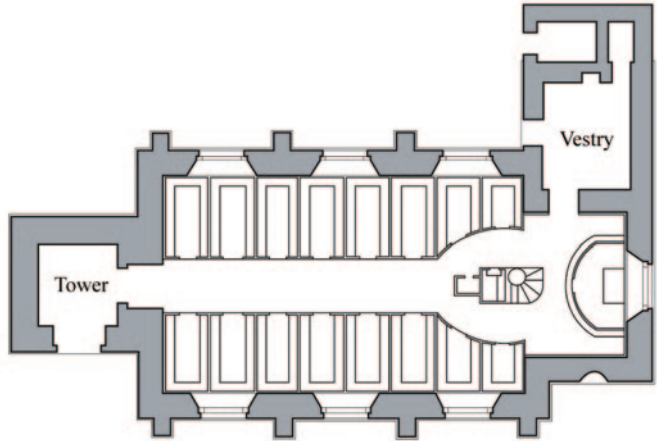
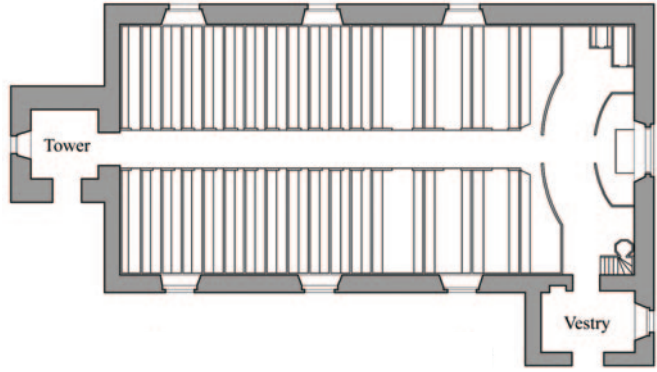
The pulpit/reading desk was located opposite the chancel at the west end at Kilcoe (Plate 9), and with benches facing into the central east-west aisle of the church, the visible relationship between the congregation and the altar was limited. Indeed, it might be suggested that the chancel at this church, as at Castleventry, was difficult to integrate into the whole. The response was to maintain the emphasis on preaching/reading in the nave, with the altar – a somewhat isolated feature in the chancel – relegated to a position of relatively lesser significance. The location of the vestry was at the west end, creating a direct link with the pulpit/reading desk. This arrangement facilitated the creation of an entrance to the church at the centre of the south side of the nave, in the form of a porch, which in turn produced a short aisle dividing the rows of seats on the south side of the nave.

It is apparent from this brief survey that not all First Fruits churches were simple

7 – Plan of Church of Ireland parish church, Kilmacabea, county Cork (MS 138, vol. 3, nos 36/2 and 16/1)

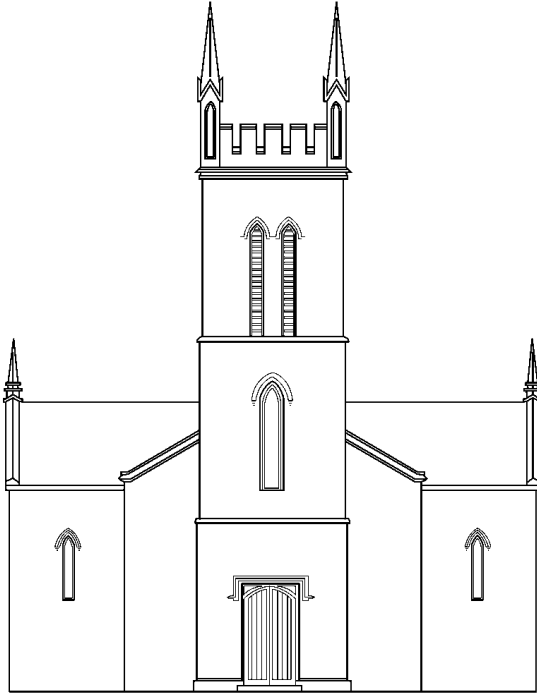
8 – Plan of Church of Ireland parish church, Castleventry, county Cork (MS 138, vol. 3, nos 36/2 and 16/1)

9 – Plan of Church of Ireland parish church, Kilcoe, county Cork (MS 138, vol. 3, no. 45/1)



10 – Church of Ireland parish church, Myross, west elevation

(MS 138, vol. 3, nos 57/1 and 57/3)

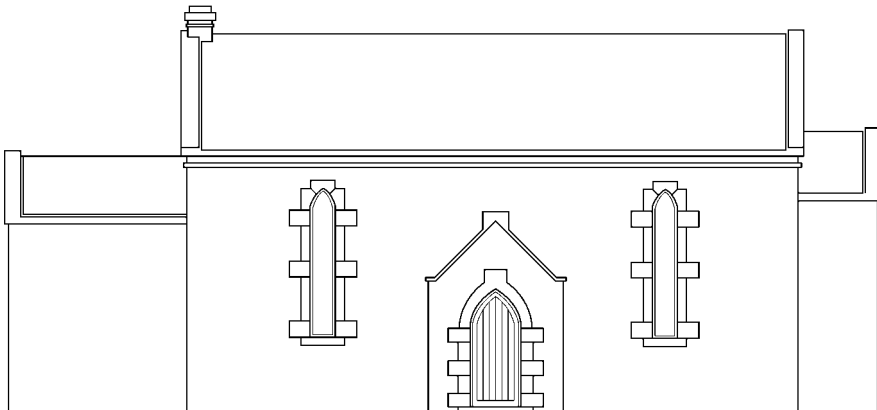


11 – Church of Ireland parish church, Kilcoe, south elevation

(MS 138, vol. 3, no. 45/3)

(all illus courtesy RCB Library, Dublin)

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*12 – Church of Ireland church, Castleventry, county Cork
– view from the south-east*

buildings, and that complex forms, with attached elements, were in fact more common than the ‘standard’ rectangular preaching box with attached tower. This complexity in form, evident in the churches of the late 1820s, was mirrored in the arrangement of church interiors. A high degree of variety in the internal arrangements of these churches was to some degree the result of the apparent difficulty of accommodating the altar as a visible liturgical centre of increasing importance – with the associated introduction of east-facing benched seating – into a church where the emphasis had traditionally been on the pulpit/reading desk with box pews throughout. This dilemma was further compounded at all the churches discussed above, except Kilmacabea, by the necessity to incorporate the chancel as a separate place to contain the altar within a church-type where all liturgical activity had traditionally been held in the nave. The presence of a transept, as at Myross and Glanbarrahane, created further problems regarding the need to increase the emphasis on the altar in the chancel while maintaining the auditory relationship between the pulpit/reading desk and the congregation in the transept. It is clear that these considerations must have hindered the design of a standard interior layout.

The location of the vestry was also a concern in a church with no consistent interior layout. Apart from Glanbarrahane, the vestry is in a location convenient for access to one of the liturgical centres. The establishment of a close spatial relationship between

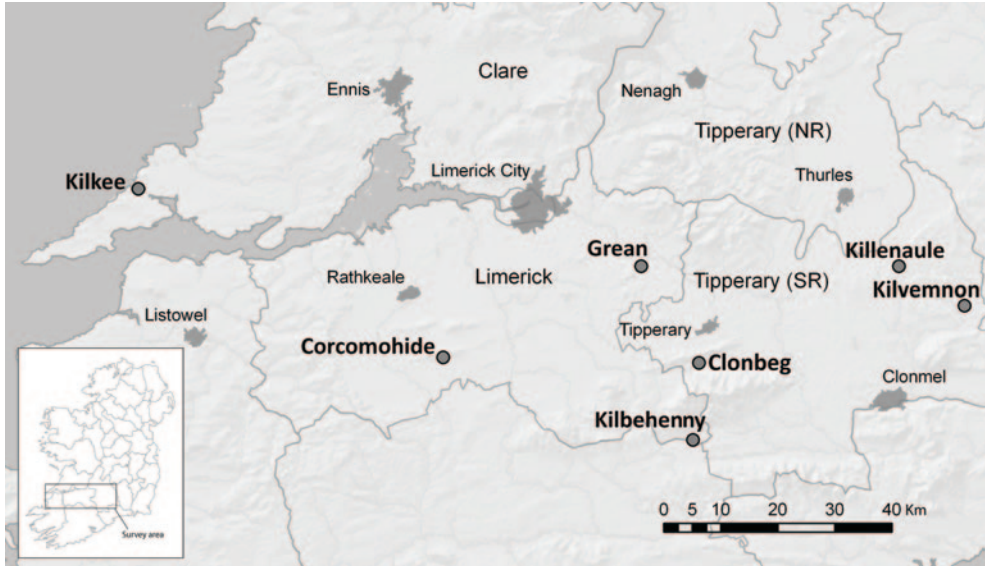
the vestry and the pulpit was preferred at Castleventry, Myross, Kilmacabea and Kilcoe, with the vestry adjacent to the location of the reading desk at Lislee. The variety of locations for vestries, evident in these particular churches, appears to have been the result of the insistence of maintaining as short a route as possible between the vestry and one of the interior liturgical centres. This facet of First Fruits church design is most striking at Kilcoe, where the vestry took the place of the almost ubiquitous tower at the west end of the church and the consequent attachment of the porch to the south side of the nave. It is evident that the endeavour to integrate attached elements – such as chancels, transepts, vestries and porches – into a church where a simultaneous change in the relationship between the congregation and liturgical points of reference was in progress, influenced the complexity and diversity in form and internal layout.

Though the drawings of the First Fruits churches designed in the 1820s show a period of improvisation in church design, it could be claimed that the only form and layout that successfully addressed the problem of integrating the increasingly significant altar was that at Lislee. This church was built in 1830, just prior to the termination of the Board of First Fruits in 1834, and so it can be suggested that the design is the end result of a process of experimentation.⁶ When the other First Fruits churches are considered chronologically (by date of construction), it would appear that there was a gradual move from a church with the emphasis on sermon and reading, as at Castleventry (1824),⁷ through the rather unresolved designs for the churches complicated by the presence of a transept at Myross (1825),⁸ and at Glanbarrahane (1827),⁹ to the experiment with the introduction of the three liturgical centres at the east end at Kilmacabea (1828).¹⁰ The difficulty of assimilating the altar seems to have been finally resolved at Lislee, with the seating arranged wholly east-facing for emphasis on the three liturgical centres. However, the form and layout of the church at Kilcoe, built in 1830, the same year as Lislee, would suggest that the apparent solution achieved at Lislee had not yet become the standard when the Board of First Fruits was terminated.¹¹

JAMES PAIN'S ECCLESIASTICAL COMMISSION CHURCHES

BEFORE THE END OF HIS TIME AS OFFICIAL ARCHITECT TO THE BOARD OF FIRST FRUITS, and after a lull in church construction activity during the earlier years of the Ecclesiastical Commission, James Pain designed new churches for a number of parishes in north Munster (Plate 13). The plans and elevations of these churches – Killenaule, Kilvemnon at Mullinahone, and Clonbeg, near Tipperary town, in south county Tipperary, Grean at Pallasgreen, Kilbehenny, and Corcomohide, in county Limerick, and Kilkee in county Clare – all built between 1840 and 1842, seem to have been drawn from the same template.

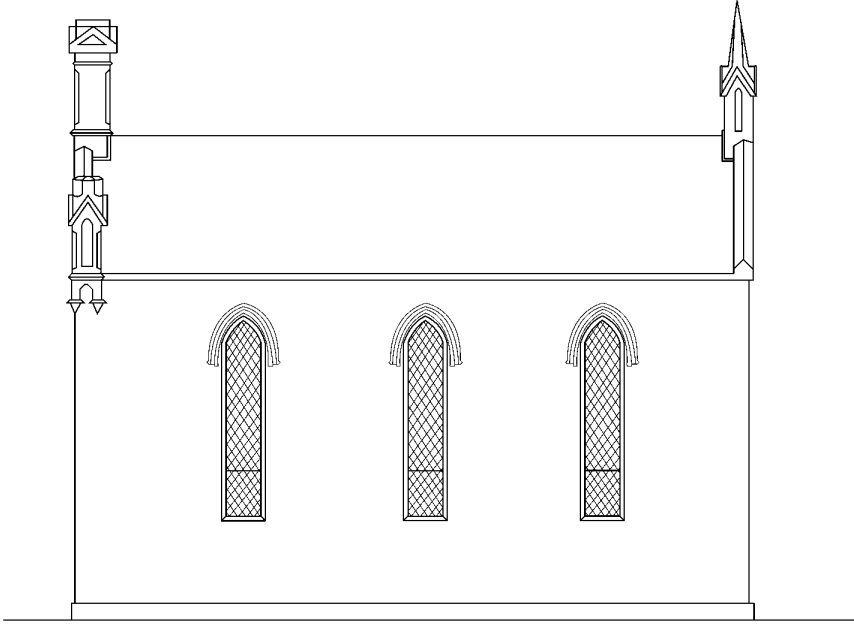
The drawings of one of these churches, the parish church of Grean, in Pallasgreen, county Limerick, show a simple building, rectangular in plan with neo-gothic detailing



13 – Locations of James Pain's Ecclesiastical Commission churches in north Munster
(drawn by the author)

throughout (Plates 14–16).¹² The church had a row of pointed lancets in the north and south walls, and a large pointed window with a grouped triple lancet in the east gable. A bell cote was located at the top of the west gable above the entrance to the church, with shortened lancets to either side. The entrance portal and all windows had decorative hood mouldings. The ends of the west gable and the top of the east gable were topped with pinnacles. In form, the church can best be described as a single, self-contained unit. The west end of the church was reserved for the entrance lobby, which was flanked on one side by a robing room and on the other by a coal store. The rest of the church was reserved for worship, with an emphasis on the east end. The rows of benched seating focussed the attention of the congregation on the east end, with a space for the altar raised one step above floor level and railed. The altar was the centrepiece of the east end, being flanked on the north side by a pulpit and on the south side by a reading desk. The west-to-east central aisle between the rows of benches followed the traditional liturgical orientation. This form and internal layout was reused by Pain with some slight variations at his other Ecclesiastical Commission churches. At Killenaule, the form and layout are almost identical to Grean, but the robing room was situated in the north-east corner, behind the pulpit, the coal store was located in the southeast corner behind the reading desk, and the seating was arranged with no central aisle (Plate 17). However, these variations did not interfere with the west-to-east orientation of the congregation, and the emphasis remained on the east end, with the altar central and slightly further east between the pulpit and reading desk.¹³

The churches at Clonbeg (Plates 1, 20, 21), Corcomohide, Kilkee, Kilvemnon

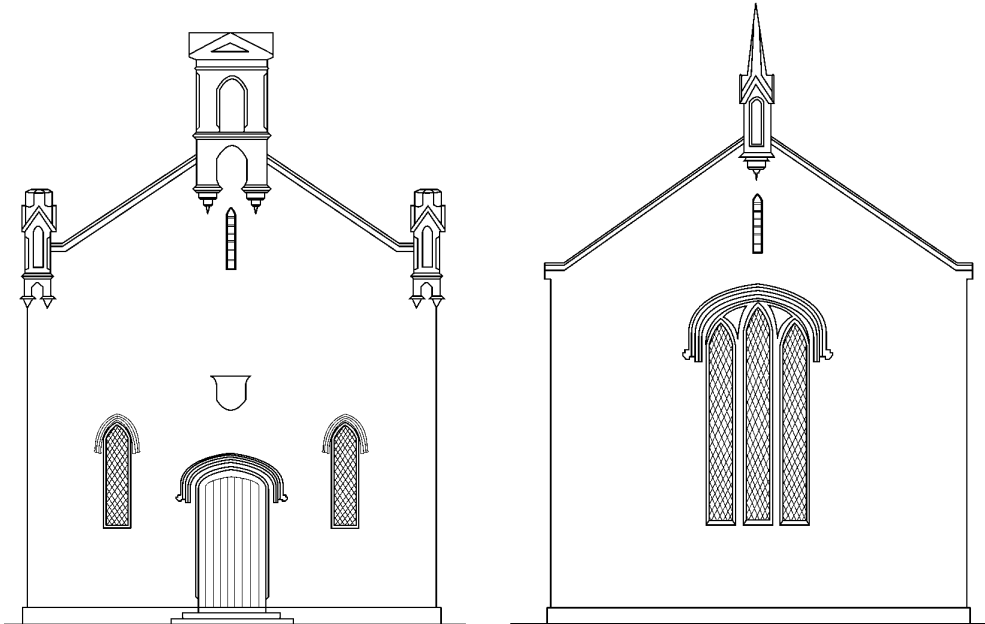


Church of Ireland parish Church, Grean, county Limerick

14 – South elevation / 15 – West and east elevations

(courtesy RCB Library, Portfolio 17, Diocese of Emly; redrawn by the author)

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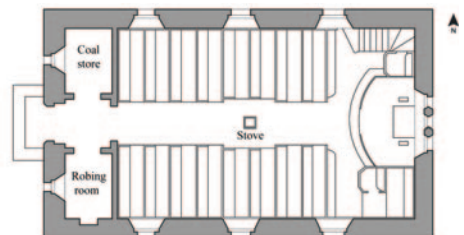
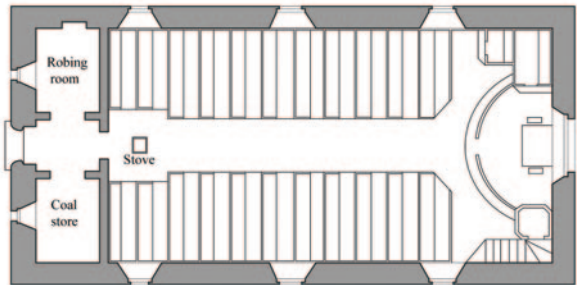
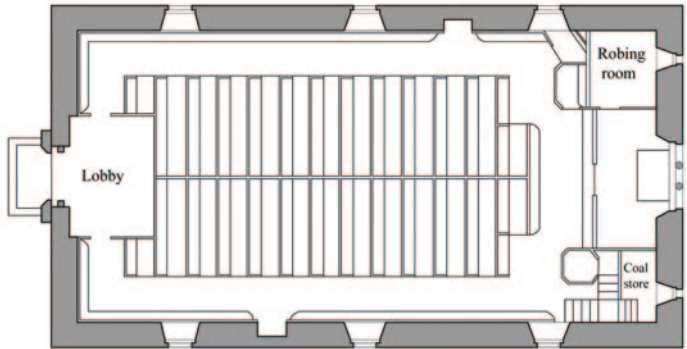
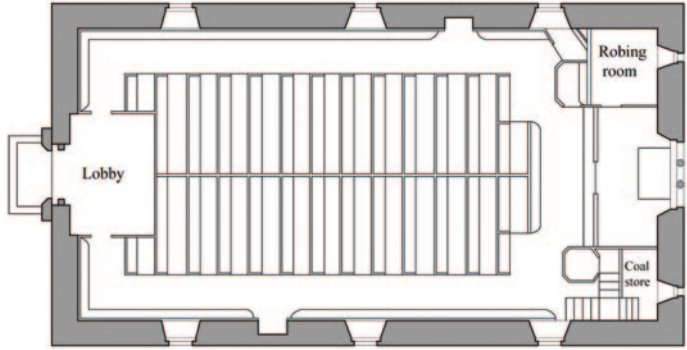
16 – Plan of Church of Ireland parish Church, Grean, county Limerick
(Portfolio 17, Diocese of Emly)

17 – Plan of Church of Ireland parish Church, Killenaule, county Tipperary
(Portfolio 3, Diocese of Cashel)

18 – Plan of Church of Ireland parish Church, Kilvemnon, county Tipperary
(Portfolio 3, Diocese of Cashel)

19 – Plan of Church of Ireland parish Church, Kilbehenny, county Limerick
(Portfolio 17, Diocese of Emly)

(all illus courtesy RCB Library, Dublin)





*Church of Ireland church,
Clonbeg, county Tipperary*

20 – West gable

21 – View from the south-west



(Plate 18) and Kilbehenny (Plate 19) shared a similar form and layout as Grean.¹⁴ The overall form remained unchanged and the only deviation in the layout of worship space is the alternating position of pulpit and reading desk.

It would appear that Pain, despite subtle variations, had established a preferred design for the Ecclesiastical Commission church that was applied consistently thereafter. This design suited the requirements of a church where the emphasis was on the altar as the centrepiece between the pulpit and the reading desk. The consistent eastern-facing benched seating concentrated the attention of the whole congregation on the east end. Though there may have been scope for alternating the positions of the pulpit and reading desk, the fixed location of the altar was pivotal, and now formed the primary focus. Apart from the eastern location at Killenaule, the preferred location for the robing room and coal store, on either side of the entrance lobby, suggests an attempt to include these elements in the overall design without interfering with the preferred arrangement of the eastern-orientated worship space. Rather than include the robing room and coal store as separate but attached elements, they were included in the body of the structure and, apart from at Killenaule, were partitioned off at the extreme west end. This design maintained the uncomplicated single-unit form and ensured that no attached element would impact upon worship space. This design, with overall form dictated by a settled and consistent approach to worship, enabled more consistency in the design of overall form and the arrangement of the interiors of Ecclesiastical Commission churches.

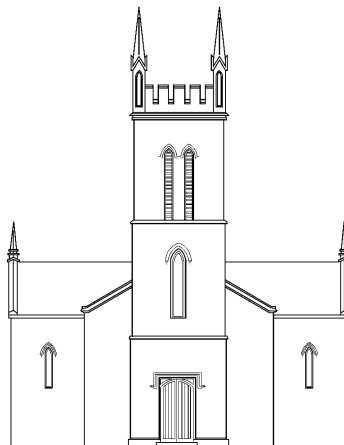
A NEW DIRECTION

THE REGULARITY IN FORM AND INTERNAL LAYOUT OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL COMMISSION churches of the early 1840s signalled a new direction in church design for the Church of Ireland. The consistency of Pain's designs for Ecclesiastical Commission churches is obvious when compared with those designed for the Board of First Fruits; indeed, it is difficult to find any similar degree of uniformity in the plans of the First Fruits churches of the 1820s. If anything, the decade before the termination of the Board of First Fruits can be described as a phase of experimentation with form and internal layout, facilitated by the gradually increasing emphasis on the altar as a liturgical centre. These churches accommodated additional elements such as towers, vestries, chancels, porches and transepts as attachments, and, unlike the single self-contained church of the Ecclesiastical Commission, the Board of First Fruits church was an amalgamation of separate but attached units around a core rectangular worship space, which incorporated three distinct liturgical centres – pulpit, reading desk and altar.

The interiors of First Fruits churches display a similar lack of uniformity in design when compared with Pain's later designs for the Ecclesiastical Commission. The problem of incorporating the altar with benched seating facing the east end, into a church where the emphasis had previously been on sermonising (and reading and where the pres-

ence of a chancel, transept or vestry may have to be considered), would seem to have been a major obstacle to the standardisation of internal layout.

Of particular interest is the layout of the First Fruits church of Lislee. The interior arrangement at Lislee is, but for the chancel, almost identical to the churches of the Ecclesiastical Commission, and though its design was not replicated as standard during the 1820s, this church appears to have informed Pain's church designs of the 1840s. The arrangement of the altar as the centrepiece of three liturgical centres, with full congregational focus on the east end, may have been one of many responses to changing Anglican attitudes to the altar in the 1820s. However, it was only in the early 1840s that this arrangement became the convention, and it is now clear that this standardisation of form and layout signifies a Church that had finally accepted and was comfortable with the changes in the treatment of worship space that had been gradually evolving in the preceding decades.



ENDNOTES

- ¹ Irish Architectural Archive, 'Pain, James', Dictionary of Irish Architects 1720-1940, www.dia.ie.
- ² N. Yates, *The Religious Condition of Ireland 1770-1850* (Oxford, 2006) 214-20.
- ³ D. Akenson, *The Church of Ireland: ecclesiastical reform and revolution, 1800-1885* (New Haven and London, 1971) 115-21; E. Brynn, 'Some Repercussions of the Act of Union on the Church of Ireland 1800-1820', *Church History*, 40, 1971, 284-96; A. Acheson, *A History of the Church of Ireland, 1691-2001* (Dublin, 2001).
- ⁴ J. Godkin, *Ireland and Her Churches* (London, 1867) 146-48; J.T. Ball, *The Reformed Church of Ireland (1537-1889)* (Dublin, 1890) 244-45; Acheson, *A History of the Church of Ireland*, 141-46.
- ⁵ M. Craig, *The Architecture of Ireland: from the earliest times to 1880* (Dublin, 1982) 216; J. Sheehy, 'The Nineteenth Century' in P. Harbison, H. Potterton and J. Sheehy (eds), *Irish Art and Architecture* (London, 1978) 187-262; N. McCullough and V. Mulvin, *A Lost Tradition – the Nature of Architecture in Ireland* (Dublin, 1987) 75; S.D. O'Reilly, *Irish Churches and Monasteries, an Historical and Architectural Guide* (Cork, 1997) 160-61; S. Hutchison, *Towers, Spires and Pinnacles: a history of the cathedrals and churches of the Church of Ireland* (Wicklow, 2003); D. Lee, *James Pain Architect* (Limerick, 2005) 133.
- ⁶ Representative Church Body Library (RCBL), Dublin, MS 138, Six volumes of architectural drawings by James Pain (c.1779-1877) architect of the Board of First Fruits and, from 1833, of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for the province of Cashel, of churches in the dioceses of Cashel and Emly; Cloyne, Cork and Ross; Killaloe and Kilfenora; Limerick and Ardfert; Waterford and Lismore (1820s-1840s).
- ⁷ W.M. Brady, *Clerical and Parochial Records of Cork, Cloyne and Ross*, 3 vols (London, 1864) II, 534.
- ⁸ *ibid.*, 501.
- ⁹ *ibid.*, 538.
- ¹⁰ *ibid.*, 480.
- ¹¹ *ibid.*, 513.
- ¹² *ibid.*, 495.
- ¹³ RCBL, ground plan and elevations of Grean Church signed and dated 5th May 1841, Portfolio 17, Diocese of Emly.
- ¹⁴ RCBL, ground plan of Killenaule Church signed and dated 12 December 1840, Portfolio 3, Diocese of Cashel.
- ¹⁵ RCBL, ground plan of Clonbeg Church, Portfolio 17, Diocese of Emly; ground plan of Corcomohide Church signed and dated July 1841, Portfolio 5, Diocese of Limerick and Ardfert; ground plan of Kilkee Church signed and dated March 1840, Portfolio 19, Diocese of Killaloe; ground plan of Kilvemenon Church signed undated, Portfolio 3, Diocese of Cashel; ground plan of Kilbehenny Church signed and dated 1840, Portfolio 17, Diocese of Emly.