



PRESS RELEASE

Date: Thursday 11th April

**HIDDEN FEMALE VOICES UNCOVERED IN EXHIBITIONS AT PRONI & LINEN HALL
LIBRARY**

The Linen Hall Library and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) have come together to present simultaneous exhibitions uncovering hidden female voices and stories from across the centuries. The EU funded *In Her Words* and *Anonymous Was A Woman* exhibitions will open to the public on Thursday 11 and Friday 12 April.

The exhibitions are part of Women in the Archives, a strand of the Making the Future project, which is a regional programme being delivered by the Nerve Centre, National Museums NI, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland and Linen Hall Library. Making the Future is supported through €1.82m of EU funding under the PEACE IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

The Women in the Archives strand is being jointly delivered by the Linen Hall Library and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland to explore unique and untold stories of women through their archives. The project is the first major collaboration on this scale between both organisations and has highlighted how collections and archives can be used in new and innovative ways.

In Her Words will open at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) from Thursday 11 April and brings forward the voices and experiences of unseen women, written by them in their own words, found in diaries and letters held in public records.

The exhibition provides an intimate insight into the lives of selected women, many of whom have gone unnoticed by history, and whose words offer a glimpse into the realities of life for women across more than a century. It celebrates Marjorie Lyle, an entrepreneur who, at one time, was the only female insurance broker in Ireland, and a prolific writer and author. The collections of Dr Anna (Nann) Watson also go on show in an exhibition for the first time. Nann Watson's collection details a wide range of her interests and her abilities of organisation and leadership, particularly in female movements and circles.



In Her Words features audio recordings of letters and diaries found throughout the exhibition, recorded by community engagement participants that can be accessed on mobile devices using augmented reality technology.

Dr Michael Willis, Director of PRONI and Deputy Keeper of the Records said: **“PRONI is delighted to have produced *In Her Words* as part of the Women in the Archives partnership with the Linen Hall Library and Nerve Centre. This is an innovative and illustrative exploration of women’s unheard voices using archives within PRONI’s collections. This is the first time many of these voices will have been heard and gives us an insight into their lives. Had it not been for the wealth of privately deposited papers donated by the public over the past 100 years, we would not have been able to curate an exhibition of this size and scale.”**

At the Linen Hall Library, *Anonymous Was A Woman* opens on Friday 12 April and charts some of the key events that have contributed to female equality and citizenship across the island of Ireland.

The exhibition features a timeline of female advancements over the last 230 years. From September 1792 when Miss Catherine Clarke became the first female member of the Belfast Library and Society For Promoting Knowledge (later the Linen Hall Library), to the 2018 referendum in the Republic of Ireland where people voted by a landslide to repeal the eighth amendment to the constitution, the exhibition explores a number of milestones across education, work and politics.

Each of the zones are complemented by the extensive collections of the Linen Hall Library, including items such as a recently discovered book signed by Emma Duffin to her sister in 1916. Emma was a Belfast nurse who served during the First World War and whose diaries, held in the PRONI collections, will be loaned to the Linen Hall Library for the duration of the exhibition. Also on display is a copy of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* which appears in the Library's first catalogue in 1793.

The *Anonymous Was a Woman* exhibition also features newly commissioned graphic novel style portraits of women who appear throughout the exhibition, drawn by female artists from across Ireland, including Leeann Hamilton, Hilary Lawler, Triona Farrell and Clare Foley.



Linen Hall Library Director Julie Andrews says: **“The Linen Hall is excited to be part of this very significant project identifying, promoting and celebrating Irish women and their individual and collective journeys over the last three centuries. It is also an opportunity to dig deep into our archives and illuminate areas that have not been explored for some time. We hope the exhibition and associated events will educate, inspire and generate curiosity for many years to come.”**

Both exhibitions will showcase the work of participants involved in Women in the Archives community engagement programmes, including a Buried in Belfast trail map of significant women buried in the city, researched and created by members of the public.

Recognising the importance of the exhibitions Gina McIntyre, CEO of the Special EU Programmes Body said: **“This highly innovative project will provide the space within which people can reflect on the events of the past and the impact that they are still having on our society. Reflection and conversations that will help people to gain a greater understanding of different points of view, that they may never have been exposed to before. Given encouragement and support, this understanding can lead to reconciliation and greater levels of social cohesion, which is one of the primary goals of the EU’s PEACE IV Programme.”**

A free events programme including talks, antiques and archival roadshows and curator led tours of the exhibitions will also take place.

Match-funding for the project has also been provided by the Executive Office in Northern Ireland and the Department of Rural and Community Development in Ireland.

Both exhibitions are free. For more information on the exhibitions and events programme visit www.makingthefuture.eu.

- ENDS

Notes to Editor



For additional images or interview requests please contact Karen Friel,
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Special EU Programmes Body PEACE IV

The Special EU Programmes Body is a North/South Implementation Body sponsored by the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Ireland.

It is responsible for managing two EU Structural Funds Programmes, PEACE IV and INTERREG VA which are designed to enhance cross-border co-operation, promote reconciliation and create a more peaceful and prosperous society.

The Programmes operate within a clearly defined area including Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and in the case of INTERREG VA, Western Scotland.

The PEACE IV Programme has a value of €270 million and aims to promote peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland.

For more information on the SEUPB please visit www.seupb.eu

Linen Hall Library

The Linen Hall Library is a truly unique institution. Founded in 1788, it is the oldest library in Belfast and the only remaining library in Ireland that still generates a proportion of its income from membership. The Library is free to enter and enjoy, and is housed in a stunning Victorian former linen warehouse in the picturesque Donegall Square, across from Belfast City Hall. It is renowned for its unparalleled Irish and Local Studies Collection, ranging from comprehensive holdings of Early Belfast and Ulster printed books to the 350,000 items in the Northern Ireland Political Collection, the definitive archive of the recent 'Troubles'.

www.linenhall.com

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)

PRONI is the official archive for Northern Ireland and holds over 3 million documents, covering a period from 1219 to the present day. These records are a unique combination of official government files and privately deposited collections from local businesses,



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Foras Um Chláir Speisialta An AE
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organisations, families and individuals. PRONI also holds many valuable genealogical sources such as church registers, school records, landed estates records, court records and wills. PRONI is located in the Titanic Quarter of Belfast.

www.nidirect.gov.uk/proni

Nerve Centre

The Nerve Centre is Northern Ireland's leading creative media arts centre with sites in Derry~Londonderry and Belfast. More than 120,000 people a year benefit from the Nerve Centre's wide-ranging programme of arts events, cutting edge projects, creative learning centres, training opportunities and state-of-the-art production facilities.

www.nervecentre.org