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O’Donnell + Tuomey Architects’ Account
“A Conversion of the Provost’s Stables”

The existing Provost’s Stables building was designed by Frederick Darby in 1841 and constructed in 1843–1844 as a stable and carriage building to serve the Provost’s House in Trinity College Campus. The 2007 conversion of the stables building and courtyard accommodates a new research centre for Irish Art (TARIC).

When we first visited the site in April 2005, we noted the inwardness and austerity of the stable yard. Within the building, the difference in function and character between the two levels was clearly visible in their respective flooring materials. Upstairs haylofts and rooms for grooms and coachmen had unvarnished timber floor boarding throughout. Downstairs a granite flagstone floor ran through the rooms with areas of brick flooring located to the horse stalls. Gullies carved in the granite provided rills for run-off from the loose boxes and stalls to drains in the cobbled yard. These signs of use and other distinctive details and characteristics of the existing building were surveyed and recorded as evidence for further reference in the detail specifications of the refurbishment and repairs. A redundant chimney shaft gave us the location for the introduction of the required vertical services; the array of five stalls with their timber screens showing scratch marks from years of use provided the requisite fifteen study bays for researchers.

The rooms in the existing building were dark because of the small windows and the provision of windows on the north facing elevation only. In order to increase the daylight to the upper floor reading room and offices, we moved the circulation to the rear, opened up the single blind window and fully glazed two existing half-light door openings. The north elevation had been resurfaced in cement plaster. This inappropriate material was removed and a stone-pigmented lime render was reinstated.

Detail

It is the author’s effort to put life into language; the translator’s role is to find the style within that language. Working on conversion projects such as this, where the setting and theme of the architecture have been so clearly established by another architect in another time, the incoming architect forges his visual role as author/designer to become a reader/translator of the given material. We took all our decisions on this project in this spirit; the position of a redundant chimney shaft gave us the location for the introduction of the required vertical services; the array of five stalls with their timber screens provided the fifteen study bays for researchers. Close reading and sensitive translation should prevent the unwritten introduction of extraneous elements or inappropriate interventions that inadvertently undermine the setting. This is not merely a precautionary measure to reduce risk of damage to original material. There is pleasure to be derived from this reading and translation.