

Architecture Within My Hometown:

The Royal Arcade

Context and Historical Background

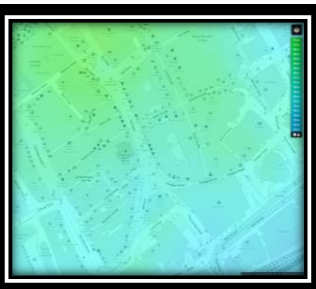
The Royal Arcade is a structural building best described as a collection of smaller buildings creating an internal avenue replicating the outside streets, with vintage shops, boutiques and general commercial-type buildings alongside the pedestrian pathway, (Windsor, 2023). It recreates an old-timey atmosphere that provides different types of feelings for the public; however, I would describe it as a space outside of time, maintaining a more authentic experience from the past. The reason I chose the Royal Arcade over the multiple other arcades that are arguably more beautiful is due to the history and authenticity of the Royal Arcade; it is the oldest arcade in Cardiff, opened in 1858 by an architect called Peter Price, hired by 'The Cardiff Arcade Company', (Mortimer, 2013). The style has an Italianate front and direct influence from Greek architecture additionally the internal storefronts boasted a more Victorian aesthetic which for some stores, has survived until today after 150 years, (Mary Ann Steane, 2004) (Mortimer, 2013). Before the arcade, cramped residential housing slums existed, created in response to a population boom in the mid-19th century, (Anon., n.d.). Additionally, there is evidence showing a remodelling in 1870 which improved the overall internal design, (Anon., n.d.), the images (Figure 4&5) show a comparison of the design differences from before the remodelling and the present design.

The Royal Arcade is located within Cardiff's central city, connecting St Mary Street to The Hayes in a northeast direction (shown in Figure 1). The Royal Arcade is located within a highly dense area within the city centre (Figure 1) that has high pedestrian traffic. The altitude level of the terrain remains consistently at around 18m, (Figure 2) which highlights the flat area of the city centre and by extension, the Royal Arcade.

The Royal Arcade entrance on the western facade comprises a three-storey section with decorations and layered arches throughout the window frames to the overhanging eaves and a slate roof. The central entrance of the ground floor comprises of two plate glass shop windows fronts, seeable from the outside on St Mary Street and from the inside of the Royal Arcade due to the western facades and internal facades showcasing its windows: (Anon., n.d.), (Figure 3).



(Figure 1 - Locality)



(Figure 2 – Elevation of terrain)



(Figure 3 – Arcade Front)



(Figure 4 – Before 1870s)



(Figure 5 - Present)

Plan and Section

Due to the Royal Arcade being a collection of stores sharing a singular public space, similar to that of a courtyard, I am going to analyse the general floor plan of the entire arcade (Figures 6&7), followed by an analysis of an example store' (from the royal arcade) floorplans and elevations (Figures 8&9). Additionally, due to the internal-looking outward design of the Royal Arcade, I will be using (Figure 8) as a section example, because the Royal Arcade is essentially a repeating storefront.

The general floorplan of the Royal Arcade shows a long singular pathway accessed from St Mary Street connecting to The Hayes; alongside this pathway exists various stores with very similar plot sizes additionally there's a connecting pathway to other arcades, like Morgans Arcade. The pathway size seems to be perfect for allowing people through and maintaining its atmospheric design to showcase various storefronts; there also seem to be a lot of connecting points between the arcades; alongside this, there are three exits onto the Hayes and two entrances into the arcades from St Mary Street; this design indicates thorough understanding of the circulation of pedestrians, in which the paths offer differing routes to allow people to separate and avoid high dense crowds. Furthermore, within the general floor plan design, the crossing path that connects the Royal Arcade to the Morgans Arcade continues further into an outside area which is likely the route and space that stock is brought into the arcade for the stores inside; (Figures 6&7).

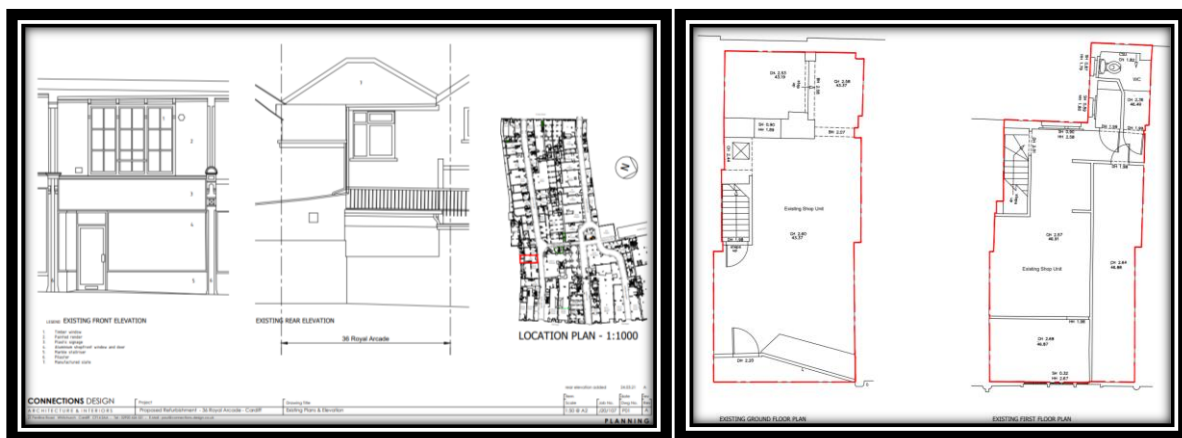


(Figure 6)



(Figure 7)

The Elevations and acting partial section (Figure 8) showcase the standard storefront design, the fact that the Royal Arcade consists of one-story stores with significantly large windows in proportion to the stores size and the use of pillar-like structures on the sides of the stores acting as a border. These pillars showcase Victorian influences, especially with the subtle transition of width of the pillars between the ground-floor and first-floor. The structures shape is also relatively dynamic with the front door being further back and the window on the side being at a sharp diagonal. The usage of large windows creates a feeling that the space is larger not only from inside the public area but also inside the stores; The high ceiling and pitched glass roofing on top of the first-floor definitely adds to the feeling of space. Additionally, the asymmetrical front design was used to create a more dynamic pathway and focal points for pedestrians utilising the connecting stores to create interesting depth within the design. The floor plans within (figure 9) seem relatively restricted due to the bending aspect of the design which is required to follow alongside the pathway of the Arcade. However, besides that restriction there is ample space for a small to medium-size commercial store.



(Figure 8 – Example of Rear and Front Elevations, within the Royal Arcade)

(Figure 9 – Example of Store Floor Plans, Within the Royal Arcade)

Materials and Light

‘It is covered by a glass roof with fretted iron ribs, and large three-light windows to the upper floor. On the first floor are rusticated Venetian windows in moulded round-headed arches, with stringcourses at impost level across the front. Above these is a cornice, and on the second floor each end bay has paired round-headed windows with a foliated dripmould and roundel above, while the central bay had a paired segmental arch window’; (Anon., n.d.). There are significant amounts of light that access the Royal Arcade from the glass roofing and large entrances, additionally there are elevated lights for when it gets dark. The flooring seems to be stone slabs in unique shapes that creates an authentic feel to the existing atmosphere which transitions into a cleanly patterned hard flooring. Additionally, there is a combination of brickwork with wooden framing that overhangs the storefronts. Furthermore, the usage of metal is clear with the lighting and the bars within the glass roofing.

Usage

The Royal Arcade is used by the public and businesses, in which it provides shortcuts through the city, and showcases local businesses, additionally it creates a private atmosphere away from the busy streets like St Mary’ Street and with the café’s the overall space portrays tranquillity, with the surplus of light,

space and protection from the weather. I consider the arcade to be successful in the fact that it accomplishes numerous things at once and well.

Conclusion

I've learned how valuable it is to analyse existing buildings and design elements that I like in relation to the incorporation of such elements within my own design for the future. This task has provided me with practise of a skill that is clearly invaluable as an architect. In the future I think I would need to focus more on materiality due to that being a bit of a weak spot for me currently, as shown within this essay.

References

Anon., n.d. *history points*. [Online]

Available at: <https://historypoints.org/index.php?page=the-royal-arcade-cardiff#:~:text=The%20Cardiff%20Arcade%20Company%20bought,sidestep%20where%20the%20plots%20met.>

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Gonçalves, A., 2016. *Reinventing a Small, Worldly City The Cultural and Social Transformation of Cardiff*. 1st ed. s.l.:routledge.

Mary Ann Steane, K. S., 2004. *Environmental Diversity in Architecture*. s.l.:Routledge.

Mortimer, D., 2013. *Unofficial Cardiff*. s.l.:eBook Partnership.

Windsor, D., 2023. *Cardiff Travel Guide: A Comprehensive Guide to Cardiff, Wales*. s.l.:Interactive Media Licensing.

Figures 1: Shows Context and locality, google maps.

Figures 2: Shows elevation of contextual location via a topographic map, URL: <https://en-gb.topographic-map.com/map-dbt/Wales/?center=51.47844%2C-3.17756&zoom=17>

Figures 3: Façade on St Mary Street, Dominic Nelson, URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Arcade,_Cardiff#/media/File:Royal_Arcade,_St_Mary_Street_entrance,_Cardiff.jpg

Figures 4: Royal Arcade before 1870, URL: <https://historypoints.org/index.php?page=the-royal-arcade-cardiff#:~:text=The%20Cardiff%20Arcade%20Company%20bought,sidestep%20where%20the%20plots%20met.>

Figures 5: Royal Arcade presently, URL: <https://anarcadesproject.org/royal-arcade-cardiff/>

Figures 6: Tenant Plan, URL: <https://propertylinkassets.estategazette.com/images/20240304/2-118149887.pdf>

Figures 7: Government database general plan, URL: <https://cadw.gov.wales/advice-support/cof-cymru/search-cadw-records>

Figures 8: Rear and Front Elevations of store, URL:

https://docs.planning.org.uk/20220701/163/_CARDIFF_DCAPR_139724/vos5q79ezm37hh5y.pdf

Figures 9: Floorplan of Store, URL:

https://docs.planning.org.uk/20220701/163/_CARDIFF_DCAPR_139724/vos5q79ezm37hh5y.pdf