

## **Speech by Minister Frances Fitzgerald TD at the Four Courts**

**28 March 2016**

Chief Justice, citizens and relatives of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion who manned the Four Courts and its surrounding areas on that historic week in 1916.

We are gathered here today not just to acknowledge the memory of those who participated in those momentous events – but more importantly in memory of the ideals they stood for.

For many of you present here today, this is a personal journey - a journey into family memory and history. But it is part of our national and international history too. Your ancestors were part of a movement that changed the fault lines of history.

Their actions along with those of the other Volunteers in Dublin, Wexford, Galway, Meath, Cork and Kerry – in that momentous Easter Week in 1916 - led ultimately to the establishment of this State – one of the oldest continuous democracies in the world. It is a legacy that we must cherish and protect above all else.

Your forebears take their place in the annals of Irish history, at the birth of our fledgling nation. We honour them today. We remember, above all, their courage, their vision and their self sacrifice.

At our ceremony here today we rightly remember those who fought and died for Irish freedom in 1916. While we commemorate those who fought for Irish freedom in 1916, we are also mindful that the Rising also resulted in the deaths of British Army and police personnel - many of whom were Irish – and that the majority of those who died during the conflict were civilians.

This area – the Four Courts and surrounding areas - was strategically significant as it controlled the main route between the British military barracks, the Royal Barracks, later Collins Barracks, to the west of the city and the Volunteer headquarters at the General Post Office.

Accounts tell us that on Easter Monday members of the 1st Battalion, Irish Volunteers, under the command of Commandant Ned Daly, occupied these buildings and began to fortify their designated locations; they blocked windows using whatever they had at hand, using chairs, tables or sandbags. They dragged furniture onto the streets to build road blocks. They began to post sentries and rotate them on a regular basis. They prepared medical and food stations. This

was a planned military operation. They had spent three years training as a military force in public view.

During the week they repelled numerous advances from the British forces, some on horseback, and some in armoured cars. Volunteers were fighting on streets such as Charles Street, Church Street, Red Cow Lane, Lurgan Street, Coleraine Street and areas around Smithfield.

At Father Matthews Hall on Church Street members of Cumann na mBan attended to the wounded volunteers, nurses moving from building to building under fire to do whatever they could to help.

We know from various archival material that the Volunteers went through a range of emotions; in some statements they mention they felt a huge amount of comradeship, a sense of being involved in something momentous but at times felt afraid or even desperate. This makes their actions all the more poignant.

This area witnessed some of the most intense fighting of Easter week. Twelve civilians were shot dead by British Forces on North King Street on Friday, April 28th, an action which ultimately helped turn the tide of public opinion in favour of the participants.

Today we are reminded that this wreath laying event is not just about family memory, or indeed national history – it acknowledges and celebrates idealism, heroism, and who we are. Over the course of one week they changed the course of history, making headlines that reverberated across the globe. In its wake, it inspired many oppressed people through the world.

Lenin once said: *“There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen.”*

Well he got it right if he was referring to the 1916 Rising.

Easter Week 1916 is one of the most epochal weeks in Irish History – not just for the military valour of its participants, not just for the manner of the death of its leaders – but for the forces that it unleashed and the principles that underpinned it. The events of that momentous week and its aftermath, and the inspiring Proclamation which underpins it, has shaped our view of ourselves and our nation, for the past century.

In commemorating the events of Easter week – we in no way wish to be one dimensional or exclusive. Wolfe Tone, who greatly influenced the 1916 Leaders, wanted:

***“To unite the whole people of Ireland to abolish the memory of all past dissensions and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter.”***

In that spirit, it is not open to us to honour the dead of Easter 1916 and to forget those who died at Messines and the Somme. The Decade of Centenaries seeks to ensure that the experiences of all Irish men and women over that momentous decade are remembered appropriately- that we call to mind the competing strands of Irish and European history which set the context for the Rising.

As we stand here today, with our heads bowed in respect to honour the men and women who fought here in 1916 – we acknowledge their endeavours, their ideals and their legacies.

Eleven volunteers lost their lives in this area, they are:

- Thomas Allen died on the 28<sup>th</sup> April of wounds he received in the Four Courts, in Richmond Hospital
- John Dwan –killed in action on the 27<sup>th</sup> April in North King Street
- Patrick Farrell – wounded in North Brunswick Street – Died on the 29<sup>th</sup> April
- Sean Howard – Wounded in Church Street– Died 29<sup>th</sup> April in North King Street
- Sean Hurley– Killed in action on the 27<sup>th</sup> April in Church Street
- Peter Paul Manning– Killed in action 29<sup>th</sup> April in North Brunswick Street
- Peter Joseph O’Flanagan– Killed in action 29<sup>th</sup> April in North King Street
- Philip Walsh - Killed in action on the 29<sup>th</sup> April in North King Street
- James McCormack – Killed in action 26<sup>th</sup> April in Bersford Place
- Peter Wilson–Killed in action in the Mendicity Institution on the 29<sup>th</sup> April
- Edward Joseph Costello– Wounded in Church Street – Died on the 25<sup>th</sup> April in Jervis Street Hospital.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a n-anamacha.

Commandant Daly surrendered his battalion on the 29<sup>th</sup> April. Those remaining were later marched in column formation and interned in Richmond Barracks on the south side of the city. This is where the court martials took place. Commandant Ned Daly’s was executed by firing squad on 4 May 1916, at the age of 25.

The remaining prisoners were later transferred to Frongoch Prison.

The contribution that these men and women gave to their nations cause must never be forgotten. We must remember what they were rising for, and that message is at the heart of our Proclamation – National freedom and Sovereignty, Religious and Civil liberty, Equal rights and opportunities to all its citizens, cherishing all the children of the nation equally.

The members of the revolutionary generation of 1916 have bequeathed to us a precious democratic legacy that transcends politics and traditions. It is part of who we are, it's their legacy, our inheritance and our children's patrimony.

In respecting and honouring that legacy with this wreath laying here today – we assert the democratic principles enshrined in the Proclamation that they stood for – and acknowledge the sacrifices they endured for the patrimony our children will inherit.

I would now like to introduce the Chief Justice Susan Denham to say a few words.

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