

### *Journey Around Ireland*

As a result of the developing body of creative practice engagements, I became increasingly intent on developing further commemoration of the stories shared with me. Moreover, I continued to want opportunity to offer the relatives of these women – those who had shared their stories with me through recent events – their own means to honour and connect with such. Each of the stories shared presented me with new layers of understanding this wider narrative of departure and migration. Working together, these offered both biographical insight, and also through the building of this vast accumulation of memories conceiving a collective gesture. As before, I was creating a means to undergo and position self as part of the narrative, allowing me to connect with the nature of these stories and experiences. I was reminded in particular of the candle, which I had lit on the shore in front of my grandmother's family cottage. Performed as a way to offer both marked tribute and remembrance, connecting Agnes and myself in that moment and through the act, I reflected that I could take this same candle – which I had taken back home with me<sup>1</sup> and visit these other various points of departure that were recorded within the wider stories submitted. Retrieving the candle, I hoped now that this small item would hold the embedded experience of the memory felt when originally lighting it, with the candle providing a link with the emotions felt during the original act. The candle, conceiving such as an extension of myself – and of memory of self within the landscape at Tra Na Rosann - existed as a conduit through which to support these further acts of remembrance onto. Physically travelling to these ports, lighting the candle, and journeying within the various landscapes, which these women would have encountered in their own migrations, would hopefully grant me further means to connect and interpret such voices and narratives. Also in lighting the candle I would engage in a form of communion between each of the individual women in marking these sites through this one flame and candle.

Drawing from this collection of personal histories, I created a map of sorts, marking the significant points of embarkation, of these last sites and landscapes the women had been in contact with, and often the places where they left their families behind

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<sup>1</sup> I had originally intended to have this candle lit at Tra Na Rosann form part of a larger work and, without knowing at the time in what way this would occur, I had stored it in waiting.

permanently. I made the decision to make the journey alone, using public transport. As compared to having a car to drive around Ireland, I felt that remaining reliant on local communal connection points and stations, would better inform this performative experience. Additionally, in physically carrying everything I had with me in a bag, I felt these themes of journey would be better paralleled through the means of buses, trains and the walking between transfer points. Similarly, I opted to take the ferry across from Scotland<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Agreed, I was still travelling in extremely comfortable means in comparison I was still nevertheless responding to my own sense of what I needed to 'perform' in order to engage with their stories. Through using these shared transportation modes I believed value would be gained from being part of these interim spaces journeying between public departure points and domestic destinations of bed and board.



**Figure 1 Route Taken Around Ireland, September 2012**

Framing my journey around these points of departure I intended to travel to each location in turn, lighting the candle at the water edge – allowing it to burn until the wind blew the flame out – documenting each act on video. As well as this, on another camera, I wanted to film the expanse of water to the side of the candle as it burned – capturing the sea which lay beside each of these sites, representing that expanse which carried these women away from their homeland. Although I wasn't sure how these filmed elements

would find resolve within the wider body and journey of the work, I wanted to capture these details as fragments gathered as potential resource and material of the engagement<sup>3</sup>.

The internal dialogue of these daily experiences became further material through which to understand the emotive layers wrapped up in the acts, through the performative writing which emerged each evening as I reflected upon the day. The lived journey I took myself took upon a pilgrimage-like significance, with that encountered taking on route to conceive the themes of the work, of migration, departure, passage, and arrival.

The following account of the journey, through excerpts of reflective writing along route, imagery and video still serves to capture the journey. Further examples are included in the appendix and the videos recorded on site are included on accompanying DVD. Whilst finding challenge in accurately containing the journey into a summarised textual account I believe that the reverberations of the journeys took register in many nuanced ways within the work developed subsequently.

#### *EXCERPT ONE: LARNE – DUBLIN – WEXFORD – NEW ROSS – WATERFORD*

Initially, the decision to make New Ross, Wexford, the first port at which to light a candle on my journey around Ireland seemed to be directed by my desire to complete what I saw as the longest physical leg of the journey - from top of the country to bottom – feeling that once endured, I would be comforted that this arduous stretch was behind me. The connections between ferry, trains, buses and coaches, relied upon swiftly and alertly running across platforms and country tracks (with luggage in tow). The eagerness of infancy for endeavour lent itself towards such catching and swerving although it became apparent as the week progressed that my desire to attend all of these sites, to complete the act of lighting the candle to the various women's memories, eclipsed and overruled notions of personal tiredness.

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<sup>3</sup> Some of these elements were later captured as part of the Irish Women of Our Past website portal. Developed as an online map of journeys where those who had submitted names of relatives could log on and see both the candle burning and the location from where their relative had left. See appendix [3](#).



**Figure 2 Waiting at Bus Stop (Wexford - New Ross)**

The final transfer of the day's journey was to be at Wexford, with the last bus of the day needing to be caught from the town to New Ross. On paper I had fifteen minutes between the bus arriving in Wexford and the final bus being caught to New Ross. With each person getting on at the various stops on this second last leg, as they made conversation with the driver or looked for change, a knot grew in my stomach at the thought of a late arrival in Wexford threatening to strand me there for the evening. Trying to remain 'inside' the experience of the trip I attempted to transpose such feelings of anxiety within the narratives of those embarking on the journeys of migration, as they themselves may have felt as they looked out of to skies darkening, wondering if they would find board for the evening. There was something incredibly remote about the roads we were driving through – and the fact that I was reliant upon public transport – manifested as a sense of being vulnerable to finding oneself lost in an unfamiliar landscape.

I did however catch the last bus to New Ross. It was in fact waiting, with the driver commenting as I got on board that he saw the man who drove the Wexford bus hadn't arrived in yet and he thought he would wait just in case. The sea of faces of fellow travellers seated and waiting seemed to be okay with such delay being imparted on them. Setting off for this last part of today's journey I was settled back at ease, with plans of bed and boarding restored and awaiting my arrival in New Ross.

The next morning I arose early, leaving the bed and breakfast, to walk - suitcase in tow -for the first lighting of the candle at New Ross. I had chosen to go down to the water edge to light it beside the famine memorial. Asides from the fact that the memorial marked the location most prominent within the town as a point of embarkation, I also reflected that many people who wanted to commemorate or visit the place where their ancestors would have left from would come to do so beside the memorial. Again, I wanted to somehow draw from emotions imparted at such places in informing my own work.

This first re-lighting of the candle brought back forgotten memories of the difficult task of lighting a small candle at Tra Na Rosann, with even slight winds stalling the process of getting the flame to take. Setting up the small camera to document the practice, I managed to light the candle. I was conscious of not letting the mechanics of the process involved cause me to lose sight of the catharsis of the act and gesture . As the candle burned I took another camera and filmed the expanse of water located beside the port. There was a release of sorts, as this first lighting signalled a shift from the conception of the work to the actual performance of it, with a sense that the initiation of a performance had begun into which I had started to become absorbed. Moreover, as the act was unfolding I was feeling an opening up and connecting of fragments. With this engagement being a collective voice – spanning years and locations – I was strengthening my relation with them through performing a return for these women within my own gesture.



**Figure 3 Candle at New Ross**

In the lead up to this first stop I had worried that when it came to the actual *doing* of the work I wouldn't feel a genuine connection with that which was being made tangible through the practice. Interestingly, as I filmed the area of water, I was able to become lost as the movement and the sound of its hitting against the port side acted as a means to create a closeness with what they may have themselves heard.



Figure 4 Still of water, New Ross



Figure 5 Travelling from New Ross – Cork

Following the flame extinguishing, I became aware that I had only a short time before I was to catch a bus to the next location. I was stopping briefly at Waterford to light a candle, before getting back on a bus to take me to Cork. Perhaps nervous for this

first candle performance I hadn't slept very well the previous night and was looking forward to being able to sleep en route as I recommenced travel and boarded the bus from Waterford to Cork.



Figure 6 Candle at Waterford

*EXCERPT TWO: WATERFORD – CORK – COBH – CORK*

Retrieving my map as I stood in the arrival bay at Cork Bus Station, and facing the direction of onward travel, I realised that walking in the direction of my hotel required the climbing of a very steep part of the city. Instructions told me to head towards the Rail station and from there find signed directions to the hotel. Hidden from the black-lined route on the instructions were the winding stone steps which staggered back and forth on themselves for some height, with each long well-weathered step seeming to cling tremulously to this steep divide of the city landscape.

Facing this climb I felt yet again the burden of travelling alone on foot with the large case of equipment and goods needed for the trip. Although walking back towards the station and travelling on to the hotel in a taxi would have been easier at this stage, I was resolved to draw from the experience of journey on foot and without assistance. Whilst not positioning this route from station to hotel as being a path walked by those involved in the stories I was exploring, the nature of the endeavour –as being a task, which would foster a sense of catharsis through effort – was central to my experience. It was getting dark and I felt alone as I contemplated the steep wall of steps, feeling uneasy by the solitude of the challenge. I was not even sure I was able to lift the large case up and around the shadows off the stepped route. Both through the physical engagement of this

gesture and in the vulnerability of self- realised in traveling, the act became means for me to again come into contact and to conceive and realise the voices imagined within such histories.



**Figure 7 View from hotel, above the city (Cork)**

Waking up in Cork, I could tell without opening my eyes that the day would be perfect for traveling around today's sites. The red glow felt through my closed eyelids signalled that I would be able to pack away my large coat and walking boots into my wheeled case, the walk between stations and along harbour edges being free from bulky layers of clothing. Remembering travel from the day before I was relieved to avoid fitting the collection of handles of kit and bags through bulky tiers of jumper and coat sleeves as I walked downhill from the hotel to the harbour.



**Figure 8 Train journey to Cobh**

Following the lighting of the candle at the port in Cork, I caught the train to Cobh. Narrating a political history, this location had been renamed in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century as Queenstown, to mark the visit of Queen Victoria. It had been significant in terms of sheer numbers of those who had come to this port to migrate. The town was a popular seaside resort, still holding such draw, with annual crowds of holidaymakers filling the streets. This was underlined on my arrival to the station at Cobh, being greeted by signposts for the local museum and attractions, and a cluster of large cruise ships which had moored for their passengers to enjoy the setting.



**Figure 9 Candle at Cobh**

Despite the bustle of the visitors I managed to find a fairly secluded spot in which to light the candle. Amidst the bustle of tourists, I experienced a reprieve, becoming lost

through the soft flickering sound of the candle and the sea birds overhead. The distanced murmur of activity in the distance became a whispered detail, separate from where I was standing. In a way I longed for the candle to keep burning, knowing that its extinguishing would signal my time to gather my various bags and set back on the journey.

### *EXCERPT THREE: LIMERICK*

As I left the Cork to head onwards I was struck by gratitude that I was having opportunity to discover these various parts of the country. I felt that in travelling these distances I was acquiring further layers of knowledge and connection with this landscape, sensing this authenticating of myself with this ‘departed homeland’.

En route to the station, via the port, the vibrations of the broken pavement by the water edge seemed to travel directly up through the long suitcase handle, into my arm. Paired with an uneven rattling noise, this physical judder revealed a splayed tread which was loosely clinging on to the bare structure of the left suitcase wheel. Part of my initial plan, when contemplating this solo journey, was to keep all the fragmented bits and pieces contained in this one big case which despite being bulky, could at least be wheeled around the various locations I would be visiting. I was unexpectedly challenged by the thought that, if this rather sparsely covered wheel was to buckle completely, I would encounter a potentially ruinous problem in terms of progressing in my journey. I had wanted to travel around these locations experiencing this lone persona with mobile belongings – and had been enabled to do this through containing my cameras’, notes and provisions within this piece of luggage. I hadn’t actually conceived of the scenario which would unfold if this mode was to be impaired. Reflecting back now, the panic which I suddenly felt was perhaps clouded by the fact that I was, by now, absorbed in this solo activity; with only my own internal dialogue being company as I meandered through the city.

This earlier journey to the train station had unfolded as an experience, which as mentioned, I had not envisioned. I became nervous at the thought of pulling the case over the uneven brick-worked roads, predicting that such aggravation upon the remaining wheel structure would render the case completely inoperable – at least in terms of my capacity to travel with any degree of ease through my itinerary. Standing down by the port, facing up towards the direction of the train station, I could see two routes, which would lead me up towards it. The first, and originally planned, route was up a pathway, which gradually inclined uphill. Unfortunately, as I had learned from my

travels on arrival to the city, the road had been carefully preserved (or perhaps carefully recreated) to present an historic cobbled surface. Undoubtedly this route would not be one, which would prolong the life of the suitcase. The alternative was to walk towards the tarmacked road headed for the station car park and then climb the steep stone steps which headed up through several staged levels, with the narrow walkway bordered ominously by rusty and lopsided railings.

Part of me was hoping that I may meet someone in the station car park who would offer to help in this climb up towards the station entrance. This was due to both the weight, which I knew it held and also because this awkward route was going to significantly impact my chances of catching the train, which I was scheduled to get. Unfortunately I didn't meet assistance and the train, which I had originally been scheduled to get, went without me. As I made my way to the ticket office to discover my new departure I was at least glad that I would have opportunity to be seated and stationary, and regain a moment of rest.

When I did eventually arrive in Limerick I made the decision that in interest of preserving the wheel of my suitcase I should try and drop the luggage at the hotel before heading to the waterfront to light the candle. I had briefly looked at the map before I had departed the hotel in Cork and there appeared to be a shortcut to the hotel possible, walking from the station through a local housing estate.

Shortly into this detour from the main route I was aware of my bearings becoming lost in a network of end roads and ever-circling blocks of housing. Without mobile signal, I tried to fathom any printed out maps I had prepared earlier, though through a mixture of anxiety about the wheel of my suitcase, and the prospect of losing time to light the candle, I was finding it hard to work past the worry creeping in.

From the side of the road I heard a call out. A woman who had been sitting on her front step walked to the end of her path and asked if I needed any help. Explaining to her that I was looking for the hotel I was staying at, she began to lift the latch on her gate, telling me that she would walk me there herself. As she noted it was *'a bit tricky to explain, and you can't be too careful in some of the streets beside it'*. My protests were unheard, and we were soon walking en route to the venue. Waving out to neighbours and children peddling by on bikes, she kept a steady flow of conversation with me. She asked about the project and where I had been so far. As we approached sight of the hotel in the

immediate distance, I was suddenly aware that we had been walking for over fifteen minutes. Embarrassed by the inconvenience I had caused I apologised and told her that I hadn't realised how much I would be taking her in her providing of directions.

Her parting comment was yet another affirmation the wider value I was beginning to recognise in this work. Both in terms of the what the work was representing, along with that which becomes opened up in collaborating through the help and assistance of others along the way, her words *I'm just glad I could have helped in the remembering of these women* left me recharged and ready to walk down to the port in the main town.



Figure 10 Candle at Limerick

#### *EXCERPT 4: DERRY & LARNE*



Figure 11 Walking along the waterfront at Derry

I wonder now if my decision to travel to Derry at the end of my visit was one which was purely a result of logistics, or whether it was some sort of internal decision conceived by some part of myself, allowing for this visit to a site so significant in my personal family history to occur on the back of the experience accumulated through the trip.

I had anticipated that there would be much to be drawn from going to this location in terms of it being a definite 'test' of my practice linking me to ancestral ties, with this site belonging to my grandmother's past, having been her *point of departure*. In being amidst this particular site I had a potential channel through which to access and gain a deeper understanding of both her, how she may have felt upon such place, and in such, my own relatedness towards this sense of departed landscape. I was apprehensive that I wouldn't be able to draw any sort of intimate internal resonance from the space, that the concrete surface and visible signs of an historic port would simply present a scene to me which stood to narrate the evidence that a general people had left from this location. My belief – core to my handling - that there was a form of insight and knowledge which could be touched, imparted and translated through this act of engagement, would be ultimately faced through this visit to the site where my grandmother departed from.

Taking myself down to the port area, a stream of thoughts resonated. Not wanting to stop my physical motion I decided to record these shifts of reflection I which were unfolding as I engaged at the site. I took out my audio recorder and spoke the following:

*“walking along this stretch of water, knowing my grandmother was here in the past, years before I existed, before she left for Glasgow...wondering what she may do when she arrived...she was a young girl though...I’m trying to get into the mind of my grandmother when she was younger than myself...the things which would go on to happen in her life...unfolding...all this was yet to exist as she stood on this landscape...I now return to it”.*

Rachael Flynn. Personal recording, Derry. 26<sup>th</sup> September 2010

As I prepared the candle to burn at the water edge, the gesture of lighting it at this particular site – as palpable in the audio thoughts recorded – had significance as physically being the landscape from which this generational legacy would unfold from. Asides from any feelings which would or would not come to me as I engaged at site, I realised that the very act itself was something which had meaning. In essence, I was both drawing resource from the meaning already attached to the area, but also being agent for resource in enacting this gesture.



**Figure 12 Candle burning at Derry water edge**

Note the following images are captioned with their locations. There includes both pictures displaying the candles in the other locations visited, snap shots en route which captured certain states of experience – as ways of remembering feelings amidst such, and also documentation of myself within practice and process.



Figure 13 Various images from journey (additional)

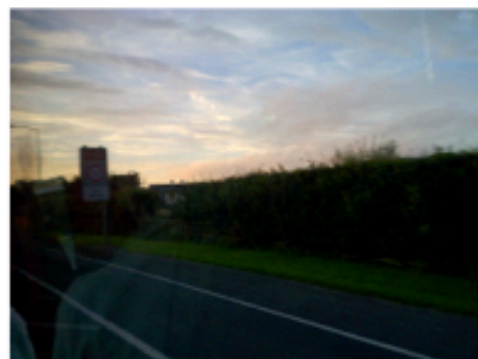


Figure 14 Various images from journey (additional)