

FORGOTTEN HEROES

By JOE COUGHLAN



The Great War/ the “War to End All Wars” or the First World War began on 28th of July 1914 and ended on 11th November 1918. 70 million fought in this war and by the time it ended 9 million had lost their lives. Of these at least 85 and probably many more were from Roscrea.

When John Redmond urged the nationalists to enlist with the promise of home rule, about 300 men from Roscrea and surrounding areas volunteered.

Some of those came home with the scars both physically and mentally of what no human should have to see. Some drowned in the mud and even today their bones and equipment are coming to the surface when the land is ploughed each year.

Among those to enlist were six sons of John and Jane Nixon of Parkmore. Robert, John, Joseph, George, Adam and James joined the Leinster Regiment which was based in Crinkill Barracks, Birr which was where most local volunteers signed up.

Nineteen-year-old Lance Corporal Adam, the youngest of the boys, was killed in action on August 18th 1915, his body was never found and his name is inscribed on the Helles Memorial near Sedd el Bahr in Turkey. James who was also a Lance Corporal was 25 years old when he died of wounds received in the second battle of Ypres and is buried in Bedford House Cemetery in Belgium.

Some of those who fought and died were career soldiers such as Michael John Matthews born in 1899 in Bunkers Hill. He also enlisted in the Leinster Regiment in 1911. He was stationed in Fyzabad in India when the war started and was shipped back to England in 1914 and from there posted to France. He also took part in the second battle of Ypres in 1915 in which the Germans used poison gas for the first time. He was killed later that year in Sanctuary Wood and his body was never recovered. Michael Matthews is remembered on the Menin Gate in Ypres Belgium.

These are typical stories of the men from Roscrea who fought and died. Those who made it home came back to the War of Independence. They put their tin trunk

under the bed and some never spoke of it again only to have these trunks opened two or three generations later by grandchildren who knew nothing of their story. Very few families in town were not affected by this war in some way.

In the Church of Ireland and in Legion Villas there are memorials to these brave men.

When the guns were eventually silenced between 1500 and 2000 men from North Tipperary had lost their lives.