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GRAPHIC STUDIO DUBLIN

Fine Art Printmakers

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Architectural Information: Distillery House

The plot of land bounded by Portland St, North Circular Road (originally Russell Place), Russell St and the Royal Canal comprises around seven acres. It was agricultural land on the border of the city in 1800, noted for its apple orchards. By 1816 a terrace of fine Georgian houses occupied the Russell St, NCR corner of the site (two of which still stand at the entrance to Distillery Court), as an extension of the housing developments around Mountjoy Sq. By 1845, Georgian development had come to a halt and a primary school, old men's asylum and artisan housing had been built. What is now called Distillery Court had developed on more or less the plan it occupies today. However, none of the business and street directories of the period make any mention of a distillery on the site and the title may be of later origin. Buildings stood in the positions now occupied by Malt House, Distillery House and the other structures around the Court. Their original function and character is currently unidentified.

In 1852 the developer Alex Findlater and relatives established Findlater's Mountjoy Brewery which occupied three and a half acres of land (half the block) between Russell St and Portland St and along the Canal bank but did not initially connect to the North Circular Road. The location was strategic as water could be drawn from the Royal Canal, the Vartry River and deep wells on the site. The Brewery was designed by an architect called Davidson and built by Edward P. Gribbon. The outer buildings were of granite and some still stand on both Portland and Russell Streets at the canal end. Other buildings within the Brewery were of brick, such as a Malt House. Mountjoy Brewery was the largest of the many small Dublin breweries with a capacity of about a quarter of Guinness Brewery at St James's Gate. Mountjoy Brewery was famous for its 'Nourishing Dublin Stout'.

The Brewery later expanded to the North Circular Road and as Findlaters were also involved in distilling at another location (the Trinity Tower on Pearse Street), they may have acquired Distillery Court some time after the 1850s. Distillery House is a two-phase building, the facade at Distillery Court being the original structure, possibly dating from the 1840s. It is a typical early 19thC industrial warehouse with loading bays on each floor. The extension towards Russell St (built by Findlaters?), visible externally and internally, has load-bearing brick walls on the NCR side but cast iron columns on the other. The latter have been in-filled with brickwork but were originally free-standing and probably fitted with timber ventilation louvers and the building used as the hop-drying store for the Brewery. Before its mid 20thC conversion the building had only three floors, a double height ground floor to contain the industrial machinery of the Brewery with the hop stores above on two floors. Further research is required to more fully understand the history of Distillery House which was acquired by Graphic Studio Dublin, Ireland's oldest fine art print studio, in 2007.

Brian Lalor, Artist and Graphic Studio Dublin Member.