

## The Organ

Adjacent to the Jebb 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 6

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 time line 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 Co-operative Dairy System in this country.

## The Great West Door 7

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 Glentworth Chapel 8

This contains memorials to Edmond, Viscount Glentworth 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 Ginkel hanging in the archway. The Cathedral suffered considerable damage particularly at the east end, during the Williamite sieges; one reason being the siting of a Jacobite gun in 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

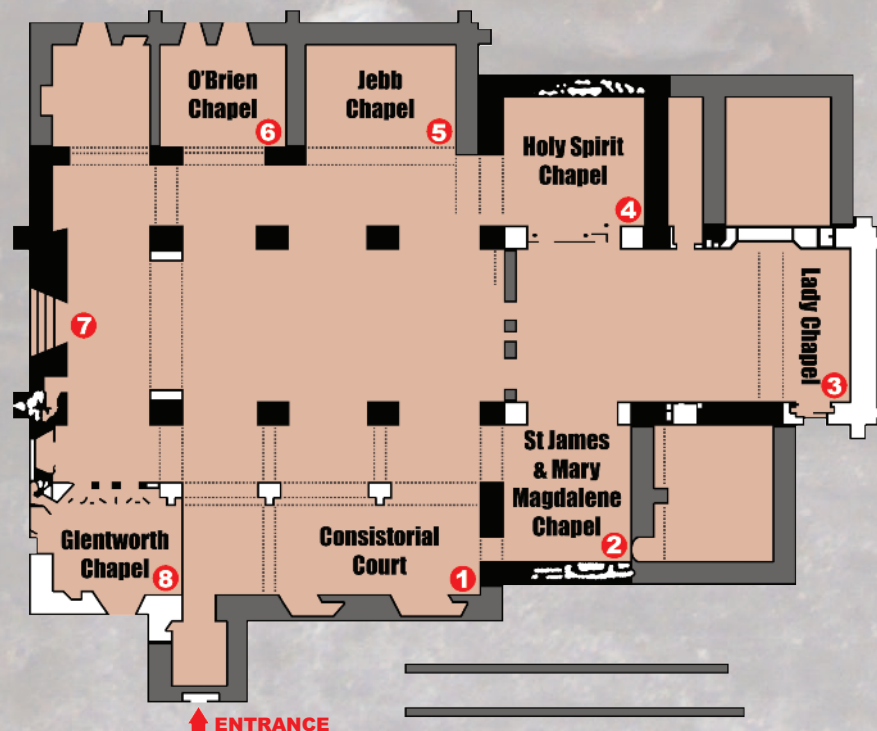
As you may have gathered an extensive £2.5 million Restoration Programme was put in place as part of the City's preparations for the **tercentenary** in 1991. Work was completed on the exterior of the building in 1993. The restoration was continued in late 1996 with the excavation and re-laying of the 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 '*Miscellaneous in 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.



# St. Mary's CATHEDRAL 1168



A GUIDE  
TO THE  
**CATHEDRAL CHURCH**  
*of*  
**ST. MARY THE VIRGIN**  
LIMERICK



## 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 building in Limerick which is in daily use. 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 use:

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 this faith, free from sin and safe from danger: though Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## St. Mary's Cathedral

The Cathedral was founded in the 12th century on a hill on King's Island which is the oldest part of Limerick. The Cathedral was built where the palace of the late King of Munster, **Donal Mór O'Brien**, who was fifth generation in descent from Brian Boru once stood. He donated the same site for the building of a church. Long before this, on the same island, the *Vikings* had pushed their beaked longships ashore and probably built their meeting place or '*Thingmote*' here, their most western European stronghold. King Donal also built the Cathedral on top of the Rock of Cashel, St Flannan's Cathedral in Killaloe and Holy Cross Abbey in Co. Tipperary. We suggest an anti-clockwise walk through the Cathedral. Reference will be made to the points on the compass. To help orient yourself, the door through which you just gained entrance to the Cathedral is through the South Porch on the south wall and the main altar is at the east end.

## The Consistorial Court 1

The area in front of you, which includes the shop, was once known as The Consistorial Court. This area was laid out as a mediaeval Great Hall. The Bishop may have entertained here and also carried out his Diocesan business. If you examine the layout of the three stained glass windows of this hall, one will notice that the one nearest the Chapel of St. James & Mary Magdalene is the largest; the next one smaller and the one above the entrance door even smaller still. The hierarchical grading of the windows had to do with the fact that the Bishop sat near St. James's Chapel. Thus the windows emphasised the importance of the Bishop.

## The Chapel of St James & Mary Magdalene 2

On the East Wall of this chapel you will observe a **Reredos** erected in memory of Thomas Johnson Westropp. It depicts the Agony in the Garden, the Entombment and the Resurrection. Westropp died in Madeira and his body was brought back to Cheltenham for burial. On his mother's death the chest, allegedly containing his mortal remains, was opened and found to be empty!

The chapel is the original South Transept of the Cathedral which was probably constructed following the Cistercian cruciform design, strongly influenced by Mellifont Abbey in Co. Louth.

Cistercian architecture is plain and simple. The other chapels and the tower would have been considered a vanity in those days and were added on later. The Clayton & Bell stained glass window consists of five lights, which from left to right represent scenes from the lives of Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and Solomon. Below the window is a monument erected in memory of Geoffrey Galwey and his father-in-law Richard Bultingfort, who was six times Mayor of Limerick between 1357 and 1390. There are four family shields over the monument. To the right of this is the **Budstone Sedilia** dating from about 1400 and consisting of three recesses with trefoil arches. It was erected by John Budstone who was Bailiff of the city in 1401.

A monument to Cornelius O'Dea (Bishop of Limerick from 1400 to 1426) a liberal benefactor to this Cathedral, is on the west wall of St. James's Chapel. His beautiful crozier and mitre can be seen on display in the nearby Hunt Museum.

## The Lady Chapel 3

Passing through the Glentworth Choir Screen behind the main altar one can see a **Reredos** which was erected in 1907. This was carved by James Pearse, father of the Irish patriots Padraig and William Pearse, who were deeply involved in the 1916 rising. The mosaic triptych shows Christ as prophet, priest and shepherd. A vault was discovered under the sanctuary floor in which three decapitated skeletons were found. Who they were or what happened to them no one knows. The heads may have separated through time. The **Altar**, made of limestone is over 4 metres (13 foot) long and weighs more than 3 tons, is the Cathedral's original pre-Reformation **High Altar**. It was removed from the building by Cromwell's troops and was only reinstated within the Cathedral in the 1960s. It is reputed to be the largest such altar in these islands, carved from a single limestone block. The beautiful pale blue frontal was woven by Anglican nuns in Dublin and the motives echo designs from the famous **Book of Kells** located in Trinity College Dublin. On the top of the altar or mensa you will see five crosses carved into the stone.

St Mary's has a wealth of stained glass in its windows. Before people were literate the Bible was often taught using images expressed in stained glass. The stonework in the East Window above the main altar is in the early English style. The main image of the central light shows Christ seated with the Good Samaritan below and the Charity of Dorcas above. The lights either side of these represent six images from the Gospel.

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.

(St Matthew, Chapter 25, Verse 35)

In 1860 this window was erected as a memorial to Augustus O'Brien Stafford at a cost of £1,500. A member of the then English Parliament for Northamptonshire, North in 1841, he was a distinguished statesman and scholar. He visited the Crimea during the war where he assisted with the wounded and dying soldiers. Nurse **Florence Nightingale** was one of the many subscribers to this window. On the left you will see a large monument. It contains two effigies –

the lower one is of Donough, fourth **Earl of Thomond**, who died in 1624, and above him, his wife Elizabeth Fitzgerald. Both of these figures were damaged by the Cromwellian soldiers, who generally vandalised the Cathedral and were reputed to have stabled their horses here.

Below this massive memorial is a less imposing, but nonetheless important, monument. It is the coffin lid of the founder, **Donal Mór O'Brien** who died in 1194. If you look closely the three lions of the O'Brien arms can be seen with a celtic cross. In 1997, just a few feet from the O'Brien monument, excavations revealed a hitherto unknown burial chamber containing three skeletons. These were most likely 18th century interments.

The **Glentworth Choir Screen** defines the high altar on the west side. Incorporated in this Screen are Bronze Gates which were donated in memory of Dean Hackett, a good friend of Eamonn de Valera, who in 1959 became President of Ireland. The Screen was installed in 1921 in memory of Edmund, Viscount Glentworth, who was killed in the First World War and his sister, Lady Victoria Brady.

## A View

If you turn and look west, down the length of the Cathedral, you will see the Barrel Vaulted Roof of Cratloe oak and on each side of the seats in the nave, four plain pointed arches can be seen the Clerestory windows along which run walkways high above the floor, these were also part of the original building. The Great West Door is worth looking at from outside when you have completed your tour.

A total of five chandeliers hang from the ceiling. These are lit on special occasions in the Cathedral. The larger three were made in Dublin and presented by Limerick Corporation in 1759. The one nearest the west door was discovered by Mr Edward Coulter, an art collector, in a dump, he had it cleaned and restored and presented it to St. Mary's Cathedral.

## The Chapel of the Holy Spirit 4

This is the original North Transept. It contains unusual reredos with its painting and mosaic in memory of Francis and Gladys Cleeve. The **Leper's Squint** is in the north wall, tucked away to the left of the organ pipes. Lepers were not allowed into mediaeval churches, but were able to receive communion through holes in the wall. Leprosy was, of course, far more widespread in those times. The **Ffox Slab** is to the left of the Squint. The Reverend John Ffox was an Augustinian who died in 1519. On exiting the transept one passes 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 5

This chapel is lit by the most modern window in the Cathedral representing the Ascension of Christ, produced by the Harry Clarke Studios. It was dedicated in 1961 by Dr Michael Ramsay – 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 (*lower right*). Two windows of some artistic merit are to be found below this, one commemorates the Rev James Dowd, an important local historian, while the one adjacent to it shows St Luke drawing the Virgin and Child.

**Bishop John Jebb's statue** is one of the most striking in the Cathedral; Jebb was an ecumenist and peacemaker. 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 altar of Murroe Church exhorting the people to peace.

Abington thereafter remained a remarkably peaceful area in contrast to the troubled neighbourhood parishes. To the left of the window, high up on the wall, is a **Machicolis**. This feature usually appears on the outside of a building and was used as a look out post. This suggests that this part of the present-day building was once outside the Cathedral. Eventually it was roofed and became another chapel.

## The Misericords

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 'misericord' comes from a Latin word meaning 'act of mercy'. Carved from oak, between 1480 and 1500, from the woods at Cratloe, Co. Clare, the seats are constructed so that they may be raised. In the early Church the clergy stood throughout the services, in fact at one time sitting was forbidden. On the lip of each of the 23 seats there is a ledge which was designed to allow the occupant, though appearing to stand, to rest during long services, hence the name 'Mercy Seats'. The oak from Cratloe has been used since the 11th century. The beams of the roof of Westminster Hall and those in this Cathedral also came from Cratloe. Each misericord is now a stall for a member of the Cathedral Chapter. The beautifully executed carvings on the underside of the seats include such fabulous monsters as the Cockatrice (under the seat marked 'Archidiaconus') and the Griffin which was carved by a master's hand (Praecantor's stall). The carvings represent symbols of good and evil and in some cases their conflict. There now follows a complete list of carvings and the name of the canon's stall above each seat:

Decanus (Dean) – Human head wearing a 'chaperon' Archidiaconus – Cockatrice (a two headed lizard); Ballycahane – Antelope; Croagh – Mantichora (ate human flesh); Tullabracky – a man's head; Donoghmore – Wyvern and Lion fighting; Anhid – Antelope; Cancellarius – Wyvern (two legged dragon).

Praecantor – Wyvern biting his tail; Munchin – Antelope; Ardcanny – Mantichora; Killeedy – an Angel; Kilpeacon – Lindworm (wingless Wyvern); Effin – two Antelopes; Dysert – Swan (one of the finest carvings); Thesaurius (seat broken); No plaque – Griffin (half Eagle, half Lion).