

Decade of Centenaries Programme

Phase 2: 2018 - 2023

Guidance from the Expert Advisory Group on Commemorations to support the State's approach to the remembrance of significant historical events over the remainder of the Decade of Centenaries

1. Introduction

The role of the Expert Advisory Group on Commemorations is to advise Government on how the challenging events of this important and formative period in our history and related themes, might be meaningfully, proportionately and sensitively remembered. It is not the function of the Group to be prescriptive or directive in how to interpret the impact of this pivotal part of our history.

2. Second Statement of Principles of the Expert Advisory Group on Commemorations

The Initial Statement of the Expert Advisory Group on Commemorations, published in 2012, detailed guiding principles and values, which underpinned the State's approach to remembering the significant historical events that took place between 1912 and 1916.

The Second Statement of the Advisory Group was launched by the then Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Heather Humphreys T.D., in October 2017. This statement reiterates the tenets of the Group's original statement. These guiding principles are intended to provide clarity and a broad template to empower and support the State and other interested parties involved in delivering authentic, citizen-focused and appropriate commemorations at national and local level throughout the second half of the Decade of Centenaries.

It is worthwhile to reaffirm these core principles here: -

- *The aim of commemoration should be to broaden sympathies without having to abandon loyalties and, in particular, to recognise the value of ideals and sacrifices, including their cost.*
- *Throughout the remainder of the decade, it is important not to forget the bloodshed and the deep antagonisms of these years. While few eyewitnesses survive, the memories remain vivid in some communities and families, and commemorations may revive painful memories of loss or dispossession.*
- *We should also be conscious that on this island we have a common history but not a common memory of these shaping events.*
- *Commemoration should not ignore differences and divisions. The goal of inclusiveness is best achieved, not by trying for an enforced common interest or universal participation,*

but by encouraging multiple and plural commemorations which remember the past while ensuring, as far as possible, that the commemoration does not re-ignite old tensions.

3. Public consultation process and findings

Minister Humphreys T.D. launched a public consultation process on 18th October 2017 on behalf of the Expert Advisory Group. Its objective was to stimulate a public conversation around how the significant historical events between 1918 and 1923 might be appropriately remembered, in line with the principles expressed in the Second Statement of the Expert Advisory Group on Commemoration. The original closing date for receipt of submissions was 31st January 2018 and this was extended to 28th February, to give all interested parties the opportunity to participate. The response was extremely positive, with 73 submissions received. This rich diversity of perspectives and ideas has been of great assistance to the Advisory Group, and the Chair, Dr Maurice Manning, expressed his sincere appreciation to everyone who took the time to prepare a submission.

The submissions received highlighted a number of recurring themes. They emphasised the importance of adopting a respectful and sensitive approach to the remembrance of the historical events of this period, which focuses on reconciliation and the remembrance of all who suffered and lost their lives.

Of the 73 submissions received, 20 were made by local authorities and it is clear that local authorities have already given significant consideration to how they will plan for commemorations at county and community level over the remainder of the Decade. It is worthwhile to summarise their observations here:

- The remembrance of the War of Independence and the Civil War should be characterised by a series of local events across the country, as was the case in the multiple 1916 centenary commemorations, rather than one major event. Local authorities would welcome a creative and inclusive approach to the remembrance of this period, which is sensitive to the local historical context and which acknowledges that there was no uniform experience within counties or across the island of Ireland. This inclusive approach could facilitate engagement from all traditions and communities on the island.
- Local stories and experience will be very significant. Local research, scholarship and access to authentic local archival sources will support communities in exploring and reflecting upon these events.
- A collaborative approach – similar to that adopted for the 1916 centenary commemorations - between the State, local authority network and local organisations and commemorative committees would provide a supportive structure which would work very well.
- A degree of certainty around the availability of multi-annual State funding would allow for planned and sustainable commemorative programming over the remainder of the Decade.

- Local cultural organisations and the library network have a significant role to offer as 'cultural brokers', managing conversations and building relationships, and engaging communities in a meaningful way through the various forms of creative expression.
- Local authorities would welcome a holistic approach to the remembrance of this period, which acknowledges also the significant events and developments in the world of arts, culture, agriculture, medicine, commerce and innovation during this period.
- Opportunities for sharing resources, co-operation and co-ordinated events across local authorities would also be helpful.

It is clear that the National Cultural Institutions have a very important role to play in the creation of a space which allows members of the public to reflect upon the complexities of the historical events and themes from 1918 to 1923. The National Cultural Institutions welcome the continuation of the current inclusive, participatory and reflective approach that has been the hallmark of the Decade of Centenaries programme to date.

Submissions were received from family members of people who died or whose lives were deeply affected by these significant historical events. They advocated that the approach to the remembrance of this period should be sensitive, dignified and respectful, with a focus on reconciliation.

Historical authenticity was a recurring theme in the submissions received, highlighting the importance of ongoing research at national and local level; of free, public access to authentic historical sources; and the collection and preservation of oral histories, stories, personal papers and ephemera from the period for future generations.

Some of the other significant themes referenced in the submissions received, included the following –

- the role of women;
- the role of the labour movement;
- the experiences of nationalists and of unionists on both sides of the border;
- the international dimension and the role of the Irish Diaspora; and
- Specific events and figures of national or local significance were also highlighted.

The Expert Advisory Group is in broad agreement with the general thrust of the submissions.

4. Advice from the Expert Advisory Group on Commemorations

Following from the publication of its Second Statement of Principles and the consideration of submissions made under the public consultation process, the Expert Advisory Group now sets out its advice, which is intended to support the State in approaching the remembrance of significant historical events and themes over the second half of the Decade of Centenaries.

The Advisory Group has identified a number of historical events and themes from 1918 – 1923 as particularly significant. These are outlined at Appendix A. The Group recommends a three-tier approach in the remembrance of these events, comprising a limited number of formal State-

led commemorations, complemented by State-supported activities and events, led both at local authority and community level.

The ending of World War I

Over the past four years, the State has remembered and explored the complexity of the events surrounding Ireland's participation in World War I. In doing so, the State has collaborated effectively with key stakeholders to develop inclusive, sensitive and respectful commemorative events and activities. The Advisory Group recommends that these partnerships should continue as we approach the centenary of the signing of the Armistice that ended the fighting in World War I, on 11th November 1918.

Introduction of women's suffrage

The Advisory Group recommends that the State marks the centenaries of the passing of the Representation of the People Act 1918 and the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918 and acknowledges the significant contribution of Irish women in public and political life.

The founding of Dáil Éireann

It is clear that the first meeting of Dáil Éireann on 21st January 1919 is one of the most significant historical events in the Decade of Centenaries and deserves to be commemorated accordingly. The Advisory Group notes that the Houses of the Oireachtas are advancing plans for a ceremonial event and a complementary programme of diverse activities to mark this centenary, with a focus on the enduring parliamentary tradition and the putting of it on a new democratic foundation.

The Struggle for Independence 1919 – 1921

The War of Independence is the term commonly used to describe the conflict that took place between 21st January 1919 (Soloheadbeg) and the coming into effect of the Truce on 11th July 1921.

Many of the events of this period have great local significance; it is therefore appropriate for local authorities and local community organisations to be encouraged to lead the commemorative process. Some events have been commemorated annually for decades and it would be inappropriate for the State to compete with these established ceremonies. It is recommended that the Defence Forces could have an appropriate ceremonial role to reflect the significance of the centenary.

All commemorative events should be informed by the principles laid down in the Second Statement of the Expert Advisory Group.

The various collections that have been digitised by the Military Archives, the National Library of Ireland and the National Archives, which are freely available, as well as local newspaper

archives, provide excellent records of these years and will be a key resource for local archives, libraries, heritage groups and school projects.

It is important that the War of Independence is viewed in a wider political context, with the establishment of Dáil Éireann and alternative administrative structures, including the Dáil Courts and local government reform. These wider political, administrative and societal developments deserve particular recognition.

The Advisory Group recommends that a formal commemoration for all of those who lost their lives during the War of Independence be held on 11th July 2021 or a suitable date close to the centenary of the coming into effect of the Truce.

The Civil War

Europe has experienced numerous civil wars in the last 100 years and the problems of reconstruction and achieving consensus in the aftermath of such conflicts have been manifold. Reconstruction – in the sense of a return to normal economic and State functions – is one thing in post-civil war societies but reconciliation requires the need, amongst other things, to confront the atrocities committed during the conflict.

There was nothing ignoble in the many silences that followed the Irish Civil War – they were a better alternative to simplistic, polarised narratives and myth-making. With time, those silences can be replaced by meaningful engagements with a difficult and traumatic time. The consequences of the actions on all sides, and the depth, sincerity, or sometimes anger and sense of retribution underpinning those actions, needs to be confronted as part of any meaningful commemoration. There are also opportunities to broaden the parameters of our understanding, highlight new information and expose propaganda masquerading as history and deliberate selectiveness serving contemporary political needs at the expense of evidence and nuance.

For some, commemorating the Civil War will remain an intensely personal matter and local communities need to be encouraged to find their own civil war commemorative path. The State's task is to encourage a reflective and a reconciliatory tone that recognises that neither side had the monopoly of either atrocity or virtue and this was true of words as well as actions.

The Advisory Group recommends that a ceremony of remembrance and reconciliation be held on a neutral date in remembrance of all of those who lost their lives during the Civil War. The National Cultural Institutions, local authority network, and local archives, libraries, museums and cultural organisations all have a significant role to play in facilitating the exploration of the events and legacy of the Irish Civil War.

The foundation of the State

Unlike the United States of America, the independence initially proclaimed did not coincide in terms of extent or status with the State that emerged post conflict. The transfer of power took place over the course of 1922, beginning with the handing over of Dublin Castle on 16th January 1922 and ending with the formal coming into being of the Irish Free State on 6th December 1922,

in the midst of Civil War. There is unbroken political continuity with the Irish State that exists today, notwithstanding many important transformations since. There is another, even longer, institutional continuity going back to January 1919 – the existence of the Dáil, which is the link between the revolution and the State and is, in a real sense, the founder of the State. Commemorating the foundation of the State should link the two as closely as possible, centred in the precincts of Leinster House.

The Advisory Group recommends that two formal commemorations take place to mark the foundation of the State -

- A ceremony on, or close to, 16th January 2022 at Dublin Castle to mark the symbolic transfer of power to the newly emerging Irish State, with the handover of Dublin Castle on 16th January 1922; and
- A ceremony on, or close to, 6th December 2022 in recognition of the struggle to settle the democratic character and institutions of the newly emerging Irish State.

Partition and the Foundation of Northern Ireland

Partition divided Ireland into two political entities. It also divided families, farms, parishes, dioceses and long-established business and social communities. The division reverberates to this day; 20 years after the Good Friday Agreement, new stresses have been brought about by Brexit and continued political division. In the context of the ongoing Brexit negotiations, there is a renewed interest in the Border and its history and this should be informed by historical evidence.

The approaching centenary of Northern Ireland coming into existence poses difficult and sensitive challenges. It is recognised that partition represented a gulf that affected, for a long time, the totality of relationships within this island, particularly up until the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. The identification of the unionist community with Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom, and their pride in its existence and achievements cannot be overlooked. Equally, the nationalist community in Northern Ireland experienced serious alienation over 50 years under the Parliament established in 1921. The story of a third group, the Southern Unionist tradition, whose way of life, culture and political aspirations were forever impacted by partition, should also be acknowledged during the commemorations.

The once distant relationship between the two jurisdictions was transformed by the improvement in North/South and East/West relations brought about by the peace process. However, the Advisory Group is acutely aware of the current challenges caused by the continued absence of political agreement in Northern Ireland. The Group met with representatives of the Northern Ireland Round Table earlier this year. It notes the ongoing co-operation between the two jurisdictions and encourages continued and enhanced engagement with appropriate events in Northern Ireland, over the remainder of the Decade of Centenaries.

In particular, there should be funding and encouragement for joint cross-border events, perhaps focusing on local museums and on the Centre for Cross-Border Studies and broader cross-Border cultural engagement. Targeted funding would support the digitisation of key archival resources, including the North East Boundary Bureau records, the minutes of the Boundary Commission

and other relevant material. It would be important to ascertain first if such initiatives are already underway by universities, libraries, archives or museums. The guiding principles in the Advisory Group's Second Statement are of particular importance in the remembrance of partition, because of contemporary issues and sensitivities.

The Advisory Group recommends that a significant academic conference be held to mark the centenary of the partitioning of Ireland and the foundation of Northern Ireland, which could examine comparative partitions in Europe, post 1918, to emphasise that Ireland's experience was not unique. It is noteworthy that the conciliatory speech of King George V opening the Parliament of Northern Ireland on 22 June 1921 was also a catalyst for moves towards the Truce which came into effect on 11 July.

The admission of the Irish Free State into the League of Nations in September 1923

Independence was ultimately less about abstract notions of indefeasible sovereignty, never fully possessed by any country large or small, and more about Ireland taking its place amongst the nations. The Irish Free State's admission to the League of Nations in September 1923, to a general welcome, was very important symbolically. Marking this event, with an appropriate ceremony, would provide a fitting and uplifting conclusion to the Decade of Centenaries as well as the all-important international dimension to the foundation of the State.

5. Other Recommendations

The Advisory Group recommends that the foundation of the Defence Forces and of An Garda Síochána should be commemorated appropriately.

Consideration should also be given to the organisation of specific initiatives to commemorate the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) and the Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP) and to acknowledge their place in history.

The Group recommends that the archive, museum and library network around the country should play a significant role in supporting citizen engagement.

Young people will need to be supported appropriately in learning about this seminal but sometimes divisive and difficult period in our history, particularly in its concluding phase.

It is also recommended that universities play a prominent role in facilitating exploration of key events and themes from various local, national and international perspectives, through academic conferences and public engagement.

The Group would encourage State Departments and Institutions, particularly where their establishment coincides with or predates the foundation of the State, to commission official histories and pay special attention archival matters where possible.

6. Legacy

The Decade of Centenaries has created a unique opportunity for people to consider and explore, in an unprecedented way, some of the most significant events and themes in the history of modern Ireland. The Advisory Group is of the view that this positive engagement, and the associated tangible, long-term benefits, should continue to be supported beyond the conclusion of the Decade in 2023.

The Advisory Group welcomes also the Government's commitment to capital investment of almost €1.2 billion in Ireland's culture, language and heritage over the next 10 years under *Project Ireland 2040*. This investment will protect and enhance our cultural heritage, ensuring that our cultural institutions and archives will continue to play a central role in bringing this period to life for generations to come.

It is against this background that the Advisory Group recommends that State support should be considered for specific, significant legacy initiatives. One such initiative is *Beyond 2022: Ireland's Virtual Record Treasury*. This project seeks to re-imagine and recreate, through virtual reality, the Public Record Office of Ireland and its archival collections, which were destroyed on 30th June 1922 in the opening engagement of the Civil War. It is recognised that, while incomparable with the loss of human life, this cultural loss was one of the great tragedies of the Civil War. An all-island and international legacy project of this stature, which combines historical research, archival conservation and technical innovation, would be a lasting and meaningful legacy, democratising access to invaluable records and illuminating 7 centuries of Irish history.

Dr Maurice Manning
Chair of the Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations

12th July 2018

APPENDIX A

Significant Historical Events and Themes (1918 – 1923)

The ending of World War I

Significant changes to the political landscape in 1918

Introduction of women's suffrage in 1918

The founding of Dáil Éireann

The Independence Struggle 1919 – 1921 (military and parallel non-military activity)

The foundation of the State

The Civil War

The foundation of Northern Ireland, Partition and the drawing of the Border

The experience of minorities and border communities in Ireland from 1918 - 2023

The admission of the Irish Free State into the League of Nations in September 1923

APPENDIX B

Membership of the Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations

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