

# Marmora et Lapidea

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# Marmora et Lapidea



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**MARMOR ABSCONDITUM**






Christine Casey

## Evidence for the work of Pietro Lazzerini in Irish Archives: preliminary findings and an unpublished document

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### Abstract ITA

L'identificazione dello scultore carrarese Pietro Lazzerini (1842-1918) quale autore delle grandiose sculture destinate alle cattedrali di Armagh e Monaghan, a Nord di Dublino, ha permesso di avviare una nuova ricerca sui rapporti intercorsi tra Irlanda e Carrara tra la fine del XIX e l'inizio del XX secolo. Presso gli archivi parrocchiali di queste cattedrali sono stati rintracciati documenti inediti che mostrano l'effettiva portata del ruolo svolto dal clero irlandese nelle commissioni artistiche dell'epoca. Fondamentale il carteggio di James Donnelly, vescovo di Clogher (1865-1893) a Monaghan, che intrattenne un rapporto diretto con Pietro Lazzerini di cui fu ospite a Carrara nell'inverno del 1888.

### Abstract ENG

The identification of the sculptor from Carrara, Pietro Lazzerini (1842-1918), as the author of the highly accomplished sculptures for the cathedrals of Armagh and Monaghan north of Dublin has allowed a new research on the relations between Ireland and Carrara between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Unpublished documents have been found in the parish archives of these cathedrals, showing the true extent of the role played by the Irish clergy in the art commissions of the time. The correspondence of James Donnelly, bishop of Clogher (1865-1893) in Monaghan, shows the direct relationship with Pietro Lazzerini, who entertained him at Carrara in the winter of 1888.

### Parole chiave

Carrara, Irlanda, Cattedrale di San Patrizio, Armagh, arcidiocesi d'Irlanda, Cattedrale di San Macartan, Monaghan, diocesi di Clogher, Pietro Lazzerini, Vescovo James Donnelly, Cardinale Michael Logue

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The career of Pietro Lazzerini in Ireland has hitherto been confined to brief notes in dictionaries or regional histories of Irish architecture<sup>1</sup>. Since childhood I have passed by a local parish church unaware until recently that the figures flanking its western portal had made the arduous journey from Carrara to Drogheda in County Louth. While conducting research on the importation of marble from Carrara to Britain and Ireland in the eighteenth century, I encountered the work of Luisa Passeggia, initially on the links between Carrara and the London marble trade, and later, in conversation, on the sculptor Pietro Lazzerini and his little-known work in Irish cathedrals of the 1890s and early 1900s. My interest was piqued, for here was a similar trajectory to that of the eighteenth century in terms of the procurement of marble and its transportation across the seas to Ireland. For the eighteenth century such information is hard won, necessitating extensive research in Tuscan and British archives, not least the copious civil law cases in the Archivio di Stato at Livorno and notarial records at Massa. Ireland is poorly served for the period because of the dispersal of country house collections after the establishment of the Free State in 1922 and the destruction during the Civil War in June 1922 of the Public Record Office, in which centuries of public and private records were lost<sup>2</sup>. In contrast to this dearth of documentation, initial research on Pietro Lazzerini's activities in Ireland has produced richly illustrative archival material. The two principal documented sites are the Cathedral of Saint Patrick at Armagh, seat of the archdiocese of Ireland, and the Cathedral of Saint Macartan at Monaghan in the diocese of Clogher. Archivists at Armagh and Clogher have generously assisted in discovery of correspondence and accounts for Lazzerini's sculpture in each location<sup>3</sup>. At Armagh, this consists of surviving niche figures on the west front, Saints Patrick and Malachy flanking the western portal, and above them a row of the eleven faithful apostles, together with monumental statues of Bishops Croll and MacGettigan on pedestals in front of the cathedral [fig. 1]. Lazzerini was also responsible for an elaborate rood screen inside the cathedral [fig. 2], completed in 1899, which was removed during a post Vatican II reordering of the interior in 1982, fragments of which were sold at auction by Sotheby's in 1987<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Irish Architectural Archive, *Dictionary of Irish Architects*, <<https://www.dia.ie/architects/view/304/LAZZERINI-PIETRO%2A%23>>; K. V. Mulligan, South Ulster. *The Counties of Armagh, Cavan and Monaghan*, London and New Haven, Yale University Press, 2013, pp. 111, 464.

<sup>2</sup> <<https://www.nationalarchives.ie/our-archives/collaborative-projects/beyond-2022-irelands-virtual-record-treasury/>>.

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Roddy Hegarty, archivist at the O'Fiaich Library, Armagh, and Gary Carvill, archivist to the diocese of Clogher for their generous assistance.

<sup>4</sup> Sotheby's Sussex, *Garden Statuary and Architectural Items*, Thursday 24th September 1987,

At Monaghan Cathedral Lazzerini provided niche figures for the north and south transepts and entrance front together with interior statuary, the extent of which remains to be determined [figg. 3-4]. Further works by Lazzerini have been noted at Thurles, Kilkenny and Drogheda and doubtless there is more documentation to be discovered.

The cathedral of Saint Patrick at Armagh [fig. 5] embodies in its fabric the chequered history of Irish catholic church building in the nineteenth century. During the suppression of the Roman Catholic church in the eighteenth century, Catholic bishops of the archdiocese were restricted from coming within three miles of the city<sup>5</sup>. This restriction related to the so called popery or Penal Laws, a series of sixty Acts of Parliament of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries enacted in the wake of the Williamite wars which 'ensured the security of the Protestant interest, limited Catholics 'access to land and circumscribed the activities of the clergy'<sup>6</sup>. It was thus with considerable zeal that the building of a new cathedral was undertaken in the decades following the Act of Catholic Emancipation passed in 1829. Construction began in 1840 during the episcopate of Archbishop Crolly (1835-1849), but work ceased due to the Great Famine of 1847-1849 and was not resumed until 1854, resulting in an even more ambitious building. Two soaring western belfries tower above the cathedral of the established Church of Ireland in the centre of Armagh, which occupies the site of the medieval building. This ecclesiastical triumphalism was prevalent throughout Ireland in the period but the grandiose scale at Armagh reflects its special status, traditionally held to be the site of Saint Patrick's first church in Ireland. Though the new cathedral was dedicated in 1873, like many catholic churches of the period, ambition outweighed funding and it was not until the 1890s that the embellishment of the façade and interior could be achieved. This was overseen by the architectural firm of Ashlin and Coleman who dominated catholic church architecture in the period, aided by George Ashlin's previous business partnership with Edward Welby Pugin, son of Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin. Surviving drawings by Ashlin and Coleman at Armagh and the Irish Architectural Archive leave little doubt that their office provided designs for the architectural fittings of the cathedral interior at Armagh. Though no correspondence between them and Lazzerini has hitherto come to light, the former rood

London, Sotheby's, 1987.

<sup>5</sup> K. V. Mulligan, *South Ulster*, cit., p. 109.

<sup>6</sup> T. O'Connor, *The Catholic Church and Catholics in an era of sanctions and restraints, 1690-1790* in J. Kelly, ed., *The Cambridge History of Ireland*, vol. III, 1730-1880, Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 257-279, at p. 260.

screen is characteristic of their approach to interior fittings and appears in sketch form in the firm's surviving collection of drawings at the Irish Architectural Archive<sup>7</sup>. However, the papers at Armagh include much documentation of Lazzerini's work there including lists of payments, cheques paid to Lazzerini, transport costs and insurance documentation.

As this research commenced in May of this year it is still in a preliminary stage with partial findings that will hopefully be corroborated and amplified by further archival and site research. The aim of this short paper is therefore to alert scholars to the ongoing work in the hope of attracting further documentation on the relationship of Carrara and Irish ecclesiastical patronage in the period. The documents at Armagh and Monaghan bear witness to wider patronage of Carrarese and Roman sculptors by the Irish hierarchy, a subject worthy of further development in Ireland and Italy. Scholarship to date has focused largely on the native and British sculptural firms active in Ireland in the period and on the British and German firms who provided stained glass to Irish churches, but the role of Italian suppliers of marble, fittings and statuary has not been addressed<sup>8</sup>.

Among the documents at Armagh is a short letter from James Donnelly, Bishop of Clogher (1865-1893) at Monaghan to Cardinal Logue, Archbishop of Armagh (1887-1924) [figg. 6-7]. Logue was a dynamic force in the Irish church of the period, hugely successful in raising funds for Irish catholic church building across the globe. Such was Logue's fame that the archbishop of Bobbio sought his assistance in his campaign to restore the tomb of Saint Columbanus. But the letter from Bishop Donnelly to Logue makes clear that the impetus to Lazzerini's commission at Armagh came not from Logue but rather from Monaghan. For it was Donnelly who travelled in Italy and visited Lazzerini in his studio at Carrara where he sat for a portrait bust on several occasions in December 1888<sup>9</sup>. Donnelly described Lazzerini as 'the greatest sculptor here' and remarked upon 'the greatest pains' taken in the sculptor's work on the portrait. Arriving in the depths of winter, Donnelly described Carrara as a very cold place 'sun not seen till far in the day'<sup>10</sup>. This did not

<sup>7</sup> Irish Architectural Archive, Ashlin & Coleman Collection (76/1).

<sup>8</sup> T. J. Duffy, *Artisan sculpture and the stone carving firms of Dublin, 1859-1910*, PhD, National College of Art and Design, 1999; C. McGee, *Building Catholic Ireland: religious art and industry, 1850-1922*, PhD, University of Dublin, 2017; C. McGee, *Religion Pays: The Business of Art Industry Entrepreneurs and Splendour in the Spaces of Nineteenth-Century Irish Catholicism*, «Journal of Victorian Culture», XXVIII/4 (2023), pp. 597-604.

<sup>9</sup> Notes from Bishop Donnelly's diary, for 1888, provided by Gary Carvill, Clogher Diocesan Archives.

<sup>10</sup> Clogher Diocesan Archive, *Diary of Bishop James Donnelly*, 1888.



deter him from walking out to the quarries where he observed oxen drawing large blocks, heard explosions and 'saw marble stones torn up & rolling down'. He also visited many studios in the city 'cheap for statues' and travelled by bus to Massa in search of more, finding there only two or three sculptors' studios and proclaiming it 'a queer old place'.

Lazzerini's portrait bust of Donnelly was most likely a clay model as this was the method adopted for the statues of Archbishop Logue's predecessors based on photographs, as documented in correspondence at the Irish College in Rome discovered by Luisa Passeggia<sup>11</sup>. The portrait bust seems to have been conceived in conjunction with the sculptural programme for Monaghan Cathedral as the niche statues of the south transept include figures of Bishop Donnelly and of the cathedral's founder Charles MacNally, Bishop of Clogher (1844-1864), amusingly holding incomplete and complete models of the cathedral [figg. 8-10].

In his efforts to establish the cathedral MacNally employed robust Roman Catholic rhetoric:

In this diocese we are gradually recovering from the deplorable state of things ... There are still people who remember that in their time there was scarcely a Catholic church or chapel in the entire diocese so that in all the seasons of the year our poor people had to gather in the open air under the heavens to hear Mass, with a covering only for the altar and for the priests during the celebration of the Divine Mysteries. After I was ordained priest, I myself had to celebrate Mass in this way in one of the districts of this very parish in which I now reside<sup>12</sup>.

When MacNally died in 1864 the cathedral walls at Monaghan had risen to a height of 32 feet (9.75 metres). James Donnelly was equally forthright in his dealings and clashed with the Anglo-Irish ascendancy on several occasions, not least due to his support for the Irish Land League, an agrarian organisation that sought reform of the landlord system through fair rent and fixity of tenure<sup>13</sup>. Donnelly has been described as 'the kind of priest who became a bishop in 19th-century Ireland: a disci-

<sup>11</sup> Kirby Collection Catalogue, Irish College Rome (1891-1895), p. 2452, inventory 375, Holograph letter 22 June 1891 from Michael Logue to Tobias Kirby.

<sup>12</sup> J. Duffy Bishop of Clogher, *Monaghan Cathedral (Irish Heritage)*, Dublin, Eason & Son Ltd, Dublin, 1992, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> J. H. Murnane, *Dr James Donnelly Bishop of Clogher (1865-1893) and the Ascendancy in Monaghan*, published by Clogher Historical Society, XII/3 (1987), pp. 265-297 and XIII/1 (1988), pp. 1-25; G. Carville, *Bishop James Donnelly and the Catholic Electorate: The Monaghan Liberal Registration Society 1874-1885*, XXI/1 (2012), pp. 43-64.

plinarian with an unlimited capacity for work, toughminded, tenacious and shrewd, ascetic and autocratic’<sup>14</sup>. No wonder then that a third bishop of Clogher carved by Lazzerini and standing next to MacNally is the ‘warrior bishop’ Heber MacMahon (1643-1650) who led an army against the Cromwellians and was executed for his role [fig. 11]. Almost two years after Donnelly’s visit to Carrara, on November 12<sup>th</sup> 1890 Pietro Lazzerini arrived in Monaghan where he remained until November 25<sup>th</sup>, having agreed upon the commission for Monaghan with Donnelly. On November 17<sup>th</sup> Donnelly and Lazzerini travelled together to Armagh where Cardinal Logue ‘bargained’ for the 11 statues noted above.

The brief letter among Cardinal Logue’s papers recording the agreement with Lazzerini for the Armagh statuary is transcribed below. Though summary in content and style, it reflects the means by which Pietro Lazzerini secured these substantial sculptural commissions in Ireland, documents his visits to Monaghan and Armagh, and illuminates the significant role that individual clergy could play in ecclesiastical patronage of the period.

‘Monaghan  
15 May ‘[18]92  
My dear Lord Primate  
Your Grace seemed in doubt as to the prices agreed on with Lazzerini, and lest I might forget it, I determined to send the information today.  
On Nov[ember] 17<sup>th</sup> 1890 the bargain was made.  
For 11 Apostles & S.S. Patrick & Malachy      £ 12,000-  
The colossal statue of late Primate              £ 3,000  
The 2 statues for Archdeacon Murphy<sup>15</sup>        £ 2,000  
  
Total      £ 17,000  
  
Seventeen thousand Liri Italiani  
Remember one pound sterling is now equivalent to £25.30 or rather more.

---

I had a letter on Thursday last from Lazzerini. He says that he shall soon forward the statue of Dr McGettigan, on which he has bestowed wonderful care & labour.

<sup>14</sup> J. Duffy, *American Journal of James Donnelly*, *Clogher Record Album: A Diocesan History*, published by Clogher Historical Society, III (1975), pp. 109-152.  
<sup>15</sup> Right Rev. Monsignor Murphy, parish priest of Drogheda County Louth. Ex info Roddy Hegarty, archivist at the O’Fiaich Library, Armagh, from the documents dated 1893. These appear to be statues of Saints Joseph and the Virgin Mary flanking the western portal of Saint Peter’s parish church, Drogheda.

*Verso*

He asks me to request your Grace not to divulge the price of this statue, as every one in Carrara thinks he will receive £10,000 for it i.e. nearly £ 400

Take this for whatever it is worth

Wishing Your Grace every peace & blessing I remain your humble suffragan

† James Donnelly

Most Rev. Michael Logue

Archb[isho]p of Armagh & Primate of all Ireland

The details above given, as to prices, are taken from my diary where I recorded them after returning with Lazzerini from Armagh. They are strictly accurate.



Fig. 1. Saint Patrick's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Armagh, west front with statue of Archbishop McGettigan.



Fig. 2. Saint Patrick's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Armagh, interior with rood screen before removal (Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland).





Fig. 3. Interior of Saint MacCartan's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Monaghan (Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland).



Fig. 4. Pietro Lazzerini, figures from North Transept, Saint Macartan's Cathedral, Monaghan (Courtesy of Karl Pederson).



Fig. 5. Saint Patrick's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Armagh (Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland).



Monaghan  
15 May '92

My dear Lord Primate

Your Grace seemed in doubt  
as to the prices agreed on with Lazzorini,  
and lest I might forget it, I determined to  
send the information today.

On Nov 17<sup>th</sup> 1890  
the bargain was made

For 11 Apostles & SS. Petrus & Malachy £12,000 -  
The colossal Statue of late Primate £3,000  
The 2 Statues for Archd. Murphy £2,000

---

Total £17,000

Seventeen thousand Liri Italiani  
Remember one pound Sterling is now  
equivalent to £25.30 or rather more.

---

I had a letter on Thursday last  
from Lazzorini. He says that he  
shall soon forward the Statue of  
St. K. Hyeligen, on which he has  
bestowed wonderful care & labour.

Fig. 6. Letter (recto) from Bishop Donnelly of Monaghan to Cardinal Logue of Armagh.

He asks me to request Your  
Grace not to divulge the  
price of this statue, as  
being one in Carrara thinks  
he will raise £10,000 for it  
cc nearly £400.

Take this for whatever it is worth.

Wishing Your Grace  
every grace & blessing  
I remain your humble servant  
+ James Donnelly

Most Rev. Michael Logue  
Bp of Armagh &  
Primate of all Ireland

The details above given, as to price,  
are taken from my diary where I recorded  
them after returning with Lazzarini from  
Armagh. They are thoroughly accurate.

Fig. 7. Letter (verso) from Bishop Donnelly of Monaghan to Cardinal Logue of Armagh.





Fig. 8. Saint Macartan's Cathedral Monaghan, exterior (Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland).

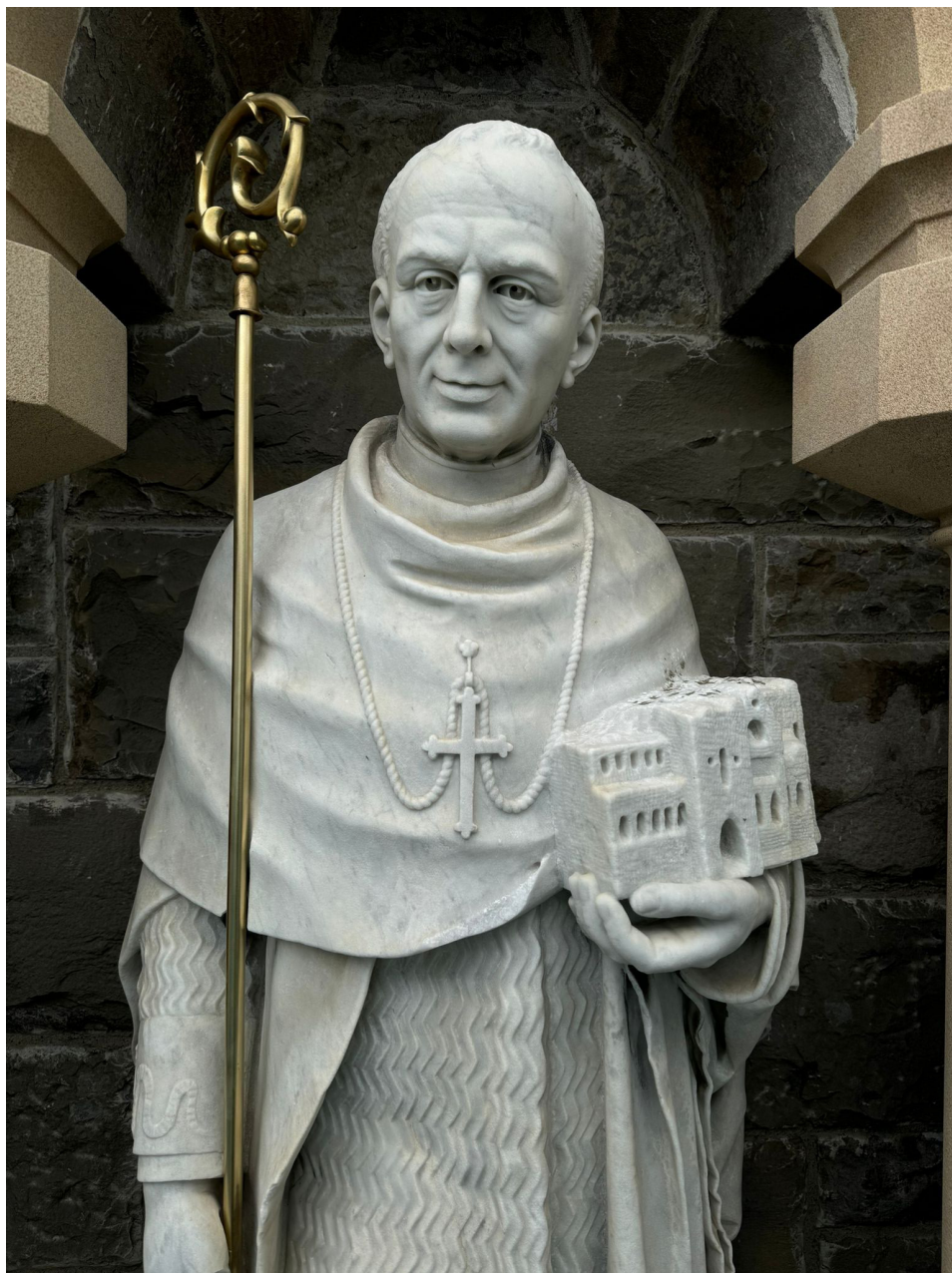


Fig. 9. Pietro Lazzerini, *Bishop Charles MacNally*, South Transept, Monaghan Cathedral (Courtesy of Karl Pederson).





Fig. 10. Pietro Lazzerini, *Bishop James Donnelly*, South Transept, Monaghan Cathedral (Courtesy of Karl Pederson).



Fig. 11. Pietro Lazzerini, *Heber MacMahon*, South Transept, Monaghan Cathedral (Courtesy of Karl Pederson).



## PROFILO

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### Christine Casey

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Christine Casey è una storica dell'architettura, docente presso il Trinity College di Dublino; rivolge particolare attenzione al rapporto tra architettura e decorazione e al ruolo dell'artigianato nella produzione architettonica. La sua ricerca si è sviluppata da un focus iniziale sull'architettura irlandese del XVIII secolo a un interesse più ampio per l'architettura europea della prima età moderna. Nel 2019 ha ricevuto l'Advanced Laureate Award dell'Irish Research Council per un progetto quadriennale intitolato "Craft value: the agency and Impact of crafts in the architecture of Britain and Ireland, 1680-1780". Questa ricerca ha esplorato la relazione tra progettazione e realizzazione nell'architettura della Gran Bretagna e dell'Irlanda nella prima età moderna (<<https://craftvalue.org/>>). Nel 2023 le è stato assegnato un "ERC Advanced Grant" per un progetto di ricerca quinquennale sull'interdipendenza nella produzione architettonica intitolato "Stone-Work".

Christine Casey is an architectural historian, professor at Trinity College, Dublin; she has particular interest in the relationship of architecture and decoration and the role of craftsmanship in architectural production. Her research has developed from an initial focus on Irish eighteenth-century architecture to a broader interest in European early modern architecture. In 2019 she received an Irish Research Council Advanced Laureate Award for a four-year project entitled "Craft value: the agency and impact of craftsmanship in the architecture of Britain and Ireland, 1680-1780". This research explored the relationship between design and making in the architecture of early modern Britain and Ireland (<<https://craftvalue.org/>>). In 2023 she was awarded an "ERC Advanced Grant" for a five-year research project on interdependence in architectural production entitled "Stone-Work".



## REFERENZE FOTOGRAFICHE

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2, 3, 5, 8: Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland;  
4, 9-11: Courtesy of Karl Pederson.





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