IVRLA¹ RESEARCH REPORT
GEORGIAN DUBLIN: ARCHITECTURE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

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1. CONTEXT

The primary context for this project is the facilitation of access to archival holdings within UCD’s School of Art History and Cultural Policy. The project’s research collection makes available digitised photographs of Dublin’s Georgian buildings and streetscapes for teaching and research purposes. The chosen images constitute a selection from the School’s slide collection devoted to Irish architecture. Originally produced by staff members in response to pedagogical needs, this sub-set was compiled and catalogued specifically for the Irish Virtual Research Library and Archive (IVRLA) and focuses on the civic, domestic and ecclesiastical architecture of eighteenth-century Dublin. Photographed between 1978 and 2005, the selection presented here also documents patterns of urban redevelopment, the changing nature of historic conservation and the city’s evolving built environment.

2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

The School of Art History and Cultural Policy has created a digitised image database as part of the IVRLA project. Drawn from its extensive collection of 35mm slides, the database focuses on the public and private architecture of eighteenth-century Dublin. As a record of public and private buildings, streetscapes, and domestic interiors documented over a period of approximately thirty years, this collection is an important visual resource for research devoted to architecture and the built environment, the historic interior and decorative plasterwork, as well as broader interdisciplinary studies related to political, economic and

¹ The UCD Irish Virtual Research Library and Archive (IVRLA) is a major digitisation project which was undertaken by University College Dublin from 2005 to 2009. Material selected from UCD’s extensive resources of archival and rare material was digitised and catalogued before being made available from a single virtual location (http://ivrla.ucd.ie). This digitised material covers a wide range of humanities and social science disciplines and is arranged in curated collections which can be browsed, searched, bookmarked, or downloaded. In addition to the digitisation of existing UCD collections, the IVRLA conducted a series of demonstrator projects. The remit of these projects was to develop additional digital research resources and to present these in the form of an exhibition collection. Some of these projects incorporated existing IVRLA material but many generated new content which was inspired by the potential of digital resources. Consequently, the IVRLA and its demonstrator projects show how digital repositories can provide access to diverse archival research materials as well as challenging the ways in which we consider digital content and generate research in a digital environment. The IVRLA is a component of the UCD Humanities Institute of Ireland and is funded under the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLI) Cycle 3, administered by the Higher Education Authority.
cultural geographies. The project was undertaken in a six-month timeframe from July to December 2009. Instigated by Professor Kathleen James-Chakraborty, head of the School of Art History and Cultural Policy, the research and development of the project was undertaken by Dr Conor Lucey. Scanning and image correcting was undertaken by Carla Briggs, the slide curator at the School.

The intention was to make the School’s important collection of Irish material, specifically its images of early modern architecture, available for teaching and research purposes. It was decided that, given the limited timeframe available, it was best to work with material already available – namely the slide collection – rather than to produce new digital photography. The material digitised and catalogued for this research collection is a set of photographic slides of the architecture and built environment of eighteenth-century Dublin, extending to images of important public buildings (including the former Parliament House at College Green, the Royal Exchange, the Four Courts, and the Custom House), significant decorative interior schemes (principally documenting the extent and diversity of stuccowork ceilings in their domestic contexts), and general views of the city’s Georgian streetscape and residential set-pieces.

The database and image scanning have been undertaken to comply with international cataloguing and digitising standards respectively: a selection of two hundred images was digitised in the form of hi-resolution TIFF scans, and the corresponding metadata was compiled using the Thesaurus for Graphic Materials developed by the Library of Congress. Two separate collections were produced under the general heading “Georgian Dublin: architecture and the built environment”: namely, the “Domestic Architecture of Georgian Dublin” collection and the “Civic and Ecclesiastical Architecture of Georgian Dublin” collection. An important development for this pilot project is the subsequent collaboration with the ARTstor image hub, which is discussed further below.

3. DETAILED OUTPUT

Identification and Selection of Material

These first part of this six-month project involved the identification of original photography (i.e. those images created by former staff members, as opposed to that from books and other sources) and the preparation of a rudimentary database/catalogue in Microsoft Excel, which was limited to textual information gleaned from slide mounts. This preliminary investigation resulted in the identification of some 2,045 original slides of Irish
architecture. Of particular significance at this developmental stage was the fact that slides of Dublin’s built environment represented approximately fifty percent (960) of the entire total, something which, depending on the manner in which the project was advanced, could be either a potential strength or weakness of the slide collection.

Having removed those slides from already published and/or copyrighted sources, there was a marked inconsistency in terms of the representation of building types and distinct historical periods. This was more particularly a problem for the wider island of Ireland as the collection related to the School’s curricula where (as with any curriculum of Irish architectural history) Dublin’s eighteenth-century architecture is necessarily a significant component). Therefore the slide collection in its entirety was not in any way representative of the architecture or built environment of individual counties. Similarly, while many important buildings within the Dublin sub-set were well represented in terms of exteriors, interiors and construction/decorative details, others were far less rigorously documented; this was particularly notable for the architecture of the twentieth century and the period pre-1700. A further limitation was represented by the inconsistent quality of images in terms of composition, lighting and so on.

Despite these limitations, there was one particular area of architectural history that was comprehensively covered in this selection of images: that of Georgian Dublin. Given that the eighteenth-century represents the most significant period of the city’s architectural history, revealed through its legacy of spectacular public buildings and residential set-pieces, this selection will remain important for students and researchers of Irish and European architecture generally. Moreover, while the city’s most important eighteenth-century civic, ecclesiastical and domestic buildings are all, broadly speaking, very well represented (as discussed below), of related significance is the manner in which these particular images document changes to the urban contexts of individual buildings over a period of approximately thirty years. Some examples of how this represents an important research resource would include:

- Exteriors and interiors of early Georgian houses on Fownes Street: Since these photographs were taken an extensive programme of restoration work has been carried out on these important historic properties. These images would be useful for studies relating to contemporary urban redevelopment and city planning.
- Images and streetstapes of houses in Mountjoy Square, shown in various stages of dereliction and/or demolition: These slides represent important documentary evidence
for histories of conservation, economic recession and redevelopment, and the change in attitudes towards the city’s eighteenth-century urban fabric.

- Contextual views of the now-demolished Gasometer which, until it was taken down in the 1990s, terminated the view of the north side of Merrion Square and the vista from Fitzwilliam Place: these images record changes in the Georgian city’s urban scenography with specific links to political, economic and cultural geographies.

In addition to the slide collection’s comprehensive representation of the architecture of eighteenth-century Dublin, it was also clear that the allotted six-month time period represented a limitation in terms of the project’s scope. The pressure of the December 2009 deadline limited the time available for scanning and image correcting, as well as the research and preparation of textual metadata. For these reasons, it was decided that a Georgian Dublin sub-set represented the most feasible and pertinent research strand for this project.

**Project Work and Output**

The first step in the process was the scanning of the slides. This was undertaken by Carla Briggs (the School’s slide curator) to the digital resolution standards required by the IVRLA and output as TIFF files. It was agreed that preliminary textual information would then be recorded in a Microsoft Excel file, which was then converted into a FileMaker Pro database by the IVRLA team and returned to myself as researcher in order to complete further cataloguing and metadata fields.

The preparation and compilation of both images and metadata was conducted in direct consultation with the IVRLA professional team and I wish to acknowledge their significant assistance in this regard. In applying the standards of the *Thesaurus for Graphic Materials* (TGM) developed by the Library of Congress and used by the IVRLA, it was deemed necessary to occasionally add local detail within the database in order to adequately describe images specifically within the domestic architecture sub-set. For example, the TGM does not provide terms such as Rococo or Palladian, a restriction in terms of established search criteria for these academically-defined periods and/or topics. Specific local terms were added to the TGM template in two fields or headings: one was subjects (where terms such as Rococo, Palladian, and Dublin School – all critical to the study of Dublin’s Georgian architecture – were added) and the other was roles that are specific either to Ireland or this particular period.

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2 The standards for TIFF files require scanning at 24 bits per pixel in colour RPG with a resolution of 450 DPI. Further technical information on file formats and other standards can be found on the Workbook section of the IVRLA website (http://ivrla.ucd.ie).
(such as builder and stuccodore). This facilitates users, allowing them to search by these local subject headings and to understand the various roles involved in creating these buildings.

All the digitised and catalogued items are now accessible through the IVRLA website; although (as with all IVRLA material) they are stored in a database, the user accesses the list of images in each collection through their web browser and can select individual items to view the detailed image together with its associated cataloguing and contextual information. Two stand-alone, but related, databases were produced: “Domestic Architecture of Georgian Dublin” and “Civic and Ecclesiastical Architecture of Georgian Dublin.” Each separate collection was organised alphabetically by street name (“Domestic Architecture”) and building name (“Civic Architecture”). Descriptive information, together with additional notes where appropriate, has been included for each individual image to enhance the user’s understanding and to provide useful contextual information. This information was sourced from a variety of published texts and online sources, principally Christine Casey’s Dublin, The Buildings of Ireland Vol. III and the online Dictionary of Irish Architects.

Despite the variation in image quality (none of the images having been taken by professional photographers), the particular slides chosen were selected for their relative importance in terms of recording and documenting the building themselves as well as the city’s evolving built environment for the period from 1978 to 2005. In this respect they will appeal to instructors and students of planning, geography and conservation as well as of architectural history. The content may be broken down into the following four categories and corresponds to the period 1680–1840; this relates both to historical definitions relating to the Georgian period (1714–1837) and what is often referred to as “The long eighteenth-century” (approximately 1680–1800):

- Architecture before 1700: the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham (now the Irish Museum of Modern Art).
- Civic architecture 1700–1820: the Royal Barracks (now the National Museum of Ireland); Dr Steeven’s Hospital (now the Eastern Health Board); St Patrick’s Hospital, Bow Lane; the Newcomen Bank, Cork Hill (now the Rates Office); the Royal Exchange (now City Hall); the General Post Office; the Lying-in Hospital (Rotunda); the former Parliament building, College Green (the Bank of Ireland); the Four Courts; the Custom House; the Royal College of Surgeons; the state buildings of Dublin Castle; the Blue Coat School, Blackhall Place (now the Incorporated Law Society); and the buildings of Trinity College campus.
GEORGIAN DUBLIN: ARCHITECTURE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

- Domestic architecture 1720–1840: exteriors and interiors of individual houses on Cavendish Row (Parnell Square), Ely Place, Fitzwilliam Place, Fitzwilliam Square, Fitzwilliam Street, Fownes Street, Henrietta Street, Hume Street, Kildare Street, Merrion Square, Mount Street Upper, Mountjoy Square, North Great George’s Street and St Stephen’s Green. Included here are contextual streetscapes, images of important decorative interiors (including stuccowork ceilings), and representative vernacular details such as fanlights and doorcases. A number of Georgian Dublin’s most significant private residences are also represented here, including Powerscourt House, South William Street; Belvedere House, Great Denmark Street; Tyrone House, Marlborough Street; and Doneraile House, Kildare Street.

- Ecclesiastical architecture 1720–1840: exteriors of the Duke of Gloucester’s Chapel, Seán MacDermott Street; St Catherine’s Church, Thomas Street; St George’s Church, Hardwicke Place; St Mary’s Church, Mary Street; St Stephen’s Church (‘Pepper Canister’), Mount Street Upper; St Werburgh’s Church, Werburgh Street; and the Church of Saints Michael and John, Essex Street.

4. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

UCD’s School of Art History and Cultural Policy subsequently agreed with ARTstor to make the School’s important collection of Irish architectural material – a subject currently under-represented through ARTstor – available for an international audience. ARTstor is a digital library specialising in art history and associated fields which is used by educators, scholars, and students in universities, colleges, museums and public libraries worldwide. The material digitised and catalogued for the IVRLA collection is in an appropriate format to be included in ARTstor and demonstrates the value in creating digital collections that are curated and created to international standards. UCD is the first Irish university to contribute images to the ARTstor resource.

Arising from the preliminary listing of images for this project, a further 420 original slides of Dublin’s domestic, civic and ecclesiastical architecture, both historic and contemporary, have now been identified. This includes, for example, an important collection of images relating to nineteenth-century civic and commercial buildings, including the South City Markets, Heuston Station, the National Library, and the Royal College of Physicians. This represents the potential for a significant expansion of the current IVRLA database.
WORKS CITED

