Leabharlann Náisiúnta na hÉireann
National Library of Ireland

PRESS RELEASE

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National Library of Ireland Launches 10,500 Newly Digitised Items

A portrait of the infamous Ellen Byrne, who was tried for her husband's murder in 1842 after his badly decomposed body was found in their shared bed; photographs of 1916 leader Tom Clarke, his wife Kathleen and family; and posters documenting the suffragette movement are just some of the 10,500 newly digitised items released by the National Library of Ireland (NLI) today (24.04.14).

This new release of digital images means that a total of 63,000 items that tell the story of Ireland are now freely available worldwide through the National Library catalogue.

Speaking today, Sara Smyth, NLI Digitisation Programme Manager, highlighted the importance of having an effective national programme of digitisation and preservation to ensure public access to culturally important collections.

"Libraries have always collected, managed and provided access to all forms of information," she said. "While this core remit has not changed, dramatic advances in information technology means the NLI is driving forward a programme of metadata creation, digitisation, digital preservation and online access to our cultural heritage. Since 2010, we have overhauled our digitisation workflows and put in place key technical infrastructures. We achieved this with limited full time technical resources and a very restricted budget by collaborating on international open source projects.

"Through this collaboration we enhanced our catalogue, giving researchers seamless access to high-quality digital content from any device, anywhere, and enabling them to zoom into the smallest detail of these remarkable items. The ability to regularly deliver large quantities of new digital content to our audiences is the culmination of years of seven hard work by the NLI's team, with much more to come in the years ahead."

Highlights of the items released into the NLI's digital collection today include:

- **Face to Face with Ireland:** The "Elmes" portrait collection of engraved Irish portraits and original drawings is named after the librarian, Rosalind Elmes, who first catalogued most of the collection. This central visual resource at the NLI consists of nearly 3,000 images of 1,100 famous – and infamous – figures from Irish history, up to the end of the 19th century. Portraits include society hostesses; actresses; faith healers; politicians; writers; scientists; and patriots such as Robert Emmet and Theobald Wolfe Tone. Some subjects are recorded in only a single portrait but others are recorded several times; for instance, there are more than 30 engravings of Jonathan Swift and many portraits of Daniel O'Connell.

- **A Revolutionary Family:** The Thomas and Kathleen Clarke collection of letters and photographs includes personal letters of Tom Clarke, signatory of the 1916 proclamation and his wife Kathleen Clarke (née Daly), as well as further correspondence with family, friends and political associates in Ireland and among the Irish community in America. Among the correspondents are Eamon De Valera, John Devoy, Margaret Pearse, Padraic Pearse, John Redmond and Austin Stack. The Clarke family photographs are also available, including portraits of the family before and after 1916, and images of

Tom Clarke's famous tobacconists shop on Amiens Street which was a hub for much revolutionary activity.

- **Throw-away Treasure:** One of the most fascinating and valuable collections consists of things that were not intended to last very long. Ephemera such as tickets, cigarette cards, posters, match programmes are throw-away, cheaply printed, and often mass-produced items yet preserved in places like the National Library, they can bring history and society to life for us. Much of the story of this "Decade of Commemorations" comes to life through these collections, such as these items from 1914:
    - A poster from August 1914 highlighting the struggle for votes for women.
    - A poster promoting Mr Hebert G Ponting's 'moving picture lecture' about Captain Scott in the Antarctic. (http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000515853)
    - A card showing the "National Volunteers" – the grouping who volunteered to fight in WWI, after the split in the Irish Volunteer movement.

Speaking at the launch of the new additions to NLI's digital resources today, Jimmy Deenihan TD, Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, said, "The National Library of Ireland holds collections that are of great national significance. The newly digitised collections chart the story of Ireland and are a wonderful piece of our cultural and literary heritage which will now be preserved for and made accessible to the people of Ireland for generations. Furthermore, it showcases once again Ireland's growing reputation as a centre for the innovative use of digital technology."

Further information about the NLI is available at: www.nli.ie.

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Contact: Ciara Murphy / Sarah Harte, DHR Communications, Tel: 01-4200580 / 087-9626231 / 087-9858259

Notes to Editors:
Sara Smyth, NLI Digitisation Programme Manager is available for interview and comment.

The mission of the National Library of Ireland is to collect, preserve, promote and make accessible the documentary and intellectual record of the life of Ireland and to contribute to the provision of access to the larger universe of recorded knowledge. It is open, free of charge, to all those who wish to consult the collections for material not otherwise available through the public library service or an academic library. The Genealogical Office, the Office of the Chief Herald in Kildare Street, and the National Photographic Archive in Temple Bar are all part of the National Library.