



The official 1916-2016 Centenary Programme states that commemoration in 2016 'will be measured and reflective, and will be informed by a full acknowledgement of the complexity of historical events and their legacy, of the multiple readings of history, and of the multiple identities and traditions which are part of the Irish historical experience'.

This exhibition is created in the spirit of these objectives. It presents a unique perspective of 1916 from inside the Irish country house, an edifice which to most republicans was a physical symbol of British oppression in Ireland.

Exhibition supported by The Ireland Funds
and Maynooth University's Commemoration Fund
Curated by Dr Ciarán Reilly
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THE IRELAND FUNDS



1916 AND THE IRISH COUNTRY HOUSE

In the main, Irish country houses families were unionists and loyalists. Up to 1914, they had been prepared to fight the implementation of Home Rule, in Ulster by force if necessary. At the outbreak of war, they showed their loyalty to king and empire when they went to fight in their thousands and enthusiastically contributed to the war efforts at home.

To the country house community, the 1916 Rising was an act of treason; their response was one of

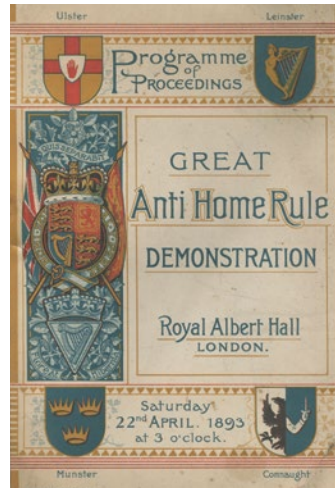
'It is a pity Redmond's did not join in with the Sinn Feiners as we could then have made a job of the lot'

John Cole writing to his father,
4th earl of Enniskillen

revulsion towards the conspirators. It was also condemnatory of the incompetence of the British administration in Ireland. Harriot, the marchioness of

Dufferin and Ava, had harsh things to say of the chief secretary, Augustine Birrell: 'I trust Mr Birrell will be got rid of after this – a good man, and not an old joker is wanted here'.

The events of 1916, from the Rising to the Battle of the Somme, changed the world of the Irish country house forever.



Invitation and programme issued to William J.H. Tyrrell of Ballindoolin House, Carbury, Co. Kildare to attend the Anti-Home Rule Demonstration at the Royal Albert Hall, London, 22 April 1893. In 1912 Ulster Unionist opposition to the third Home Rule Bill culminated in the signing of the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant in which unionists pledged to defend the union by force if necessary.



William J.H. Tyrrell,
Co. Kildare land agent
and Justice of the Peace.



Abbey Street corner and the remains of the Dublin Bread Company at 6-7 Lower Sackville Street after the Easter Rising.

COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND

In the wake of the Easter Rising, much of the blame centred on the perceived inaction of the Chief Secretary of Ireland, Augustine Birrell (pictured). John Cole, later 5th earl of Enniskillen, remarked: 'Birrell ought to be hung beside Casement for his neglect of duty and incompetence'.



'THE SINN FEIN ROW': HAMWOOD AND THE 1916 RISING

Charles Hamilton of Hamwood, Dunboyne, Co. Meath, was at Fairyhouse races on Easter Monday when rumours of a rebellion began to circulate. When he returned home, he was surprised to find there relatives who had fled from Dublin.

In the panic-filled days that followed, rumours abounded. The Hamiltons were told that '3,000 Germans were in Cork and 10,000 rebels were on the route to Dublin from Athlone'. On Friday night, 28 April, they were awoken by an explosion in Dublin that 'shook the house and brought the soot out of the chimney'. With news of fighting at Ashbourne, Co. Meath, and members of the Louth Volunteers reaching Dunshaughlin and Dunboyne, there were growing apprehensions that Hamwood would be attacked. Charles Hamilton recalled, 'listening half the night to hear if people were creeping up to the house'.

'It all seems like a nightmare, or as if things had wound back to '98 again'

Letitia Overend of Airfield House, Dundrum, Co. Dublin on hearing that rebellion had broken out.

Throughout the week the Hamiltons 'could see the fires blazing in Dublin' and 'the servants were all out listening' to 'the boom of guns'. On 3 May, Charles heard that 'thousands of men

must have been killed' and of the 'horrid smell of burnt bodies' in the city.

The aftermath of the rebellion brought more cause for panic as rebels were arrested and their ammunition seized in coal carts in Buckley's yard in nearby Maynooth. The yard belonged to local rebel leader, Domhnall Ua Buachalla. A few years before, he had been a member of a committee that had presented an address of congratulations to the 6th duke of Leinster on his coming-of-age.



The Metropole Hotel following heavy shelling during Easter Week, 1916. COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND

The Overend sisters of Airfield House, Dundrum, Co. Dublin were in Co. Down when the rebellion broke out on Easter Monday. Letitia (pictured) commented: 'We are very fortunate in being here, where everything is quiet and peaceful so you need not be in the least uneasy about us, but of course so far, there is no possibility of returning home, as the military hold the line and cannot allow any civil passengers through'.

COURTESY OF AIRFIELD ARCHIVE, OPW/MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY ARCHIVE & RESEARCH CENTRE



Crowds gather on Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street) to witness the destruction that the Rising had brought.

COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND



William Upton Tyrrell of Ballindoolin House, Carbury, Co. Kildare who enlisted in the Royal Irish Rifles in 1915. Having read in the French newspapers that the rebellion had been crushed, he wrote approvingly to his mother: 'I am very glad that the country is quiet around you and I hope it remains so'.

THE PRESTONS OF GORMANSTON

Hubert Preston of Gormanston Castle in Co. Meath, brother of Jenico, 15th Viscount Gormanston, was more directly involved in the Rising. Hubert was a serving officer in the 3rd Royal Irish Regiment. He was at Fairyhouse races on Easter Monday and was called back to Dublin where he ended up in the ‘thick of the fray and was lucky to have escaped’ the worst fighting in the city.

On hearing news of his brother’s exploits, Jenico wrote to their sister, Ismay Crichton-Stuart, that Hubert and his men were ‘hard at work plugging the rebels’. Jenico had little sympathy for the rebel leaders and in particular, Countess Markievicz. He wrote that she:

‘deserves shooting; she fired the shot that killed the policeman near Shelbourne. When she was taken near the Castle and disarmed I am told she kissed her revolver before handing it over – a dangerous and clever woman. If only her energies had been directed in a good cause.’

It was a sentiment shared by others. Sir John Leslie of Glaslough, Co. Monaghan, also took time to

deride ‘my friend the Countess Markovitch [sic]’ who ‘massacred the Dublin police with her own fair hands [and] is doing nothing for her sins beyond a little fancy sewing in detention...’

However, Viscount Gormanston had some compassion for the

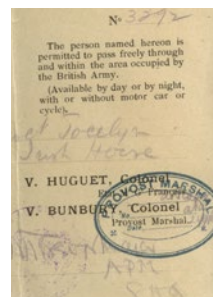
rank and file rebels noting that they were merely ‘dupes of the old men and leaders...what mad fools they were’. It was a sentiment shared by most of nationalist Ireland at the time.

‘I was, I admit much distressed that we were not able to pull off a scrap with the rebels – I would [have] loved to have been able to swot them – dirty dogs’

Captain Anektell Moultray of Co. Tyrone, on learning that he would not get the chance to suppress the rebels in Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford.

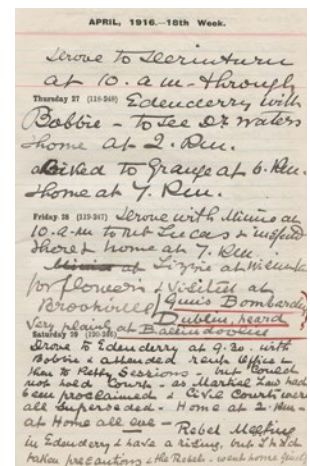


Gormanston Castle, Co. Meath home of the Preston family.

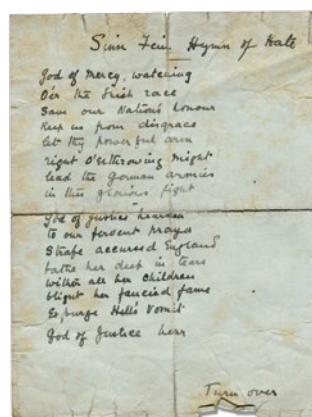


Pass issued to Robert Jocelyn, North Irish Horse, September 1914 to travel through all areas occupied by the British Army.

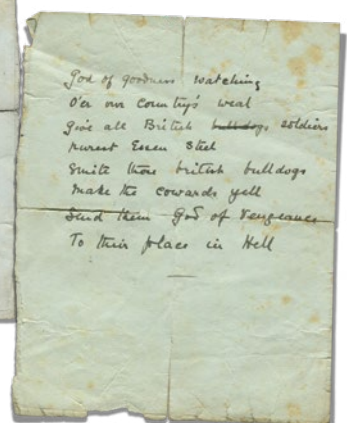
COURTESY OF ROBERT JOCELYN, 10TH EARL OF RODEN



William J.H. Tyrrell's diary entry noting on 28 April 1916 that the 'guns bombarding Dublin heard very plainly here at Ballindoolin'.



Copy of an oath allegedly found on prisoners arrested in Dublin May 1916.



THE TYRRELLS OF BALLINDOOLIN

On Easter Monday, the Tyrrell children of Ballindoolin House, Carbury, Co. Kildare, walked to Edenderry to post shoes to their older brother, William Upton, who had been serving on the Western Front since March 1916. In the same town, on the following Saturday, their father, also William, a local justice of the peace, broke up a gathering of rebels who, he claimed, simply 'went home quietly'.

In France, young William Upton reacted angrily to the news of the rebellion. Writing to his father, he exclaimed: 'Oh! If I could only get at those fellows now...if only I had been another month at home'. He further reported: 'All the Irishmen here are frightfully mad with the scoundrels and want to get back to get a shot at them'.

William made reference to the murder of the pacifist, Francis Sheehy Skeffington, and two others, on 27 April at Portobello Barracks in Dublin. For the crime, Capt J.C. Bowen-Colthurst of Dripsey, Co. Cork, who had been invalided home from the Front, was court-martialled and found guilty but insane. Tyrrell remarked: 'I hope the officer who ordered the execution of Skeffington will get off alright. I know him intimately...'

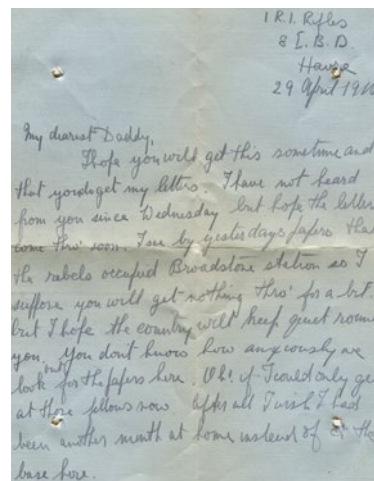


Captain J.C. Bowen-Colthurst

Tyrrell's sense of justice was questionable but also tainted by news of the rebellion, as was Sir John Leslie's of Glaslough, Co. Monaghan who remarked: 'As to Capt. Colthurst, rebels must take their chance of some such fanatic appearing. Their own proceedings of killing and ambushing soldiers and police deserved some such retribution.'



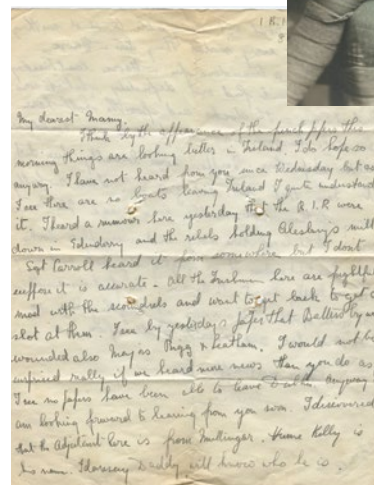
Ballindoolin House, Carbury, Co. Kildare which the Tyrrells acquired in 1898.



Letter from William Upton Tyrrell to his parents, following the Easter Rising telling them that his colleagues in France are 'frightfully mad with the scoundrels' who had organised the rebellion.



William Upton Tyrrell



Letter from William Upton Tyrrell to his mother in which he relates that he knew Bowen-Colthurst 'intimately'.

ROBERT JOCELYN, 8TH EARL OF RODEN

In August 1914 Robert Jocelyn, 8th earl of Roden, excitedly welcomed the outbreak of the Great War as crowds cheered his departure with the North Irish Horse Regiment from Newcastle, Co. Down. However, after initial successes with the regiment in France, his war service was frequently interrupted by ill-health.



Robert Jocelyn, 8th earl of Roden
COURTESY OF PHILIP TARDIFF,
www.northernhorse.com

Roden was recuperating from illness when the Easter Rising broke out. He returned home to Tollymore Park, near Bryansford in Co. Down, when he heard that his regiment was to be sent to Dublin to suppress the rebellion. However, it proved to be only a rumour and the regiment was instructed instead to patrol around

Lough Neagh in order to prevent any possible uprising in Dungannon and surrounding areas.

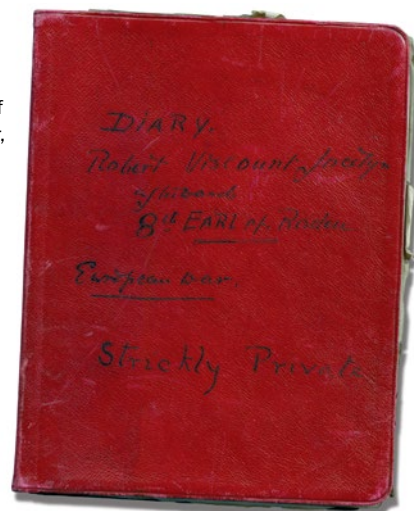
Roden received eye witness accounts of the Rising from Mrs Murland who had 'a front seat' while staying in the Shelbourne Hotel: 'the slaughter has been awful', she wrote to him, claiming, with some exaggeration, that it was impossible to walk up Sackville Street 'without treading in blood or insides or bits of flesh'.

Clearly outraged at what had happened, Roden believed that 'absolutely unconditional surrender' by the rebels would be the 'only terms' acceptable.

He was called into action late in the week and manned a checkpoint in Bryansford with six men from the Ulster Volunteer Force tasked with stopping and searching motor cars.

Following his exertions in preventing rebels from mobilising, Roden was again hospitalised and would not return to action in 1916. His continuing illness meant that he would be spared the horrors of the Somme.

'Diary of Robert, Viscount Jocelyn, afterwards 8th earl of Roden, European War, Strickly [sic] Private.'
COURTESY OF ROBERT JOCELYN, 10TH EARL OF RODEN



Roden's diary entries relating to the Easter Rising.
COURTESY OF ROBERT JOCELYN, 10TH EARL OF RODEN

April 24 Still on sick leave - staying at
Autism for week end - Hear from
Finn broken into in rebellion in Dublin
Piercy was to have come Autism to-day
25th Went home - heard R.I.H. to go to
suppress rebellion - so.
26th Went Autism to ask colored to let
me go with them - he refused as
I was unfit for any duty & told me
to go home - The reg. going on patrol
round Lough Neagh to intimidate possible
rebels at Dungannon etc -
Hear fighting in Dublin very severe
& casualties heavy but can get
no reliable news - Govt official
reports mostly tries to save own
salaries -

May 1st Rebellion greatly suppressed. &
rebel leaders in Dublin surrendered
a ordering followers in county districts
to do like wise - Thousands of rebels
in Dublin killed & proper firing no
quarter during fighting - absolutely
unconditional surrender only
terms - but the forces among
soldiers & police very heavy - was
ordered by Major Hall (in Newcastle)
(with R.I.H. 17th Bde) to form a post
in Bryansford to stop motor etc.
did so - had 6 armed U.V.F. &
rope across the road at entrance
gate - this post taken off in the
evening -
4th Saw Mrs Murland She had been
at the Shelbourne Hotel Dublin all
though I had in consequence had
"a front seat" her apt for long to
write but slaughter has been awful
she told me that it was impossible to
walk up Sackville Street without treading

in blood or insides or bits of flesh
etc & at the time when Brouck
reported 3 killed & 12 wounded she
est count of dead within 20 yds of
hotel door -
5th To cross to England to-day children
agreement to Kathleen's & self to
Harrigale where Hall to join me on
Monday - must have police permits to
leave the country -

June 9th Into Lady Carrington's Hospital
July 29th
Aug 1st at home on sick leave -
↓
Jan 15 '17 Returned by medical board
for light duty - rejoined R.I.H. at
Autism
Feb 8 Into Lady Carrington Hospital again -
Feb 16 to Mar 14. At Harrigale for treatment
Mar 14 Returned for light duty - to Autism

LORD DESMOND FITZGERALD OF CARTON (1)

Lord Desmond FitzGerald, brother of the 6th duke of Leinster of Carton House, Maynooth, was an officer in the Irish Guards when war broke out. He wrote: 'To a great extent I am a futurist but if I am granted to die for my country, it is the one death above all others that I should wish for and gladly accept'.

Lord Desmond made the claim to be fighting for 'my country'; as far as he was concerned he was fighting for Ireland but an Ireland that was an integral part of the British empire. His sense of patriotic sacrifice in death was not dissimilar to that shared by Irishmen of a different political persuasion who fought in the Easter Rising in 1916.

Desmond experienced the horrors of war from an early stage. During the battle of Ypres in November 1914, he wrote to his aunt: 'the casualties have been so awful that I shall not find more than two officers out of the 30 that started with me and not so many as 100 men out of the original lot'.

Desmond's best friend was Edward, Prince of Wales. In the Spring of 1916, Lord Kitchener proposed that Edward visit the Middle East to report on the defences in the Canal Zone. During the planning stages, Edward suggested that Desmond should accompany him as his equerry but the proposal was rejected on the grounds that Desmond was too junior an officer for the role.



Carton House, Maynooth, Co. Kildare home to the dukes of Leinster.



Officers of the 12th Royal Irish Rifles wading through the mud of a collapsed communication trench, Essigny, February 1918.

COURTESY OF THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

A support company of an assault battalion, of the Tyneside Irish Brigade, going forward shortly after zero hour on 1 July 1916 during the attack on La Boisselle at the Battle of the Somme.

COURTESY OF THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM



LORD DESMOND FITZGERALD (2)

On 3 March 1916, at Calais, a week before Prince Edward sailed for the Middle East, Lord Desmond was asked by the regiment's elderly Roman Catholic chaplain, Fr Lane-Fox, to teach him how to throw grenades. Either the chaplain held onto a grenade too long, or it had a defective fuse, but it exploded wounding Lane-Fox – he lost an eye and several fingers – and fatally wounding Lord Desmond.

On hearing the news of Desmond's death, Prince Edward wrote to his maternal aunt, Lady Cynthia Graham:

'Please forgive my troubling you with a letter at such a time as this, but I must ask you to accept my very sincere sympathy on the great loss you have sustained. I got a wire this evening to say that dear Desmond had been accidentally killed in a bombing accident at Calais. It is one of the greatest blows or shocks I have ever had for in Desmond's death I have lost my greatest friend.'

Edward's biographer, Philip Ziegler, contends that Desmond's death had a devastating effect on the Prince of Wales and that 'he left for Egypt in a mood as depressed as he had ever known'.

Queen Mary also wrote to Desmond's aunt expressing how 'deeply distressed' she and her husband, King George, were at the news of 'the death of your dear and charming nephew' and concluded: 'His loss will make a big blank in my boy's life'.



Edward, Prince of Wales

'This is just to say that except for the sorrow it may cause to my dear relations, I have no reason to fear death and I hope this will be a comfort to anybody who sorrows over it. I am most anxious that on no account should there be a memorial service for me and as far as possible that nobody should mourn...'

Desmond FitzGerald, 17 November 1914



An anti-aircraft Lewis gunner of the 12th Battalion, Royal Irish Rifles in action, near Essigny, 7 February 1918.

COURTESY OF THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM



A contemporary of FitzGerald was Major Richard George Hely-Hutchinson who served in the Royal City of London Fusiliers but unlike FitzGerald he survived the war. During the course of the war he was wounded three times, mentioned in despatches and awarded a D.S.O.

COURTESY OF THE HELY-HUTCHINSON COLLECTION, FINGAL COUNTY COUNCIL ARCHIVES

LORD DESMOND FITZGERALD (3)

For his earlier bravery at battles such as Festubert, Lord Desmond had been awarded the Military Cross and mentioned twice in despatches.

At home in Kildare, his death was marked as an act of heroism. Normally separated from them in civilian life, Fitzgerald had fallen alongside men from all classes including former tenants. In the town of Athy, part of the Leinster estate, over 2,000 men enlisted during the war and 118 were killed. Rather ironically, his courage was compared to 'the ardent national enthusiasm of a celebrated member of his family in 1798', Lord Edward FitzGerald, United Irishman, and founding father of Irish republicanism.

In the week that news of the Easter Rising made its way to Kildare, the county council passed a resolution of sympathy with the FitzGerald family 'confident that the sympathetic knowledge which is shared by an appreciative and grateful people, that he gave his life for his country...will tend to mitigate in some degree the great sorrow which they feel for the early ending of a promising and brilliant career'.

At the same meeting, the council passed another resolution strongly deprecating 'the recent deplorable action of a section of our countrymen in resorting to force of arms'. It appealed 'in what we consider the best interests of this country, and the empire as a whole, to the government to extend the greatest possible clemency to the rank and file, who we believe were deceived into taking part in the Rising'. It did not ask for clemency for the leaders.



Irish Guards tending the wounded at Pilkem Ridge, Belgium, 1917.
COURTESY OF THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

In a letter home he referred to a volume of poems by Marianne Farningham, and one poem in particular, 'Too Soon', which he said he wanted read at his service in the event of his death.

*God loves them, and He spares them much,
Not theirs to wait alone,
And feel the ache of useless years,
With strength and vigour gone,
They are not stranded derelicts...
Not theirs to lift their fading eyes
And find no comrades left;
Not theirs to dwell among the graves,
Forsaken and bereft,
They pass from work to better work.*



William Upton Tyrrell (right) pictured on horseback in France, 1917.

Regimental recruitment postcard belonging to the Royal Irish Rifles, of which Tyrrell was a member.

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

The long and bloody action on the Somme in Picardy lasted from 1 July to 18 November, and on the first day alone there were almost 60,000 casualties. It has been estimated that men from perhaps 2,700 Irish country houses fought in the war. Of these, one in every five were killed and many more physically and psychologically damaged.

On 6 July 1916, William Tyrrell, who had been so condemnatory of the 1916 rebels, was wounded at the Somme. He was lucky. His brother, Robert, later wrote of that first week of the battle: 'My brother...on one occasion was shelled for six days. They started with three officers and three hundred men. At the end, William Upton was the only officer alive with seventy five men'.

The horror of total war was by then all too apparent. Lord Frederick Blackwood, wrote that 'I was only in the trenches about 30 hours but during that time I [had] a pretty good idea of what hell [must] be like'. Frederick had a nervous breakdown having spent six weeks in the trenches surrounded by dead bodies that could not be moved or buried.

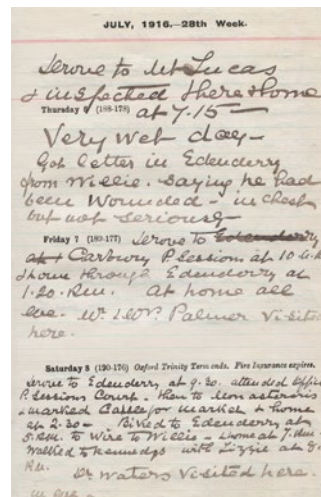
By the end of the war the sons of many Irish peers

were among the dead, including Frederick Sydney Trench, Cyril Myles Brabazon Ponsonby, Arthur John Hamilton, Henry and William Parnell, Hugh Dawnay, John Henry Grattan Esmonde, George Cecil Rowley, Thomas Pakenham and Ernest William Maitland Molyneux Brabazon.

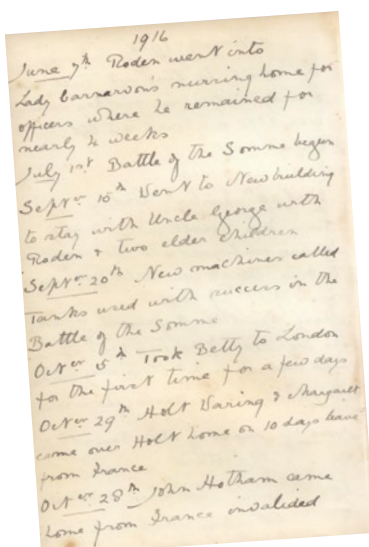
By early 1916 British and French forces had decided to launch a decisive strike centered on the River Somme region in a bid to end the stalemate. German success at Verdun and other locations made it imperative for the allies to put their plan into action.

'The moment has come when I must again take my place at the front. I know this will reopen a time of anxiety for you but I am so certain in my own mind that no other course is possible or at least honourable.'

Writing to his mother in September 1916, Lord Basil Blackwood (pictured), third son of the marquis of Dufferin and Ava, encapsulated both the sense of duty he felt and the worry he knew his mother would experience, wondering if her son would return. He was killed at Ypres on 4 July 1917.



William J.H. Tyrrell's diary entry, 6 July 1916 recording the news that his son, William Upton had been injured at the Battle of the Somme.



Robert Jocelyn's diary entry, 20 September 1916, recording how tanks were used with success in the Battle of the Somme.

COURTESY OF ROBERT JOCELYN, 10TH EARL OF RODEN



Daylight patrol of the 18th Battalion, London Regiment (London Irish Rifles, 47th Division) entering Albert, 6 August 1918. Of the patrol of seven, one was killed and three were wounded.

COURTESY OF THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

THE PURDONS OF WESTMEATH

‘The Purdon family have done their bit’, wrote Colonel Valerio de Calry to Samuel Purdon of Lisnabin Castle in Co. Westmeath in 1916. He was referring to the death of Lieutenant George Purdon of the King’s Royal Rifle Corps, killed on 23 July 1916 at the Somme.

On hearing the news, Samuel Purdon, also serving on the Western front, wrote to his mother and tried his best to comfort her. He wrote:

‘I am terribly shocked to hear your news of our baby soldier, but like you I expected it all the time, ever since he had gone there, somehow or another I felt it was bound to happen... Don’t mourn too much. He has gone in excellent company and the last thing any of us wish is that you should grieve too much or too long for us.’



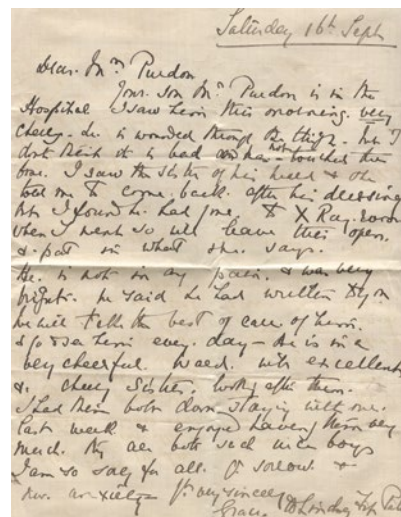
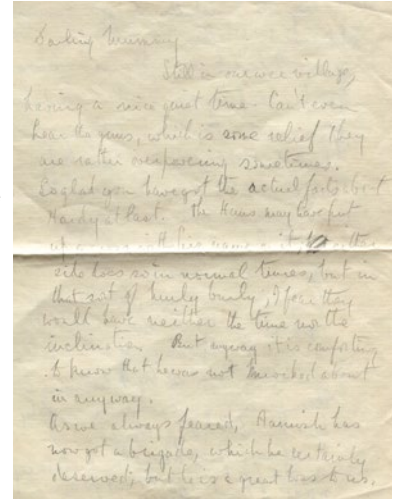
George Hardress Purdon, son of Colonel Edward Purdon-Winter, of Lisnabin Castle, near Killucan, Co. Westmeath was killed in action on 23 July 1916, on Pozieres Ridge, during the Battle of the Somme.

His family was most concerned at whether George had received a Christian burial. According to Samuel: ‘The Huns may have put a cross up with his name on it; either side does so in normal times, but in that sort of hurly-burly, I fear they would have neither the time nor the inclination’.

Having endured a ‘hellish’ 1916 Samuel wrote on 31 December: ‘this war is going to be treated as a war now, not as one eternal joy-ride’.

Letter from Samuel Purdon to his ‘Darling Mummy’, 3 September 1916 in which he tells her that they ‘can’t even hear the guns, which is some relief they are rather overpowering’.

COURTESY OF ANNE PURDON



Letter to Mrs Purdon, dated 16 September 1916 informing her that her son, Samuel has been injured but that he ‘is not in any pain’.

COURTESY OF ANNE PURDON



Envelope addressed to Mrs Purdon Winter, 14 August 1916 one of the many ‘Darling Mummy’ letters written by her son, Samuel.

COURTESY OF ANNE PURDON

AFTER 1916

On 6 March 1916, Lieut. Col. Robert Heard of Pallastown, Co. Cork, came of age. As part of a long estate tradition he was presented with an illuminated address by the existing and former tenants. As was customary, it praised the family's benevolence, but there was an added dimension in that it equally praised Robert for his 'pluck and courage in entering the Army and fighting for your country in the trenches in Flanders'.

The address concluded by hoping that 'when the war is over that you will return home with honours, and settle down in Kinsale among the people who thoroughly appreciate your many good qualities and generous disposition, and uphold the traditions of your illustrious ancestors'. It spoke volumes for the complexities of relationships and attitudes that remained in rural Ireland.

Returning thanks, Heard hoped that he would 'be spared to fight to the end of this terrible war'. Ironically, having survived the horrors of battles including Loos, the Somme and Passchendaele, he succumbed to the deadly influenza in March 1919.

Had Robert Heard lived, he would have found Ireland greatly changed. The war had transformed country house society and the Easter Rising had given rise to a dramatic shift in Irish politics. For Frederick Beaumont-Nesbitt of Tubberdaly in King's County, it had a more sinister effect: 'I do not recall a single incident during my boyhood when hostility was shown either to myself or a member of my family at least not until the outbreak of Easter week 1916'.



Frederick George Beaumont Nesbitt, an officer in the Grenadier Guards, was the son of Edward J.D. Beaumont Nesbitt of Tubberdaly House, Rhode, King's County. His brother Wilfred was injured at Les Boeufs during the Battle of the Somme in September 1916. Returning to action in August 1917, Wilfred was killed three months later near Cambrai in France.

Edmond William Claude Gerard de Vere, Viscount Glentworth of Dromore Castle, Pallaskenry, Co. Limerick was killed near Arras, France on 18 May 1918. The only son of the 4th earl of Limerick, Edmond joined the Royal Air Force in November 1916.

COURTESY OF SYLVIA, COUNTESS OF LIMERICK



In 1918 William Tyrrell transferred to the Royal Air Force. Experiencing his first flight in an aeroplane (pictured below) he excitedly wrote to his mother: 'little did you think a few years ago that I would take to the air'. Although he reassured his father that he was not engaged in military engagements, he soon took to the skies and in September, scored six victories, four kills and two 'out of controls', flying Bristol Fighters as an observer and gunner with 22 Squadron. After one flight he likened firing at the Germans to 'shooting snipe at Ballindoolin'.



Writing to tell his father of the news of the armistice in November 1918 he remarked: 'I just can't write a letter this evening the news is too astonishing to believe...did we actually fire our last shot today and did we chase our last hun?'