

## **I Dublin after the 1916 Rising: a geography of destruction and reinstatement**

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The Rising between 24 and 29 April 1916 was the first major armed revolt against British rule in Ireland since the United Irishmen Rebellion of 1798. It was organised by the secret Irish Republican Brotherhood, which was committed to the winning of an independent republic by force of arms. The Rising was a predominantly Dublin affair; in a military sense it was doomed to failure when it became clear that the countryside outside Dublin would not rise up. A number of prominent buildings such as the General Post Office (GPO) on Sackville (O'Connell) Street, the Four Courts and South Dublin Union, among others, were seized and the rebels waited to be attacked. After six days of resistance, a majority of the leaders decided to surrender to spare further civilian fatalities. Initially, many inhabitants of Dublin were indignant at the bloodshed (485 had been killed (Glasnevin Trust, 2016, p. 5)), the inconvenience of food and other shortages, and the devastation of the city centre. As many studies have shown, the most significant consequence of the Rising was the impact on public opinion of the vigorous British response to the outbreak (Foy and Barton, 1999; Laffan, 1999; Townshend, 2005). Fifteen immediate executions and the crude application of internment and martial law radicalised Irish political feeling. For decades before the 1916 Rising, Irish nationalists sought Irish home rule – a subordinate parliament and government in Dublin. Though granted in 1914, it was not implemented because of the First World War. After the Rising, a demand for an independent Irish republic, championed by Sinn Féin, swept aside home rule. The Rising is regarded as the first stage in the struggle that led to the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922.

Political developments aside, the most visible after-effect of the Rising was the destruction of Sackville Street and adjoining thoroughfares such as Moore Street; this was the combined result of fire and military bombardment. Many contemporaries likened the smouldering ruins to a scene from the First World War. In *The Insurrection in Dublin*, the writer James Stephens observed: 'The finest part of our city has been blown to smithereens, and burned into ashes. Soldiers amongst us who have served abroad say that the ruin of this quarter is more complete than anything they have seen at Ypres, than anything, they have seen anywhere in France or Flanders' (Stephens, 1916, p. 73). On the plus side, the damage was largely confined to the Sackville Street area and architecturally significant buildings such as the Custom House and the Bank of Ireland had been spared. But on the negative side, Captain Thomas Purcell, chief of Dublin Fire Brigade, estimated that £2.5 million (a relative value of about €197 million in May 2016) worth of damage had been caused to over 200 buildings and stock (Purcell, 1917, p. 33). Based on archival material, this paper describes the compensation

process that enabled the reconstruction of Dublin city centre, municipal concerns about town planning and reinstatement in an improving style, and the material impact of the restitution on Dublin and its people in neighbourhoods such as Moore Street.

As the sense of astonishment at the insurrection receded, attention focused on the issue of restitution, even as the executions were taking place. A consensus swiftly emerged that the Imperial Treasury should make good the loss to private citizens, as the *Irish Times* put it, of ‘those rights ... that the Government exists to protect’ (*Irish Times*, 6 May 1916). The compensation question should not be divorced from the broader political context. The British cabinet was aware of the corrosive effect on Irish public opinion of secret courts martial, early morning executions, mass arrests and deportations. In this light, a generous measure of compensation was a means of conciliating the Dublin business community, citizens, and municipality. Furthermore, given British anxiety for America to enter the First World War, a demonstration of statesmanship in Ireland would placate inflamed Irish-American opinion. Also, it was linked to the fresh but ultimately ill-fated attempt to bring about a home rule settlement during the summer of 1916.

After the Rising, Sir Robert Chalmers assumed the duties of Under-Secretary for Ireland. As Treasury Secretary with a reputation for efficiency, he was well qualified to tackle the problematic issue of compensation. He was in little doubt that the government would have to pay for the damage occasioned by the military and, in particular, by the use of artillery. But he insisted that this be *ex gratia* and not in recognition of any right to compensation. As early as 8 May 1916, traders and property owners who suffered loss by the destruction of their premises and effects formed the Dublin Fire and Property Losses Association to deal with insurance companies and the government. The driving force behind this was William Martin Murphy, the most prominent businessmen of his day, whose interests in Clery’s department store, the Imperial Hotel and Dublin United Tram Company were all affected significantly by the insurrection. The committee of the association included high-profile business leaders in Dublin, such as Charles Eason and Sir Thomas Robinson, director of the Metropole Hotel. Notably, the commercial imperatives of compensation and reconstruction transcended political divisions, whether between nationalists or between nationalists and unionists.

Chalmers insisted that all claims would be dealt with on the basis of insurance, that looting would be deemed the same as burning for settlement purposes and, despite loud protest, that no claims for consequential losses, such as loss of profits or customers, would be entertained. In mid-June 1916, a three-man Property Losses (Ireland) Committee (hereafter PLIC) was established with Sir William Goulding, chairman of the fertiliser and phosphates firm of the same name, and the Great Southern & Western Railway, as chairman. The committee completed its work in less than ten months. Significantly, its interpretation was sympathetic in that it recognised that buildings were allowed to burn out because the fire brigade could not intervene, the police were withdrawn from the streets, and owners were prevented by the British military from approaching their burning premises.

Consequently, nothing could be done to save property from fire or looting. In each case, where loss could be proven, the committee recommended payment of the sum that an insurance company would have allowed had the loss been fully covered by insurance.

The claims were divided into two categories: damage to buildings and damage to contents. A total of 7,001 claims for just under a total of £2.8 million were made, of which 6,236 applications (89%) were admitted. The committee recommended for payment £1,844,390 or about 66%. The business community were not, of course, the only claimants. The committee, and particularly William Martin Murphy, recognised the importance of promptly settling the claims of workmen and employees 'who, owing to the loss of tools or clothing, were in many cases unable to obtain work' (Property Losses (Ireland). Committee (1917), para. 8). Some 3,200 small claims for personal effects or minor damage to property were processed. The amounts involved were generally modest. For example, Mary Jane Larken, a domestic servant employed by Bridget Morris of 4 Moore Street, was awarded £7 10s. for the loss of all her 'humble' belongings, including a heavy woollen coat, four aprons and one 'good costume' (PLIC/1/5704). James Dodrill, a butcher employed by Christopher O'Donnell at 62 Moore Street, received £2 10s. for the loss of his butcher's aprons, coats and knives (PLIC/1/5722). Kate Isabella Gore made two claims for £120 and £92 12s respectively for looting and damage to stock and personal effects caused by the Irish Volunteers' occupation of 17 Moore Street, a building that has become central to contemporaneous debates about the future of Moore Street. She was awarded £38 and £35 (PLIC/1/3347, PLIC/1/6127). There were many claims for property destroyed in the jewellery stores of Sackville Street and Henry Street such as watches, rings, clocks, and barometers. John Farrell of 62 Upper Sackville Street sought £20 for his gold watch, which was destroyed in Hopkins and Hopkins at 1 Lower Sackville Street on the corner with Eden Quay. Farrell was awarded £12 (PLIC/1/3255). Many visitors over Easter staying in hotels such as Wynn's claimed for the loss of personal effects; those who donated pictures to the Royal Hibernian Academy for its annual exhibition also sought compensation.

For a variety of reasons, 765 applications totalling £159,350 were declined. The rejections fell into eleven general categories, which ranged from lack of evidence, to loss of money, to consequential loss. A typical example of the latter was John A. Gibney who sought £30 for the loss in sale of sausage and pudding cases that rotted during the rebellion at Lime Yard, off Moore Street (PLIC/1/2042). Predictably, no grant was made in respect of the property of anyone complicit in the outbreak and each list of claims was subjected to police inspection. Yet, twenty such claims amounting to £6,368 were received. No less than four were made by Count and Countess Plunkett for the alleged theft by the military of money, jewellery and personal effects, as well as damage to property. None were entertained. This was undoubtedly due to the participation of their three sons in the Rising: George and Jack were interned and Joseph was executed. On the instruction of Lord Wimborne, the Lord Lieutenant, claims in respect of government property were

not considered. In this way, the GPO, the Linen Hall Barracks on Constitution Hill and four other buildings were excluded.

The largest awards were for the 210 cases in which property had to be rebuilt (Table 1 below).

**Table 1:** *Number and location of buildings requiring full reconstruction after the 1916 Rising*

Location	Number of properties	Location	Number of properties
Abbey St Lower	16	Harbour Court	3
Abbey St Middle	25	Harcourt St	3
Beresford Place	1	Henry Place	4
Bolton St	4	Henry St	36
Bridge St Lower	4	King's St North	1
Brunswick St Great	1	Linen Hall	1
Cathedral St	1	Marlborough St	2
Clanwilliam Place	2	Moore St	10
Cole's Lane	6	Parliament St	1
Crane Lane	1	Prince's St	8
Dame St	2	Sackville Place	5
Dean St	1	Sackville St Lower	35
Earl Place	3	Sackville St Upper	6
Earl St North	11	Usher's Quay	3
Eden Quay	13	Yarnhall St	1

The largest rebuilding award was £77,292 granted to Clery & Co. for the destruction of 21-27 Sackville Street (Ó Corráin, 2014, p. 286). By contrast, awards for rebuilding on Moore Street were on a smaller scale. Margaret Mulligan, trading as Patrick Reddy poulterers, was awarded £812 for the destruction of a house, shop and premises by fire at 7 Moore Street (PLIC/1/5612); in a separate claim, she received £550 for loss of contents (PLIC/1/1277). The PLIC did not actually disburse awards. Its purpose was to investigate claims and recommend a sum for the Treasury to approve and pay out. A total of forty-one compensation schedules were presented to the British government between July 1916 and April 1917. This mechanism gave the impression of delay and disgruntled the business community, which was eager to resume normal trading. The situation was eased in January 1917 when it became possible for owners to inspect the note of awards at Dublin Castle. Until rebuilding was completed, businesses either relocated or erected temporary premises. In September 1916, for example,

Dublin Corporation approved Margaret Mulligan's request to erect a temporary structure at 7 Moore Street for one year (Dublin Corporation, 1916, p. 406). Funds for actual expenditure were released on a phased basis on the production of a certificate from the architect or builder. William McDowell, for example, was paid £2,070 in six instalments between May and December 1917 for the restoration of 3 Upper Sackville Street (Ó Corráin, 2014, p. 287).

The Treasury was one source of delay; the other was the Dublin Reconstruction (Emergency Provisions) Act (1916) without which rebuilding could not commence. Led by James Gallagher, the Lord Mayor, Dublin Corporation petitioned the government for workable town planning regulations to ensure that buildings were restored, at a minimum, in a manner not worse than before and ideally, as Gallagher put it to the Home Secretary, 'in consonance with a well devised town planning and street widening scheme' (Ó Corráin, 2014, p. 288). Similar sentiments were expressed by the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (hereafter RIAI) and by R. M. Butler, editor of the influential *Irish Builder and Engineer* and, from 1924, Professor of Architecture at UCD. Butler warned repeatedly that 'no worse fatality could befall O'Connell Street than the giving of unfettered powers to every owner to produce a design to suit himself' (Butler, 1916, pp 572-3). As the Housing and Town Planning Act (1909) did not apply to Ireland, the Corporation sought legislative powers to have some measure of control over the character of the buildings to be erected and to improve streets. In the event, despite the Dublin Reconstruction (Emergency Provisions) Act, no uniform design scheme proved possible for Sackville Street (Rothery, 1991, p. 84).

The Corporation's other concern was financial. It sought assistance to cover loss of rates, estimated at £16,000 in the 1916 financial year, to purchase ground areas for street widening and to provide financial aid to private owners over and above the *ex gratia* grant where the compensation did not allow rebuilding in an improving architectural style or meet elevated building costs. This put the Corporation on a collision course with the Fire and Property Loss Association, which fiercely resisted any planning regulations that might impinge on rebuilding or add to its cost. After a protracted dispute, the Reconstruction Act was passed finally in December 1916. The Corporation fared better on the financial side than on the planning regulation aspect. A loan of £700,000 was secured after Gallagher appealed in person to H. H. Asquith, the British Prime Minister, in July 1916. From London, Gallagher proceeded to Paris to visit the Exposition de la Cité Réconstituée – an urban planning exhibition of plans for rebuilding areas in France and Belgium destroyed during the First World War (Dublin Corporation, 1916, p. 341). The Corporation appointed a reconstruction committee, which sought the advice of Raymond Unwin, a leading English architect and town planner, as well as members of the RIAI. When the reconstruction committee made its report in July 1917, the advice of the experts was generally not followed on grounds of cost or delay. The Corporation confined itself to widening parts of Earl Street and Henry Street, and the removal of an unsightly transformer substation from Eden Quay (Dublin Corporation Reports and Printed Documents, 1917, vol. II, pp 642-6).

Under the Dublin Reconstruction Act, plans for new or restored buildings had to be submitted to the city architect who could, in the public interest, require alterations in respect of external design, frontage lines and materials. But this was open to appeal by property owners. In many cases, such as numbers 1 and 2 Moore Street, where it was proposed to rebuild exactly on the lines of the former buildings, the Corporation promptly approved the plans (Dublin Corporation Reports and Printed Documents, 1917, vol. III, p. 285). With the help of the Dublin MPs, owners secured other concessions. There was no valuation of buildings in Dublin for twelve years (the most recent valuation had been in 1915); rates on rebuilt property were remitted in the first year after reconstruction; and excise licenses attached to some of the destroyed premises were preserved.

The end of the First World War greatly accelerated the pace of reinstatement. By mid-1920, the restoration of Sackville Street, so important for the commercial life of Dublin, as demonstrated by Joseph Brady, was almost complete (Brady, 2001, pp 332-9). Only a few *ex gratia* payments were outstanding due to legal difficulties, labour disputes or shortages of materials. The fundamental demand of the Dublin Fire and Property Losses Association and the Corporation that the state should accept and meet its liability was largely satisfied by the British government. Not to have done so would surely have inflamed Irish public opinion. The scale of compensation – £1,844,390 in *ex gratia* grants and a £700,000 loan – was substantial, particularly given wartime austerity. In simple purchasing terms, the relative value of the combined compensation sum and loan is about €200 million. However, the British government received little gratitude for its financial outlay because the Easter Rising became the catalyst for the creation of an independent Irish state, realised just six years later. This occasioned civil war and further destruction of Dublin city centre including Upper Sackville Street ‘which was subsequently razed, echoing the destruction of Lower Sackville Street which had occurred five years earlier’ (Whelan, 2003, p. 117). According to Bannon, the destruction of 1916-1922 proved a catalyst for the advancement of planning and a more orderly development of the city (Bannon, 1989, p. 13). In 1922, Dublin Corporation sought new legislative measures to address destroyed areas and strengthen its powers under the Dublin Reconstruction Act of 1916, and in 1924, it obtained some powers in respect of derelict sites. But the advancement of town planning proceeded very slowly and was overshadowed by the urgent need for the provision of adequate working class housing. Indeed, during the early years of independence, the process of suburbanisation began apace with new residential areas constructed in Marino, Drumcondra and in the south-east of the city to cater for a growing urban population (Brady, 2014); this shaped how the future city would evolve with particularly acute consequences for the inner city. Although the Town and Regional Planning Act (1934) set town planning on a firm legislative foundation, the formal planning of the development of Dublin did not begin until the 1960s.