

Who Fears to Speak of '14–'18? Remembrance in Ireland and Australia¹

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INTRODUCTION

The First World War had a profound effect on Ireland and Australia. Both countries suffered huge losses, killed and wounded, so much so that few families or communities were unaffected. Consequently, it is a period that is etched into the social psyche of each country.²

In Australia this is evidenced physically by the profusion of war memorials across the landscape and conceptually by the vitality of the Anzac tradition, which more than ninety years after the landing at Gallipoli 'retains significant emotional power and political utility'.³ But in Ireland attitudes to the soldiers of the First World War have been deeply divided, more or less along the border that divides North from South. In the North, remembrance is observed with diligence and emotion, much as it is in Australia, though with a sectarian edge, while in the South it has been noteworthy for its near-complete absence, both physically and conceptually.

This chapter explores how the First World War has been commemorated over the years in Ireland and Australia. In particular, it will examine the interrelationship between remembrance and the expression of national identity in each country. Although for the most part remembrance in Australia has been a unifying national influence, it has at times and for a variety of reasons been contentious. Relevantly, in the context of this chapter, there were divisions along sectarian lines lasting into the 1960s. In Ireland, on the other hand, remembrance became a battleground upon which unionists and nationalists, each in their own way, continued the national struggle, particularly in Northern Ireland, long after the guns fell silent.

REMEMBRANCE IN AUSTRALIA

While most of Australia's First World War allies set aside 11 November to commemorate those who fought and died in that war,⁴ Australians have chosen to commemorate not the day the killing stopped, but the day on which for them it began – the day widely regarded as the anniversary of their national baptism of fire, the day of the landing at Gallipoli, 25 April 1915. Throughout the country, in cities, towns and suburbs, tens of thousands of Australians turn out to attend commemoration services and to march, or watch others march, in honour of those who fell in all the wars in which Australia has participated. Many Australians take the commemoration one step further and travel more than ten thousand kilometres to Turkey to be on the spot at Gallipoli where the Anzacs landed as dawn breaks on Anzac Day.

But Anzac Day has not always enjoyed the popularity it does today. In the 1950s, Anzac Cove was almost deserted on 25 April, while on the fiftieth anniversary in 1965 the question being asked in the media was whether it would continue to be observed for much longer.⁵ In the late 1960s, the anti-Vietnam War movement challenged the assumptions underlying the Anzac tradition, as did the feminist movement in the 1980s: members of the Women Against Rape campaign attempted to join in Anzac Day marches to protest against male violence and rape in war and to criticise the 'male glorification of war' they regarded as inherent in the Anzac legend.⁶

When Anzac Day was first celebrated in 1916, a march of Australian soldiers took place in London, while spontaneous unofficial activities occurred in Egypt, where there were concentrations of Australian soldiers. In Australia, a variety of small-scale events was organised by state governments and community groups. These ceremonies were the product of popular enthusiasm, with a local rather than a national focus, a pattern that continued for some years. Yet from the outset there were high hopes that Anzac Day would become a symbol of national unity.

Before the war Australian society had been divided along religious and ethnic lines with many Irish-Catholics, who made up about a quarter of the population, believing themselves to be a persecuted minority, particularly over the issue of state aid for Catholic schools. When the idea of Anzac Day was first promoted, Catholics enthusiastically endorsed it, seeing it as a portent of a new Australia in which they might find acceptance. A Catholic newspaper the *Freeman's Journal*, in an editorial subtitled 'The birth of a nation', opined effusively:

We were Australian in name, and we had a flag, but we had been taught by our politicians not to trust ourselves – we were constantly

admonished by our daily journals to remember that we were nothing better than a joint in the tail of a great Empire... The Empire Day orators had a better hearing than the faithful souls who clung to Australia Day and gave special honour to their own starry banner.

Anzac Day has changed all that. The Australian flag has been brought from the garret and has been hoisted on a lofty tower in the full sight of its own people. No matter how the war may end – and it can only end one way – we are at last a nation, with one heart, one soul, and one thrilling aspiration... Anzac Day and Australia Day, honoured by hundreds of thousands of deeply-stirred people – what a great change this is!⁷

But as the editor was penning those words, news of the Easter Rising was beginning to reach Australia. Irish-Australian Catholics initially deplored the rising as misguided and a threat to the promised implementation of Irish home rule. However, following the execution of the leaders and the imposition of martial law, they became quite critical of British rule in Ireland, in turn provoking a Protestant backlash that saw sectarianism in Australia, dormant since the outbreak of war, flare up and intensify, particularly during the conscription debates of 1916 and 1917. By 1920, interdenominational relations in Australia were at flashpoint, even infecting relations between soldiers who a few years before had been serving shoulder to shoulder in the trenches. In November that year, Catholic returned soldiers formed a separate ex-servicemen's organisation because of perceived anti-Catholic bigotry of the Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA).⁸

For years after the war, Catholic ex-servicemen refused to participate in some Anzac Day ceremonies.⁹ This was not because they disapproved of remembrance as such, but rather because as Catholics they were forbidden by Church teaching of the time from attending interdenominational religious services of any kind, and the main Anzac Day ceremonies included such a service. In the case of Sydney, for instance, this meant that Catholic ex-servicemen would start out marching with their units but would then proceed to St Mary's Cathedral to attend mass while their Protestant comrades continued to Hyde Park or the Domain for the official ceremony there.¹⁰ The withdrawal of Catholic ex-servicemen from such ceremonies reinforced Protestant impressions of Catholic exclusiveness and raised suspicions as to the reasons for their reservation, while Catholics felt excluded because the organisers insisted on including a combined religious service as part of the commemoration.

Finding an acceptable solution to the problem was not easy. In 1938 Catholic ex-servicemen in Melbourne persuaded the RSSILA to substitute

a civic service for the combined religious service. Archbishop Mannix applauded the initiative, but Protestant clergy boycotted the new service, protesting that it was no longer a Christian ceremony. In Sydney, it was not until 1962 that the issue was resolved by a compromise which, though simple, illustrated the absurdity of the stand-off. The ceremony was to include a religious service, but the prayers would be said by leaders of the armed services and the RSSILA, while a religious leader would give the Anzac address, which would be patriotic and not religious.^{xi}

But in the decade after the war, provincialism rather than sectarianism posed the greatest threat to Anzac Day becoming a symbol of national unity. Not until 1921 did Prime Minister William Hughes express interest in a national celebration, a suggestion the RSSILA took up and promoted among the states. It was another two years before the states agreed at the 1923 Premiers' Conference that Anzac Day should be Australia's national day of remembrance and that it should be celebrated on 25 April. They also decided that each state should take its own steps to implement the day's observance. In 1919, Western Australia had been the first state to declare Anzac Day a public holiday. In 1923, the Commonwealth government made it a holiday, but only for federal public servants. Not until the end of the decade did all the states pass the necessary legislation to make it a public holiday across the country.

The emerging national focus of Anzac Day was boosted by the inauguration of the Australian War Memorial at Canberra on Anzac Day 1929. However, the project progressed slowly, with the building not being completed and open to the public until 1941. The inauguration ceremony itself sent a mixed message. Prime Minister Stanley Bruce said that the memorial was 'destined to stand as a symbol of Australia's nationhood'. However, Governor-General Lord Stonehaven 'spoke of the spirit of sacrifice displayed by "more than 60,000 Australian soldiers [who] had died to save the institutions and the birthright of all those who inhabited British soil"'.¹² In some people's minds, the link between the nation and the empire was still strong. The Catholic Church was not represented at the ceremony, a fact that historian Joan Beaumont attributes to the legacy of the divisive conscription debates.¹³ However, the absence was more likely to have been due to the order of the ceremony, which included prayers and bible readings by Protestant ministers of religion.¹⁴

In the meantime, local communities had demonstrated their desire to remember those who had fought and died in the Great War by erecting war memorials. The popularity of the movement to erect memorials is evidenced by the presence in almost every city, town and suburb across the country of a memorial as a 'community's statement of bereavement, pride and thanksgiving'.¹⁵ Although there were divisions in Australian society,

those divisions related not so much to remembrance itself, but rather to the manner in which people of different ethno-religious backgrounds might participate in the forms of remembrance. Ken Inglis has written: 'The making of the Great War memorials in Australia was a quest for the right way, materially and spiritually, to honour the soldiers.'¹⁶

Inglis, whose detailed study of Australian war memorials is itself a monumental work, cites many instances where divisiveness impacted on the movement. For instance, in Boorowa, in western New South Wales, where there was a large Irish Catholic population, it was not until 1933 that a memorial was erected because Protestants and Catholics could not find common cause about its meaning. Eventually, the RSSILA stepped in and built a memorial clock tower.¹⁷ In Moruya, on the New South Wales south coast, in a district with a high proportion of Irish Catholics, no standalone public memorial was ever erected, though in 1992 a small memorial was built as part of the memorial hall of the Returned and Services League (the name by which the RSSILA is known today). The town had voted two to one against conscription, and the 1917 referendum campaign had witnessed local violence. Private memorials were erected in the state school and in the Protestant churches, but not in the Catholic churches. Inglis has written: 'Moruya's missing memorial is itself a kind of monument, to wartime division so painful that people unwilling to risk a recurrence tacitly agree not to put the matter on their civic agenda.'¹⁸

Some towns ended up with two memorials. One example is Wagga Wagga, in south-western New South Wales. Two committees were established, one Protestant and the other Catholic. One committee erected a pillar, the other an arch. The pillar was erected in 1922 and the arch five years later. But by the time of the later ceremony, the rupture had been healed and the chairman of the pillar committee spoke as mayor at the unveiling of the arch.¹⁹

There were, however, some individuals who disapproved of the remembrance movement itself, and either stayed away from commemorations or remained silent if they were obliged to attend as part of their official duties. An example of the latter is Joseph Lyons, son of Irish-born Catholic parents, who had led the Tasmanian anti-conscription campaign in 1916 and who as Premier of his state sat on platforms at the unveiling of monuments but did not speak.²⁰ Lyons later became Prime Minister in a non-Labor government during the 1930s. Jack Bailey, a Labor member of parliament and a wartime anticonscriptionist, absented himself from remembrance ceremonies.²¹ But opposition of this kind was not united and motives were mixed: some were pacifists, some socialists, some Irish nationalists, while some simply believed the money would be better spent on those who had returned and were now in need.

Such examples are the exceptions that made the rule that Australians tended to look positively on the sacrifice of the soldiers of the Great War. Partly this was because both empire loyalists and Australian nationalists could interpret the war to suit their own preconceptions: it was either a wonderful victory for the British empire or it was an experience out of which the Australian nation emerged. Either way, it was something to be remembered.

REMEMBRANCE IN IRELAND

While the Irish share with Australians a self-irony that often elevates defeat into victory, nationalist Ireland, unlike Australia, does not commemorate Gallipoli even though its soldiers were slaughtered in their thousands in much the same needless fashion as the Anzacs. In *The Irish at the Front*, an exaltation of the Irish contribution to the war effort published in 1916, Michael MacDonagh made the following prediction (wrongly as it turned out): ‘Because of those [Irish] dead Gallipoli will ever be to the Irish race a place of glorious pride and sorrow.’²²

In fact, prior to the mid-1980s, when Irish historians rediscovered the Great War, the popular understanding in the South was that Ireland had played only a minor part in the war. Most people in the twenty-six counties were infinitely more acquainted with the rising in Easter week in which sixty-four rebels and 254 Irish civilians were killed than with the four years of the Great War that claimed the lives of over 35,000 Irishmen. The harsh treatment of the leaders of the rising ‘created an atmosphere in which the achievements of Irish soldiers in the Great War was [*sic*] never glorified’.²³ Furthermore, in seeking to establish its own sense of nationhood during the postwar years, a nationhood which, unlike Australia’s, claims an ancient heritage predating English occupation, ‘the Irish Free State had little use for the memory of Irishmen who served in the British army’.²⁴

Far from being honored as returning heroes of the “war for civilization”, they were a distinct embarrassment to the governments of the independent Irish state, whose credentials rested on resistance to recruitment and, indeed, outright rebellion against British rule.²⁵

It is this point that so clearly distinguishes the Irish and Australian experience.

After federation had united the six Australian colonies the people of this self-governing dominion began searching for a sense of nationhood to go with their new country, and they believed they had found it in the blood

sacrifice of Gallipoli and the western front. Although they had fought in the empire's cause, they did so for Australia as members of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF), a force which through the digger legend had developed a sense of identity that was unique and superior. Although Irish soldiers also developed a sense of their superiority as warriors, not unlike that of the Australians, the three Irish divisions did not possess or maintain a distinctive national identity in the same way as did the five Australian divisions. From the start, the 36th (Ulster) Division saw itself as exclusively Protestant and unionist, while the 16th (Irish) Division was 'nationalist and catholic Ireland's most distinctive contribution to the British war effort'.²⁶ Moreover, both the 16th and the 10th (Irish) Divisions included British units and individuals. As the war progressed, the Irishness of these divisions declined even further as English and Indian reinforcements replaced Irish casualties. After its near-destruction at Gallipoli, the 10th (Irish) Division spent the rest of the war in the backwater of the eastern theatre, eventually becoming an Indian formation in May 1918, while the 16th (Irish) Division suffered the ignominy of annihilation during the German offensive of March 1918.²⁷ By contrast, the Australian divisions ended the war on a high note with a series of brilliant victories, the most outstanding being the Battle of Hamel on 4 July 1918, which diverted attention from the symptoms of decline, such as mutinies, that were beginning to manifest themselves due to the lack of adequate reinforcements.

Nevertheless, in Ireland, collective amnesia of the war, which F.X. Martin called 'the Great Oblivion', did not set in immediately.²⁸ Some public memorials were erected and, although not as ubiquitous as in the North or in Australia, they can be seen in towns such as Bray, Cahir, Drogheda, Longford, Sligo, Tullamore, Whitegate and Cork city, as well as Dublin. But often they were dedicated in a manner that emphasised imperial over national sentiment, thus alienating Irish nationalists, who objected to having the Union Jack waved in their faces.²⁹

Between the wars, Armistice Day was commemorated in the South, with masses being offered up for the war dead and poppies being sold openly in Dublin, the money usually going to ex-servicemen's charities. Throughout the 1920s, Armistice Day services in Dublin drew large crowds, including an estimated 70,000 in 1924, though a sour note was struck in 1919, when students from Trinity College, singing 'God Save the King', clashed with students from University College, singing the 'Soldier's Song', a nationalist song soon to become the Irish national anthem. Ordinary citizens often found themselves harassed from both sides by aggressive poppy-sellers or poppy-snatchers.

Construction of the National War Memorial at Islandbridge near the Phoenix Park, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, an Englishman who had

designed the cenotaph in London, began in 1931. Even so, the project was not without controversy. The site was deliberately located on the outskirts of the city rather than in a prominent position nearer the city centre. A bill introduced in the Senate in 1927, proposing to erect it at Merrion Square, had been withdrawn in the face of nationalist opposition. The memorial was completed by ex-servicemen in 1938, but the opening ceremony was postponed indefinitely and did not occur until more than half a century later.

In its efforts to create a national identity, the new Irish state enshrined the Easter Rising as the country's defining historical moment. Public acknowledgement of Ireland's participation in 'England's war' was discouraged, with the result that Armistice Day services in Dublin came to be regarded as an outmoded celebration of Ireland's imperial past. From 1933, no government representative attended the ceremonies. Ireland's part in the Great War was no longer seen as its contribution to the defence of small nations as John Redmond had envisaged; rather it was 'a great mistake, a profound betrayal'.³⁰ Even in 1992, Terence Denman wrote:

The fate of tens of thousands of patriotic Irishmen who, in response to the granting of home rule, chose to follow a different path to Irish nationhood by volunteering to serve with the British armed forces rarely attracts more than a passing reference, and that often pejorative.³¹

What might have served as a bridge between Ireland and the empire, even while the fetters on Irish independence were being loosened, was gradually obliterated from public memory. As if to symbolise the dominant mood, the National War Memorial after the Second World War was allowed to fall into a state of dilapidation. In 1986, Jane Leonard described it in these terms:

Today the Irish National War Memorial is in a sorry state. The memorial records have long since been destroyed by vandals, the fountains are dry, the graffiti seem ineradicable. The most constant visitors are horses grazing and dogs being exercised... In a sense the bleak granite, decapitated columns, broken-down hedges, rotted pergolas, damaged fountains and empty pavilions are aptly evocative of a long-abandoned battlefield. Neglect verging upon desecration symbolizes the persistent indifference to the War and its legacy of successive administrations, anxious to guard the people from historical awareness lest they remember too much.³²

It was as if the Irish war dead had once again found themselves in no-man's-land – this time a political no-man's-land. Stephen Gwynn, a poet

and Irish Parliamentary Party MP who had fought in the war, wrote:

We trod our way to the end;
We were part of victory:
And in the face of the world
Ireland disowned us.³³

In Northern Ireland ‘memory of the war soon became an ideological football kicked around for the sake of political expediency’.³⁴ The Great War was appropriated as another sacred chapter in unionist mythography, with Ulster Protestants commemorating their war dead as defenders of the empire, where ‘death on the battlefield is commemorated as some sort of ritualistic act reaffirming Ulster Protestants’ covenant with the Union and faith in their preordained political destiny’.³⁵ This manifest destiny was irreparably linked with the sacrifice of the 36th (Ulster) Division on the first day of the Somme, an event whose significance for unionists is akin to that of Gallipoli for Australians, being remembered not as a disastrous British failure but as a glorious chapter in the quest for communal identity.³⁶

Memorial services in the North took on an imperial and sectarian tone, with the Somme becoming as emblematic as the Boyne. Protestant churches installed memorials, while Catholic churches in the main did not. Remembrance Day services employed imperialistic ritual and were often organised by the local Orange Lodge, deterring attendance by nationalists fearful that their participation might be construed as an act of solidarity with unionism. Catholic ex-servicemen formed the Irish Nationalist Veterans Association separate from the Royal British Legion and organised their own church services. The poppy became synonymous with the Orange lily, seen by nationalists as a supremacist emblem commemorating ‘their’ sacrifices but not ‘ours’. It was also regarded, both North and South, as an imperial icon. The identification of remembrance with Protestantism, imperialism and unionism served to reinforce northern nationalists’ indifference by deterring their participation, effectively hijacking Irish memory of the war for the unionist cause.³⁷

Of the war years, it is 1916 that holds a special place in the memory of the people of Ireland, much as 1915 does for Australians. But, whereas Australians look back to 1915, with its evocation of Gallipoli and the Anzacs, as a source of unity, remembrance of 1916 for the people of Ireland is a source of division. Two major events of that year in Irish history, the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme, have become exclusively iconic for nationalists and unionists, respectively. As David Fitzpatrick has pointed out in *The Two Irelands 1912–1939*,³⁸ both events share a sense of fighting against overwhelming odds, an acceptance of

defeat with dignity, the suffering of appalling losses, and the sense of martyrdom for a just cause. According to Fran Brearton in *The Great War in Irish Poetry*:

The Battle of the Somme and the Easter Rising functioned, in their different ways, as part of the origin myths of Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State respectively. They became events which were held to encapsulate the inherent qualities of the true Ulster Protestant (proud, reticent, unimaginative) or true Irish Catholic (spiritual, voluble, imaginative), oppositional stereotypes used and abused on both sides. But they have this in common: they simplify interpretations of history, and in doing so leave completely out of the equation those Irish soldiers who fought in the Great War and yet were committed to an independent Ireland, or indeed those who fought for no complex political reason at all – those, in other words, whose actions cannot be easily explained in one or other version of events.³⁹

By viewing the Easter Rising as part of the Irish experience of the Great War, rather than as an event independent of it, we can begin to understand how it came to displace the memory of the 10th and 16th Divisions, in much the same way as northern remembrance of the Somme has displaced memory of the 36th Division's other battles and obliterated memory of the 10th and 16th Divisions, in which many northerners fought and died. A similar phenomenon has occurred in Australia, where Gallipoli has displaced other battles in which the AIF fought. How many Australians have heard, for instance, of the battle of Hamel, arguably the finest Australian military achievement of the war? The Easter Rising, as it came to be imagined with all the overlays of heroic romanticism and blood sacrifice, provided a memory that was both compelling and effective in bolstering a sense of national identity. Thirty-five thousand Irishmen might have died at Gallipoli and in Flanders and Picardy, but as far as most nationalists were concerned they had been simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

As he prepared to leave Ireland for the front, Tom Kettle, an Irish Parliamentary Party MP who had been in Dublin during Easter week 1916, referred to the rebels and lamented: 'These men will go down in history as heroes and martyrs, and I will go down – if I go down at all – as a bloody British officer.'⁴⁰ He was killed a few weeks later during the 16th Division's attack on Ginchy on 9 September. A memorial to him in St Stephen's Green was erected only after controversy, including objections to the words 'Killed in France' from the Commissioners of Public Works, who, according to historian Keith Jeffery, feared 'possible political

repercussions'.⁴¹ Francis Ledwidge, another nationalist soldier-poet, was recovering from wounds received while fighting with the 10th Division when he penned his famous 'Lament for Thomas McDonagh', one of the executed leaders of the Rising. Ledwidge was killed in July 1917 during the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele).

Today, in Northern Ireland, the powerful symbolism of the Easter Rising and the Somme is exploited by the propagandists. Loyalist murals in Belfast depicting scenes of battle during the First World War seek to reinforce tribal identity. Jim Haughey in *The First World War in Irish Poetry* points out that 'Memory of the war has been submerged by the subsequent mythmaking industry of unionism and nationalism... Surely these divergent memories of the Great War have played their part... in maintaining current political divisions in Ireland.'⁴²

A Remembrance Sunday ceremony was the occasion for one of the worst atrocities of the recent Troubles. Shortly before 11am on 8 November 1987, as the citizens of Enniskillen in County Fermanagh were assembling at the cenotaph for the remembrance service, a bomb exploded, killing eleven people and injuring sixty-three. The bombing drew immediate condemnation from around the world. Apart from deploring the number killed and injured and the fact that the victims were mostly civilians – men, women and children – many critics of the IRA's tactics on that day, including Irish nationalists, singled out for particular abhorrence the fact that the victims had come to the cenotaph to commemorate their war dead.

THE RHETORIC OF REMEMBRANCE

But remembrance is not simply about honouring the dead. It forms 'a potent element in the endorsement of a particular political culture or the creation of an alternative one'.⁴³ Its power derives from the fact that it evokes a sense of duty owed by the survivors to those who died 'for us'. But it is a duty without legal or moral force, imagined rather than real. And in the same way that nations derive their power as imagined communities, it is the imagined duty to the dead which empowers remembrance.⁴⁴ While the community is exhorted to further the cause for which 'they' died, so that their sacrifice is not in vain, it is those who control the rituals of remembrance who define the cause for which the remembered were 'faithful until death'. And it is they who are in a position to deploy its power to further the interests of a section of the community.

James Loughlin illustrates the phenomenon with the following extract from the *Belfast News Letter* published in 1920:

The war is now, happily, a thing of the past, but we can profit by its lessons, and one of the most important of these is that no community can be deprived of its birthright if it is sufficiently firm in its determination to defend and maintain it. The two minutes of silence was an act of solemn remembrance – remembrance of the men who were faithful until death and recollection of the duty laid upon us, for whom they died, to see that their sacrifice was not in vain.⁴⁵

Because the unionists controlled the rituals of remembrance in Ulster, they were able to use remembrance of the war dead to further the interests of unionism during the critical post-war period when various forms of constitutional arrangement were being considered by the British government, including an all-Ireland parliament. The subtext of the above quotation is that these men died to defend and maintain Ulster as an integral part of the United Kingdom, free from the tyranny that would inevitably flow from the grant of home rule to an all-Ireland parliament. In other words, the duty laid upon ‘us’, the survivors, is to see that their sacrifice was not in vain, by mobilising to defeat home rule. The political quality of remembrance in post-war Ulster can be seen in stark relief when one considers the thousands of Irishmen from that province who enlisted to further the cause of home rule, as John Redmond and Belfast Nationalist MP Joe Devlin had urged them to do. Is there no duty laid upon the survivors to see that their sacrifice was not in vain? And what of those who enlisted without regard to a cause, but did so out of a sense of adventure or for economic reasons? Are they less worthy of remembrance?

Remembrance in Northern Ireland is not so much unique as polarised: its spectrum of public discourse lacking the shades of grey that moderate differences in most other communities. In Australia, too, remembrance serves a political purpose, but one that accommodates a broader cross-section of the community.

In Ireland in recent years, however, the rituals and rhetoric of remembrance have been changing. This transformation has coincided with a revolution in Irish historiography in which traditional interpretations have given way to a more complex, varied and inclusive narrative of Ireland’s past. The change in attitudes to remembrance has been symbolised in the South by the condition of the National War Memorial, which underwent a major restoration in the 1990s. Attempts have been made in the North to bridge the gap between unionist and nationalist attitudes to remembrance and in the South to dispel ignorance of Ireland’s part in the First World War. In the 1990s a spate of publications, some by journalist-historians whose work is accessible to a mass readership, raised the awareness of the Irish people to the significant contribution which

nationalist Ireland made during the war. These included books by Tom Johnstone, Terence Denman, Tom Dooley and Myles Dungan.⁴⁶

In 1996, plans were announced to build a memorial to commemorate Irish war dead in the form of an Irish round tower at Mesen (formerly Messines) in Belgium, where in June 1917 the 16th (Irish) Division and 36th (Ulster) Division had fought alongside each other. As far back as 1921, a monument had been erected to the 36th Division at Thiepval, where the Ulstermen had suffered so terribly on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. Memorials had also been erected in 1923 to the 10th (Irish) Division at Salonika and in 1926 to the 16th (Irish) Division at Guillemont in France and at Wytshaete in Belgium. But the round tower was to be a memorial to all Irishmen who had served, regardless of politics or religion. On 11 November 1998, the Irish Peace Park at Mesen was dedicated in a ceremony in which the Irish President, Mary McAleese, stood beside Queen Elizabeth. Just a few days earlier President McAleese had been seen wearing a poppy while laying a wreath at London's Cenotaph.⁴⁷

On both sides of the border there have been attempts to find common ground. At Newtownards, a unionist stronghold east of Belfast, the Somme Heritage Museum tells the story not only of the 36th (Ulster) Division, but of the 10th and the 16th Divisions as well. At the 1996 West Belfast Festival, an annual cultural festival organised by the nationalist community, one of the topics discussed was 'on the lessons of 1916 – both the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme'. Seamus Breslin, from a nationalist area of Derry, has written numerous articles in the press on the contribution of Derry nationalists in the First World War.⁴⁸ However, as yet, he does not participate in the official Remembrance Day ceremony as he considers it totally British in nature; instead, after the service, he and others lay a wreath for 'everybody'.⁴⁹

There is still a long way to go, and, in this highly contested aspect of Irish political and cultural life, mutual ground can be hard to find. In 2002, the Sinn Féin Lord Mayor of Belfast, Alex Maskey, laid a wreath at the cenotaph on the anniversary of the Somme – a gesture that would have been unimaginable a few years before. However, Maskey performed the ritual two hours before the official ceremony. While some unionists accepted the gesture as a step forward, others took it as an insult, arguing that he should have attended the main ceremony, to which Maskey's supporters replied that nationalists might consider doing so if the ceremony were made inclusive. At the same time, many diehard republicans remain opposed to honouring Irishmen killed in the empire's war in the same manner as those who died fighting for Ireland's liberation.⁵⁰

In the South, a number of groups have been formed to promote the memory of the Irish war dead, such as the Royal Dublin Fusiliers

Association and the Fame of Tipperary Group. In recent years, war memorials have been erected: at Bandon, County Cork, in 1996; at Leighlinbridge, County Carlow, in 2002; and at Tipperary town in 2005. In October 2006, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern unveiled a new war memorial at Fermoy, County Cork, saying in the course of his speech:

As a country, we owe it to the many Irish men who fought and died [in the First World War] to remember the part that they played... Those that survived came back to a very changed Ireland that did not value their sacrifice. Those that died in the battlefield came close to being completely forgotten by the following generations. It is right and proper that in more recent times the memory of these men has been resurrected and proper tribute has been paid to them.⁵¹

Philip Lecane of Dún Laoghaire has been instrumental in having a memorial erected to remember those who perished in October 1918 on the *RMS Leinster*. There are exhibits on the First World War at the Waterford County Museum, Dungarvan, and the Athy Heritage Centre in County Kildare. In October 2006 the National Museum of Ireland opened an exhibition at the Collins barracks museum in Dublin which includes displays on Irish soldiers in the First World War.

Remembrance Day is commemorated each year in St Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral, Dublin, under the auspices of the Royal British Legion, though it has not enjoyed popular support, despite the presence in recent years of President McAleese. However, a number of cities and towns have recently revived remembrance services: in 1999 a remembrance ceremony was held at the Drogheda War Memorial for the first time in thirty years;⁵² in 2003, the Sinn Féin mayor of Sligo attended the remembrance service at the town's war memorial;⁵³ in 2005, Cork's Lord Mayor attended that city's wreath laying ceremony.⁵⁴

In a gesture of inclusiveness, Belvedere College, the Jesuit school in Dublin, unveiled a memorial plaque in 2003, which lists the names of old Belvederians who died in all Irish wars and civil strife. The names include those who fought and died on opposing sides in the Easter Rising and in the Civil War, as well as those from the two world wars.

At a popular level, Sebastian Barry's *A Long Long Way*, a best-selling novel about the Dublin Fusiliers during the war, is informing a new Irish generation of their long-forgotten past.⁵⁵ But perhaps the most significant recent development was the Irish government's commemoration of the ninetieth anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, which involved a ceremony in Dublin attended by the President and the Taoiseach, as well as ministerial representation at commemorations in France. It was the first

time the Irish state has commemorated that battle, so long the exclusive preserve of unionists.⁵⁶ As yet there is no official commemoration in the Republic of Ireland of the Gallipoli campaign in which thousands of Irishmen died. Nevertheless, there is an Anzac Day service in Dublin, organised alternately by the Australian embassy and the New Zealand Irish Association. The ceremony involves a church service and reception. In 2006, the Irish government was represented for the first time by a minister of state, while senior Irish military officers have attended for a number of years, as have members of Irish ex-service associations.

CONCLUSION

In Australia, remembrance on the whole has served to unify the nation, though at times sections of the population have been marginalised. In Ireland, however, it has contributed to the division between unionists and nationalists, North and South, Protestants and Catholics, though in recent years tentative steps have been taken to devise memorials and forms of remembrance that are more inclusive and less contested. Perhaps, as a result, people across Ireland might find sufficient common ground to commemorate together the sacrifice of too many lives cut short or devastated in the conflicts of the past. Whether we can hope for more is hard to say. As President Mary McAleese observed in 1998 in relation to the Irish Peace Park at Messines, 'Its message of reconciliation is clear, but we must not forget that reconciliation is made up of a series of steps – it is a journey, not an event.'⁵²

NOTES

1. The chapter title is a reference to 'Who Fears to Speak of '98?', the popular name of John Kells Ingram's poem 'The Memory of the Dead', written in 1843 to commemorate those who died in the rising of 1798. It became a popular nationalist ballad.
2. In relation to remembrance of the war generally, see, for example, Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (eds), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); T.G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson, Michael Roper (eds), *The Politics of War Memory and Commemorations* (London: Routledge, 2000).
3. Joan Beaumont, *Australia's War 1914–18* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995), p.xvii.
4. This day, variously known as Armistice Day or Remembrance Day, marks the armistice that ended the fighting in 1918. In some places it is observed on the nearest Sunday and referred to as Remembrance Sunday.
5. Jenny Macleod, 'The Fall and Rise of Anzac Day: 1965 and 1990 Compared', *War and Society*, 20 (May 2002), pp.149–68.
6. Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.189–90, 200.

7. *Freeman's Journal*, 27 April 1916, p.22.
8. Letter from the General Secretary of the Catholic Returned Soldiers and Sailors Association, published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and republished in the *Catholic Press*, 22 June 1922, p.15.
9. Joan Beaumont, 'The Politics of a Divided Society', in Beaumont, *Australia's War*, p.56.
10. John Luttrell, 'Cardinal Gilroy's Anzac Day Problem', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 85 (June 1999), pp.1–19.
11. Luttrell, 'Cardinal Gilroy's Anzac Day Problem'.
12. Graham Seal, *Inventing Anzac: The Digger and National Mythology* (St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2004), p.119.
13. Beaumont, 'Politics of a Divided Society', p.56.
14. K.S. Inglis, 'A Sacred Place: The Making of the Australian War Memorial', *War & Society* 3/2 (1985), pp.99–126 at p.109.
15. K.S. Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2001), p.124.
16. *Ibid.*, p.128.
17. *Ibid.*, p.227.
18. *Ibid.*, pp.227–8, 384–5
19. *Ibid.*, p.128.
20. *Ibid.*, p.224.
21. *Ibid.*, p.226.
22. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916), p.102.
23. Mark McCarthy (ed.), *Ireland's Heritages: Critical Perspectives on Memory and Identity* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), p.22.
24. Jim Haughey, *The First World War in Irish Poetry* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002), p.37.
25. Charles Townshend, 'Religion, War, and Identity in Ireland', *The Journal of Modern History* 76/4 (December 2004), pp.882–902, at p. 890.
26. Terence Denman, *Ireland's Unknown Soldiers: The 16th (Irish) Division in the Great War, 1914–1918* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1992), p.17.
27. For a history of the changing national identity of the Irish divisions during the war see Nicholas Perry, 'Nationality in the Irish Infantry Regiments in the First World War', *War & Society* 12/1 (May 1994), pp.65–95.
28. F.X. Martin, '1916 – Myth, Fact and Mystery', *Studia Hibernica*, No. 7, pp.7–124 at p.68.
29. Keith Jeffery, *Ireland and the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chapter 4 and David Fitzpatrick, 'Commemoration in the Irish Free State: A Chronicle of Embarrassment', in Ian McBride, *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.184–203 discuss forms of remembrance of the First World War in the South. See also Ewan Morris, *Our Own Devices: National Symbols and Political Conflict in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2005), pp.153–66.
30. D.G. Boyce, "'That Party Politics Should Divide Our Tents": Nationalism, Unionism and the First World War', in Adrian Gregory and Senia Pasetta (eds), *Ireland and the Great War: 'A War to Unite Us All'?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp.190–216, at p.202.
31. Denman, *Ireland's Unknown Soldiers*, p.16.
32. Jane Leonard, 'Lest We Forget' in David Fitzpatrick, *Ireland and the First World War* (Dublin: Trinity History Workshop Publications, 1986), p.67.
33. Quoted in Haughey, *The First World War in Irish Poetry*, p.206.
34. *Ibid.*, p.37.
35. *Ibid.*, p.42.
36. See David Officer, "'For God and for Ulster": The Ulsterman on the Somme', in McBride, *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, pp.160–83.
37. James Loughlin, 'Mobilising the Sacred Dead: Ulster Unionism, the Great War and the

- Politics of Remembrance', in Gregory and Paseta (eds), *Ireland and the Great War*, pp.133–54.
38. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.61.
 39. Fran Brearton, *The Great War in Irish Poetry: W.B. Yeats to Michael Longley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.37–8.
 40. Quoted in Boyce, 'That Party Politics Should Divide Our Tents', p.201.
 41. Jeffery, *Ireland and the Great War*, p.128.
 42. Haughey, *The First World War in Irish Poetry*, p.61.
 43. P. Travers, 'Our Fenian Dead: Glasnevin Cemetery and the Genesis of the Republican Funeral', in J. Kelly and U. MacGearailt (eds), *Dublin and Dubliners* (Dublin, 1990) p.52, quoted in Nuala C. Johnson, 'The Spectacle of Memory: Ireland's Remembrance of the Great War, 1919', *Journal of Historical Geography* 25/1 (1999), pp.36–56 at p.37.
 44. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).
 45. Loughlin, 'Mobilising the Sacred Dead', pp.142–3.
 46. Tom Johnstone, *Orange, Green and Khaki: The Story of the Irish Regiments in the Great War, 1914–18* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992); Denman, *Ireland's Unknown Soldiers*, 1992; Thomas P. Dooley, *Irishmen or English Soldiers?: The Times and World of a Southern Irish Man (1876–1916) Enlisting in the British Army During the First World War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995); Myles Dungan, *Irish Voices from the Great War* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1995); Myles Dungan, *They Shall Grow Not Old: Irish Soldiers and the Great War* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997).
 47. Haughey, *The First World War in Irish Poetry*, p.38.
 48. See, for example, *Derry Journal*, 12 January 1996, p.17; 23 January 1998, p.22; 3 August 2004, p.17; *Andersonstown News*, 30 October 1999, p.32.
 49. Email communications with the author.
 50. See reports in the BBC News Archive at <<http://news.bbc.co.uk>>.
 51. <<http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/index.asp?locID=200&docID=2920>> [accessed 29 November 2006].
 52. <<http://community.channel4.com/eve/ubb.x/a/tpc/f/8896096411/m/683608464/p/18>> [accessed 10 October 2006].
 53. *Sligo Weekender*, 18 November 2003. <<http://archives.tcm.ie/sligoweekender/2003/11/18/story15300.asp>> [Accessed 10 October 2006].
 54. <http://www.corkcorp.ie/news/archive/2005/remembrance_day.shtml> [accessed 10 October 2006].
 55. (London: Faber & Faber, 2005). It was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize for 2005.
 56. In 2006, the Taoiseach's website added a page entitled 'Irish Soldiers in the First World War', which includes a reasonably detailed narrative of Ireland's role in the war <<http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/index.asp?docID=2517>> [accessed 10 October 2006].
 57. Quoted in McCarthy (ed.), *Ireland's Heritages*, p.27.