National College of Art and Design
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The Design of Temple Bar Square and Meetinghouse Square.

by
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INTRODUCTION

Urban Design

Whereas buildings are always designed, the spaces in between are all too often left to chance; indeed, they are often not left at all. There is a need for communication and co-operation between the different groups responsible for the shaping of the urban environment. Architects, urban designers and city planners all have a role to play. There are reasons why one arrangement of buildings has an entirely different impact to another and there are positive arguments for the provision of public spaces between these buildings. The design of the urban environment is primarily the responsibility of the urban designer. However, rarely is the urban designer presented with a *tabula rasa* and their influence is limited by the complexity and density of the modern city. This thesis deals with two specific case studies, where recent urban design projects have created two new public spaces in an old part of Dublin City. The two spaces, Temple Bar Square and Meetinghouse Square, are situated in Temple Bar, a newly restored and developed area in the centre of the city. Whereas Temple Bar Square is part of the extant streetscape, Meetinghouse Square is a completely new space within the Temple Bar area. The two squares, both part of an extensive regeneration plan for what is now the cultural quarter of Dublin, are starkly contrasting spaces. In broad terms, the thesis examines how the squares have been designed, what they are like today, and how they operate as

public spaces. The positive benefits of creating these open spaces for public use – which is of course an expensive activity – are illustrated, as are the problems involved with providing such spaces in the centre of the city.

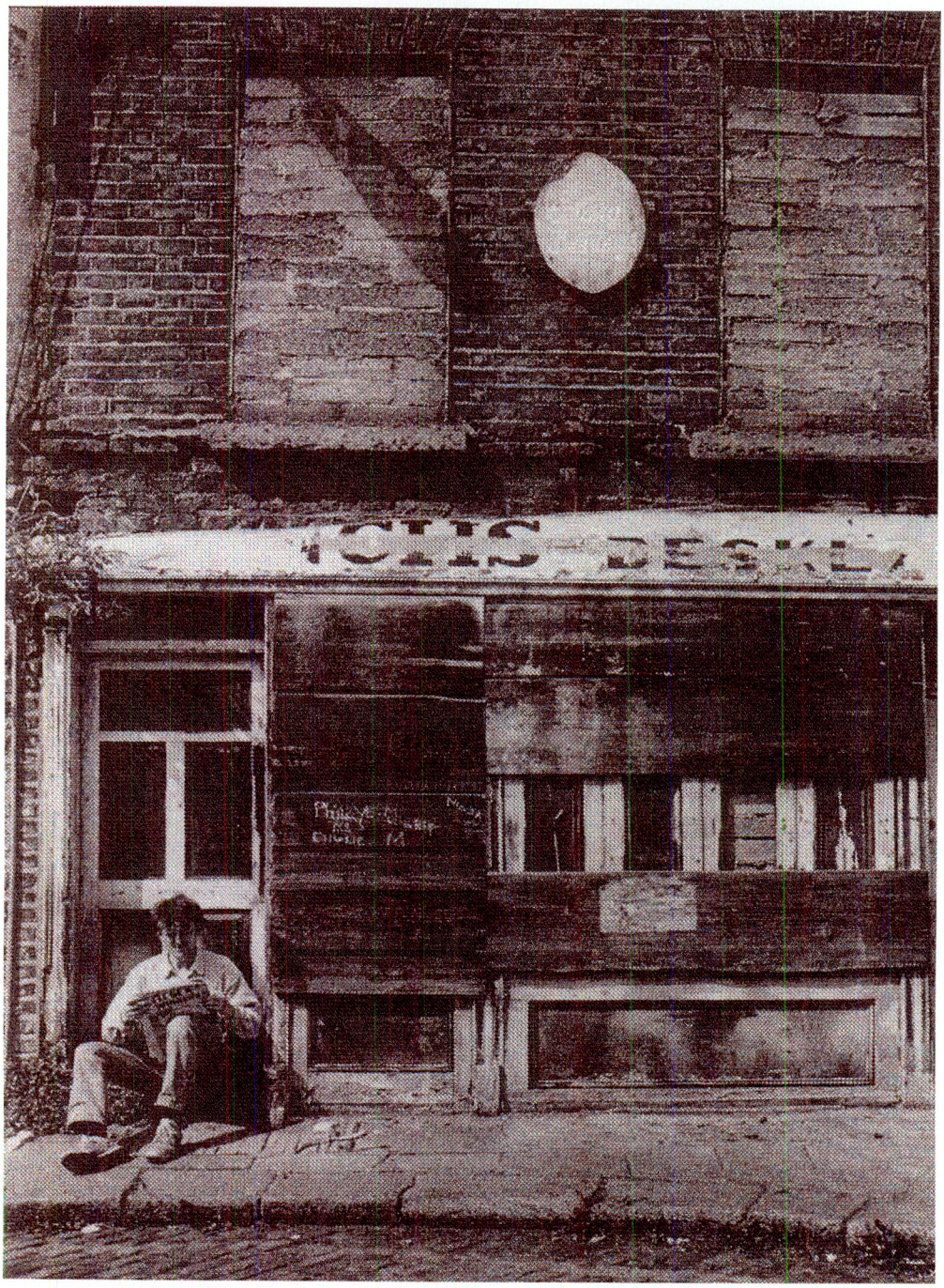


FIG. 1 *Exchange Street Upper, Temple Bar; before the urban renewal project.*

In the case of the Temple Bar Project, urban design was posited as a vehicle for urban renewal. For those removed from the traditional fervent activity of the Temple Bar streets (that is, those who never ventured into the area and those of us who are too young) the last decade has seen Temple Bar come from virtual non-descript obscurity, to being the new and vibrant heart of Dublin's city centre. Obscurity, that is, in the sense that the area was nameless and in its dilapidated state, did not provide anything like the attraction that the medieval backstreets of many European cities do today. The quarter now serves as a new central core, which links extant focal points in the city.

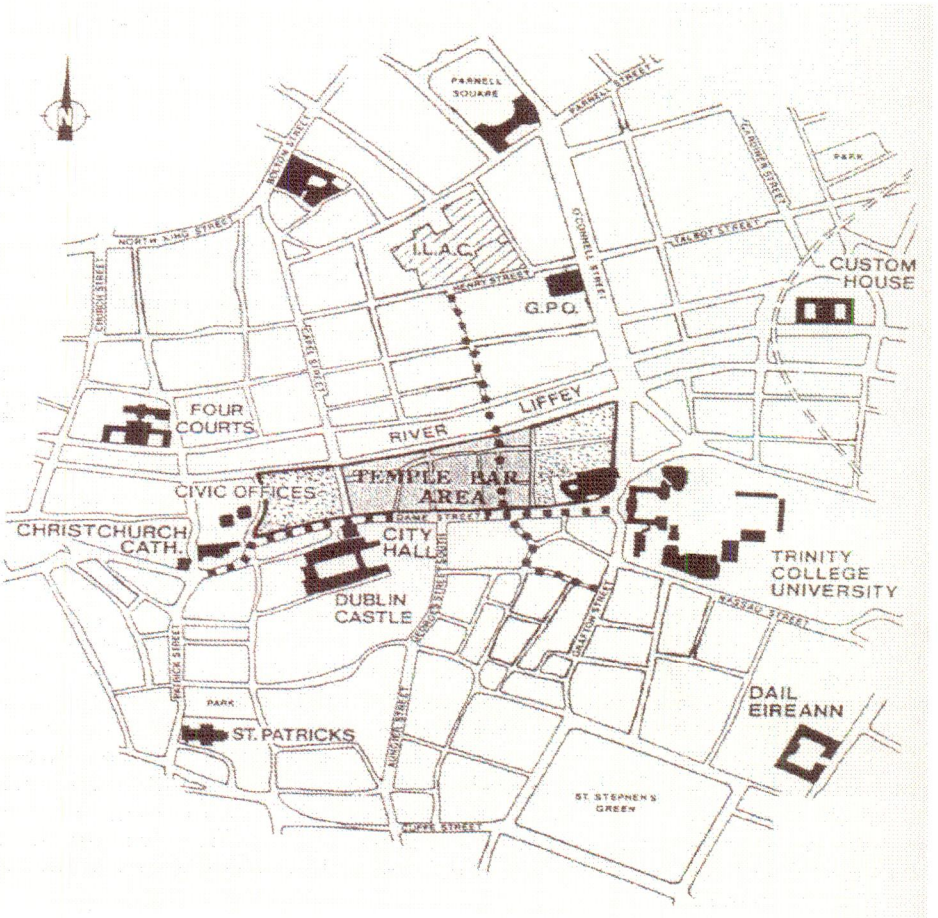


FIG. 2 *Temple Bar and surrounding focal points.*

The streetlife and thriving artistic community that existed within Temple Bar, something that developed over time, was not installed or planted there. What has been created is something that provokes, and no doubt will continue to provoke, a serious debate over the nature of this urban intervention. This debate, although not the focus of the thesis, is intertwined with any critical analysis of the new architecture in Temple Bar.

Integral to the analyses of the squares is an evaluation of the extent to which the history and particular urban character of Temple Bar has shaped the new spaces and contributed to their successes and failures. Also important is how the new squares succeed in repossessing the public space and how the communicative power of traditional formal elements – streets, squares, monuments, facades etc – has been harnessed. Is it naivety, optimism or foresight on the part of the designers, that has resulted in two new public spaces, which in some respects, seem to ignore the realities of our contemporary urban culture? Is the Temple Bar project a European model for urban regeneration, or simply a unique and extravagant experiment?

Life Between Buildings

Shaped by considerations of weather, trade routes or military defence, or by the hierarchy of power, religious or civil, the design of our towns and cities has always been the result of careful thought. With the rapid expansion of urban life in the 20th century, these traditions have been eroded and the function and identity of the modern city has changed. The traditional

market square evolved out of a functional requirement and the social life that was enacted there was a natural side effect. Similarly, social interaction occurred in the town square as people gathered to hear the town-crier or witness some other civic event. Modern technologies and advanced communications systems have made such traditions obsolete. Meanwhile, the quality of life in the city is still greatly effected by its public spaces, which allow opportunity for social interaction and enhance the pedestrian experience of the city. The design of our public spaces has long been an area of confused responsibility. It has also been underestimated and often ignored as a vital component of a successful living city. However, these are the places in our cities where people like to go and which break the monotony and oppressiveness of city streets for inhabitants and visitors. In William Whyte's influential *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (1980) Whyte describes an interesting city as:

> One in which there are changing definitions with sequences of comprehensible formal and informal spaces, link-passages, corners to turn and moments of revelation. Cities are dull in which movement yields no sense of change, no surprise and no sense of arrival (Whyte,1980, p.57).

Whyte goes on to suggest that the failure of the grid-iron city, as a pleasant place to be, is that we never arrive anywhere, and in the successful city, the visitor constantly arrives and is constantly surprised (Whyte, 1980, p.57). Similarly, in Gordon Cullen's *The Concise Townscape* (1971) the author describes an experience he calls "serial vision" whereby the city is discovered visually in a series of revelations (Cullen, 1971, p.17). While

Cullen refers to the experience of the town in terms of both motorist and pedestrian, Whyte deals exclusively with pedestrian life in the city. Pedestrianisation is a major factor in keeping our streets alive. Any space won back from the motor car must be seen as a triumph. The spaces this thesis is concerned with are both located in a pedestrian priority zone. In Temple Bar, as in any pedestrianised area, the drivers of necessary service vehicles understand that they are effectively trespassing and that they should go carefully, while the pedestrian receives signals that say linger, do business, enjoy yourself, sit down and watch the passers by.

A New Consciousness Develops

In Europe, changing attitudes to the city and its conservation have been developing for the last 25 years (Fera, 1995, p.129). The changes taking place in Temple Bar reflect this development in many respects. There has been a renewed consciousness about urban spaces evolving since the end of the Second World War. A revival in the use of the street, as a space where social life is given expression, shows a return to some traditional qualities of a city – to the way the streets and squares were used before the motor car. Many books have been published on the subject of urban design and pedestrianisation. This new attention to the heart of our cities has meant the steady growth of public spaces and an increase in pedestrian zones. In America, this trend is accompanied by a return to tradition in the creation of public spaces with the traditional, framed, lively European piazza as the model for new urban spaces (Holtz Kay, 1989, p.34). In the case of the

United States this has been done to a great level of success. Meanwhile, European debate has led to an approach of "...returning public space design to its structural origins as the creation of a place congruent with the overall structure (urban, social, historical, formal etc.) of the urban fabric" (Fera, 1995, p.129). Temple Bar Square and Meetinghouse Square reflect this European approach. However, in some respects, these two urban spaces must be looked upon in isolation, as they are part of a unique urban regeneration plan without any real precedent.

Literature Survey

Among the many books written on the subject of public space and pedestrianisation, William Whyte's *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (1980) has become a useful tool for city planners and architects in the U.S. Whyte's findings are the result of years of research in the field using various techniques to determine why people do or do not use particular public spaces. The author's comprehensive research reveals how people react to public spaces, what exactly draws people to a public space and what deters them. This information is useful in the critical analyses in this thesis.

Gordon Cullen's *The Concise Townscape* (1971) is one of the most important texts on the subject of Town Planning and Streetscape Design. Cullen deals with the 'art of relationship' between the formal elements that make up our towns and the impact their arrangement has on the viewer. The townscape is analysed in terms of its many integral aspects, such as serial vision, enclosure, focal points, changes in level etc.

Temple Bar Lives! Winning Architectural Framework Plan (1991), edited by Jobst Graeve, is the Temple Bar Properties publication that outlines the objectives of the architectural framework competition (which was held by Temple Bar Properties to find a viable architectural framework plan for the area) and a summary of the winning entry. *Temple Bar, The Power of an Idea* (1996) is another Temple Bar Properties publication with concise, factual information on the history of the area; the formation of Temple Bar Properties; and the development of a regeneration plan. It also contains essays by various informed figures in the Irish architectural scene and a breakdown of all the new projects in Temple Bar. From this point of view, the book puts the two squares in the perspective of an overall plan.

Dublin, a Guide to Recent Architecture (1997) by Angela Brady and Robin Mallalieu, provides factual information on the Temple Bar Project, Group 91 and the course of the individual projects. It also contains good critical analyses of the finished projects and information and comment on the relationship between the semi-state company Temple Bar Properties and Group 91.

Maurice Craig's *Dublin 1660-1860* (1980), provides an insight into the Dublin of that era and the significance of Temple Bar through the centuries. This historical background is essential to an understanding of how the existing fabric and culture of Temple Bar developed and the nature of previous interventions.

The following three books were less influential but nonetheless useful and informative reading. *Public Space* by Stephen Carr et al. (1992) deals with the values and needs of public spaces from the point of view of multiple disciplines including psychology, sociology, geography and anthropology as well as architecture, urban and regional planning. *The Design of Urban Space* by Richard Cartwright (1980) focuses on the practical aspects of designing public spaces and is based on case studies in London. The author speaks of transferring some of the qualities of our interiors to what are effectively the open rooms of our cities. In *Streets For People* (1997) by Bernard Rudofsky, the author compares the nature of pedestrian areas in America with those of Europe. He remarks in the Preface "According to the card index of the fifteen-odd million volumes in the Library of Congress, no book was ever written about the street proper, pedestrian or otherwise" (Rudofsky, 1969, p. 15). Also, whilst commenting on the absence of a social element on American streets he describes America as "...this country where the streets are roads" (Rudofsky, 1969, p.15).

Shane O'Toole's article *Renovation of the Temple Bar Urban District in Dublin* (Domus, 1998) and Ludovica Pasqui's article entitled *Urban Regeneration* (MODO, 1997) both comment on the nature of the Temple Bar Project from a European perspective and in this respect have an added value to, for example, the Temple Bar Properties publications.

Dublin Renaissance by Catherine Slessor (Architectural Review, 1993) is a comprehensive analysis of the work (which was in progress at the

time) in Temple Bar as well as other projects in the city. The author also draws comparisons with urban renewal schemes elsewhere in Europe.

Further useful background reading on urban renewal, the value of public spaces and street furniture design was gained from the following articles: *Street Furnishing?* (Abitare, 1995); *Changing Values for Public Spaces* (Landscape Architecture, 1999); *New Life for Public Spaces* (Landscape Architecture, 1989); *Listing the Best in Street Design* (Town and Country Planning, 1998); *Dublin's Temple Bar Initiative* (Town and Country Planning, 1993).

Frank McDonald's Irish Times articles on Temple Bar (April and September, 1997) provided informative critical comment on the nature of the Temple Bar Project and the realities of the social life that is now enacted there. McDonald highlights interesting points on the existing urban culture in Dublin and has the added advantage of living right in the centre of Temple Bar.

In reply to an article by Frank McDonald, Laura Magahy, the manager of Temple Bar Properties, wrote an article entitled *Temple Bar has Attained its Objectives* (The Irish Times, April 1997) refuting McDonald's claims and highlighting the many cultural activities which take place in Temple Bar. Although both Frank McDonald and Laura Magahy are biased in their commentaries, their opposing viewpoints illustrate the frictional undercurrents of the Temple Bar Project.

Hugh Pearman's Sunday Times article *It's not hip to be square* (October 1998), is a critical analysis of Meetinghouse Square with contrasts made with Temple Bar Square. The author has the advantage of being a visitor to Dublin with five years between a recent visit and the previous one; allowing for a unique 'before and after' perspective.

Two other Irish Times articles, *A Tale of Two Temple Bars* (Bernice Harrison, September 1996) and *Temple Bar: a dream gone wrong?* (Catherine Cleary, November 1996) both focus on the problems of vandalism and disorder on the streets of Temple Bar.

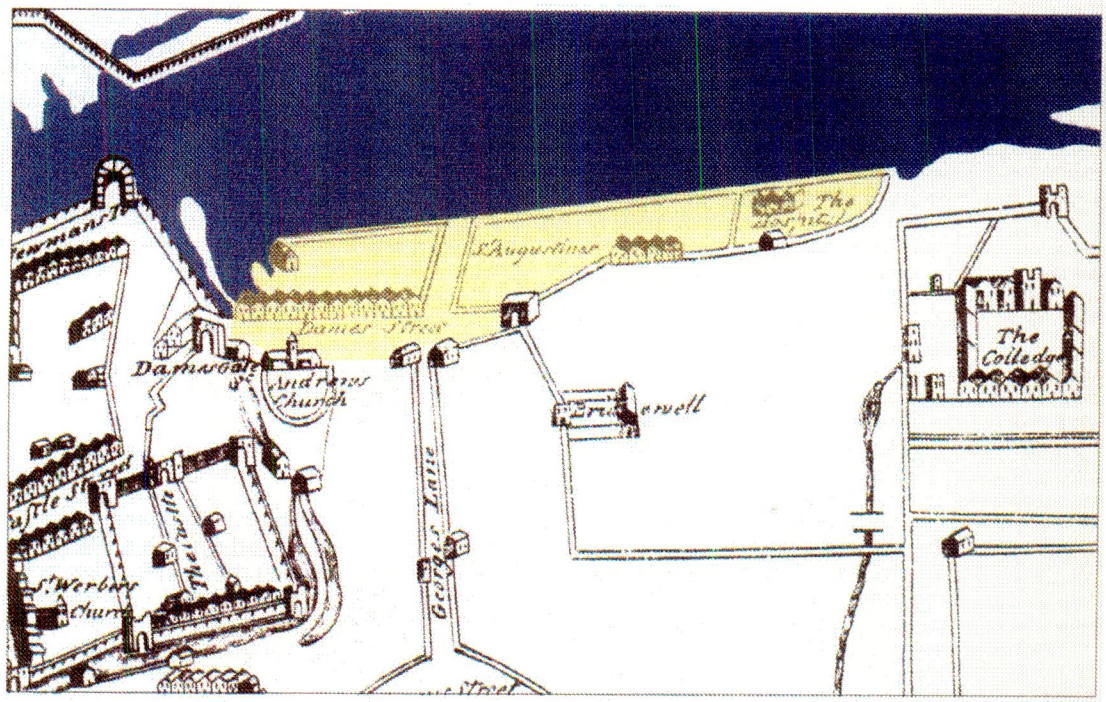
Despite all that has been written on the new architecture and the nature of the urban renewal project in Temple Bar, this thesis focuses on a subject that has not yet been dealt with in any comprehensive way.

CHAPTER 1: A HISTORY OF TEMPLE BAR

The surviving medieval street pattern is the most obvious legacy of the past that characterizes Temple Bar today. However, the unique urban character of the area – visual, structural and cultural – is the result of many realities established over time.

From the Middle Ages, the area was an identifiable parcel of land and a service quarter to the young city. The area's great period of growth was the period between 1600 and 1720 (Temple Bar Properties, 1996, p.27). An outline was defined by the river to the north, Dame Street to the south and the River Poddle to the west. The quarter was not built up in the Middle Ages but was farmed intensively. A major landmark was the Augustinian monastery on the banks of the river, which was connected to Dame Street by Dirty Lane, a medieval route which initiated the north – south ladder of streets that exists today. The area gained some importance in 1620 with the establishment of a new Customs House on the quay. Crane Lane joined the Customs House to Dame Street and meanwhile Sycamore Street evolved nearby. With the establishment of the Irish Parliament in Chichester House on College Green, Dame Street filled up with the mansions of aristocratic landowners with pleasure gardens leading down to the river (Temple Bar Properties, 1996, p.28). 1660 saw the arrival of the Duke of Ormonde and the subsequent extension of the quay wall in Temple Bar. Parallel to this, a

new street developed to create a clearly defined mode of passage along the axis of the quarter. This route was of course the concurrent Fleet Street,



The Temple Bar area superimposed on the Poole & Cash map of 1610 (above), and the John Rocque map of 1757 (below)

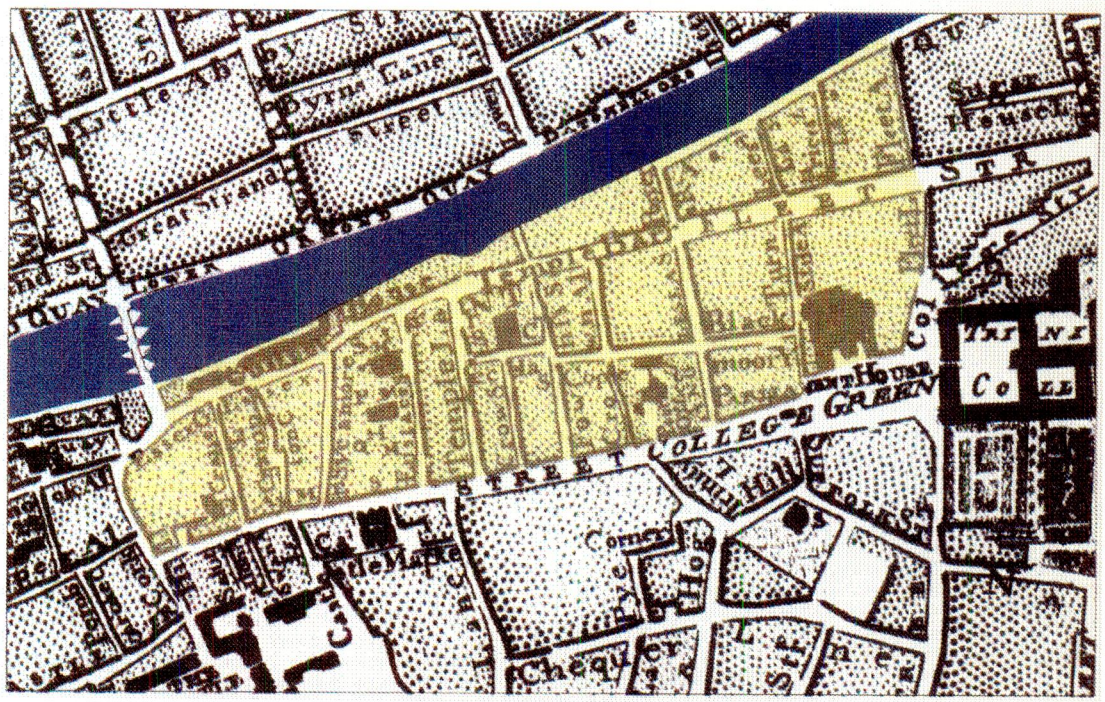
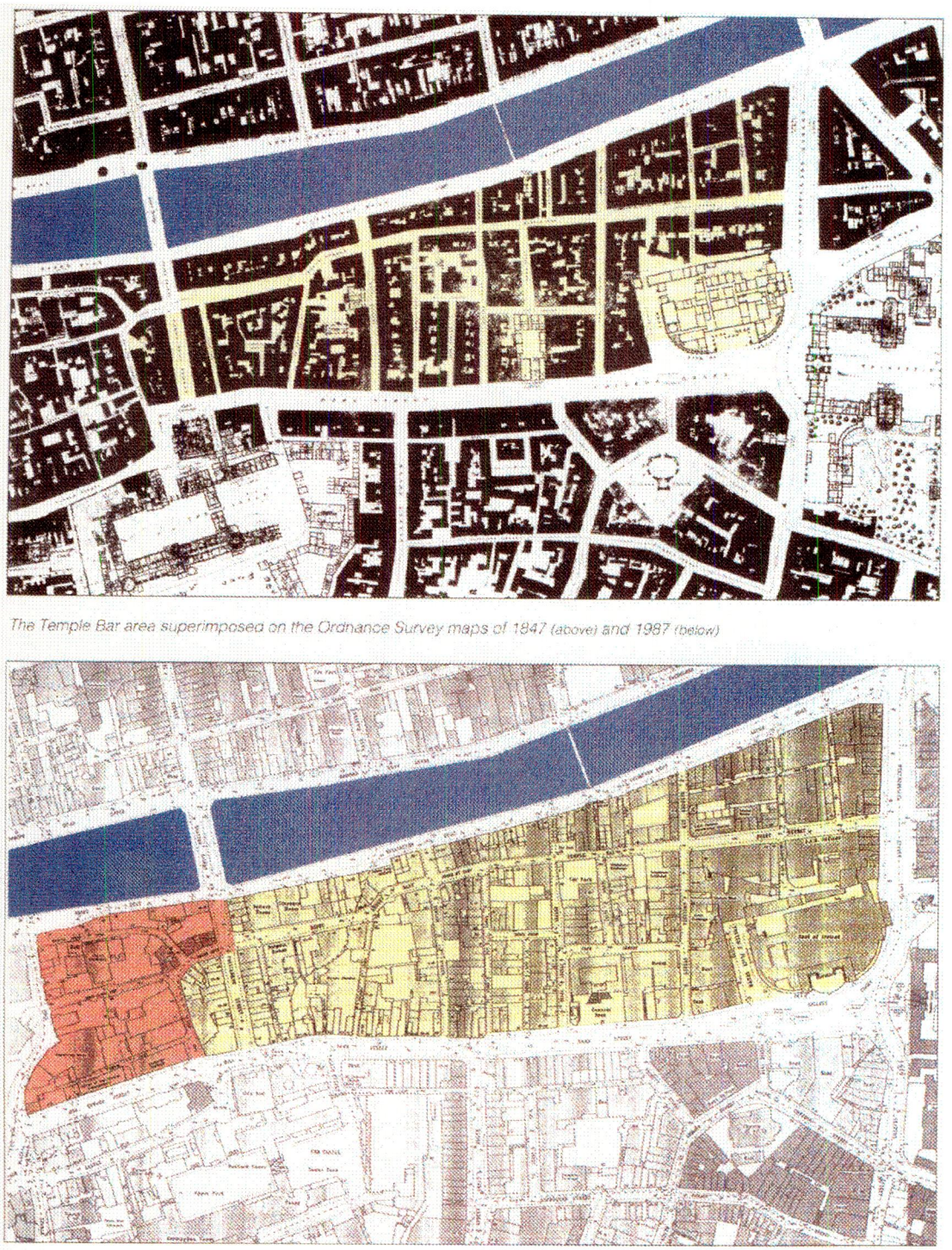


FIG. 3 / FIG 4

Temple Bar and Essex Street *(see FIG.4, p.13)*(Temple Bar Properties, 1996, p.28). At this time much of the land was leased to various individuals and groups from the landowning families. These individuals and groups built on their leased sites and initiated the now traditional diversity of building types and sizes. The main street pattern of Temple Bar was laid out towards the end of the 17th century in two waves. Essex Street and Essex Bridge were established in the 1670s and Eustace Street, adjacent to Essex Street, in the 1680s. Anglesea Street was established shortly afterwards, as was Aston Quay. The second wave was the sequence of Crow Street, Cecilia Street, Cope Street and Fownes Street. The western end of Temple Bar predated this as part of the medieval city. By the early 1700s Temple Bar was the heart of the city. Set between two important foci, the Customs House and the Theatre Royal on Crow Street, by the mid 1700s the streets around had as many banks, taverns and Dissenter meeting houses as residential properties (Temple Bar Properties, 1996, p.28).

In the late 18th century, Georgian Dublin grew up around Temple Bar and served to redefine its edges. The Wide Streets Commissioners created Parliament Street and Westmoreland Street. Dame Street was widened and Wellington Quay was extended from Aston Quay to Parliament Street (Temple Bar Properties, 1996, p.29). These changes served to further define the boundaries of Temple Bar. Later, in 19th century Dublin, offices, warehouses and factories filled many gaps in the narrow streets of the quarter *(see FIG. 5)* completing a dense and varied range of building types,

from 17th century houses to early 18th century Dutch Billies (Temple Bar



The Temple Bar area superimposed on the Ordnance Survey maps of 1847 (above) and 1987 (below)

FIG. 5 / FIG 6

Properties, 1996, p.29). This heritage was then left to disintegrate in the modern era. Temple Bar remained in a state of slow decline until finally, a threat to the area arose in the 1960s that prompted change. The future of Temple Bar was at risk for over twenty years following the decision at the end of the 1960s to establish a major transportation interchange there. This would have meant the demolition of a huge portion of the old city and the imposition of an enormous, sprawling concrete mass *(see FIG. 7)*. Coras Iompar Eireann (the semi-state body overseeing Irish public transport) bought up properties in Temple Bar and leased them out on a short-term, low-rent basis. This condition attracted an eclectic and vibrant mixture of small scale users and the area soon developed into an unofficial bohemian centre attracting shops, cafes, recording studios, clubs and art galleries (Brady, Angela and Mallalieu, Robin, 1997, p.142). And so, ironically, the environment that rose out of the renewal plans became the main argument against those plans. Following exhaustive objectives through the late 1980s the transportation plans were cancelled and through the Office of An Taoiseach, Temple Bar Properties was established with the mission to oversee the sensitive renewal of the quarter (Brady, 1997, p.142). The

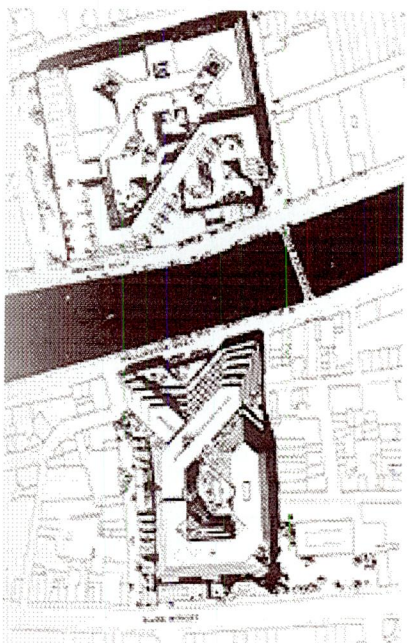


FIG. 7 *Proposed station.*

situation draws parallels with that of Soho in New York. In the 1950s and early 1960s Soho exploded as an artist's community at a time when Robert Moses was planning to execute the Lower Manhattan Expressway which would have meant clearing the area. However, New York lost its expressway and gained what developed into the centre of the international art world (Forget, December 1998). As well as the cultural precedent that had developed for renewal there was also a precedent for renewal in the structure and fabric of Temple Bar. This lay in the medieval street pattern; the mixed building types and uses; the empty sites and gaps; the overlayering of Renaissance on Medieval; the intrusion of the Wide Streets Commissioners and the human scale of Victorian modernity. It seems that a sufficient period of time for a decline and an overlapping of uses were perhaps the most essential part of the history of Temple Bar in creating a clear opportunity for a complex regeneration plan. To this extent, parallels can be drawn with Soho in London, the Marais in Paris and the Jordaan in Amsterdam, which all date from the same 17th century period. However, in Temple Bar's use of cultural centres to create change, it is more similar to Frankfurt-am-Main. Here, successful urban regeneration was founded on the idea of a quality life in a living, changing and evolving city. Ordinary buildings have been intelligently reused without 'themed facades' (Temple Bar Properties, 1996, p.29).

CHAPTER 2: THE TEMPLE BAR PROJECT AND GROUP 91

Temple Bar Properties and the Regeneration Plan

In 1991, Temple Bar Properties, established by an Act of Oireachtas, was given the task to stimulate and facilitate the regeneration of the area by conserving the existing building stock; persuading residents to stay; attracting new residents; and encouraging cultural activity. Parallel to framework plans for other aspects of the regeneration plan, Temple Bar Properties held a limited architectural competition to provide a development framework for the area. The competition incorporated residential, retail and cultural concerns as it attempted to institutionalize the informal artistic community that already thrived in Temple Bar (but did so without a support structure). Also, new public spaces were sought to increase the presence of the public realm in the area.

The theory behind the project was that new, quality architecture could force real urban revitalization, providing a viable catalyst for change. Backed by European funds and with Dublin's 1991 status as Cultural Capital of Europe, the project was intended as a European example "of how to lead, not to trail behind, the private sector" (Rogers, 1990, p.7). Also in a European context, the project was to be a model for a more responsible approach to the historic fabric of the city based on new design (Forget, December 1998). The competition placed a major stress on the design of public space "...streets, squares and their sequence and proportions –

acknowledging it as a subject of cultural importance to the identity of the city, and hence, a public responsibility" (O'Toole, 1998, p.47). On every level of the project, architecture and urban design were posited as effective vehicles for change.

Group 91

Convincing winners of the Framework Competition were Group 91, a consortium of eight young architectural practices. These are Shay Cleary Architects, Grafton Architects, Paul Keogh Architects, McCullough Mulvin Architects, O'Donnell and Tuomey Architects, Shane O'Toole Architect and Derek Tynan Architects (Graeve, 1991, p.16). The architects who would later become Group 91 had been at the heart of discussions about Dublin's future in the preceding decade. As part of the generation coming to maturity as Ireland joined the European Union in 1973, Dublin was very much their city, and with America no longer the automatic role model, there was much talk of Dublin's future as a European city (O'Toole, 1998, p.47). Then associated with the School of Architecture at University College Dublin, these architects generated much of the Irish focus of a debate that was going on in many European cities. Here, the core of the debate involved the appropriate nature of urban interventions and developments in the city as well as the development of a regional architecture with a recognizable Irish character (Brady, 1997, p.144). Aldo Rossi and Leon Krier were influential figures in the debate and Niall McCullough was largely responsible in shaping the regional debate. Key projects by the architects included *Dublin City Quays*

(1986) and *Making a Modern Street* (1991) (Brady, 1997, p.144). Although the projects remained on paper they resulted from a decade of typological research and the group went on to develop a mature, collective approach.

The Architectural Framework Plan

Group 91's Framework Plan was based on a new east-west pedestrian route through the city blocks, punctuated by and linked to, public spaces and nodes which serve to draw people into the area. This new circulation logic is described in the plan as a system of 'hearts' (public spaces) and 'spines' (access routes). The spines are allied to the east-west backbone of Temple Bar and serve to channel and deliver people to the 'hearts' of Temple Bar. In the section entitled 'Users' in the Plan, Group 91 stress 'diversity and vitality'. Mixed-use buildings are highlighted as the vehicle for this - "bringing vitality to every street". However, each of the 'hearts' were characterized by a distinct predominant use, for example:

- Commercial and street life around Temple Bar Square
- Cultural and performance around Meetinghouse Square (Graeve, 1991, p.29). Use-patterns, particularly the reintroduction of residential units into the city and new cultural centres, were as much a part of an overall plan as formal design issues.

Although the original street pattern survives intact, the Temple Bar area has seen a series of interventions over the centuries and the architectural Framework continues this evolution; avoiding large scale developments, conserving the urban fabric and meanwhile, introducing new

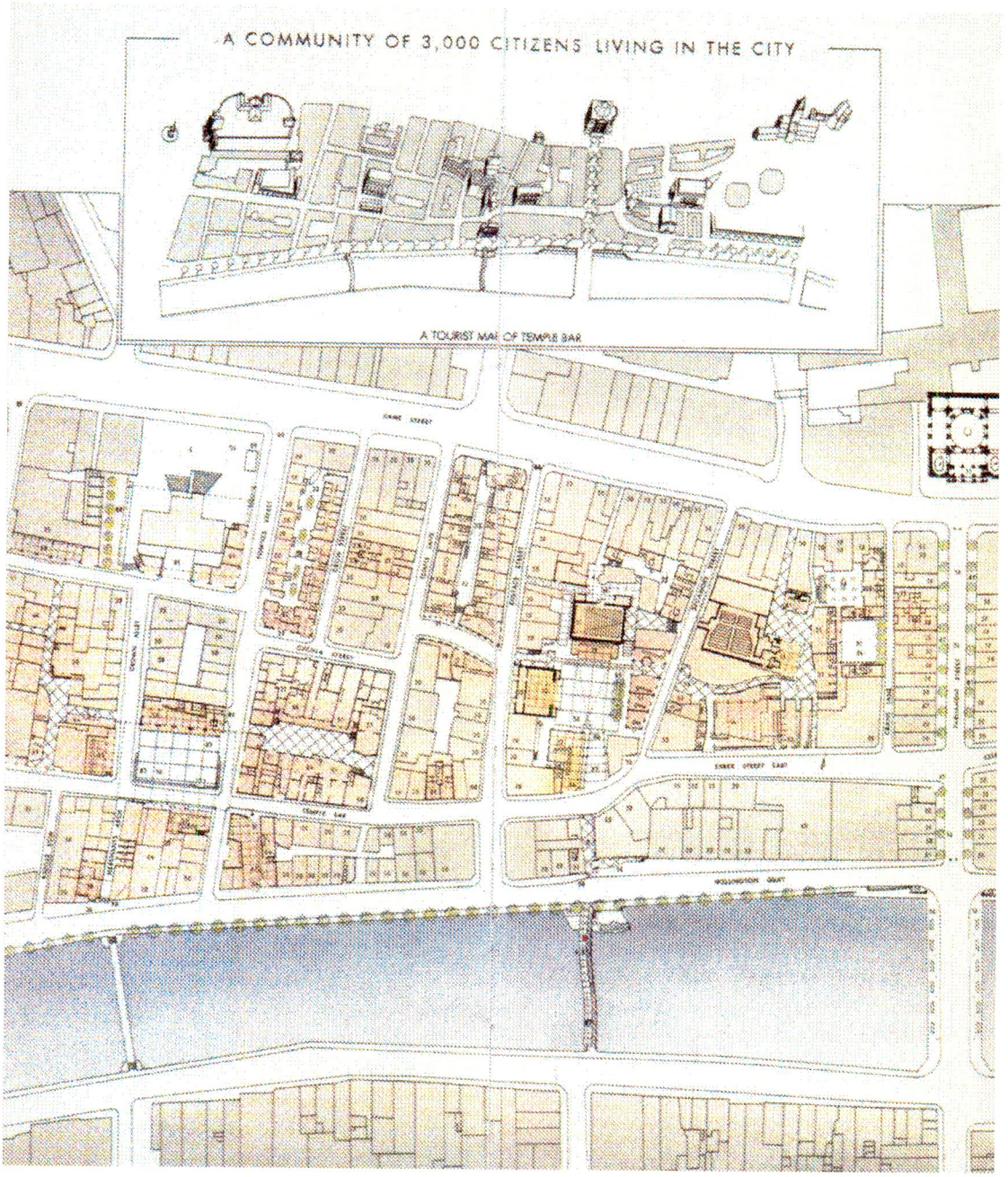


FIG. 8 *Group 91's Framework Plan.*

designs (Forget, December 1998). Group 91's treatment of the streetscape and public space design, along with the design of the individual buildings, reproduces the ambiguity which is the city itself.

Temple Bar Properties and Group 91 faced some difficult problems in the regeneration of Temple Bar. The sheer density of the existing buildings stock and complex ownership patterns were the source of much conflict. The resistance to the imposition of contemporary architecture in an historic area was another cause of some disquiet.

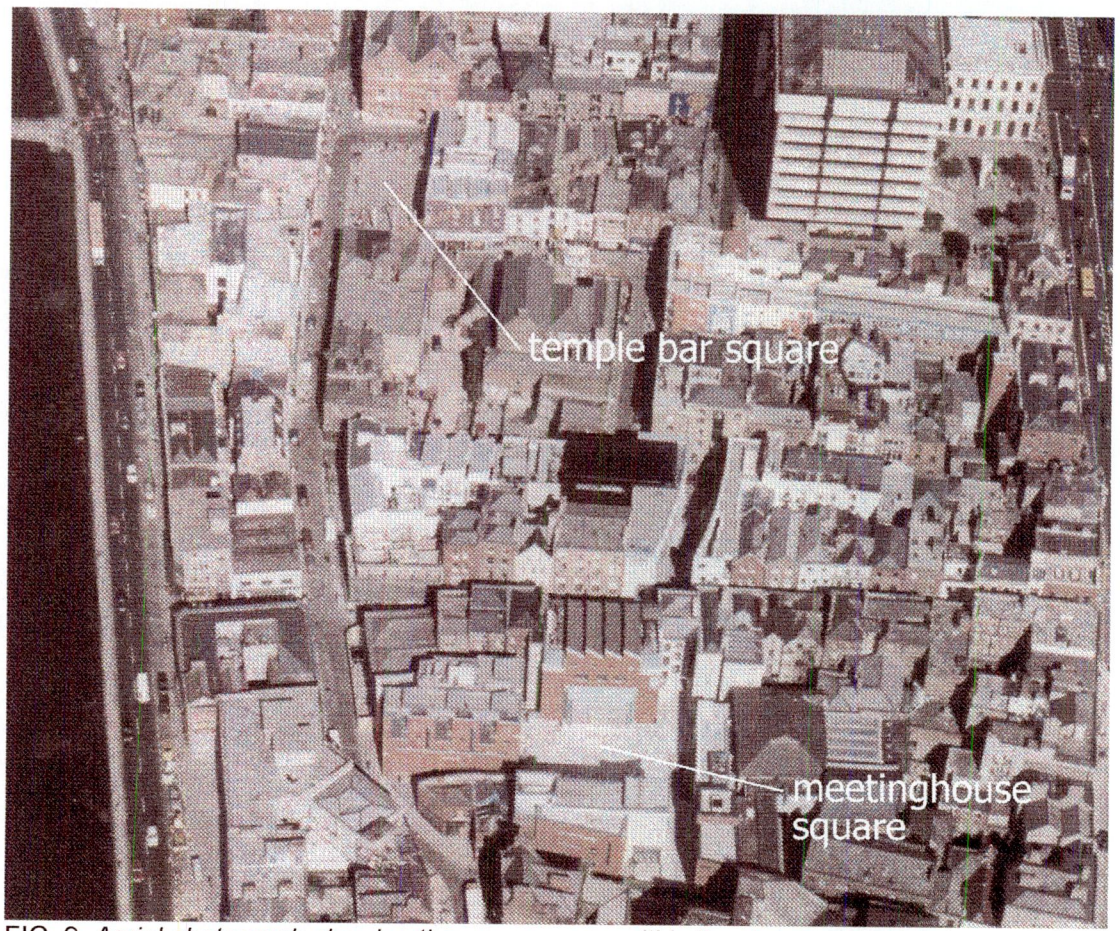


FIG. 9 *Aerial photograph showing the new squares within the dense urban fabric.*

CHAPTER 3: TEMPLE BAR SQUARE

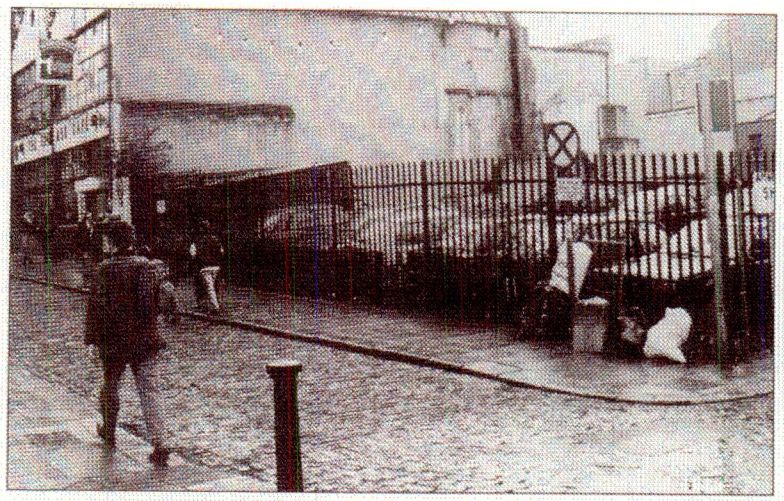
By Grafton Architects (Group 91) 1995.

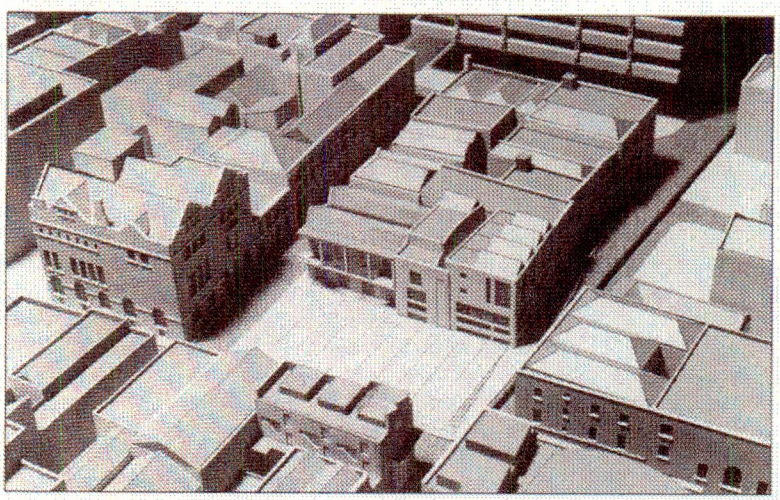
Concept and Design

Temple Bar Square is located at the important junction of the new east-west pedestrian route and the north-south axis that runs from Central Bank Plaza on Dame Street to the Ha'penny Bridge. In this respect there is a certain inevitability in its location.

A new mixed-use building with an intricate mix of commercial and residential uses overlooks an open public space. The open space is intended as a forum for Temple Bar's vibrant street culture. Built on the site of a surface car park and requiring the demolition of only one small building, Temple Bar Square was planned for the minimum disruption to the area (Slessor, 1993, p.43). The square acts as a gateway to the area and serves to reorientate the pedestrian within Temple Bar itself.

The new building, which organizes the space, is smaller than it may first appear, as half of the elevation onto the square is a narrow strip, used principally to obscure the side of a warehouse and complete the building's civic frontage. The elevation onto the square has two restaurants, a café, a bank and a shop opening directly onto the square. When closed, these premises are protected by an inventive, vertically folding security screen, which then doubles as a canopy. The elevation is a complex geometric pattern of solid and void. This pattern is composed of panels of brick, metal,





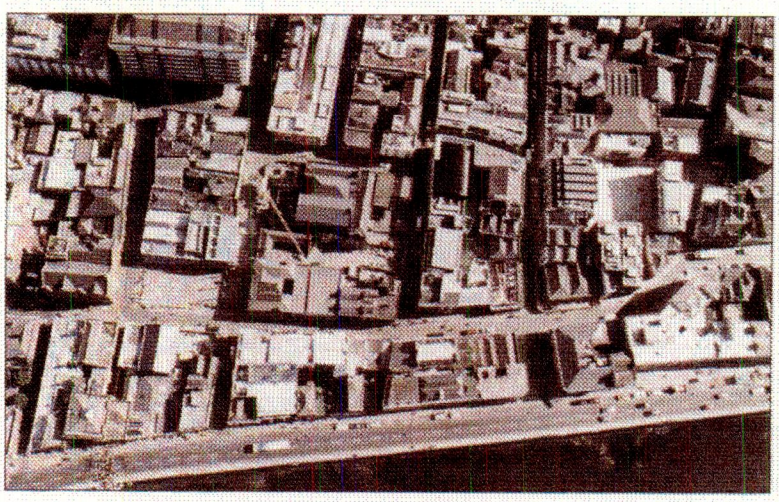


FIG. 10 *The original surface carpark;* FIG 11 *An architectural model of the proposed square;* FIG 12 *An aerial photograph with Temple Bar Square to the left.*

plate glass, translucent glass and steel section grilles. These panels are presented without any apparent depth and the result is that this series of panels and voids creates a light feel to the façade and in this respect it compliments the simple open space it integrates with.

FIG. 13 *An overview of Temple Bar Square before some of the clutter.*

Above a restaurant, on the Fownes Street side, are nine apartments. Entry to the apartments is via an open slot in the centre of the main façade. This means of entry is typical of Group 91's ambiguity between the private and the public. The slot is an exterior space leading to a raised exterior courtyard, the transitions from public to private and from exterior to interior are not strictly parallel.

The open public space is created by simply projecting a level stone surface out from the building. Tapering steps compensate for the sloping site. This surface was originally furnished with three stone benches of the same pale green-grey Donegal quartzite, three lighting masts and three litter bins defining one edge, and three bollards mirroring these on the opposite edge. Today the litter bins and the benches have been removed and four lime trees have been added opposite the mixed-use building (Frank McDonald, September, 1997).

FIG. 14 *The square with a temporary sculpture in place.*

In many ways the building acts as an introduction to the architectural vocabulary of Temple Bar including its mixed uses, the importance of a residential element, complex sections, monitor rooflights and open access

voids, all finished with crisp, modern detailing. The main elevation can also be said to give the impression of stage scenery, with the square as the stage – an effect heightened by the apparent 'thinness'' of the façade – an appropriate reflection of the street theatre ideals of the development plan (Brady, 1997, p.150).

The mixed-use building, with restaurants on two levels; the use of the square for transient sculptural pieces; a book market at weekends; the use of the square by buskers; and the general activity of this intersection point make the square a vibrant, lively space. However, much of the real benefit is for those passing by the square or traversing it because for most of the time the square does not invite repose. In the evenings, the busy night time atmosphere is complemented by the three modern lighting masts and the light from the restaurants and residences in the building. At other times, the greyness of the entire development creates a very dull picture that does not harmonize well with either the surrounding architecture or the nature of the activity that takes place on the square. When the sun is shining this is inconsequential but on a dull day the only splash of colour on the square is in the transient things like canopies, café furniture and the people themselves. The 19th century red brick buildings help to add some life to the area. A less important but perhaps more unforgivable shortcoming is the very bad drainage on the square which is unattractive and makes a slippery surface even more treacherous.

FIG. 15 *Temple Bar Square at night.*

As a Public Space

Temple Bar Square is not designed as a place where many people can stop to sit and watch passers-by, nor is there much opportunity for social interaction here – only one café has a very small number of outdoor tables and the book market only appears once per week. However, people do stop to watch street performers and in the evenings there are often many people on the square, meeting, talking, and wondering were to go next. In Whyte's

FIG. 16 *The book market on Temple Bar Square.*

The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces the author cites seating as the most important part of a successful public space. Temple Bar Square of course, has none. The benches, which originally populated the square, were removed when they became a base for drug dealers and other undesirables

(Frank McDonald, September 1997). Whyte also describes the importance of integral seating such as steps and ledges where people will often prefer to sit due to the infinite possibilities of arrangement for comfort and socialising. The steps, which resolve the gradient as the square meets the street, are often populated by people resting, meeting or just watching the passing scene. However, the steps were not designed with any ergonomic considerations in order to capitalize on this opportunity for effective, integrated seating. Nevertheless, people sit here and they do so in numbers in the summer months, it seems a shame that the original benches had to be removed, making the surface of the square a little bleak. On the other hand, the four lime trees, which replaced the benches, add some colour to the greyness of the paved area. Guidelines in the British Design Council's street furniture sourcebook state that planting should be considered at the inception of any scheme. Given the square's location in a dense urban area, the opportunity to add a natural element seems to have been sadly overlooked in the original design of the square.

Unlike many other forms of design, the design of public spaces is a form of gardening which requires constant maintenance and will inevitably require some change. Changes in the existing street furniture suggest that some measures have been taken to ensure the space is appropriately maintained yet there are signs that the square is not receiving the attention it requires. For example, both corners of the square's steps are damaged and at the time of writing repairs had just begun, several weeks after the

stonework had been damaged. A post bearing a 'no parking' sign has been vandalised and has stood askew for a number of weeks at the time of writing. The public telephones, which have been added on the square's east side, detract from the three stainless steel bollards which aptly defined the edge of the square. The two sets of telephones here are also different models of telephone kiosk, the mismatched pair again taking away from the 'cleanness' of the space, as are the four posts bearing various signs, which have been inserted thoughtlessly around the edges of the square.

The idea to install transient sculptural pieces is a perfect way to add life and variation to a public space. In the past years some excellent sculptures have appeared on the square, each for two or three months. Unfortunately, some of the pieces chosen for the square have been entirely impractical. For example, the previous offering was constructed of four tractors bolted together, one on top of the other *(see FIG.14, p.26)*. Despite being unsightly (which could be argued to be strictly a matter of opinion) the tractor sculpture was protected, for the duration of its exhibition, by an enclosure of barriers. The obvious potential for abuse (owing to the sculpture's attraction for the few who will inevitably attempt to climb it) seems to have been overlooked or ignored. The resulting ring of barriers created an unnecessary eyesore. The present sculpture consists of several plexiglass (tough transparent plastic) boxes encasing growing shrubs. The boxes are arranged in a miniature maze and seem to be a success with young children.

FIG. 17 / FIG. 18 *Clutter and vandalism on Temple Bar Square.*

However, as one would suspect, the minority which were inclined to climb the previous sculpture were also inclined to destroy the expanses of plexiglass presented to them. Sadly, the sculpture survived one day before it was vandalised. The management of the sculptures, added to the careless way in which several new additions have been allowed in the square (including the signs, telephones and just recently, an information point) suggests that the original enthusiasm of Temple Bar Properties has faded to a passive interest.

As Part of the Streetscape

For the benefits to pedestrians passing by or through Temple Bar Square there is much to be said for such a space. The pedestrian can approach Temple Bar Square from six different routes. Once the motor car is removed and the street is no longer a congested, multi-purpose artery, the street becomes a destination in itself. Added to the experience of the pedestrian street is the sense of release when the street opens onto a larger space. This may occur as a welcome and familiar part of a commuter's daily trip to work or a surprise for a visitor to the city. The sudden visual contrasts of such experiences bring the plan of a city to life, with even slight variations in projections or setbacks in plan having a powerful effect in the third dimension. A particularly strong example is the approach from Merchant's Arch, which is claustrophobic and congested, and then suddenly opens onto the square like a breath of fresh air.

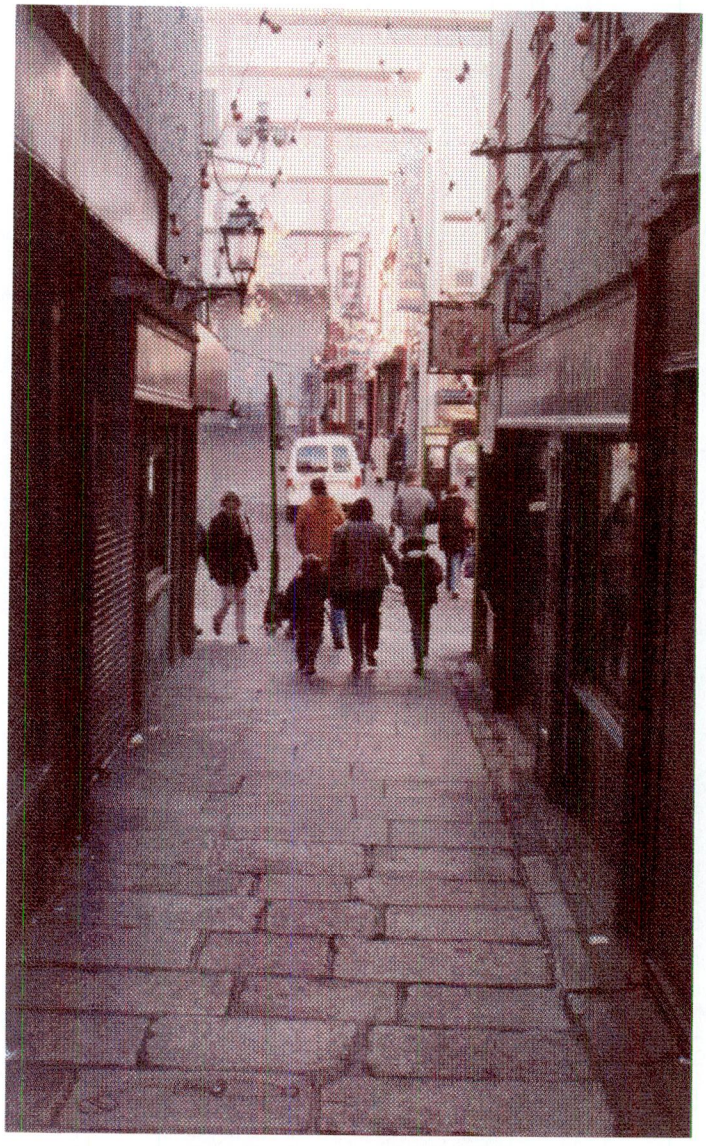


FIG. 19 *Approaching Temple Bar Square from Merchants Arch.*

Another aspect of the pedestrians' experience of the streetscape is an individual's sense of position in their environment. Enclosure, or the 'outdoor room' is one of the most powerful devices with which to instill a sense of position and identity with ones surroundings. In this sense, Temple Bar Square serves to re-orientate the pedestrian in Temple Bar itself and to give a sense of the city's overall urban, historical, social and formal structure.

Further to their sense of position, a change of level also effects the pedestrians' emotional reaction to the urban environment. In the case of Temple Bar Square the variation in level is a result of the contours of the site. On levels above a datum line – in this case simply the street level – there is a feeling of exhilaration, command and superiority. This can be compared to a child's love of walking on walls. This is experienced to a minor extent in the case of Temple Bar Square's platform but nonetheless these feelings are stimulated by the slight raise in level.

Temple Bar Square provides a successful focal point at an important location in the quarter. The development has assimilated well with the surrounding environment, with the very modern mixed-use building neither overpowering nor detracting from the existing buildings, which now form the other three sides of the new square. In fact, the two 19th century red brick buildings to either side of the square now face each other and form a new relationship which compliments the development.

Original drawings for the square show that a second building was intended for the vacant site (which still remains) on the northern side of the square. This unrealised part of the project denies the executed building an intended relationship to a second building across the square. Nevertheless, the square is a successful, living space.

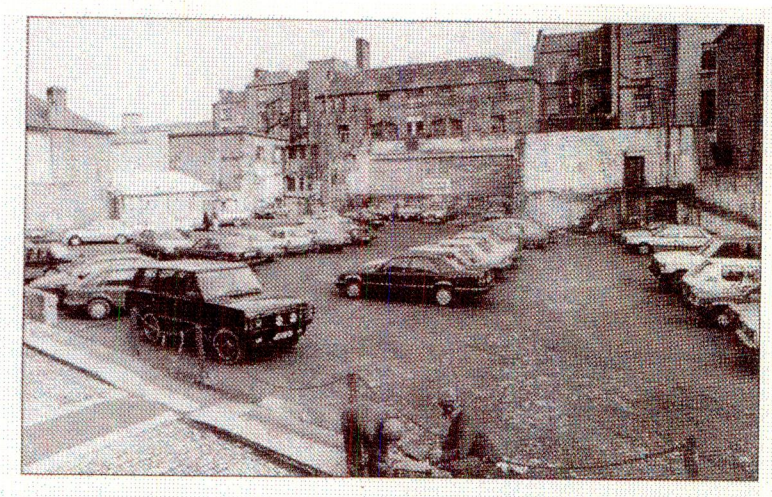
CHAPTER 4: MEETING HOUSE SQUARE

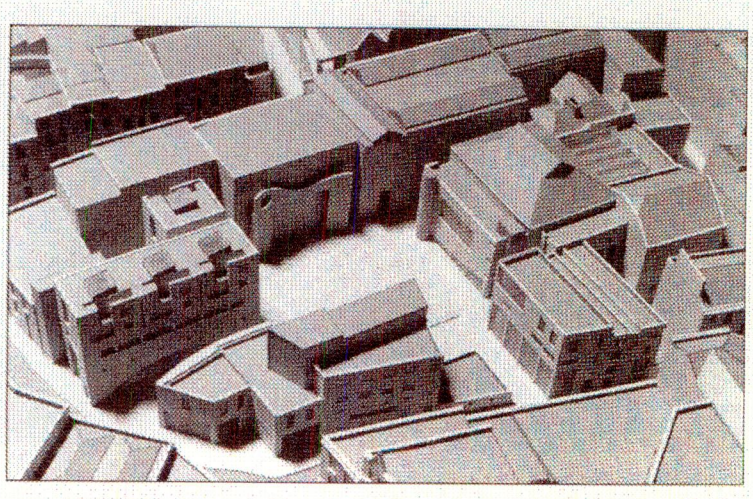
By Paul Keogh Architects (Group 91) 1995.

Concept and Design

Meetinghouse Square is the second of the two new public squares in Temple Bar. A major 'heart' on the east-west pedestrian route, Meetinghouse Square is surrounded on all sides by new cultural centres. 'The Ark' Children's Cultural Centre, the National Photography Centre and the Gallery of Photography all interact directly with the square itself. Also with facades on the square are the Irish Film Centre and a new mixed-use building with a café opening onto the square at ground level and the Gaiety School of Acting occupying the upper floors. Intended as a focus for cultural activity within Temple Bar, the square acts as an outdoor room for musical performances as well as film and slide projections.

Like Temple Bar Square, Meetinghouse Square is built on the site of a surface car park and two of the buildings on the square incorporate earlier buildings. However, in contrast, Meetinghouse Square has altered the streetscape by creating a new fully enclosed space with new means of entry. The square was intended to be part of a pedestrian route that has yet to be fully realized. The east-west route should have run from Curved Street, through the new entrance to Meetinghouse Square and south to meet a new pedestrian bridge over the Liffey, linking in with the important northside shopping area. The Poddle Bridge was not executed and hence the





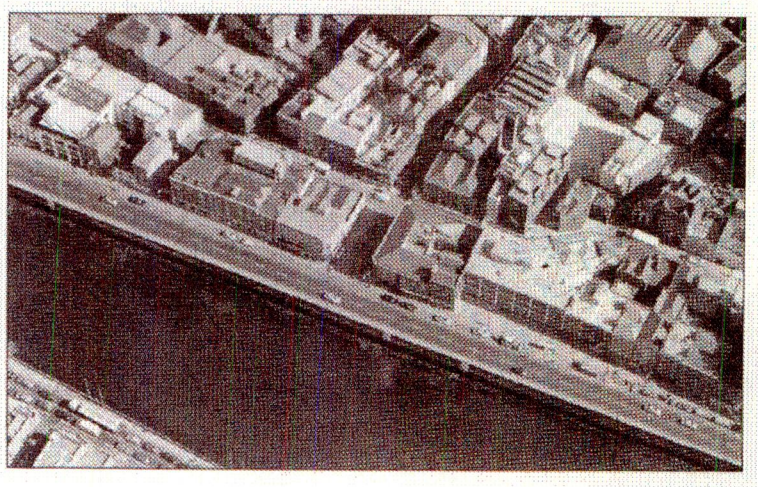


FIG. 20 *The original surface carpark;* FIG 21 *An architectural model of the proposed square;* FIG 22 *An aerial photograph with Meetinghouse Square to the right.*

Meetinghouse Square concept has been frustrated to an extent and it lies relatively quiet, in stark contrast to the hustle and bustle of Temple Bar Square *(see FIG. 23 below).*

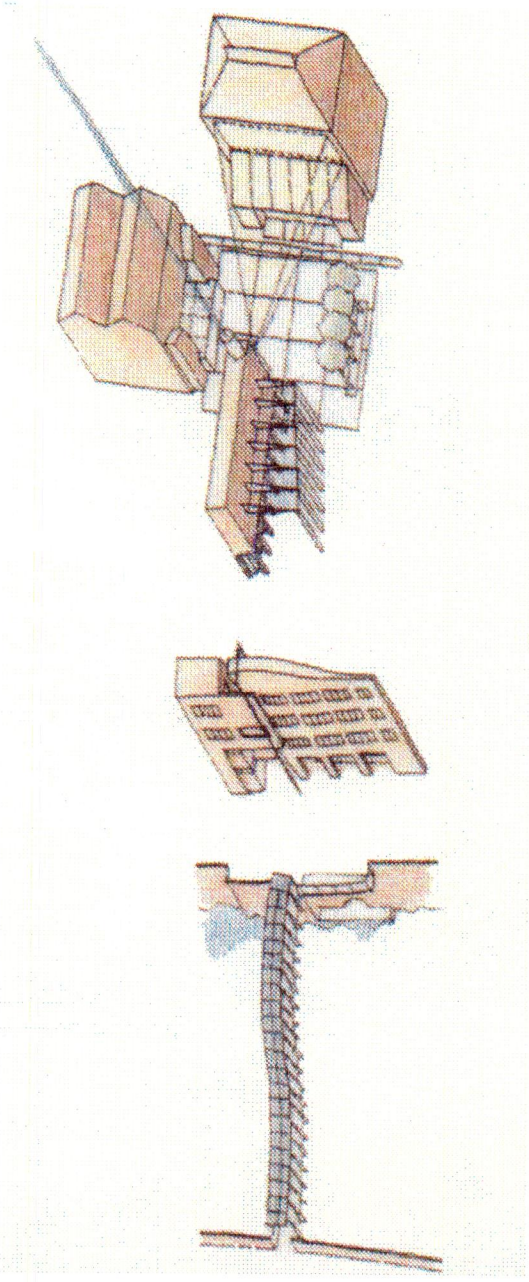


FIG. 23 *Axonometric view of Meetinghouse Square showing the proposed 'gateway' and Poddle bridge which have not been executed.*

The first building that attracts one's attention is 'The Ark' Children's Cultural Centre designed by Shane O'Toole. Its Meetinghouse Square

façade also contains the most striking feature in the square. This is the spectacular folding wall designed by Santiago Calatrava, which reveals the internal stage to Meetinghouse Square (Brady, 1997, p.182). This ingenious

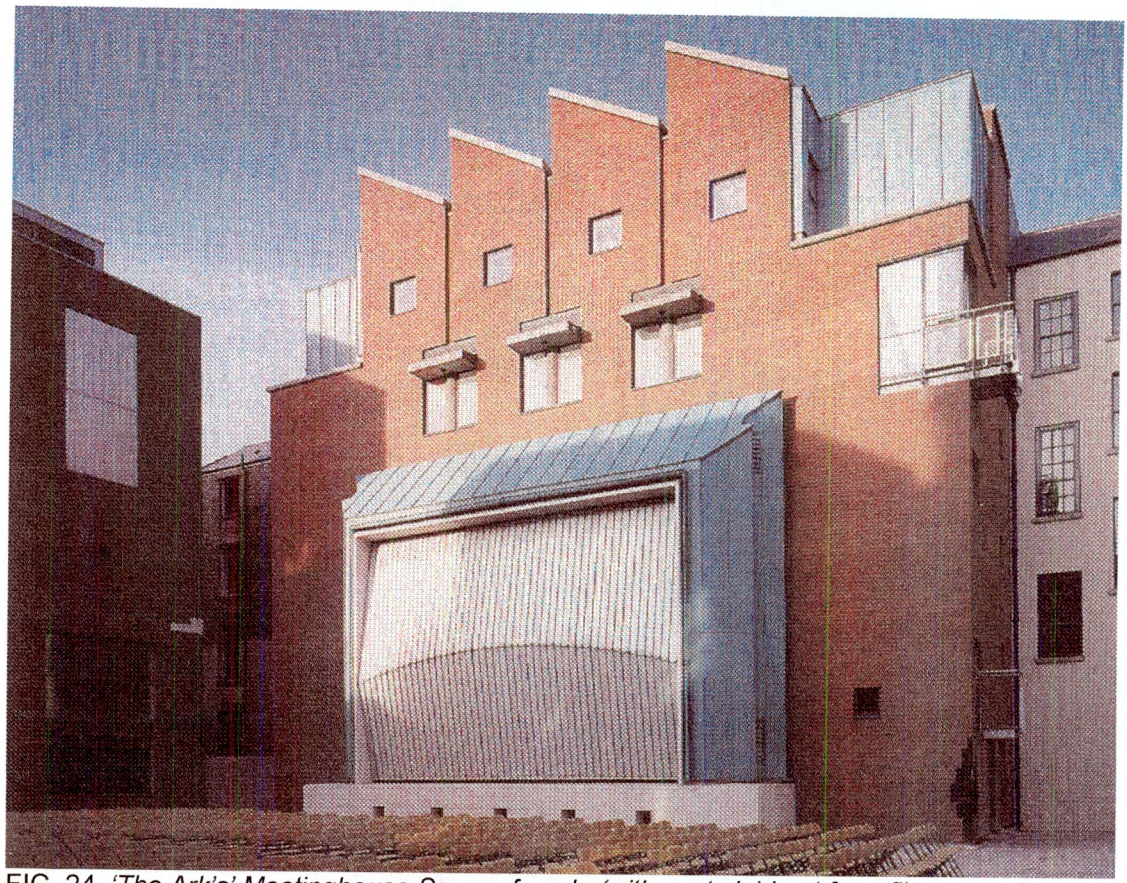


FIG. 24 *'The Ark's' Meetinghouse Square façade (with seats laid out for a film screening).*

system allows the stage to be used for both outdoor and indoor, in-the-round performances. The stage extends in a bellows-like projecting bay and its pre-patinated copper forms an external proscenium (Brady, 1997, p.182). This bay extends from a façade of soft red brick. A distinctive roofline is formed by the Group 91 trademark saw-tooth rooflights. Despite the sophistication of the stage door and the distinctive features forming the

roofline, 'The Ark's Meetinghouse Square façade retains a simplicity evocative of a child's drawing. 'The Ark' retains the original façade of the

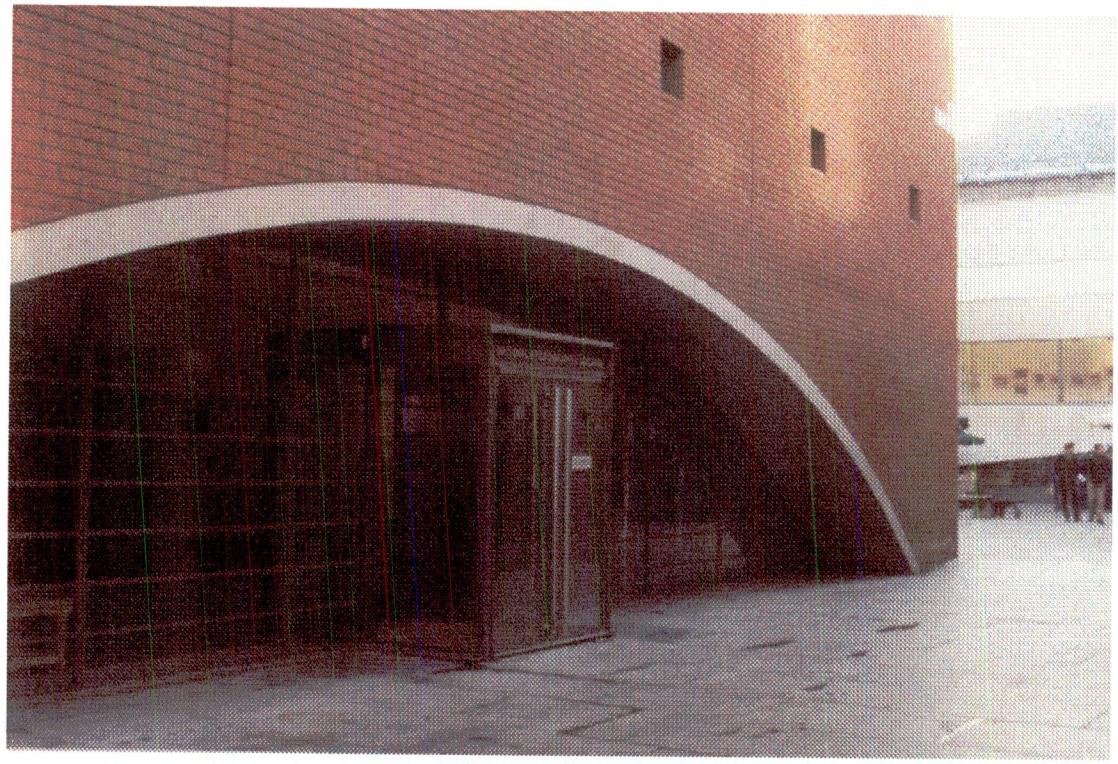
FIG. 25 *'The Ark' with the stage open to the square.*

Georgian Presbyterian Meetinghouse on Eustace Street. With this façade fully restored and a new façade onto Meetinghouse Square, 'The Ark' is an example of how retaining an old façade can enrich the overall design without devaluating the new work, or undermining the old fabric. However, 'The Ark' is quite unique in the way the new and old facades are isolated in entirely

different environments - (those of Meetinghouse Square and Eustace Street).

The other cultural institutions, which interact with the square, are the National Photography Centre and the Gallery of Photography. Both buildings are the work of O'Donnell and Tuomey Architects (of Group 91). Facing each other across Meetinghouse Square, the two buildings are linked, appropriately, by light. Films and slides are projected from the Photography Centre onto the Gallery opposite, where a large window doubles as a rolling screen. The Photography Centre is a quite monumental building with its red brick walls rising sheer from the street. Its low, arched entrance seems compressed by the weight of the building. This long arch creates an effective visual transition between East Essex Street and Meetinghouse Square. This elevation also contains deep-set strip windows with a row of columns as well as zinc-clad projecting forms and scattered stone elements through the brickwork. All this detailing serves to accentuate the massiveness of the wall

FIG. 26 *The National Photography Centre.*



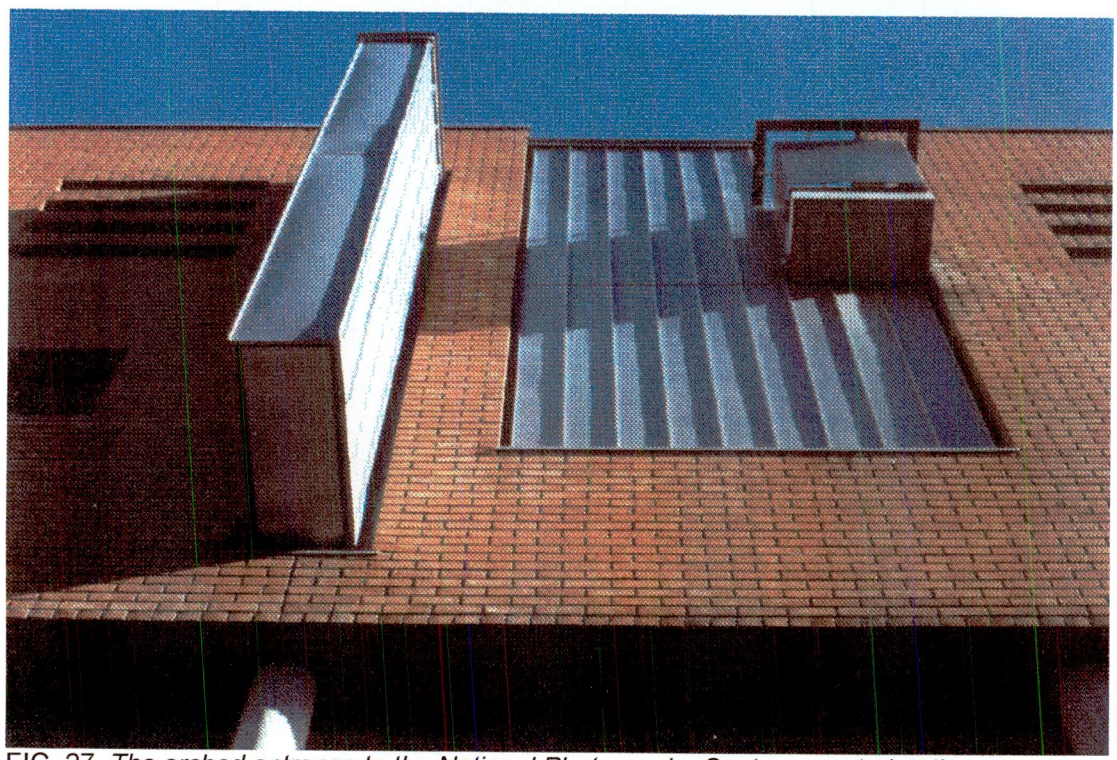


FIG. 27 *The arched entrance to the National Photography Centre on entering the square.*

FIG. 28 *Detailing on the façade of the Photography Centre.*

and to create an "illusion of something more ancient" (Brady, 1997, p.184). The façade directly onto Meetinghouse Square continues the only seemingly arbitrary features, which are in fact part of a very personal vocabulary developed by the architects with a particular interest in the psychological impact and metaphorical use of form. For example, the stone elements on the corner of the Photography Centre represent the sprockets in a roll of film, a feature repeated and mirrored in the gallery of Photography. This façade of the Photography Centre also contains a zinc-clad projection box from where films and slides are projected across the square. The Gallery of Photography opposite is faced with Portland stone (a reflective element) and hides the flank wall of the Irish Film Centre (by the same architects). The central element on the Meetinghouse Square elevation is the large double-height window, which also becomes the projection screen. The metaphorical use of

FIG. 29 *The Gallery of Photography opposite the above.*

form continues in the wedge-shaped ground floor form, which refers to the journey from light to dark. Also, the vertical strip with repetitive small windows reminds us of a film reel or roll of film. The use of plate glass, translucent glass and zinc sheeting creates a variety of effects between transparency and opaqueness. The Portland stone cladding of the Gallery harmonizes well the brick buildings in the square. Some existing buildings in the area are faced with Portland stone including City Hall and the Newcomen. The predominant material in the architecture of the square is a warm, soft orange-red brick. The colour and texture of Mediterranean town, as are the French style market canopies that appear at the food market. The benefit of this is the atmosphere of warmth added to the square. Even on the wettest days Meetinghouse Square remains quite colourful, in contrast to the dullness of Temple Bar Square. When the sun does shine the square radiates and is a magnificent sight either in its normal serene emptiness or at the bustling food market.

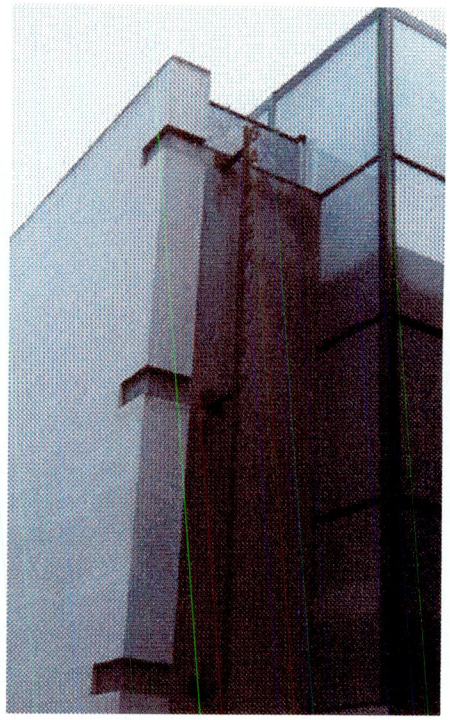


FIG. 30 *Corner detail on the Gallery*

The other main frontage onto Meetinghouse Square is that belonging to the mixed-use building designed by Paul Keogh at the same time he planned the square itself. It is the least monumental or striking building on

the square and (as described in *Dublin A Guide to Recent Architecture*) "its more conventional 'new modern' idiom has neither the conviction of O'Donnell and Tuomey's personalised style nor the bravura of Shane O'Toole's Children's Cultural Centre" (Brady, 1997, p.192). The building form is fragmented by the square's exit to Sycamore Street with a shop building becoming an extension to the Irish Film Centre Library. At ground level on

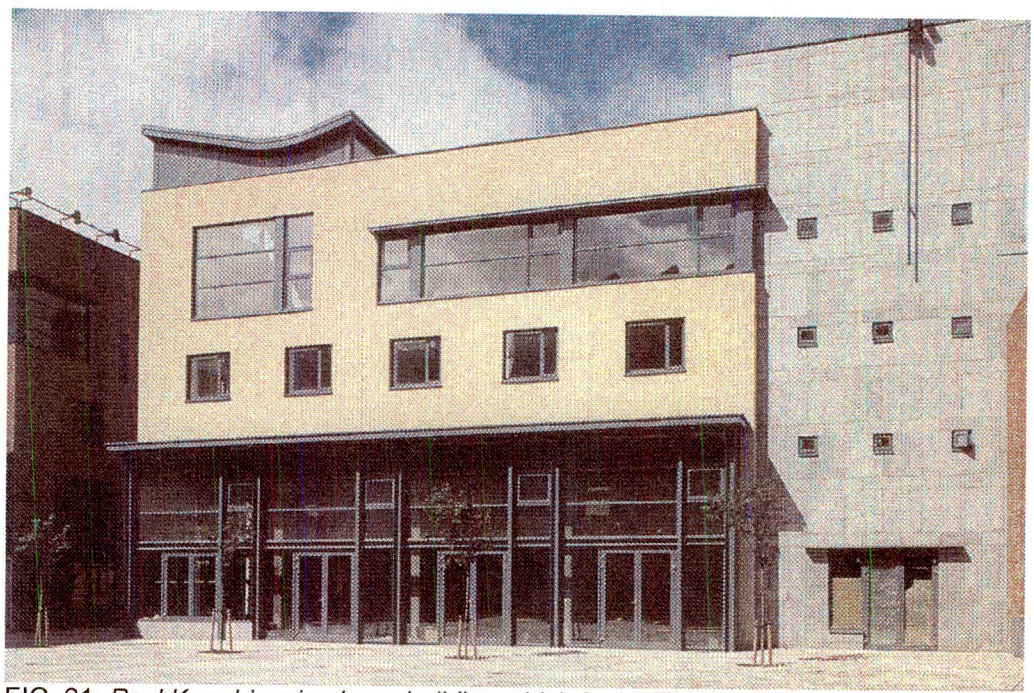


FIG. 31 *Paul Keogh's mixed-use building which faces 'The Ark' opposite.*

the main elevation a double-height glazed wall defines the restaurant space and the external tables, allied to the transparent wall of the internal part of the restaurant, helps to animate the area. At roof level there is an interesting feature in the form of a butterfly roof orientated to the southern end of the building. Large windows signal the significant usage on the upper levels. The main building is well proportioned and successfully resolves the

difference in scale of its own fragmented section to the south and an existing building, which frames the main building to the north.

As a Public Space

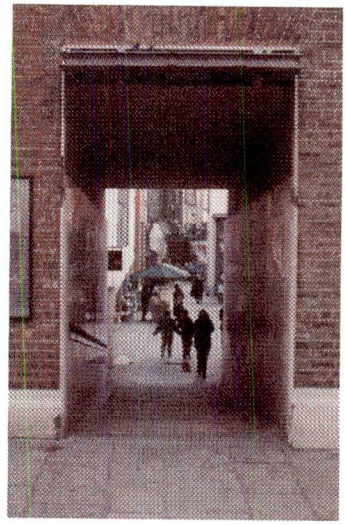
Although Meetinghouse Square provides a strong focus for cultural activities, the square itself is underused. Other than a means of access to the buildings on the square, the only attractions are the single (expensive) café and an almost unnoticeable osteria, which open onto the square. The strict use of the buildings for specialized activities, along with the fact that the square is not on a pedestrian thoroughfare, have led to Meetinghouse Square lying dormant for much of the time. A fully enclosed space, with all points of entry through or between buildings, Meetinghouse Square does not provide any view of the passing scene of the busy city. Therefore, for the space to become a successful public space, the attraction must come entirely from within this urban room. Despite the open air slide and film projections, open air musical and other stage performances and a food market at the weekend, the rest of the time the square is a space in waiting, and it feels just like it. As an open-air performance space the square is inventive and very successful. The open space itself is simply executed in granite paving, with a central circular array of uplighters mounted in the paving, acknowledging the various axes of the space. A strip of darker limestone paving defines a pathway from the new entrance on Eustace Street to the entrance from Sycamore Street directly opposite. Four young trees add a natural element in front of the mixed-use building. The only other

installations are the specifically designed moveable benches, which prove very useful. When slides are being shown they are placed in front of the screen, then at the weekend people sit to eat at the food market when they are arranged in the centre of the square. People do sit on them and move them and so far they have withstood any abuse. The moveable benches are a successful means of resolving the problems of standard, fixed seating and allow infinite arrangements. In the summer, however, there is not enough seating when a number of local employees take their lunch to the square on a sunny day. People resort to sitting on the ground of course but as with Temple Bar Square, little provision has been made for adequate seating, integrated or otherwise.

FIG. 32 *Meetinghouse Square benches at the food market.*

As Part of the Streetscape

The pedestrian's experience of Meetinghouse Square is far more dramatic than that of Temple Bar Square. Such experiences for the pedestrian were perhaps created at the expense of hiding away the square a little too well. From Eustace Street, Meetinghouse Square is entered via a tapering and sloping passageway through an older building. This mode of entry has four effects. The first is the obvious feeling of release onto the square. The second is the feeling of intimacy and protection created by the gentle descent into the square, which then encloses you. The third is the feeling that you are entering a space which is not strictly public. The experience is more like entering a private courtyard than a public square. This is accentuated by the fact that the private building you pass through is allowing public passage through the aperture. Finally, there is the sense of mystery created by the tunnel-like passage heightened by the unfamiliar tapering and the curious backlit coloured glass forms on the wall and ceiling of the passageway.



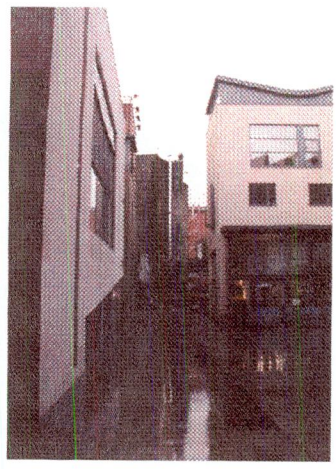


FIG 31

Similar effects are created by the entrance through the Irish Film Centre. The pedestrian here passes from the airy atrium of the Irish Film Centre foyer into a narrow colonnade, emerging at the top of the steps, which then bring one down to the surface of the square. The Irish Film Centre itself is a masterpiece of townscape design and foresaw the development of Meetinghouse Square and indeed the whole Temple Bar Project. It was designed by O'Donnell and Tuomey before the establishment of Temple Bar Properties (Brady,1997, p.194). Entry from East Essex Street and Sycamore Street also results in a sense of release onto the square and continues traditional modes of passage in Temple Bar.

With its different points of entry and means of discovery, Meetinghouse Square is a successful piece of townscape design. The fact that it does not become immediately obvious from the busy pedestrian thoroughfares means it is discovered only by the curious ones who investigate the glimpse of the square afforded by its narrow entrances.

CONCLUSION

Democratic Public Spaces

There is no doubt that Temple Bar Square and Meetinghouse Square contribute to life in Temple Bar and indeed, help towards repossessing public space in the broader context of the city. However, despite the restrictions of the environment and the contemporary urban culture, some decisions by the designers of these spaces remain questionable. Informed and practical design decisions are required to create a public space that is truly 'democratic'. When sacrifices are made to ulterior interests the success of a public space is compromised. One such consideration may be the use of the two projects, particularly Meetinghouse Square, to showcase the work of the relevant architects. Here there is a sacrifice of user requirements to individual style. Conversely, a positive aspect is that new principle buildings also serve the broader purpose of changing the public's perception of the city and generating further interest and activity.

Streetscape Design

As part of the rejuvenated Temple Bar streetscape, the new squares are very successful. Passage along the busy north-south route through Merchants' Arch and up to Dame Street has been transformed from being an unspectacular shortcut to a popular and pleasant journey. The square also makes the east-west route through the quarter more interesting and serves as a useful focal point at the intersection of these two busy pedestrian routes.

Due to its strategic location it has successfully become the new gateway to Temple Bar. The contrasting Meetinghouse Square, despite being an underused space, is also extremely successful in terms of the streetscape of the area. The various narrow entrances and the sense of enclosure are combined to create a very powerful effect which makes the square a treasure for the pedestrian. Unfortunately, the concept being frustrated by the decision not to build the Poddle Bridge, means that its intended integration into the overall street-plan has been negated.

Assimilation: Historically, Architecturally & Socio-culturally

A mature sensitivity to its character has reinforced the aspects of the Temple Bar streetscape which give it its unique diversity. Both public spaces consider the historical fabric of the city while putting the focus on contemporary life in Temple Bar. However, the new mixed-use building in Temple Bar Square would possibly have assimilated better with the environment if something in the material or structure of the building had been familiar to the architecture of Dublin. The extant buildings of Temple Bar, which in most cases, have been preserved, are primarily low-rise industrial and commercial premises. The character of the new architecture is sympathetic to this and the overall aesthetic is not disrupted by the imposition of modern buildings. Rather it is complimented by this latest stage in the evolution of the area. However, the debate goes on as to whether the imposition of such a number of new modern style buildings is appropriate, given that this is one of the few areas of Dublin where such old buildings and

streets have survived. On one level, the new architecture is in visual harmony and successfully assimilates with the older fabric. On another level, the focus on new architecture, although allied to the preservation of other buildings, dilutes the original strong urban character of the area.

Urban Culture

It would appear from evidence of vandalism, misbehaviour and misuse that a proportion of the inhabitants of the city do not have the same sense of civic pride that is found, for example, in Parisians (and many other Europeans). Subsequently, the design of the public spaces has been restricted by this factor. On the other hand, certain impracticalities in the make-up of the two squares perhaps depict an underestimation of the numbers belonging to this minority. From another perspective, the impracticality of today may become appropriate tomorrow; Dubliners are relatively new to the idea of the European City and perhaps in time a more mature and responsible attitude to the fabric of the city will evolve. Only time will tell whether this is the case and if it was naivety, optimism or intelligent foresight that influenced the design decisions of the Group 91 architects.

The Public and Private Sector Relationship-a Model for Urban Regeneration?

The Framework Plan for Temple Bar stemmed from the Irish Government's acknowledgement of urban design as a subject of cultural importance to the identity of the city and, hence, a public responsibility. David Mackay, one of the assessors of the Framework competition remarked:

> In the Temple Bar architectural competition, both public institutions and architects have regained their roles in setting the collective framework for the individual users and private enterprises to complete and continue the building and renovation of the city. It is a creative partnership that stems from both the public and private sectors – the public sector responsible for the creative aspects of the public space, and the private sector responding in the private space to the cultural quality of the framework (O'Toole, 1998, p.48).

In this sense, the unique partnership created by the public and private sectors demonstrated a viable model for urban regeneration even if the Temple Bar Project is a little extravagant. (There are serious concerns that such a concentration of cultural institutions, which were built and funded in their early years by European and Irish government grants, will be unable to function once these capital grants dry up). For many, the extravagance of the project has created the illusion of a perfect solution to the problem of urban renewal. For others, the reality is clear: the new architecture, much of which is focused in Temple Bar Square and Meetinghouse Square, is certainly a welcome improvement on the previously rapidly deteriorating fabric of Temple Bar, it is the nature of the intervention, and the style in which it was carried out, which is questionable. Despite the advantages of the new public spaces, ultimately, in their design, more attention has been given to the architecture than the successful operation of the squares as public spaces. For this reason, both projects are lost opportunities to create the truly democratic public spaces that every city needs. Although it is clear from Group 91's framework plan that this was the objective, sitting in the sunny tranquility of Meetinghouse Square one could argue that the fundamental failure of the square is in fact its major success.

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