

# Unveiling of WWI Memorial this Sunday acknowledges 1,100 Waterford dead

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## Hundreds of those being commemorated have no known grave

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THIS SUNDAY, October 6<sup>th</sup>, at 3pm, the Waterford Memorial will be unveiled following a dedication and remembrance ceremony at Castle Street, Dungarvan. A monument to the 1,100 men and women from Waterford whose lives were claimed by the First World War, their passing will be collectively commemorated, providing their families with a memorial in their home county.

Chairman of the Waterford Memorial Committee, Deputy John Deasy, says: “We hope that as many people as possible will come along to the unveiling. I thought about doing this after meeting a number of families of soldiers who didn’t have a grave and had never even seen their relative’s names commemorated anywhere. I think people have different takes on the history, but it’s vital we remember them.”

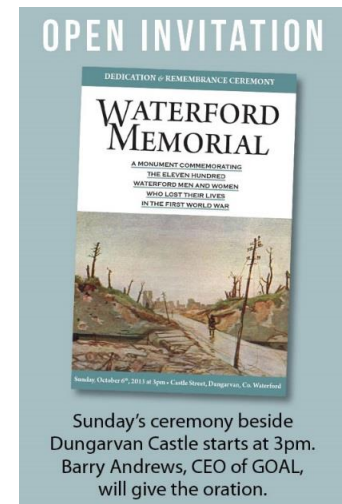
The tales behind the individual inscriptions on the black granite memorial are filled with sacrifice and sadness. Take Private Paddy Shanahan, who was about to become the pride of Carrickbeg when, in September 1917, his father received a letter from France stating that his son was being recommended for the Military Medal for great gallantry and would be granted leave “very soon”. It didn’t come soon enough. The Royal Irish Regiment soldier was killed in action on November 10th, 1918 – the day before the armistice was signed and WWI officially ended.

Some stories elevate the poignancy of the war to another level. One Ballybricken family saw four sons fall in WWI. In all, six of Mrs Agnes Collins’s sons signed up to serve, including Stephen, a mere 16-year-old Private with the Royal Irish Regiment who was killed in action in France on October 19th, 1914. Michael Collins was killed amid heavy shelling on May 8th, 1915, and then on September 9th, 1916, a German barrage at Ginchy cut down Private John Collins and 80 others from The Munster Fusiliers.

The family’s fourth fatality was eldest brother Patrick, a Corporal deployed to create tunnels and undermine German defences with the Royal Engineers. On March 29th, 1918, having been drafted in as an infantryman to stem the German advance, he was killed on the frontline. A fifth son, Christopher, was very badly wounded and invalided home, while the sixth, William, was released to save the family any further anguish. To this day the other four brothers lay in unmarked graves.

Female casualties were in the minority, yet gender was no defence. Sister Mary Walsh from Kilmacthomas – who had worked as a surgical staff nurse in the County and City Infirmary – was killed in Malta on August 21st, 1915, having volunteered to help the Red Cross as part of Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service just weeks earlier.

Anne O’Callaghan, 52, from St Joseph’s Terrace, Green Street, was a Stewardess with the Mercantile Marine when the Waterford-based S.S. Formby sunk in the Irish Sea during a fierce storm on December 16th, 1917, with the loss of all 27 hands. Though the



wreck was never located, Anne's body was washed ashore near Milford. She was identified by a badge of the Sacred Heart, on the back of which she'd written her name and address.

As an army captain's son, Desmond De la Poer Villiers-Stuart of Richmond, Cappoquin, was determined to follow in his father's footsteps. However, he was discharged by the Australian Infantry in March 1916 on being deemed 'Not likely to become an efficient soldier'. Not to be denied his destiny, he re-enlisted Down Under using the pseudonym "Richard Clive Manders". Not long later, Desmond was killed in action, aged 20, on August 7th, 1917.

Edward Beecher of Castlefarm House, Lismore, was also an inevitable recruit. He was only 19, but already a Lieutenant, when he died of wounds suffered while leading his men in a charge against the enemy in France in July, 1916. An only child, he was a member of the Royal Munster Fusiliers, and a direct line descendent of Colonel Thomas Beecher, who was aide-de-camp of King William at the Battle of the Boyne. An exceptionally gallant soldier, senior officers told the family that, had Edward survived, he would have been recommended for the Military Cross.

Another born leader was Captain Patrick Lynch of the Leinster Regiment. From John's Hill, Waterford, the vastly popular "Paddy" won the Military Cross for 'conspicuous gallantry' after laying and firing a torpedo under the enemy's wire; his congratulations coupled with the caution, "but you must be more careful another time." Within a month his courage resulted in a bar being added to his cross: effectively twice the honour. Alas, he was killed on the front in France while trying to save his own men under heavy shelling two days after Christmas, 1916.

Sergeant Robert Chambers from Kilmacthomas also had the army in his blood. A native of the Leinster Regiment, he was 21 when killed in action on June 7th, 1917. Achieving the same rank as his father, he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for gallantry. Before signing up he worked for Messrs. Hearne & Co. on The Quay.

For the loved ones of those at the front, often bad news quickly followed good. Royal Irish Regiment C Company Drummer, Private Daniel Attridge from St John's, Waterford, wrote to his relatives in the City in 1915 recounting a particularly bloody engagement with the enemy "somewhere in France". With ten of the 11 others in his trench killed, he lay behind a dead calf for cover under shell fire for six hours before managing to escape – writing: "I will never forget it as long as I live." He died of wounds in early March, 1918.

Captain John Edward Day, a son of the deceased Dean of Waterford, was 22 when he succumbed to wounds sustained during service with the Royal Irish Regiment in April, 1917. Just over a year previously he'd written home via the local press to thank his friends for kindly sending a football inscribed "from Waterford" to the Battalion out of funds collected by Mrs Mitchell, Michael Street. Her weekly penny collection had also seen 2,200 cigarettes sent over to the soldiers since the start of that year, along with a dozen requested mouth organs. John Edward's brother, Maurice, had only been a year older when he was killed in action the morning after landing in German East Africa in November, 1914.

The consequences of the war were felt across workplaces too. Charles Bowers was a Sapper (or mine expert) with the Royal Engineers Base Signal Depot when he died in Egypt, aged 25, in early May, 1917. From Anne's Court in Waterford, and living in Portlaw, he was one of three young men from the City G.P.O. staff who joined as expert telegraphists. By 1916 over 50 local postal employees had joined the colours.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of the Irish who took up arms in Europe was their predominantly young age. The famous 'boy soldier' John Condon was but one of many. Royal Irish Regiment Lance Corporal, Noel Fernie, of Rosemount, Tramore, was awarded the Medal for Distinguished Conduct before being killed in action on October 19th, 1914. He was just 17.

Many had just entered manhood when they were thrust into the fray. Michael Stephens from Ozier Bank Terrace, Poleberry, was a 2nd Class Stoker with the Royal Navy Hood Battalion, having previously worked with Graves and the GPO in Waterford. He died of wounds sustained when fighting the Turks in the Dardanelles on May 8th, 1915 – his 19th birthday.

A similar fate awaited Private Maurice Duggan of the 6th Battalion Royal Irish Regiment. Born in Kill and living in Bonmahon, he went to Waterford City to enlist before his 18th birthday and was 19 when he died of wounds on June 7th, 1917 at the start of the Battle of Messines. Laid to rest in the civil cemetery at Bailleul, France, he would have received a burial with Full Military Honours and, being from an Irish Regiment, would have had a lament played by a piper – probably “Flowers of the Forest” or “40 Shades of Green.”

At the other end of the age spectrum, the oldest recorded Waterford casualty was Sir Frederick Roberts, decorated Field Marshal of the Irish Guards and Royal Fusiliers. From Newtown Lodge, Waterford, and of military stock, Roberts had been in active service since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and was Colonel-in-Chief of Overseas and Indian Forces in WWI. He was all of 82 years of age when he gave way to Pneumonia while visiting troops in France on November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1914.

As well as the home recruits who were scattered to far-flung, often unheard-of parts, many Waterford emigrants signed up overseas with the various forces that made up the British Army and its Commonwealth allies. Some would never to return to their homeland. Private Patrick Flynn, 35, was serving with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force’s 2nd Otago Regiment when he met his demise two days before Christmas, 1917. The Teamster from Glendalligan, Kilrossanty, Kilmacthomas, was killed by shellfire at Ypres, Belgium, six months after embarking to Europe.

For others, their demise was gradual rather than sudden. A native of Tramore and a Ships Fireman, Private John Hannigan was serving as a stretcher bearer with the Australian Infantry when he died of Tuberculosis on December 12th, 1916. In the autumn of the previous year he’d been hospitalised with a gunshot injury to his right lung, sustained on the Gallipoli Peninsula, Turkey. John’s valour was recognised by his comrades, who sent a wreath to his heavily-attended funeral with the inscription, “In memory of the bravest and best of the Battalion.”

The loss and longing felt by the people who served and those they left behind is exemplified by Sapper Maurice Murphy, 26. A plumber from Passage Road, Waterford, he had returned from service with the Royal Engineers in France to attend the funeral of his mother, Mary Anne, only a few weeks before he was killed in action on November 3rd, 1916.

Barely back in France three days, he had just finished writing a letter to his father, Patrick, and was about to start another, when a shell entered his dug-out. His commanding officer sent Maurice’s last missives home to his dad.

The reasons why these young men and women left Ireland to serve in the First World War are varied. Many of them went purely out of a sense of adventure and for a source of employment. Deputy John Deasy said, “The arguments over the politics of that era will go on for years. It’s time to put that aside and reflect on them as individuals from our city and county.”      ENDS



**Private Paddy Flynn (right), son of Alice Flynn, Glendalligan, Lemybrien, who was killed in action near Tyne Cot, Belgium on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1917, aged 35. Paddy emigrated to New Zealand and was conscripted there. The two unidentified soldiers are probably from the Kilmacthomas area. (Waterford County Museum)**