The Organ
Adjacent to the Jubb Chapel is the Cathedral Organ. St Mary’s has had an organ since 1624 when Bishop Bernard Adams donated one. Rebuilds have taken place over the centuries with the most recent work occurring in 1968 to mark the 800th anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone.

The O’Brien Chapel
Walking west again along the north aisle, you come to the Chapel of the O’Briens. Murrough ‘Of the Burnings’ O’Brien, an extremely unpopular man was buried here in 1674. He was so hated that the next morning the citizens of Limerick stormed into the Cathedral, removed his body and threw it into the Shannon river. He derived his name from his penchant for burning churches. It was he who set fire to the Cathedral on the Rock of Cashel in the hope that the Archbishop of Cashel was inside.

Extra installations of interest have been added to this chapel in recent times. Some very interesting information panels showing a historical timeline of events in the life of the Cathedral and the world at large have been installed.

The chapel next to this was once a Baptistry. The ‘Angel at Prayer’ outside it was originally at the head of the Cleeve grave, but was brought into the Cathedral because it was deteriorating. The Cleeve family had a business which was a forerunner of the Cooperative Dairy System in this country.

The Great West Door
If you go and stand beside the west door, you are now under the Cathedral tower. The door is Romanesque in style and tradition claims that this was once the entrance to King Donal Mór O’Brien’s Palace. Outside one can see the carved stone arch showing alternate monster-like heads with stylised flowers which are typical of Hiberno-Romanesque Sculpture. The tower which stretches 120 feet in height was added in the fourteenth century. The view of Limerick from the ‘battlements’ is unparalleled, however we regret that as the way up is unsafe, tours to the top are not available. The tower’s location at the west end is unusual for an Irish Cathedral. Normally Cathedrals of this age had the tower located centrally in the building. In the belfry there is a peal of eight bells. In 1673 six were presented by William Yorke, three times Mayor of Limerick. These six were cast by William Perdue who died while this work was in progress and is buried in the graveyard outside.

One of his descendants was, up until recently, a Clergyman in this parish and subsequently, Dean of Killaloe. St Mary’s has an active team of bell ringers who travel the country to compete with other campanologists.

The Pery or Glenworth Chapel
This contains memorials to Edmond, Viscount Glenworth and Henry Hartstonge, an earlier Viscount. The ceiling design is interesting. Also note the cannon balls from the 1691 Siege of Limerick by William of Orange and Guiskel hanging in the archway. The Cathedral suffered considerable damage particularly at the east end, during the Williamite sieges; one reason being the siring of a Jacobite gun at the Tower. After the Treaty of Limerick William granted £1,000 towards repairs. Above the Pery Chapel was a room with a fireplace which is reached by means of a spiral staircase. This is what remains of what was once the Bishop’s quarters.

Restoration
As you may have gathered an extensive £2.5 million Restoration Programme was put in place as part of the City’s preparations for the tercentenary in 1991. Work was completed on the exterior of the building in 1993. The restoration was continued in late 1996 with the excavation and relaying of the floors and the installation of underfloor central heating. Restoration work continues today with the aid of FÁS and recently further new alterations and additions have begun.

We would like to pay tribute to several authors on whom we have relied heavily for the production of this booklet:

- Very Revd Maurice Talbot and his ‘Monuments of St Mary’s Cathedral’
- Sean Spellissy and John O’Brien and their ‘Limerick the Rich Land’
- Ms Linda Mulvin and her unpublished ‘History of the Cathedral of St Mary’s Limerick’
- J.A. Haydn for the information in the ‘Miserercordia at St Mary’s Cathedral’

We also wish to acknowledge the work done by Revd Patrick Harvey and Donal Moloney in producing this guide.

The Cathedral costs almost €500 each day to run. We do not receive any Government or EU aid towards the day-to-day running and maintenance of this historic building.
Welcome

Welcome to the Cathedral Church of St. Mary the Virgin. We ask all who enter here to remember that this has been a house of prayer for around 840 years. In fact, it is the oldest church in the historic city of Limerick. Each day there is at least one service of worship. The priests and people who worship here belong to the Church of Ireland, but all Christians are welcome to come and pray, whether in private prayer or with us in our public worship.

Here is a prayer you might like to take:

God Almighty: Bless us with His Holy Spirit this day; guard us in our going out and our coming in; keep us ever steadfast in that faith, free from sin and safe from danger; though Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

St. Mary’s Chapel

The Chapel of St. James’s and Mary Magdalene

The Chapel of the Holy Spirit

The Chapel of the Holy Spirit

This is the original North Transept. It contains unusual relics with its painting and mosaic in memory of Francis and Gladys Cleave. The Loper’s Squint is in the north wall. The original first-floor window was tucked away in the left of the organ pipes. Lopers were not allowed into medieval churches, but because of the Holy Spirit they were allowed to have communion through holes in the wall. Lopers were not allowed, of course, far more widespread in those times. The Flax Slab is to the left of the Squint. The Reverend John Flax was an Augustan who died in 1519. On exiting the transept one passes into the Caen Stone Pulpit with its carvings of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple. You then approach the large Jebb Chapel.

The Jebb Chapel

The Chapel in by far the most beautiful window in the Cathedral representing the Ascension of Christ, produced by the Harry Clarke Studios. It was dedicated in 1961 by Dr Michael Ramsey – then Archbishop of York and soon to be enthroned Archbishop of Canterbury. The window also shows St Catherine and her wheel of torture (lower left) and St Nicholas (Father Christmas) giving fruit to children (upper right). Two windows of some artistic merit are to be found below this, one commemorates the Rev James Dodd, an important local historian, the other is to John Sebright, the Virgil and Chaucer scholar. Bishop John Jebb’s chapel is one of the most striking in the Cathedral. Jebb was an economist and a government official. In 1820, while Rector of the nearby church at Abington during a time of unrest, he and his Roman Catholic colleague, Father Costello, spoke from the steps of Abington church. After Abington thereon remained a remarkably peaceful area in contrast to the troubled neighbourhood. To the left of the window, high up on the wall, is a Mackintosh. This feature usually appears on the outside of a building and was used as a look out post. This suggests that the part of the present day building was once outside the Cathedral. Eventually it was roofed and became another chapel.

The Miserere

Of all the things people come to see in St Mary’s these are the most famous. They are the only examples of this kind of furniture preserved in Ireland. The name ‘miserere’ comes from a Latin word meaning ‘act of mercy’. The carvings from the twelfth to fourteenth century. The oak from Cratloe has been used since the 11th century. The beams of the roof of Westminister Hall and those in this Cathedral also came from Cratloe. Each miserere is now a staff for a member of the Cathedral Chapter. The beautifully executed carvings are the sailing ships of the sea, the men in their boats, the fish and animals like the Cockatrice (under the seat marked ‘Archidiaconus’) and the Griffin which was carved by a master’s hand (Przezg_PD’s) stall. The carvings represent symbols of good and evil and in some cases their conflict. There are now more than a complete list of carvings and the name of the canon’s stall above each seat.

The Catechism

Decanus (Dean) – Human head wearing a ‘chapron’. Archidiaconus – Cockatrice (a two headed lizard); Ballyance – Antelope; Crouch – Manticora; Garek – Human flesh; Tuballer – a man’s head; Vicker – Holy Spirit, Vyven – Lion and Luing Fighting, Ashch – Antelope; Cancellarius – Vyven (two legged dragon).

Praecurate– Vyven biting his tail; Munich – Antelope; Anid – Antelope; Killeedy – an Angel; Kilpeacon – Lindworm (wings); Effin – two Antelopes; Dysan – Swan (one of the finest carvings); Ffox Slab – An Angel; Duncannon – a Man’s head (one of the finest carvings); Tullabracky – a Man’s head; Donoghmore – Wyvern and Lion fighting; Anhid – Antelope; Ardenny – Manticora; Killeedy – a Man’s head; Killeedy – Lion).