

# Letters 1916–1923

Ordinary Lives – Extraordinary Times



## Case study – Rebecca Shackleton and her family

Use the Letters 1916-1923 database, the Irish testamentary records (link below) and the Irish Census of 1911 to answer the following questions:

1) Go to the Letters 1916-1923 search engine and find the letter sent from Lucan. Guess why the letter is so very long and was written on several consecutive days.

- At the time of the Easter Rising, the postal system in Ireland came to a temporary breakdown. Many people continued writing to their family member and friends throughout the crisis and sent all letters in one package as soon as the postal services resumed.

2) The letter was written by Rebecca Shackleton. Which family members and members of her own household does she mention?

- She speaks of a brother and a sister. Her brother is referred to as “George”. She also mentions a nephew, “Uncle Richard” and two aunts who are living in Howth. Rebecca has a cook named Ellen.

3) Use the 1911 Irish Census records (National Archives of Ireland website) and try to find out more about Rebecca Shackleton’s household at the time of the Easter Rising. How many people were residents of her home in 1911, and what was her relationship to them?

Six people lived in 18 Woodlands, Clonsilla, Dublin, at the time. Apart from her brother George, the cook Ellen Coghlan and her sister Jane Christine, another brother, John, and a servant named Elizabeth Doyle lived in the same house.

4) In her letter, Rebecca is very critical of the “Sinn Feiners” and expresses support for the British government and army. She also criticizes the way in which Catholic priests take sides with the insurgents during and after the Rising. What is her own religious affiliation, and in how far may her religious views have influenced her political stance?

Rebecca and her sibling are Quakers (Society of Friends). The Quakers are a Christian revival movement which originated in 17<sup>th</sup>-century England and held strongly pacifist views. In many countries, including Britain and the US, Quakers refused to serve in the armed forces. They rejected violent revolution.

5) Another digital resource to find out more about Irish families in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are the wills and testamentary records:

<http://www.willcalendars.nationalarchives.ie/search/cwa/index.jsp>

Use this database to find out about the financial situation of the Shackleton family and the profession of Rebecca’s brothers.

# Letters 1916–1923

Ordinary Lives – Extraordinary Times



- On 5 April 1918, Joseph Fisher Shackleton, Rebecca's father died, and left the family business and a considerable amount of money (more than £10,000) to his two sons George and John. Joseph, George and John are listed as "merchants".

6) How is the social status of the Shackleton family reflected in Rebecca's description of the Easter Rising?

- As a member of the upper middle-class, Rebecca was generally in favour of the existing order and stability. The family is able to afford servants and seems to be well-connected in the Dublin society. The Shackletons are in contact with government officials and army officers.