

# Architectural Trinity

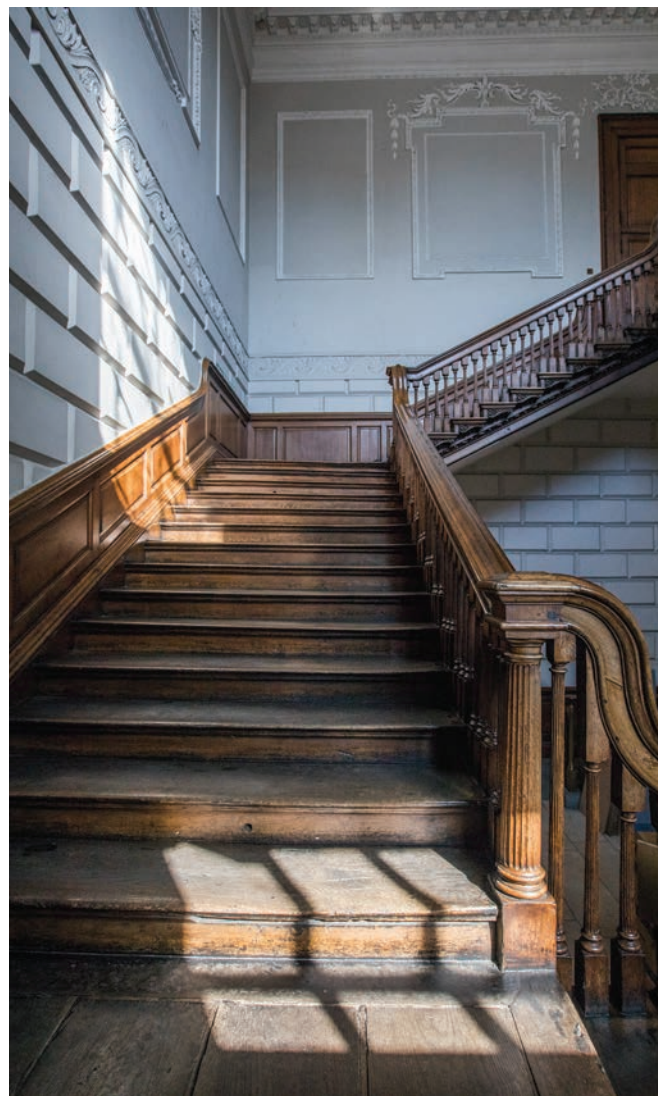
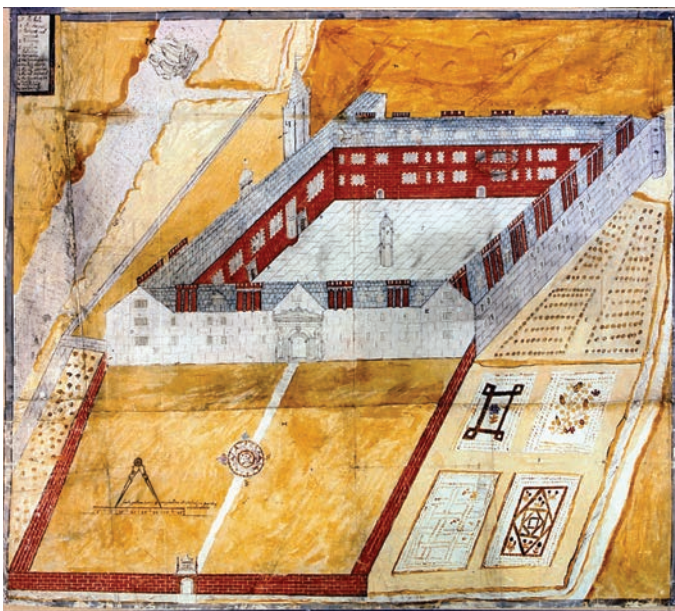
By Professor Christine Casey

A rare view of some of the University's unique architectural features.

**B**esides the familiar set-pieces of College Green and Front Square, the buildings of Trinity College Dublin are rich in lesser-known spaces and details of high quality and historical interest. Likewise, rare archival items throw light on the architecture of the original College and on ambitious, unrealised plans which are still echoed in the surviving 18th-century buildings. What type of buildings and grounds greeted the first occupants of Trinity in 1592? How did staff and students originally reach the library in the Long Room? Why is the oak-paved vestibule inside Front Gate such a substantial granite-walled octagon? What do the College and the Giants' Causeway have in common? Have we maintained the high standards in design and craftsmanship set by our forebears? Let us take a tour of Campus to answer these questions.

## 1592: AUGUSTINIAN MONASTERY

A rare birds-eye view of the original University buildings survives. This shows the Augustinian Monastery of All Hallows which was adapted for use by the new Trinity College Dublin in 1592. Typically this was a quadrangle with a chapel and dining hall in the north range and tall clustered chimneys of red brick which would have stood out against the eastern skyline of the expanding city. In summer, wafting into the quadrangle on the south-westerly breeze was the scent of roses, lilies and violets from the parterres of a garden which adjoined the buildings to the south-west near the site of the present Provost's House and its stables.



## 1732: OLD LIBRARY STAIRCASE

Principal access to the Long Room is by a concrete stair at the east end of the Old Library with egress through a cut in the floor towards the middle of the room. Alumni who have used the manuscripts reading room or the Henry Jones Room in the west pavilion will know that the original stairhall of the Old Library is among the most dramatic interiors in the University. Completed by Richard Castle, the stairhall has robust rustication to the walls like that of the later Provost's House and Public Theatre, and an elegant oak staircase with the low gradient and handrail characteristic of the early 18th-century.



## 1750s: REGENT HOUSE

The granite octagon inside Front Gate bears witness to grandiose but unrealised plans to raise a dome over the centre of the west front and minor domes over the terminal pavilions. The domed design is recorded in a rare contemporary broadside published by a County Clare architect seeking the commission for his own alternative design. While the base for the central dome and roofing of one pavilion were begun, plans were abruptly abandoned being considered old-fashioned by an "influential gentleman", so far unidentified, lately returned from the Grand Tour. A benefit of the jettisoned dome is the great double-height, dual-aspect space over the vestibule known as Regent House which is used for teaching, examinations and concerts. Recently refurbished, it will serve in summer as the starting point of the Trinity Visitor Experience. Its grandly scaled sash windows to College Green and Front Square render it one of Trinity's most atmospheric interiors.



## 1850s: MUSEUM BUILDING

Although it is the sustained achievement of its classical architecture and planning which renders Trinity such a significant university campus, the most influential and acclaimed building is one which departed from the classical canon in favour of more exotic exemplars. The Museum Building is celebrated as the first expression of Ruskinian or Venetian Gothic, an approach which favoured the round arch, expressive carving and polychrome stone. Designed by Deane and Woodward, it housed the geological and engineering museums and teaching facilities. A conscious and costly decision by Trinity to use native rather than imported marbles resulted in Dublin's most spectacular interior of the Victorian period. The great stairhall is approached through a lower vestibule and an arcaded screen containing columns of Connemara, Armagh and Cork 'marble'. The column of green Connemara Serpentine or 'Galway Green' in the stairhall screen is perhaps the finest specimen of Irish stone in the building.



## 1895 - 1995: PARSONS BUILDING

The high standard of design and craftsmanship established in the early modern period has been sustained into the present through strategic investment and the munificence of alumni. The Parsons laboratory at the east end of the campus provides our link to the Giants' Causeway as the main volume angled out over a granite-clad laboratory plinth is clad in black basalt, a unique incidence of this material in the University. It was designed by the Dublin firm of Grafton Architects who have since won international acclaim, including World Building of the Year Award in 2008 for their Bocconi University School of Economics in Milan and more recently the prestigious commission to design and direct the Venice Architecture Biennale of 2018.



## 1930s: LLOYD INSTITUTE

The Lloyd Institute of c.2000 by Cullen Payne, a twin building with the Nasr Institute, preserves a link to the past in two sculpted panels retained from the Dixon Memorial Hall of 1939 by F.G. Hicks. The stylised Portland stone sunken-relief figures, which now frame the portal of the Lloyd, represent nature and science and were carved by Wilfred Dudeney, an English sculptor who was assistant professor at the National College of Art in Dublin in 1938-39.

## 1960s: BERKELEY LIBRARY

The Berkeley Library celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2017 and a great deal has been written about its pioneering Brutalist design and the high craftsmanship of its concrete and glass detailing. Arguably the most thrilling corner in the College is the junction where the Berkeley meets the Museum Building and its bulk is cut away to create a thoroughfare to College Park. The patterning of the surface of the concrete walls of the building, known as formwork, is a joy to behold: vertical and horizontal bands of wood-grain patterned surface carefully calculated to echo the bespoke fir planks of the original shuttering into which the concrete was poured. This celebration of the process of making buildings was pioneered by Le Corbusier. In the Berkeley it was juxtaposed with Wicklow granite to create one of Ireland's most successful 20th-century buildings.





## 2003: USSHER ATRIUM, THE LIBRARY OF TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

The Ussher Library is sited between the Berkeley Library and Nassau Street with the park and the Arts Block on either side. The building design was a collaboration project between McCullough Mulvin Architects and KMD Architecture (formerly Keane Murphy Duff). A podium plaza was created between the Berkeley and James Ussher libraries. The interior of the Library is dominated by an atrium that spans the height of the building from the basement Journals Room through to the eighth storey. Glass-fronted balconies open on to the atrium from every level, permitting both light and air to circulate freely through the entire space. Throughout the building, the walls are of exposed concrete, however the areas immediately around the atrium from first floor level upwards are clad with a smooth finished timber giving a sheen to the atrium.



## 2010: TRINITY LONG ROOM HUB



Also designed by McCullough Mulvin Architects, the Trinity Long Room Hub is located in Trinity's historic Fellows Square. Perched on the end of the Arts Block, the building closes the Square and frames views to Front Square over the 1937 Reading Room. The building was conceived of as a powerhouse of ideas. The honeycomb granite surface is crisp and detailed to create deep window embrasures in the manner of a tower house. Internally walls are lined with walnut to create seats, desks and bookshelves. The building's striking modernity enters into an exciting dialogue with its classical surroundings and expresses the interaction between the past and the present that the arts and humanities enable and enact.

## 2018: OISÍN HOUSE



Photo: McCullough Mulvin Architects

Oisín House is currently being rebuilt on Pearse Street to provide 250 student rooms over a Health and Sports Centre and is due to be completed in 2019. Designed by McCullough Mulvin Architects, the form has been likened to a granite rock with an undulating stone roof folded and shaped, reflecting the mountains in distant view to the south and, at close quarters, a grouping of ordinary Georgian roofs glimpsed in the city. The architecture folds down to provide a more intimate context around the Printing House. Adjacent gables do not have windows, they will be moulded planes setting its classical temple architecture in a rocky landscape setting, allowing it to retain precedence in the view from New Square and the steps of the Berkeley Library.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christine Casey Ph.D. (1992), is a Professor in Architectural History at Trinity.

### PHOTOGRAPHY

Photos by Naoise Culhane Photography