

Britishness and Commemoration: National Memorials to the First World War in Britain and Ireland

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Abstract

The 1917 call for a national memorial to the First World War led to the establishment of the Imperial War Museum in London. It also inspired Scottish, Welsh and Irish national memorials. No English national memorial was ever proposed; instead the Cenotaph and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier were conceived as imperial memorials. The new statelet of Northern Ireland did not commemorate its overall war effort within its own territory. This article surveys the organization, location and design of the Scottish, Welsh and Irish national war memorials to the First World War. It examines some aspects of the complex set of relationships between the local, regional, national and imperial layers of identity that are inherent in Britishness. In doing so it reveals the confused and contested nature of national identity in the United Kingdom at the close of the First World War.

Keywords

Britishness, commemoration, First World War, national identity, war memorial The state visit of Queen Elizabeth to Ireland in May 2011 marked a milestone in the transformation of British and Irish relations. For one commentator it represented

the end of Anglophobia [which] is a useful part of the redefinition of what it means to be Irish. That new identity has to be positive rather than negative. But it also has to find a way to include Britishness. Those on the island who value the British part of their identity have to know that, for everyone else, British is not a dirty word.¹

Amongst the Queen's itinerary was a visit to the Irish National War Memorial at Islandbridge, Dublin which commemorates Irish participation in the British Army during the First World War. Many of those volunteers also perceived a British dimension to their Irishness, but by the time the war was over and the moment for commemorating their war service had arrived, it was profoundly controversial. Nonetheless, with some considerable difficulties, the Irish National War Memorial was partially completed by 1937. However, the closest it came to an official opening occurred in 1994. It is one of a number of national memorials to the First World War in the British Isles. The Scottish National War Memorial was opened in 1927. The Welsh National War Memorial was officially unveiled the following year. No English National War Memorial was ever proposed. Northern Ireland's closest equivalent to a national memorial was built outside its territory.

This article will survey the organization, location and design of these national memorials in order to explore the way in which different layers of identity were negotiated in this period. It examines some aspects of the complex set of relationships between the local, regional, national and imperial layers to reveal the confused and contested nature of national identity in the United Kingdom at the close of the First World War. These memorials have all been studied individually by Keith Jeffery,² Jane Leonard,³ Feargus D'Arcy,⁴ Angus Calder,⁵ Angela Gaffney⁶ and Catherine Switzer⁷ amongst others. This article seeks to build upon this research by considering the national war memorials to the First World War in comparative fashion for the first time. Together these memorials illuminate the nature of national identity in Britain and Ireland in the interwar period and offer the opportunity to examine the relationships between Englishness, Scottishness, Welshness and Irishness and what

was once an overarching Britishness. In doing so, the article takes as its inspiration George Mosse's insight that 'war memorials and military cemeteries became shrines of national worship'⁸ and are thus a powerful means by which to investigate national identity. Accordingly, the article seeks to draw together two vibrant areas of historiography, Britishness⁹ and commemoration,¹⁰ at a moment when even as the status of Anglo-Irish relations appear to have been resolved, the spectre of a referendum on Scottish independence hovers on the horizon with all its implications for Britishness and what would remain of the 'United' Kingdom.¹¹ Arthur Aughey wrote recently, 'To be British, one could argue, is to participate in a conversation, an imaginative rather than a mythical engagement, about the country's history, culture and society'. This article is a contribution to the historical element of that conversation.¹²

The period in which these memorials were erected was a moment that in some respects was the zenith of an imperial Britishness, even whilst its constituent elements were beginning to peel away – most spectacularly with Irish partition in 1922, somewhat feebly (at first) in the foundation of nationalist political parties in Wales (1925) and Scotland (1934), and with most widespread consequence in the Statute of Westminster of 1931 granting complete autonomy to the Dominions.¹³ Those who sought to construct these national war memorials did not seek to contribute to this unravelling of Britishness: quite the contrary. This is a corollary to a wider point about their political stance. As Mark Connelly has argued, the 'effect of the various forms of commemoration was usually to allow grief to flow but at the same time to buttress a socially conservative message.'¹⁴ Thus whilst some of these national memorials fully embraced and promoted the imperial British dimension to their national identity, others found it an impediment or irrelevance to their task. Here are further examples, then, of the elisions and exclusions that can mark the creation of collective memories and the development of national identity through commemoration.¹⁵

The capital of the United Kingdom, London, was the first place to erect collective national memorials, in addition to a range of national memorials to key individuals such as Lord Kitchener.¹⁶ These collective national memorials, unveiled in 1920, reflect the confused nature of national identity.¹⁷ There is an imperial war museum, a cenotaph – deliberately taking an ancient Greek and hence non-Christian form to commemorate the empire's dead – and the tomb of the unknown warrior. The dedication on the tomb includes the assertion that he died 'for King and country, for loved ones home and Empire'. These were paid for and organized by the British government and unveiled by the King. These are memorials for the entire empire situated in its symbolic heart. What is interesting from the point of view of national identity is how completely any distinct sense of Englishness has been subsumed within this imperial Britishness.

Krishan Kumar has argued that the English are a doubly imperial nation – first they colonized and dominated the rest of Great Britain, then they turned outwards to create the British Empire. In achieving and sustaining this double imperialism, he says, the English willingly buried their national identity.¹⁸ The English had no need for continental style nationalism. Instead, it was in the interests of the English to make Great Britain and the British Empire work, and that meant putting Britishness before Englishness. There was no differentiation between the two, and the discourse surrounding these memorials switched to and fro between reflecting on England and the Empire unselfconsciously. Thus Tom Lawson has noted that, 'The Daily Express hailed the Unknown Soldier as the "salvation" of empire, and the memorial tablet commemorates the million dead of the "British Empire"',¹⁹ whilst it also 'celebrated the "England" that he had "died to save."' Similarly, the war museum was initially termed a national war museum in 1917, but became 'imperial' in 1918.²⁰ When it was opened in June 1920, the King acknowledged the contribution of Allied

Governments and his Dominions in the work of establishing the museum, but he went on to describe it as a memorial to the work of a 'nation in arms'.²¹ It is in this context that the absence of a separate English national memorial should be understood. It was left to local commemorative efforts and to foreign fields to embody the Englishness of the fallen. Yet with the replication of the local English graveyard around the world by the Imperial War Graves Commission, the blurring between Englishness and Britishness is underlined once more.²²

The situation north of the border provides a complete contrast: Scotland constructed the most elaborate and ornate national memorial in the United Kingdom.²³ Where Englishness was completely submerged within imperial sentiment; the Scots were able to use imperial sentiment to assert a separate, equal Scottish identity within Britishness. The driving force behind the Scottish National War Memorial was the Duke of Atholl. In August 1917 Commissioner of Works, Sir Alfred Mond, proposed a national memorial in London. This ultimately led to the founding of the Imperial War Museum. In response, Atholl

made a public statement that if the people of Scotland wished to have a National War Memorial to commemorate their own dead it would not be in Hyde Park, London, and put up with Government money, but it would be put up by Scottish hands, with Scottish money, on Scottish soil.²⁴

Atholl was thus the originator and driving force behind what became the Scottish National War Memorial.²⁵ The committee appointed to carry out the scheme comprised 19 named individuals plus the most senior military and naval officers in Scotland, and the Lord Provosts of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Perth and Dundee.²⁶ The committee comprised Scotland's great and good: frequently Conservative and hence unionist in their political affiliations, often aristocratic, Presbyterian and ex-armed forces, and for the most part, deeply involved in service to the community, the country and the empire.

A vast sum of money was collected for the memorial. The lion's share came from the upwardly mobile industrialists of the west coast. The largest single donation, Sir Alexander Park Lyle's £50,000 made in August 1922, accounted for 45 per cent of the £111,500 collected in total.²⁷ In addition, a range of fundraising activities targeted the general population. Despite the fact that virtually every community in Scotland had by then erected its own local war memorial, by the beginning of 1923, 569 out of Scotland's 940 parishes had also subscribed something to the memorial fund. Their donations, prompted by dedicated 'Thistle Day' activities, totalled £14,147 – mostly donated in small denominations from 1,131,760 individuals.²⁸ Scotland's population at the time was just under five million.

The breadth of support for the memorial, and thus identification with Scotland and her people's war effort is also shown in the donations received from the Scottish diaspora. In total, the support provided by Scots societies abroad was impressive. They amounted to just over £11,500 in January 1923. The largest single source was London-based Scots who donated £5412, but donations from Scots in 20 countries around the world were received.²⁹ The memorial was thereby recognized as commemorating Scotland's sacrifice in the war by a vast network of Scots across the Empire and beyond, who imagined themselves as a national community.

The memorial was built within the commanding location of Edinburgh Castle, which towers over the heart of the capital city. As the Castle dates back to at least the twelfth century, placing a memorial there located the First World War in the tradition of a series of key episodes in Scotland's history. The design of the war memorial further evokes its Scottish identity by reference to religion, history and empire. Its architect, Sir Robert Lorimer, designed a Hall of Honour, with an octagonal shrine

abutted to it. Although a plan to include a chapel was abandoned early in the design process for fear of sectarianism,³⁰ the memorial was nonetheless intended to be of a 'sacred character' which would provide 'a building to which the relatives of the fallen could have recourse for silent prayer, and would also be available for the holding of Commemoration Services by Regiments or relatives.'³¹ Perhaps in consequence there is extensive religious symbolism inside in Douglas Strachan's seven stained glass windows in the Shrine and in various sculptures. The most dramatic of these is Alice Meredith Williams' oak sculpture of the Archangel Michael which is suspended above the Casket containing the Roll of Honour. It was intended to symbolize 'Righteousness overcoming Wrong in the Spirit of Good and the Spirit of Evil.'³² Altogether, threaded through these works of art is a distinctly Presbyterian sensibility which affirms the nobility of sacrifice made by the Scottish nation.³³

The memorial's depiction of Scotland's war effort acknowledges the efforts of the home front (through a further eight stained glass windows by Strachan) as well as the sacrifices of the common soldier. They are shown at the side of mythical Scottish heroes and in a remarkable bronze frieze in the Shrine which portrays 74 contemporary figures comprising at least one representative of every rank and unit employed. The full range of regiments, formations and services – including women's services – in which they served are acknowledged in the extensive memorials which fill the rest of the space. Most prominent of these are the memorials to the twelve Scottish regiments in the Hall of Honour. Each has its own arch, and many chose to describe their origins and to list their pre-1914 battle honours alongside those more recently acquired. The battles of the First World War are thereby incorporated into centuries of history through Scotland's martial tradition. These regimental memorials also provide a direct way of linking Scottish individuals and localities to the broadest expanses of the Empire and the war effort. Above the regimental arches are engravings of the coats of arms of the counties and principal burghs of Scotland. At the foot of each memorial are the Rolls of Honour naming the individuals who fell. These are replicated by the Roll of Honour placed in a casket at the heart of the Shrine. The casket sits on a Stone of Remembrance, carved with a cross of sacrifice and Kipling's words that are familiar from countless other imperial war memorials: 'Their Name Liveth'. This Roll of Honour includes the name of all Scots who died in the war – including Scotsmen who served in other units of the armed forces of the British Empire and non-Scots who served in nominally Scottish ones, such as the South African Scots. This is further evidence of the imagined community of Scots from across the Empire illuminated by the memorial.

The war memorial was officially opened at 11 a.m. on 14 July 1927 by the Prince of Wales. The ceremony involved the inspection of two Guards of Honour, and two short religious services, one for the public gathered on the Castle Esplanade, and one inside the Castle conducted by the Free Church, United Free Church and Established Church Moderators. The Roman Catholic Church had declined an invitation to take part, and instead chose to conduct a simultaneous Requiem Mass at St Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh for the Roman Catholic soldiers who fell in the war.³⁴ It attracted a large congregation, as did the official opening. Dense crowds thronged the Royal Mile and Castle Esplanade for the opening,³⁵ and thousands visited the memorial subsequently. An initial run of 10,000 programmes was printed for the memorial's opening,³⁶ and 'enormous crowds' proceeded to visit.³⁷ A year later, 5000 programmes were being printed each month to meet demand.³⁸

In contrast to the Edinburgh Castle memorial, the Welsh National War Memorial had no such trappings of imperialism; indeed it had few trappings of Welshness. It was virtually a national war memorial in name only. The memorial had a couple of false starts. A month after what became the Imperial War Museum was proposed in 1917, the idea found its echo in a call for a war museum in Wales. When in January 1919 the Lord Mayor of Cardiff took the lead³⁹ he was met by general apathy⁴⁰ and by the September he had publicly acknowledged that he would not be able to raise

funds nationally for a central memorial in Cardiff.⁴¹ A month later the Cardiff-based newspaper, the *Western Mail*, stepped in to the breach.⁴² Hence in contrast to all other national memorials, the origins of the Welsh National War Memorial lie in a commercial entity. The newspaper is generally regarded as Conservative in inclination, and the small memorial committee that was established included the Earl of Plymouth, former chairman of the Union of Conservative Associations, and also Baron Glanely, a Cardiff ship owner.⁴³

The first day of the appeal, 26 October 1919, garnered £1093 in subscriptions,⁴⁴ but fundraising swiftly proved to be an uphill struggle. Part of the problem, it was emerging, was the lack of enthusiasm outside the Cardiff area for the project. This was hinted at in an editorial,⁴⁵ and subsequently in a letter from a Cardiff wine merchant: 'cannot an Entente Cordiale be established between North and South, East and West Wales, in the righteous work of setting up a memorial worthy of their dead?'⁴⁶ Eventually, by 22 January 1920, total donations had surpassed £24,000 and the newspaper was reconciling itself to the limited geographical support for the scheme:

Many towns and parishes throughout the Principality have purely local memorial schemes of their own, to which the public were asked to subscribe. It was also quite natural to expect that in view of the declared intention to locate the National Memorial in the city of Cardiff, the bulk of the money should have come from subscribers in Cardiff and Glamorgan.⁴⁷

With these funds in place, attention could now turn to the design of the memorial. The process was delayed by the death of the first appointed architect; thereafter, J. Ninian Comper a Scots-born architect was selected. Comper was based in Surrey and specialized in designing churches.⁴⁸ Thus it was in November 1924 that the war memorial committee was finally ready to erect a mock up of the memorial on the central circle in front of City Hall to test its elevations in comparison to the surrounding buildings.⁴⁹ Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith, former director of the Victoria and Albert Museum and an adviser to the war memorial committee argued forcibly in favour of this site. He contended at a meeting with Cardiff City Council:

It was of the utmost importance that the best site should be secured for this beautiful design, and that the memorial in all respects should be greatly worthy of those who laid down their lives...In placing the memorial in any spot other than the best one in Cardiff they would be failing in their duty to those whom they were seeking to commemorate.⁵⁰

Nonetheless the site was rejected because of its effect on the facade of the National Museum of Wales, and instead another city centre location in Alexandra Gardens was settled upon. The memorial dominates its site in Cathays Park which is surrounded on its four sides by City Hall, the University, the Glamorgan Building and what is now the Welsh Office.⁵¹

The memorial was unveiled on 12 June 1928 by the Prince of Wales. It comprises a sunken court and fountain surrounded by a seat and a circular colonnade and is 60 feet in diameter. It features four figures, 'The Messenger of Victory' positioned at the centre of the memorial with a Latin inscription which translates as 'In this sign thou shalt Conquer', plus a soldier, sailor and an airman each of whom is holding a wreath aloft. There are inscriptions in Welsh on the colonnade relating to the sacrifice of each of the services, plus words by Sir Henry Newbolt echoing a similar sentiment, and on the outside of the colonnade is an inscription in Welsh which translates as 'To the Sons of Wales who gave their lives for their Country in the War of 1914–1918'.⁵² The memorial was unveiled by the Prince of Wales accompanied by a range of Welsh dignitaries including Lloyd George and the ceremony attracted crowds up to ten deep. After the ceremony, the Book of Memory which recorded the names of 35,000 'heroes of Wales' was handed over to the Welsh National Museum.⁵³

What does the Welsh National Memorial reflect about Welsh national identity? The Western Mail commented extensively on what it termed the 'essentially Welsh atmosphere' of the opening ceremony with its 'rich compound of military magnificence, and religious observations, and keen civic and national consciousness.' It felt that the atmosphere of the day tapped into Welsh history and a 'spirit that has never died'. The memorial ceremony was 'the act of a whole race'.⁵⁴ Yet this argument is hard to sustain. It is true that the bi-lingual ceremony was distinctively Welsh in character with its appropriate range of church leaders,⁵⁵ regimental representatives, local officials, the Prince of Wales and the Welsh ex-Prime Minister. They sang two hymns as well as Land of My Fathers and God Save the King. The memorial itself has Welsh inscriptions. But it is Greek in its form and the principal idea guiding the organizing committee was not to ensure its essential Welshness but to 'convey the idea of a shrine' and to 'get away from the beaten track of the cenotaph'.⁵⁶ It was not designed by a Welshman, it was not made from Welsh materials but from Portland stone. Most of the money to build the memorial did not come from across Wales, but from Cardiff and Glamorgan. And crucially, there was another semi-National Memorial in North Wales. Thus, if we apply the Scottish National War Memorial's yardstick of 'By Scottish hands, with Scottish money, on Scottish soil' and its rich array of symbols, transposed to the Welsh situation, the Welsh National War memorial seems to be only quite Welsh and not very national.

If we can infer anything about Welsh national identity from its national war memorial, it is the absence of national unity. One aspect of this was the position of Cardiff in Wales. It was not proclaimed its capital city until 1955 although from the turn of the century it began to acquire 'national' institutions like the museum of Wales – though not the National Library of Wales, which is located in Aberystwyth. But it was viewed by many as being rather too cosmopolitan and anglicized to be truly Welsh. A revealing cartoon from 1913 captures a sense of the animosity that the city could arouse: it portrays Cardiff as an octopus whose tentacles stretch through the country sucking the life out.⁵⁷ The second aspect of Welsh disunity is the North Wales Heroes' Memorial in Bangor, which, according to Angela Gaffney was briefly described as the 'National Memorial to the Men of North Wales' before the title was dropped at the first meeting.⁵⁸ This was a far more ambitious and successful project which built a memorial and a new science block at the University College of North Wales (now Bangor University), as well as establishing scholarships to provide for the university education for the sons of the fallen. Many members of the memorial committee were closely associated with the college.⁵⁹

In contrast to Cardiff's spluttering start, the scheme was launched at a meeting of all the public bodies of North Wales on 14 February 1917.⁶⁰ The scheme was inspired by R.J. Thomas, local shipowner and Liberal MP, who took on the role of Honorary Secretary of the campaign and donated the first £20,000. The initial call for funds looked not only to North Wales for the projected £150,000 required, but to all North Walsians in the UK and particularly to all Welshmen 'scattered up and down the world, many of whom, having been spared the losses and tribulations of the War, will gladly give of their substance for the sake of Wales, and in memory of their fallen countrymen.'⁶¹ By 1924, £90,000 had been collected (with an estimate of another £20,000 to complete the scheme) – that is, approximately 3.5 times the amount raised for the 'national' memorial in Cardiff and by a far less wealthy part of the country. The money was raised across the counties of North Wales as well as from London, Liverpool, Manchester, Stockport, Shanghai and the Welsh Hospital, India.⁶² They were thus able to set aside £5000 to cover scholarships for about 50 scholars over a 15 year period in 1923,⁶³ and then to embark on building a relatively modest memorial. The design of the memorial was the result of the winning bid by Mr D. Wynne Thomas at an open competition held at the Carnarvon National Eisteddfod in August 1922. It was opened on 1 November 1923 and cost just under £15,000.⁶⁴ The memorial is a Tudor-style two storey gateway built of Portland Stone.⁶⁵ It has

a wood panelled rectangular upper room which is reached by a stone staircase. On the panels are listed the 8000 names of the fallen according to their 'counties and localities' (rather than by regiment which was the original suggestion).⁶⁶ There are a range of 'armorial bearings' carved into the stonework, ranging from that of Wales and the Prince of Wales, to the towns and counties of North Wales. The inscription on the memorial repeated in Welsh and English was 'In Memory of the Heroic Sons of Gwynedd and Powys 1914–1918'. In using such nomenclature instead of the workaday 'North Wales', they harked back to medieval names: Gwynedd (Venedotia) was the ancient north-western Welsh kingdom/principality and Powys that of mid and north-east Wales.⁶⁷ The memorial was opened by the Prince of Wales and a service in Welsh and then in English followed. The band of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, clergymen and academics in their robes, and Scouts and Guides formed a colourful spectacle for the 'great crowd' that gathered for the ceremony.⁶⁸ A memorial concert followed later in the day. In aggregate, it seems that from its design and fundraising success, this memorial was much more successfully rooted in Welsh culture and community than its southern counterpart. In a circular to newspaper editors written in 1924, H.P. Wheldon, the second Honorary Secretary of the memorial committee wrote, 'As a matter of public interest it may be stated that the number of visitors to the Memorial has been very large and the Archway is now clearly regarded as the National Memorial.'⁶⁹

If the national memorials in Wales reveal an essential cultural disunity and an intense localism, the situation in Ireland was, of course, far more acute and politicized. The relationship between Ireland and the United Kingdom was never more fraught than in the period of the First World War. In such circumstances, as one historian has written, 'honouring the dead was not simply a matter of paying due respects – it forms a potent element in the endorsement of a particular political culture or the creation of an alternative one.'⁷⁰ The idea of an Irish National War Memorial was launched at a meeting on 17 July 1919 hosted by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, John French. The plan that emerged was to build a Great War Memorial Home in Dublin, a hostel for soldiers and sailors passing through the capital. It was envisaged as a 'symbol of unity', uniting north and south, Catholic and Protestant.⁷¹ The committee established to oversee the project was chaired by Sir Dunbar Plunket Barton, a lawyer and former Unionist MP.⁷² Many of the other stalwarts of the committee over the years were also staunch Unionists.⁷³ But they also counted amongst their number Captain Stephen Gwynn, former MP for Galway, a 'moderate cultural nationalist' and biographer of John Redmond; Captain Henry Harrison, former MP and secretary to Charles Stewart Parnell,⁷⁴ who had become one of the Honorary Secretaries of the Irish Nationalist Veterans Association;⁷⁵ and Major-General Sir William Hickie who successfully commanded the 16th Irish Division on the Western Front – both in terms of tactical proficiency and as a Catholic supporter of Home Rule, in terms of political sensitivity.⁷⁶ He later became a Senator in the Irish Free State as an independent,⁷⁷ and from 1925 was President of the Southern Ireland Area of the British Legion.⁷⁸

Collections for the memorial began promptly: by late August 1919 they had collected almost £13,000,⁷⁹ and by the end of the year they had more than £36,000 in their coffers.⁸⁰ Thereafter the rate of donations began to slow, nonetheless by 30 October 1920 the memorial committee had acknowledged £41,609 in donations.⁸¹ Thereafter, progress on the Irish National War Memorial drew to a halt amidst the intensifying violence between the IRA and British forces from the late summer of 1920. It was only after the end of the civil war that substantial developments regarding the memorial resumed. The first was the decision to postpone the original scheme since, as newspaper reports declared with remarkable understatement: 'it was plain that one part of the original plan – the erection of a hostel for the use of British soldiers passing through Dublin – had become impracticable.'⁸² Nonetheless the work of gathering the names of the Irishmen who fell in the war had been quietly ongoing. This Roll of Honour was published in eight volumes and copies

were presented to the two cathedrals in Dublin and a number of libraries at home and abroad.⁸³ These volumes are decorated with ornate borders drawn by Harry Clarke which 'incorporate Celtic and Art Deco motifs, battle scenes in silhouette, medals, insignia and religious and mythological scenes, all drawn in pen and ink'.⁸⁴

By the spring of the following year, a new scheme had emerged – to purchase Merrion Square in Dublin with a view to erecting a memorial there. This change of plan required a legal ruling and a private Bill in the Oireachtas [Parliament]. The new scheme provoked a great deal of opposition – on the one hand from those who thought that the money should be spent on the welfare of impoverished ex-soldiers, and on the other, from nationalists.⁸⁵ One such was Diarmuid Lynch who told a Clan Na Gael meeting in New York that the 'pro-Britishers' were growing bolder and were fast 'driving Ireland into the imperialistic and West British groove', such a memorial in one of the 'principal Squares of the Capital of Ireland' would be a 'most outrageous insult to the martyrs who died for Ireland in bygone generations'.⁸⁶ John Sweetman, a resident of Merrion Square, wrote to the newspapers saying 'The West Britons must learn they do not own Ireland',⁸⁷ and sent a copy of his letter to President of the Executive Council, William T. Cosgrave, for good measure. For its part, the government had declined to take on responsibility for the park, had opposed the Court application to spend memorial funds on the scheme, and finally opposed the private bill. When the matter was debated in the Senate, even committee member William Hickie turned against it and committee President Andrew Jameson had to admit that the scheme was 'wrecked'.⁸⁸ During this period, Nationalist supporters of the plans to commemorate the Irishmen who fell in the Great War continued to insist on their essential Irishness⁸⁹ and their commitment to Irish nationalism. An editorial on the drive to erect Irish Battlefield Memorials argued:

They took up arms in defence of an ideal – to assert the right of small nations to lead their lives and shape their destinies in their own way without interference. As the event proved, the principle for which they gave their lives in tens of thousands, through four years of blood and suffering, was established in their own country by other men and other methods.⁹⁰

But clearly there was a vehement body of opinion in Ireland which viewed the commemoration of the Great War as inherently pro-British – indicated not just by opposition to the Merrion Square scheme but also by the violent outbursts that were frequently provoked by each November's commemorative events.⁹¹

Cosgrave's government had allowed the annual commemoration of the Armistice within limits, though he had declined to attend himself. For the government, the difficulty of the memorial was not so much in the desire to commemorate those who fought in France, but in the symbolic geography of doing so. Kevin O'Higgins in opposing the Merrion Square Bill on behalf of the Executive Council announced:

I do not want to see the little park in front of this State's seat of government dedicated to the memory of those who fell in the Great War ... it is not on their sacrifice that this State is based and I have no desire to see it suggested that it is.⁹²

The Cabinet also opposed the idea of a memorial arch to Phoenix Park in 1928,⁹³ but the following year Cosgrave was instrumental in helping an increasingly despondent Jameson to find an acceptable location adjacent to Phoenix Park at Islandbridge on the south bank of the River Liffey. This was about three miles from the symbolic heart of Dublin and the old Merrion Square site. The Sunday Times concluded that what it termed a 'distant backwater' was the 'nearest site that is considered politically expedient, and the protection of which can be reasonably assured'.⁹⁴

The War Memorial Committee managed to secure the services of the Empire's foremost designer of war memorials, Sir Edwin Lutyens. He proposed a remodelling of the park land and monumental building to include a Stone of Remembrance, two fountains, a high Cross set upon a flight of steps, and pavilions for Name Records, along with a garden of remembrance, plus plans to improve access to the site which included a bridge over the Liffey and some roadworks.⁹⁵ The overall cost of the scheme was estimated to be £167,000, or £109,000 without the bridge and suchlike. Given that the memorial fund had about £50,000 in hand, the government therefore agreed to make up the remaining £59,000 which would be directed towards laying out the memorial park but not building the memorial itself. Despite this accounting distinction, the remarkable situation therefore arose wherein this most politically difficult memorial was the only one outside London to benefit from state funding. The work began in December 1930 and was used as an unemployment relief scheme, with care being taken to employ labourers in equal numbers from amongst veterans of the National Army and the British Army. The work was completed in April 1937.

Thoughts then inevitably turned to an opening ceremony. Opinion within the government feared that the accompanying publicity might incite the destruction of the memorial – bearing in mind that the statue of George II had recently been blown up.⁹⁶ In the end, the need to protect young plants was used as an excuse to postpone the use of the memorial for that year's Armistice ceremony.⁹⁷ In 1938 the British Legion began to push for an opening ceremony in the summer of the following year, stressing the need to hold it separately to Armistice Day. Their concern was that on 11 November, ex-servicemen from Great Britain, Northern Ireland and elsewhere in Ireland would be tied up with local ceremonies and would be unable to attend. As the representatives of the British Legion informed a government official, 'Such a ceremony would accordingly be merely local in character and could not be accepted as the formal opening ceremony of a National Memorial.'⁹⁸ Discussions continued and De Valera indicated his willingness to attend the opening ceremony, 'conditional on the absence of anything which might tend to create ill feeling or resentment or to embarrass the Government in the slightest degree.'⁹⁹ The British Legion pushed on with the planning of the ceremony. They hoped to ask The Earl of Cavan (who they felt to be politically neutral) to unveil the memorial preferably as the King's representative. They wanted to invite the British and Northern Ireland governments to attend in some form, as representatives of the Dominions and Allied Armies. In addition to the Defence Forces of Eire, they also thought it important for detachments from the Irish Guards (and its band) and the Inniskilling Fusiliers to attend and hoped that no objection would be raised to their uniforms.¹⁰⁰ The private response within government to this wish list was that 'far too much emphasis is laid on the imperial and military aspect of the function.'¹⁰¹ In short, all of the British Legion's ideas were objectionable and would have been modified substantially if the ceremony had gone ahead on 30 July 1939. Ultimately however, the ceremony was indefinitely postponed as a result of the deteriorating international situation. From 1940 the memorial was used on Armistice Day on the condition that there would be no parades or undue displays. Gradually in the postwar period the park fell in to disrepair, until work began to restore it in 1985. A semi-formal opening was conducted in 1988, and in 1995 the first ever government-led ceremony to commemorate the Irish dead of the Second World War completed a process begun almost 80 years before.¹⁰²

If the British Legion had had its way, it is clear that the Irish National War Memorial would have been unveiled in such a manner that the British context of pre-partition Irish service in the war would have been strongly apparent. It seems that the Legion view was embarrassing to the memorial committee and there was no chance of it being put into practice. Thus while some ex-soldiers continued to see the resonance of the imperial dimension of their identity, for the Fianna Fail government of Ireland, as for many others, it was anathema. It is also probable that attendance at

the opening ceremony might have caused difficulties for Unionists from Ulster for entirely opposite reasons. In the new statelet of Northern Ireland, no official national memorial was erected.¹⁰³ Instead, more local and regimental commemoration predominated and was an opportunity to assert the area's Britishness. As Keith Jeffrey has noted, 'the commemoration of the war became overwhelmingly an opportunity to confirm loyalty to the British link and affirm Ulster's Protestant heritage.'¹⁰⁴ The closest Northern Ireland has to a national memorial is the Ulster Memorial Tower at Thiepval. This started off as a regimental memorial to the 36th (Ulster) Division and their extraordinary losses on the first day of the Somme. Even when it ostensibly became a national memorial, memorializing men from all of Ulster, and thus nationalists of the 16th Division amongst others, it did not shake off its symbolism associating it with the commitment of Protestant Ulster to the British Union. Yet there were inherent limits and paradoxes in this process of identification through memorialization as Catherine Switzer and Brian Graham have shown. Firstly, to have gone much beyond maintaining Protestant unity within Ulster to develop a Northern Ireland identity would require 'a narrative that underscored a separate Ulster identity within Ireland [that] would be to admit to an Irishness that, in turn, diminished the Britishness which was the very justification of the new polity.'¹⁰⁵ Secondly, the location of the Ulster tower in the Thiepval area meant it was equated in the minds of visitors to the national memorials erected by Australia, South Africa and Newfoundland.¹⁰⁶ These Dominions were intent on establishing a separate identity apart from Britishness, whereas Northern Ireland was intent on binding itself tightly into its British identity. The commemorative process in Dublin, Ulster and France thus underscores the complexity and intense sensitivity of the relationship between Irishness and Britishness.

As Linda Colley has famously argued, Britishness was forged in a period of warfare against France between 1707 and 1837: 'Britishness was superimposed over an array of internal differences in response to contact with the Other'.¹⁰⁷ In warfare against Germany between 1914 and 1918, it was simultaneously reaffirmed and undermined. Some of those internal differences were brought to breaking point and were a source of exquisite difficulties for the would-be commemorators, but it was only in Ireland where those internal differences were over Britishness per se. Within Great Britain, the unifying bond of imperial Britishness remained uncontroversial but of differing relevance. In Wales, Britishness as represented by imperial symbols seems scarcely to have figured – unlike the Irish memorial there is no replication of Kipling's formulation, 'Their Name Liveth' or of the Stone of Remembrance. Yet loyalty to the Empire and to Wales were entirely compatible,¹⁰⁸ rather it was the nature of Welshness that was the difficulty due to intense localism. As in Ireland then, the memorials in Wales reflect inherent divisions within the society, yet these were essentially cultural and apolitical, reflecting disunity in the country but not disagreement over the relationship to Britain. Scotland was not without its divisions either, though plans for a Highland and a Roman Catholic memorial came to naught. Its relationship to the empire was celebrated rather than suppressed or ignored. The Scottish National War Memorial ultimately serves to show the unity of the Scottish nation and the ongoing strength of its martial tradition, which continued to be the means by which Scotland could express a distinctive identity whilst remaining securely within the United Kingdom. Meanwhile, England's position within the Empire and imperial Britishness was so dominant and secure that a separate identity was entirely unnecessary. This resulted in slippery and inconsistent use of key terminology. Amidst all these confusions and contradictions of national identity, little wonder then, that the alliterative and usefully vague declaration 'For King and Country' became so commonplace.

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10 In addition to Mosse's 1979 article and *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford 1990), important early works in this area are P. Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire* (7 vols, Paris 1984–92); S. Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London, 1990), K.S. Inglis, 'War Memorials: Ten Questions for Historians', *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, (1992), 5–21; and J.M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge 1995). The following important contributions to the subsequent debate have appeared in this journal: a 2004 special edition, see J. Bourke, 'Introduction: "Remembering" War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 39(4) (2004), 473–85 and these review articles: C. Moriarty, 'The Material Culture of Great War Remembrance', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 34 (1999), 653–62; S. Goebel, 'Review Article. Beyond Discourse? Bodies and Memories of Two World Wars', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42 (2007), 377–85.

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26 Brigadier-General The Duke of Atholl, KT, CB, MVO, DSO; The Rt Hon Lord Carmichael, GCSI, GCIE, KCMG; The Admiral Commanding-in-Chief at Rosyth; The General Officer Commanding-in-Chief Scottish Command; The Lord Provosts for the time being of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Dundee,

Perth; The Rt Hon William Adamson, MP; The Rt Hon Lord Balfour of Burleigh, KT, GCMG, GCVO; James Brown, Esq (Ayr); Sir John Burnet, RSA; Lieutenant-Colonel D.W. Cameron of Lochiel, CMG; Lieutenant-General Sir J. Spencer Ewart, KCB; Sir John R. Findlay, KBE; The Rt Hon Lord Glenconner; The Rt Hon Sir J.H.A. MacDonald, GCB; The Rt Hon Sir Herbert Maxwell, Bart of Monreith; Sir Hector Munro, Bart of Foulis; The Rt Hon Lord Newlands; Sir William Robertson (Dunfermline); The Very Rev Sir George Adam Smith DD; The Rt Hon Eugene Wason, MP; The Very Rev A. Wallace Williamson, DD; Sir George Younger, Bart, MP. A further two members were co-opted on to the Construction Committee at a moment of controversy in 1922 to shore up confidence in the project. These were David Erskine, Esq, of Linlathen, President of the Board of the National Gallery and J. Lawton Wingate, Esq, PRSA; 'Report of the Committee appointed by the Secretary for Scotland to consider and report upon The Utilisation of Edinburgh Castle for the purposes of a Scottish National War Memorial with copy of the warrant appointing the committee', July 1919, Cmd 279, HMSO, (Edinburgh 1919), NLS, Acc 4714/1. Further biographical information on these individuals is drawn from Who's Who and the relevant entries in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography unless otherwise noted.

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107 Colley, Britons, (2003 edition), 6. 108 Gaffney, Aftermath, 109