

Covid means Waterloo for buyers and a city vendor

A D4 mews is being sold due to the impact of the pandemic, which will also likely produce its new owner, writes **Celine Naughton**

33 WATERLOO LANE

Ballsbridge, Dublin 4

Asking price: €1m

Agent: Owen Reilly (01) 6777100

Forced by the plague of 1666 to shelter indoors, Shakespeare is said to have written both *King Lear* and *Macbeth* in lockdown. Isaac Newton also worked from home during the Great Plague of 1665 and, during his time in isolation, developed his famous theories on gravity, motion and optics. Painter Edvard Munch caught the flu during the great 1918 epidemic and had to self-isolate. So he got hold of a mirror and got to painting. The result was *Self Portrait With The Spanish Flu*.

The connection between social isolation and increased productivity is clearly as old as the hills, and this year's Covid-19 lockdown is no exception. If anything, modern technology makes it so easy to work from home that many people are now reviewing not only how they live, but where.

Covid has not only shown us how to work from home, but is also changing how we want to live as a result. A case in point is that of the mews house at 33 Waterloo Lane in Ballsbridge, Dublin 4, which is being sold because of Covid and, ultimately, is also likely to find a buyer who is motivated by concerns about the virus.

Before the coronavirus, the owner hadn't considered selling his property. He had divided his time between the Dublin mews and the country village where he grew up. Travelling a lot with work, he had just returned from South Africa at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and spent lockdown with his family in the West of Ireland.

He'd bought the south Dublin mews house in 2013, spurred on by frequent

commutes to the capital to meet clients, do business and to travel abroad from Dublin Airport for work purposes. But Covid-19 changed everything. While Zooming through conference calls, working at home without distractions and with travel suspended, he started to reconsider the need for a Dublin base at all.

Indeed, he worked so well from home that he can now no longer see himself travelling to Dublin more than once a month from here on. His conclusion: sell the house and use a hotel in future.

On the downside, his parents are distraught. Both avid rugby fans, they will miss what has always been a handy city base from which to get to the Aviva for Six Nations Saturdays.

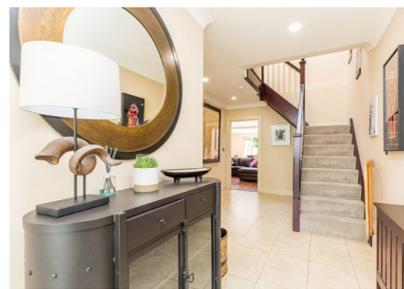
And now that the property has been placed on the market, it seems that Covid is set to provide additional interest from buyers.

Located within easy walking distance of the Irish headquarters of Amazon, LinkedIn and Google, most would consider 33 Waterloo Lane ideal for young professionals in the tech industry with Facebook and others located on the doorstep.

However, selling agent Owen Reilly's money is on a different demographic entirely. Already he's been getting interest from downsizers in D4 and D6 who might have considered one of the larger more luxurious apartments in the area, but are now firmly seeking an own door property.

"But ever since social distancing, self-isolation, wearing masks and all the other protective measures that came into force, some downsizers have been put off the idea of negotiating the sort of communal areas found in an apartment building," says Reilly.

"One 79-year-old told me recently that he wants nothing to do with potential hazards like touching door handles, handrails on stairs or anything else in



the common areas of even the most upmarket apartment developments. For Covid-conscious downsizers, having your own front door is proving to be a major attraction."

While the mews houses of Ballsbridge are now classed among the most desirable city dwellings, most of them had much more humble origins as horse and carriage stables serving the big houses constructed in the mid-1800s for the upper classes. A century later, they were to undergo a transformation.

The pioneer of trendy back-lane homes in Dublin was controversial architect Sam Stephenson, who converted nearby 31 Leeson Close in 1958 as a modernist masterpiece, complete with a lounge with a sunken party pit. The 1960s and 70s saw a swathe of similar conversions in Dublin 2, Dublin 4 and Dublin 6, offering a more manageable and contemporary home in an upmarket period location.

Waterloo Lane's mews homes were developed from the coach houses

servicing the big period homes on Waterloo Road. The building at No33 was converted to a three-bedroom house in 1978. Bought by an investor in the Noughties, it was rented out during the Celtic Tiger years before being taken over by a receiver after the crash. By 2013, it hadn't been lived in for over two years and was in a dilapidated state. The current owner bought it for €535,000 and put €200,000 into its renovation.

Although the site came with planning permission for a 3,200 sq ft house, the current owner's preference was for a two-bedroom home spanning 1,485 square feet — less than half the permitted footprint, yet still bigger than most three-bed semis.

He argues that there's no point in having three poky bedrooms when you can have two big luxurious versions with their own walk-in wardrobes and ensuite bathrooms. His logic was that if he needed more space in the future, he could easily extend the property out

back where there's still plenty of room to do so. On acquiring the property, he gained a spacious two-bed, high-spec Dublin base in turn-key condition, which was within walking distance of the city centre and a 20-minute drive to the airport.

He replaced the formerly single-glazed windows with triple-glazing for soundproofing and energy saving. The house was also rewired, replumbed, had new heating installed and walk-in closets and marbled ensuite bathrooms installed off the two new double bedrooms.

Another factor that appealed was the fact that the front bedroom has an outdoor sun terrace from which to dine on sunny summer mornings. Downstairs, the tiled entrance hallway has a guest WC off. To the front of the house is a modern kitchen with integrated units, centre island and a separate utility area.

To the rear is an open-plan living/dining room that draws in light through Velux windows, roof lights and floor-to-

Clockwise from left: The rear of the mews, which has space for an extension; one of the large double bedrooms; the open-plan sitting room; a bathroom; the kitchen with island unit; the hallway; the dining area with Velux windows and doors leading out to the wooden deck



Garden ornaments open a gateway to history



Treasures Eleanor Flegg

Ireland's Fine Arts, antiques and collectables column

There's a small Victorian cast-iron gate, a humble object amid much finer things, in Sheppard's Gantelwe Gardens Auction of architectural ornaments and garden sculptures. It doesn't look like much. It's not particularly valuable either. But for auctioneer Philip Sheppard, that scruffy little gate (Lot 14: €150 to €250) has a noble history. "It's a social document — that's what it is!" he says. "It's a primary source."

The gate came from the piggery of a labourer's cottage, one of a type established by the Labourers (Ireland) Acts (1883-1919). "They were the first social housing on these islands," Sheppard says. "The origin of that gate is in agrarian agitation. That's its DNA."

The solid simple cottages were built by rural district councils, each of which developed their own distinctive style, and were considered a huge improvement to the one-roomed cabins where farm workers traditionally lived. "The Irish agricultural labourer can now obtain a cottage with three rooms, a piggery, and a garden allotment of an acre or half an acre, and for this he is charged a rent of one to two shillings a week," wrote Padraic Colum in *My Irish Year* (1912). "These cottages by the wayside give a hopeful aspect to the country... flowers are before the doors of the new cottages and creepers upon the walls. The labourer can keep pigs, poultry and a goat, and grow his potatoes and vegetables in his garden allotment."

Within such households, the pig had pride of place. He was popularly known as "the gentleman who pays the rent", which is a humorous way of acknowledging that the families of Irish agricultural labourers couldn't afford to eat the livestock they so carefully reared. "The gate was built to keep the pig in, but it had a symbolism beyond it. It was a gateway to financial stability," Sheppard says, imagining a future for the gate where it forms part of a little garden.

The River Erkina runs alongside Gantelwe Gardens, which includes a small island, accessible by a footbridge, and a life-sized gorilla lurking in the undergrowth. The gorilla (Lot 370: est €4,000 to €6,000) is made of bronze and sufficiently realistic to give someone a



fright on a dark night.

The island is also inhabited by a small bronze bear (Lot 5: est €1,500 to €2,500), shown in the act of catching a fish. "It's not particularly old, but it's an extraordinary piece. It has a presence."



Some of the pieces show traces of the passage of time. A large (120cm high) marble sculpture shows The Three Graces (Lot 160: est €400 to €600) locked in a mutually supportive embrace. It looks as though they are comforting each other, which is understandable because two of them have lost their heads. Happily, the heads have not been lost and are included in the lot.

There is also a 19th-century Irish carved sandstone figure (110cm high) of Saint Columba, also headless but identifiable by his basket of doves (Lot 165: est €1,400 to €1,800). Also weathered, but with an undeniable Regency elegance, a wrought-iron games seat (Lot 143: est €2,500 to €3,500) looks like a high-seated garden bench, but with a hinged footrest and with wheels at one end. It was designed around 1820 to be wheeled around the garden to wherever the entertainment was taking place.

The footrest was so users could keep their skirts out of the mud. In this, as in many other of the pieces in the sale, the interest is as much about the story as it is about the aesthetic.

Similarly, an original cast-iron pillar post box with an early Victorian monogram. It has the distinction of being the only one ever sold by An Post

Seasonal fare: Lot 46 is a set of cast-iron figures representing the four seasons (left). The Three Graces (right), two of which have their heads detached; and the stoneware urn in the shape of a vase (below) are all up for auction in Sheppard's annual Gantelwe Gardens Auction



(Lot 30: est €6,000 to €9,000). "We have the receipt of the sale and the key for the box," says Sheppard.

English post boxes, many of which were sold off in the 1990s, are sometimes painted green and sold as "Irish". This is the genuine article. Post boxes were introduced to Ireland by the novelist Anthony Trollope, then a Surveyor for the Post Office, in the 1850s. They were, of course, originally painted red. Their Irish identity was quickly and cheaply established by the Irish Free State with a lick of green paint in 1922. Interestingly, Hong Kong's colonial post boxes are now also painted green. In 1997, when the territory reverted to Chinese rule, the red versions were painted over, bringing them into line with the rest of China where post boxes had been green since that postal service was established by Robert Hart in 1897. Hart, who hailed from Portadown, never explained why he chose the colour green, but it is often interpreted as a nod to his Irish roots.

Other pieces of Victoriana in the auction include a stoneware urn, shaped like a vase, on a column (Lot 151: est €2,500 to €3,500). It was made in Glasgow and shows figures of various nationalities bearing gifts centred around a seated figure of Queen Victoria. The urn was exhibited at the Great Exhibition of 1851, at which the Irish prize winners included the bell maker John Murphy, who added a bell foundry to his copper and brass works in 1843.

Murphy was a famous bell-founder, famously responsible for making the eight bells for Saint Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne, Australia. A large bronze estate bell (Lot 349: est €1,400 to €1,800) mounted on a forged iron vertical bracket and imprinted "J. Murphy founder, 15 Thomas Street, Dublin 1853" is included in the sale.

One of the most glamorous pieces in the sale, although not exactly a garden ornament, is a horse-drawn carriage (Lot 269: est €4,000 to €6,000) once owned by Maureen O'Hara (1920-2015), Irish queen of Hollywood's Golden Age. It's very, very similar to the one in which she rode with John Wayne in the movie *McLintock!* (1963). The film, a rowdy vulgar pre-feminist romp, hasn't aged well. It's hard to watch the elegant, iconic O'Hara being spanked.

"It's not the same carriage, but that may be the reason that she had it," says Sheppard, who feels that the similarity between the two carriages is too marked to be a coincidence. "There may well have been some sort of emotional connection between the carriage and the film." But the story of the carriage, how O'Hara acquired it, has been lost along the way.

Sheppard's Gantelwe Gardens Auction of architectural ornaments and garden sculpture takes place online on Tuesday, June 23, but is available to view in its outdoor setting from June 20-22. See sheppards.ie.