

THE STORY OF IRELAND
A BRIDGE BETWEEN
CELTIC AND MODERN,
AMERICA AND EUROPE

Mícheál ua Séaghdha



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DTP: Ondřej Strnad

Production services: Jan Dosoudil

Print: Česká Unigrafie, a.s.

Published by: Nakladatelství Bridge[©], Bridge Polska[©]

Prague, February 2007

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This book is free of charge for each Bridge subscriber

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FOREWORD

Islands are different. Not because people have to come there to live – people have to come to all countries at some time – but because they are on an island. They are separated from the rest of us, and people who live on an island often feel that they are different – special. Their world is smaller than ours. Everything off the island is the Big World, outside. The island is their own Little World.

This book will tell you the story of the Irish people, their island, their culture, and adventures in the Big World and life back in their not-so Little World today.



The Cliffs of Moher are one of the most extraordinary places in Europe. Here you really feel at the end of the world.

On the front cover: Poul nabrone Dolmen

PART ONE

ANCIENT IRELAND

1. WHO WERE THE FIRST IRISH?

The question of origins is the number one question in Irish history. Who are we? Where did we come from? If two Irish-born people meet, anywhere in the world, the first conversation begins: “What’s your name and where do you come from?”, but within less than a minute they get to the real question: “Where in Ireland do *your people* come from?” When they ask this question, you always know that “your people” means your ancestors. What they are asking is: What tribe were your ancestors?

Nobody knows exactly when people first came to Ireland. Irish people have many legends about it. They say different races with exotic names came in waves, one after the other, many of them magical people with great powers. Some of them were good, some bad. Some died out, some were thrown out, and people used to believe that some of them still lived in secret places under the ground. And then there are us, the Irish as we are.

HUNTERS

Archaeologists today tell a similar story. When the Great Snow melted and the land became an island in the sea, hunters came from nearby¹ Scotland. They had stone tools and fire, and made huts² and lived by fishing and hunting and collecting food. They lived in a world of spirits and shamanic rituals, linked³ to their ancestors and to the animals they hunted by a cult of the life force⁴ that runs through all living things.

For hundreds and hundreds of years – thousands in the end – they must have lived near rivers and lakes and forests and the sea, travelling from camp to camp, families living in the wilderness. We have no idea how many they were, but hunting peoples⁵ are never very many in number: a few thousand perhaps, in all the island.

FARMERS

Then, some time between 4,000 and 3,000 years BC, a group of skilled farmers came into Ireland from Europe, beginning with cow herders⁶ and later crop farmers. Archaeologists call this the Neolithic Period or New Stone Age.

They brought with them a totally new way of life, and very probably a new language, a more organised religion, new animals, new diseases, new ways of killing.

We do not know for sure what language the first farmers in Ireland spoke, since they never wrote it down. Some archaeologists think that these people were the first people in Ireland to speak an Indo-European language. If so, then it is possible that the Neolithic farmers of Ireland, Britain, France and other parts of Central Europe were, in fact, a very early form of Celtic people: “Proto-Celts”, direct ancestors of the Celtic peoples whose languages and culture came to dominate large parts of Western and Central Europe by 1,000 BC. If this is so, then Ireland has been Celtic in some form for far longer than most textbooks say. It is often said in books that the Celts came to Ireland only 300 or so years BC. This new theory would make the real date more like 4,000 BC – much earlier! So were the first farmers early Celts? One clue is in their religion.

2. NEOLITHIC RELIGION IN IRELAND

Neolithic is the word archaeologists use to talk about the “New Stone Age” – stone because the people had no metal tools, only stone ones. The monuments these farmers built were like temples¹, but they don’t look anything like Greek or Roman temples. They are called megalithic, because they are made of big stones, literally². The most famous one in Ireland is called “Newgrange” in English and *Brú na Bóinne* in Gaelic.



Browne’s Hill Dolmen has the biggest capstone (a stone placed on top of a tomb) of any dolmen in Europe. It weighs over 100 tons.

Brú na Bóinne, situated in County Meath, not far from Dublin, was built, we think about 5,200 years ago (although it may possibly be older), and thus about 500 years before the Great Pyramids of Egypt and about 1000 years before the famous stone circle of Stonehenge! It is one of the oldest buildings in the world and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Brú na Bóinne is Stone-Age Ireland's most sacred site. The symbolic decorations on the stones (usually three Spirals together making a Celtic *Triskal*) are some of the greatest works of early Neolithic art in the world, and an unending inspiration to modern artists.

It looks like a small hill on top of a real hill. A bump³, if you like. This bump was meant to represent the Mother Earth expecting a baby. *Brú na Bóinne* in Gaelic means “Womb⁴ of the White Cow”. The White Cow is another name for Mother Earth: She feeds us with her milk – in the form of the drinkable water of rivers and springs⁵ and lakes – just like a great cow feeds us with the rivers of milk that flow from her breasts. The historic Irish river that runs within sight of this monument, called The Boyne in English, is actually called *Bóinn* in Gaelic – The White Cow. In Ireland, mountains were seen as the breasts of the Mother Goddess and are called that even today in some places.

However, this bump is not her breast, but a belly! And inside her belly, the Mother Earth is able to carry a very important baby indeed⁶: the Baby of the Year – the farming year itself. But just as a woman needs a man to have a baby, so too Mother Earth needed a “husband”. And who better than the Sun God? In one of the greatest artistic and religious achievements⁷ of their civilisation, these first farmers made a tunnel inside Mother Earth, into which the light of the Sun God can shine only for a few days around Mid-Winter's Day. The life-giving light of heaven enters the dark passage and arrives in a central, almost round chamber, hitting a beautiful carved *Triskal*. From this moment, Winter is defeated and the Living Land – Our Mother – begins to grow fat with new life!

Nothing can have been more sacred⁸ to a farming people than the great gift of Life: from our mothers, from female farm-animals and from our Great Mother – the Earth, the ultimate origin of all life and all food, which keeps us alive. Once built, Irish people have never forgotten this magic place – and never will.

Later Celtic religious traditions seem to continue these religious traditions of the Neolithic farmers and not to be a new religion, different from the old one, suggesting a continuity of civilisation and culture.

3. CHRISTIANITY REFORMS IRISH CULTURE

Today we know about the Celtic religion because of the early Irish Christians. Ireland was never part of the Roman Empire, unlike most of Britain, but was in regular contact with the Empire. Very often that was in order to attack it and rob¹ slaves² – a good business in Celtic times as slaves were very valuable. The Irish attacked and robbed British settlements so much that the normal British names for Irishmen were: *Gael* (wild men) in Welsh and *Scotti* (pirates) in Latin.

After the Romans accepted Christianity, Christian missionaries began to come to Ireland to try to tame³ these wild men, and over a period of about 200 years they converted the Irish to this new religion. One of these missionaries later became famous as Saint Patrick, today the patron saint of Ireland, himself taken as a slave to Ireland, who returned to save the people who tortured him.

What these Christian monks also brought – for the first time in Irish history – was the Roman alphabet of the Western Empire and a tradition of writing and reading manuscripts and books. After Christianity became established in Ireland, Christian monks began creating a native Gaelic literature for themselves and for the Celtic aristocratic families and kings to whom they were often closely related. Laws, histories, genealogies⁴, traditions of all sorts were written down for the first time, and under the influence of the civilising spirit of Christianity Irish culture entered its Golden Age: 600 – 800 AD.

However, it did not stop the slave trade, nor the attacks. On the contrary, Irish kings extended their power to Scotland: The land of the *Scotti* (Irish pirates). Scotland was Gaelic Ireland's most successful colony. Even today, over 1500 years later, many Scots still speak Scots Gaelic, their dialect of the Irish language. With colonies also in North and South Wales and the Isle of Man, for a time it looked like Gaelic/Irish might become the language of all Celtic Britain! But that did not happen.

After the pagan⁵ invasions that followed the fall of the Roman Empire, Irish Christian monks went all over the Empire and re-introduced

Christianity wherever it had been wiped out⁶ or never fully established. It was the Irish who brought Christianity to the pagan Anglo-Saxons, and for several hundred years their two cultures existed in a sort of political and cultural equilibrium⁷. The great Irish monastery of Lindesfarne in the North-East of England was a perfect example of this almost heaven-on-earth.

And in the process of writing down almost everything they liked or needed, the monks also recorded much of the old Celtic religion that they had replaced, and which now survived as folk-tales and evening entertainments.

4. CELTIC RELIGION AND THE DRUIDS



The symbol of early Christian Ireland, stone crosses were used to teach the Bible story when most people could not read. The hat on top represents a Celtic church, the Circle is a symbol of perfection and eternal life.

Celtic Religion is a complicated affair. There were probably very many local variations of it, much of it so old that no-one could remember where it came from, or often what it originally meant. That's probably why there emerged¹ a group of specialists called Druids – “True Seers²”, who originally were a shamanic cult group that performed sacrifices³ and rituals to predict⁴ the future and who came to dominate Celtic religion in many parts of Europe, including France, Switzerland, Belgium, Britain and Ireland. The Druids ensured⁵ that there were orthodox beliefs and gave a philosophical logic to the old and complex web of local and international beliefs that they inherited⁶ from their ancestors.

5. THE CELTIC CALENDAR AND ITS FESTIVALS

In all the Celtic countries until recent times, important folk festivals marked the start of the agricultural seasons of Winter, Spring, Summer and Autumn about 6 - 7 weeks before the astronomical ones. In Ireland today, Winter begins on the 1st of November, Spring on the 1st of February, Summer on the 1st of May and Autumn on the 1st of August.

The festivals were both a sort of funeral ceremony for the old season and a birthday party for the new season. And like any good Irish funeral/ birthday party they were a time to come together, eat, drink, share memories, tell stories, play music and games, celebrate the past and wish good luck for the future – in this case not for a person, but for the season and the work to come.

In each case the party started the night before. The greatest of these parties was *Samhain* [Sau-in], Celtic New Year, starting on the 31st of October and continuing into the 1st of November. This festival is better known today as Hallowe'en¹, the Festival of the Dead.

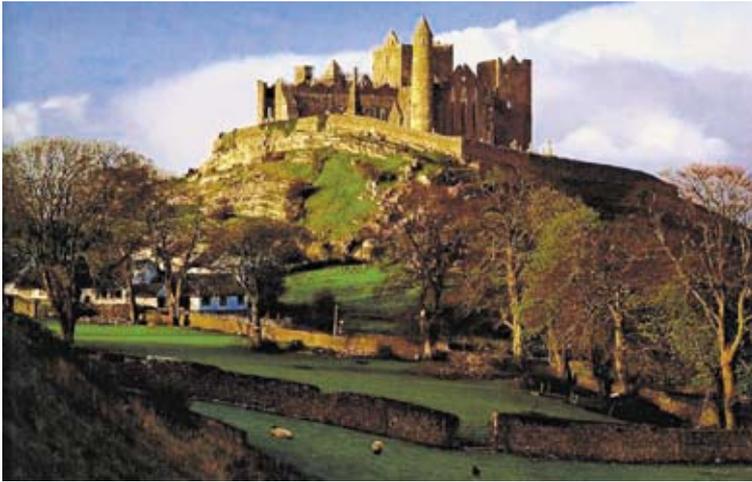
Samhain marks the end of the farming year and the start of Winter. To the Celts *Samhain* was much more than a change of year. It was a deeply psychological festival. Originally, *Samhain* probably meant “the end of the pleasant half of the year”, i.e. end of Summer, but it could also mean “the end of the pleasant half of life”, i.e. the moment of death, the time when we must leave behind the ones we love in the day-lit world² and enter the dark other world where we will meet the rest of the dead people.

At *Samhain*, the dead welcomed the Sky God into their country, and came out to see him come. Little children, closest to the dead among us (because the Celts believed in reincarnation³), dressed up as ghosts and old bodies and went from house to house asking for nature's sacred foods – apples and nuts, full of the whiteness of the life force – so that the dead too could live on in the afterlife⁴ and celebrate with all of us the success of the year's farming and the completion of time's destiny⁵.

So Hallowe'en, with its black skulls⁶, bones, ghosts, devils, mummies and its burning of the Devil in a bonfire, is not an American holiday at all, but a Gaelic version of the ancient Celtic festival of *Samonios*, celebrating the death of the Summer and sending his soul to the World of the Dead by *burning his body* (as they do for ordinary people in India to this day in a ceremony called “cremation”). Since we know that the Druids of ancient Gaul celebrated it 2,000 years ago, so probably did the Boii in Bohemia.

For this reason it is particularly interesting that in the Czech lands people burn a witch⁷ at the start of May during *Čarodějnice* – the Festival of the Witch. This is exactly 6 months different from *Samhain*, and falls on the same day as the Gaelic/Celtic Festival of *Bealtain*, and in the Czech Republic marks the end of Winter by burning the body of an old woman – who represented Winter, just as a man represented Summer. She is a “witch” because she was a magic old woman, and she is burned because the Winter is dead. (In some areas they make sure she is dead by drowning her⁸ a few weeks before!)

These traditions today in the Czech Republic must have survived for over 2,000 years (and maybe for as many as 8,000), making them by far the oldest part of Czech culture alive today!



The Rock of Cashel was formerly the seat of the Irish kings of Munster (one of the four provinces of Ireland). Later, a cathedral was built there. It flourished as a religious centre until it was destroyed in 1647.

PART TWO: MODERN IRELAND

1. IRISH CELTIC CULTURE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

THE VIKINGS

The Irish on their island developed a complex Celtic culture, later becoming Christian and continuing their Celtic festivals, laws, arts, traditions and language. And so it might have continued until today, were it not for who¹ came next.

First, it was Vikings – fierce² pagan sea-pirates that raided the rich Celtic monasteries from about 790 – 900 AD looking at first for gold and then for slaves. Most of the early Vikings were led by the sons of Nordic kings who wanted to return home rich and successful in battle. But as time went on, many came to Scotland, Ireland, England and Wales and set up mini-kingdoms and started trading from there to home.

The modern City of Dublin started as a safe winter harbour and camp for raiding³ Viking boats – 60 Viking ships are said to have come there to set up camp in 837. After 850 AD, it became the Viking Kingdom of Dyflinn with Viking Kings for nearly 150 years. Finally, they lost their independence to Brian Boru, the most powerful Irish chieftain⁴ of his day, in the Battle of Clontarf, north of Dublin Bay, on Good Friday 1014, and the Viking city of Dublin fell under Irish control for a time.

THE NORMANS

Then it was Norman feudal knights. They descended⁵ from some of the Viking kings but settled in the north of France, calling it Normandie – the land of the Norsemen. They first returned to England, which they started to conquer⁶ in the Battle of Hastings, just south of London, in 1066. William the Conqueror, or Guillaume de Normandie, spoke French, not Norse, and he and his men were not just looking for gold or slaves this time. They were looking for kingdoms from the start. They wanted to be kings, barons and lords of the land. This was real conquest⁷.

About 100 years after they took control of England, a knight called Strongbow (now buried in Dublin's St. Patrick's Cathedral) led a group of these French colonising adventurers, together with their English and Welsh soldiers, to Leinster (one of the Irish Provinces, in the east of Ireland), in 1169/1170. He said he was supporting a local Irish King who wanted to regain⁸ his kingdom, but in fact it was all part of the empire building plans of Henry II, the French-speaking King of Normandy, Aquitaine, Toulouse, Brittany, England, Scotland and Wales.

As in England, the Normans took much of the land by force, built military castles and fortifications⁹, and forced the people to obey¹⁰ them and work for them. This was a real invasion. But unlike in England there wasn't a single Kingdom to conquer. Ireland at the time was a mass of little kingdoms and semi-kingdoms, united by family ties¹¹, tradition and language, but politically divided. There was no central government. Finally, the Norman lords found themselves more and more involved in the local politics. In time, they adopted the Irish language, married Irish aristocrats and became Irish themselves.

In the end, rather than being destroyed by the Normans, Ireland was modernised by them. Gaelic Ireland was still very Celtic, but developed a taste for all the high-culture of the Middle Ages: knights in shining armour¹², ladies in towers, mysterious tales of love, loyalty¹³, monsters and

courage. In England the Normans adopted the Celtic hero King Arthur, in Ireland it was Cormac Mac Airt [kormak mak airġ] and his Leinster champion, Finn Mac Cumhaill [fiñ mak kúil].

It was not the Vikings, not the Normans, but the third and final invasion that was to destroy the unique Celtic civilisation of Ireland. And that was when the English came.



A great Norman fortress from the 12th century, Carrickfergus Castle, is one of the best preserved medieval castles in Ireland.



Glendalough, this beautiful monastic settlement, was founded by the legendary monk Saint Kevin. It developed into an early form of Christian university. It is from sites such as this that beautiful simple poems by Irish monks have survived in manuscripts all over Europe.

2. THE MODERN WORLD BEGINS

The Norman Kings of England had sponsored the Invasion of Ireland in the first place, so they always looked on Ireland as legally theirs.

Henry VIII of England – the one with the six wives – always wanted to extend his personal power and had taken a serious interest in his rights as “King of Ireland”. That situation, however, changed fundamentally and forever in 1534 when the Reformation came to England. Henry made himself Head of an English Church separate from Rome. Europe was now split – or splitting – into Catholic and Protestant Kingdoms. England, Lowland Scotland, Holland, Northern Germany, Scandinavia, Switzerland and others became Protestant. France, Italy, Austria, Southern Germany, and the then “World Superpower” Spain remained Catholic. And so did Ireland. Suddenly – in less than a generation – Ireland was on the frontier of the greatest ideological split in modern European history until the birth of Communism. The control of Ireland became strategically important to the defence of Britain.

Spain – and a century and a half later, France – could rely on¹ the Catholic Irish to support an attack on England from behind. It was Britain’s weak back door! The Royal dynasties that ruled Britain from the Reformation onwards: the Tudors – and the Stuarts and the Hanoverians

after them – saw this as a real danger, and began taking military control of Ireland, this time forever.

You all know about the famous “Invincible² Armada” that Philip II of Spain sent against Elizabeth I in 1588, but did you know that he sent a second Armada in 1601? This Armada landed in Kinsale in the South of Ireland at the climax³ of a Spanish-sponsored Irish Rebellion called “The Nine-Years War”. It resulted in the Battle of Kinsale, in which the Irish leader Hugh O’Neill – whose stronghold⁴, Western Ulster, was the last really free Gaelic province of Ireland – fought together with the Spanish against an English army that came down from Dublin. The Catholic Irish and Spanish were defeated and the Protestant English won. The result was total disaster for Gaelic Ireland.

Within a generation of that battle, all Ireland was really an English colony. Over the next 200 years, 95 per cent of the land was given to English generals and aristocrats, and in many areas of Ulster to settlers from Scotland. The last of many of the Irish Kings escaped to Spain, Portugal and Italy, where their descendants live among the aristocratic families of those countries to this day. The intellectual culture that had been created when Christianity first introduced writing to the pagan Celts a 1,000 years before was destroyed and the poor farmers were left as slaves and servants in their own lands, paying rent to English landlords (or to Irish landlords who adopted English ways) for land that had belonged to⁵ the farmers and their families for over 5,000 years! Ireland had been conquered.

3. A NEW IRELAND

THE SOUTH

The Ireland that we know today is not Gaelic. It says it is Celtic, but that is honestly only marketing. There are Celtic traditions in Ireland, and the Gaelic language still survives, even thrives in some quarters¹, but the State that calls itself “Ireland” (*Éire* in Gaelic) is in no way a re-creation of the Celtic or Gaelic past. It is instead entirely² a new democratic creation based on the structures of the British Colony in Ireland – just like the United States of America is not an American Indian Tribal country, and modern Mexico is not run by Aztec Priests!

In the South of Ireland, with the birth of modern mass democracy in the 19th century, the Catholic population gradually³ took control of the colony set up by the British, and started using it for themselves. From the mid 19th century onwards it was inevitable⁴ that this new Catholic-dominated Ireland would require greater freedom from London. It was only a question of when and how.



Dublin: A Viking city with an Irish name, an Irish capital with English architecture. Dublin has always been a city that looked inwards to Ireland and outwards to the world outside.

It is a sad fact that the rise of democracy (interrupted all too often by acts of violence and terrorism) split Irish people along sectarian lines⁵. It led to the division of the Island, in 1921, into what is now the Republic of Ireland in the South, and the Six Counties of Northern Ireland, part of the United Kingdom, in the North.

On the positive side, Protestants in the South have generally accepted the democratic fact that most Irish people wanted more freedom from Britain, and many of them – like earlier colonists before them – are among the leaders and spokespersons of an independent Ireland. The first President of Ireland (1938 – 1949) and Gaelic language revivalist⁶, Douglas Hyde, is an excellent example. Most Protestants in the South have integrated very well into modern Ireland and consider themselves to be Irish, even if not Gaelic.

One reason why this was easier for them to do is that, in the 18th and 19th centuries, the Irish people in general had become more like the English, adopting their language, dress, ideas and ambitions. Old Gaelic Ireland ceased to be⁷ the country of most of the people, and this new Ireland – anglicised Ireland – was born. This is the Ireland that most people think of as the real Ireland today. It is the Ireland of Jonathan Swift, Oscar Wilde, James Joyce, U2, Pierce Brosnan, Michael Flatley and Colin Farrell.

And as the new and more democratic Ireland gained in self-respect⁸, there has been a revival of respect for the old culture too. Today the two main Irish cultures – Gaelic and Anglo-Irish – are no longer seen as enemies, but as different expressions of historical Irishness. The best examples of this modern, more open feeling about Irishness are probably Bono of U2, from a mixed Protestant/Catholic family in Dublin, and the Gaelic-speaking band Clannad from West Ulster.

THE NORTH

The one part of Ireland where Catholics have not taken control is in Northern Ireland, one of the few places where the settlers came in sufficient numbers⁹ to outnumber¹⁰ the native Irish. The lowland Scots and English who settled there during the Colonisation period are still there today: about 1,000,000 of them. That is why Northern Ireland is still part of the United Kingdom, and not in the Republic of Ireland. Today, these people feel themselves to be British, not Irish, mostly because they came from Britain, starting around 450 years ago. But even in Northern Ireland, the surviving English (and sometimes even Gaelic!) aristocrats have lost control, and the people, this time mostly Protestant, took democratic control for themselves, staying united to Britain, but very independent in their own province of the United Kingdom.

The Catholic Irish minority that remains in Northern Ireland has at times found it very hard to live in their own land, under a strict Protestant (and for many years anti-Catholic) government. This led some Catholics to support anti-British terrorism, mostly led by the IRA (and its various splinter groups¹¹), a secret Irish anti-imperial organisation, much influenced by Irish-Americans.

The result was a “terrorist campaign”, also called a “war of liberation” (depending which side you were on), that almost all people now euphemistically call “The Troubles”. Its political peak was probably the attempt¹² to kill Margaret Thatcher in 1984. The IRA claimed responsibility the next day, and said that they would try again. Their statement famously included the words: “Today we were unlucky, but remember we only have to be lucky once. You will have to be lucky always.” This was serious terrorism.

Happily, there are now plans to fix this problem. Neither Protestants nor Catholics will have to give up or move out. They can both stay and live together, but their government must be fair to both groups. So there is now a system to make sure that both Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland share¹³ in the government. It is called the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement (1998). As a result, the IRA announced an end to its armed campaign and their war is now formally over. Political violence and terrorism on both sides have almost completely vanished¹⁴.



In Belfast, political paintings on the walls have expressed the feelings of both Protestants and Catholics in a divided society. The UFF is a Protestant terrorist group that wants to keep Ulster in the UK.

For now, Northern Ireland is still part of the UK. Whether it will remain so will depend on the democratic wishes of the majority of people who live there. Whatever happens there in the future, the citizens of the North can have either British passports or Irish passports or both. They can always stay in close contact with both Britain and the rest of Ireland.

EMIGRATION

Today both North and South of Ireland are wealthy and getting richer day by day. But before this modern economic miracle could happen, either in the South or in the North, many Irish people, Catholic and Protestant, had to leave to find work and a life abroad. The British colony in Ireland was never good for the poorest people of either religion, but the growing British Empire gave them an alternative that they had not had before. They could join the British Army, or just go as settlers to the new British colonies in America, Australia or Africa.

When the potatoes in Ireland were attacked by a fungus¹⁵ that destroyed the food of the very poorest people in the years 1845-9, Ireland had a population of over 8,000,000 people. By 1911, all of Ireland had a population of only 4.4 million, nearly half what it had had 50 years before! By 1960, the population of the South of Ireland was just 2,800,000 people.



Today Dublin is one of the youngest, most energetic, richest and international cities in all of Europe.

It is today estimated that anywhere between 500,000 and 1,500,000 people died of hunger and typhus¹⁶ in those years, with anything up to 2,000,000 more people seeking refuge¹⁷ and food in other parts of Ireland and another 2,000,000 emigrating to other countries in the British Empire in the immediate aftermath¹⁸ of the Famine¹⁹. It was one of the greatest mass tragedies in all of human history.

For the emigrants, America was the favourite destination. It was a modern, free country which needed people, paid good money, and where English was spoken. Those who went during and after the Famine were mostly poor Catholic farmers from the South and West of Ireland.

In Massachusetts today, for example, there live more than 1,500,000 people of Irish origin. In that one American State there is practically another modern Ireland, equally born of the old British Empire. And in great American cities like New York and Chicago there are millions and millions more. Sixteen US Presidents have been Irish by family. Since John F. Kennedy was elected in 1960, every elected American President has come from an Irish-American family, up to and including George W. Bush. (Even Walt Disney and John Wayne were Irish-American!) In America, Irish people found their Promised Land, the Land of Opportunity. For five generations, to be Irish was to be a potential American: to be the American-born son of an Irishman or woman was to be a potential President!

THE CELTIC TIGER

Today, it is mostly American money that is making Ireland one of the richest countries in Europe and the world. Per person, not even Switzerland is richer than Ireland anymore! Within the last 15 years the grandsons of poor farmers that took over an almost penniless²⁰ colony have called on their American cousins and together created a new economy. How did they do it?



The heart of Dublin's tourist industry is the popular Temple Bar sector of the city, full of bars and clubs, but also theatres, art galleries and international cinemas.

Different answers have been given by different people, but in the end probably the most important answer can be expressed in three words: Foreign Direct Investment²¹. American companies have been putting thousands of millions of Dollars/Euros into Ireland every year for over a decade and a half now.

None of this would have happened unless Irish politicians went regularly to talk to the richest and most powerful men and women in America, to convince them that Ireland was the place to come to be in Europe. Tax deals²² were made, land was found, along with government support for construction and training.

The money put into Ireland was unique in terms of its size and its purpose²³: the Americans wanted to sell the best quality US computers, software and services to the rich Europeans of Spain, France, Germany, Holland etc. One result of these investments is that the Republic of Ireland is a leading world exporter of computer software.

4. THE NEW TOMORROW

Ireland today is a multi-racial country – with as many as 200,000 Poles, many tens of thousands of Chinese, Arabs, Americans, English, Czechs, Slovaks,

Ukrainians, Latvians, Lithuanians, French, Spanish, Germans, etc., and more coming every year. The Gateway to Europe needs Europeans especially: people with the language skills to interface¹ between our big American partner and the many markets of the new, commercially united Europe.

For the first time since the first farmers arrived, the Irish people themselves have a real choice about their own future. Not just on paper, but in fact. There is now the money to start making decisions about the future. What kind of society would they like to have? Will Ireland keep up², or even restore, its lost Celtic traditions? Will it do its bit to save the environment? Will it share its success with others?

One of most important questions is, will Ireland become a country of haves and have-nots³, like its new parent, America, or will it follow the European model of social support for all citizens, and help even the poorest live in some senses in equality? The Republic of Ireland now has one of the largest divides between rich and poor of any country in Europe.

Ireland can be a bridge between Europe and America, a role it can well fulfil⁴, as truly European as it is possible to be, yet more American than anywhere else in Europe. When Europeans lose touch with America, or vice versa, neither benefits. Ireland, if it is wise as it is old, can use its link between two great cultures of recent times, and show that you can have the best of both worlds, Old and New. Both America and Europe can learn from its little, shining example: an emerald island, indeed!

PART THREE

IRISH CULTURE AND IDENTITY

1. TRADITIONAL IRISH MUSIC

Irish music has a long and complex history. One thing that has remained constant throughout the hundreds – indeed thousands – of years is the fact that music has always been a central part of Irish culture, making Ireland and its cultural colonies distinct¹ from the outside world. But more than just proclaim² their Irishness, the best of our musicians sing with true feeling of their universal humanity.

Traditional Gaelic music is different in Ireland from English-language folk music, so folk music and traditional music mean different things in Ireland. “Traditional music” is Celtic in origin and typically is used either



Both traditional and folk music are common in Irish pubs today and not just for tourists. It's a lot of fun!

for dancing or singing, but not both at the same time. This kind of music uses complex rhythms and melodies, but (until modern times) no harmony. In this, it shares common features with traditional Hindi music, to which it is probably related. The classic example is *Sean-Nós* [Šan-nous] (in Gaelic it means “Old Style”), in which Gaelic language love-songs (with texts modelled on the French troubadour tradition of the Normans) are sung *a-capella*, i.e. with no musical instruments, by a solo singer.

“Folk music”, on the other hand, in Ireland means mostly English-language pub-ballads as sung by groups like The Dubliners and The Pogues, and is often witty³, bawdy⁴ and easy to sing along to. Many of these songs are sentimental and often also political.

The instruments that the Irish have used to make both kinds of music have changed over the years. The Celts and Gaels used different instruments than today, especially the harp⁵, which they played at all special occasions. The harp is today the official symbol of the Republic of Ireland (and of a well-known beer!) for this reason.

Another early instrument were the bagpipes⁶. In Ireland we use the Uilleann or elbow pipes, which are different to the pipes used in Scotland, in that the air is not blown by the player into the bag, but pumped using a pump under one elbow.

Other instruments are more modern: fiddles⁷, tin whistles⁸, a goat-skin drum called a Bodhrán [bourán], which ironically means “little deaf man”, squeeze-boxes⁹, and very recently guitars. In the end, it is not so much the instruments but the music itself and its overall sound that has survived over the years.

2. MODERN POP/ROCK MUSIC



U2, the band that speaks for modern Ireland, plays music with both soul and mind. It was formed in Dublin in 1976 when vocalist Bono, guitarist The Edge, bassist Adam Clayton and drummer Larry Mullen Jr. were teenagers. They became mega-stars with their 1987 release *The Joshua Tree*.

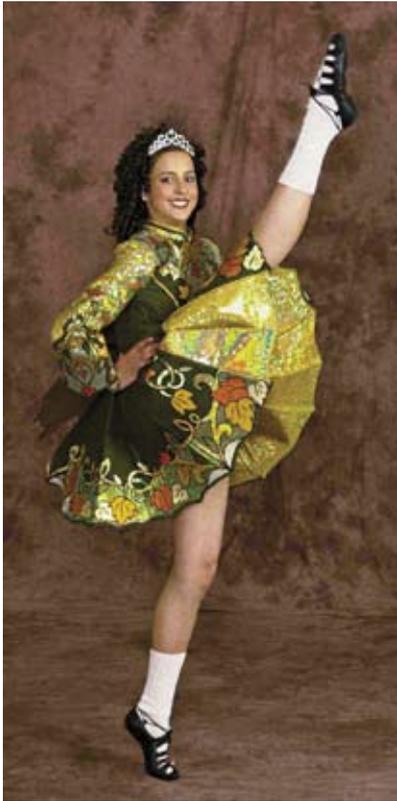
Today, the most famous Irish musicians are the members of U2. One of the most interesting things about U2 is that their songs – which are basically ordinary rock songs – always have a message. There are love songs, in which Bono says sorry to his wife because he forgot her birthday. There are philosophical songs like “One” and “I Still Cannot Find What I’m Looking For” about the nature¹ of humanity. There are political songs like “Sunday, Bloody Sunday” about the sad history of prejudice² and violence in Northern Ireland, and “Pride³ (in the Name of Love)” about the political power of love to transcend prejudice and political violence.

However, though a good song-writer, singer and performer, Bono is not unique. Rather he stands at the end of a long line of Irish poets and singers (in the past, poems were always chanted⁴ or sung in Ireland) who have used their words and music, not as an escape from reality, but to face and to change reality. Other modern Irish singer-songwriters include Sinéad O’Connor, Shane MacGowan, Van Morrison, Christie Moore, Glen Hansard, Kieran Duddy and Damian Rice.

3. IRISH DANCE

Traditional Irish music has probably always had two strands¹, one for singing and one for dancing. Irish people are famous for both. Recently the success of *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance* – both created by Michael Flatley, the champion Irish dancer from Chicago – has made Irish dancing popular all around the world, as a unique alternative to other forms of dancing, both individual and social.

In Ireland there are three main categories of traditional dance. *Step dancing* is mostly danced solo and is for the most trained experts, very often young men, known for their fitness and musicality. *Set dancing* is



Traditional Irish dancers wear Celtic-style costumes with complex designs and have long curly hair and golden tiaras (crowns which you put on your head from the front) on their heads.

any movement of the hands would be a distraction⁴. The public were meant to watch the feet, not the head, hands or arms. So the arms were kept still to focus attention⁵ on the real skill, that of tapping the floor in one spot to make the musical rhythm. Later, this form of dancing step was used in dances not on the stone and thus not limited to one place.

This connection with tap-dancing is something Michael Flatley fully understood and uses in *Riverdance*, since he is also a champion tap-dancer, twice setting a *Guinness Book of Records* record for making the most taps in one second – at first an absolutely amazing 28 and then 35 taps *in one second*. (The current record is now 38, held by Michael's Irish dancing friend James Devine.)

mostly danced by groups or *sets* of couples using simpler steps than the solo step dancers and making complex patterns². *Céilí dancing* (in Gaelic *céilí* means “party”) is group dancing involving 2, 4, 6, 8 or more dancers and is most popular with younger people. It gives a chance during the evening for every girl to dance with every boy and for every boy to dance with every girl, something which young people like.

In general, Irish dancing uses complex foot movements while the rest of the body is kept straight. This fits perfectly to Irish music, but people often ask why the dancers don't use their hands. Some people think it is because the Catholic Church didn't want people touching each other! Others say it was because the houses were so small. It is more likely – since dancing was often in the open air anyway – that the dancer was dancing on top of a stone with a hole dug beneath it, making a loud drumming sound that could be clearly heard over the music.

This meant that in a way the dance – like tap dancing in America – was a kind of percussion, and needed many complex kicks and taps³. In that case

It is extremely interesting that this peak of⁶ Irish dancing is a highly athletic and distinctly⁷ male art-form. It suggests ancient tribal roots, such as seen in the dances of African tribes, where the young men display for the women (whose dance is less athletic) and invite their interest. It seems likely that dance was⁸ seen as an expression not only of virile⁹ energy but of the life-force itself, from which babies were thought to be engendered¹⁰. As such, Irish dance's athletic qualities are probably among its most ancient.

4. IRISH LITERATURE

THE CELTIC TRADITION

In Ireland we had an Irish-language story-telling tradition, which continued into the 20th century, and we have many old manuscripts (mostly written by medieval record-keepers¹, often priests or monks, who were used to writing things down) that show us something of what that lost world must have been like. It is also mainly thanks to interviews and recordings made with the last of the great Irish story-tellers that we can reconstruct so much of Celtic literature and mythology.

We know that the Celts had an elaborate² literature and a rich story-telling and poetic tradition, but only a fraction of it has survived into modern times. Alas³, the continental Celts never wrote it down. That was not because they never had access to writing (they could have used either the Greek alphabet or the Roman one, or others that we do not use today), but because they thought it was too important to write down. That sounds very strange to us; in our culture, we write down important things. In many ancient cultures the holy men had the idea that some things must be kept secret, especially when they are very sacred, too holy to let anyone not specially blessed know them.

The stories of the Gods were sacred, reserved for those with a special relationship to the Gods, who “revealed”⁴ them to us at special events, just as the Gods had “revealed” the stories to them during magic and shamanic ceremonies. As a result, the stories were events – mystical performances – and not just “readings”. (The Catholic Mass is a mixture of both today.)

For the Celts, on a more popular level too, a good story was never something you read in a book, but something you told at a feast⁵. The Celts and their descendants were generally not writers or readers, like the Romans or Greeks or Jews, but drinkers and story-tellers. In Ireland today, the pub is where you can hear some of the best story-tellers in action, not telling old folk tales anymore, but plenty of new ones!

It is very probable that ancient Celtic performances of the epic tales were accompanied by music, as in traditional Japanese Noh theatre⁶. Poetry in particular used to be sung, or lilted⁷ in a style between speaking and singing. So it is very interesting to compare this Celtic attitude to literature to the situation in music: for almost all of us, music is what is played or sung, and written music is only the score of what is to be played. Until very late in the 20th century that is how most Irish people regarded⁸ writing; it was a record of something to be told. This may help to explain the very small number of books owned by most Irish people even today.

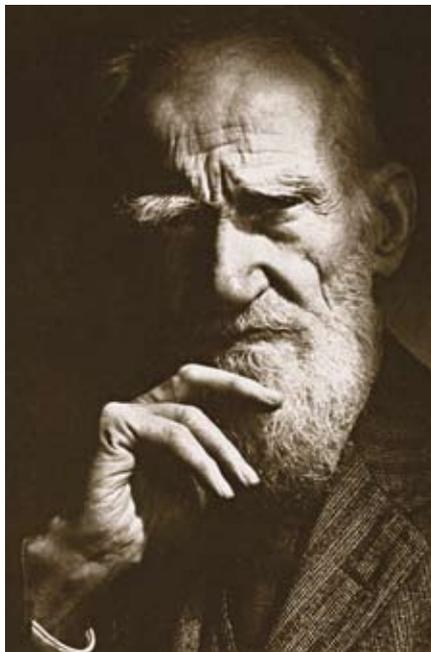
IRISH WRITERS

The Celtic tradition survives even in the writings of modern Irish authors. Their books are still often meant to be read aloud. This is particularly⁹ true of James Joyce, but it is also true of poets like William Butler Yeats, and of course like playwrights like Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw or Samuel Beckett.

This Celtic influence is clear even if these writers write in English and not in Irish Gaelic. But what about literature in Gaelic? Does Ireland not have a written Celtic language literature? Indeed it does.

Gaelic literature began when Christianity became the religion of the Irish, bringing the Roman alphabet and the traditions of reading and writing that went with it. That literature continues until today, some 1,500 years later. It is in fact the oldest continuous literature in Europe, apart from Greek literature.

The fact is, however, that writers who have written in Irish are generally not well known outside of Ireland. One who is quite well known is Brian Merriman, who wrote a wonderfully satirical poem called *The Midnight Court*, in which the women of Ireland



George Bernard Shaw (1856 – 1950) was a man ahead of his time, believing in women's equality and universal human rights. He was a true revolutionary who wrote plays to change the world.

demand more sex from their men! You can see why that poem is so popular! However, since most Irish people today can't read Irish fluently, only the literature that has been translated into English is well known: mostly early sagas and fairy tales.

So it is that the most famous Irish writers today are those who have written in English. They are now generally recognised as Irish writers not as English writers, but many foreigners make the mistake of calling them English.

OSCAR WILDE AND JAMES JOYCE

Oscar Wilde (1845 – 1900) was a Protestant born in Dublin. His mother was a fervent¹⁰ Irish nationalist, dedicated to¹¹ Irish myths and folklore. Oscar was in fact an ancient Celtic name, chosen by his mother. He studied at Dublin University, and later moved to study in Oxford. He was proud to be Irish, but wrote only in English or French, and later in his life he lived mostly in London and Paris. He wrote almost exclusively¹² about English people and for English people.



Oscar Wilde (1854 – 1900), Irish poet and dramatist, is renowned for his comic masterpieces *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. People also like his only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and his fairy tale *The Happy Prince*.

James Joyce (1882 – 1941) was a Catholic born in Dublin, but left Ireland as a young man to live in Trieste, and later moved to Paris. Unlike Oscar Wilde, he wrote books only about Ireland and Irish people. But his books were not really for Irish people, they were for everyone who reads or listens to books at all.

What makes these two writers Irish? The fact that they were born in Ireland, certainly. But being born in Ireland is not just a fact in a biography. It means growing up experiencing what it means to be Irish every day of your life. The difference between Oscar Wilde and James Joyce, where one writes about aristocratic English people and the other about very ordinary Irish people, shows how much Ireland itself had changed in the generation that separates them.



James Joyce (1882 – 1941) was noted for his experimental language and interior monologue in his works (*Ulysses*, *Finnegans Wake*, etc.). He also used symbolic parallels from mythology, history, and literature, and created new words and puns.

international world. And that's why he wrote so much about Ireland, in the most modern of styles. His writing was also bitter-sweet, because to be modern was still deeply unpopular in Ireland itself, and Joyce both loved and hated his own country.

In fact, what makes most Irish writers interesting is not just that they use the English language in a way that is more playful than most English people do, but that their stories, books, plays and poems are almost always bitter-sweet. This double quality gives these Irish writers an extra interest, because they are not simply telling jokes or tragic stories. They are telling tragic jokes and comic tragedies.

Irish writers realised that great stories are not just stories about great men or great women, like Achilles or Cleopatra, but about real men and real women, told by a great story teller. That is what links Samuel Beckett, James Joyce, George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde to Brian Merriman to the ancient Celtic Sagas: the deepest ironies of ordinary human life, told in glowing¹⁴ stories!

Wilde was born when Ireland was very much under the control of Britain, dominated by its Protestant upper-middle class who generally looked up to their “superiors” in aristocratic England and admired them. Wilde, who was not an aristocrat, saw this from the point of view of a person brought up in a house where Celtic nationalism was the craze¹³, and was deeply ironic about the popularity of the English ruling class. That's why he wrote about it so much in bitter-sweet ironic terms.

Joyce was born when Ireland had already become more like modern Ireland: dominated by its Catholic middle class and looking for a modern identity among the nations of the world. Joyce loved modernity and international culture and wanted to give Ireland a place in that modern,

GLOSSARY

Part One

1.
 - 1 **nearby** – not far away
 - 2 **hut** – a small building of simple construction
 - 3 **to link** – to connect
 - 4 **by a cult of the life force** – because of a religion based on life-energy
 - 5 **people** – a race or a nation
 - 6 **herder** – a person who takes care of a group of animals
2.
 - 1 **temple** – a building where people go to worship in some religions
 - 2 **literally** – according to the original meaning of a word or expression
 - 3 **bump** – a raised area on the land or on your body
 - 4 **womb** – a part of a female's body where her baby grows before it is born
 - 5 **spring** – a place where water naturally flows out from the ground
 - 6 **indeed** – really
 - 7 **achievement** – sth very good that you have succeeded in doing by your own efforts
 - 8 **sacred** – holy and deserving respect
3.
 - 1 **to rob** – to take illegally
 - 2 **slave** – a person who is owned by someone else and has to work for them
 - 3 **to tame** – to make less powerful and easier to control
 - 4 **genealogy** – family tree (a chart that shows how each person is related to the others)
 - 5 **pagan** – used in the past to describe a person who didn't believe in Christianity
 - 6 **to wipe out** – to destroy
 - 7 **equilibrium** – harmony, balance
4.
 - 1 **to emerge** – to appear
 - 2 **seer** – sb who can see into the future and say what will happen
 - 3 **performed sacrifices** – killed an animal or a person and offered them to a god or gods
 - 4 **to predict** – to say that sth will happen in the future
 - 5 **to ensure** – to make sth certain to happen
 - 6 **to inherit** – to receive sth from someone after they have died
5.
 - 1 **Hallowe'en** – hallow(ed) even(ing) or sacred/holy evening, the festival Night of the Dead, shortened in America to Halloween

- 2 **day-lit world** – the world in the light produced by the sun during the day
- 3 **reincarnation** – the belief that a dead person's soul can live again in a new body
- 4 **afterlife** – the life that some people believe they have after death
- 5 **the completion of time's destiny** – ending a cycle of nature, such as a year, or a life
- 6 **skull** – the bones of the head
- 7 **witch** – a woman who has magical powers
- 8 **to drown sb** – to cause to die by being unable to breathe under water

Part Two

1.
 - 1 **were it not for who** – if it was not for who / unless these people came after
 - 2 **fierce** – violent and frightening
 - 3 **to raid** – to attack a place suddenly
 - 4 **chieftain** – the leader of a tribe
 - 5 **to descend** – to be related to a particular person or group of people who lived in the past
 - 6 **to conquer** – to take land by attacking people or winning it in a war
 - 7 **conquest** – the act of defeating an army or taking land by fighting
 - 8 **to regain** – to take or get sth again
 - 9 **fortifications** – strong walls, towers, etc. that are built to protect a place
 - 10 **to obey** – to do what sb in a position of authority (rule or law) tells you to do
 - 11 **tie** – a relationship between two people, groups or countries that connects them
 - 12 **shining armour** – metal or leather clothing that protects your body
 - 13 **loyalty** – to be faithful to your friends, country, etc.
2.
 - 1 **to rely on** – to trust sb or sth to do what you expect them to do
 - 2 **invincible** – too strong or skillful to be defeated
 - 3 **climax** – the most important moment, situation
 - 4 **stronghold** – a building or position which is strongly defended
 - 5 **to belong to** – to be sb's property
 3.
 - 1 **thrives in some quarters** – is successful in some areas
 - 2 **entirely** – completely
 - 3 **gradually** – slowly over a period of time
 - 4 **inevitable** – certain to happen and impossible to avoid
 - 5 **split... people along sectarian lines** – people were divided into two groups on the basis of their religion

- 6 revivalist** – sb who tries to bring sth (language, culture) back to life
- 7 ceased to be** – wasn't any more
- 8 as... Ireland gained in self-respect** – because... Ireland began to respect itself more and more
- 9 came in sufficient numbers** – there were enough of them
- 10 to outnumber** – to be greater in number than sb or sth
- 11 splinter group** – a group of people who have left a political party or other organization and formed a new separate organization
- 12 attempt** – when you try to do sth
- 13 to share** – to use or have sth that other people also use or have
- 14 to vanish** – to disappear
- 15 fungus** – any of various types of organism which obtain their food from decaying material
- 16 typhus** – a serious infectious disease causing a high body temperature and severe pains, carried by insects that live on the bodies of people and animals
- 17 seeking refuge** – looking for shelter (protection)
- 18 aftermath** – during the period after
- 19 famine** – when there is not enough food for people, causing illness and death
- 20 penniless** – having no money
- 21 Foreign Direct Investment** – money invested in a country by foreign countries
- 22 tax deals** – arrangements about the money paid to the government
- 23 purpose** – why you do sth
- 4.**
- 1 to interface** – to connect
- 2 to keep up** – to continue
- 3 haves and have-nots** – a “have” is a rich person, a “have-not” is a poor person; “have and have-nots” means an unfair distribution of money
- 4 to fulfil** – to do sth that is expected

Part Three

- 1.**
- 1 distinct** – different
- 2 to proclaim** – to show openly
- 3 witty** – using words in a clever and funny way
- 4 bawdy** – enjoyable, noisy, often with humorous remarks about sex
- 5 harp** – a large musical instrument with strings that are stretched from top to bottom
- 6 bagpipes** – a musical instrument, played especially in Scotland and Ireland, from which you produce sound by blowing air into a bag and forcing it out through pipes

- 7 fiddle** – a violin
- 8 tin whistle** – a simple musical instrument with six holes that you play by blowing
- 9 squeeze box** – slang for accordion
- 2.**
- 1 nature** – character
- 2 prejudice** – a dislike and distrust of people without good reasons
- 3 pride** – to go beyond or rise above the limit
- 4 to chant** – to repeat or sing a word or phrase continuously
- 3.**
- 1 two strands** – two parts
- 2 patterns** – arrangements
- 3 tap** – a light hit
- 4 distraction** – sth that makes you stop concentrating on what you are doing
- 5 to focus attention** – to give a lot of attention
- 6 peak of** – the highest or the best point
- 7 distinctly** – clearly
- 8 it seems likely that dance was** – that dance was probably
- 9 virile** – describes a man (especially a young man) full of strength and energy
- 10 to engender** – to make sth exist
- 4.**
- 1 record-keeper** – sb responsible for keeping information for the future
- 2 elaborate** – containing a lot of details
- 3 alas** – sadly
- 4 to reveal** – to allow sth to be seen that, until then, had been hidden
- 5 feast** – a festive day
- 6 Japanese Noh theatre** – “Noh” is a major form of classical Japanese musical drama that has been performed since the 14th century
- 7 to lift** – to speak or sing with rising and falling of the voice
- 8 to regard** – to consider
- 9 particularly** – especially
- 10 fervent** – believing or feeling sth very strongly
- 11 to dedicate to** – to give completely your time and energy to
- 12 almost exclusively** – almost always
- 13 was the craze** – was extremely popular
- 14 glowing** – warm, enthusiastic

FACTS ABOUT IRELAND

The Republic of Ireland (Ireland/Éire), as we call it today, has been independent (from the UK) since 1922.

Ireland joined the United Nations in 1955 and the European Union in 1973. It is *not* a member of NATO. It was officially neutral in WWII.

About 90 per cent of the population are traditionally Catholic. (Less than half of whom now practice.)

Irish (also called Gaelic) is the *first* official language of the Republic of Ireland, English is the second official language. Irish is completely different from English; it is a Celtic language.

The Republic of Ireland has only 5 legally recognised cities: Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway, and Waterford. Over 40 per cent of the population resides within 100 km of the capital city, Dublin.

Ireland has had a woman President since 1990. First Mary Robinson, now Mary McAleese. President McAleese is from Northern Ireland, where people can have *both* Irish and British citizenship.

The Prime Minister in Ireland is called the Taoiseach [Týšoh], in Gaelic meaning “Leader” or “Chieftain”.

The population of the Republic of Ireland: 4,250,000 (in 2006). That year, approx. 200,000 immigrants came to Ireland, mostly Polish. About 3,000,000 Irish citizens live outside of Ireland; people of Irish origin living around the world have been estimated at 80,000,000. Most are in the USA, Canada, the UK and Australia.

The harp is the national symbol. It is on Euro coins, passports and the President’s flag.

Cars in Ireland drive on the left, as in the UK.

Four Irish writers have won the Nobel Prize: George Bernard Shaw, William Butler Yeats, Samuel Beckett and Seamus Heaney. James Joyce and Oscar Wilde both died too young and were never nominated.





Hi! My name is Mícheál ua Séaghdha [Míchjál Oušej]. I am an Irishman born in Dublin but living now in Prague. I teach English and I give training courses for Czech, Slovak and Polish teachers on Irish and Celtic Culture. I speak Gaelic and English, and am learning Czech. I also have a university degree in German, Spanish and French.

I have done a number of different jobs. I first worked as a secondary school teacher in Ireland. Then I worked for Irish television as a researcher. After that I started my own record label and made CDs of Irish singer-songwriters and bands. As a hobby, I used to do a lot of acting and work in the theatre. In Dublin, I also had my own radio show in Gaelic. That was a lot of fun, but now I am back teaching and loving it!

I came to the Czech Republic because I found Czech people very friendly and very honest. I will be visiting Poland soon and am looking forward to visiting Slovakia very much. I hope you enjoy my book and come to visit Ireland some time. You will be very welcome! Irish people love making new friends.

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