



Dublin City Council
Comhairle Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath

Dublin Street Names and Topography 1880-1910

Dublin City Library and Archive

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Dublin Street Names and Topography

Reading and interpreting the street names of Dublin can not only be an extremely interesting process but also a rich source of information regarding the political, social and urban history of the city. The names chosen to be given in the streets reflect the historical and cultural heritage of the area and shape a particular narrative of the past. Their power lay in the fact that they incorporate naturally ideological structures with the spatial practices of everyday life leading to the promotion of a certain version of history according to the goals of each period and its authorities. The focus of this project was drawn to the role of the historical and political context and ideology as they are traced in the transformations emerged in the visual landscape of the Dublin City.

More specifically, the aims of the project Dublin Street Names and Topography were to record the cases of renaming streets in the city of Dublin in order to reach conclusions regarding the role and perceptions of the persons involved - authorities and the public - the significance of the process in shaping and promoting ideology and the commemorative aspect in naming streets after certain personalities and historical events. The period set for research was the years from 1880 to 1910 during which the names given to the streets of Dublin became the centre of political debate and were interpreted as the symbols that carried the ideology of the new state and its national character. Therefore, particular focus has been given in the nationalistic angle of the street names and their contribution in shaping the Irish national identity.

The main primary sources used for the purposes of this project were the Minutes of the Dublin City Council and the Dublin Corporation Reports, which are available on open access in DCLA Reading Room. The research was further facilitated by newspapers – the Irish Times – and secondary literature, such as the Dictionary of Irish Biography. Before proceeding to the presentation of the results of the research, some interesting documents of the period, recorded in these primary sources, will illustrate and illuminate the ideology and intentions of the process of renaming streets in Dublin of the late 19th and the beginning of 20th century.

The first reference of the ideological aspect of the street names, by setting 1880 as the starting point of the research, was made on the 31st of October 1884 when the

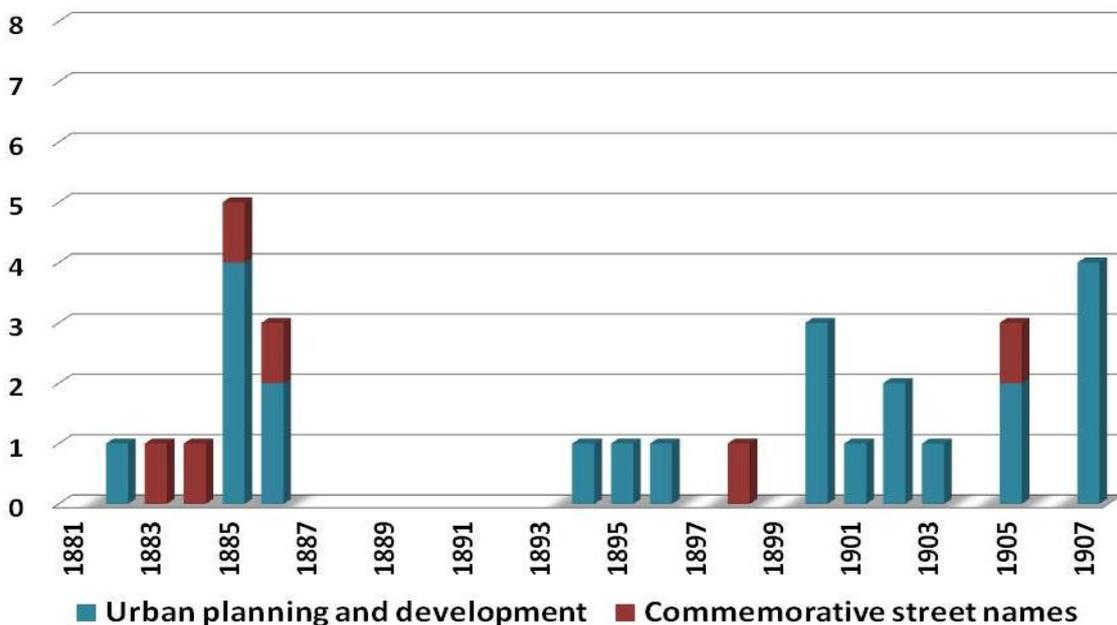
Committee of the Whole House recommended the change of Sackville Street to O'Connell Street supporting that *“the names of the main thoroughfares of the chief cities of a nation should be such as to recall events in its history and progress deserving of commemoration; and that the names of many of the principal streets in Dublin do not do so, several of these names being without any meaning to the present residents, the streets possibly having been called after insignificant persons undistinguished by any public services”* (DCR 1884, vol.3, no.176). The persons or committees involved in this dialogue are numerous as can be observed by another document dated in 1893 by the Young Ireland League. The Secretary of the League submitted a letter stating that *“the names of thoroughfares under the control of the Municipal Council and the Corporations and Commissioners of other Cities and Towns in Ireland, should be painted in Irish over the English names”* (DCCM 1893, no.341). The significance of the street names as entities carrying ideology was realized and addressed against the colonial character of the city of Dublin and of Ireland in general.

Another interesting and characteristic example of this dispute is dated on March 1898 when the Lucan Sarsfield '98 Club stated as the resolution of their meeting that they *“call upon the members of the Dublin Corporation, the principal city of Ireland, as at least, one small token of respect for our martyred dead, and as an everlasting memorial of Ireland's Centennial year of '98, to exert themselves, and do all in their power to erase from Dublin city, the names of the Saxon tyrants, which disgrace our principal streets, namely – Brunswick, Camden, Henry, Pitt etc. – which names are indeed a mockery to Irish nationality. And we impress upon the Dublin Corporate Body the dire necessity of substituting for such names, the soul-inspiring names of our different Irish patriotic martyrs”* (DCCM 1898, no.180). The centenary of the 1798 Rebellion seemed to spark new controversies on this subject and reaffirmed the national interests on the personalities commemorated in the streets of the city.

The examples given from the years 1880 to 1910 quite eloquently present the intentions and significance attributed to the process of (re)naming streets as well as the nationalistic ideology promoted. Their presentation here was considered useful for the contextualization of the database that follows, which presents the results of the research. Another final element which strikes the reader of the Minutes and Reports of

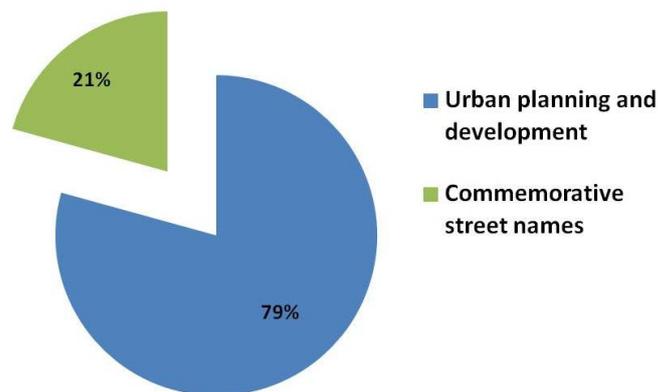
that period is the emphasis given in the Irish language. Specifically, nine reports suggesting the promotion of the Irish language in the street names of Dublin were submitted between the years 1900 to 1909, a revealing fact of the nationalistic character that this process was gradually driven to. The initial request in 1900, when it first appears in the archives, was to have *“the name of the streets, lanes, squares, etc. of the metropolis printed in Gaelic”* (DCCM 1900, no.543, 625, 634); however, the reports that appear afterwards, from 1901 onwards, seek the erection of Bi-Lingual Plates as instructed by an interest on the revival of the Irish language. This element is undoubtedly connected with the nationalistic ideology promoted through the commemoration of certain personalities while their relevance is clearly stated, for example, in a resolution of the Gaelic League referring to the use of the Irish language in naming streets stating also that *“the re-naming of certain streets in the city, and the selection, when streets are being renamed in the future, of names of historic interest, associated with the struggle for National Freedom in Ireland”* (DCCM 1902, no.405). Finally, the policy regarding the names given to new streets is officially presented in a resolution directed to the Paving Committee in 1909 which states that *“the Paving Committee be directed to take steps to ensure that in future no name which is un-Irish or anti-Irish in expression or sentiment, shall be given to any new Street...that the name plates in future erected on such new Streets or other places, shall bear names in the Irish language only”* (DCCM 1909, no.419).

Results of the research categorized according to the type of request



Database: Changes to Dublin City Street Names 1881-1910

The research in the Dublin City Council Minutes and the Dublin Corporation Reports regarding the changes that are traced in Dublin's street names led to the creation of the database for the presentation of the results. Twenty seven cases of streets which were renamed between the years 1880 to 1910 are recorded while these records do not include requests which were rejected or names given to new streets. The fields developed for the purposes of the database are old street name/new street name/date that the change was suggested and implemented/petitioner/reason for request/biographical information/additional comments/sources. Another field that has been added in the database – type – is aiming to categorize the cases of renaming streets into commemorative street names, which were the focus of this project, and requests made on the basis of the urban planning and development, which were the majority of the cases recorded.



The dates given, either for the suggestion of a new name or for its implementation, are in most records taken from the dates that the relevant reports of the Committees were submitted, as indicative of the period that this issue was discussed. Moreover, abbreviations have been adopted for the field of the sources; namely, the Dublin City Council Minutes are referenced as DCCM while the Dublin Corporation Reports as DCR.

Finally, in order to search the database the fields that have been selected to function as filters of the results are the name of the street – old and new – the chronological period and the type of request. Users can always have access to all the records of the database without searching specific fields.