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# ‘HAPPY COMBINATION OF JUDGMENT AND GOOD TASTE’: ST. WINEFRIDE’S CHURCH IN HOLYWELL, WALES

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*St. Winefride’s Church in Holywell, Flintshire, was the first church designed for the Catholic religious order the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) by the architect Joseph John Scoles (1798–1863). This article considers the significance of this largely overlooked building in terms of design, and in relation to the architectural expression of the Jesuits in Britain, to its built environment, and to nineteenth-century Catholic visual, material and liturgical culture more broadly. It seeks to provide an assessment of why Scoles and the*

*Jesuits made the design choices they did, and to do so by examining the surviving sources – many examined here for the first time.*

St. Winefride’s (built 1832–3) was Scoles’s third church commission. It was his first for the Catholic Church, his first for the Society of Jesus and his first in Wales (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> Securing this commission was to prove a pivotal moment in his life and career. He was later to work with the Jesuits on a total of



Fig. 1. St. Winefride’s Church, Holywell, Flintshire. Exterior, liturgical west as originally built. Woodcut from *The London and Dublin Orthodox Journal of Useful Knowledge*, II, 32, (1836).

eight church building commissions – the subsequent seven all in England – as well as on a range of alteration, extension and decorative commissions for existing Jesuit churches. He went on to become Secretary of the Royal Institute of British Architects and a notable figure in British architecture, and in particular British Catholic architecture, in the early – and mid-Victorian periods.<sup>2</sup>

Architectural historians have largely overlooked this early Italianate Catholic ‘Mission’ church.<sup>3</sup> It has not been the focus of sustained attention or research, and there is no extended monograph or modern published history of the building. The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, for example, jumps straight from Scoles’s Norfolk churches to his St. Peter’s Church at Stonyhurst, pronouncing Stonyhurst ‘his first important church.’<sup>4</sup> This is a mistake: the design and construction of St. Winefride’s marks both an important event in the architect’s career and an important development in the public architectural expression of the Jesuits in Britain. It is a sophisticated town church, its liturgical Italianate style striking and modern in both time and place. Study of overlooked buildings such as St. Winefride’s goes some way to redressing the neglect of small, non-metropolitan churches of the early 1830s, and can help historians to ask better questions about architecture and the built environment in this period.

Recognition of its importance by contemporaries was immediate, making its subsequent neglect by architectural historians all the more curious. As early as 1832 it was referred to by Holywell’s Welsh-speaking townspeople as ‘Capel y cerryg nâdd’ – ‘the dressed stone chapel.’<sup>5</sup> William Eusebius Andrews, editor of the Catholic magazine *The London and Dublin Orthodox Journal of Useful Knowledge*, noted in his 1836 account of the building that Scoles’s new ‘Chapel and the Schools are nearly the best, if not the very best, buildings in Holywell; and display the same happy combination of judgement and good taste in the person who

designed them, that the other works of the same gentleman do.’<sup>6</sup>

St. Winefride’s Church is a multivalent building. It is a pilgrimage church for a Holy Well which for practical purposes cannot be on site. It celebrates an ancient cult and is dedicated to a Welsh Celtic female saint. It served multiple constituencies: an English-speaking and a Welsh-speaking congregation, local and national pilgrims, cradle-Catholics and converts, workers, the emerging middle and professional classes, and landed gentry. Its local and national audience is interesting – a complex and diverse constituency which needed to be satisfied by its architecture.

#### ARCHITECTURAL GOOD MANNERS

It is here argued that, in designing and building the Italianate St. Winefride’s Church, Scoles and his Jesuit patrons were seeking to articulate their Catholic and Jesuit identity in a manner carefully judged for time and place: a town chapel of the Catholic Reformation, long-delayed in England and in many ways built ‘out-of-time’, St. Winefride’s is a correctly-planned Tridentine church in function and form – these elements were largely prescribed.<sup>7</sup> The adoption of the ‘modern’ Italianate style was, however, a choice – a measured public articulation of ‘architectural good manners.’ It is an evolution of the Catholic town chapel tradition which had emerged from the shadows following the Catholic Relief Act of 1791. This Act gave Catholics a wide degree of freedom of worship and the ability to legally build churches, albeit with design constraints. This Act was arguably more important for Catholic church building than the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829, the culmination of the process of Catholic Emancipation.<sup>8</sup>

Catholic Emancipation brought Catholic practice and church building into the open by placing it, more or less, on equal terms with other



Fig. 2. The Well Chapel and the opened and vaulted Well Chamber beneath, together with St. James's Church, Holywell. (Angela Hampton Picture Library, Alamy Stock Photo)

‘dissenting’ religious bodies – it emphatically did not place it on terms equal to the Church of England. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that this provincial church exhibits design and stylistic parallels with Nonconformist chapels of its time. It does not seek to engage in competition with the late fifteenth-century or early sixteenth-century Perpendicular Gothic of the celebrated Well Chamber itself, in the possession of the established church since 1723 (Fig. 2). It also does not enjoin stylistic battle with the adjacent St. James’s Church, complete with its Gothic embraced west tower.<sup>9</sup> Emancipation was not popular in Holywell, and architectural good manners were prudent.

The Italianate was regarded in Britain at this

time as a relatively ‘modern’ style. St. Winefride’s Church was an early and trail-blazing experiment in this emerging form, at least in a Welsh, provincial, and liturgical context. Whilst the *Flintshire Observer* of 1860 described the building as ‘plain Grecian’, the *Orthodox Journal* in 1836 described it specifically as ‘plain Italian; a style which is much better suited for our Churches and Chapels than the more classic styles of Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome.’<sup>10</sup> It is noteworthy that a non-specialist journal such as the *Orthodox Journal* used ‘plain Italian’ as early as 1832, a full thirty years before James Fergusson (1808–86) dubbed it ‘the Common Sense style.’<sup>11</sup> The Jesuits had form here, having recently designed the first Italianate church in the British Isles, St. Francis

Fig. 3. St. Francis Xavier’s Church, Dublin, exterior, liturgical west end. (*DubhEire, Wikimedia Commons*)



Xavier in Dublin, built between 1829 and 1832 (Fig. 3). Almost certainly known to Scoles and the English Jesuits, it was built by two architects: the amateur Jesuit architect, Fr. Bartholomew Esmonde (1789–1862) and the professional lay architect, John B. Kean (d. 1859).

#### FR. FRANCIS LYTHGOE SJ AND THE JESUITS – SCOLES’S COMMISSIONING PATRONS

Fr. Francis Lythgoe SJ (1796–1873) was made Missioner at Holywell on 30 October 1826, and he served in that capacity at Holywell until 1842.<sup>12</sup>

He was therefore in post during the conception, commissioning, designing, building, first use and reception of St. Winefride’s Church. He was Scoles’s chief interlocutor throughout design and construction, as the surviving archival sources attest. Holywell, with the responsibility for building a new church, was a significant first posting for the young Jesuit: he had been ordained at Fribourg, Switzerland, only five months earlier, having completed his Jesuit theological studies there.<sup>13</sup>

Such years spent in Europe were not uncommon for the British Jesuits of this period. Fr. Lythgoe’s cousin, Fr. Randal Lythgoe SJ (1793–1855), had studied theology at Dôle in France and was ordained



Fig. 4. Santa Prisca, Rome. Façade of 1660 designed by Carlo Lombardi. (Anthony Majanlahti, Wikimedia Commons)

at Pigerolo in Piedmont. The Jesuit Provincial in our period, Rev. Charles Brooke SJ (1777–1852), hailed from Exeter, but was educated at Liège and Stonyhurst, and was ordained in Maynooth. Stonyhurst College in Lancashire served at the same time as the headquarters of the Jesuit Mission in England and Wales, also hosting their novitiate, seminary and main school. The previously mentioned Irish priest, Fr. Bartholomew Esmonde SJ, completed his novitiate training at Stonyhurst and later studied philosophy and theology at Palermo.

Given the above, it is not surprising that the design language and plan of St. Winefride’s can be placed within the stylistic tradition of European

Counter-Reformation town chapels, conventual chapels and smaller oratories which would have been familiar to the Jesuits in this period. These churches were every bit as familiar to the European-trained Jesuits as native Protestant chapels – indeed, perhaps more: it is unlikely that Catholic priests spent much time at all inside Protestant chapels. Their European tastes were those of a polyglot, cosmopolitan British recusancy with its own cultural experience.<sup>14</sup> Churches such as Santa Prisca in Rome, with its façade of 1660 by Carlo Lombardi are at least as important in terms of design influence on St. Winefride’s as are British Nonconformist chapels (Fig. 4).

How did Scoles first come to know the Jesuits? We know that his kinsman and teacher Joseph Ireland (1780–1841) had an established working relationship with the Jesuits, with Stonyhurst alumni and with the Catholic Church in England. His influence is likely to have been of some importance. Ireland had strong links with the Catholic church leadership, notably with Bishop Thomas Walsh (1777–1849), and he undertook work throughout the country. As the Catholic convert the Hon. the Rev. George Spencer wrote in 1835, Joseph Ireland had ‘the first personal claim on [...] the Catholic body.’<sup>15</sup>

### SOURCES

There is much valuable historical material on the Jesuit Mission at Holywell and, later on, concerning St. Winefride’s as a parish, but there are few architectural sources pertaining to Scoles’s church of 1832–3. The architect’s drawings (unbuilt, working and presentational), costings, and correspondence between the Jesuits and Scoles regarding this commission are all lost, or undiscovered.<sup>16</sup> The British Jesuit Archives at the ABSI, at their Welsh base at St. Beuno’s, and at Stonyhurst College are aware of no such records.<sup>17</sup> Jesuit historiography is almost completely silent on the church of 1832–3; it has been called a church ‘all but forgotten by its begetters.’<sup>18</sup> *Letters and Notices*, their annual internal publication of record, has nothing of substance to say on its design and construction, and the surviving letters in the ABSI of Fr. Francis Lythgoe are also found wanting. Fr. Lythgoe wrote an eight-page ‘History of the Mission at Holywell’ in *Letters and Notices*, ending with a one-line sentence announcing the year he was appointed and giving no detail whatsoever on his career at Holywell or on the church building.<sup>19</sup> The Flintshire Records Office, the National Library of Wales, the Archives of the Catholic Diocese of Wrexham, and the archives at the Shrine of St. Winefride at Holywell do not

record any such correspondence, drawings, plans, or accounts. It is cases such as this that give rise to the claim that the Jesuits at this time ‘were not fussy about style.’<sup>20</sup>

The most valuable extant written source is the *Orthodox Journal* of 1836, which gives an important account of the history and architecture of the building, complete with detailed visual analysis, measurements, descriptive text and a woodcut illustration. Given the dearth of other sources, this journal takes on a disproportionate importance in our study; all other known architectural sources date from the 1860s and later. In the 1830s Catholic architecture lacked a critical or professional journal of its own. What the Catholic Church did have was a lively popular and unofficial press, with publications such as the *Orthodox Journal* covering new churches in detail. As Rory O’Donnell has pointed out, it is in Catholic journals such as this that the contemporary response to Catholic church building is to be found.

More information on Scoles’s building can be gleaned from the newspaper archive of the Flintshire Record Office, particularly its microfilm copies of the *Flintshire Observer*, *Chester Courant*, and *Chester Chronicle*. The Flintshire Record Office’s estate records are also invaluable. Representative of the slim pickings is the deadpan, matter-of-fact *Catholic Magazine and Review* in 1833: ‘We see in the ‘Liverpool Journal’ an advertisement, that the new church at Holywell was to be opened on Wednesday, November 13, by the Rt. Rev. Dr. Briggs, and a sermon preached by the Rev. R. Sumner, of Stonyhurst. We presume all this was done.’<sup>21</sup>

### WELSH CATHOLICISM AND THE HOLY WELL

People have bathed in St. Winefride’s Well for over 1,350 years. Various surviving ‘Cures’ books attest to the efficacy of its healing waters, and over eight hundred years of such records survive.<sup>22</sup> According to the legend on which her reputation for sanctity is

based, Winefride (in Welsh, Gwenfrewi) was a lady of noble birth who lost her life resisting the advances of an unwanted suitor. A spring of healing water arose near the place of her death and this spring was developed into the Holy Well.<sup>23</sup>

St. Winefride’s Holy Well received patronage and pilgrimages from some of the most important figures in England’s pre – and post-Reformation history and a visit to the Shrine was for centuries a part of the nation’s Catholic religious cycle. King Richard I came to pray there for his crusade, Henry V came to pray at the Well before and after the Battle of Agincourt, and Henry Tudor prayed there before going to meet Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth. Margaret Beaufort, wife of Henry VII, had a special devotion to the saint and to the shrine itself. In the high summer of 1605, several of those implicated in the Gunpowder Plot made their pilgrimage. Later, a visit by James II and his wife Mary of Modena was reputed to be responsible for the birth of their son James Edward, later to be known as the ‘Old Pretender’. In 1687 the ancient shrine itself was presented to the Jesuits by Mary of Modena. Since 1723 it has been held by the Church in Wales, though at no point has this diminished the practice of Catholic pilgrimage and bathing in hope of a cure. Despite the best efforts of Protestant ministers away from Holywell, the shrine has always been a place of pilgrimage for both Catholics and many non-Catholics.<sup>24</sup>

As one of the most celebrated shrines and pilgrimage centres to survive the Protestant Reformation in England and Wales, its maintenance and cultivation was considered essential by both the Jesuits and the Catholic secular clergy, both of which maintained missions in the town. The Welsh naturalist and antiquary Thomas Pennant (1726–98) of Downing, Flintshire, author of the *History of the Parishes of Whiteford and Holywell*, wrote that ‘to supply the loss the Roman Catholics have chapels erected in almost every Inn for the devotion of ye pilgrims that flock hither from all the popish parts of England’ occupying and celebrating Mass

in a ‘species of hotel, probably designed for the reception of pilgrims of better rank’.<sup>25</sup> George Petre, youngest son of the Lord William Petre who was to die a prisoner in the Tower, bought the Star Inn at Holywell, with a garden and some fields, in 1689. It became the official residence of the Jesuit Mission in the town some thirty years later, and they said Mass in a chapel concealed within its walls.<sup>26</sup> The secular Catholic clergy in Holywell chose the same disguise: they operated out of the Cross Keys Inn, less than two hundred yards from the Star.<sup>27</sup>

Catholicism survived the Protestant Reformation more successfully in the North and border country than elsewhere in Wales, with Catholic outposts at Holywell, Bangor, Wrexham, and Talacre, each with a Catholic chapel. Holywell was the greatest of these centres of Catholicity.<sup>28</sup> Local gentry families such as the Mostyns played important seigneurial roles, including with the construction of the Jesuits’ church at Holywell. Information on the number of Catholics in Holywell can be derived from the register of births and baptisms kept from 1730 onwards at both the Star Inn and the Cross Keys; from the analysis recorded by Thomas Pennant; and from the Jesuits’ parish registers. No survey counts more than four hundred Catholics in the town.<sup>29</sup> A building of this architectural intent was made possible only by Holywell’s status as a major pilgrimage town and Catholic mission centre.

The Jesuit Order itself provided unbroken service to Holywell from 1590 to 1930. There was a very real Welsh character to the staffing of Jesuit Mission there from the outset – it was never in any real sense ‘colonial’ or an English Mission to the Welsh.<sup>30</sup> The first Jesuit Missioner at Holywell was Fr. John Bennet, a native of Flintshire. The second, Fr. Edward Morgan, also came from Flintshire and the third, Fr. Evans, was a native of Caernarvonshire. His successor, Fr. Hughes, was from Anglesey. By 1623 there were ten Jesuits working in Wales, about ten per cent of the English Mission, and classified as ‘missio Walliae’, the Mission of Wales.<sup>31</sup> The

British Jesuits’ internal journal or record tells us that on 17 November 1833, the Sunday following the official opening of St. Winefride’s, Fr. Francis Lythgoe, a native of Chester, addressed an audience of five hundred persons in the Welsh language, in which he continued to give instructions to his increasing flock.<sup>32</sup>

Intriguingly, the original Inn ‘chapel range’, now part of the parish Presbytery buildings, has flat arched ‘Gothick’ windows with intersecting glazing bars.<sup>33</sup> The adoption of the Italianate style by Scoles and Lythgoe was, therefore, a deliberate change from what had gone before. In between the concealed chapel of the Star Inn and Scoles’s St. Winefride’s church, Fr. Edward Wright SJ (1752–1826) had built an interim chapel, now demolished, next to the Star Inn itself.<sup>34</sup> This chapel of c.1808 was a smaller, more tentative affair than St. Winefride’s: the *Orthodox Journal* described it as ‘a mere room, 31 feet long and 19 feet wide.’<sup>35</sup> Save for what is described in the *Orthodox Journal* we have no record of its design or furnishing.

The cost of building Scoles’s St. Winefride’s Chapel and its nearby schools building amounted to around £2,000 and was paid for by a combination of subscriptions raised by Fr. Lythgoe and by recourse to the Jesuits’ own property portfolio and funds. It has been estimated that perhaps as much as half of the total was raised by subscription.<sup>36</sup> Property owned by the Residence of St. Winefride was advanced as security for a loan of £1,000 from the Jesuits’ Lancashire district.<sup>37</sup> Fr. Lythgoe’s surviving letters vividly attest to the difficulties of fundraising for the church, something he directed for six years prior to construction and for several years thereafter.<sup>38</sup> The total combined cost of around £2,000 equates to around £220,000 in today’s terms.<sup>39</sup> This small figure stands in stark contrast to the £16,000 cost of Scoles’s church for the Jesuits at Stonyhurst, a church which attracted funding from hundreds of subscribers over several decades.<sup>40</sup>

## THE BUILDING

St. Winefride’s (Fig. 5) occupies a commanding position in the town, sitting above and looking down towards the Holy Well. The church and presbytery are bounded by New Road to the west and Well Street to the east. The church was originally entered from New Road, liturgical orientation corresponding to the cardinal directions of the compass. The church was turned around in the major extension and rebuilding works of 1909 to face the other way, but we shall refer in the first instance to Scoles’s orientation and Scoles’s church. It underwent two phases of redecoration and extension after his commission: the first an internal redecoration in 1860, the second a major enlargement and re-orientation in 1909. This makes piecing together the architecture and furnishing of the original church harder than is the case for Scoles’s less altered buildings.

Even though St Winefride’s is a ‘Mission Chapel’, it takes time to appreciate and understand it in its original setting. At the time of construction the main elevation was a visible point of reference from the Liverpool and Holyhead high road. The church is essentially freestanding, and can be experienced in the round. Its external massing is impressive: an elegant and chaste Italianate building of dressed stone bringing order to an otherwise uneven and irregular plot. Its presence is announced by the quality of its construction, especially when it is compared to the vernacular buildings around it: smaller, mostly rendered or brick, domestic buildings, several with the typical North Welsh vernacular motif of flat and shaped cement-rendered window surrounds. The *Orthodox Journal* judged it to be ‘nearly the best, if not the very best’ building in Holywell, and a ‘happy combination of judgement and good taste.’<sup>41</sup>

The chapel’s golden ashlar stone gleams in its surroundings – from 1832 it was referred to by the local Welsh-speaking townspeople as ‘Capel y cerryg nâdd’: the ‘dressed stone chapel.’<sup>42</sup> In 1836



Fig. 5. St. Winefride's Church, Holywell, exterior, the re-orientated liturgical west as now seen from Well Street. (Pjposullivan, Wikimedia Commons)

the *Orthodox Journal* noted that ‘the whole of the exterior of the chapel is faced with a very superior stone,’<sup>43</sup> probably from the quarries of Talacre, the ancestral lands of the Catholic Mostyn family, nine miles from Holywell. The writer was struck by the expense and care taken with the dressed stone; uniquely among town churches built for the Jesuits in the 1830s, it is constructed entirely of dressed ashlar on all sides. It is one of only a handful of ashlar-faced buildings in the town, and perhaps the only one with structural dressed stone to all elevations. The only other notable near-contemporary public building in the town was the workhouse (now the Lluesty Hospital), designed

by John Welch and built in 1838–40; it has a three-storeyed and pilastered ashlar façade, but its other elevations are largely of rubble.<sup>44</sup>

The central section of the original west-facing entrance front was stepped forward with quoins and a pediment with a crucifix finial. The *Orthodox Journal* recorded that the principal doorway was ‘decorated with architraves, consoles and a cornice, all of bold character’, and described its elegant rusticated quoins as ‘external angles [...] finished in chamfered projecting rustics.’<sup>45</sup> As can be seen from the *Orthodox Journal*’s woodcut perspective view of the exterior (Fig. 1), and from the church’s exterior today (Fig. 5), the liturgical west entrance

remains in all material respects the same as that designed by Scoles, but the church has been turned around, each end rotated 180 degrees. One notable difference is that the *Orthodox Journal* depicted Scoles’s original church with a recessed panel over the doorway with the Christogram ‘IHS’ carved in stone – an assertive proclamation of Jesuit identity for a church of 1832–3. This was either elaboration on behalf of the *Journal* or has not survived. The steps with pierced parapet in front of the west end today are from the 1909 extension and re-orientation.

Scoles’s church was a single-cell building designed to seat a congregation of around four hundred people.<sup>46</sup> As first built, it had five-bay side elevations in a 1 + 3 + 1 plan with parapets and plinths. The bold cornice and dressed ashlar ran around the entire building. The windows are Georgian in style and round-headed, as found in Nonconformist chapels throughout Britain. When the church was doubled in size in 1909 the nave extension replicated Scoles’s façade in terms of proportions, round-headed windows and in the continuation of its projecting cornice, but the extension was finished in cement-rendered brick, and the break with the original masonry is clear.

The original interior arrangements were described in the *Orthodox Journal* of 1836 and in the *Flintshire Observer* of 1860.<sup>47</sup> The decoration of the interior was said to be ‘simple’, in keeping with its ‘chaste’ exterior. The nave was aisleless and the church originally had no transepts. It had a plain, flat plastered ceiling with a coved cornice, all originally painted white. Interestingly, Scoles divided the ceiling not into a coffered pattern or segments but into three long rectangular sections which ran the whole length of the ceiling, giving an appearance of length to the interior. This was a clever device for a short nave and shows Scoles’s ingenuity. St. Winefride’s is a simple structure, but its effect is hard won. Following redecoration in 1860, a sermon given by Rev. Fr. George Porter SJ of the Jesuit College of St. Beuno’s reminds us of the emotional importance of church-

building for Catholics of the period. They were living through and making history, and their buildings were important declarations of faith, meaning, and identity. Rev. Porter preached on the words of the Psalm 26, 8: ‘O Lord, I have loved the beauty of Thy house, and the place where Thy glory dwelleth’, and reminded his hearers that for three centuries the Catholics of Wales and England had been driven to leave the monuments of their generosity in foreign lands, remarking that the Catholic Church had always distinguished herself by her zeal in adorning the house of God.<sup>48</sup>

#### ARCHITECTURAL INFLUENCES

Scoles was thirty-three years of age when building commenced. By this time, he had twenty years’ of training and experience; he had been apprenticed to his kinsman Joseph Ireland in 1812, the year of A.W.N. Pugin’s birth. He had worked not only with Joseph Ireland but also with John Carter (1748–1817) and John Nash (1752–1835), and he spent 1822–26 travelling on the Continent and in the Middle East with peers including Joseph Bonomi Jr (1796–1878), sketching, measuring and making measured drawings.<sup>49</sup> By the end of 1832 he had completed one, and was busy building three, of his first four church commissions.

The plan of a Tridentine Catholic church was governed to a significant degree by Roman approval processes and established practice, but matters of style were a far more local affair, in which architect and patron had perhaps a greater degree of agency. In terms of style, several churches are likely to have exercised a formative influence on Scoles and the Jesuits at Holywell. The Jesuit Chapel of St. Ignatius in Oxford (1793–95) built for Fr. Charles Leslie was the first Catholic church to be built there after the Reformation (Fig. 6) is an example of plain, Neoclassical, Mission Chapel architecture. It cost nearly £1,000 in total and featured a deep sanctuary



Fig. 6. St. Ignatius's Chapel, Oxford, looking south east, c.1909. (*Author*)



Fig. 7. Banqueting House, Westbury Castle, Talacre, Flintshire. (*Welsh Historic Gardens Trust*)



Fig. 8. All Saints Church, Hassop, Derbyshire, exterior.  
(*Nick Maslen, Alamy Stock Photo*)

and an altarpiece flanked by Corinthian half-columns and pilasters, said to be ‘solemn and handsome’ and in ‘a style of elegant simplicity.’<sup>50</sup> It shared clear architectural similarities with St. Gregory’s Church in Preshome, Banffshire, a church sited within the Catholic ancestral lands of the Leslies. Erected in 1788, this was the first Catholic church built in Scotland after the Reformation that was not disguised or reticent in its projection of identity. Its eighteenth-century Jesuit baroque west end is skilfully naturalised to a Banffshire setting. Uninterested in matters of ‘Englishness’, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish Jesuit Missions in our immediate period most often built a version of an axiomatic Roman style in their city and rural churches. Catholic chapels of this period also have features in common with buildings such as the 1750s banqueting house at Westbury Castle, Talacre (Flintshire), built by Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown

and commissioned by Hon. Barbara Brown, wife of the Catholic Sir Edward Mostyn, 5th Baronet: Italianate, heavily pedimented, astylar, and single-cell (Fig. 7).

The design of St. Winefride’s harks back to the classicism of John Nash at Gloucester Terrace (on which Scoles worked) and to that of his teacher Joseph Ireland at a trio of important churches: his 1816–18 Catholic Chapel at Hassop Hall, Derbyshire; his 1825–27 St. Mary’s, Walsall; and his St. Austin’s Church at Wakefield – this last church built by Joseph Ireland for the Jesuits (1826–28). The Grecian chapel at Hassop Hall (Fig. 8) is a rectangular Doric temple. Plain Doric pillars line the internal nave walls, the ceiling is coffered, and a Baroque altarpiece sits at the east end. For this private chapel for the Eyre family – Old Catholics long-associated with the Jesuit – Ireland had acted as both architect and contractor. From 1818–19 he sent Scoles to Hassop Hall to



Fig. 9. St. Mary's Church, Walsall, Staffordshire, exterior.  
(*Mazur/www.catholicchurch.org.uk*)

superintend construction as clerk of works: Scoles spent around 150 days there.<sup>51</sup>

Joseph Ireland's St Mary's, Walsall (1825–27) is an even more obvious influence on the design or St. Winefride's (Fig. 9). Of stucco and brick rather than fine dressed stone, Scoles took over and refined many of its design cues: the moulded plinth, entablature and pediments at the east and west ends, the doorway with its architrave and moulded cornice, the north and south wall, each of five bays, the east wall similar to the west wall, but with no openings, and the single-storey link to the contemporary presbytery.<sup>52</sup>

Scoles would also have been aware of Joseph Ireland's St. Mary's Church near Clayton-le-Moors in Lancashire, now demolished (Fig. 10). Near to the Jesuits' headquarters at Stonyhurst, the church was opened in 1819. On the outside it was a 'plain rectangular structure of no architectural

pretensions.'<sup>53</sup> It was strikingly like St. Winefride's: a church of five bays in the Georgian Nonconformist style with tall round-headed windows of clear glass and boldly rusticated quoins. Its interior, however, was a revelation, with its coffered ceiling and Baroque altar flanked by two fluted floor-to-ceiling Ionic columns framing a large devotional painting by one of the Carracci. Significantly, the first parish priest was Fr. Charles Brooke; Jesuit Provincial and Fr. Lythgoe's main correspondent regarding the building of St. Winefride's.

Holywell was in the Western District of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, administered by Bishop Augustine Baines (1786/7–1843).<sup>54</sup> St. Winefride's would have been very much been on Baines's radar: in 1832–3 only three other churches were being built in the entire Western District, none of them in Wales.<sup>55</sup> Baines strongly favoured Neoclassical architecture, and a church in

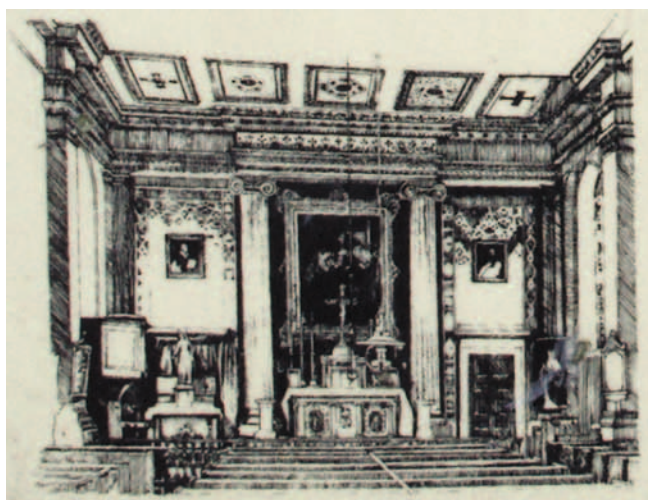


Fig. 10. St. Mary's, Clayton-le-Moors, Lancashire, interior and exterior view. (Author)

sympathy with Baines's architectural preferences was a politic choice. Baines famously engaged in a 'battle of the styles' with the monks of the recently-established Downside Abbey in Somerset: the monks' advocacy of Gothic Revival was in part due to their opposition to Baines's interference in their monastic community.<sup>56</sup> Baines was more successful in building along Classical lines at Prior Park, on the outskirts of Bath, combining with architect Henry Goodridge (1797–1864).<sup>57</sup> Scoles later went on to design Prior Park's impressive Neoclassical chapel.<sup>58</sup>

A later Jesuit church in the Western District which particularly pleased Baines was the Church of St. Francis Xavier in Hereford, built in 1837–39. The architect was Charles Day of Worcester, also architect for the Jesuits of their Classical church of St. Edmund at Bury St. Edmunds of 1836–37.<sup>59</sup> Behind a portico of two Greek Doric columns *in antis* is a broad rectangular church with the now very familiar altar grouping of Ionic columns. The tabernacle is modelled closely after that made by Bernini for the Blessed Sacrament

Chapel at St. Peter’s in Rome. Both St. Francis Xavier in Hereford and the Jesuits’ church in Bury St. Edmunds postdate St. Winefride’s. They are exuberant, expensive, and assertive, seeking to be ‘archeologically correct’ Greek Revival churches. They are in many ways the culmination of the classical town chapel tradition of which St. Winefride’s is a neglected part.<sup>60</sup>

What we struggle to observe in St. Winefride’s is any direct quotation or influence from contemporary Anglican church building. On a national level, this period is perhaps most notable for the 612 new Anglican ‘Commissioners’ Churches’ which were provided between 1818 and 1856 as result of the Church Building Acts of 1818 and 1824, yet they make little obvious impact on the design and building of St Winefride’s.<sup>61</sup> Scoles himself designed a Commissioners’ Church – St. Peter’s in Yarmouth (1831–3), a large Perpendicular Gothic Revival building of brick. Built with the aid of the Second Parliamentary Grant, St. Peter’s cost £7,735 (Grant £5,755), had pews for 705 parishioners and standing room for 1,096.<sup>62</sup> M.H. Port calculated that the average Commissioners’ Church from 1819–1832/3 was built to seat around 1,361 parishioners and for an average cost of £9,586.<sup>63</sup> St. Winefride’s, with seating for a congregation of 400, cost less than £2,000 to build.

### CONCLUSION

In late Georgian and Victorian Britain, to build was to create meaning.<sup>64</sup> The Jesuits were able to do this successfully at Holywell in a way which combined fidelity to their tradition and openness to their environment.<sup>65</sup> What the design of St. Winefride’s Church in Holywell demonstrates is that in Wales the Jesuits were emerging from the period of the penal laws in Britain, and also from the period of the global Suppression of the Jesuits, with a sensitivity to, and awareness of, their specific time and place.

Seeking neither an archaeologically-derived Neoclassicism nor an ‘English’ Gothic Revival style, they chose instead a *via media*; the flexible and modern Italianate style, a style they judged to be appropriate to Catholicism in Wales in our period. St. Winefride’s Church was an early and trail-blazing experiment in this dynamic style, certainly in a Welsh, provincial, and liturgical context. This judgment is entirely in keeping with the established global practice of the Jesuits of building in sympathy with time and place, articulating the global identity of the Catholic Church and the Society of Jesus, but with stylistic accommodation and acculturation.<sup>66</sup>

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ENDNOTES

- 1 These first three churches were: 1) St. Peter’s Church (CofE), Yarmouth, Norfolk, 1831–3; 2) St. Mary’s Chapel (CofE), South Town, Yarmouth, Norfolk, 1831–2, Enlarged 1893; and 3) St. Winefride’s Church (RC), Holywell, Flintshire, Wales, 1832–3, Enlarged 1909. For a complete list of Scoles’s commissions, see Howard Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600–1840*, 4th edition (New Haven and London, 2008), pp. 908–10.
- 2 See Gerard Purnell, ‘J.J. Scoles: contemporary and competitor of A.W.N. Pugin’, *True Principles*, 4/1 (2009).
- 3 A note on nomenclature. The Jesuits initially referred to this building as a chapel, though contemporary commentators described it interchangeably as either a chapel or a church. For the Jesuits, see *Archivum Britannicum Societatis Iesu* (henceforth *ABSI*), ‘Letter from Francis Lythgoe to Charles Brooke, 19 October 1828.’ Until the Restoration of the Catholic Hierarchy in Britain in 1850 by the Holy See, Jesuit apostolic works or churches were often called ‘Missions’ and priests ‘Missioners’. A Jesuit administrative district was called a ‘College’ or ‘Residence’. The Residence of St. Winefride, based at Holywell, covered the entirety of North Wales. The Jesuit priests in the Residence of St. Winefride are described variously in correspondence as Missioners, Missionaries or simply as ‘Mr’.
- 4 S. J. Nicholl, revised Peter Howell, ‘Joseph John Scoles’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:4563/10.1093/ref:odnb/24849>> [accessed 9 March 2020].
- 5 J. Lloyd-Price, ‘Holywell in the Early Part of the Nineteenth Century’, *CEMS Lecture*, 4 December 1912.
- 6 William Eusebius Andrews, ‘Chapel of St. Winefride at Holywell’, *The London and Dublin Orthodox Journal of Useful Knowledge*, II, No. 32 (1836), p. 83.
- 7 For Tridentine Catholic church building see George J. Wigley, *St Charles Borromeo’s Instructions on Ecclesiastical Building* (London, 1857).
- 8 See J.C.H Aveling, *The Handle and the Axe: The Catholic Recusants in England from Reformation to Emancipation* (London, 1976). See also Denis Gwynn, *A Hundred Years of Catholic Emancipation: 1829–1929* (London and New York, 1929).
- 9 Edward Hubbard, *Buildings of Wales Clwyd – Denbighshire and Flintshire* (New Haven and London, 2003), p. 371.
- 10 *Orthodox Journal*, p. 81.
- 11 James Fergusson, *History of the modern styles of architecture*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1891), Vol 2. The 1st edition was published in 1862.
- 12 See Geoffrey Holt, *The English Jesuits 1650–1829 – A Biographical Dictionary* (Southampton, 1894).
- 13 Holt, *English Jesuits*, p. 154.
- 14 See Peter Davidson, *The Universal Baroque* (Manchester, 2018); Evonne Levy, *Propaganda & the Jesuit Baroque* (Berkeley, California, 2004); and Rudolph Wittkower, *Baroque: The Jesuit Contribution* (New York, 1972). See also Philip Edwards, *Canute’s Tower – St. Beuno’s 1848–1989*, p. 12, and Rory O’Donnell, ‘Roman Catholic church architecture in Great Britain and Ireland 1829–1878’ (PhD Dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1983), p. 14 for the ‘continentalism’ of English clergy educated in Europe.
- 15 University Library Cambridge, Add MS 8170/84, Spencer to Blore, 3 March 1835.
- 16 For an exposition of the importance of unbuilt architecture see Richard Butler, ‘“The radicals in these Reform times”: Politics, Grand Juries, and Ireland’s Unbuilt Assize Courthouses, 1800–50’, *Architectural History*, 58 (2015).
- 17 Confirmed with Mary Allen, assistant archivist at the *ABSI* and Dr Jan Graffius, curator, and Joe Reed, archivist, at Stonyhurst College.
- 18 I am grateful to Br. Alan Harrison SJ for this elegant observation on this church.
- 19 *Letters & Notices*, VI, (1869).
- 20 Bernard Basset, *The English Jesuits from Campion to Martindale* (London, 1967), p. 162.
- 21 *Catholic Magazine and Review*, 4 (1833), p. lxxiv.
- 22 Stonyhurst Archivium, ‘St. Winefride’s Holy Well Cures Book’, for a surviving example.
- 23 P. Shaw (ed.), *St. Winefride, or, Holywell and its Pilgrims* (London, 1860, repr. 2011).
- 24 See A. Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape* (Oxford, 2011), p. 466.
- 25 Thomas Pennant, *History of the Parishes of Whiteford and Holywell* (London, 1796), p. 244.

- 26 M. Blundell & A. Blundell, *St. Winefride and her Holy Well* (London, 1954, repr. 1964), p. 57.
- 27 T.W. Pritchard, *St Winefride, Her Holy Well & the Jesuit Mission c.650–1930* (Wrexham, 2009), p. 153.
- 28 Edwards, *Canute’s Tower*, p. 192. For a general survey see E.A. Livingstone, ‘The Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales after the Reformation’ in E.A. Livingstone, (ed.), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford, 2013).
- 29 P. Hook, ‘Historical introduction to the Catholic registers of Holywell’, *Catholic Record Society*, 3 (1906); Pennant, *History of the Parishes of Whiteford and Holywell*, p. 242. Use has been made of the collection of notes and transcripts of Fr. Henry Foley SJ kept at the *ABSI*. Foley’s notes form the basis for his *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus: Historic Facts Illustrative of the Labours and Sufferings of Its Members in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London, 1877).
- 30 Hannah Thomas, ‘The Society of Jesus in Wales, c.1600–1679’, *Journal of Jesuit Studies*, 1, (2014) See *ABSI*, ‘Photographic Copy of the Album Presented to the Jesuit Order, Holywell, 1st October, 1930 fol., pp. 4–5, and ‘A Holywell Miscellanea’, *Letters & Notices*, XXXI (1911–12), p. 186.
- 31 Pritchard, *St Winefride*, p. 154.
- 32 *Letters & Notices*, IX, (1873), p. 168.
- 33 CADW, ‘Full Report for Listed Buildings – Presbytery at St. Winefride’s Roman Catholic Church’, Ref. No. 491 <<https://cadwpublic-api.azurewebsites.net/reports/listedbuilding/FullReport?lang=&id=491>> [accessed 28 August 2020].
- 34 The original internal chapel of the Star Inn is now the kitchen of the present presbytery. See Pritchard, *St Winefride*, p. 232.
- 35 *Orthodox Journal*, p. 82. Also, Pritchard, *St. Winefride*, p. 232.
- 36 Pritchard, *St. Winefride*, p. 236.
- 37 Geoffrey Holt, ‘Jesuits in Montgomeryshire, 1670–1879’, *Journal of Welsh Religious History*, 1 (1993), p. 76.
- 38 For example, see *ABSI*, ‘Letter from Francis Lythgoe to Charles Brooke, 19 October 1828’.
- 39 £2,000 in 1829–32 equates to c.£220,000–£250,000 in 2019 terms. See <<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator/>> [accessed 4 March 2020].
- 40 See *Stonyhurst Archivium*, Fol.I.1.11 – St. Peter’s Church, 2.c. ‘Subscription list for the Stonyhurst Chapel, printed 12 July 1819’ and *Stonyhurst Archivium*, Fol.I.1.11 – St. Peter’s Church, 2.u. ‘Accounts book including additional subscriptions up to 1841.’ See also, *ABSI*, Coll. St. Aloysius – Stonyhurst Mission – St. Peter’s Church, 1 Fol, ‘3 Separate Subscription Lists of Donations.’ £16,000 in 1832 equates to c.£1,800,000 in 2019 terms: See <<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator/>> [accessed 4 March 2020].
- 41 *Orthodox Journal*, p. 83.
- 42 Lloyd-Price, ‘Holywell in the Early Part of the Nineteenth Century’, *CEMS Lecture*, 4 December, 1912, p. 9.
- 43 *Orthodox Journal*, p. 82.
- 44 See Hubbard, *Buildings of Wales: Clwyd*, p. 374.
- 45 *Orthodox Journal*, p. 81.
- 46 *Orthodox Journal*, p. 82. The author gives the proportions of the chapel as follows: nave 46 feet long and 33 feet wide, altar end projection 9 feet long and 16 feet wide, entrance projection 6 feet long and 20½ feet wide, giving a total combined length of 61 feet. Interior height from the floor to the ceiling is 26 feet. External height from the base of the steps to the top of the entrance from cross is 44 feet.
- 47 Flintshire Records Office, *Flintshire Observer*, 8 June, 1860 (MF:57).
- 48 Flintshire Records Office, *Flintshire Observer*, 8 June 1860 (MF:57)
- 49 Purnell, ‘J.J. Scoles’, *True Principles*, 4/1 (2009) p. 75.
- 50 See Bryan Stapleton, *A History of Post-Reformation Catholic Missions in Oxfordshire* (London, 1905).
- 51 Nicholl, ‘Joseph John Scoles’, *ODNB* <<https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:4563/10.1093/ref:odnb/24849>> [accessed 9 March 2020].
- 52 See *Taking Stock*, <<https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/walsall-st-mary/>> [accessed 1 April 2020].
- 53 Bryan Little, *Catholic Churches Since 1623* (London, 1966), p. 56.
- 54 Pamela J. Gilbert, *This Restless Prelate: Bishop Peter Baines, 1786–1843*, (Leominster, 2006).

- 55 West Bromwich, Grantham, and Hethe (Oxfordshire).
- 56 See Aidan Bellenger OSB (ed.), *Downside Abbey: An Architectural History* (London, 2011); also Leo Almond, *Downside Abbey and School, 1814–1914* (Exeter, 1914).
- 57 Amy Frost, ‘Henry Edmund Goodridge and the first buildings at Downside, in *Downside Abbey: An Architectural History* (London, 2011).
- 58 Andrew Foyle and Nicholas Pevsner, *The Buildings of England, Somerset: North and Bristol* (New Haven and London, 2011), pp. 202–3.
- 59 Dates as given by J. Saunders (ed.), *Years of Faith: Catholic History in and around Bury St Edmunds* (Bury St Edmunds: St Edmunds History Group, 2018). NB Colvin, *Dictionary of British Architects*, p. 305, lists only 1838, also the year the drawings were exhibited at the Royal Academy.
- 60 O’Donnell, DPhil Dissertation, p. 252.
- 61 M.H. Port, *600 New Churches: The Church Building Commission 1818–1856*, 2nd edition (Reading, 2006).
- 62 Port, *600 New Churches*, p. 339.
- 63 Port, *600 New Churches*, p. 247.
- 64 A-M. Moubayed, *On Culture, Colonialism and Religious Gothic Revival Architecture Across the British Empire*, 2010 <[https://www.academia.edu/3880393/On\\_Culture\\_Colonialism\\_and\\_Religious\\_Gothic\\_Revival\\_Architecture\\_Across\\_the\\_British\\_Empire](https://www.academia.edu/3880393/On_Culture_Colonialism_and_Religious_Gothic_Revival_Architecture_Across_the_British_Empire)> [accessed 22 August 2020].
- 65 John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community 1570–1850* (London, 1975), p. 297.
- 66 Bailey, ‘*Le style jesuite*’, p. 73.

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