

Cathedral of the Assumption Thurles



1879~1979

On June 21, 1879, an important event in the history of the diocese of Cashel and Emly took place. On that date Dr Croke consecrated the Cathedral which had been built by his predecessor, Dr Leahy, between 1865 and 1872.

This year we celebrate the centenary of that occasion, and on the same date, June 21, the high altar which has been renovated will be re-consecrated by Most Reverend Dr Morris, the 6th Archbishop to preside in the Cathedral.

We welcome you to share with the people of Cashel and Emly in thanking God for the blessings of the hundred years, and we invite you to visit this place of prayer, a holy place indeed since the 14th century.



ARCHBISHOPS SINCE FOUNDATION OF CATHEDRAL

+ Patrick Leahy	1857–1875	(Gortnahoe)
+ Thomas W. Croke	1875–1902	(Kilbrin, Cloyne Diocese)
+ Thomas Fennelly	1902–1913	(Moyne)
+ John M. Harty	1914–1946	(Murroe)
+ Jeremiah Kinane	1946–1959	(Upperchurch)
+ Thomas Morris	1960–	(Killenaule)

The first view of the Cathedral presents an imposing façade, campanile and baptistry.

The Facade has for its model the Cathedral of Pisa, and its Romanesque architectural style is the same as that of Cormac's Chapel on the Rock of Cashel. Irish marble, Aberdeen granite, grey limestone and Portland stone are used to full effect. Three Roman arched doorways form the main entrance to the interior, with statues of the Blessed Virgin and St Joseph on either side of the central door. In the tympana above the doors are carved the head of Christ, St Peter and St Paul. Pillars of Cork red marble, and a colonnade of Galway green form a fitting base for the Rose Window which surmounts them.

Three huge statues of Portland stone—Our Lady Assumed into Heaven, St Patrick and St Albert—surmount the cornice. There are statues too on the apexes of the transept gables—Our Lord, St Peter and St Paul on the eastern one, and Ss Ursula, Augustine and Brigid on the western one.





The Campanile, or bell tower, is a remarkable feature of the Cathedral. 120 feet high and 25 feet square it can be seen for miles around, towering in its stateliness over every other building in the locality.

The Clock was given to the people of Thurles by Dr Croke on the occasion of his Episcopal Silver Jubilee, July 1895. Originally it had three faces, but a fourth was added; now it is a familiar landmark from every direction, and its chimes every quarter hour are a familiar sound.

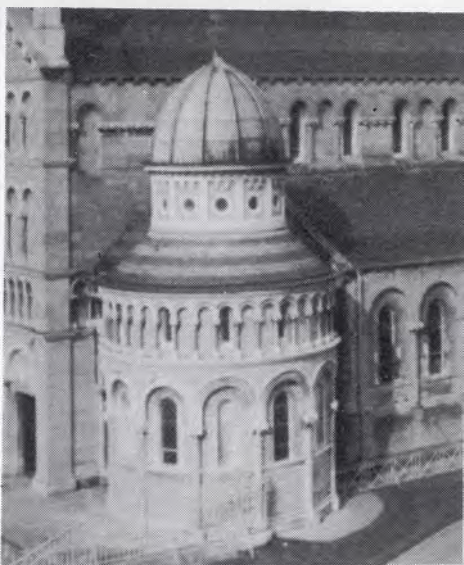
It has been powered by electricity since 1968.

The remainder of the exterior is designed and decorated on the same architectural plan as the front. Blue grey limestone and Portland stone predominate, and mullioned windows are an outstanding feature. . .

The Baptistry resembles Pisa and other Continental Cathedrals in being separate from the main building. It is built in Byzantine style of limestone quarried locally.

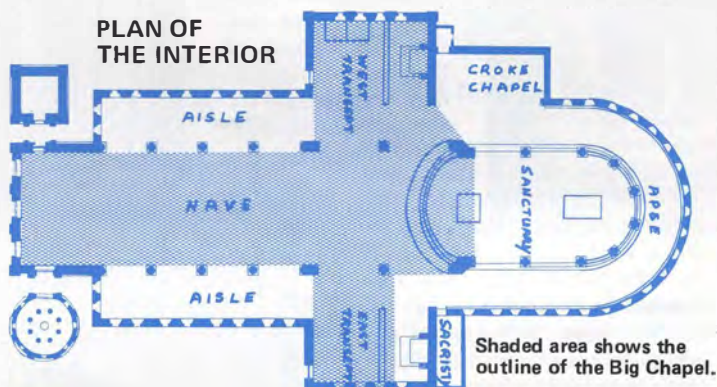
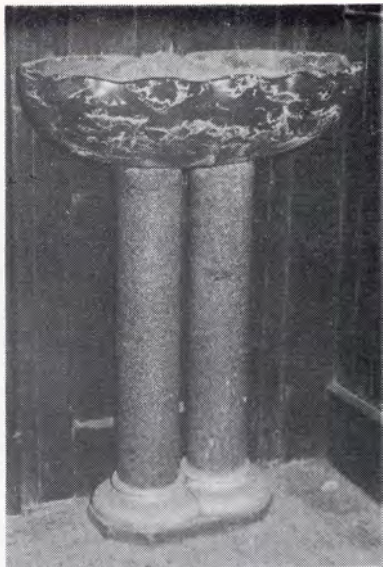
In 1927 the dome of the baptistry was re-covered with copper.

The gilt cross on top has two arms; this was the customary symbol in Ireland of a Metropolitan Archbishop.



As you come inside . . .

the first thing to notice in the central entrance porch is the unusual holy water font. How old this is we do not know, but when purchased over 100 years ago from Boucneau, a London marble merchant, it was already considered 'an ancient font'. It is cut in the shape of a shell of Griotte de Flandres marble, and rests on two columns of polished grey Aberdeen granite.



The interior is divided into the nave, aisles, west and east transepts, apse, sanctuary area, and what was the mortuary chapel and now called the Croke Chapel.

The nave is divided from the aisles by two rows of pillars, the position of which marks the outside walls of the Big Chapel (1807–1865).

These pillars are worth noting—the plinths of Leugh limestone, pillars of Cork red marble, bases and capitals of Caen stone.

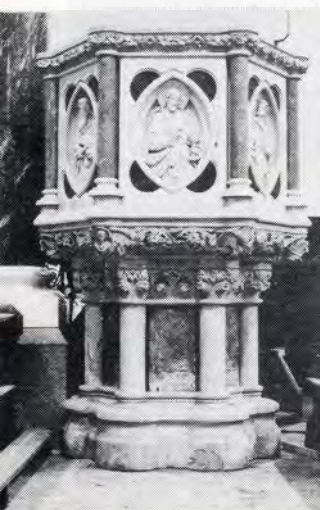


Different sculptors carved the capitals in their present position; no two are alike



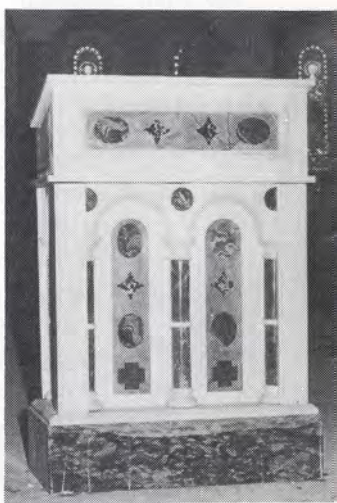
Over the pillars, between the windows and the clerestory, there are slender columns of white, red and green marble resting on corbels representing the heads of saints—a symbolic expression of the idea that the saints are, as it were, the pillars of the Church.

The figure of Christ Crucified opposite the pulpit was erected in 1884 to mark a mission given by the Jesuit Fathers.



The Pulpit, hexagonal in shape, with the Lord and the four Evangelists represented in its five panels, was erected by the people of Thurles in 1878.

In accordance with modern Church custom, the Word of God is now preached more frequently from the ambo in the sanctuary than from this pulpit.



Confessional rooms near the Sacred Heart Shrine are a new addition to the Cathedral, but for those who prefer them, the old style confessionals remain.

An interesting point to note about the Archbishop's confessional is that there is a mitre over it. This is a relic of the days of the Big Chapel where it held the same position. When the old confessional was discarded, the sacristan of the time, Andy Cahill, preserved the mitre which was later placed in its present position. So that little mitre has witnessed an important aspect of the pastoral care of ten Archbishops, from the time of Dr Bray to Dr Morris.

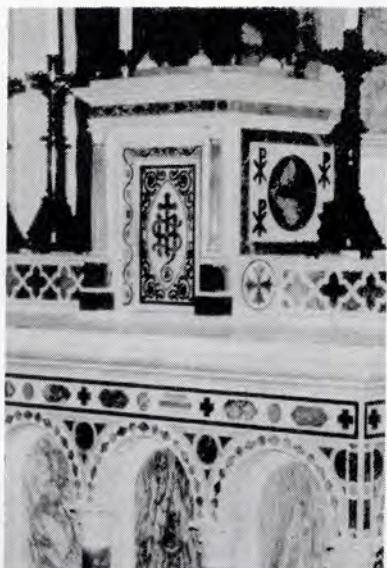


SACRED HEART SHRINE

This altar in the west transept is planned on the same lines as the high altar. It is of white marble inlaid with an abundance of precious stones, and supported with six marble pillars in front and two at each side.

The tabernacle is worthy of special note. The letters IHS on the centre of the door and the fishes on the sides are worked in lapis lazuli and malachite. The entablature rests on two slender fluted columns of giallo antico, and the dome on six others.

The large statue of the Sacred Heart in Parian marble is the work of the famous Italian sculptor, Benzoni.



SHRINE OF OUR LADY

This altar in the eastern transept resembles the Sacred Heart altar in its panels, pillars and arcading. The tabernacle, made of statuary marble, is inlaid with lapis lazuli, agate and other precious stones. The two pillars flanking the tabernacle and the six supporting the dome are of tinted onyx; they are representations in miniature of the famous columns supporting the canopy over the high altar in the Basilica of St Paul outside the Walls in Rome.

The statue of Our Lady, like that of the Sacred Heart, is the work of Benzoni.

MARBLES

The Cathedral is privileged to have among its marbles some which were given by Pope Pius IX to Dr Leahy when he was in Rome for the First Vatican Council.

Tradition tells us that they were among those quarried by early Christian slaves—another link with the past.



—AS IT WAS

The Sanctuary

The sanctuary area has been completely re-arranged for the centenary. The picture above shows it as it was for the past hundred years except for the post Vatican II addition of the portable altar.

The high altar was designed to harmonize with the tabernacle which rested on it until the centenary renovations. The original concept was of a double altar, but only the front was consecrated and used. It is of white marble inlaid with precious stones (malachite, lapis lazuli, rosso, agate and others) and a variety of marbles some of which were donated by Pope Pius IX. Sixteen columns—six of yellow Sienna marble, six of griotte and four of vert campan—with their bases and capitals of bronze support the table of the altar which rests on solid masonry with a veneer of precious marbles.

Since it was brought forward to the front of the sanctuary its new position highlights its beauty, and this unusually large altar (11' x 7') now dominates the whole Cathedral.

On the ceiling overhead is a beautiful painting of Our Lady Assumed into Heaven.

The tabernacle is the oldest thing in the Cathedral, a link with Italy of the 1500's. Originally made for Gesù, the church of the Jesuits in Rome, it remained there for almost 300 years, and eventually found its resting place in the heart of Tipperary. It was believed to have been the work of Pozzo (1642–1709), an Italian painter and architect. More recently, however, experts are agreed that it is more ancient, being the work of Giacomo della Porta (1537–1602), one of the architects of Saint Peters and a pupil of Michelangelo.

When the Gesù was being renovated in the mid-nineteenth century, Dr Leahy purchased the tabernacle for Thurles. He chose it "for the sake of the antique marbles composing it". Antique they certainly are— giallo antico, rossa antico, africano. The door is of bronze with a silver host bearing the letters IHS over three nails.

When the tabernacle came from Leonardi's workshop in Rome, the back of it was plain tuffo, a soft stone, as in the Gesù it had been set against a wall. Dr Leahy had it remodelled as far as possible on the design of the front; he failed to procure verde antico to reproduce the two front pillars, but Galway green marble proved a good substitute. The doorway at the back is closed by a slab of oriental alabaster in which a large cross of lapis lazuli is inlaid— a work Dr Leahy himself is said to have done.

The tabernacle is six and a half feet high, eight feet if the dome is included. It now rests on a separate marble plinth.

—AS IT IS



THE ROSE WINDOW

As you turn to come down the Church your attention is caught by the Rose Window. It was designed and erected by Messrs Mayer and Co., Munich.

The stained glass windows portray figures from the Old and New Testaments, Christ, Our Lady and the saints.

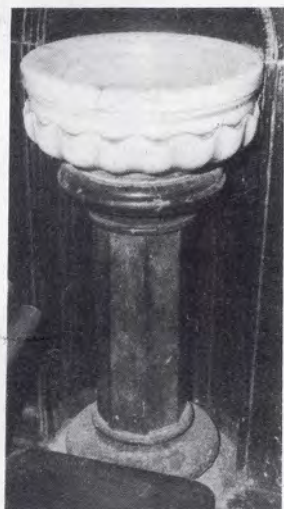
The visitor should note in particular one window in the apse—the fourth from the sacristy door. It was donated by Dr Croke and commemorates St Thomas Aquinas, but even a passing glance shows that the face resembles Dr Croke of Cashel more than the saint of Aquino!



THE ORGAN was first erected in the Big Chapel by Archbishop Laffan in 1826, and was there for 40 years. The work of Messrs Flight and Robson, London, it had three manuals and 1653 pipes. While the Cathedral was being built the organ was stored in St Patrick's College, then overhauled and re-erected in the Cathedral. It has been brought up-to-date on several occasions since. The most recent reconstruction work done on it was in 1974–76. The best of the surviving old pipes have been restored and re-voiced, and almost 1000 new ones added. There are now almost 2000 pipes in the organ which was solemnly blessed by the Archbishop on October 7, 1976.



Before leaving, the visitor should note two holy water fountains rather hidden away in recesses at either side of the entrance porch. These are historic relics of the days of the Big Chapel where the two formed the baptismal font.



THE BAPTISMAL FONT in the baptistry at present is unusual, and that it was originally connected with a fountain is indicated by the many water 'exits' at the fluted edge. The basin is supported by three sea-horses, and it has four intertwined serpents carved in relief above its upper rim.

A stained glass window in the baptistry appropriately depicts the baptism of Christ.

The first baptism in the Cathedral after its consecration was that of Laurence Haven, June 23, 1879.



THE BELLS

The ringing of the bells has marked many memorable occasions since they were solemnly blessed by Dr Leahy on June 29, 1868. Each bell in the eight-bell peal is dedicated to a particular saint or mystery. The inscription on the large bell when translated reads:

Patrick Leahy, Archbishop of Cashel, caused us sisters to be made by John Murphy, A.D. 1867. I am to the honour of God and of the Blessed Virgin Mary Assumed into Heaven.

The second bell reads:

I was made by John Murphy in Dublin, A.D. 1867. I am to the honour of God and of St Patrick.

Other bells are dedicated to St Albert and St Albeus, Ss Joseph, Augustine, Columba, Peter and Paul.

Having been rung by bell-ringers for over 100 years, the bells are electrically programmed since 1978.

A JOYFUL RINGING—

the Episcopal Ordination of the Archbishop, February 28, 1960



How it all began . . .

"Roots"

It is fashionable nowadays to trace one's roots, and this can be done for a building as well as for a people. In celebrating the centenary of this Cathedral we are commemorating a period of history far longer than 100 years, because its roots go through many centuries into the distant past.

12th century Cashel

In 1111, the Synod of Rathbreasail, near Thurles, had decided on two Archbishops for Ireland, one in Armagh and one in Cashel.

Cormac's Chapel

The first Episcopal Church of which any relics remain is Cormac's Chapel on the Rock of Cashel, built between 1127 and 1134.

The O'Brien Cathedral

Sometime after the Synod of Kells (1152) when Cashel was given metropolitan Status, King Dónal Mór O'Brien (the same king whose Charter established Holy Cross Abbey in 1180) built a Cathedral for the Archbishop near Cormac's Chapel.

St Patrick's Cathedral

The O'Brien Cathedral was replaced about a hundred years later by St Patrick's Cathedral, which continued to be the Archiepiscopal Church until it was burned by the Earl of Kildare in 1494. Incidentally he afterwards apologised for his action; he would not have burned it had he not been under the impression that the Archbishop was inside!



Uprooting

So Cashel of the Kings ceased to be Cashel of the Bishops, and during the 16th, 17th and part of the 18th centuries the Archbishops were in hiding, or wandering and seeking shelter wherever they could find it.

Emly

Up until 1718 Emly was a separate diocese. Its last bishop was Terence Albert O'Brien who died on the scaffold in Limerick at the hands of Cromwell's army in 1651. Since 1718 the Archbishop of Cashel has been the Apostolic Administrator of Emly.

Re-settling: Thurles, the Cathedral Town

In the mid-eighteenth century Dr James Butler 1 came to Thurles and took up residence beside the thatched chapel of the time. From this time on, the search for the Cathedral's 'roots' becomes very real, because it stands on the actual site of earlier chapels.

The Carmelite Priory This was the first church on the site, and though it was not an Episcopal Church its existence means that this is indeed a holy place, being a place of worship since the 14th century.

The Mathew Chapel In the 1700's, Mr Mathew, one of the Ascendency class who sympathised with the Catholics, built a 'Roman Chape' near the ruins of the Carmelite Priory. This is often referred to as the Old Chapel, and it was beside it that Dr Butler took up residence.

The Big Chapel In 1807, the Archbishop, Dr Bray, replaced the Mathew Chapel by a more spacious building known as the Big Chapel. It was cruciform in shape and extended from the front doors of the present Cathedral to the north walls of the transepts. This was the venue for the Synod of Thurles, 1850. The Illustrated London News gave this description of the scene:

The Cathedral is, in ornament, within nearly as plain as without, save and except the high altar, which is rich and florid in the extreme; but what is of more importance, the buildings are large and convenient, and were, upon this occasion, fitted up with much care and costly taste.

The High Altar of the Big Chapel



1857 Dr Leahy

In 1857 Dr Leahy was appointed Archbishop, and he soon began to make improvements around the Big Chapel. In 1862 he announced plans for its complete renovation; his aim was a Cathedral worthy of the Archdiocese—an ambitious aim, surely, considering the economic distress of post-famine Ireland, and the extra financial problems of Thurles and surrounding areas due to the failure of Sadlier's Bank in 1856. In 1865 the work began, and what was to be 'renovation' became almost a completely new building. The façade was added, the campanile and baptistry, then the aisles, sanctuary and apse.

Dr Leahy attended the First Vatican Council, and while in Rome purchased the tabernacle and other treasures for Thurles; he also received precious marbles as a gift from the Pope.

The architect was J. J. McCarthy; because he was so involved in church building he was often referred to as the Irish Pugin. He based the facade on the Cathedral of Pisa. The builder was Barry McMullen, and J. C. Ashlin was responsible for the enclosing walls and railings, and for much of the furnishing.

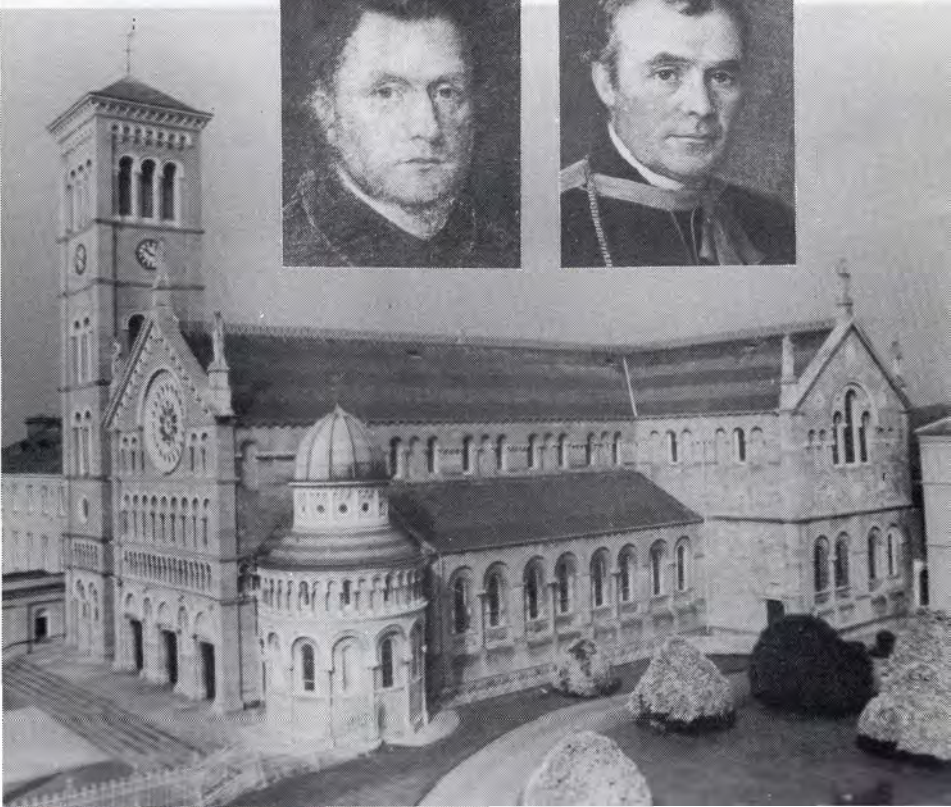
Cathedral of the Assumption

By 1872 the Cathedral of the Assumption was completed and it was consecrated by Dr Croke on June 21, 1879.

Dr Leahy



Dr Croke



GRAVES

In all ten archbishops are buried in the Cathedral, five who were re-interred there after its building, and five in the past hundred years.

+ James Butler I	1774	+ Patrick Leahy	1875
+ James Butler II	1791	+ Thomas Croke	1902
+ Thomas Bray	1820	+ Thomas Fennelly	1927
+ Robert Laffan	1833	+ John M. Harty	1946
+ Michael Slattery	1857	+ Jeremiah Kinane	1959

During the renovations of recent weeks the brass plaque marking Dr Leahy's grave was uncovered in the sanctuary, the grave stone of James Butler I near the pulpit, and between the Croke Chapel and the sanctuary the grave of one of the Ursuline nuns (1861) whose burial place was in that area before the Cathedral was built.

TO MARK CENTENARY YEAR

the building has been re-slatted, the interior painted, floor carpeted, lighting and heating improved;

in the re-painting many stencils have been omitted; this is in keeping with the modern trend, and it aims at brightening the interior and reducing upkeep expenses;

woodwork between nave and aisles has been removed, giving a more spacious appearance;

mortuary chapel, now to be known as Croke Chapel, has been raised to level of sanctuary, and dividing ornamental screen removed;

sanctuary are has been changed

—floor raised

—altar brought forward

—tabernacle on separate plinth

—Archbishop's chair and Canons' stalls re-sited;

Stations of the Cross have been re-painted;

confessional rooms have been provided near Sacred Heart Shrine.

And so with gratitude for the blessings of the past—

the innumerable Masses in this Cathedral

the sacraments that have been received

the missions and retreats

the novenas and vigils

the 18,217 baptisms

the 4,068 marriages

the 997 ordinations

we trust the present to the Lord, and begin the SECOND CENTURY with confidence.

IMPORTANT DATES IN HISTORY OF CATHEDRAL

1111	Synod of Rathbreasail, near Thurles
1127–1134	Building of Episcopal Church on Rock of Cashel —Cormac's Chapel
1152	Synod of Kells
Late 12th c.	Building of the O'Brien Cathedral, Cashel
Late 13th c.	Building of St Patrick's Cathedral, Cashel
1494	Burning of St Patrick's Cathedral
16th, 17th, part 18th c.	Years of wandering, exile and hiding for Archbishops of Cashel
1700's	The Mathew Chapel built near the ruins of the 14th century Carmelite Priory, Thurles
c 1750	Archbishop James Butler I came to reside in thatched cottage near the Mathew Chapel (site of Archbishop's house)
1807	Big Chapel built by Archbishop Bray
1857	Appointment of Dr Leahy as Archbishop
1865–1872	Building of Cathedral of the Assumption
1875	Death of Dr Leahy. Appointment of Dr Croke as Arch- bishop
1876	Dr Croke held the first meeting of the Confraternity of the Holy Family, May 24
1879	Consecration of Cathedral by Dr Croke, June 21
1895	Clock on campanile presented by Dr Croke
1911	Statue of Dr Leahy erected by Dr Fennelly
1924	Installation of electricity
1927	Dome of baptistry re-covered with copper
1935	Rebuilding of organ
1948–1954	Redecoration of interior, modernization of electric in- stallation. Public address system introduced
1968	Clock powered by electricity
1974–1976	Reconstruction and restoration of organ
1978	Cathedral bells electrically programmed
1979	Centenary renovation Re-consecration of renovated altar by Dr Morris, June 21