



Decade of Centenaries grant report

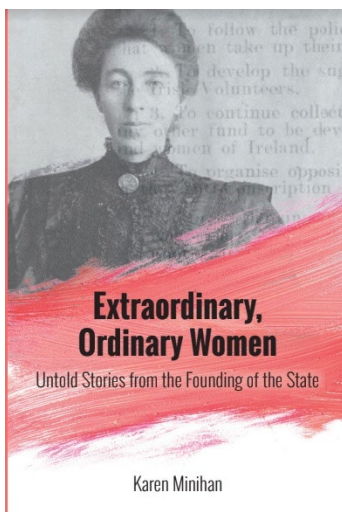
Recipient name:	Karen Minihan
Amount and year awarded:	€8,766 in 2022
Title of project:	Extraordinary, Ordinary Women: Untold Stories from the Founding of the State

Summary of project:

The project was the research and writing of 'More Extraordinary, Ordinary Women, Untold Stories from the Founding of the State', the second in the series of untold stories of diverse women from the West Cork area in the years around the founding of the Irish State. The stories were found through personal contacts and from presenting 'Extraordinary, Ordinary Women: Live!' involving the stories in Book 1 in a West Cork tour in 2022.

The area of land to which the narratives relate stretches from the west part of Cork at Garnish, Beara and goes to Kilbrittain in the east. Research of the history of the time was also required, the circumstances of the various areas in which the stories are set, meetings with historians and family members, attending the settings where necessary to see the places where events took place and to get photos. Writing the stories to be included in 'Extraordinary, Ordinary Women 2' was then undertaken.

As in Book 1, there is a creative response to the stories. There are three new poems and new lyrics to the song, "Mná na hÉireann".



Objectives of the project:

To search for other untold stories of women and to publish them in 'More Extraordinary, Ordinary Women, Untold Stories from the Founding of the State' mirroring the aesthetic style of Book 1.



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Methodology used in conducting the research:

Sourcing the stories

Some people were aware that I was seeking stories, for example: through a radio interview in relation to the premiere of a documentary, also called 'Extraordinary, Ordinary Women', at the Fastnet Film Festival based on four stories in Book I. I was also approached at the end of the performances of 'Extraordinary, Ordinary Women: Live!' which toured with the short play from the book I, 'Home Rules'. From June 2022 to April 2023 the performances went to 15 different West Cork venues. (This performance was a commentary on writing the book and dealing with the stories, trying to understand the time and our history, and included songs and references to the women.) Contacts that I made during the writing of Book I also gave me stories and three were those I wanted to find out about myself, having come across their names when researching.

Methodology

Recorded interviews with families, local historians, and local community leaders to access the oral versions of the stories.

Following the work undertaken for Book I, there were stories already to be pursued and I followed these through my existing connections.

I continued researching witness statements and pension applications in the Bureau of Military History and in many local and national films and publications on the history and events of the time, including newspapers and online essays and local history books.

Findings of research and milestones achieved:

I have easily found more stories of remarkable, ordinary women, that show different impacts of the war, different positions on the political front, different religions, social backgrounds and circumstances. As a combination, they reflect the varied and diverse community that was living in West Cork at that time. Each of the stories brings a different angle to the social and oral history of the time, from the death of one Cumann na mBan member, to the women who were forced to emigrate, to a Protestant doctor working for the nationalist side.

As the process has continued, I have written three poems as they came to me and new, alternative lyrics for the traditional song "Mná na hÉireann", which are also influenced by working on this project. My experience during this past year is that the crossover between the story telling—firmly based on historical facts—and other art forms—the poems and songs—works very well.

Dissemination of the project outcomes:

I have existing contacts for the project in the Southern Star; C103; and used, in conjunction with Facebook, an email drop with connections; website.

Published work/plans



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When the book is published, a launch will be held with a reading of some of the text /poems and songs at Working Artist Studios, Ballydehob. This is planned for the first week in December. I also plan to have book signings in 3 of the bookshops where the book will be sold in West Cork. This has been confirmed with Bandon Bookshop, Kerr's Clonakilty and Wormbooks, Schull.

As a result of the success of the short documentary 'Extraordinary Ordinary Women', based on Book 1, Wombat Media, a film company based in West Cork, have successfully applied for a grant to replicate the documentary-type, using four new stories from Book 2. This allows for continuing the discussion of the contents of Book 2 plus the communication of the stories within the book. The project is at preproduction planning stage and will be filmed in November. The 'Extraordinary, Ordinary Women: Live!' presentation featured in the Beara Military Heritage Festival in September, 2023 and the stories of Book 2 featured in this show.

Lectures given/outreach activities:

6 events where 'More Extraordinary, Ordinary Women' was promoted, prepublication; 3 performances; 2 schools; interview during Fastnet Film Festival.

Plans for furthering the project:

This project on 'Extraordinary, Ordinary Women' has already expanded far beyond my initial plans. As well as disseminating the second book, I would like to produce the play 'Triskele: Reconciliation'. This was written three years ago and is the starting point for this project. A play around the stories of two women affected by the War for freedom and yet, needing to come together in the love for their grandchild. With music and movement playing an important role, the overall theme of the play is a reconciliation to our common humanity and our shared future.

How the bursary enhanced professional development:

The bursary was a great benefit in allowing me the chance to continue the research on this project and connecting with the wide range of people with an interest in the untold stories of extraordinary, ordinary women, whose actions, bravery and dedication were intended for the benefit of all...and the consequences of that for all of our society.



Acadamh Ríoga na hÉireann
Royal Irish Academy

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