FORMER MERRION BATHS

Sandymount Strand

Dublin 4

Conservation Report

August 2015
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The baths at Sandymount Strand were erected as the Merrion Pier, Promenade and Baths in 1883. They formerly consisted of a cast-iron and timber pier which ran from the shore out to the mass concrete bathing pool. The latter pool is the only part of this once extensive complex which survives today. The baths operated for a relatively short period of time before closing in 1920 as a result of the collapse of a section of the sea-wall to the baths. Since 1920, a period of almost a century, the baths have survived as a ruin on Sandymount Strand.

The surviving remains of the bathing pool are generally in poor condition. There has been significant undermining of some sections of the walls as a result of erosion and scouring by the sea. The SW corner of the bathing pool is particularly badly undermined and is potentially at risk of collapse. The remaining sections of the walls are in moderately better condition but nevertheless are in need of repairs and maintenance works.

The current condition of the baths gives rise to a number of health and safety concerns, in particular the potential for partial collapse of the SW corner of the bathing pool. Steps to resolve these health and safety concerns will need to be taken sooner rather than later.

A number of options can be considered with regard to the treatment of the baths. Repairs and consolidation works could be undertaken to prolong the life of the bathing pool. However the long-term effectiveness of such repairs is difficult to predict and it must be accepted that once repairs are undertaken, ongoing maintenance works will be required on a periodic basis given the harsh environment in which the baths sit.

If it is found that the repair and subsequent maintenance of the remains of the bathing pool is likely to be impractical and prohibitively costly, partial or complete demolition or clearance of the bathing pool may have to be considered. Any such works would of course have to be subject to the relevant protocols given the environmentally sensitive nature of Sandymount Strand and this section of Dublin Bay.

At this point, it is our opinion that any proposals to ‘restore’ the bathing complex are impractical on the grounds of costs and the need to conform to prevailing infrastructural, sanitary and water treatment requirements.
1. PREAMBLE

This report has been prepared on foot of instructions by Michael Noonan, of Dublin City Council – Parks Department. The report has been prepared for the sole use of Dublin City Council and its agents.

The brief for the report required the following actions:

- Review of archival and pictorial records to produce a concise research report that fully describes the baths as constructed, protagonists involved in its development, and a brief account of how it was used and by whom, when it went into decline and was closed.
- Condition Assessment which will generate a statement of condition of the remains of the structures as they exist today: materials, stability and provide recommendations.
- Statement of significance which will take into account its maritime heritage and the 20th century maritime recreation tradition along the coast of Dublin Bay and current condition.

This report has been prepared by Frank Keohane - Conservation Accredited Chartered Building Surveyor - with the assistance of Ivor McElween - Chartered Engineer.

2. HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

The Merrion Baths at Sandymount Strand were constructed and opened for business in 1883. When first built, they were connected to the Strand Road by an iron and timber pier which measured approximately 350ft in length and 14ft in width. The bathing pool itself, was divided into two parts for males and females. The two sections measured 120ft by 80ft and 120ft by 40ft respectively. In comparison, a standard swimming pool today is 75ft long while an Olympic-sized swimming pool is 164ft long and 82ft wide. Today, only portions of the bathing pool survive. There are no significant remains of the pier itself.

The baths and pier were built Messrs Connolly & Son of Upper Dominick Street. The architect/engineer was Frederick Morley. Morley as an engineer to the Clontarf township where he built the Clontarf baths and also served as a Pembroke Town Commissioner.

The active operation of the baths was surprisingly short. By 1918, efforts were made to sell the baths no doubt due to declining attendances, although it doesn’t seem that the baths found a new owner. It appears that the baths finally closed in 1920, less than 40 years after opening for business, after a section of the seawall collapsed or was washed away. The pier was later dismantled, no doubt for scrappage while the remains of the bathing pool were left in place on the strand.

A more detailed history of the Merrion Baths as well as sea-bathing in Dublin Bay is provided in Appendix B.
3. DESCRIPTION OF MERRION BATHS

The surviving structure of the Merrion Baths at Sandymount Strand, comprises the remains of the former bathing pool. A cast-iron pier or walkway which connected the baths to the Strand Road, together with a similar structure that ran along the west side of the baths and contained changing rooms and other facilities, have been removed. The base of a single cast-iron hollow column, 260mm in diameter, is buried in the sand, can be seen to the south of the bathing pool.

The bathing pool consists of a 10-sided enclosure, on a roughly D-shaped plan, with overall measurements of 52m (N-S) and 54m (E-W). The E side of the pool, facing out to the bay, is broken into five lengths of wall, presumably to dissipate the force of the sea crashing against the bathing pool walls. A single straight length of wall would have been a much weaker structure in comparison to the multi-facetted polygonal shape that was employed. The SW and NW corners, to the land-side, are also canted, or angled, to avoid the use of a single major corner which again would have been weaker than the present arrangement. Two sections of the wall to the SE corner of the bathing pool have been lost, presumably having been washed away by the force of the sea. It is believed that this may have occurred around 1920 and may have been the cause of the bath’s closure although documentary evidence has not been found to confirm this.

The enclosure walls of the bathing pool are roughly 1,700mm high on the south side of the pool where the ground level is at its highest. The walls are approximately 1,100mm wide at their base and have a tapered and shouldered cross section, with the horizontal top surface of the walls being approximately 350mm wide. The walls are constructed of mass concrete using broken granite, calp limestone pebbles, brick fragments, shells and sand as aggregate. It is assumed that the walls do not contain iron or steel reinforcement as this would not have been a common practice at the time the baths were built. The internal and external walls have a smooth finish which has been painted. It is not known if the concrete was originally painted in such a manner.

Along the E side of the pool and for part of the length of the N and S sides of the pool, the base of the walls have been strengthened at some point in the past, evidently after the original construction of the pool. This was achieved by increasing the thickness of the wall by adding a tapering base batter, or continuous buttress, along the base of the walls to a maximum thickness of approximately 600mm. In places, where the buttressing has been broken down, it can be seen that this incorporates steel or iron reinforcement in the form of bars of metal set vertically, at intervals, into the ground.

The baths are divided into two unequal parts male (N) and female (S) by a wall which runs in an E-W direction for a distance of 11m. Fencing or ropes may have been used to divide the rest of the bathing pool for its full length. A series of iron hoops are set into the internal surface of the walls, presumably for ropes while the stubs of vertical iron post, set into the top of the walls, probably supported a fence of some form.

The internal floor of the bathing pool is covered with sand to a considerable depth. It is not known if the original concrete floor to the pool, survives beneath this sand. There is evidence off a sluice gate at the base of the wall on the E side of the pool, with remains of iron formwork.
The surviving walls to the Merrion baths are constructed using mass concrete; a material composed of a mixture of cement, crushed rock or gravel, sand and water. The origins of concrete go back as far as 5,000 years BC and it was widely used in the Roman and Egyptian civilisations. The Romans regularly built bridges, vaults, and marine structures using concrete. The ability to construct such structures, and to build in water, was made possible by using hydraulic limes, cements and pozzzalanic additives, such as crushed volcanic ash, which enabled mortar to set even when submerged in water.

Early attempts to produce a mortar which would set in water were made by John Smeaton in 1756 when attempting to build the Eddystone lighthouse off the coast of Plymouth. In 1796, Rev. John Parker discovered a naturally-occurring cement, made from lime to which nodules of septaria or cement stone was added, which he patented as Parker’s Roman Cement. It was only in 1824 when an English stonemason, John Aspdin, invented what became known as Portland Cement by mixing chalk and clay, heating it together and then grinding it into a powder to which water could be added to produce a cement. At first, Portland cement was used largely for renders and in foundations and engineering works such as the construction of bridges and harbours. These early concrete structures were generally built using mass concrete, whereby the concrete is poured and cast in-situ using shuttering to form a mould. It is this technique which was used to construct the bathing pool at Sandymount.

4. CONDITION APPRAISAL OF MERRION BATHS

Marine structures, such as the surviving portion of the Merrion Baths, are exposed to particularly extreme weathering conditions and have to cope with salt-loaded wind and water, the pounding and abrasive action of waves and tides, and constant wetting and drying where they are located within the tidal zone. All of these factors can cause defects in a concrete structure.

Nevertheless, while many historic concrete structures will show at least some degree of decay and deterioration, is it remarkable how well some of these structures have stood the ‘test of time’, particularly where they have been subject to minimal maintenance.

Problems with historic concrete often relate to the design and construction principles which were used at the time of their erection. In the case of reinforced concrete, iron reinforcement was often set too close to the surface of the concrete, in other words, having insufficient cover of concrete, and as a result the iron reinforcement corrodes or rusts and loses its structural cohesion while at the same time shattering the concrete itself.

In the case of mass concrete structures, such as the subject baths, the lack of expansion or movement joints and inadequately graded aggregate can result in superficial and structural defects. However early concrete often contained a large quantity of lime. This would have given the concrete a degree of flexibility, enabling it to cope with a certain amount of structural and thermal movement without failure. It is likely that the concrete walls at the Merrion Baths are lime-rich and therefore the use of expansion joints would not have been an absolute necessity.
The Merrion Baths display a number of defects arising from both inherent design defects and long-term weathering. These include the following:

4.1. Collapse of Walls

Two sections of the walls enclosing the bathing pool have collapsed into the sea. It is not known when this occurred but it may have occurred around 1920 and may have been the reason that the baths were closed. However, no documentary or pictorial evidence for this has been uncovered.

It is clear that the collapse occurred a considerable time ago as the collapsed sections of wall have been completely broken down by the action of the waves and most of the stones and aggregate have been washed away by the tides.

4.2. Undermining of the Walls

Undermining of walls occurs where unstable sand, soil, or rock beneath a wall is washed away over time by the scouring action of waves or flowing water. In the case of the Merrion Baths, it is clearly evident that undermining of the walls has been a long term problem.

Over time the waves have eroded the base of most of the exterior face of the walls. This can clearly be seen in the jagged, rather than smooth, surface profile of the wall, as well as a distinctive ridge formed where the wall is partially covered, and thus protected, by the sands.

Attempts have been made in the past to prevent undermining by erecting a buttress around the base of the walls. This was made using reinforced concrete and is either of late 19th century or early 20th century origin. The buttressing was applied along the base of the E wall and for part of the way along the S and N walls. The buttresses was only partially successful and did not prevent the eventual collapse of the E wall to the bath. In fact the buttresses to the SE corner and along the E side of the bath, have been almost eroded away.

The SW corner of the swimming bath was not given the additional protection of the buttress and consequently has been severely undermined by the action of the waves and tides. This has resulted in a gap, measuring approximately 450-650mm in height, being formed under the base of the wall. This has placed enormous stress on this section of the wall and has resulted in the unsupported section of wall collapsing downwards. This section of wall has essentially broken loose from the surrounding walls, but owing to direction of cracking it has assumed a wedge-shape and therefore has not fallen away from the adjoining walls. However further collapse is possible and may be imminent.

4.3. Cracking

Cracking in concrete can be caused by both thermal stress and tensile (structural) stress. Thermal stress occurs as a reaction to thermal movement by which a structure heats up (expands) and cools down (contracts) over the course of a day, week, month, year in response to changing ambient temperatures. All structures experience thermal movement to some degree with varying materials, such as metal, glass, stone and concrete, expanding and contracting at different rates.
Structural movement occurs as a result of compression, where a structure is squeezed, or tensile pressure, where a structure is bent or twisted. Concrete behaves very well when subjected to compression, so it copes admirably with heavy loads being placed directly on top of it. Concrete, especially mass concrete, does not however cope well with tensile stress such as where it has to act as a lintel to span an opening.

In the case of the bathing pool, it is evident that cracking has occurred as a result of both thermal and tensile stresses. As the walls heat up and cool down, the wall expands and eventually contracts. In the present case, this appears to have given rise to structural cracking at the ends of the walls (at the corners) and midway along the walls. Thermal movement is also likely to have been the cause of the finer, superficial surface cracking which can be found in many locations. In most modern concrete buildings and walls, expansion or movement joints are incorporated into the wall, to allow the wall to expand and contract without cracking. This technology was not understood in the Victorian times when the baths were built, and as a result it is common to encounter cracking of this type in old concrete structures.

4.4. Surface Deterioration

There is extensive surface deterioration to the walls of the swimming baths. The walls would originally have had a smooth surface finish, formed by the shuttering used to contain the concrete as it set. Spalling of the surface of the concrete has occurred leaving pocks and blemishes as well as revealing the aggregate of the concrete. This spalling is likely to have been caused by the long-term pounding of the sea against the walls and the gradual loosening of portions of the concrete.

While spalling of this sort is generally a cosmetic defect it can also result in accelerated de-aggregation of the concrete by which the cement binding the aggregate together is washed away and pieces of aggregate such as sand particles, pebbles and larger stones work loose.

Patch repairs can be undertaken to repair areas where spalling has occurred. This usually involves cutting back of the damaged section of concrete to sound material, placing shuttering boards over the gap, and pouring concrete into the void. In some cases, sprayed concrete can be used instead to cover over shallow blemishes and indents.

4.5. Monitoring

At the present time it is not known to what extent movement and ongoing cracking is occurring. It is possible that some of the cracking, and other failures, occurred a considerable time ago. It has not been possible to locate photographs or visual imagery that would shed further light on the age and progress, of some of the more serious defects. Monitoring, using tell-tale signs, could be put in place to determine to what extent, if any, movement and ongoing cracking, is occurring.
4.6. Recommendations

A number of different approaches could be taken with regard to the future treatment of the surviving portions of the swimming baths. At the outset it is our opinion that any proposals to ‘restore’ the baths and put them back into working order, after almost a century of dereliction, is deemed to be impractical on the basis of expense and the infrastructural, sanitary and water treatment requirements.

One option would be to take a ‘do nothing’ approach. The walls of the baths have survived to the present day without any apparent form of maintenance and such a status quo could continue for an unknown and unquantifiable period. It should be noted however that this would fail to address existing health and safety risks and concerns to users of the strand and anyone who might enter or climb onto the bath walls. This could result in a dereliction of duty and lead to litigation in the future.

A further option would be to undertake a range of repairs and remedial measures to stabilise the remaining portions of the bath walls. These works would be considerable and complex and it is very difficult to predict if they would provide a lasting satisfactory repair. These works are also likely to be expensive. As per the report prepared by Ivor McElveen, Structural Engineer, some or all of the following repairs would be envisaged:

i. Underpin and repair the southwest section of the collapsed wall with appropriate quickset concrete (6 hour) designed for purpose and compatible with existing. Alternatively this section of wall could be removed.
ii. Create a relief opening at west wall approximately 6 metres on either side of the spur wall, being 12 metres in all, making good the breach at the wall ends.
iii. Cap repair and make good the wall ends of the existing breach on the east wall.
iv. Grout all fissures with suitable quickset grouting (6 hour) and finish flush with existing surfaces.
v. Discretely provide rock armour along the outer perimeter of the wall, rising to approximately 300 mm maximum above the sand surface.
vi. Clear all fallen rubble masonry and debris from site so as to minimise future scouring, and leave clear and tidy beach.
vii. Point and render repair all damaged wall surfaces including pocket repairs for missing masonry. Omit and avoid any cavities or areas of water entrapment.
viii. Cap wall with new capping reducing hydraulic resistance.

All such repairs would require detailed design by an appropriately qualified professional and all relevant health and safety issues would need to be considered given the fact that the works would take place in a marine environment.

Any proposal to undertake such repairs would also require a ‘real’ commitment to undertake ongoing maintenance works as and when necessary. Anything less than this is likely to result in a waste of public funds. Given its exposure to the sea, the need for regular cyclical repairs at relatively short intervals is probable and adequate resources would need to be put in place to undertake these works in the future. Of course, periodic storms may give rise to the need to undertake more significant repairs from time to time.

A final option would be to recognise that the in the long run the ongoing maintenance of the bath, which has been ruinous since 1920, is likely to be unsustainable. On that basis, a more pragmatic decision may be to remove the remaining sections of the walls, either in part or in their entirety and possibly to include the concrete slab or floor of the pool. It should of course be noted that the bath is located in an environmentally
sensitive location. This part of Dublin Bay is designated as a UNESCO Biosphere as well as being a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA). Therefore all appropriate procedures would need to be put in place to include undertaking an EIS, Appropriate Assessments and making all necessary applications and notifications. Such an operation will also require resolution of all access and health and safety issues during the course of demolition and clearance works in addition to making good of the site on completion of the works.

Ultimately the final decisions on the actions to be taken will have to consider existing and potential health and safety risks as well as the availability of funds to undertake either repairs, maintenance or clearance works.
5. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The former Merrion Baths at Sandymount, with the former Clontarf Baths, is one of two 19th century purpose-built sea-water swimming pools surviving within the administrative area of Dublin City Council. A further bathing complex of 19th century origin survives at Dun Laoghaire, while a bathing complex at Blackrock was demolished in 2012. The significance of the baths has been assessed in line with the categories of cultural significance or interest as set out in the Burra Charter (2013 Revision).

5.1. Aesthetic Interest

The surviving remains of the swimming pool are regarded as being of minimal architectural or aesthetic interest in that they were designed in a purely functional manner and in terms of form, proportion, massing and detailing, the structure was not designed to convey aesthetic stimulation. Nor can it be said that the structure was designed to make a positive contribution to its setting.

5.2. Archaeological Interest

The swimming pool is of moderate archaeological interest in terms of industrial archaeology. It has no significance in terms of medieval, or earlier, archaeological significance.

5.3. Historical and Social Interest

The remains of the Merrion Baths are regarded as being of considerable historical interest to both the immediate locality of Sandymount and the wider context of the city of Dublin in their ability to provide insights into past communities and their activities.

The baths provide considerable evidential value about past human activity – namely the passion for sea-bathing amongst the citizens of Dublin during the 18th, and more particularly, the 19th century. The surviving structure is illustrative of the growing concerns during the 19th century about moral decency and societal distinctions whereby in previous years, all classes of society appeared to have bathed together. The baths provided facilities where the upper and middle classes could bath in a place which provided for class segregation as well as segregation of the sexes. They provided secure and concealed facilities for dressing and undressing before and after bathing and also isolated the bathers from the polluted water of the bay and detritus which was washed onto the surrounding beaches.

The baths are the last remaining physical structure, in the immediate vicinity of Sandymount and Ringsend, which provides tangible physical evidence of the popular historic practice of sea-bathing in this locality. The former bathing spots at Beach Road are now lost owing to reclamation of the shoreline while bathing establishments such as Cranfields have long been demolished. Owing to the shallow nature of the bay in this location, bathers are today more likely to take a dip at the South Wall or at Seapoint rather than at Sandymount.

At the present time, no evidence has been uncovered to establish any notable associations with a notable person, family, event or distinct social movement.
5.4. Scientific Interest

It has not been established if the surviving portions of the baths are of scientific or ecological interest as a natural habitat.

5.5. Technical Interest

The baths are of moderate technical interest as an example of a comparatively early use of mass concrete in Ireland. However this significance is diminished by their poor condition and the degree of incompleteness.
APPENDIX A - ILLUSTRATIONS

1. N elevation of swimming baths

2. E elevation of swimming baths
3. S elevation of swimming baths

4. W elevation of swimming baths
5. Contextual view of baths from NW

6. View of interior of bath looking NW

7. View of interior of bath looking SW

8. View showing screen wall between men’s and ladies’ baths

9. View of interior of bath looking SE
10. Exposed top surface of W wall showing aggregate

11. Spalled surface of W wall showing aggregate

12. Spalled surface to N face of wall

13. Sample surface spalling to W wall

14. Eroded base to wall showing ridge marking original base of wall

15. View showing tapered shape to wall and buttress to RHS
16. Eroded buttress to SE corner  
17. Partially intact buttress to NE corner  
18. Eroded buttress showing iron reinforcement  
19. SW corner of baths  
20. Gap beneath wall at SW corner – exterior side  
21. Detail showing gap beneath wall at SW corner – interior side  
22. View of SW corner – interior side
23 & 24. Illustrations showing erosion (roughening) to base of walls at SW corner of baths

25. Crack to W wall

26. Crack to E wall

27. Crack to SW corner

28. Cracking to SW corner

29. Cracking at junction of screen wall to bath wall

30. Cracking to NW corner
APPENDIX B.

1. HISTORY OF THE SANDYMOUNT BATHS

1.1. Merrion Baths

The Merrion Baths at Sandymount Strand were constructed and opened for business in 1883. The previous year, a prospectus was published in the newspapers seeking investors for what was a private venture. The Irish Builder for August 1 1883 provides a lengthy description of the new bathing establishment and records that the baths had been formally opened the previous Saturday. The article records that the baths were connected to the Strand Road by a pier which measured approximately 350ft in length and 14ft in width. The pier was floored with deal planks which had been creosoted to protect them from the elements. These sat over a framework of wrought-iron lattice girders supported on cast-iron columns which were secured to iron-screw piles driven through the sand. The correspondent at the time described the baths themselves, as ‘very carefully planned for the convenience of bathers and those practising the art of swimming’. The bathing pool was divided into two parts for males and females. The two sections measured 120ft by 80ft and 120ft by 40ft respectively. In comparison a standard swimming pool today is 75ft long while an Olympic-sized swimming pool is 164ft long and 82ft wide.

The baths and pier were built Messrs Connolly & Son of Upper Dominick Street using concrete, in a similar manner to the baths at Clontarf and were described by the Irish Builder as appearing to be ‘of sufficient thickness.’ The latter comment certainly suggests that the approach to specifying and designing such structures was more by trial and error than a more scientific approach to calculation of strength and loading. According to Thom’s Directory for 1886 the baths, then known as the Merrion Promenade, Pier and Bath, cost approximately £5,000 to construct.

1 Freeman’s Journal December 29 1882. p.13
View showing the Merrion Pier, Promenade and the Baths. The white walls to the swimming pools can be seen to the right. The refreshment room can be seen halfway along the pier.

In this view the series of changing rooms running along the west side of the swimming pools, which are not visible, can be clearly seen.

The baths did not operate all year round but instead were opened for the summer months only, usually from late May until September. The Dublin Evening Mail reported on 26 May 1884 – ‘the public will be pleased to learn that the directors of the Merrion Pier and Baths Company have arranged to commence their season by a band promenade on Saturday 31st May from 7.30 to 9.30pm and thenceforward during the summer months on each Tuesday and Saturday at the same hour. The band of the Highland Infantry will play on the 31st instant. The baths will be open for bathing early in June.’

2 Freeman’s Journal May 20 1891. p.4
A major selling point for the baths was the ease by which they could be reached from the city. In 1883, the Irish Builder noted that customers of the baths could avail of ‘the Dublin Tramway Company, whose cars ran frequently to and from the baths at a small charge, including admission’ into the baths. Proximity to the railway to Queenstown (Dun Laoghaire) was also an important consideration. A combined ticket to Sydney Parade station and the Merrion Baths was also available. A notice in the Freeman’s Journal announcing the re-opening of the baths for the season on May 15th, states the opening times were 6am to dusk and the entrance charge inclusive of ticket for the Sandymount tram or the train to Sydney Parade, was 5d.

Early twentieth century photograph of the tram on Sandymount Strand. The Merrion Baths can be seen in the distance beyond the Martello Tower

1.2. The Architect

The architect-engineer for the baths was Frederick Morley who was born in England. He appears to have settled in Ireland in 1872 when he took up a post in the architectural office of Thomas Newenham Deane. From about 1875, Morley had established his own practise, working first from his home at 6 Strand Road in Sandymount/Merrion and later from an office in Nassau Street. Though a local resident, it is not known if Morley was a habitual user of the baths. As was not uncommon at this time, Morley acted in a professional capacity as both an architect and an engineer. His varied, but not particularly noteworthy, practice included commercial shops and offices in the Dublin area and Methodist chapels in Portlaoise and Jones’ Road in Dublin. He was also the architect for the remodelling of the Baths and Assembly Rooms at Clontarf in 1886. He was listed as an engineer to the Clontarf township and served as a Pembroke Town Commissioner. Morley died on the 31st of July 1896 at his home, Lowell House in Sandymount. He left an estate of £3,373.61.3 to his widow, Kate Morley. Following his death, his practice was carried on by his partner, George Patrick Sheridan, and his son Frederick Louis Morley.

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1.3. Supply of Water

The supply of fresh, clean, sea-water was of primary concern to the operators of the baths, and needless to say, the bathers alike. In 1883, the correspondent for the Irish Builder noted that ‘An excavation was made in the sand of sufficient depth to admit the sea-water to flow in through 12in earthen pipes’ the water being taken from Cockle Lake. Cockle Lake is a deep channel of water, located north east of the baths which does not empty at low-tide level but remains permanently wet.

It would appear that Cockle Lake, as a source of water, eventually proved to be either inadequate or unsuitable. It is possible that the water became stagnant or polluted. The Irish Builder for 1 September 1889 provides a detailed report on a new system of water pumps, installed only 6 years after the baths first opened. The article has been quoted in full below.

‘The Merrion Swimming Baths

The directors of the Merrion Company have recently fitted up machinery for the purpose of securing a daily supply of fresh sea-water to their baths. The swimming baths are 120ft by 120ft, equally divided for ladies and gentlemen, with graduated depths from 9ft down. The mechanism in connection with the filling of the baths and their discharge is of an ingenious character. The sea water is brought from a distance of nearly 600ft from the engine and pump, and about 500 yards outside the sea wall of the baths. A 9-in. pipe runs from the pump under the strand, and in connection with an enormous tank placed at the spot from which the water is drawn, this tank being covered with iron strainers, for the purpose of keeping out seaweed and ensuring a pure supply. Another 9-in. pipe, fitted with foot valve and strainer, is carried to the bottom of the baths, for the purpose of emptying them, both suction pipes being controlled by rods carried up the level of the pier. Thus, by turning one of these rods, the water from the bay comes dashing in in fountain fashion at the rate of more than 2,000 gallons per minute. The delivery pipe has two connections, controlled by a valve, by closing which the water is pumped into the baths, and by opening it the contents are discharged with equal rapidity on to the beach. The pump itself is enclosed in a cast-iron tower which goes 6ft. below the level of the strand and which carries the platform on which the gas-engine rests. It requires an hour and three quarters from time of low-water to clear out the basins completely, while about two and a-half hours are necessary to refill them, which latter work will be done when the day’s bathing is over, and before the commencement of the next. The works were carried out, under the superintendence of the company’s engineer, Mr. Frederick Morley, C.E., by Messrs. M’Garvey and Co., Lombard Street Works.’

The steps taken to ensure that the bathing water, within the swimming baths, was pure and clean, is of considerable interest. It appears that the baths were emptied and re-filled each day. This would have ensured that the water did not become stagnant. Waste products and pollutants would also have been removed in this manner. Today, modern sea-bathing baths which tend not to be emptied on a daily basis, commonly have to add chlorine to the water to prevent it stagnating.

During the 19th century large quantities of sewerage, effluent and waste industrial products would have been washed into the River Liffey and out into the bay without any form of treatment. While later sewerage discharge systems tended to use long pipes which discharged effluent well out into the bay, at the time the baths were built, it is probable that a proportion of this waste material was washed back onto the shoreline by the changing tides. The new water supply system was therefore of great importance.

Eliminating seaweed from the baths was also a priority. Grilles or ‘strainer’s’ stopped seaweed from entering the pipe, ensuring it didn’t reach the baths but also preventing blockages in the pipe itself. The baths

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5 Irish Builder 1 Sept 1889 p 217
themselves were provided with a concrete floor. Sources indicate that the inside of the baths were regularly swept and scrubbed to remove seaweed, silt, sand, molluscs such as barnacles and other organic materials.

1.4. Later History

The baths were not always financially successful and at the AGM of the Merrion Promenade, Pier and Baths Company in 1892 it was reported that attendances in the previous year had been 27,447 while in the previous year, 1890, it was 33,613. However, the profits for the year was only £10.52s.1d.6

Towards the end of the 19th century, ownership of the Baths appears to have changed hands. A notice in the Freeman’s Journal in 1895 noted that it was under new management. In 1898, Thom’s Directory records the Merrion Promenade, Pier and Baths Co. as being a limited company with Edwin Liller as Secretary. However by 1903, the baths were described as in the ownership of William West who lived at Strand Lodge, Sydney Parade. The baths appear to have remained in the possession of the West family up until its closure. In 1915, they were owned by William West's widow and were valued at £30 for rates purposes. Mrs West, resident at 91 Strand Road, was again recorded as the owner in 1918.

1.5. Proposals for Re-development

In 1912, a motion was placed before the Pembroke Urban District Council, proposing that the Council purchase the Merrion Pier and Baths. The proposal met with a mixed reception and was the subject of much debate both within the council chamber and local newspapers. The debate was fuelled to a great deal by the fact that the proposal was made by Unionist members of the council at a time when the Home Rule party were vociferously campaigning for Home Rule. Nevertheless, when the rate-payers of the Pembroke council area were invited to vote on the proposal, 2,604 voted for the proposal and 1,963 voted against. Ultimately, however, the baths were not acquired by the local authority.

In tandem with the proposal to acquire the baths, ambitious designs for remodelling them were prepared by Messrs. Kaye-Parry and Ross.7 At the time, it was noted that the baths were in poor and dilapidated condition and as a result attendances at the baths had declined with only 6,000 bathers paying the admittance fee in 1911 in comparison with over 33,000 bathers in 1890.8

Kaye Parry & Ross’s proposed to retain the existing iron pier while they intended infilling the bathing pools (those that survive today) to provide a base for a new pavilion which would accommodate concerts and other such events. A new iron pier, 360 yards long was to extend far out into the bay to connect the concert hall with a new complex of baths at the end of the pier. The baths, measuring 150ft in length, were to include separate male and female baths together with hot and cold salt and fresh-water slipper baths and showers. The whole development was to cost £10,400 in addition to the £1,000 purchase price of the existing baths.9 No visual representation of what Kaye, Parry & Ross proposals at Sandymount survives but some idea of what was proposed may be seen in a scheme the designed for Warrenpoint.

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6 Freeman’s Journal April 24 1893. p. 7
7 Irish Builder 12 October 1912 p 573
8 Freeman’s Journal February 12 1912. p. 2
9 Ibid. p. 2
A view of a bathing complex designed by Kaye, Parry & Bass for Warrenpoint.

The proposal continued to meet opposition within the council chamber, largely because of the Unionist politics of the promoters and while it continued to be discussed into 1913 the proposal was eventually abandoned for both political and economic reasons.

1.6. Final Years & Closure of the Baths

In 1918, owing no doubt to declining attendances, the baths were put up for sale. The Freeman’s Journal announced its sale by auction in March of that year and noted ‘Merrion Pier and Baths have always shown a substantial profit, which with energetic management could be substantially improved.’ The sale at auction does not appear to have taken place, or to have been successful and later that year the baths were being advertised for sale as a going concern for £1,000.

However, it does not appear that the baths found a new owner and instead remained in the ownership of William West’s widow. The baths appear to have closed around 1920 at about the same time that the seaward wall of the bathing pool collapsed. The baths were not listed in Thom’s Directory for 1922 or 1924 and it would appear that they were dismantled between 1920 and 1922.

An early 20th century view of the Merrion Baths showing its derelict condition

10 Freeman’s Journal March 1 1918. p. 8
11 Freeman’s Journal August 23 1918. p. 6
2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR SANDYMOUNT BATHS

While swimming in the sea must have been an activity that people have engaged in since the dawn of time, it was only during the 18th century that sea bathing became particularly popular, or for that matter, fashionable. Sea bathing was seen as an activity which was beneficial to one’s health, in much the same way as taking the waters was at spas such as Bath and Leamington in England; Mallow and Lisdoonvarna in Ireland and the various continental spas. Elsewhere, the construction of ‘plunge pools’ – deep, unheated baths or pools - into which one plunged were also popular and they were commonly provided on country estates. Similar plunge pools survive at Luttrellstown Castle and St. Enda’s in Co. Dublin.

2.1. Medical Benefits of Sea-Bathing

A notable early advocate of health-benefits of sea-bathing was Dr Richard Russel (1687-1759). Having established a medical practice in Lewes in Sussex, he moved to Brighton in 1747 where he pioneered the development of Brighton as a bathing resort. In 1750 he published a Latin dissertation De Tabe Glandulari, in which he recommended the use of sea-water for the cure of enlarged lymphatic glands. In 1752/3 he re-published this treatise in English as Glandular Diseases, or a Dissertation on the Use of Sea Water in the Affections of the Glands. Russel’s book became widely popular such that by 1769 it had reached its sixth edition.

Russel advocated both bathing in, and drinking seawater. Today we would consider latter action as a rather suspect activity but it was also undertaken at spas such as Bath, where sulphorous water was drunk as a medical treatment. This would have acted as a purgative, a common medical treatment at the time although of course this practice has now fallen out of favour. Russel believed that seawater was particularly beneficial in treating ailments such as scurvy, jaundice, King’s evil (perhaps gout), leprosy and glandular consumption. In addition he advocated sea-bathing as a means of treating skin ailments, rheumatism and treatment of tumors.

However, it was common in the 18th century for medical cures to cause as much injury as the ailments and not all medical practitioners advocated sea-bathing. Sir Arthur Clarke, a Dublin-based surgeon, cautioned many on the perils of sea-bathing in cold weather. In his Essay on Warm, Cold and Vapour Bathing (published 1820) he commented on ‘The predilection which mothers have in general for cold bathing, in order to brace and strengthen their children, as they conceive, accounts for frequent cases of dropsy of the brain which occur in the early periods of life, and of bilious and liver complaints in the latter periods; which are decidedly the most prevailing disorders in Dublin, arising from the indiscriminate use of the cold bath.’ He further noted ‘I have seen five thousand children and upwards of a day, matched through the streets of Dublin, from the House of Industry, and the different Charter and Parochial schools, to the sea side and all indiscriminately immersed without any regard whatsoever to peculiarity of constitution. I have observed many of these unfortunate little ones who are thus forced into the sea, return to their respective institutions, pale and shivering, their lips blue and their bodies debilitated; but such is the mania for cold bathing in this city, from its contiguity to the sea,.’

In an Essay on the Nature of Scrofula, published in 1810, Dr Richard Carmichael also cautioned against the use of sea-bathing as a panacea for particular ailments but especially scrofula. He noted that while the inhabitants of Dublin ‘particularly the children, even those of the lowest class, enjoy the advantage every summer of sea-bathing’, cases of scrofula in Dublin were amongst the highest in the empire.

2.2. Sea-Bathing in Ireland and Dublin

The increased popularity of sea-bathing during the 18th century saw many towns in Ireland and Britain develop as resort towns frequented by the upper classes during the summer months. In England, Brighton, Eastbourne, Blackpool, Scarborough and Weymouth grew quickly to become sizeable resort towns. In Ireland, Youghal in Cork, Kilkee in Clare and Tramore and Dumore East in Waterford, all became popular resorts from the late 18th century onwards.

An early 19th century print depicting sea-bathing on the south coast of England

Several prominent noble families built villas along the coast to take advantage of the proximity of bathing facilities and the sea. These include the families of the Duke of Leinster and Lord Cloncurry, whose now demolished houses at Frascati and Maretimo, were prominent landmarks around Blackrock. Further afield, bathing was also popular at Dun Laoghaire before the construction of the new harbour from 1815 onwards as well as at Bray. Many of these resorts continued to be popular through the nineteenth century and through the bulk of the twentieth century.

In an essay on the Customs, Manners & Habits of Dublin, published in 1813, a commentator noted that during the summer ‘The aristocracy, who had assembled in Dublin, return to their country seats; and the families of the lawyers, merchants, and trades-people, if their circumstances admit of it, retire to their villas near the sea: those whose circumstances forbid this gratification, crowd into lodgings near the coast; and those who cannot afford either, content themselves with bathing, a luxury which they very much enjoy. Thousands may be seen every morning between Dublin and Blackrock, and on the shore of Clontarf, going into the water to “wash”.’

In 1818, William Whitelaw noted that ‘the whole population of Dublin seems to crowd to the water in the summer months, and all ranks and ages think bathing a specific for preservation of the health or the cure of distemper. On these times the road to the sea, at particular times of the tide, present extraordinary spectacles. Every vehicle, public and private, is seen filled with people crowding the avenues that lead to the salt water on both side of the bay, particularly to the south. As the shore is flat and the period of bathing but short at

13 Wakefield, Edward. Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political. 1812
each tide, they hasten to avail themselves of it, and rush altogether into the water. The swarm of naked figures that can be seen on the shore from Ringsend to Sandymount is as singular as it is surprising, while the noise and sportive merriment seem to indicate that it is not practised so much for health and festive recreation. It is supposed that 20,000 bathe every tide in Dublin bay during the summer months, and many continue the practice through the winter.'

2.3. Bathing Spots in Dublin

In the neighbourhood of Dublin, the most fashionable bathing resorts were on the south coast of Dublin bay. In 1817, Ann Plumptree published *A Narrative of a Residence in Ireland* and provided an insight into bathing in Dublin bay. Describing the north side of the bay, she noted that it ‘displays little better than a vast expanse of mud’ while on the other hand the south side, was ‘of a fine sand, and is a great resort for walkers and riders.’

While the south coast of the bay possessed an impressive sandy expanse, a disadvantage was the shallow flat nature of the shoreline and the fact that at low-tide, the water receded for a distance of as much as 2 miles. This of course made sea-bathing particularly difficult and as a result certain locations along the coast, such as the Forty Foot at Sandycove, were prized for the fact that they were largely unaffected by the tides. In 1851 Thomas Benson, who operated several bathing establishments along the coast advertised that there was ‘Good water 2 hours before and 2 hours after high water at Blackrock, 1 hour before and 1 hour after high water at Merrion [Sandymount].’ While bathing was possible all day long at Salthill.

In the early 18th century, Ringsend became a popular bathing spot. ‘To meet the tidal variations, and one may assume, to escape the polluted river, on the ebbing tide, baths were built, as separate establishments for men and women. It is not known whether these ‘baths’ resembled modern domestic baths or whether they were large enough to permit swimming. However the construction of the South Bull Wall affected the tides in the area and increasing development in the area resulted in the air becoming polluted. The construction of the wall did however transform the area from the Shelly Banks near Pigeon House as far as Merrion into a great, relatively sheltered tidal pool.

An early 19th century view of Ringsend by T. Snagg showing the South Wall to the left and bathing boxes along the shore.

14 Whitelaw, William. History of the city of Dublin, from the earliest accounts to the present time. 1818

15 Freeman’s Journal August 29 1851. p 1.
The earliest pictorial evidence for bathing establishments along Dublin bay, is to be found in John Rocque’s map of Dublin, published in 1756. Separate bathing places for men and women are indicated on the shore at Ringsend and Irishtown respectively. What these establishments looked like is unknown but it is probable that they consisted of simple structures in which bathers could undress, leave their belongings in a secure location where they weren’t going to be robbed, and perhaps partake in refreshments following their dip. A little further along the shore was the ‘Conniveing House’, a tavern famous for its ale and fish supper. The Conniving House was built around 1725 and was depicted on Scale and Richard’s 1765 chart of Dublin bay, as a two-storey thatched house. These bathing sites stood roughly in the vicinity of Beach Road in Ringsend, which is now set back from the shore owing to reclamation.

In 1818 the shoreline along Sandymount Strand from Irishtown to Merrion Gates was described as ‘Along this shore the sea is kept out by strong dykes which lie below its level. Further on are Cranfield’s baths much frequented for the purity of its water, which is not diluted with any fresh stream; and beyond them the village of Sandymount, which is comparatively large and populous, and much resorted to in summer for the benefit of bathing. From hence the shore is solitary and naked, and deserted to Booterstown where the road from Dublin opens upon it.’

In 1756 Rocque recorded further bathing sites for men and women at Salthill as well as a bathhouse at Killiney Beach. In 1818, Whitelaw noted that ‘the villages of Booterstown, Williamstown and Black-rock, form an extensive town, exceeding crowded by the citizens during the summer months who generally prefer this to the north side of the bay as having more pure and undiluted water for bathing.’

Elsewhere around the coast, Dubliners regularly bathed at a location on the Tolka River, close to Annesley Bridge on the north strand. Tolka or Clontarf Island, now reclaimed and forming part of the East Point Business Park, was another popular bathing spot. An unusual facility was what was known as the bathing

16 Whitelaw, William. History of the city of Dublin, from the earliest accounts to the present time. 1818
wharf, essentially a floating bath. It is of interest that a similar floating swimming bath was granted planning permission by An Bord Pleanala in May 2015 for construction in Dun Laoghaire harbour. The floating bath was of late 18th century date and in 1823 was known as the ‘Antient Bathing Wharf’. It was moored opposite George’s Dock Parade on the north quays and measured 80ft by 27ft and incorporated two private baths with dressing rooms.17

A view of a floating swimming pool proposed for Dun Laoghaire harbour in 1888

2.4. Bathing Complexes in Dublin

In 1796, John Ferrar noted that at Sandymount the ‘very convenient salt-water bath, erected by a Mr Cranfield,’ after whom Cranfield Avenue in Ringsend is named. Samuel Lewis in 1837 credits Cranfield’s baths as being the first hot sea-water baths erected in Ireland. Cranfield’s baths were still in operation in 1900 but had closed by 1908. Ferrar also referred to proposals to erect a bathing establishment at Dalkey, but nothing is known of these.

During the first decades of the nineteenth century, several notable bathing complexes were located along the south coast. These include the Seafield Baths at Booterstown, Peafield Baths at Blackrock (on the site of Blackrock Park) and a bathing establishment at Killiney Strand. The latter was established by a Mr Hutton and provided changing and dressing facilities, including a mangle room, where clothes could be wrung out to remove as much water as possible. In addition to these, there were several private bathing houses placed along the coast on the shore and serving local mansions such as Maretimo House and Blackrock House.

17 Wright, G.N. An Historical Guide to the City of Dublin. 1825, p. XV
Thomas Benson operated the Merrion Hot and Cold Baths at Sandymount which included the Ladies Bathing Place at Sandymount. In 1870, a newspaper notice indicated that a hot bath cost 1s., a hot shower 6d., while use of the ladies bathing place cost 3d.

The construction of the railway between Dublin and Kingstown, saw the closure of the baths at Booterstown and Blackrock, as the bathing huts were now cut off from the sea by the railway which ran along an embankment across the shallow bay. While the arrival of the railway did spell the end for some bathing spots, it opened up other parts of the coast for bathing. In 1848, the owners of the Seafield baths, Messrs. Maddox and Clinch established a new bathing complex at a new location on a promontory at Seapoint, at the north end of Brighton Vale and now occupied by a private house. John Walsh operated a bathing establishment with hot and cold baths at Sandycove from at least 1838 to 1868 although these perhaps provided salt-water baths rather than swimming facilities. At a later date in 1870 the Sandycove Swimming Club was established at Sandycove Point, better known today as the Forty Foot.

2.5. Bathing Boxes & Facilities

The provision of suitable bathing facilities in Dublin appears to have been an ongoing concern for correspondents of different newspapers and journals. The Irish Builder in 1863, noted ‘True that at Clontarf and Sandymount respected, there are provided by private speculators suitable ‘baths’ to which access may be had for a comparatively small charge (we believe 4d) and what are by suction pumps supplied by sea water from the adjoining shores.’ However the correspondent noted that the cost of admittance was well beyond what a labourer could afford, particularly if accompanied by his wife and children. Instead he noted that these bathers ‘were compelled to shelter themselves in a bathing box [a communal bathing box] close by with the scum of society … and were supplied with ragged garments called “bathing dresses” at one penny per head.’ In other parts of the city, such as at the North Wall, male bathers tended to swim in the nude.

In England, bathing boxes were popular as a means of protecting a bather’s modesty by ensuring that they did not have to wade out across the shallows before they could dip under the waves. Appearing in wet bathing costumes, clinging to one’s body, would have been decidedly risqué at this time, particularly for women. The bathing boxes also enabled bathers to take a ‘header’, or plunge, into the water, rather than wading out to a point where the water was adequately deep. Plunging into the water like this was regarded as particularly invigorating and beneficial for a bather’s health.

With regard to bathing facilities, Ann Plumtree noted that on the south coast of the bay ‘and various other parts round the bay are a number of small boxes, like sentry boxes, for the use of bathers to dress and undress. For ladies these are extremely inconvenient, since instead of plunging from them immediately into the water, as with English bathing machines, they must walk some a way from the sentry box in the bathing dress before the water is reached. I never saw a bathing machine go into the sea anywhere in Ireland.’
Mobile private bathing boxes appear to have been comparatively rare in Dublin and the stationary bathing huts where provided were commonly regarded as ‘an outrage to common decency.’ In 1836 Samuel Leigh noted that ‘The mode of bathing is dissimilar from that in England, where bathing-carts are employed; at Clontarf, bathing-boxes are placed on the shore; and watched by their owner, here the bather dresses in a gown and thus accoutred wades into the water, those who can swim proceed in boats to a distance from the shore.’

In June 15 1863, a correspondent for the Dublin Builder, published a lengthy article criticising bathing facilities. While the correspondent noted that ‘Perhaps in the kingdom there is no seaport town more favourably situated in this regard than our fair citie [sic] of Dublin … and is in full equal to that most fashionably frequented watering places of Margate, Ramsgate, Kilkee etc.’ However the correspondent noted that facilities were ‘shamefully deficient’. In comparison he noted that ‘Along the coasts of even the prettiest and poorest fishing villages of both North and South Wales may be seen comely, spacious and freshly painted “bathing boxes”, so constructed on wheels as to admit the bathers being rolled out into deep water..’. The Irish Builder went on to recommend a wider use of bathing boxes and advocated the acquisition of prefabricated iron and timber bathing boxes which were available from firms such as McFarlanes and George Smith of Glasgow.

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18 Leigh. Samuel. Leigh’s New Pocket Road Book of Ireland. 1835. p 194
The marked variation between high and low tides that occurs around the shores of Ireland and Britain has not always been conducive to sea-bathing. We have seen that bathing boxes, which were wheeled out into the water when the tide was out, were one popular method of ensuring that a bather could dip straight into the sea without the ignominy of having to wade a great distance out into the water while wearing what would have been regarded as rather skimpy attire. One way of avoiding this was to bath in natural sea-pools or around the base of cliffs where a good depth of water was maintained even at low tide.

2.6. Early Swimming Baths and Pools

Perhaps taking inspiration from natural sea pools, the construction of manmade baths or pools, which held water and did not empty at low tide, became increasingly popular during the 19th century. Perhaps the earliest such sea-bath or ‘lido’ was erected in 1833 at Lymington in Hampshire, England. Measuring 110m by 50m in size, this is also one of the largest sea-baths in Britain and following a period of closure, they were restored in 2010 and re-opened for public use. The bathing pools at Clontarf, Sandymount and Dun Laoghaire all owe their origins to the Lymington baths. Open-air bathing continued to be popular right through into the 20th century in both Ireland and Britain, with as many as 169 open-air lidos being built in the Britain during the 1930s alone.

The provision of an expanse of water, isolated from strong tidal surges, was a big factor in the growing interest and use of enclosed walled pools. In Dublin, several such bathing pools were erected along the coast. A new bathing complex was commenced at Blackrock in 1886 for the Blackrock Promenade Pier and Baths Company Limited to the designs of Mr W. Kaye Parry Engineer. These were completed the following year and consisted of a man’s bath 165ft long and 100ft wide, with a graduated depth of 3ft to 7ft 6in. The ladies bath was 102ft long by 54ft wide. The baths were constructed of cement concrete, with buttressed boundary walls and floors laid in concrete.19 These were remodelled in 1928 when new grandstands with timber seating for as many as 1,150 water polo spectators were erected. The baths were demolished by Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council in 2012.

19 Irish Builder 15 July 1887 p 210
Two separate bathing sites were recorded on maps from the 1790s at Dun Laoghaire. The Royal Hotel erected baths in 1828 on the shoreline but these were probably removed when the railway line was constructed. In 1843, John Crostwaite erected what became known as the Royal Victoria Baths on the site of the present Dun Laoghaire baths. These were rebuilt in 1864 at a cost of £4,000.20 The Victoria Baths were acquired by Kingstown Town Council in the 1890s and between 1907-08 they were extensively remodelled to the designs of W. Kaye Parry at a cost of £10,200.12.0.21 These baths were constructed throughout with Vectis brand cement and granite aggregate, which was crushed on the ground by the contractors. The swimming baths measured 150ft by 30ft with an average depth of 10ft 6in divided into two sections for men and women. There were 26 bathing boxes for men and 16 for women as well as 32 white enamelled baths fitted up for hot and cold salt, and hot and cold fresh, water.22 A report prepared in 1936 by Manning Robertson records improvements that had been carried out in the intervening years with the baths having at that time, changing booths for 43 men and 127 women, a tea room, lounge and laundry as well as facilities for Russian steam baths, seaweed, sulphur and alkaline baths. Unexecuted proposals were also underway to erect a new series of baths at a cost of £65,000. This would have incorporated an enormous swimming pool measuring, 900ft by 300ft, together with sun bathing terraces, hot and cold medicinal and ultra violet baths and a palm lounge to accommodate a cafe, concerts and dances. It was also proposed to add warm water to the swimming pool during the winter season. The Dun Laoghaire baths were closed in 1997 but are at the time of writing, the subject of proposals for renovation and redevelopment.

One the north side of the bay, a bathing pool was erected at Clontarf in 1879-80 following the granting of a lease to the Clontarf Baths and Assembly Rooms Ltd. The plans were drawn up by John S. Sloane, an architect and engineer with the Commissioners of Irish Lights and local resident, although it appears that Frederick Morley, the architect for the Merrion Baths was also involved in this project, perhaps owing to

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20 Dublin Builder 1 June 1864
21 Irish Builder 23 March 1907 p 214
22 Irish Builder 13 June 1908 p 374
Sloane’s infirmity, and in his capacity as Engineer to the Clontarf township. The cost was to be £2,000 and included separate pools for ladies and gents, dressing closets for 50 gents and 20 women, hot and cold baths and shallows for non-swimmers. The intended assembly rooms were never in fact built while the baths were approached from the Strand Road by a concrete bridge over the mudflats, the promenade not being built until the 1950s.\(^\text{23}\) According to the Irish Times, ‘the water is renewed each night, bottoms of the baths are well scrubbed, free from seaweed. Hot water baths … in large airy rooms … provided with Bradford’s most approved of porcelain baths.’ The Clontarf baths closed in the 1990s although proposals have been made in recent years by a private company to re-open them.

In addition to these purpose-built swimming baths, facilities for bathers were erected during the 1930s and 1950s on the North and South Walls and along the promenade at Clontarf in the form of bathing shelters, access steps and terraces where bathers could dry off or bask in the sun following a dip.

\(^{23}\) Irish Builder 1 Oct 1879.