



Home » Ireland » Other stories »



4



0



8



Text Size: A - A

The Irish Times - Thursday, March 22, 2012

National Library call-out answered by families bearing WWI treasures



Philip Mahon from Sligo holds urns, made from spent shells, brought home by his grandfather James Sweeney, who served with the Connaught Rangers in the first World War. Hundreds of people brought memorabilia to yesterday's World War One Family History Roadshow at the National Library in Dublin. Photograph: Bryan O'Brien

TIM O'BRIEN

A CAPACITY crowd turned out to answer the National Library of Ireland's appeal for first World War memorabilia yesterday.

The institution, in conjunction with Oxford University and Europeana – Europe's digital museum – is building an online archive of private stories and documents from the Great War.

Earlier this month the library asked for memorabilia of which it could make digital copies ahead of the 100th anniversary of the start of the war in July 2014.

As the library opened at 10am yesterday, people – many of them clutching old photographs, citations, scrolls, even embroidery – gathered in the library's rotunda. The queue quickly stretched along halls and into other rooms.

Frank McKenna from Palmerstown, Dublin, carried framed souvenirs that had belonged to his father, Terence McKenna. Included was an embroidered insignia of the Royal Irish Regiment as well as a montage of souvenirs including a miniature Bible, medals, and a bullet that had pierced Terence's shoulder. He survived the conflict and lived until 1959.

Also queuing was Laurence Scott from Malahide in Dublin, who was holding "a scroll from the king". It was headed GVR (King George V), and was a tribute to Mr Scott's maternal uncle, described as "Gunner Laurence Joseph Brown".

However, Mr Scott said his uncle's name was spelled Laurence Joseph Browne and he attributed the discrepancy to a mistake on the part of the British army. Gunner Browne was killed in May 1916 in the Battle of Jutland. His family lived in the gate lodge of the Vice Regal Lodge, now Áras an Uachtaráin, in Dublin's Phoenix Park, Mr Scott added.

Michael Andrews of Dublin 4 was carefully holding a preserved helmet that bore shrapnel marks. His father, William, a second lieutenant with the Royal Engineers, was wearing the helmet when it was struck, and he kept it as a souvenir of his good luck.

Carrying the flying log of Giles Blennerhassett of Sligo – "one of the earliest Irish flying aces" – was his son,

In this section »

- ▼ How was the Titanic 11-course meal? First class
- ▼ Irish slant to 'Titanic' series
- ▼ 'Vast majority' of radio stations viable
- ▼ Director rebuffs criticism over 'obnoxious' reality TV show
- ▼ Fingers to stray on Joyce's guitar again after its restoration
- ▼ Bookseller claims Ryanair baggage policy affects sales

Brian, who lives in Glenageary, Co Dublin.

"My father was with the Royal Flying Corps, having originally joined the Royal Irish Fusiliers and served in the trenches", said Mr Blennerhassett. The early aircraft were more akin to a flying bedstead with a propeller at the back, he said. His father, who was awarded the Military Cross, had to stand upright to take photographs over enemy lines.

Mick Sheridan of Bray, Co Wicklow, had two photographs of his relatives and was hoping to learn more about them. Richard Gill of the Royal Irish Regiment and his brother Daniel, a member of the Camel Corps, were killed in Flanders, he said.

Some 49,400 soldiers died serving in Irish divisions of the British forces in the first World War, although not all of them were natives of Ireland.