

Report to the Protocol Committee
“Turning of the Sovereign Seal” at the Mansion House

Background:

For the past number of years, a request has been received to have the use of the Dining Room in the Mansion House to carry out a ceremony called “Turning of the Sovereign Seal”.

The ceremony was originally carried out by Mr. Tom McGuire who was the owner of Vaughan’s Hotel in Parnell Square, Dublin which was the headquarters of the Irish Republican Brotherhood and Óglaigh na hÉireann. It is claimed that the All-Ireland elections of 1918 established the sovereignty of Ireland and gave rise to the establishment of Dáil Eireann. On 21st January 1919 the Sovereign Seal was turned by Tom McGuire and the proclamation of Ireland was read out. According to the ritual, once this was done all Irish people became sovereign citizens and were no longer subjects to the crown of England. It also claims sovereignty for the people of Ireland over all the Territory, Rivers and Lakes, Seas, Fishing, Fishing Rights, Mineral Rights, Licences and all assets of the State.

Up until 2009 the ceremony continued on an annual basis on 21st January in the Lady Mayoress Parlour. It was a small and private affair attended by the head of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, a harpist and a number of supporters. In January 2009 the then Lord Mayor Eibhlin Byrne took an interest in the ceremony and it moved to the Dining Room. Since then a request has been made to use the Dining Room for the ceremony as it is claimed this was the Cabinet Room of the first Dáil in 1919. There are no records for when this ceremony began in the Mansion House.

An Taoiseach, an Ceann Comhairle and the Chief Justice are invited to attend but they have not done so since 1922. The Ambassador of India to Ireland is also invited and they (or a representative) generally do attend. This is because the plans for India’s independence were formulated in Vaughan’s Hotel and the fourth President of India Varahagiri Giri was a member of Sinn Féin and the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

What is turned on 21st January annually is a small IRB emblem which is a small bronze harp with 12 strings on a wooden plinth. We have been advised that this seal is one of the 32 seals issued for use in the County Courts established by the First Dáil

There has been previous correspondence between the Office of the Lord Mayor / Dublin City Council and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht requesting assistance to determine the legal status of the event. However, no definitive response has been received.

Since 2010, where permission was granted, attendance was limited to 20 people to the Dining Room. In 2013 some of those attending verbally attacked the Lord Mayor for not allowing everyone access to the Mansion House to view the ceremony. Lord Mayors Oisín Quinn (2014), Christy Burke (2015) and Brendan Carr (2017) refused permission for the ceremony to take place. The Head of the IRB and his supporters gathered outside the Mansion House and performed the ceremony on the front steps. Lord Mayor Críona Ní Dhálaigh (2016) allowed the ceremony to take place in the Mansion House under the

supervision of Bartle D'Arcy, Historian. This year, the Lord Mayor Mícheál Mac Donncha, gave permission for the ceremony to take place on the front steps of the Mansion House. However due to adverse weather conditions they were permitted access to the Oak Room to perform the ceremony.

Concerns:

Every year on the 21st January the Mansion House experiences significant disruption as the ceremony is either taking place inside the residence or outside on the forecourt. It is a controversial event which attracts a number of protesters. The Gardaí in Pearse Street Garda Station are required to assist on the day to ensure there is no trouble.

The Head of the IRB also declares that he is the President of Ireland. By allowing him into the Mansion House to carry out his ceremony, there could be a perception that we are providing his claim with credence.

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Administrative Officer