



RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Destruction, delay and *déjà vu*: the restoration of Dublin's O'Connell Street after the Irish civil war, 1922–1933

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## Abstract

During the opening phase of the Irish civil war, Dublin's O'Connell Street was subjected to large-scale destruction of properties and businesses for the second time since the 1916 Rising. Utilizing newly available compensation claims as well as state and local government records, this article examines four aspects of the post-civil war restoration of O'Connell Street for the first time: the scale of the destruction; the compensation scheme devised by the Irish government which accorded O'Connell Street a unique status in the Damage to Property Compensation Act of 1923; the context of the town-planning regulations introduced, as well as the concerns of property owners, the local authority and central government; and the process of reconstruction – how compensation was paid, what properties were rebuilt, in what manner and when.

The Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921, which granted dominion status to 26 counties but not a republic, sundered Irish nationalism and culminated in a bitter civil war between June 1922 and May 1923. During the opening phase of the conflict in early July 1922, Dublin's O'Connell Street<sup>1</sup> was subjected to artillery bombardment and large-scale destruction of properties and businesses for the second time since the 1916 Rising, six years earlier. O'Connell Street held particular sway not just as the principal street of the Irish capital, where much of the economic and social life of the city was focused, but also, given its wide spatial dimensions, as a well-established site of popular spectacle or protest since the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> By the end of the civil war, it had also become an unofficial memorial to the sacrifices and achievements of the Irish Revolution of 1916–23. The street was accorded special status under the Damage to Property Compensation Act 1923 which addressed property losses

<sup>1</sup>Sackville Street was officially renamed O'Connell Street in May 1924, but O'Connell Street had been widely used since the 1880s.

<sup>2</sup>The same observation has been made of Trafalgar Square; see R. Dennis, *Cities in Modernity: Representations and Productions of Metropolitan Space, 1840–1930* (Cambridge, 2008), 163–4.

occasioned by the civil war. That no other thoroughfare was treated in this manner underlines the symbolic importance attached to restoring the capital's main street. As Daniel Noin and Paul White have observed, 'any capital city of a unitary state is more than just a tangible spatial phenomenon. It is also the representation of the nation of which it is capital.'<sup>3</sup> In addition to nation-building, however, the restoration of O'Connell Street was also regarded more pragmatically by members of the government as an 'effective way of getting back to normal'.<sup>4</sup>

Whereas the process of restitution following the 1916 Rising has received specific historical attention, the post-civil war rebuilding of O'Connell Street and compensation in general have been overshadowed by other aspects of the conflict.<sup>5</sup> The restoration of certain iconic buildings on O'Connell Street such as the General Post Office (GPO) have been examined by Stephen Ferguson and Gary Boyd, among others, while the survival of public statuary along the thoroughfare and how this iconography expressed changing political identity has been explored by Yvonne Whelan.<sup>6</sup> Largely due to a paucity of archival records, the post-civil war reconstruction of Dublin city centre has been treated only in general terms, if at all, in urban histories of the Irish capital.<sup>7</sup> Far greater attention has been focused on the provision of large-scale public housing and slum clearance, as well as Irish engagement with new movements in design and urban planning.<sup>8</sup> However, the archival

<sup>3</sup>D. Noin and P. White, *Paris* (Chichester, 1997), 1.

<sup>4</sup>Comment by Richard Mulcahy, *Dáil Éireann Debates (DÉD)*, vol. 10, col. 1092, 13 Mar. 1925.

<sup>5</sup>On the 1916 compensation process, see D. Ó Corráin, "'They blew up the best portion of our city and... it is their duty to replace it': compensation and reconstruction in the aftermath of the 1916 Rising", *Irish Historical Studies*, 39 (2014), 272–95; and J. Dolan Stover, *Enduring Ruin: Environmental Destruction during the Irish Revolution* (Dublin, 2022), 18–20. On the Irish civil war, see M. Hopkinson, *Green against Green: The Irish Civil War* (Dublin, 1988), which remains the standard account of military developments; B. Kissane, *The Politics of the Irish Civil War* (Oxford, 2005), which blends a social scientific and historical approach; G. Foster, *The Irish Civil War and Society: Politics, Class and Conflict* (Basingstoke, 2015), which examines the social aspects; D. Ferriter, *Between Two Hells: The Irish Civil War* (London, 2021), which examines the legacies of the conflict. The civil war in Dublin is examined by L. Gillis, *The Fall of Dublin* (Cork, 2011); P. Yeates, *A City in Civil War: Dublin, 1921–4* (Dublin, 2015); and J. Dorney, *The Civil War in Dublin: The Fight for the Irish Capital, 1922–1924* (Newbridge, 2017).

<sup>6</sup>S. Ferguson, *The GPO: 200 Years of History* (Cork, 2014); G.A. Boyd, *Dublin, 1745–1922: Hospitals, Spectacle and Vice* (Dublin, 2006), 196–7; G.A. Boyd, 'Negation: the General Post Office and a collapsing of time', in G.A. Boyd and J. McLaughlin (eds.), *Infrastructure and the Architecture of Modernity in Ireland, 1916–2016* (Farnham, 2015), 9–27; Y. Whelan, 'Symbolising the state – the iconography of O'Connell Street and environs after independence (1922)', *Irish Geography*, 34 (2001), 135–56; Y. Whelan, 'The construction and destruction of a colonial landscape: monuments to British monarchs in Dublin before and after independence', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 28 (2002), 508–33; and Y. Whelan, *Reinventing Modern Dublin: Streetscape, Iconography and the Politics of Identity* (Dublin, 2003).

<sup>7</sup>See J. Brady, 'Reconstructing Dublin city centre in the late 1920s', in H.B. Clarke, J. Prunty and M. Hennessy (eds.), *Surveying Ireland's Past: Multidisciplinary Essays in Honour of Anngret Simms* (Dublin, 2004), 639–63; G. Shaffrey, 'Rebuilding O'Connell Street, Dublin – a case study', in R. Loeber, H. Campbell, L. Hurley, J. Montague and E. Rowley (eds.), *Art and Architecture of Ireland*, vol. IV: *Architecture, 1600–2000* (Dublin and New Haven, 2014), 411–12. Brief references to restoring the city centre are made in R. McManus, *Dublin, 1910–1940: Shaping the City and Suburbs* (Dublin, 2002), 463–4; A. Kincaid, *Postcolonial Dublin: Imperial Legacies and the Built Environment* (Minneapolis, 2006), 67; D. Dickson, *Dublin: The Making of a Capital City* (London, 2014), 475–6; K. Milligan, *Painting Dublin, 1886–1949: Visualising a Changing City* (Manchester, 2020), 23.

<sup>8</sup>On housing, see, for example, McManus, *Dublin, 1910–1940*; Kincaid, *Postcolonial Dublin*, 61–100; and E. Rowley, 'Slum clearance in Dublin – a case study', in Loeber *et al.* (eds.), *Art and Architecture*, 409–10. On

situation has been transformed between 2014 and 2017 when the National Archives of Ireland made compensation claims for property destroyed or damaged during the civil war available to researchers.<sup>9</sup> This archival treasure-trove will transform our understanding of the reconstruction process and challenges during the early 1920s and provide new insights for a variety of disciplines with an interest in the history of the built environment and urban space.

Utilizing the aforementioned compensation claims as well as state and local government records, this article is the first in-depth historical assessment of the political, financial and administrative aspects of the restoration of O'Connell Street in the 1920s. The article has four aims. First, the scale of the destruction is set against that of 1916 when the street was the epicentre of a rebellion against British rule. Second, the compensation scheme devised by the Irish government is dissected for the first time. After the 1916 rebellion, the British treasury footed the compensation bill, but in 1922 the burden fell on an impecunious Irish state that was fighting for its very survival. Irish policy-makers had to contend with the same challenges faced in other jurisdictions after World War I and II but on a far smaller scale.<sup>10</sup> These included, among others, how reconstruction would be financed, how building materials and labour would be allocated, which stakeholders should make decisions and to what extent new amenities were required. Third, the article explains why rebuilding did not commence until the second half of 1924. A primary cause of delay was the need to introduce statutory town-planning regulations in the shape of the Dublin Reconstruction (Emergency Provisions) Act and to prevent an approach to rebuilding determined solely by property owners. In this respect, the concerns of the principal stakeholders – central government, the local authority and property owners – are also considered. Lastly, the article examines the process of reconstruction: how compensation was paid, what properties were rebuilt, in what manner and when. While a detailed engagement with architectural aesthetics is beyond the scope of this article, in overall terms a pragmatic desire to return the fabric of O'Connell Street to the status quo ante prevailed. In this respect, the restoration of Dublin's principal

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architecture, see S. Rothery, *Ireland and the New Architecture, 1900–1940* (Dublin, 1991); H. Campbell, 'Modern architecture and national identity in Ireland', in J. Cleary and C. Connolly (eds.), *Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture* (Cambridge, 2005), 285–303; Boyd and McLaughlin (eds.), *Infrastructure and the Architectures of Modernity*; E. Hanna, *Modern Dublin: Urban Change and the Irish Past, 1957–1973* (Oxford, 2013).

<sup>9</sup>See National Archives of Ireland, *Director's Report and Accessions Reports for 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017*, available at [www.nationalarchives.ie/what-we-do/publications/annual-reports-of-the-director-of-the-national-archives/](http://www.nationalarchives.ie/what-we-do/publications/annual-reports-of-the-director-of-the-national-archives/).

<sup>10</sup>A useful overview is provided by J.M. Diefendorf, 'Introduction: new perspectives on a rebuilt Europe', in J.M. Diefendorf (ed.), *Rebuilding Europe's Bombed Cities* (Basingstoke, 1990), 1–2. The literature on developments in Britain, Europe and beyond is vast. Good starting points are provided by J.M. Diefendorf, *In the Wake of War: The Reconstruction of German Cities after World War II* (New York, 1993); N. Bullock, *Building the Post-War World: Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain* (London and New York, 2002); N. Tiratsoo, J. Hasegawa, T. Mason and T. Matsumura, *Urban Reconstruction in Britain and Japan, 1945–1955: Dreams, Plans and Realities* (Luton, 2002); L.J. Vale and T.J. Campanella (eds.), *The Resilient City: How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster* (Oxford, 2005); C. Flinn, *Rebuilding Britain's Blitzed Cities: Hopeful Dreams, Stark Realities* (London, 2019); A. Demshuk, *Three Cities after Hitler: Redemptive Reconstruction across Cold War Borders* (Pittsburgh, 2021).

street fits into the metropolitan model proposed by Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene of pragmatic restoration of urban functions which was largely the case in London and in many Japanese cities in contrast to the more deliberately symbolic revival typical in European cities.<sup>11</sup> It also bears some similarities with Spain in the aftermath of the Spanish civil war but without the pronounced ideological efforts to shape an interpretation of the conflict through monuments and street names.<sup>12</sup>

### ‘Greedy flames are eating the heart out of Sackville Street’

The Irish civil war began on 28 June 1922 when the Four Courts, the centre of the Irish judiciary which had been occupied since April by the anti-treaty IRA, was shelled by the National army. The siege ended on 30 June when an enormous explosion destroyed the Public Record Office which was located in the Four Courts complex and held seven centuries of Irish historical records. After the surrender of the Four Courts garrison, the focus switched to O’Connell Street where the IRA commandeered almost the entire block on the upper eastern side between Earl Street and Parnell Street and included the Gresham, Hammam, Granville and Crown hotels. Buildings were also seized on the western side of the street, including the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), the Sackville Street Club and the Edinburgh Hotel. Both the IRA and the National army occupied a small number of premises in Lower O’Connell. The government forces took over Hopkins & Hopkins jewellers at 1 Lower O’Connell and Elvery’s sports goods store on the corner of Middle Abbey Street and O’Connell Street.<sup>13</sup> Between 3 and 5 July, the National army pounded the IRA positions with machine-gun fire, rifle grenades and artillery. An 18-pounder gun was positioned at the corner of Henry Street and O’Connell Street and the bombardment caused intense fires.<sup>14</sup> Writing in *The Irish Times* under the pseudonym ‘Nichevo’, Bertie Smyllie, the paper’s future editor, described the whole eastern portion of the street as ‘a surging furnace of destruction’ and how ‘greedy flames are eating the heart out of Sackville Street’.<sup>15</sup> The fires spread rapidly as the anti-treaty IRA had breached the party walls of occupied buildings. The level of destruction would have been much greater had it not been for the heroic action of the Dublin Fire Brigade.<sup>16</sup> In his report for 1922, John J. Myers, chief of the brigade, graphically described how his men braved ricocheting bullets to save as many premises as possible. Critically, on 5 July they prevented fire from reaching the vaults of Findlater’s and Gilbey’s where thousands of gallons of alcohol

<sup>11</sup>S. Goebel and D. Keene (eds.), *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War* (Farnham, 2011), 38.

<sup>12</sup>On Spain, see O. Muñoz-Rojas, *Ashes and Granite: Destruction and Reconstruction in the Spanish Civil War and Its Aftermath* (Liverpool, 2011); A. Shubert, ‘After Civil War: Francoism and the reconstruction of Spain’, in U. Planert and J. Retallack (eds.), *Decades of Reconstruction: Postwar Societies, State-Building, and International Relations from the Seven Years’ War to the Cold War* (Cambridge, 2017), 315–29.

<sup>13</sup>National Archives of Ireland (NAI), FIN/COMP/2/23/747 (R. Murphy); NAI, FIN/COMP/2/28/36 (J.W. Elvery & Co.).

<sup>14</sup>See Hopkinson, *Green against Green*, 123–5; Dorney, *Civil War in Dublin*, 89–106; Yeates, *A City in Civil War*, 82–94.

<sup>15</sup>*Irish Times (IT)*, 6 Jul. 1922, 3.

<sup>16</sup>See T. Geraghty and T. Whitehead, *The Dublin Fire Brigade: A History of the Brigade, the Fires and the Emergencies* (Dublin, 2004), 171–5.

were stored.<sup>17</sup> Subsequently, both firms took out newspaper advertisements to pay tribute to the fire brigade.<sup>18</sup>

A total of 41 buildings on O'Connell Street were damaged. On the lower street, 11 premises suffered relatively minor injury, such as broken plate glass windows, whereas 30 buildings on Upper O'Connell Street were more extensively harmed. When the fires abated, 5 buildings on the western side were completely destroyed, including the Edinburgh Hotel (No. 56), Messrs J. & G. Campbell, wine merchants (No. 58) and the YMCA building at No. 43. Over 20 premises on the eastern side, almost the entire block, lay in ruins. Among them were the Hibernian Bible Society (No. 10), the Hammam Hotel (Nos. 11–12), the Gresham Hotel (Nos. 20–2) and Sir James W. Mackey, seed merchants of 23 Upper O'Connell Street. It was therefore with some justification that *The Irish Times* later deemed the gaunt ruins 'a ghastly monument to our national folly'.<sup>19</sup> In 1916, the destruction was concentrated in Lower O'Connell Street where awards were made for 35 premises to be rebuilt. The upper street escaped extensive damage and only 6 buildings required complete reconstruction.<sup>20</sup> In 1922, the situation was reversed.

What the future held for affected businesses and O'Connell Street itself was uncertain. With remarkable fortitude, several establishments quickly reopened in temporary premises. James Mackey placed an advert on 15 July to inform customers of their temporary office on the first floor at 31 Upper O'Connell Street as did M.F. Keogh, merchant tailor, whose announcement read: 'burned out of 18 Upper O'Connell St. Will, in a few days, carry on at 3 Upper O'Connell Street (over McDowell's Jewellers)'.<sup>21</sup> In October 1922, Mackey's announced the opening of a new temporary shop and office on the site of its destroyed premises – a one-storeyed structure 'built on the latest Canadian shack style'.<sup>22</sup> As for the restoration of the street, Horace T. O'Rourke, city architect from 1922 until 1945, 'a traditionalist in his architectural taste' and a proponent of town planning who was influenced by Patrick Geddes, sounded a hopeful note.<sup>23</sup> Interviewed by the *Irish Independent* shortly after the bombardment, he suggested that good might come of the destruction and signalled his desire for co-ordination of the design of frontages and building heights of the ruined area which he suggested would take at least three years. He also floated the possibility of linking Gloucester and O'Connell Streets to relieve traffic congestion.<sup>24</sup> The burning question for affected property owners was whether compensation would be forthcoming from the nascent Irish state. An allied concern was the desire to protect Dublin ratepayers from being saddled with the burden of reconstruction.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>17</sup>*The Sixtieth Annual Report from the Chief of the Dublin Corporation Fire Brigade Department for the Year Ended 31 December 1922* (Dublin, 1923), 33–4.

<sup>18</sup>*Freeman's Journal (FJ)*, 8 Jul. 1922, 1; *FJ*, 10 Jul. 1922, 1.

<sup>19</sup>*IT*, 1 Jan. 1924, 4.

<sup>20</sup>The National Archives (London), T 1/12090, report of the Property Losses (Ireland) Committee, 1916, para. 13.

<sup>21</sup>*Dublin Evening Telegraph*, 15 Jul. 1922, 4.

<sup>22</sup>*FJ*, 2 Oct. 1922, 3.

<sup>23</sup>See M.J. Bannon, 'O'Rourke, Horace Tennyson', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography Online*, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3318/dib.007020.v1>, accessed 15 Aug. 2023.

<sup>24</sup>*Irish Independent*, 8 Jul. 1922, 25.

<sup>25</sup>*Irish Builder*, 15 Jul. 1922, 494.

### Devising the Damage to Property (Compensation) Act

The provisional government<sup>26</sup> first considered the twin issues of reconstruction and compensation on 8 July 1922, even as the fires on O'Connell Street still smouldered. The contentions that rebuilding should be 'started without delay' and that the street 'could be rebuilt in about twelve months' proved hopelessly optimistic.<sup>27</sup> They made no allowance for framing the necessary legislation or devising compensation machinery or for the necessity of clearing sites, preparing drawings, seeking planning approval or obtaining tenders. At the end of July, a small committee comprising Michael Collins, chair of the provisional government, Patrick Hogan, minister for agriculture, Ernest Blythe, minister for local government, Joseph Brennan, secretary of the department of finance, and Hugh Kennedy, the law officer, was appointed to consider general policy in respect of compensation.<sup>28</sup> Two aspects were quickly decided. First, the government accepted liability for losses in respect of destruction or damage to buildings and other property during military operations subsequent to the Anglo-Irish truce on 11 July 1921.<sup>29</sup> On 22 September 1922, a motion that a proportion of compensation be 'borne as a National liability' was carried unanimously in Dáil Éireann.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, urgent claims for small amounts such as those of hotel employees were to be dealt with summarily. Initially set at £30, the limit was increased to £100 in August and by early November about 1,000 such cases had been settled.<sup>31</sup>

The immense financial burden on the new state dictated that strictest economy governed the approach to compensation, which Joseph Brennan deemed the 'most serious financial problem' facing the government, a point insufficiently noted in the historiography.<sup>32</sup> His assessment of the general financial position in April 1923 made this starkly clear. The estimated total revenue for 1923–24 was £26.1 million, whereas the estimated expenditure was £46.6 million. The largest abnormal financial liabilities were for the army and for property losses compensation with estimates of £10,664,500 and £10,385,000 respectively, almost three-quarters of government revenue.<sup>33</sup> The estimates for property losses were £7,333,000 in 1924–25, £3,675,300 in 1925–26 and £2,170,500 in 1926–27.<sup>34</sup> The country was not in a

<sup>26</sup>The government was 'provisional' until the Free State constitution gave effect to the Anglo-Irish treaty in December 1922.

<sup>27</sup>NAI, TSCH 1/1/2 provisional government minutes 29 Jun.–30 Jul. 1922, meeting of 8 Jul. 1922.

<sup>28</sup>NAI, FIN/1/1126, extract from report of meeting of the provisional government on 28 Jul. 1922.

<sup>29</sup>NAI, TSCH 1/1/2 provisional government minutes, meeting of 8 Jul. 1922.

<sup>30</sup>*DÉD*, vol. 1, cols. 592–631, 22 Sep. 1922.

<sup>31</sup>NAI, TSCH 1/1/2 provisional government minutes, meeting of 11 Jul. 1922; NAI, TSCH S1309, provisional government decision on claims for compensation, 11 Aug. 1922; NAI, FIN 1/2911, J.J. McElligott to attorney general, 3 Nov. 1923.

<sup>32</sup>NAI, TSCH S1309, memorandum by Joseph Brennan to minister for finance, 2 Oct. 1922. Curiously, R. Fanning's in-depth *The Irish Department of Finance, 1922–1958* (Dublin, 1978) makes only a brief passing reference to the compensation issue as do older studies such as D. Gwynn, *The Irish Free State, 1922–1927* (London, 1928), 251; and N. Mansergh, *The Irish Free State: Its Government and Politics* (London, 1934), 256.

<sup>33</sup>National Library of Ireland (NLI), Joseph Brennan papers, MS 26,223(3), memorandum by Brennan on the general financial position, 27 Apr. 1923. On this, see J. FitzGerald and S. Kenny, "'Till debt do us part': financial implications of the divorce of the Irish Free State from the United Kingdom, 1922–1926", *European Review of Economic History*, 24 (2020), 818–42; F. Barry, *Industry and Policy in Independent Ireland, 1922–1972* (Oxford, 2023), 71–2.

<sup>34</sup>NLI, Brennan papers, MS 26,223(3), estimates, 1925–26. Vote on account, 23 Mar. 1925; estimates, 1926–27. Vote on account, 16 Mar. 1926.

position to sustain increased taxation given the destruction wrought by the civil war and the mounting cost of living, which by mid-January 1923 was 90 per cent greater than mid-July 1914.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, during the 1920s, under the terms of the Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921, the Irish government paid the British government an average annual aggregated payment of £5.375 million to meet the cost of payments in respect of annuities under the land acts of 1891–1909, police pensions and compensation arising from the War of Independence, civil and judicial pensions and a range of other smaller annuities.<sup>36</sup> This amounted to a fifth of the approximate tax revenue of £25 million per annum.

Brennan played a decisive role in setting out how compensation should be defined and in devising a mechanism to deal with claims. In 1916, he had been private secretary to Sir Robert Chalmers, the interim Irish chief secretary who oversaw the establishment of the Property Losses (Ireland) Committee in the aftermath of the 1916 Rising. Many of the rubrics of the post-1916 Rising compensation process were utilized in 1922 and Brennan wrote several lengthy memoranda on the subject. He maintained that local tribunals in the form of the county court system would be a more expeditious means of treating civil war claims than a central government commission, as had been the case in 1916.<sup>37</sup> The volume of civil war compensation claims for property (c. 26,000) dwarfed those of 1916 (7,001), which predominantly pertained to Dublin.<sup>38</sup> To minimize the state's liability, Brennan suggested that the minister for finance should nominate a solicitor in every county to contest claims with the assistance, if required, of assessors or investigators to inspect damaged premises.<sup>39</sup> In 1916, consequential loss was excluded, as was loss of cash and ornamental jewellery unless belonging to a bank or jeweller. Brennan succeeded in having the same approach adopted under sections 6 and 7 of the Damage to Property (Compensation) Act (1923).<sup>40</sup> Looting and robbery, which were widespread during the civil war, presented a different challenge because the provisional government had a responsibility to protect peaceable citizens. Loss arising from such cases was admitted but limited to the cost price of the goods with no allowance for the consequential loss of expected profit.<sup>41</sup> Acts of requisitioning by the National army were treated as goods and services supplied and assigned to the department of defence for payment. Insurers were to bear any liability that could be established. For example, the insurers of the Edinburgh Hotel paid out £20,684 and this sum was taken into consideration when its claim came before the courts.<sup>42</sup> Lastly, Richard Mulcahy, minister for defence and National army commander-in-chief, was adamant that all claims for compensation by the anti-treaty IRA and their active supporters be

<sup>35</sup> *Minister of Industry and Commerce. Report on the Cost of Living January 1923* (Dublin, 1923), 2.

<sup>36</sup> NLI, Brennan papers, MS 26,264, department of finance memorandum on 'Certain financial and economic effects of the annual payment by Saorstát Éireann to Great Britain', Sep. 1932.

<sup>37</sup> NAI, FIN/1/1126, memorandum by Brennan on revised draft scheme of compensation for post-truce damage to property, 9 Sep. 1922.

<sup>38</sup> The civil war figure was provided by Ernest Blythe in the Dáil; see *DÉD*, vol. 11, col. 2540, 28 May 1925; the 1916 figure is that given in the report of the Property Losses (Ireland) Committee, para. 24.

<sup>39</sup> NAI, TSCH S1309, memorandum by Brennan for minister for finance, 2 Oct. 1922.

<sup>40</sup> University College Dublin Archives (UCDA), Hugh Kennedy papers, P4/468, Brennan to minister for finance, 25 Oct. 1922.

<sup>41</sup> NAI, FIN/1/1126, memorandum by Brennan on revised draft scheme of compensation, 9 Sep. 1922.

<sup>42</sup> *IT*, 20 Mar. 1924, 2.

excluded.<sup>43</sup> This was approved by the government in October 1922 and laid down in section 9 of the Damage to Property Act.<sup>44</sup>

Notwithstanding the Dáil motion on compensation in September 1922, which relieved local authorities of significant liabilities, the absence of bespoke legislation to deal with civil war claims posed a grave risk to the system of local government. During the War of Independence, the British government passed the Criminal Injuries (Ireland) Act (1920) as a war measure to compel local authorities to pay awards to servants of the crown who suffered injury in the discharge of their duty and to others who sustained loss of property.<sup>45</sup> In the aftermath of the civil war destruction in Dublin, many property owners sought damages under that legislation and some 612 claims were lodged for hearing at the Dublin quarter session in October 1922.<sup>46</sup> When the government belatedly recognized that this would financially cripple local government, it sought the adjournment of all such claims until legislation to give effect to the Dáil resolution on compensation was in place.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, on 3 October the government passed a decree to restrict the application of certain powers under the 1920 act. For instance, rates could not be used to meet amounts covered in decrees for compensation.<sup>48</sup>

The Damage to Property (Compensation) Act became law only in May 1923. In the interim, the department of finance approved a detailed application form in November 1922 for claiming compensation in respect of damage to or destruction of property since 11 July 1921.<sup>49</sup> Claims had to be submitted in triplicate. The original form had to be signed before a commissioner for oaths and lodged with the clerk of the crown and peace of the area in which the damage or destruction occurred. Copies had to be sent to the secretary of the department of finance and to the secretary of the relevant county council or town clerk.<sup>50</sup>

W.T. Cosgrave, president of the executive council, initiated what would become the Damage to Property (Compensation) Act in the Dáil on 19 December 1922.<sup>51</sup> Part II of the measure comprised the greater portion of the bill and concerned injuries to property between 11 July 1921 and 20 March 1923. Cases were to be heard and determined by the county (later circuit) court. The court was empowered to make a decree payment which was mandatory on the minister for finance unless he appealed to a higher court. Under section 10, the court was also empowered to attach a reinstatement condition to a decree in respect of damaged buildings. Given the acute housing shortage in the Irish Free State, the minister for local government requested

<sup>43</sup>UCDA, Kennedy papers, P4/468, Mulcahy to W.T. Cosgrave, 3 Oct. 1922.

<sup>44</sup>TSCH/1/1/3 provisional government minutes 18 Sep.–5 Dec. 1922, meeting of 28 Oct. 1922.

<sup>45</sup>*House of Commons Debates*, vol. 134, col. 737, 5 Nov. 1920.

<sup>46</sup>*Irish Independent*, 3 Oct. 1922, 5.

<sup>47</sup>NAI, TSCH/1/1/3 provisional government minutes, meeting of 2 Oct. 1922.

<sup>48</sup>UCDA, Kennedy papers, P4/467, Provisional Government (Criminal Injuries) decree no. 10, 1922; 'A decree to restrict the application of certain powers under the Criminal Injuries (Ireland) Act, 1920', decree no. 10, *DÉD*, vol. 1, cols. 1353–4, 6 Oct. 1922.

<sup>49</sup>*Iris Oifigiúil*, 21 Nov. 1922, public notice no. 20 compensation in respect of damage to or destruction of property inflicted since 11 July 1921, 697–8; *Irish Independent*, 23 Nov. 1922, 7.

<sup>50</sup>*Iris Oifigiúil*, 1 Dec. 1922, public notice no. 21 compensation in respect of damage to or destruction of property inflicted since 11 July 1921, 731.

<sup>51</sup>The bill was initially known as the Criminal and Malicious Injuries bill but was retitled by Cosgrave during the committee stage on 21 Mar. 1923; see *DÉD*, vol. 2, cols. 2392–3, 21 Mar. 1923.



that local councils press for the attachment of reinstatement conditions.<sup>52</sup> Specific provisions were included for O'Connell Street in clause 2(a) of this section. Full reinstatement conditions were to apply to any injured buildings on the street – in other words, there was an obligation to rebuild or repair so that the building was of the same character and not less valuable than the injured building. That no other street or area was treated in this way emphasized O'Connell Street's exceptional status as the main thoroughfare of the newly independent state's capital. In other locations, partial reinstatement was possible and a smaller or more suitable building could replace the original. Where no reinstatement condition was attached, the compensation was not to exceed the amount by which the market value of the building was reduced by injury. This amounted to a lower scale of compensation for owners not undertaking rebuilding. County courts also considered claims pertaining to seized goods. In such cases, the court could make a report or recommendation for payment. These were generally discharged in full but the minister for finance had the power to reduce reports deemed excessive. Given the parlous state of the public finances, section 13 required applicants to accept a proportion of their compensation in the form of government securities. As the bill made its way through parliament, representations were made to Cosgrave by the British government that special provision should be made for those loyalists who could not safely return to Ireland or who did not wish to.<sup>53</sup> His solution was to allow an applicant to claim partial reinstatement in the form of a building to be erected elsewhere, but any suggestion that the full nominal value be awarded was resisted.<sup>54</sup>

The 1923 act was subsequently amended three times. Within weeks of its promulgation, the departments of local government and defence wanted to extend the period covered from 20 March to 12 May 1923 as the conflict did not end in March and over 300 compensation claims had been received for injuries to property after 20 March.<sup>55</sup> While there was no formal truce, the end of the civil war was signalled by Éamon de Valera's order to cease operations on 27 April and by IRA chief of staff Frank Aiken's command to dump arms on 24 May 1923. An amendment in August extended the period covered by the act to 12 May.<sup>56</sup> A further amendment act was introduced in 1924 to authorize the issuing of securities in certain cases.<sup>57</sup>

The third alteration was the most significant and arose as a consequence of the financial agreement between the British and Free State governments on 3 December 1925 that followed the boundary commission crisis.<sup>58</sup> The commission had been enshrined in article 12 of the Anglo-Irish treaty but it did not begin its work until 1924 due to civil war in the Free State and the fall of David Lloyd George in Britain.

<sup>52</sup>NAL, FIN 1/2896 circular from E.P. McCarron (secretary department of local government) to secretaries of county and urban councils, and town clerks, 15 Aug. 1923. On the housing shortage at this time, see McManus, *Dublin 1910–1940*, 76–83.

<sup>53</sup>NAL, FIN 1/2888, T.M. Healy (governor-general) to Cosgrave, 26 Mar. 1923, enclosing despatch from the duke of Devonshire (secretary of state for the colonies), 24 Mar. 1923.

<sup>54</sup>NAL, TAOIS/S2158, Loughnane to Mark Sturgis (Colonial Office), 25 Mar. 1923.

<sup>55</sup>NAL, TAOIS/S1938, memorandum to members of the executive council on damage to property subsequent to 20 Mar. 1923, 28 Jul. 1923.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, extract from executive council minutes, 9 Aug. 1923.

<sup>57</sup>NAL, TSCH/1/2/3 meeting of the executive council, 16 Jun. 1924; Damage to Property (Compensation) (Amendment) Act, 1924.

<sup>58</sup>For a detailed account, see C. Townshend, *The Partition: Ireland Divided, 1885–1925* (London, 2021), 247–68.

Nationalists, north and south, expected that the commission would redraw the border according to local nationalist or unionist majorities and transfer substantial territory to the Free State. However, this was not the interpretation of Richard Feetham, the commission chair. The report was leaked by *The Morning Post* in November 1925 and caused outrage. The following month, the governments of Northern Ireland, the Free State and Britain agreed to suppress the report, maintain the existing border, transfer to the Northern Ireland government the powers of the council of Ireland envisaged in the treaty insofar as they related to Northern Ireland, and waive the Free State's liability for the servicing of a portion of the British public debt under article 5 of the treaty. Under article 3 of the December 1925 agreement, Cosgrave undertook to repay the British government the money it had paid for malicious damage committed in the Free State during the War of Independence. This took the form of a lump sum of £150,000 on 1 January 1926 and from 1 April 1926 an annuity of £250,000 for 60 years.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, the Irish government agreed to increase post-truce compensation decrees by 10 per cent. This was a means of meeting British concerns about southern unionists.<sup>60</sup> The financial agreement of 1925 was implemented by the Damage to Property (Compensation) (Amendment) Act 1926. Section 3 of that act provided that amounts of less than £50 would be paid in money from funds provided by the Oireachtas, and that securities would be issued where the amount exceeded £50.<sup>61</sup> By 1936, the payment of the additional 10 per cent was estimated to have cost £410,000.<sup>62</sup>

### The wait for compensation awards and a municipal scheme of reconstruction

Although the Damage to Property Compensation Act was enacted in May 1923, several months elapsed before claims were heard. Instructions had to be framed for county court judges and state solicitors had to be appointed in each county to defend the government's interest. Cases in Dublin city and county were assigned to Michael A. Corrigan, the chief state solicitor, whose home in Rathmines had been blown up by republicans in January 1923. He was assisted by the headquarters staff of the Office of Public Works (OPW).<sup>63</sup> The OPW investigations took considerable time and further delayed hearings. For example, Patrick Gleeson submitted a claim for £21,200 in respect of his shop at 11 Upper O'Connell Street on 4 October 1923, but it was not inspected until the end of January 1924 and an architect's report for the government was not completed until 11 February.<sup>64</sup>

The frustrations of Dublin property owners prompted several parliamentary questions. In June 1923, George Gavan Duffy asked Cosgrave what steps were being taken to speed up the payment of compensation in Dublin.<sup>65</sup> Three months later, Alfred Byrne

<sup>59</sup>In 1969, remaining repayments were waived, see Fanning, *Department of Finance*, 167.

<sup>60</sup>UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/142, note of proceedings of meeting in 11 Downing Street, 3 Dec. 1925.

<sup>61</sup>Damage to Property (Compensation) (Amendment) Act, 1926.

<sup>62</sup>NAI, Taoiseach 97/9/80, W.A. Honohan (secretary department of finance) to private secretary to president, 10 Feb. 1936.

<sup>63</sup>NAI, FIN/1/1579, M.A. Corrigan to J.J. McElligott (assistant secretary department of finance), 19 May 1923; McElligott to Philip Hanson (secretary OPW), 22 Jun. 1923.

<sup>64</sup>NAI, OPW/6/1/481, 11 Upper O'Connell St.

<sup>65</sup>*DÉD*, vol. 3, col. 2297, 22 Jun. 1923.

asked Ernest Blythe, minister of finance, when claims for destroyed property in Dublin would be heard and whether the government proposed steps to speed up the rebuilding of O'Connell Street. No clear answer was provided beyond indicating that the Dublin claims would be heard in Michaelmas term.<sup>66</sup> Dublin Corporation also grew increasingly restive. The town clerk invited property owners to a conference in the Mansion House on 31 December 1923 at which a deputation was appointed to visit the minister for local government and impress upon him the need to expedite the restoration of O'Connell Street and relieve unemployment in Dublin.<sup>67</sup>

Just over 2,500 compensation claims pertained to Dublin city and county.<sup>68</sup> When Judge Thomas O'Shaughnessy, the recorder of Dublin since 1905, began to hear O'Connell Street claims at the end of November 1923, he described the condition of the street as a 'disgrace' and declared it was 'time all traces of this shocking squabble should be obliterated and have the appearance of something better than Ypres'.<sup>69</sup> Wishing to dispose of the claims as expeditiously as possible, the recorder heard 92 pertaining to damaged or destroyed buildings and 198 concerning personal property. Many employees of the businesses on O'Connell Street and visitors staying in hotels were compensated for loss of personal effects. Kathleen Mullen, manageress of the Granville Hotel, and Ellie Keane, assistant manageress, claimed £270-12-6 and £266-12-4 respectively for the loss of all their clothing and personal possessions, as well as their employment and lodgings. On 18 February 1924, Kathleen was awarded £149 and Ellie £150 payable in money.<sup>70</sup> Richard O'Reilly, a guest in the Hammam Hotel, was awarded £100, having claimed £160-5-9.<sup>71</sup> As might be expected, Dublin Corporation received a number of compensation awards. These included, among others, £1,900 for damage to electric lamps and £250 for gas lamps in O'Connell Street and elsewhere, £800 for damage to service cables in the O'Connell Street area, £310 for damage to pavements on O'Connell Street and elsewhere, and £190 for electric meters destroyed in the vicinity of the Four Courts and O'Connell Street.<sup>72</sup>

The first significant award for rebuilding was made by the recorder on 19 December 1923 when £12,950 was awarded to Messrs J. and G. Campbell of which £8,500 was designated for the rebuilding of 58 Upper O'Connell Street.<sup>73</sup> Table 1 (see end) summarizes the nineteen largest claims for rebuilding. The single biggest award of £93,550 (of which £74,000 was for rebuilding) was for the 150-bedroom Gresham Hotel which was destroyed by fire on 5 and 6 July 1922. Its original claim for £227,134, based on 1922 building estimates, was revised downwards to £116,325 (£82,325 for structural damage and £34,000 for furniture and fittings) as building costs had declined by about 12.5 per cent.<sup>74</sup> In general, the

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 5, col. 73, 25 Sep. 1923.

<sup>67</sup>Dublin City Council minutes of meeting, 17 Dec. 1923, no. 755, 491; *IT*, 1 Jan. 1924, 5.

<sup>68</sup>These are held in the National Archives of Ireland in series FIN/COMP/2/6 and FIN/COMP/2/28.

<sup>69</sup>*Dublin Evening Telegraph*, 28 Nov. 1923, 1.

<sup>70</sup>NAI, FIN/COMP/2/28/463 (Kathleen Mullen); FIN/COMP/2/28/433 (Ellie Keane).

<sup>71</sup>NAI, FIN/COMP/2/28/1149 (Richard P. O'Reilly).

<sup>72</sup>NAI, FIN/COMP/2/28/1352 (John J. Murphy town clerk).

<sup>73</sup>*IT*, 20 Dec. 1923, 4.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, 7 Feb. 1924, 3; NAI, FIN/COMP/28/1102 (William George Dudley, secretary of the Gresham Hotel Ltd). By comparison, the largest award made in 1916 was £77,292 for Clery's Department Store which occupied 21-7 Lower O'Connell Street, see Ó Corráin, "They blew up the best portion of our city and... it is their duty to replace it", 286.

recorder met claims for rebuilding liberally. For example, James W. Mackey claimed £34,376 in total for rebuilding, fittings and loss of cash and account books. J.B. McMahon, architect acting for the government, valued the building, contents and professional fees at £14,572. O'Shaughnessy recommended £19,050 of which £15,350 was for reinstatement of 23 Upper O'Connell Street.<sup>75</sup> The *Irish Builder* criticized the manner in which the legislation placed the determination of awards in the hands of judges with no technical building knowledge and argued that a statutory commission with qualified architects or surveyors, as was the case in 1916, would have resulted in speedier outcomes and 'greater satisfaction to all concerned'.<sup>76</sup> No owner received the full value of a new building. Instead, they got the value of the old building towards the construction of a new one. In the case of the Gresham Hotel, the company claimed that the award for rebuilding was inadequate to the extent of £50,000.<sup>77</sup> Several buildings required more modest repair. For example, Tyler & Sons Ltd was awarded £2,800 for the reinstatement of 1–2 Upper O'Connell Street and this work was completed in July 1924.<sup>78</sup>

The availability of substantial sums for rebuilding or reinstatement was one required component for the reconstruction of O'Connell Street. Just as was the case after the 1916 Rising, rebuilding could not proceed until a municipal scheme for reconstruction had been agreed and appropriate town-planning legislation put in place. Two years elapsed before Horace O'Rourke completed his scheme and the government promulgated the Dublin Reconstruction (Emergency Provisions) Act (1924). Political crises at both local and national government level in 1924 in the form of the dissolution of Dublin Corporation and the army mutiny crisis delayed the legislation. In this vacuum, the sites on Upper O'Connell Street remained a 'gaping wound'.<sup>79</sup>

Relations between Dublin Corporation and the government became increasingly strained during and immediately after the civil war. Two issues predominated. The first concerned the welfare of republican prisoners. The government's steadfast refusal to allow representatives of the corporation visit prisons and its directive in January 1923 that no money be paid to the dependants of corporation employees in military custody embittered relations.<sup>80</sup> Several resolutions by members of the corporation in the closing months of 1923 were distinctly anti-treaty. For instance, in November a motion called for the release of Éamon de Valera and 'all interned Republican deputies as the first step to national unity, peace and prosperity'.<sup>81</sup> The second issue was the corporation's poor financial management and profligacy to the detriment of the ratepayer. Describing the corporation as 'municipal wastrels', one Dublin newspaper editorialized that 'in almost every department of municipal

<sup>75</sup>NAI, OPW/6/1/491, 23 O'Connell St.

<sup>76</sup>*Irish Builder*, 29 Dec. 1923, 1002.

<sup>77</sup>NAI, FIN/COMP/28/1102.

<sup>78</sup>NAI, OPW/6/1/471, 1–2 O'Connell St.

<sup>79</sup>*Evening Herald*, 16 Oct. 1925, 4.

<sup>80</sup>Dublin City Council minutes, 29 Jan. 1923, agenda item 49, 34; see also A. Quinlivan, *Vindicating Dublin: The Story behind the Controversial Dissolution of Dublin Corporation in 1924* (Dublin, 2021), 66–9, 73, 80; T.J. Morrissey, *Laurence O'Neill (1864–1943): Lord Mayor of Dublin (1917–1924). Patriot and Man of Peace* (Dublin, 2014), 218.

<sup>81</sup>Dublin City Council minutes, 5 Nov. 1923, agenda item no. 659, 421.

administration inefficiency goes hand in hand with prodigality'.<sup>82</sup> In May 1923, Ernest Blythe, then minister for local government, wrote to Dublin Corporation to object to the scale of pensions voted the previous month for 45 retiring employees and to excessive bonuses paid to officials.<sup>83</sup>

In early 1923, the Local Government (Temporary Provisions) Act empowered the government to dissolve local authorities and replace them with appointed commissioners. This heavy-handed instrument was deployed against local authorities with republican sympathies like County Kerry and those guilty of maladministration such as County Leitrim; in 1923, 5 local authorities were dissolved and the following year the number increased to 13.<sup>84</sup> On 20 February 1924, section 12 of the act was invoked against Dublin Corporation when Séamus Burke,<sup>85</sup> who succeeded Blythe as minister for local government, addressed a formal letter to the town clerk, announcing that an inquiry would be held into the corporation's administration. Between 11 March and 14 April, a 14-day inquiry was held under the chairmanship of Nicholas O'Dwyer, chief engineering inspector in the department of local government.<sup>86</sup> While his final report did not find evidence of corruption, it criticized the mismanagement of rates and wages and the lack of progress on housing. On 20 May 1924, the minister announced that the duties of the corporation were 'not being duly and effectually discharged' and consequently the municipal authority was dissolved by special order.<sup>87</sup> The dissolution was broadly welcomed in the press.<sup>88</sup> Until the restoration of the corporation in 1930, municipal government in Dublin was overseen by three commissioners – Séamus Murphy, Dr William C. Dwyer and Patrick J. Hennon. This development provided 'a unique opportunity for the restructuring of local government without short-term local political considerations dominating the debate'.<sup>89</sup>

The dissolution of the corporation coincided with the far more serious 'army mutiny' crisis in March 1924, the most dangerous threat to W.T. Cosgrave's government and liberal democracy in the new state. Three issues lay at the heart of the crisis which has been extensively examined in the historiography: large-scale demobilization at a time of high unemployment, the reorganization and professionalization of the army, and an ambiguity in terms of relations between the army and the civilian authority that dated from the War of Independence (1919–21).<sup>90</sup> Ultimately,

<sup>82</sup>*Evening Herald*, 1 May 1923, 4.

<sup>83</sup>*Irish Independent*, 23 May 1923, 7.

<sup>84</sup>See Mansergh, *The Irish Free State*, 238; P. McGarth, *Leitrim: The Irish Revolution, 1912–23* (Dublin, 2019), 105.

<sup>85</sup>Séamus (James) Burke also spelt his surname Bourke and sometimes used the Irish form Séamus de Búrca.

<sup>86</sup>On this, see Quinlivan, *Vindicating Dublin*, 92–147; Dickson, *Dublin*, 473–4; Yeates, *A City in Civil War*, 277–82.

<sup>87</sup>Morrissey, *Laurence O'Neill*, 228.

<sup>88</sup>See, for example, *FJ*, 21 May 1924, 4; *Irish Independent*, 21 May 1924, 6; *IT*, 21 May 1924, 6.

<sup>89</sup>Dickson, *Dublin*, 474.

<sup>90</sup>On the army mutiny, see M.G. Valiulis, 'The "army mutiny" of 1924 and the assertion of civilian authority in independent Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies*, 23 (1983), 354–66; E. O'Halpin, *Defending Ireland: the Irish State and Its Enemies since 1922* (Oxford, 2000), 45–53; J.M. Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution, 1921–36: Treatyite Politics and Settlement in Independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), 163–97; M. Farrell, *Party Politics in a New Democracy: The Irish Free State, 1922–37* (Basingstoke, 2017), 119–23; P. Ó Caoimh, *Richard Mulcahy: From the Politics of War to the Politics of Peace, 1913–1924* (Newbridge, 2019), 192–215.

the primacy of civilian over military authority was established, but in the complex political manoeuvring Joseph McGrath, minister for industry and commerce, and Richard Mulcahy, minister for defence, resigned. This had a bearing on the Dublin Reconstruction (Emergency Provisions) Act of 1924 because, in early February 1924, McGrath and Mulcahy had formed a cabinet subcommittee with Cosgrave to consider the issue of reconstruction in Dublin. The committee's work was quickly side-lined by the political crises outlined above.<sup>91</sup>

The long wait for the municipal scheme of reconstruction occasioned much complaint. In early April 1924, at the request of several owners of destroyed premises on O'Connell Street, Edwin M. Lloyd, a Dublin solicitor, wrote to the press to make clear that the delay in rebuilding was not due to 'any default on the part of the owners' but rested with the municipal authorities which had denied permission for rebuilding applications because its own scheme had not been finalized.<sup>92</sup> For this reason, owners were unwilling to instruct their architects to prepare designs because the corporation could not sanction plans until its powers over design, alignment and materials were clarified. Lloyd's insinuation was repudiated at a meeting of Dublin Corporation on 7 April where a motion was passed requesting the minister for local government to expedite the passing into law of the Dublin Reconstruction (Emergency Provisions) bill.<sup>93</sup> Ignatius Rice, the corporation's law agent, first raised the necessity of statutory powers to deal with reconstruction in July 1922 and the town clerk inquired about special legislation during 1923.<sup>94</sup> The lack of progress led *The Irish Times* to lament in early April 1924 the 'manifest tendency among all the parties concerned to shift the responsibility, and the dismal tract of waste and ruin in the centre of what should be one of the finest thoroughfares in Europe remains to offend the eyes of every visitor to the capital'.<sup>95</sup> There was a sense of urgency during the remainder of April, however, when the government provisionally approved the corporation's plans for rebuilding O'Connell Street and at last initiated the Dublin Reconstruction (Emergency Provisions) bill. The city architect had prepared a design for new buildings with which owners would have to conform. In terms of public amenity, the plans included provision for the widening of Cathedral Street from Thomas' Lane to Sackville Street by absorbing the premises of the Dublin United Tramways Company and for the extension of Lower Gloucester Street into O'Connell Street.<sup>96</sup> The latter required the acquisition of a portion of the site occupied by the Catholic Truth Society. Kingsway in London was cited as an example of such an improvement. The commissioners pushed ahead with these plans in 1925 at a combined cost of £28,532.<sup>97</sup> The new, but unnamed, linking thoroughfare, which required the relocation of St Thomas' church destroyed in 1922, became known popularly as Cathal Brugha Street as it was near to where Brugha, who led the anti-treaty garrison on O'Connell Street, made his last

<sup>91</sup>NAI, TSCH/1/2/3 second executive council minutes, 22 Sep. 1923 to 1 Mar. 1924, meeting of the executive council, 4 Feb. 1924.

<sup>92</sup>Lloyd to editor, 5 Apr. 1924, *FJ*, 7 Apr. 1924, 7.

<sup>93</sup>*IT*, 8 Apr. 1924, 7.

<sup>94</sup>Dublin City Council minutes of meeting, 24 Jul. 1922, no. 473, 354; NAI, FIN/1/2914, E.P. McCarron to J.J. McElligott, 21 Nov. 1923.

<sup>95</sup>*IT*, 9 Apr. 1924, 9.

<sup>96</sup>*Irish Independent*, 21 Apr. 1924, 7.

<sup>97</sup>*Dublin Corporation Reports 1925*, no. 13 report of the reconstruction section, 45; no. 213 report of the reconstruction section, 375.

stand in July 1922 in the very battle that devastated the street.<sup>98</sup> The popular name was given legal effect in August 1932 and in the same year Gloucester Street was renamed Seán MacDermott Street in memory of the 1916 martyr.<sup>99</sup> These changes were overseen by Fianna Fáil, the losing side in the civil war, which won the 1932 general election and went on to dominate parliamentary politics for the next 16 years.

The Dublin Reconstruction (Emergency Provisions) Act conferred wide powers on Dublin Corporation in respect of the rebuilding of Upper O'Connell Street. Six of its provisions were noteworthy. First, the corporation was authorized to acquire land compulsorily for the purpose of street improvements and to acquire narrow and inconvenient sites. Second, building owners had to lodge plans with the town clerk for any new buildings or alterations of existing ones on either Upper or Lower O'Connell Street. If in the view of the city architect the plans were injurious to the amenity of the street, he could demand alterations to the design, line of frontage or materials. Arbitration was to be used where disputes arose. This provision allowed the city architect greater control over rebuilding than had been the case after the 1916 Rising.<sup>100</sup> Third, the corporation was permitted to make loans in aid of the expense of reconstruction on the security of the ownership of the site. However, unlike 1916 loans for this purpose would not be advanced by the government to the corporation. Fourth, the corporation was empowered to acquire derelict sites after the elapse of two years.<sup>101</sup> Fifth, to promote rebuilding, allow recovery of trade and acknowledge increasing building costs, new valuations would not come into effect until 31 March 1930 and rates would not be applied until the end of March 1926.<sup>102</sup> Lastly, provision was made for the continuation of licences in public houses, hotels or other licensed premises destroyed or damaged. The act became law on 10 July 1924.

The establishment of a legal framework for rebuilding and the appointment of Dublin commissioners did not immediately surmount the hesitancy of owners about rebuilding. On 20 June 1924, the commissioners invited owners of sites, city officials (including the city architect and town clerk) and the secretary of the department of local government to a conference at city hall about rebuilding.<sup>103</sup> The commissioners urged on owners the necessity of having sites cleared without delay, but the meeting did not allay the misgivings of owners. In answer to a parliamentary question in July, W.T. Cosgrave revealed that clearing operations were under way at four sites, building had begun at two others and plans had been lodged with the municipal authorities in just four other cases. This was despite the fact that over £413,000 had been awarded up to 8 July 1924 for destruction on O'Connell Street of which almost £300,000 was in respect of rebuilding.<sup>104</sup> Although awards had been sanctioned by the recorder, many owners could not undertake reconstruction until they received payment from the department of finance. There were often delays between the hearing of claims and the lodgement of decrees with the department. In many cases,

<sup>98</sup>See D. Ó Corráin and G. Hanley, *Cathal Brugha: 'An Indomitable Spirit'* (Dublin, 2022), 155–60.

<sup>99</sup>S. Conboy, 'Changing Dublin street names, 1880s to 1940s', *Dublin Historical Record*, 64 (2011), 217.

<sup>100</sup>On this, see C. Casey, *Dublin: The City within the Grand and Royal Canals and the Circular Road with the Phoenix Park* (New Haven and London, 2005), 214.

<sup>101</sup>Dublin Reconstruction (Emergency Provisions) Act, 1924, available at [www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1924/act/24/enacted/en/print](http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1924/act/24/enacted/en/print), accessed on 14 Aug. 2023.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*; *DÉD*, vol. 8, cols. 105–7, 1 Jul. 1924.

<sup>103</sup>*IT*, 20 Jun. 1924, 5.

<sup>104</sup>*DÉD*, vol. 8, col. 1632, 18 Jul. 1924.

because reinstatement conditions were attached to awards, the ministry was unable to pay compensation until rebuilding was under way.<sup>105</sup> Each stage of rebuilding had to be certified by an architect before the department would advance payment. Taking James W. Mackey as an example, the £15,300 awarded for reinstatement was paid in 12 stages between 14 May 1924 and 16 April 1926.<sup>106</sup> As Table 1 below indicates, in some cases where property had changed ownership, final payments were not made until the 1930s.

A further conference took place in mid-September of representatives of the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland (RIAI), master builders and ministry officials to ascertain additional reasons for owners' reluctance to rebuild. A number of alleged causes of delay were considered. The most pressing was cost. Many owners believed that compensation awards were insufficient to cover the full cost of rebuilding in accordance with the city architect's scheme at a time when labour costs and materials were becoming more expensive. While there was no prospect of the government increasing awards, owners were entitled to borrow any shortfall from the corporation as had been the case in 1916. In January 1926, Commissioner Séamus Murphy applied to the minister for local government for sanction to borrow £50,000 for the purpose of making advances to owners under section 5 of the Dublin Reconstruction (Emergency Provisions) Act.<sup>107</sup> A second and related concern was the perceived expense of cut stone fronts as favoured by the city architect. A representative of the builders resolved this issue by explaining that the cost differential between a plain cut stone front with stone cornices and brick with cut stone dressing was negligible and amounted to no more than £10 per foot.<sup>108</sup> This was borne out by James W. Mackey, which was the first firm to begin rebuilding on Upper O'Connell Street in December 1924. The company had received 12 tenders, which supported the argument that a cut stone front need not be more expensive than one of brick and stone.<sup>109</sup> A third cause of delay was that several building owners had attempted to sell their properties but had failed to do so.

Murphy agreed to a suggestion that the RIAI nominate a small committee to assist Horace O'Rourke and facilitate building owners in an advisory capacity.<sup>110</sup> To this end, George P. Sheridan, president of the RIAI; Frederick G. Hicks, a prominent Dublin-based architect who had been involved in the post-1916 Rising rebuilding of O'Connell Street and who designed a pioneering housing scheme in Marino in the 1920s; and John Joseph Robinson, then a partner in the architectural practice of Donnelly, Moore, Keefe & Robinson, were appointed in early October.<sup>111</sup> The committee met with O'Rourke on 24 occasions.<sup>112</sup> Reflecting on the September conference, the *Irish Builder* suggested that it had at least 'cleared the air' and demonstrated support for a co-ordinated building scheme and 'that it would be a

<sup>105</sup>*IT*, 22 Mar. 1924, 7.

<sup>106</sup>NAI, OPW/6/1/491, 23 O'Connell St.

<sup>107</sup>*Dublin Corporation Reports 1925*, no. 284 report of the reconstruction section, 583; *IT*, 14 Jan. 1926, 4.

<sup>108</sup>*IT*, 25 Sep. 1924, 4.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*, 4 Dec. 1924, 4.

<sup>110</sup>*Irish Builder*, 20 Sep. 1924, 802.

<sup>111</sup>*IT*, 10 Oct. 1924, 9; McManus, *Dublin, 1910–1940*, 73.

<sup>112</sup>E. Rowley (ed.), *More than Concrete Blocks*, vol. I: *Dublin City's Twentieth-Century Buildings and Their Stories: 1900–1940* (Dublin, 2016), 172.



disaster if every owner were allowed to follow his own devices in building, even to the extent permitted in Lower Sackville Street in 1916'.<sup>113</sup> The *Freeman's Journal* also emphasized this point: 'Individuals cannot be permitted to give free play to their personal preferences in the main thoroughfare of a national capital... The desire of site-owners to save their pockets as much as possible is natural enough. But the restoration of O'Connell Street is a duty which they owe not only to themselves but to the nation.'<sup>114</sup>

### The belated reconstruction of O'Connell Street

In early 1925 – two and a half years after the civil war destruction of O'Connell Street – reconstruction began in earnest. In January of that year, *The Irish Times* observed that the 'unsightly gaps' on the east side of O'Connell Street were about to be filled as labourers worked on the sites of the Gresham Hotel and Mackey's.<sup>115</sup> On the western side reconstruction plans were approved for the YMCA building, for Adam Scott and Co. wine and tea merchants at No. 58 and for J and G. Campbell at No. 44.<sup>116</sup> However, the pace of rebuilding increased significantly when the government introduced an uncompromising element of compulsion. In July 1925, an amendment to the Dublin Reconstruction (Emergency Provisions) Act slashed the two-year grace period set out in the principal act for derelict sites to just three months, which expired on 16 October 1925.<sup>117</sup> After this, the commissioners could apply for an order to sell all interests in a derelict site by public auction with any compensation being transferred to the new owners. In the event, there was little need for the commissioners to exercise their new powers. As the destroyed area was restored, the character of O'Connell Street remained much as before. The 'architectural style was more modern, but the overall impression was of reconstruction rather than redevelopment'.<sup>118</sup> In this regard, a grandiose reorganization of the city centre as envisaged in three town-planning reports – *Dublin of the Future* published by the Civics Institute of Ireland, the Greater Dublin Reconstruction Movement and the *Dublin Civic Survey* of 1925 also sponsored by the Civics Institute – found no support among the cash-strapped government.<sup>119</sup>

The most notable works of reconstruction on Upper O'Connell Street were the Gresham Hotel, the Hammam Buildings, the Savoy cinema and the GPO. They merit a brief discussion. Of the five hotels on the street destroyed in 1922 – the Gresham, Hammam, Granville, Crown and Edinburgh – only the Gresham Hotel resumed business. Robert Atkinson, director of the London Bartlett School of Architecture, designed an 11 bay five-storey hotel with a dormer attic in a simple Classical style devoid of ornamentation with a Portland stone façade.<sup>120</sup> It reopened on 16 April

<sup>113</sup>*Irish Builder*, 20 Sep. 1924, 802.

<sup>114</sup>*FJ*, 5 Sep. 1924, 4.

<sup>115</sup>*IT*, 20 Jan. 1925, 5.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, 29 Jan. 1925, 4.

<sup>117</sup>NAI, TAOIS 3/S4504, Dublin Reconstruction (Emergency Provision) (Amendment) bill.

<sup>118</sup>J. Brady, 'Some aspects of the geography of the city centre in the early twentieth century', appendix iii in R. McManus, *Dublin, 1910–1940*, 464.

<sup>119</sup>See McManus, *Dublin, 1910–1940*, 55–68, 76, 83–6; Dickson, *Dublin*, 476–9; M.E. Daly, 'Dublin the restored capital: civic identity in an independent Ireland', in Clarke, Prunty and Hennessy (eds.), *Surveying Ireland's Past*, 573–6.

<sup>120</sup>Rothery, *Ireland and the New Architecture*, 86.

1927 with 120 bedrooms in addition to public rooms and was ‘a symbol in the public mind that the policy of reconstruction was under way’.<sup>121</sup> The site of the Hammam Hotel was acquired by the Cork builders Meagher and Hayes in 1925 and awards totalling £73,950 for reinstatement were assigned to them.<sup>122</sup> Initial plans for a hotel were not realized and instead Daniel Andrew Levie designed the Hammam Buildings with offices above and retail units at street level. Its height, style and façade matched the Gresham.<sup>123</sup> Meagher and Hayes also purchased 16–19 Upper O’Connell Street, which between 1916 and 1922 had been used by the administration and accounting staffs of the GPO. The company submitted plans for a new cinema on the site to the department of finance in July 1928.<sup>124</sup> Designed by Frederick Mitchell for the Savoy Cinema group, the Savoy was completed in 1929 at a cost of £200,000. It was the largest and most impressive cinema in the Free State with a 2,789-seat auditorium, decorated in a mixture of Venetian and Moorish styles, and a 300-seat restaurant.<sup>125</sup> The cinema was opened by W.T. Cosgrave on 29 November 1929 with a screening of *On with the Show* (Alan Crosland, 1929, USA) – one of the first sound-era musicals in technicolour. No building was more integral to the street than the GPO built by Francis Johnson between 1814 and 1818. It had been all but destroyed in 1916 apart from its façade, Doric columns and pediment statues of Hibernia, Mercury and Fidelity.<sup>126</sup> Additional adjacent properties acquired after 1916 allowed T.J. Byrne, the principal architect of the OPW, to design longer elevations to both the Henry Street and Prince’s Street sides of the building, which were linked by a covered shopping arcade. Although formally reopened on 11 July 1929 by Cosgrave, the reconstruction was not fully completed until 1933. The nine-year reconstruction cost £276,000.<sup>127</sup> The restoration of the GPO completed a narrative arc that spanned the Irish Revolution.

## Conclusion

Using the restoration of O’Connell Street in the aftermath of the Irish civil war as a lens, this article addresses a significant historiographical omission. Although compensation for property losses in the aftermath of the conflict was one of the most pressing issues for the new Irish state, it has received scant historical attention despite the availability of richly detailed compensation applications. These permit an in-depth analysis of the process of restitution and the associated challenges. The magnitude of awards for reinstatement offers one means of gauging the importance attached to O’Connell Street in the opening years of independent Ireland. Of £1,533,582 awarded for reinstatement at a national level (excluding the Four Courts, the GPO and the Custom House), £294,000, or almost one fifth of the total, was for

<sup>121</sup>U. O’Connor, *The Gresham Hotel, 1865–1965* (Cork, 1965), 29; C. Sands, *The Gresham for Style* (Dublin, 1994), 19; *Irish Independent*, 18 Apr. 1927.

<sup>122</sup>NAI, OPW/6/1/490, 19 O’Connell St.

<sup>123</sup>Rowley (ed.), *More than Concrete Blocks*, 167; Brady, ‘Some aspects of the geography of the city centre’, 474.

<sup>124</sup>NAI, OPW/6/1/483, 16–19 O’Connell St.

<sup>125</sup>M. Zimmermann, *The History of Dublin Cinemas* (Dublin, 2007), 154; K. Rockett with E. Rockett, *Film Exhibition and Distribution in Ireland, 1909–2010* (Dublin, 2011), 74.

<sup>126</sup>Casey, *Dublin*, 147.

<sup>127</sup>Ferguson, *The GPO*, 165–82.

buildings on O'Connell Street.<sup>128</sup> This was a reflection not only of the extent of the damage but of the prominence of the thoroughfare as a commercial and entertainment centre, as a transport hub and as the Irish capital's symbolic core. Not unlike the case of Belgium after World War I, the reconstruction of the thoroughfare was one aspect of the nascent Free State's nation-building project. Hence, the *Freeman's Journal* called for the 'completion of the work on a scale in accordance not only with the dignity of Dublin in the past, but of the greater dignity that she now boasts as the capital of a free people'.<sup>129</sup> For the Dublin citizen weary of the dislocation occasioned by the Irish Revolution, the damage caused by the civil war must have induced a sombre sense of *déjà vu*. After the 1916 Rising, the restoration of all but a handful of buildings had been completed by early 1922 before the cycle began again later that year. The post-civil war restitution took somewhat longer at seven years and was largely completed by 1929. Despite many delays and severely constrained financial circumstances, the restoration of O'Connell Street from the ashes of the civil war was a significant symbolic feat for the new state, for its capital and its citizens.

**Table 1.** Compensation awards for rebuilding on Upper O'Connell Street

Name/owner	Address	Claim <sup>1</sup> (£)	Award (£)	Reinstatement amount (£)	Final payment
Gresham Hotel <sup>2</sup>	20–2	116,325	93,550	74,000	19 May 1927
Crown and Granville hotels <sup>3</sup>	17, 17A, 18 and 18A	104,727	63,750	49,500 <sup>4</sup>	8 Oct. 1929
Samuel Reid Armstrong, owner of Hammam Hotel <sup>5</sup>	11–13	55,513	40,083	32,572 <sup>6</sup>	28 Feb. 1928
Presbyterian Association (Sackville Hall) <sup>7</sup>	16	35,278	17,200	17,200 <sup>8</sup>	8 Oct. 1929
Trustees of Hibernian Bible Society <sup>9</sup>	10	42,092	18,754	16,323 <sup>10</sup>	9 Jan. 1933
R.J. Mackay for The Edinburgh Hotel Co. <sup>11</sup>	56	33,683	20,400	15,500	
Sir James W. Mackey & Sons <sup>12</sup>	23	34,376	19,050	15,350	15 Apr. 1926
John J. Gogan <sup>13</sup>	25	16,160	8,652	8,652	
J. & G. Campbell, wine merchant <sup>14</sup>	58	20,482	12,950	8,500	23 Oct. 1926
Dublin United Tramways <sup>15</sup>	9	10,500	10,120	8,270 <sup>16</sup>	
Catholic Truth Society <sup>17</sup>	24	31,646	17,253	8,000	25 Jan. 1933
Adam Scott <sup>18</sup>	44	31,937	18,220	7,250	9 Nov. 1925
Helena Bookey <sup>19</sup>	19	12,000	7,250	7,250 <sup>0</sup>	13 Nov. 1929
A. & R. Thwaites & Co. Ltd, mineral water manufacturer <sup>21</sup>	57	18,253	11,358	7,113	2 Jun. 1926
Edinburgh Assurance Co. Ltd <sup>22</sup>	55	17,635	6,525	6,150 <sup>23</sup>	29 Sep. 1930
Young Men's Christian Association <sup>24</sup>	43	10,428	7,058	5,500	25 Jul. 1925
W. & A. Gilbey <sup>25</sup>	46–7	8,268	5,022	4,422	9 Apr. 1925

(Continued)

<sup>128</sup> *DÉD*, vol. 20, col. 501, 6 Jul. 1927.

<sup>129</sup> *FJ*, 5 Sep. 1924, 4.

Table 1. (Continued)

Name/owner	Address	Claim <sup>1</sup> (£)	Award (£)	Reinstatement amount (£)	Final payment
Patrick Gleeson <sup>26</sup>	11	21,200	15,601	3,757	26 Oct. 1931
W.G. Moore <sup>27</sup>	11	8,114	5,000	3,700 <sup>28</sup>	26 Oct. 1931

<sup>1</sup>Rounded to the nearest pound.

<sup>2</sup>NAI, FIN/COMP/28/1102 (William George Dudley, secretary of the Gresham Hotel Ltd); *IT*, 7 Feb. 1924, 3.

<sup>3</sup>NAI, OPW/6/1/483; OPW/6/1/490; *Dublin Evening Telegraph*, 26 Feb. 1924, 5.

<sup>4</sup>The rebuilding award pertained only to the Granville which was later assigned to Messrs Meagher & Hayes, Cork, and subsequently to the Savoy Cinema Ltd.

<sup>5</sup>NAI, OPW/6/1/482.

<sup>6</sup>Assigned to Messrs Meagher & Hayes, Cork.

<sup>7</sup>NAI, OPW/6/1/483; OPW/6/1/490.

<sup>8</sup>Assigned to Messrs Meagher & Hayes, Cork and subsequently to the Savoy Cinema Ltd.

<sup>9</sup>NAI, OPW/6/1/479.

<sup>10</sup>Assigned to Messrs Meagher & Hayes, Cork.

<sup>11</sup>NAI, OPW/6/1/465; *IT*, 20 Mar. 1924, 2.

<sup>12</sup>NAI, OPW/6/1/491.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, OPW/6/1/451.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, OPW/6/1/518.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, OPW/6/1/479; *Dublin Evening Telegraph*, 22 Feb. 1924, 1.

<sup>16</sup>Dublin Corporation acquired the site for street widening purposes and a portion of No. 9 was acquired for the reinstatement of No. 10.

<sup>17</sup>NAI, OPW/6/1/493.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, OPW/6/1/504.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, OPW/6/1/490.

<sup>20</sup>Assigned to Messrs Meagher & Hayes, Cork, and subsequently to the Savoy Cinema Ltd.

<sup>21</sup>NAI, OPW/6/1/516.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, OPW/6/1/515.

<sup>23</sup>Later assigned to Messrs Meagher & Hayes, Cork.

<sup>24</sup>NAI, OPW/6/1/503.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, OPW/6/1/505.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, OPW/6/1/481.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, OPW/6/1/480; OPW/6/1/481.

<sup>28</sup>Assigned to Patrick Gleeson.

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