

Architectural Heritage Assessment



Patrick Dunne Architects Ltd.,
Rockingham,
Boyle,
Co. Roscommon

Architectural Heritage Assessment Clonsilla Old School House Site

May 2025
Ref Number 24014



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1 Introduction:

This report on the proposed masterplan for the site of the Old School House, Clonsilla, has been prepared to assess the building and its grounds for its special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest, taking cognisance of all features that merit mention or specific conservation.

Vacancy

Public concern for preservation

Past considerations for development

2 Purpose of this assessment:

This Architectural Heritage Assessment, prepared by Patrick Dunne Architects for Urban Agency Architects, forms part of a baseline report to inform the development of a masterplan for the Old School House Site. It is to be read in conjunction with the masterplan drawings and documents.

The report is submitted in the form recommended in "Architectural Heritage Protection - Guidelines for Planning Authorities" and is intended to provide sufficient documentation to assist the Planning Authority in making an informed decision on the potential impact on the protected structure and its setting by providing background information, analysis and supplementary photographic information. This report also contains recommendations based on a review of the proposals taking into account any mitigating measures that have been incorporated into the design during the course of the consultation process, the design as now proposed, the planning history and earlier alterations.

3 Core Data:

Building Address -	The Old Schoolhouse, Porterstown Road, Clonsilla, Dublin 15
Typological aspects -	An idiosyncratic three-story Victorian schoolhouse with combined boys and girls classrooms and accommodation for staff. Architectural style is pared back Victorian Tudor.
Coordinates -	705672, 738026 ITM Co-ordinates.
Local Authority -	Fingal County Council
Form of protection -	Fingal County Council Record of Protected Structures, ref no. 0700 "Former Clonsilla School".
Date -	1854
NIAH Survey Data -	Reg No: 11361001 Rating: Regional Categories of Special Interest: Architectural, Social Original Use: School Date: 1850 - 1855 Coordinates: 306063, 237823

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NIAH Description: *“Detached single-bay (three-bay deep) two-storey over raised basement national school, built 1853; opened 1854, on a rectangular plan with pair of single-bay single-storey lean-to projecting porches framing single-bay two-storey gabled projecting breakfront. Closed, 1963. Disused, 2000. ROOF: Pitched (gable-fronted) slate roof with ridge tiles, coping to gables on ogee kneelers, and cast-iron rainwater goods on saw tooth-detailed red brick header bond eaves with cast-iron downpipes. WALLS: Roughcast coursed rubble stone walls on rendered chamfered cushion course on roughcast base. OPENINGS: Square-headed window openings in tripartite arrangement with rendered surrounds having chamfered reveals framing timber casement windows. Square-headed window openings in tripartite arrangement (breakfront) with rendered surrounds having chamfered reveals framing timber casement windows. Pointed segmental-headed door openings approached by flights of five steps with rendered surrounds having chamfered reveals framing timber boarded doors. SITE: Set in unkempt grounds.”*

Building Address - Royal Canal. Ashtown to St. Catherines Park, Leixlip

Typological aspects - One of a pair of late 18th c. canals with associated bridges, lough gates, tow paths etc. serving Dublin

Local Authority - Fingal County Council

Form of protection - Fingal County Council Record of Protected Structures, ref no. “0944a” “Royal Canal”.

Date - Late 18th century.



4. Description and Photographic Survey

The building is a two-story over raised basement, mid- nineteenth century Victorian schoolhouse, generally retaining its original construction and features, though in a very poor state of conservation. It is detached, overall form is vertically emphasised. Pitched roof with slate finish; one brick chimneystack on the north side. Walls are brick and coursed rubble stone with decorative brick and plaster features. Primary (east) façade features a projecting, two-storey, gabled stairwell with two flanking single story entrance porches and access steps. External finishes are generally rough cast plaster with smooth plaster and brick features. Original form, construction and materials are extant though dilapidated. Interior layout is thought to be generally intact though dilapidated and vandalised.



East façade and approach. 2024

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Southeast corner. 2024



West façade. 2024

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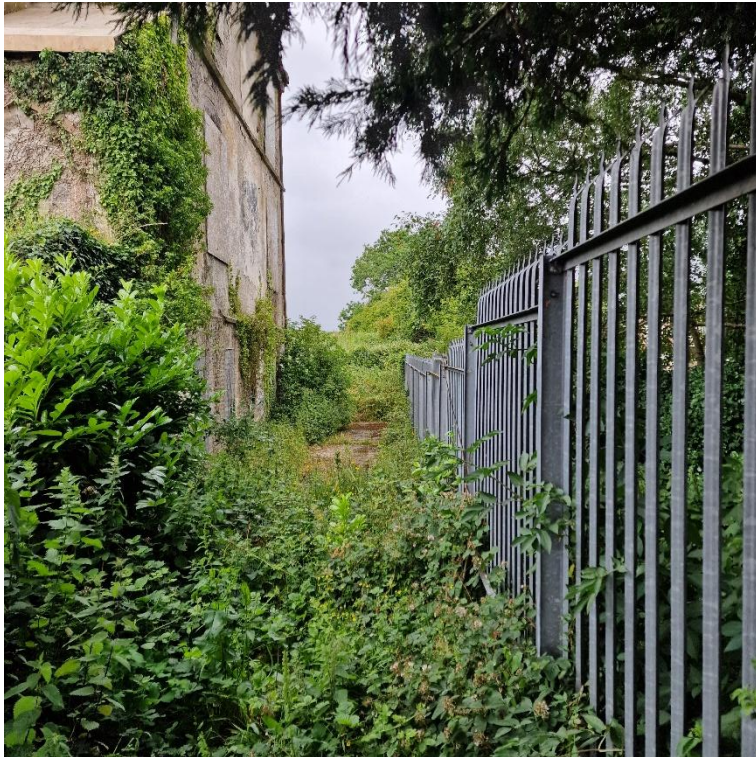
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North side of the schoolhouse. 2024



West façade and surrounding area. 2024

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5. History of Development:

The Clonsilla Old School House, also known as the Old Porterstown National School first opened on January 16, 1854. The school had 124 students, 66 girls and 58 boys. It was built by vintners James and Charles Kennedy. The school closed in 1963 when a new school was built nearby. It has been unused and neglected since this time or shortly after.

The building sits alongside the Royal Canal, built circa 1790. In 1845 the Midland Great Western Railway Company of Ireland bought the canal, using the banks of the canal to build the railway. The school was built after these, and little development happened in the following years nor into the 20th Century.

A number of applications were made in the 1990s proposing to build a residential dwelling on the grounds of the school, these were refused due to the 'highly sensitive landscape' surrounding the school. A proposal to develop residential apartments in the area was refused in 2021 for similar reasons. Part of the proposal was to develop the school *'to provide a management office with ancillary community use for residents'*.



Photograph courtesy of facebook.com/fingalculthralheritage

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2000 Photograph courtesy of buildingsofireland.ie

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6 Inch Colour (1829-34)

The school was not yet built at the time of the first edition 6 Inch mapping, surveyed between 1829 and 1834. The canal can be seen but the railway has not yet been built.

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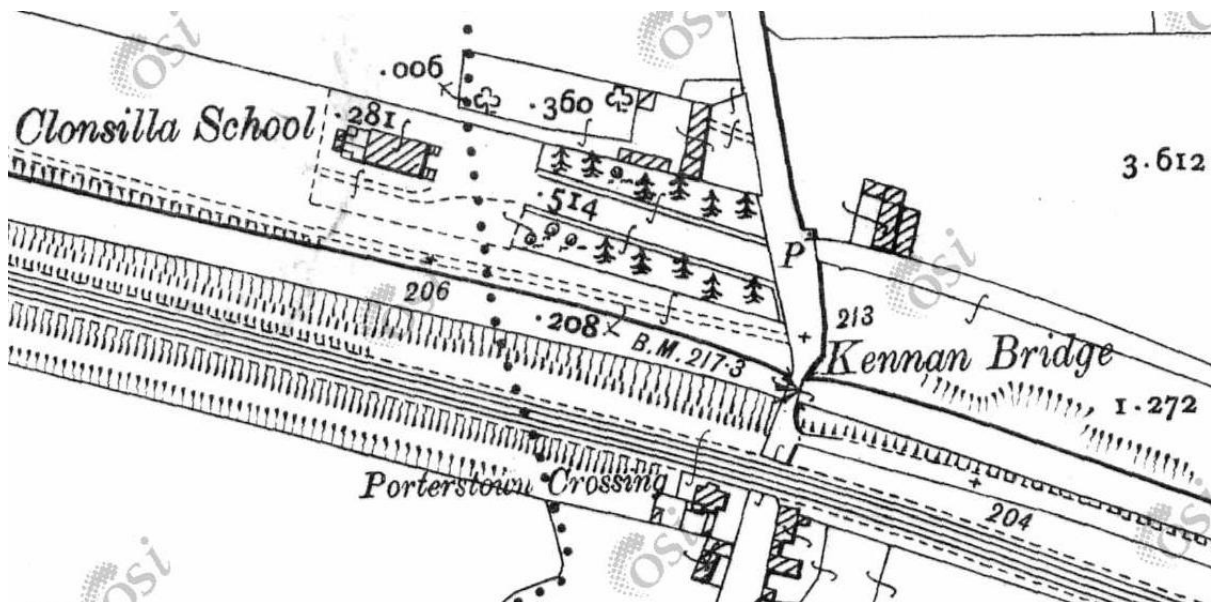
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25 Inch B&W (1863-1924)
School, railway and canal can be seen.



25 Inch B&W (1863-1924) Detail

The school was visible on the 25inch map, surveyed 1863-1924.
A short, tree-lined avenue can be seen leading up to the school to the East.
Outbuildings, a rear yard and pathway can be seen around the school.

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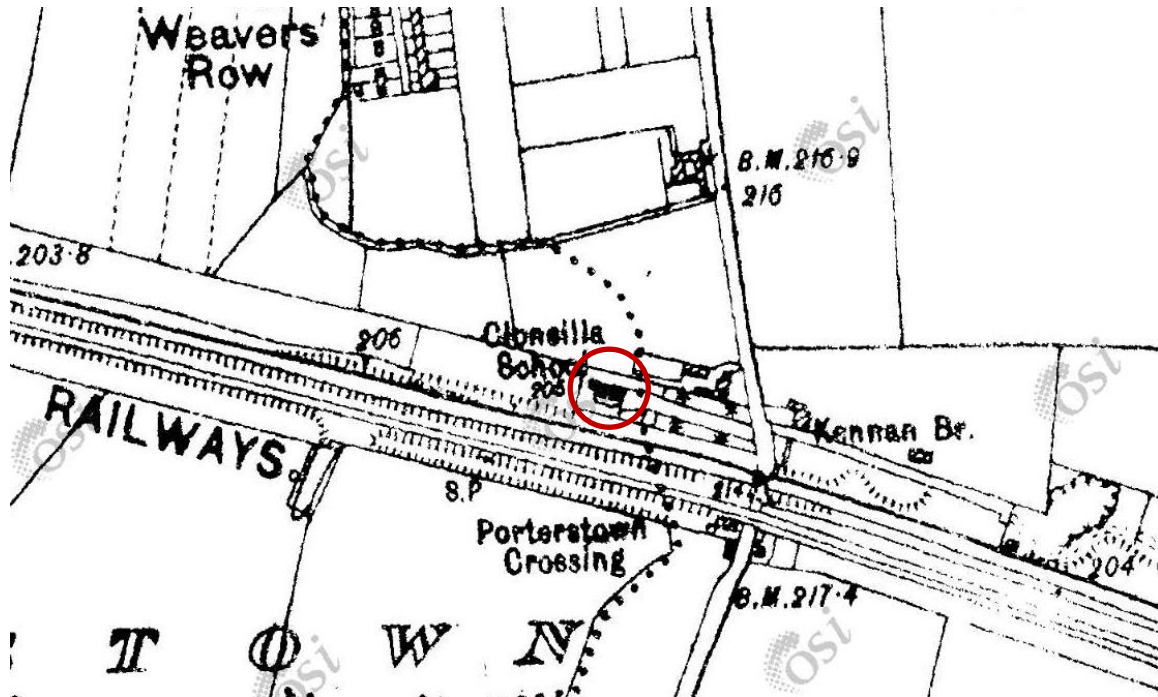
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6 Inch B&W (1830-1930)



1990s Aerial View

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1996 Planning Application - Refused

Ref. Number: F95A/0965

Planning application for dwelling house to the rear of the Old Schoolhouse.

Reason for refusal:

The proposed house would be visually intrusive, the Development Plan zoning for the area being '*to preserve and provide for open space and recreational amenities.*'

1997 Planning Application - Refused

Ref. Number: F97A/0316

An Bord Pleanála Ref. Number: PL.06.103117

Reason for refusal:

Inter alia, the proposal would "*impinge on the development of the adjacent stretch of the Royal Canal*"

2021 Planning Application - Refused

Ref. Number: SHDW/001/21

An Bord Pleanála Ref. Number: 309622.

The proposal, which was to be accessed from Porterstown Road, was to consist of the following:

1. The construction of a residential development of 198 no. Build to Rent apartments units (120 no. one beds, 59 no. two beds and 19 no. three beds) in 8 no. blocks, ranging in height from four/five to seven storeys in height.
2. internal/external refurbishment and alterations to the Former Clonsilla School to allow for its change of use and conversion to provide a management office with ancillary community use for residents.
3. the construction of 1 no. childcare facility located within the ground and first floor level of Block G.
4. 100 no. car parking spaces; 392 no. bicycle parking spaces; landscaping; a playground etc.

Reasons for refusal:

ABP

- Regarding the 'highly sensitive landscape', the scale and position of the blocks would alter the character of the location, have a negative impact on the Royal Canal and be contrary to the Development Plan Objectives.
- The granting of permission would be premature, pending completion of ecological assessments.



6. Current Context, Condition and Analysis:



Image courtesy of <https://www.youtube.com/@itsmyireland>

Site:

The old schoolhouse building is located within the 3.17-hectare master plan site, a long thin strip of land running east west. The site is bounded to the north by the residential outskirts of Clonsilla village. It is aligned to the Royal canal on its southern boundary, which is a protected structure (ref. 0944a). The old schoolhouse is located at the easternmost end of the site. The old schoolhouse building, canal and tow path establish the conservation and heritage context of the site.

The main landform of the site is a raised ridge of spoil material from the excavation of the canal. The schoolhouse sits on top of the ridge with a raised basement level approx. 7 meters above the water level of the canal.

The site is overgrown generally. The old schoolhouse is the only significant structure on the site, save for the bridges, towpath and structure of the canal. There is a notably overgrown and sylvan feel to the site with maturing trees, grasslands and associated wildlife.

The canal, tow path, and overgrown bank (part of the construction story of the canal) form a coherent entity with amenity potential. But they currently are undeveloped and unmanaged.

Old School House Building:

The building has been vacant for several decades, possible since shortly after it ceased use as a school in 1963 and is showing a severe and rapidly increasing pace of deterioration. While there are some protections in place in form of a steel fence surrounding the building, OSB shuttering on windows and on vulnerable sections of roof the building is currently not watertight or secure from vandalism.

Roof: The original slate roof is present but missing slates and showing deterioration. While the bulk of the roof is probably salvageable, splicing repairs to structural timbers, and re-slatting parts of the roof at a minimum, is likely required. Slipped and missing slates have exposed the vulnerable eaves which will have compromised the wall plate, end grain of rafters and likely the soft core of the walls below.

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The two monopitch roofs over the entrance porches on the east façade are covered in plywood, indicating deterioration of the original roof.

Chimney: The brick chimney on the northern side of the building is in good condition, needing removal of vegetation and expected routine repairs likely repointing, repairs to flashing and haunching etc., which have not been carried out in recent decades.

Walls: Generally, the coursed rubble stone walls are in a fair but deteriorating condition with structural repairs evident on the west facade, where further structural cracks require appraisal and repair. Water damage is accumulating from damage to roof and rainwater goods. Damage may be localised at present but the building needs urgent attention before the problems spread.

External wall finishes are of a roughcast lime render which has spalled extensively, but from which samples can be taken to specify an appropriate new render.

Rainwater goods: Original cast iron rainwater goods are still extant in some sections. Those which survive require extensive repair. Large sections of the roofs are without gutters, which, combined with the lack of overhanging eaves, are a concern.

Windows: Windows were extensively present up to approx. 2000. Window opes are currently blocked or boarded up, indicating that windows are not intact. Some window frames are observable, which may form templates for replacement windows.

Internally:

It has not yet been possible to access the interior of the building due to safety concerns. However, the interior was observed and recorded in early 2021 by Hanna Loughnane of Five-Seven Architects. It was noted at that time that suspended floors, floorboards, balustrades and some of the stairs are in extremely poor condition. Vandalism, fire damage and prolonged water ingress have taken an expected toll. It is assumed that the deterioration has continued since early 2021.

Services:

The building does not have any modern services. Fireplaces have been removed.

Royal Canal:

The site runs on the north side of the canal from Callaghan Bridge to Keenan Bridge, two original Victorian canal bridges. This structure is of national importance and has great potential as an amenity resource.

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“Cultural Heritage There are eight Protected Structures of architectural and historical interest within or adjoining the LAP boundary. These buildings and sites are included on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) owing to their contribution to various categories of special interest such as architectural; historical; archaeological; artistic; cultural; scientific; social; or technical.” - Kellystown Local Area Plan Adopted 11th January 2021 Appendix 3 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report.

7. Summary Assessment:

It is essential for any development of the site that the care of the old schoolhouse building be made a priority. The provision of a greenway and cycle link offers the opportunity to heighten the amenity cultural and community impact of the canal, bridges, tow lane, spoil mound, and the old schoolhouse. The combined value of these assets can add to the developing residential community immediately north of the site and within the wider Clonsilla area.

However, the old schoolhouse building is at the beginning of a process of rapid deterioration following the slow deterioration of at least five decades of neglect. Time is of the essence as these buildings do not wait around forever for care. Every month, and in particular every winter will lose more historic fabric.

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8. Recommendations & Conclusions:

The heritage assets of the canal, bridges, tow lane, spoil mound, and the old schoolhouse form a central cultural asset to the greater site, complemented by the natural asset of the flora, fauna and water of the canal. The structures are recognized with their protected structure status as regionally and nationally significant. The royal canal is recognized as a nationally significant Natural Heritage Area.

The canal needs standard routine maintenance of hardy Victorian limestone industrial structures.

The old schoolhouse building needs immediate and urgent action to stop the deterioration of the structure before it fully establishes a state of rapid deterioration.

Water ingress needs to be stopped by:

- repairing leaks at roofs,
- Carrying out permanent or temporary repairs to tie walls.
- Improving measures to prevent water ingress at windows. Plywood and OSB sheets are not present on all windows.

Structural stability of walls needs to be ensured by:

- preventing water ingress into the cores of the walls
- assessing tying requirements for external walls, which are likely needed since internal floors have been compromised.

The steel fencing in place around the building is a welcome short-term measure to maintain security and prevent vandalism.

Report prepared by:

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