



A postcard from the era shows Grafton Street.

# Oh to be from Rathmines

Joseph Brady outlines the social and physical landscape of Dublin on the eve of the Rising



**A** MINOR character in Seán O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars* is the fashionably-dressed middle-aged stout woman from Rathmines.

As the Rising begins to affect the city and the trams are stopped, she meets Fluther, the Covey and Peter and asks ‘For Gawd’s sake, will one of you kind men show any safe way for me to get to Wrathmines?’ She is not treated sympathetically, for to be from Rathmines was to be far removed from the reality of life in the tenements.

Dublin in 1916 was a city of great social contrasts even though it was a small place in geographical terms. It was not a single urban area but rather a city and a collection of adjacent independent towns bound by economic ties. To be from Rathmines, was not just to be of elevated social status, it was also not to be from Dublin but from an entirely different legal urban entity, a suburban township with its own council, water supply, rates – and its own view of the world.

Despite the efforts of Dublin Corporation in the latter years of the 19th century to absorb the townships – and so get their ratebooks – Pembroke, Rathmines and the coastal townships of Blackrock, Kingstown, Dalkey and Killiney were still independent in 1916. Though the townships were relatively small compared to the city – 29,294 people in Pembroke and 37,840 in Rathmines/Rathgar in 1911 compared to 304,802 – they were middle-class in character and were important to the business and commercial life of the

city. For example, though there were 2,090 civil service officers and clerks in the city, there were 303 in Rathmines and 566 in Pembroke alone. It was to the city that they came to work, to shop and to enjoy themselves.

In the evening they went home, insulated from the lives of the poor whose streets they shared during the day, for even in the best street the tenements were only a stone’s throw distant. They also avoided having to support the work of Dublin Corporation in addressing the housing crisis – there were 21,133 one-room tenements alone in the city in 1911 – though the 1913 Housing Inquiry suggested that Dublin Corporation’s commitment to that project was not what it might be.

The main business area was around College Green where many insurance and financial institutions had built impressively while the legal profession had offices along the quays between O’Connell Bridge and the Four Courts.

Sackville Street, for all its impressive scale, was not a major business street but directed more to tourism with some shopping and the Metropole, Hamman, Imperial and Gresham hotels provided a high level of service with all of the facilities that wealthy people might expect. These were international standard hotels with separate accommodation and dining facilities for the servants who accompanied visitors. In fact, it was these visitors who were most immediately discommoded by the events of the Rising, given the location of the hotels.

The city centre was pre-eminent as a shopping destination for the people in the townships. While they enjoyed good quality local shopping, nothing could compete with downtown. Travel was easy and efficient with good train and tram services. A minority could afford to travel by carriage and the best shops provided liveried attendants to ensure that these customers were treated as they expected.

It was suggested that the more elegant suburbanites did not cross the Liffey when they came to Dublin. That is an exaggeration because the north city had excellent shopping facilities and there were middle-class areas in Clontarf and Drumcondra which had been absorbed into the city after 1900. It is equally true that the needs of most southsiders could be met south of the Liffey.

Then, as now, there were two main quality shopping districts – one bounded by Grafton Street and South Great Georges Street and a more linear area on the northside with Henry Street as its core, flanked by Mary Street and Talbot Street. Grafton Street had pretensions to pre-eminence long before 1916 and a 1904 shopping guide for visitors advised that it was there that one would see the ‘wealth, fashion and beauty of Dublin’ engaged in shopping in the morning and in promenade in the afternoon.

Status was important and many shops boasted royal warrants, though some took care to feature the Irishness of their products. London, Paris and St Petersburg led fashion and Dubliners were kept up to date on trends by magazines

## DUBLIN IN 1915



### THE BIG HOUSE IN THE PARK

The Viceregal Demesne was home to the British viceroy – in 1916 this was Lord Wimborne. It is now Áras an Uachtaráin, home of the Irish President

### SPORTED AND PLAYED

The five cricket grounds show how popular that sport once was. Before the First World War there were 20 cricket grounds in all in the Phoenix Park but now just two remain.

### KILMAINHAM JAIL

The jail was built in 1796 and held 150,000 prisoners including the Rising leaders until it finally closed in 1924. A popular site for tourists and schools visits, it hosted 329,000 people in 2014.

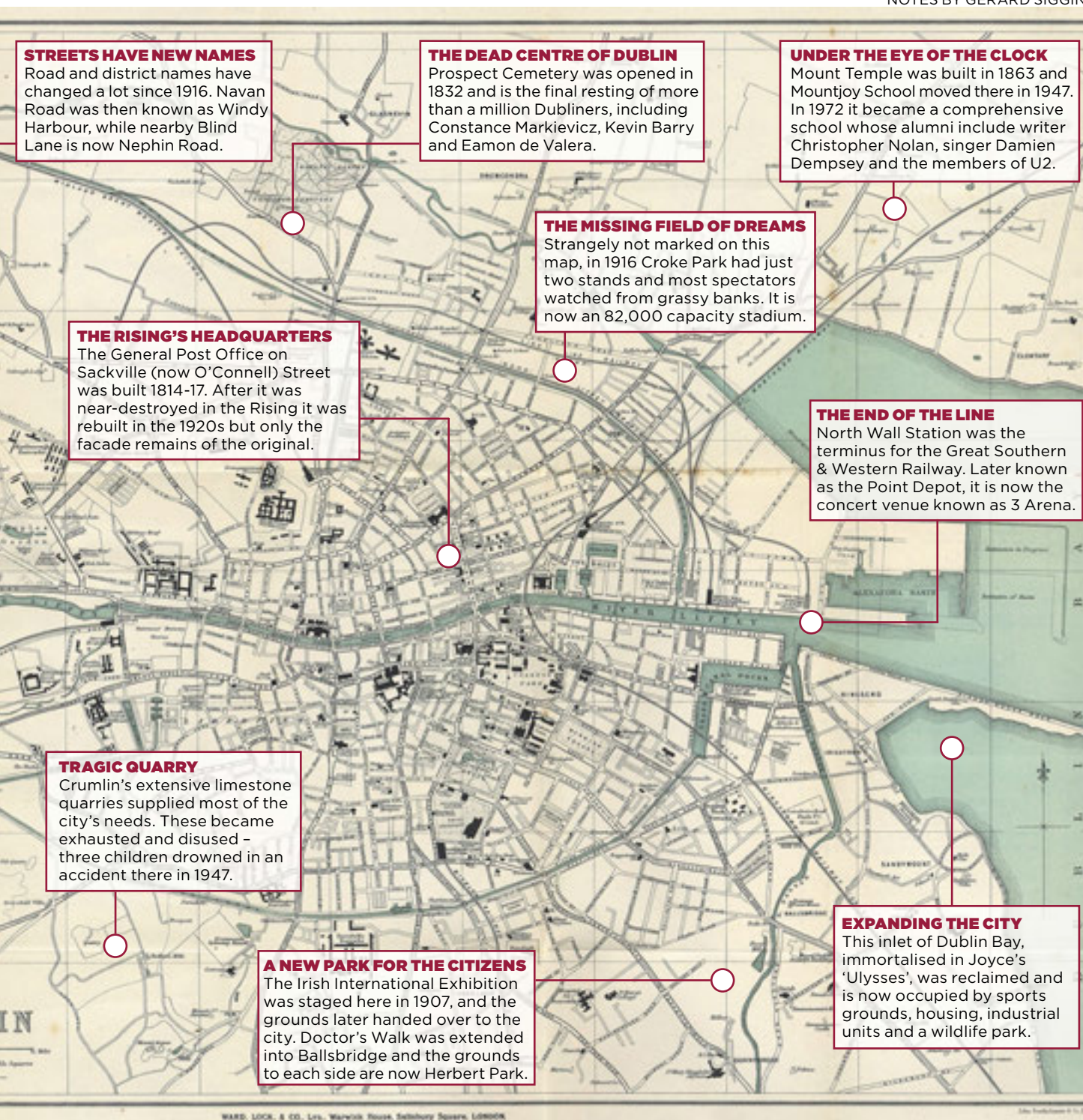
such as *The Lady of the House* which also offered practical advice. Women’s clothing dominated the shopping landscape and smaller boutique shops vied with the larger warehouses (department stores) such as Brown Thomas and Switzer’s.

Made-to-measure clothing was easily available and stores often maintained a manufacturing component on the upper floors or to the rear of the premises. For those who preferred an even more personal experience, there were many dressmakers who had rooms on the upper floors.

In the nearby streets a range of personal services was available, including language instruction, dancing masters as well as hair and beauty salons. Men were well catered to, even though it was recognised that they did not go ‘shopping’ with a similar emphasis on made-to-measure clothing including suits and shirts.

Exhausted by shopping, the ladies could repair to a number of fashionable coffee houses, of which Mitchell’s was probably the best known, and discuss the business of the day. Perhaps they might have some servant issues and so visit one of the nearby servant registries. Even those on more modest middle-class salaries could afford a daily servant and this was the single most important respectable employment opportunity for women. Some 14,263

NOTES BY GERARD SIGGINS



**STREETS HAVE NEW NAMES**  
Road and district names have changed a lot since 1916. Navan Road was then known as Windy Harbour, while nearby Blind Lane is now Nephin Road.

**THE DEAD CENTRE OF DUBLIN**  
Prospect Cemetery was opened in 1832 and is the final resting of more than a million Dubliners, including Constance Markievicz, Kevin Barry and Eamon de Valera.

**UNDER THE EYE OF THE CLOCK**  
Mount Temple was built in 1863 and Mountjoy School moved there in 1947. In 1972 it became a comprehensive school whose alumni include writer Christopher Nolan, singer Damien Dempsey and the members of U2.

**THE MISSING FIELD OF DREAMS**  
Strangely not marked on this map, in 1916 Croke Park had just two stands and most spectators watched from grassy banks. It is now an 82,000 capacity stadium.

**THE RISING'S HEADQUARTERS**  
The General Post Office on Sackville (now O'Connell) Street was built 1814-17. After it was near-destroyed in the Rising it was rebuilt in the 1920s but only the facade remains of the original.

**THE END OF THE LINE**  
North Wall Station was the terminus for the Great Southern & Western Railway. Later known as the Point Depot, it is now the concert venue known as 3 Arena.

**TRAGIC QUARRY**  
Crumlin's extensive limestone quarries supplied most of the city's needs. These became exhausted and disused - three children drowned in an accident there in 1947.

**A NEW PARK FOR THE CITIZENS**  
The Irish International Exhibition was staged here in 1907, and the grounds later handed over to the city. Doctor's Walk was extended into Ballsbridge and the grounds to each side are now Herbert Park.

**EXPANDING THE CITY**  
This inlet of Dublin Bay, immortalised in Joyce's 'Ulysses', was reclaimed and is now occupied by sports grounds, housing, industrial units and a wildlife park.

domestic servants lived in the city in 1911, 85 percent of whom were female. Pembroke had a further 2,600 while Rathmines had almost 4,300.

It was not all hand-made items with personal service. The shops catered to the range of middle-class incomes and but even those with more modest salaries were distant from the lives of the poor. An advertisement for Switzer's appeared in the *Freeman's Journal* in February 1916 for a discounted consignment of tailor-made coats which usually would retail for 2-3 guineas but which they could offer for between 17/6 and 21 shillings. It was estimated that a household income of £1 per week was needed to meet basic needs but many families did not come near this.

Despite the damage caused by the Rising to Sackville Street and the surrounding blocks, quality shopping was back by 5 May. This was much easier on the southside but even Arnott's, who were lucky to have survived, were back in business. Clery's, whose main premises were smoking ruins, announced on 12 May that their postal business was back in action in Earl Place and that their summer stock had missed destruction because it was in transit.

*Joseph Brady is a lecturer in the School of Geography, University College Dublin*

<b>Anchovies—</b>		
Lazenby's Essence of Anchovies	per quarter bott 4 1/4d., half-bottle 9 1/4d., large bottle	1 6
Findlater's Finest Gorgona Fish	per 1/4 lb. bottle 1s. 2d., 1 lb.	2 2
Anchovies in Oil	per bottle	0 11
Lazenby's Anchovy Paste	per tin or glass 6d. and	0 10
Anchovies in Barrels, Norwegian	per barrel	1 6
<b>Apples—</b>		
Whole cored—Best Brands	per gallon tin	1 2
Normandy Pippins—Dried	per lb.	0 10
Apple Rings—Finest Loose, or in 1 lb. cartons	per lb. 6d. and	0 8
<b>Apricots—Desert (A. F. &amp; Co.)</b>		
Extra Quality (A. F. & Co.)	per large tin	1 0
First Standard Quality (Labrador Brand)	per large tin	0 10
Extra Quality in bottle	per bottle, 1s 8d. and	2 0
De-od—Finest	per lb.	0 10
Crystallised and Glare	per lb.	1 10
Apricot Pulp	per gallon tin	2 6
<b>Arrowroot—Findlater's Finest</b>		
Finest quality	per lb.	1 6
Genuine	per lb.	0 8
<b>Artex</b>		
	per 7 lb. bag	1 2
<b>Asparagus—</b>		
	per tin	1 1

\* **FINDLATER:** An extract from their catalogue giving an idea of the range of goods available in the quality grocer.

\* **PRESCOTT:** People needed to take care of their furs! (*The Lady of the House*, 1913).

**FURS**  
BEAUTIFULLY CLEANED  
BY OUR NEW PROCESS  
IN A FEW DAYS.  
BY THIS TREATMENT THE FUR IS PRESERVED  
AND LOOKS LIKE NEW.  
**PRESCOTT'S**  
DYE WORKS.  
DUBLIN. BELFAST. CORK. LIMERICK.  
The Largest Dyeworks in Ireland.  
Telephone No. 571. Telegrams—'PRESCOTT, DUBLIN.'

\* **MCCABE'S:** An advertisement for McCabe's, one of the best known poulterers. Note that they list their customers rather than their products. (Hotel Guide, Metropole Hotel, 1911).

BY SPECIAL APPOINTMENT.  
**R. TYSON,**  
Outfitter  
The Lord Lieutenant and H.R.H. The Duke of Connaught,  
Practical Shirt Cutter,  
Hosier and Hatter, . . .  
**57-GRAFTON STREET-57**  
DUBLIN.  
Top of Grafton Street. Two Minutes' Walk from Hotel.  
**SERVICE DRESS.**  
Knee Trousers, Collars, Ties, Blouses, Sleeping Suits, Parties, Leather Waistcoats, Washday Trowsers, and British Warm overalls.  
Agent for **AUTO-STROP SAFETY RAZOR**  
and **ADUASCUTUM COATS.**  
Telephone No. 6 9894.

\* **TYSON:** Gentlemen were not entirely ignored. (Advertising pamphlet, no date but about 1913).

**G. LUCAS,**  
**6, SUFFOLK STREET, DUBLIN.**  
The Only Hair Specialist in Dublin.  
Diploma, Medalist from British School of Pharmacy, London.  
THE MOST UP-TO-DATE LADIES AND GENTLEMEN'S  
HAIRDRESSING SALOON IN DUBLIN. . . . .  
**MANICURE. CHIROPODY. FACE MASSAGE.**  
Removal of Superfluous Hairs by entirely new method.  
No Electricity. The most simple method practised.  
It is Painless, and absolutely safe.  
Leaves no mark, and the care is permanent.

\* **LUCAS:** An example of the range of hair and beauty services available. Note particularly the beauty services. (Hotel Guide, Gresham Hotel, 1912).

**MANNING.**  
Costumiers to the Royal and Vice-Regal Courts for over 70 years.  
OF WORLD-WIDE REPUTATION  
FOR ELEGANCE AND TASTE.  
Irish Tweeds,  
Laces, Lingerie,  
and Embroideries.  
**MANTLES, MILLINERY, FURS.**  
**102 & 103 GRAFTON STREET.**

\* **MANNING:** Note the balance between the appeal of a Royal connection and the production of Irish goods. (Hotel Guide, Metropole Hotel, 1914).

By Royal Warrant to H.M. the King.  
**MCCABE'S,**  
Fish, Poultry, Game, and Ice Merchants.  
Founded by His Majesty the King; the late Queen Victoria; Duke of Connaught; His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant; Chief and Field Marshals; the Admiralty, General, principal Clubs, Military Bands, and Hotels.  
MONTHLY CUSTOMERS SPECIALLY CATERED FOR. Every Requisite Guaranteed.  
LARGE DAILY ARRIVALS OF . . . . .  
FISH, POULTRY and GAME, as in Season.  
**South City Markets, DUBLIN.**  
11, Rathgar Road, Dublin; 10, Ranelagh, Dublin;  
85, Main St., Bray; Curragh Camp, Co. Kildare.