

Doireann de Courcy Mac Donnell reviews Making Belfield, a beautiful publication charting the history of UCD on the Belfield campus, compiled in conjunction with the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Newman Building and move to Belfield.

By Doireann de Courcy Mac Donnell | Oct 28 2020

Making Belfield: Space and Place at UCD is a collection of essays, a series of studies of some of UCD's most iconic structures, and a compilation of writings on the richness of the little-known UCD Collections. The book was edited by Finola O' Kane, Professor in UCD School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy (APEP), and Ellen Rowley, Assistant Professor in Modern Irish Architecture in UCD School of APEP. Prior to the publication of the book, there was a significant gap in the written history of the architecture, landscape, collections of Belfield and, according to Professor Donal McCartney of the UCD School of History, "Making Belfield is certainly a significant contribution to that history".

The book begins with a series of eight essays discussing topics such as UCD's landscape history, the move to suburbia, the international context for university design, and detail history of the architectural design from authors like Sean Phillips, the Librarian of UCD from 1978-2008, and Hugh Campbell, Professor of Architecture and Dean at the School of APEP.

In Architectural Review in 1957, Lionel Brett "posited that universities were ideal cities, having to accommodate many but without the bother of urban dross such as traffic". Although UCD Belfield first housed students in Downes' Science building in 1964, and the official move to the campus was completed in 1981 when UCD students of Architecture moved to their new building in Richview, 2020 was chosen as the year to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the University College Dublin Belfield campus as it marks 50 years since the opening of the Arts, Law and Commerce Building, now the Newman Building. As part of 'Building Studies', Rowley discusses ten of UCD's buildings, from the Arts, Law and Commerce (Newman) Building in 1970, to the 1972 Water Tower, and the 2018 Confucius Institute for Ireland.

One of the gems of *Making Belfield: Space and Place at UCD*, is the portion dedicated to UCD's Collections. Chapters include discussions on the UCD Archive, The National Folklore Collection and 'The challenges of establishing' a space for Irish within an academic context; "Bhraith spás na Gaeilge i UCD go mór ar cheannairí tíre agus teanga a chloígh le feachtas leanúnach a raibh treoirphlean don Ghaeilge mar theanga phobail agus mar dhisciplín acadúil mar thorach air". These collections can often be forgotten in the day-to-day running and development of the greater UCD population, however many, including the UCD Art Collection, are of national importance and their recognition is vital to their retention.

Unfortunately for the oppressed student activist, in the book's introduction Rowley and O' Kane debunk the riot-proof and 'protest preventative' theories that surround many of the main structures. While UCD's own Gentle Revolution in 1969 joined the chorus of student activism globally at the time, the masterplan for the Belfield campus, (in particular the iconic walkway shelter structures and the long steps which force you to take large strides or two awkward steps per level) predate the revolt by some twenty-five years. Although *Making Belfield* emphatically "put[s] to rest... any subsequent myths around Belfield's design as a spatial translation of UCD's anti-student revolt/anti-mass gathering agenda" it is likely that the rumors and imaginings of student might against oppressive bureaucracy will persevere.

Not only is *Making Belfield: Space and Place at UCD*, a wonderfully engaging read, but it is also a beautiful publication, filling an important gap in the record of the history, art and architecture of UCD.

Making Belfield: Space and Place at UCD is published by UCD Press and retails at €40