



Decade of Centenaries grant report

Recipient name:	Medbh Gillard
Amount and year awarded:	€3,500 in 2022
Title of project:	Beekeeper, Bagpiper, Bombmaker. The life and legacy of Irish Patriot Donnchadh MacNiallghuis 1887-1954

Summary of project:

The research positioned and considered the life of Irish patriot Donnchadh MacNiallghuis within a framework of historic events which were experienced by his unique generation. It is a chronological focus on his family background, early life, his revolutionary activities and post-Civil War life in the Northwest – specifically Donegal and Sligo. By conducting interviews with his surviving elderly children, accessing a rich cache of family documents and photographs, and the discovery of family letters spanning several decades, I will present a fulsome account of the man's rich and varied family, political, social, business and personal life.



Objectives of the project:

The story of Donnchadh MacNiallghuis and his contribution to Ireland's revolutionary movement has faded into gentle obscurity. Although he was featured in two recent Decade of Centenary commemorations, some of the information publicly available lacks full contextualisation. The objective is to create a comprehensive study of his singular life. His pre and post-revolutionary life merits consideration and the project aims to present a portrait of the man by means of a cache of letters spanning 1918-1943 which offer his contemporaneous voice over half a century.



Decade of Centenaries grant report

Methodology used in conducting the research:

I accessed untapped archival sources, i.e., the Sligo, Donegal and Cork County archives, and the Bureau of Military History (BMH) witness statements. The recollections and collections of family members and those of some of his former comrades and colleagues. The research explored and built on the way this Irish patriot's life had been remembered and commemorated publicly and within his family. It considered how the process of remembering and commemorating his life and revolutionary activities has evolved and developed as a result of some Decade of Centenary events, and the overarching influence of the Centenary of Ireland's Revolutionary Decade.

Findings of research and milestones achieved:

The project will inform a proposal for a public history exhibition in counties Donegal and Sligo.

Dissemination of the project outcomes:

A public history exhibition in counties Donegal and Sligo, in cooperation with the County Library service, with accompanying public lectures by this researcher on the life and legacy of Donnchadh MacNiallghuis. This research will also be made available to the public via the Decade of Centenaries website.

Lectures given/outreach activities:

Two future lectures in counties Donegal and Sligo.

Plans for continued communication of the project's results:

Pending on completion: Sligo ATU and relevant social media interest groups in counties Donegal and Sligo in particular. Local newspaper and regional history groups and societies, the mailing lists of Donegal and Sligo county libraries. I will do some local radio interviews and intend to publish a book on the topic at a later date. All research will be made available through the Decade of Centenaries website and my own social media.

Plans for furthering the project:

A public history exhibition in counties Donegal and Sligo in cooperation with the County library service. The publication of a book on the subject with related launch events in his adopted home place of Rosses Point Sligo and his native place at the Folk Village in Glencolmcille. (I discovered that the stones of the house in which he was born in 1887 now form the framework for the Clocha in Éireann monument at Glencolmcille). I propose to have a permanent selection from the exhibition at the Glencolmcille Folk Park and at the Ardnacrusha ESB Museum where he was employed as an engineer in the early days of the



Decade of Centenaries grant report

Free State. I will present a bound copy of my research to each of his surviving children, now all in their late 80s or 90s.

How the bursary enhanced professional development:

Being awarded a bursary by the Royal Irish Academy has significantly enhanced my professional development as an historian and researcher. It has been an overwhelmingly positive experience that has allowed me to integrate, along with my academic experience in the field of local history, my previous education and professional experience in the fields of visual education, psychology and in my professional work as a visual artist. The financial security offered by the bursary allowed for a greater scope of research and ability to travel to access original source material, conduct interviews etc. Specific opportunities in terms of recognition as an historian and researcher included collaborating with public bodies and other professionals, gathering original oral testimony from the subject's surviving elderly children, working closely with archivists in Sligo, Donegal and Cork libraries and local studies collections, the Bureau of Military History and the National Library.