

CURATING CONFLICT

THE TROUBLES AND BEYOND

NNNi
NATIONAL MUSEUMS NI

Author Karen Logan

FOREWORD



1972 WAS A TURBULENT YEAR IN NORTHERN IRELAND. IN FACT, IT WAS THE WORST YEAR OF THE TROUBLES BY ITS MOST DISTRESSING MEASURE – LOSS OF LIFE. 479 PEOPLE WERE KILLED IN 1972 AS A RESULT OF THE CONFLICT.

On 30 January thirteen unarmed civilians were shot dead in Derry as British paratroopers opened fire on a banned civil rights march. A fourteenth victim also died some months later as a result of injuries sustained in what came to be known as ‘Bloody Sunday.’ In March, the Northern Ireland Parliament was suspended after Prime Minister Brian Faulkner resigned.

Direct rule from Westminster was introduced. In July nine people were killed and over one hundred injured in a series of Provisional IRA explosions in Belfast city centre, in what came to be known as ‘Bloody Friday’. Amidst an unrelenting diet of grim headlines, some relief was provided by local athlete Mary Peters’ personal triumph at the Munich Olympics when she won the pentathlon; a feat made more poignant when she returned to Belfast and said ‘I went for gold, I won gold, and I brought it back for you’. And in October 1972, the new Ulster Museum opened to the public.

Right: Programme for the opening of the Ulster Museum, 1972

Left: Peace Line at Alliance Avenue, Ardoyne, 1983 © Martin Nangle





In more peaceful times, this would likely have attracted greater attention as it was undoubtedly the culmination of an unusually ambitious project for Northern Ireland, with its roots in the optimism and modernity of the early 1960s.

The neo-classical portion of the building was opened in 1929 as the Belfast Municipal Museum and Art Gallery run by Belfast Corporation. In 1959, when Terence O'Neil was Minister of Finance, a formula was agreed whereby the NI government agreed to take over the completion of the building and the Belfast Corporation agreed to hand over the control of the Museum to an independent Board of Trustees. The subsequent Museums Act (Northern Ireland) 1961 established the Museum as a national institution, called the Ulster Museum.

The opening of the Ulster Museum in October was a one of the last public events dominated by the ancien régime. The Governor of Northern Ireland, Lord Grey, presided over the official proceedings alongside the Duke of Abercorn in his role as Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

Yet the new Ulster Museum was far from conservative. The leading British Architect, Francis Pym, had developed a radical concept of a new brutalist extension, which boldly fused the neo-classical building with progressive modernism. It was one of 12 buildings that year to win a Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Award.



Simultaneously looking back and looking forward embodies the essence of the Ulster Museum. The traditional and modernist architecture symbolically expresses the creative tension that sits at its heart. For some, the Museum represents the cultural establishment and its perceived elitism is confirmed by its very location in affluent South Belfast. Yet for many the Museum is a trusted, shared space that represents intellectual rigor across its core disciplines of art, natural science and history. The international character of its collections is an antidote to insularity.

Our goal today is to diversify our audiences by achieving greater contemporary relevance, with access and inclusion at the heart of everything we do. We know that the museum is at its best when it is bold and courageous – when it deals with the issues that truly matter, whether this be climate change and biodiversity, inspiring creatively through art, or exploring and debating our history and identity. The cornerstone of our ambition for National Museums NI is our new vision: 'celebrating who we are: telling the stories of our past, challenging our present and shaping our future'.

Above: The Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Terence O'Neill, overseeing the filling of a time capsule to be built into the new Ulster Museum, 1966

Left: Architect's impression of the Ulster Museum, 1960s

Right: Art gallery in the new Ulster Museum after 1972

Over the last 50 years, the Ulster Museum has developed a reputation for dealing with contested history. In the past, this has been achieved by providing an authoritative interpretation and framing of our history within a broad international perspective, and was the case with exhibitions like *Kings in Conflict* (1990) and *Up in Arms* (1998). In recent years, whilst the international context remains just as important, we have evolved our practice in new ways. The need to present diverse voices and multiple perspectives through collaboration and co-creation now guides our thinking and approach. At the forefront of this is our new exhibition gallery *The Troubles and Beyond*. This has been a key corporate priority for National Museums NI. We have learned a great deal during the course of its development, which will be carried forward into further phases of work. Whilst we certainly have much still to learn, we also have much to share. And that is the purpose of this book.

William Blair
Director of Collections
National Museums NI



INTRO- DUCTION

THE REPRESENTATION OF CONTESTED HISTORY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A DIVIDED SOCIETY PRESENTS BOTH SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES.



Above: *The Troubles and Beyond* exhibition

Left: Colin Davidson's *Silent Testimony* exhibition at the Ulster Museum

Interpreting our recent past has been a priority for National Museums NI for more than a decade and our evolving approach has included a number of initiatives, most recently *Collecting the Troubles and Beyond*.

Supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the aim of the project was to widen the scope of the collection through greater academic and community engagement and to ensure that the collection could be used to support a full and inclusive narrative. This project demonstrates that despite the inherent challenges in interpreting contested history, the Museum can play an important role

in building understanding and in helping to address the legacy of the past. It can offer a shared space in which to explore controversial issues through critical narrative and interpretation which presents multiple perspectives and offers the opportunity for dialogue and debate. This publication will outline the role of the Museum in relation to such opportunities and how the framework of the project was designed to support academic and public engagement with contested history, whilst being mindful of the ethical considerations involved.

This work has been independently evaluated and based on the learning and recommendations that followed in 2020 we are now looking ahead to a new phase of development.

INTERPRETING OUR RECENT PAST AT THE ULSTER MUSEUM

The History collections at the Ulster Museum reflect evidence of people and events in this place from the earliest settlers, through the main archaeological and historical periods up to the present day and have long been used to interpret our history for local, national and international audiences. There are examples, prior to the Troubles and Beyond exhibition, of the curation of difficult or contested narratives from our recent past at the Ulster Museum. While the confidence and success of the organisation in delivering such content has waxed and waned, we have learned from our collective experiences and that has brought us to where we are today.

The *Icons of Identity* exhibition that opened in 2000 was described as an exhibition for the new millennium and played on the distinction between devotional icons and popularist icons, looking at both the object of admiration and its image.



It was then left to the visitor to decide whether any of the selected icons related to their experience or informed their identity. A total of nine icons were selected: Cú Chulainn; the Virgin Mary; Christ crucified; St Patrick; Erin; King William III; Sir Edward Carson; the Somme and Michael Collins. The narrative was written from the present-day perspective, enabling consideration to be given to how their meaning had been shaped over time and influenced by contemporary agendas. Acknowledgement was made that people may profoundly disagree with some of the statements and suggestions made in the text, but it was felt that this would encourage consideration to be given to alternative points of view. The curators believed that we would perceive most of the icons in a way that is conditioned by our personal and communal background, and that people of different backgrounds are likely therefore to have radically different perceptions of them. The aim of the exhibition was to provide perspectives that may modify our reactions to each icon and to enable visitors to understand that others might react differently and why that is the case. This agonistic approach in bringing opposing views together is one which the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition would draw on, as in it multiple perspectives are curated together with no attempt to achieve consensus. The two large depictions of Cú Chulainn that feature in the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition were originally commissioned for *Icons of Identity*. Painted by well-known mural artists, they present Cú Chulainn as both a republican martyr and as an ancient defender of Ulster.

In 2003, the exhibition *Conflict: The Irish at War* presented a history of warfare in Ireland from the arrival of the first settlers 10,000 years ago to the present day. Using objects from the collection to focus on particular periods and events,

Above: *Icons of Identity*

it provided a long view on conflict, with objects dating back to the Mesolithic, and included Viking violence and Norman invasions as well as early modern conflict, the United Irish Rebellion and two World Wars. However, the strength of the *Conflict* exhibition lay in its representation of our more recent past. The interpretive content dealt directly with the subject of the Troubles and the Museum was praised for its courage in displaying objects such as an RUC helmet damaged by a petrol bomb, rubber and plastic bullets and an IRA roll of honour. Narratives of peace were included alongside those of conflict, with key objects including Mairead Corrigan's Nobel peace prize medal. The exhibition also reflected on the aftermath of conflict, the trauma and need to care for those affected, as well as to remember and commemorate those whose lives were lost. Importantly, it incorporated the voices of victims and survivors and gave visitors space to reflect and contribute their own thoughts. People were invited to comment on objects that reflected their own experience of, or views on, conflict and warfare and the community were also involved in the selection of artefacts. This made the exhibition all the more powerful and it was awarded the

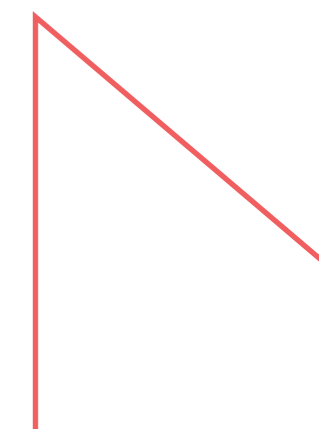


Above and right: *Conflict: The Irish at War*, Top: *The Troubles* (2009)



prize for best exhibition at the Museum of the Year Award in 2004 and Irish exhibition of the Year for 2005/2006.

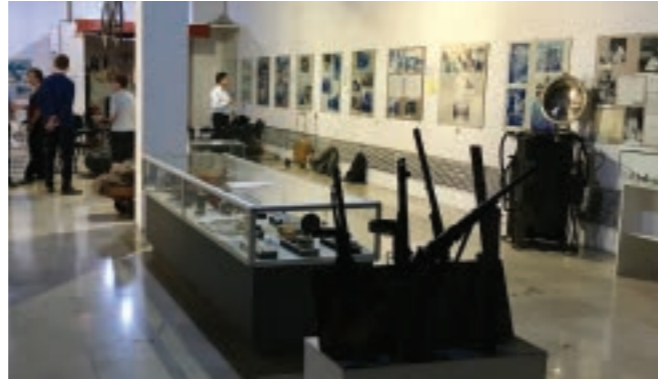
The Ulster Museum closed in October 2006 to undergo major refurbishment and when it re-opened in 2009, an exhibition entitled *The Troubles* was launched as part of the new History galleries. Consisting entirely of black and white photographs and text, the impact of the exhibition was limited by the absence of original artefacts and alternative viewpoints. The perspective was comparable to that of a photojournalist and little or no interpretation was offered. Journalists at the time described it as “bland, safe and strenuously non-controversial” (Meredith, 2009) and “the past defeating the present ... for fear of giving offence [or] causing controversy” (O’Connor, 2009). While in general the public, and particularly international visitors, found the exhibition interesting and well balanced, the lack of social history was apparent and visitor feedback called for the inclusion of objects and personal stories. It was understandably seen as a backward step from the *Conflict: The Irish at War* exhibition which had done more to represent the events and impact of the Troubles and had included powerful and emotive objects.



INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES



Above: Ruins of the Winter Olympics 1984 site in the mountains above Sarajevo, held by the Serbian army during the siege



Above: The 'Besieged Sarajevo' gallery at the History Museum of Sarajevo

Following the mixed reaction to the 2009 Troubles gallery, we immediately embarked on a new process of thinking and planning. We believed that our understanding of the Northern Irish experience would be enhanced by critical comparison with other conflicted regions. In 2013 National Museums NI hosted an ethnically diverse group of museum professionals from Bosnia-Herzegovina, an exchange supported by the British Council. William Blair followed this with a research trip to Sarajevo in 2016, at the invitation of the director of the History Museum of Sarajevo, Elma Hasimbegovic. The legacy of ethnic segregation from the civil wars of the 1990s is a tragic and ever present sub-text in a city that once prided itself on its cosmopolitanism.

'It was interesting to see how in recent times people were finding ways to come together at the new outdoor leisure developments in 'border' areas in the mountains. Interesting also to hear how young Serbs are still drawn to Sarajevo for its lively nightlife, but would be careful to avoid using their Serbian names in public.'
William Blair, Director of Collections, National Museums NI



Above: The 'Beit Beirut' building which was used as a control post and sniper base during the civil war and is now being converted into a museum and a cultural and artistic meeting place.

William Blair also visited Beirut in the Lebanon and planned an itinerary that included visiting 'single identity' museums and sites across the complex sectarian divides, along with others like the National Museum of Beirut which, despite being badly damaged during the civil war, has sought to present the layers of archaeological history that underlie Lebanon's diverse cultural heritage. A recurring theme during the trip was the resilience of people during the civil war and how they adapted to create a new version of 'everyday life' amidst the chaos.



Above: Site of the Shabra and Shatila massacre, Beirut
 Right: Interior of the National Museum in Beirut



'The strength of feeling, based on the truth of lived experience and family history, was always evident in the opposing perspectives that I listened to over the course of the trip. Unfortunately, the geo-political fault lines running through Lebanon and its neighbours means that conflict is never far away. It certainly puts Brexit into perspective.'
William Blair, Director of Collections, National Museums NI

MODERN HISTORY

The years that followed the re-opening of the Ulster Museum were the lead up to the period 2012-2022 which is described as the 'Decade of Centenaries'. This period represents a series of anniversaries of key historical events, including the signing of the Ulster Covenant, the Battle of the Somme, the Easter Rising, the War of Independence and partition. The need to position itself to be able to adequately interpret this period and provide significant content and programming provided National Museums NI with an opportunity to refresh the History galleries and to reflect on broader historical perspectives. Supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure, we began work on the new *Modern History* exhibition which opened at the Ulster Museum in November 2014 and spans the period 1500 to 1968.

Using a range of carefully selected objects, which often demonstrate the complexity of our history, the exhibition explores the seminal events which have shaped our country and the many connections and interdependencies which reflect our shared past. It offers the opportunity to gain insight into cultural, social, economic and political change in Ulster within Irish, British and international contexts. The gallery was designed with a view to current best practice in interpretation, which involved enhanced interactivity and multi-media to improve visitor experience, the use of accessible language in the form of the Ekarv text method and the integration of interpretive threads, or themes, offering different routes into our past. It was based on collaborative research and development with academic and community partners which, together with evaluation of the previous History galleries, informed our interpretation. Feedback on the need for structure and clarity led to the clear definition of five sub-sections to the exhibition within a chronological framework, which is further reinforced by a timeline of key events that runs along one side of the gallery. New design concepts saw 'gateway' cases used to introduce each of the five sub-sections, these deliberately juxtapose defining objects of the period such as the base depot flag of the 36th (Ulster) Division and the Irish Proclamation from 1916 and encourage critical thought around intersecting narratives. The *Modern History* exhibition has also been supported by an extensive public programme and throughout the Decade of Centenaries to date, the Ulster Museum has provided dedicated temporary exhibitions linked to the key anniversaries. These are further examples of our interpretation of difficult and contested history and include exhibitions such as *The Ulster Crisis: Irish Home Rule and the Ulster Covenant* and *Remembering 1916: Your Stories* (Blair, 2016).



Above: *The Modern History Gallery: The Birth of the Modern Era section* © Donal McCann Photography Ltd.



Left: *Remembering 1916: Your Stories* (Prof. Keith Lilley, Director of *Living Legacies 1914-1918* (left) and William Blair, Director of Collections at National Museums NI)

Below: *The Modern History Gallery: Home Rule to Partition section* © Donal McCann Photography Ltd.



INTERPRETING THE TROUBLES THROUGH ART

At the same time as the History department was focussed on the *Modern History* gallery and the ongoing Decade of Centenaries, our colleagues in Art were developing incredibly challenging and powerful exhibitions based on the Troubles. The *Art of the Troubles* exhibition, curated by Kim Mawhinney and developed in collaboration with Wolverhampton Art Gallery, opened in April 2014 and provided a broad representation of artists' responses to the Troubles from their own perspectives. *Art of the Troubles* comprised 60 works, including paintings, drawings, photographs, videos and sculpture and brought together the work of 50 artists from Northern Ireland and beyond including Joe McWilliams, Willie Doherty, F.E. McWilliam, Rita Duffy, Paul Seawright, Jack Pakenham, Michael Farrell and Richard Hamilton. It involved loans from the Imperial War Museum's Northern Ireland Collection, the Irish Museum of Modern Art and Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane, as well as works from private collections and artists themselves. Although many of the individual pieces had been displayed previously in various settings, this was the first time that work about the Troubles had been exhibited together on such a scale. The subjects, themes and meanings of the works were diverse and offered the perspectives of the artists themselves. Some works were direct responses to violence inflicted on innocent victims. Some were shaped by the social and political outlook of the artists. Others captured visual aspects of conflict and division. Together they evoked a variety of experiences and emotions and reflect on the causes, impact and complexity of the Troubles.

'The response from the public to *Art of the Troubles* was hugely positive and through their feedback we knew the exhibition was an important way of interpreting our recent past. The exhibition allowed people to have difficult discussions about their experiences of the Troubles through art. It was very important to include art made after the Belfast Agreement to show how artists were continuing to respond to the legacy of the Troubles.'

Kim Mawhinney, Senior Curator of Art, National Museums NI

The exhibition attracted almost 57,000 visitors and received an overwhelming response. There was a powerful programme of tours, workshop activities, online resources and public engagement accompanying the exhibition, which enhanced its capacity to encourage dialogue on what remains a difficult subject. It became obvious that there was genuine interest from visitors and within the community in exploring the history and impact of the Troubles and we began to realise there was an expectation on us to have the courage to facilitate that. The main themes that emerged from the artworks were the physicality of violence, suffering and loss, dereliction and abandonment, the meaning and power of flags and symbols. The imagery used by artists often makes an obvious and direct connection to these themes and it can be more subtle in conveying a deep sense of emotion and trauma.

Below: *Art of the Troubles* exhibition, *Woman in Bomb Blast*, 1974/1 by F.E. McWilliam © the Artist's Estate





'Without doubt Colin Davidson's *Silent Testimony* has been the most emotive exhibition we have ever displayed at the Ulster Museum. Visitors were openly overwhelmed by the power of the portraits and human loss they portrayed. The exhibition is not about the past, it is about the now and the impact the Troubles still has on tens of thousands of people today.'

**Kim Mawhinney, Senior Curator of Art,
National Museums NI**

Above: *Silent Testimony*

This was never truer than in the *Silent Testimony* exhibition, which opened in 2015, and which has proven the most emotive in our history. An exhibition of portrait paintings by the internationally renowned artist Colin Davidson and curated by Kim Mawhinney, it revealed the stories of eighteen people connected by their individual experiences of loss through the Troubles. Whilst each of the portraits is personal, *Silent Testimony* is an emotive response which reflects on how the conflict has had, and continues to have, a profound effect on, not just the eighteen sitters, but thousands of individuals – the injured, their families, the families of those who died and the wider community. The captions reveal what loss has been suffered by the individual but there is no detail on specific circumstances and no blame is apportioned. The visitor is surrounded by the silent testimony of these individuals, communicated through their expressions, and can only acknowledge the impact of the conflict on those who were deeply affected. It is the viewer who completes the interpretation, by being present among the portraits and receiving their testimony. The portraits are never exhibited separately and the impact of the whole exhibition is greater than the sum of its parts, it is an experience based on our common humanity, and it is overwhelming. It was developed in close partnership with cross-community victims' support group WAVE who have collaborated throughout the project. As with *Art of the Troubles*, it was supported by a public programme of activities, which allowed the theme of common humanity to be further developed and explored. We underestimated the scale and intensity of the public response to this exhibition, which has been displayed twice at the Ulster Museum as well as the Centre Culturel Irlandais Paris in 2016 and Dublin Castle in 2017. The paintings were shown to mark 20 years since the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement in 2018 at Nerve Visual in Derry/Londonderry

Right: Northern Ireland's 1968

and at the UN Headquarters in New York, and were last shown at The National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire in summer 2019.

The public response to *Art of the Troubles* and *Silent Testimony* made clear to us the need for the Ulster Museum to continue to develop and extend its ability to present difficult or contested history responsibly and effectively, the importance of doing so, and the potential role the Museum could play in dealing with the legacy of the past. We had regained confidence in our approach to this subject and this needed to be reflected in History as well as Art. Where much of the power of *Silent Testimony* lay in the fact the interpretation was stripped right back and the portraits themselves provided the testimony, this would not be possible in a History exhibition where the contextual information would have to be provided. With the *Modern History* gallery completed, we continued to work on a transitional area between it and the Troubles gallery in which we examined the period 1968/69 and the escalation of tensions culminating in violence at Burntollet. The next stage was to redevelop the Troubles gallery itself and we knew from the outset that the first step would be to develop our collection to ensure it would be representative of what is a complex period of our history.



COLLECTING THE TROUBLES AND BEYOND

In 2015 a successful application was made to the National Lottery Heritage Fund to address the limitations of the Troubles exhibition through its Collecting Cultures Programme. A new initiative entitled Collecting the Troubles and Beyond was established and it received £370,000 of funding. The aim of the project was to widen the scope of the collection, supported by greater academic and community engagement, in order to enhance our interpretation of our recent past. Research into the existing collection and a thorough assessment of its strengths and weaknesses informed the collection development plan. Its focus was on going beyond the political narrative to represent broader social, cultural and economic history as well as exploring the impact of conflict on everyday life, people and communities. A modern approach to social history curatorship was adopted, emphasising the importance of documenting the personal and community context of objects. Time was invested in establishing a network of contacts and liaising with relevant groups as well as delivering outreach activities and workshops.



In a national context the Northern Ireland Museums Policy (2011) states that museums have an important role in a shared and better future for Northern Ireland as they can “help us understand our diversity and our interdependencies” (Department of Culture Arts and Leisure 2011). Taking these objectives together and being more proactive in engaging its audience, National Museums NI has delivered a significant programme of collections access and engagement in recent years. This has involved reaching out to new audiences and engaging with difficult subjects. Most recently, a new vision, mission statement and set of values have been identified for the organisation which aims to celebrate who we are: telling the stories of our past, challenging our present and shaping our future. With this remit curators can pose questions and challenge ideas, enabling visitors to be more critical in their analysis and to communicate their views to the Museum and each other. It is hoped that this will afford opportunities to shape our future through dialogue and shared understanding as visitors reflect on sensitive and contentious issues curated responsibly and in context.

Left: Outreach event at Belfast Central Library on the theme of Alternative Ulster

OUR APPROACH

THE DECADES OF CIVIL AND POLITICAL CONFLICT COMMONLY REFERRED TO AS 'THE TROUBLES' CLAIMED OVER 3,600 LIVES AND AFFECTED ALMOST EVERYONE WHO LIVED HERE AND MANY OTHERS FROM FURTHER AFIELD.



Above: Visitors engaging with the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition

There are obvious challenges and sensitivities involved in interpreting such recent, and still unresolved, conflict in a museum setting as the history of what happened continues to be contested.

Central to our approach has been to view this as a process. Both the wider project and the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition itself have been designed to act as platforms for engagement and to be responsive

to feedback. This chapter will outline the role the Ulster Museum has played in encouraging dialogue, building understanding, taking a critical approach and representing multiple perspectives in order to facilitate audience interpretation of our recent past, and the relevance that has today in the context of a divided society emerging from conflict. This represents a new approach taken by the Museum, which builds on previous experience and contributes to a new understanding of the role and purpose of museums in relation to social impact.

ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES

There are inherent responsibilities and challenges in ensuring the ethical representation of a conflict which claimed thousands of lives. The intention is not to present a comprehensive account of every event that took place but then how do you justify selecting one over another? There may be sensitivities surrounding particular objects, for instance where the individuals may not wish to be identified, or there may be objects that could be considered inappropriate for display. It is important to achieve balance but objects can be weighted both in terms of meaning and physical scale. It is also important to understand that this is contested history, different perceptions and interpretations exist and the Museum should present pluralism without bias. From the outset of the project a strong ethical framework was established, guided by the principles of ethical remembering, those outlined by the Community Relations Council (CRC) and the Museum Association's Code of Ethics for Museums (Community Relations Council, 2011; Museums Association, 2015). There are responsibilities in terms of editorial integrity, providing and generating accurate information for and with the public, engaging with new and existing audiences and treating everyone equally and with respect. In addition, there is a significant duty of care to victims and survivors.

The concept of ethical and shared remembering presented by The Junction is about taking a critical approach, not condemning or celebrating the events of the past but analysing i. the personalities, characters and motives; ii. the actions and policies; and iii. the consequences and outcomes. It involves flexibility and pluralism in narratives and hospitality towards the 'other'. Like the four principles outlined by the CRC, it was tied into the Decade of Centenaries.

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

The Code of Ethics for Museums relates to public engagement and public benefit, the stewardship of collections and individual and institutional integrity. In the context of this project the guidance on ensuring editorial integrity in interpretation and working in partnership with communities and audiences was central. The Code of Ethics for Museums also makes specific reference to collections, stating that museums and those who work in and with them should preserve collections as a tangible link between the past, present and future (Museums Association, 2015).

Right: Objects relating to the Remembrance Day bombing in Enniskillen in 1987



THE ACADEMIC ADVISORY GROUP

An Academic Advisory Group was established at the beginning of the project.

Their specific terms of reference are:

- To advise on interpretation of contemporary history including overall approach, context, accuracy, inclusiveness and balance.
- To suggest possible treatments of subject matter from an historical and museological perspective.
- To advise on related Activity Plan programmes, particularly complementary workshops and seminars/symposia.
- To make suggestions on possible collecting activity.
- To advise on approaches that locate the Northern Ireland experience within the context of relevant international comparisons/context.
- To help develop a relevant network of community and other contacts for the project.



Although we have worked with a wide range of academics through the *Collecting the Troubles and Beyond* project, core members of the advisory group include:

Dr Kris Brown

lectures in Politics at Ulster University, and is a researcher in the Transitional Justice Institute. Kris's research interests focus on the politics of commemoration in deeply divided societies, especially its interaction with transitional justice, conflict narratives, museums, and national identities.



Professor Brandon Hamber

Director of Incore: International Conflict Research Institute based in Ulster University, whose projects include 'Accounts of the Conflict' - a digital archive of personal accounts.



Professor Fearghal McGarry

works on modern Irish history at Queen's University Belfast. He is interested in how museums, commemoration, and films shape public attitudes to the past.



Professor Debbie Lisle

who is based at the School of Politics, International Studies and Philosophy in Queen's University Belfast and whose research interests include international relations, critical security studies and visual culture.



Dr Gordon Gillespie

from the Institute of Irish Studies at Queen's University Belfast whose research relates to equality issues, popular culture and the Troubles, political imagery and Ulster Liberalism. Gordon has published a number of books on the history of the conflict.



Dr Chris Reynolds

from Nottingham Trent University whose main research interests relate to the events of 1968. In 2015 he published his second monograph entitled *Sous les pavés...The Troubles: France, Northern Ireland and the European Collective memory of 1968* with Peter Lang.



Professor Graham Black

from Nottingham Trent University whose work involves teaching, research and consultancy in relation to museums and visitor participation.



Professor Sean O'Connell

is a social historian of modern Britain and Ireland who advocates the use of oral history to write new histories of everyday life in Northern Ireland. He is the founder of QUOTE Hub, Queen's University oral history collective.



Professor Tom Hennessey

who is Professor of Modern British and Irish history at Canterbury Christ Church University and has done a lot of work on conflict resolution, terrorism and counter-insurgency



Dr Olwen Purdue

Director of the Centre for Public History at Queen's University Belfast and whose research interests include the history of urban poverty and welfare, and uses and abuses of the past in the public sphere.



Dr Kieran Connell

from the School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics at Queen's University Belfast whose research interests relate to cultural history and photography.

KEY PRINCIPLES

In consultation with the Academic Advisory Group for the project, and in particular Dr Kris Brown from the Transitional Justice Institute at Ulster University, a set of key principles was established that underpin the project and inform the Museum's approach:

- To recognise key aspects of the Troubles period and chart their development and evolution.
- To provide context to the Troubles period by examining wider social, economic, and cultural activity and their interplay with the Troubles.
- To allow a range of interpretations of, and from, the period to be displayed.
- To facilitate reflection on our historical understanding of the period, and commentary on the exhibition.
- To engage with a wide range of communities and constituencies in Northern Ireland and beyond.
- To incorporate information drawn from scholarship and apply best museological practice.

These are aligned with the principles of ethical remembering and are intended to address the challenges of interpreting sensitive and contested history by emphasising context, pluralism and critical reflection. The following sections describe how these principles have been put into practice through the Collecting the Troubles and Beyond project in order to better position the Museum to fulfil its role in interpreting, and addressing the legacy of, our recent past.

'Curating a recent conflict, and its legacy today, comes with a great weight of responsibility. For many people this is not history but lived experience. It has therefore been so important for us to seek guidance from and define our approach in accordance with ethical best practice. Our process has been one of consultation, evaluation and review, as we have listened to and learned from partners, stakeholders and communities. We view it as a gesture of confidence and trust that people have shared their experiences and, in some cases, deeply personal and emotional reactions with us, and we owe it to these people to curate their stories in a sensitive and ethical manner. This is what drives us. This is what makes us strive to do more, to do better.'

**Hannah Crowdy, Head of Curatorial,
National Museums NI**

Right: Leeson Street during the redevelopment period, 1983.
© Martin Nangle



ENCOURAGING DIALOGUE

Poulot (2012) suggests that museums can provide a forum for discussion on issues of memory and history. Rightly so, however, effective dialogue that promotes openness and sharing, while acknowledging hopes and fears, has much greater transformative potential (Hardy and Hussein, 2017). There may not always be agreement, but reasoned disagreement can build more authentic and stronger relationships and addressing difficult questions directly and respectfully can build trust (Hardy and Hussein, 2017).

A phased approach was taken to the development of the *Troubles and Beyond* gallery, which provided a platform for consultation and engagement. Time was spent working with community groups and representatives to establish the significance of events and objects through workshops and dialogue, resulting in an important element of co-production within the project. Audience involvement was encouraged through events and touring exhibitions that brought collections out to local venues. This both raised awareness of the project and offered members of the public the opportunity to comment on, or contribute to, the proposed content for the exhibition. A cyclical approach to interpretive design was established whereby collections development, supported by consultation and engagement, informed interpretive planning which was then subject to evaluation and review and then the cycle would begin again in response to that feedback. This process remains ongoing and it is important that the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition remains dynamic and offers a platform for engagement.



Above: The cycle of interpretive design within the project
 Right: Photograph of Deirdre Conaghan being comforted after witnessing the murder of her father. © Belfast Telegraph



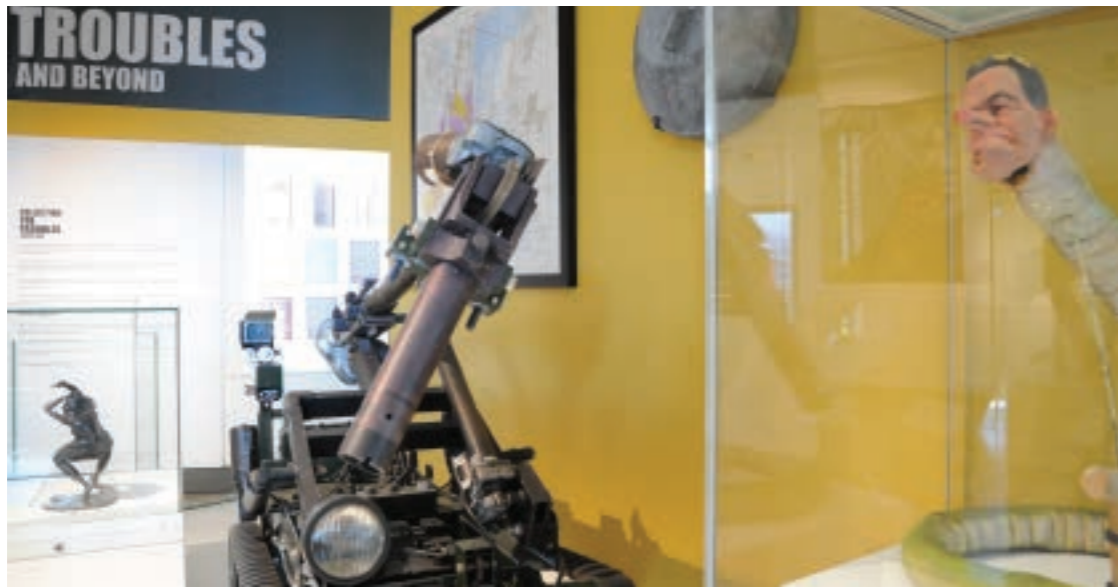
Press releases, social media posts and gallery notices made an open call for contributions and the response was measured but significant, spanning a wide geographical area and representing a range of perspectives. At all stages, participant and visitor feedback was collated and an open conversation continues to be encouraged.

In order to align with best practice and promote discourse from a museological perspective, seminar days were held to explore themes of diversity and pluralism and the sensitivities involved in interpreting conflict. The development of the exhibition was informed by these processes of academic and community engagement and the result affords new opportunities to encourage dialogue within the space. Lisle (2006) describes how experiences of the sublime (a powerful and potentially destabilising response to terror or awe) are often regulated or resolved within conflict exhibitions. The *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition is not focussed exclusively on war and extends into post-conflict Northern Ireland, yet the violence of the Troubles and its impact is left unresolved. As a result, there are numerous entry points to continued and effective dialogue in terms of sharing lived experience and building mutual understanding within, and between, communities.

BUILDING UNDERSTANDING

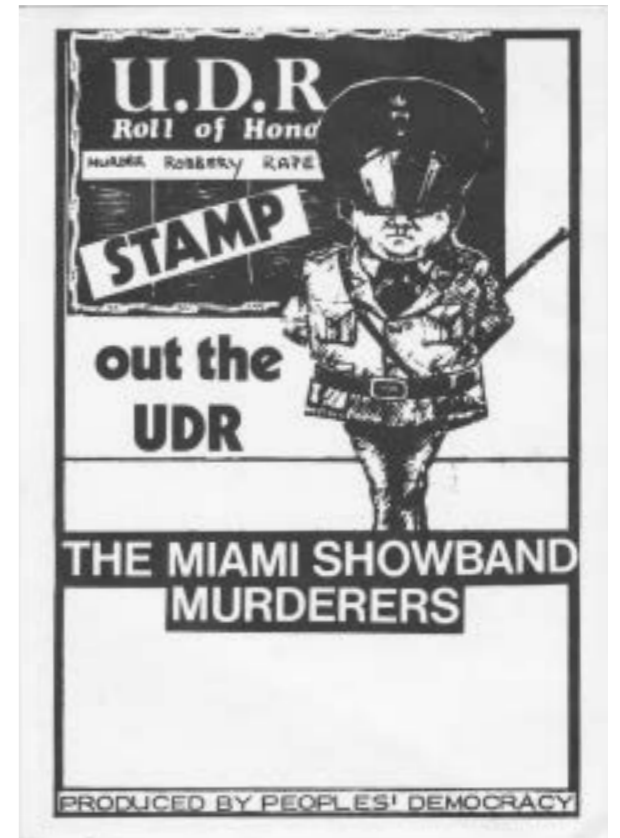
The Museums Association's flagship campaign Museums Change Lives has demonstrated the social impact museums can have and how that can be augmented through a reciprocal relationship with museum audiences. Conducting research into collections and engagement with them helps people to make sense of the world and their place in it (Black, 2011) and important opportunities exist to build understanding around difficult subjects. While the previous Troubles gallery presented a factual description which Cameron (2005) would class as a surface level of interpretation, the new exhibition aims to offer a deeper interpretation, a critical and challenging representation that links intersecting narratives. For example, a bomb disposal robot used by the British Army in response to the security situation is displayed alongside a metal bin lid that residents in nationalist communities would have rattled on the ground to warn of soldiers entering the area.

There is a responsibility to accurately communicate key information about the Troubles in a clear and effective manner. However, this is contested history and numerous interpretations exist, both in the historiography and research into the conflict as well as in terms of communal understanding and collective memories. In that context the aim is not to achieve consensus, but to encourage narrative hospitality. Integrative complexity offers a way of recognising and coding the intricacy of human thought and personality, individual or collective (Savage and Boyd-Macmillan, 2010). There are seven levels in interpreting contested history of integrative complexity from seeing only one point of view to understanding the integration of many points of view. Individuals move up and down this scale according to situation and/or stimulus.



Conflict and the contestation of our history can begin to be resolved through ascending these levels. By interpreting diverse perspectives, in context, alongside original artefacts and information drawn from scholarship, it is hoped visitors gain a greater understanding of the history of Northern Ireland and how different narratives intersect.

Left: *The Troubles and Beyond*
 Above: A recruitment booklet published by the Ulster Defence Regiment
 Right: A postcard produced by the People's Democracy



The facilitation and interplay of diverse narratives can be further promulgated in a structured way to promote understanding. For example, gallery-based learning resources and activities have been developed for school and university groups as well as self-guided visitors. As part of a parallel project 'Voices of 68' (Reynolds and Blair, 2018), a series of student conferences have been delivered during which pupils take part in thought provoking lectures, engaging activities, gallery tours and interactive panel discussion with key figures from 1968. The amalgamation of academic research, museum interpretation, and direct engagement has proved a successful model which could be applied more widely to building understanding around contested history.

TAKING A CRITICAL APPROACH

In response to visitor feedback the new *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition is structured chronologically and within each decade there are three integral themes: i. political developments; ii. conflict; and iii. life during the Troubles. The latter provides social, cultural and economic context as well as reference to employment, education and the impact of the Troubles on everyday life. Consideration is given to the nature of the conflict, its causes and its legacy both locally and internationally. The visitor is presented with a curated selection of objects and a range of perspectives including individual testimonies and must draw together their own interpretation. The approach is intended to challenge ideas, debunk myths, to demonstrate the integrative complexity of the conflict. A new interpretive device called 'Stop and Think' was designed to deliberately punctuate the narrative with short points of reference or statistics that again would challenge visitors' thinking.

For example, in December 1971 the British Home Secretary, Reginald Maudling, discussing the situation in Northern Ireland referred to "an acceptable level of violence" (McVeigh, 2015). During that year 180 people lost their lives (McKittrick *et al.*, 2007).

There is a risk that placing an emphasis on the trauma of events results in personalisation, psychologising and the production of emotion, which makes it difficult to interpret and understand the underlying factors more comprehensively (Poulot, 2012). In challenging existing perceptions we can demonstrate that the violence of the Troubles was not inevitable. Conflict can be seen as a series of processes which evolves over time through periods of latent conflict, the emergence and escalation of conflict, stalemate and the subsequent de-escalation of conflict, negotiation and peacebuilding (Lund, 1996). Examining these processes in more detail enables us to give greater consideration to the causes of conflict and the requirements and conditions for peace and reconciliation. If the Museum is to have a role in peacebuilding it is to challenge visitors to be critical in their understanding of history, to introduce a degree of complexity that ensures multiple perspectives are given consideration.

Right: Clondeboy Gardens/Cluan Place Interface, Short Strand
© Frankie Quinn www.frankiequinn.com



REPRESENTING MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

The traumatic events of the years after 1968 touched almost everyone who lived in Northern Ireland and many others from further afield. Inevitably the interpretation of these events is contested in terms of significance, meaning and responsibility. While we have a shared past we do not have a shared memory. Different perceptions and interpretations exist and the Museum should present pluralism without bias. The previous Troubles exhibition lacked both original artefacts and alternative perspectives so from inception the *Collecting the Troubles and Beyond* project was designed to focus on collection development to ensure the collection could be used to support a full and inclusive narrative.



Lisle (2006) points out that the new language of inclusion adopted by museums in assimilating all possible points of view can limit the audience's capacity to be critical or subversive. Yet to tell one part of the story but to exclude another would limit the potential for peacebuilding. Visitor feedback called for the inclusion of personal stories, however, these also present challenges in terms of editorial integrity. How do you judge the authenticity of one account or another? There are inherent risks in presenting memory and reflective opinion, the subjectivity can destabilise the narrative and it can be as much about forgetting and self-censoring (Walkowitz and Knauer, 2009).

That said, the power of individual perspectives and personal responses is in evoking a recognitive response from the audience based on personal truth (Powers-Jones, 2014). The decision was taken to present individual testimonies explicitly in a dedicated feature within the exhibition composed of rotatable frames that incorporate a photograph on one side and a short account of the person's experiences, written in their own words, on the other. This enabled the Museum to present broader narratives counterpoised with individual voices, introducing a degree of criticality and subversion whilst maintaining inclusivity.



A diverse range of groups representing different sectors of the community, ex-combatants and ex-service personnel were invited to contribute to discussions around contemporary collecting and to inform and oversee inclusivity. This involved representatives from groups that National Museums NI actively seek to work with including women's groups, the LGBT+ community, and ethnic minority groups as well as targeting areas that have been particularly adversely affected by the Troubles (identified for priority interventions by the Northern Ireland Executive).

Left: 20 years of Queer Space
 Above: Shoppers in Donegall Place, 1973 © Martin Nangle
 Right: Personal testimonies in the exhibition



CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

The *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition does not end with the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, but extends to the present day. The inclusion of material relating to a 'post conflict' Northern Ireland enables greater exploration of continuity and change within local society and this is enhanced through the chronological structure of the exhibition. The Museum has an important role in the transition from conflict to peace in enabling visitors to reflect on sensitive and contentious issues in context and in helping to promote narrative hospitality.

It is understood that political change and uncertainty can act as a trigger for renewed struggles (Walkowitz and Knauer, 2004). In the context of the current political stalemate in Northern Ireland and the failure of the government to meaningfully address the legacy of the past, there is an opportunity for the Museum to provide leadership and direction on legacy issues. Many of the issues commonly cited around culture and identity can be explored constructively within the museum context. To date a number of events have been held to examine symbology, cultural traditions and community relations and the Museum can go further now the exhibition is in place to work directly with groups and community representatives.

Right: Parts of the 2000s section of *Troubles and Beyond*



During the development of the exhibition the Community Relations Council, WAVE and the Commission for Victims and Survivors were consulted to ensure that important issues of representation were addressed in an appropriate and sensitive manner. The exhibition content is clear on the sources and impacts of harm and refers to legacy issues in

terms of ongoing inquiries, allegations of collusion and many of the factors that result in the Troubles being described as a 'dirty war'. By bringing these accounts together there are opportunities to build understanding around the impact of the Troubles and to facilitate the development of narratives which welcome complexity.



GENERIC LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs), as defined by the Inspiring Learning for All framework (ILFA), were applied in focusing the development of the exhibition. ILFA is widely used by museums and other arts and heritage organisations as both a planning and evaluation tool. It provides a performance improvement framework, promotes best practice, and helps organisations to assess and evidence the impact of their activities.

The five GLOs are:

1. Knowledge and Understanding
2. Attitudes and Values
3. Skills
4. Enjoyment, Inspiration and Creativity
5. Activity, Behaviour and Progression

In relation to the Troubles and Beyond exhibition the aims of each GLO are as follows:

Knowledge and Understanding

- Communicating, in a clear and effective manner, key information about the Troubles – events, places, organisations, personalities.
- Helping audiences to make connections – history of Ireland and Northern Ireland before the late-60s and how this led to the Troubles, different events and experiences during the Troubles, the legacy of the Troubles and implications for Northern Ireland today.
- Establishing and exploring the significance of the wider context – the Troubles in relation to what was happening in Ireland, Great Britain, Europe, internationally.

Attitudes and Values

- Giving a balanced view – helping audiences to see the Troubles from different perspectives, and appreciate experiences that may be far from their own.
- Debunking common myths/assumptions/inaccuracies – tackling these fully and openly.
- Encouraging empathy – allow audiences to see the Troubles through the eyes of others and to appreciate the human consequences of conflict.

Left: Multiple perspectives interpreted responsibly in context

Right: Engaging with our recent past

Skills

- Developing intellectual skills – supporting critical review and analysis, showing audiences how to step back and analyse the Troubles as historians do.
- Encouraging communication skills – prompting debate, discussion and the sharing of experiences and opinions.

Enjoyment, Inspiration and Creativity

- Inspiring audiences – with stories of resilience, courage and determination.
- Sharing memories – providing opportunities to explore positive as well as negative experiences.
- Encouraging creativity – as a way to express personal responses to the Troubles.

Activity, Behaviour and Progression

- Inspiring contributions – to Collecting the Troubles and Beyond and therefore to the development of the gallery.
- Encouraging further research and development – both independently and through programmes offered by the Ulster Museum.



Our aim was to create a gallery that is dynamic and that offers opportunities for people to respond and contribute their own stories. The Museum has a significant role to play in offering space for reflection and an opportunity for visitors to examine contested history through critical narrative and interpretation, within which multiple perspectives intersect. However, the role of the Museum can go beyond this and a much more proactive approach is being taken to engaging with difficult history with a view to transformative, rather than reflective, experiences. In partnership with academia, community representatives, support groups and others, the Museum can continue to encourage dialogue, build understanding and support efforts to address the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland.

PARTNER-SHIPS



THE CENTRAL AIM OF THE COLLECTING THE TROUBLES AND BEYOND PROJECT WAS TO WIDEN THE SCOPE OF THE COLLECTION, SUPPORTED BY GREATER ACADEMIC AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, IN ORDER TO ENHANCE OUR INTERPRETATION OF OUR RECENT PAST.



Above: Children playing a game, August 1976 © Philip Woods

It has been a collaborative effort, in order to achieve our aim we have had to reach out to others and build mutually beneficial relationships in an open and supportive environment.

We have been fortunate to establish a wide network of partners including key stakeholders, community representatives and critical friends who have contributed to our collecting activities and events and provided training, guidance and support throughout the process. We would like to thank all those who have been involved in the project, some of whom have given the following testimonies about their experience of working with us and the importance of what has been achieved.

NATIONAL LOTTERY HERITAGE FUND

As a funder of heritage *Collecting the Troubles and Beyond* was significant for the National Lottery Heritage Fund. It grew out of a two decade relationship with the Ulster Museum and our confidence that the Museum could tell the story of Troubles through recognising the many and varied perspectives on that period which had the additional challenge of being lived memory for many people.

The Heritage Fund had been engaged in supporting a wide variety of community projects throughout Northern Ireland. We recognised that museums could be a powerful resource, helping communities and society to understand that complicated past. The development of the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition built on mutually agreed principles to create a resource that would challenge how people thought about the past in a divided society.

What has been achieved is an exhibition that challenges everyone, no matter their background, to look through the eyes of others and think differently about that period. It is important that the approach taken to the exhibition avoids conclusions and judgement on who did what and to whom; by so doing the space is created to think about that time, provoking debate and perhaps a greater understanding that will help people avoid such mistakes in the future.

Paul Mullan, Director, Northern Ireland, National Lottery Heritage Fund

Below: Stella Byrne, Head of Investment NI at the National Lottery Heritage Fund (centre), with Kathryn Thomson, Chief Executive of National Museums NI, and William Blair, Director of Collections at National Museums NI, at the press preview of *Troubles and Beyond*

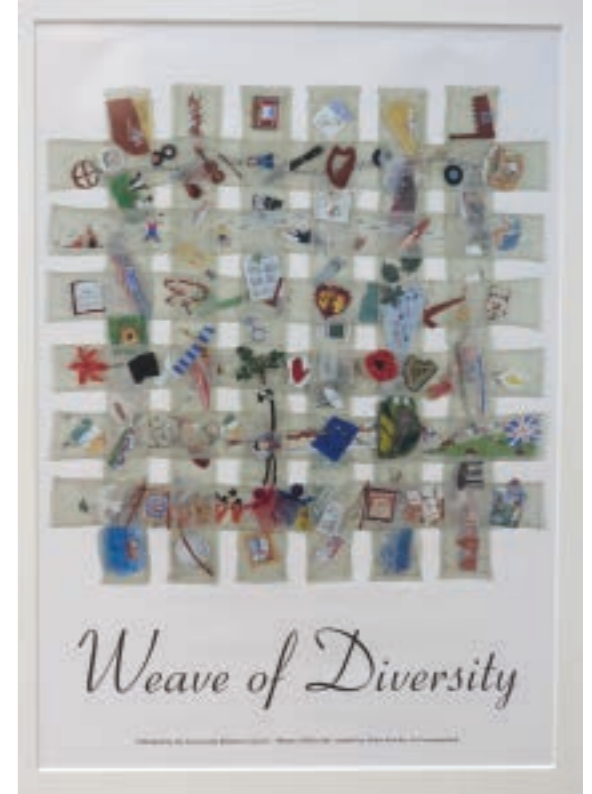


THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL

The Community Relations Council (CRC) was established in 1990 to lead and support change towards reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust. It originated in 1986 as a proposal of a research report commissioned by the NI Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights. The Community Relations Council is an arms-length body of the government of Northern Ireland and a catalyst for good inter-community and inter-cultural community relations work in the region. The organisation works to identify and develop effective approaches to peace-building and reconciliation in partnership with local people and organisations, and with central and local government. The CRC contributes to the delivery of the NI Executive priorities as contained in the *Together: Building a United Community Strategy* which outlines a vision based on equality of opportunity, good relations and reconciliation.

Museums as vehicles for creating open and shared spaces. What this means is that museums have the vital task of reflecting and reframing debates on key issues and events, through demonstrating a commitment to plural voices, encouraging active engagement with the stories and experiences of self and of others, and providing an open, safe and shared context within which that discussion can be validated in the public realm. With a commitment to open and shared learning the gallery will have a confident approach in dealing with divisions of the past, with the commemoration of controversial or divisive events or the legacy of violence.

As work continues on developing the *Troubles and Beyond* gallery the Ulster Museum has a unique opportunity to create a space in which dialogue and understanding about The Troubles can occur, which is situated in the context of Northern Ireland's continuing emergence from years of



conflict and violence and in which we are building peace and democracy. Working towards a community which promotes mutual respect and understanding and is strengthened by its diversity and where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced is a shared aim in the *Together: Building a United Community Strategy*. Northern Ireland has an opportunity to lead the way in how we remember and evaluate historical change in public space. In its interpretation of the *Troubles and Beyond* it is important that the Museum thinks about the outcomes we want to achieve so that we can maximize its potential to be a safe and open space in which reflection and possibly reconciliation can emerge even while we are dealing with hurtful living memory.

Deirdre MacBride, Programme Director, Community Relations Council

Above: Poster of the 'Weave of Diversity', an artwork representative of diverse communities by artist Helen Averley, commissioned by the Community Relations Council

HEALING THROUGH REMEMBERING

When the Ulster Museum reopened after its three-year refurbishment in 2009, Healing Through Remembering (HTR) was disappointed to see that the gallery relating to the conflict did not readily invite visitor engagement. It was a text-heavy zone with photojournalism-style black and white photos, an environment in which visitors did not linger. HTR understood that it was a difficult area to curate – for many the conflict remains too recent and for most too delicate a subject. Thanks to the Troubles and Beyond Project, the recent redevelopment of the gallery has transformed the exhibition. The project engaged with wider society – community groups, academics and interested parties - to make this space not only more attractive to visitors, but also a helpful addition to the debate on how to deal with the legacy of the past. The artefacts relate to everyday life, the scrolling images show how far we have come, and the depth and breadth of information encourages return visits. The gallery is now an engaging and thoughtful space where the public linger and examine the exhibition in great detail. As the Museum rightly says, however, this remains a work in progress. Dealing with the past is an ongoing challenge and debate across our society, and the exhibition will need to develop and evolve as this process unfolds. While the gallery and its artefacts help us remember or examine the conflict, the task remains for us all to interpret and understand it better, so that we can learn from it, and build a better future together.

**Cate Turner, Director,
Healing Through Remembering**



Above: Rev. David Latimer, First Derry Presbyterian Church, Gerry Burns, National Lottery Heritage Fund and Cate Turner, Healing Through Remembering, at the *Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict* exhibition

CORRYMEELA

Corrymeela had a keen interest in the development of the *Collecting the Troubles and Beyond* project. We have been supporting teachers and young people to explore and learn from the past to build a more peaceful and democratic present. We also have a significant volume of international groups who would visit the Museum with a specific focus on learning about the recent past. We were delighted to support the collection process and to donate some documentary artefacts to the Museum.

The use of objects in the collection provide a real and tangible window into life during the 'Troubles' through multiple and at times contrasting perspectives. This form of modelling out the diverse perspectives that people and communities had both during the conflict and in the present, is an important part of developing civic dialogue. The collection also enables a view into 'everyday life' on areas such as sport and culture as well as including groups whose voices are often marginalised, such as the LGBTQ+ community.

We appreciate the dedication of museum staff who have a challenging role in facilitating the remembrance of contested history in public spaces. We hope that the collection will grow in scope and prominence, including outreach and mobile exhibitions to communities across Northern Ireland and beyond.

**Sean Pettis, Programme Manager:
Legacies of Conflict, Corrymeela**

Below: Gay Christian Fellowship group at Corrymeela, 1978
Photograph by Doug Sobey



THE JUNCTION

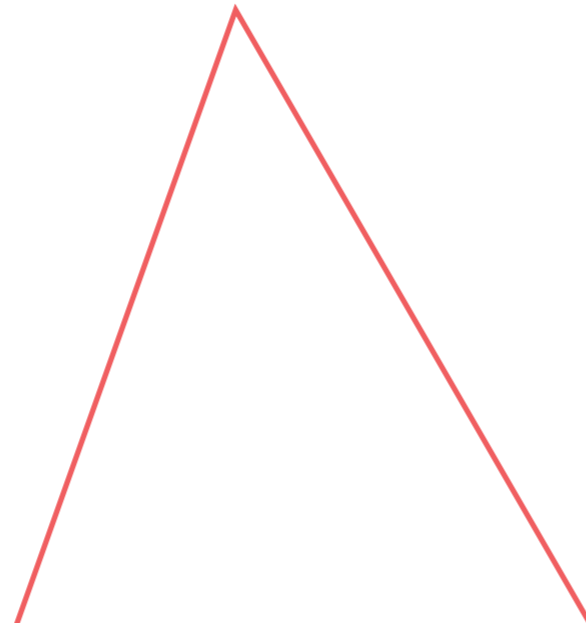
As progenitor of Ethical and Shared Remembering: Remembering a Decade of Change and Violence 1912-1922, Johnston McMaster, in partnership with the Junction, is using this decade as a unique opportunity to address the recent more raw conflict in a way that allows us to use the distant past as a prism to unpack our more recent past. Because we live in a deeply divided society, reinforcing our own story, of what we tell ourselves, the past has ensured that we need to live with 'certainties' and more often of being certain of what we are against rather than what we are for!

Remembering ethically means exploring and challenging our certainties of the past, to sit with uncertainty and open ourselves to the complexity, contradictions, insights and blind spots, and to unearth and remember those narratives that have been repressed because they were part of an alternative story and an alternative politics.

Collecting the Troubles and Beyond offers such an ethical way of interpreting contested history, complicating the narrative and presenting the multiplicity of perspectives that opens us up to other possibilities. It offers a mutually respecting space and place for open dialogue and debate, that validates and supports the work of the Junction.

Maureen Hetherington,
Director, The Junction

Below: Clandeboye/Cluan Place Peaceline, 1993
© Frankie Quinn www.frankiequinn.com



TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING AND HEALING

Towards Understanding and Healing (TUH) was delighted to be asked to contribute to the Troubles and Beyond exhibition at the Ulster Museum. Core to our way of working has been the acknowledgement and validation of people's lived experience through the traumatic days of the Troubles. It has been of the utmost importance to us that we do this in as inclusive and as ethical a way as possible. For that perhaps clumsy expression 'lived experience' we might substitute the word: 'story'. When Karen proposed that TUH offer a selection of 100 word stories coupled with pictures, we were ready to respond positively. The more I thought about this way of presenting core messages from the heart of individual stories, I made the decision to embark on a similar process here in the North West though I expanded the rubric from 100 words to 200 words.

The Ulster Museum's initiative has inspired therefore the birth of our *200 Words and One Picture* exhibition first shown in the Holywell DiverseCity Community Partnership building in September 2018, then in the Alley Theatre Gallery Strabane, May-June 2019. During January 2020, a further expanded version of the exhibition was shown at the Strule Arts Centre Gallery, Omagh and then the following month at the Duncairn Arts Centre, Belfast, in collaboration with Community Dialogue. PEACE IV SEUPB and the Department of Foreign Affairs ROI kindly supported this process which has culminated with the recent publication of the *200 Words and One Picture* book featuring all the stories and images from the final version of the exhibition. From that initial contact with Karen, all of this particular and sensitive work of acknowledgment and validation has grown.

Eamonn Baker, Towards Understanding and Healing,
Derry/Londonderry



Left: Launch of the *200 Words and One Picture* exhibition, Strule Arts Centre, Omagh

Above: One of 35 panels in the *200 Words and One Picture* exhibition

WAVE TRAUMA CENTRE

This is the story of how an NI Trauma Centre and National Museums NI began a process of discovery around the mutual benefits to each organisation and to the community in NI as a whole of working together.

WAVE is a Troubles related Trauma Centre that operates right across Northern Ireland and beyond delivering therapeutic and support services to those bereaved and injured as a result of the Troubles. WAVE works in a holistic way including outreach, counselling, complementary therapies, welfare advice, health and wellbeing, advocacy, lobbying and campaigning, peer group support, storytelling, Trauma Education and so much more. It is often referred to as an extended family.

Our connection to the Troubles and Beyond project has been such an engaging and life enhancing process for those who have shaped and contributed to its development. Living through the Troubles and being impacted by them, has resulted in more than just the loss of life or limbs for many across our society. The secondary losses associated with the Troubles are many and often invisible including loss of identity, loss of a planned future, loss of dreams, loss of income, loss of support networks, loss of faith, loss of safety, loss of education, loss of confidence and loss of self. The Troubles and Beyond project has provided an opportunity to redress some of that imbalance by providing a platform to share a story of heartbreak and devastation as a result of a Troubles. Given its public focus in such a pivotal and key institution such as the Ulster Museum, there has been an opportunity to facilitate greater growth, healing and engagement.

For a testimony to be taken seriously enough to feature in an exhibition in the Ulster Museum has been a huge and life changing achievement. Remember that in this country, Troubles related stories were taboo, silent, hidden, underground and personal.

WAVE's business is about helping individuals to address some of what has happened and also about providing greater educational opportunities to both better understand how to deal with Troubles Related Trauma and to ensure that victims and survivors get the service provision they deserve. The Ulster Museum's business is about displaying, depicting, representing and making public what has gone before. So in this sense our two remits are polar opposite, one is deeply personal and the other is about making things public; but in another way they complement each other so well.

Through the vehicle of the exhibition we have found a partner to help us break the taboo and silence surrounding what has happened here throughout the Troubles.



We commend the team at the Ulster Museum for being victim and survivor focused and sensitive to the pertinent issues which arise when the Troubles is talked about; even going as far as preparing and supporting staff with training on dealing with sensitive subjects and handling emotions of the general public, should they be impacted by the subject matter. For those who came from WAVE they have been able to engage in a publicly, accepted forum to share their testimony and document what it means to be part of the historical context of what happened here.

As a result of this we have witnessed post traumatic growth from those involved in this project whereby, with pride they can bring friends and family to see their input in the exhibition without the fear or shame usually associated with speaking about what they suffered during the Troubles. They feel that having being robbed of opportunities in life, they are now contributing in some way to building awareness and engagement across civic society.

The Troubles and Beyond project documents not just the big events of the Troubles, but the personal, the social, the everyday happenings as well; which for so long have been hidden and those affected have been voiceless, locked away behind closed doors.

It has been a privilege to work alongside National Museums NI on this project; reading, proofing, researching and documenting the alternative map of the Troubles. It has been rewarding for all associated with WAVE and has been an honour to collaborate with such a passionate, motivated, diligent partner who, like ourselves, wants to do justice to peoples everyday stories of living here. So maybe our remits aren't so far removed after all.

**Grainne McKenna, Trauma Education Team,
Wave Trauma Centre**



Above: Quilt of Remembrance by WAVE Trauma Centre, Ballymoney participants
Left: Artwork created by Eileen Fields as part of the *Through Our Eyes* exhibition

THE PEACE PEOPLE

It is with deep appreciation that the Peace People remember the great facilitation extended to us at the Ulster Museum. On the 13th of November 2016 as part of our 40th year commemorations you kindly invited Mairead to speak at the Museum and view her Nobel peace prize medal within your *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition. The integration of the medal into the exhibition was crucial to sustain the Peace People legacy and how it ultimately led to the peace process.

We returned again to the museum with students from Malone College for Community Relations week. At this event young people played table tennis on an electric light up table which was facilitated by the Museum. It was a wonderful event for all involved and we appreciated your warm hospitality. As a follow on from this day we funded a table tennis programme for students from Malone College. We now also host a group of these students every Thursday evening in the Peace House. These students come from a range of different cultural backgrounds and they participate in our Peace People Scholarship Programme. This programme promotes learning through peer education and tutoring support.

**Gerry Grehan,
Chairman, Peace People**



Right: Malone College Table Tennis Tournament

Above: Mairead Maguire with her Nobel peace prize medal

CONFLICT TEXTILES



Conflict Textiles is a physical and online collection of textiles that emerged as a response to conflict. Born from Chilean arpilleras with sewn images as testimonies on the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990) it has expanded to include arpilleras and other textiles from various countries and conflicts. To adopt a phrase of Ariel Zeitlin, Conflict Textiles are born from the urge to find a new language with which to tell a story.

Conflict Textiles, like museums, depend on collaboration - with makers, collectors, institutions, communities and academics in very different parts of the world, where contexts, political realities and economic circumstances are interwoven and become alive via exhibitions, associated activities and research. It is the collaborations that allow ownership and agency to think and act beyond the textile testimonies that confront, challenge, and identify the viewers.

It owes its presence in Northern Ireland to similar local collaborations and partnerships, commencing with the nine-venue 2008 exhibition *The Art of Survival International and Irish Quilts*. During the subsequent 12 years, Conflict Textiles has expanded to incorporate a digital collection hosted by CAIN and a permanent textile presence at the Verbal Arts Centre. International collaborations have given it life and reach far beyond Northern Ireland.

The collaboration with Ulster Museum emerged in 2014 through the *Textile Accounts of Conflicts* exhibition, hosted by INCORE, Ulster University as part of the International Conference, *Accounts of the Conflict*. It evolved through the *Textile Language of Conflicts* exhibition and colloquium event in 2017 which facilitated an in-depth exploration and progression of an epistemology of textile language.

It was further developed by the Museum hosting an arpillera doll making workshop at the end of 2017 and became more formalised in 2018 with the establishment of a permanent conflict textiles corner in the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition. These textiles, many of which were created in cross community workshops commissioned by Causeway Museum Service and Mid-Antrim Museums Service following the *Stitching and Unstitching the Troubles* exhibition (2012-2013), are exhibited on a rotating basis.

For the makers, this collaboration has allowed them to share their perspectives and their lived experiences of The Troubles far beyond their local communities, echoing the reflections of Chilean arpillera, Inelia Hermosilla Silva in the 1980s. "When we made an arpillera we wrote our experiences and left a testimony of what happened in our country".

Incorporating textiles within this exhibition brings conflict textiles to a wider audience and facilitates visitors in engaging with the context and diverse perspectives through the powerful medium of textiles. "A much more interactive, critical and honest account of the conflict" is how one viewer experienced it.

This collaboration is innovative because textiles are seldom recognised or included in political contexts.

**Roberta Bacic, January 2020,
<https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles>**

Above Left: *Praying for Peace* Northern Ireland arpillera, Moira Graham, 2013, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Museum Collection. Photograph by Deborah Stockdale, © Conflict Textiles

Above Right: *¿Dónde están los desaparecidos? / Where are the "disappeared"?* Chilean arpillera, Irma Müller, 1980s. Photograph by Martin Melaugh, © Conflict Textiles

QUEER SPACE

I've worked with the Museum through Queer Space, a small grassroots organisation. It's been exciting to see the Museum's contemporary history collection expand through the Collecting the Troubles and Beyond project. Historically LGBT people have suffered suppression and lives were hidden so it's significant that the Ulster Museum has interwoven contributions from our community into more mainstream historical narratives.

It's important that there are items relating to LGBT history in museum collections and that they are visible. It's good to know that there is an interest from researchers in some of the archival materials and artefacts that were donated and it's really great to see items on display.

A highlight for me was when Queer Space hosted a public event in the museum which looked back at events over 21 years. Everyone enjoyed themselves, there was a lot of interest and the Lord Mayor of Belfast attended. We took the opportunity to recognise the Museum for its great work by awarding it our 'Queer of the Year' award for its engagement with the LGBT+ community and work to collect, preserve and share the positive contribution LGBT+ people make to society.

**Gareth Lee, Collective Member,
Queer Space**



Above: Lord Mayor of Belfast, Deirdre Hargey, presenting the Queer of the Year award to the Ulster Museum, received by Karen Logan, Senior Curator of History with National Museums NI

DAMIEN McNALLY

I was invited into the engagement process for the Collecting the Troubles and Beyond initiative at its inception, through my work with the Wave Trauma Centre, the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council and due to my own experience of bereavement during the Troubles. The Ulster Museum worked with organisations such as Wave to ensure that it was engaging the subject matter in a sensitive and inclusive way. The Museum also worked with Wave on developing a training programme on how to support visitors, and Museum staff, when coming into contact with such sensitive and difficult subject matter.

Through its work on Collecting the Troubles and Beyond and by hosting exhibitions such as Colin Davidson's *Silent Testimony*, National Museums NI have taken brave steps to enable wider societal engagement about the Legacy of the

Past in Northern Ireland. It is particularly important that wider narratives are heard. This includes the narratives of young people and others who didn't live through the Troubles directly but are affected by it nonetheless and continue to bear the burden of our past.

While the funded project came to its end in March 2020 through the vital support of the National Lottery Heritage Fund, it is imperative that National Museums NI continues to be supported in its work, alongside community and voluntary sector organisations, to take a more proactive role in dealing with the legacy of the past.

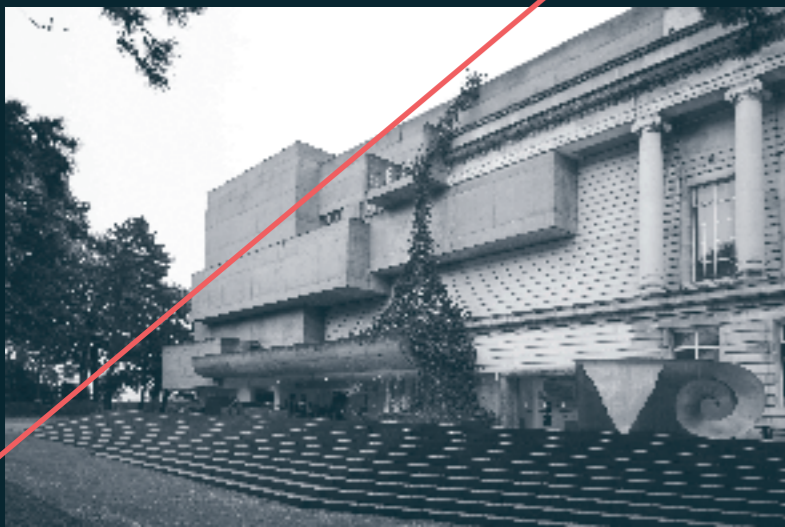
Damien McNally

Below: Colin Davidson's portrait of Damien McNally (right) within *Silent Testimony*



ENGAGEMENT- MENT

TOGETHER WITH DEVELOPING THE COLLECTION AND DESIGNING EXHIBITIONS, ENGAGEMENT IS ONE OF THE THREE CENTRAL STRANDS OF THE COLLECTING THE TROUBLES AND BEYOND PROJECT, AND OUR APPROACH TO ENGAGEMENT HAS EVOLVED IN LINE WITH THE WIDER PROJECT.



Above: Making the Future Community Engagement Group visiting *Troubles and Beyond*

Initially we organised events that would enable us to explore important aspects of interpreting contested history and examine best practice.

We then went on to focus on community engagement and the social impact of museums and since the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition opened, we have been able to use its content and themes to work more in-depth with groups and students.

EXPLORING IDEAS

The project has been designed to support academic and public engagement with what is both difficult and contested history. Therefore, it was important at the outset to develop a strong framework for the project based on careful consideration of the challenges involved, open discussion and learning about good museum practice. The events programme began on 10 June 2016 with a talk and workshop led by Professor Graham Black from Nottingham Trent University entitled 'Rising to the Challenge: Engaging with difficult history'. Author of *The Engaging Museum and Transforming Museums in the 21st Century*, Black argued for a profoundly different, much more participatory experience in museums – one that involves creating more meaningful opportunities for engagement with collections. In dealing with a difficult past, he believes that the challenge is to develop content that will be authoritative, but not single-voiced. Furthermore, it is to stimulate dialogue and understanding, support civil engagement, value visitor contributions as central to the narrative and meet the needs of a wide range of audiences.



To further progress our discussion of key topics we organised two public seminar days at the Ulster Museum. The first, entitled 'Diverse Voices', was aimed at addressing the themes of diversity and pluralism. The keynote speaker was Professor Mike Hardy who is the founding and Executive Director of the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University. Professor Hardy framed and led the British Council's global programme in intercultural and interfaith dialogue and has experience of working with UNESCO and the UN Alliance of Civilizations. Other speakers included Eamonn Baker from Towards Understanding and Healing and Professor Gillian Robinson from the International Conflict Research Institute (INCORE) at Ulster University. During the afternoon session a workshop on 'Realising the Potential' was delivered by Deirdre MacBride from the Community Relations Council and Ivy Goddard from the Inter Ethnic Forum in Ballymena. The presentations provided useful examples from a range of practitioners and very valuable discussions ensued. The afternoon workshop in particular worked well with contributions from everyone present and the feedback for the event was very positive.

Below: Peace Line at Short Strand, 1984 © Martin Nangle
 Right: *Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict*



Below: Triona White Hamilton and Vincent Dargan at the *Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict* exhibition
 Right: *Poppies: Weeping Window*

The second seminar day, entitled 'Difficult Objects', aimed to explore the sensitivities involved in interpreting conflict, whether there are any objects too emotive or controversial to display and the mechanisms for presenting difficult objects in a balanced and ethical way. Speakers on that occasion included Dr Maruška Svašek from Queen's University Belfast, Cate Turner from Healing Through Remembering and Nicolas Vanderpeet from the Imperial War Museum (IWM) in London. It was interesting to hear Nicolas Vanderpeet's candid account of the challenges the IWM faces when collecting and displaying contemporary conflict. Cate Turner based her presentation on her experience with the *Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict* exhibition project and the difficult decisions she faced when displaying conflict-related material, while Maruška Svašek focussed on the emotional resonance of art and material culture.



In a wider Ulster Museum event entitled 'More in Common? Representing Divisive Pasts in Museums' we shared our experience of working on the *Collecting the Troubles and Beyond* project and the *Poppies: Weeping Window* display and taking an inclusive approach to a divisive symbol. In this seminar, museum professionals from around the UK and Ireland shared their experiences of collecting, researching and interpreting divisive pasts, and gave practical support and advice to encourage further courageous advances in this field. Speakers included Rowan Brown from the Woodhorn Trust whose presentation was entitled 'Museum Ethics in a Changing World', George McCullough and Conor Dodd from the Glasnevin Trust who spoke about The Necrology Wall at Glasnevin Cemetery, and Ceri Thompson, Curator from the Big Pit National Coal Museum who discussed the interpretation of the 1984-85 miners' strike. Finally Mark O'Neill, Former Head of Glasgow Museums, put forward his proposed framework for interpreting divisive histories.

These events both informed our approach to interpretation and at the same time promoted openness and discussion around our activities.

MUSEUMS CHANGE LIVES

Research into collections and engagement with them helps people to make sense of the world and their place in it.
Prof. Graham Black

‘Museums Change Lives’ is the Museums Association’s vision for the increased social impact of museums. It emphasises the role museums can play in society and in line with this it is hoped that *Collecting the Troubles and Beyond* offers the opportunity for transformation rather than just reflection for those who engage with it. The relationship with the community should be reciprocal, since active participation from the public can change the museum for the better.

The social impact of museums is improved through commitment, research and review, building partnerships and sharing objectives, innovation, wider participation and reflection on lessons learned. All of these actions are integral to the design of the *Collecting the Troubles and Beyond* project.

National Museums NI is committed to:

- Listening to local communities about what they need from museums.
- Building meaningful and sustainable relationships with local communities.
- Working in partnership with local community groups and organisations.
- Proactively developing collections engagement programmes with communities.
- Delivering greater access to stored museum collections.



Right: Project Curator, Karen Logan, with the Lord Mayor of Belfast Brian Kingston and Mark Knowles, Manager of Shankill Library, at the launch of the *Street Life* exhibition at Shankill Library



In the early stages of the project we held consultation events with community groups and relevant organisations including hosted visits to the Museum where we discussed their hopes and expectations and explored opportunities to work together. For our wider audience we organised collection workshops and community collecting events, both within the Ulster Museum and in local community venues and continue to make an open call for people to get involved and contribute their own objects and stories to the project. Through reminiscence workshops and discussion groups we explored culture and experience across the decades, drawing on the collection to prompt the recollection of memories and experiences resulting in interesting and informative conversations.

Through the project and working with some of our partners we have organised a number of events specifically linked to Good Relations Week. Taking place in September each year, this involves a wide programme of events based on improving community relations across Northern Ireland and is coordinated by the Community Relations Council in conjunction with The Executive Office and the Department for Communities. It is an opportunity to celebrate all aspects of our culture and heritage, to promote cultural diversity and to tackle sectarianism and racism. All the events that take place within the programme are aligned to four priority areas of the Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) strategy and have one or more of the following aims:

1. to continue to improve attitudes amongst our young people and to build a community where they can play a full and active role in building good relations;
2. to create a community where division does not restrict the life opportunities of individuals and where all areas are open and accessible to everyone;
3. to create a community where everyone feels safe in moving around and where life choices are not inhibited by fears around safety; and
4. to create a community which promotes mutual respect and understanding, is strengthened by its diversity and where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced.

Above: Alternative Ulster event at Belfast Central Library



Initially for Good Relations Week, while the *Street Life* touring exhibition of photographs was in Falls Road Library, we organised a ‘Community Life: Share Your Stories’ event during which the Curator and two other colleagues were present in the library showing members of the public the exhibition and discussing their local history. A similar event was held in Belfast Central Library with the theme ‘Alternative Ulster’. On that occasion we brought along a selection of objects from the Ulster Museum’s contemporary collection to represent the recent decades and spoke to library visitors about changing youth cultures and the importance of contemporary collecting.

The following year, on International Day of Peace, we teamed up with the Peace People to launch their ‘Better Together’ programme and engage visitors and young people in games and activities. The Peace People have said the heart of peace culture is the understanding that every person’s humanity is more important than their ethnic inheritance. It is this principle that underpinned the event, which involved learning about the work of the Peace People around the world today, viewing relevant material from their archives and taking part in joint activities. In the morning Nobel Laureate Mairead Maguire launched the Peace People’s ‘Better Together’ programme. This was an initiative giving young people the opportunity to play and interact together through table tennis with qualified coaching coordinated by the Head of Physical Education at Malone College. Representatives of the Peace People then remained throughout the day discussing their history and their latest work with visitors and young people. A group of pupils from Malone College was invited, as well as the event being open to the public, and everyone had the opportunity to try various activities including a table tennis tournament using a special LED table.



Left: Mairead Maguire at the Malone College table tennis tournament

The same day, in partnership with Corrymeela and Healing Through Remembering, we hosted an event called ‘The Choices We Made – Learning from the Legacy of the Past’. The evening began with the screening of a film created by Corrymeela entitled *The Choices We Made: Bystanding & Conflict in Northern Ireland*, which was introduced by the film’s Producer and Director, Paul Hutchinson. This was followed by a guided tour of the *Troubles* exhibition, which presented further opportunities for discussion around its ongoing development. The evening then concluded with input on ‘Conflict and Peace – how do we remember in order to heal?’ by Cate Turner from Healing Through Remembering. During this session Cate explored the role of storytelling in addressing the legacy of the past and supporting the outworking of the Stormont House Agreement.

McNally (2019) advocates a social peace process as opposed to a political process and perhaps that is where the role of the museum should be rooted as part of a wider programme of peacebuilding and psychosocial support. Furthermore, he suggests this process should be based on a socio-ecological framework which situates individuals within wider social, political and cultural contexts and recognises the interaction of four different levels – individual, family, community and society. We believe our recent work has shown that the Museum can provide both context and a space for individual interaction, inter-generational and familial exchange and community group visits.

Right: Visitors engaging with the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition



TROUBLES AND BEYOND

Rather than have a launch reception when the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition opened, which seemed inappropriate given the content, we began a three phase programme of engagement linked to the exhibition. The first stage was to invite all those who had directly contributed, including individuals and groups who had loaned or donated objects or submitted personal stories, as well as our key partners and stakeholders, to come for a guided tour of the exhibition followed by tea and coffee. This gave us the opportunity to both thank them for their contribution and show them how we had integrated it into the wider exhibition. It was a very emotive process for many of those involved and for me as the Curator, there is significant responsibility associated with curating what was often very personal and poignant content and it was important that we took the time to acknowledge the importance of each individual or group contribution. I could see how much it meant to some of those people to have their experiences represented and I know from the conversations we had that many found it helpful and learned something about themselves and others through finding their place within the exhibition.



Patrick Rooney was the first child to be killed during the Troubles and his brother contributed an account of what happened to him that night. Speaking about his involvement in the exhibition he said:

“...thank you for this opportunity to let people know what really happened that night, the memory of that night will be forever etched in our minds, it was a terrible time, people on both sides suffered terrible losses... I hope this project gets people to reflect and think, was it really all worth it?”

In the second phase of engagement our aim was to take particular objects or themes within the exhibition and to focus on them more specifically through public programming, allowing us the opportunity to explore them in more detail with our audiences.

For example we have a small group of objects on display relating to the Belfast-born actor James Ellis which forms part of a wider collection donated by his widow Robina and their son Toto representing his career and his personal and professional achievements. The collection is wide ranging and includes material relating to performance art, creative writing, television and celebrity as well as providing an insight into the life of this talented man. Taking time to explore one aspect of his legacy, we held an evening screening of the film *Two Angry Men* directed by Toto Ellis, introduced by one of the actors Adrian Dunbar and followed by a discussion with Toto and Adrian chaired by Brian Henry Martin. This short film follows the experiences of James Ellis and Sam Thompson in trying to stage the play *Over the Bridge*, which is based on a sectarian dispute in Belfast's shipyards. Many attempts were made to prevent the play from being staged, or to censor it, but against the odds Ellis and Thompson managed to have it performed in Belfast. Jimmy sacrificed his budding career by opposing the Establishment of the time in order to bring a play with the plea for tolerance to the very people about whom it was written, and it was staged at the Empire Theatre on January 26th 1960. *Over the Bridge* played to audiences in excess of 42,000 in six weeks in Belfast and subsequently toured to the rest of the UK and Ireland.

Staying with a literary theme we also invited the Dolly Mixtures, whose poetry anthologies are on display in the exhibition, to perform within the gallery. Based in Craigavon, Dolly Mixtures was one of the first cross-community women's groups to come together to discuss and write about their experiences of the Troubles.



Right: 'Two Angry Men' panel members Brian Henry Martin (left), Toto Ellis (centre) and Adrian Dunbar (right)

Right: Philomena Gallagher reading from the Dolly Mixtures anthology

The meetings helped the women to cope with their situations and to better understand each other's points of view. Poems like *Time To Pull The Weeds*, *A True Confession*, *A Last Patrol*, *Breakout 1983*, *A Son In Jail*, *Strip Searching*; brought home to many the pain, loss and foolishness of a war between two communities who had so much to offer life in Northern Ireland. These writings helped them to accept one another's culture and beliefs and to realise that for their children/grandchildren to have a better life it was vital for us to understand and respect each other. The process also gave some of the women, many who had left school at 15 years of age, the confidence to return to adult education. Representatives of the Dolly Mixtures went on to host readings and workshops in local community venues and prisons in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. As a group they performed on radio and television and at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. We were fortunate to have the group's founder, Philomena Gallagher, perform a number of the poems within the exhibition for our visitors. This transformed the space and created a very reflective atmosphere as some people gathered on the sofas to sit and listen to the performance while others continued to explore the exhibition as it was going on in the background.

We have also taken the opportunity to build programming around key dates and anniversaries. Drawing on our representation of LGBT+ history within the exhibition, we have made regular contributions to LGBT History month and were delighted to host the first annual Outing the Past LGBTQ+ History Festival in 2018. The festival aims to make LGBTQ+ people, and their history, more visible, and to ignite an interest to explore that history more fully.

Right: Tony Macaulay with his publication *Belfast Gate*
© Magical Moments Photography



We continue to host this annual event in partnership with Cara Friend and Belfast City Council, and have supported individual speakers by providing access to our collections and by co-curating content for example through the production of pop up displays and video presentations. Each year the papers are selected to represent the diversity of the community and are based on historical topics and events from across the UK and Ireland. In 2019 we marked the 50th anniversary of the first peace wall in Belfast with an exhibition of photographs by Frankie Quinn and related programming. During one evening event bestselling author Tony Macaulay read extracts from his new book *Belfast Gate* and shared ideas from his discussion paper in which he proposes a five-phase process for the removal of the peace walls, which were initially intended to be a temporary measure.

The third and most recent phase of engagement with the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition is designed to increase opportunities for groups to use the content and the context that the Ulster Museum gives to the subject in connection with wider initiatives around dealing with the legacy of the past. We believe National Museums NI can play a significant role in these processes in offering an opportunity for the public to examine contested history through critical narrative and interpretation. In partnership with academia, community representatives, stakeholders and others, the Ulster Museum can continue to develop a distinctive platform for engagement with these issues. Our intention is that by working in partnerships with organisations like WAVE we are better able to reach those directly affected by the Troubles, as well as continuing to invite local community and school groups to work in the space and developing resources to support that.

EDUCATION

Throughout the Collecting the Troubles and Beyond project we have sought to engage students and other community and local interest groups with the history of our recent past and to explore new ways of developing learning and understanding. We began by piloting stimulating and thought provoking workshops exploring the period of the Troubles and beyond. Our aim was that through this programming participants would develop a greater understanding of the period and have the opportunity for self-reflection.

During the workshops the participants are introduced to the period through a multi-media presentation which focuses on the history of cultural identity and division in Northern Ireland, looking back to the Home Rule crisis and partition. Fiona Baird, the History Education Officer at the Ulster Museum, has also developed a number of activities to help students engage with this period with support from Corrymeela. In the first activity relating to partition, members of the group are each given a badge relating to currency, industry, politics or a place name and then an arbitrary line is drawn through group defining north and south, they must then see how their badge relates to the new state and how that might impact on them. In another relating to the Troubles the group watch the opening scene of the film *Mickybo & Me* in which footage is shown of a mother and child going into a shoe shop followed by a sudden explosion. The film is paused here and the group are then asked questions about who planted the bomb and why, and who was affected by it. This opens up discussion within the group around people's perceptions and the wider consequences of the Troubles. Activities have also been developed in relation to the exhibition itself, for example using cut-out images, like jigsaw pieces, of some of the objects on display. These are given to individuals or small groups who are then asked to find the object in the gallery and answer a number of questions on it before feeding back to the group. Through engaging actively with a range of historical artefacts including prison art, a Nobel peace prize medal and a bomb disposal robot, and source material ranging from posters to iconic press photography, individuals can investigate the different events and perspectives of this period of history. This encourages students to explore the importance of material culture, primary evidence and interpretation.



Above: Partition exercise



The plenary aspect of the workshop involves 'silent dialogue' where individuals place post-it comments next to objects, text or images that have had a significant impact on them. The group then read the content in silence. This method works particularly well as it is non-confrontational and allows freer expression which in turn provides an opportunity to experience alternative viewpoints.



Above Left: One of a number of handbills that were distributed to theatre-goers at Carnegie Hall in New York. Produced by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association in America, it compares the experiences of civil rights campaigners in Selma, Chicago and Northern Ireland and advertises a St. Patricks Day demonstration against injustice.

Above Right: Produced by the Ulster Unionist Party in 1969, the cover of this pamphlet shows Bernadette Devlin, Independent Unity MP for Mid-Ulster, breaking pavement flagstones during rioting in Derry/Londonderry in August 1969. It compares her salary with that of a man injured in rioting.

In partnership with Dr Chris Reynolds from Nottingham Trent University we have developed a number of learning resources and activities linked to the period around 1968, the civil rights movement and the outbreak of violence. Themed study days have explored whether there were missed opportunities, if the violence of the Troubles was inevitable and how Northern Ireland's experience of 1968 fits into the wider transnational narrative. We have developed a very effective format for the study days, which we offer annually and which are routinely booked out by a range of schools. The day begins with an illustrated lecture from Dr Alice Johnson exploring the civil rights campaign in Northern Ireland, then Dr Chris Reynolds gives a global perspective on the civil rights movement and the students are given a tour of the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition and take part in some of the gallery activities outlined above. After a lunch break the students come together in the lecture theatre, where three former protagonists of the period give short talks on their experiences and the students then have the opportunity to ask questions. Guest speakers have included Nelson McCausland, Brid Ruddy, Erskine Holmes and others and it is a great opportunity for the students to ask them directly about their involvement in, or perspective on, the events they are studying. A dedicated learning resource for the period 1965-1972 was developed by the Ulster Museum in association with Jim McBride from the History Teachers Association, Dr Chris Reynolds from Nottingham Trent University and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). The resource includes guidance notes and a range of pre-visit activities for teachers who would like to prepare their students for visits to the Ulster Museum.

'It gives you a better insight into what the world was like back then, I really liked hearing everyone's story and the talk about international aspect which opened my eyes to the extent of the importance of 1968'
Student feedback on one of the 'Voices of 68' study days

There is material for students to use while they explore the exhibitions which has been designed to enable them to engage fully with displays and obtain the greatest possible benefit from their visits. There are also suggestions for follow-up exercises which can be undertaken in the classroom.



Above: Students attending the panel discussion on one of the 'Voices of 68' study days

It is hoped that, by facilitating such activities (and by directing students to the wealth of Ulster Museum and CAIN resources which are available online), the material will stimulate students' independent investigations and lead to useful examination of the events themselves; their significance immediately afterwards; and their lasting impact on the politics of Northern Ireland and on all the people of the region. The material provided meets the Key Stage 4 statutory skills requirements for GCSE History and the resource is available to download at <https://www.nmni.com/learn/1968-history-resource>

A second gallery resource, aimed at self-guided visits and community/local interest groups is available on request. Designed for use as visitors explore the gallery, the resource highlights key objects that have been selected to help visitors investigate the past. There are seven themes of investigation, several of which overlap, and which all work together to create an overview of the period. The themes are: Civil Rights, Politics, Women, Security and Violence, Prison Life, Impact on Everyday Life and Global Impacts. Each section has a key question to keep in mind while the visitor is exploring the gallery, a list of featured objects, additional information to help them contextualise the objects, investigative questions, and a theme summary. Both gallery resources will be refreshed as new items are displayed. There has been considerable interest in the exhibition from local and international universities with groups coming from the USA, Denmark and France for tours of the gallery, workshops and discussions. We also use our partnerships with local universities to facilitate student placements and volunteers who make valuable contributions to the project.



Above: Fiona Baird, History Education Officer at National Museums NI, engaging with a group in the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition

'Developing an integrated and meaningful Education programme around the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition was a challenging process. It provided a unique opportunity to work with partners from other organisations who brought different skills and attitudes. This, I think allowed National Museums NI to provide opportunities for students to really engage with the recent past, acknowledge other narratives and reflect on their own. The collection material, diverse in nature, drawn from the community, is incredibly powerful eliciting personal response and connection to this period.'
Fiona Baird, History Education Officer, National Museums NI

COLLECTING ACTIVITY



BEFORE BEGINNING THE COLLECTING THE TROUBLES AND BEYOND PROJECT WE UNDERTOOK RESEARCH ON OUR EXISTING TROUBLES-RELATED COLLECTION AND ESTABLISHED A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF ITS STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES.

There was a good collection of Troubles-related posters and political ephemera, particularly for the early 1970s and a number of key objects including the Nobel peace prize medal awarded to Mairead Corrigan in 1976.



Top: In 2007 the name Belfast Gaels was adopted by employees of Belfast City Council who created the first GAA team drawn from council staff

Above: Mairead Corrigan's Nobel peace prize medal for 1976

Below: A scrapbook on the events of the Troubles kept by a school teacher in Legcloughfin, near Omagh, during the early 1970s



Above: This Ulster Volunteer Force 90th anniversary flag was found and documented by the artist and photographer John Baucher in November 2015. Interested in the use, treatment and disposal of flags, he has folded it into this triangular shape; in American tradition this would then be burned and buried. According to the British Flag Protocol when a flag is no longer in a suitable condition for use it should be destroyed in a dignified way by burning, tearing or cutting into strips

With the transfer of Arts Council of Northern Ireland's collection into the ownership of National Museums NI, we also had a collection of Troubles-related art, but there were significant gaps within the History collections. There was a relative weakness in terms of three-dimensional specimens and contemporary history and also very little material relating to our broader social and cultural history.

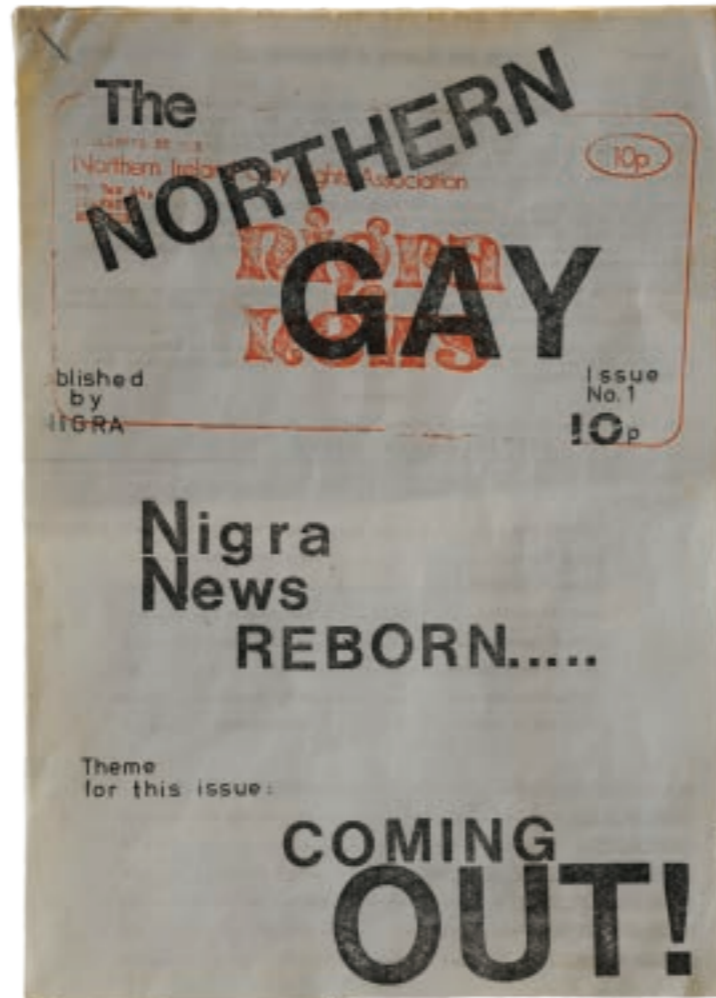
We structured a collection development plan to address these weaknesses, and collecting activity was focussed on wider social, cultural and economic themes, as well as material relating directly to political developments and conflict, thereby enabling more nuanced and comprehensive engagement with this complex period of history. The inclusion of material relating to a 'post-conflict' Northern Ireland has also enabled greater exploration of continuity and change within local society.

We were proactive in our methods of collecting and placed greater emphasis on modern social history curatorship methodologies, documenting the personal and community context of specimens thereby creating broader and deeper object biographies. This approach enhanced our ability to build a comprehensive interpretation in line with the central aim of the project - to develop the collection to ensure that it can be used to represent the complexity of the conflict and support a full and inclusive narrative.

The development of a collecting plan ensured that our activity was strategically aligned to the gallery themes and the National Museums NI Collections Development Policy. We were also mindful of the importance of identifying other relevant projects, becoming aware of what was held by others or coming up for auction, building trust and establishing partnerships and using loans to address gaps or obtain items of national significance.

COMMUNITY COLLECTING

Our community collecting involved a diverse range of groups representing different sectors of the community who contributed to discussions around how their history should be represented and what we should collect as well as providing feedback on the process. The first stage was to invite people to contribute to the project and to incorporate representatives from groups that we were actively seeking to work with including women's groups and the LGBT+ community as well as targeting areas that have been particularly adversely affected by the Troubles (identified for priority interventions by the Northern Ireland Executive). We needed to ensure that the views of victims and survivors were heard within the project and consulted with the Community Relations Council, WAVE and the Commission for Victims and Survivors, who supported us in addressing important issues of representation in an appropriate and sensitive manner. As the project developed the progress of events, workshops and collecting was fed back to community representatives for further discussion and insight.



Right: 'The Northern Gay' replaced 'NIGRA News' as the collective publication of the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association. This is a copy of the first issue which was published in 1978 with the theme of 'coming out', at a time when homosexual activity among men was still illegal in Northern Ireland



Above: 'This is the television set that can be seen in the graphic behind it being carried by a member of the Hemsworth family, during the aftermath of the burning of Bombay Street in 1969. During a 'silent dialogue' exercise with a group, they left temporary notes on the display with their responses to it

Members of the public were actively encouraged to come forward with their own objects and memories through themed collecting events in the Ulster Museum and within community venues. These were aimed at capturing how people adapted to the changing circumstances brought about by the conflict, yet retained their desire for normal life to continue. Other events focused on particular decades and the changes associated with them. At different stages of the project open calls were made through the press, social media and local radio inviting people to get involved. Responses came from across Northern Ireland and among those who came forward were victims and survivors and their relatives, ex-servicemen, ex-paramilitaries, those who had worked in frontline services during the Troubles and others who just wanted to share their experiences of life at that time. Some had objects or photographs they were able to donate as part

of the project and we were fortunate to receive a wide range of material including a television saved from the burning of Bombay Street August 1969 and collection of material relating to 40 years of service with Ulsterbus including uniform, awards and service badges. Other donations included a fur coat worn by civil rights activist Judith Jennings when she was attacked at Burntollet in January 1969, a pewter tankard inscribed with the unofficial mascot of the counter terrorism bomb disposal squad and three poetry anthologies written by a cross-community women's writing group. We also developed close links with local LGBT+ representatives and have established a strong and supportive network, through which we have received numerous donations including Pride t-shirts and programmes, badges, photographs, ephemera and banners.

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

Patrick Rooney was the first child to be killed during the Troubles, he was nine and a half years old and he was my brother. During riots on 14 August 1969, we were all in a back room of our flat trying to get shelter from heavy gunfire outside. My mother was injured on the left cheek by a bullet, then my father shouted that he had been shot and Patrick, who had been hiding in a corner of the room, slumped to the ground. My father thought he had fainted at hearing this, but when Patrick was lifted onto the bed we saw that he had been shot in the back of the head. The shot came from a machine gun mounted on an RUC vehicle. Patrick was taken to hospital but died in the early hours of the morning.



I am gay. I have known since the age of six and the trials, tribulations and travails of my life during the subsequent forty-four years have taken me on a journey upon which I never wished to embark. However, it was a journey to self-acceptance. When I participated in, and led, the PSNI contingent in the Belfast Pride Festival on Saturday 5th August 2017 I felt fulfilled that I had made a stand for who I was, what I was and the fact that I have been a gay police officer for 30 years without compromising my beliefs. When many in the crowd comprehended who we were and why we were there they cheered louder; to be accepted and lauded was a wonderful experience that I will never forget.



'Dolly Mixture Country' was the local nickname for the Brownlow area of Craigavon, due to the influx of families from all over Northern Ireland. So when I formed the first women's cross-community writing group we called ourselves 'Dolly Mixtures'. Our first anthology was our 'icebreaker', it gave us a voice, and creative writing became our therapy. *Poems like Time To Pull The Weeds, A True Confession, A Last Patrol, Breakout 1983, A Son In Jail, Strip Searching;* brought home to many the pain, loss and foolishness of a war between two communities who had so much to offer life in Northern Ireland. These working class women's writings helped us to accept one another's culture and beliefs and to realise that for our children/grandchildren to have a better life it was vital for us to understand and respect each other. The process also gave some of the women, many who had left school at 15 years of age, the confidence to return to adult education.



Some of the people who came forward through the community engagement and our open calls for objects and stories just wanted their voice to be heard. We wondered how best to represent this in the exhibition and decided to create a feature of individual testimonies where people could submit a photograph and a short summary of their experience written in their own words. This feature was developed with the support of Towards Understanding and Healing in Derry/Londonderry and forms a very significant part of the exhibition. It will continue to evolve over time, but the 12 testimonies with which the exhibition opened are reproduced here.

My father, John Gibson, was shot dead by the Provisional IRA on Thursday 21st October, 1993. His crime? - He was a Company Director of Henry Brothers, a firm which carried out work on security force bases. He was the fifth member of the firm to be murdered. John was a tireless charity worker for diabetes sufferers in NI and beyond. He ran children's and youth holidays, as well as family weekends for those with diabetes, no matter class, creed, or colour. When the charity first opened an office in Northern Ireland, it was named 'John Gibson House'.



In 1987, I was 17 and a member of the Boys Brigade. On Remembrance Sunday, 8th November I attended a service at the war memorial in Enniskillen to lay a poppy wreath. Shortly after 10.30am there was a deafening bomb explosion with rubble, glass and choking dust showering us. As a thick fog descended it was as if someone had switched off the lights and then came the silence, before the cries for help. I dropped the poppy wreath and ran over to help people from the collapsed building. At the time we went to remember our dead, we didn't expect to be digging them out. Before leaving the scene I spotted the poppy wreath which I had dropped earlier. I picked it up from the rubble and carried it home. A poppy wreath that was never laid but has a story to tell of prayers of hope and healing overcoming tragedy on Remembrance Day.



Throughout the years of the Troubles, in hospital and community settings, medical staff had to face the consequences of the violence and attend to the needs of both victims and perpetrators. At the same time, there were many nurses, including myself, who had a family member killed during the Troubles. Because of the circumstances of these deaths, assumptions were often made as to the political opinions, allegiance or thinking of such nurses. Therefore we had the added stress of keeping personal information secret and the fear of being recognised or identified. In spite of the difficult circumstances, we carried out our duties with the utmost professionalism and empathy, not allowing our own grief, trauma or fears to interfere with our interaction with any patient or family member.



I was brought up in the Protestant religion but saw enough sectarianism growing up to cause me to doubt the politics that seemed to go hand in hand with that. I was passionately interested in conflict as a young man but more with the actual study of tactics than the glamorised war comics my peers read. After a short spell in the Ulster Defence Regiment I joined the Royal Ulster Constabulary in 1986. My experiences of victim recovery after the Coshquin bomb of 1990 and Omagh explosion of 1998 inspired me to get involved with peace and reconciliation work worldwide.



On the morning of 17th August 1973, nearly 45 years ago, I was shot. I was walking to work with some colleagues, one of them a reserve police man. IRA gunmen had taken over a pensioner's house the night before and held them hostage. They opened fire and I was the one that was hit. For ten days I was in intensive care. They put me on a life support machine. They didn't expect me to survive. My consultant told me when I was getting discharged, 'I couldn't take out your bullet because it was between your heart and the main artery but I left you comfortable to die. But you didn't do it!'. The bullet is still there and I am still here, still above ground.



The week before my brother Ian was shot, I was sitting beside him in the car and I kept looking at him and I had this awful bad feeling. He always called me "Jeffy" – he couldn't say Jennifer when he was little. He put his wee hand over and said 'Aw Jeffy dear don't be thinking that way.' Myself and Gordon were in bed about 2.30am and when the phone rang I knew straightaway something was wrong. When I found out Ian was dead, I went crazy, screaming, crying, that pain, that awful pain.



Every time I went to a meeting about the bombing that killed my father and Jack Rooney, it brought it all back. I wouldn't sleep for a week. I have broken a lot of bedside lampshades waking up in an awful sweat. My daddy, Hughie Watters, was a tailor and he worked up on a third floor. In my nightmare I would get to the top step and I would be trying to open the door and, as I tried, the whole building would be gone and I would be trying to catch him... That nightmare has gone on for years. Yet I wanted to keep going, for truth and for justice.



My happiest memory of Andrew is what I call the Michelin Man story - Andrew had a Michelin Man when he was a child and I remember how me and him got accidentally locked into a closet one day. I had suggested going in there 'to see the Michelin Man lighting up in the dark.' I couldn't force the door open from the inside so we just sat in there and I told him stories. That always sticks in my mind. It's memories like this of Andrew that keep me alive. It was better to have him for twenty-four years of my life than not have him at all.



My name is Henry Cochrane. I was born on 11th September 1958 in north Belfast. I am the middle child of 12 children and had a normal, happy childhood; playing in the streets and parks, as any child would do. In March 1973, myself and five friends were listening to the Top 20 on a pocket radio. At 7pm the charts were over and I put the radio back in my pocket. I heard a loud noise and at first I thought it was a car back-firing, but then a car pulled up on the footpath across the road and started to shoot at us indiscriminately. I was shot once in the side and the bullet came out my back, having went through my pocket radio. As a result I now suffer from PTSD and chronic pain. Since the shooting every day is a challenge. My life will never be the same. My pocket radio, with the bullet hole in it, still worked.



ACQUISITIONS AND LOANS

As well as collecting objects and stories from the community, we have also been able to make targeted acquisitions and secure strategic loans through the project. This has been achieved using our networks and partnerships as well as through direct purchases at auctions and private sales. Over the three years of the project we have worked hard to develop our contemporary history collection and we have focussed primarily on social and cultural history, contemporary photography and art.

As a result we have gathered a significant and wide ranging body of material that includes objects such as a torch from the 1972 Munich Olympic Games where Mary Peters won the gold medal we have on display in the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition and a Northern Ireland football shirt worn by George Best. Other items include a copy of the book *Petals of Hope* given to the Senior Coroner John Leckey in appreciation for the manner in which he conducted the inquest proceedings into the Omagh bomb and an artist's maquette for a Peace and Reconciliation billboard. Every object tells a story and there are too many to list here, however, some of the main objects and collections linked to the project are described in more detail here.

Below: Northern Ireland football shirt worn by George Best



The James Ellis Collection

Belfast-born actor and stage director, James Ellis, died in 2014 after a long and distinguished career on both stage and screen. We have been fortunate to establish a relationship with his widow, Robina Ellis, and to acquire a significant collection of material representing his career and his personal and professional achievements. This includes his Bert Lynch uniform from *Z Cars* (1978), various hats (one worn for *Dr Who*), promotional material for various productions, books and plays he wrote including poetry books and *Troubles Over the Bridge*, which tells the story of the struggle to stage Sam Thompson's controversial play *Over The Bridge* and some of his paintings and sketches. We have also acquired some of the accolades and awards he received including the Belfast Film Festival Lifetime Achievement award and an honorary doctorate from Queen's University Belfast. This is supplemented by numerous photographs and newspaper cuttings relating to his career.



Above: James Ellis in Z-cars during the episode 'The Man Who Killed Songbirds' in 1976

The collection is wide ranging and includes material relating to performance art, creative writing, television and celebrity as well as providing a personal insight into the life of this talented man. There is enormous display potential with this material, which we used to fill one display case in the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition, and we will continue to draw on it in the future.

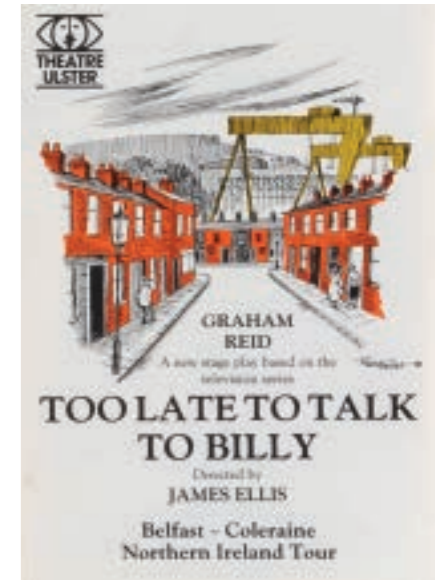
“Over the centuries and particularly throughout the worst world conflicts sport, music, writing, art and the performing arts have brought poignancy, touching light relief and more besides to so many and in this respect Ulster always punches above its weight. Here, in *The Troubles and Beyond* exhibition, along with the professionals, the ordinary people have found their own particular voice by documenting so movingly and with great honesty and truth, for a time beyond those three decades how they felt, coped and expressed themselves.

Jimmy did not live to see this exhibition, but with characteristic humility he would think it a job well done to be included once more alongside his fellow countrymen and women having their voices heard in so many honest and unbridled ways now and for posterity.”

Robina Ellis

Right: The hat worn by James Ellis in his role as Bert Lynch

Above Right: Theatre programme for a stage adaptation of 'Too Late to Talk to Billy' commissioned by The Arts Council NI and directed by James Ellis



The Northern Ireland Prison Service Collection

During the project we acquired a substantial collection of objects from the NI Prison Service including homemade tools and weapons, uniforms, prison artwork, maps and photographs, notices, contraband, objects modified to conceal contraband and body armour.

This is an important collection of material relating predominately, but not exclusively, to the Maze Prison. The Maze/Long Kesh site remains contested and politically controversial, in many ways it has become emblematic of the wider challenges we face in dealing with the legacy of the past. This collection represents the experiences of both prisoners and prison officers and encompasses a huge range of material from dress uniforms and aspects of prison routine and infrastructure to elaborate adaptations of everyday objects for concealing contraband or planning escapes. It will enable us to represent the experiences and perspectives of prison officers as well as detainees and others associated with the prison.

What was salvaged was previously held in Millisle and some of the material had been on loan to Armagh County Museum, Crumlin Road Gaol and others. It was important for us to collate the material and ensure it is preserved as it represents a significant historic record. This collection offers enormous interpretive potential for National Museums NI and further strengthens our position in consultations around dealing with the legacy of the past and the potential to extend our reach in terms of interpreting this period of our history.



Above: NI Prison Service sign from the Maze Prison
Below: Photograph from the Maze demolition series by Donovan Wylie © Donovan Wylie

Belfast/Good Friday Agreement Memorandum

One of the purchases we made through the project was a Memorandum from the Office of the Independent Chairman that was attached to a copy of the proposed final Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and signed by participants in the talks including John Hume, David Trimble, Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness and Senator George Mitchell.



Above: Ulster American Folk Park Visitors' Book, 1998
Below: Belfast/Good Friday Agreement Memorandum

The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement signed by the British and Irish governments and political parties in Northern Ireland on 10 April 1998 contained proposals for a power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland, prisoner releases, the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons, police reform and human rights initiatives. It was seen as the political accord which could finally end the Troubles and received broad public support. In a referendum in May 1998, 71.1% of people in Northern Ireland voted in favour of the Agreement and in a parallel vote in the Republic of Ireland 94.4% voted in favour. However, it involved difficult compromises on all sides, and was backed by a higher proportion of nationalists than unionists.

On 15 August 1998, the Omagh bomb planted by republicans who opposed the Agreement killed 29 people. We chose to display the memorandum, and objects relating to the referendum, alongside a visitors' book from the Ulster American Folk Park. A group of Spanish exchange students staying in Buncrana, County Donegal, had visited the Ulster American Folk Park that day before going into Omagh town centre. Many of them signed the visitors' book, including Fernando Blasco Baselga, a 12 year old boy who was killed by a small piece of shrapnel when the car bomb exploded. His leader, Rocio Abad Ramos (aged 23), and three local children travelling with the group, James Barker (aged 12), Oran Doherty (aged 8) and Sean McLaughlin (aged 12) were also among the 29 people killed.

The opening of the Troubles and Beyond exhibition was planned to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, which marked a period of reflection on what has been achieved in that time and what remains to be done.

Troubles Art (Locky Morris)

Locky Morris was born in Derry/Londonderry, where he continues to live and work in a variety of media including photography, found objects, installation, text, sound and video. Throughout his artistic career, which has spanned three decades, there has been a persistent recurring focus centred on his immediate surroundings and the impact of the Troubles on him and his community. In 2014, one of Morris's sculptures *Gap of Danger*, on loan from Wolverhampton Art Gallery, was displayed in the exhibition *Art of the Troubles* at the Ulster Museum. It was one of the most evocative sculptures in the exhibition.

None of his work had previously been acquired by a publically owned collection in Ireland which is why the acquisition of *Town, Country and People* was so important to National Museums NI. His work had been a major gap in our art collection relating to the Troubles and we had wanted to acquire a major piece of his work for many years. *Town, Country and People*, is without doubt one of his most important pieces.

Through this artwork he references the constant surveillance that was carried out by the security forces during the conflict. The cones represent the search lights of helicopters over the city. Beams of light from police and army helicopter spotlights would sweep over the landscape watching for terrorist activity.

Since being acquired for the collection this artwork has been featured as part of the *Troubles Art* exhibition at Nerve Visual, Ebrington. Featuring challenging and evocative works by artists such as Joseph McWilliams, Locky Morris, Jack Pakenham and Rita Duffy, this exhibition explored themes of conflict and violence, suffering and loss, and the meaning and power of symbols. *Troubles Art* represents the first strand of the PEACE IV-funded 'Making the Future' project, involving National Museums NI, PRONI, the Linen Hall Library, and the Nerve Centre. Over the next three years this project will also comprise exhibitions and outreach programmes on diverse topics relating to our shared past, our culture and identity and our aspirations for the future.



Bomb Disposal Robot

Prior to 1972, explosive devices could only be disarmed by hand. In 1972 Explosive Ordnance Disposal operators started to use an instrument codenamed 'Pigstick' in bomb disposal. The device shot a burst of water into the rigged explosive that caused the circuitry to malfunction.

Later that year retired Lieutenant-Colonel Peter Miller developed a bomb disposal robot that used a similar technique, but which could be operated remotely.

His design was based around the chassis of an electrically-powered wheelbarrow. From 1972 to 1978, 400 of these 'wheelbarrows' were destroyed while dealing with explosive devices. It is impossible to quantify the number of lives saved by Miller's innovation which, since its introduction to Northern Ireland, has been used around the world.



There are a number of interpretive approaches to this object, which is one of innovation and can be used to explore aspects of the conflict and attitudes to the British Army. The response from visitors and groups has varied, for some it gave them a sense of security but for others it was unsettling and an object that signalled danger to them.

We have had artistic responses to it and research interest in it. In Prof. Debbie Lisle's journal article 'Making safe: The dirty history of a bomb disposal robot' she explores the darker side of its history and 'the unruly transfers of agency between the machine and its operators as they tested and experimented in the exceptional colonial laboratory of Northern Ireland'.

Left: *Town, Country and People* © Locky Morris
Right: Bomb disposal robot

‘My dirty history of the Wheelbarrow robot ends with the cleaned-up object currently displayed in the Troubles and Beyond gallery – the object that initially sparked my unease and curiosity. What keeps me coming back is the radical contingency of this machine as an object. Like all curated objects, it signifies all over the place: its ‘thing-ness’ is unruly, excessive and troubling in ways that resist all the museological efforts to stabilize it.’



We acknowledge that every object in the exhibition is subject to multiple interpretations, and to look at any one object in isolation, out of the context of the exhibition in which it was presented, could enable our intent to be misinterpreted. Taken overall the exhibition communicates more than one perspective on the role of the British Army in Northern Ireland, and while it is not our intention to sanitise any aspect of the Troubles, we stand over the fact that this machine saved numerous lives.

As well as having the robot on display we also have one of the suits worn by Ammunition Technical Operators when approaching a device to diffuse it manually. Part of our engagement with groups, particularly school groups, has been to let them try this suit on and get a sense of what it might have been like to be in that situation, encumbered by the weight of the suit and affected by the restrictions of the heat, pressure and increasing lack of visibility and dexterity.

Left: Suit worn by Ammunition Technical Operators

The Outcasts/Greg Cowan

Part of the central feature of the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition is an outfit on loan to us from Greg Cowan from the band The Outcasts. A Belfast based punk band, The Outcasts formed in 1977 and Greg Cowan was one of the original band members, within the first month he had replaced Blair Hamilton as lead vocalist. Between 1979 and 2011 The Outcasts released three albums and nine singles or EPs. The band had split in 1984, but reformed in 2010.

Also featured in the exhibition are a concert poster and ticket for an event at the Ulster Hall which featured Ruefrefx, Rudi, Big Self, The Outcasts and the Moondogs and a ticket from a Stiff Little Fingers reunion concert. The punk rock band Stiff Little Fingers formed in 1977 and many of their tracks were inspired by the Troubles, with the songs reflecting themes of teenage boredom and sectarian violence.

It was important to us to include Belfast’s punk scene, a vibrant manifestation of a broader UK subculture, it constructed an alternative space that frequently challenged local sectarian identities.

However, as with any aspect of cultural identity, how do we represent the nuances and different perspectives even within punk? At the Museums Association conference in Belfast in November 2018 we took part in a panel discussion with Damien McNally from WAVE Trauma Centre and Brian Young formerly of the band Rudi. Brian was critical of the current nostalgia for punk and bands like Stiff Little Fingers and The Undertones and emphasised the importance it had at an individual level, over and above the music itself.



Speaking about the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition he said he would like “to see less concentration on the bands and music - as frankly that was often the most boring aspect of punk - and to see more fanzines and printed material alongside contemporary photographs and accounts of the impact punk had on individual people’s lives”. This is a fair criticism and something we can explore in more detail through temporary displays and programming, however Brian and I agree that the importance of having punk culture represented in the exhibition is to remind people that there is always an alternative.

“Ironically, if one place on earth was primed and ready for punk it was Belfast...! And when punk finally reached here it hit harder – and lasted longer – than anywhere else... punk was a positive force here, bringing people together, making a real difference to individual lives and perceptions and providing the opportunity and impetus to look at things in a new light - if you wanted to!”

Brian Young

Left: Concert poster

Right: Outfit worn by Greg Cowan from the Outcasts



EXHIBITIONS



AFTER TWO YEARS OF RESEARCH, CONSULTATION, PLANNING AND COLLECTING THE TROUBLES AND BEYOND EXHIBITION OPENED TO THE PUBLIC ON FRIDAY 30 MARCH 2018. THE GALLERY EXPLORES POLITICS AND CONFLICT AND THE IMPACT OF BOTH ON EVERYDAY LIFE, PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES. IT POWERFULLY EXAMINES OUR RECENT PAST THROUGH A REMARKABLE RANGE OF OBJECTS REFLECTING DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES.

THE TROUBLES AND BEYOND

Defining the Structure

Together with our Academic Advisory Group we spent time considering what the concept for the new Troubles gallery should be - should it be arranged by theme, as the previous exhibition was, or would a new chronological structure be better? Should it be presented as a 'Troubles' exhibition or simply an extension of our *Modern History* gallery with a wider frame of reference around the history of Northern Ireland?

The consensus of opinion was that the gallery should present a critical interpretation that links intersecting narratives, that as well as examining the conflict it should incorporate social, cultural, economic and international themes and that it should be structured chronologically. Evaluation of the *Modern History* gallery has shown that visitors prefer a clear chronological structure in order to situate themselves within the narrative and that this is further supported by reference to other key international events.

Below: *The Troubles and Beyond*



It was decided that the chronology of the gallery should be expansive and presented in decades and that each decade should incorporate the following themes:

- Political developments (to include negotiations and agreements, the growth and decline of parties, key elections and peace movements).
- Conflict (to include securitisation, collusion, internment, paramilitaries, bombings, surveillance, prisons).
- Life during the Troubles (to provide social, cultural and economic context as well as reference to employment, education and the impact of the Troubles on everyday life).

Other important principles were to include an ethos of pluralism that acknowledges different perspectives and that consideration should be given to the nature of the conflict, its causes and its legacy both locally and internationally. Our intention was that the gallery should be presented as a platform and should invite contribution from the public. It should use personal stories to promote empathy and there should be areas of development displaying recent acquisitions and providing mechanisms for engagement with the exhibition and the provision of feedback.

Taking these principles on board, Redman Design proposed a circular arrangement of decadal structures clockwise around a central feature, with an introduction to consider the nature and legacy of the conflict and a response wall running along one side of the gallery which would address those wider aims of engagement and feedback. The result forms the structure of the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition which goes beyond the Troubles both in the inclusion of broader social themes and in going beyond 1998 to the present day, giving consideration to post-conflict Northern Ireland and legacy issues.

Gallery Text and Audio Visual Presentations

The introduction to the gallery sets out that this is both difficult and contested history and explicitly states that ‘while we have a shared past, we do not have a shared memory’. This makes it clear from the point of entry that multiple perspectives will be encountered within this exhibition and that no attempt has been made to achieve any form of consensus or to present an agreed narrative of the Troubles. The text is accompanied by an audio introduction which reiterates the contested nature of the conflict, which over time has been interpreted as an anti-colonial independence struggle, an ethno-political conflict, and a terrorist campaign against democracy. It outlines how the conflict was shaped by preceding deep-rooted divisions and acknowledges its destabilising legacy.

Opposite the introduction is a video of a short drama written by Laurence McKeown and produced by Kabosh.

It centres on a young woman and an older man from different community backgrounds who meet at the entrance to the exhibition and strike up a conversation. The young woman, a student, is interested in the period and has visited the exhibition before, while the older man has a direct experience of being on a bus which was attacked during the Troubles and has not yet seen the exhibition. They visit it together and the footage shows them exploring the content and discussing whether he should donate the bus ticket he keeps in his wallet from that fateful journey. The idea was to show that we all bring our own history and perspective to the exhibition and while those may differ there are important opportunities to share our experiences and learn from each other. In the end he decides to hold on to the bus ticket, indicative of the personal journey that all those affected by the Troubles are on and the importance of respecting that process.

Each of the decade structures within the exhibition has two sets of text, one at either end. The first sets out the wider social, economic and political history of the decade. The second entitled ‘Years of Darkness’, or in the case of the 2000s ‘Legacy of Darkness’, is where we deal more directly with issues relating to the Troubles such as ongoing inquiries, allegations of collusion or specific events that took place. These are important to reference and in many cases may not be represented elsewhere in the material culture of the exhibition.

Left: Filming the drama for *Troubles and Beyond* with Director Paula McFetridge and actors Hayley McQuillan and Lalor Roddy. © Monica McNally



Above: A chronological structure

Each of the decade structures also includes a timeline referencing international events and a slideshow of photographs from the time. These give context to the decade and illustrate what it was like on the ground, from the informal barricades of the early 1970s to the more formal securitisation, check points and peace walls that formed part of the fabric of Belfast and beyond. The photographs also give a valuable social context and tell a story of deindustrialisation, housing redevelopment, cultural expression and everyday life in Northern Ireland.

Included alongside each of the main texts is a new interpretive device called ‘Stop and Think’. This was designed to deliberately punctuate the narrative with short points of reference or statistics that would challenge visitors’ thinking. For example, in December 1971 the British Home Secretary, Reginald Maudling, discussing the situation in



Above: Hanna Street, North Belfast, 1986 © Martin Nangle

Northern Ireland referred to “an acceptable level of violence” (McVeigh, 2015). However, during that year 180 people lost their lives (McKittrick *et al.*, 2007). Our intention throughout is to encourage visitors to be critical in their understanding of history. Rather than have any overall text relating to the full content of each display case, objects are individually captioned in this exhibition. The only cases that vary from that model are those relating to the security forces, republican paramilitaries and loyalist paramilitaries, each of these has an additional piece of text setting out how many members were killed, how many the organisations were responsible for killing and the number of civilians that were killed. It was important that as well as setting out objects relating to those organisations, their aims and ideologies, that we also communicated the impact and harm caused by and to those involved. The civilian death toll, which far outnumbered the rest, was reiterated for each group.



Above: Representing paramilitarism

Below: The Central Feature



The Central Feature

The group of objects drawn together at the centre of the exhibition are illustrative of a number of important aspects of our approach. The centrepiece is a bomb disposal robot used by the British Army in response to the security situation, and this is displayed alongside a metal bin lid that residents in nationalist communities would have rattled on the ground to warn of soldiers entering the area. This demonstrates how two objects with intersecting narratives can be displayed side by side to encourage consideration of different perspectives. There is a bronze sculpture from F.E. McWilliam's 'Women of Belfast' series which represents both the inclusion of artistic responses to the conflict and a visual depiction of the impact of the violence on human life. This series of sculptures was created in response to the Provisional IRA bombing of the Abercorn Restaurant in the centre of Belfast on 4 March 1972 in which two women were killed. The *Spitting Image* puppet of Peter Mandelson from the satirical television series is another example of a creative response, in this case using caricature and humour to challenge the political arena. In this context the bomb disposal robot can also be viewed as an object of creative innovation, a process made more urgent by the increasing threat to personal safety. The final object displayed here is a map of Belfast that was issued to the security forces in 1969 and is colour coded to distinguish Protestant, Roman Catholic and mixed areas of the community. This is an example of how at an early stage a rudimentary classification of people and place was passed on to those trying to understand and respond to the situation in Northern Ireland. In an inverse way it actually demonstrates that the conflict is more layered and complex than the visitor may think and warns against trying to understand it in simplistic terms.

Troubles Art

The Ulster Museum has the largest collection of art works that relate to the Troubles. Throughout the 30-year period and up until today artists from Northern Ireland and beyond have responded to the conflict through their artistic practice. Some of the earliest responses to the Troubles related specifically to deaths as a result of particular shootings or bombings. Later work reflected on the wider political and social situation and the causes and effects of the conflict. Themes have emerged which resonate through the subsequent decades – the physicality of violence, suffering and loss, dereliction and abandonment, the meaning and power of flags and symbols. The imagery used by artists often makes an obvious and direct connection to these themes. It can also be more subtle in conveying a deep sense of emotion and trauma. However, with the dominant narrative of violence becoming more distant, artists seem more occupied with the ensuing social, economic, cultural and political changes and challenges.

Below: *Peace Talks* by Jack Pakenham, 1992 © Jack Pakenham

As Northern Ireland faces these issues, art will continue to offer unique avenues for exploring and reflecting upon the manifestations and impact of violence and of division in our society.

The audience response to the *Art of the Troubles* exhibition in 2014 and the incredibly emotive *Silent Testimony* exhibition in 2015 made it clear to us that the Museum had a role to play in interpreting this period through both its Art and History collections. Both have different strengths and can be used in different ways to communicate what is a complex and difficult narrative. It was decided that the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition should have a section specifically dedicated to the art of the Troubles and that objects from the Art collection should be integrated throughout the exhibition. Senior Curator of Art, Kim Mawhinney, selected *Peace Talks* by Jack Pakenham to represent the Art of the Troubles when the exhibition opened in 2018. Painted at a time when Northern Ireland was inching towards some resolution to the Troubles, *Peace Talks* contains many of the elements which define Pakenham's work. Distorted and grotesque forms reflect his own anger at the damage to both communities in Northern Ireland. He wanted, through his work, to shock 'people who had become almost apathetic, anaesthetised over the years by horror'.

On the opposite wall from the art of the Troubles is a case set aside for textile art. Here we have used our partnership with Conflict Textiles to display quilts and arpilleras made by local women in response to the Troubles. In her peace quilt *Common Loss*, Irene MacWilliam expresses the sheer loss of life with each piece of red fabric, deliberately torn to convey a sense of destruction, representing one of those who died.

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Other smaller works produced through community workshops refer to bombings in the North Antrim area, disruption to journeys home, mixed marriage and the desire to maintain peace and avoid a return to violence. Most recently this case has been used to display a quilt made by twenty five of the pre-1982 Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross widows from the Forgotten Families Group in remembrance of those officers who were murdered, injured or served during the period of the Troubles.



Above: British Watchtowers: Romeo 12. Camlough. South Armagh © Donovan Wylie

Left: The display of the Forgotten Families quilt of remembrance

Other artworks featured in the exhibition include two large murals commissioned from mural artists Danny Devenney and David Craig in 2000. These paintings, displayed side by side, depict Cú Chulainn according to two traditions, one as a republican martyr and the other as ancient defender of Ulster. Although artistic works, these form part of the History collection and it is interesting to note where those lines cross over. Most of the contemporary photographic collections fall within History with notable exceptions such as those by Paul Seawright and Donovan Wylie. One of the prints from Donovan Wylie's British Watchtowers series is on display in the exhibition showing the elevated position of watchtower 'Romeo 12' on a hilltop in Camlough, South Armagh and its dominance of the landscape. Beginning in 2005, Donovan Wylie spent over a year photographing the British Army watchtowers in South Armagh from a military helicopter, exploring the concept of military observation as a means of control. Once a common feature in border areas, the watchtowers were dismantled and removed by 2007. Next to the print is a painting entitled *A New Dawn* by Mark Ervine, son of the late Progressive Unionist Party leader David Ervine. He based this painting on his mural *A New Dawn* on the Newtownards Road in Belfast in connection with Progressive Unionist Party Leader Dawn Purvis' election campaign.

The Response Wall

The response wall is a key component of the exhibition and performs a number of functions. Principally it relates to the wider Collecting the Troubles and Beyond project and in that sense it both establishes the framework for the exhibition and extends its reach beyond the gallery. The initial text explains that this gallery is a platform for conversation and debate and acknowledges the sensitivities involved, signposting sources of support for those directly affected by the Troubles. There is an open call for people to identify anything they think is missing from the exhibition and to come forward with their own objects and stories. The next section includes 12 personal testimonies collected as part of the project in a dedicated feature composed of rotatable frames that incorporate a photograph on one side and a short account of the person's experiences, written in their own words, on the other.

Below: The response wall



Above: Personal testimonies

It is so important to have these individual voices within the space and this feature has been very impactful both for visitors and for those who contributed their testimonies. This is followed by a space dedicated to the provision of feedback on the exhibition. Paper forms are provided for visitors to record their comments and these are then collated, typed up, and displayed on the screen above. Both positive and negative comments are shared, we do not engage in censorship, our only rule being that we do not share anything offensive or sectarian. The opportunity to be able to read what previous visitors have written and write your own response encourages dialogue and keeps the space dynamic, our aim has always been to facilitate an open conversation. Here our visitors communicate both with us and with each other. The response wall ends with a display case for recent acquisitions. This emphasises the value we place on contemporary collecting and enables us to showcase new material quickly and effectively. The whole gallery is designed to be a dynamic space and this is just one example of how we can feed in new content and show our audience what we are collecting and why it is so important. When the exhibition opened this case was used to show part of a much larger collection of material relating to the Belfast-born actor James Ellis that we acquired from his family. So much has been collected through the project that it cannot all be displayed in the exhibition. We build programming around our collections, provide access to them for research and publications but one important way we can mobilise our wider collections is through a series of temporary and touring exhibitions.

TEMPORARY AND TOURING EXHIBITIONS

Street Life; Works by Belfast Photographer Martin Nangle 1973-1989

The first of the temporary and touring exhibitions linked to the Collecting the Troubles and Beyond project, *Street Life* marked the beginning of a body of work on the new contemporary photographic collections we have been able to acquire through the project. In this case a collection of c.220 original and copy digital photographic prints by the Belfast photographer Martin Nangle, plus a camera bag and camera equipment, related to his career as a photojournalist in Belfast in the 1970s and 1980s.

Martin Nangle is an internationally-recognised professional photographer who studied photography at Belfast College of Art in the early 1970s, and worked in the city as a photographer from 1975. He initially worked as a photographer at the Royal Victoria Hospital before joining Pacemaker Press International, Ireland's main photographic agency, as a photojournalist in 1977. He has a particular interest in the relationship between place, culture and identity and how this can be recorded and explored visually. He is currently working on 'Divided Cites', a major pan-European photographic project exploring place, culture and identity in the torn landscapes of Belfast, Berlin, Nicosia and Jerusalem, which his early photography crucially informs.



Above: View of an explosion on the Falls Road in 1976, taken from the Royal Victoria Hospital © Martin Nangle

From the outset the *Street Life* exhibition was intended to be shown in the Falls and Shankill Road areas and the photographs were selected to reflect the local area. A total of 30 images were selected which firmly place the conflict in Belfast within its social, economic, spatial and cultural contexts, as well as providing a direct and moving representation of the impact and aftermath of those troubled times on the city's residents. The exhibition opened in Falls Road Library in September 2016 before moving to Shankill Road Library and finally the Linen Hall Library. At each venue community engagement events were held, as well as a final reminiscence workshop where we were able to capture people's memories of the time.

Gay Life and Liberation; A Photographic Record from 1970s Belfast

Together with Douglas Sobey and Rachel Wallace we co-curated the Gay Life and Liberation exhibition, which was testimony to the resilience of the LGBT+ community and to the strong level of mutual support during the early 1970s amid campaigns for the legal rights of thousands of gay men and women in the province. The photographs featured in the exhibition were taken by Doug Sobey, who was a founding member of Cara-Friend, and the text included excerpts from oral history interviews that Ph.D. candidate Rachel Wallace from Queen's University Belfast was undertaking as part of her research.

The decriminalisation of homosexual acts between men in Great Britain in 1967 was not extended to Northern Ireland because of opposition from Stormont. This opposition reflected the attitude of the majority of the population, both Catholic and Protestant.

Above: Jeff Dudgeon and Doug Sobey in 1976. Jeff and Doug were leading members of GLS, NIGRA and Cara-Friend. Photograph by Doug Sobey

Below: The launch of the *Gay Life and Liberation* exhibition



Even with the escalation of violence connected to the Troubles and the introduction of direct rule from Westminster in 1972, the laws regarding homosexuality remained unchanged. Homosexuality was not decriminalised in Northern Ireland until 1982 and only as a result of the campaigning of some of the gay men shown in the photographs of this exhibition.

Despite the illegality of homosexual acts between men in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s, a fledgling gay liberation movement emerged in Belfast. The exhibition presented a record of the campaigning and social activities of the members of the four main gay organisations in Northern Ireland in the 1970s – the Gay Liberation Society, Cara-Friend, the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association and the Gay Christian Fellowship. These organisations were instrumental in creating a gay identity and fostering a gay community largely free of sectarian division.

Our first dedicated LGBT+ exhibition, this was an important milestone in our representation of LGBT+ history and the Rainbow Project went on to borrow a selection of the framed photographs for display at the launch of LGBT Awareness week.

Self Portrait Belfast

In 1979 three photographers, Derek Bishton, Brian Homer and John Reardon, set up a makeshift photography studio in Handsworth, an ethnically diverse district of Birmingham. In contrast to the classic documentary tradition, the photographers aimed to enable people to form a representation of themselves. A cable-release was attached to their camera, giving each participant control over how and when they took their photograph, and a plain white backdrop was used so that the focus was on the subjects rather than their environment.

More than three decades later in autumn 2016, in the context of longstanding debates around community cohesion, changing demographics and an EU referendum in which the issue of immigration took centre stage, Homer and the photographer Timm Sonnenschein recreated this project in Belfast at two widely-used locations: CastleCourt shopping centre and the Ulster Museum. Like the original project

in Birmingham, the resulting images challenge negative stereotypes by showcasing the rich diversity of the people who make Belfast what it is today.

Together with the photographers we curated an exhibition based on the Belfast Self Portrait project at the Ulster Museum. This included a selection of framed photographs but also large graphics panels featuring all those who took part and recorded their image. The participants were also invited to the exhibition launch, which was a great opportunity for them to see their photographs on the walls of the Museum and it was also fun to recognise people from their portraits.

This principle of direct involvement and participation is key to the Collecting the Troubles and Beyond project. The Self Portrait project is one of many ways individuals can contribute and see the value of their contribution in a wider context as part of our community, and our audience. In a very visual way we were able to capture a snapshot of both.

Below: Examples of the self portraits taken in Belfast



Above: *Conflicting Images*

Conflicting Images; Photography during the Northern Irish Troubles

Drawing on a number of our contemporary photographic collections, this exhibition looked at the role photography played during the Troubles, and how photography itself changed and developed during these years of conflict. It featured over 140 images including important original works by local photographers Martin Nangle, Bill Kerr, and Frankie Quinn. The exhibition also included two studio prints by Gilles Peress, a major international force in the history of the photography of conflict.

In the late 1960s, simmering social and sectarian tensions erupted into street conflict in Northern Ireland. International photojournalism, its style honed in the Vietnam War, flew in to witness and report. This overview was quickly challenged by a wave of young, local, press and freelance photographers,



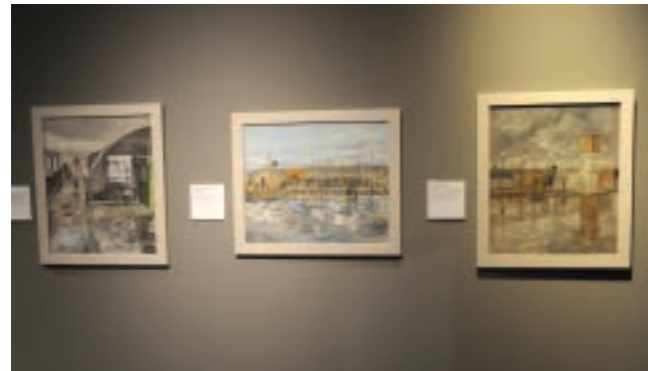
driven to bring local perspective, experience and context to the wider picture. At the same time, photography was used, as ever, to capture a more personalised record of time, event and place. It also continued to be employed to inform broader local agendas in areas such as planning and marketing.

The photographs featured in the exhibition provide a direct visual reference to significant moments and milestones during The Troubles as well as an evocative reminder of what everyday life in Northern Ireland looked like for many people during these turbulent times. The Curator of the exhibition, Dr Vivienne Pollock, described her rationale as follows; "This exhibition is not intended to be a chronological catalogue of major events during 'The Troubles'. It is rather a reflection of the many ways in which this painful period of Northern Ireland's history was viewed by professional and amateur photographers, and how these visions combine to offer new and often profound insights into how the realities of life during these years were captured on camera".

**Figures Through the Wire;
Artwork by Geordie Morrow**

Consisting of paintings and drawings by the artist Geordie Morrow, this exhibition represented the lived experiences of one man and the observations he chose to record during his time in the Maze Prison in the 1970s. Geordie Morrow was born in North Belfast in 1951, left school at 16 and, interested in pursuing an artistic career, began training as a sign writer. In 1974 he was a member of the Ulster Volunteer Force and was convicted for armed robbery.

Morrow served a three year sentence in the Maze Prison, where he sketched and painted on an almost daily basis. This body of artwork provides a unique visual record of life in prison at that time, reflecting the daily routine of prisoners and warders on their rounds. The scenes and experiences he chose to record give us an insight into the structure of life in the compounds and the different ways in which prisoners adapted to their situation.



Above: Geordie Morrow at the launch of the *Figures Through the Wire* exhibition

Below: *Figures Through the Wire*

During the mid-1970s, when Morrow was serving his sentence, the site was in transition from the compounds of Nissen Huts where he was held to the eight characteristic H-Block structures built within the site. The relocation of prisoners and loss of Special Category Status in 1976 meant that the H-blocks became associated with the campaign for detainees to again be treated as political prisoners. The Maze/Long Kesh site remains contested and politically controversial. In many ways it has become emblematic of the wider challenges we face in dealing with the legacy of the past.

Although the artwork featured in the exhibition was by a loyalist prisoner, the inside view of the prison was one that all former detainees and staff could identify with and recall. One visitor to the exhibition was a republican ex-prisoner who had been in the next compound to Geordie Morrow and we arranged for them to meet and share their experiences. It was fascinating to hear how much they had in common and how they now reflected on that time in their lives.

**Temporary/Permanent; Photographs of
Belfast's Peacelines by Frankie Quinn**

This exhibition was designed to mark the 50th anniversary of the erection of the first Belfast peace wall and was based on photographs taken by Frankie Quinn over a period of 25 years. From the outset he admitted "the context to the work is unique in that I live yards from one of the most prominent structures, they impact my life on a daily basis".

Frankie Quinn is an internationally-known, freelance professional photographer from Belfast, who has documented conflict and its social context in Ireland, Palestine/Israel, Turkey/Kurdistan and Bosnia since the 1980s. His work has been widely published and exhibited around the world. He is currently Director of the Belfast Archive Project, based at Conway Mill.

Below: Alliance Avenue - Glenbryn, North Belfast © Frankie Quinn

Right: Alexandra Park, N. Belfast © Frankie Quinn, www.frankiequinn.com



Believing the peacelines may be removed as the peace process began, Frankie Quinn published his first series of photographs on 31 September 1994, the day the first IRA ceasefire started. The photographs in Series II were taken in 2002, by which time the mood had changed, peacelines were refurbished all over the city and territories were again being marked out.

In response to the NI Executive initiative to dismantle the walls by 2023, Frankie began Series III in 2012. The initiative had created dialogue among concerned interface groups, examining ways to create the conditions whereby the walls could eventually come down, but political stalemate has meant that few walls have actually been removed.

In 2019, Frankie's work to document the Belfast peacelines continued with his fourth study. It was then 50 years since the first walls were erected as a 'temporary measure'. His colour photographs reveal the detail and construction materials used that have, over time, created their own aesthetic. Plant colonisation and natural decay can be seen to be gradually removing the walls from sight as they are subsumed into the landscape.



RESPONSES



THE RESPONSE TO THE TROUBLES AND BEYOND EXHIBITION HAS BEEN OVERWHELMINGLY POSITIVE AND THE GENERAL CONSENSUS OF OPINION SEEMS TO BE THAT THE EXHIBITION REPRESENTS AN IMPORTANT STEP FORWARD BY NATIONAL MUSEUMS NI, BUT THAT THERE IS MORE WORK STILL TO BE DONE – A SENTIMENT THAT WE WHOLEHEARTEDLY ACKNOWLEDGE AND SUPPORT.



Above: Lower Shankill Arts and Crafts. Children making posters for the Greater Shankill Peace Rally © Philip Woods

The response from visitors has been encouraging and the importance of objects is apparent in the feedback, as is the value of personal testimony and the impact of the more poignant aspects of the exhibition.

One individual said: “I experienced a mixture of emotion – sadness at all this community has gone through, relief that we are past the worst, but disappointment at our faltering peace process”. This chapter explores our visitor feedback in more detail as well as summarising the reviews of the exhibition that have been published to date and wider academic and public interest in the gallery.

PRESS AND PEER REVIEWS

Journalist Fionola Meredith, who was one of the main critics of the 2009 exhibition, described the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition as a ‘brave move’ and a ‘vast improvement’ on what went before (Meredith, 2018). In her 2009 article she had criticised the Ulster Museum for what was an exhibition of ‘dense factual text with black and white photographs documenting the conflict’ and pointed out that the Museum did have significant contemporary collections that it could have drawn on. She cited particular examples, including Mairead Corrigan’s Nobel peace prize medal and a 1974 IRA roll of honour, which had been on display in the Museum as part of the *Conflict: the Irish at War* exhibition in 2003. It seemed to her that we had taken a step back from the courage shown then and she posed the question ‘is it simply too soon for a full-scale Troubles exhibition?’ and perhaps at that time it was, certainly in terms of curatorial capacity and the potential for the collection to be used to represent such a complex period of our history. This has been a process and even as we launched the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition discussion emerged in the media over how the interpretation of this period could be taken further and whether or not there should be a museum of the Troubles.

Whatever your opinion on such a proposed venue, it is in the absence of such a museum that Meredith believes the Ulster Museum, ‘our primary institution for engaging with the past, has a particularly important role to play’. Acknowledging that addressing our violent past is difficult and painful, but necessary, Meredith went on to state that the Museum has a special duty to provide a space for visitors to ‘reflect on the complicated, cataclysmic events that happened here and how those experiences have shaped us’.



Left: Hijacked lorries burning in West Belfast
© Pacemaker Press: Stephen Bradley

There have been two reviews of the exhibition in the *Museums Journal* published by the Museums Association, one in May 2017 while the exhibition was still in development and one in November 2018 after it had opened. The first stated that a ‘major rethink’ of our approach to a troubled past was ‘paying off’. Author, Patrick Kelly, believed that ‘having a dedicated member of staff has been critical to the success of the project’ to conduct outreach, listen to the different perspectives and gather objects and stories. He emphasised the inclusion of a deeper social context to the Troubles and our efforts to create a framework for multiple perspectives to come together rather than be authoritative.



The second article, by Darragh Gannon, described the exhibition as ‘expertly designed and sensitively curated’ and said that it ‘brings people together on an evocative, emotional journey through the Museum and the Troubles’. It is interesting that he references the journey through the Museum itself, which is why we believe the Ulster Museum has more to offer than a dedicated museum of the Troubles, in that it provides the long view, the historical context of the conflict. Gannon comments on the ‘uncertain narrative conclusion’ in the fact that the exhibition is up to date with current issues around legacy, flags, language and identity and even Brexit. He states that the exhibition ‘reminds visitors that the future of the past is open to interpretation’ and describes it as a ‘display of great diversity and reciprocity’. In the same way Patrick Kelly did, he also refers to the importance of the wider social context and describes how ‘the balance between the Troubles and their times is carefully curated throughout’ and ‘the destructive effects of political violence are interposed with displays of everyday cultural life’. He finishes by describing an ‘immersive experience’ in what is a ‘participatory space’ where ‘engagement is effected by silent dialogue between exhibit and visitor’ enabling ‘a personal conversation between past and present’. This is very much aligned to what we were trying to achieve and it is reassuring to know that our efforts to encourage dialogue and to create a dynamic space for meaningful engagement are now manifest in the exhibition.

Left: Engaging with the exhibition

ACADEMIC AND PUBLIC INTEREST

The Northern Ireland Museums Policy (2011) states that museums have an important role in a shared and better future for Northern Ireland as they can “help us understand our diversity and our interdependencies”. Our work is guided by the Northern Ireland Executive’s Programme for Government which has an outcomes-based approach and is designed to deliver improved wellbeing. The Northern Ireland Executive has also published a strategy entitled ‘Together: Building a United Community’ which has identified five areas, known as ‘Urban Villages’, to be the focus of community development and it will be important to target museum outreach towards these areas.

As National Museums NI, we have a responsibility to show leadership in this area. A new vision, mission statement and set of values have been defined through engaging staff, with the aim to ‘celebrate who we are: telling the stories of our past, challenging our present and shaping our future’. With this remit curators can pose questions and challenge ideas, enabling visitors to be more critical in their analysis and to communicate their views to the Museum and each other. The role of museums is changing, and we are committed to being courageous and playing a much more proactive and forward-looking role in shaping our future and working much more directly with our audience and local communities.



Right: *First Choice* a community-curated exhibition developed in partnership with Libraries NI and the Urban Villages Initiative

There is considerable interest at the moment in how we deal with the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland. We recently submitted a response to the public consultation on dealing with the legacy of the past by the Secretary of State and put forward the need to look more holistically at the social peace process and reframe the proposed legacy institutions with greater context, structure and critical direction. We argued that much could be achieved by presenting multiple perspectives in context and beginning to build understanding around their integrative complexity. This project enables us to stand behind that and go further to examine contested history through critical narrative and interpretation and engage people directly at a community level. Museums have such an important role in the context of a post-conflict society. Our understanding of this is evolving and I am continually learning and refining my approach in response.

We have established a strong academic and community support network which is important in providing a framework for engagement and interpretation in this area and our aim is to use the opportunity to develop and extend those relationships and greatly enhance our community consultation in relation to dealing with the legacy of the past. There is a renewed emphasis on research at National Museums NI with a dedicated member of staff recently employed to co-ordinate our research strategy and develop collaborative agreements with local universities. We have worked with individual members of our Academic Advisory Group on the evaluation of feedback for the gallery and our interpretive approach and supported a number of side projects looking in particular at 1968-69 and the start of the Troubles.

Numerous academics and students have got in touch to request guided tours of the galleries or seeking to interview curators and those involved as part of their research. To date we have been interviewed by researchers from across the UK, Switzerland, Denmark, the Netherlands and the USA and hosted visitors from Europe, South America and Japan.

One of the research agreements we have is with the University of Barcelona and we are embarking on a collaborative project with them to publish an educational tourist guidebook in Spanish and Catalan about the interpretation of Troubles memory and heritage in the cityscape of Belfast. A second proposed outcome is to develop an interactive digital storytelling project inspired by the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition. We are also in discussion with academics from Nottingham Trent University, the University of Stirling, Bath University and the French National Office for Veterans and Victims of War on putting together a collaborative project based around agonism. The concept of agonism is to allow different and contrasting voices to enter into a dialogue without the imposition of an overarching consensual narrative. Focussing on the four sites of Northern Ireland, Algeria, Lebanon and Columbia, this project will use oral history and educational tools to break down dominant, reductive and divisive narratives on the past, and focus on the presentation of open-ended, inclusive and balanced treatments of difficult memories with the objective of increased empathy and understanding.

These projects form part of an important next phase of the project, to extend our research into a deeper consideration of international case studies and to position National Museums NI to actively contribute to international debate on the subject using relevant comparisons. In consultation with museums in Guernica and Sarajevo, for example, we can re-examine our interpretation of contested history leading to the exchanging of knowledge and experience to the mutual benefit of all. The Ulster Museum recently joined the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, a worldwide network dedicated to remembering past struggles and addressing their contemporary legacies. There are significant opportunities in developing partnerships within such an international network and drawing specific comparisons with other areas of difficult or contested history, for example through the Balkan Museum Network or museums in Germany or Japan.



PROUD MEMBER OF THE
International Coalition of
SITES of CONSCIENCE

There has been a lot of interest from other museum professionals including the Imperial War Museum in how we have approached the subject of the Troubles to date. There was a lot of discussion and interest in our work at the recent Museums Association Conference and other subject specific conferences on difficult history through the International Council of Museums, the Irish Museums Association and the International Network of Museums for Peace. Our work in this area has also been included in an online training course entitled 'Working Ethically' offered by the Museums Association as part of their 'Museum Essentials' online learning programme. In December 2018, Radio 4 featured a documentary by Peter Curran on our approach to interpreting the Troubles and the development of the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition. He sought to examine how a cultural institution, a national museum of Northern Ireland, tells the story of the Troubles comprehensively through art and objects and went behind the scenes to talk to curators, artists and directors. This prominent broadcast demonstrates the national importance this line of work has within the sector and beyond as well as the public interest in our approach and achievements.

Right: Anne Devlin (left) and Judith Jennings
at the launch of the *Voices of 68* exhibition



VISITOR FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION

The most important, interesting and valuable feedback that we receive comes directly from our visitors. Throughout the project we have encouraged people to comment on our events and exhibitions and as previously described there is a dedicated space within the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition for the provision and publication of feedback. Since the exhibition opened in March 2018 we have collected over 600 feedback forms from our visitors and we continue to collect, type up and make public their comments. We are currently working with Professor Brandon Hamber and Dr Kris Brown from Ulster University to analyse the results which will enable us to gain greater insights into our visitors' profiles, their responses to the exhibition and steps we can take to further develop our interpretive approach.

Through the feedback forms we collect information on the visitor's age, where they are from and how often they visit the Museum. We then ask what had the most impact on them in the exhibition and why, whether they had visited the previous *Troubles* exhibition and how this compares, how the gallery makes them feel, what they think is missing from the gallery and what else they would like to see on display and whether they have a story they would like to share. In terms of age profiles the responses show that the exhibition appeals to younger visitors with 45% of respondents aged under 24, while visitors over 60 years old were least represented. The majority of visitors (56%) were from outside Northern Ireland and visiting the Ulster Museum for the first time (58%), in contrast to some of our other prominent exhibitions such as *Leonardo da Vinci: A Life in Drawing* and *Dippy on Tour* which attracted a predominantly local audience.

When asked what had the most impact on them within the exhibition, 61% of visitors cited specific objects or sections in the gallery. The most frequently mentioned (25%) was our presentation of 12 personal testimonies within the exhibition, which visitors are finding particularly impactful.

"The personal stories included in their own words helped me humanise the conflict and understand its impact on everyday life."

"... it brought home to us the personal and family tragedies that the Troubles generated."

"... the impact beyond historical and political facts and statistics."

"...the suffering of ordinary people on both sides of the debate, most of whom wanted to live in peace."

"...it is so important to share these stories. Their courage and generosity is obvious."

The slideshows of photographs relating to each decade were cited by 18% of respondents as having had the most impact on them. Many visitors find the images familiar, associating them with what they would have seen on the news, while for others the photographs help them to visualise the reality of the *Troubles* and everyday life during that time. We often find that photographs bring back memories for people and in some cases visitors have recognised themselves or others in photographs we have displayed.



Left: A group visit to see the Conflict Textiles display including *Peace Quilt – Common Loss* by Irene MacWilliam (left to right: Valerie Wilson, Karen Nickell, Roberta Bacic, Sonia Copeland, Irene MacWilliam)

The objects that individuals select as having had the most impact on them, and their reasons for selecting them vary and are often very personal. We believe the visitor completes the interpretation and it is interesting for me as a curator to learn what has had an impact and why, it isn't always the objects we would expect – one person selected the Six Nations rugby shirt because it represents both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, while another wrote 'LGBT artefacts and references - I am gay and it is good to see diversity represented'. No more than 8% of respondents came together in selecting any one object, which is actually testament to the range and importance of the overall exhibition. Among the most commonly selected were the bomb disposal unit, improvised explosive devices and bullets as these made the conflict seem more real to people and in the case of the robot, they remembered seeing it in use. Throughout the *Troubles* there were reports of pipe bombs and car bombs being used, and plastic and rubber bullets being fired, but for many this was the first time they had seen those objects first hand. The same number mentioned objects inspired by the conflict, and in particular *Peace Quilt – Common Loss* by Irene MacWilliam and *Peace Talks* by Jack Pakenham.

Below: Six Nations rugby shirt worn by Paddy Wallace



"The red cloth tapestry has a beautifully tragic way of weaving together every death and I believe it sends a powerful message that everyone who died, died in this same struggle regardless of position."

A further 8% of respondents mentioned posters, maps and newspaper clippings including the 'Our Murdered Colleagues' poster which commemorates the Royal Ulster Constabulary officers killed during the conflict (1969-2001). One visitor commented that the map showing the security restrictions in force in the city centre showed the degree of violence and fear while another was interested in how the conflict was portrayed in the media and in poster design. There are a number of very personal and poignant objects in the exhibition, and understandably 7% of respondents mentioned objects linked to the Enniskillen and Omagh bombings.

"The poppy wreath not being laid on Bloody Sunday - such an innocent gesture holds so much memory. I remember learning about it in RE and how Gordon Wilson gave immediate forgiveness for the death of his daughter"

"The pieces from Enniskillen and visitors book from Omagh - both awful but turning points."

Rather than pick a particular object or section of the exhibition, some visitors made general comments on what struck them.

"The number of people visiting it and stopping and commenting on texts and artefacts. Good to see this gallery triggering interest and dialogue."

RESPONSES

Inevitably the extent to which people were affected by the Troubles has a bearing on how they view the exhibition, and how people judge their own experiences can be interesting, presumably in comparison to others.

“I was a child in the 70s but I was amazed at how quickly the memories came back. I wasn’t directly affected by the Troubles though I know people who died and I know the sounds of gunfire and bombs.”

Of the visitors who provided feedback 43% had visited the previous Troubles exhibition at the Ulster Museum and 72% believe that the new gallery is an improvement, referencing in particular the inclusion of original artefacts. Visitors also responded positively to the greater emphasis on social and cultural history in the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition and believe it offers a more personal and inclusive narrative with greater interactivity. When asked how the gallery made them feel 96% of respondents confirmed that the exhibition had an emotional impact on them. The poignant emotions were most prominent (39%), people felt moved by what they saw, some felt sad, but that was followed by people feeling educated, intrigued and informed (17%).

“I don’t know the word in English but it moved me. I feel almost “full” and “anxious” with all that stuff. In French ‘emue’ (moved, like a wave of emotion) ‘oppressant’ (oppressive, stressed, a heavy feeling, like a lump in one’s throat)”

“Shifted my focus, taught me. A child of the Troubles I, like everyone, had the view from my education and raising - how segregated and biased we all were.”

The next most common response (14%) was visitors feeling hopeful, proud, uplifted, resolute, inspired and optimistic for the future. Others were nostalgic and reflected on their lives in the context of the Troubles, the extent to which life went on as ‘normal’.

“Brings back raw memories and reinforces my total belief and commitment to peace and prosperity for all. No going back to the dark days.”

“I grew up as a teenager here. It was all about liking the right bands and not doing homework. The rest all seemed normal. Yet it was clearly abnormal.”

The individual responses are fascinating, some visitors (5%) felt shocked, anxious or uncomfortable, and others empathetic and compassionate (4%) while some are obviously questioning themselves and feeling a sense of personal responsibility.

“Uncomfortable - have I done nothing to change things.”

A minority of visitors (3%) felt angry, frustrated or annoyed and mentioned a lack of punishment for those responsible and the risk that we could face a return to violence. Their reaction is linked to and influenced by current events, the political stalemate at Stormont and Brexit for example, and by going beyond the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement the exhibition prompts people to give greater consideration to where we are today, as well as the past.

When asked if they thought anything was missing from the gallery, 31% of visitors thought there was nothing missing, and the majority of those who did (20%) called for more personal and everyday stories, oral histories and more information on the history of our customs and traditions.

A further 19% of respondents suggested added more artefacts and including other aspects of Northern Ireland culture as well as other events that occurred during the Troubles and contemporary events. Examples they gave included a Lambeg drum and Irish pipes, reference to Joey Dunlop and George Best and more content on the Disappeared and Bloody Sunday.

“Cannot find mention of Joey Dunlop’s funeral in 2000. Huge crowds outside his house and a very emotional day. A massively important event in sporting circles and one still spoken about among members of the community of Irish Road Racing supporters.”

In terms of the gallery layout and structure, 13% of visitors suggested more information for tourists and the inclusion of different languages and formats, while others (10%) suggested enlarging the gallery space and having more interactivity and signage.

“Maybe something for children - I was visiting with my friends’ child and found it hard to explain the history to her (even though she lives in Belfast).”

Thinking about representation, 7% of respondents suggested showing the impact of the Troubles on rural and border communities, the rest of the UK and its global impact while 5% wish to see more from under-represented groups and ethnic minorities. Addressing these perceived gaps in the exhibition is something we will continue to work on. Museums approach the past through their collections, exhibitions can be very effective, but they are also limited by space and the objects and stories that we have available.



Above: Sporting Memories & Memorabilia contemporary collecting event organised as part of the Making the Future project

We have worked hard to develop the collection and are now constrained by the physical confines of the gallery space, however, there is the potential to extend it further or to use our recent progress to inform the development of other exhibitions and programming.

Finally visitors were asked if they have a story they would like to share. Many have taken the time to share their experiences on paper, others have left us their contact details and more than one visitor has written ‘not yet’ – a poignant reminder that the pace at which the public is ready to address the past varies.

“I was an officer in the fire service and I saw the best/worst that we had to offer from the mid 1980’s to a few years ago - was heavily involved in a lot of stuff - Omagh bomb, organised riots, assassinations etc. When my shift was over - life had to go on - and it did, though coloured.”

THE CONVERSATION CONTINUES



DEVELOPING CREATIVE APPROACHES TO EXPLORING OUR RECENT PAST IS A STRATEGIC PRIORITY FOR NATIONAL MUSEUMS NI AND WE HAVE BEEN EVOLVING OUR APPROACH OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS.



Above: Exploring contemporary photography (left to right: Karen Logan, Project Curator at National Museums NI, John Duncan, Editor of *Source* magazine, Vivienne Pollock, Curator of History at National Museums NI, Michael Weir, Director of the Belfast Photo Festival and Frankie Quinn, Photographer)

The Collecting the Troubles and Beyond project came to an end in March 2020 and the preparation of this publication has provided an important opportunity to collate all that has been achieved to date and to reflect on what has been learned, so that we can continue to refine our approach and look to new ways of engaging with what remains a challenging subject.

One of our key objectives for 2021 is to implement a new phase of the *Troubles and Beyond*, informed by formal evaluation and stakeholder engagement. We want to ensure that National Museums NI continues to have an increased presence in local communities, leading to greater public understanding of our role and purpose, and the development of new relationships with community representatives, academic partners and stakeholders.

NEW APPROACHES

Since the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition opened, we have continued to develop our thinking around the contribution National Museums NI can make to dealing with the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland. There has been some debate in the media over calls for a Museum of the Troubles and if this was to go into development it would require careful planning and consideration. This publication has shown the amount of preparatory work and learning that went into the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition, which has the advantage of the wider context to our history provided by the *Modern History* galleries within the Ulster Museum. There are considerable ethical challenges in curating conflict and any proposed Museum of the Troubles would need a very measured developmental approach, driven by the need for understanding and peace building rather than tourism or enterprise. Given the strength of our collections, our longer view on history and our curatorial expertise combined with close community and stakeholder partnerships, we believe

the Ulster Museum to be the place that provides the most comprehensive and diverse orientation to our recent past and contemporary 'post-conflict' Northern Ireland. However, rather than position ourselves as a Museum of the Troubles, we believe we have the opportunity to lead and facilitate a network of museums and heritage organisations, which can work together collaboratively to provide a multi-perspective view of the Troubles. We are currently in discussion with the Bloody Sunday Trust and Healing Through Remembering about developing a Museums Legacy Network of museums and heritage organisations specifically covering, or with a defined interest in, conflict and legacy issues. The main aims of the network will be to encourage and support programming on the subject of the Troubles, to increase cooperation between organisations and to come together in advocating for statutory support or when contributing to the debate around conflict and legacy.

We will also seek to develop a shared set of values and ethical principles for museums and heritage organisations dealing with conflict and legacy, with reference to existing standards in this area, whilst recognising the unique nature, identity and independence of each member organisation. A key contribution to the social peace process could be made by developing such a network. It would provide a coherence to learning about the Troubles for visitors, as well as supporting the sharing of good practice, and enabling innovation through the collaborative sharing of resources such as artefacts and exhibition space.

We recognise the importance of extending our role beyond the museums that constitute National Museums NI, through engagement and consultation with subject specific networks and through expanding the reach of our collections, resources, and expertise. One site that remains contested and politically controversial, but which has huge potential for responsible interpretation, is the site of the Maze/Long Kesh prison, and we are open to opportunities to support the next phase of planning for the future of the MLK site. All our work is guided by the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government which has an outcomes-based approach and is designed to deliver improved wellbeing. The New Decade, New Approach Deal published in January 2020 outlines the priorities of the restored Executive which include delivering a fair and compassionate society. This involves tackling paramilitarism and ending sectarianism. There is also a clear commitment to giving people and communities the opportunity to shape the development and delivery of the future Programme for Government through engagement and co-design. The need to address the legacy of the past is recognised and there is a commitment to working on this together.



Above: The *CultureLab* exhibition opened at the Ulster Museum in 2020 as part of the Making the Future project and poses questions around issues of culture and identity past and present

'The parties affirm the need to respect the freedom of all persons in Northern Ireland to choose, affirm, maintain and develop their national and cultural identity and to celebrate and express that identity in a manner which takes into account the sensitivities of those with different national or cultural identities and respects the rule of law. They also affirm the need to encourage and promote reconciliation, tolerance and meaningful dialogue between those of different national and cultural identities in Northern Ireland with a view to promoting parity of esteem, mutual respect, understanding and cooperation. These principles will be reflected in legislation.'

A new framework for recognising, celebrating and accommodating cultural difference will be established and promoted by the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression. Clearly the work and strategic priorities of National Museums NI will be closely aligned to this framework and the principles outlined above, and we uphold the same values and aspirations to encourage dialogue and shared understanding.

Below: A *Collecting the Troubles and Beyond* display at PRONI



COMMUNITY HISTORY AND RESEARCH

This publication was produced as part of a research fellowship I was awarded in December 2018. The Headley Fellowship with Art Fund, made possible with the support of the Headley Trust, is designed to give curators the time and resources needed to focus on particular areas of the collection, developing their skills and expertise and communicating the outcomes across the sector. It encourages partnership and collaboration with the overall aim of developing and preserving specialist curatorial skills and expertise in museums. The fellowship I was awarded is based on the Contemporary and Community History Collections of the Ulster Museum and is very much aligned to our corporate priorities. By helping communities to curate their own history and repositioning our own collections within a community history framework, National Museums NI can make a valuable contribution to dealing with the legacy of the past.

The fellowship has been particularly beneficial in providing an opportunity for us to reflect on our work to date and be able to draw everything together. This process has stimulated and informed further discussion and debate within National Museums NI. Having established a platform for engagement with this subject we now seek to consolidate and build on the knowledge and experience we have gained. The development of the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition has received interest from across the museum and academic professions both nationally and internationally. There is a significant opportunity now to reach out and broker new relationships across the sector to facilitate greater exchange of knowledge and skills. It is important that we cohere the broader story, taking account of community experiences and sensitivities, to build a collaborative approach that supports dialogue and understanding.



We recognise the importance of documenting the personal and community context of objects and this approach will now be extended to develop our understanding of community history much more explicitly, both in connection with the Troubles but also more generally in the history of people and place. This has applications in community relations and peacebuilding as there are those who advocate a social peace process as opposed to a political process and one which situates individuals within wider social, political and cultural contexts and recognises the interaction of four different levels - individual, family, community and society. We will continue to use our own collections and a process of community engagement and research to help communities curate their own history. One of the outcomes of the Headley Fellowship will be the co-production of a temporary exhibition. This will be shown within National Museums NI and at local community venues, drawing together academic research, our existing collection material and community objects and stories. It will explore our community history in depth and address themes of industrial heritage, sectarian geography, culture and identity. By focussing on specific community areas that have been particularly adversely affected by the Troubles (identified for priority interventions by the Northern Ireland Executive), we will engage with community representatives, collate objects and stories, conduct oral history interviews and exploit our own collections to present a history of that community that explores its industrial and sectarian legacies, issues of culture and identity and how its heritage is understood today.

Left: Discussion in the gallery



Above: Milk distribution on a Belfast street during the Ulster Workers' Council strike © Bill Kirk

There is a renewed emphasis on research at National Museums NI with a dedicated member of staff recently employed to co-ordinate our research strategy and develop collaborate agreements with local, national and international universities. Our approach is very much aligned to wider strategic objectives within the organisation which provides a strong platform for our work on contemporary history. Through my research I have examined other international examples of curating difficult history and contributed to sectoral discourse on best practice, whilst also facilitating understanding of the experiences in Northern Ireland in a wider context. In 2019 I agreed to be a member of the Advisory Board for the project '(UN-)Stitching the Subjects of Colombia's Reconciliation Process', led by Dr Berit Bliesemann de Guevara from Aberystwyth University and Dr Beatriz Arias from the University of Antioquia in Colombia.

"The project explores the subjectivities constructed by ex-combatants in the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) in Colombia and how these ex-combatants are, in turn, perceived by other groups in society and specifically in the communities where they now settle. In order to study the transformation of both ex-combatants' self-understandings and outsider perceptions of these, the project employs a qualitative approach that combines narrative biographical interviews with textile narratives. This innovative method consists in the running of textile workshops during which first ex-combatants and then civilian community representatives, individually or collectively, create sewn wall-hangings to express their memories, self-understandings, and hopes for the future.

The same model will be applied to other local community areas and the results will inform collection development, the enhancement of collections knowledge and the development of temporary displays. This will also involve conducting research to enable us to reposition some of our existing collections in a community history context. For example, by threading personal stories and experiences through our *Modern History* galleries, looking at individual experiences in industry, conflict and the development of Belfast.

In this approach, oral and textile narratives are not merely data to inform the analysis of ex-combatants' role in the process of reconciliation and social integration in Colombia, but, as a methodological intervention strategy, are intended to actively contribute to this process. A further key component of this methodological strategy are its diverse means for the dissemination of research results. Findings are disseminated not only through the textile workshops, but also through exhibitions at the local, national, and international level and through a digital platform."

**Dr Berit Bliesemann de Guevara,
Aberystwyth University**

The advisory group meets to hear updates on the progress being made with the participants in Colombia and give feedback on what is working well, what could be improved and how the results can be shared more widely through communication, engagement and exhibitions. In the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition we also use our close links with Conflict Textiles to explore the communication of narrative and experience through textiles, drawing examples both from South America and Northern Ireland. There is ongoing research into the extent to which these can be viewed as archival records, as personal testimonies in their own right. For me, their value is in the meaning stitched into them and the empathic response of the viewer.

Right: A textile exhibition in San José de León, a village set up by demobilised FARC fighters



FORMAL EVALUATION

Although the Collecting the Troubles and Beyond project officially came to an end on 31 March 2020, National Museums NI is committed to continuing our work in this area. In December 2019, we commissioned Ruth Flood Associates to undertake an evaluation of our work to date, to inform our approach and identify opportunities for a new phase of *Troubles and Beyond*. The evaluation involved reviewing existing documentation and reports, engaging with staff and focus groups of project partners and consulting with relevant stakeholders to assess the achievements and impact to date of our work on the Troubles and Beyond and gather feedback to inform our future direction. It examined our overall approach to interpreting the Troubles in recent years, evaluating *Art of the Troubles*, *Silent Testimony* and *Voices of 68* as well as the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition itself.

The evaluation found that overall, there has been very positive engagement with the exhibitions by the public. The visitor feedback suggests high levels of engagement with often very personal, meaningful and emotional comments being made and that visitors have had a learning experience. It is great for us to know that visitors accept that our exhibitions challenge their thinking and that stakeholders see this as a fundamental role of National Museums NI. This reinforces the approach we have taken and encourages us to continue to present an interpretation based on critical thinking and to offer new perspectives, challenge perceptions and invite visitors to re-examine previously held views. It was helpful for us that the evaluation brought together so many of our partners and, while we have good working relationships with them, it was reassuring to hear it reflected back to us that the wide range of connections we have made in relation to our work in this area are broadly perceived to be working well and are considered productive for both the stakeholders and the Museum. However, there were also suggestions made that the museums engagement could be broadened further still.



With any evaluation there are positives and negatives, and inevitably there was feedback on what had worked less well and what could still be improved. With the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition in particular some respondents felt that it was aimed primarily at people who already had some understanding of the Troubles and that the narrative should be developed for those who need more contextual information to elucidate the wider story in which the artefacts sit. There was also feedback that more support could be given to schools to support engagement with the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition. We will take this feedback on board and respond to it, this is part of the process by which we develop our approach. The report itself recognises in its findings that at each stage in the development of its approach to interpreting the Troubles, National Museums NI has been learning lessons and growing in confidence. RF Associates acknowledged that it was clear that the work we have done so far has prompted ongoing internal reflection about developing greater coherency in National Museum NI's role with regard to the social peace process, and greater clarity about the aims when commissioning/undertaking work. The report also confirmed that staff recognise the journey that the organisation has made and see the changes as having been slow and measured, and in step with increasing levels of stakeholder engagement, as well as greater understanding of the audience. The staff interviewed also recognised the opportunity for future programming to have greater clarity in its aims and objectives, and contribute to the aspirations of the New Decade, New Deal agreement.

Far Left: The 1990s section of the exhibition

Left: Space to reflect, to share knowledge and experiences and to do some further research

We are reassured that over the course of all the interviews and focus groups, the significant role of National Museums NI and the Ulster Museum especially, in documenting the past, educating and assisting learning was acknowledged. Many of the interviewees also commented on the affection they, and sections of the public, have for the Ulster Museum, often stemming from childhood. The perception of National Museums NI was largely one of positivity and credibility although a minority of stakeholders questioned whether the Ulster Museum is seen as a shared space by all communities in Northern Ireland and whether there are perceived or actual barriers to visitors coming from other parts of the city, the north of Ireland generally and visitors from a 'working class' background, young people especially. These assertions are not new to us and we continually work to make our museums, our collections and our collections knowledge inclusive, representative and accessible to all. The report went on to state that despite the challenges of appealing to all communities in Northern Ireland, the Ulster Museum was frequently perceived as a 'safe space'; a 'neutral' venue, inviting to all and a place for multi-perspectivity. It is this overall reputation and status of the Ulster Museum that forms the basis for the broad perception among interviewees and focus groups that National Museums NI has made and can go on to make an important contribution to the peace process in its Troubles-related programming. Interviewees in general strongly expressed that the role of the museum was to challenge the audience to better understand the past, themselves and others, and to consider what this meant for the future. Gratifyingly this almost exactly reflects the vision of National Museums NI which is to celebrate who we are: telling the stories of our past, challenging our present and shaping our future.

The report highlighted suggestions from a number of stakeholders that National Museums NI should develop a clear strategy around its values, expertise and resources in this area to help focus its work on the Troubles, as it cannot do everything. It was recommended that we look carefully at the context we are working in, who we are working with and where we are best placed to make a contribution. In many respects we commissioned the evaluation as a first step in that process and its findings will certainly inform our future direction. The report made a number of specific recommendations firstly on consolidating what we offer currently and secondly on developing new phases of work. With regard to the former it recommended more facilitator-led engagement with the *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition for general audiences and especially for schools. Many of the content-specific suggestions from interviewees focussed on storytelling, particularly the stories and experiences of ordinary people. This is something we will continue to develop, for example we recently conducted an oral history interview with a gentleman who worked as a bus driver throughout the Troubles who described multiple hijackings and other incidents that took place during his career. We are also interested in interpreting the story of the home during the Troubles.

Looking at the Troubles through the prism of everyday life, and moving beyond the dominant political narrative, has always been a core principle of the Collecting the Troubles and Beyond project, but we intend to go further in representing domesticity in the context of conflict. Other areas that it was suggested we focus on in our interpretive approach were the impacts of de-industrialisation, the role of the church, peacebuilding, both throughout the Troubles as well as in the recent past, and partition and the early Troubles of the 1920s. Further work on Troubles art was encouraged, as were international approaches and comparisons. It was suggested that an international dimension to future content might explore comparison with other global conflicts and the responses to them, prompting discussion of learning from other places. These are natural progressions for us and, while we will take the specific feedback and comments on board, we have already been making progress on many of these recommendations behind the scenes.

In terms of our approach to a new phase of *Troubles and Beyond*, it was recommended we engage more widely with audiences and communities and work in partnership with others. It is evident that National Museums NI has developed partnerships widely over the past several years and these are acknowledged as having helped to produce a depth and quality of work. Partnerships have been wide and varied including relationships with individual artists and academics through to more formal working relationships with community-based organisations.

The evaluation report recommends we review our current engagement with community groups, particularly those with community influence, as part of our wider audience development strategy, so that our activities reach as wide an audience as possible. It states that inclusive, creative and engaging ideas can only be sustained through active partnerships with others who can stimulate and challenge us from across society generally, and specifically in the arts, community groups, other civic bodies and organisations seeking to develop the social peace process and engage with the legacy of the past. A key step for us moving towards the next phase of *Troubles and Beyond* will be to look strategically at our current partnerships both in terms of who we are engaged with and which voices are missing and also the means of engagement, specifically where there is opportunity to have a broader discussion and an exchange of ideas not always centred on the work of the museum. Stakeholders also suggested widening these partnership approaches to include other Northern Ireland museums, and/or perhaps even more extensive work to create a network of Northern Ireland museums that works collaboratively together. The advantage of this concept was considered to be that museums develop ethical approaches to communicating contested narratives. This would provide a coherence to learning about the Troubles for visitors, as well as support the sharing of good practice, and enabling innovation through the collaborative sharing of resources such as artefacts and exhibition space.

What the evaluation report has reinforced for me is the role of the community as an active participant and what more we can do, with an audience and community focus, to develop our partnerships (locally, nationally and internationally), enhance our interpretation and documentation of diverse perspectives, and to work with people and perspectives in the space to make a contribution to the social peace process. The consultation process confirmed what I identified to be limitations but also brought forward new suggestions that I found interesting, such as following the trajectory of people's lives and how they have responded to their experiences. It is encouraging to know that much of what the stakeholders recommend we have already been working to develop behind the scenes and that there is widespread support for our efforts. We will continue to reflect on the evaluation report and draw on it as we reassess our work to date and formulate a clear and well-articulated strategy for the next phase of *Troubles and Beyond*.



Right: *Troubles Art* at Nerve Visual in Derry/Londonderry, delivered by National Museums NI as part of the Making the Future project

SUMMARY

Curating the *Troubles and Beyond* has been both a rewarding and challenging experience for me personally and for National Museums NI. We have drawn on lessons learned from previous exhibitions, benefitted from the commentary of critical friends and developed an approach which we feel can be applied to other initiatives and in other contexts around the world. Our approach is underpinned by ethical principles, a keen awareness of the responsibilities associated with curating difficult history and an openness to both conversation and contradiction. It relies on academic and community involvement, so that the consequent interpretation is based on critical thinking, multiple perspectives and lived experience. Our aim was to be inclusive, to ensure people had direct involvement in developing our collection and its subsequent interpretation. The *Troubles and Beyond* exhibition was designed to evolve on a dynamic platform and be responsive to feedback. From the outset we viewed this as a process and continue to do so. The exhibition will continue to evolve and our conversations with our audience, key stakeholders, partners and subject specialists will guide our next steps.

We look forward to creating a museums network, to extending our outreach and engagement and making best use of what we have developed to date as well as looking to new exhibitions, new content and new ideas.

Right: Karen Logan, Senior Curator of History, with William Blair, Director of Collections, making some last minute adjustments before the exhibition opening

We believe we can make a valid and valuable contribution to addressing the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland and that it is our role and responsibility to do so and do so in a purposeful and meaningful way. We will continue to work with victims and survivors, ex-service personnel, ex-combatants and local communities to collect and curate their experiences and to give them a contextual framework. We have never aspired to achieve consensus, but by curating multiple perspectives responsibly and in context I believe we can transform people's thinking and encourage greater narrative hospitality. The process continues, and the individuality of experience and response cannot be overstated, we understand that the level of impact and the pace at which people are able to address what happened varies enormously.



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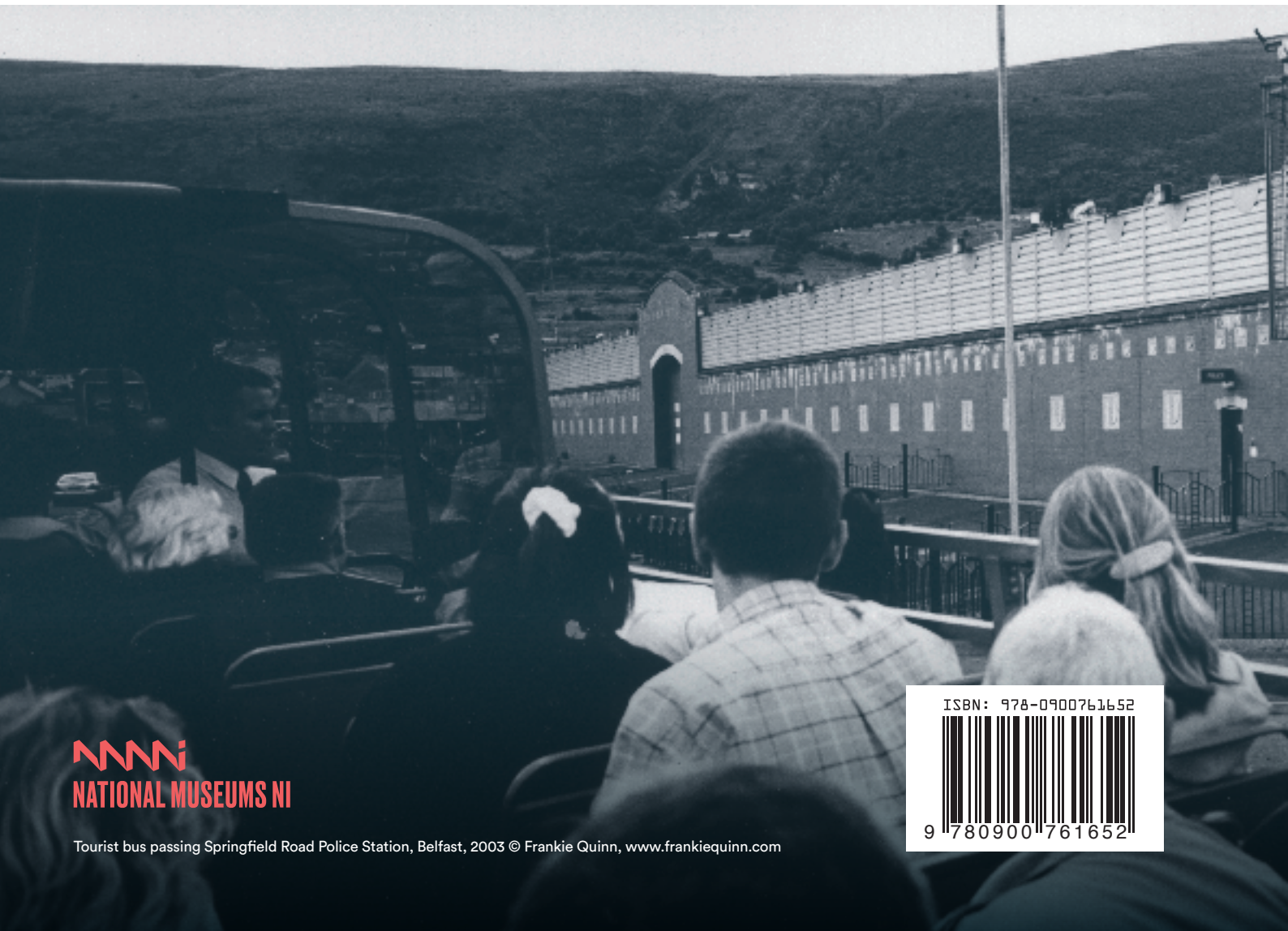
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Tourist bus passing Springfield Road Police Station, Belfast, 2003 © Frankie Quinn, www.frankiequinn.com

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