

# *Ingenious Ireland: A County-by-County Exploration of Irish Mysteries and Marvels*

By Mary Mulvihill



Reviewed by Patrick Roycroft

**Title:** *Ingenious Ireland: A County-by-County Exploration of Irish Mysteries and Marvels*

**Author:** Mary Mulvihill

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## **PUBLISHER'S INFORMATION:**

*Ingenious Ireland* is a unique study of this country's natural wonders, clever inventions and historic industries. Richly illustrated, meticulously researched and lucidly written, it brings the reader on a fascinating county-by-county tour of Ireland, with details of what to see and places to visit.

Find out why half of Ireland really belongs to North America and why Connemara rain is so salty. Marvel at the natural wonders that surround you, among them the oldest fossil footprints in the Northern hemisphere, and the disappearing springs of Fore. Read about the advent of railways and modern timekeeping. Discover why the shamrock is a sham, and the Dublin Bay prawn is a fraud.

Meet the ingenious Irish and wonder at the range of their inventions: from Milk of Magnesia to the hypodermic syringe; from the steam turbine to the ejector seat; from the modern tractor to the first guided missile.

Mary Mulvihill's knowledge is encyclopaedic and her enthusiasm for unravelling the mysteries and marvels of Ireland irresistible. Dip into *Ingenious Ireland* and you may discover that history was made on your own doorstep.

**Mary Mulvihill** was a pioneering science writer and broadcaster. A former editor of *Technology Ireland* who has written widely about science, she held a degree in genetics and an MSc in statistics from Trinity College Dublin. She had a diploma in journalism from Dublin City University and DCU Special Collections now host her archive. She was instrumental in founding WITS (Women in Technology and Science) and edited *Stars, Shells & Bluebells – biographies of Irish women scientists and pioneers* (WITS, 1997).

## A REVIEW (SENSU LATO) BY PATRICK ROYCROFT

No beating about the bush – I love this book and wholeheartedly advise anyone with any interest in anything Irish to buy it. If you have a strong interest in anything Irish, you will positively relish it. This is, quite simply, one of the very best books on the people behind Ireland's inventive heritage—be that to do with the first submarine, the first 'lady computers', or the man who invented the very first flavoured crisp ['chip' to US readers]—or on Ireland's natural history (geology, geography, flora, and fauna). As Jocelyn Bell Burnell, the Irish-born discoverer of pulsars, puts it: Mary Mulvihill hangs snippets and stories on places, and enlivens those places through the stories related to them. Geology, archaeology, sociology and technology jostle each other, producing interesting interactions. They certainly do. In her Preface, Jocelyn goes on to write, 'To all of us with Irish roots this book gives a sense of history and of place. I commend it to 'ex pats' (and dear knows there are a lot of us!) who want to recall their heritage, take pride in Irish ingenuity, and be really well-informed next time they visit!'

Indeed, because this book is both high quality in terms of the information given and the way it is written and that it exceptionally good value for money (the republication being generously subsidised so as to keep the price down), I recommend buying at least two copies: one as a present. This is a book that can be enjoyed for years. It is the ultimate structured miscellany of Ireland.

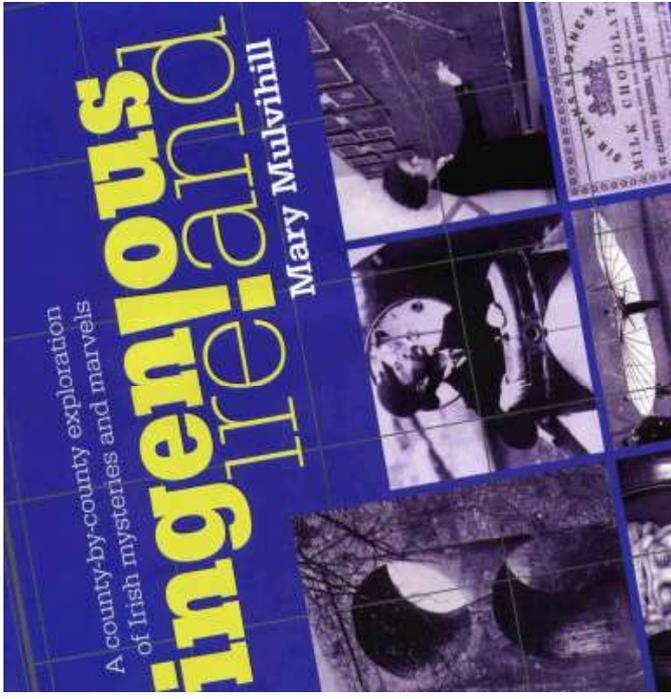
That's my review.

But I'll add a few words of additional information. As noted in the Blue Plaque article in this issue, the book was originally planned as a -month venture but turned

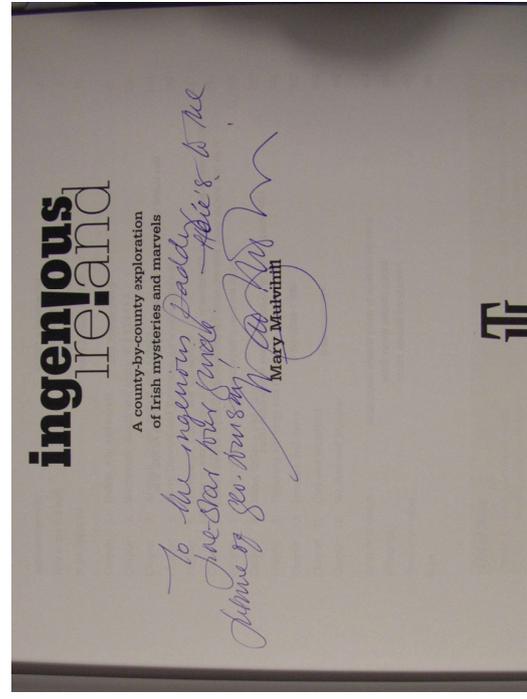
I went up to the cashier and asked how many copies did they have. Turned out they had about 20 in a box round the back. Without hesitation, and with my own money, I bought the lot! I heaved one rucksack full home on the bike [Those hardbacks are heavy!] and got the car in to get the rest. When I told Mary she could not believe it. She, in turn bought them off me and had no difficulty in selling them on to people who had long been on a waiting list. Or giving them away. She gave me a copy and specially signed it (Fig. ).

There was one thing that always niggled Mary about the book. That was the front cover. She admitted that she would have preferred to have designed it herself, but had had no choice in the matter. I had not known then that authors rarely get a say in the covers of their own books. This was something I bore in mind years later when I wrote my own miscellany book (and Mary gave me sage advice on this). I am sure that Mary would have approved of the new cover of the 01 reprint.

Although described in places as the second edition, this is actually the original publication reprinted. For a book of such incredible richness, variety, diversity,



^ Figure Front cover of the original 00 TownHouse and Country-House Ltd print.



^ Figure Mary's autograph and the special message that she wrote on my (then newly found) 00 TownHouse edition of *Ingenious Ireland*. The message reads, "To the ingenious Paddy, five-star tour guide. Here's to the future of geo-tourism!" Photo: Patrick Roycroft.

and complexity there are remarkably few typos or errors. Even fewer that make any material difference, and I've read it cover to cover. But in the interests of accuracy, and for the geological entries (which I know something about), readers should be aware of the following: p. 98, the age of the Lambay Island volcanics is 450 million years old, not 500 million; p. 240, in the second paragraph of the Slishwood Gap entry, the mineral referred to should be 'chrysolite' not 'chrysolite' [this is clearly a simple typo, but the problem is that they are two totally different minerals]; p. 140, in the second paragraph on the Mourne Mountains, there is mention that emeralds can be found there – sadly for the 'Emerald Isle', this is not the case; p. 240,

not the correct illustration for the Carboniferous Period fossils to be found at Streedagh (County Sligo): the illustration is of an ammonite from the Jurassic Period.

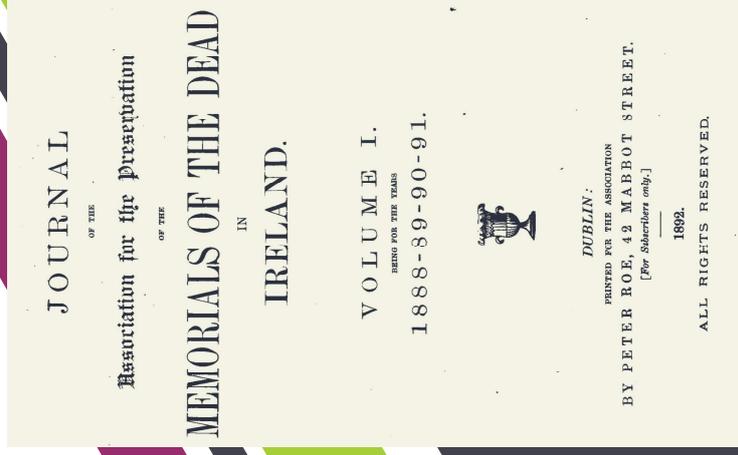
Let me re-emphasise: there are only a tiny number of errors. This is a *tour de force* compendium and unquestionably Mary's magnum opus. From this one book one could design tours, exhibits, lectures, and innumerable smaller local books and guides. The more one reads it and uses it, the more one is in awe of what has been achieved. And the most remarkable thing of all .... it wears its massive achievement like a gossamer scarf.

Available from <https://www.fourcourtpress.ie/books/2019/ingenious-ireland/>.

v **Figure 4** Author Mary Mulvihill admiring an orrery, which is a clockwork orb model of the Solar System. And an orrery was so-named, as we discover on page 230 of the book, after Charles Boyle, Earl of Orrery in County Cork, who owned one of the first ones. What is not mentioned in the book is that the word 'Orrery' itself is the anglicization of the Irish term *Orbh-raighe*, which means ... "Orb's people"! Photo: Brian Dolan.



To understand your  
Family History, it helps  
to understand the time  
and place they came  
from...



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