

Battlefield assessment

**139-149 North King Street
Dublin 7**

RPS Ref. No. 8790
RMP Ref. DU018-020

By

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report considers the battle for the control of Dublin over Easter Week 1916, with specific analysis of the narrative as it unfolded in the immediate urban environment of the premises of James Crean and Son, soap manufactures, known as the Phoenix Works (Figure 1). The report was requested by the Archaeology Section, Dublin City Council on foot of a pre-planning consultation.

The former factory is now listed on the RPS (Ref. No. 8790), and the industrial elevations to North King Street and Bow Street are being retained in the site's proposed redevelopment as purpose-built student accommodation.

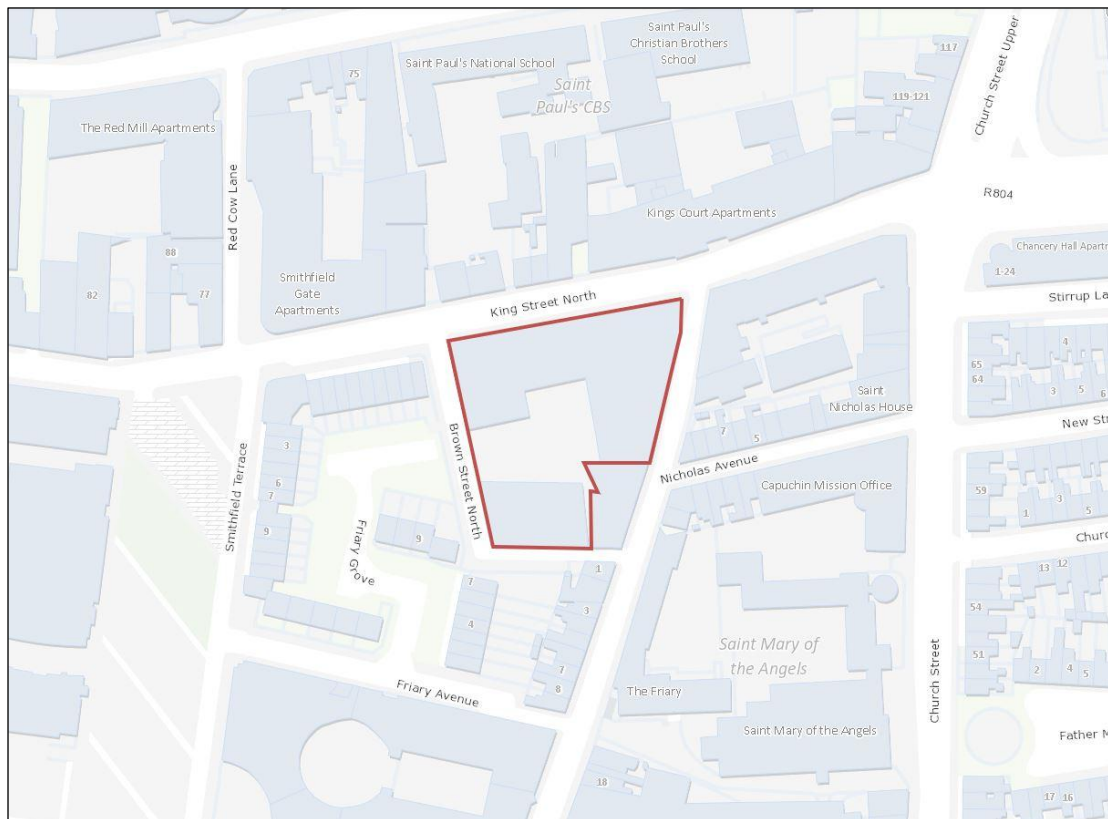


Figure 1 Development site location (ASI Historical Environment Viewer)

- 1.2 The proposed development will consist of

the demolition of existing structures on site, with the exception of the façade on North King Street (N) and Bow Street (E), which is a protected structure (RPS Ref. No. 8790 – north and east elevation only), which will be retained, improved and restored as part of the proposed development.

The proposal will provide a purpose-built student accommodation development in a 7-storey building over a partial existing basement with a setback at 5th floor and a further significant setback at the 6th floor level.

The proposal includes 361 no. student bedspaces, a ground level retail unit with frontage to both North King Street and Bow Street, communal facilities including a courtyard, external terrace at roof level at 5th and 6th floor and internal amenity spaces.

- 1.3 On Friday 28 April, sometime after 10.00hrs, the factory was occupied by Crown forces infiltrating the area to the western flank of positions held by the First Battalion Irish Volunteers since Monday morning. There is no confirmation in the Witness Statements collected by the Bureau of Military History that the factory was occupied by Volunteers prior to the arrival of British troops, and there is no evidence of damage to the brick elevations indicative of direct assault or incidental gunfire.

Two detailed claims for compensation were made by the company to the Property Losses (Ireland) Committee; the claim for the building does not detail gunfire damage, where the removal of glazing is an immediate action in buildings occupied by troops in zones of conflict.

Given the proximate location of one of the largest military barracks on the islands, the relatively late infiltration of Crown forces into this part of the city has not been satisfactorily explained. It is of interest that the last Volunteer post to surrender on Sunday morning was at Clarke's Dairy, nearby on Church Street, where the troops occupying Crean's were likely being held in reserve for a final assault.

- 1.4 The area was surveyed by *Archaeology and Built Heritage* in 2016 as part of a project recording the physical evidence of the rising in the contemporary city, and the research below was collated by the writer and Dr Eve Campbell.

This report thus examines the nature and impact of the rebellion in the immediate area of the Phoenix Works. Where the narrative of the fighting that took place here remains uncontested in the historiography of the Rising (excepting perhaps the location of Clarke's Dairy),¹ there is an attraction in investigating the events from other angles, where the surviving built fabric of the area is another source which can be as usefully exploited in an analysis of events. This is especially the case where the very physical remains of the Rising remain contested to this day.

¹ Where was Clarke's Dairy? <https://thearchaeologyof1916.wordpress.com/2016/03/31/where-was-clarkes-dairy/>

2 North King Street: battlefield contexts

2.1 *Introduction*

Of all the battlefield sites of the rebellion, the eastern end of North King Street is perhaps the most difficult to interpret in the contemporary landscape. Air Corps photographs taken in 1950 depict an area completely alien to modern eyes, one which still retains many of the buildings evident on the Ordnance Survey 25 inch mapping undertaken in 1907. According to the Bureau of Military History (BMH) website, the photographs were annotated by Commandant R. Feely who fought in the area in 1916 and when taken along with the other images obtained by the Air Corps they provide a fascinating glimpse of a city which has virtually vanished in the intervening years.

The western end of North King Street, where the site under discussion is located, was somewhat quieter, and despite modern development and some dereliction on its northern side, it retains considerably more historic fabric, none of which displays obvious surviving evidence of the brief conflict.

In addition to the photographs, the BMH has over 20 witness statements from participants and observers of the fighting in the area, which provide details of the location of barricades and premises occupied by the Volunteers from the Monday through to the eventual surrender of the final outpost the following Sunday. The witness statements were collected between 1947 and 1957, some thirty to forty years after the events took place, and a certain degree of imprecision is to be expected.

Another crucial resources are the files of the Property Losses (Ireland) Committee (PLIC). The PLIC was set up in the aftermath of the Rising to address the substantial damage to property that had occurred during the Rising. Businesses or individuals who had suffered losses could claim for compensation from the committee. The PLIC archive provides an insight into the material culture of Dublin households in 1916 and assists a spatial appreciation of the geography of the Rising, by noting which buildings were occupied by which parties, and what damage was done in the process.

2.2 *On the barricades*

Barricades were central to the strategy of the First Battalion of Volunteers in the North King Street area. The web of narrow streets and lanes extending north from the Four Courts was easily blockaded, and the industries and building yards dotting the area provided ample materials for the purpose. The First Battalion, under the command of Commandant Edward Daly, initially aimed to hold a line running from the Four Courts to Cabra, linking up with the 5th Battalion in North County Dublin and with the garrison in the GPO.² Their position also aimed

² Bureau of Military History, WS0201, 5; WS0162, 3.

to defend against attack from the Royal (Collins) and Marlborough (McKee) Barracks to the north and west.³

On Monday the Volunteers set about securing the area, occupying and fortifying buildings and building barricades. They took over and barricaded key buildings including St. John's convent, Fr. Matthew Hall, Moore's Coach Factory, Clarke's Dairy, Reilly's Public House, and indeed the Four Courts. That Daly's Volunteers are generally referred to as the 'Four Courts Garrison' is something of a misnomer where most of the fighting took place to the north of the sector at the junction of North King Street and Church Street.

By Tuesday afternoon, the Volunteers had thrown up over 20 barricades in an area stretching from Church Street Bridge to Coleraine Street and from Smithfield to the Fruit Markets. They sealed off the ends of the main arteries of North Brunswick Street, North King Street and Church Street, and set up blockades at Mary's Lane, Cuckoo Lane and Chancery Place, facing east towards the markets, and at May Lane and Hammond Lane facing west towards Smithfield.

The barricades were built with a variety of articles taken from adjoining houses, stores, yards, including barrels, boxes, carts, cabs, old furniture, planks, sacks filled with sand and rubble.⁴ On North Brunswick Street, Glynn's and Cullen's building yards were raided for cement, sandbags, and building materials.⁵ Further south on Church Street, rubble and old timber from ruined tenements and materials from an adjacent construction site were used to build 'a massive brick barricade'.⁶ The Volunteers even recruited men from the crowds queuing at Monk's Bakery to carry materials from the building site to nearby barricades in exchange for bread.⁷

Carts and cars were commandeered from all over the area, upturned and piled into makeshift defences. In May Lane, Liam Archer took carts from Jameson's Distillery,⁸ and on North Brunswick Street, Moore's Coach Factory was occupied and carts, traps, a motor bike, and household furniture were thrown into a barricade defending the junction of Church Street and North Brunswick Street.⁹ The 'formidable' barricade outside Reilly's Fort was reported to be 'at least 14 feet high'.¹⁰ On Church Street Bridge the barricade included a cab, a motor taxi, and barrels of porter commandeered from a local publican.¹¹ This barricade was reinforced with stone setts dug up from Hammond Lane, bed-ends from the adjacent Starkey's Foundry Yard, and the Volunteers spread broken glass bottles in front of the barricade to prevent enemy forces approaching on their hands and knees.¹²

³ WS0162, 3.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ WS0313, 3.

⁶ WS0619, 6; WS1686, 16.

⁷ WS0314, 11.

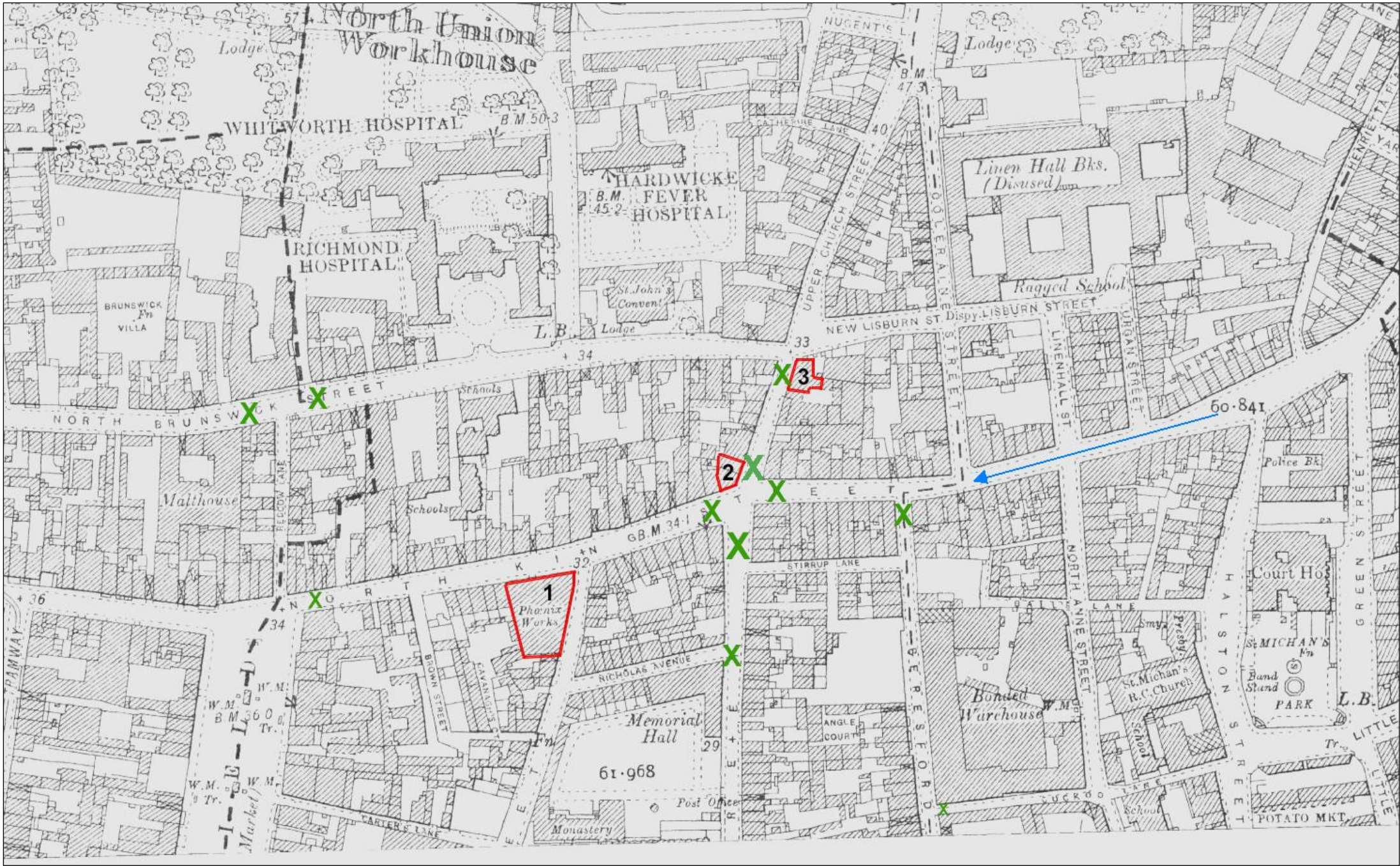
⁸ WS0619, 6.

⁹ NI PLIC/1/3022

¹⁰ WS920, 16

¹¹ WS0842, 8-9

¹² WS0842, 11



Irish Volunteers' deployment in North King Street, 24-30 April 1916

- 1 Phoenix Works
- 2 Reilly's Fort
- 3 Clarke's Diary

IV barricades X

Main British advance →

Figure 2 Ordnance Survey, DN018-07, 1907-11

The Phoenix Works were located between a barricade erected at the northeastern corner of Smithfield, and larger obstructions placed at the corner of Church Street. This in turn was covered towards the end of the week by Volunteers occupying the buildings on the western side of Church Street, directly facing British troops who began advancing slowly westwards along North King Street, on Friday morning.

Until that afternoon, there is little evidence that the Volunteers faced infiltration along their western flank. The fighting on Northumberland Road on Tuesday, combined with the large field of fire across Smithfield from the surrounding industrial buildings may well have discouraged an advance, however it is important to consider that the British units were not trained in urban warfare and were particularly unaccustomed to fighting irregular troops, for the most part presenting as civilians. Smithfield presented a large open area with little cover and from Monday evening it remained in the sights of marksmen such as Frank Shouldice, who held an elevated position in the distillery with a rifle and a borrowed pair of binoculars.¹³

The infiltration of the area started several hours after the arrival of General Sir John Maxwell at the North Wall at 02.00hrs, who ordered the 2/5th (R) and 2/6th (S) South Staffordshire Regiment to advance from Trinity College and cross the river upstream from the Four Courts. This task was made easier by the surrender of the Volunteer garrison at the Mendicity Institution on Wednesday, which for three days had dominated the western quays.

It is likely that the Phoenix Works were occupied from Friday afternoon by a detachment of the 2/5th South Staffs, where a further advance was possibly impeded by friendly fire from the east as the advance began from the eastern end of North King Street. The Volunteers remained in occupation at Reilly's Fort 80m away on the Church Street corner until 09.00hrs on Saturday. By 11.00hrs elements of D Company 2/6th South Staffs, who had taken heavy casualties on North King Street rushed the now empty Reilly's Fort and immediately came under heavy gunfire from surrounding Volunteer positions. Here they remained pinned down and separated from the main force for the remainder of the day. The remaining Volunteers retreated north to Clarke's Dairy through holes broken through adjoining buildings, where they surrendered on Sunday morning, the last detachment of Volunteers to do so.

This assault on Reilly's Fort concluded with the murder of 15 civilians in their homes in North King Street. Their houses have long since been demolished for road widening and a plaque erected on the northern side of the street commemorates the event. Four years later the corner was again to see action when a young Volunteer, Kevin Barry was arrested after an IRA attack on an army bread delivery which resulted in the deaths of three British soldiers. He was found guilty of three counts of murder by court-martial and executed on 1 November 1920.

¹³ Shouldice, F. 2016. *Grandpa the Sniper: The Remarkable Story of a 1916 Volunteer*. Dublin.

2.3 Tactics

The tactics employed by the Volunteers were not mere improvisation. In 1915 Connolly had published articles on the tactics of urban warfare, gleaned lessons from the insurrection in Paris in 1848:

The insurrection of Paris in June, 1848, reveals how districts of towns, or villages, should be held. The streets were barricaded at tactical points not on the main streets but commanding them. The houses were broken through so that passages were made inside the houses along the whole length of the streets. The party walls were loopholed, as were also the front walls, the windows were blocked by sandbags, boxes filled with stones and dirt, bricks, chests, and other pieces of furniture with all sorts of odds and ends piled up against them.¹⁴

Volunteer Seán Cody reported that 'lectures in street fighting and the construction of barricades and road blocks from all available materials were given to us at regular intervals by officers from Headquarters' Staff, and all men were expected to acquaint themselves with the layout of streets, important buildings, entrances to factories, position of windows and any information which could be of use in the course of a Rising'.¹⁵ Similarly, Volunteer Liam O'Carroll from Cabra recalled attending lectures by Connolly on urban house to house fighting and by MacDonagh on open air guerrilla fighting.¹⁶

During the Rising O'Carroll held the western end of North Brunswick Street facing Smithfield. In the week before the Rising he had walked the area with Daly deliberating on the best position for barricades:

We proceeded into North Brunswick Street, through Red Cow Lane, to the vicinity of the Richmond Hospital ... "Well, now", he [Daly] said ... tell me exactly what preparations you would make for the purpose of defending the position against an attack by the military, approaching from Stoneybatter". I went round and examined the area in the immediate vicinity; and I selected the spot immediately east of the old Richmond Hospital as the most suitable point to defend; I also found to the west of this point a carrier's yard – Cullen's, I think – in which there was an amount of timber and heavy lorries; I decided that this would be very suitable material for the erection of a barricade; I pointed out four or five houses on each side of the street, and opposite to one another, and explained the loop-holing I would do, and the breaking-in from one house to another, and the provision of rear exits. Commandant Daly informed me then that he was very satisfied with the plan; and he then said: "You may be called on very shortly to carry out that plan".¹⁷

Both the Volunteer witness statements and the Property Losses (Ireland) Committee (PLIC) claims indicate that O'Carroll and his men carried out their plan. The PLIC was set up in the aftermath of the Rising to address the substantial damage to property that had occurred during the Rising. Businesses or individuals who had suffered losses could claim for compensation from the committee. The PLIC archive provides a fascinating insight into the material culture of

¹⁴ *Workers' Republic*, 24 July 1915.

¹⁵ WS1035, 4.

¹⁶ WS314, 2-3.

¹⁷ WS0314, 6-7.

Dublin households in 1916. They also aid in the mapping of the Rising, by noting which buildings were occupied by which parties, and what damage was done in the process.

There was a cluster of claims for damage due to 'rebel occupation' around the junction of Red Cow Lane and North Brunswick Street near O'Carroll's barricades. Most of the occupied houses have since been demolished, but on the southern side of the street Nos 73-76 survive. The only valid PLIC claim for these properties was by one Thomas Nolan, who lived and ran a grocer shop out of No. 75 North Brunswick Street. On Monday afternoon he and his family were evacuated from their home by Volunteers who 'said they wanted them for the Irish Republican Army'. Nolan and his family were given shelter by Dr Joseph O'Carroll in the Richmond Hospital on Monday, and they stayed with a friend for the rest of the week. When Nolan returned to his house on Wednesday at noon, he found 'shop door & gates open and Volunteers gone, and my shop looted'. The house was searched by Crown forces on Sunday morning, and the family returned on Monday. After the Rising Nolan made a claim to the PLIC for damage to his home and for loss of stock by looting.¹⁸

The east side of North Brunswick Street was also heavily fortified. G Company took Moore's Coach Factory (Nos 1 to 3) as their headquarters.¹⁹ Clarke's Dairy on the diagonally opposite corner was also occupied. In addition, they took possession of a number of dwellings around the junction of North Brunswick Street and Upper Church Street. Most of Moore's Factory was demolished to build apartments, but No. 3, the late-eighteenth century dwelling that formed part of the property, survives. Mary J. Moore, resident of the house in 1916, claimed £165 from the PLIC for extensive damage to the structure and its contents.

According to Moore's claim, the hall door was smashed in by rebels and the locks were blown off; holes were bored through the walls of the house and the factory; bricks were removed from the external sides of windows; window glass was smashed; and the internal walls were damaged by bullet holes.²⁰ In addition, furniture from the house was hauled out of the house for use in barricades, and personal effects were broken or stolen. Moore included a matching gold bracelet, brooch and earrings, a mother of pearl beads and a white ostrich fan worth £1 in her PLIC claim.

Little trace of the structural damage cited by Moore is apparent on the façade of No. 3 today. Traces of earlier brown brick are visible on both gables of the building, and it appears that the entire façade of the building may have been rebuilt after 1916.

Across the road, at No. 100, the humbler dwelling of Mrs Catherine Nolan, was also damaged by the Volunteers. Nolan reported that her house was 'taken over by rebels', and claimed for property 'destroyed by them whilst in possession'. Among her itemised possessions were two mattresses, bed linen, 3½ dozen cigarettes, food, and a hand saw.²¹ Only the much-altered

¹⁸ PLIC/1/506.

¹⁹ WS1035, 9.

²⁰ PLIC/1/2102.

²¹ PLIC/1/3810.

façade of No. 100 North Brunswick Street survives. The buildings either side, also occupied by the Volunteers, have since been demolished.

Catherine Nolan's PLIC claim makes no mention of damage to her home from wall boring, but it is recognised from BMH witness statements that it was a Volunteer tactic used in the vicinity. As the fighting escalated during Thursday, both Volunteers and British soldiers were forced to advance by boring through houses to avoid gunfire in the narrow streets. As Reilly's Fort came under increasing pressure, members of G Company commenced boring through houses at the corner of North Brunswick and Church Streets in a bid to reach the position. They took hammers, sledge hammers, chisels and saws from Moore's Coach Factory²² and broke holes through the party walls of a terrace of early eighteenth-century houses on the western side of Church Street. Seán Cody gave this account of events:

On Thursday the British advanced, from Bolton St. up North King St. firing from all directions, and severe fighting was taking place at the barricade near Reilly's public house which held Lieutenant Shouldice's men, and immediately north of this post we of "G" Company and others were burrowing our way through party walls of houses to come nearer to the junction of North King St. and Church St. We pushed out windows and under the shining example and command of Paddy Holohan kept up a terrific fire on the barricade through which the British were advancing ... During the night of Thursday, I think, we were attacked as it seemed from all sides, and when dawn arrived we could hear the voices of British soldiers all down North King St. towards Bolton Street.²³

Gearóid Ua hUallacháin, a member of *Fianna Éireann*, also recounted a plan to reach Reilly's Fort through the adjoining houses and to bomb out the soldiers with tin-can hand grenades. The men were carrying out this operation when news of the surrender reached them.²⁴ Although the southern corner of North Brunswick Street and Church Street Upper has been demolished, most of the building through which the Volunteers tunnelled survive at 116-22 Upper Church Street, and 44 North King Street, the site of Reilly's Fort.

²² PLIC/1/3022.

²³ WS1035, 13.

²⁴ WS328, 66.

2.4 Compensation claims

The factory premises occupying the initial eleven bays on North King Street is depicted on the company letterhead which accompanied two applications for compensation to the Property Losses (Ireland) Committee, after the Rising (Figure 3). The first was a claim for £30 10s 5d for damage by Crown forces to the premises and contents at Nos 144-149. A payment of £27 10s was recommended by Committee.²⁵ A second claim for £125 for looted soap stock was disallowed as it was received past the deadline for submissions.²⁶

There was no application made for the repair of damage occasioned by gunfire which reinforces the narrative that the most intense fighting in this sector occurred further east at the corner of Church Street, where most of the offensive action was taken from the east and directed towards Reilly's Fort.

The damage in Crean's was however caused by the occupation of British troops, most likely a detachment of the 2/5th South Staffs, and the repairs specified included damage to the window opes and new glazing, as well as repairs undertaken to the interiors.



Figure 3 James Crean & Son. Company letterhead, c. 1916

²⁵ PLIC/1/3882.

²⁶ PLIC/1/6448.

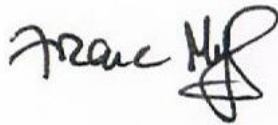
3 Conclusion

- 3.1 This report has examined the nature of the events which took place in the immediate environs of the site during the Rising. The compensation claim supports the documentary evidence for an infiltration of the area from 10.00hrs on Friday and does not suggest that the premises were taken by force.

Where there is no recorded evidence of civilian looting (or certainly no attempts made by the Volunteers to contain it), it must be assumed that the damage to the building was caused by troops from the 2/5th South Staffordshire Regiment. They were most likely awaiting orders to assault the remaining Volunteer positions at Clarke's Dairy, where Volunteers holding positions on Church Street south of North King Street had surrendered the previous evening.

- 3.2 The association of the premises with the events of 1916 is not a spurious one. The factory was on the edge of the battlefield and was probably remained unoccupied by the Volunteers where it did not enjoy the height advantage for sniping afforded by the distilleries and malhouses to the south. There remain no surviving features or fittings which sound an authentic echo of its brief occupation by Crown forces.

The historic brick elevations to North King Street and Bow Street survive nonetheless, albeit unscathed by the battle.



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