

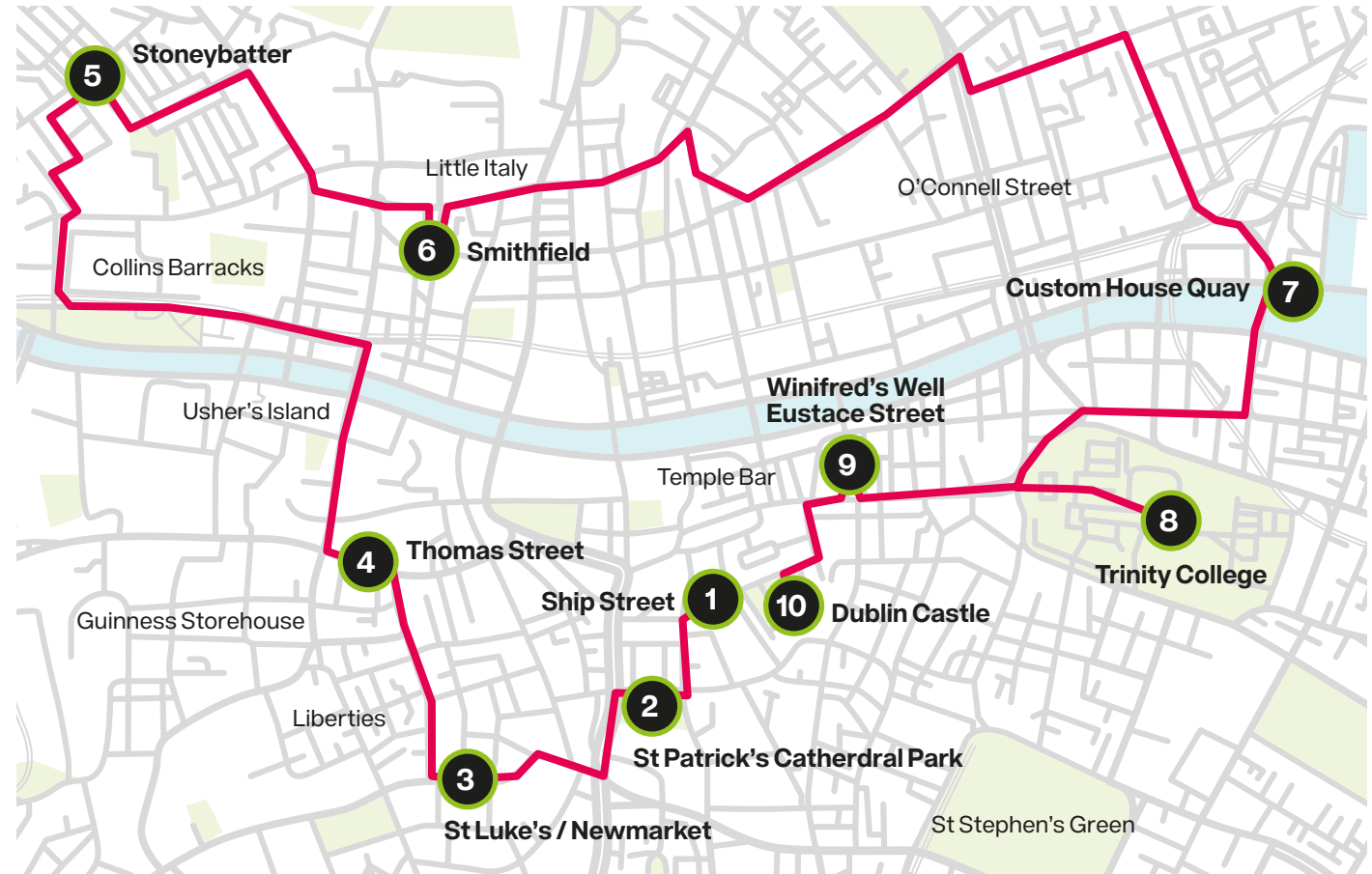
Hannah Alexander's Early Modern Food of Dublin Self-Guided Walking Tour

by Deirdre Nuttall

Dublin has a long and glorious food history, and today when we walk the ancient streets of Dublin, read their placenames, and learn about their background, we are also learning all about Dublin's food history.

It is an amazing story that links Dublin with Ireland's green countryside, with its fresh-water courses, with Dublin Bay and – through the trade and commerce that have been an integral part of Irish life since antiquity – with the rest of the world.

This self-guided Walking Tour of the Food Culture of Early Modern Dublin, which begins and ends in the area of Dublin Castle, will help you to think about Dublin's culinary history in a whole new way – and chef Mary Farrell will provide you with some exciting recipes from the period, adapted to the modern kitchen, for you to try at home!



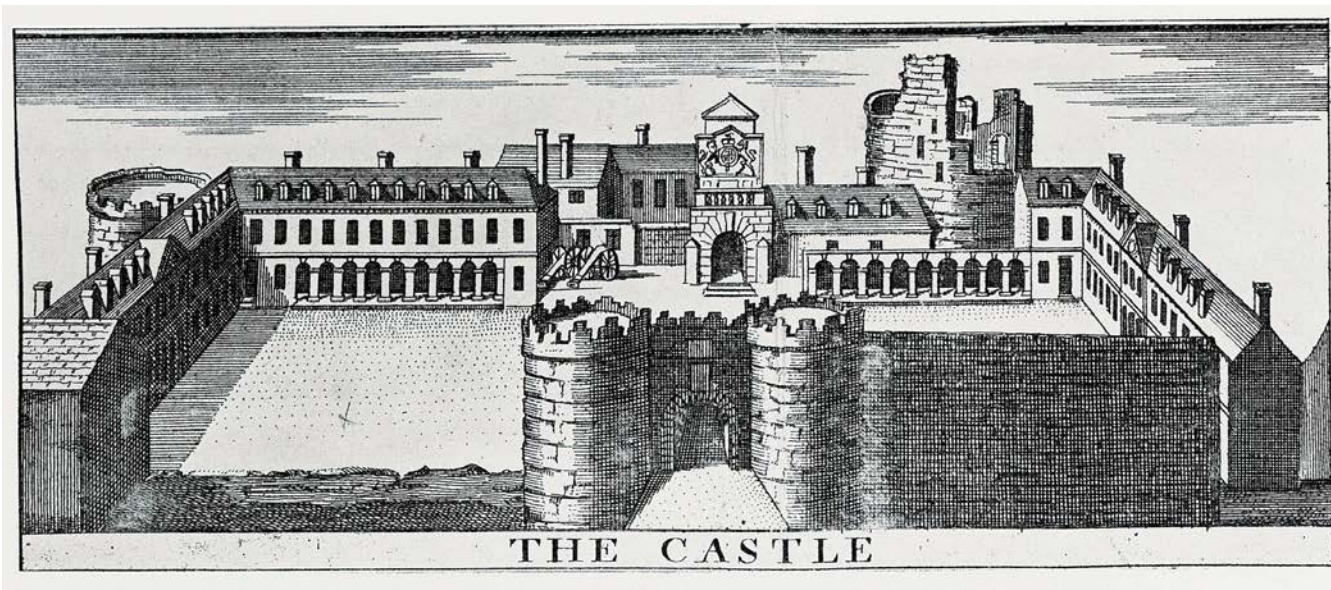
Stops along the walk

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1: Ship Street | 6: Smithfield Market |
| 2: St Patrick's Cathedral Park | 7: Custom House Quay |
| 3: St Luke's / Newmarket | 8: Trinity College |
| 4: Thomas Street | 9: Winifred's Well on Eustace Street |
| 5: Stoneybatter | 10: Dublin Castle |

Eat the Streets! 17th Century Food Walk

Stop 1: Ship Street

2



View of Dublin Castle, from Charles Brookings map of Dublin, c.1728

In about 1688, a young woman called Hannah moved to Ship Street, which had gained its name through a medieval misspelling of "Sheep Street", reflecting the fact that it was once the location of a sheep market.

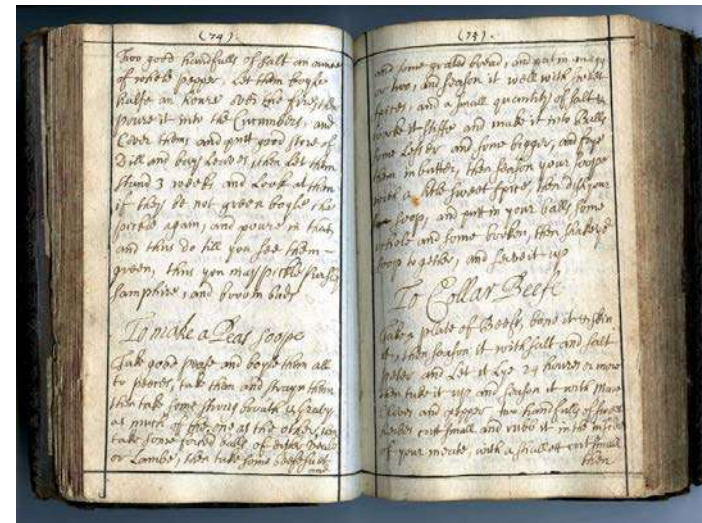
Hannah had just married James Alexander, a Scottish man who had come to Ireland to work in the equivalent of the tax office in Dublin Castle. At that time, Britain was consolidating its power over Ireland, and work of this sort was part of the process.

We do not know that much about Hannah, but we do know that she loved to cook, because she left a long and detailed hand-written recipe book that records what people in Dublin were eating in those days.

While ordinary working people in much of Ireland were largely subsisting on dairy produce and oats, early modern Dublin had an incredibly rich food culture at the time, and housewives and other women like Hannah were its creators, custodians, and guardians.

Living on Ship Street, Hannah was within easy walking distance of the main markets and shops in Dublin in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Today's route will take you to some of the markets and commercial areas of Dublin of Hannah's day, and introduce you to their rich histories.

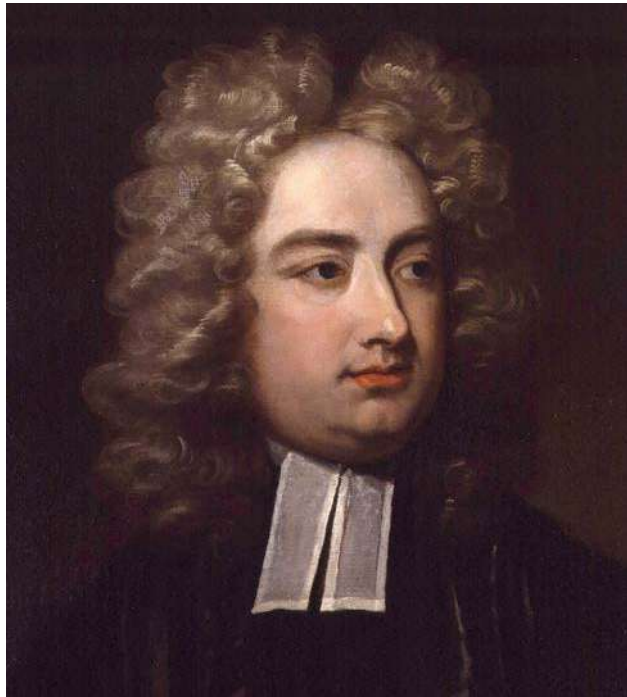


Inside Hannah Alexander's Recipe Book

(Before saying goodbye to Ship Street, it might be fun to pop around the corner and, if the queues are not too long, visit the new Lidl on the corner of Aungier Street and Golden Lane. On the outside of the building on Golden Lane, you can see the remains of an eighteenth century theatre, and through glass panels in the floor of the supermarket, you can see the part of the theatre, and part of a medieval house built and used by Hiberno-Vikings!)

So, let's say goodbye to Ship Street and move on to the next stage of the walk!

Eat the Streets! 17th Century Food Walk



Jonathan Swift, by Charles Jervas, 1710

Stop 2: St Patrick's Cathedral Park

According to legend, St Patrick's Cathedral was built on the spot where St Patrick himself baptised local Irish people into the Christian faith.

By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, St Patrick's Cathedral was firmly associated with the privileged classes in Dublin. Many of the wealthiest people in Dublin would have attended church here, and would have been on first-name terms with the Cathedral's grandees.

Jonathan Swift, who was born and raised in the area, and whose most famous work, *Gulliver's Travels*, is memorialised in the form of sculptural medallions on some of the homes adjacent to the park, would go on to be the Dean of the cathedral.

Jonathan Swift wrote passionately about the desperate poverty of so many of the Irish people of his day (particularly famously in his satirical piece, *A Modest Proposal*, in which he sarcastically proposed solving the problems of Ireland's poor by eating their babies).

However, like most well-connected Dubliners at the time, he himself had access to a great wealth and variety of rich and luscious foods. In those days, while both sweet and savoury dishes were prepared, there was less of a clear-cut difference than there is today, and many meat dishes featured sweet sauces. Sweet and savoury dishes were also frequently served together.



Sweets at St Patrick's

Swift's diaries reveal that he knew Hannah's family, and his portraits reveal that he liked food, so it is not much of a stretch to imagine that they may have eaten together on occasion, and certainly he would have enjoyed many of the rich recipes that she wrote about.

Would you like to try a recipe of the sort that Jonathan Swift enjoyed? At the end of the tour, we share a delicious recipe for biscuits just like the ones he would have eaten.

Eat the Streets! 17th Century Food Walk

St Luke's Avenue, at the bottom of Cork Street, is a busy, noisy road, but there's a lovely place to stop outside the old St Luke's Church, which is now an architect's office. The little park here is a welcome addition to Dublin's public spaces.

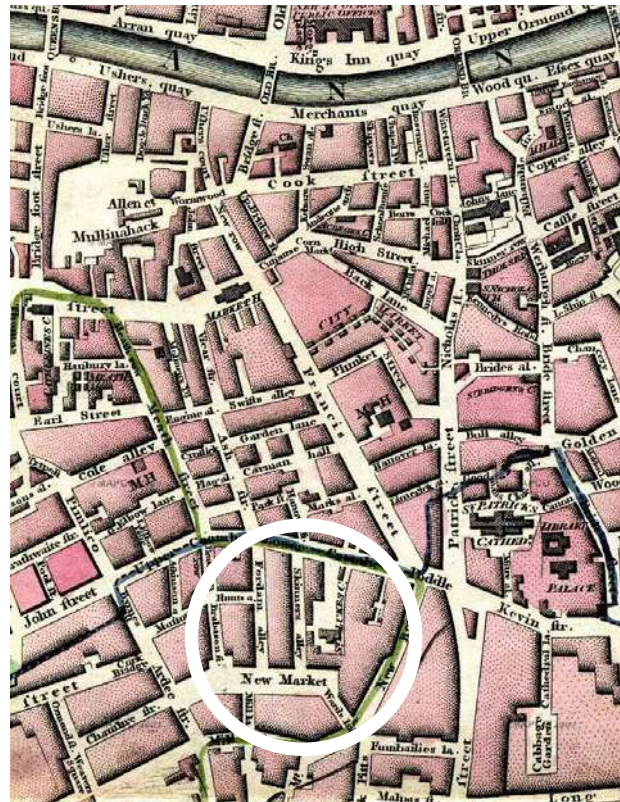
St Luke's Church itself was opened in 1709 and is thought to have been associated with the Huguenot community that was settled in the area at the time, and that was deeply involved with the weaving industry.

However, of particular interest to our walking tour is the huge public space of Newmarket, which stretches out behind St Luke's and the large segment of Cork Street that is currently a building site.

Newmarket, as the name suggests, was one of the most important market spaces in Dublin. It was laid out in more or less its current form in the early seventeenth century by the second Earl of Meath, who had a house in the area at the time. A number of the streets, including Meath Street, still recall the connection with the Brabazon family.

Newmarket was a location in which all sorts of livestock were bought and sold, particularly domestic animals that would end their days on the plates of hungry Dubliners.

Stop 3: St Luke's / Newmarket



The Liberties, 1798



Dutch Billy Houses at Weaver Square



Beer at St Luke's

This area also has a very long history of brewing and distilling. In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the water in Dublin was not safe to drink, so adults and children alike generally drank beer with their meals. They mostly consumed a particular type of beer known as "small beer" because of its low alcohol content!

In recent years, distilleries have started setting up in this area again. Teeling's Distillery on Newmarket, and Dublin Liberties Distillery on the adjacent Mill Street, have brought distilling back to this local area!

Before you leave, pop your head around the corner and take a peep at Newmarket. Although this area is largely under construction at the moment, the sheer size of the market space makes it easy to imagine what it must have been like when the animals were herded onto the market square and sold.



Thomas Street environs

Thomas Street was another very important market area. In particular, the Cornmarket area of Thomas Street was associated with the sale of cereals and bread, and had been since the Middle Ages. There was also a meat market at which meats of all sorts were sold.

In about 1700, this area was known to be difficult to walk through because of all the people who were hired as “pluckers in”. Their job was to stand in the streets and try to entice shoppers inside the shops and businesses in the area.

At that time, like today, this area benefitted from its multi-cultural population. From the early seventeenth century, there had been a Dutch community. Dublin's "Dutch Billy" homes, a characteristic feature of the Dublin streetscape, are a reminder of their presence and influence.

Today, Thomas Street is still a lively market street with all sorts of food-related stores, and there is still a market atmosphere on many of the adjoining streets. Back in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, this was one of the most important shopping locations for the busy housewife or cook.

At that time, white flour was a luxury item, much more expensive than wholemeal flour. For special occasions, or in homes where money was not in short supply, people loved to make white bread, pastries, and cakes with white flour.



Bread at old city wall, Cornmarket, Liberties

Eat the Streets! 17th Century Food Walk

Stop 5: Stoneybatter

6



Oxmantown Green, Stoneybatter

Stoneybatter is one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Dublin. The big road that runs through the heart of Stoneybatter links Dublin with the rich hinterland of Meath, and in times gone by drovers often brought herds of cattle and other domestic animals down the street on their way to nearby Smithfield Market to be sold.

As well as animals, this major thoroughfare would have been a conduit for other sorts of ingredients, too. Some of the things that were eaten in Hannah's day have dropped out of fashion subsequently. Violet leaves, for example, were considered a tasty leaf that could be eaten in a salad or boiled, like spinach. Other foods that were commonly eaten, but which have fallen out of the Irish diet to varying degrees, are wild garlic, watercress, sorrel, tansey, and game such as grouse. All of these ingredients provided variety in Dublin kitchens and were sought after by housewives like Hannah. One of the recipes we provide at the end of this walk illustrates one way in which violet leaves can be eaten.



Violets and wild garlic

Given Ireland's long, dark winters, in the days before freezers and fridges, it was important to preserve fruits and vegetables for the winter, so people bottled and conserved them in a variety of ways. Housewives and cooks like Hannah therefore shopped not just for today's meal, but also with an eye to items that they could preserve in a variety of ways to keep the household fed for the winter.

Given the long journeys on foot that the cattle drovers and other supplies faced, many of them would have spent the night in Dublin – and no doubt a great time was often had.

Eat the Streets! 17th Century Food Walk



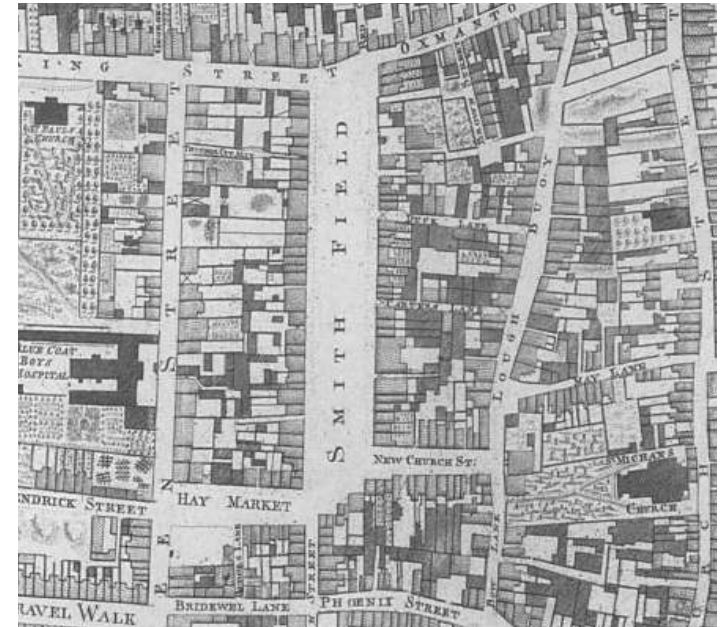
Beef at Smithfield

Stop 6: Smithfield Market

The wider Smithfield area has a history with the cattle industry that long predates even historic Smithfield market. In 1542, the Dublin Assembly Roll declared that cattle sellers could gather to sell their animals on Oxmantown Green, and in no other part of the area. Probably the local residents were getting tired of the inevitable mess associated with a cattle market, and were trying to contain it as much as possible.

Smithfield Market was founded as a livestock market in the 1660s, although it would go on to become known for its horse markets later on. While these markets certainly served to fill the butcher shops all over Dublin, the Irish cattle trade was also supplying England, with Irish cattle being exported to England to be fattened and slaughtered there.

Today, the modern apartments contain the original market area, which today has been, or is being, reimagined as a vibrant city space. If you close your eyes and block out the sound of the traffic, perhaps you can still hear the distant echoes of the cattle mooing all those years ago in this very spot.



Smithfield

Eat the Streets! 17th Century Food Walk

Stop 7: Custom House Quay

8



Ships in Dublin Harbour in the 18th century, Roque's Survey

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Dublin was a very important port. The Custom House you see today had not yet been constructed; construction would finish in 1791. Britain was extending its empire all over the world, and as part of this trade, huge numbers of ships were docking in Dublin, bringing with them exotic ingredients from far-flung places.

By this stage, the dishes prepared in Dublin were often heavily spiced, featuring ingredients including mace, nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon, musk, and much more. Ambergris, which is a substance excreted by whales, was much sought-after and was both imported and sourced in Ireland. From this area, these spices and other ingredients were sold directly to merchants, who in turn sold them on to their customers, who enjoyed putting them to use in their kitchens and then tasting them at mealtimes.

While the importation of these delicious spices, many of which we still enjoy today, was a real gift to the collective Irish palate, this location also evokes thoughts of the dark side of the colonisation of much of the world by British and other European powers. At this time, too, large numbers of slaves were being brought across the Atlantic, while here in Ireland policies that were already being put in place would lead generations later to the terrible Famine of the mid-nineteenth century.

By the early 1800s, ordinary Irish people largely consumed a poor diet consisting mostly of potatoes and milk, occasionally enlivened by ingredients such as offal. The terrible consequences of an over-reliance on the potato, and the exportation of other food stuffs from Ireland at that time, are well known.



Spices at Custom House Dock

Eat the Streets! 17th Century Food Walk

Stop 8: Trinity College

9



Oysters and samphire



University of Dublin, Trinity College

Trinity College, already a long-established institute of learning by the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, was a bastion of privilege.

We already know a little about what the wealthy classes liked to eat in Dublin at that time, but what about the army of servants and domestic staff who cleaned their homes, prepared their meals, and did all the donkey-work?

Today, oysters are considered a luxury food item and sold in fancy restaurants, but in those days, they were seen as a cheap source of protein, and wealthy people who were also cheapskates often provided their servants with lots of oysters to eat. Well-placed domestic staff who were in demand often specified in their contracts that they were only prepared to eat oysters a certain number of times a week!

Servants in those days had to work hard. For those who worked in affluent homes with large kitchens, much of the day was spent preparing meals without any of the modern conveniences that we have today. Creams, custards, jellies, and cakes all had to be whipped, beaten, and stirred by hand, while meat roasting on the fire had to be turned on the spit. It was all very hard, physical work that was mostly kept out of the sight of the wealthy people who enjoyed the final product.

Eat the Streets!

17th Century Food Walk

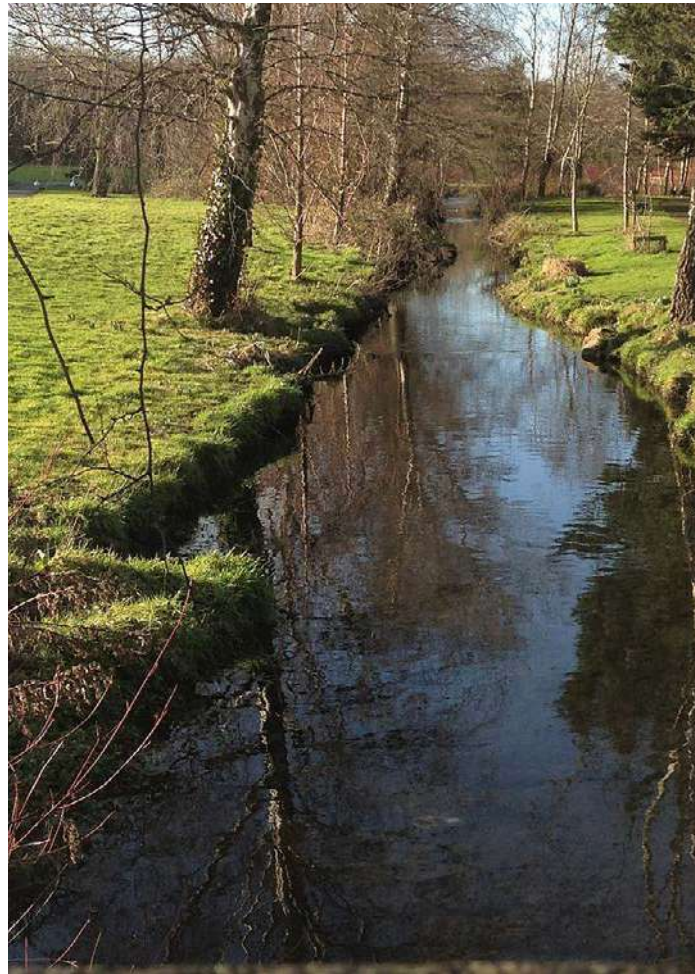
Today, almost all of the watercourse that is the Poddle River is underground. St Winifred's Well, which is still visible on Eustace Street in Temple Bar, was originally on the banks of the River Poddle, which once ran through Dublin, and which still joins the Liffey in Temple Bar (today it runs into the Liffey from a tunnel, which you can see at low tide).

In general, it is easy to overlook the many small rivers that criss-cross Dublin. But all of these, as well as the Liffey were sources of a variety of foods, including watercress, fresh-water shellfish, eels, freshwater fish, and even water birds that could be hunted from rivers and streams. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, eels were so common that they were a popular source of protein, and served often at table.

While the Poddle may have been too grubby by the time it reached Eustace Street to produce much to whet the appetite, further upstream it is likely to have been a source of numerous tasty things to eat.

Stop 9: Winifred's Well on Eustace Street, Temple Bar

10



Upper Poddle River, Tymon Park, Tallagt



Duck breast and watercress, Temple Bar



Dublin Castle

Well done! You have reached the end of your tour. It is time to relax in the beautiful Dubh Linn Garden outside Dublin Castle's Chester Beatty museum. The River Poddle, which you have just visited on Eustace Street, runs right beneath your feet.

Back in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Dubliners were just starting to enjoy some of the drinks and other goodies that we take for granted today. Chocolate, which originally comes from Mexico, was becoming popular, generally being served as a hot drink (with some ambergris melted into it, if you were being really fancy), and coffee, which so many of us feel we can't live without today, was also increasingly on the menu. Sugar had become much cheaper than before, as a result of which more and more people were enjoying sweet treats such as cakes, desserts, puddings, and pies (we won't say anything about the dramatic decline in dental health that also dates to that period).

The point is... you've just finished a long walk, and you are probably feeling a little tired and in need of refreshment. Would this be a good moment to send one of your walking group to the shop to pick up some treats before you head home?

Thank you for taking part in our walking tour of Dublin's food scene of the early modern period! Just as you can't talk about the history of Dublin without talking about the history of food in Dublin, and evoking the memory of the countless housewives and cooks, like Hannah Alexander, who endlessly put food on the tables of their families, our lives today are intimately bound in every respect to the food we eat, to our food culture, and to how recipes and eating bring us together.

On your way home, take some time to think about the recipes that are important in your family today, and what they might look like to the people of the future. We would love it if you would share your thoughts about this online, with **#EatTheStreets**

We have also put together a small selection of recipes inspired by Hannah's book but adapted to a modern kitchen. You might like to try them and let us know how they taste!

Eat the Streets! 17th Century Food Walk

Lady Owen's Simple Biscuit Recipe

(adapted)

Ingredients

225g butter, softened.
110g caster sugar.
275g plain flour.
1 tsp mace or caraway seeds.
2 drops of rose water (optional).

Method

1. Heat the oven to 190C/170C fan/gas 5.
2. Beat the butter and sugar in mixer until light and fluffy.
3. Sift in the flour and add the spices and rose water.
4. Bring the mixture together with your hands until it forms a dough.
5. Roll the dough into walnut-sized balls and place them slightly apart from each other on a baking sheet.
6. Flatten the balls a little and bake them in the oven for around 10-12 mins until they are golden brown and slightly firm on top.
7. Leave the cookies to cool on cooling rack for around 15 mins before serving.

Three Hannah Alexander recipes to try at home

by chef Mary Farrell

Pea Purée

(Pees Porridge)

Ingredients

50g/1³/₄oz unsalted butter.
200g/7oz fresh podded peas.
Handful of washed spinach leaves.
Handful of washed violet leaves (optional).
Small handful flatleaf parley.
100ml/3¹/₂fl oz double cream.
Salt and freshly ground black pepper.
Nutmeg to taste.
Handful of strawberries (sliced in halves).

Method

1. Heat butter until melted.
2. Add the peas, spinach, violet leaves, parsley and double cream.
Season to taste with salt, pepper, and grated nutmeg.
3. Warm through on a gentle heat.
4. Blend and pulse until you have a very smooth purée.
5. Taste to check the seasoning and add more butter if desired.
6. Decorate with strawberries.

Bacon & Leek Soup

Ingredients

25g butter.
3 streaky bacon rashers.
1 onion chopped.
4 leeks, sliced and washed thoroughly.
3 medium potatoes, peeled and chopped.
1.4 litres vegetable stock.
Pinch of mace.
150 ml single cream.

Method

1. Melt the butter in a large pan, fry the bacon and onion, stirring until they start to turn golden brown.
2. Add the leeks and potatoes, stir well, then cover and turn down the heat. Cook gently for 2 mins.
3. Pour in the stock, season well and bring to the boil.
4. Cover and simmer for 20 mins until the vegetables are soft.
5. Leave to cool for a few mins, then blend in a food processor until smooth.
6. Return to the pan, pour in the cream and mace and stir well.
Taste and add salt and pepper if needed.