

## Your country needs your wartime memorabilia



### External

- Video: National Library unveils project to digitise war history

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Archivist Avice-Claire McGovern holds a picture of her cousin Jack Jenkinson

EOIN BURKE-KENNEDY

EVER WONDERED about the provenance of an old family photograph or a stack of letters gathering dust in the attic? If so, the National Library wants to see them.

As part of the build-up to the 100th anniversary of the first World War in 2014, the library is taking part in a European-wide initiative aimed at digitising the war through family histories and artefacts.

On Wednesday next, the Kildare Street venue in Dublin will play host to a unique history roadshow at which members of the public can bring in their wartime memorabilia and tell their stories.

People are invited to bring in photographs, letters, postcards, medals, diaries and any other keepsakes belonging to their family and friends who took part in the war.

The objects will be scanned or digitally photographed on the spot before being catalogued and uploaded to the "Europeana" website – Europe's digital library, museum and archive.

There will also be a team of experts on hand – in the style of the BBC's popular Antiques Road Show programme – to explain the provenance and context of some of the more unusual items.

Announcing details of the event yesterday, director of the National Library Fiona Ross said that as the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the war approaches, it is vital we preserve precious documents and other memorabilia in digital format for future generations, in remembrance of the war and its effect on people's lives.

"We want ordinary families to tell us about their keepsakes, who they belonged to and why they are so important to them – and we will save those memories in our archive: [www.europeana1914-1918.eu](http://www.europeana1914-1918.eu)."

At yesterday's announcement, National Library archivist Avice-Claire McGovern held a picture of her relative Jack Jenkinson, whose story reflects the tragic topography and divided loyalties that many Irishmen and women found themselves in during the war.

In 1912, Jenkinson enlisted in the army at the age of only 14, joining the 16th Lancers at the Curragh Camp in Co Kildare.

As he was too young to be deployed in France at the outbreak of the war, he was stationed with a regiment in India for two years before returning home.

In April 1916, when the Easter Rising erupted on the streets of Dublin, Jenkinson was one of the lancers put into action against the rebels.

According to Ms McGovern's grandmother, Jenkinson's first cousin, he was unable to cope with orders "to shoot his own".

To escape the turmoil in Ireland, he repeatedly volunteered for the cavalry draft to aid the war effort on the continent.

His wish was finally granted in 1917 when he was sent to France, only to die from injuries sustained during the British advance at the Battle of Cambrai, at the age of just 19.

Ms McGovern yesterday held a picture of her long-lost cousin Jack as an infant, who bears a striking resemblance to her own son. When her son was shown the photograph recently, he said: "That's me, Mummy."

Chairman of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association Tom Burke said that the National Library's project represented "a light into the darkness" of what the first World War meant in Ireland, and was a part of a continuum in the country's participation in remembering the war.

As part of the Europeana project, the National Library has put on display a number of recruitment posters from the time, one of which urges Irishmen to "Avenge the Lusitania" by joining the war effort.

The Europeana roadshows, which began in Germany last year, are being rolled out across 10 countries in Europe this year to create a unique pan-European account of the war.

The nine roadshows – organised in libraries across German cities last year – attracted thousands of people and a welter of artefacts including individual field postcards and photo albums as well as detailed diaries and letters home.

The Irish leg of the project will take place at the National Library from 10am until 7pm on Wednesday, March 21st.