

REMEMBERED

A Bray Man in the Great War



7 NOVEMBER 2018 - 31 JANUARY 2019



Curated by Seán Downes

5th Floor, dlr LexIcon,
Moran Park, Dún Laoghaire

Introduction: John Cleary and the Irish Division

My maternal grandfather died when my mother was still very young. It was around this time that my mother remembers her own mother bringing her to the memorial at the Carlisle Grounds in Bray, and pointing to John Cleary's name there. He was her dad's uncle, and he had disappeared during the Great War. Nothing else was known.

She later learned that his wife's name was Elizabeth, and that they had lived together for a while at Bowden Cottage on the strand, near Bray Head. My mother still remembers Bowden Cottage and her grandmother Agnes well. Agnes Cleary was two years younger than her big brother John, who had gone away to war and never come back. She never forgot him.

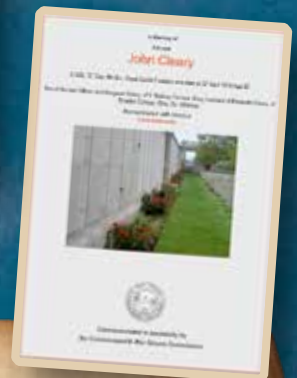
Seán Downes, Curator of Exhibition



The Bray Memorial



Bowden Cottage



In addition to the impressive work they do maintaining the hundreds of cemeteries along the former Western Front, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission also maintains a comprehensive, searchable database of their records at cwgc.org

It is immediately clear from these records that John has no known grave. His name is recorded instead on the Loos Memorial, a monument close to the small town of the same name in northern France. Some idea of the violence that this region suffered during the war can be gleaned from the 20,000 other names of missing men that appear beside his on the memorial.



Dud Corner cemetery and the Loos Memorial



The 9th Dublin Fusiliers battalion that John joined was just one of twelve battalions that together formed the 16th (Irish) Division. Established in September 1914, the 16th Division was formed around a core group of National Volunteers who had answered John Redmond's call to take up arms and fight against Germany. Overwhelmingly Catholic and nationalist in character, the 16th (Irish) Division was widely seen as a counterpoint to the predominantly Protestant and unionist 36th (Ulster) Division, which had itself formed around a core of UVF volunteers dedicated to opposing the introduction of Home Rule. In the volatile political climate in Ireland at this time, Irish Catholic men were encouraged to enlist.

Recruitment into the 16th Division was initially strong, especially in the wake of Redmond's speech at Woodenbridge in County Wicklow on 20th September 1914. His decision to encourage enlistment would also lead to a historic split in the Irish Parliamentary Party, with the majority supporting his position to pursue Home Rule through constitutional means - and a minority who, frustrated with the perceived lack of progress, would ultimately choose instead to take matters into their own hands during the week of Easter in 1916.



John Redmond and the National Volunteers, Phoenix Park 1914



The men who served in the 16th (Irish) Division came from every corner of the island of Ireland, but the recruitment area for the Dublins was concentrated in the counties of Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow and Carlow. Their depot was at Naas in County Kildare.

Approximately 200,000 Irish men went to fight in the Great War. At the lowest estimate, around 35,000 of them did not return.

Bernard Reid: an Officer from Dalkey

LE HAVRE, 20TH DECEMBER 1915

After months of training in Ireland, the 16th Division gradually began transferring units to Britain towards the end of 1915, in preparation for its departure for active service at the front. Finally, in December the first battalions of the Division arrived in France. The War Diary of the 9th Dublins opens with an entry for December 20th 1915:

5.20am Battalion landed in France and proceeded to rest camp. Strength: officers 33, OR [other ranks] 919 and 1 MO [medical officer]. Lt Col WEG Connolly in command.

6pm Entrained for the front.

Their sister battalion, the 8th Dublins, had travelled with them. Their Diary for the same day records:

Havre Battalion disembarked at 7am & marched up to No.5 Rest Camp, and was joined by transport at noon. Marched to station of entrainment at 3pm. Battalion, less 3 officers and 125 men, entrained with transport at Point 4 and left at 12 midnight

The two battalions then made their way by rail separately to the village of Houchin, situated in the Nord Pas-de-Calais region of northern France, still some miles behind the front lines but well within sound of the guns.

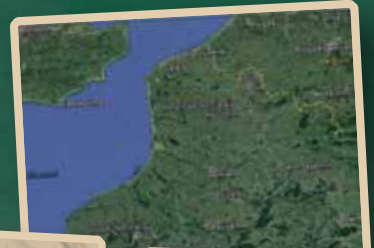
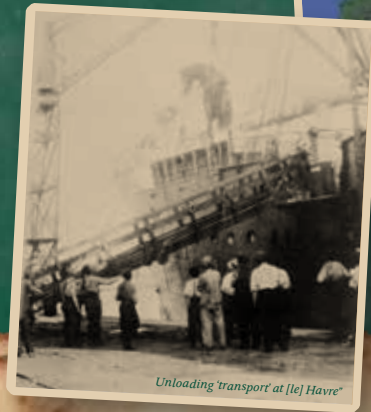
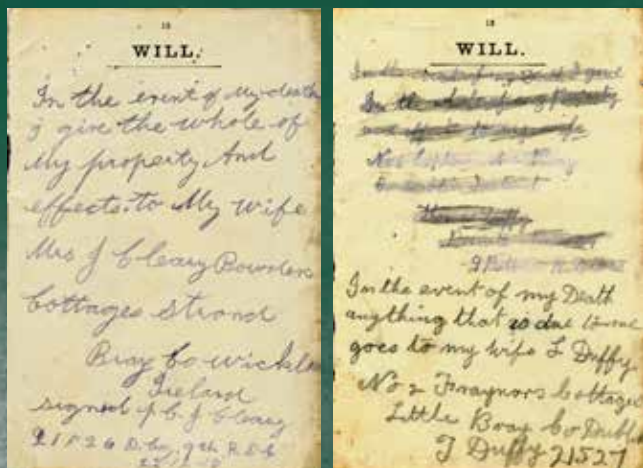
John Cleary's 9th Dublins arrived first, on 21st December, having disembarked at the town of Choques and received orders to march the rest of the way. Arriving after them, the 8th Dublins' Diary noted the difficult weather conditions:

Arrived at Houchin where battalion encamped under canvas. Camp became uninhabitable owing to bad weather and mud. Two companies 7th R. Ir. Rifles and 9th R. Dub. Fusiliers were in camp with battalion. Iron rations issued to all ranks.

The Dublins would spend their first Christmas in France here, under canvas in the rain at Houchin.

It was normal practice to ask the men to make a will before they went on to face the dangers of the front lines. John Cleary made his will in Houchin a few days after his battalion had arrived at the village, and it has survived. He signed it with his service number, 21526. He also added "D. Company, 9th R.D.F." and dated it 25-12-15. It is the only record of his handwriting that we have.

He was not alone. Another man from Bray who was there at the time was private 21527 Thomas Duffy. Thomas also served with the 9th Dublins, and his will has also survived. As both men have consecutive service numbers, it is possible that they were friends who enlisted together.



BERNARD REID

One of the enduring myths of the Great War is that the ordinary soldiers were simply sent forward to be slaughtered, while their officers remained safely out of range of the guns. Like many myths, it has at a grain of truth: those who made the big decisions that would ultimately cost so many lives were rarely there themselves to witness in person the carnage that resulted.

In reality, the lower-ranking officers at battalion level had no say in strategy, and did not make those decisions. They were expected to lead their men into action in person, and they did. By 1918, the average life expectancy of a battalion-level officer on the Western Front was estimated at six weeks.

One of these officers was 2nd Lt. Bernard Reid from Dalkey. He was educated at St. Mary's College in Rathmines and at the National University, where he was editor of its college magazine. He joined the Leinster Regiment shortly after the outbreak of the war and was gazetted to the 8th Dublins afterwards. A fluent French-speaker, he wrote about what he witnessed first hand with the 16th Division upon its arrival in France. When he wrote home on 20th January 1916, he was serving with the 9th Dublins, John's battalion.

The newly-arrived Irish troops had taken the place of some Scottish units in the region, and Reid observed that when the Irish mixed with the local population behind the lines, they made a strong impression, despite the language barrier:

"The Irish being so Catholic, as they were surprised to see from the muster at Mass on the Sunday, are well treated but the Scotch, with their petticoats, for which they will never be forgiven, it would seem, they didn't like. The curé at Mass on the Sunday, at which the soldiers, with all their war accoutrements crowded out the population, started his discourse by saying 'I'm sorry the soldiers don't understand French or that I cannot speak English. We have all heard [of] the Irish Catholics, but now we see what an example they are.'"

Bernard Reid would not be the only one to comment on the effect that such a large Irish army was having on this part of rural catholic France, but in the meantime duty called. On New Year's Eve he received orders to lead a platoon of the 9th Dublins up to the front lines a few miles east of Houchin, through the shattered town of Loos-en-Gohelle.

Loos lay in a 'salient' in the front lines, which meant that it was vulnerable to attack from three sides. Because the approaches to it were constantly shell-swept, the only relatively safe way to enter it was under cover of darkness.



REMEMBERED A Bray Man in the Great War

The Western Front: the 16th (Irish) Division in late 1915



The front lines at night



NEW YEAR'S EVE

On the evening of the last day of 1915, Bernard Reid led his platoon of 9th Dublins on the hazardous journey up towards the trenches at Loos on foot. As they approached the ruins of the village, they were forced to seek shelter when a sudden barrage of German artillery opened up on their position. He wrote home later about what he witnessed:

"We went along in single file on the heels of a guide and had to halt before proceeding from that unsheltered place to some protected place. The guide was unquiet. Our artillery had just broken its hell upon the night. Presently we shall pay for this, we were all thinking, they'll surely answer in a few moments and they did. The first crashes came as we waited huddled against a wall. The bursting shells threw up earth that descended in showers, shrapnel and other shells came roaring along, you hear them, you can judge the direction by the sound. I was looking out over the open space for them. We dare not move. The men were quiet, not a move out of them, except for the whispering of one to the other. One chap I heard saying "It is awful being here and maybe killed without being able to strike a blow for yourself."

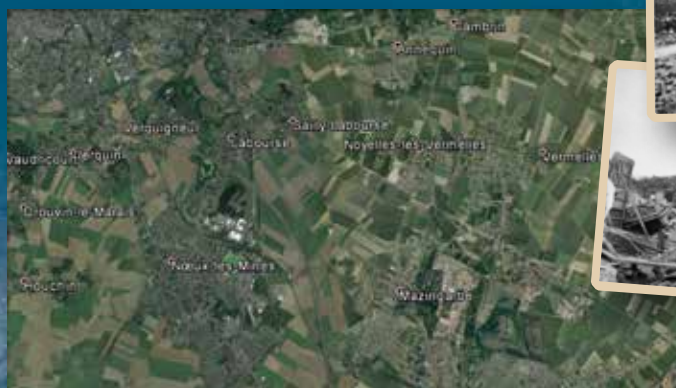
This one is going to the right, that one to the left, this seems right for us, but it stops short and it is a dead shell, it does not explode. I kept telling the men these things and then you hold your breath as one rushes over you and drops just behind crashing through the broken roof and knocking some brick-dust around you. There is nothing for you to do, except to keep a firm grip over everything and wait till the bombardment stops. Forty-five minutes of this seems a long time. It stopped and we came out again on the road. I felt proud of myself and proud of the men, it had been a very trying baptism and those fresh troops had borne it with unimaginable calmness. As we waited for the Captain to return I learned that during it one man had passed the gate of silence."

The man who had passed the gate of silence that evening was private 14572 Henry Mason from Bray, county Wicklow, aged 29. He was buried by his comrades the following night, but his grave could not be found after the war. His name is recorded on the Loos Memorial.

INTO THE LINE

By the end of 1915 the town of Loos-en-Gohelle had been devastated. Captured by German forces in 1914, it had been a constant target for allied artillery until September 1915, when it had been recaptured by the allies, with enormous casualties to both sides. The German forces then dug in on the higher ground around the town, and it was then the turn of the German artillery to fire down into the ruins.

The exposed nature of the salient meant that many of the estimated 20,000 casualties from the previous battles could not be recovered, and that is why their names appear on the Loos Memorial today. This was to be the 16th (Irish) Division's first position on the Western Front.



Loos-en-Gohelle, winter 1915

Posen Alley: The Staniforth Letters and Bray and Dalkey Trenches



The Loos Salient



Looking east towards Loos across the battlefield from a captured trench. The winding towers of the town, dubbed "Tower Bridge" by the troops, can be seen on the horizon. The town itself sits in a slight depression among the surrounding fields.

Posen Alley was a communication trench through the fields to the north of *Loos*. 'Communication' trenches were so called because they served as arteries to and from the front lines, providing a vital connection between the men at the front and their headquarters and reserves to the rear. They were especially important during daylight hours, when any safe movement across open ground was impossible.

At its eastern end, *Posen Alley* connected with the front line trenches at a junction where two sections of trench branched off from it to the southeast. The names of these trenches appear on another map overlay provided by the *National Library of Scotland*.

Both the *Bray Trench* and the *Dalkey Trench* ran from the end of *Posen Alley* as far as *Forest Trench*, with the *Meath Trench* branching off from them towards the southwest. This map also shows the trenches which were occupied by the Irish marked in blue and the German front lines opposite them in red. The space between them was, of course, *No-Man's Land*.

The 16th (Irish) Division was occupying the most extreme tip of the *Loos Salient*. It was also, very literally, making itself at home.

John Max Staniforth

During a house clearance in the 1970s John Staniforth, known as "Max", discovered a collection of letters which had been kept by his parents. He had written them himself more than half a century earlier, when he had served with the 16th (Irish) Division on the Western Front.

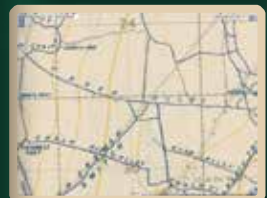
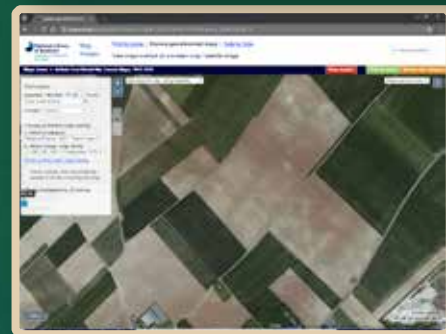
In 1914 he had taken the unusual step of declining a commission as an officer, instead choosing to enlist as a private with the 6th Connaught Rangers, in deference to his Irish-born mother from county Cavan. He was soon promoted to Signals Officer, serving with the 7th Leinsters in the same Division. In this capacity he was assigned to the Leinsters' battalion headquarters, and tasked with maintaining communications with each of its four companies throughout his time at the front. He had written home to his parents frequently, describing his experiences of daily life with the 16th (Irish) Division.

After he rediscovered his old letters, Staniforth spent his last years typing them up into a volume with the working title "Kitchener's Soldier, 1914-18: The Letters of John H. M. Staniforth." He then tried without success to bring some attention to them. He died in 1985 without ever having seen any of his old letters published.

Fortunately, in 1981 he had donated the letters to the Imperial War Museum's archives where they were later found by Professor Richard S. Grayson. "At War with the 16th Irish Division 1914-18: The Staniforth Letters" edited by Grayson was published in 2012.

Staniforth's task of maintaining communications between his battalion's units was assisted by the fact that every section of trench within the whole complex network was clearly defined, often with names chosen by the men who lived in and maintained them.

In one of his letters, written early in 1916, he remarked that "No. 3 Posen Alley was my last address."



Trench Warfare in 1916

An aerial photograph of this area still exists. The German trenches, on the right and lower part of the photo, were situated on higher ground. This meant that as well as overlooking the Irish positions, they could also be excavated deeper before becoming waterlogged. The relative depths of the two opposing trench systems can be seen in the amount of white chalk 'spoil' surrounding each.

The southern ends of the Bray and Dalkey trenches can be seen at the top left. The white area within the Irish salient is a chalk pit. The long straight vertical line, running roughly north to south through No-Man's-Land, is the main Lens to La Bassée road, which is still in use today.



The front lines, with parts of the Bray and Dalkey trenches visible on the upper left

In the early months of 1916 the individual battalions of the 16th (Irish) Division continued to arrive in France, as the division was gradually brought up to full strength. The new year brought no change in the hostile weather conditions, and the daily struggle to shore up trench walls and pump out floodwaters continued.

During this period its active units were temporarily broken up and assigned to battalions in service around them. This was a deliberate strategy to give the men some experience of front-line conditions and to 'blood' the Division before committing it as a whole to the Loos Salient.

It was also a strategy which contrasted with the situation the previous year, when inexperienced troops of the 10th Division had been sent directly into action at Gallipoli, with appalling consequences.

When not attached for combat experience in the lines, the men were drilled and trained continuously. The term 'rest' was considered a grim joke all along the Western Front, as units which were nominally at rest were routinely called upon to provide labour details and carrier parties. This was back-breaking work; digging new trenches and maintaining the existing network, carrying supplies and equipment and providing manpower for the numerous engineering and construction demands of the salient.

On 1st March 1916, the now fully-constituted 16th (Irish) Division took over its first position on the Western Front, occupying the trenches in the salient around Loos. Later that month they celebrated St. Patrick's Day with sports and concerts for the men who were not in the firing line. On the same day, shamrock from John Redmond was distributed to all the men in the Division.

The battalions were rotated, as far as possible, between the front-lines and reserve, to ensure that all the men had a chance both to fight and to recover afterwards. But the lethal nature of the salient was always clear, with fewer men returning after every spell at the front.

28TH MARCH

I saw a little tragedy yesterday. A man was blown in at the door of a dug-out, a man belonging to another regiment. We were digging out what was left of him, and there was a little knot of onlookers. At last we recovered him. His arm and shoulder were blown off, and his thigh and leg shattered and horribly burnt, and his neck was mostly blood and fragments, poor chap. We laid him on a trench-board – and one of the bystanders, a kid of 18 or so, burst into tears. 'My brother ...' It was rather wretched.

Max Staniforth

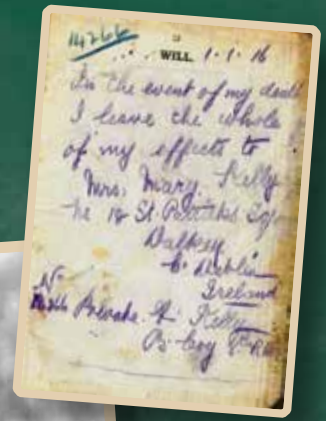


REMEMBERED A Bray Man in the Great War

Gas Attacks on 8th and 9th Dublins in 1916

The weather continued to improve as the month of April passed, but there was also growing concern about increased levels of activity in the German lines. Night-time reconnaissance patrols into no-man's-land reported that saps, or shallow trenches, were being dug forward from the German front line.

Aerial reconnaissance also noticed rats fleeing from one of these saps, which the observers concluded was probably due to a leaking gas cylinder. On the night of 23rd a captured Bavarian deserter confirmed that 3,800 chlorine gas cylinders were being deployed opposite the Irish lines. The gas was to be released as soon as the wind conditions were favourable.



From the War Diary of the 8th Dublins, 27th April:

Gas attack was signalled back from A company at 4:45am. There was an almost imperceptible breeze from the EAST. A dense cloud of black gas and smoke was between us and the sun and gradually spreading over our lines. At 5:20am a heavy bombardment of our front line trenches began during which time heavy rolls of whitish gas was seen to come from all the sapheads in front of Hulluch subsection and the POSENER CRATER and pass over the lines of the 49th Infantry Brigade on our left; the bombardment lifted to our reserve and communication trenches and under the gas the enemy entered a section of our front trench where nearly all the men were killed or wounded. They were put out again and the line held for the rest of the day by the remnants of the two companies reinforced by B company from the reserve trench and later (at dark) by A company of 9th Dublins from GUNTRENCH.

A company 8th Dublins now had about 20 effectives and D [company] 45. Casualties attached. The night passed in evacuating wounded and burying dead & identifying where possible. Our guns put up good shooting and at 5pm put up a strong barrage.

The 8th Dublins had been hit hard. Their two companies caught in the front line, 'A' and 'D', had each been devastated. Nominally, a company consisted of around 200 or more men, but these had been reduced to "remnants" of 20 and 45 "effectives" respectively. In reserve just behind them, 'D' company had also suffered terrible losses.

One of the men in 'B' company who was killed that morning was private 14266 Alfred Kelly from Bray, County Wicklow. In his will, written on new-year's day, he had named Mrs. Mary Kelly of St. Patrick's Square in Dalkey as his beneficiary. The man who had been in the queue to enlist in front of Alfred was also killed with the 8th Dublins that day: Lance Corporal 14265 Patrick Breen was 21 years old and had lived at Boghall Cottages in Bray. His will, if he made one, has not survived. Neither Bray man has any known grave, but both their names are inscribed on the nearby *Loos Memorial*. They are also recorded on the memorial in Bray.

Private 15653 James Doyle is also recorded on both memorials, but sadly no more information is available.

From the War Diary of the 9th Dublins:

5am

Gas attack on Divisional front. At about 5am Enemy opened an intense bombardment on the front & support trenches along the Divisional front especially in the Right Subsection, HULLUCH SECTION and left subsection 14 Bis SECTION. At about 5.25am gas was sent over in great density. In the bombardment the trenches were severely damaged, casualties were high, and 3 of the battalion's lewis guns were knocked out so that the enemy effected a footing in the Brigade section near CHALK PIT WOOD shortly before 6am. A counter attack with grenadiers was duly arranged, the battalion sending 30 battalion grenadiers to assist 8th Dublins. Our artillery barrage on German trenches appeared to be very effective, but heavy artillery was somewhat late in opening fire. At about 7am Enemy again let off gas presumably to cover their withdrawal from our trenches. Between 7.30am & 8am the situation became normal again. At about 10am 2 companies from 7th Royal Irish Rifles in brigade reserve arrived in 10th Avenue as reinforcements. Of these companies one under Major A.B. Cairns was at once sent forward to Reserve trench to support 8th Dublins, the other remaining in tenth avenue. At 3pm owing to heavy casualties sustained by 8th Dublins, A company 9th Dublins proceeded to take over front line previously held by centre company of 8th Dublins. B company accordingly moved to Gun Trench vacated by A company and the remaining company 7th RIR took over the position vacated by B company 9th Dublins. During the night large working parties from the brigade worked to repair trenches, replenish ammunition and evacuate wounded.

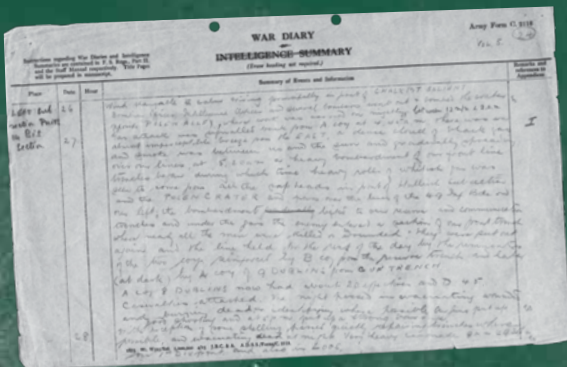
Casualties 2nd Lt. A.E. Carrette killed

10 OR [other ranks] killed

9 OR gassed

8 OR wounded

Compared with their sister battalion, the 9th Dublins has suffered relatively light casualties. But of those reported as killed or gassed that day, only A. E. Carrette has a known grave, in the nearby cemetery at Vermelles. The others, if they were buried, could not be found after the war. One of those men was John Cleary.



REMEMBERED A Bray Man in the Great War

Fr Willie Doyle from Dalkey

Situated to the left of the 8th Dublins in the front lines were the 7th Inniskillings, and with them was Fr. William Doyle from Dalkey. In a small gesture, typical of many for which he would later become renowned, he had given his own dug-out to an officer he had come across the night before who "had been badly shaken by an exploding shell". He then found himself too cold to sleep. Describing the morning of 27th April later, he wrote:

"About 4 o'clock the thought struck me that it would be a good thing to walk back to the village to warm myself [...] the village is about two miles behind our trench, in such a position that one can leave cover with perfect safety and walk there across the fields. As I left the trench about 4.45 the sun was just rising. It was a peaceful morning, with a gentle breeze blowing.

I had just reached the point [...] halfway between our trenches and the village, when I heard behind me the deep boom of a German gun, quickly followed by a dozen others. In a moment our gunners replied, and before I could well realise what was taking place, the air was alive with shells [...] It was a magnificent if terrifying sight. The ground fairly shook with the roar of the guns, for the 'heavies' now had taken up the challenge, and all round the horizon I could see clouds of smoke, and dust from the bursting shells, as both sides kept searching for their opponent's hidden cannon [...]

After a while, seeing that this heavy shelling meant an attack of some kind, and that soon many a dying man would need my help, I turned and made my way towards the ambulance station."

On his way back, he stumbled into what he assumed to be shell smoke, only to find himself standing in the middle of a dense cloud of chlorine gas. It was an understandable mistake, as the Germans had released large quantities of smoke in advance of the gas. Hurriedly fitting his gas helmet, which for once he had taken with him, he made it back to the trenches, where he discovered a scene of devastation.

"I shall not attempt to describe my work for the next two days, nor the harrowing sights I saw [...] From early morning till late at night I worked my way from trench to trench, single handed the first day, with 3 regiments to look after, and could get no help.

Many men died before I could reach them: others seemed just to live till I anointed them and were gone before I passed back. There they lay scores of them [...] in the bottom of the trench, in every conceivable posture of human agony, the clothes torn off their bodies in a vain effort to breathe, and from end to end of that valley of death came one low unceasing moan from the lips of brave men fighting and struggling for life.

I don't think you will blame me when I tell you that, more than once the words of Absolution stuck in my throat, and the tears splashed down on the patient, suffering faces of my poor boys, as I leant down to anoint them."



Fr. Willie Doyle from Dalkey



Willie Doyle refers to "the next two days" because the first attack, involving two waves of gas sent over against the Irish on 27th April during the bombardment, was followed by a second on the 29th, during which the gas cloud lingered for a while over the Irish lines, before the breeze shifted and it drifted back across the German positions, with equally appalling results.

Over the following few days an uneasy calm settled, broken only by a series of "gas alarms", all proving to be false. Any man could sound a such an alarm by striking repeatedly on an empty artillery shell with a piece of metal, which would be heard and repeated down the line.

"You don't know what it's like to pray for rain when your trenches are full of corpses and the Hun is using gas"

Having endured months of bitterly cold weather, soaked and filthy in waterlogged trenches, the men now found themselves standing in the April sunshine, praying desperately for rain.

The thing that is engrossing all our attention and conversation just now is the weather. You don't know what it's like to pray for rain when your trenches are full of corpses and the Hun is using gas. (Rain dissipates a gas-cloud and makes it useless.) And every day the dawn breaks out of a cloudless brassy sky with a blazing sun. All day and all night there are little knots of men clustering around the little wooden weather-cocks that are erected in every trench to give warning of a gas-wind, and every little flicker is watched and noted, just as every speck of haze that might be a rain-cloud is watched in the sky. And still the wind hangs in the east [...] We watch it like the Ancient Mariner, and every now and again the Hun puts up a smoke-bomb from his front trench to test it, and the smoke drifts across into our lines, and everyone bustles for his gas-helmet. Everyone except the dead [...]
Max Staniforth

The weather was not their only cause for concern. The front lines were close enough in many places for communication to be possible between the sides, and the Germans would shortly use this to play on the rumours that had already begun to filter through to the Irish troops about events at home in Ireland. Facing them across No-Man's-Land one morning, the Munsters discovered a small sign erected in the German front line.

Irishmen! Heavy uproar in Dublin. English guns are firing on your wives and children! 1st May 1916



Gas alarm



Sign displayed in German trench opposite Irish front lines, May 1st 1916

REMEMBERED A Bray Man in the Great War

News from Ireland: The Easter Rising



"Undeliverable sacks of mail accumulate at the platform in Dún Laoghaire (then Kingstown) train station, Easter 1916"

In August 1916, the 16th (Irish) Division was transferred south, to the Somme. Writing to his father in Dalkey the following year, Willie Doyle describes a subscription raised amongst the ordinary men of the division, in memory of their fallen comrades:

Before we left the Loos district our Divisional Commander, General Hickie, suggested that all ranks should subscribe towards a memorial of our stay there and a monument to the memory of the men who had fallen in action. This was to take the form of a life-size statue of Our Lady of Victories, to be carved in white marble by the best Paris sculptor and erected in the church of Noeux-les-Mines, where the Divisional Headquarters were, with the names of the fallen inscribed on the pedestal. We are all to receive a small book containing a photo of the statue, the names of the subscribers, etc., which will be a pleasing memento of the 16th Irish Division.

On Passion Sunday the men arrived with the box, and asked the curé where he wished Our Lady of Victories to be erected. As it was only a quarter of an hour before High Mass, he told them to come back later. Then he turned into his own garden, a few yards away, to finish his Office. The Mass servers were playing outside the church which at the moment was empty – the sacristan having finished his preparations had lately left – when a 15-inch shell fired from a German naval gun crashed through the wall and exploded in the sanctuary. As a rule, shells burst on impact; but this, being an armour piercing shell, came through the wall like paper and exploded inside with results impossible to describe.

When I went into the ruin, I exclaimed, 'M. Le Curé, surely you have had fifty shells in here!' 'No,' he answered, 'only one; the havoc you see is the work of a single shot.' Not a trace remains of the beautiful altar; where I so often offered the Holy Sacrifice. The carved stalls, the altar-rails, benches and chairs are smashed into splinters, the roof and parts of the walls are stripped of plaster. I have never seen such a scene of destruction; the explanation being that the explosion took place inside the church and the liberated gases rushed around like ten thousand mad animals, rending and tearing all they met, seeking for an exit. The building is nearly as large as Kingstown Church, but from end to end it is a perfect ruin. Pictures, statues, organ, all are gone; the door of the sacristy was blown in and the vestments torn to ribbons, while not a particle remains of the beautiful stained glass which filled the twenty large windows.

There is just one ray of comfort in this sad destruction: not a life was lost. Ten minutes later the church would have been crowded with civilians and soldiers.

After the bombardment, the statue was moved to the neighbouring town of Bruay-en-Artois, out of range of the guns, for safe keeping. In 1921 it was returned to the newly-refurbished church of St. Martin in Noeux-les-Mines, and erected in the left transept of the church, as originally intended. It remains there still.

Inscribed on the pedestal are the words *Partout et Toujours Fideles*. This was the 16th (Irish) Division's motto: *Everywhere and Always Faithful*. The inscription beneath reads:

À la mémoire des officiers, sous-officiers et soldats de la 16ème Division Irlandaise tués au champ de bataille, ou morts par suite de blessures ou maladies contractées à la Guerre, en France en 1916. R.I.P.

To the memory of the officers, subalterns and soldiers of the 16th Irish Division killed on the field of battle, or who died of wounds or sicknesses contracted in the War, in France in 1916. R.I.P.

It is not clear when exactly news of the Easter Rising in Dublin first reached the men of the 16th Division at the front, but an unidentified officer of the division later wrote: "there was something crushing in the fate that reserved the tidings of the disaster to reach us as we were in the midst of the sufferings of the recent gas attacks."

Willie Doyle may have known of it on 28th April, when he had ended a letter home to his father with the words: "Poor old Dublin, always in the wars".

Rumours had clearly been filtering through to the front, which the Germans could and did use to their advantage. But the Irish soldiers' real concern was with the lack of any communication with home at all. The main point of contact between Dublin and the outside world at this time was Dún Laoghaire [then Kingstown] port, where the mailboats were based. The main processing point for their post to and from home was at the GPO, in the centre of Dublin.

For their families, waiting at home for news from France, this must have been a difficult time. This letter, from an unnamed Dublin Fusilier, was written on 7th May at a time when the sentiment he expressed was still widely shared by the population of Dublin. It was published in the Kildare Observer later that month:

Not a letter from Dublin for over a fortnight! It is a cruel anxiety for us poor exiles, overstrung as we have been lately. It is something for us, as you know, to get news of home, and you can realise what a worry it is to be without news except that sad and terrible news of the wreck of our city and the devastation of our hopes for Ireland – news that makes for disquiet only [...] It is a horrible death this gas. Poor devils crawling about, perhaps seeming to be about to do well, and at the end collapse. In the cloud of gas you could not see a man three yards away. Certainly the Dublins will remember gas for ever. In one part of the line, after the shrapnel, etc., and the gas, there were only a sergt. and six men keeping the thing going.

I am writing from the trenches, where I am again after five days out. I'd simply love to get back on leave just now, to reassure myself and get a little rest among my dear friends. You get a bit shaken and lonely after seeing these sights [...] I do feel lonely at the thought of Ireland

HONOURS OF GAS ATTACK

DUBLINER SENDS ORIGINAL
LETTERS FROM OFFICERS
THEY WERE FROM BUNDOG
THIS NEWS IN THE IRELAND

A Catholic officer writing from the French
under date 15th May writes:—"A letter
from Dublin for over a fortnight. It is a
great anxiety for us poor exiles, overstrung
as we have been lately. It is something
for us, as you know, to get news of home,
and you can realise what a worry it is to
be without news except that sad and
terrible news of the wreck of our city and
the devastation of our hopes for Ireland—
news that makes for disquiet only. There
was something crushing in the fate that
reserved the tidings of the disaster to reach
us as we were in the midst of the sufferings
of the recent gas attacks. Gas in the trench
had nothing to do with it. He has done these
did not depart."

"For the first time we were in the
trenches. It was the first of our exile,
but we had to go back to the front. We
understand our own condition, and these
are the words for the trench, that our work
the following morning."

THE BOMBING OF BUNDOG.
"I had some eight days being lost, and
as we are in 1916, it is the very first time
the title of Dubliner gas and soldiers
has ever been used. The letter from
Dublin after we saw the gas coming, and
the explosion, and the death of the
sergt. and the six men keeping the thing
going."

THE HONOURS OF GAS ATTACK.
"I had some eight days being lost, and
as we are in 1916, it is the very first time
the title of Dubliner gas and soldiers
has ever been used. The letter from
Dublin after we saw the gas coming, and
the explosion, and the death of the
sergt. and the six men keeping the thing
going."



The interior of the church after the shell's impact



Notre Dame des Victoires, the memorial to the 16th (Irish) Division at Noeux. April 2015

REMEMBERED A Bray Man in the Great War

Loos-en-Gohelle: A Memorial

Agnes never forgot her big brother John, who had gone away to war and never come back. As he had initially been reported "missing" there may have been some hope in the early days that he might somehow still return. But as the weeks turned into months, with still no news from France, it must have become clear that no news would ever come. He is missing still.

In April 2016, we travelled to Loos-en-Gohelle with her granddaughter Marie, my mother. The fields to the north of the town are so peaceful now that it is difficult to imagine the carnage that they witnessed a century ago. But there are still signs: the white scars in the earth that mark the lines of trenches still stubbornly reappear every time the ground is ploughed, and the debris that the war left behind is easily found, if you take a few steps off the road into those fields. They are littered with iron.

We parked in the town and took a short walk out towards the north west. After a few minutes we crossed a small rise in the ground and walked downhill for a few hundred yards. It was as close to John Cleary's last known location that we could get. I picked up a piece of shrapnel from the spot. It's not much: just another splinter of broken metal, but it is a piece of Tenth Avenue that we could bring back home, to Bray.

Seán Downes, Curator of Exhibition



John Cleary's sister Agnes and her granddaughter Marie, January 1949



*Signing the visitors' book at the Loos Memorial,
27th April 2016*



The Loos Memorial, April 27th 2016

REMEMBERED A Bray Man in the Great War

From the Diary of the 8th Dublins:

APRIL 1916

