

Gerald Morgan and Gavin Hughes (eds)

SOUTHERN IRELAND AND THE LIBERATION OF FRANCE

NEW PERSPECTIVES



This collection of essays sets out to correct an injustice to citizens of the Irish Free State, or Twenty-Six Counties, whose contribution to the victory against Nazi Germany in the Second World War has thus far been obscured. The historical facts reveal a divided island of Ireland, in which the volunteers from the South were obliged to fight in a foreign (that is, British) army, navy and air force. Recent research has now placed this contribution on a secure basis of historical and statistical fact for the first time, showing that the total number of Irish dead (more than nine thousand) was divided more or less equally between the two parts of Ireland.

The writers in this volume establish that the contribution by Ireland to the eventual liberation of France was not only during the fighting at Dunkirk in 1940 and in Normandy in 1944, but throughout the conflict, as revealed by the list of the dead of Trinity College Dublin, which is examined in one chapter. Respect for human values in the midst of war is shown to have been alive in Ireland, with chapters examining the treatment of shipwreck casualties on Irish shores and the Irish hospital at Saint Lô in France. Other essays in the volume place these events within the complex diplomatic network of a neutral Irish Free State and examine the nature and necessity of memorial in the context of a divided Ireland.

Gerald Morgan was a postgraduate at Jesus College, Oxford, before moving to Trinity College Dublin, where he still teaches. He was a Fellow of Trinity from 1993 to 2002. His primary research field is medieval literature and his most recent book is *The Shaping of English Poetry* (Peter Lang, 2010).

Gavin Hughes is currently Research Associate at the Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Trinity College Dublin. He holds a PhD from the University of Wales, Lampeter.



Southern Ireland and the Liberation of France

Reimagining Ireland

Volume 33

Edited by Dr Eamon Maher
Institute of Technology, Tallaght



PETER LANG

Oxford • Bern • Berlin • Bruxelles • Frankfurt am Main • New York • Wien

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In honour of

ROBERT BUTLER DIGBY FRENCH
(Department of English, 1930–1974)

and

OWEN LANCELOT SHEEHY-SKEFFINGTON
(Department of French, 1933–1970)

Trinity College Dublin

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Preface

In the war of ideas there can be no neutrality.¹

Yesterday, sitting as County Minister and Ghoul Lighter in Ordinary for Dublin Town and Environs, I had under consideration certain dossiers from the Sûreté, Ireland Yard, dealing with the perforation of glazed cultural and other fenestrations by missiles not illapidate; and dealing also with missilaneous matters, arising therefrom, not excluding the ceremonial hoisting, dehoisting, and incineration of chauvin insignia, acts reputedly performed by a person or persons uninishowen ...

I earnestly counsel the wise and thoughtful men who form your Government to place on a more explicit basis the admitted extra-territoriality that Trinity College has long enjoyed. *Give Trinity independence!* Devise a separate Trinity citizenship! Let there be there the right of sanctuary, an honourable customs barrier, a distinct nationality!²

True, ... much later I did oppose him in many ways. But ... that cannot serve as a justification of my previous passivity ... mine was not a moral opposition. I didn't try to act against him [Hitler] because he persecuted the Jews or started the war. Even then I was able to tell myself that *that* ... was not my business. And the undeniable fact that we had all been conditioned to this attitude is no justification either, I know it.³

1 'End of Agony', *The Irish Times*, 10 May 1945, p. 1.

2 Myles na gCopaleen, 'Cruiskeen Lawn', *The Irish Times*, 12 May 1945, p. 3. Myles na gCopaleen ('Myles of the Ponies, / Little Horses') is the pseudonym of Brian O'Nolan (1911–66), better known as Flann O'Brien. He was at this time a civil servant and bound by a special obligation of political impartiality (or neutrality). Hence his pseudonymous resourcefulness as the author of 'Cruiskeen Lawn' (that is, full jug or little brimming jug).

3 Letter from Albert Speer, Minister for Armament Production, 1942–45, to his daughter, Hilde Schramm, Spandau Prison, 14 May 1953. Quoted in Gitta Sereny, *Albert Speer: His Battle With Truth* (London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 636. I owe this reference to my learned co-editor.

The subject of the Second World War is one that must still be broached with sensitivity and caution in the Republic of Ireland, that is, the Twenty-Six Counties or Southern Ireland of the title of this book. From this perspective the Second World War is not so much a war (however much the rest of the world may perceive it as such) as an Emergency. The difference of nomenclature is not an aberration but expresses a unique perspective in the Irish Free State (as it was in 1939) that must be understood by the historian and (if needs be) by the moralist. The Emergency is that of a small country on the western edge of Europe struggling to come to terms with a recent history of a War of Independence (1919–21) and a Civil War (1922–23) and surrounded by much larger nations, especially Britain, France and Germany (and then subsequently the United States), engaged in a life and death struggle for survival and supremacy. Had the war taken a different course, the Irish Free State would have been invaded by one or other of these contending behemoths and, like Belgium, Holland and others before them, would have been powerless to resist.⁴ The sense of vulnerability of the newly formed state persisted in one way or another throughout the war, threatened as it was within by the barely dormant forces of civil conflict. The fragile unity of the new state was held together by a sense of its own sovereignty among the nations of Europe and by the doctrine of neutrality, presented with as much ideological purity as political necessities allowed, by the then Taoiseach, Éamon de Valera. The personal expression of condolence on the death of Hitler to the German Minister, Dr Edouard Hempel (1887–1972),⁵ by the visit of the Taoiseach, accompanied by the Secretary

4 This is not to say that the Irish government was indifferent to or neglected the physical defence of the homeland, and to this end it accepted the necessity of secret co-operation with British Admiralty intelligence; see Michael Kennedy, *Guarding Neutral Ireland: The Coast Watching Service and Military Intelligence, 1939–1945* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008).

5 The official title of Dr or Herr Hempel (as he is most frequently known) was Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary. The punctiliousness of Herr Hempel in respect of diplomatic protocol ought not to disguise the fact that he was a faithful and obedient servant of the Nazi government in Berlin, and clearly Hitler intended him as such in appointing him to Dublin on 22 June 1937. See John P. Duggan, *Herr Hempel at the German Legation in Dublin 1937–1945* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press,

of the Department of External Affairs, Joseph Walshe, to his private residence in De Vesci Terrace, Monkstown (not the German Legation at 58 Northumberland Road)⁶ on 2 May 1945 (astonishing as it may have seemed and still seems to the contending nations) is surely to be seen in this light as the profoundest affirmation of the doctrine of neutrality.

It is a wonder that the new state survived the war and it is hard to see how it could have survived in any other way. This was not only the result of the political skill with which de Valera responded to the various exigencies that world war presented but also of the maturity of the Irish people themselves. No one living in the Twenty-Six Counties between 1939 and 1945 could have been unaware of the catastrophic consequences had political divisions been allowed to develop to the point of open conflict. They threatened to do so on more than one occasion, most notably, in relation to Trinity College itself, when riots broke out in College Green as a result of the news of the German surrender on the Monday morning of 7 May 1945. For once the College had allowed itself an unguarded moment in the expression of political sympathies at a time of extreme relief and elation. Or perhaps rather the College had failed to keep in check such a moment in a few of its members. 'Quidnunc' (Patrick Campbell, 3rd Lord Glenavy) in 'An Irishman's Diary' on the following day describes the contrast between the enthusiasm of the young students on the roof above Front Gate and the silence of the crowd in the street below. On the following Saturday, 12 May 1945, the editor himself, Robert (Bertie) Smyllie, under his own pseudonym of 'Nichevo',⁷ drew attention under the characteristically witty

2003), Appendix 2, pp. 286–87. Illustration 6 (between pp. 146–47) shows Herr Hempel giving the Nazi salute at the Royal Dublin Horse Show in August 1938 in the presence of President Douglas Hyde, Taoiseach Éamon de Valera and Tánaiste Seán T. O'Kelly. Herr Hempel was conspicuously not a member of the Nazi Party when first appointed to Dublin, but became so on 1 July 1938.

6 See Duggan, *Herr Hempel at the German Legation*, pp. 219–20 and 264–65, n.27. President Hyde visited Herr Hempel on the following day.

7 *Nichevo* is apparently Russian for 'nothing' or '? I don't know, who cares.' Robert Smyllie was editor of *The Irish Times* from 1934 to 1954 and had himself initiated 'An Irishman's Diary' (which continues in being to this day).

heading 'Trinity Monday',⁸ to the contrast between the noise at Front Gate and the silence in College Chapel:

I was in Trinity on Monday afternoon ... and witnessed some of the student excesses that led in the fulness of time to the smashing of the plate glass windows in the *Irish Times*; and, having been a student myself, I was not greatly impressed. I saw some foolish young men burning the Union Jack. I saw even more foolish young men trying to set fire to the Irish Tricolour, and, like Queen Victoria of sainted memory, I was not amused ...

Once inside the Front Gate I saw a number of students making for the College Chapel, and I joined the throng ...

The Chapel was packed. And it was packed with young people – men and women. I should say that the men were in a slight majority. The Service, which was quite spontaneous, and was conducted by the Rev. G.O. Simms, did not last for more than about twenty minutes, but I, for one, was amazed at the fervour and sincerity of it all. The Provost was there and Dr Jourdan. Apart from them, and my old friend, Professor H.O. White, the congregation was composed exclusively of students; and it was while this Service was in progress in the dignified quietude of the College chapel that all the fuss was going on outside. It was interesting to note that the first hymn was one which I did not know in English, but do know very well in German; it was 'Nun danket alle Gott', an old Lutheran hymn, if I am not greatly mistaken.

Trinity College Dublin had allowed itself to become more isolated than ever, an island within a partitioned island at odds with the state of which it was a loyal and irrevocable part. The Provost, Ernest Alton, set out at once to repair the damage by visiting the Taoiseach to offer his apologies on behalf of the Board, staff and students for these 'unfortunate incidents' and to express 'the desire of the College to dissociate itself from the irresponsible acts of a few individuals'.⁹ A letter to the editor under the heading, 'The T.C.D. Episode', written by 'Another of the Many' from the College Historical Society, explained that '[w]hen the news of peace came on Monday College was overjoyed' and 'feelings of relief and triumph went to our heads and resulted in the demonstration on the roof'. The writer continued:

8 In 1945 Trinity Monday was 28 May.

9 *The Irish Times*, 10 May 1945, p. 1.

No one, however, even at that time, would have in the slightest degree approved, or, if we had known about it, allowed, the burning of the Irish flag ...

The position of the Irish flag, under the others, was due to momentary hot-headedness, and is also regretted by College. It was in the process of being re-hoisted above the others when a College official said that one flag only could be hoisted on the staff. The U.S.A. flag was then put up as the one least likely to cause ill-feeling, and at the same time to express our sentiments.¹⁰

In other words, neutrality was a precondition of the survival of the Irish State and it was perceived by the vast majority of the population to be so.

Of course such a perception was virtually limited to the island of Ireland itself. It did not recommend itself in the political circles of London and Belfast (which, unlike Dublin, was in a state of war) or to those who came to see the fight against Hitler and Nazism (not unnaturally in the light of the persecution of the Jews) as a moral crusade. The present book has been written by those whose view of history has not been entirely shaped by these distinctive Irish perspectives, but it is hoped that they have been informed by them. The account by Edward Arnold of the shifting and indeed tortuous relations between Ireland and Vichy France and then with de Gaulle and the Free French shows that the need to sustain the principle of neutrality was at the heart of them. It had become the means of the self-preservation of the Irish State, a matter of vital national self-interest. It was as vital in Irish eyes, for example, as the Battle of Britain in the eyes of the British. The difference of scale between the nations does not alter the validity of these perceptions. Once the issue of war and peace had been settled and the French reestablished in their homeland, the Irish could once again express themselves with a more straightforward generosity to their continental neighbours. The story of the Irish hospital in St Lô (Phyllis Gaffney) is an inspiring example of such Irish generosity.

All combatants in war try to claim for themselves the moral high ground and these claims centre as a rule on theories of a just war. Many wars in human history have been claimed to be just which have not been just. Many just causes have been pursued with a ruthlessness that have led to atrocities. But there was (and is) a strong case for claiming that the

10 *The Irish Times*, 11 May 1945, p. 3.

British cause in the war against Nazi Germany was a just cause. Nazi Germany had been the aggressor, overrunning Czechoslovakia and Poland and then in quick succession Belgium and Holland and Luxembourg and, more shockingly, France itself, driving the British into the sea at Dunkirk, whence they were fortunate indeed to rescue a great part of their Expeditionary Force. France was subjugated and occupied, suffering all the humiliations and miseries of a conquered people over four long years. The victors were often brutal and sometimes barbarous in their methods, and no less so when the Occupation was removed in the hard fought battle of Normandy in June to August 1944. Those in the French resistance could expect no mercy if they were discovered or if, not infrequently, betrayed to the enemy by collaborators. The seeking out and persecution of the Jews continued unchecked in the conquered territories as in Germany itself, as Edward Arnold also makes clear. Many individuals therefore could draw their own conclusions about the moral rightness and wrongness of these matters. Many did, and many of these were led in consequence to join the fight against Nazi tyranny. In Trinity College Dublin itself no fewer than one hundred and eleven did so at the price of their own lives (as recorded in Gerald Morgan's essay). Samuel Beckett himself joined the French resistance (Sarah Alyn Stacey), earning the Croix de Guerre and the Médaille de la Résistance, but characteristically making no great exhibition of them. Such Irish men and women did not see themselves as un-Irish in doing so, although some (not a few) of their compatriots may have thought that they were. They did not dispute the national necessity, but (in a world of hard choices) were led by an overarching moral necessity, entirely in line with the Christian traditions that have distinguished Ireland throughout the centuries. Hence Roman Catholics and Protestants alike gave themselves to the struggle against fascism in Europe, even as Ireland itself in the wake of partition became increasingly divided along religious lines. It is possible for us to claim here that the Irish who fought alongside the British in the Second World War were at one and the same time Irish patriots and the liberators of Europe. They surely deserve to be honoured in their homeland as well as on the beaches and in the towns and villages of Normandy. They ought not to become the moral victims of the policy of neutrality. Indeed it was this policy that enabled them to fight, for that policy created a moral space in which individuals could act on their own initiative.

For my own part, I was born into a simpler moral world in Lydbrook in the Forest of Dean (Gloucestershire) on 19 August 1942 on one of the darkest days of the war, the day of the unsuccessful raid on Dieppe (perhaps revealed to the German defenders by Herr Hempel in the German legation in Dublin).¹¹ In Lydbrook there was a general sympathy for the war effort. My mother continued for years afterwards to refer to the miracle of Dunkirk, and my father, who was deaf, to the bombs over Dieppe on the day of my birth. He had become a father on the day on which many fathers (especially Canadian fathers) had lost their sons.¹² I grew up in the aftermath of the war when pride in the fight against Nazi Germany (the heroics of the few in the Battle of Britain in the summer of 1940, the daring of the Dambusters raid on the Möhne, Sorpe and Eder by the Lancaster bombers of 617 Squadron under Wing Commander Guy Gibson on 16–17 May 1943, the Ox and Bucks at Pegasus Bridge on D-Day) was always close to the surface and reinforced in one film after another. Now I realise how many of these heroes were Irishmen from the Twenty-Six Counties (Major Frank Sheridan (1920–2009), 591 (Antrim) Parachute Squadron, Royal Engineers, 6th Airborne Division, for example, a native of Aughakine, Aughnacliffe, Co. Longford, at Pegasus Bridge). It is the task of historians to remind us of their deeds. In this book we attempt in some degree to put right the historical record.

- 11 Duggan, *Herr Hempel at the German Legation*, refers repeatedly to the secret radio transmitter in the German Legation in Dublin (pp. 78, 86, 126, 157–58, 159–61, 175, 179–80 and 300, most notably in reference to Operation Market Garden, the failed attempt to cross the Rhine at Arnhem on 17–26 September 1944 (pp. 215–16 and 218). If the presence of the 9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions at Arnhem in a state of combat readiness was due to information received from the German Legation in Dublin, as Duggan strongly suggests, then Herr Hempel did indeed make a significant contribution to the German war effort.
- 12 On 19 August 1942 in the frontal assault on Dieppe (Operation Jubilee) the 2nd Canadian Division lost 3,164 men and 215 officers out of a force of 4,963 men. In addition the Royal Navy had 550 casualties. No. 4 Commando in the accompanying Operation Cauldron left behind sixteen dead on the soil of France. See Will Fowler, *The Commandos at Dieppe: Rehearsal for D-Day* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), pp. 15, 17, 217–18 and 236–37.

Pride of place among all these essays in my view must be accorded to the painstaking and exemplary scholarship of Yvonne McEwen. For the first time we can do more than speculate about the actual number of Irish soldiers, North and South of the border, who fought in the war and who sacrificed their lives in the fight against fascism (no fewer than 9,100 or so at the present date of reckoning, more or less equally divided North and South). It is a contribution of which the whole island of Ireland may be justly proud and Britain and France justly grateful. The tragic history of Ireland has enabled the Irish to see with a peculiar force and insight the value of liberty. Perhaps it is this sense that has enabled the Irish to perform with such distinction on the many places of battle of the Second World War (in the air, at sea and on the ground) and to do so not by the force of conscription but at the behest of conscience. Chapters by Gavin Hughes and David Truesdale supply much of the detail of the engagement of Irish battalions in the retreat from Dunkirk and in the advance from the Normandy beaches. Kevin Myers spells out in graphic detail the personal sufferings endured by individuals and families in the fight for the freedom of European neighbours enslaved by tyranny. His essay makes uncomfortable reading, for that price was in many cases intolerable for the individuals concerned and often paid in quiet hours of loneliness and isolation. Moral choices on this scale are not easy to make and perhaps they are beyond the moral scope of many to make. They can be sustained only by a profound conviction in the rightness of a cause. They still inspire admiration many years after the event and at the least are worthy of reflection by those who come after them. Those who fought and returned home to tell of their deeds and those of their friends left behind on the field of battle need and deserve to be held by us today in special esteem, and they are remembered by Donal Buckley in an affectionate memoir.

There are many things in war (the bombing of Dresden, let us say) that individuals may prefer to forget but that a proper historical record ought not to allow us to forget. The sacrifice by graduates and students of Trinity College Dublin (Gerald Morgan) ought not to be forgotten or suppressed as it has been to this day. We do not have as yet within the College any adequate memorial to the one hundred and eleven names recorded here (and there may well be more) and this matter ought to lie heavily on the

conscience of the university of Edmund Burke. We have fallen short in our duty to them and to the freedom which alone enables a university to prosper. We cannot say that a war has been won if those who have fought the war are systematically excluded from the historical record of the war. As in the case of the murder of fourteen innocent marchers on Bloody Sunday in Londonderry/Derry on 30 January 1972, we require the truth, even if the truth is harmful to the reputations of many in whom we have previously placed our trust. We need more than rumour or suspicions in the face of an establishment version of events, for only the truth can liberate us from the shackles of the past. History provides a reckoning for good and bad alike if properly and diligently pursued.

No island can conduct its affairs entirely indifferent to the happenings in the rest of the world. The war in Europe made itself felt in many uncomfortable ways, not least in the number of bodies washed ashore in remote parts by ships sunk in war. Thus soldiers of the Devonshire regiment (along with German and Italian internees and prisoners of war) were washed ashore in Donegal and as far south as Mayo from the SS *Arandora Star*, in happier days a cruise liner of the Blue Star line but converted on the outbreak of war into a transport ship and struck by torpedo at 06.58 on 2 July 1940 some seventy-five miles west of Bloody Foreland (Co. Donegal) on her way without escort from Liverpool to St John's, Newfoundland. Fergus D'Arcy gives us an insight into this and other such cases and the complications arising from them in ensuring honourable burial for those of whatever nation laid low by the accidents of war.

Even when we allow for the necessity of the policy of neutrality we cannot say that all the things done in the name of neutrality can be justified by it. In the aftermath of the war, magnanimity was required if Irish men and women of different persuasions were to be united as equal citizens of a sovereign state (as indeed many had been united by war in another sovereign state). We cannot say it was often shown. Trinity College Dublin itself, in the wake of the Lenten Regulations of 7 February 1944 of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, was now to be seen as a breeding ground for heretics rather than as a liberal university embracing and educating Catholics and Protestants alike (although it continued to do so). It took from 1944 to 1970 for the ban on Catholics entering Trinity to be lifted,

but by then we had already embarked on another ruinous conflict on the island of Ireland, as often as not separating one religious denomination from another. Perhaps it is possible now to bring these strands together. The key to such reconciliation is surely the act of memorial itself, and Sarah Alyn Stacey takes us to the heart of this matter in her essay in drawing on the work of the distinguished French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur.

Finally, a word about the French people themselves, the special object of our solicitude in the liberation of their country. Liberation is no doubt a fine thing, but it came to Normandy in 1944 in the form of the destruction of Caen and St Lô and the death by aerial bombardment of thousands of Norman French to match that of the British in the bombardment of cities such as Belfast, Coventry and London by the Luftwaffe in 1940. We cannot expect the French (even today) to be of one mind as to the merit of suffering on this scale (even as the means of liberation). The human and cultural disaster that befell the people of Normandy has still to be properly measured, and there are legitimate questions to be raised as to whether the destruction of the medieval city and people of Caen was a necessary prerequisite for Allied success. In France as in Ireland a national destiny imposed itself, often at variance with the multiple destinies of the people themselves. However we may wish to describe these historic events we must surely see that the French sacrificed themselves for their own liberation. In such a sacrifice on a national scale we may also see a deeply enduring bond between Ireland and France stretching beyond the bitterness of war.

— GERALD MORGAN, 14 July 2010¹³

13 I wish to express our gratitude to Andrea Greengrass who compiled the index and to Gemma Lewis who prepared the book for publication. Their professionalism has greatly eased the labour of checking references and of ensuring consistency in presentation.

SARAH ALYN STACEY

*Patria non immemor:*¹

Ireland and the Liberation of France

In memory of FRANK SHERIDAN, 591 (Antrim) Parachute Squadron,
Royal Engineers, and LOUIS HEUGUET, French army

Le 18 janvier 1945

Nous avons été hier visiter le cimetière anglais. C'est très impressionnant. Il y avait beaucoup de soldats inconnus. Il y en avait un où il y avait écrit qu'il avait donné sa vie pour les autres. C'est beau.

... Cher album, je ne comprends pas encore la vie, que c'est triste d'aimer, puis de se quitter, ma maman dont il faudra que je me sépare un jour, toi, qui me quitteras, moi qui fermerai plus tard les yeux. Comprends-tu la mort, toi, quel mot terrible que je ne comprends pas. Mes animaux qui eux aussi me quitteront. Je crois nous revoir tous un jour mais si la vie nous sépare, qu'un souvenir reste en nous, comme un petit nuage blanc qui voguera sur le monde.²

- 1 'The homeland [is] not forgetful': Inscription on the reverse of the Médaille de la Résistance.
- 2 Excerpt from the diary of Jackie Landreaux who was aged ten in 1944. Reproduced in *Paroles du jour j: lettres et carnets du Débarquement, été 1944*, ed. Jean-Pierre Guéno and Jérôme Pecnard (Paris: Les Arènes, 2004), p. 150. Translation (mine): 18 January 1945: 'Yesterday we went to visit the English cemetery. It makes a big impression. There were many unidentified soldiers. There were some [graves] on which it was written that he had given his life for others. It is beautiful ... Dear diary, I don't yet understand life, but how sad it is to love, then to leave each other; my mother from whom I must separate one day, you who will leave me, I myself who will later close my eyes. Do you understand death? What an awful word that I do not understand. My animals who will also leave me. I believe we will all see each other again one day, but if life does separate us may a memory remain within us like a little white cloud which will float over the world.'

Mémoire, histoire: loin d'être synonymes, nous prenons conscience que tout les oppose. La mémoire est la vie, toujours portée par des groupes vivants et à ce titre, elle est en évolution permanente, ouverte à la dialectique du souvenir et de l'amnésie, inconsciente de ses déformations successives, vulnérable à toutes les utilisations et manipulations, susceptibles de longues latences et de soudaines revitalisations. L'histoire est la reconstruction toujours problématique et incomplète de ce qui n'est plus. La mémoire est un phénomène toujours actuel, un lien vécu au présent éternel; l'histoire, une représentation du passé ...³

The inspiration for this volume lies in two conferences organised by myself and my colleague Gerald Morgan in Dublin University (Trinity College) to consider the role played by Ireland in the Second World War specifically with regard to France. The first conference, 'Southern Ireland and the Liberation of France', was held on 6 June 2008, the anniversary of D-Day, chosen deliberately to emphasise explicitly the theme of liberation. The second conference, "Les dés sont sur le tapis": Ireland in World War II', held on 12 June 2009, reflected our decision to broaden the analysis to consider the Irish role beyond the liberation of France. It concluded with a ceremony highlighting the importance of a theme intrinsic to every historical perspective, that of commemoration.⁴ Yvonne McEwen, Research Fellow at the Centre for the Study of the Two World Wars at the University of Edinburgh, presented the College with a Roll of Honour of the Irish

3 Pierre Nora, 'Entre mémoire et histoire: la problématique des lieux' in *Les Lieux de mémoire: I. La République; II. La Nation; III. Les France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984–86), I.xvii–xlii (p.xix). Translation (mine): 'Memory and history: we become aware that far from being synonymous they are opposed in every respect. Memory is life, always embodied in living groups, and, as such, is in permanent evolution, subject to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unaware of its ensuing distortions, vulnerable to all forms of appropriations and manipulations, subject to lying dormant for long periods and to suddenly being reawoken. History is the always problematic and incomplete reconstruction of what is no longer. Memory is a phenomenon always of the present, a "lived" link to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past'

4 On the link between history, memory and commemoration, see in particular the work of Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, and Paul Ricœur, *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris: Seuil, 2000).

men and women who died fighting in the Allied forces during the Second World War.⁵ This handsome leather-bound volume is today housed in the Old Library of Trinity College and is available for consultation by the general public who have responded vigorously to our encouragement to send in details of names which might be added. Six months later, at a special ceremony at Stormont at which all major political parties in Northern Ireland were represented, Yvonne McEwen bestowed a second copy of the Roll of Honour. Both Southern and Northern Ireland therefore possess two monuments (so to speak) incarnating the sacrifice of Irish men and women from both parts of the island who fought against Nazism. The significance of this Roll of Honour for a better understanding of the Second World War, for a better understanding of Ireland in the last century and, indeed, for a better understanding of contemporary Ireland, ought not to be underestimated. Whilst France has a long commemorative tradition with regard to those who died in the First and Second World Wars and continues to examine the impact of these episodes on her historical and cultural identity, even if evidence continues to emerge to challenge the earlier comfortable stereotypes, notably of a united France fiercely opposed, bar a few collaborators, to German occupation,⁶ this is far from the case in Ireland: the policy of neutrality adopted by Southern Ireland at the outbreak of war in 1939 seems to have perpetuated a general (and perhaps appealing) notion that the conflict did not really concern Ireland in any significant measure. Moreover, the general political tendency still prevalent today to consider those who fought alongside the British

5 On these men and women, see Yvonne McEwen's chapter, this volume.

6 See for example the following: Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940–1944* (New York: Knopf, 1972); H.R. Kedward, *Occupied France: Collaboration and Resistance 1940–1944* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), pp. 32–45; Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy, 1944–198...* (Paris: Seuil, 1987) and G. Hirschfeld, 'Collaboration in Nazi-Occupied France: Some Introductory Remarks', in G. Hirschfeld and P. Marsh (eds), *Collaboration in France: Politics and Culture during the Nazi Occupation 1940–1944* (Oxford: Berg, 1989), pp. 1–14. For a re-evaluation of the Normandy Landings, see Olivier Wieviorka, *Histoire du débarquement en Normandie: des origines à la libération de Paris 1941–1944* (Paris: Seuil, 2007).

allied forces as traitors to the Republican cause has also contributed to a lack of awareness and discussion of the role of the Irish in these two major European conflicts.⁷ If now, thanks to the pioneering research courageously undertaken by Kevin Myers during the 1990s, the role of Ireland in the First World War is no longer a taboo subject (it might strike one as even having become fashionable, with all the risks that attach to such a status), the serious examination of Ireland's role in the Second World War is a much more recent initiative.⁸

- 7 In this respect we might recall Paul Ricœur's observation in *La Mémoire*, p. 101: 'Les manipulations de la mémoire ... sont redevables à l'intervention d'un facteur inquiétant et multiforme qui s'intercale entre la revendication d'identité et les expressions publiques de la mémoire. Il s'agit du phénomène de l'idéologie ... Le processus idéologique est opaque à un double titre. D'abord, il reste dissimulé; à la différence de l'utopie, il est inavouable; il se masque en se retournant en dénonciation contre les adversaires dans le champ de la compétition entre idéologies: c'est toujours l'autre qui croupit dans l'idéologie. D'autre part, le processus est complexe.' Translation (mine): 'The manipulations of the memory ... owe much to the intervention of a worrying and multiform factor which inserts itself between the claims of identity and the public expressions of memory. It is the phenomenon of ideology ... The ideological process is opaque in two respects. Firstly, it remains concealed; unlike utopia, it is inadmissible; it masks itself by denouncing adversaries in the competitive field of ideologies: it is always the other who languishes in ideology. Moreover, the process is complex.'
- 8 The following are amongst the most important studies on the subject to have appeared: Brian Girvin and Geoffrey Roberts (eds), *Ireland and the Second World War: Politics, Society and Remembrance* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000); Richard Doherty, *Irish Volunteers in the Second World War* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002); Eunan O'Hallpin, *MI5 and Ireland, 1939–1945: The Official History* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003); Mervyn O'Driscoll, *Ireland, Germany and the Nazis, 1919–1939: Politics and Diplomacy* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004); Henry Patterson, *Ireland since 1939: the Persistence of Conflict* (London: Penguin, 2006), in particular chapter 3 "'Minding Our Own Business': Éire during the Emergency', pp. 50–75; Terence O'Reilly, *Hitler's Irishmen* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2008). These studies may be seen as part of a recently emerging trend to examine the 'forgotten armies' of the Second World War; see for example Michael Hickey, *The Unforgettable Army: Slim's XIVth Army in Burma* (Stroud: Spellmount, 1998); Tim Harper and Christopher A. Bayly, *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941–1945* (Harvard: Harvard University

Despite these recent developments on the academic front, there remains a political hesitation regarding the specific commemoration of the Irish in the Second World War. When we consider the intrinsic value of commemoration, this hesitation, this official disassociation of the event from the commemorative act, must be interpreted as a political refusal:

Commémorer est une manière de se souvenir, et cela pose comme question le rapport à un passé collectif dans le rappel à soi de ce qui a disparu. C'est aussi délivrer un message au cours d'une opération de transmission et de communication dont le monument est souvent le lieu central ... L'implantation du monument commémoratif marque le territoire ; son inscription dans le paysage est, en elle-même, une forme de construction d'un espace politique.⁹

For the same reasons, this refusal may also be interpreted as a deliberate effacing of the past out of deference to contemporary values (whether accurately defined or not by a particular political authority) with a view to influencing the values of future generations:

La commémoration ... a pour but dès l'érection du monument, que le monument désigné n'appartienne jamais au passé et qu'il demeure toujours présent dans la conscience des générations futures. Cette ... classe des valeurs de mémoire présente ainsi un lien évident avec les valeurs d'actualité.¹⁰

Press, 2005) and Isabelle Bournier and Marc Pottier, *Paroles d'indigènes: les soldats oubliés de la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Paris: J'ai Lu, 2006).

- 9 Jean-Yves Boursier, 'Le Monument, la commémoration et l'écriture de l'histoire', *Socio-anthropologie*, no. 9 (2001). Online. Available: <http://socio-anthropologie.Revues.org/index3.html> [accessed 15 May 2010]. Translation (mine): 'Commemorating is a way of remembering, and that raises the question of a link to a collective past in the reminder to oneself of what has disappeared. It is also the action of delivering a message in the course of an exercise in transmission and communication and the monument often occupies the central place in this exercise ... the establishment of the commemorative monument marks the territory; its inscription in the landscape is, in itself, a form of construction of a political space'.
- 10 Alois Riegl, 'Le Culte moderne des monuments', *Socio-anthropologie*, no. 9 (2001). Online. Available: <http://socio-anthropologie.Revues.org/index5.html> [accessed 15 May 2010]. Translation (mine): 'From the moment a monument is erected, the aim of commemoration is that the designated monument should never belong to

Certainly, this refusal of commemoration proves morally problematic and raises several questions about the recording of this episode in Irish history which remind us of the polemical issues intrinsic to historical writing: does this refusal not signify a radical diluting of the importance of the combat against Nazism?¹¹ Would not the official commemoration of the Irish who died in the Allied effort in the Second World War signify a moral and social engagement with the past, without which history is devoid of scruples and meaning? Why should the act of commemoration be perceived as inimical to historical accuracy and intellectual impartiality?¹² As Ricœur, who compares the duty of the historian with that of the judge, observes, we should not forget the moral role of the citizen in the construction/commemoration of the past:

Il émerge comme un tiers dans le temps: son regard se structure à partir de son expérience propre, instruite diversement par le jugement pénal et par l'enquête historique publiée. D'autre part, son intervention n'est jamais achevée, ce qui le place plutôt du côté de l'historien. Mais il est en quête d'un jugement assuré, qu'il voudrait définitif comme celui du juge. A tous égards, il reste l'arbitre ultime. C'est lui le porteur militant des valeurs 'libérales' de la démocratie constitutionnelle.¹³

the past but will remain always present in the awareness/conscience of future generations. This ... class of the values of memory therefore presents an obvious link with the values of the present'.

- 11 Clearly it is a question which presumes a collectively negative opinion about Nazism. We should not forget, however, the few Irishmen who fought on the side of the Germans. On these men, see O'Reilly, *Hitler's Irishmen*.
- 12 For an interesting discussion of this problematical conflict between impartiality and judgement in the writing of history, see Ricœur, *La Mémoire*, pp. 413–36.
- 13 Ricœur, *La Mémoire*, p. 436. Translation (mine): 'He emerges as a third party in time: his gaze is fashioned by his own experience which has been diversely informed by penal judgement and by published historical enquiry. Moreover, his intervention is never completed, something which places him rather on the side of the historian. But he is in search of an assured judgement, which he would like to be a definitive judgement such as that provided by a judge. In all respects, he remains the ultimate arbiter. He is the militant bearer of the "liberal" values of constitutional democracy'.