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IVRLA¹ RESEARCH REPORT: THE IRISH BUILDER AND ENGINEER CATALOGUE

Niamh Collins (Researcher)

1. CONTEXT

This is a cataloguing project which has created a complete contents² catalogue of The Irish Builder and Engineer for the years 1890 through to 1914. Although periodical reference sources such as Hayes contained some articles from the journal, no comprehensive catalogue or index of the journal had ever been produced. Hence, researchers wishing to use it faced a time-consuming search for the material relevant to their research.

The Irish Builder and Engineer, which commenced publication in 1859 under the title The Dublin Builder and survived under various titles until 1979, is a key resource in understanding the development of the Irish building and engineering trades. In its longevity it is untypical of many Irish periodicals established in the nineteenth century. Despite the prevailing high rate of failure for many journals and periodicals (Tilley 112), The Irish Builder and Engineer survived for not just one year, but for over 120. The main reason attributed to this longevity is the central importance to the Irish economy of the building trade (McKay 103). The journal in catering for this essential trade quickly became an invaluable resource for anyone involved. As well as simply being in the right business, McKay notes that “its lay-out, content and general production were all of a very high standard” (103); this, in addition to its wide appeal as a valuable resource for all kinds of interests, helped to ensure its longevity.

The Irish Builder and Engineer from the years 1890-1914 was initially selected for this project because it feeds into three other specific IVRLA research strands. These research

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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.

² As discussed further below, the contents catalogue excludes advertisements.
strands are: James Joyce’s Dublin, of which the journal provides illustrative and documentary evidence; the history of science in Ireland; and the history of public health in Ireland. Its relevance to the topic of James Joyce’s Dublin is essentially provided by illustrations and photographs of planned, ongoing or existing buildings and building works in Dublin. The many articles on the history of Dublin parishes as well as articles and reports documenting contemporary events and issues related to Dublin, provide an insight into the Dublin in which Joyce was living and writing about at the turn of the century. Its relevance to the history of science in Ireland lies in the numerous minutes and proceedings of the engineering societies of Ireland, as well as articles and reports on new inventions and developments in the area. Its relevance to the history of public health in Ireland lies in the many articles on the subjects of sanitation, sewerage, water, the building of hospitals, asylums and workhouses, and notably, in the reports of local or county council meetings and the meetings of various boards.

At a more general level, The Irish Builder and Engineer was selected for this cataloguing project because of its wide range of subject matter, which ensures it is of value for researchers interested not only in the history of construction and engineering in Ireland, but also for researchers interested in public health, sanitation, the applied sciences, technical education, transport, the arts, Irish history, language, literature and legends, and the social issues of the day. A particularly significant area covered in detail in The Irish Builder and Engineer is that of technical education in Ireland. The journal documents developments and innovations in science and industry, as well as providing features on a range of other areas. A sample of these features illustrates just how wide ranging the scope of The Irish Builder and Engineer could be. Examples of regularly contributed features include: features on the history of Dublin parishes; “Historic Memorials of Leix”; “History, Statistics, and Present Condition of the Various States Comprising the American Union”; “Irish Local Legends”; and “Classic Details and their Application.” It is this diversity that makes The Irish Builder and Engineer such a valuable resource in a wide range of research areas.

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3 The Joyce’s Dublin project gathered contextual material in relation to Joyce’s short story ‘The Dead’ in order to offer additional understanding both of the story itself and the time and place in which it was set. It produced a series of podcasts as well as other audio and text resources; the final podcast is a walking tour of Joyce’s Dublin.

4 The Reconstructing Irish Science: The Library of the Royal College of Science (1867-1926) project considers the history and library of the Royal College of Science for Ireland and assesses its role in the shaping of scientific and technical education in modern Ireland.

5 The Dublin Journal of Medical and Chemical Science Catalogue project provides a complete catalogue of this important medical journal from its foundation in 1832 up to the end of 1949.
The journal was also selected because of the inclusion in almost every issue of illustrations, plans, or photographs, often contributed by leading architects in Ireland and Britain. These illustrations and photographs can range from large building works, such as banks, schools and public buildings, to residential buildings such as suburban villas and labourers’ cottages. It is significant that many of the buildings illustrated and photographed in the journal between 1890 and 1914 were churches. These illustrations, plans and photographs are a unique feature that helps to make *The Irish Builder and Engineer* such an important resource for researchers of the built environment of Ireland.

2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

This is the first phase of a long-term project to catalogue the entire run of *The Irish Builder and Engineer*. The aim of this phase was to create a comprehensive catalogue of *The Irish Builder and Engineer* journal between the years 1890 and 1914.

It is important, therefore, to outline the history of the journal leading up to and including these years. *The Irish Builder and Engineer* was established under the title *The Dublin Builder* in 1859, by the architect J.J. Lyons, its first proprietor and editor. It was initially published once a month and aimed to cater for the building and constructive arts in Ireland. The title page of the first issue states that it is a journal “Devoted to Architecture, Engineering, Sanitary Improvement, the Sciences and Arts.” It is possible that it was this wide remit that ensured the journal’s growing readership and ultimate survival until 1979. The success of *The Dublin Builder* meant that by 1861 it appeared twice monthly. By 1901 it was published every two weeks, increasing the yearly number of issues from 24 to 26.

In 1864 Peter Roe, originally the journal’s printer, took over the management of the journal, and subsequently took over as editor. In 1867 the title of the journal was changed to *The Irish Builder* which Tilley sees as being indicative of the increasing prosperity of the construction trade outside Dublin (112). In 1899 *The Irish Builder* was taken over by a syndicate and edited by the architect R.M. Butler. The editorial entitled “To Our Readers” on the 15th June 1899 is essentially the mission statement of the new management, where they pledge to keep readers in touch with London via a new London correspondent, as well as introducing a series of illustrated articles dealing with the work of leading Irish and British architects. McKay believes that “it was at this stage that the Builder [sic] slowly underwent a change of direction from the all-embracing Victorian journal to a more commercially-orientated publication” (111). In 1903 the journal changed its name yet again to *The Irish
Builder and Engineer and began to include an Engineering Section within each issue, possibly to appeal to a wider readership, but also to satisfy the wider interests of the existing readership.

Items in The Irish Builder and Engineer appeared in a variety of formats. These included articles, reports, regularly contributed columns and features, editorials, letters to the editor, minutes and proceedings of various trade societies and associations, reviews, notes of works, parliamentary notes, lists of tenders and contracts, illustrations, plans, photographs, and even the occasional poem. This range of formats is matched by the diversity of subject matter covered by the journal. These included architecture, construction, engineering, applied sciences, medicine, sanitation, social and housing issues, politics, art, literature, and history. As well as reporting developments in these areas, the journal also provided a platform for discussions of these topics and related issues. It is this wide range and variety that contributed to The Irish Builder and Engineer maintaining its high readership and guaranteeing its longevity.

3. DETAILED OUTPUT

The Irish Builder and Engineer is held in a number of repositories, in two formats: hardcopy and microfiche. The various repositories and their holdings are listed in Appendix 1. For the purposes of creating the catalogue, the project researcher worked in the UCD and National Library repositories and consulted each issue of the journal between 1890 and 1914, systematically cataloguing every item, excluding advertisements.

The greatest constraint encountered during the project was that of time. The project was a three month project (carried out by one researcher from October to December 2009); hence it was necessary from the start to establish realistic goals that were achievable within this timeframe. Central to this was the issue of whether or not to catalogue the advertisements. The number of advertisements included in each issue of The Irish Builder and Engineer increased dramatically over the years of its publication, and while the range of advertisements in The Irish Builder and Engineer provide valuable information as to the construction and retail trades in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, it was felt that by including this information the number of issues catalogued would have been seriously reduced. It would not have been feasible to list the increasingly numerous advertisements that appear in each issue and still meet the original aims of the project. It was also decided not to include information as to the content of each item as usually the content is indicated by the title. The
issue of time constraints also applied here, as including information as to the content of each item would have similarly resulted in a reduction of issues catalogued.

Having made these decisions, an appropriate catalogue format needed to be chosen. It was decided to create the catalogue in Microsoft Excel as the search and filter capabilities would assist researchers in identifying useful material. The items in each issue were listed sequentially, working from 1890 through to 1914. For each item the catalogue gives the date, volume, issue number, item/article title, author(s)/illustrator(s), and page number(s). It also notes whether or not the item was illustrated, provides a “category” field to indicate the item type, and gives the location references for UCD microfiche holdings, UCD hardcopy holdings and National Library of Ireland (NLI) microfiche holdings. There is also a field for notes, which will assist researchers by giving information on supplements and illustrations which may be missing or bound with another issue. The catalogue is presented in four parts (1890-1899, 1900-1903, 1904-1908, and 1909-1914) and drop-down filters are available on each one so that researchers can search under specific headings or under multiple headings as required.

All fields, apart from the author/illustrator details, were fully completed for every item. Unfortunately, as was common in journals of that time, many of the articles and items were either unsigned or were written under a pseudonym. Although the writer’s identities may well have been known to readers at the time, it is difficult – if not impossible – to establish such identities at this remove and no attempt was made to do so. One example is “Oculus”, the writer of the regular feature “A.A.I. Jottings”; readers today do not know who this contributor is or even if he/she had contributed other articles (either signed or unsigned). This may well lead to frustration on the part of the researcher in trying to establish the identity of any particular contributor but is an unavoidable hazard of any research undertaken on journals of that period.

A final problem encountered was that of missing issues or parts of issues of the journal. On microfiche in both the National Library of Ireland, and the UCD Architectural Library, the latter part of the issue of 5 December 1901 (no. 1006) is missing, as is a later issue from that month (no. 1007). As there was no hardcopy version available to the researcher for this year, it was impossible to discover the contents of these missing issues.

The project achieved its aims, comprehensively cataloguing *The Irish Builder and Engineer* for the years 1890-1914 within the required timeframe. What has been completed is essentially a finding aid to assist researchers in using the journal. This has now been made

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6 It does seem likely that these particular issues were relatively short. As there is continuous pagination from one issue to the next, the missing pages are those from 967 to 982 inclusive (16 pages in total).
available online through the IVRLA in excel files which make it possible to search the journal for those years by date, issue number, item title, author or illustrator, organisation, society, body, or category. This should assist researchers in locating either a specific reference or in gaining a wider understanding of topics covered by the journal; in all cases, it will make finding information in the journal considerably less time-consuming. It is hoped that it will also bring *The Irish Builder and Engineer* to the attention of a wider audience and create awareness of its potential as a resource for a diverse range of subject areas.

**4. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

The cataloguing of the journal for the years 1890 to 1914 has created a significant resource for scholars. However, as this was effectively a pilot project which was undertaken in a very short timeframe, it was not feasible to produce a complete catalogue of the journal. The cataloguing of the years from 1859 to 1889 and from 1915 to 1979, together with the dissemination of the complete catalogue in digital form, would make this into a truly comprehensive and accessible finding aid for researchers.

Having catalogued the journal, a further research direction could be to digitise some or all of the journal content. The illustrated articles offer particularly rich material but all of the material has scholarly merit and interest; the digitisation and cataloguing of the journal content (which could be undertaken in either chronological or thematic phases if appropriate) would allow this very valuable journal to be made available to scholars worldwide.

Most importantly, the catalogue that has been created allows scholars to easily locate material relevant to their research. Therefore it facilitates academic investigation into the history of engineering, construction and sanitary science in Ireland as well as into the history and content of *The Irish Builder and Engineer* itself. The research team looks forward to seeing the results of such investigations over the coming years.
APPENDIX 1

Repository Holdings of *The Irish Builder and Engineer*

**UCD**
- Microfiche: Architecture Library 1859-1979 (Ref: Journals)
- Hardcopy: James Joyce Library 1859-1866; 1877-1882; 1886-1888; 1894-1897; 1909; 1937-1939. (Ref: Special Collections 30.PPB.1 - 30.PPC.2)

**National Library of Ireland**
- Microfiche: 1859-1979 (Ref: Ir 6905 i 42)

**Dublin City Archives**
- Microfiche: 1959-1979 (Ref: 690.05, MF)
- Hardcopy: 1904-1915

**Irish Architectural Archive**

**WORKS CITED**


