

Famous Sons of East Belfast

CS Lewis, author of 'The Chronicles of Narnia', soccer superstar George Best and rock legend Van Morrison were all born and raised in East Belfast and you can enjoy an enthralling day visiting sites associated with them. Depending on your interests you can mix and match the following sites or take special black cab or bus and walking (in season) tours. Find out more at the Belfast Welcome Centre.

The Narnian Trail

To celebrate the centenary of Clive Staples Lewis (Jack to his friend and family) a special statue, 'The Searcher' was commissioned from sculptor Ross Wilson. Showing Professor Digory Kirke (of 'The Magician's Nephew' and 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe') entering the magic wardrobe into Narnia, it stands outside the Hollywood Arches Library on Hollywood Road.

Further up Hollywood Road is Dundela Avenue. Here a Blue Plaque records that CS Lewis was born at Ballyhackamore House, No 47 Dundela Avenue (now a block of flats), on November 29th 1898.

The house where Jack spent most of his childhood, however, still exists. It was in the attic of 'Little Lea' on the Circular Road that he and elder brother 'Warnie' created stories of other worlds, including his first work of fiction, 'Boxen', about an animal kingdom. The house is now a private residence.

If you want to discover what may be the true origins of Narnia you should make your way to the beautiful red sandstone St Mark's Church of Ireland, Dundela. It was here that Lewis was baptised in 1899 by his grandfather, the Rev Thomas Hamilton, and later confirmed. He and his brother came here each Sunday to worship and, in 1935, donated the fascinating stained glass Lewis Window to the Church. The Church was known as 'The Lion on the Hill' and you can see what may be the true origin of Aslan at the adjacent Old Rectory, where Lewis's mother grew up and where he would have visited his grandfather as a child. On the front door is a doorknob shaped as a lion's head. If you're looking for a coffee and bite to eat on your tour why not try the delightful café at nearby Belmont Tower at 80 Belmont Church Road.

The Belfast Boy

The world's greatest footballer, George Best grew up at 16 Burren Way in the Cregagh Estate, which was owned by the family until 2008. You can still see the three-bedroom terrace house and the garden where 'The Belfast Boy' kicked his first football and, nearby, a fabulous mural of him overlooking the football pitches he once graced. You can see another great Best mural closer to the city centre at the bottom end of the Woodstock Road.

Best was educated at Lisnasharragh Secondary School at Stirling Avenue nearby. Following an emotional funeral and procession attended by hundreds of thousands of mourners in 2005, Best was buried next to his mother at Roselawn Cemetery on Ballygowan Road.

Van the Man

A Blue Plaque at 125 Hyndford Street, off the Beersbridge Road, records that one of the greatest singer/songwriters in contemporary music was born here on August 31st 1945. Around the corner, at 289 Beersbridge Road, is his first school, Elmgrove Primary School. A little further away, at Cameronian Drive, near Castlereagh Road, is his secondary school, Orangefield (one of several local areas mentioned in his songs).

Indeed many of the landmarks of his East Belfast childhood found their way into his songs, including 'Cyprus Avenue' and 'Hyndford Street' itself. This was also the area he worked when he was 'Cleaning Windows'.

Starting off with local group Them, for whom he wrote their 1964 hit 'Gloria', Van Morrison went on to become one of the rock world's most successful singers, with songs such as 'Brown Eyed Girl', 'Moondance', 'Domino' and 'Warm Love' becoming standards. Perhaps his most memorable live performance was at Belfast City Hall in November 1995, at a vital time in the peace process, before US President Bill Clinton and 60,000 people. His song, 'Days Like This', became the official anthem for the Northern Irish peace movement.