

FRANCIS LEDWIDGE

.....

IRELAND'S SOLDIER POET



**Creative
Centenaries**

The story of
Francis Ledwidge

Key Stage 3 Learning Resource





Creative Centenaries

The Story of Francis Ledwidge has been developed by the Nerve Centre's Creative Centenaries project which produces innovative resources around the Decade of Centenaries and important historical events in Ireland's history.

This is a Key Stage 3 curriculum linked resource that looks at literary figures from the turn of the 20th century and the impact they had, and continue to have, across the island of Ireland.

Further graphic novel resources, as well as animations and interactive iBooks are available to access from www.creativecentenaries.org/resources

Script written by Martin Melarkey and artwork produced by David Campbell.

The Nerve Centre gratefully acknowledges the permission of Faber and Faber to quote from the work of Seamus Heaney.



Department of
**Culture, Arts
and Leisure**
www.dcalni.gov.uk



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha
agus Trádála
Department of Foreign Affairs
and Trade

SEAMUS HEANEY'S
POEM WRITTEN IN
MEMORY OF THE
IRISH NATIONALIST
WAR POET FRANCIS
LEDWIDGE...

...BEGINS WITH A CHILDHOOD
MEMORY OF A VISIT TO THE
SEASIDE TOWN OF PORTSTEWART.



THE BRONZE SOLDIER AND THE LIST OF
NAMES ON THE TOWN'S WAR MEMORIAL
MEANT LITTLE TO THE YOUNG BOY.



NOW WHEN SEAMUS HEANEY THINKS
OF THE WAR MEMORIAL, AN IMAGE OF
FRANCIS LEDWIDGE COMES TO MIND.

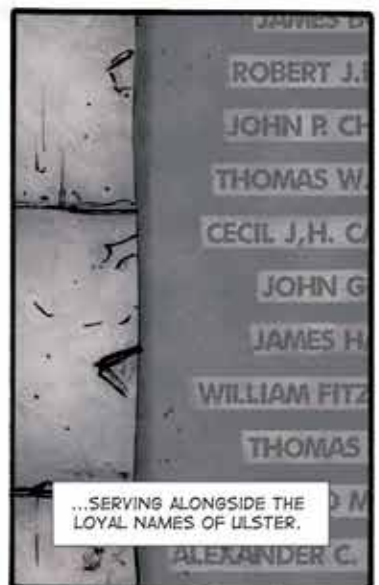
A SOLDIER POET...



...AND NATIONALIST ACTIVIST...



...SERVING ALONGSIDE THE
LOYAL NAMES OF ULSTER.



"I think of you in your Tommy's uniform,



*A haunted Catholic face,
pallid and brave,*



*"Ghosting the trenches
with a bloom of hawthorn"*



FRANCIS LEDWIDGE WAS BORN IN A COTTAGE NEAR SLANE, IN THE BOYNE VALLEY, IN 1887.

HE WAS A KEEN POET WRITING WHEREVER HE COULD—SOMETIMES EVEN ON GATES OR FENCE POSTS.



HIS POEMS ARE FILLED WITH THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF HIS RURAL UPBRINGINGS.

HE WAS ACTIVE IN BOTH NATIONALIST AND LABOUR POLITICS.

IN 1913, HE AND HIS BROTHER JOE WERE AMONGST THE FIRST TO JOIN THE LOCAL BRANCH OF THE IRISH VOLUNTEERS TO CAMPAIGN FOR HOME RULE.

YOU CERTAINLY LOOK THE PART, FRANK. NOT SURE ABOUT THE HAT, THOUGH.

THOSE WOODEN RIFLES WON'T SHOOT FAR.

I SUPPOSE WE'LL JUST HAVE TO MAKE DO UNTIL THE REAL ONES ARRIVE.



THE OUTBREAK OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN AUGUST 1914 CAUSED DEEP DIVISION IN THE RANKS OF THE IRISH VOLUNTEERS.

REDMOND IS CONVINCED THAT JOINING UP WILL STRENGTHEN THE CAUSE OF HOME RULE.

LEDWIDGE ARGUED AGAINST HEEDING JOHN REDMOND'S CALL FOR IRISH NATIONALISTS TO GO WHEREVER THE FIRING LINE EXTENDS.

HE'S WRONG. WE NEED TO STAND TOGETHER TO HAVE A CHANCE OF SUCCESS. DIVIDED, OUR CAUSE IS LOST.



WHEN THE IRISH VOLUNTEERS SPLIT OVER THE ISSUE, LEDWIDGE SIDED WITH THE MINORITY WHO WERE OPPOSED TO JOINING THE WAR EFFORT.

HIS FRIENDS AND FELLOW POETS, THOMAS MACDONAGH AND PATRICK PEARSE, WERE ELECTED TO LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN THE NEW, SEPARATIST IRISH VOLUNTEERS.

PATRICK, WE MIGHT NOT HAVE MUCH TIME FOR WRITING POETRY FOR A WHILE.

THERE WILL BE PLENTY OF TIME FOR POETRY WHEN WE HAVE OUR FREEDOM, THOMAS.





HOWEVER, THE THOUSANDS OF IRISH VOLUNTEERS ENLISTING IN THE BRITISH ARMY HAD AN EFFECT ON LEDWIDGE. ONE MONTH LATER, HE HAD CHANGED HIS MIND.

I'M JOINING THE BRITISH ARMY BECAUSE SHE STANDS BETWEEN IRELAND AND AN ENEMY COMMON TO OUR CIVILISATION.

I WOULD NOT HAVE HER SAY THAT SHE DEFENDED US WHILE WE DID NOTHING AT HOME BUT PASS RESOLUTIONS.



FRANCIS LEDWIDGE JOINED THE 5TH ROYAL INNISKILLING FUSILIERS, PART OF THE 10TH IRISH DIVISION.

DURING HIS ARMY TRAINING IN DUBLIN, LEDWIDGE STRUCK UP A FRIENDSHIP WITH ROBERT CHRISTIE, A PROTESTANT FROM BELFAST.

THE NAME'S ROBERT. CHRISTIE. BOB TO MY FRIENDS

FRANK. FRANK LEDWIDGE



THE 10TH IRISH DIVISION WENT INTO ACTION AT GALLIPOLI IN APRIL 1915 ALONGSIDE ANZAC REGIMENTS FROM AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND. ATTACKING HEAVILY FORTIFIED POSITIONS ON CLIFF TOPS.

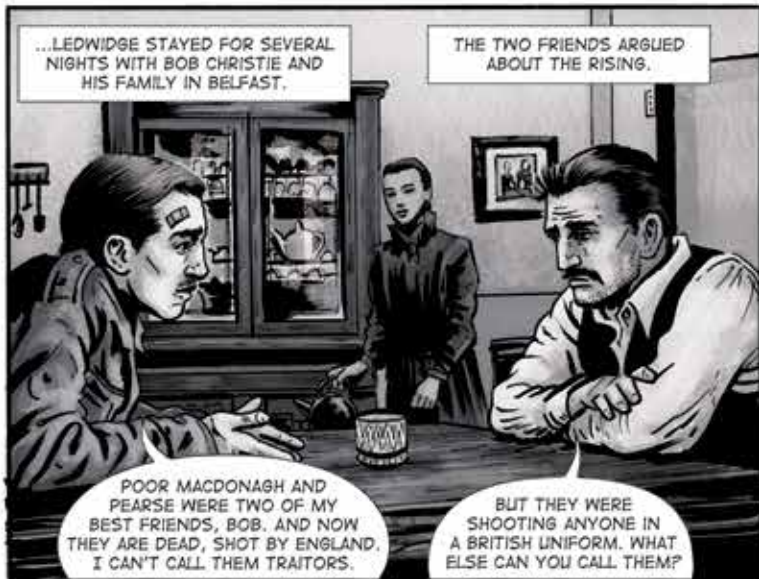
THE DIVISION SUFFERED HEAVY LOSSES.







TRAVELLING TO HIS REGIMENTAL BARRACKS IN DERRY A FEW WEEKS AFTER THE EXECUTIONS...



...LEDWIDGE STAYED FOR SEVERAL NIGHTS WITH BOB CHRISTIE AND HIS FAMILY IN BELFAST.

THE TWO FRIENDS ARGUED ABOUT THE RISING.

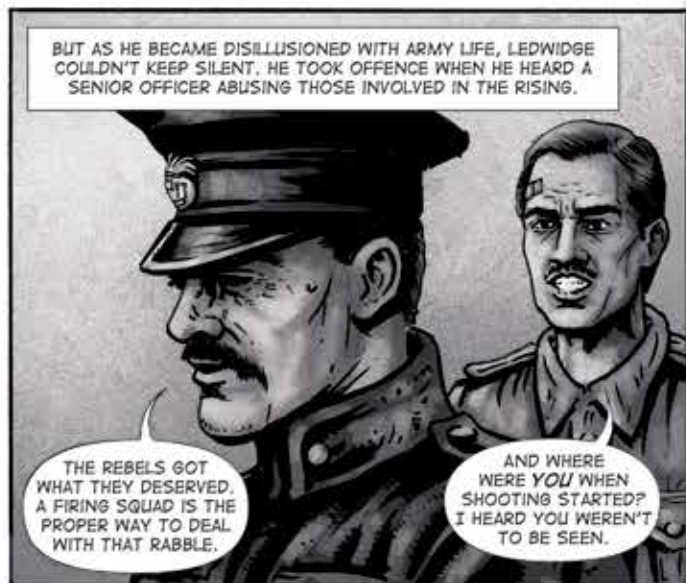
POOR MACDONAGH AND PEARSE WERE TWO OF MY BEST FRIENDS, BOB. AND NOW THEY ARE DEAD, SHOT BY ENGLAND. I CAN'T CALL THEM TRAITORS.

BUT THEY WERE SHOOTING ANYONE IN A BRITISH UNIFORM. WHAT ELSE CAN YOU CALL THEM?



MARTYRS. THAT'S WHAT I CALL THEM.

FRANK YOU'LL GET INTO TROUBLE WITH THAT TALK. IT'S BEST YOU KEEP IT TO YOURSELF.



BUT AS HE BECAME DISILLUSIONED WITH ARMY LIFE, LEDWIDGE COULDN'T KEEP SILENT. HE TOOK OFFENCE WHEN HE HEARD A SENIOR OFFICER ABUSING THOSE INVOLVED IN THE RISING.

THE REBELS GOT WHAT THEY DESERVED. A FIRING SQUAD IS THE PROPER WAY TO DEAL WITH THAT RABBLE.

AND WHERE WERE YOU WHEN SHOOTING STARTED? I HEARD YOU WEREN'T TO BE SEEN.



I'LL HAVE YOU COURT-MARTIALLED FOR THAT REMARK.



I HEARD the Poor Old Woman say
"At break of day the fowler came,
And took my blackbirds from their songs
Who loved me well thro shame and blame..

And when the first surprise of flight
Sweet songs excite, from the far dawn
Shall there come blackbirds loud with love,
Sweet echoes of the singers gone.

But in the lonely hush of eve
Weeping I grieve the silent bills.
I heard the Poor Old Woman say
In Derry of the little hills.

FRANCIS LEDWIDGE
RETURNED TO
THE WAR...

...WHEN HE WAS POSTED
TO THE WESTERN FRONT
IN JANUARY 1917.

HAVING SURVIVED THE BATTLE OF
ARRAS, LEDWIDGE'S UNIT WAS ORDERED
NORTH TO BELGIUM TO PREPARE FOR
THE THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES.

THE BLASTED LANDSCAPE OF THE WESTERN FRONT
CONTRASTED STARKLY WITH THE WILD COUNTRYSIDE
OF SLANE. HOWEVER, AS THE POET SEEMED TO CARRY
THE ATMOSPHERE OF HIS NATIVE LAND WITH HIM...

...THERE WAS ALWAYS SOMETHING
TO REMIND HIM OF HOME.

ONE MORNING, DURING A BRIEF LULL
IN THE ARTILLERY BOMBARDMENT,
LEDWIDGE HEARD A ROBIN SINGING. HE
STOPPED TO LISTEN TO THE BRAVE
TRILLING UNTIL THE BOOMING GUNS
RETURNED TO DROWN IT OUT.

THIS INSPIRED THE POEM
HOME, WRITTEN SHORTLY
BEFORE HIS DEATH.

*This is a song
a robin sang
This morning on a
broken tree,
It was about the
little fields
That call across the
world to me.*

ON 31 JULY 1917, LEDWIDGE WAS WITH HIS UNIT BEHIND THE LINES.



THEY WERE ASSIGNED THE TASK OF BUILDING COMMUNICATION TRACKS DESPITE THE DANGER FROM SPORADIC GERMAN SHELLING.

THE SOLDIERS TOOK A SHORT BREAK FROM THE DIGGING. WHILE HE WAS DRINKING A CUP OF TEA...



...A STRAY SHELL EXPLODED NEAR LEDWIDGE.



CHAPLAIN FATHER DEVAS WAS AMONG THE FIRST TO ARRIVE ON THE SCENE.



THAT NIGHT HE WROTE IN HIS DIARY...

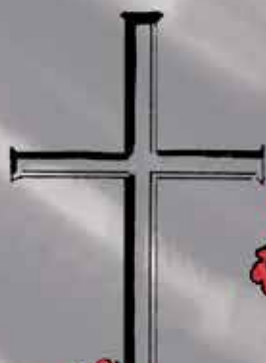


'LEDWIDGE KILLED, BLOWN TO BITS...'

THE LEDWIDGE MEMORIAL IN THE MUSEUM GARDEN AT JANEVILLE IN SLANE IS AN EXACT REPLICA OF THE MEMORIAL THAT STANDS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF BOEZINGE, A SMALL VILLAGE 6KMS NORTH OF THE TOWN OF IEPER (YPRES) IN BELGIUM, AND WAS UNVEILED ON 31 JULY 2001 BY JOSEPH LEDWIDGE, THE POET'S NEPHEW.



16138 LANCE CPL.
F.E. LEDWIDGE
ROYAL INNISKILLING FUS.
31ST JULY 1917 AGE 29



FRANCIS LEDWIDGE

IRELAND'S SOLDIER POET

Francis Ledwidge, born in Slane, County Meath in 1887 is regarded as Ireland's greatest soldier poet. One of nine children, Francis was just four years old when his father Patrick died, with the result that the Ledwidge family would experience financial hardship.

Despite this setback, however, Francis was known to have excelled at school and won praise from his schoolmaster who called him an 'erratic genius'. He held various jobs in his youth including as a miner and road worker, all the while writing poetry – including some published in his local newspaper, the *Drogheda Independent*. Some of his poems were taken to the local paper by Ellie Vaughey, the younger sister of his friend Paddy.

Ledwidge later became a member of the Gaelic League and a committed nationalist. Ledwidge and his brother Joe were among the first to join the local branch of the Irish Volunteers. When the Volunteers split over the issue of support for the First World War, Ledwidge sided with the minority opposed to joining the war effort. Yet a few weeks later, he enlisted in the 5th Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.

Some have speculated that a heartbroken Ledwidge went to war following the break up of his relationship with his fiancée, Ellie Vaughey. He himself wrote that he could not stand aside while others sought to defend Ireland's freedom. His first collection of poetry, *Songs of the Fields*, was published in June 1914 and appealed to members of the Irish Literary Revival.

During the opening years of the war, Ledwidge saw action at Gallipoli and in Serbia, eventually suffering injuries and being admitted to hospital in Manchester. From here, he learned about the events of the Easter Rising in April 1916. He was deeply affected by the events of the Rising and wrote 'Lament for Thomas MacDonagh' for his friend, one of the seven signatories of the Proclamation who was executed for his role in the uprising.

Ledwidge was court-martialled and demoted from lance corporal in May 1916 for overstaying his home leave and for insubordination to a superior officer. For the remainder of 1916, he was stationed at Ebrington Army barracks in Derry~Londonderry where he appears to have settled well, writing a number of poems about the events of the Easter Rising. In his 'Lament for the Poets', he describes the dead leaders of the Easter Rising as blackbirds.

Francis Ledwidge was posted back to the Western Front in January 1917. He was killed by an exploding shell while mending a road during the third battle of Ypres on 31 July 1917, aged 29 years old.

Search online:

www.francisledwidge.com
website of the Francis Ledwidge
Museum in Slane

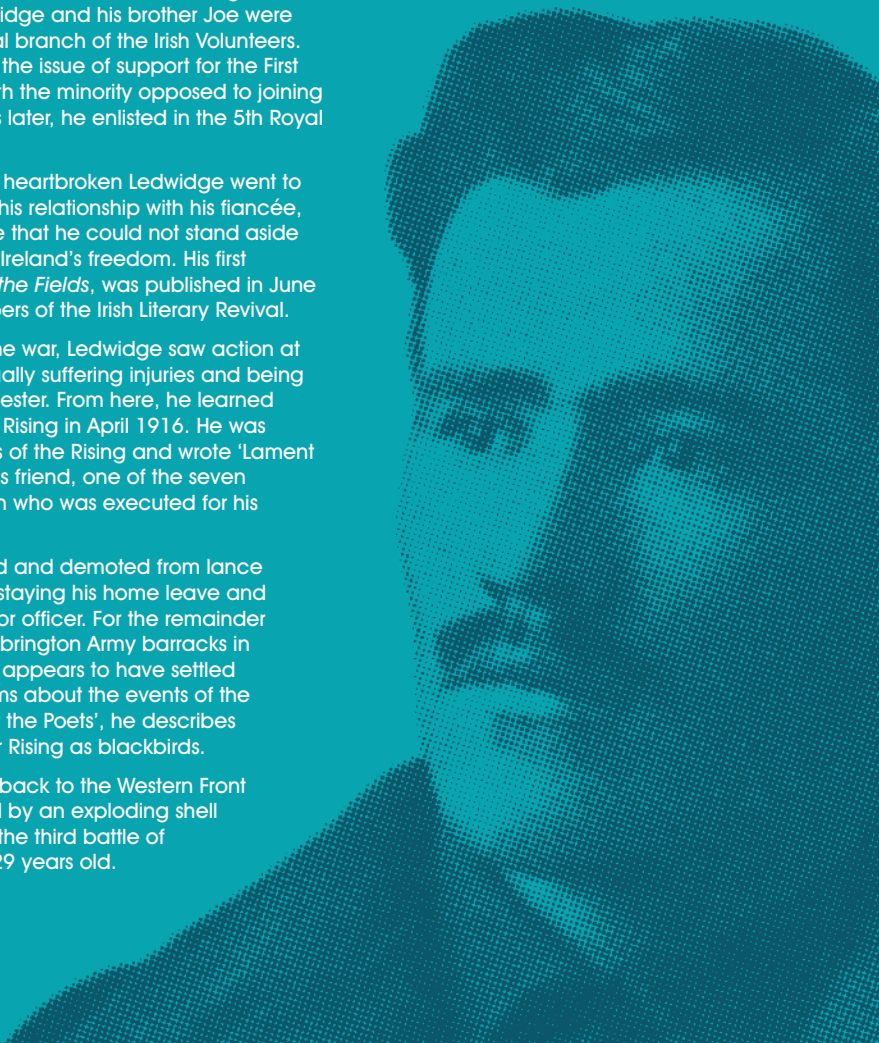
www.poemhunter.com
website containing recorded
poems of Ledwidge

Read some more:

'In Memoriam Francis Ledwidge',
Seamus Heaney, 1980

Search YouTube:

'Every County Has A Story – Derry'
'Francis Ledwidge – War Poet'





Produce a film based on Ledwidge's poetry

Students will use filmmaking software to combine Ledwidge poetry with imagery of the First World War. Students should research the poetry of Francis Ledwidge, in particular his work recalling experiences from the front, and use film editing software to combine recorded spoken word of his work with relevant imagery. Students will work in teams to decide on a particular piece of Ledwidge's work and create a film lasting approximately one minute.

Key Stage 3 Curriculum Links

Key Elements	Personal Understanding; Mutual Understanding; Moral Character; Citizenship; Cultural Understanding; Media Awareness
Cross Curricular Skills	Communication; Using ICT
Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities	Managing Information; Being Creative; Working With Others
Areas of Learning	The Arts; English (with Media Education); Environment & Society



Examine the poetry of Francis Ledwidge

Students will study the writings of Francis Ledwidge and other notable poets involved in the First World War, including Tom Kettle, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. Students should compare and contrast the various writings in order to gain an impression of the types of imagery being evoked by the writers. Students will then complete their own piece of creative writing, imagining themselves taking part in the First World War. Students could examine the poem 'In Memoriam Francis Ledwidge' by Seamus Heaney for further information.

Key Stage 3 Curriculum Links

Key Elements	Personal Understanding; Mutual Understanding; Moral Character; Spiritual Awareness; Citizenship; Cultural Understanding; Ethical Awareness
Cross Curricular Skills	Communication; Using ICT
Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities	Managing Information; Being Creative; Self Management
Areas of Learning	The Arts; English (with Media Education); Environment & Society



Record a radio interview with Francis Ledwidge

Students will imagine a scene where Francis Ledwidge is interviewed by a radio journalist at Ebrington in Derry~Londonderry, in the aftermath of the Easter Rising. In groups, students will take on the role of Ledwidge and a journalist, imagining the types of questions that may have been asked and the responses Ledwidge may have given. Students should examine Ledwidge's connection to the people involved in the Easter Rising and the political context of the First World War in Ireland.

Key Stage 3 Curriculum Links

Key Elements	Personal Understanding; Mutual Understanding; Moral Character; Citizenship; Cultural Understanding; Media Awareness; Ethical Awareness
Cross Curricular Skills	Communication; Using ICT
Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities	Managing Information; Thinking, Problem Solving, Decision Making; Being Creative; Working With Others
Areas of Learning	The Arts; English (with Media Education); Environment & Society



Above
 A copy of the *Shan Van Vocht* magazine, which Alice Milligan helped to establish in 1898.

Above
 A British 18-pounder field gun battery taking up new positions close to a communication trench near Boesinghe, 31 July 1917, during the Third Battle of Ypres, on the same day Francis Ledwidge was killed. © IWM (Q 5723)

