



Archives & Records Association Cumann Cartlann agus Taifead Ireland/Éire



*Perspective view of central plaza, Shannon New Town, Frederick Rogerson, c. 1965
(IAA Frederick Rogerson Collection 98/7)*

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A Word from the Chair

Niamh Ní Charra
ARA Ireland Chair

Welcome to this sunny summer edition of ARA Ireland's newsletter. It features articles on a diverse selection of archive projects happening all over the country, and I am grateful, as is our newsletter officer Nora Thornton, for all the contributions to this and previous editions. Many thanks too to Nora who has compiled it for your enjoyment.

As I write this, the internationally sporting community are transfixed with the spectacle and drama currently taking place in North America at the FIFA World Cup 2026 (Men's). Here in Ireland, we have discovered a love for all things Cabo Verde, thanks to Crumlin native Roberto (Pico) Lopes, whose story of getting a place on the team of his father's native country through a LinkedIn message has captured the imagination of national and international media alike. Pico, the only active League of Ireland player to feature in a World Cup, did both countries proud, no more so, than in the thrilling David versus Goliath encounter against Argentina, where Cabo Verde brought the reigning champions to extra time before being eliminated. It is a wonderful example of Irish abroad and the New Irish at home and ties in nicely with our upcoming annual #ArchiveDiaspora campaign taking place this year on 15th July.

This social media campaign celebrates the Irish people, both new and old, both famous and forgotten, who have either left or come to these shores seeking a new life. I encourage individuals and institutions across Ireland and around the world to share material from their archives which relate to Irish people who left Ireland for a life abroad, as well as material relating to those who chose to make Ireland their home.



Later this year, the annual #ExploreYourArchive campaign will kick off with a focus week in November, and I am delighted to announce ARA Ireland's launch will take place in the Irish Architectural Archive on Thursday 19th November. More details to follow.

Elsewhere, the ARA Ireland Diversity and Inclusion Lecture Series, our series of free lunchtime webinars, has taken a pause for the summer. This series, which has featured many fascinating and diverse talks, will resume in the new academic year, before coming to a close in November. More on this will be shared in the coming weeks, and videos of previous talks continue to be made available [here](#).

Finally, we do have vacancies on our committee and we would encourage members to consider becoming part of this incredibly rewarding volunteer work, especially if new to the sector. Current vacancies include Campaigns Officer, Treasurer and Honorary Secretary, and if interested please contact me for further details [here](#).

I encourage everyone, as always, to embrace and engage with our online campaigns and our training as much as you can, and to follow us on our various social media channels.

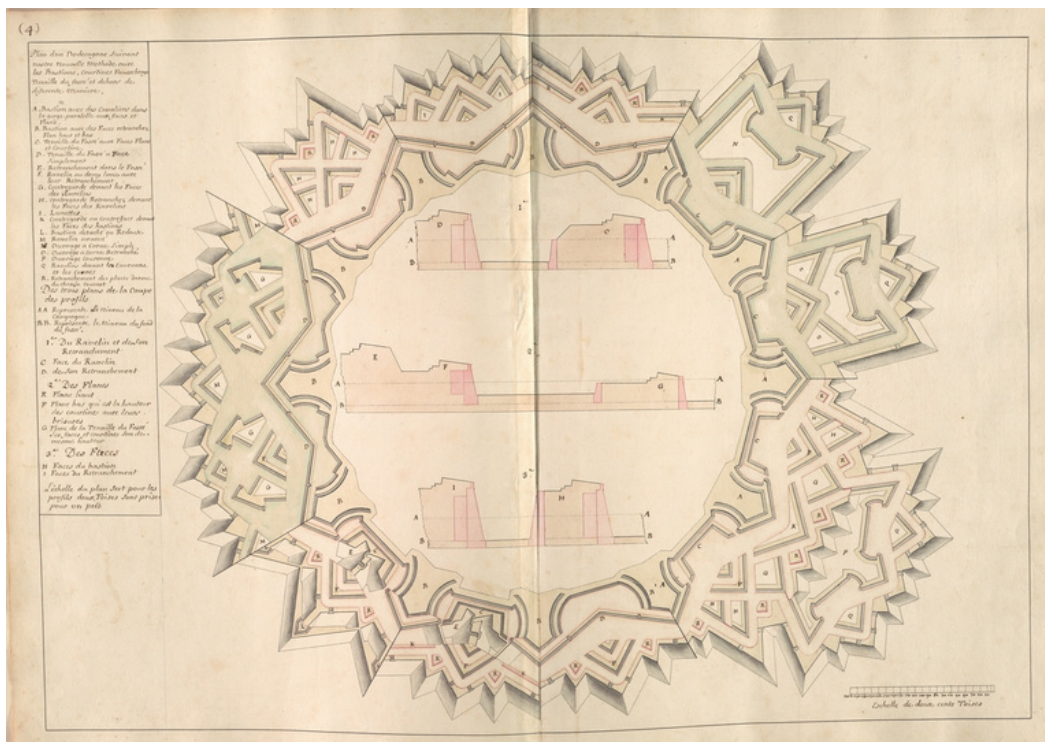
Without further ado, welcome to the 2026 summer edition of ARA Ireland's newsletter – enjoy the read.

Beir bua,
Niamh

Pivot Points: the Irish Architectural Archive's 50th anniversary exhibition

Colum O'Riordan
CEO, Irish Architectural Archive

Founded in 1976 and celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, the Irish Architectural Archive (IAA) collects, preserves and shares the records of architecture from across of the island of Ireland, inviting learning, discovery and enjoyment of this rich cultural inheritance. The IAA's founders, Dr Edward McParland and Nicholas Robinson, started with an ambition to create a photographic record of Irish architecture. Fifty years on and the IAA is home to over 2.5 million architectural drawings and related documents, 600,000 photographs, 35,000 printed items and dozens of architectural models.

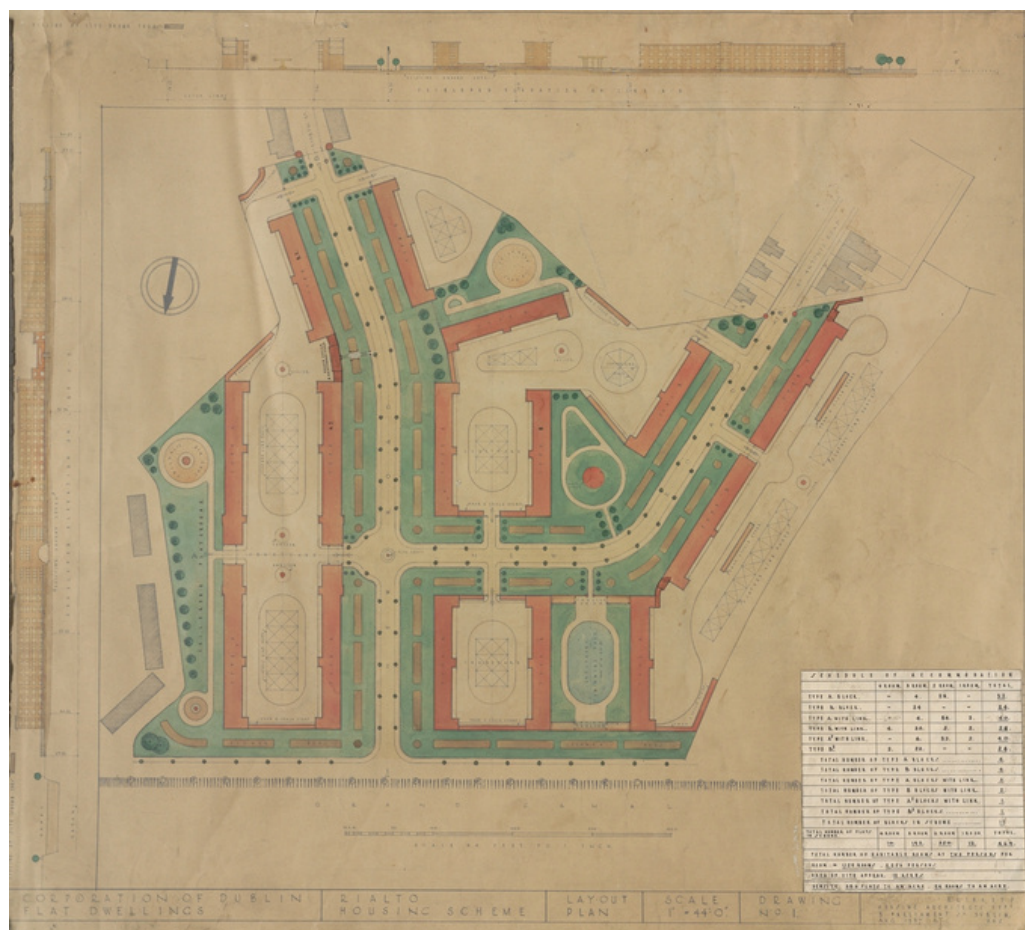


Plan for a fort from Treatise on Military Architecture by Jacques Wibault, 1701 (IAA Ormond Collection 77/9.93)

In celebrating its 50th anniversary, the board, led by chairperson Tony Reddy, wanted show how the IAA collections can contribute to an understanding of contemporary issues in architecture, planning, and urbanism. This vision has been translated into Pivot Points: Moments and movements in the development of Ireland's built environment, an exhibition, publication, and travelling exhibition which uses objects from the 1690s to the 2000s as a way to help us understand why the world around us has taken its current shape.

Pivot Points presents a selection of key objects from the IAA collections each of which stands as an exemplar of a directional shift in the history of development, design, and construction across the island of Ireland. Each object is accompanied by a short text which describes and contextualises the particular item, situating it within the IAA collections, within the career of a particular architect, or within the context of its time and building type. Each object is also accompanied by a longer text commissioned from a relevant specialist. These contributions respond to the individual objects in their broader context, setting out and expanding on the particular moment or movement which the object has been selected to represent. The contributions are accompanied by additional images drawn primarily from the IAA.

Pivot Points was conceived from the start on an all-Ireland basis. The thirty objects selected for the exhibition are geographically diverse and include, for example, a 1690s deed for a house in the city of Cork, an 1820 elevation of Armagh Lunatic Asylum, an 1884 interior perspective for a church in Cahirciveen, Co. Kerry, and the 1967 Belfast Urban Motorway Report. The moments and movements which these objects represent impact every part of the island, be it buildings by and for the state (workhouses, asylums, school and hospitals), the sacred spaces of faiths both long established and more recently arrived (Church of Ireland, Roman Catholics, Nonconformists, Judaism and Islam), infrastructural projects, their delivery and their impacts (canals, railways, harbours, airports and roads) and housing, both urban and rural.



Dublin Corporation Rialto Housing Scheme Layout Plan, Herbert Simms, 1937 (IAA 2021/54)

As Prof. Kathleen James-Chakraborty says in her foreword to *Pivot Points*, 'The IAA's purpose has never been the creation of a historicist architecture, that is new buildings that imitate their predecessors, but instead the appreciation of what has already been accomplished, and the belief that the architecture of the past can continue to inspire the public as well as the architects of new buildings that serve the changing conditions of our own times and those to come'



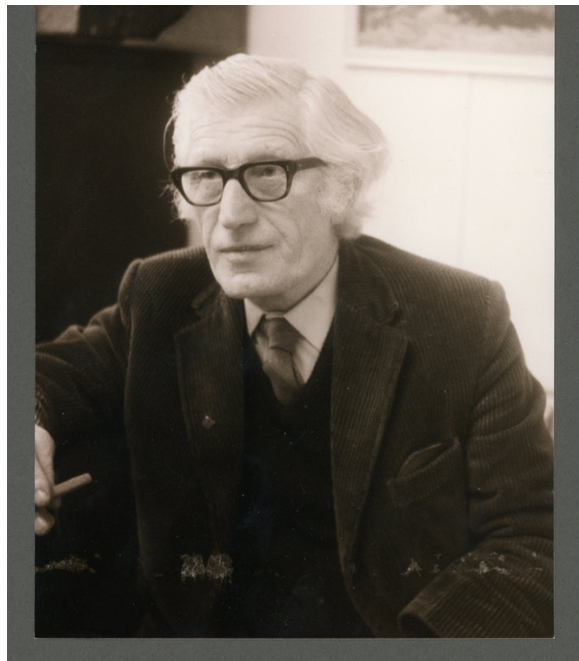
*Perspective view of central plaza, Shannon New Town, Frederick Rogerson, c. 1965
(IAA Frederick Rogerson Collection 98/7)*

Pivot Points runs in the IAA Architecture Gallery, 45 Merrion Square, from 18 May 2026 to 2 April 2027. A travelling version of the exhibition will visit venues across Ireland from autumn 2026 to spring 2028. A publication to accompany the exhibition will be available in July 2026. For more see <https://irisharchitecturalarchive.ie/exhibition/pivot-points/>

Irish Theatre Heritage in the Archives at Maynooth University Library

Ciara Joyce
Archivist, Maynooth University Library

In 2025, I had the pleasure of working on two collections relating to the theatre in Ireland. Interestingly, both collections happened to be in the archives of Irish publishers. The archive of the New Theatre Group is part of the Thomas O'Brien (1914-1974) collection. Documents relating to An Damer, form part of the Caoimhín Ó Marcaigh (1933-2014) archive.



Thomas O'Brien (1914-1974), Maynooth University Library

The New Theatre Group began life in Dublin in 1937, when a group of friends with similar left leaning politics, decided to start a worker's theatre. Most had been members of the short-lived Left Book Club, and all were from republican, socialist or trade unionist backgrounds. The New Theatre Group was not affiliated with any political organisation. It declared itself to be anti-fascist, anti-war and pro working-class. Founding members included Thomas O'Brien and Alec Diggs, both of whom left Ireland in 1938 to fight for the Spanish Republic in the Spanish Civil War. Playwright Seán Ó hEidirsceoil (1916-2002), and siblings Roddy Connolly (1901-1980) and Nora Connolly O'Brien (1892-1981), children of James Connolly, were also responsible for the establishment of the Group.

The first production staged by the New Theatre Group was *Waiting for Lefty* by Clifford Odets. It ran for one night in the Engineers Hall, Dawson Street, in June 1937. O'Brien took a minor acting role in the production, which he would do in many plays staged by the Group. The play was a remarkable success, and O'Brien later wrote that '*the audience roared its approval*' (Surge, March 1943, MU/PP48/3/13/7). It was another ten months before the Group produced a second offering. A double bill of *After All those Years* by Joe Corrie, a satirical two-act play, and *Where's that Bomb?* by Herbert Hodge and Robert Buckland, was staged in February 1938. Subsequently the fledgling Group endeavored to produce a new play each month, a huge undertaking for an amateur group. Plays were staged in the Peacock Theatre and Trade Union Halls, before they secured their own premises. They settled first at Charlemont Row, before moving to Rutland Place in 1941. The Group staged a mixture of works by international leftist playwrights and original productions by members of the Group. This included O'Brien's play, *The Last Hill* (September 1939), based on his experience of the Spanish Civil-War, Séan Ó hEidirscoil's play *Lockout*, concerning the 1913 Lockout (December 1939), and *Partition* (October 1939) by O'Brien and his fellow New Theatre Group member, William Clare.



Members of the New Theatre Group on their annual summer outing, Carrickmines, County Dublin, 1938, including Louise Gebler, Des McNamara, Simon Sevvitt, Alex Diggs, Tommy Gannon, Barney Larkin, Owen Keating, Paddy Byrne, Ann Peach, Ann Sevvitt, Thomas O'Brien and Dudley Allen. Maynooth University Library.

The New Theatre Group archive contains 383 items including, correspondence, programs, and reports on productions. Items of note include a minute book from 1943-1944, producer's reports from various productions including for *The Last Hill* and a production of George Bernard Shaw's *Heartbreak House*. The archive also holds 180 letters, both incoming and copy outgoing, relating to the operation of the New Theatre Group. These letters cover the day-to-day administration, including payment of royalties and dealing with Trade Unions. They also deal with the payment of subscriptions by members. Additionally, there are letters from the Group's solicitor. These address members objections to being referred to as a communist organisation and as a vehicle for communist propaganda by a journalist in the *Catholic Standard* newspaper (May 1941).



Ephemera from the Thomas O'Brien archive, relating to the New Theatre Group. Maynooth University Library

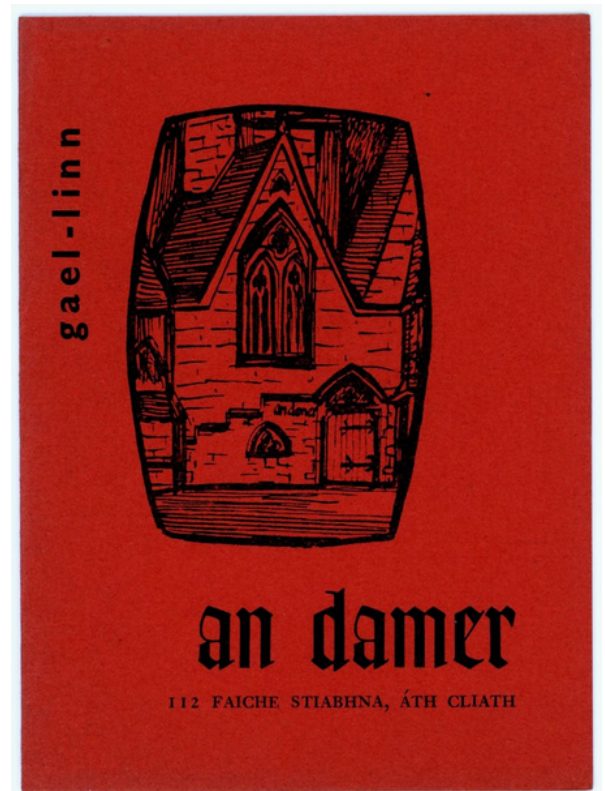
The New Theatre Group ended in 1944. By then many of the founding members had left. O'Brien felt that the Group had '*completely lost its "Waiting for Lefty" audience*' (Surge, March 1943, MU/PP48/3/13/7) and wrote that if the Group was to survive it needed to return to its roots as a worker's theatre. Thomas O'Brien would later establish The O'Brien Press with his son Michael, in 1974.

In 1955, a vastly different theatre began life in the basement hall of the Unitarian Church on Saint Stephen's Green, Dublin. The Damer Theatre or An Damer, was established by Gael Linn. It aimed to produce plays in the Irish language, and to prove there was an audience in Dublin for such a theatre. Gael Linn also established a drama club, An Club Drámaíochta. The club not only attracted aspiring actors but also provided the Damer with an audience of Irish speakers. For an annual fee, members got one ticket for each production of the season. By the end of the first season, the club had five hundred members.

The 1955-1956 season began in November, with three short plays performed by Dublin based drama group, Aisteoirí Chéitinn. The plays, *Ríte* by Máiréad Ní Ghráda, *An Caidéal sa Chlós* by Máirtín Ó Díomsaigh and Gearóid Ó Tiarnaí, and *Olc Maith*, translated by Ó Díomsaigh from the play by Philip Johnson, were all produced by Ó Díomsaigh. The productions were well received. The Irish Independent described *Ríte* as 'an excellent presentation', while also praising the cast (Irish Independent, 15 November 1955).

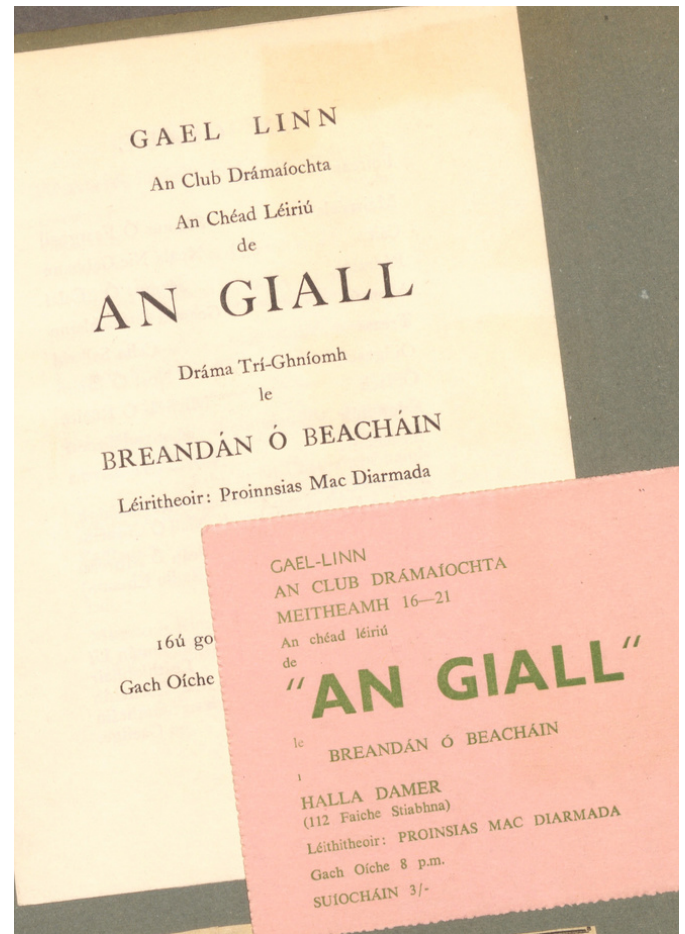
In 1956, Gael Linn decided to hire a professional theatre producer. Proinsias Mac Diarmada (Frank Dermody) (1907-1978), a veteran of the Abbey and Taibhdhearc Theatres, London's West End and the BBC, was recruited. He had a huge influence on the Damer. Mac Diarmada's first production was a translation by Tomás Tóibín of the Catalan play *La Herida Luminosa* by José Maria de Sagarra. It was entitled *Bua na Créachta*. The play ran from the 11th until the 16th of March 1957 and was well received.

However, the third season at the Damer proved to be its most successful to date. It opened in November 1957 with an original play entitled *Labhrann na Fallaí* by Éamon Ó Guailí. Another original production was staged in February 1958. Written by Máirtín Ó Díomasaigh and performed by Aisteoirí Chéitinn, *Scáth a Chéile* was well received. The final play of the season however, really put the Damer on the map for theatre goers. On the 16 June 1958, Brendan Behan's original play *An Giall* opened at the Damer. It was Behan's first play in the Irish language. *An Giall* was a tremendous success and played to a full house for three weeks. The Irish Times described it as 'a very cleverly written play'. The reviewer singled out Séamus Páircéar in the lead role, writing 'at no time was his acting anything but first-class'. Of Mac Diarmada he wrote, 'Mr. Frank Dermody's production was of a high quality which coupled with Mr. Behan's pen, presented a most entertaining show' (Irish Times, 17 June 1958).



Membership Card for An Club Drámaíochta at An Damer. Maynooth University Library

Other successful productions at An Damer included the first production of *An Triail* by Máiréad Ní Ghráda (1896-1971). Opening in 1964 it ran for two weeks in September, two in October and two in November. It featured Caitlín Maude in the role of a young, unmarried mother who takes her own life and that of her child. Fionnula Flanagan also played the role when the run of the play was extended. It played to a full house each night, despite its grim topic. Writing in the Irish Times, L. MacG. stated that *'The play is significant because it has an urgent theme and is entitled to rank as the most important offering the Theatre Festival makes available... Go neartuighidh Dia do pheann, a Mháiréad Ní Ghráda agus do'n fhuireann a chabhrúig leat an dréma so do staitsiú'* (Irish Times, 23 September 1964).



Ticket and flyer for the first performance of Brendan Behan's An Giall at An Damer, 16 June 1958. Maynooth University Library

While operating primarily as a theatre for Irish drama, the Damer also hosted a series of other events. Most notable of these was their Oícheanta Seanchais. At the end of their first season in 1956, on the suggestion of Máirtín Ó Cadhain, musician Séamus Ennis (1919-1982) and Dónal Ó Góráin, organised an Oíche Seanchais. Dancers, musicians, and storytellers, the majority from the Gaeltacht, were brought together for an evening of entertainment. The event ran nightly from the 14th until the 19th of May. It was so successful that people were turned away from the door each night. The Oícheanta Seanchais became a staple at the Damer, running annually to a packed house.



Caoimhín Ó Marcaigh (1933-2014)
Maynooth University Library

The Damer archive is part of the archival collection of Caoimhín Ó Marcaigh (1933-2014). Ó Marcaigh, a life-long Irish language advocate, was the manager at the Damer Theatre from 1957 until 1960. He also enjoyed a busy career as a teacher, writer and was the editor of Irish language journal, Comhar. He worked for the Educational Company of Ireland and the Mercier Press and served as senior editor with An Gúm. In 1981, he took over Irish language publisher Sáirséal agus Dill (later Sáirséal Ó Marcaigh), with his wife Aingeal.

The archive contains a small selection of administrative documents, correspondence, lists of members of An Club Drámaíochta, guestlists, and notes. The core of the archive, however, is a sizable collection of ephemera. This includes, tickets, posters, programmes and newspaper cuttings relating to productions at the Damer from 1956 -1965.

Both the Thomas O'Brien archive and the Damer collection in the Caoimhín Ó Marcaigh archive can be accessed by contacting Special Collections & Archives library.specialcollections@mu.ie

An online exhibition based on the Damer collection is also available at <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library/events-exhibitions/virtual-exhibitions>

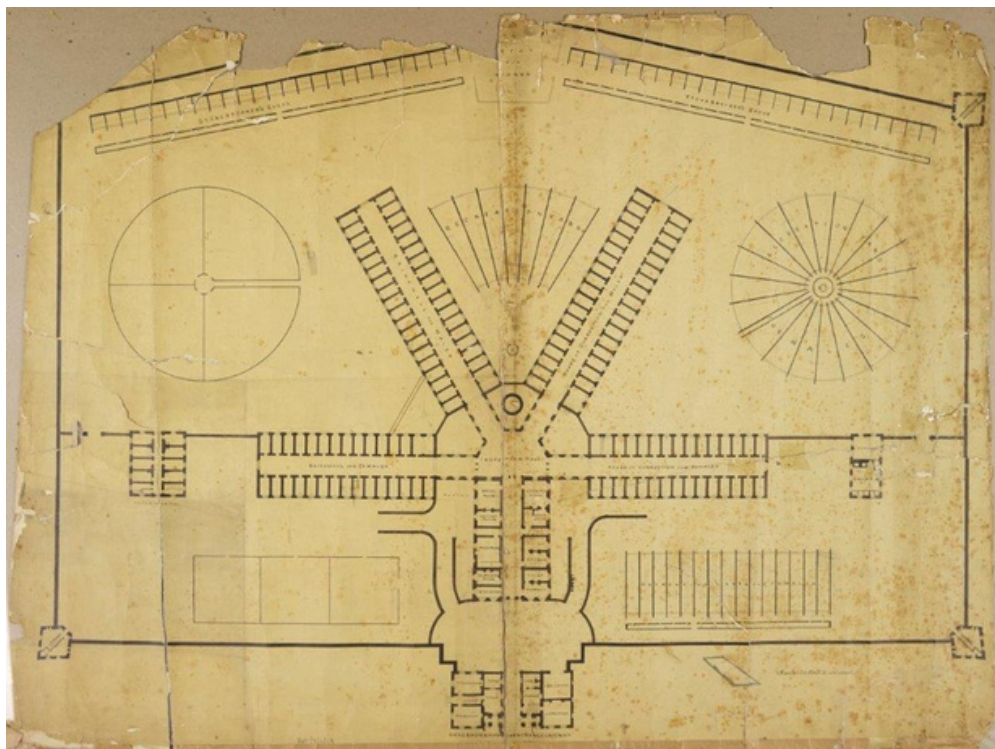
Echoes from the Crum: Archives of Belfast's Crumlin Road Gaol

Brett Irwin

PRONI

In 1845 a new prison for County Antrim was built in Belfast to replace the old gaol at Carrickfergus. The first one hundred and six prisoners had to walk in procession from Carrickfergus to Belfast and these first inmates walked a total distance of twelve miles. This gaol, designed by the prominent architect, Sir Charles Lanyon, at a cost of £40,000, and was named the Belfast Gaol and became known colloquially as the Crum due to its location on the Crumlin Road in Belfast. This gaol was regarded as the senior, establishment of incarceration in the north of Ireland. The design of the goal was heavily influenced by the designs of HMP Pentonville in London (considered the most advanced prison design of the day). The site of the gaol covered an area of thirteen acres in north Belfast, and it was divided into four separate wings: A, B,C and D. The design of the gaol fully embodied the mid- Victorian attitudes towards penal servitude, punishment and morality. Each wing was a self-contained unit and could hold different categories of prisoner. The prison was structured like this:

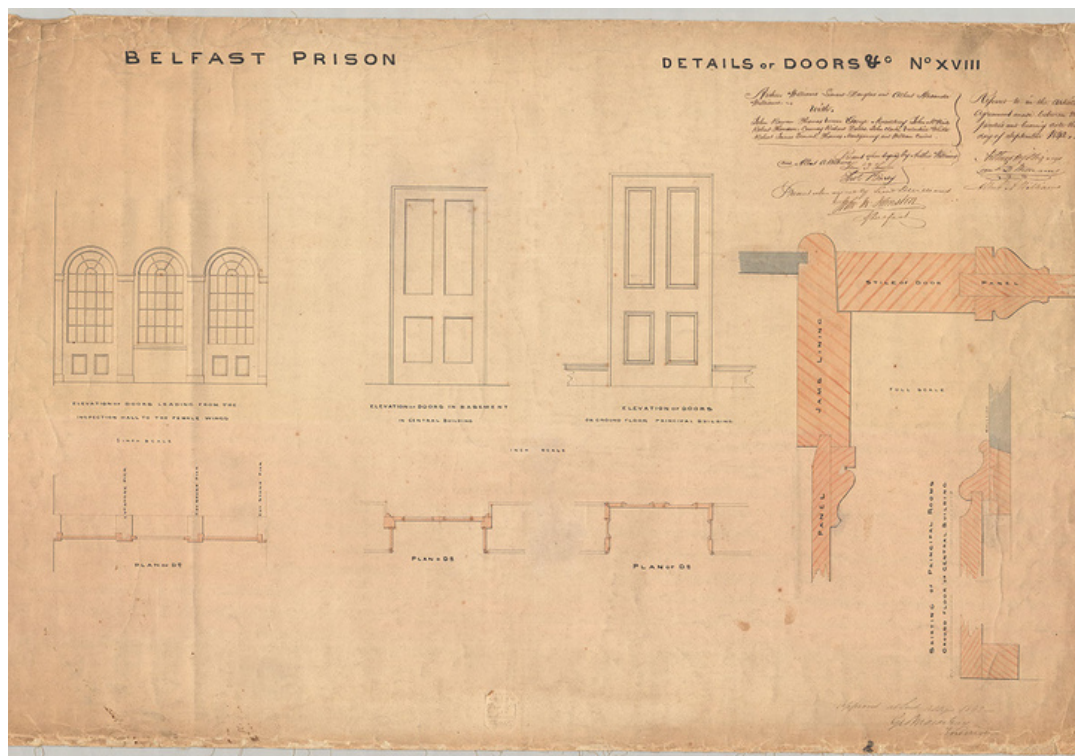
- A Wing - 110 Cells
- B Wing - 70 Cells
- C Wing - 70 Cells
- D Wing - 130 Cells



ANT/4/11/19 - Crumlin Road Gaol plan with Panopticon design (1843).

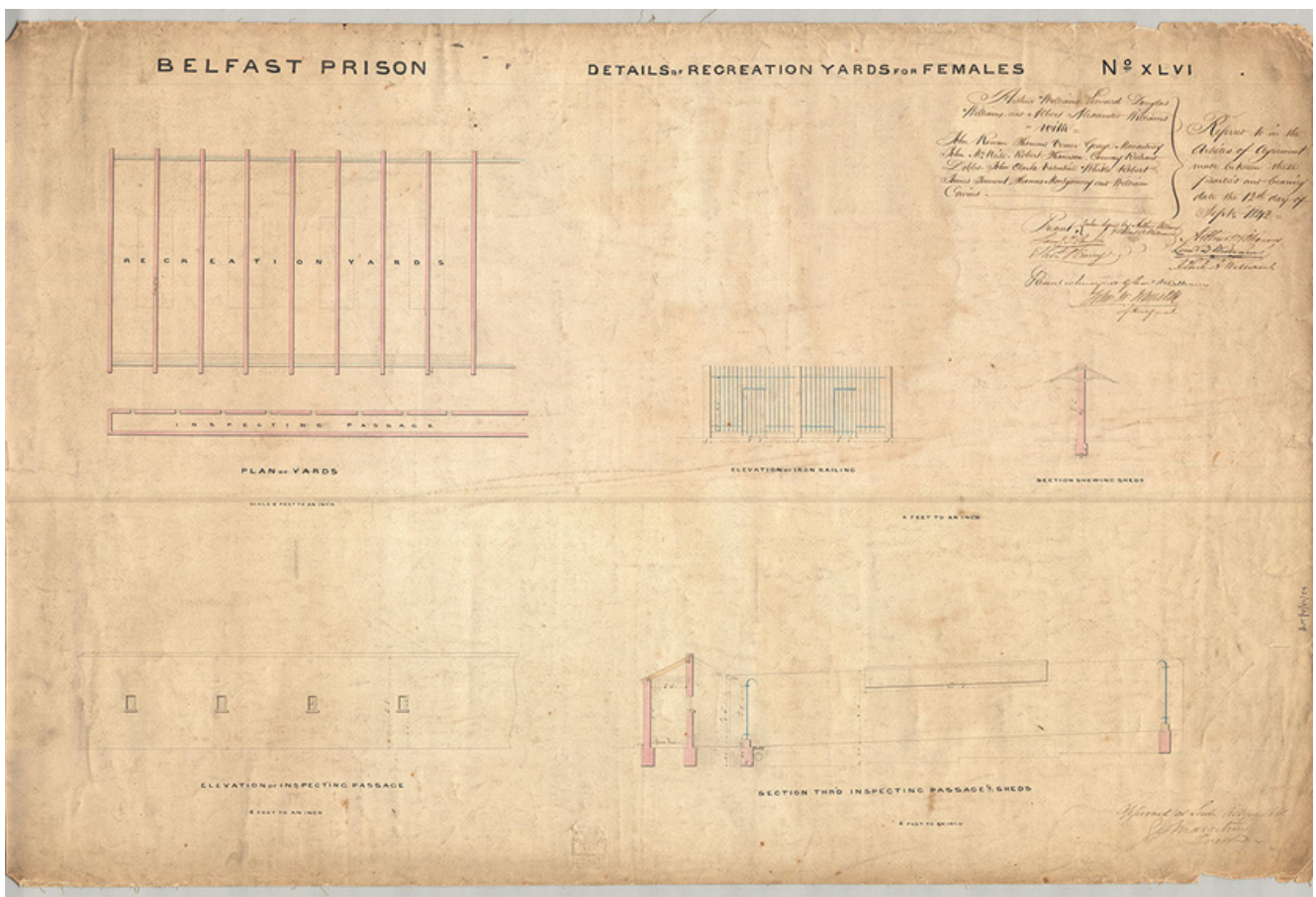
Each individual cell had roughly the same dimensions; twelve feet long, seven feet wide and ten feet high. And could accommodate three hundred and eighty prisoners in single cell accommodation, although up to four prisoners per cell could be accommodated if required. As you can see by archival image ANT/4/11/19, the prison created the effect of prisoners being watched or thinking they were being watched all the time. The architecture is complicit as of having a physical impact on the prisoners and also a psychological one. The French theorist, Michel Foucault, takes this idea and uses prison architecture as a kind of metaphor for what is happening in society. The state initially exerts power over the body of the prisoner by incarceration, then shifts to controlling the behaviour, the morals and the mind of the inmate. Foucault sees architecture as transformative as it not only shelters inmates, but it also has power over them in that it influences their conduct. He explores the shifts of punishment from minor offences to capital offences and the relationship between felon and the power of the state. Although Foucault is not writing specifically about the Crumlin Road Gaol, he could well be with its design known as a Panopticon and the role the building played regarding observation and control. The architecture of the jail reflects the changing attitude by the state towards the nature of imprisonment with emphasis on:

- Punishment
- Security
- Systematic control and supervision
- Prisoners becoming corrupt by contact with other inmates
- Reform by work, religion and later by education



ANT/4/11/22 – Details of door plan for the gaol (1843).

In the early days of the Belfast Prison, prisoners had to exercise in silence. Typical sentences involved hard labour which often included the breaking of rocks and the sewing of mailbags. These punishments continued until around 1950 when the prison authorities made reforms in an attempt to improve the lot of prisoners. Elements of these reforms included evening mixing between prisoners and the introduction of games such as darts and snooker. All of this added to incentivise the prisoners into good behaviour and ensure the smooth running of the prison. Parole was introduced in Northern Ireland in 1948 initially for prisoners serving their first sentence and consisted of a couple of days of home leave. Corrective training was introduced in the early 1950s. This was designed to allow prisoners serving sentences less than four years access to areas of work in the prison and the chance to develop a skill and a better chance of gaining employment after prison. Another major change to the lives of prisoners during this time was the idea of preventative detention. This was aimed at repeat offenders and involved work activities in the prisoner's own cell and again with the intention of giving the prisoner a chance to develop a skill that could help them get a job after the sentence was served. This was a world away from the early-Victorian ideas on crime and punishment on which the foundations of the gaol were built.



ANT/4/11/29 – Female recreation yard plan for the gaol (1843).

Although the Crumlin Road Gaol looked the same as any other prison in the United Kingdom, and due to Northern Ireland's stormy political and social history, important differences need to be explained. There have been major periods on internment in Northern Ireland from the 1920s to the 1970s and this has had a major impact on the prison population and what form a prison should take. Politically motivated violence and civil unrest led to imprisonment without trial and a surge in the prison population, particularly between 1968 and 1974 as the Troubles began to take hold. Jim Challis has provided some fascinating figures with the prison population in Northern Ireland in 1968 being around six hundred and rocketing to two thousand six hundred and fifty by 1974 and reaching a peak of three thousand in 1979.[1] Belfast Gaol was shared during the early stages of 'the Troubles' between Loyalist and Republican prisoners. Violence steadily grew as various political factions took hold and the situation inside began to reflect the dire political landscape outside. In 1972, the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, William Whitelaw, granted special category status to prisoners convicted of terrorist offences. This meant that convicted political prisoners had the right to wear their own clothes, had the right to free association in the prison, could receive food parcels and had extra visit privileges this was to end in 1976 with a change in government policy.

There have been seventeen executions at the Crumlin Road Gaol. The first execution took place on 21 June 1854 for the murder of a soldier named Corporal Brown. A fellow soldier, Robert O'Neill was hanged for the crime. The final execution was for the murder of Pearl Gamble and Andrew McGladdery was hanged on 20th December 1961. Thomas Joseph Williams was convicted for his part in the murder of a police constable and was hanged on the 2nd September 1942 by Albert Pierrepoint. Pierrepoint would later go on to hang an estimated two hundred Nazi war criminals at the Nuremberg Trials in Germany.

[1] Challis. J. The Northern Ireland Prison Service (Belfast;1999)

There had been many escape attempts at the Crum with thirty-seven prisoners having escaped including a particularly successful escape in 1971 with thirteen prisoners clearing the walls. However, not every attempt was successful. In 1957 vigilant prison officers foiled an attempt when a tunnel was discovered leading away from C wing. The Crumlin Road Gaol's imposing iron gates swung shut for the final time in 1996. It is now a heritage site.



Photograph of the main gates of 'the Crum' (c.1960).

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