

Dublin – A Brief History

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“Though Dublin cannot boast the venerable age of many European cities, it can at least claim a respectable antiquity.”

The history of community living in Dublin can be traced back to 130AD and Ptolemy's map, which shows the town of Eblana (Dublin). However for the first 10 centuries of its existence Dublin could not rightly be called an Irish city. For more than 300 years, since the Norsemen wrested of it control in 836AD, Dublin had been the centre of a small Scandinavian kingdom.

Dublin's image as the metropolis of Ireland only becomes apparent with the advent of Anglo-Norman rule in the 12th Century. The historical city was founded and grew up around Christchurch. This layout was organic and incorporated stout defensive walls. In the following centuries development moved eastwards down the River Liffey, where a formal Georgian city emerged.

Dublin's great architectural period was in the 18th century. The most important statutory influence on Dublin's growth in this period were the Wide Streets Commissioners and they helped create a city of fine public buildings, elegant streetscapes and residential squares. The framework of modern Dublin is largely their work.

The Wide Streets Commissioners were originally appointed under an Act of the old Irish Parliament in 1757 for the making of "a wide and convenient street from Essex Bridge to the Castle of Dublin." This new street is the Parliament Street of today. Many other streets were subsequently laid out or enlarged and so we have the spacious thoroughfares of Dame Street, Lower Abbey Street, Beresford Place, O'Connell Street, Westmoreland Street, D'Olier Street, Burgh Quay, Hawkins Street, etc.

Earlier in the 18th century the River Liffey was enclosed with walls, and towards the end of the century the two canals, embracing Dublin on the North and South sides, were constructed. New bridges spanned the Liffey, and the construction of the North and South Circular Roads completed the framework of the modern city. This was facilitated by a kind of public-private partnership as the nobility, the professional, manufacturing and mercantile classes vied with one another to make Dublin worthy of its place as the country's capital

The shift in political and economic status following the Act of Union of 1800 meant that major city rebuilding projects gradually ceased. And in 1840 a reformed Corporation took control of the city's affairs. Public funds, now wholly provided by the Municipality had to be diverted from the re-planning of the city streets, to the provision of a system of sanitation and other services to take the place of the primitive conditions that had existed.

Until the mid 20th century the Corporation was largely concerned with providing adequate sanitation and housing. Costly replanning schemes, such as those of the Wide Street Commissioners, were put on the back burner. Legislation providing for the drawing up and enforcing of a planning scheme for Dublin was not passed until 1934.

And in 1941 the first town planning report for Dublin and its surrounding area was published. This Sketch Development Plan for Dublin identified the River Liffey as the city's backbone. It went on to recommend that an outer limit be set for city in order to maintain a green belt surrounding the city and restrict urban sprawl. And mentioned is also made of the need to do something about the decaying nature of the city's Georgian heritage.

Despite this realisation Dublin continued to decay and the city was in a desperate state by the 1980s, in danger of disintegrating. The historic heart of the city, Temple bar, was in disrepair and due to become a central Bus Depot. Through community pressure, this plan was defeated and the government launched the Temple Bar initiative as a flagship project to mark Dublin's year as European City of Culture in 1991. The Temple Bar urban renewal project began as a common vision articulated by diverse groups of local cultural and business organisations, architects and conservationists, who recognised the importance of the area. A state agency, Temple Bar Properties, was set up to develop the area as Dublin's cultural quarter, building on what had already taken place in the area. A competition for an architectural framework plan was held. The winning entry by Group 91 Architects was then adopted and implemented by Temple Bar Properties. This was the first framework plan to be drawn up for any urban area in Ireland.

In 1996 a review of Dublin's urban renewal programme was commissioned and carried out by KPMG, architects Murray O'Laoire and the Northern Ireland Economic Research Centre. The report argued that the Temple Bar Achitectural Framework Plan could be adopted as a model for integrated planning. It recommended the drafting of an Integrated Area Plan (IAP) for any area that was to be designated for urban renewal. Also tax incentives would be linked to these plans taking account of community development, employment, urban design and conservation considerations.

The success of the Temple Bar Architectural Framework Plan, as a model of urban renewal, continues to inform the redevelopment of other areas in Dublin such as O'Connell St., the HARP area, and the Docklands. Each of these areas now has an Integrated Area Plan and these are examined in the following sections.