

Leaving Cert Cycle: The Georgian Beginnings of Henrietta Street

Henrietta Street was built in the mid 18th century, almost 300 years ago, when Ireland was still part of the British Empire. The street changed significantly over the years, as a result of the actions of certain people, and wider events happening in Ireland and across the world. As the street changed, the identity of the people who lived there also changed. This section looks at what these changes were, and why they happened, from the creation of Henrietta Street in the 18th century, up until the mid 20th century.



14 Henrietta Street

Senior Cycle School Resources

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1: Introduction

14 Henrietta Street is a social history museum of Dublin life, from one building's Georgian beginnings to its tenement times. We connect the history of urban life over 300 years to the stories of the people who called this place home. The aim of this pack is to provide you with a toolkit of case studies and further resources to help you design activities, lessons, and projects for your Leaving Cert history group.

2. How this pack links to the history syllabus

This resource pack provides an exploration of various topics on the Leaving Cert history syllabus through the context of *14 Henrietta Street*. The pack connects to the core concerns of the history syllabus, in particular 'Human experience - the concern of history'; 'Time and change - the essence of history', and 'Developing understanding - the revision of history'

Regardless of your topic of study, your group will develop their skills as historians through a visit to *14 Henrietta Street* and the tools in this pack. However, there are particularly strong links to the following topics on the syllabus:

Early Modern:

- The end of the Irish kingdom and the establishment of the Union, 1770-1815

Later Modern:

- Ireland and the Union, 1815-1870
- Movements for political and social reform, 1870-1914
 - Case study: Dublin 1913 – strike and lockout
- Government, economy and society in the Republic of Ireland, 1949-198

Throughout this pack, there is a focus on different types of evidence, reflecting the 'working with evidence' section of the syllabus framework.

3. The Georgian Beginnings of Henrietta Street

Syllabus links:

- *The end of the Irish kingdom and the establishment of the Union, 1770-1815*
- *Ireland and the Union, 1815-1870*

Leaving Cert Cycle: The Georgian Beginnings of Henrietta Street

Henrietta Street is the earliest Georgian Street in Dublin. Construction on the street started in the mid 18th century, on land owned by Luke Gardiner. Henrietta Street quickly became Dublin's most exclusive address, attracting the leading figures from Ireland's governing elite. In its first thirty years, Henrietta Street was home to no less than six titled residents, two army generals, three archbishops, two speakers of the House of Commons and the Lord Chancellor of Ireland. These high-class town houses were social settings and political arenas, the scenes of parties, strategising and intrigue. Almost all of the Georgian residents of Henrietta Street were involved in politics or law, from MPs and Lords to powerful churchmen. They included Lord John Maxwell (Baron Farnham); Owen Wynne (MP for Sligo); the Earl of Thomond; George Stone (Bishop of Ferns); Nathaniel Clements MP; William Stewart (Earl of Blessington); Sir Robert King (Baron Kingsborough); and Nicholas Hume-Loftus (Earl of Ely).

After the Act of Union in 1801, many fashionable Dublin streets fell out of use as the aristocracy and socialites moved away. This period saw the rise of the professional middle classes such as doctors and lawyers, and the proximity of the King's Inns at the top of Henrietta Street led to the area becoming a legal enclave, where solicitors lived, trained, and worked. From 1800 until the 1840s, 14 Henrietta Street was the home and office of solicitors.



Exterior Shot of Henrietta Street (Photo by Ros Kavanagh)

The Georgian Beginnings of Henrietta Street

The Great Famine of the mid 19th century led to the establishment of the Encumbered Estates, which was set up to handle the large number of country estates that had become insolvent. The Encumbered Estates Court was established at 14 Henrietta Street, and the coach house at the back of the building was turned into a courtroom. From 1849, the purpose of 14 Henrietta Street was to manage the sale and settle the debts of these huge estates.

From 1862 until 1876, the fortunes of the building changed yet again when it became a barracks for the Dublin militia and was lived in by soldiers and their families. It was around this time that other buildings on the street started to be made into tenements. The soldiers did not make good neighbours for the members of the legal profession who still worked on the street, who made formal complaints to the government about the noise of their drilling, and the militia left in 1876.



Front door of Henrietta Street (Photo by Ros Kavanagh)

Humans of Henrietta Street



Luke Gardiner (a. 1690 - 1755)

Lived in 14 Henrietta Street: 1751 - 1758

Henrietta Street was developed by Luke Gardiner. We know very little about Gardiner's early life, origins or parentage, but he is believed to be a native of Dublin City. He became one of the most successful and wealthiest men in Ireland. He was an MP, a banker and as a property developer he shaped the face of the northside of Dublin. He developed Gardiner St, Mountjoy Square, Marlborough Street, and, for Ireland's elite and powerful, he created Henrietta Street.

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Viscount General Richard Molesworth (1680 - 1758)

Lived in 14 Henrietta Street: 1751 - 1758

The first family to occupy 14 Henrietta Street was the Molesworths: Viscount General Richard Molesworth of Swords and his second wife Mary. Richard Molesworth had a distinguished military career and led his regiments at the Battles of Blenheim (1704) and Ramillies (1706) during the War of the Spanish Succession. He was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Irish Army in 1751.

Molesworth's daughter by his first wife was Mary, Lady Belvedere. Her husband held her under house arrest in Gaulstown, Co. Westmeath for nearly thirty years, as he believed she had been unfaithful to him. Mary denied the accusations, but her family disowned her over the scandal. Once, she escaped and fled to 14 Henrietta Street for her father's help, but he turned her away.

Humans of Henrietta Street



Lady Mary Molesworth (1728 - 1763)

Lived in 14 Henrietta Street: 1751 - 1758

Born Mary Jenney Usher, Lady Mary Molesworth was only fifteen years old when she married Richard Molesworth in 1743, who was then sixty-three. She was described by writer Horace Walpole as a “very great beauty,” whose “amiable character” and virtue were “beyond all suspicion, untainted and irreproachable.”

Lady Mary had eight children, and died in 1763 in a house fire in London, along with her brother and two daughters.

Image ©National Trust Images/Derrick E.



John Bowes (1691 - 1767)

Lived in 14 Henrietta Street: 1751 - 1758

John Bowes was an Anglo-Irish politician and judge. He was noted for his legal ability and his hostility to Catholics. He once ruled during a land dispute that: “The law does not suppose any such person to exist as an Irish Roman Catholic, nor could such a person draw breath without the Crown’s permission.” Such extreme views made him very unpopular. He lived at 14 Henrietta Street until his death.

Image: Bust of John Bowes at Christchurch Cathedral, Dublin



Mary Wollstonecraft (1759 - 1797)

Lived in 15 Henrietta Street: 1786 - 1787

Mary Wollstonecraft moved to 15 Henrietta Street in 1786 to work as a governess for the three eldest daughters of the Kingsborough family. She did not get along with Lady Kingsborough and was dismissed the following year. Five years later she wrote the pioneering feminist book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Wollstonecraft gives us a look at a Dublin where women were expected to abide by what she regarded as oppressive social rules: “The least deviation from a ridiculous rule of propriety... would endanger their precarious existence”.

Image © National Portrait Gallery, London

Evidence of life on Henrietta Street

The condition of the street in 1807, after the Act of Union:

“Henrietta Street, once the proud residence of the O’Neills, the Shannons, the Ponsonbys, the Kingsboroughs, the Mountjoys and the primates and chiefs of our religious establishments, is now a heavy melancholy group of monuments of our recent prosperity, it is literally covered with grass.”

The Irish Magazine

Two descriptions of 14 Henrietta Street from the 1850s, when it was the Encumbered Estates Court:

The court was held in “one of the houses in Henrietta Street- a small and quiet, but handsome street in the extreme north of the city of Dublin”. The courtroom in the coach house at the back of number 14 was a “large, chilly-looking room, without a ceiling between the roof and the floor, furnished with some rows of seats for the public, a small table covered with green cloth for the bar and the attorneys, and an elevated bench unadorned even with the royal arms, for the commissioners”.

‘The History and Statistics of the Irish Incumbered Estates Court’ in The Journal of the Statistical Society of London vol.44 No.2 (June 1881) pp.203-234

“A large old-fashioned mansion in Henrietta Street, Dublin, was taken for the commissioners, the stable at its rear being enlarged into a court house, where the commissioners sat together two days weekly, and where the public sales of estates took place [...] the quantity of work which flowed in upon the court, especially in the years 1851-4 was in excess of all anticipations [...] Little account was made of the usual office hours, or even of customary periods of vacation. The only anxiety was to clear off the heavy work in the offices as rapidly and efficiently as possible.”

‘The History and Statistics of the Irish Incumbered Estates Court’ in The Journal of the Statistical Society of London vol.44 No.2 (June 1881) pp.203-234



1860: An advertisement for General Engineering, Geological Survey and Valuation Office

Some questions to consider

In the 1720s, Luke Gardiner set about transforming the face of Dublin with magnificent mansions, only thirty years after the Battle of the Boyne.

- What was happening in Ireland/Europe that led to this prosperous situation?
- What effect was the parliament at College Green having on the country before the Act of Union?
- What might life have been like for the women of Henrietta Street?
- After the Act of Union, much of the north side of Georgian Dublin went into decline and decay. Why was this?
- How was Henrietta Street affected by the Act of Union? Why was it affected differently to most other areas of Georgian Dublin?



Tenement Times and Social Reform (Henrietta Street 1870 - 1914)

The Famine of 1845-49 saw a huge influx of people move from the Irish countryside to the cities. Landlords capitalised on the demand for housing by buying huge Georgian houses and converting them into multiple living spaces known as tenements.

From the 1860s, a number of the houses on Henrietta Street had been converted into these tenement buildings. In 1876, Thomas Vance of Blackrock in Co. Dublin bought number 14 Henrietta Street with the intention of turning it into a tenement with fourteen flats. He removed the marble chimneys and mahogany doors of the grand Georgian period and sold them at auction. He removed the grand staircase to fit in more rooms, and the former servants stairs became the communal staircase. He installed two toilets.

Over the next few decades, 14 Henrietta Street and other tenements across Dublin became home to huge numbers of working people and the poor. In the 1911 census, over 100 people were registered as living at 14 Henrietta Street, the house built for one family in the 1700s.



14 Henrietta Street (Photo by Paul Tierney)

The Dublin Housing Inquiry 1913-1914

Published by the Local Government Board for Ireland, the Dublin Housing Inquiry was prompted by the collapse of two tenement buildings at No. 66 and No. 67 Church Street on the 2nd September 1913, when seven people died and many were injured. It was also a result of an increased public focus on the living conditions of the poor, as a result of the Dublin Lockout.

The report found that over 20,000 families lived in one-room tenements (23% of the entire population). Many buildings were classified as “unfit for human habitation”. The report was accompanied by a series of photographs of housing conditions, which were probably taken in autumn of 1913. They were presented to the Dublin Housing Inquiry in November 1913 by John Cooke, Honorary Treasurer of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC).

The report was presented to Parliament in February 1914, but with the outbreak of war in the summer of that year, housing conditions of Dublin ceased to be a political priority.

“I condemn the whole of the tenement system now existing. It breeds misery; and worse. It causes a great waste of human life and human force; men, women and children can never rise to the best that is in them under such conditions.”

- John Cooke, 1913



Back Stairs of 14 Henrietta Street (Photo by Ros Kavanagh)

The full report can be downloaded in the 'further resources' section below. Here are some extracts from the committee's recommendations:

TENEMENT HOUSES.

The vast majority of existing houses occupied by the working classes consist of what are called "Tenement Houses," that is to say, houses intended and originally used for occupation by one family, but which, owing to changes of circumstances, have been let out room by room, and are now occupied by separate families, one in each room for the most part.

As regards those tenement houses, we make the following suggestions, some of which cannot be effected without legislation.

CARETAKER.

If the landlord does not reside in the house there should be compulsorily a caretaker or other responsible person residing in the house and having charge of it.

The presence of a caretaker would prevent wilful damage by tenants, and tend to produce compliance with the Bye-laws, especially as to cleaning the stairs and passages, overcrowding in the rooms, and notification of infectious disease, and if the hall-doors were closed at night, and light provided in the hall, stairs and passages, the evils which are referred to in the report would be checked.

It is stated there on page 4 that:—"The front door is often left open all day and all night," and on page 5—that witnesses, including the clergy, have testified that—"The constantly open doors and the want of lighting in the halls and passages at night are responsible for much immorality."

The full report can be downloaded in the 'further resources' section below. Here are some extracts from the committee's recommendations:

WATER SUPPLY AND SANITARY ACCOMMODATION.

There should be a water tap and a sink to carry away dirty water on every floor.

The Bye-law No. 11 provides for privy accommodation so that the number of water closets or privies in relation to the greatest number of persons who, subject to the restrictions imposed by any bye-law in that behalf, may, at any one time, occupy rooms in the house as sleeping apartments, shall be in the proportion of not less than one water closet or privy to each twelve persons.

This provision, which is also in the Liverpool Bye-laws, is, we understand, not enforced by the Sanitary Authorities as it should be, and we doubt if it is adequate.

The water closets are generally in the yard. There should be at least one in the house, if not one on every floor.

These provisions for water supply and sanitary accommodation should be made conditions for the granting and renewal of the licence.

COOKING APPLIANCES.

Good cooking is essential to health, and badly fed men and women cannot work properly. The small open bedroom grates in the upper rooms in tenement houses are quite unfit for cooking meals, however simple, and waste much coal. We suggest that where the ordinary grates in living rooms are not suited for cooking purposes, small open ranges or stoves should be provided. They are not by any means expensive, about £3 15s., including fixing.

PUTTING HOUSES IN REPAIR.

The Report shows that most of the tenement houses have been allowed to go out of repair, and the difficulty is how to get the owners to put them in repair. The Corporation have no power to interfere unless the want of repair is such as to make the house unsanitary, dangerous, or unfit for habitation. If the system of licensing is adopted, it could be made a condition that the house first should be put in proper repair, and the caretaker would then be responsible

Evidence of life in 14 Henrietta Street as a tenement:

1877: An Irish Times advert for accommodation in 14 Henrietta Street:

“To be let to respectable families in a large house, Northside, recently papered, painted and filled up with every modern sanitary improvement, gas and wc on landings, Vartry Water, drying yard and a range with oven for each tenant; a large coachhouse, or workshop with apartments, to be let at the rere. Apply to the caretaker, 14 Henrietta St.”



Dublin Housing Inquiry 1914 - John Cooke



Ruined houses, 68, 69 and 70 Upper Dominick Street.

Dublin Housing Inquiry 1914 - John Cooke

Some questions to consider

- Why did so many Georgian developments like Henrietta Street become tenements in the latter part of the 19th century?
- What factors led to the Dublin Housing Inquiry of 1913?
- What were the key recommendations of the committee in the Dublin Housing Inquiry?
- Looking at the three photographs above, what do they tell us about tenement life in Dublin? Consider the sources: are they reliable?



*Children on Henrietta Street:
Courtesy of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*

The End of the Tenements

Introduction

After the Dublin Housing Inquiry, many tenements were condemned and their residents rehoused across the 20th century to new developments in the form of inner city flats, such as Henrietta House behind 14 Henrietta Street, and suburban developments such as Ballyfermot, Ballymun, Coolock, Crumlin, Darndale, Drimnagh, and Finglas.

For the people who lived in the tenements, this was a huge change. Some were delighted at the move into houses with their own bathrooms and gardens. Others missed the community spirit of the tenements, and struggled with the distance between the suburbs and their workplaces and schools in the city.



Stoneybatter Cottages (Photo by Marc O'Sullivan)

Evidence of life on Henrietta Street in the second half of the 20th century:

Many people still remember growing up in the tenements during the 20th century. Oral histories are a great way to capture these living memories and paint a vivid picture of what life was like in Dublin's tenements.

Because most of the people we talk to were children at the time, we have a rich collection of accounts of what tenement life was like from the perspective of a child. The interviews below are with former tenement residents, and cover all aspects of daily life.

- Births and deaths: <https://youtu.be/d9yMCarHs6M>
- Childhood: <https://youtu.be/q0p5aTTsBuk>
- Daily Life: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dthcCQcMxY>
- Food: https://youtu.be/8vQn-Pz_F4g
- Moving to the suburbs: https://youtu.be/84fw4CPbr_w
- School life: <https://youtu.be/BJF8USS-zDw>
- The Sense of community: <https://youtu.be/DfHOZc05SEA>
- Special occasions: <https://youtu.be/awQA8-VO0O8>
- Working Life: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skEMk97I3fA>

Some questions to consider

- Tenement residents were relocated to new developments across the city over a period of roughly eighty years. Why did this process take so long?
- Listen to the oral histories on page 10. To what extent do the voices agree about tenement life? Are there any examples where they disagree, or share a different experience?
- What do these oral histories tell us about society in the Republic of Ireland in the second half of the 20th century?
- Consider oral histories as evidence: how reliable are these records? How might they be unreliable? What are the advantages and limitations of oral histories as evidence of a period in history?

Further Resources

Georgian period

- [Exploring Georgian Dublin](#)
This site contains information on Georgian Dublin and on conservation of the Wide Street Commissioners maps

Tenement period

- [The Report of Committee on Control and Improvement of Tenement Houses, 1914](#)
- **Dilapidated Housing 1964 (RTÉ)**
<https://www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/894-house-and-home/139167-housing-in-dublin/>

This documentary from 1964 examines the condition of public housing, and includes interviews with people being moved from their homes in the city centre to the suburbs

- **Housing Conditions Critical in Dublin 1966 (RTÉ)**
<https://www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/894-house-and-home/139163-housing-conditions-in-dublin/>

This documentary from 1966 focuses on the conditions of Dublin's inner city tenements, interviews people who are struggling to find a home, and takes a look at a new housing development in Ballymun.