

The Story Of St. John's Cathedral, Limerick

Limerick Diocesan Appeal (SECOND LIST)

The Committee gratefully acknowledges the following subscriptions:—

	£	s.	d.
Lallyagran Co-op. Soc. ...	20	0	0
Holgers Stores ...	20	0	0
Christian Brothers (St. Teresa's) ...	20	0	0
Devane, Dr. J. F. ...	100	0	0
Green, Chief Supt. ...	10	0	0
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McCoury, Louis, M.I.A.A. ...	50	0	0
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McNally, Bishop, New York ...	500	0	0
McNally, non. ...	1	0	0
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McNally & Co. (per Mulholland family) ...	10	0	0
McNally, G. O'G. ...	2	2	0
McNally, John (St. John's Square) ...	5	0	0
McNally & Co., Ltd., Morgan ...	50	0	0
McNally, non. ...	100	0	0
McNally, J.P. & Co. ...	50	0	0
McNally, E. & Co. ...	100	0	0
McNally, Patrick ...	20	0	0
McNally, Ralph & Jack ...	50	0	0
McNally & Co. (per F. O'Mahoney) ...	100	0	0
McNally, E. D., 114 O'Connell St. ...	10	0	0
McNally, J. J., Catherine St. ...	50	0	0
McNally, Presentation Sisters ...	100	0	0
McNally, non. ...	100	0	0
McNally, Murphy, Thos., Limerick Woollen Co., Wm. St. ...	25	0	0
McNally, John & Co. ...	105	0	0
McNally, non. ...	20	0	0
McNally, Mission Sisters ...	15	0	0
McNally, non. ...	50	0	0
McNally, White, A. & Co., Shannon St. ...	10	0	0

IN view of the special collection in the city on Sunday next, in aid of two worthy Diocesan purposes—the fund for the reconstruction of St. John's Cathedral and the erection of a new Diocesan Seminary—the subjoined special article on the history of the former building will be read with much interest. This contribution, which gives a comprehensive outline of how St. John's Cathedral came to be built, was specially written for the "Limerick Leader" by a correspondent who signs himself "S. del G."

In 1853, Dr. John Ryan, Bishop of Limerick, decided to take down the old Parish Chapel of St. John's, not only because it was inadequate for the wants of the parish, but also because it was unfit for a place of Divine Worship. Originally it was intended to erect a plain substantial edifice sufficiently spacious to contain the congregation. It was to be of the simplest character and without ornament and it was one of the first conditions that it should cost the smallest possible sum.

One of the hardest workers behind the scenes was the then Administrator, Rev. Wm. Bourke. It was decided that, due to the poverty of his parish, it would be prudent not to embark on a building of extravagant character, "when the parishioners were so little able, however willing, to assist with large funds."

PLANS MADE AND WORK COMMENCED.

The plans for the new building were made, and work commenced.

result of this is a certain poverty of appearance in the exterior, and due to the necessity of strictly economising the funds the architect had to trust to large simple forms for the effect of the exterior of the building rather than to any decoration or richness of detail.

WORKS OF AN ORNAMENTAL NATURE.

Originally the roofs were perfectly plain but subsequently certain works of an ornamental nature were carried out in the chancel, and across the chancel arch was placed a rood beam bearing the figure of Our Lord on the Cross, with figures of the Blessed Virgin and St. John on each side. These figures were carved in wood larger than life size and were the work of Phylffers, a Belgian sculptor. The high altar, in the ancient form of a canopy standing on four columns of red Limerick marble, was executed in stone alabaster, red and other marbles, which is decorated by figures and bas-reliefs, also the work of M. Phylffers. The altar

FINE SPECIMEN OF GOTHIC ARCHITECTURE.

In spite of the simplicity of design, the Cathedral on its completion was one of the largest in Ireland and also one of the most perfect specimens of Gothic architecture in the country. The designs were prepared by a London architect, Hardwicke, who incidentally also designed the Redemptorist Church at Mount St. Alphonsus, and who also was commissioned to design some of the later works at Adare Manor.

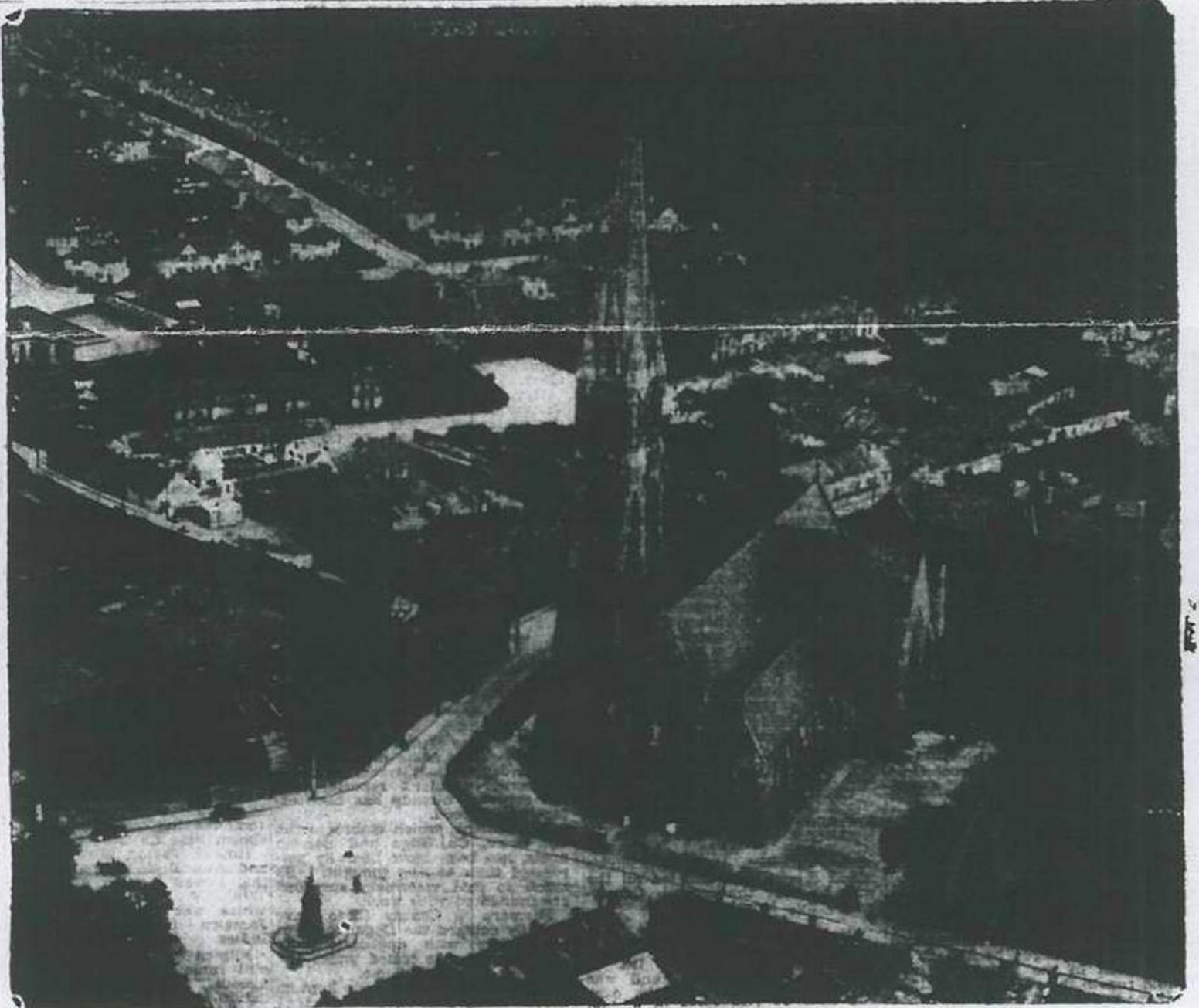
The tower and spire of the Cathedral were not completed until August, 1883, in the original contract the tower was raised above the roof rising in all to about seventy feet above the ground. It was to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Pope Pius IX that it was decided to build a great spire under the invocation of Mary Immaculate. The Most Rev. Dr. Butler, then Bishop of Limerick, was foremost in the movement and the clergy and

During that night and the following morning a most unexpected gale arose. It was one of the most violent gales that had been experienced in living memory. Crowds flocked to St. John's Square with the fervent hope that the newly completed spire would withstand the fury of the wind. The scaffolding was still in position at the top of the spire when the storm broke.

BEAMS FORCED LOOSE.

After a time the beams were forced loose and were lashed against the top of the spire. Eventually at 11 a.m. on October 1st, 1882, about twenty feet of the top of the spire was carried away. Fortunately, the falling debris was blown clear of the main building by the south westerly gale and so no damage was done to the Cathedral itself.

Undaunted by the calamity, the zealous administrator, Fr. J. McCoy, marshalled his forces and



A special view of the Cathedral as seen from the air.

The first stone was laid by Dr. Ryan on 1st May, 1856. It is rather interesting to note that the church was about half finished when it began to attract much attention beyond the parish and these immediately interested in it, and it was determined to extend the scheme and make the new church the Cathedral of the Diocese of Limerick. This decision rendered some alterations necessary in the arrangements of the building, but, fortunately, as the church was originally designed to cater for a large congregation, the plan required but little alteration, but the height and decoration of the building had to be altered considerably as the plain structure designed merely for a Parish Church was hardly suitable in character for a Cathedral. It was unfortunate that so much of the work had been completed before it was decided to build the Cathedral, because it was impossible at that stage, without incurring considerable expense, to alter the extreme simplicity of character already given to the exterior. The

was presented by Mrs. Frances McNamara, in memory of her husband.

One of the most striking ornaments in the Cathedral, a statue of the Blessed Virgin by Benzoni, was presented by William Monsell, M.P.



Very Rev. W. J. O'Grady, present Adm. of St. John's.

lately were most generous in the support they gave the project. The designs and specifications were carried out by Messrs. M. A. and S. Hennessey, architects, Limerick. Originally it was intended that the height of the spire would be 263 feet but when completed the top of the cross that surmounts the spire was 275 feet above the ground, the highest in Ireland.

GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT IN STORE.

The work went on enthusiastically from the start and the stone used was from the Rosbrien Quarries, which were famous at the time. The stone was carved and placed in position by local artisans and the finished spire remains a fitting monument to their industry and skill. A very great disappointment was in store for the people of Limerick before the spire was finally completed. The last stone of the spire was placed in position on 30th September, 1882, and the banners of the various trades' guilds floated from the apex of the spire.

aided by subscriptions that poured in, unasked, from all sides, decided to proceed with the work the following May. A contract was entered into with a Newcastle-on-Tyne contractor named Massingham and he completed it on 4th August, 1883, when, with the aid of the architect, who mounted to the top of the scaffold, he fixed the cross at the apex of the spire.

ENTHUSIASM OF OTHER DAYS

It would be well for us, now that his Lordship, Most Rev. Dr. O'Neill, is appealing for funds to carry out much needed repairs to this same Cathedral, and for other urgent requirements of the diocese, to cast our minds back to the enthusiasm with which the Limerick of another generation undertook the noble work of building and rebuilding the glorious Cathedral, which we are now privileged to help in handing on to future generations as a monument to the devotion and zeal of the Limerick of 1854.

LIMERICK MENTAL HOSPITAL BOARD.

NOTICE TO BUILDERS.

Tenders are invited from competent Building Contractors for the erection of new Cow-Byres and auxiliary buildings on the Committee's farm at Rathbane, Roxboro Road, Limerick, in accordance with the plans and specification prepared by the Architect, Patrick J. Sheahan, R.I.A.I., M.I.C.E.I., 47, O'Connell Street, Limerick.

Copies of the plans, specification and Tender Form may be obtained on the Architect during the usual office hours on payment of a deposit of 15/6, returnable on receipt of bona fide tender not subsequently withdrawn.

Sealed tender on the Official Form endorsed "Tender for Cow-Byres," and having the contractor's name and address on the outside, must be lodged with the undersigned not later than 12 noon on Friday, 22nd October, 1954.

The lowest or any tender will not necessarily be accepted and the acceptance of any tender will be subject to the sanction of the Minister for Health.

P. McAULIFFE,
Acting Chief Clerk.
12nd September, 1954. (fo16c)

LIMERICK COUNTY COUNCIL, acting as Newcastle West Town Commissioners.

REPAIRS TOWN HOUSES

Limerick County Council, acting as Newcastle West Town Commissioners, invites tenders for Repairs Houses in the town of Newcastle West, the property of the Town Commissioners. Specifications, Tender Forms and List of Houses to be paired may be obtained from the Acting Town Clerk, County Council Offices, Newcastle West.

Tenders and Priced Specifications sealed envelopes marked "Repairs Town Houses, Newcastle West," should be addressed to the Limerick County Council Offices, 32, Connell Street, Limerick, and delivered not later than 4 p.m. on Friday, 12th November, 1954.

A separate tender should be submitted for each house.

The lowest or any tender need not necessarily be accepted.

J. J. KING,
Acting Town Clerk,
County Council Offices,
Newcastle West,
10th October, 1954. (9-23c)

LIMERICK COUNTY COUNCIL.

COAL SUPPLIES - COUNTY DISPENSARIES.

Limerick County Council invites tenders for the supply of best quality House Coal to Dispensaries in the County at per ton delivered and stored.

Tender Forms, together with list of Dispensaries setting out quantity of coal required for each, may be obtained from The