

*Film City*



Figure 1 Unknown (1908) *Govan Town Hall and Tram* (Postcard) Valentines, Dundee



Figure 2 Film City - Candles Burning

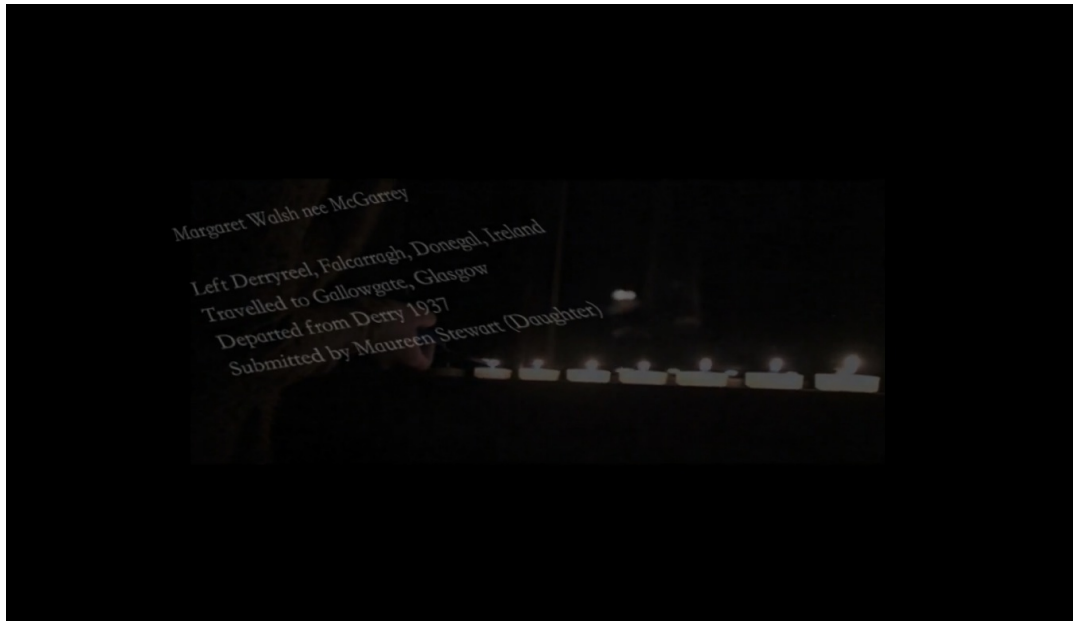


Figure 3 Images of Candles and Video Work combined

Following my journey around Ireland I decided I wanted to create a work which would incorporate the experience of lighting the candle, and the connection I felt whilst doing so, alongside the collection of names which had amassed through the growing submissions.—In conceiving this piece there emerged a means to involve and bring together details and aspects of the other performed works which had led to this point, with the narratives of the research work finding expression through the journey taken up to this point. Within the space I wanted to have both material details such as candles, the display of names, and a video projection, alongside the performative notions including the act of lighting the candles, the bringing together and presence of the relatives of these women within the space, the site-specificity of the venue<sup>1</sup>, the eventual extinguishing of the flames, my sharing through discussion of the journey, and the significance of streaming the performance online for those who wanted to see the work outwith its physical location . In this work, through performance and installation, the narratives and themes of the research developed another layer of meaning through their collective assemblage.

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<sup>1</sup> Located beside the Broomielaw which was a prominent route for boats arriving

The work took place at Film City, a location selected as a result of being one, which held resonance with many of the women who had attended the discussions at Glasgow Women's Library. Film City had been formally Govan Town Hall and along with playing host to many community events, was physically situated on the banks of the Broomielaw passageway, where boats from Ireland would have frequently transported people back and forth to Ireland, including my own grandparents<sup>2</sup>.

The sculptural element of the work involved placing a long row of candles around the inner courtyard of the building. The candles mirrored the original candle used through the journey, all being this same style of white tea light. The commencement of the performance would be signalled once I began to light each of these candles in turn<sup>3</sup>. Each candle within the space represented the name of a woman whose name had been submitted to the work<sup>4</sup>. Amongst these candles I placed the original candle, which had been initially lit in front of Agnes's family cottage at Tra Na Rosann, and had then travelled around each of the departure points featured in my recent journey across Ireland. The new candles were each estimated to burn for four hours, with the original intended to burn for as long as remained following its journey so far.

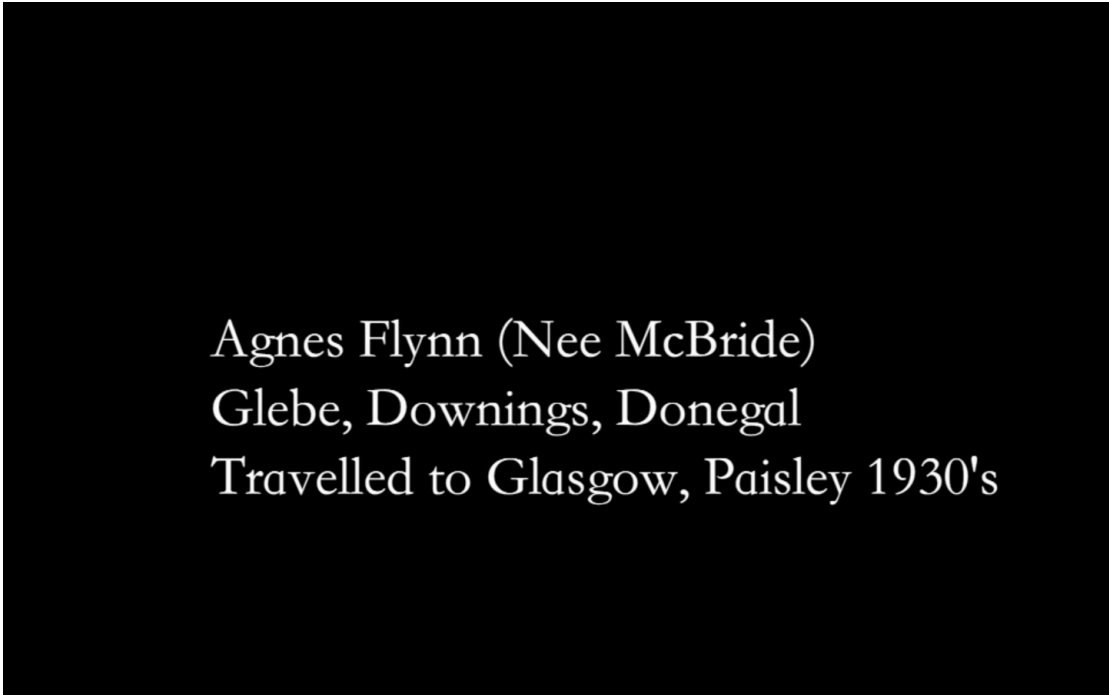
Screened to the side of this collection of candles was a video piece which moved through each of the names of the women whose individual candle was burning, displaying text revealing details and dates of each of their departures and arrivals (see below). These dates, alongside the details of lands departed and water crossed, appeared beside each name, reminding those watching of both the physical and temporal distances covered, marking this collective mass migration.

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<sup>2</sup> Once again, a later biographical thread emerged, as on visiting the building with my parents prior to the install of the work my mother realised that tucked behind the building was the site of the convent hospital – since knocked down – where both my parents had been born.

<sup>3</sup> In keeping with the work at 91 High Street, I was intent on having the burning of the candles occur during late evening, feeling that a solemnity would be better fostered in this light, and furthermore would allow the building which is used commercially during the day to be quieter in atmosphere.

<sup>4</sup> Due to the passing on of an opportunity for those who had submitted a name to be offered through my work, I wanted each entry within the book to have its own personal flame.



Agnes Flynn (Nee McBride)  
Glebe, Downings, Donegal  
Travelled to Glasgow, Paisley 1930's

Figure 4 Still taken from video work

This temporary devotional space, as the candles were lit, was viewable from an area behind a large glazed wall, with those who came along being able to witness each candle burning in memory of each women. To the side of this viewing area, the video work played on loop, pulsing with the names of the places left, commemorating their departure and subsequent journey. Again, this arrangement of space, and the experience for the viewer within it, served to allow me to create a space, which enabled experiences and registers of distance, boundary and dedication.

Due to there being many names submitted by those who were unable to attend that evening, in the main because of the great distances from where they lived; of course a significant detail as part of the narratives of the migrations made – I decided to film the candles burning and have it playing live online. This would offer those who wished to log on to a web portal and watch as their commemorative candle was burned.

Following the lighting of the candles a discussion was held, where I talked about the work and invited any questions or reflections from those who had came along to the evening. I also wanted to have the opportunity to have an artist's talk as conversation, where details and layers regard the work could be discussed and opened up. In order to facilitate a structure of sorts I asked artist and researcher Dhiarmuid McAuilfe if he could

converse with me in the style of his own on-going archive of such<sup>5</sup>. I wanted for this discussion to be opportunity for someone with a fresh-eye to engage with the work and then prompt comment, regards that which they felt was apparent in it. It is true that I was at this stage feeling very ‘close-up’ to the work and whilst I didn’t want to detach myself from it, was interested in how Dhiarmuid would interpret the body of creative response.

Regards the developing reflection of how my creative research practice was that which described the potential for such to act in honouring, or offering the opportunity for someone to be engaged in this, one point in the evening stands out for illustrating this. One of the women who had come along to the weekly events put her hand up at the end of the artist’s talk and expressed how important it had been of her to have her mother as part of this work. She emotionally expressed that she found a great sense of peace and comfort from knowing that her mother was now remembered as *“part of something bigger”*.

An unexpected twist occurred as the work reached conclusion on the evening. As mentioned, I had positioned the original candle – which had been lit repeatedly at the various stops around Ireland– amongst this sea of newly burning candles. With each of these fresh candles having an approximately similar burn time I expected that, despite slight amounts either side, they would gradually all distinguish after four hours. This was the case, as the filmed installation gradually started showing signs of each individually going out. One candle however kept going, and continued to do so for another 70 minutes. Despite having already burned for a considerable time prior to that evening, the candle which remained burning was the original one which had travelled from the sea edge at Tra Na Rosann, and then subsequently at each point of departure around Ireland. There was a sense that this candle was resolved to remain burning with marked persistence.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://vimeo.com/uwsartistteacher3958693>