

# MARINO CASINO

## ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION AREA ( ACA )



Adopted: 11-05-09

*Dublin City Council wishes to protect and enhance an important part of the former Marino demesne that lies to the north of Griffith Avenue in Dublin 3. This area surrounds the Marino Casino, an ornamental garden temple of international architectural importance completed in the mid-1770s to the designs of Sir William Chambers. To assist in the future management, protection and presentation of of the area which, in addition to the Casino, contains other historic structures of significance, an Architectural Conservation Area has been proposed. Howley Hayes Architects have been commissioned to prepare this report to support this designation.*

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The aim of an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) is to identify areas of special character and architectural interest and to preserve their special character. The goal is to provide a framework that will inform future development consistent with the proper maintenance and improvement of the essential character of the area. Policy H17 of Dublin City Council's Development Plan (2005 – 11) states that It is the policy of Dublin City Council to preserve and protect the special interest and character of architectural conservation areas.

It is an objective of Dublin City Council to identify and designate at least eight new ACA's during the period of the current plan. The ACA at Marino is not typical of other designated ACA's. What remains of the landscape in and around the Marino Casino, is fragmentary and

fragmentary and much-altered from its original form. Despite these changes the establishment of an ACA is fully justified by the architectural importance and cultural significance of the Casino, which is both a national monument and a protected structure, together with the other protected structures in the area.

As part of an initiative to retain the setting and to protect and enhance the character of this part of the former Marino Demesne, Dublin City Council is proposing to designate this area as an ACA (see Fig. 2). This report will outline the history, significance and essential character of the former Marino Demesne. It will go on to describe how the area has been fragmented and compromised by various interventions over the years and the impact these have had on the character of the area. The report will also include proposals to restrict further development that would prove to be damaging to the setting of the principal historic buildings

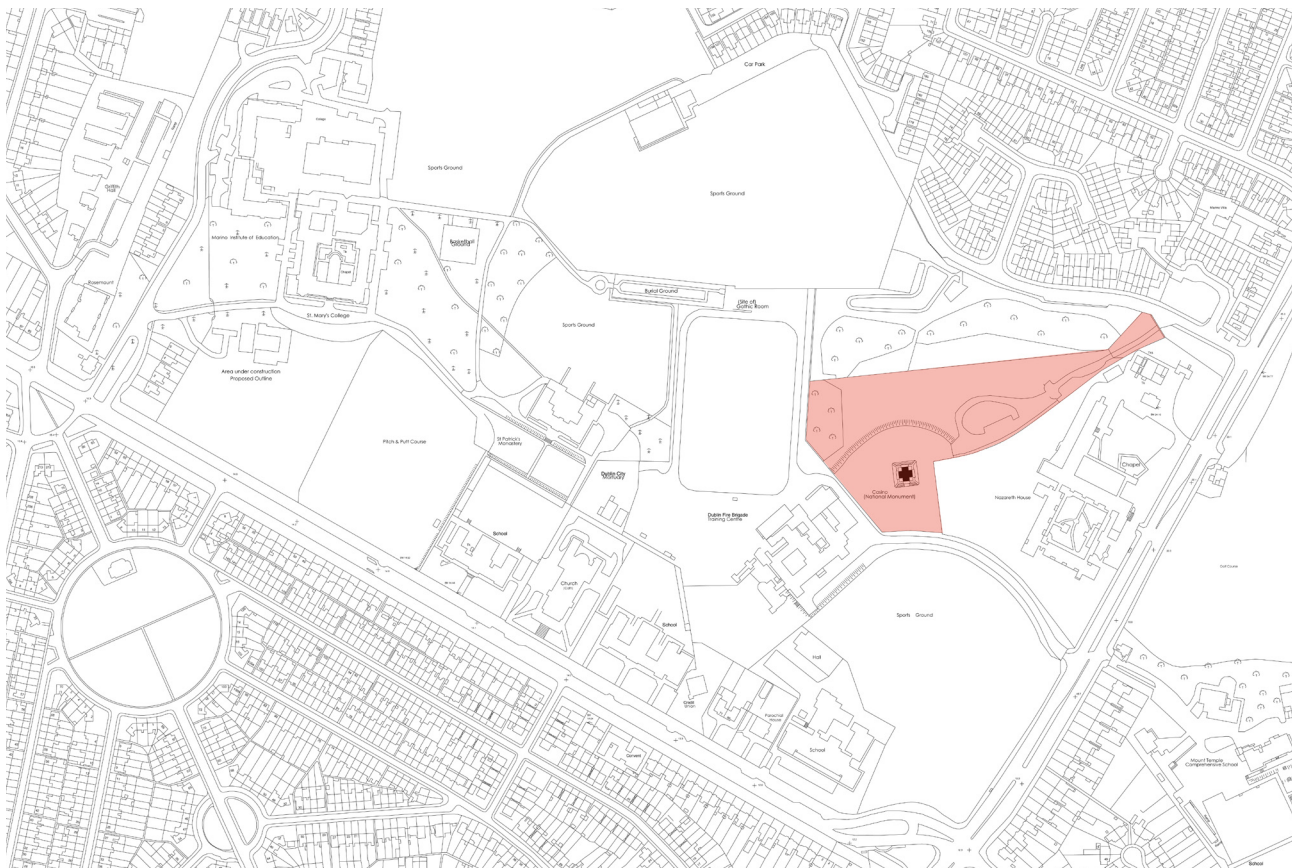


Fig.1: The current extent of the Marino Casino site highlighted in pink

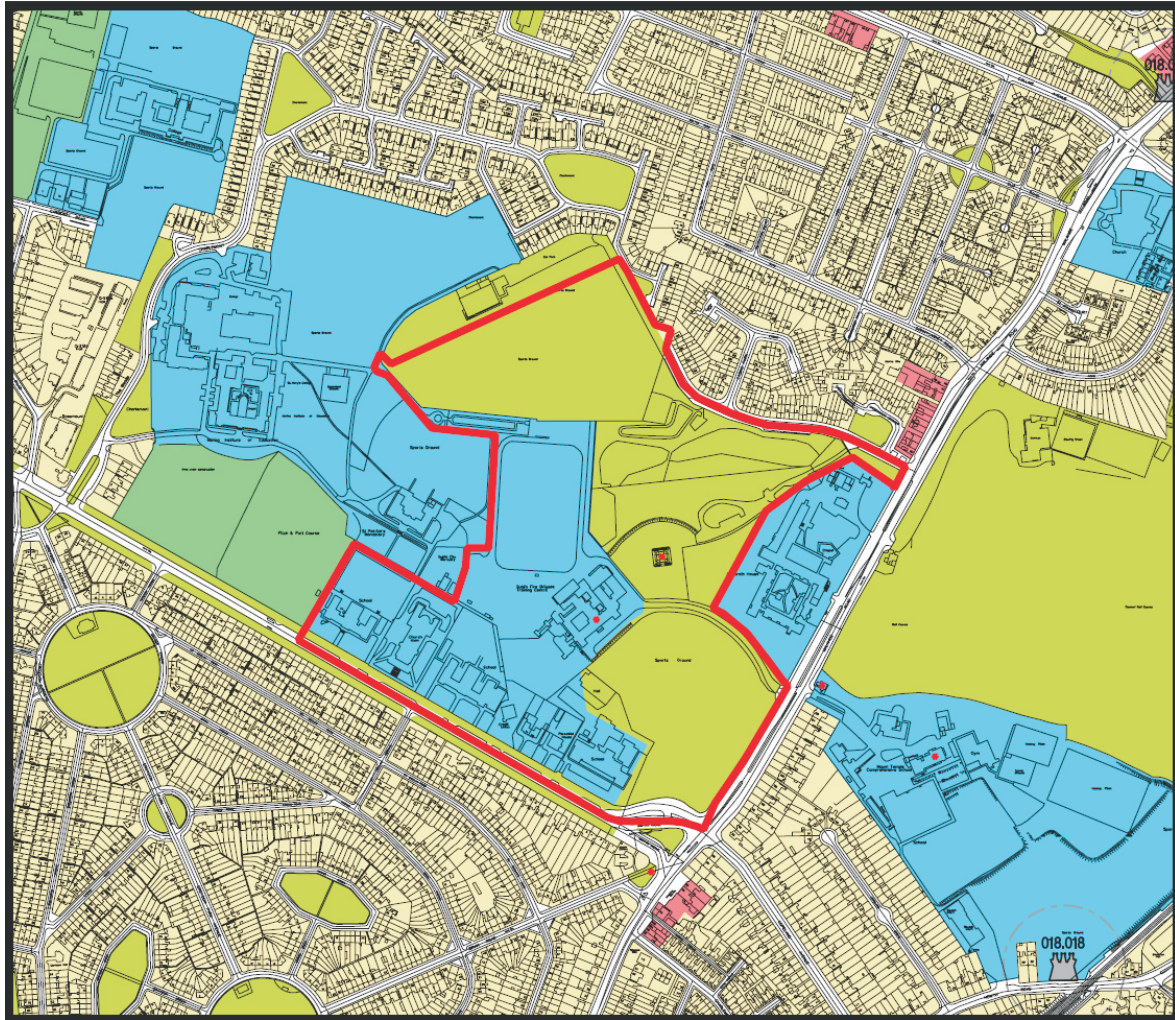


Fig.2: The Marino Casino outlined in Red

and structures within this part of the former demesne. Finally, it will set out a number of objectives to guide a long-term Conservation Plan to create an improved and more sensitive setting for these buildings.

Today, the former Marino Demesne bears little resemblance to its original form and extent. Having been encroached upon by inappropriately located nineteenth and twentieth-century development, only a limited number of

small pockets survive from the northern portion of the estate. These are located to the north-east of Dublin city centre, just north of the Marino garden suburb housing development of the 1920s. The area is bounded by the Malahide Road to the east, Griffith Avenue to the south, and later housing estates to the north.

Today, the principal access route to the Casino, is from the Malahide Road, north of the

## 2.0 HISTORY & SIGNIFICANCE

### James Caulfield, First Earl of Charlemont

The Marino Demesne was one of the most important designed landscapes ever to have been created in Ireland. It was laid out by James Caulfield, First Earl of Charlemont (1728-1799), during the second half of the eighteenth-century on what was then a coastal site a short distance to the north of the city of Dublin. Charlemont was a learned, well-travelled and patriotic man, who made a major contribution to the cultural and intellectual life of Dublin, through his architectural patronage and his role as founder of the Royal Irish Academy.



Fig.3: James Caulfield, First Earl of Charlemont

### The Marino Demesne

When first laid out, the southern tip of the Marino Demesne extended to the coast of Dublin Bay, from where the land rose steadily to the north affording splendid views over Dublin, the bay and the distant mountains. Marino House and the main neo-classical entrance gates lay to the south, on the Dublin side of the demesne, close to the sea. The more interesting part of his designed landscape containing: the Casino; an artificial lake; an extensive walled garden and various other

ornamental garden structures, was situated to the north-east of the demesne, where the views were at their most impressive.

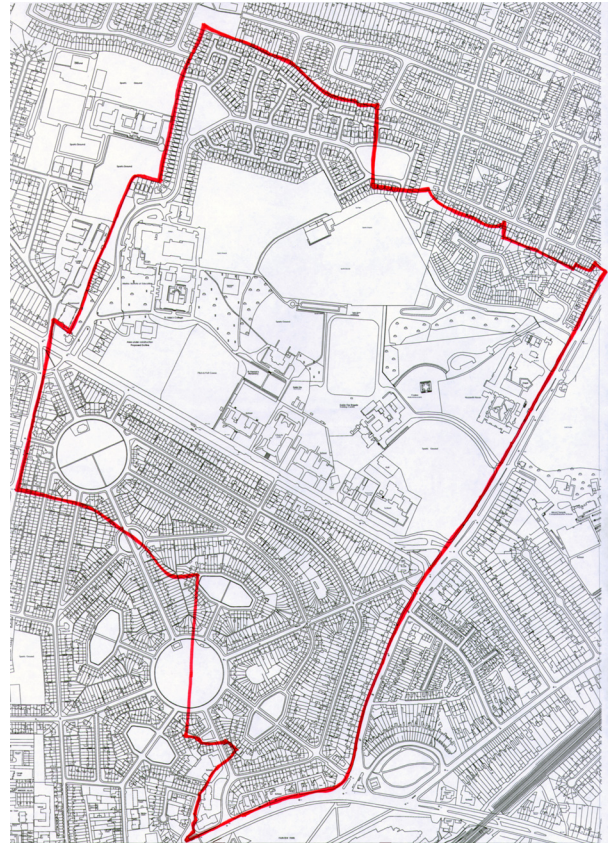


Fig.4: The original extent of the Marino demesne overlain on the current (2006) OS map

Formerly its principal asset, the proximity of the Marino Demesne to Dublin, in time, became its greatest threat. As the city expanded outward the result was the loss of large parts of the demesne. The parcel of land in the north-east corner of the demesne extending to approximately thirty-acres, which was held by Lord Charlemont on a lease of lives renewable forever, contains some surviving elements of the original historic demesne. It is within this area that the principal features of Charlemont's designed landscape were concentrated, of which the Casino is the most significant and best preserved structure.

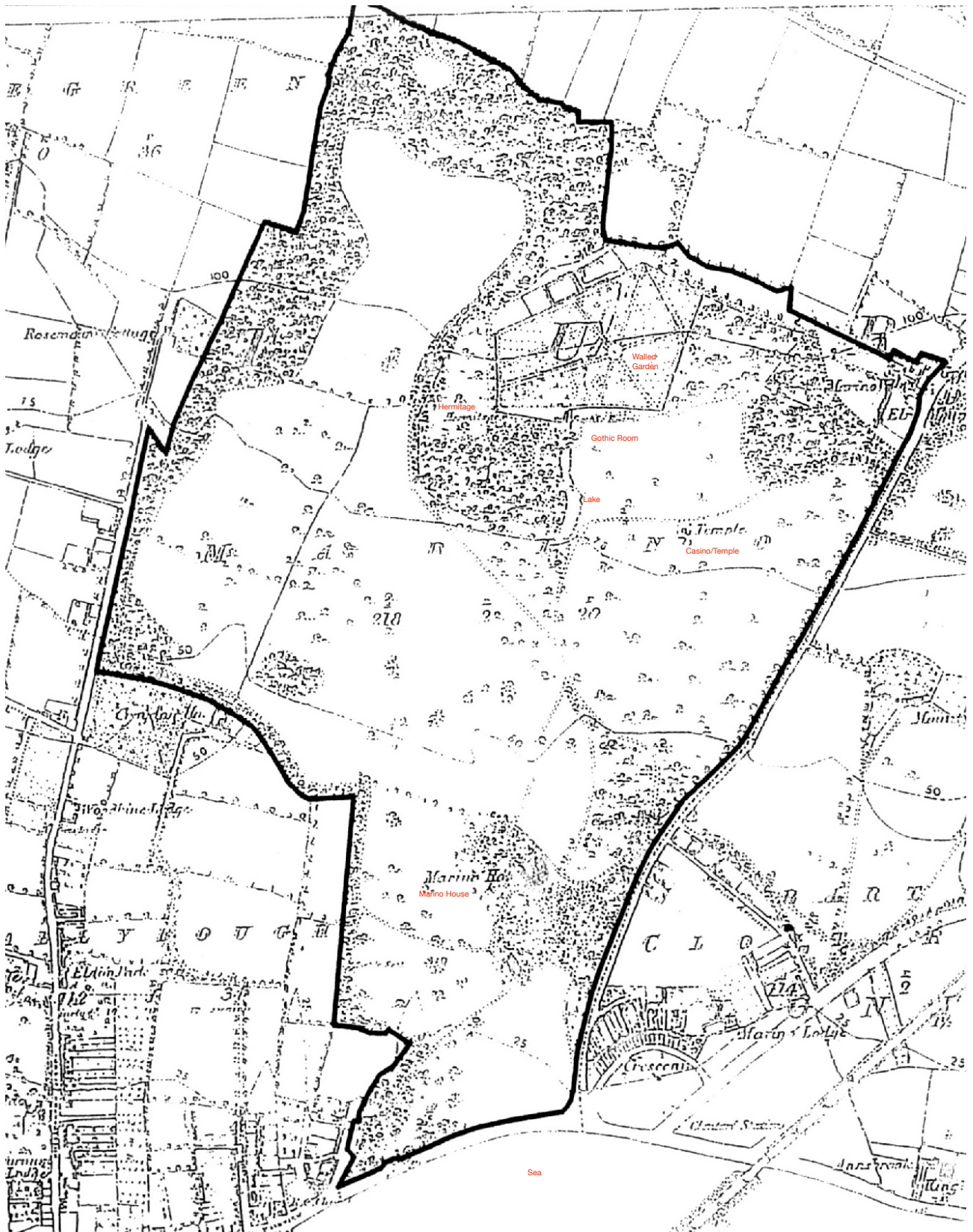


Fig.5: 1st Edition Ordnance Survey 1837 showing the main features and extent of Marino Demesne



Fig. 6: Ordnance Survey 1867 2nd Edition, showing the thirty-acres of land held on a lease of *lives renewable forever*



### The Casino

The most impressive example of Charlemont's architectural patronage is to be seen in the Casino (from the Italian meaning small house near the sea), which he built in his demesne at Marino. The Casino - conceived as the central jewel of what was an impressive designed landscape in the natural style - was built over a period of some sixteen years, in the form of a neo-classical garden temple, to the designs of Sir William Chambers, a pre-eminent architect of the day. The Casino is considered by many to be amongst Chambers' best work and is today acknowledged as being a building of international architectural importance and national cultural significance.

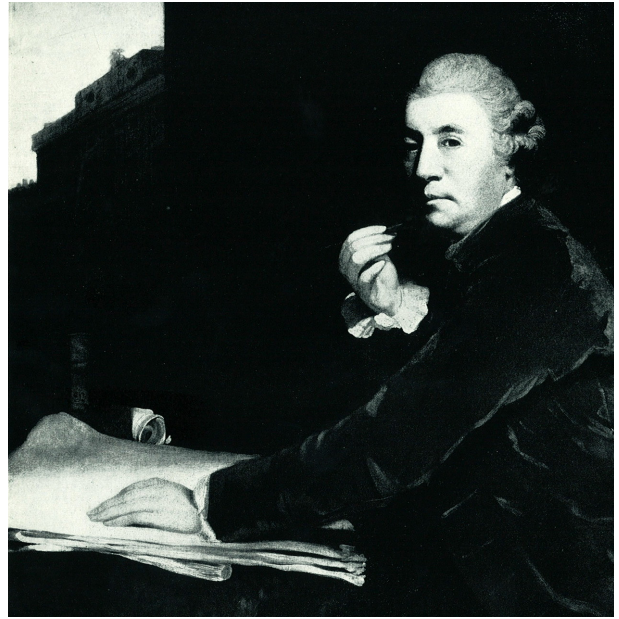


Fig.7: Sir William Chambers, architect of the Casino

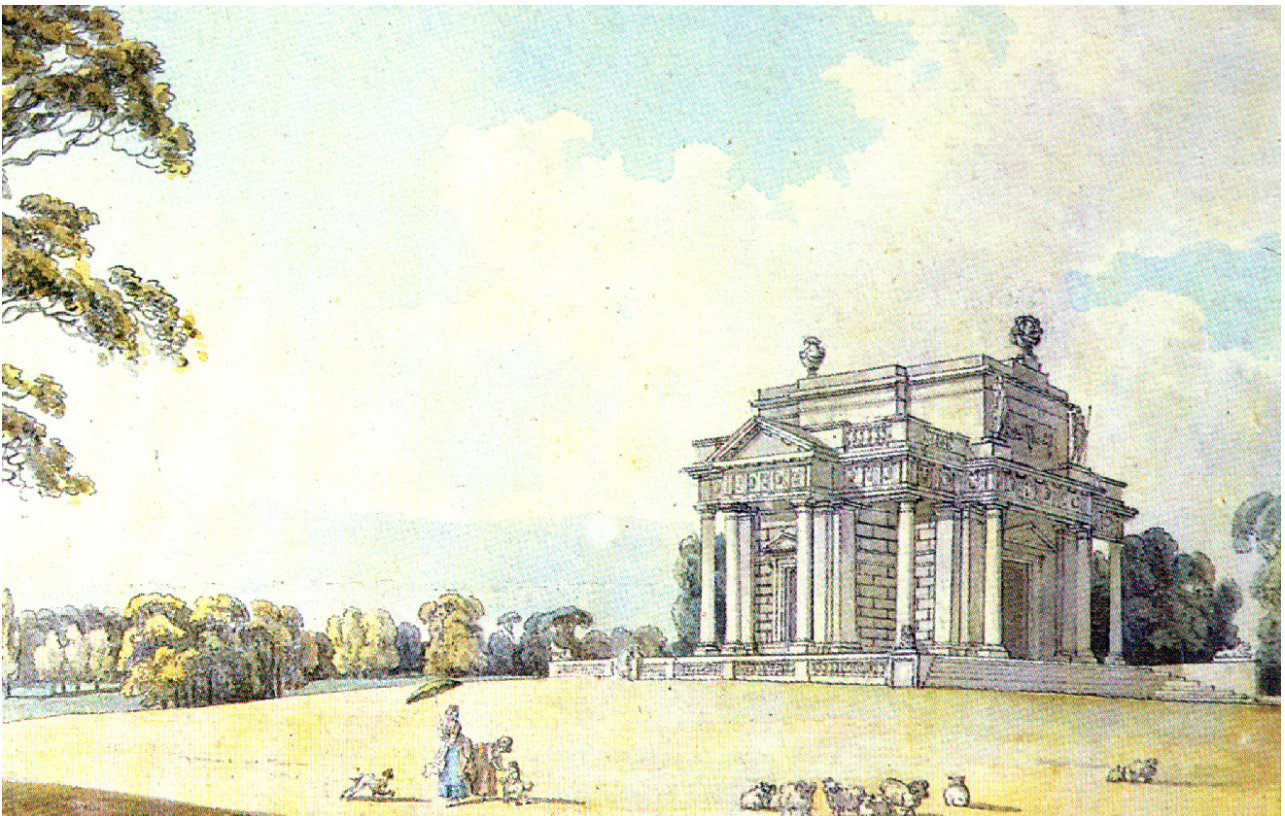


Fig. 8: The Wheatley engraving of the Casino and demesne at Marino, dated 1782

### 3.0 THE MARINO DEMESNE

#### **Charlemont & the Marino Tenure**

Lord Charlemont's lands at Marino were not held on a freehold basis and were subject to a rent payable to Dublin Corporation. However, the land held on a lease of lives renewable forever basis was, arguably, the most secure within Charlemont's control. It has been suggested that he located his principal and most expensive garden features in this area for that reason. A map of the Donnycarney Estate of 1770 - the year in which his work began - illustrates this precise area of land. It is equally likely, however, that the Casino, walled garden, Gothic Room and artificial lake were so positioned in response to the genius loci, combined with the practicality of an existing water-course. Early maps show that the Vartry River was widened to form an artificial lake to the south of the walled garden, and also within the walled garden where it would have provided a valuable water source. The Casino stands in the most advantageous position, on rising ground, to act as a striking landmark and also to provide beautiful panoramic views over Dublin Bay, city and the distant Dublin Mountains. The Gothic Room would also have enjoyed fine views of Dublin and the mountains viewed across the artificial lake.

#### **Marino After the First Earl's Death**

Charlemont died in 1799 when his 238 acre estate, together with his title, passed to his son, Francis William. At the time of his death the estate was impoverished, and the second earl was forced to sell off much of it to clear his father's debts. The death of the second Earl in 1864 marked the final decline of the Charlemont estates in Dublin.

In 1876, the estate, which had by this time grown to some 352 acres, was sold through the landed estate courts, in a single lot, to one Charles Kennedy Esq. of Mountjoy Square. Kennedy purchased the property in trust for Cardinal Cullen for the sum of £8,200.

An area of some thirty-acres was reserved for the erection of an orphanage, while the remainder of the demesne was subsequently conveyed to the Irish Christian Brothers. The Brothers retained Marino House until a purpose-built premises, known as St. Mary's College, designed by W.H.Byrne, was completed in 1904.



Fig.9: 1980s SW aerial view of Casino & O'Brien Institute

#### **The O'Brien Institute**

On the thirty acres of the former Marino Demesne retained by Cardinal Cullen, an orphanage was constructed between 1881-3, at the bequest of Miss Brigid O'Brien, after whom it was subsequently named The O'Brien Institute. This imposing Gothic Revival building is a typical example of the religious institutional buildings being constructed in Britain and Ireland during the second half of the nineteenth century. The positioning of the imposing O'Brien Institute less than forty-five metres from the delicate, neo-classical Casino, was to have a major impact on the context and setting of the earlier building.

Having been long abandoned as an orphanage, the O'Brien Institute had fallen into a state of dereliction by the time it was obtained by the Dublin Fire Brigade in 1982. The brigade renovated and converted the building for use as a training centre, to which purpose it still serves.

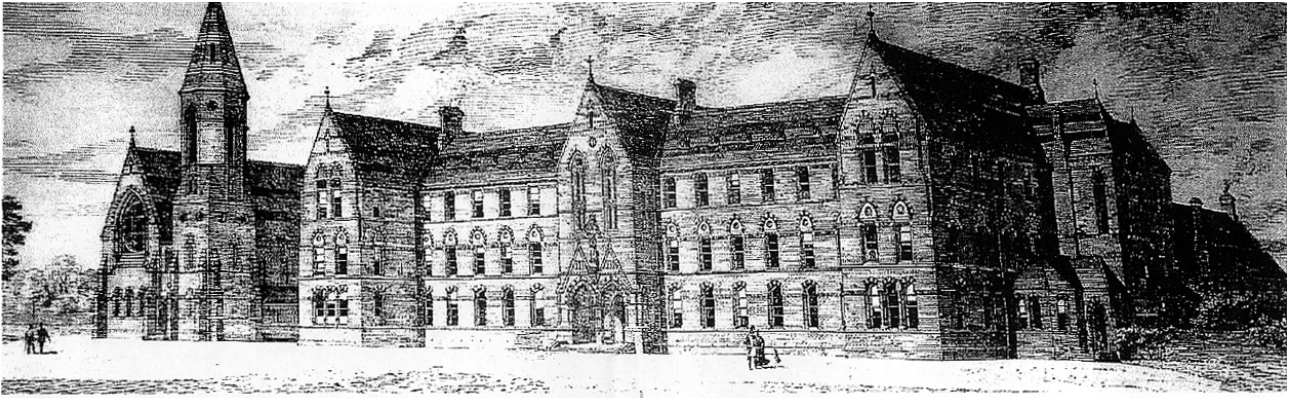


Fig:10 Perspective sketch of O' Brien Institute 1881- *The Irish Builder*

Despite its unfortunate siting and the intrusive visual impact on the more significant Casino, the O'Brien Institute building is itself now also a protected structure under current legislation.



Fig.11: NE view of O' Brien Institute from Casino, illustrating the close proximity of the Institute to it

### Early-Twentieth Century Development

When the lease on the Marino Demesne expired in 1921, Dublin Corporation repossessed the lands and later constructed Griffith Avenue (1924-28). Around that time the Corporation also developed the southern half of the Marino Demesne as an extensive estate of social housing, in the form of a garden suburb, to serve the housing needs of the expanding city of Dublin. To make way for this development, which was the first major social housing programme of the new Irish Republic, Marino House was demolished and all traces of the former demesne south of Griffith Avenue were removed.

### Late-Twentieth Century Development

Throughout the late-1970s and 1980s there were further developments along the northern and eastern boundaries of the former demesne, which also had an adverse impact on the setting of the Casino. Dublin Corporation erected houses along the northern edge of the demesne, while a large nursing home run by the Sisters of Mercy, called Nazareth House, was constructed directly to the east of the Casino, in 1973.

A new school called Ard Scoil Rís was later built to the south of the Casino, with playing fields extending from Griffith Avenue to the southern edge of the current Casino site. To the west of the school a number of other minor buildings have been constructed, including a Credit Union and some private houses. In the former walled garden to the north of the Casino, now owned by St Vincent's GAA Club, a number of playing fields were laid out and a new two-storey clubhouse erected. While encroaching development to the east and west of the Casino has restricted the amount of open space along this axis, the playing fields lying to the north and south have proved invaluable in maintaining a green open setting. It is essential to the setting and character of the Casino and the O'Brien Institute that these areas be maintained as open spaces free of any future development.



Fig. 12: Ard Scoil Ris & Sports Grounds with Fire Brigade Training Centre (the former O'Brien Institute in the background)

## SIGNIFICANCE

The Marino Demesne along with the artistic, scholarly and political influence of its creator, the First Earl of Charlemont, represents a cultural high-point in Irish history. Charlemont, a leading patron of the arts, founded the Royal Irish Academy and led by example in his commissioning of first-rate architects, such as William Chambers – arguably the leading architect of his day. All of these qualities found expression in the Marino Demesne and, in particular, the exquisite Casino.

Conceived as a symbolic Temple of the Arts, the Marino Casino is the embodiment of all that Charlemont strove for artistically and scholastically and, as such, marks not only an almost unsurpassed high-point in Irish cultural history, but is arguably also William Chambers' most perfect architectural composition.

The significance of the Casino was recognised as early as 1930, at a time when such buildings were generally being seen as unwelcome symbols of a colonised past, when an Act of Parliament was passed to enable it to be taken into state ownership and care. This was an unprecedented decision, as the Casino became the first post-1700 building to be held in state care as a national monument. More recently it was also listed as a protected structure in further recognition of its architectural importance and cultural significance.

While Marino House and most of its former demesne have long since vanished, the Casino has survived by virtue of its architectural qualities. It stands as one of the few reminders of the former beauty of the demesne and the highly significant contribution it has made to Irish and European culture.

The other architectural fragments of significance that survive from the former demesne are the walled garden and two neo-classical gateways, one of which currently stands outside the area of the ACA.

#### 4.0 PROTECTED STRUCTURES

##### **Marino Casino (Existing)**

Completed around 1775, the Casino is a small, perfectly proportioned neo-classical temple dedicated to the arts. It measures 50ft square to its outer columns, and in plan takes the form of a Greek cross, with a pair of columns framing each projecting elevation. Faced with Portland stone, a fine oolitic limestone, from which much of its character is derived, its external facades are richly-ornamented with channelled ashlar walls and rich decorative carving and sculpture.

Externally, it has a deceptively simple appearance of a single-roomed structure, with a large panelled door on the north elevation and a single large window on each of the other elevations. This is, however, a feat of clever visual trickery that belies an ingeniously complex interior far larger than one would expect, comprising some sixteen rooms of varying sizes distributed over three floors. Equally clever is the use of elaborate decorative features to mask the more functional features. These include urns that act as chimneys, and the outermost columns which contain downpipes discharging water from the roofs and gutters.

The base from which the Casino rises, guarded by *lions couchant*, has been described by the architectural historian, Sean O'Reilly, as being like a *pedestal to a sculpture, gently but firmly raising the building above the surrounding land*. Each elevation of the emphatically modelled Casino is unique. The entrance front and south front are distinguished by the attic storey with statues and urns, though the east and west fronts are treated as minor elevations, with small triangular pediments.

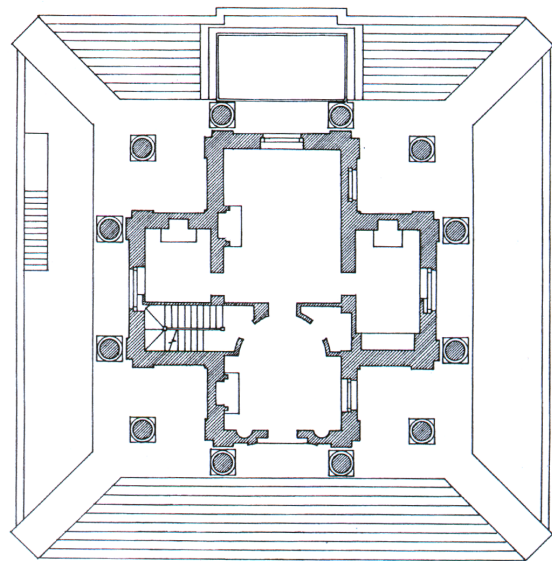
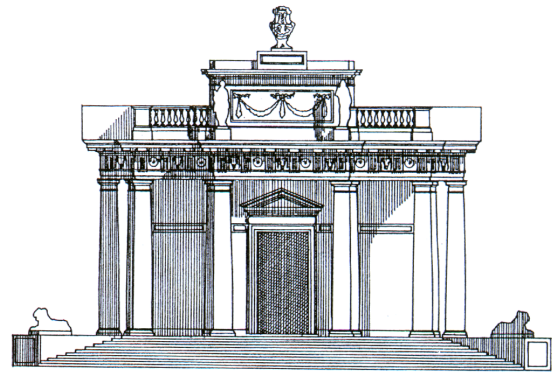


Fig.13: Plan and Elevation of the Casino



Fig.14: View of Marino Casino

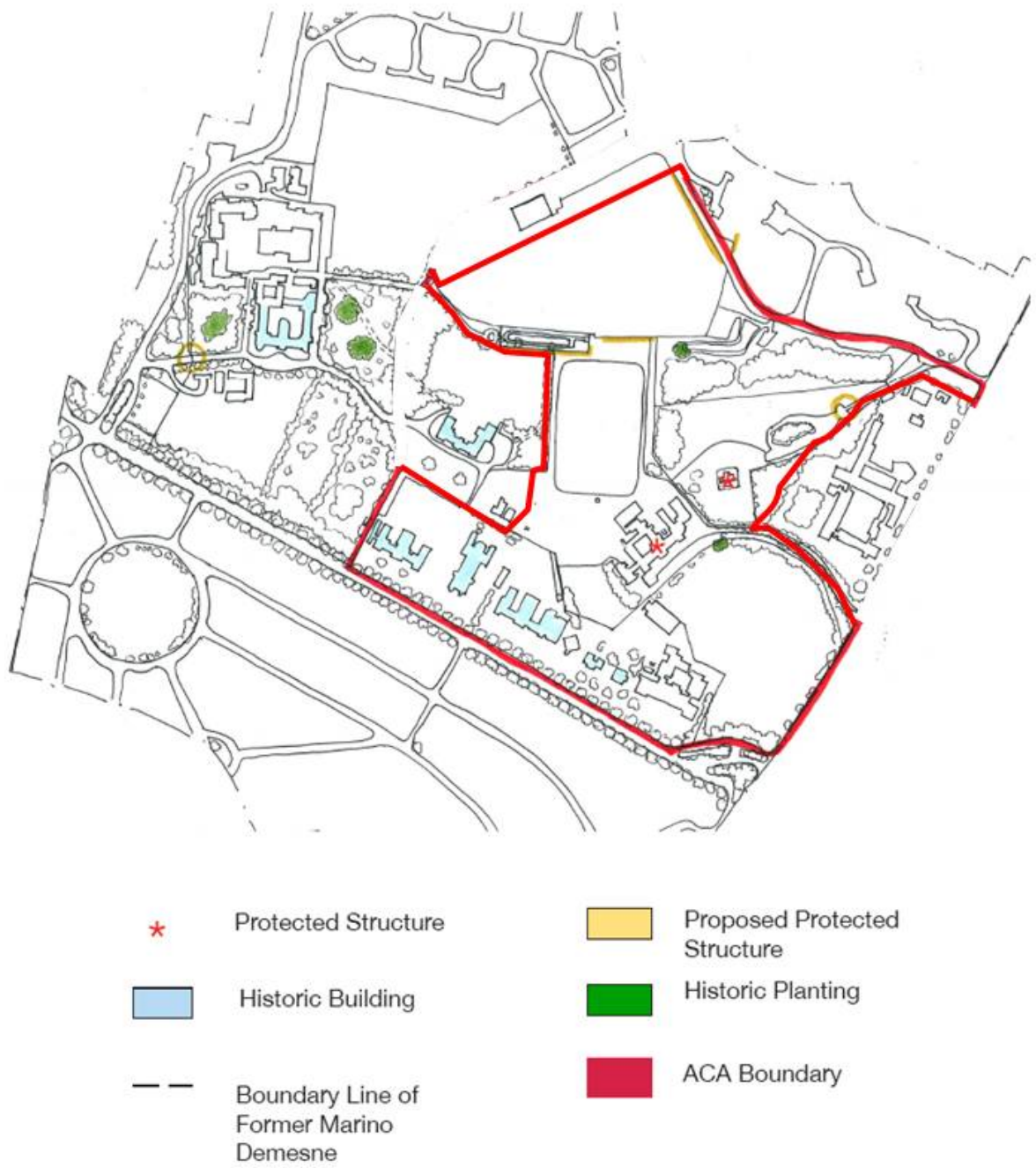


Figure 15 Protected and Proposed Protected Structures and historic fabric

The main distyle entrance to the Casino provides a dramatic introduction to what lies inside. Its plain Roman Doric columns support a richly-ornamented frieze with bucrania, triglyphs and metopes surmounted by a modillioned cornice. The underside of the cornice and the soffit of the entablature are also enriched by a lavish display of intricate carving and pattern-making. At centre, above the cornice, is a rectangular panel with carved stone swags flanked by two statues, which in turn, are flanked by sections of balustrading at roof level. An elegant stone urn placed centrally completes the composition.

Overseen by the master stone carver, Simon Vierpyl, the design and craftsmanship of the Casino stonework is amongst the best to be found in Ireland.



Fig. 16: The Casino viewed from the north-east

### **The O'Brien Institute (existing)**

The O'Brien Institute is three-storeys high and sixteen-bays wide of load-bearing masonry structure in a gothic revival style, faced in red brick with granite dressings. The wide entrance front is symmetrical with a central projecting breakfront complemented by projecting bays at each end,, all of which terminate with steep gabled roofs.



Fig.17: View of front elevation of O'Brien Institute

Containing the classrooms and dormitories, the main front block also provided the main circulation spine of which a series of wings extended at right angles corresponding to the projections exposed on the front elevation. These contained the study hall, refectory and the Brothers bedrooms. To the south-west stands the chapel which is connected to the main building by a cloister-like link approximately 30ft in length. It is built in the same style and of similar materials as the main building, but has been comprehensively remodelled internally. The belfry is situated at the north-west corner containing a porch at ground level to what was formerly a secular chapel.



Fig.18: View of front elevation of O'Brien Institute from the chapel

it is surmounted by an elegant octagonal spire. The original plan-form to the rear of the building has been much-altered over the years, particularly the former wings.

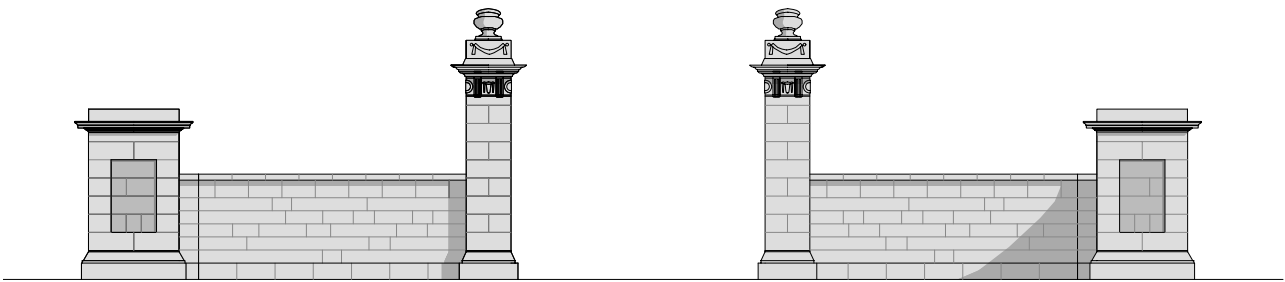


Fig.20: the Northern Gateway

Further development is now proposed in this section of the building that will facilitate a much-improved visual appearance from the north, together with the restoration of some of the previously damaged parts of the historic fabric.

### Boundary Wall (Proposed)

The walled garden was the first project undertaken by Lord Charlemont at Marino. It is located at the north-eastern corner of the demesne within thirty acres of land to which Lord Charlemont had held secure title. Enclosed within walls rising to twelve feet in height, the shape of the garden described an irregular pentagon. The boundary walls were constructed of rubble limestone, with brick facings to those walls that enjoyed a sunnier aspect.



Fig. 19: The boundary wall

Today, the St. Vincent's GAA club occupies most of the area within the former walled garden, which, with the exception of the eastern corner on which housing has been constructed. Only two short sections and one long section of wall survive in a good state of preservation but a poor state of repair. The long section runs north to south at the eastern side of the of the walled garden and the smaller sections of wall occur along the

southern boundary and consist of rubble limestone on the exterior, and brick-coated with recent cement render on the inside faces.

### The Northern Gateway (Proposed)

The northern gateway (see Images overleaf) is a simple neo-classical structure which probably marked the northern entrance to the demesne. It is likely to be the work of Chambers as the Doric friezes with bucrania matches exactly the detail to be found in the frieze of the Casino. This now stands within the current Casino site, where it marks the entrance to the car park. It consists of a pair of tall elegant piers topped with urns on a swag-enriched plinth, which sit on ornamental cappings with Doric enrichments and bucrania identical to those of the outer piers of the Griffin Gateway.

From these, long ashlar-faced walls curve outwards, forming a carriage-turn, and terminating in squat, wide-based piers. While both of these gates are no longer in their original positions their survival is nonetheless extremely important to an understanding of the site as they attest to the grandeur and scale of the former demesne..



Fig.21: Detail of brick and lime mortar from boundary wall



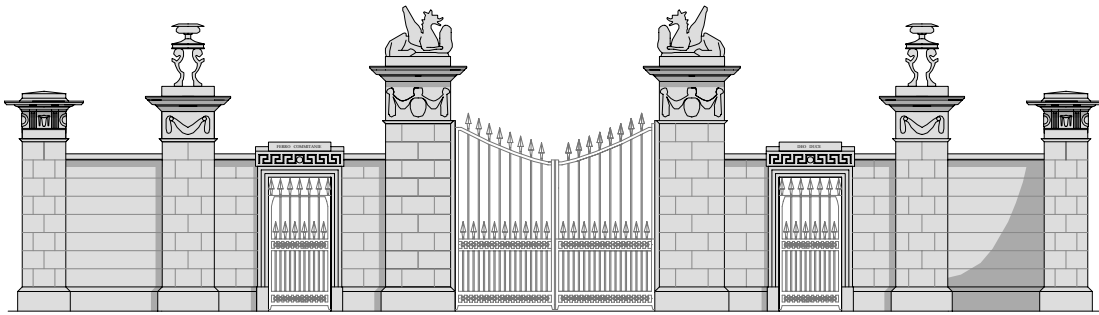


Fig.22: the Griffin Gateway

### The Griffin Gateway (Proposed)

While the Griffin Gateway falls outside the boundary of the ACA it represents an important architectural component from the original demesne and contributes greatly to our understanding and appreciation of its character and significance.

Designed as the main entrance to the former Marino Demesne by William Chambers and Battista Cipriani, this neo-classical structure was originally located in Fairview, close to the eighteenth-century coastline. It is also possible that at some future time this much travelled structure might be moved to a new position within the ACA where it would attain even greater significance and meaning through closer association with the Casino.

Having been dismantled, re-located and reconstructed on two separate occasions, the gateway currently stands just off Griffiths Avenue where it serves as an

entrance to the Marino Institute of Education. Constructed in neat ashlar granite with Portland Stone enrichments, the structure consists of a pair of tall central piers festooned with swags and medallions and surmounted by a pair of couchant griffins. To either side of these piers which support the main entrance gates, two stretches of wall containing gated pedestrian openings with Greek key enriched lintels. These flanking walls terminate with another pair of stone piers enriched with swags and projecting moulded coping, some of which appear to be replacements. The middle piers are topped with metal urns supported on four monopods, from which further curved sections of wall extend, terminating in smaller, more elegant piers of vermiculated granite, with Doric enrichments and bucrania. The detailed design and workmanship are of the highest order and after the Casino, this structure is the most important historic fabric to survive from the former Demesne.

## 5.0 CHARACTER APPRAISAL & THREATS

### Existing Character

The special character of the Marino ACA is dominated by the splendid Casino and the landscape setting in which it stands. Soft landscaping in the form of tree-lined, open parkland provides a setting in the spirit of the original demesne, framing views both long and short, to and from, the building. In this regard, the playing fields to the north and south of the Casino are particularly important, as they provide and protect the longer views.

Although this landscaped zone around the Casino falls into six different ownerships, there is no reason why the existing boundary and planting cannot be adjusted in the future to improve the setting of the Casino and to strengthen the special architectural character of the area.

The critically important lands to the north and south of the Casino are at risk of being developed inappropriately if suitable controls are not put in place. This threat could be mitigated by removing planting to the east and the unsightly extension to the O'Brien Institute to the west.

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### Threats

The setting of the Casino has been compromised by encroaching development over the last 150 years. Most noticeably through the construction of the former O'Brien Institute and Nazareth House Nursing Home, with its heavily planted garden that extends to within ten metres of the Casino. Both are visually intrusive forming a pinch-point along the east-west axis backdrop that detracts from the Casino's setting interrupting key views to and from the building.

At present, the adjoining lands to the north of the Casino are at risk of being inappropriately developed, which could further impinge on, and detract from, the setting of the Casino. The unsightly eastern extensions to the former O'Brien Institute also detract from the Institute itself as well as the Casino. It is hoped that this accretion will be removed during the proposed redevelopment of the former O'Brien Institute building.



Fig.23: Aspirational long-term proposal for a new public park at Casino Marino

### **Aspirational Character**

The soft landscaped areas that currently surround the Casino provide an impression of the original parkland setting of the Casino. This area could, however, be reorganised to create a most impressive and appropriate setting for both the Casino and the former O'Brien Institute. By realigning current boundaries, instigating a more appropriate planting plan and creating a new network of pathways, it should be possible to recreate an authentic parkland setting, albeit much smaller in its extent than the original demesne layout. This could be realised without the need for changes of land tenure, to create a new public park within which the Casino would provide the central focus.

Carefully selected species of broad-leaved trees such as oak, lime, chestnut and beech would help create the spirit of an eighteenth-century demesne, while at the same time providing a screen to block out the visual intrusion of later

development. The current temporary visitors facilities, access paths and security measures, including the inner fencing and ha-ha, could be removed and replaced by more suitable facilities set back discretely from the Casino building.

The parking and access arrangements could also be re-planned, and the northern gateway integrated more prominently within the ACA. If in the future it becomes possible to relocate the Griffin Gateway into the ACA, this would be a welcome and valuable addition to the ACA. The surviving fragments of the original brick and stone boundary wall to the former walled garden should also be repaired, recapped and all vegetation removed to prevent further damage.

The most appropriate conservation approach, in the current circumstances, is therefore to concentrate on policies that will improve and enhance the immediate setting of the Casino which is the single most important surviving feature.

## 6.0 ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION AREA OBJECTIVES

*The long-term goal is to facilitate the presentation of the Casino within an open parkland to create a microcosm, not a replica, of its original setting.*

- Dublin City Council's designated Marino ACA includes all of the grounds within the site bounded to the north and northwest and including the grounds of St Vincent's GAA; further bounded to the west and south-west by the grounds of the O'Brien Institute (OBI) and Scoil Mhuire Na Mbrathar; to the south by Griffith Avenue (the section from Scoil Mhuire Na Mbrathar to Ard Scoil Rís); to the southeast and east by the playing fields of Ard Scoil Rís and Malahide Road (from Griffith Avenue to Casino Park junctions); to the north-east and north by Casino Park.
- It is an objective to protect the ACA from inappropriate, intrusive development on lands surrounding it.
- It is an objective of the ACA to promote and enhance the special architectural, historical, cultural and amenity significance of the Casino and environs through improved public awareness. This will be achieved through a combination of nationwide advertising and marketing, improved signage, education and guided tours.
- The ACA recognises the strategic importance of the open spaces to the north and south of the Casino. It is an objective to protect and enhance all views and vistas of the Casino including the implementation of measures to appropriately screen buildings and roads from the Casino.
- In order to address the current threats and to protect and enhance the setting

and character of the Casino, the ACA will seek the co-operation and active involvement of all stakeholders within the area. These include: the OPW; St Vincent's GAA; Dublin Fire Brigade; Nazareth House; Ard Scoil Ris.

- Subject to the agreement from the Marino Institute of Education (the current owners), it is an objective of the ACA to relocate the Griffin Gates to the entrance of the new enlarged Casino site, possibly on the Malahide Road. This would reinforce the Marino Casino ACA and provide the gates with a more significant setting.
- It is an objective of the ACA to support the existing security systems in place at the Casino and its environs, and in the future, promote optimum security on a cost-efficient basis.
- It is an objective of the ACA to protect and conserve any surviving fragments of the former walled garden.
- Within the Casino site, under the control of the OPW of the Architectural Conservation Area, it is an objective to facilitate small-scale development to ensure the proper maintenance and management of the Casino and environs. Any structures or buildings in this regard should be appropriate in terms of their design and location.
- It is an objective of the ACA to encourage and support the redesign of the existing landscape around the Casino so as to provide for a more authentic setting for the building.
- It is an objective of the ACA, in consultation with the relevant stakeholders to encourage and support the creation of a new public park in keeping with the former arrangement at Marino under the first Earl of Charlemont.

- Within the new enlarged parkland setting of the Casino, it is an objective of the ACA to replace the existing paths, ha-ha and fencing with appropriate and coherent treatments, thereby providing improved access to the building and walks.