

ARCHITECTURAL CERAMICS IN DUBLIN

Category: Short and rapid communications

Abstract: This paper examines five examples of architectural ceramics in Dublin, Ireland: The Medical Mission, The Dublin Fruit Market, The Trust buildings, The Sunlight Chambers Building and St. Mary's Church of Ireland. It explores ceramic detailing, brickwork and tilework, with both a structural and decorative focus.

Keywords: Ceramics, Terracotta, Brickwork, Glaze, Carving.

Major cities around the world have their landmarks. Many are known by locals and visitors and tourists. For example, the Golden Gate Bridge, The Charles Bridge, Taipei 101, or the Sydney Opera House. Dublin is no exception. Perhaps the Guinness Brewery, Trinity College, Dublin Castle or Temple Bar are the 'must see' attractions in the Town of the Ford of the Hurdles, Dubh Linn or Baile Atha Cliath¹.

However, secreted throughout the city are buildings, façades, gables, arches, columns and friezes of relevance to those with an interest in ceramics. Some are imposing and grand, others perhaps abrupt and out of place, others discreet and waiting to be discovered. This paper examines a selection of those to be found in Dublin City Centre, Ireland². Research in the spring and summer of 2021 within a 5km pandemic lockdown radius of the author's home sharpened the research focus. It identified five buildings with elements of material, cultural, political and historical significance and this formed the criteria for their selection. Also, four of the five buildings were selected as they were constructed at a similar time period.

This paper will examine the following buildings and the reason for their selection will be outlined in each case:

- The Medical Mission, Chancery Place. 1891.
- The Dublin Fruit, Vegetable and Flower Market, Mary's Lane. 1892.
- The Iveagh Trust Buildings, Bull Alley Street. 1901.
- The Sunlight Chambers Building, Parliament Street. 1905.
- St. Mary's Church of Ireland, St. Mary's Road, Crumlin*. 1942

Alongside its fine brickwork and detailed carved graphics and patterning, the Medical Mission was selected for its significant role during the Easter Rising (against British Crown forces) during the Easter week of 1916 (fig. 1). Based on Chancery Place, it is very close to the River

¹ Translated or Irish (Gaelic) names for Dublin. Dubh Linn translated as the 'Black Pool' was place of convergence and a docking point for Viking invaders. Available on <https://www.britannica.com/place/Dublin>, accessed 15.6.2021.



1. The Dublin Medical Mission.

1. Зграда Даблинске медицинске мисије.



2. The Dublin Fruit Market, north facing façade featuring brick and tile.

2. Зграда Даблинске пијаце воћа, северна фасада са циглом и плочицама.

Liffey and positioned beside the Four Courts. An examination of records gives different dates for the building, which was originally two buildings, number five and six Chancery Place, dated as 1909.³ The Dublin Medical Mission operated as an infirmary, its terracotta pediment on the top and third floor reads 'founded 1891' and 'rebuilt 1909'. Its current function in 2021 is as a community centre now known as the Dublin Christian Mission.⁴

The ground floor, of three, features three sections, with the centre being a very fine entrance framed by signage in wrought iron declaring the building as a 'Medical Mission'. Above this signage there are sixty-six terracotta tiles featuring a four-sided sweeping form, creating a rhythmic, rotating pattern. This tilework is repeated five times on the ground floor, above and across the main entrance and four windows. Floral sections are featured below four of the windows on both the second and third levels.

2 The 2021 Covid 19 lockdown limited movement to within a 5km radius from one's home (in Ireland) until the month of May. For the author this identified an area of Dublin City Centre within which to focus and identify architectural ceramics of relevance to this paper. The author also identified the 'city' as the areas between the Royal (to the north) and the Grand (to the South) Canals as a boundary for this research (except for one building*, but still within this 5km radius).

3 National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, available on <https://www.buildingsofireland.ie/buildings-search/building/50070272/dublin-christian-mission-5-6-chancery-place-charles-street-west-dublin-7-dublin>, accessed 12.6.2021.

4 The Dublin Medical Mission was originally designed by George Palmer Beater (1850-1928) (McDowell Cosgrave 1928).

British forces occupied the building during the 1916 Easter Rising, as it was adjacent to the Four Courts which was occupied by the 1st Battalion of the Dublin Brigade of the Irish Volunteers.⁵

The roof line of the Medical Mission features five sections in line with the ground floor entranceway and windows. The sections above the windows (see fig. 1) feature four scooped sections of most probably sledged terracotta blocks. Three curved sections of terracotta combine to create these circular scoop features. Perhaps the most detailed and eye-catching visual element of the Medical Mission is the very apex of the building. On this occasion in a floral design, a multitude of terracotta tileworks surround the main element of the apex. These tiles include a vertical floral stem, bud, and leaves in the background. The central aspect in carved raised relief declares: 'Founded AD 1891. Rebuilt 1909'. The font for this lettering hints at an Art Nouveau or perhaps Arts and Crafts influence.

In line with one focus of this paper, the Dublin Medical Mission is one of those buildings we may pass every day, perhaps otherwise occupied with the business to hand of the day. However, to pause for a moment and breathe in the Medical Mission, one discovers a multitude of features and details, a curious building, with a significant visual and historical legacy.

5 The scars of Easter Week: The Medical Mission, Chancery Place, available on <https://comeheretome.com/2021/12/03/the-scars-of-easter-week-the-medical-mision-chancery-place/>, accessed 4.5.2021.

Locally known as the Fruit Market, (fig. 2) the building is far less inconspicuous than the Medical Mission. However, its location in Dublin City is not aligned with bus routes, tram lines, or commuter routes. Therefore, while it is quite a substantial building, occupying a large site in the city, it may not be as well known or visited by those not directly involved in the commercial function of the building. Its selection here is also due to its vibrant patterned brickwork and its detailed brick and stone carving. It is also an example of a historic building, over 120 years old, which is still thriving and active today as a community concern.

Located 400 metres from the Medical Mission, the Victorian market, officially known as the Dublin City Council Wholesale Fruit, Vegetable and Flower Market opened in 1892⁶. The Market is a large single storey, rectangular building covered by a wrought iron roof, manufactured in Bristol, England. The front, west facing façade features four archways with distinctive terracotta and cream brickwork patterning, a main gateway entrance with stone pillars and crest and a plaque. The north facing façade also features a fine stone pillared main entrance. Both north facing corners of the building are cut off at forty-five degrees by large wooden doorways under archways. At several points along the façades of the building, very fine carvings of fruit, vegetables and fish are visible in what appears to be made from Portland Stone. Some are quite eroded due to weathering, while others retain some very crisp carving details.⁷ These carved decorations clearly relate to the commerce of the building and the produce which is traded therein, on a daily basis.

The ceramic elements of significance are quite visually impactful patterning of terracotta and cream brickwork and, akin to the Medical Mission, terracotta tiled sections with fine modelling features. On each façade, every second archway is infilled with brickwork. Those that remain open with wrought iron work visible, allow light into the market. While the patterns in the bricked-up archways are visibly striking from a distance, there is an optical issue at play (fig. 3). The chevron patterning of the brickwork in one arch, leads the eye inwards creating a visual sense of the archway recessing backwards into the interior of the market. Close inspection of this arch reveals that this is not the case, the brickwork is perfectly flat and perpendicular to the footpath. Other arches feature cross-hatch, zigzag and vertical patterning brickwork. The experience of observing this brickwork brings a sense of play to the experience. Two façades of the Fruit Market feature detailed and intricately modelled terracotta sections, occupying the spaces between

6 Dublin City Council Wholesale, Fruit Vegetable and Flower Market, designed by Spencer Harty was opened by the Lord Mayor, the Right Hon. Joseph M. Meade LL.D. JP, 6/12/1892. Trinity College Schools' Competition Junior Gold Medal Winner; Dublin's Wholesale Fruit & Vegetable Market, available on: <https://www.historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/trinity-college-schools-competition-junior-gold-medal-winner-dublins-wholesale-fruit-vegetable-market>, accessed 29.4.2021.

7 Since 2019 discussions to restore the Market continue.



3. The Dublin Fruit Market, north facing arches.

3. Зграда Даблинске пијаче воћа, лукови на северној фасади.

the archways and roof top. A swirling leaf pattern is rotated three times to create a four sectioned panel of swirling fauna, centralised with a blossoming bud or flower form.

Dublin City Council Wholesale Fruit, Vegetable and Flower Market is a living, operational, working building, still trading 129 years after it opened. It is known to operate from very early in the morning as fruit and vegetables are delivered for distribution from around the country and the world. It may also be responsible for the 'early houses' that open along the nearby Capel Street. These are old Dublin pubs that open early to serve the workers ending their nightshifts at the market and other trading establishments.

The Iveagh Trust Buildings (1901) are located between two fine icons of Dublin City. These are Christ Church Cathedral and St. Patrick's Cathedral, whose Dean, Jonathan Swift, was the author of 'Gulliver's Travels' in 1726. The Iveagh Buildings is still a thriving community of social housing in the centre of the city (fig. 5) and, in a similar way to the Fruit Market, is a vibrant living community building, still bustling today.

Founded by Edward Cecil Guinness, the Iveagh Trust Buildings are an example of the generosity of the Guinness (brewing) family to the people of the city of Dublin (Bielenberg 2002/2003). Living conditions in the city were dangerously poor, and the Iveagh Trust Buildings is an example of Guinness family intervention to improve these conditions.



4. Iveagh Building Trust interior quadrant.
4. Зграда Ајви траста, унутрашњи квадрант.



5. The Sunlight Chambers building, north facing from the banks of the River Liffey with ceramic friezes and busts.
5. Зграда Санлајт চেјмбрз, северна фасада од обале реке Лифи са керамичким фризовима и бистама.

The buildings are four storeys high with attic living spaces as well. Main doorways (centre above) lead into central staircases that bring residents to their homes. Intricate plaques overhang each doorway and on the exterior corners of south and north facing façades. The south facing gable end has three vertical columns of angled terracotta brick between four windows and above is the plaque dating this particular part of the Iveagh Trust Buildings as 1904.

Now a more commercialised or privatised concern, the Iveagh Baths, still in operation today, was a part of the Trust and another example of the Guinness family catering for the welfare of the people of the city of Dublin. The Baths are:

“a fitting adjunct to the great Iveagh building scheme and are another example of the philanthropic spirit which prompted the generous donor”⁸.

The Baths run parallel to Bride Road and have a fine vista. The ground floor is clad with stone blockwork and the first floor has five ceiling level windows. There are two semi-circular relief panels at the top of the building between a long horizontal window roof section. The panel above the doorway features ornate lettering and floral and figurative decoration as signage for the Baths.

The Iveagh Trust Buildings and Public Baths are both examples of Dublin buildings which have remained

⁸ The citation available on The Iveagh Trust web: <https://www.theiveaghtrust.ie/our-story/edward-cecil-guinness/>, accessed 12.5.2021.

active and lived in and continue to flourish in the urban landscape.

The Sunlight Chambers Building, on the corner of Dublin's Parliament Street and Essex Quay, is arguably one of Dublin's more unusual historical buildings.⁹ Designed for the soap manufacturing Lever Brothers of Liverpool, it has two exterior façades facing east and north, with the north facing façade on the south bank of the River Liffey. It is locally considered to be a frequently unnoticed building.

“It's also one of the most passed-by buildings in Dublin, which is a shame because what people should be doing is looking up... They should give themselves a few minutes to absorb the beauty of the sculptures and the story they tell.” (Pat Liddy)¹⁰.

However, from the point of view of ceramics in general and colourful terracotta tilework in particular, it is truly remarkable. Just above the doorway entrance to the Chambers, the building is named in carved and glazed white lettering with decorative features behind. The ground floor façades are covered in granite blockwork. The remaining exterior of this four storey building is covered in a cream coloured rendering.

⁹ The Sunlight Chambers was designed by architect Edward Augustus Lyle Ould (1852–1909). Conrad Dressler was commissioned to make the colourful terracotta friezes depicting the story of hygiene (Pevsner, 2003)

¹⁰ The citation is available on Dublin Treasures – Sunlight Chambers web: <https://dublin.ie/live/stories/dublin-treasures-sunlight-chambres/>, accessed 20. 6 2021.



6. Sunlight Chambers glazed ceramic detail.
6. Зграда Санлајт чејмбрз, глазирани керамички детаљ.



7. St. Mary's Church, Crumlin Village, Dublin.
7. Црква Свете Марије, село Крамлин, Даблин.

However, looking beyond these two visual elements, we encounter twelve panels known to tell the story of the making and use of soap (central to Lever Brothers industry). Six ceramic panels are placed above the first floor windows and main entrance, and six above the second floor windows. All were made by English potter/sculptor Conrad Dressler, 1902, in his studio in Buckinghamshire. Between each of the north and east facing façades (there is a third façade on a tangent) are four glazed terracotta busts with glazed floral backgrounds.

The activity in these façades is busy. Men and women are busy working, ploughing the fields, laying blockwork, drawing water and washing clothing. More detailed activity reveals the preparation and making of soap. Against a light blue sky background, earth colours of brown, green and yellow, are contrasted against the stark white terracotta glaze of human skin. These workers, supervised by others in darker blue and green garments, are also framed by white glazed sculptures which section off each action filled frieze. A full day of labour is taking place.

The Sunlight Chambers Building is a rather overlooked building. Arguably as historian Pat Liddy infers, the activity, the actions and energy of the day is taking place above the ground floor, and beyond eye level. What awaits the passer-by that chooses to look up, is one of the finest examples of relief and tiled ceramics in architecture in Dublin and this is the reason for its inclusion here.

The paper concludes with a building of a more recent age. Built in 1942, St. Mary's Church of Ireland

Church (fig.7), just outside Crumlin village is built entirely of ceramic brick. It is a simple construction with some architectural flourishes, notably the long vertical windows with influences of the Art Deco Movement. The Irish Architectural Archive describes it as:

“The apparent austerity of the exterior is belied by elegant Art Deco flourishes, notably in the treatment of the windows, and an interior of calm and peaceful simplicity. (Dr Michael O'Neill) ©.”

Dr O'Neill describes the 'apparent austerity' of the exterior and its 'elegant flourishes' around the windows. The Church certainly has nothing of the drama and flamboyance of the Sunlight Chambers, or the graphic interplay of the Fruit Market brickwork. Therefore, in that sense it certainly is more austere. The reason for its inclusion¹¹ is that it is made from local brick and sourced from brickworks within the same neighbourhood.

In the nineteenth century, Ireland had well over one hundred brickworks located all over the country. These began to close through the early and mid-twentieth century. This was partially due to the exhaustion of clay pits and partially the transition of brick manufacturers from clay to concrete. St. Mary's Church is made of bricks from Dolphin's Barn Brickworks and is constructed with the last

¹¹ Catherine Scuffil, the historian in residence, 'Dolphins Barn Brickworks', Walkinstown Library Dublin, May 2021. The lecture is available through <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=502158074253179>, accessed 21.5.2021.

bricks to be made at the Brickworks. The clay was sourced just across the (Sundrive) road in a clay pit now closed and repurposed as a public park (Eamonn Ceannt Park) and outdoor cycling track¹². It is considered that St. Mary's Church was the last building built by bricks fired at the Dolphin's Barn Brickyard, before the yard permanently closed.¹³

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¹² Covid 19 Restrictions prevented the author from gaining closer access (for photographic purposes) to St. Mary's Church, Crumlin.

¹³ The above lecture in the footnote No. 11, described that it is considered that St. Mary's Church was the last building built by bricks fired at the Dolphin's Barn Brickyard, before the yard permanently closed.

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АРХИТЕКТОНСКА КЕРАМИКА У ДАБЛИНУ

Ове зграде могу значити много различитих ствари различитим људима. У прилог томе говори и чињеница да квалитет Зграде медицинске мисије (The Medical Mission) стоички одолева променама. Дискретна зграда пуна ситних архитектонских детаља и обележја историје која је подразумевала и конфликт. Право је откровење стајати мирно на иначе прометној градској раскрсници. Даблинска пијаца воћа је и данас пуна енергије. На њој људи тргују. Преплављена је опремом и возилима која долазе и одлазе много пре изласка сунца. Одликује је скоро хаотична живост. Зграде Ајви траста (The Iveagh Trust Buildings) одликује нека друга врста живости, јер оне представљају стамбени простор на ком се деца играју, а одрасли разговарају и обављају свакодневне послове. Зграда Санлајт чејмбрз (The Sunlight Chambers Building) скоро да подсећа на кукавицу у гнезду. Стоји тако издвојена од суседних како савремених, тако и историјских зграда. За аутора је бављење овом зградом представљало једно чудесно искуство. Добро се сећа како су пролазници реаговали док је фотографисао ову зграду. Чинило се као да је виде први пут. Светла, за неке можда блештава, али истовремено декоративна знатижеља у граду који је познатији по својој џорџијанској и викторијанској архитектури. Црква Свете Марије (St. Mary's Church) нас подсећа на грану индустрије која данас представља далеку прошлост, али која нас враћа у доба занатлија, неимара и грнчарства.

Да закључимо, човек се може запитати – шта је утврђено овим радом? Овај рад је започет у јединственом сплету околности, који је већ сада постао познат на глобалном нивоу, јер се од становништва захтева да ради и живи у нужно ограниченим условима, услед пандемије. У овом случају, радијус изолације од 5 километара није нужно ометао, али је свакако сузио фокус истраживања које је имало за циљ проналажење јединствених примера архитектонске керамике у Даблину. Међутим, чак и овај ужи фокус је открио неке јединствене примере који иначе можда не би били истражени и разматрани. Са овако дефинисаним географским параметром, истраживање је започето и истраживало се унутар датог параметра. А оно што је откривено прича нам многе приче. Приче о занатској и материјалној култури, дуговечности и наслеђу ових грађевина које красе керамички елементи, и њиховом значају као делу градског пејзажа Даблина.