

Meeting of the Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations

Tuesday, 9th May 2023 at 1.15 pm
Room 301, Department of the Taoiseach

Minutes

Attendees:

Dr Maurice Manning (*Chair*)
Dr Martin Mansergh (*Deputy Chair*)
Dr Sandra Collins
Professor Mary Daly
Dr Anne Dolan
Professor Diarmaid Ferriter
Professor Patrick Geoghegan
Dr Mary Harris
Lt. Col. Stephen MacEoin
Dr Sinéad McCoole
Ms Emily Whelton *D/Taoiseach*
Mr Conor Falvey *D/TCAGSM*
Ms Sinéad Copeland *D/TCAGSM*
Mr Rónán Whelan *D/TCAGSM*
Orlaith Lochrin *D/TCAGSM*
Ms Muirne Lyons *D/TCAGSM*

Apologies:

Mr Francis Devine
Mr Gabriel Doherty
Mr Jerry Kelleher
Dr Leeann Lane
Dr William Murphy
Professor Eunan O'Halpin

Guest Attendees:

Major General Adrian Ó Murchú, *Deputy Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces*
Gráinne Guinan, *Department of Defence*
Aislinn McCauley, *Deputy Director, UN Policy Unit, D/Foreign Affairs*

Key Points:

The Chair welcomed the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces, Major General Adrian Ó Murchú, who gave a presentation to the Expert Advisory Group on plans for Defence Forces commemorative programming over the remainder of the Decade of Centenaries. The Chair expressed his great appreciation for the participation and commitment of Comdt. Stephen MacEoin in his role as a member of the Group.

A Defence Forces ceremonial event is due to be held on 30th July in Glasnevin Cemetery to commemorate the National Army dead of the Civil War. It is estimated that approximately 800 National Army soldiers lost their lives in the Civil War, with approximately 180 buried in Glasnevin Cemetery. Work is ongoing to clarify and confirm their names and they will be incorporated into the overall Defence Forces Roll of Honour. A portrait has been commissioned of Brigid Lyons Thornton, public health doctor and the first female commissioned officer in the Irish Free State Army. A key objective of the Defence Forces has been to contribute an enduring and substantial legacy for the Decade of Centenaries – this has been achieved in the immense work undertaken by the Military Archives, including digitisation of papers from the Military Service

Pensions Collection. A new book by Dr Éoin Kinsella has recently been published, titled *The Irish Defence Forces 1922 – 2022*.

The Expert Advisory Group expressed their support in principle for the planned ceremonial event to commemorate the National Army dead of the Civil War, noting the sensitivities and complexities involved. The Group advocated a thoughtful and careful approach to the planning of this event. The Chair commended all involved in the Military Archives digitisation work and reiterated its importance and the need for long-term support as a key legacy project for the Decade of Centenaries. Major General Adrian Ó Murchú confirmed the Defence Forces commitment to this digitisation work post Decade of Centenaries.

Aislinn McCauley provided a further update to the Group on plans to mark the centenary of the admission of the Irish Free State into the League of Nations. Progress is being made and the programme includes a touring exhibition designed, curated, delivered, and toured by the National Archives, in partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Royal Irish Academy, featuring records from its collections relating to Ireland's membership of the League; launch by An Post of a commemorative stamp; engagement with schools; broad public engagement through events such as the National Ploughing Championships and Dublin Festival of History; an international dimension focused on New York and Geneva; a Hedge School; a new podcast led by Dr Sinéad McCooile as part of Mná 100; and support under the Community Strand of the Decade of Centenaries Programme for local authorities who would like to develop initiatives to mark this significant centenary moment.

The Group reflected on the ending of the Decade of Centenaries and noted that a significant event was required to mark this appropriately. Plans are underway for a cultural and reflective event, led by RTÉ and supported by the Department (D/TCAGSM). A further update will be provided on this and other matters associated with the ending of the Decade, at the next meeting.

The Department of the Taoiseach provided an update to the Group on plans for the National Commemoration to mark the centenary of the Civil War on Sunday, 28th May. This ceremony in the Garden of Remembrance will complement the State-led cultural event, which was held in the National Concert Hall in September 2022. The programme will include Defence Forces ceremonial participation, participation of young people, and cultural elements drawing on Ireland's rich musical and literary heritage. Speeches on this occasion are not envisaged, in light of the substantial addresses given by the President, Taoiseach and Tánaiste at the earlier event. Invitees will predominantly comprise family members of those whose lives were most impacted by the events that occurred during the Civil War from communities around the country.

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed, with no matters arising. It was noted that the minutes of all of the meetings held in 2022 have been published on <https://www.decadeofcentenaries.com/>.

Under AOB, the Chair commended RTÉ for its two-part documentary, *The Silent Civil War*, supported by D/TCAGSM, noting the care and sensitivity with which difficult events and themes were addressed. The Group reflected on Pat Butler's request to RTÉ to give consideration to screening the documentary, *Ballyseedy*, in this centenary year. They agreed that requests such as

this one would be a scheduling matter for RTÉ and that it would not be appropriate for the Group to intervene in this process.

The Group noted correspondence from Professor Brian Walker, published in the Irish Times on 8th March and reflected on how the experiences of minority communities in Ireland, including the Protestant community, have been addressed throughout the Decade of Centenaries Programme, noting the complexities and sensitivities involved.

The Chair noted the immense contribution of local archivists and historians throughout the Decade of Centenaries, supported by funding under the Programme and the guiding principles of the Expert Advisory Group. The work undertaken in the field of local history studies and digitisation of local archival collections has been immense and connected broad public audiences of all ages with the significant historical events in their communities. It would be very helpful if options to continue resourcing and supporting this work could be explored post Decade of Centenaries.

Date of next meeting to be confirmed.

Ends.