Australian War Graves and War Memorials in Ireland

by Jeff Kildea[1]

When I tell people I am researching Australian war graves in Ireland the usual responses are "I didn't know there were any," and "What were they doing there?".

Well, there are in fact 65 Australian war graves in Ireland: 25 from World War I (20 in the Republic and 5 in Northern Ireland); 39 from World War II (all in Northern Ireland); and one from the Vietnam War (in the Republic). Of the 25 from World War I: ten died in Ireland while on leave there; ten died in England from wounds or illness and their Irish relatives brought their bodies to Ireland for burial; and five died at sea and their bodies were brought ashore and buried in Ireland.

Of the 39 from World War II, almost all were killed in air crashes in Northern Ireland or Eire while serving with the RAAF attached to RAF units as part of the Empire Air Training Scheme. One crashed in England and his Northern Irish wife, whom he had met and married during the war, brought his body back to Northern Ireland for burial.

The one from the Vietnam War was a native of Clonmel, Co. Tipperary, who was killed in Vietnam while serving with the 9th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment, and his family brought his body back to Ireland for burial.

In addition to the war graves there are war memorials in towns throughout Ireland, both north and south, on which are recorded the names of soldiers who had emigrated from the town or local area to Australia and, having enlisted in the AIF, were killed at Gallipoli or on the Western Front. So far I have located such memorials at: Ballymoney, Co. Antrim; Ballywalter, Co. Down; Bray, Co. Wicklow; Cahir, Co. Tipperary; Dromore, Co. Tyrone; Kilrea, Co. Derry; Portadown, Co. Armagh; Portrush, Co. Antrim; and at Belvedere College, the Jesuit school in Dublin. There are probably many others.

This paper is a report on a work in progress, so it does not contain any concluded views. I began the research a couple of years ago as part of a wider project concerning the experiences of Australian soldiers in Ireland during World War I. With the assistance of a grant from the Australian Army History Unit, I have completed the research on one aspect of the project, namely the activities of Australian soldiers in Dublin during the Easter rising. In October 2003 my article on the topic was published in the *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, an online publication accessible at the web site of the Australian War Memorial (http://www.awm.gov.au/journal/j39/index.htm).

While touring Ireland in January and August 2003 I located the nine graves in Dublin and the six World War I graves in Ulster, of which five are in Northern Ireland and one in Co. Donegal in the Republic. After returning to Australia I widened the scope of the project to include servicemen from Word War II.

In April this year I returned once again to Ireland with the goal of locating all 65 Australian war graves and placing an Australian flag on each, starting with the graves in Dublin, appropriately, over the Anzac Day weekend. While in Dublin I took the opportunity of attending the Anzac Day service at St Ann's Dawson Street and the reception at the Mansion House hosted by the Australian ambassador Dr John Herron. By chance earlier in the day the Fianna Fail party held its commemoration of the Easter rising at Arbour Hill led by Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, so I attended that ceremony as well, which has relevance to one of the wider themes of my project, as will become apparent toward the end of the paper.

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Because of time constraints I will confine this presentation to the World War I graves and memorials, and, except in a couple of cases, I will not go into the details of each soldier, though an important part of the project when completed will be to tell the personal story of each one – and some of them are quite fascinating.

Tracking down all of the graves was certainly an interesting way of touring Ireland, as you can see from the map on which the black dots represent the locations of the graves. So I will present the paper as a travelogue, starting in Dublin.

Located on Blackhorse Avenue near Phoenix Park is Grangegorman Cemetery in which there are seven Australian war graves in two rows for reasons of denominational propriety. Four in the front and three behind. Three of the seven died of illness: Pte Arthur Andrew Murphy; Pte George Bardon; and Pte Charles Michael Byrne, while four drowned at sea: Pte Michael Ernest Smith; Pte Joseph Gratton; Pte Edwin Johnson Carter; and Pte Joseph Thomas Barnes. This occurred when the *RMS Leinster*, the mail boat between Dublin and Holyhead, was torpedoed by a German submarine on 10 October 1918, a month out from the end of the war. Over 500 lives were lost including seven Australian soldiers and an Australian nurse. The bodies of three of the soldiers and the nurse were never recovered.

Also in Dublin is Mt Jerome Cemetery at Harold's Cross where there are two graves: Private Philip Douglas Davis and Lt George Gilmour Allardyce.

We travel from Dublin to Belfast where we visit the Belfast City Cemetery off the Falls Road, where there are eight Australian war graves: one from WW1 and seven from WW2. The WW1 grave is that of Lt Reginald Leopold MacLean. When I visited the cemetery the headstone was missing. During the troubles a number of Commonwealth War Grave headstones were vandalised and, to avoid further damage, the authorities removed some of the others. The City Council is in the process of restoring the damaged and removed headstones.

Also in Belfast is Balmoral Cemetery where Pte James Cowan is buried in a family plot.

We take an excursion from Belfast to the beautiful Ards Peninsula, Co. Down, where on the ocean side is the village of Ballywalter where there is a memorial on which an Australian name is recorded.

Next we come to Portadown and Lurgan in Co. Armagh. At Portadown there are six Australian names on the war memorial in the Market Square. At Lurgan New Cemetery there is one grave, that of Pte James Balfour Leathem.

We then travel up to the north coast visiting Kilrea, Co. Antrim, where there are six Australian names on the local war memorial.

At Ballymoney, Co. Antrim, memorial plaques adorn the walls of the building of the British Legion, on which there are nine Australian names.

At Portrush, Co. Antrim, the war memorial records one Australian name.

We then travel to Macosquin, Co. Derry, where there is one war grave in the churchyard of St Mary's Church of Ireland.

We head across Lough Foyle to the western side of the Inishowen Peninsula in Co. Donegal and to Upper Fahan, where beneath this memorial an Australian seaman is buried in a mass grave with his ship mates from the *Laurentic*. Able Seaman Sheedy, misdescribed as "Sheehy" on the memorial, went down with the *Laurentic*, a converted merchant ship that struck a mine off the north coast of Ireland on its way to New York. It sank with the loss of 350 lives.

We return to Northern Ireland and head to Dromore, Co. Tyrone, and Boho, Co. Fermanagh. In the Church of Ireland at Dromore there is a memorial plaque on which one Australian name is recorded.

In the Church of Ireland churchyard at Boho there is one Australian war grave. The churchyard is located in a beautiful spot high up in the hills above Lough Erne. Buried there is Sergeant Thomas Reid, who had emigrated to Australia via South Africa, where he had served with the South African Constabulary in the Boer War. He married a Melbourne girl before enlisting in the AIF on the outbreak of war and returning to Europe where he died of illness shortly before the war's end. What a pleasant surprise it was to discover inside this church an Australian flag commemorating Sgt Reid and his brother, who was killed while serving with the Royal Irish Fusiliers.

Heading back into the Republic we come to Kilturra Old Graveyard, Co. Sligo where Pte James Carroll is buried.

Further south is Cam Cemetery, Co. Roscommon, and the grave of Pte John Michael Doyle.

Then onto Glenkeen Old Graveyard, Borrisleigh, Co. Tipperary, where Pte John Quinane is buried.

In Co. Clare, at Bridgetown Catholic Churchyard, lies Pte John Joseph Hickey. He was hit by a train near the Curragh in Co. Kildare and died at the Curragh hospital. His body was brought to Bridgetown for burial by his uncle. In May this year I interviewed Sean Clancy, who as a young school boy was at Limerick Station in 1918 when Hickey's coffin arrived by train from Kildare. Clancy is 103 years of age and when I interviewed him he was very lucid.

The next grave is at King's Island Military Cemetery, Limerick, where Cpl John Taylor Anderson is buried.

At Killarney, Co. Kerry, in the New Cemetery lies Pte Robert Emmett Kinchington.

We head east to Cork City where in the suburb of Blackrock there is St Michael's Church of Ireland churchyard and the grave of Pte Thomas Paget Sudlow.

Just outside of Cork is Our Lady of the Rosary, Midleton, where Gnr Ambrose Augustine Haley is buried.

We travel north to Mitchelstown, Cahir and Powerstown. In the churchyard of the Catholic church at Mitchelstown, Co. Cork, is the grave of Pte John Joseph Cahill.

At Cahir, Co. Tipperary there is a war memorial located near the castle. On that memorial are the names of three Australians.

At St John's Catholic Churchyard, Powerstown, Co. Tipperary, there is the grave of Pte John Parnell Darmody.

We head on back toward Dublin stopping at Bray, Co. Wicklow, where there is a war memorial with one Australian name.

Onto Dublin we go, where we call at Belvedere College, where a memorial plaque has recently been erected and on which is recorded the name of Pte Claude Edwin Egan of the 19th Battalion AIF. What is interesting about this memorial plaque is that it records not only the names of old Belvederians who fought and died in the Boer War and World Wars 1 and 2, as one might expect, but also those who died in the Easter rising (Reginald Clery and Joseph Plunkett), the War of Independence (Kevin Barry) and the Civil War (Cathal Brugha and Fred Lidwell), as well as more recently in peacekeeping operations with the UN. What is interesting is that Reginald Clery was a member of the Crown Forces when he was killed,

while Joseph Plunkett, one of the signatories to the Proclamation, was executed by the British. Cathal Brugha was killed by Free Staters during the Civil War, while Fred Lidwell died while serving with the Free State army.

As part of the broader project I am examining the different ways in which Australia and Ireland remember the Great War. That is why the memorial plaque at Belvedere College is such an important development and why it was so fortuitous for me to be able to attend the Anzac Day and the Easter rising commemoration at Arbour Hill on the same day. Remembrance is not simply about honouring the dead. According to Pauric Travers in "Our Fenian dead" it forms "a potent element in the endorsement of a particular political culture or the creation of an alternative one".[2]

Whereas in Australia remembrance on the whole has served to unify the nation, in Ireland it has contributed to the division between unionist and nationalist, Protestant and Catholic, north and south. However, in recent years steps have been taken to devise memorials and forms of remembrance that are more inclusive and less contested. The inauguration of the Irish Peace Park at Messines, Belgium, in 1998 with its memorial in the form of the traditional Irish round tower was one such step. It was opened by President Mary McAleese in the presence of Queen Elizabeth II. In 2002 the Sinn Féin mayor of Belfast laid a wreath at the Belfast cenotaph to commemorate the Battle of the Somme, traditionally a unionist commemoration. At Newtownards, a strong unionist area east of Belfast, the museum of the Somme Heritage Centre commemorates all Irishmen who served in the Great War, including the 10th and 16th (Irish) Divisions from the south as well as the 36th (Ulster) Division. In Co. Fermanagh a couple of nationalist local historians have been instrumental in having WW2 crash sites marked with memorial plaques. Commemorations of that sort have traditionally been the exclusive preserve of unionists.

Whether or not in years to come these initiatives will lead to closer ties between the different communities in Ireland is yet to be seen. But it certainly brings a certain frisson and relevance to my project.

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[2] P. Travers, "Our Fenian dead: Glasnevin cemetery and the genesis of the Republican funeral" in J. Kelly and U. MacGearailt (eds), *Dublin and Dubliners* (Dublin 1990) p. 52, quoted in Johnson, "The spectacle of memory", p. 37.