



# REMEMBERING THE FUTURE

Understanding Our Past,  
Shaping Our Future



**PERSPECTIVES FROM THE CONFERENCE - 21ST MARCH 2011  
BELFAST CITY HALL**

Edited by Deirdre MacBride



# Principles for Remembering in Public Space

## Marking Anniversaries

### Principles

In straight forward language the principles that can be applied are:

- 1 Start from the historical **facts**;
- 2 Recognise the **implications** and **consequences** of what happened;
- 3 Understand that different **perceptions** and **interpretations** exist; and
- 4 Show how events and activities can deepen **understanding** of the period.

All to be seen in the context of an ‘inclusive and accepting society’

**Community Relations Council**



[www.community-relations.org.uk/programmes/marketing-anniversaries](http://www.community-relations.org.uk/programmes/marketing-anniversaries)

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This publication is based on the proceedings of a conference held in March 2011 at Belfast City Hall.



# Preface

Deirdre Mac Bride,  
Cultural Diversity Director CRC

This publication comprises articles and speeches from the Remembering the Future conference held in March 2011 in Belfast City Hall. In the intervening time there has been significant progress. The development of a set of principles for remembering in public spaces has been influential. The Community Relations Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund has continued to work in partnership to promote discussion and create resources. The latter has included the Marking Anniversaries webpage and the recording of the ten week lecture series which are available at <http://www.youtube.com/user/CRCNI/videos?view=1>

Some articles were written before agreement was reached on the development of the Maze Long Kesh Regeneration Site and before a more nuanced approach to dealing with the past was developed.

The principles outlined have influenced the framework that government has been putting in place in order to set the tone and put official acknowledgement processes in place. The practical outworking of the principles has been evident in lectures and events organised to date around the Ulster Covenant in that the broad context is being set and a range of perspectives shared. As we go through the coming months and years the depth and range of divergent voices included will we hope increase.

The partnership between the Community Relations Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund has continued. The Marking Anniversaries web page is now in place at <http://www.community-relations.org.uk/marketing-anniversaries>. It is a gateway to links to relevant culture and heritage organisations, publications, up and coming events, case studies and discussion and guidance papers. The 'Up and Coming' section relies on

organisers and others bringing events to our attention.

The Remembering the Future 10 week lecture series which ran from March to May 2012 is now available via You Tube on the webpage with audio visual and podcasts. The 30 lectures and 50 plus question and answer topics comprise a broad range of perspectives including the nationalism and unionism, Covenant, WWI, the Easter Rising, from rising to partition, labour and women's history and trapped by the border.

In this publication attention is drawn to the understanding of complexity as understood from the historical facts and the popular versions of history as remembered in family and community life. Thus there are no indisputably right or wrong interpretations. We are reminded that what we choose to remember is influenced by the present. So our concern, it is suggested, may be less about any ideological motivation and more about whether there is a future vision; one that is ethical, shared and forward looking.

We should mine family stories and draw on intergenerational work to make sense of the past. Fintan O'Toole suggests a giant version of "Who Do We Think We Are?" supported by the Irish Government and Northern Ireland Executive would help us avoid a kind of "equal opportunities mythologising" in which we may put on a show of tolerance for "their" events so that we are able to commemorate "ours" and indeed ignore wider social and economic contexts.

The conference heard from two distinct panels. Firstly we heard the perspectives of historians and commentators. Secondly the DUP, SF, UU, SDLP and Alliance Parties provided political perspectives drawn from their own contexts and work. The work of explaining and exploring continues in these articles.

Éamon Phoenix set out how the complex events

of the decade are interwoven and the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. The central role of public spaces - in promoting exploration and broadening our horizons was elucidated by Duncan Morrow and Paul Mullan. This includes museums, town halls and art galleries; broadcasters, artists and historians.

Johnston McMaster writes that remembering the future is a different way of remembering. Ethical remembering acknowledges the destructiveness of violence and its destructive legacy. By exploring the Covenant and the Proclamation together-in effect walking through our histories together - may be the only liberating option. Realistically some of these events are more important to some than others. Making them less threatening or intimidating, Brian Walker suggests, will require explanation. We can be optimistic as our remembering over the 20 years in relation to the two world wars, the Boyne site and 1916 have shown.

Returning to the theme of popular versions of history, Marianne Elliot outlines the challenges we face to overcome "communal memory" based on exclusive origin stories of identity and loyalty. There is great potential in exploring the overall context of the decade. One such way may be retrieving memories through family photographs - "how did your parents/grandparents experience the decade 1911- 1921?"

In her article Susan McKay opens with a question: have we replaced "tit for tat killing with tit for tat remembering?" Paying attention to the memory of those killed in the recent conflict is not, she suggests, something we are good at. In this context as we commemorate the decade she suggests we would do well to note that less is more.

Nelson McCausland begins by identifying opportunities to examine, re-evaluate and interrogate the past. He sets out the complexity with which 1798 and 1966 have been remembered. At times this has been partisan he suggests, overly dominated by nationalism and

therefore had a de-stabilising effect. The centenary of the Ulster Covenant, he suggests, gives Unionists an opportunity to explore the principles of unionism and the experience of the border counties. In contrast nationalists and republicans will have the opportunity in the centenary of the Easter Rising of 1916 to similarly explore this tradition. Uncovering these complexities will, he suggests, with the assistance of the national cultural institutions promote a "shared future".

The tomb stone grave of the Reverend Rutledge Kane, senior member of the Orange Order, opponent of the 1886 Home Rule Bill, inscribed "A Faithful Pastor, A Gifted Orator and Loyal Irish Patriot", Tom Hartley suggests, is an invitation to question contemporary interpretations of what we consider to be "Loyal" and "Irish". In the context of contested histories and identities it is necessary to construct an open and on-going dialogue, an historical engagement and negotiation that is a two way "historical street" in which concepts are given, re-shaped and received back as a challenge. As various institutions and interests commemorate events important to them, there will be challenges for civic institutions. How the state deals with this will be of immense importance. He suggests the point is to enjoy the complexity.

Dolores Kelly suggests the decade of anniversaries provides opportunities for society in its broadest sense, north and south to engage in a public debate about the future. What do "history" and "identity" mean to us? The Assembly and Executive should move society on by "building an active process of reconciliation". Implicit in this approach is developing a mechanism to address the legacy of our past.

Ian Adamson discusses the impact of the devastation and heroism of the Battle of the Somme in July 1916. He suggests that at the level of community consciousness the loss of the sons of Ulster and the founding of Northern Ireland are intertwined. The Battle became Northern Ireland. He sees in



the decade the opportunity to establish in Ulster a cultural consensus – indeed a united Ulster to which we can all give allegiance.

While most societies have a founding myth, Northern Ireland has two contrary founding myths. The commemoration of the American Civil War, Stephen Farry suggests is a moot case of how particular accounts and interpretations are privileged – in that case the denial of the rights of African-Americans and the elevation of the honourable “Lost Cause” of the Confederates. With positive political and civil society leadership the decade of anniversaries can help build a shared future and transform society. He identifies the need for principles, framework, and realisation of potential economic benefits and to take into account that the island has changed through increased diversity, and how the economic crisis challenges the old certainties.

Collectively the various contributions highlight the importance of the decade of centenaries as an opportunity to explore identity and contested histories. The emphasis differs across the contributors. In the perspectives some contributors focus on dealing with the legacy of the past, others focus on exploring and gaining a deeper insight into one's own identity and others on the challenges of retrieving memory in a contested society.

In this context contributors recognised the need for commemoration to be set in a broad context and framework including the development of principles. The challenges and opportunities facing cultural, heritage, arts, media, educational and civic institutions in broadening our horizons and in remembering in public space are recognised as an ethical or forward looking endeavour.

Such are those challenges and opportunities that contributors drew attention to the importance of complexity and the desirability of engaging society at large in using family and local stories as a springboard to unearthing a history of us together charting the broad experience of men, women and children and of different socio-economic groups. We are reminded as we face into the twenty first century that society is more diverse and the economic realities challenge old certainties. Finally, we are also reminded, there is reason for optimism as we approach the 50<sup>th</sup> and other anniversaries of the conflict although the sensitivities and difficulties involved are substantial. But as a society moving forward from a difficult past, there is no doubt that this period and significant events within it must be remembered as part of a history of us.

## Remembering the Future?

By Duncan Morrow (CRC) and

Paul Mullan (HLF)

(reprinted by permission of the Belfast Telegraph

19.3.2011)

In Northern Ireland, political anniversaries are usually associated with moments of contention. Remembering is something we do apart; a competition for dominance, not a chance to re-examine the evidence. Every event is a matter of a partisan celebration or deliberate avoidance, with the risk that every commemoration is a re-run of the division of the past.

Over the next ten-plus years there will be a number of critical and contested anniversaries and commemorations of events that continue to shape our lives, even centuries later. Indeed, some are already calling this the ‘Decade of Anniversaries’; it will soon be four hundred years since the Plantation and one hundred years since the Ulster Covenant, the Battle of the Somme, the

Easter Rising and Partition. By 2018, we will begin another cycle of anniversaries, signifying fifty years since the Civil Rights movement, the arrival of British troops, internment and so on. The question is not whether we remember these events, but how. Can we turn pivotal events in the past into opportunities for learning, challenge and engagement for a better future?

How we approach and commemorate these events will say much about our maturity as a society. Many of these events have taken on a resonance and meaning far beyond the complex original facts and evidence. History has become a battlefield in which we bend events to fit a wider political story, choosing our facts to prove a political point rather than learn more complicated truths. Voices of those less directly connected to political leadership, whether they are those of women, small minority communities or representatives of the international context, disappear from view. In Northern Ireland, we have sometimes been better at myth-making than history, to the point that we come to the conclusion that only one view, usually our own, can be tolerated.



Clearly, conflict still affects us all, but the wider search for a shared and better future now offers us a possibility to set the megaphone aside and make space for pluralism and the contest of evidence. Public spaces, like museums, town halls and art galleries can become places for exploration, learning and challenge instead of simple propaganda or banal neutrality.

Broadcasters, artists, historians and writers should be challenged to expand our horizons in an open public space. Commemorations offer an opportunity to revisit old certainties, to think again about received ideas and to compare our own assumptions with those of others in the face of evidence.

Just over twenty years ago, to mark the three-hundred years since the Williamite wars, the Ulster Museum put on an exhibition, 'Kings in Conflict', which tried to put those seminal events in context. It reminded us that the wars were part of a bigger European story, one which saw conflict between King William and King James in a very different light to the simple notion of a Protestant King fighting a Catholic King. Instead of a simple Catholic-Protestant battle, 1690 became the year in which the Pope in Rome celebrated the Protestant William's victory.

Such a contextualisation and presentation of wider and broader evidence made for a fascinating story, challenging many long-held beliefs and allowing for a richer and more surprising exploration of our past. With so many events in the next decade, we have a real opportunity to turn Northern Ireland into a centre of tolerance, pluralism and robust learning rather than the usual inter-community ding-dong where nobody learns much but we restate our old positions and make some new wounds. It was with this in mind that the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Community Relations Council are organising a one day conference in March on how we acknowledge the past through the forthcoming anniversaries. The intention is not to dictate what will happen but to kick-start a public

debate on the issue.

Could we, for example, develop a set of shared principles to ensure an open approach to commemoration over the next ten years, rooted in evidence and recognition of different points of view?

In all of this there is a tremendous opportunity to create a better understanding of our past and to recognise together that the past is a complex inheritance with many interpretations. The challenge for our public institutions and media will be to create the space for a more honest understanding of our past. Some of the early indications are good, with the BBC developing a series on the History of Ireland and with more specific programmes planned. It is also to be hoped that our major cultural institutions, such as the museums, will put on challenging exhibitions and events over the period that will greatly enlighten people about our difficult and challenging past and help them to question their preconceptions.

A decade of anniversaries is both a challenge and an opportunity. It is our hope that we will end the decade better informed and with a greater understanding of who we are and why our past is important to us. We might even have a new shared culture of learning and robust debate which is enlightening and enriching and neither partisan nor bland.



# Welcome

Tony McCusker  
Chairperson  
Community Relations Council

We are pleased to welcome you, some 250 participants to today's event which has been organized by the Community Relations Council and the National Heritage Lottery Fund. The participants include the Joint secretaries of the British Irish Governmental Secretariat, Officials Dept of Foreign Affairs and Taoiseach's Office and US Consulate's office, Councils North and South, academics, cultural organisations, government departments and agencies and interested parties.

Our aim is to develop a discussion about how the significant anniversaries\* over the next decade can be marked in ways that help us to deal better with the legacies of the past and to shape a better future.

- This is, of course, contentious and complex territory.
- It can be difficult to even reach agreement on the facts of what actually happened; and

- The implications of what happened can- hundreds or scores of years later - be hotly contested. Moreover, the different interpretations or perceptions can still have a profound impact on politics and attitudes across society today and into the future.

It is our hope that today's discussions can help us move towards some basic agreed principles and practices in handling the anniversaries

The CRC and NHLF hope that this process will assist our two organisations in deciding how best to focus their support for activities linked to the anniversaries and that the process will be of wider benefit for others in the public and the third sectors faced with the challenges of dealing with the decade of anniversaries. With this in mind CRC will be making available a discussion paper on the principles and issues of remembering and we will indeed forward it to you

Thank you for your support and participation.





## Opening Speech by Lord Mayor, Councillor Patrick Convery

Good Morning - Minister, Assembly Members, Councillors, representatives from the Governments of Ireland and the USA, ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of the City Council, I have great pleasure in welcoming you all here this morning to the City Hall to discuss the forthcoming Decade of Centenaries and Commemorations.

It is particularly appropriate that you have chosen to hold your conference here in this wonderful building of ours. A building that itself is over 100 years old and one that has seen many tumultuous events in its time – both inside and outside its doors.

When the City Hall first opened in 1906, it was a time of enormous prosperity for this city. Over the years, the building has assumed a special iconic status in Belfast, not only because of its architectural splendour but also because of its symbolic importance, as a key focal point in the life of the city.

This building has witnessed many significant historic social and political events and experiences that have shaped Belfast and Northern Ireland.

One year after it opened, Belfast workers involved in the Dock Strike of 1907 converged on the City Hall.

In 1912, thousands of people queued here to sign the Ulster Covenant – in this building, at an old wooden table that is still kept in the Council Chamber.

In 1914, troops paraded past on their way to join the main armies in France in a Great War that was expected to be over by Christmas.

Over the years, the building has witnessed many memorable events in the city and has hosted some unforgettable visits – like that of President Clinton in 1995, to boost the peace process – although some people in Belfast at that time would have preferred the Power Rangers!

The City Hall has been a natural assembly point for Belfast people - for celebrations, for returning sports heroes; for peace rallies; for trade union protest marches; and for impromptu vigils.

The City Council of course is a political organisation. In recent years, the political composition of the Council has changed considerably and the current Council is made up of 6 political party groups, reflecting closely the community background of our citizens.

Here, perhaps more than most, we are conscious of the need to mark the many forthcoming centenaries and commemorations in a manner that is not seen to be divisive but that increases our understanding of the past.

Councillors in Belfast have begun to discuss, more openly, topics previously regarded as contentious and to address sensitive issues in a more positive manner.

We have set up a cross-party Centenary Working Group of politicians to examine this very subject. We want to develop a respect for the complexity of our history – our shared history - and to broaden our appreciation of other people's points of view.

The City Council is committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity and of good relations in the city. We want to support events that reflect a broad range of community perspectives and traditions in Belfast and that are welcoming to all sections of our increasingly diverse community.

Ladies and gentlemen - you have some very interesting speakers in today's programme and you have an excellent opportunity to contribute to this important debate.

I hope you have an informative and enjoyable event. I wish you well in your discussions and deliberations at today's Conference



# Enough bad history and politics.

Perhaps the past is best seen on TV  
Fintan O'Toole, Deputy Editor  
Irish Times, and Commentator  
(reprinted by permission of the Irish Times 26.3.2011)

The years between 1901 and 1911 constitute the longest decade in Irish history. The census returns for those years, placed online by the National Archives, show a remarkable number of people becoming 12 or even 15 years older between one and the other. This speeding-up of the ageing process is not all that mysterious. The reforming Liberal administration of Lloyd George introduced, in the period between the two censuses, old age pensions for those over 70. There was suddenly a very good reason for people to revise an apparently fixed aspect of personal identity: the year of one's birth.

This episode illuminates two things that are relevant to the next decade in Ireland, north and south. We are entering a period in which commemorations come thick and fast: the Plantation of Ulster (1608-12), the Solemn League and Covenant (1912), the foundation of the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Irish Volunteers and the Dublin Lockout (1913), the First World War (1914-18), the Curragh Mutiny and the Larne gunrunning (1914), the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme (1916), the anti-conscription campaign (1917), female suffrage and Sinn Fein's electoral triumph (1918), the first Dail and the beginning of the War of Independence (1919), the Government of Ireland Act and partition (1920), the Treaty and the establishment of Northern Ireland (1921), the beginning of the Civil War (1922).

Almost every year for the next ten years, in other words, there is the centenary of a bitterly divisive event on this island. With Northern Ireland still in a fragile state and the Republic in long-term

turmoil, there is the opportunity for commemorations to be exploited, as they have so often been used in the past, by the most reactionary forces in Irish culture. But there's also the opportunity to challenge crude versions of history.

The rapidly ageing population between 1901 and 1911 points towards two interesting ways to approach this whole business. Firstly, it highlights the things that are not commemorated. People changed their ages because the old age pension was one of the most significant things that ever happened in Irish society. But we don't commemorate things that don't involve conflict. The Old Age Pension Act of 1908 wasn't marked with any great fanfare in 2008, just as you'd be hard put to know that this year is the centenary of the National Insurance Act that introduced unemployment benefit. Equally, this year's centenary of the foundation of the Irish Women's Suffrage Foundation, has been given relatively little official recognition (though An Post, to its credit, issued centenary stamps this month.)

Commemoration, therefore, isn't determined by the calendar. It is a matter of choice. It is not essentially about history – it's about culture. It's about ideas of the "historic" that are always shaped by present day concerns. Pensions and national insurance would be very good subjects for commemoration, not least because they were an all-Ireland phenomenon. But since both the UK and Irish governments have been in the business of rolling back the welfare state, these particular anniversaries are inconvenient.

The other thing about the way people aged between 1901 and 1911, though, is that it tells us that identity is much more malleable than we like to think. As individuals, we are supposed to have a strong sense of our own past, of the unfolding identity that we mark every year with a birthday. But if it suits us, we can be remarkably pragmatic about the past. If there's something in it for us, we'll happily subject our past to the most radical surgery.

If we keep in mind that commemoration is a



cultural phenomenon and that the past is not a closed book, it is possible to navigate the rapids of awkward centenaries, not just safely but pleasurable. What's needed is a process of communal thinking – one that involves artists, historians, politicians, churches, communities. There is a real challenge to Irish culture, but there are encouraging signs that it is at least being recognised. Last year, Brian Cowen made a very well-judged speech on the subject, identifying mutual respect and historical accuracy as key principles. On Monday, I spoke at a very lively and well-attended conference in Belfast city hall, organised by the Community Relations Council, at which politicians, historians and community groups had a complex and civilised discussion about the challenge of arriving at a common framework in which to commemorate the centenaries. There is at least an awareness of the issues and what seems to be a genuine determination not to allow commemoration to reinforce tribalism.

The biggest danger, in fact, is not that official commemorations will be full of rancour. It is that the rhetoric of "mutual respect" and "two traditions" will result in a kind of equal opportunities mythologising. Thus, the Catholics/nationalists will hold their tongues and put on a show of tolerance while the Protestants/unionists mark the Ulster Covenant, the Battle of the Somme and the foundation of

Northern Ireland. The Protestants will return the favour while the Catholics are allowed to mark the 1916 Rising and the First Dail. This is the kind of sterile "mutual respect" that would end up merely reinforcing the idea that there are two histories – ours and theirs.

This would be bad politics, but also bad history. You can't understand the Ulster Covenant unless you understand the Home Rule movement. The foundation of the Irish Volunteers is a direct response to that of the Ulster Volunteers. Events take the shape, not of railway tracks, but of a cat's cradle.

The temptation for officialdom is to seal off the commemorations from each other and, especially, from the great unwashed, who can't be trusted not to turn them into excuses for atavism. On the contrary, the real challenge is to engage with popular culture, north and south. Get people to do history – of their own families and communities.

The success of genealogy shows of TV suggests both that people are immensely curious about where they came from and that when you take it down to the smallest levels, history is always full of surprises, contradictions and ambiguities. The best thing the governments of both parts of the island could do is to make the decade of anniversaries into a giant version of Who Do You Think You Are?

# ‘Remembering the Future’:

Some Thoughts on a Decade of Commemorations

By Dr. Éamon Phoenix,  
Stranmillis University College

In Ireland, north and south, we often speak of ‘the burden of our history’. Recently President Mary McAleese commented that: ‘In Ireland we have a common history but not a common memory.’ This is reflected in the divergent views of individuals and communities in Northern Ireland today on key events in modern Irish history. (Few dispute the received wisdom on the Stone Age or the Bronze Age on this island!)

The 1640s recall for many Ulster Protestants the sectarian massacres of their co-religionists by Catholic rebels in 1641, but for Irish nationalists, the 1640s are associated with ‘the curse that was Cromwell’ and the massacres of Drogheda and Wexford. Similarly, the Orange tradition celebrates the Boyne as marking the triumph of ‘civil and religious liberty over tyranny’, while the nationalist folk memory of 1688-91 is very different, focusing on military defeat, dispossession and a century of persecution under the Penal Laws (1691-1793).

In the next decade, this divided society, which has only recently emerged from thirty years of conflict, will be challenged by the unrolling of a decade of historical anniversaries connected with the Irish Revolution of 1912 to 22. These include the signing of the Ulster Covenant in 1912, the emergence of Partition (1912-16), the rise of the UVF and Irish Volunteers/Irish Republican Army (1913), the outbreak of the Great War (September 1914), the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme (1916), the rise of Sinn Féin, the Irish Convention (1917-18), the Conscription Crisis (1918), the General Election of December 1918 (the last all-Ireland election), the first shots in

the Anglo-Irish War (1919), the Belfast disturbances of 1920-22, the 1920 Partition Act and the 1921 Treaty and subsequent Irish Civil War.

It seems clear that there is little cross-community consensus on these events and the iconic personalities behind them. Collins, De Valera, Carson and Craig stand out as the architects of modern Ireland, yet evoke vastly different feelings and reactions across the traditional divide. The polarisation of opinion over commemoration was demonstrated on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of key events. The 1962 commemoration of the Covenant appealed only to Unionists while the 1966 celebration of the 1916 Rising was very much a Republican event, marked, by military or paramilitary-style parades in Dublin and Belfast. ‘Ulster ’71’, launched by the last Unionist government against a background of mounting violence and Internment proved equally divisive.

Paul Brady, the Strabane-born singer/song-writer, asks in his haunting ballad, ‘The Island’:

*Are we still at it in our own place?  
Still trying to reach the future through the past,  
Still trying to carve tomorrow from a tombstone?*

Happily, the Troubles have ceased and a broad community consensus has been reached on a power-sharing administration and institutions which reflect the full complexity of our allegiances and traditions. A corner has been turned, but feelings remain raw with no agreement in sight on how to deal with the events of 1968-94, let alone those of a century ago. Inevitably political, religious and cultural organisations will celebrate those events to which they feel an affinity in their own way. But government, local councils, museums and heritage bodies have a responsibility to approach this ‘Decade of Anniversaries’ in a pro-active, sensitive and inclusive manner which will build on the progress made by our political leaders since 1998. The eminent Derry-born Irish historian, FSL Lyons once observed: ‘To understand the past is to

cease to live in it’. The aim of government and arms-length bodies should be to promote a balanced, informed and inclusive approach towards, 1912, 1916 and the rest which will seek to place these pivotal events in context while promoting constructive dialogue and mutual respect. It is no exaggeration to say that in dealing with these critical centenaries we must take care ‘to remember the future’ as well as the past.

The question arises: can we reconfigure our approach to historical anniversaries in the new Northern Ireland/new Ireland without distorting the historical significance of events? Can we approach our chequered, largely controversial past in a spirit of mutual tolerance and an overarching quest for truth? In this context it is worth recalling that in 1990, while the Troubles continued, the Ulster Museum marked the tercentenary of the Boyne with a highly successful, world-class exhibition, ‘Kings in Conflict’ which sought to remove the battle and its consequences from mythology and folk memory. More recently the bi-centenary commemoration of the 1798 Rebellion in 1998-in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement-managed to embrace every section of the community with a profusion of conferences, summer schools, guided tours, a re-enactment of the Battle of Antrim and a special Orange Order dinner attended symbolically by the Lord Mayors of Belfast and Dublin.

As a fundamental principle it is essential that any programmes dealing with 1912-22 should reflect the historical facts, seek to explode myths and propagandistic distortions and place events in their broadest historical perspective. Not only should the 1912 Covenant be seen in the context of the Scottish Covenanting tradition and the Home Rule crisis of 1912-14 but it should be pointed out that there were, in fact, two opposing Covenants: the document signed by Carson, Craig and 240,000 Ulster Protestants and a pro-Home Rule Covenant, signed by Rev JB Armour of

Ballymoney, the famous Presbyterian Home Ruler and 3,000 co-religionists.

It is also important to bring out the connections between Unionist resistance to Home Rule, especially the formation of the UVF in 1913, and Irish nationalism. As the historian Michael Laffan has noted, in rejecting the right of the British Parliament to impose a Dublin Parliament on the north-east, ‘Carson rekindled the Fenian flame’ of revolutionary nationalism. Eoin MacNeill, Antrim Glensman and founder of the Irish Volunteers, welcomed the UVF in an influential article, ‘The North Began’ in November 1913 and even called for, ‘Three cheers for Carson’ at a rally in Cork. Admittedly his risky injunction provoked not three cheers, but three chairs hurled at the platform!

For the Belfast-born Quaker and IRB leader, Bulmer Hobson, Carson had opened a revolutionary door to a Republican insurrection in 1916.

If people are to be encouraged to challenge stereotypical views of this decade, it is important in talks, exhibitions and workshops to emphasise the sheer complexity of these events. For example, Edward Carson was a quintessential Southern Unionist who took up the Ulster issue in the hope of ‘killing Home Rule stone dead’, as he put it. For him, Ulster was a weapon rather than a cause and he was haunted to his dying day by his failure to save ‘my own people’ - the abandoned Protestants of the Irish Free State. Carson’s bitterness welled up during the 1921 Treaty debate in the House of Lords when he denounced his former Conservative allies: ‘What a fool I was. I was only a puppet, and so was Ulster, and so was Ireland in the political game that was to get the Conservative Party into power!’

James Craig, his loyal northern deputy, on the other hand, had succeeded by 1921 in saving the ‘Ulster’ he knew and loved within the folds of the Union Jack. The commemorative process should reflect such ironies and complexities.



Similarly, in marking the centenary of Rising – ‘the founding act of the modern Republic’, as Fintan O’Toole has termed it – it should be recalled that it occurred when the great mass of Irish nationalists supported John Redmond and the idea of ‘Home rule within the Empire’. One hundred and thirty pro-Republican Volunteers mustered at Coalisland, Co Tyrone in Easter 1916 in an abortive mobilisation, but 3,000 Belfast Catholics joined the Connaught Rangers in the First World War at the behest of their Home Rule MP, ‘Wee Joe’ Devlin, the head of the Ancient Order of Hibernians. An early casualty of the global conflict was Dr. Hugh McNally, a Falls Road doctor and commander of the Redmondite Irish National Volunteers who perished on the HMS *Hampshire* along with Lord Kitchener when it struck a mine off Scapa Flow in 1916.

Yet the role of the North in the run-up to 1916 cannot be underestimated. The IRB was

revitalised in Belfast in the Edwardian years by Denis MacCullough and Bulmer Hobson while ‘Ard Righ’, the Antrim Road home of the Protestant Nationalist lawyer, FJ Bigger, served as ‘a school for separatists’, drawing in young men such as Ernest Blythe, a young Lisburn Protestant journalist, Joseph Campbell, the Belfast nationalist poet, and Sir Roger Casement, scion of an Ulster Unionist family, in the decade before 1916.

Clearly any balanced treatment of 1916 should take account of both the Irish and international contexts at that time, the impact of World War 1 as providing the ‘opportunity’ for the IRB, the catalytic impact of ‘Carson’s Army’ on nationalism, the element of ‘blood sacrifice’ (notably in Pearse’s writings), the role of the Belfast-based socialist James Connolly and the transformative impact of the executions on Irish public opinion. For Lady Fingall, an aristocratic

Irish woman, the executions were ‘like watching a flow of blood under a closed door’.

Yet, while a wave of sympathy for the insurgents swung Nationalist Ireland from Home Rule towards a new, republican-based Sinn Féin movement, Ulster Protestants viewed the Rising as ‘a stab in the back’ and focused on their own ‘blood sacrifice’ at the Somme in July 1916. The last two decades have seen a more balanced, informed and inclusive approach to the First World War in which almost 50,000 Irishmen of both traditions died. From 1919 until the early 1990s the Great War was largely appropriated by the Unionist tradition as a further affirmation of the British link and ‘Ulster’s British heritage’. Largely as a result of the 1916 Rising and independence struggle, the Nationalist Irishmen who died in France or at the Dardanelles were airbrushed out of the official narrative, victims of collective amnesia in independent Ireland. As a result the Irish National War Memorial at Islandbridge lay abandoned and was not officially opened until 1994.

Since then, however, the symbolic ceremony at Messines Ridge in 1998 involving Queen Elizabeth, President McAleese and the King of the Belgians has seen a sea-change in political and community attitudes, reinforced by the recent successful royal visit to Dublin. This new-found interest in the Great War, reflected in a recent community history publication on ‘*West Belfast and the First World War*’ should enable further cross-community engagement and exploration of this shared aspect of our heritage.

In dealing with all these events it is important to show that different perceptions and interpretations exist. This can often be demonstrated by drawing on a range of narratives. For example, in examining 1916 it is possible to draw on the diaries or personal accounts from a range of perspectives. George Irvine, a Protestant school teacher from Co Fermanagh and a member of the IRB and Irish Volunteers, fought in the South Dublin Union during the Rising and later recorded his

experiences for the Irish Government’s Bureau of Military History.

Seán MacEntee, a Belfast-born engineer, took part in the insurrection in Louth. Sentenced to death for the murder of an RIC man, he later recalled how his sentence was commuted, largely on the evidence at his court-martial of TE Alexander, a Belfast Unionist councillor and family friend, held up by MacEntee’s men as he travelled north from Fairyhouse Races on that fatal Easter Monday. Half a century later in 1967 MacEntee, a former Tánaiste in the Irish government, confided to a Belfast journalist: ‘I myself was greatly indebted to Tommy [Alexander], not only because of his very favourable and impressive evidence at my court martial, but because of this indefatigable efforts to save me from being executed as, but for him, I would have been.’

A final account is the recently discovered diary of James Mitchell, a 35-year old East Belfast teacher who went to Dublin at Easter 1916 to join the British army only to find himself marooned in the Gresham Hotel with a commanding view of events. His diary, uncovered in a discarded bank deposit box in the 1990s, gives a compelling day by day account of the Rising from a northern Unionist perspective. Mitchell would seem to have survived in the Great War.

These very different ‘takes’ on the Rising –and they are only a sample- enrich our knowledge of this landmark event and should be reflected in any public exploration of its significance and impact on nationalists and unionists in Ireland as a whole.

For those who wish to consolidate the political progress made in this society in recent years, the ‘Decade of Anniversaries’ looming ahead provides an opportunity as well as a challenge: an opportunity to cut away the cobwebs of myth and misunderstanding and promote a more informed understanding and balanced view of the formative forces, events and personalities which have shaped this island and its people.

# Remembering the Future

By Dr. Johnston McMaster,  
Irish School of Ecumenics

The decade of centenaries between 2012 and 2022 presents major challenges and calls for a great deal of generosity and sensitivity. Any retreat into the rhetoric of the past and an exploitation of events for narrow political purposes will be unhelpful and even destructive of community relations and the generational peace process. There are ways of remembering that could draw another generation of young people into repeat violence. Such young people have no living memory of the most recent decades of violence, never mind the events of a century ago. Unless we learn some hard lessons from history, we may well repeat the past. The title of the Community Relations Council conference is crucial. The desired and shared future is the context in which we remember a decade which shaped Ireland for the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and still casts a long shadow over our lives together on the island.

The total context in which we remember is complex. There are various other strands as well as the important future we want to build. The project for the decade developed by the Junction in Derry/Londonderry is focussed on '*Ethical and Shared Remembering*'. This still-developing framework has two important foci; remembering over the next decade needs to be ethical and shared. Remembering requires an ethical framework and it needs to be shared as an open and imaginative community relations project. The Junction methodology, therefore, is being built around five key strands.

## Remembering in Context

It is a truism to say that the past is a foreign country. It is, and its language, worldview, thought forms and culture make it a strange place far removed from the world we live in a

century on. To remember the past as though it was the present is to delude ourselves and is an irresponsible way of remembering. Yet we often do find it difficult to remember outside contemporary political needs and pretence.

The world of 1912-1922 belongs to a different planet, so breathtaking and far-reaching have been the geopolitical and socio-cultural changes in a century. To remember honestly and ethically means entering into the world and context of the past. It is a complex and multiple contexts; space does not allow for a detailed unpacking, but the following contextual streams flow into the decade of 1912-1922, and we can make no sense of what happened in Ireland without factoring in these influential streams.

- An era of imperialism, expansionism and three emperors.
- Late 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century nationalism – a recent and then dominant political invention.
- High profile religion – Christendom and the marriage of church and state.
- Suffragette movement and women's rights – European and Irish.
- Labour movement – 1907 and 1913 lockouts and the birth of trade unions.
- Deep class divisions – world of 'upstairs downstairs'.
- Boer War – Irish on both sides and impact of the South African events.

## Remembering Whole

In the context of contested histories and community sectarian divisions, there will be the temptation for 'each side' to remember its own events. Nationalists and republicans may see no need, and feel deep antipathy to engaging with Ulster Covenant memory. Likewise, unionists and loyalists may feel that the 1916 Rising has nothing to do with them. Either response would be an example of amnesia, and a limited and skewed view of history. Antipathy there may be to the Covenant or the Rising, to the foundation of the first Dáil or the first Northern Ireland



Parliament, but history cannot be compartmentalised. Especially on a small island there are no self-contained events in this decade or any decade of Irish history.

During the crucial decade of 1912-1922, one event led to another; 1912 led to 1916, both events militarised politics in Ireland, and 1916 led to the Anglo-Irish War which led to the partition of Ireland and to the treaty and the civil war. A thread connects all of the centennial events, including the Somme, and there is a symbiotic relationship between all that happened between 1912 and 1922. Only a selective and skewed memory will isolate events and put them into self-contained boxes. Remembering whole, however difficult or even painful it may be, is an ethical and honest approach to acknowledging the past and learning from history.

## Remembering the Future

This is not about interpreting the past in the light of present ideological needs. Again, there will be the temptation to use and interpret the Rising and what followed to push forward the realisation of a united Ireland, as if ideas of nationalism, the state and the world have not radically moved on since one hundred years ago. Likewise, there will be the temptation to use and interpret the Covenant to advance and try to guarantee a brand of unionism for the next one hundred years. Both attempts would be failures to realise that we are on a different planet from a century ago, and that our world is one dominated by globalisation for better and worse. We now live with an entirely different set of questions and assumptions.

The political agreements have committed us to building a different and shared future. Whatever

that means, it is a future, or needs to be a future with no resemblance to the past. It will be a future in which reconciled relationships, social justice and equality and active non-violence will be paramount, in a global, interdependent context. Remembering the decade will be through the prism of such a future vision. In fact we will not work from past, present to future, but in reverse order, from future vision to present, to past. Remembering the future is a different way of remembering.

### **Remembering Ethically**

An ethical approach has been implied in all the above and is of key importance in dealing with the decade. Ethical remembering is critical remembering. The succession of events during 1912-1922 changed Ireland in a dramatic way. It was a decade of change, but it was also a decade of horrific violence. It was a decade characterised by blood lust, bloodletting, at the heart of which was a theology of blood sacrifice, brutality, atrocity and sectarian killing. None of the centenary commemorations can or should deny the brutal violence. The use of the word 'celebration' would also be totally inappropriate, as is the proposal to hold military style commemorations of the Covenant. Likewise, a military style commemoration of the 1916 Rising is ethically questionable in a context where we are trying to make a very different kind of history, in which militarised politics have no place and where the gun has been, or needs to be completely removed from Irish politics.

Ethical remembering is not about going back to the past in condemnation, nor to indulge in a blame game. Neither has any contribution to make to a desired and shared future. It is, though, about raising critical ethical questions about the use of violence to deal with differences and the resolution or defence of political objectives or causes. Uncritical remembering is a failure to learn from history. Ethical remembering acknowledges the destructiveness of violence and its destructive legacy, and builds a different, de-militarised political future.

Ethical remembering also underlines the need for hospitality, a generous openness to each other, to engage in meaningful dialogue, hear each other and be prepared to walk through contested histories together. Such hospitality in relation to the events of 1912 to 1922 is three dimensional.

### **Narrative Hospitality**

We all have stories, personal and communal, and collective memory is strong and a significant part of who we are. At whatever level, our historical narratives are contested and diverse. Centuries of religious and political sectarianism have ensured that we are strangers to each other, even antagonistic strangers.

Narrative hospitality is the readiness to hear each other's narrative. Thousands of people in contemporary Northern Ireland have been traumatised, as thousands were by the events of the decade. The phenomenon of the disappeared characterised in part the decade and also the most recent phase of violent conflict. There are many stories that need to be heard, from non-combatants and paramilitaries of all shades, ex-soldiers and former police officers. There are multiple narratives from 1912 to 1922 and from the recent 'troubles', and narrative hospitality is the generosity of spirit to hear these narratives, especially those outside our conditioned historical and narrative framework.

### **Narrative Flexibility**

There is always more than one narrative. Ideology and politics, including religion, will delude us into thinking there is a mono-story or a grand meta-narrative. There is often a battle for the dominant narrative, the single narrative that is norm, whether it be our narrative story of 1912-1922 or 1969 following. From within our tribal political or religious camps we might prefer an inflexible narrative, one shaped by certitudes and absolutes. Such inflexibility exists only in our minds and is a fictionalised invention of our tribal group. Narrative flexibility means acknowledging the many and the multiple. An ethic of narrative flexibility means acknowledging this and being

open to and discovering understandings and fresh interpretations of the various events.

### **Narrative Plurality**

Insisting on narrative oneness in the approach to history is a denial of the complexity of it all. It is the attempt to live in a one-dimensional world and that blocks our emotional, intellectual and social flourishing. We cannot approach the decade and remember in a reductionist way. There is not one Irish history but different versions and interpretations. Historians, like theologians, never agree.

Educational systems as well as peer education and local folk education shape us with different stories of the past. To be unaware of this is to live in a restricted, if not pretend world. There are Irish histories and stories told from different historical and experiential perspectives; even the same event can be recounted differently. The past is always in dispute and always contested and there are no certitudes, absolutes or pure objectively. Plurality is part of life, not least because we all have different standpoints, see things differently, and because none of us as individuals, groups, parties or organisations have 360 degree vision.

Narrative hospitality, flexibility and plurality offer a more ethical way of remembering. How we will remember in 2012-2022 will require honesty, generosity, openness and hospitality in relation to each other; a three dimensional hospitality is required.

### **Remembering Together**

We can, of course, sit out the decade of centenaries with our own bit of the story, cherishing our tribal memory, happy with ourselves alone. But in remembering solo we will distort the decade, skew memory and risk yet another replay of political violence. 'Never again' is an ethical imperative and commitment; it may only be possible if the remembering is shared. Efforts will need to be made to remember together. Walking through our histories together

may be the only liberating option.

A practical and creative example of this was experienced in a recent conference shared by ex-republican and ex-loyalist prisoners. At their request, the Junction project facilitated a critical and comparative exploration of the Covenant and Easter Proclamation texts. The texts of two iconic documents, seen by many as the foundational documents of the respective parts of Ireland, were critically compared and explored together. This walking through historical documents together did not become stuck in the past, but opened up creative reflection on future vision. Three signposts to the future emerged:

- The need now for separation between church and state.
- The need for an ethical vision of society, north and south.
- The need to develop ethical leadership, north and south.

This practical example of remembering together suggests a model for the forthcoming decade which may enable not only a positively critical acknowledgement of the past, but a creative visioning of the future.

The developing ethical and shared remembering methodology provides a framework in which the centenaries of 1912 to 1922 can be remembered in such a way as to contribute positively to healing and community peace building.





## Commemorations, Past and Present

By Professor Brian Walker, Queen's University Belfast

During the last half-century, there has been very considerable change in how important historical events and people are remembered in Ireland, north and south. Fifty years ago, commemorations were often occasions for discord and confrontation. Referring to the 1960s, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield remarked, 'Anniversaries are the curse of Ireland. Like saints' days, the dates of historically resonant events punctuate the Northern Ireland calendar, calling for an orgy of reminiscence, celebration and demonstration from some section or other of the population.' He continued: 'It does not seem to matter that some of these demonstrations annoy or infuriate other people; this is, indeed, for some at least of the participants, a principal attraction'. In recent years, however, commemorations have often been occasions to promote understanding and reconciliation. To some extent, such change reflects efforts to create some resolution to the

conflict which has engulfed our society. To some extent, such change has made it easier to achieve our new political accommodation.

Evidence of this new approach to commemorations can be seen clearly in how we have recalled some important historical events over the last two decades. The year 1998 marked the bicentenary of the 1798 rebellion in Ireland. In 1898 the centenary of the rebellion had been commemorated in a divisive and confrontational manner. Generally speaking, centenary commemorative events were dominated by nationalists and ignored by unionists. In 1998, however, there was a concerted effort to avoid this polarised approach. The bicentenary of the 1798 rebellion was commemorated widely, north and south, as a shared historical event. Museums in Dublin and Belfast held major exhibitions on the rebellion. Local historical and community

societies organised lectures and publications on the subject. Public events were run by councils to publicise events of 1798. A strong effort was made by politicians and members of the public to ensure that these commemorations were marked in an inclusive manner. There was a strong input from members of the academic community into the debate on these historical events.

Another area where we can see evidence of this new approach lies in the commemoration of those from Ireland who died in the two World Wars. In the early 1920s there was strong public acknowledgement of Armistice Day by nationalist and unionist communities, north and south. Subsequently, the remembrance event and the public acknowledgement of the Irish war dead came to be dominated largely by unionists and ignored by nationalists. However, the 1990s saw a very important change in this matter. In her 1996 study of war commemorations, Jane Leonard has remarked how, 'In Ireland politicians and local communities have endeavoured to replace the partisan character of existing war commemorations with more inclusive, generous forms of acknowledging the Irish past'.

There was now a strong effort to recall the common suffering and shared history of nationalists and unionists in relation to the war dead. In Northern Ireland, the 1990s saw unionist and nationalist councillors attending Remembrance Sunday (which replaced Armistice Day) commemorative events together. In the Republic of Ireland, the Irish president has attended the Remembrance Sunday service in St. Patrick's cathedral in Dublin since 1993, and other commemorative events are held once again in the south. As a result of efforts by former Derry/Londonderry loyalist leader, Glenn Barr, and former Co. Donegal Fine Gael T.D., Paddy Harte, the island of Ireland Peace Park was opened at Messines in Belgium in 1998, with a ceremony attended by Queen Elizabeth and President Mary McAleese, and many guests from both sides of the border.

In both cases it has been possible to develop a shared identity. However, there are some historical events where it is unlikely that this will happen. These are events which are very particular to one community and are likely to remain single identity occasions. Nonetheless, it can be noted how in a number of examples there has been an effort to explain their significance and also to make them less threatening to members of the other community.

In Derry/Londonderry parades are held every year by members of the Apprentice Boys of Derry Clubs to commemorate the siege of the city in 1688-9. Since 1998, these clubs have organised events and exhibitions in the city each August to 'explain their ethos and culture to Derry's wider nationalist community'. The Twelfth of July continues to be an important day for Orangemen as they commemorate the Battle of the Boyne, which occurred in 1690. Recently, there have been efforts by some members of the Orange Order to make the 'Twelfth' celebrations more of a festival, resulting in the idea of 'Orangefest'. Since July 2006, demonstrations in a number of areas have included Ulster-Scots events and historical enactments, and attempts have been made to make the day more family and tourist friendly.

In the south, a very important gesture has been made by President Mary McAleese in relation to the Battle of the Boyne. Since 1998, every July on a date on or close to the 'Twelfth', she has held an official reception at her residence in Phoenix Park to remember the Boyne, to recall all the 'Jacobites and Williamites' who were involved, and to honour the Protestant community in the south, particularly the Orangemen, many of whom are invited to the occasion.

Commemorations at Easter, the time of the 1916 Dublin Rising, have also witnessed change. Again, it is very likely that these events will remain single identity occasions, but nonetheless, there have been efforts to make this commemoration less exclusive and threatening to others. At the

official 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the rising in 2006 in Dublin, there was an effort not only to mark this event in an impressive way, but also to present a more inclusive image than had been the case with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1966. At the main parade on Easter Sunday on O'Connell Street in Dublin, the British ambassador was an invited guest at the platform outside the General Post Office. The previous day, President McAleese had called on people to remember not only those who in 1916 died in Dublin but also those who died in France. In Northern Ireland, Easter Rising commemorative parades remain important for republicans, but there have been efforts to make these occasions less threatening and more public-friendly, including the appearance of marchers dressed as historical figures, such as Wexford pikemen from 1798.

Such changes are evidence of a new maturity towards remembering and celebrating the past. They show a range of approaches to historical

events. When we look at the important historical events which we will mark over the next decade it is clear that some have the potential to be experienced as part of a shared history. Other events, however, will have strong resonances for some communities but not for others. This need not be a problem.

The experiences of the last two decades have shown that we cannot expect agreement on the importance of such events, given differences between communities and individuals in both their political positions today and peoples' historical backgrounds. At the same time, the last twenty years have shown the value of trying to understand other perspectives and to explain one's own position. Success in handling the commemoration of important historical events over the last two decades are grounds for hope that commemoration of such events over the next decade will be handled in a positive and peaceful manner



## Remembering Different Pasts for Different Futures

By Professor Marianne Elliott,  
University of Liverpool

People believe that you cannot change the past, and that is true as to how it was lived and experienced at the time. However, people's understanding of the past is interpreted and the street history of Northern Ireland provides a sad example of polemical and sectarian interpretations masquerading as accurate history. Nor are you allowed to forget. Communal 'memory' comes from constant re-enactment, retelling and progressive simplification. Every incidence of violent inter-communal conflict throughout the world involves this process. It becomes a habit, part of one's identity. Challenging it is seen as 'selling out' and can lead to ostracisation, or worse.

Identity is acquired, built up step by step from influences around us, which decide the groupings we feel we belong to and those to which we do not. But the stories and origin-myths of our community are not always benign and they can explain why murderous maniacs can pose as defenders of those identities. 'The "tribal" concept of identity still prevalent all over the world facilitates such a distortion,' writes Amin Malouf (*On Identity*, 2000, 25). 'It's a concept inherited from conflicts of the past, and many of us would reject it if we examined it more closely. But we cling to it through habit, from lack of imagination or resignation, thus inadvertently contributing to the tragedies by which, tomorrow, we shall be genuinely shocked.'

It is during anniversaries and commemorations that the process is ramped up. This is why this decade of anniversaries presents us with such an

important opportunity for change. Because another truism of the fashioning of 'historical memory' is that the present determines what we choose to remember, and if commemorations can

themselves make history (more often than not adding further weight to the negative versions), these ones have a more constructive potential.

We also need to ask what interested parties have chosen the events to commemorate and why were others ignored? Indeed, why have peaceful people gone along with such glorification of the violence and bloodshed which has come to fashion national and cultural identities in Ireland? Why was the idea of the rebel Catholic and the loyal Protestant espoused by both traditions when they are unsustainable against the historical facts? Yet the cultural representations that have been chosen for us, and that we and our forebears have gone along with, tell us so. So why not bring other stories to the fore?

At the event in Belfast City Hall to launch this initiative, I was part of a panel of historians who were being asked how the decade of commemorations should be approached. Firstly, I should warn that, unlike popular versions of history, historians realise that there are no indisputably right or wrong interpretations of the past, and most greeted with dismay the 1989 claim by an otherwise very talented historian from a Catholic nationalist background that wrong history was fine if it was part of national identity. This is a very dangerous argument, particularly if such wrong history underpins the narratives which have produced so much suffering and hatred in Ireland and elsewhere.

This is why the decade of commemorations offers such an opportunity, because there are different narratives of the past and discussing and explaining how they interlock must be one of our objectives. All the historians on the panel agreed that we should seek to look at the decade as a whole; you simply cannot understand the different events in isolation. World War I and the

culmination of the Home Rule debate are central. The Protestant origin-myth of the sacrifice of the sons of Ulster, whilst the huge loss of life is indisputable, is no longer sustainable in its sectarian and exclusive usage against the tens of thousands of Catholic Irish who also lost their lives in the war and who have continued to serve in Crown forces ever since.

Equally, republican origin-myths of popular Irish support for violent revolt disintegrate against the reality of overwhelming popular support for non-violent Home Rule. Outrage at the executions of the 1916 leaders did increase such support for militancy (outrage shared, it must be said, by Dublin Castle, and is an object-lesson of how not to hand victory to your enemies), but still does not invalidate the fact that most Irish people were constitutional nationalists rather than militant republicans. As for the Ulster Covenant (and female Declaration) signed on Saturday 28 September 1912 by over four hundred thousand, the fact that it was made available to the congregations in the churches must surely have impacted on the numbers and motives for signing.

Indeed, another way of looking at the signing of the Ulster Covenant is to bring to the fore its religious underpinnings. The sermons in the Protestant churches that day are easily accessed, for they were printed in the press. They contain the essence of the Ulster Protestant story; the struggle against the errors of Rome, their self-image as God's People, how they created a promised land in the Ulster Plantation (also part of the decade of commemoration), how Popery would always persecute and how this had been demonstrated from the 1641 massacre of Protestants onwards and would do so again under Home Rule. The Calvinist covenanting theology in these sermons would repay more shared public awareness, but there are other elements in the Protestant story which are simply wrong and, much like the counter-myths in the Catholic nationalist story, need to be demonstrated as such.

For example, take the 1641 massacre of Protestants by Catholics, the subject of government-sponsored commemorations and warning edicts until Britain ordered their discontinuation in 1859, the main factor in centuries-old arguments against conciliating Catholics, the justification for murdering them in the 1970s, the theme still of loyalist murals. Yet, when recently the finance was made available

military help. It came, with Cromwell, and you cannot understand Cromwell in Ireland without realising how such myths about the murderous papists were created and deployed. This is only one instance of how massively influential wrong 'history' has been. In this decade, we need to examine why such selective, often false 'memory' has taken hold in defiance of the evidence and we need to disseminate such knowledge in the

various organisations (particularly if they are publicly-funded) can take. Indeed, any such body applying for public funding should be challenged to explain their interpretative models and denied such funding if it is more of the same one-dimension, one-story narratives of old.

Many contributors to the Belfast meeting in March suggested a, 'Who Do You Think You Are?' series for ordinary, non-celebrity people, and that indeed would be a very significant contribution (though how it would travel outside Northern Ireland might be an issue).

Another ground-up initiative would be a memory retrieval one involving different generations of the same family. Using family photographs, interviews, even school history projects, we might ask the young and middle-aged generations, 'How did your grandparents/parents experience the decade of 1911 to 21?' Sadly, many will have passed away, but the photographs and family traditions will have survived, and since our understanding of the past is generated by available evidence, such new evidence brought into the public domain can change the way we think about the past.

Sadly, my Belfast father died when I was a young historian and rather traditional in my faith in the written, documented source, so I never 'interviewed' him about the experiences of his forebears. However, I have done so with my Southern Mother and her story of the women of her very republican village, retrieving the bodies of the young Catholic RIC men killed by the IRA during the War of Independence and ensuring dignified obsequies, is just one example of how we can discover and tell those alternative histories, which more often than not, were those of the majority.

If Queen Elizabeth II and President Mary McAleese could demonstrate how we can share in dignity the commemoration of a divided past, it is surely not beyond the ability of those co-ordinating and participating in the upcoming events to do likewise.



through British research councils for in-depth study, the results have been astounding and potentially (or at least they should be) epoch-changing. They show that in general the horror stories were fabricated by Dublin-based clerical polemicists in order to gain English

widest media accessible to the public at large.

There are then other equally valid stories to be told and once these find their way into print and visual culture, they can help defuse the simplified stereotypes. There are also certain actions that

# Remembering The Future.

Well, There Was Wrong On Both Sides. But. By Susan McKay, Journalist and writer

The conflict is over. The weapons have been decommissioned. There is no more tit for tat killing. We have replaced it, however, tit for tat remembering. We do not allow our dead to rest in peace. No, they must be up annoying the other side, adding fatal insult to fatal injury. The other side rises to the occasion with a call to its own martyrs.

Take the "Love Ulster" march of 2005, when busloads of militantly aggrieved Protestants travelled from the North to Dublin, bearing placards which demanded that their dead, Protestant victims of the IRA, be remembered. They were met in O'Connell Street by a rabble, faces wrapped in tricolours and bearing placards which countered Love Ulster's "Remember Kingsmills" with "Remember Bloody Sunday," the innocent dead of two despicable massacres summoned up to fight an undignified battle.

Symbolism is too readily to hand in "the narrow ground" that is this island. "No man shall have the right to fix the boundary to the march of a nation," is what it says on the monument to Home Rule's hero, Charles Stuart Parnell. "Effing Brit loving bastards," is what the latter day republicans shouted at the bewildered Gardai of the Irish republic while hurling paving stones from around the monument. The unionists had rehearsed the politics of their protest in a newsletter which had been brought ashore from boats at Larne in a symbolic re-enactment of the gun running for Edward Carson's Ulster Volunteer Force to resist Home Rule in 1914.

Sinn Fein made a more organised attempt to marshall its dead heroes in 2007 when it turned a "March for Truth" for the victims of British

collusion with loyalists into a commemoration for the 1981 IRA hunger strikers. In the same year it declared its intention to hold a commemoration for Mairead Farrell in the Long Hall at Stormont. She was an IRA volunteer shot dead by the SAS in Gibraltar. The DUP countered by proposing that the Long Hall be used for an event to commemorate members of the SAS who had been killed in Northern Ireland.

Throughout the Troubles, we exercised the most extreme disrespect for each other's commemorations. The IRA bombed the cenotaph in Enniskillen in 1987, killing 11 people. A decade later, the Orange Order and its loyalist allies used a commemoration of the 1916 Battle of the Somme as an attempt to escalate the dying conflict into a civil war. The Orange Order took disciplinary action against unionist politicians who attended the funerals of Catholic Troubles victims.

There are endless examples of threatening commemorations, last posts tortured out of bugles that stir the hearts of the assembled patriots and chill the hearts of neighbours of the other sort hearing them across disputed fields. There are endless examples too of the desecration of monuments, the smashing of gravestones, the ripping apart of wreathes. There was even a protest during which loyalists threatened to dig up Catholics.

"It seems history is to blame." Like the Englishman Haines in Joyce's Ulysses, we tended to exonerate ourselves. We are experts at what Professor Edna Longley has brilliantly called "remembering at". It is a feature of what she has named "rhetorical history".

It is easier to contemplate commemoration in the Republic, that portion of it which is distant from the border anyway. The North was and to an extent remains a place apart. In the seventies, feminists famously came up on the train to buy contraceptives to bring back to Dublin. Post conflict, the North is seen by many southerners mainly as a destination for cheap vodka.

But history has only gone quiet in the republic in very recent times. Pat Cooke, who for 20 years directed the Museum of Irish Nationalism in what used to be Kilmainham Jail, has spoken about the 'emotionality of history'. The potency of this was such that Kilmainham Jail had to lie empty for 40 years and go almost to ruins before it could be resurrected as a museum, he said. It wasn't the fact that Pearse and the other signatories of the 1916 Proclamation had been imprisoned and executed there, it was that civil war prisoners had been shot there. The British shot the former, but it was fellow Irish men who shot the latter.

Up North, we had 40 years of the Troubles, but we have not had our 40 years of peace. A proposal to the new Assembly by republicans to turn part of the Maze prison, aka Long Kesh, into a museum, failed because of unionist objections that it would turn murderers into martyrs.

Until less than a decade ago, this was a place in which neighbours murdered neighbours. The bereaved see the killers of their loved ones in the supermarket. I think of Vera McVeigh, whose teenage son, Columba, disappeared in 1975. It was 23 years before she learned that he had been taken by the IRA. One of those involved had been serving communion to her in her local church throughout the years when she had waited for her son to return.

Vera died in May 2007. Her gravestone has Columba's name on it too, but his body has never been found. Her death struck a poignant note in a week which saw the restoration of power-sharing at Stormont, the tone set by images of Martin McGuinness and Ian Paisley smiling from ear to ear. There are thousands of similar stories. We can't let grief stand in the way of the peace process, but that process has served the victims of the conflict badly.



The wonderful novel, "Troubles", by the late JG Farrell, is set in the south of Ireland in 1919. Towards the end a group of British undergraduates from Oxford comes to stay in the Majestic Hotel. The younger ones are boisterous and carefree, but there is one older man who is less spontaneous, whose laughter always comes a little after that of his companions. The Major, Farrell's central character, learns from him that he had, like the Major, served in the war, in this case, the first world war. "and yes, it was a little hard getting back to one's studies – at least, he added with an agonised smile, he'd found it so at first anyway. But now of course... and his sad, shocked eyes returned to the faces of his high spirited companions."

At dinner that night, Captain Roberts contemplates telling a story about how during the war they used to have to shoot rats while they ate their dinner – however he has learned from experience that although the young chaps sometimes listened politely to such stories, there had been the occasion when one of them burst out: "Oh give the bloody war a rest will you Roberts? Its been over for 3 years!" So he stays silent.

After the Queen's visit this summer, there can be no concern that commemorations in the Republic will re-ignite old fires. The risen people loved her and would happily have waved union jacks in her face only that the streets were closed as a security precaution. There was a breathtakingly lovely symbolism to her matching visits to the Garden of Remembrance where she laid a wreath to 'those who gave their lives for Irish freedom', and then the War Memorial Garden where she laid a wreath to those who died in the first World War.

For me, the magic was marred, though. It was insensitive to have the visit commence on the anniversary of the Dublin Monaghan bombs, particularly given the refusal of the two governments to explore compelling evidence of collusion between loyalists and the British in

carrying out the atrocity. It was unforgiveable to bury the report into the inquiry into the murder of Rosemary Nelson between the Queen's visit and President Obama's. How will we commemorate properly events whose history we refuse to investigate or acknowledge?

Aileen Quintin's Mother, Alberta, who served in the Second World War, was one of those who died in the Enniskillen bomb. Alberta told me her mother liked Remembrance Day because it provided time to remember those whose deaths had occurred in circumstances that did not allow for contemplation. Alberta hated the monument erected to commemorate the Enniskillen victims, 11 bronze doves fluttering around the lone soldier of the original war memorial. Another of the bereaved who felt the same sawed off and removed one of the doves. Aileen told me she liked to think of that dove as her mother, escaping. James Mullan, whose parents were killed in the bomb, had visited the war memorial in Whitehall, and admired its simplicity. In his book, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Jay Winter praises this monument for the same quality. "It says so much," he writes, "because it says so little."

In our plans for a decade of commemorations, we should bear that in mind.



## Remembering the Future

By Nelson McCausland MLA (DUP)

In the very near future we will enter a decade of 100<sup>th</sup> anniversaries in Northern Ireland and those anniversaries cover the period from the Ulster Covenant in 1912 through to the formation of Northern Ireland and the Free State in 1921. Other events in that period include the start of the First World War, the Battle of the Somme, the 1916 Easter Rising, and the end of the First World War.

These are important dates and important anniversaries and ignoring them is not an option but how are we to approach them? These anniversaries are to be welcomed as opportunities for celebration, commemoration and inspiration but they are also opportunities to examine, re-evaluate and interrogate the past.

In 2001, when the historian Professor Roy Foster wrote *The Irish Story*, he gave it the subtitle, 'telling tales and making it up in Ireland' and he spoke about 'theme park ... pop history'. There are so many myths, so many misunderstandings and so many misrepresentations about the history of Ulster and of Ireland and these anniversaries afford us an opportunity to consider them and confront them.

How then are we to approach them? I believe that we can learn some important lessons from past commemorations such as the centenary and the bicentenary of the 1798 rebellion.

In 1891 the centenary of the founding of the United Irishmen was hijacked by Irish nationalists and republicans who sought to portray themselves as the natural successors of the United Irishmen.

However there was an interesting situation in Belfast where republicans organised a celebration

and visited the grave of Dr William Drennan. This led Drennan's son, Dr John Swanwick Drennan, to write to the press protesting strongly 'against any attempt to identify his (father's) name and opinions with those of the present so-called Nationalists and Nationalism'.

Again in 1898, the centenary of the rebellion, Irish nationalists and republicans hijacked the commemoration with what Foster called 'a lot of dressing up and posing with pikes'. Meanwhile in Belfast they organised a Dr Drennan Centenary Club and this time Drennan's grand-daughter, Mrs Maria Duffin, wrote in a similar vein stating that 'Dr Drennan was at first opposed to the Union but afterwards modified his view of it'.

The bicentenary of the rebellion in 1998 should have afforded an opportunity for a more reflective assessment of the United Irishmen. The fact is that most of the United Irishmen in Ulster were eventually reconciled to the Union and by December 1811 William Drennan was advising the readers of the *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, the literary journal he had launched in 1808, to 'Be Britons with all your souls – and forget your father called himself an Irishman.'

Such are the complexities and apparent contradictions of our history and they deserved to be explored but unfortunately the opportunity that was there in 1998 was squandered. The Ulster Museum produced an exhibition but outside of that most of the other commemorations were dominated by nationalists with only a token unionist presence.

It is also worth noting the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1916 Rebellion, which had a destabilising effect in Northern Ireland.

In Belfast the main commemoration was a republican parade by 20,000 people to Casement Park. This included 400 members of the GAA, as well as members of camogie clubs, Irish dancers and the executive of the Belfast Trades Council.



The chairman of the organising committee was Leo Martin, a veteran Belfast republican who became OC of the Northern Command of the Provisional IRA, and the main speaker was Seamus Costello.

However there are also examples of good practice and in 1990 much of the exploration around the tercentenary of the Boyne was highly successful in challenging the insularity of some perspectives and recognising the broader European context of the Glorious Revolution and the Battle of the Boyne. In that regard the Ulster Museum exhibition *Kings in Conflict* was excellent.

We cannot afford to squander the opportunities that are now coming forward.

The centenary of the Ulster Covenant affords an opportunity to look back to the events surrounding the Covenant and that includes the signing of the Covenant in the border counties of Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal. The story of the Unionist communities in those counties is part of the Covenant story.

This centenary is also an opportunity for the second political nation to explain itself. The Ulster Covenant was inspired by the old Scottish

covenants and it is said to have been written by Thomas Sinclair, the leading Liberal Unionist of his day and the leading layman in the Presbyterian Church.

It was and is a profound expression of Ulster Unionist thought and it is as relevant today as it was then because it has in it the core principles of Unionism.

1. It speaks of 'civil and religious freedom' or as we might say today 'human rights' and of course those rights are not just for one section of society but for everyone.
2. It speaks of 'citizenship' and there was at that time a strong awareness of the meaning of citizenship and also the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
3. It speaks of Ulster and the 'men of Ulster' and their place within the United Kingdom.
4. It speaks of the 'material well-being' of Ulster within the United Kingdom.
5. It speaks of 'equal citizenship' within the United Kingdom.

The centenary will therefore provide unionists with an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the union and unionism and to set out a broad unionist agenda, a unionist vision for the future, as we move to the end of the first century of Northern Ireland and then beyond that into the next.

There are also important opportunities for Irish nationalists.

For example, the centenary of 1916 offers those of an Irish nationalist background an opportunity to reflect on republican ideology and the results of that ideology.

It also affords Irish nationalists an opportunity to broaden their story. The year 1916 should be remembered as much for what happened on the battlefields of France as what happened on the streets of Dublin. Those Irishmen who fought in France must not be forgotten.

Another aspect of that period that deserves exploration is the difference between Belfast and Dublin. Within nationalism in Belfast there has always been the constitutional nationalist strain as well as the recidivist republican strain but for most of the time it has been constitutional nationalism that has been to the fore. In Belfast most of the Irish volunteers remained loyal to Redmond and this was the city that chose Joe Devlin before de Valera. Today Sinn Fein is to the fore within nationalism but that is not the way it always was.

However I must also sound a warning note as regards the legacy of 1916. There is the real danger of a veneration that could encourage and assist those dissident republicans in Northern Ireland who want to indoctrinate another generation of young men to pursue the nihilistic path of violence.

I am determined to do all that I can to ensure that we use the opportunities that these commemorations will bring to create a better understanding and appreciation of our history and

to that end I have already convened a meeting of all the relevant arms-length bodies.

I spoke to them in the context of a 'shared future' and said that I wanted to see how we could develop a coherent and comprehensive strategy for commemoration, one that would bring maximum value through collaboration and cooperation. This initiative received a very positive response and work is well underway on that strategy.

The first event will be the centenary of the Ulster Covenant and so I use that as an example. Clearly there is a role for major institutions such as National Museums and the Public Record Office, especially as the latter holds the archive of the Ulster Unionist Council, including the Ulster Covenant, and I will want to see a major exhibition on the Ulster Covenant in 2012.

The Ulster-Scots Academy will be able to support serious academic research on these topics and the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund will be a potential source of funding for television programmes or films on the Covenant.

These are just some of the ways in which we can support the commemoration of the Covenant and of course, as the first anniversary in the series of centenaries, it will set the tone for the rest.

Commemorations can help or hinder a shared future. We must seek to ensure that they help rather than hinder and I hope that will be the case in Northern Ireland and in the Irish Republic.

Everyone will have to step up to the mark, government, media, education, academia and society at large but if we really believe in the vision of a 'shared future' and if we do step up to the mark, then at the end of the decade of centenaries we will be much further along the road towards that vision.

(Nelson McCausland at this time was Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure.)

# Negotiating With Our Past

By Councillor Tom Hartley (Sinn Fein)

Among the graves to be found in the lower end of the Belfast City Cemetery is the grave of the Reverend Richard Rutledge Kane. A senior member of the Orange Order in Belfast, Kane played a pivotal role in the campaign against Gladstone's 1886 Home Rule Bill. On his headstone he is described as 'A Faithful Pastor, Gifted Orator and Loyal Irish Patriot'. A closer look at Kane's life reveals that he was an Irish speaker; in the December 1895 issue of the *Gaelic Journal* he is named as one of its patrons.

To the modern political eye the inscription 'Loyal Irish Patriot' seems to be at odds with our understanding of how the terms 'loyal' and 'Irish' are interpreted in today's political context. Indeed, the linkage of this nineteenth century conservative and unionist cleric with the Irish language may provide contemporary unionist with something of a cultural and political dilemma.

Such a dilemma originates in the assumption that Kane's life poses no competition between his loyalism and his sense of Irishness; in fact, his headstone inscription reveals a political and cultural mix that binds his loyalism to his Irishness. If we accept these conclusions, do they challenge those unionists who today define themselves wholly inside a frame of Britishness? Equally so, do they also confront those nationalists who find it difficult to place an 'Irish Patriot' into the frame of a unionist historical narrative?

Kane's real gift to us is the invitation contained in his headstone inscription to question contemporary interpretations of what we consider to be 'loyal' and 'Irish'. His political and cultural identity is a reminder of the numerous historical examples that upend a one-dimensional view of who we are and where we come from. Rutledge

Kane, with his cultural and political complexity, challenges the idea of a pure history. The past does not run along parallel and separate lines, and we rarely find a simple 'them and us' narrative. Rather, we are confronted with the reality that 'them is us'. Could this unionist cleric therefore become a signpost as to how we should engage with a period of historical centenaries that one can only describe as an extended period of concentrated memory and emotion? A simple headstone inscription points us in the direction of curiosity, exploration and the need to consider ideas and concepts that are made more complex by the passage of time and the abundance of conflicting and competing historical interpretations.

The forthcoming centenaries of the years 2011 to 2023 will provide enormous opportunities and challenges on how we engage with the complexity of our island past. It may seem that the recent legacy of political conflict, embedded as it is in our collective capacity to hang on to the detail of historical events, remains a barrier to engagement and changed perspectives.

In this context, I believe we require the empowering mechanism of a broad community negotiation in an intellectual space, wherein all of us gain a deeper understanding of our historical inheritance. By its nature this form of historical negotiation is a two-way historical street. Concepts which are given to change 'the other' are reshaped and received back as a challenge to fixed historical attitudes. A deeper knowledge of our history has the potential to generate new forms of commemoration and engagement with our past.

Historical events allow us to criss-cross our historical narratives; we constantly find ourselves transgressing their boundaries. The year of 2012 will see the centenary of the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant; this presents us with the opportunity to study the life of Thomas Sinclair, a liberal Unionist, who wrote the first draft of the 1912 Covenant. This Covenant also allows us to look at the original Scottish Covenant, the

Covenanters, their contribution to Northern Irish society, and their role in the United Irish rebellion. The centenary of the formation of the Irish Women's Suffrage Federation in 1913 invites us to look at the changing role of women in these turbulent years. Their civil disobedience campaigns included the political tactic of hunger strike which was later used by Irish Republicans. In 2017, we will remember Thomas Ash, a republican who died in 1917 in Mountjoy Jail, Dublin, as a result of a hunger and thirst strike. These few examples merely begin to illustrate the rich texture of our past and its continued relevance to our present sense of us.

In these years of commemoration many individuals and institutions will use their own forms and structures which they have developed to suit their chosen form of remembrance; this is their right. However such an approach generates its own challenges, particularly in the sphere of civic institutions. A service in the grounds of the City Hall to remember the fallen on the Somme Battlefield raises the prospect of another commemoration, also in the City Hall, to remember the fallen at the GPO in Dublin in 1916. Central to any public discourse on commemoration must be the issue of how the State differentiates between victims and between different forms of commemoration.

Addressing the challenges associated with the

commemoration of our turbulent history of the years 1911 to 1923 must not paralyse our need to remember. It is therefore necessary to create an ongoing dialogue about civic forms of commemoration that recognise contested histories and identities. This requires a progressive discourse that is dignified in its approach to the other and considers historical complexity as strength, and not as an excuse for divisiveness. We all need to construct a process that invites its participants into an engagement that recognises the integrity of those who are different, and that generates a deep curiosity and a willingness to look at our history through many prisms. In such a process we need to have the confidence to lift our cultural, political and historical anchors; to set ourselves adrift in a great sea of opposing and conflicting ideas, albeit with a little bit of historical turbulence.

So where do we begin? Well, let's start with Rutledge Kane, and while we're at it, can we also look at the Reverend Lynd, whose motion to the 1892 Unionist Convention and seconded by Rutledge Kane pledged support to southern Unionists? By the way, the son of the Rev. Lynd, Robert Lynd, was a friend of James Connolly; he wrote the introduction to Connolly's *Labour in Irish History*. And do you know that Chief Justice Lord Lowry was a nephew of Robert Lynd? So the point is, enjoy the complexity.



# Decade of Centenaries

By Councillor Ian Adamson (UUP)

It may be that there are certain setbacks in history of such magnitude and heroism that they serve to sustain and temper a people instead of weakening them. Perhaps the setbacks come to have an energising, emblematic power. Perhaps the first day of the Battle of the Somme on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916 has come to symbolise unconsciously the thwarted nationhood of the Ulster People. Perhaps at the level of community consciousness the loss of the sons of Ulster and the founding of Northern Ireland are intertwined. The Battle became Northern Ireland. This was a statelet which invited the pride in which it was fashioned. The supremely arrogant Stormont Parliament Buildings and the splendidly reassuring Burgher Palace, the Belfast City Hall, came to be seen figuratively as stationary Titanics in danger of sinking by the chilling, impersonal icebergs of Irish nationalism following partition.

Such it was that Nationalists in Ulster rejected the emotional appeal of the *Titanic* story as they did the heroism of the Somme and the other great battles of the Great War. In the case of the *Titanic*



it is doubtful that this was due to the one hundred and thirteen third class Irish passengers the ship picked up on its last stop at Queenstown, now Cobh, two thirds of whom perished. The *Titanic* was not primarily an immigrant ship; the reason for rejection was ideological.

The quarrel was with Ulster Protestants rather than with British policy makers in Ireland; for Nationalists, the dispute was caused by the creation of Northern Ireland itself. This is why the return of the *Nomadic*, tender to the *Titanic* and a veteran of both World Wars, and the overwhelming generosity of the Government in purchasing it and Thiepval Wood on our behalf, are important to us.

Equally dear to us are the Ceremonies at the Ulster Tower and Guillemont in France when all of Ireland is represented to honour the memories of both the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) and 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Divisions at the Somme.

The Somme Association was formed in 1990, with Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester as our President to emphasise the contribution of Irish soldiers of both the North and the South in the tragedy that was the First World War. We are now looking at the future of Craigavon House, which has strong associations with the period leading up to such crucially important events as the Signing of the Ulster Covenant and loss of the *Titanic* in 1912, the Easter Rising and Battle of the Somme in 1916 and the formation of Northern Ireland and establishment of the Ulster Tower at Thiepval in 1921; we must find a way forward to maintain this valuable part of our history and culture. It is therefore poignant that the Unionist Centenary Committee selected this venerable building as the site to launch their plans for the forthcoming commemorations of the coming centenary years.

As we enter this decade of centenaries, which mark Ulster's entry on to the World stage and the birth of the Irish nation, the Unionist Centenary Committee will take as its particular mission statement the Ulster Covenant itself, for this was



the Declaration of the Ulster people of their own right as a free people.

Today we must also use this decade to establish in Ulster a cultural consensus, irrespective of political conviction, religion and ethnic origin, using a broader perspective of our past to develop a deeper sense of belonging to the country of our ancient British ancestors, for this land of the aboriginal people, the Cruthin, is our homeland and we are her children. We all have a right to her name and nationality. We all have a right to belong here, a right to be heard here, and a right

to be free; free from suspicion, free from violence and free from fear.

Therefore, we must develop the vision of a new and united Ulster, to which all can give their allegiance, so that we may achieve a government of all the people, by all the people, for all the people. Only in the complete expression of our Ulster identity can we find the basis of that genuine peace, stamped with the hallmarks of justice goodness and truth which will end at last the War in Ireland.

# Decade of Anniversaries Can Be Shared Experience

By Stephen Farry MLA (Alliance)

While many may see the forthcoming decade of anniversaries as a challenge to community cohesion on the island of Ireland, with proper political leadership and positive approach from civil society it can help to build a shared future and indeed to accelerate the transformation of this society.

The many and varied events in Ireland and further afield during the critical ten year period between 1912 and 1922, and indeed some the myths that have been built around them, did much to shape and reshape identities, and to define many of the political, social and economic features and trends of subsequent years right through to today.

In the main, this legacy has been primarily negative. Northern Ireland itself became increasingly afflicted with political violence and deepening communal divisions, and suffered from economic decline and an inability to transform like other western economies in the wake of de-industrialisation. Over the same time, the Republic of Ireland remained economically and socially stagnant through to the 1980s before taking off as the 'Celtic Tiger' to become notionally one of the richest countries in Europe before spectacularly crashing.

Most cohesive societies around the world do tend to have a founding myth. Often, competing myths are forced to the margins and sometimes, the legacy of victory and defeat determines who gets to set the agenda. These myths are essentially social constructs and can be shaped and reshaped over time, through particular events and economic, social and political challenge. Northern Ireland is

unusual in having both a founding myth and a counter myth reflecting the disputed nature of the state.

A particularly timely and interesting parallel lies in the historical treatment of the United States Civil War, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of which occurred in April 2011. Despite the existence of slavery being a clear factor in the conflict, the defeated South successfully invented the romanticised myth of the honourable 'Lost Cause' perhaps best exemplified through '*Gone with the Wind*'.

In parallel, attempts at national reconciliation proceeded on the basis of the de facto and subsequently de jure denial of rights of African-Americans under the 'separate, but equal' mantra. This was best illustrated by a Civil War memorial in the former slave border state of Maryland that shared the names of those who had fought on the respective Union and Confederate sides. Adjacent to it, and very much an afterthought, lay a separate memorial to the African-Americans who had fought for the union.

The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that civil war coincided with the height of racial segregation, with President Woodrow Wilson (himself a strong segregationist in contrast to his otherwise internationally progressive image) stressing reconciliation to thousands of veterans at the anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg without any reference to slavery. The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary coincided with the height of the civil rights movement, with little immediate opportunity to reflect on the past. The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary offers the opportunity for a more mature reflection, but such are the strength of the historical myths that some tensions remain raw, with some leading southern politicians making inappropriate and unfounded historical comment.

While in many respects the history of the 1912 to 1922 period has been studied and popularised much more than other periods from the past, there will nevertheless be a hunger to celebrate, commemorate, analyse and reinterpret. This may manifest itself through the media and arts, including theatre, cinema and documentaries, academia, and events.

Given the disputed nature of history and continued divisions within Northern Ireland, it is inevitable that different parts of the community will seek to place varying emphasis on particular or selected events. As the freedom of expression and respect for cultural difference are cornerstones of a liberal society, these rights should be respected.

In doing so, the principles that should apply to the regulation of shared space should apply to commemorating the past. Shared space need not be sanitised, neutral space where cultural difference or varying cultural expressions are suppressed. Rather, the key to ensure that no exclusive claims are placed on shared space that compromise or restrict the ability of any individual or group to celebrate their own culture. In turn, no single narrative should be allowed to crowd out other opinions.

That said, attempts should be made to place commemoration of the past within a shared framework. This would aid mutual understanding of the past, and provide an opportunity for those from differing traditions to consider alternative points of view. Ultimately, all of the various events did not occur within individual silos but were in practice all mutually interdependent.

There will undoubtedly be considerable economic benefits from a shared framework for commemorating the past. Northern Ireland has a potential competitive advantage from the international interest in Ireland, including its varied culture and history. In addition to the economic potential of the creative industries and arts, there is significant scope for cultural tourism. Greater collaboration between the Tourist Board, the arts sector, local businesses and civil society will be required to fully capture the benefits on offer. In particular, attention should be paid to ensuring that there is a tourist legacy beyond the immediate decade of anniversaries itself. Cultural tourism can play a significant role in the growth of a substantially underdeveloped part of the economy.

A further spin-off from a shared commemoration could be a wider understanding and reshaping of the nature of identity within Northern Ireland. In the

past, there has been a working assumption of mutually reinforcing political, religious and national identities, whereby unionist equals Protestant equals British and nationalist equals Catholic equals Irish. This rigid assumption of two separate and mutually exclusive communities runs against the growing diversity within Northern Ireland and the increased presence of open, mixed and multiple identities.

This 'two communities' or 'both communities' language fails to acknowledge that a significant number of people cannot be labelled as unionists or nationalists, Protestants or Catholics. Some people come from mixed marriages, are part of ethnic minorities, or choose not to be described in such terms, preferring a more multicultural and pluralist self-identification. It also ignores the reality that many Protestants and Catholics, and unionists and nationalists, have more in common with people across the perceived 'divide' than they do with each other. A new shared approach to history could accelerate this new understanding.

Even more fundamentally, this decade of anniversaries could draw a veil on the historical legacy of the past century and provide a watershed transition to a new era. Recently, the extreme financial and economic circumstances of the 2011 Irish General Election arguably brought a final end to civil war politics which had provided the dominant cleavage for almost a century, most conclusively manifested by the clear switch of voters between Fianna Fail and Fine Gael.

Ultimately, the decade of anniversaries and the opportunity to look backward before looking forward may bring Northern Ireland a degree of closure on the past and open the door to an increased effort to heal a divided society and to refocus on emerging economic opportunities.



# Remembering the Future

By Dolores Kelly MLA (SDLP)

During the next decade and beyond, we face a raft of anniversaries of hugely significant events that have helped shape our island and shape our people. Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to speak at the 'Remembering our Future' conference, hosted by the Community Relations Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund. At the event, participants spoke of how we might remember and mark the anniversaries of some of the major historical and political milestones of this island's past.

It is the view of the SDLP that the next weeks and months are crucial, as we work towards an agreed approach ahead of the first anniversary in 2012. If we get this right, we believe we can build consensus and develop understanding, so that we can celebrate our shared identity. This has to be the goal of everyone involved in this debate.

And I use 'we' in its widest sense possible - political parties, the governments, communities, artists, educationalists, historians, students and others. Inclusivity can help make sure the anniversaries are not allowed to be hi-jacked by certain groups who may intend to exploit them for narrow sectarian or political purposes. The SDLP has been clear that history of this island and the history of modern Ireland belong to all of us.

There are a number of themes central to the SDLP's approach to the forthcoming decade of anniversaries.

## Eliminating the divisions in our society

Some commentators may ask just what makes the forthcoming anniversaries so different to those we've already lived through. Others might question whether we even need to have this conversation about remembering our future at all.



After all, they may say, many commemorative occasions have already come and gone, such as the bicentenary of the United Irishmen rebellion in 1998, the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Easter Rising and memorials to victims of the Famine. We have commemorated ten years since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, and annually remember those from these islands killed during the World Wars. Formal occasions aside, local communities hold numerous unofficial commemorations to mark the events that are important to them, and no doubt will continue to do so.

Some observers might say that we have commemorations down to a fine art, and that there is no need to do anything differently for the series of anniversaries that lie ahead of us. Some might suggest ignoring them altogether; that there is little to be gained from looking back.

But it is the SDLP's view that to do so would be to cheat future generations of an opportunity to build a truly shared society here. A society that does not forget, but remembers without insulting,

commemorates without glorifying, and reinforces this place as somewhere we are capable of finding justice without the need to divide.

## Addressing our past through our future

For the SDLP, Ireland north and south is presented with an opportunity for a real public debate, not only on our past but on our future. How do we want this place to look in another 100 years? What do 'identity' and 'history' really mean to us? Are we willing to challenge tribal myths and have our own beliefs challenged by others? How can we sensitively meet the international demand to learn more about the history of this island? How should we include Irish communities abroad in marking the anniversaries that are upon us? The SDLP believes all of these questions should be posed in the context of a deeper discussion aimed at agreeing a mechanism to address the legacy of our past. It is the responsibility of political parties here, and the British and Irish governments, to build on the considerable amount of work done to date by the Commission for Victims and Survivors, the Consultative Group on the Past and others. We believe that full consideration of the past and its impact on the present is more than acknowledgement and accountability: it is a critical part of creating a healed and reconciled society.

We also believe that failure now to address the past in the most complete terms will impede the creation of a healed and reconciled society. The SDLP is not prepared to allow this to happen.

It will be a true measure of this Assembly whether it steps up to the mark and, with the needs of victims and survivors to the fore, succeeds in openly and sensitively dealing with our past.

## Public involvement

While political discourse, academic conferences and seminars have an important role to play in developing an agreed approach to the upcoming anniversaries, I think it's essential that wider

society is enabled to contribute to the debate too. We must facilitate artists to challenge and interpret, allow our young people to quiz and question, and make sure those who have left this place feel part of their island's commemorations.

## A lasting legacy

Clearly, the Troubles have had a devastating effect on the mental health of so many people in the North. This particular legacy of more than 30 years of violence has led to up to 30% higher levels of psychiatric morbidity than other regions in these islands. The SDLP is working to ensure the Executive takes people's mental health as seriously as their physical health.

The experience of other countries suggests that resolving mental health issues in communities affected by years of violence and displacement will necessitate more than a cessation of violence. It may also require an active process of reconciliation to promote social cohesion.

Looking ahead to the forthcoming decade of commemorations, we are presented with an opportunity for the Assembly and the Executive to really move society forward by building an active process of reconciliation. If all parties are truly capable of showing the determination to build a process to once and for all deal with this particular legacy of the Troubles, this will truly be devolution at work for the people of this region.

This is a key aim of the SDLP as we approach this decade of centenaries.

There is great opportunity in front of us to develop the shared narratives and unite the people of this island, instead of focusing on what may have divided us in the past, and indeed what sadly still divides us today. The SDLP is working to ensure that the years ahead are a period of coming together to look to the future, and not a time to create division by harking back to historical conflicts.

This is a time to unite people and build prosperity on this island.

# Closing Remarks Remembering The Future Conference

By Ronnie Spence,  
Chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund

It is my role as the Northern Ireland Chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund to say a few words to draw this event to a close

Some months ago, the HLF and the Community Relations Council agreed to work together to encourage a debate about how we might respond to applications for funding linked to the decade of anniversaries.

We wanted to explore whether we could- after wide consultation- develop some principles to help both organisations in deciding what activities and projects to support financially, and what steering advice we might offer to those planning such activities and projects.

The Heritage Lottery Fund has, over its 15 years of existence, already invested over £130 million in different aspects of our heritage – from major

museum developments to small projects which mean a lot to local communities. We have helped around one thousand organisations, both big and small, and we estimate that our funding has to date resulted in a total investment of £200 million in our heritage

Perhaps uniquely at present, the HLF has, as a UK wide body, the good fortune to have a budget that is growing. We want to get as much of that money as we can for our area and to spend it to maximum effect.



Although the conference debate about responding to the decade of anniversaries was very constructive, we cannot ignore that the dangers of getting it wrong are very real. We are, in many ways, victims or prisoners of our past; it can hang round our necks like an albatross. It has been said that Ireland is an island divided by its history and we know that our politics can often be “applied history”. In marking the anniversaries that lie ahead we have to guard against the events of the past being used to reinforce divisions or being hijacked to promote narrow political advantages today.

The rewards from getting it right are potentially very significant. What we must strive to do is to deal with the past in ways that enable us to deal better with the present and to build a better and shared future.

In the delegate pack, HLF and CRC attempted to suggest some basic principles and practices that might be adopted in handling the anniversaries:

1. Striving, as far as is possible, to build on the facts of what actually happened. Our many fine historians are continuing to develop our knowledge and understanding of facts;
2. Seeking to develop an evidence-based analysis of the real implications and consequences;
3. Recognising and respecting that different perceptions and interpretations may exist and that the importance of the popular memory should not be ignored;
4. Working towards outcomes in which a deeper and wider understanding of the events can help us to deal better with today's problems and contribute to building a better and shared future.

The organisers of the conference event will need next to reflect on everything that has been said and examine what changes are required in these suggested principles- what should be dropped or amended; what should be added.

We will also want to consider how the discussion that took place today can be continued and, if necessary, broadened to include other views.

Thank you for your participation and we appreciate all the excellent contributions from our range of speakers.





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