

AAHN: H-31 Grant Statements by Julie Crowley

Full Statement by Julie Crowley

I greatly appreciate the H-31 Grant because it gave me the opportunity to view historical archives that are highly relevant for my PhD research. I pre-arranged the viewing of bulk orders and standard orders (some of which were stored offsite) at the National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew, in advance of my visit. I took a flight from Dublin and stayed in London for a week to visit the archives. These collections were not digitised, so viewing them in person was my only option. I found fascinating archives that illustrated the changing role of Irish nurses and doctors in the twentieth century, including World War One, the Irish War of Independence, the Irish Civil War, the early years of the Irish Free State, and World War Two. I viewed many collections related to notable individuals and professional organisations and will discuss some relevant records below.

I viewed collections from the Irish General Nursing Council, including general correspondence and rules (1920-1934) covering the pre-independence and post-independence era (Reference: DT 16/302), and collections from the National Council of Nurses of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I learned that nursing organisations in Britain and Ireland prioritised co-operation, order, and education despite the turmoil surrounding them during the revolutionary era. The correspondents did not overtly refer to guerilla warfare in Ireland. Despite civil unrest, the nursing organisations worked together to arrange a system that benefited nurses' professionalisation.

In the aftermath of war, the councils negotiated policies of reciprocal registration that allowed British and Irish nurses to join the same register and work in both countries. I hired the services of a researcher from the National Archives to find out when the policy was formally enacted. They found that the Rule for Reciprocal Registration was approved by the General Nursing Council for England and Wales on 16 March 1923. The Nursing Councils corresponded about registration, curriculums, syllabuses, uniforms, and other shared issues.

I viewed files about the 'Defence of the Realm Act 1914 and Restoration of Order in Ireland 1920: Regulations and Enforcement' (Reference: WO 35/62) legislation passed by the British government during the War of Independence. Its purpose was to secure 'the restoration and maintenance of order' due to the 'state of disorder' in Ireland and it gave new powers to the military authorities. The government restricted travel in motor vehicles, but doctors and nurses were given special permissions to drive beyond the limited radius and to travel during prohibited 'curfew' hours for work purposes.

I found stories of individual nurses and doctors during the War of Independence, including the bravery of a nurse named Alice Gray who played a vital caregiving role during an ambush at Sheemore Hill, Co Leitrim (Reference: HO 351/87). Gray, a 'lady searcher,' had accompanied a Royal Irish Constabulary patrol that was ambushed by a flying column of Irish Volunteers, and she tended to the wounds of casualties amid gunfire. Afterwards, she was awarded a Medal of the Civil Division of the Order of the British Empire for her heroism.

I viewed a collection related to 'attempted murder' and 'high treason' including an incident where Dr Robert May, an alleged Medical Officer to the Irish Republican Army, was arrested by the British authorities on suspicion of withholding information about the murder of an RIC officer who was shot during an IRA ambush. The doctor was questioned but ultimately released without charge. When viewed in conjunction with files from the Irish Military Archives, these files provided insights into conflicts that medical professionals were drawn into during wartime.

I viewed correspondence of the Irish Red Cross and their attempts to provide refuge in Ireland for Polish orphaned children during World War Two (FO 371/56625). Although Ireland was neutral during the conflict, the government was invested in assisting refugee children, although bureaucratic issues with the Polish government prevented the scheme from reaching completion.

Finally, I want to pay tribute to my academic mentor who made it possible for me to obtain this grant. Professor John Wells, my primary supervisor at South East Technological University, Waterford, encouraged me to apply for the H-31 Grant and was pleased that I had been awarded it. We had planned to discuss my findings when I returned from the National Archives, but shortly after my arrival in Ireland, I received the sad news that he had died unexpectedly. John had advised me to join the AAHN and was an advocate of nursing and healthcare history.

Paragraph by Julie Crowley

I greatly appreciate the H-31 Grant because it gave me the opportunity to take a flight from Dublin to London to view relevant historical records that I would not have otherwise seen. I gained new insights into the history of nursing and healthcare at the National Archives of the United Kingdom in Kew. Significant archival collections illustrate the changing role of Irish nurses and doctors in twentieth century wars and conflicts, including World War One, the Irish War of Independence, the Irish Civil War, and World War Two. I viewed many collections and will briefly discuss some relevant records. By reading correspondence from the Irish General Nursing Council (Reference: DT 16/302), I learned that nursing organisations in Britain and Ireland prioritised co-operation, order, and education despite the turmoil of the revolutionary era. Ireland and Britain developed a policy of reciprocal registration in 1923 that allowed nurses to join the same register and work in both countries. I viewed files about the 'Defence of the Realm Act 1914 and Restoration of Order in Ireland 1920: Regulations and Enforcement' (Reference: WO 35/62) legislation passed by the British government during the War of Independence, which affected doctors and nurses. I found stories of individual nurses and doctors during wartime, including the bravery of a nurse who played a vital caregiving role during an ambush, and a doctor who was arrested during a murder investigation on suspicion of assisting the IRA. I viewed correspondence about the attempts of the Irish Red Cross to provide refuge in Ireland for orphaned Polish children during World War Two (FO 371/56625). My late supervisor, Professor John Wells (who died in May 2026), had encouraged me to apply for the H-31 Grant and was highly interested in my research.