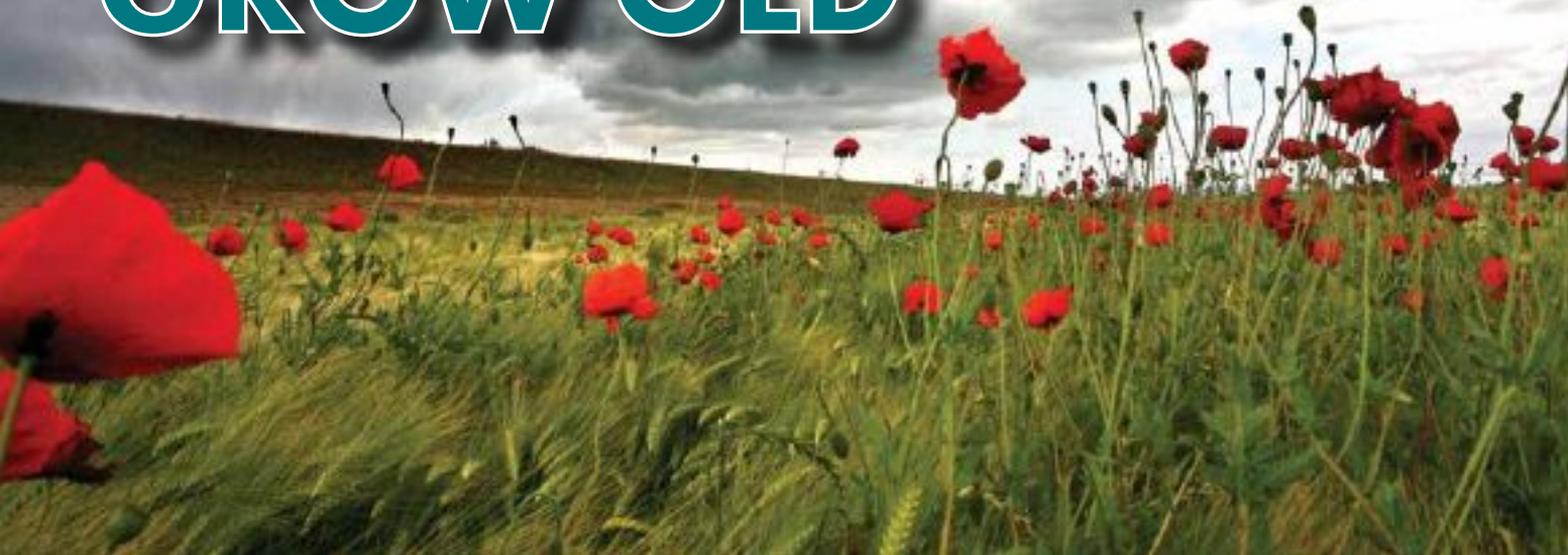


THEY SHALL NOT GROW OLD



As we approach Remembrance Sunday, it is timely to reflect on how today's rituals of war commemoration have their origins in the First World War. After that conflict, societies around the world developed new commemorative practices, many of which live on to this day.

In France, November 11 is a public holiday and, in each town and village, the names of the war dead are read out loud in a ceremony at the local war memorial. In the UK, the British Legion, the main organisation that supports war veterans, fundraises through the sale of poppies which are worn on the days leading up to November 11. More recently in 2004, New Zealand established its own tomb of the Unknown Soldier when it repatriated a body from the western front.

All of these traditions grew out of the First World War and its colossal loss of life - some 16 million combatants and civilians made up the conflict's global toll. November became a focus for commemoration as it linked to the date of the Armistice on November 11 1918. Poppies became a symbol of remembrance because of their ability to grow on the battlefields of war-torn Flanders and northern

France, and the fact that in the interwar period they could be easily made out of paper by disabled war veterans as a way of fundraising for their welfare. In November 1919, the idea of a two-minute silence at 11am - the time of the Armistice - was first initiated. The following year, Armistice Day 1920, would see the burial of the Unknown Soldier, an unidentified body retrieved from

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Modern war commemoration forms invariably have their roots in the Great War, the seminal global catastrophe that opened the 20th century
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the western front, at Westminster Abbey - an unprecedented gesture to help those hundreds of thousands of families whose loved ones had no known graves.

In the UK, unlike France with its strong tradition of state secularism,

war commemoration came to be combined with a religious church service, establishing the template of 'Remembrance Sunday' which ultimately supplanted Armistice Day as the focus of national commemoration. Hence why the British ceremony occurs at the Cenotaph in Whitehall on Remembrance Sunday, the second Sunday in November, rather than the November 11 date. Later, the British commemoration of the dead of the Second World War and subsequent conflicts was incorporated into the rituals already established for remembering the war dead of the First World War.

In Ireland, the First World War template for remembrance has influenced local practices to this day. Remembrance Sunday traditions on the island connect directly to those established in the period after 1918, including the two-minute silence and the reading of the words of Laurence Binyon in his 1914 poem *For the Fallen*: 'They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old.' It has also influenced the Republic of Ireland's National Day of Commemoration, held to commemorate all Irishmen and Irishwomen who died in past wars or on service with the United Nations, which is similarly held on

a Sunday closely connected to a historic date - the Sunday nearest to July 11, the anniversary of the 1921 truce date that ended the Irish War of Independence - and also incorporates a one-minute silence.

Today's physical landscape of commemoration also links to the 1914-18 conflict. After the First World War, war memorials were built, often through local fundraising, across most of western Europe in workplaces, town squares, railway stations, cemeteries, churches and synagogues.

However, although we find examples of such memorials in Ireland, this process was complicated by the twin political upheavals of partition and independence. The First World War was associated with the connection with Britain for many of those supporting Irish independence in the interwar period and they contested its public commemoration.

As a result, fewer war memorials were situated in town squares than in other western European countries and there is also a particular discrepancy in Church memorials, with most Protestant churches across the island having a war memorial listing the names of First World War dead from the parish, often with Second World War dead added, whereas examples of war memorials inside Roman Catholic churches are much

rarer. St Mary's Haddington Road, Dublin, is one interesting example. Roman Catholic parishes often commemorated war losses through masses for the dead rather than building war memorials.

Yet, despite these long-standing connections and continuities back to the First World War, why societies remember and who they remember has profoundly changed over time. There were huge war commemorations in Dublin until the 1930s, which gathered both Protestant and Roman Catholic war veterans and bereaved, first at College Green before the ceremony moved to the larger Phoenix Park as a venue. These were events which drew together those directly personally affected by war loss.

The Second World War saw war commemoration paused in the then Irish Free State, due to Government fears that it would impinge on its neutrality in that conflict, and after 1945 it did not recommence on the same scale. While war remembrance continued in Northern Ireland, it was marginalised in the Republic of Ireland by the 1980s, although the recent centenary of the First World War has seen a huge wave of renewed public interest, particularly in the neglected history of Roman Catholic war dead, and the building of new war memorials, including at Woodenbridge in Co Wicklow and in Wexford town.

In 2018, the Republic of Ireland

held a state commemoration of the Armistice at Glasnevin Cemetery. More generally, First World War commemoration now frequently references the war's long-neglected global impact - the 1.5 million Indian men who served, the over 1 million Africans who died in the war in Africa, and the over one million Armenian civilians massacred in the genocide the conflict triggered.

In recent years, in some areas, direct familial connections with the First World War names on the local war memorial and personal memories of the dead or veterans of that conflict, which would once have motivated annual war remembrance, have also largely disappeared.

In contrast, for the Second World War, a direct living link remains, in the form of veterans and siblings and children of the war dead. Personal memories and griefs thus remain a motivation for Remembrance Sunday, but alongside them remains the imperative, first articulated by the generation of the interwar era, to highlight the horrors and human cost of war violence to prevent it from ever happening again.

First World War remembrance traditions were explicitly designed to impart this warning and prevent society forgetting war's devastation. From their first iteration on November 11 1919, there was no emphasis on victory or war glorification. In this, these rituals were profoundly universal, new and modern, with a message about war grief that was applicable beyond any one conflict, and perhaps this, ultimately, explains why they have lived on to this day.



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