Abstract
On 2 September 1914, an Irish regiment was formed in Montreal for the Canadian militia called the Irish Canadian Rangers. Prominent individuals within the Montreal Irish community were active in its formation and the two conditions of entry were fitness and Irish descent. But this regiment was unique in another way. ‘There will be no religious or other lines drawn, but the regiment will be purely Irish Canadian in the best sense of the word’ (The Montreal Gazette, 2 September 1914). Irish unity, a theme championed by Nationalist leader, John Redmond, was consciously replicated in the regiment’s formation. On Easter Monday 1916, the same day as the Easter Rising began in Ireland, recruiting commenced for the 199th battalion Irish Canadian Rangers as part of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. By December, the regiment was ready to go overseas but it would first stop in Ireland to supposedly reinvigorate interest in the war effort.

This paper interrogates the relationship between John Redmond and the Irish community in Montreal through the Irish Canadian Rangers. To what extent did the Montreal Irish embrace Redmond’s policy of Home Rule? Did the Easter Rising of 1916 affect their loyalty to King and country? How did the Canadian Irish and Irish at home respond to the Irish Canadian Rangers’ tour of Ireland? Was there widespread protest and disaffection? How did the Irish in Ireland react to such a blatant demonstration of inter-communal unity and service to the Empire at a time when Nationalists had allegedly lost interest in the war effort and all facets of British rule?

This paper will demonstrate that when the ‘ends of Ireland’ meet, a radically different understanding of Irish commitment to the war effort and the Empire emerges in contrast to most historiography of the Irish after the Easter Rising. Images and short video clips of this tour will be presented.

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