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**Not all is lost
when specialists
are involved**

How experience, expertise, and empathy brought an historic building back from the ashes

New Year's Eve 2021 became a night to remember for the owners and occupiers of one of Dublin's most historic buildings – the Grand Lodge of Ireland, Freemasons' Hall, a protected structure at 17 and 18 Molesworth St., just across the road from Dail Eireann.

But it is memorable for all the wrong reasons as that was the night an arson attack nearly destroyed the building that has steadfastly been home to the Grand Lodge of Ireland since being built in the 1860s.

The arson attack, which followed a break-in at the premises, caused extensive damage with scorching, smoke, water, and fire damage evident throughout the building in the bleak aftermath of the fire. Once the hard work of the courageous and expert teams from Dublin Fire Brigade had brought the blaze under control, it was time for a different, but equally speedy expertise to bring the building back from the brink.



On Dublin City Council's List of Protected Structures, 17 and 18 Molesworth Street is a landmark building and one that is insured by the renowned specialist heritage insurance company, Ecclesiastical. With over 130 years of experience in covering heritage properties the Ecclesiastical team arrived on the morning of 2nd January 2022 to help the team at the Grand Lodge formulate a claim and protect their heritage from the destructive effects of the arson attack.



First things first

Anyone who has experienced the devastation of a fire at their building will know the shock of the aftermath and the struggle of where to start. The Ecclesiastical team, with experience, expertise, and empathy, assisted with the initial work and speedily wrote a cheque to help the Freemasons fund the extensive, specialist, and costly clean-up operation, initial repairs, and replacement of operational equipment including the commercial kitchen.

With this initial scoping and repair work done and paid for, the slower and more painstaking restoration work could commence. Through the team of experts, vital parts of the original building were assessed and had a restoration plan in place within days of the fire.

Comprising of in-house underwriting, claims, and risk management specialists, Ecclesiastical knew that speed was of the essence in saving the historic fabric of the building and its contents. The fire was out but the damage from acidic soot residue had the potential to render permanently useless the historic furniture, paintings, and documents that are integral to the building and the heritage of the members.



As well as insurance expertise, the team included loss adjusters, a forensic engineer, Conservation Architect, and a cadre of skilled craftspeople to recover, repair, and reinstate the timber finishes and flooring, the decorative lath and plaster ceilings, ornate coving, and other plaster work. In addition, calendars, journals and some 50 volumes of handwritten masonic notes dating back to the 15th Century were among the historic books, manuscripts, and paintings rescued that chart the history of the Grand Lodge of Ireland.

Everyday risks managed every day

Ecclesiastical knows that everyday risks happen every day and can, on some days, tear asunder hundreds of years of heritage. That's why they work with customers and their advisers before any insured event occurs. This advance work builds knowledge, mitigates risk, and aids a seamless recovery for when things do go wrong.

In this case, this advance work was both evident and impactful. Several number of years prior to the incident, Ecclesiastical's Risk Management team undertook a comprehensive review of the building's insurance by working closely with the management team at the Grand Lodge and their insurance brokers, Arachas. This review identified risk improvements that could further protect the building and provide mitigation in the event of loss. This included monitoring of the fire alarm system and new measures to support general security of the premises, all of which came into play and resulted in the early raising of the alarm when fire broke out.

The review had other benefits which became factors in line with our overall philosophy to protect our customers. Appropriate sums insured were agreed and reviewed at regular intervals with a specialist architect nominated by the Customer. As a consequence, the Condition of Average was not a factor at the time of the loss as the sums insured were index linked at each subsequent renewal. Thus, the Policyholder received the full benefit of the policy in the aftermath of the blaze.

While some of the paintings and elements of the building were either damaged or destroyed, the rapid and comprehensive work of the insurer, the team of experts involved, and the customer themselves, meant that the building was returned to the magnificence of its origins and restored after the fire.

With restored paintings on the walls and outstanding conservation and restoration to the building and its contents, 17 to 18 Molesworth Street was back to full use in late 2022. Home to the Grand Lodge and accessible to the public as a venue for conferences or a café, the building takes pride of place again on the street where it was built in 1860.

The team at Ecclesiastical, proudly part of the Benefact Group, were delighted to have played our part in the speedy restoration of this iconic building at the core of Dublin's heritage heart.

Our specialists make us who we are.

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