

MAYO WORLD WAR GARDEN OF REMEMBRANCE PEACE PARK

I have always been amazed that in a county with such a great interest in local history that so little acknowledgement was shown for all the men and women of county Mayo who served or were killed in the major world wars of the past century.

It appears there was general amnesia as to their very existence, no one spoke of them or remembered them except the families and relatives of the deceased .

One thing was certain there were no Memorials to commemorate them in county Mayo and very little mention of the in our history books. I always found this strange because I had travelled around Europe and Great Britain and I found that every town and village gave pride of place and great respect to its war dead.

As a young schoolboy, now many years ago, growing up in McHale Road, Castlebar over 50 years ago, I was privileged to know many survivors of World War One, old men who were still alive and healthy, living amongst us, so I suppose I was interested in their exploits from an early age, especially as my grandfather was killed in that war. In 1988 I wrote an article for the Castlebar Parish Magazine, I mentioned those men and put out a call to have a memorial to mark the memory of all who died.

By the mid 1990s I was researching Mayo's involvement in World War One, as time went on the numbers of those killed in action , grew and grew. By 1999 I had uncovered the names of hundreds of Mayo men who were killed in action on the battlefields of Europe to say the least I was very surprised as every other day I was finding more and more and yet nobody in Mayo seemed to know about their existence it appeared they were written out of our history.

I went to the Mayo County Library to see if they had any books about those men but there was none that I could find except for an article in the Westport Historical Society magazine which indicated that as many as 50 members of the Connaught Rangers regiment were killed. On checking this list I found that my own grandfathers name was not on that list, so I wondered how many others were excluded as well. There was one very good article in the Western People by Michael Commins which had a huge number of names, which we could cross referenced against what I already had,

What was really surprising to me was the large number of Mayo soldiers who were killed as part of the U.S. Australian, Canadian, and other forces as well as the British in W.W.1.

Many more died in W.W.2. and later in Korea, Vietnam, Spain, and U.N. peacekeeping

On Thursday 22nd August 2002 I called a public meeting, which was held in Castlebar to form a "Mayo World War Remembrance Committee to finally address this problem.

There was a good attendance, at the meeting, and there was a full debate on the huge involvement of Mayo men and Women in both world wars as well as all who served on U.N. Peacekeeping duties, and other subsequent wars. The meeting decided to promote the idea of a "Mayo Garden of Remembrance" to commemorate and honour all Mayo people who were killed as a result of world wars over the past century. It was hoped that this would be a suitable recognition of their sacrifice for world peace. The feeling of the meeting was that the people of Mayo needed to be informed and made aware of the fact that so many hundreds of our men and women were killed fighting for world peace and yet forgotten in our history.

As a result of this decision, a Site was acquired with the assistance of Mr Gerry Casey, and Mayo County Council. It is located beside the old cemetery in Castlebar town centre. Mr Michael Walsh an Architect and retired army officer Officer offered his service to prepare plans for it, we wish to thank to Michael Walsh for his gesture, without it the project may never have got moving. The Project eventually received the full planning permission, our sincere thanks to all involved particularly our County Manager Des Mahon, Mr Peter Gill, Mr Ray Norton , M/S Siobhan Sexton and Mr Declan Turnbull from Mayo County Council. Work on the initial site clearance started at the end of June 2005, this was possible because we received some financial donations from members of the public as well as generous support from Castlebar Parish Council, We are depending on the further support like this to complete the project.

At his point I wish to acknowledge the early donations received from the Mayo Association in Chicago the Mayo Association in Luton, they were the only Mayo Associations to respond in a positive way to our project appeal. Mrs Ethel Corduff, London, Mr Aiden Crowley Castlebar Mrs Kathleen Collins on behalf of her father Sgt Thomas Collins, Mr Chad Coleman, Montreal, and Mr Patrick S Huddy, Cong made early contributions We have since received donations from the Castlebar Lions Club, and the Castlebar Rotary Club, the dept of an Taoiseach, the Dept of the Environment, and many local contributions. We were very pleased to receive them it was a great boost and encouragement for us that they recognised the need for such a historical memorial and were prepared to assist as they did. WE have completed the first phase of the works, We are now at a point where we need further private and public subscriptions and sponsorship to enable us to complete our project. We would appreciate sponsorship from individuals or companies at home and abroad.

We would also like to see more people involved in our committee so if you were interested please contact the Chairman Michael Feeney, Milebush, Castlebar, Mr Henry Moroney, 81, Lakeveiw, Castlebar, Mr Ernie Sweeney , Snugboro, Caslebar, Mr Stephen McLaughlin, Blackfort, Castlebar, As a committee we look forward to the day when the President of Ireland together with various ambassadors and dignitaries will come to Mayo to pay homage to the men and women who fought for the freedom of Europe and the World, we hope to see the flags of their nations fly in honour of all the Mayo men who died in foreign and world wars in the cause of world peace. When that day comes we believe that Mayo folk everywhere will be proud of the contribution made by our soldiers in the cause of world peace.

Members of the committee include those who attended our meetings so far, and all those who offered to assist since, we would welcome assistance from anyone so do please help us if you can, and together we can complete this Mayo Peace Park, Garden of Remembrance.

Michael Feeney
Chairman
Mayo World War Remembrance Committee
Milebush,
Castlebar,
Mayo.

094-90-22562

Email mayomemorialpeacepark.org

