



Comhairle Cathrach
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Council



History on your Doorstep

Volume 7

Seven stories of Dublin's history

by Dublin City Council's Historians in Residence Katie Blackwood, Elizabeth Kehoe, Cormac Moore, Mary Muldowney and Catherine Scuffil, Historian in Residence for Children Dervilia Roche and historian Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh

Edited by Katie Blackwood and Cormac Moore

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Réamhrá

Beannachtaí agus fáilte romhaibh go léir!

Tá ríméad orm, mar Ardmhéara Bhaile Átha Cliath, an t-eagrán is deireanaí de *History on Your Doorstep*, foilseachán bliantúil faoi stair Bhaile Átha Cliath, a chur in bhur láthair. Is é seo an 7ú heagrán den fhoilseachán seo de chuid Leabharlanna Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath. Tá ailt ann, mar a bhíonn i gcónaí, ó sheisear Staraithe Cónaithe Chomhairle Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath, agus ina measc sin tá beirt staraithe nua – Katie Blackwood agus Elizabeth Kehoe. Chomh maith leis sin, tá ríméad orm go bhfuil caibidil Ghaeilge san eagrán seo, a scríobh Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh. Tugann sé seo aitheantas don ról lárnach atá ag an nGaeilge mar theanga bheo i gcathair Bhaile Átha Cliath.

Pléitear i gcaibidil Katie Blackwood stair ársa agus stair níos deireanaí toibreacha naofa i mBaile Átha Cliath, agus díritear ar cheithre thobar ar an taobh ó thuaidh den chathair. Ag tagairt do chúrsaí béaloidis, creidimh, féilte agus ailtireachta agus d'fhorbairt na mbruachbhailte, léirítear sa chaibidil seo an nasc idir an tírdhreach agus taithí saoil na ndaoine a tháinig romhainn, agus éilítear go gcaomhnófar na suíomhanna oidhreachta seo.

Breathnaíonn Elizabeth Kehoe ar ról Chumann Naomh Uinseann de Pól i leas agus carthanacht a chur ar fáil do na daoine ba bhoichte i mBaile Átha Cliath ag tús an fhichiú haois. Déanann sí scrúdú ar an gcaoi ar tháinig dhá fhachtóir le chéile – leibhéal ard dífhostaíochta agus teaghlaigh mhóra – chun timthriall na bochtaineachta a chruthú. Is beag a rinne an Stát chun an fhadhb seo a mhaolú agus is Cumann Naomh Uinseann de Pól a líon an bhearna sin, gníomh a raibh iarmhairtí fadtréimhseacha don tír mar thoradh air.

Tugtar léargas cuimsitheach i gcaibidil Cormac Moore ar shaol liteartha an scríbhneora Frank O'Connor, agus ar a chuid oibre mar leabharlannaí i mBaile Átha Cliath, rud nach eol don oiread sin daoine. Scrúdaítear an caidreamh a bhí ag O'Connor ar feadh a shaoil le leabharlanna, an tionchar a bhí acu ar a fhorbairt mar scríbhneoir agus an chaoi ar cruthaíodh tearmann fáiltiúil do leanaí áitiúla a bhuí leis an gcur chuige neamhghnách a bhí aige i leith leabharlann a reáchtáil.

Nochtann Mary Muldowney an easpa uafásach cúraim a d'fhulaing na páistí a chónaigh i dTeach Marlborough idir na 1940idí agus na 1970idí. Scrúdaíonn sí an chaoi ar loic Ranna Stáit éagsúla ar na buachaillí leochaileacha sin a coinníodh ann agus a d'fhulaing mí-úsáid uafásach agus drochíde dá bharr.

Cuireann Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh síos ar choimhlintí faoi chúrsaí teanga ar Bhardas Átha Cliath i 1920. Ba mhór an teannas idir comhairleoirí a thug dúshlán rialtas na Breataine agus oifigigh a chloígh leis an seanreacht, agus tugadh sin go cnámh na huillinne nuair a bhí sé de dhánacht ag roinnt comhairleoirí an Ghaeilge a úsáid i ngnóthaí an Bhardais.

Déanann an Staraí do Pháistí, Dervilia Roche, cur síos ar a cuid oibre i scoil amháin i mBaile Átha Cliath agus ar an togra podchraolta a chruthaigh sí i gcomhar le daltaí Phobalscoil Náisiúnta na Cathrach Theas. Breathnaítear ina caibidil sin ní hamháin ar stair shaibhir cheantar Shráid na mBráithre Bána, ach ar an gcaoi a gcruthaíonn iniúchadh nuálaíoch páistí ar an stair togra spreagúil pobail.

Aon ghrianghraf amháin is bunábhar do chaibidil Catherine Scuffil, agus tugann sí léargas oilte ar an stair áitiúil, náisiúnta agus idirnáisiúnta a chuimsítear ann. Faightear cuntas sa chaibidil seo ar Phádraig Mac Piarais agus ar Athbheochan na Gaeilge, ar rannpháirtíocht saighdiúirí Éireannacha sa Chéad Chogadh Domhanda, ar leagan amach Chromghlinne i gcaitheamh na staire agus ar scéalta daonna ó na daoine a chónaigh ann.

Tá stair shaibhir agus éagsúil Bhaile Átha Cliath agus éagsúlacht an taighde atá idir lámha ag na Staraithe Cónaithe ina gceantair le brath ar an saothar ilchineálach seo. Tá *History on Your Doorstep* ar fáil saor in aisce ó Leabharlanna Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath uile, áit a mbíonn fáil chomh maith ar an iliomad leabhair agus foilseacháin staire eile ar fiú do gach duine i mBaile Átha Cliath súil a chaitheamh orthu.

Bainigí sult as!

James Geoghegan

Ardmhéara Bhaile Átha Cliath

Foreword

It is my pleasure as Lord Mayor of Dublin to introduce this latest issue of *History on Your Doorstep*, the annual publication that takes the history of Dublin as its subject. This year marks the 7th volume of this homegrown Dublin City Libraries publication. As per usual, it features writing by the six Dublin City Council Historians in Residence including two new historians – Katie Blackwood and Elizabeth Kehoe. In addition, I am especially delighted that this volume includes a chapter in the Irish language, written by Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh, which recognises the central position of Irish as a living language to the city of Dublin.

Katie Blackwood's chapter tackles the ancient and recent history of holy wells in Dublin, focusing on four wells located in the northside of the city. Covering folklore, religion, festivals, architecture and the growth of the suburbs, this chapter demonstrates the connections between the landscape and the lived experiences of people in the past while calling for the preservation of these heritage sites.

Elizabeth Kehoe investigates the role of the St Vincent de Paul in providing welfare and charity to Dublin's poorest citizens in the early part of the twentieth century. She looks at how high unemployment and large families combined to create a cycle of poverty which the State did little to alleviate. This led to the St Vincent de Paul stepping into this gap, one which had lasting consequences for the country.

Cormac Moore's chapter on the writer Frank O'Connor gives a thorough overview of his literary career and it sheds light on his lesser-known work as a librarian in Dublin. It examines O'Connor's life-long relationship with libraries outlining the importance they played in his development as a writer and how his unconventional approach to running a library created a welcoming refuge for local children.

Mary Muldowney reveals the shocking lack of care endured by the children who were residents in Marlborough House from the 1940s through to the 1970s. She examines how various State Departments failed these vulnerable boys who had been detained within its walls and were subject to horrific abuse and maltreatment as a result.

Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh describes the language struggles in Dublin Corporation in 1920. There was great tension between councillors who challenged the British government and officials loyal to the old system, which was brought to a head when some councillors dared to use Irish in the business of the Corporation.

Dervilia Roche, Dublin's Historian in Residence for Children, describes the podcast project she co-created with the children of the South City Community National School. Her chapter explores both the rich history of the Whitefriar Street area and how children's innovative explorations of history resulted in an engaging community project.

Catherine Scuffil bases her chapter on just one photograph and skilfully uncovers the local, national and international history within it. Bringing us from Pádraig Pearse and the Gaelic Revival to Irish soldiers' participation in the First World War, from previous configurations of the Crumlin area to touching stories of its former inhabitants.

The varied work featured in this volume goes some way to illustrating the rich and diverse history of Dublin and the many strands of research being undertaken by the Historians in Residence in response to their areas. *History on Your Doorstep* is available free from all Dublin City Libraries, along with a multitude of other history books and publications which the residents of Dublin are welcome to explore.

Enjoy your reading.

James Geoghegan
Lord Mayor of Dublin

About the authors

KATIE BLACKWOOD is Historian in Residence for the Dublin North Central area. She holds an MA in Public History and Cultural Heritage from the University of Limerick and a BA in Fine Art Sculpture from the National College of Art and Design. She has worked for many years in libraries and archives. As an independent researcher she has undertaken community-based oral history projects focusing on cultural and social history.

ELIZABETH KEHOE is Historian in Residence for the Dublin Central area. In 2015 she returned to formal education and completed a degree in history at Trinity College Dublin followed by an M. Phil. in Modern Irish History. She is an independent tour guide and researcher based in Dublin, working in Ireland and online. She shares her love for history with established local communities, new Irish communities, and visitors to this island.

CORMAC MOORE has a PhD in History from De Montfort University in Leicester and an MA in Modern Irish History from UCD. He is Historian in Residence for Dublin South East and is author of *Laois: The Irish Revolution, 1912-23* (due to be published in 2024), *Birth of the Border: The Impact of Partition in Ireland* (2019), *The Irish Soccer Split* (2015), and *The GAA V Douglas Hyde: The Removal of Ireland's First President as GAA Patron* (2012). He is a columnist with the Irish News as well as editor of its daily 'On This Day' segment.

MARY MULDOWNEY holds a PhD in History from Trinity College Dublin and a postgraduate qualification in Adult Continuing Education and Training from the National University of Ireland at Maynooth. She is the Historian in Residence for Dublin North West. Mary is the author of books and journal articles with a particular interest in labour and women's history. She is a member of the Grangegorman Histories Expert Working Group, the committee of the Irish Labour History Society (ILHS) and she is co-editor of *Saothar*, the journal of the ILHS. She was a founding member of the Oral History Network of Ireland and is a frequent consultant on other history projects.

AINDRIAS Ó CATHASAIGH: Tá a lán leabhar faoin tréimhse réabhlóideach in Éirinn scríofa aige, chomh maith le scrípteanna do shraitheanna faisnéise ar TG4, agus aistí in irisí éagsúla. Bhronn an Chomhdháil Mheiriceánach do Léann na hÉireann agus Oireachtas na Gaeilge duaiseanna ar a leabhar *Ainm na Saoirse: Gaeilge Dháil Éireann 1919-22*. Is é *Triúr ar Chlé: Ó Riain, Ó Maicín, Ó Maoláin* an leabhar is deireanaí leis, beathaisnéis triúr sóisialaithe Gaelacha sa chéad leath den fhichiú céad.

DERVILIA ROCHE is Education Manager and Historian in Residence for Children at Dublin City Council Culture Company. She has been working in heritage and public history for over sixteen years. She has a BA in History of Art and Architecture and Music from Trinity College Dublin and an MSc in Tourism Management from Dublin Institute of Technology. She has undertaken and published research on how children engage with heritage sites, and has worked across the city in education roles at historic sites and museums. She was appointed as Dublin's first Historian in Residence for Children, as part of Dublin City Council Culture Company's Creative Residency programme. The Historian in Residence for Children Creative Residency @ Richmond Barracks is a partnership with Dublin City Council Culture Company and Dublin City Libraries.

CATHERINE (CATHY) SCUFFIL Dublin born and reared, Cathy's interest in local history was formed at an early age. In addition to an honours Business and Management degree, Cathy also holds a Certificate and a Masters in Local History from NUI Maynooth. An abridged version of her master's thesis research was awarded the silver medal by the Old Dublin Society (2018). Cathy was involved in a range of community events during the 1916 Rising centenary commemorations. She is currently a tutor in local studies and a consultant historian for a range of projects. Cathy is Historian in Residence for Dublin South Central. She is author of *By the Sign of the Dolphin* (1993), *The South Circular Road, Dublin, on the Eve of the First World War* (2013), and *1916 in the South Dublin Union* (2016 editorial committee).

Dublin City Council's Historians in Residence programme is created by Dublin City Libraries, and is delivered in partnership with Dublin City Council Culture Company.

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Holy Wells of Struel, County Down, illustration from *The Holy Wells of Ireland* by Philip Dixon Hardy, 1836

Courtesy of Dublin City Library & Archive

Four Holy Wells in North Dublin: Past and Present

Katie Blackwood, Historian in Residence,
Dublin North Central

This must be it. I pulled up and parked beside the kerb. Stepping out onto the footpath, I looked around at the 1970s-era housing estate. It reminded me of the one that I grew up in, in another part of Dublin. I walked into the green between the houses which seemed to be a well-worn short-cut to the shops. I had wondered if there would be any trace of its past or a sense that this was once a special place. Looking around, I saw a typical suburban green. There were some signs of littering and scorch marks in the grass where fires had been lit, suggesting people still gather here sometimes. 'No Dumping' signs were nailed onto the grey painted breeze-block walls. There was nothing to indicate that this was the site of a holy well.

Although many are now forgotten, the holy well was once a common feature in the Dublin landscape. Over 130 have been identified and it is likely that there were many more of which no memory remains. For generations, Dubliners made pilgrimages to these sacred sites where they would connect with the landscape and mark the cycle of the year. Visitors to holy wells were commonly seeking cures for illness, giving thanks, and they would often leave offerings. Holy wells were places with a link to the miraculous. Although visiting holy wells is still practised in many parts of Ireland, in Dublin most of these wells have fallen into disuse or have been built over.

This chapter will discuss the history of holy wells in Dublin, with a focus on four wells in the northside suburbs: St Brendan's in Coolock, St Ann's in St Anne's Park, St Donagh's in Donaghmede, and St Assam's in Raheny. Interestingly, these four wells are within walking distance of each other, perhaps indicating how numerous these wells once were. St Donagh's and St Assam's have been filled in and no trace of them is visible. St Brendan's and St Ann's have dried up, although each is marked – St Brendan's by a tree and St Ann's by an arched hood of stones. I set out to visit each well and to find information about them. Holy wells and the rituals surrounding them were part of folk tradition, of ordinary people's comings and goings, and so the record of this is incomplete and patchy.

Holy wells are naturally occurring springs or small bodies of water that have a long history as spiritual and religious sites. As mysterious openings into the earth, they symbolised a magical and sacred space in-between worlds. The water from these wells was believed to cure a multitude of ailments including eye diseases, toothaches, headaches, backaches, rashes, ulcers, infertility, whooping coughs and rheumatism. Some wells specialised in particular illnesses, others were more general. Holy wells were also known to be nourishing to the soul and relieved distress for sufferers of mental illnesses. Many wells have local legends and stories associated with them and it is commonly said that the water from holy wells cannot be brought to the boil. Holy wells served as a focal point for community-led worship. Local people visited the wells together, especially on pattern days (the patron saint's day), and performed rituals such as rounding the well, in which people would circle the well in a particular direction a set number of times, often on their knees. They would pray and drink the water.

It is thought that the veneration of holy wells predates the Christian era, and it is widely believed that customs relating to them are ancient and indigenous. Water worship is a universal feature of all prehistoric societies reflecting its essential, life-giving qualities. However, very few holy wells have been subjected to archaeological excavations and the exact nature of their ancient history is unknown. With the coming of Christianity, holy wells and the customs around them were subsumed and adapted to fit the new faith. Holy wells became dedicated to Irish saints with St



**Crowd praying,
St Columcille's
Well, Ballycullen,
Rathfarnham, Co.
Dublin, The Wiltshire
Photographic
Collection, 1954**
Courtesy of National
Library of Ireland

Patrick and St Brigid being the two most common. Wells were also used to perform baptism ceremonies for new converts. These sites continued to have religious importance as early Christian churches were frequently built beside existing holy wells.

St Brendan's Well in Coolock is just steps away (and a hop across the river) from the gates of St John the Evangelist Anglican Church. There has been a church here going back to the ninth century at the very latest. Before the Reformation, the well and the church were both dedicated to St Brendan. Many holy wells are located beside other notable landmarks such as rivers, trees, burial mounds, and large stones.

Today, St Brendan's Well is located on a green space between the Malahide Road and the Tonleegge Road. It sits alongside the Santry River, which has been contained within a concrete bedded channel, and it is marked by a fairy tree – a Whitethorn, I have been told. When I visited, I could see no sign of a well or a spring, although previous accounts note that the well water drains into the river or that it is piped away for domestic use.



St Brendan's holy well site alongside the River Santry in 2023

Photograph by Katie Blackwood



St Brendan's holy well photographed by A. Harris, Stanford Album, 1894

Courtesy of National Library of Ireland

Whitethorns (also known as Hawthorn trees), like the one that marks the site of St Brendan's, are rich in folklore, being associated with fairies, bad luck, and death. To cut down a Hawthorn was to risk the wrath of the fairies and legends tell of farmers being blinded by thorns entering their eyes. Like fairies, holy wells, if not treated properly, could bear ill-will towards humankind. They had the power to curse as well as to cure. St Brendan's Well was blamed for a fever outbreak in the area in 1914. The well was filled in, but the water rose up to the kitchen of a nearby house, so the well was opened again. Similarly, to destroy a holy well risked bad luck with tales of cattle dying and houses burning down as a result. Disrespecting a well, particularly by washing feet or clothes in it, caused many wells to dry up or move away. These folktales communicate the value of the natural world and warn against polluting the well which would have been a vital source

of clean water. Oliver Cromwell and his army were particularly notorious offenders and were associated with bad deeds at many holy wells. This is illustrated by numerous accounts in the National Folklore Schools' Collection, including this one: 'There is a big stone outside the town of Tallaght. It is in the shape of a holy water font. It never held water since Cromwell let his horse drink out of it.'

It is not clear whether Cromwell is to blame for St Ann's holy well running dry but recent attempts to find its water source have failed. Of the four wells included here, it is the easiest to visit and it appears from afar to be a site of significance. It is the only well of the four that is included in Dublin City Council's list of protected structures (St Pappin's in Santry and St Patrick's in Finglas are also on it). It likely owes its continued existence to its location in St Anne's Park, saving it from being built on with the expansion of the suburbs. It sits just off the path between the Clontarf Road carpark and the pond. I have walked by it and stopped at it many times without realising that it is an ancient sacred site. I had incorrectly assumed it was an ornamental structure in the style of a holy well built by the Guinness family, like the many other follies dotted about that part of the park.

It was still providing water in 1902 but was dry by 1958. An account from 1884 describes it as 'simply a natural spring, uninfluenced by climatic changes, and from which a supply of the purest water bubbles upward at the rate of about fifteen gallons per minute.' In 2018, as part of restoration works, vegetation was removed, the well opening was uncovered, and a stainless-steel grill was placed over it. St Ann's Well is surrounded by trees and its outer structure is still intact, a pertinent reminder of what other wells in the vicinity may once have looked like. I can't help thinking, however, that water is the most fundamental part of any well and without it, St Ann's is missing its essence.

And what if there is no sign of a well whatsoever? What if most people have forgotten that it ever existed? St Donagh's Well was formerly located on what is now a green space between St Donagh's Road and Holywell Road in Donaghmede. It sat beside a stream known as the Kilbarrack Stream or the Donagh Waters that was culverted during the 1970s and 1980s. The well was still there in 1958 when folklorist Caoimhín Ó Danachair



**Hawthorn tree marking the site
of St Brendan's holy well**

Photograph by Katie Blackwood



St Ann's holy well, St Anne's Park

Photograph by Katie Blackwood



**Green between St Donagh's Road and Holywell Road, Donaghmede,
site of St Donagh's holy well**

Photograph by Katie Blackwood

compiled his list of holy wells in Dublin, but according to local residents it was gone by 1970. Most likely, it was filled in during the construction of the Donaghmede estate. Letters to *The Irish Press* and the *Irish Times* by P. Healy of the Dublin Civic Trust in 1975 called attention to its demise, saying 'the site is now an open space south of the shopping centre and the well could have been preserved as a centrepiece of this area.'

St Donagh's Well was an important holy well on the Northside. It is listed on many historic maps of Dublin as a major feature in the Kilbarrack area and it was the site of a significant pattern. The water was 'remarkably good' and believed to cure a host of ailments. Based on its name, many

commentators have assumed that this well was dedicated to St Donagh (bringer of the honeybee to Ireland), whose patron day is in February. But it was St John's Eve on 23 June that was celebrated here. Donagh may, in fact, be an anglicisation of *Domhnach*, the Irish word for Sunday. Holy wells that were visited on this day frequently took on the name of Sunday Well.

Samuel Lewis' *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, published in 1837 notes that St Donagh's Well 'is resorted to on St. John's Eve by poor sick people' who rubbed themselves against the walls of the well and then washed in an adjoining one, suggesting there may have been more than one well in the immediate vicinity. By the 1830s the customs at St Donagh's were already in decline. The *Ordnance Survey Name Books* remarks that 'little care' was taken of the well but on St John's Eve people came 'to say their prayers and (get drunk as they do at St John's Well) drink some water and on retiring hang up their votive rag.' There was an Ash tree hanging over the well where people tied their rags. These offerings, usually torn from a piece of clothing, were a common sight at holy wells. The rag took on the illness and, as it disintegrated over time, health was restored. At wells that are still in use, a wide range of offerings are left behind nowadays, from toys and trinkets to lighters and inhalers.



St Donagh's holy well diagram from Ordnance Survey Letter, Names Book
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Courtesy of Dublin City Library & Archives



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**'Pattern at Glendalough by Mrs Maria Spilsbury Taylor', Oil on Canvas,
B094.10.00001**

Courtesy of National Folklore Collection, UCD

Coinciding with Midsummer, St John's Eve derives from the pagan summer solstice festival, and it has many traditions associated with fire and fertility. On this day communities gathered to celebrate one of the biggest pattern days of the year. Bonfires were lit on high ground to guide the sun on its journey and encourage it to shine on through the harvest. Cows would be driven through the smouldering ashes of the bonfire for good luck. Young men demonstrated their bravery and eligibility by 'jumping to and fro through the flames' while young women did the same in order 'to marry early and have many children.'

St John's Eve was a time of festival where the community gathered at holy wells to pray and seek cures. The waters were considered most potent on the patron saint's day so large crowds gathered to drink the water and bathe in it. But patterns were also large-scale social events, in which excess and debauchery went hand-in-hand with piety. Drinking, dancing and other immoral behaviours such as 'licentious mixing' were commonplace. Kilmainham's St John's Well was famous for its all-night Midsummer festivities. As with contemporary festivals, tents and stalls were erected to sell alcohol and food, musicians played into the night, and people let loose. Thomas Crofton Croker, writing in 1824, describes the behaviour of revellers at a St John's Eve pattern at a holy well in Cork:

"The tents are generally so crowded that the dancers scarcely have room for their performance: from twenty to thirty men and women are often huddled together in each, and the circulation of porter and whiskey amongst the various groups is soon evident in its effects. All become actors, – none spectators, – rebellious songs, in the Irish language, are loudly vociferated, and received with yells of applause: towards evening the tumult increases, and intoxication becomes almost universal. Cudgels are brandished, the shrieks of women and the piercing cry of children thrill painfully upon the ear in the riot and uproar of the scene; indeed the distraction and tumult of a patron cannot be described."

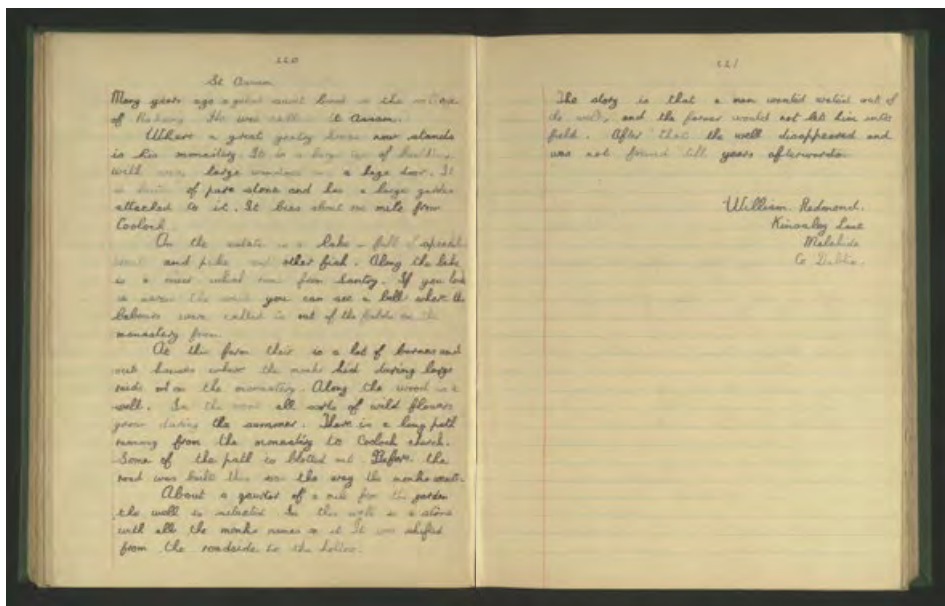


‘A Pattern Day’ by Daniel Maclise, illustration from *The Holy Wells of Ireland* by Philip Dixon Hardy, 1836

Courtesy of Dublin City Library & Archive

On pattern days, the normal laws did not apply. Faction fighting, in which two rival groups gathered for a brawl, were another common feature of the day. Groups of armed men attacked each other with weapons, while women and children threw stones from the sidelines. These brutally violent clashes frequently led to injury and even deaths of participants. Unsurprisingly, the revelry and feuding during pattern days were condemned by the authorities. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, concern about holy well traditions were gaining traction and there were efforts to stamp them out. The Popery Act, a Penal Law passed by the Irish House of Commons in 1704 declared that gatherings at holy wells were ‘unlawful assemblies’ punishable by fines, whippings and imprisonment.

Several commentators of the time frowned upon pattern days, viewing them as idolatrous and hedonistic. In 1836, Philip Dixon Hardy, a Protestant in the publishing business from Dublin, wrote a highly critical book on the ‘superstitious and degrading practices’ around holy wells, declaring them to be ‘the prolific sources of much of the irreligion, immorality and vice’ in the country. The Roman Catholic Church too disapproved of the more bacchanalian and raucous elements of the patterns. Following the repeal of the Penal Laws, the Catholic Church was keen to bring rituals and customs back indoors, within the formality of the new church buildings. All these factors contributed to the demise of Dublin’s holy wells.



A description of St Assam and his holy well. National Folklore Schools' Collection 0792: 220-221; Raheny, County Dublin. Collector: William Redmond, Kinsealy School, 1937-8. Teacher: C. Mac Domhnaill
 Courtesy of National Folklore Collection, UCD

One of these new Catholic churches was St Assam's, built in Raheny in the 1850s. It shared its location with St Assam's holy well which was in a field between the railway line and the church. This well is not marked on the 1834 Ordnance Survey map. Weston St John Joyce, writing in 1912, remarked: 'a depression in the ground and a bush still mark its site' so it had already been filled in at that stage. By the time Caoimhín Ó Danachair visited in 1958 there was nothing at all to mark the site of this well.

In the 1960s, a new church was built in the field between the old church and the train station. Called *Our Lady Mother of Divine Grace*, it is a large and conspicuous building in the centre of the village. It was part of a massive spate of church-building overseen by the Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid. Dublin's population was growing, the suburbs were expanding, and churches were needed to accommodate these new congregations. Between 1945 and 1960, thirty-four new churches were built in Dublin and twenty-six parishes were formed. Raheny's new church, designed by Peppard and Duffy, boasts a striking façade referencing medieval Irish architecture. The triangular stained-glass design was influenced by the famous Romanesque doorway of Clonfert Cathedral in Galway (which incidentally has its own holy well and rag tree).



**Church carpark at
Our Lady Mother of
Divine Grace, Raheny**

Photograph by Katie
Blackwood



**Triangular stained-glass design on the façade of
Our Lady Mother of Divine Grace, Raheny**

Photograph by Katie Blackwood

But this appreciation for the medieval did not extend to the ancient holy well on the site and the best guess suggests that St Assam's now lies somewhere under the carpark. When I went looking for the site of this well recently, there was nothing left to see. I walked around the carpark for a bit and traipsed through the shrubbery growing along the River Santry. Then I went into the church to look around. On my way in I noticed the holy water dispenser in the porch. Nowadays the parishioners can get their holy water straight from a tap.

Many local roads in Raheny are named in St Assam's honour, as they are with St Donagh in Donaghmede and St Brendan in Coolock. St Anne's Park was named after its holy well with an extra 'e'. These are legacies of the former prevalence of holy wells in this part of Dublin.

For many ordinary Dublin people in the past, holy wells were a central part of their places of meaning. A place where solace could be found and the sacred coexisted with fun, rowdiness and entertainment. The waxing and waning of holy wells' popularity over time reflects many of the broader changes happening in Irish culture and society. And although it is impossible to return to a time when a spring in the ground is a magical occurrence, Dublin's holy wells are important cultural heritage sites that should be honoured and preserved.



Holy well dispenser at Our Lady Mother of Divine Grace church, Raheny

Photograph by Katie Blackwood

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St Vincent de Paul

Courtesy of the St Vincent de Paul Archive

The Society of St Vincent de Paul 'stood between hundreds of families and complete destitution'

Elizabeth Kehoe, Historian in Residence, Dublin Central

In the decade when the Irish Free State began its existence in December 1922, poverty and welfare increased because of a lack of coherent social policies. The role of charities like the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) were crucial in the provision of much needed services to the poverty-stricken people of Dublin.



Photograph of Cumann na nGaedheal Government, 1922/1923

Courtesy of UCD Digital Library



**Patrick McGilligan, Minister
for Industry and Commerce**

Courtesy ESB Archive

A cursory look at what has been written about in the first ten years, when Cumann na nGaedheal were in power, does not engender a great deal of hope for the most vulnerable members of Irish society. Mel Cousins, who has published several books about social welfare in Ireland, writes about the '*dramatis personae*' of those taking up office in the Dáil. They were a conservative group of men not given to profligacy and their main goal was stability at all costs. That those paying the price for that stability were the least able comes across vividly when the historian Joe Lee writes about how 'the poor, the aged, and the unemployed must all feel the lash of the liberators.' With statements

from the serving minister for Industry and Commerce, Patrick McGilligan, declaring that 'people may have to die in this country and may have to die through starvation' we are left with, as historian Anne Dolan puts it, a distinct impression of disappointment with this period.

Economic stability and a need to deal with those leading 'a parasitic existence' as J.A. Burke the Minister for Local Government put it, leaves a sense that this new Ireland differed little from the previous regime when it came to putting food on tables or in the provision of adequate shelter. The economist Patrick Lynch called it the social revolution that never was.

But where did this parsimonious attitude toward the poor and welfare come from? To find the roots for these mindsets it is necessary to look back at how social welfare had been developing in Ireland up to this point. Ireland took its first tentative steps toward the provision of statutory social services in the nineteenth century. From 1838-1872 the Poor Law was the chief mechanism by which social policy was implemented by the British Government to try to alleviate some of the abject poverty that was prevalent in Ireland at that time. The common understanding of the Poor

Law was, and still is, overshadowed by the concept of the workhouse, both as a building dominating the landscape in the Irish countryside and in most people's perceptions of relief during the Great Famine.

The workhouse was the sole way that relief was provided prior to the Famine. When that disaster struck and starvation became widespread, the system was broadened in 1847 to allow the Poor Law boards to grant outdoor relief to the sick and disabled, and to widows with two or more legitimate children. Outdoor relief was a programme of social welfare in which assistance was given in the form of money, food, clothing or goods to alleviate poverty without the requirement that the recipient enter an institution. Unless it was fully occupied or it was a place of infection, the workhouse remained the only other access to relief for the rest of the Irish poor. Immediately after the Famine most Boards of Guardians looked to stop or at least curtail outdoor relief which was viewed as costly for them and undermining for the people receiving it. However, as time went on outdoor relief became more prevalent and widespread across the country. It gradually developed to be an accepted component of relief provided by the Poor Law unions.

The Poor Law had a lasting impact on how Irish people and their elected representatives perceived welfare. Firstly, it created a new status of person, the pauper, which an individual became when they entered the workhouse. Paupers became a distinct group of second-class citizens deprived of basic human rights and so, even amongst the poor themselves, regardless of how desperate they were, there was a reluctance to enter into a system which stripped them of everything. This led to a stigmatisation of the acceptance of welfare that has permeated society up to the present day. The workhouse test, which had the principle of 'less eligibility', meant that people had to be beyond desperation to admit themselves to the workhouse. Secondly, concepts of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving poor' were brought into sharper focus because of the Poor Law. Though many associate such attitudes with the British, the Irish middle and ruling classes soon adopted these notions of who did and did not deserve help and they became deeply embedded into the culture. The TDs elected to the Dáils from 1922 to 1932 came largely from business and skilled

classes. Most were educated to secondary level and up to a quarter had attended a university. They were middle-class in makeup and attitude with Cumann na nGaedheal leader W.T. Cosgrave likened to ‘the general manager of a railway company’.

Their conservatism did not lend itself to the development of a welfare system that was fit for purpose. They grappled instead with the perennial question facing architects of social welfare systems, a question that their predecessors, the Irish Poor Law reformers, were familiar with. Namely, how to deliver relief to the poor without at the same time promoting dependence. This went alongside a widely held belief that many of the poor were malingering and this was insupportable. The Protestant work ethic that was an intrinsic part of the Poor Law found a place in the hearts and minds of these conservative and,



William Thomas Cosgrave, Leader of Cumann na nGaedheal Government
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in the main, Catholic TDs. Nowhere more so was this apparent than with the Minister for Finance, Ernest Blythe, a Protestant, who went on to propose and implement cuts to spending across the board, including to old age pensions. The old age pension was regarded as the greatest blessing to most of those who received it. Less so for a government who viewed it as a fiscal nightmare inherited from the previous administration.

The new Irish Free State had a dependency on charitable organisations to supplement legitimate social welfare provision. Charitable organisations in Ireland were dominated by the Protestant laity, usually women, up to the middle of the nineteenth century. The second half of the century witnessed an increase in Catholic charities and one of the most well-known of these

was the SSVP. Judge D.J. O'Brien, writing about these years, said that the SSVP 'stood between hundreds of families and complete destitution'.

The breadth of the work undertaken by the society is extraordinary and ground-breaking for the time. Writing about the society in 1940, Professor Charles K. Murphy from University College Cork gives an overview of what the society called their 'special works'. These 'special works' were run in tandem with the mainstay of the society's work which continued to be weekly visits to families in need and included an orphanage in Glasnevin, assisting students and apprentices with their studies and placements, evening classes and running an employment bureau. The society cleaned tenement buildings and provided Christmas trees for the under-privileged. It provided aid for families of prisoners and helped discharged prisoners reintegrate into society. As well as the other work outlined here, every Tuesday night the society ran an advice clinic at their headquarters in Dublin. This provided information, guidance and official assistance with army and old age pensions and unemployment insurance. There is more on the list, but this small outline of their activities demonstrates what another commentator at the time, Professor T.W.T. Dillon, also writing in the 1940s, called the society's 'elasticity of approach to social problems'. Both these scholars write about the society's varied work and make it clear that the main goal of the SSVP was the spiritual rather than the material welfare of those they are helping. Murphy's book had a preface by the titular Archbishop of Gabula, Finbar Ryan. He wrote that because of all the special works that the society carried out, that people may possibly forget the words of Professor Antoine-Frédéric Ozanam, the founder of the SSVP. He wrote that 'the aim of the society is to enkindle and spread among the young the spirit of Catholicism' and 'our principal aim is not to the assistance of the poor, that is only a means we employ, but to spread the faith among others through charity'.

It is clear from reading the society's annual reports written during the 1920s and 30s that the organisation placed great emphasis on sending its active members on enclosed retreats. This allowed members a time for withdrawal from daily activities to pray, meditate, study, or receive instruction from a director to assist spiritual development. However, the rapid growth of the society in Ireland during this period and the range of activities it carried



**Poverty on the
streets of Dublin**

Courtesy of Dublin City
Library & Archive

out is suggestive of a quasi-social services running, not in tandem with official provision, but very much instead of it. Despite its main goal being spiritual, and because of the *laissez-faire* attitude of the Irish government, the SSVP was forced to increase its basic and 'special works' exponentially to meet the growing needs of people devastated by poverty.

At this time people lived in appalling slum areas in Irish inner cities and conditions were particularly dire in Dublin. This urban degradation and poverty had two root causes - large families and unemployment. There was poverty in rural areas too, but it was not on a par with the deprivation and squalor that was found in urban slums.

In the Irish Free State there were no family planning policies in place to help alleviate the relentlessly high marital fertility rates. One-room tenement apartments rented to newly married couples soon became overcrowded within two to three years because of natural procreation.

Family planning was practised by some Irish couples, but these were more likely to be prosperous Protestants. Some people did seek advice about contraception from Marie Stopes in the early 1920s but almost all efforts at family planning were thwarted by both the Church and State. The new censorship laws prevented couples getting hold of any publications advocating contraception. Women were not in any position of power to press for more

modern approaches to contraception and maternity. The conservative men in power did not formulate policies that helped with female mortality rates which were higher than men's. Even though one of the main causes of poverty was high birth rates and large families, there were no social policies from the Cumann na nGaedheal government to address this. Given the zeitgeist this is hardly surprising. Family planning advice and services were available in Britain and Northern Ireland. Ireland remained a backwater where these social and healthcare policies were concerned for several more decades. Large families together with worn out mothers would continue to be a significant feature in the landscape of poverty.

Unemployment, the second cause of poverty, increased in the 1920s. The levels were hard to measure because of the government's threadbare employment policies. Records in the SSVP offer some insights into the problem. A letter sent to the Archbishop of Dublin, Edward J. Byrne, in 1922 notes that the society's resources were being severely tested by increased costs of maintenance. This was in connection with a night shelter for men in Back Lane near Merchants Quay that the society had founded in 1912.

A report about the shelter written in 1930 illustrates how unemployment was affecting the city. The report notes that between 1915-19, over a four-year period, admissions to the shelter were 14,459 with 20,719 free meals distributed. In 1920 those figures rose to 16,786 admitted and 26,801 meals provided. A handwritten annotation in the margin notes that 1920 had more men coming to the shelter than the four previous years in total. The report later observed that: 'Owing to economic conditions prevailing during the past two years and the consequent spread of high unemployment in the city, the figures for this period were abnormally high'. In 1921 numbers increased to 30,361 admitted with 47,607 meals provided. This provides a good measurement of poverty levels amongst unemployed men at that time. A year had seen an increase of over 13,500 men seeking shelter and a staggering increase of almost 20,000 needing a hot meal.

These are stark figures and though the stories behind these numbers are not recorded in the committee reports, it can be surmised that some came from rural areas seeking work. Others were there temporarily before

emigrating. In another report written in 1927 the society reports on one such young man they assisted with passage to Liverpool. Whatever their reasons for being in the shelter, their presence there is an indicator of unmet need and the increase of male unemployment.

The historian Catriona Clear calls the years between 1922 and 1961 a missed opportunity for the State to improve women's lives and increase their agency. It was also a missed opportunity for Ireland's poor, and women's minimal presence in the Dáil meant that there was little or no attention given to poverty and welfare in the first ten years. Elsewhere, links have been made between women's activism and political participation and increased welfarism. For example, in America during the Progressive Era it is no coincidence that welfarism in state politics came to the fore at the same time as more women became activists.

In Ireland women had opportunities to organise and manage charitable organisations. These were predominantly Protestant women who were prolific in Dublin in the early 1900s. The SSVF like many other Catholic lay organisations was governed by men.



Only men could become members and women had to organise separately under the banner of the society until 1963. They merged with the men in 1967. This inequality did not deter the women of the SSVF and a report in 1930 from St Andrews Parish in Westland Row, a branch of the society managed by women, shows that 942 visits were made to

**Night Shelter for men in
Back Lane**

Courtesy of the National Inventory
of Architectural Heritage



Image of the all male membership of the St Vincent de Paul

Courtesy of St Vincent de Paul Archive

families in need and 341 extra bags of coal were delivered at Christmas by that branch. In addition to these, 12 children received Communion and Confirmation outfits (it was noted that the boys' outfits were more expensive), 16 babies' bundles were distributed, as were blankets for 'poor old women in small cold rooms'. It is regrettable that women did not play a bigger role in Irish state building in those initial years. It is, of course, a matter of pure conjecture but it is reasonable to believe that strategies to improve poverty would have been pursued more aggressively in those first 10 years, if women had not been consigned to the domestic sphere and had more opportunity to be active members in the public domain.

From 1922, when the new State was being formed, a Civil War was being fought over the Anglo-Irish Treaty and until that officially ended in 1923, atrocities and executions were carried out on both sides of the divide. At the same time agrarian unrest and the ubiquitous question of land and its ownership had to be dealt with. Patrick Hogan, the Minister for Agriculture, urged Cosgrave to act quickly and introduce legislation to prevent 'landless men' attempting to enforce their claims 'with the gun and the torch'. It is

an understatement to say that Cosgrave and his ministers had their hands full, and this government could not be expected to replicate the works that charities like the SSVP were doing as described here. While many laud the government's furthering of a stable democracy, they were not men given to a sympathetic view of the poor and their lack of policies to improve living conditions for the more vulnerable members of that society is evidence of that. At the dawn of this new era, women were ready and prepared to get involved in political life. This was not to be, however, and from the beginning of the Free State women's social and political rights were diminished. Women had some agency through philanthropic works, but even here Catholic women had to wait until the 1960s before they gained some measure of equality with men. Poverty was exacerbated by a lack of social and economic policies. Overcrowding due to large families and high fertility rates made life in the slum areas even more difficult, and high rates of unemployment meant hardship for many and an increase in those having to emigrate. Sound social policies for family planning were not forthcoming in a conservative government under the growing influence of the Catholic church. Policies to increase employment in urban areas took a backseat to helping farmers. This can be summed up by Patrick Hogan's words when he said in a speech 'helping the farmer who helped himself and letting the rest go to the devil'. The 'devil' was kept at bay by charities like the SSVP.

Poverty and welfare were managed almost exclusively by charitable agencies in that opening decade of the State. The SSVP became involved in an official capacity on the committees set up by the Minister for Finance Ernest Blythe to look at how home assistance could be managed. This was a move toward providing home care for the aged and infirm as an alternative to institutional care. Such were the demands on the society, it began to have concerns that it was putting the spiritual dimension of its work at risk. Because of this evangelical aspect of its work, charities like the SSVP can have an image problem in the modern more secular Ireland. Nevertheless, Judge O'Brien's assertion that the society 'stood between hundreds of families and complete destitution' is patently true.

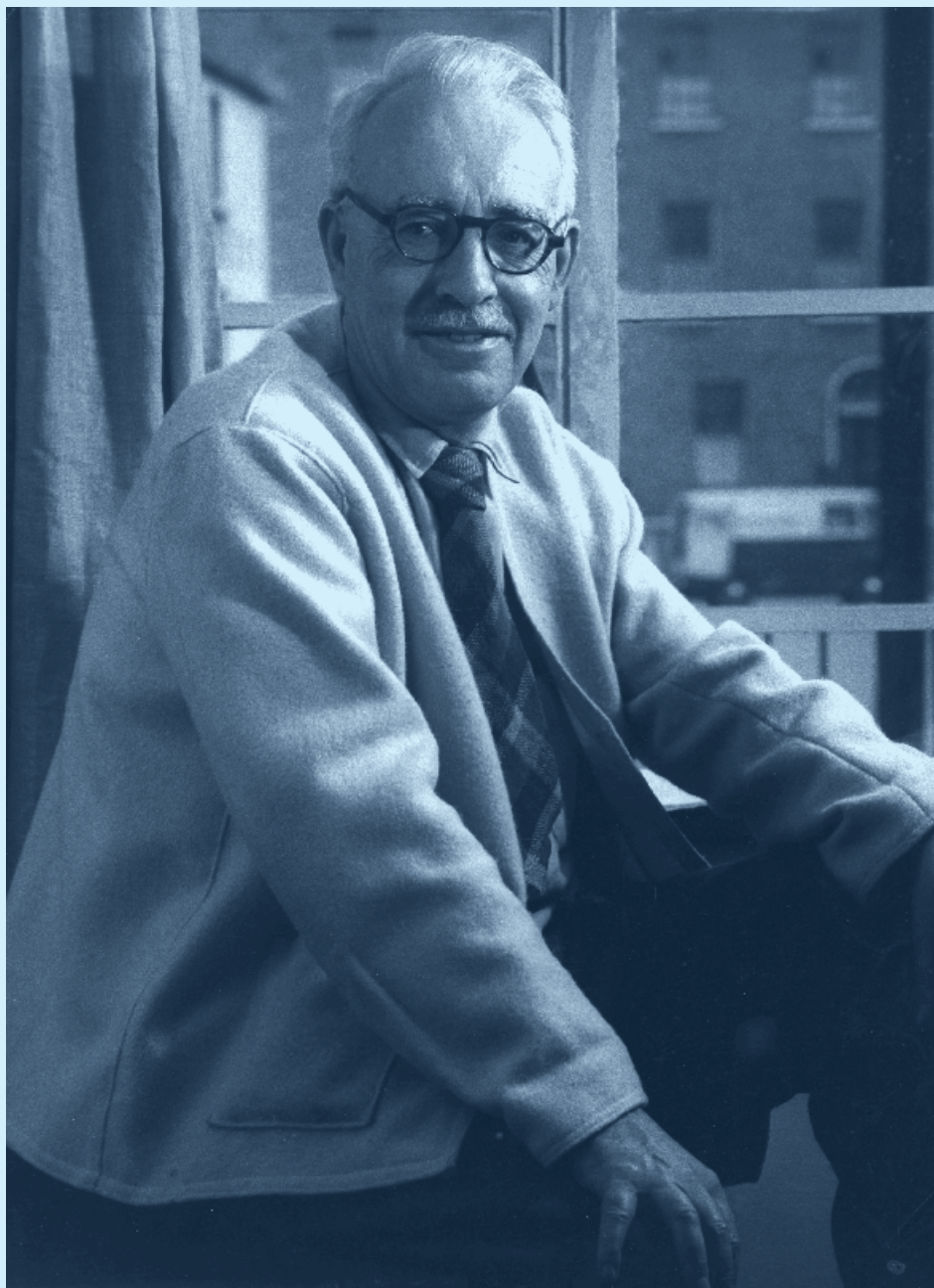
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**Michael O'Donovan, more commonly known
as Frank O'Connor – 1903-1966**

Courtesy of the family of Frank O'Connor

Frank O'Connor: Pembroke Library's First Librarian

Dr Cormac Moore, Historian in Residence,
Dublin South East

Self-educated, mainly through public libraries during his childhood in Cork, Michael O'Donovan (more commonly known as Frank O'Connor), went on to be a revolutionary, a librarian, managing director of the Abbey Theatre, accomplished translator of old Irish texts, a novelist, a biographer, a travel writer, a poet, a playwright and producer of plays, a teacher and lecturer, a broadcaster and columnist, a literary critic and, most famously, a peerless writer of short stories. According to his friend and collaborator, William Butler Yeats, he was to Ireland what Anton Chekov was to Russia.

Michael O'Donovan was born into a life of grinding poverty in Cork on 17 September 1903, on the southside of the city, on Douglas Street. He was an infrequent attendee at primary school, mainly due to regular bouts of illness, something that persisted throughout his adulthood too. Michael's main early sources for reading were from penny weeklies such as the *Gem* and the *Magnet*. Always enveloped in his own imagination, he used to sit on the walls of the buildings of Cork City and its hills, watching the people and the world around him from above for hours on end.

By the age of 10, he complained of bad headaches, caused by poor eyesight, probably as a result of excessive reading. He continued to miss much of school. He attended St Patrick's School before moving to North Monastery Christian Brothers School. Believing Michael would never pass his examinations and that he was not suitable for the trade profession either, the Christian Brothers "invited" Michael to leave school, which he did at the age of twelve in 1916.

Although he left formal education, his self-education continued at pace and seeing that he had outgrown the schoolboy weeklies, his mother Minnie enrolled him in the children's section of the Carnegie Library, an old red brick building adjoining Cork City Hall. Michael loved his first experience of a library and spent every spare moment there immersed in books. While many 1916 Easter Rising rebels were being educated in their University of Revolution, Frongoch, Michael was being educated in his new school, the library. He soon exhausted most of the books in the children's department and, using a ticket he had obtained for his mother, he started borrowing from the adult section.

It was at this time that he underwent a political awakening, which led to his involvement in the War of Independence and on the anti-Treaty side of the Civil War, when he acted as a censor in the *Cork Examiner* and for the Munster edition of *An Phoblacht*. He was eventually caught and imprisoned, first in the cramped conditions of the Women's Prison in Sunday's Well in Cork, and then in Gormanstown Internment Camp, north of Dublin. While most of the thousands of republican internees and prisoners during and

after the Civil War condemned the conditions they were incarcerated in, Michael was happy with life at Gormanstown. He later wrote that 'it was the nearest thing I could have found to life on a college campus, the only one I was really fitted for'.



Michael O'Donovan at about twenty years of age, around the time he started his career as a librarian in Sligo in 1924

Courtesy of the family of Frank O'Connor

Like many republicans facing life in the new Free State, he initially found it hard to get work. As he recalled in his first autobiography, *An Only Child*, he was told by his former teacher and fellow writer Daniel Corkery that the dramatist Lennox Robinson, who was Secretary of the Irish Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, 'was organising rural libraries and looking for young men and women to train as librarians.' He continued:

"The moment he said it I knew that this was the very job for me and that I was the very type of person Robinson was looking for. It was not so much that I wanted to be a librarian, or even knew what being a librarian meant; it was just that never in my life had I had enough books to read and this was my opportunity."

He was interviewed by Robinson in the restaurant of the Cork railway station and was duly offered the job. The pay of thirty shillings a week was dreadful though, particularly as he had to move from Cork to Sligo and pay for lodgings.

Of his short time in Sligo, Michael said he was not entirely happy there, partly as he missed Cork and partly because he felt there was an air of futility about the work of the library. He wrote:

"We had village and small-town branches throughout the country, and every three months we sent them each a box or two of books by rail. We had a printed catalogue of the "Three Thousand Best Books", and the local secretary made his choice from this, though, as we had only one copy of each book, he rarely got what he asked for."

There were some positives too. He had many books at his disposal for the first time in his life and he went on his first trip outside of Ireland, on an all-expenses paid trip to London for a library conference.

After six months, he left Sligo and became an assistant librarian in Wicklow town where a new library was being opened. He was still on very low money that he had to supplement by using the library bicycle to cycle to

the Wicklow Mountains and teach Irish. When the librarian of his branch, Sligo-born George Phibbs, found out, he wrote to the library authorities about Michael's meagre wages, resulting in them being doubled. Not only was Phibbs responsible for doubling Michael's wages, he also was indirectly responsible for providing Michael with another source of income through writing, by introducing Michael to George Russell, better known as AE, who became a hugely influential figure in Michael's life.

Michael soon became a regular writer for the newspaper AE edited, the *Irish Statesman*, contributing poems and other writings. For Michael's first contribution in March 1925, he changed his name for writing purposes to Frank O'Connor, derived from his mother's maiden name and his second name. This was done to separate his writing from his library career, and not to jeopardise the latter, prompted by the sacking of Lennox Robinson from the library service in 1924 for the publication of a short story in the *Tomorrow* magazine.

Soon Michael was a regular visitor at AE's house on Sunday evenings and at the house of Nobel Prize-winning poet W.B. Yeats on Monday evenings. Yeats greatly admired the young Cork man and particularly his brilliant translations from Irish. Even though Michael was making a significant breakthrough in his writing career and fraternising with some of the most important literary figures in Dublin, he was lured back to Cork, the city he loved and hated in almost equal measure, to take on the job as county librarian in December 1925.

It was a daunting task for the young librarian to set up a library almost from scratch. Cork was still rebuilding from the devastation of the revolutionary years. There was no building and a temporary office in the courthouse had to be used initially. As well as sourcing a building, he had to find staff and books for the library. And he had to navigate the complex local politics of Cork County Council. Decisions that took five minutes to make in Wicklow took five months in Cork. Once the library was organised in the city, Michael, realising he needed closer contact with the country branches, bought a van and distributed boxes of books around the vast county of Cork.

He continued with his artistic endeavours, writing poems and translations at nighttime, contributing to most editions of the *Irish Statesman* as well as to the *Irish Tribune*. He also started to tinker with writing short stories.

Lovesick for Nancy McCarthy, who was lead actress for several plays Michael produced in Cork and who refused to marry him, as well as being frustrated with the parochialism of Cork, Michael applied for and secured a job as librarian in Pembroke in late 1928. The new job in Pembroke could, as Hilary Lennon has written, 'be considered a demotion, a step-down from his previous position as librarian of Cork County Library, but O'Connor jumped at the chance to return to the bigger city'.

His first impressions of his new library were not encouraging: 'When I saw the new library I was to work in, I cursed. It was a miniature Georgian version of a Dublin library of 1880, which in its turn had been copied from some

English library of 1840'. While known for his brutal honesty and not for his tact, Michael was adept at navigating library committees and throughout his career as a librarian, was never reprimanded, let alone fired, from any position.

His first main task was to staff the library, and most importantly find an assistant who knew more than he did about running a library. The first person he hired was Dermot Foley, a trained librarian with superior knowledge to Michael on the technical workings of a library. According to one of Michael's biographers, James Matthews, Foley 'was Dublin middle-class: practical, stable, and properly educated', who:



Michael O'Donovan standing outside Pembroke Library

Courtesy of the family of Frank O'Connor

“was as horrified by Michael’s country manner as he was intrigued by his wild talent. Michael seemed to him oblivious of every social grace. He was repelled, for instance, by the ring of stains on the wall of the lavatory where Michael sat every morning reading, smoking and spitting, habits acceptable perhaps in a slum neighbourhood, but hardly in Dublin’s fashionable south side. Michael was also oblivious of his own personal appearance, often showing up at the library in rumpled clothes; and his hair never seemed to be combed. In spite of their differences, the two young librarians soon became good friends.”

The two of them worked tirelessly to have the library opened to the public by 27 September 1929. Michael wrote:

“Dermot was a musician, and we built up a music library that we could be proud of. I was a language enthusiast, and we built up a foreign library which attracted those French, Germans and Italians in Dublin who could find nothing in their local libraries. We bought an epidiascope [projector] and a cheap gramophone, and each week we talked to the children about pictures and classical music until the Dublin Corporation took over, removed our epidiascope and gramophone and sent Gaelic League lecturers who talked about Red Hugh O’Donnell and life in the Gaeltacht until they drove the kids away.”

Michael was an innovative librarian and left his mark on the library in Pembroke, not only by his book selections, but by the effort he made with the children’s library.

Recognising the benefits he had garnered from the Carnegie library in Cork as a child, he wanted all children, rich and poor, from his adopted community in Dublin, to have a place of their own in his library. He transformed the spacious, well-lit area upstairs into a welcoming room for children. He also organised talks and other special events. For the first year the library was opened, 2,103 children attended the talks, with an average of 87 per lecture. Dermot used his music skills to form a children’s

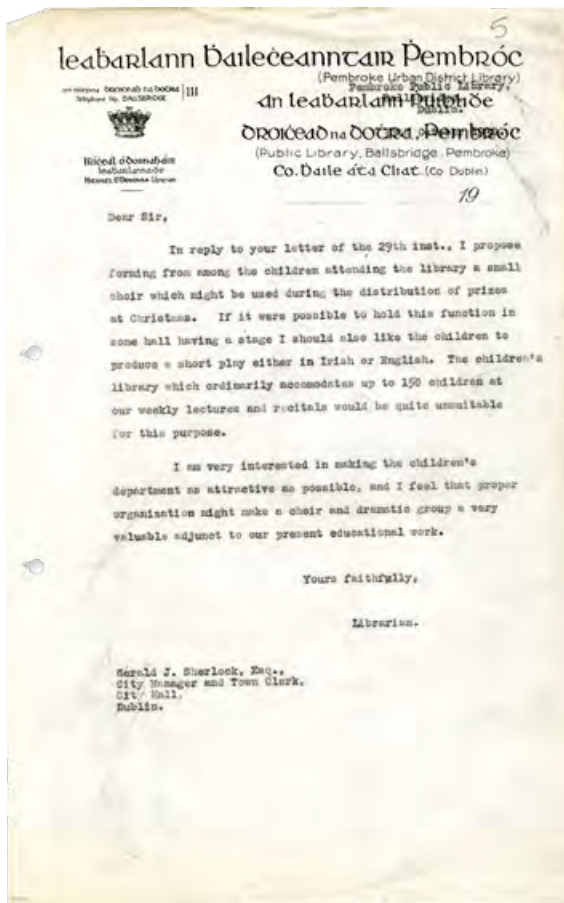


Dermot Foley, first left, at the unveiling of the public display of Frank O'Connor's death mask at Pembroke Library in March 1985. Dermot Foley was Frank O'Connor's first assistant at Pembroke Library. Frank O'Connor's death mask remains on display in Pembroke Library to this date

Courtesy of Dublin City Council Photographic Collection,
Dublin City Library & Archive

choir. Soon, youngsters from all over the area were turning up for auditions. Michael was proud of the efforts made with the children's library, claiming, 'we have confined ourselves to the work of stimulating the children's imaginative sense. Mythology, folk-tales, romantic history, poetry, travel, music – these for the most part have been our subjects'.

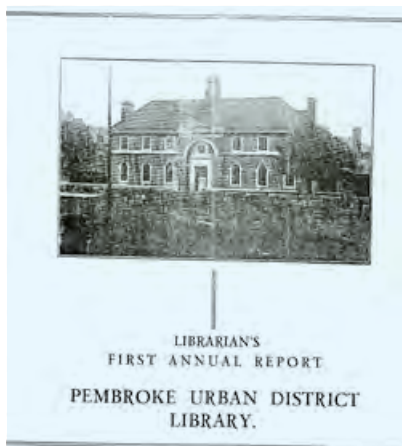
Michael was an exacting and, at times, difficult boss. The staff were happiest when Michael was upstairs, in his office, entertaining his friends AE, Yeats and Lennox Robinson who tended to stay there for hours talking literature. Their 'visits helped to give the Pembroke a reputation for being a modern and artistic library', when soon it became 'the talk of Dublin'.



Letter from Michael O'Donovan to Dublin City Manager and Town Clerk Gerald J. Sherlock proposing an expansion of services to offer to children, including a choir and the production of a play. Michael was proud of the children's library he established at Pembroke Library

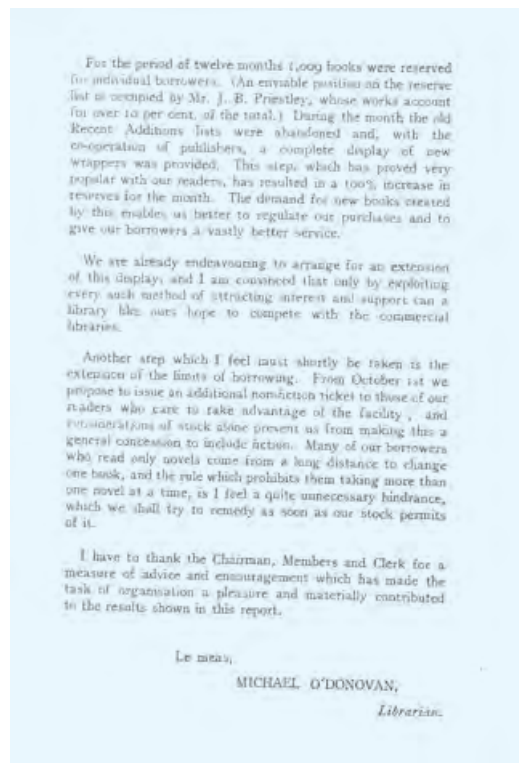
Courtesy of Dublin City Library & Archive

It was preferable for Michael to be in his office than at the lending desk, where Dermot Foley did his diplomatic best to keep him away from. Once there, he turned Dermot's meticulous system upside down and he talked to too many people for too long, causing chaos with queues often forming out the front door. In his first annual report, Michael declared that 'the success of the Library has exceeded all expectations', with 4,010 borrowers using the library in its first year, 11.9 per cent of the total population of the catchment area. Lending numbers totalled 122,699 for the year.



Pages 1 and 6 of Michael O'Donovan's First Annual Report as Librarian of Pembroke Library, year ending 30 September 1930

Courtesy of Dublin City Library & Archive



CONTINUED

Local Government (Dublin) Act 1930.

I shall be glad if you will get in touch with me.

Subject to the foregoing, existing routine arrangements will continue as from the "appointed day", with the proviso, however, that all reports as to works and other matters, including the ordering of goods, which hitherto have required previous notification to, or sanction of, your Council, or any Committee thereof shall be transmitted to me for the requisite authorisation. As our organisation is divided into several different sections, a separate report on each subject will be necessary.

You should at once procure rubber stamps with the wording "Corporation of Dublin" and stamp same on all your existing headed books, papers and documents as from the 14th instant.

I am sending a copy of this communication to all the Corporation Departmental Heads for their information and guidance, and trust that as a general outline of the contemplated procedure it will be sufficiently clear for your guidance. Should there be any points, either now or later, on which you would wish more explicit instructions do not hesitate to let me know, as my object is to effect a smooth and harmonious change-over and to occasion the minimum of inconvenience to the ratepayers of your district.

I shall be greatly obliged if you will kindly supply me with the various particulars asked for in mine of the 30rd July last.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed) GERALD J. SHERLOCK.

Town Clerk.

Joshua Manly Esq.,
Clerk to Pembroke U.D.C.
Town Hall,
BALLSBRIDGE.

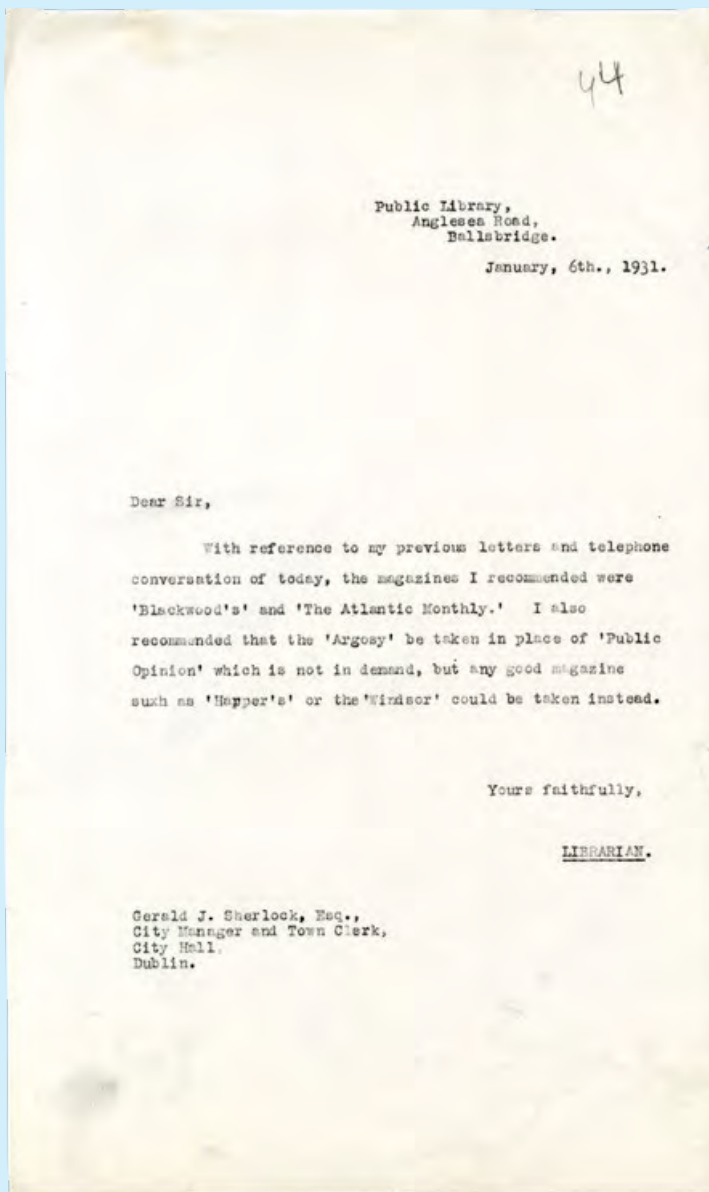
Letter from Gerald J. Sherlock, Dublin City Manager and Town Clerk, to Joshua Manly, Clerk to Pembroke Urban District Council, in October 1930 detailing changes from 14 October 1930 when Pembroke Urban District became part of the City of Dublin
Courtesy of Dublin City Library & Archive

Change was afoot, though, as the Pembroke and Rathmines townships were absorbed into Dublin and the Pembroke Library was brought under the authority of Dublin Corporation in October 1930. Although Michael's worst fears of losing his job did not materialise, he did lose the independence he had enjoyed under the District Council. Michael had regular confrontations, requests denied and demands imposed, particularly by the City Manager and Town Clerk, Gerald J. Sherlock. Where beforehand, he had great freedom in working with booksellers, choosing books and magazine subscriptions, after Dublin Corporation's takeover, he was forced to work with a centralised system that had many libraries under its control.

As well as their afternoon programmes being taken over by the Gaelic League, his assistants were replaced by Central Library staff. The library was also raided by a group of vigilante protectors of public conscience who removed books on Russia. Dermot left Dublin in late 1931, becoming librarian in Ennis in Clare. Michael stayed, telling Nancy McCarthy, 'I've got a job and I'm going to sit on it'.

What makes Michael's achievements as librarian at Pembroke even more remarkable is the other activities he was involved in, in that 10-year period. And he suffered regularly from poor health, mainly due to gastritis, forcing him to only eat baby food at one point.

Almost from the moment he arrived in Dublin, his writing career took off. While organising Pembroke Library, he wrote two books, *Guests of the Nation*, a book of war-related short stories, and his first novel, *The Saint and Mary Kate*, a book he believed 'was a work of art'. The short story 'Guests of the Nation' had been published by the American-based *Atlantic Monthly*, however, the book of short stories of the same name was published by English-based Macmillan, run by future British prime minister Harold Macmillan. Macmillan also published *The Saint and Mary Kate*. At night times and weekends, he threw himself into his literary work, 'turning out short stories literally by the dozen in a prolonged burst of creative energy'.



Letter from Michael O'Donovan to Gerald Sherlock, Dublin City Manager and Town Clerk, in January 1931, requesting magazine subscriptions for Pembroke Library, including for the *Atlantic Monthly*, which published his short story 'Guests of the Nation' in 1930. His requests were turned down
Courtesy of Dublin City Library & Archive

As well as being close to Yeats and AE, he befriended other people such as Father Tim Traynor of the Star of the Sea Church in Sandymount and revolutionary veteran Dr Richard Hayes who became, in many ways, another father figure for Michael. As well as catering to Michael's considerable health needs, without Hayes, Michael believed, he would not have written his biography of Michael Collins, *The Big Fellow*, nor his historical play *The Invincibles*. It was Hayes who's expert probing of Collins's loyal lieutenant Joe O'Reilly resulted in O'Reilly revealing much of the character of Collins that Michael used in his book, a book that Michael described in the foreword as 'an act of reparation' for his part on the other side of the Civil War.

Hayes also served on the board of the Abbey Theatre with Michael. Yeats invited Michael to join the board of the theatre, which was being upstaged by the new venture across the street, the Gate. Yeats, getting older and ailing, once told Michael he saw him as his successor of the Abbey. Michael became wholeheartedly involved in the Abbey, along with young English director Hugh Hunt, to make the Abbey relevant and popular again. He served as managing director of the Abbey Theatre for a time also.



**Evelyn Bowen with
Frank O'Connor**

Courtesy of the family of
Frank O'Connor

By day he was working in the library and by night in the Abbey. In between, his literary output of short stories, novels, plays, translations and poems was extraordinarily prolific. He also started a relationship with Welsh actress Evelyn Bowen, who was married to an English actor, Robert Speaight, and he was soon shunned by Church and State. Evelyn's divorce dragged out, leaving them unable to marry until 1939.

At the opening night of his play *Moses' Rock* in the Abbey, Michael collapsed. Luckily Hayes was on the spot and ordered him straight to bed. Despite being six-foot tall, he weighed less than 10 stone and was very gaunt in appearance. Hayes was very worried. He grimly told Michael that he believed he had cancer and gave him five years to live, a devastating blow to Michael that hung over his head from thereon in.

Returns for year 1st April 1937 to 31st March 1938

DEPARTMENTS. DAYS AND HOURS OF OPENING:
 Lending. Mon.Tues.Thurs.Fri.Sat. Opens daily 11-9. Wed. 11-1
 Reference. Same as above.
 Juvenile. Mon.Tues.Thurs.Fri.Sat. Opens daily 4-8. Sat. 11-4.
 Newsroom. Mon.Tues.Thurs.Fri. Open daily 9.30-9. Wed. 9.30-1.
 Sat.]

NET BOOK STOCK

		Lending	Reference
Adult ...	****	13,100	271
Juvenile ...	****	2,204	-
Special Collections	****	-	-
		<u>15,304</u>	<u>271</u>
Total Stock <u>15,575</u> volumes			

BOOK ISSUES

		Lending	Reference
Adult non-fiction	***	24,072	-
Juvenile non-fiction	***	919	-
Adult fiction	***	82,122	-
Juvenile fiction	***	6,512	-
Total Issues <u>114,575</u> volumes			
Loan Period <u>14</u> days			

BORROWING (Two non-fiction tickets given with fiction tickets)

	Adult	Juvenile
Total number registered	do	do
Estimated number actually borrowing	do	do
Total number of tickets in use. <u>Estimated</u>	do 3,190	do 124

I certify that *****the particulars in the above return are correct.

Date. 22/4/38. Acting Librarian.

**Pembroke Library returns
for year 1937/1938,
Michael O'Donovan's last
year as librarian**

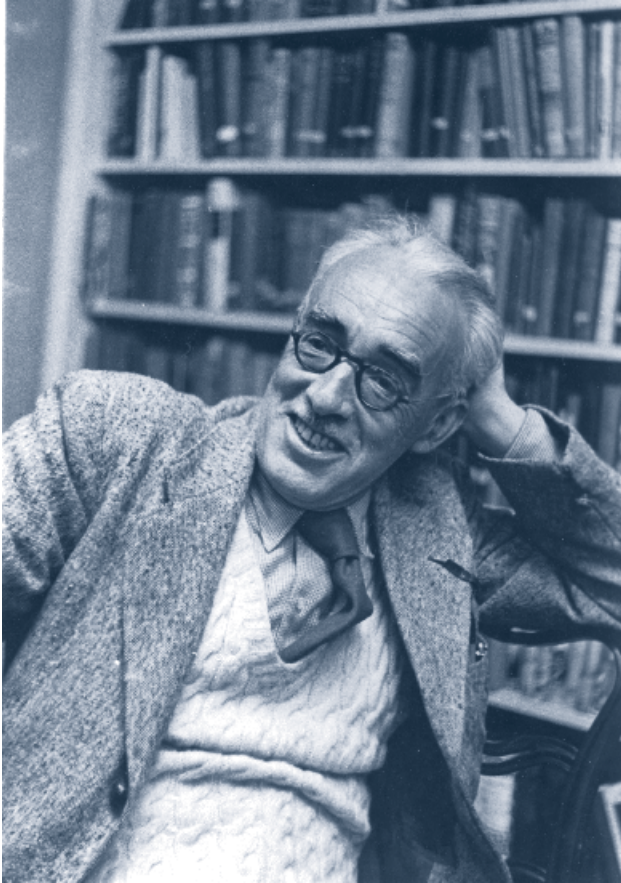
Courtesy of Dublin City
Library & Archive

While he was recovering, Michael received a note from his publisher, Harold Macmillan, who was concerned after Michael missed another deadline. He 'advised Michael to decide whether he wanted to be a good public servant or a good writer, because it was impossible to be both'. On 1 April 1938, he retired from Pembroke Library with an annual pension of seventy-five pounds. He was only thirty-four years old. His departure appeared to have a negative impact on the lending figures in Pembroke Library, going from 114,575 in 1937/38 to 100,592 the following year.

Michael's extraordinary output continued as he wrote and had published many short stories, novels, and travel books. He undertook broadcasting work for the BBC and wrote regular columns for the *Sunday Independent* and the English newspaper, the *Evening News*. In an obituary after Michael's death at the age of 62 on 10 March 1966, his publisher, by then a former British prime minister, Harold Macmillan wrote:

"Michael had two names and lived a life with many facets. Yet everything he did, however unexpected or contradictory it might seem, was informed by the same singleminded and passionate integrity. The young Irish rebel and the mature wartime friend of Britain, the eccentric librarian, the enthusiastic man of the theatre and the meticulous self-taught scholar, the sonorous translator of Irish poetry and the superlative short-story writer, the inspiring public lecturer and the dogged master of the seminar – all were unquestionably the same unique and original man."

A large factor in making Michael the force that he became was the public library system that played such an important part in his life. As a youth, it was the Carnegie Library in Cork city that was his school and university. It provided the self-education Michael used to reach extraordinary literary heights in so many different forms, particularly the one he excelled most in, the writing of short stories. Michael was an innovative librarian imbued with a vocation to share his passion for books and knowledge to as many people as possible from all backgrounds. The 10 years Michael spent at Pembroke Library were undoubtedly the most productive of his life. As well as opening and growing this library, his versatile and extraordinary



While Michael O'Donovan was the making of Pembroke Library, in many ways, Pembroke Library was the making of Frank O'Connor

Courtesy of the family of Frank O'Connor

writing career took off, and he contributed handsomely to theatre through his contribution at the Abbey Theatre, all while suffering bouts of ill health that plagued him throughout his life.

According to Hilary Lennon, as a librarian, 'O'Connor encountered a rich variety of people who frequented the libraries and it not only fuelled his interest in the "reader", it also provided him with a fascinating insight into the more common needs of Irish people'. While Michael O'Donovan was the making of Pembroke Library, in many ways, Pembroke Library was the making of Frank O'Connor.

Further Reading

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- Lennon, Hilary. *A Variation of Voices: Frank O'Connor, 1922-1939*. Trinity College Dublin (PhD Thesis), 2010.
- Matthews, James. *Voices: A Life of Frank O'Connor*. Atheneum, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1983.
- McKeon, Jim. *Frank O'Connor: A Life*. Mainstream Publishing, 1998.
- O'Connor, Frank. *An Only Child*. Macmillan, 1961.
- O'Connor, Frank. *My Father's Son*. Macmillan, 1968.
- Pembroke Library Correspondence, 1930-1949. Dublin City Library & Archive, Pearse Street.



A young Belfast refugee sitting outside Marlborough Hall in Dublin in 1922. Waves of sectarian violence accompanied the birth of Northern Ireland. A consequence of the violence was the displacement of thousands of people from their homes in Belfast

Courtesy of British Pathé. With thanks to Cormac Moore for sharing this image.

Marlborough House: A Shameful Place of Detention

Dr Mary Muldowney, Historian in Residence,
Dublin North West

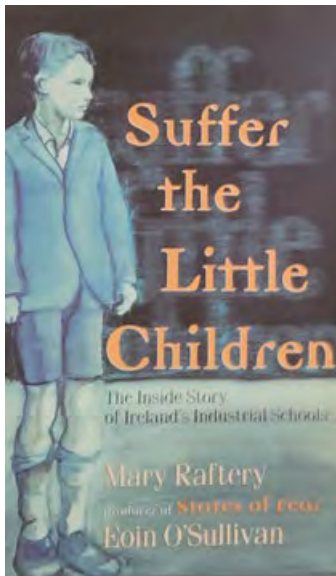
In the later decades of the twentieth century the extent of the abuse perpetrated against children in industrial schools, orphanages, and reformatories was revealed by courageous individuals who refused to be silenced by the State or the religious institutions entrusted with the care of vulnerable young people. Although the Catholic Church has been shown to have behaved reprehensibly in many cases, there were also instances of abuse in Church of Ireland institutions. However, from its very foundation in 1922, the State's neglect of the declaration in the 1916 Proclamation of the Republic to 'pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally' contributed to the mistreatment of many children and young people whose only offence was being poor.

This chapter will examine the history of Marlborough House in Glasnevin, with a particular focus on the final years of its existence between 1944, when it became a detention centre for boys, until 1972, when it was closed. It was demolished and replaced by the headquarters of Met Éireann in 1975. During those years the responsibility for running Marlborough House was shared by the Department of Education and the Department of Justice, whose senior civil servants seem to have been far more concerned with their own careers and reputations than the welfare of the children in their care.

There is ample evidence to show that the State was well aware that some staff at the detention centre at Marlborough House were guilty of abusing children during the decades it was under the direction of senior civil servants. The politicians at the heads of both Education and Justice were equally culpable. The ground-breaking research carried out by Mary

Raftery and Eoin O'Sullivan in the 1990s clearly showed that not only did the State actors do nothing to end the abuse, but they actively colluded in covering it up. The history of Marlborough House shows that the State behaved as shamefully as any of the religious orders who participated in and covered up the appalling physical, psychological and sexual abuse in many of the institutions for which they were responsible.

The official name of Marlborough House was the Place of Detention. Administered by the Department of Justice, it was the only facility for locking up children which was run directly by the State. It was under the control of the Department of Education, although Tarlach Ó Raifeartaigh, Assistant Secretary of the Department, was insistent that the Place of Detention could only be regarded as a prison for juveniles and therefore it should be administered by the Department of Justice. It was used for children on remand, for those serving sentences of up to one month, and boys whom industrial schools had refused to admit during the late 1950s and 1960s. Its superintendent was a lay person appointed by the Department of Education and his wife was the matron. Its staff had been recruited from among men claiming benefits from the Unemployment Exchange office who had no training in childcare and were particularly inadequate in dealing with boys who had fallen foul of the law.



Before Marlborough House was opened as a Place of Detention in 1944, it had been a military installation, which had been declared to be too dilapidated to be fit for purpose. It was purchased by the Department of Education to replace Summerhill Police Barracks, which had been holding remand prisoners since 1912. The Cussen Commission of Inquiry into the Reformatory and Schools

Mary Raftery and Eoin O'Sullivan, *Suffer the Little Children. The Inside Story of Ireland's Industrial Schools*. New Island Books, 1999

Photograph by Mary Muldowney

System, which sat between 1934 and 1936, found that the Summerhill Barracks was unsuitable as an industrial school because it was a fire hazard. In 1933, industrial schools had been abolished in the United Kingdom but not in Ireland.

The Cussen Report had reservations about the large number of children in care, the inadequate nature of their education, the lack of local support, and the stigma attached to the schools. Despite the seriousness of the Commission's findings, the Department of Education's implementation of the Report's recommendations was inconsistent and intermittent. As the numbers of boys being detained decreased significantly in the 1930s, the Department of Education advised that there was no immediate need to find a replacement for the Summerhill Barracks.

On 24 February 1943, a fire broke out in St Joseph's Industrial School in Cavan, resulting in the deaths of 35 children and one employee. The subsequent Tribunal of Inquiry judged that the Department of Education's management of the institution was unsatisfactory. In response to public concern about the danger of a similar catastrophe in the Summerhill Barracks, the Chief of the Dublin Fire Brigade was asked to inspect the premises by the Department of Education. He recommended that the building should be closed down as a matter of urgency as it would be completely unsafe if there was to be a bombing incident. Thomas Derrig, the Minister for Education, sought funding from the government to purchase a replacement building and the Office of Public Works (OPW) identified Marlborough House. The government funding did not include any provision for upgrading the premises or making at least some effort to convert former military accommodation into a suitable centre in which to house children.

Correspondence between senior officials of the two Departments in the early 1950s is quoted in Chapter 16 of the *Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse* (usually referred to as 'The Ryan Report') which was published in 2009. It demonstrated that 'rivalry, often amounting to hostility, marked the relations between the two Departments'. Despite many efforts by the Department of Education to get the Department of Justice to take over Marlborough House, the institution remained under the control of the former until it was closed on 1 August 1972. At the time

it was purchased, it consisted of three floors, containing 18 rooms, with kitchens, larders and five bathrooms, and a garden of half an acre. The OPW reported that the front of the building was in poor condition and had to be supported by iron tie bars. There was an extension to the rear which was said to need only routine maintenance. No provision was made for new fire safety measures or an air raid shelter. This was particularly negligent given that it was only two years since the devastating bombing of the North Strand in which 28 people were killed and 90 injured.

Once the decision was made to set up the Place of Detention in Marlborough House, permission had to be sought from the Department of Finance to release the money for the essential alterations. This took some time, and several legal issues arose delaying the project still further, despite the Dublin Fire Brigade Chief demanding immediate closure of the Summerhill premises. In August 1943, the Minister for Justice Gerald Boland registered Marlborough House as a Place of Detention for up to 50 male children. Between 1944 and 1972, there were approximately 21,500 admissions of children aged at least seven or eight or at most 17. The Department of Justice stated to the Ryan Committee that their responsibility was to satisfy themselves with the suitability of the accommodation as directed by Section 108(3) of the Children Act 1908. Sole managerial responsibility in terms of the administration and operation of the institution was to be dealt with by the Department of Education.

It is clear from Department of Education files and other sources that the children incarcerated in the Place of Detention were just as brutally treated by some of the lay attendants as those imprisoned in the religious-run industrial and reformatory schools. The Department did not carry out regular inspections as its supervisory role required it to do, as reported by the Ryan Committee:

“In the absence of a formal or routine inspection system, contact with Marlborough House was mainly in the form of written correspondence between the Superintendent of Marlborough House and the Inspector of the Reformatory and Industrial School Branch when dealing with issues such as the investigation of complaints and incidents, staff, funding, requisitions, etc.”

As early as 15 March 1944, concerns were raised about the calibre of staff employed in Marlborough House, who were described in an inter-departmental memorandum to the Assistant Secretary of the Department of Finance, two weeks before the Place of Detention was opened, as 'the lowest paid labour known to the Civil Service'. The author said that because of the low calibre of the staff, practically nothing would be done for the boys committed there 'except to feed them and ensure that they do not escape'. Further correspondence recommended that, given the funds available, the best solution would be to hand over the running of Marlborough House to a 'suitably qualified' religious order. The response from the Department of Finance denied any justification for such a move, suggesting that some time should be allowed in the new surroundings to assess the 'manner of management', thereby avoiding any additional cost to the State.

From the mid-1950s to 1972, there was frequent newspaper coverage of court cases involving young boys where claims of beatings and other forms of abuse were made. In January 1951 an attendant employed at Marlborough House was sentenced to 12 months in prison for sexually abusing two boys who had complained to Justice H. McCarthy. In a later case before Justice McCarthy, in March 1956, the accused boy named two staff members as being responsible for beatings he had suffered. Another boy questioned in court by Justice McCarthy supported his allegations, saying that he had also been beaten by Marlborough House staff. However, Sergeant M. Byrne testified that all this was a surprise to him.

Justice McCarthy remanded the case for 14 days, by which time he ordered that the Superintendent of Marlborough House should be brought before him. When Mr. Harte, the Superintendent, appeared in court two weeks later, he had with him statements from the staff members and some of the older boys who all declared that the inmates were well treated and well fed. The judge dismissed the accusations of ill treatment and sent the original boy back to Marlborough House.

The Minister for Education, Richard Mulcahy attempted to set up an inter-departmental meeting in 1951 to discuss some of the problems associated with Marlborough House, but the meeting does not seem to have taken place until 1962. In the meantime, Justice McCarthy had complained

repeatedly to the Department of Education and the Department of Justice about the terrible conditions in which young offenders were kept. He referred to evidence that Justice O'Sullivan, who had tried the attendant found guilty of sexual abuse, had testified that the blankets were only cleaned or disinfected every six years. The judge had taken the matter up with senior officials in the Department of Education's Reformatory and Industrial School Branch but their excuse for the neglect was again that the attendants were very poorly paid.

Raftery and O'Sullivan wrote that Judge McCarthy was an advocate of using the Probation Act more often rather than incarcerating children. McCarthy had complained that although this approach was very successful in many cases, there were only four probation officers dealing with children in the whole of the country. He proposed the setting up of a committee to examine the area. A letter in the Department of Education files from Gerry Boland, Minister for Justice at the time, to Thomas Derrig, Minister for Education, recommended that they adopt McCarthy's suggestion to set up the committee and then use it 'to hang him'. Boland thought he understood that Derrig, like himself, believed that McCarthy was too lenient. He wrote that this was a course to which McCarthy 'cannot object because

he himself invited it. And I think the advice of such a committee might be sought with advantage in about six months' time, as to how far McCarthy is at fault.'



Poster published by the Irish Press in 1933, showing the Fianna Fáil cabinet on the leaves of a shamrock. Thomas Derrig is on the right of the third row from the top and Gerald Boland is on the left of the fourth row

Courtesy of National Library of Ireland

Boland added a postscript to his letter, saying that he had just received correspondence from Father Counihan SJ of the Commission on Youth Employment. According to Boland, Father Counihan strongly advocated the caning of young delinquents. 'The rod is badly needed for the under 16 offenders', he wrote. Boland suggested that Father Counihan should be invited to serve on Justice McCarthy's committee but there is no record of whether it was ever convened.

Other instances of children complaining to judges about their ill treatment in Marlborough House were generally dismissed as being down to overactive imaginations on the children's part. The father of an eight-year-old who was serving a month in the Place of Detention for stealing sweets from Mount Pleasant Lawn Tennis Club sent a letter to both Ministers for Education and Justice explaining that his son had been assaulted by an older boy. The superintendent denied that anything more than 'a slight tip' had occurred. The child was returned to serve out the rest of his sentence in Marlborough House.

This was by no means the only case of children's complaints being described as exaggerated or false. At Christmas 1971, Peadar Kelly, an attendant working in Marlborough House, was involved in an attempt to save a boy from the brutality of other members of staff. He was told by the matron that the staff usually managed to clear the house of inmates over the Christmas holiday, with the help of the Gardaí. This was to enable 'revelry' over the three or four days of Christmas.

The Gardaí in Limerick were unaware of this arrangement and sent a young boy to Marlborough House by himself. He was badly beaten by staff members on the first night. The matron enlisted the assistance of Peadar Kelly and his wife to help the boy get on a train back to Limerick because she was concerned his life could be in danger and she knew that Kelly had not been involved in the abuse. Unfortunately, the child was returned to Marlborough House by the Gardaí in the station in Limerick after he had sought to report what had happened to him. Kelly decided that the only way to prevent further harm to the boy was to go public on the issue and he contacted the then editor of the 'Women's Page' in the *Irish Press*, Mary Kenny and journalist Rosita Sweetman. The story was

published in the paper and Peadar Kelly was summarily dismissed from his job, after experiencing threats from the superintendent of Marlborough House and senior Gardaí. A campaign involving newspapers, political figures, trade unions and concerned citizens followed, demanding that the Place of Detention be closed. It was not shut down until 1972, by which time nothing had changed. Raftery and O'Sullivan found no reference in the Department of Education files of any disciplinary action taken against staff who had been accused by inmates of attacks on them. In a 2017 letter to then Minister for Education Richard Bruton, Kelly outlined what had happened to him and restated his claim for unfair dismissal. He died two years later without any redress.



Article by Rosita Sweetman published in the Irish Press, 6 January 1972, following her interview with Peadar Kelly

Courtesy of Irish Newspaper Archive online

Apart from the refusal to deal with the appalling treatment of the children and young people incarcerated in Marlborough House, the Department was also guilty of ignoring the safety implications of the building's condition. It had been condemned as dangerous as far back as 1957 by the Board of Work, later renamed the Office of Public Works. The Board wrote to the Department of Education urgently recommending its replacement with a new building, warning about a grave risk of loss of life if any part of the building was to collapse. Nevertheless, up to 50 children at any one time continued to be kept there for the following 15 years.

The Department officials were indefensibly mean when it came to providing education and recreation facilities for the boys, although there was no problem paying for access to religious instruction. In 1960, according to the Department, the inmates' weekly march to Mass was the subject of

complaints from the public about this ‘unedifying spectacle’. It also provided the boys with an opportunity to escape, involving a chase through the streets. It was decided in future that Mass should be said in Marlborough House and the local parish priest was paid £100 a year by the State, with a further allowance of £55 to purchase the necessary materials. This was literally the only provision of any kind made for the boys other than feeding and housing them.

From 1970 to 1973, there were repeated references in the media to the dangerous inadequacy of the industrial school system, with frequent criticism of Marlborough House in particular. The Kennedy Report was published in 1970, and it was described as ‘one of the most damning indictments of the operation of any state system ever produced in this country’. It covered an impressive amount of work, but mainly it condemned the system of inspection of industrial schools by the Department of Education as having been totally ineffective, saying that not even its statutory obligations had been fulfilled. It also criticised the financial provisions made by the State as totally inadequate.

In 1969, even before the Kennedy Report was published, the Committee wrote to the Minister for Education urging that Marlborough House and Daingean Reformatory be immediately shut down. The committee wanted the Glasnevin Place of Detention to be urgently shut down regardless of the fact that its planned replacement was not yet completed. Most fundamentally, the Kennedy Report sounded the death knell for the institutional model of childcare, which had remained remarkably resilient in this country for almost 100 years. Its first major recommendation was that the committal or admission of children to residential care should be considered only when there is no satisfactory alternative. In total, the Kennedy Report made 13 major recommendations, all of them designed to structure a modern childcare system, complete with fully trained staff, special educational supports, adequate aftercare provisions, and a proper system of inspection. It also stated that the Department of Health should in future have responsibility for the area and that funding should no longer be based on the capitation system per child, but rather on an overall budget for the institution.

The Department of Education was very hostile to the report, not surprisingly. Donogh O'Malley was the Minister for Education who was responsible for setting up the Kennedy Committee. However, he died suddenly in 1968 at the age of 47 and at that point it had not even been provided with administrative backup from the Department of Education. It was only when O'Malley's successor, Brian Lenihan, intervened that it managed to get that kind of essential support. Neither the State nor the Catholic Church shared the enthusiasm for change that was recommended by the Kennedy Report. It was never debated in the Dáil, and the only debate on the issues raised was in the Seanad, and that was in November 1973, three years after its publication.

The closure of Marlborough House in 1972 was 30 years after the government was informed the building was unsafe and 20 years after concerns were raised about the care given to the boys condemned to stay in it. The inmates themselves acted in the 1970s by drawing attention to their conditions, by rioting and repeatedly attempting to escape. The media finally began to take an interest in what was prompting the disorderly behaviour. The Department of Education appealed to the Prison Service to take over when the Marlborough House attendants walked out of what they said was an 'unsafe environment'. It was certainly that, but not just for them. Their lack of interest in the safety and wellbeing of their charges was

consistent to the end of their tenure and consistent with the indifference of their ultimate employers in the Department of Education.



**Justice Eileen Kennedy,
Chair of the Committee
appointed to examine the
reformatory and industrial
schools' system.**

Image courtesy of the Courts
Service, Women in the Law
exhibition

Further Reading

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- Justice Kennedy, Eileen, *Reformatory and Industrial Schools' System Report*. Government Stationery Office, 1970. <http://hdl.handle.net/10147/77793>.
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Cath na Gaeilge ar an mBardas, 1920

Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh, Scríbhneoir agus Staráí

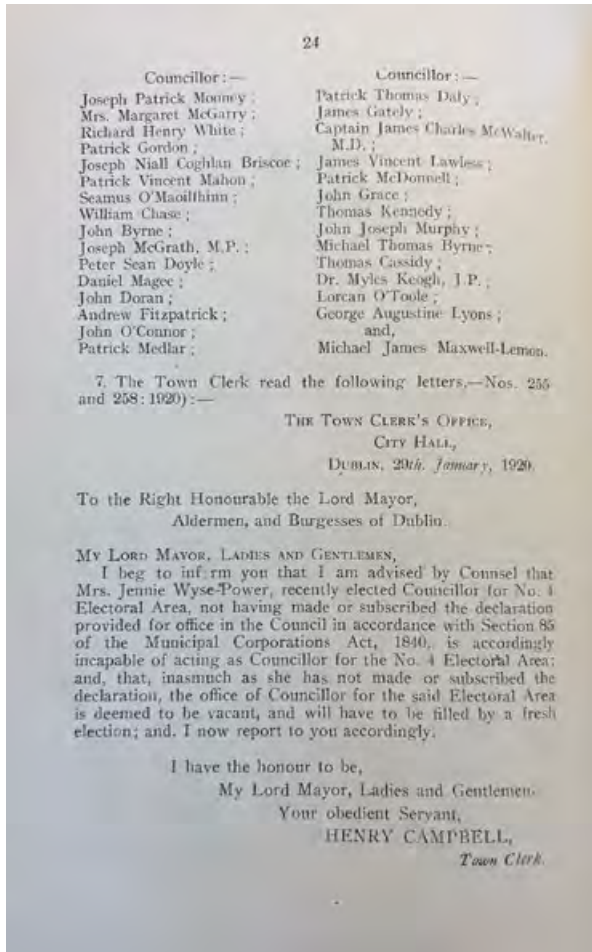
Ba dhúshlán neamhbhalbh faoi údaráis na Breataine é Dáil Éireann a thionól i 1919. Bhí Sinn Féin ag tabhairt faoi struchtúir stáit ar leith a chur ar bun, a bheadh mar chreat le poblacht neamhspleách in Éirinn, saor ó cheannas na himpireachta. Rinneadh nasc soiléir os comhair an tsaoil idir cúis na poblachta seo agus cúis na teangan nuair a rinne an Dáil a cuid gnóthaí go léir i nGaeilge ar a céad lá i mbun oibre.

Bhí sé ina pholasaí ag Sinn Féin le fada leas a bhaint as údaráis áitiúla na tíre le saoirse na hÉireann a chur chun cinn, agus bhí Sinn Féinithe ar Bhardas Átha Cliath ó 1908 anall. Bheadh toghchán do Bhardas Átha Cliath, agus bardais eile na tíre, ar siúl 15 Eanáir 1920, den chéad uair ó 1914. Bhí faoi Shinn Féin an deis seo a thapú agus comhairleoirí a thoghadh a shéanfadh rialtas na Breataine agus a dhéanfadh uirlis eile sa troid de na bardais. Ba cheann de na dualgais a ghabh siad orthu, a d'fhógair clár Shinn Féin le haghaidh na dtoghchán seo, 'helping by every means in their power to nurture and spread the native tongue'.

In olltoghchán 1918 shocraigh Sinn Féin go mbeadh Gaeilge ag gach iarrthóir dá gcuid i gceantracha Gaeltachta, ach ní raibh sin i gceist an babhta seo, ó tharla gur sna cathracha amháin a bhíothas ag vótáil. Ní thoghfaí comhairlí sa gcuid eile den tír go dtí an Meitheamh. Mar sin féin, bhí roinnt cainteoirí Gaeilge aitheanta i measc na Sinn Féinithe a sheas do na bardais. Bhuaigh an páirtí móramh na suíochán i mBaile Átha Cliath, agus bhí roinnt comhairleoirí de chuid an Lucht Oibre ag tacú leo freisin.

Nuair a bhí a chéad chruinniú ag Bardas nua Átha Cliath i Halla na Cathrach 30 Eanair, ba í an Ghaeilge an chéad chnámh spairne idir lucht an tseanchórais agus an dream nua. D'éirigh Cléireach an Bhaile, Henry Campbell, ina sheasamh chun ráiteas a dhéanamh. Bhí sé gléasta go péacach mar ba ghnách leis, faoina chroiméal róin, duine a bhí ina fheisire ag an bPáirtí Parlaiminteach go dtí 1893 nuair a ceapadh mar Chléireach é.

Bhí dearbhú le síniú ag gach comhairleoir, agus chuir sé in iúl nach raibh sin déanta ag duine amháin, Siobhán Bean an Phaoraigh – ball de Shinn Féin le blianta fada, a toghadh in iarthuaisceart na cathrach – agus go raibh sí ‘incapable of acting as Councillor’ dá réir. Shínigh sí an dearbhú



Miontuairiscí Bhardas Átha Cliath, 30 Eanair 1920

le caoinchead Leabharlann
agus Cartlann Chathair
Bhaile Átha Cliath



Cárta toghcháin de chuid Siobhán Bean an Phaoraigh, 1908
le caoinchead
Leabharlann
Náisiúnta na hÉireann

níos luaithe sa tseachtain, ach faoin leagan Gaeilge dá hainm. Mhínigh sí don Bhardas go mba shin an síniú a bhíodh aici i gcónaí. Nuair a thairg a dlíodóir an lá roimh an gcuinniú go síneodh sí leagan Béarla ina dhiaidh, d'fhreagair Campbell: 'She is too late to modify it, and if she intervenes in the debate to-morrow she will be liable to a fine of £50.' Dúirt Bean an Phaoraigh go raibh sí sásta seasamh aríst agus an scéal a fhágáil faoi bhreith na vótóirí, 'and the Town Clerk might find that attacking the Irish language was not as easy a job as he thought'.

Nuair a bhí vótáil ar thoghadh ardmhéara, níor ghlaoigh Campbell ar an bPaorach le vóta a chaitheamh. 'I am disqualified, and not allowed to vote, because I signed my name in Irish', a dúirt sí leis an gcuinniú. Dar le Michael Flanagan, a toghadh do Shinn Féin sa gceantar céanna léi, 'a direct insult to the Irish language' a bhí anseo. Glacadh d'aon ghuth le rún ó William O'Brien den Lucht Oibre go raibh an Paorach 'duly and properly elected' agus go gcuirfí a hainm le liosta na gcomhairleoirí. 'I tell you I decline to recognise your resolution', a dúirt an Cléireach leis an Ardmhéara gníomhach Laurence O'Neill, áfach.

Mhol O'Brien ansin go gcuirfí an Cléireach ar fionraí, 'he having refused to carry out the declared wish of this Meeting'. Labhair Liam Mac Coscair, a bhí ina chomhairleoir ag Sinn Féin ó 1909 i leith, agus é níos faichillí:

"If he (Alderman Cosgrave) were in the same position as the Town Clerk he would be inclined to keep to his own opinion. He knew this case was one which struck at the fundamental principle of representative government, but he thought the motion before the chair was an exceptionally drastic one.... Although they might feel strongly on the case, personally, if it were his own case, he would not be inclined to hold up the whole business of the Council."

D'iarr sé ar O'Brien gan leanacht lena rún, ach rialaigh O'Neill go raibh an rún as ord ar aon chaoi.

Níorbh í an Paorach an t-aon chomhairleoir i láthair a bhaineadh leas as ainm Gaeilge. Bhí Cathal Ó Murchadha ar bharr na vótaí in oirdheisceart na cathrach do Shinn Féin, agus toghadh a chomhghleacaí Seán Mac Caoilte ar an taobh ó thuaidh. Ní bhíodh aon ainm ar cheachtar acu ach ainm Gaeilge, agus tá sin le feiceáil i mbileoga toghcháin Shinn Féin. Ní amháin sin, ach thug Mac Caoilte óráid i nGaeilge ag an gcuinniú seo den Bhardas, agus níor chuir an Cléireach ná aon duine eile ina aghaidh. I miontuairiscí an Bhardais, áfach, tá an bheirt seo liostaithe mar 'Charles Murphy' agus 'John Forrestal': is follas gur ghéill siadsan don Chléireach nuair a sheas sé ar shíniú i mBéarla.

Bileog toghcháin de chuid Sinn Féin, 1920, agus Séamus Ó Maoilfhinn i measc na n-iarrthóirí
le caoinchead Leabharlann Náisiúnta na hÉireann



Tá ainm Gaeilge amháin le feiceáil ar liosta oifigiúil na gcomhairleoirí, áfach. Toghadh Séamus Ó Maoilfhinn do Shinn Féin in oirthuaisceart Bhaile Átha Cliath. ‘James O’Maoilfhinn’ a tugadh air ar bhileoga toghcháin, ach is é ‘Seamus O’Maoilfhinn’ é i miontuairiscí an Bhardais. Is léir gur i nGaeilge a shínigh seisean a ainm – agus nár thug an Cléireach sin faoi deara.

Ba chosúil, a scríobhadh ar *Misneach*, nuachtán Chonradh na Gaeilge, ‘go bhfuil paor éigin ag an gCléireach ar Bhean an Phaoraigh. (Ní “pun” é sin.)’ Ach tá rud aisteach eile le feiceáil sna miontuairiscí. Bhí ar an mBardas a shocrú cé a cheapfaí ar na coistí éagsúla, agus scaip Campbell dréachtliosta a chuir sé féin le chéile. I measc na ndaoine a mhol sé don choiste glantacháin, tá na Comhairleoirí “MacCaoilte” agus “Mrs. Wyse Power”. Is follas gur le gairid amháin a chinn sé gan glacadh le hainmneacha Gaeilge.



Siobhán Bean an Phaoraigh, 1920
Irish Life

Bhí cruinniú eile ag an mBardas trí lá ina dhiaidh sin agus an Paorach i láthair. Má bhí sé i gceist ag an mBardas glacadh léi mar chomhairleoir dleathach, a chuir Campbell in iúl, ‘I am now advised that the responsibility will attach to the Council, and not to me’. Ba ghearr an mhoill air a mhalairt de chomhairle dlí a fháil nuair ba léir dó go mb’fhearr rith maith ná drochsheasamh, agus sheachnófaí a lán achrainn dá ndéanfadh sé amhlaidh i gcásanna eile. Tá an Paorach thíos i miontuairiscí an chruinnithe seo aige, ach mar ‘Mrs. Jennie Wyse-Power’.

Bhí gluaiseacht na Gaeilge amhrasach faoin gconspóid ar an mBardas. ‘Is dócha gur fearr i bhfad na comhairleoirí nua ná na seana-chomhairleoirí i gcúrsaí na Gaeilge,’ a dúirt *Misneach*, ‘ach ní foláir a admháil go bhfuil iomad de lucht Sinn Féin fuar faillitheach i dtaobh na teangan.’ B’fhearr

leis go ndéanfaidís rudaí praiticiúla ar nós féachaint chuige go mbeadh an Ghaeilge ag teastáil i ndáiríre i bpostanna faoin mBardas. Ba léir ó chaint Mhic Coscair go raibh rudaí seachas úsáid na Gaeilge ar a n-aire ag a lán de mhuintir Shinn Féin.

Tháinig an cheist chun tosaigh aríst ag cruinniú an Bhardais 1 Márta. Agus comhairleoirí ag vótáil ar thuarascáil an Choiste Ceardoideachais, chuir William Paul, comhairleoir de chuid Sinn Féin in iarthuaisceart na cathrach, a ghuth in iúl leis an bhfocal ‘Bíodh.’ Dhiúltaigh Campbell glacadh leis sin: ‘he was bound to report the division in the language of the council, which was English’, cé go raibh sé féin ‘as much in favour of encouraging the Irish language as anybody’. Ba chuid dá mhearbhall go raibh ‘two or three different pronunciations of the same word in Irish’. Thug Paul vóta ‘Bíodh’ aríst. D’fhiafraigh an Paorach den Chléireach cén fuaimniú a bhí ar an bhfocal sin ina cheantar dúchais féin.

Is léir go raibh Sinn Féinithe eile ar an mBardas ag brú ar Paul cúlú, áfach. Thairg Michael Dowling vóta Paul a aistriú go Béarla, ach dhiúltaigh Campbell dó sin. Dúirt an tArdmhéara ‘that a member could answer in Irish and explain in English what he meant’. Sheas Paul an fód:

“I am out now for a principle. There are any amount of influences being brought to bear on me, but I say I would rather see the Council adjourn, and let the Gaelic League and the people of Ireland take up the matter. I am going to see that that principle is asserted, and no consideration would make me withdraw.”

Dúirt an Cléireach: ‘a member has answered a question in a language I do not understand’. Dúirt an comhairleoir neamhspleách Lorcan O’Toole gur mba chóir dó fios a chur ar bhall dá fhoireann a thuig an Ghaeilge, ach d’fhreagair Campbell nach n-inseodh aon duine fios a ghnóthaí dó. D’iarr an Sinn Féiní George Lyons ar Paul labhairt sa dá theanga, ag rá ‘that he might become famous, but might make the movement ridiculous’. Bhí an tArdmhéara ar tí an cruinniú a chur ar athló nuair a d’éirigh Paul dá shuíochán. ‘I don’t like to do it,’ ar seisean, ach tharraing sé siar ón gcruinniú, a lean ar aghaidh dá uireasa.

Is ait gur dhúirt Campbell nár thuig sé an Ghaeilge, nó mhaígh sé i ndaonáireamh 1911 go raibh sí aige – agus teangacha lena cois sa daonáireamh roimhe sin: ‘Irish and English etc etc’. Ba as Condae an Dúin é, agus chomh fada is féidir a dhéanamh amach, ba in Aontroim a rugadh Paul. Más ina chanúint dúchais a dúirt sé an focal ‘Bíodh’, cheapfá go dtuigfeadh a chomharsa é, mar sin. B’fhíor don chomhairleoir a dúirt leis an gcruinniú gur iomaí caoi leis an bhfocal céanna a rá i mBéarla freisin, agus níor ghá don Chléireach ach ‘Bíodh’ agus ‘Ná bíodh’ a fhoghlaim, rud nár stró ar fhear léannta mar é ach a fhonn a bheith air.

4 Márta, bhí cruinniú eile den Bhardas ag plé soláthar uisce. Nuair a vótáladh ar an gceist, thug an Comhairleoir Paul an freagra ‘Bíodh’ aríst. ‘I must have your answer, sir, “for” or “against”’, arsa an Cléireach. ‘Now, Mr. Paul, the Town Clerk does not understand you’, a dúirt an tArdmhéara. Tharraing Paul siar ón gcruinniú aríst gan a vóta comhairthe.

Níos deireanaí, thug John O’Connor, comhairleoir Lucht Oibre in iardheisceart Bhaile Átha Cliath, a vóta i nGaeilge. Dúirt an tArdmhéara O’Neill nach raibh dóthain Gaeilge aige féin lena thuiscint, agus d’iarr sé air ligean don vótáil a ghabháil ar aghaidh. Nuair a glaodh ar O’Connor aríst, vótáil sé ‘Bíodh’ aríst. B’éigean an vótáil a thaifeadadh ‘in the language generally understood’, arsa an tArdmhéara, agus ‘Councillor O’Connor would not be sacrificing any of his principles if he answered both in Irish and in English’. Vótáil O’Connor i nGaeilge den triú huair, áfach. Dúirt Campbell nach bhféadfaí a ghabháil ar aghaidh. D’fhiafraigh Dowling cén dlí a bhí in aghaidh Gaeilge a labhairt sa mBardas, agus d’fhreagair O’Neill nach raibh aon dlí ina aghaidh. ‘Very well,’ a dúirt an Paorach, ‘why can we not take a vote in Irish?’ Cuireadh an cruinniú ar athló – de bharr O’Connor ‘having refused to answer’, a scríobh an Cléireach sna miontuairiscí.

Ag cruinniú 1 Aibreán dúirt O’Neill go mba é comhairle dlí an Bhardais go gcaithfeadh comhairleoirí ‘Aye’ nó ‘No’ a fhreagairt nuair a ghlaofaí orthu chun vótáil, agus d’iarr sé orthu cloí leis seo. Is cosúil gur chloígh Paul, mar tá a vóta taifeadta i miontuairiscí an chruinnithe. Ag cruinniú 3 Bealtaine leasaíodh miontuairiscí 4 Márta le rá nár dhiúltaigh O’Connor vótáil ach gur fhreagair sé i nGaeilge d’ainneoin na rialacha.

“ Biodh ! ”

COMHAIRLE NUA ATH-
CLIAITH.

Bí a lán pírád as Comairle
Daile áit Cluic le deunaisge i
“biao” nó “ná biao” i n-ionad
“for” or “against.” Cuir an
Cléineac ruar do Mac Póil toisc
“biao” a pád. Níorbéir leir
an bpólaic tuillead Saeoilge lab-
airt. Lá na diaidíon do dem
Seán Ó Concubairt troic i doad na
ceirte—do labairt pé as beurla,
as coraint a cirt cun “biao”
do pád. Togá Saeoil agus togá
Saeoilgeóra iread Seán agus bí
púil agusinn le n-a mairt de
cailt uaid.

Dá mbeaò “bíòò” nò “ná bíòò” ar riubál aṣ ṣaḥ éan com-
aipleòir i nḗirinn ní òeunfaò pé
faic cùn an Ṣaèòilṣ òo cùr cùn
cinn. Mar a céile é aṣur an nór
bpeáṣ pinnfémeaḥ ron—“a ǎpa”
—a cùr i òtoráḥ leirpe òeupla.
Má’r ṣáò òo òuine òeupla lab-
air, labpaò pé òeupla; ní òeun-
faò “bíòò” Ṣaèòilṣeòir òe.
Má’r mian leir an Ṣaèòilṣ òo
cùr i bḗiròm i ṣcùppaí puibṭiòe,

LABRATO SE ZAEΘILZ.

1r peápp i bpað a taitneann linn
an éainnt éiallmán oo tug an fuit-

Misneach,
Márta 13 1920

le caoinchead
Leabharlann agus
Cartlann Chathair
Bhaile Átha Cliath

Ba bheag a shíl Conradh na Gaeilge den scéal ar fad. ‘Dá mbeadh “bíodh” nó “ná bíodh” ar siúl ag gach aon chomhairleoir in Éirinn ní dhéanfaidh sé faic chun an Ghaeilge do chur chun cinn’, a scríobh *Misneach*. Ba chosúil nach raibh ach an t-aon fhocal Gaeilge sin ag an gComhairleoir Paul, a dúradh, agus ba mhó dealramh a bheadh le vóta O’Connor dá leanfaidh sé den Ghaeilge seachas cur ar a shon féin i mBéarla. ‘Tuigeadh lucht na ngeáitsí nach geáitsí atá uainn ach gníomhartha’, a dúirt an páipéar. Cheap an Conradh fochoiste le féachaint chuige go dtoghfaí cainteoirí Gaeilge i dtoghcháin áitiúla an Mheithimh agus go gcuirfidís an teanga chun cinn. Níor chuir eagarfhocal fiacail ann:

“Ní foláir do gach ‘Sinnféiní’ glacadh le bunphrionsabail ‘Sinn Féin’ agus a ligint air go bhfuil sé go mór ar thaobh na Gaeilge; ach tá fhios againn go rómhaith, má bhíonn a chaint linn gur rómhinic ná bíonn a chroí linn, agus is geall le tine d’adhaint fé loch é a spreagadh chun gníomh a dhéanamh ar son na Gaeilge. Ní haon chabhair dúinn a bheith ag brath ar a leithéid chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn i gcúrsaí poiblí.”

D’fhógair an Conradh nach dtacódh sé le hiarrthóirí poblachtacha mara mbeadh guth aige féin ina roghnú, agus leag sé bearta praiticiúla amach ba cheart do na húdaráis a chur i bhfeidhm le feabhas a chur ar staid na teangan. Mhol eagarfhocal eile ar *Misneach* iarrthóirí Gaelacha a fháil ‘le heagla go mbuailfidh na Sinnféinithe bréige bob orainn arís’.

Bhí toradh ar an mbrú seo. Nuair a toghadh na comhairlí condae i Meitheamh 1920 bhí cuid mhaith cainteoirí Gaeilge i measc iarrthóirí Shinn Féin, agus ghlac go leor comhairlí leis na bearta teangan a moladh. Rinne Baile Átha Cliath amhlaidh 13 Meán Fómhair nuair a vótáil an Bardas ar shon sraith rún ó Sheán Mac Caoilte: ghlacfaí le vótaí i nGaeilge nó Béarla feasta, d’fhoilseofaí rúin an Bhardais sa dá theanga, agus thabharfaí freagra i nGaeilge ar chomhfhreagras i nGaeilge. ‘B’in lá maith oibre do Sheán’, dar le *Misneach*.



Coiste Seasta Shinn Féin, 1922: tá Siobhán Bean an Phaoraigh ina seasamh ar chlé sa lár, agus is é Seán Mac Caoilte an dara duine ar chlé ina shuí
le caoinchead Leabharlann Náisiúnta na hÉireann

Ba scéal eile é Henry Campbell, áfach. Ag cruinniú 4 Deireadh Fómhair buadh ar rún ardú páighe a thabhairt d'oibrithe leictreachais, ach níor comhaireadh ach 32 vóta air. D'fhiafraigh comhairleoir ar cuireadh vótaí i nGaeilge san áireamh, agus dúirt an Cléireach nár cuireadh, de réir comhairle dlí. D'iarr an tArdmhéara air vótaí i nGaeilge a thaifeadh de réir an rúin ar glacadh leis ag an gcrúinniú roimhe sin, ach shiúil Campbell amach. Rinne an Cléireach Cúnta John Flood an rud céanna nuair a iarradh air siúd é a dhéanamh. Iarradh ar an gComhairleoir Mac Caoilte seasamh isteach, agus chomhair sé 45 vóta. Faoi seo bhí briste ar fhoighid an Ardmhéara, a dúirt:

“By a unanimous voice of the Council, a resolution was passed at the last meeting that the votes of the representatives of the people here should be recorded in Irish. We now find that the language of the country is to be trampled upon by our officials, and it is up to us to see that, if every official of the Corporation leaves us, we are then going to discharge our own business.”

Ní raibh Campbell i láthair ag cruinnithe 1 ná 4 Samhain, ach tharraing Flood siar aríst nuair a tugadh vótaí i nGaeilge. Ghlac comhairleoirí le rún go gcuirfí an bheirt acu ar fionraí. Scríobh Campbell litir ag éirí as, ach bhí an scéal idir dhá cheann na meá de bharr ceisteanna achrannacha dlí.

Bhí cath na Gaeilge ina chuid de chogadh níos leithne idir an Bardas agus a chléireach. Ghlac an Bardas le rún i 1920 a bheith dílis do Dháil Éireann, gan a thuilleadh bainte aige le údaráis na Breataine. Rinne Campbell cinneadh, is léir, go gcloífeadh seisean le dlí na Breataine seachas a leithéid a chur i bhfeidhm. Bhí sé imithe faoi dheireadh na bliana, agus briseadh go foirmeálta é i dtús 1921. Bronnadh an teideal Sir Henry Campbell air an bhliain sin, chomh maith le lánphínsean fial.

Is léir gur cúrsaí siombalachais is mó a bhí i gceist le úsáid na Gaeilge ar an mBardas. Na daoine a bhí ullamh fód an tsiombalachais a sheasamh, ar nós William Paul, ba ghearr gur cuireadh i gcéill dóibh nach raibh Sinn Féin ina iomláine sásta a ghabháil go bun an angair leis. Ní raibh sa teanga acu i ndeireadh báire ach focheist thánaisteach nárbh fhiú a ghabháil in aon bhearna baoil ar a son. Bhí comhairleoirí Lucht Oibre a sheas ní ba láidre leis an nGaeilge ná iad.

Bhí easaontas soiléir le brath idir Sinn Féin agus gluaiseacht na teangan dá thoradh. Den chuid is mó, bhí lucht na Gaeilge sásta muinín a chur i Sinn Féin go dtí sin, glacadh leis go ndéanfaí beart de réir na mbriathra bána lá éicint. Anois, áfach, seachas fáiltiú roimh an gcupla focal Gaeilge i Halla na Cathrach agus páirt a ghlacadh sa raic ina dtaobh, ba é a laghad a locht, dar leo. Thosaigh siad ag éiliú bearta cinnte praiticiúla ar mhaithe leis an teanga seachas buaileam sciath, ag glacadh seasamh neamhspleách agus ag brú ar Shinn Féin.

Bíonn níos mó i gceist le teanga i gcónaí ná focla agus gramadach amháin. Bhí an Ghaeilge – dá bhoichte bhriste í mar Ghaeilge, scaití – ina dlúthchuid den iarracht an bonn a bhaint d’impireacht na Breataine in Éirinn agus an tír a thabhairt faoi smacht a muintire féin. Fiú mara raibh mórán den teanga thairis sin ag comhairleoir, bhí sé de cheart ag aon ionadaí tofa ainm a chlárú agus vóta a chaitheamh i nGaeilge, agus ba dheargmhasla don daonlathas nach mbeadh a vóta bailí go gcaithfí i mBéarla an rí é. Níorbh aon chath na bpunann a bhí dá throid sa bpríomhchathair i 1920, ach ceist thábhachtach, agus ceist nach bhfuil socraithe fós ná baol air. An teanga seo a bhí na mílte de mhuintir na tíre a labhairt nó ag iarraidh a labhairt, an mbeadh sí faoi their i gcónaí, nó an bhfaigheadh sí cothrom na féinne ar deireadh thiar?

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'Dublin your Knowledge': Exploring Whitefriar Street with the children of South City Community National School

Dervilia Roche, Historian in Residence for Children

There are parts of Dublin where the local history can represent almost the entire story of the city as a whole. One such place is the area in and around Whitefriar Street in Dublin 8. Within an area of just four or five streets we are taken through the stories of Gaelic settlements, Vikings, Normans, through to Georgian developments, nineteenth century changes, and twentieth century warfare. Not only this, but it's an area where many recent excavations and discoveries have continued to add to our knowledge of its long history. All of this was recently explored by 17 students, aged 11 and 12, from 6th class in South City Community National School, Whitefriar Street, during a history podcast project.

The project took place as part of my work as Historian in Residence for Children. This role provides space, opportunities and resources for children to uncover the stories of the places where they live, planting seeds for a lifelong connection to the history of Dublin. It involves working with children across the city, on short and longer projects. For this particular project, we worked together over six sessions in one month, giving us lots of time to delve into the area's history in-depth. The project was run in collaboration with The Digital Hub, Dublin 8, who connected the class with me and our other collaborator, Aidan Fitzmaurice, a comedy writer and workshop facilitator who helped the children to structure and record the podcast and managed the final editing of the piece.

We decided from the outset that the project would involve creating a podcast about local history. The creation of the specific content and decisions about the format of this podcast were led by the children as much as possible, through facilitation from myself and Aidan. For the children, this involved both learning about how to make a podcast and learning lots about the history of their local area which we explored in several different ways. The project began with a visit to their classroom, where I delivered a local history workshop to tell them the story of the area from its earliest history up to modern times. This was designed to give them an overview of the possibilities of topics we could explore in more detail and to get an initial idea of what they were interested in. We gathered feedback at the end of this session and throughout all further sessions to assist with this process. From our second session on, we mostly met the class in The Digital Hub, where we began to talk about which parts of history intrigued them the most. In two groups, we worked together to narrow down the topics into two main strands for the group to research, one of which led to a local history walk and visit to nearby Dublin Castle and the other to a short oral history project on the history of food in the local area. After they had undertaken all this research, they were ready to pull together what they had learned and to prepare and record the podcast.

When looking at the history of the area, we began by going as far back as we could. The area around Whitefriar Street is believed to be the location of the original Dubh Linn settlement. Dubh Linn was a seventh century Gaelic settlement, predating even the Viking and medieval city that we might tend to think of as the 'original' Dublin. Later texts suggest Dubh Linn was an early medieval monastery, like the origins of many other Dublin neighbourhoods and towns around Ireland. It took its name from the dark pool along the (now underground) River Poddle, which was located nearby, roughly where the Dublin Castle gardens are now. The Irish name of the pool 'Dubh Linn' ('black pool') eventually evolved into the name of our city.

The monastic settlement had a roughly curved outline, again typical of early monasteries in Ireland. The area continued to have strong connections to religious buildings later in history, but arguably the main reminder of the old settlement is what many people believe to be its curved outline,

still very visible in the position of the streets in that area, namely Stephen Street, Whitefriar Street, Peter Row, and Mercer Street. This can be easily seen on maps but the curved outline is also noticeable while walking on the streets themselves, as the children on the podcast project found out during our local history walk. Many of the children on this project had known about the origins of the name ‘Dublin’ but were interested to find out that their school is located right inside the Dubh Linn settlement area and of their local connection to the name of the city.

During our project we also discussed what might have led to the settlement being formed in this location in the first place. Like most similar settlements from that time, it was located near a source of water, or two in this case. The Rivers Poddle and Steine flow near the area, both of which are now mostly culverted, flowing through underground tunnels. For many children around Dublin, it can be exciting to realise there are hidden underground rivers in many neighbourhoods, often below streets they are familiar with. One of the children even had a personal connection to one of the rivers, saying: ‘The River Poddle runs through my back garden. You’d have to dig up the ground to see it’.



Modern-day map of the area showing roads that are believed to follow the curved outline of the Dubh Linn settlement, as well as the Dubh Linn Garden where the black pool was located

Map Data from Open Street Map, openstreetmap.org/ copyright

The next major phase of the area's history, as with much of the rest of the city, came with the arrival of the Vikings in the ninth and tenth centuries. The Vikings are thought to have used the black pool as a harbour. The location of their first camp in Dublin (their 'longphort') has been the subject of some debate, but one theory suggests it was located on the south banks of the pool, roughly around the area where Ship Street, Stephen Street Upper and the southern part of South Great George's Street now are. The longphort is mentioned in later texts, and excavations in recent years appear to confirm this area as its location. It was close to or overlapping with the previously mentioned older monastic site of Dubh Linn. It is likely that the Vikings seized the monastery and plundered it for resources.

The name of the area evolved during the time of the Vikings to 'Dyflinn'. Several excavations in the area have led to the discovery of Viking burials, with remains of people and accompanying items such as shields, daggers, butchered animal bones, and a decorated bone comb. On our local history walk we saw some of the areas where excavations had taken place, some of which are now new hotels and offices. But one novel way to experience the area's Viking history (for children and adults alike) is by viewing the remains of an eleventh century building under a glass panel on the floor of the Aungier Street Lidl supermarket. This is a Hiberno-Norse structure, meaning it dates from the later phase of Viking history in Dublin, after they



**Hiberno-Norse
structure on display
under the floor of
Lidl Aungier Street**

Photo by Dervilia
Roche

had settled here and when Viking and Irish culture was mixing. The children on the podcast project were really engaged with this, excited to be seeing and understanding history in a building they were already very familiar with, with some noting things like: ‘It was really interesting and cool to see in our local Lidl’ and ‘I’d say most people do their shopping in here and don’t even notice the bits under the ground’. Also in the same Lidl are some remains of an eighteenth century theatre, which was a useful way of demonstrating to the class how just one area can have many layers of history.

With the arrival of the Normans in the twelfth century, the area was developed further. They built the stone wall that would surround the medieval city and on our walk we viewed some of the remains of the wall at Ship Street. The Normans also built the nearby Dublin Castle. From initial discussions with the children, it had become clear that many of them were interested in the castle, and because of this we organised a trip there and a guided tour. This helped to link together many of the things we had discussed: the castle garden being the site of the original Dubh Linn/black pool (although recent excavations now suggest that the pool covered a much larger area), as well as the remains of a Viking wall, the remains of the original Norman castle, and water from the River Poddle, as viewed in the Medieval Undercroft of the castle. For many of the children, this was a highlight of the whole project, with some of their comments being: ‘Going underground to see the round tower and the River Poddle was amazing to see’, ‘There used to be a big moat, and there was a stairway to go up from it. It looked like it was going into pitch black so it looked scary, but I thought that was really cool’, and ‘I had never been - that was my first time, and I found it interesting’.

Another local development during the time of the Normans was the arrival of the Whitefriars or Carmelites to the area that is now Whitefriar Street. This monastic order was named because of their distinctive white cloaks. They established a church and priory, following on from the tradition of monasteries in this immediate area. This continued until most of the site was demolished after the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth century. The Whitefriars returned to the area in the nineteenth century, building the church that is still there today.



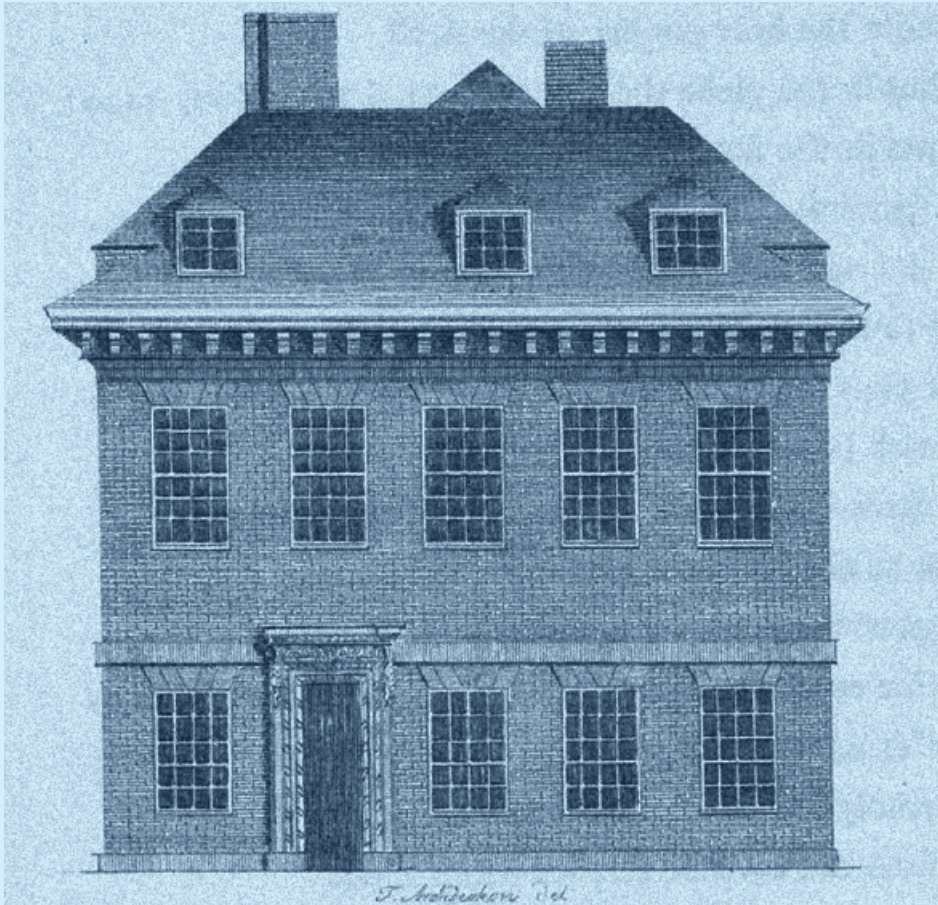
The lower courtyard of Dublin Castle, where we entered the Medieval Undercroft to see parts of the original castle, as well as a Viking wall and water from the River Poddle

Photo by Dervilia Roche

Following on from the Normans, the area underwent major developments in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This process was begun by Francis Aungier, Earl of Longford, who leased land to developers who built up the area with large houses in the late seventeenth century. He also laid out a grid pattern of streets, including Aungier Street, on the site, which now sit in contrast to the curved streets of the old seventh century monastery outline. In this development, Aungier essentially created a new suburb of the expanding city of Dublin and it was considered a fashionable place to live. Aungier Street was one of the widest streets in Dublin at the time and this later influenced the development of more wide streets around the city in the eighteenth century. Numbers 9/9A and 21 Aungier Street are two buildings that survive from this early stage of development. Both have had many changes to their exterior since, but both retain parts of their original staircases. One is believed by some to have been the inspiration for an Aungier Street ghost story by Irish Gothic writer Sheridan Le Fanu.

When we stopped to look at the different buildings along the street, the children began to make some guesses as to which ones had been changed over the years and to notice which ones appeared more modern than others. A second stage of housebuilding occurred in the area in the early eighteenth century, when 'Dutch Billy'-style houses were common, with their distinctive curved gables. These were once a familiar sight around the city but are much less visible now, often hidden or changed by the more well-known Georgian style of architecture that came later. The students were interested to see a historical photo of these 'Dutch Billy' houses on nearby Digges Street, a street that's now built up with flats that some of the children themselves live in.

Further development in the nineteenth century saw the building of a tram line on Aungier Street, where we now find many of the city's bus routes. By this time, Aungier Street was changing from an exclusive residential street to a shopping street, with the buildings by then mostly having businesses on the ground floor and tenements on the upper floors. The nineteenth century also saw the building of the current Whitefriar Street Church, as previously mentioned, located between Aungier Street and Whitefriar Street. The presence of the Whitefriars or Carmelites continues to this day, although the church and surrounding buildings that form part of the convent have been altered over the years. Nowadays this church is associated with St Valentine's Day. The relics of the saint are enclosed in a shrine on display in the church. They are believed to have been gifted by Pope Gregory XVI to a Carmelite named John Spratt on his visit to Rome in 1835. The shrine is visited by couples every year on St Valentine's Day. The children taking part in this project had already heard about the church's association with Valentine but were interested to discuss in more detail the idea of relics and their significance through history, learning that in medieval times it was common for relics to be paraded through streets and viewed by thousands of spectators, and sometimes even brought on tours around cities in Europe. Similar practices still continue today but are perhaps less familiar to many of us than they would have been a thousand years ago.



A seventeenth century Capel Street building, similar in style to the large houses built on Aungier Street in the late seventeenth century

[Wikimedia Commons](#)

Moving into the twentieth century, we discussed the significance of a nearby building during the 1916 Easter Rising. The children had already learned a bit about this time in history and had recently read *The Guns of Easter* by Gerard Whelan. Like many other children I’ve worked with, reading historical fiction set in a particular time period led to them being engaged with the topic and keen to find out more about it. Their school is only a few hundred metres away from the site of Jacob’s factory, famously used by the rebels during the Rising, when it was occupied by the 2nd Battalion under Thomas MacDonagh. Parts of the site were later turned into the National Archives, as well as the Aungier Street branch of Dublin Institute of Technology (now named Technological University Dublin). A reminder of the site’s past is found in several features on the buildings, including the ‘W. & R. Jacob & Co. Limited’ lettering visible



**St Valentine's Shrine,
Whitefriar Street
Carmelite Church**
Photo by Dervilia Roche

from Bishop Street. One of the children, after our local history walk, commented that: 'It was interesting to see the sign on the wall that was still there'. There was much to talk about with the children when we visited this site. We discussed what it might have been like to walk those streets during that week of fighting in 1916. We shared local anecdotes about people sheltering inside Whitefriar Street Church during that time, and considered how that might have felt. We also discussed some of the follow-on turmoil in Dublin and looked at photos of a War of Independence rifle which had been found hidden in Whitefriar Street Church, and which is now in the National Museum of Ireland collection. They wondered about whether there could still be other artefacts from that time in history hidden in buildings around the area.



A reminder of Jacob's Factory on Bishop Street

Photo by Dervilia Roche

As well as its role in 1916, Jacob’s Factory, of course, played a big part in local life. It employed around 3,000 people in the early twentieth century, most of them women. The building’s history was also linked to something else the children had expressed a strong interest in, which was the history of food in the area. For this, we suggested that talking to someone about their memories could be a good way of investigating the topic. They arranged to interview the grandmother of a student in their school. Some of what she told them was about eating broken biscuits from Jacob’s, a memory shared by many who worked there or had family members working there. They also asked her about the price of a dozen eggs and what kind of ice-cream flavours people used to eat when she was young. She spoke to the children about buying food from women at market stalls and the lack of processed foods back then. From this, we were able to draw some contrasts between different things we had learned, comparing the food she discussed with the lavish types of meals people had eaten in Dublin Castle historically, and even using our trip to Lidl as a little reminder of the differences in how we buy food nowadays. Interviewing this local person was also a chance for the children to practise their skills as historians and beforehand we talked about some of the things to consider when undertaking a project like that. They were delighted to speak with her and were so grateful for the stories she shared.

From our local history walk, our visit to Dublin Castle and the oral history interview they undertook, the children were able to bring together a rough outline for how the podcast would go, arranging the information into questions and answers that they would present in a panel-discussion style. After some rehearsing and getting used to the recording equipment, we were ready to record. Added to their panel discussion were some jingles they had recorded with instruments in school, some funny fake ads (including ads for a Viking toilet and a Smell of Dublin 8 deodorant), as well as their chosen title for the podcast: ‘Dublin your Knowledge!’

There was very positive feedback from the children and their teacher about the project. What was clear was the value of being outside of the classroom. Unsurprisingly, the children were particularly engaged with local history stories when out visiting the relevant places, whether it was just having a walk along their local streets or visiting Dublin Castle. It was wonderful to see them experience places like the inside rooms of the castle, a building so close to their school, but that most of them had never been inside of. Allowing the children to guide the project as much as possible and being responsive to their comments and interests also meant that they were finding out answers to questions that they were genuinely interested in and all of this came across in their discussion during the recording of the podcast. The enthusiasm and collaboration of each participant in the project (the children and teachers of South City Community National School, facilitator Aidan Fitzmaurice, The Digital Hub, and me) was also crucial to its success. Doing this project over multiple sessions allowed us to really explore the history in-depth. It allowed the children time to form a greater understanding of the significance of the area around their school, and its many layers of history. They enjoyed listening to the final version of their podcast, which they have kept private within their school. But the value of this project was really in the process rather than in the end product, through the historical inquiries made by the children about their local area and their discoveries along the way.

Further Reading

- Clarke, H.B. *Dublin, part I, to 1610 (Irish Historic Town Atlas)*. Royal Irish Academy, 2003.
- Database of Irish Excavation Reports, excavations.ie
- Dictionary of Irish Biography, dib.ie
- Dublin Castle, dublincastle.ie
- Dublin Civic Trust, dublincivictrust.ie
- Goodbody, Rob. *Dublin, part III, 1756 to 1847 (Irish Historic Towns Atlas)*. Royal Irish Academy, 2014.
- Le Fanu, Sheridan. *An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street*, 1851. Accessible at en.wikisource.org/wiki/An_Account_of_Some_Strange_Disturbances_in_Aungier_Street.
- Lennon, Colm. *Dublin, part II, 1610 to 1756 (Irish Historic Towns Atlas)*. Royal Irish Academy, 2008.
- National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, buildingsofireland.ie
- The Digital Hub, thedigitalhub.com



Pearse at Towerfield

Courtesy of South Dublin County Council Source Archive

One Photograph, Many Stories

Catherine Scuffil, Historian in Residence,
Dublin South Central

Social historians find inspiration for research in the smallest of things, knowing evidence of collective, shared history often hides in plain sight, awaiting discovery. We travel roads, pass laneways and street-signs without fully appreciating the events that may have happened here in the past and the layers of history surrounding our present-day localities.

A photograph found in South Dublin County Council's '*Source*' Archive illustrates just this. The image, taken in the Crumlin area of Dublin over one hundred years ago, formed the basis of an in-depth investigation which revealed numerous fascinating background stories connected, or directly related, to the image and the immediate vicinity where the photograph was taken. These stories track Irish history in multiple ways with unexpected links to local, national, and international events.

The photograph shows a large gathering of people who appear to be dressed up for an outdoor occasion of some kind. The assembled group are listening attentively to a speaker, a man, who is on a raised platform in their midst. Abandoned bicycles litter the hillside in the background, suggesting that the group of people in attendance lived within cycling distance of this site. There is a ridge or a hill in the background which has a somewhat man-made sculptured appearance to it. There are two small children sitting away from the crowd, on the crest of the ridge. Another person nearby, a young man, who, as he is standing with his back to the crowd below, seems to be acting as a look-out. Behind mature trees, also in the background, chimney stacks of a big house or villa can be clearly seen. The overall setting for the image is rural countryside.

The original archive image contained vital additional information handwritten on the back of the photograph. This provided more clues about the actual event and where the image was taken.

“Photo of Pearse inscribed by Ignatius Calendar. PH Pearse speaking at Colmcille Branch Gaelic League [illegible] Towerfield House Ground, Dolphin’s Barn 1915. First appearance of Pearse at such [a] function in Irish Volunteer uniform. Introduced by Ignatius Calendar MC [remaining script illegible]”.

The speaker is Pádraig Pearse dressed in the uniform of the Irish Volunteers, suggesting the photograph was taken at some point before Pearse’s death in 1916. The fact that he is in uniform adds a layer of curiosity to the image – perhaps this is a volunteer recruitment meeting of some kind in preparation for the 1916 Easter Rising.

The Gaelic League was founded in 1893 with the key aim of restoring Irish as a spoken language. This was especially linked to renewed interest in Irish culture in the late nineteenth century, where writers and scholars agreed that language was a key part of Irish identity. Among its founders was Douglas Hyde, later Uachtarán na h-Éireann. In addition to running Irish language classes around the country and teaching native speakers in Gaeltacht areas to read and write, the Gaelic League also arranged associated cultural events centred on music, dance, poetry and other traditions. The newspapers in the early years of the 1900s regularly advertised these events, referring to them variously as ‘Aeriocts’, ‘Aerideacht’ or ‘Aerideac’.

This image shows a crowd at one such Aerioct at Towerfield House Grounds, Crumlin Road, Dolphin’s Barn. From newspaper accounts and advertisements, it seems these events were held annually on this site, especially from 1904 onwards. The place was ideal, located just off the main Crumlin Road and close to the tramway at the South Circular Road, Dolphin’s Barn. It was adjacent to the Grand Canal Circular Line, running from Ringsend to the west of Ireland. To the south lay the route to Blessington, which was a main link from Dublin to the then rural villages of Tallaght and Crumlin. The impressive Towerfield House was located at the top of an unnamed narrow country laneway, very close to the intersection with

the then Dark Lanes. The Dark Lanes were widened in the 1930s when the area was extensively developed and renamed Sundrive Road, the name it holds today. Other than a later fill-in of red-brick terraced housing on the main Crumlin Road, the only other ‘big house’ of note close to Towerfield at the time was Carn Cloch House, close to the Crumlin Road junction with the Dark Lanes and Herberton Lane (known today as Herberton Road).

Griffiths Valuation records a house, offices, land and a quarry in this area. Occupier John Hall operated the stone quarry, most likely established in the 1790s to support the development of the nearby Grand Canal Circular Line. The man-made appearance of the ridge landscape in the image discussed earlier is most likely the remains of the quarry in later years. A subsequent owner of the house was John Colclough (pronounced ‘Coakley’), a coachbuilder with a business in Duke Street in the city. In the early 1900s, the property was home to John Whyte and family. By the time the photograph was taken, Towerfield House was the home of the Healy family.

In the early 1900s the surrounding landscape was dominated by the Rutland Mills, which used the diverted water of the City Watercourse – a branch of the river Poddle – as a source of power. Other industries nearby were the extensive brickworks and clay-pits at Dolphin’s Barn and Mount Argus. Other than these industries, the area was mainly rural, with market gardening, dairy farms and piggeries.

On some early maps the house at this site is called Marian Villa. This name did not endure and Towerfield is carried through on most maps and into living memory. A newspaper article from the 1920s shows a photograph of a tower at this site, which was previously used as a tearoom for day-visitors enjoying a break from the busy city. The tower appears as a type of garden folly or feature, rather than a re-modelled defensive structure of an earlier time. These structures were a fashionable garden item around Dublin, with others located at Ballygall and in nearby Crumlin village. Most detailed maps clearly indicate the tower structure and it is visible in aerial photographs as late as 1930.

There are only two other dwellings in the lane, a small group of cottages called Larkville. In the 1911 census, the extended McCann family was living in one. William and Ellen McCann were parents to a growing family. Their eldest son, Alexander, joined the Royal Irish Fusiliers at the outbreak of the First World War. Sadly, Alexander was killed in the conflict in May 1917 and he is buried in Elzenwalle Brasserie Cemetery near Ypres, Belgium.



**Grave of Alexander McCann,
Elzenwalle Brasserie Cemetery,
Belgium**

Courtesy of John Buckley

His mother, Ellen, had a brass memorial plaque installed in Dolphin's Barn Church in his memory. Curiously, a second name is included on the plaque, with Alexander being mentioned alongside his younger brother Christopher. However, Christopher was not killed in the First World War. There is a much bigger, Irish history story relating to him.

The Irish Military Archives holds a file containing details of Ellen McCann's unsuccessful application under the Army Pensions Acts. She was requesting a dependant's allowance relating to the death of her son Christopher, a Free State Army soldier, who had been shot and killed in August 1922 at Banagher Barracks, Co Offaly. An inquest was held into the death of Christopher McCann which found that the incident occurred as a result of the discharge of a gun among a group of young men. Christopher was accidentally shot and died later from his injuries.

Ellen then submitted an application for a posthumous medal, noting that Christopher had been a member of Na Fianna Éireann and the IRA between 1912 and 1920. Ellen stated that her son Christopher had served in the Jameson Distillery, Marrowbone Lane, an outpost for the South Dublin Union, during the Easter Rising. Her medal application was supported by PJ Young, Secretary of the Fourth Battalion, Fianna Éireann. Also included in the file was a Garda Síochána report detailing Ellen's personal



McCann Memorial Plaque, Dolphin's Barn Church

Courtesy of Fr. Fergal McDonagh PP

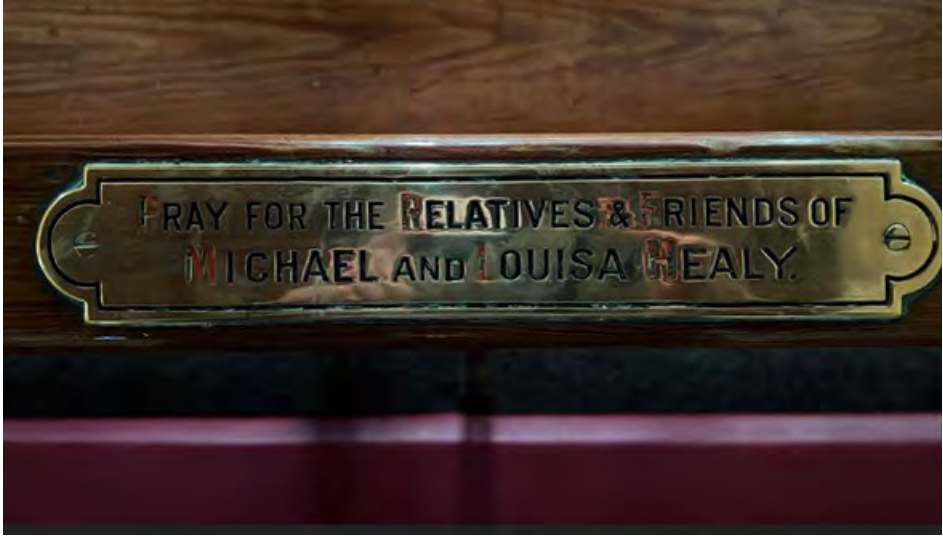
circumstances and her dependency on the deceased at the time of his death. Eventually, in September 1945 she was awarded a medal-with-bar in respect of Christopher's service from 1917 to 1921. In considering this story, there is a strong possibility that Christopher McCann was, in fact, the young man on the hill in the photograph, acting as look-out for the Aeriocht. Certainly, whoever it was must have had detailed knowledge of the terrain around Towerfield House and the key access routes to the grounds.

The file also includes a detailed description of the house at Larkville, mentioning that the McCann's had horses, pigs, and other livestock. The father and all the sons worked as carters with the Dolphin's Barn Brickworks, earning about £5.00 weekly. William, the father, was involved in carting bricks when a row of new houses was built in Kimmage. The McCann family were eventually re-housed at Keeper Road following the construction of the Drimnagh housing estate in the 1940s, at which time Larkville was demolished.



Healy family group at Towerfield House

Courtesy of Billy Kennedy and Carmel Rafter, extended Healy Family members



Healy Memorial Plaque Dolphin's Barn Church

Courtesy of Fr. Fergal McDonagh PP

In 1915, Towerfield House was owned by Michael Healy. He was originally from a farm holding at Bohernabreena, a rural community south of Tallaght village. In 1901, he had married Mary 'Louisa' Gill of Spencer House (beside Dolphin's Barn Bridge) in St James's Roman Catholic Church on James's Street, the then parish church for the area. Louisa's father, a retired Dublin Metropolitan Police officer stationed at Donnybrook, had died earlier that year. When the couple married, they initially set up home at Spencer House, where several of their children were subsequently born. They, with their growing family, eventually moved to Towerfield House, Crumlin Road, taking over the operations of Whyte's large dairy and cattle farm around 1915. Michael Healy was well-known and much respected in business, supplying animals to the city market and providing milk, buttermilk and other dairy products to the local communities.

Their son, Terence, was later ordained a priest in Mount Argus. Coincidentally, there is a Healy family memorial plaque in Dolphin's Barn Church, near that of their neighbours, the McCann's.

Charles Gannon, in his book about his father Cathal, *The Life and Times of a Dublin Craftsman 1910-1999*, provides a detailed description of the Healy farm, which was located quite near to the Gannon home. The Healy's were close family friends, and young Cathal would often be sent to get fresh buttermilk in a large milk churn from the farm. He recalls one particular memory:

“A great celebration was organised when the Healy's son was ordained a priest. They rigged up a stage in a barn and performed little amateur plays that they wrote themselves. Much later, Cathal remembered his brother Jack playing a part in Lady Gregory's Spreading the News. An old quarry in one of the Healys' fields looked like an amphitheatre. It was here that Cathal witnessed an open-air meeting known as an Aeriocht. He was told afterwards by someone that he had seen Patrick Pearse addressing the assembled crowd. There was also Irish dancing and traditional music. A photograph of the event in a newspaper many years later helped to jog Cathal's memory. He remembered being brought to the quarry when he was about five years of age by a girl who lived nearby. There were uniforms and flags, people marched up from Dolphin's Barn and went into the field. The children followed afterwards. Although Cathal could rightfully claim he had seen Patrick Pearse, he really had just a hazy recollection of him”.

From this description, it is quite possible that Cathal is one of the young children on the crest of the hill in the photograph.

Michael Healy's dairy farm seemed to be a successful business, certainly in the early years. However, in September 1920, the newspapers reported on his appearance in court, where he was fined for bringing a diseased animal into the city market. Following examination by the city market vet, the cow was found to have tuberculosis and was destroyed.



School Children at Loreto Crumlin c.1935

Courtesy of Dublin City Library & Archive

Further significant pressures arose for the Healy's in the early 1930s. The areas on both the city-side and the Crumlin-side of the farm started to develop as a housing suburb for the expanding Dublin city. Development accelerated with the building of a new school and convent for the Loreto Order at Carn Cloch House on the Crumlin Road in 1930. Ursula, the Healy's youngest daughter, was one of the first students enrolled in the new school. Michael agreed to sell some acreage to the convent to develop future school sports playing fields.

At the same time, Dublin Corporation commenced compulsory acquisition of lands to widen the narrow Dark Lanes. This radial route linked the Crumlin Road with the Kimmage area where significant housing construction was being planned. A file held by the Dublin City Library & Archive provides details of several local landowners who were directly affected by this, including Michael Healy, who subsequently lost acreage fronting onto the Dark Lanes. The Loreto Order also lost some of their newly acquired playing fields, with a land swap as well as financial compensation agreed in this case. In the final outcome, Healy also lost grazing opportunities for six months elsewhere on his farm, with the construction of a culvert and sewer in support of the new road development. In part compensation, Healy was granted a new gated 'right of way' laneway, linking his lands around Towerfield House to the newly widened road, to be renamed 'Sundrive' when completed. Later, a local resident remarked that the installed five-bar gate in the laneway was an 'eyesore' and the lane itself 'an attraction to children from the new houses', who not only played in the area but climbed walls into private property on a regular basis.

In November 1934, the Healy family suffered a personal tragedy. Their youngest daughter, Ursula, died at Towerfield House at the age of 12 years. She had contracted tuberculosis. Her funeral Mass in Mount Argus was concelebrated by her brother Terence. There was a huge attendance from the local communities in both Dolphin's Barn and Crumlin, including a significant number from the Loreto community and local school children.

The *Irish Press* of April 1938 carried an article detailing the proposed intensive building scheme under the guidance of architect Herbert Simms 'to house up to 1,500 families'. The scheme was planned for the Dolphin's Barn and Crumlin areas in response to the then housing crisis. The Rutland Avenue Compulsory Purchase Order (1938) acquired the land needed and the development covered an area of 97 acres to provide housing for these families. In order to proceed with building, the existing 103 dwellings in the area, many considered in poor condition, were demolished. Provision was, however, made to re-house those displaced, and premises were provided within the new proposed development for some businesses also affected by this demolition. A major feature was the widening of Parnell Bridge on the Grand Canal to facilitate the construction of a new traffic artery extending from Kildare Road, Crumlin to the South Circular Road (today's Clogher Road).

There were many objectors to the scheme. They included the Grand Canal Company, the Dublin General Cemetery Committee, and Joseph Meagher, a publican whose licensed premises and home was located at the junction of Rutland Avenue and the Crumlin Road near Dolphin's Barn Bridge. (He was later provided with new premises on the Crumlin Road). Also among the objectors was Michael Healy of Towerfield House. At a hearing convened to discuss the concerns of landowners, Healy's legal representatives highlighted that the acquisition of his dairy farm would deprive him and his sons of their only means of livelihood. He was willing to go if he could be provided with the same accommodation elsewhere. Simms emphasised that Towerfield House and grounds, which comprised fifteen acres, were absolutely essential to the scheme.

However, due to outward pressures and constrained finances resulting from the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, when all building development ceased, the scheme as originally envisaged was only partially built. It remains to this day as the houses around Rathdrum, Glenealy, and Aughavannagh Roads and some on Clogher Road and Rutland Avenue.

Michael and Louisa eventually moved out of Towerfield House in the early 1940s, relocating to a new property at Kimmage Road West. Louisa died there in 1943, with Michael surviving her by only four more years. He died in 1947.

Today, the playing fields of Templeogue Synge Street GAA club at Dolphin Park occupy part of the site. A new junior school as part of the Loreto Schools Campus, known locally as ‘the little school’, was also built on part of Healy’s land. This was to accommodate the growing number of children in the wider Crumlin area as more young families moved in over the years. Healy’s land stretched to present day Clogher Road but remained undeveloped until a College of Further Education was built there in the early 1950s. In a nice piece of continuity, some of the site is currently used for market gardening, beehives, and public allotments. The College of Further Education on Clogher Road is appropriately named Pearse College. It is located on the site where, in 1915, Pádraig Pearse addressed the crowds as depicted in the earlier photograph.

It truly is ‘One Photograph, Many Stories’.



Pearse College, Clogher Road

Courtesy of John Buckley

Further Reading

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- O'Donnell, Ruan, *Patrick Pearse – 16 Lives*, O'Brien Press, 2016
- Gannon, Charles, *Cathal Gannon – the life and times of a Dublin Craftsman, 1910-1999*, Liliput Press, 2006

Websites

- Griffith's Valuation maps and records <https://www.askaboutireland.ie>
- Military Service Pension Applications: <https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/military-service-pensions-collection-1916-1923/search-the-collection>
- Census Records (1901 & 1911) <https://www.census.nationalarchives.ie>
- South Dublin County Council Online Database [https://www.SDCC Source: Home \(southdublinlibraries.ie\)](https://www.SDCC Source: Home (southdublinlibraries.ie))
- Dublin City Library and Archive <https://www.Dublin City Library and Archive | Dublin City Council>
- Dublin City Libraries subscribe to the Irish Newspaper Archives Online, which give access to a searchable electronic archive of newspaper titles in the city's libraries

About Historians in Residence

Since 2017, Dublin City Council's Historians in Residence have worked in neighbourhoods across Dublin City to encourage local people to engage with history, and to promote its sources and discussion, especially the historical collections in Dublin City Library & Archive.

Since 2020, a Historian in Residence for Children has been included to provide space, opportunities and resources for children to uncover the stories of the places where they live, planting seeds for a lifelong connection to the history of Dublin.

By engaging with local communities and keeping people front and centre of history, the Historians in Residence help the people of Dublin City feel a connection to their local history.

The 2024 Historians in Residence in are:

- Katie Blackwood – Dublin North Central Area
- Elizabeth Kehoe – Dublin Central Area
- Cormac Moore – Dublin South East Area
- Mary Muldowney – Dublin North West Area
- Catherine Scuffil – Dublin South Central Area
- Dervilia Roche – Historian in Residence for Children

Dublin City Council's Historian in Residence programme is created by Dublin City Libraries, and is delivered in partnership with Dublin City Council Culture Company.



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**Above: School Children at
Loreto Crumlin c.1935**

Courtesy of Dublin City
Library & Archive

**Cover image: Frank O'Connor
outside Pembroke Library**

Courtesy of the Family of
Frank O'Connor

For more pictures like this go to dublincitylibraries.ie and search the Dublin City Council Digital Repository where you can see over 43,000 free images including photos, postcards, letters, maps, and cartoons.

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