

# Local Histories in Northern Ireland

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*The aim of a local historical society should . . . be to find a meaning in the past which all may share and to try to communicate it widely to our society. If history is the memory of that society, it must be a memory of experience shared, even if it is shared in different ways.[1]*

Brendan P. Devlin, 1995

### Introduction

During 2000 and early 2001 a travelling exhibition entitled *Local Identities: an Exploration of Cultural Identity* toured regional museums throughout Northern Ireland. It was developed by the Northern Ireland Regional Curators Group and the Northern Ireland Museums Council and supported by the Community Relations Council. In most of the regional and county museum venues, local museum staff, many of whom were involved in the development of the project, responded to the seven touring panels of text and images (on the themes of culture, a sense of place, politics, faith, work, leisure, unity and diversity) by curating exhibitions of objects, images and sometimes oral histories from their own collections.[2] In the same year the Federation for Ulster Local Studies produced a touring road show entitled *History Here and Now* to promote interest in local history through the themes of family history, archaeology, built heritage, cures and crafts, place-names, and political history. Anyone whose interests were stimulated by the road show was encouraged to contact the Federation, which acts as an umbrella organization for local historical and cultural organizations across the nine counties of the old province of Ulster. Both touring exhibitions were incorporated into a programme of events, cultural activities and millennial celebrations designed to explore and celebrate cultural diversity in Northern Ireland and entitled *Diversity 21: an introduction to ourselves*.

As these activities suggest, local history and local identity have been significant themes within recent attempts to engage with questions of cultural diversity and division in Northern Ireland. Local history has been mobilized as a positive resource for reconciliation in a context of violence and division and more recent fragile peace and political instability. Yet local history was a popular pursuit before its recent promotion within cultural and community relations policy. It is estimated that there are over a hundred local historical societies in addition to the hundred or so affiliated to the Federation for Ulster Local Studies. Numerous local history projects are also undertaken by community and cultural organizations of all kinds, sometimes with the support of community-relations funding or as part of rural and community-development projects. Relative to the population, the number of local historical projects engaged in by established and new societies and other organizations represents a significant strand of culture practice in Northern Ireland. This essay explores the ways in which local history in Northern Ireland is presented, practised and promoted in relation to the politics of culture, history and identity; to the meaning of the 'local'; and to the possibilities of shared and distinctive histories within a collective sense of the past.[3]

Like family, oral, and community history, local history can be considered under the heading of 'people's history' with its emphasis on democratizing the content and practice of history and broadening the sources, constituency and forms of historical research and representation. This 'history from below' challenges notions of academic expertise, intellectual individualism, professional monopolies on the production of knowledge and the marginalization of 'ordinary' experience from conventional histories of 'great men and great deeds'. This ethos was central to the radical people's history movement fostered by Raphael Samuel and this journal, which continues under the heading of 'public history' in Britain today.[4] Yet, as Raphael Samuel acknowledged, though 'the main thrust of people's history has been radical, . . . the Left can make no proprietorial claim to it'.[5] In part this is the result of the different shades of meaning that 'the people' of people's history can have. 'The people', as he emphasized, can stand for 'the ruled', 'rural folk', a national 'ethnic stock', as well as 'the

exploited', the 'industrial working class', or other groups 'hidden from history'. This question of who are 'the people' in people's history is complicated in a context where it also refers to issues of belonging, identity and difference in a contested state and divided society, including here the dilemmas of identity of Protestant, Loyalist, Unionist or British people in Northern Ireland.[6] And if both radical and conservative versions of people's history share a common heritage of romantic primitivism in which idealized organic communities of the past have been allegedly broken by 'mass society' or capitalist modernity, what is the role of romanticism, escapist longing and nostalgia where experiences of violence and sectarian division cut across these senses of the costs of modernity? How does the focus on rural, agrarian communities prevalent in the British academic tradition of local history[7] work where images of rural, pre-modern communities are inflected by anti-colonial nationalist and settler models of belonging? If some conservative versions of people's history present the past as devoid of struggle, how might a radical people's history of social division, power and property function in a context already dominated by histories of conflict? Similarly, how helpful is the emphasis on the social production of historical knowledge to those already painfully aware of the intense politicization of the past?

Questions about the specific spatial scale of local history and its relationship to other scales and centres of historical investigation and imagination are similarly complicated in this context. Local history can be a counterpoint to histories of the state with their emphasis on the broad political process of state formation. Alternatively, it can contribute to national history by highlighting the overlooked dimensions of socio-economic and cultural history, or the locally differentiated experience of broader processes and developments. Local histories of migrant communities and regional cultures challenge unitary narratives of the nation. Local histories can reproduce the dominant and exclusive narratives of the nation at a local scale, but they can also contribute to a critical sense of the collective national past. In Northern Ireland the question of the relationship between local and state-centred or national history is complicated by the contested nature of the state and the fraught coexistence of three national histories: the Nationalist narrative of a pre-colonial golden age, followed by oppression, resistance and struggle; the Unionist narrative of an embattled civil people under siege from hostile natives but struggling to preserve the covenant of Protestant presence in Ulster and bring the region out of native anarchy; and traditional English royal, parliamentary and military history, which was taught until recently in Catholic as well as Protestant schools because of suspicions about the dangerously emotive nature of Irish history, and, in Protestant schools at least, in an officially sanctioned attempt to inculcate a British rather than Irish consciousness in Northern Ireland.[8]

These issues of the relationship between local and other scales of identity and historical analysis also involve the question of the scale and meaning of the local itself. As Felix Driver and Raphael Samuel asked in this journal ten years ago, what is "local" about this "local history" after all?[9] Though the local has been proclaimed as a scale vulnerable but potentially resistant to the powerful economic, cultural and political effect of globalization, it has no inherent value nor a fixed political character. Like the notion of 'community', with its ambiguous associations of cohesion and security, conformity and exclusion, the local can be imagined as open, inclusive, dynamic and progressive, or in closed, exclusive, static and regressive ways; it can be enlisted for different political projects, radical or reactionary. As Doreen Massey has argued, the way the local is envisaged shapes how social and cultural change and wider relations to other places are understood.[10] Attachments to the local are often expressed and defined in opposition to other locals or to the non-local. This has specific implications in Northern Ireland where regional and micro-geographies of segregation create differently divided localities and where displacement and emigration over the course of the conflict, as well as recent immigration, have shaped local demographics in different ways. The local is not a natural area. It can be invoked and produced at different scales – street, townland, parish, ward, county, borough, region or even nation or state – so producing differently-scaled boundaries between the local and non-local and differently scaled versions of community.

But if local history is complicated by its connections to ideas of the nation and community, it is also strongly associated with the equally loaded concepts of ‘heritage’, ‘tradition’, ‘culture’, and ‘identity’, whose complexity has similarly local dimensions in Northern Ireland. Here anxieties about the commodification of history in commercial heritage developments intersect with more specific concerns about the manipulation of history, not only for the sake of traditional Nationalist and Unionist political positions, but also for alternatives to both these polarized perspectives. But ‘heritage’ and ‘tradition’ are also part of a new political and cultural discourse in Northern Ireland. Here attempts to rethink exclusionary and reactionary versions of heritage, culture and tradition as unchanging essences or as forms of collective inheritance under threat, and instead to emphasize the continuous and contingent production of these categories, have particular nuances. Since the early 1990s organizations like the Community Relations Council have fostered efforts to explore the range of cultural practices in Northern Ireland that conventionally correspond with, yet exceed, the idea of ‘two traditions’. The emphasis has been on replacing divisive senses of difference with positive senses of collective cultural diversity and on questioning fundamentalist approaches to identity and essentialist versions of culture. Local history was supported as part of this programme from the start, through the Local Traditions grant scheme, fellowships and published resources.[11] Local studies have also been a strong theme within the Education for Mutual Understanding programme first developed by school teachers in the 1970s and made part of education policy in Northern Ireland in 1989.[12]

But ideas of ‘parity of esteem’ and ‘respect for traditions’ have also been shaped by their use within the political negotiations that sought to allay fears that any outcome of the Peace Process would be at the expense of one ‘community’. For some the terms ‘tradition’, ‘identity’, ‘heritage’, ‘culture’ and ‘diversity’ offer legitimacy to familiar entrenched positions that are taken up in new ‘culture wars’; for others they offer some potential to rethink the polarities of belonging and identity in Northern Ireland.[13] These ideas can be used in attempts to undermine as well as to reinforce separatist and culturalist understandings of ‘community’. Thus, arguments asserting the value of local history indicate the resilience of defensive and antagonistic versions of ‘community’. Yet the efforts and achievements of local historical initiatives are also examples of practical and innovative (but often overlooked) attempts to address division, frequently in the face of resistance and cynicism. This local historical work is paralleled by other sorts of engagements with the recent past: public enquiries into longstanding and new controversies, debates about the official commemoration of the conflict, and a wide range of community-level commemorative practices. Though the politicization of history inevitably frames the practice of local history in Northern Ireland, the level of interest in local history does not support the common argument that Northern Irish society is marked by a uniquely obsessive focus on the past, an ‘overdose of history’. Instead it suggests a more complex picture of historical knowledge, interest and practice than that contained within the image of two violently destructive, intense and permanently irreconcilable perspectives on the past. It is to this complexity that I now turn.

### **Common Grounds**

Over the last three decades local historians, museum and education-sector professionals, policy-makers, cultural commentators and community-development workers have challenged the idea that the past must be left behind for the sake of a peaceful future. Instead they have sought ways of addressing history and constructively re-imagining ideas of heritage, tradition and culture in response to the problems of a singular historical narrative of political division, the limits of polarized and antagonistic nationalist and unionist histories and the model of ‘two communities’ divided by ‘different heroes, rituals and anniversaries’.[14] Often they have done so by directly tackling highly-charged subjects such as the iconography of Unionism and Nationalism, war and conflict of all kinds, and the 1801 Act of Union.[15] Recent exhibitions have openly acknowledged the deeply-politicized nature of history in Northern Ireland, but have argued that the past should be understood as a resource rather than as a problem. The *Local Identities* exhibition was clearly framed by this approach:

It is often said that people in Ireland are obsessed with their history. This supposedly unhealthy habit is often portrayed as the root of our problems. In fact, history is not the problem. History is essential, for without it we would be marooned from our heritage and our culture. What would your identity be without knowledge of your community or your past? History itself is not the danger, rather the way that we use and abuse it.[16]

While there is increasing recognition of the need for better historical understanding in general, specific arguments are made about the particular value of *local* history. Though the development of local history reflects the wider growth of public history, interests in local history in Northern Ireland have also been prompted by a sense of having not too *much* history but too *little* – little apart from the opposing Nationalist and Unionist narratives, and little as result of the neglect of the history of Northern Ireland in schools. Before the late nineteenth century local historical and antiquarian studies in Ireland were pursued by the broadly, but not exclusively, Protestant country gentry. But by the late nineteenth century local history was inspired by cultural nationalism and was taken up by Catholic clergy and teachers leading to the foundation of new historical societies in the first half of the twentieth century.[17] However, the greatest growth in numbers of local historical societies in Northern Ireland – established and supported by local ‘sages’ acting as repositories of local knowledge and local stories, enthusiasts, teachers, professionals, and more recently, community-development workers – has occurred since the early 1970s when they often provided the only opportunities for non-political social gatherings in those ‘dark times’.[18] Many of the key figures in the promotion and co-ordination of local history, often active within the Federation for Ulster Local Studies since its foundation in 1975, have been explicit about the value of local history in building peace and overcoming division in Northern Ireland, and in exploring the questions of identity, culture and heritage raised by the Troubles.[19] The growth of local history is widely explained as a response to the Troubles, and widely encouraged as a constructive way of answering those questions. Brian Turner, campaigning for funds to support local history as Secretary of the Federation, was happy to ‘make large claims for local history’:

Many times has Ireland suffered from violence and hatred.  
The conflict has worn many economic, political and religious faces.  
We do not seek to ignore it.

Our homeland also has deep reserves of humanity and a common  
heritage of life and labour.  
We demonstrate that people from all our traditions are united in valuing  
the dignity of our own home, place and communities.

Support this positive work.

We make large claims for local history.  
They concern anyone interested in the welfare of Ulster.  
Local studies draw people together to seek understanding rather than self  
justification; to find their history and their shared community. This is  
not merely the pursuit of homely entertainment, although that too has  
its place, but has a radical relevance to modern society, particularly in  
Ireland.

We believe that local studies are involved with identity, with community,  
with understanding, and as such are a civilizing influence on any  
country.[20]

As local history began to feature in new debates about cultural diversity in Northern Ireland in the late 1980s and 1990s, a series of overlapping arguments were made about the nature of the ‘radical relevance’ and ‘civilising influence’ suggested in Turner’s campaign call. Local history could affirm the value of ordinary and conventionally insignificant lives and thus ‘democratise the study of the past’.[21] It could challenge a hierarchy of values in which

places are deemed peripheral and insignificant in relation to 'the centre', which for Northern Ireland could be Belfast, London or Britain more widely. The value of the local is often ascribed to its potential to resist the homogenizing effects of globalization.[22] But themes of de-marginalization and affirmation through local history have particular resonance in Northern Ireland. The ethos of community relations policy at present is to encourage senses of confidence within 'communities' that can lead to more critical explorations of identity, in a context where dominant expressions of collective identity are often based on defensive and anxious assertiveness. A strong local identity, it is argued, can provide a sense of pride and pleasure that does not depend on antagonistic senses of difference.

Arguments about the value of local history are also based on the sort of subject matter encouraged by local studies, whose emphasis on social, economic and cultural history expands the narrow focus on political history, and in Northern Ireland challenges a historical narrative defined solely by political division. Here, these histories of 'ordinary lives' not only provide an alternative to political history but furnish evidence of the extent to which shared experience crosses sectarian division. This recent emphasis on the shared past draws on a specifically local tradition of rural historical geography in Northern Ireland in which the rural landscape and rural material culture and traditions are understood as a shared heritage of everyone, regardless of religious and political differences. The idea of the 'common ground', developed in the 1970s by historical geographer Estyn Evans (1905–89),<sup>23</sup> is central to efforts by local historians and historical geographers for greater understanding and awareness of the shared material culture and customs of rural life that preceded the hardening of political divisions around ethnicity and religion in the late nineteenth century and that are 'revealed through the letters and diaries of local families, the reminiscences and stories of oral history, the photographs and postcards of local scenes'.[24] This was the perspective that informed the establishment in 1961 of the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum in Co. Down to exhibit a shared heritage of rural vernacular architecture and artefacts. Margaret Gallagher and Kathleen Maguire at Belcoo and District Historical Society in Co. Fermanagh, in an example of recent work in this tradition, provide opportunities for people to learn about and use local craft traditions and locally-gathered environmental materials. Linking themes of environmental and social sustainability, community development, integration and reconciliation, their projects use local knowledges of craft and ecology and the practical experience of working together with those skills and materials, to reconnect people to the place and its resources and to each other.[25]

Other projects expand the 'common ground' beyond its focus on rural material culture and folk life to include urban and industrial histories. In 1991 the Northern Ireland district of the Workers Educational Association initiated two programmes as part of a pro-active anti-sectarian strategy. One was a structured adult education course entitled 'Us and Them' which included workshops on 'Roots and a sense of the past', supplemented since by a course focusing specifically on history – 'Paths through the past: an introduction to Irish history'. The other programme was 'People's History', a series of projects 'about the lives of ordinary people written by themselves', which harnessed interest in local history to bring people together to learn research skills and to produce alternatives to the one-dimensional narratives of political history, as 'a covert way of tackling sectarianism'.[26] The projects, co-ordinated by Jack Johnston, a leading figure in local history in Northern Ireland, included oral reminiscences of working-class industrial life in East Belfast; recollections of island life in the lakes of rural Fermanagh; the histories of workhouses in the north-west of Northern Ireland and Ireland; the memories of former residents of a series of back streets in Enniskillen demolished in slum clearance and redevelopment in the 1960s; oral histories of Carrickfergus; of the life in the streets around in the linen mills of Clonard in West Belfast; of the mainly loyalist community of Sandy Row in Belfast; or in the townlands of Cooneen in Co. Fermanagh; or of living with the border in the rural district of Jonesboro. The preface to the 1992 publication in the WEA People's History series *Railway Days in Strabane* suggests what is valued in the content and the practice of local history:

The purpose of this book is to preserve a record of the important part which Strabane played in Ireland's railway network and to convey some sense of the comradeship which united men and women from every religious and social background in a common loyalty to and pride in the railway companies which they served. The same cross-community support has been evident at every stage in the production of this book and it is our hope that it will remain a fitting reminder of the contribution made by railway personnel living and dead to the prosperity of Strabane and the north-west.[27]

These projects record overlooked histories of commonality and historical experiences and traditions that have never been the exclusive preserve of one 'side'. Recalling them challenges cyclical versions of the past in Northern Ireland whereby all events are interpreted through the historical patterns of repression and resistance, or embattled siege.[28] By attending to concrete examples of collective heritage these projects can allay concerns that wider calls for a sense of shared identity in Northern Ireland may mask attempts to assimilate or appropriate the heritage of one 'side' either as a prelude for reunification or as a justification of Unionism.[29]

Accounts of the value of local history do not only centre on the potential for recovering forgotten shared histories. There is also the argument that the significance of local attachments and identities is common to all in Northern Ireland. The 'common ground' here is not, or not only, the land and landscape but a shared tradition of identification with the local. Indeed, recent local histories *of* local history and antiquarianism reveal the ways in which interest in the past could be shared by those with very different political perspectives.[30] In the literature of local historical studies, the local is presented as a good scale for research and a natural scale of identity. The ideal scale for local historical studies, they argue, is the townland, a sub-parish administrative and land-owning unit based on the traditional territorial division of the country (into counties, baronies, parishes and townlands) whose names and boundaries have largely survived.[31] Local history in its traditional rural mode is thus figured as a contemporary manifestation of a longstanding tradition of local identities centred on the townland. Many local societies are undertaking projects to record and map townland names and the names of very small local features – crossroads, wells, standing-stones, field-names – and in some cases erect stone markers denoting the townland names. Many of these projects have been prompted by the on-going campaign co-ordinated by the Federation for Ulster Local Studies to retain townland names as an essential part of the rural address system, and to have their cultural and practical significance reflected in the postcode system in Northern Ireland – a campaign that was celebrated as a cross-community defence of local names.[32] The significance of townland names and the sense that this local scale of identification is shared by all in Northern Ireland (and by all in Ireland), even though the national scale of identification remains fraught and divisive, is the subject and starting point of recent projects.[33]

In October and November 2000 an exhibition organized by Killesher Historical Society took place in the mixed rural community of Killesher in Co. Fermanagh, on the border with the Republic. It featured photographs lent by local people, displayed in groups according to their townland locations and accompanied by names and dates where possible. They pictured familiar subjects: children lined up outside front gardens for the camera, weddings, farm work, holidays and outings. Generations of families could be traced through the photographs. They also featured more distinctive traditions and experiences: little girls in communion and confirmation dresses, photographs of men and women wearing orange sashes on 12 July in 1936, and the lives of emigrants from the area: a nurse killed in the Blitz, a policeman in Australia, Catholic missionary nuns, emigrants to England, the States and Canada home on holidays. During the project photographs of Catholic families were lent by Protestant families, reflecting now fractured and often forgotten patterns of friendship and social networks. This meant that at the exhibition someone's father or mother could be noticed in a picture from the 'other side', and as Roberta Johnston, the project co-ordinator, commented, 'that has registered'. [34] In a place whose recent history has included sectarian attacks, grief, distrust and fear, this is a sensitive and significant way of recovering forgotten local histories of social interconnection, shared experiences as well as distinctive traditions.

It is also significant, as in the case of Strabane and its local railway heritage, that local histories attend to local distinctiveness. Local historical research refigures Northern Ireland as regionally diverse rather than just politically divided. In recent accounts the sense of the landscape as a shared inheritance is accompanied by attention to local distinctiveness within Northern Ireland. History, and especially local history, is central in attempts to reimagine Northern Ireland as a region characterized by cultural diversity rather than division, as a society made up of a complex mix of multiple shared and distinctive traditions, rather than ‘two communities’ or ‘two traditions’. As Brian Turner argued: ‘At the local level, rather than a simple two way division, harsh as we know it is in some areas of life, we are much more likely to recognize a tapestry of Presbyterians and Roman Catholics and Methodists, urban folk and rural folk, mountain folk and lowland folk and wealthy people and poor people, and O’ Neills and Thompsons and Hollywoods and Greenaways, and Cafollas’.[35] The intertwined strands of a place’s history can emerge through telling local stories about local objects.[36] Responding to the Local Identities exhibition panels, William Blair, working with local historian Eull Dunlop, curated an exhibition of Ballymena’s history that included the Flamingo Ballroom (which flourished in the 1960s and 1970s as a venue for local and touring bands), the local enthusiasm for motorbikes amongst farmers’ sons as well as the town’s mayors and mill workers, its Ulster Scots bard, businessmen, politicians and ‘Bible Belt’ tradition. The intention was to highlight aspects of the town’s social and cultural history that get obscured in the focus on the Troubles, yet to acknowledge its effects and explore the significance of local politics in the political history of Northern Ireland. This is an approach which neither elides the recent history of the Troubles nor presents the past solely in terms of conflict.[37]

Local history, then, complicates narratives of division and directs attention to shared histories, to local traditions and to cultural and regional diversity. This sense of Northern Ireland as composed of a complex geography of distinctive local places is being explored by the Nerve Centre, an educational and cultural organization based in Derry that uses new digital technologies in innovative approaches to culture and identity in Northern Ireland, working in partnership with the Linen Hall Library in Belfast. Its *CultureNorthernIreland* project is an on-line cultural atlas of Northern Ireland based on over 300 towns, villages and cities, and conceived as a resource that will ‘allow us all to explore our history, heritage and diversity and find out what and who has made this the place it is today, and who will be shaping it for tomorrow’.<sup>38</sup> This atlas of local diversity presents heritage as both collective and plural, and builds on over a decade of efforts to find alternatives to ideas of polarized difference and cultural homogeneity, in which local history has been a significant theme. Writing in 1989 Edna Longley argued that ‘local studies lead the way in culture-sharing – not pasteurization or homogenization – and are actually a lot more interesting than cultural defence’.<sup>39</sup> It is this potential that leads Longley to argue that ‘[c]ollective work on regional history, even intensely localized history, has been perhaps the most successful ‘cultural diversity’ activity in the North’.[40]

### The Common Ground in Question

Yet the celebration of local history is tempered by two different critical perspectives. The first concerns the degree to which valorizing local history in the context of reconciliation and community relations reflects an artificial and external agenda, a form of ‘social engineering’ that undermines or destroys the organic and distinctly local character of local history. For some local historians, local history should reflect the specificities of the local rather than be manipulated to reflect a forced diversity based on equal attention to all social groups and traditions. If a town has a strong Presbyterian tradition, for example, this should be reflected in the representations of that past. Similarly, the composition of a local history society should reflect the social character of the local area rather than aim for a contrived numerical balance of Catholics and Protestants. Representations of places in local museums or local history projects should, critics argue, be concerned less with producing images of diversity and more with reflecting the specific character of that place. Central support can jar with what is valued in the local: its autonomy and distinctiveness. Brian Turner, while involved in the Cultural

Traditions Group of the Community Relations Council, warned of its potentially damaging impact on delicate local social networks and local traditions of tolerance that predate new cultural policy, and cautioned against the appropriation of local historical studies and local rural traditions to serve a discourse of diversity emanating from Belfast.[41] For some, an apparently instrumental approach to local history as a mechanism for reconciliation suggests little understanding of, or affinity with, local history itself. Others express concern that in formalizing local historical knowledge through the format of the lecture series or journal, local history societies risk devaluing the informal historical knowledge that they want to preserve.[42] Thus some of the earliest accounts of the value of local history were accompanied by concerns that ‘in being seen to advocate local studies as a cure for society’s ills the subject could lose its spontaneity and risk being discredited’.[43]

Such resistance to external approval and tense relationships with supportive funding bodies can have particular political inflections. Protestant groups may maintain a tradition of self-reliance and separatism, refusing to be bought out for ‘thirty pieces of community relations silver’ and distancing themselves from what they see as a Catholic culture of dependency. In turn, nationalist community groups undertaking community history projects such as *Dúchas*, – the Falls Community Council’s living-history archive which records the experience of the conflict in nationalist West Belfast since 1969 – have an ambivalent relationship to state funding bodies.[44] Here the relationships between local autonomy and central support or validation are cross-cut by the histories of changing relationships between community groups and a contested state, and by shifts in the policies and political structures of that state.

The celebration of local history as force for reconciliation is, secondly, qualified by arguments about the degree to which the emphasis on shared histories effectively fosters or thwarts a critical engagement with the past. Since local history is a social practice as well as a form of knowledge, the relationships between its content and the sorts of social relationships it supports, depends on, or precludes can be very complex. A local history society may be socially inclusive, or at least politely harmonious, by avoiding contentious historical subjects. Sometimes more open engagement with difficult subjects can disrupt slowly achieved and fragile ‘cross-community’ social relationships. Again, the advocates of local history acknowledge that while local history can provide a sense of community cohesion, confidence and self-reliance, divided histories can be experienced most intimately and immediately at local levels. If local history personalizes and embodies wider historical processes it can also personalize histories of conflict, not just between Nationalist and Unionist groups, but also in local disputes about land or inheritance.[45] Thus different societies and organizations have different approaches to the content of local history, influenced by local experiences of division and local social geographies of segregation and integration. They have developed strategies for deciding on ‘how long an interval must elapse before contentious (i.e. socially divisive) historical episodes can be said to belong “safely” to the past of history. How many years must pass before a particular historical period or episode can be discussed within a divided community without causing further division, rancour and conflict within that community?’[46] They have faced the awkwardness, anger, disapproval, disengagement and distrust that these decisions can cause. In some places where more overt engagement with complex histories of division is not yet possible, a shared nostalgia for the pre-Troubles past can encourage cross-community social contact and provide evidence of cross-community co-operation in the past. Other historical societies look at the local experiences and effects of larger historical events and processes, sometimes using anniversaries as opportunities for tackling the most challenging or controversial themes,[47] trying to create safe and ‘neutral’ contexts for dealing with sensitive topics such as the Famine, or the Hunger Strikes. Tempo Historical Society in Co. Fermanagh for example, has had a long series of annual thematic talks and debates of this kind.[48]

This critical exploration of sources of division as well as shared histories is central to the *People’s History Initiative* established in 2000 by the Ulster People’s College, an adult-education centre founded in Belfast in 1980 by community activists, academics and trade

unionists, which runs educational projects with groups which have experienced violence, sectarianism, deprivation and educational exclusion. The People's History Initiative, devised by David Officer, aims to equip people with the confidence and the skills to explore the past, represent themselves, and effectively articulate their resistance to social, economic and cultural marginalization, and to use these resources as the basis of dialogue with other groups. In tutor-led workshops, groups firstly explore the history of Belfast and the region to situate local community histories within wider patterns of social, economic and political change, then learn historical research skills and undertake local historical research, and finally present this work in the form of an exhibition. The collective display of the work of different groups which have separately undertaken the course provides opportunities to encounter other community histories and other community groups. The course encourages participants to consider inter-community relations in terms both of causes of division and class-based sources of partial connection (through common concerns about unemployment, redevelopment, housing, education and health for example), as well as to explore the internal diversity of the 'two communities' in terms of gender, class, age and other differences.<sup>49</sup> It discourages nostalgia for a past before the Troubles, because the idea of a 'golden age' of good pre-Troubles community relations obscures more complex and overlapping structures of advantage and disadvantage and patterns of division that need to be acknowledged and addressed.<sup>[50]</sup> It also avoids the demythologizing tendency of some historical approaches which set up an unhelpful opposition between 'myth' and the 'objective facts' of the past, rather than encouraging critical reflection on all forms and versions of historical knowledge. The *People's History Initiative* aims to offer groups a new sense of control over the past and the representation of their local identity, and a chance to re-evaluate their own views of themselves and others.<sup>[51]</sup> While projects like this are designed to foster challenging engagement with local and community history, they also challenge the cynicism of those who argue that issues of history, culture and tradition can only be damaging and divisive within Northern Ireland.

### **Expanding the Local**

The value of local history in these accounts and arguments lies in what it can contribute to understandings of history and identity by providing a sense of shared local heritage, by complicating grand narratives of political division through local stories, by affirming the value of the local and of ordinary lives and experiences against the values of the centre, by figuring a complex geography of regional and cultural diversity, by pointing to a shared tradition of local attachment and affiliation, and by prompting critical reflections on collective history. Yet local history can change not only the meaning of history, but also the meaning of the local. If one challenge for local history in Northern Ireland is how to deal with history in a context where history has been used in sectarian ways, and where distant and recent histories of conflict are deeply sensitive and contentious, another is how to affirm a version of the local that does not serve exclusive, introspective and conservative versions of community. Some of the most innovative approaches to local history in Northern Ireland are those which rearticulate the local through networks of relationships at different scales, and which feature new approaches to historical geographies of settlement. In doing so they are engaging with the question posed by Driver and Samuel and its particular significance in Northern Ireland: 'is it possible to maintain a sense of the uniqueness of localities, and the singularity of our attachments to them, without falling prey to introverted (and ultimately exclusionary) visions of the essence or spirit of places?'<sup>[52]</sup>

In Northern Ireland the traditional annual field trip of local historical societies can have unexpected significance. Under the leadership of a figure like Jack Johnston, they can change the character of local history. As secretary from 1979 to 1997 of the Clogher Historical Society, founded in 1952 and based on the cross-border Catholic diocese of Clogher, Johnston worked to widen its focus by alternating outings, presidents and meetings between North and South. This was not for the sake of 'trivial variety' but to 'accommodate the story of another tradition' in a formerly Catholic historical society.<sup>[53]</sup> More recently, local historical societies from predominantly Protestant parts of Northern Ireland have travelled

south of the border often for the first time and met other local historians. Though the focus of the trip can reflect a group's interest in exploring Protestant history – visiting the site of the Battle of the Boyne, for example – these interests can lead to social networks that would otherwise be unlikely to develop. Cross-border links between local historical societies can happen at different scales and involve different levels of contact. One of the most sustained and significant networks of local historical societies is the Border Counties History Collective. This is an association of twenty-three local historical societies in the adjoining border counties of Leitrim, Cavan and Sligo in the Republic and Fermanagh in Northern Ireland. The need for greater cross-border co-operation was recognized by history groups in Fermanagh doing projects within the WEA People's History series with Jack Johnston, and the Collective was established in the winter of 1996/1997 to promote cross-border co-operation and to provide training and resources from the base in Blacklion, Co. Cavan, just over the border from Belcoo in Co. Fermanagh. Accounts of the Collective's work make the relationship between local history and 'peace-building' explicit:

In addition to training, support and information needs the groups recognized the power of local history to promote peace and cross-border relations. The work of the collective is rooted in the conviction that local history can help reconcile identities, create relationships and celebrate ways of life and cultural traditions.[54]

But the mechanisms for promoting peace and reconciling identities are always practical. The centre provides resources; it is avowedly 'neutral'; it hosted the first outreach facility offered by the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland in Belfast through which members could access specialist research indexes for the record-office archives; and it offers an evening certificate course in Local History from the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. They are also subtle. In practice the aim of 'bridge building' is not explicit; instead common interests are stressed. Though most groups have cross-community involvement to some degree, some are 'single identity'. Social events, classes, talks and collaborative projects are organized on the basis of crossing borders, between North and South and between groups from different backgrounds.[55] This is not envisaged as a process of dissolving social and cultural differences but, like the *People's History Initiative*, as a process of 'exploring similarities and differences between cultures and identities', building trust and confidence and encouraging people to identify themselves in new ways:

People and members of various communities are being drawn together through a common interest in local history and are discovering the similarities and differences of their's [sic] and others' local history. This cultural activity allows for creative expression, exploration and research and allows individuals, groups and communities to identify themselves away from what has been their label for so long, i.e. conflict, troubles, border area, Republic, Northern.[56]

This is a cross-border and cross-community regional network 'building bridges on the border'.[57] It has provided the basis for the collective exploration of the 'borderlands' between Northern Ireland and Ireland and for new initiatives to create wider networks of local historical societies through out the island. In 2001 a local-history conference organized by Jack Johnston and Brian Turner took place in Monaghan just south of the border, funded by the Local History Trust Fund (Northern Ireland) and the Heritage Council (Ireland), to celebrate and encourage the exploration of the shared and distinctive historical geographies of the border counties.[58] It hosted the launch of the report, *The Local History Project: Co-operating North and South*, which explored the possibilities of all-island-wide co-operation between local history societies, using the model of the Border Counties History Collective as an 'effective grassroots, non-centralized collaboration that reaches across-religious, cultural and political divides'.[59] This strategy of sustained and structured cross-border twinning is also a feature of a new historical and educational project being developed by the Nerve Centre in co-operation with Letterkenny Arts Centre, Derry City Council's Museum Services and Donegal County Council. This project, *Diversity in a Digital Age*, will result in a digital

archive of the social, cultural and political life of counties Donegal and Derry in the twentieth century and involve projects with secondary schools through which pupils will learn skills in new multimedia technologies, explore historical themes and events and contribute to the archive.[60]

Organizations like the Border Counties History Collective and projects such as *Diversity in a Digital Age* are developing relationships between groups and individuals divided by the political border who have both shared and distinct local histories. The local here is the basis for new cross-border relationships. Yet the local is also being re-imagined as a product of historical relations. Brian Turner argues that ‘as individuals have relations so do places have relationships. Local places are not just about the parish pump but have relationships to places that could take you all over the world’.[61] This sense of the local as produced by interconnected geographies as well as long continuities informed his work as Director of Down County Museum to resituate Downpatrick within an ‘triangle of interest’ stretching from Down to Norway (through the histories of Viking connection) and to Normandy (through Viking and Norman invasion), and to re-establish its relationships to Australia (through the descendants of inmates deported from the gaol that now houses the museum). Here the ‘common ground’ is ‘the variety of history and environment which has made us what we are’[62] and the product of wider interconnections and influences. Similarly, the focus of local history in Ireland more widely is being reformulated through the framework of mobility and social networks rather than bounded places, on the basis that: ‘[t]he people of Ireland have always been mobile’.[63]

The historical geographies of interconnection and interaction at different scales that are the *subject* of such projects are paralleled by the cross-border and translocal as well as inter-generational collaborations that are fostered in the *practice* of local historical projects. The Northern Ireland Reminiscence Network, for example, works with groups to create local community multimedia archives that can be accessed on-line and thus build intercommunity, intergenerational and international local history networks. For Christine Johnson, who coordinates the Network, this wider context counteracts the intensity of the focus on the local and a ‘ghetto mentality’ in Northern Ireland.[64] A sense of the local based on openness, interconnection and local attachment has been prominent in recent debates about the geographies of identity in Ireland and Northern Ireland. For Seamus Heaney, local attachments and identities do not stand in opposition to wider knowledges, consciousness and relationships. Writing in support of the townland place-name campaign in 1991, he argued that ‘the local can be valued and embraced as a counterbalance to a value-system based on some larger national or international consensus’. Yet this does not mean a narrow, defensive, introspective, isolationism. ‘Keeping the accent’ means a ‘combination of a broad horizon of understanding with an intimate fidelity to what is near at hand’.[65] The focus on interconnection and networks in these community and local-history projects both highlights the distinctiveness of the local – a distinctiveness that is the product of local circumstance and wider relationships to other places and processes – and tempers it, so that the history of localities in Northern Ireland, and that of Northern Ireland, are not represented as exceptional and inexplicable. This resonates with Doreen Massey’s idea of a progressive sense of place, in which understanding local distinctiveness as the product of relationships and wider processes counteracts exclusive and reactionary understandings of the local.[66] Yet wider geographies of interconnection can lead to new negotiations of local belonging. The sense of the local as a node in networks and interconnections also extends further afield through the transnational connections between local historical societies in Northern Ireland and groups and individuals in Canada, New Zealand, Australia and the United States who seek help as they trace their genealogies back to Ulster. Thus local questions of what counts as heritage, who it belongs to, and who belongs in Northern Ireland, intersect with diasporic desires and anxieties about the meaning of roots and the reciprocal recognition of shared ancestry.[67]

The local is also reimagined through a focus on patterns of migration and settlement within Northern Ireland. These are standard historical themes. They are also highly charged ones since the legitimacy or the illegitimacy of settlement – that is, early modern Plantation – and

the legitimate or illegitimate presence and power of the descendants of this settlement are central to bitter political division, but are also being addressed in contemporary efforts to re-imagine the basis of belonging in Northern Ireland. The political significance of settlement underlies recent attempts to figure the history of Northern Ireland as one of waves of settlement that predate and include the arrival of English and Scottish planters in the seventeenth century. Jack Magee, for example, long argued that ‘Celts, Vikings, Normans, Scots and English might be seen for what they actually were, successive waves of immigrants who intermingled and fused, and each have left their marks on our settlement patterns, our rural customs and traditions, our place-names and our colloquial speech’.[68] This diminishes the neatness of the categories of ‘native’ and ‘settler’ or ‘Planter’ and ‘Gael’ without denying histories of dispossession. But some versions of local history focus on patterns of settlement that postdate as well as predate Plantation. The History Here and Now road show organized by the Federation for Ulster Local Studies foregrounded different and shared histories of settlement, as in this panel text:

You don't have a history, do you?  
Identity is how we see ourselves through others' eyes  
Our history tells us who we are . . .  
Who they are . . . .  
And what the difference is  
Real history shows us that we are different  
but it also tells us of our shared experiences  
'Our' history can tell us that we are always right . . .  
they're always wrong.  
See the big picture. History belongs to us all.  
We live on an island and our ancestors all  
came here from somewhere else some time in our common history.  
You do have a history. Don't you?  
Record it and pass it on.[69]

This text suggests the possibility of locating specific histories within a broader framework of shared histories of settlement and migration which can undermine the usual division in Northern Ireland between those who claim to be have been there first and those who came since. Local history is presented as an inclusive history of diversity. It is about deep attachments to local places shaped by long histories of settlement, rather than cultural purity and simple divisions. Yet, though long generations of presence in Northern Ireland provide a model of belonging that includes Protestant descendants of English and Scottish settlers, this can be a less inclusive model of belonging for those recently arrived. In the *History Here and Now* panels local history was figured as a history of settlement that explicitly included recent histories of immigration. References in the panels to ‘immigrants from all over the world who have helped to shape the local economy’ and to the first Indian surname in Northern Ireland, recorded in Derry in the 1930s, reflect moves within the Federation and the Community Relations Council to address racism in Northern Ireland and to promote awareness of diversity beyond the ‘two communities’ of Catholics and Protestants by incorporating these histories of immigration into the cultural and social history of Northern Ireland. Working with local historical societies and cultural groups, the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust and the Multicultural Resource Centre, Roddy Hegarty, the Development Officer for the Federation, insists on a version of local history that recognizes shared attachments to the local across political divisions, and that does not figure the presence of immigrant groups as part of a narrative of the erosion of the local with social change and globalization.[70] He argued that ‘when the history of Strabane, for example, is told it should include its Sikh businessmen who have helped revitalize the town and the Italian Vicaro family who arrived in the 1920s. Having ice cream in Portrush in the 1950s or a kebab in the 1990s reflects the infusion of different cultures into Northern Ireland. Sometimes a townland name may survive most visibly in the signs of local Indian shops’.[71] Recent settlers are thus figured as part of and as keepers of Northern Ireland’s heritage. This is an intercultural

history of Northern Ireland rather than a narrative of the most and least 'native' or naturally belonging. As the leaflet accompanying the road show argued

Whether you see yourself in terms of Irishness, Britishness or Chinese. Whether Protestant, Catholic, or Jew, your community has played a role in building our society and in creating what we see around us today. That process is the process of history. A process that we can all call our local history.[72]

All history is thus local history. This is an approach that tries to accommodate pride in the specific achievements of one 'community' and a shared sense of history as the accumulated history of these achievements. Again this challenges, but is also challenged by, the ways in which those distinctive community achievements are commonly framed by historical narratives of native resistance and settler resilience.

As well as early modern and recent immigration, historical geographies of settlement include the recent history of migration within Northern Ireland. Local historical projects using maps and street directories to record changing residential patterns can uncover histories of forced and voluntary out-migration and increasing residential segregation over the course of the Troubles. Though it may originate in straightforward empirical projects, mapping the growth of a town for example, this research leads to maps of demographic change that reflect the arrival of people displaced from the front line of sectarian violence in the 1970s, and the voluntary and forced departure of people through increasing sectarian tension. These projects thus recall those who were once local. The stubbornly positivist approach to the past in some forms of local history can make it difficult to overlook these maps that effectively chart the sorts of informal knowledge of who is who, and who lives where, that have been part of everyday sectarianism, fear and risk. Inadvertently perhaps, but inescapably, local historical projects of this kind are directly connected to personal and collective attempts to deal with the recent history of conflict.[73]

\* \* \*

The engagements with local history presented here involve different scales of identity, different negotiations of commonality and difference and different sorts of 'common ground'. Sometimes the common ground is defined geographically. The possibilities of shared senses of history, heritage and identity are being explored at the local scale, even if this is the scale at which the results of violence are felt most acutely. Sometimes it is the region that seems to offer a common ground. But imagining the region as a distinctive topographical area, a county, or as Ulster, implies different sorts of politics; arguments about Ulster's distinctiveness or local diversity and its relation-ship to wider regional geographies in Ireland can be used to challenge or to naturalize the border. Imaginative geographies of local distinctiveness or regional identities are thus caught up in political arguments about the most appropriate forms of state jurisdiction. But while the 'common ground' can have different geographies, including the local, it is significant that local historical projects can remake the meaning of the 'local' itself. In projects that reimagine the local through interconnection and interrelationships with wider geographies, identity is also refigured as multiply scaled: local, regional, translocal or transnational. Sometimes the common ground is a sense of shared experience of making a living or of particular sorts of labour – domestic, industrial or agricultural – especially in projects where working-class commonalities cut across sources of division. Sometimes common ground is found in a shared sensibility towards the local. In arguments that the local is the most significant scale of identification for all in Northern Ireland, the common ground is based not, or not only, on the idea of land and landscape as a shared inheritance, but on the shared sense of the significance of attachments to specific localities. Feeling affirmed and secure in your own sense of place and belonging, as a means of recognizing the validity of other people's, is a key dimension of the discourse of cultural common ground in Northern Ireland in both local history and community relations policy, even if that policy is sometimes interpreted as a threat to the autonomy of local organizations or considered an inappropriate framing of local historical practice.

Nevertheless, the challenge in local history, as in cultural politics more widely, remains the question of division. Local historical societies and community history projects have different practices and different perspectives; sometimes they overtly espouse challenging approaches, sometimes it is more appropriate to look for sensitive ways of dealing with the past. Some pursue local history as an escape from the tensions of the recent past and present; some use it to deal directly with those tensions. One strategy is to refigure division as diversity; another is to interrogate sources of division. The difficulty of combining senses of distinctiveness and shared heritage within local history reflects wider challenges of imagining and establishing social relationships and political structures that can accommodate divergent political perspectives, including those that reject pluralism. The mixture of realism and hope in accounts of the value of local history suggests the persistence of exclusive, defensive and oppositional versions of identity, 'community' and history, and, thus, the significance of these alternative approaches. Avoiding the language of 'two traditions' and the language of assimilation or homogenization, and rejecting both a depoliticized and a reductively politicized version of the past, the most innovative projects are trying to find ways of imagining a history that includes a shared history of conflict, shared histories of common experience, and distinctive experiences of those patterns of commonality and conflict for specific localities in Northern Ireland, and for Northern Ireland as a whole. The version of local history and collective identity based on 'a memory of experience shared, even if it is shared in different ways', that Brendan Devlin wrote of in the journal of the Gortin and District Historical Society, stands for the difficulties and possibilities of imagining a sense of history and heritage as collective and plural.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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[1] Brendan P. Devlin, 1995, 'The Cultural Uses of Local History', *Meeting and Memories in Lower Badoney*, Book One, Gortin and District Historical Society, pp. 4–6, p. 6.

[2] *Local Identities: an Exploration of Cultural Identity*, Northern Ireland Museums Council, Northern Ireland Regional Curators Group, Belfast, 2000.

[3] The research for this paper was funded by a Leverhulme Research Fellowship. I am very grateful for this support and to all those who generously facilitated this research and for the helpful comments of William Blair, Brian Graham and Brian Turner.

[4] *Seeing History: Public History in Britain Now*, ed. Hilda Kean, Paul Martin and Sally J. Morgan, London, 2000. The term 'public history' is used to describe quite varied perspectives in different contexts. See Graham Davison, 'Paradigms of Public History', *Australian Historical Studies* 24, 1990–1, pp. 4–15.

[5] Raphael Samuel, 'People's History', in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel, London, 1981, p. xx.

[6] *Who Are 'the People'? Unionism, Protestantism and Loyalism in Northern Ireland*, Peter Shirlow and Mark McGovern, London, 1997.

[7] George Sheernan and Yanina Sheernan, 'Discourses in Local History', *Rethinking History*, 2: 1, spring 1998, pp. 65–85.

[8] John Magee, 'The Teaching of Irish History in Irish Schools', *The Northern Teacher* 10: 1, winter 1970; Alan D. Falconer, 'Remembering', in *Reconciling Memories*, ed. Alan D. Falconer and Joseph Liechty, Dublin, 1998, and Peter Pyne, 'The Teaching of History to Adults in a Culturally Divided Society: a Northern Ireland Case Study (1)', *Études Irlandaises* 12, 1989, pp. 171–91.

[9] Felix Driver and Raphael Samuel, 'Rethinking the Idea of Place', *History Workshop Journal* 39, 1995, pp. v–vii.

[10] Doreen Massey, 'Places and Their Pasts', *History Workshop Journal* 39, 1995, pp. 182–92.

[11] Publications funded by the Community Relations Council to promote local history include Peter Collins, *Pathways to Ulster's Past: Sources and Resources for Local Studies*, Belfast, 1998. The C. R. C. Magee Fellowship honours the work of Jack Magee and is awarded to research that can report and inform local history.

[12] Vivien McIver, 'Education for Mutual Understanding in the Northern Ireland Curriculum: Policies, Progress, Problems', in *Cultural Traditions in Northern Ireland: Cultural Diversity in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Maurna Crozier and Richard Froggatt, Belfast, 1998. By the late sixties and early seventies there were increasing calls for new approaches to the teaching of history, and especially new attention to local, social, economic and social history in schools in Northern Ireland. Local studies have often been the focus of inter-school activities for Catholic and Protestant children. See for example 'Omagh Inter-Schools History Society', *Ulster Local Studies: Journal of the Federation of Ulster Local Studies* 2: 2, 1977, pp. 35–6. In the work of educational reformers and local historians like Jack Magee, the development of new approaches to teaching history in schools and involvement in local history were closely intertwined.

[13] I discuss this approach more fully in 'Equity, Diversity and Interdependence: Cultural Policy in Northern Ireland', *Antipode*, 37: 2, 2005.

[14] Jack Magee, untitled contribution to *Cultural Traditions in Northern Ireland: Varieties of Irishness*, ed. Maurna Crozier, Belfast, 1989, p. 36.

[15] Recent examples include *Icons of Identity*, Ulster Museum October 2000 to April 2001; *War and Conflict in 20th Century Ireland: a Travelling Exhibition from the Ulster Museum*, in 2000; *A Most Momentous Question: the 1801 Act of Union and its impact in Mid-Antrim*, an exhibition by the Mid-Antrim Museums Service that toured from September to December 2001.

[16] Craig McGuicken, 'Local Identities in Northern Ireland', *Local Identities* 2000, p. 2

[17] Raymond Gillespie, 'Introduction: People, Place and Time', in *Cavan: Essays on the History of an Irish County*, ed. Raymond Gillespie, Dublin, 1995.

[18] Interview with committee members of the West Belfast Historical Society, Belfast, 15 June 2001.

[19] Tony Canavan, 'Local History – New Resources or New Responsibilities?', *Ulster Local Studies* 122, 1990, pp. 58–61.

[20] Brian Turner, 'A Heritage Fund for Ulster', undated Federation for Ulster Local Studies Trust Fund appeal leaflet.

[21] Austin Logan, 'A Little Local Knowledge Goes a Long, Long, Way . . . Local History in Schools', *Ulster Local Studies* 17: 1, 1995, pp. 23–7.

[22] Kevin Whelan 'The Bases of Regionalism', in *Culture in Ireland: Regions: Identity and Power*, ed. Proinsias O Drisceoil, Belfast, 1993.

[23] Brian J. Graham, 'The Search for Common Ground: Estyn Evan's Ireland', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 19: 2, 1994, pp. 183–201.

[24] R. H. Buchanan, 'Ulster: Exploring the Common Ground', *Familia* 2, 1989, pp. 52–59, p. 58.

[25] Interview with Margaret Gallagher and Kathleen Maguire, 16 November and 14 December 2000, Becloo, Co. Fermanagh. Their museum featuring local material culture and craft traditions opened in November 2000.

[26] Interview with Colin Neilands, 15 November 2000, Belfast WEA. See also Colin Neilands, 'Report on the initial stage of the partnership between WEA and CRO's', *A Journal for CR Trainers and Practitioners* 1, 1992, pp. 5–7.

[27] Jim Tinneny, 'Preface', *Railway Days in Strabane*, Strabane WEA Railway Reminiscence Group, WEA People's History Series, 1992, p. 9.

[28] Frank Wright, 'Reconciling the Histories of Protestant and Catholic in Northern Ireland', in *Reconciling Memories*, ed. Falconer and Liechty.

[29] Arguments for the recognition of patterns of commonality and diversity can be read as attempts either to make Protestants accept their Irishness and the logic of reunification or feel included in a plural but united Ireland, or as efforts to incorporate Northern Irish Catholics into Northern Ireland either because of the cultural distinctiveness and thus naturally separate character of Ulster or because of the civil tolerance of difference in the British state.

[30] As evident in the Mid-Antrim Museums Service exhibition *Signs of the Times: Collectors and Collecting in Mid-Antrim*, curated by David Officer and William Blair, 2002. I am grateful to William Blair for alerting me to this.

[31] W. H. Crawford and R. H. Foy, *Townlands in Ulster*, Belfast, 1998.

[32] I discuss this campaign up to the late 1990s in 'Irish Placenames: Postcolonial Locations', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24, 1999, pp. 457–80. Interest in townlands and townland names and noport for their recognition continues through the Federation for Ulster Local Studies and the Ulster Place-Name Society.

[33] See the History Local History Trust conference and publication: *The Heart's Townland: Marking Boundaries in Ulster*, ed. Brian S. Turner, Downpatrick, 2004.

[34] Interview with Roberta Johnston, Killesher, Co. Fermanagh, 27 October 2000.

[35] Brian Turner, 'Local Studies', in *Cultural Traditions*, 1989, p. 110.

[36] William Blair and Eull Dunlop, *Mid-Antrim Objects, Local Stories: Exploring the History Behind Some Items in Morrow's Shop Museum*, Ballymena, Ballymena, 2000.

[37] This approach has been developed further and applied by William Blair and David Officer in their innovative exhibition *The 1970s: A retrospective look at a turbulent decade*, Mid-Antrim Museums Service, 2003.

[38] [http://217.77.181.22/nervecentre/news/culture\\_02.php](http://217.77.181.22/nervecentre/news/culture_02.php), accessed 3 February 2004.

[39] Edna Longley, 'Pulling down the Cultural (De) fences', *Fortnight* 279, 1989, pp. 26–30, p. 30.

[40] Edna Longley, 'Multi-culturalism and Northern Ireland: Making Differences Fruitful', in *Multi-culturalism: the View for the Two Irelands*, ed. Edna Longley and Declan Kiberd, Cork, 2000, p. 22.

[41] Brian Turner, 'The Twisting Rope – Local Studies in Ulster', *The Irish Review* 8, 1990, pp. 47–51.

[42] Eamonn Hughes, 'Workshop 2', in *Culture in Ireland*, ed. O Drisceoil, 1993, p. 169.

[43] 'Seminar Discussion: Local Studies', in *Cultural Traditions*, ed. Crozier, 1989, p. 115.

[44] Clare Hackett presentation to the Academy for Irish Cultural Heritages, University of Ulster, Heritage Seminar, 'Communities building histories', Belfast, 11 October 2002.

[45] Tony Canavan, 'Locality and Divided Histories', in *Culture in Ireland*, ed. O Drisceoil, 1993.

[46] Eamonn Hughes, 'Workshop 2', 1993, pp. 166–7.

[47] This approach is shared with local museums developing projects to address the local implications and dimensions of topics usually confined to 'big history'. See 'A Most Momentous Question', 2001 (note 15).

[48] Interview with Mary Hamilton and the committee of Tempo Historical Society, 26 October 2000. See also Mary Hamilton, 'Upping the Tempo', *CRC News* No. 5, winter, 1993–4, pp. 3–6.

[49] P. McNamee and T. Lovett, 'A Bridge between Community Development and Community Relations?', *A Journal for CR Trainers and Practitioners* 4, 1993, pp. 3–6, p. 3.

[50] Interview with David Officer and Karen Mc Cartney, Ulster People's College, November 2000, Belfast.

[51] The People's History Initiative, course brochure, Ulster People's College, Belfast 2000.

[52] Driver and Samuel, 'Rethinking the Idea of Place', 1995, p. vi.

[53] Jack Johnston, 'Building Bridges on the Border', in *The Debateable Land: Ireland's Border Counties*, ed. Brian Turner, Ulster Local History Trust, Downpatrick, 2002.

[54] Border Counties History Collective, Annual Report, 1999/2000, p. 5.

[55] Interview with Jack Johnston, 27 October 2000, Fivemiletown, Co. Fermanagh.

[56] Annual Report, 1999/2000, p. 20.

[57] Johnston, 'Building Bridges on the Border', pp. 84–86.

- [58] *The Debateable Land*, ed. Turner, 2002.
- [59] Jacinta Prunty, Raymond Gillespie and Maeve Mulryan-Moloney, *The Local History Project: Co-operating North and South*, Armagh, 2001, p. 7.
- [60] See [http://217.77.181.22/nervecentre/news/culture\\_03.php](http://217.77.181.22/nervecentre/news/culture_03.php), accessed 3 February 2004.
- [61] Interview with Brian Turner, 23 October 2000, Lisban, Co. Down.
- [62] Down County Museum *Newsletter* 9, winter 1993, p. 1. *The Common Ground* is also the title of the Down County Museum video about the Museum's work and perspective.
- [63] Gillespie, 'Introduction: People, Place and Time', in *Cavan*, ed. Gillespie, 1995, p. 12.
- [64] Interview with Christine Johnson, 16 December 2000, Belfast.
- [65] Seamus Heaney, 'Preface', in *Every Stoney Acre has a Name: a Celebration of the Townland in Ulster*, ed. Tony Canavan, Belfast, 1991; Seamus Heaney, 'Keeping the Accent', in *The Debateable Land*, ed. Turner, p. 12.
- [66] Massey, 'Places and Their Pasts', 1995.
- [67] I discuss the tensions surrounding shared genealogical relationships in '“They're family!”: Cultural Geographies of Relatedness in Popular Genealogy', in *Uprootings/ Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, ed. Sara Arned, Anne-Marie Fortier and Mimi Seller, London, 2003.
- [68] Magee, in *Cultural Traditions*, ed. Crozier, 1989, p. 37.
- [69] Panel text, 'History Here and Now', 2000.
- [70] Roddy Hegarty's work in fostering the exploration of cultural diversity in Northern Ireland was recognized with an individual award at the *Diversity 21* programme awards ceremony on 29 May 2001.
- [71] Interview with Roddy Hegarty, Federation for Ulster Local Studies, 6 October 2000, Belfast.
- [72] 'Local History' leaflet for the 'History Here and Now Road Show', 2000.
- [73] Accounts of attempts to deal with the recent history of conflict often draw parallels between Northern Ireland and other post-conflict contexts (see for example B. Hamber, *Past Imperfect: Dealing with the Past in Northern Ireland and Societies in Transition*, Londonderry, 1998) and are often framed by ideas of the therapeutic value of collectively dealing with guilt and grief and 'tied to a narrative of disclosure, closure and reconciliation' (*Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, ed. Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, London, 2003, 'Introduction: Contested Pasts', p. 9) that can have ambiguous relationships to attempts to address the structural causes of conflict.

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