

8: GROWING EMINENCE: THE NATIONAL MUSEUM & LIBRARY

By the late 70s it had become the policy of the firm to be appointed, whenever possible, by the promoter, his agent or his architect rather than by builders; this necessitated a certain amount of canvassing and the following are two examples:-

To the Directors of the Provincial Bank of Ireland: 1/1/77.

Gentlemen, Having learned that you are about to have some Branch Offices built we beg to apply to you for the appointment of surveyors to prepare the quantities for the proposed works. Our Mr Patterson had the pleasure of acting as surveyor to your Company in the very heavy disputed account in connection with the erection of your Dublin offices and we have reason to believe that he did so to the satisfaction of the Directors. He was subsequently employed by your Directors to prepare the quantities for your Branch office in Dungannon.

This may have been little more than a formality because they were appointed almost immediately for the branch at Bandon for which the quantities were issued in February, followed by Sligo in August, T. N. Deane was the architect in both cases and the accepted tenders were: Bandon £2,535, Sligo £4,019.

To Colonel McKerlie RE., CB., Chairman Board of Public Works, Dublin. 14/5/82

Hoping that your Board will appoint a surveyor to watch their interests during the preparation of quantities for the new Science and Art Building, I take the liberty of enclosing a letter I have this day received from Lord Justice Fitzgibbon with whom I have had many professional dealings as mentioned in his Lordship's letter. Not having ever had the honour of meeting you personally I have thought it desirable to supplement our application to your Board by some such letter of introduction.

Direct engagement by the building owner involved new responsibilities however; for instance Kempster had to reassure a client who had not previously employed a surveyor by sending him a rather rashly worded letter on 31st August 1878

We hereby promise and agree to give our best endeavours to get out the bills of

*Provincial Bank of Ireland,
now the Post Office,
Bandon, Co. Cork.*
Photo: Tina Murphy



quantities in a fortnight after we get the drawings and specification in a complete and perfect state from the architects and we agree to keep you indemnified against any claim that may be made against you by the contractor for the work on the ground of inaccuracy in the quantities for the work prepared by us.

The drawing arrived two days later but, due to what Kempster described in a letter to the architect, John McCurdy, as *the irregular outline of the buildings, their extent and varied character as well as the numerous questions that have arisen*, the last section of the bills was not sent to the builders until 25th October, almost five weeks after receipt of drawings. The result was a dissatisfied client, an architect annoyed at being hounded for answers to queries and a surveyor who has learned to avoid making promises, however well qualified, when he is not full control of procedures.

Fearing that his letter to Colonel McKerlie in May 1882 may have been lost or overlooked and having heard that approval for the new Museum project was imminent, Patterson wrote again in September 1882, this time to Mr Commissioner Roberts with whom he had now become acquainted:

As I understand that the Commissioner of Works will within the next few months require tenders for several buildings, some of considerable magnitude, I would be glad to know whether the Commissioners would favourably consider an application to appoint our firm to act as surveyors.

They did, but nothing happened for four months when Patterson was interviewed by the



*National Museum,
Kildare Street, Dublin.*
Photo: Bill Murphy

*National Museum of
Ireland, Majolica doorway.*
Photo: Ian Broad



Commissioner on 20th February 1833 for what was then called ‘ the new Science and Art Museum’ for which a long-delayed approval was about to be granted by Parliament. During the interview he was closely questioned on an accusation made by one of the Board members to the effect that the appointment of a surveyor by the Board would cause delay. He was apparently prevented at the time from dealing with this criticism of his profession generally and of the efficiency of his firm in particular, by the arrival in the room of the Board’s chief architect; he therefore found it necessary to send the following letter to Mr Commissioner Roberts on the same day.

When Mr Owen² came in today I was about to say that the apprehension of delay being caused by appointing a surveyor which has arisen in the minds of some of the Board, may have been caused by the surveyors appointed by the builders not always having the quantities ready in time to have their estimates in by the advertised dates and consequently having to extend the time for receiving the tenders, but we have never made quantities for any work [thus delayed except where the fault] does not lie against us, though we frequently hear complaints of such delays from both architects and builders. But I may safely say that none of the architects or builders for whom we are in the habit of doing work will accuse us of causing any such delays as we make a point of never undertaking to do any work within a given time if we are not confident that we can accomplish it and it is very seldom indeed that we fail to do so, and then only when unforeseen difficulties in the work crop up.

I cannot see that the working of the suggestion that I have made would cause more delay than the ordinary system, [the builder’s] surveyor is just as liable, or more so, to cause delay as a surveyor appointed by the Board whose manifest interest, as well as duty, it must be do so everything in his power to meet the requirements of the Board.

² Chief Surveyor i.e. architect, to the Board

I can only say that if the Board put any of their works in our hands we will give no cause for the complaints that are anticipated [as] either I or Mr Kempster would at once and continuously apply ourselves to it until it would be completed.

His canvass was successful but initially only to assist those appointed to judge the open architectural competition by means of which the architect for these, the most important public buildings to be erected in Dublin during the 19th century, was to be chosen. One of the conditions of the competition was that the cost of the proposals must not exceed £110,000.

The preliminary result of the competition, for which more than 50 entries (of which 35 were from Ireland), were received, was given in the issue of *The Irish Builder* dated 15th April 1884. Entries from the following five competitors were selected to develop their designs to the next stage:

Messrs Holmes & Hornblower, Liverpool

Mr James Williams, Bangor, North Wales

Messrs T. N. Deane & Son, Dublin

Messrs Millar & Symes, Dublin

Mr Thomas Drew, Dublin

Standard practice at that time demanded that each entry for architectural competitions be submitted under a *nom-de-plume*, called a ‘motto’ and Deane, whose motto was ‘*Crom-a-Boo*’, was declared the winner at the end of June ’84. Patterson wrote to him on 24th June on the subject of the Museum job:–

I have been greatly surprised this morning to hear that the document which I gave you for your private information on yesterday and which contained details of my calculations ...had been “mis-laid” and, as I think it highly objectionable that this document would be made known to anyone else than yourself I trust that you will endeavour to recover it and treat its contents as a private communication as it was intended to be.

The Irish Builder dated 15th July 1884 carried the following editorial comment

The unwarrantable delay that has taken place in the matter of the buildings in Kildare Street led to some sharp questions in the House of Commons on Thursday last. It appears that the design of Mr T. N. Deane cannot, according to estimates made by surveyors both here and in London, be carried out for less than something like £1,000 over the amount voted by Parliament.

In fact the approximate estimate for Deane’s premiated entry was reported to be £140,000, £30,000 over the stated limit, but there is no evidence of Patterson having prepared one although it is difficult to believe that he did not do so.

On the 1st August 1884 Patterson wrote to the Secretary to the Commissioners of