

SEAPOINT

SEA, SKY AND SPIRES



PHOTO: Eoin O'Brien

An exhibition curated by
Prof. Eoin O'Brien
in association with dlr Lexlcon

11 JULY
2017
17 SEPT

dlr Lexlcon, Haigh Terrace, Level 3, Moran Park, Dún Laoghaire

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This exhibition is a tribute of gratitude to a little stretch of water that has been for me a place of solace and inspiration, especially during those moments when I soothe my mind in all weathers in preparation for a day of heaven-knows-what difficulties and travails. Indeed, I have to admit I miss the therapeutic solace so much when the tides deny me immersion, that my life has become subservient to the relentless chronometry of the tide, and in common, I suspect, with the birds and the fish, I adjust, insofar as is possible, the business of the world according to the dictates of the tide. These photographs record the visual impact of the sky, the sun, the spires of four churches seen from the sea, and, of course, the many beautiful birds that share the sea so willingly with us human intruders. The photographs are what a swimmer might see rather than what a casual photographer might shoot in a passing peregrination of the little promenade (*plage* being too egregious a term!) that constitutes 'Seapoint'.

The exhibition opens appropriately with some photographs of times past, which though acknowledging the rich history of Seapoint, do not attempt to address the many interesting aspects of the neighbouring Monkstown that has been so well surveyed by others. However, we swimmers cannot and should not ignore the legacy of the sea, so calm, so soothing and gentle for most of the year but liable to vent its anger on occasion in moments of turmoil, when we are reminded of the tragedy it wreaked on Wednesday, November 18th, 1807 when the Rochdale was blown on to the rocks at the Martello tower with the loss 265 lives, many of whom were washed up on the shore and buried in Carrickbrennan graveyard. We can sense with regret in these past images how we so readily sacrifice what we deem 'old-fashioned' for the needs of modernity – compare the Salthill and Monkstown Station of today with its Victorian predecessor, or the Salthill Apartments with the Salthill Hotel! An explanation and comment is, I feel, needed on the photograph of the children rushing towards the camera at what were known euphemistically as the 'Seapoint Baths'. There were no 'baths' as such, but rather a wooden wharf extended from the railway station with entry by a turnstile that admitted one for a penny or so. I recall men sunbathing on the wharf (with the inevitable knotted handkerchief on their heads), and at full tide one could throw oneself into the water.



Salthill Hotel Monkstown Mid Winter Resort. Courtesy Irish Historical Picture Company



Seapoint and Salthill Hotel. Courtesy Irish Historical Picture Company



Seapoint and Martello Tower. Courtesy Irish Historical Picture Company



Salthill and Monkstown c 1865. Courtesy Irish Historical Picture Company



Bathers at Seapoint Baths c1940s. Courtesy Eoin O'Brien



Salthill Hotel. Courtesy Irish Historical Picture Company



Salthill Hotel interior. Courtesy Carole Cullen

The Martello Tower is the focal point in Seapoint, with its cannon and a plaque to remind us of the Rochdale tragedy, with its bathing shelter from where swimmers launch themselves to the sea, and for those who care to look, the intricate and magnificent granite work that is a tribute to the stonemasons of the past. The recreational rewards of Seapoint are not confined to swimming and canoeists, surf-boarders, rowers and aspiring yachtsmen and yachtswomen are all able to share the waters.



Martello Tower at Seapoint. Courtesy Eoin O'Brien

Regrettably, I know nothing about birds, but I find them so fascinating that I cannot resist photographing them; the cormorants, characteristically astride 'the rock' with wings outstretched to dry, who allow me to swim with them, often popping up beside me to say good morning; the terns occasionally dropping very close to me in their dives from on high to seize a fish for their offspring; the gulls -so many varieties, and what aeronautical skills they display in high winds; the heron from Booterstown marsh, often in stately sentinel poise but usually with his mate; the swans from Blackrock Park, who pass so majestically on a mission to instruct their cygnets on the perils of the sea; but most lovingly for me are the Greenland visitors, the Brent geese, fattening themselves here in the winter months before embarking on their epic arctic flight to the north.

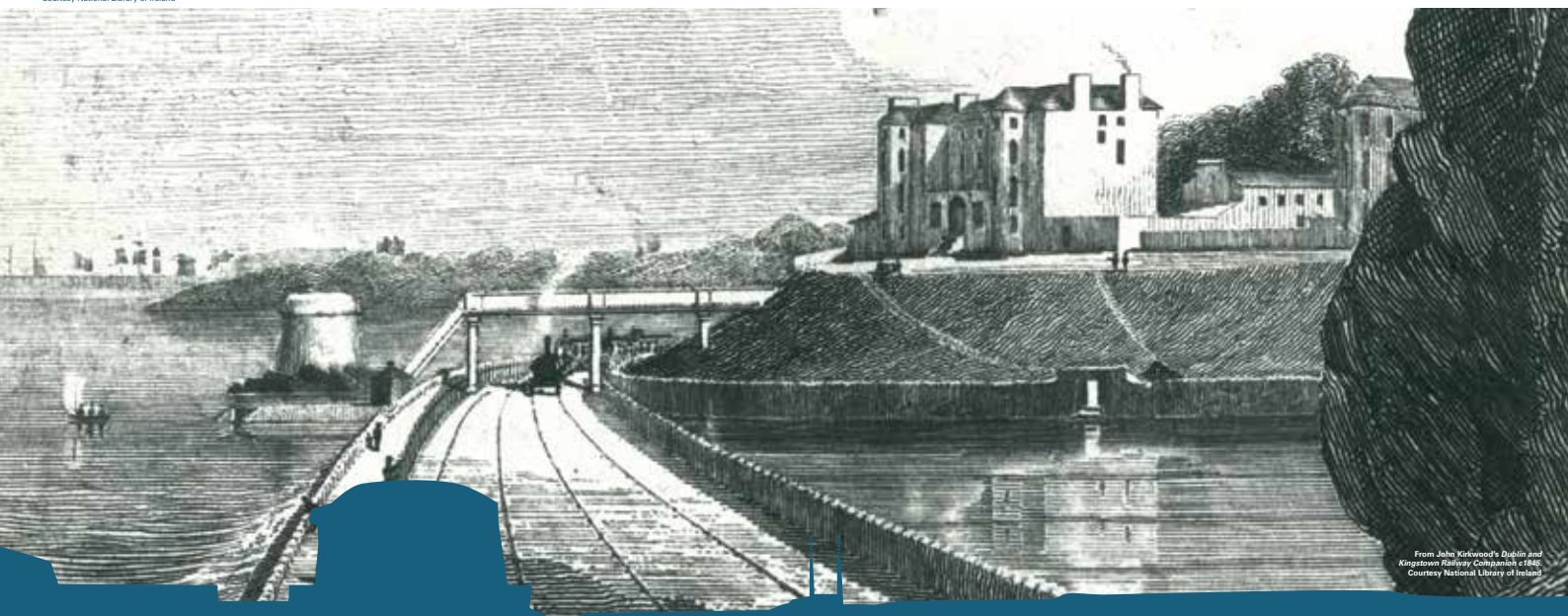


Loss of the Price of Wales Packet from Walkers Hibernian Magazine. Courtesy National Library of Ireland



Shipwreck at Seapoint. Courtesy National Library of Ireland

And, finally, we swimmers are granted a vision and a peace that is denied our land-bound brethren, namely, the blending of the colours of sky and sea at Seapoint, the white horse waves and the wisping, wafting cumulus cloud, shot betimes with a kaleidoscopic rainbow and the four spires (St. Michael's, Monkstown Parish Church, St. Patrick's Church and St. John's Church) silhouetted by a golden sunrise – these unique elements make this little place an idyll without equal.



From John Kirkwood's Dublin and Kingstown Maritime Companion of 1845. Courtesy National Library of Ireland

EOIN O'BRIEN

BIOGRAPHY

Eoin O'Brien and his wife, Tona have lived on Clifton Terrace, facing Seapoint, since 1973. Eoin is a cardiologist who has conducted much research into hypertension and he is Adjunct Professor of Molecular Pharmacology at the Conway Institute of Bimolecular and Biomedical Research, University College Dublin.

He has written books on medical historical subjects, which include *Conscience and Conflict: A Biography of Sir Dominic Corrigan*, and *A Portrait of Irish Medicine*. He has also written books on famous Dublin writers and artists, including A.J Leventhal and Nevill Johnson; he wrote an acclaimed biographical study on Samuel Beckett, who was his friend for many years, entitled *The Beckett Country: Samuel Beckett's Ireland*, and he published Beckett's first novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* in 1992. His latest book *The Weight of Compassion & Other Essays* has been published by Lilliput Press.



Seapoint swimmers, early 1920s. Courtesy Dr Orla Fitzpatrick



Seapoint swimmers, early 1920s. Courtesy Dr Orla Fitzpatrick



Martello Tower at Seapoint. Postcard. Courtesy of dlr Local Studies Collection



Swimmer June 2017. Photo Ger Holland

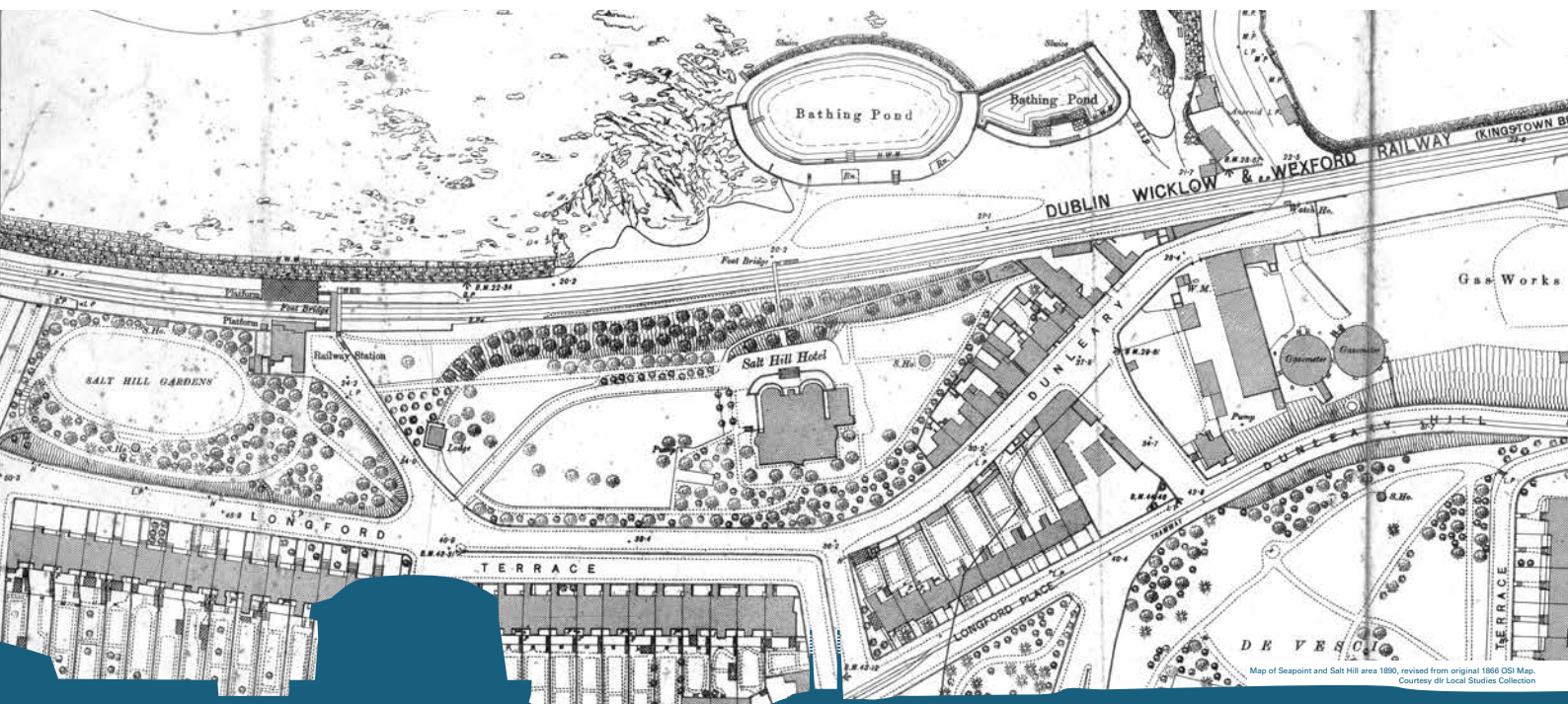


Longford Terrace and Salt Hill Hotel, Monkstown. Courtesy Irish Historical Picture Company



Swimmers June 2017. Photo Ger Holland

All photos in the main exhibition, unless otherwise credited, are taken by Eoin O'Brien. If anyone has any further information about any of the images or those featured in the photographs, please email localhistory@dlrco.ie. We will be pleased to hear from you.



Map of Seapoint and Salt Hill area 1866, revised from original 1866 OSI Map. Courtesy dlr Local Studies Collection



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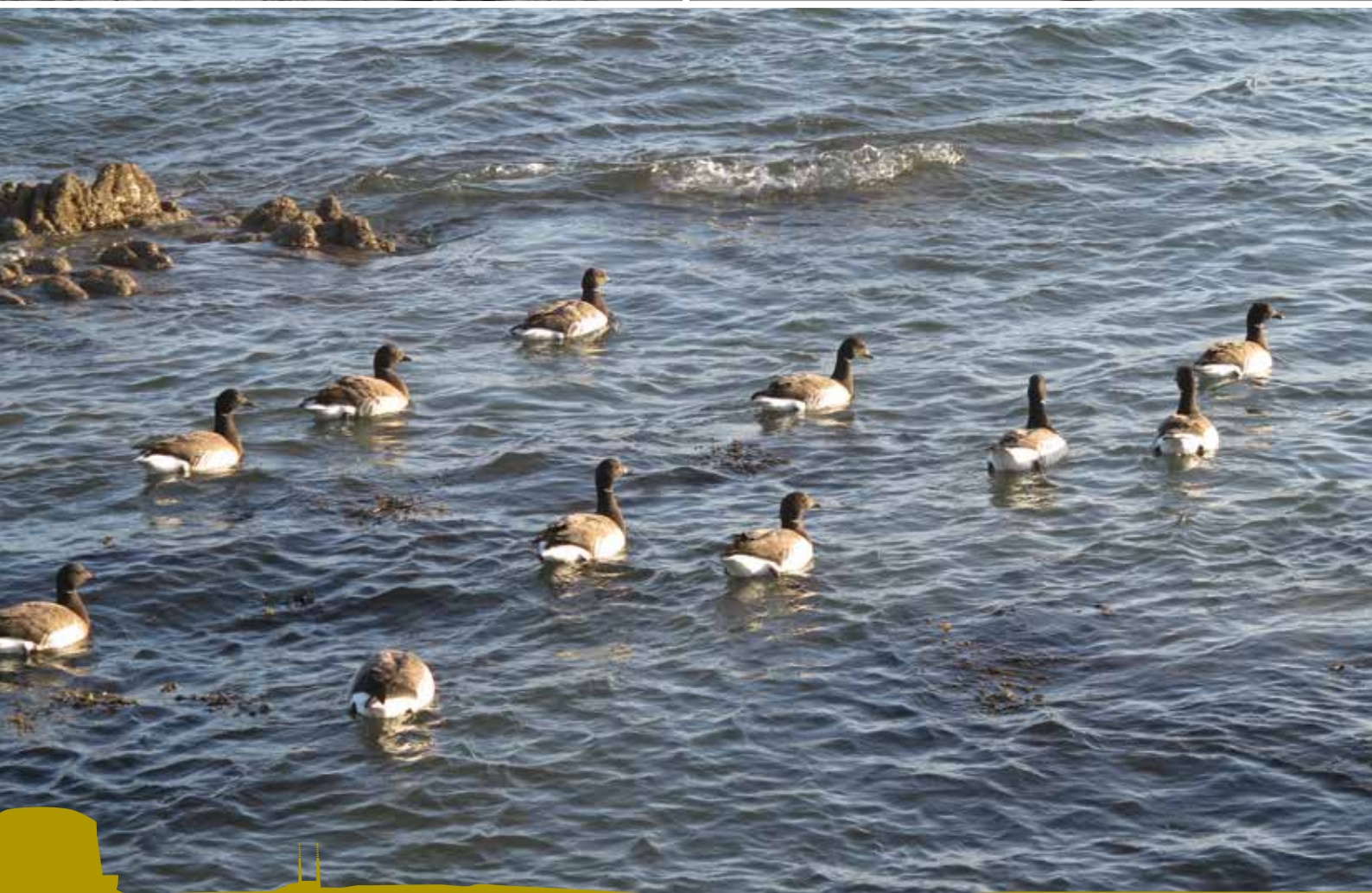
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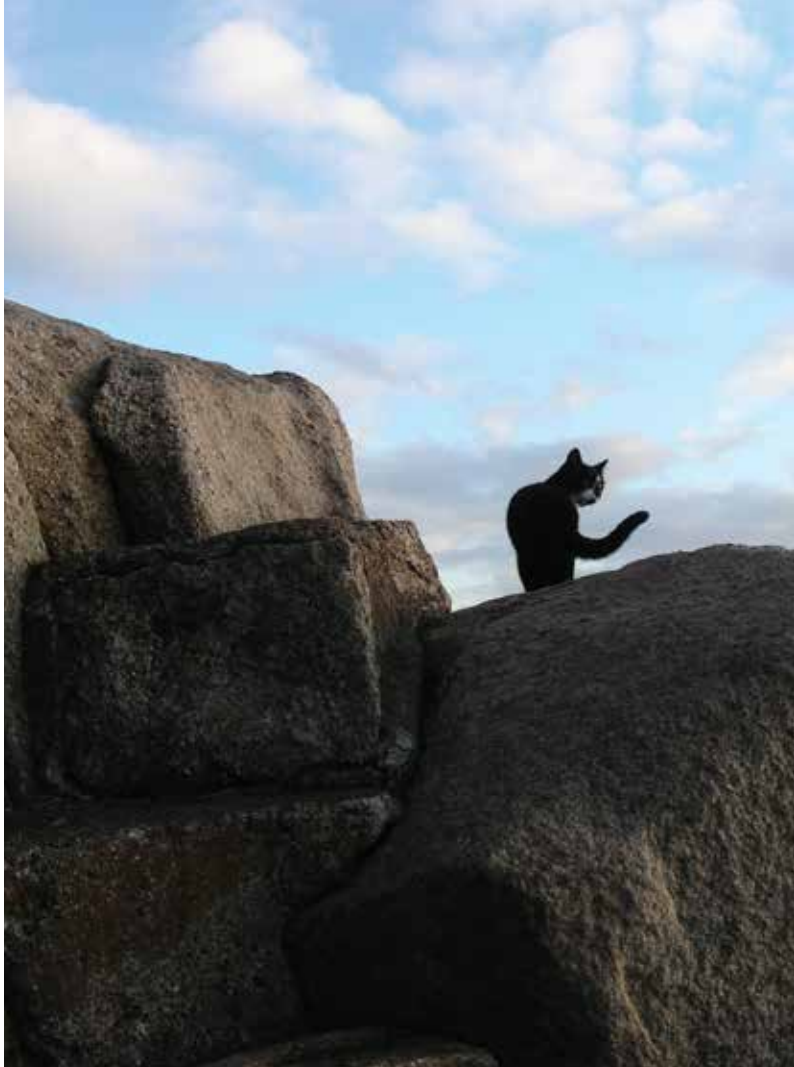
OUR FRIENDS

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OUR FRIENDS

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AND TO HAVE FUN

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AND THEN TO SWIM

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AND THEN TO SWIM

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MARTELLO TOWER



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