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# MY DAY IN DUBLIN

## Looking for Dobbins and Finding Stella

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06 APR 2015: What do Marlon Brando, Elaine Benes and Jonathan Swift have in common? The answer is Stella. In the movie A Streetcar Named Desire, Brando, playing Stanley Kowalski cries out in longing anguish "Stella! Stella!"



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In a Seinfeld episode, Elaine Benes, played by Julia Louis-Dreyfus, is hyped up on pain killers. She meets Uncle Leo's wife, Stella, at a dinner reception, and immediately launches into a Stanley Kowalski -type rendition of Stella's name.

Jonathan Swift, the author of Gulliver's Travels and Dean of Dublin's St. Patrick's Cathedral in the early 1700s, met Esther Johnson when she was 16 years old. In several poems and writings, he referred to Esther as "Stella" and in fact their graves are very close to each other in the Cathedral.

As a few sources have noted, "the exact nature of their relationship has never fully been established", however from my tour guide's point of view, this was the type of fun and sort-of-salacious gossip that added to the intrigue of discovering all there is to know about Dublin.



And so it was on a cold, windy day in January that I started my adventure, first by sleeping in, which I never do, and then walking from The Marker Hotel in the east end to Fade Street in the downtown area, to meet Julian for my cycling tour with See Dublin By Bike. The east end is the new techno-happening area of Dublin. The Marker Hotel, which opened in 2013 is an ultra-modern, five star, chic hangout for those working at nearby Facebook or Google headquarters, as well as for the après Grand Canal Theatre crowd.

The walk downtown is about 25 minutes (of course you can also take the hop-on/hop-off bus or a taxi). I met Julian, we donned our helmets and set off for a 3 hour tour of everything you can see in Dublin.

We started with a visit to the iconic statue of Molly Malone - now moved from Grafton Street to Church Lane - and then rode to Trinity College where Julian explained some of the history of the city. He recited a verse from the poem, Dublin, by Louis MacNeice, that begins with a description of some of the statues: "Grey Brick upon Brick, declamatory bronze on sombre pedestals" and ends with "...Nelson on his pillar watching his world collapse". This is a reference to the famous pillar that was destroyed by an IRA bomb in 1966. Today the 398 foot Spire of Dublin marks the spot on O'Connell Street, just north of the Liffey River.



We passed by Parliament where US President Obama invoked the Irish phrase “Is Feidir Linn”, meaning “Yes we can” to encourage hope and optimism to the thousands who attended. And then it was on to Dublin Castle where the Statue of Justice, erected by the British in 1751, stands with her back to the city, a fact noted in the poem “Lady Justice under her station, Face to the Castle, Arse to the Nation”.

And so our tour progressed. At some point I asked about Dobbins and was told that it was about a 20-minute walk from the hotel, so I put it out of my mind for the time being.

We continued to cycle past the Dubh Lind, the ‘dark pool’ from which Dublin’s name originates, to the amazing manuscript, art and cultural collection in the Chester Beatty Library, and on to St. Patrick’s Cathedral with gossipy stories of Jonathan Swift, Stella and even some about Bono of U2, who was expelled from a nearby school. We cycled through the west end, up to the north, out to the east (where we took photos of Sir Bob Geldoff being interviewed) and finally back downtown.

Honestly, this is the best way to see and understand the city and to get an appreciation of its history, architecture, people (and gossip).

In the afternoon I met Martin Hart, the Director of Tradfest, the annual celebration of folk and

traditional music. Hart explained that visitors from around the world descend on Dublin in January to share in the infectious nature of Irish music. And why January? “What we don’t have in weather, we have in music. People like sunshine. Music is sunshine”.

Hart talked about some of the stars of this year’s festival including Donovan, and noted that Tradfest provides “a rare opportunity to hear the best of the best, in historic venues that would not normally be open to the public”.



Afterward I headed toward the Liffey River, through Temple Bar, the area where many Tradfest events would take place. Heading east along the river I stopped at the Jeanie Johnston, a three-masted ship used to transport victims of the Irish Famine to Quebec in 1848. Nearby are the Famine Memorial Sculptures that sadly and poignantly

depict the poor souls whose lives were changed irrevocably by the potato famine.

All the time I was asking about Dobbins.

Martin Hart had advised me to take a taxi, as Dobbins was difficult to find. At the hotel, the staff shrugged at first and then pointed to a maze of streets on a map and concluded that even though it looked like a short walk, I was better off taking a taxi. I bundled up against the cold and set out on my quest by foot.

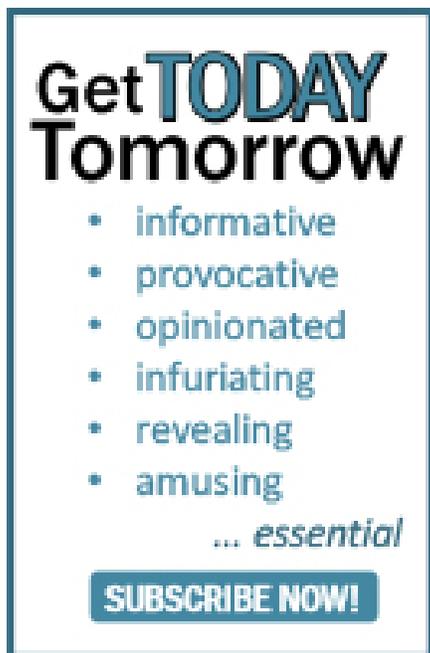


It turned out that finding Dobbins was a bit of a pilgrimage. I walked north and west of the hotel, arrived in the area of Merrion Square (famous for the colourful statue of Oscar Wilde) and then spoke to a few passersby (none of whom knew exactly where Dobbins was located). Finally after retracing some of my steps, I decided to walk through an archway that I had passed earlier and lo and behold, there was Dobbins... and the place was packed!

The restaurant is located in a reconverted stable. The quaint, cozy atmosphere and the staff ooze passion for service and taste from the moment you arrive. I introduced myself to one of the owners, who asked if I wanted some wine.

When I looked at the 'wine by the glass' menu, he leaned over and discretely turned to the 'wine by

the bottle' section, whereupon I ended up forming a deep relationship with a 2013 Merlot from Chile.

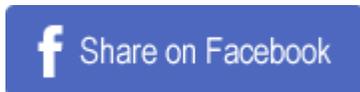
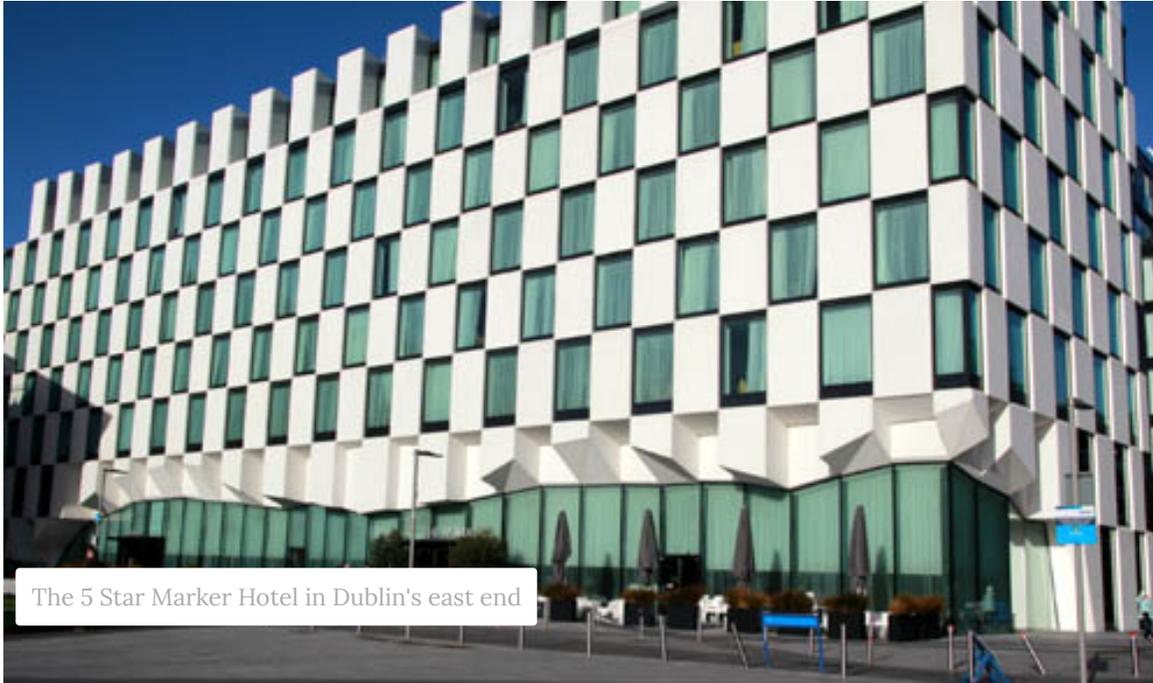


The meal soon arrived and it was amazing: Crab with pink grapefruit and cucumber salad, followed by lamb, cooked to perfection with side dishes of potato gratin, carrot, turnip, broccoli and peas. My notes for the evening indicate the initials “OMG” as my reaction to every dish. The prevailing attitude at Dobbins is “we want diners to love all we do here”. Simply put, they succeeded.

Afterward I attended a concert labelled as ‘Radical Trad’, featuring the group ‘Beoga’ (meaning ‘lively’).

And just like that the day was over. It was that perfect combination of excited energy, visual amazement, musical wonder, fascinating conversation and culinary bliss. Dublin seems to have it all.

## Dublin



Steve Gillick