

The Royal Canal

The Royal Canal is a national waterway, which links the River Liffey to the River Shannon. The first boats stopped at Clonsilla in 1799 and continued until 1961. At its peak (1830s), 46,000 people used the canal for transport. As the roads improved, the canals introduced “fly-boats”- instead of horses pulling boats at a walking pace, they would gallop down the towpath!

After the development of the railways, fewer people used the canal and it closed in 1961. In 1974, Ian Bath set up the Royal Canal Amenities Group (RCAG), in Coolmine. Over the next 30 years, the group worked to reopen the Royal Canal. The canal in Clonsilla reopened in the 1990s. Since 2010, you can again travel by water and by towpath, from Clonsilla, to the River Liffey and the River Shannon.

One of Ireland’s largest inland waterways disasters happened on the Royal Canal, between Porterstown and Clonsilla. On 25th November 1845, the boat to

Longford was 2 hours into its journey, when it hit the bank, at Porterstown. It rocked, then tipped the stern (rear) into deeper water. Crowding on board, plus bars on the window, made escape very difficult. In total, 15 people drowned, including 2 children.

Between Clonsilla and Castleknock is a very special section of canal. Called the Deep Sinking, the canal was blasted through the old Carpenterstown Quarries. The cost almost bankrupted the Royal Canal Company. Today, the Deep Sinking is unique along the Royal Canal. It is narrower than the rest of the canal, the towpath is up to 30 foot above the water and a tree canopy meets overhead. It has its own ecosystem and is a haven for wildlife.

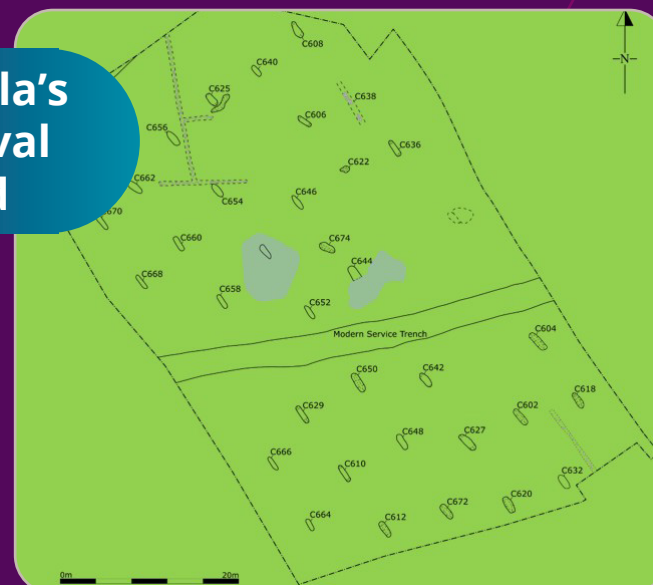
Deep Sinking, Royal Canal. Photo: Mossy Kinahan

Shackleton’s Garden

Originally a fruit and vegetable kitchen garden for Beechpark House, in the 1980s, David Shackleton transformed it into a walled garden, renowned for its plant specimens. The garden was so famous that people travelled from all over the world to visit it. Restored and reopened in 2017, by Fingal County Council, Shackleton’s Gardens is again famous for its rare plants and beautiful glasshouses. Maintained by FCC and supported by a dedicated group of volunteers, Shackleton’s Gardens is beautiful to visit in all seasons.

Shackleton’s Gardens. Photo: Christine Moore

Clonsilla’s Medieval Pitfield



In 2019, during the construction of St Joseph’s housing estate, an amazing archaeological discovery was made. Rows and rows of identical pits, 6 metres apart, extending out over an area of 80 metres x 50 metres. Each pit was 1.6m x 0.5m x 0.35m. Archaeologists dated the pits to the 1300s, established that they were man-made and that there would have been up to 100 pits in total. This is the first pitfield ever found in Dublin and there is still no definitive explanation for its construction.

Medieval Pit Field. Graphic: Archaeology Plan

Clonsilla Heritage Festival

Established in 2023, the heritage festival has been held each autumn. On a weekend in mid-September, across various venues, we celebrate the best of Clonsilla’s natural and built heritage, on land and on water!

Clonsilla Heritage Festival. Photos: Mary Greene and CPHS



<https://clonsillaheritage.ie>



Cover image: Clonsilla Signal Box. Photo: Sharon Campbell Shaw



Comhairle Contae
Fhine Gall
Fingal County
Council



Clonsilla Cluain Saileach

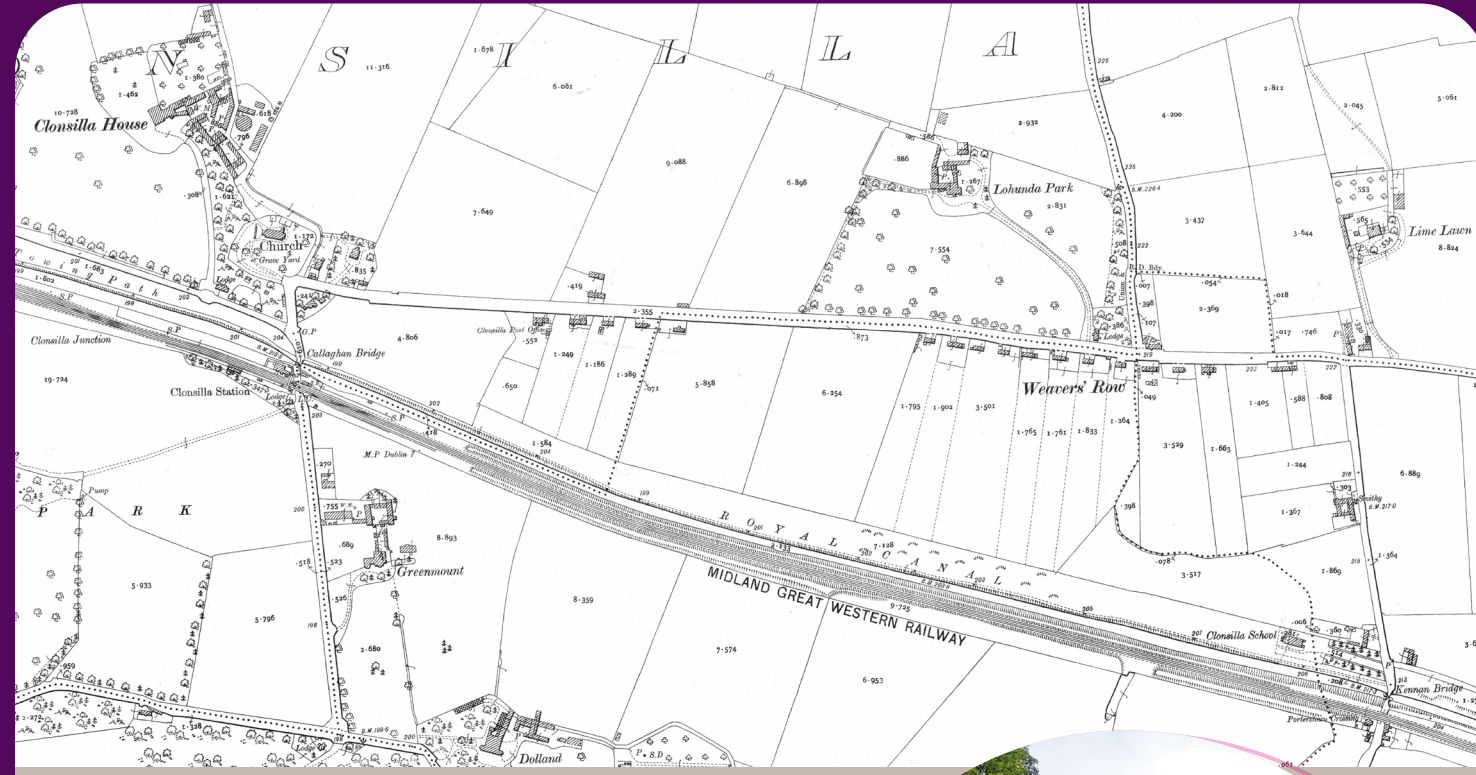


Introduction

Clonsilla means ‘**Meadow of the Sally (Willow) Tree**’. With origins in the early Christian period, Clonsilla formed part of an extensive Anglo-Norman landscape. The lands were granted to Geoffrey Luttrell, in 1210 and the Luttrells continued ownership until 1799.

The 1790s also saw the construction of the Royal Canal, linking the Liffey to the Shannon. This included the Deep Sinking, between Clonsilla and Castleknock, a very unique section. The historic towpath also forms part of The National Famine Way, a national walking route.

The 1800s brought the railways. It also saw the construction of big houses and stud farms. Many of these are now the site of local housing estates. While Clonsilla has undergone significant changes in recent years, there is still plenty of heritage to be found.



1860s Ordnance Survey Map© 2026/OSI_NMA-00

The Old Schoolhouse



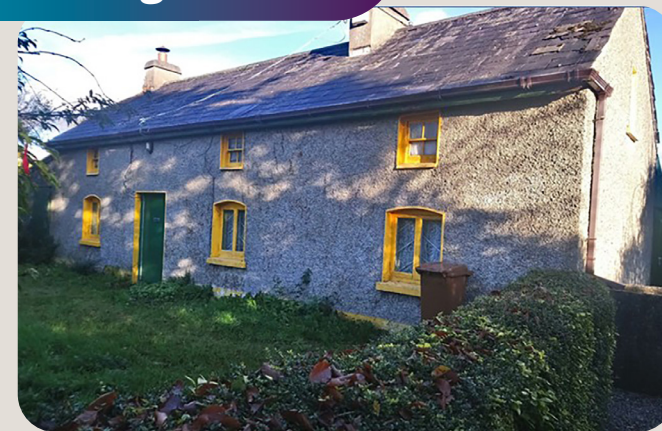
This School has been built by the parishioners
Fr Dungan (1854)

The Clonsilla National School served the Catholic children of Clonsilla for 109 years. Opened in 1854, it was built by local people in only 6 months. The distinctive Victorian gothic schoolhouse is 3 storeys high: the top floor, with a high vaulted ceiling, was for girls; the ground floor was for boys; and the basement comprised 2 self-contained apartments for the master and mistress.

Prior to this school, the Catholic children had been in Porterstown School - a mixed faith school under Protestant management. Tensions grew and the parish priest at the time, Fr Michael Dungan, removed the children from the Porterstown School, schooling them in the chapel, until the Clonsilla schoolhouse was ready. Many local people still have memories of attending the Old Schoolhouse, which closed in 1963. This iconic building is a Protected Structure of Regional Importance.

*Clonsilla National School (Old Schoolhouse).
Photo: Bernard Caldwell*

Keane's/Kane's Cottage



Opposite the Clonsilla Schoolhouse, beside the Royal Canal, is Keane's Cottage. The cottage forms part of a cluster of heritage structures, which comprise rural Porterstown. These include the Forge, Village Pump and Railway Worker's Cottage. A "storey-and-a-half building", Keane's has distinctive small yellow windows. An adjacent lime kiln, shown on old OSI maps, indicates a possible connection to the business of the canal. The cottage was in continuous use until 2016, but is now threatened by development.

Keane's Cottage. Photo CPHS.

The Railway



The Railway came to Clonsilla in the 1800s, with the Enfield (Maynooth) line opening in 1847 and the Navan (Dunboyne) line opening in 1862. The Midlands Great Western Railways (MGWR) purchased the Royal Canal and built the railway line alongside it. Clonsilla's level crossing is still operated manually by a big wheel, located in the historic Clonsilla Signal Box. It is in fact a replica, the original signal box having been burnt down, in 1923, by anti-treaty forces. Inside the station, there is a beautiful Victorian wrought iron footbridge. Originally located in Tralee, the footbridge was installed in Clonsilla Station in 1981.

Clonsilla Train Station. Photo: © Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

Luttrellstown Castle



Luttrellstown Castle contains over 800 years of history. King John of England granted Geoffrey Luttrell the lands, in 1210 and the Luttrells remained living in the castle for almost 600 years. Luke White bought Luttrellstown, for £90,000 in 1799 and his family remained there for 4 generations. Major Hamilton was the next owner, at the start of the 20th century. Then Aileen Guinness was given the castle as a wedding present! The newly wedded Mrs Plunket continued to live at the castle until 1983. Sold in "the auction of the century",

it was bought by billionaire Didier Primat and used as his holiday home! Finally, in 2006, it was bought by the present owners, JP McManus and John Magnier. Today, it remains one of the most prestigious luxury hotels in Ireland.

Luttrellstown Castle. Photo: CPHS

St Mary's Church & Graveyard



Built on the site of an earlier church, St Mary's dates from 1846. The bells date from the 1740s and were donated from St Werburgh's Church, Dublin. There are beautiful stained-glass windows by Evie Hone, EC Childs and Joshua Clarke (father of Harry). These were donated by Jeanie, Lady Bellew (formerly of Dolland House) and Capt. William Edward Holloway Steeds (WEHS) and his wife Agnes, of Clonsilla House.

There are many interesting graves in St Mary's Graveyard including:

- Luke White of Luttrellstown Castle.
- Catholic Archbishop Patrick Fitzsimons (1700s).
- Frances, Lady Newcomen of Sutton (d 1687).
- Judge William Wylie of Clonsilla House (who sentenced the 1916 leaders to death) and Agnes Mallin (widow of Michael Malin, leader in 1916)
- David Shackleton and family (of Shackleton Gardens).
- Honor Guinness, daughter of Lord Iveagh, buried with her husband Frank Svedjar
- Capt. WEHS and Agnes Steeds of Clonsilla House

The Luttrells' grave is (deliberately) less prominent. In the 1798 Rebellion, Henry Luttrell "The Traitor" (who was assassinated in 1717), was dug up and his skull was smashed.

St Mary's Church. Photo: Christine Moore