

THE WEIR by Conor McPherson

Glossary

by Susan Myer Silton, Director and Dramaturge

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Setting and Time Setting

A small rural bar in a cottage on the farm of Brendan Byrne at the foot of Knocknarea Hill, County Sligo, Ireland, in the mid-1990s.

anorak. a waterproof jacket, typically with a hood, of a kind originally used in polar regions.



Vintage 90s Royal Robbins Navy Anorak Windbreaker Jacket

pint of stout: Our production used the iconic British Imperial Pint Glass for Guinness Stout, which holds a British Imperial pint, or 20 oz.



peat, aka turf, is a cooking and heating fuel harvested from local bogs. There are many bogs in Sligo, including “blanket bogs”, which thrive in cool climates with consistently high rainfall of 235 days or more a year (Sligo has 247). The ground surface remains waterlogged for much of the time, fostering the development of bog vegetation as a layer “blanketing” much of the land, including hilltops and slopes.

Peat harvested from the bogs is an important source of fuel, as it can be easily obtained from the many surrounding bogs. Bog vegetation consists of organic matter such as fallen tree twigs, small limbs, and other plant remains. The peat is cut during May or June and laid out to dry. Later it is turned over, stacked to continue drying and finally brought home at the end of summer. The cutting and drying of turf is traditionally a “man’s job”.

Burning peat has a pleasant scent, similar to the smoky odor of whiskey if you are able to separate it from the alcohol smell. In the whiskey-making process, damp malt is dried over a peat-heated fire, bringing the smoke flavor into the barley grain.



Peat from a bog in Sligo

your man: “your man” is a term applied to any random, nameless man

good for the worms. According to [this article](#), alcohol won’t kill worms or other parasites

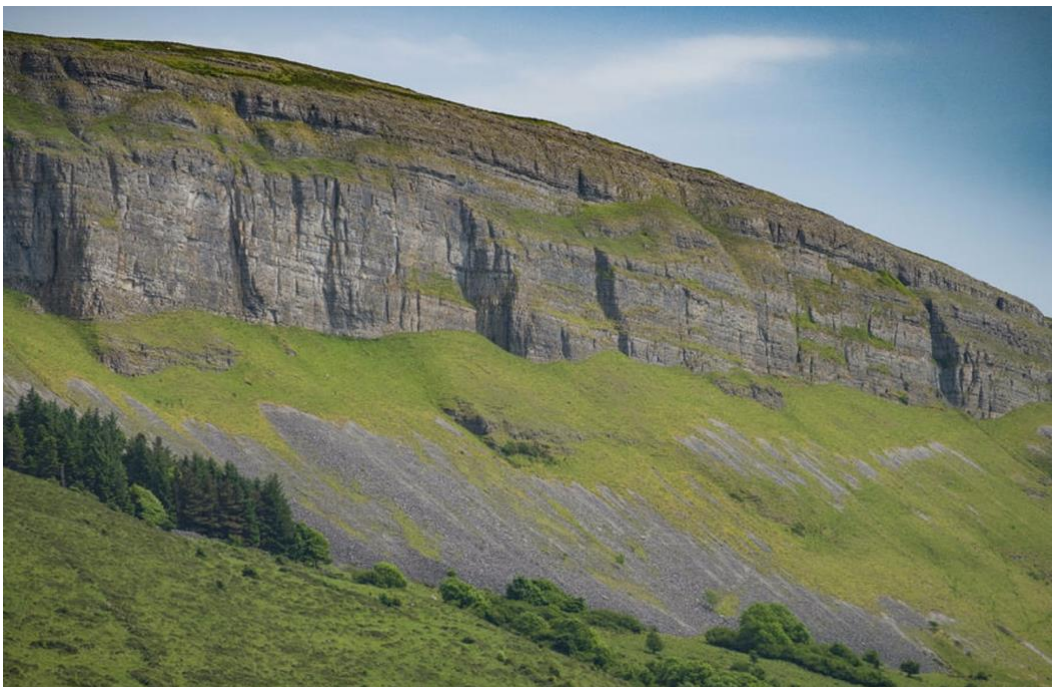
in your body, but the belief persists. However, [Scientific American](#) claims that drinking wine and beer can save you from conditions like E.coli and ulcers.

a right couple of worms. [This article](#) claims that having worms can bring on irritability, mood swings and anxiety.

The Knock: “The Knock” is the name given to Knocknarea Mountain, a hill, albeit a large one at 1,073 feet tall, situated west of Sligo on the Cúil Irra peninsula overlooking the Atlantic coast, between Sligo and Ballysadare bays.



An aerial view of the Knock, with Queen Maeve's cairn topping it



The west face of Knocknarea as seen from Strandhill

The steep limestone cliffs of Knocknarea, often called “monolithic,” dominate the landscape, as seen in the photo above by David L. Moore.

gas: From TheIrishRoadTrip.com: “You’ll often hear Irish people refer to a person or a situation as ‘gas’. The word ‘gas’ is Irish slang for funny. For example, ‘Ah stop, that’s gas!’ or ‘Emma’s dog is gas. He does be flying around the garden like he’s possessed.’”

Carrick: Carrick-on-Shannon, the town southeast of the Knock, where Finbar fled after his otherworldly scare and established his hotel, the Arms. Carrick is an Anglicization of the Irish word “carrig,” meaning “rock”.

go on out of that: basically, cut the nonsense

fair dues: Giving someone their due, or the respect they deserve. The [Urban Dictionary](http://UrbanDictionary) claims “it comes from ‘fair is due to the comrade’”.

goodo: an interjection, the same as saying “good” and used to show approval or satisfaction.

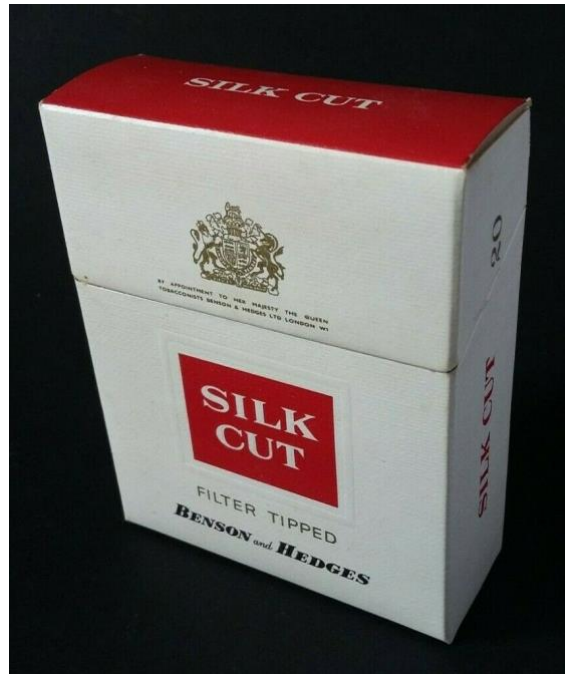
muggins: fools, idiots, or simpletons

juvenile carry on: to have a “carry on” is to act or behave – particularly, to misbehave to attract attention. By calling it a juvenile carry-on, Jack is attempting to defuse Brendan’s irritation by suggesting that Finbar may just be showing off. However, the alternate meaning of “carry on,” to have an illicit sexual liaison, supports Jack’s contention that Finbar is hoping to have an affair with the “fine girl” he is bringing to the bar.

talking all that crack: Pronounced in English as it is spelled, crack, or craic in Irish, is fun, banter, entertainment; to have a good time.

Silk Cut: a British brand of cigarettes, currently owned and manufactured by Gallaher Group, a division of tobacco giant Japan Tobacco International (JTI). Benson & Hedges is also among its brands. Silk Cut’s packaging is characterized by a distinctive stark white packet with the brand name in a purple, blue, red, silver, white or green square. The brand is known to be lowest in tar and nicotine. Silver is the lightest and purple is the strongest, which puts red the next strength up from the middle.

Below is an undated but older version of the packaging.



a right going concern: Going concern is an accounting term for a company that is financially stable enough to meet its obligations and continue its business for the foreseeable future. ([Investopedia](#))

auldfella: just as it sounds, an old fellow

small one: A “small one” is a term for a small glass of straight whiskey: two shots or two fingers, the forefinger on top of the middle finger held horizontally.

packed up: a Britishism meaning stopped, quit, or as applied to the tractor that’s mentioned, not working.

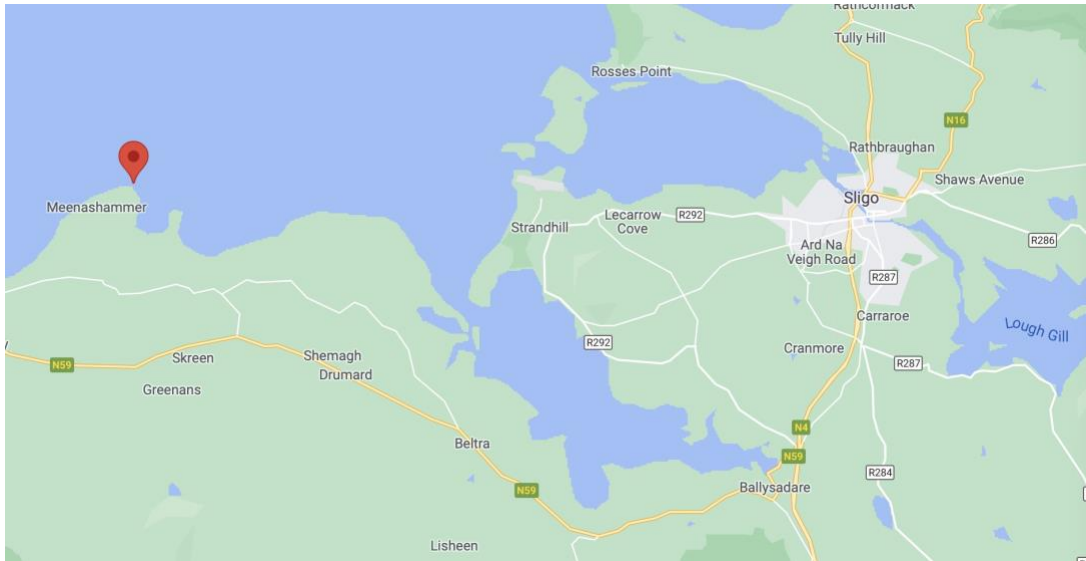
figary: This [article is all about the word](#), which means whim, foolish action, or tantrum.

mammy: the Irish equivalent of mommy or mom, also said “mam”.

grand: used by the Irish in the same way we use “great” in the US

cosy: comfortable. Equivalent to cozy in the US.

the Head: [SligoWalks.Ie](#) identifies the Head as Aughris Head, a scenic headland in west Sligo. It is home to the highest sea cliffs in all of County Sligo. On the next page is a map of its location, and below that is a photo taken along its coastal path.



The coastal walk at Aughris Head in Sligo in a photo by David Tuffey

thick: stupid or unintelligent

the Germans: the generic name given to the tourists from the Continent by the characters in the play.

caravans: campers equipped with living quarters

campsites: fields where the caravans congregate



A caravan campsite at the foot of the Knock

shekels: Currently a monetary unit in Israel, the word shekel came into the English language via the Hebrew Bible, where it is first used in the Book of Genesis. The term "shekel" has been used for a unit of weight, around 9.6 or 9.8 grams, used in Bronze Age Europe for balance weights and fragments of bronze that may have served as money.

a few bob: a small amount of money, equivalent to "a few bucks" in the US. "Bob" is a UK slang term for the old shilling coins.

holliers: holiday or vacation

acting the mess: behaving like a fool

fags: cigarettes

bog: per Merriam-Webster, wet spongy ground; especially a poorly drained, usually acid area that is rich in accumulated plant material, frequently surrounding a body of open water, and having a characteristic flora like sedges, heaths, and sphagnum.



A boardwalk through a peat bog along Sligo Way

hole: An [article in Ireland's Daily Edge](#) entitled "17 words that have a completely different meaning if you grew up in Ireland" offers this definition of hole:

What it usually means: Er, a hole.

What it means in Ireland: A hole in, your, er, body. A lower down hole. "Ask me hole", "Did you get your hole" etc.

Jays: an expletive that is short for Jaysus (Jesus)

Janey: From [The Irish Post](#), Janey is short for Janey Mack, which is "an exclamation of surprise, tamer than another Irish favourite 'Jesus, Mary and Joseph', so you can say it front of your gran without getting a right look".

codding: playing a trick or joke on someone

knacker: an epithet that was once used in Ireland to describe travelers and is now used to describe a lowbrow person

bang on the nail: accurate, as in hitting the nail squarely on the head; close to the US expression to "hit the nail on the head"

Cheltenham: The Cheltenham Festival is a meeting in the National Hunt racing calendar in the UK, with race prize money second only to the Grand National, a prominent annual British horse race. The four-day festival takes place annually in March at Cheltenham Racecourse in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire. It usually coincides with Saint Patrick's Day and is particularly popular with Irish visitors. ([Wikipedia](#))

It is broadcast on TV and live streamed across the UK. Large amounts of money are gambled at betting sites online, through bookies and at places like the (fictional) Spar in Carrick, the gambling establishment that Jim and Jack frequent. Hundreds of millions of pounds are bet over the course of the week.

giving out: In Ireland, the phrase “give out” means to scold someone or to complain about something. For example, if an Irish person tells you to “stop giving out”, then it means that they want you to stop complaining. ([ThisInterestsMe.com](#))

lash: This word can be used to mean a few different things. It can be used to describe heavy rain as in “Heavy rain lashes Dublin”. It can also be used to refer to trying at something, as in “I’ll give it a lash”. Finally, it is commonly used in the phrase “on the lash” which means to go out drinking. ([IrishBoutique.com](#))

chancer: A chancer is someone who “chances their arm” a lot, or pretends to be someone they’re not, or tries to fool people into doing something. Generally, they are a risky character. ([CladdaghDesign.com](#))

peel a banana in his pocket: Tight-fisted, cheap. An alternate phrase is “peel an orange in his pocket.” The idea is that someone is so cheap, he will peel a piece of fruit inside his pocket so no one will see it and ask for a bite. “That fella’d peel a banana in his pocket.” ([SouthCoastRep.Blogspot.com](#))

eejit: idiot

weir: just as Finbar says in the play, it is a dam that regulates the water for generating power for the area and for Carrick as well. It has a subtextual significance in the play, as discussed in my paper, *THE WEIR: Themes, Time, Setting, Supernaturalism*, available in the “Play Background” section of [The Weir information page](#) on the Jewel website.

ESB: the Electricity Supply Board, a corporate body formed to control and develop Ireland's electricity network. The weir in Sligo is across the Garavogue or Garvoge (An Gharbhóg in Gaelic) river in Sligo town, which was known historically as the Sligeach or Sligo River. [More information](#) ...

headers: Mentally unstable persons, e.g., “Keep away from that header” ([IrishSlang.info](#))

view of Carrick from our top field up there: From Queen Maeve’s Tomb at the top of the Knock, you can see 50 to 60 miles in any direction.



A view from the Knock

fairy fort ... ring of trees: the remains of stone circles, ringforts, hillforts, or other circular prehistoric dwellings in Ireland. As the dwellings were not durable, in many cases only vague circular marks remain in the landscape. The remains of these structures, inclusive of the vegetation around them, are associated with local traditions and folklore, perhaps involving fairies or other supposed supernatural entities, who would "defend" the structures from destruction by builders or farmers. ([Wikipedia](#))

The structures usually form the shape of a raised circle which is indented with bushes and trees. Irish history identifies fairy forts as places where all sorts of mysterious happenings take place. Fairies, leprechauns, and spirits from the "other world" are said to reside in these forts. If someone is foolish enough to disturb these hallowed shrines, there will be hell to pay with the spirits wreaking revenge upon their hapless victims. ([IrishCentral.com](#))

Also see *THE WEIR: Themes, Time, Setting, Supernaturalism*, pp. 11-14



A ring of trees in County Sligo, also called a ringfort or fairy fort

fairy road: a stretch of roadway, usually well off the beaten track and hidden up a succession of byways and boreens, or narrow country roads, where if you stop the car and let the handbrake off, the vehicle will mysteriously and eerily roll uphill. ([Irish Examiner](#))

the abbey: Sligo Abbey, defined and pictured on pp. 4-5 in *Why I Think It's Sligo*, is not the only "ruined abbey" in the Sligo area. [This article](#) describes the others.

townland: In the US, we designate a city by its population. Not so in Ireland, where the requirements for a town to be called a city is that it be a seat of government or a cathedral town. Though it satisfies the requirement as a seat of government, Sligo has not been termed a city, and is instead called Sligotown. Citizens and politicians have brought forth movements to make it a city, contending that it would attract more investors. This article from *Sligotown.net*, entitled "[Why Sligo Will Never Become a City.](#)" discusses the town-city debate.

the capital of the county: Sligo is the administrative capital and largest town in County Sligo.

an eye for the gap: Explained on p. 4 of *THE WEIR: Themes, Time, Setting, Supernaturalism* and also on [SouthCoastRep.Blogspot.com](#), it's "an ability to see opportunity. Often used to describe rugby players who can spot the weakness in their opponent's defense. 'Bought up the whole town years ago, I did, for nothing, 'cause I've got an eye for the gap.'"

bollocks: a word for testicles, it has many uses in the UK, as described by [Wikipedia](#):

The word is often used figuratively in British English and Hiberno-English [in Ireland] in a multitude of negative ways; it most commonly appears as a noun meaning "rubbish" or "nonsense", an expletive following a minor accident or misfortune, or an adjective to describe something that is of poor quality or useless. It is also used in common phrases like "bollocks to this", which is said when quitting a task or job that is too difficult or negative, and "that's a load of old bollocks", which generally indicates contempt for a certain subject or opinion. Conversely, the word also appears in positive phrases such as "the dog's bollocks" or more simply "the bollocks", which will refer to something which is admired or well-respected.

When a few media organizations polled the British public on their perception of the relative severity of various profanities, "bollocks" came in at eighth position between "prick" (seventh) and "arsehole" (ninth). Comparatively, "balls," which shares some of bollocks' meanings, came in at 22nd place.

Niamh: In Irish mythology Tír na nÓg (in "Land of the Young") or Tír na hÓige ("Land of Youth") is one of the names given to the Celtic Otherworld. It's the setting for the tale of Niamh, daughter of the King of Tír na nÓg, and her mortal lover, the great warrior, Oisín. Niamh, having heard of his exploits, leaves the underworld to seek Oisín and ask him to return there with her. She finds him with his father, the legendary Finn MacCool, leader of the Fianna, a group of great protectors who guarded the High King of Ireland. Oisín falls in

love with her at first sight, jumps on her white horse, and promises his father he'll return soon. He and Niamh ride off together to Tír na nÓg.

After about three years, Oisín got homesick and wanted to return to Ireland. Niamh reluctantly let him but warned that he had to remain upon the white horse. If he were to set foot on the soil of Ireland, he wouldn't be able to return to Tír na nÓg.

As these stories always go, he ended up falling off the horse. To his credit, it was in commission of a good deed. As he was leaning down to help some guys who were trying to move a big rock, his saddle strap broke and he tumbled off the horse, who galloped away. He immediately and rapidly began to age before the eyes of the shocked men. It seems that what Oisín thought was three years passing was in fact 300. In that time, everything had changed. Everyone he knew had died, and the castle he once called home was in ruins. He died in despair soon after.



Niamh

Did Conor McPherson choose to name Valerie's daughter Niamh to give her eternal youth? Could be. Or not. If it sparks your imagination to think so, if it brings you understanding and empathy, then it is an interpretation that works for you. On one hand, Conor McPherson has said that the two Niamhs were a coincidence that he hadn't noticed until a theatre writer pointed it out to him (p. 15, *THE WEIR: Themes, Time, Setting, Supernaturalism*). On the other hand, English playwright Simon Stephens has said that he is awed by interpretations of his work that he never knew were there.

blow-ins: Irish and Australian slang for an unwelcome newcomer or stranger

headbanger: Like header, it's a mentally unstable person, possibly deriving from banging one's head on the walls of a padded room.

Westport: Westport is a town in County Mayo on Ireland's west coast that sits on the edge of an inlet of the Atlantic Ocean. It's 62 miles SW of Knocknarea.

sergeant in the guards, stationed in Carrick: The Garda, or An Garda Síochána, are Ireland's national police and security service. There is a [Garda Station in Carrick-on-Shannon](#).

he was fifty-odd and still only a sergeant, so, like, he was no Sherlock Holmes. Garda Sergeants are front-line supervisors and are the rank above garda, or guard. According to the [Irish Statute Book](#), there were 10 rankings in the Garda at the time of the play, with Commissioner being the highest and Garda being the lowest. Sergeant is second lowest.

Longford: Longford, An Longfort in Irish, is a town in the west-central part of County Longford and is the county seat. County Longford is in the province of Leinster in north-central Ireland. It is due east of Westport and 57 miles SE of Knocknarea.

Ouija board: A Ouija board is also known as a spirit board. It is a flat board marked with the letters, numbers, the words "yes", "no", used to contact spirits. ([Collins English Dictionary](#))



chipper: A fish and chip shop, or more generally a cheap fast-food outlet, typically selling chips and other deep-fried foods. ([Wiktionary](#)) Although Jack is referring to a fictional chipper in Carrick called Luigi's, there is an actual chipper called Luigi's in Longford. It was

named as best takeaway in County Longford in the Lovin.Ie article [“The best takeaway in every county in Ireland”](#).



The real Luigi's chipper in Longford

According to this article in *TheJournal.Ie*, entitled [“6 interesting facts from the unique history of Irish-Italian chippers”](#), “almost all of the chipper families come from the same district of six villages in the Casalattico and Val Di Comino municipalities in the province of Frosinone in the Lazio region in the South of Italy, about 110km away from Rome. Up to 8,000 Irish-Italians have ancestors from Casalattico and nearby Picinisco”.

Irish Wolfhound: This [article in DogTime.com](#) calls the Irish Wolfhound “on average, the tallest dog breed in the world,” as Finbar attests and as evidenced by the photo below.



in bits: “In bits” is used when you're describing something or someone that's in a bad way. For example, “Got food from that Indian place. My stomach is in bits. And so is the jacks [toilet]”. ([The IrishRoadTrip.com](#))

surgery: In this context, it's a room where a doctor or dentist can be consulted.

Vatican two: In January 1959, Pope John XXIII assembled Roman Catholic religious leaders to settle doctrinal issues. This Second Vatican Council, also known as Vatican II, was the first in nearly 100 years. From [“Why Is Vatican II So Important?”](#) on NPR.org:

The council called between 2,000 and 2,500 bishops and thousands of observers, auditors, sisters, laymen and laywomen to four sessions at St. Peter's Basilica between 1962 and 1965. Cultural changes in the aftermath of World War II spelled a need to reconsider church practices. These meetings did just that — 16 documents in total came out of it, laying a foundation for the church as we know it today.

... a theme of the documents was reconciliation. In keeping, they allowed for Catholics to pray with other Christian denominations, encouraged friendship with other non-Christian faiths, and opened the door for languages besides Latin to be used during Mass. Other new positions concerned education, the media and divine revelation.

Most prominently, says Xavier University's Peter A. Huff, the council highlighted the church's willingness to operate in the contemporary realm.

Vatican II's massive reforms caused a divide within the Church – conservatives who rejected it and others who embraced it. Fr. Donald is in the latter camp.

aul: old

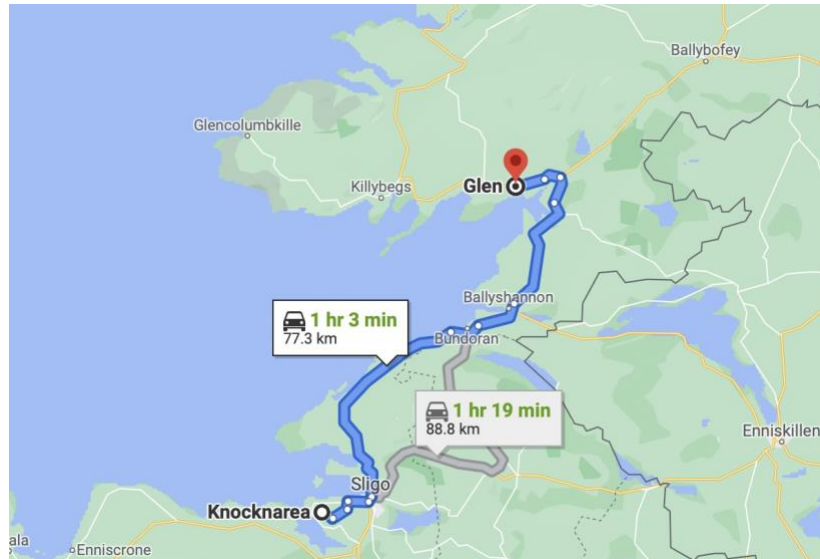
dote: cute, adorable.

mullen: a complete failure

rasher: a portion or slice of bacon or ham.

pudding: In this context of breakfast food, it's probably a black or white sausage. Black pudding – *mílsean dubhis* in Gaelic – is the blood sausage, and white, or *putóg bhán* or *marag gheal* in Gaelic, is the white sausage. It consists of suet or fat, oatmeal or barley, breadcrumbs and in some cases pork and pork liver, fitted into a natural or cellulose sausage casing. ([YourDictionary.com](#))

Glen: a small village in County Donegal, Ireland, it is situated on the north coast, 48 miles above Knocknarea. It has rough, rocky terrain, and very cold, rainy weather. Tough for anyone to work outdoors, let alone someone with the flu.



Map showing the drive from Knocknarea to Glen

got put on to him: gave him a task

quid: A colloquial term for money. For example, “I have no money for the toll – do you have a few quid on you?” ([Irish Repertory Theatre, New York](#))

knocked up to me: In this context, it means to wake someone up in the morning from knocking on the door. ([The Phrase Finder](#))

leaba: The Irish word for “bed.” ([Irish Repertory Theatre, New York](#))

QT: In a secret, private, or quiet way, as in “All the arrangements were made on the QT”. In this context, Jim and Declan were being paid “under the table”.

Sacristy: a room in a church where a priest prepares for a service, and where vestments and other things used in worship are kept.

Gaa: G.A.A. (Gaelic Athletic Association), organization for Irish sports – Gaelic football, hurling, camogie, etc. Also sponsors Irish cultural events. G.A.A. is never spelled out, so just shortened to Gaa. ([GAA.ie](#))

leggings: waterproof rain trousers

Wellies: A name for a pair of rain boots. Short for Wellington boots. Primarily used in the UK but recognized in other countries. ([Kaplan International Languages](#))

stuck in: From [MacMillanDictionary.com](#): to start doing something, especially eating a meal or doing some work, with energy and enthusiasm.

poitin: the Irish Gaelic spelling of poteen, a traditional Irish homemade spirit, often

distilled from potatoes, with an alcohol content of 40-60% ([Collins English Dictionary](#))

sambos: A colloquial nickname for sandwiches.

removal: When the body of the deceased is removed to another location for preparation for burial.

knackered: tired, exhausted, or broken

the spit of: To look exactly like or bear a very strong resemblance to someone. Primarily heard in Ireland. ([CladdaghDesign.com](#))

cop on: An Irish idiom that means to behave or grow up.

old jar: If someone asks if you're heading for a jar, don't be confused. A jar simply means a beer, and "a" = at least six. ([DailyEdge.com](#))

a good nosy around: Equivalent to the US "to have a good poke around", it means to investigate or look through something, typically a place or area, often casually.

DCU: Dublin City University, a university based in the northside of Dublin. It has 18,500 students, from 55 countries around the world and was named University of the Year for 2021 by the *Sunday Times* as a "champion of social mobility".

Here's their [website](#).

CRC in Clontarf: [The Central Remedial Clinic](#), or An Príomhchlinic Feabhai in Gaelic, commonly known and referred to as the CRC, is a non-residential national center established for the care, treatment and development of children and adults with physical disabilities. It is in the Clontarf area of Dublin. Use of the pool is not limited to people with disabilities but is open to the public.



The pool at the CRC in Clontarf

kiss of life: mouth-to-mouth or mouth-to-nose resuscitation in which a person blows

gently into the mouth or nose of an unconscious person, allowing the lungs to deflate after each blow

I got the wind put up me that night: To put the wind up on someone is to make them afraid or nervous ([Merriam-Webster](#)).

naggin: From [Publin.Ie](#):

“Will we keep it simple and call them quarter and half bottles?” “No, let’s be cryptic and call them a naggin and a shoulder.” “Sound.”

Most Irish people are familiar with the terms naggin and shoulder for 200ml and 350ml bottles of whiskey, vodka, rum, and gin, but we’re probably in the dark as to why we actually use these names. So, what do ‘naggin’ and ‘shoulder’ mean?

The word naggin is a variant of the word ‘noggin’. Noggin is a word that was recorded in the 17th century that meant ‘a small quantity of alcohol’, usually one gill (140ml). In Irish, the word derives from naigín, cnaigín, meaning a small wooden pale with a capacity for two glasses.

... The next time you’re in an off license you can ask for a naigín cnaigín. Or not. Actually, best not to. Just buy the alcohol, be pleasant, and leave.

Brylcreem: Brylcreem’s [UK website](#) claims it’s the number one styling brand in Ireland. Founded in 1928 in Birmingham, England, Brylcreem “has a concise men’s styling range made up of its Original Paste (still sold in its 1960s packaging), a few gels, a wax and a cream. In Ireland, you can buy it at Boots or Inish Pharmacy, as well as any number of establishments all over the globe.

The brand was bolstered by its iconic jingle ‘A little dab’ll do ya! You’ll look so debonaire’.

Brylcreem was built on giving men confidence – ‘Brylcreem goes hand in hand with success’. This confidence was derived from Brylcreem’s reliable performance in creating neat, sharp hairstyles every day.”



Brylcreem packaging from the mid-1990s

Culchies: Dictionary.com defines a culchie as an Irish informal noun meaning a rough or unsophisticated country-dweller from outside Dublin.

Phibsboro: Baile Phib in Gaelic, and also spelled Phibsborough, it is a mixed commercial and residential neighborhood on the Northside of Dublin, Ireland.

moaner: a person given to excessive complaints and crying and whining. grumbler, sniveller, squawker, whiner, bellyacher, complainer, crybaby. (The Free Dictionary)

barney: phony, fake, gratuitous

mender: an alternate form of maunder, which has several meanings, but the one that pertains best to the context is to move or act in a dreamy, vague, aimless way. Someone who does that would be considered a mender, or maunderer.

mushes: according to DiffSense.com, a mush is the face.

shite: A vulgar word for excrement; by association, it takes on the meanings of lousy, nonsense, rubbish, and unpleasantness.