

Meeting of the First World War Centenary Historical Interpretation Working Group

Monday 1st July 2013

Held at

Fulton House, Swansea University

Present:

Prof Sir Deian Hopkin, Chair

[British Council Official 1] (Chair, British Council)

[AC-NMW Official 1] ([job title redacted] National Slate Museum)

[Aberystwyth University Official 1] (Aberystwyth University)

[Swansea University Official 1] (Swansea University)

[NLW Official 1] (Retired [job title redacted] – National Library of Wales)

[Aberystwyth University Official 2] (Aberystwyth University)

[Swansea University Official 2] (Swansea University)

[RCAHMW Official 1] (Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales)

[WFA Official 1] (Chair, Western Front Association, Gwent Branch)

[British Army Official 1] (British Army (Retired))

[St Cyres School Official 1] ([job title redacted] St Cyres School, Penarth)

[Welsh Government Official 1](Welsh Government - minutes)

Apologies:

[AC-NMW Official 2] (Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales)

1. Welcome and introduction

DH welcomed everyone to the meeting. Members of the group introduced themselves and gave an overview of their interest in the First World War Centenary.

2. Scoping the group's work and relationship with the Welsh Programme Board

Three planning events for interested stakeholders jointly organised by CyMAL and Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) were held at Cardiff, Llandudno Junction and Llanellwedd in January and February 2013. Over 150 people attended representing around 80 organisations.

DH has convened and is chairing a Programme Board to develop the Programme itself and to monitor its implementation. The Board has representation from Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales, the National Library of Wales, Arts Council Wales, BBC Wales, S4C, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Army in Wales, the Royal Navy, the National Eisteddfod, the Imperial War Museum, Welsh Local Government Association, the Royal British Legion, the British Council, and the Welsh

Government. Others may join as the Programme evolves, and DH asked the group to consider whether anyone else should be invited to join the Programme Board.

The Welsh Government's intention is to deliver an inclusive Framework Programme with national events and exhibitions, accompanied by community-based activities, for example researching local war memorials, together with a variety of educational projects and programmes.

DH is representing Wales on the UK Government's First World War Centenary Commemoration Advisory Group, along with representatives from the Scottish and Northern Irish Governments. The UK Government has also recently established a Cultural Board to deliver a cultural programme at key points during the centenary, and appointed Vikki Heywood as Programme Director. DH asked the group to consider what does this mean to Wales.

The UK Government has identified a number of key commemorative dates:

- The outbreak of war (4 August 2014)
- Gallipoli (2015)
- Battle of Jutland (June 2016)
- The Battle of the Somme (July 2016)
- Armistice Day (11 November 2018)

As well as these dates, of particular significance for Wales will be the Battle of Passchendaele (July 2017) and the Treaty of Versailles (June 2019). The Welsh outline Programme envisages an appropriate Welsh response for these, and other commemorative dates which may emerge, and a major conference on Wales and the War for 2016.

The UK Government has also announced a number of commemorative events:

- The Commonwealth Games will be held in Glasgow next year and Commonwealth Heads of State will be in the city for the closing ceremony on 3 August. The UK Government has said that the leaders will be invited to stay on for a special service at Glasgow Cathedral to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War
- Candlelit vigils will be held across the country to mark the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. There will be a service held at Westminster Abbey exactly 100 years since war was declared, with a final candle extinguished at 11pm, the moment Britain's ultimatum to Germany passed
- On the same day an event at the St Symphorien Military Cemetery in Mons will bring together British and German politicians and armed forces for a service to mark the centenary

The UK Government has also announced £5.3 million of funding to allow two pupils and one teacher from every state school in England to visit battlefields such as the Somme, Verdun and Fromelles.

The Scottish Government has also convened a Programme Board and has announced a number of commemorative events and projects, including a

commitment to fund visits by schoolchildren to Western Front battlefields, as is the case in England.

In Ireland there will be a decade of remembrance, including the Ulster Covenant and the Easter Rising. There will be a joint Irish project to regain the history that has been lost.

DH asked the group to consider a number of questions in light of the proposed Programme:

- Is the Welsh approach to the commemoration the right kind of approach, and how can historians contribute?
- What are the key moments (Jutland, Somme, recent discussions on including Amiens)?
- How do we ensure that the proposed commemorative events do not impact upon normal Armistice events?
- What would be the best way of using the educational material which will be generated during the commemorative period?
- Is there a need for a permanent Welsh memorial?

3. Discussion on memorials

Of the two memorials for which funding has been requested from the Welsh Government, the majority view was that it was more important that work is carried out at the existing Mametz Wood memorial, rather than providing funding for the erection of a new memorial to all Welsh casualties of the First World War at Langemark, Passchendaele. It was felt that there is a lack of interpretation at the Mametz Wood memorial, that access to the site is very poor, and that funding should be directed to improving access to, and interpretation of the Mametz Wood memorial rather than a new memorial. It was suggested that Imperial War Museums could prepare the interpretation for the Mametz Wood memorial. DH suggested that the National Library could develop an app for the Mametz Wood memorial.

It was also stressed that there is greater urgency for the Mametz Wood memorial to be ready by 2016. There was a strong feeling among the group that the Mametz Wood site carries a particular resonance for Wales, although there is also a strong link with Passchendaele since that is where Hedd Wyn was killed. The land where the Mametz Wood memorial is sited is owned by a local Count and it was suggested that the Count could be approached to request that the land be gifted to the people of Wales.

The group reached a consensus that the Mametz Wood memorial should be given priority due to its importance, and that dialogue would be required with the Western Front Association.

4. Educational Programme

In terms of the UK Government's plans to fund schoolchildren's trips to the Western Front, [St Cyres School Official 1] pointed out that there are already regular trips from schools to the Western Front and that funding already exists for such trips. Group members questioned the legacy of the UK proposal, and indicated that the money would be better spent providing digital resources. The Group discussed war memorials in Wales and it was suggested that children could be sent to Commonwealth War Graves Commission-maintained sites in Wales.

[Swansea University Official 1] suggested that Wales could provide a template for community groups to research the stories of those who served during the First World War, in a similar way as the Imperial War Museums' *Lives of the First World War* project aims to do. [NLW Official 1] pointed out that there is a natural concentration on those who were killed, but it is not so easy to find details of those who survived. For example, Talybont Memorial Hall has details of those who survived, as well as those who lost their lives.

DH outlined the funding available through the HLF *First World War: then and now* grant programme, i.e. £3,000 - £10,000. [WFA Official 1] pointed out that a number of local projects require funding of less than £3,000 and enquired as to whether the HLF could offer grants of less than £3,000. DH agreed that officials would look into this.

Action: CyMAL to discuss the possibility of offering grants of less than £3,000 with HLF.

[RCAHMW Official 1] indicated he and [name redacted] will be doing a tour of the 51 Thankful Villages in the UK. These are villages with no traditional war memorial because all who left to fight in the Great War were lucky enough to return home. 3 of the 51 villages are in Wales, namely Llanfihangel y Creuddyn, Herbrandston and Colwinstone. The ride will raise funds for the Royal British Legion and the target figure is £51,000.

The Group discussed whether the commemoration should continue until 2019. There was a broad consensus that the war didn't end in November 1918, but rather with the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. In fact, one Welsh serviceman who was awarded the VC was killed in 1919. The War of Intervention is an important aspect of the conflict, as well as Navy links during 1919 and the Temple of Peace. Also, it was pointed out that the IWM's website mentions no end date. [St Cyres School Official 1] mentioned that the Programme Board had said that the commemoration should last from 2014 to 2018, but the commemoration is an opportunity to re-educate people.

Interpretation

DH asked the Group to consider whether there should be overall interpretation of the war and whether this Group would provide the interpretation. [Swansea University Official 2] queried where would the interpretation be put, i.e. the *Cymru'n Cofio – Wales Remembers 1914-1918* website? There should be an indication on the website of why the war began, what it was about and why it ended. [British Army Official 1] suggested that the interpretation should not go too far, and that there should be a range of views and a broad overview of the war. [Aberystwyth University

Official 1] said that there was no single interpretation but there would be a need to provide contextual information. The website should be used to enhance the user's ability to find interpretations, i.e. Welsh periodicals and primary material. Historical review publications will be providing interpretation over the next few years and links to these should be provided on the website. DH mentioned that the *Great War Centenary* BBC newsletter is another source of interpretation.

Cymru'n Cofio – Wales Remembers 1914-1918 website

The Group discussed what themes should be included on the *Cymru'n Cofio – Wales Remembers 1914-1918* website. The Group agreed unanimously that the 'Welsh Culture and Identity' theme should just be called 'Culture and Identity' since so many ethnic groups from Wales had been involved in the war, e.g. Somali sailors and Muslim combatants. [Aberystwyth University Official 1] stated that information on the complex Irish contingent in Wales should be included under this theme, e.g. Frongoch. It was agreed that 'Technologies' and 'Legacy' should be included as themes. DH asked the group to consider what themes should be included and how the theme boxes on the website should be populated, and to forward their ideas to him. DH also stated that there should be a timeline on the website. [Swansea University Official 2] suggested a 'The war where you live' function for the website, which would include maps and details of what resources etc there are to explore in certain areas. Such a function would be a good way of highlighting local events, which is likely to be the most important aspect for users.

Action: All to consider what themes should be included on the website and how these should be populated, and to send their ideas to DH.

Historical conference

DH asked the Group to discuss whether or not a historical conference should be held. [Aberystwyth University Official 1] pointed out that there are separate kinds of audiences and there would be a need to be very clear about who the conference would be for, i.e. would it be for academics only, or would it also be open to those with a passing interest in the First World War. [Swansea University Official 2] suggested that it could be a conference bringing together academic work and also material brought together by others. DH asked the Group to consider the question of a conference and to contact him with their views.

Culture

DH informed the Group that the Irish government is eager to collaborate with Wales on a project on Hedd Wyn and Francis Ledwidge, an Irish poet who was killed on the same day as Hedd Wyn. He has held talks with [Bangor University Official 1] of Bangor University with regards to how the literature of the period can be included in the commemoration. The Welsh National Opera has commissioned an opera *In Parenthesis*, based on the work of the war poet David Jones. The opera is to premiere in 2016, though there is currently some confusion as to where the premiere will take place. The National Library of Wales is working on an exhibition to be held in 2016 – a retrospective of the Welsh art of the Somme. [Aberystwyth University Official 2]

suggested that perhaps the National Eisteddfod could look at holding a literary competition next year on the First World War.

AHRC call for co-ordinating centres to commemorate the centenary of the First World War

[Swansea University Official 1] informed the Group of the Arts and Humanities Research Council's call for co-ordinating centres to commemorate the centenary of the First World War.

The AHRC, working in partnership with the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), wishes to invite applications for a small number of co-ordinating centres to support community engagement activities to connect academic and public histories of the First World War and its legacy.

AHRC funding of up to £2.5m is available to support 5-7 co-ordinating centres under the first three-year phase of this initiative. Applications for co-ordinating centres may seek funding of up to £500,000 on a full economic costs basis and the AHRC will fund 80% of the full economic costs.

Further details can be found at the following link: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funding-Opportunities/Pages/Call-for-Co-ordinating-Centres-to-Commemorate-the-Centenary-of-the-First-World-War.aspx>

Historical Interpretation Group – the future

There was a consensus that the Group and the Programme Board has an important role to play in facilitating local commemoration. It was agreed that the Group should continue to meet, and that meetings should be held on a quarterly basis. DH said that the Programme Board and the Welsh Government would keep the Group informed of any decisions that are made, of the findings of the other working groups, and other ideas for events. The Group's views on the website and historical conference would be welcome and can be copied to other members of the Group to stimulate discussion.

Any other business

[WFA Official 1] stated that Wales' attitude towards refugees during the First World War would be an important aspect of the commemoration. The Welsh generally welcomed the refugees, many of whom were from Belgium. Belgian nationals who sought refuge in Menai Bridge during the First World War were so grateful to their hosts that they constructed the 'Belgian Promenade' as a token of their gratitude.

[British Army Official 1] informed the Group that he is working with museums in Germany to produce an exhibition on the Christmas Truce of 1914 which will be held in Germany, France, Belgium and Wales. The Royal Welsh Fusiliers Museum Trust has a great deal of material on the truce, including journals, letters, newspaper cuttings etc. He queried where the exhibition would be held in Wales, and said that this was something for CyMAL to consider. DH concurred that reconciliation and the fact that former enemies are now allies are important factors in the commemoration.

Action: CyMAL to consider a venue for the Christmas Truce exhibition.