

# Dirt, Dwellings and Culture





# **Dirt, Dwellings and Culture**

Living conditions in Early Medieval Dublin:  
A case-study from Fishamble Street

Eileen Reilly



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## Preface

My wife, Eileen, passed away in July 2018. She left behind the bulk of this monograph and it has been completed through the good offices of her colleagues Dr. Lorna O'Donell and Professor Aidan O'Sullivan.

It is an epitaph to a scientist and a scholar, and to her love for her native city.

Eileen was an archaeologist to her fingertips. And she was also a Dub. Working on the Fishamble Street samples was a thrill for her. A marriage of interests.

Her scientific interest in coleoptera was driven primarily by what they could tell us about the human experience. But she thought they were beautiful too. Her beetle specialism – I used to enjoy the reaction of people when asked what she did – was not an alternative to archaeology, it complemented it.

While this volume is almost entirely Eileen's work – it was described to me as 95% finished when I retrieved it from her computer's systems – others have worked to get it over the line.

I am grateful to them.

Eileen was grateful too to the Irish Research Council who funded this research by way of a Government of Ireland Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship, 2013-2015.

One of the most difficult things to reconcile about her passing is the loss of her potential and the contribution to the profession she would have made. As an environmental archaeologist she broke new ground and I know she was looking forward to going further.

Eileen, of course, was more than an archaeologist even though the subject consumed her. She was a mother, a wife, a sister, and a daughter. She was a caring and warm human being, a loyal friend with a beautiful personality. Everyone liked her.

I am pleased we have been able to get this book published for her and I hope she won't be too cross about some of the assumptions we have made to help complete it.

She is hugely missed by her friends and family.

But most of all by myself and her beautiful daughter Áine.

Rónán O'Brien

October 2023

## Preface

I will always remember when I first visited Pat Wallace's excavations on the Fishamble Street site, Dublin 37 years ago. I was staggered by the level of organic preservation. I hadn't seen anything like it. It was a treasure trove of archaeology and not least for an environmental archaeologist. I had seen waterlogged organic preservation before on early urban sites in Britain but nothing on that scale.

Pat and his crew had a great responsibility on their shoulders, as they knew full well, and incredible pressure was placed on them for the duration of the excavation. Pat was very much inclined to environmental sampling, not least because of Frank Mitchell's regular visits. Finbar McCormick had also worked on the site and was instrumental in encouraging the collection and sampling of several tons of animal bones for his study and for further research. Also the structural wood of the houses was identified as it was excavated. It did not therefore take much persuasion to set up a sampling programme for the non-wood macro plant remains which an enthusiastic student of mine with a love of plants – Siobhan Geraghty – began for her Master's research. The National Museum facilitated the work with equipment for processing the samples and a place for Siobhan to work.

Siobhan and I noted the presence of insect remains in the samples back then in the early 1980s, and realised the potential for their study from the ongoing work of Paul Buckland and Harry Kenward in York. However, as it happened, some of the pioneering work on insects from archaeological sites was carried out by G. Russell Coope from Birmingham University on samples from Brendan O'Riordain's excavations at Christchurch Place and Winetavern Street.

Unfortunately no one was available at that stage to carry out an archaeoentomological study on the Fishamble Street samples.

Fortunately the sampling strategy we put in place was an optimistic one and involved taking more samples than Siobhan's project could deal with. The realisation that their content would hold potential for future research was accepted by Pat and the National Museum, and hence with storage advice from us, has meant that over 30 years later they were available for Eileen's work.

This study was always waiting to happen, but it needed the right person to take it forward and that person has been Eileen Reilly, whom I have known for over 20 years. Her interest and enthusiasm for environmental archaeology found a focus in archaeoentomology when she was studying for an MSc with Paul Buckland in Sheffield. She came back to Ireland energised by the possibilities of insect studies and first realised the potential for Viking Age samples from the Waterford excavations. We spoke about the Fishamble Street material back then and the possibility that the samples may still be present and viable (as they were for those from Waterford).

With Lorna O'Donnell this possibility became a reality when they successfully obtained funding to prospect the Dublin samples.

There was a huge amount of work involved in going through the samples and checking their viability before the extraction and analysis could be undertaken. This was done with maximum efficiency and this tremendous volume of information and interpretation has been the outcome. The new insights that Eileen has gained from the study both enhances but also considerably 'fine tunes' our understanding of the variation in living conditions of this internationally important site – fully justifying the curation and storage of the samples for over 30 years.

## Preface

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I am delighted that this work has been published. It reflects well on all concerned – Pat Wallace and his excavation team, the National Museum for having curated the samples for over three decades, and especially the work of my friend and colleague Eileen Reilly, who saw the value of the samples and carried out this exemplary study.

### **Postscript to preface**

*Mick Monk:* I wrote the above a couple of years ago, shortly after Eileen asked would I do so.

I didn't think I would need to write a postscript. To be honest I find it difficult to do this because I still cannot believe Eileen is no longer with us.

She had so much more to give to life, to her family, her friends, and her profession. She was supportive to everyone in all areas of her life and not least her friends and colleagues.

Every one of us in our small group of environmental archaeologists in Ireland have cause to thank her for her friendship and the support she has given us in our work. She gave freely of her time to help and advise.

Her enthusiasm for her work was contagious. She loved nothing more than discussing this with others and interacting with colleagues about their work. Although a specialist, she was always able to see the wider relevance of the results of her research and the implications it had for cognitive environmental and cultural archaeological interpretations.

This was particularly the case for the research into the early medieval and Viking age urban environments not only in Ireland but across Europe, to which she has made a major contribution. It is a travesty that she was on the threshold of taking this research to another level when she was taken ill.

Eileen's contribution and passion for archaeoentomology is to be seen in many scholarly publications that she published in her own name or contributed to. However, I know the work she carried out on the Fishamble Street samples, and the bringing this together for publication, was of key importance to her because it was work showcasing the international importance of the archaeology of her home city.

November is a time to remember, and a time to be thankful. I will always remember you Eileen and be thankful that I knew you as both a good friend and a colleague. I, along with the others in our group of Irish environmental archaeologists, will continue to miss your friendship, your scholarship, and your encouragement of our own work. This volume, along with your other publications, will serve to remind us of your pioneering scholarship and presence in our lives.

Mick Monk  
November 2018

## Preface

This is the second set of comments that I have written on Dr. Eileen Reilly, following her death in 2018, in the space of the last two months in the Summer of 2022. It is not a surprise, given the normal half decadal pace of academic publishing that I am being asked to do this at this date. What remains a surprise that I find myself having to writing them at all. The tragedy is, of course, that Eileen was taken from us all much to young.

Eileen was educated in archaeology at University College Dublin, graduating in 1992. She undertook an MSc in Environmental Archaeology at Sheffield in 1995 which was followed by a PhD on insect biodiversity in modern woodlands at Trinity College Dublin which was awarded in 2008. Eileen also worked as a consultant on archaeoentomology of a number of important archaeological sites particularly the Iron age Corlea Bog Trackway and a range of Late Bronze, Iron and Viking age deposits from the waterfront at Dublin; such as, Temple Bar and, most importantly, Fishamble Street. Eileen was on of the few archaeoentomologists to work deliberately on urban and settlement deposits, with their rich insights into human life and behaviour, rather than concentrating the ‘paleoecological’ role of the discipline. This probably speak to her love of the archaeological and her appreciation of what this work can bring to the archaeologists and the sites on which they work. Towards the end of time with us Eileen had started work on the insect faunas from the Drumclay crannog site. I have been privileged to see the draft of some of this work and it is highly innovative and analytical. Perhaps Eileen largest impact is that she promoted the discipline of Environmental Archaeology, and archaeoentomology in Ireland with such dedication and charm that its futures seemed assured.

My initial contact with Eileen was the result of supporting her early work, particularly confirming her identifications, when she started to work as an independent consultant back in the 1990s. For several years she was a constant visitor to the lab at Birmingham, an event I always looked forward to. As the years went by, and life and family intervened for both of us, this happened less often. We did continue to have ‘nerdy’ conversations about long dead beetles and when we met at conferences we would great as old friends. Mainly, this was due to Eileen being one of those people who had the gift of just picking up the conversation from the last time we spoke often years previously.

I also hoped, or dreamed, that, as I headed towards the last 10 years of my working life, Eileen would start to take over my UK work from me. After all she was a decade younger than me, was the safest pair of hands around, and would be a good ‘inheritor’. Amongst the least important implications of her early death, is that, perversely, I have started to inherit projects from her. This passage of events is clearly the wrong way around and, in its own minor way, is deeply sad.

David Smith  
January 2023

## Editors' Note

Dr. Eileen Reilly would have written a better book than this, but she just didn't get the time to do it. As editors, we have taken her early drafts, her texts and illustrations, and, with the addition of a paper as a concluding chapter that she was then co-authoring with one of us (Aidan O'Sullivan), we have sought to complete the draft text, as we think she may have finished it. We know that Eileen would have done much more work if she had the chance and can imagine her going back and forth over the text, checking details, conferring with colleagues, and honing her analysis. However, as the Irish Quaternary scholar Prof. Frank Mitchell once said at a conference in TCD many years ago, 'The best is the enemy of the good'. This book is not the best that Eileen would have done; she would have done it far better than us, but we hope that the scholarly community will agree, it is still very good, and a vital contribution to the archaeology of her native city.

Lorna O'Donnell,  
Aidan O'Sullivan,  
and Stephen Davis  
December 2020

## Acknowledgements, by Eileen Reilly

This book began as the result of a project undertaken under the auspices of The National Museum of Ireland and co-funded by them and the Environment Fund of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in 2011–12. However, it was clear that many of the findings, especially those related to living conditions, needed to be explored and discussed in a wider European context. A subsequent application to the Irish Research Council resulted in a successful Postdoctoral Fellowship at UCD School of Archaeology (2013–15), under the eponymous title of this book, which allowed for many of these wider themes to be examined. There are, therefore, many people to thank for helping to bring this work to fruition.

I would like to thank Dr Patrick Wallace, retired Director of the National Museum, and Dr Ragnall Ó Floinn, current Director, who supported the application to the Environment Fund and were instrumental in shepherding the project in its infancy; Eamonn Kelly and Maeve Sikora who steered things in-house, and Tara Jennings and Eamonn McLoughlin for financial management.

Thanks to all the staff of Collins Barracks who facilitated the sample inventory project. Thanks to Brenda Malone and the staff of Treacy's for help in transporting the samples from Daingean to Collins Barracks and to volunteer Tommy Leonard for help in moving samples within the Quartermaster's Store in Collins Barracks.

To the numerous archaeologists and labourers who worked on the excavations at Fishamble Street we all owe a particular debt of thanks. Without their meticulous excavation, recording and sampling of the deposits and features, none of this work would be possible.

Heartfelt thanks must go to Adrienne Corless, former post-excavation manager of the Dublin Excavations Project, for supporting the project in every way possible; to Mark Gallagher, whose encyclopedic knowledge of the stratigraphy of Fishamble Street was invaluable in trying to identify the origins of each and every sample inventoried, and to Johnny Ryan, whose stunning digital rendition of the original site plans was critical to visualizing the sample locations.

Thank you to Darren Mann, Head of Life Collections at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, for access to the entomology collections and for his generous assistance on many of the more difficult identifications.

To a great number of people who have provided useful criticisms, comments, discussions on aspects of this work over the last two years: Rebecca Boyd, Steve Davis, Susan Lyons, Mick Monk, Ellen O'Carroll, Lorna O'Donnell, Jean O'Dowd, Aidan O'Sullivan, Bettina Stefanini, Ingelise Stuijts, and David Smith.

Finally, and most importantly, to Lorna, who undertook the inventory with me and whose professionalism, thoroughness, and dedication to the task in hand were extraordinary and always a source of inspiration; to Bettina, without whom this project would never have happened; to Rónán and Áine, who make everything worthwhile, and to my family and in-laws, who have always been proud of my achievements, as I have been of theirs.

I dedicate this book to all of them but especially to my late mother, Jo Reilly (1946–2009).

Eileen Reilly  
Dublin 2016



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

‘HOUSE, *n.* A hollow edifice erected for the habitation of man, rat, mouse, beetle, cockroach, fly, mosquito, flea, bacillus and microbe.’

*The Devil’s Dictionary*, Ambrose Bierce (1911)

The Vikings have left an indelible mark on the Irish imagination – from the vivid contemporary accounts of their violence and barbarism in the *Annals*, to archaeological sites like Wood Quay, and the political controversy that surrounded it in the 1980s, to the perception of Dublin as a ‘Viking town’ by both Irish people and visiting tourists today. Many of Ireland’s towns and cities – such as Dublin, Wexford, Waterford, Cork and Limerick – owe their origins in part to the original Viking Age settlements of the 9th and 10th centuries AD. Archaeology has contributed hugely to our understanding of the Viking Age in Ireland, through meticulous excavations of urban and some rural sites, and subsequent public display of Viking Age artefacts and house reconstructions in our museums. But how much do we really understand about what daily life was like in a 10th- or 11th-century town? What were Viking Dublin’s houses like to live in, what were their interiors like, what about their backyards, the streets of the town, and the surrounding landscape? Can we reconstruct that everyday human experience, or is this still somewhat out of reach?

In Dublin, we are fortunate to have the extraordinary legacy of the archaeological excavations undertaken by the National Museum of Ireland, the Office of Public Works, and the several Irish commercial archaeological sectors – archaeological excavations set in the Viking town at the heart of the modern city – on which to build our understanding of past living conditions (Fig. 1). In total, more than 383 Viking-age buildings have been excavated in the city, the largest proportion of which were uncovered in Fishamble Street (1977–81), in works under the direction of Dr Patrick Wallace (e.g. Wallace 1992; 2016; Boyd 2012). At Fishamble Street, the preservation of archaeological and environment deposits was extraordinary due to waterlogging, as the anerobic quality of the soils enabled the survival of organic remains. Particularly significant for this study were the excavations named Fishamble Street II (Licence No. E172) and Fishamble Street III (Licence No. E190), with the latter having more plentiful and better preserved occupation levels. Examining the plant macrofossils, animal bone, shell, insects and internal parasites contained in these urban settlement deposits can give us insights into the diet, living conditions and health of past peoples, as well as hinting at the types of the wider rural landscape that surrounded the urban settlement.

This study began as a project entitled the ‘Fishamble Street Inventory Project’, undertaken under the auspices of The National Museum of Ireland and co-funded by them and the Environment Fund of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in 2011–12 (O’Donnell and Reilly 2012). A subsequent Irish Research Council Postdoctoral Fellowship at UCD School of Archaeology (2013–15), entitled ‘Dirt, Dwellings and Culture: Living conditions in Early Medieval Europe, a case-study from Dublin, Ireland’ investigated living conditions in early medieval settlements in more depth, time and space, and in particular explored the implications of dirt and hygiene in early medieval settlements in Ireland and Europe.

This current book then originates from the examination of insect remains from over 100 of the original soil samples taken during the excavation of Fishamble Street. The samples were taken from within



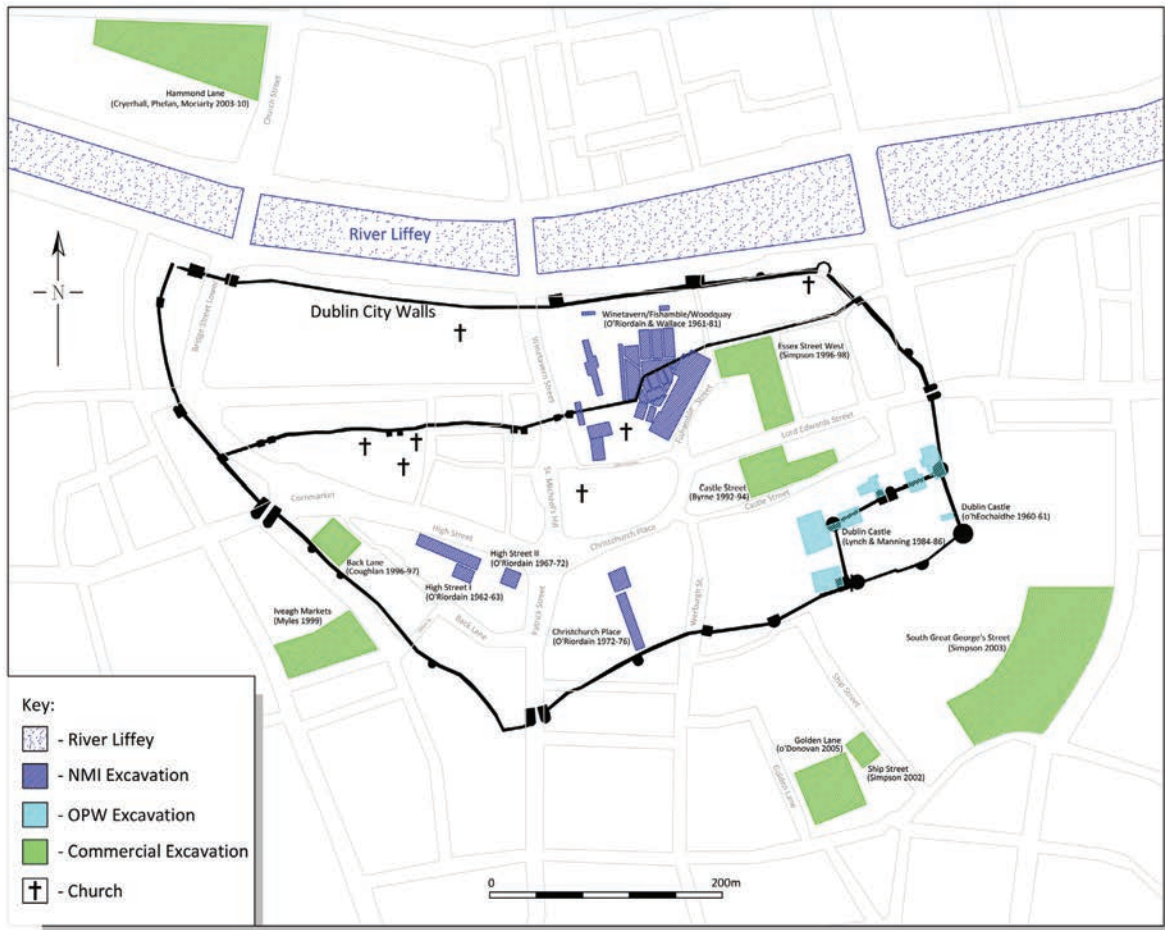


Figure 1: Location map showing sites of major NMI, OPW and commercial archaeological excavations in Dublin, 1962–2010 (© Johnny Ryan).

houses, from animal pens, pits, drains and yards, and it is hoped that this work will complement the study of plant macrofossils published by Siobhán Geraghty (1996).

### Insect analysis

Insect remains have been utilised in archaeological and palaeoecological research since the late 1950s – an approach usually termed as *palaeoentomology* or *archaeoentomology*. The method developed at the University of Birmingham, UK, where Fred Shotton, Peter Osborne and especially G. Russell Coope undertook numerous studies of Pleistocene faunas (e.g. Shotton 1959; 1965; Coope *et al.* 1961; Osborne and Shotton 1968). Through careful examination of fossil specimens with comparative collections in Britain and other parts of the world, Coope and others proved that while these species might now be extinct in Britain, they were in fact still present around the globe. This hugely important discovery led to the development of a powerful climatic model, known as the *Mutual Climatic Range* method, which utilized the temperature preference of individual species of beetles to reconstruction temperature changes at the end of the last Ice Age (Coope *et al.* 1971).

It has also been recognised since the 1950s that fossil insects could provide very precise and important data on past environmental conditions, from the local site to landscape scale, for archaeologists and palaeoecologists alike. Beetles, in particular, have proved especially useful due the fact that they survive well in waterlogged archaeological deposits, are relatively abundant, have generally narrow habitat preferences, and, in some cases, have a sensitivity to climate. Through analyzing these habitat preferences and grouping insects into ecologically related habitat groups a picture of changes in local environmental conditions through time and across a site emerges.

While exceptional and groundbreaking work was undertaken across a range of sites by the likes of Peter Osborne and Maureen Girling (e.g. Osborne 1969; Girling 1976; 1977; 1978; 1979a; 1979b etc.), arguably the most important contributor to the field of urban archaeoentomology was Harry Kenward, who, since the 1970s, developed the science to particularly address the complex archaeology found on deeply stratified, waterlogged sites of this nature. He, along with other scientific colleagues, analyzed huge volumes of organic material excavated from sites all over York during major redevelopment of the city centre in the 1970s and 1980s (for a review see Kenward 2009). Kenward, and more recently David Smith, have worked to establish ‘indicator packages’ of ecofacts which indicate particular on-site activities: these include stable manure (Kenward and Hall 1997); smoke-blackened thatch (Smith *et al.* 1999); cess (Smith 2013; 2020); and leather production (Hall and Kenward 2011).

Kenward and colleagues have also identified the ‘rural’ origins of many of the insect communities observed on urban sites, suggesting that many species end up in towns by occupying artificially created niches that in effect mimic their natural habitats (Kenward and Allison 1994; King 2014). Some have even become dependent on humans for their survival (*synanthropic*) and are now very rare, or possibly extinct in nature. All of the above make insect analysis a particularly powerful tool when attempting to reconstruct or re-imagine living conditions in Viking-age Dublin.

I am delighted that this work has been published. It reflects well on all concerned – Pat Wallace and his excavation team, the National Museum for having curated the samples for over three decades, and especially the work of my friend and colleague Eileen Reilly, who saw the value of the samples and carried out this exemplary study.

### **Postscript to preface**

*Mick Monk:* I wrote the above a couple of years ago, shortly after Eileen asked would I do so.

I didn't think I would need to write a postscript. To be honest I find it difficult to do this because I still cannot believe Eileen is no longer with us.

She had so much more to give to life, to her family, her friends, and her profession. She was supportive to everyone in all areas of her life and not least her friends and colleagues.

Every one of us in our small group of environmental archaeologists in Ireland have cause to thank her for her friendship and the support she has given us in our work. She gave freely of her time to help and advise.

Her enthusiasm for her work was contagious. She loved nothing more than discussing this with others and interacting with colleagues about their work. Although a specialist, she was always able to see the wider relevance of the results of her research and the implications it had for cognitive environmental and cultural archaeological interpretations.

This was particularly the case for the research into the early medieval and Viking age urban environments not only in Ireland but across Europe, to which she has made a major contribution. It is a travesty that she was on the threshold of taking this research to another level when she was taken ill.

Eileen's contribution and passion for archaeoentomology is to be seen in many scholarly publications that she published in her own name or contributed to. However, I know the work she carried out on the Fishamble Street samples, and the bringing this together for publication, was of key importance to her because it was work showcasing the international importance of the archaeology of her home city.

November is a time to remember, and a time to be thankful. I will always remember you Eileen and be thankful that I knew you as both a good friend and a colleague. I, along with the others in our group of Irish environmental archaeologists, will continue to miss your friendship, your scholarship, and your encouragement of our own work. This volume, along with your other publications, will serve to remind us of your pioneering scholarship and presence in our lives.

Mick Monk  
November 2018

## Preface

This is the second set of comments that I have written on Dr. Eileen Reilly, following her death in 2018, in the space of the last two months in the Summer of 2022. It is not a surprise, given the normal half decadal pace of academic publishing that I am being asked to do this at this date. What remains a surprise that I find myself having to writing them at all. The tragedy is, of course, that Eileen was taken from us all much to young.

Eileen was educated in archaeology at University College Dublin, graduating in 1992. She undertook an MSc in Environmental Archaeology at Sheffield in 1995 which was followed by a PhD on insect biodiversity in modern woodlands at Trinity College Dublin which was awarded in 2008. Eileen also worked as a consultant on archaeoentomology of a number of important archaeological sites particularly the Iron age Corlea Bog Trackway and a range of Late Bronze, Iron and Viking age deposits from the waterfront at Dublin; such as, Temple Bar and, most importantly, Fishamble Street. Eileen was on of the few archaeoentomologists to work deliberately on urban and settlement deposits, with their rich insights into human life and behaviour, rather than concentrating the ‘paleoecological’ role of the discipline. This probably speak to her love of the archaeological and her appreciation of what this work can bring to the archaeologists and the sites on which they work. Towards the end of time with us Eileen had started work on the insect faunas from the Drumclay crannog site. I have been privileged to see the draft of some of this work and it is highly innovative and analytical. Perhaps Eileen largest impact is that she promoted the discipline of Environmental Archaeology, and archaeoentomology in Ireland with such dedication and charm that its futures seemed assured.

My initial contact with Eileen was the result of supporting her early work, particularly confirming her identifications, when she started to work as an independent consultant back in the 1990s. For several years she was a constant visitor to the lab at Birmingham, an event I always looked forward to. As the years went by, and life and family intervened for both of us, this happened less often. We did continue to have ‘nerdy’ conversations about long dead beetles and when we met at conferences we would great as old friends. Mainly, this was due to Eileen being one of those people who had the gift of just picking up the conversation from the last time we spoke often years previously.

I also hoped, or dreamed, that, as I headed towards the last 10 years of my working life, Eileen would start to take over my UK work from me. After all she was a decade younger than me, was the safest pair of hands around, and would be a good ‘inheritor’. Amongst the least important implications of her early death, is that, perversely, I have started to inherit projects from her. This passage of events is clearly the wrong way around and, in its own minor way, is deeply sad.

David Smith  
January 2023

## Editors' Note

Dr. Eileen Reilly would have written a better book than this, but she just didn't get the time to do it. As editors, we have taken her early drafts, her texts and illustrations, and, with the addition of a paper as a concluding chapter that she was then co-authoring with one of us (Aidan O'Sullivan), we have sought to complete the draft text, as we think she may have finished it. We know that Eileen would have done much more work if she had the chance and can imagine her going back and forth over the text, checking details, conferring with colleagues, and honing her analysis. However, as the Irish Quaternary scholar Prof. Frank Mitchell once said at a conference in TCD many years ago, 'The best is the enemy of the good'. This book is not the best that Eileen would have done; she would have done it far better than us, but we hope that the scholarly community will agree, it is still very good, and a vital contribution to the archaeology of her native city.

Lorna O'Donnell,  
Aidan O'Sullivan,  
and Stephen Davis  
December 2020

## Acknowledgements, by Eileen Reilly

This book began as the result of a project undertaken under the auspices of The National Museum of Ireland and co-funded by them and the Environment Fund of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in 2011–12. However, it was clear that many of the findings, especially those related to living conditions, needed to be explored and discussed in a wider European context. A subsequent application to the Irish Research Council resulted in a successful Postdoctoral Fellowship at UCD School of Archaeology (2013–15), under the eponymous title of this book, which allowed for many of these wider themes to be examined. There are, therefore, many people to thank for helping to bring this work to fruition.

I would like to thank Dr Patrick Wallace, retired Director of the National Museum, and Dr Ragnall Ó Floinn, current Director, who supported the application to the Environment Fund and were instrumental in shepherding the project in its infancy; Eamonn Kelly and Maeve Sikora who steered things in-house, and Tara Jennings and Eamonn McLoughlin for financial management.

Thanks to all the staff of Collins Barracks who facilitated the sample inventory project. Thanks to Brenda Malone and the staff of Treacy's for help in transporting the samples from Daingean to Collins Barracks and to volunteer Tommy Leonard for help in moving samples within the Quartermaster's Store in Collins Barracks.

To the numerous archaeologists and labourers who worked on the excavations at Fishamble Street we all owe a particular debt of thanks. Without their meticulous excavation, recording and sampling of the deposits and features, none of this work would be possible.

Heartfelt thanks must go to Adrienne Corless, former post-excavation manager of the Dublin Excavations Project, for supporting the project in every way possible; to Mark Gallagher, whose encyclopedic knowledge of the stratigraphy of Fishamble Street was invaluable in trying to identify the origins of each and every sample inventoried, and to Johnny Ryan, whose stunning digital rendition of the original site plans was critical to visualizing the sample locations.

Thank you to Darren Mann, Head of Life Collections at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, for access to the entomology collections and for his generous assistance on many of the more difficult identifications.

To a great number of people who have provided useful criticisms, comments, discussions on aspects of this work over the last two years: Rebecca Boyd, Steve Davis, Susan Lyons, Mick Monk, Ellen O'Carroll, Lorna O'Donnell, Jean O'Dowd, Aidan O'Sullivan, Bettina Stefanini, Ingelise Stuijts, and David Smith.

Finally, and most importantly, to Lorna, who undertook the inventory with me and whose professionalism, thoroughness, and dedication to the task in hand were extraordinary and always a source of inspiration; to Bettina, without whom this project would never have happened; to Rónán and Áine, who make everything worthwhile, and to my family and in-laws, who have always been proud of my achievements, as I have been of theirs.

I dedicate this book to all of them but especially to my late mother, Jo Reilly (1946–2009).

Eileen Reilly  
Dublin 2016

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

‘HOUSE, *n.* A hollow edifice erected for the habitation of man, rat, mouse, beetle, cockroach, fly, mosquito, flea, bacillus and microbe.’

*The Devil’s Dictionary*, Ambrose Bierce (1911)

The Vikings have left an indelible mark on the Irish imagination – from the vivid contemporary accounts of their violence and barbarism in the *Annals*, to archaeological sites like Wood Quay, and the political controversy that surrounded it in the 1980s, to the perception of Dublin as a ‘Viking town’ by both Irish people and visiting tourists today. Many of Ireland’s towns and cities – such as Dublin, Wexford, Waterford, Cork and Limerick – owe their origins in part to the original Viking Age settlements of the 9th and 10th centuries AD. Archaeology has contributed hugely to our understanding of the Viking Age in Ireland, through meticulous excavations of urban and some rural sites, and subsequent public display of Viking Age artefacts and house reconstructions in our museums. But how much do we really understand about what daily life was like in a 10th- or 11th-century town? What were Viking Dublin’s houses like to live in, what were their interiors like, what about their backyards, the streets of the town, and the surrounding landscape? Can we reconstruct that everyday human experience, or is this still somewhat out of reach?

In Dublin, we are fortunate to have the extraordinary legacy of the archaeological excavations undertaken by the National Museum of Ireland, the Office of Public Works, and the several Irish commercial archaeological sectors – archaeological excavations set in the Viking town at the heart of the modern city – on which to build our understanding of past living conditions (Fig. 1). In total, more than 383 Viking-age buildings have been excavated in the city, the largest proportion of which were uncovered in Fishamble Street (1977–81), in works under the direction of Dr Patrick Wallace (e.g. Wallace 1992; 2016; Boyd 2012). At Fishamble Street, the preservation of archaeological and environment deposits was extraordinary due to waterlogging, as the anerobic quality of the soils enabled the survival of organic remains. Particularly significant for this study were the excavations named Fishamble Street II (Licence No. E172) and Fishamble Street III (Licence No. E190), with the latter having more plentiful and better preserved occupation levels. Examining the plant macrofossils, animal bone, shell, insects and internal parasites contained in these urban settlement deposits can give us insights into the diet, living conditions and health of past peoples, as well as hinting at the types of the wider rural landscape that surrounded the urban settlement.

This study began as a project entitled the ‘Fishamble Street Inventory Project’, undertaken under the auspices of The National Museum of Ireland and co-funded by them and the Environment Fund of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in 2011–12 (O’Donnell and Reilly 2012). A subsequent Irish Research Council Postdoctoral Fellowship at UCD School of Archaeology (2013–15), entitled ‘Dirt, Dwellings and Culture: Living conditions in Early Medieval Europe, a case-study from Dublin, Ireland’ investigated living conditions in early medieval settlements in more depth, time and space, and in particular explored the implications of dirt and hygiene in early medieval settlements in Ireland and Europe.

This current book then originates from the examination of insect remains from over 100 of the original soil samples taken during the excavation of Fishamble Street. The samples were taken from within



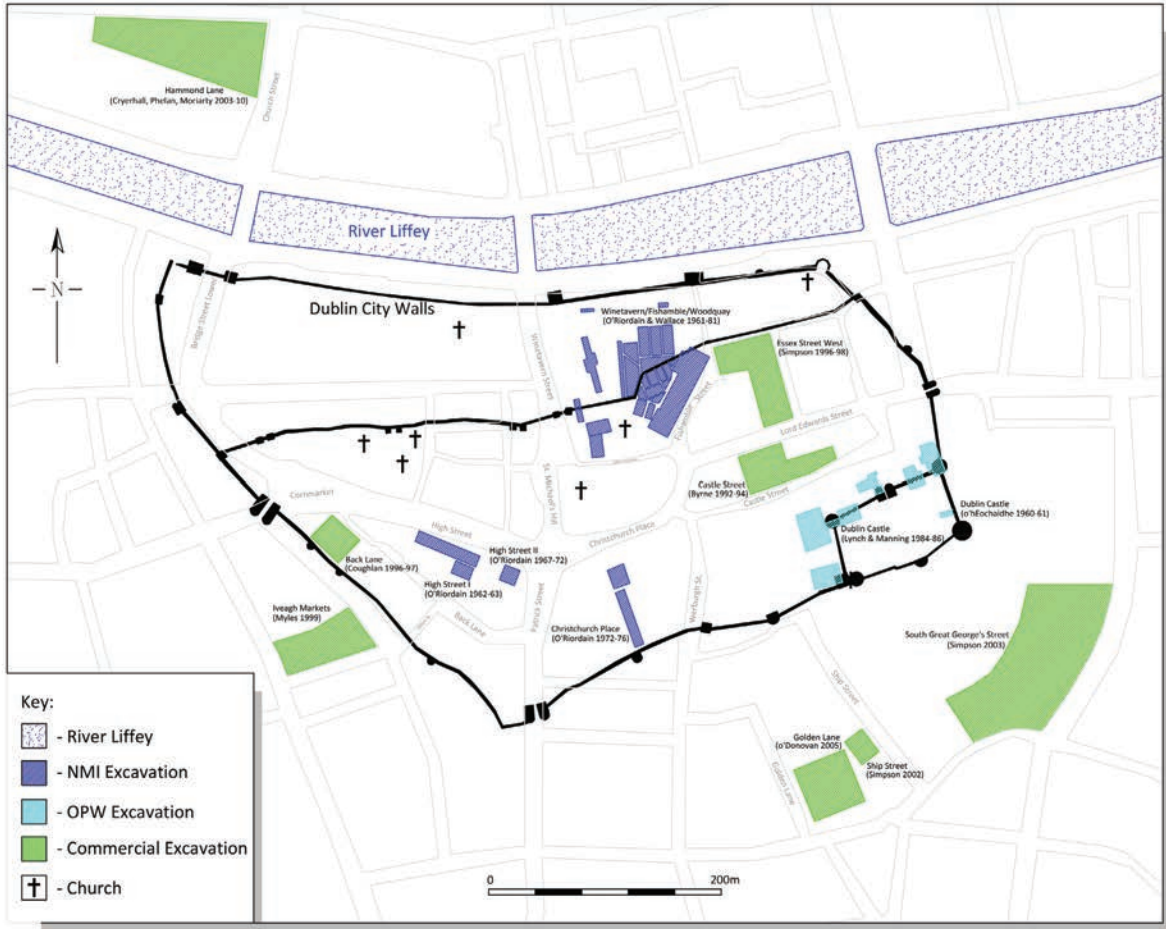


Figure 1: Location map showing sites of major NMI, OPW and commercial archaeological excavations in Dublin, 1962–2010 (© Johnny Ryan).

houses, from animal pens, pits, drains and yards, and it is hoped that this work will complement the study of plant macrofossils published by Siobhán Geraghty (1996).

## Insect analysis

Insect remains have been utilised in archaeological and palaeoecological research since the late 1950s – an approach usually termed as *palaeoentomology* or *archaeoentomology*. The method developed at the University of Birmingham, UK, where Fred Shotton, Peter Osborne and especially G. Russell Coope undertook numerous studies of Pleistocene faunas (e.g. Shotton 1959; 1965; Coope *et al.* 1961; Osborne and Shotton 1968). Through careful examination of fossil specimens with comparative collections in Britain and other parts of the world, Coope and others proved that while these species might now be extinct in Britain, they were in fact still present around the globe. This hugely important discovery led to the development of a powerful climatic model, known as the *Mutual Climatic Range* method, which utilized the temperature preference of individual species of beetles to reconstruction temperature changes at the end of the last Ice Age (Coope *et al.* 1971).



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