



**An Architectural Heritage Survey
of The Square & Church Street,
Listowel**

Client: Kerry County Council

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An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council



CARSON AND CRUSHELL ARCHITECTS

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1.0 Introduction

Carson and Crushell Architects were commissioned in May 2019 by Kerry County Council to undertake an architectural heritage survey of Church Street, Main Street and The Square Listowel having undertaken a similar survey of William Street in 2016.

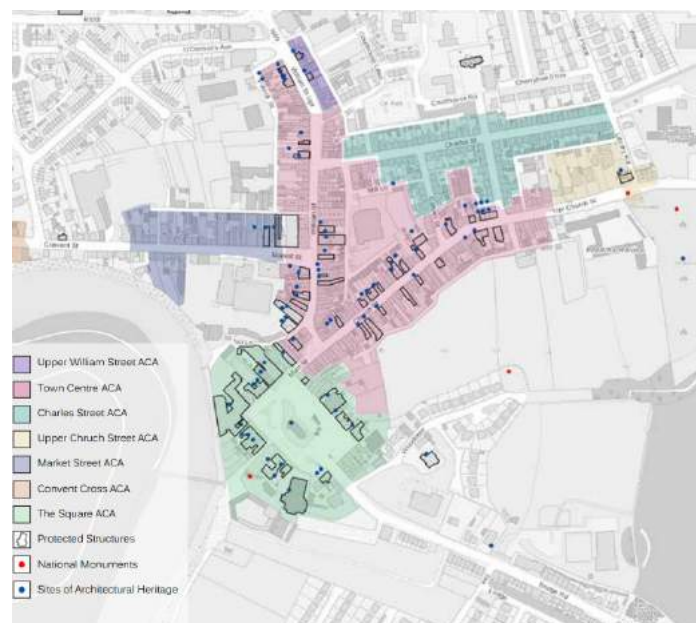
Listowel is one of three pilot towns in 'The National Historic Towns Initiative', a joint undertaking, in 2012-13, by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht¹, The Heritage Council and Fáilte Ireland, who have come together to promote the heritage-led regeneration of Ireland's historic towns.

The undertaking of an architectural heritage survey of Listowel's street frontages is one of a number of projects set out in the Kerry County Council 'Listowel Heritage and Community Led Regeneration Strategy 2016 -2021' (project 2a), the purpose being to audit each street façade to establish its current condition and material character, to outline how each façade contributes to and/or detracts from the streetscape.

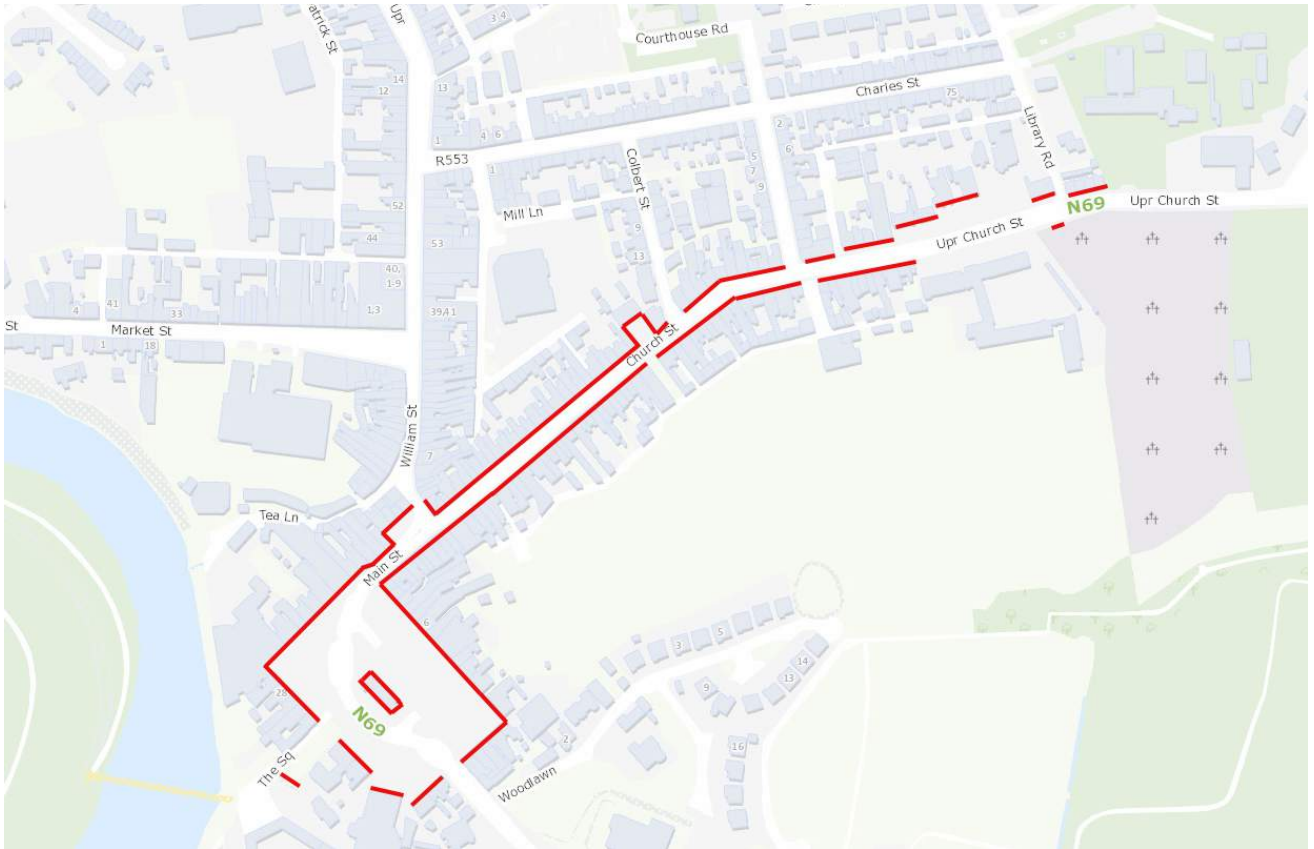
In the longer term the audit will serve as a tool to aid public awareness and the introduction of a Streetscape Improvement Scheme.

2.0 Survey Area

The survey areas are within three separate Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA) as identified by Kerry County Council. Church Street Lower is located within the 'Town Centre' ACA, Upper Church Street within Upper Church Street ACA and The Square ACA. 162 properties were surveyed, 42 of which are on the current Record of Protected Structures and two National Monuments.



Map indicating ACAs, Protected Structures and National Monuments



Maps indicating location of survey area in red

Each of the three ACAs in the survey area possess different characteristics:

The Square presents an impressive urban open space, with St John’s Theatre and Arts Centre (former church) as a central Architectural set piece. The perimeter, predominantly comprising two- and three-storey nineteenth century townhouses, forms a strong enclosure. A number of the building façades have early twentieth-century embellishments, a characteristic that typifies Listowel’s streets. Within The Square perimeter, there are further eye-catching landmarks, notably Listowel Castle and St Mary’s Church. The townhouses are also punctuated by three impressive and exemplary late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century bank buildings that stand as excellent examples of Irish bank architecture, a very specific typology. The townhouses constitute a wonderful example of urban dwellings that activate the Square and provide sustainable homes, as well as contributing handsome aesthetic values to the streetscape.

The Town Centre ACA, incorporating William Street and Church Street, represents the dense commercial heart of Listowel. It is primarily defined by nineteenth-century three-storey terraced townhouses with shopfronts at ground floor level. As with William Street and The Square, many façades were remodeled or embellished in the early twentieth century. The more ornate façades are attributed to master craftsman Pat McAuliffe. As such, Listowel presents a very unique collection of stucco façades, and forms a very important collective built heritage that represents the best of Irish nineteenth and early twentieth-century urban architecture.



Street views of The Square from the Lawrence Collection Photographs (1865-1914) show how much of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century built heritage remains today. Images Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.



Street views of Church Street from the Lawrence Collection Photographs (1865-1914) show how much of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century built heritage remains today. Images Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

Upper Church Street ACA marks a transition of dense urban development to rural hinterland. Plots are larger than those of Lower Church Street, and while the streetline of Lower Church Street is continued in the form of property boundaries, this stretch has a leafy and more suburban character, owing to the buildings being pulled back from the front boundaries. Church Tower and the Youth Centre (former Carnegie Library) add particular historic interest while the intervening buildings are fine examples of twentieth-century townhouses.



Present day photographs of Upper Church Street.

3.0 Methodology Employed

On site surveying was carried out by Rosaleen Crushell and Jenny O'Leary over a period of three days in early May 2019. Where commercial units were open the recorder introduced herself, explained the survey and offered a letter of introduction. No negative comments were received from property owners or occupiers.

3.1 Photography:

The recorder aimed to take photographs that best represented the property in question with as few as possible obstructions, by way of traffic, parked cars, pedestrians and street furniture. For each property the following photographs were taken:

- Front elevation
- Street context: two context photographs of each property were taken, showing the properties relationship to its neighbours and how it sits within the wider streetscape.

For certain properties the following photographs were taken:

- Notable features e.g. windows, doors, signage or those elements that the recorder considered to be key to the architectural or historical character of that façade.

3.2 Property Data Sheet

A data sheet was created for each property outlining the following key information:

- a) Name & address of the property
- b) Current and (estimated) historic uses of the property
- c) Estimated date of construction
- d) If the property is included in the Kerry County Council Record of Protected Structures or National Inventory of Architectural Heritage
- e) Description of the façade
- f) How the property enhances the street character
- g) List of accompanying photographs

4.0 References

In order to describe each property the following sources were referenced:

- Listowel Town Development Plan Record of Protected Structures
- National Inventory of Architectural Heritage www.buildingsofireland.ie
- *Streets of Listowel*, AnCO, 1987

- Lynch, Sean, *The Stuccowork of Pat McAuliffe of Listowel*, (Tralee, 2008)
- Lawrence Collection photographs of The Square and Church Street (1870-1914), National Library of Ireland
- Ordnance Survey 6" map (1837 -1842)
- Ordnance Survey 25" map (1888-1913)
- Current Ordnance Survey map

Other general references

- 'Kenmare, Main Street, Architectural Conservation Toolkit', Kerry 2015.
- 'Listowel Heritage and Community Led Regeneration Strategy', Kerry County Council, 2015.

5.0 Findings

The enclosed survey (appendix A) describes each building and highlights the particularly positive contribution made by each property to the Listowel streetscape. Recurring interventions, additions, removals to individual properties can have a detrimental impact to the streetscape. It is the aim of this summary to highlight detrimental alterations can be avoided in future in order to conserve the unique character of Listowels built heritage.

Vacancy: After demolition, vacancy is the single biggest threat to the survival of historic properties. Without occupation, properties can quickly fall into a state of decay. It is very encouraging that there are no noticeably derelict buildings and a good number of dwellings are fully occupied. There is also a relatively low level of vacancy to the commercial ground floor units, where they exist. Where shop units are vacant, some degree of effort has been made to maintain the façade and in some instances a shop window display has been installed. This approach is to be encouraged so as to maintain visual interest. A number of properties appear to have maintained residential use at upper floor levels and it is noteworthy that few have commercial use to the upper levels.

Scale: The fine grain of the established streetscape, determined by plot sizes, should be maintained. The amalgamation of properties, if not carefully considered, can interrupt the rhythm of the streetscape and the long urban vistas. The proportions of ground floor window and door openings should be retained.



The amalgamation of 6 Church Street with number 8 and 27 Church Street with number 29 has interrupted the vertical emphasis to the streetscape particularly at ground floor level where the number of entrances has been reduced. Both of these photographs also illustrate the impact of removed chimneystacks to the rhythm of the roofscape.



The amalgamation of 41 Church Street with number 43 has been more successful as the traditional arrangement of the shopfronts and entrances has been retained.

Building Elements

Roofs: Very few roofs have original slates in place. This may indicate that the original slate was of poor quality and some further research on the source and thickness of slate used may provide an explanation. Where surviving, efforts should be made to maintain it as it is now extremely rare. A number of properties have had **rooflights** inserted. These punctuate the cohesive terrace roofscapes that characterise the impressive long vistas of Church Street.

Chimneystacks: Of all building elements, chimneystacks are those that appear to be most neglected due to both their inaccessibility and their falling into disuse. Very few early chimney pots remain. Chimneystacks are increasingly being removed in their entirety. Again this has an impact on the overall streetscape views as the former rhythm of repeating units is lost.

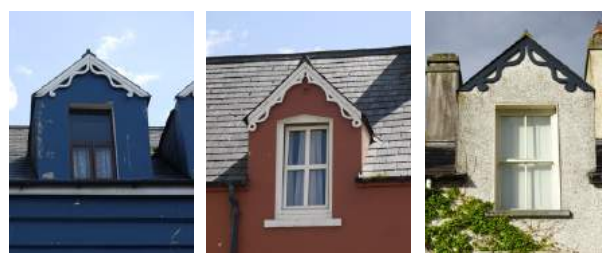


The slate roof of the Listowel Arms Hotel is a very rare surviving example of slate roofs in the town. The variation in the natural material adds depth of character that can especially be enjoyed due to the open space allowing sight of the roof from afar.

The junction between a natural slate roof covering and artificial roof covering highlights the differing characteristics of the materials, previously a seamless joint (46 & 48 Church Street).



Artificial roofing materials are visually less forgiving of undulations in the underlying roof structure due to their flat and uniform character. Removal of chimneys and introduction of rooflights alter the rhythm of the streetscape vistas.



Dormer windows with decorative bargeboards can be found on both Church Street and The Square. Those retaining their decorative bargeboards, adding interest to the roofscape, are shown here (63, 65, 79, 81 Church Street and 23 The Square).

Rainwater goods: Some early cast-iron goods remain, however, a large number have been replaced with uPVC. Some replacements, particularly those in black uPVC and those that have rounded profiles are less visually obtrusive than white uPVC with square profiles. Where cast-iron remains efforts should be made to retain it. It is as an inherently more robust material and can be painted to match the façade resulting in less visual clutter to the streetscape.



Cast-iron rainwater goods can be painted the same colour as the facade mimising their visual impact (70 Church Street above). Many buildings have regrettably had the cast-iron rainwater goods replaced with uPVC versions.

The cast-iron rainwater goods to 15 Church Street (left) are integrated while the white uPVC downpipe to 13 Church Street (on the right) stands out.

Walls: The majority of walls are smooth rendered. Relief is provided to some by the presence of render detailing such as quoins, architraves and string courses. Notably, the plasterwork of Pat McAuliffe lends visual and contextual interest to several structures. Celtic motifs are a recurring theme representing a growing interest in visual expressions of Nationalism at the time of their execution. Plaster has been removed to expose the underlying rubble stonework at three properties. This is out of character with traditional finishes and also leaves the structure more vulnerable to decay from water ingress.

Windows: Very few early timber sliding sash windows remain, particularly to Church Street. A great deal have been replaced with uPVC windows. In addition to the material, many of these are outward opening, which is out of character with the historic appearance of the streetscape. Efforts should be made to retain and repair the historic windows that do remain.



Church Street retains few early sash windows. Window replacement is one of the most frequent alterations that detracts from the traditional character. Every effort should be made to repair and retain surviving early windows as above. Left to right: 35, 46, 55, 93 Church Street.



Samples of early sash windows in the The Square. Left to right: 8, 12 19, 36 The Square.



A comparison of the ground floor timber sash windows (far left) and the first and second floor outward opening uPVC windows (middle) to the Listowel Arms Hotel demonstrates the differing characteristics of the two materials and opening arrangements and the impact that can have on the entire facade (right). The uPVC windows, with false mullions, lack depth and material character.

A large number of timber shopfronts have been applied in recent decades. Their bulky pilasters and fascias are at odds with the elegant proportions of the overall façade. They encroach on the public footpath and their material character is inherently unsuitable to placement directly on the ground resulting in rot giving an impression of neglect. Some shopfronts have been painted in entirely separate range of colours than that of the upper levels of the building, this excessively divides the composition of the entire façade. A colour scheme that unifies the entire building should be chosen.



Examples of how a lack of coordination between ground and upper floor paint colours detracts from the overall composition of the entire facade.



Examples how how a paint colours can unify the shopfront and upper floors, enhancing the streetscape.

Signage: Overall, Listowel benefits greatly from well designed and executed signage be that historic or recent. In some instances hand-painted signage, perhaps not of historic interest, contributes positively to the visual appeal of the streetscape and alleviates clutter. In recent times signage of a very temporary nature has been applied over shopfronts thereby obscuring historic fabric beneath. There are not many projecting signs however it was noted where it did occur as adding clutter to the façade and obscuring the picturesque vistas.



Signage concealing render decorative render details (left) to top of moulded architraves. (as above).



Hand painted signage and raised lettering can add greatly to modest facades, displays skilled craftsmanship and alleviates the necessity for planted on signs resulting in visual clutter.

Services: exposed cables are very common, particularly over and around the shopfront fascias. They add clutter and detract from both the plain and modest façades as well as the more ornate shopfronts. Some buildings also have floodlights mounted to the façades. Again, this adds visual clutter to the façade, detracts from the render detailing and is a source of light pollution



Services, projecting signage, floodlights, spotlights and alarm boxes all add visual clutter and detract from the well proportioned facade and overall streetscape.

Carriage-arches: A number of carriage-arches are integrated within building façades to both The Square and Church Street. They make a significant contribution to the streetscape; usually having decorative voussours that add articulation and visual interest to the street, recall historic occupation and usage of the site and allow permeability to backlands. A number of carriage- arches have been subsumed into building interiors in recent decades, a regrettable alteration to the streetscape that hinders easy pedestrian movement through the town and occupation to rear sites. Jostle stones that served an important purpose in the protection of buildings from the jostling wheels of traps and carts still stand at many carriage arches and add material and historic interest to the street.



The carriage arch to 67 Church Street as seen in the Lawrence Collectoion photograph above (right) has been infilled reducing permeability to the town centre. Carriage arches also existed to 36 and 46 CHurch Street and 30 The Square.

Boundary Treatment

Overall, property boundaries such as railings and walls are in very good condition. Townhouses to The Square have a variety of plinth walls with cast and wrought-iron railings and pedestrian gates intact. These have been well maintained and add to the special character of The Square. Similarly, railings to Upper Church Street remain with front gardens intact. It is commendable that these have not been removed and turned into car parking spaces, an ubiquitous problem in many other historic urban and sub-urban areas. Similarly, the coursed limestone rubble wall to St Michael’s Graveyard on Upper Church Street is in good condition and adds a rich material character to the street.

New interventions: Where new interventions have been made there has been a lack of high quality contemporary architectural design. Two vacant plots to Church Street (59 - 61) offer an opportunity for renewal. New buildings should avoid pastiche and follow existing plot boundaries to retain the existing grain, an important determining factor of the special character of the streetscape.



Proportions of openings/ dormers, tinted glazing, stone cladding, brick and ill considered layout of rainwater goods are add odds with the traditional materials and character of the streetscape.



59-61 Church Street offers opportunity for the introduction of exemplary contemporary architecture that is complimentary to the surrounding nineteenth-century buildings.

6.0 Recommendations

Expand survey area: Listowel has a vast array of very individual and expressive street façades. An audit of all conservation areas within the town will provide a thorough conservation toolkit. Upper William Street ACA, Market Street ACA, Charles Street ACA and Convent Cross ACA have not yet been surveyed.

Primary research: Comprehensive understanding of our built heritage leads to best practice conservation. Primary research into the façade renovations/ improvements carried out at the end of nineteenth/ beginning twentieth century would aid in the understanding of this very unique aspect of Listowel's built heritage. Subjects that could be explored are the motivations behind the works, the costs expended, the skills and fashions. This may tie into project 6 (Heritage Archive) of the Listowel Heritage and Community Led Regeneration Strategy.

Public awareness: An increase of public awareness in the unique built heritage of Listowel, particularly outlining the more modest, often forgotten buildings, would assist their long term conservation. This approach could take the form of an exhibition that highlights the threats and opportunities of Listowel's built heritage, consultations for property owners with Conservation Architects and the publication of advice leaflets for property owners.