



Decade of Centenaries grant report

Recipient name:	Mary O'Mahony
Amount and year awarded:	€1,550 in 2022
Title of project:	94 Days: Hunger Strike in Cork and Brixton 1920 – Digitisation Project

Summary of project:

Terence MacSwiney (1879-1920), whose father John was a native of Crookstown in Kilmurry parish, is among the prominent members of the revolutionary generation to have links to this area of Co Cork. Elected to the First Dáil as TD for Mid-Cork, he became Lord Mayor of Cork City in March 1920, following the murder of Tomás Mac Curtain. He was arrested and tried by court-martial the following August and sentenced to two years in prison. The Lord Mayor died on 25 October 1920 in Brixton Prison, after 74 days on hunger strike. Independence Museum Kilmurry includes artefacts from the Terence MacSwiney Memorial Museum, opened here in 1965 and there has always been a strong focus in our collection, on the role the MacSwiney family played in Ireland's struggle for independence. However, research at the newly-opened museum during 2016/17, suggested many visitors knew little about MacSwiney, or the contribution he had made to Irish cultural and political life.

Kilmurry Historical & Archaeological Association (KHAA) decided that raising awareness of his life and legacy would form a central part of our Decade of Centenaries programme. Three Terence MacSwiney weekends were planned, with the 2020 weekend to focus on the hunger strike in its centenary year. Due to Covid restrictions this was held in 2021.

In protest at his arrest in City Hall in August 1920, Terence MacSwiney joined the hunger strike which had started in Cork Gaol the previous day. About 65 men had initially started this strike and others joined in the following days as further arrests were made, prisoners were deported to England and more were released in an attempt to break the strike. By early September, twelve men remained on hunger strike: Terence MacSwiney in Brixton Prison and eleven in Cork Gaol. Michael Fitzgerald was the first to die on 17 October, followed by both Terence MacSwiney and Joe Murphy on 25 October. The remaining nine ended the hunger strike after 94 days without food on 12 November 1920. Global coverage of the hunger strike, particularly that of the Lord Mayor in Brixton, bought world attention on the Irish cause as the conflict escalated and did much to undermine British Rule.

The germ of an idea that led to the book and temporary exhibition '94 Days: The Longest Hunger Strike' arose following a conversation with Conor Kenny, grandson of Joe Kenny, one of the men who remained on this hunger strike until the very end. Despite commemorations held in 2020 – which had to be modified due to the Covid pandemic – the Hunger Strike in Cork, was referred to by Dr Gabriel Doherty UCC in 2021 as 'an understudied, and for many an unknown, episode,'. KHAA decided that finding out more about



Decade of Centenaries grant report

those involved would be the focus of our 2021 Terence MacSwiney Weekend exhibition. Confirming exact numbers was difficult but during 2021, we identified more than 90 men, who we believe participated in the hunger strike for some days at least. Several suffered from ill-health afterwards and some died young. While it is unknown what happened to many of the others, among them were those who played a further and significant role in the War of Independence and those who went on to take part in public life in the new Irish Free State. All deserve to be acknowledged during the Decade of Centenaries for the part they played in gaining Irish self-determination.

Funding from the Royal Irish Academy has supported us to digitise and share the research we have gathered to date online, in what we anticipate will be an ongoing project at Independence Museum Kilmurry.



Objectives of the project:

To recheck, review and digitise research undertaken on the men who participated in the hunger strike which started in Cork Gaol on 11 August 1920. This was undertaken for the temporary exhibition and book published as part of the Terence MacSwiney memorial events held at Independence Museum Kilmurry during the Decade of Centenaries.

Methodology used in conducting the research:

Review and cross-check of research done on 65+ volunteers involved in the hunger strike to update research spreadsheet with information, such as age, county, reason for arrest, release/trial dates; using Irish Newspaper Archives, FindMyPast and other online sources – to be published on our website – ongoing.

Review of BMH files, including further releases online since 2021 to check if further information is available online to add to our spreadsheet – ongoing.

Review and digitisation of other information associated with the Terence MacSwiney events at Independence Museum Kilmurry, including YouTube recordings of talks given during the three weekends and the temporary exhibition boards from 2021.



Decade of Centenaries grant report

Meeting with historian Neil Donovan during the Liam Lynch Centenary Commemoration to discuss digitising his research on Michael Fitzgerald.

Meeting and telephone conversations with the Upton and O'Brien families to discuss digitising the commemorative booklets they produced in 2020 as part of our online exhibition.

Preparation and scanning of Terence MacSwiney Weekend posters and other artefacts in IMK collection associated with the Lord Mayor for our online archive.

Upload of material to our iCAN Kilmurry Heritage website and to our IMK Omeka archive.

Two copies of digital objects preserved master (TIFF) and dissemination (JPEG). Omeka archive currently hosted by Reclaim Hosting, pending development of new IMK museum website (separate to iCAN) during 2023/24. All '94 Days' research stored in Kilmurry Heritage Google Drive. Off-site 2TB hard drive back-up to be made.

Findings of research and milestones achieved:

Our work to date, which will be digitised on our Kilmurry Heritage website, includes posts on: An About The Project page, including acknowledgement of RIA funding.

A post with spreadsheet embedded of names of the 65+ volunteers involved with information such as age, county, reason for arrest, release/trial dates links to BMH files etc.

Posts on the Terence MacSwiney Weekends held at Independence Museum Kilmurry in 2018, 2019 and 2021.

A link to digitised Terence MacSwiney artefacts in the IMK Omeka archive. Posts with further associated information and digitised content – ongoing.

In 2022, we were also fortunate to be accepted into the NMI's Irish Community Archive Network (iCAN). We discussed digitising our project through our new iCAN Kilmurry Heritage website as we agreed this would give the research a much higher reach and profile.

Following the Terence MacSwiney Weekend in 2021 and the publication of the book, we put our research to one side as we needed to begin work in early 2022 on a temporary exhibition planned to mark the centenary at Béal na Bláth and the anniversaries of two local Volunteers who died during the Civil War. That exhibition and associated events, along with further training and research ahead of the launch of our new iCAN website in May 2023, meant that we were not able to devote as much time as had originally been planned to the review of the '94 Days' research. In March, we wrote to RIA, advising the Grant Manager of our difficulties and were granted an extension to the project deadline.

We have almost completed the first part of our project, to review research done to date, although we envisage this research will be ongoing. We have reached out to some of the families involved and to other



Decade of Centenaries grant report

historians with information on those who took part, but we have not been able to travel to the archives in Dublin as was originally intended, or to visit communities who were affected by the research yet.

We also underestimated the time it would take to collate the research already done and to develop our website posts. And as always, since we are a volunteer-run association, other research and fundraising commitments absorbed much of the time when we had hoped to focus on this research.

A recent example was time to curate objects for a National Treasures segment on RTE's Today show, including the dish ring given to Terence and Muriel MacSwiney on their wedding day. You can watch the episode back on RTE Player. Segment starts at 1:21 (Episode 116 / 23 October / available for 27 days).

Dissemination of the project outcomes:

From 3 November 2023, we will begin to publish the completed posts on this project on iCAN website: <https://kilmurry.heritagecork.org/>

Published work/plans:

A book written by KHAA volunteer Deirdre Bourke was published for the 2021 Terence MacSwiney Weekend.

Plans for furthering the project:

Engaging with family of those we are endeavouring to commemorate is where the project has truly come alive and enabled us to elicit information which is not in the bare facts of formal archives, doesn't make newspaper columns and is rarely written down. Via publication of the present stage of the project we anticipate the next stage of '94 Days' will be more of this engagement. The Independence Museum has gained many new friends to date by taking ownership of the pursuit of remembering the sacrifice of these men over one hundred years ago.

How the bursary enhanced professional development:

Working on this project enabled us to learn, practice and experience a diverse range of research skills across a wide range of media. Research tools such as FindMyPast, Irish Newspaper Archives, etc., will be indispensable for our ongoing research on this and other projects. Engaging through the project with other members of our own organisation and sharing the methodology with them was a worthwhile endeavour for this project. Even within the limitations (mentioned above) imposed by being a voluntary organisation our research to date has pushed us to engage and seek support with many more outside agencies than we would have heretofore. These contacts are invaluable and have showcased our museum to an even wider range of visitors, people within the museum community; researchers and historians (local and national).