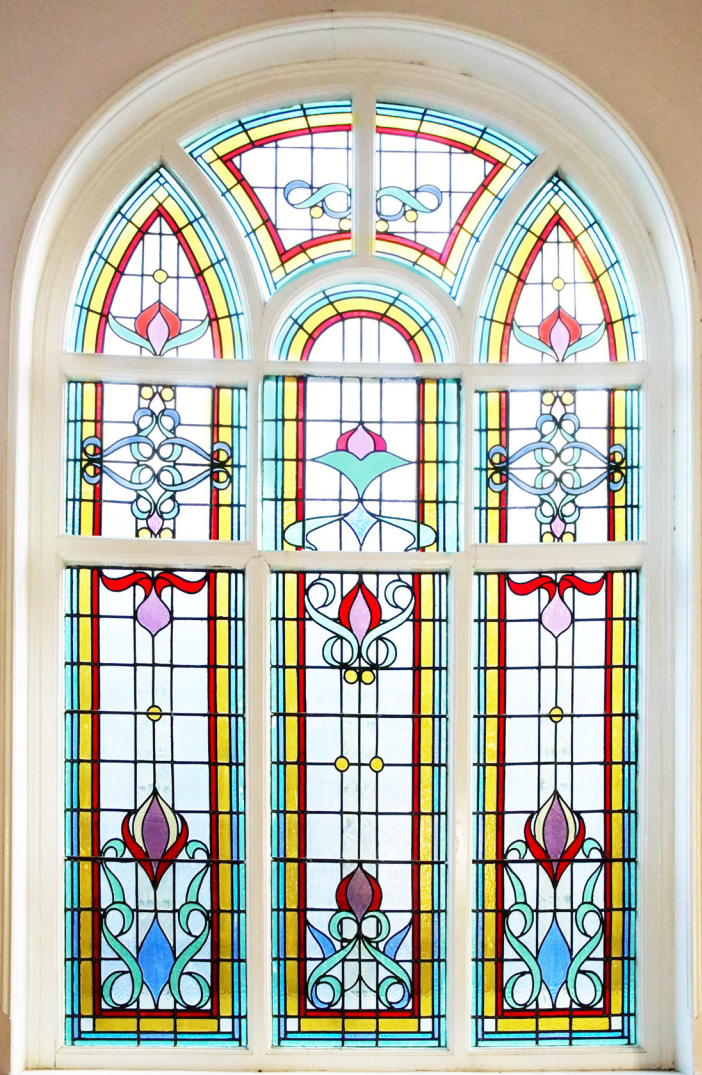




Heritage Placemaking Case Study

Lurgan Carnegie Library





Introduction

Libraries NI is responsible for the provision and delivery of a public library service in Northern Ireland. We have an extensive network of 98 static libraries in cities, towns and villages across Northern Ireland including nine Heritage Libraries holding major collections, with the largest collection held in Belfast Central Library. There are many unique and interesting library buildings, including a number of Carnegie Libraries, which adds to the history and heritage of libraries, and their role, in cities, towns and villages across Northern Ireland.

This case study focuses on the library in Lurgan and provides an insight into the role of libraries in the context of heritage and placemaking and how they connect with and deliver services to communities.



Lurgan Library

A Heritage Placemaking Case Study?

Lurgan Carnegie Library was chosen for this placemaking case study as an example of a library steeped in history with a rich heritage of providing services to communities in Lurgan and the surrounding area. It is a listed Carnegie Library building, unique in that has been in continuous use as a library since it was built and is sited on the aptly named Carnegie Street, ideally located to serve all communities and traditions in Lurgan town.

In this respect, Lurgan Carnegie library continues to be a neutral, safe and trusted space in the town centre where everyone is welcome and where people and communities come together to learn, and consider their shared histories and to discuss and celebrate the cultural heritage of the area including the linen industry, railways and the workhouse.





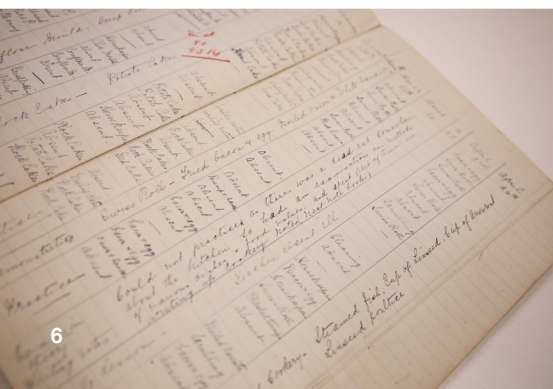
Lurgan Town

Lurgan is a market town in the County of Armagh and lies approximately two miles from the southern shore of Lough Neagh. The name Lurgan is anglicised from Irish meaning 'The Long Ridge'. The town is typical of many Ulster settlements with its wide straight main street and it has a number of historic buildings including Lurgan Carnegie Library which is a B1 listed building. In 1610, James I granted land to the English Lord Brownlow and his family who went on to develop the linen industry which was at its peak in the town in the late 17th Century. The town continued to grow and develop with many fine buildings and amenities including churches, a distillery and Lurgan Park, the largest urban park in Northern Ireland. Today the population of Lurgan is approximately 26,985¹.

¹ NISRA Population Statistics 2020, available at www.nisra.gov.uk

Libraries NI Cultural Heritage Offer

Public libraries in Northern Ireland have a long tradition of collecting and preserving material which relates to cultural heritage. Libraries NI connects people and communities through its heritage services and programmes with all libraries providing access to heritage resources and nine libraries providing dedicated cultural heritage services, including Lurgan Library. Access to cultural heritage can enrich society through nurturing creativity, imagination and a sense of place. This is of central importance in supporting and enriching a community's understanding, not only of its local identity but also of the past and its role in shaping the present.



Cultural Heritage Services in Lurgan Library and County Armagh

Following a public consultation in 2020/21, Cultural Heritage Services in County Armagh were reorganised. This entailed a relocation of services at a newly refurbished premises at Markethill Road in Armagh City and the enhanced provision of heritage resources and services in the Lurgan Carnegie Library which had also undergone a refurbishment.

The enhanced heritage offer in Lurgan Carnegie Library has an extensive range of resources that are of benefit to anyone with an interest in cultural and community life, past and present, as well as for historians, researchers, genealogists and students. The heritage offer includes access to lending and reference book stock and stock in other formats including maps. The offer also includes access to newspapers on microfilm and in digital format.

Programming and activities support library customers in the use of heritage resources and these have included:

- book launches
- heritage school visits for young people
- local and family history taster sessions
- local history talks
- online workshops exploring sources for family history
- exhibition space and display cases
- capturing the oral tradition through Yarnspinning and storytelling sessions
- Northern Ireland Screen Digital Film Archive screenings
- reminiscence sessions.



The Built Heritage

Carnegie Libraries in Northern Ireland

The Carnegie Trust was formed in 1896 by Dr Andrew Carnegie the Scottish born American millionaire steel magnate who is well known for public library philanthropy and who funded many libraries, for use by communities free of charge, between 1900 and 1913. This connection as a Carnegie Library forms part of the history and heritage of Lurgan Library.



Lurgan Carnegie Library

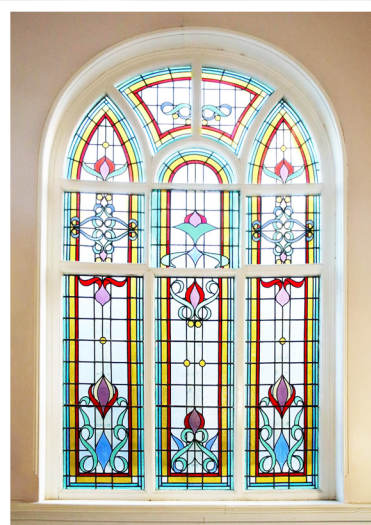
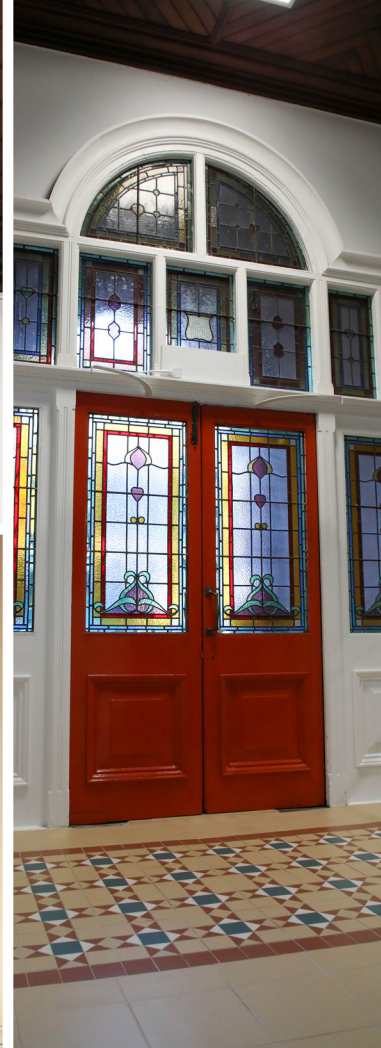
In 1896 Lurgan was among the first provincial towns in Ireland to have a public library under The Public Libraries Act (Ireland) 1855² when a free library was opened in the basement of the town hall in Union Street. While well used the accommodation was not ideally suited for a library and the Chairperson of the Council wrote to the Carnegie Trust which responded in 1903 with an offer of funding of £2,000 towards the cost of the work. The proposed location was an area of the town being developed at Margery's Lane which was accessed from Market Street beside the recently completed Northern Bank. Margery's Lane was later renamed as Carnegie Street in recognition of Dr Andrew Carnegie's generosity.

Henry Hobart, an architect from Dromore, was appointed to design the new library, having recently completed the Carnegie Library in Banbridge, (the firm of Hobart and Heron is still in business today).

The project was tendered and the successful contractor William Callaghan, from Magheralin, completed the construction of the new library which opened in 1906.

The Edwardian style building was granted a B1 listing in 1994 and is considered to be a fine example of a Carnegie Library with red brick elevations, ashlar sandstone copings to parapets, sills and header courses. One of the more striking features of the library is the arch over the entrance to the original Carnegie building, supported by red stone columns, carved caps and moulded bases with the words 'Free Library' proudly announcing the ethos of the public library service. One interesting aspect of the original design and layout of the building was a separate children's room on the ground floor and this was a progressive facility that very few libraries in Ireland had at that time.

² The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, 2006, Cambridge University Press



Development and Refurbishment of the Library

Some 80 years after the library was completed a large extension was constructed in 1991 which increased the size of the building to a total area of 1,256 square metres. In 2011, the first floor of the library was extensively refurbished and in 2020 a further renovation of the layout and décor of the ground floor was carried out, including restoration of architectural features of the original Carnegie Library building at a cost of £250,000.

The 2020 restoration project was a careful combination of protecting and retaining original features of the building while modernising and incorporating more up to date construction industry technologies. The public toilet facilities were increased in size and relocated to a more central position within the building. The concealed ornate

ceiling and roof structure in the Carnegie meeting room was revealed and restored to its original design by removing a suspended ceiling which had been installed in the 1970s. Carpets were removed and a period decorative, tiled ceramic floor was laid in the hallway, reflecting the original grandeur of the Carnegie building. Generally new energy efficient LED lighting was provided throughout the ground floor together with new floor coverings and ceilings and finally the addition of new furniture helped complete the transformation.

The finished project is a bright, airy, comfortable building well suited to the provision of modern library services while respecting and reflecting the history, heritage and features of the original Carnegie Library.

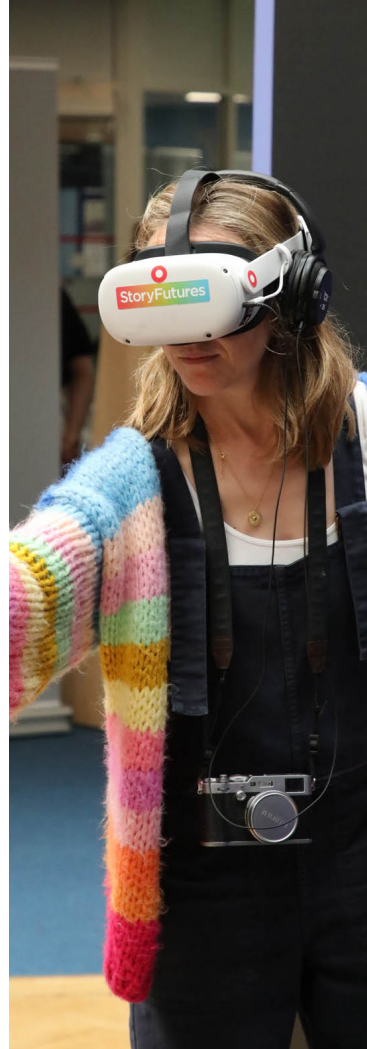
Library Services Reviewed and Renewed

Following the refurbishment of the library the opportunity was taken to review the service offer resulting in a complete spatial reorganisation of the library to meet the changing needs of library customers. The ground floor was completely transformed into a dedicated library space for children. Modern furniture, including child friendly modular book browsing systems, has enabled the zoning of the library for different age groups. A sensory wall was installed and an attractive play area for younger children has created an exciting space to explore stories, books and reading. For older children and teenagers, a new IT zone was created providing a range of high and low level seating, study space and art tables. Improved toilet facilities alongside additional pram and buggy parking has created a family friendly, welcoming and inspiring library for parents and children.

Adults have the choice of selecting books from popular quick picks on the ground floor, or browsing a comprehensive range of books on the first floor. The first floor space is light and airy and offers soft seating and study spaces and access to computers and free Wi-Fi.

Library programmes for both adults and children enhance the service offer and include rhyme activities, storytelling, school visits, reading groups and a Lego club. Adult participation includes activities to promote reader development, to address social isolation and to improve digital skills.

The refurbishment has also enhanced the community meeting room space - Carnegie Meeting Room - to provide an attractive space for activities, meetings and programmes.





A Place to Connect and Work Together

The refurbished library is a place to connect and promote partnership working with government departments, public bodies and the voluntary and private sector. Examples of partnerships include:

- Community Planning initiatives with Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council such as making free period products available in the library and facilitating intergenerational communication between primary school children and older people through a letter writing project
- working in partnership with local schools to support reading for pleasure, fostering independent research skills and information literacy, offering study space and access to a wide range of study materials
- a local partnership with the Southern Health and Social Care Trust Memory Team has supported the delivery of reminiscence sessions using heritage resources to people impacted by dementia
- working with the AE Russell Appreciation Society by participating in the annual festival which celebrates the life and work of the Lurgan-born poet and painter.



Impact, Value and Contribution of Cultural Heritage in the Context of Placemaking

Libraries NI recognises the importance of conserving and preserving our library buildings and specifically the remaining Carnegie Heritage Libraries, including their architectural legacies. There are a number of studies demonstrating the impact of a new build or a refurbished library contributing to the regeneration in the immediate areas surrounding the new library and adding social value and amenity. The extension to the Lurgan Carnegie Library completed in October 1991 and the subsequent refurbishment in 2020 have contributed positively to the local community in terms of cultural, economic, social and environmental development. It has enabled the provision of modern library services, supported an enhanced cultural heritage service offer, reinforced the history of the building and preserved the Carnegie ethos to empower and enable people and communities. Perhaps the most important legacy illustrated by this case study is the enduring nature, place and value of libraries at the heart of communities.



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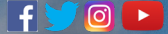


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