

Worship

LESSON 2b

Places of Christian Worship



ARCHAEOLOGY
time in transition

IT'S ABOUT TIME 2



Aim(s)

To provide the students with an insight into the changes that occurred in the Irish church over time.



Objective(s)

To show how the study of changes in church architecture can help archaeologists understand the development of the Irish church.



KEY INFORMATION

Lesson

- What did Early Christian churches look like?
- Looking at the Romanesque.
- The layout of a Medieval church.
- Protestant Churches: consequences of the Reformation.

Context

- Churches are built in Ireland as Christian places of worship from the arrival of Christianity in the 5th century AD.
- For about a hundred years (c. 1120 - 1220 AD) the Romanesque style dominated church building in Ireland. This was followed by the Gothic style.
- Like all churches in Christendom until modern times the medieval church is orientated east-west, with the altar at the east end.



METHODOLOGY & MEDIUM

- Instruction
- Discussion
- Visual–PowerPoint
- **Factsheet 1** Irish Churches Throughout the Ages
- **Factsheet 2** Layout of a Medieval Church



SECTIONS

- Section 1** Early Christian Churches
- Section 2** The Romanesque and Gothic Styles
- Section 3** The Medieval Church
- Section 4** The Church in the later Medieval period
- Section 5** After the Reformation



Key Question(s) What did Early Christian churches in Ireland look like?

Slide 1 Places of Christian Worship

We will now look at the development of churches in Ireland throughout the ages.



Teacher Instruction

Distribute **Factsheet 1** to the students to support this section.

Slide 2 Early Christian Churches

- **Churches** are built in Ireland as Christian places of worship from the arrival of Christianity in the 5th century AD.
- What do we know about these early **churches**?
Bede, an eight century writer, describes a typical Irish church as one **made** of wood which he calls *The Irish Style* (as opposed to the *French Style* where the churches were made of **stone**).
- What did they look like?

Slide 3 Early Christian Churches

Let us examine what a church built 'in the Irish Style' looked like?

*None of the wooden churches built in Ireland at this time survive but we can get an idea of what they looked like from a number of **sources**.*

- There is a drawing of a church in the Book of Kells. This is on a page showing *The Temptation of Jesus by the Devil* and features an illustration of Solomon's Temple. This shows what a wooden church in Ireland looked like c. **800 AD**.
- Another source are the carvings of a church which are on the top of some of our finest High Crosses, like Muiredach's Cross at Monasterboice c. 900 AD. These show a church with very similar features to the church as shown in the Book of Kells' church. (Copies of these can be seen on top of late 19th century/early 20th century Celtic revival cross headstones).



Illustration: *The Temptation of Jesus by the Devil* page from the Book of Kells



Illustration: Sculpture at top of Muiredach's High Cross at Monasterboice, Co. Louth

Slide 4 Features of the Early Irish Church

Features included

- A rectangular **plan**.
- A sloping roof covered by wooden **shingles**.
- A finial at the apex of the **roof**.
- A door as a plain rectangular **opening**.
- Wooden posts at the **corners**.
- Ridge timbers.

Slide 5 Stone Churches

We have some churches surviving in Ireland which are roughly the same age (9th century) such as the **Book of Kells** and **Muireadach's Cross**. These are found in remote areas along the western seaboard, especially on islands. Presumably, in these places wood was very scarce and therefore were built in stone.

It is perhaps not surprising that when these early stone churches were built, they copied features of a typical wooden church.

The small stone church on St Mac Dara's Island, off the Galway coast, is a good example. Some features of this church **are**

- The ends of the side walls project beyond the end wall itself (antae) and this projection continues up the edge of the gable. This is clearly a representation in wood of the end beams of a wooden **building**.
- To complete the illusion a finial is placed on the apex of the gable in the form of two crossing timbers—exactly in the form of the Book of Kells **finial**.
- The doors of these churches, located in the west end-wall, also reflect the type of simple wooden door seen in the Book of Kells. They are plain openings with inclined sides and a lintel on top.

Why are these early stone churches so small in size?

There is some evidence that in Early Christian times only the celebrants of the mass were accommodated inside the church with most of the congregation outside. This would explain why these churches are so small. However, it could also be that they are catering for a very small congregation in isolated locations.



Skeuomorphic means the copying of features in one medium from another. For example, plastic objects moulded to look like they were made of timber. The antae on these early stone church are skeuomorphic i.e. built of stone to give the appearance of being built of wood. Modern examples include: concrete fences imitating wooden posts; plastic baskets moulded to look like willow baskets.

SECTION 2 The Romanesque and Gothic Styles



Key Question(s) What is the Romanesque Style? What is the Gothic Style?

Slide 6 The Romanesque Style

- **By** the early 12th century the church in Western Europe was undergoing a period of great reform.

- Irish clerics and people of high rank, by then regularly making the pilgrimage to Rome, were coming into contact with these new ideas (see *The Cistercian Monastery*, T1, U2, L2). They saw that the Irish church needed reform to bring it in line with what was happening in France and Italy.
- Synods were held, Cashel in 1101 and Rath Breasil in 1111, which introduced a diocesan system instead of the old monastic way of organising the church. This system of dioceses and parishes is the basis of the present diocesan system.

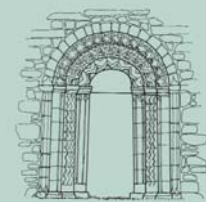
The Rock of Cashel, for centuries the inauguration place of the Kings of Munster, was granted to the church at the synod held there in 1101. A high cross and a round tower were amongst the first two religious structures put up on the Rock. In 1127 the construction of a church was begun which was consecrated in 1134. This is now known as Cormac's Chapel, after its patron Cormac MacCarthy, King of Munster.

- Cormac's Chapel is remarkable in that it is built in an entirely new style of architecture for Ireland, what is now termed Romanesque.
- The plan is divided between a wide nave and a narrow chancel.
- The entire structure is built of chiselled blocks of sandstone.
- The window and door openings are covered by round arches elaborately carved in 'orders', featuring geometric designs like zig-zags and scallops.
- All of these ideas are brought in from Europe and represent a new 'modern image' for the Irish church.



Nave and Chancel: The chancel at the east end of the church was reserved for the priest and those officiating at the mass. The addition of a wider and longer nave at the west end shows that a large congregation was now allowed into the church. However, in the medieval church a wooden screen between the chancel and nave prevented the congregation from having a full view of what was going on in the chancel.

The chief characteristic of Romanesque architecture is the **round arch**. This was copied from Roman remains and hence the name of the style.



Slide 7 Hiberno-Romanesque in Ireland

- For about a hundred years (c. 1120 - 1220 AD) the Romanesque style dominated church building in Ireland.
- Elements of Cormac Chapel's design are taken and applied to plainer buildings built of rubble stone with wooden roofs. This is the Irish style of Romanesque or Hiberno-Romanesque as it is termed.
- There are no further churches built entirely of cut-stone blocks like Cormac's Chapel.

- This style was especially used in the 'orders' around door and window openings. Some of these became very elaborate, especially around the door in the west wall. An example of this is the 'gable' frame around the west door at Clonfert Cathedral in Co. Galway. Another fine example is the Nun's Chapel at Clonmacnoise.
- Parish churches built in the Hiberno-Romanesque style were appearing all over Ireland in the mid-12th century.

Orders: These are the series of frames around the outside of a door or window opening. They are the focus of carved decoration in Romanesque churches.



The introduction of the diocesan system after the Synod of Rath Breasil in 1111 AD resulted in a lot of new church building. This was because of the need for cathedrals for the new dioceses and parish churches for the new parishes. These new churches were built in the Romanesque style.

Slide 8 The Gothic Style

- A new style of architecture called Gothic arrived into Ireland in the 13th century.
- This style was developed on the continent in response to the demand for bigger churches than were possible to build using the round arch of the Romanesque.
- The new style used a pointed arch instead of the round and this, with other innovations like the use of buttresses and pointed vaults, enabled builders to go higher and wider. The doorway at Athassel Priory, Co. Tipperary is a fine example of the new style.
- In Ireland the introduction of the Gothic style sees a change in the main stone used for church building from the soft orange sandstone of the Romanesque period to the hard grey limestone used by builders in the Gothic style.

Slide 9 Gothic Cathedrals

- The largest medieval building in Ireland is **St Patrick's Cathedral** in Dublin. This was built in the new Gothic style and shows how much larger it was possible to build in the new style when it is compared in size with Cormac's Chapel. St Patrick's Cathedral was begun about 1220 and consecrated in 1254.
- By the middle of the 13th century Dublin was a thriving walled town with a large enough population to fill not alone St Patrick's Cathedral but the nearby **Christ Church Cathedral** as well. Christ Church was also constructed in the first half of the 13th century and is also built in the Gothic style.
- Gothic remains the dominant architectural style for church building in Ireland up to the Gothic revival in the 19th century. This style of architecture is very suited to expressing the idea of a church in architectural terms with its high pointed vaults and spires.



Key Question(s) What are the key features of a Medieval Church?

Slide 10 The Medieval Church: The Cruciform Plan



Teacher Instruction

Familiarise the students with the layout of a medieval cruciform church with particular reference to the following features.

- **Orientation**
Like all churches in Christendom until modern times the church is orientated east-west, with the altar at the east end. The eastern orientation of churches from earliest times is not fully understood but is likely to have been symbolic. The rising sun in the east represents the Risen Christ and the second coming would be from that direction. It also had a practical function; morning light was needed for first mass which was celebrated at dawn.
- **Chancel**
The east end of the church where the religious ceremonies take place. This area contains the altar.
- **Choir**
Immediately west of the chancel. So-called because this is the location of the benches where, in the case of an abbey church, the monks sing/chanted during mass. Cathedrals also had choirs which occupied a similar position.
- **Nave**
The west end of the church where the congregation were located. In most medieval churches the congregation stood throughout the ceremonies. The east end of the nave was closed off by a wooden screen so the congregation did not have a clear view of the priest during mass.
- **Aisle**
Flanking the nave and serving the same purpose. The reason for an aisle is because of the line of pillars on each side of the nave.
- **West Door**
The main entrance into the church is the door in the centre of the west wall of the nave. This was usually decorated with carvings to emphasise its role as giving entry to a special place.
- **Transept**
The church is cruciform in plan for symbolic reasons. The main function of the transepts, which stick out on each side, was to give room for side chapels where extra masses were said.



Teacher Instruction

Distribute **Factsheet 2** to the students and look at the layout of a medieval church in the next slide.

Slide 11 The Medieval Church: Nave and Chancel

Not every church could afford to be built to a cruciform plan. It was much more normal for an ordinary parish church just to have a nave and a chancel. These functioned in the same way as in a cruciform church:

- **Orientation**
East-west, like all churches in Christendom.
- **Altar**
Always located directly against the east wall of the chancel, and directly under the large east window.
- **Aumbry**
This is a rectangular recess built into the wall near the altar. It had a wooden door and houses the sacred vessels used during the mass.
- **Altar Step**
This separates the area occupied by the priest during mass from the rest of the chancel. The elevation also emphasised the importance of the chancel.
- **Piscina**
A recess in the south wall of the chancel near the altar. In its base is a stone basin with a drainage hole. It is here that the water used to wash the sacred vessels and the priests hands during mass, was poured away.
- **Sedilia**
A set of three stone seats built into the south wall of the chancel near the altar and just west of the piscina. These seats were used by the priest and his two deacons during mass when the choir were singing/chanting the sacred offices.
- **Rood Screen**
The wooden screen separating the nave from the chancel. In a medieval mass the congregation were prevented from having a full view of the priest at the altar. The word 'rood' is an old form of the word 'cross'—a large wooden cross was located above the screen. No medieval rood screen survives in Ireland.

Slide 12 The Medieval Church: Interior View of Chancel

- **Reredos**
A carved wooden screen directly behind the altar. It often contained panels decorated with paintings of sacred scenes.
- **Tomb**
The most revered burial place in a medieval church was in a wall tomb in the north wall of the chancel beside the altar. Burial rights within the church were reserved for very important people, like a bishop, abbot or wealthy patron.
- **East Window**
Directly above the altar is the largest window in the church, filled with stained glass. One of the oldest traditions in the church is the symbolism of the rising sun as representing the risen Christ. Morning sunlight streaming through the east window during dawn mass carried this symbolism.



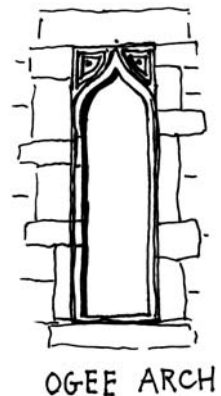
Key Question(s) What changes took place in church architecture in the later Medieval Period?

Slide 13 The Church in the Later Medieval Period

- After the bleak period of the 14th century, church building picks up again in Ireland during the 15th and 16th centuries. This was the second flowering of the Gothic style in Ireland.
- Many new monasteries were founded throughout the country by orders like the Augustinians and the Franciscans and these all contained fine church buildings. But this is also the period of the great rebuilding of parish churches throughout the country. Few of these buildings have the magnificent architecture of 13th century Gothic architecture, but they do have a distinctly Irish style.
- Many of the churches are rectangular in plan but some have a nave and chancel.
- The location of the door moves to the south wall. This was done to accommodate a priest's residence at the west end in some churches (occasionally this accommodation was in the form of a tower).
- A large number of these churches were abandoned in the 17th century and now stand in ruins in the middle of old graveyards.
- Some were converted/rebuilt into Anglican (Church of Ireland) parish churches.

Slide 14 Features of Later Medieval Churches

- One of the hallmarks of 15th and 16th century Irish church architecture is the use of the 'ogee' arch. This elegant form, carved in limestone, is used at the top of many window surrounds.
- South door—The door moved to the south wall to accommodate a priest's residence at the west end of the church. Most of these doors had a pointed arch.



SECTION 5 After the Reformation



Key Question(s) What happened to the church in Ireland after the Reformation?

Slide 15 Protestant Churches: Anglican

After the Reformation the Christian church in Ireland is split between Roman Catholic, Anglican (Church of Ireland) and non-Conformist (Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist etc.).

- Because of the war-like conditions in Ireland during the 17th century there was little church building during this period.
- The next great period of Church building was in the late 18th/early 19th century, with each of the denominations having a different story to tell.

Anglican Churches

Because it became the official state religion in Ireland (hence The Church of Ireland) and also the religion of the land-owning elite, the Anglican church had more resources available to it for church building during this **period**:

- The great period of Anglican church building in Ireland was the period immediately following The Act of Union in 1800.
- Between 1800 and 1840 many parishes in the country had a new church built. **These** were built under the auspices of a body known as The Board of First Fruits and this name is often applied to these **churches**.
- A typical Board of First Fruits church has a nave and chancel plan, orientated on its long axis east-west, with altar to east and bell tower to west. It was built in the Gothic style.
- They were often built on the site of an earlier medieval church because the Church of Ireland was granted the lands belonging to the medieval church.

Slide 16 Protestant Churches: Non-Conformist

- The non-Conformist protestant denominations, like Presbyterians, Quakers and Moravians, were also effected by the Penal Laws in the 18th century.
- In marked contrast to the neo-Gothic of the Church of Ireland churches, Presbyterian churches are much plainer. Some were built so plainly they look more like a parish hall than a church—indeed many are referred to as a Meeting House.
- This plainness in style also reflects the philosophy of these faiths, as opposed to the ‘high church’ of Anglicanism reflected in the tall and elaborate Gothic spires of its churches.

Slide 17 Roman Catholic Churches

- The introduction of the Penal Laws in 1690 restricted the building of Catholic churches.
- Initially, Catholics resorted to Mass Rocks located in remote areas for their worship.
- With the relaxation of the Penal Laws during the 18th century, churches of various types were built, depending on the means of the congregation and local enforcement of the Penal Laws, (these 18th century churches are often referred to as ‘Mass Houses’ or ‘Thatched Chapels’). In the early 19th century more substantial T-shaped or rectangular stone-built churches were built with bellcotes (rather than towers). These are often referred to as ‘Barn Churches’ owing to the simplicity of their design. These are very similar in style to the churches being built by Presbyterians at the same time.

Slide 18 After Catholic Emancipation

- The passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829 marks a great revival in Catholic church building. Architects were now employed to design churches in the latest style.
- The most influential designer of Roman Catholic churches in Ireland in the mid-19th century was the English architect Augustus Pugin. His neo-Gothic style can be seen here at St. Aidan's, Enniscorthy and St. Marie's, Killarney.
- One feature of Catholic and non-Conformist churches built in the 18th and 19th centuries is their abandonment of the traditional east-west orientation. These churches and meeting houses don't have any preference for orientation.
- Another difference is the location of churches. Because the Church of Ireland inherited the old medieval church lands they built in the existing church grounds. Thus many Board of First Fruit's churches stand in ancient graveyards beside the ruins of a medieval church, or incorporate part of the old church.
- By contrast the other denominations had to find new ground for their churches. In many cases it is the local landlord who donated land to the church for its new building.

Slide 19 The Modern Church

In recent times church design has become much more radical. This is exemplified by St. Aengus' Church, Co. Donegal. The circular form by architect Liam McCormack was inspired by the prehistoric fort of Grianán Aileach. St. Aengus' was built in the 1960s.

WEB LINKS**WWW.**

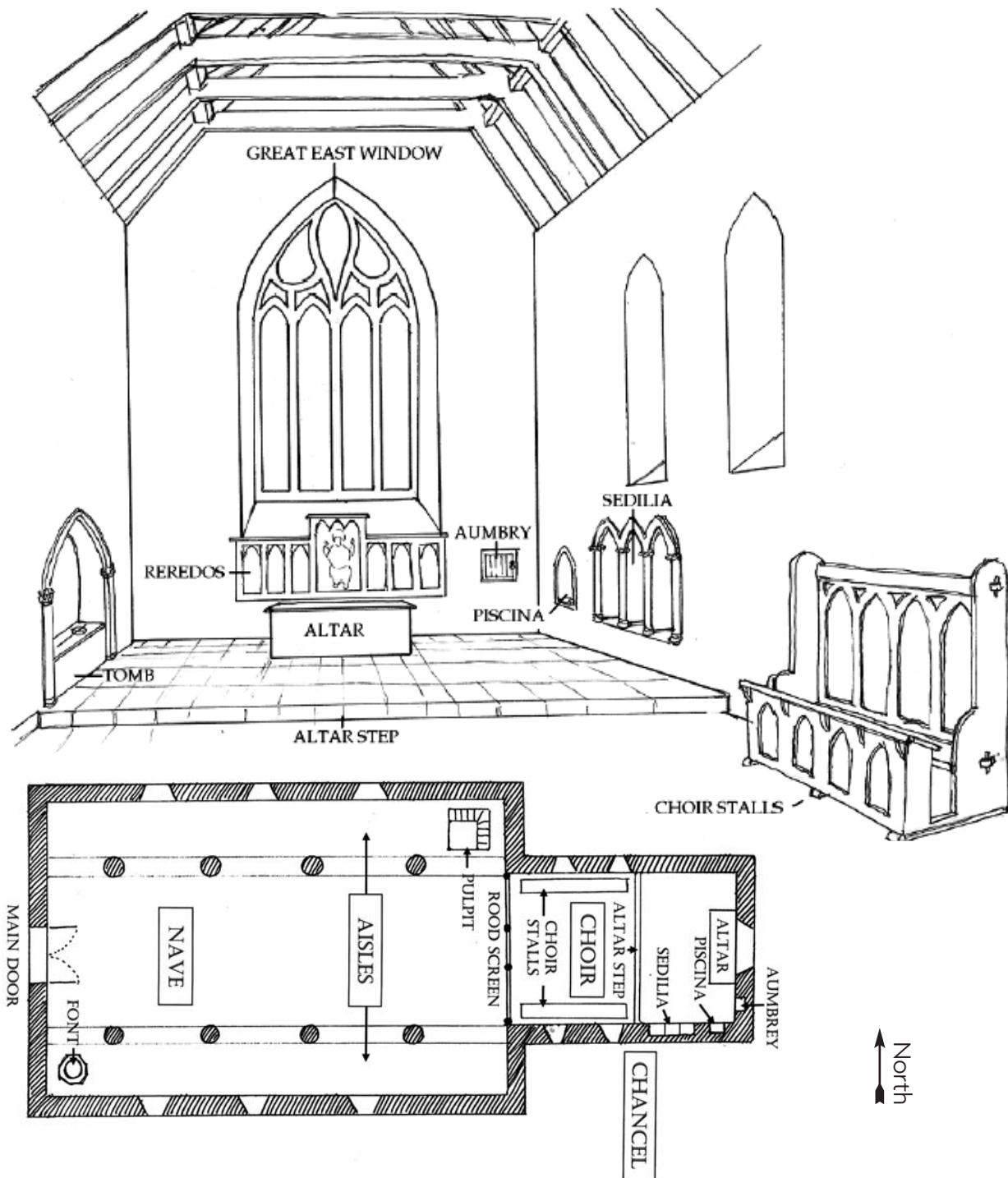
National Monuments Service

www.archaeology.ie/National Inventory of
Architectural Heritagewww.buildingsofireland.com/Archiseek—Online
Architectural Resource[www.archiseek.com/category/buildings/
ireland-buildings](http://www.archiseek.com/category/buildings/ireland-buildings)

400 AD	500 AD	600 AD	700 AD	800 AD	900 AD	1000 AD	1100 AD	1200 AD	1300 AD	1400 AD	1500 AD	1600 AD	1700 AD	1800 AD	1900 AD	2000 AD
<p>In the Irish Style</p>																
<p>Stone Church in the Irish Style</p>																
<p>Romanesque</p>																
<p>Gothic Style</p>																
<p>15th/16th Century Parish Churches</p>																
<p>18th/19th Century Church</p>																
<p>19th Century Church of Ireland Church</p>																
<p>Late 19th Century Church</p>																
<p>Description</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small wooden structure Rectangular Wooden post at each corner Projecting ridge at end of roof Decorative finial at top ends of roof Wooden shingles Only religious inside; congregation outside <p>Examples</p> <p>None upstanding</p> <p>Other sources</p> <p>Archaeological excavation; top of high crosses; illustration in Book of Kells</p>																
<p>Description</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of round arch for doors and windows Stone, sandstone for carved details Rich decoration on arches: geometric; leaf and animal patterns; sides of door columns with capitals Cruciform nave and chancel plan Addition of nave to allow congregation into church Result of French and English influences <p>Examples</p> <p>Approximately 200 e.g. Nun's Church, Clonmacnoise, Monaincha, Co. Galway, Cormac's Chapel</p>																
<p>Description</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed on Continent due to demand to build bigger and higher churches Limestone replaced sandstone as main building material Pointed arch allows to build higher and slimmer walls Buttresses supported higher walls Cruciform/ nave and chancel plan English / Norman influence More wall space for more windows, stain glass becomes popular <p>Examples</p> <p>Approximately 100 E.g. St Marys Youghal, Co. Cork, Christ Church Dublin</p>																
<p>Description</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Door on south to accommodate the priests residence (occasionally this in the form of a tower) Simple gothic features, notably use of ogee arch on windows and pointed doors Most rectangular but some nave and chancel Most of these churches were abandoned in the 17th century with some being converted into Anglican parish churches <p>Examples</p> <p>Numerous examples throughout Ireland, usually in ruins accompanied by old graveyard</p>																
<p>Description</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Built on new sites, sometimes donated by the local landlord Simple in design and materials Local builder/ vernacular in style T-shaped or rectangular known as 'barn churches' Replaced modest thatched chapels Not necessarily orientated east-west Bellcote on gable Associated burial ground if present dates to the construction of the church <p>Examples</p> <p>Numerous examples throughout Ireland</p>																
<p>Description</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nave and chancel. East west orientation with altar to east Bell tower to west Built of rubble stone with cut stone detail Used Gothic Features such as buttresses, pointed openings, pinnacles and battlements, hood mouldings Usually built on old church ground, sometimes bought into prime location in new towns <p>Examples</p> <p>Numerous examples throughout Ireland</p>																
<p>Description</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imposing buildings built of cut stone often in new locations Neo-gothic style pointed windows, pinnacles, buttresses, side aisles and transepts Formally designed strong influence by Gothic architecture and particularly of English architect Augustus Pugin Display highly skilled craftsmanship e.g. stone carving, pews, altar stain glass etc. <p>Examples</p> <p>Numerous examples throughout Ireland</p>																

Post 1700 Churches: Buildingsofireland.ie: church/chapel/cathedral

Pre 1700 Churches: archaeology.ie: Church



Altar Always located directly against the east wall of the chancel, and directly under the large east window.

Altar Step This separates the area occupied by the priest during mass from the rest of the chancel.

Aumbry/Wall Press Equivalent of modern tabernacle.

Chancel The east end of the church.

Choir This is where the monks or choir sat in choir stalls.

East Window Directly above the altar is the largest window in the church.

Nave The area where the congregation stood at the west end of the church.

Piscina A drain to dispose of the water used by the priest for washing during the sacraments.

Reredos A carved wooden screen directly behind the altar.

Sedilia A seat in the wall for the officiates (priest and two deacons) of the mass.

Side Chapels Additional altars were located in the side chapels.

Tomb The most revered burial place in a medieval church was the north wall of the chancel.