

Two of the columns which had been entirely destroyed were replaced with replicas cast in artificial stone. An internal system of steel framing was employed bracing the external walls and carrying reinforced concrete floors. Using the latest technologies and techniques, T.J. Byrne rebuilt the dome using reinforced concrete. This was achieved in one operation, twenty men working in a total of thirty hours with just one short interval.

Post-1922

The alterations made since 1922 have only in a few respects materially changed the aspect of the older building. An arcaded passage ran along the southern front of the quadrangles. This arcade has been enclosed with offices provided and a new corridor constructed on their northern side. The library on the first floor has been removed. The passageway which was built out from the central hall to the solicitors buildings has been built over. Here the fine Supreme Court has been erected where the Chief Justice sits with his seven colleagues of the Supreme Court and behind the Supreme Court a library for barristers - the Law Library - has been built.



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The Heritage Series aims to increase awareness of matters of historical, architectural and cultural interest associated with the courts system in Ireland. Included in the series are features on court buildings, members of the judiciary and court staff, famous trials and other events and occasions.



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The Four Courts

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Dublin is an ancient city with more than its fair share of architectural and historical landmarks but few buildings have embodied a profession in the way that the Four Courts complex has.

For two hundred years it has been the physical centre of legal life in Ireland. Many great men and women have passed through its halls: judges, barristers and solicitors, police and politicians. It has hosted some of the most dramatic trials in Irish history; its walls have resounded to the words of O'Connell, Curran and others, masters of high poetry and ready wit. And yet somehow, the Four Courts is

more than mere brick and stone. Judges and lawyers play out their appointed time upon the stage, then leave; others take their place, though they too must vanish eventually into the mists of time and precedent. But the building remains - a symbol of the enduring power of the common law.

From time to time it may be redesigned; new corridors opened, or additional rooms built onto the existing structure. But the Four Courts complex, like the common law itself, retains a unique identity, and a unique place in Irish social and cultural life.



Early History

The 1775 decision to house the country's legal system under one roof brought to an end the centuries old nomadic nature of the Irish courts.

Under English rule in Ireland there had been two legal systems. Within the Pale, with Dublin at its centre, English law prevailed. Justice beyond the Pale was administered under the old Brehon laws. Passed on orally from at least the first century BC, the Brehon Laws, named for Ireland's wandering jurists, were first set down on parchment in the 7th century A.D, using the newly

developed, written Irish language, and continued in use until the beginning of the 17th century.

Prior to the 17th century the courts sat in various locations though mostly in Dublin Castle. The transitory nature of the courts ended in 1608 when they were located in new buildings in the grounds of Christ Church and in the adjoining Christ Church Place. The space proved inadequate, however, and the offices of the courts and the legal records remained dispersed. In 1775 a decision was made to build new premises on the present site.



Architecture

Work based on the designs of Thomas Cooley, architect of the Royal Exchange (now City Hall), began in 1776. Cooley's building concentrated in the area of the west courtyard and was intended to house only the Public Records Office and King's Inns. When Cooley died in 1784, James Gandon, architect of the Customs House, was appointed to add the courts to the plan. Into his completed design he incorporated Cooley's building, adding two quadrangles and a central block. The quadrangles were given to the record and legal offices, the centre to the four courts of Chancery, Exchequer, Kings Bench and Common Pleas. At the hub is the Round Hall, 64ft in diameter, with inner and outer domes and a surround of Corinthian columns. It was once

described as "both the physical and spiritual centre of the building".

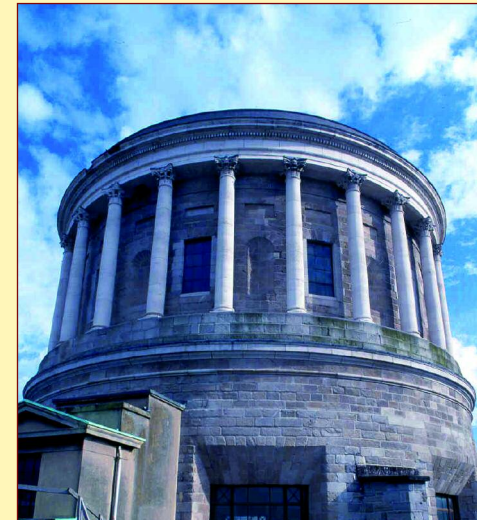
Structurally, the hall and domes are largely as Gandon left them. The interior decoration was, however, much richer before the civil war damage of 1922.

Statues of Irish judges and lawyers stood in the niches, the floor was flagged in stone and the dome enriched with the stucco work of sculptor Edward Smyth. Smyth's five roofline statues which survived have been identified as Moses, Justice, Mercy, Authority and Wisdom.

The Dome

The dome - a feature of the city skyline for over a century was destroyed during the 1922 civil war. T.J. Byrne, principal architect at the Office of Public Works,

and his team erected an elaborate system of scaffolding allowing for careful examination of both the supports and the drum. It was discovered that almost all of the Corinthian columns surrounding the dome had been shattered although



the inner wall of granite remained largely intact. It was found on removal of the columns, (a skilled operation in its own right), that because they had originally been carved on all sides, it was possible to simply rotate them so that the damaged sides face inwards.