

Solemn: Queen Elizabeth and President Mary McAleese lay wreaths at the Garden of Remembrance on May 17, 2011, in Dublin. PHOTO: GETTY



Young republicans in UCD were first to suggest the queen's visit to Garden of Remembrance

QUEEN Elizabeth's visit to Ireland in 2011, and particularly the way she showed such respect in the Garden of Remembrance, was a significant moment in the realignment of Irish-British relations.

Indeed, the positive reaction to the British monarch's Dublin visit influenced another campaign effort that was ultimately successful when former defence minister Alan Shatter introduced legislation to provide immunity from prosecution to those blacklisted personnel who had gone awol and joined British or allied forces during the Emergency years in Ireland.

This unique and historic piece of legislation would not have been possible to introduce in previous years without the efforts of all concerned, and it took political courage by Mr Shatter to introduce this act within a new climate of developing Irish-British relations.

There are many claims and counter-claims in some quarters as to how the idea of the queen's visit to the Garden of Remembrance came about.

For the record, it was the Kevin Barry Branch of the Fianna Fáil party in University College Dublin who were the first to adopt a motion (which, by the way, can be viewed online) inviting the queen to visit the Garden of Remembrance, and it was passed on November 9, 1994, in UCD.

Young students were told it would not be possible to take it up, but the passing of that motion would be included on the records within Fianna Fáil HQ in Mount Street, Dublin 2.

It's heartening to know that, 16 years later, the queen visited the Garden of Remembrance with a little bit of support and a suggestion, made by students from years before, of a return visit to Windsor Castle in 2014 by President Michael

D Higgins (which was another success).

We knew at the time that the Fianna Fáil-led government thought a visit to the Garden of Remembrance would not be possible or should even be suggested.

As it turned out, the visit became the symbolic moment of the queen's visit to our country.

Although others have claimed the credit for the various schedules – and they are quite entitled to do so – they also need to be reminded that it was the young students of UCD who foresaw the benefit in 1994 of a visit by the queen to the Garden of Remembrance, in order to help build and maintain the fledgling peace process.

The younger generation of republicans were right. I thank them for their courage and clarity of vision at a time when others thought such a visit would be impossible.

Peter Mulvany
Clontarf, Dublin 3