

## Seatown, ye buachail.

Nick McGinley

If Seatown is beyond your lockdown catchment, you just have to picture it in your mind's eye, as the crow flies over the marshlands, or in keeping with the maritime theme you can hover up there as a Dundalk Bay gull on shriek patrol.

As you look out over the mudflats and catch the canny herons at their work – Castletown more rumour than river, the outer boundary of anyone's idea of Seatown, making its presence felt most in the nostrils – it's easy to recognise that much of the town was rescued from pestilent swamplands and that Dundalkers are practically Dutch in our zeal for a fight with the sea.

Typical – we'd fight anything. Anyone. Anytime. Anyway, hey. Wasn't it in Realt na Mara that I threw my first punch? Just like in the Big House, when you're a junior infant getting grief from a senior infant you've got to set the bruiser straight.

Seatown looked to me like a heroic place to live with its castle and its ruined windmill and its historic fight against the tide. I was jealous of their residents as a boy, still am. Delve deeper and we find the castle is no castle but a Franciscan bell-tower that failed to alert all the friars who got fried in situ for their troubles by Edward Bruce.

You don't have to travel back as far as my late '70s schooldays, to discover a farm still operating on Jocelyn Street by the Curio Shop with her cattle grazing where a marshy shopping centre now stands.

The faded gentility of a seatown-within-de-Town beckons you in with intricate, secretive streets and alleyways tucked in behind the broad boulevard of Seatown Place — built wide enough for a carriage charge straight from the Barracks to defend the Square.

When the secret service were busy welding manhole-covers and sticking snipers on Georgian roofs, they appreciated that military foresight and the straight-shot route for Clinton's speech about the Corrs pulling pints in McManus's. The Larrier. Never saw that Rhodes scholar in Leonard's gardens for his pre-pub tipple but we gave him the Freedom of Seatown anyway.

Stirling Moss raced these streets, squealing around the corner of Vincents, missing all blue uniformed schoolgirls that usually swarm like an academy of bean-gardaí. I don't know if they added their navy glamour to the podium's allure instead, to welcome a legend coming second in a canary-yellow Widi. There were no tears or gnashing of veteran Stirling teeth, the only thing that broke down that day was the recovery service van.

Town Hall, you can have your young Pavarotti, Seatown Fest had Who's Eddie playing the hind wheels off a big rig. Those carefree communal outdoor days will be back with us soon.

Forget the Mississippi, we had...The Rampart, that most canal-looking river, giving its plural name to the industrial spinal column of the town that gave much more than just a council-replenished duck kung po supply to the takeaways and rats to Seatown basements.

The Amazonian green-algaed watercourse was the setting for Huckleberry escapades of

pallet-rafting and string-fishing with its globs of frogspawn and concrete mini-bridges into secret gardens. Feats of agility and daring-do were performed there that lorded it over any landlocked tarmac playground.

Here's to Seatown, boasting both Arctic explorer McClintock and young Watters lads shot down in their prime – those brothers didn't get to explore much beyond Dowdallshill if they even got that far.

I wonder did the water's proximity give Brother Holland his submarine thoughts or was it just an extreme version of every teacher's daydoze of escape as he looked down the barrel of double Maths and stroked his 'tache, then gazed out the windows of the CBS. In any case, it was a periscope dream until he got some US Fenian funding to set sail under the sea.

Was it the sound structure of a bell tower on Castle Road that inspired engineer Peter Rice? No singer yet has blown the shells off his Opera House roof in Sydney. Perhaps we'd better give that geometric honour to Gyles's Quay.

Like the holy well in the scrapyard, Seatown, you may be a bit broke-down but you've got spirit. And loads of pubs, so you've got spirits. You have waves under your streets that could knock a fellow down and a lunar pull that drags him back to pay homage. Remotely, from his socially distant perch. Sure we'll always be close.

Seatown, ye buachaill.

I doff my sailor's cap to you.

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[A file picture of the tower on Castle Road or the Windmill might go well with this piece if there's space.]