twenty-seven proposals for the new City Library at the Potato Market by the School of Architecture, University of Limerick

Exhibition. 26th February–7th March
Opening. Thursday 26th February at 16:00
Exhibition to be launched by Mayor John Gilligan
Limerick City Library, The Granary
Michael Street, Limerick

Third year Design Studio projects by Stephen Barry, Jeremiah Cahill, Shane Carroll, Sean Collins, Reidin Corbet, Marian Dinneen, Ronan Farrell, Shane Fenton, Cornelia Foley, Anna Healy, Elaina Hickey, Danny Holland, Aisling Joyce, Sarah Keane, Eamonn Kelly, Ian MacDonald, Sinead MacMahon, Michael McLaughlin, Brian Moriarty, Benjamin Mullen, Eugene O’Callaghan, James O’Donovan, Diarmuid O’Sullivan, Naomi Panter, Clare Reidy, Gerard Walsh & Silvia Zheleva.
Tutors: Jan Frohburg, Javier Burón, Irénée Scalbert, Maria Donoghue & John O’Reilly

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Limerick City Library & Hackett Reprographics

This exhibition is part of Library Ireland Week, for more information: www.libraryirelandweek.ie
This brochure documents twentyseven proposals for a New Limerick Library, designed by thirdyear architecture students in SAUL, the School of Architecture at the University of Limerick, in the autumn semester 2008. These projects shall serve as a basis for a wider discussion on the aspirations and demands regarding contemporary library facilities in Limerick. They stand in support of plans to establish modern facilities for the Limerick Public Library and promote a design competition amongst professional architects to select the best project. A public exhibition of these designs was hosted by the Limerick City Library as SAUL’s contribution to Library Ireland Week 2009.

The design studio project addresses the pendant relocation of Limerick’s city library. Although this is an actually pressing problem in Limerick city the design studio tries to reach beyond purely answering to the city’s needs and will discuss the role of a library, of books and recorded knowledge in general, asking if, where and how current changes might impact on location and conception of a building.

Knowledge economy

Ireland’s ongoing transition to a knowledge-based economy provides the backdrop for choosing our design studio projects. The future of Ireland’s economy is largely based on its transformation into a knowledge economy with education self-evidently assuming a major role in this process. As knowledge becomes crucial in the process of defining one’s own position we will focus on the production and consumption of knowledge. This process is happening on a national level, hence local decision will have to be understood within the larger context of the whole island. Thus, third year will introduce ideas of planning and urban design: “Knowledge is the theme, city is the place.”

The City and Borough of Limerick are facing the challenge to ensure that all parts of society gain equal access to the sources and resources of education. At present, Limerick has large pockets of its population who are socially excluded, not only in terms of access to education. Social exclusion imposes additional costs, direct and indirect, on society and reduces the quality of life generally (i.e. crime). The National Development Plan notes that one of the costs of social exclusion is “a loss of the potential contribution – both economic and otherwise – which people who are affected by social exclusion could make” to society and to business. (Ireland, National Development Plan 2000–2006. p.188)
Bridge Street and Merchants Quay. At present, the area is used as a car park of roofed market stalls including a “loggia” and period railings towards the Potato Market. The site is defined along the Abbey River by a stretch of Hall and Sarsfield House (destined for demolition) are within sight of Cathedral with its graveyard are adjacent to the site, too. Limerick City footbridge connecting the two. The Limerick Court House and St Mary’s river the site has the Hunt Museum as its immediate neighbour, with a strategy. Situated at the confluence of the River Shannon and the Abbey thus assumes a key position within Limerick’s city centre development cupy the site of the Potato Market in the city centre. The Potato Market for New Limerick Library

New Limerick Library

The new city library branch and head quarter building(s) are to occupy the site of the Potato Market in the city centre. The Potato Market thus assumes a key position within Limerick’s city centre development strategy. Situated at the confluence of the River Shannon and the Abbey river the site has the Hunt Museum as its immediate neighbour, with a footbridge connecting the two. The Limerick Court House and St Mary’s Cathedral with its graveyard are adjacent to the site, too. Limerick City Hall and Sarsfeld House (destined for demolition) are within sight of the Potato Market. The site is defined along the Abbey River by a stretch of rooftop market stalls including a “loggia” and period railings towards Bridge Street and Merchants Quay. At present, the area is used as a car park with restricted public access. A boat club and its slipway occupy the westernmost point of the site.

Information centre

A library is usually defined as a collection of information, sources, resources, and services, as well as the structure in which it is housed. Modern libraries are increasingly being redefined as places to get unrestricted access to information in many formats and from many sources. In addition to providing materials, they also provide the services of specialists (librarians), who are experts at finding and organising information and at interpreting information needs.

More recently, libraries are understood as extending beyond the physical walls of a building, by including material accessible by electronic means, and by providing the assistance of librarians in navigating and analysing tremendous amounts of knowledge with a variety of digital tools. As “a collection of useful material for common use,” the term “library” has itself acquired a meaning beyond its original definition. (see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Library)

Libraries changed from being seen as institutionalised sources of knowledge to be understood as interlinked repositories of information, as interfaces for data access. Yet increasingly they become places of social interaction. Limerick’s city library moving from the original Carnegie Library building at the corner of People’s Park (an institution of civic pride) to the Granary warehouse (a place of mass depository) to the Potato Market (a place of mercantile exchange) is emblematic of this shift in function and perception of libraries in general. One might even say, here the history and future of Ireland are condensed onto one site: from potatoes to books. There is a comparison waiting to be made between the potato and the book, both of them staple food, both of them a cause of famine when in shortage.

Design learning

Giving the transformation from leabharlann to contemporary library its adequate architectural expression is a main concern of this semester's studio project. The library project aims at integrating the urban, aesthetic, technical and intellectual aspects of architectural design. Its programme has an inherent complexity in that it combines spaces of public interaction with spaces of individual withdrawal. A building for a library, more than any other building type, condenses design conflicts and challenges:

“Books have the same enemies as people: fire, humidity, animals, weather, and their own content.”

Paul Valéry (1871–1945)

In design studio we adopt a contemporary mode of knowledge production characterised as context-driven, problem-focused, interdisciplinary, and criticised as “tinged with political commitment” (for further reference see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mode_2). The Design Studio project starts out from the social and cultural condition as outlined above and moves through a series of studies in order to present a single complex architectural proposition. Finalised design projects deal with buildings on many levels, from the analysis of intention and meaning to materiality and detailed design.

Jan Frohburg, May 2009
A NEW LIBRARY FOR LIMERICK CITY

The Solitaire Civic Library is the proposed new public library for Limerick City on the Potato Market site. The design is for a seven storey library with a coloured glass façade sitting on top of a one storey administrative block. The interior of the library is organised with circulation on the outside of the library, a central atrium, open plan reading areas and solid "boxes" for the louder activities in the library.

Proposed changes to the surrounding area are, planting trees on the site and re-activating the river walk from King John's Castle to Georges' Quay. Access to the library is a gently inclined ramp which brings you from Bridge Street to on top of the administrative block. Access within the library itself is in the form of ramps between floors, two lifts and a central stair core.

The services provided for the people of Limerick are, an adult library and reading rooms, teenage library and reading room, a children's library and activity spaces, printing and PC facilities, music lab, exhibition hall and rooftop café.

A third year Design Studio Project in the School of Architecture in the University of Limerick by student Stephen Barry.
Access to City, Access to Site, Access to Info.

My proposed library is two buildings facing each other with a large courtyard connecting the two with a covered passageway separating the two at the same time.

These two buildings contain all the buildings that any modern library would wish for. The northern building contains the music rooms, storage, and some community rooms on the ground floor with the second floor containing the administrative and more community rooms. The southern building contains the children’s, computer, adult, and teenage areas of a traditional library spread out over the three floors of the southern building.
The initial idea behind this project is based on the movement of people through the site and how to incorporate this into the building. This gave the building its distinctive shape to allow maximum uninhibited movement around the building coming from any direction.

To the west of the building there is a large public area for occasions such as Riverfest and other occasions. This area is also connected to the other public areas by the movement patterns of people in the area.

Another aspect of the building which drew from its surroundings is the outer edge of the building which is a heavy limestone block wall similar to that of King Johns Castle and other buildings along the river while the inner edge is all glazed to be inviting.
Nicholas Negroponte has developed for the third world a $100 laptop with Internet connectivity. The laptop is an ideal reading device for digital content of Kahle's Library. There is in this laptop the potential to expand the catalogue of a library exponentially. Library's house the contents of books, not exclusive-
y the books themselves. Andrew Carnegie was the foremost philanthropist of his
day. He set up numerous libraries around
the world, all with the goal of provid-
ing free access to the people. The in-
scription above the entrance to the Bos-
ton Public Library reads, "FREE TO THE
PEOPLE". Amazon, the world's largest book
store, is introducing to its product range a
digital book, the Kindle. Amazon hopes
to sell digital copies of books to its
customers for them to read digitally. The
advertising centres around green slogans
and promises of increased readability.

What does this mean for the traditional
paper book? Does the

Kindle herald the de-
nise of the hardback
book? Is it possible
that the two could
survive in such a

competitive world? The
idea that a library
is an ever-changing
and dynamic entity is
certainly not new.
Mobile libraries can
be seen across the
world, especially in
more rural areas. The
transitory nature of
a library is very im-
portant to the de-
sign process. There
once was a library
in Alexandria that
was the home of much
knowledge before it
burned. Now it is the
home of a vast digi-
tal library, Browse
Kahle's life's work.
The continued use of
the book as the sole
means of preserving
knowledge is surely
at an end. The di-
verse nature of in-
formation storage has
reduced our depen-
dancy on books. There
certainly is a role
for books, but not an
exclusive role.

Barcode Library, Potato Market, Limerick

Shane Carroll
NOT SIMPLY TO LOOK AT THE WATER; BUT TO LIVE WITH IT
SEAN COLLINS

The site, a marshy site, is a place of overwhelming character. The presence of St Mary’s Cathedral, the old Customs House, the Court House and the City Council Headquarters complements the idea of the Library as being a new office located centrally in the heart of Liverpool City. There is a clear logic to the form of the building itself, for it is formed from two halves that sit beside each other – the new half on the river bank and the old half adjacent to the site. I wanted this to be reflected in my library by trying to create undulating forms of space through the building, allowing free flowing movement through the building for all users. To achieve this, I decided to completely decou- ple the building from the ground and raised the first floor plane level over a mezzanine floor. This prevents the building from encroaching into the spaces that are available to the public. I also created a void along the line of the site, leaving the existing site untouched. The library is reflected in water between the public, people entering from different directions, or the edge of the site where both can conver- ge. The circulation route through the building guides users up through four floors from the first floor level, leading them to the mezzanine and then to the height main Library space. This space relates to the junction of the water which it contours and on to the second floor where it descends onto a floating platform position which provides an intimate interaction with the river and its surroundings. The first floor consists of a commercial area and public gallery space, second level includes the children’s library with external ba- renes, computer pods and multi-functional rooms, and third and fourth floor are main li- brary spaces with cells and external terraces. Semi-annual summer events and the site’s natural beauty make it a unique location for visitors.

The siting and orientation of the core allow each floor plate to relate uniquely to both views. The orientation also creates vistas to be created in each floor plate between the core which remain open and spatial con- nections between floor plates. The effect of this is that the library has a series of rooflights and congregates deep into the building, and helps ventilate the entire building. I chose the floor to ceiling height of most spaces in my library to be 3 m. An average that people’s eye level (under 1.5m) would approach. The element between the floor and ceiling height, and the lines of sight to important pieces of art create a kind of tension in the space which helps create a better idea of movement for the user and adds a quality of space for the library.

I took inspiration from O’Flaherty House, designed by Roddy Wald- er, where I learned that the use of glass greatly achieves the notion of transparency and penetration, a great sense of place and a strong relationship to its site, as does the Saratoga Res- ervation, by Michael Van Der Rhoen, where use of material can create a more expansive sentiment of space, and Fallingwater by Frank Lloyd Wright, where building uses water and nature and relates to it, as opposed to being set back from it and seeing it as an object.
Since the ground floor slab contains a lot of landfills, it seemed necessary to see the foundations for each block as well as the second floor slab. For floors, use a cast-in-place concrete due to the fact that the sea floor and water may come in contact with it. Concretes were tested in this situation. The floor plates above this are made of concrete in precast due to their better spans to depth ratio. They are aligned using primary blocks connected together to ensure alignment. The slab of concrete can be poured on site to give a uniform rigid surface. The floor measures approx. 550mm in depth.

For a ceiling, I used white plasterboard, and for floor material, I used off-white laminate. This came from the idea of trying to create an expansive space that reflects off the ceiling. Laminate is also a good choice as it can be used internally and externally, giving no differentiation between each allowing space to flow freely in and out. Floor to ceiling glazing with white frames is used for this purpose, and glazed balustrades also.
The concept for this project was to capitalise on the surrounding views of the Shannon and the city. Also I felt it was important to improve the river walk along the edge of the Shannon, so I allowed for a stronger access point across the Abbey River straight into the focal point of the library. This resulted in floating floor-plates which reach out to the views. Each floor varies in shape and orientation, gaining the best light from the sun for the activities in question.

Also, it was important that people could see the activity through the library from every floor, and so, I created an external courtyard which could be seen from every floor in the building, as it was surrounded by a glass facade. People can walk right through the courtyard to access the Court House and Civic Offices. The area surrounding the library is also developed to encourage passers-by, to utilise this beautiful location where the Abbey river meets the Shannon.
Limerick City Council have proposed the development of a purpose-built library for the city centre. The new building is to house a variety of functions, with an emphasis on community activity and social inclusion as well as the pursuit of knowledge.

“There is not such a cradle of democracy upon the earth as the Free Public Library, this Republic of letters, where neither rank, office, nor wealth receives the slightest consideration.”

- Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919)

The proposed site is at the Potato Market, between the Court House and Medieval St Mary’s Cathedral. This area of the city has stunning views of the River Shannon and the Abbey River. With such strong factors on the site a strong intervention was required.

I proposed a building which would divide the site, making an open public space to the north and another riverside space to the west, taking advantage of the context and views. The library building takes advantage of the south sun and encloses a riverside garden.
Taking full use of the riverside site, the proposal puts special emphasis on the west side of the site. An edge stepped down to meet the water provides space for people to sit in the evening sun and admire the view of the river.

An important factor in designing the building was to separation of conflicting functions. The entrance level is an easy area, a place for the public, informal, not intimidating for first-time users of the library. The quiet functions of a library are clubbed together on a higher level, but the majority of the library is for community use, noisy and fun.

Above: People enjoying the riverside in Stockholm, Sweden.

Right: Aerial view of scale model of new city library west towards the mouth.
the breacain library

PHOTO SHOOT IN RELAXED READING CAFE

SKETCH VIEW FROM BRIDGE

PRODUCTIVE STUDY

1:200 EAST ELEVATION APPROACH FROM GEORGES QUAY

1:200 LONG SECTION
The library is named after a long-removed ship called the 'Bremen' that sailed on the River Geelong. The main entrance is on the north side of the site.

The materials used in the building are local and natural. The top layer is a timber frame construction, the middle layer is a steel frame with a glass roof, and the bottom layer is a concrete frame.

The library is designed to provide a comfortable and welcoming environment for the community. The main entrance is on the north side of the site, with a large glass window providing natural light.

The library is located on the edge of a small park, providing a quiet and peaceful environment for the community. The building is designed to be energy-efficient and environmentally sustainable.

The library is open from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday, and 10am to 2pm on weekends. Visitors can access the library online through the library's website, which provides access to a wide range of resources and services.
The Riverside Library was developed around the concept of creating a building that would both form a relationship with the river's edge and create public spaces to interact with and compliment the existing urban landscape.

The library consists of two linear buildings that are linked together on the ground floor that also creates an open public plaza on the 1st floor.

In section floor plates move and cut to create double and triple height spaces. Triple height light wells bring natural light to the ground floor library space, and also provide a visual interaction between spaces on the different floors.

Classrooms and reading spaces are divided by glass panes to allow for visual interaction between everyone in the library. This visual link from above and below encourages movement throughout the library, movement that creates a more vibrant environment within the library.

The library's bookshelves are on the ground floor with the different sections divided by light wells that also provide views up to the public plaza level.
The riverside wing of the library contains the library's reading spaces. These intimate spaces have a close relationship with the river which creates a calming atmosphere within the spaces.

The courthouse wing of the library contains the busier and noisier activities such as the music and classroom spaces. These spaces have both views of the internal public plaza to the south and views of the existing urban fabric to the north. The views change as you move through the spaces as your view is directed by the library's facade.

The masonry from the quay wall is used in the structure of the riverside wing. The masonry is used on the outer facade to continue the grain of the quay wall from Kings John's Castle, by the Library and to the Hunt Museum.

The masonry is used on the inner leaf and in the reading space to enforce the connection with the quay wall and the outer facade.
Confluence

Confluence, n. [L. confluentia.]
The act of flowing together; the meeting or junction of two or more streams; the place of meeting.

The assemblage of a multitude of elements together.

The theme of confluence is evident in the analysis of the geographical location of the site. The potato market site is located at a point where the Abbey River meets the Shannon. The site stretches from a cityscape, situated amongst Limerick city’s civic buildings, court house and St. Mary’s Cathedral, to the vast views onto the Shannon and Abbey rivers which surround the site on two sides.

The Concept

Within the theme of confluence, the concept of this project was to design a building which would address the civic cityscape, which it stands to face on two sides, while opening up as it approaches the banks of the Shannon. A clear circulation route through the library is the means by which visitors can travel from a civic setting to a peaceful riverside.
Entrance to the Exhibition Space, for access to evening events, is on the North Facade of the Building. The Library gains a storey with a slope in ground plane.

The building opens out to the West with views onto the Shannon provides open air spaces. External reading spaces in the private garden are on the West Facade of the Library.

The South Facade allows for optimum natural light into the easy reading, PC and Children’s Lending/Activity on the Ground Floor and the Teenage Lending/Activity and Adult Lending on the First Floor.

The breaking down in volume of the building as it approaches the river Shannon to open up to its views and allow for external spaces is also visible in the South Elevation.
Void to Solid
External courtyards to internal library
The introduction of courtyards into the library buildings allows the public the pleasure of reading outside and brings light into the deep plan. There are places where one can be outside but covered, or overlook a courtyard while inside.

Reference and Lending
The main reference and lending facilities, as well as facilities for arts and crafts and music are spread over 2 floors in the main part of the plan to the bottom left. At the far end the building reaches out into the river. A cafe is located here to make the most of the beautiful views of the city and hills.

Headquarters
The headquarters and administration functions are located in a block that makes an edge with the Courthouse and creates an enclosed public area to front of the library, protected from the wind.

Independent public functions
The building to the right is single storey and houses the more public functions of the library, such as an easy area, pc suite, a double height exhibition space, community rooms and a cafe that opens out onto a paved area by the river. It can have opening hours that are independent of the main library.

Movement Pattern
The building allows for the maintenance of existing movement patterns through the site. It makes an edge with the river, the Courthouse and the road.
Construction
The library is a timber construction, with columns spaced at 3.5 metres, giving it quite a domestic feel. Internal walls are made of plywood. The relatively open plan and plywood walls make the space adaptable and suited to future changes of use.

Courtyards
The courtyards are central to the scheme in every way. Here they are envisioned as a piece of nature within the building. They are spaces to look at but more importantly they are spaces to be in.

Copper Skin
The building is clad in copper. Copper is a durable material, often used in the roofs of churches etc. Over time copper naturally changes colour to a sort of blue-green. In a city environment this would take roughly 10 to 15 years. The building would settle into its surroundings over time.
Limerick: A New Library in the Potato Market
Elaina Hickey

Concept

The main library occupies the central cube, while other activities are accommodated in the area that wraps around this central library. The south, glazed areas house the activities that generate more movement and activity while the north facing rooms are used for quiet study spaces and relaxed reading rooms.

Emphasis is placed on structure, with the library stacks being organised by the columns that are placed at 7 metre centres, the ideal span for a concrete slab.
Leabharlann na hAbhann looks at three things in its proposal for a new City Library for Limerick. It examines the relationship the City currently has with the River Shannon and the River Walk along the East bank. It controls light entering the building to ensure a suitable environment for reading and storing books and it shapes two new public spaces for the City among the Courthouse, City Council buildings and St. Mary’s Cathedral.

The building, while remaining one single unit, is divided essentially into three elements. The first is the Staff Headquarters and administration side of the Library. The second is the Public Library, incorporating the main entrance, main lending, classroom and café; The third is a bridge on the first floor that connects the two blocks and provides for Reference and Local Studies, easily accessible from both staff and public areas of the building. The two public spaces shaped by the Library building are connected underneath this bridge.

Through manipulating the shell of the building, light is carefully controlled as it enters the library, adjusting the conditions for the various functions inside. Louvred openings in the facade control direct sunlight, creating bright reading spaces around the outside of the library while keeping direct light from reaching the centre of the building where the books are stored.

North facing, louvred roof openings allow for controlled, diffuse sunlight to penetrate to the centre of the library. This is most ideal for both reading and the storage of books.
The River Walk: Reactivated

A pedestrian route along the bank of the Shannon as it passes through the city, while a great idea, has been largely unsuccessful up to now. There are a number of reasons why this has happened. Firstly, for security reasons, large parts of the walk are gated every evening - effectively closing the whole route at night. Many of Limerick’s quayside buildings also face onto the streets rather than the river, making the river walk one along the rear of city, rather than the main pedestrian artery it has the potential to be.

This proposal carves two new public spaces into the City’s Civic Quarter. The first on the approach to the existing Courthouse and City Council buildings, allows for the passage of cars and provides a front for the Library to the main road. The second, on the South West of the building, is a pedestrian courtyard. An ‘outdoor room’ for the Library.
The development of my concept for Limerick city library was a slow and constantly evolving process. It started with a site investigation. My main area of study was geology, typography and vegetation. This led to a number of interesting discoveries, one of which became of particular interest to me. The site is a “ hinge point” on Limerick’s two main vegetation areas; the primary line running along the banks of the river Shannon in the form of open public green spaces and planted trees (Arthurs Quay) the secondary, along the canal and the Abbey River. The site, along with the gardens of the hunt museum, was the connecting element of these two linear vegetation patterns.

The underlying concept thus was to develop a library which exists in harmony with an open green public space. However, I didn’t want the library’s green to rival the formality of the Hunt Museum’s arranged gardens. I wanted to create a casual ambience on the site Limerick City Library.

The next step was to decide how the physical structure of the library was to be arranged on the site. From the beginning, I considered the eastern corner (where the bridge crosses) as the strongest point on the site. It is the first point of arrival of people travelling to the library from the city. It is also the point of highest visibility for traffic and pedestrians. For this reason it became the anchor point. I wanted the main headquarters of the library to be located here.

As a consequence of this and to retain the “casualness” of the site the other library quarters scattered across the site from here. Like a pack of cards thrown across the site. I experimented with this idea through a number of models as shown in the photographs.

The height and profile of the library building was arranged to allow for a view of the river and to address the existing structures (the town hall). By dipping in the middle it framed a view of the existing riverside landscape. This can be seen in the elevation below.
The layout of the library is pretty straightforward. Main desk, staff offices, Pc room, history section and lift in the main building. The children's area is in the next volume and the adults in the third. The final building that is only connected to the main library by an open plaza and relates to the Court House in terms of height and scale. This accommodates community services such as homework clubs, gallery space and a café and because it is not connected to the main library in can remain open later into the evenings.

The point where each of the volumes intersects become voids that act as light wells as well as visual links from one area of the library to another. A stairwell runs through each building, slightly skewed in order to adhere to the concept of casually scattering the programme elements across the site. The bookshelves run perpendicular to the staircases.

In terms of materials, the facades facing the harder city urban fabric are rendered in brick. His relates to Limerick's typical Georgian architecture. However, the sunnier South facing facades are glazed in an opaque u-shaped glass channels and the South-West facade is clear to take advantage of the views. Only the North Eastern facade has long narrow windows to avoid too much wall shelf space being taken up by windows. The North facade has no openings. In this way the library opens up to the sunnier green area and is closed to the darker Northern side.
Limerick City Library

Limerick City Library is determined to engage and target all sectors of the population to the usage of the service and to reading in particular. “Social inclusion is an area in which the public library has a major role. Providing access to knowledge is one of the greatest contributions that libraries can make to social inclusion. Far from being illusory, ignorance excludes people from much what is important and valuable. Reading is the first essential ingredient to gaining knowledge and education.” (Limerick City Library, Application for Agreement, 1993)

The new city library and headquarters are to occupy the site of the Potato Market in the city center. The Potato Market thus assumes a key position within Limerick’s City Center Development Strategy. Situated at the confluence of the River Shannon and the Abbey River, the site has the Hunt Museum as its immediate neighbour, with a footbridge connecting the two. The Limerick City Court House and St Mary’s Cathedral with its graveyard are adjacent to the site also.

This proposal aims to reflect the existing urban fabric of Limerick City and the River Shannon. The building part of the library consists of two concrete blocks housing the library’s books, reading rooms and services. These two are enclosed in a softer skin of glass. The transparent membrane wraps around the structures creating three story high circulation spaces overlooking the fast moving River Shannon. The entire structure is housed by a light steel roof with the main entrance from the west.

Ground Floor Plan – Reception Area, Exhibition & Performance Space, Delivery & Processing, Newspapers & PC Suite
First Floor Plan – Children’s & Teenagers’ Library, Book Storage, Community Rooms

Concept Models of Library Building: Two solid blocks of building surrounded by a loose shell of glass

Second Floor Plan: Main Library, Headquarters, Staff Common & Breakout, Meeting Rooms
Third Floor Plan: Music & Multimedia Library, Cafe/Restaurant & Bookshop

Section through Library
Floor plans of two blocks extend over the entrance space and central circulation corridor. This allows views to activities happening below and to other floors. Both the blocks and the open space interact at these points.
The glass skin of the library is made of right glass varying from translucent strips and transparent strips allowing framed views over the city and the River Shannon. The translucent strips create an element of mystery for the exterior giving hints of movement and activity within. At night the library remains open in parts with the exhibition space, performance spaces and the restaurant area still active. The light from within acts with the glass to create a soft glow, creating a beacon along the river. The curved river edge created from the glass wall makes a new addition to the river’s coast reflecting the more organic natural shapes along the river including King John’s Castle and the existing natural landscape. This new organic element acts in contrast to the interior of the building. The two interior blocks reflect the geometric characteristics of the urban fabric and man-made forms. Together they create a new world for reading, living and learning.

"There is not a cradle of democracy upon the earth as a Free Public Library, this republic of letters, where neither rank, office, nor wealth receives the slightest consideration." - Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919)
The Design for this library focused on the movement of people, library users as well as the general public, to facilitate their transition through and around the site, riverside walk and adjacent civic square and Limerick City Courthouse. Existing level changes across the site provided interesting opportunities to manipulate movement in and around the library building as well as ensuring ease of access from each possible approach. The Library is entered from within an internal core that links up the riverside walk with the courthouse square Merchants Quay, George's Quay and Bridge Street addressing the issue of "The Front of the site". The building "faces" in many different directions and responds directly to the geometry of the building fabric in which it finds itself. It aims to give a sense of order to its immediate surroundings on the border between Irish and English town and redevelop the street and square patterns which have become disjointed. The roof-scape provides a public surface for activities of both social and academic interests. The Library functions are organised around the circulation principles of the design in a pattern which aims to provide ease of access while addressing key environmental, and logistical limitations.
1: North East Facing Elevation
2: North West Facing Elevation
3: South Facing Elevations

Above: 1:1000 Sections of the building facing toward George Quay
Left: 1:100 Elevations

Below Left: Site Context
Below: Exploded Axonometric of the building structure showing simple movement patterns into the Library
Limerick’s New Public House

This is Limerick’s sense of knowledge and creativity. The house can be entered throughout the new civic space which extends to the library house or over the river bridge passing the custom house.

Once entering your eyes will be tingling upward in this vast open space of innovation, your eyes will help the light of curiosity, the exchange of ideas of knowledge. These open windows blue sky from scattered throughout the new window of knowledge. On the floor the light will be shimmering at your feet blue light, dark light, produced by the rain of lesser space.

The rooms you can come and see this? These rooms are kept in the walls of the house, light circle rooms kept in the circle. The upper floor community activities are kept in these rooms. Those windows made of steel sheets painted black for colour, capped with a heavy concrete roof with the light shining through. Reading spaces are scattered around, find your favourite spot. Leaving enlightened will be waiting to come back.
The Site
The Potato Market of Limerick is an historic site in the city, having been a place of city trade for many years. Its importance is emphasized by its location within a grid of civic buildings. With this grid taking a different direction to that of Newtownpery, the site may be seen as sitting in between the two grids, a fulcrum or link between two parts of the city, providing an opportunity to connect by form two directions.

The Project
At the moment Limerick has large pockets of its population who are socially excluded, not only in terms of access to education. Libraries have changed from being seen as institutionalised sources of knowledge to be understood as interlinked repositories of information, as interfaces for data access. Yet increasingly they have become places of social interaction. With changes taking place simultaneously in the perception of a library and within Limerick City, the development of a library is something which could have great affect on the city, providing open access to education and helping to decrease social exclusion.

The Concept
The project initially found form in turning with the change in direction of the two grids. This allowed for a large space to house the library. The space was to be a fragmented one, one with different zones and areas but with little space actually enclosed. The structure was to become the dividers of space, house the bookshelves and contain intimate reading spaces. While the ground floor was looser and more temporary, allowing the public to wander amongst the heavy structural walls, finding different areas, activities and experiences.

Limerick City Library

Library as One Shared Space

Ground Floor Plan
Five wedges fanning out from double height entrance space which contains newspaper area and small cafe; Adult Reference, Music Room, Adult Lending, Music Lending and Courtyard space. Children and Teenage Lending. Service Block and Exhibition Space.
Top Page:
- Context Plan
- Ground Floor Plan
Bottom Page:
- Section Perspective, internal view.
- Photographs of final model.
- Long Sections through library.
- Cross Sections through library.
People like many different atmospheres to read in. The essential element for creating these atmospheres is light. In the Library of Light there is a choice of many reading experiences. Readers can filter through the balconies in the triple height mezzanine reading area, select a book and then select their preferred reading experience.

One could choose the diverse solitary seats overlooking all directions for those who wish to be at one with their literature. These seats like rooms have one window each looking out onto the Abbey River. Here one can enjoy your read and the view of the quaking Abbey mill while being protected from the hustle and bustle of the rest of the library. If solitary reading isn’t your sort of thing and you would rather nest among the activities of the rest of the library then the second floor is the place for you. From the tables and chairs or the couches on the second floor you can enjoy views of Leamshk city, the Shannon and Abbey River as well as being able to look down into the main library and all its activities.

LIBRARY OF LIGHT
limerick city library
The function of a modern-day library is constantly evolving, as technological advancements dictate the way information is accessed and stored. The concept of a library being a space to solely store and reference literature no longer applies. With this in mind, the project aims to provide a framework within which future developments and advancements can be facilitated.

The site for the project is one of great significance for Limerick City. Located along the banks of both the Abbey river and the Shannon, the site is visible from several access routes to the city. The former Potato Market was an exchange of goods and information, bounded by monuments to nature, religion and civic life. Today the site is wholly underutilised as the location for a car park, little more than a void in the centre of the city. An opportunity exists to add to this historical fabric by providing a library that is open and welcoming to the citizens of Limerick City and beyond.

With this context in mind, a library with a monumental quality has been conceived. The exterior is a composition of brick and glazing, vertical panels which represent the ascension through the library to find a space of one's own. Deep reveals allow for a play on shade and shadow, activating the facade. The entrance is located in the heart of the building, where one enters into a central public space from which several routes exit to meander off along.

The ground floor is entirely devoted to public activities, resulting a transparent and porous spatial quality. An open plan gives views along the building, out towards the river or giving glimpses of what is happening around or above. This minimalist interior is one of potential adaptation and evolution, allowing that facilitation of any future activities into the library.

From here cues are given on how to move through the library. Large, colourful steps lead up to the Children's lending area, a large expanse of glass towards the river signals the location of the café and a place to rest and enjoy the visual amenities of the site. A central staircase rises through the building and up to the main lending and reading area. The structural brick walls enclose reading rooms, desks and rest points, providing places to read, use a notebook or converse.

Each floor has a central open space which is adjacent to the central staircase, and from this area, private rooms and reading areas are provided to retreat into. As you rise through the building, bookshelves begin to frame space and determine the main circulation routes through the library, which are along the perimeter of the floorplan. The top floor is the location of the main lending and reading area, again with minimal interior structure to facilitate and future adaptation of the building. The brick walls again house private reading rooms, desks and seating areas.

The clear and concise design provides a space for the exchange of ideas and information, through media that exist now or in times to come. The project lives up to the local context of the Potato Market, and will provide a place for the exchange of ideas and information that is required for the citizens of Limerick City.
Limerick City Library

Limerick City Library should be an exciting place of diverse activity, a vibrant energetic location for a wide variety of creative activities. The Library should operate as a centre for the advancement of education and provide opportunities for learning, listening, reading, watching, sharing and communicating information in a healthy positive atmosphere.

To create this type of multi-disciplinary focus and to achieve a level of social and ethnic inclusion my interpretation of this project is first to create a new place for the City, an iconic place that contributes to the Civic quarter of the city and that establishes a new social dialogue for people in the area. By populating this new place with educationally activities it is hoped that children of all ages will be attracted by the wide variety of information and activities available.

The library also acts as a resource for local learning, a historical archive and a new social environment which all contribute to the identity of the City. I hope to shift the perception of Libraries in Ireland from dull unpopulated places towards becoming active popular places for social exchange and the mutual interest in the sharing of all kinds of information.

Strategy

This building is about space which represent accessibility. Designed to increase social inclusion and provide a sense of entrance through the building — the ramps allow for a consistent movement and for a continuity and division of the separate elements of the Library's program.

A priority was designed to create a relationship between the building and the public spaces surrounding it and to establish a dialogue between the Library and the Civic quarter of the city. The two areas of the building embrace the space in front and form people into the building's main entrance and interaction space. This is a new public hall for Limerick City.

Ground Plan 1: 2000

The building bends its shape from a response to the geography of the site and the need to create a new place for Limerick City, an "active place" that becomes familiar and socially neutral to everybody. The Library Plan is a place for kids, for adults, for extended living, for social exchange, for people, for love and for fun.

Site Elevation 1: 2000

The Market Site is defined by its adjacency to the waterfront and bounded by St. Mary's Cathedral to the rear. The4" to 1" aspect ratio of the site putting the Library into a direct dialogue with the river, the presence of the city council house and the public buildings behind establish a Civic context for the Library Building to contribute to or to adapt against.
Longitudinal Section 1 : 200
Section shows ramp that creates voids and entailed floor surface in the building. The program is organised accordingly with the primary activities happening along the voids, offices, studios and wings below. The ramp connects to the main entrance and a lift shaft to facilitate new pedestrian traffic through the building.

Elevation 1 : 200
The ‘Sheepfoot’ facade onto Bridge St, establishes a degree of communication with the public and gives the building its joining identity. This area is bright and colourful for children’s reading and learning and longer to attract people into the building from the outside.

Section 1 : 200
This is a section through the staff quarters on the ground floor level and the community room on the half level. The building is positioned at a distance from the river to create a new place for Limerick City to enjoy itself.

Upper Level Plan : 1 : 200
The Upper Level in the Library Building is a large open plan space for concentrated social activity. Steps cut onto St. Mary’s Cathedral and down to the new public plaza help to articulate the new open space within the building.

Program
The Library's complex program is accommodated by a ramping system, which allows for movement between the different sections of the Library and for moments of shelter and rest from the movement of the city.

Staff quarters are located underneath ramp 1 along with local studios and other quiet areas. The main Library cata
table is housed on top of ramp 1 with seating and seating
gaps at 3 metre intervals. Community Rooms and Activity Areas are found on the half levels between ramps and look out onto the River Shannon.

The central open space level 1 is a new Public Library Room for Limerick City with a view up to St. Mary’s Cathedral and back across to the GPI. It is an open plan room open for ex
dibitions, public talks, concerts, film screenings and anything else the City requires.

Technical
The building's external skin is designed to help reduce its environmental impact by employing mechanical, external louvers connected to the glazing system. A rainwater harvesting system naturally recharges the building and helps to maintain the environmental quality of the internal spaces. Roof lighting assists in bringing light into the centre of the deep plan and follows the line of the ramp system for aesthetic continuity.

Coloured glazing panels on the exterior facade lend a playful and attractive quality to the Library's appearance and provide the Library with interesting views out of the building. The 35mm, highdensity Steel mullions set at 3m intervals support the glazing and extend up into the roof construction. The roof is clad with Finn paneling which is very robust and also a good colour match with the stone of St. Mary’s Cathedral.

The building is quite sustainable as an object from the exterior but has a highly modular infrastructure, on the interior to assist way finding and ease of movement.

Limerick City Library
"Knowledge is King"
The Labyrinthine Library is described by Jorge Luis Borges as an ideal typology and the location of all knowledge and information. In this infinite way, where is creativity? Does it exist without a definition of limits? When information is aggregated, up to the point of infinity, I believe it's a source for creating things. Information and knowledge fuel the flight of the imagination, then what is created is transformed back into information by representation in a cartesian format. It becomes a source again for someone else to continue on from in the direction of Borges’ ideal.

The necessary limits that enable creativity in a city library are its place in the city and its resources. For me to see a little bit of the library, make it my own for a short while, and then let it go and move on, I need its edges to blend with the city. I need books and internet access. I need somewhere to read and write or draw. Sometimes I need something inspiring to look at, and I will need somewhere to take a break. If I’m getting a little lost and confused, I need to go back and forth between inspiration and somewhere to see it. That is my library.
"Beside the river is a small hill. It would be good for rolling down if it was made of grass or some other soft surface for cushioning when you land. It's a nice gentle slope though, long enough to enjoy on a bike and with enough lift for some decent momentum. That's not unusual for a hill, plenty of them do that. But this hill is a strange one because of what happens at the end. There's an easy transfer to an alternative that's either just vertical or winds round and round, but isn't a real shock. Downwards with water at the bottom.

It might not look like much but this is the scariest hill I know. I've gone down it a few times but never to the end, not even close. I kept my eyes closed between the courthouse and the library, on all that water, and stayed off when they got too close. That's one of the nice things about slopes, if you go across them they slow down.

When I can stand still and look, the courthouse is safe. It's big and nicely organized like a chess board (I play at school). All the pieces have roles and that's just the way it works. I watch the library too because it's fancy. I think all the bits of it move when I'm not looking and then freeze as soon as I turn around. I wonder does the stuff inside and the in-between bits change too? Maybe I would fall straight in there instead of going bump against the courthouse or splash in to the river.

When it gets to night, the blinds grow darker than most of the city. It's a leisure look out from the people and the lights too over just the top of the slope. The crossing river becomes a big glistening sheet of possibly interesting depth. It's never that definite anymore any more. I think it's an angry threat now. And down the hill between us are only blocks and spaces. A block and a space and a block in the dark. So I closed my eyes, closed the poles, my rolling wheels picked up speed and I waited. And I hoped that something would catch me."
NEW LIMERICK CITY LIBRARY AT THE POTATO MARKET

SOUTH ELEVATION

NORTH ELEVATION

EAST WEST SECTION

NORTH SOUTH SECTION

GROUND FLOOR PLAN
THE IDEA for this project came from the idea of how one goes into one's own world while reading but also the idea that people often have different ways that they read. With this in mind, I sought to design a library as a public forum, a locus within the city and also one which can accommodate the variety of uses required of a public cultural building while also providing a building as a seat to accommodate the different ways in which people read. Here you may be alone or you may work in groups.

THE POTATO MARKET site is just a gap in the inner city of Limerick. It is important to design a library that adds significantly to the changing elevation of the city. The key position of the site as visible from a number of points across the city means there is a unique opportunity to provide a new building which can add significantly to the identity of Limerick City.

As a public building, the experience of the approach to the library is paramount. There are two different entrances to the library: a rear approach to the south and a larger scale more formal stepped entrance to the North which both meet in the centre of the main public floor. As the experience of level change within the building is equally important, the main route through the building is expressed on the outside as a cantilever to provide shelter as one approaches the building. Also, as one approaches along the river, the cantilevered double stair compresses the space to the scale of a simple entrance.

The site itself has a flat and unremarkable nature, to which I decided to apply a new, more tailored landscape. This was to be done with a path as a base to something much lighter and more malleable above. The path would give the new library a solid footprint within the context of the civic buildings around it and would also be cut and sculpted to its context to shape streets, faces, public spaces and a varying experience of the building at ground level.

The building is positioned on the nodal point of the site, the meeting point of the footbridge across the river, the street between the site and the courthouse and the former approach to the library which sits on the old market wall. The building offers the continued passage across the Abbey River and presents a final face to the green public space in front of the old Custom House. The path is then sculpted on the other side to form a number of stepped hard areas, the main one being a large stepped amphitheatre meeting space as a seat looking back towards the city.
FROM A DISTANCE: the building stands proudly as part of the river elevation of Limerick city. The wrapped concrete volume suspended above the plinth is clad in anodised aluminium tiles which are a mix of polished and matt finishes which will catch the sun salutarily and the underside of containers will bounce the light which is reflected from the river deep into the plan. A hung glass double facade is coated with a metallic layer which reflects the light by dispersing it into a number of colours which will change with the intensity of the sunlight. The idea of a new public library taking its place in the river elevation with a fiery red/yellow or deep violet/blue beacon would significantly add to the identity of the river city.

THE PLAN: it essentially two overlapping rectangles and the core is placed at the centre which helps to define a spine of the building, to house the book stacks protected from harsh sunlight within the darker centre of the plan. Within this spine, slits between the stacks carry light right down through the building to the basement level. The main circulation within the building is pushed to the edges and one works around the building, guided by views in daylight hours and by artificially lit spaces in the hours of darkness, to a centralised community room, the climax of the library.
Building break down...

Old concepts of the library dissolve to create a new hybrid building.

The objective of this project was not just to create a library but to create a hybrid building, a building which would serve both as a communitycentre, a small theatre, an exhibition space and much more. As I began my study into the type of modern libraries being produced today I realised the those spaces are no longer simply walls in which to store books: these have become multifunctional areas which allow people to explore knowledge, creativity, and social interaction. This variety of medium in which we now define knowledge is incredibly varied and diverse.

The building itself however begins to break down from this initial solid mass. Small holes which double up as light wells, courtyards and small gardens begin to be punched through this solid mass. Slowly the building dissolves - integrating from a mass to a light open structure. The end of the building is surprising; you are in a completely different type of space from which you began. It is light, open, permeable, the virtual world. The building then dissolves from old concepts of a library to new.
As you can see from the above elevation and side pictures, the materials which I would intend on using would be wood, stone and glass. You can also see how nature would begin to be incorporated into the punched light wells and courtyards, allowing people the freedom of outdoors.

By Clare Reidy
The inspiration for this design, on the one hand, came from the imminent layers of history on the site. And the thought “Why couldn’t this new building reflect that phenomenon in history?” These layers are then interpreted in the form of the building. Some of the walls replicate the old stone walls for instance, which defined this part of the river until the mid 19th century. In other parts of the building, the expressed structural columns and yards bearing names which existed there for most of the last century.

The essence of this design stems from the interweaving of a Library. More than just a place for borrowing and reading books, a library is a place where people listen and study, behind the scenes at the Library there lies a constant cataloging, storing, and preserving information critical to the history of Limerick. Sometimes these things may seem small and insignificant, but these banners, maps, leaflets and so on are simply not kept anywhere else. And this library seeks to act as a stage within the city for exhibiting this information in many different ways. It is the extra activities like these that enrich a library.

— Gerty Welsh
CONCEPT

The purpose of this project is to create a cultural and civic focal point for the city, with it in direct relation and proximity to the old market, St. Mary’s Church, and the town council office. The proposal is to be an extension of the existing figures framework, connecting the old hospital to the old town.

Form

The cantilevered floor plates on either side of the building create a visual and structural prominence. Taking advantage of the beautiful vista found in the site,

these cantilevered floor plates provide direct light and views from exterior into the interior spaces.

Structures

The 1.2m thick reinforced concrete plates are supported by columns with two service cores sitting against shear forces.

Programme

This proposal creates a large, covered, multifunctional, indoor, leisure space in the city. The project also includes office spaces for the new town centre and hotel.

The city is currently lacking. The proposal is about making provision for a variety of leisure and recreation spaces, as well as areas of relaxation, meeting, music, arts, events, multiuse, and leisure (cafés, festivals).

The building is a space that can be used for a variety of purposes, including leisure, education, and community events.

Environmental

The building is to be naturally ventilated. As a result, a maximum of natural light can be achieved, minimising energy requirements and electricity costs.

PERFORMANCE

The key performance is to provide natural light and views of the site. The building will be designed to be energy-efficient, minimising its impact on the environment.

TECHNOLOGY

The technology involved includes advanced structural systems and sustainable materials. The building will be designed to be energy-efficient, minimising its impact on the environment.

SUSTAINABILITY

The sustainability aspect will be to ensure the building is designed to be energy-efficient, minimising its impact on the environment. The building will be designed to be energy-efficient, minimising its impact on the environment.

CONSTRUCTION

The construction method will be to ensure the building is constructed using sustainable materials. The building will be designed to be energy-efficient, minimising its impact on the environment.

CONTACT

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