

04 The Work of Many Hands: Crafting the Built Environment

Christine Casey

What is the value of architecture and craftsmanship for Irish society? Why should we maintain and preserve our historic buildings? For many people, architecture may seem a thing apart, and yet of all creative endeavours it has the highest impact on our everyday lives – we dwell, we work, we are educated and we enjoy our leisure and recreation in buildings, not to mention that every time we take a walk or look out the window we're confronted by our built heritage.

While listed buildings are protected by law, much of their value remains at risk and the historic built environment continues to be eroded. Histories, local, national and international are embedded in the buildings of Irish cities, towns and villages, while the distinctive character of Ireland's geology dictates the texture and palette of its architecture. Unlocking these narratives enriches understanding and increases awareness of architecture's value and meaning.

For three decades my research has focused on documenting, analysing and raising awareness of architecture's value and significance - whether in sumptuous Georgian interiors or in the modest but impeccably crafted rubble walls of field or farmyard. My work builds on a distinguished tradition of architectural history at Trinity, established in the 1970s by Edward McParland and Roger Stalley.

Dublin and Europe – The greatest challenge of my career was the documentation of Dublin city, a mammoth decade-long task supported by a state-funded research team, which produced a comprehensive reference work for the architecture of the city, published by Yale University Press in 2005 and widely used by architects, planners, conservationists and the general public. This involved visiting every street and square in the city, photographing, sketching and consolidating manuscript and published materials for all buildings of note. *Dublin* laid the ground work for analysis of the city's Georgian houses and their remarkable plasterwork interiors and led to an absorption with materials and craftsmanship in architecture. Why did Georgian Dublin have such opulent interiors? This initial question led to an exploration of Ireland's place within the wider European context. In the absence of an existing consolidated study, *Dublin* provided the platform to produce an analysis of the entire European decorative phenomenon in *Making magnificence: architects, stuccatori and the eighteenth-century interior* (Yale University Press, 2017).

Making Victorian Dublin – The fundamental role of materials, craftsmanship and industry in fashioning buildings of all periods has not received due attention

and much remains to be known about the quarrying and stone-carving communities who created Ireland's richly decorated Victorian buildings. The spectacular Museum Building of Trinity College Dublin built in the 1850s is the focus of an Irish Research Council New Horizons interdisciplinary grant awarded in 2017 which seeks to explore the interface between geology, industry and building in Victorian Dublin. I am leading the research team, together with geologist Dr Patrick Wyse Jackson; our aim is to achieve a dynamic new interpretation of historic architecture, privileging materials and craftsmanship, and disseminated through a digital reconstruction of the building's original appearance and an illustrated book. Polished stone from all over Ireland was experimented with in this building and opened the way for a colourful new architecture which replaced the restricted palette of the Georgian period and enlivened every town and parish in the country.

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Christine Casey received her BA from UCD and her PhD from Trinity, where she is now Associate Professor in Architectural History. She has held research fellowships in Britain, Europe and the United States and has been a board member of several national organisations for architectural heritage. She is the author of multiple books on Irish and European architecture. She is currently PI on an IRC New Horizons interdisciplinary project focused on Trinity's Museum Building as an exemplar of Dublin's Victorian building industry.

Contact: caseych@tcd.ie

TOP AND BOTTOM – My research demonstrates the significance of craftsmanship in architecture, whether in sumptuous Georgian interiors such as the Saloon in Carton House (bottom image) or in the modest but impeccably made buildings such as the rural house in Co. Louth (top image)

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OFFICE OF THE PROVOST

House 1, Trinity College Dublin
Dublin 2, Ireland

–

T + 353 1 896 4362

E provost@tcd.ie

W www.tcd.ie

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