

# Urban Planning and the Church of St Thomas

*The clearance by fire... affords a unique and unexpected opportunity for the putting into practice of the true principles of town planning.*

IRISH BUILDER, 13 MAY 1916, P. 202

The laying waste to large areas of central Dublin in 1916 and again in 1922 was seen by many as providing an opportunity to apply modern techniques of urban planning to rationalise and improve the city centre. Suggestions ranged from a traffic 'circle' around Nelson's Pillar to new parks, new squares, new housing, and new streets.

The 1916 Dublin Reconstruction Act and its 1924 successor both provided Dublin Corporation with the authority to compulsorily purchase lands 'for the purpose of widening, opening, enlarging, extending or otherwise improving streets in the City of Dublin'. But in the end, no large scale changes were made. The western end of North Earl Street was widened slightly, and one new street, Cathal Brugha Street (as it was officially named in 1932), was created when the opportunity afforded by the destruction of the original Church of Ireland Church of St Thomas was used to continue Gloucester Street into O'Connell Street, Upper.

Modelled by its architect John Smyth on Palladio's Redentore in Venice, old St Thomas's was built between 1758 and 1762. It closed a half-mile vista down Gloucester Street (now Seán MacDermott Street) and was mourned by the *Irish Builder* as 'next, perhaps, to the Four Courts in architectural value amongst the buildings lately destroyed'. The new St Thomas's was built from 1929 to 1933 to

designs by Frederick Hicks on an island site bounded by the newly created Cathal Brugha Street. With echoes of Ravenna and the Lombardic Romanesque, it is an exercise in total design from its extensive use of brick to its cast-stone loggia, its apsidal east end, its varying roofs clad in Roman tiles, and its stained glass by Catherine O'Brien.

The new church is much smaller than its predecessor but, as the RIAI Yearbook noted in 1933 when reporting the fact that it has been awarded the Institute's first Triennial Gold Medal for Architecture, it may 'fairly be considered as another architectural gem in Dublin's architectural diadem'.



Map showing position of old St Thomas's Church at the end of Gloucester Street (now Seán MacDermott Street)

St Thomas's Church, Marlborough Street, 1780  
Views of the most remarkable Public Buildings, Monuments and other Edifices in the City of Dublin, Robert Pool & John Cash, Dublin, 1780



St Thomas's Church, Marlborough Street, exterior, c.1870  
IAA Photographic Collections, 10/75X1



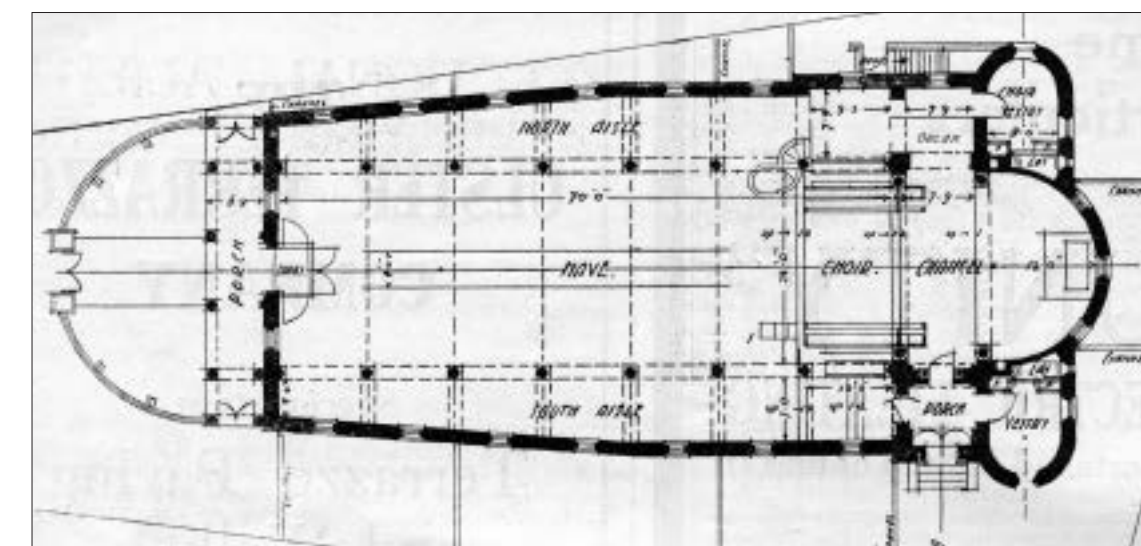
St Thomas's Church, Marlborough Street, interior, c.1870  
IAA Photographic Collections, 10/75Y1



St Thomas's Church, Cathal Brugha Street, nearing completion, 1932  
*Irish Builder*, 16 January 1932, p. 66



St Thomas's Church, Cathal Brugha Street, 1933  
RIAI Yearbook, 1933, p. 5



St Thomas's Church, Cathal Brugha Street, plan by Frederick Hicks, 1929  
*Irish Builder*, 16 January 1932, p. 66