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Food and Power

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The Emergence of Irish Diplomatic Dining¹
Dublin Castle, 1934

In September 1933 the Executive Council of the Irish Free State sent a formal proposal to King George V requesting that the ceremonial procedure for the presentation of credentials be amended so that future Letters of Credence and Recall be presented to the President of the Executive Council. As a dominion and a member of the Commonwealth, foreign envoys to Ireland had, up to this point, presented their credentials to the Governor General, the Representative of the Crown. The submission was granted and when the new United States envoy to the Irish Free State, William McDowell, arrived in March 1934, he presented his credentials to Eamon de Valera, President of the Executive Council and Minister for External Affairs. De Valera then hosted a state banquet in honour of the new minister at Dublin Castle.

The banquet for the American minister marked a change in Irish state hospitality. From 1934 onwards, de Valera hosted a formal banquet in honour of each new minister at Dublin Castle to formally welcome them to their post and when an envoy left to take up a post elsewhere, a banquet was given in their honour to mark their departure also. In 1935 de Valera extended dining at Dublin Castle beyond the Diplomatic Corps to distinguished visitors to the state and with this, confirmed the Castle's status as the primary venue for official entertaining by the Irish government.

This paper explores the state entertainment which took place at Dublin Castle between 1934 and 1940 and discusses how menus were created, the table designs used, how hierarchy of prestige was conferred by virtue of the seating plan or the type of meal offered. The paper also discusses the style and form of the Irish state menus from this period along with the intrinsic symbols of sovereign identity used by de Valera and his government to demonstrate the state's independence from Britain, and shows that even in its infancy, Irish diplomatic dining was in line with other nations and reflected international standards of that time.

¹ Mahon, E. 'Irish Diplomatic Dining, 1922-1963'. PhD Dissertation. Dublin Institute of Technology, forthcoming.