

- 1. Fishamble Street;
- 2. Dame Street;
- 3. Dominick Street;
- 4. 35 Midland Street



- 1. 14 Russell Street
- 2. 70 Midland Road, Crumlin
- 3. 13 Fitzwilliam Square

Mapping the City



4. 15 Herbert Street
5. 5 Anglesa Road

1

There is a poem in Eavan Boland's 1994 sequence, 'In a Time of Violence' entitled 'That the Science of Cartography is Limited'. The poem's opening line carries on the sentence that begins with the poem's title: ' – and not simply by the fact that this shading of / forest cannot show the fragrance of balsam'.¹ It is a useful reminder that while a series of maps can show the changing outlines of a city's streets over time, the experience and texture of change has a quality that goes beyond aerial views of streetscapes. Those experiences also leave their traces, the emotional memory that makes one street different from another, 'the fragrance of balsam' – or, in the case of a city, the feel of wet cobblestones, the dampness of a nearby canal, bullet holes in masonry, or the street corner where two people first met. So, if the science of cartography is indeed limited, a city's literature can be thought of as the missing words on the back of the map.

One of the great Dublin poems, Louis MacNeice's 'Dublin', works in just this way. MacNeice was not from Dublin (he was born in Belfast), but found himself in the city in 1939 just as World War II was breaking out. As he felt historical change rushing towards him like a great fireball, Dublin became a foothold from which to think about change itself:

*Fort of the Dane,
Garrison of the Saxon,
Augustan capital
Of a Gaelic nation,
Appropriating all
The alien brought,
You gave me time for thought
And by a juggler's trick
You poise the toppling hour –
O greyness run to flower,
Grey stone, grey water,
And brick upon grey brick.*²

The compact, almost conversational language of MacNeice's poem manages to condense into a very few short lines the layers of history that have built up – 'brick upon grey brick' – in the centre of Dublin. Apart from anything else, Dublin is a place in which historical change is inscribed in the city's fabric. One way to imagine the city is to picture the rings on the cross-section of a great tree: in the centre (or what had been the centre) is the old medieval core, surrounded by a grey-brick Georgian layer, which in turn is ringed by the two late-eighteenth and

early nineteenth-century canals, beyond which is a redbrick nineteenth-century ring; beyond this, again, are successive layers of twentieth- and twenty-first-century growth, which are also dotted through the earlier rings, where the original wood has rotted or been cut away.

So, if we go back to the earliest detailed map of the city, John Speed's map of Dublin drawn in 1610, we see a small walled town with a population of somewhere between 8,000 and 10,000 people,³ mainly clustered in a nest of streets on the south bank of the River Liffey between Dublin Castle and the narrow stretch of quays (see colour plate C1). To the south, outside the city walls, the main landmark is St. Patrick's Cathedral, but the land is mostly open fields. To the east of the Castle, apart from 'The Colledge' – Trinity College Dublin, founded in 1592 – there is only the odd scattered dwelling. A single bridge crosses the Liffey to a north bank that is much less densely settled than the south (the map shows about one hundred buildings), protected only by an incomplete stretch of wall. As Peter Sirr comments in his essay 'The Poet and the Mapmaker' (2021), in Speed's map 'the city looks frail and vulnerable, as if it might collapse at any moment, or be swallowed up by a modest invasion party'.⁴

The Dublin of Speed's 1610 map was MacNeice's 'Garrison of the Saxon'; however, at that point there had been a town on the site for almost eight hundred years. No one knows precisely when the very first human settlement took place at the mouth of the River Liffey, but there are mentions in early medieval annals of a people living in an area known as Áth Cliath, 'the ford of the hurdles' from at least AD770. There is also reference to a monastery, probably near where the very early Church of St. Michael le Pole stood, and where later again Dublin Castle would be built. There is some speculation that 'le Pole' referred to the deep pool where the River Poddle (which has since been completely covered over) joined the River Liffey, giving the settlement the name by which it would come to be known: Dubh Linn, or the 'dark pool'.

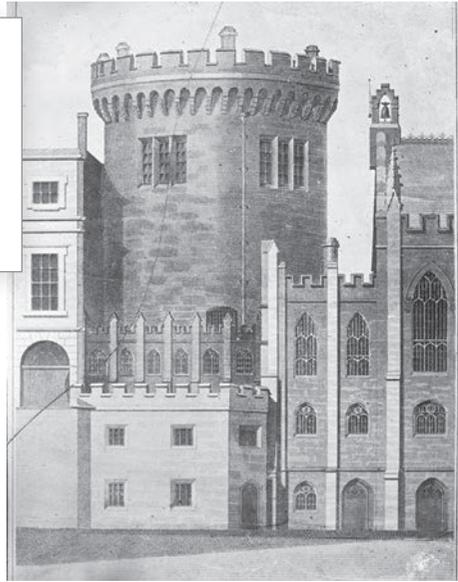
The River Liffey: Dublin was first settled because of a river that begins unremarkably enough, in a bog between the hills of Kippure and Tonduff in the Wicklow mountains, and which runs for 132 kilometres through Wicklow, Kildare, and Dublin, before emptying into the Irish Sea. Originally its banks where it runs through the city were much more irregular, and parts of Dublin as far inland as Pearse Street were once marsh.

By the middle of the ninth century, Viking longboats were mooring in this pool, initially only during raiding sorties along the east coast of Ireland, but by at least 841 they were remaining for longer, until

eventually they began building more permanent structures in the area of what is now Wood Quay. There are records of battles and skirmishes fought between the Danes and the Gaelic Irish, but by the early tenth century the Danes were well enough settled to begin constructing a fortified town. Sporadic fighting continued, however, most famously erupting in the great Battle of Clontarf in 1014, when an army led by a Munster king, Brian Boru, defeated an alliance between the Dublin Vikings and Máel Mórda mac Murchada, the King of Leinster. That battle has lodged vividly (and not wholly accurately) in Dublin folk memory as an Irish national victory over the Danish invaders. Stephen Gwynn tells a story in his *Dublin Old and New* (1937), of ‘an old friend of mine, an ex-Fenian’ confessing with some shame: ‘I will tell you what I would not tell to many’ – that his ancestors ‘were on the wrong side at Clontarf’.⁵ In fact, there were Gaelic Irish on both sides of the battlefield fighting for control of Dublin in 1014, which can remind us that (unlike most of the rest of Ireland) Dublin from the outset was ethnically hybrid, if not cosmopolitan – at least by the standards of the eleventh century. By the time of the Battle of Clontarf, the Vikings were long-term residents of Dublin, not temporary interlopers. What is more, when the site of the Viking settlement at Wood Quay was excavated in the late 1970s, it turned up bits of silk from Asia, walrus tusks from the Arctic, and coins from Samarkand. Old Norse was certainly spoken, but so, too, was Irish, English, and, later, Norman French.

As part of what one historian has called ‘the evolution of a pirate base into a medieval city’,⁶ Dublin had already become a trading port by the time the last Danish ruler, Sitriuc Silkenbeard, died in 1042, and was well along the road to ‘Appropriating all / The alien brought’. Initially, this was a slow process of intermarriage, as Gaelic Irish continued to migrate to the city. However, the situation changed much more dramatically in 1170, when a small (but effective) company of Norman knights surprised the city from the hills and woods of Wicklow to the south, capturing it for Richard de Clare, ‘Strongbow’, and thereby extending the Norman takeover of the neighbouring island that had begun in 1066. Over the next two centuries, Dublin Castle was rebuilt, with its huge circular towers. New streets were laid out, more quay walls built, and St. Patrick’s Cathedral began construction in 1191. By the end of the middle of the thirteenth century, Dublin’s population was triple what it had been before 1170. ‘It is now possible to speak of Dublin as a *city*,’ declares historian David Dickson. At the same time, it was as vulnerable as other European medieval cities to raiders, and its wooden buildings burned all too easily. Worse, along with much of the rest of the continent, it was

Just as the medieval city of Dublin developed around Dublin Castle, so the Castle grew in successive layers. This image shows the Record Tower, which dates from 1204, and is the oldest surviving element, with more recent additions clustered around it. The image is from a glass lantern slide, the crack in which is visible. Courtesy of Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland.



subject to famine, and to plague. In 1348, the bubonic plague – the Black Death – reached the city, as recorded by the contemporary Franciscan chronicler, John Clyn: ‘*ipsas civitates Dubliniam et Droghda fere destruxit et vastavit incolis et hominibus*’ (Dublin and Drogheda were almost destroyed and emptied of inhabitants and men).⁷

And yet Dublin survived. Seven years before Speed’s map of 1610, Ireland had come under the control of the British crown, when James I was proclaimed king, making Dublin firmly the ‘Garrison of the Saxon’. There then followed a period in which the institutions and apparatus of an early modern state began to be put in place. The first book printed in Dublin (indeed, in Ireland), an edition of *The Booke of Common Praier*, had already been produced by Humphrey Powell in Dublin in 1551; Trinity College had been founded (and its library started) in 1592. The Lords Deputy appointed after 1603 were keen to build up a viceregal court life in Dublin Castle, and this included, among other projects, sponsoring Ireland’s first theatre, on Werburgh Street, just beside Dublin Castle, which was built around 1635. All of this activity was suspended with the English Revolution, or War of the Three Kingdoms in 1641; however, when the conflict subsided in the 1660s, the process of city-building resumed. The works of those years continue to define the outlines of the city’s core.

‘The Eighteenth Century lives on & on,’ the poet John Berryman once wrote of Dublin.⁸ There are many reasons that the eighteenth century continues to exert such a gravitational pull on the city, not the least of which is that the century had a head start in Ireland, and was effectively well under way by the early 1680s. Dublin in the 1590s, with a popula-

tion of around 8,000, was still a small late-medieval city. By the time Jonathan Swift was born in Hoey's Court, an alley just off Werburgh Street, in 1667, it had swollen to around 30,000; by the mid-1680s, when Swift entered Trinity as a student, that population had doubled again, to more than 60,000.⁹ In those years, as the original maze of streets around the Castle became ever more congested, it became apparent that the city needed to spread outwards. With land rapidly changing hands in the aftermath of war, the time was ripe for a major change.

By 1669, the Viceroy of the time, the Duke of Ormond, found himself tasked with the management of a large tract of land to the west of the city, on the north side of the Liffey, enclosed by seven miles of wall. It would become the Phoenix Park. 'It is hard to imagine such a park being created at any other time in the city's history,' comments historian David Dickson. Meanwhile, to the south and east of Dublin Castle, by 1680, St. Stephen's Green (named for a small nearby medieval Church of St. Stephen and its attached leper hospital) was transformed from a commonage for grazing animals into a formal public park. Houses then began to be built around its perimeter as wealthier citizens initiated what would become a repeated pattern in Dublin history, moving away from the increasingly congested older inner streets to the space and fresh air of the city limits – as odd as it is today to think of St. Stephen's Green as a greenfield site at the edge of the city.

In those same years, Dublin's print culture took hold. The first regular Dublin newspaper, *The News-Letter*, began appearing in 1685, and by the end of the century Dublin had a thriving publishing industry, given a boost in 1709 when the Copyright Act passed by the Westminster Parliament was not ratified in Ireland. It also helped that while other parts of Ireland had been convulsed by the Williamite War of the 1690s, there had been no actual fighting in Dublin, and, if anything, the political consequences of the defeat of Catholic power in Ireland had consolidated Dublin's place as what MacNeice calls the 'Augustan capital / Of a Gaelic nation'.

Here, as at other points in its history, Dublin stood out as anomalous in contrast to the rest of the island. The majority of the Irish population continued to be Irish-speaking throughout the eighteenth century. Indeed, in the hinterlands of Dublin, and throughout the city itself, large parts of the Catholic population were at the very least bilingual. And yet, this Irish-language culture had, as the cultural historian

Joep Leerssen once put it, ‘no organisations to speak of, no Church infrastructure, no coffee houses’,¹⁰ and very limited access to print. In 1925, the writer Daniel Corkery memorably called this world ‘the hidden Ireland’. And yet if Gaelic Ireland were in hiding in the century after 1690 – often in plain sight – English-speaking Dublin was the opposite, putting itself and its inhabitants on show. These were the years not only of building great public parks but also of laying out wide streets in which people could promenade and meet, of proliferating coffee houses and taverns, and of printing houses and theatres (most notably the Smock Alley Theatre, built in 1662). As Irish oral culture retreated around the island, Dublin blossomed into a world of print, public performance, and display.

Where the old medieval city had grown up without much real planning, the Dublin of the eighteenth century would be a planned urban environment with a strong sense of public culture, even if that sense of the ‘public’ was understood in a limited way. Following on from the great civic projects of the Duke of Ormond in the 1660s and 1670s, the early decades of the eighteenth century were a time of lasting public works, still to be seen – such as the magnificent Palladian Parliament House on College Green (1729) and the Library of Trinity College (1732). The establishment in 1758 of a Wide Streets Commission marked a further statement of intent. Although it took the Commissioners several decades to acquire real legislative power in the 1790s, even before that time they were managing traffic flows with new river crossings, and widening older streets such as Dame Street to create vistas and thoroughfares. Recently, the Dublin architectural writer and campaigner Frank McDonald referred to the Wide Streets Commission as ‘Dublin’s First Futurists’.¹¹ The architectural historian and poet Maurice Craig also puts it well in his poem ‘Merrion Square’: ‘And those who built this city for a few / Laid out Wide Streets wider than they knew’.¹²

By the final decades of the eighteenth century, armed with new legislative powers, the Wide Streets Commissioners would be responsible for much of the civic planning that still defines the shape of Dublin within the canals. That final decade of the century also saw construction of the two great buildings that still dominate the riverscape: the Custom House (1791) and the Four Courts (1796). Knitting these monumental buildings together was a new network of streets, built and laid out by successive generations of private developers,

from Joshua Dawson (for whom Dawson Street is named) in the early part of the century, to the two Luke Gardiners, father and son, the former developing Henrietta Street and what became Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street) in the 1720s, and the latter giving his name to Gardiner Street in the 1790s.

What is more, where for many centuries the two banks of the Liffey had been connected by a single bridge, by the end of the 1720s there were five bridges, opening up the north bank of the river to a total city population that would reach 125,000 by the middle of the century. Again, it was the attraction of space and clean air that attracted fashionable Dublin to the north city, to mansions on Dominick Street and Henrietta Street, where 'two giant terraces', as David Dickson describes these streets, 'of massive houses faced each other, their brick-faced façades (some as broad as sixty feet) in precise alignment, their flat parapets emphasising the cliffs of brick'.¹⁵ Dublin would never quite have the grid of midtown Manhattan or Barcelona's l'Eixample, but John Rocque's map of 1756 does show a geometrical pattern of new streets laid out in sharp contrast to the tangled alleys of the medieval core (see colour plate C2). By the end of the eighteenth century, what the architectural historian Edward McParland has called a 'combination of enlightenment and power'¹⁴ had indelibly shaped the physical fabric of Dublin's core, and today the phrase 'Georgian Dublin' immediately conjures up streetscapes in which principles of symmetry and balance highlight details such as the ornate fanlights over doors. They have become some of the most immediately recognizable images of the city.

At the same time, as the Georgian city was being built, the old medieval core continued to decline. For instance, what had been Skinner's Row (just

Perhaps the defining architectural image of Dublin is its Georgian streetscapes, in which the symmetry of the building highlights small details – such as the characteristic fanlight window over the door. This is the door to the house at 4 Ely Place, just off St. Stephen's Green, where the novelist, playwright and memoirist George Moore lived from 1901 to 1912. Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.



beside Dublin Castle) had a claim to be the city's main street in the early part of the eighteenth century. It was here that you could find one of the city's main meeting places, Dick's Coffee House, as well as important printers and booksellers, including John Milliken, who in 1768 founded what would become Hodges-Figgis, which still operates today, making it one of the oldest bookshops in the world. However, by 1797 Milliken had moved to Grafton Street, just up from Trinity College. Within a few decades, the area around what had been Skinner's Row, which became Christchurch Place, was on its way to becoming one of the most dangerous parts of the city, notorious for prostitution and violent crime. Nearby, in his 1798 independent census of the city, the Rev. James Whitelaw came across 'the entire side of a house, in School-house Lane' that 'fell from its foundations. I observed with astonishment, that the inhabitants, above thirty in number ... had not deserted its apartments ... by the circumstance of the wall falling outwards.'¹⁵

If we know (or at least think we know) what we mean by eighteenth-century Dublin, the nineteenth century is more complicated. 'The nineteenth century in Dublin is so far an age without a name,' observed Elizabeth Bowen, in her history of the Shelbourne Hotel, built in 1824.¹⁶ As always with Bowen, the observation is astute; there may be a 'Georgian Dublin' that conjures up a whole world, but the term 'Victorian Dublin' is largely restricted to architectural historians. The reasons for this go back to the way in which the eighteenth century ended, in one of those rare instances in which dates with round numbers line up with significant events. As the century came to a close, in 1798 a group known as the United Irishmen staged a rebellion founded on the republican ideals that had underpinned the revolutions in France and in the United States. Although the actual rebellion, in which more than 25,000 people were killed, took place largely outside of Dublin, notably in the north of Ireland and in the south-east, one immediate effect was felt in the heart of Dublin. Here, as historian Thomas Bartlett puts it, 'a further casualty was to be the Irish parliament; on learning that rebellion had broken out in Ireland, [British Prime Minister William] Pitt determined this was the opportunity he needed to push for a Union of the two parliaments.'¹⁷ In May 1800, just as the new century dawned, induced by a combination of political pressure and bribery, the Irish parliament effectively voted itself out of existence. Henceforth, Ireland would become part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. There was a second, short-lived rebellion that did take place in Dublin in 1803. It was led by a Dubliner, Robert

Emmet, who was born on St. Stephen's Green, educated at Whyte's Academy on Grafton Street, and later went to Trinity. It ended in disarray; however, the memory of Emmet's rebellion (not least because of its continuous re-enactments in political melodramas in Dublin's theatres) meant that it had a long afterlife.

The effects of this sequence of upheavals would shape both the fabric of Dublin and the shape of Irish political and cultural debate well into the twentieth century – in both instances, in ways that were never simple. The group who perhaps felt the loss of an Irish parliament most directly were the former elected members of that parliament, many of whom had lived and socialized in the houses of the great Georgian squares. This produced a curious convergence, in that they shared with later nationalist writers (with whom they often shared little else) an interest in portraying Dublin after the Union as a kind of wasteland, a diminished provincial city. As a character in Maria Edgeworth's novel *The Absentee* (1812) puts it, there was a perception that the ink was barely dry on the Act of Union before 'most of the nobility and many of the principal families of Irish commoners, either hurried in high hopes to London, or retired disgusted and in despair to their houses in the country'.¹⁸

However, Edgeworth's novel as a whole presents a more nuanced view of the change, as one of her characters, Sir James Brooke, reflects that he, too, was at one point convinced that 'decorum, elegance, polish, and charm of society was gone' from Dublin after 1800. With hindsight, however, he has come to see that the shake-up of the old order produced a kind of filtering: 'You find a society in Dublin,' he says, 'composed of the most agreeable and salutary mixture of birth and education, gentility and knowledge, manner and matter; and you see pervading the whole new life and energy, new talent, new ambition.'¹⁹ Although *The Absentee* appeared in 1812, it was remarkably prescient as to the direction that the city would take over the next century, and the image of a ghost town, bemoaning past glories, is misleading. In part, this would be an effect of Catholic Emancipation in 1829, which activated the 'new talent, new ambition' of Irish Catholics who had been legislatively precluded from much of public life in the eighteenth century. In Dublin lore, when the Catholic church that took up residence in what had been the old Smock Alley Theatre – Saint Michael and Saint John – rang its bells in 1815 to mark the first opening of a Catholic church in the city since the Reformation, it not only anticipated Catholic Emancipation but also created one of its symbols (a century later, to mark the event, a cast of the bell was built into one of Dublin's bridges). In retrospect, the

pealing of those bells signalled a turning of the tide, and by the end of the century what had been a predominantly Protestant city – politically and culturally – would become a city in which the Catholic Church was an inescapable force.

Even as the political tide shifted, Dublin continued to build and to grow. An impressive new theatre, the Theatre Royal, opened in 1821; the Shelbourne Hotel took in its first guests in 1824, and in 1854 a new university, which would become University College Dublin, opened on St. Stephen's Green, with John Henry Newman as its first Rector. On the map, there was not only growth but movement, as the city's centre of gravity also began to shift southwards and eastwards along the coast.

One way to trace Dublin's development after the Act of Union is to follow the moving van containing the possessions of the novelist Lady Morgan. Born Sydney Owenson, she was the daughter of an actor and theatre manager, Robert Owenson, who for a period ran a theatre in Fishamble Street, one of the oldest streets in the medieval city, originally the fish market. Born some time in the early 1780s (her memoirs are vague on this point), Sydney Owenson grew up at 60 Dame Street, not far from Dublin Castle. Around the turn of the century, she took a job as a governess in a 'fine, old-fashioned furnished house on Dominick Street',²⁰ in the fashionable north city. It was here that she wrote her first work (a collection of poems), which she followed with her best-known novel, *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806), subtitled 'A National Tale'. As her fame grew, she lived for a time outside of Ireland. However, when she returned to Dublin in 1835 as a celebrated novelist and centre of a literary salon that included the poet Thomas Moore (who had been born not far from her in the old city, at 12 Aungier Street), she avoided the now increasingly down-at-heels north side, where she had been a governess, and moved into the newly fashionable south side, at 35 (later renumbered as 39) Kildare Street (more or less opposite the National Library of Ireland today).

That Lady Morgan decided to call *The Wild Irish Girl* 'A National Tale' signals another of the lasting effects of the 1798 rebellion and the Act of Union. Over the course of the century that followed, to be an Irish writer increasingly meant contributing to a 'national literature', or else face questions as to why not. This would continue to be the case well into the twentieth, and, indeed, twenty-first centuries. In fact, the slow disentanglement of Irish writing from this nineteenth-century ideal has become an abiding concern for more than one contemporary writer. For instance, in her essay 'Becoming an Irish Poet' (2011), the

poet Eavan Boland recalls that as a student in Trinity College in the 1960s, her walk home took her through Merrion Square, 'one of the old treasures of Georgian Dublin. An ambiguous gift of colony. [...] In the nineteenth century, this was the hub of a garrison city':

The fanlights, then as now, spun off down the street, making a vista of semicircles. The topmost windows looked over chestnut trees. The demeanour of it all revealed a purpose. A deceptive grace closing its iron grip of class and dominion over an unreliable nation.

Here, in the heart of the 'garrison', Boland recalls that she always stopped outside No. 1 Merrion Square, the childhood home of Oscar Wilde. However, it was not Oscar that Boland recalled, but his mother, Lady Jane Wilde, who as 'Speranza' wrote poetry for the nationalist *Nation* newspaper in the years leading up to the rebellion of 1848, at the height of the Irish Famine. As much as she admires Speranza as a person, Boland has to admit that her poetry seldom goes beyond being 'bellicose and patriotic'. 'Through her,' Boland writes, 'I first came to realize that a national agenda could be an editor: I was less aware it could also be a censor.'²¹

Speranza's nineteenth-century Dublin, then, was one in which a literary world that increasingly (although never exclusively) fostered a literature framed in nationalist terms occupied a city built as the capital of a colony. And so, while Merrion Square may have retained its 'deceptive grace' right up to the time that Boland passed through it in the 1960s, and continues to do so today, in Speranza's lifetime large swathes of the Georgian city went into the same sort of decline that the medieval city had suffered a century and a half earlier. So, once again, the now familiar pattern repeated itself: as the Georgian city became congested, Dubliners with means began looking for fresh pastures (quite literally), and found them beyond Merrion Square to the east, and beyond the Grand Canal to the south. In this respect, Dublin in the middle of the nineteenth century makes a sharp contrast to the rest of Ireland – which is one of the reasons why a Dublin literature and a wider Irish literature do not always align. In the country as a whole, the population surged over the first half of the nineteenth century to a level it has yet to regain in the twenty-first century, reaching 8.2 million in the 1841 census. Rural Ireland was then decimated by the Famine of the late 1840s, and the population of the country as a whole fell to 6.6 million in the 1851 census and continued to drop in the decades after. Dublin, by contrast,

grew steadily over the course of the century, and even increased by 6% over the decade of the 1840s to just under 250,000 by 1851.²² By 1901, Dublin was a city of more than 380,000, whereas the population of the country as a whole had fallen below 4.5 million. If the image of the Irish countryside was increasingly dominated by derelict stone cottages and abandoned villages, in Dublin the picture was the exact opposite, with congestion, overcrowding and a burgeoning population.

Here again, the change shows up on maps. Maps of Dublin in the 1830s show a city still safely tucked inside the Royal Canal and the Grand Canal that ring the city to the north and south, respectively (see colour plate C3). By the end of the century, however, the footprint of the city is completely different. To the south of the city, rows of terraced houses now run from the canals all the way to the nearby villages of Ballsbridge, Rathmines, and Ranelagh, although they would continue to hold on to their individual municipal identities. Rathmines, for instance, would become large enough to be granted town status in 1847. The process of suburbanization was speeded up by rail, with five rail stations feeding into the city in 1876. The first of these opened in 1834, only five years after the first passenger line anywhere in the world, when a commuter line connected the city centre with the newly developed port of Kingstown (now called Dún Laoghaire) on the south coast. Initially, the area around Kingstown was a smattering of villages interspersed with private villas (such as the fictional one in Bray that provides much of the setting for Edgeworth's *The Absentee*). However, increasingly houses in this part of the city resembled the middle-class houses that had been built in places like Ballsbridge and Rathmines. 'It seems clear enough,' writes the historian Ciaran O'Neill, 'that we can identify the nineteenth century as the bourgeois century *par excellence* and that this is also true of Ireland, and the Irish bourgeoisie.'²³ If bourgeois Ireland had an epicentre, it was the new inner suburbs of south Dublin, spreading along the south coast, and their counterparts on the north side in Drumcondra and Phibsborough, as – to use the words of one of Edgeworth's characters – 'commerce rose into the vacated seats of rank'.²⁴

If maps show this middle-class nineteenth-century city encircling the old Georgian and medieval core, what these maps do not show is the transformation that was taking place in the older streets. In the original city core, the three-storey, gable-fronted Dutch Billies, as they were known, which had housed generations of textile workers since the early eighteenth century, were giving way to rows of small artisan cottages, and in these streets a working-class culture took shape. Among the

Dubliners living here were many of the 2,000-strong workforce of the Guinness brewery, located along the quays at St. James's Gate, adjacent to the area known as the Liberties. The brewery would expand massively in the 1870s, and it still dominates the skyline in this part of the city. Similar workers' housing developments were being built in those same years on either side of the mouth of Liffey, in Ringsend and North Wall, for the workforce in the docks. Beyond those with solid industrial jobs, however, were increasing numbers of Dubliners who lived in real destitution, crammed into rooms in what had once been the city mansions of the wealthy.

So, by the end of the nineteenth century, most single families had long since moved out of the large houses on the great terraces of Henrietta Street and Dominick Street, including the one in which a young Lady Morgan had been a governess, and as property values dropped these vast buildings were divided and subdivided into tenements. In the case of Henrietta Street, for instance, by 1911 only No. 4 still housed a single family of three, while the building next door now housed 108 people from multiple families.²⁵ Moreover, this kind of grotesque overcrowding was neither unusual nor recent. Going back to the 1841 census, we find that fully 46.8% of Dublin's population lived in dwellings of a single room.²⁶ In other words, in the same years that the residential Victorian and Edwardian suburbs were taking shape, the suburbs in which so many Dubliners would live and continue to live, the city's medieval and Georgian core was deteriorating and becoming increasingly congested. The playwright Christine Longford puts it well in her 'biography' of Dublin published in 1936. 'In a play of Webster,' she writes, 'there is a character described as "an Italian nobleman, but decayed." Dublin is an eighteenth-century city, "but decayed".'²⁷ Eventually, the city's poverty would ignite: on 26 August 1913 a series of strikes began, culminating in a general strike and lockout that brought the city to a virtual halt. And, almost as a reminder as to what lay behind the strike, on 2 September, two tenements on Church Street collapsed, killing seven people.

It was conditions such as these, underpinned by a continuing sense of grievance at the loss of the Irish parliament, that fed into the sense that Ireland at the end of the nineteenth century was, as Yeats put it in his autobiographical writings, 'like soft wax',²⁸ not just ripe, but demanding to be formed into a new shape. As the century drew to a close, what Roy Foster has called a 'revolutionary generation' increasingly interrogated all aspects of the world they inherited 'in student societies, Gaelic League dances, and the front rooms of houses on those Dublin streets where comrades found lodgings close to each other and

sat up late at night talking. The more one reads accounts, letters, and diaries and reflections of this generation, the more one gets the sense of an intimate but complex city, with certain areas defined by political subcultures.²⁹ Those densely intertwined literary, cultural, and political subcultures were behind the military uprising that occurred at Easter in 1916, when groups of armed insurrectionaries occupied locations around Dublin, including the General Post Office on Sackville Street, a distillery in the Liberties, a biscuit factory a few blocks from Merrion Square, and St. Stephen's Green. From the perspective of thinking about Dublin as a literary city, part of the continuing fascination of the 1916 Rising revolves around the awareness that so many of its leaders – including its two principals, Patrick Pearse and James Connolly – were writers. As Fearghal McGarry puts it, 'the Rising was the product not only of Ireland's insurrectionary tradition but of the cultural-nationalist revival [...] Many of this "rising generation" graduated from learning Irish to fighting for Ireland'³⁰ – or, indeed, from staging a play to staging a revolution.

The week of the Easter Rising has probably exerted a greater hold on the historical imagination of Dublin than any other single event, and you can still walk down O'Connell Street and see the pockmarks made by bullets in the columns of the General Post Office. In the immediate aftermath of the Rising, to which the British army had responded by shelling rebel positions from a gunboat in the Liffey, large parts of the centre of Dublin were reduced to burnt rubble. However, unlike cities in the Netherlands, France, or Germany, for instance, where today planned streetscapes made up entirely of post-World War II buildings are often an indication that a city had been bombed flat, Dublin's main street was rebuilt after the Rising in a style that echoed what had been there before. In terms of the city's built fabric, the major casualty of the War of Independence that followed in 1919–1921, and of the Civil War that followed it in 1922–1923, was an explosion in the Four Courts that destroyed many of the city's oldest records, wiping clean, as it were, part of Dublin's memory. Deeper scars would be left by the particularly intimate warfare Dublin experienced, particularly during the Irish Civil War. While not anything like as destructive or extensive as the wider European experience of warfare in the middle of the twentieth century, Dublin's conflicts – such as the massacre of fourteen civilians in the Croke Park Gaelic Athletic Association stadium on 19 November 1920 – left deep scars because of their almost personal nature. 'I hope things are quieter with your world,' the Abbey Theatre director Lennox Robinson wrote to Lady Gregory, who was in Coole Park. 'Here they are very bad as you may imagine. [...] they were working up a strong

anti-reprisal campaign. – Sunday has set all that back and no one ever mentions (in England) the little Amritzar at Croke Park in the afternoon.³¹ Once a city has had that experience, it lodges deeper than old bullet holes in the sides of buildings.

The Dublin that emerged from insurrection and civil war was a capital once again, with the new government eventually taking up residence in what had been the Duke of Leinster's old city address, Kildare House, across from where Lady Morgan had had her salon. However, in some respects, the city continued as it had been before, for better and for worse, and in the 1920s a new recognition that Dublin was now a large conurbation began to take hold. For one thing, the city expanded geographically, formally incorporating what had been independent townships such as Rathmines and Pembroke (in the Baggot Street area). At the same time, the tenement collapse in Church Street in 1913 had sparked a slow-burning enquiry that recommended the clearing of Dublin's slums. During the conflict, the ensuing report sat on a shelf, so it was not until the 1920s that the Dublin Corporation began to address a situation that had been festering for a century. By 1928, 1,300 new terraced houses in a planned development would be built in Marino, on the north of the city towards Dublin Bay, although these were initially out of the reach of the poorest tenement-dwellers. However, over the following decade, from 1930 to 1939, a further 6,000 suburban houses were built on greenfield sites outside the city, to which many of Dublin's former tenement dwellers were able to move, redrawing the map of the city by 1935 (see colour plate 4). This process would continue and accelerate into the 1960s; on the city's northern edge, the villages of Ballymun and Finglas grew into sprawling suburbs, while to the west the city crept outwards to take in Ballyfermot and Tallaght.

In some respects, Brendan Behan's story is the story of Dublin's development in those years. Behan was born in 1923, at the end of the Civil War, and was raised 'in a Georgian House that had gone to rack and ruin as a tenement', as he put it in a later memoir.³² The house at 14 Russell Street was a three-storey stone townhouse that had been built in 1803, about a ten-minute walk from where Lady Morgan had been a governess on Dominick Street. By 1923, the Behans were one of fourteen families each living in a single room in the building, sharing a single toilet. In 1936, the building was condemned, and the family were allocated a newly built house at 70 Kildare Road, in the recently developed suburb of Kimmage. This was a classic piece of Irish modernist urban planning, with streets laid out in the form of a stylized Celtic

cross, around a circular park bisected by crossroads. Here, the Behans' end-of-terrace house had its own toilet and a small garden. Behan hated the place, and spent as little time as possible there, often staying over with friends in a basement warren known as 'the Catacombs' at 13 Fitzwilliam Square, before settling in a small rented flat in a converted nineteenth-century house at 15 Herbert Street in what was then the respectable, but bohemian, Baggot Street area of the city. It was only in 1959, when Behan had a production of his play *The Hostage* about to open in Paris, and *The Quare Fellow* rehearsing in Berlin, that he and his wife Beatrice bought 5 Anglesea Road, in Ballsbridge, 'one of the most prestigious bourgeois addresses in suburban Dublin'.³³

The Behan family's migrations in an outwardly expanding city tell us something about the continuing anomalousness of Dublin in an Irish context. In the half century or so between 1901 and 1961, the population of the island of Ireland as a whole continued its long post-Famine decline, losing 200,000 people to emigration.³⁴ Not surprisingly, much of the rural literature of this period revolves around themes of lethargy, depopulation, and general stagnation. However, in that same period the population of Dublin grew, and continued to shoot up sharply in the second half of the twentieth century, going from over 600,000 in 1950

Dublin's great outward sprawl in the middle of the twentieth century was characterized by large-scale public housing projects, like this one in the suburb of Kilbarrack, where Roddy Doyle grew up. One of the great challenges for recent Irish writers has been to find a way to write about parts of the city that have only been in existence for a generation or so. *Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives.*



to over 900,000 in 1980. Inevitably, as the city grew, there were periods during which its physical fabric – particularly the great Georgian squares – were ripped open in ways that caused many to despair, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s. ‘First the city planners took away the old street,’ writes the poet Gerard Smyth in his poem ‘Taken’ (2021), ‘along with the neighbours who had seen tragedy and comedy. [...] They disturbed the dust / that lay on the handiwork of guilds, / pulled up foundations buried since / the first strangers put a name on what they saw.’⁵⁵

The sense that the city was becoming one vast derelict building site intensified during the 1980s, at a time of economic stagnation throughout the country as a whole. Then, in the early 1990s, a variety of factors combined to produce an economic uplift that quickly mushroomed into a fully fledged boom – based to no inconsiderable extent on property speculation – in what became known as the Celtic Tiger. This would have a profound transformative effect on the fabric of Dublin, as older industrial areas became post-industrial office space, most notably around the docklands on either side of the Liffey. At the same time, the city’s western and northern boundaries expanded outwards at an accelerated pace, repeating the process by which villages such as Rathmines and later Finglas had been absorbed into the larger urban area a few decades earlier. Iconic new postmodern buildings began to appear around the city, such as the swirling arcs of the Aviva Football Stadium, or the tilted cannister of the Convention Centre on the north quays. The economic collapse of 2008 put most of this development on hold; however, within a decade, the Dublin skies were full of cranes yet again, and, at the time of writing, a house on Anglesea Road where Brendan Behan used to live would not leave you much change out of €2 million.

As the old literary culture of pints spilt over sonnets gave way to gentrification, the literary culture of Dublin has changed. In some respects, it has become more professionalized. The city now plays host to half a dozen literary festivals every year, has a well-established theatre and fringe festival every autumn, and Dublin City Libraries sponsor the world’s richest prize for a single novel, the Dublin Literary Award. In 2010, Dublin became the world’s fourth UNESCO City of Literature, and in 2019 the Museum of Literature in Ireland (MoLI) opened on St. Stephen’s Green. At the same time, as the economy grew so, too, did the population of the greater Dublin area, which now stands at just more than 1.4 million. For the first time since the end of the seventeenth century, when there was an influx of Huguenot migrants, a significant

number of these new Dubliners were born outside of Ireland, attracted both by a growing economy and by the expansion of the European Union to include countries in Eastern Europe. In 2015, for instance, the Central Statistics Office counted 182 different languages spoken in Ireland, with the highest concentration in Fingal, North Dublin, where more than a fifth of the population spoke a language other than English at home. Polish is the most commonly spoken of these new languages of Ireland, but there is also a large number of Mandarin speakers. In fact, the 2016 Census shows that 'just over 17 per cent of the resident population of Dublin city were non-Irish with Polish, Romanian, UK nationals, Brazilian, Italian, Spanish and French making up more than half of the total 91,876 non-Irish in the city in 2016'.³⁶ As one historian puts it, in the twenty-first century Dublin has undergone 'the most significant demographic transformation in the modern history of the state'.³⁷

This new multiculturalism has changed the experience of being in the city in very basic ways; to walk down O'Connell Street today is to hear a multitude of languages. Equally, it has multiplied the perspectives from which Dublin is now experienced. As the Greek-born Irish poet Natasha Remoundou writes:

*On Grafton Street I noticed every single passer-by who looked foreign
wondering if they could tell I was one of them,
whether they know where I'm from,
if I have good English
if I have friends.*³⁸

The built traces of these multiple Dublins, from the Viking trading settlement of the tenth century to the plurilingual conurbation of today, are layered on top of one another. In some cases, their physical traces have been erased, or are all but impossible to find. 'I walk the north-side streets / that whelped me; not a brick remains / of the tenement I reached the age of reason in,' writes Paula Meehan in her poem 'A Child's Map of Dublin'. 'There is nothing there to show you, not a trace of a girl / in ankle socks and hand-me-downs, sulking.'³⁹ However, the great paradox of writing is that even when evoking what is gone, we conjure it into memory, so that a dead past becomes a living part of the present. When we remind ourselves that the tenement of Meehan's childhood no longer exists, we nonetheless call it into imaginary existence, where it becomes one of the layers of our experience of the city as we inhabit it.