

IRELAND

Guinness | Irish Soda Bread | Irish Coffee

The Emerald Isle

Wendy Dunham Travel, along with Trafalgar Tours, hosted another great adventure for us. Trafalgar's **Irish Experience** tour brought us to both Ireland and Northern Ireland over 11 days. Highlights of the trip included:

- Dublin
- Belfast
- Giant's Causeway
- Londonderry
- Inishowen Peninsula to Malin Head
- Belleek
- Galway
- Connemara Region
- Cliffs of Moher
- Killarney
- Ring of Kerry
- Blarney
- Waterford
- Kilkenny
- New Ross

Follow along on my journey. My hope is that this journal inspires you to visit Ireland and learn of its history, its people and its "troubles".



Who Would Have Ever Thought?

I knew Ireland would have beautiful green rolling hills, majestic wind swept cliffs along the great Atlantic Ocean, and, of course, great food. But it was so much more than that. It was beyond my wildest expectations! From Guinness to sheep, Ireland has it all.

Ireland's History

Ireland is rich in history, with the arrival of the Celts in 300 BC (who gave Ireland its official language, Gaelge); Christianity in 600 AD; the Vikings from the 9th century until 1014; the 12th century Norman era; the 1801 union with Great Britain; the Great Famine of 1845-1851; the Easter Rising in 1916, the War of Independence from 1919-1921; the Civil War from 1922-1923; and the creation of Northern Ireland in 1920 and its ensuing "troubles" from 1968-1998. Our guided tour through Ireland gave us insight into how each era shaped Ireland and its people to be what they are today.



Dublin



A Day to Explore

We arrived in Dublin the day before our official Trafalgar tour. It was a perfect opportunity to explore the city on our own and visit well known landmarks. We started off along the banks of the River Liffey.



Our first stop was on the Liffey Boardwalk where we saw the first of many memorials dedicated to the great famine of 1845-1851. The **Jeanie Johnston** is a replica of an 1850 emigrant vessel, docked close to the **Famine Memorial**, sculptures dedicated to the one million people who died during the famine and to the 1.5 million people who emigrated to other countries.

The **Ha'Penny** Bridge, built of cast iron in 1816, is Dublin's most famous foot bridge. A ha'penny toll was in place for 100 years to pay for its construction.



In contrast to the old, the **Samuel Beckett Bridge** is much more modern, built in 2009. Ireland's national symbol is the harp, of which the bridge was designed after. This bridge is wide, with four lanes of traffic and two pedestrian walkways.

Dublin

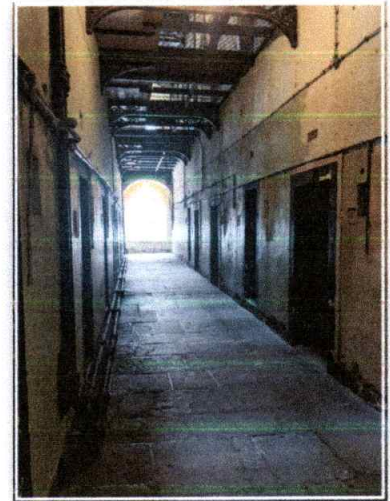
Kilmainham Gaol

The Kilmainham Gaol opened in 1796 as the Dublin county jail. It held people found guilty of various crimes, including petty theft up to political uprisings seeking independence. Several of us took a guided tour of the jail and learned about many of its high profile inmates, including the United Irishmen, the leaders of the Easter Rising in 1916 and Joseph Plunkett and Grace Gifford, an imprisoned couple in love.

The oldest section of the jail is the **West Wing**. When it was first built, it had no glass in the windows, nor heat or lights. Political inmates were housed here in addition to those affected by the famine and imprisoned for stealing food or charged as part of the Vagrancy Act.



The **East Wing** was built in the 1860's with a large skylight that brought in "cleansing rays of sunlight". Each of its 96 cells had a small window, but placed too high for prisoners to see out of. Beneath the floor are solitary, unlit cells for inmates who guards felt warranted punishment. Many inmates from this wing went on hunger strikes during the Irish Civil War of 1922-1923.



The **Stonebreakers' Yard** was used by men sentenced to hard labour. They spent their days outside manually breaking stone.



The prison was closed in 1911 and was given to the Military for their own use. The years that followed were turbulent times in Ireland and the Military used Kilmainham as a Military detention centre. It is here that 14 leaders of the **Easter Rising of 1916** were executed.

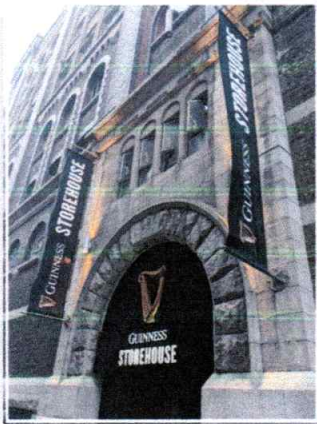


The Love Story - Joseph Plunkett was one of the leaders executed in the Stonebreakers' Yard. The evening before the execution, he married artist Grace Gifford in the prison chapel. Grace was not a prisoner at the jail until her arrest during the Civil War in 1923. She never remarried and lived in Dublin until her sudden death in 1955.

Dublin

Guinness Storehouse

We headed over to the **Guinness Storehouse** at St. James's Gate to meet up with others from our tour for supper at the 1837 Bar & Brasserie. This was definitely the happening spot in town.



Arthur Guinness started brewing ale at the St. James's Gate location in 1759. It has since grown to one of the largest breweries in the world. Company ownership has diversified since 1986 with the family now only owning 51%.

Dublin Castle and Temple Bar

Built in 1204 on the site of a Viking settlement, **Dublin Castle** served originally as the administrative headquarters of the English government, and later the British government in Ireland. It was originally built as a medieval fortress with four corner towers and a large central enclosure. Following a fire in 1684, it was rebuilt as a Georgian palace and a place of worship.



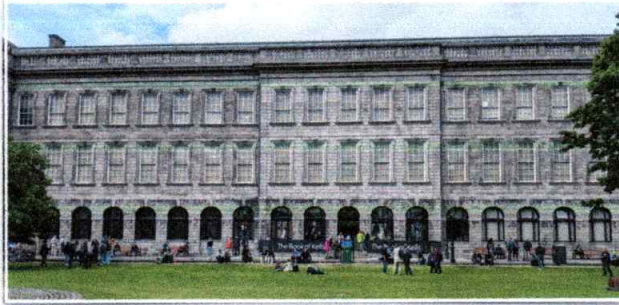
Temple Bar is actually a district in Dublin and is known for its entertainment, art and culinary establishments. It is the best place in Dublin to hear live Irish folk music. There's always a party going on in this district.

The district is best known for the famous **Temple Bar pub**. It was built in 1840 and is famous for serving over 450 types of rare whiskies. Interesting fact: There are 772 pubs in Dublin, and this is the most popular one.

Day 1 - Dublin

Our Tour Begins!

This was the day we met **Ali**, our Tour Director, and **Stevie**, our coach driver. Over the next 11 days, they will have taken us on a fascinating journey through Irish culture and history, starting with a driving tour of Dublin, with stops at Trinity College, the Molly Malone statue and Phoenix Park.



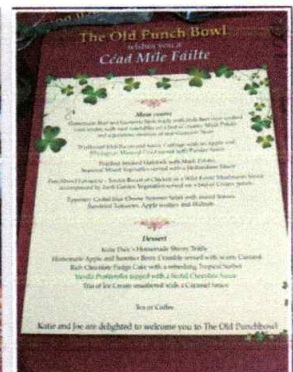
Trinity College is Ireland's most prestigious university, offering degrees in law, literature, humanities, nanotechnology, IT, immunology, math, engineering, psychology, politics and English. Since 1661, the library has contained the famous Book of Kells. Interesting fact: The Book of Kells was most likely created by monks in the Abbey on the Scottish Isle of Iona. We visited the Abbey in 2017 during another of Wendy's group tours with Trafalgar.

Not far from Trinity is the statue of **Molly Malone**. Molly is a fictional character in the song "Cockles and Mussels", the unofficial anthem of Dublin. Based on the reaction of these two blokes, her reputation as a female street hawker preceded her.



Phoenix Park is a 10,000 acre public park built in the 1600's containing both historical buildings and modern edifices, in addition to sports fields, walking trails and gardens. The park is open every day with no admission fees. Shown here is the Ashtown Castle, a medieval tower house built in the early 15th century, pre-dating the park.

Trafalgar's Welcome Reception was held at the **Old Punch Bowl tavern**. Established in 1779, the building has withstood Dublin's most turbulent times. Today, the O'Rorke family continues to welcome guests and provide them with great ales, wines and home cooked meals. The owner, Joe O'Rorke, spoke with each of us and welcomed us with an Irish toast. Ali followed up with a welcoming Trafalgar toast.



Day 2 - Belfast - Titanic

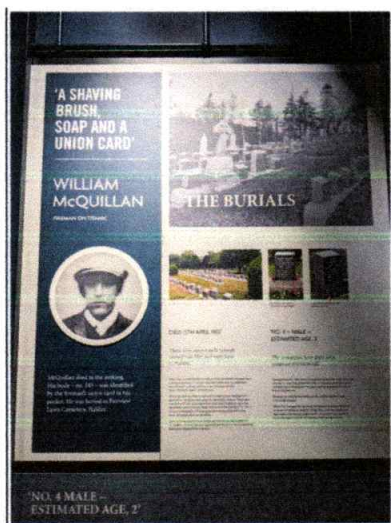
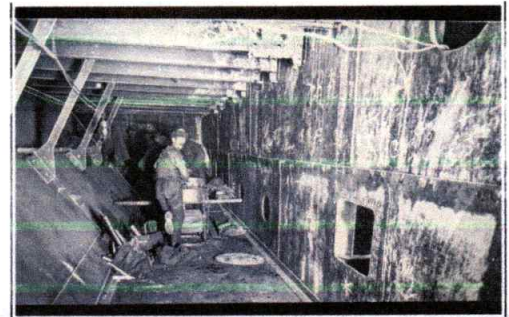
The Titanic

Our first stop in Belfast was at the **Titanic Museum**. The Titanic was built by the Harland & Wolff shipyard in Belfast for the White Star Line and entered into service in 1912. On April 15, 1912, it sank in the North Atlantic during its maiden voyage from Southampton to New York. Of the 2,224 passengers and crew, 1,500 died.



Ship Building

To accommodate the construction of the Titanic and its sister ship, the Olympic, Harland & Wolff had to demolish 3 slipways and build two new, larger ones. Titanic's keel was laid on March 31, 1909. Interesting fact: The Titanic has 2,000 steel hull plates, as shown here, and over 3 million steel and iron rivets.



The Sinking

On the night of April 14, 1912 while sailing at full speed, the Titanic's starboard side hit an iceberg, denting the hull's seams, causing buckling and separation. Water flooded into five watertight compartments, causing the ship to slowly sink bow first. Other compartments flooded as the ship sank lower. Unfortunately, there were only enough life boats for half of the people, and some were launched only partially full.

Four ships from Halifax were hired by the White Star Line to retrieve bodies. 333 victims were recovered and brought to Halifax, our home town. 150 people were buried in three Halifax cemeteries: Fairview Lawn, Mount Olivet and Baron de Hirsch.

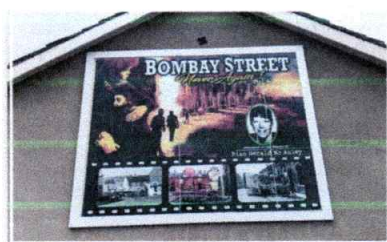
Day 2 - Belfast - The Troubles



The Troubles

From 1968 to 1998, there was heavy conflict between Northern Ireland's Protestant Loyalists who wanted to remain part of the UK and its Roman Catholic Nationalists who wanted Northern Ireland to become part of the Republic of Ireland. During "The Troubles", 3,600 people were killed and 30,000 injured in civil war type attacks, such as bombings and street fighting. In 1998, the governments of both Northern Ireland and the UK reached a peaceful solution to the fighting.

Bombay Street



August, 1969 saw many violent civil outbreaks, including the bombings of almost every house on Bombay Street, a Catholic neighbourhood in West Belfast. We visited a monument and gardens dedicated to those who lost their lives trying to protect their homes and families.



Peace Walls

In 1969, walls were erected between Protestant and Catholic neighbours to quell the violence. Belfast has 97 such walls called peace lines or peace walls. Our cabbie tour took us to one that is on the other side of the Bombay Street monument. We were able to write messages of peace on the wall, which hopefully will somehow help with the citizens' dreams of a unified country. It is the government's plan to remove all peace walls by 2023 under the *Together: Building a United Community Strategy*.



Day 2 - Belfast - Walking Tour and Fish & Chips



Trafalgar arranged for a local specialist to walk us through **the streets of Belfast** and show us their beautiful old structures. Although founded during the neolithic period, it was the 1100's before Belfast became a city. In 1171, John de Courcy, an Anglo-Norman knight from England, arrived as part of the Norman invading forces and conquered lands in Northern Ireland.

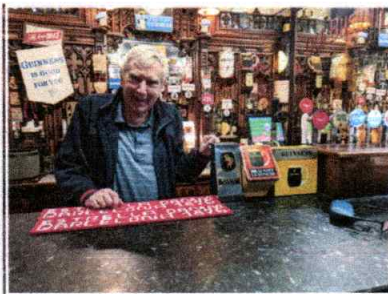


During the many years of conflict, Belfast did not see a lot of development. This was to change with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

Large development projects have since been completed, including the Titanic Quarter, Victoria Square and the Waterfront Hall.



Our group stopped in at one of Belfast's oldest pubs, the **Duke of York**. Everyone had a great time trying out the local beer, checking out the memorabilia on the walls, and visiting their outdoor courtyard. We then strolled down the street to **John Long's Fish & Chips**. The owner of the diner opened up just for our group!



Day 3 - Belfast - City Hall



Located in Donegall Square, **Belfast City Hall** was opened in 1906, replacing the old Town Hall. The cost to build the new building was £369,000, a staggering amount at the time. The structure features towers at each of the four corners, with a lantern-crowned 173 foot green copper dome in the centre.



The grand entrance is impressive. Standing in the centre of the reception area and looking up, you see through to the second floor. Marble railings frame beautiful adorned walls and intricate paintings.

Stained glass windows are found throughout the complex. They depict important historic events or highlight important individuals that have

contributed to the city's identity throughout the years.



Day 3 - Giant's Causeway



Driving along the Antrim coast road, we stopped to admire the view. And what better view than sheep going about their day. The most popular is the **Scottish Blackface** breed (remember Shaun the Sheep?). Did you know that there are over four million sheep in Ireland? That's one for each of Ireland's five million citizens with a few left over. I'll take one!

The Giant's Causeway

The causeway is a natural wonder that showcases over 40,000 basalt interlocking columns, each with a unique hexagonal shape with between 5 and 7 irregular sides. Legend has it that the "steps" were created by Irish giant **Finn McCool** who created it in order to cross Scotland so he could go into battle against his enemy Benandonner. In reality, however, the formations were caused by lava cooling and contracting, which causes stress fractures.

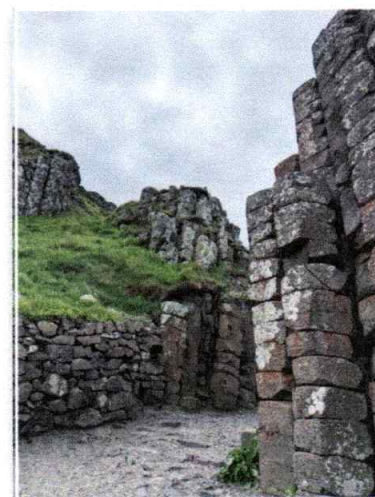


The cliff that Shelley is standing on is one of many that provide an important **habitat for birds**, including the cormorant, redshank, fulmar and eider varieties, important to Ireland's ecology. We saw many flying into their nests with feed for their young ones.



Tourism started at the Giant's Causeway in the 1690's after a visit by the Bishop of Derry and then boomed with the installation of a tramway in the 1900's. The Giant's Causeway was designated a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** in 1986 and a National Nature Reserve in 1987. It is managed by the National Trust who maintain it free of commercialism.

After many years of weathering, some of the formations have taken on shapes of objects. Some now have nicknames, including: the *camel's humps*, the *organ pipes*, the *harp*, the *chimneys*, the *eyes of the giants* and the *honeycomb*. My guess is that this particular formation is called either the organ pipes or the chimneys.



Day 4 - Inishowen Peninsula

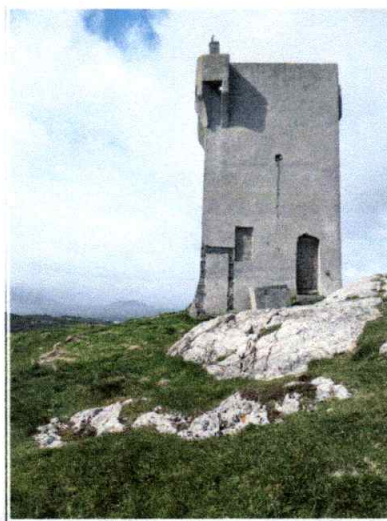
Grianan Aileach



Located in Inishowen, County Donegal, the Grianan Aileach is a restored Ringfort dating back to the sixth century. It was the seat of the Kingdom of Ailech and a royal site of Gaelic Ireland. The walls are 15 feet thick and 16 feet high, with three distinct terraces.

It was destroyed in 1101 by Muirchertach Ua Briain and restored starting in 1874.

Malin Head



We drove to Malin Head, the most northwesterly point of Ireland. Original buildings on this barren land include a military watchtower built in 1805, a weather station built in 1885 and a signal station built in 1902 and used by the Marconi Company.

Malin Head was an important location in WWII as allied forces were permitted to use the weather station's two radio direction finders to monitor U-boat and aerial activities in the North Atlantic.



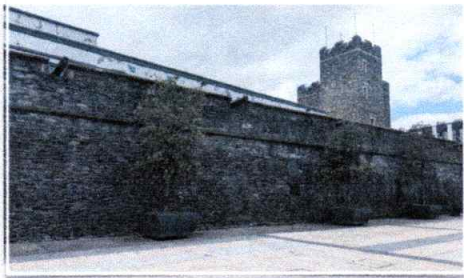
In this picture, look carefully and notice the white stones. They read "80 EIRE". This was to signify to planes that they were crossing Irish territory. Since Ireland was neutral, this navigational aid ensured pilots did not attack or land on Irish soil.

Day 4 - Londonderry

What's in a Name?

People lived in Doire Calgaich, the original name of the area, as early as the 6th century. It wasn't until the 17th century under the Plantation of Ulster movement that the city was named **Londonderry**. For many years there was contention between the Irish Nationalists and Unionists on the name Londonderry versus Derry. In 1984, the city's name was officially changed to **Derry**.

City Walls

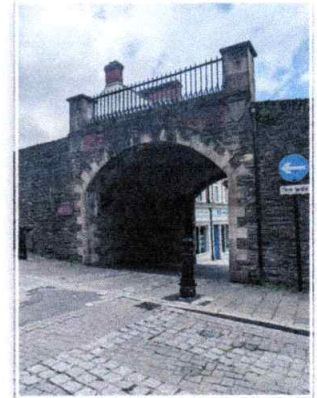


Built starting in 1613, the **fortified wall** around the inner city is the only fully intact one left in Ireland. It was created as a defence for settlers from England and Scotland. Its design has a promenade all along the top of the 1.5 km wall; walls are between 12 and 35 feet high and 4 of the 7 original gates still remain. The streets are laid out in Renaissance style, designed by London Architect Peter Benson.



Our guide gave an excellent tour of the inner city, providing us with detailed information on Derry's way of life, both past and present.

Interesting fact: This fortified inner city never had its walls breached and its nickname is the *Maiden City*.



Peace Bridge

The first bridge to be built across the River Foyle was in 1790, called the Earl Hervey Bridge. The east and west sections of the city are now connected by three bridges: the Craigavon Bridge, the Foyle Bridge and by the newest one, a foot bridge called the Peace Bridge. The Peace Bridge was designed to symbolize the coming together of the Waterside and City Side communities of Derry.



Day 4 - Londonderry

Leading Up To "The Troubles"

In the late 1960's, tensions escalated between Nationalists and Republicans with marches and rioting occurring in and around Derry, specifically the Bogside area, home to many working class Catholics. The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) was the police force in place at the time and whose membership was mostly Protestant.



In October 1968, physical clashes ensued between the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association and RUC, leading to the RUC batoning and injuring citizens. In January 1969, members of the town and the People's Democracy were attacked by RUC for rioting in the Bogside area. Citizens then erected barricades in Bogside and patrols were organized to keep out the RUC. This is when this mural was painted on the corner of Columbs Street. In April, 1969, the first fatal attack occurred, with the RUC breaking into Samuel Devenny's home and attacking him with batons. He died of his injuries in July, 1969.



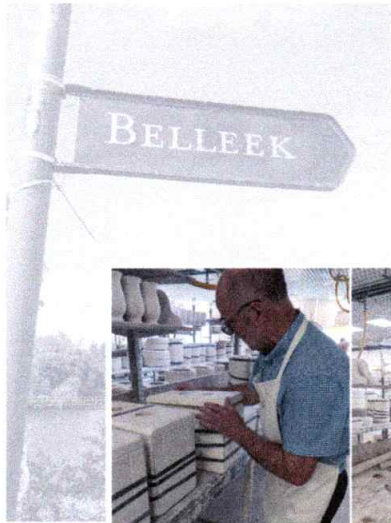
Battle of the Bogside

"The Troubles" officially began on August 12, 1969 with the annual parade of the Apprentice Boys, a Protestant fraternal organization, commemorating the lifting of the 1689 Siege of Derry. Battles broke out between the Bogside residents and their supporters against police and Loyalists. Rioting spread all the way to Belfast, with 6 people dying. The Prime Minister of Northern Ireland requested troops be sent to Londonderry where hereinafter the Prince of Wales Own Regiment separated the RUC from the Bogside members, with instructions to leave the barricades up and unbreached. The barricades were forcibly removed on July 31, 1972 during a massive operation, Operation Motorman, led by the British and Northern Irish governments.



Day 5 - On Our Way to Galway

Belleek Pottery



We stopped for a guided tour at the Belleek Pottery, Ireland's oldest establishment making fine china pottery. The company originated in 1857 and now operates under six brand names. Each piece is handmade with the craftsman's initial placed on the piece, followed by at least six quality control checkpoints. Many of its employees are loyal and have been there for decades, including the gentleman in this picture.



Creevykeel Court Tomb

Back in the Neolithic times of Ireland, those who died were cremated, not buried. Their ashes were put in a gallery, such as the full court tomb found in Creevykeel. A court cairn has an uncovered courtyard area connected to one or more covered burial galleries. Dating back to 2500 BC, the Creevykeel cairn is 50m long, with the main oval shaped court being 15m x 9m, shown here. The entrance you see in the picture goes to the burial gallery, which leads into three subsidiary chambers.



Sligo

We made a quick stop in Sligo for lunch. It is a beautiful town with lots of restaurants along the river. Jim and I had a great lunch with this fun crew.



Day 5 - Galway Castle Banquet

The **Dunguaire Castle** was built on the shores of Galway Bay in 1520 by the O'Hynes family. Although it has seen its share of sieges throughout the years, it was best known as a place for literary greats to visit throughout the past five centuries. The Martyn's of Tulira owned the castle from the 17th to the 19th century when it was then given to the Shannon Heritage Society in 1954.



A Feast Fit For A King



The castle is now open for tours that promote Irish history and its past inhabitants, including greats such as Oliver St. John Gogarty to George Bernard Shaw, WB Yeats and Lady Gregory. The Shannon Heritage Society also hosts a **banquet** whose actors portray what life was like in medieval times. Members of our group were chosen to portray the King, Queen and servants. Bob, Dawn, Frank, Chris, Jim and I enjoyed being part of the night's entertainment.



The real actors of the banquet were dressed in period costume and were very talented in playing musical instruments and singing. We were entertained by King Guaire and his clans people who sang their way through an historical account of what it was like to live in medieval times. In between the stories, they served us a four course meal with drinks. The menu included leek and potato soup, chicken with mushroom sauce and apple pie with cream.

It was such a fun evening!



Day 6 - Kylemore Abbey



Located in the beautiful **Connemara region**, **Kylemore Abbey** was the home of Mitchell Henry, MP, and his wife Margaret. It was built in the late 1800s by local craftsmen and included many innovations of the modern age. Their 40,000 square foot home had 70 rooms and was elegant and stately.

Mitchell and Margaret had nine children together, one who sadly died in a horse accident on the property. Margaret died at the age of 45 from a fever she contracted in Egypt. Mitchell built a memorial church in her memory, and a mausoleum where she, and eventually, Mitchell were laid to rest.

After Mitchell's death in 1910, the estate was sold to the Duke and Duchess of Manchester, then in 1920 to the **Irish Benedictine Nuns**. The Abbey opened up an International Boarding School for Catholic girls and girls from the locality. The school was closed in 2010, but the nuns have since offered retreat activities to continue their mission of prayer, work and community.

Visitors to the Abbey are welcome to roam the grounds of the estate, including the walled garden, church and mausoleum, and learn more about the Benedictine way of life. This is a very special place that we were lucky to visit and enjoy.



Day 7 - Cliffs of Moher and Be My Guest Lunch



Cliffs of Moher

Located on the West County Clare coast, the Cliffs of Moher offer spectacular views of Ireland's rugged Atlantic coastline. The cliffs rise to 700 feet along 18 kilometres of shoreline. The surrounding Burren lands and the cliffs form part of the UNESCO Global Geopark, which makes the area internationally known for its unique geology, landscapes, history and culture.



To the west of this view are the three Aran Islands. Visitors can travel back in time to 1100 BC to present day while visiting typical settlements, a monastery, a ring fort and a castle. 1100 people live on the islands now, enjoying temperate climates and long growing seasons.



Be My Guest Lunch



Trafalgar treated our group to lunch with a local organic horticulturalist, **Oonagh O'Dwyer**. Oonagh is an activist for sustainable living and sources her food ingredients locally. She led us on a walk to the **Liscannor Bay** and pointed out the benefits of many ordinary plants and how they can be used in healthy cooking.



Our group then proceeded to the **Barrtra Seafood Restaurant** overlooking the Bay. Chef Ruben cooks only high quality local products in his very cozy and inviting dining room. Our meal was served by sweet young locals.



Day 7 - Irish Ceilidh



Tonight was all about music, food and dancing.

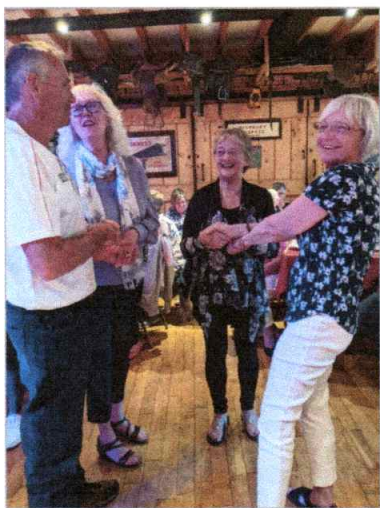
Located just outside Killarney in the Gap of Dunloe, **Kate's Cottage** has been famous since the 1800's, known for the distillation of Kate's famous poitín, 'Kate Kearney's Mountain Dew'.

Local musicians entertained us with Irish songs for three hours. Two Irish dancers gave us demonstrations on how to do various Irish jigs, then it was the audience's turn to try and replicate their moves. Loads of fun and lots of laughs.

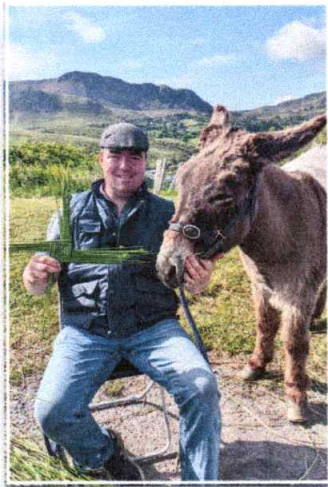


Throughout the evening, the food and drinks kept coming. We had choices of local dishes including salmon and lamb. Such hard choices. Dessert wasn't an easy choice either. Everything tasted great and was nicely presented.

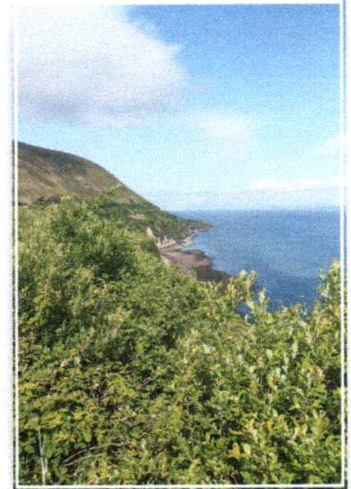
All of Trafalgar's optional experiences are chosen for promoting the country's traditions in authentic manners. This excursion in particular gave us a taste of Ireland with its traditional music, food and drink.



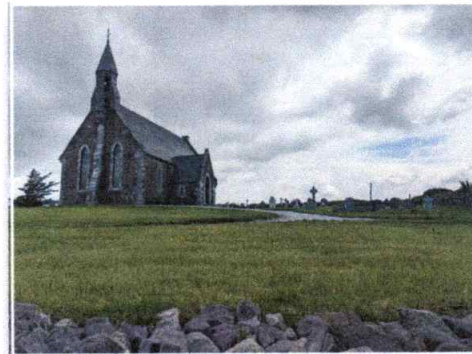
Day 8 - Ring of Kerry



Known for its stunning scenery, the Ring of Kerry is a driving route around the Iveragh Peninsula, beginning and ending in Killarney. Our first stop was to visit a **roadside market** where we met an Irish farmer making a St. Brigid's Cross out of reeds, while his pet donkey looked on. Who could resist that face! Our next stop was at Mountain Stage that overlooks Rossbeigh and Inch beaches. The Great Southern and Western Railway used to travel through this area.



There are many towns on the 170 km route. We stopped in **Waterville**, known for the Atlantic Telegraph and its Marconi Memorial, the Mick O'Dwyer statue, Ireland's most famous Gaelic football manager, the Charlie Chaplin statue and St. Michael's Church that dates back to 1866.



The **Killarney National Park** is Ireland's first national park dating to 1932. It is spread out over 25,000 acres and is a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The park has a very high ecological value because of its diversity of habitats and plant species. The three Lakes of Killarney are Lough Leane (the lower lake), Muckross Lake (the middle lake), and the Upper Lake, bordered by the Torc Mountains.

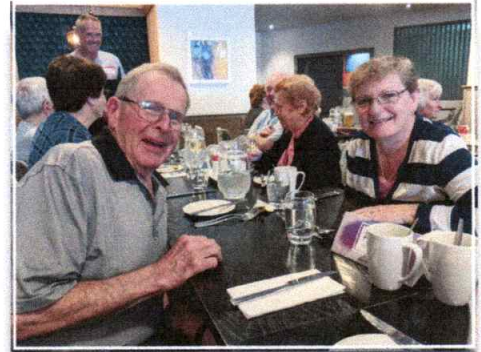


Friends

We all have very personal reasons why we travel to distant and interesting countries. For some, it's the history, the culture and the food. For others, it's the friendships made along the way. Jim and I have been so lucky to meet some wonderful people on our adventures with Wendy. We've stayed friends with many of them throughout the years, keeping in touch on email, through social media and with the occasional get together. Here are a few shots of old and new friends, lots of fun and laughter.



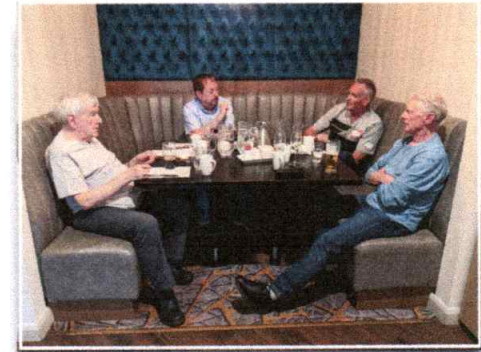
← Pearl d'Eon and I at Liscannor Bay



→ Jerry and Bep Demings-Mattern in Galway



← Bonnie Meads, Arlene d'Eon and Jean in Belfast



→ Frank Cameron, Bob Westhaver, Jim Greeno and Don Lane in Galway

Jim Greeno, Rose Collins and Marlene Knowles at the Grianan Aileach Ring Fort



Sheila and Mary in Londonderry



Bonnie Meads and Pearl d'Eon in Killarney



Day 8 - Muckross House



Located within the Killarney National Park, **Muckross House** was built for Henry Arthur Herbert in 1843. Within the estate's 13,000 acres, there is the main house, large stables, beautiful gardens and views of Muckross Lake. The rooms in the house all contain original furniture, dishes and paintings.

The Herbert family was very active in both social and political circles and were honoured to host Britain's Queen Victoria on a visit to the estate in 1861. The family spent a great deal of money planting gardens, beautifying the home and creating a private apartment for the Queen. All of this for a 42 hour visit. There were hopes that Henry would receive a Knighthood for his troubles, however, Prince Albert died shortly thereafter and the Queen went into mourning.

The Herbert family was forced to sell the estate, first to none other than the Guinness family. It was resold to the Bourn family from California who eventually gave the estate to the Irish Free State in 1932. It was abandoned for 30 years before locals formed the Trustees of Muckross House (Killarney) Limited.



Day 9 - Blarney Castle



The current **Blarney Castle** is actually a tower house, a type of fortification, built in 1446 by Cormac Láidir MacCarthy, Lord of Muscry. An additional tower was built in the 1500s. The castle was involved in many battles up until the 19th century, including the famous Williamite War in the 1690s. The castle and surrounding property was sold many times, with the last owner being James St. John Jefferyes, Governor of Cork City.



The Jefferyes family built **Blarney House**, a mansion dating to 1874 after the original one was destroyed by fire. In the mid 1800s, the Jefferyes family joined in marriage with the baronetage Colthurst family. The Colthurst family still occupies the lands, but under the title "Lord of the Manor" which does not constitute ownership but rather has manorial rights.

The **Blarney Stone** is a block of limestone built into the top of the back wall of the castle. Legend has it that the kisser will receive the gift of gab. It is said that Cormac, the owner, was having legal issues and consulted with a goddess for assistance. She advised him to kiss the first stone he saw in the morning on the way to court and he would be granted eloquence in his speech. He won his case and now the Blarney Stone is said to impart "the ability to deceive without offending". The majority of our group hiked up to the top to wait their turn to kiss the stone (pretend kiss, no touching!).

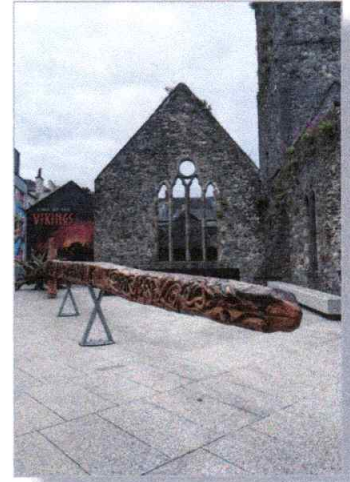


Day 9 - Waterford



Waterford comes from the Old Norse name “Veðrafjörðr, established when the **Viking raiders** settled nearby in 853 until 902. They were driven out by the native Irish, however, they returned in 914. By the 12th century, many of the Vikings were converted to Christianity.

The Viking Triangle is the cultural and historic area of the city and has monuments set up that represent the history of the Viking era.



Waterford Crystal



Waterford Crystal manufactures lead glass, commonly called crystal. Production started in 1783 but closed in 1851. It wasn't to reopen again until 1947, with it now being owned by Fiskars Corporation under the Waterford, Wedgwood, Royal Doulton, Royal Albert and Rogaška brands. Most production is now done outside Ireland.

The Waterford location has a guided factory tour that gave us insight into the many steps involved in producing a world class product. Craftspeople showed us glass blowing techniques, followed by molding and glass refinement through engraving.



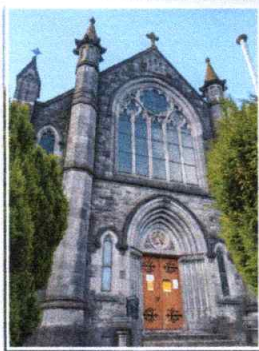
During our visit, we were shown the design of a special wine goblet that was being crafted for the Queen's upcoming 70th Jubilee. Waterford was chosen as the crystal provider because of their dedication to quality and excellence.



Day 10 - Kilkenny



Kilkenny is a medieval city that straddles the River Nore and is known for its historic buildings and churches. Kilkenny Castle was built in 1195 to control the junction of several water routes on the River Nore. The castle was owned by many influential families over the years, most notably the Butlers. Many Butlers inherited the property through marriage or death but it was expensive to maintain. By 1967, the building was in disrepair and was gifted to the people of Kilkenny to restore and open it up to the public. It is now managed by the Kilkenny Castle Restoration Committee.



The best way to see the small city was by a tourist train. It took us through back alleys to view many of the city's churches, then along the river to see old buildings once used to store provisions. Paul Matthews was our local guide who had a lot of entertaining stories to tell about the city's past and present.



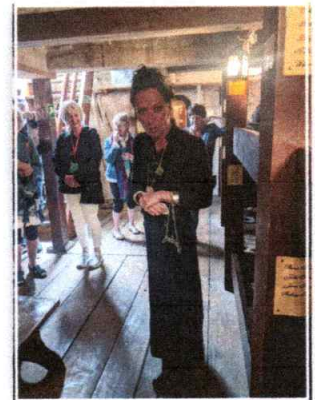
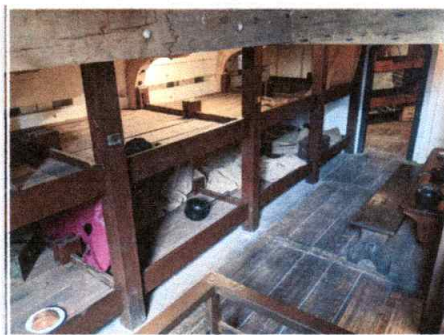
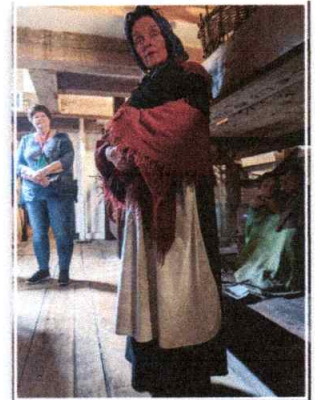
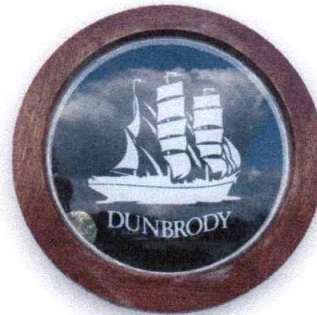
Day 10 - Dunbrody Famine Ship



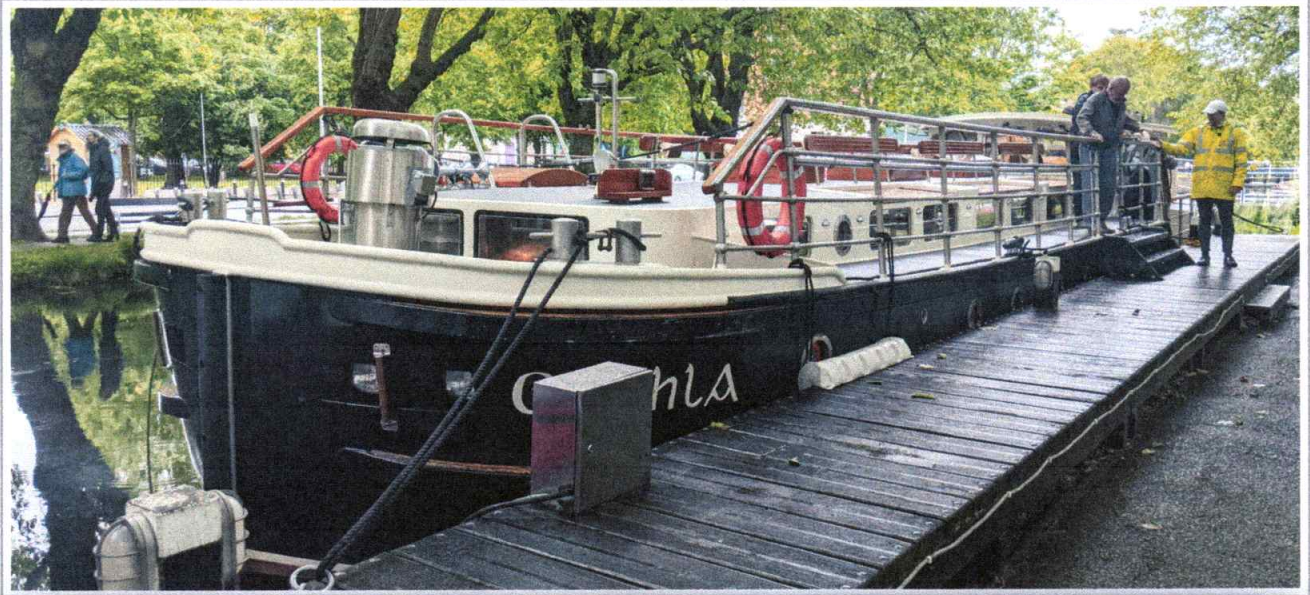
During the potato famine of 1845-1851, 1.5 million Irish people were forced to leave their country in search of a place that offered food and jobs. The Dunbrody, built in Quebec as a cargo ship in 1845, was converted into an emigrant ship based in New Ross, Wexford. Its main destination to deliver emigrants was Savannah, Georgia.

Life onboard the ship during the journey across the Atlantic was challenging for those in steerage class, with slightly better conditions in cabin class. We met Mrs. Anne White from steerage who was onboard with her husband and five children. Her husband died during the voyage, one of only six to die. Then we met Mrs. Mary O'Brien from cabin class, who was quite vocal about having to sometimes come in contact with those from steerage. The acting gave us a very good insight to what life would have been like on the ship.

The Dunbrody foundered on the Labrador coast in 1875 and was unrecoverable. Between 1997 and 2001, the J F Kennedy Trust built a replica ship that is permanently docked in New Ross. The Trust also has a database of everyone who left Ireland on her between 1845-1851.



Day 11 - Farewell Dinner - Dublin



Having to say goodbye to a country so filled with life, fun and culture is tough, but Trafalgar made it a tad easier on our final evening back in Dublin with a farewell dinner on a canal cruise boat. We were treated to a two hour tour through the canal and lock system, all with tasty, authentic Irish cuisine being served by friendly staff.

The group presented gifts to Ali and Stevie, with additional Nova Scotia gifts for them and Wendy from Marilyn. Allie, Stevie and Wendy gave each of us an unforgettable journey through Ireland, one which we will always remember. Throughout the adventure, we had many good times with old friends and new ones. Each trip we take with Trafalgar brings us all closer together at home and in our travels.

Thank you Wendy and Trafalgar. Another job well done!

