



*Leabharlann
Náisiúnta
na hÉireann*
National Library
of Ireland

EXPLORING EPHEMERA

An Introduction to Postering in Public Spaces



What is Ephemera?

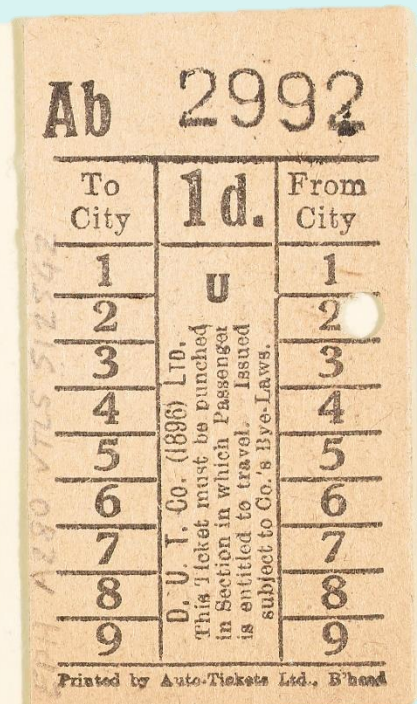
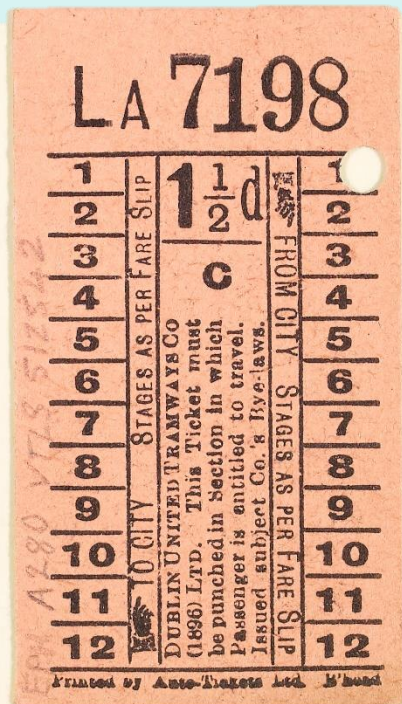
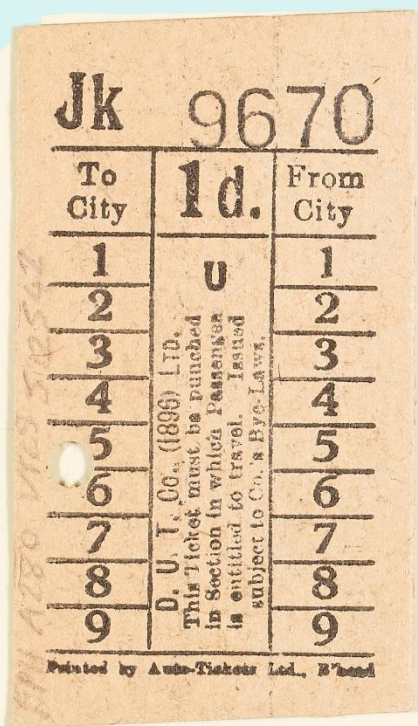
Ephemera: Items, mainly paper, that were originally meant to be discarded after use but have since become collectibles/collected

These items can give us valuable insight into the everyday life of a time period—how much did the tram cost; how did people receive political pamphlets; and what events were advertised, for example.



Can you think of any examples in your life of things that might be considered ephemera? List them below. Public transport tickets like the ones below are one example.

Why do you keep these items even though their intended purpose is over?



Street Culture of Ephemera

Ephemera exists on the streets in various forms. One of the main ways we encounter ephemera in our communities is through product advertising.



EMB/2

Between 1926 and 1932, the British government ran the Empire Marketing Board campaign. The Empire Marketing Board produced materials that promoted goods from various British colonial countries such as India and Gibraltar. The British public were needed to buy from these countries to strengthen trade relations. This particular design was created in 1930 by the Irish artist Margaret Clarke to encourage the purchase of Irish butter.

Audience

Who is the intended audience when an object is placed on the street?
How does it function within this space?

For instance, the Empire Marketing Board campaigns attempted to create new communities— connecting the British island populous to those living within the colonial reach of the Empire and implying an interdependence.

Regardless of what community an object is placed in, one aspect of disseminating messages throughout the streets is that the audience is never-ending and varying. Constant streams of people from a wide variety of backgrounds and situations encounter the object.

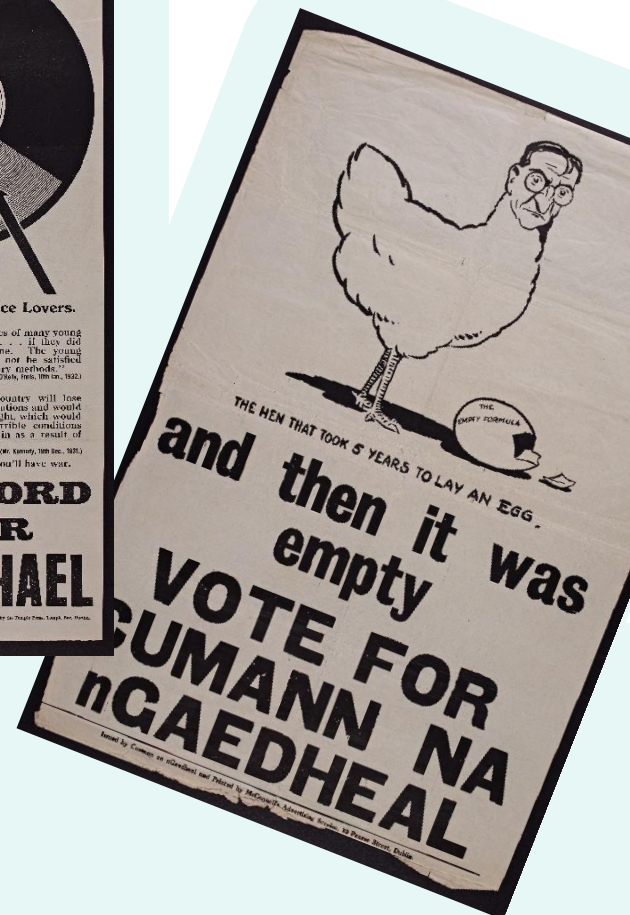
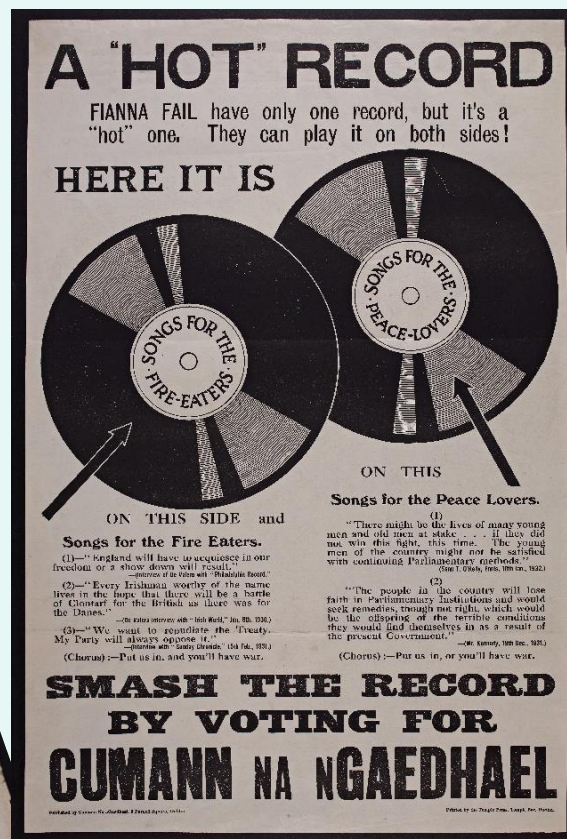
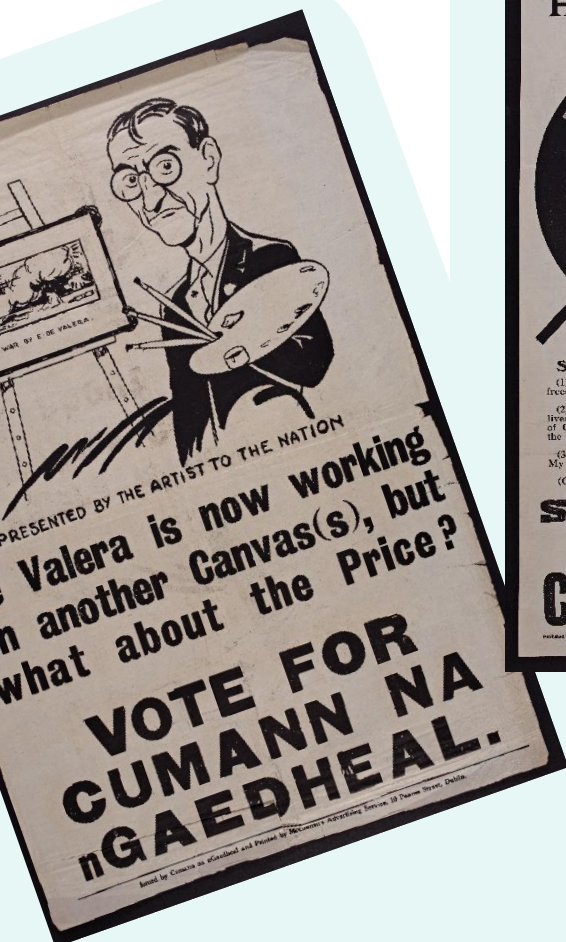
It is a quick and efficient way to spread a message. Naturally, this method of ephemeral placement in the streets is used by political and social campaigns as well.



Aside from the vast audience, why else might political and social campaigns frequently make use of these temporary formats? What are the other benefits to posters?

The political sphere changes quickly—elections approach and pass; referendums are posed; and a continuous cycle of issues and discussions are considered. As such, resources must be created to respond in real time and space must be cleared as new things come to the forefront.

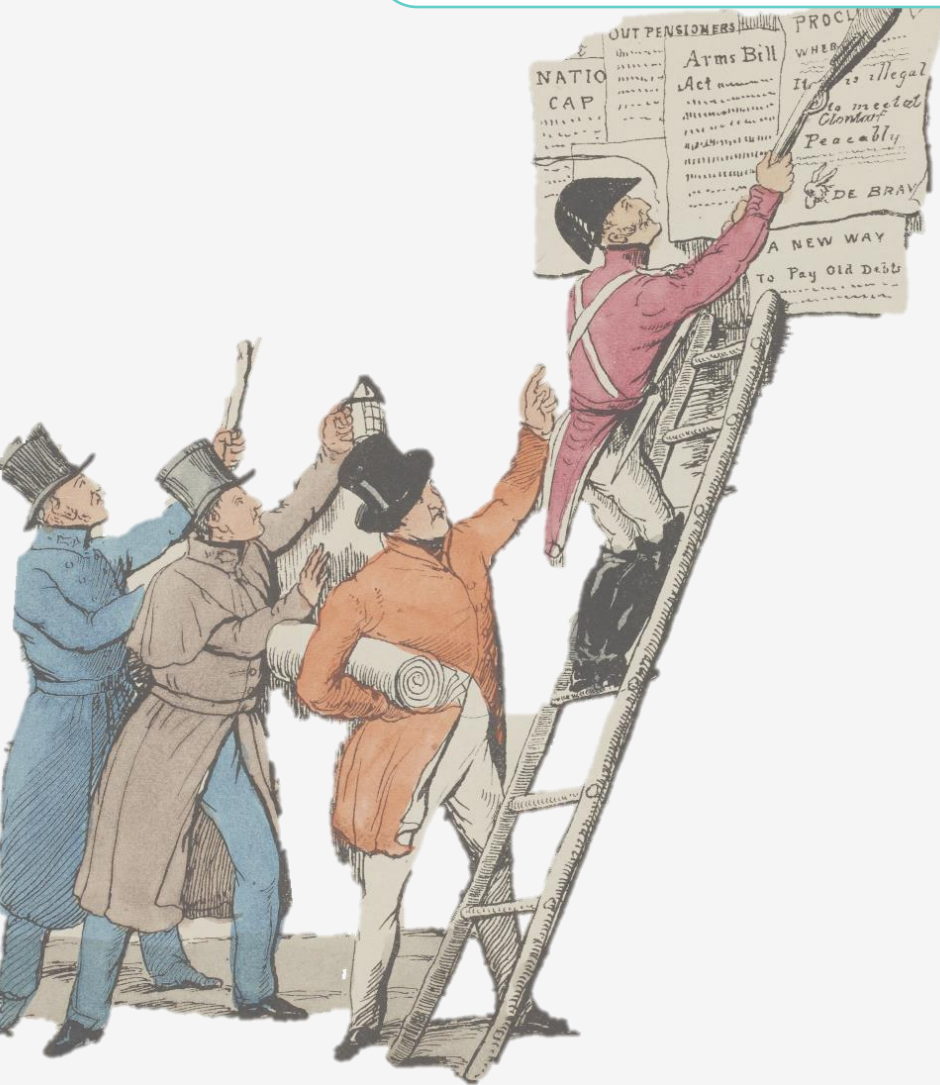
The ephemera collection at the NLI contains many political posters that would have been wheatpasted across the streets.



What is Wheatpaste?

Wheatpaste: an adhesive that is made from wheat flour and water. It is used for sticking notices and posters to walls, as well as for crafts such as collage and bookbinding. You can easily make this at home on your cooker.

Historically, wheatpaste has been used to paste messages across streets through communities.



This graphic by William Tell shows men pasting posters to a wall. The soldier on the ladder can be identified as British by the colour of his coat. His speech bubble says, “Damn those rough Irish Bricks I can't stick them, Bob.” To which his companion responds, “Come my little Corporal try the other end if Paste won't do Try Steel”.

Notice the overlay of posters on the wall—there is a continual pasting over of old material as new posters need to be seen.



PD 4003 TX 6

Can you think of a famous Irish example of something that was wheatpasted across Dublin?

The Proclamation of 1916

POBLACHT NA H EIREANN. **THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT** **OF THE** **IRISH REPUBLIC** **TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND.**

IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.

Having organised and trained her manhood through her secret revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and through her open military organisations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment, and, supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe, but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory.

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty; six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades-in-arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and of its exaltation among the nations.

The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

Until our arms have brought the opportune moment for the establishment of a permanent National Government, representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women, the Provisional Government, hereby constituted, will administer the civil and military affairs of the Republic in trust for the people.

We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the Most High God, Whose blessing we invoke upon our arms, and we pray that no one who serves that cause will dishonour it by cowardice, inhumanity, or rapine. In this supreme hour the Irish nation must, by its valour and discipline and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.

Signed on Behalf of the Provisional Government,

THOMAS J. CLARKE,
SEAN Mac DIARMADA, THOMAS MacDONAGH,
P. H. PEARSE, EAMONN CEANNT,
JAMES CONNOLLY. JOSEPH PLUNKETT.

The Printing of the Proclamation

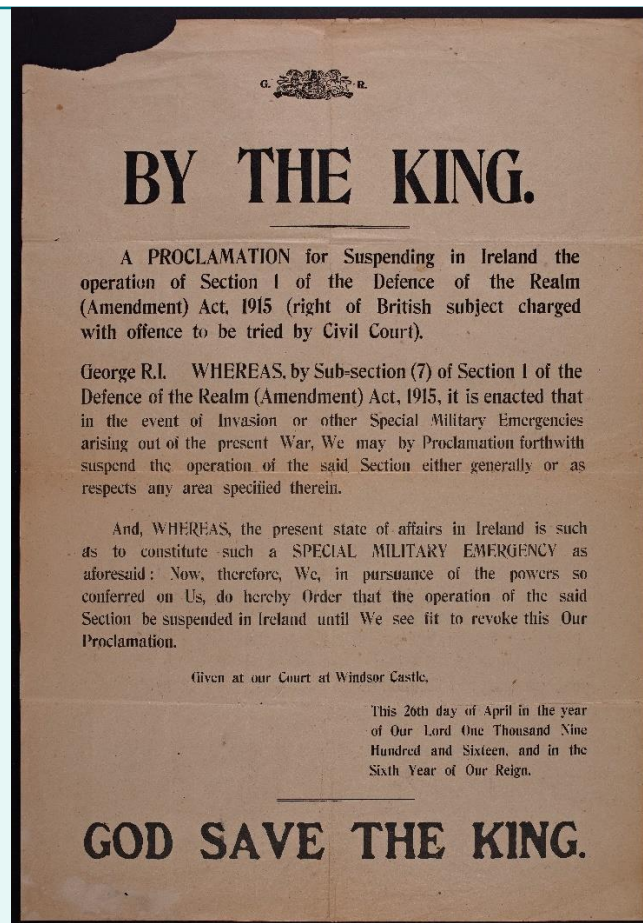
The Proclamation was printed by three men who worked for the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, printing trade union cards and weekly programmes. They were Christopher Brady, the printer, and Michael Molloy and Liam O'Brien who worked as compositors (arranging the moveable type for printing). James Connolly asked them to come to Liberty Hall on Easter Sunday—here they read the Proclamation and made the decision as to whether they wanted to print it.

They printed 2,500 copies of the Proclamation. These were then brought to the GPO. Patrick Pearse's assistant, Sean T O Ceallaigh was tasked with sending the Proclamation out into the city to be pasted on the streets. Today there are only 30 copies remaining of the original 2,500.

Significance of a Proclamation

What were proclamations used for?

In the previous graphic, a British soldier pasted a proclamation in a public space. The tradition of Proclamations in the British government arose to distinguish the delegation of power and to “prevent jurisdictional conflicts” between executive and legislative branch. Royal proclamations demonstrate the monarchy’s power to create ordinances. They also attempt to lay authority over and claim to public space.



EPH F253

This proclamation, issued 26 April 1916, suspended the right of a British subject charged with an offence to be tried by the Civil Court, due to the state of affairs in Ireland as a Special Military Emergency.



Within this context, the pasting of the 1916 Proclamation feels particularly subversive. It did address what could be called a jurisdictional conflict—over the ownership and sovereignty of Ireland. It also took a common practice that the British used to showcase dominion, refashioned it for their own use, and claimed a new authority in public space.

Continuing through the years to today, street pasting has been particularly appealing to a wide variety of groups for this reason. While some may attempt to claim public space, anyone can contribute to the layers of ephemera that cover a cityscape.



The Proclamations of 1916 were printed and pasted within one day—there was a sense of urgency. In spite of this, scholars note the extreme care taken with the design—even margins and a print layout with no hyphenated words at the end of lines.

However, while the medium does allow for quick responses and dissemination, there are still campaigns that are planned and executed in advance. Many posters are created for certain political campaigns and may exist on the streets for several months leading up to an election.

The NLI collections have numerous political posters from various organisations and time periods. Today we will be looking at one issued by Cumann na nGaedheal in 1932.

**VOTE FOR
CUMANN
NA N GAEDHEAL**



A "HOT" RECORD

FIANNA FAIL have only one record, but it's a "hot" one. They can play it on both sides!

HERE IT IS



ON THIS SIDE and

Songs for the Fire Eaters.

(1)—"England will have to acquiesce in our freedom or a show down will result."
—(Interview of De Valera with "Philadelphia Record.")

(2)—"Every Irishman worthy of the name lives in the hope that there will be a battle of Clontarf for the British as there was for the Danes."
—(De Valera interview with "Irish World," Jan. 6th, 1930.)

(3)—"We want to repudiate the Treaty. My Party will always oppose it."
—(Interview with "Sunday Chronicle," 15th Feb., 1931.)

(Chorus) :—Put us in, and you'll have war.

ON THIS

Songs for the Peace Lovers.

(1)
"There might be the lives of many young men and old men at stake . . . if they did not win this fight, this time. The young men of the country might not be satisfied with continuing Parliamentary methods."
(Sean T. O'Kelly, Ennis, 10th Jan., 1932.)

(2)
"The people in the country will lose faith in Parliamentary Institutions and would seek remedies, though not right, which would be the offspring of the terrible conditions they would find themselves in as a result of the present Government."
—(Mr. Kennedy, 19th Dec., 1931.)

(Chorus) :—Put us in, or you'll have war.

SMASH THE RECORD BY VOTING FOR CUMANN NA NGAEDHAEL

Published by Cumann Na nGaedhael, 5 Parnell Square, Dublin.

Printed by the Temple Press, Temple Bar, Dublin.

EPH F37

What stands out when you look at this poster?

Visual Analysis

Ephemera such as political posters and campaigns placed on the street must appeal to a wide audience. They are encountered in various ways by people of all political persuasions and backgrounds.

Think about how you view advertisements or signage on the streets. Do you linger over it or glance quickly and move on? Often, posters and other street ephemera have just a moment to convey their message.

This poster design seems to take that into account by using the analogy of a record to make their point quickly. Even though there is more text, the viewer can understand the main message at a glance.

A hot record is a popular or trendy release. The two sides of the Fianna Fail record—Songs for the Fire-Eaters and Songs for the Peace-Lovers—present opposing views. Despite this supposed contrast, both sides proclaim the chorus of, “Put us in or you’ll have war.”

The slogan of “Smash the Record” can be interpreted several ways as well. Smashing the Fianna Fail record could be an expression of renouncing their politics or putting a stop to the continual repeat as they only have “one record.” The expression of “sounding like a broken record” when people say things repetitively comes to mind.

Considering this was a call to bring voters to the polls there is another aspect to the phrase as well. “Smash the record” also means to break a record by a large amount—perhaps alluding to the number of votes Cumann Na nGaedhael hoped to beat Fianna Fail by.

Forms of Street Ephemera

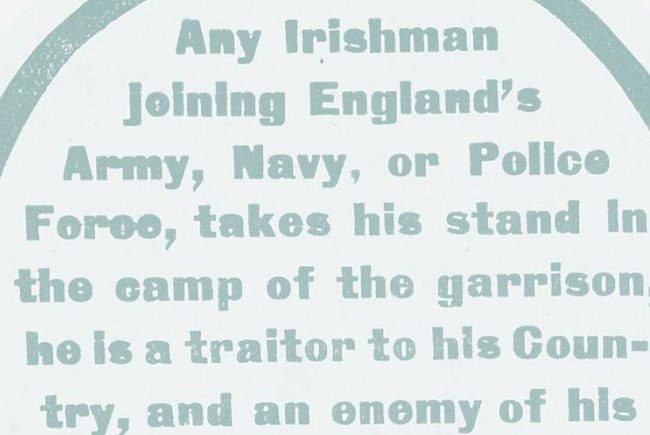
Posters and wheatpaste have consistently existed as street ephemera. Other mediums have also been introduced.

The first entirely self-adhesive sticker was invented in 1935. Prior to this, Sir Roland Hill pioneered an adhesive paper in 1839. This technology was used to make postage stamps. It was also used to make early versions of what we call stickers.

While street stickers were not popularised for political campaigns until the 1970s, here at the NLI we have two stickers in our Patrick McCartan Papers collection from 1919-1921 representing political opinions.

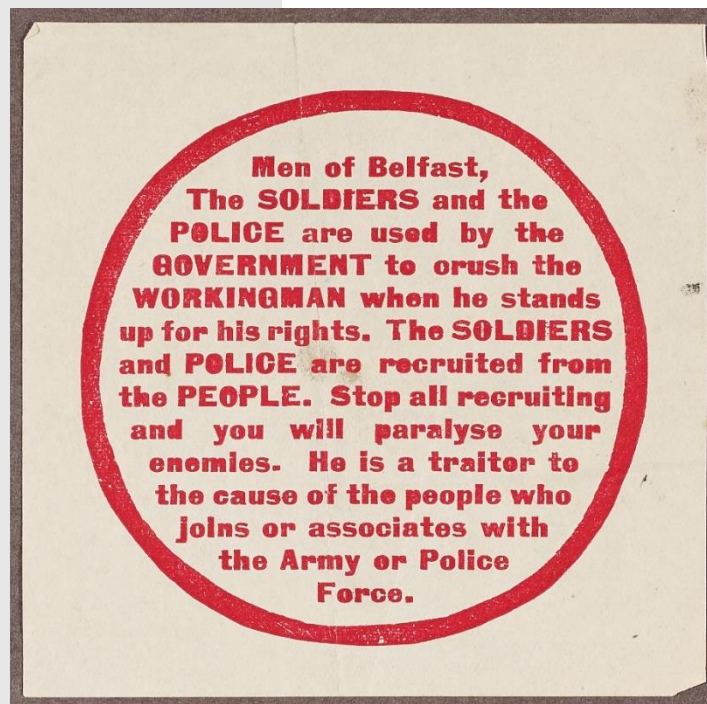
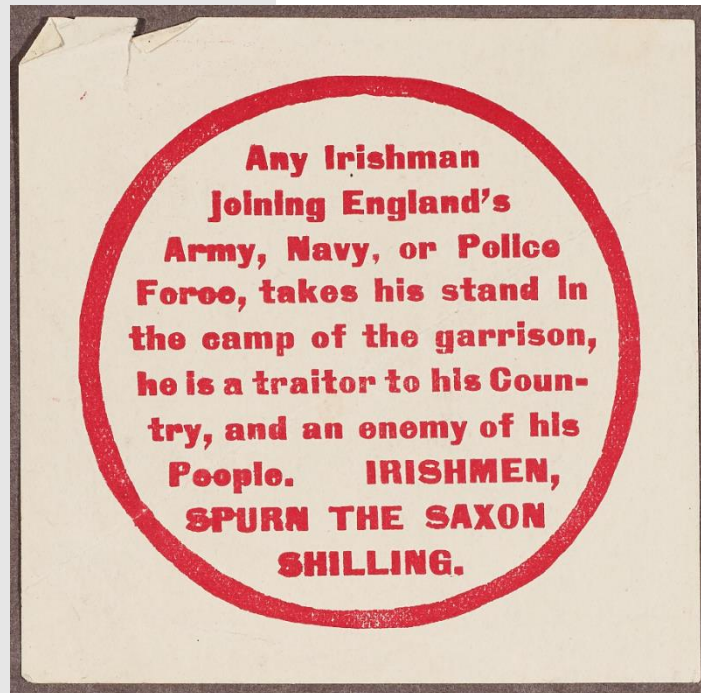
Stickers, just like posters, portray a wide variety of messages. They are also quicker and easier to attach than wheatpaste.

Have you ever seen a street sticker where you live?
What topic did it address?



**Any Irishman
Joining England's
Army, Navy, or Police
Force, takes his stand in
the camp of the garrison,
he is a traitor to his Coun-
try, and an enemy of his**

Two Republican stickers attacking support for the police and British army in Ireland and Belfast.

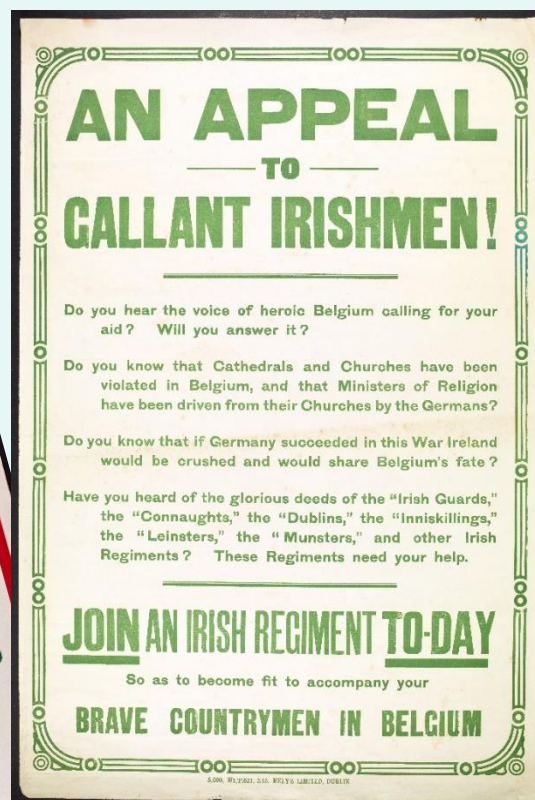


Context

Consider what has happened historically in this period—World War One lasted from 1914 to 1918. Throughout the war, the British army recruited for their military forces heavily in Ireland, using poster campaigns that would have been wheatpasted across the country.

These stickers and posters have a strikingly different message though the design for these happen to be rather similar! The poster below awards gallantry and the “true Irish spirit” to those who enlist, whereas the stickers call them traitors to their country.

This demonstrates how varying opinions can on the street through ephemera—communicating messages that counteract each other.



Activities

Design a Political Poster

Create a design for a poster on a topic of your choice. Consider elements such as how the image and text will interact, or what slogan viewers will walk away remembering.

Create a Sticker Design

Stickers have to be small and send a message quickly! Convert your previously made political poster into a sticker design. How will you adapt the design to the new format while keeping the theme and message the same?

Practice Visual Analysis

Look critically at the political poster on the next page. This dates from the same election in 1932 as the “Smash the Record” poster. Pay attention to the various elements of the poster and write a brief analysis.

CROCODILE TEARS



THE COST OF AN EMPTY FORMULA

“OH DRY THOSE TEARS!”
AND VOTE
CUMANN NA
nGAEDHEAL.

Issued by Cumann na nGaedheal and Printed by McConnell's Advertising Service, 10 Pearse Street, Dublin.



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