

■ Thomas McGarry died on January 25, 1917, when sister ship of Titanic sank

Historical riddle is solved a century on

ANNE SHERIDAN

E: anne.sheridan@limerickleader.ie

A PLAQUE in memory of a Limerickman who died when a ship destined for Canada sank off the Irish coast in 1917 has been handed over to his next of kin - 50 years after being dug up in a garden in Limerick city.

After years of online investigations by two different families, the plaque bearing the name of Thomas McGarry, has now been returned to his rightful family, after lying in a drawer in Castleknock in Dublin for decades.

For McGarry's grandchildren, now spread out across the world, it is their only physical connection with a man they never knew, and for whom there is no grave to visit, as his body was never recovered.

On January 25, 1917, McGarry, a fireman, was on board the HMS Laurentic, which sank while travelling to Canada.

A number of crew members onboard were suffering from yellow fever, and the captain directed that the ship be pulled in to Lough Swilly, Donegal.

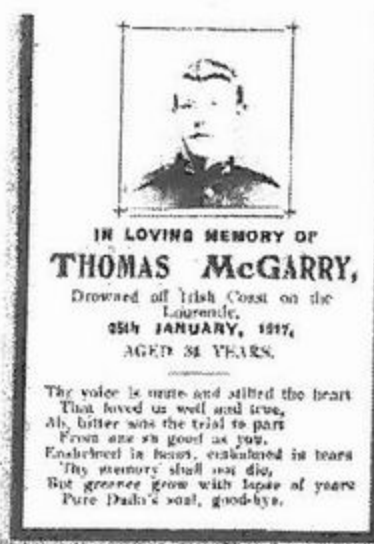
The vessel, built in Harland & Wolff in Belfast in 1907 to sail between Liverpool and Quebec, struck two mines near Lough Swilly on pulling out again, and sank in less than an hour. A sister ship of the Titanic, both had the same origins, with a tragic end to their respective courses. McGarry was one of 354 passengers and crew who lost their lives.

Decades later, a bronze memorial plaque was dug up by Tom Murphy - who claimed the title of Ireland's champion pole-vaulter in 1937 and 1939 - in the garden of his home in Limerick's Clancy Strand.

It fell into the possession of his daughter Helen Murphy, and within the past decade her son Killian Downing, from



Yvonne O'Connor, grand-daughter of Thomas McGarry who died in 1917, Helen Downing, daughter of Tom Murphy who found the plaque, and Callum McGarry, great-grandson of Thomas McGarry



Memorial cards of the late Thomas McGarry, and his widow Bridget

Castleknock, an assistant archivist in the National Gallery of Ireland, began researching its provenance and links to McGarry's next of kin.

He posted the story on Europeana 1914-1918, a digital archive of sharing stories and items relating to World War One.

Three grandchildren of Mc-

Garry - Yvonne O'Connor in Caherdavin, Niall McGarry in the UK and Hugh McGarry in Australia, discovered the story on social media, and managed to track down Killian's contact details via LinkedIn.

The plaque was returned to them in Dublin last weekend - just before the centenary of his passing. "It was really exciting

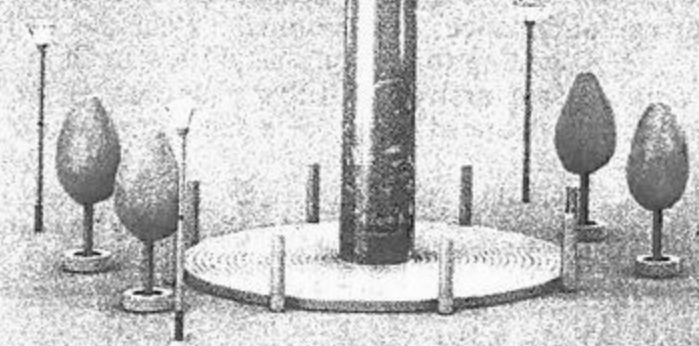
for them; they just couldn't believe it," said Killian, who examined Census and military records in his search to find McGarry's relatives.

"It was thrilling to be able to return this to them, and for the family it was hugely emotional as it's their only physical connection to their grandfather."

McGarry's grand-daughter Yvonne O'Connor, said: "This has all happened in the past two weeks - and the fact that it's the month of January [when he died] and the centenary as well. It has been so exciting, but all the coincidences recently have been uncanny. I just can't believe it."

Thomas McGarry's wife, Bridget 'Delia' Moran was widowed with five children - one of whom served during the Second World War and survived being torpedoed by a German submarine, losing only a toe.

LIMERICK TO
DUBLIN
NOW ONLY
€9.99



LIMERICK TO DUBLIN BY TRAIN
FROM JUST €9.99

Offer available from Jan 1st - Jan 29th. Price for one way journey.
Tickets booked in advance on irishrail.ie.

