



## **History of Bewley's Hotel Ballsbridge**

The building is situated on the corner of Merrion Road and Simmonscourt Road in Dublin's exclusive area of Ballsbridge.

Originally built as the Masonic Female Orphan School, the foundation stone was laid by the Duke of Abercorn on St John's Day, June 25<sup>th</sup> 1880 "in the presence of a fashionable and extremely large assemblage." Two years after this foundation stone was laid, the construction of the new Masonic School was completed.

The M.F.O.S. was built by Messrs. Gahan and son according to the architectural plans of Messrs. McCurdy Mitchell. The work of Messrs. McCurdy and Mitchell is also linked to the construction carried out on the Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin, Trinity College, Dublin and the Zoological Gardens in Dublin's Phoenix Park. Set on a site of nearly ten acres, the new School, which included a library, dormitories, schoolrooms, recreation and dining areas, boasted some of the most advanced building and engineering techniques of the day. The school formed two sides of a quadrangle, and was entered beneath a tower at the corner. This tower was not merely ornamental but also contained all the works connected with the water supply of both the building and the bathrooms.

Inside, the rooms were airy and bright and the dormitories, with their adjoining lavatories, were cheerful, despite the military style order, cleanliness and sparsity. The dining hall was also functional but comfortable, heated by slow combustion stoves, as was the entrance hall. The kitchens were furnished with the most up-to-date appliances and the laundry area was positioned so as to be convenient but not intrusive. Recreational and exercise facilities for the orphans were also to the highest standard.

As far as was possible, the fittings and furniture for the school were manufactured and bought in Ireland. Built at a cost of £14,986.47 the new school would remain the home of the Charity for the next 90 years.

The beautiful terracotta fountain which stands in front of the main building was bequeathed to the school by a Mr Sawyer who was not a member of the Masonic Order. The hall to the left of the main building was built ten years after the construction of the school was completed and was used as an assembly hall for prayers and meetings.

The building was bought by the Royal Dublin Society in the early seventies and renamed Thomas Prior House after one of their founding members. It was bought by Burt Allen in the late eighties and converted to Bewley's Hotel over the last number of years.

In 2008 The Moran Hotel Group bought all Bewley's Hotels in the UK and Ireland. Work began straight way in restoring The Assembly Hall, now known as The Thomas Prior Hall. In September 2008 The Thomas Prior Hall was launched with the filming of the final episode of "The Apprentice" and has been an extremely popular venue due to its uniqueness ever since.