

## Blog 17 - May 7 - Walking Tour of Galway

Our “free day” in Galway started with short bursts of sunlight peeking through otherwise grey skies. We slept in a bit before popping down for breakfast. Then we headed out to the Tourist Office to find out what our options were.

We had two options to consider. A couple of competing “hop on-hop off” two decker buses which take you through the city and then out to the perimeter sites like the Saltink Beach and the Galway Cathedral. After yesterday's long day of driving we opted for shanks mare and waited for our tour guides arrival at 11:30.

Our guide Billy arrived right on time and had seven of us ready to go. The cost was E10 for adults and E8 for seniors, but he wasn't allowed to collect the money in the Info building, so he said we would head down to the town Square (Eyre) and he would do the “business” there.

The 90-minute walking tour would cover the medieval core of historic Galway and that really appealed to us. We thought we were suitably dressed in layers for the occasion, however that proved to be wrong as the walk took way longer to finish and we were frozen solid by 2:00 pm.

Our certified guide was an ex teacher with two degrees in history and a Masters. He told us a bit about his family history which proved very interesting when we got into the history “lesson” as he call them throughout the walk.

Bill started us off in Eyres Square. He did do the “money business” thing and it was E10 per person. We were going to mention the senior rate, but since he must of thought we were younger so we let him have his illusion.

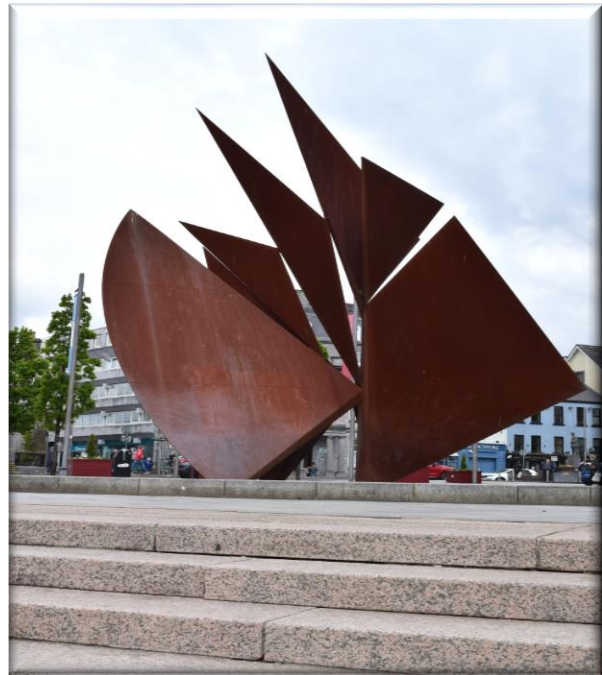


*Eyre Square ('An Fhaiche Mhór' in Irish) in the heart of Galway City, is officially known as the John F. Kennedy Memorial Park. The square has a rich history dating back to medieval times when markets took place on the green in front of the town gates. In 1710, Mayor Edward Eyre officially presented the plot of land to the city. It remains a popular gathering place for visitors and natives alike and the grass areas are often packed on sunny days.*

*A bust of the US President Kennedy, who was made a Freeman of the city, marks the spot where he made a speech to approximately 100,000 Galway people in 1963, on his last trip before his assassination.*

*Over the years, the square has undergone a number of name changes and facelifts to become the present square, which received the Irish Landscape Institute Design Award in 2007.*

There are a number of ornate fixtures in the park, such as the historic Browne family mansion doorway (1627) and the Quincentennial fountain (1984) which is a representation of the Galway Hooker, which is a traditional fishing boat unique to Galway.



Just going back to JFK's visit. The Irish liked JFK due to his Irish Catholic heritage but they also liked him because he was just like them in many ways. He had the gift of gab and was a bit of a "bullshitter". (Billy's wording).

Galway was a bit depressed at the time and JFK's presence gave them a real economic boost. The Bishop of Galway at the time of JFK's visit was in the midst of trying to build a Cathedral and they had run out of money. JFK wrote out a personal cheque to help complete it which they did in 1965.

Even though the structure was built in modern times it looks like it was built a hundred years ago. The Bishop had wanted to build it in the town square but he was denied permission so instead the city manager gave him a piece of land outside the city walls atop the old city gaol, which happened often in Ireland e.g. Colman Cathedral in Cobh near Cork. We had hoped to visit the cathedral but it was about a 20-minute walk in the opposite direction of our hotel so we just couldn't do it. In this photo you can just see the green dome of the Cathedral.

Galway City has a population of 80,000 and is the 4th largest city in the country after Dublin, Cork, Limerick. In early years the settlers were farmers and fisherman. Then came the Normans from France.

One man in particular played an important part in the rebuilding of Galway “economically”. DeBourgue got permission from the King of England for a City Charter which placed Galway under the protection of the Crown and then he started to bring in 14 tribal leaders from Normandy. These families became well known as they were traders with France, Spain and Portugal as well as the Mediterranean region. They started to prosper, they wanted Galway to become a vibrant city. One of their contributions was to build a city of stone instead of wood. (The photo of the door on the first page was one of the legacy’s remaining to this era - Browne was one of the 14 tribal families).

Proper walls for defense and a safe protected port and canals and rivers for the safety of citizens was another of their legacies. Personally, they did very well for themselves until the English King decided to suppress the Catholics and he sent in Oliver Cromwell in the 1600’s.

Cromwell and his army did so in ruthless fashion, deported all the traders and killed thousands of innocent citizens and then reallocated ownership of lands to his soldiers who became landlords of the people. As the famines came many were starved to death or emigrated on ships for the new world. Galway rapidly slipped into poverty as many gave up their land for 5 pounds which was the cost of ships passage to the new world.

The economy of Galway remained largely poor until the 1970’s when the two universities began to flourish and four hospitals developed to a point where bio-medical technology companies began to arrive. IT firms, like HP are located in Galway and other multinational companies set up. This provided lots of employment opportunities for those in Galway. became



Lots of young people started to arrive and with their arrival lots of creativity and cultural energy was injected into Galway. All of these things have contributed to “Galway” today a city of festivals, music, TV networks and theatrical productions. There is a very artsy cultural buzz in the air around Galway for sure.

As Bill explained Galway is a city of young people and artsy individuals. This is very evident as you see the wonderful inner city of Galway alive and buzzing as Kevin said. I just loved this area and you truly can see how things are turning around.

Bill said, that a lot of apartments are being built on the upper levels of the buildings and this is another thing that is bringing life to the inner city. Because people live right here, it doesn't close down at 7:00 at night but thrives into the early hours.

On our tour we saw various examples of earlier building styles but not much restoration work has been done as yet. We did see lots of "recycling" which basically meant recycling of earlier materials to fit into the new storyline.



This photo shows some of the older architectural examples that keep reappearing. This bar owner was replacing some of his windows and he had to tear away some of the brick work. He uncovered the stonework which is shown. Not sure if he is going to expose more of the brick, but he is going to leave these beautiful examples there for us all to see.

This building is the Lynch Castle another of the 14 tribal families. I believe Bill said this was the last of the limestone buildings in Galway that are intact. It is the home of the Irish AIB - Allied Irish Bank. The majority of the front of the building is the original limestone work, however the bank did add the arches over the doorway.



There is quite a "story?" about the Lynch family and we saw another example of an old wall and window which was said to be part of their building.

The Earl of Lynch, was the Mayor of Galway and he had a son. His son had a "lady friend" who was reported to be very beautiful. A visitor of the Earl's rather took a fancy to the lovely Anna and the son did not like this at all, so he murdered him.

The officials brought the son before his father and said he killed a man, you are the Mayor, you deal with it. The Earl of Lynch supposedly had hung his oldest son from a window for committing this murder. According to all - this is where the term lynching came from. Many of the Lynch family members immigrated to the US (a lot in the Southern States). Many of them

became wealthy landowners, plantation owners complete with “slaves”. The term lynching followed them - it was their way of dealing with unrepentant or disobedient slaves.

Other types of dated stones in the same wall seemed to be at odds with what actually had happened. As Bill said to the couple on the tour with us from Boston - “put that in your pipe and smoke it” the term came from Ireland. We all had a good laugh about that.



***As legend has it, in 1493 the town's mayor hung his son from this window for murdering a visitor.***



Bill took us into a few really scary “alley’s”. He wanted to show us what the Ireland he grew up in was like. The seventies - the hippies - the poverty. It was actually awful in there. Reality often is!

This photo which was in this “old courtyard” shows a medial passageway.

I just couldn’t take photos in there, but the walls had painted images of John Lennon and David Bowie, windows hanging out of buildings, garbage. Bill said it was a shame that the city didn’t spend some of its money cleaning up these areas.



Our next stop was St Nicholas' Church which is quite an active one and it has become an inter-denominational church and a community centre for arts and music. St Nicholas, the patron saint of anyone who is marginalized has opened its door to the community. When the Catholic church was undergoing intensive renovations the Minister at St. Nicholas' invited them to hold their masses in his church. This willingness to be all inclusive continues to this very day.

Another interesting fact. Remember what I said in an earlier blog about being told the ruins we were looking at were those of a church Cromwell had destroyed. Naught! It was St. Nicholas that was destroyed. The Cromwellian troops used the church as a stable for their horses after the siege of Galway in 1652. They are blamed for the headless and handless state of most of the carved figures inside the church. They left

the church in ruins.

Bill told us that one of the most famous visitors to St Nicholas' over the centuries was Christopher Columbus, who likely prayed here during a visit to Galway in 1477.



Just across the street from the church is a very famous building Bill said.

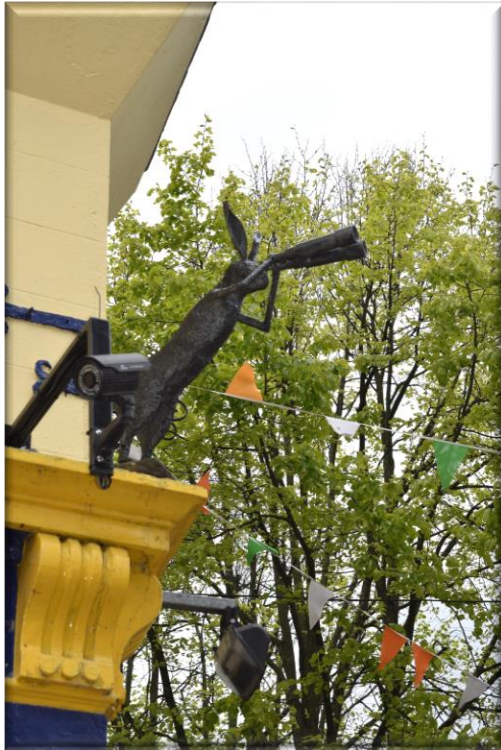
He clarified this statement by saying "modern day famous". Sheridans. An Irish family run business. The Cheesemongers of Ireland. A lovely place to have lunch. Most tourists don't know about it as it is a little out of the way.

Our tour continued down to the port area where Billy pointed out one of the 7 locks of Galway. An interesting fact is that the river Corrib is the shortest river in Ireland and it connects Lache Corrib to the sea.

Another interesting "tidbit". Galway has become a city of so many cultures. You can see evidence of this diverse culture everywhere you turn. Turkish, Spanish, English, Scottish and the list goes on. This was such an interesting mural.



Bill told us about the many theatres that are here in Galway, the development of their own TV network; the concerts, the famous singers. What a wonderful history this city has.



One of my favorite photos was of the proverbial “hare” . Situated on the corner of the pub on the busiest street in Galway - what is the meaning? Think about it.

Even the Hare has his telescope to view the scene and see the sea.

Or is there looking for gossip to share?

We were nearing the end of our tour when Bill our guide took us up into this sheltered area which showed a map of the entire “old” Galway and we were able to piece all the information he had been sharing with us to this map.

We were at the site of current day Customs and Excise Building. They were wanting to do an expansion and had to get approval to excavate the site. What was discovered were the ruins of the original Norman fort. Even the pillars of the building that had been there were uncovered. You never would guess what building the foundation was of - the original Customs House. The old and the new have been joined leaving the foundation exposed.



The tour ended at the Spanish Arch which recognized the strong Spanish connection to Galway.



Judi was quite taken with a billboard outside a local restaurant. Billy told us the restaurant was incredible. With a great seafood menu.

Nemo's

*One of Galway's most enduring restaurants, housed in one of the city's most iconic restaurant spaces, Ard Bia has always placed as much emphasis on community experiences and aesthetic stimulation as on serving great food in a fun environment. We believe in having roots in a place whilst having an identity that transcends location and takes inspiration from around the world.*



I didn't see the billboard until Judi showed me the photo.

We were absolutely freezing by the time so we stopped into the Galway Museum Cafe and had a nice warm bowl of soup before we had to trek back to our hotel. My old Fitbit is getting quite a work out. Gosh these Irish soups and chowders are delicious. I can see my freezer being filled this winter.

We had a quick look at our walking map and saw if we could find Merchant Street it would be a straighter and quicker way back to the hotel. The wind had picked up

and it was just starting to rain so this was our return route.



We got back to the hotel just as the rain started. What a wonderful History tour of Galway we had and we highly recommend it to anyone wanting to learn about this city.

We rested in our room until about 8:30 when we headed down to the dining room in our hotel. We had a lovely waitress "Ingrid" who is from Croatia. She has told us a lot about her homeland, and it has made us think we might like to go there.

We had a lovely meal of mussels and seafood. Beautiful.

Our time in Galway is running out, tomorrow we head to Connemara and the Abbey as well as Cong the town made famous because of "The Quiet Man" movie.

KJ