

CAPITAL

Letter *Tony Ruane.*

“Who was this guy Gogarty anyway?” I was being asked a question to which there could have been a very long reply. “He was a famous Dublin character” I replied as best I could to the inquisitive American tourists. They were seeking somewhere to go in Dublin and have lunch, as well as to hear some Irish music.

At about 12 noon on a weekday lunch might be easy enough to find in central Dublin, but Irish music posed a problem. Then I thought of Gogarty's in Temple Bar, where food and drink are available throughout the day as well as a fair chance of hearing some Irish Traditional music. I had directed the group to Gogarty's and this raised the question of who Gogarty was and was he the owner of the bar? I explained that he was not the owner of the "Bar" or "Pub" in Irish parlance, but that the premises was named in his honour. "He sure musta ben famous if he has a Bar named after him!" quipped one of the Americans.

Then I told them, to the best of my knowledge, that he was famous in Dublin, as a surgeon, poet, wit and literary personality in the 19th and 20th century. I felt at a loss, not knowing sufficient on the occasion and decided that I would look into the matter at my earliest opportunity.

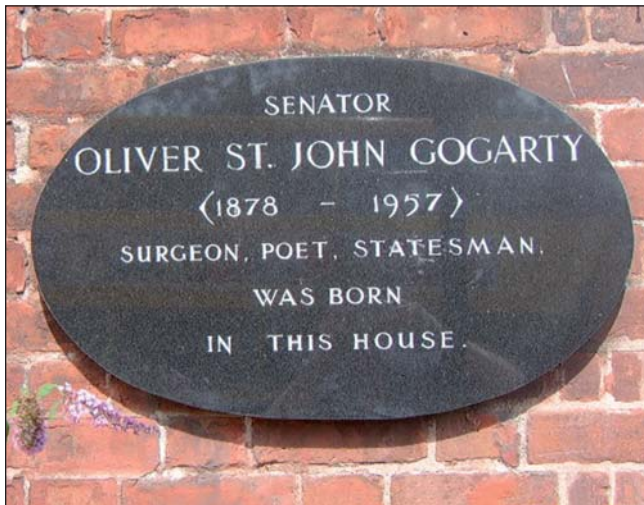
There are few characters of Dublin's past who could boast such an array of illustrious memories and activities than this famous joker and socialite. From escaping captivity and certain execution to breaking sporting records Oliver St John Gogarty lived quite a hectic life from his birth in 1878 until his demise in 1957. Known to his friends as a prankster, many tales were told by Dublin's best known writers like W.B. Yeats and James Joyce. One such fondly remembered story is told of how Gogarty once sold a drunken acquaintance to The Royal College of Surgeons for the purpose of medical research. The paralytic victim awoke from his drunken stupor just in time to escape from his wrapping and avoid dissection!

A multitalented individual, Gogarty had the ability to turn his hand or mind to anything. A distinguished throat surgeon he was also an award-winning poet, a record breaking athlete, a footballer with Bohemians F.C. a brave Irish rebel and controversial politician, Gogarty was also a colourful socialite amongst Dublin's literati.

Gogarty's activities at that time helped to elevate him to legendary status. He penned some of the most famous and



5 Parnell Square Dublin. (5 Rutland Square)
birthplace of Oliver St. John Gogarty



Plaque at No 5 Parnell Square. Ref Oliver Gogarty. (Originally called Rutland Square)

influential poetry inspired by 20th century satirical and contemporary issues. He gained an immense popularity through his works and W.B. Yeats as well as James Joyce were ardent admirers of his literary talents. Joyce, in his earlier writing years was taken under the wing of Gogarty who oversaw the budding writer's development and invited him to "house-share" with him in the Martello Tower that he occupied in Sandycove at the time.

The now famous tower was one of a series built along the coast by the British in 1804 as a security measure, guarding against the feared invasion by Napoleon's forces. Occupied by the British Forces until 1904, Oliver Gogarty, a medical student at the time, was the first civilian tenant to take up residence there. Joyce agreed to share with Gogarty and they lived there together for some time, in tolerance, if not in perfect harmony. It is said that Gogarty was in fear of being lambasted by Joyce in his new writings at the time and he felt that by allowing Joyce to stay in residence he would win favour with him. They were joined a short time later by a third housemate named Samuel Chenevix Trench, an Anglo-Irish friend of Gogarty's, whose attempts to converse in Irish often annoyed both of his "Big Brother" companions.

They would part some time later under rancorous circumstances when Joyce was working on his yet undefined classic novel "Ulysses". Proving to be the original "odd couple", Gogarty and Joyce often bounced off each other and Trench frequently acted as referee in these quarrels. It would appear that a certain amount of jealous or possessive feeling prevailed between Gogarty and the budding genius, James Joyce. In a bid to distract Joyce from his work, Oliver Gogarty would often attempt to set him drunk. The final event, or "straw that broke the camel's back" ended the trio's unique living arrangement one morning when James Joyce, who had been having a 'lie-in', was suddenly

awakened by the explosive sound of gunfire in the vicinity of his bedside. He awoke to find Gogarty firing a volley of shots at a line of saucepans on a shelf above the bed on which Joyce lay. It was reported that Joyce jumped from the bed and packing his personal belongings left the tower, never to return. Little more than a month later he eloped with his young sweetheart, Nora Barnacle, from Galway to their self imposed exile in Europe.

Although Gogarty proved to be a bit of a menace and a distraction to Joyce during that period of domesticity in the Martello Tower he still used one of Gogarty's poems "The Ballad of Japing Jesus" in the first chapter of *Ulysses*. Its title was slightly adjusted to: "The ballad of Joking Jesus. It is also accepted by many literary analysts that the character Buck Mulligan in the same novel, is based on Oliver St John Gogarty. W. B. Yeats paid another great tribute to Gogarty's lyrical genius when he included seventeen of Gogarty's lyrics in his book "The Oxford Book of Modern Verse".

In 1922 Gogarty was captured and imprisoned by anti-treaty Republicans in a house situated beside the River Liffey. The cunning Gogarty sensed that he was staring execution in the face. He pleaded with his captors for urgent leave to use the toilet and while there he lifted a window sash and escaped into the garden. Sprinting to the riverbank he dived into the icy waters of the River Liffey. A



Entrance arch at St Stephen's Green erected in memory of the fallen in the Boer War 1899-1900



Statue of James Joyce 1882–1941. Unveiled by The Right Honourable Lord Mayor of Dublin Alderman Senator Seán Haughey, on Bloomsday 1990.

Presented to the City of Dublin by the North Earl St.

strong swimmer and athlete, Gogarty swam for his life, as a hail of gunfire peppered the water around him. He reached the far bank unscathed and ran for his life into the night. His fitness and athletic stamina stood to him on this occasion and most probably saved his life. No stranger to the Liffey waters, Gogarty had to his credit the rescue of several individuals from certain drowning in that same river.

Gogarty later donated a pair of swans to the Liffey as a token of his gratitude for his own miraculous escape from captivity and certain death. He released the pair of snow-white swans into the river at the TCD boat-club in Islandbridge under the admiring gaze of Free State President William Cosgrave, W. B. Yeats and Colonel J. O'Reilly, the President's Aide-de-Camp. This daring escape wasn't the only brush with the rebel cause that Gogarty would experience. He had already been involved in the 1916 Rising and the Anglo-Irish War. He was also the getaway driver on an occasion when four members of the female revolutionary movement known as "Cumman na mBann" had organised an escape from Mountjoy Prison.

Oliver Gogarty often provided a safe refuge for "The Big Fellow" during his quest for a free Ireland. When Michael Collins's pockets were searched after his assassination, at Béal na Blath, Co Cork, his personal belongings included a key to Gogarty's flat in Dublin. Before Collins' journey to his final resting-place Gogarty is credited with the laying out and dressing of the famous corpse.

Oliver St John Gogarty was a top throat surgeon who had followed in his father's footsteps into the medical profession. Described by many of his colleagues as being fast and dextrous; Gogarty was also known to bring entertainment and mischief into the operating theatre. A quintessential joker, he was reputed to be capable of playing tricks; like tossing newly removed tonsils to nursing assistants on the other side of the theatre. Like his father before him, he was reputed to be a gifted diagnostician.

When he was not fighting for the cause, Gogarty was an accomplished athlete, as well as being a record-breaking cyclist. He succeeded in knocking 2 seconds off the Irish three-quarter mile record in 1899. But his glory amongst the cycling fraternity was short lived when he was banned in a subsequent contest for swearing at the judges. He is also credited with pioneering the initial Tailteann Games in 1924.

Of course Gogarty's writings sometimes caused controversy and landed him in trouble and even into the Civil Law Courts. His 1937 memoir "As I was going Down Sackville Street" resulted in a libel lawsuit. Henry St Clair, who was an uncle of Samuel Beckett, claimed that Gogarty characterized his grandfather, Morris Harris, a usurer. The trial attracted a large amount of media attention at the time and the as-yet unknown Beckett filed one of two affidavits on behalf of his uncle's lawsuit and played a key role in the trial proper, which Gogarty ultimately lost.



Martello Tower Sandycove Dublin, Gogarty Joyce and Trench shared accommodation here. (The red and yellow hut in the foreground is the Lifeguards' hut)

Having been involved in the 1916 Rising and The War of Independence, it was inevitable that Oliver St John Gogarty would be present at the birth of the first Irish Democratic State Parliament. He was elected to the Senate and was very much at home in the field of political debate with his quick wit and sharp intellect.

Gogarty was opposed to the British army's recruitment of Irishmen for the Boer War in South Africa, but on the return of the victorious Irish Regiments in June 1900 he penned his ironic 'Ode of Welcome' in the Anglo-Irish establishment Journal, namely 'Irish Society'. It sold out within an hour of publication, not because of any empathy for the returned soldiers, but for the 'scandal' hidden in the text which read:

*The Gallant Irish Yeomen
Home from the war has come
Each victory gained o'er foeman
Why should our bards be dumb?
How shall we sing their praises?
Or glory in their deed
Renowned their worth amazes
Empire their prowess needs
So to old Ireland's hearts and homes
We welcome now our own brave boys
In cot and hall; 'neath lordly domes
Love's heroes share once more our joys
Love is the Lord of all just now
Be he the lover, husband, son
Each dauntless soul recalls the vow
By which not fame, but love was won
United now in fond embrace
Salute with joy each well-loved face
Yeomen, in women's hearts you hold the place.*

(The 'scandal' is revealed by reading vertically the first letter of each line)

Born at Number 5 Rutland Square (now Parnell Square] Dublin, in A D 1879, Oliver St John Gogarty immigrated to London in

1937. He travelled from there in 1939 to the United States, where he worked as a writer and lecturer. He died there in the year 1957.

The following is a list of some publications by Oliver St John Gogarty:

An Offering of Swans (1923)
Wild Apples (1928)
As I Was Going down Sackville Street (1937)
Others to Adorn (1938)
I Follow St Patrick (1938)
Intimations (1950)
It Isn't This Time of Year at All! (1954)
Tumbling in the Hay
Collected Poems (1954)
A Week End in the Middle of the Week (1958)



Gogarty's Pub Restaurant Temple Bar Dublin



Bronze statue of Oliver St John Gogarty