A Norman knight is still on the look-out over the Golden Vale of Tipperary, but he has never seen the peaks of the Galtees that define the eastern edge of the plain, for Pierre, as his name suggests, is of stone, and he stands on the flat turret of Glenstal Castle. There the architect's desire to be remembered conflicted with his patron's vision of medieval Ireland, and, having inscribed round the turret Bardwell me fecit, he added the date 1839, but cut it to look like 1139. Even in its incomplete form, Glenstal is one of the most remarkable castle-style projects in Ireland, and William Bardwell does not tell the whole truth in putting up just his name. For the project dates back at least five years earlier, and no less than seven architects were eventually to be involved.

All this makes for complications and uncertainties, but, as the castle was built on a new site on a newly formed estate, at least we need not go into the details of the early history of the place, for that is set out in the history of Murroe and Boher by Mark Tierney. In the second half of the 18th century, the Lords Carbery leased out their increasingly encumbered estates in Limerick, and in 1818 that part of the property then called Cappercullen, Garranbane, Glenstal and Meentolla was taken by Matthew Barrington for £150 a year. A few years later, Matthew Barrington began to consider building a more ambitious house some five miles away on that part of the property then called Glenstal. However, most confusingly, he changed his mind about both the site and its name and decided to build two miles to the west, on the present site, then called Garranbane, which means 'old nag', and which he proceeded to call Glenstal.

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Matthew Barrington's plans for building a great Norman-Revival castle were never fully realised, but it is interesting to follow the changing ideas of his first four architects from 1833 to Bardwell's building, begun about 1838. In 1927 Glenstal was acquired by the Benedictine Order, who run it as a boys' school; it became an Abbey in 1957.
3-PART OF THE KEEP AND SOUTH-WEST FRONT.

Business. Matthew's great-grandfather, Benjamin, was one of Limerick's leading merchants and served as Sheriff in 1720. Just over 100 years later, in 1831, Matthew's father, Joseph, was made a baronet. Matthew, who was the eldest of five boys, was trained as a lawyer and his career divided into two parts, a first period when he held the profitable job of Crown Solicitor for Munster, which meant he handled all government legal work in Cork, Tipperary, Kerry, Clare and Limerick; and, then, a second in the 1840s and 50s, when he was solicitor and adviser to the Great Southern Railway and also had a thriving private practice in Dublin.

The idea of building a new house at...
Glenstal dates from the earlier part, when he was assured of a basic income of some £15,000 a year, but its realisation and the acquisition of the estate dates from the second phase when both profits and risks were greater. It is this change of direction, and bouts of costly litigation with the heirs of the 5th Lord Carbery in the 1840s and '50s over the legality of his purchase of the property in 1840, that probably explains much of the building history of Glenstal, and certainly its stop-go character after 1839.

The survival of projects dated 1833, 1834 and 1835 that precede the perspectives, which we must take to be Bardwell's, throw fascinating light on changing attitudes to the gothic and castle styles at that time. There are two from 1833, one by James and George Pain of Limerick, dated April (Fig. 5), and one by William O'Hara of Percy Place, Dublin (Fig. 6). The Pains had been sent to Ireland by Nash to build Lough Coutra Castle in Galway, and James worked at Dromoland Castle in 1813; they stayed on and developed a considerable practice in south-western Ireland. Bearing in mind the Nash connection, it is not surprising to find strong evidence of his style in their design for Glenstal, and they noted that their proposal was a pretty picturesque villa with battlements and towers. O'Hara, on the other hand, proposed to Barrington an Irish Windsor. A still obscure figure from Dublin, he is recorded only as an engineer to the Paving Board, but he may well have been a railway man, for he was one of the architects who submitted a design for Kingsbridge Station, Dublin, in 1845 (see Kingsbridge Station by Jeanne Sheehy, Gatherton Series, 1, 1973). Windsor, of course, was much in the architectural news then, because Wyatville's transformation had been begun in 1824 and the heightening of the Round Tower had been carried out in 1830-31. However, O'Hara's Round Tower was not a keep in the Windsor sense, but a Picturesque pivot of the design, as were so many of Nash's towers, both castellated and classical.

The following year, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Decimus Burton appeared briefly on the scene, producing in November yet another Windsor-inspired design (Fig. 7), a commission no doubt received as a by-product of his visit to Ireland in connection with improvements to Phoenix Park, Dublin. All that came of it was that the drawings were evidently shown to O'Hara, who produced a revised scheme in January 1839.

After that there is silence until 1839, when Barrington records in his only surviving account book payments to Bardwell, but there is no clue as to how the connection was made. H.N. Colvin records among Bardwell's works his unsuccessful projects for the Fitzwilliam Museum in 1835, and for the Houses of Parliament in 1836, but unfortunately nothing appears to be known about his style of draughtsmanship, and we have no positive means of identifying as his the two unsigned and undated perspectives of Glenstal, now in Glenstal Abbey (Figs 1 and 4). The buildings are very much in the manner of Thomas Hopper, as the Knight of Glin has suggested to us, and certainly the influence of his Gosford Castle, Co. Armagh, is apparent; but then it is his name that dominates the Norman Revival, largely because of Penrhyn Castle in North Wales. (However it is known that John Kelly, one of the later architects to be involved, exhibited views of Glenstal at the Royal Hibernian Society in 1848 or '49).

It is interesting to relate Hopper's influence to that of contemporary architectural literature by Carter, Rickman, Britton and Pugin, and to compare both with Sir Charles Long's views on the treatment of Windsor, which are quoted in the recently published volume of the History of the Office of Works, and then to look forward to the simplified forms of Salvin's Peckforton, which was begun in 1846. The character of Windsor, he wrote, 'should be that of simplicity and grandeur, and as well for

7-DECIMUS BURTON'S DESIGN, 1834.
its History, as from the imposing style of Building belonging to that period, I should say the period of Edward the 3rd is that which should generally predominate, not however excluding the Edifices of earlier Periods, where we find anything of grand or picturesque effect- ... He dreaded modern gothic architecture and the repetition of small towers: 'this style which has been called gothic is in a great degree fanciful, and does not belong to any period of Castle Architecture that I am acquainted with'.

It is conceivable that the reason for the pause at Glenstal was not architectural, but lies in the details of Barrington's own career. As well as being Crown Solicitor, he had become increasingly interested in Irish railway projects in the 1830s (and in fact he chose the site for Limerick Junction) and partly in order to have more time for these, he was attempting to get the reversion of his solicitorship for his son. He had influential allies at Dublin Castle, who were prepared to accept this, and his support for the government was recognised in London by Lord Melbourne. But Thomas Drummond, the Under Secretary in Dublin from 1836 to 1839, who was an administrative reformer, refused to co-operate, and, indeed, in 1838 he more or less forced Barrington to give up his post, perhaps because of Barrington's other affairs, and work stopped in 1840 or '41. Bardwell came over in 1840 and two years later he was consulted about the restoration of St Mary's, Limerick, but despite the preparation of a new estimate in 1843, it seems building at Glenstal was not resumed until 1846 or '47. Then the designs were entrusted to a Dublin architect called Dargan, and he handed them on to John Kelly, who is recorded in the Irish Almanac for 1851 as being an architect and surveyor and valuator of railway and public works living in Upper Gloucester Street North; but as to his career the only other clue at the moment is that he worked at Malahide Castle. By May, 1847, 42 men were being employed on the building, and early the following year it was envisaged that the whole of the south-west range would be complete by the spring of 1849. But again there were delays and work stopped in 1849, leaving the shell of the picture gallery and the drawing room on the south front and the entrance hall behind finished, but the 'keep' hardly started.

Four years later Barrington made a final effort to complete the castle. He paid off Bardwell and called in Joshua Hargrave from Cork, a member of a dynasty founded by the grandfather, Abraham Hargrave I, and a contact he had probably met through his railway activities, because Hargrave is credited with the design for the Cork and Blackrock Railway Terminus. Although the idea was to go on with Bardwell's designs, inevitably these were curtailed; the octagon tower at the west end of the south-west front was given up, as was the range linking it to the keep that was to contain the drawing room, and so the plan of the keep had to be revised to provide a dining room.

Probably Glenstal was an economic
folly from the beginning, but it produces
detective work for perverse architectural
historians, particularly when it comes to
the details. To start with, Bardwell had a
great deal of carving done by Kelsey in
London, presumably W.T. Kelsey of
Brompton, whom Rupert Gunnis records
as working about 1830-46, rather than
Charles Samuel Kelsey, who was only
born in 1820. Fifteen cases of Kelsey's
work, mostly shafts of columns, capitals
and corbels, were sent over in April,
1844, and much of it was not finally used
until the former drawing room and grand
staircase were finished after 1849.

However not all the detail is
English-inspired or made, and this is one of the
most interesting things about Glenstal.
The first sign of specifically Irish interest
is the doorway from the (roughly finished)
dining room to the drawing room, which
is a particularly fine copy of the doorway
at Killaloe Cathedral, some 11 miles from
Glenstal. Even then it was coming to be
recognised as the finest of the few
remaining examples of Irish
Romanesque carving.

From Killaloe one moves to the west
door of Iffley church adapted for the
overmantel in the drawing room, and
then, beyond the former picture gallery,
in the round tower is the library, an
extraordinary octagonal room with a
central pier containing two fireplaces and
a stone-ribbed vault springing from
elaborately carved capitals. From the
point of view of 19th-century concepts of
comfort and cosiness it is hard to think of

a more unusable room: to look out of the
windows one has to step up from the
main floor level, and the sense of light is
largely achieved by reflections in panels
of looking glass set into the central pier.

The design of the capitals is
particularly intriguing and various
theories have been advanced as to the
sources of their design, including an
Augustinian abbey in Lisbon, but it
seems more likely that an Irish carver
was shown the plates in a book like
Carter's and then he was allowed to use
his Celtic head. But who was he?

Apparently a local carver called White did
the Killaloe door in 1841, and there are
also unspecific payments to a carver
called Shiel.

Until more is known about the Irish
Revival in the late 1830s and early '40s
we may not have the answer, but these Irish
elements at Glenstal are not isolated
phenomena. Adare (Country Life, May
15, 22 and 29, 1969), also in Limerick,
for instance, comes to mind: begun by
the 2nd Earl of Dunraven about 1832, it
is rich in ornament of comparable fantasy
done in the late 1830s and early '40s and
in its entrance hall there is Irish
Romanesque detail comparable with that
to be seen at Glenstal. This may not be
coincidence for it is clear from
Barrington's account book that he had
dealings with Lord Dunraven, and as
they were both building, it is more than
likely that they discussed architecture as
well as business.

It is sad that not more of Barrington's
papers have survived and also that there
appears to be no old photographs of the
interior of the house, for it is evident that
Bardwell attended to its furnishing and
decorating as well as its design.

Tapestries, pictures, stained glass,
amour and furniture were all sent over,
and it sounds as if the kind of effect he
was trying to achieve was a cross
between Nash's Mansions and the plates
in Meyrick's and Shaw's books on armour
and furniture.

The Barringtons continued to live at
Glenstal for some 60 years after Sir
Matthew's death in 1861, but the tragic
accidental shooting of Winifred
Barrington, the daughter of Sir Charles,
the 5th baronet, in an IRA ambush on a
group of Black and Tans with whom she
was returning to the castle in May, 1921,
led to their departure and the eventual
sale of the estate in 1925. The castle
was bought by Mr. James Ryan as a gift
for a religious order, and it was offered to
the Benedictines at Maredsous in
Belgium, whose previous Irish abbot,
Dom Columba Marmion, had wanted to
found a house in Ireland. The first monk
arrived in May, 1927, and later that year
Glenstal was canonically erected into a
Simple Priory. It became an Abbey 30
years later.

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