

Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment

Church of the Immaculate Conception

Kingscourt, County Cavan

Submitted to Cavan County Council

February 2011



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Architectural Recording and Research

“The tower is built only as far as the base of the spire, which when added to the work, will render the whole construction a unique and handsome edifice.”

Jan de Vey,

The Irish Builder (Vol. 14, p.309)

15th November, 1872

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The following document is an Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment on the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt, County Cavan. Commissioned by Fr Gerard MacCormack on behalf of the parish, it includes a detailed written and photographic inventory, an appraisal assessing the significance of the church, an overview the church's development, an impact assessment relating to the proposed development to erect a new belfry and spire, and a conservation method statement. The report meets the standard requirements of an Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment as set out in the publication 'Architectural Heritage Protection, Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (DoEHLG, 2004).

2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Church of the Immaculate Conception is a Roman Catholic church of architectural, artistic and social significance, and was built between 1869 and 1872 to a design by Cavan-born architect, William Hague.
- Although originally intended, a spire was never erected - most likely because of a lack of funding.
- A design for a spire was produced by architect, William Henry Byrne in 1914, however, it was never built.
- In 2011, Mr Niall Smith, MRAI has been commissioned to design a spire by the parish. The design has been influenced by 'broach-spires' designed by W.H. Byrne including those at Stabannan and Louth Village, County Louth.
- An investigation by project engineer, Mr Alan Clarke, has revealed that the foundations of the belltower are sufficient to support the loading of a spire.
- This report finds that the proposed scheme to erect a new spire has been well researched and planned, and that the addition will have a positive impact on the architectural character of the church.

3.0 SITE LOCATION MAP

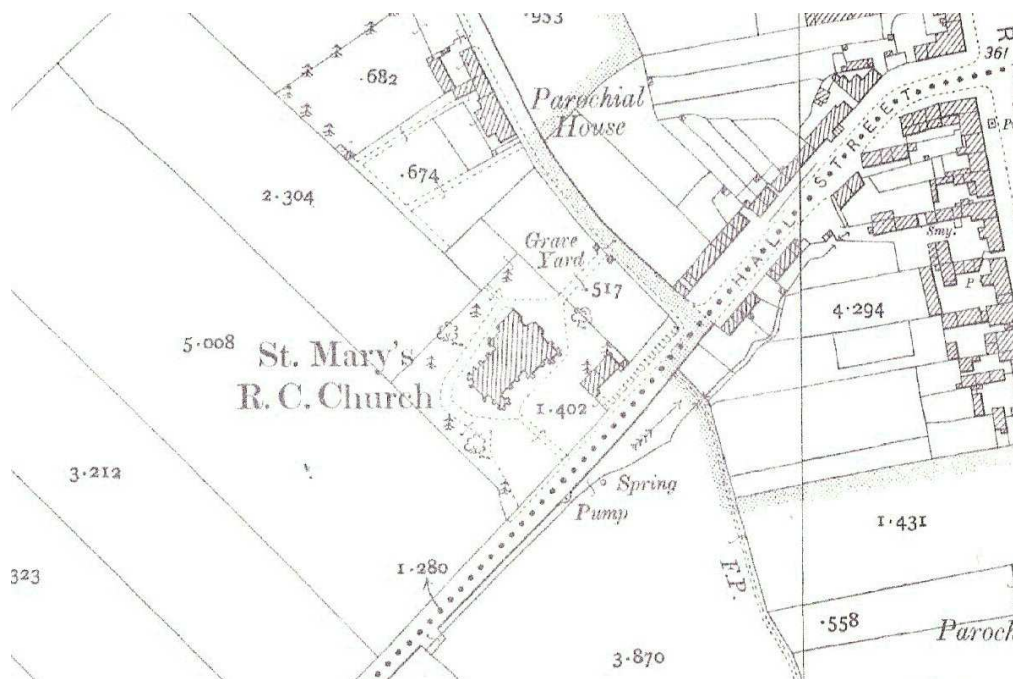


Fig. 1: Site Location Map of the Church of the Immaculate Conception
Ordnance Survey Map of the County of Cavan, surveyed 1911, Scale 1:1,056

4.0 CORE DATA

Purpose of Assessment	Report accompanies a planning permission application. Permission is sought for the erection of a new belfry and spire, which will be built upon the existing belltower.
Address of Structure	Church of the Immaculate Conception, St. Mary's Road, Kingscourt, County Cavan
Townland	Dunaree
Protection Status	Record of Protected Structures, Cavan County Council Ref. Number CV35033
Special Interest	Architectural, Artistic, Social
Importance Rating	Regional
NIAH Reg. No	Not Applicable
Coordinates	E678334, N795627
Original Use	Roman Catholic Church
In Use As	Roman Catholic Church
Construction Date	1869-1872
Author of Report	Sinéad Hughes, Architectural Recording & Research (AR&R) 141 Iveragh Road, Whitehall, Dublin 9 Tel: 01 8574264 Mobile: 087 9170070 Email: info@arr.ie
Qualifications of Author	Postgraduate Dip. Applied Building Repair and Conservation (TCD) Postgraduate Dip. Architectural Inventory and Recording (DIT) Bachelor of Arts (UCD)
Date of Site Inspection	3 rd February, 2011
Planning Authority	Cavan County Council

5.0 ARCHITECTURAL AND PHOTOGRAPHIC INVENTORY

5.1 Composition of Church:

Cruciform Gothic-revival Roman Catholic church, built between 1869-1872, to a design by William Hague, Architect. Located on an elevated site overlooking the town of Kingscourt. Church comprises central nave flanked by side aisles, apse, side altars and transepts. A sacristy is located off the northwest transept and the base of an incomplete belltower is located to the southeast of the apse. A spire was never erected. Gabled entrance facade has a large rose window and elaborate door surround. Car park to southwest of church. Graveyard to south of church.

5.2 Roof:

Single-span pitched slate roofs to nave and transepts. Mono-pitched slate roofs to side aisles. Pyramidal hipped roof caps the incomplete belltower. Limestone coping stones over gables. Terracotta crested ridge tiles and cast-iron and carved stone cross finials. Two tones of natural slate are found on roof with a pattern created by alternating bands of red and blue/purple toned slates. Bands comprise two courses of slate each. Cast-iron rainwater goods. Lead flashing to valleys.

5.3 Walls:

Walls comprise locally quarried hammered sandstone blocks, laid to random courses, with line-tooled (Carrickmacross) limestone dressings including limestone flat-bands to walls, decoratively carved corbel course and window and door surrounds. Angle buttresses to church.

5.4 Openings:

Entrance gable is southwest facing and has square-headed double door set within pointed-arch surround with polished stone columns. Gabled entrance porch to rear of southeast-facing side aisle with timber battened double door with decorative door furniture set within pointed-arched opening with polished stone columns in surround. Additional door openings at base of tower and in northwest transept.

Variety of window openings with leaded and stained glass windows. Original glazing comprises Cathedral glass set in leaded lights, made on site by Mr Farron of Marlborough Street, Dublin. Large rose window on southwest-facing entrance gable with decorative limestone tracery and stained glass window designed by Eoin Butler, installed c.2000. Pointed-arched window openings to side aisles with smooth limestone surrounds and carved limestone tracery dividing window into two lights and quatrefoil. These windows contain decorative stained glass windows designed in the Harry Clarke Studio, Dublin in the early 1960s. Smaller paired pointed-arched windows at clerestory level with smooth limestone surrounds and leaded lights. Three pointed-arched window openings within apse with limestone tracery and stained glass windows by artist Evie Hone, c.1947.

5.5 Interior:

Central aisle is separated from side aisles by Gothic arcade of carved sandstone supported on polished Aberdeen granite columns. Hood mouldings to arches terminate in decoratively carved drip stops depicting human heads and foliage. Tiled floor with geometric pattern tiles to aisle. Plastered walls to interior. Timber roof trusses and pitch-pine panelled timber ceiling over central nave. New altar and sanctuary furniture c.1988.

5.6 Site:

The Church of the Immaculate Conception is located on an elevated site bounded by the Kells Road and St. Mary's Road. The site is enclosed by a limestone wall and is accessed through vehicular and pedestrian gates. To the northeast of the church is the gable wall of an older church dating to the early nineteenth century. This gable wall now marks the entrance to the site from St. Mary's Road.

There is an old graveyard to the northeast of the church and a newer graveyard southwest. The church and new graveyard are separated by a large car park. The parochial house is located northwest of the church.



Fig. 2: Southeast-facing side elevation with nave, side aisle and transept. Tower is to east end.



Fig. 3: Northwest-facing side elevation with sacristy adjacent to transept



Fig. 4: Entrance gable with rose window



Fig. 5: Central apse with flanking tower and sacristy



Fig. 6: A view of the church from St Mary's Road



Fig. 7: A view of the church from the Kells Road



Fig. 8: A view of the church from the south



Fig. 9: A view of the graveyard to the south and west of the church



Fig. 10: Extant entrance gable of earlier church, which lies to the northeast of the present church



Fig. 11: Northeast elevation of belltower



Fig. 12: Southeast elevation of belltower



Fig. 13: Principal entrance door

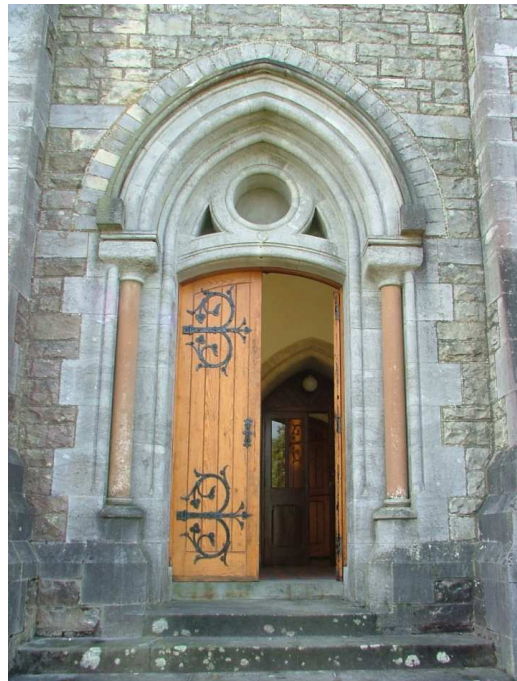


Fig. 14: Entrance door to belltower



Fig. 15: Southeast-facing transept



Fig. 16: Interior of church, view towards altar and apse

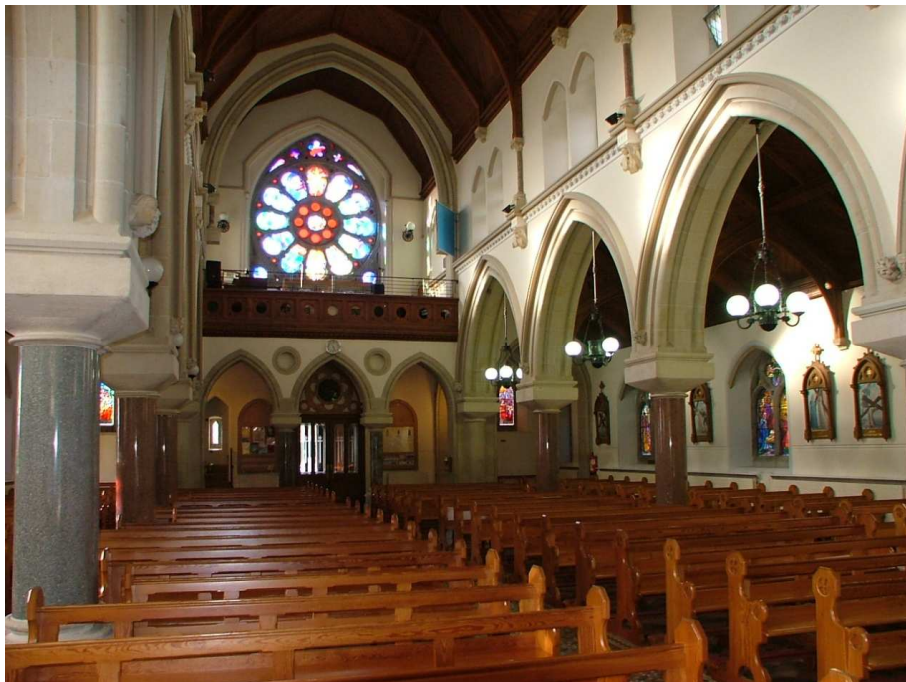


Fig. 17: View of nave, looking towards entrance gable



Fig. 18: Pitch-pine panelled ceiling to nave and apse (left)



Fig. 19: Gothic arcade of sandstone springing from polished Aberdeen granite columns (right)



Fig. 20: Stained glass window to side aisle by Evie Hone

6.0 APPRAISAL OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHURCH OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

The Church of the Immaculate Conception is a landmark building that was formally designed by church architect, William Hague. It was built in the Gothic idiom to reflect its status as the community's most sacred and significant structure.

The church is an expression of skilled craftsmanship and is a building of architectural and artistic importance. Its carefully designed exterior, with hammer-dressed locally quarried sandstone and ashlar limestone dressings, sourced from Carrickmacross, is handsomely executed. The interior is notable for its decoration with carved stone, timber and stained glass.

The church is renowned for its stained glass windows, which were designed by celebrated stained glass producers including Evie Hone and Harry Clarke Studios. The windows, which were inserted in the 20th century, illuminate the interior and provide artistic significance to the place of worship.

Categories of Special Interest: Architectural, Artistic, Social

Rating: Regional Importance

7.0 OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT THE CHURCH OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

The plot of land upon which the Church of the Immaculate Conception now stands was originally leased in 1798 by Sir Joseph Pratt of Cabra Castle to Rev. James Bermingham. At the time, a mud-walled house was used to celebrate Mass and it was the intention of Rev. Bermingham to erect a more appropriate chapel.¹

In 1812, the new stone-built chapel was built in the Later English Style and, as seen on the first edition map of the Ordnance Survey, it was cruciform in shape. The entrance gable, which marks the northeast entrance to the site, is all that survives of this church today.

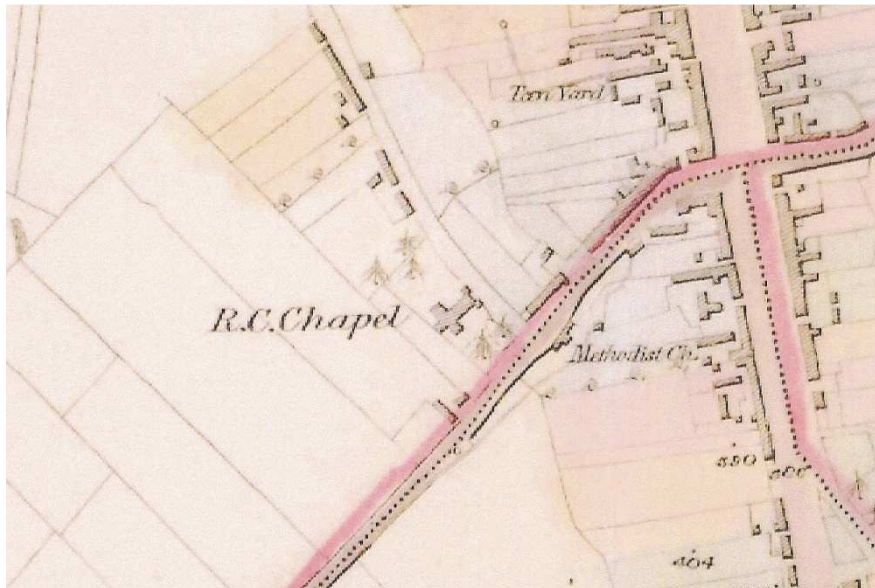


Fig. 21: First Edition Ordnance Survey Map of the County of Cavan, surveyed 1835-6, Scale: Six Inches to a Mile
The earlier church, whose entrance gable survives today, is shown

Following the Great Famine of the mid-nineteenth century, plans for a larger church were made. In 1869, Rev P. O'Reilly engaged Cavan-born architect, William Hague, to design a new church building. Hague contracted Mr Hugh Kelly of Granard to undertake the building project, and by 1872, the Church of the Immaculate Conception was completed and consecrated.

A contemporary description by a correspondent to *The Irish Builder*² provides detailed information about the sources of building materials found in the church. These included locally quarried sandstone for the elevations, Carrickmacross limestone for the ornate ashlar dressings and window openings, Aberdeen granite for the nave's columns, Middleton marble for the front wall columns of the organ gallery and pitch-pine for the ceiling. The original leaded windows were glazed with three shades of Cathedral glass by a Mr Farron of Dublin.

Speaking of the tower, the correspondent, signing himself as Jan de Vey, stated, *"The tower is built only as far as the base of the spire, which when added to the work, will render the whole construction a unique and handsome edifice."* Although the church had been consecrated and opened for worship by 1872, it is clear that the architect's plans had not been fully realised.

¹ Information about the site's early history is taken from a publication entitled 'Kingscourt – A Journey of Faith', published 2000, which is reproduced on the website: <http://kingscourtparish.ie/churches/church-of-the-immaculate-conception-kingscourt/>

² A full description of the church in 1872 appears in *The Irish Builder*, 15th November, 1872, Volume 14 (Source: Irish Architectural Archive)

As is the case with many Roman Catholic and indeed Church of Ireland churches, spires were very often added years, if not decades, after the building had been completed. In the case of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, the church to date had cost somewhere between five and six thousand pounds. Mr de Vey's account in *The Irish Builder* records that the bill for workmanship and part of the materials was given to be £3,000. The remainder of materials including all stones and lime were supplied by the committee, "and everything needed was carted to the ground gratuitously by the parishioners..."

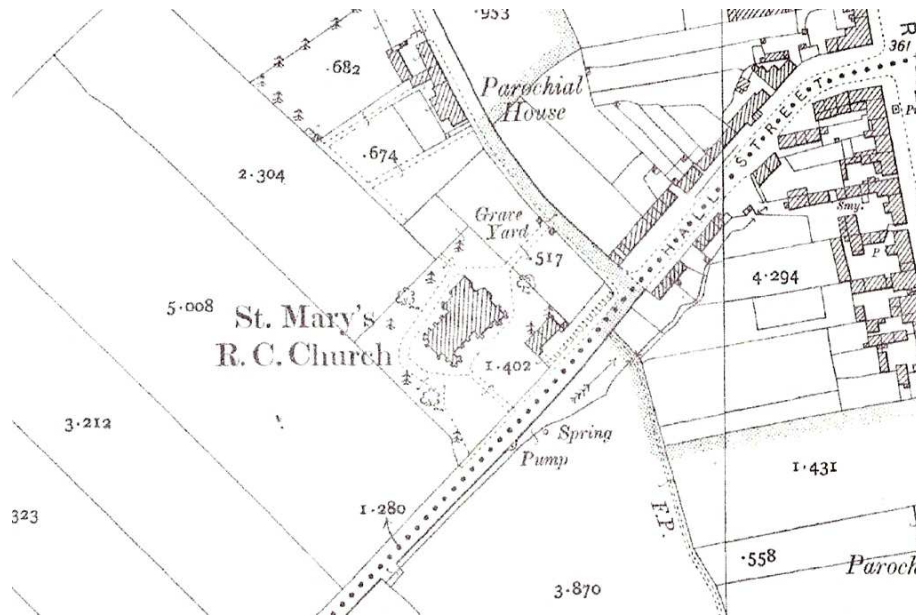


Fig. 22: Site Location Map of the Church of the Immaculate Conception
Ordnance Survey Map of the County of Cavan, surveyed 1911, Scale 1:1,056

The Church of the Immaculate Conception has been a work in progress since its inception in 1869. Throughout the 20th century, various features have been added or changed. In 1914, the firm of William Henry Byrne was commissioned to design a spire for the church³. However, like that of William Hague, it was never built.

Other improvements included the replacement of the plain Cathedral glass windows with bespoke stained glass windows by two of Ireland's best celebrated stained glass producers, Evie Hone and the Harry Clarke Studios.

The landmark church, on its elevated site, remains a focal point for the local community, who will celebrate its 140th anniversary in 2012. To commemorate this special year, the parish have decided to 'complete' the church by erecting a spire and belfry. The spire, which is of a traditional and appropriate design, will pay homage to all who have worshiped at the church for the last century and a half.

³ W.H. Byrne's spire plan of 1914 was once stored in the firm's archive but could not be found during the research stage of this project. Information on the existence of plans taken from Dictionary of Irish Architects, <http://www.dia/works/view/3265/building>

8.0 ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 Chapter Objective:

The following chapter aims to describe and evaluate the proposed design of the new spire, and to outline how the addition will impact on the fabric and character of the church and its wider setting. The statement should be read in conjunction with the plans and documents produced by project architect, Mr Niall Smith, MRIAI.

8.2 Objective of the Proposed Development:

In 2012, the Church of the Immaculate Conception will celebrate its 140th anniversary. To commemorate this important year, Parish Priest, Fr Gerard MacCormack and his parishioners have commissioned a new spire, which will complete the unfinished belltower. Construction work is to take place over the summer months of 2011.

8.3 Designing the Spire:

Careful consideration has been given to the proposed design and treatment of the spire. A neo-Gothic design has been produced by the project architect, Mr Niall Smith, MRIAI and is favourable to Fr MacCormack and the congregation.

The above parties are aware that the church is a building of architectural significance and that it has been assigned statutory protection under Cavan County Council's Record of Protected Structures. As such, special care and attention has been paid at design stage to ensure that the new spire will complement the architecture of the Gothic Revival church.

8.4 Rationale for the Design of the Spire:

Research has shown that William Hague, the church's architect, intended to erect a spire over the belltower. It appears however, that following the completion of the main body of the church, there was simply not enough money to bring his full architectural plans to fruition. The tower was capped with a functional slate roof and left to await the resources and energy of future generations.

An attempt to erect a spire was made in 1914, when W.H. Byrne was commissioned to produce a suitable design. For reasons that are unclear, though likely financial, the spire, like that of William Hague, was never built.

To commemorate the 140th anniversary of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, the Parish Priest and his congregation have undertaken the challenge of fund-raising and commissioning a new spire. Their chosen architect has based his design on Byrne's neo-Gothic styling by studying the completed spires at Ballyhaunis, Louth Village, Stabannan and Dangan.⁴

⁴ Photographs of churches at Louth Village and Stabannan are reproduced from the website: www.buildingsofireland.ie



Fig. 23: Ch. of the Immaculate Conception, Louth Village, 1890 (left)



Fig. 24: Ch. of St Nicholas, Stabannan, Spire added 1898 (right)

8.5 Proposed Design for the Spire:

As per the examples seen at Louth Village and Stabannan, Co. Louth, an octagonal broach-spire with lucarnes is to be erected at Kingscourt. The spire will rise from a new belfry with typical pointed-arch louvred openings. The spire will be surmounted by a cross finial.

The existing pyramidal slate roof, which currently caps the belltower, is to be carefully dismantled. A new belfry stage is to be erected and will be constructed of cast concrete with an outer facing of hammer-dressed stonework. The coursing will copy that of the existing elevations of the belltower below. Decorative dressings such as the eaves-course will be finished in ashlar limestone. The stonework will be bedded in and pointed with a sand-and-lime mortar. Naturally hydraulic lime mortar will be appropriately specified to suit the stonework and its exposed setting. The joints of the stonework will be flush finished and brushed to promote carbonation of lime mortar.



Fig. 25: Hammer-dressed, locally quarried sandstone blockwork to tower elevation (left)



Fig. 26: Carrickmacross limestone ashlar dressings to door and buttress of tower (right)

A modestly designed stone date plaque will be inserted at belfry level to record the year of construction for the spire. This will ensure that the new addition can be clearly identified as modern by the visitor.

The new belfry will support the steel-framed spire over a timber-framed sub-structure, which will be externally finished in natural slate. The slates will be fixed to battens with copper nails and hooks over a breathable membrane. A galvanised steel cross finial will be erected at the apex of the spire.

The hips of the roof will be weather-proofed with suitably specified lead sheeting as per the hipped roof of the adjacent apse.

It is intended that the belfry and spire will be reversible by future generations if required. Their construction has been detailed so as not to impact on the existing belltower substructure.

8.6 Evaluation of Proposed Design for the Spire:

As shown in the measured drawings and sketches supplied by the project architect, the proposed spire will complete the building both physically and visually. See pages 23 & 24 of this report.

The neo-Gothic design has been largely influenced by the styling of architect, W.H. Byrne, who in 1914 was commissioned to produce a plan for a spire. As such, the proposed broach-spire is a fitting addition that will enhance the nineteenth-century church and age well. The new spire will marry contemporary construction technology with nineteenth-century styling.

Although many of Byrne's spires were executed in ashlar stone, a slate-clad example has been found at Ballyhaunis. The use of slate is justified as the commissioning of an ashlar spire would result in extra loading and an unfeasibly large bill.



Fig. 27: Slated spire built at Ballyhaunis

8.7 Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment:

The erection of a new broach-spire will complete the unfinished Gothic Revival church. The carefully detailed design, which can be seen in the architect's sketches, will have a positive impact on the architectural character of the Victorian church.

The chosen materials including slate, stone and lime will blend harmoniously with the fabric of the church. This will ensure a timeless quality to the finished spire, which as a beacon in the landscape, cannot afford to 'age badly'.

The dramatically increased height of the church will mean that it will be of higher visibility within the landscape. However, as a well designed and traditionally detailed spire, it will be a positive

landmark to be viewed from the town of Kingscourt and its neighbouring environs.

Following an examination of the foundations by the project's structural engineer, it has been determined that the belltower is capable of withstanding the loading of a new spire. As such, the careful construction of the new addition will not affect the fabric of the existing tower or church.

In summary, the new broach-spire has been carefully designed to enhance the building's architecture and to complement its fabric. Its construction will complete the church, which has awaited a spire for 140 years.

9.0 CONSERVATION METHOD STATEMENT

9.1 Conservation Philosophy and Principles

Works at the Church of the Immaculate Conception will be guided by the internationally accepted conservation principles and the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government's conservation guidelines. In the interest of preserving the existing historic character and fabric of the church, works have been carefully specified and are to be sensitively carried out. It is important that the conservation principles of minimum intervention and maximum retention of existing fabric be adhered to during the project. New works have been designed to be reversible.

Project personnel are aware that the church is protected under Part IV, Planning and Development Act, 2000, and have an understanding of the building's special interest.

9.2 Protection of Existing Features and Fabric

- The church and site will be closed to the public during construction works. The adjacent graveyard will however remain open to visitors and for the facilitation of funerals.
- Scaffolding will be erected by licensed scaffolders.
- Temporary plywood boarding will be provided around window openings near to the belltower. This is to prevent accidental damage of vulnerable stained glass windows.
- Vulnerable lead-covered valleys or gutters will be protected by means of plywood sheeting during works. On completion of works, nearby valleys and gutters will be inspected for any construction-related debris.
- Should any slates of adjacent roofs be damaged during works to the tower, the contractor will replace them with same.

9.3 Sourcing and Specifying Materials

- Natural slate will be sourced from a reputable supplier. New slates will be used. Salvaged slates harvested from other old buildings will not be used. The slates will match the Bangor Blue slates of the church's principal roof. Black-coloured Spanish slates will not be used.
- Copper nails will be used for slating the new spire.
- Naturally hydraulic lime will be sourced from a reputable supplier. A suitable mortar mix will be specified and checked with the supplier to ensure it is appropriate for use in an exposed setting.
- Joints will be pointed with a flush finish.
- Cement (Ordinary Portland Cement) will not be used for bedding or pointing of limestone stonework at belfry level.
- The proposed contractor will have experience in the preparation and use of lime mortars.
- Lime will only be used during suitable weather conditions.
- The contractor will use adequate protection such as gauntlet gloves, goggles and boots to protect his/her skin from the caustic lime.
- Sand will be clean, sharp and well graded.
- Stone will be sourced to match the existing in texture and colour. It must be noted that the existing stonework of the belltower has been weathering for 140 years and is soiled due to biological staining.
- Pre-treated timber will be used in the construction of the spire.

9.4 Supervision of Works

- On-going supervision of works will be carried out by the project architect, Mr Niall Smith, MRIAI.
- Site inspections will be carried out at agreed intervals by Bronagh Lanigan of AR&R to ensure good conservation practice throughout the project. Ms Lanigan holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Applied Building Repair and Conservation.

10.0 SKETCHES OF PROPOSED SPIRE AND BELFRY

PROPOSED SPIRE / BELLTOWER TO THE CHURCH OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION, KINGSCOURT

VIEWS FROM CHAPEL LANE



Drawings produced by Mr Niall Smith, MRAI, 2011

**PROPOSED SPIRE / BELLTOWER TO
THE CHURCH OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION, KINGSCOURT**

VIEWS FROM KELLS ROAD



EXISTING VIEW



PROPOSED VIEW

Drawings produced by Mr Niall Smith, MRAI, 2011