

GRAFTON STREET

Grafton Street is the premier shopping street in Dublin and has always been regarded as such. This image was taken around the turn of the last century, probably close to 1905, before the advent of the motor car. The view is north away from St Stephens Green, with Trinity College clearly evident in the centre background.

Always a popular street with shoppers and workers, it was referenced in the 1970s hit single from Bagatelle, called Summer in Dublin (an oxymoron, if ever there was one!). The reference goes as follows:

I remember that Summer in Dublin
And the Liffey as it stank like hell
And the young people walking on Grafton St
Everyone looking so well.

Even more so following the affluence generated by the Celtic Tiger, Grafton St is the place where fashion is both sold and displayed by those hanging out there. And it is clear from the image that it has always been as such. However, this image was probably taken in Autumn yet the women are all dressed rather formally, with their skirts only an inch or so off the ground – this being the standard dress all year, irrespective of the weather. The men on the other hand are less wrapped up (not wearing scarfs) than they would be in winter. And, of course, nowadays, the fashion statements on this street would be huge.

Grafton Street was not cobbled, as the traffic on the street was not heavy enough to warrant such protection (befitting its Posh status), the road surface being more akin to crushed cinders, with paved sidewalks. The transport evident is the traditional horse and cart, known as a Landau, with the unit in the centre of the street (where the passengers sit sideways and back to back, as opposed to facing each other) being a jaunting car, a form of transport unique to Ireland.

The street lamps were gas and, again befitting the importance of the street, would light automatically at dusk. The less important street has a lighter to manually light each lamp.

The centre background clearly shows Trinity College, one of the oldest universities in the world, being founded by Queen Elizabeth I in 1590.

Many of the buildings remain unchanged to this day. And, although spanning a period of one hundred years, there are surprisingly few major changes with the street still being the focus for the fashion statement and its commercial success enhanced in more recent times, perhaps to its turn of the century splendor, by the enormous success of the Celtic Tiger.