

Cathedral Time frame

- 1828 a subscription list for a new cathedral was opened under the direction of Thomas Joseph O Sullivan, a Killarney priest. The Bishop at the time was Bishop Egan. Lord Kenmare gave a total of €2500. O Sullivan died in 1851 but devoted great energy to this cause throughout his life. Daniel O Connell's name appeared on the list and his brother, John was one of the first contributors.
- By 1840, the fund was £890.10s.7d. An architect was engaged (Augustus Welby Pugin) and the design was in a gothic style.
- The foundation stone was blessed in 1842 and Pugin himself laid out the foundations.
- The work continued despite the Great Famine but in 1847, work was severely affected and in May 1848, there was a complete suspension of work.
- 1853 work resumed under the direction of JJ Mc Carthy, Pugin's friend, colleague and successor. Over £2,000 was raised during this year
- 22nd August 1855 the consecrated and dedicated to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
- Between 1855 and 1908 minor work was done, including the addition of the Telford organ in 1869 at a cost of £700.
- 1907 an architectural firm of *Ashlin and Coleman* was engaged by the Bishop, Dr John Mangan, to complete the cathedral. They designed and built a spire 285 (over 86 metres) that was not in the original Pugin plans.
- 1908 and 1912 the work was completed – the nave and side aisles were extended and a sacristy and mortuary chapel were added. The spire was also added at this time.
- 1970's renovation work started. The interior of the cathedral was transformed to meet the demands of the new liturgy. This is still the Cathedral we see today...

Killarney is famed throughout the world for its scenic treasures! With its stunning mountain range and lakes, it is known as beauty's home. Rising above the whole scene of the town and its backdrop, is this Cathedral – the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption, better known as St Mary's. This is the Cathedral of the Diocese of Kerry, the successor Cathedral to that of St Brendan at Ardfert, to the north-west of Tralee. This building is a memorial to so many people, and to the aspirations of a period which saw the Catholic Church in Ireland emerge from the shadows of penal days. This Cathedral is a testament to the Bishop of the Diocese and a small number of priests, who succeeded in constructing such a Cathedral in a small rural diocese in Ireland. Soaring heavenward, it carries with it the devotion and prayers of generations of people of the Diocese, at home and abroad. Every visitor to Killarney who can trace links to Kerry can claim it as part of their inheritance, and be proud that such a monument stands as a beautiful and noble house of God.

The cathedral was designed by Augustus Welby Pugin. Pugin was an interesting choice as architect. Pugin had become a Catholic in 1833, declaring that he had found his faith in the cathedrals of Europe. He believed that a revived Gothic style and a thoroughly Roman Catholic spirituality brought a reunion with the glories of medieval Christendom. He started on a personal spiritual quest to lead others to worship in his creations. In doing so, he revolutionised Church architecture in Ireland. He was inspired by the cathedrals at Ely and Salisbury and others on his many trips to the continent. Pugin enjoyed total freedom in regard to the design of Killarney Cathedral. He held a firm principle of allowing the church to reflect the society it served. The exterior forms are simple and straightforward with a certain bleakness intended to reflect the setting he experienced. For Pugin every detail of an individual design had some significance. The overall plan was for a rugged exterior and a smooth light-filled interior, echoing the notion of the Church being the rock and its interior a heavenly Jerusalem.

The foundation stone was blessed in 1842 and Pugin himself laid out the foundations. These years were at the beginning of the Great Famine. The work continued through 1845 and 1846, but in 1847 the project was severely affected. In May of 1848 there was a complete suspension of work. For 5 years, the unfinished shell was subjected to the force of the weather. Local tradition has long had it that the building was used to shelter famine victims, and an area near the west doorway, by the large redwood now there, holds a children's burial ground dating from this time. These years were also to bring the deaths of O Sullivan and Pugin himself, who died at the age of 40. He never lived to see the resumption of work on the project. It was to take many more years to complete, and others came to be involved in its completion. Nevertheless Pugin's genius is evident in every line and curve of the basic structure and exterior finish. It would seem that Killarney was a project in which he took a special interest. Killarney's Cathedral was the nearest to his heart. His son Edward who was present at the consecration of the Cathedral stated:

“He tried to make it a splendid temple to almighty God and at the same time... suited to the beauty and majesty which the God of heaven had clothed every hill and valley of that earthly paradise”

2nd phase of work - 1853 work resumed under the direction of JJ Mc Carthy, Pugin's friend, colleague and successor. Over £2,000 was raised during this year and on 22nd August 1855 the Cathedral was consecrated and dedicated to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Bishop Egan, by now very feeble, was brought in a chair the day before to view the work. He was moved to tears and recited the words of Psalm 25: *'I have loved, O Lord, the beauty of thy house and the place where thy glory dwelleth.'* The pontifical high mass presided by Bishop David Moriarity took 5 hours!

Between 1855 and 1908 minor work was done, including the addition of the Telford organ in 1869 at a cost of £700. In 1907 a major fundraising drive was again launched. Priests visited America and Australia to collect funds. The architectural firm of *Ashlin and Coleman* was engaged by the Bishop, Dr John Mangen, to complete the cathedral.

The spire and three spirelets on the east and west ends, had been added during Bishop Moriarity's time. One of Pugin's designs had envisaged a cathedral without a spire, but the final design, seen in 1854 saw a soaring spire rising to 300 feet. Between 1908 and 1912 the work was completed – the nave and side aisles were extended and a sacristy and mortuary chapel were added. 1912 saw brought the building of the cathedral coming to a close. This is what we see today.

Changes in the Cathedral – 1970's - This takes us up to more modern times of the 1950's/60's and 70's. At this time, it became clear that essential maintenance had to be done. It was Bishop Casey who embarked on a renovation of the Cathedral around 1970. There was an initial fund of £50,000 and a plan of renovation was prepared with appointed priests and laity from the diocese. The demands of the new liturgy and the time and energy given to the project meant that the interior of Pugin's cathedral would be transformed utterly. Killarney Cathedral was given a radical renovation which kept nothing of the original interior and furnishings, and created a whole new atmosphere and worship space. We can still see however, the strength and grace of Pugin's design: the stonework on pillars and finished surfaces, and the plain vault high above the floor. The most radical change has undoubtedly been the stripping of the walls, removing the plasterwork which Pugin intended to be fresh and white. However very little of what was provided in the spirit of Pugin was left intact in the 1970s. It was argued that Pugin's philosophy was a restraining force on the liturgy, divorcing the activity of the altar from the people kept at a distance.

Other changes included:

- The original sanctuary with its high altar and rood screens is now all but empty. The new altar is at the crossing, under the spire.
- Both the Bishops Chair and the celebrant's chair is made from Tasmanian Oak
- The limestone baptismal font was fitted
- The floor throughout is also new and it allowed for a new under floor heating system

Some of the features of our modern day Cathedral

The Kenmare Chapel (dedicated to the Blessed Virgin) something of Pugin's world still is evident. The floor is tiled with representations of the Kenmare coat of arms and motto: Loyal in Everything (*loyal en tout*). The family vault is under the chapel, the entrance to this is covered by the flags at the end which again carry the coat of arms. The vault was opened in recent years to receive the remains of Beatrice Grosvenor, the last of the family. One of the most exquisite features in the Chapel is the reredos, a very beautiful and delicately worked piece which has been decorated with scenes from the life of the Blessed Virgin. The stained glass here draws on scenes from the life of the Holy Family. St Catherine of Alexandria also figures in the window above the altar.

Between the sanctuary and the Kenmare Chapel, we have the **Day Chapel**.

Near the Sacristy we have the **Blessed Sacrament Altar**. This was completed six years after Pugin's death but it is very much in the spirit of Pugin. This has remained intact and survived untouched in the renovations of the 70's.

Four Bronze doors mark the **tabernacle** itself. These show the 1. loaves and the fishes, 2. the Eucharistic symbol of the pelican feeding its young with its blood, 3. the chalice and grapes and the 4. Victorious lamb.

The **Central Column** contains 12 medallions... the overall motif is of the tree of life which rises out of the tabernacle and culminates in the crucifixion tableau.

The **Stain Glass windows** are also worthy of attention. There are three main styles of stained glass: in the Kenmare chapel, in the transepts and in the west and east lancets, and finally the glass found in the aisles. The east lancets contain a detail of Our Lady of the Assumption, the official title of the Cathedral. Over the gallery (the pipes of the organ were split into two sections to give an unimpeded view of the lancets in the renovation), there is a representation of King David, complete with harp. The windows in the aisle contain scenes from the life of Christ and scenes taken from the life of the early Irish Church.

Ten Bishops in all are buried in the Cathedral itself. The remains of Bishops Teaghan (died 1797) and Sugrue (died 1824) were brought here and lie with those of Bishops Egan, Mc Carthy and Higgins in the Day Chapel. A memorial tablet to Bishop Teaghan can be found on the wall at the west end of the chapel. Five bishops are buried in the north transept near what was originally St Patrick's altar.

Other notable areas of interest in the cathedral's interior include the baptistery, the mortuary and the former St Joseph's altar, between the sacristy and the Blessed Sacrament Shrine. **The Baptistery** is quite attractive with its double font, mosaic work and panelling on the ceiling. **The Mortuary Chapel** although it lacks the original floor, also gives an impression of the pre-renovation Cathedral even without its original altar. This chapel was added with the sacristy between the years 1908-1912.