Nationalism and the First World War Centenary: Post 29

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Steve Marti of the University of Delaware brings H-Nationalism another monthly update on nationalism and the commemoration of the First World War. Please feel free to respond to this post. Interested in contributing to this series? Drop Steve a line at steve.marti.25@gmail.com.

May 28th marked the hundredth anniversary of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Originally named the Imperial War Graves Commission, this intergovernmental organization maintains war graves and commemorative sites for soldiers of the Commonwealth of Nations. A ceremony at Westminster Abbey marked the centenary of the CWGC. While the CWGC plays an active role in coordinating centenary commemorations for a number of its member nations, the only public observation of the anniversary outside the UK consisted of a small ceremony at the Canadian War Museum.

A series of commemorative ceremonies took place on June 7 to mark the centenary of the Battle of Messines, in Belgium. Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny and Prince William laid wreaths at the Island of Ireland Peace Park during a ceremony organized by the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom. The joint commemoration recognized losses suffered by the 36th (Ulster) and 16th (Irish) Divisions, which fought alongside one another during the battle. New Zealand and Australia held their own commemorative services.

Conflict erupted over the design of a new memorial on the grounds of the Auckland War Memorial Museum. The project has ground to a halt while the Auckland Domain Committee and the memorial’s designers resolve their dispute on the layout of a path connecting the proposed memorial to the museum. The United States Commission on Fine Arts made some revisions to the design of the WWI Memorial in Washington D.C. Members of the CFA and the WWI Memorial Committee disagree on whether the scale of the memorial’s current design adequately reflects the significance of the loss of life suffered during the conflict. Smithsonian Magazine published an article surveying a collection of national memorials and cemeteries honouring the First World War. An inscription quoting Mustafa Kemal Atatürk disappeared from a prominent memorial at Ari Burnu, near Anzac Cove in Turkey. The Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism stated that the memorial is undergoing a scheduled resturation. Sources in Turkey and Australia suspect the refurbished memorial will present a more Islamist narrative of the Gallipoli campaign, to reflect the views of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s government.

The Heritage Lottery Fund released an interim report on centenary grants awarded in the UK since 2014. In his report, Sir Peter Luff highlights projects that commemorated the experiences of Indian, African, and Caribbean soldiers, and reflected on the impact of the First World War in forging new nations such as Turkey, Australia, and New Zealand. The National Museum of Northern Ireland published an evaluation report for its “Remembering 1916: Your Stories” exhibit. The report compiles responses from surveys completed by visitors and reveals public reactions to the decision to include both the events of the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme in one exhibit.
The Australian Broadcasting Corporation cancelled Australia Wide, the weekly news magazine hosted by Yassmin Abdel-Magied. Last month’s post detailed the outrage directed at Abdel-Magied as a result of her Anzac Day social media post stating: "LEST. WE. FORGET, (Manus, Nauru, Syria, Palestine ...)". An ABC spokesperson stated that decision to cancel Abdel-Magied’s program arose as part of a wider restructuring of the network.