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Joyce's real Dubliners

The Real People of Joyce's *Ulysses*: A Biographical Guide

by Vivien Igoe
(University College Dublin Press, €40.00hb)

John Wyse Jackson

When James Joyce wrote his tale of a day in early 20th-Century Dublin, he confused his earliest readers by naming it after the heroic Mediterranean seafarer at the centre of Homer's *Odyssey*.

The novel was about ordinary people wandering around the city: it seemed entirely unrelated to the greatest epic of the western world. People wondered if the grandiose title was the author's cynical attempt to give his book classic status and stature.

There was probably some truth in this, but Joyce had more commendable reason for the link: he believed that the Dublin citizens he was chronicling were every bit as important as Homer's semi-mythical heroes. It's a position held by the Church the author rejected: we are all equal in the eyes of God.

Joyce rarely invented: he used real people in his books, usually without changing their names.

Even when for legal or family reasons a character has been rechristened, it is often possible to discover who lies behind the pseudonym.

Biographies

Through hundreds of short biographies, Vivien Igoe's book allows us to explore the lives and minds of a wide (though frequently interconnected) range of Dubliners. Were it not for Joyce's novel, this valuable, detailed social

history of Victorian and Edwardian Dublin would have been lost to us.

An intriguing list is given here of people appearing in *Ulysses* who seem to have left no verifiable trace at all in history.

It is significant that most of these vanished shadows come from the lower strata of society. Maybe there was a Miss Mina Kennedy working in the bar of the Ormond Hotel, but she is likely to have lost her name through marriage; and even if, say, we found a Philomena Kennedy in the 1903 census, what records have survived that would

professions, which tended to keep detailed records of their members. In *Ulysses*, we are told here, 43 clergy are named. In terms of numbers, they are beaten only by those connected with the law (48).

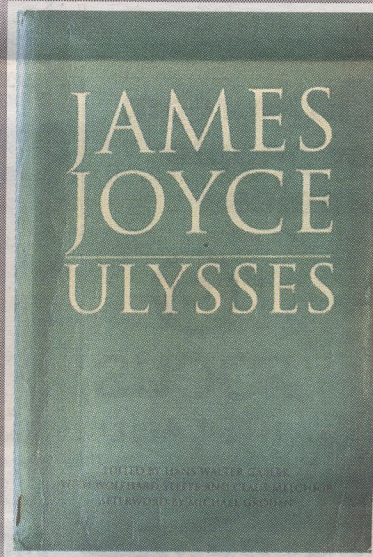
There are 35 people linked to the press, and 32 in one or other of the medical professions, as well as numerous actors, musicians, national and local politicians, and sportsmen (but no sportswomen). Igoe's entries are succinct but elegantly written, and often feature rare photographs of the subjects.

But there are also *great numbers* of less eminent people here. This book (with the help of James Joyce) rescues for posterity dozens of stories from the early years of the last century that would have never been heard again.

Many of the hundreds of short biographies here concern friends and acquaintances of the Joyce family, and thousands of present-day Dubliners must be descended from them (though generally not from the priests.)

The presence of these 'real people' in *Ulysses*, together with decades of diligent inquiry and research by Vivien Igoe, have together resulted in a unique reference resource for a vanished generation that would be the envy of any city.

Keep a copy beside the bed. Who knows, you may find a long-lost ancestor!



prove her to have been the hotel barmaid?

It's different with the pro-