



The arts past and present

Ireland: ambivalent attitude to architectural heritage

Narrator

It's known throughout the world as the emerald isle, a land of saints and scholars. But Ireland is undergoing rapid change. Its economy is booming, and its capital is a magnet for revellers. Ireland's future is being reshaped, but so is its past.

The evidence can be found on every street corner in Dublin.

St Mary's Church was built in 1704. Visitors included John Wesley and Jonathan Swift. Now it's a smart bar and restaurant.

The Royal Military Hospital Kilmainham was a refuge for Irish soldiers who'd fought in Britain's colonial wars. Now it's the Irish Museum of Modern Art.

What these two early 18th century buildings have in common is not just their architect, Sir William Robinson, but their place in Irish history. They represent British rule in Ireland that lasted from the 12th century until 1922. They're rare survivors too. For much of the 20th century, Ireland had little interest in preserving the architecture of its British oppressors. Nations give away a good deal about their attitude to their own past by how they choose to preserve or ignore their built heritage.