

Historyeye

Preston Street

In the shadow of the railway



Preston Street lies in the civil parish of St. Thomas and was built between 1810 and 1817 in the northeast outskirts of Dublin City off the newly-named Amiens Street. (Previously just called The Strand). It was almost certainly named after the Preston family of Gormanston. At little more than 150 feet in length, the street is one of the shortest in Dublin, but its terrace of houses boasts many attractive and original Regency features. Judging from past records, the street was home to an unusual mixture of inhabitants over the centuries from sea captains, merchants and musicians to the last surviving Huguenot refugee to flee France. The railway played an enormous role in shaping its character. Here is *Historyeye's* brief history of this neglected cul-de-sac.

Architecture

Although bearing signs of grime and age, the houses of Preston Street are still impressive brown-brick, three bay and three storey dwellings. Their main doors are flanked by ionic columns in the style of Robert Adam. Many original features remain, including ornamented leaded fanlights, stone steps and casement windows.

When newly built, the houses came with a 170-year lease and could be rented for 40 guineas. In terms of interior plan, the houses contained two parlours, two drawing rooms, three bedrooms, several kitchen rooms and a pantry.

At first, Preston Street's inhabitants enjoyed an almost unimpeded vista of fields stretching to present-day Seville Place. Newspaper ads from the 1860s show that many of these fields were sown in potatoes. In the 1890s the distinctive and impressive red-brick railway parcel post building was erected and closed in the north side of the street.

Catholic inhabitants worshipped at the Pro-Cathedral while members of the Church of Ireland worshipped at St. Thomas's Church (demolished in 1922). Both places of worship were on nearby Marlborough Street.

No. 4 Preston Street was in a derelict and roofless state in the early part of the 20th century, but since the early 2020s it has been extensively restored and is now inhabited and in use. No. 1 shares a corner with Amiens Street whose adjoining houses were developed at the same time and to the same design. (e.g. Number 107.) Basements on Preston Street are raised and the brick work bears several layers of coloured plaster, as fashion and tastes changed.

Sea Captains, Perfumers, and Huguenot Refugees

Throughout the 19th century, Preston Street was home to many sea captains, merchants, decorators and government workers. Newspaper ads from the early part of the century stressed how close the street was to centres like the Custom House, the Post Office and the Corn Exchange.

Preston Street was home to **John Cayre**, from Anjou, the last surviving Huguenot Refugee, who lived at No. 4 and died there in 1835 aged 81 years. (Born 1754).

John Highmore Jeboult, Capt. of 41st Regiment, died at his home at No. 3 Preston Street in 1833. Married to Lydia Brownrigg in 1821, Jeboult was previously held as a prisoner of war by American forces at Kentucky in 1813. He later served as chief constable of police in Dublin. ¹

In the early 1830s, No. 1 Preston Street was home to **Isaac Hinds**, a goldsmith and active member of his trade guild. Hinds is best known for his public spat with the city fathers over the dismissal of **Colonel William Blacker** (1777-1855) from public office due to Blacker's alleged orange leanings. (Blacker is best known today as the coiner of the lines: '*Trust in God and keep your powder dry*', taken from a poem he penned called *Oliver's Advice*).

The Hinds/Blacker controversy reflected the growing influence of Catholic representatives in bodies like Dublin Corporation during the 1830s. Isaac Hinds died at Preston Street in July 1849. He was the youngest son of Thomas Hinds of Bruce Hall, Co. Cavan. **Martha Warner**, wife of Alderman George Warner, was Hind's sister and lived with him on the street after she became widowed, occupying No.1 until her own death in 1853.

Matches and Mendicity

Other residents from the 1830s who perhaps did not 'keep their powder dry' quite so well were the extraordinary **William Kertland** and his wife, **Elinor Graham**, who was a member

¹ National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers, CSO/RP/1827/1816.

of the Roberts family of Waterford. ² The Kertlands carried on the business of Perfumers and Manufacturing Chemists at Ormond Quay from at least the early 1820s and they were active in charitable concerns such as the **Mendicity Institute**.

It was a case of fortunes made and lost however for the Kertlands. Initially William Kertland made a great deal of money from his invention of the phosphorous match in 1816. ³ As proof of his prosperity, one writer in the 1860s noted that Kertland was always to be found on a Sunday evening at Quin's Hotel in Bray after a day-long amble over Powerscourt Demesne. ⁴ He also found a measure of fame as the composer of plays and operas which were popular in the 1830s and were performed at the Theatre Royal. Examples included *The Maid of Snowden* and *Shaun Long and the Fairies*. The rights to the latter were bought by a favourite actor/ impresario of the time, **Tyrone Power** (1797-1841), who tragically lost his life at sea in the SS *President* steamer disaster of March 1841.

It is thought that William Kertland's role in promoting causes such as religious tolerance, Catholic Emancipation and the Window Tax Repeal won him powerful enemies and caused his business to decline. By the 1840s, William and Ellen Kertland, who had 14 children, were living in penury at Preston Street. Collections were organised for them among friends and admirers who had not forgotten their dedication to charity. This group included **Daniel O'Connell**.

William Kertland died at Preston Street in 1846 aged 70 years. Ellen continued to live in Preston Street for many years until she eventually moved to Manders Terrace, Ranelagh, where she died in 1869. The couple are buried in St. Mary's Church of Ireland graveyard. (Now Wolfe Tone Square and public park.)

The occupant of No. 4 Preston Street for many years was **Captain George Sweet**, although 'occupant' is probably a misnomer as it is likely he was seldom there. Connected with Dublin port for forty years, George Sweet captained a ship to Australia in the 1830s called the *Cleopatra*, which regularly promoted emigration to Australia in the newspapers. The ad spoke of George Sweet's experience, local knowledge and kindness to his passengers, both steerage and cabin alike. Later in the 1850s, Sweet was involved in the Portuguese trade route with ships like the *Oporto* and the *Mary Sweet* (undoubtedly named after his own daughter, Mary, who died in Dublin 1914.) After many decades travelling the high seas, Captain George Sweet rested his sea legs at Preston Street where he died in 1856 aged 65. His wife, Priscilla, moved to nearby Gloucester Street afterwards where she died in 1873.

At the end of the 19th Century the **Thiele** family were living at 4 Preston Street. **George Thiele** was also a sea captain and his son, Carl Frederick, a painter and decorator, who married Bernadina Hendricks, daughter of Johannes Hendricks, sea skipper, at St. Thomas' Church, Marlborough Street .

Names associated with Preston Street in the 19th Century:

Thiele (N. 4)
Kertland (No. 2).

² William J. Bayly, "The Roberts Family of Waterford", *Journal of the Waterford & South-East of Ireland Archaeological Society*, Vol. 2, 1896, pp 99-100.

³ *The Chemical News and Journal of Physical Science*, Vol. IV, No. 83, July 6, 1861, page 69, Correspondence

⁴ Ibid.

Stubbs (Benoni) No. 3 . Firm of Stubbs & Brodigan. Builders Bankrupt in 1882.
 Brownrigg (No. 3)
 Cayre (No. 4)
 Jeboult
 Duncan
 Clarke (No. 4)
 Browne (No.1)
 Farrell (No. 5)
 Sweet (No. 4)

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Great Northern Line Railway

The construction of the railway line adjacent to the area in the early 1840s changed the look, character and destiny of Preston Street as it came to lie in the eastern shadow of Amiens Street (now Connolly) Station. As a result, it remained a short street as it could not expand to the east. Amiens Street station served as the terminus for the Dublin and Drogheda Railway Company, later the Great Northern Line.

Widening of this terminus in the mid 19th century caused the demolition of No. 5 Preston Street⁵ but at least the street itself survived. Two small parallel streets lying to the south, namely **Halpin's Row** and **Inkerman** (called after the Crimean War battle of that name) did not fare so well. Twelve dwellings were demolished in the first case while Inkerman disappeared completely under the foundations of Amiens Street Station.

Initially an open railway arch may have allowed access to the street on what is now the blind east end. Ordnance Survey maps show that a foot bridge connected the train station to an exit point beside the street. A clue to this arrangement is found in the newspapers of the 1880s where there were complaints about an adjoining archway being dark, foul smelling and filthy.⁶ This arch is now solidly bricked up.

Indeed for most of its history, the main activity in the street would have been at the cul de sac end where the terminus and eventually the main entrance/exit of the post parcel depot lay. Today the street is overlooked by Connolly Station's north-bound railway platform but regrettably there is no longer any access to the station from the street.

Doctor James Duncan of Farnham House

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By the time of *Griffith's Valuation* of Preston Street in 1854, the main lease holder for the entire street was Dr. James Duncan MD (1812-1895), who had considerable property in other parts of the parish of St. Thomas.

Duncan was best known for his practice and papers on psychiatry and was the owner of a family asylum at **Farnham House**, Finglas, founded by his Scottish father, also James Duncan.

According to *Griffith's Valuation*, the inhabitants of the street were: Patrick Kerr (No. 1), Ellen Kertland (No. 2), Anne Brownrigg (No. 3) and George Sweet (No. 4). No 5 was vacant and was frequently so in the 19th century.

⁵ 'Current Building, and other topics', *Irish builder and engineer. v.1-3(1859-1861)*, Jan. 1, 1859, page 3.

⁶ *The Irish Times*, 'Sanitary Complaint', July 24, 1883.

Elizabeth C Clarke, Composer

In the 1860s, one inhabitant of the street was so appalled at the state of the footpaths there that they wrote a letter of complaint about it to the *Daily Express*.⁷ If you were walking down the street too in the 1860s, the faint sounds of the piano may have drifted through the air to the untidy pavements below, courtesy of the music rooms of composer Elizabeth C. Clarke, who lived at No. 4.

Clarke made her living as a music teacher from this house in the early years of that decade. Her sister Louisa Clarke (later Wilson) was a well-known soprano who performed regularly at the **Antient Rooms** on Great Brunswick Street (Pearse Street). Both musicians were daughters of Tipperary brewer, Usher Clarke, (died in 1847 aged 74) and Sarah Corbett (died in 1869 aged 82.)

Clarke was composer of such songs as the 'Minstrel of Auburn', 'The Warrior's Parting', 'The Raising of Lazarus', 'Happy Home' and other marching band numbers. Her publisher was Addison and Co., London, and Marcus Moses of Dublin. After a life devoted to music, Elizabeth C. Clarke died at nearby No. 37 Upper Gloucester Street in 1888 aged 81 years.



Side of Victorian Parcel Post Depot facing terrace of houses on Preston Street

For many years the street was occupied by the Browne family who traded in pianos at No. 1 Preston Street. Thomas H. Browne was a piano tuner and his younger sister, Mary Browne, taught music.

Parcel Post Depot

The building of the impressive, red-brick post parcel depot brought a great deal of additional noise and bustle to Preston Street and closed in the street from the north. The building was designed by Armagh native, **John Howard Pentland** (1855-1919), who designed many post offices as architect/surveyor for the Board of Works⁸. It was completed in

1892 at a cost of £16,000. Although it shows signs of neglect today, it is still an impressive

structure with its facings of Portmarnock brick and dressings of Skerries limestone.

The post parcel depot adjoined the junction of the Great Northern Railway and Dublin Junctions Railway which were experiencing a huge increase in parcel traffic. In 1892 it was a state of the art building with hydraulic and electric plants powered by steel boilers. It also had a roof made of steel

⁷ *Dublin Daily Express*, 11/07/1864, page 3.

⁸ Dictionary of Irish Architects 1720-1940, <https://www.dia.ie/architects/view/4325/PENTLAND%2C+JOHN+HOWARD>

⁹ and glass, which is clearly visible from the north-bound train platform today. Internal plaster came from Bloomfield & Co.

The side of the depot ran the whole length of Preston street. Its construction shaped the character and purpose of the street - commercial instead of residential, and it evokes another era - Victorian instead of Georgian. The main entrance and exit to the depot was a large opening at the east end of Preston Street beside the railway terminus.

Underground tunnels

In the basement level of No. 1 Preston Street a door is visible. It marks an entry point to a series of underground rooms or cellars that stretch under Amiens Street and possibly reach the far side of the road. It would be natural to assume that these structures were for storage purposes, perhaps in connection with the docks, the railway or the Custom House. But this author proposes that these tunnels, reinforced by brick archways, may instead have been built by the titled owners of several nearby townhouses (e.g. Aldborough House (previously *Luxembourg*) and Waterford House (now *Tyrone House*, Marlborough Street). ¹⁰



Entrance to underground cellar under Amiens street at No. 1 Preston Street

Since this area constituted the outskirts of the Georgian city, it's possible these tunnels allowed occupants of these houses to move about in privacy and safety, hidden from the dangers of

⁹ 'New Parcels Post Depot, Amiens-Street', *Irish builder and engineer*. v.34(1892), July 1, 1892, page 146.

¹⁰ The 18th century taste for tunnel building is exemplified in James Caulfield's (Earl of Charlemont's) nearby estates where tunnels connected the main residence, *Marino House* to the summer residence *Casino*.

robbers or highwaymen. Whatever the purpose of these underground structures, they are a surprising feature of the street.

From the 1860s, some of the houses on Preston Street ceased to be inhabited by a single family and instead were divided up into separate dwellings by floor or room to be tenanted by multiple lodgers. By 1901, there were 39 people living on the street. No. 2 had the most inhabitants with 13 people (or 6 families). In contrast to the 19th century, train employees such as railway guards and station masters now made up a good proportion of the street's population. Oddly the population of the street declined by 1911 with only 31 inhabitants listed that year.

On a sad note, in October 1932, tragedy came to one of Preston Street's long-standing inhabitants when 37 year old fireman, Francis McCourt (who lived at No. 3), died after being knocked down by a train engine at Amiens Street Station.

*Section of wall of raised
basement of No. 1
Preston Street*



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Back to the Future

If Dublin Transportation plans are to be believed, there are proposals to make Preston Street an entrance/exit point to Connolly Station again as it was in the 19th Century. ¹¹ If this plan is carried out, it will no doubt bring more life and activity to the street and will open another chapter in its history.

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¹¹ Dart + Programme, Project Ireland, 2040, <https://www.dartplus.ie/en-ie/projects/dart-west/public-consultation-round-2/dart-west-preferred-option/accessible-image-description-for-preston-street-entrance>. Accessed Jan 2023.

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