



This item contains the Dublin core metadata attributes and Curatescape item type metadata fields for a story from the Ports, Past and Present archived collection on the digital repository of Ireland. It has been provided in .odt format for easy copy and pasting.

For more information about the Ports, Past and Present Project, see

<https://portspastpresent.eu/>.

For more information about Omeka Classic, see <https://omeka.org/classic/>.

For more information about Curatescape, its Omeka plugin suite and this item type metadata schema, see <https://curatescape.org/>.

For a .csv containing tabular data for all stories, see the larger collection at

<https://doi.org/10.7486/DRI.ht259b362>.

For an archived snapshot of the story as it appeared between 2020 and 2023 on

<https://portspastpresent.eu/>, see the Relation field below.

## Dublin Core

### Title

Peerless Jim Driscoll and Little Ireland, Cardiff

### Subject

Boxing

Cardiff 'Little Ireland'

Jim Driscoll

### Creator

Anonymous

### Publisher

Ports, Past and Present Project

### Date

2023

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### Relation

<https://perma.cc/P633-FRJY>

### Format

Curatescape story

### Language

English

## Coverage

51.47746351588678, -3.1680821401209225

# Curatescape Story Item Type Metadata

## Lede

Peerless Jim Driscoll (1880-1925) was an outstanding boxer of Irish heritage. He grew up in grinding poverty in an area of Cardiff called Little Ireland - this is a short snapshot of his life.

## Story

Peerless Jim Driscoll (1880-1925) was an outstanding boxer of Irish heritage. Driscoll is described as ‘a fighter who is always mentioned in lists of the greatest pugilists never to have won a world title’. Driscoll grew up in an extremely poor household in a neighbourhood of Cardiff called Newtown but given the moniker ‘Little Ireland’.

The 1881 census has James Driscoll as a four-year-old boy living with fourteen others in 12 Ellen Street (pictured). As the map shows, Ellen Street is situated in grid of streets bounded by railways, docks, goods yards and Tyndall Street making it a natural enclave. The large Catholic church on the corner of Tyndall Street was built in 1870 and became a focal point for the area and Jim’s life. Moving forward to 1891, the census shows Jim’s mother has remarried a man named Franklin (his father died when he was one after being hit by a train near his home) and the family have moved a few doors down to 3 Ellen Street.

It is not clear precisely when the family first arrived in Cardiff from Ireland. Cornelius Driscoll (Jim’s father) is five years old in the 1861 census of Wales. The family live just one street across from Ellen Street on William Street. Interestingly, all the ages of the Driscoll family have been rounded to the nearest five. This was not uncommon in census returns as birthdays were not as marked or remembered as they are today. The census sheet indicates the older people were all born in Ireland and their children are now being born in Cardiff. This would be the generation fleeing the hardship of the Irish potato Famine (1845 – 1849) and its aftermath. Jim’s grandfather is William Driscoll and using the round number age of thirty-five we can assume he was born c1825. A search of the records indicates five baptisms of William Driscoll in Cork, Ireland around this time. We cannot with any accuracy be sure which is the correct William Driscoll but it is likely the family came from Cork or the surrounding southern counties. In Edward MacLysaght’s *The Surnames of Ireland* (6th edn, Dublin, 1985) he notes that the surname (O) Driscoll is ‘very numerous in Co. Cork but not elsewhere’ (p. 90) which ties in with the baptism data.

Jim’s early life was one of grinding poverty. In his chapter ‘Peerless: the Life and Legend of Jim Driscoll (1880-1925)’ O’Leary notes that Jim’s mother accepted parish relief (when his father died) and soon she ‘acquired the arduous and uncertain work of shovelling potatoes and fish from the holds of ships on the dockside’ with four children at home. This inauspicious start coupled with a number of other factors led to Jim’s life-long career in boxing.

Firstly, the catholic church established a number of boxing schools in pre-dominantly catholic areas like Little Ireland. According to O’Leary they viewed ‘sport as a way of channelling the energies of young men into disciplined activities under the influence of the Church’. Priests liked the mix of piety and self-discipline. Jim had found his calling and was nurtured in it.

Secondly, in 1888 John L. Sullivan an Irish-American boxer came to Cardiff. Even if Driscoll did not see a 'hero for the Irish' in Cardiff, he would have heard of the amazing welcome he received, as the Cardiff Times put it, from a 'mob largely recruited from the unwashed section of society'. Perhaps this early encounter with a feted Irishman planted a seed of hope in the youngster.

Driscoll's working life began assisting in a newspaper office but he soon left to join travelling fairground boxing booths where his speed and agility meant he was able to beat larger opponents. Images of Driscoll show a very slight man but his boxing career spanned from 1901 until 1919. He fought over seventy professional bouts winning fifty-four, losing three and no decision in fourteen. Driscoll died in 1925 at the very young age of 45 from pneumonia on 30 January 1925. A British Pathé film of his funeral is available here:

I would like to thank Professor Paul O'Leary at Aberystwyth University for sharing with me the chapter P. O'Leary 'Peerless: the Life and Legend of Jim Driscoll (1880-1925)' from his co-edited volume P. Stead and Gareth Williams (eds) Wales and its Boxers, The Fighting Tradition, (Cardiff, 2008) which was an invaluable source for this blog post.

### **Factoid**

### **Related Resources**

A documentary on the life of Jim Driscoll, <https://youtu.be/YXNtRkoSDGA>

Welsh Boxers Hall of Fame - Jim Driscoll, archived at <https://perma.cc/UGC4-S548>

### **Official Website**