

Volunteer Readers' Comments on the Recordings and the Art Project April 2016

What made you volunteer? How did you find the recording?
Does anything stand out for you regarding the session?

B

What made you volunteer?

I'm interested in the role Dubliners played in WW I. Especially the *Dublin Fusiliers* role. My grandfather's brother, aged just 20 years old, was killed in Belgium and buried in Ypres.

How did you find the recording?

It was a pleasure to take part in and very well organised.

Does anything stand out for you regarding the session?

Very interesting during the recording whilst reading out the names, I was reminded of all the lives lost through war.

(Maria Ball)

What made you volunteer?

The project instantly sparked both my interest and imagination. I was intrigued at the unique way in which Christina Kubisch was going to connect history with art and technology. In addition, I wanted in some small way to take time out of the present moment to remember the past and to acknowledge and honour the lives of the Irish men and women who lost their lives during WW I.

How did you find the recording?

It was an emotional and thought provoking experience. I felt an immediate connection with the names and wanted to learn more about the individuals. As I read each name I was picturing the person and felt a deep sorrow for the loss of their life.

Does anything stand out for your regarding the session?

The session was extremely well organised and a very positive experience. I was given clear instruction and the atmosphere was relaxed and supportive. I felt that my small contribution was really appreciated which made me feel like I was part of something worthwhile.

(Natalie Boyce)

I was delighted to participate in this project, I love art and particularly Harry Clarke, so when I heard that he had illustrated the book of names, I was in. I had also heard about sound installations before and was interested in being part of that. For some reason I was a bit nervous before the recording and my mouth was dry but I got through it. The thing that stood out in my mind was reading the same name out for the amount of people of that name that died; I thought that was very respectful and touching.

(Paula Boyhan)

The bare empty room of Merrion Square created a timeless atmosphere
I had the L's to read” Francis Ledwidge” ...poet of County Meath

“Ledwidge killed, blown to bits...” July 1917, village of Boezinghe northwest of Ieper (Ypres).

A Soldier's Grave

Then in the lull of midnight, gentle arms
Lifted him slowly down the slopes of death,
Lest he should hear again the mad alarms
Of battle, dying moans, and painful breath.

And where the earth was soft for flowers we made
A grave for him that he might better rest.
So, Spring shall come and leave it sweet arrayed,
And there the lark shall turn her dewy nest.

- *Francis Ledwidge*

Laid to rest, Artillery Wood Cemetery, Ypres, Belgium

(Hugh Boyle)

I have read so much about 1916 this year, visited exhibitions and attended talks that I felt I would really like to be part of it all somehow. Unlike so many Dubliners, I don't have any relatives who were directly involved in the 1916 Rising and so this project has given me an opportunity to be directly involved; an experience I thought would never be mine. I found the sombre task of reading out so many names in a seemingly never-ending list to be in itself a moving experience and the very act of doing that in itself brought home to me the magnitude of what had happened in 1916 and the repercussions of that for future generations to come.

(Denise Buckley)

I had a number of reasons for volunteering for the Memorial Gardens Project. I do volunteer work regularly and this one appealed to me very much as my Grandfather was in the Royal Navy and served in Gallipoli. We were lucky he came back. I have also visited the Normandy Beaches, The War Graves in Northern France, Ypres, and latterly Verdun with some American friends, who had family who did not come back from Verdun.

I would like to have recorded some more of the names as I found it interesting that you wanted various accents. I am Irish but am told by my foreign friends you would not recognise the accent at all. I was recording the name Byrne which is my married name and there were so many of the same name they were so young and the different Regiments they enlisted in. I have tried over the years to interest friends in visiting the *Memorial Gardens* as they are so beautiful and find most of them have not visited or in some cases have not heard of them. Hope your good work will persuade more visitors to it.

(Shelia Phillips Byrne)

D

What made you volunteer?

I received an email and I thought it was an amazing concept. I really wanted to take part as I believe it is something that we owe to those people who gave their lives fighting in WW I, particularly as a national apology for the years they were branded traitors by some. In this 1916 centenary year, I am delighted our city and our country celebrates not only those who fought for Irish freedom at home, but also those who fought for freedom on a much larger scale.

How did you find recording?

It was a very relaxed and enjoyable experience. My compliments to the organisers and the sound engineer.

Does anything stand out for you regarding the session?

The pages I was given to read contained names from the late Cs to the early Ds, and contained quite a number of John, Joe, Michael and Patrick Dalys, which are names that are very familiar to me as a lot of my male relations and ancestors have the same name. This overwhelmed me slightly during the practice session but it definitely made the experience a lot more personal to me, even though I am not aware if any of my actual relations fought in WW I.

(Sid Daly)

I read about the Memorial Gardens Project in a newsletter from the Goethe-Institut Irland. I thought the project looked intriguing, so I put my name down to record names. I found the recording process itself very efficient and comfortable. What stood out for me was reading the same name, e.g. John Higgins, as many as ten times. It made me think about the individual behind each name and at the same time made me consider the collective nature of what it meant to fight in a world war.

(Andrew Deering)

I volunteered for the project because I feel strongly that the Irish men who died should not be forgotten. I found the recording experience easy because the people put me at ease so I was very comfortable but I was very surprised how emotional I felt when I was about halfway through recording the names. Even afterwards on my way home I kept thinking all these men are dead and buried: How did they die? Who did they leave grieving for them? What age were they? What would their lives have been like if they had survived? Were they better off dead? Why did they go to war?

The whole experience provoked so much emotion and deep thoughts. I would still do it again. Many thanks for the opportunity.

(Margaret Doyle)

The country and Dublin in particular had been consumed with the spirit and nostalgia around the 100 year commemoration of the 1916 Rising and the relevance of the ongoing World War at that time. I felt that I had just watched some of the television coverage of the ceremonies and hadn't really appreciated the moment.

Getting involved in the recordings gave me a personal but private way of living the history.

Vocally sounding the names of real men, perhaps names that have not been said out loud for a long time, gave life to the person. Not just a number in statistical form but a real name linked to a real person. The surnames in some cases were ones that were very unfamiliar to me - ones that you would not hear today. The surroundings of Collins Barracks set the tone perfectly, the impressive military architecture with a haunting history.

(Susan Dunne)

F

Two of my uncles fought in WW I, the elder survived and was awarded the Military Medal the younger a 2nd Lieutenant was killed in 1916 aged 19years.

The recording area was quite small yet reading out the many names of the dead created its own atmosphere.

(Patrick Fawl)

What made you volunteer?

I volunteered as my grandfather and his brother both served in WW I - and thankfully both survived. As a serving member of the *Defence Forces*, with a son also in the service, I felt drawn to contribute personally in some manner and help to remember those who did not come home.

How did you find recording?

The recording experience was helped enormously by the preparation afforded me by the 'welcome staff' and their thorough briefing. Speaking for the time allotted became a bit tough as dry mouth syndrome affected me towards the end. Any longer and a pause for a drink would have been necessary. The list of those deceased brought home the scale of losses, as behind each name would have been a family group of parents, wives, sweethearts, brothers, sisters, children etc.

Does anything stand out for you regarding the session?

One outstanding moment of the session was reading out the surnames 'REDMOND' as the great parliamentarian John Redmond must have been one of those on the list. Given the year that we are living in this represented a significant honor for me.

(Paul Fry: Brigadier General, General Officer Commanding the Air Corps and Director of Military Aviation)

H

I volunteered because I felt it was a small way of allowing these people's names to resonate in our own time. I have a big interest in WW I and feel that it was an avoidable and terrible loss of life. What stands out for me is how long it took to read out just part of the surnames beginning with a particular letter. You could have read all day and it would have been like a grain of sand on a beach

(Paul Heffernan)

J

What made you volunteer? My conscience.

How did you find recording? Lonely, miserable, poignant.

Does anything stand out for you regarding the session? How violent and stupid humans can be on occasion.

(Philip James)

L

My list of names started with the letter D. I rehearsed the first few pages silently before the recording. During the rehearsal I noted the rank of each person, until I came to a name with no rank. The word BOY was entered. His rank was BOY, no age. Did he run away to the war? Did his parents know? How did he get to the front? What adventure was this BOY seeking? Did he suffer. He may not have had a military rank, his rank was the one he held in his mother's heart!

(Vincent B. Langan)

M

I considered it very worthwhile and long overdue to the memory of the people involved. I also considered myself as a good reader, with clarity and good diction.

I found the recording simple and straightforward and was conscious of getting the pronunciation of the names correct before the recording itself.

By reading out each name individually it made me aware of my responsibility to speak and read each name with clarity, expression and empathy.

(Christine Mc Cabe)

What made me volunteer?

I think I have a good speaking voice. I liked the idea of my voice being recorded and archived for future generations.

How did I find the recording?

I found the preparation and recording to be managed very professionally.

Does anything stand out for me regarding the session?

I tried to speak slowly and be respectful to every name I read out.

I was also struck by the long list of names I read out in such a short time.

I felt emotional and sympathy for the families of the deceased and I was struck by the terrible loss of life.

(Carmel McCartney)

What made you volunteer?

I volunteered because I believed in this project, in honouring the men and women who gave their lives for freedom, and remembering the fallen. My personal connection to my Granduncle, Pt. Michael Nugent.

How did you find recording?

Recording was a pleasant, seamless event. The technician was patient and enthusiastic.

Does anything stand out for you regarding the session?

Knowing that every name mentioned mattered. That every name mentioned belonged to someone who had loved them and missed them. And that every name mentioned was being remembered. That is what stood out for me most.

(Marie McLoughlin, Grandniece of Pt. Michael Nugent)

O

I thought it was an original and very interesting idea. Also my great uncle – Richard Lee – was killed at Gallipoli and I felt owed it to his memory to work on this project. I found myself in the more recent session reading out soldiers with my surname O'Connor – very moving to say the least.

I thought the whole project was handled sensitively and imaginatively and am glad to have been a part of it.

(Martin O'Connor)

I have a relation who signed up in 1916 to join the British Forces and subsequently perished at the Somme. Hugh Osborne had been talking to his friends on a street in Belfast during a time when Catholics had little opportunity in the workplace. The lads decided to sign up and made an arrangement to turn up at the recruiting office the following morning. Sure weren't they going to get a nice uniform and kit not to mention food and pay.

Only Hugh turned up. The rest is history.

There must be numerous similar stories in the world relating to the tragedies of war. I feel acutely aware that I have lived through my 57 years on this earth without the threat of war or the need to consider my allegiances to one side or another in a conflict situation. For this I am enormously grateful.

With the centenary of the Great War current I hoped to contribute in some small measure to the memory of all those who perished. My motivation was to help remember the victims and to contribute to the awareness of the futility of war and the damage it does.

My experience of the recording was a good one. I found it comforting that there was recognition for those who died, not just written on a page but whose names were spoken out into a recording device for posterity. The experience was somewhat draining but reassuring at the same time.

I felt that there was a tangible experience in respecting the dead of war, especially for those so young and vulnerable. Men who in a different era, where battle strategies were questionable, were treated, in the main, as cannon fodder. An era of obedience, the stiff upper lip, and the notion of king and country being almost a divine devotion.

I found the project a positive experience and would like to be involved further.

(Gerry Osborne)

Q

I volunteered because I liked the idea of every person in the *Memorial Records* being remembered individually. I've seen names being read publicly at events commemorating loss of lives in terrible circumstances and thought it was very respectful and dignified (e.g. 9/11 commemorations, reading of the names of those killed in Northern Ireland).

I enjoyed the recording process very much and liked how just the individual name was read out, with no distinction as to rank, company, etc. My portion of the book

included McCarthys - I remember there were a lot of John McCarthys! What stood out most for me was the effect reading the same name out over and over had. I know the phenomenon of repeating a word or name results in it losing any meaning, but I actually found it unexpectedly moving reading the same name many times. It was the only moment during the recording when I felt a little emotional - wondering what all those John McCarthys were like and how they died.

Congratulations on the project - I look forward to seeing/hearing the end result.

(Pearl Quinn)

R

A friend told me about it as I live beside the *Memorial Gardens* and visit there often. I decided that I would like to contribute something to it. I enjoyed the experience of recording, it was my first time doing it and I felt well looked after and not put under pressure. It gave me space to pronounce the names correctly and not skip anyone and give the men their due respect. I felt privileged to be able to do it. The whole experience was new and all stood out for me.

(Miriam Ryan)

S

I volunteered for a range of reasons. Firstly because as a Trustee I believe it is important to support a project of this kind which emphasizes the contemporary relevance of the Memorial. On a personal level I am invested in what the Memorial seeks to do; my husband's grandfather served in the *Royal Munster Fusiliers* and was killed shortly before the end of the War. He is buried in a *Commonwealth War Cemetery* near Cologne and we were the first members of the family to visit it a few months ago. Also my own Grandfather served in the *Inniskilling Fusiliers*, he fought at the Battle of the Somme and in his later years talked about '...going over the top'. Unlike many of his pals, he came home. Participation was my small way of remembering their sacrifice and I am simply proud of them.

(Captain Gale Scanlan: Honorary Treasurer and Secretary of the Trustees of the Irish National War Memorial)

My brother was a soldier and before he took on this role I was oblivious to what being a soldier entailed and more so from the point of view as a family member. When he went away for 5 years it suddenly struck me that I was constantly waiting to hear from him (and we heard from him quite often). Every time we got news it was relief. You put the risks associated with his job far far away at the back of your mind but it was always there. Thankfully he arrived home safe and sound but for these men's families that fear became a reality. I do not know how families coped getting such news and cannot imagine what that moment in their lives was like. It's a feeling I never ever want to experience. If I could do anything to help remember these men I would gladly do it.

While I was recording the names I actually got shivers up my spine. A lot of men's names I read out were the same, e.g. James Brown, there must have been 25 James Browns. Each and every one of these men should stand out as individuals, as men, as brothers, fathers, husbands, sons, uncles, friends; defenders of freedom and peace. They got reduced to a list. I prayed for them all as soon as I left. What stood out for me is all these men died for no reason, none at all. The song Willy Mac Bride comes to mind "the sorrow the suffering the glory the pain, the killing and dying was all done in vain, for young Willy McBride it all happened again, again and again and again and again", I don't think anyone can sum it up better than that.

(Sarah Scannell, happy to be quoted)

I volunteered as I believe it is an honour to be part of such an experience and in remembrance of those that fought for our freedom.

The actual recording experience was more daunting than I thought it would be as I suddenly became aware of the importance of pronouncing each name correctly.

With regard to the recording session, the thing that stands out the most was the quietness of the room, I became aware of my own breathing and the rustling of paper.

(Siobhan Swan)

W

My reason for taking part in this Project is that I lost two great-uncles in the Great War, John and Charles Hand, and I thought it was wonderful to know that their names would be spoken 100 years on. It was a pleasure to take part and I found it very moving.

(Angela Walsh)

What made you volunteer?

A colleague Barbara O'Meara told me about it as she is an artist who painted the 40 children who died in the 1916 Easter Rising and I did a shamanic Ceremony to launch it for her. I was immersed in those Commemorations and felt that for balance it was important for me to commemorate the Irish men who fought in World War I as well.

How did you find recording?

I found the recording easy as I am used to radio and video recording and the chap was very helpful and gave clear instructions.

Does anything stand out for you regarding the session?

Yes, I felt the weight of responsibility in honouring the men and voicing their names with reverence. When I started there were a group of French Foreign Legion soldiers doing their own Ceremony in the yard and they began to sing the 'Marseillaise' as I spoke. Both I and the recording chap thought that very apt.

(Karen Ward)

Thank you for the opportunity to say a few words of thanks for including me in the list of readers of casualties for the Memorial Gardens Project.

The reason I volunteered is that I have a grand uncle who was killed in the Battle of Ginchy on the 9th September 1916. His name was Ernest Francis O'Kearney White and he served as a 2nd Lieutenant in the 9th Battalion of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. I really appreciate the fact that you included me in the reading section that had his name honoured. It was a very poignant experience reading out the names of so many young men who died in the prime of their lives and some who were only entering it.

(Brian White)

I was delighted to take part in this innovative project. It is a fitting tribute to those who lost their lives and I was pleased to be able to acknowledge them. I found it very moving reading out the list of names.

(Maeve White)

I participated because I feel it important that every single one of those lost lives should be honoured and remembered individually in some fashion. The artistic ambition and scope of this project finds suitable expression for the gravitas of their sacrifice; and this composition, from the very sound of their names, is a fitting tribute to their huge courage.

The recording was, perhaps not too surprisingly, emotional, as one felt the responsibility of enunciating each name with appropriate respect: Certainly repetition occurred; Thomas Smith was repeated multiple times, but each man deserved to have his name enunciated with fresh focus and feeling. This dynamic lent a very real sense of responsibility to the already visceral recording process.

War is senseless-we know this to be true, however the very least we can do is honour those who died and their incredible bravery.

All who died must have been, to varying degrees, frightened, yet still they went to war. Such ideological conviction and unbelievable courage will be, and fully deserves to be, captured and honoured in this project.

(David Windrim)

While reading aloud the names of the young men who sacrificed their lives, I was struck by the fact that although these men were fighting in a "World War", I found the numbers that came from the same villages and town lands perturbing. I found most poignant the fact that so many of those who died were mere boys fighting in a man's world. May they rest in peace.

(Mark Wynne)

Delighted to be part of this fascinating project. The reading of names had a kind of meditative effect. The need to really focus on each individual name with the same care and attention became very powerful and moving.

(anonymous)