

Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment

Property:	No.2 St Mary's Lane/St Mary's Almshouse/Lees Lane Almshouse
Status:	Protected Structure No. B139
NIAH No.	12000129
Project:	Conversion to offices
Location:	Townland: Gardens (St John's Par.)
ACA	City Centre
NMS	Close to: 019-026115 - Church, Within zone of notification: KKKK019-051/026/096
Coordinates:	650581, 655912
Owner:	Kilkenny County Council
Planning Applications	04/990114

Date: Thursday 5 December 2019



Fig 1 View of Almshouses, the building subject to this report is the further half which is No.2.

1.0 Introduction

No.2 St Mary's Lane is situated in St Mary's churchyard in the centre of Kilkenny. There are two semi detached almshouses each of which was originally designed to house 6 women. Both buildings are in the ownership of Kilkenny County Council having been purchased from The Church of Ireland. The left hand almshouse, No.1 St Mary's Lane was occupied residentially until recently by a family who moved there in 1946. It is not the subject of this report. No.2 was refurbished from a state of dereliction around 2006 as two apartments. It is now proposed to be renovated by Kilkenny County Council as office space. This report accompanies a planning application for this change of use.

2.0 Short Description of the Structure

The building is a three bay, three storey, semi-detached almshouse with a central single bay breakfront to full height. It has replacement windows and doors and replacement natural slate roof. The walls are random rubble and would probably have been rendered originally. Inside there are three floors with two mirror image single rooms with limestone fireplaces on each level which are almost identical. Accessed from an original central limestone staircase with a wrought iron bannister. At ground level there is a kitchen off the right hand room which is a

later single storey addition, with a monument facing the the outside of the front wall. The interior of the building has been dry lined and all the doors and windows are replacement.

3.0 History of the Structure

St Mary's Almshouse was built in the early 19th century by the Rev Peter Roe who was at the time a curate at St Mary's Church. Funds were raised by subscription of 3d per week, by donations and charity sermons. It was originally established in 1803 in Lee's Lane, which is now Abbey Street, using an existing rented building as Lee's Lane Poor House. It was later moved to the new purpose built buildings in St Mary's Churchyard around 1820. It was established as the Peter Roe Trust for the relief of distressed widows.

The buildings appear to be shown first on the first OS map c.1839 (they do not appear on Roques map of Kilkenny (1758) where there are no buildings shown at that end of the churchyard). The layout of the building with six virtually identical rooms also supports the suggestion that it was purpose built as an almshouse.

At the same time, the other side of the River Nore Evan's Asylum was being built from the funds left by Joseph Evans who died in 1818. It is notable that the fireplaces in Evan's Home are similar to those in St Mary's, but Evan's seem cruder, possibly they were the prototypes for St Mary's.

The Eastern building which is the subject of this report was derelict in the 1980s, and discussions were apparently held with the corporation regarding the buildings in 1960s but came to nothing due to the complex ownership situation. The trust's deeds having been lost.

4.0 Drawings, Maps & Photographs

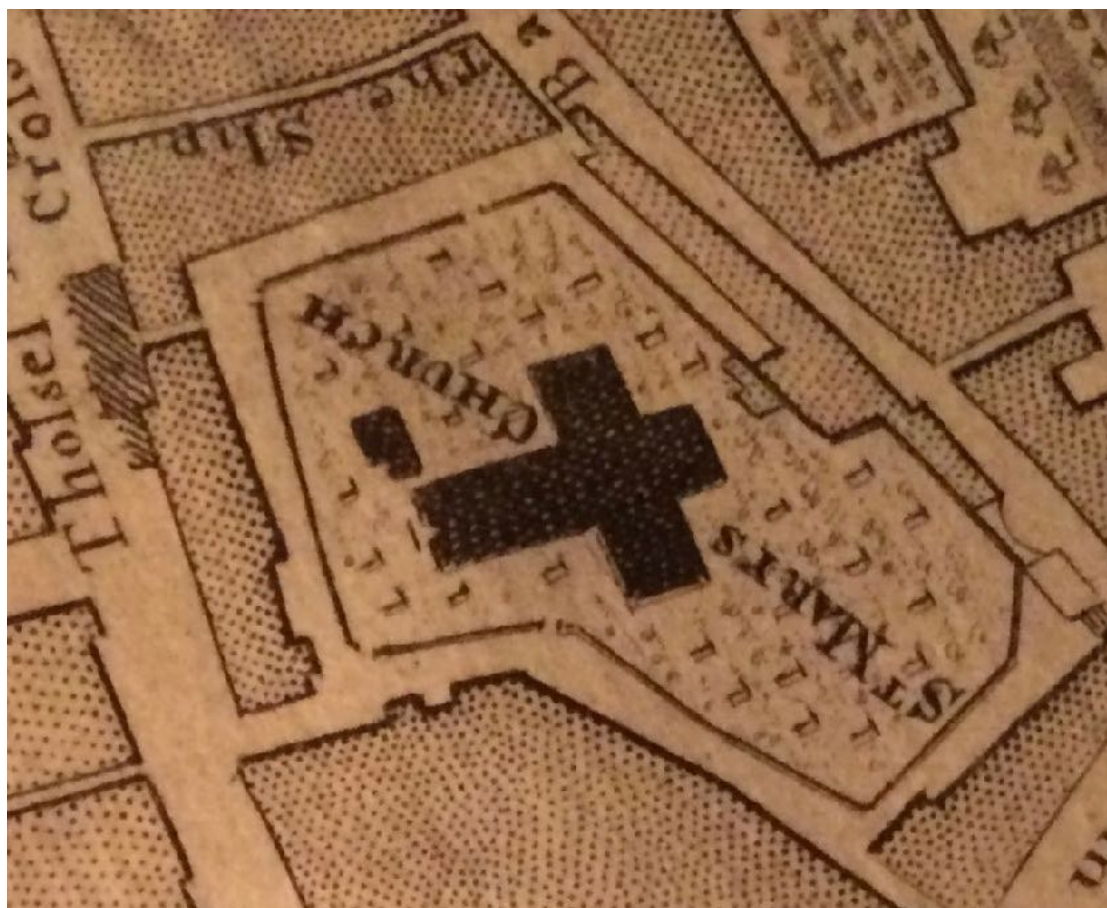


Fig 2 Extract from Roques map of Kilkenny 1758 where there are no buildings shown at the top of the churchyard.

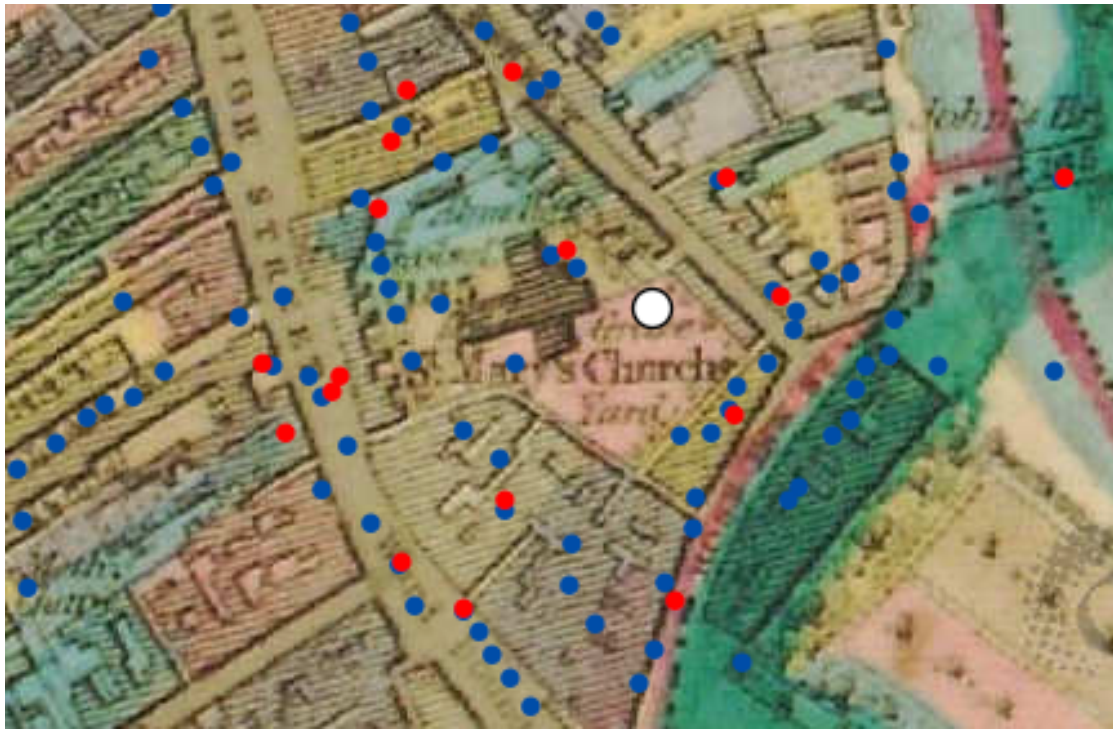


Fig 3 Detail of the first OS map c.1839 where a building appears on the site of the almshouse



Fig 4 Detail from the second OS map c.1900 where the buildings can be clearly seen

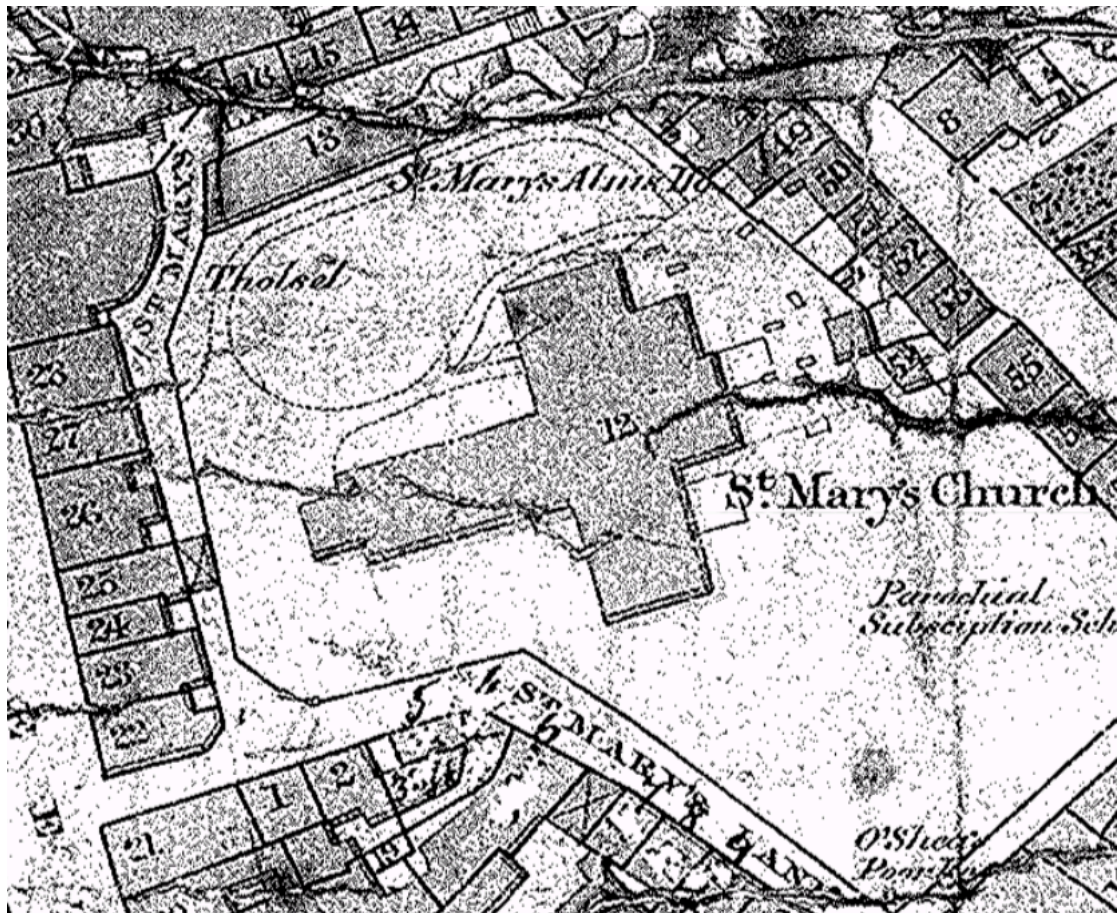


Fig 5 Detail from the Griffiths Valuation Map 1825-44 where the buildings are marked No. 13, labelled St Mary's Alms Ho., detailed as Almshouse in the description and valued as £17-10

5.0 Impact Assessment

The development proposes to use the building in a virtually unchanged state. Within the dry lined interior, in the ground floor existing kitchen area, the existing kitchen units and a shower room are being removed and two toilets inserted using existing drains and plumbing connections.

The removed kitchen units are being replaced into the adjacent room to make it a canteen. Another shower room and a press were removed from the second floor rooms. All of these rooms were stud partitions added around 2006 and of no historic significance.

The central staircase is original limestone cantilevered steps which has a stud box built up the centre to simplify the division of the building into two apartments in 2006 and to make the stairs safer. It is proposed to remove this block and replace it with an alternative solution such as a simple steel frame to carry a higher handrails and glass plates or similar to overcome the wide and irregular spacing of the iron spindles supporting the original low iron handrail. The proposed solution to be agreed with the Conservation Officer prior to any commissioning or installation.

Limestone fire places in the individual rooms to be retained without modification. Some of these have grates and cast iron surrounds. All have been fitted flue closers and vents and need no further intervention.

Replacement wiring and fire alarm were installed in 2006 so there will be no new impact from these services. The plumbing will be modified by only second fix, outside the dry lining and above the floor.

6.0 Discussion

The proposed development has minimal impact on the historic structure. The interior walls are already dry lined, covering or replacing any historic finishes. This is not proposed to be modified.

All the doors and windows are replacements and these are to be retained as they are. All services are existing and no substantial changes are proposed.

The box in the stairwell is to be removed, and an alternative solution to overcome safety issues proposed, the exact nature of this will need to be agreed with the Conservation Officer. The existing wrought iron handrail must be better displayed and not compromised with brackets supporting the new handrail. Opening up the stairwell will greatly improve the ambience in that area.

7.0 Recommendations & Conclusions

In the event of the Planning Consent being granted for the proposed development it is suggested that strict conservation principles should be applied throughout the intended works and in all aspects of workmanship that could have an impact on the historic structure. The methodology to be adopted should observe the recommendations contained in *Architectural Heritage Protection – guidelines for planning authorities (2004)*, published by the DoCH&G. The Building Regulations 1997 – 2017, as appropriate, should also be observed. Further, the works should use traditional materials where practical taking due regard of the status of the building, and should generally be carried out in accordance with good building conservation principles as stated in the ICOMOS Charters (1979-to date). The overall repair specification, at all times, should be the faithful replacement of what exists, or did exist, as is appropriate to good conservation practice, i.e; repair with like materials or replace *with what was – and in like manner* – where at all possible. Observation notes and a photographic record should be maintained throughout the project which should be Certified by a suitably qualified Conservation Consultant on completion.

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Fig 2 Example of limestone fireplace



Fig 3 Example of limestone fireplace with original grate and cast iron side panels



Fig 4 Detail of cast iron fireplace.



Fig 5 Limestone staircase with wrought iron stair rail. Timber additional handrail supported on stud box inserted in the stair well. The timber handrail and the stud box are proposed to be removed and replaced with a more open structure, possibly glass and steel. To be agreed with Conservation Officer.