

Junior Cert Cycle: Change on Henrietta Street

Henrietta Street was built in the mid 18th century, almost 300 years ago, when Ireland was still part of the British Empire.

The street changed significantly over the years, as a result of the actions of certain people, and wider events happening in Ireland and across the world. As the street changed, the identity of the people who lived there also changed. This section looks at what these changes were, and why they happened, from the creation of Henrietta Street in the 18th century, up until the mid 20th century.



Georgian townhouse to
tenement dwellings



14 Henrietta Street

Junior Cycle School Resources

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1. Introduction

14 Henrietta Street is a social history museum of Dublin life, from one building’s Georgian beginnings to its tenement times. We connect the history of urban life over 300 years to the stories of the people who called this place home. The aim of this pack is to provide you with a toolkit of case studies, suggested activities, and further resources to help you plan lessons for your Junior Cycle history group.

2. Syllabus links

This resource pack provides an exploration of various topics on the Junior Cycle history syllabus through the context of *14 Henrietta Street*. Regardless of your topic of study, your group will develop their skills as historians with the tools in this pack. However, there are particularly strong links to the following topics on strands 2 and 3 of the syllabus:

Recognising Key Change

- Key changes/developments in the domains of politics and international relations
- Impact of settlement and land ownership on ideas of identity
- Role of significant individuals as agents of change

Exploring people, culture and ideas

- Impact of new and changing ideas about how people should live and be governed
- Impact of such factors as population change, migration, famine, genocide on the lives of ordinary people
- How women’s lives changed over time

Applying historical thinking

- Connections between people, events and places in the past
- Sense of historical empathy in exploring people in the past
- Local, personal or family history
- Identifying patterns or trends of change over time
- Concepts such as culture and civilisation and power and authority

The topics covered in this pack are drawn together by a focus on strand 1 of the syllabus: ‘the nature of history’.

Before 1800: The Georgian Beginnings of Henrietta Street

The period from 1714 to the 1830s is known as the Georgian period. For most of this time, Dublin was known as the 'second city of the British Empire', and had the second highest population of any city in the Empire, after London. Because of its status, Dublin was especially popular with aristocrats and the powerful elite. Many exclusive neighbourhoods were built during this time such as Mountjoy Square and Merrion Square.

Henrietta Street was built in the mid 18th century, on land owned by Luke Gardiner, and quickly became Dublin's most exclusive address. In its first thirty years, Henrietta Street was home to six titled residents, two army generals, three archbishops, two speakers of the House of Commons and the Lord Chancellor of Ireland.

These high-class town houses were social settings and political arenas, the scenes of parties and politics. Almost all of the Georgian residents of Henrietta Street were involved in politics or law, from MPs and Lords to powerful churchmen.

We know very little about the people who built Henrietta Street - but it is possible to find clues about the lives of these people who built houses for the rich and powerful. During renovation works a few years ago, oyster shells were found beneath the floorboards of 14 Henrietta Street. Oysters were a popular snack in Georgian Dublin as they were cheap and easy to obtain. They could have been the discarded remains of lunch, belonging to the workmen who originally put down the floorboards in 14 Henrietta Street nearly 300 years ago.



Exterior Shot of Henrietta Street by Ros Kavanagh



Luke Gardiner (a. 1690 - 1755)

Henrietta Street was designed by Luke Gardiner. We know very little about Gardiner's early life, origins or parentage, but he is believed to be a native of Dublin City. He became one of the most successful and wealthiest men in Ireland. He was an MP, a banker and as a property developer he shaped the face of the northside of Dublin. He developed Gardiner St, Mountjoy Square, Marlborough Street, and, for Ireland's elite and powerful, he created Henrietta Street.



Viscount General Richard Molesworth (1680 - 1758)

The first family to occupy 14 Henrietta Street was the Molesworths: Viscount General Richard Molesworth of Swords and his second wife Mary. Richard Molesworth had a distinguished military career and led his regiments at the Battles of Blenheim (1704) and Ramillies (1706) during the War of the Spanish Succession. He was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Irish Army in 1751.

Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

1800 - 1876: Lawyers and Soldiers

In 1801, The Act of Union was passed by parliament, creating the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. This meant that political decisions were made in London, and Dublin was no longer the 'second city' of the British Empire. The aristocracy moved away, and many fashionable Dublin streets fell out of use.

This period saw the rise of the professional middle classes such as doctors and lawyers. Some of the previously fashionable Georgian buildings became derelict, while others adapted and became offices and housing. At the top of Henrietta Street is the King's Inns, where lawyers and barristers trained. The presence of this local centre of study meant that many people involved in the law lived and worked on Henrietta Street. From 1800 until the 1840s, 14 Henrietta Street was the home and office of solicitors.

The Great Famine of 1845-49 caused many large country estates to become bankrupt. In 1849, The Encumbered Estates Court was established at 14 Henrietta Street to sell and settle the debts of these huge estates. The coach house at the back of the building was turned into a courtroom.



Image: © 1860: An advertisement for General Engineering, Geological Survey and Valuation Office

A description of 14 Henrietta Street from the 1850s, when it was the Encumbered Estates Court:

The court was held in “one of the houses in Henrietta Street - a small and quiet, but handsome street in the extreme north of the city of Dublin”. The courtroom in the coach house at the back of number 14 was a “large, chilly-looking room, without a ceiling between the roof and the floor, furnished with some rows of seats for the public, a small table covered with green cloth for the bar and the attorneys, and an elevated bench unadorned even with the royal arms, for the commissioners”.

1877: An Irish Times advert for accommodation in 14 Henrietta Street:

“To be let to respectable families in a large house, Northside, recently papered, painted and filled up with every modern sanitary improvement, gas and wc on landings, Vartry Water, drying yard and a range with oven for each tenant; a large coachhouse, or workshop with apartments, to be let at the rere. Apply to the caretaker, 14 Henrietta St.”



14 Henrietta Street, Photo by Paul Tierney

1876 - 1911: The Tenements

The Great Famine led to even greater changes on Henrietta Street. During this time, many people moved from the countryside to cities to look for work and food. Some landlords saw an opportunity to make money from this new demand for housing, and bought huge Georgian houses like 14 Henrietta Street to convert them into homes for many families.

The large rooms were split into smaller rooms with partitions that only reached halfway up the walls. We can still see evidence of these partitions in 14 Henrietta Street today.

The people who lived in these buildings shared a toilet and water supply. These buildings became known as tenements.

From the 1860s a number of the houses on Henrietta Street had been converted into these tenement buildings. In 1876, Thomas Vance of Blackrock in Co. Dublin bought number 14 Henrietta Street with the intention of turning it into a tenement with fourteen flats. He removed the marble chimneys and mahogany doors of the grand Georgian period and sold them at auction. He removed the grand staircase to fit in more rooms, and the former servants stairs became the communal staircase. He installed two toilets.

Over the next few decades, 14 Henrietta Street and other tenements across Dublin became home to huge numbers of working people and the poor. In the 1911 census, over 100 people were registered as living at 14 Henrietta Street, the house built for one family in the 1700s.



Back Stairs of 14 Henrietta Street (Photo by Ros Kavanagh)

Suggested activities/ questions:

Task 1: Henrietta Street Over Time

Draw a timeline of Henrietta Street. On this timeline add:

- Key dates
- Major changes on the street
- National and world events that led to these changes
- Key people and their involvement in these changes
- How identity changed on the street over time

Task 2: Using the Census

What is the census?

- Take a look at the Irish Census (<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/search/>)
- Select Census year '1901' select the country as 'Dublin' and type 'Henrietta Street' into Townland/street
- Select 'show all information'.
- You will be able to see people's names, age, religion, and what they did for work.
- Make a list of some of these occupations - are there any jobs you don't recognise? What are they?
- Look at the census again, but this time for 1911. Compare the occupations of people on the street to those in 1901. Which jobs are the same? Are there any new ones?
- For both 1901 and 1911, make a list of jobs that men had, and a list of jobs that women had. What kind of jobs did men and women do? Were they different? Were they the same?



*Children on Henrietta Street:
Courtesy of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*

The Women of Henrietta Street

In many ways, the lives of the women and girls who lived at 14 Henrietta Street changed significantly over time. Lady Molesworth in the Georgian townhouse of 1751 had a very different lifestyle to Mrs Dowling who lived in the first floor room of the tenement in the 20th century. In the tenement times, women were often the main breadwinners, and worked locally in areas such as Moore Street and the surrounding markets. It was common to see women and children packing matches and threading rosary beads on the steps on a sunny day.

Whether she was a Georgian Lady expected to be a glamorous society wife, or a mother in the tenements trying to raise a large family, life as a woman on Henrietta Street was shaped by the changing fortunes of the street, and society's gender expectations.



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Lady Mary Molesworth (1728 - 1763)

Lived in 14 Henrietta Street: 1751 - 1758

Born Mary Jenney Usher, Lady Mary Molesworth was only fifteen years old when she married Richard Molesworth in 1743, who was then sixty-three. She was described by writer Horace Walpole as a “very great beauty,” whose “amiable character” and virtue were “beyond all suspicion, untainted and irreproachable.”

Lady Mary had eight children, and died in 1763 in a house fire in London, along with her brother and two daughters Mary and Melosina. The fire was a result of arson: a servant trying to cover up a theft.

Image ©National Trust Images/Derrick E.



Mary Wollstonecraft (1759 - 1797)

Lived in 15 Henrietta Street 1786 - 1787

Mary Wollstonecraft moved to 15 Henrietta Street in 1786 to work as a governess for the three eldest daughters of the Kingsborough family. She did not get along with Lady Kingsborough and was dismissed the following year. Five years later she wrote the pioneering feminist book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Wollstonecraft gives us a look at a Dublin where women were expected to abide by what she regarded as oppressive social rules: “Dublin has not the advantages which result from residing in London; everyone’s conduct is canvassed, and the least deviation from a ridiculous rule of propriety... would endanger their precarious existence”.

Witty Image © National Portrait Gallery, London

Suggested activities/ questions:

Task 1: Uncovering Women's Lives

- Look at the pictures on the previous page of Mary Molesworth and Mary Wollstonecraft. What do they tell you about their lives? Is this evidence reliable?
- Look at the Census:
<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/search/>
What does it tell you about the lives of women on Henrietta Street in 1901 and 1911? Has it changed? How?



Youth Group Tour (Photo by Dan Butler)

Task 2: A Day in the Life Of...

- Write a diary entry from the point of view of each of the people above. Use evidence including portraits, oral histories, and the census to help make the entry authentic.

Applying historical thinking: Voices from the Past

Oral histories are recordings of people talking about their memories of the past. They are one type of evidence we have of what life was like for people in times gone by. 14 Henrietta Street has many oral histories about tenement life. They are recordings of people who lived in tenements across Dublin, and cover topics such as food and drink, school, play and games, and moving to the suburbs. Oral histories are collected by interviewing people about different subjects, and asking them questions about what they remember of a particular time.

Many people still remember growing up in the tenements during the 20th century. Oral histories are a great way to capture these living memories and paint a vivid picture of what life was like in Dublin's tenements.



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Applying historical thinking: Voices from the Past

Because most of the people we talk to were children at the time, we have a rich collection of accounts of what tenement life was like from the perspective of a child. The interviews below are with former tenement residents, and cover all aspects of daily life.

- Births and deaths:
<https://youtu.be/d9yMCarHs6M>
- Childhood:
<https://youtu.be/q0p5aTTsBuk>
- Daily life:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dthcCQcMxY>
- Food: https://youtu.be/8vQn-Pz_F4g
- Moving to the suburbs:
https://youtu.be/84fw4CPbr_w
- School life: <https://youtu.be/BJF8USS-zDw>
- The sense of community:
<https://youtu.be/DfHOZc05SEA>
- Special occasions:
<https://youtu.be/awQA8-VO0O8>
- Working life:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skEMk97I3fA>



Youth Group Tour (Photo by Dan Butler)

Suggested activities/ questions:

Task 1: Examining Oral Histories

- Listen to the oral histories on the previous page. To what extent do the voices agree about tenement life? Are there any examples where they disagree, or share a different experience? List them below.

Task 2: Local History Project

- Uncover what life was like in the past in your school, street, or local area. Gather evidence such as photos, objects, census entries, and oral histories to make a picture of what life was like.

Further Resources

- The Irish Census
<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/>



Youth Group Tour (Photo by Dan Butler)