



Comhairle Cathrach
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Council



History on your Doorstep

Six stories of Dublin history

by Dublin City Council's Historians in Residence Maeve Casserly, Donal Fallon, Cormac Moore, Mary Muldowney, Bernard Kelly & Catherine Scuffil

Edited by Maeve Casserly & Bernard Kelly



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Réamhrá / Foreword

Ré órga é an t-am i láthair na huaire ó thaobh cúrsaí staire de. Tá méadú as cuimse tagtha ar an tsuim sa stair i measc an phobail de bharr meascán nithe – comóradh céad bliain de mhór-imeachtaí i stair na hÉireann maraon le lear mór de leabhair nua staire agus cláir faisnéise teilifíse. Cuir leis sin fáil a bheith go héasca ag an mórfhobal ar stair teaghlaigh agus doiciméid digithe ar shuíomhanna idirlín. Ní hamháin gur mhúscail siad sin spéis na ndaoine san aimsir chaite ach chothaigh siad bród mór iontu de bharr a gceangal leis an stair sin.

Under the Decade of Commemorations designation, Dublin City Council has supported public history with grants for community groups and schools, exhibitions, restored historic buildings, history documents, photographs, books and newspapers in our libraries and archives, and the innovative Historians in Residence project. All this work strives to remove the barriers to accessing history – for free you can read, watch, listen, walk and even download to find out about your history, including the history of Dublin. The team of six Historians in Residence work right across the city to talk to people about history and they visit schools, libraries, community centres, nursing homes, Men's Sheds, local history clubs and groups to champion history and promote its sources and discussion.

This book is another chapter in the success story of Dublin City Council's Decade of Commemorations work and the Historians in Residence project in particular. Maeve, Donal, Cormac, Cathy, Mary and Bernard have researched these six topics relating to the history of Dublin and have added beautiful old photographs to illustrate each chapter. They have also included a list of even more books to read on the history of Dublin, all of which you can borrow from your local public library.

Is linn uile an stair agus tá áthas orm a rá go bhfuil todhchaí iontach rathúil i ndán don saol atá thart i mBaile Átha Cliath. Tá súil agam go mbainfidh sibh sult as an leabhar seo lena scéalta suimiúla faoi shiopa, faoi mhonarcha, faoi thithe nua, faoi litreacha de chuid saighdiúirí, faoi mhná ag éileamh a gcearta vótála agus faoi oibrithe iarnróid.



NIAL RING
Lord Mayor of Dublin

Dublin City Council Historians in Residence Project

A team of six Historians in Residence work across Dublin City to talk to people about history and promote its sources, especially documents, photos and books in Dublin City Libraries and Archives. The Historians in Residence project is part of Dublin City Council's work under the Decade of Commemorations (1912-22) designation and strives to break down barriers to history.

Who are they?

MAEVE CASSERLY has an MPhil in Public History and Cultural Heritage from Trinity College Dublin and is completing her PhD in University College Dublin. Her most recent publication is 'Exhibiting Éire: representations of women in the centenary commemorations of the Easter Rising,' in (ed.) Oona Frawley *Women and the Decade of Centenaries* (2019). She is the Historian in Residence for the South East area of Dublin City.

DONAL FALLON is a historian and author based in Dublin. His publications include *Revolutionary Dublin: A Walking Guide* (2018) and *The Pillar: The Life and Afterlife of the Nelson Pillar* (2014). His work has appeared in *History Ireland*, *Review of Irish Studies in Europe* and *Jacobin*. He is the Historian in Residence for the North West area of Dublin City.

BERNARD KELLY received his PhD from NUI Galway in 2010 and did his postdoctoral work at the University of Edinburgh. He is the author of two books on Ireland and the Second World War, and is currently Historian in Residence based at Dublin City Library & Archives in Pearse Street.

CORMAC MOORE has an MA in Modern Irish History from University College Dublin and is completing his PhD at DeMontfort University, Leicester. He is Historian in Residence for the North Central area of Dublin City and is author of *The Irish Soccer Split* (2015) and *The GAA V Douglas Hyde: The Removal of Ireland's First President as GAA Patron* (2012).

MARY MULDOWNEY holds a PhD in History from Trinity College Dublin and also a postgraduate qualification in Adult Continuing Education and Training from the National University of Ireland at Maynooth. She is the Historian in Residence for the Dublin Central area and works as an adult education consultant for community groups and trade unions. Mary is one of the organisers of the Stoneybatter & Smithfield People's History Project and a founder and former director of the Oral History Network of Ireland.

CATHERINE SCUFFIL has an MA in Local History from Maynooth University. She is currently the Historian in Residence for Dublin's South Central area which includes the historic Liberties and some of the city's oldest suburbs. Catherine has written a number of local history books and an abridged version of her MA thesis was awarded the Old Dublin Society's silver medal in 2018.

Contact them at commemorations@dublincity.ie, Twitter and Facebook @DubHistorians www.dublincity.ie/decadeofcommemorations.

Suffragette's City: a walking tour of the suffrage movement in Dublin City

Maeve Casserly, Historian in Residence, Dublin South East

2018 marks a century since the Representation of the People Act 1918 came into law. The Act allowed women in Ireland and Britain to vote in a general election for the first time. Despite its limitations (women had to be over 30 years of age, meet a property qualification, and/or be university graduates) the Act was seen as a great victory for the suffrage movement. In this chapter I'll focus on the stories the buildings of Dublin city have to tell about the individuals who lived, worked, gathered together and debated in them as part of the long campaign for women's suffrage. Those who fought for this right were also involved in many other movements. These included but are not limited to; social reform, education reform, Irish nationalism, the labour movement, and the Irish language revival. This will become clear when we explore their lives.

This chapter will give you a starting point to go on your own walking tour of Dublin city centre and connect with the *lieux de mémoire* (a site with a memory or history) of the women's movement. A great place to start our tour is **St. Stephen's Green** as it is one of the few places in the city where there are a concentrated number of monuments dedicated to people involved in the suffrage movement.

Beginning in the centre of the Green, beside the bronze bust dedicated to Countess Markievicz, we start with a landmark moment in the suffrage movement. Markievicz represents the great victory of the 1918 Acts for women's suffrage and representational rights. Not only could she vote in the December 1918 general election, but she also ran as a Sinn Féin candidate and won her seat in St. Patrick's Division (Dublin). This made Markievicz the first woman to be elected to Parliament in Britain and Ireland. Like her fellow members of Sinn Féin, Markievicz didn't take her seat in Westminster, but instead established a parliament in Ireland, Dáil Éireann.

Throughout her life Markievicz's activism in the campaigns for Irish independence and worker's rights overlaps with her work for women's rights.

Turning northwards, you'll come across an ornate limestone bench dedicated to Anna and Thomas Haslam for their lifelong commitment to women's suffrage and social reform. Anna was born in Youghal in 1829 and credited her Quaker upbringing with giving her a strong sense of women's equality with men. Anna met Thomas Haslam, also a Quaker, born in Mountmellick, in Yorkshire. The young couple later married and moved to Dublin where they lived at 125 Leinster Road, Rathmines for the rest of their lives. The Haslams were part of the first generation of suffragists who saw their primary function as educators; organising public lectures and distributing information pamphlets. They also campaigned for women's rights by sending petitions to government. The first Irish suffrage society, the Dublin Women's Suffrage Association (DWSA), was founded in 1876 with Anna as its secretary. She held this post until 1913 when she became President. The focus of the DWSA shifted in the late 1890s and renamed itself the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association (IWSLGA) in 1901 to indicate its new national remit and aim to allow women to vote and be elected

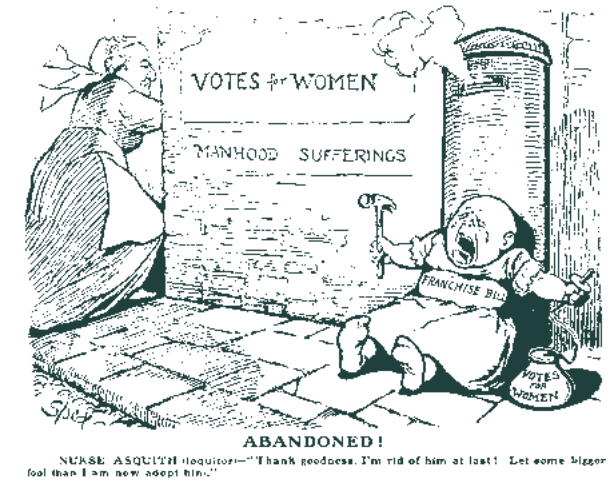
at local government level. Over his long career Thomas wrote several articles on women's suffrage including a publication called *The Women's Advocate* and pamphlets such as, 'Women's suffrage from a masculine standpoint' (1904).



'Thomas and Anna M. Haslam' by Sarah Cecilia Harrison
(Courtesy of Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane)

Anna and Thomas were unionists and in the December 1918 general election Anna voted in Rathmines for the Unionist candidate Maurice Dockrell, whose wife Margaret was a member of the IWSLGA. Despite their political differences, unionist and nationalist suffragists alike gathered together to mark Anna's important contribution to the movement and celebrate the occasion of her first vote. Sadly, Thomas had died in 1917, and so didn't live to see his wife vote.

Walking northwards, before you go over the bridge in St. Stephen's Green, turn left towards the sensory garden. The long wooden bench in this small haven is dedicated to Louie (Louisa) Bennett and Helen Chenevix. Louie was a suffragist, trade unionist, and peace activist. She was educated in Alexandra College (where the Conrad Hotel on Earlsfort Terrace now is) and went on to study singing in Bonn in Germany. She moved back to Ireland and became involved in the suffrage movement in the 1910s through newspapers like the *Irish Citizen*. In 1912 she cofounded, with Helen Chenevix, the Irish Women's Suffrage Federation. The Federation was an umbrella organisation which was politically independent and non-militant. It linked a variety of suffrage societies throughout the country and established connections with groups in Europe and the USA. In late 1916 she accepted an invitation to restructure the Irish Women Workers' Union (IWWU) along more professional lines. This really worked and with the assistance of Helen Chenevix its membership rose dramatically from a few hundred to over 5,000 by 1918. Like Louie, Helen Chenevix was also educated at Alexandra College and went on to graduate with a BA in 1909 from Trinity College Dublin. Early on she became involved in labour and social issues, though it was as a suffragist that she first came to prominence. During the passage of the Home Rule Bill in 1912 she was very prominent in the (unsuccessful) campaign to include women's suffrage as part of the Bill.



Votes for Women Franchise Bill, Lepracaun, 1912
(Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)

ABANDONED!
NEASE ASQUITH (lequitor) "Thank goodness, I'm rid of him at last! Let some bigger fool than I am now adopt him!"

Leaving St. Stephen's Green and heading down **Dawson Street** we'll stop briefly outside the Mansion House, a hugely important venue for many Irish political and social movements as it provided a meeting space for public events. In June 1912 a mass meeting of suffragists took place in the Mansion House protesting the new Home Rule Bill which failed to include women's suffrage in its demands. Public venues were also used to protest against women's franchise. For example, there was an anti-suffrage meeting held in the Mansion House in December 1911 run by the National League for Opposing Women's Suffrage. One of their speakers, a Mr. Frank Fox, came all the way from Australia to tell people why women shouldn't have the right to vote!

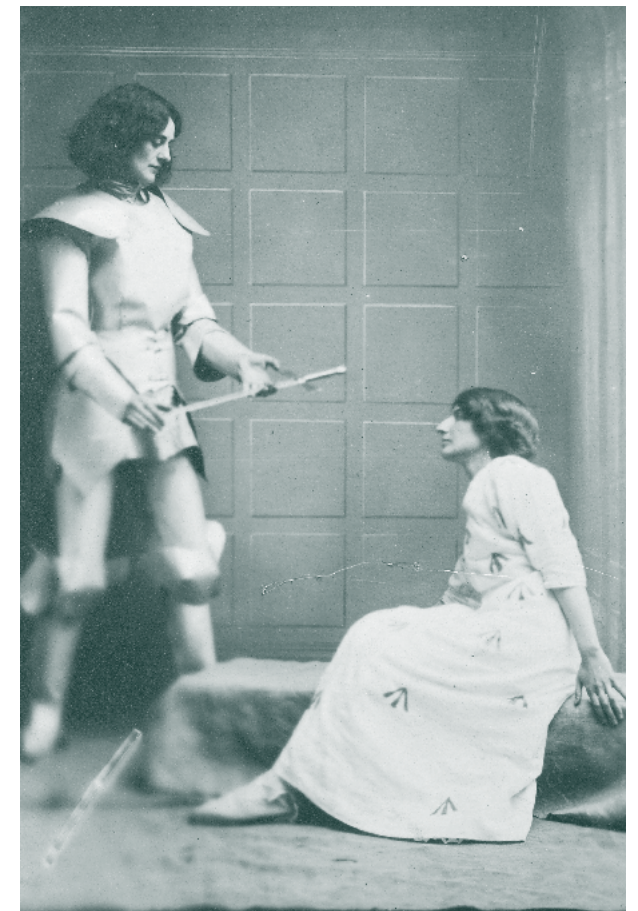
Continuing down Dawson Street and turning right onto **Molesworth Street**, you'll walk by a new office block which used to be the site of Molesworth Hall, an important public meeting place demolished in 1978. The first public manifestation of interest in an Irish campaign for women's suffrage happened here in 1870. In April of that year a successful public meeting was held in Molesworth Hall on the theme of 'electoral disabilities of women.' The meeting was addressed by Millicent Fawcett and received extensive coverage in the *Freeman's Journal* where it was reported that the body of the hall was 'completely occupied.' The meeting led to the foundation of the first Irish suffrage society, the Dublin Women's Suffrage Association (DWSA) in February 1876. By the early 1900s the DWSA had achieved much in legislative reform; the extension of the provisions of the Married Women's Property Act, the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, the participation of women in local government (as both voters and candidates at local government, urban and rural district councils), the increased availability of education to women, and increased employment opportunities.

In December 1913 the Irish Women's Suffrage Federation sponsored 'Suffrage Week' in Molesworth Hall. Political speeches, debates between pro and anti-suffragettes, concerts, and a Christmas fair selling 'Suffragist Turkey,' 'Suffragist Sweets,' 'Suffragist Flowers,' toys and dolls were held throughout the week. At that stage the Federation's membership was very diverse and Suffrage Week was designed to bring together members of different backgrounds and opinions to celebrate the Irish suffrage movement. A 'Debate with the Antis' was also organised for 'Suffrage Week' which the *Irish Times* described as the highpoint of the week. Presided over by the Lord Mayor, the debate was waged between suffragist Mary Hayden and Mabel Smith, representing the London-based National League for Opposing Women's Suffrage. The debate had an audience of about 500 people and started badly for Smith as she was greeted with hisses from the crowd. Mary was an excellent representative for the suffrage movement and a seasoned debater. She had attended Alexandra College

and graduated with a BA in modern languages in 1885 and an MA in 1887. Together with Agnes O'Farrelly and Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, Mary steadfastly campaigned for the right of women to receive education on the same terms as men and to be employed by universities on an equal basis. Mary was a key figure in the formation of the Irish Association of Women Graduates in 1902. The Association focused on women graduates' employment and public policy in relation to employment equality. In 1911 she became the first professor of modern Irish history at UCD. That same year she chaired the first meeting of the Irish Women Workers' Union and presided over a mass meeting in June 1912 protesting against the proposed Home Rule Bill, which did not include suffrage for women.

From 1908 the pace of the suffrage movement began to quicken with the foundation of the militant Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL). The daffodil, now associated with the Irish Cancer Society, was adopted by the Franchise League as a symbol for their cause. In 1914 the first daffodil day was held in Molesworth Hall. The events included Markievicz dressed in a suit of armour playing the role of Joan of Arc in a series of drama scenes, known as *tableau vivants*, depicting 'great women of history.'

Countess Markievicz dressed as Joan of Arc appearing to a suffragette in prison
(Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland)



Taking a short stroll past Trinity College on Nassau Street and along Westland Row onto **Pearse Street**, you'll spot a building called 'The Academy' at 42 Pearse Street. It used to be an important public lecture hall and performance space called the Antient Concert Rooms. The Irish Women Workers' Union (IWWU) was founded at a public meeting held here in September 1911. Amongst those to address the meeting was Constance Markievicz who said that the union would not only give women a greater voice in the workplace but would also help to win them the vote and improve their status in society. Delia Larkin, sister of James, was its first secretary and within weeks the IWWU was involved in a successful dispute over pay with W. & R. Jacob's Biscuit Factory, then the largest employer of women in Dublin.

Before establishing offices of its own on Westmoreland Street the Irish Women's Franchise League rented rooms in the Antient Concert Rooms and often hired the performance hall for their public lectures and debates. In 1911 a meeting of the IWFL was interrupted when Dublin Metropolitan Police barged in and demanded to know if the suffragettes intended to meet the next night to avoid being home for the census. Many suffragettes did boycott the census as a political protest, others gave misinformation or under the 'Disability' column wrote things like 'not a citizen' or 'don't have the vote.' For example, if you look up the Sheehy-Skeffington's census record for 1911, a 28-year-old Emily Sheehy-Skeffington born in Co. Dublin is listed, but Hanna was in fact thirty-three and born in Co. Cork.

1911 Census, Sheehy-Skeffington household, Grosvenor Place, Rathmines
(Courtesy of the National Archives of Ireland)

CENSUS OF IRELAND, 1911.														
FORM A.														
RETURN of the MEMBERS of this FAMILY and their VISITORS, BOARDERS, SERVANTS, &c., who slept or abode in this House on the night of SUNDAY, the 2nd of APRIL, 1911.														
NAME AND SURNAMES.	RELATION to Head of Family.	SEX AND AGE.	EDUCATION.	AGE last BIRTHDAY.	MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, OR SEPARATION.	PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE.	MARRIAGE BOND.	SINGLE LANDRADE.	MARRIAGE BOND.	SINGLE LANDRADE.	MARRIAGE BOND.			MARRIAGE BOND.
											12.	13.	14.	
James Sheehy-Skeffington	Head	M	33	33	Married	Emily Sheehy-Skeffington								
Emily Sheehy-Skeffington	Wife	F	33	33	Married	James Sheehy-Skeffington								
James Sheehy-Skeffington	Son	M	10	10	Single	Emily Sheehy-Skeffington								
Emily Sheehy-Skeffington	Daughter	F	7	7	Single	James Sheehy-Skeffington								

Leaving Pearse Street, travelling through College Green and Dame Street and through Dublin Castle, you'll spot a commemorative plaque to Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington at the back of Dublin Castle on **Ship Street**. Hanna is probably the most well-known Irish suffragette and her tireless work had a profound influence on the movement. She graduated with a BA in modern languages and was awarded an MA in 1902. Hanna Sheehy met Francis Skeffington in 1896 and when the couple married they took each other's surnames as a symbol of the equality of their relationship. In 1902 Hanna joined the long-running Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association. Encouraged by the formation in London in 1903 of the militant suffrage group, the Women's Social and Political Union, along with Margaret Cousins, Hanna founded the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL), an independent, non-aligned, and militant group in 1908. By 1912 the IWFL claimed a membership of over 1,000, making it the largest suffrage group in Ireland.

In May 1912 the first issue of the suffrage paper the *Irish Citizen*, edited by Francis Sheehy-Skeffington and James Cousins (Margaret's husband) appeared and remained the main voice of women's suffrage in Ireland for the next decade. On 13 June 1912 a number of IWFL women, including Hanna, broke several windows in government buildings, Dublin Castle. The women were arrested and imprisoned for a month in Tullamore Gaol. In prison they immediately lobbied for political status. The brutal treatment of two English suffragettes by the Irish authorities led Hanna and a number of other suffragettes to go on hunger strike. Because of her feminist activities Hanna was fired from her German teaching post at the Rathmines School of Commerce. Despite the difficulties its members faced, the IWFL continued its militant activities and between 1912 and August 1914 there were thirty-five convictions of Irish women relating to suffrage activities, twenty-two of which were in Dublin alone.



Dublin City Council plaque to Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington

During Easter Week 1916 on his way home from an anti-looting meeting, Francis was arrested and shot without trial on the orders of Captain Bowen-Colthurst. An inquiry into the murder left too many questions unanswered for Hanna's satisfaction. In late 1919 Hanna was elected as a Sinn Féin candidate to Dublin Corporation.



'Votes for Women',
Lepracaun, 1912
(Courtesy of Dublin City
Library and Archives)

Opposite page
'Votes for Women
Nothing for their "Panies"',
Lepracaun, 1912
(Courtesy of Dublin City
Library and Archives)

In May 1926 she was one of four women appointed to the executive of the new Fianna Fáil party, but later split with the party. Margaret Cousins joined the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association in 1906. However, she soon became frustrated by their timid approach, and with Hanna founded the militant IWFL in 1908. As one of its most influential and high-profile members she regularly spoke at its open-air meetings in Dublin and on suffrage tours of the country. In January 1913 she was jailed with fellow IWFL activists Meg Connery and Barbara Hoskins for breaking windows in Dublin Castle. During their imprisonment they successfully fought for political status in prison after a brief and well-publicised hunger strike. In 1915, disheartened by the stagnation of the suffrage movement during the First World War, Margaret and her husband moved to India. Wasting no time, she became a founding member of the Women's Indian Association and played a pivotal role in organising the first all-India women's conference and all-Asia women's conference.

City Hall, next to Dublin Castle, was the focal point for one of the biggest events of the suffrage and labour movements during the war. 'Lá na mBan' (Women's Day) was a major, all-Ireland anti-conscription event which took place on 9 June 1918. It involved thousands of female activists from several organisations. The *Freemans's Journal* reported that 40,000 women had signed an anti-conscription pledge in Dublin alone. Over 700 uniformed Cumann na mBan members and over 2,400 IWWU women marched to City Hall that day.



NOTHING FOR THEIR "PANES."

The Militant Suffragettes (again at work in Dublin), are by their destructive methods alienating a lot of sympathy from their cause.

The campaign included a 'solemn pledge for the women of Ireland' signed by an estimated two-thirds of Ireland's women which stated that, 'the enforcement of conscription on any people without their consent is tyranny.' 'Lá na mBan' was one of a number of public protests, general strikes and pledge signings held across Ireland against the introduction of conscription. This display of people power really worked and conscription was shelved in July 1918.



Margaret (Meg) Connery, Mabel Purser, Barbara Hoskins, and Margaret Cousins, 1913 (Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland)

Turning back now and walking to where we started in St. Stephen's Green, the south side of the Green is home to many beautiful buildings, one of which is Iveagh House (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade). Meg Connery, a member of the IWFL and prominent public speaker in the Irish suffrage movement was famously photographed trying to sell the *Irish Citizen* to Bonar Law, the Conservative party leader, and Edward Carson outside Iveagh House. In 1918 Meg was very critical of the Representation of the People Act, describing it as a limited victory, and demanded full equality with men.

Just around the corner from Iveagh House is the Conrad Hotel on **Earlsfort Terrace** standing on the site of what used to be Alexandra College, an institution which laid the foundation for many of the aforementioned women's involvement in suffrage.

Education reform was extremely important within the suffrage movement, particularly for the second generation of women like Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, Louie Bennett, Helen Chenevix and Mary Hayden who benefitted from the early reforms and became university graduates. Many of these women went to Alexandra College which was founded in 1866 by Anne Jellicoe with the aim of furthering women's education. Under Jellicoe, the school grew from a small establishment into a pioneering force for women's rights and education, providing an education to women equivalent to that available in boys' schools. In 1879 the Royal University of Ireland Act allowed women to take university degrees on the same basis as men and Alexandra students were now also prepared for the university entrance exams. Alexandra College moved to new grounds in Milltown in the 1960s to accommodate more students and the original buildings were later demolished.

And so ends our short walking tour around Dublin city. If you are interested in learning more about the people and places of the suffrage movement in Ireland here are a number of great books and resources to start you on your journey.

BIFF! BANG! BASH!

(A Song of Some Suffragette.)

By S. H. Y.

Air: Any air—fresh preferred.



'Biff! Bang! Bash!',
Lepracaun, 1912
(Courtesy of Dublin City
Library and Archives)

Sing "Biff! Bang! Bash!"
With a right good smash.
Heave ho, with a one, two, three.
A big stone dash
Through a window crash!
Then, hurrah for liberty!

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Tenements, suburbia and the remarkable architect Herbert Simms

Donal Fallon, Historian in Residence, Dublin North West

If there is anything more depressing than a study of Dublin's slums in detail it is a study of Dublin's slum-dwellers... They look like people who have no healthy interests, no fresh and natural desires, nothing that the wildest imagination could call dreams; people who go through life as a narrow, burdensome, unintelligible pilgrimage; they have lost the capacity of sympathy, understanding and hope.

WILLIAM PATRICK RYAN'S *The Pope's Green Island*, 1912.

2018 witnessed renewed interest in the history of public housing in Dublin. The 120th anniversary of the birth of Herbert George Simms, Dublin's Housing Architect from 1932 until his death in 1948, was one contributing factor, but so too was the worsening housing crisis, and the opening of 14 Henrietta Street, a new museum which tells the story of tenement Dublin within its broader narrative.

The story of tenement Dublin – and the solutions to it – has direct appeal in the contemporary city, which grapples with the question of public housing solutions going forward. It is unsurprising that the story of Herbert Simms has resonated so strongly in recent times; in his time as Housing Architect, Simms was responsible for the design and construction of some 17,000 new dwellings in Dublin, ranging from suburban housing schemes in Cabra and Crumlin to beautifully designed Art Deco flat blocks in the city centre. From Chancery House, nestled behind the iconic Four Courts, to Marrowbone Lane, neighbouring the Guinness Brewery, his work still stands on both sides of the Liffey today, showing that even against the backdrop of economic uncertainty, it was possible to tackle the housing crisis of the day head on.



Chancery House flats, photographed by Paul Reynolds as part of Simms120 project documenting the work of Herbert Simms in Dublin

Frank McDonald, author of *The Destruction of Dublin* and former planning correspondent with the *Irish Times*, has described Simms' work, quite rightly, as 'heroic.'

In his time, remarkable leaps forward were made – the population of Cabra increased from 5,326 in 1926 to 19,119 in 1936. Still, it is his fundamental belief that people could and should live in the city that makes Simms such an interesting subject. In cases like the Marrowbone Lane scheme, new public housing of the highest calibre was built where some of the worst of tenement Dublin had stood before.

In Dublin, the ages of history fall on top of another, and the worst excesses of the tenement city in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were to be found amidst former Georgian splendour. The writer, politician and raconteur Oliver St. John Gogarty found much beauty in the Dublin of the early twentieth century:

Today on both sides of the river the city is covered with the most perfect examples of Georgian architecture that remain, now that a great part of London is demolished or replaced. Dublin stands about its river very much as when the City Fathers planned it at the end of the 18th Century.

Dublin was a beautiful city if one didn't look beyond the façade. In contrast to Gogarty, trade unionist Jim Larkin Junior recounted in his statement to the Bureau of Military History that 'Dublin was the capital city, a city of fine Georgian houses which had been slowly rotting away for a hundred years and which had become an ever growing cancer of horrible, inhuman, dirty, vermin infested tenements, unequalled by any modern city in Europe.'

The origins of Dublin's tenement crisis were somewhat unique in the British Empire. It was rapid industrialisation which created the slumdums of cities like Edinburgh and Manchester – in both cases particularly grim districts gained the title of 'Little Ireland' – while in Dublin the absence of industry was the most significant factor to the emergence of the tenement landscape. Quite simply, as Joseph V. O'Brien notes in his classic study *Dear, Dirty Dublin: A City in Distress, 1899-1916*, 'it was a city undergoing industrial decline and demographic stagnation at a time when others were experiencing rapid industrial growth and population increase. Belfast stood proudly as Ireland's industrial capital, while Dublin was a fallen political capital, lacking so much as a native parliament.'

'The Slumowner' looming large over inner-city Dublin, Lepracaun, 1911 (Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)



TOWN PLANNING (Latest Scheme)
MOTTO—"EXCELSIOR!"
Certainly! Abolish the tenements. Each family a cottage. Suburbs being too far for workers, central ground rent too dear, there being no charge for sky space, the higher the air the purer, we'll build the cottages on top of each other.

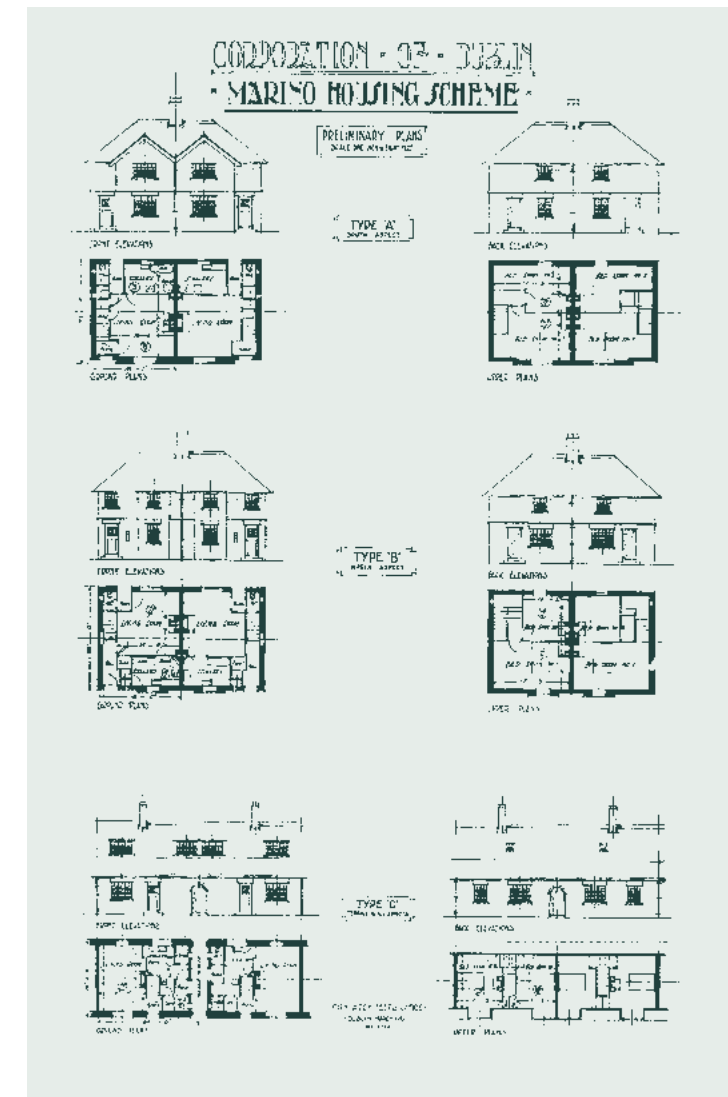
Town Planning (Latest Scheme) – Plan for Workmen's Cottages, Lepracaun, 1914 (Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)

Primary source materials that allow us to paint a clear picture of the extent of the problem include Housing Reports and, perhaps most crucially, the 1901 and 1911 census returns. In the latter, we see the pre-eminence of ‘general labourers’ in the metropolis, they being unskilled workers who were largely at the mercy of precarious employment. Labour historian Pádraig Yeates notes that at some 45,000 workers, they accounted for ‘a seventh of the entire population and a third of the labour force.’ Earning something between 15 shillings and 25 shillings a week, such labourers were entirely at the mercy of private landlords. The census returns also demonstrate the diversity of labour living within tenements, perhaps proving Ernie O’Malley’s wry observation that in Irish towns and cities ‘the grades in social difference were as numerous as the layers of an onion.’ Henrietta Street in 1901 was home to 141 families, consisting of 897 people, on a street that boasted only sixteen houses. In the mix were fish mongers, apprentice book binders, general labourers, corporation labourers, plumbers and housekeepers.

Housing Reports were almost routine condemnations of local government. The 1914 *Report into Housing Conditions*, published in the aftermath of the collapse of two tenement homes on Church Street in September 1913, revealed that fourteen members of Dublin Corporation were themselves slum landlords. One member, Alderman Corrigan, owned nineteen tenement houses and a further thirteen smaller houses across the city. The report made for shocking reading, detailing how there were 2,288 tenement houses ‘which are so decayed or so badly constructed as to be on or fast approaching the border-line of being unfit for human habitation.’ Crucially, the report pinpointed land on the periphery of the city which could be utilised for the construction of public housing, including Crumlin, Cabra, Ballyfermot, Donnycarney, Inchicore and Marino.

By the 1880s, Dublin Corporation was constructing its first public housing schemes, though not without criticism. The Benburb Street scheme, commenced in 1886 and completed the following year, saw the construction of 144 small flats, designed by the City Architect, D.J. Freeman, and described by architectural historian Murray Fraser as ‘consciously austere four-story blocks in the manner of tenements erected by the Glasgow Improvement Trust.’ Built to low constructional and sanitary standards, they also suffered from their geographic location in the shadow of the Royal Barracks. The area was of ill-repute; one contemporary military journal noted that the area was home to ‘dens of filth and iniquity’, awash with ‘the most abandoned crew of rogues and prostitutes which even all Dublin, with its unhappy pre-eminence in that species of population, can produce.’

Repeating the same mistake, the next significant Corporation public housing project was Corporation Buildings, located in the midst of the city’s notorious Monto (red-light) district. It wasn’t long before loss-making rents were introduced, and the reputation of Corporation Buildings remained bleak into subsequent decades. During the famous ‘Animal Gang’ court cases of the 1930s, when Gardaí clamped down on inner-city youth violence in Dublin, one judge remarked that Corporation Buildings were ‘unfit for human habitation’ and that no ‘Christian or civilised person could truly emerge from being raised within them.’



Marino Preliminary Plans No. 1 March 1919 (Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)

Beyond the Corporation, the semi-philanthropic Dublin Artisan Dwelling Company (established in 1876) constructed durable and well-designed cottages in places like Stoneybatter, Harold's Cross and Rathmines, but the rent on the 'small neat red brick homes' (as one project in the Coombe was described in the Press) was above and beyond that of a general labourer.

Post-independence, the first government of the Free State was faced with a capital city that Harry Clarke captured beautifully in his frontispiece to Patrick Abercrombie's *Dublin of the Future: the New Town Plan* (1922). Entitled 'The Last Hour of the Night', Clarke's illustration shows a terrifying figure – resembling the haunting Nosferatu – amidst the ruins of Dublin. Gandon's masterpiece, the Custom House, is engulfed by flames, the Four Courts and the General Post Office likewise. Yet in addition to these Georgian icons, we see a rickety tenement block. It too posed a dilemma for the new state.

The first significant public housing endeavour of the Free State administration was the Marino scheme, constructed in the style of the Garden City model which had first been proposed by Ebenezer Howard in 1898. This emphasis on green space, gardens and communal parks was a radically new approach to public housing, with Ciara Mitchel maintaining that 'Howard's idea of returning to the fresh air and open expanses of the countryside appealed to the Irish national romanticism of the new state and his vision of individual houses, grouped around communal garden spaces became hugely influential in early Irish social housing initiatives such as Marino.'

Much like the houses of the Dublin Artisan Dwelling Company, the primary criticism levelled against the Marino scheme concerned its relatively high rents. To the *Irish Times*, 'The people who will be lucky enough to get the new houses, and will be able to pay for them, are not slum-dwellers in the conventional sense of the term; in fact, they are among the aristocracy of labour in Dublin.' The initial Marino scheme comprised 428 houses, and was a tenant-purchase scheme, encouraging Dubliners towards the aspiration of owning their own home; the houses had cost £659 each to build.

The general election of 1932 remains the most embittered of post-independence Irish political history, with the out-going government party portraying itself as the 'sole bulwark against terror and Communism,' while presenting Fianna Fáil as a party of socialistic ideology. The tone was set by W.T. Cosgrave, leader of Cumann na nGaedheal at a rally in the Mansion House at the opening of campaigning, proclaiming that a Fianna Fáil government would transform the nation into 'a field for the cultivation



The Last Hour of the Night.

Harry Clarke's frontispiece for *Dublin of the Future: the New Town Plan* by Patrick Abercrombie (Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)

of those doctrines of materialism and communism which can so effectively poison the wells of religion and national traditions.’



The Chancery Park entrance, photographed by Paul Reynolds as part of Simms120 project documenting the work of Herbert Simms in Dublin.

changes were apace too in Dublin Corporation, with the creation of a specific office of Housing Architect. Prior to 1932, the task of public housing fell under the remit of the City Architect. Now, there was new emphasis on the important task of building working class housing. Dublin's first Housing Architect was Herbert George Simms.

A Londoner, Herbert Simms entered the service of Dublin Corporation at the age of twenty-seven, a veteran of the First World War who had served with the Royal Field Artillery. A scholarship received in the aftermath of the war allowed him to study architecture at Liverpool University, and he was appointed temporary architect to Dublin Corporation in February 1925. From the beginning of his employment with the Corporation, his focus was very much on working class housing, and in 1926 he was authorized to visit London, Liverpool and Manchester to investigate the latest trends in flat building there.

The anti-communist rhetoric of Cosgrave's party was reflective of something broader in 1930s society. To the *Irish Times*, the slums were 'Dublin's deepest shame and gravest peril' and it was 'almost a miracle that hitherto communism has not flourished aggressively in that hideous soil.' There was little communistic about the programme of Fianna Fáil however, which was more rooted in social democracy. In Dublin and other urban centres, Fianna Fáil candidates made housing an election issue, pledging to tackle the tenement crisis. Labour leader Willie Norton made it clear in election rallies that 'any government that fights hunger and starvation and makes war on the slums will have our support.'

The coming to power of Fianna Fáil in 1932 was a landmark moment, but



Herbert Simms, Dublin Corporation Public Housing architect (Courtesy of Irish Architectural Archive)

Christine Casey, a leading authority on Dublin's architectural heritage, has written of the distinctive nature of much of his output, noting how:

Simms developed formulae for inner-city blocks of flats, which derived ultimately from Dutch housing design, but probably more directly from contemporary British models. They are generally composed of three or four storey perimeter walk-up blocks with galleried rear elevations and stair-towers facing large inner-courtyards.

Simms had a great appreciation for the contemporary styles popular in Dutch public housing, and there are echoes of Amsterdam and Rotterdam in his inner-city work. In particular, the influence of Michel de Klerk is obvious. A founder of the Amsterdam school of expressionist architecture, de Klerk had done wonders in Amsterdam where working class housing standards had declined sharply during the rapid industrialisation of the city.

Particularly popular is the Chancery House scheme beside the Four Courts, completed by June 1935. Though comprising just twenty-seven flats, it is considered a master class in public housing, and boasts a beautiful small garden, an important communal feature. Gardens and shared courtyards are frequent features of many of the inner-city housing schemes. Simms told a Housing Inquiry that he firmly believed the homes he was constructing would outlast the slum dwellings they were replacing. To him, 'flats should last at least 200 years... providing they were properly maintained.'

Simms is primarily remembered today for his work in the city, but he was also responsible for the erection of new dwellings in the suburbs, including in Cabra and Crumlin. Of course, rehousing people beyond the city in new suburbs brought its own challenges, and social alienation was very real; Brendan Behan would quip that there was no such thing as suburbia, only Siberia. Behan's mother Kathleen would recall that, 'Crumlin was a desperate place when first we went there: no schools, no shops, nothing, except plenty of desolation... There was a spirit in Russell Street that you could hardly imagine in Crumlin.'

Simms recognised the need to provide for the needs of communities. Speaking in 1935, Simms outlined his belief that 'you cannot re-house a population of 15,000 people, as in the Crumlin scheme, without providing for the other necessities and amenities of life.'

In Dublin, the period in which Simms worked witnessed real political pressure for change in public housing. The *Irish Press*, essentially the newspaper of Fianna Fáil, called for war on the slums, though the paper routinely presented them as a product of British imperialism, noting that it was Britain that 'left to the Free State its inheritance of slumdom.' Others, more accurately, pointed the finger of blame at domestic landlords. The Republican Congress, a small but influential left-wing split from the ranks of the Irish Republican Army which included Peadar O'Donnell, Frank Ryan and others in its ranks, organised Dubliners into Tenant Leagues, seeking reductions in rent and improvements in conditions. These Tenant Leagues won a number of victories, with Patrick Byrne of the Republican Congress recalling how, 'On one occasion the Third Dublin District Committee carried on a rent strike for two months affecting five streets in the vicinity of Westland Row, and finally won a 25% reduction in rent. At the same time the Fourth District Committee won rehousing by the Dublin Corporation for the tenants of Magee Court, a collection of filthy cottages fit only for the vermin abounding therein.' The Republican Congress also called for direct consultation with those who lived in Dublin tenements in seeking solutions for them, arguing for a Commission 'on which the slum-tenants will sit. That is the only Commission that will satisfy the tenants, and that is the only Commission that would lead to the ending of slums.'

The retirement of the City Architect, Horace O'Rourke, in 1945 left a greatly increased workload for Simms, who found himself essentially occupying the office of both Housing and City Architect. Simms was certainly overworked, to such an extent that in September 1948 he took his own life, throwing himself in front of a train near Coal Quay Bridge in Dun Laoghaire. His suicide note, reprinted in the *Irish Press*, noted:

I cannot stand it any longer, my brain is too tired to work any more. It has not had a rest for 20 years except when I am in heavy sleep. It is always on the go like a dynamo and still the work is being piled on to me.

In a fine tribute shortly afterwards, the City Surveyor Ernest Taylor remembered him as a man who had done much for the poorest in Dublin:

By sheer hard work and conscientious devotion to duty, he has made a personal contribution towards the solution of Dublin's housing problem, probably unequalled by anyone in our time... It is not given to many of us to achieve so much in the space of a short lifetime for the benefit of our fellow men.

Large attendances at public talks dedicated to Herbert Simms in 2018, and the participation of communities with the Simms120 project and conference, demonstrated the continued respect for the work of this pioneering architect. Now more than ever, we can learn from the vision of Herbert George Simms.



The Marrowbone Lane flats, photographed by Paul Reynolds as part of Simms120 project documenting the work of Herbert Simms in Dublin.

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'My Dear Men': The Monica Roberts Collection from the First World War

Bernard Kelly, Historian in Residence, Dublin City Library and Archives

Monica Roberts was a twenty-four-year-old woman from an affluent family living in Stillorgan when the United Kingdom entered the First World War in August 1914. Her father, W.R. Roberts, was a Protestant minister and a Trinity College academic. A strong supporter of the war, Monica and a group of like-minded friends established 'The Band of Helpers for the Soldiers', a voluntary group dedicated to sending care packages to the troops in the front line. Monica asked that members of the Band pay three pence upon joining, which would go towards the purchase of 'Handkerchiefs, boot-laces, chocolate, peppermint, dried fruits, briar pipes and tobacco pouches, tobacco, cigarettes, cigarette-tobacco and cigarette-papers, small tins of boracic ointment or borated Vaseline for sore feet, antiseptic powder, postcards, pocket knives, lead pencils etc.' At one point, the Band contained 150 members and many shops installed collection boxes for the group. Each parcel that was dispatched to the front contained a hand-written letter from Monica (or her sister). In return, they received a steady stream of replies from grateful soldiers and airmen; a total of 453 letters and postcards from fifty-three predominantly Irish members of the British army and Royal Flying Corps which makes up the Monica Roberts collection, held in Dublin City Library and Archives as part of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association Archive.

The Band of Helpers was part of the large-scale civilian mobilisation that took place in Ireland during the First World War. The military aspect of Ireland's war is well known: an estimated 210,000 Irish joined the British forces, with the bulk of these following the traditional path into the British army. However, Irish civil society also mobilised to assist the war effort, either in a general way or to help address specific needs, such as caring for wounded soldiers, helping to house refugees fleeing from the war or, as in the case of the Band of Helpers, making life more comfortable for

No. 67887

POLICE CERTIFICATE OF IDENTITY.
(See instructions overleaf.)

SURNAME (in block letters) **Roberts.**

Christian Names **Monica Katherine**

Age **28** Height **5 ft 4 in** Profession or Occupation **=**

Permanent Address **Kelston, Stillorgan Co. Dublin, Ireland.**

DECLARATION.—I declare that the above particulars are true.
Signature of person named above **Monica K. Roberts.**

CERTIFICATE A.—I certify that the above description and photograph is that of **Miss M. K. Roberts.**
Signature of Police or responsible householder **Wm C Blaney.**
Address **2, Bank Buildings** Date **16 July 1918**

CERTIFICATE B.—I certify that Mr. **Edwards** who has signed the above Certificate A is a responsible householder in this district.
Signature of Police **Edwards**
Police Station **Edwards** Date **17 July 1918**

PHOTOGRAPH.



PERMIT.
(For conditions see back.)

PERMIT TO IRELAND.
17 JUL. 1918
VALID FOR 3 MONTHS

Monica Roberts identity card (Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)

front-line troops. Around 3,000 Belgian refugees arrived in Ireland during the war, and a wide variety of local and national groups rallied to their cause, collecting money, providing accommodation and sourcing employment. Some organisations, again like the Band, were set up just for the war, but pre-war organisations which ostensibly had little to do with the conflict, such as the Irish Automobile Club, also attempted to do their bit. In some cases, voluntary war work served a twin purpose: the Distressed Ladies' Association, based in Dawson Street, created clothing for the troops and at the same time provided employment for jobless women. In most cases, these voluntary groups were explicitly pro-Allied, but there were some which bucked the trend. The Society of Friends, better known as the Quakers, established and ran a committee which provided aid to the German, Austrian and Hungarian civilians interned in Ireland during the war, which was not a popular action to take given public feeling against the Central Powers and Germany in particular.

Each home comforts group was encouraged to 'adopt' their own regiment or unit, and the majority of the parcels sent by the Band of Helpers were sent to the Royal Dublin Fusiliers (RDF). The RDF was created in 1881 and was one of eight Irish regiments of the British army which were established in the 19th Century as part of a policy of localisation of British forces. By creating units which had local connections, the British government hoped to raise the profile of the forces and encourage more enlistment from the regions of the United Kingdom. This also extended to the Royal Navy: HMS Hibernia was launched in 1905 and HMS Dublin in 1912 and the latter fought at the battle of Jutland. The act of adopting their local regiment was one way in which civilians could support the war effort and express solidarity with the troops at the front, while also emotionally engaging civilians with the war. As Monica herself

RULES FOR BAND OF HELPERS TO THE SOLDIERS.

1. This Society will last during the War, and shall be called "Band of Helpers for the Soldiers".
2. Members pay 3d on being enrolled, which sum will go towards buying comforts, also for postage of goods to the Front.
3. Members to send monthly, addressed to Miss Monica Roberts, Kelston, Stillorgan some contribution, however small, either in money, or any of the following articles, all of which are said to be useful by the War office. Handkerchiefs, boot-laces, chocolate, peppermint, dried fruits, briar pipes and tobacco pouches, tobacco, cigarettes, cigarette-tobacco and cigarette-papers, small tins of boracic ointment or borated vasoline for sore feet, antiseptic powder, post cards, pocket knives, lead pencils etc.
4. These articles will be forwarded monthly to the Dublin Fusiliers, and the Royal Flying Corps.
5. If the Society grows, and receives good support, more regiments could be included, but at present, the above mentioned will be all to whom this Society will contribute.
6. Members are requested to kindly tell their friends about this Society, for as many members as possible are required.

Monica K. Roberts.

Rules of the Band of Helpers to the Soldiers (Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)

The collection itself is a fascinating snapshot of life in the front line and the correspondence is filled with poignant personal details. They are reflective of the concerns of the soldiers and their preoccupation with their own situation, rather than the wider context of the war. In December 1917 Private Edward Mordaunt of the 2nd Battalion of the RDF wrote to the Roberts sisters, thanking them for his Christmas parcel

wrote, 'Everyone in Ireland is very proud of all our brave Dublin Fusiliers have done at the Front.' For the soldiers receiving the packages, the arrival of even small personal items from home was vital to maintaining their morale, distracting them from the horrors of war surrounding them and subtly reminding them of what they were fighting for. The Band responded quickly to Monica's appeal. By October 1914 she reported that she had been able to send out 4,428 cigarettes, 172 handkerchiefs, 158 pairs of boot laces, 116 tins of boracic ointment, fourteen packets of tobacco along with 'chocolate, peppermint, postcards, pencils' to the front.

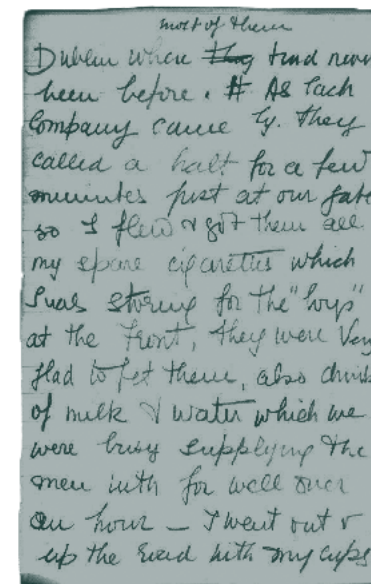
of a 'shirt, socks, mittens, scarf, writing paper and especially the cigarets [sic] which I needed very badly.' Clean and fresh socks were especially important to soldiers in the trenches where the near-constant immersion of soldiers' feet in mud and water lead to painful conditions such as 'trench foot', which could lead to amputation in extreme cases. Troops regularly spent extended periods of time in these conditions; Mordaunt himself complained of being 'up to our chests in water' while on duty. As Harry Loughlin of the 1st Battalion RDF wrote to Monica in January 1917, 'the socks are the most thing we require, owing to the amount of wet and damp feet. Likewise, they are so different from the army issue and comfortably soft in our heavy boots.' Cigarettes were often top of the list of items requested from the Band, to supplement the meagre army tobacco ration. Smoking was almost universal in the early 20th Century and the trade journal *Tobacco* wrote in October 1914 that, 'it might almost be said that a man in the firing line thinks first of his cartridges and the very next thing he worries about is ammunition for his pipe. The pipe itself is only less precious than the rifle.' One particularly distressing request for tobacco received by Monica came from Private J. O'Halloran, 2nd Battalion RDF, who wrote that he was, 'at present in Norwich War Hospital having had my right leg amputated from above the right knee. I was wounded on Sept 28th at Ypres through the right knee which necessitated in my right leg having to be amputated from just above the knee... I would much like some cigarettes as we get practically any [sic].'



Military postcard sent to Monica Roberts, 1916
(Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)

Monica not only empathised with the men at the front, she also wholeheartedly supported the Allied cause. In one letter, she wrote to 'My dear men', saying that she was 'sure we are going to give the Germans a beating they won't forget in a hurry, and which they richly deserve.' She also detailed how she confronted a door-to-door salesman whom she suspected of being a foreign agent because of his broken English; she had, as she described it, 'spy fever.' When the Rising broke out in April 1916, she was horrified at the loss of life and destruction of the city centre. She kept a diary of her experiences in Dublin during the Rising, which is an important eye-witness account of the event that would change Ireland forever. Monica's first impression of the rebellion was the immediate dislocation it caused to everyday life:

the trains had stopped; post offices and shops were closed, and the telephone lines were reserved for military calls only. One consistent theme through the diary is the constant difficulty in finding food and she therefore greeted the arrival of British reinforcements with delight and relief: 'It was grand to see our Tommies & they gave one a great sense of security' as they marched past on their way from Dun Laoghaire. So pleased was she to see these troops that she distributed cigarettes to them which she had been storing for the men at the front, and also handed out cups of water and milk. Later, when she saw Red Cross personnel carrying stretchers, she thought 'it makes one cold to think of the fighting that may take place soon & the useless waste of our soldiers' lives.' She did not hold back in her feelings about the Rising. 'It is awful to feel our own people have betrayed us', she wrote on Thursday 25th April 1916. She greeted the surrender of the rebels in the last entry on the diary with the simple phrase 'Such a lovely, lovely day.'



Monica Roberts' diary of the
1916 Rising (Courtesy of Dublin
City Library and Archives)

Monica's reaction to the Rising was mirrored in the letters from the soldiers at the front, many of whom wrote to her to register their disgust at the events in Ireland. The Royal Dublin Fusiliers drew a great deal of recruits from the city of Dublin and particularly from inner-city areas, which meant that some were personally affected by the fighting. Private Joseph Clark wrote to Monica in May 1916 lamenting the fact that 'one or two poor fellows have lost relatives in this scandalous affair.' Clark's remedy to the situation was simple. 'We of the 2nd Battn the Dublins would ask for nothing better than the rebels should be sent out here and have an encounter with some of their ("so called allies" "the Germans")... these men are pro-Germans pure and simple and no Irish-men will be sorry when they get justice meted out to them which in my opinion should be Death by being shot.' Other soldiers expressed similar sentiments. Sergeant John Brooks wrote on 14 June 1916 that 'I think in my opinion it is scandalous for any civilized people for to do such a thing... I think I have said enough on the subject of Dublin only if I had my way I would shoot every one of them.' Similarly, William de Combe in July 1917 offered the rebels 'No Mercy. They are nothing more than traitors.'

Another event which provoked the soldiers to fury was the fate of British nurse Edith Cavell. She was the matron of a nurse training school in Brussels when the war broke out in August 1914; the city was occupied by the Germans the following November. Cavell was suspected of assisting Allied prisoners of war, as well as French and Belgian civilians, escape from occupied Belgium and was arrested in August 1915. Accused of treason under German military law, Cavell was tried by court martial, found guilty and sentenced to death. Despite a worldwide outcry and multiple appeals for clemency, Cavell was executed by firing squad on 12 October 1915. Cavell's death was immediately condemned in the Irish press and used to call for recruits for the forces and conscription. Under the headline 'Murdered because she was an Englishwoman', the *Irish Times* reported on 1 November 1915 that the execution was justification for compulsory military service.

Cavell's death was widely used in Allied propaganda, particularly in posters and postcards. One example of a French Cavell postcard, exhorting the reader to 'Remember' the murder of nurse Cavell, is contained in the Monica Roberts collection, depicted a German soldier standing over Cavell's body, with the point being reinforced by the fact that Cavell is shown still in her nurses' uniform. Private Joseph Elley of 2nd

Postcard depicting the execution of Edith Cavell
(Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)



Battalion RDF wrote to Monica, asking 'what do you think of poor Nurse Cavell, it was a brutal affair don't you think so? All the boys will never forget things like that if we get the chance. I am glad that the men left at home are still rallying round the flag to avenge those good lads that we lose every day.'

Along with individual letters from the soldiers, the Monica Roberts collection also contains a significant number of postcards. The early 20th Century was known as the 'Golden Age of Postcards', an era that was made possible by a combination of an increasingly sophisticated postal system and the rapid advance of the techniques of mass production. The first official postage stamp was introduced in Britain in 1840, while the postcard appeared in Germany and Austria in 1870. Initially they were expensive to produce and to buy and were confined to commemorative events. However, the move away from woodcut or engraved printing to the cheaper and faster lithographic method meant that postcards could be printed quickly in huge quantities. Soon, rather than marking events, postcards were being produced commercially and the connection between holidays and postcards meant that they became almost universal from the 1880s onwards.

The Monica Roberts collection contains three types of postcards (see overleaf). The first is the standard military postcard, which was a simple and unadorned item, usually with a patriotic message printed in one corner. There was room for very little text on these and they were the cheapest variety on offer. The second is the more expensive, but still very cheap, commercial illustrated postcard which were produced in their millions across the continent. Selling them to soldiers provided a steady stream of income to merchants behind the front lines; popular cards often depicted military scenes, famous local landmarks or the classic trope of the uniformed man wistfully remembering the girl he left behind. The last and most expensive were the embroidered postcards. Usually done in silk, these first appeared in France around 1907 and generally carried personalised messages. Their popularity was sustained during the war by soldiers sending them to loved ones at home, with the embroidered images usually being national flags, regimental or unit emblems and mottos, or patriotic catchphrases. These were far more expensive to buy than standard postcards and were usually accompanied by a letter, as the sender would not want to ruin the complex needlework by writing on the card underneath. The embroidery was done by hand before being sent to a factory to have the cardboard attached and usually they were sold with envelopes to protect them in the post. They were popular in cities and towns with a heavy military presence and they were sent in large numbers at particular times of the year: on anniversaries or at Christmas. The sheer number

of embroidered postcards sent by the recipients of Monica's packages, which would have represented a significant outlay of between one and three francs for poorly-paid soldiers, is a testament to the gratitude felt by the men for the items they received.

The Monica Roberts letters are a unique resource of primary source documents which are invaluable in understanding Dublin's connection to the First World War. They portray Irish soldiers and the conditions they endured at the front in detail – or, at least, as much detail as the military censor would allow. Conscious that the letters would be opened and read, the writers displayed a level of self-censorship, generally not including information regarding where they were in the line or whether operations were upcoming. They are emotive, subjective and highly personalised, portraying history from below rather than from above. Most importantly, they are an illustration that Dublin's, and Ireland's, connection to the conflict should not just be measured in the number of recruits who joined the forces. Irish civil society was mobilised for and engaged with the war. Groups such as the Band of Helpers showed that the links between the home front and the fighting line were much closer than we might realise.



Military postcard (Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)



Embroidered postcard sent to Monica Roberts (Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)



Printed picture postcard (Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)

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100 Years of Fairview's Edge Hardware: 1917–2017

Cormac Moore, Historian in Residence, Dublin North Central

Founded by Elias Edge in 1917, Edge Hardware has been in existence and an integral part of the Fairview community for over 100 years. Elias Edge senior was born in Wicklow in 1872. By 1901, he lived on Eccles Street with his English-born wife Gertrude, and their two daughters Gertrude and Rowena. He worked as a stock-keeper in Hampton Leedom, a large English-owned hardware merchant on Henry Street. A fellow employee at Hampton Leedom was the future playwright, Seán O'Casey who was hired as a junior delivery clerk. Whilst there, O'Casey claimed to have robbed everything that wasn't nailed down. He took matches, soap, candles, ink, ketchup, tins of enamel, knives, forks, spoons, hairbrushes, eggcups, toys and other items too numerous to list. James Joyce referenced Hampton Leedom in his book, *Ulysses*. The novel's hero, Leopold Bloom, was advised that prostitutes would 'spit in your ten shilling brass fender from Hampton Leedom's.'

By 1911, now a father of four and living on Connaught Street, Phibsborough, Elias had progressed from a stock-keeper to a hardware charge-hand. He remained working in Hampton Leedom on Henry Street until Easter week, 1916.

The Easter Rising started in April 1916 and with it ended Elias' career at Hampton Leedom. Most of Henry Street was destroyed during the week-long rebellion. Hampton Leedom was burnt and destroyed on the Saturday night of the Rising. The incident was described in the Dublin Fire Brigade Ambulance Log Book, where it was stated, 'one of the most spectacular fires was at Hampton Leedom in Henry Street on the Saturday sometime after 10 pm. It was reported as an awe-inspiring sight as multi-coloured flames from the oil stores shot skywards and oil barrels exploded.' The business itself did recover from the Rising but eventually closed its doors for the last time in 1928.

Elias, now 44 with six mouths to feed and no job, decided to take matters into his own hands. He rented a premises north of the city centre at 2 Fairview Corner. The premises not only became their business but also home to the Edge family, with a two bedroom flat above overlooking the main street of Fairview and Fairview Park.

In March 1917, the shop opened as Elias Edge Hardware and China Merchants. The Fairview Elias and Gertrude moved to was still reeling from the Rising the year before. It was home to many of the key participants involved in the burgeoning Irish Revolution. One of the main architects of the Easter Rising, Thomas Clarke, lived for some time in Richmond Avenue, Fairview from 1910 with his wife Kathleen. Kathleen's brother Edward (Ned) Daly, moved into the house with them in 1912. Both men were executed for their part in the Easter Rising.

Fairview and Marino had hosted demonstrations for the Irish Citizen Army and the locked-out workers of 1913. Close by, at the Clontarf Town Hall, a decision was made by the Irish Republican Brotherhood Supreme Council in January 1916 to launch a rebellion that Easter.

When the Rising started, there was some activity in Fairview as volunteers, many of them local residents, sought to prevent British troops entering the city centre via Fairview. Captained by Frank Henderson, volunteers including Harry Boland, Oscar Traynor and Seán Russell attempted to hold the British at bay as they tried to force their way through Fairview and Annesley Bridge. Seán T. O'Kelly, future president of Ireland, was ordered by James Connolly to take between twenty and thirty men with him to Fairview to help the volunteers. After some successes and losses, the volunteers moved towards the epicentre of the battle, many of them ending up in the GPO.

Other local residents who played an active part in the Irish Revolution included trade-unionist Rosie Hackett, who lived with her half-brother in Marino; Nellie Gifford and her sisters who lived for a time in Philipsburgh Avenue; Cathal Brugha who was born in Fairview; Jack Shouldice and Frank Robbins lived there too. Perhaps they frequented this new, local hardware shop!

Initially when the shop opened, both Elias and Gertrude worked there and employed a woman server and a messenger boy. Their eldest son Elias Junior, who was 14 in 1917, also worked in the shop at this time. The delivery boys delivered between ten and twelve gallons of oil around Fairview on bicycles. It was a herculean feat for the boys, considering the bikes were very heavy, even when empty.

Customers who remembered Elias Senior recall him as quite the gentleman, wearing his distinctive bowler hat and smoking his pipe. He was a hard-working man always trying to build on his business. The shop had to endure many incidents of inclement weather during its one hundred years in existence. In January 1920, a gale reaching 70 miles per hour caused severe damage in Dublin. One boy lost his life and many properties were damaged, including Edge Hardware, which according to the *Irish Times* had its plate glass windows blown in. Many other buildings in Fairview and Clontarf suffered severe damage due to the storm.

By 1922, the shop was thriving and was able to expand. It installed a road side petrol pump, the first to be seen on the North side of Dublin. The area was still affected by the turbulences of the previous ten years where one of the most brutal incidents of the civil war occurred in Fairview in December 1922. Anti-Treatyite republicans approached the family home of Seán McGarry, Pro-Treaty T.D. who lived on Philipsburgh Avenue.



Elias Edge Senior and his son George outside Edge Hardware Shop, 1922 (Courtesy of Beverly Edge)

They claimed to have a special delivery letter for McGarry and forced their way into the house. They sprayed the top half of the house, the stairwell and ground floor with petrol, and set the house alight. The only occupants in the house at that time were two women and two small children. Both children (Emmet and Sadie) were rescued, however Emmet died shortly afterwards from horrendous burns.

In 1926, Elias bought the property to the rear of the shop with a mortgage and employed architects to design and build for him what was, at the time, a high-tech petrol station and garage. He wanted his son George, a trained mechanic, to run the garage with him running the shop and they did this for a time. However, this was not the path that George wanted to take and he later became a motor insurance assessor. The running of the garage as well as the shop was simply too much for Elias to undertake, and so the garage was sold in 1953. It remained a garage until 2002 when it was closed for good and re-opened in 2005 as a Centra supermarket. It is now a Eurospar (2018).

The opening of the garage was big news for the local area and received significant news coverage. In one detailed write-up it was recorded that, 'The new petrol station and garage has been designed by Mr. Henry J. Lyons, F.R.I.B.A., architect, for Mr E. Edge, and has been constructed chiefly as a petrol station, where cars can run in easily off the road, and obtain petrol under cover, independent of weather conditions. Facilities are provided for repairs and overhauling of cars.'

As the shop expanded, Elias had to deal with some unsavoury incidents over the years. In 1929, a husband and wife from Lombard Street were brought to court for obtaining goods and money from Elias under false pretences. The wife received a stove worth 21 shillings and an advance of £4.7s and one and a half pence in cash, based on a cheque she endorsed, claiming they were building houses in Clontarf. Unfortunately for Elias, the cheque bounced, resulting in the court case.

Also in 1929, Elias had to deal with a severe flood that struck Fairview in August of that year. The wooden covers of the pits at the garage were washed out onto the street. Elias told the *Irish Times* that in order to save his property from being carried away by the flood, or damaged by getting wet, he had to work for some hours in eighteen inches of water. Windsor Avenue, opposite the garage, resembled a canal.

In 1934, a young boy painted words in graffiti on a wall adjoining Edge Hardware. When arrested by a Garda he said he had nothing to say. In court he refused to give his name and address, claiming, 'as a soldier of the Republican Army he refused to

give his name.' The judge replied that he was in, 'a court of justice and not a stage for the comedy of pantomime with slapstick clown and slippered pantaloons,' remanding the boy in custody for one week.

Although over a decade old, the Irish Free State was still feeling the effects of its violent beginnings. In 1935, an ex-Royal Irish Constabulary pensioner living in Melrose Avenue, Fairview was admitted to Mater Hospital in critical condition after being stabbed in the throat.

Elias, a keen motorcar enthusiast, also had his own brushes with the law. In 1938 he had to pay £1,500 plus costs to a university tutor who was struck by one of his cars at the garage. When he was 83, he also knocked down a Garda cycling a bike, with his van. It all ended amicably though, as the Garda was not hurt and was happy with a new bicycle.

Although Ireland was neutral during the Second World War, the local area was affected more than most places in the twenty-six counties. In March 1941, a British Blenheim bomber made a crash-landing on the strand in Clontarf. The Polish pilot escaped without injury but was interned in the Curragh camp until 1943. The bomber was recovered from the sea and returned to England.

Just two months later a far greater tragedy occurred nearby. On the night of 31 May 1941, four high-explosive bombs were dropped by German aircraft on the North Strand area of Dublin City. The casualties were many: 28 dead and 90 injured, with 300 houses damaged or destroyed. One eye-witness who was 9 when the bombs struck, recalls the night, saying 'I remember when they dropped the bomb on the North Strand. We were in bed asleep when it fell. Everyone got up and went outside. It was strange seeing all the adults in their pyjamas. Our house had pull down roller blinds on the windows and with the force of the explosion, the blinds all rolled back up open. I also remember one of the neighbours went back into their house and started to play the piano, I do not know why, maybe they were in shock.'

In 1943, at the age of 39, Elias Junior married Martha Mary Christina or 'Chrissie' as she was known. Chrissie was 18-years-old at the time and moved from her family farm in Wicklow into 'Lonsdale' the house on the Howth Road that Elias Senior had built some years before. Chrissie worked in the shop as well as cooking dinners at lunchtime in the small kitchen. She also nursed both of her parents-in-law when their health started to decline. Their first-born Victor, was born on 10 August 1946 followed by their daughter



Damage caused by the North Strand Bombing in May 1941
(Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)

Hilary in January 1949, and finally another son Leslie in 1954. Chrissie was a constant at the shop right up to her death in August 2016 at the age of 92.

Fairview in the 1940s and 1950s had a resident with an unusual occupation. Bill Stephens was a lion tamer. Bill kept a number of his lions in a pen at his home. He used to bring the lions for walks in nearby Fairview Park. He travelled with his lions with two of Ireland's biggest circus families, the Fossetts and the Duffys. His act, 'Jungle Capers with Bill Stephens and Lovely Partner' involved the lions and some Alsatian dogs – Stephens would famously stick his head between the lions' jaws, and feed them from his own mouth. His 'Lovely Partner' was his wife Mai. Mai was beautiful and exotic looking with dark hair and skin. Many locals thought she was from abroad, somewhere in the East. She was from the East, nearby East Wall, though!

On the afternoon of Sunday, 11 November 1951, many locals were in the Grand Cinema in Fairview, an institution that entertained locals from 1929 to the 1990s. Aptly, the movie they were watching was a B-movie called 'Jungle Stampede' which included 'thrilling animal fights and weird wedding rites', according to its tagline. Behind the cinema that afternoon, one of Bill's lionesses escaped her cage. The lioness made her way down Merville Avenue, stopping briefly in a dairy before backing out. She then moved on to a nearby garage where a young boy was pumping up a car tyre. The lioness pounced on the boy who had to be rescued by Bill Stephens. Frantically trying to capture her, Stephens cornered her into a field. Frightened by the gathering crowd of onlookers, the lioness bit Stephens in the shoulder. Stephens urged the Gardaí to shoot her as she had now tasted blood. The four Gardaí took about seven shots, killing the lioness. Although Stephens escaped this encounter, he did succumb to wounds from another lion in January 1953 as he was showing his act to a scout from the United States. He was just 30 years of age. His funeral in Fairview saw many in attendance, including many who knew Bill from show business around Ireland.

In 1954 a huge flood struck the Fairview and North Strand areas. On 8 December it rained all day long and as the waters swelled, the river Tolka eventually burst its banks in the early hours of that night. The waters rose over the walls and into Fairview park, much of Fairview and the surrounding area was under six feet of water. Hundreds of locals were evacuated from their homes, some by boat. The water reached ceiling height of many homes as the flood continued to inundate the area. A state of emergency was declared in the city. The *Irish Press* called it 'the worst day following the worst night in memory.' The railway bridge carrying trains on the Belfast line was washed away by the Tolka waters at around 4.30am — and in the following months, trains on the

northern commuter line terminated in Clontarf. A 70-year-old woman died on the night of the flood. Another elderly woman died from a heart attack several days later in hospital. Edge Hardware suffered severe damage too and, like all other local businesses affected, received five gallons of Jeyes Fluid (disinfectant) from Dublin Corporation to clean up the shop.

Even though he turned 80 in 1952, Elias Senior still worked in the shop. He continued to do so until three months before his death at the age of 92 in 1964. On one occasion in 1956, after closing the shop, Elias Senior went out to the garage to go home, not realising that hiding in the rafters was one of his delivery boys. When Elias left, the 15-year-old boy stole £50. A day later, the boy's father brought him to the Gardaí. He was eventually ordered by Dublin Children's Court to be sent to Daingean Reformatory for two years.



Bomb damage on Talbot Street after the Dublin-Monaghan Bombings of 1974 (Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)

As Elias Senior grew older, Elias Junior became mainly responsible for running the shop. He, however, became ill in the 1960's. He developed arteriosclerosis. Chrissie nursed him at home with his eldest son Victor taking over the running of the shop. Elias Junior passed away in 1973 at just 69 years of age.

The Fairview of the 1970s had much changed since Elias Senior opened the store in 1917. Fairview was also affected by the Troubles that had broken out in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s.

On Friday, 17 May 1974, a series of three car bombs exploded in Dublin City at rush hour, 5:30pm. The car bombs were located in Parnell Street, Talbot Street, and South Leinster Street. Some 90 minutes later, another car bomb exploded in county Monaghan, killing seven people. Thirty-four civilians died and over 300 more were wounded. There were no warnings given. Of the thirty-four civilians killed, twenty-six were from Dublin. Marie Phelan from Fairview was killed in Talbot Street. She was just 20-years-old.

Ten other people from the local area (Marino, Ballybough, Clontarf, Drumcondra and Fairview) were injured and hospitalised that day too.

The 1970s was also the decade U2 started to ply its trade. The band was formed in Mount Temple Comprehensive School on the Malahide Road in 1976. Legend has it that one of the boys in the band, David Howell Evans, was looking for inspiration for a stage name, and he looked no further than Edge Hardware in Fairview. He has called himself 'the Edge' ever since.

As many family businesses have suffered and gone under over the years, squeezed out by big multinationals, Edge Hardware remains a constant in Fairview. Edge Hardware has helped the community over the years with all their hardware needs as well as with some unusual requests too. When construction began in the early 2000s on the Port Tunnel in Fairview, inadvertently, the work unsettled a number of rats' lairs. The rats scurried all over the community and Edge's sold scores of rat traps to help deal with the infestation.

A testament to the popularity and the importance of Edge Hardware was demonstrated when the community came out in force in March 2017 to celebrate the shop achieving the extraordinary milestone of celebrating 100 years in business; 100 years that had seen the area change greatly with the one constant of the Edges providing a great service to the Fairview community.



The Edge Hardware Shop, 1970s (Courtesy of Beverly Edge)

Further Reading

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A Bumpy Ride: Dublin railway workers and the 1908 Old Age Pension

Mary Muldowney, Historian in Residence, Dublin Central

The United Kingdom's Old Age Pensions Act of 1908 was the culmination of a long policy debate, in which Ireland barely featured as a consideration. Nevertheless, it was the serious underestimation of the number of Irish people who would meet the age and income qualification that almost derailed the scheme. Eligibility was based on being over 70 years of age with an annual income of less than £31 and 10 shillings (£31.10s). The maximum weekly payment was 5s (£13 per year). The cost of providing old age pensions in Ireland was so much greater than the estimates that a special 'People's Budget' had to be delivered in 1909 to cover the shortfall.

In the waning years of the 19th Century, before the intention to introduce a state old age pension was publicised, several industries introduced occupational, or work-based, pensions for their waged employees, in addition to their salaried staff. The British railway industry was one such example and it was followed in 1900 by the largest railway system in Ireland, the Great Southern and Western Railway (GS&WR).

In the early years of the 20th Century, even in the lower paid grades such as permanent way-men and crossing-gatekeepers, jobs on the railways were prized because they were generally secure and frequently came with accommodation, which usually had to be surrendered when a worker retired. The rationale was that wages were considered by the railway companies to be high enough for employees to save for their old age. This policy often resulted in workers holding on to their jobs until they were very old or even dying in service in order not to lose their homes.

In the 1901 Census, there was a total of 11,777 people employed in the railway industry in Ireland, the majority of them male. These figures had not changed much ten years later in the 1911 Census. The GS&WR was typical of other companies in the railway

industry in employing a predominantly male workforce. Women's employment was confined to catering and cleaning for the most part, although they were starting to be hired for clerical work.

When the announcement of the state Old Age Pension was made in 1908, the GS&WR immediately decided to reduce the pension it had been giving to the lower grades of staff to the amount that would be required to make up the balance between the state pension and the existing company pension payment. On 16 October 1908, a notice was issued on behalf of the board of the company by Francis Ormsby, the Company Secretary:

Free Pensions to servants on the wages staff of the company.

When free pensions to the wage-earning staff of the Company were sanctioned in the circular of 17 February 1900, the Directors reserved to themselves the right to alter or terminate the arrangements then made, as per following paragraph:

'As the allowances to be granted by the Company will be provided out of their own funds, without contributions from the men, the Directors reserve to themselves the right of declining, withdrawing, or reducing an allowance in any case, as also the power of altering or terminating the arrangement at any time, and as they may deem necessary.'

The recent provision of Old Age Pensions by the Government, charged in the General Taxes, to which the Company and their Shareholders, both as a Corporation and as individuals, are large contributors, has materially modified the position of men of advanced years, and the Directors give notice that they hereby terminate the Free Pensions Scheme hitherto in force from 1 January 1909.

This Notice does not affect those to whom pensions are at present being paid.

In a letter to Ormsby dated 7th December 1908, S. Gordon of the Engineer's Office queried the final sentence of the notice, which was contradicted by the Company's move to cut off its pensioners pending resolution of their claims for the State pension. Ormsby replied on 10th December that there was no real inconsistency with the circular, "inasmuch as the monetary position of the men will be the same, though their Paymasters will be changed".



'Old Age Pensions – The death-blow of the rotten and degrading workhouse systems of this country has been struck by the Old-Age Pensions', Lepracaun, 1909 (Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)



Late Victorian railway workers (Courtesy of National Library of Ireland)

The claim that existing pension holders would not be affected was immediately responded to by current members of staff, who sent a petition to the Board signed by adult employees at the Inchicore works. William Partridge, who was their representative, wrote to the *Irish Independent* on 11 November 1908 clarifying the position from the men's point of view:

Upon the publication of the recent order of the Board, relative to the stoppage of old age pensions after January next, a petition was drafted seeking a modification of that order, in so far as not to apply to men having 30 years service and upwards. The object of this petition was to safeguard the interest of old and faithful servants, who had devoted the best years of their lives to the service of the Company, and who for the past eight years had been schooled to regard the reception of the free pension as a certainty in the future...

To such men the recent order of the Board was cruel in the extreme, and the petition presented upon their behalf was signed by 860 adult employees engaged at the Inchicore works. Of that number no less than

700 possessed only 29 years' service and under, and therefore would not be eligible to gain anything by the granting of the request. The remaining 160 had a service of 30 years and upwards, and would, if they lived, and were fortunate in the services, qualify for the pension, provided the Directors were so kind as to favourably consider the petition presented upon their behalf...

This very day we were officially informed that the order of the Board, relative to the stoppage of the payment of free pensions must stand, but that the Directors would be prepared to consider individual applications upon their merits. This promise carries no guarantee that a pension will be granted. Thus, the door is not slammed. It is shut gently, but nevertheless, closed tightly, leaving not one ray of hope for those whose lives were given in the service of the Company, and now in their old age are disappointed.

The Board did not heed the petition and department heads were told to compile lists of the pensioners who had previously worked in their areas and to give details of their dates of birth. This was to ensure that the Company would be aware of every worker who was over 70 years of age and thus entitled to the state old age pension.

In December 1908 Ormsby wrote to all the pensioners who had been identified by department heads, sending them the following circular letter:



William Partridge
(Courtesy of Irishmedals.ie)

Sir,

Under the Old Age Pension Act, which comes into operation on the 1 January 1909, every person aged 70 and upwards, whose yearly income does not exceed £31.10s per annum, is entitled to an Old Age Pension from the Government, at the rate mentioned in the Schedule of the Act.

As the Company will have to contribute to these Government Pensions as ratepayers, they cannot continue to pay the Company's existing Pensions in full, and I am directed to say that you should immediately make application for an Old Age Pension from the Government, and, as soon as you report to me that you have obtained such, the Board will

then consider the question of supplementing the weekly payment which you may receive from the Government.

The Company will only continue their present Pension to you up to the 1 March 1909, but not after that date, and you should therefore take steps at once to secure whatever weekly sum you are entitled to from the Government.

Forms of application for Government pensions can be obtained at your local Post Office.

Secretary

The notice caused consternation and what followed was a copious correspondence between Ormsby and other senior personnel in the GS&WR, and elderly men who were in receipt of a pension from the company, who wrote of their distress and concern at the proposal to cut their pensions. Not only did their letters illustrate the poverty in which many of the former waged staff of the company were living but they also shed light on the sense of vulnerability which the Company's decision inflicted on many of them.

Cornelius Forhan's letter was typical of much of the correspondence:

In reply to your letter of the 1st inst., I beg to state I have applied for and been granted the old age pension of 5s per week. I wish to lay before you the particulars of my case, which are as follows:

I have been employed by the Company for 50 years and was granted my present pension [4s per week] as compensation as I met with an accident by breaking my hip bone (while discharging my duty). I am 83 years of age and unable to do any kind of work and I have to help my wife (who is not getting the old age pension) and myself out of that small sum. I will ask you to consider also that I have never put the Company to any expense in the way of Lawyers but trusted to your Honours for Justice as I am quite willing to do now.

I remain Sir

Your obedient servant

Cornelius Forhan

Pensioner

There is no record in the file of Ormsby's reply but in the 1911 Census Forhan is listed as a 'Retired Gatekeeper' living with his wife and his son, Daniel who was now the gatekeeper. It was quite common for family members to take over such a role. The Census record also showed that neither Cornelius nor his wife, Honoria could read or write, suggesting that someone else, probably their son Daniel, was the author of the letter to Ormsby.

John Barrett had worked as a viceman in the Inchicore works and his pension was slightly above the government limit, at £32.10s per annum. A viceman was employed to make small components in railway workshops, being paid on a piecework basis and specialising in particular parts, such as regulators or whistles. Barrett wrote to Ormsby about his situation and the Secretary replied that the company would discontinue Barrett's pension, so he could qualify for the full government pension of 5s per week.

The Company will then consider the question of making you an allowance to bring your weekly income up to the amount of your present pension.

Barrett was awarded the full state old age pension from March 1909, which would have been significantly less than his previous occupational pension. Hopefully, the company's consideration of the allowance gave him a positive outcome.

One of the fascinating aspects of the introduction of the Old Age Pension in Ireland was the revelation of the extent of irregular recording of births. There were multiple cases of people who were unable to prove that they were over 70 years of age and who had to rely on a range of sources other than a birth certificate to satisfy the regulations. This was an important issue because the Old Age Pension would not be granted unless the applicant could offer proof that was acceptable to the local Pensions Board.

James Russell, a former milesman, wrote that he had been forced to resign in 1907 because of a 'breakdown in health.' A railway milesman was responsible for patrolling and inspecting a particular section of railway, doing any routine maintenance that could be done by one man, and reporting anything that required more workers. Russell believed he was over 70 at that point but when he was claiming the Old Age Pension the Pension Officer discovered that he was 68 and therefore not eligible. Since his birth certificate had proved to be incorrect, he produced his baptismal certificate, which the company accepted as proof of age. His occupational pension of 6s per week was restored until he reached the age of 70.

SECRETARY'S OFFICE
RECEIVED
19 JAN 1909
No 199
G. S. W. R.

Donnelly
No 1, Ushers Island
Dublin
18 January 1909

Mr Francis Ormsby Esq
Secretary
G. S. W. R.
Ampleforth

Sir

On 15th November 1907, I was discharged, as being unfit for further service with the Company, & granted a weekly pension of 5s, after a long & faithful service of 34 Years & 9 Months. I was in receipt of a pension also from the Army, of a Chilling for dress, which I obtained after being 15 Years in the Royal Horse Artillery, leaving that Corps with the rank of Sergeant. I made a further application to War office, & they increased my pension by 9 pence, which brought my Army pension up to the total of 12s 3 for week. I am informed now per your Circular of 28th October 1908, that I am to apply for the Government Old Age Pension, & that my railway pension will cease from 1st March 1909. You will note Sir, that my Army pension totals to £31-14-0 per Annum, which debars me from the Old Age Pension Scheme, & my wife is not entitled to it either, as she is not the age. I would respectfully beg to point out to you that if my railway pension is stopped, I will get it very hard to live, as I have my wife & a cripple daughter to support, & no other member of my family can assist me. Trusting Sir that my case will receive further consideration.

I remain
Your obedient Servant
Michael Donnelly
Late Chucker. Ampleforth

(Over)

Letter from Michael Donnelly to Francis Ormsby, 18 January 1909 (Courtesy of Irish Railway Records Society)

An item in the *Freeman's Journal* in October 1908 shows that it was not only commercial organisations like the GS&WR who were unhappy about supplementing the Old Age Pension. It refers to the resolution of the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church not to make the mistake of allowing their funds to treat 'the corner-boy, and the idler, and the blackguard who disgraced the street corners in almost all our large cities' as well as the man who had worked hard all his life.

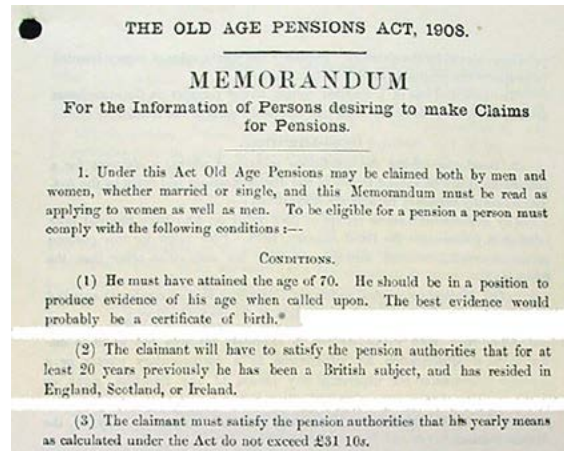
The Act introducing the Old Age Pension actually excluded the dissolute and the occupants of work-houses. Presumably, on the basis that they were not deserving of the pension because they had not contributed their labour during their lifetimes. Several of the GS&WR pensioners wrote from their local Union or workhouse, proving that their occupational pension was insufficient to keep them in their old age. Others wrote that if the company was to cut or cancel their pension payment, they would be forced into the workhouse because they would no longer be able to pay for lodgings for themselves or their families.

The company was not always in a position to update their records quickly, as in the case of John Carr, who was sent the pension correspondence and replied to Ormsby in January 1909. He had been granted an Old Age Pension of 4s per week, but he wrote that if the company would not continue his occupational pension he would be forced 'to go on the Union' as it would not be possible to live on such a small amount. Carr had solicited a letter from the Engineer's Office to Ormsby, confirming that the man had been a 'good and faithful servant' of the company. Carr was sent the standard letter about the company's position on 2 February but it was returned by his family, informing Ormsby that the pensioner had died on 29 January.

Many of the letters outlined the circumstances in which the writer had become unable to work, although in many cases they were much older than 70, and the majority of the writers also referred to the longevity of their service. David Coughlan was granted the full Old Age Pension of 5s and his company pension of 8s was to be reduced accordingly. After fifty-six years working for the company he wrote:

I am now almost helpless. I am over 80 years of age and have to support a wife and an invalid daughter on the sum allowed by the GS&WR Company. I considered the old age pension a God send, as you can imagine what a miserable existence three of us had to eke out on 8s per week.

Memorandum to Old Age Pensions Act 1908
(Courtesy of National Archive of United Kingdom)



There was general dismay that the company they had served for so long was treating them so shabbily in their old age, when they were so much in need. John Grady was permanently disabled because of ‘rheumatics’ but without the support of friends he would be destitute. He also wrote about the disappointment he and his family had suffered on discovering that the Old Age Pension would not be improving their lives after all:

I thought better days were going to come until I got your circular and leave it to God that both would hardly meet my present needs and little wants as you can be told by your doctor.

Milesman Denis Fahey was also pessimistic about his future, after he was granted the 5s Old Age Pension:

I don't think I will be getting any pension very long as my health is not so very good. I hope the GS&W Railway Company will not treat me too unfair now as it was in their employment I spent mostly all my life. It is now I would want the help in my old days.

As Cormac Ó Gráda shows, the introduction of the Old Age Pension had more far-reaching ramifications in Ireland than in any other part of the United Kingdom:

Three months after its inception 28.3 per cent of those drawing the pension lived in Ireland; two years later, after the purging of thousands of bogus claims in Ireland, and big increases in the number of claimants in Britain in the wake of amending legislation, Ireland's share was still 22.2 per cent. Ireland's shares of the total UK population and those of pensionable age were small by comparison, one in ten and one in seven respectively.

The sheer numbers of Irish people who qualified for the full 5s paid by the State to pensioners who satisfied the age requirement to be over 70 paints a grim picture of life in the country in 1909 when the legislation became operative. The 1911 Census found there were 295,027 people over 70 in the country, which was just under seven per cent of the total population. The valid claims from this country were significantly out of proportion in terms of the overall payments, indicating high levels of poverty. The GS&WR Board was not unusual in its willingness to bolster profits at the expense of their pensioners but as many of the letters responding to that decision indicate, this was consistent with their working relationships over decades. The company's haste to use the excuse of the Old Age Pension to undo the occupational pension scheme that was only eight years old in 1908 suggests that trusting in their ‘honours’ for justice was a forlorn hope.

Further Reading

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- Pensions files of the Great Southern & Western Railway in the Irish Railway Records Society, Dublin.
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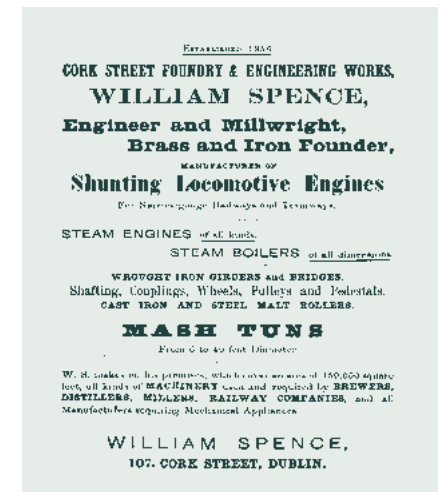
William Spence, Victorian Engineer: Right man, right place, right time

Catherine Scuffil, Historian in Residence, Dublin South Central

The Cork Street Foundry and Engineering Works of William Spence and Son established in 1856, continued trading over two generations until 1930. Situated on a 3-acre site at 105-109 Cork Street in Dublin 8, previously a tannery, the engineering/steel foundry operations that evolved over time were ranked among the first and finest of the kind in Ireland.

Born in Dublin in 1837, William was the son of Robert Spence, Scots Presbyterian, who had moved to Dublin from Linlithgow in the early 1800s. By 1850 they lived at 44 New Row, in Dublin's Liberties. William served his time with John Haigh, commencing engineering operations in Cork Street in 1856 initially with his brothers George, Alexander and marine engineer Robert. Spence's Scottish heritage was a lifelong theme, especially evident on 4 October 1860 when he married Scotswoman Marion Edgar, daughter of William and Jane Edgar Howison of Pigeon Park, Gowran, Co. Kilkenny in the Scots Church, Kilkenny.

William and Marion had three children: Wilhelmina Jane, Arthur William and Evaline Marion and their family home was at 109 Cork Street, beside the engineering works. They later moved to two adjacent houses, 67-68 Brighton Square, Rathgar where at number 68 Marion, 'dearly beloved and loving wife of William Spence', died in 1906.



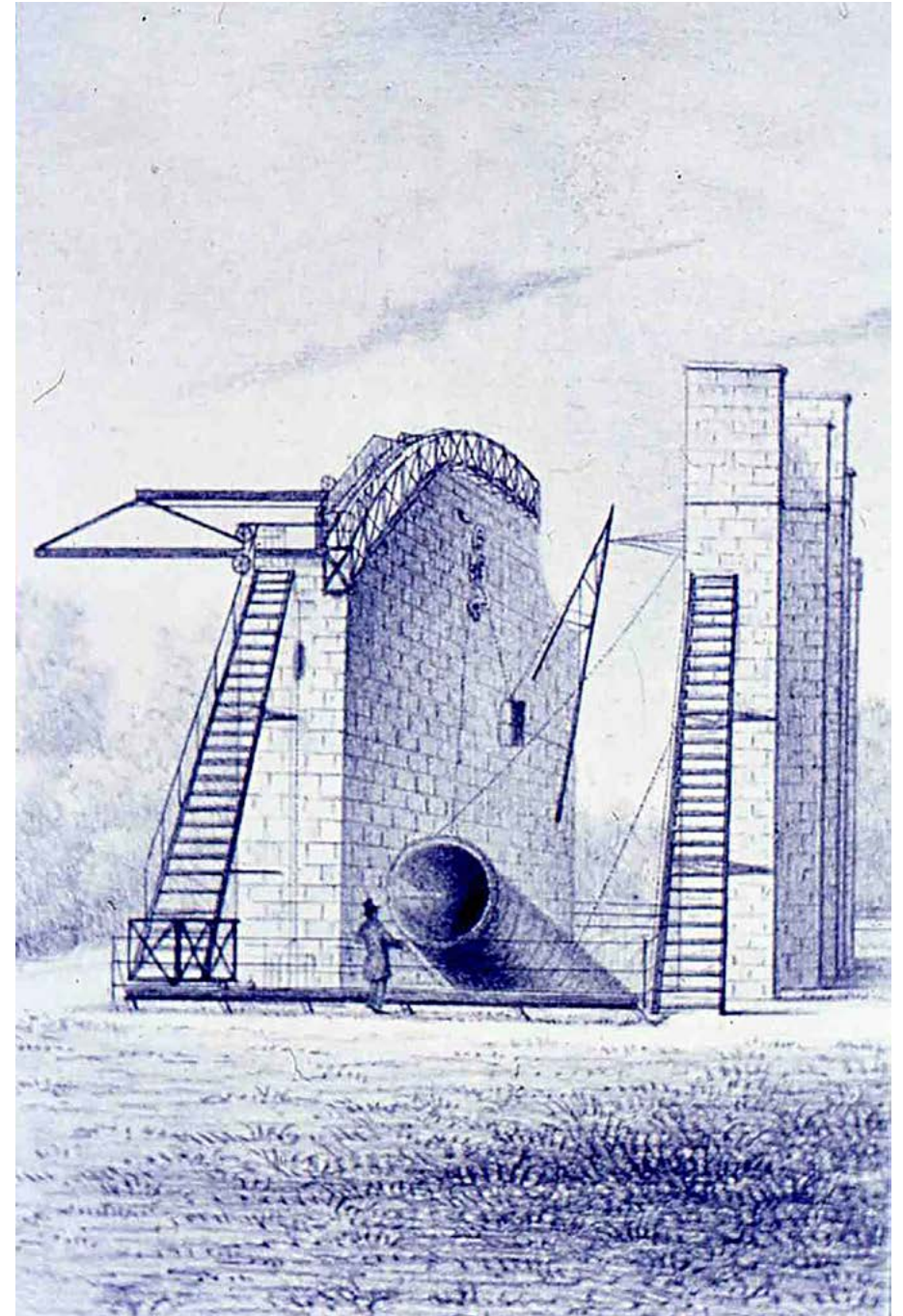
Thom's Directory entry for William Spence and Son (Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)

Famous for many industrial and remarkable business achievements, Spence was active in Dublin civic life during his lifetime, becoming a Poor Law nominee in 1887 for the Merchant's Quay Ward and making charitable donations to Cork Street Fever Hospital and Ormond Quay orphanage among others. He was a member of the Scottish Benevolent Society of St. Andrews and a founder/trustee of St. Andrew's College on Clyde Road, attending their student prizegiving. He was also a member of Portmarnock golf club and the Masonic Order. In 1905, Spence was elected on the fifth count to the Rathmines Township and appointed to their public health committee.

Post-famine Cork Street was a poor area, straddling both rural and urban Dublin. With a declining weaving industry, there was cheap local labour and reasonably priced, extensive property sites. By 1870 it was quite industrially focussed, evidenced by well-known concerns like W. & R. Jacobs, biscuit manufacturers, A. Guinness & Sons brewers and Jameson's Distillery all being established in the area. Smaller companies were established to supply these larger concerns, with businesses and owners' residences located side-by-side. Newspaper articles in 1876 listed Cork Street residents running a variety of businesses - tanners, silk and poplin weavers, dairy yards and the street was 'reckoned by all to be a very healthy locality notwithstanding that it has on one side a large fever hospital and on the other a burial ground.' There was also a Methodist chapel and Hodsman's firework manufacturers.

Spence's distinctive premises are quite noticeable in Cork Street even today, with a granite carriage arch, sidedoor entrances and unusual keystones. Inside the yard was the timekeeper's department and general stores from 1891 with nearby Spence's Terrace, residential properties, dating from around 1890. The works were powered by a highly efficient steam-plant with a distinctive overhead crane, and moulding, pattern, setting-up, machine and fitting shops, a large forge, boiler as well as erecting and finishing workshops. The company name changed from Messrs Spence, Iron Foundry in 1858, to Spence Bros, Iron Foundry, Engineers and Millwrights in 1863. From 1875 until its closure in 1930 it was known as William Spence (and Son) Engineers and Millwright, Iron and Brass Founder, Boiler and Wrought Iron Girders Works, located at 105-107 Cork Street, with other related premises at numbers 121-123 Cork Street.

Spence won distinction in many areas of engineering but was most famous for steam-boilers and engines of all dimensions. Most notable were the steam-train engines they created for the Guinness Brewery's internal narrow-gauge railway. Another remarkable achievement was the framework and circular railway for the 22-foot-high



The Great Ross Telescope (Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)

telescope at Birr Castle with the lens completed by Grubb in Rathmines. This took two years to manufacture.

Spence's also provided equipment for lighthouses, supplying the Old Head of Kinsale Co. Cork with lanterns and fog-signal jibs in 1907. The production range was hugely diversified, an auction in Watling Street in 1898 included Spence water tanks and pulleys. Guinness's expanded the brewery complex in 1863 which included 'a new 25 horse power engine from Spence Brothers, Engineers which has been put up to work the machinery of the brewery; to give great power throughout the entire works.' The Guinness Archive displays a Spence Horizontal Steam Engine with a similar model at the Ulster Folk Transport Museum.

The 1870s were an excellent time for the iron/steel trade in Ireland – from then until the 1920s were regarded as Ireland's 'golden age of iron'. Spence's main business of steam-engines and boilers was heavily linked to Dublin's expanding brewing, distilling, baking and milling trades and the emerging national railway operations, bridge building and road construction.

In the 1870s Guinness's was having difficulties moving heavy raw materials and waste products within the complex with slow and inefficient horse and carts. This was identified as a serious obstruction to future expansion at the newly acquired land at the river Liffey to bring operations nearer the Kingsbridge railway terminus and barges to the port. The solution was the construction of a narrow-gauge railway for the entire plant. Work commenced in 1873, supervised by Head Engineer, Samuel Geoghegan. But the first locomotives proved unsatisfactory, so he designed his own patent engine. The prototype locomotive, made by the Avonside Engine Company Bristol, cost £848. Subsequent engines were built by Spence all of which were in service until the introduction of diesel locomotives.

Corcoran's *History of Dublin Trams* mentions that whilst carrying out modifications and general improvements to their tram fleet, the Dublin United Tramway Company (DUTC) records in 1886 contain a cryptic note that tram car number two was sent for works at Spence's foundry. A newspaper headline 'Improvements in Tramcars' explains how DUTC had a self-starting tram apparatus installed, with the first trial run from Nelson's Pillar to North Frederick Street, carrying a number of guests, including MPs and DUTC chairman. Also on-board was William Spence 'at whose works the car was fitted with the internal mechanism improvement' causing tramcars to be pulled into motion after every stoppage without the aid of horses. This was 'certain

to prove of great value in the important matter of rendering animals serviceable for a much longer period than at present.'

As Spence's business expanded, advertisements were placed by staff seeking accommodation, with one, requesting a furnished sitting room and bedroom with board within ten minutes' walk of Cork Street, applications care of the foundry. Spence constructed a terrace of townhouses, beside the works called Spence's Terrace, and a new street, called 'Marion Villas' to honour his wife. Newspapers in 1907 describe these apartments as 'well furnished, large, clean and bright.'

23 July 1895 was a turning point for Spence's business direction when fire broke out at the foundry. The fire took three hours to bring under control and was prevented from spreading 'by the great work of fire officers.' A large quantity of valuable engine models and other machinery were completely destroyed but work continued as usual. The fire provided a blank canvas for the years ahead, and the marriage of his youngest daughter Evaline at Christ Church Rathgar in 1901 to Henry Lundy of 40 South Circular Road was pivotal in Spence's business changing from manufacturing steam-engines to civil engineering construction. Lundy arranged the first of a number of visits by members of the Architectural Association of Ireland to the works, described as 'extensive' with a 'large fitting shop under construction.' The large casting work-in-progress was for Guinness's. Lundy was a well-known architect, designing the Nenagh Presbyterian Church in 1907. Lundy installed a bathroom in the Spence Brighton Square home and designed a new fitting shop in 1904 and repaired the roof at the works in 1907.



Spence Terrace, 2018 (Courtesy of John Buckley)



Marion Villas, 2018 (Courtesy of John Buckley)

At the Great Exhibition in Herbert Park in 1907 the company showed boilers, wheels and axles, bogie wagons and pumps, from its expanded production range at a stand designed by Henry Lundy. A family story relates that during the exhibition, Spence joined others on a key attraction: the water chute. During the descent, he suffered a heart attack and died of apoplexy three days later at his daughter Wilhemena's residence, 67 Brighton Square. His funeral at Mount Jerome Cemetery was attended by many well-known people from trade, industry and political life, including family members, a large Masonic Order representation, Sir Maurice Dockrell, Sir George Cameron as well as foundry employees and tenantry of Cork Street.

In his eulogy Reverend Prenter stated that 'Dublin had lost one of its finest and best workmen, who left behind an unblemished reputation, an example of personal virtue which the rising generations would do well to imitate and a legacy of work well done in many spheres.' Spence was laid to rest in Mount Jerome with Marion, who had predeceased him by seven months. In later years, his son Arthur donated an inscribed bell 'a fine example of the founder's art' in their memory to Harold's Cross Church, Mount Jerome. Even in death, the Scottish heritage of William Spence is still evident - his large distinctive headstone is of polished Aberdeen granite and contains the following inscription:

'Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away'



Harold's Cross Church of Ireland and entrance to Mount Jerome Cemetery (Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)

In 1908, properties at Marion Villas and Ivy Terrace Cork Street, with a 'gross annual rent of £220', were sold by Hayes and Company Solicitors in compliance with the instructions of William Spence. The business was transferred to William's only son, Arthur, and thus began the second generation of the engineering works at Cork Street.

Arthur William, the second child and only son of William and Marion, was actively involved in his father's business from age fifteen. In 1893 at St. Kevin's Parish Church he married Selina Jane (Sissie) Crofton, eldest daughter of Mervyn Paget Crofton of Stamer St. Dublin, granddaughter of the Hon. Francis Henry Needham and great-granddaughter of the late Earl Kilmorey. By 1911 they were living at 'Lithgow' Oakley Road, Ranelagh with three sons: William Needham, Arthur Victor and Ernest Edgar.

Arthur patented a safety rotary mounting for church bells in 1896, thus opening further business opportunities for Spence's with 'casting and mounting of heavy peals of bells for churches - all orders entrusted will have prompt and careful attention.' When St. Catherine's Church in Thomas Street reopened



St. Catherine's, Thomas Street (Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)

in 1896, renovations carried out also involved installing a new Spence bell. Arthur also presented to the Institute of Engineering and Science his screw pile-driver to promote the use of construction girders. His memberships included the Institute of Civil Engineers of Ireland, Dublin Chamber of Commerce and, imitating his father, the Scottish Benevolent Society. The years after his father's death presented Arthur with more difficult business tenure, reflecting the turbulent changing times.

Within three years another fire occurred at the foundry, with 'a great quantity of machinery destroyed.' Damage was estimated around £12-15,000 but the boiler, machinery and fitting shop were saved. Only three locomotives were manufactured for Guinness under Arthur Spence. During the First World War he was director of the Dublin Armaments Management Committee, with company advertisements including 'By appointment to the War and Admiralty office' or 'on the War Office and Admiralty List'.

Arthur regularly attended Committee of Production meetings in London, on one occasion arguing for reduced wages as Dublin iron-workers enjoyed lower living costs. He was extensively involved in the resettlement and re-employment of ex-servicemen.

During the 1913 Lockout, Spence goods were stranded onboard steamers in Dublin port, as 'not an ounce of steel or iron would be carried for him along the quays affecting ability to carry out Guinness contracts' which still included engine manufacture. At a Dublin Castle labour troubles inquiry, James Larkin cross-examined the Employer's Committee Executive, including William Martin-Murphy and Arthur Spence. Foundry ironworkers did not return to work until January 1914, but it was noted that 'the firm had been affected for some months past but were now in a position to carry out business as usual in their different departments.' There was another industrial dispute in 1921 when workers withdrew labour at the foundry, when a foreman was appointed who was a member of the Iron Moulders Union of Great Britain. The British union refused to recognise the cards of the Irish Engineering Union.

In 1926 Spence joined a deputation of the Engineering Employers Federation and Trade Unions at a meeting with President W.T. Cosgrave at Government Buildings, convened to discuss the iron industry in the Free State. Cosgrave advised that issues would receive earnest sympathetic consideration saying that the 'direction desired' would be done with the drafting estimates to secure work for national projects. Spence's firm continued trading through these difficult times, with curtailed production. The yard was used for sales, such as the traction engine at the premises during an equipment sale by Cavan County Council in 1927.

Arthur Spence retired from active business in 1927, moving, on medical advice, to Bath, England. His death was announced in February 1928 and his funeral, like that of his father, was attended by engineering-works staff, and representatives from Guinness, Dublin Shipbuilders, Dublin Distillers, Jacobs, Hammond Lane Foundry and City Woollen Mills, Cork Street. He was interred, with his parents, in the family plot in Mount Jerome.

Hayes and Company Solicitors advertised the sale of Spence's Cork Street premises in 1930. It was noted that 'there was plenty of male and female labour in the vicinity.' The premises were later Irish Construction Ltd., Prescott's Cleaners and MacGowan's Print. Rooms were also made available to local sports clubs. Today they form part of Urban Plant Life.

There are many remnants of this once great firm such as two cast iron gate kerbs and external stairway, marked 'Spence Dublin' at 107 Cork Street. The tennis pavilion in Brighton Square Park Rathgar, opposite the former Spence home has a stone sited in the roof, inscribed 'William Spence Memorial 1908.' There are remnants of this company today, in buildings and the place names Spence's Terrace and Marion Villas. William Spence holds a special place in local folklore and pride. Dolphin's Barn and its immediate area produced some of the most unique and remarkable feats of engineering in the Spence foundry, showing employees willing to adapt to new things and a fearless approach to change that is still evident in Dublin's Liberties. Spence has indeed left a special and unique legacy for generations to come.

Further Reading

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Explore more Dublin history

There are lots of books on the history of Dublin but if you only have time to read one book on the history of the city what should it be? Here are the suggestions of the Historians in Residence:

'Dublin the making of a capital city' by David Dickson is a wonderfully comprehensive history book that you can easily read from cover to cover or just dip into whatever chapter takes your fancy. Even at over 700 pages it doesn't feel like an overwhelming tome. It is both enjoyable and highly informative giving a broad history of Dublin over centuries, showing the many contradictions of our nation's capital, alongside carefully chosen micro-histories and case studies that use individual stories to illustrate a wider point.
MAEVE CASSERLY

'Dublin: A Traveller's Reader' by Thomas and Valerie Pakenham is a collection of first-hand reflections on Dublin through the ages and offers rare insights into the city through key moments in its history, from the Anglo-Norman invasion through to the birth of an independent state. Includes the memoirs of Frederick Douglass, Benjamin Franklin and Ernie O'Malley.
DONAL FALLON

John Dorney's 'The Civil War in Dublin' is a very thorough, accessible and balanced account of the civil war in the capital city. It is the most comprehensive account of the civil war in Dublin, offering many new insights to our understanding of the events that happened in the capital throughout the conflict.
CORMAC MOORE

'Dublin: a new illustrated history' by John Gibney covers a broad outline of the city over millenia and is a perfect read to dip in and out of, with lots of fantastic pictures, stories and quotes.
MARY MULDOWNEY

'A City in Wartime, Dublin 1914-1918' by Pádraig Yeates shows how the First World War impacted on all levels of Dublin society and how the city changed over the four years of conflict.
BERNARD KELLY

My suggestion (and all time favourite!) is 'The Neighbourhood of Dublin' by Weston St John Joyce. It describes Dublin in the early years of the 20th Century, through the eyes of a hill walker and rambler, as he paints a picture of the suburbs as rural villages and townlands.
CATHERINE SCUFFIL

History on Your Doorstep

Take a walk around Dublin city centre in the footsteps of Irish suffragettes, look anew at the striking flats blocks of Dublin city Housing Architect Herbert Simms, read the words of Dublin soldiers serving in the trenches in the First World War, peruse the history, as you would the shelves, of Edge Hardware in Fairview....

These six stories bring new research on Dublin's history to the page, accompanied by photos and contemporary cartoon sketches and show that there's lots of history on your doorstep, wherever you are in Dublin!

Dublin City Council's Historians in Residence work across the city to talk to people about history and promote its sources and discussion, especially documents, photos and books in Dublin City Libraries and Archives. The project is an initiative of Dublin City Council under the Decade of Commemorations.



Cover image: 'Clearing the Dublin Slums' showing the building of Chancery House flats on the left, printed in *Dublin Evening Mail*, 24 February 1933 (Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)

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