



*Leabharlann
Náisiúnta
na hÉireann*
National Library
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TEMPORARY THINGS

An Introduction to Ephemera



What is Ephemera?

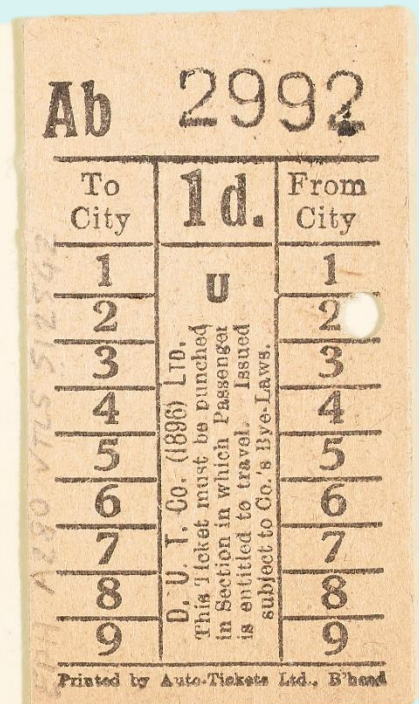
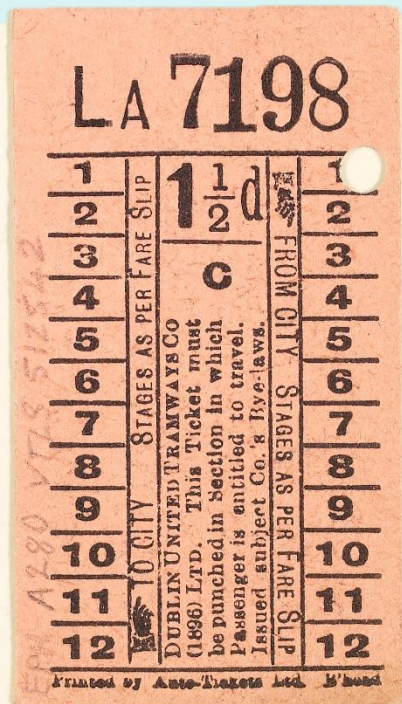
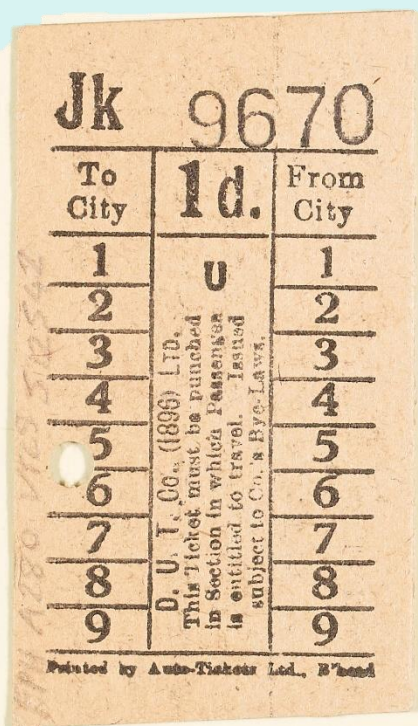
Ephemera: Items that were originally meant to be thrown out after use but have now been collected

These items can tell us information about other time periods of history. We can learn how much the tram cost, look at menus from restaurants, and read postcards to friends while on holiday.



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

Do you ever keep these items instead of throwing them out?



Ephemera on the Street

One of the main ways we encounter ephemera in our communities is through advertisements and posters. What product do you think the image below is advertising?



In 1929 our imports of butter from the Irish Free State amounted to 566,000 cwts.

EMB/2

Between 1926 and 1932, the British government ran the Empire Marketing Board campaign. This displayed posters that encouraged people to buy products from past and present British colonies.

This design was created by the Irish artist Margaret Clarke to encourage the purchase of Irish butter.

Audience

What do you do when you want to share a message with a large amount of people?

When objects like posters are placed on the street the audience is constantly changing and lots of different people see them. This is a quick and easy way to spread the word!

Can you think of any posters or displays you see when you go for a walk through your local community today? There is one very famous example of a poster that was spread across Dublin in 1916!

Do you know what it was?



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 Ceallaigh was tasked with sending the Proclamation out into the city to be wheatpasted on the streets. Today there are only 30 copies remaining of the original 2,500.

Printing Presses and Moveable Type

Printing presses are machines that transfer ink to paper to form words and images.

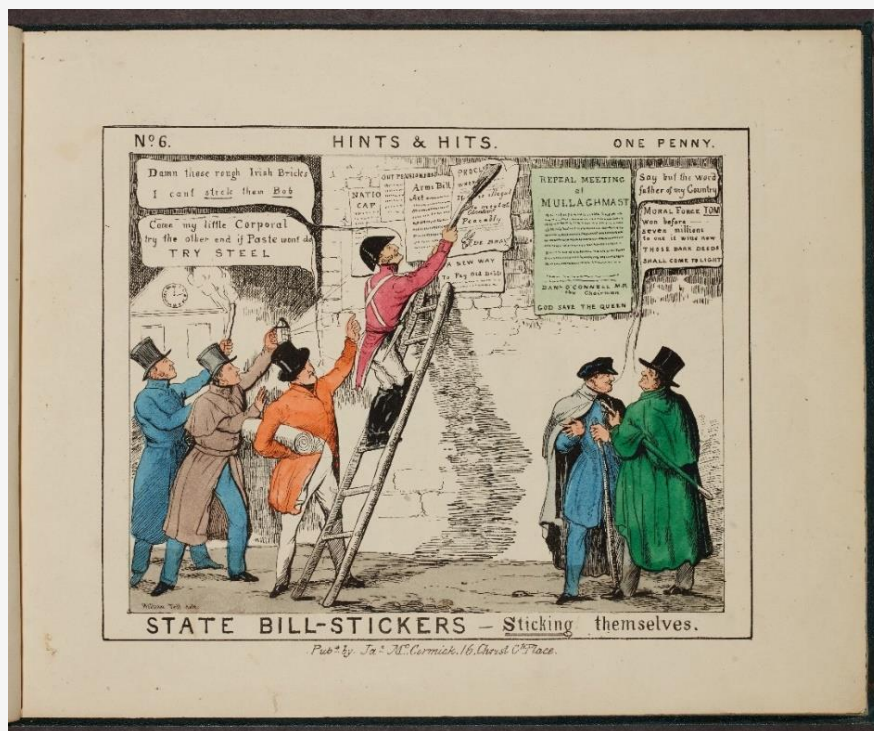
On some models, ink is rolled over “moveable type.” These are metal pieces that make up characters and letters. Each piece of type has to be arranged in a line to form the text.

When that section is done ink is transferred to the paper, the type can be lifted up and rearranged for the next bit of text—hence the word moveable! This is what was used to print the Proclamation.

What is Wheatpaste?

Wheatpaste: a glue 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.



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Historically, wheatpaste has been used to paste messages such as the Proclamation across streets through communities.



Wheatpasting usually appears in many layers and covers the city as seen here. Ephemera that is typically wheatpasted includes:

Advertisements

Political posters

Band and concert flyers

News posters



The NLI collections have numerous political posters from various organisations and time periods. Today we will be looking at one issued by the Labour Party between 1940-1949.



EPH E25

What stands out when you look at this poster?

Interpreting the Image

Ephemera such as political posters and ads placed on the street must appeal to lots of different people.

How do you interpret things you encounter on the street? How much time do you spend looking at them? It is important that the viewer understands what the message is saying quickly.

This poster makes an appeal to women—particularly those familiar with the tedious task of doing laundry!

One woman peers over the fence. Hanging up on the washing line of her garden is a sheet that has written on it, "Eire". She is listening to her neighbour, who is pointing to the sheet hanging on her washing line that says, "New Zealand." The New Zealand woman says, "I have no dirty linen, Dear, I always use Labour!"

The poster informs Irish people that citizens in many other countries such as New Zealand, Australia and Britain are voting Labour and argues that it is beneficial to them.

In this graphic, those benefits are represented by the lack of "dirty linen" because the speaker "uses Labour"—a clever play on words of the labour it takes to do laundry!

Activities

Find Ephemera in Your Home

You probably have items that are considered ephemera in your home. Look for things with a story such as old letters or bus tickets from a fun trip. Collect a few items and bring them into the class to share your stories and where it came from.

Create a Design for a Poster

What message do you want to share with people on the streets? Draw and create a poster that illustrates this message. Be creative with the design and try to keep it easy to understand!



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