POBLACHT NA H EIREANN
THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT
OF THE
IRISH REPUBLIC
TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND

REMEMBERING 1916

Challenges for Today

The Easter Rising the Battle of the Somme
and the First World War

Edited by Deirdre Mac Bride

Remembering 1916 – the challenges for today¬

In the current decade of centenary anniversaries of events of the period 1912-23 one year that rests firmly in the folk memory of communities across Ireland, north and south, is 1916. For republicans this is the year of the Easter Rising which led ultimately to the establishment of an independent republic. For unionists 1916 is remembered as the year of the Battle of the Somme in the First World War when many Ulstermen and Irishmen died in the trenches in France in one of the bloodiest periods of the war.

How we commemorate these events in a contested and post conflict society will have an important bearing on how we go forward into the future. In order to assist in this process a conference was organised by the Community Relations Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund. Entitled 'Remembering 1916: Challenges for Today' the conference included among its guest speakers eminent academics, historians and commentators on the period who examined the challenges, risks and complexities of commemoration.

The conference was held on Monday 25 November 2013 at the MAC in Belfast and was chaired by BBC journalist and presenter William Crawley.

Marking Anniversaries

Principles for Remembering in Public Space

1 Start from the historical **facts;**
2 Recognise the implications and **consequences** of what happened;
3 Understand that different **perceptions** and interpretations exist; and
4 Show how events and activities can deepen understanding of the period.

All to be seen in the context of an 'inclusive and accepting society'

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Remembering the Future

Preface

Deirdre Mac Bride,
Cultural Diversity Director CRC

In the current decade of centenary anniversaries (2012-23) one year that rests firmly in the folk memory of communities across Ireland, north and south, is 1916. For republicans this is the year of the Easter Rising which led ultimately to the establishment of an independent republic. For unionists 1916 is remembered as the year of the Battle of the Somme when many Ulstermen and Irishmen died in the main Allied attack on the Western Front during 1916 with the loss of 58,000 British troops, one third of them killed on the first day of the battle, 1 July 1916.

How we commemorate these events in a contested and post conflict society will have an important bearing on how we go forward into the future. With this in mind Tony McCusker and Ronnie Spence respectively the Chairpersons of the Community Relations Council and Heritage Lottery Fund identified the importance of promoting a timely public discussion about the implications of the 100th anniversary of 1916. The ensuing conference and this publication "Remembering 1916 Challenges for Today" is the result. The conference of the same name took place on Monday 25th November 2013 in the MAC Belfast. It focused on how we remember the critical events of the Easter Rising, the Battle of the Somme and the First World War and how this has changed over time. Critically we wanted to explore and reflect on the challenges facing society as we begin to contemplate how the 100th anniversary will be publicly acknowledged in 2016.

This publication is the latest in a series of resources produced by the Community Relations Council and Heritage Lottery Fund. The basis of the joint work of the Community Relations Council and Heritage Lottery Fund is focused on how the anniversaries are marked in the context of the principles for remembering in public space. Activities marking the anniversaries have taken many forms and include talks, plays and projects, the organisation of commemorations and dialogues exploring the past and understanding our future. Such activities need not be mutually exclusive; indeed, if the commemorations are handled sensitively, if we share together in exploring the history and its relevance, they will provide an opportunity to underline how much of our history is shared. We hope there are increasing opportunities for communities and groups to reflect on and address issues of identity within a safe space, to promote contributions to the public realm, and to explore local heritage together.

Indeed Elazar Barkan[1], argued the case for the employment of historical dialogue in contributing to conflict prevention. By explicitly opening up partisan historical narratives of identity to wider perspectives, scholars and civil society can contribute to a process of on-going historical dialogue and conflict transformation that may lead to the end of the conflict. Such shared narratives are themselves subject to further research and debate. This is particularly relevant, he argues, where the conflict is protracted or sectarian and historical narratives are the main vehicle for expressing the conflict. It is possible to identify in emerging practice in Northern Ireland some of the features of historical dialogue that Barkan puts forward. These include the importance of - good empirical research; contributions from people with long held nationalistic and opposing views which find resonance in their own communities; and offering with openness and empathy wider perspectives than long held partisan and national views.

Participants from a broad range of fields from Northern Ireland and Ireland came to the conference. They included those involved in policy development; influencing, planning and/ or organising events and programmes in relation to the decade of anniversaries; academic life and scholarship; culture, heritage and community organisations; media and representatives from the political spheres; those interested in identity and in how events are remembered in contested or post conflict societies.

CRC and HLF were ably supported by a steering group in designing the "Remembering 1916"Conference. We acknowledge the significant contributions of Marie Coleman, Queens University Belfast, Damian Smyth, Arts Council Northern Ireland, Robert Heslip, Belfast City Council and Éamon Phoenix, Stranmillis University College, in planning and organising the conference.

[1]"The memory of the past in post-conflict societies conference" April 2014 Conference organised by Dr Marie Coleman, Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation and Social Justice. QUB Podcasts Elazar Barkan, Professor of International and Public Affairs at New York's Columbia University and Tom Dunne, Emeritus Professor of History at University College Cork, are available on the ISCTSJ website:
http://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/isctsj/Events/SeminarPodcasts/

How World War 1 Changed Everything in Ireland

Ronan Fanning

Ireland had been the touchstone of British party politics, the most important single issue distinguishing Liberals from Conservatives, ever since Gladstone had embraced Home Rule and this was never more true than in 1914 when the Ulster crisis over the third Home Rule bill had brought Britain to the brink of civil war. The Great War changed all that: henceforth the British political parties, united in pursuit of the supreme national interest of victory over Germany, shunned what divided them and embraced what united them. Bipartisanship was no longer a matter of choice but of necessity. This powerful impetus towards consensus made imperative the immediate resolutions of party political differences on Ireland which had previously seemed intractable.

This, then, was the compromise that put Ireland on ice for the duration of the Great War: John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, fatefully, agreed to the suspension of Home Rule; the prime minister, Henry Asquith, agreed to the suspension of partition.

'I feel as if a great weight were off my chest', wrote Asquith, on 18 September 1914 as the third Home Rule Bill, accompanied by the Suspensory Bill, went through all stages in the Commons 'on oiled castors in about 7 minutes.' The Suspensory Act provided that the Home Rule Act would not come into effect until an indefinite date 'not being later than the end of the present war.' It was also accompanied by an explicit assurance from Asquith to the Unionists that 'the employment of force, any kind of force, for ... the coercion of Ulster, is an absolutely unthinkable thing ... a thing which we would never countenance or consent to.' Asquith's declaration, in Nicholas Mansergh's words, 'carried, despite the wartime qualification, an unmistakable ring of finality. There would be no coercion of Ulster, with the Ulster Unionists left in effect to decide what was coercion. To that the government was now pledged.'

The Irish Parliamentary Party lost more than it gained from a formula which deprived it of its *raison d'être*. Forty years after its foundation as a separate party, its members appeared to have achieved their goal and yet they had nothing to show for it: no parliament to set up in Dublin, no offices to fill, no patronage to dispense, no panoply of power to cover their impotence in the vortex of a war that sucked up all political energy for four long years.

The erosion of John Redmond's power at Westminster and, consequently, in Ireland, became quickly apparent. The wartime spirit of co-operation between Liberals and Conservatives made meaningless the Irish Parliamentary Party's control of the balance of power in the House of Commons. This became explicit on 25 May 1915 when bipartisan politics found full expression in the formation of the first coalition government.

This had two consequences. First, both Liberals and Conservatives wanted to avoid the Irish issue if at all possible, to minimise straining the coalition. Second, and again in the interests of the coalition's cohesion, if the Irish nettle had to be grasped, there was a powerful incentive towards compromise, an incentive of a kind lacking in the normal workings of the British party system as it had developed around the turn of the century. The impetus, in short, was towards agreement on Ireland where previously it had been towards disagreement; and agreement, in the context of coalition, meant partition.

It was precisely because of that understandably obsessive concern with the war effort that the Great War conferred as many advantages upon the forces of Irish revolutionary nationalism as it did disadvantages upon the Irish Parliamentary Party. 'England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity' is so well-worn a slogan of Irish separatists that it is too easily forgotten how long it had been since international difficulty had created such opportunity. Not since the battle of Waterloo had Britain been drawn into a major war involving all the Great Powers. The 120 years of the Act of Union were, for the most part, a period of unparalleled tranquillity in the history of Britain's relations with the European continent. It is no coincidence that, just as one great European war played a decisive part in making the Act of Union, the next great European war played a decisive part in breaking it.

The Prime Minister spent the Easter weekend of 1916 at his country home, resting from the responsibilities of running the war and preparing for a crucial Commons debate on the introduction of compulsory military service. He drove back to Downing Street late on Easter Monday and arrived just after midnight. Only then did he learn of the rebellion*that had erupted in Dublin earlier that day. Asquith 'merely said "well, that's something" and went off to bed'. Thus did the Irish question emerge from the oblivion to which it had been consigned in September 1914.

Asquith's languid indifference sums up the impact of the Great War on Britain's Irish policy. Ireland, which in 1912-14 held the centre of the political stage, had, by Easter 1916, been driven into the wings, if not out of the theatre.
Home Rule, first postponed at the outbreak of war, was postponed again after the collapse of Lloyd George's 1916 negotiations with John Redmond and Edward Carson about the immediate implementation of Home Rule: the crux, as always, was Ulster. Would its exclusion be temporary or permanent? The outcome, which made public Redmond's readiness to accept partition if only on a temporary basis, had a predictably disastrous impact on the popularity of Ireland's beleaguered constitutional nationalists.

The crisis in the spring of 1918 precipitated by the proposal, albeit aborted, to apply compulsory military service to Ireland set the seal on this process. The conscription crisis of 1918 epitomises the impact of the Great War on Britain's Irish policy. It provides the classic example of how that policy wobbled and wavered with the ebb and flow of war, of how it was totally indifferent to how it benefitted Sinn Féin and disadvantaged Ireland's constitutional nationalists, of how it was shaped by the need to nurture Anglo-American relations – the American entry into the war in 1917 was the moment when the so-called 'special relationship' became what it has ever since remained: the central plank in British foreign policy – rather than by any intrinsic concern for harmony in Anglo-Irish relations, by the pursuit of victory on the Western Front rather than by an ambition to resolve the Irish question.

Although conscription was never introduced in Ireland, the threat of its introduction galvanised and alienated Irish nationalists. The crisis devastated what remained of the Irish Parliamentary Party's credibility, partly because Sinn Féin had blazed the anti-conscription trail that John Dillon followed when he led the Irish Parliamentary Party out of the House of Commons back to Ireland to join in the synchronised campaign of all Irish nationalists against conscription. Never again were the elected representatives of nationalist Ireland to sit at Westminster. On 18 April, when the Bill

(providing for the imposition of conscription on Ireland by Order in Council) was enacted, a conference assembled in Dublin's Mansion House to co-ordinate the anti-conscription campaign. Éamon de Valera and Arthur Griffith represented Sinn Féin. That it was de Valera who drafted both the declaration and pledge agreed by the conference revealed how rapidly power was changing hands in nationalist Ireland. That evening, moreover, Sinn Féin scaled new heights of respectability when de Valera was one of the conference delegates received at Maynooth by the Catholic bishops; the bishops immediately issued a manifesto sanctioning resistance to conscription and instructed that arrangements for taking the anti-conscription pledge be announced from every pulpit in Ireland on the following Sunday. The, next day, 19 April, the Sinn Féin candidate in the Tullamore by-election was elected unopposed after the withdrawal of the Irish Parliamentary Party candidate. On 23 April a one-day general strike in protest against conscription paralysed all Ireland, outside Belfast: shops and factories closed; trains and trams came to a standstill; even the pubs were shut, although not even the strike stopped racing at Punchestown.

Although conscription was never introduced in Ireland, the threat of its introduction infuriated all Irish nationalists. The crisis devastated what remained of the Irish Parliamentary Party's credibility, partly because Sinn Féin had blazed the anti-conscription trail and abandoning Westminster was seen as jumping on the Sinn Féin bandwagon.

It was the war that put Home Rule on ice; it was the war that restored the Unionists to office; it was the war that demanded the executions after the Easter rebellion and that then, and again in 1918, dictated internment without trial, thus empowering Sinn Féin and the Irish Volunteers while destroying the Irish Parliamentary Party; it was the Great War that conceived, brought forth and nourished the 'terrible beauty' of Yeats's 'Easter 1916'.

Ronan Fanning Discussion

William Crawley: Does this suggest a preoccupation with the war or a lack of knowledge about what was happening in Ireland at the time?

Ronan Fanning: On the day the treaty was signed one of the Liberal ministers in Lloyd George's government went to the War Office and asked for the total numberof British causalities since 1916; the answer was 506 and, as he wrote in his diary, 'the Irish troubles had cost fewer losses than were incurred on the quietest day on the Western front'.

Tom Hartley: To what extent did the British learn a lesson in the period of the third Home Rule crisis on the impact of British domestic politics on Irish Home Rule and then pursued a decision to keep Ireland out of British domestic politics. You can see that process in this generation in, for example, the agreement betweenthe Labour party and the Conservatives. And yet in 1913 there were issues in relation to the UVF being raised in England.

Ronan Fanning: Your point is well made in respect of the duration of the war. By1918 Bonar Law and the Conservative Party insisted that Ulster must under no circumstances be coerced but they had no interest in a federal solution to the Irish problem; nor did they care about the settlement for nationalist Ireland as long as Ulster was not coerced. Bonar Law was born in Canada, and, when his mother died, was sent to relations in Glasgow, to live with more affluent relations. But when his father fell ill he returned to Ulster where he had been born. So as a young man, Bonar Law formed close ties with Ulster in the course of visiting his father almost every weekend. While he temporarily retired from politics in 1921 because he had no appetite for negotiating with Sinn Féin he was happy for Lloyd George to do so as long as he did nothing to undermine Northern Ireland's position under the Government of Ireland Act of 1920.

Northern Nationalism, the Great war and the 1916 Rising, 1912-1921

Éamon Phoenix

In 1906 the Irish nationalist journalist, William Bulfin visited Belfast for his best-selling travelogue, *Rambles in Eirinn.* Bulfin, from the Irish midlands, was not impressed by Ireland's only industrial city at its Edwardian zenith. As he noted: 'Belfast impresses you as being a very rich and a very busy city but somehow it repelled me. As I stood within it I asked myself was I in Ireland? I thought of Henry Joy McCracken and of other men and other times and could feel nothing in my surroundings to feed such a train of thought.'

Bulfin concluded that Belfast was an alien place in which industrial success was undergirded with 'a cast-iron bigotry'[2].

Yet Belfast was the epicentre of the north of Ireland's industrial revolution, an unsleeping metropolis of 350,000 people by 1901 based on a tripod of linen, shipbuilding and engineering. It was also the most Protestant and Unionist city in Ireland. Catholics – largely post-Famine migrants from rural Ireland – made up some 24 per cent of the population, having fallen from one third in 1861.

It was in these early years of the twentieth century that Ulster's modern political framework was forged with Belfast at its centre. 1905 saw the effective 'Ulsterisation' of northern Unionist politics under a new upper middle class leadership epitomised by James Craig, the son of a wealthy distiller, his finger firmly on the Orange pulse. As the threat of Home Rule increased after the 1906 Liberal landslide, Craig was determined to rescue a north-eastern Protestant homeland from the clutches of any Catholic-dominated Dublin Parliament. His determination would result in his masterminding the Ulster Covenant, the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force and the subsequent gunrunning in the years 1912-14.

1900 had marked the reunification of constitutional Nationalism under the chairmanship of John Redmond after the bitterness of the Parnell split. Redmond believed passionately in the concept of 'Home Rule within the Empire'. His early career as a clerk in the House of Commons had instilled in him a deep attachment to the British parliamentary tradition. As his biographer, Dennis Gwynn has observed, 'John Redmond's entire life was centred in the House of Commons'[3] As such, he was strongly opposed to the separatist stirrings which marked the dawn of the new century.

The Gaelic League had from the 1890s steadily promoted the idea of a separate Irish cultural nation based on the revival of Irish as the spoken language of the country. Of a similar stamp was Arthur Griffith's tiny Sinn Féin party whose novel policy of an Anglo-Irish 'dual monarchy' even attracted some northern Protestants like the

[2] W Bulfin, Rambles in Eirinn, vol 1 (Sphere, 1983), p 89
[3] Denis Gwynn, The Life of John Redmond (London, 1932) p15

essayist, Robert Lynd. In the background too flickered the 'Fenian flame' of the militantly separatist Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), revived in Belfast after 1904 by two young men, Bulmer Hobson, a Quaker journalist, and Denis McCullough, a Falls Road Catholic. By 1908 these northern 'young Turks' had linked up with the old Dublin-based Fenian, Thomas J Clarke. The importance of these marginal developments on the extreme fringes of nationalism would only become clear after the emergence of an armed Unionist response to the third Home Rule Bill in 1913-14.

In the decade before the First World War, however, the Irish Parliamentary Party reigned supreme in nationalist Ulster. In these years nationalism in Belfast and the north of Ireland was reorganised and re-energised by the young Belfast barman turned journalist, 'Wee Joe' Devlin. Devlin was the most significant Nationalist politician to emerge in the north during the first half of the twentieth century. Born in 1871 into a working-class family in West Belfast, he rose from humble beginnings as a pot-boy in a local public house to become a Home Rule MP and finally, in 1903, holder of the key post of general secretary of the United Irish League (UIL), the main Nationalist organisation. For the next thirty years, Devlin's name was synonymous with northern Catholics' politics. Small and thick-set with a large head, coal-black hair and a deep resonant voice with the hard intonations of his native city, he had emerged in the strife-ridden 1890s as the leader of the 'Irish National Federation' in Belfast and a superb organiser. He soon gained a reputation as a combative and captivating orator, skilled in the cut and thrust of political debate. As a later Sinn Féin critic put it, 'No man knew Nationalist Ulster, its conditions and particularly its prejudices better than Mr Devlin.'[4] His standing in the reunited Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) was further enhanced by a series of fund-raising tours in the United States and Australasia during 1902-06. For some 12 years from 1904 till 1916, this 'pocket Demosthenes' (as his enemy TM Healy once dubbed him) dominated the Ulster Nationalist scene by the sheer weight of his personality and consummate political intellect.

Devlin was driven by a fixed hatred of dissent within the Home Rule ranks. At the outset of his career in the early 1900s, he had successfully crushed the 'Belfast Catholic Association' (BCA), the political machine of the local bishop, Henry Henry. Devlin's hostility to Henry's clericalist party was influenced by two factors: the first was the potential threat which such a 'factionist' vehicle posed to the Home Rule cause, but another was undoubtedly the close identification of nationalism with Catholicism which the BCA seemed to portray.

Devlin's growing ascendancy was cemented in 1906 when he captured the 'cock-pit seat' of West Belfast from the Conservatives by the narrow margin of 16 votes. Characteristically, his victory was partly due to an unwritten pact between Devlin, TH Sloan, the radical Independent Orange leader, and the Labourite William Walker. Devlin, always a populist, declared the Belfast contests 'a fight of the workers and toilers against intrigues, political machines and combinations'. Both Devlin and Sloan were elected in what was the greatest reverse ever sustained by official Unionism in the city.

It was this peculiar blend of constitutional nationalism and social reform which marked Devlin off from the rest of the Home Rule leadership. His rise to power, however, was closely associated with the revival of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), a sectarian secret society which he converted into a personal power-base within the Home Rule movement after 1905. Tracing its historical origins to the Defenders, an agrarian banditti which surfaced in Ulster in the 1790s as a sectarian corollary to Orangeism, the AOH fed on the intrinsic religious bitterness which characterised the rural north. In a real sense therefore, the 'Hibs' claimed 'to do for the Catholic community what the Orange Order claimed to do for the Protestants'.

The United Irish League, with its essentially agrarian programme, had made little headway in the industrial north-east and Devlin shrewdly realised that a revived AOH, firmly harnessed to the Home Rule movement, could provide the social cement that the IPP badly needed in Ulster.

In 1905, he established the Board of Erin as the controlling council of the organisation with himself as national president, a post he retained until his death in 1934. The attraction of the AOH was partly increased by the National Insurance Act of 1911 and by 1915, it was strong within most 'chapel areas' particularly in Ulster and, with 122,000 members, formed the grassroots of the Nationalist Party in the north of Ireland.

Devlin's control of the AOH has led to the somewhat distorted image of the Ulster Home Rule leader as a 'ghetto boss', assiduously cultivating an atavistic sectarian vote. The truth is that he was, in some ways, like his great adversaries, Craig and Carson, an enigmatic figure. As the leading Nationalist in Ulster during the period 1902-18, it was inevitable that his speciality should be in 'getting out' the Catholic vote. Yet his proletarian apprenticeship left its imprint in a sharpened social conscience, which resonated amongst sections of the Belfast Protestant working-classes. Devlin was not a socialist but he condemned the social evils of unemployment, 'sweated labour' and insanitary housing and saw state intervention as the only solution. His successful exposure of the sweated conditions in the Belfast linen mills resulted in the application of the Trade Boards Act to the industry after 1909 with a consequent improvement in the lot of the workers. Indeed, it was a measure of his uniqueness in Irish politics in the twentieth century that he evoked a genuine affection and admiration that transcended class or creed.'

Despite these qualities, however, the Belfast Nationalist leader failed to comprehend the exaggerated image of an insidious Catholic power which his reinvigorated AOH conjured up in the minds of Ulster Unionists.

By the advent of the Home Rule crisis of 1912-16 Devlin – now turned forty – was at the high-point of his political career. Lovat Frazer, an astute observer from the London Times who heard the northern Home Rule leader address a great Nationalist demonstration in Limerick in 1913, informed his editor: 'One thing struck me very much indeed. Devlin had a distinctly bigger reception than Redmond. He woke up the people more … It was most instructive to mark his effect upon the people. He is evidently the coming man….'[4]

Devlin remained the unquestioned leader of the Ulster Catholics through the stresses of the 1912-14 Home Rule crisis to the 1916 Rising. At first both he and the northern nationalist press dismissed the UVF as 'Carson's Comic Circus', while the Belfast Irish News ridiculed the claim of Craig's Provisional Government to 'conquer Ulster', a feat which even 'that brawny and valiant warrior', John de Courcy had failed to achieve in Anglo-Norman times. As Asquith's Liberal government began to consider 'concessions to Ulster' Devlin assured ministers that the danger of bloodshed was 'grotesquely exaggerated' and that northern Home Rulers regarded 'Carson's Army' 'with absolute contempt'. But – never a Gladstonian Home Ruler – Asquith was unconvinced and warned Redmond in October 1913 of the need for a compromise to defuse the deepening crisis. The Nationalist leaders reluctantly acquiesced 'as the price of peace'.

The upshot was the abortive 'County Option' proposals, drawn up by the pragmatic, partitionist Lloyd George in February 1914. The proposals allowed any Ulster county to opt out of Home Rule for a six-year period by means of a plebiscite. The

[4] Fraser to Robinson, 12 October 1913 quoted in Lovat Fraser's Tour of Ireland in 1913 (Belfast Historical and Educational Society, 1992) p 18

Nationalists had little difficulty in securing the necessary local and episcopal support for such a measure since it would have ensured the inclusion of Fermanagh, Tyrone and the city of Derry under a Dublin Parliament while virtually guaranteeing the early reunification of Ireland. Carson's rejection of such a 'stay of execution' ended any hopes of a settlement. Lloyd George had, however, succeeded in introducing the idea of partition – or 'exclusion' as it was then known – into the public debate. A precedent had been created which would be built upon in the years ahead.

From the moment Carson spurned 'temporary exclusion', the whole of Ireland began a lurch into anarchy that was only arrested by the onset of the Great War in August 1914. For a brief moment the government considered a show of force against the 'Carsonites' but the Larne gun-running of April 1914, hard on the heels of the 'Curragh Incident', destabilised an already beleaguered Asquith government. Military supremacy now lay with 'Carson's Army'.

The impact of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) was no less dramatic on Irish Nationalism, however. As Michael Laffan observes, by blatantly challenging parliament and by re-introducing the gun as the final arbiter in Irish politics, Carson effectively, if unwittingly, 'rekindled the Fenian flame'. The revolutionary Irish Republican Brotherhood, watching in the wings, was quick to emulate the north's example and by late 1913, had called into existence a nationalist counterweight in the shape of the Irish Volunteers (IVF). Patrick Pearse, who favoured a 'blood sacrifice' to regenerate the soul of Ireland, found an Orangeman with a rifle 'a much less ridiculous figure than a Nationalist without one'.

By the eve of the Great War, the IVF – now under Redmond's nominal control – had mushroomed to some 170,000 men, a quarter of them concentrated in Ulster. Their raison-d'etre was to ensure the implementation of all-Ireland Home Rule. The mood of the Nationalist majorities west of the Bann in the midst of the crisis was captured by the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) County Inspector for Tyrone in March 1914: 'The Nationalists are disquieted by recent events and think they must have an army of their own … It is alleged that the Catholic clergy have sanctioned the movement and … it is likely to spread.'

In a final effort to break the impasse, the king, George V convened the Buckingham Palace Conference on 21-24 July 1914 in what turned out to be the last days of world peace. This involved Redmond and Dillon in protracted negotiations with Carson and Craig with Asquith and Lloyd George, representing the Government and Bonar Law and Lansdowne the Tory opposition. In the event, the focus was on the question of 'acreage' rather than whether partition would be permanent or temporary. Devlin's notable absence from the conference weakened Redmond's authority on the north though Carson's suggestion that a six-county bloc – the area which was later to comprise Northern Ireland – should be precluded permanently from the operation of the Home Rule Act marked a portentous development in the evolution of the partition debate.

The outbreak of war on August 4 1914 was marked in the north of Ireland by what the RIC termed 'a mutual cessation of political strife' as both Redmond and Carson pledged their unequivocal support for Britain's war effort. As the storm clouds gathered, the Irish leader's success in forcing a reluctant Asquith to place the Home Rule Act on the Statute Book proved something of a hollow victory. Not only was its operation suspended for the duration of the war, but the prime minister made it clear that any final settlement must include partition. The arrangement enabled Redmond to defer the hated but seemingly unavoidable partition of Ireland.

In a desperate effort to win British goodwill for the future, Redmond was to make his great mistake at Woodenbridge, Co Wicklow in September 1914 in urging Irishmen to enlist in the British Army. In advocating such a course, the Home Rule leader – ever the imperialist – revealed his lack of touch with grassroots opinion, now deeply distrustful of the British Government. The immediate effect was to split the Volunteers. A small radical section – by far the most active militarily – broke away under Eoin MacNeill, Antrim Glensman and Gaelic Leaguer. This element now passed into the hands of the IRB which was to use it as the strike-force of the Rising it was determined to stage before the end of the war.

Thousands of Redmondite Volunteers joined the rush to the colours in the first two years of the war and fought bravely alongside their former UVF adversaries on the battlefields of Europe. Amongst the Irish contingent were several thousand members of Devlin's National Volunteers from West Belfast. James Connolly, the leader of the Irish Citizen Army and a supporter of a separatist uprising, expressed a rather different view, however, in his paper, the *Workers' Republic:*

> *Full steam ahead, John Redmond said,*
> *And everything is well chum.*
> *Home Rule will come when we are dead*
> *And buried out in Belgium.*

In the north, as in the rest of Ireland during 1914-16 the great mass of the IVF remained loyal to Redmond and Home Rule. In Belfast only 120 of the 3,200 Volunteers broke away to join the MacNeill anti-war section, led locally by the IRB's national leader, Denis McCullough. This pro-Redmondite pattern was replicated across Ulster.

Aware of the simmering sectarian tensions in the north, Devlin was reluctant to arm the northern companies of (now re-named) Irish National Volunteers (INV) which were led by reliable party lieutenants and Devlinite priests. Indeed, according to the Anglo-Irish organiser of the INV in Belfast, GFH Berkeley, the West Belfast MP aroused resentment among the rank and file because of his reluctance to provide them with arms. He did obtain 800 rifles at the beginning of the war but he 'was compelled to do so or he would have lost all hold over the people who had seen the [UVF] run their arms openly but themselves had no weapons for self-defence.'[5]

Following Redmond's call to arms at Woodenbridge Devlin – loyal to his leader and the Liberal alliance – directed all his rhetorical skill to persuade young nationalists to fight for 'the rights of small nations', thus ensuring all-Ireland self-government after the war. At a rally in September 1914 he declared:

'This is a war for human liberty. We told the British people that if they gave Ireland … autonomy … Ireland would give her blood and allegiance to that empire….'[6]

In October 1914 Redmond himself visited Belfast to address a mass recruiting meeting at the Clonard Picture House on a Falls Road adorned with Union Jacks. A bewildered Nora Connolly, the *Cumann na mBan* daughter of the then Belfast-based Socialist Republican leader, James Connolly told her father:

'Never were there so many Union Jacks hung out to honour Sir Edward Carson as there were hung out ... in honour of JE Redmond. ...Everywhere along the road was England's flag ... all the way from King St to Grosvenor Road.'[7]

[5] Éamon Phoenix. Northern Nationalism: Nationalist Politics, Partition and the Catholic Minority in Northern Ireland 1890-1940 (Belfast, 1994), pp 7-21
[6] The 6th Connaught Rangers: Belfast nationalists and the Great War (6th Connaught Rangers Research Project, Belfast, 2008), passim. This is an excellent insight into the enlistment of Belfast Catholics during the First World War.
[7] Nora Connolly O'Brien, Portrait of a Rebel Father

Redmond turned up the heat on those considering joining up by telling his audience that they would face abject humiliation 'if, when this war is over, they had to admit that their lives and liberties had been saved by the sacrifices of other men while Irishmen remained safe at home.'

Devlin's support for the British war effort earned him the bitter antagonism of Connolly who stigmatised him as 'a recruiting sergeant, luring to their deaths the men who trusted him…'

By November 1914 – on the strength of the calls of Devlin and Redmond and the achievement of 'Home Rule on the Statute Book' – over half of the 3,250 men of the INV in Belfast had enlisted in the army, mostly joining the Sixth Battalion of the Connaught Rangers. 'We have succeeded in making national self-government the law of the land', Devlin assured them as they left for the front in November 1914.

Among prominent northern nationalist recruits were two doctors, Hugh McNally – the former commanding officer of the National Volunteers in Belfast – and Francis Wisely, the son of a local publican. McNally, from Portaferry, Co Down, was lost along with Kitchener in the sinking of the *Hampshire* in 1916. Wisely, a 31-year old former surgeon in the Belfast Mater Hospital, was killed, as his memorial stone in Friar's Bush Graveyard records, 'at the post of duty while attending to the sick and wounded under heavy fire at the Dardanelles' in 1915. In a letter to his grieving mother the Catholic chaplain reassured her: 'He died as a hero … Do not grieve for him: he has died for his country and, like a good man, doing his duty unselfishly.'

The sacrifice of Dr Wisely, a Home Rule supporter and product of a west Belfast Christian Brothers' School, was commemorated in verse by his friend, the Belfast nationalist poet, Padraic Gregory:

Not yours to heed the battle-trumpet's call,
And order slaughter with your latest breath,
Not yours locked in your comrades' ranks to fall,
But yours to clutch their bleeding forms from death.[8]

Yet the bulk of the northern nationalist recruits came from a working class or agricultural labouring background. Typical were the Brennan brothers, Robert and Michael, both strong nationalists from the Carrick Hill area of north Belfast. Michael would later say that he had joined at 19 'for gallant little Belgium'. Similarly Owen and James Conlon from the Falls had lost their jobs during sectarian trouble at Combe Barbour's Engineering Works on the sectarian interface. For them, 'enlistment was not based on loyalty to the Crown, but survival.' With their father, Owen Conlon Senior, they joined the 6th Connaught Rangers in Galway. Owen was killed, aged 20, at the Battle of Sari Bair in Gallipoli in August 1915; his body was never found. His brother James suffered mustard gas poisoning in France in May 1918 and, discharged as medically unfit, died in Belfast the following month.

By 1915 a recruiting office for the so-called 'Irish Brigade' had opened at 47, Mill Street at the city end of the Falls Road. Most nationalists joined the 6th Battalion of the Connaught Rangers. On 19 November 1914 thousands cheered as they marched to the Great Northern Railway Station to entrain for their camp in Fermoy, Co. Cork 'flourishing banners with the Red hand of the O'Neills'. They were seen off by an ebullient Joe Devlin. They would fight in a series of major battles on the Western Front from the Somme and Messines to the German Spring Offensive of 1918.

But while the northern nationalist press eulogised such self-sacrifice in the early years of the war, a note of cynicism was detected in previously uncritical quarters as the toll of Irish war dead

[8] Poetic tribute by Padraic Gregory, Belfast poet and architect (c1880-1955) in possession of Wisely family.

mounted. Thus, Fr John MacLaverty, the dutiful Catholic chaplain to Victoria Military Barracks in Belfast was clearly alarmed by the increasing war casualties in his poor, inner city parish; in his diary for May 1915 he recorded the death of another parishioner on the Western Front with the pungent comment: 'There are two orphans as a result…This is an example of the price Ireland is paying for the privilege of helping England against the Kaiser.'[9]

Redmond's parliamentary influence was undermined in May 1915 by the formation of a coalition government which included Carson and Bonar Law. Home Rule, it seemed to many nationalists, was now at the mercy of its implacable foes. In such circumstances, it required only the 'blood sacrifice' of the Easter Rising to seal the Irish Parliamentary Party's fate.

The veteran Tyrone Fenian, Tom Clarke, with MacDermott and the IRB inner circle, had intended the insurrection as a successful national revolt by the anti-war Volunteers and Connolly's small but elite Irish Citizen Army. But, in the event, with the struggle narrowed to Dublin, the secret cadre of revolutionaries realised that they had no prospect of military success. However, they calculated that an armed stand – however futile – would almost certainly provoke the British into harsh reprisals; by their 'martyrdom', they might convert Irish nationalists to the cause of an Irish republic.

The insurgents judged accurately. The Rising had at first engendered feelings of strong hostility among Irish Nationalists, many of whose relatives were fighting on the Western Front. Redmond's hasty condemnation of the Rising as a 'wicked German plot' was echoed by the Irish News, a paper closely controlled by Devlin. On 1 May 1916, the paper rejoiced that an attempt by 'German agents' to create a diversion in Ireland had been thwarted. 'Happily', the editor observed, 'the Irish people were not duped. We say nothing of the unhappy instruments of Teutonic duplicity who have fought Germany's battle in the capital of this country.'

The Rising hardly affected the north at all. 'Confusion and chaos, climaxed by frustration' was the lot of the minority of IRB activists in Ulster according to their leader, Denis McCullough as he reflected fifty years later on what might have been. McCullough, who had been largely responsible for the revival of physical force republicanism in Ireland, had been appointed President of the IRB's Supreme Council in 1915 and thus, in Fenian logic, president-in-waiting of the Irish Republic. Yet, as he freely acknowledged, republicanism was weaker in Belfast and the north than in the rest of the country. The mass of Ulster Catholics were ardent Redmondites. Apart from this intrinsic weakness, those planning the Rising feared that, in the event of a northern revolt, the UVF would support the British army. This might easily spark off a sectarian civil war.

As a result, Connolly's final orders to McCullough in March 1916 were: 'You will fire no shot in Ulster; we will deal with Ulster when we win through.' The northern IRB man's instructions were to take his Belfast Volunteers to Tyrone and there join the Tyrone men before marching west to link up with Liam Mellows in Galway. McCullough at once realised that this was an impracticable, even 'hare-brained scheme'.

In the event McCullough led his 132 Volunteers from Belfast to Coalisland by train on Easter Saturday. They had 'two days' rations and no plans'. On his arrival he found that the Tyrone IRB 'centre', Dr Pat McCartan was in thrall to two cautious clerical advisers who insisted that what was intended was not an IRB rising but one 'inspired by Connolly'. For the Tyrone Volunteers Eoin MacNeill, the IVF's chief of staff, was the

[9] Hugh O'Neill (ed), Diary of a City Priest 1915 (Fountain Publishing, 2009), p 46

ultimate authority and they were determined to obey his countermanding order.

In the upshot McCullough brought his disillusioned followers back to Belfast. His reputation never recovered.[10] The young Nora Connolly who arrived in Tyrone shortly afterwards with a despatch from her father was incensed at the failure of the northerners to rise, telling McCartan: 'It's a disgrace… The men in Dublin preparing to lay down their lives while the men in the North are being chased home by their leaders.'

The insurrection's aftermath, however – internment, martial law, and above all, the execution of 16 of the leaders – worked a sea-change in Irish public opinion. As one Redmondite observer, Colonel Maurice Moore, head of the National Volunteers, wrote: 'A few unknown men, shot in a barrack yard, had embittered a whole nation'. Even in the Devlinite north nationalist opinion swung quickly from condemnation of the rebels to admiration of their cause. As the RIC county inspector for Tyrone noted, the executions 'changed the whole feeling … the Sinn Féiners [changed] from being objects of contempt and derision becoming heroes'. Even in Devlin's stronghold of West Belfast the RIC observed how after the executions 'the original feeling of disgust and annoyance changed as time went on and a feeling of sympathy with the rebels arose.' By contrast, Ulster Unionist opinion saw the Rebellion as a 'stab in the back' of the empire in its supreme crisis.

In a final desperate effort to salvage Home Rule from the enveloping morass the Nationalist leaders allowed themselves to be stampeded in May 1916 into the disastrous Lloyd George scheme for six-county partition. The resourceful 'Welsh Wizard' led Redmond to understand that the 'exclusion' would be temporary. Home Rule would apply immediately to 26 counties; there would be no 'Orange Parliament' in Belfast while the interests of the northern Catholics would be safeguarded by the continual presence of eighty Irish Nationalist MPs at Westminster. To Carson, however, Lloyd George gave a written guarantee that partition would be permanent, a factor which helped ensure the support of the pragmatic 'six-county' Unionists. For the first time Redmond and Devlin found themselves confronted by virulent hostility of the Ulster Catholic bishops, whose fears for the future of Catholic education in the north-east was only matched by a desire to avoid – in Logue's phrase – 'going down to posterity as the destroyers of the country'.

The proposals fell through in July 1916, sabotaged, ironically, by the southern Unionists in the cabinet, but not before the Home Rulers, and Devlin in particular, had become tarred by the brush of partition in the Irish nationalist mind. The fractious 'Black Friday' conference in St Mary's Hall, Belfast, which endorsed the Lloyd George scheme in June 1916, was to split northern Nationalism irrevocably and paved the way for the rise of the anti-partitionist 'Irish Nation League' with a power base in Tyrone, Fermanagh and Derry City. Beginning as a reformist Nationalist party, the new league gradually became separatist, finally merging with Sinn Féin in 1917. As such it provided the bulk of the revolutionary movement's northern leadership. Rev Philip O'Doherty, PP, a leading Ulster Sinn Féin cleric, attacked the beleaguered IPP leadership for 'abandoning the Catholics of the six counties to … their unsleeping and relentless hereditary enemies'. As a result of the Nationalists' endorsement of the Lloyd George scheme and charges that Devlin had 'packed' the Belfast Conference, the traditional AOH and IPP machinery in Ulster began to disintegrate while, as in the south, many of the younger clergy switched allegiance to Sinn Féin. Only in east Ulster, where Devlin's influence remained strong, and amongst the older generation across the province, did the Home Rule movement retain a substantial following after 1916.[11]

Support for the insurgents and their cause soon crystalised around the new republican Sinn Féin party, embracing Griffithites, Republicans and northern anti-partitionists and dedicated to a policy of abstention from the British Parliament. Its president from 1917 was Éamon de Valera, the sole surviving commandant of the Easter Rising. The new movement's growing popularity was reflected in a series of by-election triumphs in the south. In the north, however, the burning issue for Nationalists remained partition rather than 'Home Rule v Republic'. Many Ulster Catholics opposed the abstentionist tactic, arguing, with much force, that such a policy would play into the hands of the Unionists and make partition more likely. This fear on the part of northern nationalists largely explains the decisive victories of Home Rulers over Sinn Féin in the South Armagh and East Tyrone by-elections held in January and April 1918, respectively.

British policy during the last months of the war and particularly the threat of the new prime minister, Lloyd George to impose conscription on Ireland in April 1918 gave an immense impetus to Sinn Féin. All over Ireland, north and south, tens of thousands declared their defiance towards this 'blood tax' by signing the strongly-worded Anti-Conscription pledge, issued by Cardinal Logue. The conscription crisis enabled the revolutionary party to project itself as the champion of Nationalist Ireland.

This was the background to the post-war general election of 1918, the first test of the ballot box since 1910. Sinn Féin, campaigning on a policy of abstentionism and an all-Ireland Republic, swept 73 of the 105 Irish seats. The old Nationalist party was reduced to half a dozen seats in Ulster thanks to a 'Green Pact' with Sinn Féin brokered by Cardinal Logue to `avert the loss of marginal seats to the Carsonites.' Edward Carson, symbolically switching from Trinity College to 'a slum constituency in Belfast' (Duncairn), demanded partition for the north-east, and assisted by a redistribution, now led the largest Irish grouping at Westminster with 26 seats, 23 of them in Ulster.

In the new, solidly Catholic Falls constituency Joe Devlin defeated de Valera by a margin of almost three to one though the northern nationalists would remain bitterly divided between constitutional nationalism and Sinn Féin for the next decade and more.

The Rising and its transformative impact bewildered northern nationalist volunteers returning from the battlefronts after the Armistice. In a letter published in the Irish News on December 11 1918, seven Belfast members of the Second Leinster Regiment, describing themselves as 'a few survivors of the old Irish Brigade', declared their undying allegiance to Devlin in his fight against the Sinn Féin leader: 'our confidence in Joe Devlin is stronger than ever… there are no friends of de Valera out here.'[12] Most of these veterans would retain their constitutional nationalist allegiance on their return home. Many would fade into obscurity as the wartime truce turned to violence while a few would join the ranks of the IRA. By 1920 an Irish Nationalist Veterans' Association had been established in Devlin's political headquarters, the National Club in Berry St to address the needs of Nationalist ex-soldiers.[13] Its chairman was Alderman John Collins, a Great War veteran and Belfast Nationalist councillor.

In accordance with their manifesto the Sinn Féin MPs, meeting as Dáil Éireann, set up an alternative republican government to that of Dublin Castle with de Valera as President. At

[10] Denis McCullough, 'The Events in Belfast' in The Capuchin Annual (1966), pp 381-4; Fearghal McGarry, Rebels: Voices from the Easter Rising (Penguin, 2011), pp 250-7

[11] Phoenix, Northern Nationalism, pp 21-41

[12] Irish News, 11 Dec 1918. Of de Valera the pro-Home rule soldiers wrote: '…we fail to see how our interests can be represented by a foreigner who has caused nothing but division amongst the Irish people.'

[13] Irish News, 21 January 1920

Westminster the return of a Tory-dominated coalition, headed by Lloyd George, ensured that partition would become the basis of post-war British policy. Sinn Féin's 'blessed abstentionism' to borrow Churchill's phrase – meant that the balance of power shifted from the Irish Nationalists to the Ulster Unionists under Craig who was well placed to dictate the shape of the forthcoming Government of Ireland Act (1920).

On the Irish benches, Devlin was a powerless onlooker in the critical years 1919-22. The leading survivor of the Redmondite tradition rejected by Nationalist Ireland, he saw the dangers of the Partition Act for his own people. He railed against it as portending both 'permanent partition' and 'permanent minority status' for northern Catholics. Not without justification the Falls MP attacked the glaring lack of safeguards for the minority. In particular, he spoke against the Government's failure to provide nationalists with weighted representation in the Northern Ireland Senate and contrasted this with the generous treatment of the southern Unionists who were to enjoy the protection of a strong effective voice in the Dublin Senate.

The need for such measures, he told an impassive House of Commons, was underlined by the tragic sectarian bloodshed which had erupted in the north of Ireland in 1920 against the backcloth of the Anglo-Irish War in the south. Some 8,000 Catholic workers – many of them Nationalist war veterans – were expelled from their jobs in Belfast and adjoining towns while, over the next two years (1920-22) 450 persons, the majority of them from the Catholic community, died violently in the city. The upsurge of violence confirmed Nationalist fears of being subjected to the rule of the Unionist majority in a separate Ulster state.

Finally in May 1921, following elections in the six counties, the new Unionist-dominated Northern Ireland Parliament was established with Sir James Craig as its first Prime Minister. 'From that moment', wrote Churchill perceptively, 'Ulster's position was unassailable'. The Nationalists and Sinn Féin, cooperating on a platform of anti-partition and abstention from the 'Partition Parliament', secured a total of 12 of the 52 seats and one third of the popular vote.

In general during those vital years, the Sinn Féin leadership failed, in the words of the northern Republican, Louis J Walsh, 'to grapple with the Ulster Question'.[14] The 'naked deformity of partition' came a poor second to National Status in the revolutionary scheme of things. This was certainly the case during the Treaty negotiations between Sinn Féin and a formidable British delegation in London in the fall of 1921. The Sinn Féin leaders tried to secure the 'essential unity' of Ireland but were forced in the end to settle for Dominion Status for the south and an ambiguous Boundary Commission was to revise the 1920 border.

Northern nationalists were shocked and bitterly disappointed at the Treaty terms which effectively left partition and their minority status in the new Unionist state intact. The minority problem, however, remained unaddressed and would continue to fester in the years ahead.

[14] Irish Weekly, 14 June 1919

Éamon Phoenix Discussion

William Crawley: Give us a feeling of where the Catholic Church was in all of this.

Éamon Phoenix: Cardinal Logue in 1914 would have preferred Ireland to say where it was because of the impact on Catholic education rather than any commitment to nationalism. Bishop McCrory in Down and Conor was an instinctive Republican and was at loggerheads with Devlin. The views of both Bishop Henry a neo Unionist and McCrory a Sinn Féiner, were both at odds with Devlin's perspectives.

William Crawley: When do you see the language of Blood Sacrifice emerging?

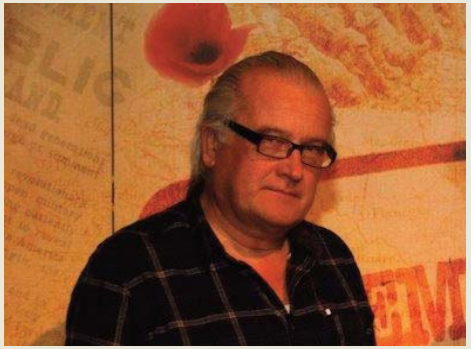
Éamon Phoenix: Keith Jeffrey notes it as a grandiose use of language in the Protestant churches. But of course there were some Catholic chaplains who were also supporters of this. There was one particular one (unnamed) appointed who kept a diary noting how he met with Carson's men supporting them in all sorts of ways and how the grand ladies of the big houses were providing to give comfort to those at the front. Of course after 1916 recruitment of nationalists drops off in the north as it did in the rest of Ireland.

William Crawley: We are trying to separate history from mythologies and stereotypes. Where do you see nationalist stereotypes?

Éamon Phoenix: Well most of us who were at school in or before the 1960s remember that the narratives of Irish history were working to this great crescendo of 1916. There is now a sense that even the AOH who had been hostile to the Rising and blamed it for partition, are now responding differently. And it was very late in the day, post-hunger strikers, that any other brand of nationalism was considered.

Remembering the Somme

Philip Orr



There are many people in modern-day Ireland, north and south, who possess a deep interest in Great War history. Many people also engage in acts of Great War commemoration. This commitment springs from a variety of motivations, but it often comes from a deep curiosity about family members who took part in that terrible conflict. The popularity of genealogical research and the relative ease with which it can be undertaken are key factors in the growth of interest. Cheap travel and the ready accessibility of north-west France and Belgium have enabled many Irish men and women to make a journey to the Western Front that would have been beyond the reach of earlier generations.

However, it is quite possible to discern ways in which the war – and especially the Battle of the Somme – matter deeply to Unionists, including that subset of Unionism which we know as Loyalism. For Unionists and Loyalists, the year 2016 will possess a very special commemorative meaning due to the centenary of the opening day of the bloody battle known as the Somme.
At 7.30, on the morning of 1st July 1916, the infantrymen of the 36th Ulster Division rose out of their trenches and crossed no man's land. They achieved a significant though momentary breakthrough in one of the toughest parts of the German lines. By nightfall they had suffered over 2,000 fatalities whilst thousands more were injured or captured. Within hours the division was withdrawn from the line. Soon afterwards it was sent north to Flanders in order to regroup and recuperate.

Although the casualties of 1st July represent but a fraction of the Irish war-dead, the tragedy of 1st July 1916 would soon become the most significant and long-lasting representation of the war on this island. In the post-war years, as Ireland was engulfed in civil turmoil, the island was partitioned and the new Northern Ireland state was birthed. The deaths on the Somme gained a powerful mythic meaning. This was due to the fact that the 36th Division had been formed in 1914 to facilitate the inclusion of men from the Ulster Volunteer Force. The battalion structure of the division had been created to mirror the regional format of the Volunteers, a number of UVF officers had been given early leadership roles in the division and many of the best units had been filled with men who had signed the Ulster Covenant and taken part in the Larne gun-running. They would continue their Orange Lodge meetings on entering the forces. The 36th Division was known to many as Sir Edward Carson's Army.

Little wonder that in the early years of Northern Ireland, the deaths of the men in the 36th Division on an incongruously bright July morning in wartime France, should take on the character of a sacrifice – one that might offer ample proof to Britain of the ultimate loyalty of the Unionist people.

However the loyalty of Ulster Protestants could have been construed as very questionable in the pre-war months. The UVF was on the verge of armed conflict with the forces of the Crown and dead-set against the Irish policy of the Liberal Government. The deaths on the Somme could function as an exclamatory answer to anyone who questioned Ulster devotion to the Empire and the Crown.

The circumstances of these young men's deaths made their loss all the more poignant. The tight-knit nature of the division and of the Ulster society in which it originated meant that the grim tidings from France in the early days of July 1916 brought about a shared trauma. The distress was felt on Ulster's working-class streets, on its suburban avenues and in its villages and countryside. What is more, 1st July on the pre-modern calendar was the actual date of the Battle of the Boyne. It is still marked out as a commemorative date on the parading calendar, even in the second decade of the 21st century. Those who mourned the July tragedy perceived the Boyne and the Somme flowing into one other as twin rivers on whose banks the battle for Ulster Protestant freedom had been won, albeit at a price.

In the early 1920s, when the island was embroiled in riots, gun-battles and assassinations, a number of veterans who survived the war became members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary or joined up as Special Constables in the northern state, alongside a generation of younger men. In these post-war years, veterans felt they were writing a fresh chapter of an extended story in which Ulstermen secured, extended and defended the British Empire, whether on home soil or overseas. A people's memorial to the war dead was constructed on a street near the City Hall in the heart of Belfast, later to be replaced by a grander cenotaph in the grounds of the building. 1st July became a yearly day of public commemoration to complement 11th November. In Protestant churches, plaques were unveiled, bearing the names of the fallen, most of them raised by subscription. War memorials in town squares became a familiar sight.

Meanwhile, the military format of these very British acts of remembrance soon led to the absence of most of Northern Ireland's disaffected Nationalists from such gatherings, despite their own heavy wartime losses when fighting with such distinctive Irish regiments as the Connaught Rangers .

In the Irish Free State which emerged in the 1920s, the new regime had its own founding narrative to celebrate, set in the year 1916 and involving martyrdom and heroic sacrifice. The Somme deaths of 1st July could function in the northern polity in a way that matched these inspirational uses of the Easter Rising in the public culture of the southern state. A memorial garden for the Great War was planned and eventually constructed in Dublin but it was placed on the western outskirts of the capital at Islandbridge. Poppies were sold in the Free State in the 1920s but increasingly they were worn only in southern Protestant communities. They were regarded by many Irishmen and women as the mark of a 'West Brit'. Thousands of Great War veterans, Catholic and Protestant alike, tended to keep quiet about their stories, as the years rolled on.

At this time, perceptions of the First World War in Britain were becoming coloured by a degree of scepticism. There was criticism in some quarters of the military tactics of the generals and the social elite from which they came. In due course, many people would be influenced by powerful literature composed by poets, dramatists and autobiographers who had gone through the hell of the trenches, seen young lives cut short and been forced to question what patriotism meant.
However the Ulster Unionist variant on British Great War memory in the post-war decades was less likely to entertain questions about the validity of the war as a pure, patriotic endeavour. It was in the nature of Northern Irish Unionists to be defensive, residing as they did on an island full of unsettled business, where the Irish Free State still claimed ownership of the north and where Republican insurgency could and did break out from time to time.

However, the mythic vigour of the Somme story was fading somewhat by the time of the 50th anniversary in 1966, as the ranks of veterans making their way to the cenotaph were thinned by age and mortality. The exploits of the 36th Division had also been occluded by the fresh memory of an even more devastating global conflict, the war with Nazism. However the capacity of the Somme to stand as an identity narrative for Unionism was given a huge boost after 1969, with the onset of the 'Troubles'.

Two types of interlinked militarisation affected Ulster Protestant men and their families, as civil violence increased, lives were lost and the IRA campaign posed a powerful threat to the very existence of Northern Ireland.

Firstly, although some Catholics did join the security forces, many thousands of Ulster Protestants were recruited into an armed police force, into the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) within the British Army and into the prison service, building on an earlier and very deep involvement of Unionist communities in policing, through membership of the RUC and the Special Constabulary.

Secondly, there was a massive growth in Loyalist militias within working-class communities, principally in the shape of the modern-day Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Defence Association. Such militias sought to take the fight for the Union to the Republican enemy at any cost.

There were more than 40,000 members in the UDA (Ulster Defence Association) at its peak. In the RUC, including its reserve units, there were, at one stage, 13,000 men. In the UDR there were over 9,000 full or part time soldiers at the peak of recruitment. Whole families, whole neighbourhoods were affected by the conflict and by the mid-1970s Ulster was a society permeated with fear and anger and steeped in what amounted to a costly militarisation of much of its manhood, and not just on the Unionist/Loyalist side. It is not surprising that the Somme story became freshly relevant to Unionists, with its portrayal of men in uniform, in arms, facing danger and making sacrifices.

As an oral historian, I decided to interview as many as I could of the surviving Ulster Division veterans during the 1980s. My book The Road to the Somme was published in 1987 in Belfast. It became a key text for many Unionists and Loyalists, as I found out to my cost on one occasion, when I got into trouble for not signing my identity as British in a visitor's book at the Ulster Tower on the Somme battlefield. An offended fellow-visitor tracked me down through my publisher, accusing me of betraying the men who had died for Ulster on their 'sacred ground'.

More benignly, after the amnesties for political prisoners in the 1990s, former combatants came up to me during book readings or afterwards, on the street, in order to shake my hand and thank me that I had 'stood up for their culture'. On a more haunting note, a friend on Belfast's Shankill Road told me how an acquaintance of his had been a Loyalist prisoner and how he had hanged himself in gaol. The relatives had found little to collect from his cell in the aftermath of the suicide, except a few items of clothing and toiletries – and a copy of my book.

Today, within a peace process that has lessened the violence and established shared local governance but left many working-class Protestant communities uncertain and unrewarded, a journey along thoroughfares such as the Shankill Road reveals the enduring mythic power of 1st July. On gable end after gable end, the death of the Ulster Division on the fields of France, ceremonies of remembrance at the Menin Gate, solemn fields filled with tombstones and poppies are all portrayed in vivid detail, often intermingled with memorial art that deals with atrocities like the infamous Shankill fish-shop bomb of 1993.

Visits to the Western Front are a regular event on the Loyalist calendar. Many travel there to visit the tomb of a great-grandfather and lay a wreath. Numerous local men build remarkable collections of souvenirs, decommissioned Great War weapons, badges and trench art. They seem to me to be constructing their own 'people's history', a response to their alienation from the master-narrative of elite imperial history that pervaded the curriculum for so long in Northern Ireland.

For me, Loyalist Somme culture offers a revelation of what it feels like to be the discarded vanguard of Britishness in Ireland. The Somme story is a narrative for many communities that feel both demoted and disempowered. The old emblems of William of Orange, the conquering victor on his rampant steed are no longer so dominant. The image of some young boy from Ballymacarret or Portadown, rushing towards machine guns and glory in his thin, khaki uniform, is more likely to be mounted on the gable wall.

As a local Great War author I have met men and women who repudiate any link with paramilitary organisations and deplore Somme imagery on Loyalist gable walls, but who served in the police, the prison service or the army during the long years of the Troubles and for whom my book also matters. An encounter with a former RUC man whom I met at a lecture I delivered in East Belfast in 2012 may serve as an example. I was on my way to my car after the event, and in a hurry, due to another engagement. A man ran after me, carrying a copy of *The Road to the Somme,* which he wanted me to sign. My urge to depart was placed on hold as he told me how he was on duty one night in an RUC station, not far from the border, in what used to be called 'Injun territory', staring out into the dark at the start of his shift.

I heard how a colleague had come up to him and said – 'Here, read that book.' He started at once on *The Road to the Somme* and he kept on reading through what turned out thankfully to be a quiet night. He almost completed reading it by the time dawn broke.

On a guided trip from Belfast to the Western Front a few years ago I sat in a busy bar in a French hotel, late into the small hours, talking to men for whom the trip to the Somme was quite clearly a pilgrimage. One man showed me bullet and shrapnel wounds from his days in the Ulster Defence Regiment. Another former UDR man described the painful questions about Unionist identity that bothered him, mentioning the sacrifices made in uniform by his colleagues and wondering whether, in light of the current political arrangement that included Sinn Féin in government, it had all been worthwhile or not.

In recent times there have been many valuable efforts by northern Nationalists and Republicans to reach out towards a shared understanding of the Irish Great War tragedy. There is a recognition that over 200,000 men form this island took part in the war and many thousands died, from every county. There have been excellent contributions by several southern governments and by important southern institutions such as the Glasnevin Trust, all of whom wish to show an inclusive respect for the Great War dead.

However, most remembrance ceremonies for the 36th Division that occur in Northern Ireland or at the site of the battle in France during 2016, will involve the regalia and the emblems of British-ness and the rituals of British military tradition. There will be a widespread understanding by those who memorialise the Somme that the dead were not mere victims of an imperialist war, as Irish Republicans might see it, but rather that they still serve as vivid proof of the deep cost of remaining British in Ireland.

But there will be some complementary commemorative responses to 1st July 1916 that are not held under a specific flag or possess a Unionist or Loyalist imprimatur. There will be some opportunities within civil society for a

comfortable non-partisan involvement and there will be some conferences and debates that permit a critique of the war, of Unionist involvement in it and of the current commemorative culture. This diversity is a healthy thing.

It will be equally healthy for a similar space to open up for non-partisan remembrance and intelligent critique alongside more overt Nationalist memorialisation of the Easter Rising, whose anniversary falls earlier in the same year.

In all of this, I believe that remembering the Somme, as such, poses no danger to non-Unionists, though any increase in the number of commemorative events may of course raise the number of parades to and from the ceremonies and these will possibly involve 'contentious' routes used by those who are taking part.

However I do think that excessive preoccupation with the Somme and the Great War, in the years that lie ahead, can pose grave dangers for Unionism and Loyalism and should therefore be guarded against by those who wish to see an on-going vigour in that particular form of Ulster politics.

In understanding the danger, it may be useful to refer to a recent collection of essays written by historians in contemporary Australia, entitled *What's wrong with Anzac? – the militarisation of Australian history* (Sydney, 2010). These articles contain challenging reflections on what the authors see as the undue emphasis on military history by a political culture that is bent on re-using the tragic, stirring story of Gallipoli in order to avoid deeper, disquieting legacies and dilemmas, including the displacement and mistreatment of the aboriginal people and the country's changing role as a society with a 'white nation' legacy, on the Pacific rim and in the south world.

The final essay in the collection, by Henry Reynolds and Marilyn Lake, argues that it is not appropriate for Australian politicians to propose that the spirit of the modern nation was born amongst the members of the Australian army, one century ago. The soldiers at Gallipoli were far removed from normal life, its affections and responsibilities. They were placed within an all-male environment, in a narrow age cohort, governed by military law that demanded obedience and punished insubordination.

The authors of the essay believe that the Anzac myth does not enshrine the qualities needed in the creation of an all-inclusive, mature, democratic Australia. They suggest that Australians must look to alternative national traditions that give pride of place to equality of opportunity and the pursuit of social justice, the long historic struggle for a living wage and good working conditions and the pursuit of sexual and racial equality. They believe that 'the myth of Anzac' is one where 'military achievements are exalted above civilian ones' and 'events overseas are given priority over Australian developments' whilst 'slow and patient nation-building is unfortunately eclipsed by the bloody drama of battle.' [15]

In responding to these arguments, I am not making the case for an eclipse of the Somme memories here in Ulster – memories that I as a writer helped to recover and to pass on. There are, as I have indicated, many good reasons why the Somme story has been so important on a Unionist journey that has often been painful and difficult. No doubt that Somme story will continue to provide nourishment.
But if political violence continues to recede, parliamentary institutions continue to be significant and the demographic changes in Northern Ireland continue to reduce the Unionist majority, the pro-Union leadership will need an ever more nimble, creative approach to politics,

[15] Henry Reynolds and Marilyn Lake, Moving On, in What's wrong with Anzac – the militarisation of Australian history (Sydney, 2010) p 167

history and culture, exploring a partnership with that which was once perceived as 'the other'. Alongside the Somme story, a range of fluid, non-military narratives about co-operation rather than violence will need to be invoked in the Unionist and Loyalist story. Delineating what those might be is the matter for another essay at other juncture.

However, if a large swathe of the pro-Union community is left demotivated, culturally vulnerable and socially and economically disempowered, then the danger is that the dead of one hundred years ago will return as ghostly mentors for those unhappy young men for whom combat on the street is an analgesic for the pain of what's been lost.

Philip Orr Discussion

William Crawley: We now talk about the stories of both the 16th and the 36th, but didn't always. What is your sense of the submergence of the story?

Philip Orr: I have alluded to the way in which the ceremonies of commemoration had a very British feel. The Nationalist submergence is very much one of turning their back on, or suppressing the war commemoration story. The new mythology through Easter 1916 is important, and after that 1920-22, but you have to remember that the British Army during the Black and Tans era helped push away the remembrance amongst those Nationalists who had taken part during the war. What is now exciting is that in the last two decades we have seen a desire both north and south to reclaim that desire to remember them. For example the Connaught Rangers project on the Falls Road. Two weeks ago I was at a ceremony in Dublin, at Glasnevin Cemetery. There were poppies, wreaths including green white and orange flowers. It epitomised that there is an increased confidence in the way the Irish walk the world, in seeing how this process of commemoration and loss can be resurrected. For after all, over 200,000 men are believed to have taken part in the forces – that is the biggest assembly of Irishmen in uniform in modern times.

William Crawley: The date itself, the 1 July, brings connections to both Boyne and Somme. I grew up hearing stories about UVF men wearing the collarettes as if they were re-fighting the Battle of the Boyne. Does that ring true?

Philip Orr: I think there's evidence, yes. There had been Lodges actually formed from inside the 36th (Ulster Division) so that sense of being part of the Orange fraternity is very important but there is a likelihood that we exaggerate this for mythopoeic reasons. If you are facing battle and you are part of a military unit inside a transnational British Imperial force, your own concerns are perhaps less important than the bigger picture, but that is not to deny Unionist 'neighbourliness' in the trenches.

William Crawley: Your point of view is often impacted on by your point of viewing. I would like you to comment on the gendered, testosterone-fuelled aspect of history.

Philip Orr: Yes, that emerges for me and it is true that the story of combat is most often told about and by males. There are, of course, fascinating women's stories to do with nurses, to do with women in factories. But one really important thing, helpful in re-gendering this period and the war is to concentrate on the home front. I commend how the BBC concentrates on the home front in Jeremy Paxman's series and that will enable us to see the terrain in which women were operating, keeping families together, working on a separation allowance, having to deal with news from the front, with bereavement, with death. So there has to be a way for us to uncover how women and children experienced being fatherless and to consider whether they were 'propagandised' by the war. I think that a way to think through the period of anniversaries will be to consciously take stock, review and reconsider the period.

'In Balance With This Life, This Death': Poetic Responses to 1914-1918

Fran Brearton[16]

I

My focus here is on poems which 'remember', in different ways, events from the First World War period, in terms of the form and language they employ, and the politics implicated therein. When it comes to mediocre war poetry of the period 1914-18 (and beyond) there is as much to choose from in Ireland as there is anywhere else, and some sentiments, perhaps unhelpfully, repeat themselves ad *infinitum.* When it comes to finding what has been called, in relation to English First World War poetry, an 'adequate response', or what Heaney later talks of in his 1974 essay 'Feeling into Words' as a poetic response 'adequate to our predicament', the field narrows considerably, not least because the Irish context poses particular problems for its war poets.

Two poems – by Patrick MacGill and Padraic Pearse respectively – might stand as indicative of sentiments – and literary styles – that proliferated at the time of their composition. First, MacGill's, 'The Dawn', from his 1917 *Soldier Songs*, where the final stanza runs:

> Out of the battle, out of the night,
> Into the dawn and the blush of day,
> The road that takes us back from the fight,
> The road we love, it is straight and white,
> And it runs from the battle, away, away

MacGill utters sentiments in this poem heard often enough: his soldier songs are ones of camaraderie; they do not glorify war, but they are not an exposé of its horrors in the manner of an Owen or Sassoon; they recognise that the ordinary soldier is not all about heroic sacrifice. Rather he is stoic, although sensitive, and hoping to survive. Poem after poem by MacGill exhibits nostalgia for a magical Irish homeland, the pastoral 'other' affirmed in contrast to the day-to-day experience of war. One might substitute Devon for MacGill's Donegal, and find this sentiment uttered again and again in war poetry of the First World War, if not always with his freshness and simplicity. He succumbs to the Georgian poetic flourishes of the time – in 'The Dawn' we find 'creeping o'er', 'saffron clouds', the 'dewy lea'; the rhyme can drive the poems in the manner later modernists would come to eschew ('The dawn comes creeping o'er the plains […] / I hear the creaking limber chains, / I see the drivers raise the reins'); but MacGill's strength is precisely his simplicity, at its best when the language is unforced – as in (perhaps apart from the poetical 'blush of day') the final stanza quoted above. It is not coded, nor is it ambiguous, and there's a cleanness and musicality to its lines. The final stanza, with its transparent sentiment, is entirely monosyllabic apart from 'away, away' (leaving us on what used to be called a softer 'feminine' ending). It is the only poem discussed here written 'from memory' of the wartime context which is its subject; it makes no attempt to anticipate anything beyond itself, or its own experience. The language is neither ornate nor difficult, and by and large it keeps 'politics' out of the equation: soldiering in the war is somehow remote from class wars, sectarian politics, the 'stuff' of home; soldier songs are songs to, as well as by, soldiers – theirs is a different world on which those at home can eavesdrop but of which they are never a part.

Second is Pearse's 'Renunciation', one of the best-known of his poems, which closes:

> I have turned my face
> To this road before me,
> To the deed that I see
> And the death I shall die

'Renunciation', with its repudiation of all temptations of self, in a single-minded commitment to 'this road before me', ('I hardened my heart', as he puts it, picked up by Yeats in 'Easter 1916' with 'Too long a sacrifice / Can make a stone of the heart'), has the same simplicity of expression at its close as we find in MacGill's 'The Dawn': whether one is committed to loving life or loving death, there's no real difference here in the complexity of the sentiment uttered. In that sense, whilst MacGill and Pearse might say very different things about war – the road we love runs from the battle; the road we love runs to it – they are not different in their certainty of self-positioning ('one read black where the other read white', as Louis MacNeice would later put it in *Autumn Journal*). The key difference is that where MacGill's poems are written out of remembered experience, they are not themselves acts of remembrance, whereas Pearse's writing habitually anticipates the terms of remembrance. 'Renunciation' dates from 1910: 'this road' is a known road some years in advance of the fact. And the death, as the later 'The Mother' (1916) by Pearse makes explicit, will be remembered, and in particular ways:

> I do not grudge them: Lord, I do not grudge
> My two strong sons that I have seen go out
> To break their strength and die, they and a few,
> In bloody protest for a glorious thing.
> They shall be spoken of among their people,
> The generations shall remember them,
> And call them blessed…

Here we come up against the paradox that the most influential (in terms of remembrance) poetic response to an event may be the one which predates that event. That is the case with the one Great War poem everyone knows, Laurence Binyon's 'To the Fallen' ('They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old') , written in September 1914, probably just after the Battle of the Marne (5-12 September) but still, before most of the Great War fallen fell. In this context, Pearse's writing shares much with the wartime literature of England, and with the wider mood of Europe, particularly in 1914-15: the notion one is blessed by the sacrifice made; fidelity to an ideal; the gift willingly given to future generations. Pearse's work shares other typical wartime literary traits too – not least the tendency to project onto women (as in 'the Mother') the views of men. How sacrifice is to be remembered in the future trends in popular literature and in propaganda to come hand-in-hand with a message to women about how they should behave *now.*

The terms of remembrance in relation to Easter 1916 have proven powerful and resilient, perhaps more so in Pearse's case than in that of his English equivalent Rupert Brooke, and for the reason encapsulated in the only phrase in 'The Mother' that might look out of place in an English war poem of this time – 'they and a few'. (The sheer scale of slaughter in the First World War, and conscription, tell against the narrative of individual heroic sacrifice.) 'The Mother' is the vehicle for a subtext too: 'I do not grudge', the sentiment repeated three times in a short poem,

[16] An earlier version of some of this material appeared in *Anglophonia: French Journal of English Studies* 33 (2013): 105-122.

also strikes the ear with the opposite – that there is a 'grudge' justifiably held (the opening line's iambics reinforce the point, where the stresses fall on 'do…grudge…Lord…do…grudge'). 'I weary…of the long sorrow' later in the poem is the mother's sentiment, but is also the long sorrow that warrants the protest; 'My sons were faithful' implies others were not; 'they fought', presumably where others did not – the pronouns work in evocative (and provocative) ways too.

II

By way of contrast, AE's (George Russell's) long poem, 'Salutation: To the Memory of Some I Knew Who Are Dead and Who Loved Ireland', is also a poem which anticipates events in advance of the fact but fails to bring a counter-imaginative power to bear. The poem was published, along with a letter to the Irish Times, on 19 December 1917. In that letter, 'The New Nation', AE considers at length 'how in future' Irishmen 'may live together'. 'I will ask our national extremists', he writes, 'in what mood do they propose to meet those who return [from the Great War], men of temper as stern as their own? Will these endure being traitors to Ireland? Will their friends endure it? Will those who mourn their friends endure to hear scornful speech of those they loved?' His argument is that 'there is moral equality where the sacrifice is equal' – no-one has more to give than death – and that 'the necessary preliminary to political adjustment is moral adjustment, forgiveness, and mutual understanding'. He appends the poem which, driven by what it anticipates to be the 'memory' of the future, runs against the tide by commemorating three Irishmen who were executed following the Easter 1916 Rising – Pearse, MacDonagh, and Connolly – alongside three Irishmen (all broadly nationalist in sympathy) who were killed in the First World War – Alan Anderson, Thomas Kettle, and William Redmond.

The poem attempts to hold things in 'balance', to be even-handed: it proclaims the 'moral adjustment' for which AE argues in prose. And it has been praised for that reason, as a poem which aspires towards the emergence of a 'new Ireland', united in its memory of the past, and bringing different traditions together in a spirit of inclusivity. It is commendable in its aims therefore; and AE's fears that memory of the Great War would reinforce lines of division in Ireland were prescient enough. But the main problem with 'To the Memory…' is not so much that it reiterates an argument that is fundamentally flawed – namely, that if people die for different ideals, those (bereaved) at home will unite in response. Rather, however admirable its inclusivity may be, the poem itself is less than adequate. It is trapped in the very style and diction it wishes to escape, from 'waters into wine' to 'heroic barricade', 'sacrifice' 'gallant dead', and 'shining lad'. The expression is clichéd, the rhythms are inert ('You paid the price. You paid the price'), and it is over-written ('hope lives on age after age'). Because it doesn't find a style adequate to its ambition, then whatever it might want to say, it hasn't worked out how to say it. 'To the Memory' is also doomed to failure because it enshrines even within its form that sense of 'other'. This is not a poem; it is two poems spliced together in a manner which forces a kind of either/or reading upon us:

> The hope lives on age after age,
> Earth with its beauty might be won
> For labour as a heritage,
> For this has Ireland lost a son.
> This hope unto a flame to fan
> Men have put life by with a smile,
> Here's to you, Connolly, my man,
> Who cast the last torch on the pile.
>
> *You, too, had Ireland in your care,*
> *Who watched o'er pits of blood and mire,*
> *From iron roots leap up in air*
> *Wild forests, magical, of fire;*
> *Yet while the Nuts of Death were shed*
> *Your memory would ever stray*
> *To your own isle, Oh, gallant dead –*
> *This wreath, Will Redmond, on your clay…*

When AE talks in its final stanza about a 'confluence of dreams', and 'One river, born from many streams', he cannot enact such confluence in the form and structure of the poem. On the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising, it was reprinted, also in a spirit of inclusivity, in the commemorative volume, *1916: the Easter Rising*, ed. Owen Dudley Edwards and Fergus Pyle. There, the layout indents further to the right margin the stanzas relating to Anderson, Kettle, and Redmond, thereby reinforcing the distinction between the two kinds of 'sacrifice' made – one kind privileged in the eye that reads from left to right, the other italicised, indented, sidelined. Although the argument is made in the poem that the Irishmen who enlisted in the British Army also 'had Ireland in [their] care', it does not persuade, since they have been rendered visually subservient to the 'real' heroic sacrifice. Its subjects don't actually meet in the poem, however much it gives an equal-handed stanza to each of them. While one might commend its spirit of inclusiveness, the terms on which it seeks that inclusiveness (they died too, so they are equally patriotic), and the form in which it enacts it, serve in the end only to expose the gap between two narratives which converge on the page but have something of a no man's land between them. In the context of a war of attrition, this may be strangely appropriate – but it is symptomatic not curative in terms of the problem it confronts.

Yeats's 'An Irish Airman Foresees His Death' was written a few months after AE's poem, in June-July 1918. It's the third of four elegies Yeats wrote for Major Robert Gregory, who was killed in action earlier that year, and as Roy Foster, Terence Brown and others have pointed out, all four poems have to negotiate the 'unpalatable' fact that Robert Gregory, who enlisted apparently enthusiastically in the Royal Flying Corps in 1915, was an imperialist whose politics were significantly at odds with Yeats's cultural nationalism. Moreover, as James Pethica has recently uncovered, in an article in the *Dublin Review* (2013), Gregory's decision to enlist was 'precipitated by an explosive personal drama', since he had conducted an extra-marital affair from late 1914 onwards, which caused considerable 'fallout' once his wife, mother, and Yeats, came to know of it; but clearly was not, nor has been since, public knowledge. The complexities which feed into this poem are considerable, involving as they do both political and personal issues for the subject of the elegy, his family, and the poem's author. Yeats's views on the Great War are well-known enough ('some blunderer has driven his car on to the wrong side of the road – that is all'), as are his political views, yet this is a poem he was clearly under a felt moral obligation to write.

Briefly, I've suggested that in poems by MacGill or by Pearse, we see a simplicity of style and diction that is, within limits, relatively successful for the purpose of articulating a clarity of purpose or vision. AE, attempting a more delicate political balancing act, resorts to an over-wrought style and form which defeats his purpose: the 'wordiness' is symptomatic of the difficulty. Yeats's 'An Irish Airman Foresees his Death' is a more complex beast altogether. The poem doesn't directly mention Gregory's imperialist politics: his country is only 'Kiltartan Cross'. It represses, at least on the surface, his enthusiasm for the war machine: he is motivated here only by 'A lonely impulse of delight' – although 'lonely' may now tell us something of the personal trauma behind enlistment. And a number of features distinguish it stylistically from those poems where Yeats places the 'quarrel with ourselves' at the heart of the matter. 'An Irish Airman' is in perfect tetrameter; almost every line is end-stopped; it uses perfect cross-rhyme; much of it is monosyllabic. All these things give the illusion of simplicity, strength and precision; but it is very difficult, nevertheless, to position either the poet or his subject:

> I know that I shall meet my fate
> Somewhere among the clouds above;
> Those that I fight I do not hate,

Those that I guard I do not love;
My country is Kiltartan Cross,
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before.
Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,
A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of
breath,
As waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.

The poem ventriloquises *for* Gregory 'in advance' of his death, in the manner of other patriotic poems (by Pearse, or most famously by Rupert Brooke with 'If I should die, think only this of me…') but it does so after the event and it 'remembers' the past only by making a number of adjustments. These are not the 'moral adjustments' AE talks of; instead the poem steers a course with consummate linguistic and formal skill through a memorialising minefield.

It would be easy to say the poem is evasive, or deceptive, or an over-simplification; but it is not. First its monosyllables work to open up rather than close down suggestion. That is, they function in the opposite way to the clarity of expression in MacGill or Pearse. The longer a word, the less likely it is to be polysemic ['having many senses or distinct meanings']. An obvious example of a short polysemic word, (as given by John Lennard in *The Poetry Handbook*) is 'rose' – 'in the air/world/morning, a colour, a flower'. As soon as diction becomes more ornate, possibilities of meaning can close down. This, in part, is wherein AE's difficulties lie, with 'heroic', or 'nobleness' or 'sacrifice' – as against, say, the more simple yet more complex 'brave'.

'An Irish Airman Foresees his Death' is driven by what it doesn't appear to say as much as what it does, and indeed is telling us that directly, through repeated expression in the negative – 'do not', 'do not', 'nor', 'nor', 'nor'. In its style, its form, the repetitions of its closing lines, it achieves a kind of impossible balance, mirroring, as Terence Brown has suggested (*Our War,* 2008), the controlled 'exhilaration' of piloting a small plane, with a 'carefully managed rhythmic equilibrium'. But it says more than its surface lets on too, through its apparent simplicity. Take 'waste' for instance. Waste in its most prominent sense now (that is, to 'employ uselessly')? Or waste as a desert, a wilderness, a ruination? Waste in its rhetorical sense as 'empty space or untenanted regions of the air'; waste as in 'to exhaust by gradual loss', or 'to ruin one's prospects? Is it a noun, adjective or verb here? This is only the tip of the OED iceberg. (There is no such complexity in 'grudge', by point of contrast on use of monosyllabic words). The poem says something about Gregory and about its complexities through rhyme too, linking as it does for instance 'fight' and 'delight'. And its closing 'In balance' has all the ambiguity of that word working to render it a less than simple statement. 'Balance' in which of its multiple meanings? One thing weighed against the other; counterpoised; held in equilibrium? Does one thing 'neutralise' the other, and is Yeats here saying something about opposites, contested narratives more generally? Or is 'balance' to 'waver, to deliberate'? The poem never completely elides the unpalatable aspects of his subject, but it encodes ambivalence within a lexis open to more positive interpretation too. Among other things the poem balances, one is 'this life', the here and now of the poet's life in Ireland, with 'this death', Gregory's death, weighing up the two. Its speaker brings 'all to mind' – that is, causes it to be remembered; but 'to mind' can imply advice or a warning, as it is also to attend to or care for something. The poem is exemplary in terms of what seemingly direct and simple language, and traditional form skilfully deployed can do; not least, it also tells us that proximity to an event, however difficult the challenges posed by the act of remembering may be, does not preclude an 'adequacy' in the response.

III

If the various subjects of these poems – both AE's and Yeats's – pose particular problems for their elegist, making the work of memory unusually difficult, the same is true for Seamus Heaney sixty years later, in his elegy for the Irish soldier-poet Francis Ledwidge, killed on the Western Front in 1917. Heaney's 'In Memoriam Francis Ledwidge' appeared in his 1979 collection *Field Work*, and in terms of its timing is a poem situated at turning point in Irish cultural and political history as regards memory of the First World War. The first thing to note, therefore, is that without this poem, it is probable that Ledwidge's life, experience, and poems, would not have reached as many people as they now have. The poem has become a site of memory, beyond that of most elegies, a monument, a trigger for recollection of what might otherwise be forgotten: it is, therefore, an important act of recovery.

But it sits curiously ill-at-ease in and of itself, as a lyric poem, in contrast to some of Heaney's other elegies. This might seem apposite to the complexity of its subject, Heaney consciously sounding a troubled note, pulling to-and-fro between harmony and discord; yet the poem struggles to an unusual degree with how it encompasses or imagines history. Given it is really Heaney's only explicit 'First World War' poem, that can be revealing too. In *Field Work,* Heaney asks numerous questions – of himself, of his subjects, about his role as poet: 'Did we come to the wilderness for this?'; 'What is my apology for poetry?' The book is in that sense in the tradition of Yeats's 'Easter 1916', which encompasses an extraordinarily complex history and response within the questions Yeats poses throughout that poem: 'O when may it suffice?'; 'What is it but nightfall?'; 'Was it needless death after all?'; 'And what if excess of love / Bewildered them till they died?' This last is one of the most complex too – 'what if' meaning 'what does it matter'; 'what if' asking 'whether this is the case'.

The insistent (self)-questioning of *Field Work* has its most profound and searching expression in 'Casualty', the elegy for Louis O'Neill, a civilian Catholic who (like Ledwidge) was blown to pieces – in this instance in a bar in Stewartstown, Co. Tyrone, in February 1972; and we might note some similarities between 'Casualty' and 'In Memoriam'. Both poems have as subject the man who seems to have gone against the 'tribe's complicity' – Ledwidge by enlisting in the British Army, O'Neill by breaking an IRA curfew – who serves as vehicle for some of Heaney's own aesthetic questioning. Yet curiously enough, 'In Memoriam Francis Ledwidge' is the only poem in this volume, written 'in memoriam', and one of the few poems in the book, that does not contain within it a single question mark.

Perhaps one might say the whole poem and its subject make for Heaney one giant question-(mark); but it reads more as an aporia for Heaney than a question: he seems not to know what questions to ask of himself. In projecting back to pre-1922, pre-partitioned Ireland, part of the difficulty is that the poem enshrines within it lines of opposition conditioned by Heaney's experience of post-1969 Northern Ireland:

The bronze soldier hitches a bronze cape
That crumples stiffly in imagined wind
No matter how the real winds buff and
sweep
His sudden hunkering run, forever craned

Over Flanders. Helmet and haversack,
The gun's firm slope from butt to bayonet,
The loyal, fallen names on the embossed
plaque –
It all meant little to the worried pet

I was in nineteen forty-six or seven,
Gripping my Aunt Mary by the hand
Along the Portstewart prom…

Its starting point, the Portstewart war memorial, associates memory of the war with Protestantism and unionism. The opening images of hardness and certainty implicitly pass judgement on a hardened unionist position with its entrenched politics: 'This We Shall Maintain'; 'Ulster Says No'. The bronze soldier, here eternally fixed 'No matter how the real winds buff and sweep' is by implication holding an 'unreal' position against the odds, and in denial of a changing world; by the end of the poem the memorial is a 'vigilant bronze' (cf. 'The price of liberty is eternal vigilance'). The gun's 'firm slope from butt to bayonet' reinforces what is made explicit in the next line – that this is a hard-line 'loyal' (loyalist/unionist) commemoration. For the Ledwidge of the poem, by contrast, the imagery is both rural and Catholic – the 'May Altar of wild flowers, / Easter water sprinkled in outhouses, / Mass-rocks and hill-top raths…' – soft not hard, fluid and sensory rather than fixed (and unfeeling). Ledwidge, with his 'haunted Catholic face, pallid and brave' is uneasily trapped inside his 'Tommy's uniform'. With a beautiful pastoral touch, Ledwidge is 'Ghosting the trenches with a bloom of hawthorn / Or silence cored from a Boyne passage-grave'. The different histories that converge on this poem thus go back well beyond 1914-18: The Boyne of Heaney's poem is Ledwidge's Boyne of Irish antiquity, the 'passage-grave'; but by the end it has become evocative of the Boyne as unionist symbol too. And if the 'sure confusing drum' of the poem's final lines is most obviously the drum of war, the poem also brings to mind the drums and flutes of the 12th July parades in the North.

In other words, multiple contested 'streams', as AE has it (historical, geographical, metaphorical), lead into this poem. But it is less clear how many lead out of it. He draws on letters written by Ledwidge indicative of the pastoral yearning for 'home' typical of much First World War writing, of the strange beauty of war, and of Ledwidge's anxiety about Ireland:

> 'My soul is by the Boyne, cutting new meadows…
> My country wears her confirmation dress.'
>
> 'To be called a British soldier while my country
> Has no place among nations….' You were rent
> By shrapnel six weeks later. 'I am sorry
> That party politics should divide our tents.'

Notably, he quotes here from a letter written by Ledwidge in June 1917:

> I am sorry that party politics should ever divide our own tents but am not without hope that a new Ireland will arise from her ashes in the ruins of Dublin, like the phoenix, with one purpose, one aim, and one ambition. I tell you this in order that you may know what it is to me to be called a British soldier while my own country has no place amongst the nations but the place of Cinderella.

What Heaney edits out here, and what he grammatically and syntactically alters, so that 'To be called…' becomes in the poem a self-contained lament not a rationale for actions taken, might answer what troubles him most about his subject. Instead, and in perhaps the most difficult lines of the poem, Ledwidge becomes 'our dead enigma' in whom 'all the strains / Criss-cross in useless equilibrium'.

> In you, our dead enigma, all the strains
> Criss-cross in useless equilibrium.
> And as the wind tunes through this vigilant bronze
> I hear again the sure confusing drum
>
> You followed from Boyne water to the Balkans
> But miss the twilit note your flute should sound.
> You were not keyed or pitched like these true-blue ones
> Though all of you consort now underground.

The strains that criss-cross reflect the musical motifs of the poem – its drums and flutes; and they are, self-reflexively, the lyrical passages of the poem itself, the strains of Heaney's own music. They are also the fault lines of history, and more literally, the strain under which he himself, as a poet, is placed in the context of the 'Troubles'. The lines project onto Ledwidge Heaney's own anxieties. But where in the Troubles elegy 'Casualty' he is exhorted by his subject to 'Puzzle…The right answer to that one', here Ledwidge is simply an 'enigma', a code he can't crack. In the crudest reading, 'Our dead enigma' simply means 'I don't understand him'. I take 'enigma' to be because Ledwidge is the rural Catholic nationalist who enlisted in the British Army. But there is nothing necessarily enigmatic about that from the vantage point of 1914, and in a pre-partitioned Ireland, even though subsequent memory and commemoration may have struggled to accommodate it. Heaney struggles with it in the 1970s too – albeit it is important to note he chooses the struggle, in a context where there is no compulsion, or little political incentive, for him to elegise the Irish nationalist dead of the First World War.

If one can equate symmetry and balance with 'equilibrium', this would suggest a kind of beauty, which is itself often a characteristic of Heaney's work; but his 'equilibrium' here is 'useless' (which beauty certainly is not given its association with justice, so powerfully affirmed by Elaine Scarry's 2006 *On Beauty and being just*), and the poem is rhythmically uneasy in its final stanza, lacking the compelling lyric beauty of the close of 'Casualty', or of 'The Harvest Bow'. Everything converges here, and everything gets stuck, be that the 'haunted Catholic' Ledwidge or the immovable bronze statue. History becomes an unproductive stasis, the present trapped in binary forms of discourse and thinking that disallow future movement. The poem knows it too – replicating the 'answer' that has already failed history more than once (although the temptation to make it has still not gone away) – that 'all of you consort now underground'. This moment is not, as in AE's poem, a well-intentioned 'inclusive' gesture: evocative more of Wilfred Owen's 'Strange Meeting', with its 'I am the enemy you killed, my friend', it reads as an attempt on Heaney's part to ally himself, and his own sensibility as a Northern Irish Catholic post-partition with Ledwidge's Irish Catholic sensibility pre-partition; and in the end he cannot cross the divide. In the 'strange meeting' of this poem, elegist and elegised remain, in some degree, strangers.

In this context, the *OED* definitions of 'equilibrium' are suggestive too:

(1) [*Physics*] The condition of equal balance between opposing forces; that state of a body in which the forces acting upon it are so arranged that their resultant at every point is zero

(2a) The state of balance between powers of any kind

(2b) The condition of indecision or indifference produced by opposing influences of equal force

The first of these, from physics, may be a useful metaphor for what happens to AE, since the resultant for his poem 'To the Memory of Some I Knew' seems to be zero in all sorts of ways. More pertinently, if definition 2a here is close to what Yeats achieves with his 'In balance with this life, this death', and with the power of the poet certainly part of the equation, then 2b seems to be where 'In Memoriam Francis Ledwidge' leaves us, not 'indifferent' as such – evidently not, given Heaney's worrying at his subject through 13 stanzas – but caught between opposing influences, competing versions of history. Yet even if the poem cannot see its way ahead, the mere fact of its existence disturbs the context of 'useless equilibrium' out of which it was written, to affirm, however indirectly, the possibility of a different future that for Ledwidge himself was denied.

Fran Brearton Discussion

Ronan Fanning: I was surprised that you didn't' say anything about the "Haunted Catholic face" in Heaney's Poem.

Fran Brearton: Yes, one might ask what is a 'haunted Catholic face? I think the challenge for Heaney in this, his only poem about the period, is evident, almost as if he feels Ledwidge's enlistment as something of a betrayal of his faith; and when the thinking isn't quite right about a particular subject, or fully formulated, the poem manifests that unease. It would be fair to say that he handles these issues more subtly at other times, and not in the WWI context.

Sean O'Hare: I find it a great mystery as to why Paddy MacGill joined the Rangers. He was a relation of mine and I just can't say other than he was most probably influenced by the upper class circles. Another point on a local aspect of the whole thing is the song written by the Parish priest of St Peter's in West Belfast, "The Foggy Dew" and 600 of his parishioners had joined the Connaught Rangers, and it's the only rebel song where they are mentioned. "Our wild geese fled …… had they died by Pearce's blood."

Fran Brearton: To some extent we can attribute too much thought and difficulty to this, making enlistment more problematic and more politicised for the individual than it actually was. It's what happened, and in huge numbers. I am not convinced that people went through as much soul searching as we sometimes now ascribe to them. For example, C.S Lewis commented that the decision to serve was one he made in part because it 'absolved [him] from taking any further notice of the war'.

William Crawley: Can I ask about this term adequacy? There's a crucial adequacy in terms of language, but there may also be a moral sense to this term adequacy of a poet to do justice to a time in history. A poet may just feel they are there to reflect their own response, rather than to do historical justice. How would you advise poets to approach commemorating?

Fran Brearton: You are asking the key question that has preoccupied poets and literary critics for years: What is the role of the poet and that of the poem? It is difficult to answer, but clearly we now tend to feel Rupert Brooke's response is not adequate whereas Siegfried Sassoon's is. When Heaney talks about symbols of adequacy, the argument is that if you write to any prescribed view other than your own response, then you are responding inadequately. Be true to your imagination in other words, not to what others might ask of you.

William Crawley: Is that not solipsism?

Fran Brearton: No: the poet is engaged imaginatively with the world so the work is not solipsistic.

Damian Smyth: Heaney chooses to reclaim and recover Ledwidge. This is a clear choice made to get involved, which he need not have done.

Remembering 1916 - Myths and Risks of Commemoration

Mary E. Daly

Most members of the public would be surprised to learn that historians have a very ambivalent attitude towards the commemoration of major historical events. Yes commemorations provide opportunities to sell strategically-timed books, invitations to conferences, media appearances, but the historical narrative favoured by political leaders, film makers and others may well elide or reject some of the issues that historians regard as significant. In this respect commemorations are a useful reminder for historians that they do not have a monopoly on history. History is a common/public property, which everyone can remember, forget or invent as they will.

As somebody who led a research project on the Golden Jubilee of the 1916 Rising (with Margaret O'Callaghan of QUB), we are now developing a fascination with the manner in which the 1966 Golden Jubilee has continued to be represented, and in our opinion, misrepresented, despite our best efforts to record what happened on that occasion.

I will begin by presenting a brief and selective synopsis of the Golden Jubilee Commemoration as it emerged from the project that Margaret O'Callaghan and I directed. I will then draw on some issues that emerged to speak about the wider question of commemoration.

The Golden Jubilee of the Easter Rising in 1966 happened at a time when the Irish Republic appeared to have finally overcome the miseries of economic stagnation and a falling population, and indeed at a time when the anti-partition rhetoric which was so prominent in the late 1940s and the 1950s had been quietly abandoned. The Irish government, led by Sean Lemass, regarded the Jubilee as a celebration of the achievements of the independent state and its achievements, and an opportunity to urge Irish citizens to work for a better Ireland. Speeches by government ministers urged the Irish people to emulate the spirit of sacrifice exemplified by those who took part in the 1916 Rising – by working hard, raising productivity and not going on strike; children were urged to be good citizens and to show this by picking up litter. Taoiseach Sean Lemass told the Irish Management Institute that the true heir of those who fought in 1916 would be the student in the Regional Technical College (none of these colleges yet existed), who would presumably obtain a qualification in business and technology before taking a job with a multi-national company. There was a major emphasis on educational opportunity – indeed the importance of education and expanding educational opportunities are recurring themes throughout the Jubilee. Patrick Pearse was lauded as a pioneering educator – and many organisations, including the government, marked the occasion by offering scholarships to university or secondary schools. An essay competition asked school children to write about their vision for Ireland in 2016. So a lot of the focus – if we concentrate on speeches was on the present and the future. Veterans were

[17] Mary E. Daly and Margaret O'Callaghan (eds.) 1916 in 1966. Commemorating the Easter Rising, (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2007). The projected was funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA under the Programme for North-South Research, which was approved as part of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.

present too, but there was a real sense that 1916 was being remembered, celebrated and then being consigned to history – something of A Last Hoorah. The government insisted, much to the chagrin of the distinguished film-maker George Morrison, that a short film about the Easter Rising, which it funded, should close with shots of contemporary Dublin – the Donnybrook bus station, an electricity generating station, the television studios in Donnybrook and a factory. It is no surprise that most European TV stations who showed that film edited out this section.

As for the 1916 leaders, they were represented as men of vision: - poets, scholars, trade union leaders. With the exception of the Teilfis Eireann drama Insurrection – which has acquired mythological status in multiple ways – the violence associated with the Rising was largely ignored. The two pageants held during the commemoration also reflected the elements that I have identified in the official commemoration – an emphasis on poetry, vision, emotion together with symbols a contemporary Ireland – air hostesses marching, men with welding equipment and protective visors, young people. Yet when people refer to the Golden Jubilee today, or in recent decades, these are not the images that are recalled.

In the Republic the 1966 commemoration can be seen as marking a healing of the divisions of the civil war – many veterans who had not spoken for decades met and spoke at the state reception on Easter Sunday. Lemass made some overtures to Irish parliamentary party and to those who fought in the Great War, but this was only a minor element. But the Jubilee was also marked by the strong involvement of the Presbyterians, Methodists and Church of Ireland in the Republic, and the Jewish congregation, through religious services, sermons, and lectures. But the Protestant churches were extremely careful to ensure that this engagement stopped at the boundaries of the state – they gave clear direction to the government about the terminology that should be used to avoid any difficulties with respect to their fellow-churchmen and women in Northern Ireland. One noteworthy element of the commemoration was a determined effort to see the occasion as one that involved all religious communities in the Republic. On a more local note, I attended the historical pageant in St. Louis Convent Monaghan (I was at school in St. Louis Convent Carrickmacross). In the scene depicting the founding of the Ulster Volunteers and the signing of the Covenant some of the students wore sashes and collars lent by the local Orange Lodge, and it was claimed that the student who played Carson wore a collar that once belonged to him. The pageant was attended by members of the Orange Lodge, and by the Church of Ireland bishop and Catholic bishops. The 1960s was marked by genuine efforts to create better inter-church relations; not everybody supported this – John Charles McQuaid, the Catholic archbishop of Dublin vetoed government plans for an ecumenical blessing of the new Garden of Remembrance, in Parnell Square, but one of his priests organised a joint service with his Church of Ireland colleague at the graves of some 1916 veterans.

So what mistakes did the Irish government make in 1966? One – which does not concern us was their naïve belief that the world wanted to take part in these events – travelling to Dublin – or that they would be widely covered by foreign television stations. They weren't, and some of the coverage was critical – not about the history – but about contemporary Ireland – with images of slums and poverty featuring in a column that was widely-syndicated throughout North America. But from a more local perspective, complacency was an obvious error: the sense that republican violence and denominational tensions were of the past– for example the destruction of Nelson's Pillar in March 1966 was treated with considerable equanimity, likewise any other demos or explosions at the time. But the British authorities shared this equanimity; the discovery of a bomb at the residence of the British military attaché in Dublin was treated very lightly indeed.

More importantly, Easter 1966 was very much a partitionist event, as the attitudes of the Protestant churches showed very clearly. The Irish government appears to have given little, if any thought to the potential impact of the commemoration in Northern Ireland. By 1966 Lemass and O'Neill had met; Lemass' government was determined to build closer relations with Stormont, and with the Northern Ireland business community. This co-operation is reflected in the instructions given to CIE (the state transport company), not to authorise a special train to carry republicans to the Belfast commemoration a week after Easter Sunday, and the absence of any protest by the Irish government when the northern authorities sealed the border that weekend. By 1966 the Irish government had minimal links with northern nationalists, and showed little interest in their opinions; Dublin's agenda was rather one-dimensionally economic – and nationalists carried little economic clout.

The most striking finding for me, from the 1966 study, was the degree of distance and the growing alienation of northern nationalism from the Irish state. Throughout Northern Ireland nationalists of all varieties called on people to commemorate the Easter Rising at home – not to go to Dublin. This distance anticipated the position in 1969 when the Irish government found itself with no significant contacts or information about the mindset of northern nationalists.

Looking more closely at Northern Ireland it is important to recall that community tensions did not begin in 1966, though tensions escalated with the murder of Catholic men in Belfast that summer, the banning of the UVF and the bombing of the Silent Valley Reservoir. But the disturbances in Northern Ireland reflected local tensions – such as hard-line Unionist unease at Terence O'Neill's rhetoric of change, or evidence of ecumenism on the part of some church leaders, plus the impact of a more politically-active nationalism evident in Gerry Fitt's victory in the Westminster election. The Golden Jubilee did not create these tensions, but it undoubtedly aggravated them. O'Neill – like Lemass was determined to present Northern Ireland as a modern state – so he was unwilling to ban commemorative events – for fear of the repercussions in Whitehall or internationally. His muddled approach probably offended all parties. The 1916 Rising and the Jubilee could be cited, and was cited to strengthen tribal loyalties and/or fears. For Ian Paisley the Jubilee, and O'Neill's indecision presented a major opportunity to enhance his public profile.

So what lessons, if any does this provide?

A commemoration says more about the time of the commemoration than about the events that are being remembered. So how the commemorations of the Great War, the Somme, the Easter Rising, etc. will evolve depend on public opinion, popular attitudes, the presence or absence of tensions, flashpoints in Belfast, Dublin and elsewhere at the time. These matters are not within the control of those who organise the commemoration, but they should be aware of these possibilities.

We live in a democracy – so no authority can control how a commemoration will be celebrated, interpreted or resented. In the Republic 1966 was used to highlight the grievances of Irish language activists, and social inequalities – but these are not the flashpoints that we remember today. The impact of the Jubilee was much more significant in Northern Ireland – because while the Republic was largely at ease with itself in 1966 (perhaps naively so), this was not the case in Northern Ireland.

One major difference between 1966 and today, is the media revolution. We live in an age of digital records, social media, and mass communications – and these have been used elsewhere to organise flash mobs, instant protests and to set new agendas. This means that commemorations are even less amenable to control than in the past

Those organising official events must be conscious of history and sensitivities associated with the past. The sensitivities that must be considered are not those of academic historians, and perhaps not even the sensitivities of senior politicians – but those of families and community groups. Families and communities are critical – indeed with mass interest in genealogy and family histories, many people have discovered long-forgotten relatives who fought in Flanders, Gallipoli or in the Irish war of independence. The various commemorative conferences or exhibitions that have been organised in Dublin have attracted a remarkable number of men and women – brought there because some family member was involved in events during these years – some of these relatives are well-known, many are not, but there is a real determination by many people to tell their stories. So one challenge – and one real opportunity – lies in providing a space for these reminiscences and family memorabilia.

As we have seen in the case of 1966, politicians see a major commemoration as an opportunity to promote a contemporary agenda. Leading trade unionists have used the celebrations of the 1913 Lockout to strengthen their public image, reiterate the importance of trade unions today, and encourage recruitment after years of falling membership. The Irish government will probably try and celebrate 2016 as a recovery of Irish sovereignty (whatever that might mean). It is probably too much to ask that politicians might agree not to politicise the coming commemorations to advance a political agenda, but it would be good if they could avoid distorting history to achieve their goals. One of the worst examples of the misuse of commemoration was the bi-centenary of the 1798 Rebellion – when two successive governments – the Rainbow Coalition (Fine Gael, Labour and Workers Party), and the Fianna Fáil/Labour Coalition – trotted out a similar narrative of 1798 which most historians would regard as inaccurate: that the 1798 rebellion was progressive and forward looking; that it was not sectarian, and that it was the same rebellion in Antrim and Down as in Wexford.

This bi-centenary was directly linked with the Good Friday Agreement and the subsequent referendums, and in the mood of goodwill the Irish government actually got away with this without a serious challenge.

But concepts such as 'shared history' must be used with caution. The shared history may be one of mutual antipathy; while nationalists and unionists fought in the Great War they may have done so for very different reasons. Some Irish officials have spoken about Orangemen marching past the GPO in 2016 – citing the fact that German and French troops will march together on the Champs Elysée on July 14, 2014. But for most Germans and French people World War I is truly history, and they share a common view of this event – both countries regard that war as an unmitigated tragedy with no winners. There is no such consensus about Easter 1916, and we should not force one.

What can be achieved – is bottom-up community engagement, perhaps built around diverse family histories. A sharing of these experiences, and small-scale community encounters – such as those organised by Jane Leonard and Trevor Parkhill at the Ulster Museum as part of the museum's 1798 exhibition – offers space for voluntary interaction about the past, which may pay dividends in terms of divisive contemporary issues.

In terms of commemorative events – the advice that the committee on which I serve has been giving the Irish government – is to concentrate its resources on making historical evidence widely available – through physical exhibitions and most especially online digital platforms. These give people – regardless of their views – an opportunity to engage with the past; they represent a permanent legacy, opportunities for community engagement, and they are less

prominent flashpoints than processions or prominent public monuments.

Mary Daly Discussion

Brian Kennaway: Given how little attention was paid to how 1912 was commemorated or celebrated in 1962, how did that impinge on how the 1916 Rising was commemorated/celebrated in 1966 and furthermore, given that we have almost a constant decade of commemorations now, what will that mean for the Government's response in the future?

Mary Daly: The Irish Government was somewhat introverted. It looked to the future more than the past so that the 1912 commemoration did not impinge. In terms of the rolling anniversaries there is a real fear that by the 1918 anniversaries we will all be exhausted with commemoration fatigue. What we are getting at the moment is a timetable that is changing, we had a burst of activity in 2012/13, then there was a lag, but there is a sense that things are now beginning to pick up again. I think the agenda will change and there will be a reflection of what jars over the next few months, and in what resonates there will be fluidity in the way it evolves.

William Crawley: The recently announced State visit to England perhaps provides an opportunity to think collectively about commemorations at a state level –and there may be an opportunity for President Higgins to be involved in commemorations prior to any potential state visit which would be a unifying moment? Do you see risks around that?

Mary Daly: Not at this moment. I can speak as someone who regarded the Royal visit with a degree of trepidation in case it went wrong. I was on the RTE team speaking about the Garden of Remembrance and Islandbridge. It was only when it was coming to a close that I could relax and think that was good. There was a large tension attached to this.

Margaret Ward: I like your notion of a democratic commemoration. But we need to recognise that women are not part of this discourse. The Proclamation talks in a male language. Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington talks about it as a seminal moment as it is the first time men voluntarily included women and that's something that Ireland has that the French Revolution and the Americans don't have and there is a whole discourse that needs to be considered and also how women are later removed from the public sphere.

Mary Daly: I think it will be there. There is a book coming out imminently which suggests that of the seven signatories of the 1916 proclamation, at least six were clear supporters of women's suffrage. I think what you will get in terms of later events, for example certainly the Irish Government will do things about the extension of suffrage.[18] I would argue that you need to include the farmers' sons who also got the vote for the first time. I think it's important to include them but it's also important to not overly fragment the broader political messages. That it lets us be inclusive but that it also leaves space for all special groups. There are strong groups of women scholars who are looking at that, but we must not overly distort the story. History needs to be seen in the context of the times.


POBLACHT NA H EIREANN.
THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT
OF THE
IRISH REPUBLIC
TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND

[18] Senia Paseta, *Nationalist women in Ireland, 1900-1918*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

(Not) Commemorating The First World War and The Somme

Dr Marie Coleman

Introduction

In November 2013 the Attorney General of Northern Ireland, John Larkin, suggested the possibility of ending troubles-related historic prosecutions in Northern Ireland. These remarks provoked a considerable reaction, mostly hostile, and while the attorney's rationale was based largely upon the practical difficulties associated with gathering reliable evidence and securing prosecutions after a lengthy time lag, his suggestion raises the question of whether forgetting would be preferable to remembering when it comes to our contested past. This paper intends to take a different slant on commemoration by exploring in broad terms the theme of 'not commemorating'. In this regard it will examine the arguments in favour of remembering. Specifically in regard to the case of the memory of the First World War, it will examine the mistaken impression that the commemoration of that conflict was not widespread in independent Ireland during the inter-war years. Finally, it will suggest some of the greatest challenges facing contemporary Northern Irish society in marking the decade of centenaries.

Why remember?

A wide variety of adjectives are being used at the moment to describe the contemporary engagement with the historic events of a century ago which shaped the Ireland of today. The official Irish government website www.decadeofcentenaries.com is dedicated to the Irish state's 'programme of commemorations relating to the significant events in Irish history that took place between 1912 and 1922'. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the Imperial War Museum's First World War Centenary Partnership 'will present a global programme of cultural events and activities from 2014-18 to *commemorate* the centenary of the First World War'. By contrast, the programme of events organised by the Community Relations Council and Heritage Lottery Fund, including the conference at which this paper was presented, prefers to use the more general terms of 'Marking Anniversaries' and 'Remembering', as in the case of the 1916 conference and the 2012 lecture series, 'Remembering the Future'.

In a society where language and specific terms carry a loaded significance – ¬that might not at first glance be obvious to those not familiar with Northern Irish life or politics – the terms used to describe these activities, precision of phraseology, and an understanding of why a specific term is used, is an important starting point for those involved. From a social-anthropological perspective, Dominic Bryan views commemoration as a contemporary political act, rather than simply an examination of the historic past: 'commemoration seems … to be more than just an act of remembering or historical research. It is a practice of public recognition.'

All of which leads to the central question of why do we remember the past? At a basic level it appears to be grounded in an instinctive human interest in the past and a desire to understand how we got where we are today. My own development as a professional historian was similarly motivated. Some scholars suggest that there is a moral duty to remember, an argument that is particularly strong when applied to exceptionally traumatic events from the human past, such as the Holocaust; the Israeli philosopher, Avishai Margalit, has argued that 'We must remember because remembering is a moral duty. We owe a debt to the victims … By remembering and telling, we … prevent forgetfulness from killing the victims twice.' Such an obligation must, however, be balanced against the potential dangers of remembering, especially the conflation of history and myth, the mis-use of history to invent or strengthen a tradition that is not necessarily based on fact, and the abuse of collective memory to inflame ethnic conflicts.

(Not) commemorating in southern Ireland

The golden jubilee celebrations of the Easter Rising in the Republic of Ireland in 1966 were unusual by southern Irish standards. The independent Irish state did not have a great tradition of state commemoration until then. David Fitzpatrick has aptly described the attitude of the governments of the Irish Free State (1922-37) towards commemoration as 'a chronicle of embarrassment', while Anne Dolan has shown that the Irish state was as neglectful of the army plot in Glasnevin cemetery, for members of the Free State army killed in the Civil War, as it was of the Irish War Memorial Garden at Islandbridge, which remembered Irishmen killed in the Great War.

Such resistance to official state commemoration can be attributed in large part to the divisiveness of the Civil War, the sense that the independence project remained incomplete while partition remained, and the desire to forget rather than to remember certain events. The latter argument is especially the case concerning the memory of the Irish Civil War. Fianna Fáil governments preferred to forget a conflict in which many of its personnel had been on the losing side, while some of the actions of the Free State forces at Ballyseedy and Ben Bulben were not ones that the pro-Treaty government and its successors could be proud of.

1916 was probably the one event that the two main Irish political parties which had their origins in the Treaty split, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, could agree on, and by 1966 time had healed some of the emotional wounds associated with the revolutionary period. By 1966 the revolutionary generation was also aware of its own mortality and felt the need to ensure that future generations understood its legacy. In 1941, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Rising, Taoiseach Éamon de Valera did not consider an elaborate ceremony to be appropriate in the context of another European war. As Minister for External (Foreign) Affairs (a post which he held along with that of Taoiseach from 1932 until 1948), he was also prudent enough not to antagonise Britain unnecessarily at a time when Irish security and the maintenance of neutrality depended on British goodwill and success in defending itself from a German attack. He also carried the authority of the last surviving commandant of the Rising.

While state commemoration in independent Ireland was neither extensive nor elaborate prior to 1966, non-state commemoration was much more vibrant. This is especially the case with remembrance of the First World War in the inter-war years. Because the Irish state distanced itself from the memory of the war, an impression was created that there was, in the words of Keith Jeffery, a 'national amnesia in the south about the First World War'. Research in the past two decades has shown this not to have been the case. This attitude dated more for the post-Second World War period than from the inter-war years. In fact, First World War commemorations in the Irish Free State were 'extensive and well-

attended' in the 1920s and 1930s. This is not to say that such commemorations were held without opposition from advanced nationalist and republican forces still hostile to the war and its memory; Armistice Day celebrations were a particular focus of the IRA's campaign against British imperialism during the 1920s and resulted in a toning-down of the British paraphernalia associated with such ceremonies, such as the prominence of the Union Jack and the Poppy.

While southern towns by and large have no equivalent of the local war memorials which are dotted around the principal towns of Northern Ireland, some interesting examples stand out. One of the first war memorials in Ireland was erected in Bray, County Wicklow in 1920. Similar constructions appeared in both Cork city and Longford town in 1925. The latter is especially noteworthy as Longford was one of the most active centres of IRA activity, outside of Dublin city and the province of Munster, during the Irish War of Independence. While the memorial was largely the work of local unionists and remnants of the old Irish Parliamentary Party, the large attendance at its unveiling in August 1925 – described by the *Longford Leader* newspaper as 'one of the most imposing and impressive displays ever witnessed in Longford' – and the unveiling ceremony which consisted of a Union Jack being draped over the memorial, is surprising in light of the strength of republican sentiment in Longford after 1917. The event was largely ignored by local republicans and nationalists, yet there appears to have been very little interference with it and to date it is still a largely uncontroversial site in the county. In fact, the Organisation of National Ex-servicemen and Women, which comprises veterans of the Irish national army, now holds an annual commemoration at the site of the memorial, reflecting the way in which First World War commemoration has gained greater acceptability in the Republic since the Good Friday Agreement.

Subsequent to 1966, commemoration in the Republic of Ireland during the latter half of the twentieth century was overshadowed by the Northern Irish troubles. In some ways the troubles provided a convenient excuse for southern Ireland to deal with its historic embarrassment about commemoration by ignoring it. The most obvious example of this was the extremely low-key recognition afforded the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Rising in 1991. In the same way that the beginning of the troubles silenced state commemorative practice, the peace process of the 1990s removed a large part of the Irish state's embarrassment about such official ceremonies to mark its past. In 1998 the chronological co-incidence of the Good Friday Agreement with the bi-centenary of the 1798 rebellion of the United Irishmen and the ninetieth anniversary of the end of the First World War is an interesting study in this regard.

The peace process made the Republic of Ireland more prepared to engage with its First World War past. This more open attitude to exploring the lives of Irishmen who volunteered for and died in that conflict also reflected the cumulative effect of historical research by Myles Dungan, Keith Jeffery and Terence Denman, and the journalist Kevin Myers, among others, over the preceding decade. The political advancement of Sinn Féin in the south since 1997 inspired Fianna Fáil to resuscitate large set-piece commemorations of the historic past in an effort to live up to its epithet of 'the republican party' and ward off Sinn Féin's encroachment on its electoral territory. The state funerals of the executed volunteers, including Kevin Barry, in 2001 and the elaborate ceremony to mark the ninetieth anniversary of the Rising in 2006 were the best example of this. Northern nationalists also became more comfortable in recognising their ancestral involvement in the Great War as seen in the project examining the experience of Belfast nationalists who enlisted in the 6th Battalion of the Connaught Rangers.

However, this new and more open atmosphere was not without its negative consequences. The 1998 commemorations also witnessed a

disturbing willingness by public figures to distort history to make it more palatable to contemporary political aims. Specifically in the case of 1798, the focus was more upon the inclusive republicanism of the United Irishmen (more applicable to the organisation prior to 1795) while down-playing its more blatant sectarian aspects. The most notable example of this was the debate over the massacre of up to two hundred Protestants at Scullabogue in County Wexford, where a legitimate debate exists as to whether the local rebels were actually official United Irishmen.

(Not) commemorating in Northern Ireland

The biggest problem facing Northern Ireland in this decade of centenaries is that of selective commemoration, which has the potential to enhance sectarian and ethnic divisions. The best example of this to date was the way in which Ulster Day was marked in September 2012. While it is understandable that this event appeals overwhelmingly to the Protestant and Unionist sectors of the community, it is unfortunate that there has not been a greater willingness by nationalists to explore its significance both historically and to contemporary unionist political culture. The prospect of both the Somme and the Rising being marked by one community and ignored by the other is disheartening. If we are to strive for the shared future and united community envisaged by the Northern Ireland Executive and set out in the 2013 report *Together Building a United Community,* we need firstly to be able to explore and engage with our shared past.

There is also a sense of ownership associated with certain events of the past that has produced an insularity and unwillingness to share historical traditions. The appropriation of the memory of the Somme by loyalist paramilitaries, partly a result of the co-incidence of the fiftieth anniversary of the Somme with the establishment of the modern paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force in 1966, has gained ground since the ceasefires of the 1990s. It has also taken on a class-based dimension that paints the Somme as the sacrifice of the loyal Ulster working class, which was broadly ignored for years by mainstream middle-class official unionism, a view that resonates with an element of the recent flag protests. This appropriation of the Somme memory was facilitated to an extent by the Stormont government after 1922, which held itself aloof from official commemorations in a similar fashion to its southern counterpart.

Conclusions

While asking ourselves the question of why are we remembering?, we must accept that there will be widespread interest in Northern Ireland in commemorating the events of one hundred years ago that helped form the society and polity in which we live today. The effective ignoring of the Rising in the Republic of Ireland in 1991 and the selective focus on the legacy of the United Irishmen in 1998 show how commemoration says more about the time in which it occurs than of the events to which it relates. There is a duty to ensure that the pitfalls of commemoration are avoided as much as possible, in particular that history will not be distorted for short-term political agendas. A genuine effort should be made to encourage exploration of a historical tradition that might be seen as alien or not relevant to one's own background, and to achieve this, those who see themselves as the keepers of that tradition, need to be more open in sharing it.

Further reading

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Marie Coleman Discussion

William Crawley: What is ethical remembering?

Marie Coleman: I think it means being aware of the sensitivities involved in remembering. This would probably be even more relevant when we get to 2018/19 they are events part of a grand political narrative but they are also personal narrative and I refer back to Margalit's comments in relation to the Holocaust.

Myrtle Hill: I don't think that ignoring the narratives is what we should do at all. There are many discourses. Focusing on a two traditions model has pushed aside others and there is a better way of remembering this.

Marie Coleman: I don't feel comfortable using the two traditions model when, for example looking at how we commemorate the Somme. Its association to working class Protestant traditions can be read as a rejection of the role of official unionism.

Ronan Fanning: There is a difference between ethical remembering and ethical commemoration – the idea of bringing ethics into remembrance is nonsense.

Remembering the Future

Maurice Hayes

Remembering the future brings in another sense of remembering – a change of gear from the nostalgic to the minatory. This is a finger-wagging injunction to be careful, to think of the consequences for the present and the future of the way in which we exhume and celebrate past events, or fail to do so, to reflect how unconsidered, partisan or over-exuberant and triumphalist recall of the past may re-kindle smouldering embers of bitterness, endanger the peace, so hard won, and disrupt community relations in the present and impede reconciliation in the future. Walk softly, for you tread on my hopes.

It brings into question too, the nature and purpose of commemoration, whether as celebration, triumphalism, memorial, reassessment, or simply to be used as an armoury from which to withdraw weapons with which to belabour political opponents, to make opportunistic points, to embarrass, to recriminate while playing to the gallery of one's own supporters.

The events we have been remembering today, the Great War, the Battle of the Somme and the Easter Rising, part, we are told, of a sequence of such events which has been categorised by governments as The Decade of Centenaries – although in some cases the connection is only one of chronology, and it is hard to fit them all into a common matrix – and questionable whether one should even try.

One can imagine, too, that the governments and those responsible for public order and the advancement of political consensus might regard the sequence stretching from the Ulster Covenant to the Civil War, and including the Great War, the Somme, the Easter Rising, the Anglo-Irish War and the foundation of Northern Ireland as a series of potential elephant traps rather than landmarks to be floodlit in retrospect and celebrated with mutual enthusiasm. To change the metaphor, a sea passage littered with icebergs and lesser floes, to be negotiated with care and trepidation in the hope of coming through, if not unscathed, at least not holed below the water-line, but with a feeling too that if they as governments do not orchestrate the commemorations which tradition demands should be ritualised, others with less benign agendas will seize the baton and produce much more discordant and ultimately disruptive tunes.

So far the commemoration of the Ulster Covenant has been carried off with dignity (but did it unwittingly set the scene for the flag protests) without provoking adverse reaction in the North or attracting much interest in the South (although it is encouraging to see the Ulster Museum exhibition transferring to Glasnevin). The remembrance of the 1913 General Strike/Lockout, which attracted little attention in Northern Ireland seemed (at least as presented on RTE) to have been entirely uncritical, a glorification of Larkin and Strumpet City with William Martin Murphy cast as a pantomime demon, and no space left for alternative narratives or points of view.

We should not flagellate ourselves too much about the difficulty of dealing with these events in a divided society and contested space, even after a century. It is only this year, fifty years after an event that convulsed the nation and reverberated across the world, that the city of Dallas could bring itself to give civic recognition to the fact that the President of the United States had been assassinated on its streets. Interestingly, however, in honouring the anniversary for the first time on Friday, the Mayor of Dallas struck a note

which should resonate through our deliberations. He said "To honour the past it is not necessary to live in the past." Then was then and now is now.

It is always difficult, too, to strike the right note in commemorating events which raise questions of morality, of reasonableness or utility, especially in cases where both sides have adopted at times morally questionable weapons, tactics or practices, and there has been a widespread and indiscriminate sacrifice of human life, especially of non-combatants. A case in point is the difficulty British society has had in recognising monumentally the service of those incredibly brave men of Bomber Command of the RAF who were required to carry out a policy of blanket-bombing of non-military targets.

Of the three events on the programme, the commemoration of the start of World War I, which we all called the Great War, is likely to be the least contentious in political terms, now that Irish public opinion, and the State, have recalled to life all the thousands of Irishmen, living and dead, who enlisted in the British Army, and who had been written out of the national narrative for most of the last century. Debate is more likely to be about how the great nations staggered into war on the basis of guarantees lightly given to smaller and often inconsequential states, and whether the subsequent slaughter of millions was justified either by the proximate causes or the eventual outcomes. But these are more likely to be cross-community, largely academic discussions, and unlikely to displace Armistice Day as a more appropriate occasion for remembrance. Commemoration of August 1914 is more likely to be in sorrow rather than glorification, of shame at the inability of politicians and statesmen to settle their differences without causing the subsequent massacre.

With the influence of the war poets, particularly since they were admitted to the canon and to the school curriculum, their views are likely to prevail and to colour discussion, of the futility of it all, of lions led by donkeys, of Oh What a lovely war, Frank McGuinness' play, Birdsong, Sebastian Barry and All Quiet on the Western Front.

The challenge presented by the commemoration of the other two is of a different order, since both have been used in the past as signposts to different futures, as basic parts of the foundation myths of separate (and hostile) political entities. The form and nature of the narrative of the Rising which was developed and nurtured on the formation of the new polity in the South paid no regard to realities in the North or to the impact on the two communities and political sensitivities there.

In the new Northern Ireland, the Somme was advanced as a proof of loyalty while others were engaged in treason, and the blood sacrifice a down-payment, a veritable mort-gage for continual membership of, and protection by the United Kingdom. For this purpose the narrative was shaped of a purely protestant force, writing out not only those from Southern regiments who had also died there (if on a different prospectus) but Northern Catholics too. Ironically, it suited the southern narrative, too, to consign them to oblivion, so that until very recently their sacrifice, their very existence, went unrecognised in both parts of the island. The present day resonances in loyalist working-class communities have been powerfully evoked by Philip Orr.

Nevertheless, thanks to the work of small bands of people over the years, the involvement of Queen and President at the Messines tower, to Frank McGuinness' play and Finbar Furey's poor Willie McBride, the commemoration of the Somme is unlikely to prove a major challenge, provided it is not over-militarised in the North, presented as community and human tragedy rather than military triumph (which it was not).

It should be said too that the recent presence of the Sinn Féin Mayor of Belfast at the civic ceremony at the Cenotaph on Armistice Day is a welcome gesture which should be recognised as a sign of willingness to take some risks in the cause of reconciliation and mutual understanding.

The Easter Rising is potentially the most contentious of the three, and the hardest to handle both at community and civic level. In the

North it has twin resonances which are mutually antipathetic, and even in the South it has become, if not contested territory, at least increasingly open to scrutiny and doubt.

For nation building the message had to be unequivocal, with no room for nuance. A terrible beauty had been born, and that was it. Few who quoted Yeats' lines stopped to notice the reservations expressed a couple of lines later about the wisdom of it all "For England may keep faith". What did take on, as Yeats noticed, was the transformative effect which elevated some quite ordinary (and in his view one quite nasty) people into heroes and martyrs. Add to that the religious symbolism associated with Eastertide, of sacrifice, crucifixion, followed speedily by glorious resurrection which would liberate God's people, of éirí amach becoming aiséirí, rebellion into resurrection.

There was no room in this version for other casualties, even the civilian casualties who are ignored to this day, to the destruction of Dublin (except by British guns) to deeper questions of legitimacy, of usurpation of initiative by a covert splinter-group, or who expressed the will of the people.

That this version of the achievement of nationhood was propagated to the exclusion of all others, with the elimination of all possible alternative means of attaining self-government from the national narrative, and the perpetuation of this through the teaching of history to successive generations of schoolchildren adds to the complexity of commemoration in a more open and sceptical society.

Jack Magee, who taught me history, or more importantly, what history was about, once remarked of his education in County Monaghan in the nineteen twenties and thirties, that he felt he was being prepared to take part in a revolution for which he had been born too late.

The high point of Easter Rising commemoration in the South was probably the 50th anniversary in 1966, entirely celebratory and glorifying with a pageant in Croke Park by Bryan MacMahon (replicated at least in part in Casement Park, if I remember rightly) and day by day re-enactment on RTE. Fr. Shaw's critical re-evaluation in *The Canon of Irish History* was regarded as so embarrassingly unpatriotic and subversive that it was suppressed for some years.

Since then, with the onset of violence in Northern Ireland, and the threat to the institutions of the state in the South, governments have been anxious to play down the role (hitherto claimed as crucial) of violent uprising in state-building – or at least to deny any connection or resemblance of that glorious episode to the rather sordid and brutal way in which life was now being taken in the North.

However I am not into counterfactual history. 1916 happened, for a variety of reasons and with all its consequences – many of them unintended. It is in the public mind the great symbolic starting-point of the independence of modern Ireland, and cannot be wished away. No government, of whatever hue, could fail to commemorate the centenary publicly and with considerable ceremony. Whether that could apply in Northern Ireland in a cross-community administration where there is no common perception of either the reality or the morality of the Rising is another question entirely – perhaps a bridge too far at this time.

Be that as it may, no Irish government could leave the field entirely to others to rewrite the national narrative on their own partisan and divisive terms, without regard to the impact on a divided society in Northern Ireland.

And while we here are principally concerned with commemoration in Northern Ireland, how 1916 is celebrated in the South (especially those celebrations which have the imprimatur of state or official sponsorship or participation) will have reverberations there, as indeed had those in 1966. There is no point in trying to cobble together a common narrative of the past. Conor Cruise O'Brien, recalling "ancestral voices

prophesying war" talked of the reality of "different ancestors, different wars". In Thompson in *Tír na nÓg*, a one-act farce of 1912, in which an Orangeman killed at Scarva finds himself among remnants of the Fianna in Tír na nÓg. The possibility of dialogue was frustrated by the inability of the parties to recognise even the names of the other's heroes.

The best that can be done is for people to re-examine their own narrative, seeking, as far as possible, for truth, factual accuracy and fair presentation, and seeking to relate it in terms which are non-inflammatory, non-recriminatory, and to be prepared to listen while others present their narrative in the same spirit.
This, of course, applies to more than the 1916 story – it applies to the events euphemised as the Northern Troubles, which Richard Haas is currently grappling with and in which we can only wish him well.

Of the more remote, centenary events with which we are here mainly concerned, we can only heed the advice of the Mayor of Dallas – to honour the past but not to live in it. We need to remember that that was then, this is now. It is a mistake to judge the morality of actions taken a century ago by the standards and norms of today. Even the concept of blood sacrifice which people recoil from now was common currency in some circles in pre-war England (as presented in Vera Brittain's *Testimony of Youth*, and the same impulse which drove some men to the GPO drove others to war in 1914, and ultimately to the Somme.

What has changed in relation to national narratives has been the context, both domestic and internationally. Then the emphasis had been on nation-building in times of uncertainty and insecurity, allowing no space for ambiguity or nuance, now the imperative is on reconciliation and bridge-building and what that implies in terms of compromise and empathy.
What has changed, too, in Northern Ireland is experience of the reality of violent conflict, of the cost to individuals, to families, to communities and to society, of the difference between a rousing ballad and grim reality, that, as Pegeen Mike cried ruefully "There's a great gap between a callous act and a dirty deed" – murder at a distance in time or space could be celebrated when rhetorically reported, but not in the presence of the bloodied victim.

Also changed are the relationships between the communities in Northern Ireland, between North and South and between Britain and Ireland, and the realisation that technological advances have made the potential of terror so awful that every other means of resolving conflict must be pursued.

What has changed things in Northern Ireland has been the Good Friday Agreement (if I can avoid overtones of crucifixion this time) – endorsed by referenda in both jurisdictions on the island, which is suffused with sentiments of respect, understanding tolerance and mutual respect and calls for sensitivity in the use of symbols and emblems.

The GFA finally unhitches the nation from the state, allowing national identity to flow across boundaries, and accepts that full citizenship can accommodate a range of allegiances and a spectrum of cultural identities. What people must realise is that with rights come responsibilities. In claiming the right to express one's cultural identity, one concedes the right to others to express theirs (provided both are done lawfully and with respect).

Another game change has been the Queen's visit to the Republic two years ago (and the follow up visit next year of President Higgins to Britain). Of particular importance in our context is the visit to the Garden of Remembrance, when a simple dignified bow of the head was sufficient acknowledgement of a national narrative and a nation's dead, and an acknowledgement later that things had happened in a common history which would have been better not to have happened.

Over the years there have been examples of good practice – how the Ulster Museum presented the tercentenary of the Battle of the Boyne by an exhibition putting events in Ireland in a wider European context, which toured the island, the acquisition and development of the Boyne site by the Irish state, how the city of Londonderry remembered the Siege of Derry, not least through the music of Shaun Davey. Indeed how Derry has managed the whole matter of parading has been a model for other places.

What is important is to remember that we are commemorating the events of a century ago, not trying to replicate them. To commemorate either Easter Week or the Somme is not to endorse blood sacrifice or trench warfare as an appropriate response to conflict or intercommunal tension or the solution of political or constitutional problems in the 21st century. Putting the events in their appropriate context involves locating ourselves in the here and now and records the priority as reconciliation, integration and social cohesion.

As President Higgins put it recently in Belfast, "Whatever mechanisms are ultimately agreed on for the task, the overall needs of a flourishing and shared society must be at their heart and the memory of victims must appropriately be reflected and cherished in thoughtful memorials and initiatives that bring communities together so that we can learn from the terrible failures of the past."

The best approach for the commemorations is to be low-key and permissive – to encourage people at the local level to commemorate as they wish, and to facilitate them in doing so by the public and civic agencies. Museums and libraries have an important role to play and it is often easier for people to accept the presentation of painful and divisive issues when mediated through poetry literature or drama, the arts should have a big role and should be funded and assisted to do so.

In which context (more widely than, but including commemorations) the main challenges are –

The burden of the past; the pattern of remembrance and commemoration; the accretion of ritual and pageantry; and distortion of the narrative through intergenerational transmission.

And the main requirements are –

To review and reformulate narratives in order to take account of other competing narratives; to consider the impact on others; to be willing to listen to their narratives; and to swap stories.

Above all it is about respect, mutual respect for identities and tolerance and restraint in how they are displayed and how they are received in a divided society. Nobody should be stopped remembering in their own way, but they might be enjoined to bear in mind the Hippocratic injunction, at least to do no harm. Civic and political leaders should set the tone in their own language, and in resisting the temptation to react to every idle word from the fringes of society.

In endorsing the GFA the people of Ireland voted for the politics of reconciliation and rejection of the politics of revenge and recrimination.

As Bishop MacNeice said on the Sunday before the Twelfth in 1935, "It would be well to remember and to forget, to remember the good, the things that were considerate and chivalrous and reasonable – forget the things that are behind you, forget the unhappy past, forget the story of the old feuds, the old triumphs, the old humiliations, that you may be better able to put all your strength into the tasks of today and tomorrow.

His son, the poet, put it more bluntly "Put out what flags you will, it is too late to save your souls with bunting."

Contributors

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Tony McCusker was Chair of the Community Relations Council. He is a retired civil servant who in the late 1980s as a member of the Central Community Relations Unit (CCRU) at Stormont was involved in setting up the Community Relations Council. He served in a number of other posts in the civil service dealing with both community and economic issues and was adviser to Mo Mowlam and Peter Mandelson on planning the implementation of devolved government following the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement. This included setting up the institutions of the Agreement – the Executive, North/South Institutions, the British/Irish Council, and the British/Irish Inter-governmental Council. Subsequently he became Deputy Permanent Secretary at the Department of Agriculture.

Since retirement he has been active in youth and community work. His term of Chair of the Community Relations Council ended in December 2013. He is currently Chair of the Community Foundation of Northern Ireland.

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"Cutting Off One's Head to Get Rid of a Headache": the Impact of the Great War on the Irish Policy of the British Government

Ronan Fanning, Professor Emeritus of Modern History at University College Dublin, is the author of *Fatal Path: British Government and Irish Revolution 1910-1922,* which has been shortlisted for the 2013 Irish Book Awards. His other major publications include *The Irish Department of Finance 1922-1958, Independent Ireland*, and (co-authored with Michael Lillis) *The Lives of Eliza Lynch*, which is the subject of a drama documentary that had its European premiere at the BFI London Film Festival and which was also screened at the Dublin Film Festival in February 2014.

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Challenging nationalist stereotypes of 1916

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The Battle of the Somme and the Unionist Journey

Philip Orr has written, both as a historian and a dramatist, about the Irish experience of the First World War, the Home Rule crisis and 18th century radicalism. He spent many years as an English and Theatre Studies teacher in secondary education, and has worked as a researcher for a number of local museums while also exercising a role in community education and peace-building.

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"In balance with this life, this death": Poetic Responses to 1916

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Remembering 1916 – Myths and Risks of Commemoration

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Challenge of Contemporary Commemoration

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