

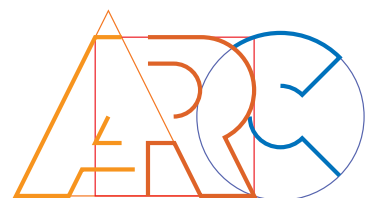


REPORT ON THE CARNEGIE LIBRARY AT SKERRIES

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ARC Consultants has been commissioned by Fingal County Council to prepare this report on the heritage of Skerries Carnegie Library, and to comment on aspects of the condition of the building. Annotated photographs of the interior and exterior of the building, taken at the end of April 2016, are reproduced below. A short visual inspection was carried out at that date, and some comments on the condition of the building are provided below, arising out of that inspection. No opening up was carried out, and the comments are not exhaustive. Skerries Carnegie Library is listed in the Record of Protected Structures, Record Number 201.

The Carnegie Library at Skerries bears the date 1910 on a carved stone plaque over the entrance. As an early 20th century building, the building does not appear on the First Edition Ordnance Map, which would have been surveyed in the late 1830s, nor on the historic 25 in Ordnance Map, which would have been surveyed shortly before the library was constructed. Skerries Carnegie Library is discussed in *'Irish Carnegie Libraries - a catalogue and architectural history'* by Brendan Grimes, published by the Irish Academic Press, Dublin in 1998. It is worth quoting an extended extract from this book:

'SKERRIES: Strand Street, Skerries, Co. Dublin

District Council Balrothery RDC, Donor of the Site Lord Holmpatrick Architect Anthony Scott

Opened 8 May 1911. Accommodation: Ground floor: large reading room, librarian's office, cloakroom, and bicycle stand. Upper floor: large room for reading or lectures Materials: Front facade: limestone from Milverton quarry with some sand-cement work. Other facades: roughcast rendering. Joinery: pitch pine for the roof trusses and wainscoting. Roof finish: natural slates (now replaced by asbestos cement slates) and red clay decorative ridge tiles. Chimneys: Sand-cement render and brick

Skerries Library was one of seven libraries built under the direction of Balrothery Rural District Council with money obtained from Andrew Carnegie. The other six libraries were built at Balbriggan, Malahide, Swords, Lusk, Rush, and Garristown.

A grant of £1,000 was obtained for Skerries in 1907, but due to a delay in obtaining a site from Lord Holmpatrick, and a delay caused by a legal dispute over tenders for the building work, construction did not begin until 1910. By that time the District Council had spent the money allocated to Skerries in building the library in Swords.

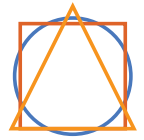
The design used for Skerries was originally intended for Malahide, but was disapproved by Bertram as being wasteful. Somehow he overlooked the design when the plans were sent to him for approval. It was only when the parish priest and chairman of the Skerries library committee, Thomas Dolan, wrote to Carnegie, enclosing a photograph of the library and requesting money for a clock to be put in the tower that Bertram realised he had made a mistake. After receiving a copy of the plans he wrote to Father Dolan:

It is unfortunate that the plans were not called for before any money was advanced to put up the structure, because they would certainly not have been approved, for the scheme of building is not economical nor is the effective accommodation a maximum.

Up to the end of the nineteenth century almost all the dwellings in Skerries were small thatched cottages. By the beginning of this century these cottages were being replaced by more substantial two-storey buildings. The scale of the library is like that of these two-storey buildings. The main part of the building consists of a two-storey structure very like a domestic residence, and its front facade is in line with the other houses in the street. The tower juts forward of the building line, proclaiming that this is not a domestic structure but a public building. The use of cut stone for the whole of the front facade is unusual in contemporary Irish libraries of this size. Stone is used for the whole front facades on Great Brunswick Street, Waterford, and Limerick libraries, but these are large city buildings. The only comparable library to use stone as extensively as Skerries is Bray.

The stone quoins, and window dressings are lightly hammer dressed with furrowed margins, and the quoins at the entrance opening are furrowed, giving a smooth appearance. The remaining stonework is rough squared. All the work is ashlar and laid in courses. The stonework on this building is a fine example of the stonemason's craft. Unfortunately the sharp edges have been blurred by recent stone cleaning using sand blasting.

There is a faint suggestion of baroque in the use of scrolls to connect elements. The circular windows and the opening for the clock are carefully arranged on the facade. The differing planes of the facade provide contrasts in light and shade. The elevational treatment of this library is unlike that of any of Scott's other libraries, and it raises the question of whether Scott designed the facade. It is not unreasonable to speculate that Anthony Scott's son, William Anthony, who was practising in Ireland at this time, had a hand



in the design. In W.A. Scott's Cavan Town Hall (1908) and in his St Mary's College, Galway (1911-12), can be found examples in the treatment of the facades echoed in Skerries Library. For example, the central tower feature in St Mary's is reminiscent of Skerries, and the use of pilasters in Cavan and Galway is echoed at the corner of the tower in Skerries. If the scrolls were removed from the facade, the building would look very like W.A. Scott's work.

It is not known what the committee had in mind when they asked the architect to provide two rooms on the ground floor and two rooms on the upper floor. In the event two rooms were provided on the ground floor and one large room on the first floor. This arrangement is similar to that in Scott's other libraries at Swords and Malahide.

¹ Milverton quarry, just outside Skerries on the Dublin road, produced good-quality limestone. The quarry is still open but no longer produces stone for building.'

The Skerries Carnegie Library is listed in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, where it is assessed as having 'Regional' importance, Record Number 11311017. The NIAH record includes the following description:

'Detached five-bay two-storey limestone faced Carnegie Free library, built 1910, with full-height projecting central single-bay breakfront flanked by single-bay single-storey bays. Designed by Anthony Scott and his son William. ROOF: Double pitched; slate; terracotta crest tiles; cast-iron rainwater goods; red brick chimneys; limestone coping; cast-iron weather vane to breakfront apex. WALLS: Snecked; rockfaced limestone; nap rendered plinth; cornices and volutes; limestone name and date plaque; tooled limestone quoins; rough cast render to side and rear elevations. OPENINGS: Roundheaded door opening; rendered archivolt; timber fanlight; limestone quoins to jambs; original timber glazed double doors; square headed windows; limestone reveals and cills; original 6/6 timber sashes; circular windows with projecting keystones to advanced bay; hood moulding over first floor central bay; narrow square headed, limestone dressing and sill with fixed timber casement window flanking entrance door, a blind circular opening to breakfront. INTERIOR: Encaustic tiled to hall; original staircase.'

This description is a little overblown, and the description given in Brendan Grimes' book is preferable.

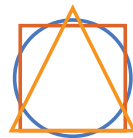
Skerries library is a fine example of the series of Carnegie Libraries built in Ireland. It appear to be in generally good condition, though there are some obvious defects. Comments on the some of the more obvious defects are contained in the captions to the photographs and a summary is provided in schedule form below.

Perhaps the key issues in the building relate to fire safety and disabled access. At present the first floor is not in use by the public, presumably because of what are felt to be problems in these areas. There is an ugly black steel ramp and handrails approaching the front door. This could be removed if the forecourt were resurfaced, which is badly needed, and if the new forecourt were gently ramped. Gentle ramps can provide safe access for both wheelchairs and ambulant disabled. Fire safety in historic buildings is always an issue. However, Skerries Library is a small building capable of accommodating only a small number of people and with the potential for very short travel distances to any exits, and a flexible approach to fire safety is needed to preserve the heritage value of the building. Guidance on fire safety in historic buildings is available from a number of sources. One such is Chapter 17 of the *Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities* published in 2004 by the then Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government, though the name of the responsible government department has changed twice since.

Summary of Defects and Elements in Need of Attention

Exterior

- Cast iron rainwater goods are showing evidence of leaking, rusting and peeling paint. The rainwater goods will need to be taken down and checked, and, assuming the goods are still sound, old paint removed and the goods refitted, ensuring that all joints are watertight.
- All joinery will need to be painted externally. Paint analysis may reveal the original colour that the doors and windows were painted.



- Sand and cement castings over the entrance and in other locations on the facade and at high level around the building are in need of careful cleaning. The extent to which these castings are affected by rain should be assessed. There may be a case for treating the castings to reduce the chance of future staining, but the use of chemical treatments may not be appropriate.
- The concrete forecourt is unsightly, in poor condition and has cracked in many places and the sand and cement plinth to the Library building is cracked and damaged. Replacing the paving and plinth would offer an opportunity to provide proper disabled access to the building and to remove the present ugly and unsafe ramp. At present rainwater pipes discharge directly onto the surface of the forecourt. Gulleys for rainwater and proper surface water drainage could be provided as part of the renewal of the forecourt.
- The present plinth to the building appears to be sand and cement and is coming away in some places and there is a broken vent to the ground floor sub-floor space visible in the plinth below the window on the north side of the front facade. No vent is visible in the equivalent position on the south side of the front facade. It is important that sub floor vents be retained, and maintained in good repair. It is suggested that the present plinth be removed and replaced with a new plinth in lime based render or in stone.
- External wiring etc., fixed to the surface of the building, should be removed
- If a new fire stairs and/or lift are proposed, the preferred location would be at one of the gables of the building.

Interior

- All original joinery, doors, windows, skirtings, dados etc should be retained and overhauled. Sample paint analysis may reveal original colours, and it may be found desirable to reinstate the original decorative scheme.
- The double doors to the first floor library space are important, though there have been some alterations to the mouldings at the glazed parts of the doors. The doors should be retained and overhauled.
- The ground floor glazed screen between the circulation areas and the library spaces have been covered with a jumble of signs, notices, electrical fittings etc., and bookcases have been placed against both sides of the glazed parts of the screens. If the first floor is brought back into public use, it will allow the jumble on the ground floor to be cleared.
- The quarry tiles in the ground floor hall are showing signs of wear. Despite this, it would be preferable to retain them, rather than replace them. The NIAH record refers to these tiles as 'encaustic'. However encaustic tiles are tiles where a clay of one colour is inlaid into the body of a tile of a different colour; so the tiles in Skerries library are quarry tiles and are not encaustic.
- There are a number of cast iron chimney pieces and what appears to be a painted stone hearths and surrounds. These should be overhauled and perhaps have the paint removed.

W. H. Hastings FRIAI

ARC Consultants • June 2016



The front facade of Skerries Carnegie Library, facing east onto Strand Street. The facade is finished in coursed limestone, with smooth faced quoins at the corners and around openings, and with the main wall surfaces finished in squared and rough rusticated limestone. Decorative mouldings at parapet level, barge level on the roof, over the entrance door and around the carved plaque bearing the name, all appear to be of a cast composition similar to a fine concrete or artificial stone. The roof is of slate with decorative red fireclay ridge tiles. The two chimney stacks are of red brick.





Entrance door the Skerries Library. The ramp and handrails for disabled access are very intrusive, as is the alarm sounder. The large casting over the door opening appears to have lasted well, but could do with careful cleaning. How it deals with water run off is uncertain



The fine original entrance doors. The door furniture might be reviewed.



The rear facade of Skerries Library. The large iron fire escape stairs is very intrusive. It is also substandard in terms of access to it and being located over a window. It is suspected that, with a proper fire engineering approach a fire escape stair may not be necessary. If one is deemed necessary, it would be best located at a gable of the building.





4 over 4 up and down sash window on the stair tower. Generally the windows appear to be in reasonably good order, but some paint is peeling



6 over 6 up and down sash window on the front facade. All windows should be checked and overhauled and repainted where necessary.



Small 4 over 4 up and down sash window in the small rear return. There is evidence of cracking in the sill



One of two small decorative windows in the front facade.





Oblique view of part of the front facade of the Library. The iron rainwater goods are showing evidence of leaking, rusting and peeling paint and are in urgent need of overhaul. The forecourt surface is an ugly mosaic of cracked sand and cement, and should be replaced with a more suitable surface. Rainwater downpipes discharge directly onto the forecourt surface, which is very unsatisfactory. The sand and cement plinth to the Library building is cracked and damaged and it too should be replaced. Replacing the paving and plinth would offer an opportunity to provide proper disabled access to the building and to remove the present ugly and unsafe ramp. Gulleys for rainwater and proper surface water drainage could also be provided. It is noted that paint on the windows on the first floor is peeling, revealing previous painting of a dark blue colour. Some local paint analysis might reveal the original paint colour. External wiring fixed to the surface of the building should be removed.



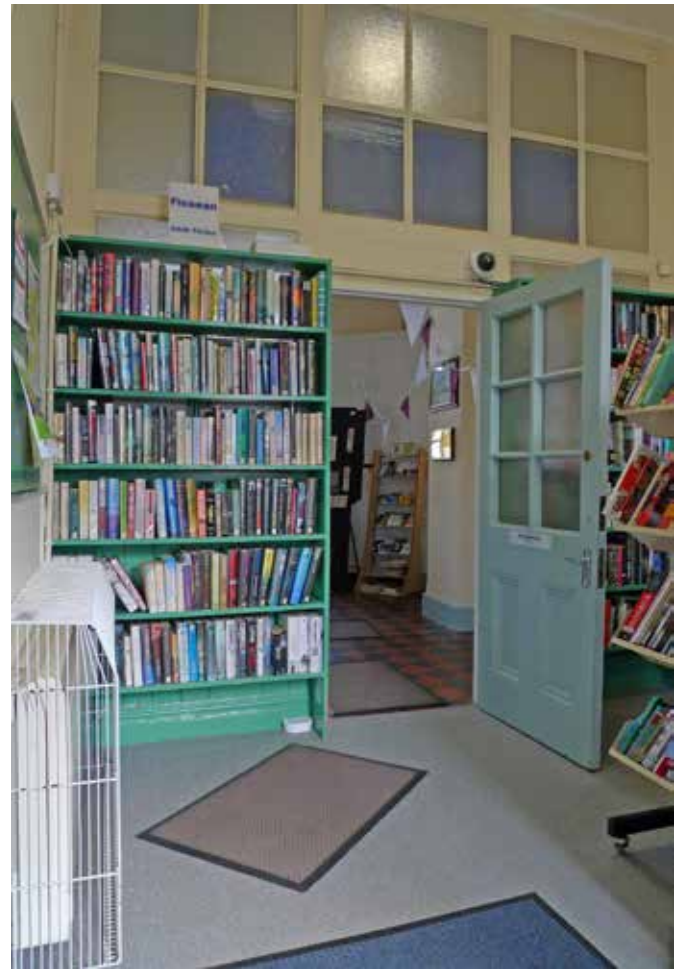


Oblique view of the northern side of the front facade of Skerries Library. Defects are evident in the rainwater goods, external painting, surface of the forecourt, surface water drainage, etc (see notes on the previous page). There is a broken vent to the ground floor sub-floor space visible below the window on the right. It is important that sub floor vents be retained, and maintained in good repair.





View of the hall looking in from the front door. The screen to the library is probably original. The jumble of signs, wires, etc should be removed.



View from the ground floor library back towards the hall. Bookcases covering the screen to the hall are not appropriate.



Corridor to the front of the north side of the ground floor, the exit route impeded by boxes and a bookcase. The value of an exit in this location is doubtful.



View in the ground floor hall looking towards a small office. The quarry tiles on the floor are a little worn but it would be good to retain them.





View of the large first floor library space looking north. This fine space, with its impressive ceiling and two fine fireplaces, is not accessible to the public, presumably because of issues around fire safety and disabled access. If this floor is brought back into public use, it will allow the jumble on the ground floor to be cleared.





View of the large first floor library space looking south east. This impressive library space has a fine quality of light, admitted through five pairs of 6 over 6 up and down sash windows.





Double doors to the first floor library space, looking out towards the upper level of the stair hall. This pair of doors are very finely detailed, although they have been altered and some of the details do not match.



The same doors looking in towards the first floor library space. These doors are one of the finest features in the building and should be retained.



Newel, handrail and balusters at the top of the main stair.



6 over 6 up and down sash window to the front of the first floor stair hall.





Cast iron chimney piece and what appears to be a painted stone hearth and surround, located at the south end of the first floor library space. These should be overhauled and perhaps have the paint removed. It appears that there were originally four such fireplaces.



Detail of the first floor skirting



Detail of the cast iron chimney piece





Detail of the inside of one of two circular windows in the front façade



Detail of a typical sash window in Skerries Library

