

Wartime diary reveals mum's heartache over lost soldier son

By Breda Heffernan
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A DIARY kept by a worried mother as she waited for news of her son missing in action in [World War One](#) is among items of memorabilia being gathered across Europe to mark the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of war in 1914.

[Mary Martin](#) of Monkstown, Co Dublin, was a widowed mother of 12 when she learned in December 1915 that her 20-year-old son Charlie, a member of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, was wounded and missing in Gallipoli.

"Dear Charlie," she began, "Since I heard you are missing as well as wounded it has occurred to me to write this diary in the form of a letter.

"We hope to hear from you soon and till then can communicate with you and later on when you read this it will let you know what has been happening," she wrote.

Tragically Charlie would never read the diary that was dedicated to him as he is thought to have died of his wounds a day or two after his capture by Bulgarian forces.

Beginning on January 1, 1916, the diary covers a five-month period up to May 25 when the family learned of Charlie's death.

During this time, Mary details all the details of everyday life, from the tennis party called off due to rain to more momentous events such as the Easter Rising.

Other items from the Martins will also be included in the [World War One](#) archive which is being collected by the [National Library](#) in conjunction with [Oxford University](#) and Europeana, Europe's digital library.

Among them are letters from Charlie's sister Marie [Martin](#), who would later found the Medical Missionaries of Mary (MMM), who was stationed as a nurse in [Malta](#) and France.

Desperate

She wrote 40 letters to her mother in Monkstown telling her of the desperate efforts she was making in Malta to find out what had happened to Charlie.

"She goes from one hospital to another and the whole of Malta was hospitals, every big building became a hospital, from one to another, looking at the injured lists every day and she goes enquiring and she gets different dates, different pieces of information," said Sr Isabelle Smyth, image archivist with the MMM who researched the Martins.

Marie later learns that Charlie had been giving orders on a parapet when he was badly wounded in the shoulder. His company had to retreat 15 miles at which point Bulgarian forces captured their trench and took him and around 30 others prisoner.

"It's only when we look at the memorabilia that we see the human pain and loss in the war," said Sr Isabelle.



War-time recruitment posters

Meanwhile, Paddy O'Neill, from North Wall in Dublin, has allowed his grandfather Patrick O'Neill's discharge papers from the British Army and his bayonet to be scanned for the Europeana project.

"He signed up when he was 15 and his discharge papers say he was discharged as he was 'surplus to military requirements and had suffered impairment since entry to the services', in other words he was wounded," said Paddy.

He said his grandfather suffered shrapnel wounds to the length of his body at Ypres in [Belgium](#). "His life when he came back was rough, he could no longer function because of his wounds, but he also found he wasn't welcome anymore."

The National Library will be running a 'World War One Family History Roadshow' next Wednesday, March 21, from 10am-7pm and hopes members of the public will bring along photographs, letters, medals, diaries and other memorabilia as well as telling their stories.

Those who cannot attend are asked to take digital photographs of their war memorabilia and upload them to www.europeana1914-1918.eu.

- *Breda Heffernan*

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