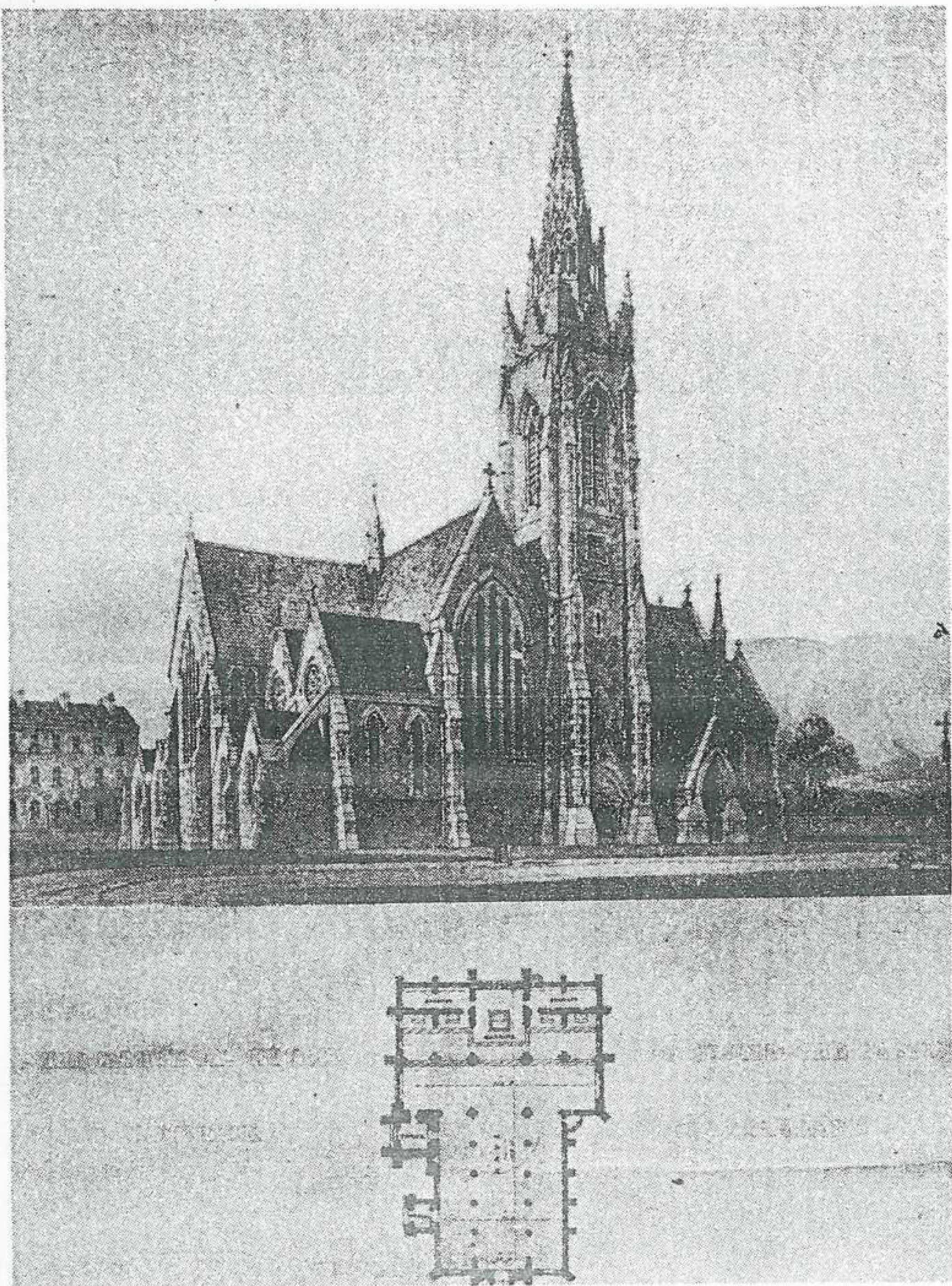


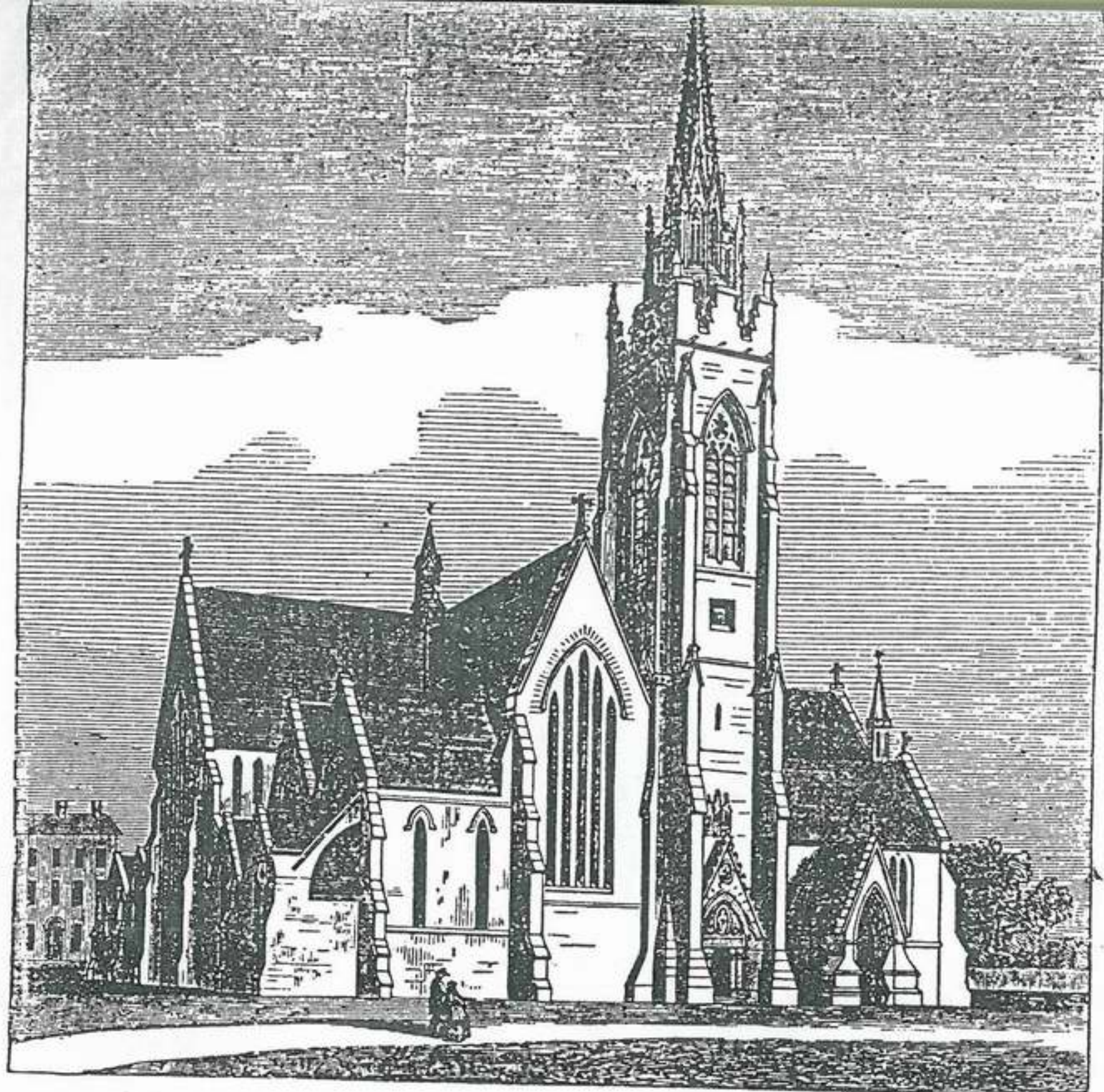
4 Philip Charles Hardwick,
designer of St John's cathedral

Worcestershire for the earl Beauchamp; and Charterhouse School near Godalming, Surrey.

Though ten years younger than the third earl of Dunraven the two men had much in common, especially their joint interest in architecture and religion, and seem to have been friends for some years. Indeed it would appear, in particular from letters between the third earl and Hardwick which form part of the Dunraven Collection, that Hardwick was himself deeply interested in the religious movement of the 1840's and 1850's which occupied minds as diverse as Newman, Dunraven, Tervoe, Pugin and Ruskin.¹¹ The 1850's, therefore, saw Philip Charles Hardwick in Adare, designing the west end of the south front of Adare Manor and the south parterre. His presence at so prestigious a venue and his standing in architectural circles in England, would naturally commend him to anybody undertaking a major project at the time; his religious beliefs and his friendship with the third earl, who in 1855 himself became a convert to Catholicism, seem to have made it inevitable that thoughts of Irish architects being employed should be dropped and the commission given to him.

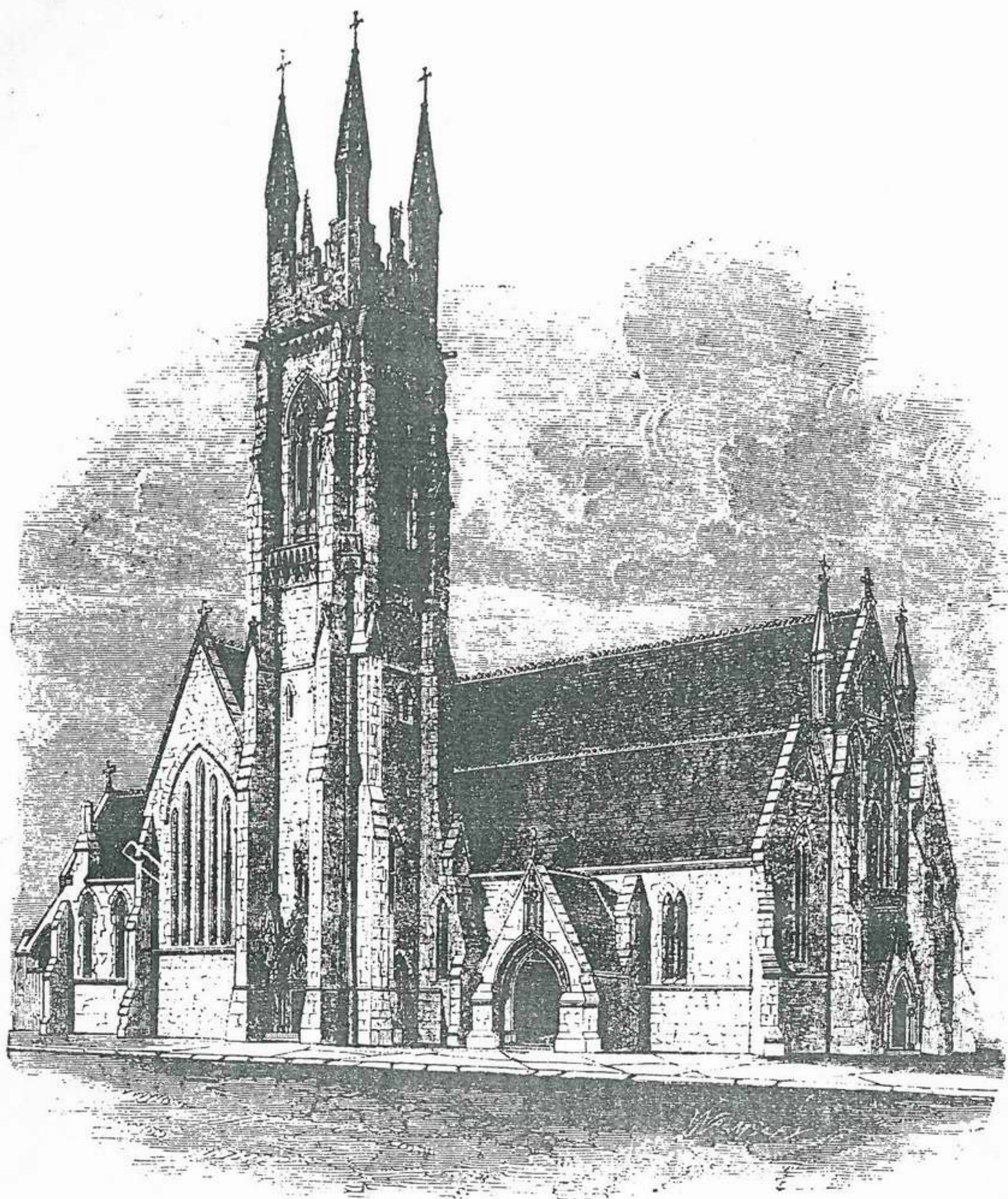


5 Hardwick's design for the cathedral (drawing by Metcalf)



6 The cathedral as depicted in the *Irish Builder*, 1 January 1860

The stone used in the building of the cathedral was quarried locally at the Garryowen quarries, in what is now known as the Market's Field, and was, in the words of Maurice Lenihan, 'better adapted than any other' because of its hardness.²⁶ Maurice Lenihan also noted 'the quarries at Garryowen, Altamira, Rosbrien, Ballysimon etc. produce very fine marble and limestone with which many of the buildings of modern Limerick have been constructed. . . . Among the most perfect and beautiful of the more recent uses of the Limerick stone, or as it may be called, marble, are the buildings of St John's Catholic cathedral, the Catholic church of Mount St Alphonsus, the convent orphanage and church of the Sisters of Mercy at Mount St Vincent. Mr Barry, the architect of Westminster Palace, was in treaty some years ago with the late Mr Staunton, the then proprietor of the Ballysimon quarries, in reference to



7 The *Illustrated London News* drawing, 5 May 1860

Baptist would flank the tabernacle. It described the altar as follows: 'The table itself is of Limerick marble, the substructure being of alabaster and coloured marble adorned in the centre by a group, carved in pure white alabaster, of the sacrifice of Abraham. . . . The stonework of the altar has been executed by Mr White, the sculpture by Mr Theodore Phyffers.'

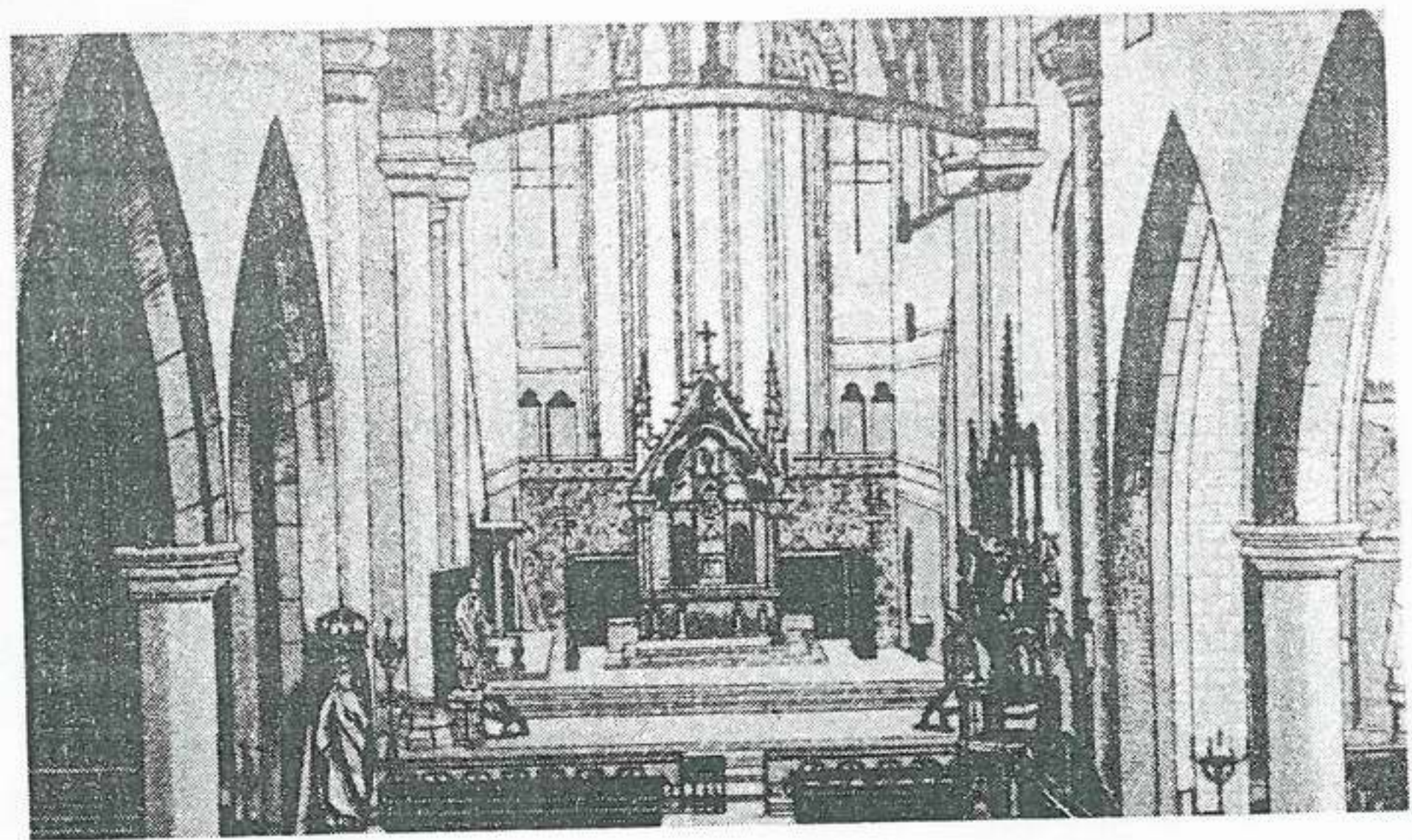
This report also gives an interesting list of the work which was unfinished when the cathedral was opened in July 1861 — the completion of the tower, the three side chapels, the pulpit, font and other requirements and the general decoration of the

8 Benzoni's
Immaculate Mother



Butler tomorrow. The noble edifice was then nearly and is now fully completed in every requisite for the solemn event. The High Altar is very beautiful and has for some time been finished and the Altar of the Virgin is finished in like manner. The beautiful statue of the Immaculate Mother is placed on the site, before one of the columns, which it will occupy. The Altar rail is set up and it extends the entire breadth of the Church. Below it the whole space between the altars and the pulpit is occupied by admirably formed seats in continuous lines. . . . The organ of St John's parish has been temporarily placed on the left, on which a superior one will hereafter stand. Large numbers visited the Church yesterday and not only admired its architectural form but its workmanship. . . . The tower remains unfinished . . . '.

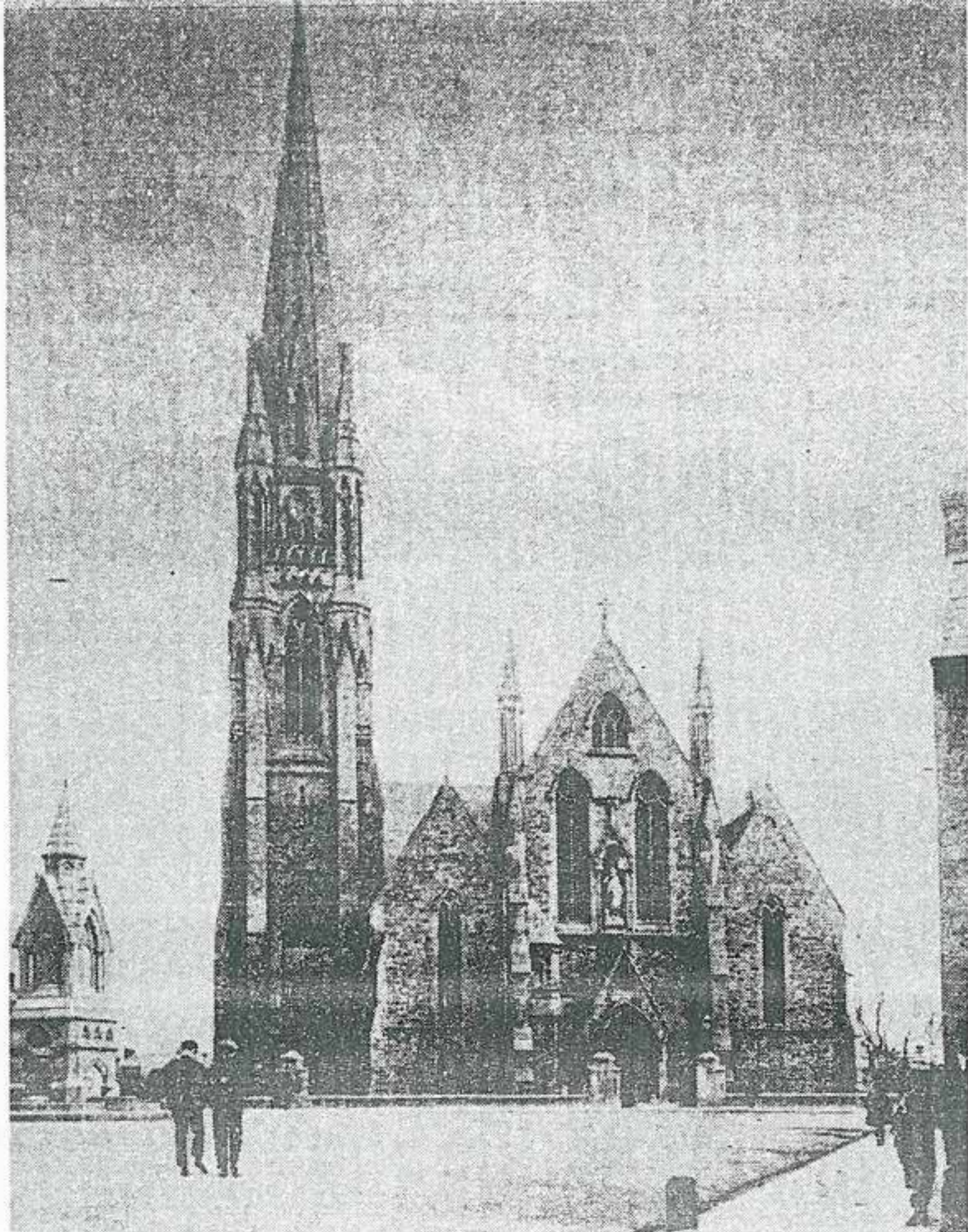
The beautiful statue of our Lady referred to was carved in Italy by the well-known Italian sculptor Giovanni Benzoni²⁹ and presented to the cathedral by William Maunsell, the future Lord Emly. Like his brother-in-law, the third earl of Dunraven



9 A drawing of the cathedral interior, c. 1880

gibbet, dug deep the grave, and swore that Ireland's faith should die lest they should not be the friends of Caesar. . . . And lo the three hundred years are now passed and our Church rises again with new majesty and splendour. This grand Cathedral before which the beauty of ancient architecture sinks into insignificance rises out of the ground — every stone in it an act, an offering of faith. Its portals are now opened for the first time and the wondering multitude as they enter behold the robed Prelates seated around the Altar. The very mitre³⁴ which four hundred years ago the Bishop of this city took from his weary brow as he laid down to rest — that same mitre crowns today the head of the newly consecrated Bishop. Thus do we span the chasm of ages and link the present with the past.'

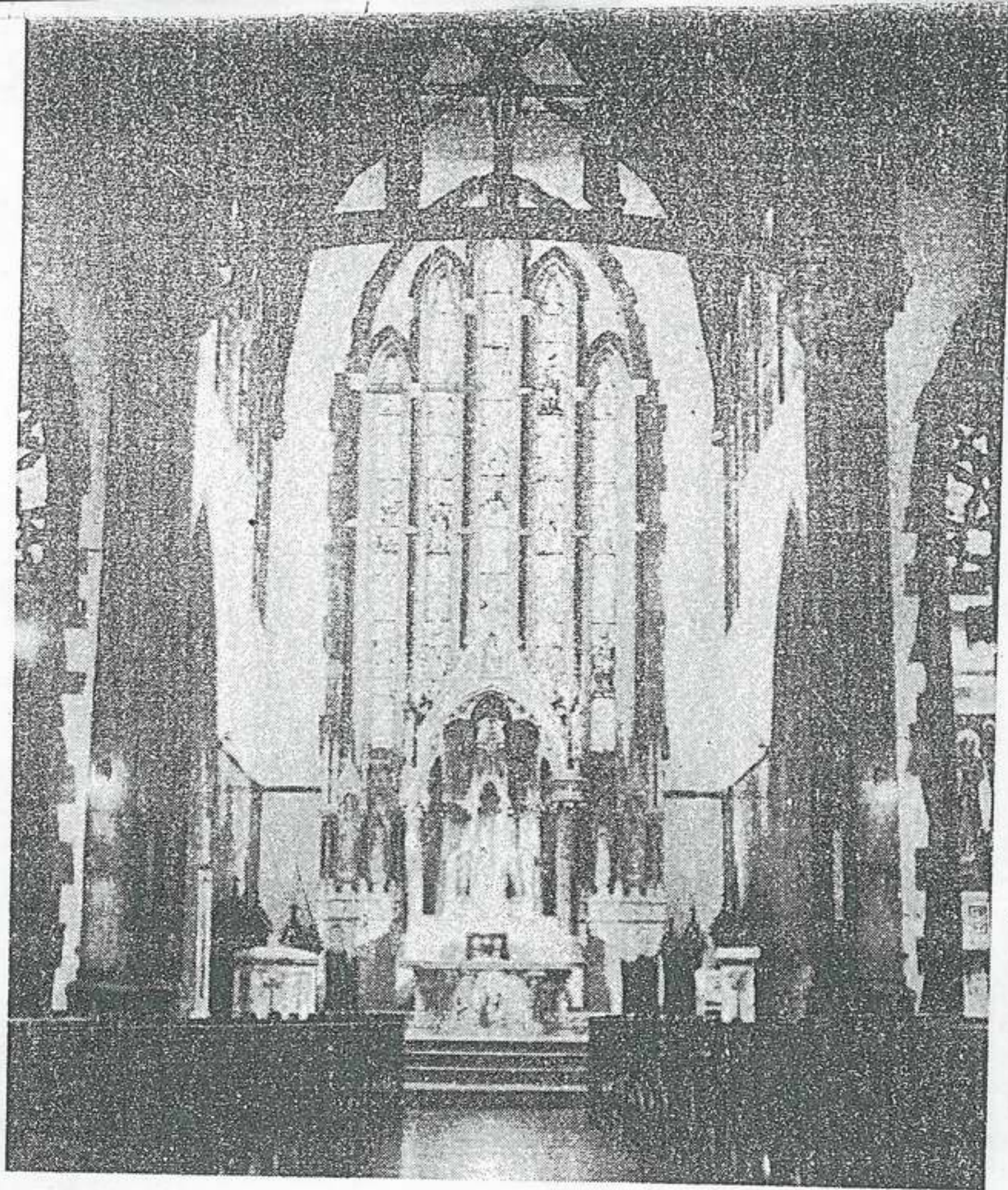
With a new bishop, consecrated in a new cathedral, evening fell on that July day in 1861 as two hundred guests toasted a new era at a banquet in the Schools of the Christian Brothers in Sexton Street.³⁵ Philip Charles Hardwick had given to Limerick what the *Irish Builder and Engineer* described as 'one of the finest buildings produced during the latter part of the [nineteenth] century.'³⁶



10 A postcard photograph of the cathedral, c. 1900

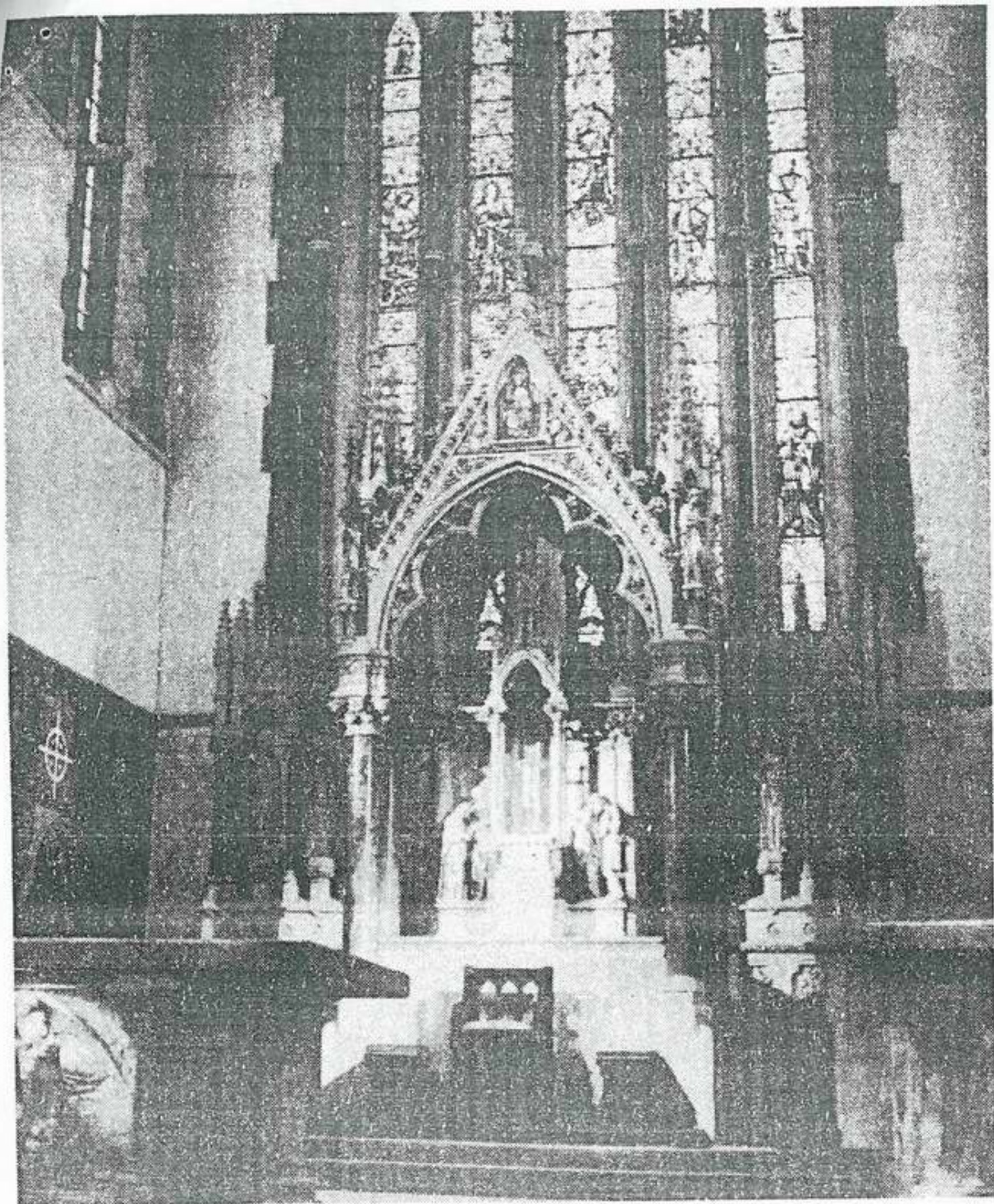
when some of his first followers came from the diocese and yielded his Society's first martyr, Fr White. This chapel is the second monument to him in the cathedral.

The small side windows of the transept have stained glass in them also: with St George and St James on the southern transept and St Michael and St Edmund on the northern one. Mrs Harriet O'Brien of Southill, the great friend of St John's, presented the windows of St George as a tribute to Bishop George Butler and the window of St Michael, in memory of her father, Mr Michael O'Neill. Friends of Mr James Barry, who died on 2 September 1856 and who was for many years a county magistrate, presented the window of St James in his memory. During the 1870's Denis and Elizabeth Ryan gave oil



14 The interior of the cathedral after the 1977 renovation

reredos of the high altar as its backing and the stalls of the cathedral chapter flanking it. The finely carved back and canopy of the former throne were then placed in the Blessed Sacrament chapel with the tabernacle set on a pedestal in front of it. Messers O'Neill of Dublin were entrusted with the marble work, and a new chair, lectern and paschal candle holder were also made by them. Restoration work, at a cost of £45,000, was carried out on the organ. The entire interior of the cathedral was painted by the firm of Mr Hodkinsons, Limerick, who had painted it in 1894 for its consecration. An excellent example of craftsmanship in Limerick today is to be found in the work of Mr A. O'Sullivan of Clare Street, who made a new confessional



15 The sanctuary, after renovation

after fire had destroyed an old one in 1983. Externally the windows were storm glazed, part of the roof repaired and general maintenance carried out on the building.

Much work was also carried out on the tower, part of the stone of which had begun to suffer from stone cancer. Mr Denis Hayes, Dublin Road, Singland, was commissioned to do this part of the renovation plan. The floodlighting of the entire edifice, which has just been completed, brings a new visual dimension to the city of Limerick at night-time. The entire renovation has cost upwards on £300,000 since it began nine years ago and the funding of it has been achieved in the by now traditional way. The bishop, Dr Newman, appealed in 1977 for