

# Evening Echo

## Architecture has a role... much bigger than you'd imagine

A FASCINATING touring exhibition about the modernisation of Ireland between 1916-2016 and the role of architecture in this transformation runs at St Peter's Commemorative Centre until October 1.

The exhibition, which covers everything from the introduction of electricity to health, transportation, television, aviation, education, telecommunications, motorways and data, is curated by John McLaughlin, an architect and senior lecturer at the Cork Centre for Architectural Education at UCC, and Gary Boyd, a reader in architecture at Queen's University, Belfast and director of the Masters of Architecture programme.

The exhibition, 'Making Ireland Modern' is an expansion on the Infra-Eireann exhibition which was Ireland's representation at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2014.

'Making Ireland Modern', which was shown at this year's Galway Arts Festival and will be going to Dublin after its stint in Cork, is aimed at a broad Irish audience.

As McLaughlin said: "Architecture is part of a much bigger network. For example, in the first half of the 20th century, Ireland had one of the worst TB problems in the world. A minister in the government, Noel Browne, who had had TB himself and lost family members to the disease, decided that he was going to make it his mission to do something about it.

"When he was Minister for Health, a series of sanatoria was built to treat TB, including Sarsfields Court in Cork. This was before penicillin. The thinking at the time was that the health of people with TB would improve with fresh air and green spaces to go walking in. Rich people with TB would go to places like the mountains in Switzerland to recover.

"The Irish government rolled out its programme for ordinary people. We looked at one sanatorium in Galway (Galway Regional Sanatorium at Merlin Park.) It was designed by an architect called Norman White." (His son, Alex, works as an architect in Cork.)

The government purchased a big house in Galway, originally built for wealthy landlords. It was turned into a curative place for people with TB.

New modern buildings were built on the site that were bright and ventilated. People would walk between the buildings and it was thought this would help them to recover.

"Also, devices were introduced which were considered very modern at the time. These included little incinerators around the buildings.

"It was realised that one way TB was spread was through contaminated tissues from

people coughing up phlegm. The incinerators were for used tissues."

McLaughlin says that in the 1940s in Ireland, "modern design through architecture and health tried to solve the huge medical problem of TB. While this helped to reduce the level of TB, the ultimate resolution was through antibiotics.

"The point we're trying to make is that architecture has a role in much bigger wider things than you'd imagine."

The exhibition, funded by the Arts Council and supported by the Government Policy on Architecture and the **Royal Institute of Architects** in Ireland, includes a number of artefacts — everyday objects that people will recognise.

"Dublin Transport Museum lent us some of the ticket machines used by bus conductors. I recognised them from when I used to get the bus to school as a kid.

"We're also showing a collection of cigarette cards made for Wills Players that show the construction of the Ardnacrusha power station in the 1920s.

"We're showing the stamps of the new State given to us by An Post. Immediately after independence in 1921, there were no stamps or coinage with an Irish identity. So the government commissioned some printers in London to print over British stamps. Instead of the head of the king, 'Saorstát Eireann (the Irish Free State) was on the stamps. They're collectors' items."

McLaughlin points out that the architecture of the GPO changed after independence.

"There used to be a big royal coat of arms along the front of the building. When it was rebuilt after the Rising and after independence, the coat of arms was not put back. So in the

exhibition, we'll show how buildings get altered."

While motorways are the work of engineers, McLaughlin says they're important in the evolution of Ireland.

"The construction of the M1 to Belfast in the context of the Good Friday Agreement is very much understood by people as being about reconnecting the two parts of the country. In the exhibition, we're trying to make the point that everyday things like roads, hospitals, post offices and schools show how that State used these things to change our lives. Architecture has a role in all that. It's not necessarily all about making iconic buildings. It's about making good buildings to improve people's lives."

The growth of the tech sector in Ireland is also a feature of the exhibition.

"One of the things we're showing is a new



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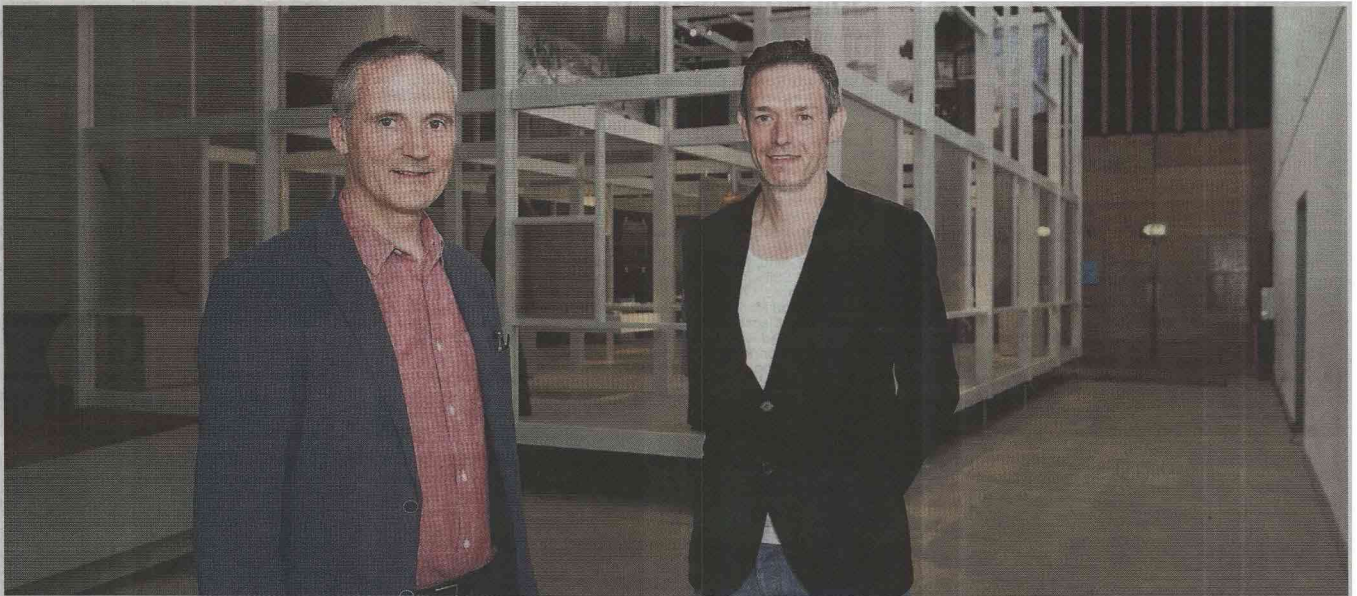
circuit board that Intel has brought out for what is called The Internet of Things. Called the Galileo board, it's going to be inside all of the embedded technology that's going to be embedded in our environment. In ten years, we'll all be using them. They will also be speaking to each other without us. Gradually, technology fills jobs in our human environment."

Are we potentially putting ourselves out of work? "No. I think we'll just do different jobs. Ireland has shifted from being an agricultural economy to a manufacturing one to providing services.

"The change isn't without consequences. But there has been a whole century of change that we want to look back on as a way of thinking about where we are today and where we're going in the future."

■ 'Making Ireland Modern' runs at St Peter's, on North Main Street, until October 1.

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DOCUMENTING CHANGE: Architects John McLaughlin and Gary Boyd, co-curators of Making Ireland Modern.