

Literary Travels in England, Scotland, and Ireland

July 5- August 10, 2006

Part Three: Ireland

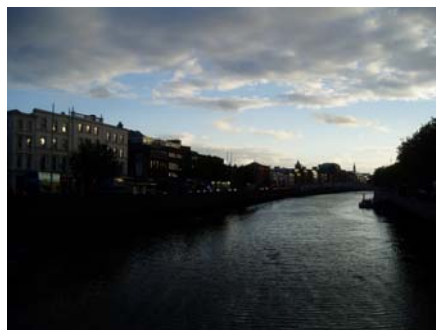
Dublin

On Tuesday, August 1, we took a short flight from Edinburgh to Dublin to begin the final stage of our three-part literary tour. For James Joyce fans, the ideal time to visit Dublin is in June to celebrate the annual Bloomsday anniversary of the one-day sojourn through Dublin on June 16 in Joyce's novel *Ulysses*. But whenever one visits Dublin, the city, which is compact and very walkable, offers much for a literary traveler.



Our lodgings were in an inexpensive guest-house called the Phoenix Park House, located at 38/39 Parkgate Street on the western edge of Dublin, right across the street from

the expansive gardens and greens of one of the largest urban parks in the world. Both the park and the guest-



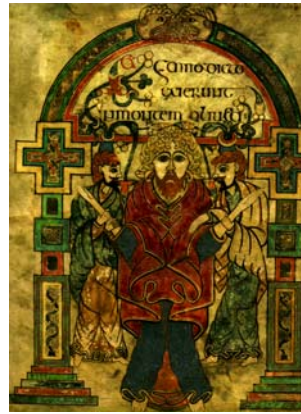
house are a short walk from Heuston train station, on the north bank of the Liffey. Once settled there, we found a great local pub, Mary's Hand, just around the corner, where we had dinner, and then, to get our bearings, we took a leisurely walk east along the Liffey toward Dublin city center. We crossed the bridge at O'Connell Street, found Trinity College, and continued our walk back toward our hotel down the south side of the Liffey, through Temple Bar, past Christ Church Cathedral and the Guinness Brewery.



Our first full day in Dublin began Wednesday morning with a walking tour of Trinity College and a visit to the Library Colonnades where the Book of Kells is displayed. The college was founded in 1592 by Queen Elizabeth I who wanted a place where her loyal subjects could get a university education without being “infected with popery.” In other words, it was founded as a Protestant institution which did not officially admit Catholics until 1970; nowadays the majority of the students are Catholic. The Book of Kells display is entered through the Long Room of the library, which houses the oldest volumes of Trinity College’s collection. The room is lined with busts of famous philosophers and writers, such as Jonathan Swift and Edmund Burke, and down the center



are display cases which, the day we visited, contained vintage examples of children’s books. Also part of the display, in what appears to be a small cage, are the library’s book restorers. One can also see the harp of Brian Boru, one of the oldest harps in Ireland,



and the one reproduced as the official national symbol.



A gold boat from the treasure room of the National Museum. Delicate and beautifully crafted, it is more wonderful to me than the Golden Tara Brooch or the Ardagh Chalice or even the Cross of Cong. Impressive as they are, it has an Egyptian or otherworldliness those other works don't share.

From Trinity College, we walked a few blocks to the National Museum which houses the finest collection of Bronze and Iron Age gold artifacts in the world, including the Ardagh Chalice and the Tara Brooch. These two objects have the greater claim to fame, but I was drawn more to the small golden boat, which had an Egyptian delicacy and elegance. For us, the most arresting display the museum offered were the preserved bog-people: men who had been ritually killed or sacrificed and buried in peat



Hand from the preserved torso of a man sacrificed and buried in a peat bog - from the National Museum



bogs, until unearthed by farmers and peat-harvesters. Each figure was encased in glass and sheltered behind a partition. More than one small child emerged wide-eyed or crying, which didn’t surprise me, because their preserved and blackened corpses are disturbingly expressive. They are also unexpectedly beautiful, in a macabre sort of way.



Across from the National Museum is the National Library, built to provide a place where the poor could educate themselves, and where many young Catholic scholars, unable to attend Trinity College, pursued their education. The National Library's reading room was the setting of one of the most famous scenes in Joyce's *Ulysses*. Joyce, being a Catholic, would have studied here, while attending Dublin's Catholic University, still housed in buildings off Merrion Square. The Library also houses the Genealogical Office, which my sister Annie visited for information about our Irish roots: O'Connor and Kiley.

Nearby Grafton Street is the



Dublin



destination of many of Dublin's tourists, as the premier shopping district, but the area is rather frantic and commercial at the height of tourist season. After checking out the famed "tart with the cart" statue of Molly Malone, we headed to Merrion Square, location of the former



homes of playwright Oscar Wilde, poet W.B. Yeats, revolutionary Daniel O'Connell, and others. Merrion Square is famous for its Georgian-style buildings and colorful doors. In fact, Dublin houses are known for their doors, doorknobs, and knockers, the shop pictured above illustrates.

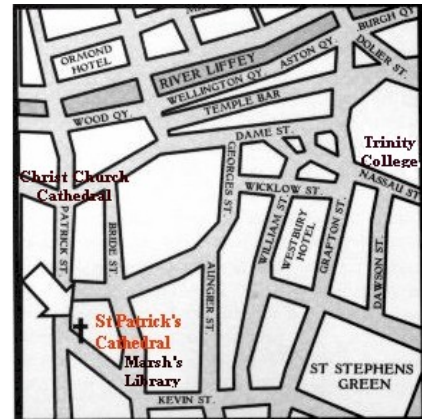
The north-east corner of Merrion Square, across from Wilde's childhood home, is a monument to Oscar Wilde featuring many of his witty one-lines carved into two pedestals before a huge rock on which the sculpted figure of Wilde drunkenly reclines.



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Our walking tour of Dublin continued through St. Stephen's Green, a tranquil oasis of picnickers and music, and through the Temple Bar District's southern border along



Parliament Street, past City Hall and Dublin Castle, and on to St. Patrick's Cathedral.

Jonathan Swift, author of Gulliver's Travels and "A Modest Proposal," was the Cathedral's most famous dean from 1213-1745, and he is buried



there, along with his wife and mistress, both named Stella. Around the corner from their tombs



lie the remains of Swift's valet, whose tomb, paid for by Swift, bears the inscription "In

gratitude for his discretion." The windows and floor of the cathedral are decorated with vividly colored patterns, pictured here. The cathedral's choir took part in the first performance of Handel's Messiah at a theater between St. Patrick's and Christ Church Cathedrals, which is now a hotel called the George Frederick Handel, bearing a plaque to

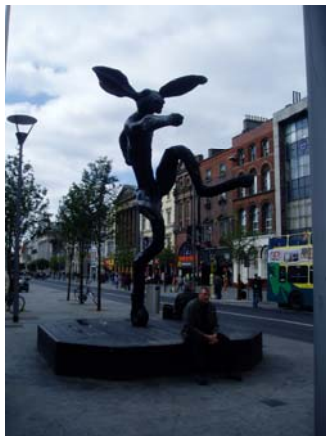


commemorate the historical musical event.



We ended our walking tour of Dublin south-of-the-Liffey with dinner at a pub called the Brazen Head on Lower Bridge Street, which claims to be Dublin's oldest pub, dating from 1198. We enjoyed our meal in the open-air courtyard, followed after nightfall by live music indoors.

On Thursday, our second day in Dublin, we headed down to O’Connell Bridge, then up O’Connell Street to the Post Office. Our goal wasn’t to mail letters, but to see the building which is most closely associated with the Irish Revolution of 1916, for it was here that the revolutionaries stood their ground against the British, and it is here one can still see the bullet holes in the columns, the plaque commemorating the Irish Declaration of Independence, and the statue of Cuhulain, mythical hero of Ireland.



The central walkway down O’Connell Street has a number of statues to Ireland’s historical figures and patriots, along with displays of contemporary public art. When we visited, the temporary sculptures were giant rabbits whose postures and gestures commented on the elements of Irish history and culture. One rather pugnacious rabbit, pictured here, seems about to stomp on the tourist seated below his foot. But his foot and fist are raised toward a statue opposite, depicting a leader of Dublin who introduced prohibition—a short-lived and clearly unpopular bit of legislation.

Our destination at Parnell Square was the Writers Museum. Dublin is famous as a city of writers and literature, and the Dublin Writers Museum is an essential visit for anyone who wants to discover, explore, or simply enjoy Dublin's immense literary heritage.

At the Writers Museum, Dublin’s literary celebrities from the past three hundred years are brought to life through their books, letters, portraits and personal items. After our visit to the Writers Museum, I went a few blocks away to the James Joyce Center, and then to St. Mary’s Catholic Cathedral and the Abbey Theater.



The Malborough Street frontage of the Pro-Cathedral



The Abbey Theater, at 26 Lower Abbey Street, was founded in 1904 by W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory, the Abbey is Ireland's national theatre and remains a crucial promoter of established and emerging Irish playwrights. The theatre's early years saw much controversy: the 1926 premiere of O'Casey's 'The Plough and the Stars' upset nationalist sensibilities and provoked Yeats to personally rebuke the audience, who felt offended by the depiction of the 1916 nationalist movement. Although generally less controversial these days, new Irish plays are still staged in the basement theatre, the Peacock. The theatre's Abbey Street premises has been open since 1961, but changes are afoot. The management is currently considering a move south of the river.

While I was continuing my literary tour, Don and Caitlin visited the Jamison Distillery, and Allison and Annelisa headed for Christ Church Cathedral. We met up at 4:00 at the Guinness Brewery for a tour and sampling of the beer in the pub located at the top of the brewery, with a 360 degree view of Dublin. The windows are etched with inscriptions indicating where in Dublin significant events in *Ulysses* occurred, for the Joyce aficionados.

We concluded our second day in Dublin with a musical pub crawl in Temple Bar. The pub crawl originates from St. John Grogarty's Pub in the center of the district, and is hosted by two musicians who weave an introduction to Irish music and pub etiquette with lively performances on a variety of traditional Irish instruments.

