

# Living Legacies



For two days, on the banks of the Erne surrounded by the historic buildings of the Watergate, Maguire Castle and Inniskillings Barracks, the Living Legacies team worked in intense creativity with two writers groups, the Fermanagh Writers and the Omagh Robins.

The *Living Legacies 2016 Writers' Summer School* was a new departure for the Engagement Centre. The Centre was established in January 2014 as one of five First World War Engagement Centres in the UK which work alongside community groups to explore the war period and its meaning for people today. It includes academics working at Glasgow, Newcastle, Queen's and Ulster Universities, amongst others, who have teamed with community groups, museum experts and people across the heritage and cultural sectors to produce new knowledge and understanding of the period.

The *Summer School* built upon previous initiatives events hosted by Living Legacies, including: Medals All Round Research Initiative (MARRI), which resulted in *Of Bicycles and Fallow Fields*, a WW1 drama written and performed by Omagh Robins; the event *Music and Memories* held at the Inniskillings Museum in June 2015, during which musician Tracey MacRory talked about the wartime inspiration for her music; and the visit of the Fermanagh Writers to Northern Ireland War Memorial in March 2016.

The writers made new and deeper connections with the Living Legacies team; learned from the experiences of Marion Maxwell, Bellanaleck History Group, and their Cleenish Island project funded by HLF *First World War Then and Now* scheme; and made new friends within the recently amalgamated of Fermanagh & Omagh District Council. The two days represented not only a significant time commitment from the participants, but also one that would challenge their preconceptions of the war period and why we should remember. By the end they had produced new work, learned new skills about their craft, and had greater understanding of the impact and legacy of the First World War period.

For the Living Legacies team the two days provided an invaluable insight into the multiple meanings that can be drawn from the war period and how each person constructs that past in a way that has relevance for their contemporary lives. Collaborations were lively, the mood was one of generosity and mindfulness, and the work read on the final day was moving and deeply insightful.

Looking to the future, the new work will be read at the *Literature of Irish*

*Exile* 17th Annual Autumn School: *The Great War in Memory, Writing and Drama* on Saturday October 15th at the Mellon Centre for Migration Studies, Ulster American Folk Park. The afternoon will be devoted to community creative response to the First World War in readings and performances of newly composed poetry, prose and drama from the Fermanagh Writers Group, the Omagh Robins WW1 Drama Group (MARRI project), and others.

The Living Legacies team of Elizabeth Crooke, Johanne Devlin Trew (both Ulster University) and Kurt Taroff (Queen's University Belfast) would like to thank all the participants who contributed so enthusiastically to the School. Our gratitude is also extended to Sarah McHugh, Curator and Manager Fermanagh County Museum, who made us very welcome on site and provided a tour of historic buildings.

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Inniskillings Museum to the School – Director Neil Armstrong spoke warmly to the group about his pleasure welcoming the Writers to Castle Barracks; he mounted the travelling exhibition *Inniskillings and World War One* in our venue and provided a First World War handling collection for the duration of the School. His colleague Natasha Martin provided the group with an impressive tour of the First World War sections of the permanent galleries in the Inniskillings Museum. We would also like to thank playwright and Director Brenda Winter Palmer who facilitated the workshops so skilfully, with a balance of creativity and thoughtfulness which forged an atmosphere conducive to high quality writing.

**Elizabeth Crooke and Johanne Devlin Trew**