

Newman, Pugin and the Tridentine Liturgy

1 Newman and Pugin

In February 1975 John Henry Newman sent Edward Pugin a letter¹ thanking him for the copy of his father's *Earnest address on the establishment of the Hierarchy*, which he had recently been sent. It was first published in 1851 under the title *Church & State*; Edward had had it re-issued² in January 1875 as a response to Gladstone's call upon the Catholics of England to re-affirm their allegiance to the Crown and to renounce spiritual tyranny. Gladstone's "fanatical outburst" (to use Edward's expression) was provoked by the decrees of the First Vatican Council (1869-70), in particular that of 1870 defining Papal Infallibility, in consequence of which Gladstone believed Catholics had "forfeited their moral and mental freedom".



Fig. 1a John Henry Newman, 1845



Fig. 1b Augustus Welby Pugin, c.1840

Edward's father was the liturgical architect Augustus Welby Pugin (1812-52), the High Priest of the Gothic revival in England, which he had promoted through his many buildings and even more influential writings, such as *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*³, in which he articulated his profoundly held belief that Gothic architecture was synonymous with Christian architecture; he intended his churches to be not just places of worship, but also places that *induced* worship, repeatedly stressing, for example, that the verticality of "pointed" architecture was, above all, "an emblem of the Resurrection".

His pamphlet *Church & State* was itself a response to the furore that followed the restoration of the English hierarchy in 1850, which was commonly perceived as an act of

insolent and insidious “Papal aggression”. Pugin’s aim was two-fold: to help “restore reciprocal charity between us and our separated countrymen”, and to exhort the Catholic laity to support their new hierarchy, cautioning the hierarchy, lest they repeat the mistakes of the past, to remain “unpolluted and uncorrupted with State intrigue and diplomacy”.

Newman recorded¹ his pleasure on reading Pugin’s pamphlet, describing it as “an exposition of great and important principles, written in a frank, straightforward and forceful style”. Such posthumous praise would surely have pleased Augustus as much as it did Edward himself, who claimed that Newman’s approbation of his father’s last published work was “the highest tribute yet paid to his memory”. For after his conversion, Newman’s relations with Augustus Pugin had steadily deteriorated, both sides, on occasion, even trading insults with one another, Newman calling Pugin a bigot on at least two occasions^{4,5} whilst Pugin described the behaviour of Newman’s Oratorians as “worse than the Socialists”⁶!

The root of the disagreement between Newman and Pugin was a difference of opinion concerning the style of architecture that, in the mid-nineteenth century, was appropriate for Catholic churches. To Pugin, as we have already noted, Gothic was synonymous with Christian, and thus was not an option, but mandatory, all other styles being adaptations of pre-existing pagan forms (such as the Roman basilica). To Newman, however, who had struggled for four years to convince himself that antiquity was not the guarantor of truth, the post-Gothic *Baroque* style, which during his studies in Rome he had seen deployed there in the design of Counter-Reformation churches, was much better suited to the Tridentine liturgy that was then (with a few exceptions) normative throughout the Western Latin Church; Baroque churches have wide naves in which the congregation’s attention is focused on the High Altar.

In England, of course, no such Counter-Reformation developments in church architecture had been possible in consequence of the Penal Laws that until 1791 had prohibited the building of Catholic chapels. With the lifting of such restrictions, new Catholic chapels were deliberately designed to be externally very unostentatious, often more redolent of a Non-Conformist chapel. After the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, there were brief flirtations with Baroque, Classical styles, and pastiche Gothick, but by the late 1830s Pugin had started to establish himself, promoting what had been the *English national style* in pre-Penal, Medieval times, namely, **Gothic**. He finally settled on what he considered to be its purest form – namely, the so-called “decorated” (or “second pointed”) style that flourished during the reigns of Kings Edward I, II and III, c. 1275-1375.

Apart from the mid-Victorian literary/romantic interest in things Medieval, there were other motivations for adopting Gothic: these came from “Oxbridge” Anglicanism. Firstly, there was the *Oxford Movement* founded in 1833, whose aim was to renew the Church of England by returning it to its Catholic roots. This meant re-emphasising its apostolic origin, its sacramental, sacerdotal and sacrificial nature, and reviving long-abandoned Catholic rituals. Newman at first believed that to achieve this “nothing else is necessary but to take our Church in the Middle Ages” – when Gothic was, of course, the national architectural style. This naturally appealed to Pugin who entertained “great hopes for the Oxford men”, *via* whom he believed corporate union between the Anglican and Catholic Churches might be realised – the prevailing Tractarian view at the time being that the Anglican Church was a “*via media*” between the extremes of Roman Catholicism and Calvinistic Protestantism.

The Oxford Movement was followed six years later by the *Cambridge Camden Society* (later called the Ecclesiological Society) whose aim was to ensure that church interiors were ordered as in the Catholic Middle Ages so that the ritual practices that the Oxford Movement wished to promote could be correctly carried out (actually coining the word “ecclesiology” to reflect this). *The Camden Society* exerted (via its monthly journal, *The Ecclesiologist*) a very profound influence on the internal ordering of Anglican parish churches to produce what we generally witness today, and which, ironically, is much closer to Pugin’s ideal than was ever generally realised in Catholic churches.

There was a problem, however: the internal layout of the Mediaeval Gothic churches that Pugin and the Camden Society were using as exemplars was geared to the Sarum Rite – the rite that was normative in England for 400 years prior to the Reformation; believing it would be reinstated with the restoration of the Hierarchy, Pugin designed his early churches accordingly. Thus, the High Altar was situated at the East end of a narrow chancel that was long enough to accommodate choir stalls, the Easter Sepulchre, the sedilia (seating for the clergy), and the piscina (a small basin wherein the sacred vessels are washed after Mass). The chancel itself was separated from the nave by a Rood Screen, the purpose of which was not only to emphasise the distinction between ordained clergy and the laity, but also to partially shield the altar from the gaze of the unordained in order to protect the mystery of the Blessed Sacrament.

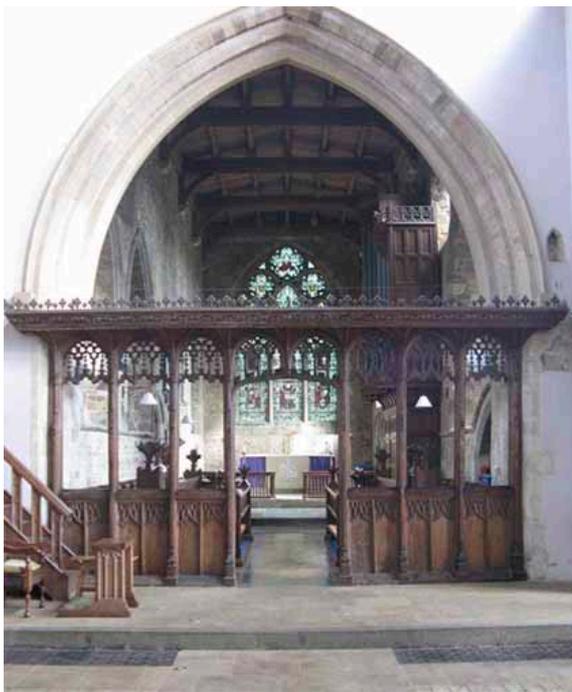


Fig. 2a A typical “Sarum Rite” chancel

(Ss Peter & Paul, Deddington)



Fig. 2b A Counter-Reformation Baroque church

(Church of the Gesù, Rome)

Such an arrangement clearly did not facilitate the fuller “all seeing, all hearing” participation of the Faithful that the Council Fathers at Trent wished to promote with their new (Tridentine) rite. This required an *uninterrupted view* of the High Altar on which, in order to emphasise its centrality, the Blessed Sacrament was to be reserved in a

tabernacle. Above this, from a visually prominent throne, the monstrance containing the Blessed Sacrament could be displayed in full view of the congregation during Benediction, and particularly the *Quarant' Ore* – an Italianate devotion involving an exposition of 40 hours, which the Oratorians and Italian missionary Orders had introduced into England, and which the newly re-established English hierarchy was keen to promote. These requirements could not be fulfilled by the kind of altar that had been used in the Middle Ages, and with which Augustus Pugin had furnished his early churches. These “English” altars did not even have a central tabernacle, it being customary in the Middle Ages to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in a dedicated side-chapel, such as Pugin provided in his church of St Giles, Cheadle. Despite his initial hostility to such Italianate practices, Augustus Pugin did eventually pioneer such an arrangement – the so-called ‘Benediction altar’ - in his chapels at Ushaw and Ware, and in his design of the High Altar for the Jesuit church in Farm St, London; the most impressive example, however, was that which he designed for his own church (St Augustine’s) in Ramsgate. The ‘Benediction altar’ was later developed by his eldest son Edward, and reached its apogee in the hands of his youngest son, Peter Paul.

Newman identified what he considered objectionable about Pugin’s Gothic revival churches in a letter⁷ to a family friend, Maria Rosina Giberne, dated 6 June 1848:

In details, Pugin is perfect, but

- *his altars are so small that you can't have a Pontifical High Mass at them*
- *his tabernacles are so low that you can scarce have exposition*
- *his East windows are so large that everything else is hidden in the glare*
- *his skreens [sic] are so heavy that you might as well have the function in the sacristy, for the seeing of it by the congregation.*

Newman nevertheless believed that Gothic could be adapted to the new requirements, as he stated in a letter⁴ of 15 June 1848 to Ambrose Phillipps de Lisle:

In order that any style of architecture should exactly suit the living ritual of the 19th Century – it should never have died – else, while the ritual has changed, the architecture has not kept pace with it. This defect is actually to be found in Gothic. Gothic is now like an old dress, which fitted a man well 20 years back but must be altered to fit him now.

Newman was not against the Gothic style *per se*, but rather against the **interior arrangement** of churches in the service of which the Gothic style had been deployed and had fossilised – namely, that found in the Medieval exemplars that Pugin was using as the basis of his revival, which, as we have already noted, were geared to the defunct Sarum Rite.

Consistent with his undoubted “admiration of the Gothic style”, whilst still a Tractarian, Newman (in 1839) had been a founder member of the *Oxford Society for Promoting the Study of Gothic Architecture*, and, earlier had his church in Littlemore built (1836-36) in the Gothic style, but internally ordered such that the altar was the visual focus of the building, there being (originally) no chancel at all.

It is not sufficiently appreciated that towards the end of his life, Augustus Pugin had started to distance himself from his earlier Utopian view of the Middle Ages as an era to be emulated both architecturally and socio-religiously (*Church & State*², pp. 35-36). This,

in turn, led him to recognise that the design of his earlier churches was appropriate only in rural situations, and not for urban churches, which he argued should be of much greater height than their rural counterparts in order that surrounding buildings do not block the light, whilst the chancel should essentially be a continuation of the nave (*A Treatise on Chancel Screens*⁸, p.120).

Further on in the same publication, Pugin makes the following highly significant statement (p. 122):

It is most essential to erect spacious sanctuariesOur churches should now combine all the beauty and symbolism of antiquity with [what]altered ecclesiastic discipline requires.....Unless Pointed architecture is carried out on these adaptive rules, it is not a living monument.

He concludes (pp.123-4) as follows:

.... the real principles can combine with any legitimate requirement of religion; let the bishops and clergy practically perceive that Christian architecture (i.e. Gothic) fulfils perfectly all their wants....Above all, we must remember that everything old is not the object of imitation - everything new is not to be rejected.

This could have been Newman speaking in the late 1840s! Although he would never have admitted it, Pugin had clearly moved a considerable way towards Newman's position concerning the necessity and possibility of adapting Gothic to the Tridentine rituals of the Catholic Church in mid-19th century England, although, in fairness, it must be noted that he had already started to address some of these issues in the design of his Liverpool church of St Mary – contemporarily described as “an excellent example of a *town church*” – some five years *before* Newman articulated his criticisms of Gothic. It was, however, left to his eldest son **Edward Welby Pugin**⁹ fully to implement his father's revised vision - but not immediately, as we shall see.



Fig.3 Edward Welby Pugin, c.1865

II EW Pugin and his reconciliation of Gothic with the Tridentine Liturgy

Edward Welby Pugin (1834-75) was only 18 years old when his father, Augustus, died in 1852. He was educated at home, and from the age of seven had helped his father in his architectural practice. Having been unsuccessful in applying Pugin in connection with the new Houses of Parliament), Edward remained with his

father, eventually becoming his “right-hand-man”. He was thus well placed during his father’s final illness in 1852 to assume responsibility for the practice, overseeing the completion of buildings he had left unfinished at the time of his death, and to realise, but to his own designs, some commissions of his father that had not been commenced, such as Shrewsbury Cathedral.

Helped by the burgeoning in Catholic church-building following the restoration of the Hierarchy in England and Wales in 1850, only two years prior to his father’s death, Edward soon began to acquire an increasing number of clients of his own. In his relatively short working life of only 23 years he established himself as one of the leading High Victorian Catholic architects of his day producing a vast amount of work, both ecclesiastical and secular, not only in the UK and Ireland, but also in Belgium.

Up to 1859 the design of EW Pugin’s early town churches was (with a few exceptions) similar to that which his father had eventually deemed appropriate only for *country* churches, namely, designs that provided for a distinct, separate chancel lit by a large East window, although his chancels were much shallower than his father’s. In 1859, however, he developed a design for a new diocesan church in Eldon St, Liverpool, which addressed and resolved all of the criticisms that Newman had made of his father’s earlier country churches. In this way, Edward Pugin finally succeeded in fully reconciling Gothic with the requirements of the Tridentine liturgy and associated devotions.

Let us reconsider, point-by-point, Newman’s four objections to the design of Augustus Pugin’s early churches, to see precisely how Edward Pugin’s Eldon St solution successfully addressed these objections

- *His altars are so small that you can’t have a Pontifical High Mass at them*
EW Pugin ensured that the mensae of his high altars are adequately wide.

- *His tabernacles are so low that you can scarce have exposition*

In his smaller churches, EW Pugin, following his father’s lead (at Ware, Ushaw and Ramsgate, for example), positioned the exposition throne immediately above the tabernacle, where it could be accessed directly from the top step of the altar. In the case of larger churches, however, in order that the exposition throne be visible to all parts of the church, it needed to be positioned much higher up, making it impossible for it to be accessed as before: an alternative had to be found. One solution devised by EW Pugin was to position the reredos (a decorative screen rising above the rear of the altar) sufficiently far forward of the East wall of the chancel/apse to create enough room for a permanent staircase *via* which the monstrance containing the

Blessed Sacrament could be positioned on the elevated exposition throne from the rear – see Fig. 4b.

- *East windows are so large that everything else is hidden in the glare*

After 1859, the square-ended chancels with their huge East windows, which characterised EW Pugin's earlier churches, were often replaced by chancels ending in an apse and lit by groups of short lancets positioned high up in the wall, just below the start of the roof structure. This reduced the glare (particularly when there were insufficient funds to install stained glass). On the occasions when the design continued to feature a square-ended chancel a Rose window was often incorporated, but again sufficiently high up so as not to be obstructed by any reredos.



Fig.4a Apsidal sanctuary lit by high level lancets
(*Our Lady's, Birkenhead*)



Fig.4b Square-ended sanctuary lit by a Rose window
(*St Anne's, Rock Ferry*)

- *His skreens [sic] are so heavy that you might as well have the function in the sacristy, for the seeing of it by the congregation*

There are *no* screens in any of EW Pugin's parish churches (the only screens he ever incorporated were in churches associated with religious orders, mostly enclosed ones). To further ensure that the majority of the congregation had good sight-lines to the sanctuary he used wide nave arcades with slender pillars. In addition, he replaced the deep chancel of the displaced Sarum Rite by a quite shallow apsidal sanctuary that is essentially a continuation of the nave under the *same* roof-line, with no demarcation between them, either internally or externally.



Fig.5 A typical EW Pugin ‘vessel’ church with wide nave arcades and roof timbers that resemble the ribs of the hull of a wooden vessel
(*Our Lady’s, Eldon St, Liverpool*)

Externally, this results (in the absence of transepts) in a kind of (inverted) ‘vessel’ church, within which the roof timbers are reminiscent of the ribs of the hull of a wooden vessel; indeed, the term ‘nave’ comes from the Latin for ship/ boat/ vessel

Reporting on the progress of the Eldon St church in Liverpool, *The Tablet* of 1 October 1859 described the result as follows:

“This glorious church, majestic in its proportions....exemplifies a new phase in ecclesiastical architecture”....if not in effect “a complete revolution in church building.”

The Eldon St formula was one that EW Pugin continued to develop and refine for the next ten years, until the end of the 1860s, after which he partially reverted to designs that incorporated a distinct, square-ended chancel. Three main phases of development can thus be discerned in EW Pugin’s ecclesiastical oeuvre:

Phase I – 1852-59: essentially, variations on this father’s country church design characterised by a distinct, square-ended chancel with a large East window.

Phase II – 1859-59-1969: variations on the “vessel” church formula pioneered at Eldon St.

Phase III – 1869-75: a partial reversion to Phase I.

Church commissions (many of which were built through the munificence of Catholic landed gentry, such as the de Traffords) came from both diocesan clergy and religious orders. No commission was too large or too small, and even for the most impoverished communities he invariably succeeded in providing a dignified place of worship, often having to show (in his own words) what he could not do, rather than what he could! For very often features that he had wished to see produced had to be sacrificed simply for lack of means, the most frequent victims being towers and spires. Indeed in some case, it is difficult to believe that the designs ever came from the pen of EW Pugin. Nevertheless, as Archbishop Downey of Liverpool once said:

*“These churches were built in the tradition of the cathedrals of old, in the spirit of sacrifice, to be temples **with which** to worship God.”*

Edward worked mainly on his own, although, at various times between 1856 and 1868, he was in partnership with other architects – the most significant relationship (of 8 years duration, 1860-68) being that with his former pupil George Coppinger Ashlin, an Irishman. Ashlin effectively ran the Irish side of the practice from Dublin where an office had been set up, initially in order to manage the building of the large church of *Ss Peter & Paul* in Cork. In England Pugin maintained offices in Liverpool (the Catholic heartland of the North-west from where many commissions originated), Westminster (where he maintained a residence) and Ramsgate (where he lived and worked at *The Grange*, the house his father had built in the mid-1840s).

Edward's ecclesiastical buildings (which constitute by far the majority of his output) include 3 cathedrals, 9 conventual (abbey/friary/monastery) churches, 73 parish churches (including two for the Church of England), 29 chapels of various kinds (convent, cemetery, private, college, institutional), 13 convents and monasteries, 9 institutional buildings (orphanages, almshouses *etc*), and 34 church schools. His 13 secular buildings include domestic residences of various kinds (often for Catholic landed gentry), a hotel and other commercial buildings. He was also responsible for additions to 21 churches by other architects and for at least 50 miscellaneous minor works, both ecclesiastical and secular; at least another 58 projects – such as a cathedral for Liverpool – were never realised.

At the age of 24 he was created a Knight of the Order of St Sylvester by Pope Pius IX, in recognition of his design of the *Basilica de Notre Dame* in Dadizele, Belgium. Four years later, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects (*FRIBA*), and frequently exhibited his designs at the Royal Academy.

Edward differed from his father both in his mature (post-1860) architectural style and in his life-style. Architecturally EW Pugin's mature work is distinguished by a persistent emphasis on the vertical element of the design (often reinforced by a prominent West-end bell-cote) and the use of flamboyant Franco-Flemish elements.



Fig.6a A typical West- end bellcote
(*All Saints', Barton-on-Irwell*)



Fig. 6b A Franco-Flemish spire
(*Ss Augustine & John, Dublin*)

His life-style (which itself might be described as somewhat flamboyant!) was most probably a reaction to the quasi-monastic domestic regime in which he had been brought up, and to the oft-commented-on unkempt appearance of his father. Edward, by contrast, appears to have been something of a dandy figure to whom dress sense and personal cleanliness were important (as evidenced by his fondness of Turkish bathing, actually designing one such establishment). Apart from during his final years, he appears to have been something of a *bon vivant* – a larger-than-life, if not eccentric, character.

He was well-known locally in Ramsgate, after his family's return there from London in 1861, for his hospitality and social engagement, such as his participation for three years (as Captain Pugin) in the Ramsgate Volunteer Artillery Corps, and with his attempts to improve local housing conditions *via* domestic building projects. The most ambitious such project was his vision of a completely new seaside resort (to be called St Lawrence-on-Sea) on the East Cliff of Ramsgate, the centre-piece of which was the Granville Hotel: this proved to be his nemesis, however.

It has been suggested that his extrovert life-style was perhaps driven by the desire to gain social acceptance, particularly given his religion. Although engaged at least twice – in 1862 (to the granddaughter of Lady Scarisbrick, one of his most enthusiastic and indulgent patrons), and again in 1867 – he never married.

His output peaked in the mid-1860s, 22 churches and chapels being commenced during 1864 alone, when his annual income (in today's terms) was around £4 million. Despite his national eminence, he was not, however, amongst those invited in 1867 to submit designs for the new Law Courts, and he responded by publishing a trenchant criticism of the design submitted by Edward Barry, a son of Sir Charles Barry. This marked the beginning of a pamphlet war between the two concerning the relative contributions of their fathers to the design of the new Houses of Parliament. His remaining years were blighted by litigation and financial problems arising from his reckless speculation in the Granville Hotel venture in Ramsgate, which ultimately led to his bankruptcy in 1872. In an attempt to improve his financial circumstances, he left for the USA in October 1873, where he did obtain quite a few commissions, although there is no evidence that any were ever executed.

After his return to England, which was announced at the beginning of January 1874, things deteriorated even further, following the publication of yet more pamphlets – this time against those whom he paranoically felt had contributed to his financial demise. The pamphlets were often deemed to be malicious and libellous, resulting in frequent regrettable court appearances in both Kent and London. The most high profile case involved his father's friend, the painter JR Herbert RA, who brought against EW Pugin a charge of publishing false and defamatory libels arising from a financial grievance over a house that he had designed for him. This led to two appearances in the Central Criminal Court in London. On the first occasion, in July 1874, when William Gladstone gave evidence on behalf of *both* parties, Pugin was acquitted, but after offending again later that year he was found guilty and only just escaped a six months custodial sentence.

By now, the accumulated stress was starting to have a detrimental effect on both his work and his health, which was already in a precarious condition on account of the punishing work schedule he had sustained over many years, and within twelve months he

was dead. He died at the age of 41 (one year older than his father) on the evening of Saturday, 5th June 1875 at his Westminster residence, Victoria House, 111 Victoria St, of syncope of the heart, provoked, it was claimed, by injudicious use of chloral hydrate (a then quite new sedational drug, commonly used to treat insomnia).

Shortly before his death he is reported to have said: “Put on my gravestone *Here lies a man of many miseries*”.

Although it was his irascibility and volatility that invariably attracted attention and adverse criticism, there was another side to his nature, as the author of his obituary in the *Thanet Advertiser* was at pains to point out, writing: “He was a good hater and a firm friend – impetuous to a degree and generous to a fault”. He was much loved by his workmen who (said his obituary) “speak of him with reverence”. As his funeral cortège made its way through Ramsgate to St Augustine’s church on 10th June 1875, it was followed by a great crowd of admirers, including many of the poor who showered his coffin with flowers, whilst in the Royal Harbour fishing smacks flew their flags at half-mast, and in the town many shops were closed out of respect. He was buried in the vault beneath the Pugin Chantry, wherein his father had been laid to rest 23 years earlier.

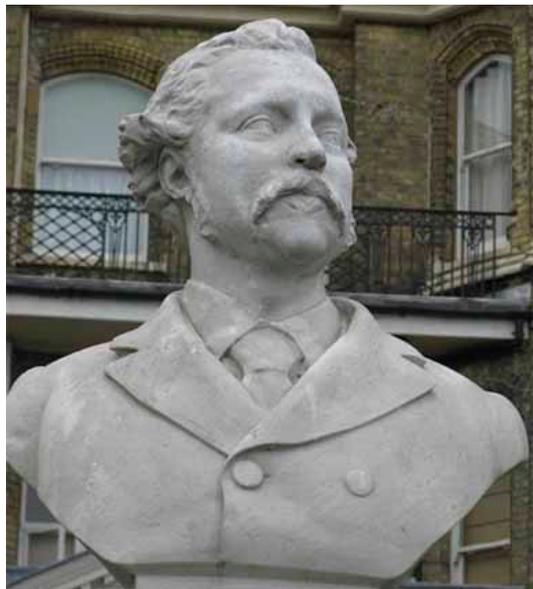


Fig.7 Bust of Edward Welby Pugin, outside the Granville Hotel, Ramsgate

Gerard J Hyland

Member of the Pugin Society

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