Pathways to Participation:
Engagement and Learning at the National Museum of Ireland during the Decade of Centenaries

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Lorraine Comer and Mary Shine Thompson, co-editors

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First published in 2022 by the National Museum of Ireland

National Museum of Ireland
Ard-Mhúsaem na hÉireann
Collins Barracks
Benburb Street
Dublin 7
Ireland

www.museum.ie

ISBN 978-1-914470-02-8

Production Team: Lorraine Comer, Frances McDonald and Mary Shine Thompson.
Designed by: Source Design Consultants Ltd.
Printed by: Impress Printing Works Ltd.

The 'Irish Republic' flag flown over the Prince's Street corner of the GPO during Easter Week 1916 until after the surrender, when it was taken as a regimental trophy by the Royal Irish Regiment. It entered the Royal Collection of King George V, and was returned to Ireland in 1966 for the 50th Anniversary of the 1916 Rising. HE:EW.3224


IRISH
Republic

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Foreword

Catherine Martin T.D., Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

I welcome the timely publication of this book, *Pathways to Participation: Engagement and Learning at the National Museum of Ireland during the Decade of Centenaries,* which offers a snapshot of the public programme the National Museum of Ireland developed for a range of groups and individuals to participate in between 2012 and 2018.

The Irish government's approach to the Decade of Centenaries commemorations emphasised the importance of starting with historical facts, and then showing how engagement through a series of events could enhance the public's understanding of a complex period of Irish history. The challenge was to remember that decade appropriately, proportionately, respectfully, and with sensitivity. *Pathways to Participation* captures the National Museum's and the public's reflective responses to those principles.

The Museum's extensive collection of items of material culture was a key starting point for a deep, enriching public programme that encouraged curiosity about the past among diverse groups and communities, and brought an authenticity to the public's learning experience.

I was struck by the range of individuals and organisations who collaborated with the National Museum, sharing their unique range of expertise and resources to create and deliver this varied programme.

One notable feature of *Pathways to Participation* is that it reinforces the National Museum of Ireland as a listening museum. The Museum reached beyond its walls and invited those it collaborated with on this Decade of Centenaries Programme, to reflect on their values, their interests, their dreams. This collection of reflective essays captures the voices of those individuals, partner organisations, participants in events, and numerous communities.

What these voices tell us is that museums matter; that the collections in the National Museum of Ireland contain a wealth of stories about the past, and particularly about the turbulent, complex years of the decade commemorated. They tell us the importance of commemorating this defining period in Irish history so that we can understand both ourselves and that decade's influence on our lives. These essays also tell us that engagement in public programmes can encourage fresh insights and perspectives on our past. These essays explore the significance of the roles that cultural institutions such as the National Museum of Ireland plays in providing a space for people to reflect on and engage with the past and identifies the Museum as a space for dialogue and discourse.

The stories in this publication also remind us of the power of objects to draw us in and deepen our emotional connection with the past. They highlight how the National Museum of Ireland, through its Education and Learning Decade of Centenaries public programme, supported communities to contribute to history and to participate in a dialogue around remembering and commemorating our past.

Also relevant is the role that artists played in creating and developing the public programme that this book documents. Exploring the past through engagement with poetry, music, theatre and the visual arts provided the public with alternative interpretations of history and provoked new insights and new understandings of events perceived as 'understood'.

Foreword

Lynn Scarff, Director, National Museum of Ireland

As we move from one programme of events to another, we rarely create the space to gather and reflect on the outcomes of the previous programme. This book, *Pathways to Participation: Engagement and Learning at the National Museum of Ireland during the Decade of Centenaries,* does that rare thing: it gathered participants of the National Museum of Ireland's public programmes commemorating the Decade of Centenaries together and invited them to reflect on their experiences. It provides insights into the opportunities and challenges people faced in the development of new work and new approaches, as well as providing lessons for the future.

The repercussions of the decade 1912 - 1923 were profound, and they radically shaped the political, social and cultural trajectory of the years that followed in ways that we are still trying to understand. In Ireland, the Home Rule Bill crisis, the Easter Rising, the women's suffragette movement, the War of Independence, and the Civil War were played out against the backdrop of World War I and its aftermath. That Great War, intended to end all wars, not only impacted directly on enlisted Irish combatants, but on the entire fabric of Irish life, intensifying complex, contradictory loyalties and dissonances. Commemorations worthy of the lives lost, the progress made, and the grand narratives spun from the events demanded ambition, dialogue and reflection.

This book examines ways in which the National Museum of Ireland invited the public to engage with the Decade of Centenaries through a public engagement programme that was challenging and reflective. Rooted in strong values of participation, the programme aimed to facilitate learning and foster dialogue. The essays in this book, penned by a variety of contributors, offer a window into how the Museum, through its Education Department, collaborated with diverse communities to interrogate the past, facilitating the public in confronting familiar physical, social, psychological, historical and cultural landscapes with fresh eyes. Key to this process was the use of varied formats to engage a diverse public with the themes and events around the Decade of Centenaries in a manner that was inclusive, collaborative and democratic. These initiatives included panel discussions, workshops, tours, performances, poetry readings and exhibitions. *Pathways to Participation* shows how this inspiring programme extended the National Museum of Ireland's reach beyond its three main physical sites to communities throughout Ireland and beyond.

Pathways to Participation also offers a glimpse into the Museum's commitment and its team's sensitive leadership in overseeing the public engagement commemorative programmes. It traces the Museum's active roles in building resilient, trusting and

sustainable relationships with communities, partner organisations and individuals. It underlines the value of investing in long-term partnerships involving Museum staff and individuals, local communities and organisations and how these relationships can in turn sow the seed for future collaborations.

Pathways to Participation reflects on many significant aspects of the National Museum of Ireland's distinctive culture, but three are particularly worthy of note. One is the emphasis which this book places on individuals' and communities' voices. Time and again, it highlights the spoken words of audiences, community participants, artists, academics, heritage professionals, public representatives and others. The immediacy of their exchanges at workshops, talks and conferences in several chapters is striking. This approach underscores the role that the Museum has adopted as respectful listener, collaborator and balanced facilitator of reflective memory-making and of the learning process.

This publication also shows how objects, such as those displayed as part of the commemorative exhibitions, can evoke powerful responses from different audiences. Such objects can embody histories that are both tragic and commonplace, and they can highlight gaps in official histories. They stimulate emotional, personal and critical connections with, and curiosity about, the past, and can create the conditions necessary for healing old wounds. Inanimate objects can revivify faded, fragmented culture.

Finally, a further notable aspect of the Decade of Centenaries commemorations woven through *Pathways to Participation* is the degree to which the Museum's initiatives called upon artists to collaborate with the public in order to probe old certainties. To reclaim and reinterpret lost meanings and stories, the Museum's public engagement commemorative programme harnessed artists' unique empathy, flexibility and playfulness. Poetry, music, visual arts and crafts were the new eyes and sharp ears focused on old issues in an immersive voyage of discovery with the public.

Pathways to Participation has plotted signposts on the National Museum of Ireland's pathway through the Decade of Centenaries programme from contested pasts towards uncertain futures. It highlights the Museum's position as an advocate for inclusive dialogue within communities. It reflects the importance of engagement and learning as a core element of our work. It testifies to the innovative and constructive processes and practices embedded in the Museum's culture, and its readiness and capability to play its part in helping to shape Ireland's stories.

Introduction

This book, *Pathways to Participation: Engagement and Learning at the National Museum of Ireland during the Decade of Centenaries* provides an invaluable insight into the crucial role of the National Museum of Ireland (NMI) in commemorating those events associated with the Decade of Centenaries, that complex period in Irish history between 1912 and 1923.

The motivation behind producing this book was to document and learn from the breadth and depth of the Museum's commemorative public programme delivered between 2012 and 2018. This programme focused primarily on commemorating Easter Week 1916, World War 1 and women's suffrage. *Pathways to Participation* examines the significance of the Museum's commemorative exhibitions and the enormous potential of objects displayed in these exhibitions to question understandings of the past and influence perceptions about the present. This book reflects on the different elements of the public engagement programme led by the Education Department at the NMI between 2012 and 2018, which took its inspiration from the exhibitions' themes and exhibits. Using different formats and platforms, this public programme created opportunities for intergenerational dialogue, for exchanges of stories and viewpoints, and for discovering fresh insights into this revolutionary period in Irish history.

The authors of the thirteen chapters in *Pathways to Participation* come from a range of fields and practices. They are academics, archaeologists, artists, curators, community and cultural leaders; they are educators, politicians and policy makers. Their reflections are inspiring, constructive and thought-provoking. Their approach foregrounds the spoken words of participants in the commemorative programme, capturing the immediacy and intimacy of live exchanges and conversations.

What has emerged from their reflections and analyses are significant themes that resonate with the National Museum of Ireland's role as a public and social institution, and with its vision for the future. The chapters are arranged into four sections according to these topics. The book begins by examining how artefacts can unsettle assumptions about the relationship between the past and present. Readers are then introduced to how the National Museum, as a social and civic space, engages the public in exploring the past, using multiple avenues for engagement and learning. The chapters in the third section address the unique contribution that artists can make to interpreting the past, while the final chapter brings together the learning emanating from these experiences and insights and calls for action by museums to create space for sharing multiple narratives and histories to reflect our changing world.

The focus of the first section is on the power of material culture to stimulate historical empathy and the crucial role of museums in commemorating significant periods in our history, particularly those contested and sensitive histories. Cultural critic Luke Gibbons writes about the means by which we remember and commemorate the past, and how museums can help bring the past into dialogue with the present, taking his inspiration from the open-ended structure of James Joyce's *Ulysses,* which is set in 1904 and was first published in 1922. Audrey Whitty, the Deputy Director and Head of Collections and Learning at the National Museum, describes the Museum's various commemorative exhibitions. She highlights how personal and private objects, displayed in the *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* exhibition in particular, evoked an emotional response from audiences and generated historical empathy. Joanna Brück, Professor of Archaeology at University College Dublin, argues that objects possess unique qualities and offer insights into complex histories that challenge us to think afresh about relationships between the past and the present, and the space needed in museums for dialogue with communities using objects as inspiration.

The second section deals with the significance of museums as social and civic spaces for dialogue and debate, where people can come together and engage critically with the past, present and future, and, in the process, learn how others think and feel. In chapter four, three panellists celebrating International Museum Day in 2018, Ivana Bacik T.D., Mary McAuliffe, Director of Gender Studies at UCD, and Judith McCarthy, Curator at Donegal County Museum, discuss how museums would benefit from a more inclusive and democratic approach when engaging with communities; and how commemorative events relating to the Decade of Centenaries have deepened public interest in women's history in particular, including the material culture surrounding that history. In chapter five, Helen Beaumont and Siobhán Pierce, Education Officers at the National Museum of Ireland, reflect on how the Museum's conference programme brought together multiple voices that presented diverse perspectives and fresh insights into the past and, in so doing, allowed for nuance, for confronting difficult questions and for sharing experiences. The need to situate commemorations in rural communities is reflected in the chapter by Tom Doyle, Assistant Education Officer at the National Museum of Ireland, which documents the range of events delivered as part of the *Beyond Sackville Street and the Somme* programme, and rural communities' involvement in these events. In the last two chapters in this section, the authors describe the merits of museums placing communities at the centre of their dialogue and practice and the value of unpredicted outcomes in the learning process. Lorna Elms, Project Development Officer of iCAN, presents a model of community engagement founded on the principles of inclusion, trust and ownership, applied in developing the *Our Irish Women* exhibition, while Gary Granville, Emeritus Professor of Education at the

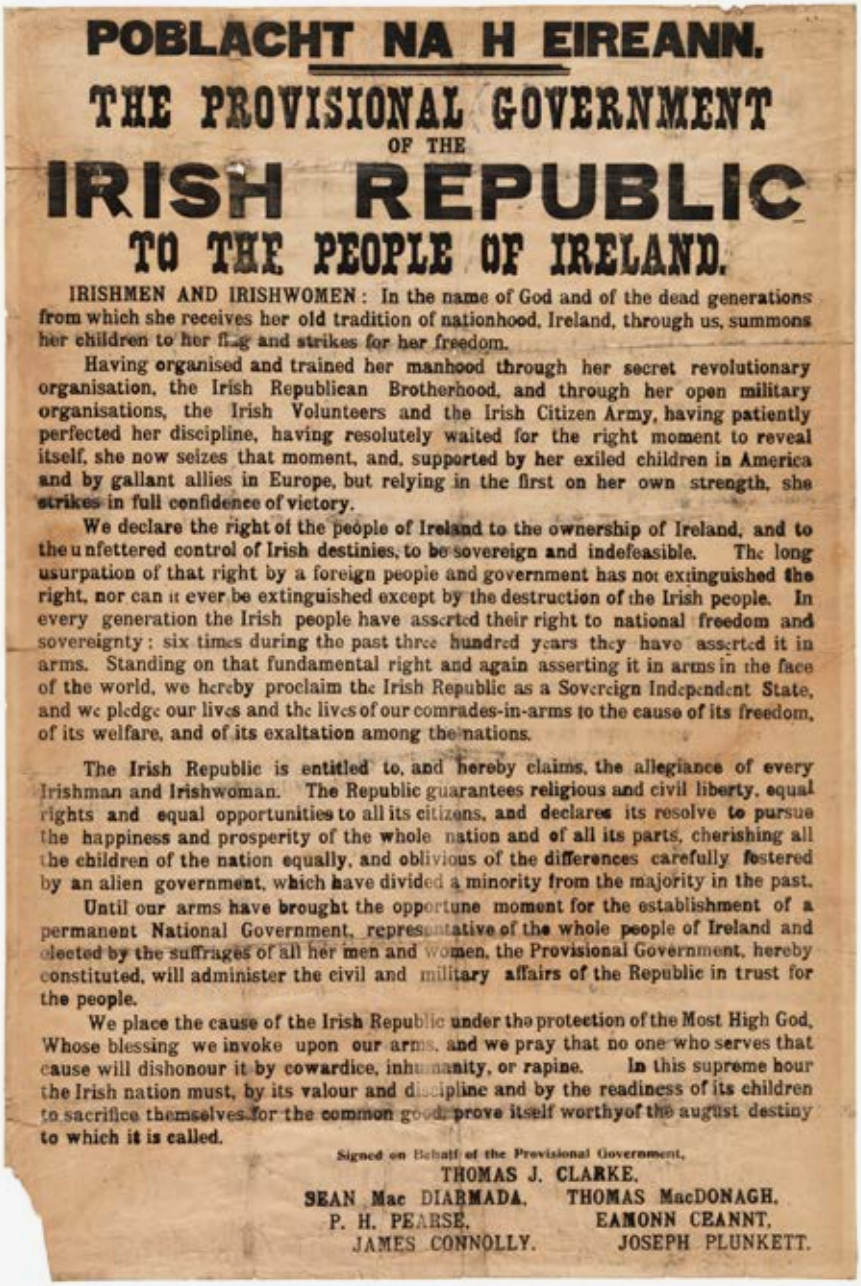
National College of Art and Design, outlines how learning experiences at the Museum foster empathy, encourage creativity and facilitate risk taking among students who engage with its exhibitions and resources.

The third section of *Pathways to Participation* explores how artists can create opportunities for people to question and to express what it is to be human in the face of challenging and complex histories. Artist Alison Conneely, as curator of the exhibition *The Shuttle Hive, A Century of Rising Threads*, reflects on how contemporary Irish textile design can respond to and challenge historical and political issues, and how participation in creative collectives can become an active platform for reviving lost memories and sharing experiences. Deborah Kelleher, Director of the Royal Irish Academy of Music, highlights how music can be a catalyst for change and can facilitate an emotional engagement with history and with those who struggled to make a difference for others. Maureen Kennelly, former Director of Poetry Ireland and current Director of the Arts Council, writes about how poets and other artists create connections between people and bring the past into dialogue with the present through their art. Dermot Bolger recounts his experience as *Writer in Residence* at the National Museum of Ireland, where he mapped avenues on which the public could explore imaginatively what it was like to live through the First World War and the Easter Rising, and the impact of conflict on people's lives then and now.

In the final chapter, an honest and thought-provoking conversation between poet Paula Meehan and policy analyst Michael O'Reilly explores the relationship between memory and the museum. They reflect on the swell of creative expression that characterised the commemorations of 1916. Their conversation looks at the healing potential of museums as spaces where trust is built and where truth is pursued. The conversation calls on museums to give space to those with no voice, to embrace uncertainties and to represent the diversity of stories that tell the story of who we all are.

In negotiating an increasingly complex and diverse Ireland, museums are more important than ever. They are social and civic spaces in which communities can gather, virtually and in person, and engage in dialogue about what matters to them and what matters to society at large. The Decade of Centenaries commemorative public programme was a springboard for dialogue and honest conversations, in which communities shared experiences of and perspectives on a formative period in Ireland's recent past. Communities were at the centre of this dialogue and discussion, shaping the Museum's way of thinking. The Museum listened to those discussions, and learned from them. It took note of the innovative approaches that characterised the commemorative public programme. It resolved to continue to build on these approaches and to create other pathways for participation as an inclusive, democratic and relevant Museum.

Lorraine Comer, *Head of Education, National Museum of Ireland*



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.

This original Proclamation of the Irish Republic was owned by Dr Kathleen Lynn who fought in the 1916 Rising. Its authenticity was confirmed by its printer, Christopher Brady, and compositors, Michael Molloy and Liam Ó Briain, who signed their names to the document. HE:EWL.2

“We must embrace the multitude of stories that comprise our past, in all their bewildering contradictions and differences.

- President Michael D. Higgins

A cricket bat from the window of Elvery's sport shop on Sackville Street, with a bullet lodged in the spine. HE:EW.5142

Section 1

Museums, Memory and Material Culture

Chapter 1

The Museum, James Joyce, and Modern Memory: Ireland's Decade of Centenaries

Luke Gibbons

This chapter reflects on the means by which numerous, contested stories of the past, whether officially sanctioned or personal, are transmitted to, and are in turn shaped by, the present. Cultural historian and critic Luke Gibbons (author, *Joyce's Ghosts; Ireland, Modernism, and Memory*) argues that museum curatorial practice is particularly well placed to present history not as a linear narrative but as an unfolding, open-ended story. On the centenary of the publication of *Ulysses* (1922), he cites James Joyce's experimental novel as an example of a mode of storytelling and remembering that finds the heroic in mundane lives, and that thereby restores potential to material objects.

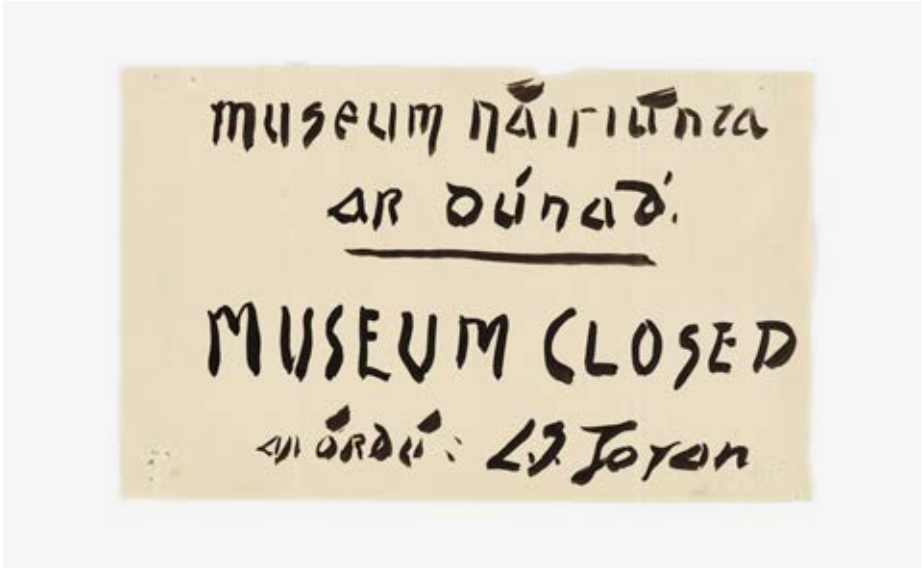
Professor Gibbons argues that the challenge presented by museums to established commemorative processes is best seen through a modernist lens, highlighting the significance of material objects such as those displayed in the National Museum of Ireland's exhibition entitled *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* in 2016. These 'histories from below' give a voice to mundane, often overlooked stories, underlining the role of the contemporary museum in the retrieval of lost voices and discarded pasts.

> But why do I say 'after 1916': I believe that we do not even yet clearly understand the origins of our struggle, which, one presumes, must have determined its ultimate harvest.
> *Sean Ó Faoláin, Vive Moi!*

Speaking at one of the earliest Easter Week tributes in Arbour Hill Barracks, 1933, Éamon de Valera questioned whether it was appropriate to commemorate an event that had still not passed into ritual and memory: 'when the time comes, the Proclaiming of the Republic may involve no more than a ceremony, the formal confirmation of a status already attained.' (Moynihan, 237) De Valera's misgivings on coming to power in 1932 were that the vision of the 1916 Proclamation had still not been realised but it is striking that in expressing his reservations, he makes it clear that memory is as much about the present as the past. Remembrance has its own moment, and one of the most important contributions of the Museum to a Decade of Centenaries is to reflect on the *medium* itself, not only the historical record (insofar as it can be established) but also on the means whereby the past comes down to us in multiple, contested forms.

One of the engaging aspects of the *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* exhibition in Collins Barracks in 2016 was the complementing of military and public artefacts by private objects that exerted their own silent claim on history, among them Willie Pearse's straight razor. Patrick Pearse's younger brother had left in his 'slasher' to be sharpened before the Rising on the expectation that it would be picked up a few days later, but that day never came. A suspended future closes the gap between past and present, as if certain events still await their

Willie Pearse's straight razor. HE:EW.51



On Easter Monday afternoon the National Museum was closed because of its proximity to the fighting at Kildare Street. Assistant Keeper Liam Gógan placed this sign on the front door.

moment in time: left in for collection, the razor became an object of recollection. 'A lot seems to go on in these dustbins of history,' the cultural critic Raymond Williams has remarked, and the retrieval of lost voices and discarded pasts is a task of the contemporary museum, restoring a sense of everyday life to an era that produced James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) as well as the Great War and the Easter Rising.

Part of the difficulty (or notoriety) of *Ulysses* derived from its diffuse, sprawling structure, a use of an open-ended narrative prompted by the integration of *actual* events (what happened on June 16th, 1904), and *real* people (Fr John Conmee S.J., George Russell, John Eglinton) into the story. Real life allows for the accidental and the unforeseen and it is this narrative contingency, open to by-ways and roads not taken as well as main thoroughfares, that distinguishes modern memory. One of the telling exhibits at the *Proclaiming a Republic* exhibition was the sign announcing the closure of the National Museum of Ireland on Easter Monday, 1916, due to the Rising, as if its activities ceased while history was being made. This time around there is an awareness that closure is never possible in historical narratives, and that the past, for every generation, is as unpredictable as the future.

It is easy to forget that the Easter Rising was itself conceived as a commemorative event, looking forward to a time in which, as Roisín Higgins (2016) notes, each subsequent commemoration 'carries echoes of previous demonstrations and anniversaries so that they can be understood better as palimpsest than replica.' Though speaking in the name of 'the dead generations,' the 1916 Proclamation is clearly addressed to the future: 'we have kept

faith with the past,' Patrick Pearse addressed his court-martial, 'and handed on a tradition to the future.' That the future weighed heavily is evident once more in a letter written before Pearse's execution: 'People will say hard things of us now but we shall be remembered by posterity and blessed by future generations.' In keeping with avant-garde thinking of the time, this was the 'imagination' of the insurrection, the transformation of the future, or 'time to be' (as W.B. Yeats expressed it in 'Easter, *1916*'), on which its claim to legitimacy rested. 'One of the foremost tasks of art,' the German modernist critic Walter Benjamin wrote in his influential essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (*1935*), 'has always been the creation of a demand which could be fully satisfied only later. The history of every art form shows critical epochs in which a certain art form aspires to effects which could be fully obtained only with a changed technical standard [technology], that is to say, in a new art form.' The experiences of disintegration, fragmentation, and disruption of the past produced by the Great War broke down the barrier between high and low culture so that, as a leading cultural historian of the Great War, Jay Winter, has noted, 'what is experimental engages in what is popular,' helping 'to democratise artistic expression.' The experimental was taking place on the streets of Dublin and it is this that brings Joyce's *Ulysses* into dialogue with the events that shaped the Easter Rising of *1916*.

The 'poet's rebellion' in Ireland in *1916* gave political form to this *avant la lettre* principle, aspiring to effects that could only be attained through new modes of civic culture and political independence: 'The true avant-garde,' the Dutch critic Geert Buelens (*2015*) has written of the *1916* Rising in a wider European context, 'reasoned that even if they only represented a fraction of the population, they were leading the Irish into the future. Their words would transform into action and change history.' It was vital this vision did not remain in the imagination, still less belong to an elite, but found its way into everyday practice, the democratic sanction of the ordinary. With regard to advances in gender equality, for example, this proved a long gestation: it took over *40* years for women to operate in the judicial system at a level similar to that of the Republican Courts in the *1919-1922* period; it took *60* years for the appointment of a female cabinet minister following the example of Constance Markievicz in the First Dáil in *1919*, and also, following Markievicz and combatants like Margaret Skinnider, to be admitted into the Irish army. As the nationwide exhibition, *Mná 1916 – Women of 1916* (*2016*), curated by Sinéad McCoole, showed, the difficulty lay not in the aspirations but in how long it takes society to catch up with many of its foundational moments. As President Michael D. Higgins suggested, gaps in the past, 'the many unsung heroes of the time, the people that history forgot,' have their correlates in the future, in ideals that have yet to become realities: 'The space of a republic having been won, its filling with the contents of a real republic, with the appropriate rights and responsibilities, delivered in solidarity, informed by care, in a public space, remains for us as a challenge'. (*2016*)

Installation image of the exhibition *Votes for Women: Suffrage and Citizenship* featuring (clockwise from top left) Kathleen Shannon, Margaret Pearse, Maud Gonne McBride, Winifred Carney, Helena Molony and Constance Markievicz.

Photograph of the ruins of the General Post Office, Sackville Street, after the 1916 Rising. *Central News*. Taken from the top of Nelson's Pillar. HE:EW.3804

Connections between the Great War and the Easter Rising are not the product of a backward look: they were made at the time itself, particularly concerning the devastation of modern urban warfare. One of the most famous photographs, 'Ypres on the Liffey,' provided the cover to a souvenir publication, the caption provided by 'a military man, home on leave from the front' who, 'standing at the O'Connell statue on Lower Sackville Street, declared that he had seen no worse scene of devastation in Flanders'. Important distinctions, however, emerge between modes of remembrance, even relating to the same event. Comparing different ways of commemorating the Great War, Jay Winter contrasted the heroic stance adopted in France with more sombre, low-key memorials for the war dead in Britain, the latter tending 'to glorify those who die in war without glorifying the war itself'. (Lindley) Both countries were on the winning side but it was difficult to see the benefits: the most to be hoped for was that it was 'the war to end all wars', but such was the lasting disenchantment in Britain that it prepared the ground for appeasement in the 1930s, the deep-seated fears of entering another catastrophic war.

Hence the fine line between honouring the fallen in the 1914 - 1918 conflict and approving of a senseless carnage that brought about the death of millions. Winter (2017) cites a characteristic funerary inscription in Britain, dying not for 'glory, but a purpose', to support the view that though commemoration is conducted in public, 'the individual stands apart, a civilian in uniform mourned by his family rather than a citizen soldier honoured by the state.' The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Westminster Abbey embodied these sentiments: unlike heroes of old, distinguished for their extraordinary feats, this hero could have been anybody. The Cenotaph, originally conceived as a temporary fixture, also conveyed this subdued grief: 'By saying so little, it said much about the moment of exhaustion and mourning which coincided with victory.' In this, the Great War differs from the Irish revolution: as Eunan O'Halpin (2020) reminds us, one has only to compare the legacy of the young war poet, Rupert Brooke, who died in far-flung Greece in 1915, with that of Kevin Barry, executed in 1920, to see the contrasts. (see O'Halpin, 2020) For all the patriotism of his verse, Brooke's reputation was overtaken by anti-heroic sentiments in the poetry of Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and others; by contrast, Kevin Barry did not even write the famous ballad that commemorates him, and yet it found its way not only into Irish memory but into the repertoires of Paul Robeson, Leonard Cohen, and others on the international stage.

It is not necessary to 'glorify' the Easter Rising to view it as the decisive event 'that led to the foundations of our state,' as President Michael D. Higgins (2016) has described it - and to that extent grant it approval, however much in hindsight. Of course, as often rancorous debates indicate, the Rising is still a contentious issue, but this only serves to underline how much its legacy is still in transition, and how it falls on the Museum and related institutions and activities to perform the memory work of a nation. As against the elegiac pomp of British mourning, Jay Winter cites the exalted patriotism of French (and, he suggests, Catholic) memorialisation: 'There is a florid, high-toned, romantic resonance to many contemporary [i.e. immediate post-war] French accounts of the war.' The reasons for this national fervour are not hard to find: France, after all, had been invaded, its borders were in question, and the fighting was taking place on French soil. It is not that war itself is glorified (though it was in some quarters) but the emphasis is placed on courage, public virtue, and republican ideas of sacrifice of the common good. It is noteworthy, Winter continues, that W.B. Yeats excluded most grim British war poetry from his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936) on the grounds that it lacked these spirited qualities: 'passive suffering is not a theme for poetry,' in Yeats's famous formulation. The point is well taken, but it does not follow that the heroic cannot also be found in the mundane, and the mythic brought down to earth. This is in part what Yeats sought to do in his own sustained poetic engagement with 1916 in his poem 'Easter 1916' - unlikely heroes 'coming with vivid faces/from counter or desk' to the GPO – but it is more in keeping with the logic of James Joyce's *Ulysses,* in which the grandeur of Homer's *Odyssey* is transmuted into the everyday life of Dublin, endowing a lasting 'epic' quality to the most humdrum aspects of a city on the verge of revolt.

An early version of this was evident in Teilifís Éireann's acclaimed 8-part *Insurrection* drama series screened during the Golden Jubilee in 1966, which portrayed the Rising (and the battle of Verdun) as if it was unfolding on television news programmes, current affairs and newspapers. As Heather Laird (2018) notes, the narrative logic of this contemporaneity conveys the impression of an open future, challenging notions of pre-determined fate: to be sure, viewers looking back in retrospect knew the outcome and, in acknowledgment of this, news reporters on the spot in *Insurrection* were dressed in modern garb, straight from the swinging sixties. (Interestingly, Joseph Strick's film adaptation of *Ulysses* (1967), filmed in Dublin at the same time, also employed modern dress and locations (Laird, 2018; Gibbons, 2017).

Recourse to the present tense was carried over into the present Decade of Commemorations through a noteworthy publishing series, *The Revolution Papers* (O'Connor, Kenneally, 2016 - 2018), the weekly issue of facsimile reprints of newspapers from the period, bringing readers into 'direct' contact not only with major events but also other disconnected material that finds its way into print, the news stories, photos, advertisements, notices, etc., that did not make history. It is in this sense that *Ulysses*, as Declan Kiberd (2000) has pointed out, is modelled on a daily paper, integrating into its prolix narratives the trivia of newspapers of a single day (June 16th, 1904), and which the attention span of readers immediately disposes of with the paper (as Leopold Bloom seeks to 'throwaway' his copy of the *Freeman's Journal*). In *Ulysses*, however,

A red brick in which a bullet was embedded, taken from the wall against which Frances Sheehy Skeffington was shot dead. HE:EW.683

ephemera are given an ironic, belated permanence, the actuality of Dublin life - commodity culture (advertisements, department stores, fashion), mass media (cinema, photography, the gramophone), communications (telegraphy, postcards, the telephone), new technologies (transport, telegraphy, electricity), lifestyles (public houses, seaside beaches), intimacies of private life - comprising the hinterland of the modern epic.

This is the city of spectacle that the spatial layout of the museum is in a position to recapture, better than any written text (unless, of course, it follows the logic of *Ulysses*). This is seen to telling effect in multimedia commemorative exhibitions such as *Proclaiming a Republic* at Collins Barracks, the *Witness History Centre* at the refurbished GPO, and *Votes for Women: Suffrage and Citizenship* exhibition. This democratisation of display ensured that in addition to more 'high-toned' military memorabilia (versions of the Proclamation, uniforms, weapons, maps, field equipment, recruiting posters, images of battle scenes), display cases carried images of street scenes, advertisements, posters for entertainment 'attractions', and popular culture. Before encountering the centrepiece of *Proclaiming a Republic* at Collins Barracks, an original copy of the *1916* Proclamation, visitors were met by a wall-size photograph of College Green in Dublin bearing the legend: 'The Bohemian Picture Theatre in Phibsboro was showing the films of Charlie Chaplin on Easter Sunday.' As in Joyce's work, bit-players also moved from walk-on to speaking parts in the exhibition, as explained by the author of the *Proclaiming a Republic* publication, Darragh Gannon (*2016*): 'In contrast to previous commemorations, which focused on the main protagonists, both military and political, the focus in *2016* has been the foregrounding of the experiences of individuals – the ordinary soldiers, policemen, rebels and civilians (men, women and children) – caught up in the events of Easter Week, *1916*, as participants, casualties, or witnesses.' The problem with bringing the heroic down to street level is that everyday life might be found wanting. J. B. Priestley wrote of the disappointment felt by war veterans re-entering civilian life that 'Men are much better than their ordinary life allows them to be'; as if with this mind, *Ulysses* can be seen as restoring a sense of potential, however stifled, to people of their everyday rounds of the city so that they live on, like the heroes of old, to this day.

This also extended to otherwise desultory objects displayed in the exhibition such as the 'cricket bat that died for Ireland' from Elvery's sports shop, in which a bullet had lodged; a red-brick in which a bullet was also embedded (from the wall against which Francis Sheehy Skeffington was shot dead in Portobello Barracks); and personal items such as Constance Markievicz's wristwatch, Patrick Pearse's spectacles, his brother Willie's razor mentioned earlier, and other ephemera. In the early days of the Museum's *1916* collection, some effects belonging to Joseph Mary Plunkett were turned down on the grounds that 'they are purely personal items, adding nothing to historical knowledge and they should be retained in the family,' but as Gannon notes, the Rising itself blurred the boundaries between public and private life. It has been suggested that in its preoccupation with things, catalogues, and

display, Joyce's *Ulysses* testifies to 'the "city as exhibition" itself,' using 'representational techniques, modes, and allusions which are to a large extent related to exhibitionary' practices.

The cricket bat has Joycean echoes: 'Elvery's Elephant house' is noted in both the 'Hades' and 'Lestrygonians' chapters of *Ulysses*, the imposing, imperial-related elephant bas-relief over the door attracting the attention of passers-by. Sheehy Skeffington also has Joycean associations: his student publication (1901) demanding equal status for women in universities (another timely reminder from the past), *A Forgotten Aspect of the University Question*, was issued in pamphlet form with Joyce's youthful polemic on Irish theatre, *The Day of the Rabblement*. Even Patrick Pearse's spectacles, the case carrying Pearse's name in handwriting beside 'Yeates and Son Dublin,' have a connection with *Ulysses*: this is the shop where Bloom stops on his rounds of the city pricing binoculars (and mentioning German technological prowess in passing): 'He crossed at Nassau Street corner and stood before the window of Yeates and Son, pricing the fieldglasses … Must get those old glasses of mine set right. Goerz lenses six guineas. Germans making their way everywhere. Sell on easy terms to capture trade. Undercutting. Might chance on a pair in the railway lost property office' (*Ulysses*, 8:551-2, 554-6).

In the age of the algorithm and virtual objects, the emphasis on the materiality of history in the museum acquires a new salience. In his essay, noted above, on 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), Walter Benjamin noted how, under mass

Patrick Pearse's spectacles. HE:1996.10

The wristwatch worn by Countess Markievicz during Easter Week, 1916. HE:EWL.5

production and built-in obsolescence, 'aura' or enduring value is eliminated from objects, leading Benjamin to scour flea markets and second-hand shops to recover the cast-offs of commodity culture. A similar exercise in retrieval is discernible in *Ulysses* whereby the material culture of Joyce's Dublin - Plumtree's Potted Meat jars, Sweny's lemon soap, Jacob's biscuits tins, even *Thom's Directory* - is given an extended shelf life: in the novel's own words, 'Hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past' (*Ulysses* 9:89). The irony of Benjamin's argument is that, overtaken by digital culture, it is now mechanical production that possesses a certain aura, as witnessed by the renewed vogue for the material traces of analogue photography or vinyl records. In this respect, the museum is not only the custodian of things but also relays the *gestures* with which they are imbued: the damaged cricket bat was perhaps looted from Elvery's shop, the stray bullet acting as an object lesson in how civilians ended up as casualties during the Rising. The freighting of objects with

A cricket bat from the window of Elvery's sport shop on Sackville Street, with a bullet lodged in the spine. HE:EW.5142

meaning - badges, flags, souvenirs, cards - was already evident in the immediate aftermath of the Rising: 'those little badges,' C. S. Andrews remarked in his memoir *Dublin Made Me* (1979), 'evoked mutual recognition and sympathy among a large section of public opinion.'

In an influential series of essays published as *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1976, 1986), the Irish artist, novelist and critic Brian O'Doherty discussed how in the 20th century, gallery space reached beyond museum walls to embrace performance art, conceptual works, and installation art, but also how aesthetic value was no longer an intrinsic quality of an object but a function of highly mediated institutional and cultural practices. The three thousand or so initiatives that have constituted the Decade of Centenaries so far can best be seen in this light, the activities of the museum interacting with other disparate forms of remembrance outsides its walls, as in its online learning resources, and the *Pathways to Participation* project. The street theatre of *Sunder*, staged by ANU productions in Moore Street and its surroundings (April-May 1916), the last HQ of the rebellion, is another case in point, as is the imaginative choreography of the Casement Project, *Féile, Fáilte*, performed on Banna Strand by Fearghus Ó Conchúir and his dance troupe in July 2016. The text/image/musical score of Jaki Irvine's *Days of Surrender* (2016) and *If the Ground Should Open …* (2017) writing and video installations at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, are also in keeping with this, experiments in commemorations exploring different effects of cultural practice.

These site-specific events invite 'history from below,' as in the extraordinary growth of interest in local history promoted by commemorations. This, it might be noted, also acts as a corrective to overly simplified accounts of new social media, which see technologies themselves, as against *uses* of them, dictating the pace of change. The digitalisation of archives - the 1901 and 1911 National Census, the Bureau of Military History and Military Service Pensions Collection, increased online availability of British Military Service records, not to mention innumerable other national and regional sources - has opened access to the hard-copy of history like never before. It may even be that the acceleration of the global throws local awareness into relief, calling precisely for strategies of looking at the overlooked, gathering and collating knowledge passed down through generations, or previously siloed in archives, which had not reached wider publics until the present day.

If 'romantic' is a key word in Jay Winter's designation of heroic modes of remembrance, perceptions of earlier commemorations, such as the 1966 Golden Jubilee of the Rising and its aftermath, have also tended to confine them within a Romantic idiom (notwithstanding notable exceptions, such as the *Insurrection* television series noted above). It was often detractors, however, who were preoccupied with myth, Celtic Revivalism, the influence of the Abbey Theatre, Catholic nationalism, blood sacrifice, intent on showing that Romantic Ireland had no place in the post-Lemass age of modernisation and urbanity. Influential

literary interpretations at the time, such as William Irwin Thompson's *The Imagination of an Insurrection (1967)*, as well as historical studies, among them Fr Francis Shaw's 'The Canon of Irish History' (1972), Fr F. X. Martin's '1916 – Myth, Fact, and Mystery' (1967) and Conor Cruise O'Brien *States of Ireland* (1972) and 'The Embers of Easter 1916 - 1966' (1968), were exercises in demythologising that acquired a new impetus with the outbreak of the Northern Ireland conflict in 1968.

By contrast, as Guy Beiner shows, the extolling of sacrifice and historic wounds that characterised veneration of the Battle of the Somme in Ulster Unionism, has not been subjected to the tragic deflation of heroic suffering in mainstream British mourning (as outlined by Jay Winter). At a time when exhortations of Empire are coming under increased scrutiny in Britain, uncritical evocations of imperial glory and colonial pride may even counter the lessons to be learned from the senseless conduct of war. As a prominent UVF member in East Belfast expresses it: 'The Somme and the Troubles are the same in a way. Both are about working-class Prods [protestants] giving their lives for Britain, the Empire and all that.' (In Graham, Shirlow, 2002) Calls for inclusion of both traditions also extend to demythologising: as President Higgins (2021) has observed of the imperial past, 'while it has been vital to our purposes in Ireland to examine nationalism, doing the same for imperialism is equally important and has a significance far beyond British/Irish relations.'

By contrast with Romantic paradigms, the most innovative achievements of the Decade of Centenaries have proceeded along modernist lines, recasting the fractured culture(s) of early 20th century Ireland through the 'cracked lookingglass' (*Ulysses, 1.146*) of James Joyce. In a perceptive observation on the aesthetics of the Great War, Robert Wohl has pointed out that many modernist breakthroughs, particularly Cubism, predated 1914, even if it was the shattering experience of mechanised violence in the war that drove them home. It is for this reason, he suggests, that the Great War may be called 'a cubist war in part, because it has got all these jagged pieces that don't fit together.' A similar conclusion can perhaps be drawn about renditions of the past in Ireland that seek to accommodate in a seamless whole the Home Rule Crisis, the 1913 Lockout, the Great War, the Easter Rising, the struggle for women's suffrage, the First Dáil, and the outbreak of the War of Independence – not to mention the deep divisions sown by events that unfolded between 1921-1923. The desire for inclusiveness should not be mistaken for a one-size-fits-all approach but instead, in President Michael D. Higgins's words, 'must embrace the multitude of stories that comprise our past, in all their bewildering contradictions and differences.' To facilitate this, modes of remembrance in the Museum might well take their bearings from the open-ended structure of *Ulysses* and related modernist narratives, epics of the commonplace in which the past is continually re-configured and brought to bear on transformations of the present.

Chapter 2

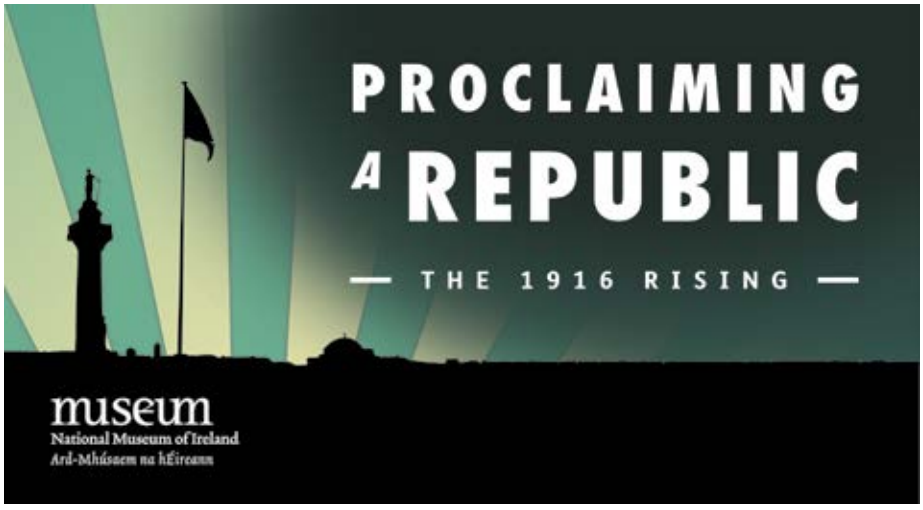
The Power of Objects in the National Consciousness: the Decade of Centenaries Exhibition Programme

Audrey Whitty

Beginning in 2012, the National Museum of Ireland (NMI) mounted a series of exhibitions as part of the Decade of Centenaries commemoration. These exhibitions interpreted significant periods and key events of the turbulent decade that began a century earlier. Their curators drew on the NMI's extensive Easter Week collection of artefacts, photographs and texts covering the period 1905-24, to bring events, stories and figures to life.

In discussing the NMI Decade of Centenaries exhibition programme in this chapter, Dr Audrey Whitty, Deputy Director and Head of Collections and Learning at the NMI, reflects on the power of objects to generate curiosity and to unpack memory. She focuses on specific examples such as the set of rosary beads which Joseph Mary Plunkett gave to a member of the firing squad moments before his execution, and the story of Erskine Childers and his yacht, the *Asgard*, which carried guns later used in the 1916 Rising. The yacht is one of the largest objects in the National Museum's collections. Dr Whitty's reflection is a reminder of the intimacy, historical importance and wider cultural significance of objects, and their ability to resonate on a personal level while also enabling us to connect with major events and leading figures. These witnesses to the past reinforce the important role that the Museum plays as their custodian. They also underline the relevance of museums as spaces in which such narratives continue to flourish and be interrogated. Finally, Dr Whitty looks to the NMI's future plans, which include a major exhibition gallery, and which consolidate and expand on the Museum's commitment to the arts and culture.

The Decade of Centenaries, 2012 - 2023, has been a particularly busy time for the National Museum of Ireland, both by way of programming and exhibition. Since 2012, it has mounted eleven major exhibitions to critical and popular acclaim. The list includes, in order of launch: *Asgard: From Gun Running to Recent Conservation* (2012); *1913 Lockout: Impact & Aftermath* (2013); *Recovered Voices: The Stories of the Irish at War, 1914-1915* (2015); *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* (2016); *Roger Casement - Voice of the Voiceless* (2016); *Portrait of a Century, Kim Haughton* (2017); *War in the Mud, The Irish Soldier in Belgium in the Summer of 1917* (2017); *Votes for Women: Suffrage and Citizenship* (2018); *Marching on the Road to Freedom: Dáil Éireann 1919* (2019); *The Irish Wars, 1919-23* (2020); and *Studio and State: The Laverys and the Anglo-Irish Treaty* (2021). Five of these eleven exhibitions are currently ongoing at NMI - Decorative Arts & History in Collins Barracks. These exhibitions signify both the importance and popularity of this Museum location, which has been steadily increasing since it was unveiled as a site of the NMI in 1997. What has resonated from each exhibition is the sheer scale of content and vast quantity of material culture being offered to the onlooker by way of an interpretation of the time. The majority of these exhibitions' objects are sourced from subsets of the Art and Industrial Division of the National Museum, and from the Easter Week historical and military history collections. The Easter Week collection constitutes one of the earliest world examples, if not the earliest, of a national cultural institution collecting contemporary political history. Darragh Gannon has shown in his book, *Proclaiming a Republic: Ireland, 1916 and the National Collection* (2016), that the first object relating to the Easter Rising, an Irish National Volunteers tunic from circa 1914, was acquired in 1917. Eventually, through donations, loans, bequests and purchases, the Easter Week collection of the NMI now comprises 15,000 objects, covering the entire early 20th century revolutionary period from circa 1905 up to 1924.



Exhibition graphic for *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* exhibition (2016 – 2020).

Installation image of the exhibition *Roger Casement - Voice of the Voiceless* (2016 – 2020).

Details of each of the listed exhibitions are outlined on pages 150-155. This chapter focuses on a selection of objects from the time which convey to the onlooker the immediacy and intimacy of connection of historically tangible objects that are closely associated with their owners or associates. Many of the contributors to this book note the moving example of a set of rosary beads owned by Joseph Mary Plunkett, which was given by him to Sergeant William Hand of the Sherwood Foresters, a member of Plunkett's execution firing squad, moments before Plunkett's death. The registration entry for the rosary beads is brutal in its factual detail:

> Joseph Mary Plunkett's Rosary Beads given by him to Sgt. W. Hand a member of the firing squad which executed him. Hand in turn gave it to his cousin Dora before going to France where he was killed in 1918. Donor is her son.

The fact that both men, connected through this one humble object, lost their lives through conflict within two years of each other, underlines the annihilating reality of war. This one artefact evokes the sense of duty experienced by both men: Plunkett's utter determination to bring about a sovereign independent Irish republic, and Hand's loyalty to king and country on that most violent of European stages, World War I.

The physical presence and the description of Plunkett's rosary beads, and of all objects displayed in the 'Executions' section of the *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* exhibition, convey a strong emotional charge, and exemplify the way that the NMI responds to the challenges of description, interpretation and designation. As Darragh Gannon has observed,

the exhibitions go beyond state-led modes of commemoration to embody the complexity of cultural memory. So inextricably have state-led commemorations of the 1916 Rising been linked with the eight Easter Week collection-based exhibitions in NMI since 1932 that to have wholly participated in one, citizens would have had, in numerous instances, to have automatically viewed the others.

Another successful, immersive exhibition, *Asgard: From Gun Running to Recent Conservation*, opened with full naval honours in August 2012, and was an important foundation for the Decade of Centenaries. Possibly the largest object amongst the 5 million-plus artefacts and specimens that make up the holdings of the NMI, the *Asgard* yacht symbolises more than most the transformation of the personal into the monumental. Its owner, Erskine Childers, was wholly involved with master shipbuilder Colin Archer in the design of *Asgard*, particularly in its internal layout, due to his wife Molly Childers' difficulty in walking as a result of a childhood injury. This yacht carried rifles and ammunition into Howth Harbour in July 1914 that were later used during Easter Week 1916. The Free State government executed Childers in 1922.

The introduction to the *Asgard* exhibition, which Sandra Heise curated, examined in detail the lead up to armed insurrection under such headings as the 'Parliament Act of 1911', 'Unionism and the Ulster Volunteers', 'The Irish Volunteers', 'The Curragh Mutiny' and

Installation image of the exhibition *Asgard: From Gun Running to Recent Conservation* (from 2012).

'The Larne Gun Running to'. Nowhere is the remit of a museum more apparent than in the transposition of the Childers' personal narrative into a chronicle of an evolving national cultural consciousness. The *Asgard* was built as a wedding present, marking the matrimonial union of two individuals, but was to become the conduit of revolutionary arms and active witness to momentous historical events. This exhibition also highlights other crucial aspects of museology, those of preservation and conservation. Embedded in its narrative is a detailed interpretation of the work of a team of conservators preserving the *Asgard* over a five-year period, led by master shipwright John Kearon. Their approach reflected their philosophy of conservation, namely, that wherever possible the original material should be retained. Sandra Heise and John Kearon's book, *Asgard: Building, Conservation & Place in Irish History* (2014), records that, apart from the deck structures and accommodation, about 75% of the vessel's original materials were preserved.

Another highly significant culmination of the NMI's commemorative development work will occur in 2024 when the National Museum of Ireland will open the *20th Century History of Ireland Permanent Exhibition Galleries* at its Collins Barracks site. The *20th Century History of Ireland Galleries* will cover the period 1900 - 2020 and will offer visitors an opportunity to explore the key events in Irish history leading up to, and including, the momentous events of 1912 - 1923. The NMI's vision for the *20th Century History of Ireland Galleries* is to produce a compelling visitor experience on the history of Ireland over the last 120 years that will speak to a range of audiences. The project will demonstrate the important legacy of the Decade of Centenaries and the way arts and culture have been critical drivers in providing the physical space and platform on which to reflect both the positive and difficult elements of our shared history.

The process of developing the exhibition will offer opportunities for the NMI team to link with partners in academic institutions, special interest groups, local museums, local archive groups and local libraries. NMI foresees that the *20th Century History of Ireland Galleries* will connect directly with local communities. Elements of the exhibition panels, as well as potential reproductions of paper-based material and objects will be designed to travel concurrently to local museums and other venues across Ireland. This will ensure an all-of-Ireland approach and will offer opportunities for multiple levels of engagement.

The NMI's *Master Vision Statement* for the period 2018-2032 reinforces the importance of this major development of exhibition galleries. It provides that three principles, the protection, safeguarding and accessibility of the collections, will underpin physical developments across the Museum's sites over the next fifteen years. The Museum will put in place the best conditions for the care of its collections, as well as increasing access for education and research. It will ensure that all the NMI sites are safe and secure for the collections and the public, and that all its sites, exhibitions and interpretations will be fully accessible to all people.

The project will address two important elements of government policy. It will provide a permanent legacy exhibition to bookend the successful Decade of Centenaries commemorations and will demonstrate the powerful role our national arts and cultural institutions can have in initiating dialogue and engagement on contentious elements of our past and present. The project will seek to serve as a dynamic and evolving cultural offering that can respond rapidly to questions of changing Irish identity and contemporary history. The powerful impact of the *20th Century History of Ireland Galleries*' location in the National Museum and the mobilisation of our national collection in a collaborative and inclusive manner to explore both the difficult and joyful elements of the last 120 years, will serve to legitimise diverse narratives and voices often excluded from the standard history books. This initiative will support and embody the strategic aims of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, in that it will demonstrate that arts and culture unites us, offers us solace and provides space for us to reflect on our national identity and the future we wish for it. The project will also be an invitation to organisations and communities to continue to collaborate with the National Museum in documenting and reflecting on our past. In addition, as it develops through a shared, collaborative process, it is hoped that this project will lead the way for collaborative-based practice within large-scale exhibitions at national cultural institutions. The *20th Century History of Ireland Galleries* will also provide a strong, coherent platform for cultural diplomacy and links to Ireland's ambitions on a global scale. It will involve the collaboration and input of the Irish diaspora across the globe and of cultural peers and partners in universities and institutions in many countries.

The relevant historical collections of the National Museum of Ireland will continue to be preserved, interpreted and displayed by way of physical and online exhibition for the remainder of the Decade of Centenaries and beyond. The examples of successful exhibits cited here offer a mere glimpse of what resides in perpetuity in the national collections that are the heart and core of the Museum. Without material culture, memory, with all its attendant associations and histories, fails in its ultimate meaning for the living. Nowhere is this statement better exemplified than in the examination of the national record at a time of commemoration.

Installation image of the exhibition *The Irish Wars, 1919-23*.


CONFLICT in the
NORTHERN COUNTIES
an CHOILINTsna
CONTAETHAo THUAIDH

Chapter 3

The material culture of Ireland's revolutionary years

Joanna Brück

In 2016, the National Museum of Ireland - Archaeology organised a series of talks entitled *The Archaeology of a Decade of War*, which focused on what learning can be gleaned from excavation of the conflict locations of Ireland's 20th century revolutionary past, and from the landscapes of World War I. One of the speakers at that event, Professor Joanna Brück, here reflects on her experience of excavating the Irish internment camp at Frongoch in North Wales. She argues that personal objects found on the site, such as a fife and a macramé child's reins, can act as agents of memory, recalling the humanity of forgotten lives. Their tactile immediacy engages the senses, can accommodate multiple perspectives, including dissonances, and thereby ground constructive, if challenging, dialogue.

Macramé bag made during the Civil War by an internee in the Curragh Camp.

Talking about the past is often difficult, and this is especially the case for traumatic and divisive events. But the material world offers alternative perspectives, opening up new ways of encountering and engaging with sensitive histories, and allowing different stories to be told. Over the past ten years, archaeological approaches have increasingly been employed to cast new light on Ireland's revolutionary years. Most people assume that the best source of information about this period is the written word, but in fact the material residues of the past can provide equally valuable insights, as demonstrated by the series of talks, *The Archaeology of a Decade of War*, organised in 2016 by the Education Department at the National Museum of Ireland. Speakers described the relict landscapes of the 1916 Rising, the First World War, War of Independence and Civil War - discussing the buildings, trenches, shipwrecks, ambush sites, bullet impact scars and other material evidence for these conflicts that survive today, and describing how they can provide new insights both into the events of the period and into the experiences of those who lived through those years. My own contribution to the series stemmed from research on the craftwork from internment camps of the period 1916 - 1923, as well as archaeological excavation and survey work at Frongoch camp in North Wales, where some 1800 Irish men were interned in the aftermath of the 1916 Rising.

Archaeology is often described as the discipline of things, and in this contribution, I want to explore the potential of material culture not only to speak of the past, but to challenge us to think differently in the present and to open new futures. This is directly relevant to the vision of museums as civic spaces in which different groups have the opportunity to engage with issues that speak to their own life experiences by encountering and handling objects. Museum collections are not just so many dead artefacts brought together to evoke the past's alterity or (as the 19th century visitors to what is now the National Museum might have felt) to reassure us of our own technological and moral superiority. Rather, objects from the past have the power to stimulate empathy, to foster inter-generational and inter-cultural understanding, and to inspire us to think critically about our own preconceptions. Collections relating to the Decade of Centenaries illustrate this perfectly.

Museum objects are not inert witnesses to history, but agents of memory that actively call for new voices to be heard. This was eloquently communicated to me in the first days of my research on the craftwork made by internees during this period – objects made to relieve boredom, to provide a sense of direction in otherwise purposeless days, and to give material expression to the identities and relationships challenged by conflict and separation. One of the first boxes I opened in Kilmainham Gaol Museum revealed two macramé bags made by anti-Treaty internees held in the Curragh Camp during the Civil War. One red, the other gold, with tassels and fringes, they perfectly evoked the flappers of the 1920s: the men who made them were not 'just' political prisoners, but sweethearts, brothers and sons whose lives were shaped by the globalising cultures of jazz and film as well as by political conflict. Objects, then, powerfully conjure the complexities of the revolutionary period and invite

recognition of the human cost of war. They remind us of the humanity of the men and women caught up in the events of the period; they demand compassion and stimulate the imagination.

Objects therefore offer extraordinary potential to illuminate multiple perspectives and experiences and to open spaces for conversation. Historically, museums were places where experts were called on to illuminate and pass judgment on the relics of the past for a public in need of education. The revolutionary objects in museum collections highlight the inadequacy of this view and the crucial role of the wider community in making sense of the past. They show how objects lie at the heart of personal and community narratives and how their potential is diminished when they are cut loose of those threads. We can compare, for example, objects that have lost much of their contextual information to those for which such details are still available. A small wooden cross made in Cork Gaol during the War of Independence displays the inscription 'In loving memory of Eamon Waters shot' and the museum catalogue notes that this item was carved by Paddy Meaney. Who these two men were is not recorded in the museum catalogue, nor are the circumstances of Eamon Waters' death or how the two men knew one another. In contrast, other objects provide richly textured accounts of the experience of war and internment recounted by the families of those who made them. Often, these are tales of love and resilience, in which humour, dignity and affection play more important roles than bitterness and anger. One elderly lady described how her mother baked a silver half-crown into a cake for her father while he was interned in

Early nineteenth-century fife from Frongoch Camp.

Part of a leather boot or shoe found during archaeological excavations at Frongoch Camp.

Ballykinlar Camp during the War of Independence. Her father made this into a brooch for her mother inscribed with the motto 'May God above increase our love' and she herself later wore it for her Confirmation.

Objects such as these have as much to say about the universal human experiences of love and loss – about the humanity and suffering of those caught up in conflict – as they have of the specificities of historical and political context. They therefore offer the potential for social repair and renewal, particularly in the context of unresolved conflicts such as the Civil War, for they can open new dialogues and new ways of seeing the 'other'. They reveal the 'small stories' of troubled pasts and let us attend to the voices and experiences of those who lie at the margins of political history. Their power comes from their materiality – their ability to generate a visceral connection with long-vanished people, places and events. Engaging in dialogue around such objects of personal and family significance facilitates reflective forms of self-expression; it allows individuals to locate themselves in relation to broader narratives and to generate social and emotional connections with others past and present. Community engagement is therefore crucial to revealing the complexity and contradictions of the revolutionary period, underlining the importance of the co-creation of knowledge in

current museum practice. Events such as *The Archaeology of a Decade of War* seminar series provided one mechanism for members of the public both to engage with difficult histories and to share their own family narratives of the period.

Recently, I have been conducting archaeological survey and excavation at Frongoch in North Wales, the camp where around 1800 Irishmen were interned after the Easter Rising. We were lucky enough to be helped with the excavation by the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of several internees. The objects that our excavators found - shards of blue glass medicine bottles, a clay pipe stem, fragments of barbed wire - spoke powerfully of the personal hardships, boredom and frustration endured by their fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers. The sense of emotional connection that excavation - tactile engagement with the physical remains of the camp - can afford helped to bring the past into the present in a way that few other activities could. Some of the most poignant objects were items that had intimate connections with the human body, such as part of a leather boot we found protruding from what was once churned-up ground between huts. Other items had been recovered over the years by the local Welsh community and were brought for us to see. One of these was an early 19th century Irish fife (a musical instrument rather like a flute) uncovered some years previously during building work at the edge of the camp: music was one of the things which helped internees to cope with the challenges and deprivations of camp life, and the antiquity of this item - already old in 1916 - made us wonder if it was an heirloom, an item of particular meaning and value for whoever had once owned it. The tactile immediacy of such items engages our senses and our emotions in a way that written histories cannot, providing different pathways to understanding the past.

The potential of hands-on engagement with the remains of the past to generate empathy, to create an authentic sense of connection with both past and present, and to open our minds to new horizons is also key to the mission of contemporary museums. Handling artefacts, particularly original historic objects, provides a profoundly discursive and democratic way of learning, and it is for this reason that the National Museum of Ireland has sought to develop a series of handling collections, from the Bronze Age handling box project to artefacts from the more recent historical past. Objects are more than simply evidence for past lives, however, and can actively stimulate critical reflection about complex histories and the ways we speak about these in the present. One of the objects I encountered while researching internment camp craftwork in the National Museum was a set of macramé child's reins made by Domhnall Ua Buachalla while he was interned at Frongoch. I had young children of my own when I first took these out of the store in Collins Barracks, and I felt an immediate sense of connection for I had used very similar reins myself to stop my youngest son running onto the road when he was a toddler. To me, the reins – made using a technique that involves knotting – were an evocative way of expressing the emotional ties and parental commitment threatened by the act of internment. However, I also saw them as a mechanism of paternal

Macramé child's reins made by Domhnall Ua Buachalla at Frongoch Camp.

control over the domestic domain. Internment threatened normative models of early 20th century masculinity for it deprived the male head of household of the ability to provide for his family; this is likely to have been a source of significant ontological concern for internees who may have felt their sense of self and their position within the social order to be called into question. Yet speaking about these objects to audiences that included family members of internees, I felt considerable unease about proffering this feminist reading of the evidence. For me, my quandary opened questions over who we are speaking for: the dead cannot speak for themselves, and the academic voice is too often privileged over other forms of knowledge. The past is meaningless outside of its significance in the present, and the co-curation of museum collections in collaboration with relevant stakeholders is therefore a crucial component of contemporary museological practice.

The material remains of the past are not always straightforward to interpret, and they can intrude into the present in ways that can provoke anxiety and dissent. Yet, we must be careful not to paper over those dissonances in an effort to create a past that is uncontentious. The centenary celebrations at Frongoch in 2016 involved local politicians and historians, members of the local community and visiting groups from Ireland. A group of radical Welsh nationalists, including members of a marching band who had been advised they could not perform at the event, were unhappy that they had not been formally included in the schedule of speeches, and they took to the podium uninvited as the Irish ambassador to the United Kingdom, the main speaker, was shepherded away by the organisers. So, too, the memorial panels at the site are occasionally defaced, perhaps by visitors troubled by its links with the formation of the Irish Republican Army (IRA): over the years, I have seen words like 'murderers' written on these panels. Here, the ghosts of the past disturb the present and undermine the linear narrative of history; they foreground alternative perspectives and agendas and remind us that dialogue with the 'other', even if mediated by the most poignant of objects, is rarely likely to be a comfortable or easy process. Yet, hearing those different voices and understanding their context is a necessary first step to coming to terms with a difficult past. Forgetting the past can all too easily lead to marginalisation and repression in the present.

As we continue to reflect on the legacy of our revolutionary past in our museums and communities, it is evident that objects from the period offer redemptive and restorative potential though they also unsettle comfortable assumptions and raise difficult questions. Objects speak powerfully of the texture of human emotion and experience. They are the axis around which we construct our sense of self, and they locate us within broader narratives of social and national identity. The intimacy of everyday objects can elicit an emotional response that may help to generate empathy and understanding as we confront unresolved episodes in our country's history. The objects of the revolutionary period call our attention to

gaps and dissonances in historical knowledge, to conflict and contradiction, but also to love and endurance in the most difficult of circumstances. The potential of museum collections in creating space for different perspectives and experiences is clear: community engagement is key to this process, for without those other voices, even the most evocative objects will remain silent. It is in participatory acts of dialogue that history and value are created. The particular worth of historical and archaeological objects is that they allow us to engage with sensitive issues both in the past and the present: they spur us to critical reflection around ethics, politics and identity. Indeed, in contemporary, multicultural Ireland, it is equally imperative that we understand the links between the Irish struggle for independence and revolutionary movements elsewhere in the early 20th century. Museums must be restorative and dialogic as much as didactic spaces, their role not to generate a single narrative but to demonstrate the complexity of historical events, to make space for different voices and to encourage the public to engage critically with our world past, present and future.

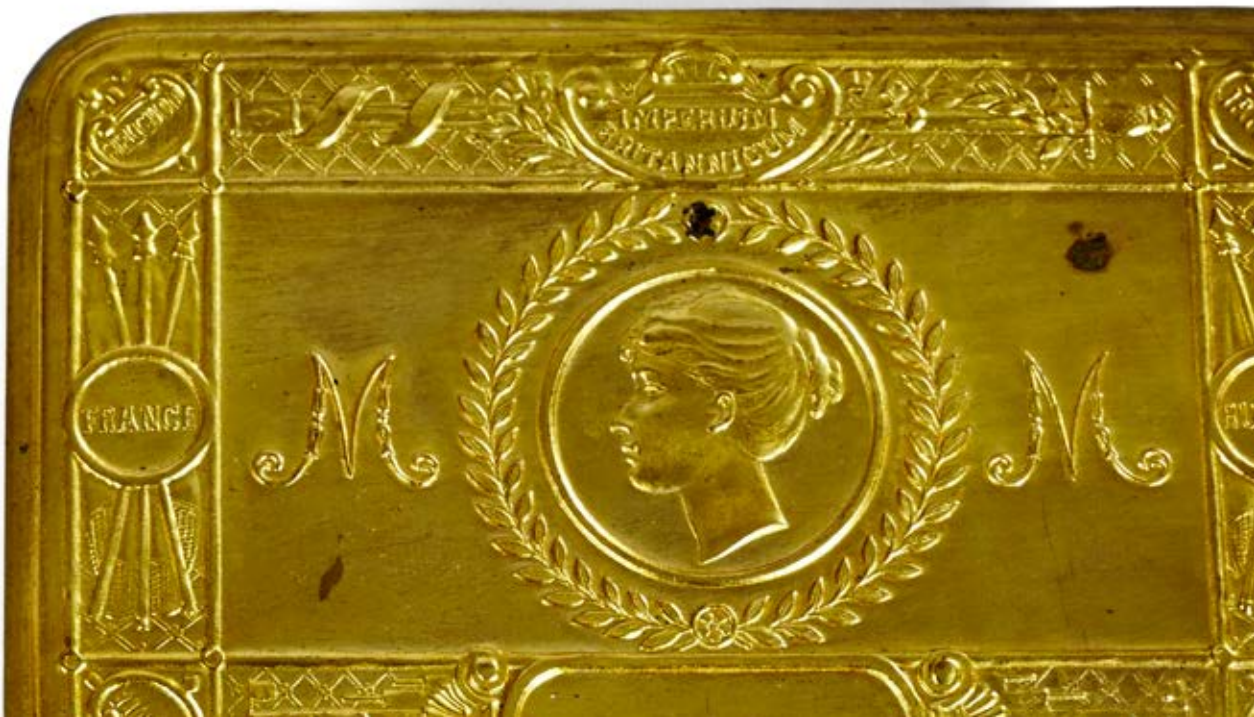
Section 2

People and Participation - Museums as Social Spaces

> I don't think I could have come close to understanding the horrors of war as much as I've understood it through [the Gallipoli Schools] project.
>
> - *George Burac, student, Trinity Comprehensive School, Ballymun*

> Local people know local stories.
>
> - *Mary Mullin, participant in the* ***Our Irish Women*** *exhibition*

Gilt metal box, an example of the gift distributed to 2,321,553 men wearing the King's uniform on Christmas Day 1914, from H.R.H. The Princess Mary's Sailors' and Soldiers' Christmas Fund. HA:1919.100.1



Chapter 4

Hyperconnectivity and the Role of Museums

Ivana Bacik, Catherine Heaney, Mary McAuliffe, Judith McCarthy

In 2018, the theme of International Museum Day was 'hyperconnected museums: new approaches and new publics'. The Houses of the Oireachtas and the National Museum of Ireland (NMI) jointly hosted an event to celebrate the occasion and to commemorate the centenary of women's suffrage. Speakers reflected on the general role of museums and on their role specifically in relation to centenaries and commemoration. Their exchanges highlighted how remnants of material culture can enrich and complexify our understanding of women's resistance.

This chapter reproduces an edited and abbreviated transcript of that discussion, which was introduced by Catherine Heaney, Chair of the Board of the National Museum of Ireland. Ivana Bacik, then a member of Seanad Éireann and a professor of law at Trinity College Dublin, chaired the event and introduced the speakers, historian Professor Mary McAuliffe and museum curator Judith McCarthy.

Catherine Heaney: We attend the museum for pleasure and to understand the collections that reflect our history and our society, but we also visit the museum to be educated, to explore, to challenge how we think about things. Museums become an important place for reflection and for dialogue, for dealing sometimes with controversial topics. The collaboration tonight between the National Museum and the Houses of the Oireachtas is not only about offering this space for public discourse, but it is about working together so that we can convey our insights.

Ivana Bacik: I am here particularly in my capacity this year as chairperson of the Oireachtas programme of events to commemorate the centenary of women's suffrage, which we call *Vótáil 100.* The Oireachtas is collaborating with the National Museum on a number of things, like tonight's event. In the Seanad ante room, we'll be running an exhibition over the summer with National Museum of Ireland artefacts, items like the votes-for-women banner that came to us through the Sheehy Skeffington family. We also have replicas of the original Irish Women's Franchise League badges. Not only do we mark in February 2018 a hundred years since the passage of the Representation of the People Act that finally removed gender as an absolute bar on voting, and allowed women, at least some women, to vote for the first time. But also, later this year, we will be marking the centenary of the first election in December 1918, when women had the right to vote, and when Constance Markievicz was elected as the first woman member, both of the first Dáil Éireann and of the House of Commons.

Let me introduce our panellists: Mary McAuliffe is assistant professor in Gender Studies at UCD. Her latest publications are *We Were There: 77 Women of the Easter Rising*, and *Kerry, 1916: Histories and Legacies of the Easter Rising*, which she co-edited. She has been a consultant on several important Decade of Centenaries projects and documentaries, and her latest research includes a forthcoming biography of Margaret Skinnider (1892-1971) and a major research project on gendered and sexual violence during the Irish Revolutionary period. Mary focuses more specifically on the centenary and on the history of women's suffrage and the suffrage movement in Ireland. Judith McCarthy has managed Donegal County Council's Museum service since 1994, and she is a member of the Board of the National Museum of Ireland.

Throughout the Decade of Centenaries, the Museum developed successful partnerships with community groups and organisations throughout the island, with the aim of raising awareness about and increasing understanding of the history which has shaped our community and of the role of museum, 140 years after the foundation of the National Museum.

International Museum Day event in the Seanad Chamber, 2018.

Judith McCarthy: The theme of International Museum Day 2018 is 'hyperconnected museums: new approaches and new publics'. Hyperconnectivity describes multiple ways of communicating, whether through face-to-face communication or instant messaging or the internet. Museums are using these new technologies to reach out beyond their core audiences and to improve interaction with their collections through digitisation of collections. Multimedia in exhibitions means that a museum audience can share experiences through social media. This has changed the way that museums interact with their publics. But also, museums connect in different ways, other than just through technology. In the last number of years, you would have seen a rise in the number of projects that the National Museum and local authority museums are doing with their local communities. To engage with these communities, we're also looking at new ways of interpreting our collections and our displays.

The role of museums is changing. There's the traditional role whereby they preserve, collect, record and communicate, but more and more we are looking at an economic role, a social role. Museums can strengthen community identities and bring community groups together. They can also act as a voice. Communities can be represented through collections and displays. Museums are becoming more aware of the role they can play in areas such as multiculturalism, gender equity and reconciliation. We are working with all sorts of different communities. We are there to serve them.

Museums can provide people with an opportunity to examine and explore their histories, whatever those histories might be. Everyone has a different perspective on their history and that's particularly the case in relation to the Decade of Centenaries. They commemorated events within the memory of people's parents and grandparents, and all have very specific perspectives on it. We have to be willing to listen to those perspectives, to bring them out into the open. That's what museums should be trying to do: to listen, share those stories, and our use collections to do that. We were amazed at the response we got from people who just came in and were interacting with the exhibition on the First World War but were also telling us their stories. They felt they never had an opportunity to do that before. They wanted to talk about their granddad and their great uncle or the man from next door whom they knew had been involved. We can give them these opportunities.

Mary McAuliffe: Since the Decade of Centenaries started in 2012, women's histories and voices have become a very integral part of what's been going on. The digitised archives that museums are now putting on display have brought us more archival sources. We are now seeing much more about women. We now know, for example, that 300 women took part in the 1916 Rising, whereas up to recently you would have thought, maybe about 90? That's a big leap in our knowledge.

Irish Women's Franchise League banner.

Ivana Bacik chairing a discussion with Judith McCarthy and Mary McAuliffe at the International Museum Day event in the Seanad Chamber, 2018.

The public was familiar with Countess Markievicz, Elizabeth O'Farrell and Winifred Carney, and that was about it. But there were way more than that: young women, working-class women, women from communities whose voices you really don't hear, those communities that didn't make it into the museums back in the day, whose histories were hidden for all sorts of reasons, mainly because they weren't seen as important.

Some of us were concerned that perhaps after 2016, people would think 'we've heard all about the women and what they've done in 1916.' But actually, it seems to have deepened people's interest, particularly in what women did not just in achieving the vote, but the route to the vote from the middle of the 19th century to the militant suffragettes in the early 20th century. Seeing the suffragettes in their national and international context, this new generation of young women get involved, reject the moderate constitutional politics of the previous generations, and now they achieve the vote. That is a very important thing, probably the most basic thing we can mark in this year.

Let's now talk about the multiple layers of their involvement in civic disobedience through the anti-conscription campaign in 1918 and through their propagandising the revolution after 1916, and about the fact that the women were the most effective propagandists of the revolutionary ideologies. They become serious activists. After 1916, we see them grow into

what they will be throughout the War of Independence and into the Civil War. Then, when we come to the general election, we're only really getting to grips with what the female vote meant in terms of Sinn Féin sweeping the board, but also what the women did in terms of canvassing and personation: now we have evidence.

What the centenary and the commemoration of women getting the vote - women over the age of thirty, with certain property qualifications - does is it gives us an idea, firstly, that gender is now no longer an obstacle to voting and to political participation. The obstacle now actually becomes class, and age, to a certain degree. But that didn't stop women who weren't eligible to vote from being political activists. They did rely on the promise in the Proclamation that full and equal suffrage would come into being in the new Republic. That's what they kept faith with. So we look at what they are doing in 1918 other than just voting, and that's why the Museum is bringing out the Irish Women's Franchise League banner and the different things they used as part of their activism, why the National Treasures programme includes that little voting slip that a woman in Roscommon got. This was her being given permission to vote by her local electoral district, and that's so important. Those material culture remnants that we have for women are not as extensive as they are for male political activism. Women's political activism wasn't privileged, and so their stuff wasn't kept in the same way. But this commemoration has made people look in their attics and wardrobes and suitcases. We are beginning to realise that, actually, there is a lot of material culture, new archival materials, photographs, imagery, banners, different things. That is giving us a deeper, more nuanced understanding of women's political activism. These were young women, most of them teenagers or in their early twenties in 1918 when they are getting involved in this activism. One young woman, my grandmother, joins Cumann na mBan in this period. They're being energised and radicalised by what is happening in terms of the vote, anti-conscription propaganda, the greening of politics at that time. It is way more than the vote. The vote is central.

Ivana Bacik: It had taken many decades to win the right to vote. There's a long history of activism, both the constitutional activism and the more militant suffragism. Do you want to say a word about that?

Mary McAuliffe: We divide them into suffragists who were the constitutionalists and the suffragettes who are the militants. Suffragists are the ones who like to write a lot of letters. They achieved a lot. They achieved the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in the nineteenth century. They got the local government vote in the 1890s. And then you have women involved in local government. We tend to forget that. Women are already being elected into politics by the beginning of the 20th century. They are poor law guardians, local councillors and they are quite active. It's making the step to national politics then that

exercises the militant suffragettes and of course, the Irish Women's Franchise League, set up in 1908, is part of that. But also, don't forget Inghinidhe na hÉireann, set up in 1900 by Maud Gonne, which is the first militant separatist feminist organisation. They didn't want to campaign for the vote from a foreign government, but they did collaborate with the Irish Women's Franchise League in 1912 to try and get the Irish Parliamentary Party (the IPP) to include suffrage in the third Home Rule. The IPP had defeated a conciliation bill earlier that year. I don't think the suffragettes ever forgave them for that. Recently I've been doing some research on what the women actually did during the election in December and the speeches they were making. Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, Maud Gonne, all of them reminded their audience that the Irish Parliamentary Party had betrayed women in 1912. Again and again they drive home that message. What they are doing is trying to get the women's vote out for Sinn Féin. So, that refusal to include suffrage in the 1912 Home Rule Bill was probably one of the nails in the coffin of the Irish Parliamentary Party, that did come in 1918. Some women do hold faith with the Irish Parliamentary Party, including Anna Haslam, who is in her eighties, and she's been fighting for the right to vote. It's very affecting to see those women who had been fighting since the 1880s for the right to vote, and she does work for her IPP candidate. And you have women who are suffragettes who are unionists. In fact, the unionist suffragettes are the most militant of the lot on the island of Ireland. They vote for their unionist candidates. So, we have those multiple layers, those complications and those nuances. It isn't just that women fought for the vote, and they got the vote. We are now beginning to understand more, building on the work of great historians like Margaret Ward, Senia Paseta, and Rosemary Cullen-Owens. That is the importance of commemoration. In and of itself, we mark it but what it does is it encourages people to look deeper into questions of what is happening at that time.

Ivana Bacik: It's fascinating that the role of museums is to draw out the layers of history and different histories in commemoration. It's not just about the 1918 Representation of the People Act. It's about all the other things women were involved in.

You mentioned the National Treasures Museum campaign, Mary. It invites the public to submit articles relating to the last 100 years of Irish life. I am a fan, having presented a piece of glass of my grandfather's to the campaign. It's a wonderful programme to generate public interest in the role of museums, the role of curators.

A Response by Ivana Bacik T.D.

As I reflect back now over this memorable event, what strikes me is the reference to that symbolic act: my donation of my grandfather's glassware to the Museum's National Treasure programme. Karel Bacik had been imprisoned in his native Czechoslovakia during the Nazi occupation and fled with his family to Ireland where, in 1947, he co-founded Waterford Glass. The Bacik dessert bowls were used throughout Professor Bacik's childhood. Like the Roscommon woman's voting slip to which Mary McAuliffe refers in this transcript, these objects and their impact goes far beyond their original purpose. Voting slip and glassware both weave personal and national narratives into a diverse and complex Irish social and political history. They also transcend their concrete, physical state to symbolise absence and loss. As objects invested with so much memory and significance, they are a powerful means for us to engage with the past emotionally and to historically empathise with that past.

That awareness of loss - and also the possibility of retrieval - underlies Mary McAuliffe's detailed presentation of recent work on women's political activism. Her talk underscores the vital importance of material culture in rediscovering and re-framing stories such as those about the contribution of poor, working-class women to political activism, as well as the complex social and political affiliations of suffragettes.

Judith McCarthy flags the possibilities inherent in the multiple resources of hyperconnectivity for engaging with and creating new publics and new knowledge, and for facilitating wider and more egalitarian access to museum exhibits. Her comments highlight the public role of museums to connect with communities in commemorating and remembering the past.

The form of this presentation, a transcript, captures the immediacy of a live exchange between speakers and audience in a venue that is a seat of political power. It also evokes the idea that history unfolds out of interpersonal engagement, just as the conversation reproduced here does. Taken together, the speakers' exchanges invite their audience to reflect on the way that the realms of the animate and the inanimate, the audience and the material objects such as the voting slip and glassware, engage dynamically with each other.

What is of significance about this event is the collaboration that underpinned all elements of its organisation. The Museum collaborated with the Houses of the Oireachtas and in doing so shared resources and expertise to bring us an event that was inspiring and thought provoking.

Chapter 5

Many voices, other voices

Helen Beaumont and Siobhán Pierce

Between 2012 and 2018, the National Museum of Ireland's (NMI) public programmes across its four locations featured more than 120 events whose themes related to the Decade of Centenaries. While the range of events (listed on pages 156-173) was diverse, all were conceived with a set of common goals and were grounded in our shared conviction that the Museum is a public space uniquely placed to foster social learning and the sharing of knowledge, ideas, multiple perspectives and experiences through its collections and programmes.

In this essay, Museum educators Helen Beaumont and Siobhán Pierce look back in particular at the nine conferences held at the National Museum of Ireland - Decorative Arts & History, Collins Barracks during this period, and the year-long series of talks entitled *The Archaeology of a Decade of War* held at the National Museum of Ireland - Archaeology in 2016. They focus on some key moments from these events which exemplify the Museum's aims for the public engagement programme during the Decade of Centenaries.

At the heart of the National Museum's public programmes are people: the individuals and groups who attend and participate in them; the curators, educators, historians, archaeologists, writers, artists and others who speak, perform or facilitate events; and the individuals whose lives and experiences remembered, investigated and commemorated. What is evident in reflecting over these events is how the Museum space has witnessed so much sharing of knowledge and ideas, and engagement in dialogue, sparked by this eventful and pivotal period of our history.

Our remit to reach as wide an audience as possible informed how these events were shaped. In planning events, we strove to include diverse contributors from a breadth of disciplines and fields, including those who spoke from lived experience or had familial connections to the Decade of Centenaries. We aimed to give each of these gatherings a depth and breadth of access and a range of entry points and perspectives into the historical themes explored.

Luke Gibbons speaking at the *Mise Éire: Shaping a Nation through Design* conference, 2016.

Our engagement programmes have always been grounded in the Museum's collections and exhibitions. We are inspired by the power of objects to stimulate dialogue, to connect us with the past, enable deeper understandings of and engage us in complex histories. One of the most evocative segments of the series of talks that constituted *The Archaeology of a Decade of War* was when battlefield archaeologist Dr Tony Pollard explained how a small, insignificant metal medallion in France assisted in identifying the remains of an unknown soldier who died at the Battle of Fromelles, which took place on 19th – 20th July 1916. Subsequent research and excavation led to the identification and re-internment of the remains of nearly 400 Australians who died in this battle.

The power of even the smallest and seemingly unremarkable objects was evident in *Mise Éire: Shaping a Nation through Design,* the two-day conference held in 2016 to explore national identities through the lens of craft and design. As part of his keynote address, artist and writer Edmund de Waal passed around three small shards of 11th century Chinese porcelain for the audience to handle during a mesmerising talk on what he described as 'his journey into obsession' with porcelain. Inspired by one of the Museum's most well-loved artefacts, the Fonthill Vase, de Waal's talk framed design, craft and national identity through a global lens.

The concept of stepping back and taking a broader view also informed the planning of these conferences and talks. It was critical to look at the wider contexts, and in doing so bring the overlooked, forgotten or marginalised histories to light. So, for example, we strove to include wider perspectives by considering Ireland's role in World War I or the 1916 Rising in the context of European nationalism in the early years of the 20th century. When Dr Judith Devlin spoke at the conference entitled *Remembering World War One in Europe, 1914-2014,* we were given an opportunity to understand how the Great War was remembered and commemorated from the Soviet perspective. When the historian and diplomat Altay Cengizer spoke at the *Soldiers and Civilians: Experiences and Memories of the First World War* conference, we were offered the Turkish viewpoint on WWI.

As a key strand of our engagement with audiences, the conferences aim to stimulate and encourage dialogue, and it is always rewarding when the Museum Education team receives informative and positive feedback from conference attendees. Sometimes audience members have responded by subsequently making donations to the Museum's collections. One such example followed the conference held in February 2014 on commemoration and memory, *Remembering World War One in Europe, 1914-2014*. Among those attending were sisters Margaret and Patricia Horne, then in their nineties. At the end of the event they approached us about donating objects, including a photograph album belonging to their father Lieutenant Andrew J. Horne, which they had in their possession for decades. He had been a medical doctor serving in Gallipoli in 1915-16. His photograph album documenting this time and his subsequent service during the war became a key artefact in the exhibition

***The Volunteers* mural by Joe Caslin at Clarke Square, Collins Barracks.**


RAMC

entitled *Recovered Voices: The Stories of the Irish at War, 1914-15.* In 2018, the Museum received a donation of an Irish Women's Franchise League badge following the *Votes for Women: Suffrage and Citizenship* exhibition and related programmes marking the centenary of the Representation of the People Act in 1918. These donations enhance the Museum's collections and are an expression of the dialogue and relationship between the general public, our communities and the Museum.

Lieutenant Horne's photographs from Gallipoli were a key stimulus for post-primary students who participated in the Museum's year-long *Gallipoli Centenary Education Project*, which culminated in a conference for the five participating schools in 2015. The following year, some of these students travelled with us and their teachers to Birmingham, where they presented their research at an international schools' conference as part of the *Gallipoli Centenary Education Project*.

Objects were at the heart of the conference held in 2017, marking 20 years since the opening of the Museum at Collins Barracks. Entitled *A National Health Service?* this event explored the social impacts of museums. Artist Joe Caslin was one of those who spoke about the power of objects to connect and ground us. His large-scale mural, *The Volunteers*, on display in Clarke Square in 2017, depicted another artefact from the *Recovered Voices* exhibition. This was a leather belt belonging to Dubliner T.F. Gill, a member of the Irish Volunteers who subsequently joined the British Army to fight in WWI. Gill wore his Irish Volunteer belt as a British soldier, and displayed badges he collected from other soldiers he fought alongside during the war, before returning to Ireland in 1919. This object provoked Caslin to consider how Gill's 'simple action of placing various national emblems together as a joint insignia is powerful and worthy'.

Key to the Museum's approach are the aims of interrogating accepted histories and enabling new ways of seeing and understanding the events of the Decade of Centenaries. Linked to this is its responsibility and desire to encourage new research into the collections and their contexts. At the conference in 2018 entitled *Deeds not Words? Assessing a Century of Change,* the audience was privileged to hear a range of new research, including design historian and PhD candidate Miriam Phelan's interrogation of how Roger Casement's clothing and body have been enacted, performed and curated to communicate the changing attitudes to male identity and sexuality during the Decade of Centenaries. Dr Rosaleen McDonagh spoke powerfully at the same event on Traveller feminism over the past century, and on how the diversity of Traveller women's voices has been omitted from Irish history.

Introducing new research and how it can reinterpret our surroundings was a raison d'être for *The Archaeology of a Decade of War* series. The talks brought to the public what was for many a new way of analysing historic events, that is, through the lens of landscape and conflict

archaeology. Dr Heather Montgomery, in her talk about WWI training trenches in Ireland, and Dr Damian Shiels and Muiris de Buitléir's presentations exploring the landscapes and buildings of the War of Independence and the Civil War demonstrated how history is often all around us in urban and rural settings as we go about our daily lives.

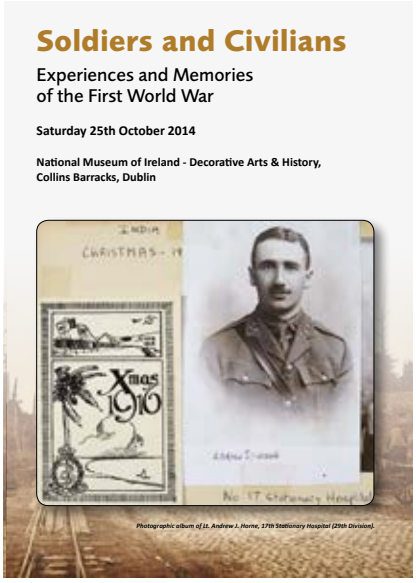
These events attracted large audiences and in many cases were booked to capacity. Typically they brought together a wide range of people, some coming in groups or as individuals. They represented a broad range of backgrounds and ages, from second and third-level students to retirees. From the lively discussions and debates held at most of these events, it was evident that the sense of connection to this history was a strong common thread, which seemed to grow deeper as the Decade evolved.

An interesting example of how audiences enriched and informed the programmes arose through the process of taking bookings for *The Archaeology of a Decade of War* talks. This routine administration revealed to us the motivations of those coming to the talks, where

Dr Barra Ó Donnabháin, UCC, speaking at the *Archaeology of a Decade of War* lecture series.

their interest lay, and, in this way, they influenced the details that would be explored in talks. Through our correspondence with those booking places, and evaluation forms and emails after the lectures, we noticed the strong link and emotional response people felt about the topics explored. Those corresponding mentioned direct ancestral links to those who participated, or were caught up in that decade of conflict. Attendees at the two talks about the 1916 Easter Rising communicated their connections ahead of the talks by historian Lar Joye and archaeologist Franc Myles. Franc responded to a request from one attendee by mentioning, during his talk, particular details about attendee Darina Tully's grandfather, James O'Connor, who had been with The O'Rahilly and retreated with him through the buildings of Moore Street. The high attendance and emotional response to these particular talks was also reflective of deep public feelings and debate over the future of the landscapes and buildings where these events occurred. Leila O'Flaherty explained when booking a place at Professor Joanna Brück's lecture, that her uncle 'was interned at Frongoch, so I have a special interest in that particular lecture'. This theme of ancestral links continued through to the last lecture, delivered by Dr Barra O'Donnabháin, about Spike Island. Attendees remarked how grandfathers and great-grandfathers had been imprisoned there. Attendees were also anxious to share the history they knew with us. When booking a place at a talk by Karl Brady and Charise McKeon about the shipwrecks of WWI in Irish waters, a man

Kitchen at 17 Moore Street.



***Soldiers and Civilians: Experiences and Memories of the First World War* exhibition conference programme, 2014.**

***The Howth Gun-running: 100 Years On* exhibition conference programme, 2014.**

explained his connection to these sites by recounting the history of a ship his relative served on, the *SS Saint Barchan*, which was torpedoed off County Down, on 21st October 1918 by UB-94. The next day German submarines were told to stand down. Whilst some people came to the talks alone, others were with family members. Angela Rainsford wrote, 'My great-grandfather was killed in action in WWI and is buried in French Flanders. I've visited the battlefields twice and am very much looking forward to the talk on May 26th. The booking is for myself, my two daughters and a friend.' The above information shared by participants with the Museum illustrates their rationale for attending the event and their commitment to discovering more about the time period. They reflect the immense personal interest in family history and genealogy generated during the Decade of Commemorations.

These shared personal stories have the potential to resonate with us, connecting us with the people whose lives were impacted by these events. There is an immediacy and an intimacy to these testimonies which can be poignant and moving. There have been moments at the conferences at Collins Barracks, when speakers, and those speaking from the floor, brought the audience close to tears. When Dr Rory Childers gave a personal and heartfelt talk on the story of his grandparents, Erskine and Molly Childers at *The Howth Gun Running 100 Years On* conference on 26th July 2014, there was a profound sense in the room that we were privileged to hear him speak; all the more so when we heard subsequently that he had died just over a month later, in August 2014.

Tess Carroll from the film Big Jim created by students of Larkin Community College in partnership with the National Museum of Ireland.

Later that year Dr Elaine Byrne spoke at the *Soldiers and Civilians: Experiences and Memories of the First World War* conference about her great-grandfather, Sylvester James Cummins. Cummins served in the 9th battalion of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers following John Redmond's call. He survived the Battle of the Somme and returned to Ireland briefly before leaving for England, where some years later he took his own life. As Byrne noted, 'He didn't die in the War, but he died because of the War'. Dr Byrne's grandmother kept this story of her father secret until she was 70 years old, so strong was her sense of shame that her father had fought in WWI and subsequently took his own life. Byrne's talk also referenced her granduncle on her father's side of the family, who fought alongside Michael Collins in the War of Independence. In contrast to her great-grandfather, this man has been celebrated in her family. Byrne's family history, while deeply personal and tragic, is not unique; similar stories were revealed as the Decade progressed.

In shaping these events we endeavoured to include contributors who might provide other ways of seeing the events of the Decade. When historian and singer Justine Murphy led the audience in singing songs of the suffrage movement at the *Deeds not Words? Assessing a Century of Change* conference in 2018, it enabled us as audience members feel a connection with those activists of one hundred years ago. In 2014, at the *Soldiers and Civilians: Experiences and Memories of the First World War* conference, composers and musicians George Higgs and Robbie Blake invited the audience to crack Morse Code as part of their

presentation on a collaborative project with the Museum entitled *The Great War Signal Corps.* With the aid of a handout, we were able to decipher the letters V-O-I-C-E which George tapped out. At the same conference, curator Lar Joye spoke about a project the Museum would collaborate on in 2015, with multidisciplinary company ANU productions. This exceptional and ground-breaking project entitled *Pals – The Irish at Gallipoli* told the stories of the 7th Battalion of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers through immersive theatre. These young men left Collins Barracks in 1915 to fight at Gallipoli, where in just a few months many of them had lost their lives. The site-specific play ran during 2015 and for many who witnessed it, it was an extraordinary experience which left a profound impact. At the 2013 conference *Dublin Lockout–Impact and Objects* we screened two short films made by students at Larkin Community College. Both films were also shown in the Museum's exhibition, *1913 Lockout: Impact & Aftermath*, a first for the National Museum. One film features a student's reflections on the school's participation in the nationwide *1913 Tapestry* project led by SIPTU and the National College of Art and Design. Dubliner Tess Carroll reminisces in the second short film on meeting Jim Larkin as a young girl working in the Grant Barnett umbrella factory, Dublin. These exceptional moments enabled audiences to connect with the subject matter and themes under discussion and offered alternative ways for us to understand and connect with the interwoven, complex histories of the Decade.

Listening back to the recordings of many of these conferences, it is noticeable how often, just before an event is about to start, one is aware of the hum of many voices in the room, which is evocative of the sound an orchestra makes just before a performance. Then, from the moment the first contributor begins, that energy and the buzz of chatter transform into debate, and moments of enlightenment, inspiration, or resonance ensue.

The very first conference held in 2012, *Understanding 1916–Approaching 1916,* posed the question of how Ireland should commemorate the then upcoming hundredth anniversary of the Rising in the context of that and other centenaries, in what would become known as the Decade of Centenaries. Much anger and frustration about the then recent financial crisis were expressed by our audience that day, and those present argued for a centenary programme which could be inclusive, focusing on young people and featuring diverse voices. This conference, and all the centenary events that followed, aimed to provide a relevant and appropriate space for an exchange of diverse views and the sharing of knowledge on the challenges and complexities of commemoration. We hope those who attended Museum events will not alone remember the histories of the places and people, but feel that they had space to question and reflect, and be part of wider public discourse on that turbulent period.

As we come to the end of the Decade, and there are new issues and concerns to address, our resolve for the Museum to be that place and space where people can gather together to learn, connect, and share knowledge and history, is stronger than ever.

Chapter 6

Telling our stories:

iCAN and the *Our Irish Women* exhibition

Lorna Elms

In 2008, the Education Department at the National Museum of Ireland (NMI) established the Irish Community Archive Network (iCAN) to support and facilitate communities to collect, curate and share their local history and heritage on community archive websites. Ten years on, the iCAN communities were invited to collaborate with the NMI and Local Authority Heritage Officers in the co-creation of an exhibition. *Our Irish Women (OIW)* commemorated both the vital contribution of women to Irish life and society and the centenary of the Representation of the People Act, which extended a limited form of suffrage to women in Ireland for the first time. The exhibition featured women from local areas whose extraordinary lives and achievements had far-reaching impacts, and whose stories were at risk of being omitted from the national historical narrative.

In keeping with the community-led and collaborative ethos of iCAN, this chapter is framed around the voices of iCAN member communities and partners. Their thoughts and views provide valuable insights into iCAN's model of community participation which is rooted in values of collaboration, inclusion, ownership and trust. Their spoken words describe how these values informed the development of the *Our Irish Women* exhibition and how participation in co-creative projects, like OIW, stimulate personal and community development and foster stronger and more equal partnerships between the Museum and local communities.

iCAN: Collaborating with Communities

In understanding how the *Our Irish Women* (OIW) exhibition was developed, it is helpful to examine the values and principles that underpin iCAN's model of participation and collaboration and its evolving practice over the past ten years.

Since its establishment in 2008, iCAN has grown to incorporate 25 local volunteer groups in the west, south and east of Ireland. These communities are facilitated and supported, in an inclusive and democratic way, to collect, record and present their local history and heritage online. In the voice of one iCAN member responding to the 2018 Participant Feedback Survey: 'The iCAN approach cleverly harnesses the … knowledge of the small community historians, who are now bringing to the fore much of Ireland's previously hidden and undocumented heritage.'

Member groups are motivated to join the network by a shared sense of responsibility to document and preserve their local history and heritage, and a shared belief that remembering and learning from the past is important. As Mary Mullin, Moylough Heritage commented: 'To understand ourselves we need to know our past. And you know it's to look backwards that you may go forward.' iCAN communities acknowledge that through dialogue and shared experiences they are documenting the past within their local context to tell a more nuanced and textured history which can shape collective and individual identities. In the words of Brige Woodword, Louisburgh-Killeen Heritage: 'What we're trying to do within the iCAN movement is to provoke conversations so that we can get history written down and documented.'

Through iCAN, the Museum is adopting an inclusive approach that requires institutional trust and respect for a community's ownership of its past and the telling of its own story. As Marie Mannion, County Galway Heritage Officer put it: 'it's giving the local voice and the local history a voice ….that fits into a local, regional, national and international picture.'

iCAN is founded on a strong set of values and partnerships between the communities, the NMI and the Heritage Officers. The Local Authority partnerships provide expertise, funding and resourcing which has helped grow and expand iCAN over the past ten years:

> The [iCAN] partnership has been so successful, we all believe in it which is really important, but we're also committed to it … we're very optimistic – this is a project that's here to stay. (Mary Mullin)

The values of collaboration, respect and trust underpin these relationships. In the 2018 Participant Feedback Survey, one community member noted: 'From the outset we have felt valued as a community group with intimate knowledge of our local area and its history. We have been supported and listened to.' Marie Mannion observed: 'It's very much … a

partnership project and we all bring different skill sets to the table. We constantly challenge what we're doing, and we constantly ask, is it right? Or do we need to change? But also, there's a trust between the organisations.'

Ownership and inclusion are the other key values embedded in the iCAN model. The programme is driven by community needs, interests and expectations, and decisions related to iCAN's vision and ambitions are made collectively and democratically. One participant remarked: 'No decision to improve or grow the network [has been] taken without full consultation with all members.' (Participant Feedback Survey, 2018) iCAN members also invite others in their communities to get involved in documenting the history and heritage of their area through projects, events and activities, sometimes resulting in the wider community getting behind community initiatives. As another volunteer explained:

> Sharing the rich history and heritage of Oughterard online led to a renewed interest and pride in our area. This resulted in the significant renovation and development of the town's courthouse, now a thriving heritage and exhibition centre at the heart of the community. (David Collins, Oughterard Heritage Group)

Having built up a way of working that is democratic and inclusive within a collaborative and supportive environment, iCAN communities were well-equipped to participate as equal partners in the co-creation of the commemorative exhibition, *Our Irish Women.*

Co-creating the *Our Irish Women* Exhibition

The *Our Irish Women* exhibition comprised seventeen graphically designed banners, each telling the story of a local woman or group of women that iCAN members felt had made a significant contribution to sport, music, science, the Second World War, Irish Independence, community, women's rights, philanthropy, public health and the arts, over the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. The exhibition was co-funded by the NMI and the Galway County Council Heritage Office and following its display in the National Museum of Ireland – Country Life, it toured to each participating locality during 2019.

The exhibition featured women from across all strata of Irish society and included those who 'had made a difference in their respective communities. So, it was very, very personal, if you like, to the individual groups.' (Frances Holohan) Participants were also motivated to create *Our Irish Women* to counteract the invisibility of women in the Irish historical narrative:

> The humble women in Ireland … who go unsung day in, day out, over the last how many years and who have done so much good for the world, not even just their communities - for the world - and are not documented …. Those are the type of people we need to remember. (Brige Woodward)

Violet Florence Martin (1852 – 1915), novelist and suffragette, who featured in the *Our Irish Women* exhibition, 2018 – 2019.

iCAN members involved their wider community in researching and deciding on which women would represent their locality. Those selected included Aggie Whyte Ryan, the 1954 All-Ireland Senior Fiddle Champion; Lily McNicholas, a volunteer nurse awarded an MBE for 'gallant and distinguished services' during the World War II; Sister Dr Hilary Lyons, a missionary nun and doctor who worked in Sierra Leone for 42 years; Violet Martin, a novelist and committed suffragette who co-founded the Munster Women's Franchise League in 1911 and Niamh Heffernan, a second level student and All-Ireland U-16 Camogie Winner and World Handball Champion.

During initial discussions, participants quickly reached consensus on the theme of the exhibition, reflecting iCAN's ethos of community ownership. As Deirdre Burns, County Wicklow Heritage Officer, recalled: '*Our Irish Women* was something everybody could readily agree to. It just struck a

Máirín Fahy, Ballinakill, Co. Galway with 300-year-old reproduction Stradivarius fiddle owned by Aggie Whyte Ryan, with Frances Holohan, Abbey & District Heritage Group, Co. Galway and iCAN member

Sister Dr. Hilary Lyons (1924 – 2020), a missionary nun and doctor who worked in Sierra Leone for 42 years, who featured in the *Our Irish Women* exhibition, 2018 – 2019.

chord, and everybody had something they could contribute.' The groups were adamant that they not only wanted to remember and celebrate the lives of local women, they also wanted to acknowledge women's efforts to bring about societal change: 'We don't always have a concept that, you know, generations before us have struggled, and have had to work and look for and maybe agitate ... for the things that we now take as totally for granted', said Frances Holohan, Abbey & District Heritage.

Working Together for the Benefit of All

Using the iCAN model of participation, the NMI was keen to explore how it could work with the communities and the Heritage Officers in the creation of an exhibition. While the iCAN groups were used to working collaboratively, this was the first time they had co-created an exhibition where there was a need to problem-solve and maximise opportunities collectively, while retaining ownership of their individual contributions. As Mary Mullin said: 'This is a real co-operative kind of an experience...there's actually a real bond between the people... and there's always a great sharing of information or help – you know it's real co-operation.'

Lily McNicholas (1909 – 1998), enlisted as a reserve in Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service and was awarded an MBE for her gallant and distinguished service, and featured in the *Our Irish Women* exhibition, 2018 – 2019.

The NMI set out to foster this collaborative approach and to facilitate a learning environment where people listened to each other and where everyone's contribution was valued. Working together in this way resulted in a generosity around the sharing of knowledge, skills and experience, which was, as Marie Mannion observed: 'hugely important because … I have a certain knowledge and expertise, and the Museum has huge knowledge and expertise, so we all have bits of the jigsaw, and by coming together with communities you're really strong.'

This approach is illustrative of the 'meitheal' tradition where everyone works together to achieve a common goal according to shared values. As one participant explained: 'Our iCAN member groups identify with each other's aims and hurdles, we pool ideas, training and solutions and enjoy an amazing camaraderie along the way.' (Participant Feedback Survey, 2018) This model of collaboration also provided participants with multiple opportunities for learning and applying new skills to different tasks as they worked collectively and individually. One community member remarked:

> Activity-based learning is really, really so important. Being out there, being involved, feeling it, seeing it, experiencing it … Experiential learning is hugely, hugely important for people. (Frances Holohan)

According to community members, participation in the OIW exhibition contributed to their individual and community wellbeing. Those working on OIW reported feeling more positive about themselves and as a result, more connected to and less isolated in their community. As Mary Mullin observed: 'In that coming together, [the project] developed a sense of value in the local experience, a sense of identity and a sense of pride and a sense of belonging'. The experience of being active participators in the history-making process and shaping how their history and heritage are presented and shared was transformative for some group members and their communities:

> Being part of iCAN has changed my life. I have learnt skills … that can be applied to all aspects of my personal and professional life. The contacts made throughout the network have begun new friendships that will last a lifetime. Having the opportunity to engage our local community and our diaspora … has strengthened our community life. Bridging the generational gap between our senior community members and our youth through community-based projects [such as OIW] has been a highlight. (Participant Feedback Survey, 2018)

iCAN awarded 'Best Network of Archives' by Community Archives & Heritage Group (UK & Ireland) in 2020.

The OIW participants keenly acknowledged the role played by the Museum in supporting their agency and capacity to create this exhibition. They valued the Museum as a trusted and reliable source with expertise that covered exhibition development, programme design and delivery and knowledge derived from its stewardship of the material culture related to the Decade of Centenaries:

> A lot of people would look to the Museum to guide the way of what's appropriate and what can be done. So I think it's this kind of leadership role … I think that's very important, particularly with commemorations … people feel safer when the National Museum is involved …. It's not going to be biased; it's going to be objective. (Deirdre Burns)

One of the many benefits coming out of OIW for the Museum was the way in which it extended its reach into local towns and villages around the country in a meaningful way. Through touring OIW from one local area to another, the Museum was able to engage with communities in their local villages and towns. As one member noted:

> We were just a little dot, you won't find us maybe even on the map in southeast Galway and … we got such support from the Museum that we were able to do an exhibition like this and bring it to people on their own doorsteps. And that was hugely, hugely important.' (Frances Holohan)

There are beneficial outcomes that can emerge from co-creative projects such as OIW. Through iCAN, the NMI and its partners established a discursive and inclusive way for communities to gather and curate information. This approach was adopted for the OIW exhibition, reflecting the importance of co-creating knowledge using a social-based approach where memory, personal experience and local knowledge are valued and fore fronted. This model of collaboration can not only enrich the Museum's knowledge of the national collections, but it also enables communities to engage with and share their local history and heritage with a wider public:

> From my experience … it is a mutually beneficial relationship with both parties learning from each other; the community groups are learning new and exciting technical skills and the National Museum is expanding its knowledge of local history and heritage from people with generational knowledge of their localities on the ground. The Museum is providing an avenue for this local knowledge to be delivered to a wider audience. (Participant Feedback Survey, 2018)

One of the most significant benefits for the NMI arising from the OIW collaboration is learning the importance of being a 'listening museum'. Listening is a key aspect of collaborative work and means being prepared to change both direction and ways of working. Listening means not only taking on board the opinions and needs of others but acting on them. Creating an open and safe environment to enable full participation while facilitating and listening to many voices, has been the biggest, yet most valuable challenge posed by this collaborative model.

Gilt metal box, an example of the gift distributed to 2,321,553 men wearing the King's uniform on Christmas Day 1914, from H.R.H. The Princess Mary's Sailors' and Soldiers' Christmas Fund. HA:1919.100.1

Talking about the Future

Through conversations with iCAN communities about their participation in future commemorations, OIW participants wanted the NMI to provide greater access to those objects in the national collections related to the history of their own locality. They strongly advocated more opportunities to have loans of locally donated and locally relevant objects for display within safe and environmentally protected local venues. While acknowledging the challenges associated with this undertaking in the absence of adequate resourcing, they were keen to stress the impact displays of such objects would have on strengthening local community identity:

> There is an issue with donating local objects to the Museum that we may not see again, so we lose that local connection to the story behind that object and its historical relevance which means so much to us. Obviously [artefacts are] in safe storage (in the Museum), but people don't see them. So, we'd very much welcome that connection. (Hazel Morrison, Moycullen Heritage Group)

Another suggestion was to facilitate the three-dimensional scanning of items in the NMI collections that could be digitally displayed on the iCAN community archive websites, making details of objects available to the public in an accessible way and at a relatively modest cost. It was suggested that the NMI could play a significant role in funding, coordinating and providing the expertise for this process.

The mutual benefit around information sharing was also highlighted by OIW participants. They felt that the OIW content and wider content collated through the iCAN programme can offer unique, place-specific contexts for and stories about people and objects in their local areas. They stressed the potential for this information and knowledge to be shared, not only with the National Museum of Ireland, but with museums around the country:

> If there was an object found in a place, local people could say 'well, that field used to be known as X Y or Z,' and add some of the local history and maybe oral history … having this two-way learning with museums … that could be really interesting. (Deirdre Burns)

What participants wanted was an extension of iCAN to include other communities around Ireland all connecting with one another, generating multiple narratives based on shared experiences. They voiced their support for a model of participation that is based on a collaborative, democratic and a principled way of working which facilitates communities to be creators, curators, editors, moderators and educators of their local history and heritage, where they can tell the story of their people and place in their own way.

Chapter 7

Beyond Sackville Street and the Somme: Recalling the Rural Experience

Tom Doyle

With a view to recalling and commemorating the rural experience throughout the Decade of Centenaries commemorations, the National Museum of Ireland (NMI) programmed a series of events in 2016 entitled *Beyond Sackville Street and the Somme*. These events, which took place at NMI – Country Life in County Mayo, provided an opportunity to explore some of the most turbulent years in Irish history from a local and largely rural perspective. Focusing on seismic events such as the 1916 Rising and World War I, *Beyond Sackville Street and the Somme* reflected on the experiences of people in the west of Ireland through their memories, stories and personal accounts. It explored how national and global events fundamentally affected people's lives at a local level during this period and beyond. In consultation with local community organisations and with access to national programming through NMI – Decorative Arts & History, the *Beyond Sackville Street and the Somme* programme of events primarily ran from October to December 2016 and included talks by national and local curators and historians, as well as members of the Irish Community Archive Network (iCAN). Central to the success of the programme was the Museum's long-term relationship with Mayo Genealogy Group, as was the role of the arts, in particular theatre and film, in engaging audiences and facilitating discussion in communities where divergent ideas about the past endure.

The Rural Perspective

At a preliminary event at NMI – Country Life in April 2016, held to coincide with the centenary of the 1916 Rising, curator Noel Campbell delivered a talk that explored the preparations for the Rising from the perspective of County Mayo, and of Castlebar in particular. While centring on the local story, the talk was also mindful of the national perspective. This event set the scene for the programme that followed, which focused on the rural voice and how national and global events at that time shaped Mayo's future. This emphasis on local stories resonated with the audience, as well as those who were consulted on the overall programme. Dymphna Joyce, a member of Mayo Genealogy Group, recalled watching centenary events in Dublin and feeling empowered that 'we could put on an event as well. The rural involvement was important to us. These were not the stories you get about generals or anything like that,' she recalls, 'they were about our own uncles and our aunts'.

The Value of Collaboration

In successfully undertaking a programme such as *Beyond Sackville Street and the Somme*, it was important for the Museum to consult and collaborate with local community organisations such as Mayo Genealogy Group. This group already had a relationship with the National Museum of Ireland – Country Life. Originally coming together through their love of genealogy and history, a desire to learn about the past and to share their knowledge and experience with others, the group has, over ten years, come to view the Museum as an enabling space in which to discuss and debate shared – and sometimes contested – local histories.

Members of Mayo Genealogy Group from their promotional film.

However, they have also begun to see the Museum as a social space in which to meet friends and like-minded individuals over a cup of tea in the Museum café after the more 'formal' activities had concluded. As member Billy Lyons remarked, 'It's afterwards. That's when the real conversation starts.' This multi-layered approach has been crucial to the development of a symbiotic relationship between the Museum and the local community which have come to value it as a safe space to share and record stories of rural involvement in, and responses to, events such as the 1916 Rising. Other areas of debate have included the impact of the social, cultural and economic changes during that period, the changing role of women and the comparative experiences of rural and urban Ireland.

Mayo Heritage and Diaspora Day

The Museum's engagement with Mayo Genealogy Group in developing *Beyond Sackville Street and the Somme* culminated in one of the central events in the programme, *Mayo Heritage and Diaspora Day*. This event featured a talk by Edel Healy, curator of the Jackie Clarke Library in Ballina, on the library's 1916 archive collections. Dr Fiona White, lecturer in history and geography, and Dr Yvonne McDermott, lecturer in archaeology and history, both at Atlantic Technological University (ATU), Galway Campus, addressed the national, local, cultural and political contexts and conflicts at work during the period and a presentation by Mayo Genealogy Group discussed their research project. In addition, Museum curator Sandra Heise provided a glimpse into how the exhibition *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* was created. In it she described key objects associated with Easter Week 1916. Her insights provided an understanding of the Museum's institutional approach to creating collections, and the wealth and significance of this particular collection, which continues to be used to tell the story of the Irish people from a multitude of perspectives. Objects bring historical figures to life. They reveal stories and offer tangible links to the men, women and children of 1916. This talk was a reminder of the capacity of objects not only to encourage and stimulate historical empathy and curiosity about the past, but also to enable the past to continue to speak to the present, as local communities remember past generations. 'When people come in [to the Museum], they can see everything that was here from yesteryear.' says Billy Lyons. 'If you want to see the living conditions, the housing, the way they worked, the implements, it's all there. The vision is there.' Most importantly, adds Dymphna Joyce, 'it's the emotional connection to these symbols of the past'.

The Role of the Arts

Through its programming, the Education Department at the National Museum of Ireland has consistently incorporated the artistic voice as a vehicle to mediate and reflect history. In the *Beyond Sackville Street and the Somme* programme this approach was effectively used to explore the story of the 1916 Rising and World War I from various perspectives. The work of Carnation Theatre, which staged *Midwives of the Nation* in October 2016, explored the local

and the everyday experience, focusing on individuals who may have been lesser-known characters from a national perspective, but those stories resonated with a local audience. Interactive in nature, *Midwives of the Nation* looked at the contribution of women to the events of 1916. It featured a cast of characters that included dispatchers, doctors, snipers, tea makers and gunrunners. Their performance sought to reveal the hidden history surrounding the role of women, particularly in rural areas, during the revolutionary period.

Initiating discussion and debate through the medium of film formed the basis of the final part of the *Beyond Sackville Street and the Somme* programme. In collaboration with the Irish Film Institute and the Centre for War Studies at Trinity College, The University of Dublin, a series of short films incorporating fiction, live-action, animation and documentary invited audiences to commemorate, celebrate and ruminate on the events of 1916 and its aftermath. In association with the Imperial War Museum, Dr Jennifer Wellington, cultural historian at University College Dublin (UCD), introduced the screening of restored footage of *The Battle of the Somme*, a British propaganda documentary film, originally released in September 1916, to rally civilian support for the war effort. Her talk linked people to the Irish regiments in the British army that went to war, thereby reminding them of their own ancestors. This

Image from the Carnation Theatre production of *Midwives of the Nation*.

Still from the documentary film *The Battle of the Somme*, showing a British soldier carrying a wounded comrade back from the front line.

connection between the rural experience and World War I especially resonated with those in the audience who had family members or acquaintances who served in the War. The film also encouraged discussion around the wider question of how these Irish soldiers were treated on their return. Although predominantly a recruitment video, it was ultimately harrowing for those who viewed it. Aware that those young faces would soon meet their demise, the audience was palpably silent and contemplative when the screening came to an end.

The series of collaborations with community and heritage groups, schools and institutions during 2016 as part of the *Beyond Sackville Street and the Somme* programme played an important role in engaging individuals and rural communities, particularity in the west of Ireland. Through the Museum's engagement and collaboration with local communities, and through the lens of theatre and film, different perspectives and the right conditions for dialogue, were made possible.

A graphic of *After '16* – nine short films inspired by 1916 and its aftermath.

Chapter 8

The Art of Education: Conversations with Creative Uncertainty

Gary Granville

One aspect of the mission of the National Museum of Ireland (NMI) relates to making its collections accessible as a source of learning and enjoyment. The Museum's Education Department, which has responsibility for developing learning programmes and services that are inclusive, responsive and relevant, is therefore integral to this mission. In response to the themes of the Decade of Commemorations, the NMI Education Department developed a series of events and projects intended to enhance young people's experience and understanding. Among these initiatives were the *Gallipoli Centenary Education Project*, the *Commemorating 1916 in Dublin 7* exhibition of students' work at TU Dublin, and *Finding a Voice - the Writer in Residence* project.

In this chapter, Gary Granville, Professor Emeritus at the National College of Art and Design (NCAD), Dublin, and formerly Head of its School of Education, describes and evaluates aspects of these projects, drawing on data collected by the NMI Education Department, and, in particular, on students' responses to the participative programmes. He highlights how the museum experience can nurture empathy, and, by avoiding recourse to a singular, terminal answer, can enrich the learning experience.

Is bás dar liom fós, freagairt
Is beatha fiafraí:
Ragham amú tamall eile
Is chífeam an tír

(For me, any answer means death
All questioning is life:
So let's go astray, let's wander
And explore the world a while)
Seán Ó Ríordáin, 'Guí'

The Decade of Centenaries (2012 - 2023) has provided us with a glimpse of what might be possible when the creative potential of small moments and initiatives is released into a wider frame. The programme of educational events organised by, through and with the National Museum of Ireland (NMI) exemplifies this creativity. The engagement of people, young and old - and the inter-generational dimension is indeed one of the striking features of the work - through the fascination with material objects, tangible evidence of the past has transformed the process of commemoration and remembrance from a traditionally passive and receptive one to an active and unpredictable experience. The Creative Ireland Programme launched in 2017 was directly inspired by the high impact of events shaped by the creative arts staged across the country throughout the 1916 commemorations. That thread of creativity and the arts is one of the defining features of the work of the National Museum in the education component of its commemoration programme.

The work of the National Museum has been central to this process of commemoration. The different forms of engagement that characterise the programme chart exciting and innovative pathways for museums and galleries into the future. I have seen this work in practice both as an observer of programmes such as the *Gallipoli Centenary Education Project* and as a participant in various other projects: the *Moving Statues Project* saw the NMI collaborate with Larkin Community College and with students in NCAD; the *1913 Lockout Tapestry* was a collaboration between the National College of Art and Design, the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), and various community and school groups; the *Stories Between Us Project*, which commenced in 2018, was a collaboration with a community development agency, a primary school, an adult education group and an artist, Janine Davidson.

Students at Larkin Community College working on the *Moving Statues* project.

Three recurring features of the NMI work stand out for me: firstly, the sophisticated and sustained forms of engagement with different communities. These communities are variously composed, incorporating social groupings, geographical locations, virtual communities, ethnic and cultural identities and intergenerational collectives, among others. A second striking feature is the involvement of third parties - artists, historians, 'local heroes' and other personnel who bring expertise, experience and empathy to the projects as facilitators and creative practitioners. And thirdly, the creative, arts-based approach employed consistently in the work of the Museum. This approach is not confined solely to the work of the many artists of various disciplines who have been involved. Rather, it resides in the overall approach to participant engagement and involvement. While no doubt the work of the NMI will be of major significance to museum and gallery educators, this work has implications across the education sector - and most specifically within the formal school system.

Moving Statues **performance at Collins Barracks with puppets inspired by statues on O'Connell Street.**

Panel from the *1913 Tapestry Project.*

There is a patronising tendency in education circles to regard the work of museums and galleries as valuable enrichment experiences but essentially ancillary to the ongoing normal or 'real' education of the school curriculum. On the contrary, the meaning of the museum education process (and for this purpose, the term 'museum' may be taken to include art galleries, cultural centres, theatre workshops and similar such entities) has profound implications for how we understand curriculum and pedagogy.

The power of objects, the magic of material, to generate multiple meanings is not just a wonderful educational tool: it is actually a core element of the essential process of learning. The authenticity of the object - it is what it is, tangible and real - requires each of us to make sense of it on our own terms. For some, this may involve creative engagement, the construction of some kind of imagined world around that object. For others, it may spark curiosity about specific historical or social context and environment of the object. For others again, it may have no purchase, no point of engagement. One of the young people interviewed on their Museum experience spoke of the facility of walking onto the next room and the next, looking at and engaging objects with varying degrees of intensity: moving on until something grabs their attention. The skill of the educator lies in facilitating and guiding these and other personal responses and, most importantly, not imposing any preordained meanings or interpretations.

Engagement with historical artefacts (like engagement with artwork) opens up a network of relationships between people, objects and environment. A crucial feature of such engagement is its capacity to generate two distinct, opposite but equally powerful perspectives: the capacity to become immersed in the meaning of the moment or in contrast, the capacity to stand back and actively observe.

The rich educational experience offered by the encounter with art object or material artefact incorporates three elements: firstly, the constructive and creative act of *seeing*, a visual literacy function that has been neglected in our schooling system; this is shaped, secondly, by the embodied experience of the observer, who brings their own prior experiences, emotions and insights as well as whatever wider contextual knowledge is available to them; and thirdly there is a recognition of the unpredictable and uncertain forces at work in the encounter between two active agents – the engaged observer on the one hand, and the museum artefact, the artwork or the environmental experience on the other.

Student Voice

It is very interesting to hear the comments that students make, as recorded in some of the documentary and evaluative work carried out by the NMI education staff. Students repeatedly refer to two inter-related features of their experience. They talk about the tangibility of material, the impact of objects, whether ordinary, everyday objects like a bicycle or a charred bottle, or more explicitly symbolic and evocative totems like a torn flag. They also refer to the range of items, where they were located in the Museum space and crucially, the flexibility they as students had to pass by, ignore or move on from items that did not hold their interest. One student spoke of the process of going from room to room, noting the different items but consciously waiting for something to rise up and grab hold of his imagination.

Two students (Liz and Shauna, the Irish Community Archive Network (iCAN) programme), reflecting on their Museum engagement as compared with school, said they really enjoyed their experience in the 1916 commemoration: '... with school,' said Liz, 'it's kind of like books and you're sitting at a desk and you kind of just have to learn it but with the Museum you can get a first-hand look at things and you can physically interact with it as well'. Shauna spoke of how she likes history but finds the school experience unsatisfactory: 'they don't do much, it's more just learn it and then do exams on it which I don't find easy ... Like, I could do better, but it's just reading and writing so I can't do it to the best of my ability.'

Another student, Alex, in Larkin Community College, reflected on her engagement with the Museum:

> you don't get the chance to learn that stuff in history [lessons in school]. And you don't get to choose what you want to learn in history either – like you have to follow the curriculum... the way the Museum has the different exhibitions, like you can take your time going through them and understanding. And I just love the way they have it really, like the different rooms. It's like you're walking through history in a way ... it's sort of like you're walking through a story if you ask me.

***Stories Between Us* workshop.**

In an intergenerational project (*Stories Between Us*), one older participant recalled how, when she was young and living close to the National Gallery in Dublin, she and her friends would go into the gallery to play. They would slide on the polished wooden floors through the interconnecting rooms until the attendants would chase them out of the building. There is a touching irony in the fact that she was now retelling the tale within the National Museum and that such transgressive behaviour was now accommodated in the cultural institution.

A recurring aspect of the NMI programme is the provision of 'choice' for participants. This was explicitly presented as a theme for study in the *Proclaiming a Republic* exhibition programme. In the support materials produced by the NMI's Education team, there was a recurring motif of choice-making: students were challenged and encouraged by Museum educators and guides to imagine themselves variously as a boy in Fianna Éireann, as a volunteer at Easter 1916, as a British military officer, and were asked to assess the range of choices open to them and to explain the choice they might have made. That creative process of imaginative role-playing fosters the capacity to empathise as well as to exercise agency.

Choice is also implicit in the provision of interactive options that allow participants to pause, investigate and select certain lines to follow, or to move on to other items that may be of greater interest. The importance of the voice of the student in the formation of education policy and school administration is widely accepted nowadays but facilitating that voice in curriculum terms is more difficult. The work of the NMI exemplifies how student autonomy in learning can be facilitated through structured options and choices.

The unpredictability of the process is where the magic lies. That unpredictability and uncertainty is an example of what the education theorist Gert Biesta has called 'the beautiful risk' of education. Implicit in the work of museum engagement evidenced in the Decade of Centenaries, is the differentiated responses of participants. These different experiences are each of equal value - there is no 'right' response and there is no hierarchy of engagement. In this respect, museum education manifests the essential qualities of an arts education. And it is no accident that so many of the Decade of Centenaries interventions employ the techniques of the arts and, in many cases, the disciplines and personnel of the arts, in drama, visual art, music or other domains.

The insights we can glean from the experience of the Museum and, by extension, similar structured programmes in galleries and other cultural centres should be addressed in terms of education policy, curriculum design and pedagogical practice.

Education and Schooling

Education policies invariably tend to eliminate the essential ambiguities of education. Policies, by their nature, map out a universal model within which all constituent elements must operate. No matter how flexible they might try to be, singular policies with singular sets of aims and outcomes implicitly demand or at least imply a singular route towards those ends. This is the recurring dilemma of curriculum development: how to foster the magic moments of learning within the strictures of a national policy programme. In this respect, education practice has much to learn from the creative practices of museums and galleries and the wider context of arts practice.

No single school could ever hope to match the resources held by the National Museum. But the real issue is not the quality or quantity of resources: rather, it is the purpose, the approach and the form of engagement with such resources as are available.

How people relate to the artefacts and experiences in the museum and the gallery is a model of how the broader thrust of education might evolve. Recent education policy has been dominated by preoccupations with literacy and with prescriptive templates such as predefined learning outcomes. There are valid reasons for this of course but unfortunately

they tend to produce crude and reductive practices. Literacy for instance has been reduced to purely functional capacities of interpreting written or numeric texts. The concept of visual literacy, if it is recognised at all, is viewed as an inessential attribute, a purely aesthetic frill. 'Learning outcomes' instead of setting out broad purposes of learning tend to be specified with excruciating granularity: the anticipated learning outcomes become the operational curriculum and exclusive assessment criteria. The provision of detailed marking schemes in our examination-dominated post-primary system reduces further the discretion of the teacher in addressing the emerging needs of the students.

While the experience of the museum cannot be replicated in the daily classroom, some aspects of what operates effectively in the museum context can indeed be equally productive in classroom use. Museum education, as demonstrated by the NMI programme, is a creative process and the practice has all the qualities of a good arts education. Moreover, on closer scrutiny, the qualities of a good arts education can be read as the qualities of a good education, *per se*. Five of its features, namely, a tangible product, a focus on emotion, ambiguity, process orientation, and making connections, resonate strongly with the experiences of the NMI programme. They are adapted from *Why our Schools Need the Arts* by American arts educator Jessica Hoffmann Davis, and, as outlined below, describe the qualities of a good general education:

> *Tangible product*: the creation of or engagement with something new, something tangible in the sense of being visible or experienced - to develop capacities of imagination (*what if ...*) and agency (*I/we did this ...*);
>
> *Focus on emotion*: alongside knowledge, the engagement with emotion is central - to develop capacities of expression (*this is how I feel*) and empathy (*this is how you feel*);
>
> *Ambiguity*: in interpretation and in creation, there are blurred edges and different readings - to develop capacities of interpretation (*what I think matters*) and respect (*what you think matters*);
>
> *Process Orientation*: carrying out the task may change the planned direction of the work, introducing new ideas or random accidents - to develop capacities of inquiry (*what do I want to know, how would I do this?*) and reflection (*how am I doing, what next?*);
>
> *Connections*: making links between one's own work and the work of others, between past and present, and between the familiar and the strange - to develop capacities of engagement (*I care about what I'm doing*) and responsibility (*I care about others*).

The process described in that set of qualities is an essentially learner-centred one. It involves open-ended procedures, and unpredictable and uncertain outcomes. The Museum's guides, teachers and facilitators of the NMI's Education programme were engaged in ongoing, open-

ended conversations with the participants. Conversations are a rich source for learning, allowing participants to engage at their own level of intensity and providing space for wandering and wondering, without defined and decisive conclusions. Because contemporary curriculum documents tend to be conceived and written in rational, developmental language shaped by learning outcomes, student 'deliverables' and generic standards, the more rhizomatic and unpredictable pattern of a conversation presents a challenge to conventional educational practice. A conversation such as those generated in a museum or gallery is located somewhere between pedagogy and art. It provides a perfect bridge to active engagement.

The conversations that take place provide a space where tinkering, exploring and 'going astray' can occur in a safe environment and at a pace and scale determined by the student. Moreover, the concern with the present moment, where programmed learning can be suspended and personal space located for the young person, does not preclude engagement with others: in fact, it demands such engagement or relation. An education that sets out, not to achieve pre-set, defined and idealised future outcomes but rather one that enables the student consciously to locate her/him/themself in the present moment requires less imposed direction and control from outside the classroom, and more direct intervention, professional judgement and personal autonomy on the part of the teacher. A truly student-centred, actively learning classroom cultivates an inherently democratic and participatory environment.

Of course, the daily rhythms of school cannot sustain a free-form programme: the need for a coherent curriculum, setting out the parameters and structures of learning over defined periods remains essential to the working of schools as we know them. It is also a requirement to ensure equity of treatment and of experience for all young people across the state, and to ensure there is shared access. However, the seemingly irresistible tendency to track, monitor and specify all components of learning, how that learning is to be processed and, crucially, how it is to be assessed, remains the greatest obstacle to progressive education. The 'teacher-proof' models of curriculum design still implicitly shape much of the education reform movements of recent decades.

There are, however, many reasons to be hopeful. The new primary curriculum, currently under consultation in its draft form, provides an exciting map of the future. The recently introduced Junior Cycle Framework is the most hopeful curriculum development to appear in generations, offering a prospect of liberation from the tyranny of examinations. These positive developments should also find expression in the upcoming review of senior cycle.

Ag Dul Amú—Going Astray

The open-ended conversations prompted by the NMI education programme provide a glimpse of what can be possible for all young people in our schools, not just in our cultural institutions as we know them. As Máire O'Higgins, deputy principal of a key partner school, Larkin Community College, said, 'cultural institutions are schools and schools are cultural institutions'. The NMI Education Department have given us a model of how school and museum partnerships can work to mutual benefit.

The poet Seán Ó Riordáin, cited at the start of this essay, wrote of his fear of the singular, terminal 'answer'. He sought instead the never-ending questions of living, avoiding absolute prescriptions, finding the path by wandering aimlessly and going astray. Making space in the school curriculum to 'go astray' is a great challenge but we now have many good examples of how it can be done.

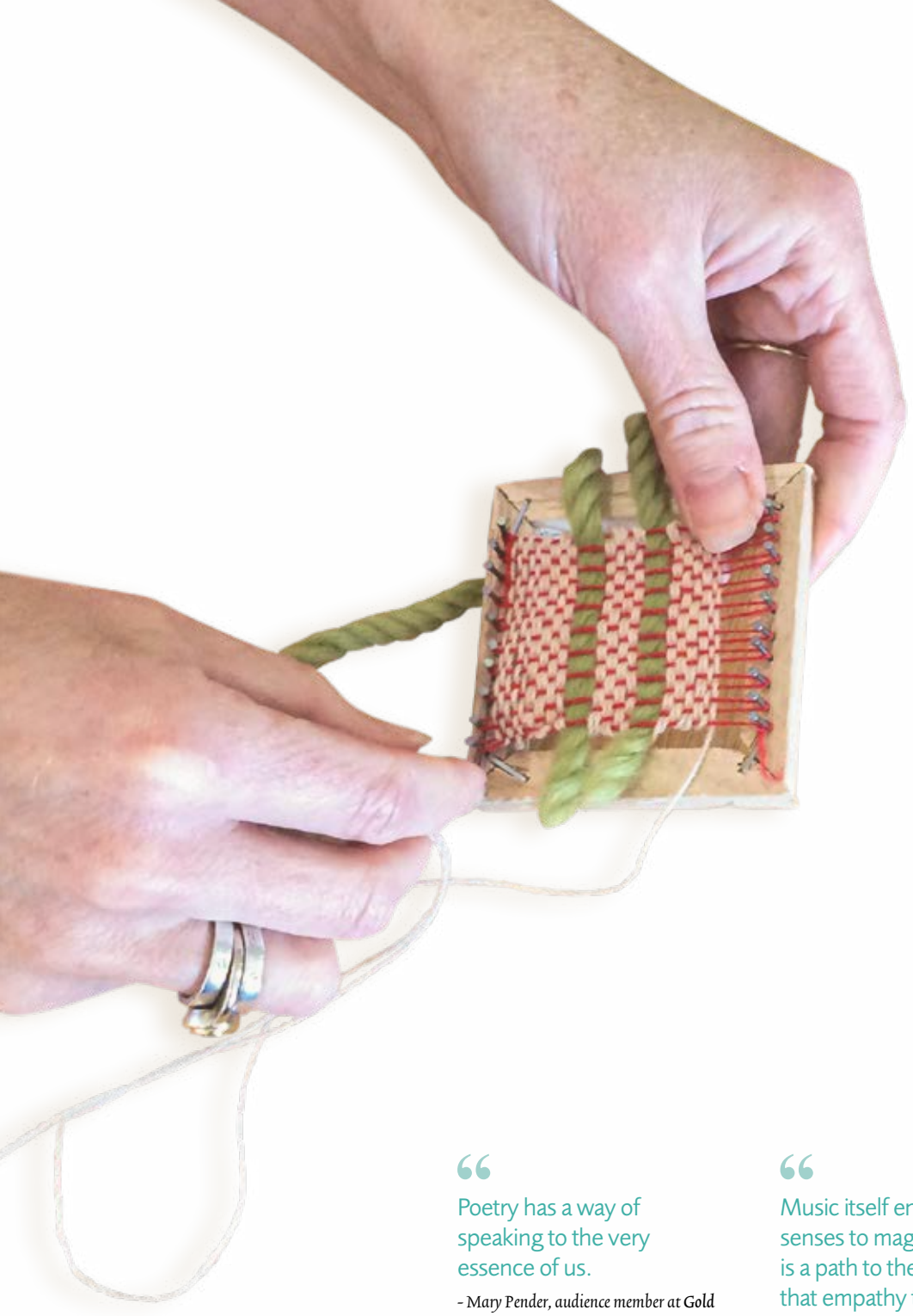


Image of participant at work during a *Shuttle Hive* craft workshop.

“Poetry has a way of speaking to the very essence of us.

- Mary Pender, audience member at Gold Air and the Blue: A Celebration of Irish Women Poets

“Music itself engages our senses to magnify emotion. It is a path to the past and evokes that empathy that we may not intellectually understand.

- Sylvia O’Brien, soprano and performer at Sounding Out: A Concert of Women’s Music

Section 3

Making Connections - Museums and the Arts

Chapter 9

The Shuttle Hive: A Century of Rising Threads

Alison Conneely

In 2018 the National Museum of Ireland (NMI) and the Design and Crafts Council Ireland (DCCI) collaborated on a project that drew inspiration from artefacts in the Museum's 1916 collections. This project consisted of an exhibition, a series of workshops, a programme of events and a major conference.

NMI and DCCI commissioned textile artist and designer Alison Conneely to commemorate the centenary of the 1916 Rising. She responded by creating a commemorative design collection entitled *The Shuttle Hive: A Century of Rising Threads*. This collection explored how the dual concepts of myth and revolt at the heart of the project of Irish independence enabled Irish women to explore paradigms of identity. The collection consisted of 6 panels: Panel 1: Architects of Resistance - Pillars of strength from earth crafted fabric; Panel 2: Patriot Red - Blood-stained rubble and Rebel dust; Panel 3: Suffragettes and Thimble Bruises - Activists and Family tribes identified by stitch and motif; Panel 4: Domestic Currency - The home as Revolution Office; Panel 5: New Myths, Old Wounds - Reimagining the Celtic Revival costume; and Panel 6: The Marching Queens - A leather harness for poise and protection.

At the heart of *The Shuttle Hive* project is a focus on material objects, on fabrics and yarns, and how they are woven, embroidered, knit into tapestries of values, and how they draw on skills developed and honed over centuries. The workshop format enfolds diverse workers, expert craftspeople, scholars and learners within a mutually supportive hive of activity. The figurative, poetic language of this chapter conveys a sense of the central roles of art and imagination in shaping the present and creating the future. The safe working space of a 'meitheal' opens up tunnel paths into the past and facilitates the mapping of the life stories yet unsung, the forgotten stories and forgotten lives that are uncovered in the process. The future is being stitched from remnants of the past treasured in the Museum.

Operatic-folk minstrel and composer Larry Beau collaborated with Alison Conneely to create an original operatic composition for the project which combined folk roots and classical influence with the rhythms of the industrial loom and the spinning wheel. The *Shuttle Hive* operetta, entitled *Taste All,* explored emotional support colonies designed by women in the workplace. It also scrutinised rebel mantras and the systems of defence that spies and sleeping agents used during wartime. The hive of the working bee was a metaphor for the underground society of women who orchestrated their own hidden personal and social support network behind the public displays of bravado and public honours. The composition was inspired by and purposed as soundscape for the collection. The NMI and DCCI developed a series of crafts, story and song workshops open to the public. The creative and collaborative engagement that these workshops facilitated, which stimulated dynamic conversations and reflection, drew inspiration from objects in the Museum's Easter Week collections, and the artwork coming out of these workshops featured in the *Shuttle Hive* exhibition. To coincide with this exhibition, a conference was organised entitled *Mise Eire? Shaping a Nation through Design.*

All you curse enchanted elders, and renegades of style
With warp and weft we weave you into the Shuttle Hive.
Alison Conneely, 'Artist's Statement'

When the gifted and the skilled and the broken and the brave come together with a shared and potent purpose, a spell of ancient camaraderie is cast; the contract to create collectively as a community begins. *The Shuttle Hive: A Century of Rising Threads* took this concept as its starting point in an exploration of how contemporary Irish textile design can respond to historical and political issues and engage with the traditional narratives. Integral to the exhibition project were textile, craft, story and song workshops which took place during the summer of 2016. These public workshops were documented and formed part of the overall exhibition. The format was inspired by the Irish traditional practice of the 'meitheal', and it drew on material culture relating to the National Museum's 1916 collections to stimulate conversation and to enable creative and collaborative engagement.

The Meitheal: Storytelling and Making, the Ebbing and Flowing of Time

In the catalogue accompanying *The Shuttle Hive: A Century of Rising Threads* exhibition, Steve Coleman, an anthropologist and a *Shuttle Hive* workshop facilitator, describes how working together released personal stories and reflections about the 1916 Rising:

> 'Meitheal' is one of the many Irish terms for a co-operative work group. On any occasion when people came together in a common task, talk has always been important for passing the time and lightening the labour. We thought that these workshops could be something similar: an informal reflection on and trading of thoughts and stories about the Rising and about Ireland in general. I felt a connection between the way that it's hard to talk about the process of making, beyond very specific concrete instructions about rows and knots and frames and yarn, and the way that it's hard to talk about an event like 1916. In each case what people knew was so personal. Making was in the hands and memory was in the networks of family stories and in personal feelings, and in usually uncanny senses of almost accidental connection to those events, which, for many, were already 'long ago.'
>
> One woman told me about making Irish dancing costumes for her children, and then remembered herself as a teenager in the 1980s. She had dancing lessons in St Enda's, Patrick Pearse's old school in Rathfarnham, which at the time was almost abandoned and untouched since the Rising. But workmen were beginning the renovation, and one day the girls ventured down to the old kitchen beneath their dancing space. They'd been told that Pearse's mother used to sit down there.

Installation images of the exhibition *The Shuttle Hive: a Century of Rising Threads*.

> 'The front part was a museum, but the back part–the Colm Cille Room and the Halla Mór–was where we used to have our dance classes. And, one day, we decided we'd go touring around the house and have a look around, and we went down in the kitchens, and in the kitchens, there was this big stove... Pádraig Pearse's mother had stayed in there, in the house. And when we looked behind the stove, there was this grid all around the stove and we were very interested to see what, why was that there? Well, the workmen had pulled away the wall, because they were renovating it, and it turned out... there were grenades stored in this grid, all around this stove. This is what we were told, anyway... It was where his mother used to be, and we used to be dancing upstairs and banging on the floor and, not realising that, below us, there was all this live ammunition... They dug up the garden as well... [and discovered a] big store of ammunition... That garden hadn't been open to the public for decades... The Rising wasn't that far away...'
>
> Another woman told the story of her grandparents who participated in and survived the Rising, and later had a milliner's shop. When they died, her mother was allowed to take just one thing from the shop, and she took a roll of lace, which she carefully preserved and displayed, then passed on to her daughter, who cut pieces to give to her own children as mementos, and we were moved when we realised she had brought a piece of this lace to incorporate into *The Shuttle Hive* exhibit. (Coleman, 'Meeting the Makers')

Democratic Space and Memory Re-awakening

The National Museum was the workshop base, contact and communication nucleus, providing an engaging and welcoming space for stories to be told and shared through the oral tradition of storytelling and through craft practice. Embroiderers stitched secret motifs underneath garment pockets; women brought letters from their ancestral kindred who died for the cause of independence; children wrote songs reflecting upon their collective identity 100 years after the revolution. Members of the public gained focused access to the Museum archives, holding historic artefacts in the palm of their hands, retracing their memory DNA back to the blood and heartstrings of the patriot days. Caoilfhionn Ní Bheacháin, a lecturer in communications and one of the *Shuttle Hive* facilitators, captures the contrast between the delicate fragments of memory nurtured in the workshops and the public forms of commemoration evident in the naming of Dublin streets and institutions:

> I traversed O'Connell Avenue, Wolfe Tone Street, Lord Edward Street, to catch my train at the station named for Con Colbert, to disembark again at the one named in honour of Sean Heuston and to walk the short distance to arrive at the fine barracks called after Michael Collins. Here within a small unnamed workshop space, a gathering of crafters congregated to weave, crochet and talk about 1916, with participants bringing fluid social and familial memories into conversation with their immediate response to the Museum's striking *Proclaiming a Republic*

Fashion image of *The Shuttle Hive: a Century of Rising Threads*.

exhibition. These ephemeral workshops created a platform for alternative memory work, yielding up a series of fragments: material objects that were brought along by participants, anecdotes, memories (both first and second-hand), and the textiles created during the sessions themselves. Thus, while a masculine nomenclature defined my journey through concrete urban space, the ephemeral collective that awaited me powerfully suggested the potential of craft as an alternative mode or grammar of memory work and as a way to reclaim a feminist cultural politics. (Ní Bheacháin, 'Reflections on the Shuttle Hive')

Cultural Activism: Portrait of an Artist as Myth Maker

Museum educators shuttled back and forth with project partners, creating and sustaining a project and a process discourse that welcomed eclectic contributions. Curators, scholars and arts practitioners shared their views and critique of the work in progress from the embryonic stage of workshop ideas through to the final touches of *The Shuttle Hive* installation. As curator I aimed to weave a contemporary folk hub, where stories, history, myth, objects, songs, skills, craft and music generated a living culture, re-examining the profound and fractured past through the discursive lens of the present. It was a renaissance approach to making and creating. The historian, anthropologist, musician, tanner, jeweller, embroiderer, sociologist, architect, weaver and the curious public all played an integral role in the development of *The Shuttle Hive*. It was a histrionic approach to timeline.

> Through the eye of steel wire needle, I witnessed a continuous core thread that started somewhere around 4000 BC, shaped through the ghost monastic cities of the Christian era, decoding the secret laws of Cromwell's ambushed wasteland, then encrypted by the women of the Rising, and ending in the existential future: a timeline to connect the needle with thread. (Conneely, 'Artist's Statement')

Stories and objects were brought and shared to become part of the core inspiration and fabric of our vision. The workshops facilitated the creation of a public-culture memory, with the oral, linguistic, tactile and textile traditions combined. The Museum provided a nurturing and state-supported space, the partners facilitated and documented the workshops, the people brought objects to life through storytelling, and this living folklore inspired the designers' creations.

> It was a romance revolution fought with time travel, paper patterns, trial and error, cotton, grief remedies, loom shuttles, Japanese silk secrets, spinning wheel mantras and the ghosts of the past that become us. I thought of generations of craft-skill workers ebbing away as the wise old cailleachs fade, obsolete down through the decades of industrial change and modernisation. We aimed to groove old methods and folkways with futuristic forms and shapes into a resonating future fantasy. (Conneely, 'Artist's Statement')

At the heart of this exhibition was strung a commemorative contemporary design collection of eighteen individual handcrafted garments. These pieces explored ideas of revolt, modernity and myth, and were inspired by the diversity of roles played by women during the struggle for independence. Rather than recreating shadows of revolutionary identity through period costume, the collection embodied a more complex, fractured, experimental and modern myth based on a communicative identity paradigm.

> *The Shuttle Hive* project engaged with such alternative histories of activism and creativity. Recalling again the notion of a 'structure of feeling', *The Shuttle Hive* workshops were designed to facilitate access to the less tangible traces of the *1916* Rising: the energy of the revolutionary impulse, the radical overspill of the emancipatory zeitgeist, and the creative imagination of the Cultural Revival. (Ní Bheacháin)

History in a sense was contested during the life journey of the project through active cultural practice in the making. Traditional narratives of heroism were brought to court. Through discourse, practice, song writing and discussion, forgotten characters emerged: key players who had secretly shuttled messages through the ghost of debris dust and between stray bullets. Clues from the past illuminated modern minds and the bard came singing in metaphors that Larry Beau channelled into an operetta, the soundscape for the exhibition:

Taste All

Larry Beau

life made roots, the wounded gather
common threads wove deep together
Take this letter through the streets
gold threads can make an army

honey trappers sleeping agents
codes beneath my calico
S.O.E.s, love couriers
gold threads can make an army

haberdasher, hem cord, french knot, buckle, feedog,
bias binding, brass button, brocade
Mata Hari
we're the drone volunteers and the liberty bees
bang and burn

Camus, Camus your words are true
but we are action pact, in fact
we work and play and love all day
let tears turn into sleep and heal

one day we'll die but not for lack
of lust for life or liberty
our sins will sow fine histories
of drones and queens and
working bees

whatever role you play, taste all
the wonders of the honeycomb
the royal bed, the plumber's shed
room with a view, dark avenue

the dizzy highs, depressive hues
alone with existential blues
with comrades, lovers
taste it all, cos fear won't
follow you along
when you are dead and gone.

Mise Éire and the Creative Collective

Within the context of the *Mise Éire* conference that coincided with the launch, *The Shuttle Hive* aimed to engage in a national dialogue that was globally influenced, with tones of ethnic diversity, feminist revival, and a futurism that merged the mystique of the Celtic Dawn movement with American minimalism. Despite the minimalist installation method, garment cuts that referenced African, Asian and Nordic roots, and three-dimensional digitally designed pattern-cutting technology, the design project retained a resonating mantra: the power of the creative collective.

Installation image of the exhibition *The Shuttle Hive: a Century of Rising Threads*, featuring on the left, participants' artwork.

The creative collective, as a democratic prism for all sectors of society to engage with and as a catalyst to explore and reflect upon pivotal changes in history, is essential. It allows for the evolution of the artist as an agent of reflection who challenges and reshapes or changes old myths. It enables metamorphic transitions among individuals, communities and society, through the process of a project that is welcoming, engaging and rewarding.

Future Threads

As *The Shuttle Hive* has begun, so it continues as an ongoing, dialogical process, branching out into new projects, enabling individuals to value their worth and raise new threads to collaborate further and to map an existential value to their lives through the arts. Conceptual designer Róisín Gartland took inspiration from her 'Marching Queens' panel in *The Shuttle Hive* collection when she designed, in collaboration with artist Jessie Jones and myself, the costume for Jones's award-winning, multi-media installation, *Tremble Tremble,* exhibited in the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017. A series of public engagement workshops took place at the National Museum in March 2020 for the process phase of my current global tapestry project with the United Nations, entitled *Hail Thee: We Come in Reveries of Change.*

> an iron lung of Autumn air
> outside the breast and shoulder bone
> protect thee in a shield of cotton
> ambushed hearts walk safely home.
> *(Conneely, 'Artist's Statement)*

The future is being stitched from remnants of the past treasured in the Museum.

Chapter 10

Sounding Out: a Concert of Women's Music

Deborah Kelleher

On 23rd November 2018, the National Museum of Ireland (NMI) and the Royal Irish Academy of Music (RIAM) collaborated with the Houses of the Oireachtas to stage a concert of women's music in the Seanad Chamber, as part of the NMI's Decade of Centenaries commemorations. While seven of the eight pieces performed were by contemporary composers, there was one significant exception: a work that was written in 1911 by suffragette composer Ethel Smyth. Compere on the evening was Ivana Bacik, professor, lawyer and, in 2018, a member of Seanad Éireann. The event highlighted the role of the arts in commemoration. Deborah Kelleher, Director of the RIAM, assesses here the impact of the *Sounding Out* concert.

William Dowdall, Sylvia O'Brien and Paul Roe performing at *Sounding Out* in the Seanad Chamber, 2018.

Composer and suffragette Ethel Smyth once said, 'I feel I must fight for my music, because I want women to turn their minds to big and difficult jobs, not just to go on, hugging the shore, afraid to put out to sea.' On 23rd November 2018, a concert, devised by women in leadership positions, was presented by the musicians of the Royal Irish Academy of Music in collaboration with the National Museum of Ireland and the Houses of the Oireachtas.

It celebrated the work of some great women composers who 'put out to sea' in an area of music that was very much a man's domain, that of original composition. Present in the audience were some living female composers that included Jane O'Leary and Marian Ingoldsby, as well as female politicians and trailblazers, former Minister Nora Owen and former MEP, Mary Banotti.

This was a night for the history books. One hundred years after the passing of the Representation of the People Act that gave women the vote, the Chamber in which those debates took place was to open its doors to host its first ever concert, one that celebrated the creativity of women.

Highlighting the Work of Women Composers

As a key focal point of the Decade of Commemorations, our concert put the spotlight on the underrepresented female voice in music composition. RIAM, founded as a national conservatoire for music in 1848 to serve and articulate the musical essence of Ireland, was a natural fit as the institution chosen to develop the musical side of the programme.

The RIAM story rings out with the names of great women who helped to found and sustain us, from composers such as Fanny Robinson, Annie Patterson and Joan Trimble, to Governors Maud Aiken and Anna Brioscu, and music teachers Rhona Marshall, Dinah Copeman and Audrey Chisholm. From the very beginning, RIAM has been an institution in which women were leaders, respected advocates for music, and acknowledged as such.

For this special evening, the works of Irish composers Jane O'Leary, Marian Ingoldsby, Ailís Ní Ríain, Amanda Feery, Solfa Carlile and Sylvia O'Brien featured alongside Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho and England's Ethel Smyth. Musicians Sylvia O'Brien (soprano), Paul Roe (clarinet) and William Dowdall (flute) performed music composed exclusively for single line instruments and voice. This artistic decision in itself added to the sense of dialogue between performer and audience. Their performances resonated through the Chamber and joined the stories buried in its walls.

The Art of Collaboration

Sounding Out was the outcome of a collaboration between three national institutions: the National Museum of Ireland (custodians of our historical artefacts), the Royal Irish Academy of Music (our performers bringing those artefacts to life), and the Houses of the Oireachtas (making the connection between art, history and politics). The National Museum of Ireland worked with the RIAM to deliver a concert of imagination and substance. Chairperson of the Oireachtas *Vótáil 100* Committee Ivana Bacik spoke stirringly of the political significance of the event.

No institution could have created this event on their own, and all had the fullest respect for their partners' expertise and perspective. This was a wonderful basis for collaboration. A team was forged that would continue to meet and innovate long after the music of this event faded.

Aside from the formal institutional relationships, there were two other collaborators on the night whose contributions made the event truly unique – the audience and the Seanad Chamber itself.

The Significance of the Seanad Chamber

The location of the *Sounding Out* performance, the Seanad Chamber, was central to the theme and focus of the event. Being in the room, where the passing of the Act that gave women the vote took place, was immensely powerful. For composer Jane O'Leary, being recognised at State level as a central figure in Irish arts and music and representing women composers' contribution to that sphere, was a profoundly empowering experience.

Sylvia O'Brien performed differently, because she was interacting with a history and narrative that transcended the repertoire and moved beyond the traditional concert hall. She held herself in another way because of that. As the only female performer on the night, she was also representing achievements throughout the 100 years that followed the life-changing debates in the Seanad Chamber, and was conscious of that honour.

As an audience member, Mary Pender absorbed the significance of the Chamber, likening the connection between the musical works and the location to Gandhi's garden, or Mandela's cell. She was to become even more connected as the concert progressed, transitioning from passive receiver to active participant when the evening unfolded in an unexpected way.

The Audience Performs

Many musical moments stand out from that extraordinary evening. The audience's performance of Ethel Smyth's anthem, 'The March of the Women', is perhaps worth dwelling on, to illustrate the psychological journey that we made. Dame Ethel Smyth composed this inspiring piece of music in 1911. She famously conducted it, using her toothbrush as baton, in Holloway prison in front of one hundred others, all members of the women's social and political union.

In our pre-concert run through of the piece, conductor Blánaid Murphy could feel the reluctance of the audience to sing. They were tentative and somewhat shy, not having expected to find themselves in the spotlight. At the end of the concert, when the moment

Blánaid Murphy conducting 'The March of the Women' at *Sounding Out* in the Seanad Chamber, 2018.

for that audience performance arrived, they stood and let their voices ring out jubilantly in the Chamber. They were emboldened to sing, having followed the musical narrative and connected it to the history and significance of the moment.

They were experiencing the power of music and its ability to bring history into the present by recreating the composer's vision. Trained and untrained voices sang side by side and the exultation of the moment transcended issues of artistic perfection or subtlety. This was a robust, unfettered rendition!

Music participation is a profoundly different experience to passive listening. Performing music allows you to internalise it through the body, mind and heart, and opens the possibility to connect many senses. The audience, in that moment, synthesised the great social and political struggles that presaged change for women (the speeches, the arguments, the marches, the sacrifices of the Suffragettes) and brought forth its essence through music.

A Catalyst for Change

The impact of the concert went far beyond one night in November 2018. A concert that traced the journey of female composers over one hundred years following the passing of the Representation of the People Act was special and important, and it had to be the starting point for more.

Although works by women composers are performed more regularly in the modern era, more must be done to re-balance the canon. This is now being addressed in a systemic way. RIAM sets targets in our programming to ensure a greater number of works written by women and other underrepresented composers are heard. Our students feature works by such composers in their assessments and student recitals. Research and musical literature classes encourage them to explore less established repertoire, and our faculty delights in nurturing their interest in less travelled paths. The result has been a richer and more varied musical landscape, with works finding their way into the repertoire that were neglected for too long.

Having seen the power of this collaboration in action, NMI and RIAM continued to work together. In a series of concerts in 2019 in Collins Barracks, RIAM performers illuminated the Museum's collections and artefacts by bringing them to life through music.

Our greatest catalyst for change will always be the promise and energy of our young people, and some were in attendance that November night in 2018. I remember seeing one young person sitting quite comfortably in the seat of the leader of the Seanad before the concert began. She listened attentively to the music and speeches, and participated in the audience performance. It was exciting to reflect that she now lives in a society that has empowered her to occupy that seat again someday, as leader in truth.

It All Comes Down to 'Form'

The threads of the event are woven together in one word: 'form'. The form of the event was different to an ordinary concert with the location and its political significance making each collaborator experience something out of the ordinary. The musical form of the works by women composers traversed the contemporary musical landscape and was a feast for the ears, from sinuous atonality to the rousing repetitive rhythm of the March. Finally, the formation of three institutions, coming together to devise the concert, was a landmark moment. This event resonated with political and historical significance. It became tangible through the female artist's imagination, to the delight and wonder of the privileged audience.

Sounding Out represented a moment in 2018 where artists, politicians, and audiences united in a unique space to connect women composers at a pivotal moment in history to the world in which they now live. The artist, as an agent of change, both documents their lived experience and uses their creative powers to provoke us to look for more. Examples of this provocation resounded on the night, through the evolving musical styles, the performers' interpretations and the meaning underpinning the works. One of the great strengths of the arts is to nurture emotional engagement with, and curiosity about, the past to encourage historical empathy. I believe we all experienced this empathy, especially participating as 'Ethel's chorus'.

I am grateful to the NMI for offering this platform to our creative artists. In making audible the voice of women composers over the span of 100 years, this listening Museum celebrated an often-overlooked group in a crucially important commemorative year.

Ethel Smyth would have approved.

Film still taken from *Sounding Out*, in the Seanad Chamber, 2018.

The March of the Women
Dame Ethel Smyth, 1911

Shout, shout, up with your song!
Cry with the wind for the dawn is breaking;
March, march, swing you along,
Wide blows our banner and hope is waking.
Song with its story, dreams with their glory,
Lo! they call, and glad is their word!

Loud and louder it swells,
Thunder of freedom, the voice of the Lord!
Long, long, we in the past,
Cowered in dread from the light of heaven.
Strong, strong, stand we at last,
Fearless in faith and with sight new-given.
Strength with its beauty, Life with its duty,
(Hear the voice, oh hear and obey!)
These, these, beckon us on,
open your eyes to the blaze of day.

Comrades, ye who have dared,
First in the battle to strive and sorrow,
Scorned, spurned, nought have ye cared.
Raising your eyes to a wider morrow.
Ways that are weary, days that are dreary,
Toil and pain by faith ye have borne;
Hail, hail, victors ye stand,

Life, strife, these two are one,
Nought can ye win but by faith and daring:
On, on that ye have done,
But for the work of today preparing.
Firm in reliance, laugh a defiance,
(Laugh in hope, for sure is the end)
March, march, many as one.
Shoulder to Shoulder and friend to friend.

Chapter 11

Gold Air and the Blue: a Celebration of Irish Women Poets

Maureen Kennelly

On Culture Night 2018, Poetry Ireland and the National Museum of Ireland (NMI) collaborated with the Houses of the Oireachtas and Seanad Éireann to celebrate a century of women's suffrage with a poetry reading in the Seanad Chamber, under the banner of *Vótáil 100*, the programme commemorating the centenary of women winning the right to vote. The event, entitled *Gold Air and the Blue,* foregrounded the work of three contemporary female poets, Moya Cannon, Martina Evans and Doireann Ní Ghríofa. In this chapter, Maureen Kennelly, former director of Poetry Ireland, the national organisation for poetry, and now Director of the Arts Council, recalls the rich legacy of women's writing and the impact of creative expression and the arts on Irish life. The event highlighted the traditional marginalisation of women within the literary canon, and efforts currently under way to rebalance it.

In 2018, Poetry Ireland was invited by the National Museum of Ireland to collaborate with them on an event to celebrate the centenary of the achievement of suffrage for Irish women. The organisation embraced the opportunity with great enthusiasm, and the fact that the chosen venue was Seanad Éireann made involvement especially beguiling. It was held on Culture Night, traditionally a night when people descend in their thousands to encounter culture of all sorts. In her introduction to the event, Olivia O'Leary reflected on all the debates, speeches and events that had happened in the Seanad over the years. In that time, women's voices were conspicuously absent and the invitation to participate in this event arrived at a time of energetic discussion about the place of women in Irish poetry.

'Gold air and the blue' is a line from 'Women's Rights', a poem by the poet, dramatist and committed suffragist Eva Gore-Booth, and we thought that it made for a fitting title for the event. Poets Moya Cannon, Martina Evans and Doireann Ní Ghríofa immediately came to mind as ideal participants for this special evening.

The lacing of history through their work is especially striking, and their poems and readings resounded well within the walls of Seanad Éireann.

> shades of those who once sauntered here,
> day-dreaming of our sunlit futures.

These lines from Doireann Ní Ghríofa's poem, 'Four Cormorants', freshly minted for the event, perfectly capture the thinking forward that good poets do, and the empathy that they bring to their work.

In recent years and especially through the prism of the Decade of Commemorations programme, I have come to admire the particular strength of the arts to make powerful connections between the generations. The fact that Moya Cannon studied history is evident in her work. Her poem, 'The Countermanding Order', is a beautiful tribute to her grandparents, written about Eoin MacNeill's recall of the Irish Volunteers from participation in Easter 1916. In her introduction, Moya reflected that while she and her siblings were disappointed that their grandfather wasn't in the GPO, they did also wonder whether their grandmother's preference would have been for a hero or a husband.

Martina Evans's book, *Now We Can Talk Openly about Men,* consists of a pair of dramatic monologues, illuminating the lives of two women in 1920s Ireland, and it offers a wonderful insight into life during the War of Independence and the Civil War.

For Doireann Ní Ghríofa, history is literally stitched into the fabric of her poems.

Doireann Ní Gríofa performing at *Gold Air and the Blue* in the Seanad Chamber, 2018.

These poets stand outside history. They are unmistakeably contemporary, but their work connects us back to our shared history. That sense of living in the present but being significantly influenced by the past is evident throughout their work.

Martina Evans' lines from her poem, 'The Green Storybook',

> the black marks straightening themselves
> out into sense across the page, saying this way, this way
> you'll escape.

remind us of the power of language to help us live beyond our own immediate reality. For women in the period leading up to 1918, without suffrage, and hidebound by so many other societal gaps and blockages, language and literature were a means of escape and agency. For Doireann Ní Ghríofa, the story of Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill speaks powerfully to her over several generations, imbuing her present life with meaning and enabling her readers to travel with her, back through history. For Moya Cannon, the tradition of her forebears is expressed beautifully in her well-known poem, 'Carrying the Songs'.

On that Culture Night evening, it felt like we had a direct line of communication from one generation to the next through these poets and their poems. That evening in the Seanad, several prominent female politicians were present. The event served as an occasion to reflect that there is still just 27% participation by women in the Irish political arena, and that well-worn arguments still need to be made.

Similarly, the neglect and exclusion of women and other marginalised groups from a male-heavy canon of poetry over the years has been to the forefront of discussion in recent years. Years of bias, conscious or unconscious, have led to the erroneous perception that women's voices were somehow less compelling or important or authoritative. Invisibility spawned deeper invisibility, and it is sad to reflect on the voices that we will never get to know of or encounter, simply because the arena did not feel open to them.

Such exclusions became normalised, and the dissolving of these structures and patterns is to be warmly welcomed. Female voices still need to be reclaimed, though happily, some excellent work has been done to redress the imbalance in recent times.

The particular charge of that evening in Seanad Éireann, with families striding the streets energetically, added to the open, democratic atmosphere. Inside the Seanad, these poets were helping us to look at the world anew, their work helping us get inside the skins of others and bringing us fresh perspectives.

I am constantly in awe of how artists can transport us back in time and can connect us with another human being through their notes, their marks on a page, their sounds and images.

It reminds us that, in the words of Samantha Power, 'the arts have the singular capacity to generate empathy, to educate citizens, to change minds, to build community, and to incite action'.

Here at the Arts Council, we have just launched our spatial policy. In this blueprint, we look to a new horizon, where everyone has the opportunity to create, engage with, participate in, and enjoy the arts and culture, regardless of who they are or where they live and work. We see creative expression as a fundamental part of our humanity and we want Ireland to be a country where people can confidently exercise their rights to creative and cultural expression and engagement, ultimately leading to a richer, more multi-faceted quality of life. Recent decades have brought seismic change to Irish society. The arts can continue to lead and reflect that change and to embrace those voices which have been ignored for so many years. That Culture Night in Seanad Éireann, we had the fortune of hearing three glorious voices who, in summoning up the past for us, pointed to a brighter, more equal future.

Four Cormorants

Doireann Ní Ghríofa

On Heuston Bridge, our tram pauses,
dawdling us a moment over those slow waters.

Everybody seeks their screens.
Only the stranger's baby by my knee turns

and gurgles milkily; her smile leads me to see
a cormorant landing on the quay. Glossy, sleek

as a black brolly blustered up by some sudden gust,
she will not nod to us, but from her perch,

she extends webbed feet, snapping her beak
as if to speak. We can't hear her or her three sisters,

shades of those who once sauntered here,
day-dreaming of our sunlit futures.

The tram jolts on. The baby burble-shrieks.
No-one sees the cormorants but her and me.

Beyond the balustrade, the Liffey – clouded,
gaudy – advances inaudibly.

This poem was commissioned by the National Museum of Ireland and Poetry Ireland on the centenary of women's suffrage.

Chapter 12

Being Writer in Residence: Small Chinks and Private Wonders

Dermot Bolger

In 2016, the National Museum of Ireland (NMI) collaborated with Poetry Ireland, the national organisation for poetry, to create a writer's residency and a series of associated events as part of its Decade of Centenaries public engagement programme. Artefacts from the Museum's Easter Week Collections, displayed in the *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* exhibition, provided the context and the impetus for this initiative entitled *Finding a Voice: Writer in Residence.* Through this residency programme, the Museum engaged with a wide range of audiences and encouraged fresh explorations of the exhibition's many themes and issues.

Poet, novelist and playwright, Dermot Bolger, was invited to be the augural Writer in Residence at the National Museum of Ireland. His residency included a schools' workshop programme, a local community workshop programme, an online mentoring clinic, and a series of public talks and events. The various initiatives were held both in NMI – Country Life in County Mayo and NMI – Decorative Arts & History in Dublin.

His reflection on his residency in this chapter begins by situating current commemorations within the Museum's historical memorialising, which traditionally undervalued personal artefacts. He intimates how the residency supported his own writing and notes the empathy that can be achieved in writing workshops. He describes how he harnessed the talents of a novelist, a dramatist and the co-director of the In Flanders Fields Museum to remember the dead of World War I. His approach was to introduce 'small chinks and private wonders' into his workshops, with a view to harvesting tiny, personal narrative fragments of the epic story of the war, and in this way enable the Museum's visitors to imagine their own engagement with the past.

When approached by the National Museum of Ireland and Poetry Ireland to become the first writer in residence at NMI – Decorative Arts & History in Collins Barracks and the NMI – Country Life in Turlough Park, County Mayo, as part of the 2016 *Decade of Centenaries* public engagement programme, I was initially unsure about taking up this opportunity. I felt that a National Museum's duty is to provide the public with accurate and balanced insights into the past, using artefacts and witness testimonies to provide a full understanding of the literal truth of historic events through comprehensive evaluation. An imaginative artist however seeks the truth in a more fragmented fashion by standing, like the Greek poet Constantine Cavafy was said to do, at an angle to the universe.

I wondered if my artistic instinct to approach events from unusual angles and hone in on fragmentary stories might clash with the Museum's duty to explore the past from a more wide-lens angle. But finally, I took the approach that among the things which Ireland had sought in 1916 was a sense of its own voice in all its complexity. I saw my role as Writer in Residence as being to help anyone who enrolled in my workshops in Dublin and Mayo to find their true voices, and expose visiting school groups to the absolute freedom that comes with the blank page, whether they were exploring historical events or examining their own lives in fresh ways. It was wonderful to watch emerging writers in my Museum workshops make imaginative leaps forward, surprising me, and, more importantly, themselves with newly minted words.

Starting my Museum residency I thought of Patrick Kavanagh's poem, 'In Memory of Brother Michael', which ends:

> Culture is always something that was
> Something pedants can measure,
> Skull of bard, thigh of chief,
> Depth of dried up river.
> Shall we be thus forever?
> Shall we be thus forever?

These lines could have been written about Dr Adolf Mahr, the Museum's former director, who, while Keeper of Irish Antiquities, was dismissive when the Museum was approached about staging a first, small exhibition of 1916 artefacts during the 1932 Eucharistic Congress. Mahr's objections were philosophical. He was then deeply involved in facilitating Harvard University's archaeological mission to Ireland, which helped to introduce proper scientific archaeological practices in relation to excavations. But, as Mairéad Carew has explored in *The Quest for the Irish Celt* (2018), the mission also had the less scientific aim of seeking to arrive at predetermined social and political outcomes.

Dermot Bolger and Brian Keenan pictured at the National Museum of Ireland, Collins Barracks.

The bloodstained vest of James Connolly, showing the location of his first wound.

The rich Irish Americans partly financing the mission to establish Ireland's racial and cultural heritage wanted it to conclude that the Irish were a white, Celtic nation of great antiquity and therefore 'eugenically fit' to continue to be allowed to emigrate to America. Mahr (whose qualities as an archaeologist were offset by right-wing political beliefs which gave credence to a crackpot pseudo-science like eugenics) recognised that this aim of unearthing traces of a radically uncontaminated Celtic lineage was equally important to the Free State government as being the starting point for Irish history which it wished to create.

Ever since Douglas Hyde's 1892 speech about 'the necessity for de-Anglicising Ireland' (claiming that our resistance to becoming 'citizens of the Empire' stemmed from our Celtic past), finding evidence that our ancestors once possessed unadulterated Celtic blood had become a founding identity myth of the new state. Mahr was preoccupied with more conventional historical processes, like excavating crannógs and passage graves, to help establish this sense of Celtic nationhood. This is why in 1932 he was baffled by the request to hold a small 1916 exhibition, feeling that, as quoted by Darragh Gannon in *Proclaiming a Republic: Ireland, 1916 and the National Collection* (2016), 'a national institution was no fitting place to display patriotic relics which were 'neither scientific nor artistic nor illustrating antiquity or industry'.

But the exhibition's instigator, Nellie Gifford Donnelly, was undefeatable and, as a 1916 veteran and sister-in-law to two executed signatories, was extremely well connected. The public were only given three weeks in which to send the Museum personal artefacts, but the resultant meagre exhibition proved so successful that, although scheduled to last a week, it ran for over a year. After it closed, the Museum kept the artefacts but severed ties with Gifford, who noted that 'after starting and completing a 1916 relics' exhibition… I am not required… Apparently we 1916 people–the women anyhow–will not be given any encouragement.' (Gannon, 2016)

But a flood of personal artefacts continued to pour in. Within a decade, the Museum's Easter Week holdings contained 4,275 items. These artefacts were still viewed through the prism of Museum best practice at that time, which mistrusted overtly personal objects. The Museum was advised against accepting some items from Joseph Mary Plunkett's widow, like his cigarette case or a lock of his hair, claiming they were 'adding nothing to historical knowledge.' (Gannon, 2016)

But the nature of human curiosity means that such seemingly inconsequential personal artefacts often spark our engagement with the past. It was fascinating to witness how, within five months of opening, the National Museum's *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* exhibition in Collins Barracks attracted over 125,000 visitors, the overwhelming majority offering enthusiastic feedback.

The most personal items in that exhibition often attracted most attention, adding human depth to historical figures previously viewed as two-dimensional. While visitors admired famous artefacts, like Countess Markievicz's tattered 'Irish Republic' flag that flew in O'Connell Street, they lingered to speculate about smaller artefacts – a burnt watch from a jewellery store, James Connolly's bloodstained vest or the 'Votes for Women' badge worn by Francis Sheehy Skeffington before his brutal murder. Each item provided a pathway into the numerous individual human dramas that became part of the Rising.

Few visitors with whom I spoke had much interest in a myth of Celtic purity as a starting point to create a modern collective sense of Irish identity. Their sheer diversity did not allow for this. Their sense of Irish identity was often indelibly linked to the night when Patrick Pearse, son of a Manchester Unitarian, and James Connolly, a Marxist born in Edinburgh, presented five fellow rebel leaders with a proclamation so radical that one nameless signatory, a traditional Irish Catholic, was so perturbed by the equality promised to women that, according to Kathleen Clarke, in her posthumously published autobiography, *Revolutionary Woman* (1991), he needed cajoling to sign it. Visitors recognised the Rising as a pivotal moment, deserving commemoration, but not as the sole foundation stone of the modern Irish state. People sensed how the Rising, while monumental in its political aftershock, was part of the broader picture of an island and a continent in a state of flux by 1916.

I saw how the smaller artefacts in the exhibition excited most interest in visitors for having both a personal and an historic provenance. Each told its unique story about this turbulent period when a nation tried to find its own voice. Therefore, in conducting writing workshops with primary school children in the Museum, I tried to retain this duality, exploring personal and historic perspectives. After checking with teachers to ensure no pupil had recently lost or been separated from a parent, I asked pupils to imagine the feel of a loved one's hand clasping their own, and to write a poem that evoked the emotions this memory unlocked. This led to simple but deeply emotive pieces of writing that sprang from their everyday lives, rendering an ordinary moment special by recording it.

Having established this notion that poetry can flow from private moments, my second writing exercise involved giving pupils a photograph of children on a Dublin street in the Rising's aftermath and asking them to inhabit this scene from any perspective they liked. Some wrote from the viewpoint of two girls central to the photograph; others from the perspective of a smaller boy who was peripheral in the image, while some imagined themselves as being these same characters, reflecting back on the photograph decades later.

What was important was to allow each child explore their unique perspective and let them see how every different reimagining of the same photograph was equally valid. I was in primary school in 1966 during the fiftieth anniversary commemorations of the Rising,

and can remember how the impact of those commemorations filtered into the collective consciousness of my peers. In terms of how primary students responded to the Rising's centenary, I found interesting differences between classes at the start and end of my residency.

The sixth-class pupils whom I encountered when the publicity surrounding the commemoration was at its height were more emotionally engaged with the politics behind the Rising. When imagining themselves as characters in the photograph, they often adopted the personas of being relatives of the insurrectionists, roaming shattered streets, desperately seeking news of loved ones who had fought in the GPO. But students only starting sixth class in September 2016 seemed less engaged. They were more likely to adopt neutral personas as hungry children, relieved to be able to venture out again in search of food and friends. Often their only emotion about the Rising seemed relief that the fighting was over, as if the insurrection had no direct connection to the characters whom they imagined themselves to be. But beyond allowing them this chance to imaginatively engage with the past, my real interest as a writer was to give them the freedom to find their own voices and engage with the possibilities of language; to show how a simple memory of a loved one's hand could be the touchstone to spark a poem, despite them often entering the Museum with no confidence in their ability to write.

The Museum residency gave me two opportunities essential for any writer. It allowed me to buy time to think and write, while providing a peaceful room in which to write. Many of my novels are historical, so there was genuine inspiration in being surrounded by the collections of artefacts within Collins Barracks. This sense of inspiration was equally true during my visits to NMI – Country Life in Turlough, County Mayo, partly because I was already familiar with the exterior of the house. At eighteen, I had come to know Turlough village after becoming friendly with a remarkable bohemian thinker, the artist Sheila Fitzgerald, whom I had frequently visited in her caravan there, and who was related to the Fitzgerald family who originally occupied Turlough Park. Now my visits to the Museum in Mayo, allowed me to walk through rooms which she had encountered as a young bride when moving there in the 1930s. The ghosts which these visits conjured up in my imagination gave me the impetus to finish a novel, *An Ark of Light* (2018), which I had spent thirteen years working on. Based on Sheila's life, many chapters are set in Turlough.

I felt privileged to return to Turlough Park to conduct a final workshop with the writers' group based there and read from my novel to an audience of local people, many of whom shared memories of Sheila and other people described in the book. This occasion gave me a sense of a circle closing: the completion of a journey that started with me arriving in that village in 1977 as an eighteen-year-old unemployed hitchhiker to read my poems to an elderly artist in her caravan, and concluded with me giving a reading about her in the Museum located in the former home of her in-laws.

An important part of the residency was the chance to work with emerging writers. Writers from across Ireland emailed me poems or chapters of novels to critique. This online engagement gave the residency a national dimension. The nature of our email correspondence allowed for more intensive advice than I could normally give to participants in a general public workshop.

As a teenager I frequently visited NMI – Archaeology, which back then felt like a fascinating but very restricted space. I was keen to find ways to bring other writers into the Museum within both a literary and historical context, and help with the Museum's aim of building bridges with the surrounding community. Working with the Museum's Education team, I initiated a series of free public conversations with guests whom I felt could bring something unique to the Museum's programming in ways that chimed with the *Proclaiming A Republic* exhibition, but allowed artists to come at things from unique angles. This started with a public conversation with a Dublin legend, John Sheahan, the last surviving original member of The Dubliners folk group. I knew that Sheahan's music and poetry would prove immensely popular with local people who might rarely visit the Museum. But the occasion was a chance for Sheahan to pay tribute to one of the Rising's least known executed leaders by performing his new musical composition, 'Lament for Michael Mallin'. Sheahan's composition, to honour the Irish Citizen Army officer who commanded the St Stephen's Green garrison, felt deeply evocative because Mallin's last letter to his parents before his execution was in the *Proclaiming a Republic: The 191 Rising* exhibition, yards away from where Sheahan was performing.

This duality of finding personal and historical contexts also informed my thinking behind a conversation and reading by one of Ireland's finest poets, Paul Durcan, which honoured Major John MacBride, another often overlooked figure of the Rising. Durcan is related to Major MacBride through his mother, the late Sheila Durcan (née MacBride) – a daughter of MacBride's older brother Joseph. In what was a private reading in memory of a deceased relative, executed a century before, Durcan discussed his memories of the MacBride family and read poems in memory of Major John MacBride, but also in memory of his mother and other MacBride family members.

If Mallin or MacBride could be described as neglected figures, then the ordinary citizens caught up in the crossfire and currents of history on Dublin's streets in 1916 were far more neglected. The Easter Rising saw far more civilian casualties than either Irish Volunteers or British Army deaths, with estimates of up to 2,500 ordinary Dubliners killed or wounded.

Few writers have written more powerfully about the terrifying experience of being a civilian unexpectedly caught up in a conflict situation than the author Brian Keenan. *An Evil Cradling* (1992), his account of being kidnapped and held hostage in Lebanon for four and a half years is a modern classic of autobiography and a remarkable testament to the survival of the

human spirit under extreme conditions. In memory of civilians caught up in the Rising, I invited Keenan to discuss his experience of being held hostage in a time of war and also his experiences of returning to present-day Lebanon as a free man hopelessly captivated by that city.

I also wished to use my residency to explore the impact of conflict on people's lives. Collins Barracks was once the starting point of a journey made by numerous young Irishmen who joined the British Army, especially in the two years before the Rising. Many marched out of its gates to confront the slaughter at the Battle of the Somme (the centenary of which was also marked in 2016), or the nightmarish conditions endured in numerous battles fought for control of the Flemish town of Ypres (Ieper).

This made me invite into the Museum Piet Chielens, who was born in West Flanders, the area of the infamous slaughter in the Ypres Salient, and grew up surrounded by First World War cemeteries. Since 1996 he has been co-director of the award-winning In Flanders Fields Museum in Ieper and was for many years artistic director of Peace Concerts Passchendaele. A man passionately interested in Ireland, in 1998 Chielens instigated the construction of an evocative non-militaristic monument (a portrait of the Irish poet Francis Ledwidge on glass over a backdrop of local yellow Ieper brick) to mark the spot where Ledwidge was killed by a stray shell in 1917. I first met Chielens when I was invited, with the poet's nephew, Joseph Ledwidge, to unveil this monument.

My residency allowed me to reunite with Piet Chielens eighteen years later for a public conversation before an audience consisting of a unique mixture of Flemish and Irish people: Chielens was accompanied to Ireland by a large group associated with the In Flanders Fields Museum. We discussed the journeys of Irishmen who left Collins Barracks and ended up at the Somme or in Ypres, and explored how these men are remembered, both in the country they left and the countries where their bodies lie, often still unfound. Part of Chielens' work is to try and identify bodies of anonymous soldiers of all nationalities still being unearthed around Ieper: stark reminders of how a conflict can still resonate a century later.

Dubliners feel a constant connection to the Easter Rising because most of its participants on one side were local, as were the civilian casualties. Indeed, many soldiers in British uniforms who found themselves ordered onto Dublin's streets from Collins Barracks (back when it was called The Royal Barracks and its previous commanders included Maud Gonne's father) were also Irish. In contrast, the battles for Ieper were mainly fought by young men from fifty different nations who converged on that town without having any direct connection to it. While the Flemish people in the audience had numerous questions about the political and social context of the Rising, I wanted to ask Chielens whether it was hard for Flemish people to feel the same emotional connection to the fallen in Flanders when an overwhelming majority had no direct connection with Flanders.

Given that civilian casualties in the Rising received little previous recognition, I wanted to ask if there was a similar sense that Flemish civilians, who died when inadvertently caught up in those battles, also seemed forgotten amid the pomp of Commonwealth memorials. Finally, I wanted Chielans to discuss how Ieper manages to retain its own sense of identity while coping with the influx of foreign visitors who see it primarily as a site for commemoration.

While this public conversation with Piet Chielans was fascinating in contextualising the Rising and Irish involvement in World War I within the broader patchwork of European history, I also wanted to invite a writer to talk about the personal impact of that war on their family. Few Irish writers have written so perceptively about the First World War as Jennifer Johnston, with many Leaving Certificate student's understanding the complexity of the conflict through her classic 1974 novel, *How Many Miles to Babylon*? To mark the anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, I invited Jennifer Johnston to give a reading in memory of her great uncle who died at the Somme, and of her mother's brother who survived the Somme but was killed soon after, aged twenty-two. Johnston's novels deal with political and cultural tensions in Ireland, and I wanted to explore how losses within her own family during the Great War seeped into her writing and how many of her books revolve around family secrets and unspoken histories.

The Irish Women's Franchise League badge worn by Francis Sheehy Skeffington and taken from his coat after his death in 1916. HE:EWL.336.2

One tragic figure killed during the Easter Rising was the pacifist, feminist and socialist, Francis Sheehy Skeffington, summarily and brutally murdered by a British officer. The 1916 exhibition displayed the Irish Women's Franchise League's 'Votes for Women' badge which Sheehy Skeffington was wearing when arrested and also a brick from the wall of Portobello Barracks in which a bullet lodged during his killing. To commemorate him I invited the award-winning playwright and actor, Donal O'Kelly, to NMI – Country Life perform his one-man show, *Hairy Jaysus*, which examines Francis Sheehy Skeffington's legacy through the eyes of a Dublin beggar. This also let me interview Donal O'Kelly about his own career as a writer who, like Sheehy Skeffington, has always been passionately engaged with political and social issues.

Other public events included a conversation with Anne Haverty about her landmark biography of Constance Markievicz, Europe's first elected female politician, an aristocrat, republican, socialist, feminist and pivotal figure in the revolutionary movement that culminated in the Rising. Haverty's biography fleshes out the complex life of an often maligned and misunderstood woman. Our conversation in Collins Barracks marked the launch of an updated edition of her biography, published by Lilliput Press.

Perhaps the most interesting public event was my chance to interview the curatorial team: Pádraig Clancy, Darragh Gannon, Sandra Heise and Brenda Malone, who developed the *Proclaiming a Republic* exhibition. I was fascinated to learn about the behind-the-scenes collaborative process through which these professionals delved into the Museum's vast collection of 1916 artefacts to create this comprehensive new commemorative exhibition. Its creation involved re-evaluating previous National Museum exhibitions about the Rising held in 1932, 1935, 1941, 1966, 1991 and 2006. It was fascinating to let each speaker explain their different but vital role in the process of selecting and contextualising the artefacts, and explore how previous exhibitions were framed by the state's changing interaction with 1916's legacy.

Being Writer in Residence in the Museum was a bit like the act of writing a poem, in that writing poetry is like dropping stones down a deep well, never knowing if you will hear a tiny splash, and where its ripples will reach. I loved how the two writers' groups, started during the residency, continued to meet after I left. Such workshops can be important in the development of some writers, in giving them an initial platform on which to be heard, the confidence to continue and allowing them to feel that they are not doing anything strange by sitting down at home to write.

I enjoyed working with school groups, but the legacy of such a residency may not appear until these students grow up and begin to explore more fully their emotions. The simple fact of meeting a writer at an early age can expose children to the possibilities of language as a way of finding their voice, but also to the possibilities of perusing dreams or ambitions which may be far removed from literature. I aimed my words at quiet unnoticed students, just in case their lives might, in some small way, be altered by this exposure to poetry, like my life was altered, aged twelve, when my primary teacher read aloud a poem not on the official curriculum. For me it had felt as if the classroom was previously in black and white and was now steeped in colour.

The book of postage stamps that Thomas Clarke never got to use.
HE:EW.444.3

In his poem entitled 'Advent', Patrick Kavanagh noted that 'through a chink too wide there comes in no wonder'. I tried to introduce small chinks and private wonders: like the insights of Paul Durcan into the family life which Major John MacBride never got an opportunity to return to, when, with no forewarning about the Rising, he set off to meet his brother from the Westport train. Seeing Thomas MacDonagh lead a group of volunteers, he felt duty-bound to join them. Or the personal letters sent home to Jennifer Johnston's family from the trenches, which she read aloud in Collins Barracks a century after they were written. Or new music composed by John Sheahan in memory of Michael Mallin. Or Donal O'Kelly's reimaging of Francis Sheehy Skeffington's passionate beliefs, to which he held firm in the face of ridicule, and which led to the death of this most peaceable of men.

None of these small events told the full story of the turbulent times being commemorated. I thought of them as being like the shards of a shattered mirror, giving totally different and totally true reflections of individual figures. I hope that they complemented the exhibition itself, which set out to tell an epic saga and did so by brilliantly using the personal artefacts about which Adolf Mahr was so dismissive in 1932. Objects that can help to make historical personages come to life: James Connolly's fedora with a bullet hole in the rim; Countess Markievicz's wristwatch worn during Easter week; the rosary beads gifted by Joseph Mary Plunkett to a member of the firing squad who executed him, a Sergeant Hand, later killed in action in France; or the book of postage stamps that Thomas Clarke never got to use. Tiny fragments and prisms into the past that allowed each of the visitors who flocked to that exhibition to create their own mental picture of a far wider story.

A bullet-pierced hat stated to have fallen from James Connolly's head when he was carried on a stretcher to the Dublin Castle Hospital and picked up by an ambulance man who was carrying him. HE:EW.251

Joseph Mary Plunkett's Rosary Beads

Dermot Bolger

Just for once let a poem be not about him, but about me;
William Hand, who never saw my twenty-third birthday,
Being destined for annihilation amid the slaughter at Arras.

But, aged twenty, I shivered in Kilmainham Jail at dawn,
A bit-player centurion used to flesh out a crucifixion scene,
Bewildered to have landed in Dublin instead of France.

Perhaps the watching padre thought I had the upper hand,
My rifle quivering among others in that jittery firing squad,
But, awaiting the order, I knew nobody would remember me.

The prisoner sensed it too, his neck swathed in bandages
From some tubercular ailment, his gaunt skin so pallid
We wondered if he had enough strength to cross that yard.

Yet he strode with composed eloquence to his appointed spot,
Displaying no fear or hostility as he appraised our faces
And then unexpectedly offered me his rosary beads as a gift

In a benign gesture of kinship. It felt like an invitation
To be a footnote in a rebellion I knew nothing about;
A trembling soldier, trying my best to aim at his heart

For his sake, unsure if my chamber contained the live round
That felled a bridegroom who was wed under military escort
In the freezing prison chapel seven hours before being shot.

Such an eerie feeling to walk away with ivory rosary beads,
Still warm from his fingers, tucked into my tunic pocket
Beside my small service book, with its edicts of army rules

And regulation form for me to fill out the details of my will.
I sensed, as I left him slumped in the stone breakers' yard,
That I was being quick marched towards an abyss of oblivion,

A piece of cheap meat awaiting my turn to be dispatched
To whatever hellhole best served the needs of my superiors.

I resolved to leave his ivory beads with my cousin, Dora,
In case, like me, they would get lost amid the quagmire

That swallowed me up after two more years of fighting.
When the telegram boy knocked at 6, Piccadilly Cottages,

In Derbyshire, I wanted these beads to serve as proof that,
Like my victim destined for immortality, I too had an existence

Before I drew the short straw, allowing a sniper time to aim
By accepting a third light from the same match lit in a trench.

The rosary beads given by Joseph Plunkett to Sergeant W. Hand, a member of the firing squad, before his execution. HE:EW.5368

William Hand of Derbyshire was a member of the firing squad who executed the poet Joseph Mary Plunkett at 3.47a.m. on 4th May 1916, following the 1916 Rising. Hand was killed in France in 1918. Decades later, his cousin Dora presented Plunkett's rosary beads to the National Museum of Ireland. For decades after the First World War, old soldiers from the trenches remained superstitious about allowing their cigarette to be the third one lit from the same match.

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Perhaps we should pay more attention to the feelings that a museum provokes.

- Michael O' Reilly

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Let museums be places of healing and the restoration of dignity, as our National Museum has proven itself to be in this decade of centenaries.

- Paula Meehan

Section 4

Pathways to the Future

Printing type from the font used in the printing of the 1916 Proclamation and found among the papers of William O'Brien. HE:EW.3579

Chapter 13

‘Memory keeper by trade’: Poet Paula Meehan and Policy Analyst Michael O’Reilly in Conversation

Paula Meehan and Michael O’Reilly

Previous chapters in this book evaluated the Decade of Centenaries commemorations from the perspectives of historians, artists, curators, educators, local communities and others. This final chapter consists of the edited transcript of a conversation between poet Paula Meehan and policy analyst Michael O'Reilly, which took place without an audience at the National Museum of Ireland – Decorative Arts & History, Collins Barracks, Dublin, in April 2022.

The two speakers reflect on the obligations of museums to the past and the future. As their musings unfold, they talk about museums as trustees of inheritance and legacy; as sites of healing, trust and dignity; as repositories of truth and memory; as places where 'the inner dreaming selves of the citizenry' awaken; whose etymology is linked to the muses, the daughters of memory, and, therefore, to the arts. They note the terror and burden of amnesia, of deliberate or inadvertent forgetting. The conversation ends with a challenge: how best the National Museum of Ireland might remember Irishness, what terms might imaginatively integrate the familial histories of those who, born elsewhere, choose to identify as Irish.

Michael O'Reilly: There's a section at the end of your 2019 collection of poems, *Museum*, in which you say that '… a museum is a dead space unless it speaks to the now.' I think that raises two questions: one, what's wrong with dead spaces? And two, what does it mean to 'speak to the now'? In the late 1990s, and we had a heated boardroom debate at the National Gallery about the living artist versus the dead. The majority conclusion was that the National Gallery represented the long dead, with some concessionary flexibility for the more recently deceased. That didn't necessarily mean that we were not obliquely or accidentally 'speaking to the now', but we were certainly not doing so deliberately.

Paula Meehan: But the past is never over, is it? Not safely corralled in a box and buried, much as some would wish it so. We are on a living continuum, we range back and forth between the past and an imagined future. We can be victims of the past, of the decisions of the powerful, even the powerful who are long dead – decisions that affect our very livelihoods, our bodily autonomy, our relationship with the state, our relationship with memory. I believe the museums and the galleries, the cultural institutions of the state, though founded in and shaped by the past, have a primary duty to the now, to the living.

The threshold over which the individual or the group must step to gain access is a real threshold in what are often the cast-off mansions and public buildings of powerful colonial rulers – their barracks, their townhouses, their old soldiers' hospital, all repurposed in the service of memory and healing. But that threshold is also a culturally loaded threshold. Who feels comfortable crossing it? Who doesn't? So even if an institution speaks of the dead, it speaks to the living.

Michael O'Reilly: I unreservedly take your point about speaking to the living. And the National Museum, where the presumption of deadness might be even greater, seems to be assuming an entirely new living energy even as we speak, from having been a kind of selective repository of objects representing distinct eras or seminal events in our history, to an exploration of identity, for the living. It's a radical transformation. I was reminded during the commemorations that the Irish word 'oidhreacht' means both legacy and inheritance – serendipitously conveying the idea of the continuum that you mentioned, that we hold the past in trust and bequeath it to the next generation. The memory keepers are our trustees who further elucidate the past and present it in the context of at least some representation of our own time. The National Gallery debate of just 25 years ago now seems fantastically anachronistic.

We assume of course that this change is good because it represents a democratisation of culture. Is there a danger, though, that we're creating a new culture directorate, with unforeseeable consequences?

Paula Meehan: Let's risk it. Let museums be places of healing and the restoration of dignity, as our National Museum has proven itself to be in this decade of centenaries where we remember and integrate some of the most difficult and contentious experiences of the past.

As a small island with a ferociously complex past, the lens we get on that past can be clear, transparent, and foster creativity instead of bitterness. We will always be at the mercy of available resources. We will always be at the mercy of systems, at the mercy of the imagination of the decision makers. But a critical mass among the citizens, I believe, will fight for what, after all, belongs to us. As the museums do. I can't see us suffering a cultural directorate. We have travelled too far for that.

The word 'museum' in English, current as far back as the mid-17th century, comes down from the Greek– a temple or shrine of the muses, a place to put and do things that please the muses; the muses being the ancient daughters of memory, nine in number. It feels apt and energising that artists and artistic practice have been at the centre of the most progressive developments in museum culture.

We rely on trust, that elusive but pervasive emotional state: that the museum trusts the citizens to have agency, that the citizens trust the museum to serve their best interests, in the name of truth and beauty.

Michael O'Reilly: Trust is the key, and trust assumes a very particular character in matters of culture. In the realm of the museum, trust seems to depend not on the quality of display but on the integrity of intent. Museum curators of the past perhaps had a narrow mandate, to create a narrative of Ireland through objects. The unspoken mission would certainly have been political in the sense of representing the State in the way that the State wanted to be seen, a kind of identity building. That kind of mission was pretty obvious for a new state, particularly one that had lost much of its identity over the preceding century, language especially.

I think though that we can be forgiving of the young Irish State. Both our own people and the world beyond had to be persuaded that the new State was durable, stable, legitimate – none of which was assured. That meant that the Museum was unlikely to have a section on, let's say, potential war crimes committed in the War of Independence or the Civil War, or what might today be described as a genocidal campaign of violence against Irish protestants. Trust – or truth for that matter – didn't enter the equation. The thoughtful, open-hearted response of the Museum and our other cultural institutions seems to have engendered a new excitement about future possibilities. Trust is reciprocal: the cultural institutions are an important bridge between citizen and state. Even fifty years ago, it was still legitimate, arguably, to say that the narrative had to be managed.

Paula Meehan: Except luckily, the state could not and cannot control the inner dreaming selves of the citizenry. I remember walking in my father's footsteps in the National Museum on Kildare Street, on rainy days back in the 1960s when my mother in the flat in Sean McDermott Street would insist he 'get those kids out from under my feet'. I remember being enchanted, sometimes frightened, by what the objects said to me just by their being there: the golden lunulae became ornaments for my princess robe, the Viking longboat the transport for great voyages across the face of the earth, the guns of the revolution my own ordnance for imagined revolutions. As a child of the poor I already had a fair idea of the disrespect and discrimination enshrined in a class system inherited through colonisation. The young state embraced that same system enthusiastically. We all had a fair idea. The poor. Luckily the door to the Museum was open and free. Crucial that it stays that way.

The Republic had to wrest itself out of the hands of the Catholic church for a start, before certain narratives could reach the light. Crucial stories had to find a language to be told in before they could be told, and that can take time; many of those stories were first broached through our writers and artists. The historians followed as archival material was discovered and integrated into the national narrative. The stories of the community that I come from, here in the city, the old Monto, at the turn of the century the largest red-light district in Europe with all the trauma that entailed, has always been difficult to map. There is still a need for a museum of the Monto. There are two rotting buildings that would serve that purpose perfectly: Aldeborough House would serve, or the old Convent, site of one of the last of the slave laundries. Ironically, the back entrance to the laundry sat cheek by jowl with the front entrance to one of the brothels on Railway Street, formerly Lower Tyrone Street, the street of the brothels. The Corporation changed the name in 1914 to hide the nature of the activity there. Now the entrance to the Monto is called James Joyce Street, formerly Corporation Street, renamed by City Council during a time of dereliction. I'm fond of its original name, Mabbot Street, which references Gilbert Mabbot who built a watermill there around 1674.

It is probably the most frequently erased district in Dublin and, given its trade and its clientele, very few people there were 'telling truth to power', so the written record is unreliable. I make poems in the chasm between that unreliable written record and the folklore which is heavily seasoned by the imagination of the oral storytellers but is nonetheless a more reliable narrative.

If the Museum wants a vital lens on the complex nature of the colony, of the use and abuse of the body in a revolutionary era, of what Louise Lowe calls 'an ecology' of a community, then a properly resourced museum of the Monto is a crucial cultural project waiting to happen.

Michael O'Reilly: We seem to have a shared enthusiasm for the museum as repository of truth and memory, belonging to the demos, rather than a state-led expression of national identity – you from the perspective of your lived experience, me from a more abstract political and legal engagement with issues of the recent past. But who is the modern curator, and indeed what is a curator today?

Paula Meehan: There is a quality the Sufi's talk about – baraka – a kind of grace that objects acquire through ritual use, through being cared for, minded over time. It transmits directly to the psyche. I love that I can wander into a space and be gripped by what I imagine the objects I apprehend say to me, sans interpretation.

Curation can be a new form of gatekeeping. It can be a way for an educated elite to impose their concerns on an imagined public. At its worst it can continue to deny certain voices and end up talking only to the already persuaded peer groups. And there is the tendency for museums to become interpretive centres, to lose mystery and radical uncertainty, qualities I admire in human undertakings. But curators can open our minds to those very qualities, open our hearts to empathy for the 'other', open our wounded selves to the balm of understanding. It's down to the culture of the museum and its workers. And you know the citizens can almost smell that culture when they cross the threshold.

I believe an important part of curation is to complicate the narrative and allow space for contradictory energies to come into the light. The contrarian or marginal in one season can be right at the centre of the action the next season. I distrust final verdicts and conclusions, whether I'm looking at an Archaic torso of Apollo in a museum in Berlin or an Apollo space suit in the National Air and Space Museum in Washington.

Michael O'Reilly: We were talking earlier about the centenary commemoration of the 1916 Rising. It's easy to forget the anxiety it aroused in the run-up years from about 2012. It was a time of anger. Speeches at the programme launch event in the GPO were drowned out by protesters banging on the windows. It felt like there was nothing to celebrate, that the vision of the Proclamation was stained by greed, lies, stupidity – and that the centenary risked further division, unravelling of the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement, a bitter contest of conflicting identities. Many people planned to 'get the hell out of the country' for Easter 2016.

Paula Meehan: Who were these people? Not the artists, certainly; many of us took, and had been taking, our own initiatives. Complex and many-stranded responses evolved without, sometimes in spite of, the state class.

Michael O'Reilly: Me for one. I was very uneasy about the whole commemoration business. Maybe family background colours one's first response. My grandfather, an 18-year-old Belfast Unionist plucked from his undergraduate studies in Trinity, took a dim view of the emerging Irish state and decided he would take his chances in India. I think his loathing of all things religious was at least part of the reason: he was born a catholic but was an avowed atheist from a young age. So yes, I dreaded the approaching scramble for green-hued-church-legitimated hegemony over the past. But then, purely by accident, I became involved in the project design and the centenary proved to be a revelatory moment, utterly different in tone and content to 1966. The key was what we talked about earlier: trust. There was no directive or orthodoxy: every community, every local history groups – every musician, artist, writer and poet was free to do and say as they wished. It became a wholly free, democratic mass-participation cultural commemoration, in which this Museum played no small part. I remember vividly the Easter Monday event here: 31 choirs and more than a thousand voices, performing 'A Nation's Voice' by Shaun Davey and Paul Muldoon. That was certainly speaking to the now, and it really was a nation's voice, a grown-up voice at last. Over the following weeks, there was a dawning realisation that it was the arts that had got us to this shared celebratory space. A contested, divisive chapter in our history which was going to be 'dragged up' was being joyfully navigated through the arts.

Paula Meehan: It will be very interesting to see where that new-found interest in the arts leads us. Certainly crucial is the resourcing of artists at all stages of their practice. You've eloquently outlined a powerful role the artists can play in public commemoration. The hope must be that that transformative energy will not just become a manipulated marketing tool for Brand Ireland. At the heart of our work is truth and beauty. And by beauty I don't mean ornamental gloss on the wounded world. By beauty I mean the shining forth of our essential goodness and deep wild intelligence. If our history has taught us anything it is that the artists keep faith with their truths, and the truths of their communities, even at the risk of ostracisation, brutal poverty (still the case for so many artists), and censorship.

Michael O'Reilly: You said somewhere that you are a memory keeper by trade. Could we explore that a little, because, obviously, it has resonance for the Museum, but, more importantly, for the idea of the artist as a curator of memory, which in turn leads to the question of the artist in the museum, not as the maker of a collectible but as an instrument of expression?

Paula Meehan: I said that in a poem, 'The Solace of Artemis', which was made out of research published in 2011 where the genome of bear bones from all over the island were sequenced by researchers in Trinity College Dublin, Penn State University in the US and Oxford University in the UK. They discovered that all polar bears alive today carry mitochondrial DNA (the DNA of the mothers' line) of one Irish brown bear, a kind of bear mother Eve. Bears are extinct here for maybe 9,000 years and this wonderful mating, between the Irish bear and whatever was there before the polar bear, would have happened as the ice cover retreated north in a time of cataclysmic change. The poet in me could not resist this emblem for the times we live in, times of cataclysmic climate change, of endless resource wars (under the guise of nationalism). The poem is a meditation on memory, the kind of memory scientific research can reveal, but also what happens to memory in a time when memory itself is subject to cataclysmic change. For the poet, the shift from the written to the digital is beyond huge; as huge as the shift with the invention of printing from the oral to the written. Every technology will have its priesthood, (its curators! its gatekeepers!). And though the technology changes, the poet's job is pretty much the same as it ever was. Words themselves carry their ghosts, their etymologies, and, as someone who writes in English, I work with a language whose ghosts reflect the history of a vast empire that plundered and rampaged through other languages. I personally find it a great language to reflect on power. You can go for a walk or you can tune into the Latinate end of the dictionary and perambulate.

The poem is dedicated to Catriona Crowe, our beloved National Archivist, the woman who put the 1901 and 1911 censuses online and thereby facilitated so many of the projects associated with these centenary years. I wanted to ask a few questions: what does it profit us that we have poetry, art, museums, libraries, if we fail to protect our planetary home? What does it profit us if the first 8 or 9 hits on Google is taken as truth, if we look no further, no deeper? What happens when we cede authority for memory to the machine? Look what happened when we passed authority for memory from the oral to the written. The laws also became enshrined in the written. We are still fighting wars over the Holy Books and the fundamentalism they engendered. Here's to the museums as spaces where human memory is preserved, cherished, and given the dignity it deserves.

The Solace of Artemis

Paula Meehan

I read that every polar bear alive has mitochondrial DNA
from a common mother, an Irish brown bear who once
roved out across the last ice age, and I am comforted.
It has been a long hot morning with the children of the machine,

their talk of memory, of buying it, of buying it cheap, but I,
memory keeper by trade, scan time coded in the golden hive mind
of eternity. I burn my books, I burn my whole archive:
a blaze that sears, synapses flaring cell to cell where

memory sleeps in the wax hexagonals of my doomed and melting comb.
I see him loping towards me across the vast ice field
to where I wait in the cave mouth, dreaming my cubs about the den,
my honeyed ones, smelling of snow and sweet oblivion.

Michael O'Reilly: Yes, memory really is at the heart of what we're discussing. I spent a lot of time over the past 20 years in another new-born state – Kosovo. On one occasion I took a tortuous road trip from Pristina, the capital, down through Skopje to Thessaloniki, which had the largest Sephardi Jewish community in the early 20th century. In 1917, a fire destroyed much of the Jewish residential and cultural quarters which were then acquired by the Greek government. They wanted to turn Salonika into a 'modern' European city, renamed as Thessaloniki. Then came the German occupation in 1941 - 1942. The Jewish community, what was left of it, sold their cemetery to raise funds for the release of Jewish prisoners. Small remnants of the headstones can still be seen today in what is now a municipal park and it struck me that the ultimate victory of evil is not just to kill people, or to drive them from their homes forever: it is to permanently erase all memory of its victims. We all die, but memory is the fount of the living continuum we talked about earlier.

But to get back to Kosovo, I recall my very first visit to their National Museum. As well as the Serb collections, the vast bulk of the Museum's Albanian artefacts – objects of huge significance to the majority population – had been removed to Belgrade by retreating Serb forces in 1999. Exhibition cabinets were empty. Plinths supported nothing more than air. A card with photograph of the taken object was suspended from the ceiling directly over the cabinets and plinths where each had been displayed. The exhibition was called, simply, *Missing*. It evoked a mixture of feelings: sadness, anger but most of all, a profound sense of missing, of absence. So, perhaps we should pay more attention to the feelings that a museum provokes, or awakens. Isn't that what memory does, and why amnesia is so terrifying?

Paula Meehan: That is a ferocious account, Michael. I can feel the hairs standing up on the back of my neck. Chilling. War is raging again in Europe. Even as we edit this conversation, we hear so many conversations about war crimes, arguments about what is a just war, don't we? And maybe our own neutrality is on the line, while billions are being channelled to arms manufacturers, and the displaced are moving in thousands across borders into uncertainty. It was never more urgent that we do not forget what trauma does to the individual, never was it more crucial that our own history should open our hearts and minds in compassion towards and solidarity with the dispossessed. The museums surely have a calling in this important work – lest we forget, lest we ourselves fall victim to silence and amnesia. And here's a last thought, Michael: up to 13% of our present population was born off-island, but so many identify very strongly now as Irish. We already need to start considering how our museums will provide for the integration of their familial histories with their present chosen identities and consider the reframing of 'Irish' in this emerging and energising context.

National Museum of Ireland Exhibitions during the Decade of Centenaries

Since 2012

Asgard: From Gun Running to Recent Conservation

The *Asgard* has had many incarnations, since she was built in 1905 by the celebrated Norwegian architect, Colin Archer, to her pivotal role in the 1914 Howth gun running and her later use as Ireland's first national sail-training vessel. Since August 2012, the yacht has been on display in Collins Barracks as part of an exhibition *Asgard: From Gun Running to Recent Conservation*. Standing as a monument to the skill of both the original builders and the conservation team, it also serves as a reminder of the turbulent events of 1914. Curated by Sandra Heise.

2013 - 2014

1913 Lockout: Impact & Aftermath

This exhibition documented life in Dublin in 1913, exploring the key actors and events surrounding the Lockout, the aftermath of the Lockout, the formation of the Citizen Army, the women's suffrage movement and the rise of trade unions. Central to this exhibition, and serving as a reminder of the materiality of history, was the original Starry Plough flag which made its first appearance with the Irish Citizen Army in April 1914 in Dublin. It then flew over the Imperial Hotel on O'Connell Street during the 1916 Rising. Also included in this exhibition was the Larkin Banner. Curated by Lar Joye.

2013 - 2014

Banners Unfurled and Lockout – The Tapestry

These temporary exhibitions were presented by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions' 1913 Commemoration Committee at Collins Barracks. The first, entitled *Banners Unfurled*, consisted of replicas of 18 guild and trade union banners. The second, *Lockout – The Tapestry*, was commissioned in 2012 by SIPTU and the National College of Art and Design. Developed by artists Kathy Henderson and Robert Ballagh and made by voluntary groups, this 30-panel tapestry depicted a visual narrative of the 1913 Lockout. Curated by Lar Joye.

2014

Stitches in Time

A collaboration with the Limerick School of Art & Design, Technological University of the Shannon, this exhibition featured 12 garments designed and made by second-year students of the BA (Hons) in Fashion Design. The designs were inspired by uniforms including those from WWI in the exhibition *Soldiers and Chiefs, Irish Wars 1919 – 1923*. The process involved the students exploring the exhibition and the Museum's handling collection material related to WWI and the Irish Volunteers. Curated by Helen Beaumont.

Locations: Archaeology Country Life Decorative Arts & History Natural History

Since 2015

Recovered Voices: The Stories of the Irish at War, 1914-15

This exhibition opened on the 28th January 2015. It deals with the complexity of World War I and how it is remembered in Ireland by looking at the many ways in which Irish men and women were personally involved. It explores the social, economic and political reasons Irish soldiers joined the British Army, and the Irish regiments that went to the Western Front in 1914 and to Gallipoli in 1915. The exhibition also focuses on Irish emigrants who fought in Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and South African armies as well as the many Irish women who supported the war effort by working in shell factories or volunteering as nurses at the front. Through a series of personal stories, this exhibition highlights the stories of Irish men and women during this period, bringing to life the difficult choices and harsh conditions they faced throughout 1914 and 1915. Curated by Lar Joye and Brenda Malone.

2016

The Darkest Hour is just before the Dawn

This exhibition of artworks was inspired by the *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* exhibition. The artworks were created by members of the Henrietta Adult Community Education and the Active Retirement Association Phibsboro, in collaboration with the artist Janine Davidson. Curated by Eimir O'Brien with artist Janine Davidson.

2016 – 2017

The Shuttle Hive: A Century of Rising Threads

A commemorative collection of 18 garments mounted on 6 panels that reflected themes from rebellion and resistance, to family and domestic life. Inspired by the various roles played by women during the Decade of Centenaries including rebels, spies, uniform makers, nurses, messengers and revolution directors. This exhibition, part of a National Museum and Design and Crafts Council Ireland collaboration with designer Alison Conneely, also included woven pieces created during a series of 'meitheal' workshops. In addition, the exhibition featured music specially composed by Larry Beau. Curated by Alison Conneely.

2016 – 2020

Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising

Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising opened on the 3rd March 2016. In this exhibition, which focused on the events of Easter Week 1916, the Museum displayed a wealth of objects from this period. Many of these objects had not previously been on public display, while others, such as the Irish Republic flag which flew over the GPO, were specially conserved. Through a combination of objects, words and imagery of the period, visitors experienced aspects of the physical reality of the events of Easter Week and followed the stories of those caught up in the events such as civilians, combatants and survivors. This exhibition also offered visitors the unique experience of physical proximity to the people and events of Easter Week through the personal belongings of the participants. These included clothing worn by the rebels and the British Army; the watches used to time rebel despatches; the bullets and bayonets that caused injury; smelling salts that revived the wounded; a crucifix perforated by a stray bullet; and most poignantly, the last letters of those sentenced to death. The inclusion of these objects is a reminder of the intimacy of objects and their ability to convey human emotion. *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* also captured the stories of those who were imprisoned and interned, displaying the arts and crafts of the internment camps alongside prison badges and caps. Curated by Pádraig Clancy, Darragh Gannon, Sandra Heise and Brenda Malone.

2016 – 2020

Roger Casement – Voice of the Voiceless

Marking the centenary of Roger Casement's death, *Roger Casement – Voice of the Voiceless* opened on the 3rd August 2016. Although recognised for his role in the 1916 Rising, Roger Casement's humanitarian work investigating atrocities in the rubber trade in Africa and South America is less well known. This exhibition used some of the objects he collected during his time in Africa and South America to tell the story of this part of his life and the story of the victims of slavery and forced labour he worked for. On display were butterflies collected in present day Colombia, items used in rubber collecting in present day Democratic Republic of Congo and objects made by skilled Congolese and Amazonian crafts people. The exhibition concluded with a panel dealing with modern day slavery and the oppression of tribal people. Curated by Fiona O'Reilly.

Locations: Archaeology Country Life Decorative Arts & History Natural History

2017

The Volunteers

This large-scale mural by artist Joe Caslin, presented on the North Block of Clarke Square at Collins Barracks, was inspired by the lives of those whose stories were told in the exhibitions *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* and *Recovered Voices: The Stories of the Irish at War 1914 – 15*. Through *The Volunteers*, Caslin posed important questions around how arts and culture can have a transformative effect on our daily lives and well-being. The mural also demonstrated how museums are both social and learning spaces where we can be inspired, reflect, find meaning, and reconnect with ourselves and our history. This project was jointly funded by the Arts Council of Ireland's Next Generation Bursary and Trinity College Creative Challenge.

2017 – 2018

In Kind

This exhibition of portraits, celebrating the contribution of community volunteers, was created by members of the Henrietta Adult Community Education and the Active Retirement Association Phibsboro in collaboration with the artist Janine Davidson. The portraits were inspired by the Kim Haughton *Portrait of a Century* exhibition and artist Joe Caslin's large scale mural in Clarke Square, entitled *The Volunteers.* The exhibition was supported by Dublin City Council Community Grants and City of Dublin Education and Training Board. Curated by Helen Beaumont with artist Janine Davidson in collaboration with local community groups.

2017 – 2019

Portrait of a Century, Kim Haughton

This photography exhibition by Irish photographer Kim Haughton featured unique and timeless photographs of contemporary Ireland threaded together through a shared language, culture and nationhood and reflecting one hundred years of Irish history as seen through the prism of its people. Curated by Kim Haughton, Alex Ward and Audrey Whitty.

Since 2017

War in the Mud - The Irish soldier in Belgium in the summer of 1917

This exhibition looked at what happened to Irish soldiers on the Western Front in the summer of 1917, a year when two Irish Divisions fought side-by-side, in victory and then in defeat. In June 1917, the 36th (Ulster) and 16th (Irish) Divisions benefited from careful preparation and good luck to eject well-entrenched German forces from the important Messines Ridge. The preliminary artillery bombardment was unprecedented in its intensity and was followed by the exploding of 19 mines under the German lines, killing 10,000 German soldiers. Two months later, the same two divisions suffered terrible casualties in assaulting concrete fortifications amid the mud of an unusually wet autumn at the Battle of Langemarck. Despite warnings from his officers, the army commander, Irishman Hubert Gough, insisted the attacks go ahead. An observer later wrote: 'The two Irish divisions were broken to bits, and their brigadiers called it murder'. Curated by Lar Joye.

2018

Votes for Women: Suffrage and Citizenship

In 2018, the Houses of the Oireachtas, in partnership with the National Museum of Ireland, hosted an exhibition of artefacts, images and ephemera celebrating the work of the suffragette movement, the importance of the Representation of the People Act 1918 and their impact on modern society. Among other exhibits, the exhibition featured the original banner used by the Irish Women's Franchise League; a lectern used by suffrage speakers and bearing the words 'Votes for Women'; and medals awarded to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington. Curated by Sandra Heise.

2018-2019

Our Irish Women exhibition

The *Our Irish Women* exhibition told the story of local women who had made a significant contribution to sport, music, science, the Second World War, Irish Independence, community, women's rights, philanthropy, public health and the arts, over the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. Following its display in the National Museum of Ireland - Country Life in October and November 2018, it toured to a number of local venues in the west of Ireland during 2019. Curated by iCAN members, NMI and Local Authority Heritage Office, Galway.

2019

Stories Between Us

Stories Between Us was an intergenerational public art project and a partnership with the Museum, artist Janine Davidson and the Grangegorman Development Agency. The project brought older people from the local community together with students from St Gabriel's NS to explore the themes of play, pastimes and games, through oral histories and the creation of a Memory Box of objects. Curated by Janine Davidson.

Locations: Archaeology Country Life Decorative Arts & History Natural History

2019–2022

Marching on the Road to Freedom: Dáil Éireann 1919

This exhibition celebrated the centenary of the first Dáil Éireann, whose formal opening took place in the Mansion House, Dublin on 21st January 1919. This took place against a background of increasing violence in Ireland between nationalists and British forces. On the same day as the first meeting of the Dáil, nine Volunteers from the 3rd Tipperary Brigade carried out an ambush at Soloheadbeg, County Tipperary. In retrospect, this would be seen as the first engagement of the War of Independence. Dáil Éireann was banned by the British government in September 1919; therefore, from that point onwards, its ministers and officials suffered increased harassment, with the resulting need to move premises on a regular basis. As a consequence, there was very little legislative activity. Curated by Sandra Heise.

Since 2020

The Irish Wars, 1919-23

Originally part of the permanent exhibition *Soldiers and Chiefs: Irish Wars 1919 – 1923*, this exhibition features more than 50 newly displayed objects, graphics and audio visual elements, as well as new interpretations of themes such as civil disobedience, imprisonment, hunger strike, propaganda, women in warfare and the effects of the conflict on civilian populations. Objects new to the exhibition include the RIC handcuffs worn by Seán Hogan when rescued by the Tipperary Brigade at Knocklong, 1919; experimental weapons made by the IRA; and items used in escapes from Lincoln, Mountjoy and Kilmainham prisons. A number of items were also returned to display from the Museum's collection after 15 years in storage; these include the death masks of Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins, Cathal Brugha and Terence MacSwiney. The exhibition is supported by a wide range of multimedia, including contemporary newsreel film provided by the Irish Film Institute of stop and searches, funerals, and IRA captures and destruction from the period 1919 – 1923. Curated by Brenda Malone.

Since 2021

Studio & State: The Laverys and the Anglo-Irish Treaty

This exhibition featured, for the first time, Sir John Lavery's paintings of the Treaty signatories from the Hugh Lane Gallery next to contemporary artefacts of the time from the NMI's collection. Museum objects include the fountain pen reputedly used by Michael Collins to sign the original Treaty document and propaganda handbills. Curated by Edith Andrees and Logan Sisley.

Decade of Centenaries Public Engagement Programme 2012 - 2018

2012	6th January	**The Howth Gun Running 1914 - Arms for the Rising** Talk by Sandra Heise, Museum curator of the exhibition *Asgard: From Gun Running to Recent Conservation*, that recalled the events of July 1914 when the *Asgard* sailed into Dublin.
	3rd February and 4th May	**Witnesses to War - The Irish War of Independence in Their Own Words** Talk by Museum curator Brenda Malone on the witness statements collected by the Bureau of Military History between 1913 and 1921.
	23rd February	**The 1916 Rising** Talk for families by Museum curator Sandra Heise on the 1916 Rising that examined important documents from the time including *Leabhar na hAiséirghe* (Book of the Resurrection).
	28th April	**Understanding 1916 - Approaching 1916** This conference, with a diverse panel of contributors including keynote speaker Dr Róisín Higgins, explored how the 1916 centenary could be commemorated.
	25th August	**Brother against Brother - The 90th Anniversary of the Irish Civil War** As the legacy of the Irish Civil War remains strong within our contemporary consciousness, this talk by Museum curator Lar Joye considered the impact of the conflict on Irish families and communities.
	26th August	**'Sure they're not going to shoot me in my own county' – the Death of Michael Collins** A Heritage Week talk with historian Tim Crowley and film-maker Marie Young who re-examined the hours before and after the death of Michael Collins in County Cork in August 1922.
	27th September	**Sail Away - exhibition tour of *Asgard: From Gun Running to Recent Conservation*** Family friendly tour of the exhibition *Asgard: From Gun Running to Recent Conservation* given by Museum curator Edith Andrees on the history of this famous yacht.

Locations: Archaeology | Country Life | Decorative Arts & History | Natural History

	9th November	**The Fighting Irish in World War One** Talk by Lar Joye, Museum curator of the *Soldiers and Chiefs* exhibition, that explored the role of the Irish who fought in World War I as soldiers of the British, Australian and American armies.
2013	*10th April*	**The 1916 Rising and the Royal Barracks** A walking tour of Collins Barracks Museum conducted by Museum curator Lar Joye who discussed the role the barracks played in 1916.
	8th June	**1689 - 2012, The Irish and France - Three Centuries of Military Relations** A panel of speakers including Dr Nathalie Genet-Rouffiac, Dr David Murphy and Professor Tom Bartlett discussed Ireland's military relationship with France from the time of the Wild Geese in the 17th century, and the two World Wars of the 20th century to the present day.
	21st August	**Seán Heuston's Easter Rising on Smithfield and the South Quays** As part of Heritage Week, John Gibney of Historical Insights/History Ireland gave an illustrated talk on Seán Heuston (1891-1916) that looked at where he lived, worked, fought and was buried, close to Collins Barracks.
	26th October	**1913 Lockout: Impact and Objects** A conference featuring a panel of speakers, including Pádraig Yeates, discussed aspects of, and objects associated with the Dublin Lockout. This conference was held in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name.
	14th November	**The Irish Soldier in World War One** A talk by Museum curator Lar Joye that explored the role of the Irish who fought in World War One as soldiers of the British, Australian and American armies.

2014	1st February	**Re-enactment - World War I, 1914 - 1918** A re-enactment in Clarke Square by the 2nd Battalion, Prince of Wales Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians), who carried out the same arm and foot drills that Irish soldiers would have displayed before they left for the Front in the First World War.
	1st February	**Remembering World War One in Europe, 1914 - 1918.** A conference, including presentations by Professor John Horne and Dr Judith Devlin, that discussed the First World War and its place in European history. The conference explored how Europe commemorated the First World War and considered contemporary debates and centenary projects underway in Ireland and the UK.
	2nd March	**The Irish Soldier on Film** Talk by Museum curator Lar Joye, where he discussed rare film footage capturing Irish military history from the early 20th century.
	30th March	**Women in the Decade of Centenaries** Historian Edward Oakes gave a tour of Collins Barracks that explored the impact of the 1913 - 1923 period on the lives of Irish women.
	26th April	**Understanding 1916** Michael Kenny, Keeper Emeritus and curator of the exhibition *Understanding 1916,* delivered a talk on events as they took place in that historic week, Easter 1916.
	26th April	**How the Rising was Armed** A talk by Museum curator Sandra Heise marking the centenary of the Howth Gun Running in July 1914, where she reflected on how the rifles and ammunition smuggled on board the *Asgard* would arm the Irish Volunteers in preparation for 1916.
	27th April	**The Easter Rising, 1916 Tour** Museum curator Edith Andrees gave a tour of both the *Understanding 1916* exhibition and the *Soldiers and Chiefs* 1916 gallery.

Locations: Archaeology | Country Life | Decorative Arts & History | Natural History

	26th July	**Asgard and the Howth Gun Running – 100 Years On** Conference exploring the background to the Howth Gun Running; its impact, setting the stage for Easter 1916, the mission itself, its key players and finally, how the *Asgard* is remembered and what it means, a century on.
	28th September	**'At the edge of this mighty conflict' - Neutral Ireland's perspective on the Second World War** Dr Michael Kennedy, historian and Executive Editor, Documents on Irish Foreign Policy at the Royal Irish Academy, discussed Irish perspectives on the Second World War, the country's first international crisis as an independent nation.
	25th October	**Soldiers and Civilians - Experiences and Memories of the First World War** Conference exploring the experiences of soldiers, nurses and civilians during World War I and how the War has been commemorated across Europe and in Australia.
2015	*17th January*	**Re-enactment - Irish Free State Army Foot Drills** The history and battle re-enactment group Lord Edward's Own displayed military drills from 1922, a time when the Irish Free State Army began to train recruits in Collins Barracks.
	4th February to 30th April	**Pals – The Irish at Gallipoli** Award-winning ANU productions presented an immersive World War I experience that was based on events surrounding the campaign at Gallipoli and was inspired by the previously untold stories of the 7th Battalion of the Royal Irish Fusiliers.
	18th April	**The Easter Rising - Irish Volunteer Drills** Historical re-enactors displayed drills as the Irish Volunteers would have between 1913 and 1916.

26th April	**Military aspects of the 1916 Rising** Lar Joye, Museum curator of the *Soldiers & Chiefs* exhibition, provided an illustrated talk that explored the Rising from a military perspective.
10th and 29th May	**Public Tour of Recovered Voices** Lar Joye, Museum curator of *Recovered Voices: Stories of the Irish at War 1914 - 1915* conducted tours of this exhibition.
6th June	**70th Anniversary of the end of World War Two** Presented by historical re-enactors, The WWII Club, this re-enactment displayed uniforms and equipment used by the Allied (American, British, French, Soviet) and Axis (German, Italian) Forces during the Second World War.
21st June	**The Irish at Waterloo** Military historian Dan Harvey, a serving Lieutenant Colonel in the Irish Defence Forces, delivered a talk on the significance of the Irish involvement in Wellington's army at Waterloo.
3rd October	**Easter Week Remembered: a morning of talks previewing the forthcoming exhibition on the 1916 Rising** Presentation by members of the Museum's exhibition team on the themes and artefacts in the exhibition *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising*.
8th to 10th October	**The Great War Signal Corps: Choral Music Theatre based on the words of the signallers of World War I** Performed in a minimalist dramatic setting, this new musical composition explored the First World War from an Irish perspective using text sourced from archival material in the National Library and the National Museum of Ireland. Composed and written by George Higgs, directed by Robbie Blake and performed by the Tonnta Vocal Ensemble and members of Dublin Youth Theatre.

Locations: Archaeology | Country Life | Decorative Arts & History | Natural History

	22nd November	**1916 in Objects** Museum curator Brenda Malone gave a gallery talk on the *Soldiers & Chiefs* exhibition focusing on 10 objects from the 1916 Rising and the stories they tell.
2016	*21st January*	**Touched by War: Reflections on the Archaeology of Conflict** Talk by Dr Tony Pollard, Director of the Centre for Battlefield Archaeology at the University of Glasgow who reflected on the highs and lows of a career in conflict archaeology and demonstrated how archaeology can shed new light on conflicts from medieval warfare to the world wars of the 20th century. Part of *The Archaeology of a Decade of War* Lecture Series.
	30th January	**Irish Volunteer Foot and Arms Drill** The history and battle re-enactment group Lord Edward's Own displayed the military drills of the Irish Volunteers in Clarke Square.
	7th February	**Dress and National Identity in 20th Century Ireland** Talk by Museum curator Alex Ward on the clothing of early 20th century Ireland, illustrating how ideas of national identity were expressed through textiles.
	7th, 14th, 21st and 28th February	**Pull Down a Horseman** Dublin Lyric Players presented *Pull Down a Horseman*, which was written by Eugene McCabe for the 50th anniversary of the Rising in 1966. The play, depicting a secret meeting between Pearse and Connolly, drew from the writings and known views of the two protagonists.
	11th February	**The Landscape of the 1916 Rising** Talk by Museum curator Lar Joye on the 1916 Rising from a military history point of view that examined the Rebel plan to take Dublin, the role of British artillery, the effectiveness of the Rebel Weapons and the impact of the *Helga*. Part of *The Archaeology of a Decade of War* Lecture Series.

27th February	**1916 Re-enacted: Foot and Arms Drill** Drill in Clarke Square by the history and battle re-enactment group Lord Edward's Own that saw a re-enactment of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) and Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP) who were first to respond to the 1916 Rising.
3rd March	**Beating the Retreat? The final hours of the Rising in Moore Street** Talk by archaeologist Franc Myles, who shared his investigations into the interiors of the buildings on Moore Street and Henry Place, offered an archaeological perspective on the Rising and explored the final 24 hours of the Rising from the evacuation of the GPO to the Republican advance into Moore Street. Part of *The Archaeology of a Decade of War* Lecture Series.
8th March	**International Women's Day Tour** Museum educator Holly Furlong conducted a tour in celebration of International Women's Day, incorporating some of the prominent women featured in the *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* exhibition.
13th March	**'The strange thing that I am'- A look at the life of P.H. Pearse** A talk by Brian Crowley, curator of the Pearse Museum, on educationalist, writer and 1916 leader, Patrick Pearse.
19th and 20th March	**Reconstructing 1916** A drop-in activity that gave participants the opportunity to handle material culture of the Easter Rising including replica uniforms and paraphernalia of the Irish Volunteers and Cumann na mBan.
30th March	**Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising** Talk by Museum curator Brenda Malone that included a guided gallery tour of the *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* exhibition.

Locations: Archaeology Country Life Decorative Arts & History Natural History

14th April	**Frongoch Camp and the Archaeology of Internment** Talk by Joanna Brück on Frongoch internment camp in North Wales where, after the 1916 Rising, some 1800 Irish men were interned. Her presentation explored the potential of an archaeological approach to its material culture. Part of *The Archaeology of a Decade of War* Lecture Series.
17th April	**Dermot Bolger in Conversation with Paul Durcan** In this conversation with Dermot Bolger, *Writer in Residence* at the National Museum of Ireland, the poet Paul Durcan discussed his memories of the MacBride family and read poems honouring Major John MacBride, one of the forgotten figures of the Easter Rising who was a relation of his through his mother, the late Sheila Durcan. Part of the *Finding a Voice* - Writer in Residence programme.
28th April	**Rising in the West: 1916 Preparation and Aftermath in Mayo** Historian Noel Campbell explored the 1916 Rising from a Mayo perspective and looked at how close Mayo came to involvement in the revolution.
1st May	**Gallipoli Schools Project** As part of the *Gallipoli Centenary Education Project*, students from five schools in Dublin and Tralee presented their projects on the experiences of Irish soldiers, nurses and civilians during the 1915 Gallipoli campaigns. In addition, ANU productions performed an excerpt of their play *Pals: the Irish at Gallipoli*.
13th May	**Dermot Bolger in Conversation with Piet Chielens** In this conversation with Dermot Bolger, Piet Chielens, co-director of the award-winning In Flanders Fields Museum in Ypres (Ieper) discussed the journeys of soldiers from the Royal Barracks (Collins Barracks) to the Somme, or Ypres. Part of the *Finding a Voice* - Writer in Residence programme.

14th May	**Finding a Voice: Dermot Bolger in Conversation with Museum Curators and Conservators** In this conversation with Dermot Bolger, Museum curators and conservators highlighted some of the 'behind the scenes' work involved in preparing for the *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* exhibition. Part of the *Finding a Voice* - Writer in Residence programme.
19th May	**Recording Ireland's First World War Landscapes** Heather Montgomery presented her archaeological investigations into the training of Kitchener's New Army, 1914 – 1918, research that brought together historic evidence relating to British military training as well as an archaeological analysis of advances in 20th century warfare. Part of *The Archaeology of a Decade of War* Lecture Series
26th May	**The Archaeological Landscape of WWI in Flanders** Talk by Jean Bourgeois and Birger Stichelbaut, with aerial photographs from WWI and modern archaeological techniques, that reconstructed the landscape of World War I and provided an analysis of sites and the complexity of the war landscape. Part of *The Archaeology of a Decade of War* Lecture Series.
29th May	**Dermot Bolger Reading and Book Launch** A reading by Dermot Bolger to mark the official launch of his novel *The Lonely Sea and the Sky*. Based on a true incident in Irish history, the book is a vivid coming-of-age novel, telling the story of Jack Roche who, having lost his father, takes his place to earn a seaman's wage and feed his family. Part of the *Finding a Voice* - Writer in Residence programme.

Locations: Archaeology | Country Life | Decorative Arts & History | Natural History

29th May *26th June* *7th, 21st and 31st July* *4th, 18th and 28th August* *25th September* *30th October* *27th November* *29th and 30th December*	**Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising** Tours of the *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* exhibition that explored some of the highlights of the Museum's extensive Easter Week collection.
3rd, 10th, 17th and 24th June	**After '16: Film Screenings** An initiative designed to commemorate, celebrate and ruminate on 1916, these short films were commissioned by Bord Scannán na hÉireann/The Irish Film Board.
12th June	**After '16: Film Panel Discussion** A panel of researchers and producers involved in the Irish Film Board's *After '16* short films discussed their research and methods of interpretation to highlight the events and aftermath of Easter Week 1916.
19th June	**Dermot Bolger in Conversation with Brian Keenan** In this conversation with Dermot Bolger, Brian Keenan discussed his experience of being held hostage in a time of war in the Lebanon and his more recent experiences of exploring present day Lebanon. Part of the *Finding a Voice* - Writer in Residence programme.
2nd and 3rd July	**The Battle of the Somme Film** *The Battle of the Somme* film was released in September 1916 and was seen by more than 20 million people in Britain and Ireland. The viewing of this restored film included a short introduction by historian David Murphy.

3rd July	**The Battle of Somme Re-enactment** A re-enactment by Lord Edward's Own that marked the centenary of the Battle of the Somme and offered the chance to view replica uniforms and equipment used at the battle.
9th July	**The Battle of the Somme Film** Historian Dr Jennifer Wellington provided an introduction to the viewing of this restored film.
9th and 16th July	**The Shuttle Hive - Craft and History Workshop** These workshops included a visit to the *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* exhibition followed by craft making and weaving in conversation with fashion designer Alison Conneely and weaver Katie Hanlan.
23rd July	**The Battle of the Somme Film** Lar Joye, Museum curator of the *Recovered Voices* exhibition, provided an introduction to the viewing of this restored film.
14th August	**Hairy Jaysus** Award-winning playwright and actor Donal O'Kelly performed his one man play, *Hairy Jaysus*, that examined Francis Sheehy Skeffington's tragic legacy as viewed through the eyes of a Dublin street beggar today. Part of the *Finding a Voice* - Writer in Residence programme.
14th August	**Writing the Past: An afternoon in conversation with Dermot Bolger and Donal O'Kelly** A reading by Dermot Bolger of his poem, 'The Stolen Future', was followed by an interview with Donal O'Kelly about his career as a writer and his views on social and historical themes. Part of the *Finding a Voice* - Writer in Residence programme.
25th August	**Mapping Shipwrecks and Protecting the Shipwrecks of WWI in Irish Waters** As part of Heritage Week Karl Brady, Underwater Archaeological Unit of the National Monuments Service and Charise McKeon, Geological Survey Ireland, provided an overview of the World War I naval conflict in Irish waters and analysed the range and quantity of resulting wrecks. Part of *The Archaeology of a Decade of War* Lecture Series

Locations: Archaeology Country Life Decorative Arts & History Natural History

28th August	**The Somme – People and Place** A Heritage Week talk by Philip Orr, historian and author of *The Road to the Somme*, on the people and places associated with the Battle of the Somme.
15th September	**The Geography of the War of Independence and Civil War in Dublin** Muiris de Buitléir discussed the geography and architecture of Dublin during the period of the War of Independence and the Civil War focusing on buildings associated with the actions of the period and the traces of the events that remain. Part of *The Archaeology of a Decade of War* Lecture Series.
16th September	**Culture Night 2016 - Midwives of the Nation** Carnation Theatre performed the play by Joe O'Byrne, *Midwives of the Nation*, that followed the women of 1916, who included dispatchers, doctors, gunrunners, nurses and smugglers.
18th September	**Dermot Bolger in Conversation with Jennifer Johnston** In this conversation with Dermot Bolger, Jennifer Johnston delivered a reading in memory of family members who fought at the Battle of the Somme. This was followed by a discussion on her life and work. Part of the *Finding a Voice* - Writer in Residence programme.
25th September	**Five months of failure, the Battle of the Somme and the 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers** Lar Joye, Museum curator of Military History, gave a talk on the Battle of the Somme, including stories of the 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers.
1st to 31st October	**Beyond Sackville Street and the Somme** A series of events that looked at how the lives of people throughout rural Ireland were affected by the 1916 Rising, its aftermath and World War I.
1st October	**In the Flesh I and II** A talk by artist Bridget O'Gorman and Museum curator Brenda Malone on their collaboration on a 1916 Rising commemorative project.

2nd October	**Midwives of a Nation** A Carnation Theatre performance of the play *Midwives of a Nation* that celebrated the often-forgotten contribution of women to the events of 1916.
6th October	**The Archaeological Landscapes of the War of Independence and the Civil War** A talk by Damian Shiels, Military Archaeologist, that examined the wealth of archaeological evidence of Ireland's 20th century conflict. Using local case studies, he demonstrated what can be learned from examining sites such as safe houses, weapon factories and ambush sites. Part of *The Archaeology of a Decade of War* Lecture Series.
8th October	**Mayo Heritage and Diaspora Day** Members of the Mayo Genealogy Group and guest speakers from The Jackie Clark Library and ATU Mayo came together to discuss the sources that are available for researching Mayo ancestry.
9th October	**Dermot Bolger in conversation with Anna Haverty** Concluding this series of public conversations, Dermot Bolger was in discussion with the author Anne Haverty about her biography of Constance Markievicz. Part of the *Finding a Voice* - Writer in Residence programme.
22nd October	**Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising** A talk by Sandra Heise, Museum curator of the *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* exhibition, which gave a 'behind the scenes' exploration of the wealth and significance of this collection of objects, which are associated with Easter Week 1916.

Locations: ◆ Archaeology ◆ Country Life ◆ Decorative Arts & History ◆ Natural History

	4th and 5th November	**Mise Éire? Shaping a Nation through Design** A conference that explored the role of design and craft in shaping national and collective identities and asked what national identity means today in 21st century Ireland. For this two-day event, internationally renowned ceramic artist and author Edmund de Waal was joined by Irish and international historians, academics, designers, makers, thinkers and curators.
	5th and 6th November	**After '16: Film Screenings** Screenings of 9 short films entitled *After '16*. A creative response by Irish filmmakers to the events of Easter 1916, telling stories from the eve of the Rising all the way to the Troubles.
	17th November	**The Fortress Prison: The Archaeology of Victorian Spike Island, County Cork** A talk by Barra O'Donnabháin on the Spike Island Archaeological Project, which investigated the archaeology of the Victorian convict depot that operated on the island in Cork harbour from 1847 - 1883. Part of *The Archaeology of a Decade of War* Lecture Series.
	3rd December	**Our Untold Stories of 1916 & WWI** A talk by members of the Irish Community Archive Network (iCAN) focusing on accounts of people, places, events and artefacts connected with 1916 and World War I.
	10th December	**The Battle of the Somme** Historian Dr Jennifer Wellington provided a short introduction in advance of the viewing of this restored film.
2017	*28th January*	**All Changed Utterly: Revising the Rising** A history conference for senior cycle history students where the legacy of 1916 was discussed with historians Liz Gillis and Donal Fallon and Museum curator Sandra Heise.

26th February *18th April* *9th July* *29th October* *31st December*	**Proclaiming a Republic** Tours of the *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* exhibition that explored some of the highlights of the Museum's extensive Easter Week collection.
4th March	**The Shuttle Hive: Suffragettes and Thimble Bruises** Taking inspiration from the exhibition *The Shuttle Hive: A Century of Rising Threads*, this workshop looked at traditional knit and crochet patterns and their symbolism.
5th March	**Public Tour: Women of 1916** This *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* tour focused on key women within the exhibition and the roles women would have played in the rebellion.
12th March	**The Shuttle Hive: A Century of Rising Threads** Designer and curator Alison Conneely conducted a tour of the exhibition *The Shuttle Hive: A Century of Rising Threads*, followed by a weaving 'meitheal' workshop with anthropologist Steve Coleman and historian Caoilfhionn Ní Bheacháin.
26th March *25th June* *6th August*	**Public Tour: Decade of Conflict** A tour exploring the turbulent decade from 1913-1923, which examined the ordinary Irishmen and women involved in World War I, the 1916 Rising, the War of Independence, and the Civil War.
9th May	**Roger Casement: Voice of the Voiceless** As part of the Bealtaine Festival, curator Fiona O'Reilly gave a talk on Roger Casement's humanitarian work in South America and Africa in the early 20th century.
12th May	**Bealtaine - In My Grandfather's Time** A talk by Anthony Leonard on the work of his grandfather and local photographer Jack Leonard who documented all aspects of rural life, as well as major political struggles at the time.

Locations: Archaeology · Country Life · Decorative Arts & History · Natural History

18th June	**Battle of Messines** Keynote speaker, journalist and writer, Kevin Myers was joined by a panel of historians including Damien Burke, archivist at the Irish Jesuit Province; Lar Joye, Museum curator and Dr Jennifer Wellington, lecturer in Modern History at UCD for an event that examined and marked the centenary of the Battle of Messines where two of the British Army's Irish Divisions fought side by side.
25th June	**Francis Ledwidge - A celebration of his life, work and legacy** Dermot Bolger, editor of a new edition of *Francis Ledwidge: Selected Poems* was joined by poet Michael O'Loughlin and artist Liam Ó Broin in a celebration of the life and legacy of this Irish First World War poet.
24th September	**Irish at WWI** A tour encompassing both the *Recovered Voices: The Stories of the Irish at War, 1914-1915* and the *Soldiers & Chiefs* exhibitions that explored the experience of Irish men and women during World War I.
1st October	**Dublin Festival of History - The Funeral of Thomas Ashe** A talk by John Gibney on the life of Thomas Ashe and the significance of his funeral.
4th November	**A National Health Service? Exploring how Museums can improve our Wellbeing** This conference, marking the Museum's 20th anniversary at Collins Barracks, coincided with artist Joe Caslin's creation of the mural in Clarke Square, entitled *The Volunteers*. The mural, which aimed to raise awareness of mental health and the enduring stigmas around mental illness, drew its inspiration from the 1916 Volunteers and the *Soldiers & Chiefs* exhibition.
30th December	**Recovered Voices - Ireland and World War I** A tour of *Recovered Voices: The Stories of the Irish at War, 1914-15* that explored the experience of Irish men and women during World War I.

2018	*27th January*	**Set in Stone? The Politics of Public Statues** A morning of talks exploring the role that public monuments play in modern society. Speakers included Professor Emily Mark-Fitzgerald, UCD; historian Damian Shiels, and artist John Byrne who discussed and questioned what, and who we commemorate through public statues.
	25th February *29th April* *26th August*	**Recovered Voices - Ireland and World War I** Tours of *Recovered Voices: The Stories of the Irish at War, 1914-15* that explored the experience of Irish men and women during World War I.
	4th March	**Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising - Bilingual Public Tour** A bilingual tour of *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* exhibition that explored some of the highlights of the Museum's extensive Easter Week collection.
	3rd April *27th May* *29th July*	**Proclaiming a Republic** Tours of the *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* exhibition that explored some of the highlights of the Museum's extensive Easter Week collection.
	21st April	**Women and the Vote: The Journey to Citizenship** Organised by the History Teachers Association of Ireland, this conference commemorated the Representation of the People Act, 1918. This important centenary was marked by Micheline Sheehy Skeffington who delivered a presentation on Francis and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington. Other speakers included archivist and broadcaster Catriona Crowe, Supreme Court Judge Justice John Mcmenamin and the Museum's Education Team.
	28th April	**The Seven Virtues of the Rising** A talk by Brendan McGowan on Pádraic Ó Conaire's *Seacht mBua an Éirí Amach* (Seven Virtues of the Rising), a collection of seven fictional stories set around the Easter Rising.

Locations: Archaeology Country Life Decorative Arts & History Natural History

18th May	**International Museum Day** A special event in the Seanad Chamber, coinciding with International Museum Day, that reflected on the centenary of women's suffrage. Organised in collaboration with the Houses of the Oireachtas and featuring Senator Ivana Bacik in conversation with historian Mary McAuliffe and Donegal County Museum curator Judith McCarthy.
30th September	**Public Tour - Bonnets, Bandoliers and Ballot Papers** A tour that looked at the changing roles of women at the turn of the 20th century, through the *Way We Wore* and *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising* exhibitions. Devised originally by Museum educator Holly Furlong.
21st September	**Gold Air and the Blue** A special event in the Seanad Chamber on Culture Night that marked the centenary of women's suffrage in Ireland and the rest of the world and explored the role of women in today's changing world and celebrated the work of Irish women poets. Organised in collaboration with the Houses of the Oireachtas and Poetry Ireland and featuring readings by Moya Cannon, Martina Evans and Doireann Ní Ghríofa.
3rd November	**Deeds not Words? Assessing a Century of Change** A conference that brought together historians, artists and writers to explore changes and advancements in Irish society, particularly for women, over the last 100 years since 1918. This was a year that saw significant social change in Ireland, including the end of WWI, the passing of the Representation of People Act and the 1918 elections. The conference posed the question, what has changed for society, since 1918, for better and for worse?
23rd November	**Sounding Out** A special event in the Seanad Chamber that celebrated the legacy of women composers at home and abroad, while also saluting the next generation of Irish female composers. Organised in collaboration with the Houses of the Oireachtas and the Royal Academy of Music and featuring performances by William Dowdall, Sylvia O'Brien and Paul Roe.

Acknowledgments

This book *Pathways to Participation: Engagement and Learning at the National Museum of Ireland during the Decade of Centenaries* documents a public engagement programme conceived of and led by Lorraine Comer and the Education team at the National Museum of Ireland 2012 – 2018. We warmly thank the Education team and all who contributed to this book and to the members of the public who participated in events, projects and exhibitions.

We endorse the work of Lorraine Comer and Mary Shine Thompson, who co-edited the book, and of Frances McDonald, whose involvement at all levels of its production was invaluable.

Those who agreed to be interviewed and to have their comments published have made an important contribution to *Pathways to Participation*. Among them are Seamus Birmingham, Dymphna Joyce and Billy Lyons of the Mayo Genealogy Group; Ciara Higgins, Deborah Kelleher, Blánaid Murphy, Sylvia O'Brien, Jane O'Leary and Mary Pender, whose comments contributed to the chapter on the *Sounding Out* event. We also thank Deirdre Burns, David Collins, Frances Holohan, Marie Mannion, Hazel Morrison, Mary Mullin, Brige Woodward, and students Elizabeth O'Malley and Shauna Murphy who participated in the iCAN programme; Assistant Principal, Máire O'Higgins, students Eoinlee Bley and Alex Kennedy, of Larkin Community College; and teacher Edel Fitzpatrick and student George Burac Trinity Comprehensive School.

We acknowledge the commitment of Dáil Deputy Ivana Bacik, and staff members of the Houses of the Oireachtas, Derek Dignam, Colm O'Rourke and their teams, who collaborated with the NMI Education Team in organising three events in the temporary Seanad Chamber, NMI – Archaeology. We would like to especially thank Minister Catherine Martin, T.D. for her contribution to this book and for the support of her Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, particularly the Commemorations Unit, which provided funding support for this book, as well as many of the programmes related to the Decade of Centenaries.

We are indebted to the authors of the 13 chapters of *Pathways to Participation*: Ivana Bacik, Helen Beaumont, Joanna Brück, Dermot Bolger, Alison Conneely, Tom Doyle, Lorna Elms, Luke Gibbons, Gary Granville, Deborah Kelleher, Maureen Kennelly, Paula Meehan, Mary McAuliffe, Judith McCarthy, Michael O'Reilly, Siobhán Pierce and Audrey Whitty. We thank Dermot Bolger, Doireann Ní Ghríofa and Paula Meehan for permission to reproduce their poems and Larry Beau for permission to reproduce an extract from the lyrics of his operetta.

The education, curatorial, front of house, marketing, documentation and IT staff at the NMI unstintingly contributed to organising its public engagement programme 2012 – 2018. Special thanks are due to Helen Beaumont, Tom Doyle, Lorna Elms and Siobhán Pierce of the NMI Education Department for their support at so many levels. The NMI also thanks Yvonne Doherty, John Murray and Richard Weinacht of the NMI's Design and Photographic Department for their work in accessing images and for their advice on design. We appreciate the contribution of Helen Beaumont, Tom Doyle, Siobhán Pierce, Lynn Scarff and Audrey Whitty of NMI and Helen O' Donoghue of IMMA, who proof-read the final manuscript. We gratefully acknowledge the help and support of Keith Thompson and Doireann Bonfield, and the expertise of graphic designers, Source Design Consultants Ltd, and of IMPRESS Printing Works Ltd.

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An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir, Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán
Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

ISBN 978-1-914470-02-8