

Custom House, 1921

The sacrifice of this noblest of Irish edifices is but the outward and visible sign of the throes through which this country is passing.

IRISH BUILDER, 4 JUNE 1921, P. 393

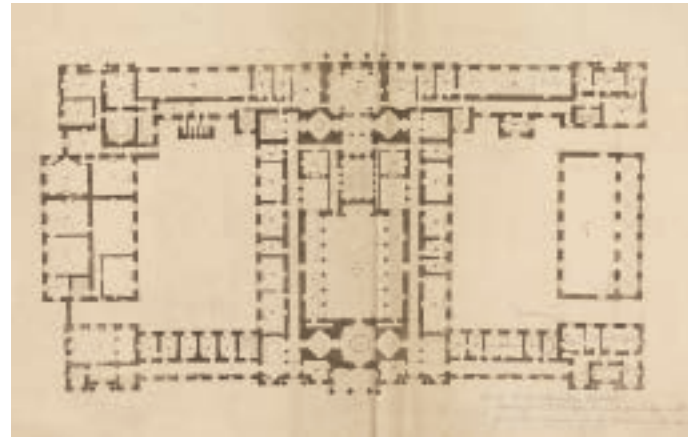
Perhaps even more than the destruction of 1916, the burning of the Custom House on 25 May 1921 shocked Ireland's architectural community. That a building which even British Prime Minister David Lloyd George could describe as 'one of the most precious possessions of the Irish people' could be deliberately destroyed left the Irish Builder aghast.

On Wednesday of last week the citizens of Dublin, and, later, all those at home and abroad, in sympathy with the Arts, learned with dismay, mingled with incredulity, that Gandon's Custom House, the jewel of Irish architecture, the pearl of the eighteenth century Renaissance in Ireland, has been destroyed by fire.

Militarily and archivally disastrous – centuries of governmental records were lost in the conflagration – the gutting of the Custom House led to a spate of rumours about the future of the building and the site. As early as 4 June 1921 the Irish Builder was

calling for its restoration, pointing out the substantial amount of original fabric which had survived, but, as with the GPO, rumours quickly spread that the ruins of the Custom House would be swept away to make room for, *inter alia*, a new central railway terminal for Dublin or a new General Post Office.

In March 1923 the OPW Annual Report was already speaking about the reconstruction, not only of the Custom House, but the GPO and the Four Courts too. Not the least consideration was the desperate shortage of accommodation for the newly created Irish government departments. The rebuilding of the Custom House began in 1925 under the direction of OPW Chief Architect T.J. Byrne. By spring 1927 the building was ready for partial reoccupation.



ABOVE: Engraved plan of the Principal (Ground) Floor of the Custom House, by Samuel Johnston, 1838
IAA 2004/93



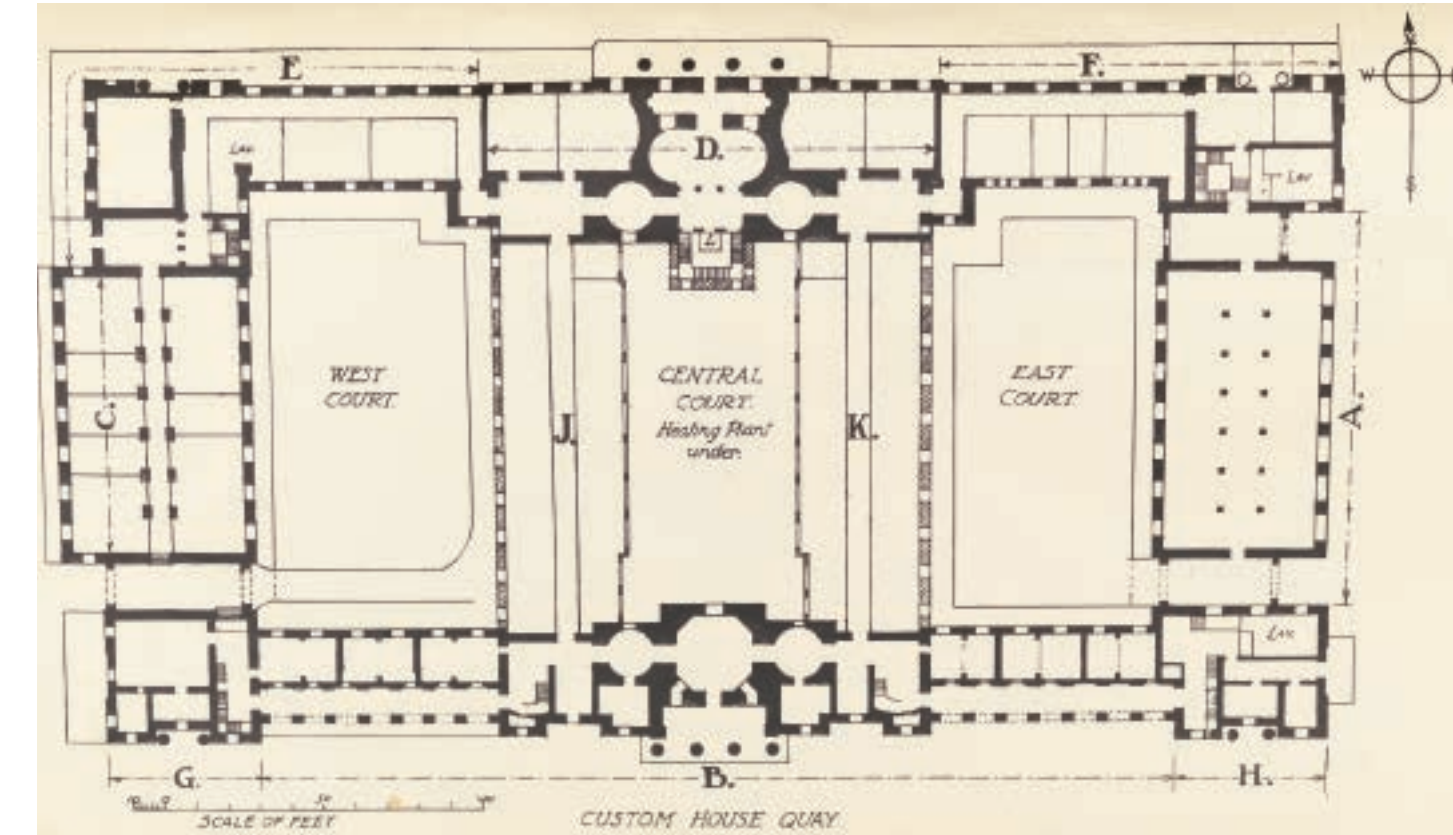
RIGHT: Custom House, dome after fire, June 1921
IAA T.J. Byrne Collection, 2012/51.1/32



'Burning of the Custom House from the roof of the National Gallery', 25 May 1921
IAA T.J. Byrne Collection, 2012/51.1/15



Custom House, interior corridor after fire, June 1921
IAA Photographic Collections, 9/63Y15



Custom House, ground floor plan as reconstructed, T.J. Byrne, 1925
OPW Annual Report, No. 94, 1926, p. 7



Custom House, new corridor, 1926
IAA T.J. Byrne Collection, 2012/51.1/44



Custom House, office area approaching completion, 1926
IAA T.J. Byrne Collection, 2012/51.1/41



Custom House, statue of Commerce on nearly completed new dome, 1928
IAA T.J. Byrne Collection 2012/51.1/51