

A precious nugget from the past

A new book exploring the historical backdrop to a diary kept meticulously by a young St Malachy's student at the onset of the Great War has been launched.

Edited by historian and retired lecturer, Hugh O'Neill, *The Diary of Edward Keys* transcribes, annotates and illuminates the contents of a tiny, black, leather-bound diary kept over the period August to December 1914.

North Belfast teenager Edward Keys maintained his diary in neat handwriting. He makes poignant references to friends and neighbours leaving for the trenches, and writes about his life at St Malachy's, his hopes and fears, views on faith, family and friends, and the other important 'F' in his life: football.

Hailing from Hillman Street in the New Lodge area, Edward was a 'scholarship boy' – a term used to describe those of exceptional ability who were given a place in the College. He was a brilliant student, particularly at Mathematics. Tragically, however, after taking his degree and returning to the College in 1919 as a teacher, Edward's life was cut short in 1921 when he died of TB. His Requiem Mass took place in the College Chapel. He was only 22.

His diary was 'discovered' in the 1980s after first-year pupil Niall Meighan brought it into Mr Sean Corrigan's history class in response to a request for examples of historical evidence.

The Meighan family subsequently donated the diary to the College and it has remained on display ever since in the O'Lavery Library as an important part of the College Archives.

The new book provides an excellent resource for the Year 8 History module, however it has also been produced to stand as a tribute to the late Dr Éamon Phoenix.

The much-loved former teacher and archivist at St Malachy's, widely recognised as one of Ireland's most distinguished historians, immediately understood the importance of the primary source. He investigated its contents in some detail and published an article on it in the 1989 edition of *The Collegian*.

Principal Paul McBride, College archivist Gerry McNamee, who assisted with research on the book, and editor Hugh O'Neill all spoke at the well-received launch event.

Among those attending were Niall Meighan, and his son Caolan, a current St Malachy's student.

Copies of *The Diary of Edward Keys* are available from the College office.