

The General Post Office

It would appear that the demolition of the fine old G.P.O. has been finally and definitely decided upon.

IRISH BUILDER, 16 DECEMBER 1922, p. 851

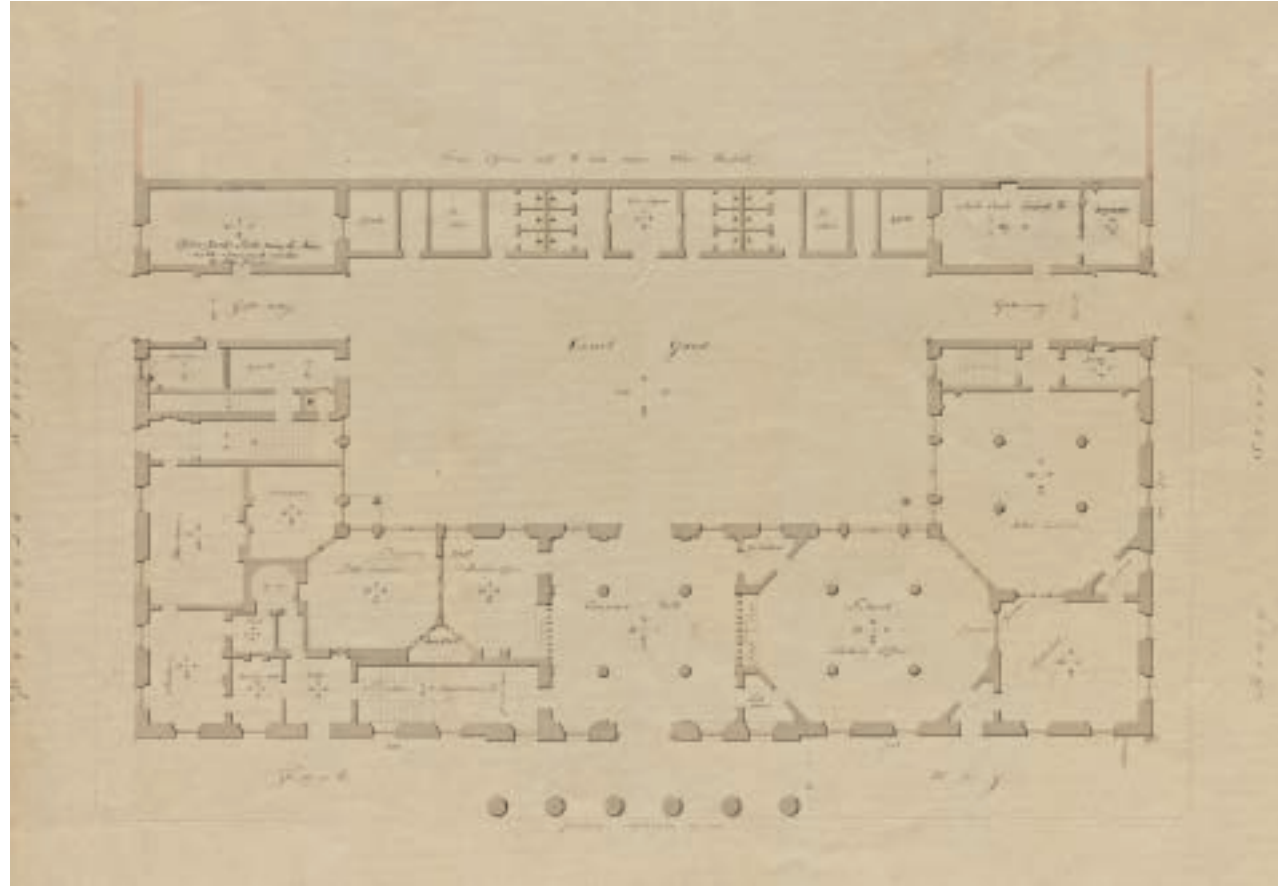
The General Post Office was designed by the architect Francis Johnston and built between 1814 and 1818. From 1905, as the centenary of the building approached, the Office of Public Works undertook a programme of restoration and reconfiguration. One of the aims of this programme, successfully realised, was to restore public access to the building from O'Connell Street. For several decades the public had been reduced to using a side door on Prince's Street. Recreating a central doorway under the portico, the OPW also carved out a new, enlarged, barrel-vaulted, public office, equipped with one of the first telephone boxes in Ireland. The new public office opened in February 1916.

As the headquarters of Republican forces, the GPO was naturally targeted by the military response to the Rising. Many exterior photographs taken in the aftermath give an eerie impression of a building having somehow emerged relatively unscathed. Photographs taken from the vantage of Nelson's Pillar or from inside the devastated structure tell a different story. All that remained of Johnston's building was the portico and the exterior walls.

In the months, and indeed years, following the Rising the *Irish Builder* regularly reported as fact that a decision had been made to demolish the remains of the GPO and to replace it with, variously, a 'red brick monstrosity' post office, a national parliament building, a new Bank of Ireland, a new City Hall, municipal offices, a Catholic Cathedral for Dublin or a traffic 'circus' around Nelson's Pillar.

However, by 1920 the OPW had completed the purchase of sites in Henry Street and Princes Street, including the site of the destroyed Coliseum Theatre only completed in 1915, for extending the GPO. The following year a 'scheme of reconstruction' was under consideration in conjunction with the Post Office Department, though it was not until 1925 that works began.

Under the direction of Thomas Joseph Byrne, Chief Architect at the Board of Works from February 1923, an entirely new concrete and steel building emerged, with interior featuring 'Saorstát stone and marbles and ornamental plastering', and the novel addition of a shopping arcade whose glazed roof was supported by parabolic ferro-concrete beams.



GPO, Dublin, ground floor plan by Francis Johnston
IAA RIAI Murray Collection, 92/46.661



GPO, Dublin, elevation by Francis Johnston
IAA Photographic Collections 19/57Y1



New public office, GPO, March 1916
Irish Builder, 25 March 1916, p. 136



Perspective view of T.J. Byrne's proposed scheme for rebuilding of GPO, signed 'C.W.E', 1924
IAA 2005/46



GPO May 1916
IAA Photographic Collections, 12/29V12



GPO, interior, May 1916
IAA Westropp Collection, 96/57 Vol. 10 p. 56 2



View of public office of new GPO nearing completion, 1926
IAA T.J. Byrne Collection, 2012/51.6/3