

New Windows of Opportunity: University of Dundee

by Roger Illsley

This September the University of Dundee was named Scottish University of the Year for a second consecutive year in the Times and Sunday Times. Also shortlisted for the title of UK University of the Year, the strength of the university's research and its economic, social and cultural impact on the wider community were specifically noted.

Today it is largely contained within a well-defined campus, consisting in the main of buildings that are specifically designed and equipped for purpose, be it social, cultural or educational.

It was not always like this.

The University that we see today owes a great deal to physical expansion in the post-war period, a period characterized by changes in the way that higher education was delivered and in the academic and residential accommodation available to staff and students.

University College, Dundee

In the late 1940s, as Dundee emerged from the aftermath of the Second World War, a more parochial conflict was starting to gather momentum in the academic world, as higher education in Dundee was increasingly perceived as being held back in its ambition and growth by the negative influence of St. Andrews University

Until 1964 there were four universities in Scotland: St. Andrews, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Glasgow. The students of Scotland's fourth city, despite attending University College Dundee, were being awarded degrees by St. Andrews University and thus Dundee's highest educational establishment had only the status of a junior partner.

This influence of St. Andrews included a degree of control over the finances available for the development of facilities in Dundee. In February 1944 Principal Fulton stressed the urgent need to improve the physical conditions of university buildings in the town, and noted that there had been no new buildings in UCD for thirty years; he also specifically stressed the necessity of dedicated hostel accommodation for students.

The Nethergate frontage,
University College Dundee,
early 20th Century



This need was apparent even though the establishment was at this time relatively small: the total number of academic staff of all grades was around 24, with approximately 460 students.

The First New Buildings

Fulton's earlier identified need for student accommodation was soon partly answered with the opening in 1946 of Airlie Place, a terrace of houses adapted

stone for the first new university building since before the First World War - the Ewing Building, which opened in February 1954.

Queen's College, Dundee

The identity of the institution changed in 1954, undergoing a complete reconstitution following the advice of a Royal Commission under Lord Tedder that was set up to look at the whole future of higher education in Dundee. As part of the process it was renamed Queen's College, in recognition of the links with Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother who spent her childhood in nearby Glamis Castle. The Dental School and the Medical School were both formally brought under the administration of Queen's College at this time.

Medicine

During this period, far-reaching discussions were held over a number of years regarding the provision of

state-of-the-art medical buildings and other facilities for the university in Dundee, ultimately to be relocated to Ninewells; these were of major significance in their own right, and are discussed elsewhere in this publication.

The Ewing Building



In October 1946 Major General Douglas Wimberley C.B., D.S.O., M.C., was appointed as Principal, and he set about strengthening relations between town and gown in Dundee; the Town Council agreed to earmark slum property around the campus on the Town Plan to allow for future university expansion. This synergy provided the initial impetus that was to permit the forward-thinking provision of modern buildings over the next thirty years that would allow university education in Dundee to flourish.

to form the first men's hall of residence in Dundee.

Further physical expansion was to follow. In October 1950 Lord Burghley opened the Chemistry Building extension and the West Park Hall extension (accommodation for women students). He also laid the foundation

Airlie Place



Administration and Academic Expansion

Despite the increased autonomy gained by Queen's College, the increasing desire for independence from St. Andrews drove a wish for a suitably impressive frontage and administration building to mirror this aspiration. In 1937 it had been envisaged that the main administrative buildings of UCD would be built facing north, west of Park Place, following demolition of the existing slums. In 1954 the City's Development Plan included a processional way that led from the City Churches to on the west side of Park Place. However, T.M. Knox, Principal of St. Andrews, realized that the dominating south-facing site on the Perth Road provided a location for a truly imposing administrative frontage.

In 1959 Knox laid the foundation stone of the Tower building, and by the time of the University Grants Committee visitation in 1961, Queen's College had in place a new frontage facing the Perth Road, the spectacular focal point of which was the first tower block in the city centre, an eleven-storey tower, opened by HM the Queen Mother. Designed by Sir Robert Matthew, the Tower contained facilities for teaching, administration, a staff club and a much-needed modern library. Many former students will

remember the tremendous feeling of space created by the high ceiling and mezzanine floor in the south-facing library reading room. The staff club at the top provided a fantastic view of Dundee and the river; today it is a café for staff and students. The first floor is the home of the purpose-built Lamb Gallery, a wonderful display space for the College's growing art collection.

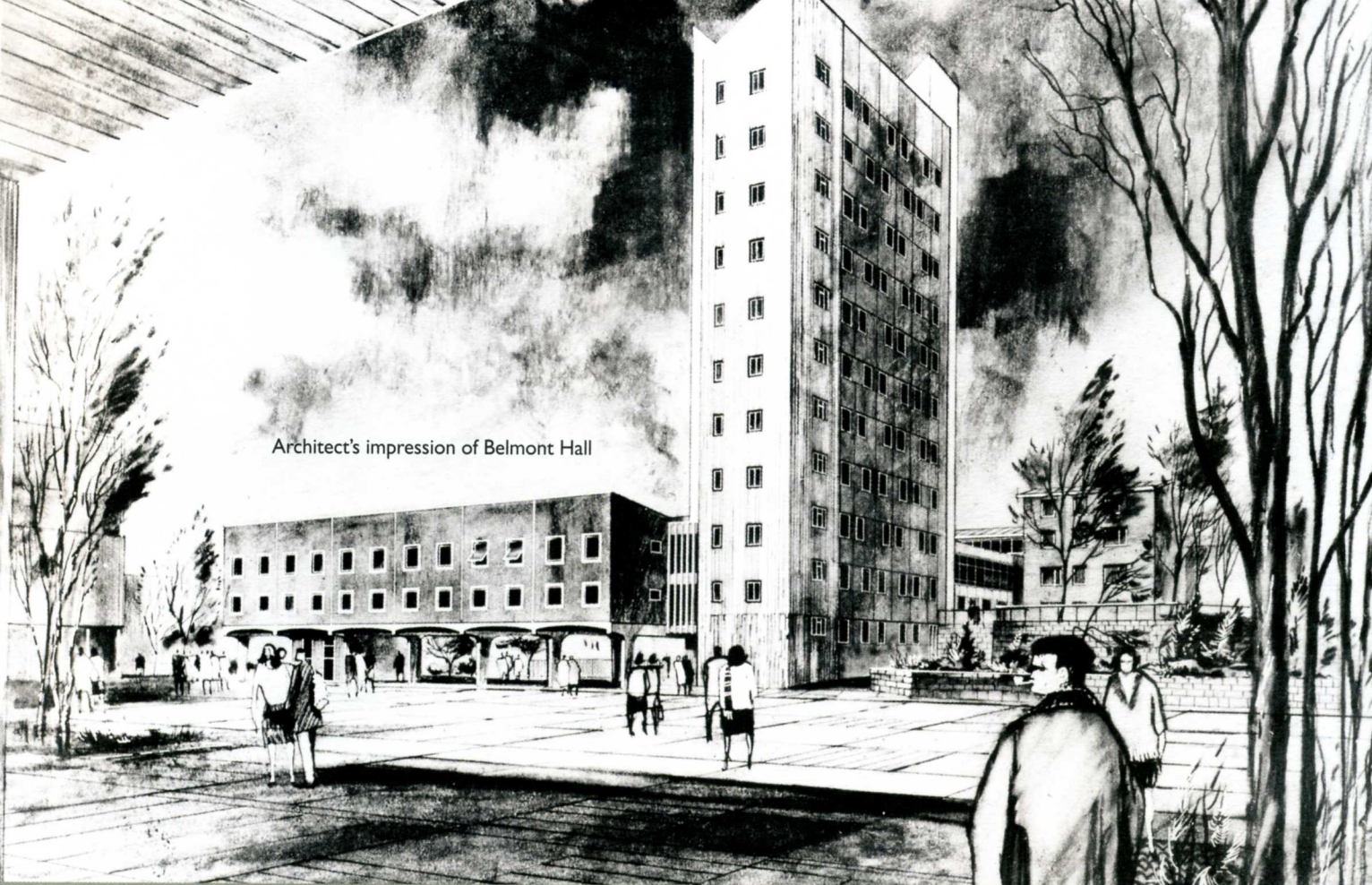
The explosion of new building continued. In 1963 the new Dental Hospital was started, 1964 saw stage I of the Fulton building opened and the Frankland Chemistry building continued this sequence the following year.



▲ The Three Towers: the Dental Hospital, the Tower and Belmont Hall, 1965. The Tay Road Bridge is under construction in the background.

▼ The Tower from the west, under construction and complete





Architect's impression of Belmont Hall

Student Accommodation

Opened in 1963, the first purpose-built hall of residence for Queen's College was Belmont, which was named after the jute works that originally occupied the site. It was at the time surrounded by some of the worst slums in Dundee. Designed by Gauldie, Hardie, Wright and Needham, it contained a refectory and other communal facilities for 300 students, together with study-bedrooms for 150. The residence was opened by Sir Keith Murray, past Chairman of the University Grants Committee.

By the mid-1960s the student population was in excess of 2000, with a resultant need for more student accommodation. In 1965 the old Royal British Hotel (today sadly lying unused) became another women's residence, named Chalmers Hall after James Chalmers, arguably the inventor of the adhesive postage stamp. In 1966 an extension to Belmont Hall opened. In addition to conversions in Airlie Place to extend Airlie Hall and an extension to West Park, blocks of self-catering flats for 232

students in units of 4-6 were built in 1967 to the south of Perth Road and named after the first principal, Peterson. In 1972 Wimberley Houses catered for an additional 217 students.

The University of Dundee

Although tensions had been mounting for some time, the move towards the separation of Dundee and St Andrews was finally triggered by the Report of the Robbins Committee on Higher Education in 1963, suggesting that there should now be seven or eight Scottish universities, with Glasgow and Edinburgh each having two. For Dundee to remain a junior relation of St Andrews was no longer thinkable.

Interestingly, on the occasion that Dundee University formally came into existence by Royal Charter on 1st August 1967, it was at Belmont Halls that the University flag was flown for the first time. Perhaps an even greater celebration from a student perspective took place in 1971, when the residence became mixed. By 1974 all other residences had followed suit.

In 1965 a public planning enquiry had established a precinct of sixty acres zoned for university development, an area that was deemed sufficiently large to accommodate future physical expansion.

Further Expansion

At this time the university was still concentrated essentially in the south-east corner of the precinct, but this was soon to change. 1967 saw the commencement of the construction of the large new Medical Sciences Institute in the north-west corner; and with the adjacent new Biological Sciences building being commenced in 1969 the two buildings delineated the western boundary of the precinct.

The next few years saw the opening of the new Dental Hospital; the Tower extension to the west; Steggall House; the new Biological Sciences building; and the planning of a new library, to be called "Baxter Library".

Student Association and Library

There remained a pressing need for a new Students' Association building, a new sports centre and a new University library. In 1969 it was decided to locate the Union on the south of the site, incorporating a swimming pool for staff and students. It opened in 1974 and is considered to be one of the most successful in the country.

By now the need for a new Library was acute, as the Tower facility had never been intended to handle the demands of an independent and expanding university. One early plan involved the demolition of three of the oldest buildings in the University: Carnelley, the Old Technical Institute and the Old Medical School. Another would have seen the Library sitting on Seabraes, south of the Perth Road.

However, in 1972 it was agreed that it should be located north of the Students' Union, and that it should be designed by Sir Basil Spence, Glover and Ferguson, who had recently designed the award-winning new Edinburgh University Library. Unfortunately, owing to financial constraints, it was to be many years before the plans were realized.

Bonar Hall

As early as 1967 there had been an ambition to create a complex of buildings to include an exhibition centre, an assembly hall and a theatre that could become a home for Dundee Repertory Theatre. By 1973 it was evident that the theatre would need to be a separate development, and the following year building commenced on what was to become Bonar Hall, opened by Sir Herbert Bonar whose family had long

been associated with education in Dundee.

Computing Centre & Scrymgeour Building

In 1975 the University purchased the buildings of the Dundee College of Education, following the relocation of the latter to West Ferry. The extensive accommodation thus acquired in Park Place included the Demonstration School, which was rapidly converted to suit the requirements of the Computing Centre, and the new DEC System 10 computer that was installed in 1977. The main building, renamed the Scrymgeour Building after Henry Scrymgeour the 18th century academic lawyer, was occupied by the Faculty of Law three years later.

▼ The Students' Union





▲ The Botanic Gardens

The Botanic Garden

Located about a mile west of the main campus, this site of about twenty acres started life in 1971 as a hay field containing only one sycamore, which can still be seen. Shortly before the retirement of Principal Drever in 1978, he named the Garden as one of the two University developments that had given him most satisfaction. Today the Garden, open to the public and enhanced by a multi-award winning Visitor Centre, is visited by more than 80,000 people every year and holds in excess of 5,000 plant varieties from all parts of the globe.

The End of the Beginning

This speed of change could not be maintained, and the thirty years to 1975 ended with a slowing down of physical expansion, perhaps reflecting the 1976 declaration by the University Court of a state of "extreme financial stringency of a recurrent nature".

Nevertheless, a huge expansion in new buildings and facilities and a successful direction of travel had been witnessed during this period: these provided solid foundations for future growth and exciting new opportunities for learning both of which are reflected in the international accolades of the present day.

Sources:

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