

Industrial Heritage Survey of Independent House, 87-93 Middle Abbey St, Dublin



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Preface

This report was commissioned by IAC Archaeology on behalf of Summix IHD Developments Ltd in connection with its planning proposal to regenerate the vacant premises at 87-93 Middle Abbey Street as student accommodation. As part of the planning process, Dublin City Council has requested an industrial heritage survey and evaluation of the premises.

This report is in fulfilment of this request and begins with a review of the *Irish Independent*, the headquarters of which were at Nos 87-93 from 1924 to 2004, and where the newspaper was printed until 2000. The second chapter describes surviving features of industrial heritage interest, albeit not directly associated with the newspaper's production process.

My thanks to Faith Bailey (IAC Archaeology), Shelley O'Donovan and Maoliosa Molloy (Molloy Associates), Patricia Thornton (Thornton O'Connor Town Planning), and the staff of the UCD Digital Library for their assistance, and also Paul McAteer (Mitchell McDermott Construction Consultants) for facilitating site access.

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Summary

The *Irish Independent* originated as *the Irish Daily Independent* in 1891 and was printed at its offices in Andrews Lane until 1904 when it went into liquidation. It was purchased by William Murphy who renamed it the *Irish Independent*. He began publishing it from No.111 Middle Abbey Street under its new title in 1905.

It remained as No.111 until 1924 when the offices and printworks were moved up the road to the purpose-built Independent House at Nos 87-90 Middle Abbey St. This Hennebique ferro-concrete building was on the site of Thom's publishing house which had been destroyed during the 1916 Easter Rising.

In the 1930s, the newspaper expanded into its neighbouring premises at Nos 91-93. This property was also destroyed in 1916 but had been rebuilt as Emerald Chambers (also called Abbey Buildings) in 1921. The stores at the rear of that building were demolished to make way for an extension to the printworks behind Independent House. Two Hoe rotary presses were installed in the enlarged printworks and operated until 2000 when printing was moved to a modern works at Citywest on the western outskirts of Dublin.

The premises were vacated in 2004 when the Independent's offices moved to Talbot St and they have since lain empty.

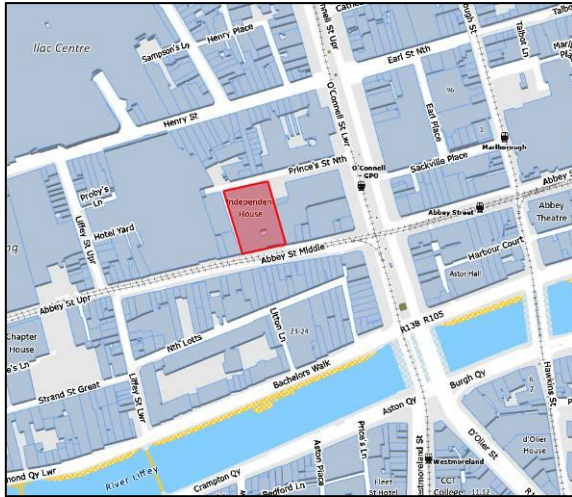
A survey carried out by the author in February 2025 found no traces of the printing presses or of any other equipment directly associated with the newspaper's production. A number of features were nevertheless recorded:

- Two murals and three travelling cranes in the Machine Hall which once housed the presses;
- The basement boiler room, the contents of which are relatively modern;
- A goods ramp between the basement and ground floor;
- The Dispatch Area at the Prince's St end of the block from where the newspapers were distributed;
- The original Waygood-Otis passenger lift in Abbey Buildings.

Of the above features, the travelling cranes, front panel of the boiler control unit, and the passenger lift are of industrial heritage interest. Recommendations are set out for their retention as tangible reminders of the site's previous industrial use as the offices and printworks of the *Irish Independent* newspaper.

1. Historical development

Independent House is situated at 87-90 Middle Abbey Street and opened in 1924 as the purpose-built headquarters of Independent Newspapers Ltd (fig 1.1). It housed the offices of the *Irish Independent* for 80 years and was also from where its newspapers were printed and distributed until 2000.

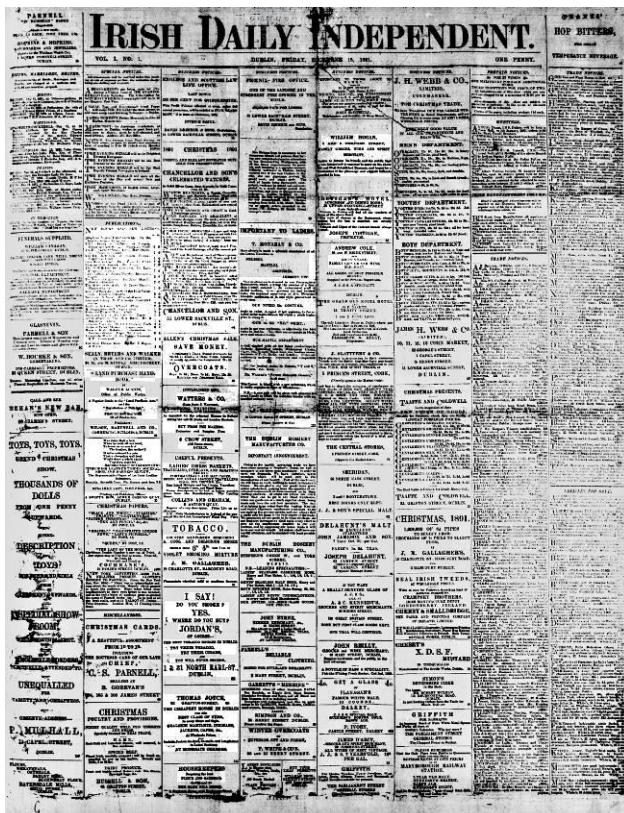


The building is actually the third home of the newspaper since its inception as the *Irish Daily Independent* over 130 years ago. Although the focus of this report is mainly on the printing process, the evolution of the newspapers and its sister titles prior to moving to Middle Abbey St is also described.

Fig 1.1 Location of site under review (*OSI.ie*).

1.1 Irish Daily Independent, 1891-1904

The precursor of the *Irish Independent* was the *Irish Daily Independent*, the first issue of which appeared on Friday 18 December 1891, priced at one penny (fig 1.2). Thanks to a rise in literacy, political awareness and growing prosperity, there was a flourishing press in Dublin at that time; daily newspapers



included the *Daily Express*, *Dublin Evening Mail*, *Evening Telegraph*, *Freeman's Journal*, and *Irish Times*.¹

The *Irish Daily Independent* was founded by the Independent Publishing Company Ltd to expound the cause of national self-determination as advocated by Charles Stewart Parnell.² Funded partly by public subscription, it strove to be a national daily rather than a provincial or local one.

Each day's events were also reported in its sister paper, the *Evening Herald*, the first edition of which appeared the following evening. A third title – the *Irish Weekly Independent* – was added in 8 April 1893.

Fig 1.2 First edition of the *Daily Irish Independent*, 18 Dec 1891 (*British Newspaper Archive*).

¹ As listed in the Irish and British Newspaper Archives.

² The editorial on page 5 of the first issue set out the paper's political stance and also described the printworks.

The newspaper's offices and printworks were in (Saint) Andrew's Lane, off Trinity Street near College Green (fig 1.3).³ Printing was carried out on a rotary press made by Richard Hoe & Co of London and



New York. Powered by an Otto gas engine, it could handle two rolls of paper at a time and produced an eight-page newspaper at a rate of up to 24,000 copies per hour. Edward Byrne, the newspaper's editor at that time, claimed it was the largest press anywhere in Ireland.

Fig 1.3 Location of Daily Irish Independent offices and press superimposed on the 1892 OS 1:1056 map, Dublin City sheet 18-57.

By the 1890s, rotary presses were well established and differed markedly from earlier flat-bed presses in which individual sheets of paper were printed on one surface at a time. Using a rotary press, a roll of paper (known as a 'web') could be continuously printed with two pages of content on both surfaces as it passed through the machine. The printed roll was cut into sheets which were then folded into a four-page newspaper. Combining it with the four pages from a second web resulted in an eight-page paper, the form in which the *Independent* first appeared.

Although state-of-the-art when first installed, the Hoe press was limited to eight pages which meant that valuable advertising revenue could be lost if squeezed out by a particularly newsworthy day. For this reason, a more advanced press by the Goss Printing Press Co of Chicago was installed in 1898 (fig 1.4).⁴ Its 27,000 parts were apparently assembled in a mere ten days.

The press was configured with two decks of cylinders on which the inked typeface was mounted (in the form of 'stereotypes'). This enabled four pages to be printed on each deck. Previously, the webs were printed side-by-side so the footprint of the new press was now much more compact. Another advantage was that it was also technically easier to combine the printed sheets as they were now running one above the other in the same direction. Having separate decks also meant that one deck could be loaded with stereotypes inked with a colour other than black, such as red, green or blue. This enabled the printed web from the first deck to be overprinted with colour on the second deck to highlight specific content. In practice, the coloured stereotypes were set up on a third deck.

The first issue from the new press appeared on Wednesday 24 August 1898 and comprised 12 pages; the back one contained a black-and-red coloured advertisement. By common consent, it was deemed to

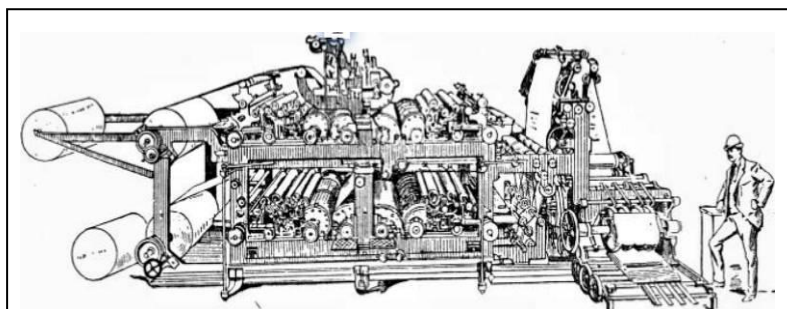


Fig 1.4 The new Goss printing press as depicted in the *Daily Irish Independent*, 24 Aug 1898. The two webs (at left) each had their own deck of cylinders. Once printed, they were combined at the right-hand end, then cut, folded and counted, ready for dispatch.

³ 1893 Valuation Revision book: South City 1880-1902, Dublin North 1, p.83. Also Thom's 1897 *Dublin Street Directory*, p.1297.

⁴ *Irish Daily Independent*, 24 Aug 1898.

be the first daily with more than eight pages anywhere in Europe and also the first to be printed with more than one colour.⁵ In practice, however, eight pages continued to be the norm during weekdays, with 12 pages generally being reserved for Saturdays.

In 1900, the Independent Publishing Co acquired the *Nation*, published weekly since 1842, and also the *Daily Nation*, in print since 1897. The paper's masthead was changed to the *Irish Daily Independent & Daily Nation*, and the weekly was retitled the *Irish Weekly Independent & Nation*. The first editions of the re-masted newspapers appeared in Sept 1900.

1.2 Irish Independent, 1905-1923

In 1904, the *Irish Daily Independent & Daily Nation* went into liquidation and the titles were purchased by Independent Newspapers Ltd, owned by William M. Murphy (fig 1.5). The last run of the *Daily* was on Saturday, 31 Dec 1904, and it was succeeded by the first edition of the *Irish Independent* on Monday 2 Jan 1905 (fig 1.6).



Fig 1.5 William Murphy, c.1911 (Wikipedia).



The inaugural issue noted that the new paper “will place our country’s interests above those of party, and it will not seek to exploit any section or individual. The extravagances of partisanship will be unknown in its editorial columns”.⁶

The new title was Ireland’s first daily newspaper to cost a halfpenny. Unsurprisingly, its first issue sold out.

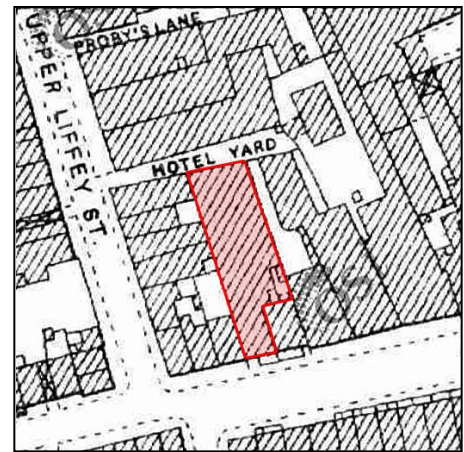
Fig 1.6 The first issue of the new paper on 2 Jan 1905. It is cited as ‘Volume 14/ Number 1’, reflecting the continuation of its precursor’s numbering.

⁵ *Irish Daily Independent*, 30 Aug 1898.

⁶ *Irish Independent*, 2 Jan 1905, p.4.

Not only did the *Independent* change its title and ownership in 1905, but its main offices and print works were relocated from Andrew's Lane to 111 Middle Abbey Street, near its junction with Upper Liffey Street (fig 1.7). According to the editor, the new premises were "the most commodious and suitable in Ireland for the production of a great daily paper".⁷

Fig 1.7 The location of the *Independent* offices and print works at 111 Middle Abbey St, as shown on the 1907 OS 1:2500 Dublin map sheets 18-07 and 18-11 (OSI.ie).



All the old printing presses were auctioned off and two new two-deck Goss ones installed (fig 1.8).⁸ They were apparently assembled over a single weekend rather than the usual six weeks; this was thought to be a world record.⁹ They were driven by 16hp British Thomson-Houston electric motors, with a gas engine back-up. Lines of metal type were prepared on linotype machines (hence "line-o'-type", as opposed to letter-by-letter typeface) from which the stereotypes were cast for the printing cylinders. Mains gas was used to melt the lead for these processes.

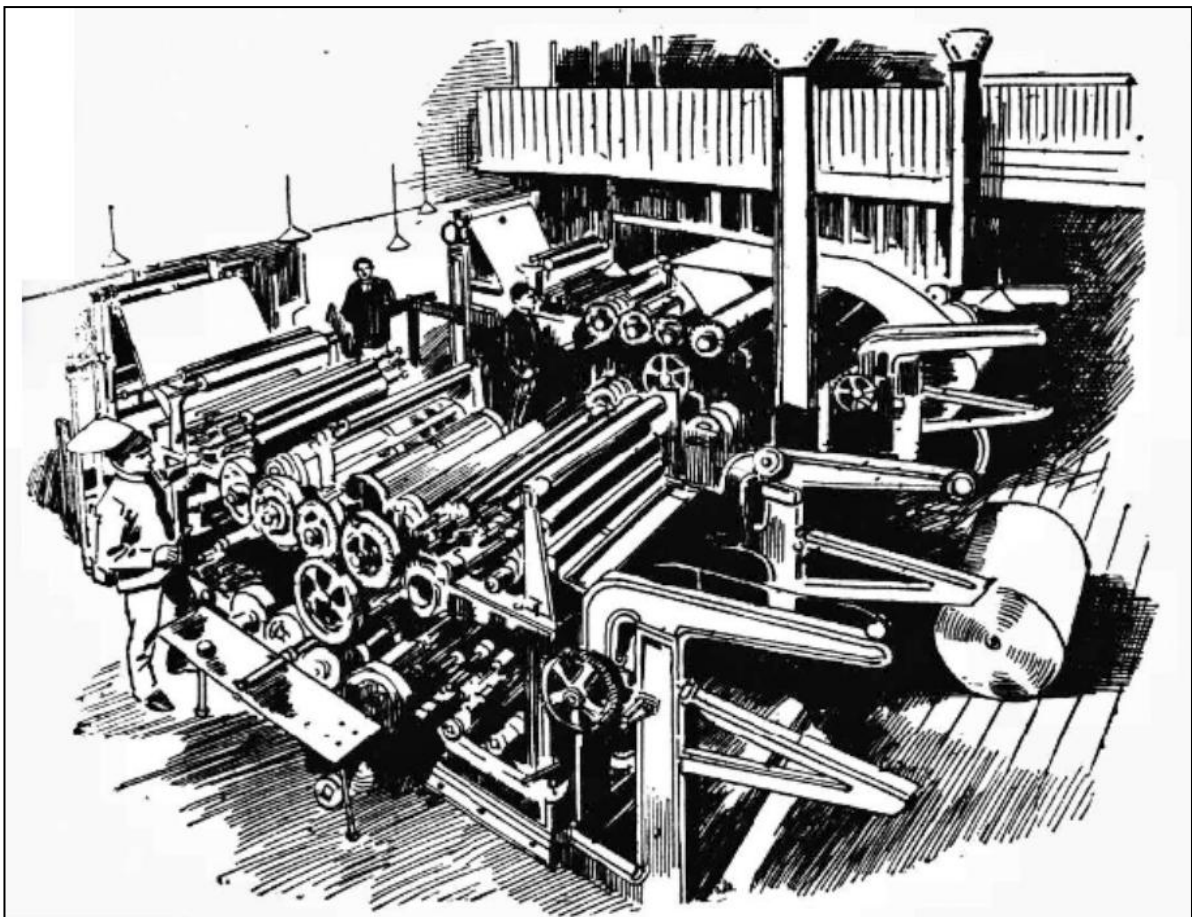


Fig 1.8 The two new two-deck/ double-web Goss presses as depicted in the *Irish Independent*, 7 Jan 1905. They were on the ground floor to mitigate any vibration damage to the building.

⁷ *Irish Independent*, 3 Jan 1905, p.4.

⁸ Details of the presses used by *The Nation* are set out in the *Irish Independent*, 15 July and 15 Aug 1904. They were auctioned off on 10 Jan 1905.

⁹ *Irish Independent*, 5 Jan 1905.

Each press had two decks and could produce an eight-pager at a rate of 24,000 copies per hour. If both presses were loaded with the same stereotypes, the rate of production was doubled.¹⁰ To meet the rising demand for advertising space, a third deck was subsequently added to each press so that each of them could print 12 pages. Around 1914, a third press was installed, this time a Hoe three-decker capable of producing up to 32,000 copies per hour.

During the Easter Rising in April 1916, the *Independent's* works at No.111 survived unscathed, unlike other buildings further up the street (as will be described below). It was not until six years later that a major incident occurred. On the evening of 21 December 1921 its offices were raided by the Irish Republican Army in response to the newspaper's outrage at the attempted assassination of Sir John French, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, two days previously. Over the course of their 20-minute occupation, the raiders smashed up the three presses, 18 linotype machines, the foundry, and other equipment such as a telegraph linking the Dublin and London offices. Remarkably, production of the *Independent* was uninterrupted as it was able to avail of the presses of the *Irish Times* until its own ones were repaired.¹¹ The company was awarded £15,000 compensation for the damage caused and an order to the value of £8,750 was placed for a new press.¹²

There appear to have been no further incidents and the *Irish Independent* continued to operate from No.111 Middle Abbey Street until 1924, when it moved to Independent House, 150 metres up the road (fig 1.9). No.111 continued to be used, but only as a paper store.

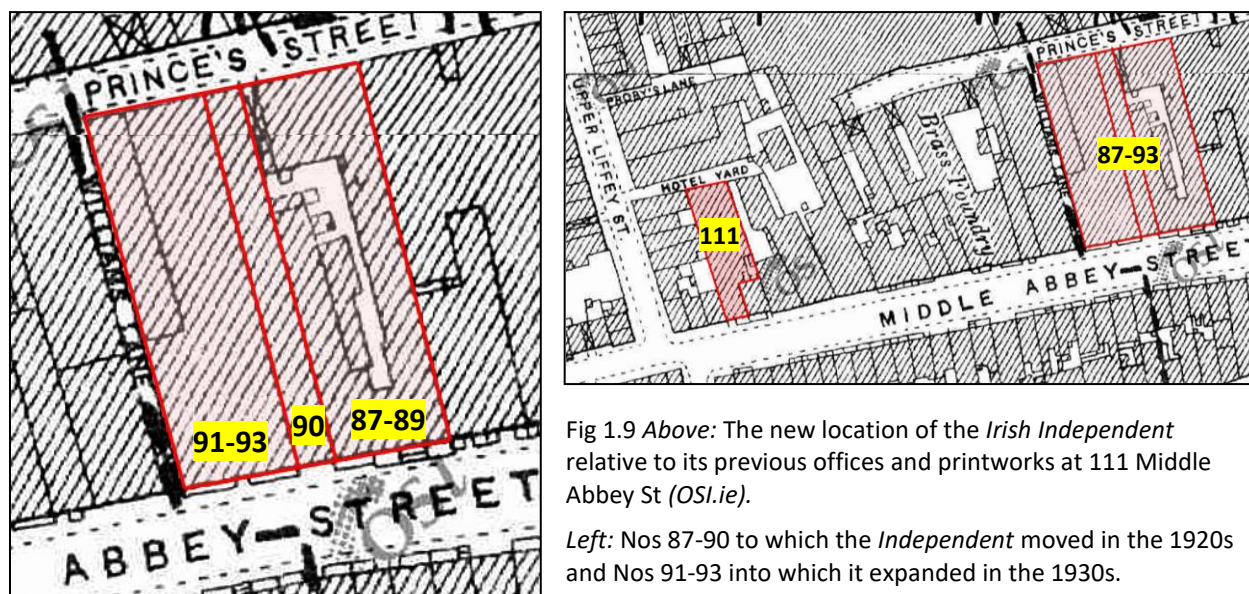


Fig 1.9 Above: The new location of the *Irish Independent* relative to its previous offices and printworks at 111 Middle Abbey St (OSI.ie).

Left: Nos 87-90 to which the *Independent* moved in the 1920s and Nos 91-93 into which it expanded in the 1930s.

1.3 Move to 87-90 Middle Abbey Street, 1924

The pre-1900 development of the plot to which the *Independent* relocated in 1924, and the adjacent one into which it expanded in the 1930s, is set out in reports by IAC Archaeology and Molloy &

¹⁰ Details of the presses are given in the *Irish Independent*, 7 Jan 1905 and 20 July 1916.

¹¹ *Globe*, 22 Dec 1919; *Irish Independent*, 22 and 23 Dec 1919.

¹² *Irish Independent*, 19 Feb 1920.

Associates.¹³ Some of the details are repeated here for completeness and are augmented with additional details gleaned from Thom's Dublin street directories, Valuation revision books, and the on-line British and Irish newspaper archives.

Prior to 1916, the portion of Middle Abbey Street which the *Independent* would eventually occupy consisted of three properties, all of which extended back to Prince's Street (fig 1.9 above):

- Nos 87-89: Occupied by Alexander Thom & Co, publishers of *Thom's Official Directory* and the *Dublin Gazette*, the government's official mouthpiece.
- No.90: This plot was formerly occupied by the publishers of the *Nation*, a weekly journal which began in 1842 and which moved here in 1868.¹⁴ As noted above, its titles were acquired by the *Daily Independent* in 1900. The presses were removed and the premises used thereafter as offices and stores by the *Independent*.
- Nos 91-93: In the 1880s, this plot, which extended to William's Lane, was occupied by the Irish National Press Co, publishers of the *National Press* and *Weekly National Press*. When these titles were acquired by the publishers of *Freeman's Journal* in 1892, the National's presses were shut down.¹⁵ In 1894, the premises were acquired by Martin Fitzgerald & Co, rectifying distillers and wholesale tea, wine and whiskey merchants (fig 1.10).¹⁶ Interestingly, the firm's telegraphic address was 'Emerald'; this may be a nod to the *Irish Emerald*, a weekly publication started in 1891 by the *Nation*, its next door neighbour, rather than a brand of whiskey.¹⁷

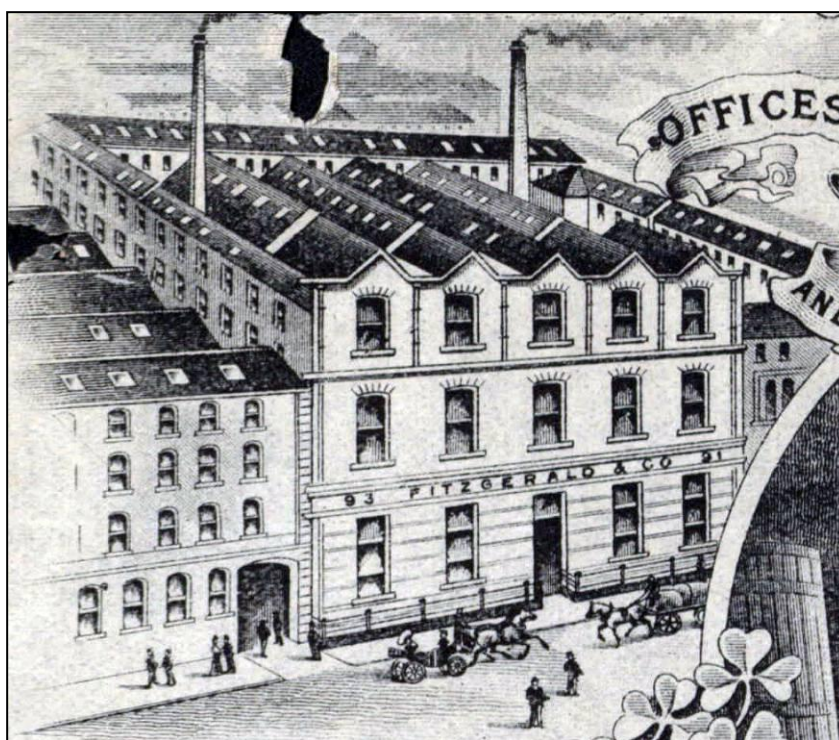


Fig 1.10 Letterhead showing 91-93 Middle Abbey St, the premises of Fitzgerald & Co.

Note the warehouses extending back to Prince's St (*National Archives Ireland: NAI/PLIC/1*).

¹³ IAC Archaeology (March 2025), *Archaeological Assessment, Independent House, Middle Abbey Street, Dublin 1*; Molloy & Associates Conservation Architects (March 2025), *Independent House Student Accommodation, 87-93 Middle Abbey Street: Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment*.

¹⁴ *The Nation*, 15 Oct 1842 - first edition; *Weekly News*, 18 July 1868 - relocation to No.90 Middle Abbey St.

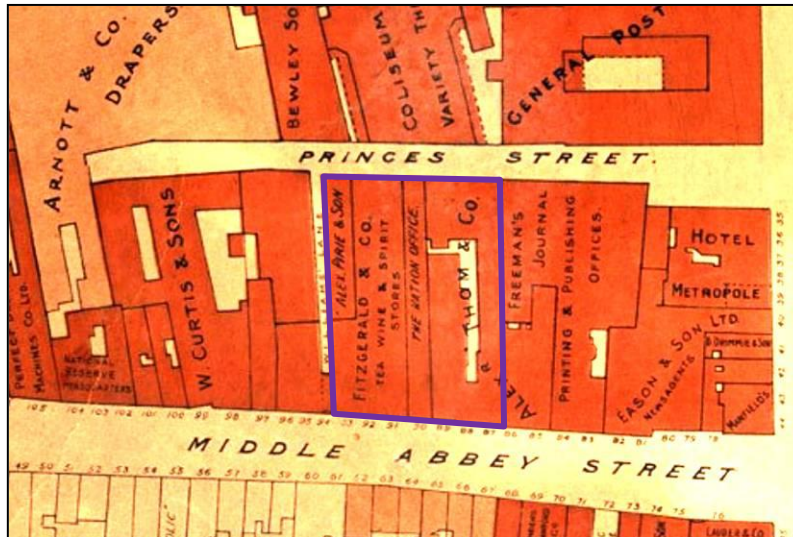
¹⁵ *Flag of Ireland*, 23 April 1892.

¹⁶ *Irish Independent*, 6 April 1894. Serendipitously, Mr Fitzgerald acquired *Freeman's Journal* in 1919.

¹⁷ The rectification process yields industrial alcohol rather than potable whiskey.

1.3.1 Destruction of Nos 87-93

Whereas 111 Middle Abbey St escaped damage during the 1916 Rising, the entire block from No.78 to No.93 was completely gutted by fire during the hostilities in and around the nearby General Post Office (fig 1.11). Thom's street directories for several years thereafter simply record this part of the street as "destroyed by rebellion".



Map of destroyed buildings; nos 87-93 are outlined in purple.



Looking east along Middle Abbey St. The entry to William's Lane and the burnt-out shell of Messrs Fitzgerald are at extreme left (*The Sinn Féin Rebellion, Belfast 1916*).

Fig 1.11 Destroyed buildings on Middle Abbey St and Prince's St in the aftermath of the Easter Rising.

1.3.2 Rebuilding of Nos 91-93

One of the first of the destroyed buildings to be rebuilt was that of Fitzgerald & Co. They had relocated to Thomas St after the 1916 calamity and it was not until 1918 that they began to reconstruct their former premises. The work was undertaken by Messrs R. Gough, building contractors of Rutland Place, Dublin, to designs by the Dublin architect Thomas J. Cullen.¹⁸ However, it was not until early 1921 that they were able to move back in.¹⁹ The building fronting the street was now known as Emerald Chambers; like the firm's telegraphic address noted above, this was probably in recognition of the *Irish Emerald*. Whereas Fitzgerald's previous front office was three storeys high, the new one was five, the form in which it survives to this day (fig 1.12).

¹⁸ *Freeman's Journal*, 20 November 1922. For further information on the new building see *Irish Builder*, vol.60, p.261 (25 May 1918); vol.60, p.483 (9 Nov 1918); and vol.63, p.671 (8 Oct 1921).

¹⁹ A raid on Emerald Chambers is noted in the *Dublin Evening Telegraph*, 28 Feb 1921. The building is also listed in Thom's 1921 *Dublin Street Directory*, p.1491.



Fig 1.12 The frontage of Fitzgerald's new offices as depicted in *Freeman's Journal*, 11 Dec 1922 (left), and in 2025 (middle). 'Emerald Chambers' is inlaid in the porch of its main entrance (right).

1.3.3 Rebuilding of Nos 87-90

Whereas Fitzgerald's premises were operational once again in 1921, work on Nos 87-90 was only just beginning, as reported in the *Irish Builder* of 15 January 1921:

"A large concrete job on the Hennebique system has been started on a site running between Middle Abbey Street and Prince's St and covering an area of some 18,000 sq.ft for the Irish Independent Newspaper Company. Messrs McLaughlin and Harvey Ltd, Dartmouth Rd, are the contractors and Messrs Donnelly, Moore, Keefe and Robinson are the architects".²⁰

The plot measured c.80ft x 220ft in plan and the new buildings used a system of reinforce-concrete construction patented by François Hennebique in 1892. This method was well established in Ireland by then, having been introduced c.1905 by Hennebique's agent L.G. Mouchel & Partners of Westminster. It was also used extensively in the rebuilding of other Dublin buildings destroyed in the Easter Rising, notably Clery's Department Store in what is now O'Connell St (rebuilt 1919-22).

Nos 87-90 Middle Abbey St were rebuilt as a single five-storey edifice called Independent House, the technical drawings for which were prepared by Messrs Mouchel and Mr R.N. Eaton, their Irish agent. It was completed in 1924 and the staff relocated from No.111 to their new premises in July (fig 1.13).²¹

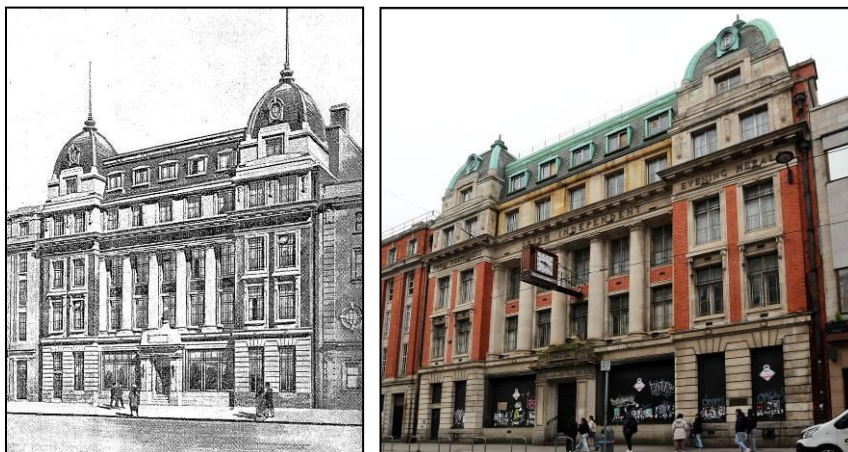


Fig 1.13 Independent House as depicted in the *Irish Independent*, 10 July 1924 (left), and as it stands in 2025 (right).

²⁰ *Irish Builder*, vol.63, p.46 (15 Jan 1921).

²¹ *Irish Builder*, vol.63, p.497 (16 July 1921). McLaughlin & Harvey also built Clery's new store.

In an article entitled 'Independent House and its Wonders' in the *Irish Independent* on 10 July 1924 (page 5), the Machine Hall which housed the printing presses is described thus:

"The great machinery hall is certainly the most spacious and admirably equipped of its kind in Ireland. It is 104ft long x 50ft wide x 40ft high and has been arranged as a mezzanine floor between the basement and ground floors to facilitate intake of paper and dispatch of printed paper. An overhead travelling crane has been installed to facilitate the handling of machines and machinery parts.

The hall has been, for a great extent, isolated from the rest of the buildings to minimise vibration. It is lined throughout with white glazed tiles and is excellently lighted and ventilated. A stereoplate drop-lift connects the foundry with it".

The above report also noted that the presses were located on a mezzanine floor between the basement and ground floors of the hall. Four were in operation, and two more were about to be installed. They were made by Messrs R. Hoe (London and New York) and R.W. Crabtree & Co (Leeds).²² At least one was a 'three-roll' press, i.e. could print three webs simultaneously (equivalent to 12 pages at a time).²³ Whether it was the one installed at No.111 in 1914 and moved here, or a new machine, is uncertain.

The basement contained generators to supply the offices and printworks with electric light and power and were driven by 50hp and 120hp Crossley 'cold start' oil engines.²⁴ The generators supplied British Thomson-Houston motors which turned the printing presses. There was also space for up to 500 reels of paper, as well as four coke-fired boilers for the central heating system and hot water supply.

On the second floor were 21 of the latest linotype composing machines by Linotype & Machinery Ltd (Altringham, Cheshire). Here the copy was transformed into typeset and then proofed using a galley press. There was also a foundry for processing of the typeset and casting the stereographs. Other features included a Creed electric telegraph, pneumatic tubing for conveying messages between departments, a passenger lift, goods lift, and fire sprinklers throughout the premises

Five titles were now being produced from the new works: the *Irish Independent*, *Sunday Independent*, *Irish Weekly Independent*, *Evening Herald*, and *Saturday Herald*.²⁵ They were all dispatched from the Prince's Street end of the premises (fig 1.14).



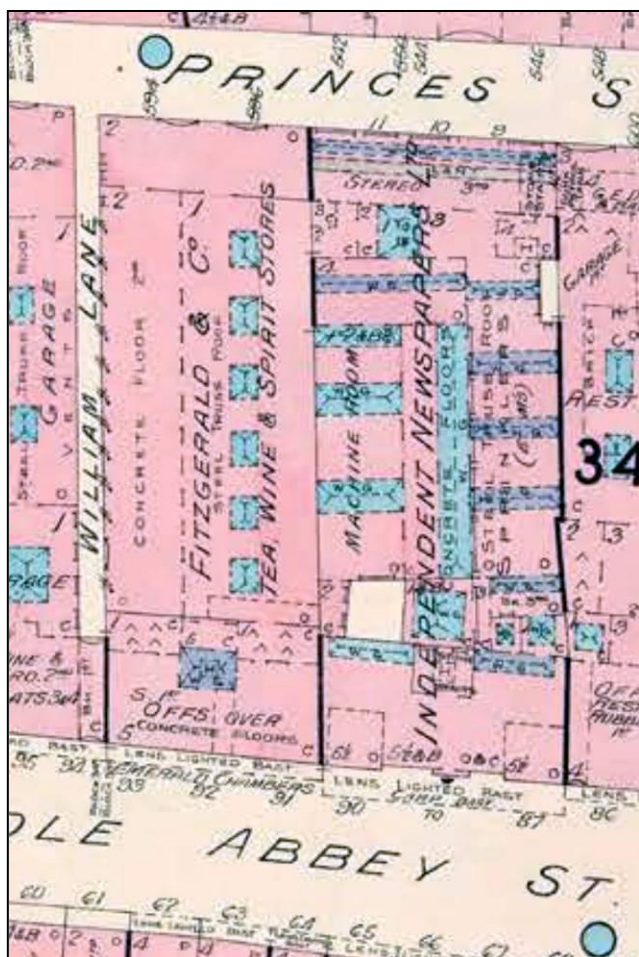
Fig 1.14 Left: Delivery vans outside the Dispatch Dept (NLI: *Independent Photo Collection*, IND H 2977). Right: The scene today is largely unchanged except for the shutters and rebuilt corner at William's Lane.

²² The link with Messrs Hoe goes back to the first presses installed by the *Daily Independent* in 1891. Messrs Hoe and Crabtree amalgamated in 1920 (Grace's Guide, <https://gracesguide.co.uk>).

²³ An order for a three-roll rotary press is noted in a Hoe advertisement in *Editor & Publisher*, vol.54 (29 April 1922), p.39. There may be a photograph of the press in the National Archives, London: *Index to the Crabtree photographic collection of presses made R. Hoe & Co, R. Hoe & Crabtree Ltd, and R.W. Crabtree & Sons Ltd*.

²⁴ These cold-start engines were claimed to be the first of their type in any newspaper office in Ireland and Britain. At that time, many oil engines were of the 'hot bulb' type and required pre-heating before being started.

²⁵ Thom's 1925 *Dublin Street Directory*, p.1491.



In 1924, *Freeman's Journal* ceased publication after 161 years and its assets were taken over by Independent Newspapers the following year.²⁶

The layout of the redeveloped plot is shown in the 1926 Goad Fire Insurance Plan (fig 1.15). Nos 87-90 were occupied by Independent Newspapers Ltd and comprised a 5½ storey building at the front and lower buildings at the back.

The Machine Hall along the west side of the premises was lit by a partially glazed three-bay saw-tooth roof, and contained the printing presses.

Nos 91-93 comprised the five-storey Emerald Chambers with Fitzgerald's tea, wine and spirit stores behind.

Fig 1.15 1926 Goad Fire Insurance Plan.

1.4 Expansion to 91-93 Middle Abbey Street, 1937-38

In 1932, Independent Newspapers acquired Fitzgerald's property. The building fronting Middle Abbey St was now known as Abbey Buildings (rather than Emerald Chambers). The Valuation Revision book indicates that the premises were initially used as offices and paper stores.²⁷

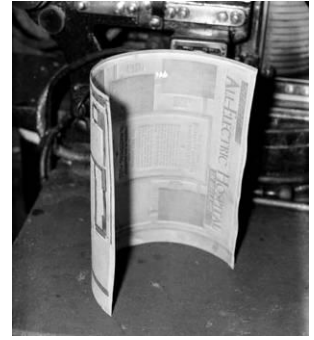
1935 marked the *Irish Independent's* 30th anniversary in its re-titled form, and a series of photographs was commissioned to illustrate various aspects of its production (fig 1.16).

Around 1937, work started on extending the Machine Hall into the former Fitzgerald property. The work was carried out by Messrs G. & T. Crampton Ltd (Ballsbridge, Dublin) and entailed the demolition of Fitzgerald's stores and their replacement with a new bay of similar size to the existing one in the printworks opened in 1924. This extension appears to have been completed sometime in 1938 as the Valuation Revision book entry for that year changes from "paper stores" to "printing works (part of), caretaker's house in rear".²⁸

²⁶ The last edition of *Freeman's Journal* appeared on 19 Dec 1924. The Independent Newspaper Co purchased its assets for £24,000 (*Irish Independent*, 31 March 1925).

²⁷ Valuation Revision book, North City 1925-35, p.414; *Irish Independent*, 29 Sept 1932. Not all the rooms in Abbey Buildings were occupied by the Independent and the unused ones were advertised to let.

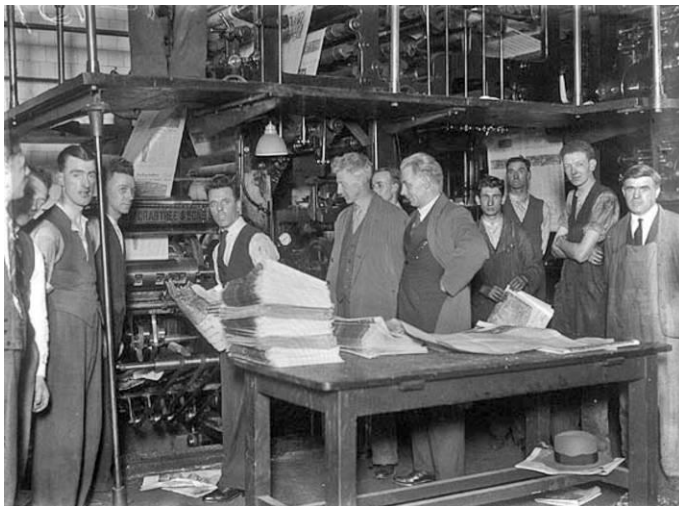
²⁸ Valuation Revision book, North City 1935-47, p.324.



Left: Composing the typeface on a linotype machine (IND H 2967). Middle: Laying out the pages (IND H 2955). Right: A stereotype for loading on to a printing cylinder (IND H 2962).



Above left: Webs ready to be loaded into the presses (IND H 2971). Right: The delivery end one of the presses (IND H 2969). Middle:



Above: Checking the finished paper (IND H 2954).

Left: Job done! (IND H 2959).

Fig 1.16 Some of the processes entailed in producing the *Irish Independent* as pictured in 1935. These and other images are viewable on-line in the *Independent Newspapers (Ireland) Photographic Collection* in the National Library of Ireland; their catalogue numbers are given in brackets.

At its AGM on 27 March 1940, Dr W. Lombard Murphy, the *Independent*'s Chairman, announced the completion of the new extension and that it had enabled the Typesetting and Stereotyping Departments to be more than doubled in size, and the Dispatch Department to be quadrupled.²⁹ The existing presses were superseded by "two magnificent printing machines of the latest Hoe unit type (fig 1.17).

²⁹ *Irish Independent*, 28 March 1940.



Fig 1.17 Circa 1938 view of the enlarged Machine Hall, as viewed from the SW corner of the ground floor of its west bay. The handrail around the stairs to the basement is visible at bottom left. The massive presses run the length of the hall and rise up to the saw-tooth roof, the windows of which face north to reduce glare. The press on the right is in the 1924 bay and the one at left is in the new extension. 'Hoe', their manufacturer, is evident on the gear covers along the sides of both machines. Note also the skeletal reinforced-concrete column-and-beam frame between the two bays and the central heading radiators on the beam between the ground and first floor levels. Overhead travelling cranes served the presses, the rails of which are visible just below the roof valleys (*University College Dublin: Photographic Archive, item 243*).

The latest linotype machines, poster printer, typeface making equipment, and a new foundry were also installed. He continued "I think I can say without exaggeration that no newspaper office of this size anywhere is better equipped".

The fact that the company was able to finance the extension and new presses out of its own pockets after only 12 years in Independent House underscores both the profitability of its titles during the inter-war years, and also an awareness of the need to keep abreast of the latest printing technology.

1.5 Later 1900s take-overs and changes

In 1973, a consortium led by (Sir) Tony Reilly bought the Independent Newspaper Co from the Murphy family. Around 1999, the company was renamed Independent News and Media PLC. The following year, a new printworks was built at Citywest, near Tallaght, at a cost of €60m. By then, the presses at Independent House had been operating for over 60 years and were now well and truly obsolete. This is a particularly surprising situation given the continual upgrading of the machinery in the past. By contrast, the new Citywest facility could print up to 32 pages in full colour and it was anticipated that it would meet the company's needs for the next 30 years.³⁰ Production moved to Citywest in November 2000 and the Middle Abbey Street presses were subsequently removed, being surplus to requirements.

The next major event was in November 2004 when, after 80 years of occupation, the newspaper's offices moved from Independent House to nearby 27-32 Talbot St.³¹ Although this marked the end of the paper's presence on Middle Abbey St, it is not quite the end of the story.

In 2019, INM was acquired by Mediahuis who, in March 2021, moved the Citywest printing operation to Newry, County Down.³² In January 2023, that press was also shut down and printing reverted to Citywest³³ Now, however, the operation was being outsourced by Mediahuis to its long-standing rivals, the *Irish Times*.

In 2013, Primark the owners of the neighbouring Penney's Department Store bought Independent House which had lain vacant for almost a decade.³⁴ The redevelopment scheme envisaged by Primark did not come to fruition and it eventually sold the premises to UK-based Summix Capital in May 2024.³⁵ The new owners propose to redevelop the buildings for student accommodation and this report has been prepared as part of the planning submission to enable the scheme to get underway.

1.6 Historical summary

A summary of the origins and development of the *Independent* newspaper is set out in the following table. Its main offices and presses were both at the one address until 25 years ago, when printing was moved elsewhere and eventually outsourced to third parties. It is also evident that until the expansion from Independent House to Abbey Buildings in the 1930s, the presses were being constantly replaced with the latest printing technology.

³⁰ *Irish Independent*, 9 June 2000, 18 Nov 2000, and 30 May 2001.

³¹ *Irish independent*, 16 Oct and 3 Nov 2004.

³² *Irish Independent*, 23 March 2021.

³³ *Irish Times*, 27 Sept 2022; *Irish Independent*, 9 Jan 2023.

³⁴ *Irish Times*, 24 April 2013.

³⁵ *Irish Times* 15 May 2024.

Date	Main title	Owner	Offices	Print works	Printing presses
1890	<i>Irish Daily Independent</i>	Independent Publishing Co	Trinity St.		1 no. Hoe
1900					1 no. Goss 2-deck
1910	<i>Daily Independent</i>	Independent Newspapers	111 Middle Abbey St.		2 no. Goss 2/3 deck 1 no. Hoe 3-deck added
1920					
1930			Independent House, 87-90 Middle Abbey St.		4-6 no. Hoe & Crabtree
1940			Independent House, 87-90 Middle Abbey St + Abbey Buildings, 90-93 Middle Abbey St		2 no. Hoe
1950					
1960					
1970					
1980					
1990					
2000		Mediahuis	27-32 Talbot Street	Citywest	Unknown
2010				Newry, then Citywest	

2020 Historical development of the Independent newspaper, 1891-2025.

2. Industrial remains

The primary objective of this report is to document any surviving features relating to the production of the *Irish Independent*. To this end, a survey of the premises was undertaken on 18 February 2025.

Virtually every room was found to have been comprehensively stripped of its contents and nothing of the presses and ancillary machinery has survived. This is hardly surprising given that it has been 25 years since the printing presses were relocated to Citywest. Indeed, even historical records are sparse and the only visual record (at least in the public realm) of the presses last used in Independent House appears to be the photograph of the two presses just after their installation almost 90 years ago.

Despite the absence of the actual presses, features of interest were identified in the Machinery Hall and also the contents of the Boiler Room and a goods ramp in the basement, the newspaper Dispatch Area on the ground floor at the Prince's St end, and an original passenger lift in Abbey Buildings (fig 2.1).

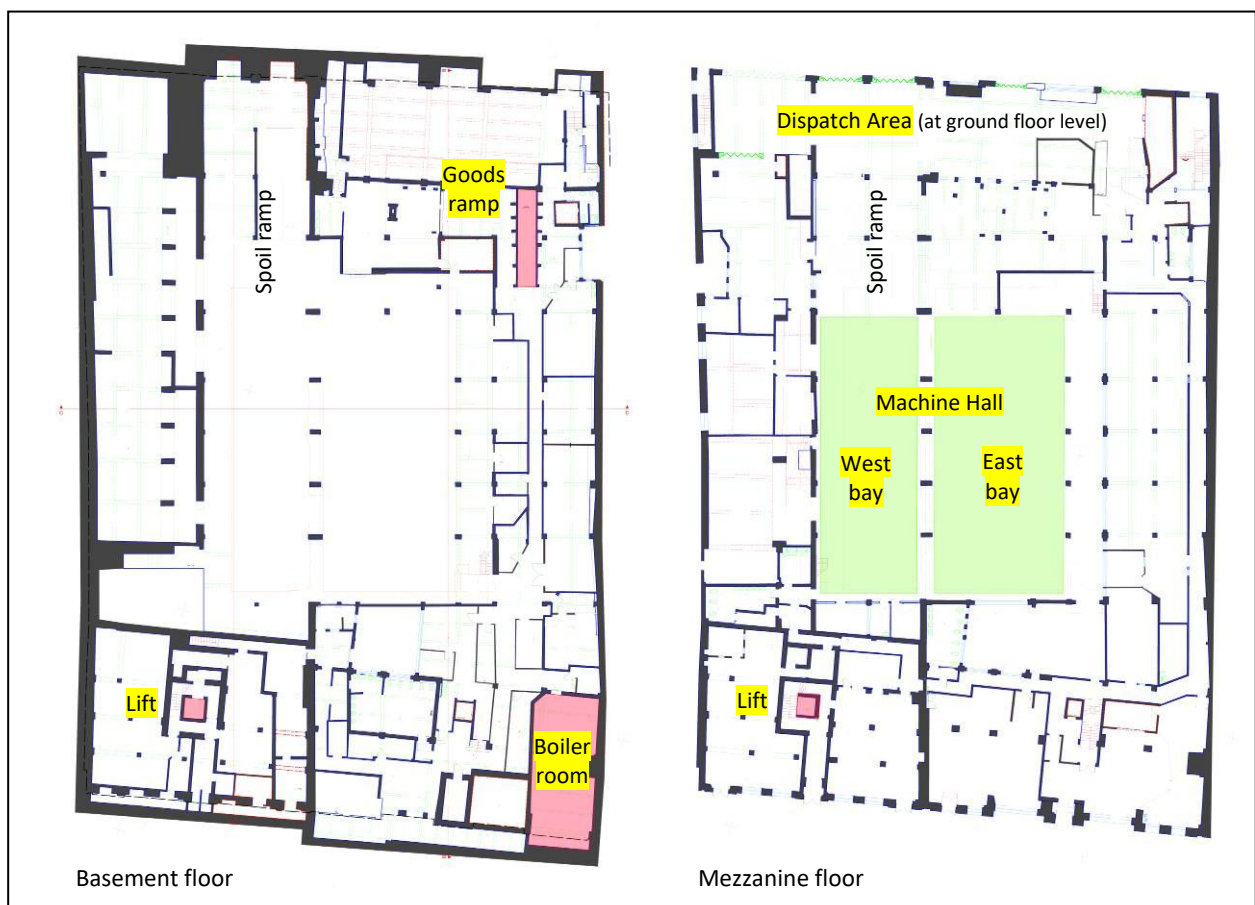
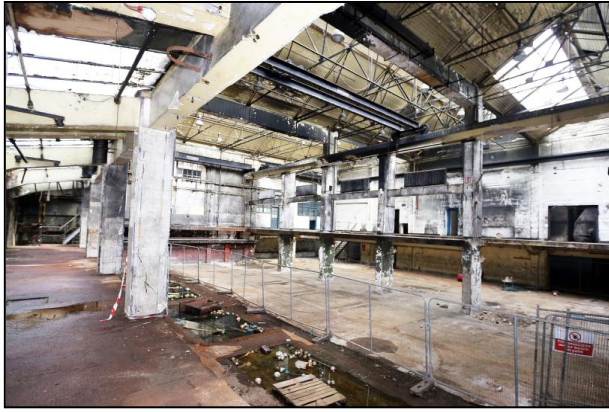


Fig 2.1 Location of features recorded in the basement and mezzanine floors.

2.1 Machine Hall

The c.1938 photo (fig 1.17) shows the two Hoe presses were on a mezzanine floor between the basement and ground floors and to have extended up to just below the roof. This floor was almost completely removed, along with some of the Hennebique frame between the two bays, when the presses were removed (fig 2.2). Some of its rubble was used to form a ramp up to the ground floor at the north end of the basement. The remnants of the mezzanine indicate that it comprised a reinforced-concrete deck over steel beams. At least one of the beams is embossed "British Steel / Dorman Long". There were doubtless also stanchions to support the presses' weight, but these have been removed.



Looking SW from NE corner of mezzanine floor.



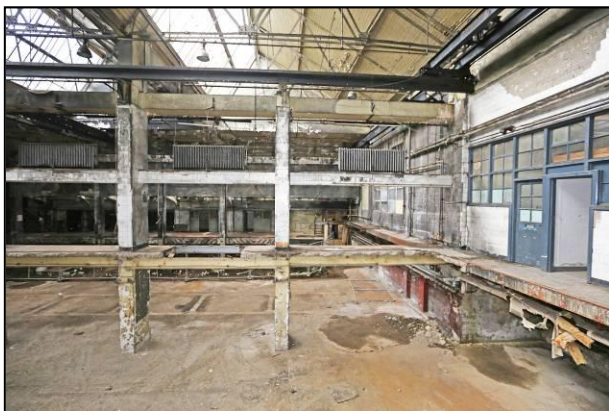
Looking NW from SE corner of mezzanine floor.



Looking NE from SW corner of mezzanine floor.



Looking SE from NW corner of mezzanine floor.



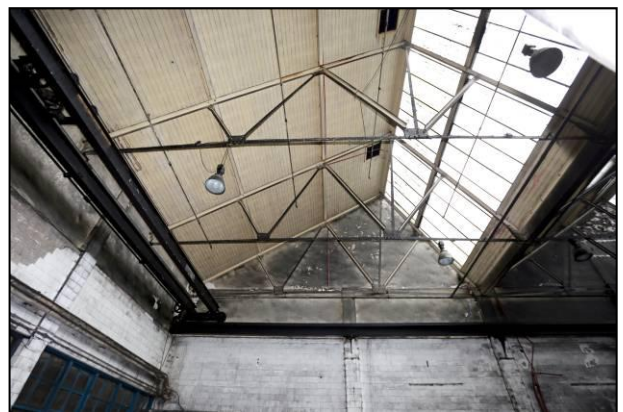
RFC frame in party wall between bays, from west.



Radiator mounted on rfc beam between bays.



RFC and steel deck detailing on mezzanine floor.



Metal roof trusses in west bay, looking west.

Fig 2.2 Machine Hall.

2.1.1 Murals

Two murals survive in the Machine Hall, both seemingly related to the newspaper's workforce (fig 2.3). In actual fact, they are relatively modern insertions, having been specifically created for a film set. They therefore bear no relationship with the newspaper and are of no industrial heritage interest.



Left: Sign at NE end of Hall.

Right: Sign at SE end of Hall.

Fig 2.3 Murals in Machine Hall.

2.1.2 Travelling cranes

Three travelling bridge cranes were used to manoeuvre heavy items within in the Machine Hall and are located just below roof level - two in the east bay and one in the west (fig 2.4). One or both of those in the east bay were probably installed c.1924 and the one in the west bay c.1938 and are therefore original features of their respective bays.



Each crane is mounted on top of two parallel metal beams between the side walls and can move along it by means of a hand-operated chain from the mezzanine floor. The bridges on which the cranes are mounted can also move up and down their respective bays on a pair of heavy-duty steel rails fixed to the tops of the columns. Again, a hand-chain was used to operate them. Each crane could thus be positioned any-where within its bay.



Above: Cranes in east bay (arrowed in red), from NE corner of the basement. The back one could lift 1½ tons (1524kg).

Left: Crane in west bay, from north. It could lift 3500kg.

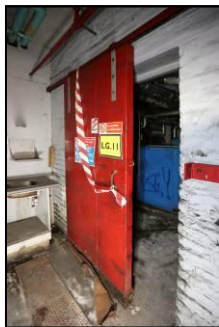
Fig 2.4 Travelling cranes in Machine Hall.

2.2 Boiler room

The entrance to this room, at the SE corner of the basement, is protected by a sliding fire door and is where hot water for the central heating and washbasins etc was generated (fig 2.5). It houses three gas-fired boilers: a 1995 'G 505' model by Buderus (Lollar, Germany), and two 'Viceroy's' by Ideal Standard. Along its east side is a bank of nine lagged vertical pipes, each fitted with several turn-wheel valves and an electrical Grundfos circulation pump. At the south end of the room is a cylindrical hot-water tank, also insulated.

At the north end is a panel fitted with three 'Metro-Flex' on/off switches for the boilers' burners. At its right-hand end are on/off switches for the valves controlling the flow of hot water in the pipes. They are labelled 'Casement & Canteen', 'Upper Case & Etching', 'Editorial block', 'Executive suite', 'Abbey Buildings', 'Despatch' (sic), 'Front office', 'Common stand-by', 'Hot water primary pump', and 'D.H.W. circulating pump' (= domestic hot water).

Fire doors were also installed in the openings between Independent House and Abbey Buildings after the latter's take-over by Independent Newspapers; none bear a maker's nameplate or date.



Left: Firedoor at entrance to boiler room.

Middle: Control panel at north end.

Right: General view from NW corner of room.



Left: Buderus boiler (left) and Ideal Standard 'Viceroy' boiler at north end of room.

Right: Lagged pipework, from SW corner.



Left: Ideal Standard 'Viceroy' boiler towards south end of room.

Right: Insulated water tank at south end of room.

Fig 2.5 Boiler Room.

2.3 Goods ramp

At the NE end of the basement is a ramp sloping up to the ground floor Dispatch Area (fig 2.6). The rolls of paper which were brought in from Prince's Street were probably brought down this ramp for storage in the basement.

Mounted on the ramp's deck are two parallel metal tracks which continue along a corridor in the basement. The rails were probably once longer, but were removed to facilitate the insertion of stud-walled rooms along the corridor. What survives is of no particular heritage merit.

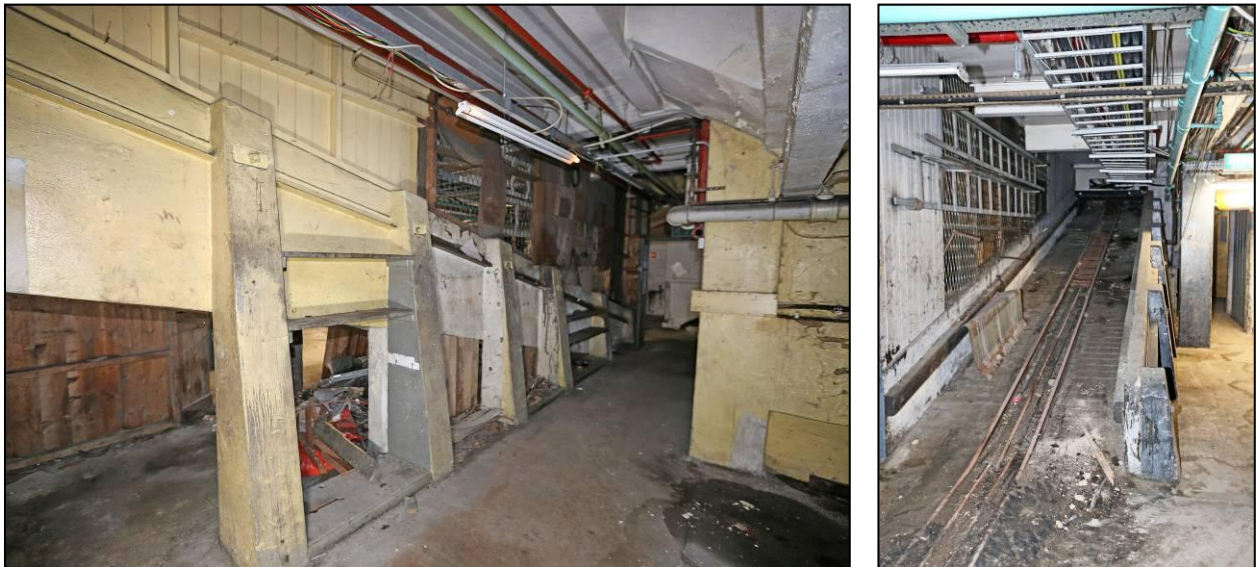


Fig 2.6 Goods ramp. *Left:* View from NW. *Right:* View up to north.

2.4 Dispatch Area

This area is at ground floor level at the Prince's Street end of the block and is where the newspapers were once loaded into the delivery vans (fig 2.7). It contains no features except for an air duct from the basement which runs up the inside of the outside wall and once vented to the street. Its opening is not on the 1935 photo (fig 1.14) so this feature must be a later insertion.

The street facade of the Dispatch Area as it now stands is otherwise largely as originally built except for the heightening of one of its vehicle entrances and the insertion of metal roller shutters (fig 1.14).

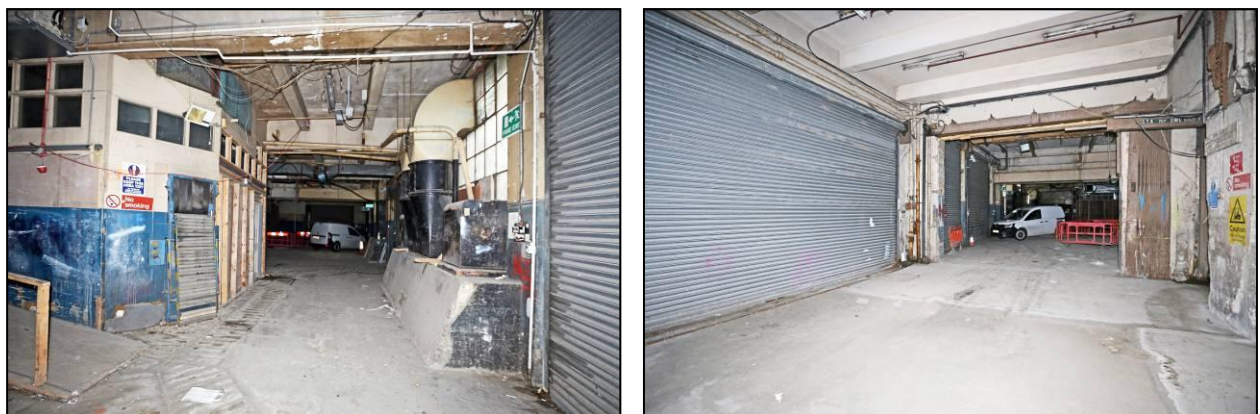


Fig 2.7 Dispatch area. *Left:* View to west. *Right:* View to east.

2.5 Passenger lift

This lift runs from the ground to 4th floors of Abbey Buildings and appears to be a largely-intact original fixture (fig 2.8). Unfortunately, the car is stuck midway between two floors and its manual concertina landing doors have seized. It was therefore impossible to inspect the car in detail at the time of survey.

Visible inside the car is a handwritten inscription on one of its wood-lined panels: “Oct 28th 1920/ J. Perry L’pool [= Liverpool]/ J. Kavanagh”. How it came to be there is unclear. If original, the writing has survived undamaged for a remarkably long time.

The lift was made by Waygood-Otis Ltd, as indicated by the legend across the top of its counterweight.³⁶ Somewhat unusually, its machine room is not at the top of the shaft, but in the basement. However, the actual motor therein is probably a later replacement. At the top of the shaft is a skylight, in the void of which the twisted wire hoisting rope is looped around a pulley mounted between two horizontal steel cross-beams.

There was no access to the lift in Independent House as its landing doors were firmly shut. These are of the automatic sliding type and relatively modern, so the car is probably a relatively recent replacement in the original lift shaft. However, this is subject to future confirmation.



Fig 2.8 Passenger lift in Abbey Buildings. *Clockwise from top left*: Cage interior (obstructed by the landing door); 1920 inscription on cage panel; Maker’s name on counterweight (*photo courtesy Molloy Associates*); Motor in basement; Hoist rope pulley in lightwell at top of lift shaft.

³⁶ Grace’s Guide notes that the name ‘Waygood-Otis’ dates from 1914 and resulted from the merger of Richard Waygood of London and the Otis Elevator Co of New York. Since 1952, the firm has traded as Otis Elevators.

3. Conservation of industrial remains

It is evident from this survey that the entire premises have been comprehensively gutted of equipment and nothing now survives which is directly related to the production of the *Irish Independent* and its sister titles. Several features of indirect industrial interest do, however, survive: three travelling cranes in the Machine Hall, a boiler control unit in the basement, and a passenger lift in Abbey Buildings.

3.1 Travelling cranes

All three cranes are of heritage interest as they are original features of the Machine Hall. Whilst the east bay will be retained in the redeveloped building, it is proposed to demolish the west bay.

It is recommended that the two cranes in the east bay are retained in situ as reminders of this space's industrial past. The one in the west bay is to be removed and it is recommended that it be photographed before and during its dismantling. It might be possible to reposition it in the east bay if the spans of their longitudinal rails are similar. Otherwise, it is recommended that it be advertised to interested third parties before being scrapped.

3.2 Boiler control unit

It is recommended that the front panel of the control unit be detached and displayed somewhere in the premises as a reminder of the former uses of the various spaces. Some of the labels refer specifically to the actual printing process: e.g. 'Upper Case & Etching' is probably the typeface store (the 'case room') and where the etching of metal printing plates was undertaken.

3.3 Passenger lift

This Waygood-Otis lift appears to be an original feature of Emerald Chambers, as Abbey Buildings was originally called. As such, it may well be one of the few earlier 20th century lifts to survive in situ anywhere in Dublin. The developer proposes to preserve it in a non-operational state in the refurbished premises.