



THE IRISH TIMES

Frank McNally

An Irishman's Diary



It may have escaped your attention, reader, as it had mine, that the Old Testament's prophet Elijah was an expert in mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. But it's true. And having somehow never heard about it in church, I have instead just learned this fascinating fact from a book called *The History of Irish Water Safety*.

Not that there is any mention of water in the biblical story. What there is is a young boy, apparently dead, from causes unexplained, until Elijah "lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth [...] and the flesh of the child waxed warm" (II Kings 34).

Clearly, humans have been saving lives in this way for millennia. Even so, the method went out of fashion for a while

in more recent centuries, probably because of concern about disease transmission. And it took a resurgence of interest in the 1950s to put the "kiss of life" back into mainstream use.

Luckily for another child – the one who grew up to be government minister Bobby Molloy – the technique was known to at least one person in Galway circa 1943. Aged 7 at the time, and floating on a tyre tube off Salthill, Molloy was swept away by a current as his older brother watched, helpless.

Rescue

That was until a man swam to the rescue, and Molloy, as he summed up many years later, was "drowned and revived". By 9pm, he was home in bed,

while his brother invented a cover story for their parents about him eating "a green apple" and feeling unwell.

Then the local Elijah called around to check on the patient, whereupon the cover-up collapsed, and Molloy's brother received an Old Testament-style smiting. As for the child, he grew up to become a trained lifeguard and, as minister for local government, to oversee establishment of the *Irish Water Safety* Association.

Moment of terror

This is a pattern in the book, which also includes an account by the late *Irish Times* columnist John Healy of a severe water scare he suffered once. He saved himself, but the "naked moment of terror" never left him. Recalling it many years later, he helped publicise a new Swedish-made "lifeline", to reduce *drownings*.

Written by Tiarnan O'Sullivan *The History of Irish Water Safety* is full of stories about what Healy called such "noble and valuable work". It sells for €15 (soft-back), €25 (hard) from bookshops, or from the head offices of *Irish Water Safety*. Tel: 1890-420202.

by ensuring men have no public toilets either

I apologise in advance for the indelicate segue, but news that the public toilets at Dublin's College Street have been demolished to make way for the Luas reminds me of James Joyce's old joke: the one he has Leopold Bloom echo as he passes the gents there, and the Thomas Moore statue, and reflects upon "the Meeting of the Waters".

Bloom goes on to comment on the need for Dublin to extend public toilets beyond the 50 per cent of the population then served, viz: "Ought to be places for women". That may in turn have inspired the plot of Flann O'Brien's *The Hard Life*, in which the hero campaigns to have a Dublin tram transformed into a discreetly mobile ladies' loo.

Lamentable

Since then, bizarrely, we have seen trams abolished and revived.

Meanwhile, 21st-century Dublin has conferred equality on women by ensuring men have no public toilets either. But traditional as it is to lament the destruction of Joyce's city, I'm not mourning the lost gents here. My main concern is the

reinstated later this year".

Why? It was considered hideous even when unveiled in 1857. And that was before the notorious head-droop that, a century later, Patrick Kavanagh lamented in verse as symbolising the "cowardice of Ireland".

Browsing the *Irish Times* archives recently, I came across another verse on the subject, from the year of Bloom, 1904. By way of assailing the Moore sculpture, it lampoons his "Waters",

beginning: "There is not in this whole world a city less neat/Than that where Westmoreland and College Streets meet". Four verses later, it suggests dumping the statue in the Liffey.

Naturally I would oppose such drastic action, as detrimental to *water safety*. But now that the divorce between Moore and the toilets has been finalised, maybe the city council should just list the joke for preservation – it's already on a plaque there.

As for the statue, wherever it is now, they should leave it.

report that, having been removed for the Luas works, the Moore statue "will be



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■ All that remains of the
public toilets on College
Street. PHOTOGRAPH: CYRIL BYRNE