

# BUILDERS, BRICKS AND MORTAR BOARDS

## The Architecture of Queen's University 1845-2005

### ESTABLISHMENT, 1845 - 1925

Charles Lanyon is renowned as the architect of the iconic main building at Queen's, although the drawings were executed by his young assistant, William Henry Lynn. Lynn's later career included the design of the library, the old Physics building and the buildings which created the harmonious central space that survived until the 1960s. This was a remarkable record over a sixty-year period.

After Lanyon and Lynn, other architects continued the tradition. These included Robert Cochrane of Dublin, who designed the Students' Union and the English architect, W A Forsythe, who added the dining hall (now the Harty Room) and completed the south wing of the courtyard. The vision, shared by architects and University alike, was that the Tudor Gothic architectural style, reflecting the medieval foundations and long history of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, was central to the credibility of the new college. It was also the appropriate metaphor for a seat of learning, in the same way as Florentine palaces were the models for banks and the great medieval Gothic cathedrals inspired Victorian church design.



The splendid façade of the Lanyon Building, as enduring an image for students today as it was for the original students in 1849.



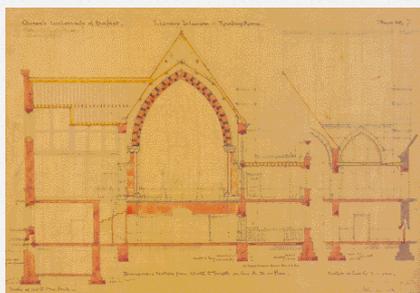
Lynn's library, a High Victorian gem, with University Square beyond, marred only by the library tower rising behind.



The intricate hammer beam roof of the Harty Room, by W A Forsythe, 1932-3, an evolution of the historic tradition rather than a break from it.



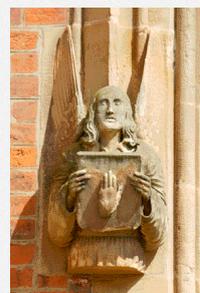
This aerial view of Queens in 1952 shows the remarkable stylistic homogeneity of the main campus following Lynn's expansion masterplan of 1911, which survived until the 1960s.



Lynn's drawings of the library, works of art in themselves and also the working tools used to create the art of architecture.



Gargoyles and polychrome brickwork details from the vibrant and robust High Victorian library.



Angels flanking the front entrance herald wisdom and righteousness within.



Staff and students celebrate Graduation Day c. 1886 at the front entrance.



The erosion of stonework adds to the sense of history which Lanyon no doubt would have found in keeping with his original intent.



The Library cupola gives some sense of the complexity of the original lanterns planned for the main building but omitted in budget cuts.

# BREAKING WITH TRADITION, 1926 - 1959

This Tudor Gothic dominance was finally broken in 1926, firstly by the neo-Georgian Agriculture Building (now Geosciences) on Elmwood Avenue and then by the Sir William Whitla Hall, started in 1939 although not completed until after the Second World War. Vice-Chancellor Dr Fred Ogilvie broke with tradition and appointed the young John McGeagh, with Edward Maufe of London as consultant. They created a truly modern building in its severity and purity, with flat roof and bold massing, softened by brick and stone and fine sculpture. The building was awarded a Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) award in 1950.

John McGeagh was the leading architect for new buildings at Queen's for the next ten years. These included the Geology building (1949-54) in Elmwood Avenue, and the new Physics building (1955-62) opposite the south wing of the Lanyon building.

The most ambitious commission of this period was the David Keir building, designed by the English firm, Lanchester and Lodge. This neo-Georgian building of 1950-59, sited between the Stranmillis Road and the Malone Road, carried on the tradition introduced with the Whitla Hall.

This was a period of great expansion for the University, and although there was a distinct break with the Tudor Gothic tradition, the brick and stone character of the new buildings fitted in comfortably with the domestic scale of the surrounding red brick suburbs. All that quiet deference was soon to be shattered.



The monumental neo-Georgian Modernism of the David Keir building – traditional materials but contemporary massing.



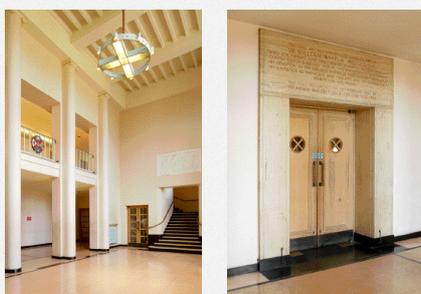
The severe horizontality of the Whitla Hall, softened by rich decorative detail and warm materials. John McGeagh's best work in his long association with the University.



John McGeagh's Physics building is even more severe, but with the overall bulk carefully reduced in scale by layered massing of the various elements.



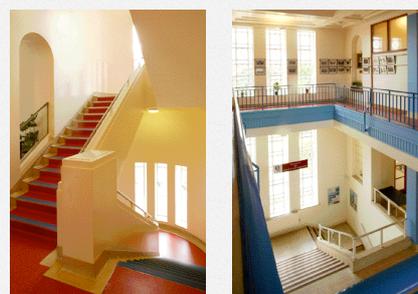
The Stranmillis Road façade of the David Keir Building, the horizontality relieved by the central entrance and staircase.



Whitla Hall entrance hall – exquisite, bespoke detailing where every element is a considered part of the composition, consciously creating something new and fresh in the context of a campus which up until then had taken a historicist approach.



The cantilevered staircase of the entrance hall, aligned with the passageway through to the quadrangle, is the Physics building's most distinctive feature.



The main architectural events are the staircase and galleries punctuating the teaching areas with light filled spaces.

# INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCES, 1960 - 1980

The dawn of the 1960s witnessed new influences being brought to bear on the University's architecture, most notably with the Ashby building (1960-5) on the Stranmillis Road, the Microbiology building (1961-5) at the Royal Victoria Hospital, and the Medical Biology Centre (1968) on the Lisburn Road.

The Ashby building, by Cruickshank and Seward of Manchester, is a gleaming white tower set against low pavilions within landscaped grounds, contrasting strongly with the conservative David Keir building built only a few years previously. It is crisply detailed and the undoubted quality of both design and construction has created a very modern building that adds to the overall architectural character of the area, despite being completely different from its surroundings.

The Microbiology building, by Sir Hugh Casson and Neville Condor, is one of the most striking modern buildings in Belfast; it is starker and less approachable than the Ashby and such uncompromising modernity would perhaps prove less acceptable today.

John McGeagh moved away from the neo-Georgian style to the more modern forms of the new library bookstack (1962-67). The Social Sciences building (now the Peter Froggatt Centre), designed by Donald Shanks and other Ulster

architects in 1962-66, and the Administration building of 1971 (Cruickshank and Seward) replaced the Tudor Gothic buildings of the north and east sides of the quadrangle. The use of red brick softens the impact of these modern buildings with their strong horizontal emphasis.

The University's first venture into industrialised buildings was the Science Library in Chlorine Gardens in 1965, which used the SEAC system to a design by Twist and Whitley of Cambridge. The building gained a RIBA award in 1970 and, despite first impressions of an unremarkable structure, it has a certain presence and is deftly placed in a sloping well-wooded site.



Casson and Condor's Microbiology building at the Royal Victoria Hospital, possibly too severe for today's taste but a powerful statement of functional form and the move to mechanised building components.



The Ashby tower remains one of the best high rise buildings in Belfast, a testament to its quality of design and construction.



The contrast between the terraced streets and the Ashby tower is only exceeded by that between the construction techniques of the 1960s and today.



The Science Library under construction in 1965, a strange cuckoo in a red brick nest.

# CONSERVATION

Queen's fully appreciates its architectural heritage and takes active steps to conserve and celebrate it. The demolition of Queen's Elms, a terrace of seven houses designed by Thomas Jackson, to make way for the Students' Union (1966), and of Lanyon's Deaf and Dumb Institute to build the Medical Biology Centre (1968), is now generally regretted. The outcry at the time led to the formation of the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society.

Queen's was designated as the first Conservation Area in Northern Ireland in 1987 and the University now owns over 100 listed buildings. This rich architectural heritage has created a unique central focus in what is a large and dispersed University campus. Stewardship of such historic buildings also presents a challenge in meeting changing academic, as well as statutory, needs. The University has responded sympathetically by replacing poor quality buildings with new, more imaginative structures and by sensitively adapting and restoring the listed buildings.

The key conservation projects to date have been in University Square and the Lanyon Building, particularly the restoration of the Great Hall. This project, and the reordering of the south wing to create The Naughton Gallery, were completed in 2000 to designs by Consarc Conservation,

architects. It won an RIBA award in 2001, in recognition of the transformation of a somewhat rundown space into a magnificent banqueting hall at the heart of the University. The Canada Room and Council Chamber (Robert McKinstry 1983), the Visitors' Centre (Twenty-two over Seven 1995) and Lanyon north (Hall Black Douglas 2002) are all sensitive reworkings of the original building, introducing contemporary features and themes, yet respecting the quality of Lanyon's original design.

The requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act have also offered challenges in relation to the provision of universal access to, and within, the University's historic buildings. The Whitla Hall, University Square, the Lanyon building and the David Keir building are all good examples of sensitive adaptations. Queen's is now regarded by the Environment and Heritage Service as an exemplar of good practice in access design.



The Great Hall, finished at last to the quality Lanyon's building deserves and might have achieved had it not been for budget restrictions.



The Great Hall before restoration. Pink and white panelling, closed in oriel window, loss of dais, a revolving door and many other indignities marred the original space.



Restoring the angels and trusses, allowed the craftsmanship of the Great Hall roof to be appreciated.



The oriel window re-opened, lighting the dais and top table.



Lanyon's Deaf and Dumb Institute which faced Elmwood Avenue across the Lisburn Road. Inconceivable today that such a building would be demolished.



Jackson's 'Queens Elms', the original student accommodation demolished in 1966, prompting the formation of UAHS and the start of 'listing' in Northern Ireland.



The warm richness of the Canada Room with its maple leaf light fittings.



Cherith McKinstry's fine painting dominates the relocated main staircase to the Canada Room and The Naughton Gallery.

## ASPIRATIONS, 1980 - 2005

The University continues to expand and at present is in the middle of a major capital development programme.

Early aspirations for a Beaux Arts complex on Elmwood Avenue never came to fruition; the Students' Union (Ostick and Williams 1966) was built instead. The Union building was to have been replaced in 2000 by Lanyon II, an ambitious scheme won in competition by Dixon Jones with Building Design Partnership, but the project was never realised.

The Queen's Elms halls of residence site on the Malone Road was laid out in the late 1960s and '70s, in a series of tower blocks designed by Cruickshank and Seward. More recently, as standards of student accommodation have changed, the site has been largely redeveloped by Roger McMichael and the Robinson Patterson Partnership (2000-2005), with modern low-rise buildings creating a well-landscaped residential village of very high quality. The first phase of the redevelopment, Beveridge Hall, was recognised by an award from the Royal Society of Ulster Architects (RSUA) in 2000.

Another new building, the McClay Research Centre for Pharmaceutical Sciences, was awarded an RSUA Design Award in 2002.

The new Sonic Arts Research Centre in Cloreen Park by Hall Black Douglas (2002) is a recent addition to the campus, but



The Elms Student Village – originally dominated by the high rise towers of the 60s and 70s, gradually being redeveloped as modern low-rise buildings in a mature parkland setting.

sympathetic to its context. The musical notes carved into the brickwork express the function of the building, while the use of red brick softens its character and links it with the adjoining David Keir building.

The new Library commission was won by Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbot following a limited design competition, which also included submissions from Foster Associates and Scott Tallon Walker. It is currently at design stage, but the montages and models in the exhibition show how it will relate to the campus and the adjoining Botanic Gardens.

Today there is genuine public engagement in the planning process and more opportunity for constructive dialogue and for the general public to influence public architecture. With a significant investment such as the new Library project (£44m), it is important to engage the interested public. What ambitions are appropriate for Queen's in the 21st century and what role can architecture play? Queen's is nearly 160 years old and is implementing an ambitious programme for future development. Investment in its built infrastructure and a commitment to lasting quality will be guiding principles in guaranteeing that it is commissioning the listed buildings of the future.



The clean, cool, machine style of the McClay Research Centre by Todd Architects (2002) reflects the high tech advanced research facilities it provides.



The modern and innovative Sonic Arts Research Centre (SARC), 2002.



SARC provides a flexible test bed for acoustic research.



Musical notation embodied in the brickwork, linking form and use.



The new Library represents the biggest architectural challenge and opportunity for many years - a balance of contextualism and contemporary expression?