



CONTEXT

HISTORIC CONTEXT

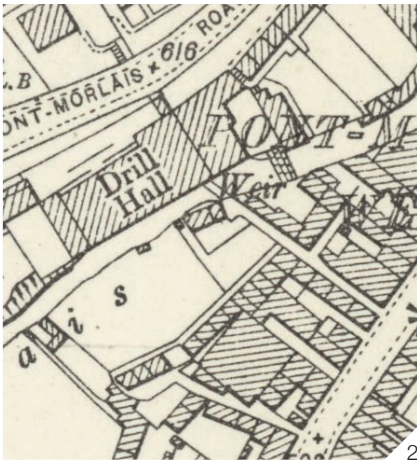
The context which the project area is positioned is within the lower ground floor of the Canolfan Soar, which is the building located north of the grade II listed Zoar Chapel.

The building has received much development over the years with much of the historic fabric concealed by campaigns of contemporary building works. Historically, it is understood that the building formed part of the vestry and school for the Zoar Chapel, with parts of the building originated from 1867. Indeed, the historic mapping suggests that the initial school building was developed directly in front of the principal elevation of the Chapel, with the 1860's ordnance survey map indicating a small L-shaped building which had a physical connection to the Chapel. To the north-west of the school a row of houses, which are named "Pottery Row" were access from the north-west, with the rear faces of the buildings abutting the Chapel and School. The 1912 Ordnance Survey map retains this layout.

In the 1912 Ordnance Survey map the school had been extended to the north-west, which had required several of the houses named as 'Pottery Row' to be removed. The layout of the building, as illustrated in the 1919 Ordnance Survey map is similar to that found today. The detail of the 1919 Ordnance Survey map reveals that the physical connection between the Chapel and the School room had been removed. The pedestrian route to the high street had been retained, which provides the main pedestrian

access to the Chapel and Canolfan today.

The extension of the school saw a significant increase in size of the footprint of the building, with the building more than doubling. There is a change in topography where the new School development took place, with the congregation seizing the opportunity to create a lower ground level and maximising on accommodation space. It is not clear how the change in level was overcome in terms of movement around the site from the Ordnance Survey maps. However, it is apparent that there was an entrance to the north-west of the school room from Old Mill Lane, a small lane located to the east, which historically had a link to a footbridge that travelled over the Morlais Brook to the Drill Hall.



1. 1860's Ordnance Survey Map illustrating the location of the Zoar Chapel, with the smaller Sunday School located to the north east of the principal elevation of the Chapel. Note the direct connection between the Chapel and School building and the location of the row of houses called Pottery Row.
2. 1912 Ordnance Survey Map outlining no changes to the immediate location of the Chapel and School buildings.
3. 1919 Ordnance Survey Map providing a clear indication that the Sunday School was extended between 1912 and 1919. The map also illustrates a potential entrance from Old Mill Lane to the rear (NE) elevation of the Sunday School building.

The area around the Old Mill Lane has a very interesting and diverse historical setting and once included a Corn Mill, with a water course feed from Morlais Brook which crated the water source to feed into the water wheel that generated the power for the Corn Mill. The historical development of the site and buildings is very interesting, and whilst this is of interest it does not form part of this report. However, the research into the heritage of this area and the historic mapping provides useful indications of previous entrances and circulation routes around the Old School building.

The 1919 Ordnance Survey map also indicates three structures attached to the north-west elevation of the school building. These seemed to have been developed during the same time as the 1919 extension to the school building. These no longer remain today, with this area now forming part of the car-park.

The building which remains today is the extended version of the 1919 School building, which was regenerated into a theatre arts complex in 2010, following the redundancy of the Zoar Chapel.

Topography/Entrances

The topography around the school building and Chapel is defined by the change in level which travels in a southwest northeast direction and follows a line of the north-west elevation of the Chapel and the first phase of the School room. The ground to the north-west is approximately a storey lower than the original setting

of the Zoar Chapel and School building.

The levels of the existing car-park are positioned higher to those of the finish floor level to the lower ground floor of the Canolfan, with an external ramp being installed to provide a means of level access to the lower ground floor.

Adjacent to the ramp is a small external enclosure which provides level access into the lower ground floor, directly into the old nursery (Meithrin).

The ramp continues towards an entrance that provides access into the 2010 extension that created a new internal stair and foyer, that also incorporated a new lift. The lift and external ramp provide a means of level access to Canolfan Soar from the car-park entrance. The levels to the north-west entrance create a partial subterranean structure to the lower ground floor, with the car-park sitting approximately 1.5 meters above finish floor level of the lower ground floor. This subterranean effect continues to the northeast and around the boiler room and eastern wall, with these spaces being fully submerged by retained ground to the northeast.

1. View of the old footbridge that connected Old Mill Lane and the Drill Hall, travelling over the Morlais brook.
2. Morlais Brook looking southwards from the Wesleyan Chapel towards the Drill Hall, with the footbridge in the background.
3. Historic photograph extracted from www.merthyr-history.com, the melting Pot illustrating the footbridge as shown in image 1 above. The Wesleyan Chapel is in the background of the photograph, with the image most likely obtained from the walls near to the School Building.
4. An internal historic photograph of the Drill Hall. A large space for large gatherings.
5. Old Mill Lane as seen today, with cobbled surfaces to the road and narrowing access to the yard that is positioned to the rear of the buildings facing on to the High Street.





1. Drone photography illustrating the south-west elevations of the Old School Building, which was generated into the Canolfan Soar in 2010. The image highlights the entrance to the building which is split over two levels. The white building to the LHS of the image is the Theatr Zoar, which was the old Zoar Chapel which is grade II listed.



2. Roof plan (not to scale) providing the site context of the buildings within the demise of the Canolfan Soar and its adjacent context. The red line illustrates the axis which represents the change in level across the site. The line also represents the location of the east wall of the lower ground floor, with the return to Old Mill Lane and indicates the east below ground walls.