

THE CHANGING LIVES OF WATERFORD WOMEN DURING WORLD WAR ONE

As we are currently in the midst of the centenary of WW1, it is only appropriate that we recognise the roles played by Waterford women during this period. Waterford leading up to the war and during it showed great loyalty to the King. One example of the popularity of the monarchy was witnessed, at the visit of King Edward VII to Waterford in 1904 when thousands lined the streets to greet him.



The Lawrence Photograph Collection Image Courtesy of National Library of Ireland

Between 1914 and 1918, 35 percent of available men in Waterford enlisted in the British Army. That is almost 4,800 men, and over 1,000 of these died during the war. Some Waterford women also lost their lives during the war. It had many other consequences for women and would have seen fundamental changes within the family structure that left many bearing the sadness of losing sons, husbands, brothers and nephews.

By the unveiling of a memorial in Dungarvan in October 2013 the 1,100 Waterford men and women who died during the First World War were commemorated.



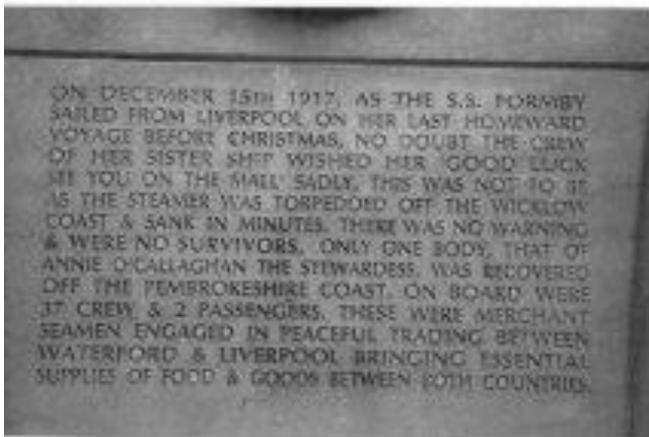
War Memorial unveiled in Dungarvan October 2013

The following obituaries, supplementary information and acknowledgements can be found in Tom Burnell's very informative book *The Waterford War Dead, A History of the Casualties of the Great War* published in 2010 by The History Press Ireland

Some Waterford Women who lost their lives:

Annie O'Callaghan:

Annie was a stewardess with the Mercantile Marine Unit, SS Formby. On 14th December 1917 the SS Formby while sailing from Liverpool to Waterford was believed to have been torpedoed and sunk by a U-boat. There was no warning and no survivors. Just 2 days later on the 16th her sister ship the SS Conningbeg met with the same fate. It was after Christmas before the sinking's were confirmed with a total loss of 83 lives. Annie's body was the only one found. It was washed ashore near Milford and it was identified by a badge of the Sacred Heart, on which Annie had written her name and address. As well as being named on the memorial in Dungarvan Annie is also listed on the Formby – Coningbeg Memorial in Adelphi Quay, Waterford which was unveiled by President Mary Robinson on December 21st 1997



Formby – Conningbeg Memorial, Adelphi Quay, Waterford (www.irishships.com)

Sister Mary Walshe:

A staff nurse with the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service. Mary was killed in Malta on August 21st 1915 having volunteered only weeks earlier. She was daughter of the late Dr Walshe, Kilmacthomas and news of her death was cabled to her mother by a Dr Morrissey, of Waterford who was also in Malta. Mary had worked for many years as a surgical staff nurse in the County and City Infirmary. The esteem with which she was held was evident with the following resolution passed by the committee of the Infirmary at their meeting, "That the committee desire to express the great regret with which they heard of the death of Sister Mary Walshe, who was connected with the infirmary for the past 15 years, and who discharged the duties of surgical staff nurse for the last seven years in such an eminently satisfactory manner." (Burnell 2010: 283)

Eileen Mary O'Gorman:

Eileen was a sister with the Territorial Force Nursing Service. Eileen was from John's Hill, Waterford and died on 20th November 1914. Her death was written about in the British Journal of Nursing December 5th 1914 and described as causing much grief, especially amongst the nursing staff.

The esteem with which she was held was evident with the following piece describing Eileen's funeral was printed in the Western Daily Express: "Bristol has witnessed some solemn scenes in the streets of late. British and Belgian soldiers who have succumbed their wounds have been borne to their last resting place attended by the ceremony which martial heroes are accorded, and yesterday there was a unique and impressive spectacle for a nurse, who up to Saturday was engaged in tending the wounded soldiers at Southmead, and who, by reasons of her connection with the Royal Army Medical Corps, was buried with military honours. The death, after so short an illness, of Nurse Eileen Mary O Gorman caused great regret at the hospital. Her home was at Waterford, but she was a matron at Ilkeston, Derbyshire, where she left to assist at the military base hospital at Bristol. The procession was headed by the band of the 6th Gloucesters", and eighteen men and six bearers of the 4th Gloucesters accompanying the gun carriage and following it came the priests and a large number of officers. Then followed about 50 sisters and nurses, 30 members of the Field Ambulance, a Red Cross detachment. At the conclusion of the service in the pro Cathedral the mortal remains of the nurse were laid to rest and over the grave was heard The Last Post." (Burnell 2010: 215)

Those Left Behind:

A Mother: Mrs. Agnes Collins:

Possibly one of the most poignant stories of the war from a Waterford point of view is the story of the Collins family from Philip Street in the city. Agnes Collins had six sons who signed up to serve, Stephen, Michael, John, Patrick, Christopher and William. Stephen, a 16 year old private with the Royal Irish Regiment, was killed in action in France on October the 19th, 1914. The following year on May 8th Michael was killed amid heavy shelling. John, a private with the Munster Fusiliers, was cut down at Ginchy on September 9th 1916, with 80 others from the Fusiliers. Patrick, a 2nd corporal with the Royal Engineers deployed to create tunnels and undermine German defences, was drafted in as an infantryman and was killed on the frontline on March 29th 1918. Christopher was very badly injured and invalided home. King George V discharged William from the army in light of the tragedy inflicted on his family by the war.



Photograph Taken from Waterford History Group Facebook page.

Mrs Bridget Geary:

Bridget's son Patrick a private with the Irish Guards, of 28 Patrick Street, Waterford was killed in action on the 22nd October 1915. Pat's letter to his mother Bridget, describing the horrors of war, was printed in the Waterford News during May 1915. His letter reads as follows:

23rd.May 1915

My Dear Mother,

“Just a few lines to let you know I am all right, thank God. We are just after having a big battle, and we are having a few days rest. Young Harris of Poleberry was killed. We had a very rough time of it, and a lot of casualties. I expect you will have read about it by the time you get this. Well, mother, I thought my own time had come at last, as it seemed an impossibility to escape. Thank God, I got through without a scratch. It was so awful, mother, that for three hours I did not know if I was dead or alive. It was simply Hell let loose all of a sudden. They did all they could to cut up us with their artillery, but we went on and gained ground in spite of them. The saddest sight of all was to see our poor chaps, with broken legs and arms, creeping in and out of the way. Even then, the cowardly beggars did all in their power to kill them. They shot down our stretcher bearers who were carrying the wounded to the rear. The day ended in a victory for us, and I think our losses could not be compared with the German losses. Once again the Irish Guards have proved themselves one of the best Regiments England ever had” (Burnell 2010: 107)

Love to all at home,

PADDY.

A Wife: Mrs. Johanna Hassey:

Johanna's husband James, was a private with the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. He was born in Waterford and killed in action on March 1st 1917. They resided at 7 Upper Yellow Road, Waterford with their four young children. A comrade of the deceased wrote to Mrs Hassey and his letter appeared in the Waterford News, March 1917.

1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers,

B.E.F., France

March 25th, 1917

Dear Mrs Hassey,

“It is with the deepest regret that I write these few lines to let you know of the death of my friend and comrade, Mr Hassey, who, I am very sorry to say, was killed in action by my side on 1stMarch,1917. For the past six months I had the pleasure of having Mr Hassey in my machine-gun section, and I am proud to say I always found his both a good soldier as well as a man. His death, you will be glad to know, was very peaceful. My home is in Clonmel, and I shortly anticipate going home on leave, and I greatly hope to be able to call on you and give you full details and particulars of him. Again offering you my greatest sympathy in your great loss. Believe me, sincerely yours

L. -Cp M. Boyle

A Sister: Kathleen Power:

Kathleen of Adelphi Terrace and later of 18 Johns Avenue, Waterford was named as next of kin to Private David Power of the Australian Salvage Corps, 1st Coy. He is the only Australian soldier to die in February 1917 with Waterford connections. He died of disease on the 23rd February. He was hospitalised twice, with shrapnel wound to the mouth where he was treated in Malta and later England and a shrapnel wound to the left hand in Gallipoli. He died of lobar pneumonia in an Australian General Hospital, Rouen, France. From the Waterford News, March 1917.

AUSTRALIAN SOLDIER'S DEATH.

Amongst many gallant Australian soldiers killed at the Dardanelles was Private Bertie Power, whose father, Mr Thomas Power, left Woodstown, near Waterford, for Australia many years ago.

*Waterford's Munitions Factory and Waterford War Hospital Depots During
WORLD WAR ONE:*

On the positive side some strides were made by women towards gender equality during this period though this was perceived at the time to be just temporary. The range of opportunities for women in the workforce leading up to the war was very limited. They worked largely as domestic servants or in the textile/dressmaking industry. However, when war was declared they showed that they were capable of doing “men’s jobs”. This is particularly true of the munitions factory workers, where many women in Waterford were employed by the factory in Bilberry. Waterford women’s contribution to the war effort which is not hugely documented or known about is the work done at the Waterford Munitions factory which at its height employed over 500 workers between 1917 and 1919. Most of these were female as the War Ministry did not allow munitions companies to employ more than five percent men and boys.

Also as a consequence of the Dublin Lockout in 1913 and the work of Jim Larkin’s union which preceded the outbreak of the war Waterford female munitions factory workers were able to join the British based National Federation of Women’s Workers. This union successfully set up a special arbitration tribunal for women employed on munitions work. This was decided in the Shelbourne hotel Dublin during April 1918. Here they were able to negotiate minimum wages, raised rates, bonuses, all inclusive of canteen, cloakroom and cleaning staff. The factory was located in Bilberry at the site of the old South Station terminus. The station was one long platform with veranda roofing and short bay platform behind. It closed its doors to passengers in 1906, where the service was transferred across the river to the main North Station. It was used for goods traffic up to 1908 after which it became a depot for the material for the new bridge and later the munitions factory. The local effort for establishing the munitions factory was spearheaded by John Redmond M.P. and leading businessmen in the city. Its first shell was produced in March 1917 which was inscribed and presented in gratitude to Mr Redmond and is currently displayed in the Bishops Palace Museum. The factory produced over a quarter of a million brass shells for 18 pounder artillery pieces.

The following Return shows the quantity and value of the deliveries made by the National Mmunition Factories in Ireland from their inception up to March 7, 1919:—

Name of Factory.	Description.	Quantity Passed Inspection.	Value (at Standard Price).
			£
Dublin National Shell Factory ..	18-pounder and 9.2" shells	518,541	569,951
Dublin National Fuse Factory ..	{ Shell Fuses A.G.S. Bolts	310,234 187,281	96,192 2,029
Waterford National Cartridge Factory	Cartridge cases.	246,637	99,604
Cork National Shell Factory ..	4.5" H.E. Shell.	29,325	44,067
Galway National Shell Factory ..	18-pounder H.E. Shell.	30,713	19,453
		TOTAL VALUE	£631,296

Image from www.boards.ie Thread "Munitions factories in Ireland"



Artillery shell cases, 1918

18lb artillery shell cases manufactured in the munitions factory at Bilberry, Waterford. Stamped NCF WF – National Cartridge Factory, Waterford. One shell case was crushed for use as an ashtray or paper weight.
By kind permission of Pat Deegan and Ray Power

Shell presented to John Redmond MP displayed at the Bishops Palace, Waterford



This photograph of the South Station was taken on the 2nd May 1904 during King Edward VII's visit to Waterford and kindly supplied by Suir Valley Railways.



Tracks to munitions factory July 14th, 1916. Image Courtesy of National Library of Ireland.



April 5th 1917.

Photographs of the Outside and inside of munitions factory, Bilberry, Waterford

Images Courtesy of National Library of Ireland



February 28th.1917



November 28th.1916Many

Many women from Waterford also worked at the Irish war hospital depots, making bandages in the City, Portlaw and Tramore



Image from irishmedals.org

The War Hospital supply Depot was set up in December 1916 at 40 Merrion Square Dublin and was affiliated with the joint British Cross and St John's Stores Department and registered under the scheme controlled by the Director General of the Voluntary Organisations. Later more than 81 sub stations existed, 3 of them in Waterford, in the City, Portlaw and Tramore. Here women made dressing and bandages for hospitals at home and at the front. Owing to the war, one of the first articles to become scarce was cotton wool, sphagnum moss proved to be a great substitute because of its absorbency and antiseptic qualities. Collecting the moss was at times a very difficult task as women had to work long hours in wet boggy ground to secure the moss which was then dried out and used in the bandages. The main depot for Waterford was in the City at the former Model School and now the site of St Declans National School. Other depots were in Curraghmore House Portlaw and in Kingscourt Tramore.



War hospital supply depot, formally the Model School, now St Declan's. December 11th.1917

Image Courtesy of National Library of Ireland.

This new found freedom of working outside the home greatly influenced the growth of the suffrage movement. In 1918, partly in recognition of the role of women in the war effort, women over 30 throughout Ireland and Britain were given the right to vote in general elections for the first time. The importance of women's voice in Waterford in this election has been noted by Fionnuala Walsh, Historian at Trinity College who commented: "the 1918 election campaign in Waterford when some volunteers said they were more afraid of the Redmondite women than the men" (www.theirishstory.com 2013)

The aim of this article is to give an introduction on the impact WW1 had on the lives of Waterford women, and show how this could be illustrated by including the personal stories of a number of different women. A full overview of WW1 experiences will only become clear with further research and the emergence of additional personal stories. If anyone knows of any additional Waterford women who played a role either on the home front or abroad, then please contact us at womencentermedia@gmail.com.

Acknowledgements

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Images Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland: L_ROY_07906, P_IMP_1670, P_IMP_1669, P_IMP_1664, P_IMP_1659 and P_IMP_2738

