

1916 Garden of Remembrance

Berrings 2016



Berrings Tidy Towns was formed in 2009 with an aim to enhance the local environment and natural amenities. To date, we have achieved a lot and each year a new project is undertaken. In 2016, the project was 1916 Garden of Remembrance.

As Berrings village has no green area we thought it may not materialise but with the goodwill of the people and the determination of the group we now have a magnificent garden in our village.

Many months of research and

sandstone and native to Berrings, was sourced and delivered. The stone work was undertaken by Dan Looney and Michael Looney. Top soil from the locality was supplied by Joe Cotter and the local community. The next step was the planting of the lawns and seven Mountain Ash trees to represent the seven signatories on the Proclamation. The borders were planted up and the flagpole and Proclamation were placed in position. The names of the seven signatories of the Proclamation were each allotted a tree. The art work was



planning went into the project and with permission we got the go ahead to place it at the corner of the church car park. Invaluable advice was given by Margaret Griffin of Griffins Garden Centre. Under the guidance of the Chairmen, Michael Looney, work started on a wet, muddy corner of the car park.

The ground was prepared with the help of the local community. The stone, which is

created by Yvonne Heelan, our local artist.

On Sunday 13th November 2016, we had the official opening of the 1916 Garden of Remembrance. The weather was perfect, and Berrings village stood proud with a magnificent garden commemorating a piece of history.

A special Mass was celebrated by our curate, Father Tom McDermott, and Berrings Church Choir performed, adding greatly to the occasion. The master of ceremonies was Brendan Walsh, and the procession from the church to the garden was led by piper Liam Kenny along a route where the pupils from Berrings National School formed a guard of honour, waving our national flags.

The Garden was blessed and opened by Father Tom, and Sergeant Denis McGarry then read





the Proclamation of Independence and raised

the National flag to the singing of the National Anthem.

Berrings School Choir performed, with principal Liam Walsh, and included a song composed by some of the staff. Paul O'Connor, a pupil of the school, entertained the crowd with a lament played on Uilleann Pipes.

Patsy O'Callaghan delivered a historic and moving oration, remembering the past with pride, voicing enthusiasm for the present, and looking forward with confidence to the future.

To conclude a memorable occasion, as is customary in Berrings, everyone was invited to the school "halla" for a cup of tea but most important of all to meet and mingle with neighbours and friends.

Gáirdín Chuimneacháin, 1916 **Domhnach , Samhain 13 2016**

An address given by Patrick O'Callaghan on the occasion of the Opening of the 1916 Remembrance Garden in Berrings on 16th November 2016

Fáilte romhaimh go léir, ar maidin, don Gháirdín Chuimhneacháin, 1916, anseo I mBiorainn. Is mise Pádraig ó Ceallacháin agus bhí mise is mo shinsear inár gcónaí san áit seo le fada an lá. Is mór an onóir domsa bheith i bhúr measc inniu sa bhlian stairiúil seo, chun cúpla focal a rá mar gheall ar na daoine agus na heactraí a ghnóthaigh ár saoirse dúinn. Tá siad go léir imithe anois ar Shlí na Fírinne. Beannacht Dé ar a nanamnacha dílse, go léir. Ní bheidh a leithéid ann arís.

Good morning and a warm welcome to you all on this auspicious occasion, the unveiling of our historic **1916 Centenary Remembrance Garden** here in Berrings.

My name is Patsy O Callaghan. I have lived in this area all my life as did my maternal and paternal ancestors for many generations. It is a singular honour for me to be invited here today to share with you some brief reflections on the incidents and people that shaped and facilitated the creation of an open, confident and friendly young nation. After much pain and suffering as a nation, we now enjoy the freedom to plan and mould our future. For instance, our local school boasts a comprehensive, expansive, educational model which is freely available to all our young students, particularly to those with special and complex needs. This model ensures greater employment options and

engenders respect for difference in religious, social, occupational and recreational pursuits.

This freedom was, until relatively recently, the preserve of the privileged classes and was off limits for the humble peasant tenant. This led to much strife, tension and agitation. Security of tenure and the right to a free vote was denied to an impoverished majority. For more than 200 years, when the **United Irishmen** introduced the possibility of an inclusive self-governing Ireland, our country has endured many wars and sacrifices with resultant humiliating defeats at the hands of a well-resourced militarised ruling elite. Nationalism and Republicanism has become part of what we are, some utilising force and armed resistance and others resorting to parliamentary debate and reasoned argument. Here the great Liberator, **Daniel O Connell**, comes to mind. He prided himself in

representing a defenceless peasantry against a cruel and powerful landlord class. Daniel, like Charles Stuart Parnell, Michael Davitt and our own, Mallow born, William O'Brien MP, honed and nurtured the power of a united peasant class, now engaging and organising in solidarity with their neighbours.

However, by 1916, the political mood was still quite volatile. Volunteer militia were organising in Ulster to stymie the perceived threat of Home Rule for Ireland. This was promised by British Prime Minister Lloyd-George and John Redmond MP but was put on hold as Europe, including Britain, was at war. Thousands of our ancestors joined the **Great War** believing they were fighting for the freedom of little nations and Home Rule for Ireland. Many joined to see the world, experience a sense of adventure or, pragmatically, to earn a half decent income.

In 1914, Kitchener's recruiting propaganda promised the carrot, "Home before Christmas". But the reality was a nightmare for our poorly trained amateur volunteer soldier ancestors who were thrown without experience into the heat of a prolonged and vicious war. On this very day, November 13th 1916, one hundred years ago, the battle of the **Somme** finally ended after 147 days of unparalleled butchery and slaughter. Several thousand Irish soldiers, from different political and religious persuasions, lost their lives. Many came from our locality. The British captured 120 square miles and suffered 419,654 casualties - 40 men killed for every yard advanced. In 1918 the Germans recaptured practically all this territory. But Britain's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity. The spark of freedom, eternally smouldering and kept alive through the 'Aishling' poetry and the cruel history of domination and subjugation, finally flared to life. The main architect in fanning and fuelling this flame of freedom was a young teacher of English extraction, **Pádraig Mac Piarais**. He gave selfless expression to his personal conviction that the blood of martyrs was the spark that would ignite the flames of passion. He believed that the quest for freedom, almost dead in the Ireland of the early 20th Century required ongoing blood sacrifices. "The Fools, the Fools, the Fools, they have left

us our Fenian dead - and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace". This was Pearse's oration in Glasnevin at the old Fenian, Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa's funeral, 1st August 1915 and was his first significant public challenge to his British masters. He had set out his stall.



Acting on the courage of his convictions Pearse and other like-minded volunteers challenged the British Government's intransigence and issued a Proclamation, in front of the GPO on Easter Monday, 1916, asserting Ireland's right to autonomous self-governance. "We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies to be sovereign and indefeasible." **Full Proclamation, Signed, on behalf of the Provisional Government:**

Thomas J Clarke, Sean Mac Diarmada, PH Pearse, James Connolly, Thomas MacDonagh, Eamonn Ceannt, Joseph Plunkett.

Our garden commemorates and perpetuates the above proud aspiration and statement of intent. Our young nation is beholden to all who have made this ancient dream, negotiated or otherwise, a reality.

At a local level, this laudable garden project is the brainchild of **Berrings Community Association** who, in keeping with the ethos of above named heroes, tirelessly work to make this community welcoming, clean, safe, vibrant and fun loving. We could deliver another oration on the merits of their cross-road dancing, artistic signage and tidy town escapades. They are all heroes.

I now wish to share one poignant folk memory arising from an incident on these grounds in

1919. **On Sunday 28th Sept. 1919**, two RIC men exited the present Church after second Mass. At the doorway they were challenged by the neighbouring volunteers (IRB) and ordered to surrender their arms. Constable Walsh complied. When Sgt MI McSwiney reached for his revolver he was shot twice and seriously injured by the Volunteers. Before this happened my grandfather, Thomas McCarthy, anticipating the outcome, threw his son of 6 years, my Uncle Den, over the boundary wall in to Reen's field where we now stand. The next Sunday, just before Mass, Fr John O'Callaghan came down the aisle and raised his hands displaying the blood soaked vestments (On the previous Sunday he was urgently required to minister to the injured Sgt McSwiney). He berated the perpetrators for their indiscretion in the Church Yard. He warned that this behaviour should never again be repeated, especially in consecrated grounds as his congregation dispersed after Sunday Mass. Lines were being drawn. The Sergeant survived.

But, "Yesterday is history, Tomorrow is a mystery, Today is a gift. That's why we call it The Present."

Presently, particularly following the **Good**

Friday Agreement, most of our country is celebrating and contributing to the reality of a peaceful co-existence. United we stand.

Ecclesiastes 3 reminds us; "There is an appointed time for everything and there is a time for every event under heaven - A time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace." Most religions would agree that the greatest gift of all is love. 'Deus Caritas Est'. We are the privileged generation, to live to see our country, and people, at peace.

To conclude, in the week that's in it, with all eyes focussed on the US Presidential election, I will quote from what I consider to be the greatest speech of all, **Martin Luther King, Washington DC, 1963;**

"When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day, when all of God's children, black and white, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro Spiritual; Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

Le sin, Go n-Eirí an Bothair Libh.

An Biorainn, Abú.



Great work by local volunteers transformed the site from the original muddy waste ground into the now beautiful Remembrance Garden featured below. Congratulations to all involved!

