

Published on Wednesday 8th June 2011

**Speech by the Taoiseach, Mr. Enda Kenny, T.D. at the launch of two books of the multi – volume History of Ireland Series National Library of Ireland on Wednesday 8th June 2011 at 1pm**

Ladies and gentlemen.

I am delighted to be here today to officially launch the new multi-volume History of Ireland Series by the Four Courts Press. In particular I wish to acknowledge the work and scholarship of Donnachadh Ó Corráin and Tomas Ó Riordain, editors of these two volumes, entitled *Ireland, 1815 – 1870, Emancipation, Famine, and Religion* and *Ireland 1870 – 1914, Coercion and Conciliation* respectively.

It has been said that history is the greatest story ever told – and what a story these books tell. The essence of true scholarship is the interrogation of facts and the presentation of those facts such that the general reader and the scholar are informed. True scholarship respects both the reader and the facts.

It is incumbent to be honest to both, and the intent should always be to let the individual form his own opinion – provided it can be backed up by facts. These two volumes tell the great story of Irish History in the 100 years between 1815 and 1915. They are backed up by facts in a manner that is to be commended. They will allow students, the general reader and all those interested in Irish history to delve with delight and enthusiasm across the vast concourse of 19th and early 20th Century Irish History – and make up their own minds.

As we move into the decade of commemorations that stretch before us, from the 100th anniversary of the Third Home Rule Bill, the Ulster League and Covenant, the foundation of the Ulster and Irish Volunteers, the Dublin Lockout, 1916, the Somme, and beyond it is imperative that the social, cultural, economic, administrative and political environments that shaped these events be understood. The revolutionary generation of Plunkett and Pearse, Connolly and Collins, Griffith, Cosgrave, De Valera, Lemass, and others were moulded by their experience and understanding of the historical forces that governed their childhoods and those of their parents. This also applied to Lloyd George, Churchill, Craig and Carson.

All were children of the 19th Century. All were influenced by the ideas, opinions, and prejudices prevalent at the time. Any understanding of the revolutionary decade, its leaders, and those events must have due regard to the preceding century.

Reflect for a moment upon our understanding of history. All of us here are of an age where we can remember events that are currently taught in our schools as modern history – but do we know the facts? All of us can recall when we were growing up our parents or grandparents reflecting on events in their time, their remembrances and experiences that stretch back to 1916, the War of Independence and the Civil War – events we are going to commemorate in the forthcoming decade. History is that close to us. Subliminally our initial opinion was shaped by how we grew up and what we heard. Many of us went on to benefit from a great education system and solid historical research and made up our own minds.

Likewise the revolutionary generation were initially children of their circumstance and upbringing. Later on, many became independent free thinkers and game changers in our

history – indeed going on to become the subjects of whole chapters of Irish History by their deeds, writings and influences. To truly understand their motives, we need to understand and appreciate the context of their environment and that of their parents and grandparents. These publications serve that purpose. They educate, illuminate, illustrate, and most importantly without castigating, they challenge, captivate and engage the reader in a History that though well known has many surprises revealed by sound scholarship.

Good stories are always worth retelling – and our History is a great story. Our history ricochets across the pages of British, European, and American experience influencing and being influenced in return. It is a story of tragedy and triumph, failure and success, hope and loss. It is their history as much as it is ours and it is incumbent upon us to be as honest and as forthcoming as possible. Interest in history has never been as great as it is now – think of the rise of the History Channels on television.

In the age of the internet and mass communication the need to communicate true facts honestly and openly is as necessary as ever before.

It is in this context I wish to commend the initiative of Donnachadh Ó Corráin and his colleagues in UCC when they set up the Multi-Text Project. These publications are the first to be dynamically linked to a dedicated Internet site. Multi-Text is the largest and most ambitious project undertaken by any university to provide resources for students of Irish history at all levels – university students, the general reader, as well as second-level students. The project responds to the political, social, economic and cultural situation of Ireland and its international environment, all of which have been transformed in the past two decades.

Dramatic changes in information technology, particularly in multimedia and social networking have opened up new vistas in the presentation of research and in teaching and student enquiry. This website has over a million words of modern Irish History and over 3,500 graphics serving the needs of those interested in Irish History abroad.

It and its sister project CELT [Corpus of Electronic Texts] is the largest full-text scholarly database of Irish history and literature on the Internet.

MultiText, less than four years online, now receives approximately 20,000 requests for pages per day. The website has had over 20 million hits since its launch in November 2006. The annualised number of user requests now exceeds 7 million. Approximately 4,500 websites have now created links to MultiText. The reach of the project, however, goes far beyond Ireland. 35% of website users are from Great Britain and North America, 45% are from Ireland, and the remaining 20% are from the rest of the world. This is success indeed. You are to be commended for your vision, your dedication and the legacy you have created for scholars and those interested in modern Irish History. Well done.

Before concluding I am sure that you all will agree with me that the National Library has done us proud with its current exhibition on William Butler Yeats. Well done and keep up the good work.

Finally I wish to acknowledge the contribution and work of Joseph Carey, Chairman of the Multi Text Project in History. I wish in particular to commend you for your fine forewords to the two publications being launched here today. Your love and passion of history shines through in your writings.

However there is a depth of gratitude to be acknowledged here today, and I am honored to make it. Without your efforts both financial and otherwise these publications and the Multi Text project would not be where they are. Public service takes many forms and your ongoing support for this project is deeply appreciated.

I now officially declare these publications launched!

**ENDS.**