

our BELFAST

An exhibition of children's experiences of iconic buildings in Belfast

What are the icons of Belfast?

While you ponder on that question here are some suggestions: the Grand Opera House, City Hall, the Crown Bar, Cave Hill, the Albert Clock and the Big Fish. There are buildings within this city which to different people really epitomise the place of Belfast – they are buildings, which have meaning and importance to the life of the city and the place that is Northern Ireland...BUT we all think that we know and understand these buildings – we expect that most people see and understand them in the same way that we do ourselves...

Whether or not we realise it, we often classify children's behaviour within the built environment as childish and immature. However, research has shown that this behaviour is often merely the means by which children are investigating and learning to understand their environment. In addition to this, it is also clear that children's perceptions and understanding of space are different to those of their grown-up counterparts and the design of space can have a huge impact on the behaviour, well-being and education of children.

A child uses all of his or her senses to understand a place whereas adults have learnt to rely predominantly on their sense of sight. Often we tell children to 'look – don't touch!' and in doing so perhaps we are stifling their own way of learning. Ultimately, children experience buildings and their environment in a way that is different to the way in which we, as adults, see it. This exhibition is dedicated to looking at some of the iconic buildings of Belfast through the eyes of some of the children of this city in order for us to see with fresh eyes, just what these buildings offer.

“Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them.”

Extract from *The Little Prince*
Saint-Exebury, 1991

During the months of April and May 2007, PLACE, in conjunction with Dr Jenny Millar from the School of Architecture and Design at University of Ulster, conducted a series of workshops with local children, giving them the opportunity to view, at first hand, five of the key buildings within Belfast: the Grand Opera House, the Linen Hall Library, the Waterfront Hall, St George's Market, Belfast City Hall.

Each weekend, the children were given a tour of one of the buildings, giving them an insight into the history, structure and workings of each. They toured the building with cameras giving them the opportunity to take their own personal pictures of things and places that were important to them. After the tour, they came back to PLACE where they had the opportunity to spend some time talking about the building together and drawing, from memory, different parts that they found interesting or exciting.

Images below:
excitement during the workshops

Background image: Brendan, age 9



Jessica takes a break to say hello