

Open Heritage
Belfast



Doorways tell stories

Exploring 30 Intriguing Belfast Entrances
UAH - Open Heritage Belfast

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Doorways tell stories

Entrances are often powerful ‘statements’. There are many architecturally vibrant and interesting doorways to buildings right across Belfast. We can often overlook what’s right in front of us, so let **Ulster Architectural Heritage** suggest a tour of some highlights in the city centre, drawing on some of UAH’s richly informative publications (see back page for more details). Each entry highlights the principal architectural features, suggests why the doorway looks the way it does and recounts some historic or unexpected details associated with the building behind the portal.

Keep looking at doorways in your area and right across the city and beyond to discover more about and value the historic built environment around us. And always remember when looking at buildings to look up too – there’s usually lots to enjoy above eye level.

From the Shankill to the Falls, Clonard to the Crumlin Rd, from Stormont to Strandtown, Beersbridge to Woodstock, Fortwilliam to Carlisle Circus, Malone to Stranmillis, and all around Queen’s Quarter, the Lisburn and Ormeau Roads, to name but a few, there are architecturally interesting and historical doorways and gateways which reveal so many stories about our urban past – take photos (like the ones in this booklet – all taken on a mobile phone) – start conversations, speak to each other in and across neighbourhoods, and cherish our historic built environment!

Dr Paul Harron, UAH



To find out more about the work of UAH in protecting and promoting enjoyment of the built heritage here, go to www.uahs.org.uk



In compiling this booklet we are conscious that, for some, very sadly, doorways in city centres can be places sought out by people who find themselves homeless or in great personal difficulty.



Along with other support organisations, Belfast Homeless Services tries to help people facing challenges of homelessness, poverty and associated problems.

If you would like to know more about their work or how you can support people facing difficult circumstances, scan the QR code.



1

Belfast City Hall

(1896-1906)

The heart of modern Belfast, the great exuberant Edwardian wedding cake of Portland stone and copper domes was designed by Sir Alfred Brumwell Thomas with sculpture by Frederick Pomeroy and its entrance, situated behind a freestanding statue of Queen Victoria, is formed as a grand domed porte cochere, ideal for dropping off dignitaries in horse-drawn carriages originally. The entrance is an original creation by Thomas in the form of an open pavilion – a stone-vaulted canopy on coupled Ionic columns – and note the wheat-ear decoration on the column shafts; the covering of the stone cupola to give a copper appearance was not actually part of the original structure.

The building has a vibrant history, including functioning as the seat of the Northern Ireland Parliament from 1921 to 1932, and it has a highly ornate interior with outstanding marble and plasterwork decoration. It cost over £360,000 to build at the time and was refurbished by Consarc as recently as 2007-9. It is the headquarters of Belfast City Council but has also stood for over a century ‘as an icon for the city and a symbol of its civic pride and progress’ (Larmour).

For a full description, see Larmour, Paul, *Belfast City Hall, An Architectural History* (2010); also see Patton (2015), pp. 132-6

2

Scottish Provident Buildings

Donegall Square West/Wellington Place (1899)

The corner entrance to this monumental Neo-Baroque building conveys the message: you can put your trust in us. The building (built in two stages in 1899 and 1902; the corner entrance was completed during the first phase) was the lavish headquarters of Scottish Provident Insurance although it always also included rentable shop and office spaces. That it is built of imported Giffnock sandstone (and is so big) immediately conveys prestige.

The entrance, with its bold rusticated columns and octagonal fluted banding, has a small porch with a mosaic floor and a semi-circular arched door: note the pretty carved cherub heads and the keystone head representing 'Scotia' alluding to the firm's Scottish base. The portal rises to include at first-floor level an aedicule (a shrine-like niche) with paired Ionic columns, containing an antique-style sculptural group of a destitute widow, daughter and infant – it reflects the company's purpose to insure citizens against disaster.

There are further carvings in the segmental pediment above - the company's and City of Belfast's coats of arms – and all over the building, including keystone heads above the ground-floor windows depicting the continents (emphasising worldwide trade), and tableaux relating to Ulster industries. The sculptors were Purdy & Millard.

The architects were Young & Mackenzie, who – along with other architects over the years – chose to have their offices here. Young & Mackenzie occupied the top floor with the best views. The entrance on the Donegall Square W façade features cherubs with banners unfurling the names of the architects and the sculptors.

Refs: Harron (2016), pp. 86-88, 253-4; Patton (2015), pp. 145-6





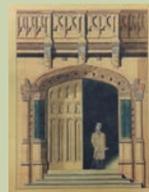
3

The Ocean Buildings

Donegall Square East/Chichester St (1902)

This striking corner doorway provides the main entrance to a fantastical Tudoresque five-storey building built of glowing red Ballochmoyle sandstone. It was designed by Young & Mackenzie Architects for the Ocean Accident & Guarantee Corporation and boasts a lively roofline and lovely stone carvings by James Edgar Winter - naturalistic details, heads, shields, and mermaids and lighthouses which formed the Corporation's trademark.

Above the main doorway, a richly carved oriel window is 'held up' by carved heads of King Edward VII (in the centre) and Queen Victoria and Queen Alexandra (on either side of him), adding the evocative embodiment of empire to the building's symbolism.



Only one side of the panelled oak doors actually opens – the double door presentation is a conceit as one half hides part of the building's iron-frame construction. A quirky architect's drawing of the entrance alludes to this depicting a top-hatted, high-collared Edwardian gent in the open half of the doorway.

The basement housed Ireland's first safe deposit secure vaults (built by Ratner Safe Co. of London). It later became known as Pearl Assurance House, has contained a variety of office and retail spaces and is currently being refurbished. It was for a time after 1922 (with the exception of the ground-floor insurance company offices) home to the NI Ministry of Home Affairs.

Refs: Harron (2016), pp. 89-90, 95, 254-5; Patton (2015), p. 137; PRONI D.2194 uncatalogued drawing, reproduced courtesy of the Deputy Keeper of the Records, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

4

**Linen Hall Library****Donegall Square North (1864)**

A venerable Belfast institution, the Linen Hall Library (or the Belfast Library and Society for Promoting Knowledge, founded in 1788) is housed in the former Moore & Weinberg's linen warehouse designed in a restrained Classical style by Lanyon, Lynn & Lanyon, converted for the Library in 1891-2 by Young & Mackenzie. Originally the Library was housed in the White Linen Hall which was demolished in 1898 to make way for the City Hall.

The Donegall Square N entrance is a grand balustraded central doorcase with swags of (appropriately) linen pinned back by rosettes and a red hand of Ulster on a shield. The doorway leads to a steep stone staircase with a polished brass central handrail, leading to the first floor of the atmospheric interior; a magnificent wide curving staircase then leads up to the second floor. Note the windows in the reading rooms (now café) featuring stained glass depictions of literary and scientific figures. The building is a treasure house of Irish history and literature, a cultural beacon in the city centre.

Refs: Harron (2016), pp. 37, 132-3, 355-6;
Patton (2015), p. 141

5

**May Street Presbyterian Church****(1829)**

A big Classical Ionic portico with fluted columns and pilasters supporting a dentilled pediment sitting on a flight of steps adorns this large Presbyterian red brick and stucco church of 1828-9 designed by John Boyd, all behind good iron railings; note the charming, if oddly proportioned, Doric school building beside the church. There are three doorways behind the porch columns.

The church could seat 1,700 people and was used by the General Assembly for sixty years prior to the opening of Church House at Fisherwick Place, and was always important in the history of Irish Presbyterianism, its first minister being the fiery Revd Dr Henry Cooke, whose statue stands in front of RBAI ('Inst') at College Square.

Ref: Patton (2015), p. 254



6

Former Clarence Place Hall Diocesan Offices

May Street (1867)

A charming arched doorway with a Juliet balcony above denotes the entrance to these High Victorian offices which were originally built as the Church of Ireland Diocesan Offices and hall, reading rooms and offices for the Church of Ireland Young Men's Society. They were designed by Lanyon, Lynn & Lanyon (likely by WH Lynn) and form a delightful Venetian Gothic palazzo showing the influence of John Ruskin in the brilliant polychromatic use of red and yellow brick, the whole structure on an ashlar plinth. Little colonettes with lovely foliated capitals frame the doorway and the CIYMS name and foundation date is carved onto an unfurling ribbon in the tympanum.

The building was refurbished as offices by Barrie Todd in 1986.

Refs: Dixon (2018), p. 154; Patton (2015), pp. 256-7

Other doorways of interest here:

Former Richardson Sons & Owdens Warehouse (1869) by WH Lynn, now Marks & Spencer (Venetian Gothic), Donegall Sq North; Former Donegall Square Methodist Church (1847) by Isaac Farrell, now Ulster Bank – façade only (hexastyle Corinthian portico), Donegall Square East; Former Scottish Temperance Buildings (1904) by Henry Seaver (Scots Baronial, polished granite pilasters and columns with sandstone Ionic capitals), Donegall Square South; Former General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland now John Ross & Co, 22-26 May Street (1873), architect unknown (Rose window and balcony)



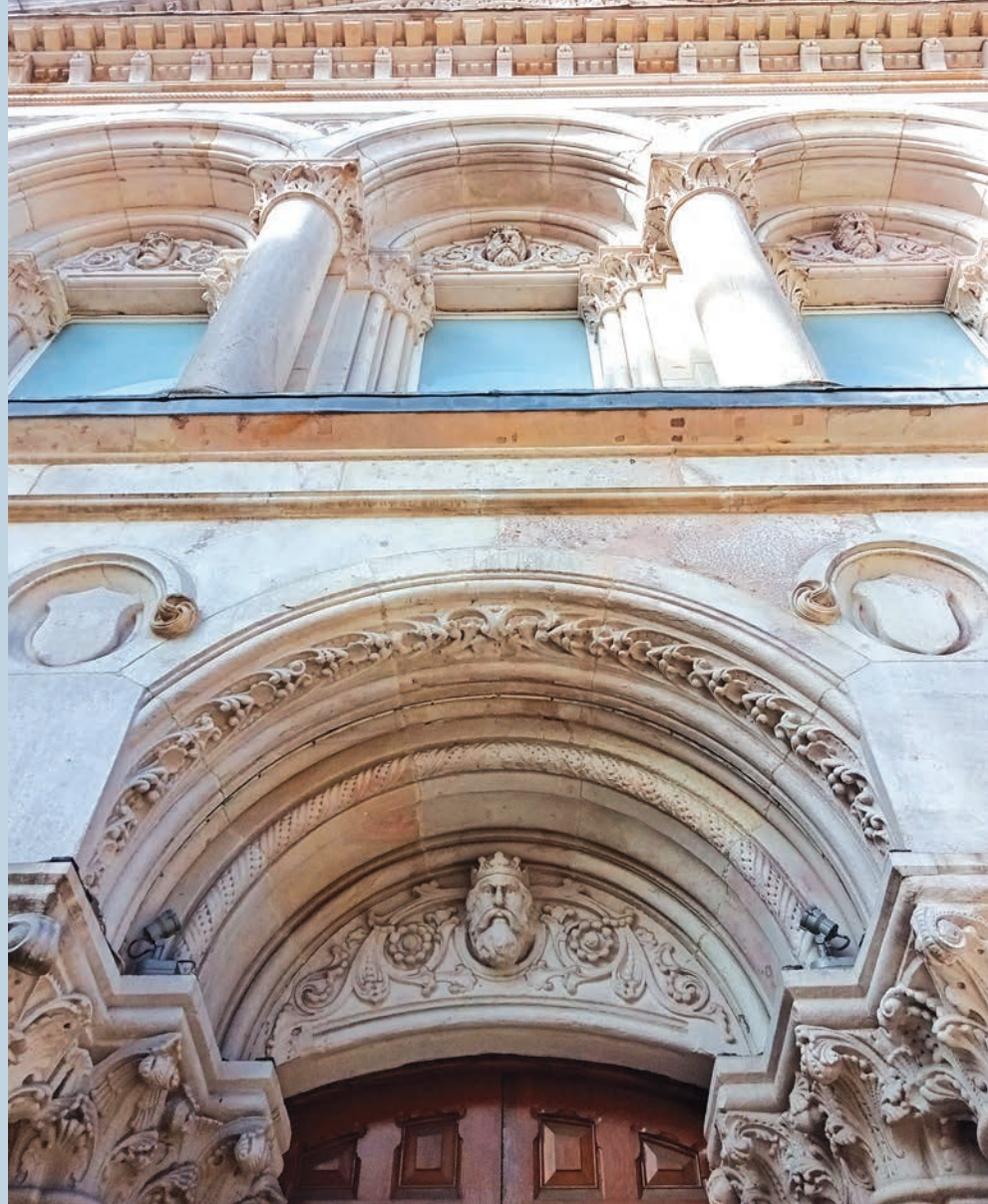
2 Royal Avenue

Former Provincial Bank of Ireland (1864-9)

A splendid entrance to a splendid former bank, designed by the High Victorian architect WJ Barre (1830-1867), completed just after his untimely death and with less decorative sculpture to the pediment and roof than he intended. Nonetheless, the façade and entrance are very imposing, suitable to a bank's self-confident display in the centre of the bustling city. The building is of Cookstown sandstone and is a Romanesque/Neo-Palladian palazzo, with clustered columns and a wealth of carved heads of Irish soldiers and ancient kings in the spandrels and a trio of large doors. It was originally designed to front on to Hercules Place and is the only building in Royal Avenue surviving from that period before the grand boulevard was created in the 1880s.

The interior of the building is an extraordinary sight, lit by a circular glass dome and with a host of quirky sculptural figures, it is one of the best and most surprising interiors in Belfast. After it ceased to be a bank, for many years it had a new lease of life as a supermarket and currently, now in the ownership of the City Council, it is a cultural and performance space. Barre also designed the Albert Clock, the Ulster Hall and the warehouse at 18 Bedford Street.

Refs: Dixon, pp. 152-3; Harron (2021), pp. 126-132 & 179-80; Patton (2015), pp. 311-12





8

The Reform Club

4 Royal Avenue (1885)

An elegant corner entrance with an iron balcony above at first-floor level and rising to a turret with an ogival lead rood and domed lantern for this red sandstone Victorian gentleman's club designed by Maxwell & Tuke of Manchester, supervised by WH Lynn. There is an inside open tall porch with a tiled floor bearing the club's shield, and note the red granite columns which complement the red sandstone of the building. The entrance speaks of subtle refinement and exclusivity.

The interior is very grand and luxurious, with a dining room on the first floor and a billiards room on the top floor, although only accessible to members of course; the ground floor always accommodated revenue-producing shops. Halfway along the main façade is the opening to the retail unit and a carriageway opening is situated in the final bay. The club absorbed the Ulster Club when it moved from its (also grand) home in Castle Place in the 1960s, now demolished; the combined club is now apolitical and open to men and women. Many illustrious Belfast figures have been members and gone in and out the doors; Sir Otto Jaffe was the Club's President in 1901.

Ref: Patton (2015), p. 312

9



No.13 Royal Avenue (1881)

Nos 1-19 Royal Avenue by David Salmon for John Robb form Corry House, a four-storey ten-bay stucco building with attic floor, Corinthian pilasters separating the bays. No.13 retains its original quirky doorway with a fork-bearded Victorian gent in a cloak and a demure lady with an empty pail perched on either side of a cartouche atop a semi-circular pediment supported by broad scrolled consoles.

The building has seen a variety of business come and go over the years; currently the entrance leads to a solicitor's offices. The decorative door gave additional liveliness to the grand High Victorian boulevard.

Ref: Patton (2015), p. 306

10



Former Northern Bank (Cathedral Quarter Managed Workspace) 109-111 Royal Avenue (1885)

A very fine pair of doors form the entrances to this former Italianate four-storey bank built of cream Dungannon sandstone designed by John Lanyon, son of Sir Charles Lanyon. These heavy doorcases on the outer bays of the building sit under richly carved scrolled brackets with floral swags; look out for the wonderful lion's head and the angry-looking eagle. Note also on the façade the 'NB' (Northern Bank) monogram and the giant order Ionic columns in reddish brown granite.



The architect himself took offices on the first floor of the building. Again, as with so many central Belfast banks, the choice of materials, lavish decoration and overall solidity of design convey wealth and assurance that people's money is well placed within that capital-rich institution: 'trust us with your money'.

Ref: Patton (2015), p. 310

Former Bank of Ireland

92-100 Royal Avenue (1930)

This Art Deco, steel-frame building by JV Downes of McDonnell & Dixon of Dublin in white Portland stone cladding with a tiered clock tower topped off with a copper dome on a canted corner to North Street forms a memorable conclusion to the Royal Avenue vista and a restrained modernist counterpoint to the flamboyant NeoBaroque City Hall whose materials it nonetheless echoes. The bank also forms a good vista conclusion to Lower North Street. With something of an American feel to it, with its emphasis on vertical lines, it speaks of economic growth and investment in the architectural language of its time.

The entrance on the chamfered corner is composed of five steps reaching a stylish Art Deco metal and glass double door with a fanlight; above the door 'Bank of Ireland' is displayed in original lettering and above it is a shallow relief of a stylised female head of Medusa (note the snakes) - in Classical architecture Medusa head reliefs were placed above entrances to protect against evil; however, the allusion here may be to the watermark of Bank of Ireland five, ten and twenty pound notes.

Closed in 2005, the building is now owned by Belfast City Council and being put to new visitor purposes.

Refs: Dixon (2008), p. 192; Patton (2015), pp. 316-18; Poppelreuter (2017), pp. 13-31





12

St Mary's Church

Chapel Lane (1868)

Behind Royal Avenue, facing on to Bank Square within a dense network of streets, the redbrick St Mary's Chapel gives Chapel Lane its name and possesses an interesting entrance with two low doors set within a semi-circular arch. Note the Maltese cross above the arch and the Celtic decoration within the arch and incorporated into the foliage of the squat capitals to the five colonettes. Within the tympanum above the twin portal is a sculpture of the Blessed Virgin Mary set within a 'mandorla', with an angel either side, one bearing a cross and the other a crown.

The building of 1868 by John O'Neill incorporates the walls of an earlier chapel of 1783 (and also has a later apse by Pdraig Gregory of 1940-41) and includes black-brick string banding and an eight-spoke cartwheel window set within a double ring of red and black brick banding and two square-plan small towers. Substantial contributions to the cost of the building were made by Protestants and some have alluded to the double entrance being akin to Presbyterians' predilection for double-door entrances; it is notable that there are no steps so that people can walk in easily off the street. An Italianate grotto dating from the 1950s is situated beside the church.

Ref: Patton (2015), pp. 71-2

Other doorways of interest here:

Rosemary Street First (NS) Presbyterian Church (1781-83) by Roger Mulholland; Former Masonic Hall, Rosemary Street (1956) by Young & Mackenzie; Former Sinclair's Department Store (1926) at 89-93 Royal Avenue by James Scott and at 95-101 also by James Scott (Art Deco, 1935); Belfast Central Library, Royal Avenue (1888) by WH Lynn; Former Telegraph Buildings (1886) by Henry Seaver



13

The Presbyterian Assembly Buildings

Fisherwick Place (1900-05)

This building, also known as Church House, in Scrabo sandstone, is the headquarters of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and is a strong statement of the denomination's sense of identity. Of major scale and a significant civic presence, it functions as offices and has lettable units but its chief function is for meetings of the Church's General Assembly in a rather beautiful meeting hall. Of note is the building's tower with a distinctive copper crown spire alluding to the Church's Scottish heritage (echoing the spire of St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh). It was designed by Young & Mackenzie Architects who designed most of the denomination's 19th and early 20th Century buildings in Ulster; it is in a mixture of Late Gothic Revival and Scots Baronial styles.

The main entrance with its Tudor doorway is a riot of display including multiple carved angel heads, the 'burning bush' emblem of the Church and the date of 1905; note also coats of arms of the principal Irish cities and towns associated with Presbyterianism across the building's façades and the balcony on the tower. The carving at first-floor level and above was carried out by Purdy & Millard while that at ground floor was by J Edgar Winter. Don't miss the Celtic Revival spirals in the spandrels above the main door by Winter – the inclusion of these might seem a little unusual; however, RM Young of the architectural firm was actively interested in the Celtic Revival. This is a showpiece entrance to a showpiece building.

Refs: Harron (2016), pp. 165-183; Patton (2015), pp. 171-2





14

The Crown Bar

46 Great Victoria Street (façade 1898)

One of the most famous, lavishly decorative High Victorian entrances in Belfast, the three-storey stucco building dates from 1839-40 and began as the Ulster Railway Hotel with a magnificent interior with snugs by E & J Byrne for Patrick Flanigan in 1885 with the tiled façade by E & J Byrne completed in 1898.

The entrance is through glass double doors with a porch of Corinthian columns, supporting a decorative gilded glass fascia displaying the sign for 'The Crown Liquor Saloon' with tiled sections either side displaying the words 'Spirit Vaults', with Corinthian pilasters and portals, all in sea green, maroon, pink, deep green and various shades of bronze. The whole entrance display is topped by green scallop features. The Crown is a landmark and destination pub for many tourists and it featured in the 1946 film 'Odd Man Out'.

The building was restored in 1980 by Robert McKinstry and a restaurant was added in 1988 by Gifford & Cairns. It is now owned by the National Trust – 'carefully pickled for posterity in Guinness, oysters and champ it has not lost its popular appeal' (Patton). The Crown presents an appearance of 'opulent richness and enjoyable gaiety' (Dixon), echoing the similar tone of the elaborate design of the Grand Opera House by Frank Matcham (1894) opposite it.

Refs: Dixon (2008), p. 168; Patton (2015), p. 195

15

Murray House

Murray Street (1910)

The entrance to the former Glendinning McLeish & Co. Ltd is a magnificent doorway tucked down the end of this short cul-de-sac. The L-shaped building by James A. Hanna (father of the well-respected architect Denis O'D. Hanna) is in red brick with an ashlar sandstone ground floor and dressings. The doorway has an Art Nouveau flair – wavy-topped set in a semicircle of leaded lights with a Gibbsian surround and surmounted by another wavy pediment containing the date – 1910 – in a field of carved shamrocks and monograms.

The firm's name is displayed in the mosaic in the pavement in front of the door. Look up, and spot the stumpy-columned windows at fourth-floor level and square end turrets with elongated porthole features.





16

The Old Museum Building

7 College Square North (1831)

This was the first museum in Ireland to be erected by voluntary subscription. It was built by the Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society but the collections which BNHPS amassed over the Victorian period were gifted in 1910 to the forerunner of the Ulster Museum.

The building was designed by Thomas Duff and Thomas Jackson and is an elegant three-storey Greek Revival structure embodying in style and function in the spirit of the Enlightenment; the ground floor is said to be based on the Choragic Monument of Thrasyllus recorded in *The Antiquities of Athens* by Stuart and Revett of 1789 – Duff and Jackson copied the laurel wreaths ornamenting the string course below the first-floor windows from that pattern book.

The portico is a copy of the doorway at the Horologion of Andronikos Kyrristos (aka the Tower of the Winds and again recorded by Stuart and Revett and widely imitated in the late 18th century – as at Mount Stewart). The fluted columns with acanthus capitals and the row of dentils all derive from that source, though the pediment on the Athens doorcase has been transposed to the top of the overall building. Note the rectangular decorative glass fanlight above the door, and, either side of the steps, stones from the Giant's Causeway.

Various tenants have occupied the building, including the Royal Society of Ulster Architects (RSUA) and the Ulster Academy of Arts. The Old Museum Arts Centre was based here until The MAC opened in St Anne's Square. The building is currently the base for Ulster Architectural Heritage and BNHPS.

Ref: Dixon (2008), p. 137; Patton (2015), p. 90

John Bell House

College Square East (1907)

A big, bold central doorway to a big, bold Edwardian NeoBaroque building built of dazzling white Portland stone (echoing the City Hall). Now student housing and renamed John Bell House after Belfast physicist John Stewart Bell (1928-1990), this was originally the Municipal Technical Institute, later the College of Technology.

The doorcase boasts rusticated columns on a frontispiece whose quoins run up to a moulded cornice above the first floor; Gibbrian columns support a segmental entablature enclosing Belfast's coat of arms on a giant scale.

When the 'Tech' opened, it had departments for building trades, textile industries, physics and electrical engineering, pure and applied chemistry, mechanical engineering and – on the top-lit top floor – the School of Art. It was a hive of activity, and through its doors thousands of Belfast's skilled workforce and artists went in and out.

It was designed by Samuel Stevenson (whose firm became a long-standing Belfast practice; Stevenson had trained with Young & Mackenzie). Its design strongly resembles (indeed is surely derivative of) the Old War Office in Whitehall, London (1898-1906) by William Young. Its mass, detailing and importance to Belfast's social history make John Bell House of interest; however, it has always been maligned for its siting in front of 'Inst' (RBAI), spoiling the view of that fine Georgian complex by Sir John Soane, 1807-14, and its overbearing presence to the elegant College Square E. Inst's governors sold the land for the 'Tech' to meet pressing debts at the time.

Refs: Harron (2016), pp. 362-3; Patton (2015), pp. 88-89





18

Former Central Tuberculosis Institute

Durham Street (1918)

This is a modest, functional redbrick building but it terminates the vista of College Square East with a doorway which incorporates a keystone head which alludes to its original purpose. The Belfast Board of Guardians instructed Young & Mackenzie to design this building to cope with the serious incidence of TB in the city at the time – it contained modern electrical machinery and an X-ray department.

The centrally placed doorway has Gibbsian pilasters and the keystone head depicts Hygeia, Greek goddess of hygiene and sanitation. Note also the carved City of Belfast coat of arms placed in the pediment within a brick arch above, a reminder of the City's civic role in providing care for citizens.

Durham Street was largely demolished over the course of the 20th Century; however, this building remained in use for healthcare purposes, including as a Blood Transfusion Service base. In recent years, it has been sensitively redeveloped for new housing by Clanmill Housing Association, and subdivided into apartments with new housing to the rear.

Refs: Harron (2016), p. 352; Patton (2015), p. 165

Other doorways of interest here:

Former Christ Church (1833) by William Farrell, College Square North and RBAI ('Inst') by Sir John Soane (1807-14), College Square East (not open to the public); Grand Opera House (1895) by Frank Matcham



19

Murphy & Stevenson

40 Linenhall Street (1902)

Don't miss the bold detailing above the central doorway of this former turn-of-the-century warehouse, designed by Young & Mackenzie for linen and handkerchief manufacturers, Murphy & Stevenson. The red sandstone entrance to a robust six-storey, fourteen-bay Belfast redbrick warehouse for a firm whose factory was in Dromore, Co. Down, speaks of ambition in the industrialised city.

The feature doorway has rusticated sandstone pilasters (echoing the rusticated sandstone ground-floor base of the building), a round-headed archway with a central keystone carved female head, and, above, an emphatic cornice incorporating a stone with the initials of the firm, M&S, a pierced parapet in front of a semi-circular window and two attached obelisk features set on balls. The other striking feature is the treatment of the pilaster capitals: two lions heads with linen swags underneath frame the doorway composition and the keystone head in a protective fashion; the Northern Whig newspaper in 1902 referred to the head as emblematic of 'our staple industry' – presumably linen.

Notice also on the scalloped roofline the circular turrets of the building.

Refs: Harron (2016), pp. 70, 255; Patton (2015), pp. 240-41





20

28 Bedford Street

(1865-7)

This highly distinctive and imposing High Victorian *palazzo* was designed by WJ Barre (1830-1867) – also architect of the neighbouring Ulster Hall (1862) – as a linen warehouse for William Girdwood. Red brick overall it is enlivened by sandstone arches, string-courses and columns and lively ornamentation, so that in it enjoys a Venetian feeling, all well-proportioned. Note also the superb chimneys.

There are two entrances – note the balconettes over each – one on Bedford Street (the principal one) and one on Franklin Street. The spandrels are carved with bas-relief arabesques; and note the piston-like short columns on the brackets – Barre often designed rather distinctive stumpy columns in his Gothic work (see also the interior of 2 Royal Avenue, the former Provincial Bank of Ireland, for example). Overall, this is a building by an architect at the height of his powers designing for boomtown Belfast ‘Linenopolis’.

The Bryson House charity bought the building in 1944 and it was its base, and therefore known as ‘Bryson House’ up until 2020; however, it is now being redeveloped as a museum.

Former Ewart's Warehouse

17 Bedford Street (1869)

This lovely three-storey Classical building with a corner copper dome was designed by James Hamilton of Glasgow – also the architect of the former Ulster Bank HQ, now the Merchant Hotel in Waring Street – for the Bedford Street Weaving Company, with later extensions by James Ewart along Franklin Street and to the rear by Samuel Stevenson & Sons in 1937 (demolished in 1990). It is in warm brown sandstone; paired windows give an arcaded effect, with idiosyncratic ornament (like the Scottish architect Alexander Greek Thomson's work). William Ewart & Son, flax spinners, linen manufacturers, bleachers and merchants bought over the business in 1876, hence the name. It lay sadly unused for many years, although with redevelopment close by and to the rear with the Invest NI building (Todd Architects) tower being erected in 2005. However, Ewart's has now been refurbished and is in use as office accommodation once more bringing this fine example of Victorian commercial architecture back to life. It bears nice comparison with the Lytle & McCausland's building (1866-7 by William Hastings) on Victoria Street with flamboyant sculptures on its façade representing inter-continental trade.

While the main Ewart's entrance turning the corner of Bedford Street and Franklin Street (rising through the semi-circular tower to the dome) is pleasing, the side entrance (pictured here) on Bedford Street is also worth noting for its Corinthian columns, crowned male keystone head figure and its lovely green-painted gates.

Refs: Dixon (2008), p. 164; Patton (2015), p. 34





22

Side entrance, former Presbyterian War Memorial Hostel

Brunswick Street (1926)

Here's a nice curiosity. The Presbyterian War Memorial Hostel on Howard Street and Brunswick Street was designed by Young & Mackenzie as a large hostel with 250 bedrooms – it is of steel frame construction with red Ballochmoyle sandstone cladding and has something of an American downtown air, perhaps reflecting the influence of James Reid Young's training in New York before the First World War. The style is simple, vaguely Art Deco, and there was originally a roof garden on the flat roof.

The side entrance on Brunswick Street includes a low relief 'burning bush' which is the symbol of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland within a rectangle above the double door while there is restrained decoration around the frame and thin side windows. Note at the base of the doorway, still just visible, the foundation stones bearing the names of the Architects and the builders.

Refs: Harron (2016), pp. 228-9 & 345-6; Patton (2015), p. 221

Former Swanston & Bones Warehouse

Queen Street/College Street (1890)

Here is a doorway gem from the High Victorian period, turning the corner of two streets at the base of a semi-circular tower topped off by conical turret. Now only the façade of the building has been retained and new student accommodation has been built behind and above; however, this was built for William Swanston as a four-storey warehouse, with stone used at ground-floor level and red brick above, and designed by the prolific practice of Young & Mackenzie.

The doorway (double-doors, now imaginatively painted) contains sculptural detail of nice wit and ingenuity and great delicacy: the head on the keystone depicts Sir Arthur Chichester, so closely associated with the foundations of Belfast as a town, wearing a deep ruffle of the seventeenth century which neatly alludes to the collar-and-cuff making purpose of the Swanston & Bones business while putting the building in the city's historic context. Amidst sculpted foliage (including rose, shamrock, thistle and oak) there are also carved coats of arms of Belfast and Ulster in the spandrels.

The retention of this fine doorway owes much to campaigning. The UAHS took two successful judicial reviews to establish the principle that an unlisted building in a conservation area which contributes to its character should not be replaced by a new building for merely economic reasons and the policy presumption should be in favour of retaining the building.

Refs: Harron (2016), pp. 70-72 & 248; Patton (2015), p. 297



Other doorways of interest here:

Ulster Hall, Bedford Street (1862) by WJ Barre; BBC Broadcasting House, Ormeau Avenue (1939) by James Millar; Ormeau Baths, Ormeau Avenue (1889) by Robert Watt; St Malachy's Catholic Church (1840-44) by Thomas Jackson, Alfred Street; Nos. 19-21 Alfred Street (1911-12) by James A Hanna



Pottinger's Entry and The Morning Star

off High Street and Ann Street

Pottinger's Entry, one of the narrow lanes or entries of old Belfast, was originally a tightly packed lane of small houses and business, including Marcus Ward Stationers, c.1840, as well as pubs and oyster houses. It was developed before 1819 and named after the Pottinger family – Thomas Pottinger became the first sovereign of Belfast in 1661 and Sir Henry Pottinger was a celebrated individual who became Governor of Hong Kong in 1843. While now wide at High Street, the entry narrows towards Ann Street and the entrance to it from there is painted black with a fanlight motif above it.



At Nos. 17-19 is The Morning Star pub of c.1820, refaced c.1885 – a pub of great character with a very distinctive doorway on its corner, guarded by a winged lion above it; the attractive brass and glass sign for the pub with a bronze urn on top juts out from one of the Corinthian pilasters of the door.



St George's Church

High Street (1811-16)

The historic St George's Church of Ireland church stands on the site of the Chapel of the Ford where travellers could give thanks for safe crossing of the River Farset, and its history can be traced back to the early 14th Century; however this elegant stone building was built in 1811-16 as a chapel-of-ease for St Anne's parish church to the designs of John Bowden of Dublin, incorporating an earlier portico which came from the Earl Bishop of Derry's unfinished house at Ballyscullion House near Castledawson of 1788. It is a four-columned Corinthian porch attached with fluted responds on the slightly curved main façade.

Within the pediment are two badges in the centre above oak leaf garlands – one of bishop's keys (arms of the See of Down and Connor), the other the Belfast coat of arms. Between the six-panel front doors at ground level are semi-circular empty niches. It is a grand presentation yet tastefully restrained and sober.

Internally, the church is interesting: a Georgian hall with an Anglo-Catholic chancel (from where a strong choral tradition was developed); the architect WJ Barre, who was a member of the church, undertook interior alterations in the 1860s. St George's (while named after the Saint, the allusion was to King George III) narrowly survived wartime bombing but was damaged sixteen times by explosions during the 1970s and 1990s but has been restored in recent years.

Refs: Harron (2021), pp. 10-13, 65-7 & 152; Patton (2015), pp. 210-211



Other doorways of interest here:

Riddel's Warehouse (1867) by Thomas Jackson & Son, Ann Street;
 Custom House (1854-7), Custom House Square by Lanyon & Lynn
 (Italianate palazzo); Headline Building (1863) by Thomas Jackson & Son,
 Victoria Street; Albert Clock (1865-9) by WJ Barre, Victoria Street;
 Former Northern Bank (1851-2) by Sir Charles Lanyon, Victoria Street;
 Lytle & McCausland's (1867) by William Hastings, Victoria Street





26

St Anne's Cathedral

Donegall Street (1898-1927)

The building of Belfast Cathedral on the site of St Anne's Parish Church took over a century and over ten architects to fully complete. The main Neo-Romanesque building in Portland stone was designed by Thomas Drew and completed in 1904; however, the impressive front was designed by Charles Nicholson and completed in 1927. It incorporates a great west central door corresponding with the wide nave and with doors either side leading on to the north and south aisles. The frontispiece, approached by a wide flight of steps, contains deeply recessed Romanesque arched doorways and it was designed as a First World War memorial. It has been the setting for many civic occasions, often notably funerals, including that of Lord Carson who is buried inside.

The rich portal carvings were undertaken by Esmond Burton – of the crucifixion on the left, the resurrection on the right and Christ in Glory in a mandorla above the central door, surrounded by saints and with the inscription 'He shall reign for ever and ever' beneath.

There are great bronze and wood doors behind which are glass doors which allow for lovely views into the nave from Writer's Square when open. The cathedral contains beautiful mosaic work, interesting glass and memorials, a huge Celtic cross at the north transept and a 2007 stainless steel flesh spire above the crossing (by Colin Conn and Robert Jamison).

Ref: Patton (2015), pp. 150-151

The Merchant Hotel

Waring Street (1857-60)

The Merchant Hotel was built as the stunningly proud headquarters of the Ulster Bank to the competition-winning designs of James Hamilton of Glasgow. It was converted to a luxury hotel in 2006 and restored by Consarc Design Group. The Italianate building, of gingery Giffnock sandstone with a wealth of sculptural carving by Thomas Fitzpatrick, has one of the most splendid façades in the city, with the main entrance approached by a grand flight of steps (down which, tragically, Robert Grimshaw, and 80-year old director of the Bank fell to his death in 1867 – supposedly, according to his biographer, why WJ Barre did not include a flight of steps in his design for the Provincial Bank at Royal Avenue a few years later).

The main door has moulded and fielded panels in round-headed surrounds with the bank arms (a red hand on shield supported by wolfhounds); note the highly ornate cast iron panels with a rich fretwork of leaves, linking the bases of lanterns in front of the bank. Note also the Doric and Corinthian columns and the dramatic skyline with a sculptured group of Britannia, Justice and Commerce, with groups of tall urns at the corner.

Refs: Harron (2021), pp. 8, 126-132 & 179-80; Patton (2015), p. 366





28

St Patrick's Church

Donegall Street (1877)

This landmark church was designed by Timothy Hevey and Mortimer Thompson in Gothic Revival style in red sandstone with limestone banding. The entrance at the base of the magnificent tower which rises to an octagonal spire presents a lively frontage which incorporates a rose window within an arched recess lined with colonettes like rows of organ pipes. The double door leading to the mosaic-inlaid porch has a semicircular tympanum above within which lively naturalistic swirling foliage carvings form a backdrop to a central stone statue of St Patrick, patron Saint of Ireland, with bishop's crook and mitre and in a stance of pronouncing a blessing, atop a column.

The church, which was refurbished after a fire in 1995, contains interesting artefacts including a superb triptych of the Madonna, St Patrick and St Bridget painted by the acclaimed artist Sir John Lavery (1856-1941), who was born nearby and baptised in the parish. A UHC blue plaque on the neighbouring terrace attests to the connection while another pays tribute to civil engineer William Mulholland (1855-1935), designer of the Los Angeles Aqueduct, also born and baptised in the parish.

Ref: Patton (2015), p. 154

29



No. 199 Donegall Street – St Patrick's Presbytery

(c.1820, brass door 1952)

This three-storey redbrick terrace of houses offers a glimpse of Georgian old Belfast and No.199 is the Presbytery to St Patrick's Church next door. It sports a magnificent highly polished brass door with a roundheaded fanlight above the lintel and supporting white-painted Ionic columns. The house was originally a Bishop's Palace for Bishop William Croll appointed Bishop of Down and Connor in 1825 and the original front door is now on the side of the house facing the church. The house claims to be the oldest continuous inhabitancy in the city of Belfast.

The brass door bears bullet and shrapnel marks from the Troubles; it was clad in brass in 1952 and repaired and fully refurbished in 2020.

Ref: Patton (2015), p. 154

30



Clifton House

North Queen Street (1771-74)

This is Belfast's oldest public building and was probably originally based on designs by Robert Joy – it was built as a Poorhouse (established as the Belfast Charitable Society in 1752) and is still used more or less for its original purpose as a charitable home for old people with sheltered housing; the historic central block is used for public purposes and events and contains various historic artefacts.

The central doorway to the pedimented two-storey block (flanked by single-storey wings with gabled end pavilions), all in nicely weathered old red brick, is most elegant: a pedimented entrance doorcase with attached Doric columns sits at the head of a flight of sweeping stone steps; the eye is drawn inevitably upwards to the octagonal sandstone tower with ball finial and weather vane.

Ref: Patton (2015), pp. 266-7

Other doorways of interest here:

Assembly Rooms, 2 Waring Street (1769-1845), Robert Taylor and Sir Charles Lanyon; The Black Box (c.1850), Hill Street (note the large keystone head in a garland of roses); Former Newsletter Offices (1874) by William Hastings, Donegall Street





1714-1837 GEORGIAN

Classical style; look out for fanlights on domestic doorways; grander buildings may have porticos (porches) with Classical columns (Doric/Ionic/Corinthian Order capitals) and pediments; sometimes Gibbsian doorways feature.

NB: The period 1811-1820 can be referred to as Regency.

1837-1901 VICTORIAN

A huge variety of Revival styles, from Gothic Revival to Italianate, and often highly decorative; sometimes Neo-Classical, Neo-Renaissance and Neo-Baroque. From the 1850s (after the publication of John Ruskin's 'The Seven Lamps of Architecture' and 'The Stones of Venice') the period is often known as 'High Victorian'. Belfast was booming in the Victorian period, so many of the doorways in the booklet are from this period.

1901-1910 (or up to 1918) EDWARDIAN

Many Revival and eclectic styles; often with grand gestures; also Arts & Crafts and Art Nouveau styles. Again, Belfast has many fine Edwardian buildings and doorways.

1901-1960s MODERN

Generally a move to cool, geometric and undecorated lines. In the 1920s and 30s Art Deco was popular with jazzy decorative elements. Belfast has a number of good Art Deco buildings.

EXAMPLES

5. *May Street Presbyterian Church;*
16. *Old Museum Building;*
25. *St George's Church;*
29. *199 Donegall St;*
30. *Clifton House*

2. *Scottish Provident Buildings;*
6. *Clarence Place Hall;*
7. *2 Royal Ave;*
8. *Reform Club;*
14. *Crown Bar;*
20. *28 Bedford St;*
27. *Merchant Hotel;*
28. *St Patrick's Church*

1. *Belfast City Hall;*
3. *Ocean Buildings;*
13. *Presbyterian Assembly Buildings;*
15. *Murray House;*
17. *John Bell House*

11. *Former Bank of Ireland, Royal Ave;*
22. *Former Presbyterian War Memorial Hostel*

SUGGESTED FURTHER DOORWAY HIGHLIGHTS IN CENTRAL BELFAST:

DOCKS

- *The Harbour Office*
- *Sinclair Seamen's Presbyterian Church*
- *Former St Joseph's Catholic Church*

LAGANSIDE/COURTS

- *The Bar Library (bronze doors)*
- *The High Court*
- *St George's Market*
- *Former Belfast Town Hall*

CARLISLE CIRCUS/CRUMLIN ROAD

- *Former Carlisle Memorial Methodist Church*
- *Mater Hospital*
- *Crumlin Road Gaol*
- *Former Courthouse*



NOW DISCOVER SOME MORE INTERESTING DOORWAYS IN YOUR AREA ...

See our Open Heritage online tour which accompanies this booklet.



RECOMMENDED BOOKS,

all published by Ulster Architectural Heritage:

Dixon, Hugh, *An Introduction to Ulster Architecture* (2nd edn, 2008)

Harron, Paul, *Architects of Ulster: WJ Barre (1830-1867): A Vigorous Mind* (2021)

Harron, Paul, *Architects of Ulster: Young & Mackenzie, 1850-1960: A Transformational Provincial Practice* (2016)

Larmour, Paul, *Belfast City Hall, An Architectural History* (2010)

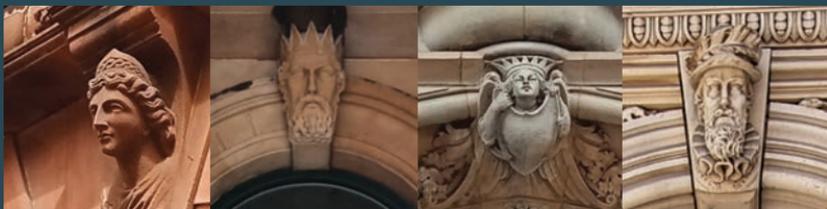
Patton, Marcus, *Central Belfast: An Historical Gazetteer* (2nd edn, 2015)

Poppelreuter, Tanja (ed), *Glamour and Gloom: 1930s Architecture in Belfast* (2017)

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Doorways tell stories



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