

IRISH MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION FORUMS 2017:

COLLECTIONS – MILITARY HISTORY Tuesday 14 November 2017, 13:30-16:30

AV Lecture Theatre, National Museum of Ireland – Decorative Arts and History, Collins Barracks,
Benburb Street, D7

#irishmuseums

SCHEDULE

13:15 – 13:45 Registration and Tea/Coffee– AV Lecture Theatre

13:45 – 13:50 Welcome, Gina O’Kelly, Irish Museums Association

13:50 – 14:30: Session One:

Challenges of interpreting a historic military building for museum visitors

Lar Joye, Curator of Military History, National Museum of Ireland –
Decorative Arts and History

The Irish Air Corps museum collection & military aviation in Ireland since 1913

Corporal Michael J. Whelan, Curator, Irish Air Corps Museum

Defence Forces military museums: education or inspiration?

Rachel Abraham, Assistant principal/teacher, CSN College of Further
Education in Cork and freelance graphic designer

Questions and responses, moderated by Gina O’Kelly

15:00 – 15:30: Tea / Coffee Break

15:30 – 16:30 Session two:

The human experience of war and conflict; understanding a universal experience through the historical military collections of the National Museum of Ireland and the Cambodian War Remnant Museum

Brenda Malone, Historian, National Museum of Ireland.

The ‘echoes’ of military prisoners in the Kilmainham Gaol Museum collection

Aoife Torpey, Museum Information Officer, Kilmainham Gaol

Questions, responses and closing remarks, moderated by Lar Joye

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES AND ABSTRACTS

CHALLENGES OF INTERPRETING A HISTORIC MILITARY BUILDING FOR MUSEUM VISITORS

Lar Joye is curator of the Transport, Flag and Military History collections at the National Museum of Ireland. He curated the award-winning *Soldiers & Chiefs* exhibition at Collins Barracks, and recently partnered with Anu productions on the play *Sunder* and *These Rooms*, which won an Irish Times Theatre award in 2017. Prior to working at the museum, he was Head of the Irish Film Archive in Temple Bar and is a qualified film archivist.

Lar is a graduate of UCD, Leicester University and the Getty Leadership Institute, chairman of the Irish National Committee of the Blue Shield and a member of the Board of Directors of the Irish Museums Association and the Military Heritage of Ireland Trust.

THE IRISH AIR CORPS MUSEUM COLLECTION & MILITARY AVIATION IN IRELAND SINCE 1913

The Irish Air Corps Museum at Casement Aerodrome holds a very unique collection of *industrial age* material in the form of military and civil aviation related artefacts. Housed in a 1917 WWI period hangar built by the Royal Flying Corps (RAF) on an aerodrome operated by the Irish Air Corps since 1922 it represents the story of military aviation in Ireland over the span of the 20th century against the backdrop of the Irish Revolutionary period, WWI, WWII, Military Aviation Engineering & Air Traffic Control, Service to the State (ATCP) including modern Search and Rescue, Emergency Air Ambulance Service, Ministerial Air Transport, Maritime and Army Support operations and the stories of the people behind them. The museum is maintained by a small team of current and former (volunteer) personnel, the collection includes a dozen vintage aircraft, various engines, weapons, uniforms, logbooks, charts, photographs, personal testimonies, an impressive oral history & documentary archive. 6000 civilian visitors viewed the collection in 2016, many of them school tours and aviation/history enthusiasts.

Through the collection and landscape a major part of the story of the Irish state and its aspirations is encapsulated, to be interpreted by current and future generations.

Corporal Michael J. Whelan has been a member of the Irish Defence Forces since 1990 and curator & historian at the Irish Air Corps Museum since 2000. He served as a UN Peacekeeper in Lebanon and Kosovo.

His published works include; Books: *'The Battle of Jadotville: Irish Soldiers in Combat in the Congo, 1961'* (2006), *'Allegiances Compromised: Ex British Soldiers in the Irish Army 1913-24'* (2011) & *'Peacekeeper'* - poetry collection (2016). His history articles, short stories and poetry has been published in Ireland and abroad and his poems, inspired by his and the Irish army's experiences on UN service, have won 2nd Place in the Patrick Kavanagh and 3rd in the Jonathan Swift Poetry Awards. He is a collector of Oral Histories for the Military Archives of Ireland Oral History Programme MAOHP and holds a BA in Local studies & an MA in Modern History from NUI Maynooth.

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DEFENCE FORCES MILITARY MUSEUMS: EDUCATION OR INSPIRATION?

Exhibitions in military museums have moved away from traditional glorifications of war, to a more critical discourse. Internationally, military museums like those at Defence Forces Ireland (DFI), are often 'behind the wire' (i.e. behind military walls). This presentation will begin by *briefly* describing the role of military museums in for example, Japan, Holland, the US and the UK; before presenting the findings from a survey conducted where the presenter, as part of her MA in Museum Studies, undertook interviews and a survey of DFI and other key personnel to ascertain the role of their military museums. Findings of this survey, focusing on Collins Barracks, Cork; the Curragh; and the Visitor Centre in Cathal Brugha Barracks, Dublin) indicate that - despite access restrictions - collections within museums in the DFI are used to educate the general public, to generate positive public relations and showcase military museums to visiting dignitaries. These type of museums are essentially, externally-focused.

Used to full capability, collections in museums within DFI can also be utilised to inspire garrisons and educate internal audiences about their history and traditions, vital to nurture esprit de corps. This presentation will outline recommendations from the research, including the development of internal and external exhibitions to target both audiences.

Rachel Abraham is a graphic designer and assistant principal/teacher with the CSN College of Further Education in Cork. A graduate of Limerick College of Art and Design, Rachel completed a postgraduate diploma in Inclusive Education at St. Patrick's College, Dublin, and an MA in Art and Design Education with the De Montfort University in Leicester (UK). She has, most recently, completed an MA in Museum Studies with University College Cork, where her dissertation focused on the role of military museums in the Defence Forces.

In her capacity as designer, Rachel has worked in the area of interpretation with Cork Prison, Castlelyons, Cork Public Museum, and Cork City Council. She additionally has presented on military history to Cork Literary and Scientific Society, the Western Front Association and at the NMI, Cathal Brugha Barracks, Dublin.

THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE OF WAR AND CONFLICT; UNDERSTANDING A UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE HISTORICAL MILITARY COLLECTIONS OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF IRELAND AND THE CAMBODIAN WAR REMNANT MUSEUM

This paper aims to look at the NMI's military history collections and its interpretative style in recent exhibitions, and compare it with the display at the Cambodian War Remnant Museum in Siem Reap. The mission of the National Museum of Ireland's Military History Collection is to tell both the military history of Ireland and its impact on Irish people and society. Amongst these collections are artefacts with deeply personal connections to soldiers, rebels and civilians who lost their lives, ideally interpreted as social history within a military history context. There is, occasionally, even a remnant of the person themselves; such human remains, especially from 20th century conflicts, are ethically problematic for the museum curator and are not displayed.

In contrast to this, the Cambodia War Remnant Museum is a Military Museum in name only. Its primary mission is to help those affected by its recent conflicts, and, though filled with the machinery of warfare, its interpretation focuses on the human cost of the civil war which ended in 1999.

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Staffed by war veterans and local people still suffering from the remaining land mines, its display includes items and images western museums would not use, but their presence induces and understanding of the human experience of war beyond an understanding of the war itself.

Brenda Malone, historian and museum professional, has worked for the National Museum of Ireland since 2000. Particular areas of interest include the development of the idea of 'nation', and how this is collected and portrayed in national museums. She has studied in detail the museum's Historical, Military and Easter Week Collections, co-curating *Soldiers and Chiefs – The Irish at War at Home and Abroad from 1550 to the Present Day* (2006), *1913 Lockout – Impact and Aftermath* (2013), *Recovered Voices: Stories of the Irish at War 1914-1915* (2014), and the 1916 Centenary Exhibition at Collins Barracks – *Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising*.

She is also the author of *The Cricket Bat that Died for Ireland*, a blog that tells the often complex and stories behind the historical objects collected by the NMI.

THE 'ECHOES' OF MILITARY PRISONERS IN THE KILMAINHAM GAOL MUSEUM COLLECTION

The Kilmainham Gaol Museum collection began in the 1960s, when the Gaol was opened as a museum by the Kilmainham Jail Restoration Society, and it has continued to grow under the tenure of the Office of Public Works. Most of the 10,000 plus items in the collection relate to movements for Irish independence from 1796 up to 1924 (when the Gaol closed for good). Aside from more obviously military objects, such as guns, bullets and uniforms, the collection also has significant material which relates to the experience of political prisoners in various prisons and internment camps in Ireland and the UK between 1916 and 1924.

These prisoners were guarded by military personnel, and their daily lives were heavily influenced by a military regime. Importantly, many of these prisoners, both male and female, considered themselves soldiers, and organised themselves along military lines. Many treated their prison experiences as an extension of military service, and were proud to have 'served time' in multiple prisons. This paper aims to showcase some of this material, which includes autograph books, photographs taken with contraband cameras, drawings, carvings and other crafts, and to draw out the references to life in military prisons, and how this impacted the prisoners. A brief survey of how the museum interprets this material will also be given. Creating these objects within the prison or internment camp was not only a way to break up the monotony of life in internment, but it was also a way to commemorate, and make visible, the internees' experiences. These items are a fantastic resource for the experience of life in military prisons, 1916-1924, and are the 'echoes' of the prisoners' voices.

Aoife Torpey is the Information Officer at Kilmainham Gaol Museum, where she has been since 2015. She works directly with the Museum's collection of over 10,000 items, ensuring that it is properly cared for and managed. She is also responsible for the documentation and research of the collection, as well as facilitating access. Aoife holds a degree in History and English Literature from Trinity College Dublin (2012), and an MSc in Professional Archaeology from Queen's University Belfast (2013). She is currently working towards completing an MA in Museum Studies from the University of Leicester.