

Honouring Ireland's dead of World War 1

Cross of Sacrifice for Irish war dead unveiled in Dublin



President Michael D Higgins and Prince Edward, Duke of Kent stand for a minute's silence after laying a wreath at the unveiling of the Cross of Sacrifice at Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin

A [Cross of Sacrifice](#) dedicated to the memory of Irish men and women who fought and died in two world wars was unveiled yesterday at a ceremony in [Glasnevin Cemetery](#), Dublin. Republican groups interrupted the ceremony with catcalls

Irish Times - The ceremony was performed by President Michael D Higgins and Prince Edward, the [Duke of Kent](#), who is president of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and included participation by members of the Defence Forces and the Royal Irish Regiment of the British Army.

Dignitaries in attendance included Minister for Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht Heather Humphreys; Northern Ireland Secretary of State Theresa Villiers; representatives of the office of First and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland; Lord Mayor of Dublin Christy Burke: and his Belfast counterpart, Nichola Mallon.

In speeches, both [President Higgins](#) and the Duke of Kent stressed the importance of remembering the sacrifice made by Irishmen in the first World War, irrespective of their background, and of the need to respect their memory, despite the divergent paths taken by Britain and Ireland after the war.

As they spoke and as a joint Irish and British military band played, catcalls and abuse was hurled by members of “Republican Sinn Fein” and the “32 County Sovereignty Movement”. They stood outside the graveyard, about 100 meters from the proceedings and made their presence felt throughout, including during a minute’s silence in remembrance of the dead

“Shame, shame, shame,” they shouted, along with “Brits Out” and “Higgins, you traitor”.

The garda press office declined afterwards to comment on security at the event but said that two people had been arrested for alleged public order offences.

Irish president’s sorrow over shunned Irish soldiers

Irish president Michael D Higgins has described a national sorrow that Irish soldiers who fought in the First World War and their families were shunned for decades in their home country.

Unveiling the first Cross of Sacrifice ever erected in the Republic of Ireland to servicemen and women killed in both world wars, Mr Higgins said the disrespect could not be undone although they are honoured now.

“And we offer our sorrow too that they and their families were not given the compassion and the understanding over the decades that they should have

received,” he said. “The suffering visited upon our own people at home had perhaps blinded our sight and hardened hearts in so many ways.”

Hundreds of thousands of Irishmen and women served with the British and Commonwealth armed forces during both world wars. As many as 60,000 Irishmen and women were killed in combat.

Until Thursday, Ireland was the only country in the world with sizeable war dead graves that did not have a Cross of Sacrifice.

The memorial was erected in Dublin’s Glasnevin Cemetery, the country’s largest burial ground and resting place to many of the State’s founding fathers.

It is the latest milestone in recent official recognition of Irish citizens who fought in the wars, and who for decades were forgotten, pilloried and blacklisted for joining the British armed forces.

It marks the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the Great War.

The dedication ceremony, including a military band made up of both Irish and British armies, was attended by Mr Higgins, Prince Edward, Duke of Kent and Northern Ireland secretary of state Theresa Villiers.

Irish government ministers Jimmy Deenihan and Heather Humphreys were also in attendance.

The Duke of Kent, said it was an important step in the continuing process of remembering those who died.

“It represents a lasting tribute to their sacrifice and it is my hope, in the years to come, that memorials such as these continue to inspire successive generations to remember,” he said.

President Higgins added that it was not appropriate to question the reasons for Irish men and women to enlist for the British Army during the conflict, at a time when many were mobilising to fight for Irish independence.

Urging an end to terms such as “the enemy” and “us” in relations between both countries, he said a better understanding of Ireland’s role in the war has deepened a sense of empathy with Britain.

“The ability to share sombre and profound national memories is an important statement and act of friendship and respect,” he said.

“As friends we, Irish and British, share this moment of remembrance; and in mutual sympathy we dedicate this monument to the memory of all those who lost their lives during the too long, dreadful years of 1914 to 1918.”

There are more than 3,000 world war dead buried or commemorated at 670 locations in the Republic.

The majority were casualties who died in the UK and were taken home for burial by their families.

But there are also many who lost their lives in ships torpedoed and sunk in the Second World War and whose bodies were washed ashore.

It is estimated around 210,000 Irishmen served in the British forces during the First World War, with many Irish descendants serving with other allied forces.

As many as 50,000 Irishmen died in the war.

In the Second World War, up to 100,000 Irishmen served and some 10,000 were killed.

Around 1,000 civilians were killed during air raids.

The Cross of Sacrifice is erected in cemeteries around the world with the graves of 40 or more war dead.

It represents the faith of the majority and the human sacrifice of all Commonwealth war dead, according to CWGC, which maintains the graves of 1.7 million servicemen and women who died in the conflicts.

Ms Villiers said the high level attendance from the UK and Ireland clearly shows a commitment to working together to mark the centenaries of the First World War and other upcoming significant centenaries across the island of Ireland.

“It is important that we use every opportunity to raise awareness of the shared history between the UK and Ireland and between the communities on both sides of the border,” she said.

“It is fitting that they now have access to a site where they can come together in quiet contemplation to pay tribute to the memory of those who gave so much for our freedom.”

The fight to honour Ireland's heroes of the First World War - Kevin Myers

Ireland's war began early in 1914: not in clashes between the Imperial German Army and soldiers in Irish regiments, as so often believed, but at sea.

Kevin Myers writes in The Catholic Herald - On August 5, 1914, the cruiser HMS Amphion sank the German minelayer the Königin Luise off the Heligoland Bight. Having taken 45 of her crew aboard, the Amphion then sailed into the Luise's recently sown minefield and blew up. Among the 150 dead were 21 Germans and 16 Irish crewmen.

So even though at least 2,000 Irishmen died at sea during the war, it is the involvement of Irish soldiers that is usually best remembered, and their first contact with the enemy occurred in the suburbs of the Belgian city of Mons on August 23 1914. The German troops were mostly conscripts and reservists who had been trained not to bypass and then enfilade strong defence positions, but merely to storm them by weight of numbers.

And within the concept that suitable cover for advancing soldiery may be provided by the living entrails, bones and sinews of their human vanguard lay the DNA much of the evil that was to come.

In that first battle, with German losses probably in the region of 5,000, some 258 British soldiers were killed, about 30 of them Irish. They were spread across a number of regiments, some of them non-Irish, but the largest component – 14 enlisted men and four officers – came from the Royal Irish Regiment. One of the dead was John Corri, grandson of the Italian choirmaster of Dublin's Catholic pro-Cathedral. Two of his cousins were to die in the war – one of them, Eugene Patrick Corri, aged just 16.

The other, George Haydn Corri, (named after the composer) was killed with the Middlesex Regiment in 1917.

One of the four officers to fall in the Mons battle was a Lieutenant John Denys Shine, 19, from Dungarvan, County Waterford, and, like his two brothers, educated at Downside. A second brother, Hugh Patrick, was killed with the Royal Irish Fusiliers the following May. The final brother, James Owen Shine, was killed in the murderous and unforgivably stupid assault on Frezenberg Ridge in August 1917. The three boys were thereafter followed to the grave by their mother, Kathleen Mary, who presumably died of whatever it is that mothers perish from when all their sons are dead.

Three Irish Divisions were raised during the war: the non-denominational 10th, the 16th, based largely on Catholic nationalists, and the 36th, based largely on the Protestant Ulster unionist community. However, neither of these two divisions was exclusively one thing or the other, especially as casualties caused units to become more mixed.

The last British or Irish soldier to be fatally wounded in the war was Private Thomas Farrell, from Navan, County Meath, who was shot as his picket of Royal Irish Lancers seized a bridge over the Canal du Nord (not far from where John Shine had fallen) shortly before 11 am, on November 11, 1918. He died the next day, at a field dressing station near Valenciennes. During the 50 months and 20 days between Shine's and Farrell's deaths, over 35,000 Irishmen were killed, or around 700 a month. There were at least 44 days on which more than 100 Irishmen were killed, and around half a dozen when hundreds died. These include the German gas attack on the 16th Irish Division in April 1916, in which some 500 Irish soldiers died, the common Calvary for the 16th and 36th Divisions, on August 16 1917, when James Shine lost his life (as did the legendary Irish chaplain, Fr Willie Doyle SJ), and the great German offensive on March 21 1918.

All these Irish soldiers were volunteers. Ireland was spared conscription, initially for political reasons, and then, after the Easter Rising, because opposition to it was so vehement. The political victors of the period of violence that followed the 1916 Rising then did their best to obliterate all memory of the Irish sacrifices in British uniforms, even though these vastly outweighed in blood and suffering the losses caused in Ireland by the Troubles. The ensuing feat of amnesia must surely be one of the greatest and most morally reprehensible deeds of mental architecture ever achieved within a free society. Not merely were the Irish military dead forgotten, but also other events were simply ignored or re-written.

Thus the murderous attack on the Lusitania, which ultimately helped bring the United States into the war, was semi-justified within Irish history books because of the munitions that were unquestionably aboard. It is unlikely that such an attack by the British on a German vessel crammed with Irish people on that same pretext would be so benignly viewed. The sinking of the Leinster, a Royal Mail ferry, in October 1918, with the loss of hundreds of lives, was simply forgotten, even though in its own way, it was highly significant.

In disbelieving rage that the Germans could behave so barbarously while secret talks were underway, the Americans broke off informal peace-feelers

with Berlin. Thus the war was prolonged for up to several days, thereby giving us the numerical palindrome that is forever associated with Armistice Day: the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month.

Ireland's amnesia took on architectural form, too. For decades, respective Irish governments declined to officially open the Memorial Gardens in Islandbridge in Dublin, built to honour Ireland's dead, and they were allowed to fall into disrepair. By 1980, they had become a Corporation tiphead. When the Irish office of Public Works restored them (following representations by the British Government, and prompted by the Catholic Ulster Unionist politician, John Gorman MC, who died recently) no Irish government representative was present for the official opening in 1986. This obsessive pursuit of lapidary deceit was further expressed with the 1930s erection of a bust to one of nationalist Ireland's most famous dead, Tom Kettle MP, a lieutenant in the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, who was killed in action on the Somme. A modest statue to him was allowed a place in St Stephen's Green by Dublin Corporation, only on condition that no reference was made to the circumstances of his death or the fact that he was a British soldier.

Irish political culture reached its moral nadir during the regime of Charles Haughey, a crook and obsessive Anglophobe, who 30 years ago ordered the Irish army to cease its presence, through a tradition of military courtesy, at the Remembrance Sunday service in Dublin. But that same year, the army was ordered to attend a service for the dead of Nazi Germany – a hypocrisy that was so shameful that Irish newspapers could not even bring themselves to report it.

The real turning point in Irish perceptions towards their dead of 1914-18 followed the IRA bombing in 1987 of a Remembrance Day service at Enniskillen, in which 11 civilians died. Even though no Irish government representative attended any of the victim's funerals, the popular mood was permanently altered. Ordinary Irish people began to challenge the state's official attitude to Ireland's war dead.

Soon plans were hatched to erect a memorial tower to the Irish dead at Messen in Belgium, and for the first time the Irish president, Mary Robinson, attended the Remembrance Sunday service in Dublin. Her successor, Mary McAleese, jointly opened the Messen Tower with the Queen in 1998, and three years ago, welcomed Her Majesty to the Memorial Gardens at Islandbridge.

So not merely does Ireland now remember its war dead, but it has now also totally forgotten its own quite shameful amnesia. But ignorance, once abolished, cannot then be mentally reconstructed. For it is not enough not to know; it is also necessary not to know that one doesn't know, and the feat of mental prestidigitation required to understand the scale of Ireland's former ignorance is now quite beyond the powers of even that most elastic of organs, the Irish popular imagination.

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This article first appeared in the print edition of The Catholic Herald (27/6/14)

Worship resources for World War One commemorations

The Church of England has produced a set of Liturgical Resources for use at services commemorating the anniversary of World War One on 4 August (or on Sunday 3rd) downloadable from their website below.

The Church is central to the First World War commemorations. Many of those who gave their lives in the conflict held fast to their Christian hope of life with Christ beyond the grave. Indeed even for those who were not churchgoers, the role of the chaplain was important in bringing comfort and reassurance as they faced combat.

Readings, Prayers, Hymns, Art and Music

[Word](#) / [PDF](#)

An outline for a service around a First World War memorial

[Word](#) / [PDF](#) / [Front Cover Colour](#) / [Front Cover B&W](#)

Vigil Service for either the 3rd or the 4th August, 2014

[Word](#) / [PDF](#) / [Front Cover Colour](#) / [Front Cover B&W](#)

Propers for a Requiem Eucharist

[Word](#) / [PDF](#) / [Front Cover Colour](#) / [Front Cover B&W](#)