

The Post Office and 1916

Themes to explore:

- The importance of communications.
- Differing perspectives on the 1916 story.
- Ordinary people in history
- The 1916 Proclamation.



Why take over a Post Office?

In 1916 the General Post Office was the communications centre of the country. It was the headquarters of the Post Office with the main sorting office for letters in it and also the Central Telegraph Office which looked after telegrams. It linked all of Ireland together and connected Ireland with Britain which was important since Ireland and Britain were then one United Kingdom. The GPO was also a large and imposing building in Dublin's city centre and for the 1916 rebels, a symbol of British control in Ireland.



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Just a few weeks before the Easter Rising began, the Post Office had completed renovation work on the main office with a lot of money spent on new counters, floor tiles and office fittings so that the GPO would be a much nicer place for customers and staff.

Inside the GPO



On Easter Monday, 24th April 1916, P. H. Pearse, James Connolly and other rebels drawn from different groups took over the GPO. Even though it was a holiday, the Post Office had to be open for urgent business. Staff and customers downstairs in the GPO were forced to leave at gunpoint and Patrick Pearse, standing at the front of the building, read the Proclamation declaring Ireland independent from Britain. Most people at the time were not very interested in what he was saying and didn't expect a week of fighting and destruction to follow.

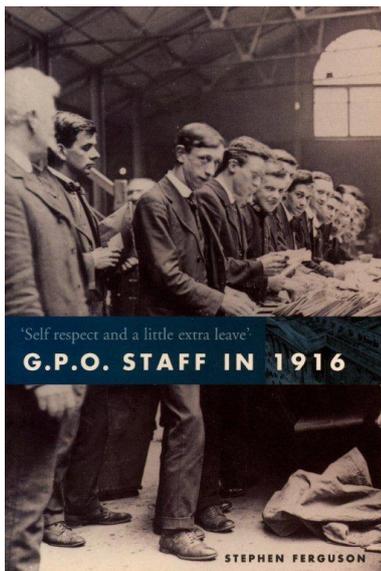
Upstairs in the Telegraph Room the staff had noticed that something was wrong when their telegraph lines suddenly were disconnected. When they heard the rebels enter the GPO, they barricaded themselves into their room, did their best to inform the police and the Government what was happening and refused to leave until shots were fired at them by the rebels. One Post Office lady, Miss Gordon, insisted on looking after an unarmed soldier who had been shot by the rebels. She promised the rebels that, if she could take the man down the street to hospital, she would bring him back to be a prisoner. Even though the hospital staff urged her not to, she kept her word and returned to the GPO with the young soldier. She was then allowed to go home while he stayed on as a prisoner.



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Doing their duty



During the week that followed, Post Office engineering staff worked tirelessly, often in great danger, to repair the telegraph lines that had been cut by the rebels. Post Office telephone staff, mostly young women, continued to work at their desks in Crown Alley Dublin, passing on urgent messages for the Government and army as they tried to put down the rebellion and restore peace. Once the Rising was over, postal staff saw that their brand new office in the GPO was completely destroyed but they quickly went to work in a temporary one beside the Rotunda Hospital at the top of O'Connell Street. Postmasters and their staff made sure that payments due to many women, whose

husbands were fighting in the First World War in France, would be paid despite all the disruption to postal business.



The GPO was utterly destroyed in 1916, the roof collapsed and the fires that burned smouldered for a long time afterwards. GPO staff worked from temporary premises for several years until the building was rebuilt in the 1920s and opened again for business. The beautiful front of the building, with its columns and classical style, is as it was before 1916.



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