

OPERATION SITRIC

Drama and uncertainty surrounded the room in the Liberties where a group of famous people met to carry out the invasion of the Wood Quay site. And what a picture they made - an alderman in his robes, well known writers, politicians and trade union leaders.

The plan was well worked out - every move on the site had been observed and recorded for days and when the unsuspecting foreman drove his car as usual through the main gate at Winetavern St. the task force struck. It was split second timing - and the security staff were left open mouthed as a nun and a priest led the group in. The Alsatian dogs were safely in their kennels awaiting release - they were padlocked. Then down the hill from Christ Church came the second wave in their robes and ribbons. A squad car was parked outside but the stunned gardi were glued to their seats with surprise at the glittering parade of famous names: Mary Lavin, James Plunkett, Michael O'Leary, Denis Larkin, Donal Navin, Oisín Kelly, Gemma Hussey, Alexis Fitzgerald, Kevin Byrne, George Eogan, John Gallagher, Benvenuta MacCurtain, Imogen Stuart, Michael Scott, Tom Kinsella and F.X. Martin.

Immediately the security boss approached Fr. Martin to be informed of the peaceful occupation. He accepted the accomplished fact and related "Oh, Fr. Martin, sure I know you well. You lectured me in History." The manning of the gates and the crucial task of locking up the guard dog kennel followed. After this Tom Kinsella read the proclamation "A Statement to the Citizens of Dublin".

Holiday Weekend

The new 'workforce' spent the sunny bank holiday securing the four gates and organising a security system and rota of helpers. A tent and camping gear were installed and cooking gear and food moved in. Outside an information caravan was positioned opposite the main gate and this was used to hand out election material and keep the public up to date.

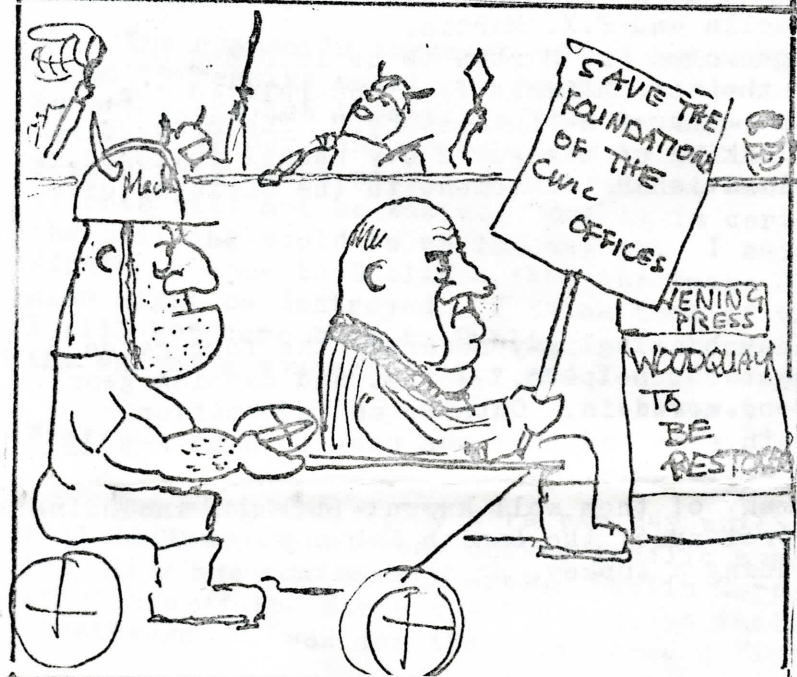
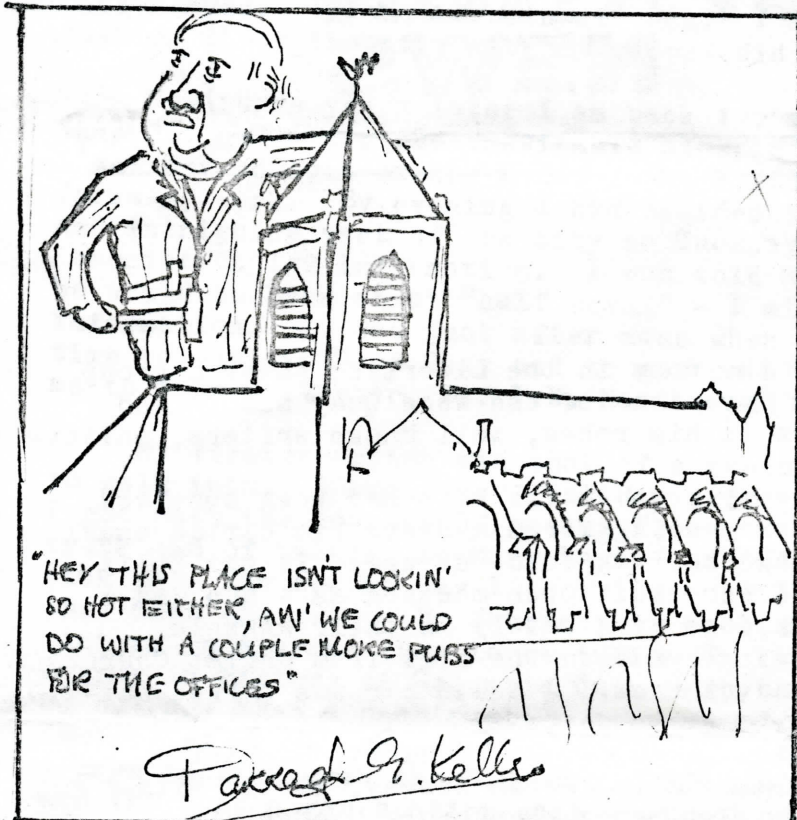
A constant stream of visitors - many of them well known - called, including the American ambassador, the First Secretary of the Danish Embassy and Rita Childers. Food arrived as gifts including a turkey, dressed salmon and cakes.

Confrontation with the Builders

Over the weekend it was realized that Tuesday morning would be a critical time. The Government and Dublin Corporation had maintained a deafening silence. A large force of occupiers, supported by a group outside the gates waited apprehensively for the building workers to arrive. It was obvious that John Paul had instructed their workers to come to work as usual at Wood Quay. Denis Larkin, the Trade Union leader assured the workers that they would get paid if they merely reported for work. This was ignored. The workmen were formally refused entry at the main gate, so they climbed over the fence in force. From then on the "cat and mouse" tactics directed by John Paul's foreman continued with outbursts of violence. The occupiers passively resisted.

Truce

This went on for two days, several girls were soaked by pressure hoses and sand was thrown into faces - violent arguments were filmed by the TV cameras and the tension was high. Meanwhile no building was done. After this when it became apparant that the invaders were here to stay a truce was declared - control of the gate was conceded to the occupiers, and the workers were let in one by one - but no machines were to be used - so the building work is stopped.



Wood Quay Meeting

A meeting will be held outside the site on Saturday at 3:00 P.M. Members of the newly elected Council will be present. Afterwards it is hoped that some of the people present may be led on a guided tour of the site in groups of 20 only. Nobody under 15 years of age will be allowed on to the site.

Tom O'Riordan's Snippets

"O'er the site a kestrel - like a question mark;
Below in green 'n' steel one rabbit before dark."

...

"With eyes of wonder and mouths agape,
In recounting history to avert its rape."

...

"Dark were the frowns for stopping the wrecking,
Now a book for shovel makes liking the Vikings."

...

"At dusk, to the ag lady it did seem,
That atop the crane it said 'God Save the Queen'."

...

"John Paul to the Press (in an hour) he would speak,
But then it was two or three or maybe a week."

ANNOUNCEMENTS

We would like to thank the people who have helped us so far by giving a food and offering their services for a few hours on the site. Move offerings of food supplies would be very welcome. Also those of you who have a few hours to spare could come to the site and help out with the manning of the gates and machines.

Information

All information concerning the historic importance of the site can be obtained at the caravan. Up-to-date reports on the 'Occupation' can be obtained at any time during the day. 'City News', 'Information Sheet', 'Wood Quay Ballad' - all on sale at the caravan.

HERE WE STAND

The decision to occupy the Wood Quay site was not taken lightly. Nor was it taken in haste. A series of events decided a responsible body of citizens to act. They believe they had, and have, a moral mandate to act.

There can be little doubt that, on objective evidence, the overwhelming majority of the citizens of Dublin are of a clear mind about Wood Quay. They want the National Monument properly excavated and preserved. They are opposed to any high-rise buildings on the Wood Quay site.

Half of the Wood Quay site was declared a National Monument by Justice Hamilton on 30 June 1978. It was the first site in Ireland to be so declared by the High Court. It is there by the law of the land. The popular support for the High Court decision was unequivocally shown by two massive Viking marches through the city in September 1978 and March 1979. This mounting wave of popular opinion finally carried the will of the people into City Hall. On 4 May the Dublin City Council, the legal owners of the Wood Quay site, passed two motions in favour of preserving the National Monument site.

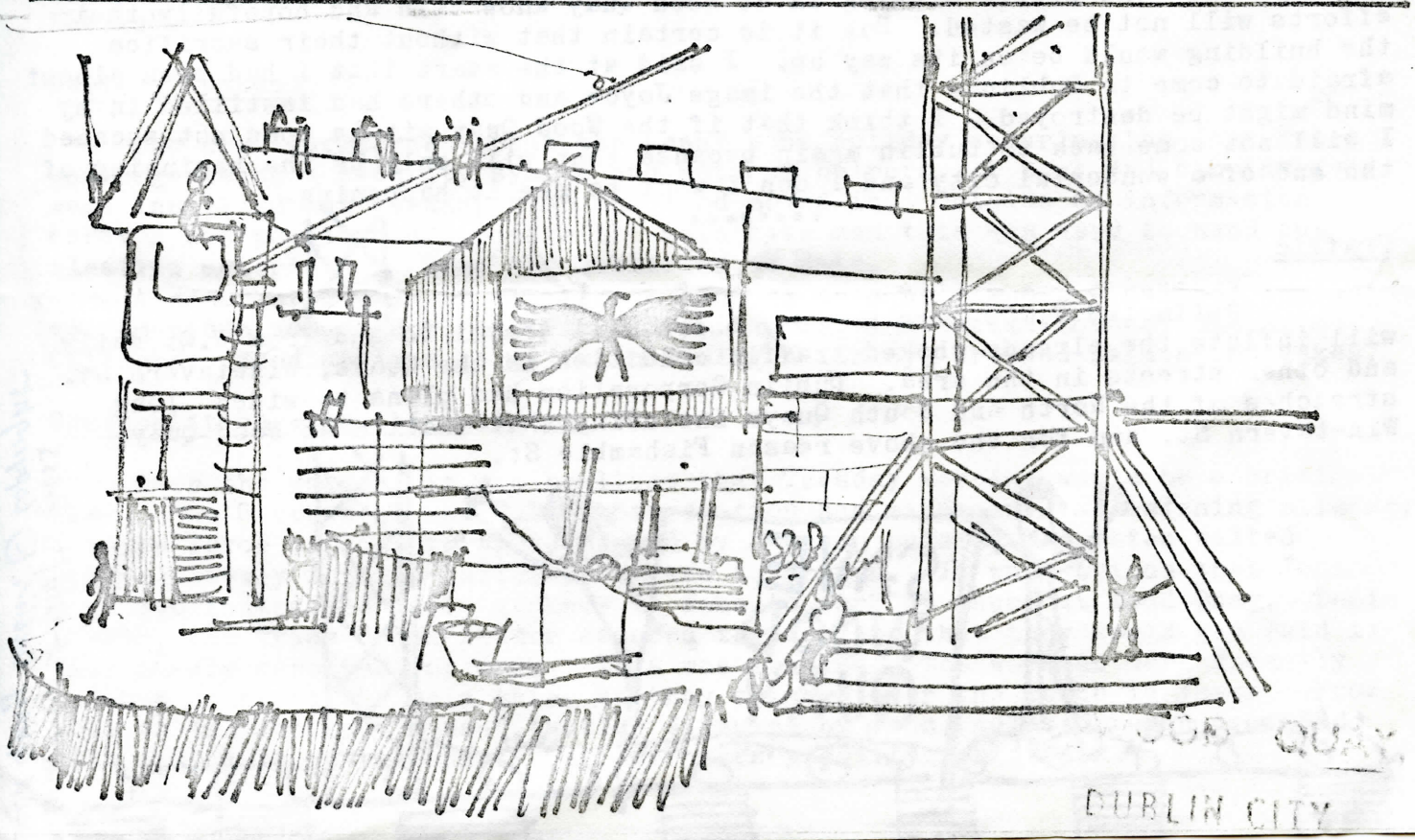
Another important event took place on 11 May when the Council of Europe passed three strong proposals - stronger even than those of the Dublin City Council - in favour of preserving Wood Quay as a European heritage. The Coun-

cil of Europe represents 20 nations and 350,000,000 people. Yet none of these manifestations of popular and authoritative opinion, since June 1978, succeeded in halting the destruction.

By the end of May it seemed as if Wood Quay was doomed, and the Civic Offices would be built on the National Monument site. The machines were busy and the City Council was in the process of dissolution due to the local elections of 7 June. The City Manager, J. Malloy, was retiring from his post, and an Acting City Manager was there to bridge the gap. How were the machines to be halted until a newly-elected City Council could be appealed to and make a decision? Tons of concrete were being poured on the National Monument site.

It was no time to stand idly by. A great heritage was in danger of destruction. The local elections were due to take place on 7 June and that democratic opportunity comes only once every five years. To make the electors aware of one important issue at stake, and to prevent the new City Council from being presented with a fait accompli, on 1 June it was decided to act - to occupy the site and await the outcome of the local elections. It would have been irresponsible not to act. Since that date no building work has been done, AND HERE WE STAND.

- F.X. Martin -



An American Reaction to Wood Quay

Jean M. Mattson

Three years ago I came to Ireland for the first time to see the country my ancestors had left during the famine. I had been almost afraid to come - years of reading Irish literature had heightened my expectations to the point where I felt disappointment was inevitable. But expectations and reality for once merged. I loved Dublin at once. I am a photographer and three weeks of dashing about the city with my camera did nothing to change my mind.

Now three years later I am back for more photography. I arrived Saturday June 2nd and after the inevitable sleeping off the results of the time change I set out on foot on the Monday bank holiday looking for something on which to focus my work. By evening I had decided the Liberties area was the most vital and intriguing part of the city so Tuesday morning I went to the Liberties Association for information. I was told Mr. Gallagher was not there - perhaps he would be back about "half seven" - I might try at St. Nicholas Church for information. It was just after mass when I arrived and Fr. O'Donahue took the time to explain Wood Quay and to get us a ride to the site where he introduced me to John Gallagher, Fr. F.X. Martin and others.

My first reaction was that of a photographer - what a marvelous situation to walk into. I spent my first day photographing everyone in sight. But once I got past the novelty of seeing Thomas Kinsella sitting in the cab of a dump truck and of talking to Mary Lavin the enormity of what was happening began to sink in. The second day I took less photographs, and spent time occupying the shed near the gate. By Thursday it seemed infinitely more important to be sitting on a crane than to be taking photographs. I am working on a master's degree in History at Columbia University at present and I feel a terrible sense of outrage that a construction company can arbitrarily come in and set about destroying one of the great historical areas of the world. Of course, this is always happening in the U.S. too. One month you have a landmark of the Revolution and the next a gas station with a little plaque marking the site.

The company's argument of the enormous cost of relocating the building seems impressive until one remembers that the wall and the archeological material is priceless not to mention that as human beings we cannot afford to let the evidence of our past be replaced by office blocks, gas stations and fast food restaurants. The people sitting in at Wood Quay know this and hopefully their efforts will not be wasted. But it is certain that without their sacrifice the building would be on its way up. I said at the start that I had been almost afraid to come to Dublin - that the image Joyce and others had instilled in my mind might be destroyed - I think that if the Wood Quay sit-in does not succeed I will not come back to Dublin again because that will only be the beginning of the end of a wonderful city and I don't want to see it happening.

Traffic

The estimated 7,000 cars per day which will travel to and from W.Q. daily will inflate the already choked traffic condition in the Quays, Winetavern St. and other streets in the area. Dublin Corporation has plans to widen long stretches of the North and South Quays including that section at Wood Quay, Winetavern St. and for the above reason Fishamble St.



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