

PÓL Ó CONGHAILE



SECRET DUBLIN

AN UNUSUAL GUIDE



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

THE HUNGRY TREE

7

Temple Gardens, King's Inns, Dublin 7

• 01 874-4840

• www.kingsinns.ie; www.treecouncil.ie

• 7am–7.30pm [or later]

• Transport: Dublin Bus stops 1613, 1614 and 1619 are nearby on Constitution Hill. The stops are served by the 83 and 83a routes between Kimmage and Harristown



An
“arboricultural
curiosity”

Nature’s revenge. The passage of time. Human folly. It’s tempting to ascribe all manner of symbolic interpretations to this cartoonish phenomenon in Temple Gardens.

The Hungry Tree greets walkers, barristers and benchers as they enter the gardens at King’s Inns from the south gate. It’s a graphic spectacle: a hapless bench apparently being eaten alive by a London plane tree. The bench, like the others scattered about this handsome park, dates from the early 19th century. The plane’s slow-motion gastronomic exploits have seen it listed as a heritage tree by the Tree Council of Ireland – alongside specimens like the 400-year-old mulberry at the Teacher Training College in Rathmines, reputed to be Dublin’s oldest tree, and the Autograph Tree, a copper beech inscribed with the initials of visitors ranging from W. B. Yeats to George Bernard Shaw, in Coole Park, Co. Galway. Standing 21m high and measuring 3.5m in girth, the Hungry Tree is listed on the Heritage Tree Database as an “arboricultural curiosity”. That senior members of an Inn of Court are known as “benchers” only adds to its delight.

Inns of Court traditionally provided law students with accommodation, meals and tuition over the course of their studies. The King’s Inns were designed by James Gandon and built in the early 1800s, although the Honorable Society of King’s Inns (the governing body for barristers in Ireland) goes way back to the reign of Henry VIII – it was founded in 1541. Temple Gardens were opened to the public in the late 19th century, creating not only a welcome amenity for the working-class suburb in which they are set, but a handy short cut between Broadstone and Henrietta Street. The short cut is yet another surprise – an echoing, cobblestoned courtyard bookended by a triumphal arch added by architect Francis Johnson.



BULLET HOLES IN THE O'CONNELL MONUMENT

O'Connell Street, Dublin 1

• Transport: Dart (Tara Street or Connolly Street DART stations); Luas, Abbey Street (Red Line); Dublin Bus; Dublin Bus stops 271, 273 and others are nearby on O'Connell Street.



***A legacy
of the 1916
Rebellion...***

Pigeon droppings and the passage of time aren't the only things to have taken their toll on the O'Connell Monument. Look closely at the statue of Daniel O'Connell on his granite plinth, at the bronze figures swarming about in the frieze below, at the four winged victories above the base. They're peppered with dozens of small holes, drilled by whizzing bullets.

The bullet holes are a legacy of the 1916 Rebellion and the turbulence that followed, including the Irish War of Independence and the Civil War that erupted after the establishment of the Free State in 1922. Clearly, the intersection of O'Connell Street and the city quays hasn't just been a busy junction for traffic. During the course of recent restoration works, no fewer than 10 bullet holes were identified in the 12m-high figure of O'Connell alone, two of which pierced his head. In total, there are approximately 30 bullet holes in the monument.

Daniel O'Connell was one of Ireland's towering historical figures. Following his death in 1847, the committee responsible for the monument resolved that it should memorialise "O'Connell in his whole character and career, from the cradle to the grave, so as to embrace the whole nation". Though a fund was established soon after his funeral, it wasn't until 1882 that the result – to a design by John Henry Foley – was officially unveiled: O'Connell tops the plinth, with four winged victories representing patriotism, courage, eloquence and fidelity at the bottom. Sandwiched between the two is a frieze of some 30 figures, including the Maid of Erin, her breast punctured by perhaps the most visible of the bullet strikes.

What would the Great Emancipator have felt about his statue being showered in a hail of gunfire? In truth, O'Connell was no stranger to weaponry. In 1815 he was even challenged to a duel by John D'Esterre, a member of Dublin Corporation, which ended with D'Esterre being mortally wounded by a shot to the hip. Tradition holds that the memory haunted O'Connell for the rest of his life – so much so that he wore a black glove on his right hand when receiving Holy Communion.

It's not only Dublin's grandest monument that bears O'Connell's name, of course. O'Connell Street itself is Dublin's widest boulevard, and bullet holes are only the start of its secrets.

CHESTER BEATTY ROOF GARDEN

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Chester Beatty Library, Dublin Castle, Dublin 2

- 01 407-0750
- www.cbl.ie
- March – Oct: Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat 11am–5pm, Sun 1pm–5pm.
- Nov – Feb: Tues–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat 11am–5pm, Sun 1pm–5pm (Closed Mondays)
- Admission: free
- Transport: Tara Street DART station (10–15-min. walk); Luas, Stephen's Green (Green Line; 5-min. walk); Dublin Bus stop 1934 is nearby



An oasis of calm in the city centre

Understandably for a city that is rained upon so often, Dublin doesn't really “do” roof gardens. That's not to say roof gardens are not “done”, of course – as this peachy patch atop the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin Castle attests.

The rooftop garden is an oasis of calm in a busy city centre. Split into a series of different surfaces – gravel, ornamental grasses, stone and hardwood – the small space commands some lovely views over the Dubh Linn Gardens below, and the sprawl of Dublin Castle beyond. Freely accessible through the museum (though backpacks, food and cameras must be checked), its close-knit timber trellises give the feeling as much of a fancy backyard as a rooftop

project. The plants creeping up these wooden barriers are slowly transforming them into green walls, though the carefully positioned “windows” will remain, preserving the bird's-eye views over the cityscape. Creative use of indigenous materials creates the overall sense of a contemporary Irish garden, but there's also a Japanese feel to the layout, with its emphasis on harmony and lack of a single dominating feature. Wisteria, silver birch, honeysuckle, bamboo, clematis and heather are just some of the plants adding colour. It's the perfect setting for the Library's Qigong classes, too!

Beneath this rooftop oasis lies Dublin's most under-appreciated museum. The Chester Beatty may be “one of the finest small museums in the world”, according to *The Washington Post*, but locals have been slower to give it a go. Step inside the door, however, and you're hooked. Beatty's collection of manuscripts, prints, icons, miniatures, early printed books and objets d'art is considered the most valuable gift ever given to the Irish nation, with Chinese jade books, dragon robes worn by emperors, papyrus gospels dating from AD 150, clay tablets from Babylon and the earliest known copies of the Book of Revelation just some of the highlights. Throw in a surprising menu of Middle Eastern food at the Silk Road Café, not to mention a beautifully airy atrium, and you have the makings of a very interesting afternoon.



IRISH JEWISH MUSEUM

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3 Walworth Road, Dublin 8

• 01 453-1797 • www.jewishmuseum.ie

• May–Sept: Tues, Thurs & Sun 11am–3pm. Oct–April: Sun 10.30am–2.30pm. Group bookings by arrangement

• Admission: free

• Transport: Luas (Green Line) stops at Charlemont Place and Harcourt Street, both a 10–15-min. walk away. Several Dublin Bus routes stop at nearby Richmond Street South and Rathmines Road Lower



**Portobello
was once known as
“Little Jerusalem”**

Ireland's Jewish community reached its peak in the 1940s, with some 5,000 members.

Today, that number has fallen to around 1,500, according to an Irish Jewish Museum that provides a fusty but fascinating insight

into their heritage in the heart of Portobello. Wentworth Road, with its Victorian redbricks, feels like an unlikely location for a museum – but Portobello was once known as “Little Jerusalem” and hummed with synagogues, schools, homes and kosher businesses (the Bretzel Bakery survives on nearby Lennox Street, albeit under new management). At No. 3, a modest red doorway bears an intercom that visitors are invited to “Please Ring”: inside, you'll find a ground floor crammed with display cases and a restored, first-floor synagogue strewn

with ark covers and Torah scrolls. At first, it all feels a bit stuffy and dated, but the more moseying and nosing about you do, the more intimate it becomes. A curator's letter welcoming visitors dates from 1989. Yellowing election posters, photographs and news clippings recall well-known Dublin politicians like Robert Briscoe and his son Ben, or Mervyn Taylor. There are identity cards, mementos of old Jewish businesses, a wooden Victorian shopping basket and a recreated kitchen – complete with two separate sinks and draining boards for meat and dairy. A display devoted to James Joyce's *Ulysses* also highlights the fact that Leopold Bloom was a Jew, born on Upper Clanbrassil Street.

A case of World War II artefacts makes a deep impression. Among other items, it contains a yellow Star of David arm patch; a copy of the marriage certificate of Ester Steinberg, the only known Irish victim of the Holocaust; pieces of bomb shrapnel recovered from the damaged Greenville Hall Synagogue; and a Nazi dagger with brass swastika and ivory handle. On closer inspection, this chilling keepsake turns out to bear a hopeful inscription – as an accompanying *Irish Times* article explains. It was gifted to the museum by Moris Block, a Jewish Dubliner who served with the British Army and spent the final days of the war in Dusseldorf. There, he helped three German Jews who had spent much of the war hiding in a basement, and one of them inscribed the dagger as a thank-you. “To my friend Moris Block in memory A Fischmann”, it reads, alongside a Star of David dated 1945.



FREEMASON'S HALL

17 Molesworth Street, Dublin 2

• 01 676-1337

• www.freemason.ie

• Guided tours Mon–Fri 2.30pm (June, July & Aug). Otherwise by appointment

• Transport: Pearse Street DART station (10-min. walk); Luas, St Stephen's Green (Green Line; 5–10-min. walk); Dublin Bus stops 792, 5034 and others are on Dawson Street



The HQ of freemasonry in Ireland

Irish freemasonry has a long and proud tradition. There's evidence of freemasons in the country as long as 500 years ago – and its Grand Lodge, established in 1725, is the second oldest in the world (the Grand Lodge of England was founded in 1717).

Freemason's Hall itself dates from the late 1860s and, as you'd expect from the HQ of Irish freemasonry, everything about the building is steeped in ceremony, symbol and exactitude. From dramatic set pieces like the Grand Lodge Room to the furtive squares and compasses hiding in door knockers, seatbacks and lapel pins, every centimetre of Edward Holmes' Victorian design reflects its masonic purpose. Despite the secret society stereotypes, tours are surprisingly open – taking in the Prince Masons' Room, the Egyptian-themed Hand Chapter Room, the Knights Templar Preceptory Room, a ground-floor museum and the undisputed highlight: the Grand Lodge Room. This is a dizzying piece of theatre, with velvet thrones surrounded by heavy drapes, studded leather benches and gilt-framed portraits of bigwig freemasons like Albert, Prince of Wales, and Augustus Fitzgerald, the Third Duke of Leinster. The black-and-white squared carpet is slightly disorienting, piling on the sense of drama as you access an esoteric organisation's inner sanctum.

Lodges from all over Ireland meet at Freemasons' Hall, but the best thing about the tour is the openness of the guides, who'll happily debunk any theories regarding the Illuminati, human lizards or fake moon landings. Arcane rituals are central, of course (“They're what sets us apart from a golf club”) and it's true that there are secret handshakes, or “grips”, though membership is open to all men who believe in a Supreme Being.

Despite the stuffiness, membership is enjoying a boom in Ireland. Our guide attributed this partly to the Dan Brown phenomenon, but intrigue, theatre and ritual play their part too. “It's boy scouts for big boys,” as he put it. “And we've got nothing to hide.”

SWENY'S CHEMIST

- 1 Lincoln Place, Dublin 2
- 087 713-2157 (11am-5pm); 085 814-6713 (after 5pm)
- www.sweny.ie
- Mon-Sat 11am-5pm
- Admission: free
- Transport: Pearse Street DART station (5-min. walk); Dublin Bus stops 408 and 2809 are nearby on Clare Street and Westland Row, respectively

“The literary pharmacy

James Joyce was nothing if not fastidious. Were Dublin to be destroyed, the author is said to have believed it could be rebuilt from the pages of *Ulysses*. And so much has changed since the novel was first published in 1922 that Joyce's masterpiece is indeed starting to look as much like a record of the Edwardian cityscape as a work of fiction. Nelson's Pillar, the red light district of Monto, 7 Eccles Street and Barney Kiernan's pub are just a handful of its locations that have disappeared.

Sweny's Chemist is a notable survivor. Dating from 1847, this little pharmacy crops up in *Ulysses* when Leopold Bloom calls to collect a prescription for his wife, Molly. "He waited by the counter, inhaling the keen reek of drugs, the dusty dry smell of sponges and loofahs. Lot of time taken up telling your aches and pains," he thinks. "Chemists rarely move. Their green and gold beacon jars too heavy to stir ... Smell almost cure you like the dentist's doorbell." Although his prescription is not ready, Bloom does leave with a bar of lemon soap – the sweet scent of which has proved irresistible. In 1904 Joyce himself is known to have visited the same premises to consult with pharmacist Frederick William Sweny, and he drew heavily from memory in recreating the fusty interior.

Sweny's shut up shop in 2009, and for a time looked like it too might join the city's growing list of lost literary locations. Fortunately, however, a group of Joycean enthusiasts stepped in, negotiated a rent, staffed it on a voluntary basis and have managed to keep it going by selling books, postcards, curios – and yes, bars of lemon soap. Regular readings of *Dubliners*, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are held, but what's most remarkable is that the interior remains almost exactly as Bloom and Joyce would have experienced it over a century ago. Rich mahogany counters take up most of the floor space. Blue bottles and bric-a-brac gather dust on dark shelves. In the old dispensary drawers, unclaimed prescriptions bound in brown paper and string date back to 1903.

Despite the city-centre traffic, bustling footsteps and whining alarms outside, you get completely caught up in the words and the world of the books. For a moment, the city is rebuilt.



GUINNESS ARCHIVES

6

St James's Gate, Dublin 8

• 01 408-4800

• www.guinness-storehouse.com

• Open: by appointment

• Transport: Luas, St James's Hospital [Red Line; 10-min. walk]; Dublin Bus 123 runs from O'Connell Street and Dame Street every 8–10 mins



Arthur's archives

The Guinness Storehouse is Ireland's most popular paid-for attraction. Year after year, the home of the Black Stuff bulges with over 1.7 million visitors, delivering a state-of-the-art brewery tour that culminates in a lesson on how to pull the perfect pint (it takes 119.53 seconds, apparently). But for all its flashy displays, the Storehouse story remains an overview. The rich details lie elsewhere ... within its awesome archives.

Guinness dates back to 1759, when Arthur Guinness signed his famous 9,000-year lease. A trove of records has been maintained since that time, but it was only in 1998 that the Guinness Archives were formally established. Treasures are now kept in climate-controlled facilities ("If you were to lay out our papers end to end, they would stretch for about seven kilometres," says Archive Manager, Eibhlin Colgan). Materials are accessible to Guinness marketing communities, economic and brewing historians, collectors, family history researchers "and anyone with an interest in the Guinness Company and brand", but that doesn't mean you can simply swing by for a white gloves experience. Visitors need a solid reason and a specific request, with appointments given in a small room full of vintage bottles (both glass and stoneware) backstage in the Storehouse.

Even a small glimpse will give you goosebumps. There are tantalising black and white photographs of coopers at work, of barges being loaded on a Liffey dock, of draymen "at tap" (chugging their daily beer allowance), of formally dressed Victorian master brewers. A small collection of artefacts on display includes the keg from which President Obama was served a pint of Guinness on his 2011 visit to Moneygall, Co. Offaly. On my visit, treasures included an 18th-century Brewers' Guild minute book featuring Arthur Guinness's original signature, an Instagram-worthy trove of old pub labels, and original John Gilroy charcoal and watercolour sketches for iconic Guinness ads. Deep within the archives, there are barley grains from Tutankhamun's tomb and, of course, Arthur's original vellum lease (the indenture displayed in the Guinness Storehouse is a copy). Much like that perfect pint, it takes time for the scale of Ireland's largest private business archive to sink in.

Guinness is inextricably linked with the social and economic history of Dublin, and the archives also include paper records of 20,000 or so employees from the 1880s to the 1980s. "When we started the service, I imagined genealogical queries would be mostly from our American and overseas visitors," Colgan says. "But it has actually been mainly Irish people themselves."

THE 40 STEPS

13

Cook Street, Dublin 8

• Transport: Tara Street DART station (15–20-min. walk); Luas, Four Courts (Red Line; 10-min. walk); Dublin Bus stops 1937 and 2001 are nearby on High Street



*The
gateway
to hell*

The faithful in Dublin's old churches worked hard to get into heaven, but the road to hell was all downhill. Literally. A medieval shortcut skirting around St Audeon's Church meant 40 steps was all it took for 18th-century citizens to descend from the heights of Cornmarket to a squalid pocket of brothels, taverns and laneways colloquially known as "Hell".

Stretching from Cook Street towards Fishamble Street, "Hell" ran thick with criminals, outcasts and ne'er-do-wells – one of the most famous was Darkey Kelly, a notorious madame who ran the Maiden Tower brothel. As the story goes, Kelly became pregnant with the child of Dublin Sheriff, Simon Luttrell, and pressed him for financial support. Gentleman as he was, Luttrell denied all knowledge of the child and upped the ante by accusing his lover of witchcraft and infanticide. In 1761 Kelly was burnt at the stake in front of a baying mob, although the baby's body was never produced. She hasn't gone away, either – sightings of Darkey Kelly's ghost have been reported at the 40 Steps in the ominous passageway where abandoned babies were once left at the side of St Audeon's Church.

Interestingly, contemporary newspaper reports appear to suggest that Kelly may have been executed for another reason. Several bodies were discovered hidden in the vaults of her brothel, according to a recent rereading of reports by the producers of *No Smoke Without Hellfire* on Dublin's South 93.9FM. Kelly may not have been a witch, in other words, but she may well have been Ireland's first serial killer. Welcome to hell, indeed.

Even today, the 40 Steps retain a dank, spooky atmosphere. No matter how bright the day, the thickness of the old city walls casts a pall over the bottom steps, and a long portion of the slipway is hidden from view – a fact that has not only proven attractive to historical criminals and drug addicts, but their contemporaries too. Be careful.



WITTGENSTEIN'S STEP

4

National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, Dublin 9

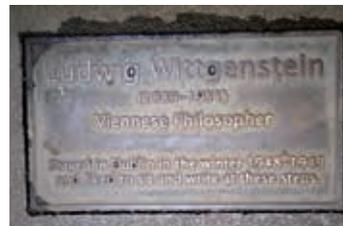
- 01 857-0909 (visitor centre)
- www.botanicgardens.ie
- Winter (second-last Sunday in October to last Sunday in February): Mon–Fri 9am–4.30pm, weekends & public holidays 10am–4.30pm.
- Summer (first Sunday in March to last Sunday of October): Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, weekends & public holidays 10am–6pm
- Admission: free
- Transport: Dublin Bus routes 4 and 9 (from O'Connell Street) and 83 (Kimmage/Harristown)



*“When
the sun shines
in my brain ...”*

The National Botanic Gardens are home to some 17,000 plant species, but just as exotic is this modest bronze plaque found in its Victorian palm house. It marks the spot (or step, to be precise) where Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) came to sit and write in his notebook during a short but very productive stay in Dublin over the course of a winter in the late 1940s.

During his stay, the Viennese philosopher roomed at the Ross Hotel on Parkgate Street. He is said to have liked Dublin – describing it as having the air of “a real capital city” – and during the winter of 1948 he spent time writing, thinking, walking, enjoying black coffee and omelettes at Bewley’s of Grafton Street and relaxing with his good friend, the Irish physicist Dr Con Drury, according to Richard Wall’s book, *Wittgenstein in Dublin* (Reaktion Books, 2000). His stay appears to have been fruitful, too. “When I came here I found to my surprise that I could work again; and as I’m anxious to make hay during the very short period when the sun shines in my brain, I’ve decided ... to stay here where I’ve got a warm and quiet room,” the philosopher wrote in a letter dated 6 November 1948. Wittgenstein was troubled by health issues that winter, but not enough to prevent regular visits to the National Botanic Gardens, whose Victorian palm house may have reminded him of Vienna. Sitting inside this lovely spaceship of a structure, he would have been insulated from the chilly weather, and it’s tempting to imagine him working on his posthumously published work, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). Strangely for an author seen by many as the greatest philosopher of the 20th century, Wittgenstein only had a single book – the 75-page *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* – published during his lifetime.



The National Botanic Gardens, which date from 1795, are home to Ireland’s richest plant collection. Over 300 of its specimens are rare or endangered, with six technically extinct in the wild. The palm house was erected in 1883 after a previous structure was damaged in a storm.