Anzacs and Ireland: Exploring the Relationship Between Ireland and Australia During World War 1*

Introduction

1Australia is arguably the most Irish country outside of Ireland. This claim might come as a surprise to those used to looking across the Atlantic to the great Irish American cities of Boston and New York. But, whereas in America the Irish tended to band together in such places, thus magnifying their presence, in Australia they were more widely dispersed throughout the community.

Even though there were clearly identifiable geographical concentrations of Irish in Australia, particularly in Sydney and Melbourne and in some rural areas, Irish ghettoes did not develop in the way that characterised Hibernian settlement in the United States.

While it is true that from Ireland's point of view Australia was not a significant emigration destination, with only about 5 per cent of nineteenth-century Irish emigrants going there, from Australia's point of view Ireland was highly significant, with about a quarter of Australia's immigrants coming from Ireland.

The influence of the Irish is still seen today. You might have heard of recent floods in Australia. The towns on the east coast most affected were Lismore and Ballina. Just two of the many town names around the country that evidence Australia's Irish heritage. There is even a town, not far from Sydney, called Home Rule. In one town in rural New South Wales the Catholic Church, St Patrick's of course, has a stained-glass window dedicated to Daniel O'Connell. In statue form, the Liberator also used to grace the front of St Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne, until the then archbishop, George Pell, moved it to the rear, but replacing it with a statue of Archbishop Daniel Mannix, a native of County Cork, as the sentinel guarding the front of the cathedral.

Another indicator of Australia's pervasive Irish connections is the phone book – if you can find one these days. Flick through and you will see Irish names in abundance, with many pages devoted to the O apostrophes and the MC's and MAC's.

Yet, despite these clear and obvious links, many aspects of our shared heritage remain unfamiliar, both in Australia and in Ireland. One of them is the story of the Anzacs and Ireland during the First World War, the story I will relate to you in my talk tonight.

Terminology

Before doing so, let me explain some terminology:

2The term 'Anzac' emerged in early 1915 as an acronym for the 'Australian and New Zealand Army Corps', ANZAC, a military formation which comprised men of the 1st Australian Division and of the composite New Zealand & Australian Division, who at the end of 1914 sailed to Egypt to complete their training before going on to the Western Front. As events turned out, they were diverted to Gallipoli in Turkey as part of the Dardanelles campaign, which I will discuss shortly.

Over time the acronym ANZAC became the word 'Anzac', a term that came to refer generally to Australian and New Zealand soldiers who fought in the war. So significant is the word 'Anzac' to Australians, it is protected by law. It cannot be used in trademarks or commercially without first obtaining a licence from the government.

3Another, more colloquial, term to describe these antipodean soldiers is 'digger', which derives from the goldfields experience in both Australia and New Zealand in the mid-

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nineteenth century. The term was readily adopted by the soldiers, who spent much of their time during the war digging not for gold but for their own protection from enemy artillery.

4Another acronym I will use is AIF, which stands for the Australian Imperial Force, a new army that was raised in Australia in 1914 to be sent overseas to support Britain in the war. By 1917 it comprised five infantry divisions on the western front and five light horse brigades in the Middle East plus supporting arms and services.

Most of my research has been confined to the Australian forces but I will sometimes refer to the New Zealanders as well.

Overview

The story of the Anzacs and Ireland has many aspects. Tonight, I will cover just five of them:

1. Brothers in Arms

5The relationship between the Anzacs and Ireland began in battle, when Australian and New Zealand soldiers, literally, fought shoulder to shoulder with Irishmen at Gallipoli. Later they served together in France and Belgium and in the Middle East in battles I will briefly mention.

2. Irish Anzacs

6Many of those wearing the Australian uniform during the war were Irish born, having emigrated to the new world to make a new life, only to find themselves caught up in the troubles of the old world they thought they had left behind. I will speak about the experiences of some of these Irish Anzacs.

3. Six-Bob-a-Day Tourists

But the relationship between the Anzacs and Ireland was not confined to the battlefield. They mostly forged their connections with Ireland and its people in Ireland itself.

7Thousands of soldiers visited Ireland on leave – a brief respite from the horrors of the Western Front or the boredom of camp life in England. Mostly they spent their precious leave with family or as tourists visiting the sights in much the same way as tourists do today.

4. Diggers in Dublin

8Some found themselves caught up in the momentous events of the period such as the Easter rising. I will speak about the diggers in Dublin and the role they played in helping to suppress the rising.

Some went to Ireland to evade further war service and found themselves under the protection of Sinn Féin, while others stayed on after the war and participated in the Irish War of Independence, fighting on both sides.

5. Wattle among the Shamrocks

9Some Australian soldiers never left Ireland and are buried there. I will finish up by speaking about the dozens of Australian war graves dotted around the country – what I have called the Wattle among the Shamrocks.

So, let's get started.

Brothers in Arms

Gallipoli

10To Australians, the word 'Gallipoli' continues to resonate more than a hundred years on. The Dardanelles campaign marked the first time that soldiers of the six Australian colonies, which had federated in 1901 to form the Commonwealth of Australia, had fought together as Australians.

Some Australians regard Gallipoli as the crucible in which the Australian nation was forged. Others dispute this idea. Nevertheless, our annual veterans' commemoration day is called Anzac Day and is held on the anniversary of the landings at Gallipoli, 25 April. Anzac Day is observed as a public holiday and men and women in cities, towns and villages across the country turn out to march or watch others march in memory of those who served in all of Australia's wars. It is typical of Australia's sense of irony, probably inherited from the Irish, that we have chosen a defeat as the focus of our national commemoration.

To the Irish, who can choose from a smorgasbord of significant battles over the centuries – Clontarf, Benburb, the Boyne, Aughrim, Fontenoy – Gallipoli is not so important. In fact, until recently it was seen as an embarrassment, a reminder of Ireland's imperial subjugation. As the song reminds us, ''Twas better to die 'neath an Irish sky than at Suvla or Sedd-el-Bahr'.

But attitudes in Ireland have changed over the past twenty or thirty years. When I started my research in the early 2000s it was difficult to find any written works specifically on the Irish at Gallipoli, apart from memoirs published soon after. Today there are many scholarly works devoted to that campaign.

11One of them is Philip Lecane's fine recounting of the disastrous landing at V Beach at Sedd-el-Bahr near Cape Helles in his book *Beneath a Turkish Sky*.

While, in May 1915, Irishmen and Anzacs fought together briefly at Cape Helles in a failed attempt to advance from the beachhead, it was in August that Anzac and Irish soldiers fought alongside each other in another failed attempt to break the stalemate, this time at Suvla Bay and Ari Burnu, which had been renamed Anzac Cove.

12While two brigades of the 10th (Irish) Division landed at Suvla Bay with IX Corps, the remaining brigade, the 29th, was sent to Anzac Cove, where it took part in some of the most important battles of the August offensive, including Lone Pine and Chunuk Bair, names that are well known in Australia and New Zealand but which few would recognise in Ireland.

Gallipoli was a severe defeat for the military forces of the British Empire and was to have a profound effect on its emerging nations. Anzacs and Irishmen both came away from the peninsula convinced they had been mucked about and butchered by the incompetence of their British generals. Among the Anzac and Irish soldiers, however, there was a mutual respect.

13In his memoirs, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Jourdain of the 5th Connaught Rangers recounted how in November 1915 a party of Australian soldiers who had been evacuated wounded to England met the leader of the Irish National Party, John Redmond, while visiting the House of Commons and expressed to him their 'highest admiration for the fighting qualities of the Irish soldiers. One charge by the Connaught Rangers was, they said, the finest thing they had seen in the war'.

For Australians and New Zealanders, eager to impress the mother country of their worthiness, Gallipoli, despite the cost, had a salutary effect on the nation-building process without rupturing relations with the British Empire. In contrast, nationalist Irishmen, who sought to

impress no-one as they wanted to become not a nation so much as 'a nation once again', were not so forgiving. Separatist nationalists, who were opposed to the war, exploited the Dardanelles fiasco to whip up anti-British sentiment, while moderate nationalists began to lose faith in the idea that supporting Britain in the war effort would assure home rule.

Messines

14The next time the Anzacs fought alongside the Irish was at the Battle of Messines in June 1917. Unlike Gallipoli, they were to experience a rare victory. Myles Dungan wrote of Messines, 'It is like a glittering diamond in a paste tiara.'

15It was at Messines that the 16th (Irish) Division, the 36th (Ulster) Division, the New Zealand Division, and the 3rd Australian Division advanced side by side to capture the high ground on which the town is perched. Irish casualties were much lighter than in their earlier battles.

16But among the dead was Major William Redmond MP, the brother of John Redmond. Willie Redmond was well-known in Australia, having first visited there with his brother in 1883. He and John both married Australian women. Thereafter Willie made several trips to Australia. Following one of them he wrote a book of his travels called *Through the New Commonwealth*. His last visit was in the Australian summer of 1913-14 – the last summer of peace.

17Today the Irish Peace Park on Messines ridge, with its replica round tower, inaugurated in 1998 by President Mary McAleese, Queen Elizabeth, and King Albert of the Belgians, reminds us of that day when the Irish divisions, divided by the politics of home, were united in the common cause abroad.

Beersheba and Jerusalem

18Four months later, Anzac and Irish soldiers once again experienced together the taste of victory in far-off Palestine.

19In October 1917 soldiers of the 31st Brigade of the 10th (Irish) Division were among the infantry supporting the Australian Light Horse which in a desperate cavalry charge captured the town of Beersheba.

20In December 1917 they marched together into Jerusalem.

Irish Anzacs

21In some of the battles I have mentioned, those wearing Australian uniforms had been born in Ireland. Before I recount the stories of some of these Irish Anzacs, it is worth noting that the traffic was not all one way. Scores of Australians, for one reason or another, took part in the war serving in Irish regiments. More than 30 of them were killed or died of wounds or illness.

22Among the dead was Captain Bryan Hughes, an Australian rugby union international and a son of John Hughes, a former Minister for Justice in New South Wales. Bryan was killed in August 1918 while serving with the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. He and his younger brother Gilbert had travelled to England in July 1915 in order to get to the Western Front as soon as possible. Armed with letters of recommendation from Archbishop Michael Kelly, the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, they both received commissions in the regiment through the intervention of John Redmond. In 1916 Bryan was awarded the Military Cross for gallantry.

23On my estimate, more than 6000 Irish born men and women enlisted in the Australian forces during the First World War. Of those, approximately 900 were killed or died due to their war service. Most of the Irish Anzacs already called Australia home, having emigrated to the new land of opportunity in the South Seas. Some, however, found themselves in Australia by chance when war broke out and enlisted there rather than returning home to join up, perhaps fearful that the war might end before they did so or calculating that they might get a free passage home when the AIF sailed.

I will mention just three of these 6000 Irish Anzacs:

The Victoria Cross recipient: Sergeant Martin O'Meara, VC

24During the First World War, 64 Australians were awarded the Victoria Cross. Among them was Irish-born Martin O'Meara of Lorrha, County Tipperary. He was the only Irish-born Australian VC, but many other VC recipients had Irish surnames: Buckley; Carroll; Currey; Dwyer; Kenny etc., being first- and second-generation Irish Australians.

Born in 1885, Martin O'Meara emigrated to Western Australia as a young man, where he worked as a labourer. In August 1915, at age 29, he enlisted in the AIF and sailed the following December for Egypt, where he joined the 16th Battalion, part of the 4th Australian Division. He arrived too late to serve at Gallipoli but was soon to see action when his battalion sailed to France in June 1916 and took part in the Battle of the Somme from August.

It was there during the fighting around Mouquet Farm near Pozières between 9 and 12 August 1916 that O'Meara earned his Victoria Cross. His citation reads:

> For conspicuous bravery. During four days of very heavy fighting, he repeatedly went out and brought in wounded officers and men from 'No Man's Land' under intense artillery and machine gun fire.
>
> He also volunteered and carried up ammunition and bombs through a heavy barrage to a portion of the trenches, which was being heavily shelled at the time.
>
> He showed throughout an utter contempt of danger, and undoubtedly saved many lives.

O'Meara's Victoria Cross has been loaned to the National Museum of Ireland, Collins Barracks, and is on display until April.

On 12 August 1916 O'Meara was severely wounded in the abdomen and evacuated to a hospital in England, where he remained until December 1916 before returning to his unit at the front. Twice more before war's end O'Meara was wounded in action: in April 1917, when he received a slight wound to the face, and in August 1917, when he received a shrapnel wound to the back. He took the opportunity during his convalescence in England to visit his hometown in Ireland, where he received a hero's welcome.

Unfortunately, this brave and compassionate man was not destined to live the full and productive life which the many wounded men he rescued would have wished for him. Soon after his return to Australia, O'Meara was admitted to a mental hospital, suffering severe mental illness. He spent the rest of his life in institutions, dying on 20 December 1935. He was buried with full military honours at Karrakatta Catholic Cemetery, Perth, by Father John Fahey, whose own outstanding deeds as a chaplain during the war bear telling.

The chaplain: Father John Fahey, DSO

25Father John Fahey, also a native of County Tipperary, had been sent to Western Australia shortly after his ordination in 1907 at age 24. Fahey joined the AIF in September 1914 and

was assigned to the 11th Battalion, which was sent to Gallipoli. Disregarding an order to remain on board ship, he was the first chaplain ashore at Anzac Cove, passing unscathed through a hail of bullets on his way to the beach while men around him fell dead. It was an eerie experience, one of many which Fahey felt compelled to describe in graphic detail in letters home, which were published regularly in the Catholic newspapers in Australia making him 'a household name amongst Australian Catholics'. His reputation was given international exposure when the Irish journalist Michael MacDonagh wrote an article on Catholic chaplains at the front.

During the Gallipoli landing, Fahey had been tempted to join in the helter-skelter of the Australian troops as they chased Turks along the ridges and through the gullies. He wrote to a priest friend in Australia: 'My first impulse was to grab a rifle and bayonet and go with them. The cheering and yelling would do your heart good to hear'. But he added, 'after clearing the first ridge, I saw so many wounded and dying that I had to turn my attention to them'. And it was the spiritual and material well-being of the men, rather than fighting Turks, that occupied Fahey's time and required his fearless devotion to duty in the difficult and dangerous conditions of the peninsula.

In a letter home from Gallipoli, he wrote that he was appalled by what he witnessed: 'War is abominable. I shall never volunteer again in any capacity, for I have seen enough of it.' Despite several close calls at Gallipoli, Fahey continued unscathed to minister to the men until he took ill and was evacuated to England in November 1915. For his service during the campaign, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for 'gallantry under fire' and was also mentioned in dispatches.

Following his convalescence, Fahey rejoined the 11th Battalion in France in March 1916. What he witnessed at Pozières during the Battle of the Somme confirmed his views on the war. In a letter to Archbishop Patrick Clune, he wrote: 'Whatever I have said in previous letters about the horrors of war I wish now to withdraw. I must admit that I have not seen the real thing until the last fortnight ... It just beggars all description'.

Fahey continued to serve with the 11th Battalion until November 1917. By then he had become the longest-serving front-line chaplain of any denomination in the AIF. He returned to Australia in March 1918 where he resumed pastoral duties in various Perth parishes for the next forty years, until his death in 1959.

The nurse: Staff Nurse Kathleen Power

26Of the 2269 Australian army nurses who served overseas, at least 30 were killed or died as a result of their war service. One of those who died while caring for sick and wounded soldiers was Staff Nurse Kathleen Power, a native of Piltown, County Kilkenny.

Having trained at Dr Steeven's Hospital, Dublin before emigrating to Australia, 27-year-old Nurse Power enlisted in the Australian Army Nursing Service on 11 August 1915.

She served at the 1st Australian General Hospital at Heliopolis, Cairo and in several other Australian military hospitals in Egypt before sailing to India in July 1916.

Conditions on the hospital ships carrying wounded soldiers from the Middle East to India were terrible, particularly during the northern summer, and India was a difficult and dangerous posting because of the physical conditions, the cultural differences and the ever-present threat of cholera. It was the last of these that claimed the life of Kathleen Power. Soon after her arrival at Bombay, she was admitted to the Colaba War Hospital, where she died on 13 August 1916.

These are just three of the thousands of stories of the Irish men and women who served in the Australian forces during the First World War. Many of them are remembered not only on war memorials here in Australia but also on memorials erected in their former hometowns in Ireland. If there is a war memorial near where you live have a look to see if any of the names are designated as 'AIF' or 'Aust. Forces'.

Six-bob-a-day tourists

27'Six-bob-a-day tourists' is an epithet frequently applied to Australia's soldiers of the First World War. Principally a self-deprecating description, it was not entirely inaccurate. Privates in the AIF were paid six shillings a day, the highest pay given to a private in any army during the First World War. By comparison, privates in the British Army, including those in Irish regiments, were paid one shilling a day. Furthermore, in many ways, Australian soldiers were tourists. A desire to see the world was one of the motivating factors for enlistment, a fact the recruiting authorities exploited.

28The New South Wales Recruiting Committee issued a leaflet entitled 'Free Tour to Great Britain and Europe: The Chance of a Lifetime', which offered a 'personally conducted tour whereby you can see the world and save money at the same time'. Another leaflet promised the recruit he would 'broaden his mind and enrich his memory with the knowledge of other peoples and with the sight of other lands'.

29A recruiting poster announced, 'Free Trip to Europe: Invitations Issued To-day'.

When Australian soldiers went on leave from the front, they did so as tourists, unlike their German, French, British and Irish counterparts for whom leave meant going home to visit the family. The Anzacs, on the other hand, went on holiday, seeing the same sights as regular tourists did back then and still do today, using similar guidebooks and sending postcards home.

30To cater to this market, Thomas Cook & Son offered soldiers organised tours to different parts of the United Kingdom. One of its brochures, 'Tours for Convalescent Australian Soldiers in England, Scotland and Ireland', advertised a seven-day round trip to Ireland including a night each in Cork and Killarney, two nights in Dublin and a night in Belfast, all for ten pounds, including travel, accommodation, tours, meals, transfers, tips, and the services of a guide throughout the tour.

Ireland was a popular leave destination for Australian soldiers. It was remote from the war, both geographically and metaphorically, and reminders of the conflict, such as food shortages and rationing were largely unknown.

London had been popular at first but when the novelty of the quaint colonials with their distinctive uniform and raw manners wore off, Londoners began to resent the high jinks of larrikin diggers. And English bobbies, motivated by the receipt of a bounty for arresting deserters, made life unpleasant for the Australians, who had a reputation for overstaying their leave, by constantly stopping them in the street to check their leave passes. Air raids and the blackout were other irritants.

Ireland was a different experience. To the Anzacs, Ireland's attraction lay in its scenic beauty and its friendly people, characteristics that continue to attract tourists to Ireland today. In fact, many soldiers' accounts of their leave in Ireland could have been written by modern-day tourists. Their letters and diaries refer to visits to Dublin Castle, St Stephen's Green, Trinity College to view the Book of Kells, and Phoenix Park including Dublin Zoo; inspections of the Guinness brewery; and train trips to Cork with excursions to Blarney Castle to kiss the Blarney Stone.

31The most popular destination of all was Killarney in County Kerry. The tours that the soldiers took are the same as those offered today: a drive in a jaunting cart to the Gap of Dunloe or Muckross Abbey, a pony ride or walk to the Upper Lakes for lunch, a boat ride down the lakes past Eagle's Nest Mountain, Shooting the Rapids and Innisfallen Island to Ross Castle

For many Australian soldiers, leave in Ireland meant visiting the place where they, their parents or grandparents were born, or a place where friends and close relatives lived. But the hospitality could be overwhelming. In a letter home one soldier wrote of a visit to his aunt's house:

> We get home to find the place crowded with relatives and friends, come to see me. Aunt wanted me to eat, but I implored mercy, for I have been eating all day. Every house I went into required an eating bout. My hosts and hostesses were not content unless I was gorging myself. Tom's sister was quite surprised and a little offended because I could not bear 9 potatoes off my plate and swallow a jug full of very rich milk. I tried hard to please and found that I could hardly get up the boreen leading to uncle's. Then aunt wanted me to eat more and I had to crave mercy. Having escaped that, I had to get out and be introduced all round. Almost every family for miles around was represented.

For other soldiers, it was not about family. Ireland was about as far away from the war as you could travel on a 10- or 14-day leave pass. For a few – those determined to excuse themselves from further military service – Ireland was a popular destination.

Absence without leave and desertion were serious problems in the AIF, which had the highest rate of desertion in the whole of the British Expeditionary Force. The AIF was an all-voluntary force and, unique among the armies on the Western Front, the Australian army did not have the death penalty for desertion.

32Lieutenant Colonel John Williams, the AIF's Assistant Provost Martial, visited Ireland in April 1918 and reported:

> [Ireland] is a perfect haven for absentees and deserters ... There are 'Sinn Feiners' and other people, who not only harbour absentees and deserters, but provide them with civilian clothes, food, and accommodation, free of charge, in order to hide their identity, and very frequently find them some reasonably lucrative employment.

He also reported that the British authorities believed that absentee soldiers were supplying arms to civilians and that in some parts of Ireland the Royal Irish Constabulary was unwilling to assist the military police, of if they did, it was in a half-hearted manner.

The revolutionary situation in Ireland sometimes intruded into the otherwise peaceful ambience that made the country such a respite from the war. In May 1918, leave to Ireland by members of the AIF was suspended due to concerns over increased anti-government activities by advanced nationalists. Men in uniform were sometimes subjected to insults and stone-throwing. Apart from the risks associated with wearing the king's uniform in a country becoming increasingly hostile to the British Empire, there were other, more serious, ways in which an Australian or New Zealand soldier on leave might find himself caught up in the troubles of revolutionary Ireland.

This leads on to the story of the diggers in Dublin. But before going there, I should briefly mention that after the war a small number of Anzacs took part in the Irish War of Independence. Some joined the Royal Irish Constabulary when the British government was

recruiting for what came to be called the 'Black and Tans' and the Auxiliary Division. Others joined the Irish Republican Army.

33One of them was Irish Anzac Jim Gorman of the 55th Battalion. In September 1917 Gorman was wounded and evacuated to England, from where he took convalescent leave in Ireland. But he did not return to France, opting instead to join the Irish Republican Army. Gorman joined the Hollyford Company of the 3rd (South) Tipperary Brigade. He is mentioned in Dan Breen's *My Fight for Irish Freedom* and Ernie O'Malley's *On Another Man's Wound*. This is an aspect of the Anzacs and Ireland story that needs a lot more research.

Diggers in Dublin

34As dawn broke across New Zealand and then Australia on 25 April 1916 heralding the first Anzac Day, a day that commemorates what some regard as the defining moment in the birth of these two nations, Irish rebels who had seized the General Post Office in Dublin the day before were fighting to establish a nation of their own. When the British Empire marshalled its forces to strike back, dominion soldiers on leave in Ireland were called to arms to help put down the rising.

While the men of the A.N.Z.A.C., newly arrived in Belgium and France, were preparing themselves for battle with the Germans in the anticipated offensive on the Somme, these Anzacs, remote from the barbed wire and the trenches, found themselves called upon to do their duty, fighting not Germans but Irishmen with whom they had no quarrel.

The Anzacs involved in suppressing the rising were not part of any organised unit. They were individuals. Many of them were veterans of Gallipoli who had been evacuated sick or wounded to England and had decided to spend their Easter leave in Ireland. Some were serving in Irish or British regiments and were in Dublin when the rising broke out or belonged to units, such as the King Edward's Horse (also known as the King's Overseas Dominions Regiment), sent from the Curragh late in the afternoon of Easter Monday to reinforce the Dublin garrison.

While, in the overall context of the rising, the role played by the Anzacs is not significant, they and their dominion comrades did make an important contribution to the Crown cause during the first 48 hours before reinforcements arrived from England, harassing the rebels and confining them to their initial positions. This was especially so at Trinity College, where six Anzacs – one Australian and five New Zealanders – had taken refuge.

[video]

35At Trinity the Anzacs teamed up with members of the Dublin University Officer Training Corps (OTC) and other stray soldiers who had sought refuge in the college. These odds and sods were the college's principal defenders until reinforcements arrived a few days later.

The Anzacs were posted on the roof of the college where they acted as snipers. From their positions they had good fields of fire towards O'Connell Street and the GPO and along Dame Street towards the rebel stronghold in the City Hall.

As well as making it dangerous for insurgents to cross those streets, the Anzacs engaged in sniping duels with rebels holed up in nearby buildings. The marksmanship of the Anzac sharpshooters at Trinity College became legendary.

In an article in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1916, John Joly, Professor of Geology at Trinity College, wrote of his experiences of the rising. Joly claimed, "There can be no doubt that the accurate fire maintained from the college was an important factor in the salvation of the

City". An OTC cadet Gerard Fitzgibbon wrote to a friend, "[T]he Anzacs were given all the eligible situations, which it must be allowed they deserved. They were an extraordinary gang. I have never seen their like".

The members of the TCD garrison were not alone in acknowledging the military skill of the Anzacs. In his memoirs of the rising Commandant WJ Brennan-Whitmore, one of the rebel leaders, related how the rebels had rigged up a flying-fox across Sackville Street in order to convey a tin can carrying messages from the GPO to the rebel position in North Earl Street. After being captured, Whitmore told one of his guards (described as an Australian but in all likelihood a New Zealander): "By the way. You British had some pretty good snipers .... We had a cable across Sackville Street and one of your fellows hit the canister from Trinity".

Despite these contemporary accounts, Irish historiography of Trinity College and the rising has all but neglected the college's contribution to the defence of the city and the vital part dominion troops played in defending the college.

36Recently, Irish-born New Zealand historian Rory Sweetman has challenged this neglect, arguing in his book *Defending Trinity College* that Trinity was on the rebels' list of targets and could easily have been captured with potentially disastrous consequences for the college. According to Sweetman, 'Trinity meant little to soldiers like [Generals] Lowe and Maxwell... By the end of Easter Week at least some of the university's fine buildings would have resembled the shell-like remnants of the … General Post Office.'

Sweetman recounts that on Easter Monday night, the rebels occupied buildings overlooking Trinity to provide a covering force for men from the GPO garrison who intended to capture the college. The dominion troops engaged them in a sniping duel and the next day the rebels withdrew.

We now know that MacNeill's countermanding order had reduced the number of rebels who turned out on Easter Monday. As a result, they lacked the numbers to seize the college from a force of effective and determined defenders. Sweetman argues that, had the rebels been successful, then, given the college's strategic position, the British would have had no qualms in using artillery to dislodge them, just as they did with the GPO.

37A few months after the rising an Australian socialist, D.P. Russell, published a 95-page pamphlet entitled *Sinn Féin and the Irish Rebellion*. In the preface Russell wrote that his pamphlet was 'an attempt to explain the Irish problem from the standpoint of the class struggle'. In it he posed the question: 'Did Australia's sons in Dublin add lustre to the deeds of the heroes who fought and died in Gallipoli for the "Rights of Small Nations"?'

So, what do we say in response to Russell's question? Certainly, in the first days of the rising, the Anzacs made a significant contribution to the efforts of the Crown forces to contain the rebels and, in Sweetman's opinion, to the saving of Trinity College from severe damage. But Russell's question challenges us to look beyond military considerations: to ask, how is it that the Anzacs allowed themselves to become involved in the suppression of a nationalist rising? After all, they had enlisted and travelled halfway round the world to fight Germans who had invaded the small nation of Belgium, not Irishmen asserting their right to be a nation.

Many of the Anzacs had reservations at the time. An Australian soldier wrote in his diary, 'We were in a very unenviable position, for we personally had no quarrel with the rioters ... We are making the best of a bad job but would prefer to be anywhere but in this unenviable city.' There is evidence that at least one New Zealand soldier declined to take up arms against the rebels.

While most historians today would agree that the rising embodied the aspirations of the Irish people to national self-determination, that is a retrospective assessment. In Easter week, before the executions of the rebel leaders began, few saw it in those terms. Most Irish nationalists in Ireland and in Australia regarded the actions of the rebels as treacherous – a threat to the hard-fought campaign for home rule that had all but succeeded. And in the first days of the rising, it was not English troops but men in the Irish regiments stationed in and near Dublin who did most of the fighting against the rebels.

Although the Anzacs might not have liked doing what they were ordered to do, they would have seen it as their duty as loyal soldiers of the king. On enlistment they had sworn an oath to 'cause His Majesty's peace to be kept and maintained', and in Ireland during Easter Week, a band of the king's subjects were in open revolt and threatened that peace.

Nevertheless, as an Australian of Irish descent, I still find Russell's question somewhat perplexing. But let's move on.

Wattle among the Shamrocks

38The diggers in Dublin survived their experience of Easter week and left Ireland to return home or to rejoin their units in France, unlike the 25 Australian servicemen whose remains lie buried in Ireland. And it is their stories which we will next explore.

39Of the 25, ten died while on leave in Ireland, ten died of wounds or illness in England and their Irish relatives brought their bodies to Ireland for burial and five died at sea and their bodies were brought ashore in Ireland.

40Of the 25 graves, five are located in what is now Northern Ireland and 20 are in the Republic.

41The graves are dotted throughout the island of Ireland as if laid out as markers for a Cook's tour of the island. Don't worry about the details. The map shows the geographical spread. While researching *Anzacs and Ireland*, I located and visited each grave and placed an Australian flag on it.

42Seven of the graves are located at Grangegorman Military Cemetery in Dublin, near Phoenix Park. In the picture the seven are outlined in red. Each year the Australian and New Zealand embassies hold a dawn service at Grangegorman to mark Anzac Day.

Of the seven graves, the front four hold the remains of those who died on 10 October 1918, a month before the end of the war, when a German submarine UB-123 torpedoed and sank RMS *Leinster*. The *Leinster* was the mail-boat from Kingstown to Holyhead and more than 500 lives were lost when she went down – the worst ever maritime disaster in the Irish Sea.

43Once again Philip Lecane has documented the stories of those involved, this time in two books: *Torpedoed!* and *Women and Children of RMS Leinster*.

In addition to the four, who are buried at Grangegorman, three other Australian soldiers died that day when the *Leinster* sank but their bodies were never recovered. Another Australian casualty whose body was not recovered was Sydney-born Nurse Winifred Starling. She was attached to a New Zealand military hospital in England, where she was serving when she took leave in Ireland. Nurse Starling had just been given a new posting on a hospital ship heading to New Zealand when she made the fateful decision to visit friends in Ireland before returning to the antipodes.

44The three other graves of Australian servicemen buried at Grangegorman belong to soldiers who died of illness in Ireland. Two of them died from pneumonic influenza, popularly known as the Spanish flu. By my reckoning, of the 25 Australian servicemen of the

First World War buried in Ireland, six died of Spanish flu. Various other illnesses claimed the lives of another seven.

Five more Australians died of wounds in English hospitals and their families brought their bodies to Ireland for burial in family plots.

45Another Australian, a naval rating, is buried in a mass grave in a churchyard overlooking Lough Swilly in County Donegal. Able Seaman Frederick Allen Sheedy drowned when HMS *Laurentic*, carrying gold to America struck a mine off the north coast of Ireland and sank with the loss of 350 lives.

Two Australian soldiers on leave in Ireland died in unusual circumstances, attributable directly or indirectly to shell shock, a condition known today as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which was then little understood.

One likely took his own life in a hotel in Limerick, though the coroner's jury attributed his death to natural causes.

The other was found seriously injured, lying on the railway tracks near Sallins in County Kildare. A coronial inquest two days later found he had died of injuries suffered after being accidentally struck by a train. What he was doing on the tracks was never explained.

Conclusion

46That ends our brief exploration of the story of the Anzacs and Ireland. More information is contained in the book, which is available from Cork University Press and through Amazon.

I will conclude my talk by saying that the people of Australia and Ireland have much in common based on genealogy and a common heritage; in many ways we have an entwined past. Yet, for a long time one aspect of that shared past has been overlooked, a case of "don't mention the war". As Ireland has increasingly come to recognise and esteem the sacrifice of her soldiers of the First World War, the time is ripe to revive memories of the shared experiences of our two peoples at that critical time in the formation of our two nations.

47END