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SHORT HISTORY OF THE CATHEDRAL

The Diocese of Limerick was established by the Synod of Rath Breasail in 1111, and the church of Saint Mary, in the heart of the Viking settlement, was declared the cathedral of the diocese – the only cathedral in any diocese that was named by the synod.

According to long-standing tradition, Saint Mary's Cathedral is built on the site of Limerick's Thingmote (the parliament of the Uí Ímair Kingdom of Limerick), dating from the tenth century. Subsequently the location of the Palace of the O'Brien Kings of Thomond and Limerick; the last king, Domhnall Mór O'Brien, donated the site in 1168 to the Church. Saint Mary's Cathedral is the best preserved Irish church built on a Continental scale before the Norman invasion of 1169 – all the others are in ruins. The design of the nave, aisles, and chancel is an Irish adaptation of the Burgundian style, introduced by the Cistercians after 1142, and the arcade arches of the nave, and

the round-arched windows of the clerestory (or "Monk's Walk"), are among the earliest in Ireland. The Cathedral is probably the most important Irish medieval church building to survive intact and still continue to perform its original function.

Subsequent to the twelfth century, the Cathedral was embellished by wealthy merchants of Limerick, who commissioned the chapels on the north and south sides of the nave – these constitute the largest surviving range of such medieval chapels in Ireland.

Saint Mary's Cathedral is an extraordinarily complex building that incorporates developments from the mid-twelfth century to the present. It remains a place of prayer, worship, and pilgrimage for all who enter its doors, and continues to bear witness to, and symbolise, faith, hope, and love in the city of Limerick.

Your Tour Around The Cathedral

Founded 1168

**SAINT MARY'S
CATHEDRAL**
LIMERICK



1. SAINT GEORGE'S CHAPEL

Side Chapel: This side chapel houses the burial vault of the Earls of Limerick (the Pery family), who were instrumental in the development of Georgian Limerick.

Hatchments: Above the entrance to chapel hang the armorial hatchments of the Pery Family.

Ceiling: One of the most beautiful features in the Cathedral, sixteen painted wooden sections of celestial background, each decorated with gold stars.

Cannon balls: Dating from the siege of 1691, these were discovered within the walls of the Cathedral.

2. CONSISTORIAL COURT

War memorials: Two memorials dedicated to the local fallen of the two world wars. The carved stone memorial was designed by the architect Conor O'Brien.

Dan Hayes: It is said that Daniel Hayes designed and worded this memorial in the hope that some kindly words would be added to the long monument.

Consistorial court: Until the nineteenth century the south aisle was used as the Bishop's Court. This space is now used for installations and hospitality.

Saint Anne's Chapel: Formerly the Sexton family chapel; it is dedicated to Saint Anne, mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

3. SAINT JAMES CHAPEL

O'Dea Monument: Cornelius O'Dea, Bishop of Limerick 1400-1426; died 1434. This monument was originally adorned with a recumbent effigy of the bishop in robes and mitre.

Crusaders Stone: According to legend, the cross was cut into this stone over many years by Medieval crusaders.

The Westropp Memorial: Carved by James Redfern, of London, and displayed in the International Exhibition of 1862. Erected in this chapel by Anne Westropp in memory of her son, Thomas Johnson Westropp (1818-39).

4. QUIRE

Bishop's Throne: The Bishop's Throne or Cathedra is the seat of the bishop and gives the Cathedral its designation. It was designed by James and George Pain in 1831.

Choir Screen: This screen, designed by Conor O'Brien (1880-1952), commemorates Capt. Edmond Pery, Lord Glentworth, RAF (b. 1894, killed in action, 1918), and his sister, Lady Victoria Brady (1893-1918); erected in the Crossing, 1921; moved eastward, to present location, 1997.

Candelabra: Made by Daniel Crosbie, of Dublin, and presented to the Cathedral by Limerick Corporation in the 1750s.

Chapter Stalls: These – reserved for the use of the Dean and Chapter of the Dioceses of Limerick – are where the senior clergy who administer the affairs of the cathedral may sit during liturgical worship.

5. LADY CHAPEL

High Altar: Medieval stone altar, or mensa, which is over twelve foot long, two foot nine inches wide, ten inches thick, and weighs over two tons.

Reredos: Erected in 1907, this is purportedly the work of William James (Willie) Pearse (1881-1916), captain (headquarters staff) of the Irish Republican Army, and brother of Patrick Henry (Pádraic) Pearse, commandant-in-chief of the Irish Republican Army. Both brothers were court-martialled and executed for their part in the Easter Rising.

O'Brien Monument: Erected in memory of Donogh O'Brien, 4th Earl of Thomond (d. 1624); defaced by Parliamentarians in 1649. Reconstructed with classical orders, 1678, by Henry, 7th Earl of Thomond.

Domhnall Mór O'Brien coffin lid: King of Thomond and Limerick from 1168 to 1194; donated the site of his palace for the building of this Cathedral. This funereal artefact is the oldest in the Cathedral.

Florence Nightingale: The founder of modern nursing contributed £3 3s. towards the East window, which was installed in the 1859.

Earl of Limerick's Stall: In 1543 Edmond Sexten, Mayor of Limerick was granted the Priory of Saint Mary's by King Henry VIII.

The Episcopal Vault: A burial chamber under the sanctuary floor. Traditionally, patrons and Church dignitaries were interred close by the High Altar.

6. HOLY SPIRIT CHAPEL

Organ: The Cathedral organ is three storeys high and contains almost 4,000 individual pipes. The first organ was installed here in 1624 during the bishopric of Bernard Adams.

Lepers' Squint: This small ledge and opening was used to give communion to those suffering with leprosy. Lepers were not allowed inside church buildings for fear of spreading the disease.

Healing: In acknowledgement of the Cathedral's mission in bringing healing to others, this chapel houses the holy oils used throughout the dioceses. Prayer cards are available here.

Arthur Tomb: This tomb, situated beneath you but decorated above with three arches and an ornate stone canopy and burial slab, is the resting place of Geoffrey Arthur, a former Canon Treasurer of this cathedral, who died on 16 May 1519. The Latin inscription reads: "Thou who passest by take heed that thou sayest here a Pater and an Ave".

7. NORTH AISLE

Frances Havergal: Havergal was a well-known English hymn writer of the nineteenth century. Many of her hymns still feature in the Church Hymnal. This bookcase and portrait were donated to the Cathedral by her sister.

Bishop Jebb: John Jebb was Bishop of Limerick from 1822 to 1833. He was an advocate of Church ritual, and was a noted ecumenist and academic. This statue was designed and carved by the prolific English sculptor, E. H. Bailey and erected in Jebb's memory by his many friends and supporters.

Misericords: These magnificent clergy stalls date from the fifteenth century and are the only surviving Irish medieval set in existence. They are made in oak from nearby Cratloe Woods and feature many ornate carvings of symbolic beasts. Their seats are hinged, which allowed clergy to rest on them while remaining standing during services.

Irish Stained Glass Artists: These chapels dedicated to Saints Catherine and Nicholas house some very fine examples of Irish stained glass from the early-to-mid twentieth century. The large Ascension window overhead, the newest in the Cathedral, is from the Harry Clarke Studio, and was dedicated in 1961 by Michael Ramsay, who subsequently became Archbishop of Canterbury.

Hidden Passage: Situated in the Eastern wall of these chapels is a hole that leads to a hidden passage within the walls of the Cathedral. It is believed that this was connected in some way with the College of Vicars Choral which once existed on the North Side of the Cathedral.

8. SAINT MARK'S CHAPEL

Architecture: This structure was originally a tower house, standing outside the Cathedral. Note the windows on the Western side of the chapel.

Vaulted Ceiling: One of the most beautiful in the Cathedral. Can you spot the faces?

Murrough of the Burning: The floor tile inscribed 'II' marks the burial place of Murrough MacDermod O'Brien, 1st Earl of Inchiquin (1614-73), known as Murchadh na dTóiteán, or Murrough of the Burning.

Earl of Tyrconnell: Richard Talbot, 1st Earl of Tyrconnell (d.1691), prominent in the siege of Limerick (1690), is buried in the vicinity of this chapel.

9. WEST END

Cathedral Shop: Formerly the baptistery, the shop stocks locally produced gifts, arts and crafts.

Cleeve's Angel: In the early-twentieth century the Limerick-produced Cleeve's toffee was world-renowned. Members of the Cleeve family are commemorated here.

Barrington Window: The West window commemorates Sir Matthew Barrington (1788-1861) a member of the prominent Limerick family who founded nearby Barrington's Hospital.

Font: The place of initiation into the Christian faith; it is situated, symbolically, near the entrance of the Cathedral.

West Door: Supposedly the oldest doorway in Limerick, the Great West Door is believed to have been the entrance to King Domhnall's Palace. Look out for marks caused by Cromwell's troops sharpening their swords here in the 1650s.

10. GRAVEYARD

Since c.1726 almost 7,000 burials have been recorded in and around the Cathedral. A separate trail may be found in the grounds.