

In Dublin's Fair City

“Do not go there! Don't do it!”

That's what the bouncer outside a downtown Dublin pub told Nicki and me one evening. We had just emerged from the establishment, a bit disappointed that the Irish music being performed inside, to a packed house, had consisted of a Dublin-area group playing American songs. We had expected to hear ballads like “Molly Malone” but instead were treated to “Take Me Home, Country Roads”. Which is ironic, since the inspiration for “Take Me Home...” was actually Clopper Road in Montgomery County, Maryland – a highway only two miles from where Nicki and I live.

So when we had asked the bouncer which pubs down in the touristy Temple Bar part of the city would offer authentic Irish music, he told us in no uncertain terms to just avoid the place entirely – it wasn't the ‘real’ Dublin. And most likely he was right – on a walk-through the previous day I had thought that Temple Bar seemed more than a little like a toned-down version of Bourbon Street in New Orleans. Probably not a very good place for a pleasant evening of food and song.

It wasn't until we happened across Peadar Browns, a neighborhood pub out near where we were staying and well away from the downtown area of the city, that we finally found some authentic Irish music. While we were seated at the bar, each of us enjoying a half pint, we noticed three guys, one with a guitar, singing ballad-like music over at one of the tables. We immediately came to the conclusion that it had to be traditional Irish music since we didn't recognize any of the lyrics. And we were right – the bartender told us that the place brought in local musicians a few nights a week for the enjoyment of Dubliners who lived nearby.



Peadar Browns pub in Dublin

But there's more than one kind of authentic Irish music. In the touristy areas, where you can find it, you hear light and relatively innocuous things like the Molly Malone song: “*In Dublin's fair city, where the girls are so pretty, I first set my eyes on sweet Molly Malone...*” On our last night in town we heard some of the other kind. Light and innocuous? *Ohh no.*

“Now Georgie and Pop they lie cold as stone, they died fighting for Derry, their own native home. So always remember and don't ever forget, they died fighting for Ireland and we owe them debt. So we'll raise up our hands, and we'll curse that British hand who tore out the very hearts of men who dared to cross their path. But my heart is broke in two, won't you tell me what to do, they couldn't stop poor George and Pop and they'll NEVER stop me and you.”

The singer/guitarist was a youngish guy who was part of a music group that was on hiatus. So on that evening he was doing his own gig at the pub. That he knew and could perform Irish rebel music was, to me, an indication on how deeply the antipathy is still felt about the long and sometimes bloody British rule of Ireland from about the beginning of the 1800s through the first two decades of the 20th century. So much so that it's an ingrained part of the Irish psyche.



the Irish rebel music singer

“It’s been quite a while.”

I said that to the concierge at our hotel after he’d asked if Nicki and I had ever been to Dublin before. And indeed it had been – our only previous time there was back in 2005 on a trip that included several days in Scotland for that year’s World Science Fiction Convention. I am Irish-American by heritage and it had been a desire to see a small bit of my ancestors’ homeland that had brought us to Dublin back then. But it had been a disappointing stay – near continuous rain the entire three days we were there had taken a toll on our stamina and enthusiasm, and we had ended up taking in only a very small part of what the city has to offer in terms of things to see and do. It was another Worldcon which had brought us back, this time – and for the first time ever, for that matter – right there in Dublin’s fair city. But we had come to Ireland to do a lot more than just attend a big convention and we got started on it less than three hours after we had deboarded the airplane.

It turned out that there were two whiskey distilleries located in close proximity to where we were staying. One of them, The Dublin Liberties Distillery, was literally right across the street but Nicki noticed that the distillery’s café had dead plants in the window. Her rule of thumb about a place is that: “If they can’t take care of plants or at least buy new ones when the old ones die, avoid it.” And so we did, instead going around the corner to the Teeling Distillery.



during the Teeling Distillery tour

Teeling is a new distillery, having been established only about four years ago. But it was the first new whiskey distillery to have opened in Dublin since before the end of the 19th century. The tour was led by Julia, a stereotypical ginger-haired lass who, we found out to our surprise, had been born and raised in Connecticut. It was relatively short, lasting only a bit more than 40 minutes, but it walked us through the entire process, from malting the barley to fermenting to distillation. Teeling whiskey is triple-distilled, with the three large copper pot stills named after the three daughters of the owner. And these

were the iconic image of the tour. There was a tasting room, of course, and also a small museum that described the history of Dublin distilling all the way back to the Great Whiskey Fire of 1875 and which had a nice collection of Irish whiskey bottles that dated back many decades. It was there that I also found a much newer relic, constructed from the staves of whiskey barrels. I doubt the stuff they were drinking in King's Landing and Winterfell was anywhere near this fine.

Nicki and I had chosen the least expensive tour option, which translated to the fewest number of whiskey samples in the tasting room. And that was probably a good thing, seeing as how we were more than a bit tired from the overnight flight from North America and had not yet been able to check into our hotel room. But it was so fine and smooth in taste that I do actually wish there had been more to drink. This must have seemed obvious to Julia who, just before she left us for the next tour group, asked me: "When's the last time you've had whiskey this good?"

I thought for a few seconds. "It's been quite a while," I said.

"It's all rubbish!"

That was the opinion of an older woman who had seen us standing in a light rain outside of Bewley's, staring longingly at a food display in the storefront window. Nicki asked her what she was referring to, and she pointed at the display. "That," she said. "It's too expensive, not worth the cost." And then she raised her umbrella and stalked off.

Bewley's is internationally known mainly for its coffee and tea, but in Dublin it operates an upscale café on Grafton Street, which is one of the most expensive shopping streets in the world. No wonder that the desserts we were drooling over seemed a tad expensive to that lady. Her comment put us off enough that we didn't eat there that evening, but we did come back a few days later for an enjoyable and affordable dinner that included an extended conversation with two men from Slovakia who were at the table next to us – one of them a counselor of some kind at the Slovak Embassy and the other involved in the Irish foodservices industry.

Irish food is good, no surprise there, and we were able to attest to that on our second day in Dublin. A few weeks earlier, when we were planning for what we might want to do on our five free days in the city, the thing that immediately jumped to the forefront was a foodie walking tour. There are several available and the one we decided on was also a history tour. The guide, a young woman named Hannah, was really knowledgeable about Dublin both past and present. And she welcomed our questions, telling us that she'd only once ever been asked what she considered a dumb one: "Does Ireland have beaches?" Her answer had been: "Of *course* it has beaches! It's an *island!*"



on the Teeling Throne

When we heard that, Nicki almost immediately came up with a follow-on query: “Ireland has beaches, but does it have *surfing*?” The answer was that yes, it does! But the water is pretty cold so surfers are usually togged out in all-body wetsuits. As for the foodie tour, it surfed us through three restaurants. The first one was Gallagher’s Boxty House, a vintage café that was famous for its potato appetizers made several different ways. They were all pretty good and the beer even better, and at that point I realized the tour was going to require a bit of stamina – the stomach as well as the legs!

After that we moved on to The Oak, where the Beef and Guinness Pie



at Gallagher's Boxty House
(potatoes are growing in planter boxes
above the storefront)



Hannah leads the Irish coffee workshop

presented me a daunting challenge in terms of being able to eat it all. And we finished up with a dessert course at a Czech-themed bar that also provided all of us in the tour an impromptu workshop on making Irish coffee. The ingredients are hot coffee, Irish whiskey, sugar, and heavy cream, and there is a specific way of putting them all together. But, as I found out, there are no specific amounts on how much of each to use. The jigger for measuring out the whiskey allowed for two different volumes, and when I inquired with Hannah if we should use the small or the large size, she came back with: “You have to *ask*?? More is better!” I’m guessing that’s probably the *second*-dumbest question she’s ever answered. But hey, I’m a newbie.

“How they manage those big, double-decker buses through all those tiny streets, I’ll never know.”

Nicki made that comment after observing the skill of tour bus drivers in getting around Dublin. When we were originally planning our Ireland trip, we had considered seeing as much of the country as we were able. There are several commercial tours for doing just that, and there was even one put together specifically for people who would be attending the Worldcon. But, we had decided, if we did that, it would severely limit our time in Dublin to explore places we’d missed the previous time. So we revised our thinking and decided that we’d stay in Dublin and maybe take a day trip tour or two outside the city.

But then we did a reality check and decided that no, we *didn't* want to get up at six o'clock in the morning so that we could make it to the tour embarkation point by seven. And that there were plenty of interesting things to do right there in the city that would easily take up most if not

all of our available time, at a pace we were comfortable with. So remain in Dublin we did. Yet another example of evolution in action, at least as far as trip planning goes.

For a couple of days we used those big double-decker buses to get around the city. There was a good seniors rate, and the bus route went near just about all of the places we were interested in seeing. One of them was the National Leprechaun Museum. I'd expected to find it lightweight and intended for children, but that's not really what it turned out to be. And that's because of the guide. Sometimes a museum is only as good as its guide and we had a *really* good one. She was an expert at Irish folklore and as she walked us through the various rooms of the museum she told elaborate tales involving leprechauns and other supernatural beings which reside in the Irish countryside. From what I could see, the adults were enjoying it even more than the kids.



the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow in the National Leprechaun Museum



our guide describes the Jonathan Swift exhibit

writer and satirist Jonathan Swift, who occupied that position for more than 30 years in the early 1700s and whose burial site is located within the Cathedral. His *Gulliver's Travels* was one of the earliest fantasy tales, and it seemed appropriate that we paid our respects at his crypt on the eve of a Worldcon.

The very best guided tour of all, though, was the one at the Little Museum of Dublin. The place befits its name, as it occupies only a relative small amount of space in an 18th century Georgian-architecture townhouse that's owned by the Dublin City Council. It's actually a

We also had pretty good luck with the other guided tours we took. The one for St. Patrick's Cathedral was led by a soft-spoken gentleman who described the church and its place in history throughout the more than 800 years of its existence. The cathedral was originally Catholic, but became Anglican in the early 1500s during the Reformation. Today it's the National Cathedral of the Church of Ireland, with its 'Dean', or senior cleric, elected by the cathedral's 'Chapter', the body of clergy which has the responsibility of guiding the ministry and mission of the Cathedral. The most famous Dean was the



Jonathan Swift's crypt

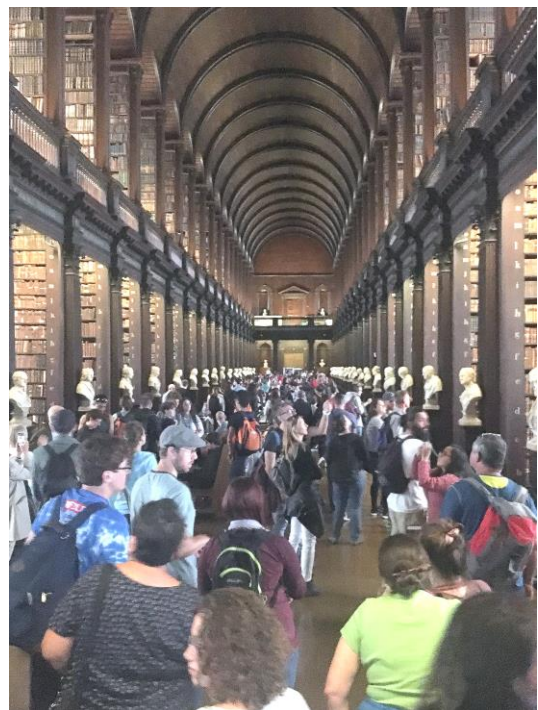


during the tour of the Little Museum

“people’s museum”, as many if not most of the artifacts and curios there have been donated or loaned by Dublin residents. The museum requires that your entry be part of a guided tour, and with good reason. The walls of each room are so covered with ephemera – old photographs, posters, framed newspaper articles, personal correspondence, and art prints – that it’s impossible to make any sense of it all without a guide. But *with* a guide it’s a marvelous experience. Each item has its own connection to something in Dublin’s past, be it a signed U2 album cover, or artist Jim Fitzpatrick’s iconic poster of Ernesto “Che” Guevara (whose ancestry includes an Irishman named Patrick Lynch and who therefore just *might* be a very distant relative of mine), or photographs of some of the Irish rebels killed in the Easter Rising of 1916. It was all skillfully woven together into a narrative that described Dublin during the years of the 20th century, and it provided me a deeper understanding of not only the city, but also the people who lived there.

“The oldest book here is a bible.”

We were informed of that by one of the security people in the Old Library of Trinity College. It dates back to the early 1700s and is famous not only for its architectural design but also because of the more than 200,000 volumes it holds, a few of them dating back before the time of Columbus’s voyages to the New World. The main chamber of the Old Library is the so-called ‘Long Room’, and it is certainly that at nearly 65 meters in length. We were told by the security guy that it’s still a working library and is used almost every day for various kinds of historical research. But it must be a formidable task to even locate any particular book or manuscript, not only because of the sheer number of them archived there but also because the place has become a prime tourist attraction – the day we were there the wide corridor which bisects the room was shoulder-to-shoulder with sightseers. We also observed that the Long Room contains more things than just books and tourists. One of them is an old Gaelic harp which dates back about the 15th century. It’s the national symbol of



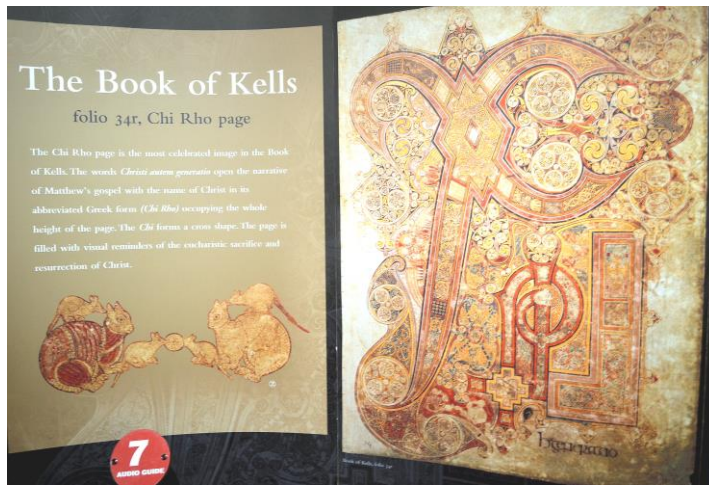
the Long Room of the Old Library

Ireland, and its likeness appears on Euro coins minted in Ireland. And there are also marble busts of great philosophers, scientists, and writers which line both sides of the central corridor – all of them of men. I guess we weren't really surprised to find that out. Back in the 1700s, when the first of these were commissioned, women's place in history had not yet been recognized.

As for how far back in time the contents of the Old Library encompasses, the security guy had been referring to an Irish bible which had been printed just a few years after the Gutenberg Bibles. But he could just as well have been describing the greatest cultural treasure in all of Ireland – the Book of Kells. It's the world's most famous illuminated manuscript – a calligraphic transcription of the first four books of the New Testament (in Latin) with religious-themed artwork and ornate Celtic illustrations adorning many of the pages. It dates back to



bust of Aristotle in the Long Room



part of the Book of Kells exhibition, enlarging and annotating one of the pages

about the end of the 8th century and, as you'd expect, is kept under lock and key. But there is a continuing exhibition that includes display of parts of the manuscript, four pages at a time, that's located downstairs from the Long Room. We were told by one of the exhibition's curators that if you're patient enough it's possible to view the entire Book of Kells, as the four pages on display are changed out every three months. But you'd have to be very, very patient – the entire manuscript consists of 680 pages, so a complete viewing would take more than 40 years.

“I wonder if they can play ‘Dueling Bagpipes’?”

That was my thought when Nicki and I came upon a couple of pipers on one of our walks across Dublin. They were busking in St. Patrick's Park, not far from the Cathedral, and as you'd expect, we heard them long before we saw them. It turned out that most places in Dublin that we wanted to visit were no more than about a 25 minute walk from our hotel. And frequently, during those walks, we happened across interesting stuff.

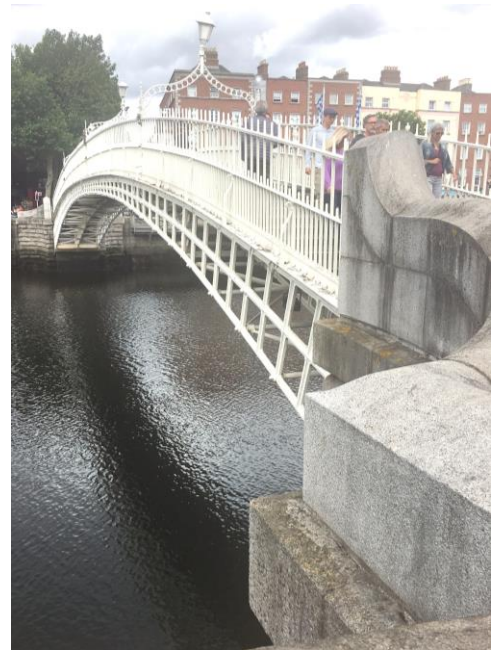
After a few days of this I came to the conclusion that Dublin itself could probably be considered as much a museum as any of the individual museums located within its city limits. Practically everywhere we went there was a place of historical interest, an example of this being an inscribed stone marker on Fishamble Street where the



pipers in the park

New Musick Hall once stood. It was the place where, in 1742, George Frideric Handel's famous oratorio *Messiah* was first performed.

And there were also plenty of noteworthy things to see on those walks, many of them picturesque. For instance, the Ha'penny Bridge which spans the River Liffey. It's the sole pedestrian-only bridge over the river and dates back to 1816, though it's undergone renovation several times during its existence. Its name refers to a toll that was charged by the builder, after the bridge opened, to offset the construction cost. Today it's free passage, and is the most popular and busiest pedestrian crossing of the river. As well as the most iconic.



the famous Ha'penny Bridge

The biggest museum by far that we visited was also the most eclectic. The National Museum of Ireland has three branches in Dublin, two of which (Archeology and Natural History) we had visited on our previous trip back in 2005. So we completed the trifecta by taking in the Decorative Arts and History branch, which is housed in a former military barracks that provides it enough room for many kinds of exhibits. Maybe too many. There are displays on everything from furniture (both historic and



the micromosaic necklace

modern) to Asian art. A large section of the museum has military-related objects on display, some of them dating back to the 1500s, but we mostly skipped that. As for the decorative arts part of the museum, Nicki was a bit disappointed that it wasn't as extensive as she'd hoped, but there was one piece

she had great admiration for – a necklace featuring nine different exquisite micromosaic recreations of famous sites in Rome. Some superb craftsmanship went into that. But how it ended up in Dublin is anybody's guess.

We exited through the gift shop, as is the case with most museums, but before we did we saw a familiar face. Or rather, he saw us. It turned out that our friend Chris Garcia and his wife Vanessa Applegate (whom we'd not previously met) were also visiting the museum at the same time we were! It's an indication of how big the place is that we nearly missed each other. But we knew we'd see Chris again, and soon – he was on the Worldcon's program.



Chris and Vanessa in the museum's gift shop

“Sixteen years after winning a sixth Hugo, and we’re now chopped liver.”

I said that to Nicki a couple of weeks prior to the trip, after we were reminded that, basically, we were yesterday’s news. We had both volunteered to be on panels at the Worldcon, and had even offered suggestions on what types of programming would match our interests and skillsets. What I ended up with was a single panel. One. And Nicki didn’t have any at all. It was the same as last year’s Worldcon, where it was Nicki who had ended up on just one panel while I was completely shut out. I’m now thinking that we must be past our sell-by dates, at least in terms of how Worldcons perceive us. But, in the end, it wasn’t wholly bad news because not having any programming commitments allowed us more flexibility to find interesting things to see and do on our own. That is, if we could actually get in to where they were being held.

It only took a few hours into the first day of the Worldcon for the realization to set in that the Dublin Convention Centre was just not spacious enough. Breakout rooms were relatively small and the corridors to access them were narrow. This resulted in a chaotic scene near the top of each hour, with hallways packed by those trying to exit rooms where panels had just ended and others wanting to get into those same rooms for the next round of panels. Convention Centre staff had to become the traffic police in a mostly vain attempt to keep everybody moving. By the second day the chaos had abated a bit – overnight, each floor of the Convention Centre had been taped off into queue lanes, one designated for each breakout room. But this created added confusion until, finally, everybody started to figure it all out.



the Dublin Convention Centre



queuing up

Given the circumstances, it was probably the best solution. But while it lessened the turmoil in the hallways, it undoubtedly increased the number of frayed tempers. The rules of the game had become that everybody had to leave the breakout room after a panel had ended. And once they were all out, the people who had queued up for the next panel in that room were then allowed in. This meant that it became near impossible to attend two panels in a row, at least those that had large audiences, as after you exited a breakout room you had to go to the back of the queue for whatever event you wanted to see next. And quite often the queues for those events exceeded the room capacities.

For me, it didn’t turn out to be such a problem, as most of what I attended was specialized enough (i.e., about fan-related topics such as fanzines) that overcrowding was rarely an issue. But unhappy were the people who had wanted to be at two media-related panels in a row. In the end, they had to decide which one they more wanted to see.

One other thing I observed was that the traffic police were not to be messed with! More than one person was firmly directed to clear out of an area where queues would be forming. And clear out they did. I don’t think anybody dared to jump a line after seeing them in action!

“Some panels are being held in a repurposed cinemaplex.”

I emailed that info with an accompanying photo to Mike Glycer for his File770.com newsblog, as he wasn't able to attend the Dublin Worldcon but still wanted as much coverage as he could get. So I became an ad hoc photojournalist for him, and he published about 40 of my photos over the course of the convention. There was not enough space in the Convention Centre, so some panels (including much of the 'Science' track of programming) were over in a converted movie theater multiplex about a 15 minute walk from the rest of the Worldcon. While there was plenty of room in the individual theaters, the configurations resulted in some unusual perspectives and sightlines. For the “How to Manage Finite Natural Resources” panel the participants were dwarfed by the large blue-lit movie screen behind them.



the “How to Manage Finite Natural Resources” panel



the irrepressible Chris Garcia

Chris Garcia had better luck with his Computer History Museum talk, which was in a much smaller theater. It was actually compact enough where he could be his irrepressible self directly in front of the audience rather than half a county away like it seemed in the other theater. Chris had been caught up in a round of layoffs at the museum back about the beginning of June. (“And yes I’m still EXTREMELY bitter!” as he put it.) Which is a damn shame as he took with him not only years of institutional familiarity about the museum and its collection but also an encyclopedic knowledge of the history of computing going all the way back to Babbage’s Difference Engine. He filled his hour with vignettes about some of the luminaries of the computing field such as Marvin Minsky, but it was Chris himself who entertained us the most with his arm-waving over-the-

top speaking style. It’s an experience (to say the least!) to sit through one of his one man shows.

Those were the only two panels I attended in the multiplex, and they were both on the first day of the convention. In the end it was just too inconvenient to head over there, especially when it meant that I’d miss getting into other panels I wanted to see at the Convention Centre. But that didn’t stop a lot of other people, especially those who wanted to get books autographed by authors who were at the convention. Autographing was one of the things that had gotten moved over to the multiplex, and the one day I was there I saw that a *very* long line had formed for a signing by George R.R. Martin. I was surprised to find out that the line had started forming an hour and a half earlier for an autographing session that was still an hour in the future.

Or maybe I wasn't. The *Game of Thrones / Song of Fire and Ice* franchise has made Martin immensely famous, and this was just further evidence that he has a lot of very loyal and determined fans!

“I’m pretty sure they would not want to give up any of the spacecraft’s resources and mission plan for something like that.”

David Clements, who is both a science fiction writer and an astrophysicist, told me that in reply to my question during the “Really Big Telescopes” panel. Different ways of doing astrometry, the science of precisely measuring star positions in order to determine their distance via parallax, was one of the topics that had been



Jocelyn Bell Burnell (at left) in the “Really Big Telescopes” panel

discussed. During the Q&A part of the panel I had I had wondered if the Juno spacecraft in orbit around Jupiter could be repurposed do that since the diameter of Jupiter’s orbit is far greater than that of the Earth’s and would provide an immensely longer baseline. But the four panelists unanimously shot that one down, with Clements’ reply the most succinct.

I had the good fortune of snagging a front row seat for that panel. I’d arrived at the meeting room just after everyone had been seated, and the moderator had motioned me to an empty chair at the front that somehow had not been claimed. Astronomy is an interest of mine, but what really made me want to attend the panel was the presence of one of the convention’s Guests of Honor: astronomer Jocelyn Bell Burnell. Back in 1967, when she was a graduate student at the University of Cambridge, she had identified an anomaly in a radio astronomy data chart which turned out to be the first pulsar ever discovered. That achievement was recognized in 1974 with the Nobel Prize for Physics, but it was her research advisor, not her, who was a recipient. That injustice did not discourage her, however, and she has gone on to have a stellar career (no pun intended) with many awards including an OBE. And now she has enjoyed the ultimate career honor, being a Guest of Honor at a World Science Fiction Convention. Maybe not *quite* the same as a Nobel, but in my opinion pretty damn close.

The only other Guests of Honor that I crossed paths with at the convention were the Fan Guests, Bill and Mary Burns. And that happened many times. I don’t think I’d ever met Mary before but I’ve known Bill for years, as he hosts and manages the **efanzines.com** website. It’s one of the two most important online locations where fanzines are being archived, including many of mine. In these days of egregious mailing costs, printed fanzines are on the verge of becoming extinct. But thanks to **efanzines.com**, their PDF equivalents are readily available. So much so that many fanzine publishers no longer do a dead tree equivalent, or if they do it’s a very small print run.



the Fan Guests, Mary and Bill Burns



Geri Sullivan and Bill Burns at the efanzines.com panel

There was a show-and-tell program item about the efanzines.com website which was moderated by this year's TAFF delegate, Geri Sullivan. Bill founded it back in the year 2000 and he now has more than 300 different fanzine titles archived there, some with dozens of issues. For the Worldcon, a small portion of the website had been directly downloaded to a notebook computer prior to the convention because the Dublin Convention Centre's Internet speed wasn't good enough for a real-time exploration of the archive. As a result, only a very few fanzines could be shown and described. The one that got the most screen

time was my friend Guy Lillian's *The Zine Dump*, probably because of its meta-ness – *TZD* is currently the only fanzine which attempts to describe and review every other science fiction-oriented fanzine published in the English language. But Guy did not make the trip to Dublin and when I emailed him that his was the featured zine and had even been praised by Geri, I got back an uncharacteristically subdued response: "Please tell Geri thanks for me." If it were me I'm pretty sure I'd have been a bit more woohoo-ish.

"They're saving fan history one page at a time."

That was my description of a photo I sent to Mike Glycer for the File770.com newsblog. There was nothing even remotely woohoo-ish about what was going on for the other major online fanzine archive. Or maybe there was. The Fanac Fan History Project has also been archiving fanzines, lots and lots of them, at its fanac.org website. Whereas efanzines.com caters mostly to current-day fanzine publishers, the fanac.org online collection consists largely of fanzines that had been published decades ago. Until recently, all of these old fanzines had been digitized as image files for historical accuracy sake. Which meant that there had been no way to do text searches of those fanzines' contents. But that's now changed. There is a relatively new software program called 'FineReader' which can process an image file containing text and convert it into a searchable PDF file. This is truly game-changing for researchers as many of the old fanzines archived at fanac.org are newszines, some of them dating back more than 80 years. Converting them from image files into searchable PDFs, as was happening right then and there at the Dublin Worldcon, was definitely gosh-wow. If you're a fan historian, that is.



Joe Siclari, Edie Stern, and Mark Olson at the Fanac Fan History Project table

Fanac was represented at the Dublin Worldcon by three of its founders: Joe Siclari, Edie Stern, and Mark Olson. They usually do special activities at Worldcons, but in Dublin they were concentrating almost entirely on fanzine preservation. Physical archives of old fanzines exist at several locations in the British Isles, and some of these ancient fan publications were brought to the Worldcon so that they could be scanned into searchable PDFs. Which is a time-consuming process. So much so that to do all the scanning, Mark, Joe, or Edie (and quite often all three of them) were usually anchored to the Fanac table in the concourse area of the convention. But there was some serendipity in that arrangement – since they weren't always able to go to other parts of the convention, the convention came to them instead. All convention long the Fanac table became a temporal nexus, where fans who had been prominent in previous eras stopped by to visit. It was a good place to find old friends.



Nicki with our old friend Perry Middlemiss at the Fanac Fan History Project table

The concourse area was not as large as for some other Worldcons, but there was still a lot that was going on. The Dealers Room occupied most of the space, with tables for special interest groups such as the Fanac Fan History Project set up around the periphery. Right across from the Fanac table was site selection for the 2021 Worldcon and that turned out to be a high traffic area. There have been Worldcons where site selection has been a contest between two, three, and sometimes even four competing bids, but not this time. The only bidder, and the ultimate winner, was the D.C. committee, and for the first time ever since Nicki and I have been attending these conventions there will be a Worldcon that we can travel to via local public transportation. Maybe they'll let me be on more panels than just one.



the busy-as-a-bee site selection tables

“Is it still possible for ordinary people like us to change the world?”

I was moderator for my lone panel of the convention and it wasn't scheduled until the next-to-last day of the convention, so I had plenty of time to figure out how I wanted it to go. The title was “How Science and Ordinary People Can Change the Future”. Which really didn't make sense to me – how can you change the future if it hasn't yet happened? So instead, I kept the topic in the present with my opening question and invited my panelists to comment on it. And very quickly the panel became focused on the concept of citizen science – what can the common

man (or woman) do to advance science and technology? There are many examples of this throughout recorded history, of people who did make a difference, be it in good or bad ways: Fritz Haber, Ada Lovelace, Robert Goddard, George Washington Carver, and Richard Gatling, for instance, all did things or devised inventions which have had profound effects on civilization.

It was pointed out that today, the Internet has pretty much changed the concept of citizen science. It's no longer 'science by the common man'. Instead, it's become 'science by the masses'. In this era of Big Data and powerful personal computers, there are discoveries out there to be made and theories to be



my "How Science and Technology Can Change the Future" panel
(l-r) Bo Balder, Klaus Mogensen, me, and Gerald Kilby

substantiated (or in some cases refuted) simply by sifting through enormous amounts of information that has been collected and archived over the years. One of the most obvious examples of this is 'SETI@home', where an army of volunteers have been using their PCs and Macs to download and analyze radio telescope data to look for signals from alien civilizations. And there are many other citizen science initiatives – 'Planet Hunters'. for example, allows volunteers to examine light curves of stars recorded by the Kepler Space Telescope, which has resulted in the discovery of many new extrasolar planets. And closer to home, 'Asteroid Zoo' has had volunteers looking at photographs from the Catalina Sky Survey and the Hubble Telescope to look for moving objects that could be as yet undiscovered asteroids. There are literally dozens of Internet-based citizen science initiatives, and not only in astronomy. And it was truly enlightening to find out, from a show of hands, that more than half of the attendees of the panel had participated in these kinds of crowdsourced projects.

It was a good panel, with knowledgeable people on either side of me and a large, interactive audience. It was also one of the more informative roundtable discussions I've ever participated in, which made it easy for me to close the panel by answering my own question: "Yes, it's *absolutely* possible for people like us to change the world!" The millions of people who participate in citizen science initiatives obviously believe so, too.

I found it a bit ironic that my one panel was part of the science track of programming, when just about all of my activity in fandom has to do with fanzines and fan history. There were a lot of panels devoted to that, including the very first one of the convention. It had the attention-getting title "Fanzines Now!" with a description that asked the question: "What are the best new fanzines, and what classic fanzines are still putting out new content?" The panelists all seemed to me up to the task of taking on this topic, as two of them had actually published non-media fanzines while the other three had been involved in other kinds of science fiction publications and at least knew what fanzines were. Or maybe they really didn't, because much of the discussion centered on blogs.

Just about everybody has hot button issues. One of mine is the growing belief in fandom that a blog, where a single web page is updated with new material as time goes on, is the same thing as a fanzine. No, it isn't! Fanzines are discrete publications, and there's nothing discrete about an online journal that's constantly changing. And yet, ever since about 2014, blogs have

succeeded in mostly hijacking the ‘Best Fanzine’ Hugo Award category even though the eligibility rules state that to be considered, a fanzine must have at least four issues published. For the Dublin Worldcon, the ‘Best Fanzine’ finalists consisted of one fanzine and five blogs. Really good blogs, but blogs nonetheless. So, in the Q&A part of the panel, I found myself compelled to point this out.

I wasn’t surprised that some of the panelists took potshots at my opinion and it was a bit disappointing that one of the fanzine publishers, John Coxon, was a potshooter. (I think I’m going to have to improve my powers of persuasion since I can’t even bring a true fanzine



the “Fanzines Now!” panel. (l-r) Joe Siclari, John Coxon, Phoebe Wagner, Greg Hullender, and Philippa Ryder

publisher over to my side.) But I *was* gratified that one of the blog publishers, Greg Hullender, showed some understanding. He is co-editor of *Rocket Stack Rank*, which does great service to science fiction readers by reviewing current short fiction and, indeed, was one of the six ‘Best Fanzine’ finalists in Dublin. After the panel concluded I was able to briefly chat with Greg and urged him to consider publishing a digest fanzine every month, collecting the best of the reviews with some new transitional contextual remarks to tie it all together. I think it would be an awesome publication, and I’m counting it as a win that he said he would consider doing that. I’ll take my victories, even the small ones, whenever I can get them.

“Mi showxa xunyam Lang Belta.” (“I speak a little Lang Belta.”)

Actually Nicki and I don’t, but that didn’t stop us from sitting in on what was possibly the most unusual panel of the Worldcon – a **full immersion** workshop on Lang Belta, the language of *The Expanse*. Or make that ‘standing in’, since the workshop was so full that every seat in the room was taken. But the event happened late enough in the convention that by then the traffic police had relaxed the rules on room occupancy. Or maybe they were just looking the other way when we made our late entry.



in the Lang Belta full immersion workshop

The Expanse, as I hope most everyone is aware by now, is an immensely popular series of science fiction novels that has been successfully transitioned over into a really good television series. It’s space opera, which is usually considered a derogatory term, I know, but in this case it’s really sense-of-wonder inducing. The main storyline follows what happens when a fragile truce between the three major powers of the solar system, Earth, Mars, and the Outer Planets

Alliance (a.k.a. ‘the Belters’), is threatened by a conspiracy involving the discovery and weaponizing of an alien infectious agent, the so-called ‘protomolecule’.

One of the things that makes both the novels and the TV series as good as they are is the painstaking attention to detail by the novels’ authors and the TV series’ showrunners. And not only for the space science stuff but societal aspects as well. The Belters are depicted as having their own language, a Creole called ‘Lang Belta’ that’s somewhat derived from English but with many bits and pieces from several other languages fused in. It was originally created for the novel series by Nick Farmer, a linguist and author who lives in California, but the language is continuing to grow and evolve with help from its users.

The description of the workshop stated that: “This course will give you hands-on practice, teaching you to understand spoken Lang Belta and to produce new, original Belta sentences of your own.” And it really did, though the one-hour time allotment didn’t allow for getting very much past the basics. Nicki and I had never taken part in a full immersion language workshop before and I was afraid that we’d be completely lost after about ten minutes, but it turned out to be easier than we had expected. The two moderators made use of visual aids to help things along, and by the end of the hour I felt confident enough that I participated in one of the practice dialog sessions. As we were leaving we were given a cheat sheet of Lang Belta phrases, should we ever be thinking of taking a trip to the asteroid Ceres. Given that it was after 5:00pm, one phrase seemed apropos: “Ketim ora xush du sherú?” (“When does the Happy Hour start?”) As the saying goes, it’s always five o’clock somewhere, even all the way out in the Belt.

The Dublin Worldcon actually had its own pub, Martin’s, named in honour of the late Martin Hoare, a noted British fan who often hosted real ale bars at conventions he helped organize. It was located on the third floor of the Convention Centre and, as expected, it turned out to be a popular albeit loud hangout. Nicki and I were there on the final night of the convention watching the video feed from the Hugo Awards event when we noticed that the speech recognition software they were using was doing wonky things that made some of the closed captioning more than a bit strange and at times unintentionally humorous. Which prevented us from taking notice that Jeannette Ng blew up the Awards Ceremony.



watching the Hugo Awards Ceremony video feed in Martin’s

She was the winner of the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer, and in her acceptance speech she heatedly called out Campbell, who has been considered one of the science fiction genre’s most respected and influential editors: “John W. Campbell, for whom this award was named, was a fucking fascist. ... He was responsible for setting a tone for science fiction which haunts this genre to this very day. Sterile. Male. White. Exalting the ambitions of

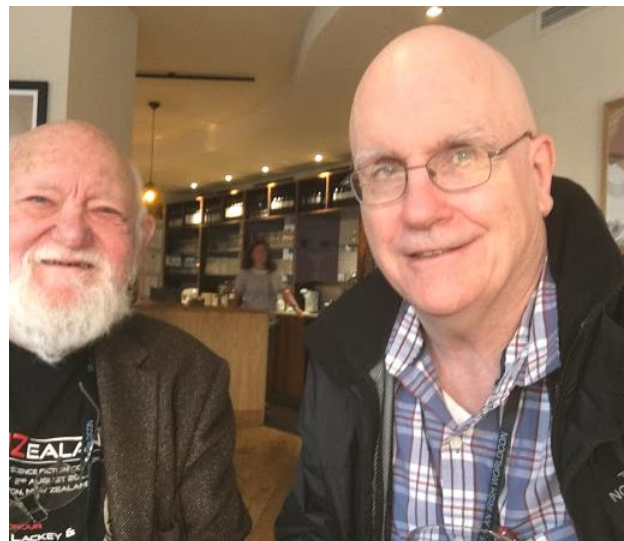
imperialists and colonizers, settlers and industrialists.” She later went on to say that Campbell, who edited *Astounding Science Fiction* back in the 1940s and had published stories by famous authors such as Isaac Asimov and Robert A. Heinlein, probably would not have published any of her fiction. Which might very well be accurate, though maybe not because she is a woman of color. Her acclaimed debut novel *Under the Pendulum Sun* is a lot more fantasy than science fiction. Under Campbell, *Astounding* published hundreds of science fiction stories and essentially zero fantasy. But be that as it may, she was actually right that Campbell’s character (as displayed by some of his editorials in *Astounding*) does have the appearance of being bigoted and atrocious – during the 1960s his essays at times took on racist viewpoints such as supporting segregated schools and claiming that slavery had actually been a *good* thing because slaves in the antebellum American South had a higher standard of living than they would have had in their African homelands. And yet...

And yet, just three days earlier, that same John W. Campbell had been voted the ‘Best Editor’ Retrospective Hugo Award for the year 1944 by the same Worldcon members who went on to raucously applaud Ng’s angry acceptance speech. It was presented by former Ace Books editor-in-chief Ginjer Buchanan, and when Campbell’s grandson came onstage to accept the award he received a warm ovation from the large audience that was present. Go figure.

“Mmmmm.... This looks good!”

I made that remark to Nicki about the cottage pie we had for lunch. Besides the beer there was food available in Martin’s, and also in other parts of the Convention Centre, and we found that it exceeded our expectations. By a lot. But the best meals were still in places outside the convention. One of them was a little café intriguingly named the Insomnia Coffee Company, which was located on the walking route to the multiplex. There was good stuff to drink, but even better was the apple tart which was so tasty and filling that Nicki and I didn’t need much supper after that. There was also an above-average Italian restaurant, Milano, which was only a very short walk from the Convention Centre. I had dinner there three times, twice with Nicki and once with my Australian friend Robin Johnson.

Robin is arguably Australia’s most renowned science fiction fan. He was Chair of the 1975 Aussiecon, which was the first time a Worldcon had been staged Down Under, and he was a Guest of Honor at Aussiecon Four back in 2010. He has become the elder statesman of Australian fandom, and is truly a joy to be around. Nicki and I have known Robin for many years but as far away as he lives from us, Worldcons are the only times we ever cross paths. So it was very much a pleasure to have the opportunity to share a meal with him and exchange some of our travel and convention stories. And talk about places yet to be visited. There still are many, even at our ages.



at dinner with Robin Johnson

After programming ended each day, some of the meeting rooms were used for parties which promoted bids for future Worldcons. There was stuff to eat in those as well, though it mostly turned out to be snack food. The best party we attended was actually sited about a mile away from the convention. And for Nicki, it featured one of her favorite foods: chili.

This was the 45th year that Keith Kato has hosted a chili party. He started it back when he was new to fandom, out in Los Angeles, as he had thought it would be a good way to meet fans and authors. It proved to be so big a success that over the years it has acquired a life of its own, and it's now one of the premiere parties at Worldcons. It's not private, but it's also not publicized and we found out about it by word of mouth. Kato is a Past President of The Heinlein Society which uses the party to help publicize their activities, and this year the Center for Ray Bradbury Studies also was a co-sponsor. He wasn't able to reach agreement with the Convention Centre for a room to site the party, so instead he found a place out in the city. And a famous place it was – the childhood home of the famous Irish poet and playwright, Oscar Wilde.



bust of Oscar Wilde
inside his childhood home



Amy Thomson, Nicki, and Edd Vick at the chili party

It's now owned by the American College Dublin, and it functions as both an academic center and a cultural museum of sorts. It's open to outsiders only for advanced-booked group tours of 25 or more and for private functions, so Nicki and I considered the chili party a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to visit the place. I discovered, too late, that there are docent tours, but we were actually there to soak in some of the historical ambience of the place as much as to eat. And also to reconnect with friends that we do not see very often anymore.

For us, Worldcons are great events for reconnecting with old friends. And they are really about the only means we have of meeting up with science fiction fan friends who live in faraway places. It was a pleasant surprise, for instance, to find Amy Thomson and Edd Vick at the chili party. We've known them for many decades, going way back to when they were single and aspiring writers. They're now married to each other and are both successful writers, Amy a winner of the John W. Campbell Award back in 1994. Edd was using the event to celebrate the publication his new fiction anthology, *True Love and Other Lies*. And, geez, neither looked to have aged very much in all those years. Which seems appropriate, now that I come to think of it. Oscar Wilde wrote a fantasy novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which describes one way to avoid aging. I'm wondering if I should have asked if they have a painting of themselves up in their attic.

“Finally, a Janice Gelb sighting!”

That was my caption for a photo that I sent to Mike Glycer from the Fan Funds Auction. Janice is also an old friend – Nicki and I have known her for more than 30 years – but she’s not the easiest person to find at a Worldcon. And that’s because she is a Program Ops maven – she has become famous within science fiction fandom for becoming so deeply involved at the program operations room during Worldcons, helping to oversee the myriad number of last-minute changes to the programming that invariably happen, that she rarely comes up for air. So it was almost a shock to see her at the auction.



Janice Gelb at the Fan Funds auction

She was one of the ‘runners’, the auctioneer helpers who take items up for bid around the room for closer inspection by prospective bidders. But I don’t think she saw me, even though at one point she was just a few steps away.

Janice is an American expat who now lives in Australia, and is married to another well-known Aussie fan, Stephen Boucher. He was also so deeply involved in the nuts-and-bolts of making the Dublin Worldcon happen that I didn’t catch sight of him until literally the last few minutes of the convention. While most of the fans still there, late on that final day of the convention, were ensconced in the Convention Center’s auditorium taking in the closing ceremonies, a very weary-looking Stephen showed up in the nearly deserted entrance foyer, where registration and badging had been ongoing almost nonstop for several days, to decompress and relax a bit. And then he was gone again, like a wraith, on his way to meet up with Janice somewhere.



Stephen Boucher appears!
OK, the convention can end now...

And soon after that Nicki and I were gone too, taking a taxi back to our hotel so we could get a start on preparing for the next day’s flight back to the States. It had been a magnificent ten days in Dublin, filled with memorable things we’d seen and done.

And it hadn’t even rained that much!

“Would I want to live in Dublin?”

I think I asked myself that several times during the trip. Lots of European cities are expensive places to live but the part of Dublin out where we stayed seemed reasonably affordable. One of the streets near our hotel looked like all the row houses there had been rehabbed and typical prices for that kind of residence, after I checked, are in the \$250-400K range. True, there would have to be some changes of lifestyle, in particular some rather significant downsizing, and from what I could see the only air conditioning available would be to open an upstairs window and let in the breeze. But we probably wouldn't need a car! That's gotta count for something.

Nicki and I know that's not going to happen – we like living where we are too much. But even though we won't be moving to Ireland, we may yet find ourselves there again someday. And next time, we'll plan for seeing more of the country than just its capital city. But for this trip, we're left with many, many pleasant memories of what we did get to see and do. And that includes the times we got to talk to the local residents. A good place for doing that turned out to be Peadar Browns. Our first time there we sat at the bar next to a middle age gent who struck up a conversation by wondering why I was drinking a lager instead of a Guinness. (I replied that I was working my way up toward that by sampling some of the other local brews first.) Turns out that he is a long-haul trucker whose travels have taken him through many parts of Europe. He had married a Polish woman who also drove trucks, and their son also has become a trucker – in the United States! We had intended to stay only a little while to take in some of the live music there that evening, but the conversation was so pleasant that we hadn't even noticed when the musicians finished their set, packed up and left.

In the end we went home wishing we had done a bit more, as is usually the case with a good vacation trip. But what we did get to experience was fabulous – the history, the glorious old buildings, the Irish culture and folklore, the culinary delights, and the people. Not only that, there was also this huge, interesting convention where we shared many pleasant moments with friends too seldom seen. Truly memorable.

It all happened in Dublin's fair city. ☀



one of the many colorful row house fronts on a street near our hotel

