

Dublin and a small part of Ireland



Michael Pierre de Villiers

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Title page: Dublin's Temple Bar, Avoca Handweavers, Skerries windmill, National Botanical Gardens and Glasnevin Cemetery tower

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Pierre de Villiers was born in Durban, South Africa. He was trained to World Meteorological Organization class one meteorologist and multi-discipline weather forecaster in the South African Weather Service where he reached the rank of Director. He served on a weather ship in the South Atlantic. He served on World Meteorological Organization expert teams and was World Meteorological Organization rapporteur for the Africa region. He was also a commercial pilot and flying instructor. More recently he was a weather forecaster in the United Arab Emirates, then in England. Now retired.

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Unfortunately, not enough time was spent in Ireland. Only four visits between September and November 2008 and March 2009 and in April 2011. All were three-day trips, including travel time, to lecture at Aer Lingus airline's operations personnel visits. Except the first trip, September 9th to 15th, to which was added a short holiday break accompanied by my wife. I was on 3 weeks leave. however, I agreed to do the work.

En route from Birmingham International on Aer Lingus I identified Liverpool airport and Liverpool when we passed to the south. Saw a gas flame from a gas rig near the English coast in the Irish Sea. Quite windy over the sea with numerous large waves breaking. Saw the inlet and large lagoon north of Malahide when we were on approach to Dublin Airport.

By the way, for the November 2008 trip I had to fly Ryanair due to flight availability and timing. Not impressed. One was not allocated a seat unless differently graded. So there is a mad scramble to board. Unbeknownst to me, I was graded preferential, which allowed me and similar others to board first and select a seat. During push back the cabin crew were still head counting to determine whether they had the correct number of passengers. Gaudy and basic interior. Although their safety record is excellent, among other reasons, I do not fly Ryanair.

We stayed in the Clarion Airport Hotel during the first 2 nights while I did 2 days of training lectures. The Clarion is a good hotel with very good service and a permanent 24 hr shuttle bus to and from the airport. I later realised it was a very short walk between the two. Apparently one of the best Ireland hotel chains, but rather pricey. The room rate was €85 per night with no breakfast.

We went into Dublin city on the Dublin 748 bus the first evening. A peculiar thing about these fast busses into the city. If you buy the ticket on the bus, it was €6 for a single trip. But if you buy a €6 roamer ticket from the machine, it is a return ticket with free travel.



The O'Connell Monument then crossing the River Liffey on the O'Connell Bridge heading to Temple Bar.

We did a bit of looking around in the city centre and then headed for the Temple Bar area to do the tourist thing. They have lots of bars in this area. It's OK during the week but weekends become very, very rough apparently. While walking around Temple Bar I think I saw a Leprechaun. This elderly, very vertically challenged person came out of the crowd while we

were waiting to cross the road at a pedestrian crossing, passed us and vanished again into the crowd.



The Oliver St. John Gogarty Bar and Restaurant.

We eventually found the type of bar for which we were looking. Namely, The Oliver St. John Gogarty Bar and Restaurant, which played traditional Irish music and very good it was, even before we started drinking. So, we had dinner there as well. My wife had cabbage and bacon, which she enjoyed very much. I had a strange burger and chips, which was a great big meat ball and no bun. Very tasty though. We did not see any Leprechauns. Although my wife did buy a booklet on Irish Fairies (the mythical kind) and I bought a book on Irish history. Be warned, the place is expensive. We had Euros and used to British prices; we still found it expensive.

We thought it would be easy to find the bus stop to get the bus back to the hotel, but we walked for ages getting nowhere in pouring rain and getting vague directions, even from a bus driver. Finally, an unlikely looking elderly guy gave us the correct directions to the 747 bus stop outside the post office in O'Connell Street.

While I worked the next day, my wife did some travelling around the city and a bus tour to the north to Malahide Castle and the Nose of Howth, which is a bulbous nose shaped peninsula north of Dublin. After final lectures on the second day, we met at the hotel, collected our luggage and then went to the airport to collect the car we had hired before we left home through Aer Lingus. Hertz provided a silver 1.2 litre 2 door hatchback Opel Corsa (Vauxhall Corsa in the UK).



Aghadoe House.

We then headed into the city to the B & B we had booked before leaving home, called Aghadoe House. Very pleasant and cosy. Run by Eugene, an Irishman. A bit of a strange, but pleasant, character. Not doing too badly by the look of things. He told us most of his rooms are always booked. He was fully booked while we were there. We had the top room, number 5 of six rooms. The en suite bathroom, consisting of shower, toilet and wash basin, was compact. It did have the advantage that you could sit on the toilet with your face over the wash basin and brush one's teeth at the same time and shave if so

desired. We had dinner at the Porterhouse North, which was recommended by Eugene and about 10 minutes walk from the B & B and where my wife had a goat's cheese salad and I had my usual fish and chips.

On a subsequent trip, I travelled by bus to Dublin centre in the evening and went to the Temple Bar area (again) to stroll before eating at The Oliver St. John Gogarty bar and restaurant (again) then back to the Clarion Airport Hotel. Did I mention it before, it is an excellent hotel?

The following day, Friday the 12th, we went north to the Nose of Howth, then to Howth, briefly visited Malahide Castle, Loughshinny (unimpressed). Howth has a Martello Tower, one of a chain of 50 signal towers constructed during the Napoleonic wars for raising the alert in the event of impending French invasion, as well as coastal defence. They were positioned so that a signal raised by one could be seen by the next tower and passed on along the chain. They could also house two heavy artillery pieces on the roof. Another tower was in the process of being restored at the Nose of Howth.



Howth harbour area where we walked along the piers and its Martello Tower. The Nose of Howth tower was surrounded by scaffolding while undergoing restoration.

We and then further north to Skerries where we had lunch at the small harbour. A very pretty little place with the Skerries Mills, a flour mill from the 16th century and operated by two windmills and a water mill.



800 years old Malahide Castle and Skerries Mill showing one of its two windmills.



We then went on north to Balbriggan and Ardgillan Castle (seen left). According to its website it is really a castellated large country-styled house built in 1738 with west and east wings added in the late 1800s.

Then on to Drogheda and inland to Nevan, all not that

great to see, before heading back south to the B & B and an evening walk to nearby Glasnevin Cemetery. More about it later.

Saturday was a brilliantly sunny and warm day. We went south through the centre of Dublin and past the Molly Malone statue to Greystones where they were building a new artificial harbour, then Wicklow (ordinary looking) and on south to Arklow (also ordinary looking) where we stopped to buy food for a picnic lunch before heading inland to Avoca.

Avoca's claim to fame, for us, is that it was the location of the TV series called Ballykissangel. We went walkabout looking at all the buildings we recognised from the TV series. My wife suggested that rather than have our picnic lunch we have fish and chips from the chippy on the corner opposite the pub that features prominently in the TV series. Or rather my wife had Calamari and chips. We then sat in a lovely little park across the road and next to the river to have our lateish lunch. It is pretty and has a long established (1728) water driven weaving mill nearby, which we visited.



Avoca and Fitzgerald's where we bought fish and chips and the nearby small riverside park.



The church seen in the TV series and inside oldest weaving mill since 1723.

We then drove further inland to Carlow (ordinary) apart from a stretch alongside a wooded river valley and later very green hills. Then it was back along country roads through Ballymore Eustace, which is strewn with race horse stud farms, and past the Rollaphuca Reservoir.

Sunday was a grey and dismal day with almost non-stop rain from late morning and overnight. In the morning we went to the Glasnevin Cemetery and the adjacent National Botanic Gardens

and spent some hours there. Some beautiful trees. One of the plants, which we recognised, had a small sign reading Cannaceae Canna 'Durban'. Particularly relaxing walking in the gardens.



The Great Palm House with the Cactus and Succulent House on the left and the Orchid House on the right. Part of the garden.

We then walked to the huge and impressive Glasnevin cemetery for a better view after the short visit the previous evening. Some impressive structures. Towering above all is the O'Connell Tower seen below left. According to the Glasnevin website, it was built to "commemorate the founder of Dublin Cemeteries Trust and one of Ireland's greatest historical figures, Daniel O'Connell, whose remains lie in the ornate crypt beneath."



Two other impressive nearby structures are the Archbishop Edward McCabe Mausoleum (below) and left an ornate sarcophagus, resident unknown.



Part of the old walled part of the cemetery has an interesting tower that bore a plaque stating that "In the 1840s, nightwatchmen on this tower successfully guarded the Cemetery against "Resurrectionists" who supplied the medical profession with corpses for anatomy students" seen the next page.

Also walked past the Met Éireann (Irish National Meteorological Service) headquarters building (also seen on the next page) that looks like a pyramid with the top chopped off. Strangely attractive.



Kilmainham Prison.

We then had a rest and read the Sunday Irish Mail before driving into the city to see the Kilmainham Prison where Irish political prisoners were held and prisoners from the various rebellions were executed. It is in the city centre. But on the way out to the west and west of the Temple Bar, which may account for the police road block we went through. We assumed they were looking for drivers over the limit. As we did not fit the profile and my wife was pouring over the road map, we were waved through. On the other hand, we could have been so inebriated that we needed a map to find our way home, but then who can read in that situation.

We then had a final evening meal at the Porterhouse North, because the wife wanted more Goats Cheese Salad, while I had bangers and mash in gravy. On the way back while walking along the pavement, heads down under umbrellas, we were drenched by a passing 4x4 going through a roadside puddle in a pothole. One thing we noticed, while the country roads are good the roads in the towns and cities are not so good. The potholes are rough and very bumpy. I do not know why they bother with speed bumps in the residential areas. One would be nuts to drive fast on these roads. The car's suspension would be shot in no time at all.

What we saw of Ireland was very much like the UK, except their post boxes and mail vehicles are green.

Monday morning 15th, we had a leisurely breakfast and started out for the airport to return the car to Hertz at the airport and then check in for the flight. The departure terminal at Dublin airport was interesting. The sign on the ground floor at the centre of the arrival terminal, where the hotel busses and Hertz bus drops passengers, shows one must go up the escalator at the left end of the hall to the departures check in desks. When one gets up there the board says all Aer Lingus flights are at area 14. This is all the way along the length of the hall to the other end.

When one gets there a sign says that one must go back down to the ground floor to area 14. We are now almost back where we started when we entered the terminal building. Here another sign said one must go to the basement to area 14. Finally, we check in. We then had to go back up a different set of 2 escalators beyond the arrival hall and back up to the departure hall where we go through the security checks and into the waiting area for flights and duty free shops. No embolisms for Aer Lingus passengers. They are all fit before they board a flight.

For the flight home we changed seats so that my wife could be next to the window for the return. Unfortunately, this row was over the wing. I should have thought of it when we checked in, but I was busy quickly locking the suitcase, as we had forgotten to do it. We were in cloud, or above cloud, from shortly after take-off until long finals directly to runway 13 at Birmingham.

During my last visit on the 3rd to the 4th April 2011, I was taken inside an Aer Lingus maintenance hangar and shown the rebuilt six-seater De Havilland 84 Dragon biplane, Iolar (Eagle), registration EI-ABI, that was on display and occasionally flown on publicity flights. Built in 1936, apparently it last flew in 2016, being restored to flying condition in 2026 for the airlines 90th anniversary.

