PÓL Ó CONGHAILE

SECRET DUBLIN

AN UNUSUAL GUIDE

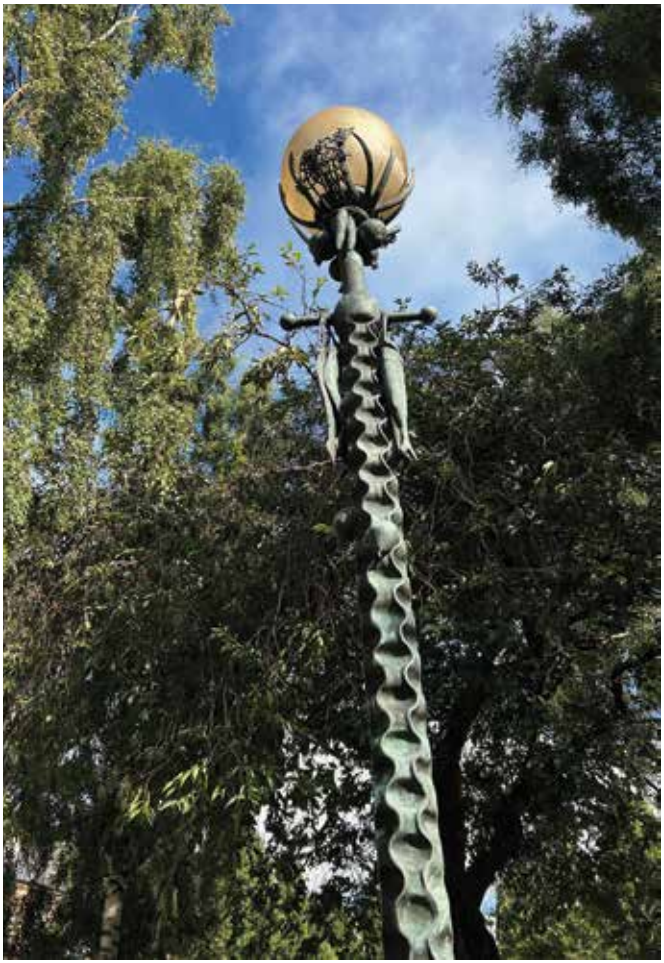
LOCAL GUIDES BY LOCAL PEOPLE
140 PLACES

JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

CHURCH STREET DISASTER MEMORIAL ⑪

A plaque, a street map of the area in 1913, brass fish and vegetables hanging from a lamppost …

Father Matthew Square, Church Street, Dublin 7
Dublin Bus stops 1615 and 1616 are nearby on Church Street; Luas, Four Courts (Red Line; 5-min walk)



On the evening of 2 September 1913, two tenement buildings on Church Street collapsed without warning. Several families lived in each of Nos 66 and 67, and the impact was disastrous, with seven residents losing their lives and others left maimed and injured in the rubble, according to contemporary newspaper reports. The youngest of the dead, Elizabeth Salmon, was just four and a half years old. Her brother Eugene (17) had rushed back into the building to try and save her, as their distraught father described in the *Evening Telegraph* the following day.

'Eugene took the youngest child (Josephine), aged one year and eight months, and brought her out safely. Then he went back for the other children, and got out with them alright, but it was when he was coming away with Elizabeth that they were struck by the falling masonry and killed.'

There's an intriguing memorial to the tragedy in today's Father Matthew Square – three elements you'd easily miss if you weren't looking for them. The first is a decorative lamppost – look up and you'll see brass fish and vegetables hanging from it just under the light, presumably a nod to the street stalls and Victorian fruit and vegetable markets nearby. Alongside is a plaque naming the dead, and a utility box painted with a street map of the area in 1913. Nos 66 and 67 are marked in red lettering … a touch that feels all the more powerful for its simplicity.

'It was a crisis or disaster waiting to happen,' Dr Jacinta Prunty, former head of the History Department at Maynooth College, says in a video featured on Century Ireland, a project compiled for Ireland's Decade of Centenaries 2012–2023. 'It could have been any of several hundred other houses in Dublin. It just happens to be those two.' The tragedy was a turning point, she explains, bringing the vexed issue of Dublin's slums to a reckoning. There was a public outcry, a huge attendance at the funerals, and relief funds and a Dublin Housing Inquiry were set up (the latter found that almost a quarter of families in Dublin at the time lived in one-room tenements).

'At this point, you couldn't just talk about it. You had to have action,' as Dr Prunty says. A new housing scheme was completed on Church and Beresford Streets by 1917, although this came too late for those remembered here.

THE HUNGRY TREE

8

An 'arboricultural curiosity'

Temple Gardens, King's Inns, Dublin 7
kingsinns.ie
treecouncil.ie
7am–7.30pm (or later)
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

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.

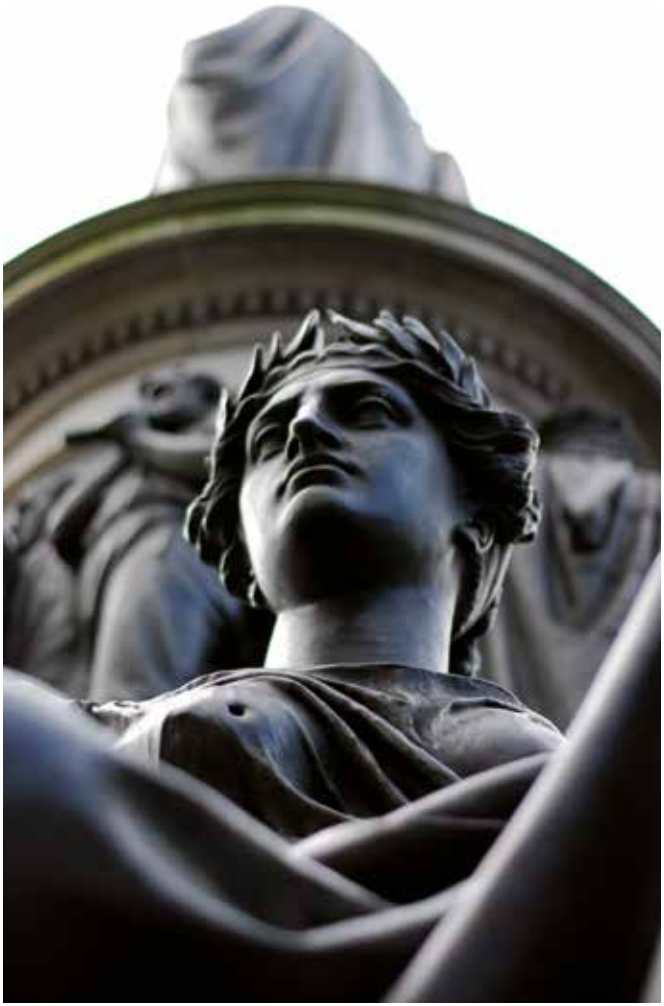
Inns of Court traditionally provided law students with accommodation, meals and tuition over the course of their studies. The King's Inns were designed by James Gandon and built in the early 1800s, although the Honorable Society of King's Inns (the governing body for barristers in Ireland) goes way back 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

⑮

A legacy of the 1916 Rebellion …

O'Connell Street, Dublin 1
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



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.

IRISH JEWISH MUSEUM ⑮

Portobello was once known as 'Little Jerusalem'

3 Walworth Road, Dublin 8
089-426-3625 ; jewishmuseum.ie
May–September: Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday 11am–3pm; October–April: Sunday 10.30am–2.30pm
Group bookings by arrangement
Admission: free
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

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 ㉕

The HQ of freemasonry in Ireland

17 Molesworth Street, Dublin 2
01 676-1337; – freemason.ie
Monday–Friday 9am–5pm
Guided tours Monday–Friday 3pm (June, July & August). Otherwise by appointment
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

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.

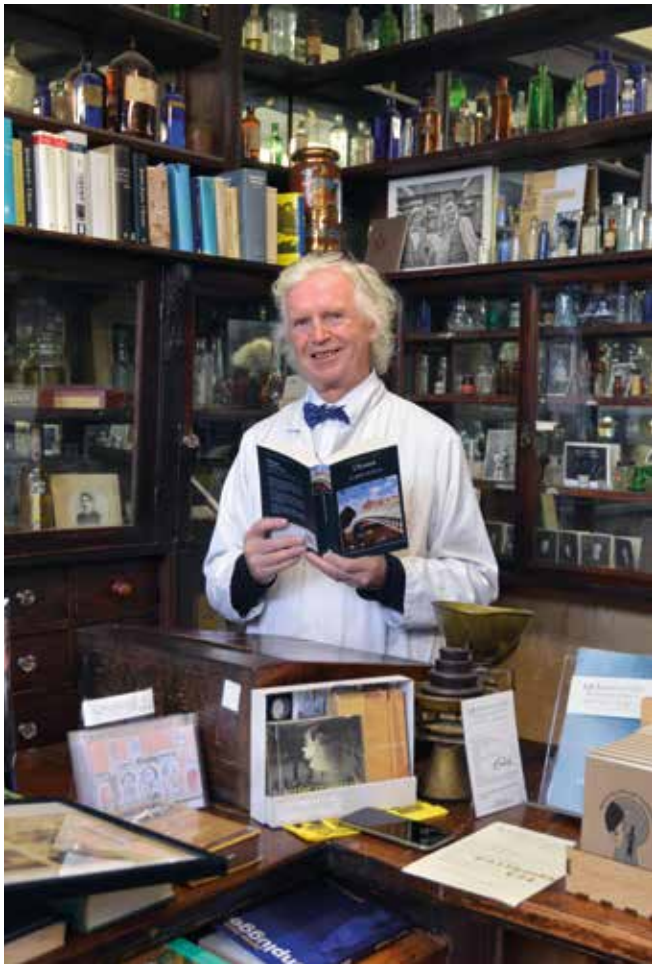
Despite the stuffiness, membership is enjoying a boom in Ireland. Our guide attributed this partly to the Dan Brown phenomenon, but intrigue, theatre and ritual play their part too. 'It's boy scouts for big boys,' as he put it. 'And we've got nothing to hide.'

SWENY'S CHEMIST

33

The literary pharmacy

1 Lincoln Place, Dublin 2
087 713-2157 (11am-5pm); 085 814-6713 (after 5pm)
sweny.ie
Monday–Friday 11am–6pm
Admission: free
Pearse Street DART station (5-min. walk); Dublin Bus stops 408 and 2809 are nearby on Clare Street and Westland Row, respectively



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

Arthur's archives

St James's Gate, Dublin 8
01 408-4800
guinness-storehouse.com
By appointment
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

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 Secret Dublin's 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

⑭

The gateway to hell

Cook Street, Dublin 8
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 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 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

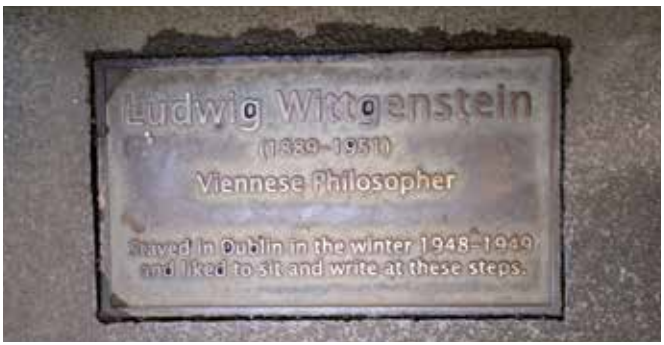
'When the sun shines in my brain …'

National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, Dublin 9
01 857-0909 (visitor centre)
botanicgardens.ie
Winter: Monday–Friday 9am–4.30pm, weekends & public holidays 10am–4.30pm
Summer: Monday–Friday 9am–5pm, weekends & public holidays 10am–6pm
Admission: free
Dublin Bus routes 4 and 9 (from O'Connell Street) and 83 (Kimmage/ Harristown)

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.

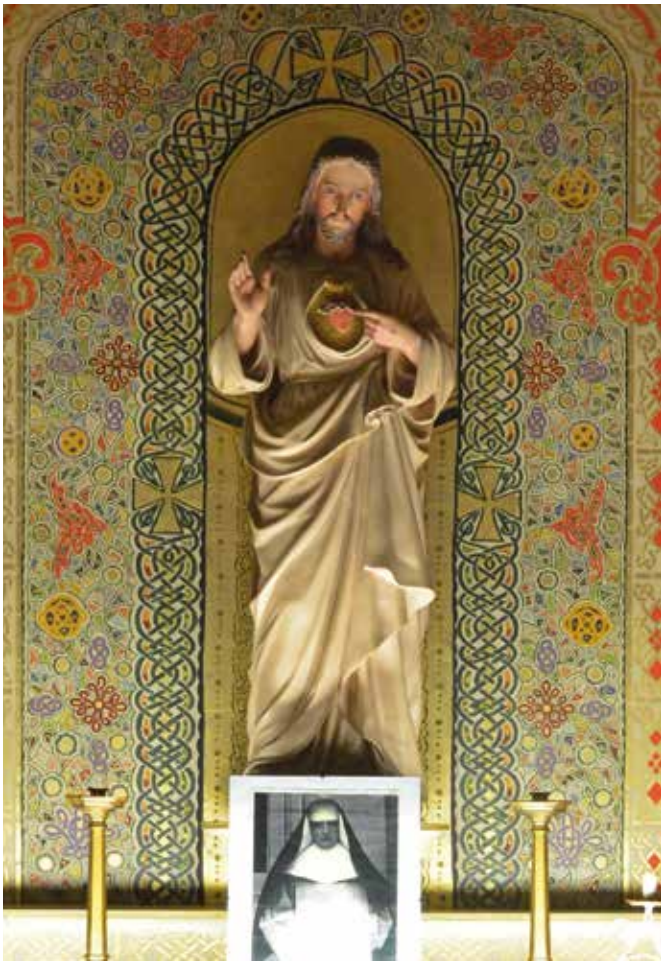
The National Botanic Gardens, which date from 1795, are home to Ireland's richest plant collection. Over 300 of its specimens are rare or endangered, with six technically extinct in the wild. The palm house was erected in 1883 after a previous structure was damaged in a storm.



ORATORY OF THE SACRED HEART ⑩

A magical little mausoleum hidden behind a shopping centre

Off Library Road, Dun Laoghaire
dlrcoco.ie
Guided tours take place during Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council's spring and summer heritage programmes
Dun Laoghaire Dart Station is a 10-min walk; Dublin Bus routes including 11, 46a, 63, 7, 75, 7a stop nearby on Clarence Street



It reveals itself like a magical little mausoleum. Hidden behind a shopping centre, and within a shell building, the Oratory of the Sacred Heart measures just 6 metres by 3.6 metres. Visitors pause while a further cage gate and wooden doors are opened, before stepping into one of Ireland's great works of Celtic revival art.

At first, it's hard to know where to look. You almost feel the overall oomph of detail, colours and interlacing motifs before seeing the individual elements. There are swirling patterns and vibrant colours. There are birds and beasts that could have flown from medieval monastic books, intricate Celtic crosses, sober figures in stained glass windows by Harry Clarke Studios and surprising, zoomorphic creatures that wouldn't be out of place in a bedtime book by Axel Scheffler and Julia Donaldson. Every wall is covered in a richly immersive work that took 16 years to create. 'It's quite a delicate monument' as Deirdre Black, the Council's Heritage Officer, muses. 'She only used house paints.'

'She' was Sister Concepta Lynch (1874–1939), a Dominican nun also known to her family as Lily. The oratory was built as a memorial to local men killed in the Great War, but this little-known artist spent several hours a day, often in cold, poorly lit conditions, enhancing it beyond anyone's expectations. Between 1920 and 1936, she sent instructions to the local hardware store for her paints (the Dominicans were a closed order), mapped out her designs, cut stencils, and painted freehand onto the cement walls. It's a Celtic revival time capsule that feels spiritual, but contains hints of Byzantine art, fantasy and at times even nods to Pointillism and Art Nouveau. The methodical, carefully calculated approach is absorbing, but somehow also feels carefree and wild.

Lily took some inspiration from her father Thomas Lynch (1852–1887), the heraldic artist and illuminator. She spent much time with him, was encouraged to study Celtic art and manuscripts like the Book of Kells, and ran the business for several years after his death when she was just 16. The oratory itself looked destined for dereliction, languishing for several years after St Mary's Dominican Convent was sold in 1991 and replaced by a shopping centre and cinema. But a drive to protect it and fund its restoration and surrounding peace garden was successful, and today those who take the time to visit reap the rewards. 'I've been here thousands of times', as James O'Sullivan, Heritage Properties Officer, puts it. 'But I always see something different.'

PÓL Ó CONGHAILE

SECRET DUBLIN

AN UNUSUAL GUIDE

Discover the inner sanctum of Freemason's Hall, see Napoleon's toothbrush, marvel at a hoax plaque hidden in plain sight on O'Connell Bridge, try George IV's footprints for size, venture into a Georgian time capsule on Henrietta Street, cross the bridge beneath which William Rowan Hamilton had his 'Eureka' moment, explore a 'museum' flat preserved exactly as it was almost 100 years ago, tune into the world of vintage radio in a Martello Tower, spot Dublin's subterranean river …

Dublin offers endless opportunities for getting off the tourist grid – for peering into the city's fascinating past and present. All you need to know is where to look and who to ask for.

Secret Dublin – An unusual guide is an indispensable resource for those who thought they knew everything about the city, or who want to discover its hidden treasures.

JONGLEZ PUBLISHING
320 PAGES

14.99 £ - 18,95 € - US$ 21.95

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www.jonglezpublishing.com

ISBN: 978-2-36195-626-4