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MANCHESTER COURTS OF JUSTICE

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES.

The conception of combined Courts of Law originated during the war after the destruction of the Assize Courts in Strangeways by enemy action in 1940. It was proposed to combine all the various courts in the city in one group of new buildings which the City of Manchester Plan sited alongside the future City Centre Road with the main block as the terminal feature of a projected processional way centred on the Town Hall tower, formed by clearing the buildings between Queen Street and Brazenose Street and continued across Deansgate by the side of the Rylands Library.

When these new roads will be constructed is a matter for conjecture but the new Courts of Law in course of construction have been sited so that eventually they will take their place in a modified road plan which retains the main features of the war-time planning scheme.

This building to house the Assize Courts is the central and largest block in the group; eventually it will be flanked on the South-West side by another building to contain the Magistrates' Courts and on the North-East side by a building to accommodate the County Court and Coroner's Court. The present building occupies the area between Dolefield, Hardman Street, Gartside Street and Wood Street but it is anticipated that the ultimate site will extend from St. John's Place, on the South West to Bridge Street on the North East. The future City Centre Road will occupy the land between Gartside Street and Young Street and thus the new Law Courts and the completed College of Building will face each other across this projected thoroughfare. Pending the formation of the Processional Way, an open square will be created in front of the new Courts extending to Welsh Street.

The main central block is 289 ft. long and 124 ft. wide and rises to a height of 75 ft. The principal entrances are on Dolefield facing towards the Town Hall and on Gartside Street are a private entrance for the Judges and entrances for the legal profession and for jurors.

The two public entrances lead into halls containing automatic lifts and stairs to the upper floors and cloakrooms and give access to a range of rooms along the front of the building which include toilets for both sexes, and accommodation for witnesses and medical inspection, and a sick room and children's room. There is a large press room with telephone cubicles, also public telephones and a large tea room for the convenience of persons attending the Courts who do not wish to use the restaurant on the third floor, and a small bar. There is also a staff dining room, room for court officials, and other staff. In the heart of the building beneath the criminal courts are the cells for prisoners awaiting trial and suites of rooms for men and women prison officers, rooms for medical inspection and consultation and also interviewing cubicles and a relatives' waiting room. On the South West side there is a covered enclosure where prison vehicles can be unloaded in complete security.

Parallel to the Gartside Street front there is an internal service road off which there is a delivery bay and goods lift serving all the upper floors. The rooms fronting the street comprise a suite of offices for the police, electricity sub-station, switch and battery rooms and cleaners' and porters' rooms. At the North East corner is the jurors' entrance with lift and stairs to the upper floors and the steward's office is adjacent. In the centre is the Judges' private entrance for use on other than ceremonial occasions, with a room for their attendants and lift and stairs to the Judges' suite of rooms on the floors above. At the South West corner is the Barristers' and Solicitors' entrance also with lift and stairs to the professional suites on the upper floors.

Beneath the ground floor is an extensive basement over the whole of the site. The considerable excavation involved and the heavy retaining walls which enclose it were rendered necessary by the nature of the ground, in order to reach a satisfactory foundation and also to provide the very large spaces required to house the thermal electric storage heating plant, and the elaborate ventilation and air conditioning plant as well as the engineers' rooms, strong rooms, storage and the lift machinery which is placed in the basement in order to avoid ugly excrescences above the flat roof. Provision has been made for subway connection to the future Magistrates' Courts block and County Court and Coroner's Block from the lift and stair halls on the Dolefield frontage.

Pending the formation of the City Centre Road, the forecourt on the Gartside Street side will be considerably restricted but the Dolefield frontage will be approached from a forecourt 60 ft. wide with lawns and flower beds; one of the piers flanking the central approach contains the commemorative stone laid by Lord Goddard before excavation work started. In the centre is a broad flight of steps leading up to the ceremonial entrance on the first floor. Beneath these steps are secondary entrances for spectators, and the opportunity has been taken to arrange in an alcove several remnants from the Strangeways Assize Courts, including the tablet commemorating their opening in 1864, the famous carved capitals depicting punishments inflicted upon wrongdoers and certain carved stone figures, and heads of sovereigns and other notabilities.

The first floor is the principal floor where are situated the three criminal courts and three civil courts on either side of the central axis. The court adjacent to the South West end of the building is occupied by the Recorder's Court and that at the opposite end is the Chancery Court; both these Courts are fitted with double glazing in the interests of sound insulation. On either side of the processional corridor are the two largest courts, one for criminal cases and the other a civil court; they adjoin smaller courts for the same purposes but provision has been made below so that the second civil court could be used as a criminal court by the erection of a demountable dock. The Courts are furnished in walnut with coloured hide seating and behind the Judge's chair is a feature in sycamore with incised and gilded Royal Arms. The four centre courts are top lit from large laylights.

All these courts are entered from the Great Hall 225 ft. long 22 ft. wide and 28 ft. high which extends the whole length of the elevation to Dolefield, with lift and stair halls at either end where the second floor halls afford views along the whole length of this concourse. The whole of the area between the structural piers on the external side is filled with polished plate glass; on the inner side are the entrances to the various courts and between them is fixed leather upholstered seating and a background of polished walnut knuckle bone strip panelling over an acoustical absorbent. Above door height there is a three dimensional fibrous plaster mural decoration designed by the late Kenneth Brayshaw, Dip.F.A.(London), M.S.I.A. which combines ornamental with acoustic functions; the ceiling will also be treated acoustically. The floor of the Great Hall

is in marble tiles in a decorative pattern; the piers between the windows are faced with polished Portland Stone. The central ceremonial entrance is emphasised by a triple-arched aluminium canopy supported on ornamental raking standards surmounted by gilded eagles from the civic badge. The wall above the doorway to the central processional corridor is faced in Shelly Reppon and Botticino marbles and the dominating feature is a large reproduction of the royal arms modelled in decorative plaster in full relief and full heraldic colours. On either side are smaller panels containing the coats of arms of Manchester, Salford, Lancashire County, Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Rochdale and Stockport, and the Duchy of Lancaster, the County of Cheshire and also the See of Manchester and the Manchester Law Society. The floor of the Great Hall is paved with Genoa and Perlato marbles.

In addition to the processional corridor there are corridors at each end which lead to the professional corridor at the rear of the courts which extends the whole length of the Gartside Street front between the two lift and stair halls and serves, in the centre, the Judge's suite, the Law Library and also the barristers' and Queen's Counsels' room, lady barristers' room, offices for the Clerk of Assize and his Assistant, the Associates' room, Associates' clerks and jurors' room.

Behind the Bench in each court there is a Judge's room and a jury room, both with toilet accommodation en suite. The Judges' rooms are accessible from the professional corridor but the jury rooms can only be entered from their respective courts and appropriate measures are taken to ensure that their discussions cannot be overheard. All the courts and the Judges' and jury rooms are fully air-conditioned, and are treated to provide the best possible acoustic conditions.

From the central corridor there are stairs to the witnesses' rooms and other rooms on the ground floor and also to the public galleries of the two largest courts.

The second floor extends along the Gartside Street frontage and the two ends of the building, the Great Hall on the Dolefield frontage extending through two floors. On this floor are the Crown Court offices, the offices of the Salford Hundred Court of Records, and in an enclosed suite in the centre of the Gartside Street front are the Judges' dining room and the High Sheriff's room and Under Sheriff's room, with serveries containing service lifts from the kitchens above. There are also rooms for barristers' clerks and solicitors' clerks, the solicitors' common room, office for the Chaplain and a suite of offices for prosecuting solicitors. The public galleries in the smaller criminal and civil courts are entered off the lift and stair halls at second floor level at the ends of the Dolefield frontage.

On the frontage at the third floor level are the barristers' lounge and dining room, a large public restaurant and a suite consisting of ante-room committee room and retiring room which could also be used for court purposes when required.

At the South West side are rooms for probation offices and shorthand writers.

The centre is occupied by kitchens and serveries with kitchen staff rooms; there is also an office for the law librarian and the telephone exchange and telephonists' rest room. The remainder of this floor is occupied by 29 consultation rooms.

The fourth floor extends over the central spine of the building and mainly houses the water tanks and the service lift machinery. On the Gartside Street side a stair from a small entrance hall on the floor below leads into the caretaker's flat which contains living room, dining room, kitchen and larder, 2 bedrooms, bath and W.C., a terraced forecourt and a small screened yard.

The building is of steel frame construction with reinforced concrete and hollow tile floors and roofs and reinforced concrete stairs. All steelwork is encased in a minimum of 2 inches thick concrete for fire resistance.

The external walls are of brick faced with Portland stone and Cornish de Lank granite, and there are Moss Green marble spandrills in certain window frames. The architectural treatment is designed to express the monumental character appropriate to the building without recourse to traditional detail. Marble panels in the end pavilions and above the Great Hall windows are decorated with incised Coats of Arms designed by Raymond Ashley, Des.R.C.A.

Heating is by embedded ceiling and floor panels; water heated by electrode boilers in off-peak periods is stored in insulated tanks and circulated by mechanical pumps, the temperature being thermostatically controlled. There is an extensive air-conditioning, refrigeration and ventilation plant and the building is fitted throughout with automatic fire alarms. Provision is made for the Dolefield facade to be floodlit.

The estimated cost of the building is over £1,200,000.

The new Courts of Law have been designed by and are being erected under the direction of Mr. Leonard C. Howitt, M.Arch.(L'pool), D.A.(Manc.), Dip.T.P., D.P.A., F.R.I.B.A., M.T.P.I., F.R.S.A., the City Architect.

- List of Main Contractors:
- R. Carlyle & Co.Ltd.,  
Elsinore Road, Manchester,16.
  - Redpath Brown & Co.Ltd.,  
Trafford Park, Manchester,17.
  - Kleine Co.Ltd.,  
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City Architect's Office,  
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