



Vaughan's Hotel, Parnell Square.

January 22, 2013 by Donal

While Dublin is a city of many plaques which mark historic locations, there are still a few missing which would help tell the story of the capital to natives and visitors alike. One of these locations to me is Vaughan's Hotel on Parnell Square, a premises which had a strong connection to the Irish revolutionary period and Michael Collins in particular. Parnell Square plays a crucial role in Irish republican history. It was there that the decision to stage an uprising was reached prior to 1916, it was there that the occupation of the Rotunda occurred in 1922, it was there that *An Phoblacht* did (and does) have its headquarters, and it was even there that the Blueshirt movement had their offices in the 1930s.



Google Street View of the corner of Parnell Square where Vaughan's was found.

Vaughan's Hotel was acquired in 1953 by the Workers Union of Ireland, and remains a home of the trade union movement to this day. The sale of the building in 1953 attracted some controversy, owing to the strong connection between the premises and the War of Independence. *The Irish Times* reported on an auction of the hotels contents in November 1953, writing that:

Vaughan's Hotel auction

The auction of the furniture and equipment of Vaughan's Hotel, on the premises next Tuesday is arousing considerable interest. Messrs. Battersby and Co., are the auctioneers.

Vaughan's Hotel, Parnell square, has been acquired by the Workers Union of Ireland for its headquarters, early in the New Year.

Many will regret the passing of such a famous hotel with its historic associations. Dubliners in particular will recall many thrilling episodes there connected with the war of independence.

Virtually the entire furniture and equipment will come under the auctioneer's hammer. Judging by a large attendance at the auction.

Just how did a Hotel in the centre of the city come to be so closely associated with Michael Collins and the republican movement? Writing in one of his popular *Irish Press* columns, 'Down Dublin Streets', Eamonn MacThomais noted that Vaughan's had first opened at no.29, at the corner on Granby Row and Lane, next to a premises owned by a surgeon doctor, and next to it was the Civil Service Institute. When Vaughan's grew, it acquired the premises next to the Civil Service Institute, and both of these premises nestled between the two ends of Vaughan's gave the cover or the impression of a respectable and law-abiding square! The Hotel had the added advantage of a long back garden running parallel with Granby Lane, and a system was developed whereby a "flowerpot in the back window told Michael Collins and his men to keep away from Vaughan's Hotel."



Vaughan's as it appeared at the time

statements to the Bureau of Military History. Frank Henderson told the Bureau how Vaughan's was just one of a number of premises in the area republicans used, noting that: "As well as Vaughan's Hotel there were James Kirwan's publichouse in Parnell Street and Flynn's in Moore Street, where I sometimes contacted the Director of Organisation and where I used see at the same time Michael Collins, Piaras Beasley and other G.H.Q. officers."

Piaras Beaslai wrote an article on the Hotel for the *Irish Independent* in 1966, writing that:

“ From the beginning of 1920 until November 21st - "Bloody Sunday"- hardly a night passed when some Directors and officers of the G.H.Q did not meet in the smoke room of Vaughan's Hotel in Parnell Square, Dublin, partly to transact business, partly to relax and indulge in general conversation, which however, seldom lasted long without bringing in topics concerned with the struggle with which we were



A now iconic image of Michael Collins, taken at the funeral of Arthur Griffith.

A fascinating story regarding Collins and the Hotel was told by Christopher Harte, who had been a young porter in Vaughan's in the days Collins would frequent it. Harte told his story in the Officers Mess of McKee Barracks, where he worked as a waiter in later life, and the story was transcribed for the BMH, with the transcriber noting that:

“ He was arrested shortly before midnight on the night of 31st December, 1920, and detained in Dublin Castle where he was ill-treated. The time was fixed in his memory by the fact that church bells were ringing in the “New Year” as he was entering Dublin Castle under arrest. A few days later, the exact date he cannot remember, while still in custody in the Castle he was questioned in a dark room as to his knowledge of Collins. He denied all knowledge of him, but was confronted with the statement that he had frequently been seen carrying Michael Collins' bicycle down the steps of Vaughan's Hotel from the hall into the street.

It was suggested to him by his unseen questioner that he was a poor man and that he would like to earn some money.

He was informed that the authorities would be prepared to pay a sum, perhaps up to even £10,000 for information leading to the capture of when Collins would be in Vaughan's Hotel, he, Christopher Harte, should ring up the Castle, Extension 28, and give the following message:

—
Brennan: The portmanteau is now ready

Harte never took the castle up upon their offer.

The wedding reception of Cork republican Tom Barry was held in Vaughan's Hotel, and was attended by Michael Collins, Eamon De Valera, Countess Markievicz, Eoin O'Duffy and other leading lights in the movement. The irony that Collins and Barry would later find themselves fighting on opposite sides of the coming Civil War is unavoidable.

Frank Henderson would recall that in-time republicans came to view Vaughan's as an unsafe location, noting that:

“ I recollect being in Vaughan's Hotel subsequent to Bloody Sunday and previous to the Truce for some reason or other. The premises were raided on the Saturday night before Bloody Sunday and it was generally regarded afterwards as being a most unsafe place to be in.

While Republicans ceased to avail of Vaughan's from this point onwards in the War of Independence, it was a great irony during the Civil War that a former favourite haunt of Michael Collins was occupied by the Anti-Treaty IRA, joined by members of the Irish Citizen Army. Among those occupying Vaughan's Hotel during the Civil War was Liam O'Flaherty, the writer who had spearheaded the January 1922 workers occupation of the Rotunda.

Surely now is the time to ensure this hugely important historic site is given the plaque it deserves?



Vaughan's Hotel, used constantly by Collins in the War of Independence.