



The Architects and Builders

The original architect to bring Dr. O'Higgins's vision to life was renowned Irish architect, Joseph Benjamin Keane (d.1859) along with the principal contractor, John Mullins. The 200 foot-high campanile, or bell-tower, was designed by John Bourke, who completed the works in 1863 to his own design, rather than that originally designed by J.B. Keane.

The architect who completed the exterior, from 1889 to 1893, was George Coppinger Ashlin, son-in-law of the great Victorian architect A.W.N Pugin. It was Ashlin who designed the great portico with its six magnificent Ionic columns and pediment housing the scene of the 'Consecration of St. Mel as a bishop'. Above the pediment are three sculptures; the Sacred Heart (funded by donations from the children of the Diocese), flanked on either side by St. Mel and St. Ciarán, who founded the great monastery at Clonmacnoise. Interestingly, Ashlin had hoped to erect the portico using cast-iron to a new design, but eventually it was agreed to return to the original vision, as set out by Dr. O'Higgins. The builder of the portico was Meade & Co., with the carvings on the pediment sculpted by George Smyth of Dublin. The original communion rail was by Edmund Sharpe and brass communion gates were by John McGloughlin. Kelly & Sons, Earl St., also carried out work on the Cathedral during this time.

In the 20th century, further changes took place in the Cathedral, with Ralph Henry Byrne undertaking designs for the mortuary chapel in the 1930s. From 1975 to 1977 the Sanctuary was reorganised in line with past-Vatican II liturgy. The architects for this were Wilfred Cantwell and Richard Hurlley. Ray Carroll designed the magnificent tapestry showing the Coming of Christ in Glory; the tapestry was woven by 'Killybegs Carpets'. Ray Carroll also designed the backdrop of the 'Supper at Emmaus' which stood over the Blessed Sacrament altar. Imogen Stuart carved the new lectern and altar for the redesigned sanctuary. The main contractor for this work was P.J. McLoughlin with Frank Rennick, Hugh Brady and Noel McGeeney as subcontractors. The new pipe organ and choir gallery was erected by Kenneth Jones of Bray in 1983.



Restored religious objects

Selection of items recovered after fire which were restored with great care by local craftsmen

