

## THE ORATORY & GRAVEYARD

**St Flannan's Oratory** was built under the patronage of King Muirchertach Ua Briain (c.1050–1119) in c.1100. It may have been built to house the relics and shrine of St Flannan. It is the nave that has survived, entered by a carved Romanesque door. It has a stone barrel-vaulted ceiling and a steep stone roof,



and is lit by two plain narrow lights with inclined jambs. There is a diminutive chamber between the vault and the roof lit by single narrow lights in each gable. On the east side is a wider plain round chancel arch. It is regarded as the earliest building in Ireland with Romanesque architectural detailing.



**The Tower** The engraving illustrated here shows the church based on a 1738 drawing by Jonas Blaymire. It reveals that the early eighteenth-century church had a single-stage tower with a pyramidal roof lit by two small lancets. This was probably the thirteenth-century tower, and is the bell ringing chamber at the base of the current tower.

The tower was raised in 1794 purportedly so that Bishop Knox could see it from the bishop's palace. It was an odd-looking structure, replaced by a taller belfry designed by J.F. Fuller in 1899 to house a new chime of bells cast in 1896 at Matthew Byrne's foundry in Dublin. It has plate tracery openings with slate louvres and stepped (Irish) battlements with raised corners.

**Tombs.** The oldest marked grave is that of Bishop John Roan who died in 1692 and whose tomb is under the great east window; close to Roan's grave slab is the most impressive tomb in the churchyard. It is a coffer tomb erected for Elisabeth Brown, inscribed as follows:

*'Deceased October the 10th, 1719. Years married 44, aged 57. one husband, bless, and children eleven.'*



It is decorated with a trumpet-blowing angel, skull, skeleton, shields and verses about Christ's invincibility, death and the afterlife.

*'Dread and terror Death doth be, Death wears an angel's face,  
And that mask'd angel will advance thee to an Angel's place  
Immortality and eternal life'*

# DISCOVER ST. FLANNAN'S

## KILLALOE'S 13TH CENTURY CATHEDRAL

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## HISTORY

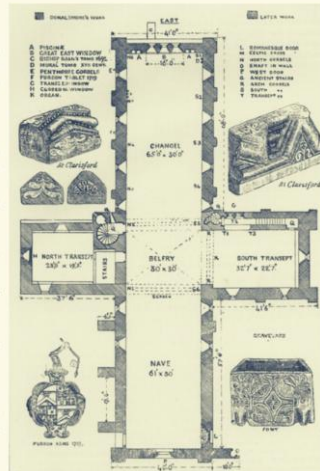
**The construction** of St Flannan's Cathedral started in c.1200 on the site of a previous smaller late twelfth-century cathedral. It is possible that the west gable of the previous building with its richly carved portal was incorporated as a rood screen between the chancel and the crossing point in the new cathedral. The overall form and the vertical, austere character of the early thirteenth-century cathedral survives today. It is expressed in the tall narrow lancet windows, and the square buttresses that flank the east and west gables.

**The building** has a cruciform plan, with a chancel, nave, two transepts and crossing. There are no aisles. Thirteenth-century carved decoration can be seen in the corbels in the chancel and crossing, the capitals to the double lancet in St Paul's Chapel and the arch of the great east window. The most significant alteration to the exterior of the church was the raising of the tower in 1899 by James Franklin Fuller. It introduced height, and a style that was contemporary with the original cathedral though not found in the west of Ireland at that time. It accommodated a new peel of bells cast in Dublin.

**The interior** has been remodelled several times since the early thirteenth century. Most of the changes have been superseded, and the decoration and ordering of the chancel we see today is mid to late nineteenth century. The exposed timber chancel roof was constructed in 1852–3 under Joseph Welland, while the carved oak furniture, designed by James Franklin Fuller, was installed in 1886–7.

**The glazed screen** was erected in 1892 and built by John Sisk of Cork. The stained glass was installed in stages from 1865 to 1936, and the organ, recently restored was built in 1900.

**The cathedral** has become the repository of a number of medieval artefacts which are displayed in the nave. The Romanesque portal was probably moved to its present position in the early eighteenth century. The thirteenth-century font was re-erected by Bishop Mant in the 1820s. In the early twentieth century Thorgrim's cross fragment (or Ogham Stone) was discovered in the boundary wall of the cathedral and erected in the nave, to be joined in the 1930s by the high cross which Bishop Mant had brought from Kilfenora over a century earlier. These artefacts were conserved in 1999.



T.J. Westropp 1893



## THE NAVE

**Until 1892** the division between the nave and chancel occurred not at the location of the present screen, but on the east side of the crossing, so that the nave was longer and more spacious. It included the vaulted space of the crossing, with open views to both the North and South transepts.

If the west gable of the previous cathedral divided the nave from the chancel when the cathedral was first built, the entrance to the chancel, the most sacred part of the church, would have been through the narrow and richly carved Romanesque door. The gable was probably adapted as a rood screen, the rood loft accessed from a mural stair. The door to the stair can be seen beside the double lancet window in St Paul's Chapel.

The absence of pews gives the nave a pre-Reformation atmosphere. For visitors to the cathedral in the eighteenth century the empty space reinforced the sublime atmosphere of the cathedral. In 1797 George Holmes wrote, *'the great aisle very lofty, and producing an uncommon lengthened and solemn echo from our footsteps.'*



**Romanesque portal** This portal, dated to the late twelfth century, was probably the west door of the earlier cathedral. It is likely that it was reassembled here in the early eighteenth century.

Situated over two grave slabs decorated with crosses, it seems that the doorway was initially presented as a monument to Muircheartach Ua Briain, King of Munster, high king of Ireland, and one of the most dynamic and outward-looking of the pre-Norman Irish kings, he died in 1119 and was buried at Killaloe.

The sandstone portal is one of the most elaborate items of Romanesque architectural sculpture to survive in Ireland. It has four orders and every surface is cut so that the eye follows the zig-zag of chevrons and chamfers and can linger on animal and human heads and a wild variety of foliate carving.

## ARTEFACTS

**Thorgrim's cross fragment** This stone is part of the shaft of a freestanding cross. It bears two inscriptions; one on the broad west face in Old Norse runes, and one on the narrow south side in Irish ogham script. On the back face is a very simple depiction of Christ crucified.

The runes read; *'Thorgrim erected this cross'*. The ogham reads; *'A blessing on Thorgrim'*. It is the only runic-inscribed Irish Christian monument known at present, and the only known bilingual ogham and rune stone in Ireland.

Who was Thorgrim? He may have lived at Killaloe, part of a local Hiberno-Scandinavian community. Recently, it has been suggested that he was Thorgrím Furcap, a Norwegian baron, who wintered in Killaloe with the King of Norway, Magnús Barelegs, under the protection of Muirchertach Ua Briain, during Barelegs' Irish military campaign in 1102-1103.



**Medieval font** This font has been dated to the thirteenth century. It is decorated with flowing leaves and a curved cross and has rudimentary capitals at the four corners. It originally had four supports. Unused by the early nineteenth century, it was re-erected in the nave by Bishop Richard Mant in 1821. It was moved to its present location in 1999.

**High cross** This is a wheel cross depicting a simple crucifixion backed by very lightly inscribed interlace. It was carved at the monastery in Kilfenora, Co Clare in the late eleventh or early twelfth century, one of five high crosses produced by the same workshop. The other four remain at Kilfenora. Bishop Richard Mant brought this cross to the bishop's palace at Clarisford, Killaloe in 1821. The plaque on the cross records this 'rescue'.

In the 1930s the cross was brought to the cathedral and attached to the wall; the bolt holes are still visible. It was conserved and set on this low stone plinth in 1999.



## THE CHANCEL

**The Chancel** has undergone many changes in 800+ years. What you see today is largely the result of sensitive restoration in the mid-nineteenth century under the architect Joseph Welland and the Gothic revival sensibility of the architect James Franklin Fuller. Fuller designed the carved oak pews and beautiful sanctuary furniture, with the exception of the altar which is twentieth century.

**The Crossing** With the construction of the glazed screen in 1892 the crossing was incorporated into the chancel and the opportunity was presented to erect a magnificent organ in front of the south transept. It was built by Nicholson & Lord of Worcester, financed by a *'fancy fair'* at Clarisford, and a *'Grand Concert'* at the recently completed Bechstein Hall (now Wigmore Hall), London in March 1903.

The baptistery is to the north side of the crossing. The octagonal font, carved in the early 1850s, is based on the early 14th-century font in West Deeping Church, Lincolnshire. It is in the chancel that you can appreciate the carving skills of the thirteenth-century masons who constructed St Flannan's.

**East Window** The three-light east window in the chancel is contained within a great arch. Two of the orders are carved with fish-bone and chevron decoration. The dramatic verticality of the window is emphasised by the slender piers between the lancets which rise the full height from sill to arch.



**The Corbels** The eight elongated corbels of the chancel (four on the north and four on the south walls) were restored in 1852-3. They were cleaned of whitewash, repaired and the few plaster replacements were re-carved in stone. Linked by a moulded string course, the corbels have a capital and short shaft tapering to a knot, leaf, interlace, and in one instance a horse. Each capital is unique; sinuous foliage wrapping around the stone, or sprouting from the neck, and on the north side one depicts a group of kilted figures.

**The Roof** Joseph Welland designed the open timber roof with its alternating scissors and arch-braced trusses in 1852. It replaced a lower ceiling that obscured part of the east window. Timber struts from the roof descend to the corbels. A quadripartite stone vault with plain chamfered ribs supports the tower over the crossing. Here the corbels are joined to the ribs of the vault. High on the east wall facing the altar the timber roof is supported by quadrant corbels decorated with Celtic interlace which may have been brought from elsewhere in the cathedral.

## ST. PAUL'S CHAPEL

This light-filled space is the south transept, a part of the cathedral with its own varied history.

**The Double Lancet** set in the east wall, reduced in height now, is something of a mystery. In a church of rigorously austere lancets, relieved primarily by the all-important east window, it is surprising to find a decorated window tucked away in the south transept. It is located in the wall which contains the mural passage to the rood stairs. The capitals that decorate the moulded arches of the window bear sinuous foliage decoration similar to the corbel carvings. The window may denote the south transept as a place for a particular devotion in the thirteenth century.



**The Bishop's Court** By 1622 the bishop's court (consistory court) was located in the south transept. This function was discontinued in the mid-nineteenth century. In the 1960s the stained glass figure of St Paul from the great east window was fitted into one of the lights of the double lancet and in 1970 a sanctuary dedicated to St Paul was created for weekly services.

**The Stained Glass** The earliest surviving stained glass in the cathedral was commissioned in 1865 from William Warrington & Sons, a London firm that pioneered the nineteenth-century revival of medieval stained glass. It is found in the two most important windows: the great east window and the west lancet over the main entrance. The three lancets of the east window incorporated thirteen saints (SS Simon, Matthew, Philip and Andrew in the left hand lancet (lower to higher); SS Thadeus, Thomas, Paul, St James the Great and Peter in the central lancet; and SS Mattias, James the Less, Bartholomew and John the Evangelist in the right hand lancet). In the early twentieth century the central figure of St Paul was removed and replaced by Christ the Good Shepherd. The west lancet depicts Faith, Hope and Charity.

It may have been the architect James Franklin Fuller who in 1897 advised the cathedral to commission glass from the newly established stained glass company of Watson & Sons, Youghal. Bishop Frederick Wynne commissioned stained glass for the two lancets on the north wall of the nave depicting (to the west) St Peter, and Christ the Good Shepherd holding a lamb. Thirty-nine years later Watson & Co produced a window of similar design depicting St Flannan for the lancet in the south nave wall. There is also a Watson & Co window in the chancel (third from east on the north side) depicting the parable of the good Samaritan commissioned in 1924.