

# The History and Nature of Irish Street Names

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## Abstract

Street names in Irish towns and cities reflect the historical periods in which those names were given, medieval through the twentieth century. The majority of these names can be traced to English words, although many streets have English-sounding names which can be traced to Irish words. Classifying these names reveals the many reasons for name origins, from descriptive through destination to commemorative.

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## The Growth of Irish Towns

Relatively little is known about the origins of Irish urban life. It is quite conceivable that future research will reveal the importance of pre-Viking settlements throughout the island, just as recent excavations, notably those at Wood Quay in Dublin (Wallace; O Ríordáin), have emphasized the role of Norse invaders and traders in developing the coastal towns of the east and south. Town life flourished in the Anglo-Norman period (1169-c.1300). The Viking ports were redeveloped and many new towns were established, often on the sites of former monastic settlements. These Anglo-Norman towns were concentrated in the southeast, in Leinster and east Munster, but they included important outposts elsewhere such as Galway in Connaught and Carrickfergus in Ulster (O Sullivan; Mc Neill).

With the decline of Anglo-Norman power many of these towns shrank into insignificance or even disappeared (Glasscock), but a few new ones were established in the counties of Laois and Offaly during the reign of Philip and Mary (1553-58). The Tudor reconquest brought about a revival of urban life in the old southeastern heartland of English influence (Aalen, chapter 6), while the early seventeenth century saw the final decline of Irish power in the north of the island and the founding of a large number of new towns in the escheated counties of Ulster

(Camblin 29-37). During the eighteenth century landlords created numerous small villages, some of which later evolved into small towns (Aalen 279-84).

The impact of the Industrial Revolution was confined mainly to northeast Ulster: there the advent of linen spinning and weaving in factories led to the rapid expansion of some towns in the Lagan Valley (Green) and particularly to the growth of Belfast (Jones). Nineteenth-century industrial growth also affected Dublin, as did the Great Famine of 1845-48 which induced a stream of starving fugitives to flood into the urban slums (Craft; Haughton; Craig; Woodham-Smith). Withdrawal of the British garrison after the War of Independence (1918-21) had major implications for many Irish towns while the last half century has witnessed considerable growth and massive suburban expansion (Aalen 286-87). Figure 1 shows the towns and cities included in this study.

### **Linguistic Background**

All these phases found expression in the urban street-scape, which in turn reflected the ever-changing linguistic geography of the urban areas. During most of the past millennium the towns formed the bastions of English power in Ireland so it is not surprising that English-language names dominate the urban scene, whereas in the countryside names of native Irish provenance are in the majority. Nevertheless some older non-English elements have been preserved, though in a corrupt form. Furthermore, as towns expanded into hinterlands which were still Irish-speaking or came to incorporate Irish settlements outside the walls, Irish names or Irish elements came to be included in the street-name pattern. With the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1921 the British policy of cultural imperialism was reversed and a half-hearted bilingualism substituted. Bilingual nameplates, often riddled with spelling, grammatical, and translation errors, supplanted the old monolingual signs, while in a few instances new streets were named in Irish only.

### **Medieval Names**

Until a great deal of research has been done on the street-name patterns of individual towns it would be premature to attempt a detailed



stratification for the entire Irish urban scene. All that is feasible at present is a brief outline of the major features. Names of medieval provenance are confined for the most part to streets which lay within the walled towns. Such towns, apart from Dublin itself, included Viking foundations such as Wexford and Waterford, and Norman foundations like Drogheda, Trim, Carlingford, Galway, and Kilkenny. Unfortunately, with the exception of that of Dublin, the medieval cores of few Irish towns have been subjected to detailed archaeological or documentary scrutiny. Very often the medieval street names have been corrupted or have undergone linguistic change. Probable medieval names from the capital city include *Sheep Street*, *Copper Alley*, *Castle Street*, *Bridge Street*, *Wood Quay*, *St. Werburgh's Street*, *St. Nicholas's Street*, *St. Audeon's Lane*, *St. Tulloch's Lane*, *New Gate Street*, *Fishamble Street*, and *Winetavern Street* (Clarke). Beyond the walls, fragments of medieval nomenclature survive in names like *Abbey Street* (where St. Mary's Abbey was located on the north side of the Liffey), *Chapelizod Road*, and *Bull Alley Street*. *Augustine Street* and *St. Francis Street* in Galway also refer back to the medieval period, as do *Abbey Street* (the location of Selskar Abbey) in Wexford and *John Street* (site of St. John's Priory) in Kilkenny. The name *Castle Street* in many towns (e.g., Ardee, Trim, and Carlow) dates back to the Middle Ages, but in other cases (e.g., Athlone and Newtownards) it is of later origin.

### 17th and 18th Century Names

The upheavals of the seventeenth century are reflected in such names as *Cromwell's Lane* (at the foot of Cromwell's Mount) in Drogheda. The Plantation of Ulster finds expression in such nomenclature as *Scotch Street*, *Irish Street*, and *English Street* in Armagh, names which are replicated in many northern towns.

The name *Barrack Street* is very common in Irish towns (e.g., Drogheda, Cork, Dundalk, Sligo, Mullingar and Belfast). Most of the military barracks to which these relate were built in either the eighteenth or the early nineteenth century (Kerrigan) in response to the threat of rebellion—a very real danger as the Rising of the United Irishmen in 1798 proved. Cognate names include *Barrack Hill*, a poor residential quarter in Cavan; *Magazine Road*, located alongside Custume Barracks

in Athlone; *Battery Road*, beside the old artillery barracks in Longford; and *Military Road*, in Waterford.

The late eighteenth century brought a gradual relaxation in the Penal Laws and in the intense persecution of Catholics which had marked the post-Cromwellian era. The native Irish began to erect places of worship in the narrow laneways of the slum quarters of the towns. These new churches were well hidden from public view lest they attract the anger of the ruling Protestant elite. Their existence is commemorated in such names as *Chapel Lane* (Lehinch, Roscrea, and Belfast), *Chapel Road* (Edenderry), *Chapel Street* (Borrisoleigh, Kilrush, Tullamore), *Old Chapel Lane* (Ardee), *Oldchapel Street* (Durrow), and *Mass Lane* (Limerick). In stark contrast, the Church of Ireland edifices, mainly eighteenth and nineteenth century constructs, occupied prominent sites near the centers of the towns. They form the origin of the name *Church Street* in Ballina, Athlone, Ennistimon, and many other towns. Exceptionally, *Church Hill* (Clones) and *Church Lane* (Stradbally) refer to the Catholic church. *Church Street* (Claremorris) referred originally to St. John's Protestant Church; later, the town's new Catholic church was built opposite the Protestant one, and the earlier site on Chapel Lane was abandoned. Memory of the Huguenot settlement is preserved in the name *French Church Street* (Portarlinton). *Cathedral Street* (Thurles, Dublin, Armagh, etc.) and similar designations are of course of nineteenth century provenance; by that time the religious disabilities of the Catholics had been reduced.

The eighteenth century was an age of much urban development in Ireland. Many towns were improved by landlords, by corporations, or by the Wide Streets Commissioners. This embellishment frequently took the form of the creation of malls as at Armagh, Tralee, and Cork: in many instances, at Sligo for example, these new tree-lined walks were designated simply as *The Mall* or were given only a locational qualification as in *North Mall* and *South Mall*, Westport. Another reminder of the leisurely pace of life in that century is enshrined in *Bachelors Walk* in Dundalk, Dublin, Tullamore, Lisburn, and elsewhere.

Transport improvements of this period find expression in such names as *The Turnpike* in Moate and *Mail Coach Road* in Sligo. Harbour Row was built alongside the new terminus of the Royal Canal at Longford, while Harbour Street in Mullingar owes its name to the

completion of that same canal as far as that Midland town in 1806. *Harbour Street* in Tullamore refers to a basin on the Grand Canal, as does a similarly named street in Mountmellick.

### The Impact of the Industrial Revolution

The advent of the Industrial Revolution did not greatly affect the development of Irish towns except in the north. There the linen industry's prosperity is reflected in such names as *Linenhall Street*, Lisburn; *Bleach Yard*, Mullingar; or *Mill Street*, Newtownards. The last of these descriptives also occurs in the context of water power: in such instances the names are of older origin. Other nineteenth century industrial developments are preserved in fossilized form in *Distillery Road*, Wexford; *Distillery Lane*, Carrickmacross; *Brewery Lane*, Carrick on Suir; *Tanyard Lane*, Tullamore; and *Foundry Street*, Mountmellick.

Though industrial development was restricted, the coming of the railways left a very strong imprint. Dozens of towns possess a *Railway Road*, a *Railway Street*, or a *Station Road*. Shipping, too, flourished, as is evident from such nomenclature as *Ballast Quay*, Sligo; *Steam Boat Quay*, Limerick; *Wellington Quay* and *Steam Packet Quay*, Drogheda; *Merchants Quay*, Waterford; *Buttercrane Quay*, Newry; *Harveys Quay*, Limerick; *Claddagh Quay* [*< Cladach* 'shore'], Galway; *Custom House Quay*, Dublin; *Crescent Quay*, Wexford; *Quay Parade*, Waterford; *Quay Street*, Westport; *Dock Road*, Galway; *Dock Street*, Belfast; *Coliemore Road* [*< Caladh Mór* 'great landing place'], Dalkey; and *Harbour Road*, Howth. *The Harbour Highway*, Larne, is a twentieth-century concoction.

The development of commerce found expression in such names as *Bank Street* in Belfast and *Bank Place* in Cashel. The nineteenth century brought the creation of a police force, the Royal Irish Constabulary. Apparently one of its major functions was the removal of stray livestock from the public thoroughfares: the temptation to avail of free grazing by the roadsides was very strong. Pounds to hold the captured animals were built in towns great and small as is clear from the ubiquitous *Pound Street* (Larne, Ballina, Kilrush) or its equivalents, e.g., *Pound Road* in Newry, *Pound Loney* [Irish *lóinín* 'laneway'] in Belfast, and *Pound Lane* in Clogheen.

## Vegetation Names

Much suburban development took place around the major towns in the course of the twentieth century, while new housing estates were added to many smaller towns especially in the period after the Second World War. The namers of these estates often suffered from an obsession with vegetation. In the southern suburbs of Limerick, for instance, one encounters *Linden Court*, *Cedar Court*, *Rowan Court*, *Maple Court*, *Chestnut Court*, *Willow Court*, *Hawthorn Court*, *Walnut Court*, and *Larch Court* – all these in a single post-war housing estate. Not far away lie *Lilac Court*, *Palm Court*, *Aster Court*, *Salvia Court*, and *Rose Court*. The Northern suburbs of the same city yield *Whitethorn Drive*, *Fuschia Avenue*, *Birch Avenue*, *Hazel Avenue*, *Rowan Avenue*, *Willow Avenue*, *Blackthorn Drive*, *Walnut Drive*, *Woodbine Avenue*, *Alderwood Avenue*, *Larchwood Avenue*, *Pinewood Avenue*, *Ashwood Avenue*, and *Mossgrove Avenue*; while the northwestern suburb of Caherdavin contains *Cherry Avenue*, *Elm Drive*, *Hawthorn Avenue*, *Laurel Court*, *Maple Drive*, and *Ivy Close*. Would that this vegetational profusion were reflected in a municipal planting programme of equal dimension and richness, but unfortunately such is not the case!

## Borrowed Irish Placenames

Ireland never possessed an empire like that of Spain, so the exotic South American names of Seville's Heliopolis district (*Chile*, *Peru*, etc.) find no parallel in Irish towns. Instead the names of Irish towns or historic spots are pressed into service. Thus the Dublin housing estate of Crumlin contains a remarkable potpourri which includes the following: *Raphoe Road*, *Kildare Road*, *Downpatrick Road*, *Saul Road*, *Slane Road*, *Derry Road*, *Clogher Road*, *Bangor Road*, *Monasterboice Road*, *Clonmacnoise Road*, *Lismore Road*, *Durrow Road*, *Devenish Road*, *Armagh Road*, *Blarney Park*, and *Kilfenora Road*. The Cabra suburb has a more restrained but still truly catholic selection which ranges from Kerry in the South to Donegal in the North, from Clare in the west to Antrim in the East: *Ventry Road*, *Liscannor Road*, *Kilkieran Road*, *Carnlough Road*, *Bannow Road*, *Mulroy Road*, *Dingle Road*, *Drumcliffe Road*, and *Swilly Road*. Only in rare instances did the Corporation officials respon-

sible for the naming process restrain their imagination to a limited source: thus the nomenclature of the Ballyfermot suburb was drawn in part from a single area—County Galway. This yielded such names as *Claddagh Road*, *Spiddal Road*, *Inagh Road*, *Clifden Road*, *Oranmore Road*, and *Carna Road*.

### Name-Clustering

In other instances the developers of suburban housing estates linked specific names with various synonyms for road. In the Clontarf district of Dublin, where King Brian Boramha (of Kincora, Limerick) defeated the Vikings of Dublin and their allies in the year 1014, one encounters *Kincora Avenue*, *Kincora Grove*, *Kincora Drive*, and *Kincora Road*. Such name-clustering is very typical of Dublin suburbs. A very good example occurs in the south-city suburb of Ballinteer where the name *Broadford* is combined with *Road*, *Hill*, *Drive*, *Crescent*, *Lawn*, *Park*, *Close*, *Avenue*, and *Rise*. One developer with an intense liking for the definite article created *The Lawn*, *The Grove*, *The Walk*, *The Rise*, *The Heights*, *The Glen*, *The View*, *The Green*, *The Drive*, *The Hill*, and *The Avenue*. This particular nest lies in that same suburb of Ballinteer.

### English Borrowings

A more recent trend has been the abandonment of Irish place names in favor of English ones. This substitution is much favored in estates occupied by the *nouveau arrivé*: whether it represents their true aspirations or is merely the response of the developers to an imagined demand is a moot question. It is well exemplified by such names as *Westminster Lawns* and *Torquay Road* in Galloping Green, *Brompton Court* and *Brompton Grove* in Castleknock, and *Brighton Road* in Foxrock. Of course, similar names were frequently bestowed on streets in the prosperous south Dublin suburbs which developed in the nineteenth century after the coming of the railway. Typical of these are *Brighton Avenue* and *Belgrave Square* in Monkstown, *Silchester Road* in Glenageary, and *Saval Park Road* in Killiney.



## Descriptives

Names which are readily identifiable in terms of the historical periods to which they belong form only a small fraction of the total street nomenclature. The remainder fall into many categories one of which might be termed simple descriptives. They include names incorporating such adjectives as *main*, *high*, *broad*, *long*, *new*, *middle*, *lower*, *central*, *circular*, *crescent*, *serpentine*, *ring*, *green*, *blind*, and *back* and substantives like *embankment*, *link*, and *hill*.

*Main Street* is ubiquitous. It occurs in Cashel, Bangor, Longford, Carrick-on-Suir, and several score other towns, both great and small. Without detailed scrutiny of the documentary and cartographic evidence available in each case it would be impossible to relate all these to particular periods but *a priori* it would seem that these names relate to the oldest name stratum in each settlement. Indeed it is noteworthy that streets bearing this name have often lost their primal importance as the economic heart of the settlements in question shifted elsewhere. In Athlone, for instance, Main Street has become a commercial backwater.

What has been written of *Main Street* applies in a lesser degree to *High Street*. There are *High Streets* in Wexford, Athlone, Tuam, and a dozen other towns. The description normally refers to commercial significance, not altitude. Once again the central location of these streets points to an early origin.

The other adjectives listed have a much lower incidence of usage. *Broad* occurs in *Broadway* (Belfast, Bangor, etc.) and *long* in *The Long Avenue* (Dundalk). *New* roads grow old and so can relate to many different periods: most, but not all, are of twentieth-century origin. This descriptive takes the form of *New Road* in Kilkenny; *New Street* in Carrickmacross; *New Row* in Templemore, and *New Line* in Cashel. *Middle* occurs but rarely: one instance is *Middle Street*, between St. Augustine Street and Merchants Road in Galway. *Lower*, too, is found very seldom except to qualify another name as in *Lower Gate Street* (Cashel). One example of its simplex use is *Lower Street* (Borrisoleigh). *Central* is contained in *Central Way*, Lurgan: once again it is a scarce element.

*Circular* is much commoner, well-known examples being *Circular Road* (Coleraine, Tuam, Ballina), *North Circular Road* and *South Cir-*

*cular Road* (Dublin), *North Circular Road* (Belfast), and *North Circular Road* (Tralee). *Crescent* exists in adjectival form in *Crescent Quay* (Wexford) and in substantive guise in *The Crescent* (Galway). *Serpentine* qualifies an *Avenue*, a *Park*, a *Road*, and a *Terrace* in the Ballsbridge district of Dublin, while *ring* occurs in such names as *Southern Ring Road* (Limerick). *Green* when not referring to “fair-green” is uncommon but is to be found in *Green Lane* (Carlow). *Blind* is used to describe a cul-de-sac as in *Blind Street* (Tipperary). *Back* refers to routes offering access to the rear of major streets, or to eighteenth- or nineteenth-century by-passes, e.g., *Back Road* (Templemore) and *Back Lane* (Carlingford). *Embankments* were constructed alongside flood-prone river courses in coastal towns for the most part in the twentieth century; instances are *Ormeau Embankment* and *Annadale Embankment* (Belfast) and *Foyle Embankment* (Derry). *Link* is found in *Crescent Link* (Derry) but is by no means common. *Hill*, however, is frequently used as a descriptive; there is a *Hill Street* in Wexford and in a number of other towns.

Directional or locational elements are not very plentiful except as qualifiers of otherwise complete names, e.g., *Cypress Grove North* (Templeogue, Dublin). The rare instances of simpliciter usage include *North Street*, *South Street*, *East Street*, and *West Street* (Newtownards); *North Street* (Newry); *North Road* (Newtownards); *South Parade* and *North Parade* (Belfast); *North Street* and *South Street* (New Ross); *South Avenue*, *North Avenue*, *East Road*, and *South Park* (Dublin); and *South Terrace* (Cork).

### Destination Names

One of the commonest ways of designating roads (and streets) is in terms of destination. Nearly all Irish towns have their *Dublin Road* or *Dublin Street*, though in the northeast (e.g., in Lisburn) Belfast occasionally substitutes for the capital. Even quite small towns contain a handful of “destination” names. Thus Clones has its *Monaghan Street*, its *Rosslea Street* and its *Newtownbutler Road*, Cappagh White boasts of a *Limerick Street* and a *Tipperary Road*, Portrush contains a *Bushmills Road*, a *Coleraine Road*, and a *Portstewart Road*, Portadown names roads after five surrounding towns while Newtownards possesses a rich selec-

tion of destination-names. Inevitably the largest towns contain a wide spectrum of such names. Belfast has its *Antrim Road*, its *Crumlin Road*, and its *Lisburn Road* on the Antrim side of the city, while the County Down side contains a *Hollywood Road* and a *Newtownards Road*. Cork's selection includes *Mallow Road*, *Glenmire Road*, and *Kinsale Road*. Among the major arteries leading out of Dublin are the following: *Swords Road*, *Malahide Road*, *Navan Road*, *Enniskerry Road*, and *Bray Road*. As Dublin spread its tentacles some of the "destinations" became incorporated in the city itself, hence *Howth Road*, *Finglas Road*, *Tallaght Road*, *Firhouse Road*, *Dundrum Road*, *Chapelizod Road* and many others. Destination names tend to be long-established.

### Names Associated with the Cultural Landscape

A very large corpus of names is based on the proximity of roads to specific man-made features or functions. Reference has already been made to some of these features, e.g., the castle. Another such is the bridge, and once again bridge names are usually very old except where they refer to structures over railways or canals. The name *Bridge Street* occurs in Ballina and a score of other urban centers. Market names, too, are often of long standing. The name *Market Street* survives in at least ten centers including Omagh and Mountmellick. Monaghan can boast of a *Market Road* as well as of a *Market Street*. Tullamore, Portarlington, and many other towns possess a *Market Square*. A closely cognate name is *Markethouse Lane*, Ardee. In addition to a weekly market many towns held fairs. This function is reflected in such names as *Fairgreen Street* (Kilcormac), *Fair Hill* (Cork), *Fairgreen Row* (Dundalk), *Fair Field* (Cork), *The Green* (Cashel, Birr), and *Fair Hill Road* (Galway). Closely allied to marketing is the shopping function. Major streets in a few Irish towns are designated *Shop Street* (Galway, Tuam, Westport, Drogheda).

Health facilities figure in a few (mainly nineteenth- or twentieth-century) street names. Examples include *Hospital Road* (Newry, Omagh), *Hospital Lane* (Dublin) and *Asylum Road* (Derry). The poverty of the Famine times is recalled in *Workhouse Road* (Ballina). Other nineteenth-century names refer to penal institutions. There is a *Gaol Walk* in Cork, a *Gaol Road* in Kilkenny, a *Gaol Street* in Templemore, a *Gaol Square* in Enniskillen and a *Jail Street* in Waterford. Those unfor-

tunates found guilty of serious crimes were executed on *Gallows Hill* (Carrickmacross, Sligo, etc.). Strangely, the element *court* was rarely incorporated into Irish streetnames: *Court House Square* in Stradbally, County Laois, and *Court House Lane* in Galway are among the very few instances which spring to mind.

Educational establishments have contributed an important component to many street-names, again mostly dating back to the nineteenth century. Third-level instances include *University Road* (Galway, Belfast), *University Street* (Belfast), *College Green* and *College Street* (Dublin) and *College Road* (Cork). Usually *College Road* refers to a second-level institution: thus *College Road* in Sligo derives its name from Summerhill College and *College Road* in west Dublin from Castleknock College. Humbler establishments are commemorated in such names as *School-house Lane* (Dublin), *Model School Road* (Birr), and *School Street* (Wexford).

### Location Names

Another group of appellations is derived from the locational characteristics of the roads in question. One common instance of this name type is *Shore Road* (Belfast). Another is *Strand Road* (Derry). A variant form is found in *North Strand* (Dublin). Of similar provenance are such names as *Strand Lane* (Carrick-on-Suir), *Whitestrand Road* (Galway), *Beach Street* (Dublin), *Hillfoot Road* (Belfast), *Seacliff Road* (Bangor), *Marine Road* (Dún Laoghaire), *Lake Road* (Lurgan), *River Street* (Clara), *River Lane* (Roscrea), *River Walk* (Birr), *Lough Road* (Cork), *The Valley* (Roscrea), and *Rock Lane* (Cashel, alongside the Rock of Cashel). In very many instances streets have acquired their names from the territorial divisions through which they run. Usually these divisions are townlands,<sup>1</sup> more rarely parishes. Examples include *Ballyholme Esplanade* (Bangor), *Tullygally Road*, *Drumgor Road*, *Moyraverty Road*, *Knockmenagh Road* (Lurgan), *Killycomain Road* (Portadown), and *Stradavoher Road* (Thurles).

### Lane Names

Possessive names are not of widespread occurrence in Irish towns. The principal exception to this rule consists in the titles applied to the

narrow laneways which "housed" the poverty-stricken slum-dwellers of the nineteenth century. These were frequently called after their builders or after their principal residents. To this category belong *Sampson's Lane*, *Price's Walk*, *Mark's Lane*, *Loftus Lane*, *Peterson's Lane* (Dublin), *Crotty's Lane* (Cashel), *Lover's Lane* (Enniskillen), *Barlow's Lane* (Portarlinton), *Crean's Lane* (Clonmel), *Lamb's Lane* and *Barret's Lane* (Ardee), *Martin's Lane* (Mullingar), and *Clinton's Lane* (Drogheda). Not all lanes were named in this fashion. Some acquired their description from the fact that they led to particular features, e.g., *Spa Lane* (Portarlinton) or *Stable Lane* (Tuam), or that particular items were on sale in them, e.g., *Buttermilk Lane* (Galway), or because of certain associations, e.g., *Cuckoo Lane* (Glasnevin). Furthermore, even the element *lane* is in many cases of recent origin: in Limerick as late as 1786 these narrow entries were still termed *bows*, e.g., *Wilkinson's Bow*, *O'Sullivan's Bow*, or *Pike's Bow* because they were approached through archways about the size of doorways (Synott 115). In very rare instances occupational groups generated specific lane-names, e.g., *Brogue* [i.e., Shoe] *Maker's Lane* (Tralee).

### Dedicatory Names

Probably the second biggest single category in the nomenclature of Irish towns is the dedicatory one: at last five percent of Dublin's 3,500 street names fall into this group. In some instances these dedications date back to medieval times: most of these originated from the transfer of church or abbey titles to neighboring streets, e.g., *St. Francis Street* (Galway) or *Thomas* [St. Thomas] *Street* (Dublin). This same practice was followed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; thus *Presentation Road* (Galway) was called after the nearby Convent of the Presentation Sisters, while *St. Mary's Road* in the same city derived its name from St. Mary's College situated on that road. After the establishment of an independent state in 1921 it became the fashion to apply dedicatory names to streets in the new housing estates: this custom continued until the nineteen-seventies. Many of these dedications bore no relationship to local institutions, though in some instances names with local associations were favored. Examples of such modern dedicatories include *St. Kevin's Villas* (Glenageary), *St. Brendan's Terrace* (Rockbrook), *St.*

*Brendan's Avenue* (Coolock), *St. Thomas Road* (Mount Merrion), *St. Declan Road* (Marino), *St. Brigid's Road* (Artane), *St. Peter's Terrace* (Howth), *St. Enda's Drive* (Willbrook), *St. Kevin's Park* (Kilmacud), *St. Fintan's Road* (Howth), *St. Patrick's Crescent* (Monkstown); all the above are drawn from the Greater Dublin area. Outside the capital one finds *St. Patrick's Road* (Clondalkin), *St. Brigid's Place* (Tullamore), *St. Alphonsus Road* (Dundalk), *St. Kieran's Terrace* (Athlone), *St. Jude's Avenue* (Limerick), *St. Fiaach's Road* (Carlow) and many more. The beatification in 1920 of the seventeenth-century archbishop of Armagh spawned a whole crop of dedications in his honor: *Oliver Plunkett Street* in Mullingar, Limerick, and Cork; *Oliver Plunkett Park* in Dundalk; and *Oliver Plunkett Avenue*, *Oliver Plunkett Road*, *Oliver Plunkett Square*, *Oliver Plunkett Terrace*, and *Oliver Plunkett Villas* – all in Dublin.

### Commemoratives

While dedicatory names are indeed numerous, they yield pride of place to commemoratives. These probably form between ten and twenty percent of the total: some of the dedicatories might equally well be regarded as commemoratives. Many of them are associated with centenary occasions or the like. They may be grouped in various ways, e.g., according to the historical periods to which they relate, or according to the events to which they pertain, or according to the types of individuals whom they honor, e.g., patriots, politicians, landlords, priests, writers, musicians. The last two groups fare badly. Apart from very occasional references to Ireland's most famous singers and composers, e.g., John Mc Cormack, Turlough O Carolan, John Field, and William Balfe, the world of music has been scandalously neglected. The Crumlin district in west Dublin does contain a *John Mc Cormack Avenue*, a *Bunting Road* and a *Balfe Avenue*: such nomenclature is most atypical.

The world of literature is equally neglected: such names as *Geoffrey Keating Road*, *Walter Macken Road*, *Gerald Griffin Street*, *James Joyce Court*, *Le Fanu Road*, or *Bulfin Road* are rare in the extreme. In so far as literary figures have been honored, it would appear (in most cases) to be on account of their association with political movements or with revolution. Thus Kickham's link with the Fenians earned him recognition in *Kickham Road* (Dublin), *Kickham Avenue* (Limerick), *Kickham Place*

(Tipperary), and *Kickham Street* (Kilkenny, Thurles, Nenagh).

Nor do priests figure prominently. The great nineteenth-century temperance preacher is remembered in *Fr. Mathew Street* (Tipperary), *Father Mathew Quay* (Cork) and *Father Mathew Square* (Dublin). Another nineteenth-century preacher is commemorated in *Fr. Burke Road* (Galway). *Father Griffin Road* (Galway) keeps alive the name of a young priest who was murdered by the Black and Tans. *Croke Street* (Thurles) honors Archbishop Croke, who founded the Gaelic Athletic Association in 1884.

The landlords have fared rather better. Lord Donegall's title is preserved in *Donegall Road* and *Donegall Street* (Belfast). *Vandeleur Street* (Kilrush), *Rosse Row* (Birr), *Brownlow Road* (Lurgan), *Altamont Street* (Westport), *Esmonde Street* (Gorey), and *Farnham Street* (Cavan) typify the many names of this genre.

### Names Commemorating Patriots and Politicians

It is difficult to separate the politicians from the patriots: many individuals played both roles. Most naming was undertaken by English speakers who had very little appreciation of the Gaelic world, so that few names relate to leaders who lived prior to the eighteenth century. The exceptions include King Brian Boramha, Eoghan Rua O'Neill [Owen Roe O'Neill], and Patrick Sarsfield. The first big cluster of commemorative names refers to the major figures of the eighteenth century (Protestant) Irish Parliament, and especially to Henry Grattan. Examples include *Grattan Place* (Clonmel, Dublin), *Grattan Court*, *Grattan Parade* (Dublin), *Grattan Street* (Sligo, Portlaoise, Dublin, Cork) and *Grattan Road* (Galway).

Next comes a vast group of street-names associated with the leading figures of the 1798 Rising. These include *Teeling Street* (Sligo), *Wolfe Tone Street* (Limerick), and *Lord Edward Street* (Kilkenny). Emmet's ill-fated rising of 1803 is remembered in *Emmet Road*, three *Emmet Streets*, and an *Emmet Square* in Dublin, in *Emmet Street* (Clonmel), in *Emmet Place* (Nenagh) and in *Ann Devlin Avenue* and *Ann Devlin Park* (Templeogue). The early nineteenth-century champion of Catholic Emancipation, the great lawyer Daniel O'Connell, attracted a vast following in his own lifetime. His name came to be linked with some of the

major thoroughfares in Irish towns, e.g., *O Connell Street* (Waterford); and older names, e.g., *Sackville Street* (Dublin), were cast aside in his favor.

The Young Ireland Movement of the 1840s, culminating in the rising of 1848, brought together a large group of (mainly Protestant) writers and revolutionaries. Prominent among them were Thomas Davis, Charles Gavan Duffy, James Fintan Lalor, and John Mitchel. The fiftieth anniversary of their rising, coinciding with the centenary of the Rising of 1798, induced a wave of patriotic fervor which led to scores of streets being renamed. Among the names of this type are *Thomas Davis Street* (Cork), *Thomas Davis Street South* (Dublin), *Davis Street* (Limerick, Tipperary), *Davis Road* (Clonmel), *John Mitchel Place* (Newry), and *Mitchel Street* (Limerick, Clonmel, Thurles, Nenagh, Tipperary).

Two major figures dominated the second half of the nineteenth century: Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-91), the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party in the British House of Commons, and Michael Davitt (1846-1900) the founder of the Land League. Parnell in particular, caught the popular imagination: he is commemorated in *Parnell Square* (previously Rutland Square), *Parnell Street* (formerly Great Britain Street), *Parnell Road*, *Parnell Avenue*, and *Parnell Place* (Dublin) and in *Parnell Street* (Waterford, Wexford, Limerick, Thurles). Davitt's name is remembered in *Davitt Road* (Dublin), *Davitt Street* (Limerick, Tipperary), and *Davitt Road North and South* (Wexford).

### **Names Arising from the War of Independence**

However, as might be expected, it is the men who were closely associated with the struggle for independence and with the establishment of the new Irish state who figure most prominently of all among the commemorative names. The major leader was Pearse. Among the thoroughfares called in his honor are *Pearse Street* (Dublin), *Pearse Avenue* (Galway), and *Pearse Road* (Cork). Limerick City named many of the streets in Willmount Estate after the 1916 Leaders: *Pearse Avenue*, *Clarke Avenue*, *Daly Avenue*, *Mc Donagh Avenue*, *Mc Dermott Avenue*, *Connolly Avenue*, *Colbert Avenue*, *Casement Avenue*. A similar practice of honoring patriots was followed in the Finglas area of Dublin: there whole clusters of names center on Plunkett, Mellows, Casement, and



Barry. Other instances include *Sean Mac Dermott Street* (Dublin), *Collins Avenue* (Dublin, Limerick), *Ashe Street* (Tralee), *Mac Curtain Street* (Cork, Gorey), *Cathal Brugha Street* (Dublin, Cashel), *Sean Tracy Avenue* (Thurles), and *Plunkett Avenue* (Galway). Arthur Griffith (1871-1922), the founder of Sinn Féin, is commemorated in *Griffith Avenue* (Dublin) and elsewhere. A recent addition to Irish commemorative names has been that of the late President of the U.S.A., e.g., *John F. Kennedy Road and Drive* (Dublin). Recent Irish politicians have seldom been honored in this way: a rare exception is found in *Donough O Malley Park* (Limerick).

### English Commemoratives

Of course many commemoratives associated with the British regime have survived, and such name types are still being proliferated in the six-county area still under British control. Recently created examples of these include *Queen Elizabeth Road* (Enniskillen) and *Princess Way* (Portadown). Older instances are *Victoria Street* (Belfast, Lurgan, Larne), *Great Victoria Street* (Belfast), *Victoria Place* (Galway), *Albert Bridge Road* (Belfast), *Victoria Road* (Derry, Cork), *Hanover Place* (Coleraine), *Wellington Road* (Cork), *Wellington Quay* (Drogheda), *Cumberland Street* (Birr), *Windsor Street* (Edenderry), *Prince of Wales Terrace* (Dublin), *Hanover Road* (Carlow), *Coburg Street* (Cork), *Clarendon Street* (Dublin), *Essex Quay* (Dublin), *Chichester Street* (Belfast), and the like.

### Battle and Treaty Names

Some commemoratives related to battles or events rather than to individuals. Eoghan Rua O'Neill's great victory over the English under Munro in 1646 is brought to mind by *Benburb Street* (Dublin). The defeat of Gaelic Ireland in 1691 is encapsulated in *Aughrim Street* (Dublin). The signing of the Treaty of Limerick in that same year is kept fresh in *Treaty Terrace* and *Treaty Villas*. The courage of the "Wild Geese"<sup>2</sup> is proclaimed in *Ramillies Road*, *Cremona Road*, *Landen Road*, and *Fontenoy Street* (Dublin). Nelson's naval victory is remembered in *Trafalgar Lane* and *Trafalgar Terrace* (Dún Laoghaire) while Napoleon's downfall finds expression in *Upper Waterloo Road* (Larne). The incorporation of

Ireland into the English state gave rise to such names as *Union Quay* (Cork). Events from the First World War are recalled in the street names of the “Holy Land” (Belfast).

### Irish Language Names

For the greater part Irish street nomenclature is in the English language, but it does contain many Irish-language elements in a corrupt form. This has arisen in a number of ways.

First, many destination names are based directly on Irish-language placenames. For example, the names of the main roads leading out of Portadown, County Armagh, are practically all of this nature: *Lurgan Road* [ < *An Lorgain*], *Tandragee Road* [ < *Tóin re Gaoith*], *Armagh Road* [ < *Ard Mhacha*], *Dungannon Road* [ < *Dún Geanainn*]. The same applies to most of the roads out of Derry: *Letterkenny Road* [ < *Leitir Ceanainn*], *Dungiven Road* [ < *Dún Geimhin*], *Limavady Road* [ < *Léim an Mhadaidh*], *Buncrana Road* [ < *Bun Cranncha*]. One could paint a similar picture for nearly every other town in Ireland.

Secondly, as towns expanded they often made use of the titles of local territorial divisions, especially of townlands or of local cultural features, in the naming process, e.g., *Garvaghy Road* [ < *Garbhachadh*] (Portadown), *Stranmillis Road* [ < *Sruthan Millis* ‘sweet stream’] (Belfast), *Shankill Road* [ < *Seanchill* ‘old church’] (Belfast), *Stillorgan Road* [ < *Stigh Lorgan* ‘Lorcan’s house or monastery’] (Dublin), *Taney Road* [ < *Tí Naithí* ‘Naithi’s monastery’] (Dublin), and the like.

Thirdly, towns sometimes expanded into areas where the Irish-language was still being spoken so that certain district names were absorbed in a relatively uncorrupted form, e.g., *the Claddagh* [*An Cladach* ‘the shore’] (Galway), *Garryowen* [*Garrdha Eoin* ‘Eoin’s garden’] (Limerick), and *Ballyphehane* [*Baile Féitheán*] (Cork); and these came to form the basis of whole clusters of names later on.

Fourthly, Irish was a living language in some towns, notably Galway, until quite recently and in a number of others, including the capital city, it still thrived in the eighteenth century (Piatt). As a result certain Irish names were absorbed in a natural way into the street-name pattern (O Máille), e.g., *Bohermore* [*Bothar Mór* ‘the big road’] (Galway), *Bóthar na Sop* (Ballina), *Ballybough Road* [*Baile Bocht* ‘poor town’] (Dublin),

*Bohereenglass* [*Bóithrín Glas* ‘little green road’] (Cashel), *Boherannisge* [*Bóthar an Uisce* ‘water road’] (Tipperary), *Parkavera* [*Páirc a’ Mhéara* ‘the mayor’s field’] (Galway), *Boherboy* [*Bóthar Buí*] (Tralee), *Boheraniska* [*Bóthar an Uisce*, ‘water road’] (Clonmel) and *Bóthar na Gréine* or *Sun Street* (Tuam). Unfortunately, in many cases as English became dominant the Irish names disappeared and English ones replaced them, thus in Galway City *An Bóthar Ard* ‘the high road’ gave way to *Taylor’s Hill*, *An Póirse Chaoch* ‘the blind arch’ became *The Spanish Arch*, and *Sráid na Súdairí* ‘the street of the tanners’ yielded to *Lower Abbeygate Street*.

Finally, in a few instances local authorities, or more rarely still, developers, bestowed Irish-language names on new streets. Examples include *Cois na hAbhann* ‘beside the river,’ *Gleann na Smól* ‘thrush valley,’ *Cúl na Gréine* ‘back of the sun,’ *Lios na Sidhe* ‘fairy fort,’ *Dún an Oir* ‘fort of the gold’ – all these are located in the Oldbawn suburb in southwest Dublin.

### Summary

It is clear that there are many different strata buried in the names of Irish streets, and that there are a number of distinct linguistic strands interwoven in them. Furthermore, there exist marked regional variations within the overall pattern, for instance English and Scottish influence is much stronger in the northern towns than elsewhere. Similarly, certain historical differences emerge clearly, e.g., the eighteenth century left a deep imprint on the Dublin streetscape whereas Belfast’s nomenclature reflects the nineteenth-century expansion of that industrial city.

### Conclusion

It must be emphasized that the data here is very tentative indeed, and almost every item given requires further investigation. Much historical and linguistic research needs to be done before these various layers and threads can be fully elucidated. In particular, detailed studies of the name-patterns of individual towns are required, as are reviews of specific linguistic contributions and of different historic periods. When sufficient such specialist tools become available it will prove possible to expose the individual layers of the complex palimpsest of the Irish urban name-

scapes. Until that day dawns the full picture of Irish street nomenclature must remain obscure.

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## Notes

1. Ireland is divided into a very large number (ca. 62,000) of small territorial units called townlands. Most are very small (50-250 acres). Despite appearances this term has no urban connotation. See *Census of Ireland for the year 1851*.

2. The term "Wild Geese" was applied to the Irish officers who were obliged to leave Ireland after the surrender of Limerick in 1691 and who found new careers in the armies of continental Europe, especially in that of France.

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