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Ursula Maria de Jong, *Deakin University, Geelong*

Translating the Gothic Tradition: St Patrick's Cathedral Melbourne

During the 1850s, England and France were the leading centres of debate over the Gothic Revival. As Barry Bergdoll argues, the issues that loomed large were at once architectural and political: stylistic eclecticism versus national purity, invention versus tradition, nationalism versus cosmopolitanism, as well as the challenge of new building programmes and new materials to the historicist logic of the Gothic Revival position. William Wilkinson Wardell (1823-99), the architect of St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia (1858-97) found himself in the midst of this debate. In 1858, Wardell's client, James Alipius Goold, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Melbourne, found that local circumstances significantly influenced his aspirations for a new Catholic cathedral for Melbourne. The choices Wardell made eventually gave shape to the Gothic Revival in Australia.

The New World perhaps echoing Didron, demanded of the past all it could offer the present and especially the future: a Gothic cathedral was deemed a fitting carrier of the principles, morals, beliefs and spirit of a Christian civilisation. Unlike many of his contemporaries in Britain and Europe, Wardell in Australia was to see his Gothic Cathedrals of St Patrick's and St Mary's substantially realised in his lifetime. This paper presents a building history of Wardell's St Patrick's, Melbourne, and critically examines the translations which are embedded in the design and fabric of this nineteenth-century Gothic revival cathedral.

St Patrick's Cathedral Melbourne, Victoria, Australia¹

In 1853 A. N. Didron prophetically stated that "The Pointed Arch will encircle the globe."² During the 1850s England and France were the leading centres of debate over the Gothic Revival. In his essay "The ideal of the Gothic Cathedral in 1852", Barry Bergdoll establishes the challenges of the Gothic cause at mid-century in Europe and argues that "[t]he issues that loomed large in the 1850s were at once architectural and political: stylistic eclecticism versus national purity, invention versus tradition, nationalism versus cosmopolitanism, and the challenge of new building programs and new materials to the historicist logic of the Gothic Revival position."³

While a number of these issues concerned the architect William Wilkinson Wardell (1823-99) and his client, the Catholic Diocese of Melbourne in 1858, they were generally superseded by other considerations dictated by local circumstances in the antipodes. As Paul Fox writes, the Catholic Church in Melbourne

"drew its inspiration and politics from Ireland, [for a church] which until the 1829 Act of Catholic Emancipation ... was without legal recognition, medievalism evoked a period before Protestant oppression and injustice. As an invented tradition medievalism served as a means of legitimising the church's adoption of the organisational forms needed to deal with the needs and demands of nineteenth century colonial circumstances and its resultant social problems."⁴

The New World in the antipodes, perhaps echoing Didron, demanded of the past all it could offer the present and especially the future: a Gothic cathedral was deemed a fitting carrier of the principles, morals, beliefs and spirit of a Christian civilisation. So while the dream of a Gothic Cathedral evaded Reichensperger in Germany and Didron in France, Wardell in Australia was to see his Gothic Cathedrals of St Patrick's, Melbourne (fig. 1), and St Mary's, Sydney, substantially realised in his lifetime.

St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne (1858-97), named after Ireland's patron saint, is arguably Wardell's finest ecclesiastical work, in an opus in which he excelled in designing numerous Catholic churches in Britain and Australia. St Patrick's is a significant example of 19th-century Gothic architecture, designed by an architect conversant with both the issues and ideas of his age. Indeed some historians such as Thomas Boase have gone so far as to say that St Patrick's represents the epitome of the English Gothic Revival style of building.⁵ Much research has been undertaken since Boase's

1 The author gratefully acknowledges comments received from Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand (SAHANZ) colleagues and reviewers, in the writing of this paper.

2 Didron quoted in Barry Bergdoll, "The Ideal of the Gothic Cathedral in 1852," in *AWN Pugin: Master of Gothic Revival*, ed. Paul Atterbury (New Haven, NY: Yale University Press, 1995), 103-36.

3 Bergdoll, "The Ideal of the Gothic Cathedral in 1852," 104.

4 Paul Fox, "Seeking a background: memory in the Antipodes," in *W W Wardell Centenary Papers*, ed. Ursula de Jong (Geelong: Deakin University, 2000).

5 Thomas S. R. Boase, *English Art 1800-1870* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 241.

1959 claims, and this paper examines the particular contribution of St Patrick's to Gothic Revival cathedral design.

St Patrick's Cathedral was a remarkable achievement in design, in craftsmanship, and in perseverance. It came from the hand of an architect who had not only sketched and studied medieval Gothic *in situ*, but who had come to appreciate and love its architectural forms deeply and was committed to its underlying theology. The commission for St Patrick's gave its 35-year old architect the opportunity to create his own cathedral based on ideas he had already explored, developed and experimented with in Britain. But more than that, it gave him an enormous challenge to bring that design to fruition in the antipodes without his network of skilled masons and craftsmen. Further, this commission brought with it a heavy burden of responsibilities: to inherited religious and architectural traditions; to the people who painstakingly scraped and saved to erect a permanent and worthy house of God; and to future generations whose lives would be touched by the cathedral.

Architecturally, Melbourne's St Patrick's Cathedral is significant for three reasons. First, the cathedral design represents a major work in Wardell's architectural oeuvre. Second, the Cathedral occupies a significant place in the Gothic Revival movement internationally. Third, its building history was closely intertwined with the history of Melbourne and Catholicism in the Colony (later State) of Victoria.

Beginnings: St Patrick's Church, Melbourne

In July 1847 the two acres of land on which the present Cathedral stands was granted to the Melbourne Catholic Diocese (which then embraced the whole of Victoria). A temporary timber structure served as a church on Sundays and school on weekdays. In April 1850 an additional two acres was granted for a bishop's residence. The site on Eastern Hill overlooked the whole settlement of Melbourne.

On 9 April 1850 Bishop James Alipius Goold laid the foundation stone of the first stone St Patrick's Church, designed by Samuel Jackson, architect of Melbourne's St Francis' Church, Elizabeth Street (1841). Wardell would have recognised a well-executed form of Commissioner's Gothic in St Francis' and in Charles Laing's Anglo-Catholic St Peter's, Eastern Hill, diagonally opposite the site of St Patrick's. Catholics and Anglicans alike recognised Gothic, albeit in rudimentary form, as giving a true ecclesiastical character to their places of worship. Jackson's St Patrick's with its single western tower and spire conformed to this earlier form of Gothic.⁶ Numerous difficulties, not the least being the mass exodus of labour from Melbourne to the goldfields, precluded a successful completion. Although tenders were called for the completion of St Patrick's Church in 1853,⁷ little

6 Walter A. Ebsworth, *St. Patrick's Cathedral Melbourne* (Melbourne: Graphic Books, 1938 rev. 1979) plate and sketch, 9. Original drawing held at Melbourne Diocesan Historical Commission (MDHC) archives.

7 Advertisement placed by Samuel Jackson, *Melbourne Morning Herald*, 21 May 1853.

was achieved. By the end of 1854 Jackson had terminated his association with St Patrick's. George and Schneider, another local architectural firm, took over the Jackson design, and undertook some major restructuring. General neglect, mistakes on plans and specifications, and lack of architectural supervision on their part caused even more delays. In January 1857 further tenders were called for the completion of the church. Most tenders submitted their costs for a structure of either freestone or bluestone: it appears that the Jackson church was to have been a freestone building, whilst the George and Schneider plan was for a bluestone church. The first section of the George and Schneider church was finally blessed by Bishop Goold on 14 February 1858.⁸

Throughout this early period, the collection of sufficient money to enable works to continue at a steady rate was painstakingly slow. On numerous occasions, the work had reached advanced stages, when for financial or constructional reasons, it was scrapped. The clergy had a hard time convincing the people that funds were not being 'misappropriated' or wasted.⁹

The Decision to Build a Cathedral

Bishop Goold embarked for Europe in June 1858, for a period of eighteen months, leaving Dr FitzPatrick, the Vicar General, in charge. It is through his correspondence with the Bishop that the next stage in the history of St. Patrick's unfolds. Between August and October 1858 work on St. Patrick's stopped altogether. Money ran out. It was during this period that Goold came to a decision to abandon the George and Schneider scheme for a far grander project: a cathedral-church befitting the status of the rapidly growing Melbourne 'metropolis'. From the vantage point of the Eastern Hill site, Goold watched with interest the changes taking place in the 'little' settlement. Gradually a shift in perception occurred, as the vision of Melbourne as a city, rather than a village or provincial town, grew. Separation from New South Wales in 1851, combined with the discovery of enormous gold deposits in Victoria, sped this process along. "If the hurly burly circumstances of a Melbourne up-ended by gold was one history", Fox suggests, "the other was epitomised by the early efforts of the cultivated and civic minded who looked beyond the ephemerality of the golden age".¹⁰ The change in perception is reflected in the public buildings of the 1850s which took on a new permanence and dignity.¹¹ That only a substantial cathedral could take its place among such public buildings, must have impressed itself upon Goold's mind. On 14 June 1858 the *Argus* noted that a numerously attended meeting was held in St Francis' Church to discuss arrangements "for the completion of the Cathedral". Bishop Goold left the following day for Rome.¹² Wardell, an architect capable of designing such a cathedral, arrived from England on 29 September 1858,

8 Ebsworth, *St. Patrick's*, photograph of the George and Schneider Church in course of construction, September 1858, 22. Original photograph held at MDHC archives.

9 Rev. John Barry, D. D., Letter to the Editor, *The Argus*, 12 December 1856.

10 Fox, "Seeking a background: memory in the Antipodes."

11 See Geoffrey Serle, "The Gold Generation," *Victorian Historical Magazine* 41, no. 1 (February 1970): 272.

12 *The Argus*, 14 June 1858.

highly recommended by Wiseman, now Cardinal-Archbishop of Westminster, and several of the English Catholic Bishops.¹³ Wardell and Goold never met in 1858: Goold leaving for Europe in June, and Wardell embarking for Australia on 2 July. It is not known if Goold knew of Wardell's decision to emigrate prior to his departure from Melbourne. He certainly knew of Wardell and his work later in 1858 when he instructed FitzPatrick to engage him to design a cathedral for Melbourne.

FitzPatrick was annoyed that Wardell, upon his arrival in Melbourne, did not immediately come and see him in regard to the planned cathedral.¹⁴ When he did, late in October and early in November, FitzPatrick proceeded cautiously, even though Wardell seemed to instil a sense of confidence in him:

"Mr. Wardell, the architect has been with us frequently since I last wrote. He requested me to let him take the measurements of the five acres with the present building in order that he might prepare a ground plan of the Cathedral, Episcopal residence and the other buildings. He has made a present of the sketch which I enclose to your Lordship. I think Mr. Wardell is competent to carry on any building which may be required in Melbourne ... We have not resumed the works at St Patrick's yet, but I hope during this month to get something done. Mr. Wardell has called for tenders for the ceiling of the portion of the aisle which is roofed..."¹⁵

So Wardell took the work in hand even before the contracts for the new cathedral were signed. In December, FitzPatrick wrote to his Bishop:

"Mr. Wardell who [sic] you desire me to try and engage is I think a first rate architect. His health is not good but I think he is improving ... I have of course, engaged Mr. Wardell but being afraid to commence the expensive works required in building the western facade of St Patrick's and being also unwilling to decide on the plan of the principal features of the building without submitting it to your inspection, I have only adopted the plan ... to complete the least expensive part of the church..."¹⁶

The first contracts were signed on 8 December. On the 17 December, FitzPatrick noted that "Mr. Wardell ... is hard at work for St Patrick's".¹⁷ FitzPatrick then began the dreadful work of demolishing walls already built,¹⁸ in order to accommodate Wardell's new plans.

Melbourne's Irish-dominated Catholic community looked with much suspicion upon this English convert who presented them with plans for a cathedral of such grandiose proportions. People who had already raised thousands of pounds, and seen them spent on a church twice partially erected

13 The other Bishops were Thomas Grant, Bishop of Southwark; Wm. Wareing, Bishop of Northampton; W. Morris, Bishop of Troy; and Alexander Goss, Bishop of Liverpool. Testimonials to W.W. Wardell, Architect and Civil Engineer, London, 1858. BOX ML MSS, 3728, 4, Item 6 Mitchell Library, Sydney.

14 15 October 1858, Fitzpatrick to Goold, MDHC Archives

15 15 November 1858, Fitzpatrick to Goold, MDHC Archives.

16 14 December 1858, Fitzpatrick to Goold, MDHC Archives.

17 17 December 1858, Fitzpatrick to Goold, MDHC Archives.

18 "The removal of the wall is an awful affair. It makes me sick to look at it..." 17 December 1858, Fitzpatrick to Goold, MDHC Archives.

and subsequently pulled down, could justifiably wonder at their Bishop's sanity in commissioning such a cathedral.¹⁹ Given the background of apparent mismanagement in the erection of a relatively small, simple Gothic church, the construction of a cathedral seemed an impossible task. Yet significantly, here in Melbourne, where freedom to move beyond bounds imposed by authority informed the colonial experience, was an opportunity for the Irish to build a Catholic cathedral, a feat denied them in Ireland.²⁰ Still the size and splendour of Wardell's proffered design were hitherto unthought-of in the Great South Land. Even St. Andrew's Cathedral Church of England, Sydney,²¹ then in the process of construction, was to be considerably smaller, if not less ambitious, than Wardell's proposed cathedral.

The Evolution of Wardell's Design

Wardell's proposal for St Patrick's took the form of a traditional cruciform Gothic cathedral: a nave with aisles, transepts with aisles, and a sanctuary encircled by ambulatory and chevet chapels (fig. 1). Sacristies were linked by an adjoining cloister. Wardell was required to incorporate as much as possible of the George and Schneider church into his own plan. This condition somewhat curtailed the freedom of the architect, but worse, governed the floor level of the new buildings. As a result, that part east of the transepts is below the level of the adjacent Albert Street. The contract also stipulated that the materials of the existing building should be reused. Wardell was therefore committed to constructing his cathedral in bluestone, a distinct, dark blue-grey local basalt. Contrary to expectations, he proved himself more than capable of handling the hard, sombre, and generally disliked building stone.²²

The design of St Patrick's stemmed directly from Wardell's many previous explorations of the geometric decorated Gothic, and his studies and designs in the Gothic Revival style. In 1849 Wardell had developed a cruciform church design with a crowning central tower-spire for St Alexis, Kentish Town (1849) which he adapted with an open central lantern crossing for the church of Our Lady

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- 19 "There was considerable dissatisfaction and murmuring at the time at seeing so much of their hard-earned money spent in vain, and this explains in some measure why there was no public ceremony at the starting of the present grand Cathedral." Fr. Dunne writing for *The Advocate*, 13 November 1897, on the occasion of the opening and consecration of St Patrick's Cathedral.
- 20 de Jong, Ursula (FAB09_034), "The Prince and the Pauper: St Patrick's Cathedral and Patronage in the Roman Catholic Church in Mid-nineteenth Century Victoria," *Fabrications* 9 (1999): 34-52.
- 21 To Edmund Blacket's design. Refer to Joan Kerr, *Our Great Victorian Architect Edmund J. Blacket (1817-1883)* (Sydney: National Trust of Australia, 1983).
- 22 Louisa Meredith's observations on the "dark-blue trap" were typical of the times. "Over the Straits," in J Grant, and G Serle, *The Melbourne Scene* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1959), 113. Parliamentarians voiced their opinion on the subject too. Mr. Langton's own idea was "that bluestone had a somewhat gloomy appearance ... Bluestone was generally regarded as a very proper material for goals, and other buildings where strength was required." *Hansard, Victorian Parliamentary Debates*, 27 August 1872. In the twentieth century these daunting qualities of bluestone are still discussed with little sympathy. For instance Kerr argues that "today Melbourne's bluestone manifestations are little more than interesting local peculiarities". See Joan Kerr, "Casually Picturesque, Consciously Ideal," in *The Sydney-Melbourne Book*, ed. Jim Davidson (Sydney/Melbourne/Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1986), 177. In 1992, a comprehensive maintenance and restoration programme was begun on St Patrick's Cathedral by Richard Falkinger, Conservation Architects P/L. The use of bluestone finally began to be praised - of all the materials used, bluestone alone had withstood the test of time, requiring minimal attention.

and St Joseph, Poplar (1850-56) a year later. In both projects, Wardell grappled with the problem of projecting a successful east end elevation. Where possible, he avoided the traditional straight English east end, both for Catholic liturgical reasons, which required additional chapels and sacristies off the chancel, and architectural considerations. A straight east end generally excluded a bold articulation of forms. In combining a multitude of chapels and sacristies in the east end elevation, Wardell tried to achieve an effective architectonic expression in a unified composition, avoiding the appearance of a collection of separate components. Neither the design for Kentish Town, nor that for Poplar was totally successful in this respect.

Extant notes and sketches attest to the fact that Wardell was on the continent on a number of occasions in the 1850s. Once again he experienced Gothic first hand in medieval buildings, in restoration work and in new building. On 20 February 1855 he was officially nominated and accepted as a member of the *Société Française pour la Conservation et la Description des Monuments historiques*. He witnessed the heated debates and different positions taken by Viollet-le-Duc, Didron, Lassus and their contemporaries; he would have known F. C. Gau's new church Ste. Clotilde, Paris; and was caught up in the intense interest in the completion of Cologne Cathedral. He found marked differences between attitudes expressed in England and on the continent: the protagonists differed and the emphasis varied from theological to structural.²³ The Lille competition results would have been instructive. Bergdoll highlights the fact that Burges and Street (first and second place getters in the Lille competition) had begun exploring Continental Gothic in the early 1850s "as a way of expanding the aesthetic vocabulary and historical base of their Gothic language of design". He notes that "both were leading advocates of the notion that to become a universal and modern architectural style Gothic needed to transcend national references".²⁴ It was the third place getter Jean-Baptiste Lassus who outlined the four possible positions in the quest for an appropriate style for the mid-nineteenth century: "create an entirely new art; admit a melange of the forms of all past styles; copy slavishly a single past style; or take inspiration in a single past style and carry it to perfection".²⁵ He advocated for the fourth as the only viable option. Wardell did not entirely agree with him: variously marrying the English and French traditions at St Patrick's Melbourne (1858) and St Mary's Sydney (1865). For cathedrals, eclecticism became a desirable quality, so long as the parts were combined into a grand composition based on sound architectural principles, and the final product entirely embodied the special features of a Minster in a unique way. The Clutton-Burges design for Lille cathedral was grand, overtly eclectic and highly individualistic. These

23 See William H Pierson, Jr, discussing James Renwick in *American Buildings and their Architects. Vol. 2 Technology and the Picturesque, the Corporate and the Early Gothic Styles* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 223-28; see also Bergdoll, "The Ideal of the Gothic Cathedral in 1852."

24 Bergdoll, "The Ideal of the Gothic Cathedral in 1852," 117.

25 Bergdoll, "The Ideal of the Gothic Cathedral in 1852," 118.

three properties, already observable in Pugin's scheme for Southwark Cathedral (1838), became the characteristics of the 19th-century cathedral.²⁶

Yet in the forties and fifties few opportunities existed in Britain for architects to build new cathedrals. It was not until 1863, when the competition for St Finbar's Cork, Ireland, was won by William Burges, that the first new cathedral was commissioned. Burges offered "a Gothic dream, a fully fledged 13th century French cathedral with aisles, towers, spires and sculpture" in a highly original design.²⁷ While calls were made for large spatially unified churches and cathedrals to serve the increasing urban populations of Christians, many of the cathedrals designed in the nineteenth-century were never executed (for example E W Godwin's sketch for a "Modern cathedral", 1860s, and G. G. Scott's 1861 design for a tropical church).²⁸ Outside Britain only James Renwick's St Patrick's Cathedral New York (1858) is comparable to Wardell's Melbourne Cathedral in its scale and function, though his eclectic design was only partially realised.²⁹ A number of cathedrals were constructed later in the nineteenth-century. Of particular interest are Wardell's Sydney Cathedral (1865) French on the inside and English on the outside³⁰; Scott's St Mary's Edinburgh for the Episcopalians (1872) a compilation of the best and truest features of Gothic³¹; Butterfield's designs for Melbourne's Anglican community (1878) a high Victorian Gothic sandstone exposition and "Butterfield's final masterpiece" according to his biographer, Paul Thompson³²; and Pearson's St Mary's Cathedral, Truro (1880) exhibiting the confidence and fluency of its architect in a fully coherent late Victorian Gothic revival design.

Personal studies, and the generally favourable climate towards French planning and articulation following the Lille Cathedral competition, exerted a strong influence on Wardell's own church designs, which gradually incorporated features of French planning and spatial articulation more overtly. By 1857 Wardell was convinced that the best way to solve the problem of massing in the east end of a Catholic church, with its many chapels and sacristies, was to incorporate a French style apse with ambulatory and chevet chapels. On his design for the church at Primrose Hill, London, in 1857, Wardell unequivocally recommended this solution as being "better in every way but more costly"³³ Unfortunately the design for Primrose Hill was never realised and it was not until

26 Ursula M. de Jong, "From England to Australia: The Architecture of William Wilkinson Wardell 1823-1899" (PhD diss., Monash University, Clayton, 1989), 320ff.

27 de Jong, "From England to Australia," 326; J. Mordaunt Crook, *William Burges and the High Victorian Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

28 de Jong, "From England to Australia," 327-329.

29 William H Pierson, Jr, *American Buildings and their Architects. Volume 2. Technology and the Picturesque, the Corporate and the Early Gothic Styles*, (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); de Jong, "From England to Australia," 330-33.

30 de Jong, "From England to Australia," 347-69.

31 de Jong, "From England to Australia," 334-36.

32 de Jong, "From England to Australia," 337-44; Paul Thompson, *William Butterfield* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1971).

33 WWW Drawing ML D317 f37, Mitchell Library, SLNSW, Archives. De Jong, "From England to Australia," chapters six and seven.

Wardell received the commission for Melbourne's St Patrick's Cathedral, that he was able to build a large-scale project embodying this design approach.

The cruciform design and French inspired apse were not the only features from Wardell's English practice to be incorporated into St Patrick's. The twin west towers with spires (inspired by the Minsters of Durham and York, and such French cathedrals as Chartres and Notre Dame in Paris) had been explored, though never built, in Wardell's design for Mount St Mary's Church at Leeds (1854), where the solid west front commands a sweeping view over the city of Leeds. Wardell had already begun designing geometric decorated tracery, clearly displayed in the great western window at Leeds, in a move away from the curvilinear decorated towards a simpler, severer exposition. Wardell clarified these aims further at St Andrews Church, Galashiels, Scotland (1856). Powerful massing is here enhanced by the use of a heavily textured polychrome local stone. Though St Andrew's resembles a collegiate chapel much more than a cathedral, it was from this church more than any other that Wardell drew inspiration for St Patrick's: not in planning or composition, but in the strength of external massing, the articulation of the internal arcading, the continued development of a great variety of geometric decorated tracery, and the use of cathedral glass.

So the plan, significant elevational features and the architectonic expression of St Patrick's can all be traced directly to Wardell's own earlier explorations in church design in Britain. This project was to be the ultimate expression of Wardell's concept of Gothic, which had been constantly developing, evolving and changing. In many respects, the commission for St Patrick's presented Wardell with the opportunity to build his Gothic 'dream'. Yet FitzPatrick considered Wardell's design rather plain and feared that the architect had pared down the ornament to suit the church's meagre purse. Goold was able to assure his Vicar General that the design was not only acceptable, but that the tracings he had forwarded to him had been greatly admired in Europe.³⁴ This correspondence begins to raise issues around style, perceptions of design (architecture and decoration) and understandings about interpretations of the Gothic in mid-nineteenth century in Europe and in Australia. Perhaps FitzPatrick had in mind more of the Gothick sensibility, whereas Goold was moving in circles where Pugin's principles were known and Ruskin's ideas were already inspiring new thinking. Yet Goold himself had a rather catholic taste: ordering Renaissance style fonts for 'his' cathedral!³⁵ In the press in Melbourne, appreciation of Wardell's design more generally was expressed in the early months of 1859, as the cathedral church rose on Eastern Hill, and began displaying its great proportions.³⁶

34 28 December 1858, Fitzpatrick to Goold; and 31 March 1859, Goold to Fitzpatrick, Rome; MDHC Archives.

35 This in spite of Bishop Willson's urging that Goold follow his own example in Tasmania in being true to Pugin's ideals, and respect Wardell's cathedral design. Refer to correspondence held at MDHC and Brian Andrews, *Creating a Gothic Paradise: Pugin at the Antipodes* (Hobart, Tasmania: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 2002).

36 See letter signed "one of the congregation" which appeared in *The Argus*, 5 February 1859, and a short article in *The Australian Builder and Railway Chronicle*, 2 April 1859. Both illuminate public perception of the changes and appreciation of the scale of the task to begin the construction anew.

Realizing the dream

St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, is in a real sense the crowning achievement of Wardell's English ecclesiastical work, and an early Victorian Gothic Revival masterpiece. The clarity of the plan is echoed in the simplicity and directness of the building itself. Wardell's concentration on a balanced architectural composition did not exclude a continued fruitful exploration of asymmetry and a particular delight in diagonality.³⁷ He was fully aware of what Ruskin described as the "noble disquietude of Gothic".³⁸ A journey around the Cathedral enables one to explore the dramatic and scenographic in Wardell's architecture. Internally, ordered progression combines with unexpected vistas and diagonal views. The ability to so order space is surely one of the wonders of Gothic composition. Wardell's design, masterful in its handling of space, admirably pays tribute to this Gothic tradition, allowing all in the antipodes some inkling of the grandeur of European architectural space. Indeed, the Australian architect, critic and writer, Robin Boyd perceived that the Cathedral's interior presented a Gothic vision unsurpassed by any other building of the 400 years since the Gothic era. Given his modernist perspective he clearly appreciated the "rather plain" design which had, a century earlier, so concerned FitzPatrick. The interior elevation at St. Patrick's stems from the English parish church tradition, whilst acknowledging the cathedral convention of a tripartite bay elevation. While Wardell's St Patrick's design has clear parallels with nave elevations at Bury St Edmund's and Newark, two of England's great parish churches,³⁹ it is generally more massive. Even so, Wardell does not sacrifice slenderness and elegance, but rather combines these with the concern for plastic expression and respect for the materials, achieving a kind of organic interconnection of elements that Pugin advocated but rarely achieved himself.

A measure of civic pride was associated with the building of the new cathedral which was to stand as a visible symbol of the city's new civic and ecclesiastical status. In 1888 Sutherland published a perspective of Wardell's proposed cathedral, and claimed that the "church promises to be the most notable ecclesiastical adornment of the city".⁴⁰ At its consecration in 1897, Archbishop Redwood of Wellington New Zealand, said: "this great Cathedral of St Patrick, the architectural pride of Melbourne and Victoria, stands [as] a glorious and enduring monument of your faith."⁴¹ At the same occasion Cardinal Moran of Sydney, told the people of Melbourne that "your Cathedral shall cast its shadow as a protecting aegis around your queenly capital of Victoria."⁴² The Cathedral grew as the city grew, and the community watched with interest as the idea of a Gothic cathedral took physical form on Eastern Hill.

37 See Ursula M de Jong, *St Patrick's Cathedral Melbourne: a guide* (Melbourne: Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, 2005).

38 John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, 3 Volumes (London, 1853, Volume II), 178, 199-200

39 For Bury St. Edmunds see plate p. 254 in Paul Johnson, *British Cathedrals* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980). For Newark see plate 53 in David Cole, *The Work of Gilbert Scott*, (London: The Architectural Press, 1980).

40 A. Sutherland, *Victoria and its Metropolis, Past and Present*, vol. 1 (Melbourne: McCarron Bird and Company, 1888), 389.

41 Quoted in Ebsworth, *St Patrick's*, 69.

42 Excerpt quoted in Ebsworth, *St Patrick's*, 67.

St Patrick's was consecrated on 31 October 1897, complete except for the spires. The total cost to that date had been 217,376 pounds sterling.⁴³ The occasion was an historic event for all of Melbourne. The achievement almost beyond belief.⁴⁴ What was so selflessly and splendidly begun, and so consistently and zealously continued, was triumphantly completed and crowned for the centenary of the foundation of Catholicism in Victoria. The spires of St. Patrick's Cathedral were completed in 1939 to the designs of Messrs. W. P. Conolly and G. W. van Heems (fig. 1). It was decided to build the main spire ninety feet higher than Wardell intended, taking it to a height of 340 feet. This necessitated a revision of the original drawings which altered the proportions generally. The front spires were also lengthened to 216 feet each, fifteen feet higher than Wardell intended. Ebsworth gives some indication of the additional work the increase in height necessitated. He states that the result shows that the increase in height was fully justified. This paper contends that this was not the case - that in fact the increase in height of the spires destroyed the tightly knit architectural composition of Wardell's design. Wardell's west front entrance, "whilst an excellent one of its kind", was considered too narrow and insignificant as a main approach, so it, too, was removed, redesigned and considerably enlarged at this time. Melbourne's small largely Irish Roman Catholic community gave Wardell the opportunity to accomplish a project that other architects continued to dream of. Wardell gave Melbourne, the city and its people, a Gothic cathedral of architectural repose and majesty complemented by fine restrained decoration. The historian T S R Boase rightly placed St. Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, into his history of English Art, and in that context praised it most highly: "...with its fine vaulting and masonry, its wide transepts, aspidal chevet, organized spaciousness, beyond Pugin's compass, and its silhouette of towers [it] is perhaps the greatest triumph of the English Gothic Revival."⁴⁵

Yet, in the end this is too narrow a view. Indeed Wardell's 1858 design for St Patrick's marks it as a significant example in the international Gothic Revival. In its role in planting the faith firmly in the new land, St Patrick's clearly sustained and transformed the memory of the sacred: it both evoked the medievalism of the Church and the Roman magisterium. Wardell's charter was, in essence, to bring together in his design all that a Gothic cathedral represented - theologically, spiritually, architecturally and experientially - and to clearly link this community to the Holy See in Rome. In his combination of English and French traditions of Gothic, of cathedral and parish church expressions, Wardell created a cathedral-church fulfilling the needs and aspirations of 19th century Melbourne Catholics. Thus, Joan Kerr could argue, that "while religious affiliations created [it]; ...architectural associations assured [its] worshippers of identity within a Christian community of souls 12,000 miles away."⁴⁶

43 Ebsworth, *St Patrick's*, 75.

44 Archbishop Carr (1898), quoted by Ebsworth, *St Patrick's*, 73) wrote: "When it is remembered that it is less than forty years since the foundation-stone of the noble building was laid; that at that time the Catholic population of the colony was comparatively small, and its resources proportionately limited, it is a matter of wonder and astonishment that the founders of the Cathedral had the courage to undertake so imposing a building." Original document in MDHC Archives.

45 Boase, *English Art*, 241.

46 Joan Kerr, Foreword to Brian Andrews, *Gothic in South Australian Churches* (Adelaide: University of Flinders, South Australia, 1984).

Thus Melbourne lays claim to a globally significant nineteenth-century early Victorian Gothic Revival masterpiece: St Patrick's Cathedral. In translating the Gothic tradition, Wardell gave Melbourne a cathedral which not only recalled ages past, but which embodied the most modern ideas in nineteenth-century cathedral design: it was grand in conception, eclectic in style and individualistic. The English/French planning; the relation between and articulation of parts; the attention to materials, predominantly local bluestone (basalt); the massing, weight and bulk, offset by fine elegant sandstone detail, all contributed to the success of the overwhelming sense of unity of the design of Melbourne's cathedral (fig. 1). Wardell succeeded in translating the Gothic architectural and faith tradition in a unique cathedral design for the Catholic Diocese of Melbourne. Wardell's massive sculptural envelope encased a light diaphanous space. Internally, Wardell managed to create anew the magnificent vistas, diffusion and layering of space which surely were the highlight of any medieval Gothic church.



Fig. 1. William Wardell's St Patrick's Cathedral Melbourne, east end with chevet chapels. Central tower and spires completed 1930s. 1970s Diocesan Offices in foreground. Photograph by Ursula M. de Jong.