

PATRICK PEARSE COMES TO LIMERICK

For the next two weeks people in Limerick will have an opportunity of seeing an interesting documentary exhibition on Patrick Pearse and his period. It has been compiled by the National Library of Ireland and is being presented at various venues in the provinces to mark the centenary of Pearse's birth.

Pearse is mainly remembered for his part in the 1916 Rising but the exhibition covers his whole life and times to show his gradual development as a writer, educationalist and finally politician. There are photographs of himself, Willie, and his sisters Margaret and Mary Brigid, taken at Sandymount in 1896 when he was aged seven. His education by the Christian Brothers at Westland Row is documented and there is a copy of an illuminated address which he and three other pupils presented on behalf of the pupils to a Brother who was being transferred to another school. On leaving school at the age of sixteen he established a society called the New Ireland Literary Society to which he invited such prominent personalities as Eoin Mac Neill and An tathair Peadar Ó Laoghaire to give lectures.

There are documents showing that he joined the Gaelic League in 1896 and that he was a member of the Executive Committee two years later. His rise to prominence in the League is well documented. The minutes of Executive Committee meetings show that he was instrumental in promoting the social, cultural and even the entertainment activities of the League in order to attract young people. Also at the time there was a great lack of books in Irish for those learning the language and as Secretary of the Publications Committee Pearse virtually established the League as a major publisher.

In 1903 he became editor of An Claidheamh Soluis and he did much to develop the popularity of the paper and to raise the standard of its content over the next six years. The exhibition includes a number of extracts and drawings from the paper during the period it was edited by Pearse and it shows the many aspects of Irish life in which he had an active interest.

Education was for several years one of his practical and theoretical interests. He had teaching posts at Westland Row, Alexandra College and University College Dublin and at the same time wrote many articles in the newspapers of the time on how he would like to see education reformed. Finally in 1908 he established St. Enda's School at Cullenswood House, Ranelagh, and the exhibition includes several photographs of the teachers and pupils involved in various school activities in the following years; there are copies of the prospectus and of the school timetable and there are views of pupils at work in the garden, exercising under the eye of Con Colbert in the gymnasium and staging plays under the direction of Willie Pearse. In 1910 the school moved to more spacious premises at The Hermitage, Rathfarnham, and again school life is well documented by letters, photographs and colour prints.

While the school was a great success from an educational point of view the finances were always a problem and in 1914 Pearse went to the United States to collect funds. There he was helped by Joseph McGarrity of Clan-na-Gael and John Devoy, editor of The Gaelic American and the exhibition indicates that from that period on he was more actively involved in extremist politics. However, his principal interest was still St. Enda's and even in 1916 he found time to publish his famous work on the Irish system of education, 'The Murder Machine'.

There is an interesting account from The Limerick Chronicle of May 1915 of a rather unfortunate experience Pearse had in Limerick. Following the split in the Volunteers Pearse's wing of the movement held a meeting in Limerick at which he was main speaker. However members of Redmond's Volunteers did not welcome the meeting and Pearse and his followers were subjected to much abuse and some stone-throwing.

While the exhibition is naturally of interest to schools the organisers hope that the general public will avail of this opportunity of viewing a selection of material from 'The National Collections'. During the exhibition there will be packets of documents on Patrick Pearse on sale; these are compiled by the National Library and are mainly designed for use in schools but any adult with an interest in Pearse should find them useful. They are also available direct from the National Library, Kildare St., Dublin 2; price £1.00 post free.

The Exhibition will be at the City Library, Pery Square, from Tuesday January 15 to Friday February 1; opening hours are Monday to Friday 10 - 1; 2.30 - 8; Saturdays 10 - 1a

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