



ROUTLEDGE RESEARCH IN ARCHITECTURE

# HOUSING, ARCHITECTURE AND THE EDGE CONDITION

*Dublin is Building, 1935 - 1975*

ELLEN ROWLEY



# Housing, Architecture and the Edge Condition

This book presents an architectural overview of Dublin's mass housing building boom from the 1930s to the 1970s. During this period, Dublin Corporation built tens of thousands of two-storey houses, developing whole communities from virgin sites and green fields at the city's edge, while tentatively building four-storey flat blocks in the city centre. Author Ellen Rowley examines how and why this endeavour occurred. Asking questions around architectural and urban obsolescence, she draws on national political and social histories, as well as looking at international architectural histories and the influence of post-war reconstruction programmes in Britain, or the symbolisation of the modern dwelling within the formation of the modern nation.

Critically, the book tackles this housing history as an architectural and design narrative. It explores the role of the architectural community in this frenzied provision of housing for the populace. Illustrated with architectural drawings and photographs from contemporary journals and the private archives of Dublin-based architectural practices, this book will appeal to academics and researchers interested in the conditions surrounding Dublin's housing history.

**Ellen Rowley** is an architectural and cultural historian who has written extensively on twentieth-century architecture in Ireland. She is editor and principal author of *More Than Concrete Blocks: Dublin City's Twentieth-Century Buildings and Their Stories* – an ongoing research and educational project into Dublin's built environment between 1900 and 2000, commissioned by Dublin City Council and co-funded by the Heritage Council of Ireland. Volume I, 1900–1940 was published in 2016 and Volume II, 1940–1972 will be published in 2018. Ellen co-edited *Irish Architecture 1600–2000*, Volume IV of *Art and Architecture of Ireland*. She is a research associate at the School of Architecture (APEP), University College Dublin, Ireland, and she has been the consulting curator of Dublin's tenement history at 14 Henrietta Street, a new museum of Irish urban life and housing. Along with housing and the meaning of ordinary architecture, Ellen is deeply interested in the influence of the Catholic Church upon Ireland's built environment and is working on a research project, *The Architecture of Catholic Ireland, 1940–1980*.

## **Routledge Research in Architecture**

The *Routledge Research in Architecture* series provides the reader with the latest scholarship in the field of architecture. The series publishes research from across the globe and covers areas as diverse as architectural history and theory, technology, digital architecture, structures, materials, details, design, monographs of architects, interior design and much more. By making these studies available to the worldwide academic community, the series aims to promote quality architectural research.

For a full list of titles, please visit: <https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Research-in-Architecture/book-series/RRARCH>

### **Architectures of Transversality**

Paul Klee, Louis Kahn and the Persian Imagination

*Shima Mohajeri*

### **Rome and the Legacy of Louis I. Kahn**

*Edited by Elisabetta Barizza and Marco Falsetti*

### **Activism in Architecture**

Bright Dreams of Passive Energy Design

*Edited by Carolina Dayer and Margot McDonald*

### **Christian Norberg-Schulz's Interpretation of Heidegger's Philosophy**

Care, Place and Architecture

*Hendrik Auret*

### **Architecture and the Modern Hospital**

Nosokomeion and Hygeia

*Julie Willis, Philip Goad, and Cameron Logan*

### **Housing, Architecture and the Edge Condition**

Dublin is Building, 1935–1975

*Ellen Rowley*

# Housing, Architecture and the Edge Condition

Dublin is Building, 1935–1975

Ellen Rowley

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK



Comhairle Cathrach  
Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City Council



First published 2019  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge  
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 2019 Ellen Rowley

The right of Ellen Rowley to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*Trademark notice:* Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

Names: Rowley, Ellen, author.

Title: Housing, Architecture and the Edge Condition: Dublin is Building, 1935–1975 / Ellen Rowley.

Description: New York: Routledge, 2019. |

Series: Routledge research in architecture | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018032418 | ISBN 9781138103801 (hardback) |

ISBN 9781315102528 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Architecture, Domestic–Ireland–Dublin–History–20th century. | Housing–Ireland–Dublin–History–20th century. | Architecture and society–Ireland–Dublin–History–20th century. |

City planning–Ireland–Dublin–History–20th century. | Dublin (Ireland)–Buildings, structures, etc.

Classification: LCC NA7339.D83 R69 2019 |

DDC 728.09418/350904–dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018032418>

ISBN: 978-1-138-10380-1 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-10252-8 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon

by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India

# Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
 <b>Introduction: Three grounds – telling the story of housing architecture in Dublin</b>	 <b>1</b>
<i>Heroes and victims?</i>	10
<i>Notes</i>	15
 <b>1 Irish architecture and its culture, 1930–1970</b>	 <b>17</b>
<i>Part I. The background</i>	17
<i>Part II. The Emergency years</i>	24
<i>Part III. Post-Emergency 1946–1949</i>	29
<i>Part IV. The 1950s’ mixed fortunes</i>	39
<i>Part V. Into the 1960s: towards wholesale modernisation</i>	46
<i>Some thoughts...</i>	54
<i>Notes</i>	54
 <b>2 Clearing hovels and building homes: Architectural endeavours in Dublin’s housing reforms, 1931–1945</b>	 <b>60</b>
<i>Part I. Working-class housing in 1930s Dublin</i>	61
<i>Part II. The Report of Inquiry into the Housing of the Working Classes of the City of Dublin</i>	66
<i>Part III. A miracle of planning</i>	71
<i>Part IV. Town planning as common ground from the late 1930s</i>	76
<i>Part V. Architects’ endeavours: into the early 1940s</i>	82
<i>Some thoughts...</i>	86
<i>Notes</i>	86

<b>3</b>	<b>Building on the edge: Dublin's suburban housing drive of the 1940s</b>	<b>92</b>
	<i>Part I. From rural depopulation to suburban housing proliferation</i>	93
	<i>Part II. Crumlin housing estate: an architectural account</i>	101
	<i>Part III. Crumlin housing estate: a social view</i>	117
	<i>Part IV. Chronology of events from Emergency to post-war</i>	123
	<i>Some thoughts...</i>	130
	<i>Notes</i>	130
<b>4</b>	<b>How we might live: The architecture of 'ordinary' housing from late 1940s to 1950s Dublin</b>	<b>137</b>
	<i>Part I. Peripheral profession</i>	138
	<i>Part II. Preoccupied by prefabrication</i>	144
	<i>Part III. Prefabrication in reality</i>	151
	<i>Part IV. Between tradition and system: the cavity block</i>	157
	<i>Part V. An ideal home for 1950s Dublin</i>	166
	<i>Some thoughts...</i>	173
	<i>Notes</i>	174
<b>5</b>	<b>Housing the collective: Multi-storey dwellings in Dublin, c.1930 to c.1970</b>	<b>180</b>
	<i>Part I. Situating Dublin's 1930s flat block schemes</i>	181
	<i>Part II. Emergency measures: Alternative types and deviations from type</i>	193
	<i>Part III. Walk-ups and suburban sites: Tentative typologies</i>	202
	<i>Part IV. Avant-garde solutions for regenerating late 1950s Dublin</i>	209
	<i>Some thoughts...</i>	218
	<i>Notes</i>	220
<b>6</b>	<b>Some thoughts...: New and old housing from the 1960s into the 1970s</b>	<b>225</b>
	<i>Part I. Crisis and new directions: System building for 1960s Dublin</i>	226

<i>Part II. Return to the living city: Protest and a housing competition</i>	237
<i>And so... some overall thoughts</i>	246
<i>Notes</i>	251

<i>Appendix</i>	255
<i>Bibliography</i>	259
<i>Index</i>	280



# Figures

I.1	The Old and the New, <i>Ireland is Building. Hospitals and Houses</i> , Departments of Local Government and Health joint publication, 1950–1951	2
I.2	R. C. Stephenson (architect on Simms' housing team, Dublin Corporation), etching of Watling Street flat scheme, courtyard, published in 1939 to illustrate lecture by Simms, <i>RIAI Centenary</i>	2
I.3	Berkeley Library, mid construction with Liberty Hall and Hawkins House in the background, 1965, ABK Collection, IAA	9
I.4	Noel Moffett, 'Mountjoy Square Slums', late 1940s, as published in Patricia Hutchins, <i>James Joyce's Dublin</i> (Gray Walls Press, 1950)	11
I.5	Herbert George Simms portrait, Simms scrapbook/album, IAA 2012/034	13
1.1	Hydro Electric Scheme, Ardnacrusha, River Shannon, ESB & Siemens-Schuckert, 1925–1929, Electricity Supply Board Archive	19
1.2	Carrickmacross Alcohol Factory, Co. Monaghan, Jan Postma, 1935–1937, <i>Irish Builder and Engineer</i> (17th September 1938)	20
1.3	Cashel Hospital, Co. Tipperary, Vincent Kelly, 1934–1940, published in <i>Oispeadéil na hÉireann, Ireland's Hospitals, 1930–1955</i>	21
1.4	Skyrne National School, Tara, Co. Meath, OPW (Basil Boyd Barrett), 1947, <i>RIAI Yearbook 1951/1952</i>	23
1.5	Marino College, Vocational School, Fairview, Robinson & Keefe, 1936, Robinson Keefe Devane archive, RKD Architects	23
1.6	National Planning Exhibition, Noel Moffett & Reginald Malcomson, 1944, photograph by Moffett, published in <i>The Architects' Journal</i> (22nd March 1945)	26

1.7	Dublin Airport, Entrance, OPW (Desmond FitzGerald and team), 1937–1941, <i>RIAI Yearbook 1945</i>	28
1.8	Ireland Issue spread, <i>Architectural Design</i> (July 1947)	30
1.9	RIAI yearbook collage, messages from J. J. P. Oud, Frank Lloyd Wright and Walter Gropius to Irish architects, 1946, <i>RIAI Yearbook, 1946</i>	32
1.10	Allenwood Power Station, Co. Kildare, ESB, 1947–1948, Electricity Supply Board Archive	34
1.11	Donnybrook Garage, watercolour elevation, Michael Scott & Brennan, 1946–1951, Michael Scott Collection, IAA	35
1.12	Chassis Factory, Inchicore, Michael Scott & Associates, 1946–1948, G. & T. Crampton Photograph Archive. © Unknown. Digital content by Dr. Joseph Brady, published by UCD Library, University College Dublin	36
1.13	Aspro Factory, Naas Road, Alan Hope, 1946–1949, G. & T. Crampton Photograph Archive. © Unknown. Digital content by Dr. Joseph Brady, published by UCD Library, University College Dublin	37
1.14	Town Centre, Lansbury Estate, Festival of Britain, Frederick Gibberd (and others), 1951, photograph by Elain Harwood, 2018	42
1.15	College of Further Education, Ballsbridge, Dublin, J.A. White (in association with Donnelly & Martin), 1949, <i>RIAI Yearbook 1950</i>	44
1.16	Shelter, People's Park, Phoenix Park, Raymond McGrath, OPW, 1956, published by <i>Architectural Survey</i> , 1957	46
1.17	Busáras, Michael Scott & Associates, 1946–1953, Michael Scott Collection, IAA	47
1.18	Liberty Hall, Des Rea O'Kelly, 1958–1963, Hugh Doran Collection, IAA	53
2.1	House example, elevations/sections/floor plans, 1924 from <i>House Designs prescribed by the Minister for Local Government under the Housing Act, 1924</i>	63
2.2	Table, Appendix 20, <i>Report of Inquiry into the Housing of the Working Classes of the City of Dublin</i> , 1939–1943, Department of Local Government and Public Health, copy in IAA	67
2.3	Reconditioning, floor plan of conversion, Dublin Corporation Maintenance Department, 1946, published in <i>The Architects' Journal</i> (26th December 1946)	72
2.4	Reconditioning, axonometric of kitchen and light well, Dublin Corporation Maintenance Department, 1946, published in <i>The Architects' Journal</i> (26th December 1946)	73

2.5	Reconditioning, streamlined façade, Dublin Corporation Maintenance Department, 1946, published in <i>The Architects' Journal</i> (26th December 1946)	74
2.6	Abercrombie et al., map of premiated design for <i>Dublin of the Future</i> , 1922, published in <i>Dublin of the Future</i> (Civics Institute, Liverpool Press, 1922)	77
2.7	Abercrombie et al., 'Diagram showing Agricultural Reservation and Urban Areas', <i>Dublin, Sketch Development Plan for Dublin</i> (Dublin Corporation, 1941)	78
2.8	Frank Gibney, 'Framework for a National Plan', published pamphlet, 1943	81
2.9	Eoghan Buckley, Ideal rural cottage competition, second place winner, 1944, as published in 'Rural Housing in Eire', <i>Architectural Design</i> (November 1946)	85
3.1	Aerial view of Mourne Road and environs, Drimnagh, Church of Good Counsel (Ashlin & Coleman, 1942), published in <i>Property Market Review</i> , 1949–1950	97
3.2	Elinor Wiltshire, Communion procession, 1969, WIL 45[8], Elinor Wiltshire Collection, National Library of Ireland	99
3.3	Malachy Hayes photo-story, 'Here you see one of our modern housing schemes at Crumlin', from <i>Dublin by Day and by Night</i> (guidebook, 1939–1945)	100
3.4	Tony Linck, 'Housing near Dublin' (Slievenamon Road, Crumlin), 1948 for <i>Life Magazine</i> reproduced courtesy of Getty Images	103
3.5	Crumlin Estate mid-construction, 1934, G. & T. Crampton Photograph Archive. © Unknown. Digital content by Dr. Joseph Brady, published by UCD Library, University College Dublin	103
3.6	DADco prototype, Oxmantown Road, Stoneybatter Scheme, 1903–1906, G. & T. Crampton Photograph Archive. © Unknown. Digital content by Dr. Joseph Brady, published by UCD Library, University College Dublin	105
3.7	Back gardens on the Marino/Croydon Park Estate, 1925–1926, G. & T. Crampton Photograph Archive. © Unknown. Digital content by Dr. Joseph Brady, published by UCD Library, University College Dublin	106
3.8	Drumcondra Estate, Walsh Road, 1928–1929, G. & T. Crampton Photograph Archive. © Unknown. Digital content by Dr. Joseph Brady, published by UCD Library, University College Dublin	106

3.9	Type 14c house, modified 4-room house, projecting centre, plan/section/elevation, 1940s, for Sarsfield Road, Ballyfermot area, Dublin City Council, City Architects/Conservation	107
3.10	Crumlin end of terrace, Mourne Road, 2018, photograph by Mark Halpin, 2018	108
3.11	Type 5 house, 32 and 33: Corner pair, 4-room house, roof plan/section, 1940s, for Sarsfield Road, Ballyfermot area, Dublin City Council, City Architects/Conservation	108
3.12	Crumlin wall and gate detail, 2018, photograph by Mark Halpin, 2018	109
3.13	Abercrombie, 'Suggested development of an area off Cabra', Plate XXV, <i>Dublin of the Future</i> (Civics Institute, Liverpool Press, 1922)	110
3.14	Typical Dublin Corporation cottage design, floor plan and elevations, 1940s, as published in <i>Architectural Design</i> , July 1947 (Ireland issue)	112
3.15	Parlour House, floor plan – ground and first floor, Crumlin, 1930s–1940s, drawn by Ronan Costello, 2018	113
3.16	Kitchen from reconditioning project, 1946, Dublin Corporation Maintenance Department, published in <i>The Architects Journal</i> (26th December 1946)	115
3.17	New Kitchen Views from Frances Sheehy, 'Your Kitchen: An Architect's Kitchen' in <i>Homeplanning</i> (September 1953)	116
3.18	Cabra Estate layout, West Cabra, 719 houses, Sections 2 & 23, Dublin City Council, City Architects/Conservation	117
3.19	Tony Linck, view of Slievenamon Road, 1948 for <i>Life Magazine</i> reproduced courtesy of Getty Images	118
3.20	Mid-war terrace, Crumlin/Drimnagh scheme, photograph by Paul Tierney, Dublin City Council Heritage C20th Architecture project, 2011	124
4.1	Dermot O'Toole, 'Runway to Pillar' lecture/photo essay, published in <i>RIAI Yearbook 1949</i>	138
4.2	Simms and team, playground drawing, Marrowbone Lane Scheme, 1937–1941, 'Marrowbone Lane Public Housing Flats no.0523 and no.0294', Patterson Kempster Shortall Collection (71/1), IAA	139
4.3	Bord na Mona villages, <i>Architectural Survey</i> , 1953	143
4.4	House at Killiney, South Dublin, Jack O'Hare, <i>Architectural Survey</i> , 1955	143
4.5	Terrace of Nofrango houses, Major Waller, Dublin Corporation housing, 1928, photograph by Paul Tierney, Dublin City Council Heritage C20th Architecture project, 2011	145

xii *Figures*

4.6	Pair of houses, Sutton, North Dublin, Noel Moffett, 1946, as published in <i>Architectural Design</i> (July 1947, Ireland issue)	146
4.7	Institute of Industrial Research and Standards (IIRS), Glasnevin, Buckley O’Gorman, 1947, as published in <i>RIAI Yearbook 1950</i>	150
4.8	Balornock Estate, Orlit housing, Glasgow Corporation, 1949, Glasgow City Archives, D-AP9/7/9/41	153
4.9	Captain’s Avenue, Orlit housing, Crumlin, 1950, photograph by Ellen Rowley, 2010	154
4.10	Cavity Block advertisement, Clondalkin Concrete, see <i>Irish Builder and Engineer</i>	159
4.11	Housing Scheme, Banagher, Co. Offaly, Michael Scott & Associates, 1946, as published in <i>Architectural Design</i> (July 1947, Ireland issue)	160
4.12	Plans, Pearse Park housing estate, Dundalk, Co. Louth, Noel Moffett, 1949–1951, as published in <i>Architectural Design</i> , 1952	161
4.13	Smith and Pearson advertisement, steel half-door, see <i>Irish Builder and Engineer</i>	162
4.14	Better Buildings Exhibition view, <i>RIAI Yearbook 1950</i>	163
4.15	Housing Estate, Sallynoggin, Daithí Hanly & Luan Cuffe, Dun Laoghaire Council, 1948–1951, <i>RIAI Yearbook 1951–2</i>	165
4.16	Ideal Home winning entry, Fred Rogerson, 1953, <i>Irish Architect and Contractor</i> , July 1953	168
4.17	CIAM group portrait, <i>Architectural Review</i> , 1947, © Unknown, Moffett’s copy, Noel Moffett Collection, IAA	170
5.1	Marrowbone Lane flats, street front, 1937–1941, 1948 for <i>Life Magazine</i> reproduced courtesy of Getty Images	182
5.2	Chancery House, Chancery Place, 1938, G. & T. Crampton Photograph Archive. © Unknown. Digital content by Dr. Joseph Brady, published by UCD Library, University College Dublin	183
5.3	Hanover Street flats, mid-construction Block B, 21st August 1934, G. & T. Crampton Photograph Archive. © Unknown. Digital content by Dr. Joseph Brady, published by UCD Library, University College Dublin	184
5.4	Dickons Lane, Dublin, 1913, Cooke Collection, Royal Society of the Antiquaries of Ireland	185
5.5	Noel Moffett, Ballybough new flats and old cottages, Ballybough House, Dublin, 1946, as published in <i>Architectural Design</i> (November 1946), Noel Moffett Collection, IAA	186

5.6	Pieter Lodewijk Takstraat, part of De Dageraad (1918–1923, Michel de Klerk & Piet Kramer), photograph by Mark Minkjan, 2018	188
5.7	Iveagh Trust housing scheme, Bull Alley, 1899–1906, photograph by Paul Tierney, Dublin City Council Heritage C20th Architecture project, 2011	189
5.8	Henrietta House, scheme aerial view, 1939, photograph by Paul Tierney, Tenement Museum Dublin project, DCC, 2017	191
5.9	Charlemont Street flat blocks scheme, proposed for St. Ultan's PUS, Michael Scott Architects, 1941, as published in <i>Irish Builder and Engineer</i> (30th August 1941)	194
5.10	Rear elevation, Ffrench-Mullen House, St. Ultan's PUS, Michael Scott Architects, 1941, as published in <i>Architectural Design</i> (July 1947, Ireland issue)	195
5.11	Hill Street scheme, Holy Child Housing Society, Vincent Kelly, 1937, as published in <i>Irish Builder and Engineer</i> (4th September 1937)	197
5.12	Flat block floor plan, Marrowbone Lane, 1941, as published in <i>Architectural Design</i> (July 1947, Ireland issue)	199
5.13	Fatima Mansions (Rialto scheme), 1950s aerial view by Rex Roberts Studio, G. & T. Crampton Photograph Archive. © Unknown. Digital content by Dr. Joseph Brady, published by UCD Library, University College Dublin	200
5.14	Leo Fitzgerald House, Hogan Place, 1957, G. & T. Crampton Photograph Archive. © Unknown. Digital content by Dr. Joseph Brady, published by UCD Library, University College Dublin	204
5.15	Dolphin House scheme, 1957, Dolphin's Barn, photograph by Hugh Doran, Doran Collection, IAA	207
5.16	Bridgefoot Street scheme, Michael Scott & Associates, 1957–1964, as published in <i>Architectural Survey</i> , 1965	211
5.17	Proposed nine-storey tower block housing, Desmond FitzGerald, 1958–1959, Desmond FitzGerald Collection, IAA	212
5.18	Maisonette scheme, Beechwood, Donnybrook, Dublin 4, G. & T. Crampton Photograph Archive. © Unknown. Digital content by Dr. Joseph Brady, published by UCD Library, University College Dublin	213
5.19	Section through maisonette circular stair tower (based on Charleville Mall Scheme), drawing by Donal McIntrye, 2016	215
5.20	Detail of mosaic panel on balcony, Charleville Mall scheme, 1962, photograph by Paul Tierney, Dublin City Council Heritage C20th Architecture project, 2011	217

5.21	Drawing of lozenge design, balcony railing, Basin Street Scheme, 1958, Housing Development Files, drawings collection, Dublin City Library and Archive	217
6.1	Elinor Wiltshire, Street protest over eviction, York Street, 1963, WIL 3[6], Elinor Wiltshire Collection, National Library of Ireland	228
6.2	Ballymun Estate, mid-construction, 1966, <i>Architectural Survey</i> , 1966	230
6.3	Flat layout/floor plan of Balency et Schul flat, Ballymun Estate, Cubitts Haden Sisk, <i>Ballymun Housing Project</i> , 1966	232
6.4	Darndale, mid-construction, 1973, Lardner and Partners/ Clondalkin Concrete booklet, IAA	234
6.5	Darndale aerial view, 1974, G. & T. Crampton Photograph Archive. © Unknown. Digital content by Dr. Joseph Brady, published by UCD Library, University College Dublin	236
6.6	Hugh Doran, High Street dereliction, 1965, Hugh Doran Collection, IAA	239
6.7	Ash Grove or Coombe North Housing scheme, Delany McVeigh Pike, NBA, 1968–1978, G. & T. Crampton Photograph Archive. © Unknown. Digital content by Dr. Joseph Brady, published by UCD Library, University College Dublin	241
6.8	‘No Fines’ houses, Tallaght, 1974, G. & T. Crampton Photograph Archive. © Unknown. Digital content by Dr. Joseph Brady, published by UCD Library, University College Dublin	243
6.9	Kidney and Burke-Kennedy Doyle (BKD) winning submission for Dublin City Quay Housing Competition, 1975–1976, Dublin Corporation Assessors Report, IAA	245
6.10	View of City Quay housing, three-storey type (two storeys over ground floor flat), BKD, 1978, G. & T. Crampton Photograph Archive. © Unknown. Digital content by Dr. Joseph Brady, published by UCD Library, University College Dublin	246

# Acknowledgements

This book is one part of PhD research undertaken in the History of Art & Architecture Department, Trinity College Dublin with conscientious guidance from Dr Edward McParland (2006–2010). It was developed into a book during my White Postdoctoral fellowship (2013–2015) in Irish art research at Triarc (TCD) with Professor Yvonne Scott, and then brought to completion during a generous research fellowship (2018) with the School of Architecture, APEP, at UCD, with Professors Hugh Campbell and Finola O’Kane-Crimmins.

I wish to thank Dublin City Council Heritage Office for a subvention towards the cost of this publication. From 2016–2018 I was an Irish Research Council EPS fellow working between the DCC Heritage Office and UCD APEP with Charles Duggan (DCC Heritage Officer) on the development of 14 Henrietta Street, museum of tenement life. That experience has coloured and enriched this architectural history of ordinary housing in Dublin.

Central to this research is the RIAI archive correspondence and other holdings in the Irish Architectural Archive from unpublished pamphlets, practice collections and contemporary architectural journals. I am indebted to the attentive and knowledgeable staff of the IAA: Colum O’Riordan, Dr Eve McAulay, Anne Henderson, Simon Lincoln and Aisling Dunne. The other significant correspondence archive came out of Dublin Corporation’s Housing Architects’ department of Dublin Corporation, as well as the Corporation’s Housing Committee reports, held at Dublin City Library and Archive, Gilbert Library. I would like to thank the DCLA archivists, Dr Mary Clarke and Ellen Murphy. Thanks too to Eleanor McGarry and Susan Roundtree (formerly of DCC Architects and Conservation) and to Dervla Cotter and Laura O’Gorman. Thanks for access to flats from maintenance and management staff of Dublin City Council housing department (Eileen Martin, Eamon Griffith, Brian Curran, Peter Murphy and Kay Noonan Cork), Sabrina Murphy (Hardwicke Street flats) and Pat Duggan, Peter Murray and Patricia Murray (Marrowbone Lane flats). Thank you to James Pike, Ruairi Quinn, Jack McDaid, Sean Rothery, Professor Cathal O’Neill and Kevin Roche for interviews. Official Publications were mostly consulted in



TCD's libraries. My thanks are due to Simon Lang and Helen McGinley at Early Printed Books, as well as to Paul Doyle, Tony Carey and Iris Bedford. Thank you too to Julia Barrett, Head of Research Services, UCD Library and to UCD's Architecture Library in Richview, especially Andrew Clinch and Emily Doherty. Thank you to Noelle Dowling of the Dublin Diocesan Archives.

Thank you to Donal Hickey, Ronan Costello, Mark Minkjan, Mark Halpin, Dr Elain Harwood, Donal McIntyre, Murtada Almohsen and Paul Tierney for wonderful photographs and/or help with illustrations generally. Thank you to Colum O'Riordan for scanning and to Professor Joseph Brady, David Crampton and Audrey Drohan for the handsome Crampton photographs (UCD digital collections). Very 'drafty' drafts of this book were read and commented upon by my father, Frank Rowley, by Dr Brian Ward (DIT), by Marcus Donaghy (UCD): thank you for early input. Thank you to Aoife McGrath and Routledge Publishers for patience and consideration. Thank you to the Thomas Dammann Junior Memorial Trust for funding short study tours to Belgium, Scotland and London. And a very big thank you to my old friend, Neil Ardiff, for copyediting the final chapter drafts.

I have benefited from professional advice and guidance from the following people: Angela Griffith, Carole Pollard, Caroline Hope, Charles Duggan, Christine Casey, Cian Neville, Conor Hyland, Conor Lucey, Denis McNulty, Eddie Conroy, Enda Delaney, Eva Weyns, Fergal McCabe, Fr Peter McVerry, Gabrielle O'Herlihy, Gary Boyd, Gerry Cahill, Grainne Hassett, Grainne Shaffrey, Iseult Kirwan, Jeannette Lowe, Jim Roche, Joe Brady, John Montague, John Tuomey, Joseph Little, Justin Synott, Kathleen James-Chakraborty, Kathryn Meghen (RIAI archive), Kelly Fitzgerald, Kevin Donovan, Lisa Godson, Livia Hurley, Louise Dunne, Luke Gibbons, Margaret Mooney, Merlo Kelly, Michael Pike, Miles Glendinning, Miriam Delaney, Miriam Dunne, Murray Fraser, Natalie de Roiste, Niall McCullough, Orla Hegarty, Orla Murphy, Patricia Wrafter, Peter Carroll, Peter Cherry, Ricardo Agarez, Robert Proctor, Rolf Loeber (deceased 2017), Ronan O Domhnaill, Ruth McManus, Ruth O'Herlihy, Sadhbh Hynes, Samantha Martin McAuliffe, Sandra O'Connell, Sarah Lappin, Shane O'Toole, Sheila O'Donnell, Simon Walker, Susan Galvan, Sven Sterken, Valerie Mulvin, Wendy Barrett.

Thanks are due to the village of friends and teachers who have minded our three daughters, enabling me to do the work: St. Brigid's Day Nursery (Mountjoy Square), especially Sinead Jones, Jenny, Fiona, Emer and Cathy; Gaelscoil Coláiste Mhuire and the múinteoirí there; Clarko and George, Caro and Mark, Donna, Leanne and Healy. For friendship and support, thank you to Michelle, Lynda C, Ali, Lynda M, Maeve, Penny, Melissa, Neil (Blondie), Aoife Fitz. Thank you to Hilda, Lindsay and Sarah. Thanks a million to my siblings, Dominic, Johnny, Maggie and Tom, and their partners and beautiful kids. To Agnes Cooney, and to my parents Frank and Gemma Rowley for non-stop generosity and encouragement. Lastly and mostly, I thank Stephen Quinn and our own Little Women, Lillian, Esme and Joan. You rock!

Ellen Rowley  
2014–2018

# Introduction

## Three grounds – telling the story of housing architecture in Dublin

In 1950, the Irish government issued *Ireland is Building. Houses and Hospitals*, a colourful pamphlet informing the public that during 1949, Dublin Corporation was building 3,219 dwellings and that a further 15,000 houses were planned by the local authority as part of a ten-year programme. A joint initiative of the Departments of Local Government and Public Health, *Ireland is Building* was designed to lure Irish labourers back from Britain to help realise this extensive building programme (figure I.1). The opening page greets the reader with eye-catching before and after images of Dublin housing: an idealised juxtaposition of ‘the past’ in the form of ramshackle tenement back lands with ‘the present and future’, represented by gleaming white repetitive terraced houses. The contrast was striking and illustrative of a by then familiar dogma underpinning Dublin’s slum-clearance project from the 1930s. Its enduring message was that of the capital city as a rising suburb of *identikit* residences; it captured the ongoing transformation of virgin sites on the city’s fringes into ‘pleasant new residential areas’.

To rebuild or construct anew was to reinvent. And where better to concretise this metaphor of modern national reinvention than in the realm of mass housing for the nation’s citizenry? ‘Roofless ruins, old eyesores, have been cleared away, and clean, comfortable dwellings have been built.’<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the housing question in Ireland had occupied *the* key emotive site for political revolution since the late nineteenth century. As Murray Fraser explores in his history of Irish housing and as Ruth McManus’ research into Dublin Corporation’s housing and suburban programme shows, working-class housing was a highly politicised issue during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Unsurprisingly, the power of housing-as-political-instrument was sustained by the newly founded post-Emergency Republic, with the provision of local authority housing becoming a fundamental state policy. In 1950, Taoiseach John Costello’s address to the Master Builders’ Association affirmed housing’s central position within the nation’s sense of itself, and more pointedly, within its sense of a pragmatic and progressive self:

The best way we can insure [*sic*] that each person is a good citizen is to give everyone a stake in the country and the way in which we can do

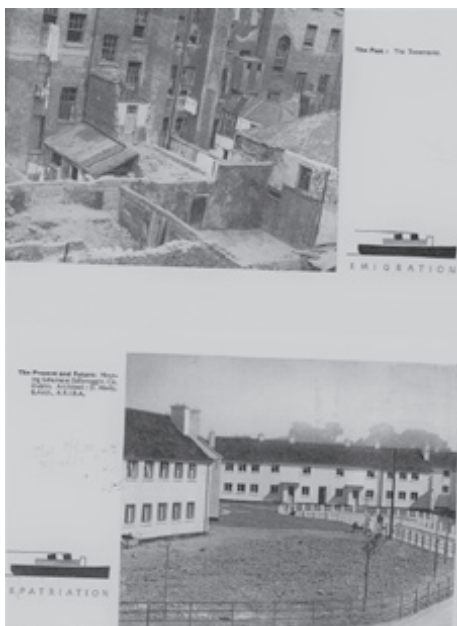


Figure I.1 The Old and the New, *Ireland is Building. Hospitals and Houses, 1950-1951.*



Figure I.2 R. C. Stephenson (architect on Simms' housing team, Dublin Corporation), etching of Watling Street flat scheme, courtyard, c.1939.

that is to give him his own home. No matter what it costs, that is good business nationally and socially.<sup>3</sup>

Taking *Ireland is Building* together with the built evidence from the 1930s to the 1970s, especially the four-storey brick flat blocks (figure I.2), the vast suburban housing estates of two-storey homes, the idiosyncratic maisonette blocks and then the 1970s reconsideration of the artisan dwelling for the city centre, we are presented with an alternate portrait of mid-century Dublin. Here is a city that is overwhelmed by construction at its edges but where less intensive building activity at its centre seems free to adapt international solutions to native restrictions and tendencies. This study asks what was behind such ‘tremendous’ endeavour? And what was the position of the architectural community in this evidently frenzied provision of housing for the citizenry?

The immediate political background points to the post-Emergency change in government in 1948 with the new Inter-Party government reviving the earlier Free State house-building drive of the 1930s. Consequently, in justification of its increase in rates to finance all this development, the Inter-Party Department of Local Government sought to champion its own initiative by pamphleteering. But I would argue that the housing situation at this mid-century juncture raises more questions than immediate political and economic explanations can provide. On an international level, there can be no doubt that the influence of the post-war reconstruction programmes in Britain was keenly felt in the suburbanising Ireland of the late 1940s and through the 1950s. On an ideological level, as already suggested, there was the symbolic role of the modern dwelling within the formation of the modern nation, an issue further engrained by the importance of dwelling to the architectural avant-garde, in formal and philosophical terms. Nonetheless, and however informative these issues were, ultimately such an intensity of house production had its roots in the extreme need and shortage which had preceded it. And as the book’s final discussions around 1960s typologies and contexts hint at, that need did not go away.

In trying to understand the whys and hows of Dublin’s great housing drive of the mid-century we must turn to the dreadful housing conditions that blighted the city during the first half of the twentieth century and again in the early 1960s. The efforts to clear the tenement slums during the 1930s came to a head with the controversial findings of the 1936 census, which had stirred up public opinion and led to the state investigation into the actualities of Dublin’s working-class housing situation in 1939. With the onset of the Second World War, the slum-clearance initiative was largely put on hold and the inquiry’s hugely important *Report of Inquiry into the Housing of the Working Classes of the City of Dublin* was not published until 1943. As we will see in Chapter 2, this damning and enlightening report played a central role in all Dublin housing developments for the succeeding two decades. The urban slum problem extended into rural regions to the extent that the White Paper on post-war planning from 1944–1945 placed emphasis on housing improvement as a

## 4 Introduction

*national* priority – projected development in this field was to take over 56 per cent of the total estimated cost of post-war building activities.

Clearly housing, or the lack thereof, was the dominant issue, and the problem was constantly exacerbated in Dublin by the realities of inward migration to the capital. Just as the ever-increasing number of individuals and families living in insanitary conditions at Dublin's centre represented the *need* for the later housing drive, the ideological thesis of suburban development represented the *where* of the later housing drive. In 1941, this town-planning ideology gained a significant public airing when Sir Patrick Abercrombie (with Manning Robertson and Sydney Kelly) published his latest version of a town plan for Dublin. Through Dublin Corporation's championing of this *Sketch Development Plan for Dublin* over the next generation, Abercrombie's explicit policy to 'thin out' the city centre and develop Dublin's outskirts was established. Furthermore, Professor Myles Wright's influential advisory plan about thirty years later (1967) echoed Abercrombie's basic tenets of a tidied-up and commercial centre, linked by roadways to independent new-town housing colonies.

These theoretical issues and economic imperatives collectively gave rise to the immense house-building programme as outlined from the early 1930s until the late 1950s, and again, from the mid-1960s into the mid-1970s, which roughly lay out three 'grounds' for the book to interrogate. In the foreground, as Chapter 3 surveys, vast housing estates of repetitive pitched-roof boxes, or cottages as they were known, loomed large. These were a mix of local authority endeavour and private speculation which, at first glance, appeared to exist outside of architectural discourse; on further examination they inevitably occupied an albeit strained position within contemporary Irish architectural culture. In the middle ground squatted the urban blocks of flats and maisonettes which were haltingly developed during the period by the Corporation's Housing Architect Herbert Simms until 1948, and from 1949 until 1955 by his successor, Charlie McNamara. As Chapter 5 describes, while Dublin's flat blocks were designed in two main phases, they were always devised with a persistent eye on developments in Britain and, to a lesser extent, on aesthetic preferences in the centres of European avant-garde architecture such as Amsterdam, Dessau, Vienna and Paris. To the soft-modernist brick buildings of the 1930s and early 1940s, and the bigger Corbusier-influenced maisonette blocks from the late 1950s and through the 1960s, we might add the system-built experimentation of Ballymun Estate and, later, the lower blocks at Inchicore, Coolock, Killester and Ballinteer.

In the background then, as Chapter 4 discusses, there was a lively architectural discourse around housing. The academic question of 'how we might live', along with theoretical explorations into progressive architectural technologies such as prefabrication, dominated the Irish architectural press and were subjects of the Architectural Association of Ireland's (AAI) lecture series and the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland's (RIAI) infrequent exhibitions. As we might expect, Dublin's architectural community

concerned itself with the burgeoning science of town planning and, through the agency of the RIAI, pushed for greater influence on the design of local authority mass housing. For the most part, however, the architects' attempt to lead Dublin's housing drive was frustrated and, considering the high volume of house construction, they played a marginal role in process and production. The design competition, an indicator of architectural culture, was almost excluded from Dublin's mid-century housing development. Aside from a small competition for a village hall and cottage promoted by the Irish Countrywomen's Association in 1944 and two ideas-based competitions for the Ideal Homes Exhibition (1953) and Asbestos Cement Ltd (1958), the architectural competition barely impacted upon the housing programme until the major Dublin Corporation housing competition of 1975. Generating ideas for the reintroduction of the single-family, low-rise home to Dublin city centre, as Chapter 6 concludes, this 1975 competition was important in bringing architects to the frontline of the housing battle – in the end, it established a new housing type for Dublin.

So, then, the book juxtaposes these three grounds: it highlights the urban flat/suburban cottage typological and geographical debate and considers the relationship between the *actual* development of Dublin's housing stock and the *aspirations* or theoretical position of the Irish architectural community for the design of that stock. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, Irish collective housing from the 1940s to the 1960s was a product of restrictive building specifications and inherent traditionalism in terms of patterns of living. An article from the Irish Countrywomen's Association 1956 annual sums up the mix, which underpinned the mid-century house-building boom, of hope for modernisation on the one hand and of reticence to jettison tradition on the other:

Our modern kitchens betoken the end of an era or rather the beginning of a new one. The danger is that these centres of Irish family life will become replicas of their counterparts in America and England with their glistening gadgets and clinical air. It is up to us women to stamp our Irish individuality on them, to preserve the warm and living atmosphere of the past, to link the old with the new. All honour to the Irish Countrywomen's Association, which strives to preserve our Gaelic heritage while endeavouring to banish drudgery from the rural kitchen. We have our cookers, cleaners, heaters and 'fridges', but let us have also our St. Brigid Crosses, our hand-loom and the lingering traditions of our past.<sup>4</sup>

This push/pull relationship underpins the book.

In trying to capture the extent of the housing programme in Dublin during the period 1930 to 1970 and in examining the programme's architectural, social and cultural implications, the book concentrates on the design and production of public housing. But 'public' is a relative term, and though the 1930s housing drive instigated a shift from Corporation provision of tenant purchase housing to rental housing, the continuation of

purchasing programmes ensured that the potential to purchase underlined all Corporation housing schemes, from the post-Emergency period onwards. As Paul Pfretzschner wrote in 1965, 'a policy bias favouring private ownership of the home runs through virtually all the legislation from grants to the individual home builder to the vesting provisions for labourers' cottages.'<sup>5</sup> He outlined several reasons for this ownership push, from the redrafted (1937) Irish Constitution to the influence of the Vatican's social instruction of Papal Encyclicals. The other ubiquitous condition was that of demographic change. Dublin's population grew by 30 per cent from 1935 to 1961, transforming it from city to city-region.<sup>6</sup> That figure related to the relentless 'drift from the countryside' – the Irish euphemism for rural depopulation – representing the shift from rural to urban in Ireland. But crucially, because this process of urbanisation was so intense, resulting in slums, it was coincident with the unravelling of the traditional city fabric and the development at the city edge of masses of public and private housing. This may be termed the making of a 'middle landscape' or the creation of a mid-twentieth-century 'suburban vernacular', growing along Dublin's edge:<sup>7</sup> the edge of the city, at the edge of Europe and the eponymous 'edge condition'. Certainly the dearth of canonical buildings was matched by an epidemic of 'non-architecture' in the form of vernacular housing estates, small-scale commercial terraces and mass-produced edifices of religious authority during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s in Dublin. Where does architectural history fit in this context?

Seemingly it does not fit, until the present study.

In seeking to react intellectually and rationally to a generation of neglected architectural production which seemed to defy architectural history's processes, this architectural history turned first to Clifford Geertz' dictum that 'Ideological change is not an independent stream of thought running alongside social practices and reflecting (or determining) it, it is a dimension of that process itself'.<sup>8</sup> Geertz' view reminded me that Dublin's housing came out of and was at once mixed back into the broader cultural history of 1930s to 1970s Dublin. In this way, Dublin's vernacular building at the suburban fringe is considered as much a strand of Irish architectural culture c.1930 to c.1970 as are, for instance, the award-winning projects, the buildings for transport and for health, and the office buildings outlined in the book's contextual backcloth opening chapter. Indeed, suburban everyday building seemed to be more enduring and compelling than most of the public buildings. But again, how does the architectural historian respond, understand, unpick and ultimately reconstruct this narrative for the present generation? First off, the book's opening chapter sets out the architectural-cultural context. Guided by the principle that a traditional architectural history might provide a baseline for all later interpretations, the opening chapter moves through the decades from the 1930s through to c.1970, highlighting architecture's responsiveness to political and economic shifts in Ireland.

Specifically, for Dublin's housing or cottage architecture, the use of the 'vernacular' label is useful, enabling us to situate the houses' design and



fabric according to architectural origins, social intent and local conditions when otherwise these suburban environments are dismissed as being devoid of architectural interest. Gleaning from the previously unexplored archives of the RIAI, looking at extant buildings, analysing official publications such as White Papers and annual reports from government departments, referring to the contemporary Irish and British architectural press, examining the activities of the two architectural bodies – the RIAI and the AAI – absorbing first-hand oral accounts from a generation of Dublin-based architects and from former tenement and ongoing flat block residents, reading the correspondence of Dublin Corporation's Housing Architect, and becoming enriched by the other forms of contemporary social and cultural commentary such as the daily newspapers and intellectual discourse in journals and literature, this book poses questions of architectural history. It sets out to respond with integrity to the evidence provided and therefore tries to compose an architectural history from the ground up, always keeping the architectonics of the home at the centre of its inquiry.

Following this type of inquiry into the true nature and origin of Dublin's mid-twentieth-century 'middle landscape', or as some commentators have termed it, 'Dunroamin', the secondary studies upon which this book has relied have been in the fields of urban and historical geography, namely those by Jacinta Prunty, Ruth McManus, Joseph Brady, Michael Bannon and Andrew McLaran, as well as essays by Arnold Horner, Mark Boyle and Kevin Nowlan. Brady's more recent work – *Dublin, 1930–1950. The Emergence of the Modern City* (2014) and *Dublin, 1950–1970. Houses, Flats and High Rises* (2016) – overlaps considerably with this book in terms of subject and chronology. But ultimately, Brady asks different questions of the built evidence. By concentrating on Dublin Corporation Housing Committee minute books and Irish newspapers, his exemplary scholarship is expansive and provides the reader with trends in land development and home ownership, for instance. While his questioning is unafraid to tackle economics and is masterful with statistics, this architectural history is reticent and tentative. And as such, Brady's study and this one feel complementary, drilling down as they do into different areas of the extensive housing question during the period, in Dublin. If a geographer's reading could be representative of the material of the built environment at this time – that is, at once pragmatic and poetic, dogged and determined, modest and modern – then Ruth McManus' history of Crampton builders, *Crampton Built* is that reading. Providence dropped it into my lap in 2008 and it has since accompanied my research, providing rare insights into the workings of the contractor as well as, arguably, the most valuable visual record of the period in the form of professional photographs of mid-construction projects (see acknowledgements).

With the help of Irish housing sociological studies by Fr. Alexander Humphreys, P. J. Meghen, Paul Pfretzschner and, more recently, Anne Power, Tony Fahy and Michelle Norris, this architectural history research sought to understand Irish patterns of domesticity – the 'how we live' question – at a



moment of seismic socio-cultural change, to comprehend both the scale of the mid-twentieth-century fringe housing estates and the architectural make-up of the units thereon.<sup>9</sup> While Dublin Corporation history (the published reports and minutes 1930–1975 and archival building files) pointed to the slum clearance project and the influence of British architect and town planner Sir Patrick Abercrombie with his principle of ‘thinning out’ the city centre, the issue seemed to boil down to something more fundamental to mid-century Irish life – Catholicism. This book only touches upon that profound phenomenon, and more work is needed, though Catholic social teaching and the nation’s religiosity are implied throughout.<sup>10</sup> In the same way, the complex issues of urban, socio-cultural and architectural obsolescence are lightly discussed while again their profound effects are implied throughout the book. Excellent contemporary Irish histories accompanied the research, notably Mary E. Daly’s history of the Department of Local Government, *The Buffer State* (1997) and J. J. Lee’s *Ireland 1912–1985: Politics and Society* (1990) and Lee’s edit of RTÉ’s Thomas Davis lecture series, *Ireland 1945–1970* (1979). More specific and directed historical studies have enhanced and improved this book’s approach at various junctures, such as the rich history of 1960s Dublin by Erika Hanna (*Modern Dublin: Urban Change and the Irish Past, 1957–1973* (2013)) and then recently, *Sixties Ireland* (Mary E. Daly, 2017), as well as essays by Enda Delaney, Brian Girvin, Gary Murphy and Diarmaid Ferriter’s study of Ireland in the 1970s, *Ambiguous Republic* (2012).

Bringing us closer to spatial and visual culture perspectives of Irish history is the inspiring study from 2004 by Terence Brown, *Ireland. A Social and Cultural History*, which was an inspiration for this housing book, along with Luke Gibbons’ essays and teachings generally. Clearly there is a generation of art, design and architectural historians in Ireland who are indebted to these scholars, and the collaborative or group studies to which I have contributed such as *Ireland, Design and Visual Culture: Negotiating Modernity 1922–1992* (King and Sisson, 2011), *InfraÉireann. Infrastructure and the Architectures of Modernity in Ireland 1916–2016* (Boyd and McLaughlin, 2015) and *More Than Concrete Blocks* (Rowley, 2016, 2018) stand as testimony to the example of Gibbons and Brown for Irish architectural studies. The more established architectural histories emerging since the late 1980s, such as Sean Rothery’s pioneering 1991 study *Ireland and the New Architecture 1900–1940*, typically concentrated on the flowering of modernism in the spirit of the new state, followed by the development of an Americanised modernist architecture facilitated by Seán Lemass-fuelled sponsorship. Accomplished overview essays by architects and cultural architectural historians have contributed to this reading, such as Seán Ó Laoire’s *Building on the Edge of Europe* (the 1996 exhibition of Irish architecture in Paris), contributions by John Olley, Hugh Campbell and John Tuomey in Prestel Publishing’s *Twentieth Century Architecture, Ireland* (1997), and Hugh Campbell’s 2005 writing on Irish architecture for *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*.<sup>11</sup>

In this way, the story of twentieth-century architecture in Dublin (up until the contemporary period from 1980 onwards), has been abridged to two episodes, each one marked by a significant *Zeitgeist* which necessarily led to the adoption of the universal forms of modernism to express that *Zeitgeist*. These established histories opportunely highlight the architecture of the 1930s and then leap into a discussion of the architecture which emerges in the 1960s. Therefore, one of the fundamental motivations for this book was to unpick received histories of Irish architecture and specifically Dublin housing from the mid-1930s through to the late 1960s; to challenge the common perception that ‘nothing happened’ during these so-called ‘lost decades’. While the Irish geographers and the (contemporary Irish) historians have been revising this perception, arguably all along, Irish design and architectural studies are only now catching up. Short essays by Simon Walker as well as ongoing trojan research by Shane O’Toole, and the newer research projects listed above such as *More Than Concrete Blocks* and *InfraÉireann*, acknowledge the reality of the built environment during this period as a layered and complex mesh of artistic influences, technological tendencies and political conditions – a reality which this Dublin housing architectural history takes as its foundation.<sup>12</sup>

The period most closely examined in the book is marked firstly by the international crisis of the Second World War, known in neutral Ireland as the ‘Emergency’ (1939–1945); secondly by the optimism of the immediate post-war era (1945–1947); followed by an unsettled decade from 1948 with successive government changes and unprecedented emigration; and finally by the promise of a new epoch, the long 1960s, beginning in the late 1950s and shifting again from the mid-1970s (figure I.3).



Figure I.3 Berkeley Library, mid-construction with Liberty Hall and Hawkins House in the background, 1965.

This last episode was ushered in by the economic programme of T. K. Whittaker (Finance Secretary) and Seán Lemass (An Taoiseach – the Prime Minister). As something of an addendum to that trajectory, this study moves – albeit for the briefest of moments – into the territory of the 1970s oil crisis.

The book is designed so that this socio-political history is presented in the opening chapter, setting up the more forensic discussions in the following chapters. After this contextual Chapter 1, Chapter 2 moves through the 1930s, using the *Report of Inquiry into the Housing of the Working Classes of the City of Dublin 1939–1943* as the central point of discussion. Chapter 3 delves into the architectural and social history of Crumlin housing estate, as the largest and most continuous of Dublin's mid-century slum-clearance housing estates. Leaving that example in the late 1940s, Chapter 4 opens up the discussion of British influences on Irish architecture and, in particular, upon Dublin housing typologies. As well as describing the architects' peripheral position through certain architectural discourses, from exhibitions to journalism, Chapter 4 describes the state's relationship with pre-fabricated technologies. After all, the backdrop to the whole history is a municipal, at times national, housing crisis.

One of the early motivations for the book was to present an in-depth history of Dublin architecture from 1940 onwards. It therefore started out as an attempt to fill the gap created by Irish twentieth-century historiography. Just as Rothery's history attempted to dispel the myth that there was neither awareness nor practice of International Style architectural modernism in Ireland in the first decades of the twentieth century, this study hopes to dispel the myth that the 1940s and 1950s were inactive and introverted in architectural terms. Focusing on housing has taken the study in different directions as it made every effort to correct a recent (2010) statement from an architectural précis on international post-war mass housing that 'there are countries that have very little existent mass social housing, such as Norway and the Republic of Ireland'.<sup>13</sup> At the very least this book should overturn that assumption. Probably the book's most significant contribution is Chapter 5's discussion and organisation of Dublin's long misunderstood flat blocks, 1930–1970. The book ends with a non-conclusive Chapter 6 and a crescendo of crisis resulting in the Ballymun housing estate, the consolidation of Dublin's conservation movement, relentless urban desecration and the accompanying cries for urban preservation. Chapter 6 then acts as a baton being handed into the 1970s. It, like the study generally, seeks to situate Dublin's public housing architecture in its cultural, social and international contexts.

### **Heroes and victims?**

By way of prefacing the book's architectural history, which is an attempt to write the Dublin housing history's meta-narrative, I want to briefly introduce the voices of the hero and the victim. In 1940, Seán Ó Faoláin's new



Figure I.4 Noel Moffett, 'Mountjoy Square Slums', late 1940s.

socio-cultural monthly journal, *The Bell* published an interview with a man who lived in a Dublin tenement slum. Compellingly honest and bare-boned, an excerpt of that interview is included here, with the view of setting up the book with a rare insight into the reality of impoverished living conditions in the early 1940s in Dublin (figure I.4):

'I Live in a Slum', November 1940

*I live in a slum. I am thirty-six years of age. My wife is thirty-one. We have five children. There are fifty-six of us all told in one house. There is one water tap and one lavatory. There was gas some years ago but it was taken out. All cooking has to be done on the fire.*

*My wife and I like all the noise of people that there is in the house. There is a lot of singing. Now and then there are rows. Sometimes we laugh at the rows, too. [...] Once there was a woman in a room below us who used to cry. We all hated her, and got the landlord to get her into another house.*

*The only thing wrong with our room is, it slopes. Our bed is under the slope, so we often bang our heads. We make a bed on the floor every night for the kids. We try to train them to do without a bucket in the room, during the night, especially.*

*I get up as soon as the children stir. I light the fire and make the breakfast: tea, bread and margarine. I pack away the bed on the floor. My wife gives orders, helps the kids get dressed, fixes the baby and gives out the prayers. She makes the children kneel before a picture of the Holy Family for their prayers.*

*I am out in the street before eight. I have a bike. I make for the docks first and stand with the other men there. Every now and then I get a start. If there is no work I make the rounds of the building jobs. It's a long time since I got anything there. And sometimes that puzzles me for my wife is never done praying to God to get work for me, and the children pray for it every day, too. On my way home I sign at the labour exchange.*

*I get back home. The wife is alone with the baby. 'Any luck' she calls when she hears my step. I say: 'No.' She says: 'Better luck tomorrow. God's good.' Maybe I sulk, but she gives me jobs to do, to mend this boot, or nail a bit of wood over a break in the floor, or maybe whitewash while she is tidying up, or mending something and telling me some story about one or other of the children [...] The dinner is usually stew. The kids grumble and say stew again [...] When my wife has washing to do I carry up the water first and then take the children out. She parks the baby on some woman in some other room. I lounge around and watch the lads play. Now and then a fellow touches me for a few coppers to make up something for the money-lender. We all grumble. When us men get together about the doors, we grumble. Anyway where is there to go and what is there to do?*

*The tea is the same as the breakfast. The kids go to the street again after tea and now my wife goes down to watch them. The other women come out on the steps too. They don't grumble. I often heard them. They talk eagerly about a woman that had a bad time or expects a bad time [...] The men get together at night, too. We talk politics. Now it's the war. The I.R.A [...] and what is to come [...] Next thing it's time for the news on the wireless. We gather around a window in the next house where a fellow has one; into the hall if it's wet and he leaves the door of his room open. We never talk much after the news. We are all very friendly, as we separate for bed.*

*There is a rat under the boards. Sometimes I borrow the trap and set it and leave a light on the lamp. I put the children into my bed and I sleep on the floor and listen to the rat tearing under the boards. I think of the morrow and wonder will there be work, and if there is no work what in the world a fellow could do to make a few shillings. But in the end I sleep.<sup>14</sup>*

Motivated by these conditions – the communality and the lack of domestic technology – Dublin Corporation and the Department of Local Government

(and Public Health) engaged in a determined slum-clearance project. It became a dogged pursuit of improved living conditions for Dubliners, new and old. And as the following undated (likely early 1940s) Dublin Corporation memorandum states, the new dwellings being built were all

of the modern type, equipped with hot and cold water, baths, electric light and ample playground space. Space is also provided for Churches, Schools and social service accommodation. Industrial areas are also provided for on new schemes, as well as shopping centres, sites for banks and other necessary public institutions, so that building on suburban areas will, to a large extent, ultimately evolve, self-contained colonies.<sup>15</sup>

Certainly, P. J. Hernon and other public servants working towards these environmental goals were conscientious and heroic in their efforts. The work of Dublin's first Housing Architect Herbert Simms (1898–1948) increasingly celebrated but for years overlooked, is of particular interest to this study due to his vital contribution to the built environment of his adopted city (figure I.5). In a tribute by his colleague, Dublin City Surveyor Ernest F. N. Taylor, Simms was referred to as quiet and unassuming but 'a forceful personality'. Taylor developed this, stating how: 'By sheer hard work and conscientious devotion to duty, he has made a personal contribution towards the solution of Dublin's housing problem, probably unequalled by anyone in our time. It is not given to many of us to achieve so much in the space of a short lifetime for the benefit of our fellow men.'<sup>16</sup> Bit by bit, we are managing



*Figure I.5* Herbert George Simms portrait, Simms scrapbook/album, IAA 2012/034.



to rescue Herbert Simms from obscurity and to acknowledge his achievements, architectural and social, in Irish history's urban trajectory. This process was begun by Eddie Conroy's accomplished Masters thesis (1998, UCD Architecture), followed more recently by the biographical account of Simms compiled by the Irish Architectural Archive and the 2010 Dublin Open House (Irish Architecture Foundation), which was centred on Simms' buildings.<sup>17</sup> Through these endeavours we have managed to locate Simms' scrapbooks – important primary resources and a biographical source – and gain greater insight into his background, formation and working practices. But still, the processes of the Housing Architecture Department remain largely unknown and beyond the fact that Simms personally signed every drawing and had a team consisting of Charles MacNamara, R. C. Stevenson, R. D. Graham and Dermot O'Rourke (among others), we still have a lot to understand.

Simms was born in London in November 1898 and came to Dublin in 1923, having studied architecture at Liverpool University from 1919 to 1922 after serving in the Royal Field Artillery during the First World War. At first, Simms worked with Aubrey Vincent O'Rourke, and then he joined Dublin Corporation as a temporary architect in 1925. During this period, Herbert Simms was sent on a study tour to Britain, to examine flat blocks. He had a break from Dublin for one year from 1929 when he worked as a town planner in India. Already by 1930 his experience in terms of a strong ethical approach to town planning and public housing was formed, so that when the new housing legislation introduced a new position of Dublin Housing Architect, Simms was well placed for the post. Becoming Housing Architect pushed him into a position of great responsibility, with direct charge over the new (from 1933) Department of Housing Architects (Dublin Corporation), and within two years his department was tripling the rate of house production in Dublin. Between 1932 and 1939, 7,638 dwellings were constructed on Simms' watch.

The method of this accelerated slum-clearance project was to build two-storey housing in rural areas at the city's western edges and four-storey flat blocks in disused urban areas around Dublin's worst slum neighbourhoods. As well as overseeing the individual design of these homes, including taking a great interest in their materiality, Simms seemed to plan and organise Dublin's new neighbourhoods, which was a pretty exhausting and thankless task. Consistently, Simms's energies were diverted, designing and redesigning the place of churches and schools primarily, but also sites for shops and parks. Two external events in the mid to late 1940s which contributed to Simms' work overload were, firstly, the retirement in 1945 and subsequent delayed replacement of Dublin City Architect Horace O'Rourke, and secondly, the new housing drive launched in 1948 with the change of government. While Simms had probably not felt the effects of the new Labour Minister of Local Government's zeal, the anticipated shift in policy and further acceleration of housing production

must have taken its toll. In September 1948, as was reported in the *Irish Times* under the headline ‘Architect Killed on Railway’, Herbert Simms committed suicide. Surprisingly, Simms’ tragic letter was published in full: ‘I cannot stand it any longer; my brain is too tired to work anymore [...] It is always on the go like a dynamo and still the work is being piled on me.’<sup>18</sup>

This book situates Simms and his architectural colleagues’ endeavours, as they housed and rehoused Dublin during the middle decades of the twentieth century.

## Notes

- 1 ‘Towns and Parishes. More People: More Houses: More Work’ in Department of Local Government/ Department of Health, *Ireland is Building. Houses and Hospitals* (Dublin, Stationery Office, 1951), unpaginated.
- 2 Murray Fraser, *John Bull’s Other Homes. State Housing and British Policy in Ireland, 1883–1922* (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1996). Ruth McManus, *Dublin 1910–1940, Shaping the City and Suburbs* (Dublin, FCP, 2000).
- 3 Costello speech (1950) cited in Mary E. Daly, *The Buffer State. The Historical Roots of the Department of the Environment* (Dublin, Institute of Public Administration, 1997), p.348.
- 4 Ellen Casey, ‘Farm-house Kitchens’ in *Our Book. Irish Countrywomen’s Association Yearbook* (Dublin, ICA, 1956), p.39.
- 5 Paul Pfretzschner, *The Dynamics of Irish Housing* (Dublin, Institute of Public Administration, 1965), p.38; see also McManus, *Dublin 1910–1940* (2000), pp.148–151 and Joe Brady, *Dublin 1950–1970. Houses, Flats and High-Rise* (Dublin, FCP, 2016), pp.240–303. Notwithstanding this potential, tenants were first offered to buy their houses in Cabra, Crumlin, Ballyfermot and elsewhere in 1968.
- 6 Arnold Horner, ‘Dublin from the 1930s to the 1990s’ in F. H. A. Aalen and Kevin Whelan (eds.), *Dublin City and County: From Prehistory to Present* (Dublin, Geography Publications, 1992), p.336.
- 7 ‘Making of a middle landscape’ is a paraphrase of Peter Rowe, *Making a Middle Landscape* (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1991).
- 8 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London, Hutchinson, 1975), pp.243–244.
- 9 P. J. Meghen, *Housing in Ireland* (Dublin, Institute of Public Administration, 1963); Pfretzschner, *The Dynamics of Irish Housing* (1965); Anne Power, *Estates on the Edge: The Social Consequences of Mass Housing in Northern Europe* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1997), and *Hovels to Highrise. State Housing in Europe since 1850* (London, Routledge, 1993).
- 10 For Catholic nature of Irish housing and planning 1940–1980, see E. Rowley, ‘The Architect, the Planner and the Bishop: the Shapers of ‘Ordinary’ Dublin, 1940–60’ in *Footprint* (Vol. 6, No. 2, Autumn/Winter 2015), pp.69–88; E. Rowley, ‘The Bishop and the Cathedral, Galway’ in *Architecture Ireland* (Issue 2, No. 298, March/April 2018), pp.37–40; and E. Rowley, ‘30 years later: Ballymun Estate & the Irish Constitution 1937’ in S. Sterken & E. Weyns (eds.), *Territories of Faith. Religion, Urban Planning and Demographic Change in Post-War Europe 1945–1975* (KU Leuven, KADOC Press, 2019).
- 11 See also the essays in John Graby, (ed.), *150 Years of Architecture in Ireland* (Dublin, RIAI, 1989).