

# St Malachy's College and the Great War

A new book exploring the role that alumni from St Malachy's College in north Belfast played in the First World War has been launched.

Entitled *St Malachy's College and the Great War*, the book provides a collection of stories detailing the roles of more than 20 former pupils who served in a wide range of regiments and units on several fronts.

Published jointly by St Malachy's College and the Ulster Historical Foundation, the book provides a voice for men who enlisted in the British Army over a century ago and reveals part of the nationalist narrative of a history that has not been told since the creation of the Northern Ireland state.

The book, and a forthcoming series of exhibitions, is the result of a research project into past pupils at the Catholic grammar school for boys, undertaken by current lower-sixth form students as part of their enrichment education, designed to broaden their academic experiences.

The boys combed through the St Malachy's College archives, censuses, newspapers, death certificates, wills, army records and more to piece together the stories and personal sacrifices of the men featured.

During the project the students were invited to visit the Orange Hall on Clifton Street, near to St Malachy's College, which has a rich source of World War I artefacts.

The project was backed by Belfast City Council's Good Relations Fund as well as sponsorship from the College's Board of Governors.

The students were under the direction of teacher Mr Conor McGinn and former St Malachy's pupil and historian Mr John Gordon, with the boys' research supported by Dr William Roulston, Research Director of the Ulster Historical Foundation.

Speaking at the launch event in St Malachy's College Hall, John Gordon said: "Following the partition of Ireland in 1921, very often the stories of those who fought for the British, especially from men of a nationalist background, were suppressed or even shunned. Consequently, the bravery of these fine St Malachy's men has remained hidden for over 100 years.

"The project and resulting book has confirmed without a shadow of doubt that alumni from the College played a small but important role in the Great War. At long last we are able to shed light on these local heroes. Once hidden, their stories of courage, endurance and sacrifice, with some paying the ultimate sacrifice to safeguard the small nations of Europe, are now out there in the light for all to see."

Descendants of some of the men who fought in the Great War and who feature in the book were present at the launch event in St Malachy's College Hall last week.

Also present were Deputy Lord Lieutenant Dr Phillip McGarry, local historians, academics, Ulster Historical Foundation representatives and members of St Malachy's Board of Governors.

College Principal, Mr Paul McBride, said: "Over the last number of years, the College has been reminded of its rich history through the renovation of our O'Laverty Library and the ongoing cataloguing of our own archive. History has come to life with wonderful artefacts, diaries, letters, photographs and documents which have enhanced our understanding of College life in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

"Now, what started out as an enrichment programme for Year 13 students has developed into an enlightening series of stories about former students and their families and how the First World War impacted upon their lives and the College community. It is a fascinating read, and I commend everyone concerned with its production."

A series of exhibitions is being organised to help disseminate the findings of the project.

Copies of *St Malachy's College and the Great War* are available from the College office, priced £10.00.