

Queen's University Belfast  
Architectural Heritage Trail





## Introduction

Queen's University is one of the great architectural set pieces of Belfast, its imposing front façade instantly recognisable and often seen on bank notes and tourist posters and even serving as the backdrop for Northern Ireland news in Moscow. Queen's, however, is much more than just the original Lanyon Building. The campus contains hundreds of buildings, of which over 100 are now 'listed' as being of special architectural and historic merit. It is not just the buildings, but also the spaces between them - the quadrangle, the trees and broad avenues - that contribute so much to the character of this distinctive part of south Belfast.

This booklet aims to guide you around this architectural treasure trove. The main tour is around the original campus centred on the Lanyon Building, and the plaques (below) mark the best viewpoints. It should take no more than half an hour for a quick tour, though you may well want to linger and enjoy the ambience.

Three further short tours extending out from the main campus are also described for those who want to go further, and the bibliography at the back of this booklet provides sources for further reading.



Front Cover: Column detail in the old Library.  
Inside Front Cover: The old Library cupola.

## Message from the Vice-Chancellor

Queen's University Belfast plays a pivotal role in Northern Ireland through its commitment to education and research, and through its direct contribution to the cultural, social and economic development of the region.

Its role at the heart of its community it serves is underpinned by its strong sense of place at the centre of Belfast's first conservation area and its responsibilities as the custodian of an impressive estate which defines the south of this great Victorian city.

The University has over 250 buildings, more than 100 of which are listed as being of special architectural or historical interest.

Queen's is committed both to protecting the city's historic fabric, on which it has spent more than £30 million in conservation projects in recent years, and to investing in Northern Ireland's built heritage for future generations.

Major building schemes such as the new Library Project, due for completion in 2009, and the £44 million Elms Village development will enhance the local environment in the future as the Lanyon Building has done for more than 150 years.

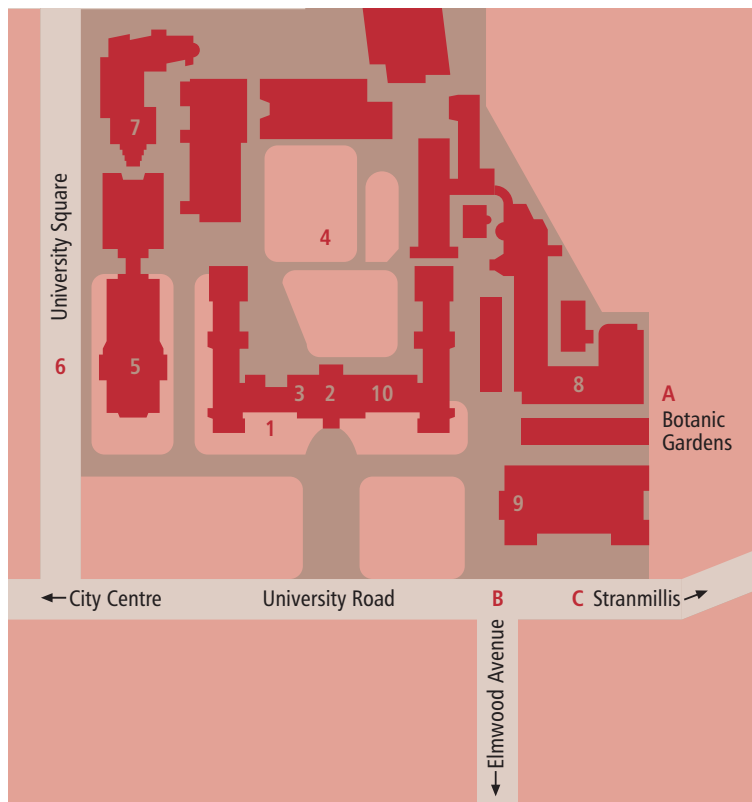
We very much welcome the publication of this engaging and readable leaflet, written by award-winning architect and Queen's graduate Dawson Stelfox, which provides a detailed insight into some of the treasures of the University's built estate.

I hope that you find it of interest and I extend my best wishes for an enjoyable and informative tour of Queen's.

## Message from the Director of Estates, Queen's University Belfast

I am delighted to echo the sentiments of Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Gregson in welcoming you to the Queen's estate. As this booklet clearly demonstrates, this estate has been built up over a century and a half and the buildings represent several architectural styles, from the dramatic Gothic of the Lanyon Building to the international style 1960s Ashby building.

Queen's, however, is not a museum, but a vibrant modern 21st century university with some 24,000 students. We are currently engaged on a major capital development programme, the aim of which is to create a campus that will be the envy of our peers nationally and internationally. The ongoing story of the Queen's estate, outlined in this booklet, focuses on our commitment to preserving the past and our confidence in the future.





# 1 The Lanyon Building

The centrepiece and the enduring symbol of Queen's University is the original building completed in 1849 and now known as the Lanyon Building after its architect, the renowned Sir Charles Lanyon. The then Queen's College was established, along with colleges in Cork and Galway, under Peel's Irish Colleges Act of 1845. A site in the southern suburbs of the rapidly expanding city was chosen, close to the Botanic Gardens which had been laid out in 1841. Charles Lanyon, then County Surveyor of Antrim and already a well-established architect, was chosen to design the new college. His design, borrowing from the general Gothic and Tudor character of the great medieval universities, and in particular from Magdalen College, Oxford, reflected the ethos of the age where architecture used historical associations to create an instant authority and presence. The soft red brick and sandstone mellowed quickly to create a timeless pedigree and the long west facing front elevation conveyed a size and status reflective of the ambitions of this new establishment.

The building tenders came in 30 per cent over budget and Lanyon was forced to make savings, mainly by removing significant amounts of fine detail to the elevations. These are recorded in detail on the elegant drawings of the time, which were largely prepared by Lanyon's young assistant William Henry Lynn, who went on to leave his own mark on the University over many years. The College was almost finished in August 1849 when Victoria and Albert made their only visit to Belfast, and it finally opened in December the same year.

The war memorial in front of the building shows a winged Victory cradling a dying soldier, designed by Sir Thomas Brock and executed by F Arnold in 1923.

1. The viewpoint chosen by Lanyon for his original perspectives.
2. Buttress cap with crocketing and ball stop ends.
3. The soaring central tower is the dominant feature.
4. The rich articulation and detail of the main façade.
5. Angels guard the entrance portal heralding wisdom and virtue within.





## 2 The Lanyon Building – Entrance Hall

The central entrance hall, or 'Black and White' hall as it has become known, was originally intended to have a large traceried window and doorway on the east wall, leading to the planned examination hall projecting into the middle of the quadrangle. The hall was an early victim of the budget cuts. In the event, a much simpler version was installed, which was unglazed at the time of the opening, but is now filled with a great stained glass window. This was designed in 1939 by J E Nuttgens, but not installed until after the Second World War. Its inscription reads: "This window is dedicated to the memory of all Queensmen and Queenswomen who having served their generation have fallen asleep. Their epitaph is graven not on stone but on the hearts of men."

Doors lead out from the cloisters and the quadrangle at one end and, at the other, into the Great Hall and the Visitors' Centre (designed in 1995 by Twenty-two over Seven, architects) and to the grand staircase leading to the Canada Room and The Naughton Gallery.

The central statue of Galileo, by Pio Fedi, was installed in the hall in 2001 as part of the restoration of the adjacent Great Hall.



1. The entrance tower, modelled on Magdalen College, Oxford.
2. The Nuttgens window reproducing the elevation in stained glass.
3. Galileo deep in thought as the focal point of the Entrance Hall.



# 3 The Lanyon Building – Canada Room and The Naughton Gallery

The north wing of the main façade was originally occupied by lecture rooms and a museum, but, as the University expanded, this was gradually taken over for administrative functions. The completion of the new Administration building in 1975 on the east side of the quadrangle provided the opportunity to refurbish the north wing. This was carried out in 1986 by architect Robert McKinstry, who created a new Council Chamber and a reception room, known as the Canada Room, at first floor level. In order to enhance and dignify the entrance to these important spaces, McKinstry moved a grand staircase from the south side of the entrance hall and formed a tall, top lit shaft rising the full height of the building. The staircase returns around a broad half-landing, dominated by Cherith McKinstry's fine painting of idealised student life, leading to the gallery over the entrance hall. To the north of this is the Canada Room, with its specially designed maple leaf motif in the light fittings, and beyond this, the double-height Council Chamber with the original Lanyon roof trusses. The Council Chamber is also dominated by a large painting. This work, by Michelle Rogers, is entitled "Women Emerging from the Shadows", and celebrates the past and future contributions and achievements of women at Queen's.

To the south side of the gallery is a reception space, formed out of a previously existing staircase, leading to the Naughton Gallery, which was created in 2001 by Consarc Conservation, architects, as part of the Great Hall restoration. It occupies a long narrow space over the cloister, formed in 1904-5 by Robert Cochrane, which formerly housed storage and service areas. It makes a delightful gallery, flooded with light and a perfect setting for the University's art collection and touring exhibitions.

1. The Naughton Gallery.
2. Entrance stair and Cherith McKinstry painting.
3. Maple leaf light in the Canada Room.
4. The rich decoration of the Canada Room.



## 4 The Quadrangle

The quadrangle is the great central space of the campus, with a remarkable homogeneity despite being the product of a century of building.

Only a short section of the south wing of the Lanyon Building is part of the original design, marked now by the diaper brickwork '1848' date. In the centre of the south side is the 'old' Physics building with its tower and passageway, designed by W H Lynn in 1911, reflecting the Tudor Gothic of the original building. This contains a plaque with the arms of the Royal University of Ireland, the date 1881 marking when Queen's became a constituent part. It was only in 1933, to a design by W A Forsythe, that the middle section of the south wing connected the earlier blocks to create a continuous façade. All three sections are distinctly different and representative of their time, yet all blend together to create a mellow and distinctive character.

The north wing of the Lanyon Building was added by John McGeagh in 1951, with the first floor oriel window only added in 1963, again in a historicist style designed to blend with the original building. This is very much in contrast to what the same architect designed for the Whitla Hall and the new Library, but as with the earlier additions, the overall ambience of the quadrangle was maintained.

By the early twentieth century, the north and east sides of the quadrangle had been completed in a variety of traditional styles. These buildings were subsequently demolished to make way for the Peter Froggatt Centre (Social Sciences, 1966, by Donald Shanks of the Ulster Architects Partnership) and the Administration building (1975 by Cruickshank and Seward). Despite the very modern style of these buildings, their low height and use of red brick tradition maintain the scale and enclosure of the quadrangle. In the southeast corner, the recent Seamus Heaney Library (1996 by Knox and Markwell) adds a further layer to the composition.

1. The east façade of the Lanyon Building with central Entrance Hall. To the left The Naughton Gallery is over the cloisters, to the right is the Visitors' Centre, Canada Room and Council Chamber
2. The north wing of the main building, added by John McGeagh in 1951.
3. The Peter Froggatt building, built 1966 and recently refurbished.







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## 5 The Old Library

It was not long after the completion of the original building in 1849 that the effects of the budget cutbacks became evident and further accommodation was required. In 1865, William Henry Lynn from the firm of Lanyon, Lynn and Lanyon was appointed to design a library, the front section of which was constructed between 1866 and 1868 in a vibrant Ruskinian Gothic style. In 1911 it was extended to the east, also by Lynn, in a seamless transition with the distinctive cupola marking the join. As constructed, this library had the most marvellous open and galleried interior, almost chapel-like in its soaring proportions. In 1952 John McGeagh inserted an intermediate floor and in 1983 architects Twist and Whitley inserted a glass vaulted mezzanine and staircase into the upper floor, which mostly filled the vaulted space. Both insertions were to the detriment of the original space. The building of the new Library may give the opportunity to restore at least the upper floor, and open up again the rich detailing of the walls and roof. On the ground floor, in a now forgotten corner, is a Gothic plaque to Lynn, including the words "This is also a record of the fact that the original college buildings erected in 1846, which owed much to his professional skill were by his designs completed in 1913 on an extended scale for the new University of Belfast in the 85th year of his age".

After the College became a University in 1908, it embarked on a major programme of building works and Lynn won the open competition to lay out the quadrangle concept. Amongst his proposals was a new museum hall straddling the quadrangle, behind and parallel to the Lanyon Building.

1. Cupola and chimney in rich High Victorian detail.
2. The great west window flooding the Library with light.
3. The same window from the inside with the floor inserted in 1952.



## 6 University Square

The great terrace of University Square was not built by Queen's, but laid out as private residences and built in portions from 1848 to 1853, with numbers 1-3 following in 1870. The owner was Jane Gregg and the architect for the overall layout was, once again, Charles Lanyon. The development was advertised at the time as

"The Land adjoining Queen's College, having been judiciously laid out for building by Mr Lanyon, is to be let on lease. Early application is recommended as several Professors having already secured ground for Houses, the most desirable sites will be disposed of without reserve."

Lanyon was probably not involved in the detailed design, which was dictated by lease conditions designed to achieve the unified nature of the terrace. The recessed Doric porches, elegant proportions of the Georgian paned windows and warm red brick, combine to create the best formal terrace in Belfast, possibly Ulster. Most of the later variations of bays and dormers add to, rather than detract from, the overall composition. Most of the original railings were lost to the war effort, but surviving fragments have been used to provide the source for new railings and plinth walls along the entire terrace, as part of recent accessibility improvements.

Framing the view down University Square to the east is the Presbyterian Assemblies College, completed in 1853, again by Charles Lanyon. While never part of the University, it clearly fits in with the surrounding academic area. The flanking trees are also essential parts of the character of the street, and indeed of the whole Queen's setting.

1. Looking east, displaying homogeneity and variety.
2. Looking west, showing the sensitively inserted access ramps..





## 7 Music Department

In the northeast corner of the campus, at the end of University Square, is the School of Music, built in 1896 as the original Students' Union to a design by Robert Cochrane of the Board of Works in Dublin. It continues the Tudor style of the original buildings and was extended by Lynn in 1911-13 in a similar style. The Dining Room (now the Harty Room) was added in 1932-33 to a design by W A Forsyth (consultant architect to the National Trust) in a distinctly different, but still historical Tudor style. The central feature is the oak hammer beam roof, one of the finest of its type in Ireland. This was the last of the buildings at Queen's to respect the style of the original design and a series of undistinguished modern buildings now predominate to the east of the main campus. These are soon to be replaced by a major new Library, to designs by the American architectural firm Shepley, Bulfinch Richardson & Abbot (SBRA).

1. The hammerbeam roof of the Harty Room.
- 2., 3. Fifty years after the original building, there is still a remarkable continuity of style.



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## Physics Building

Moving back through the quadrangle and through the passageway of the south tower of the 'old' Physics building, it can be seen that the distinctive entrance tower of the 'new' Physics building is centrally aligned. Designed by John McGeagh in 1955 in a modern style, it was not constructed until 1958 and then opened in 1962. It was recently refurbished in 2004 by Sheppard Robson, architects. This is a large building, simply detailed but with good massing and a wonderful stairway in the entrance tower. Although distinctively different from the original buildings, and the prevailing Tudor detailing of practically every other building constructed right up until the 1930s, the red brick and stone detailing and the relatively low heights allow it to remain respectful, with a quiet grandeur.



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1. The dramatic entrance tower with the elegant and daring staircase.
2. Horizontal, severe and sparse of decoration but still respectful in scale and materials.





## 9 Whitla Hall

The neighbouring Sir William Whitla Hall is much more prominently located and, when built, was of such a strikingly modern design that it must have been quite a shock to those used to the prevailing Gothic conformity. The Whitla Hall is the most notable twentieth century addition to the campus, designed in 1936 and started in 1939, although not completed until after the war in 1949. It is the work of John McGeagh, and the most successful of his many contributions to the University. In 1933 he was a young Belfast architect who attracted the attention of the Vice-Chancellor, Dr Fredrick Ogilvie, and it was seemingly Ogilvie who promoted the stylistic change. Because of his relative inexperience, McGeagh was allowed to appoint a consultant – Edward Maufe of London – with whom he also later collaborated on the Geology building in Elmwood Avenue. Despite the strikingly modern design, with clean and angular forms, the use of a warm red brick and of stone dressings blends well with the original buildings. The almost Georgian proportions and detailing of the Whitla Hall create a very subtle bridge between crisp Modernism and the historical style of the older buildings. The interior of the Hall is also of a very fine quality and includes reliefs by Gilbert Bayes, who also sculpted the bust of Sir William Whitla that is incorporated into the western elevation. The building was awarded the Ulster Architecture Medal by the Royal Institute of British Architecture (RIBA) in 1950.

Recently, the front entrance steps have been redesigned and ramps incorporated to facilitate disabled access. These revisions have maintained the linear horizontality of the original design.

1. Sir William Whitla appropriately depicted on the University Road elevation.
2. Every detail, down to the door knobs, was designed as a consistent and elegant composition, reflecting the spirit of the age.
3. The clean modern aesthetics combined with elegant relief panels in the entrance hall.
4. Modernism comes to Queen's with horizontal emphasis and severe symmetry breaking the asymmetrical, highly decorative traditions of the original building.

# 10 The Great Hall

Returning along the west front of the Lanyon Building, there are glimpses through the tall traceried windows of the most dramatic space in the University, the Great Hall. Lanyon took as his source the medieval great halls of England and the Oxbridge colleges, following the strict precedents of the raised dais, oriel window, fireplace for the top table, and a screened passage at the opposite end. These plans fell victim to the original budget cuts; Lanyon's planned gallery was never built and the panelling remained modest, the latter not helped by later redecorations. All of this changed in 2000 with the restoration of the Great Hall by Consarc Conservation, architects. The floor and dais were replaced and the oriel window unblocked. New pitch pine panelling and a screened passage with a gallery above, the replacement of the missing end trusses, and the comprehensive redecoration and installation of a new lighting system, have all combined to create a warm, powerful and theatrical space at the heart of the University. More recently, the restored organ from Christchurch (where Sir Charles and Lady Lanyon used to worship) has been installed in the gallery. The wall above the fireplace contains a bronze plaque in memory of Thomas Hamilton, first President of the University, and above this the interesting copy of Titian's 'St Peter the Martyr' by James Atkins.

The restoration received an RIBA Award in 2001 in recognition of the quality of the restoration and the rejuvenation of the space.

1. The oriel window, lighting the dais and top table.
2. The Titian copy dominates the fireplace wall behind the dais.
3. The rich pitch pine panelling as a backdrop for the sculpture and art of the University.
4. The ornate trusses now more visible because of the specially made light fittings.





## Tours in the Wider Queen's Area

The Queen's campus extends far beyond its original site, extending up the Stranmillis Road and into Elmwood Avenue. Queen's, however, is also part of a wider landscape and the following pages describe three short tours exploring the architectural character of the area. The University is at the start of the 'Malone ridge', good dry building land along the line of the original Belfast-Dublin Road. This, and the University's presence, created a major building boom in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This was driven by the need for housing and churches, schools and social facilities soon followed.

These tours are not marked with plaques. The Botanic Gardens is owned and managed by Belfast City Council. The Palm House, Tropical Ravine and the Ulster Museum are all open free of charge. The Queen's buildings in Elmwood Avenue and Stranmillis Road are not open, except by appointment.

1. The monumental Stranmillis Road façade of the David Keir building.
2. Elmwood Church at the corner of University Road and Elmwood Avenue.
3. The Sonic Arts building in Cloreen Park.
4. The Ashby Institute tower.
5. Classicism meets Brutalism at the Ulster Museum.





## A Botanic Gardens

The Botanic Gardens were established in 1829 by the Belfast Botanic and Horticultural Society and so predated the University. The entrance gates and piers were designed by William Batt in 1875 and the great statue of the famous physicist, William Thompson – Lord Kelvin, dominates the entrance. The statue is by Albert Bruce Joy of Dublin, on a pedestal designed by Richardson and Gill of London.

The iconic building in the Gardens is the Palm House. The two side wings date from 1839 and are the work of the master ironworker, Richard Turner of Dublin. They represent the earliest use of curved glass in the world, predating both Kew and Glasnevin. The great central dome was added in 1852, designed by Young of Edinburgh. The Palm House was restored in 1983.

The Tropical Ravine was added in 1886, as a fernery, by William Batt and was doubled in length in 1900 and re-roofed in 1980.

The Ulster Museum on the southern side of the park was the result of a competition in 1914, won by James Cunningham Wynnes of Edinburgh, and built between 1924-29. It makes a strong, heavily formal, neo-Classical statement. The building was extended dramatically, though somewhat brutally, between 1963-71 following a further competition won by Francis Pym of London.



1. The elegant main façade of the Palm House.
2. Side wings of 1839 and the central dome of 1852.

## B Elmwood Avenue

The first major expansion outside of the original University campus took place between Elmwood Avenue and Fitzwilliam Street, running between the Lisburn Road and the Malone Road. The developments started at the Lisburn Road end with the Agriculture, now the Geosciences, building of 1928. It was designed by the Ministry of Finance, whose chief architect was R Ingleby Smith, but it is thought that the detail was probably the responsibility of one of his young architects, T F O Ripplingham, who also designed the additional storey added in 1952. This building was the start of a grand 'Beaux Arts' plan for this area, exemplified by the Geology building, which was designed by John McGeagh in 1949 and opened in 1954. This grand plan, and indeed the Geology building, were never completed to the intended design.

At the Malone Road end, the handsome terrace of seven houses, known as Queen's Elms and designed by Thomas Jackson in 1859, was bought by Queen's in 1920 and converted to student housing in 1936. Queen's demolished this terrace in 1963 to make way for the generally unloved Students' Union building of 1967, designed by Ostick and Williams.

In the late 1990s plans were prepared for a major new complex to replace the Union building. This became known as Lanyon II, but the project was abandoned at an early stage. This, and the equally regrettable demolition of Lanyon's Deaf and Dumb Institute at the end of Elmwood Avenue to make way for the Medical Biology Centre, was the catalyst for the formation of the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society by a group of people concerned at the loss of such fine buildings. One fine building which remains is the Elmwood Presbyterian Church (now the Elmwood Hall) which was designed by John Corry in 1859 and opened in 1862. It is one of Ulster's best High Victorian designs – an Irish version of a Lombard Gothic church. At the Lisburn Road end is another fine church, All Souls Non Subscribing Presbyterian Church, which is an early Perpendicular design of Scrabo stone with a tower and oaken porch.

- 1., 2. The modern entrance to the old Geology building partially completes the unrealised complex.
3. Elmwood Church.
4. The Agriculture building, now Geosciences.







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## Stranmillis Road

The great post-war expansion of the University continued in the triangle between the Malone and Stranmillis Roads, bounded by Chlorine Gardens to the south. This started with the David Keir building (for Engineering, Chemistry and Biology), named after the eminent Vice-Chancellor. It was designed by Dr Thomas Lodge of Lanchester and Lodge, who were appointed in 1950, and the building opened in 1959. This is a very large building, with the scale difficult to appreciate except from the air. Its design is traditional neo-Georgian, but with contemporary detailing that sets it in period.

Immediately adjoining, and strikingly different in its bold modern design and massing, is the Ashby building. This was designed in 1960 by Manchester architects, Cruickshank and Seward, and finished in 1965. This is one of the finest modern buildings in Ireland and, when first built, the tall white tower and the low-rise entrance pavilion must have had a dramatic impact on the red brick terraces of Stranmillis.

Continuing down Chlorine Gardens, the system built Science Library by Twist and Whitley of Cambridge was completed in 1969 and won an RIBA award in 1970. The mundane Architecture building is also located in Chlorine Gardens. On the Malone Road, turn back right towards the rear façade of the David Keir building and there, tucked up a side road, is the new Sonic Arts Research Centre. The Centre, designed by Hall Black Douglas in 2003, is renowned for its innovative audio research facilities.

1. The Sonic Arts building, an innovative facility with decorative brickwork.
2. Staircase in David Keir building.
3. The regular purity of the Ashby tower.
4. Central Stranmillis Road entrance of the David Keir building.
5. Internal view of central staircase.



## Acknowledgements

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Inside Rear Cover: Column detail in the old Library.





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