

# WONDER WANDER MOUNTJOY SQUARE AND NORTH GREAT GEORGE'S STREET



**NATIONAL INVENTORY**  
of ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

Comhairle Cathrach  
Bhaite Átha Cliath  
Dublin City Council

## INSTRUCTIONS

TAKE A 'WONDER WANDER'  
THROUGH MOUNTJOY SQUARE AND  
NORTH GREAT GEORGE'S STREET:



Download more **FREE**  
WALKING TRAILS

- Wander through our streets, find the picture clues and delve into the stories that our city tells through its rich architectural heritage.
- Take ten minutes to spot the features in our architectural scavenger hunt, or simply relax and enjoy our carefully curated self-guided tour of Mountjoy Square and North Great George's Street.
- Always remember to glance up, peer down, and never cease to WONDER!

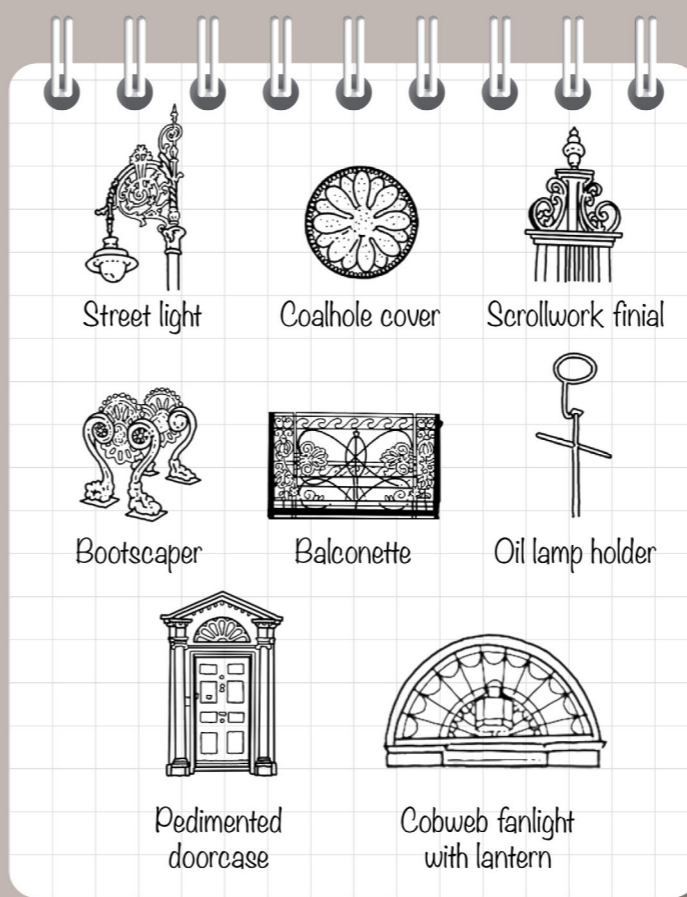


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## SCAVENGER HUNT

HOW MANY OF THESE FEATURES  
CAN YOU SPOT ON NORTH GREAT  
GEORGE'S STREET?



## THE STORY OF MOUNTJOY SQUARE AND NORTH GREAT GEORGE'S STREET

The story of Mountjoy Square and North Great George's Street is central to the development of the city during the 18th century, as developers laid out new streets and squares north of the River Liffey. Fine brick terraces were built on the Mount Eccles estate during the 1760s, along North Great George's Street and Denmark Street Great. Further townhouses were built for prosperous families on the adjoining Gardiner estate at Parnell Street (formerly Great Britain Street) and later Gardiner Place. Development of the area culminated in Mountjoy Square, a grand set piece enhanced by formal vistas of the Custom House.

The abolition of the Irish Parliament in 1801 led to a city-wide decline. Many of the grand houses in this area were subdivided to cater for the emerging middle class, and some later converted into tenements. At this time, light industry moved into the mews buildings and laneways.

By the early 20th century the area had been transformed into a spirited mixed neighbourhood. Though beset by overcrowding, Dublin Corporation's housing schemes from the period sought to deliver improved living conditions.

Today, Mountjoy Square and North Great George's Street are Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs). This designation recognises their special architectural, social and historic character and supports the protection and enhancement of the built heritage. Alongside the committed efforts of local residents and community groups, these ACAs help to ensure that the unique character of this part of the city is valued, enjoyed, and passed on to future generations.

**Want to learn more about Architectural Conservation Areas in the city? Contact the Conservation Office of Dublin City Council.**



## TICK THE BOX AS YOU WONDER

### 1. MOUNTJOY SQUARE PARK

Laid out by Luke Gardiner II, Mountjoy Square has sides of equal length, making it Dublin's only true Georgian Square. Its central park, enclosed by iron railings, was designed by the leading landscaper of the day, John Sutherland and each of the sixty-eight households received a key to what was their own private garden.



In time, it opened to the public, and in addition to croquet and lawn tennis, the park has more recently hosted community events and festivals.

### 2. TERRACED HOUSING

The terraced houses, built between 1793 and 1818, followed strict rules on height, brickwork and openings. The resulting harmony creates a grand architectural set-piece that is remarkably cohesive more than two centuries later.

Look up and you will see a Georgian rule at work: windows diminish in size as they rise.



The tallest ones were for the grand reception rooms, while the smaller windows above served bedrooms. This repeated rhythm from terrace to terrace contributes to the sense of unity around the square.

### 3. MOUNTJOY SQUARE SOUTH

The south side of Mountjoy Square has seen more change than any other. By the late 20th century, neglect and redevelopment pressures saw much of the terrace demolished and replaced with new buildings. Several of the Georgian houses including Nos. 39, 46 and 47, survived, which now hold particular significance as authentic records of the past.

### 4. COAL HOLES

Beneath your feet are circular cast-iron coal hole covers. These coal holes were once used to deliver coal into the cellars below. Coal kept the households' fireplaces glowing, kitchens cooking and water heated.

Far from being purely practical, many covers were decorated with distinctive patterns, reflecting the designs available from local iron foundries at the time. Coal men, so the story goes, could tell which home was which by the cover alone. How many different patterns can you spot?



### 5. NO. 18 MOUNTJOY SQUARE EAST

The timber box projecting from the rear elevation is locally referred to as a 'thunderbox'. The name may provide a clue to its use! Commonly added during the 20th century, these housed a toilet accessed from the stairwell. In tenement buildings, where overcrowding was common, many people often shared a single toilet.



### 6. STREET SIGNS

Look up! Have you noticed the variety of street signs? The green bilingual plates in Cló Gaelach, an ornate Gaelic script, first appeared in the early 1900s as part of a revival of Irish language and heritage. Later versions, from the 1940s and 50s, used a darker green and added postal district numbers, before being replaced by the familiar blue-and-white signs of today.



You may also have spotted the rectangular cast-iron plaques fixed high on some corners of the square. These are ward markers, once used to indicate electoral districts.

### 7. NERNEY'S COURT

The archway at Nerney's Court offers a glimpse into the hidden backlands and mews lanes that once supported everyday life behind the grand Georgian terraces. In the 1800s this lane was lined with stables, modest houses, and even a vintner's shop. By the end of the century it was notorious for its overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions.



### 8. NO. 20 DENMARK STREET GREAT

Opposite Belvedere College stood 'The Lilly White Dairy', later the 'Tuck shop', which for generations supplied schoolchildren with sweets and snacks. Though long closed, the building is a reminder of the close ties between the school and its neighbourhood. One favourite treat was 'gur cake' - also appetisingly known as 'toenail cake'! This thrifty slice was made from pastry offcuts and crumbs pressed together into something which was apparently surprisingly moreish!



Alongside the tuck shop is a row of late-19th century shopfronts. No. 16 was once home to Fay's Dancing Shoes, a well-known name in the Irish dancing community.

### 9. BELVEDERE COLLEGE

Originally built in the 1770s as a townhouse for the Earl of Belvedere, the school acquired the property in 1841. Behind its handsome façade is one of the most lavish decorative interiors in the city, with rich plasterwork that has been attributed to the renowned stuccodore, Michael Stapleton.

Perhaps the school's most famous past pupil is James Joyce, who drew on his years here in his novel, 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'. The college has also produced many distinguished sportspeople, including Irish international rugby player Cian Healy.

Would you like to learn more about James Joyce and his connections to the area? Pop into the James Joyce Centre, located at No.35 North Great George's Street.

### 10. NORTH GREAT GEORGE'S STREET

North Great George's Street was once one of Dublin's most fashionable Georgian addresses, with notable residents including the Earl of Kenmare and the Dowager Viscountess Powerscourt. Its fortunes declined after the Act of Union in 1801 when many wealthy residents left the city. Gradually passing into the hands of the merchant classes, some of the houses were later turned into tenements.

In the 20th century, new business moved in, including what is said to have been Dublin's first modern commercial hairdresser, marking a return to the street's place at the forefront of fashion!

In recent decades, conservation works have restored the street's architectural integrity, and today it is regarded as one of the city's best-preserved Georgian streets. See how many of the surviving features you can find on our Scavenger Hunt.



### 11. PARNELL STREET

Parnell Street is a street of many layers. It is home to a number of the oldest buildings in the area, some dating to the early 1700s. At the corner with North Great George's Street, an 18th century building was given a smart update in the mid-19th century with the addition of decorative stucco roundels and quoins.

Can you spot a 'ghost sign' across the road, on the brick elevation at No. 97? Ghost signs are faded advertising signage from bygone years. The ghost sign here advertises the former premises of 'King & Co. Ltd. The Well Known Boot & Shoe Retailers'.

A little further along, keep an eye out for No. 138, Formerly Rourke's Bakery. Designed by Michael Scott, a celebrated Modernist architect and past pupil of Belvedere College.

Its international-style façade, surviving to upper floors, captures the bold confidence of early 20th century Dublin.

### 12. HILL STREET

Locals recall that King Crisps were first fried up by two brothers on the corner of Parnell Street and Hill Street in the early 1960s. Known as the 'Crisp lovers crisp', this beloved Dublin brand is said to have been initially served in newspaper before adopting the now recognisable red bag. Can't decide between King or Tayto? Why not have a blind crisp tasting test to settle it once and for all!



### 13. LITTLE GEORGE'S

The tower of the old St George's Church, also known as Little George's, stands on Hill Street and pre-dates Luke Gardiner's grand vision for the area. He had intended to build a new church at the centre of Mountjoy Square, but in the end Hardwicke Place was chosen for the new site. Little George's was largely demolished in 1894 and the surrounding graveyard became a park. Can you see the headstones lined up against the southern side?



### 14. TEMPLE HOUSE

Temple House is an early example of Modernist social housing in the city, built by Dublin Corporation in response to the squalid conditions that blighted much of the area in the early 20th century. Schemes like Temple House were among the Corpo's first committed efforts to provide suitable, sanitary homes for working-class families.

As you walk up Hill Street the spire of new St George's Church will come into view. This church replaced the earlier Little George's. As you turn the corner onto Gardiner Place, look back to see Abbey Presbyterian Church on Parnell Square. Views such as these make an important contribution to the area's historic character.

### 15. GARDINER PLACE

Gardiner Place boasts some fine examples of decorative ironwork. Can you spot onion-topped finials, barley-sugar twists and swirling scrollwork on the balconies? These delightful and rare survivors show that even ironwork was once used to display style and status.



At the end of the trail take a moment to examine the wrought-iron railings surrounding Mountjoy Square Park. These originally incorporated eighty-four oil lamps, reproductions of which have recently been reinstated.

# MOUNTJOY SQUARE

## NORTH GREAT GEORGE'S STREET

### ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION AREAS

# WALKING TRAIL

CEARNÓG MHUINSEO  
SRÁID MÓR SHEÓIRSE THUAIDH

WANDER THE ROUTE USING THE PICTURE CLUES OR BREAK IT UP AND WONDER...



CEARNÓG MHUINSEO  
MOUNTJOY SQUARE

**Where do places get their name?**  
Many of the streets and places are named after historical figures and landowners - including Mountjoy Square, which was named after Luke Gardiner II, who inherited the title of Lord Mountjoy in 1789. Are there other names that you recognise?

MAP LEGEND

Architectural Conservation Area	Picture Clue Number
Walking Route, 1.7km	Dublin Bikes
Trail Number	Scenic View

