Unique records of Irish War of Independence to be



Kathleen Clarke

A unique archive of first-hand accounts of the Irish War of Independence will soon be accessible to the public, thanks to funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich Memorial Library and Archive in Armagh possesses recordings of northern members of the Irish Volunteers, who took part in the conflict. The tapes were made in the 1960s and give an extraordinary insight into the horrors of a vicious war.

The Louis O Kane collection comprises 112 audio recordings of interviews, largely of northern based veterans, of the Irish War of Independence 1919-21. These are complemented by a collection documents and handwritten accounts of activities for the period 1912-23.

The recordings have been inaccessible to all but a handful of researchers for more than 50 years. They include an interview with Kathleen Clarke, the widow of Tom Clarke who was executed for his part in the Easter Rising in 1916.

HLF is providing £58,800 to the Irish Volunteers Centenary project. The funding will go to the creation of a kiosk at the library which will give free access to the complete recordings for visitors. Edited samples will be used as part of an outreach programme which will go on tour, concentrating on the parts of the north that the interviewees came from.

Roddy Hegarty, Director of the library, said: “Fr. O’Kane was not only a passionate historian exploring many aspects of the local past but he was also a creator of historical documents. The most important of these are his collection of recordings with men and women, although primarily men, who had taken part in the struggle for Irish independence 1913-21.

“No doubt his interest in history and his position as a priest gave him the opportunity to develop relationships and build the confidence required to carry out the work of interviewing and recording these men. He travelled from Belfast to Donegal to speak with and record a variety of respondents creating a unique account of this pivotal period in Irish history.”

Paul Mullan, Head of HLF Northern Ireland, said: “We are pleased to be funding this project. The materials collected are of great historical importance and will be very gratifying to see them being made accessible to the general public.”

Further information

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