

Fellow Australians, Friends of Ireland.

We gather here this morning on the lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation to whose elders past and present we pay our respects.

My name is Jeff Kildea, Secretary of the Aisling Society of Sydney. And on behalf of Society I welcome you and thank you for coming to this special centenary commemoration.

1916 was a momentous year and over the next few months a number of significant centenaries will be commemorated, such as the Battle of the Somme, which took place in France from July to November 1916, and the conscription referendum, which took place here in Australia in October 1916.

But today we commemorate an event which began in Ireland on Easter Monday 100 years ago.

On that day at 12 noon members of the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army occupied the General Post Office in O'Connell Street, Dublin, as well as other sites

throughout the city, marking the beginning of a rising against British rule in Ireland which was to last the whole of Easter week. Although the rising was a military failure, it soon came to symbolise the aspiration of the Irish people for self-government and led ultimately to the founding of the Irish state.

Following the seizure of the GPO, the rebels raised the tricolour, which is now the national flag of Ireland, and their leader Padraig Pearse, flanked by Thomas Clarke and James Connolly, stood outside the GPO and read the Proclamation of the Irish Republic.

Although the Rising took place on the other side of the world, it also had a profound impact on the political and social life of Australia, where almost a quarter of the population were of recent Irish heritage. If, as Yeats tells us, all changed utterly in Ireland due to the Rising, the same can be said for Australia. And for that reason, it is appropriate that we here in Australia should mark the occasion.

So, this morning we commemorate the reading of the Proclamation, which took place outside the Dublin GPO on Easter Monday 1916, with a reading of the Proclamation here outside the Sydney GPO, by renowned Irish-Australian actor Maeliosa Stafford of O’Punsky’s Theatre Company.