Relics of the Tasmanian Gothic: Medieval Artefacts in Medievalist Australia

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This paper explores two objects in Tasmania and their relationships with Australian medievalism. One, a neo-gothic window, was later thought to be genuinely medieval. The other, apparently a Norman-era baptismal font, was only recently identified as being ancient. Through the way these items were treated and understood when installed and subsequently, this paper grapples with two main themes. Firstly, the possibility of confessional differences between Catholic and Anglican medievalist practices of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Secondly, the key problem of how Australian medievalism, generally held to be inspired and influenced by the absence of immediate medieval remains, understood and treated tangible medieval European artefacts in Australia.

Two objects crafted in Europe were subsequently shipped to the colony of Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) where they were installed in sandstone churches. One, a neo-gothic creation of the 1840s, was later believed to be genuinely medieval. Complex narratives of origin developed, and popular belief that the object was actually from the fourteenth century prevailed against critical scepticism. The provenance of the other object, most likely a genuine product of Norman craftsmanship, was of little interest at the time of its installation or subsequently. This seeming lack of awareness or interest in the second object's origins is striking considering it is located in a neo-gothic building. These two objects, their stories, and the mythology built around one of them, are the subjects of this paper.

Without attempting to be overly prescriptive, it is fair to note that studies of Australian (and colonial Australian) medievalism can be broadly divided into three key thematic areas. There are those interested in a) the material fabric of Australia's neo-gothic built heritage, b) medievalist literary expressions (increasingly broadly conceived), and c) other forms of affective or performative medievalism (frequently communal).[1] Clearly the categories often overlap. But thus far, other than studies of particular manuscripts or manuscript collections, there has not been a significant focus on the actual material medieval European heritage within Australia and how such

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[1] See particularly the papers in Stephanie Trigg (ed.) *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture,* Turnhout, Brepols, 2005, and the papers in a special medieval edition of *The La Trobe Journal*, no. 81, 2008.

objects related to medievalist endeavours or conceptualisations.[2] In fact, isolation, absence, and distance from the medieval past (geographically and chronologically) are, within current scholarship, common explanations for colonial and Australian medievalism generally and for their specifically localised forms.

In places such as Australia, where the archaeological and material traces of an *in situ* medieval past are necessarily absent, this absence, and the sense of historical discontinuity that accompanies it, are the conditions on which all medievalist practice is predicated.[3]

In part, while Australian medievalism certainly often inflects the intangibility and un-immediacy of the medieval past for most people in Australia, this is not always the case. Medieval manuscripts are a good example. For this paper, however, I want to commence an exploration into the relationships between the neo-gothic and the materially 'gothic' in Australia with some non-text examples. I want to understand more broadly medievalist treatments of and attitudes towards the genuinely medieval. If absence is an important part of Australian medievalist expression, then how does Australian medievalism deal with presence?

Buckland's Fourteenth-Century chancel window

In 2010 I went to investigate Tasmania's 'famous' Buckland window. I had heard that in the Anglican parish church of Buckland, a small village north-east of Hobart, there was a medieval stained glass window. The idea that the East Window in the chancel of a small rural Tasmanian church had a remarkable origin was widely repeated throughout travel literature of the twentieth century.[4] I was curious, if extremely suspicious, but went trying to be open-minded. During my visit I bought a postcard that depicted the window. On its reverse, it stated that '[t]he Church of St. John the Baptist features an authentic 14th century stained glass window from Battle Abbey in Hastings, England.' [sic!] The postcard also had a barcode: it, at least, could not have been very old.

Along with the postcard I purchased a pamphlet on sale in the church: *Parish of Buckland Tasmania, Church of St. John the Baptist, history of Church and Window* [undated].

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[2] For example, R. Thomson, *From Manuscript to Print: Catalogue of an Exhibition Held at the Morris Miller Library, University of Tasmania, Hobart, December 2008-January 2009*, Hobart, University of Tasmania Library, 2008; Lawrence Warner, 'The Gentleman's *Piers Plowman*: John Mitford and his annotated copy of the 1550 edition of William Langland's great poem', *The La Trobe Journal*, no. 84, 2009, pp. 104-112.

[3] Louise D'Arcens, *Old Songs in the Timeless Land: Medievalism in Australian Literature 1840-1910*, Crawley, University of Western Australia Press, 2012, p. 2.

[4] Widely reported, if occasionally sceptically: W. A. Beatty, *Tasmania: isle of splendour*, Melbourne, Cassell Australia, 1963, p. 140; Max Angus and Patsy Adam Smith, *Tasmania Sketchbook*, Adelaide, Rigby, 1971, p. 54; Sally Farrell Odgers, *Tasmania, a guide*, Kenthurst, Kangaroo Press, 1989, p. 134; James A. Stewart, *The Rough Guide to Tasmania*, London, Rough Guides, 2008, p. 177. Curiously, one of the least sceptical affirmations of the Window's authenticity is a Tasmanian Government source: Tasmap, *Holiday Atlas of Tasmania*, Hobart, Tasmanian Department of Lands, Parks, and Wildlife, 1989, p. 3.

Later I bought another copy of the pamphlet with some older postcards at a second-hand bookstore. Thus I know that this pamphlet was printed at least twice. The text is verbatim in both, except for the final page, which is a list of Rectors of the parish, and has been updated for a later printing. The older copy was likely printed c. 1963-1965, and the newer had to have been printed in or after 2007. This pamphlet has three chapters: 'History of the Church of St. John the Baptist' (pp. 1- 5), by Revd. R. N. Fox (rector 1958-1963); 'History of the Window' (pp. 6-7), by Revd. H. M. Maddock (rector 1938-1944); and, 'Symbolism and Motifs of the East Window' (pp. 8-11) also by Fox. Therefore, the pamphlet was most likely authored in the late 1950s or early 1960s, with the 1963 version being a likely first edition, although it is plausible that the middle chapter by Maddock is an earlier (c. 1940s) text integrated into the pamphlet when later compiled.

The middle chapter by Maddock makes the case for the east window being medieval. He opened:

> Considerable controversy has arisen with reference to the age and origin of the very beautiful East Window of St. John the Baptist. The only authentic reference to the origin of the window is the report in the 'Hobart Town Courier' of Wednesday 15th January, 1850, which claims they are "the work of Mr O'Connor, a London artist". The East window is of such outstanding quality that several legendary stories are current with regard to its origin, the salient points of which are that it was buried for safety during the Cromwellian Rebellion, that it was connected with a church built by William the Conqueror, and that it was sent out to Tasmania through the agency of the first Rector of Buckland, the Revd. F. H. Cox […][5]

Maddock then went on to indicate that 'examination of the window itself makes it possible to determine its approximate date as between 1350 and 1400'. His argument, which is based on stylistic attributes of the window, rests on an assertion that because the window was installed between 1848 and 1850 it could not have been a 'modern reproduction of an antique, because the art of reproducing antiques did not come into practice until a much later date.'[6] After thus arguing that it cannot be a modern reproduction, and can be stylistically linked to the latter half of the fourteenth century, Maddock turned to local lore.

'Legend', Maddock noted, 'links the window with William the Conqueror'.[7] He therefore posited Battle Abbey as having appropriate connections in conformity with that legend, firstly through foundation by William the Conqueror, and secondly through destruction at the hands of 'Cromwell's soldiers'.[8] Maddock then pointed to

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[5] H. M. Maddock, 'History of the Window' in *Parish of Buckland Tasmania, Church of St. John the Baptist, history of Church and Window* [undated], pp. 6-7 at 6.

[6] Maddock, 'History of the Window', p. 6.

[7] Maddock, 'History of the Window', p. 7.

[8] Maddock, 'History of the Window', p. 7.

geographical proximity between Battle Abbey and the Cecil family and the third Marquis of Salisbury, and therefore to the Marquis's personal friend Rev. Cox, to whom the Marquis 'sent the window'. Maddock concluded by contrasting his argument with the terse newspaper reference of the opening of the church. As an explanation for the 1850 assertion that the glass was the work of O'Connor, Maddock poses that the window, after excavation and before being shipped to Tasmania, was 'entrusted to Mr O'Connor for restoration'.[9]

These 'legendary stories' about the window were certainly current by the 1930s. Providing readers of the Hobart *Mercury* in October 1930 with an account of the history of the Buckland church, W. J. Rowlands noted that the story of the window being medieval in origin was 'an old one in the parish'.[10] This, apparently the earliest written account of the legend, shares elements of Maddock's later version:

> The story attached to these famous windows is that originally they were placed in an English monastery, and were saved from destruction when the Tudors were confiscating monastic property, and hidden in the home of a near-by family. One of the descendants, who emigrated to Van Diemen's Land, had enough of the glass sent out to decorate the church of his pioneer settlement, Buckland.[11]

In 1931 a correspondent wrote to the *Mercury* asking for advice about the veracity of the legends that concerned the window. The *Mercury*, citing 'a reliable authority', noted that the window 'dates back to pre-Reformation days' and 'was presented to the church by the late Marquis of Salisbury'.[12]

Across the versions of the story of the Buckland window, we can see that written accounts of the legend contained three common elements: 1) the window was pre-Reformation; 2) it was hidden in response to Cromwell (although this is variously interpreted as Thomas or Oliver, a century's difference apparently unimportant); and, 3) it was sent to Buckland through the agency of a local family, frequently identified as the Marquis of Salisbury.

Maddock was right about one thing: 'controversy' certainly arose in response to assertions of the window's antiquity. In 1934 the story of the window was again queried by a *Mercury* correspondent.[13] This second query was in response to a claim 'recently made in a ladies' journal' that the window was medieval and 'hidden from Cromwell's soldiers to preserve them from destruction'.[14] The correspondent noted the lack of reference in records of the parish to such a remarkable gift. In response, a local historian, J. Moore-Robinson answered that the window was 'bought in London in the ordinary

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[9] Maddock, 'History of the Window', p. 7.

[10] *Mercury* 27 October 1930, p. 3.

[11] *Mercury* 27 October 1930, p. 3.

[12] *Mercury* 13 August 1931, p. 6.

[13] *Mercury* 29 December 1934, p. 6.

[14] *Mercury* 29 December 1934, p. 6.

way by the incumbent, Rev. F. Cox, who built the church, and although a beautiful piece of work, has no claims to ancient fame.'[15]

Moore-Robinson's letter elicited very binary responses from subsequent correspondents. A. L. Wayn of Lower Sandy Bay agreed with Moore-Robinson.[16] Quoting the *Courier's* 1850 description of the church and its explicit mention of O'Connor, and noting the lack of any mention of either a medieval origin or even it being gifted by a notable person, Wayn concluded that it was not medieval. Every subsequent correspondent, however, would criticise Moore-Robinson's opinion, and even his subsequent provision of further archival details. J. W. simply ignored Moore-Robinson's viewpoint and reiterated the legend: 'it is a fact that one of the windows in the Buckland Church is pre-Reformation and was presented to the late Dean Cox by the Marquis of Salisbury.'[17] 'BUCKS of Glenorchy' had a more elaborate response:

> This window was in an English country church and was removed at the request of the priest in charge and buried in a spot indicated by him in the churchyard as he feared that the Puritan soldiers who were in the neighbourhood would smash it. This was done. During a skirmish between the Royalist and Puritan forces this priest was accidentally shot dead. Many years afterwards the window was laid bare during improvements to the churchyard and became the property of the lord of the manor. Having a friend in Tasmania and hearing that the community there were about to build a church he presented it to him and the window was shipped to Tasmania.[18]

A clearly frustrated Moore-Robinson again wrote to the *Mercury* to 'kill the superstition'. He pointed out that the window was made by O'Connor, shipped by O'Connor to Rev. Cox in Tasmania, and that these facts were demonstrable 'in the Customs papers still extant at Hobart, and executed when the window arrived.'[19] If he thought such 'ample documentary evidence' would dissuade believers he was mistaken. Even after this, 'Adherent' pointed to a section of the glass different from the rest, claimed this was 'broken by a pick when […] discovered in a churchyard in England', and argues that O'Connor was only given responsibility for repairing the window prior to shipping.[20] Moore-Robinson would subsequently address this by noting the window breakage occurred after installation and was actually reported in the local press.[21]

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[15] *Mercury* 31 December 1934, p. 6.

[16] *Mercury* 5 January 1935, p. 8.

[17] *Mercury* 1 January 1935, p. 6.

[18] *Mercury* 1 January 1935, p. 6.

[19] *Mercury* 11 January 1935, p. 8. These particular customs papers no longer survive, possibly a casualty of the dispute. Other customs papers from about this period do survive in the State Library Archives Office of Tasmania, indicating the likelihood that any surviving papers at that time had adequate descriptions of the windows to sustain Moore-Robinson's assertions.

[20] *Mercury* 26 January 1935, p. 6.

[21] *Mercury* 28 January 1935, p. 6.

The longevity of the legend itself proved a point of importance to adherents who believed in the window's pre-Reformation origins. 'A woman of 81 years' and Max I. Crawford of West Hobart, both described the currency of a connection between the Marquis of Salisbury and the Buckland window circa 1870.[22] Seemingly in response to this, Moore-Robinson had speculated that the origin of the story may have been from the *Courier's* 1850 report, which had 'incautiously referred to the "foliated tracery of the 14th century," and someone, ignorant of the fact that this refers to the style of architecture and not to the date of the window, began the yarn.'[23]

Of Moore-Robinson's provision of documentary evidence, the *Mercury* adopted a judicial tone: 'we find that it was made during the first half of the 19th century expressly for a Tasmanian clergyman.'[24] But it nonetheless continued to publish criticisms. Hoping to end the debate, Moore-Robinson quoted a letter from Rev. Cox to the Bishop about the window. Cox had written: 'I have placed an order for the east window with the respectable and well-known firm of Mr O'Connor.'[25] Whilst this seemed to end this spate of controversy in the *Mercury*, the myth nonetheless survived.

Throughout the middle decades of the twentieth century the story of the pre-Reformation window at Buckland was repeated in various guidebooks to Tasmania[26], occasionally mentioned in the Tasmanian press (including the *Mercury*)[27], and, of course, elaborated at length in Maddock's 'History of the Window' in the Pamphlet sold at the church.[28] Whilst occasionally various suspicions about the veracity of the story were noted or hinted at, generally Moore-Robinson's arguments and evidence were neglected. It is interesting how despite referring to 'controversy', suggesting familiarity with the 1934-1935 *Mercury* debate, Maddock made no mention of Cox's letter or the customs papers, and openly refuted the accuracy of the original *Courier* account of 1850, all in favour of adherence to a longstanding local legend and his own examination of the window.

In order to explore this mythology further, it is, however, rather necessary to finally 'kill the superstition', to use Moore-Robinson's words. Firstly, Maddock is incorrect to suppose that a mid-nineteenth-century window could not be a reproduction. The gothic revival was certainly underway at the time the window was installed, in fact, the whole church of Buckland could be said to conform to this style. Rev. Cox himself was deeply engaged with the movement, and St John's at Buckland is a significant marker of the movement in Tasmania. Prior to moving to Tasmania, Cox was secretary of the Ecclesiological Society, which was devoted to the study of church architecture and

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[22] *Mercury* 9 January 1935, p. 6; *Mercury* 10 January 1935, p. 6.

[23] *Mercury* 11 January 1935, p. 8.

[24] *Mercury* 12 January 1935, p. 8.

[25] *Mercury* 28 January 1935, p. 6.

[26] See note 4.

[27] *Examiner* 1 August 1936, p. 5; *Mercury* 20 March 1946, p. 4; *Mercury* 3 August 1946, p. 4.

[28] Maddock, 'History of the Window', pp. 6-7.

was influenced by Pugin and the Oxford Movement.[29] In fact, he designed the Buckland church himself, expressly intending to model old English churches.[30] Such interest was taken by the society in Cox's church that lithographs of the designs were exhibited back in England during the period of construction.[31]

Moreover, Maddock's stylistic arguments do not bear scrutiny. This is most definitely a nineteenth-century window. Obvious points include a) the quality of the glass (which could not be expected to survive centuries underground so well)[32]; b) the garb of the figures (antique, rather than that of the fourteenth-century which would be expected from a window of that period); and c) the lack of lead (older windows are generally much-repaired and therefore have much more lead). It also bears a remarkable similarity to other windows by O'Connor, especially in the background patterning.[33] The list could go on.

The fact that Cox wrote to his Bishop, as Moore-Robinson noted, claiming to have commissioned the window, is a significant point against any medieval origin. Further to this, in his designs for the church he was building Cox wanted a very particular scene for the east window, which make a pre-Reformation origin for the window even more unlikely. In 1847 Cox wrote to the Ecclesiological Society to describe the building underway and to request help in getting a window made. By then the stonework of the windows were either complete or nearly so. They were, he noted, 'considered a wonderful achievement in stone-cutting, being the first foliated windows in stone that have been seen in this country.'[34] With the letter he 'enclose[d] a tracing, giving the general proportions of the window, with the foliations in full size.' With the window supposed to be made to very particular specifications for a window frame already built, it would have been a remarkable coincidence if a medieval window was being unearthed of the correct specifications at just the right time.

The coincidence will have been greater were the unearthed window to bear the correct themes. Cox gave particular instructions regarding the scenes to be depicted:

> Bearing in the mind the dedication of the church, I should like the designs
> for the three lights to be something of this kind. In the first, the Baptist, as
> an ascetic in the wilderness; in the second, baptizing CHRIST (our Blessed

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[29] *The Ecclesiologist* LXII, October, 1847, (New Series, No. XXVI), pp. 87-8; Jim Cheshire, *Stained Glass and the Victorian Gothic Revival*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2004, p. 9. Co-incidentally, Cheshire's monograph opens with another O'Connor-manufactured Buckland window, this time from Somerset.

[30] *The Ecclesiologist* LXII, October, 1847, (New Series, No. XXVI), pp. 87-8; *The Ecclesiologist* XCV, April 1853 (New Series, LIX), p. 114; *Ecclesiologist*, No. LXXIX, August, 1850, (New Series, XLIII), p. 89.

[31] *The Ecclesiologist* LXXII, August 1849, (New Series, No. XXXVII), p. 58.

[32] As an interesting side note, much glass has in fact been excavated from Battle Abbey, bearing little resemblance to that of Buckland: Richard Marks, *Stained Glass in England During the Middle Ages*, London, Routledge, 1993, p. 136.

[33] Including that of St Luke's Anglican church at nearby Richmond.

[34] *The Ecclesiologist* LXII, October, 1847, (New Series, No. XXVI), p. 87.

LORD being thus made the central object of the window); and in the third, the Baptist in prison, and the approach of his martyrdom.[35]

The window as it is bears a remarkable resemblance to this plan (with St John dead rather than approaching death being the only divergence). And, should any vestige of doubt remain, Cox wrote again to a member of the same society after the window had been installed, expressing

> […] great thanks to the secretaries of the Ecclesiological Society, and as I understood from my father in England, especially to yourself, for the kind care with which the painting of the chancel windows was directed and superintended. […] We wanted something of this sort very much in Tasmania, and the want, thanks to Mr. O'Connor and yourselves, has been, I think, most excellently supplied.[36]

Cox then asked advice on how best to protect his window from external damage. We are left with a remarkable sequence of opinion centring on this window. It was initially designed to be 'gothic', in line with the rest of the church. It was known to the designer and contemporaries of its installation to be the work of O'Connor in England. Then, perhaps as early as 1870, (possibly indicating a generation after installation), and certainly by the 1930s (multiple generations), there is a body of Tasmanian opinion that believes the window to be not an example of 'gothic revival', but rather actually 'gothic', specifically, pre-Reformation. This gets narrowed to the latter half of the fourteenth century by the enthusiastic stylistic analysis of Maddock by the mid twentieth century. This idea maintains currency in the early twenty-first century, as indicated by repeated publication of Maddock's chapter and the assertion on my postcard with its very modern barcode.

In a way this speaks to the power of the gothic revival, and of latent popular memory of the English past. A profound desire to maintain links with 'home' may lie behind the myth's inception. Or perhaps a misunderstanding about the gothic revival at the moment of its introduction as a movement in Tasmania explains the development of an association between the 'gothic' window and the actual gothic past. Also, to have been the beneficiary of the Marquis of Salisbury's largess may have been important in settled rural Tasmania. This is a point particularly worth considering in connection with the appearance of the legend in the early twentieth century. Before the authenticity of the legend was questioned in the pages of the *Mercury*, posters of the 'historic church window at Buckland' were proposed as a means of attracting visitors to Tasmania.[37] In the context of first addressing the question of authenticity, and whilst still repeating the legend as true, the *Mercury* noted the window was 'the admiration of visitors'.[38]

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[35] *The Ecclesiologist* LXII, October, 1847, (New Series, No. XXVI), pp. 88.

[36] *The Ecclesiologist*, No. LXXIX, August, 1850, (New Series, XLIII), pp. 89-90.

[37] *Mercury* 8 January 1930, p. 5.

[38] *Mercury* 13 August 1931, p. 6.

Similarly, the Launceston *Examiner*, in a feature on 'Pleasures to Seek, Holidays within easy Reach', stated simply that 'the Church at Buckland possesses a beautiful stained glass window dating back to pre-Reformation days, presented by the late Marquis of Salisbury.'[39] Critics of Moore-Robinson's killing of the story noted that 'it was unkind to "rob" Buckland of sundry small revenues derived from visitors', and that his 'destructive criticism is much to be regretted'.[40] The advent of popular motor car touring of Tasmania, the presentation of Tasmania as a British-like destination, and a story of a pre-Reformation window all seem connected.

Two other coincidences bear notice in connection with the Buckland window. Firstly, if the myth did emerge about 1870, it did so at a time when medieval glass depicting John the Baptist was still in situ in the parish church of St Mary in the town of Battle, Hastings.[41] With various gestations of the story having the glass as 'monastic', from 'Battle Abbey', or from a 'church', the myth appeared at a time of intense focus on the material remains of the medieval world and some Tasmanians may have been swept up in this in a very peculiar way. If Australian medievalism reflects the absence of a localised medieval past, so too does Australian antiquarianism. Secondly, when the story first appeared in print, even if subject to debate, it was 1930, which was the same year in which actual medieval cathedral stones were relocated from England to Tasmania to be installed in the Anglican St David's Cathedral with the express intention 'to have a sentimental link with the Homeland.'[42] Carey has written about how the gothic style can be seen as an architectural expression, shared by Catholics as well as Anglicans, of 'support for the unifying power of the British empire'.[43] Did the First World War prompt a particular desire to link the Tasmanian Anglican church with the pre-medieval English church in the early twentieth century in tangible ways? Were the bonds of style growing weak, and in need of bonds of substance? Could this longing for a tangible medieval past to touch be likened or even linked to the longing for absent sons and brothers lost to war?[44] Whatever the particular cause of this strong desire to tangibly bring the medieval past to the Anglican Tasmanian present, it is made all the more interesting when contrasted with the medieval material heritage of the Tasmanian Catholic Church.

A Norman Font in St Mary's Cathedral, Hobart?

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[39] *Examiner* 19 December 1931, p. 6.

[40] *Mercury* 14 January 1935, p. 9; *Mercury* 26 January 1935, p. 6.

[41] Mackenzie E. C. Walcott, *Battle Abbey: with notices of the parish church and town*, Battle, 1870, p. 83.

[42] *Mercury* 8 December 1930, p. 3.

[43] Hilary M. Carey, 'Anglican Imperialism and the Gothic Style in Australia', *Australian Religion Studies Review*, 23(1): pp. 6-28 at 24.

[44] See Bart Ziino, *A Distant Grief: Australians, War Graves and the Great War*, Crawley, University of Western Australia Press, 2007.

The story of the font at St Mary's Catholic Cathedral in Hobart is a near inversion of the stories concerning the Buckland window. Brian Andrews, Heritage Officer of the Catholic Archdiocese of Hobart, believes that there is a strong possibility that the baptismal font of St Mary's Cathedral is of Norman origin. An architectural historian, Andrews is a specialist scholar of the Australian gothic revival, in particular the work of Pugin.[45] There is no nineteenth-century newspaper mention of the source of the font at the time of its installation in the Cathedral, and there is a dearth of documentary evidence specifically linkable to the font.

Andrews' argument is made through what he characterises as 'attribution by a series of logical observations'.[46] Having examined the font in detail, Andrews ascribes the styling of the decoration as Norman, noting that '[t]he detail repertoire of this font is characteristic of transitional work of roughly the period 1170 to 1200.'[47] This, he argued, presents three possible scenarios: the first being that the font is an original creation of the medieval period; the second is that the font is a mid nineteenth-century reproduction of a medieval style, part of the wider gothic revival; and the third possibility is that it is an early twentieth-century neo-Norman creation. Andrews could immediately dismiss the last option, as the font has been in situ since the 1890s. Noting that the stone is not Tasmanian, and explaining how unlikely the importation of stone was in the sandstone-abundant environs of Hobart, Andrews can also dismiss the possibility that the font is a *local* gothic revival creation.[48]

The details of the font, Andrews then argues, suggest it is a medieval font which was restored for use during the nineteenth century. He points to the presence of 'that organic variety and unselfconscious carelessness about consistency of detail and dimensions that is the essence of real medieval work', as opposed to the 'precision and order' of later gothic revival work.[49] He also notes that the gothic revival favoured later medieval styling, and observes that Pugin only modelled Norman in a very few instances, there being a strong case that the font has a Pugin connection (detailed below). The presence of significant wear is taken as a likely indicator of great age, something not expected of a nineteenth-century creation.[50] Contrasting with the apparent age, the top has been flattened for the addition of a lid, suggesting that the font may have been salvaged and recycled for liturgical re-use, something that Pugin was known to have done.[51]

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[45] Brian Andrews, *Australian Gothic: The Gothic Revival in Australian Architecture from the 1840s to the 1950s*, Melbourne, Miegunyah Press/Melbourne University Press, 2001; Brian Andrews, *Creating a Gothic Paradise: Pugin at the Antipodes*, Hobart, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 2002.

[46] Brian Andrews, *St Mary's Cathedral Conservation Management Plan: Baptismal Font Statement of Significance, Version 2.0, 1 February 2007*, unpublished report, kindly furnished by Author.

[47] Andrews, *Baptismal Font Statement of Significance*, pp. 2-3.

[48] Andrews, *Baptismal Font Statement of Significance*, p. 2.

[49] Andrews, *Baptismal Font Statement of Significance*, p. 3.

[50] Andrews, *Baptismal Font Statement of Significance*, p. 3.

[51] Andrews, *Baptismal Font Statement of Significance*, p. 6.

The connection with Pugin is important for Andrews' argument. Not only was Pugin known to collect and recycle medieval objects, he was a close personal friend of Bishop Willson, the first Catholic Bishop of Hobart. When Willson sailed to Tasmania in the *Bella Marina* in 1844, he did so with many gifts from Pugin on board, intended to assist in the establishment and furnishing of the new diocese. Andrews observes that Pugin mentioned that amongst these gifts were 'fonts', and that a checklist referring to this cargo listed 'a font with pillars', which matches the description of the Cathedral font better than any other in Tasmania.[52] With one Tasmanian Catholic font known to be a Pugin-designed exemplar, and no other pillared fonts to match the description, this 'font with pillars' must refer to the Cathedral font.

Fundamentally, Andrews' case is convincing, if only circumstantial. In essence, the argument rests on the assertion that it looks genuinely medieval rather than having attributes that would make it appear to be a medieval-revival creation. Weathering, apparent post-creation modification, and a documentable connection with a medieval-object-recycler all strengthen the argument that the font pre-dates the gothic revival, and the styling would suggest a late twelfth-century creation.

These initial points can be supplemented with further contextual argument. The idea of a medieval font making its way to Australia in the nineteenth century is not entirely ridiculous. There are better documented examples of old fonts of English origin being transplanted to Australia. Two examples serve to establish the possibility of font transportation and also to illuminate the wider context of antique font usages in Europe that enabled this to occur, making the case for the St Mary's Cathedral font yet more plausible. The phenomenon demonstrates a mix of antiquarianism and imperialism similar to that of the neo-gothic movement itself.

In the 1870s, the medieval font of Salisbury Cathedral was replaced with a new one after 'over 300 years' of service. The original, a 'beautiful Norman font', was brought to Australia in 1876, and installed in Yankalilla's Christ Church in South Australia where it remains to the present.[53] Yankililla was the beneficiary of three connected features of nineteenth-century English church ecclesiology: recognition, recovery, and restoration. In the 1830s, the same movement that had inspired the Reverend Cox to create a gothic church in Van Diemen's Land, saw others interested in studying and reconfiguring their medieval churches in Europe. It was only natural, therefore, that fonts would be subjected to considerable interest. This interest is evident not only in the wider discourses of classifying and assessing the architectural remains of the medieval past, but also with monographs about fonts such as *A Series of Ancient Baptismal Fonts Chronologically Arranged* (1828) and *Illustrations of Baptismal Fonts* (1844).[54] This interest in identifying antique fonts led to a greater awareness about the ages and origins of fonts throughout Britain.

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[52] Andrews, *Baptismal Font Statement of Significance*, pp. 5-6.

[53] *The Register* (Adelaide, SA) 13 January 1916, p. 4.

[54] Francis Simpson, *A Series of Ancient Baptismal Fonts Chronologically Arranged*, London, 1828; F. A. Paley, *Illustrations of Baptismal Fonts*, London, 1844.

In many cases ancient fonts were 'restored'. For instance, in the 1850s St. Peter's of Pimperne in Dorsetshire had its font 'cleaned and restored to its ancient position and use'.[55] Some of this font restoration was done in response to earlier removals of fonts. Whiting noted how English fonts were often removed or damaged throughout the early modern period as parish churches were reconfigured.[56] Such removals could be due to wider theological movements, or for more local reasons such as wear, aesthetics, or benefactions. Nor were removals restricted to the early modern period, or even to the pre-gothic revival period as the Salisbury/Yankililla font clearly demonstrates. A font could still be removed or replaced in the nineteenth century, it was just more likely as that century progressed that any removed font would be recognised as antique and valued and somehow preserved accordingly. This provides a strange twist, with poorer parishes thus presented as the nineteenth century advanced with a possible temptation to realise the monetary value of their antique assets. For instance, in 1880 the English Municipal Corporations Commission reported having inquired into one town as to the veracity of 'a charge that the corporation had at some time sold the ancient font of their church'.[57] Such things clearly occurred.

Some examples encompass both the removal and restoration of antique fonts. In the church of Harrow on the Hill, 'an ancient font, supposed to be coeval with the foundation of the church, viz. the Norman Conquest […] was removed in 1800' and replaced with a new one.[58] The original was restored in the 1840s, an action made possible because a local lady had taken that original font for use in her garden. Some parishes may, however, have replaced their fonts multiple times in the past. Certainly such 'garden fonts' appear to have been extraordinarily common discoveries from the nineteenth century onwards, another product of a growing interest in and awareness of medieval fonts.

Local histories detail discoveries like that of the Abbey Church, Shrewsbury, where a font was returned to the church by the 1830s after having been 'found […] in the adjoining garden'.[59] Enthusiasts would report local discoveries to learned journals, such as the Reverend Rogers writing to the *Transactions of the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society* and expressing 'much pleasure in sending a rude sketch of a Norman Font, which has just been dug up in the parish Church of Sithney'.[60] Such discoveries continued into the twentieth century, and were even followed by interested colonials.

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[55] *Ecclesiologist*, Vol 12, New Series Volume IX, 1851, pp. 72-3.

[56] Robert Whiting, *The Reformation of the English Parish Church*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 49-52.

[57] Municipal Corporations Commission, *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire Into Municipal Corporations Not Subject to the Municipal Corporations Acts: (other Than the City of London)*, London, G. E. Eyre and W. Spottiswoode, 1880, p. 109.

[58] *Campbell's foreign monthly magazine*, Vol. 2, 1843, p. 272.

[59] Henry Pidgeon, *Memorials of Shrewsbury,* Shrewsbury, 1837, p. 74.

[60] *Transactions of the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society*, Vol. 4, Exeter, 1853, pp. 160-161.

The Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin* reported in 1919 that '[a] medieval font, which has been used as a horse trough, has been discovered at Kimbolton, Hunts.'[61]

It was another of these ancient 'garden fonts' that has an Australian connection. In 1934, the story of a font from St Andrew's West Tarring, Sussex, was detailed in the *Portland Guardian*:

> An ancient font had recently been discovered, forgotten and neglected in some private garden. It was identified as the old font of Tarring, and it was taken back to Australia as a relic of the beloved old church, which had trained a Tarring man in the faith he carried overseas, and was given by Mr. Henty to the Melbourne Cathedral.[62]

This story is slightly at odds with that from the Victoria County History, which holds the font was removed in the mid nineteenth century to be replaced with a gothic revival one when the church was refurbished in the 1880s.[63] Both, however, agree that the font ultimately resided in Melbourne, as does the history of the Church as published on the St Andrews website.[64] The Melbourne Cathedral being referred to is that of the church of St James (Anglican), known now as the 'Old Cathedral'. And furthering the plausibility of this particular font's journey from Sussex to Melbourne is the assertion that St James also contains another old font: apparently the gift of Lieutenant-Governor La Trobe and originally from St Catherine's Abbey in London.[65]

The removal of medieval fonts from Britain to Australia was thus not only possible, but actual. No doubt other examples may exist, the St Mary's Cathedral font being a likely candidate. The Salisbury/Yankililla font was removed in a period where despite being 'discarded' as an Australian journalist would later characterise it, it was still valued for being a medieval item. Similarly, the West Tarring/St James and St Catherine/St James fonts show strong attachment to the idea of antique fonts residing in colonial church settings. And, as the case of the West Tarring/St James font illustrates, there is scope for the details of the origin of the font to be forgotten post-transportation: a 1938 newspaper report details how an '80-year-old mystery' was 'solved' when the font was recognised as being from West Tarring by an overseas visitor.[66] But these examples are generally unlike that of St Mary's Cathedral in that they are in Anglican churches, refer to originally English fonts, and mostly have clearer lines of provenance. As with the stones in St David's Cathedral, these fonts provided strong emotional links

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[61] *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton, Qld), 6 May 1919, p. 10.

[62] *Portland Guardian*, 28 May 1934, p. 3; also reported in *Argus* 29 March 1938, p. 8.

[63] T. P. Hudson et al. (eds) 'West Tarring', *A History of the County of Sussex: Volume 6 Part 1: Bramber Rape (Southern Part),* 1980, pp. 270-280. URL: https://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=18267 Date accessed: 27 August 2012 .

[64] http://www.sussexparishchurches.org/content/view/594/33/ Date accessed: 27 August 2012.

[65] http://www.sjoc.org.au/history/building Date accessed: 27 August 2012; *The West Australian*, 26 November 1927, p. 19; *Argus*, 28 June 1941, p. 10; *Argus*, 30 August 1956, p. 8.

[66] *Argus*, 29 March 1938, p. 8.

to the English homeland, and tangibly linked the British Empire's centre and periphery, past and present.

So in St Mary's Cathedral in Hobart there may be an ancient Norman-era font. Brought specifically to Tasmania to adorn a neo-gothic Cathedral, it was left in storage for a considerable period, installed, moved once, and then left in place since the 1880s. Whatever was known of its exact provenance was lost. Whilst St David's Anglican Cathedral was intentionally installing bits of medieval England, and whilst a myth was being perpetuated about the window at Buckland, parishioners in St Mary's Cathedral seemingly gave no thought to the particularities of their font.

Sectionalism medievalism?

Is there, then, a sort of sectionalism to the reception of the genuinely medieval in Tasmania, and perhaps Australia? Carey suggests that the neo-gothic was generally adopted by both Anglicans and Catholics in the Colonies, yet also noted that in Ireland the style was viewed with some suspicion as a relic of earlier English imperial ambitions.[67] Was the St Mary's font intentionally forgotten by later generations of Irish Catholics who were sensitive to its potential links to medieval conquests? It seems unlikely. But, in looking at how the genuinely medieval figured into the Tasmanian Catholic and Anglican expressions of neo-gothic architecture and nineteenth-century and later medievalism(s), there will be no simple answers.

On one hand, as Sarah Randles notes, Australian neo-gothic buildings were not built as replications of medieval buildings.[68] Extending this analysis then, a medieval element would not likely be seen as a locus of greater authenticity. This seems true of descriptions of the work done in building St Mary's Cathedral in Hobart, where the attention given in the press to features of the building mostly referenced local craftsmanship.[69] Whilst the Hobart *Mercury* did not report the origin of the font, it drew considerable attention to the Altar made of Tasmanian stone, which was quarried from Ross near the geographical heart of the island.[70] Here the Australian neo-gothic demonstrates a significant medievalist expression often overlooked, as it was not only the design and style which was important, but also the traditions of craftsmanship themselves.

One might be tempted to propose that the parishioners of St Mary's Cathedral were focused on the significance of the sacrament of baptism rather than the physicality of the font, as this relative lack of interest in touting genuinely medieval objects during the height of the neo-gothic applies to the other artefacts that the Archdiocese of Hobart possesses. A chalice with a fourteenth-century stem and a Sarum Missal from the early

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[67] Carey, 'Anglican Imperialism and the Gothic Style in Australia', pp. 11-15.

[68] Sarah Randles, 'Rebuilding the Middle Ages: Medievalism in Australian Architecture' in S. Trigg (ed.) *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2005, pp. 147-169 at 148.

[69] Nicholas Brodie, *Joyful and Glorious: Building St Mary's Cathedral, Hobart*, Hobart, 40South, 2013.

[70] Mercury, 22 January 1881, p. 2.

sixteenth century were not given much prominence as ancient objects until very recently.[71] Bishop Willson and Augustus Pugin were drawing on the past, not recreating that past, and the same is true of the building overseen at Buckland by the Reverend Cox. What genuine medieval elements passed into the material patrimony of the Archdiocese of Hobart did so as elements of a wider creative movement, effectively rendered new. St Mary's Cathedral was not designed as a giant reliquary for a Norman Font anymore than Buckland's church for an old abbey window.

Yet in contrast, on the face of it, something akin to this seems to have happened with the Anglican Church at Buckland and St David's Cathedral after the building generation had passed away. The 'genuine' medieval fabric attained a near-relic status. Whilst not venerated in a theological sense, these objects nonetheless had a certain emotional power.

One explanation for this is architectural. It would be fair to say that the Catholic Archdiocese has a greater architectural unity, particularly in the Hobart region. Neo-gothic Catholic churches exist in Hobart, New Town, Pontville, Richmond, Colebrook, Oatlands, Campbell Town, and beyond. For Anglicans in Tasmania, the neo-gothic was slightly less usual, as many of the early Churches are Georgian, such as those at Battery Point and Richmond, even though the latter had another Connor-designed neo-gothic window added after construction. Rarity breeds interest, and therefore for Anglican Tasmania, Buckland's window is outstanding.

Two other explanations may point to the early twentieth-century Anglican heightened focus on genuine medieval objects. It is important to note that both the Buckland Window (supposedly) and the stones placed in St David's Cathedral were not only links with the medieval past, but with the English medieval past. What could be more English than Battle Abbey? Carey has argued that the use of neo-gothic design for church architecture in Australia draws from, and promotes, an association of the style with England and Empire.[72] Not just expressions of Empire, these were viewable, touchable, bits of the Empire's legendary past. Also, the Oxford Movement certainly caused considerable debate within the Anglican Church, and it is tempting to see aspects of this playing out in attachment to neo-gothic features and stories about pre-Reformation connections in Tasmania. Physical connections to a pre-Reformation past may have helped salve any concerns about Apostolic continuity, and also about wider concerns about the effects of antipodean living on British peoples. Similarly, the First World War certainly energised British Imperial sentiment in Australia, and the vaunting of physical connections highlights a sort of performative medievalist trinity of God, King, and Country. We can extend Carey's analysis of neo-gothic architecture in Australia to see how in post-Federation and post-war Tasmania one exemplar of the colonial neo-gothic became a pilgrimage site where Imperial style and history fused in panes of glass thought to be tangibly connected to great moments and figures in English history.

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[71] Andrews, *Creating a Gothic Paradise*, pp. 101-2, 140-1.
[72] Carey, 'Anglican Imperialism and the Gothic Style in Australia', pp. 6-28.

Viewing the font through the window

This short survey cannot fully answer how the neo-gothic received the actual gothic, or how both were received by subsequent ages. But it can posit a framework that might bear further elaboration for exploring the ecclesiological framework of medievalist church settings in Australia. Too much could be made of comparing a window with a font, one a principally decorative item, the other having a sacramental purpose, so sensitivity to liturgical usages and theological positions is important. There may be something of a confessional difference in how the neo-gothic received the actually gothic in Australia, although this is a rather tentative notion at present. As already suggested, perhaps for the Tasmanian Anglican Church it was less the medieval that was important than the fact that these were *English* relics. Still, I think that the pre-Reformation links are important markers of internal theological divisions within Tasmanian Anglicanism at the level of the laity, quietly referencing key concerns, even if not elaborated in other documentary records. All of this also mixed with a sense of longing for an absent past, and so a sort of affective antiquarianism, as much as any expression of medievalism, probably lies behind the myth of Buckland.[73]

Catholics seem to have felt no need in the early twentieth century to emphasise links with England through the acquisition or promotion of 'medieval' material. During the construction of St Mary's Cathedral soil from Ireland was deposited amongst the foundations, highlighting an Irish connection, but unlike a window or stones this was buried under the ground and was wholly an action for the moment rather than for ever after. For those objects the Tasmanian Catholic Church does possess, it was and remains the sacramental purpose of the objects that is more important than their provenance. Whilst medieval objects were brought to Tasmania, they were part of a neo-gothic package of church-building, and the Australian neo-gothic was more about the craftsmanship of the present than that of the past, and about the beautification of liturgy, rather than something entirely reducible to performative medievalism.

And so the material fabric of the medieval world was not received with any particular fanfare during the height of the Tasmanian neo-gothic. Relics of Europe were certainly sources of design inspiration, and in Pugin's case some re-fabricated medieval artefacts found their way to the colonies as neo-gothic objects, but they were given no special prominence. Even when materially *in situ*, these particular medieval artefacts could be cognitively absent.[74] The window later adored as pre-Reformation was designed to illuminate the altar at Buckland, just as another window, also of John the Baptist, at the time of writing illuminates what may well be a Norman font.

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[73] Also, the advent of motor car touring certainly did not hurt.
[74] D'Arcens, *Old Songs in the Timeless Land*, p. 2.