

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/1

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A Blooming Good Pub Crawl

WHEN I FIRST READ JAMES JOYCE'S *ULYSSES* I took note of the drinking establishments mentioned in the massive work. I then armed myself with a map of Dublin and a list of the pubs and off I went on a *Ulysses* pub crawl around the city.

Many of the establishments in *Ulysses* are no longer with us and because of this and the fact that I had only given myself just one day to carry out such an extensive pub crawl, I must now state that I failed to visit ALL of the pubs mentioned.

Nevertheless the start of my Pub crawl began at noon as I made my way to Larry O'Rourke's.

In the fourth chapter of *Ulysses* Leopold Bloom strolls past O'Rourke's pub and wonders how publicans can make a living in a city infested with pubs. It is something still worth wondering to this day!

Bloom even comes up with the puzzle of crossing Dublin without passing a pub. Well I had no intention of doing such a thing on my *Ulysses* pub crawl!

Bloom doesn't go into O'Rourke's pub but as he passes it he describes *from the cellar grating floating up the flabby gush of porter.*

Today that is no longer the case and the name of the pub isn't even Larry O'Rourke's! In its place at the corner of Dorset street and Eccles street is the Aurora, a modernised gastro pub where all the trendy folk go.

In *Ulysses* we get the sense that Larry O'Rourke's was a stale smelling booze house but that is certainly no longer the case.

The food in the Aurora is considered locally as the best grub in the city but I had my mind set on having some food elsewhere and instead I settled in at the bar with a glass of Guinness.

The large establishment leans more towards an eatery rather than a public house but at least *Ulysses* was recognised with the ground floor bar named after Larry O'Rourke, but needless to say it doesn't resemble the Edwardian porter house that Bloom walked past on that June morning in 1904.

The staff there were pleasant as was the Guinness but I had to press on to my next pub.

I took the long ramble across the city in the direction of Davy Byrnes where I went for a cheese sandwich and a glass of red wine.

I thought it a good idea to line my stomach with some food and of course I had the famous gorgonzola cheese sandwich and glass of burgundy wine that Bloom had in Davy Byrnes.

The pub located on Duke Street is a tourist Mecca for literary types. Bloom calls Davy Byrnes, *a moral pub* and goes on to describe it as a *nice quite bar* and *nicely planned* and he wasn't far off the mark, it is indeed a nice pub with a generous inviting atmosphere.

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Although Bloom paid just seven pence for his lunch I paid E5.50euro for the sandwich and E5.35 for the glass of wine.

The one thing I didn't like about Davy Byrnes was the amount of modernisation which has inflicted the pub over the years, but I suppose that is the price of progress and like many a location and landmark mentioned in *Ulysses* which have succumbed to such progress, at least Davy Byrnes is still serving that famous sandwich and wine.

My next stop, the Ormond hotel, was the setting for the episode of Sirens but it closed down in 2006 along with it's bar which was called The Sirens Bar.

I decided to head across the river once again, towards Abbey street to Mooney's pub.

It was mentioned as a pub that young Stephen Dedalus frequented but like the Ormond Hotel, Mooney's public house is no more and in its place is a bank.

Standing outside it I craned my neck up to study the building and lo and behold there above it's doorway engraved in stone I could make out the old pub sign 'Mooney & Co. Ltd Wines and Spirits.'

One pub that was mentioned in *Ulysses* and is still operating as one is The Oval Bar and it was there that I sauntered off to next.

Bloom's young chum Stephen Dedalus was accompanied by his friend Ned Lambert as they went to The Oval bar for a lunch time libation.

Like many a pub across Ireland nowadays the afternoon clientele tend to stop by just for food and upstairs at the Oval bar the place was fairly bursting with people gouging on such delicacies like beef and vegetable stew but downstairs I sat at the wonderfully long marble bar and engaged in great talk with the jovial bar man.

The Guinness was great in this watering hole, in fact it was so good I opted to stay for more than one.

From there I took the short brisk walk towards Little Britain street where Barney Kiernan's pub once stood.

Although the pub doesn't exist anymore I still wanted to see where it was because it plays a part in the only real action sequence in *Ulysses*.

These days it is a run down abandoned eye sore and not even a plaque commemorates the pub where, albeit fictionally, Leopold Bloom got into a hysterical bar brawl with some rough characters.

I didn't linger long because the thirst was getting the better of me so I headed for the Bleeding Horse pub.

After a very long yet leisurely walk I finally reached Camden street where The Bleeding Horse Pub is situated.

This 17th century pub has all the hallmarks of a historic drinking hole from the outside but as I entered it I soon found a hipster atmosphere vibrating through its primitive walls.

I took a seat just inside the door and gulped back my glass of Guin-

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ness while taking in the surroundings which for that early evening at least seemed nice and relaxed.

The Bleeding Horse Pub gets a mention in the Eumaeus episode of *Ulysses* and as the young bar man was doing his best to pour the perfect glass of stout for me we got talking about past clientele of the ancient pub.

He informed me that James Joyce was once a drinker there and was thrown out many times for being over inebriated. I didn't know whether to take his information seriously or not but I thanked him for such a story anyway. I could have stayed at the Bleeding Horse longer but time was against me so I had to push on to my next destination.

Also given a mention in the episode of Eumaeus is the Brazen Head Pub but Joyce incorrectly stated the place as being situated '*over in Wine Tavern street*' when in fact it can be found on Bridge street.

I was in the Brazen Head many years ago and going back there again I saw nothing has changed, in fact nothing at all has changed in the old pub since its founding in 1198AD!

In *Ulysses* we find out that you can get a '*decent enough do in the Brazen Head*' and while I was there I tucked into a plate of stew as all that walking around Dublin had stirred a great hunger in me.

From the Brazen Head I walked down along the quays in the direction of 'Nighttown.' It was a long stretch for my legs but as the late evening cloaked in around the city it was a pleasant walk nevertheless.

Joyce calls it 'Nighttown' but in the early twentieth century it was called Montgomery street, or the Monto as the locals used to call the street filled with dens of disrepute.

Nowadays it's known as Foley street and has parted with it's sinful ways since religious groups swooped into the area in the 1920s to clean up its bad reputation.

Nighttown no longer resembles the hedonistic place Bloom and young Dedalus scuttled through and some years ago a street in the area was re-named James Joyce street.

I went for my next drink to the pub once known as Cormack's but now it is called Mother Kelly's.

Sitting on the corner of Talbot street this was the pub Bloom stood outside to catch his breath when he gained a stitch in his side from running after a drunk Stephen Dedalus.

The pint was good and cheap in Mother Kelly's and the cosy old pub swelled with a decent mixture of locals and tourists.

As I sat down with my drink a group of traditional musicians were striking up at the other end of the bar so I decided to stay for just a few more glasses of stout and soak in the craic.

Although I was getting tired from my day of drinking my way around Dublin I decided to hit one more pub before closing time.

I left Mother Kelly's and made my way down to Cleary's pub under a railway bridge on Amiens street.

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In *Ulysses* it was known as the Signal House and still has the same exterior and interior as it had when it first opened in the 19th century.

Cleary's was much quieter than Mother Kelly's but just as friendly. Bloom and Dedalus tramped their way past Cleary's, or the Signal House as it was known then, on their trek out of nighttown towards home and I was also finishing up my day here too.

With my belly full of stout and my legs knackered beyond belief I finished my *Ulysses* pub crawl in Cleary's and then headed home.

I was tired no doubt but I was happy I had accomplished what I had set out to do.

Although many of the drinking establishments mentioned in *Ulysses* are no longer around and the fact that my legs or my liver wouldn't be able to visit every single public house still in operation, I left Dublin with a satisfied albeit intoxicated mind.