



# Death in the garden: Patrick Byrne's mortuary chapel at Goldenbridge Cemetery, Dublin

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A DOLF LOOS SPOKE OF THE MOUND IN THE WOODS, 'RAISED TO A PYRAMIDAL FORM ... something in us says: someone was buried here. This is architecture.'<sup>1</sup> The unanticipated stone wall of a cemetery evokes a similar response. Like a secret garden, knowing and unknowing, it signals the memorialising function of architecture that silences us and draws us in. The little garden cemetery at Goldenbridge in Dublin is just that, a secret garden. Closed in the mid-nineteenth century and thus saved from expansion, its intimate scale and character is still intact (Plate 2). A relatively anonymous place despite its position on the Grand Canal, it was established as a non-denominational cemetery by Daniel O'Connell and the Catholic Association in 1829; an open-air Ionic temple at its centre was designed and built by Patrick Byrne in 1834-35.<sup>2</sup> The choice of location for the cemetery – then beyond the heart of the city – was part of the relegation of the so-called impure institutions to the peripheries. Its essence lies in its remarkable sense of self, once modern and progressive, now an entropic, timeless place. And while all cemeteries have an element of dislocation, at Goldenbridge this is heightened by its suspension in time, a rare fragment in Dublin's fabric. Perhaps the most apt description of Goldenbridge is a 'dormitory of the dead', for this place could never be a 'city of the dead'; its dimensions are too neat, its intentions too modest. Under a dense tree canopy, the slanting tombstones and overgrown grounds obscure an older grave-grid and simple pathways, all tightly bound by a high limestone wall (Plates 3, 4). There are no endless gravel walks or gleaming monuments here, just the quiet unassuming tombs of Dublin clergymen, master builders, shipwrights, inn owners, and members of the nascent Catholic middle class.<sup>3</sup>

Following the Reformation, Catholic burials were restricted to interment in

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1 – Patrick Byrne's mortuary chapel, west elevation and view of interior  
(photo: Brendan Grimes)



Protestant graveyards with all fees administered by the attendant parson.<sup>4</sup> A series of incidents during obsequies at St James's in Kilmainham and St Kevin's at Camden Row (the burial grounds most used by Dublin Catholics) and an edict issued by the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr William Magee, stating that the burial service in any of the churchyards within his jurisdiction should not be read by a Roman Catholic clergyman, triggered O'Connell's and the Catholic Association's campaign.<sup>5</sup> In 1824 the Act of Easement of Burial Bills was passed, and on 27th May 1828 the newly formed committee of the Dublin Cemeteries, led by O'Connell, bought a small piece of land of two Irish acres at Goldenbridge (formerly Glydon Bridge) from Luke Teeling of Thomas Street for £600.<sup>6</sup> Their contact to Teeling came through Mathias O'Kelly, a Protestant ally of O'Connell's and campaigner for Catholic civil rights, as well as a founding member of the cemeteries committee.<sup>7</sup> O'Connell, who had absorbed the libertarian and egalitarian principles of the American revolutionaries, sought to secure a common burial ground for all denominations 'where their bones could be deposited, within the forms of Christian burial, without fear of insult, and where the Irish Catholics might enjoy the exercise of a religious ceremony, of which only they of the whole Christian world were deprived'.<sup>8</sup> In October 1829 (six months after the passing of the Catholic Emancipation act) the *Freeman's Journal* confirmed the official consecration of its grounds.<sup>9</sup> Despite its aim as an all-inclusive burial ground, O'Connell pushed the agenda, and ultimately more Catholics were interred here than any other faith, although it is unlikely that they were fully supportive of the non-denominational slant.<sup>10</sup>



*3 – Goldenbridge Cemetery, established in 1829*

*(photo: Lotts Architecture & Urbanism)*

*opposite 2 – Ordnance Survey Map of Dublin City, 1843, detail of Goldenbridge Cemetery*

*(courtesy Glucksman Map Library, Trinity College Dublin)*

*4 – Goldenbridge Cemetery, view along northern boundary wall*

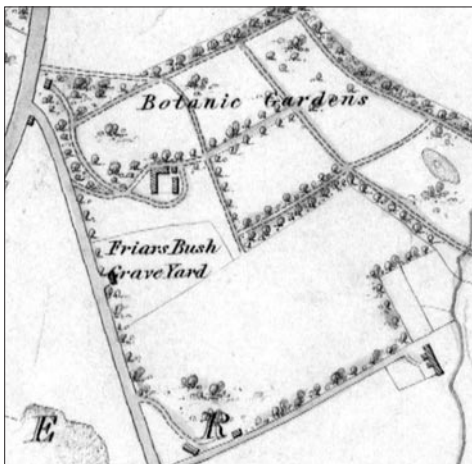
*(photo: Lotts Architecture & Urbanism)*





5 – Friar's Bush graveyard, Belfast, opened in 1829 (courtesy Belfast City Council)

6 – Ordnance Survey Map of Belfast City, 1838, detail of Friar's Bush graveyard (reproduced courtesy of the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland)



Amongst the first to be buried was Fr Lawrence Whelan, whose remains were exhumed from the nearby chapel at Dolphin's Barn where he had served as pastor.<sup>11</sup>

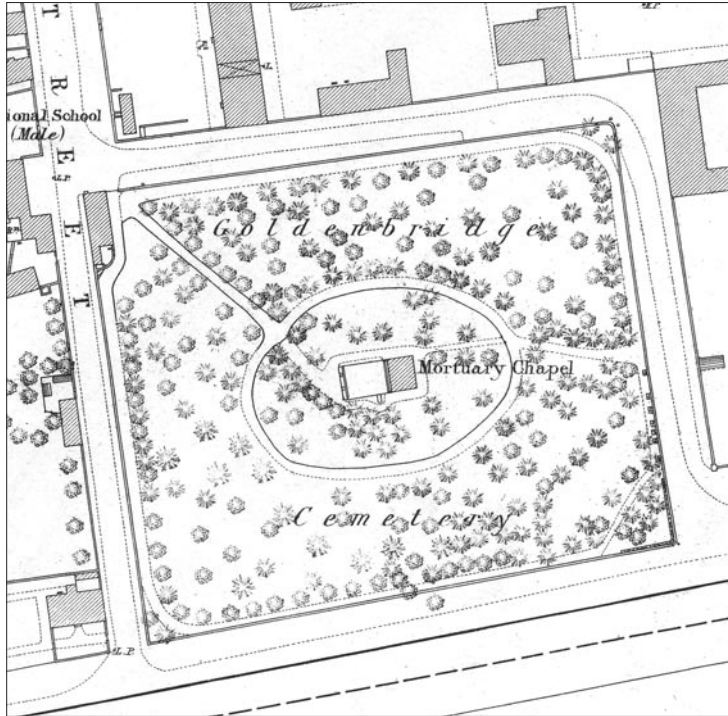
During the medieval period, interments often took place within a church, not just for practical reasons, but to feed the desire to be entombed near altars and relics. When intramural burial was not possible, the consecrated churchyard was used. In the seventeenth century, when small-scale plots were stretched to capacity, larger parish burial grounds were established at a short distance from the church. Groups such as the Huguenots created their own urban burial grounds at the Cabbage Garden, off Kevin Street (1666), and on Merrion Row (1693), and likewise the Quakers on Cork Street and on York Street (both late 1600s). Detached non-religious

grounds in Dublin city include the little Chaloner's Corner in Trinity College (1613) to honour the college's first provost, and the military cemetery of Bully's Acre at the Royal Hospital in Kilmainham (1680s).

A dramatic rise in population and the new urban poor of the eighteenth century brought about a burial crisis, and new graveyards were created outside the city limits to counter hygiene issues and any threat to the public. The first of these cemeteries in Ireland was opened by the established church at the Clifton Old Cemetery in Belfast in 1797 to replace the overcrowded corporation graveyard in High Street, its form following continental plans like that of St Marx's in Vienna.<sup>12</sup> Not before long, a pantheistic celebration of nature within these arenas took hold, and the ideals and imagery of the English landscape garden were impressed onto cemetery design. James Stevens Curl suggests that the birth of the *champ de repos* coincided with the anti-clericalism and egalitarianism of the French Revolution in 1799. Its prototype was the vast Arcadian cemetery of Père-Lachaise, in Paris, laid out in 1804 to designs by Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart. Its format became the template for cemeteries throughout Europe and the rural cemetery movement in America.

Goldenbridge sits within this lineage as the first purpose-built, non-denominational garden cemetery in Ireland. Its English predecessors include the Rosary in Norwich (1819), and the Necropolis (1825) and St James's (1825-29), both in Liverpool. These cemeteries were larger and starker, lacking the intimacy of dense landscaping, and unlike Goldenbridge they were peppered with imposing dynastic mausolea by local architects. The old-established Christian burial grounds of Friar's Bush in south Belfast was closer in configuration and scale. Its trapezoidal footprint emphasised its compact verdant environment, described by Brett as 'a soothing resort for the melancholy, in the blessed absence of tarmacadam, granite chippings and white marble'.<sup>13</sup> Consecrated and enclosed for Catholic burials solely in 1829, it had held open-air Masses on an oak table in a sand pit during the penal years (Plates 5, 6).

The site for Goldenbridge was wedged tightly between the Richmond Barracks (later Keogh Barracks) and the Grand Canal (Plate 7). The cemetery's arched entrance opened on to the parade grounds and barrack ramparts to the north, with its back turned to the canal on the south. Existing stone walls were raised to form a high boundary by John Graham, a local builder from the Kilmainham Lime Kilns. Graham also built a lodge for the sexton adjoining the entrance and a temporary timber chapel encircled by a tree-lined oval path at the centre of the cemetery.<sup>14</sup> Its geometry relates to the more rigorous form in the Chapel Circle and O'Connell Circle at Glasnevin Cemetery (established in 1832 at Prospect to the north of the city). Works at the cemetery were supervised by Charles Tarrant Jr, surveyor and engineer to the Royal Canal Company, who divided the grounds into three segments – the canal, the barrack, and the chapel section.<sup>15</sup> David Henry, also a canal engineer, mapped out a grave-grid with a numbered system from west to east, and a lettered one from north to south (Plate 8).<sup>16</sup> The matrix positions were indicated by inscribed Roman cement medallions on the perimeter walls, and in between a



7 – Ordnance Survey Map of Dublin, 1889, detail of Goldenbridge Cemetery

(courtesy Glucksman Map Library, Trinity College Dublin)

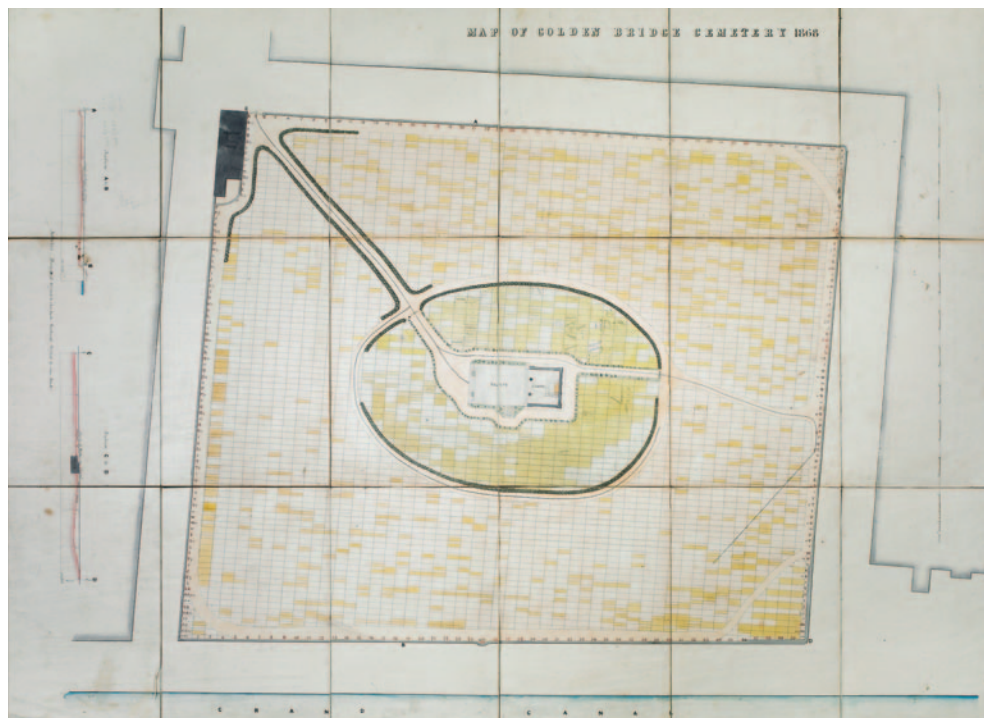
opposite

8 – Grave grid by David Henry, 1829, Trustees of the Dublin Cemeteries Committee, detail of chapel circle (courtesy Glasnevin Trust Archive)

little niche on the southern boundary provided a seat for the melancholic. The cemetery committee stipulated that the garden be landscaped with yews, scarlet oaks, limes and sweet chestnuts, all typical non-native species common to Dublin burial grounds.<sup>17</sup> A low privet hedge lined the perimeter pathways. The whole composition was a carefully considered prescription for the perfect *rus in urbe*, where the nineteenth-century desire for the preservation of memory in an idealised landscaped space could be nurtured.

Despite the threat of early obsolescence for the cemetery (exacerbated by the outbreak of Asiatic cholera in 1832), the committee maintained their plans to replace the existing timber chapel with a more permanent structure. Their motivations are unclear but are likely to have been propelled by ideas to eventually bring a dignitary such as John Philpot Curran or O’Connell to rest there. A scheme by Henry was rejected, and the architect Patrick Byrne was chosen to produce a proposal for a mortuary chapel and vaults.<sup>18</sup> Byrne had begun his architectural education in 1796 at the Dublin Society School of Architectural Drawing with Henry Aaron Baker (partner and successor of James Gandon), and from 1820 onwards he was architect to the Dublin Wide Streets Commissioners.<sup>19</sup> His progression as architect for the Cemeteries Committee ensured his position at Glasnevin, and through his Catholic connections he emerged as one of the city’s leading ecclesiastical architects in the heady days of church-building under Archbishop Daniel Murray, the aptly titled ‘Borromeo of Dublin’.<sup>20</sup>

St Paul’s on Arran Quay, Byrne’s first church commission, was completed 1835,



the same year as the mortuary chapel at Goldenbridge, both belonging to the first phase of his hesitant neoclassical style (Plate 10). Byrne's essay at Goldenbridge follows in the same neoclassical tradition of earlier Catholic churches in Dublin, such as the Pro-Cathedral (1815), St Francis Xavier (1829) and St Andrew's (1832). All of these are temple-fronted, and like St Paul's, Goldenbridge has a Greek inflection. His diminutive chapel stands at the very centre of the cemetery on an east-west axes. Its open portico faces westwards addressing a congregational platform covering a double-vaulted crypt and a watch-room, once guarded by alleged Cuban bloodhounds to prevent body-snatchers (Plates 1, 9). Graves within the chapel section contained more costly burial plots and fees for interment, and while the underlying matrix remained consistent throughout the cemetery with evenly sized and spaced tombs, the evidently opulent monuments in the long shadow of the chapel reflected the aspirations of wealthier Dublin families and the continuing desire to be entombed close by.<sup>21</sup>

The building of mortuary chapels in cemeteries began in the eighteenth century. Like the secluded demesne mausolea of the great country houses of Ireland, such as Upton at Templepatrick, county Antrim, and Dawson's Grove at Dartrey, county Monaghan, they were usually intimate hermetic spaces, emphasising the singularly private nature of the burial ceremony.<sup>22</sup> Byrne reverses this architectural formula, breaking open the shell and revealing the altar podium to the elements, and flooding the high sanctuary with natural light. Even the tall sashed windows on either side were intended to be fully open; they





10 – *St Paul's Church, Arran Quay, Dublin. Designed by Patrick Byrne and begun in 1835.*

*(photo: Brendan Grimes)*

11 – *Mortuary chapel, detail of interior prior to restoration*

*(photo: Lotts Architecture & Urbanism)*

*opposite*

9 – *Patrick Byrne's mortuary chapel, north elevation*

*(photo: Lotts Architecture & Urbanism)*

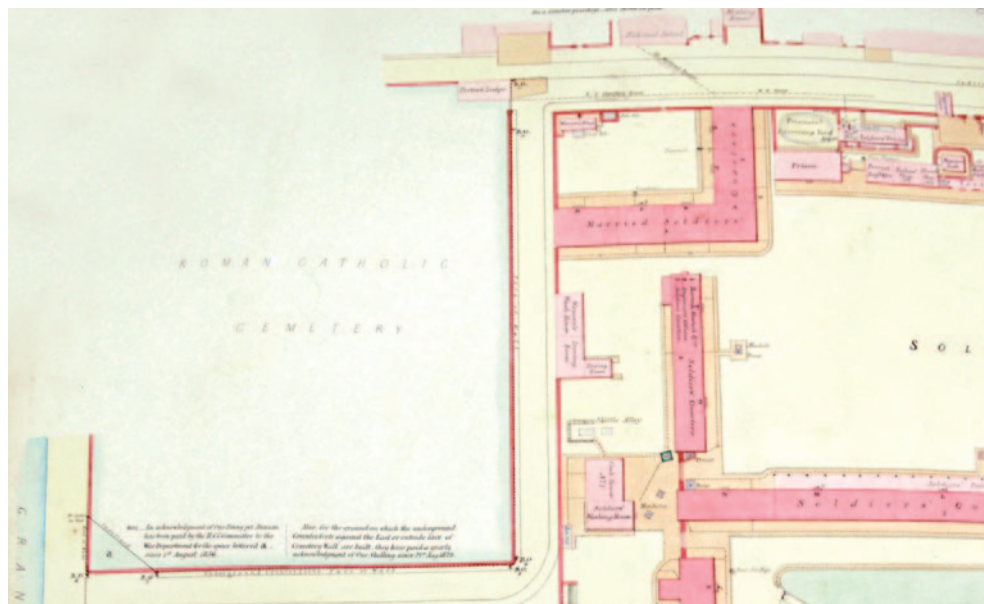


were eventually glazed by the cemetery committee. The choice of rendered rubble-stone rather than ashlar Portland stone or granite was a pragmatic move, and its Roman cement finish and internal plastered panels have produced a quiet uniform composition (Plate 11).

This does not, however, imply a lack of imagination. Open-air chapels in Ireland are unusual, and Byrne's scheme for a temple planned to be exposed to the elements at all times is an exceptional example. In the uneasy histories of Irish Catholicism, and when Catholic worship was forced outdoors by the Reformation to the secluded 'Mass-rock', the celebrant and their congregation were sometimes protected by an open-air structure known as a *scalán*.<sup>23</sup> Byrne's controlled translation from that outdoor tradition to the modern and formalised world of the Catholic burial ritual is clever and, at some level, sublime. The architect seeks to create the image or notion of a temple, like a contrived ruin or a garden folly, rather than a fully formed thing. Its scale and configuration is closer to the familial mausolea of London's garden cemeteries, but Byrne's work (which is earlier and unburdened by hybrid styles) is more nuanced; his training with the old guard of Classicism is very evident, as is his knowledge of the funerary monuments of the Irish and English country estate. As his eulogist and patron Dr William Meagher affirmed, '...he regarded the beauties of Classical and Mediaeval art with equal reverence, studied their several excellencies with equal assiduity & wrought upon the principles of both with equally supereminent success.'<sup>24</sup>

The choice of Greek Ionic abstracted from the Erechtheum (or even the Lycian tombs) mirrors St Paul's again (Plate 10). But here the freedom of Byrne's open portico and its Ionic grammar is about the passage from life to death, the end of this mortal coil, often represented in tomb design by a façade, a screen, or a half-opened door. Byrne's neo-classical phase extended to St Audeon's on High Street and a little Doric church in the Chapel Circle at Glasnevin Cemetery in 1842. The latter was eventually demolished and superseded by J.J. McCarthy's Gothic mortuary chapel at the new entrance gates. The chapel in Mount Jerome at Harold's Cross also succumbed to the burgeoning Gothic Revival style, built in 1847 following a competition win by William Atkins.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, most of the country's successive mortuary chapels were designed under the cloak of revivalism, and while mausolea and tomb-design still nurtured Classical intent, Byrne's work at Goldenbridge triumphs within this fluctuating canon.

With the exception of the overload of Famine burials in the mid-nineteenth century, obsequies slowed considerably at Goldenbridge, its function supplanted largely by Glasnevin. The cemetery's military neighbours at Richmond Barracks (under the jurisdiction of the London War Office) had waged a relentless war against the committee throughout its existence, and despite well-founded denials by the cemetery committee, they claimed that funeral processions interfered with their parades and drilling practice, and protested at latent hygiene issues emanating from interments.<sup>26</sup> Their concerns around sanitation were not completely unjustified; the cemetery's main drainage system connected directly into the barracks' sewer for which the cemetery committee paid no fees. In addition, a series of barracks drawings by Patrick Needham and James Davis in 1859



12 – James Davis and Patrick Needham, *Richmond Barracks, January 1859* (TNA, WO 78/4387) detail of southern quadrants showing drains from Goldenbridge Cemetery connecting into the barracks' sewer (reproduced courtesy of The National Archives, Kew, London)

illustrate the war department's focus on providing new privy blocks and sanitation within the grounds, burdening further their seemingly inadequate system (Plate 12). The cholera outbreak of 1867 and its impact on obsequies at Goldenbridge did not help matters. A conclusive statement by the war secretary claiming that the cemetery 'is so overcharged with bodies that the surface is much raised over the level of ground and the drainage from it is liable to impregnate the water in neighbouring tanks' forced its closure in 1869, its use then curtailed to those with established burial rights.<sup>27</sup>

The closure ensured the enduring nature of its early nineteenth-century origins. Even the grave-markers and monuments evaded the symbolism of the looming Celtic Revival. Neither Curran nor O'Connell were laid to rest here, but William T. Cosgrave was. The leaders of the Easter Rising of 1916 were held at Richmond Barracks, and following the founding of the Free State in 1922 the buildings were taken over by the Irish Army and renamed Keogh Barracks. In the summer of 1924, Cosgrave handed the complex over to Dublin Corporation to provide accommodation for local families.<sup>28</sup> The barracks subsequent demolition provided the site for the housing blocks of the beleaguered St Michael's Estate, one of the city's failed tabula rasa developments. Cosgrave was the first leader of the Irish Free State, serving as president of the Executive Council from 1922 to 1932. His funeral at Goldenbridge in November 1965 was a simple affair without the grandiloquence of his contemporaries. He is buried in the chapel section, close to Byrne's Ionic temple.

Patrick Byrne's open-air mortuary chapel has been somewhat overlooked in the histories of Irish architecture, as has the status and lineage of Goldenbridge Cemetery itself. This short essay brings a new perspective to the story of non-denominational graveyards in Ireland and places the cemetery within the religious fabric of Dublin. Aspects of the struggle for ecumenical equality in the turbulent years of the early nineteenth century, before the Roman Catholic relief act of 1829, have also been alluded to but not fully dealt with here. The extent to which Catholics (both clerical and layperson, and in particular the wealthier Dublin families) bought into the notion of all-inclusiveness in matters of life and death needs to be researched further and discussed. While not specifically concerned with graveyard history, but equally interesting, are the architectural developments at Richmond Barracks and their later conversion to housing, alongside the new state's intentions for adaptive reuse of barracks across the board. The latter aspect does not feature in any great detail in Dublin's housing history to date.

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This essay is written in honour of Roger Stalley, Professor Emeritus of Trinity College Dublin. I am very grateful for the assistance of the Glasnevin Trust, Lotts Architecture & Urbanism, Andrew Clinch, Brendan Grimes, Finola O'Kane, Patricia Bedlow, Ivar McGrath and the late Shane MacThomais.

#### ENDNOTES

The following abbreviation is used:

GTA, Minute Book      Glasnevin Trust Archive, Minute Book of the Trustees of the Dublin Cemeteries Committee, 1827-40

- <sup>1</sup> Adolf Loos, *Architektur* (Ariadne Press, Riverside, CA, 2002) 72-3.
- <sup>2</sup> The mortuary chapel was restored in two phases between 2009 and 2010 by conservation architects Lotts Architecture & Urbanism. A conservation plan for the entire cemetery is also in place and it is intended that the grounds will reopen in the summer of 2017.
- <sup>3</sup> Michael J.S. Egan and Richard M. Flatman, *Memorials of the Dead: Goldenbridge Cemetery Inchicore, Dublin* (Dublin, 1988).
- <sup>4</sup> Catholic burials provided a decent income for the Protestant church. In 1823 approximately £2,000 was collected at St James's Graveyard in Kilmainham from Catholic funerals alone. Egan and Flatman, *Memorials of the Dead*, 1.
- <sup>5</sup> William J. Fitzpatrick, *History of Dublin Catholic Cemeteries* (Dublin, 1900) 2-3.
- <sup>6</sup> 5 Geo. IV, c.25; Glasnevin Trust Archive, Minute book of the Trustees of the Dublin Cemeteries Committee, 1827-40, 27th May 1828.
- <sup>7</sup> Vivian Igoe, *Dublin Burial Grounds and Graveyards* (Dublin, 2001) 123.
- <sup>8</sup> GTA, Minute Book, 7th June 1828; R. Dudley Edwards, *Daniel O'Connell and his World* (London, 1975) 12-13.
- <sup>9</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 16th October 1829. The newspaper reports that such was the desire of some

Catholic families to have their deceased interred there that four coffins had already been deposited in the vaults under the temporary chapel before the consecration ceremony.

- <sup>10</sup> Catholics were generally in favour of the non-denominational primary school system set up through the Stanley Letter in the 1830s, whereby education was managed by reputable people of all faiths, transcending sectarian divisions. Whether Catholics were also in favour of a non-denominational burial arrangement is unclear and further research is needed to reveal their outlook in this respect. What is clear, however, is that at this juncture they had little other choice.
- <sup>11</sup> Fitzpatrick, *History of Dublin Catholic Cemeteries*, 16. While clergymen of both faiths were buried at Goldenbridge, the re-entombment of Catholic priests and friars was carried out in the first months of the cemetery's inception.
- <sup>12</sup> For a wider reading of the history and architecture of Victorian cemeteries, see James Stevens Curl, 'Cemeteries', in Rolf Loeber et al (eds), *Architecture 1600-2000* (New Haven & London, 2014) 323-26; James Stevens Curl, *Death and Architecture* (Gloucestershire, 2002); James Stevens Curl, *A Celebration of Death* (London, 1980).
- <sup>13</sup> C.E.B. Brett, *Buildings of Belfast, 1700-1914* (Belfast, 1985) 8-9.
- <sup>14</sup> GTA, Minute Book, 29th April 1829.
- <sup>15</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> GTA, Minute Book, 7th January 1829. Henry worked as an engineer on both the Royal and Grand canals, but he was engaged primarily in his capacity as an architect in the early nineteenth century.
- <sup>17</sup> *ibid.* There was no specific landscape plan, but tree species are proposed within the minutes.
- <sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, 18th November 1833.
- <sup>19</sup> For the most comprehensive account of the life and work of Patrick Byrne, see Brendan Grimes, *Majestic Shrines and Graceful Sanctuaries: the church architecture of Patrick Byrne, 1783-1864* (Dublin, 2009).
- <sup>20</sup> C.P. Curran, 'Patrick Byrne: architect', *Studies*, XXXIII, 130, 1944, 197.
- <sup>21</sup> The monuments and grave-markers of the families that sought to be buried next to the chapel reflect the varied demographic in the cemetery, and while there are many Catholic surnames inscribed on the tombstones, there are also Protestant and Presbyterian names. For a comprehensive overview of those buried at Goldenbridge until the 1980s see Michael Egan and Flatman, *Memorials of the Dead*.
- <sup>22</sup> For an architectural history of Irish mausolea see Maurice Craig, 'Mausoleums in Ireland', *Studies*, LXIV, 256, 1975, 410-23; and Maurice and Michael Craig, *Mausolea Hibernica* (Dublin, 1999).
- <sup>23</sup> Rolf Loeber, Kevin Whelan and Anne Mullin Burnham, 'Catholic churches in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', in Loeber et al, (eds), *Architecture 1600-2000*, 288.
- <sup>24</sup> William Meagher, *Five engravings descriptive of the new church of Our Immaculate Lady of Refuge, Rathmines, with a brief account of its origin and progress* (Dublin, 1855), 23.
- <sup>25</sup> Jeremy Williams, 'William Atkins 1812-1887: a forgotten Cork Pre-Raphaelite', in A. Bernelle (ed), *Decantations: a tribute to Maurice Craig* (Dublin, 1992) 241-48.
- <sup>26</sup> Fitzpatrick, *History of Dublin Catholic Cemeteries*, 96-101.
- <sup>27</sup> *The British Medical Journal*, vol. 2, no. 394, 18th July 1868, 62; Fitzpatrick, *History of Dublin Catholic Cemeteries*, 99. The graves at Goldenbridge were leased in perpetuity, but unless there was continued familial use, and especially in the case of unmarked graves, the plots could be reused.
- <sup>28</sup> *Irish Times*, 19th June 1924; *Freeman's Journal*, 29th July 1924. Cosgrave had endeavoured to initiate the reuse of decommissioned Dublin barracks as social housing for the city in the early years of the Free State.