



COUNTY BOROUGH OF CORK.

REPORT

—OF—

THE CITY ENGINEER,

CONCERNING THE

Conflagration in the City

—ON—

DECEMBER 11th and 12th, 1920

WITH

Remarks on Reconstruction and Street Improvement.



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THIS PICTURE SHOWS THE RUINS OF FOUR PREMISES ON THE WESTERN END OF AREA NO. 4



GENERAL VIEW OF THE RUINS OF AREAS 1, 2, 3, AND 4, LOOKING SOUTH.

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GENERAL VIEW OF THE RUINS OF AREAS 1, 2, 3, AND 4, LOOKING NORTH.



THIS PICTURE SHOWS THE RUINS OF FOUR PREMISES ON THE WESTERN END OF AREA NO. 4



MESSRS. CASH & Co.'s PREMISES (AREA NO. 2) BEFORE ITS DESTRUCTION.



VIEW OF THE RUINS OF MESSRS. CASH & Co.'s PREMISES.

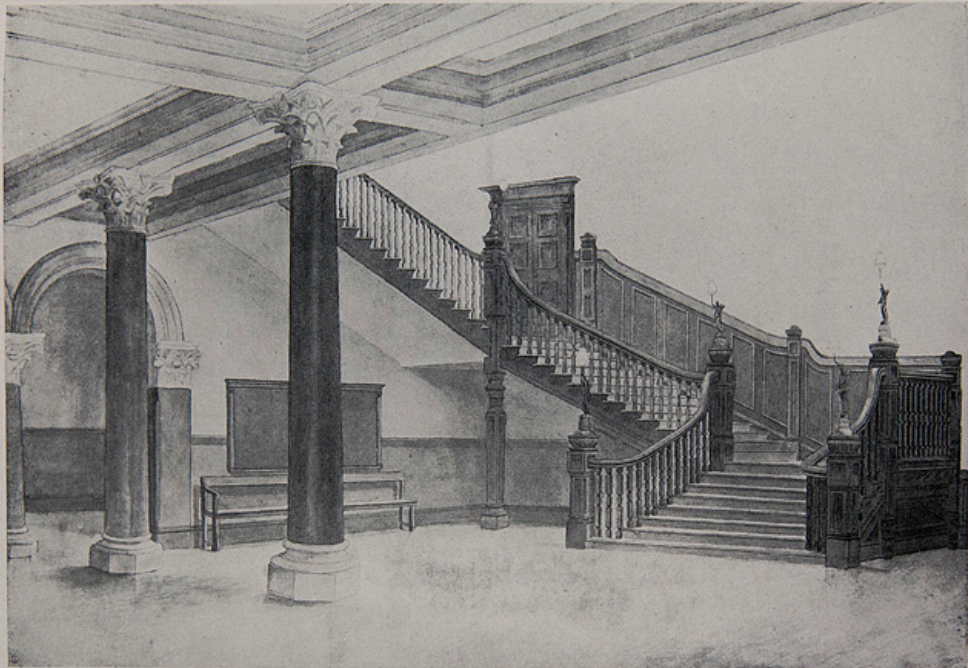


PATRICK STREET,
FACADE OF MESSRS.
ALEX. GRANT & Co.'s
PREMISES
(AREA No. 6)
BEFORE ITS
DESTRUCTION.

VIEW AFTER THE FIRE.



RUINS OF MESSRS. ALEX. GRANT & Co.'s PREMISES AFTER THE FIRE.



VESTIBULE HALL OF THE MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, BEFORE ITS DESTRUCTION, SHOWING EASTERN STAIRCASE.

REPRODUCED FROM A PERSPECTIVE STUDY BY MISS M. GLASS, PUPIL OF THE MUNICIPAL SCHOOL OF ART, CORK



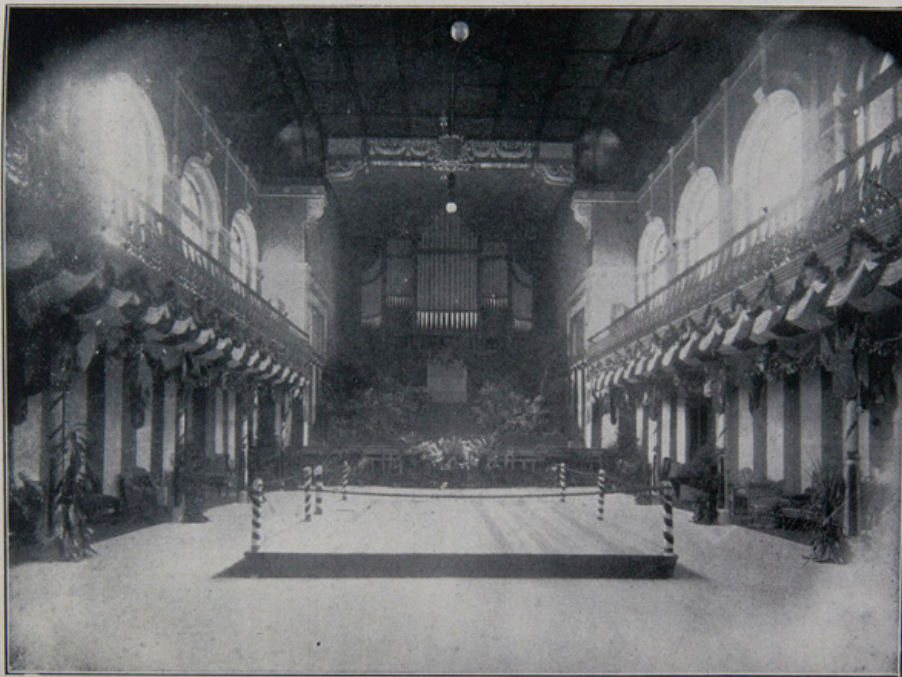
VIEW OF MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS BEFORE THE FIRE.
(AREA NO. 7).



VIEW AFTER THE FIRE.



INTERIOR VIEW OF THE RUINS OF THE MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS.



INTERIOR OF THE CITY HALL (Area No. 7) BEFORE ITS DESTRUCTION.



INTERIOR VIEW OF THE RUINS OF THE CITY HALL AFTER THE FIRE

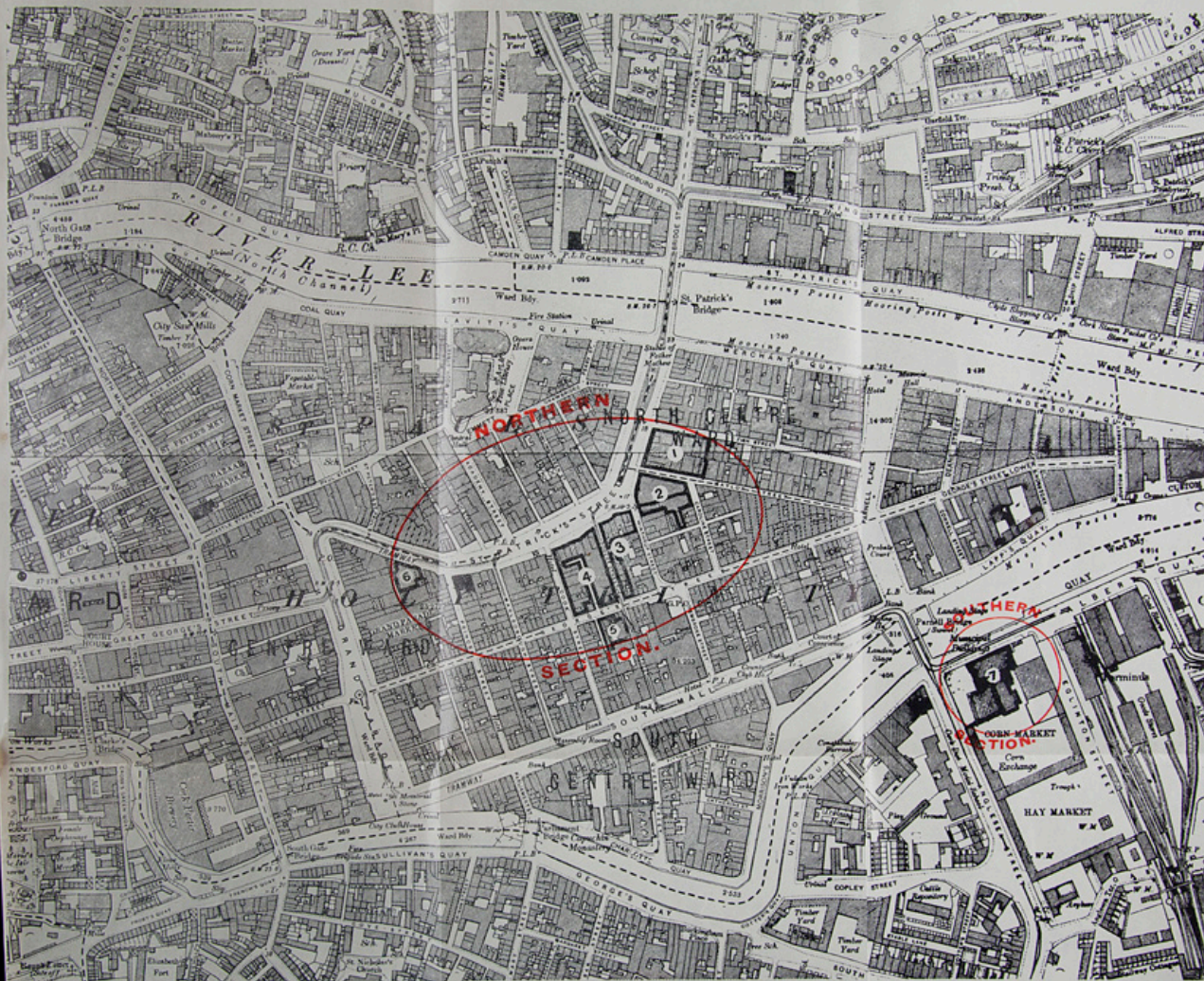


VIEW OF THE CARNEGIE LIBRARY BEFORE THE FIRE.
(AREA NO. 7).



VIEW OF THE CARNEGIE LIBRARY AFTER THE FIRE.

Map of the Central Commercial Area of the City of Cork



The areas destroyed by fire on Saturday and Sunday, 11th and 12th December, 1920, are shown in heavy black outline in red circles and numbered 1 to 7. Descriptive particulars of these Areas will be found with Corresponding Numbers in the Text Pages 7 to 12. The Sites of other buildings destroyed by fire which occurred from time to time prior to the Great Fire in December, are indicated in solid black.

CITY ENGINEER'S REPORT

ON THE

GREAT CORK FIRE OF 1920.

GENTLEMEN,

I beg to submit for your information and for the purposes of official record, the following particulars regarding the nature and extent of the destruction caused by the recent deplorable conflagration in the city on the night of the 11th December, 1920.

I should mention at the outset that this report was written during the month of the occurrence, but its issue was delayed pending the completion of the hearing of the claims for compensation made by owners of the destroyed property before the Recorder of Cork at the City Quarter Sessions.

The Inquiry into these claims was opened in the Recorder's Court on the 14th February, and during an unprecedented sitting of six weeks, approximately 650 cases in all were dealt with.

This was the first open Civil Inquiry under oath conducted in the usual judicial form under Government auspices, and evidence was submitted by special witnesses as to the cause, as well as by various experts, such as Architects, Engineers, Accountants, builders, and men of special capacity in trade, business and other pursuits as to the nature and extent of the destruction.

It is of special importance that the particulars of the destruction of your own Corporate property—adduced as they have been in a Government Court—should be put on the official records of the Municipality, and, therefore, I think it proper to include, in verbatim form, portion of the proceedings in the Recorder's Court relating to the cause and

THIS PICTURE SHOWS THE RUINS OF FOUR PREMISES ON THE WESTERN END OF AREA NO. 4

nature of the destruction of the centre of our Civic administration, the Municipal Buildings and City Hall, and also of that magnificent gift of a public spirited American, the Carnegie Free Library. These particulars will be found on pages 19 to 29. In the appendix attached hereto will be found the reports of the Fire Brigade Superintendent relating to the fire of the 11th—12th December, 1920, and previous incendiary outbreaks since October.

THE COURSE OF DESTRUCTION.

According to the report of the Fire Brigade Superintendent the fire commenced at 10.30 p.m. on Saturday, 11th of December, when the first notification was received by him that Messrs. Alex Grant & Company's premises in area No. 6, was in flames. Whilst engaged in defence work at this fire he was informed, at about 11.30 p.m., that the Munster Arcade in area No. 4 was on fire. Having taken precautions to contend with this outbreak by suitably placing his men, he next ascertained that the premises of Messrs. Cash and Company in area No. 2 were on fire and took the usual measures for defence work. Meantime the conflagration was developing in area No. 3, between Robert Street and Winthrop Street, from two causes. In the first place the intense heat and the rapid combustion going on in the Munster Arcade, Area No. 4, caused the flames to leap from its many windows in the rear of the premises in Robert Street, and the street being very narrow the intense heat started fires in the roofs and the wood-work of the premises on the opposite side, area No. 3, and the premises of Mr. Mulachy, Mr. Hogan, the Shandon Printing Works and Messrs. O'Regan, eventually developed into fires. The other chief cause was the bombing of the premises of Messrs. Burton and the Saxone Boot Shop, in which petrol was also used. The fire thus started then spread to all the adjoining premises in this No. 3 block.

Again between 1 and 3 o'clock on the 12th, portion of area No. 1 on the west side had caught fire from the roof portion of Messrs. Cash & Co., which had now become a fury of fume and flame. The primary cause, however, of the fire in this area was the bombing of Roche's Stores (late London House), and an Auxiliary Fireman has given it in evidence that petrol was also used in this case, both on the Patrick Street front and in Merchant Street. The six or eight roofs in this area quickly carried the fire from one to another.

In Area No. 5 the fire started with explosions at the rear in Morgan Street which were heard by the occupants of adjoining houses. The greater portion of this area was a one-storey workshop building.

At 4 a.m. on Sunday, 12th of December, the Fire Brigade Superintendent was informed that the Municipal Buildings, City Hall and Carnegie Library were on fire, under circumstances which will be found in the report of the Fire Brigade Superintendent (see Appendix) and in the evidence of Fireman C. Healy (pages 21 to 25).

The fire once started in each area had gained great headway and spread very rapidly to the adjoining properties in each case, fiercely consuming all before it in its devastating track until it had spent itself for want of further inflammable material at some points, or until suppressed at others by the efforts of the Fire Brigade, the property owners, members of the Corporation and of the general public, all of whom worked most gallantly against very adverse conditions in a conflagration which required the men and equipment of at least four brigades to control.

The Dublin Corporation, through the Lord Mayor of Dublin, generously responded to the call for assistance from Cork by sending the Chief of the Dublin Fire Brigade, Captain Myers, and six of his staff with its magnificent fire-fighting 45-horse-power Motor Fire Engine. They travelled overnight by special train and arrived on Monday morning, 13th of December, at 3.30 a.m., started to work immediately, and gave their services free and unstintedly until everything was rendered safe, and returned by special train at 3 o'clock on the following Wednesday, the 15th.

Some members of the Limerick Fire Brigade also came to Cork after a very trying and inconvenient road journey by motor and rendered most useful aid.

STATE OF PUBLIC FEELING.

Immediately after the occurrence feelings of indignation, protest and apprehension ran high amongst all classes in the city and vented itself through the following representative bodies:—

1. The Lord Mayor and Members of Parliament for the City asked for an "impartial civilian inquiry"; or, a tribunal inquiry by "international tribunal"; or, a tribunal

" of such Englishmen as Lord H. Cavendish Bentinck, Mr. Arthur Henderson (Secretary of the British Labour Party), Commander Kenworthy, Lord Robert Cecil."

2. The members of the British Labour Commission who were at the time investigating the condition of Ireland, came to Cork, and after investigation immediately demanded " independent inquiry."
3. The Cork Employers' Federation, representing the most important commercial interests in the City, called the Government's attention to the burning of the City, referred to the enormous amount of valuable property destroyed, the number of persons thrown out of employment and rendered homeless, the terror-stricken condition of the people, and demanded an " immediate and searching inquiry by an impartial tribunal."
4. The Cork Incorporated Chamber of Commerce and Shipping drew the attention of the Government to " the number of incendiary fires occurring in the City," the " enormous destruction of property," requested protection for the citizens' property, and demanded " personal investigation by the Chief Secretary and a Judicial Commission of Inquiry"
5. The Cork Harbour Board requested impartial inquiry.
6. The action of your Corporation, it will be remembered, was as follows :—On Friday, December 17th, 1920, the following telegram was received from the military authorities—" Borough Engineer, Corporation of Cork, Municipal Buildings—Can you attend Court of Inquiry regarding incendiary fires, being held in Library Victoria Barracks, at 9.45 a.m., 17th, to give evidence as to extent of damage. Please telephone Military, 24.—Brigadier, Cork. This communication was placed before an assembly of the members of the Corporation on the date of receipt and the following was their decision thereon—" We have instructed the City Engineer and other Corporate officials to take no part in the English military inquiry into the burning of this City, with which we charge the English military and police forces before the whole world. We adhere to the offer made by the City Members and the Lord Mayor to submit evidence, already in our possession, before an impartial International tribunal or before a Court of fair-minded Englishmen."

This military inquiry was duly held. The Report of its findings was submitted to the Government, but all requests in and out of Parliament for its publication have failed to secure its issue to the public.

The following is an excerpt from the " Irish Independent," quoting the views of an important London newspaper (and this only one of many) criticising the attitude of the Government regarding the terrible conflagration. It speaks for itself as showing how a section of the English press and its public felt over the wanton act of destruction :

STRICKLAND REPORT.

CAUSTIC LONDON COMMENT.

" Mr. Bonar Law was right, we feel confident," says the " Westminster Gazette," " in his anticipation that the Opposition will not leave the matter of the Strickland report where it is. Sir H. Greenwood may never have directly promised publication, but the House of Commons and the public were certainly led to believe that the report would be made known." The burning of Cork was followed by an immediate demand for a prompt, independent, and thorough inquiry, and this demand was met by the assertion of the Government that nothing could be more impartial and effective than the military inquiry which was being held."

" Two months later we are asked to acquiesce in the suppression of the report. We are not even to know the verdict of the military authorities themselves on the destruction of a great part of one of Ireland's greatest cities."

SURVEY OF DESTROYED AREAS.

In order to make the survey of the damage quite clear, a map is attached hereto which shows the blocks of buildings affected. Furthermore, owing to certain geographical and other inexactitudes which arose in the House of Commons in relation to these fires, it is important in reviewing their character and origin to differentiate this conflagration of the 11th and 12th December, into two distinct positions in the city—the Northern (areas 1 to 6) and Southern (area No. 7)—as shown enclosed in red on the map. These two areas lie about 400 yards apart and are separated by the southern branch of the River Lee.