

Temple Bar: A potted history...

The evidence from recent excavations of the area we now call 'Temple bar' suggests that it was first inhabited in the Viking-period during the 10th century if not even earlier. Much of this archaeological evidence relates to the western end of Temple bar, which lay within the boundaries of the old Viking town. The strategic importance of this town is reflected in the discovery of the remains of Isode's Tower on the 13th century Anglo-Norman city wall, also near the west end. To the east an Augustinian friary was established in 1257 at the north end of Temple Lane. From the Middle ages onwards Temple bar was an identifiable zone of land within the city.

Geographically the confluence of the now subterranean river Poddle with the river Liffey formed a barrier of mud flats between the western and eastern sides, whilst the Liffey itself to the north along with the dominant east-west axis of Dame Street forced the area into a roughly rectangular shape. In time the Poddle was contained and canalised and land was reclaimed from the rivers with mounds of dumped soil, industrial ash and domestic waste.

The period between 1600-1720 became an era of great activity and development for the quarter when a new Custom House and quay were built along the river and Dame Street swelled with the mansions and gardens of aristocrats, stretching to the river. These landowners subdivided and leased their plots thereby sketching a blueprint of nascent streets. These plots were leased by a variety of people and organisations, ensuring a diversity of building and urban design.

When the east-west oriented Essex St and Essex Bridge, linking the north city, were laid down in the 1670s development further accelerated, to the extent that by the early 18th century the quarter could be justly considered the heart of the city. Further extensions of the quay walls were followed by the Wide Street Commissioners' work in the 1840s. Yet, apart from the latter, the Victorian impact on the area was relatively minor as it was nearly completely built up by this stage.

The area remained important to the lifeblood of the city until the mid-20th century when businesses, shoppers and residents began to move elsewhere. From 1981 onwards CIE (the national transport company) began to purchase property to build a huge Transportation Centre. Over the years, while dealing with the planning process, it rented out its properties at low rents to artists, musicians, Co-ops and other cultural bodies. This inevitably lent an alternative, bohemian atmosphere to the place and residents began to see a real value in their area.

They formed a committee known as the Temple Bar Development Council in 1988 to oppose CIE's plans for the bus depot (the name 'Temple Bar' first appeared in a 1985 An Taisce [The Irish National Trust] report). They successfully lobbied Dublin Corporation and various government departments and in 1991 CIE sold its properties to Temple Bar Properties, a newly constituted development company established on the behalf of the Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister). The most remarkable project of urban renewal of the state's history had begun.