The 200 year history of Richmond Barracks site is fascinating, not only does it tell something of the British colonial era and the struggle for independence but also reflects the history of working class families housed there during the period from 1929 right up to recent years.

Richmond Barracks is clearly a very an important site nationally and historically which highlights two opposing positions in Irish history notably those who fought against the British Army during the 1916 Rising and those Irish who served in the British Army to fight in World War 1.

The Construction of Richmond Barracks, Dublin 8 began in 1810 and was completed in 1814. It was built by the British Government to counter the threat of a French invasion during Napoleonic times and it subsequently became a post for recruiting soldiers.

Between 1864 and 1867, three additional buildings were constructed (which are the ones in situ today, 2014) to accommodate a gymnasium and two recreation rooms to counter the boredom of day time barracks living. The barracks served as a British military barracks for over 108 years and detachments of soldiers left from there for service in conflicts which included the Crimean War, Boer War and World War 1.

After the outbreak of World War 1, Lord Dunsany a Co. Meath landowner joined the 5th Royal Inniskillings at Richmond Barracks and soon after his friend the well known poet Francis Ledwidge also joined, who whilst there wrote many poems.

The buildings have significant connections to the 1916 Rising and events that took place in its aftermath. The Royal Irish Regiment was based there and engaged in fighting the Irish Volunteers led by Eamon Ceannt. Following the surrender, over 3,000 suspected rebels where held there before being sent onto prisons elsewhere.

Court martials took place at the barracks and some of those found guilty were subsequently taken to be executed in nearby Kilmainham Goal. Furthermore the seven signatories to the Proclamation where led from the Barracks to Kilmainham Gaol for execution.

Other notable people held there included; Eamon de Valera, Countess Markievicz, Michael Collins, Arthur Griffith, William T. Cosgrave, Eoin O’Neill, Thomas Ashe, Noel Lemass and Sean T. O’Kelly.

In 1922 the Barracks was handed over to the Free State Army and renamed Keogh Barracks and in 1924 most the buildings and site were handed over to Dublin Corporation and converted into a Housing Scheme known as Keogh Square which, following many years of social deprivation and bad physical conditions was subsequently demolished in 1969. This meant that most of the original Barrack Buildings were then gone and a new Housing Estate (Apartment Complex) called St Michael’s Estate was constructed on the site.

The remaining Barrack buildings (that exist today) and some land was given to the Christian Brothers in 1929 and served as a school until 2003. This property was acquired by Dublin City Council in 2005.

The St Michael’s Housing Estate has been totally demolished in recent years and the site is currently undeveloped.

Dublin City Council disposed some of the existing Barrack buildings and land to the Health Services Executive in 2008 and they have constructed a local Primary Health Centre there. This Development is very sensitive to Historical and Conservation issues.
Therefore the remaining three original Barrack buildings (including the gymnasium) are now part of a Commemorative Restoration Project which is being led by Dublin City Council.

The Government earlier this year announced an investment package of £ 22 Million nationally for commemorative projects to mark the 1916 uprising and other significant historical events.

One of the Projects approved was for the Restoration of the remaining Richmond Barracks.

The key objective of the Project is to develop a Visitor attraction as an integral part of a wider heritage trail of significant historical locations in the Dublin 8 area which include the War Memorial Gardens and Kilmainham Gaol as well as maximising the potential to develop an interesting “Tourist Triangle” in this area.

Overall the restoration project has National importance and when completed will provide a cultural, educational, heritage, tourist, and community attraction/facility.

Dublin City Council has the responsibility to manage and deliver this very important project within the allocated Government funding of £3.5 Million.

The City Council has appointed a Project Coordinator (Martin McDonagh) and established an Internal Steering Group consisting of all relevant disciplines such as Architecture, Heritage, Planning, Conservation and Finance and it is chaired by an Assistant Chief Executive of Dublin City Council (Brendan Kenny)

A Local Advisory Committee has also been established which is Chaired by Eadaoin Ni Chleirigh which consists of Community, Heritage Educational and Political Interests

A design brief is being developed with a view to commissioning a multi disciplined consultancy team to prepare the project for Planning Permission and ultimate construction/restoration.

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