

# German students preserving history at Glencree

For the third time, students and teachers from the Eichendorffschule in Wolfsburg, Germany, visited the German War Cemetery in Glencree on Saturday 20th April, to honour and preserve the memories of those buried there.



One of the visiting German students places a new QR code on one of the graves at the German Graveyard in Glencree

This educational pilgrimage, held for the last few years, has become an annual tradition for the school, with 12 students this time conducting extensive research on the lives interred within this remote and serene resting place.

In 2022, their visit consisted of maintenance work on the gravestones where German soldiers are buried. Their aim is to maintain a project in conjunction with local schools, where regular visits are carried out for necessary work.

This year's focus included Hans Möller, a Jewish victim of World War II, whose tragic death came when the ship Arandora Star was torpedoed by a German submarine while en route to Canada. Möller's body, initially



Students from Eichendorffschule tending to the graves of German soldiers in Glencree.

washed ashore in Donegal, was later reburied in Glencree.

The students meticulously compiled Möller's story, along with those of other German soldiers and civilians, and made the information accessible to all via QR codes. These digital memorials were placed beside the graves during their recent visit, providing visitors with instant access to the histories that the graveyard conceals.

Unfortunately, the QR codes that the students installed during their previous visit last year were removed by an unknown party. The students, undeterred, expressed hope that visitors would not only engage with but also respect these digital tributes by leaving them undisturbed.

The visit also illuminated other tragic tales, such as that of a German aircrew whose plane crashed over Dursey

Head during the war. Local historian Frank Tracy showed the students a shared grave of a Jewish man who perished in World War I and a German soldier from World War II, symbolising the universal loss brought by warfare.

Amid these reflections, the students appreciated the tranquil atmosphere of the cemetery. Nadzeya and Tessa, participants in the project, noted, "Despite being a war cemetery, its atmosphere is truly peaceful." They were motivated to encourage future students to continue this work, hoping that the legacy of remembrance and reconciliation is carried on.

Adding to the rich educational experience, this visit also facilitated a cultural exchange with local students from St. Patrick's National School in Curtlestown, who participated in last year's Remembrance Day celebrations. The interaction included sharing languages and cultural insights, with German and Irish students teaching each other words from their native tongues. "We hope that we will stay in contact, and it was very nice to play, talk, and work with the Irish students," said Tessa Schubert, reflecting on the meaningful engagement.

Supported by the German War Grave Commission, these endeavors by the students of Eichendorffschule not only help in conserving the historical significance of the Glencree Cemetery but also bridge histories and cultures, fostering an understanding that transcends generations and national boundaries.

The war cemetery at Glencree, one of many German war cemeteries in Western Europe, serves as a stark reminder of the devastation of the First and Second World Wars.

134 German military servicemen and civilians are buried there, many of them Luftwaffe pilots who flew off course while flying over England, or crashed as a result of damage to their aircraft or fuel loss.

The Glencree website states, "Interred here also are a number of regular naval personnel (Kriegsmarine) whose bodies washed up, sometimes in remote coastal locations. Of the eighty-one air and naval servicemen buried in Glencree, the identities of twenty-eight remain unknown.

"Those who engaged in the 'secret side of war' are also buried here. Dr. Hermann Gortz, who took his own life to avoid arrest as a spy, has the only individual memorial - a finely carved stone relief - in the cemetery.

"Six soldiers of the First World War are also interred. These soldiers died while in a British prisoner of war camp based in Ireland from 1915-1918.

"The cemetery is also the final resting place of forty-six German civilians who were being transported from England to Canada in July 1940. Their ship 'The Arandora Star' was torpedoed by the German submarine off the coast of Donegal.

"Just inside the wrought iron gated entrance, a poem by Professor Stan O'Brien, a dedicated supporter of the Irish-German Society, set in polished stone, captures the poignancy of this quiet resting ground.

"A pathway leads to the 'Hall of Honour', a place of reflection and prayer. Just beyond the Hall the gravestones are laid out in eight gently curved arcs, while a mosaic Pieta, designed by Berlz, the Munich born painter, adorns the interior wall. Seton a height above the cemetery is a fine Celtic cross."



Teachers Benedikt Melzig, Susanne Wolf and Christian Luebke with students from Eichendorffschule