



TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
Did you know Ireland's oldest university's has a full name?: College of the Holy and Undivided Trinity of Queen Elizabeth near Dublin.

The Temptations of Oscar Wilde's IRELAND

BY MARK A. THOMPSON

YEARS AGO, with the smug confidence of youth, I picked up a boy my age at Camden Palace in London. I took him back to the Royal Automobile Club, one of the gentlemen's clubs along Pall Mall, where I was a guest of my godfather, who was sleeping in his room down the

hall from the room where the boy and I shared a bed and more. The boy was Irish, just arrived in London six months earlier. He'd left Dublin, where he'd been employed at The Shelbourne, which had enabled him a similar position at The Berkeley in London. In a postcoital stupor, he requested

that I meet him the next evening. While I haven't forgotten that Irish boy in the decades hence, the memory of him reappeared with startling clarity upon my inaugural visit to Dublin this past spring with Oscar Wilde Tours. Even for peripatetic people, Dublin too often remains on the bucket list: a Bloomsday, pub-crawling pilgrimage in search of literary and genealogical

antecedents—and yet for the LGBT community, the birthplace of Oscar Wilde affords remarkable insight into the development of modern gay history. After all, the trials of Wilde against Victorian “morality” are still being fought in the distant vestiges of the British empire today.

Born of a desire to combine travel and gay history, Oscar Wilde Tours was founded by the eminent historian Andrew Lear, Ph.D., co-author of *Images Of Ancient Greek Pederasty: Boys Were Their Gods*. Widely recognized as one of the foremost scholars on same-sex love in the ancient world, Lear has taught at Harvard, Columbia, New York University and Pomona College.

As Lear reminded us, 21st-century Ireland is a far more civil society than the one Wilde endured. Same-sex sexual activity has been legal since 1993, with the same age of consent for males and females. LGBT people serve openly in the Irish military, and civil partnerships have been legal since 2011.

As it happened, we were guests of The



ST. STEPHEN'S GREEN
Were you expecting another color?

Shelbourne Dublin, the former employer of my Irish lad, which is where the Irish Constitution was drafted in 1922 under the guidance of Michael Collins. Established in 1824, The Shelbourne resides at arguably the most distinguished address on St. Stephen's Green, Dublin's splendid Georgian square. So distinguished is its pedigree that the hotel offers a museum off the lobby that features a curated collection of historic objects, including an original draft copy of the constitution. To this day, each of Dublin's lord mayors walks from the Mansion House to the hotel on the day of inauguration, hence the origin of The Shelbourne's Lord Mayor's Lounge.

Completely restored in 2005, the five-star hotel has been the Dublin home of numerous luminaries, and accordingly, 12 of the hotel's suites bear the names of guests such as Princess Grace and John F. Kennedy. As author Elizabeth Bowen wrote of the hotel, “the place still seems to be thronged with the handsome, the hearty, the happy and the polite,” sentiments with which I concurred as I wandered the property in a blissful reverie of dark Irish lads.

As a guide, Lear combines the contagious enthusiasm of an excitable boy with the panache of an erudite professor. We followed happily as he led us through the labyrinthine streets along the River Liffey, escorting us to Wilde's birthplace and through Wilde's erstwhile home on Merrion Square, located across the park, where a pink and green stone statue of a supine Wilde gazes with cockeyed amusement at his boyhood residence.

An “Art Tea” at The Merrion Hotel is the equivalent of tea at Downton Abbey. Served in the hotel's Georgian

drawing room, where Belgian tapestries and French chandeliers complement The Merrion's private art collection, the Art Tea pastries are confectionery homages to the paintings hanging throughout the hotel. Beyond the massive



ALMOST TOO PRETTY TO EAT
Art Tea pastry at The Merrion.

windows stretches an 18th-century formal garden of box hedges and rose arches punctuated with statuary, including a bronze of James Joyce.

Once the homes of Lord Monck and Lord Mornington, as well as the birthplace of the first Duke of Wellington, The Merrion is located in four Grade I-listed 18th-century town houses, restored to their original Georgian splendor. Expect starched linens, fresh flowers, polished silver, sparkling crystal—and a window into an epoch marked by impeccable service and decorum.

Most visitors to Dublin head to Trinity College for a peek at the



POSING POETIC
A statue of James Joyce in the garden of The Merrion Dublin.



WILDE TIMES
Former home of Oscar Wilde at 1 Merrion Square (above), Lough Erne Resort (here).

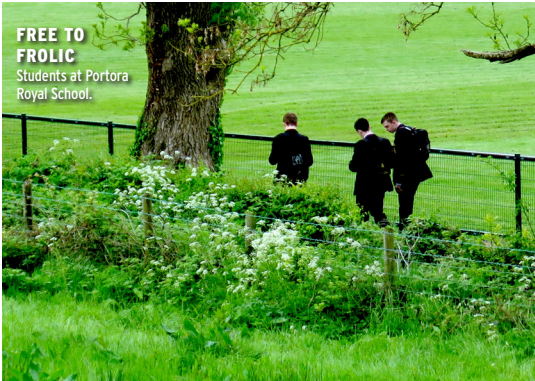
PHOTOS: MRNY



A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT
River Liffey flows through the center of Dublin.

Helmed by Stephen McAllister, the Irish television chef and restaurateur, the Michelin-cited restaurant serves “good, honest Irish fare” that’s a gastronomic representation of the city’s modernity and tradition.

The Gate Theatre, established in 1928 by Hilton Edwards and Michael MacLiammoir (who were Dublin’s most illustrious homosexual couple),



FREE TO FROLIC
Students at Portora Royal School.

distinguished itself from other Irish theater companies by introducing audiences to acclaimed productions of international dramatists. Or, as an old Dublin theater joke had it, the Gate offered the Sodom to the Abbey’s begorrah.

For more “Sodom and begorrah,” the Dublin Gay Theatre Festival celebrates the theatrical contributions of the LGBT community with an annual two-week

festival of gay-themed work at venues throughout the city. Afterwards, it’s likely that you’ll want to join the casts for some “pink pints” at Dublin’s legendary The George, which has entertained locals for years with its eclectic programming tossed “with a sprinkling of fairy dust.” There’s also The Front Lounge, Dublin’s de facto LGBT community center (particularly during Dublin’s Pride), as well as Pantibar, with its “seven days for gays” weekly calendar.

For a day trip, consider Northern Ireland. It might raise an eyebrow for those who recall “the Troubles,” but all of us were enchanted by the spectacular beauty of the landscape, particularly in and around the town of Enniskillen, located on the bucolic Lough Erne.

As a youth, Wilde matriculated at Portora Royal School, situated behind a pair of imposing entrance gates and set high atop a grassy promontory overlooking the lake. As we photographed the stunning vistas, schoolboys in uniform roamed the ruins of Portora Castle, sneaking cigarettes and huddling together in twos and threes. A step back in time and it was easy enough to imagine Wilde in residence, an

ambitious adolescent filled with dreams and desires.

A drive to Lower Lough Erne brought us to the hauntingly beautiful ruins of the 6th-century monastery on Devenish Island, which was raided by the Vikings in 837. Enniskillen is also home to The Clinton Centre, a youth hostel dedicated to peace, built in 2002 on the site of the 1987 Remembrance Day bombing that became a turning point in the Troubles.

Given the region’s turbulent history, it’s perhaps appropriate that the 2013 G-8 summit was held at the five-star Lough Erne Resort, located a few minutes from Enniskillen on a spectacular 600-acre peninsula. It’s not often that you’re residing in rooms formerly occupied by the world’s leaders at a resort complete with five helipads and a seaplane landing, two championship golf courses, a Thai spa and an award-winning restaurant. Voted Northern Ireland’s “Hotel of the Year” for 2014 by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, this idyllic resort affords a renewed perspective on the northern part of the Emerald Isle.

Late in the afternoon, glass of wine in hand, I stood along the shores of Castle Hume Lough and considered anew Wilde’s remark that “memory is the diary that we all carry about with us.” Those who travel with Lear to discover the foundations of LGBT history can expect a tour as revelatory as it is inspired.

THE NITTY GRITTY

STAY

The Shelbourne
marriott.com/hotels/travel/dubbr-the-shelbourne-dublin-a-renaissance-hotel

The Fitzwilliam
fitzwilliamhoteldublin.com

Lough Erne Resort
loughernereresort.com

EAT

The Pig’s Ear
thepigsear.com

The Merrion
merrionhotel.com/drawingrooms_tea.php

PLAY & BE MARY

Oscar Wilde Tours
oscarwildetours.com

The George
thegeorge.ie

The Front Lounge
thefrontlounge.ie

Pantibar
pantibar.com

Dublin Pride
dublinpride.ie