

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-04483-7 - The Present State of Ecclesiastical Architecture in England
Augustus Welby Pugin
Excerpt
[More information](#)

THE
PRESENT STATE
OF
ECCLESIASTICAL ARCHITECTURE
IN
ENGLAND.

BY
A. WELBY PUGIN, ARCHITECT.

WITH
Thirty-six Illustrations.

REPUBLISHED FROM THE DUBLIN REVIEW.

LONDON:
CHARLES DOLMAN, 61, NEW BOND STREET.

1843.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04483-7 - The Present State of Ecclesiastical Architecture in England

Augustus Welby Pugin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04483-7 - The Present State of Ecclesiastical Architecture in England

Augustus Welby Pugin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

ON THE PRESENT STATE OF
ECCLESIASTICAL ARCHITECTURE
IN ENGLAND.

ARTICLE THE FIRST.

From the DUBLIN REVIEW, No. XX.

May 1841.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04483-7 - The Present State of Ecclesiastical Architecture in England

Augustus Welby Pugin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04483-7 - The Present State of Ecclesiastical Architecture in England

Augustus Welby Pugin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

ON THE PRESENT STATE OF
ECCLESIASTICAL ARCHITECTURE
IN ENGLAND.

ART. II.—*Elevation of the Cathedral Church of St. Chad, Birmingham.* By A. W. Pugin. London: 1840.

THE revival of our ancient parochial church architecture is a subject which occupies much attention at the present time; after three centuries of demolition and neglect, the solemn structures raised by our Catholic ancestors are being gradually restored to somewhat of their original appearance,* and buildings which but a few years since were considered as unsightly and barbarous erections of ignorant times, are now become the theme for general eulogy, and models for imitation. To the English Catholic there is no class of religious edifices of greater interest than the ancient parish churches of this country. They are admirably suited to the present wants and necessities of the Church, nor is it possible to adopt, consistently, any other models for the greater portion of our ecclesiastical buildings.

However glorious, magnificent, and edifying as were the great cathedral and abbatical churches, wonderful monuments of piety and zeal, we cannot turn to them in our present condition as objects of imitation. To rival them is wholly out of the question; to produce a meagre and reduced copy would be little better than caricaturing past glories. They were, in fact, the crowning result of Catholic piety and zeal, when it covered the face of the land, when all hearts and hands were united in the great work of rearing piles to God. These vast and sumptuous churches were, however, only the result of a long series of humble endeavours; they were the flowers of that faith which had been sown and cultivated by other means.

It is, in fact, by parish churches, that the faith of a nation is to be sustained and nourished; in them souls are engrafted to the Church by the waters of baptism; they are the tribunals of penance, and the seats of mercy and forgiveness. In them is the holy Eucharistic sacrifice continually offered up, and the sacred body of our Lord received by the faith-

* Among these restorations, none is more deserving of praise than that of the Temple church, London. The whole of the unsightly fittings of the last century have been removed, the marble caps and shafts beautifully restored, the whole of the vaulted ceiling diapered and painted, and many of the windows are being filled with stained glass, which, in design and execution, may vie with some of the richest windows of antiquity.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04483-7 - The Present State of Ecclesiastical Architecture in England

Augustus Welby Pugin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

ful; there the holy books are read, and the people instructed; they become the seat and centre of every pious thought and deed; the pavement is studded with sepulchral memorials, and hundreds of departed faithful repose beneath the turf of the consecrated enclosures in which they stand. Each Catholic parish church is the history of the adjacent county; the family chantry, with its baronial monuments and heraldic bearings, the churchman's brass, the crusader's tomb, the peasant's cross, the storied windows, are all evidences of a long series of men and events; and valuable indeed are the national records furnished by many of even the humblest churches of this land; and even now, desecrated and despoiled as they are, still is there a traditionary reverence for these monuments of ancient piety left among the people.

Are not village spires, the church bells, the old porches, the venerable yew trees, the old grey towers, subjects on which writers and poets love to dwell? and Catholic feeling has never been so obscured in this land but that many have been found to view these holy spots with pious reverence; and what is truly consoling, the traditional form of the old buildings, although dreadfully debased and disfigured, has never been totally abandoned.* If the English Catholic body avail themselves of this feeling of attachment to the old parish churches which exists among a great body of the people, wonderful good may be produced; but if they neglect the means they are bound to employ to turn this feeling to the restoration of the old faith, then it will be found extremely inimical to the revival of religion.

A vast body of uninformed but excellently intentioned people, especially in agricultural districts, oppose the progress

* There are many interesting examples of this fact to be found in England. In that stronghold of Christian architecture, Oxford, we find colleges and buildings erected during the reigns of James and Charles, with the arrangement and features of the ancient buildings. At St. John's college are some beautiful groined ceilings of a very late date. The hall of Lambeth Palace, erected since the restoration by Archbishop Juxon, has buttresses, tracery windows, battlements, a *lovre*, a *dais* with a bay window, open framed roof, and all the characteristics of a refectory of the 15th century.

At Westminster Abbey the end of the north transept was almost rebuilt in the 17th century.

The font and cover at Durham Cathedral, set up in the time of Charles 1st, are carried up to a great height with niches, buttresses, and pinnacles.

The details of all these works are debased, and Italian monstrosities appear occasionally; but still these, and numberless other examples which might be adduced, fully prove that England long clung with a sort of lingering love to her ancient architecture.

of Catholicism from Catholic motives. They look upon the old church as the true one, they are not sufficiently instructed to draw a distinction between that same old church under Catholic or Protestant ministration, and they equally despise and avoid the dissenting conventicle, built by some independent preacher, or the *dissenting-looking* conventicle, erected in fact for the celebration of the very rites for which the old church was built, but with which it does not appear to have the slightest connexion, as an admirable writer in the *British Critic* beautifully expresses himself; "Grecian temple, Catholic cathedral, Corinthian portico, Norman doorway, pilaster and pinnacle, cannot differ so much or so essentially as the notions of a church, a preaching house, and a house of prayer. If then," he continues, "one could ensure the greatest technical accuracy in details, still if the Genevan principle of a house of God instead of the Catholic be adopted, the result must be an architectural monster." Such is the language of one, who, although unfortunately separated from us in communion, is evidently united in taste with the ancient faithful of this land; and it is lamentable that few among us appear to feel the truth of these observations. Modern Catholics have frequently abandoned *Catholic architecture* for the *Genevan*, and even make light of this melancholy decay, and speak of the architecture of the house of God and the formation of his sanctuary, on which our Catholic ancestors bestowed the greater part of their lives and goods, as a thing indifferent, dependent on mere whim and idea. Now it is scarcely less important to adhere to the traditions of the Church as regards the arrangements of material buildings, than as to any other matters connected with the celebration of the divine mysteries; for it is impossible that these latter can be performed in accordance with the rituals and intentions of the Church, if the former are disregarded; and yet it is a melancholy fact, that even a great portion of the clergy seem utterly unconscious of the close connexion between the two.

The most ardent supporters of the modern temple or conventicle style, who have cast away without the least compunction, not only the splendours but the *proprieties and essentials* of church architecture, affect great horror of what they term innovation in matters of much less importance. They regard the reduction of a shovel-ended stole to its ancient and reasonable shape, or the unstarching of a crimped surplice and restoring its graceful and ample folds, in the light of an almost mortal sin; while they sever every link between themselves

and Catholic practice and antiquity in the style and arrangement of their churches. Surely this must arise from want of due reflection or information on these matters.

Can it be imagined that the Church in all ages, would have defined with such scrupulous exactness every thing connected with the celebration of the divine office, had not such precautions been considered necessary to ensure a becoming and solemn performance of the sacred rites? The Church, moreover, appointed proper officers, such as archdeacons, and rural deans, to act under the bishop, and see that the intentions and regulations of the Church were properly carried out, and to report on the state of the various churches in the diocese.

There are yet existing visitations of the twelfth century, where the slightest defect or irregularity in the fabric or ornaments is carefully noted down, with directions for amendment; yet all these excellent regulations to preserve uniformity and discipline, established by the wisdom of the ancient Churchmen, are accounted as foolishness by many Catholics of these days. To assert the importance of adhering to ancient tradition in these matters, is sufficient to draw forth ridicule, and even censure. It is lamentable to hear the sentiments which are expressed on ecclesiastical architecture by many who should be most ardent in reviving it in all its ancient purity, but who do not even bestow as much consideration on it as on the construction of their stables. The principal part of our modern churches are the result of mere whim and caprice. Those who build them are regulated neither by ecclesiastical nor architectural authority; hence a new Catholic church is almost certain to be a perfect outrage on ecclesiastical propriety and architectural taste. It is impossible to say, before it is erected, whether the building will look most like an auction room or a methodist meeting; whether it will have any symbol of Christianity about it, or be quite plain; whether it will be a caricature of pointed or of Grecian architecture; whether it will have any characteristics of a Catholic church at all, if we except its extremely offensive appearance, which, grievous as it may be, is become a very distinguishing mark of a Catholic building.

Formerly, the word *church* implied a *particular sort of edifice invariably erected on the same principle*; it might be highly ornamented, or it might be simple; it might be large or small, lofty or low, costly or cheap, but it was arranged on

a certain regulated system. Churches built hundreds of miles apart, and with the difference of centuries in the period of their erection, would still exhibit a perfect similarity of purpose, and by their form and arrangement attest that the same faith had instigated their erections, and the same rites were performed within their walls. But now, alas, the case is widely different; anything may be built and called a church; any style, any plan, any detail. No sooner is a new building of this kind determined upon, than there is a muster of committee-men to adjust preliminaries, and decide on plans. These are men generally ignorant of every thing connected with these matters; which the result of their labours but too plainly proves. Some Protestant builder,—a matter-of-fact one-idea Roman-cement man, whose highest achievement in architectural art has been the erection of a market-house, or modernizing the front of an hotel—is not uncommonly considered as a fit and proper person to design and carry out an edifice intended for those very rites which produced the erection of every truly fine church in the land. Of course this individual, who is perfectly destitute of any idea of what the church should be like, eagerly catches at the suggestions of the committee-men, who are far from backward in having a say on these occasions. One has seen a new chapel lately opened, which he thinks extremely *neat and pretty*, but would propose that the altar should stand in a sort of alcove; a second, however, objects to this latter proposition, as he proves that those who would sit in the *last seat of the gallery could not look down on the top of the altar*; this is declared to be a fatal objection, and the altar is decided to stand against a flat wall, where *it can be well seen on three sides*. A hints that something in the Gothic style would look well; but B declares it to be all *expensive gingerbread*. C, who has been to Rome, laughs outright at such a barbarism as pointed architecture, and asks A sarcastically if he ever saw a Grecian portico; talks with equally extravagant praise of St. Peter's and the Parthenon, the two most opposite buildings in the world, and concludes with an eulogium on classical taste and refinement, and the barbarisms of the old Catholics. A ventures to reply, that there was something very grand about the old churches, notwithstanding, and offering some remarks about antiquity, is cut short by a loud laugh and general cry, "Oh, we're *all for the modern now*;" in which the one-idea Roman-cement man heartily joins, and compels him to be silent. After some further conversation about a marble altar

from abroad, candlesticks of the newest Parisian fashion, and some other foreign novelties, the meeting separates, and a building is commenced, which in due time is finished, and opened with a band of theatricals, who, as the bills announce, have *kindly consented* to sing the praises of God—it might perhaps be added, as is sometimes seen on benefit bills, (*for that day only*), which would be an additional inducement for a full audience. This is a true picture of the manner in which many Catholic churches have been, and, what is worse, are still, being built; yet, perhaps, close by such an abortion stands the old parish church of the town. Although simple in its architecture, Catholic is indelibly stamped on its venerable exterior. Heretical violence has stripped it of its most beautiful ornaments; Protestant churchwardens have fattened on its old leaded roof and spire; it is curtailed of its fair proportions, and disfigured by some unsightly modern additions, which have been tacked on to its ancient walls; yet, in spite of these memorable disadvantages, it still tells its tale,—it is Catholic from foundation to tower top. Melancholy is it to think that this venerable pile should have been alienated from the ancient faith; but thrice melancholy is it that those who should ever regard it with veneration, and strive to imitate its beauties, should pass it by unheeded and despised; and as if in mockery of its venerable grandeur, raise a conventicle-looking structure under its very walls, where the assemblage of architectural monstrosities becomes a standing proof of the degeneracy of modern times.

It is very probable that many well-disposed persons have been led to approve, or at least tolerate, these miserable erections, from a mistaken idea that nothing could be accomplished in the pointed style under an immense cost. Now so far from this being the case, *this architecture has decidedly the advantage on the score of economy*; it can be accommodated to *any materials, any dimensions, and any locality*. The erroneous opinions formed on this subject are consequent on the unfortunate results attending the labours of those who, when about to build in the pointed style, take some vast church for their model; and then, without a twentieth part of the space, or a hundredth part of the money, try to do something like it. This is certain to be a failure. Had they, on the contrary, gone and examined some edifice of antiquity, corresponding in *scale and intention to the one they wished to erect*, they would have produced a satisfactory building at a reasonable cost. Some persons seem to imagine that every pointed