

Comóradh

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A Newsletter for the Irish Abroad
in the Decade of Commemorations



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha
agus Trádála
Department of Foreign Affairs
and Trade



“In marking these centenaries,
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people of these islands...”

Dear Friend,

1914 saw many important events taking place both on the island of Ireland and overseas which had a profound impact on the course of Irish history.

In marking these centenaries, we remember that the events of the decade 1912-1922 affected all the people of these islands, and shaped the relations between Britain and Ireland for the century which followed. The extent of Ireland's connection with Britain during the First World War was made all the more clear when I launched the digitisation of Ireland's memorial record for the First World War at Google's European Headquarters, together with Northern Ireland's First Minister Peter Robinson and deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness.

This year holds significance to the Irish at home and abroad, with many having relatives who took part in the First World War or in the events leading to Irish independence. Commemorations of the past are intended to engage the global Irish family, and this newsletter highlights just some of the events that are taking place in 2014. Embassies and Consulates can provide additional information on local events.

Earlier this year, the Taoiseach launched the Military Service Pensions Collection, providing us with a fascinating window into the lives of those who took part in the 1916 Rising.

Digital archive projects such as this are, of course, of particular interest to the Irish Diaspora, with today's technology allowing all to explore Irish history wherever we may be.

A programme of events commemorated the seminal founding of Cumann na mBan in April 1914, which formalised the role of women in the Independence movement. The passing, and later suspension, of the Home Rule Bill reveals the ongoing struggle throughout 1914 for an answer from the Westminster Parliament to the 'Irish Question', and events to mark its centenary will take place in London this summer.

The outbreak of the First World War, and John Redmond's famous Woodenbridge address, set the scene for Ireland's participation in the War in the years that followed, with the Christmas Truce in December of 1914 affording us a glimpse into the human dimension of soldiers' experience along the Western Front on the first Christmas of the First World War.

I hope that you will join in the exploration of our rich history that these centenaries recall, and take part in the many events to mark them.

Eamon Gilmore T.D.
Tánaiste
Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

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GPO interpretive centre to be launched for centenary of Easter Rising, 1916

In March 2014, it was announced that An Post had been granted planning permission by Dublin City Council for the development of 'GPO: Witness History'; an extended exhibition and interpretive centre at the GPO on Dublin's O'Connell Street. A key landmark building in Dublin, the Proclamation of the Irish Republic was read by Patrick Pearse outside the building in 1916, signalling the start of the Rising. The building is a protected structure owing to its historical, social and architectural importance. The new centre will house a permanent exhibition marking the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising, focusing on the theme of the GPO as a witness to history.

Speaking at the GPO, Minister Deenihan said:

"When delivered, this interpretative centre at the GPO will be a major part of our centenary commemoration of the Easter Rising of 1916. This year, the Government has allocated €6 million in funding to support a number of important commemorative projects including this one."

Construction is expected to commence over the summer months, to be fully completed and ready for opening to the public at Easter 2016.

Centenary of the founding of Cumann na mBan

Cumann na mBan, the women's nationalist organisation which worked in conjunction with the Irish Volunteers, was formed in Dublin in April 1914. This year, a series of commemorative events to mark the centenary of its

foundation took place. A ceremony at Glasnevin Cemetery took place on April 2 2014, where President Higgins laid a wreath in tribute to Cumann na mBan at the Sigerson Memorial, which honours the dead of 1916.

In his address at Glasnevin Cemetery, President Higgins said that the women of Cumann na mBan "rose up to vindicate the unfulfilled hopes and aspirations for liberty of previous generations".

President Higgins was joined by Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht Jimmy Deenihan who, in an earlier ceremony, had laid a wreath in honour of nurse Elizabeth O'Farrell, the last woman standing in the GPO who carried the white flag of surrender to British forces, risking her own life to do so.

Relatives of Cumann na mBan members were amongst the crowd who attended two separate ceremonies to honour the women at the cemetery. A guard of honour of women personnel from the Defence Forces also took centre stage in the formal ceremony. A stamp featuring Cumann na mBan members driving at the head of the funeral of citizens shot during the Howth arms landing was issued by An Post to commemorate the founding of the organisation.

After the Presidential commemoration ceremony took place, a Memorial Lecture in honour of the foundation of Cumann na mBan was delivered by Dr. Mary McAuliffe, President of the Women's History Association of Ireland (WHAI) at the Glasnevin Museum.

Launch of Ireland's Memorial Records

On 10 January 2014, Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Eamon Gilmore T.D., together with Northern Ireland's First Minister, Peter Robinson and deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness launched an online



Tánaiste Eamon Gilmore TD, Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness, First Minister Peter Robinson, and John Herlihy, Head of Google Ireland, at Google's European Headquarters in Dublin during the launch of Ireland's memorial records.

archive of Ireland's First World War records. The new archive, 'Ireland's Memorial Records', lists 49,000 soldiers from the island of Ireland who died during the First World War in Flanders and is available online at imr.inlandersfields.be

Google, the In Flanders Fields Museum in Belgium, genealogical company Eneclann, the Embassy of Ireland in Brussels, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade worked together to bring the project to fruition. Relatives of those who died in the war were present to see the archive launched. The records were originally published in 1923 by the Committee of the Irish National War Memorial, in an eight-volume set illustrated by Harry Clarke. The records have been corrected, updated and made freely available online as part of the project. They now serve as a genealogical resource available to all who wish to explore their own family ties to the war, facilitating the remembrance of these individuals, and helping to build understanding of Irish involvement.

First Minister Robinson remarked "As we enter an important decade of commemorations in both our countries, it is my hope that what has been established here today will keep alive the history and the stories of those who did not return from war." Deputy First Minister McGuinness observed that "over 200,000 Irishmen fought in the war and over 49,000 were killed, which shows the human impact of the war on the island of Ireland. It is important all their personal stories are told and this innovative project ensures the memory of those Irish soldiers killed will continue."



John Green, Chairman of Glasnevin Trust, Dr. Mary McAuliffe, and Minister for Arts, Heritage, and the Gaeltacht Jimmy Deenihan TD at the graveside of Cumann na mBan member, Elizabeth O'Farrell.

The Tánaiste said:

“The First World War was seen for many years as a divisive part of our troubled legacy. And because of this, there was a tendency to avoid any interrogation of Irish involvement. However, we have learnt that contending with the past, as we have done over a number of years in relation to Ireland’s role and contribution, has brought with it great opportunities to recognise in our reflections on the war our common humanity, our common cause, and our common heritage.”

Launch of Military Service Pension Collection, GPO

On 16 January 2014 the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, T.D., launched the first release online of material from the Military Service (1916-1923) Pensions Collection at the GPO, O’Connell Street, Dublin. This launch was part of the National Commemorative Programme, with then Minister for Defence, Alan Shatter and Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Jimmy Deenihan in attendance.

The Collection of the Military Service Pensions Archive numbers almost 300,000 application files for pensions, allowances and medals as well as supporting documentation. This first online release of material from the Military Service (1916-1923) Pensions Collection was primarily focused on the participants of the 1916 Rising. Future releases of material from the Military Service Pensions Collection will take place over the coming years.

The pension files were created following a decision of the Houses of the Oireachtas in June 1923 to compensate wounded members of the IRA, National Army, Irish Volunteers, Irish Citizen Army, and other organisations, along with the dependents of deceased members of these organisations. The original 1924 act was augmented by its successor in 1934, which expanded the definition of active service to include Cumann na mBan, and members of the anti-Treaty IRA in the Civil War. There were 82,000 applications under the 1924 and 1934 acts, only 15,700 of which were successful.

Minister Deenihan, welcoming the launching of this project, remarked

“I would emphasise the opportunity this resource presents for members of the public to access the records of their families, community and districts to enhance their understanding of the historic times and achievements of a remarkable generation.... Although invaluable for research and contributing to the academic assessment of our history, these records are a direct communication across the gap of a century to this generation”.

The archive can be viewed online at www.militaryarchives.ie

Laying of foundation stone for Cross of Sacrifice, Glasnevin Cemetery

On 31 March 2014, Glasnevin Cemetery hosted a ceremony to mark the laying of the foundation stone for a Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cross of Sacrifice. The Cross of Sacrifice consists of a cross embedded with a bronze sword, mounted on an octagonal base, and is erected in cemeteries containing more than 40 graves of soldiers commemorated by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

The foundation stone for the Cross of Sacrifice was laid by Minister Deenihan and Ms Theresa Villiers MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Also in attendance were the Chairman of Glasnevin Trust, Mr John Green; the British Ambassador to Ireland, His Excellency Dominick Chilcott; and Ms Deirdre Mills, Director of UK Operations, Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The ceremony was marked by the attendance of a colour party from the Defence Forces.

The laying of the Foundation Stone is a cooperative venture between the Glasnevin Trust and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to ensure those who lost their lives in the two world wars are ‘forever remembered’. The Cross of Sacrifice will be formally unveiled to coincide with the centenary of the outbreak of hostilities of the First World War on 31 July 2014.

Addressing the gathering, John Green, Chairman of the Glasnevin Trust, said that

“this project ... is playing a significant part in helping to reconcile the social wounds that emerged almost a century ago when the different forms of personal sacrifice of Ireland’s youth both in the Great War and the Easter Rising were harshly compared to each other.”

Reconciliation Fund: Clondara Research Project

During the decade of commemorations, the **Reconciliation Fund** administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is supporting a number of commemorative projects as part of the regular funding of community and voluntary groups. Commemorative projects supported by the Reconciliation Fund explore issues around identity and understanding and respect for other traditions. In many cases, projects explore the ways in which drawing upon overlapping historical experiences can have an impact on contemporary political and community relations.

Case study: The Reconciliation Fund is currently supporting Clondara Historical & Cultural Group’s 6th Connaught Rangers Research Project on “The Legacy of Belfast Nationalists and the Great War”. This Belfast based project recalls the history of Irish nationalists in the First World War. Many of the Group’s members had relatives who enlisted at the outbreak of the First World War into the Connaught Rangers Regiment and, along with hundreds of others from the Falls Road area of Belfast, fought in the First World War.

Many of these men were members of the Irish Volunteers and supporters of the Irish Parliamentary Party who were campaigning for Home Rule in Ireland. The Falls Road, like the rest of Ireland at the time, was in a state of ferment and expectation.

Over the years the time and commitment given by the volunteers of the 6th Connaught Rangers Research Group has proved invaluable in uncovering photographs, memorabilia, documents, newspaper articles and family stories which tell the narrative of a community in turmoil. They also contribute today to an examination of common and overlapping histories in a divided society. Their book, ‘The 6th Connaught Rangers, Belfast

Nationalists and the Great War' has proved very popular resulting in contact from Newry to New Zealand and Lisburn to London.

The 6th Connaught Rangers Research Group is committed to uncovering and telling the stories of as many as possible of these Belfast soldiers. In the coming year, the 6th Connaught Rangers Research Group will hold numerous presentations throughout Ireland and are in preparation for exhibitions to be held in Collins Barracks in Dublin on 28 June 2014, during Féile an Phobail in Belfast in August 2014, and at City Hall in November 2014.

Iveagh House Commemorative Lecture Series: John Lewis Lecture

Congressman John Lewis delivered the inaugural Frederick Douglass/Daniel O'Connell memorial lecture as part of the Iveagh House commemorative lecture series on 23 April 2014. He was welcomed by Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Eamon Gilmore, T.D., who introduced him as an "iconic figure who belongs in the pantheon of great leaders in the American civil rights movement".

As part of a visit with the Faith and Politics Institute, Congressman Lewis was in Dublin to share his experiences of the US civil rights movement and politics, and to learn from the experiences of those involved in reconciliation in Ireland. He was joined by Governor Martin O'Malley of Maryland and US Senator Mazie Hirono of Hawai'i. Members of the Faith and Politics Institute joined the great great granddaughters of Daniel O'Connell and Frederick Douglass, Ann Quinlan and Nettie Washington Douglass, and civil rights activists past and present for the commemorative lecture and discussion, moderated by broadcaster John Bowman.



Tánaiste Eamon Gilmore TD and Congressman John Lewis in Iveagh House in advance of the Frederick Douglass / Daniel O'Connell memorial lecture.

Congressman John Lewis was one of the leading figures in the US civil rights movement and his address drew on the unique relationship between Daniel O'Connell and Frederick Douglass and their common cause of abolitionism.

He recalled the movement's global legacy, the inspiration taken by activists in Northern Ireland from the US civil rights movement and the principles of non-violence and reconciliation which underpinned it. Mr Lewis, who is now a congressman representing Georgia, recalled Daniel O'Connell's commitment to non-violence, and the impression this left on Frederick Douglass:

"It was also Daniel O'Connell who convinced Douglass that non-violence was the most excellent way to meet their common enemy. The longer I live the more I have come to believe that non-violence is one of those immutable principles that should never be violated. It is the natural companion of the highest values of love, peace and compassion."

He also spoke of the influence of Gandhi on the life and thinking of Martin Luther King junior, the great civil rights leader, and in turn King's influence on him, saying that "The work of King changed my life, and that is why I am standing here today."

In a question and answer session with the audience, the Congressman discussed his current work on reconciliation and ongoing commitment to civil rights issues such as voter registration. Audience members explored parallels with the Northern Ireland civil rights movement. The evening concluded with a presentation to the Congressman of a statuette of Frederick Douglass by Nettie Washington Douglass.

State Visit

President Higgins' State Visit to the United Kingdom in April 2014 was an historic moment for British-Irish relations. Throughout the State Visit, the importance of the current decade of centenaries to both countries was reflected through individual events, demonstrating a commitment to inclusive commemorations.

In his address to the British parliament, the first address by a president of Ireland, President Higgins paid tribute to Tom Kettle and other Irish nationalists who died in British uniforms. President Higgins reflected on the centenaries of the outbreak of

the First World War in 2014 and the Easter Rising in Dublin in 2016, stating

"As both our islands enter periods of important centenaries we can and must reflect on the ethical importance of respecting different but deeply interwoven narratives. Such reflection will offer us an opportunity to craft a bright future on the extensive common ground we share and where we differ in matters of interpretation to have respectful empathy for each other's perspectives."

In Windsor Castle on 9 April, the President, accompanied by the Duke of York, Prince Andrew, and the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Philip, viewed the Colours of the five Irish regiments of the British army that were disbanded following the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922.



Mrs. Sabina Higgins, President Michael D Higgins, Queen Elizabeth II, and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh in advance of the State Banquet during the President's State Visit to the United Kingdom.

Updates on forthcoming commemorative initiatives and future issues of this newsletter will be posted on the website of your local Embassy or Consulate, and on the website of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Useful links:

**Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs
and Trade**

80 St. Stephens Green
Dublin 2
www.dfa.ie

**Commemorations Unit,
Department of Arts, Heritage
and the Gaeltacht**

Kildare Street
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www.decadeofcentenaries.com