

MEATH PEACE GROUP and the MEATH ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

JOINT SEMINAR

“HISTORY IN MODERN IRELAND/NORTHERN IRELAND”

Saturday, 13th September 2014

St Columban's College, Dalgan Park, Navan, Co. Meath

Session I. *“The Socio-political importance of History in Modern Irish/NI Society particularly in this Decade of Centenaries”*

Mary Ann Lyons (Professor, Head of History Dept, Maynooth University),

Gordon Lucy (Belfast historian)

Thomas Byrne (Fianna Fáil Senator)

Chaired by John Clancy

1. **Mary Ann Lyons** (Head of History Department, Maynooth University)

“I would like to thank Julitta for her very kind invitation to participate in this seminar. I want to speak about the socio-political importance of history in modern Irish society particularly in this decade of centenaries. Most of my comments will focus on the Republic of Ireland, as I know Gordon will be referring to Northern Ireland in his presentation.

'States have long had an interest in how key events in their past are commemorated, and historians have equally long been complicit in promoting dominant political mythologies. Since the development of professional academic history, however, its practitioners have tended to view commemorations more as opportunities for attempting new interpretations, and for critiquing the official version. Yet, when the event commemorated has clear

implications for ongoing conflict and attempts at reconciliation, historians can come under intense pressure ... to prioritise contemporary political concerns over their primary duty to engage critically with the sources'.¹

Historian **Tom Dunne** from UCC contends that this is what happened in Ireland during the late 1990s when the bicentenary of the 1798 rebellion coincided with the final stages of a complex peace process aimed at ending the conflict in Northern Ireland. Dunne claims that the bicentenary as a result was based 'in large part on a blurring of historical memory'² since the Irish Government was eager to find a way of commemorating the rebellion that did not emphasize the sectarianism and violence that were also at the heart of The Troubles in Northern Ireland during the 1990s. The government, he contends, found this in the idealism of the rebellion's ostensible organizers, the United Irishmen, whose Belfast origins and commitment to a union between Catholic and Protestant were especially helpful. But as Dunne also points out, regrettably the role of the United Irishmen and the relevance of their ideals in Wexford were unclear in the historical record in contrast with accounts of the sectarian conflict and violence which absolutely dominate contemporary sources.³

What Dunne found particularly regrettable was the regressive step for historical scholarship that this involved on the grounds that

'In the decades prior to the bicentenary a highly complex picture of Irish politics and society during the 1790s had been developed, yet [in publications to mark the bicentenary] many historians of the period appeared to endorse the state's idealistic, one-dimensional approach to the rebellion as a 'United Irish Revolution'.⁴

In light of this relatively recent experience of contentious commemoration, with this decade of anniversaries now under way, it is timely to reflect on some of the challenges and opportunities facing historians and commemorators alike.

To this end, I propose to present you with a very general overview of some of the major

¹ Tom Dunne, 'Commemorations and 'shared' history: a different role for historians' in *History Ireland*, 21, no. 1 (Jan./Feb. 2013), p. 10.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., pp 10–11.

issues that leading historians working in the field have highlighted as worthy of reflection and debate.

It is worth remembering that we in Ireland are by no means alone in facing the challenge of interpreting the contentious events of 100 years ago. Tom Dunne has sought to contextualize our decade of commemorations by reminding us that historians the world over are grappling with how to interpret and write the history of difficult chapters in their respective lands. Citing three ongoing situations of historically inflected conflict or controversy, namely the treatment of Jews by their Polish neighbours during World War Two; Turkey's responsibility for the massacre of Armenians during the World War One, and the legacy of the wars in former Yugoslavia, he points to historians from across national and ethnic divides who are attempting to write 'shared narratives' of these past events in an attempt to contribute to present-day conflict resolution.⁵

But such participation in collaborative work with a political goal clearly presents challenges to historians engaged in scholarly research. Whilst acknowledging the validity of Professor John A Murphy's assertion that an historian's primary duty is to historical research and not to historical healing⁶, at this time it is worthwhile asking whether there might be ways of making that principal duty of the historian compatible with a reconciliation agenda, without compromising the professional integrity of history or of historians.

Dunne is not optimistic. He is wary of the language used by the 'Advisory Group' of historians assisting the Irish Government's 'Consultation Group on Centenary Celebrations' who have promised to consult widely, "at all times acknowledging the multiple identities and traditions which are part of the historic story of the island of Ireland and Irish people world-wide".⁷ He also has concerns in relation to the Northern Ireland Executive's stance. Commenting on its appointment of two ministers to "jointly bring forward a programme for a decade which will offer a real opportunity for our society to benefit economically and continue its transformation into a vibrant, diverse and enriched place to visit", Dunne thought it significant that while the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin could agree on the tourist potential of the centenary celebrations, if nothing else, and have thus promised

⁵ Ibid., p. 11.

⁶ Cited by Dunne in *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

commemorations involved “inclusivity, tolerance, respect, responsibility and interdependence”, no reference was made to achieving historical understanding.⁸

He does, however, commend **Belfast City Council** Subcommittee for its commitment to approaching the decade in a spirit of ‘Shared History, Differing Allegiances’ which is more in line with the international model of ‘shared history’, involving cross–community organizations such as ‘Healing through Remembering’ in projects aimed at promoting a genuine shared history at grassroots level.⁹

Dunne singled out as significant the endorsement of that approach in an editorial featured in the *Irish Times* two years ago, on 29 September 2012, which urged that we all

“go beyond grudging tolerant understanding of the other’s history” by developing a greater understanding of the “interconnectedness of our stories”, this being the best way of “celebrating our different narratives”.¹⁰

There have been some positive developments in this regard; for example, the change in approach to commemoration of those Irishmen who died during the Great War, notably initiatives by individual politicians in Northern Ireland and in the Irish Republic, followed by the participation in Remembrance Day ceremonies in Northern Ireland by An Taoiseach Enda Kenny and An Tánaiste Eamonn Gilmore in 2012. (Dunne also draws encouragement from the recent attempt by some members of An Garda Síochána to commemorate their RIC predecessors.¹¹)

And yet, despite these positive developments, Dunne warns against complacency, remarking that despite World War One becoming a sort of neutral ground in terms of commemoration, there still appears to be a nervousness in the official approach on the part of politicians both North and South around the commemoration of complex events of 100 years ago. He points to how the former Northern Ireland secretary, Owen Paterson, cautioned the Oireachtas Group on Centenary Commemorations about the “danger that people who do not have such a benign view could hijack them” and also to a TD’s

⁸ Quoted in Dunne, *ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Quoted in Dunne, *ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

admission that “some of these commemorations may be taken over by hard–line people from both traditions”.¹²

Dunne has highlighted the significant and relatively unique stance assumed by President Michael D. Higgins who, in a number of addresses, has emphasized the need to commemorate “in a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect” with making “historical accuracy a cornerstone of commemoration”. In this, Dunne asserts, President Higgins has provided historians with an important lead, in sharp contrast with what he denounces as

'Fear of causing offence, an obsession with ‘balance’ and all the other manifestations of this damaging ‘political correctness’ [that] can only lead to bland, meaningless history that may get political establishments safely to the end of the decade but will do nothing to deepen understanding of this island’s historical past]’.¹³

Dunne is also encouraged by the fact that the Advisory Group of historians assisting the Irish Government includes historians Eunan O’Halpin (TCD) and Diarmaid Ferriter (UCD), and by the latter’s blunt assertion that “commemorations should be divisive. They should create a certain discomfort. You don’t have to please everyone. History is about conflicting interpretations.”¹⁴

If we embark on commemoration in this spirit of openness and loyalty to the historical record, certain demands are made on us as historians and as commemorators. We need to broaden our horizon, dispensing with one of the most unhelpful divisions that has been set up in how we view the 1910s, namely the separation of the Irish experience in the 1910s from its European context.

As TCD historian **Anne Dolan** has observed, the thought of placing the Irish story within a wider European narrative, of sacrificing Irish exceptionalism, still seems to frighten some: we need to reflect on why this is so. In a thought–provoking article titled ‘Divisions and divisions and divisions: who to commemorate?’, Dolan posits the notion that arguably Ireland was never so European as it was in that decade, if we consider the trenches dug in

¹² Quoted in *ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*

St Stephen's Green during the Rising, the appeal to Versailles for recognition, the Treaty that placed the Irish Free State at the heart of the Commonwealth. At each stage, Ireland was very much part of a wider international and European history.

Dolan goes further, challenging us to consider the reasons for this reluctance to view the Irish experience in a European context, suggesting that this may stem from the fact that when viewed in that comparative light, we see that Ireland had 'small wars, few casualties, and a remarkably quick return to peace and stability'.¹⁵ The trouble is, if we admit that, do we undermine all the importance that so many have placed on those small wars for so long?

Yet another division that historians and commemorators have been slow to address is that of class. As Dolan has pointed out, class divisions are among the most striking of this decade in Ireland, and yet no one seems keen to seek out 'shared history' here, arguably the easiest place to find that 'shared history' North and South. Consequently, she asks: 'Is it not a division that should occupy us all a little more?'¹⁶ Dolan presents us with another challenge, asking: 'Do we ... miss the division between the ardent and the indifferent at our peril?'¹⁷ It is worth reminding ourselves that far more people carried on with their everyday lives throughout all these wars than went out to take whatever part in the conflict, and yet we listen to, write about and commemorate the minority of fighters, for whatever cause, so much more. Dolan argues that it is precisely in focusing on the lives of these ordinary men and women who got on with their daily lives in spite of the conflicts, that we are most likely to find some form of 'shared history' or common ground through which they too can be commemorated. She poses the penetrating question: 'What will happen to those who did not follow any flag when flags come to be half-masted in 2012, 2014, 2016, and 2021?'¹⁸ Here, perhaps the Letters of 1916 Project which is based at Maynooth University is a good approach. This crowd-sourced project invites people holding any type of letter dated 1916, from Ireland, regardless of its subject matter, to submit the letter which is then added to a fast growing collection of letters capturing not just the Easter Week events but a plethora of

¹⁵ Anne Dolan, 'Divisions and divisions and divisions: who to commemorate' in John Horne and Edward Madigan (eds), *Towards commemoration: Ireland in war and revolution, 1912–1923* (Dublin, 2013), p. 151.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

aspects of everyday life in Ireland at that time.¹⁹

Professor **Keith Jeffery** from Queen's University Belfast equally throws down the gauntlet to historians and commemorators on where we go from here in commemorating Irish involvement in World War One and 1916. Commenting on the blossoming of First World War commemoration that we have witnessed from the late 1980s, he has observed how 'much of this enhanced ... commemoration draws on a belief that shared military experience and the shared human costs of that experience might transcend local Irish political and sectarian differences.' On the other hand, he remarks that to our great cost, 'one thing [that is] largely absent ... from what we might call the 'civil war' of the Troubles is any sustained sense that shared military experience on each side of the conflict might have any sort of reconciling potential.'²⁰ And the same, he contends, can be said of 1916.

Jeffery then presents us with a stark challenge in the following terms:

'If we are serious about trying to extract some good from common suffering in 1914–18, then we must also seriously contemplate the possibility that some good might be extracted from an understanding of the common suffering and loss not just on the battlefields of continental Europe but also here at home'.²¹

He goes on to suggest that 'Ireland's domestic (and not just recent) past is perhaps so painful that we may require the more remote experience of, for example, the First World War to help us come to terms with it.'²² Jeffery also presents us with a thought-provoking speculation for the commemorative attraction in Ireland of the First World War, namely that commemorating the Great War affords people, North and South, the opportunity to reach back to a time when Ireland was politically united, albeit it under British control, and he suggests that this might help engender a sense of unity between those on both sides of the subsequently created border.²³

Another leading historian in this field, **David Fitzpatrick** (TCD), has itemized many

¹⁹ www.forasfeasa.ie/news/1916-letters-project.

²⁰ Keith Jeffery, 'Irish varieties of Great War commemoration' in Horne & Madigan (eds), *Towards commemoration*, p. 123.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 124.

²³ *Ibid.*

challenges facing us all in this decade of commemorations. Rather like Tom Dunne, he is especially wary of the desire for pluralism that so often goes with commemoration. He reminds historians and commemorators that it is 'all too easy to achieve the spurious appearance of 'inclusivity' in ceremonies, events or exhibitions by adopting simplistic misleading dichotomies.'²⁴ Here, he asserts, it is incumbent on the historian to complicate the picture. Fitzpatrick believes a connected problem is an excessive focus on 1916, the year of the Battle of the Somme and the Dublin rebellion, as commemorators find irresistible the temptation to weave these two episodes into 'a seamless sacrificial narrative'.²⁵ It is not appropriate, he argues, to concentrate on a single year marked by massive casualties on the Western Front or on the dramatic character of the Easter rebellion in isolation since to do so 'fails to convey the slow and messy course of political change in Ireland or the monotony and attrition of trench warfare... To sideline the seamier aspects of the past is to distort public understanding of history.'²⁶ Fitzpatrick also acknowledges that in the present day, 'many would prefer to remember constructive rather than violent aspects of the revolutionary epoch in Irish history'²⁷ and argues that the problem for historians is that it is not

'easy to devise a truthful narrative incorporating supporters and opponents of the Anglo-Irish treat in a common enterprise of democratic state-building in the South, given the performance of both parties in the Civil War. Faced with this conundrum, many historians as well as politicians have portrayed those who actively supported the Treaty as democrats acting in accordance with the will of the majority, and their opponents in the Civil War as idealists'.²⁸

That way, no one is too upset. But as Fitzpatrick is quick to point out, that is a spurious comparison since of course 'there were idealists on both sides but very few genuine 'democrats' in either party until it became apparent, after the Civil War, that the constitutional framework of the Free State offered practical opportunities for all factions.'²⁹ Equally, Fitzpatrick, emphasizes, it is not acceptable to depict Ulster Unionists as

²⁴ David Fitzpatrick, 'Historians and the commemoration of Irish conflicts, 1912–23' in Horne & Madigan (eds), *Towards commemoration*, p. 126.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 126–27.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

unwavering imperialists and opponents of home rule. After all, the Ulster Unionists almost rebelled against the Crown in 1912–14; their leaders proved reluctant to urge their followers to commit to the imperial war efforts, and they eventually accepted and controlled a home rule state of their own in Northern Ireland.³⁰

So what does this mean for commemorating their experiences? According to Fitzpatrick, ‘good commemoration would stress the common influence of fraternity and solidarity in nationalist and unionist Ireland rather than the strength of political idealism.’³¹ This would reflect the historian’s overriding concern which is historical accuracy.

Fitzpatrick also identifies another ‘tempting but dubious stratagem for commemorators’, namely, ‘the notion of equality of suffering between perpetrators and victims of political violence.’³² He insists that suspending moral judgement when attempting to give meaning to human losses results in poor history. He also insists that historians must draw a clear distinction between on the one hand combatants who delivered and often courted death, and on the other, non-combatant civilians who did neither. In that context, he reminds us that non-combatant civilians constituted the great majority of fatalities in 1916 and almost half of those killed between 1917 and 1921, which begs the question – how will they be commemorated, if at all? Fitzpatrick strenuously argues that the lives of both perpetrators and victims should be remembered, but not in the same way. He asserts that ‘far from avoiding all forms of judgement, historians should try to add moral intensity to the ways in which we commemorate and comprehend the past. Morally neutral commemoration’, he warns, ‘is a dangerous deception ...’ and ‘commemoration, like good history, should help us to understand what forces impelled people to commit terrible as well as courageous acts.’³³ While he admits that the outcome of such investigations is ‘often contentious and morally unsettling’, nonetheless he is convinced that it is ‘preferable to a bland recitation of general blamelessness.’³⁴ In this context, the work of Fitzpatrick’s TCD colleague, Eunan O’Haplin, in identifying many alleged civilian spies and informers shot dead by the IRA during the War of Independence has shed valuable light on a long concealed, deeply problematic and still highly sensitive secret that has, until recently, been preserved in local communities the

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., p. 127.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

length and breadth of Ireland.³⁵

Furthermore, Fitzpatrick warns again the peril of crude stereotyping that so often accompanies commemoration; here again he sees historians playing a crucial role in challenging stereotypes. In this context, he also issues a warning against efforts to depoliticize the commemoration of the Crown forces in Ireland by reverting to use of stereotypical representations of the Black and Tans, the Auxillaries, and others.³⁶ Here, like Keith Jeffery and Anne Dolan, Fitzpatrick presents us with some potentially difficult-to-swallow pills. Although on first reading it may seem bizarre, he suggests that one area in which we could have common commemoration is in relation to the Black and Tans in Ireland. He dismisses the notion, often advanced by conciliatory figures, that the Black and Tans behaved as they did because they themselves were victims of 'brutalisation'. He backs up his claim citing comparative studies that have shown they were no more brutalized than the bulk of Europe's male population who survived the Great War. Fitzpatrick argues that most atrocities committed by the Black and Tans were 'largely the result of weakness of central control compounded by paranoia arising from ignorance of their opponents.'³⁷ The same was true in the case of the IRA and the civilian population's paranoia and ignorance of the Black and Tans.

Hence, Fitzpatrick suggests that a way forward in commemorating the War of Independence is to view this as a shared psychological problem inviting common commemoration, arising from 'shared fear, ignorance and indiscipline'.³⁸ A controversial view indeed, but then the job of the historian and of good commemoration is to challenge, to unsettle, to probe debate and reflection in the hope of achieving deeper understanding of our historical past and how it has formed our outlooks, values and aspirations today.

Again and again, historians emphasise that the 1916 Rising, the Battle of the Somme, the Treaty, the Civil War are much more than significant historical events; they are also cultural products of generation after generation of Irish men and women, products whose

³⁵ Professor Eunan O'Halpin was principal investigator on an Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences-funded project *The Dead of the Irish Revolution*. For an introduction to one aspect of this project see his essay titled 'Problematic killing during the War of Independence and its aftermath: civilian spies and informers' in James Kelly and Mary Ann Lyons (eds), *Death and dying in Ireland, Britain and Europe: historical perspectives* (Dublin, 2013), pp 317–48.

³⁶ Fitzpatrick, 'Historians & the commemoration of Irish conflicts, 1912–23', pp 127–8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

significance is constantly changing. Thus, the Newcastle–based historian **Róisín Higgins** predicts that 2016 will be an opportunity ‘to assess the progress made in Ireland over one hundred years and to consider the benefits and abuses that have resulted from independence.’ The commemorations will, she believes, ‘operate as a bellwether for the Irish state and nation’, reflecting people’s view of the credibility of those who represent power in Ireland – north and south. As such, she argues, the commemorations will be ‘a telling indication of Irish citizenry’s relationship with authority.’³⁹

Fearghal McGarry, from Queen’s University Belfast, approaches the commemoration of 1916 from a slightly different angle, seeing it as providing historians with an opportunity to advance a re-evaluation of the Rising on three counts. Firstly, it affords historians a chance to show that the Rising was in fact ‘infinitely more complex than the historical myth’ would have us believe.⁴⁰ Secondly, he argues that although the memory of 1916 is frequently invoked to criticize the manifold short-comings of the present–day Irish State (most recently when the IMF intervened to address our financial crisis), there is a need for a much more nuanced understanding of rebel ideology since, on the basis of his study of the testimony of rank–and–file rebels, even in 1916 there were ‘tensions between the Proclamation’s egalitarian rhetoric and the social conservatism that characterized much of the revolutionary movement.’⁴¹ Lastly, and in common with Anne Dolan, McGarry stresses the need to interpret and commemorate the 1916 Rising as ‘part of the broader historical experience of the Great War rather than as an event that occurred parallel to it’⁴² on the grounds that the Great War backdrop ‘explains much that is otherwise inexplicable about the British State’s response to the 1916 rebellion’ and its aftermath (the Army’s willingness to devastate the city centre by artillery bombardment; the preemptory nature of the executions; the heavy–handed coercion that followed; the attempt to impose conscription).⁴³

As I hope I have shown through introducing you to the perspectives of this selection of historians currently publishing in this field, there is consensus among most professional historians of the revolutionary period in Irish history today that in terms of the decade of

³⁹ Róisín Higgins, *Transforming 1916: meaning, memory and the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising* (Cork, 2012), p. 209.

⁴⁰ Fearghal McGarry, ‘1916 and Irish Republicanism: between myth and history’ in Horne & Madigan (eds), *Towards commemoration*, p. 52.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

commemoration, we should (in the words of David Fitzpatrick):

'do our best to avoid the use of simplistic and exclusive dichotomies or facile attributions of motive; raise awkward issues, and above all, seek to broaden the terms of debate in this interminable round of national soul-searching that we now face'.⁴⁴

I conclude with a recommendation for some reading. One of the hardest-hitting but challenging and stimulating studies of the fraught business of commemorating a key event of this era which appeared in recent years in is the TCD historian Anne Dolan's book *Commemorating the Irish Civil War: history and memory, 1923–2000*, published by Cambridge University Press in 2003. Dolan asks a penetrating question which she pursues with a relentless incisiveness and humanity that one might wish to see underpinning all debate around this decade of commemorations:

She asks:

'After civil war can the winners honour their victory; can they commemorate it; can they raise their flags, cry from their well-guarded rooftops; can they hail their conquered heroes with the blood of their comrades still fresh on their boots? Or does civil war, by its very nature, demand silence? Should the winners cover themselves in shame, bow their heads and hope that the nation forgets 'our lamentable spasm of national madness'?⁴⁵

With that thought, I thank you for your attention."

Chair (John Clancy): "Thank you Mary Ann.... We will have a Question and Answer session after the presentations. Our next speaker is Gordon Lucy who will give a perspective from Northern Ireland..."

⁴⁴ Fitzpatrick, 'Historians & the commemoration of Irish conflicts, 1912–23', p. 129.

⁴⁵ Anne Dolan, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War: history and memory, 1923–2000* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 4; see also David Fitzpatrick, *Ireland and the First World War* (Dublin, 1986); Ian McBride (ed.), *History and memory in modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001); Mary E. Daly and Margaret O'Callaghan (eds), *1916 in 1966: commemorating the Easter Rising* (Dublin, 2007); Catherine Switzer, *Unionists and Great War commemoration in the north of Ireland, 1914–1918* (Dublin 2007); Mark McCarthy, *Ireland's 1916 Rising: explorations of history-making, commemoration & heritage in modern times* (Farnham, 2012).

2. Gordon Lucy (Belfast historian)

“First of all, I would like to thank you all for having me here today, particularly Julitta where I think the invitation originated, so I am very very grateful. May I also say that I am somewhat overawed by my predecessor because it was a tremendously substantial and meaty presentation compared to this rather feeble one I think in comparison.

France:

The *Rough Guide to France* used to describe **Le Chambon-sur-Lignon** as a 'rambling, rather unattractive village with a somewhat faded air'. It doesn't get a mention in the current edition of the *Rough Guide* at all. However, this village in Haute-Loire has two significant claims to fame. First, Albert Camus, who won the Nobel prize for literature in 1957, stayed nearby in 1942 and wrote part of *The Plague* [*La Peste*] here. Secondly, and more importantly, the town offered sanctuary to thousands of French Jews during the Second World War. In all, the people of Le Chambon may have saved the lives of as many as 5,000 Jews. In 1988, Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial Institute, counted the war-time population of the village among the 'Righteous among the Nations'. Le Chambon is the only place in France to have been accorded this honour.

Just before the 60th anniversary of D-Day, Jacques Chirac – the then French President - visited the village and claimed:

'here in adversity, the soul of our nation manifested itself. Here was the embodiment of our country's conscience'.

Unfortunately, this assertion is not true. Robert Paxton, the American historian and political scientist, has estimated the number of active resisters to be 'about 2% of the adult French population (or about 400,000)'. The post-war government of France officially recognized 220,000 men and women as active resisters.

Pierre Sauvage, a film-maker born in the village on 25 March 1944 and who emigrated to

the United States, claimed:

'There is nothing at all symbolic about Le Chambon as far as war-time France goes. Quite the contrary: it was the exception in a country that overwhelmingly submitted to the Nazi regime.'

Secondly, in an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic country, the area's inhabitants were predominantly Protestant. Sauvage, a Jew, contends:

'The key to their extraordinary behaviour during the war is their collective memory of their own persecuted past.'

One pastor told Sauvage: 'The Jews felt close to us, because we believed in the Old Testament and they were people of the Old Testament.' The day after France surrendered, Pastor André Trocmé told his congregation it was their duty to protect the Jews. His flock agreed: 'Everybody knew of their presence and were involved in protecting them'.⁴⁶

Let's fast forward a few years. In 2008, President Sarkozy, who is of Hungarian and Greek Jewish ancestry, stirred up a hornet's nest with an instruction that every ten-year-old French pupil should know the identity of one of the 11,000 Jewish children who were deported from France to their deaths at Nazi hands. And in a speech to Jewish leaders on 13 February 2008, President Sarkozy said that France should be secular but positive about religion. ..'The tragedy of the 20th century was not born from an excess of the idea of God, but from His ... absence'.

Writing shortly afterwards in *Libération*, the French historian Henry Russo observed that for President Sarkozy,

'The past has become a depository of political resources where everybody can pick what they want to serve their interests.'

⁴⁶ They were hidden in private homes, on farms in the area, as well as in public institutions. Whenever the Nazi patrols came searching, they were hidden in the countryside. After the war, one of the villagers recalled: "As soon as the soldiers left, we would go into the forest and sing a song. When they heard that song, the Jews knew it was safe to come home." In addition to providing shelter, the citizens of the town obtained forged identification and ration cards for Jews to use and then helped them cross the border to the safety of neutral Switzerland.

Spain:

In a similar vein, there is a Spanish proverb:

'History is a common meadow in which everyone can make hay.'

In *The Spanish Holocaust*, published in 2012, Paul Preston detailed the brutal and murderous persecution of Spaniards between 1936 and 1945: the mass extra-judicial murder of some 200,000 victims, cursory military trials, torture, the systematic abuse of women and children, sweeping imprisonment, the horrors of exile. Those culpable for crimes committed on both sides of the Civil War are named; their victims identified.

How have the Spanish coped with the turbulent past and can we identify any lessons for us?

After the death of General Franco in 1975, both the parties of the left and the right agreed that it was desirable to have a period of silence – the pact of forgetting (*'El Pacto de Olvido'*) – to underpin and facilitate the transition to democracy and to facilitate the reconciliation of the 'Two Spains' [*Las dos Españas*] which had confronted each other during the Civil War.

⁴⁷

In October 2007, the then ruling PSOE [the Party of the Spanish Socialist Workers] passed a law of historical memory (*la ley de memoria histórica*), assigning public funds to the families of victims of the Civil War (on both sides) and the victims of the Franco Regime so that they can exhume their bodies. The Law also formally condemned the Franco Regime. Two parties opposed the Law but for diametrically different reasons. The Popular Party accused the Socialists of weakening the political consensus which facilitated the transition to democracy and 'using the Civil War as an argument for political propaganda'. However, in fairness, it is also worth noting that the Popular Party supported some elements of the Historical Memory Law, including seven amendments to the original text of the law,

⁴⁷ A consensual agreement to simply “forget” and never to discuss the war or the 40-year dictatorship that followed it.

facilitating the 'depoliticisation' of the Valley of the Fallen (*Valle de los Caídos*, where Franco is buried) and monetary aid to victims of the Civil War and Franco regime. The Republican Left of Catalonia, on the other hand, voted against the Law because it didn't go far enough.

In 2011, the Popular Party returned to power after seven years in opposition, but the Party has neither repealed nor amended the Historical Memory Law. The Centre for Historical Documentation [*Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica*] gives information on victims of Francoist repression, but the government has curtailed State help in the exhumation of victims - now that could be just simply as a result of the economic crisis, I just don't pretend to know.

Interestingly enough, the United Nations has repeatedly urged Spain to repeal the pact of forgetting, for example in 2012, and again in 2013. The United Nations maintains that under international law amnesties do not apply to crimes against humanity.

Why Study History?

In 2008, **Penelope J. Corfield** (a professor of history at Royal Holloway, University of London) wrote:

'All people and peoples are living histories. To take a few obvious examples: communities speak languages that are inherited from the past. They live in societies with complex cultures, traditions and religions that have not been created on the spur of the moment. People use technologies that they have not themselves invented. And each individual is born with a personal variant of an inherited genetic template, known as the genome, which has evolved during the entire life-span of the human species.

She then proceeds to observe:

'understanding the linkages between the past and the present is absolutely basic for a good understanding of the condition of being human. That, in a nutshell, is why History matters. It is not just 'useful', it is essential.'

Elsewhere Professor Corfield writes that she is strongly opposed to the current trend in education-politics which elevates 'Skills' above 'Knowledge'. That, she says, is not only wrong in principle but it also leads to an inadequate learning of skills, thus defeating the very aim of the 'Skills' mantra.

That would be a view I would share very strongly.

I also looked at the website of the Department of History at the **University of Wisconsin-Madison**, because I have had the privilege of speaking at Irishfest in Milwaukee twice, and the Department of History offers the following excellent rationale as to why you should study history:

'You should study history if you wish to learn how and why the world and its peoples came to be as they are today. History asks "How did things get to be this way?" There is nothing in the world that does not become more intriguing and far more mysterious – once we recognize the complicated events and causes that led to its creation.

At the same time, history also recognizes that there is far more to the past than the events that created the world we know today. As the British writer L.P. Hartley once famously remarked, "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there." Recognizing what we share with people in the past, while simultaneously exploring how profoundly their lives differed from our own, provides some of history's most fascinating insights.'

Cambridge University offers a similar rationale for studying history which has much to commend it:

'The aim of studying history at university is to further your understanding and knowledge of the past and your ability to present that understanding and knowledge with clarity, insight and discrimination. The historian has to mine a large body of material efficiently; to evaluate its significance and utility in answering important questions about societies, institutions, cultures and individuals; and to order her or his thoughts on

these matters succinctly, clearly, yet with sensitivity. The teaching that you will receive over the next three years is designed to develop these skills'

The Teaching of History:

From the origins of national school systems in the 19th century, the teaching of history to promote national sentiment has been a high priority.

In most countries, history textbooks are tools to foster nationalism and patriotism, and give students the official line about national enemies. In many countries – probably most countries - history textbooks are sponsored by the national government and are written to put the national heritage in the most favourable light. For example, in Japan, mention of the Nanking Massacre has been removed from all textbooks and the entire Second World War is given at best cursory treatment. And of course Japan's neighbours have complained bitterly about it, not least the Chinese. And of course, it was standard policy in communist countries to present only a rigid Marxist historiography.

In the United States after the Great War, a strong movement emerged at the university level and in public schools to teach courses in Western Civilization. And the reason for this was to assist their students to identify with the home countries in with Europe. Since the 1980s, in the United States attention has increasingly focused on teaching *world history* and requiring students to take courses in non-western cultures, to prepare students for life in a globalized economy.

In Northern Ireland the most popular subject for males at A-Level is mathematics, while the top choice for females was biology. The other three subjects in the top five are religious studies, history and English. 2, 260 students sat A-Level history this year, representing 7.2% of the total. That actually strikes me as quite shocking, not that so many people study history at A-Level in Northern Ireland but actually that so few do.

Through the study of history, students in Northern Ireland are expected to explore the key

political, economic and social events that have helped shape today's institutions, governments and societies. And there's a wonderful wish-list of what History is supposed to achieve, particularly A-Level History:

A-Level History is supposed to -

'develop an interest in and enthusiasm for history'

'gain an appreciation of different identities within society and an appreciation of social, cultural, religious and ethnic diversity through the study of British and Irish history and aspects of European history'

That would be excellent too but I suspect that teachers are much more interested in enabling their pupils to pass their exams rather than achieve all those things.

It's also supposed to -

'develop the ability to ask relevant and significant questions about the past, to carry out research and evaluate conclusions;

'gain an understanding of the nature of historical study, for example that history is concerned with historical interpretations based on available evidence'

If A-Level History in Northern Ireland achieved all the things it's supposed to achieve I would think we would have grounds for being very happy indeed; I am just a little sceptical, I am conscious of the fact that I think that much of what passes for historical knowledge in Northern Ireland is on the level of 'a man in a pub told me...'

Decade of Centenaries:

In June, 1988, in a talk at the Library of Congress in Washington DC, **Roy Jenkins** delivered a paper entitled 'Should politicians know history?' I just want to pick one line from

it:

'No communities are more difficult to bring together' – and he then cites Northern Ireland and Cyprus – 'than those where the contemplation of ancient wrongs is a way of life.'⁴⁸

We are in the midst of a decade of centenaries during which unionists and nationalists are celebrating, commemorating or marking centenaries of a wide variety of events. Some people have viewed these anniversaries with fear and trepidation, and they may still be proved right.

However we could approach this decade of centenaries in a different spirit; we could embrace these anniversaries as opportunities to learn about the past, to reflect soberly on those events, and to evaluate their significance. Above all, these anniversaries afford us the opportunity to explore the complex relationship between the past and the present and to contemplate the challenging relationship between the past and the future.

The Peace III Southern Partnership, based in Newry & Mourne, Craigavon, Banbridge and Armagh Council areas, has been conspicuously successful in enabling people on both sides of the border to move beyond 'the contemplation of ancient wrongs' and consider the past more dispassionately and more objectively. The Partnership has organised a travelling exhibition, talks and lectures and conferences in both Newry and Dundalk. These have all been well-received and I would like to see the Peace III Southern Partnership's efforts extended to the rest of Northern Ireland - and other parts of the Republic should the demand exist. I would be of the opinion that the demand clearly exists in County Louth, I am not too sure about County Meath.

And one of the reasons why I am so keen to see Peace III Southern Partnership's efforts extended throughout the rest of Northern Ireland is that, as Professor Lyons has already said, two Ministers were appointed to oversee the Decade of Centenaries in Northern Ireland and it's not exactly obvious to me what precisely they have done. There is a job of work to be done, but it is not being done, and it would be nice to see the efforts of Peace III

⁴⁸ Roy Jenkins, 'Should Politicians Know History', in *Roy Jenkins, Portraits and Miniatures, Selected Writings* (London, 1993), 212

Southern Partnership extended ... what I would suggest is that time spent studying these events is a significant investment in the future. Thanks very much.”

Chair (John Clancy): “Thank you very much, Gordon. I would like now to call on Senator Thomas Byrne...”

3. Senator Thomas Byrne (Fianna Fáil Seanad spokesperson on Public Expenditure and Reform)

Thanks very much for having me speak here this morning, and I would of course like to give the apologies of my party leader Micheál Martin who was originally invited to speak but unfortunately could not be here this morning, and he sends his best wishes and regards to both societies and for the seminar.

If Gordon Lucy feels feeble, I certainly feel that after both those presentations, and indeed it's a privilege to speak on the panel alongside them.

I suppose I do have some practical experience in this area because I am a member of a political party that actually carries out commemorations on an annual basis in various parts of the country and indeed in part of County Meath as well. But I suppose the very fact that we have to discuss commemorations shows that they are problematic, and those of us in political parties can often overlook the problematic elements of Irish commemorations when we do indeed carry them out.

Commemorations in other countries – France for example – don't appear to be so complicated. I suppose their main focus of commemoration generally is of the birth of the nation state...

In Ireland, because of the diversity of traditions – both north and south, and then within the political party structure in this country - we have a wide variety of commemorations not all of which relate back to the commemoration of the foundation of the State. In fact the foundation of the State itself is disputed....

From a personal and practical experience, the commemoration of the Civil War in this country is the most problematic of all, and I was taken by Professor Lyons' quotation from Dr Anne Dolan of Trinity – 'does civil war demand silence?' And I have to be honest, I have often thought that myself ... That would present further complications in the early part of the next decade. I myself come from a family that, on one side, was very active in the Civil War - on the republican side - in this area, and on the other side, my grandfather and two of his brothers were gardaí at the foundation of the State, and they certainly weren't on the republican side ... in that era.

These commemorations are complicated, and they are increasingly complicated and we do have to think carefully, we do have to think of the sacrifices made by the people who died and the ideals and the visions and the values that they had, and the reality of what they did, and the good that they did, but also recognise that at the time there was another point of view which was oftentimes radically different.

So we have a lot of commemorations, and I suppose what is happening – and I am not sure if it is positive - is that many people, depending on their own particular political or social position, are latching on to a particular commemoration, saying '*we'll commemorate that*', and we have certain groups – and I am not criticising any of them, all of these events deserve to be commemorated – but the point I am making is that some people perhaps commemorate them more than others do.

The Lockout [Dublin, 1913] has particular resonance for maybe the Labour Party and the trade union movement. That's to be recognised. Maybe other parties on the political sphere didn't get involved so much. The Civil War, as I mentioned, will be commemorated by many, but maybe not by everybody in society. And then we have commemorations connected to the Unionist tradition which will perhaps be given more emphasis in that tradition....

What I would be arguing for is that we really should decide as an Irish nation what is the most important commemoration, and by that I mean what is the commemoration that celebrates the foundation of the State ... and the ideals of the State we are in, the ideals that we live for? And in my view that must mean the **Easter 1916** commemoration, that must be the one thing that gives us common purpose in the Irish nation, and particularly as an Irish republican.... and we must give recognition to that as a key stepping stone in making our

country free, if we are to be honest about it.

There were men and women who fought for those ideals in 1916, including guaranteeing religious and civil liberties, equal rights and opportunities for all ... cherishing the children of the nation equally....

The key principles of the 1916 Rising have to be, in my view, the cornerstone of Ireland today, how we interact together as a country and how we emerged from that Civil War, but also how we relate across the border, the two parts of this island....

So we should remember them with reverence, with regard, and with – I would say - recognition of the fact that the Irish state in its modern form was born at that time.

Now I would say as well that there are certain elements at official level and at Government level which maybe aren't as keen to emphasise the importance of the 1916 Rising and the commemoration thereof. And in the experience of some of my colleagues who serve on the Decade of Commemorations committee, they certainly have the feeling that the 1916 Rising – which in our view, and in my view, is the most important of the commemorations – that that is being kind of played down at official level and at Government level, and that the Decade of Commemorations is giving equality to a wide variation of commemorations when in fact it is the 1916 commemoration which in our view should be celebrated as the most important one, as the key moment in the modern history of the State.

The 1600 men and women who went out on Easter Week took on an empire on which the sun had never set at that time – by the time the First World War had finished, there were 17 million men mobilised ... the Irish Volunteers at the time were taking on 11,000 to 1...

We did at that time obtain our freedom as a nation - and I am being deliberately controversial here - but we must recognise that, that we were able to get our freedom, and we cannot be embarrassed about commemorating that. There is in my view an element of that going on at the moment.

Now what we have done, at a practical level, in our party is to commemorate in Ashbourne, particularly the battle of Ashbourne, and we also commemorate Philip Clarke of

Monknewtown who died in Stephen's Green in Dublin.

The economic benefits were mentioned, I think, in passing at the very start – and I suppose it is right in an historic forum not to emphasise them – but I think it is important that we do show ourselves as a modern nation, as a state that is happy in itself, happy together looking north and south ... but is not ashamed to say these are the historical facts, what happened...

And while, as Professor Lyons said, it is important to look at the ordinary lives of people at the time, the extraordinary sacrifice of a relatively small amount of men and women who went out in 1916 should be recognised with poignancy in this State.

I am not saying that you ignore everything else, it's important we commemorate **all** the sacrifices, all of the events that went on including the terrible Civil War that took place, and I have questioned myself whether we should almost forget that but I think the 1916 Rising was such a key event in this country and it should be the key celebration. And it's not controversial for me whether the royal family are here I don't think that's the point. The real point is that we show ourselves as a forward-looking independent nation that is proud ...

Chair (John Clancy): Thank you Senator. This morning has been an excellent session. Professor Lyons has opened the kaleidoscope in terms of the dilemmas of historians, and the danger of how history can be treated. I'm going to invite questions from the floor. I did like Gordon's idea of history being like the 'meadow' in which we all can make hay'....

Gordon Lucy: "I was quoting that...."

John Clancy: "Nonetheless it is true... And [we had] Senator Thomas Byrne's point that 1916 is the core issue in terms of the celebrations of this decade of centenaries. So we invite questions....."

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS (Summary)

Q1. Steve (Belfast): “Can I ask a question to each panel member? Three questions, and after that I'll keep quiet!

(i)for Gordon: “should we have politicians at all or just have historians and technocrats to administer the way a country is run?

(ii)for Professor Lyons: “can we really face the truth, or whatever the truth is, and how do we bring that out into the public space - in a tentative manner or more robustly?

(iii)to Senator Byrne: “is 1916 finished or is there any unfinished business there? And what exactly do you mean by the Irish State, or the Irish nation?”

Chair (John Clancy): We have quite a lot to go with there. Can I ask the speakers to take them in the order that the questions were given.

Gordon Lucy: “I think I regard politicians increasingly as a necessary evil. I'll leave it at that!

Professor Mary Ann Lyons: “I was very struck by something that the Senator said which was this idea of embarrassment. It's something that is coming through more and more in the literature about commemoration in Ireland. If you look at how in the immediate years after the 'teens' in Ireland, there is this recurrent pattern of embarrassment in the government and politics but also in local communities. And I think something that could be quite positive that might come out of this decade is by actually exploring the realities of what went on in this ten year period that we might actually take out and address why we are embarrassed, what's so awkward? And by shedding or throwing light on those awkward questions, those things that people are partly ashamed of or feel awkward about, that in the process then you can dust yourself down ...and begin to move on and say 'this is where we are now, warts and all'.

Part of the problem I think has been that there has been a reluctance to go beyond the familiar narrative and the familiar myth. I think that's what's really exciting actually about now and history is that people are lifting stones and seeing sometimes quite ugly realities,

but getting a much more real sense of what happened in Ireland in that ten years. And I think that will help us move on, much more mature ...”

Sen. Thomas Byrne: “I had an answer to the first question actually – we already have technocrats and historians running the country and I'm not sure whether the politicians have too much influence ... the civil servants have the entire say! But the point that I'm trying to sort of form in my own head - I think many people still are in this country – is what is Ireland, and you asked the questions. And I suppose that if we were to say 'well, the 1916 Rising – this is what the State is about, this is what the nation is about' – and I refer to the modern sense of it, it's an attempt to take the Rising for that purpose and I think there's some justification for doing that.

But that's not to say that people who were involved in other events of that time are not relevant. I was very pleased to see – maybe some of you were there the Bellewstown Historical Society commemorating all the men who went to fight in the First World War ... to see the names of the people commemorated there, they are all local names, they all have relations living around there, but that was hidden in this country for quite some time. I can think of one Fianna Fail councillor long dead whose father fought in the First World War, and that was certainly an unspoken topic, that was never mentioned. And I think that if there is one thing that is hugely positive about the Decade of Commemorations is that these things that were closed down in Irish society for a long time are now being remembered and commemorated.

And when I make the point about 1916, I'm not trying to say that they were terrible, listening to John Redmond and going over there – absolutely not! I mean some of them did it for his reasons, some of them did it out of sheer economic necessity. But when you actually see the names of the people who went over there to fight in World War One, and to realise that each and everyone of them you know who their relations are, and that this was never mentioned! It was never something I learned in school ... there were always Remembrance Day commemorations in towns around the place but they weren't community events I suppose, they were maybe one tradition ... But now I see a much more involved commemoration of those events, and I think ... the principles of 1916, and the principles of the Proclamation – that's the practical application of it, I hope, even if it is not exactly what the people of the time had in mind.

Q2: Danny (Kells): “Just two comments... Seven years ago I went to a seminar in St Patrick's College Drumcondra on slavery, which related to the whole issue of human trafficking today. So that's the first point I want to make, about the strength of the arguments that teaching history is irrelevant to the development of human rights in the broader sense today

The second point I want to make is more significant, and that's on tools of analysis, because I don't think it's enough to have information about history, and knowledge about history, without understanding, and there I think there is a deficit that could perhaps be enriched ... one has the opportunity through the study of politics and philosophy and so on. To give an example of what I mean – outside an academic setting for example, at the Kells Hay Festival I gave a lecture on Francis Ledwidge and I said what I thought were some provocative and challenging things, that at the end of the day I thought he was wrong to go to war. On another occasion, I talked about ... a young Meath man who ended up as a strike-breaker in 1913 in Dublin and was killed ... But there was very little response, because I think people don't have the tools of analysis to engage these issues properly, we don't have the confidence. And in that context, the default position is usually a conservative position – and these issues aren't adequately addressed. So if I could just get a response from the panel to the second issue in particular?

Professor Lyons: “ ... I am not sure that it's a question that people don't have the analytical capability, or the analytical skills. I think if you look, for example, at the popularity of, say, Michael Collins as opposed to, say, Arthur Griffith. I think we need to be conscious that we are very susceptible to the cult of personality, and in that context, for example, film representations of iconic charismatic characters in history.

And sometimes it's down to simply a question of the idea of a particular character being out there, being constantly portrayed, as - in his case - the role of the unfulfilled hero... and all of that. And there's a degree of laziness on the part of not just historians but also of the wider public, to actually look beyond that very attractive character for other more complicated, less charismatic characteristics, but it's nonetheless extremely important. So I think we are very comfortable with the traditional narrative ... and part of what we are trying to do now is to look beyond that, trying to get the sense of a much more complicated picture and to dare to ask ... I have a colleague who is a military historian who had the audacity to

say that Padraig Pearse was not a wonderful military leader, some of the students complained, 'how dare he say that?' But Padraig Pearse was an ideologue, he certainly wasn't a military strategist, yet there's that protectiveness around Pearse's character. So it does take bravery, it takes confidence as well, but it also takes work to follow up ...”

Sen. Byrne: 'Just to follow up on Professor Lyons there – you can compare I suppose the public knowledge and perception of Francis Ledwidge with that of John Boyle O'Reilly. Both of them lived right beside each other, and yet Francis Ledwidge is much more widely known than John Boyle O'Reilly who was the republican. I don't know why that is, maybe just the poems are just better known, but they are both very important people from the same area. Ledwidge is on the school curriculum, I suppose, it's as simple as that, he's better known, maybe his memory is preserved very well there. I certainly grew up going to the John Boyle O'Reilly commemoration with my uncle...

Q.3: “ I would like to ask - is it the way we actually teach history that we are so different? For instance, if we are supposed to be talking about a shared island now, that period we are talking about, pre the 1913 Lockout, from the early 1900s – if that were taught right up to 1916, right up to '22, '23 and beyond, you have a different mindset because you are covering all things, and you can't cover all of them without covering north and south, and particularly the Somme... And this idea that men were great in 1916 – any man who gives his life for anything is great – but are they lesser men because they went out to Europe and they actually died in the fields or whatever, and they had this notion of home rule anyway... So, I am just thinking north and south here, if that were taught, that whole period, it would leave us much more attuned as to what actually happened, both north and south, for A-Level and for Leaving Cert?

And another thing I feel strongly about is when we commemorate something... it's always soldiers, men out there in black suits with white shirts telling us about their perspective of history. So if we had schools like this [seminar], summer schools in conjunction with all of that, surely the next generation would learn far more, and I actually think you have got to start from an historical perspective in the schools, and I just wonder if there are any moves made by anybody in that area, either north or south?

Sen. Thomas Byrne: “Just in relation to our own party commemorations – and the other

parties have their commemorations – our commemorations are very old-fashioned, they really are, and it is probably about time for us to look at how we actually do them. There is kind of a militaristic tone to some of them ... it actually got laughed at in one of the papers a couple of years ago, the *Daily Mail*, there was a picture, two or three of the flag-bearers weren't wearing caps, wearing quasi-military garb, it doesn't look modern. Personally I would move on from that, we need to look at how we have our commemorations. What we try and do – I have given orations here locally and the party leader does them when we commemorate Wolfe Tone or when we commemorate 1916 or the Civil War and the individuals in them- we do try and look at the relevant text, the Proclamation in the case of 1916, or we look at the lives of the people who died in particular commemorations and we try to apply that to modern life.

These things are sensitive too though because in many places there are very close relatives still alive for whom these ceremonies are extremely important...

Questioner: “I have people who were involved in the War of Independence and the Civil War. I have gone right back through genealogies to what they did. Some of them I approve of, some of them I certainly do not, but that's up to me to interpret what my vision is going to be, and that vision should be shared by each person. Just because it's sensitive does not mean it shouldn't be out there. It's okay having all these commemorations ... and the amount of people that are actually studying history, and of that, how many are going on to TCD or any of these colleges, who actually take it as a degree... Where are the informed, is there an intelligentsia behind the Government who are informing them, I sometimes do wonder about that?”

Sen. Thomas Byrne: “The first point you made, about your own personal story. I get my own conflicting impressions of the Civil War, coming from two sides, that's a difficulty I have, and everybody has difficulties. You mentioned the Somme and the First World War, and I agree with a lot of what you said there...”

Q.4. Michael (Dundalk): “When you reflect back, 1916, the Civil War, they generated an awful lot of hatred.....there was a negativity generated in Ireland. I see it in lots of little places, different areas, Catholics didn't like Protestants, and Protestants didn't like Catholics and I suppose the poor old Jew, he wasn't happy either... Negativity on a vast scale - how

did it influence modern Ireland as it is at the moment, and if it has forged the bitterness in us, how long do you think it might last?

Mary Ann Lyons: “.. the complexity of trying to commemorate that period is down to precisely what you have put your finger on now, which is, that when people were killing each other with different causes in mind, obviously that left a huge legacy, and as Irish people we had some success in generating different strategies for dealing with that - in some instances it's trying to ignore what happened, in government or in society in general, in some instances it's silence, not talking about it..... The legacy of it is, for us sitting here today, is trying not to shoe-horn the experiences of those people into some sort of an anodyne commemoration where we put people who would be turning in their graves if they thought they would be put in the same sentence ... This is where I think that group in Belfast have really developed something very important which is there will be a shared experience but different traditions. It recognises that, in some respects, never the twain shall meet

Gordon Lucy: “There's a lot to be said for just agreeing to differ... The Senator's view on 1916 and mine don't exactly dovetail, but I won't fall out with the Senator on it. ... At school I spent a term and a half studying 1916.... but I still end up with a different perspective on it from the Fianna Fáil Party. We just agree to differ.”

Thomas Byrne: “There was some research done ... in DCU - on these differences in Irish society and they believe that they are tribal and go back many hundreds of years in fact, but that the Civil War showed them up, and they may continue for many more hundreds of years in other forms, I don't know.”

Q.5. Noel (Trim) “I remember growing up in the 1960s, we got the Proclamation in 1966, I remember people with poppies out, I remember we got a free day off school on 21st January 1969 for the 50th anniversary of the First Dáil. Those commemorations then disappeared and it's only in recent years there has been a procession past the GPO, I think that was re-introduced around 2006, so how we remember and why we were embarrassed for those 30 or 40 years to commemorate those things I am not sure.

If we look now at this Decade of Commemorations, there is only one county council – as far as I know - in the whole of Ireland that has put together a document (I think that is Mayo) –

and with the election of new councils this year the emphasis was on positions on committees and things, and I think in our neighbouring county, Cavan, one political party tried to go back and re-negotiate who was getting [the office of] Cathaoirleach for 2016! They realised afterwards that it was of such significance for their political party that they wanted to be Cathaoirleach or Chairman of the particular area for one part or the other part of that year. So I suppose, how we commemorate, and the emphasis of the commemoration, and history – as Professor Lyons said – the vast majority didn't know about 1916, and it raises the question as well: do we remember those people who died as martyrs or heroes, without any human faults? I am struck with the Civil War – one side remembers Michael Collins, the other side remembers Liam Mellows, the martyrs are remembered with rose-tinted glasses. And maybe that's where we are headed in relation to 2016 – that some people want to remember it with rose-tinted glasses, and the rest of the people won't have anything to do with it because of that.

Chair (John Clancy). “Thank you – we'll take the next question, this is the last question.”

Q.6. “It's not so much a question as an observation. First of all, thank you very much to all the speakers, a wonderful presentation. I was struck by what Gordon said about amnesia in Spain. I have been in a number of countries where I came across the same thing, but in different ways. In Austria, where I was until a few years ago, there was a strong amnesia factor at work there about the role of the Austrian people, the Austrian State, in the Anschluss and subsequent events which has only in recent years begun to be rolled back and recovered. And it's the subject of lively debate in Austria up to the present day. And it used to be said - Austrians themselves used to say - that Beethoven was an Austrian and Hitler was a German, whereas the opposite of course is the case, because that's what suited their view of history. In contrast to that, in Italy, you have a different kind of amnesia, amnesia to a certain degree about the Mussolini Fascist period, but what totally infuses Italian politics right up to the present day is the Civil War that took place after the capitulation of Mussolini and the division into the Left and the Right, the partisans on the Left and the pro-Fascist rump on the right. That is still the essential division in Italian politics today so these things do sometimes have a different kind of amnesiac effect.

I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s here and we had our own amnesia about the events of the Civil War in particular, but even about the 1919-21 period. Very little was taught about it

in the schools, we as kids only learned about it through commemorations that took place at that time. Now – as Danny was saying – we have sources and resources, we now have a much better database of resources available to us.....”[tape incomplete]

Closing the first session, **John Clancy** thanked all the speakers and participants and invited all to return after the break for the 2nd session “The Place of History in Irish Education” chaired by **Peter Connell** and addressed by **Damien English TD** (Minister of State at the Dept of Education and Skills), Professor **Fionnuala Waldron** (Dean of Education, SPD/DCU) and **Niamh Crowley** (Vice-President, History Teachers Association).

A report on Session II is in progress – below are some comments made in relation to the Decade of Centenaries:

Damien English TD (Fine Gael): “My Department is seeking to ensure that the education sector contributes to and benefits from the commemoration of these seminal events in Irish history.” He outlined the success of the all-island schools' competition, a joint north-south venture which “stimulated a remarkable response from primary and post-primary schools across the island”. The Department is also currently working with the RIA to develop history lesson plans for post-primary schools, and “hopes to be able to support a number of potential 'flagship' projects in the third level sector that are relevant to the period 1912-1922.”

Fionnuala Waldron (Professor, SPD/DCU) asked some key questions in relation to the commemoration of 1916: “how do we manage the tensions between celebration and commemoration in the context of child education, between the expectation of many parents and some teachers that what children should experience is an uncomplicated, consensual national narrative and the recognition that 1916 cannot and should not be reduced to a single story? What kind of context does the Irish classroom provide for such engagement? How important is it for student teachers to interrogate their own assumptions and perceptions of past events? Is child education an appropriate space to engage with those tensions?”

ENDS

Seminar recorded by Anne Nolan; report compiled and edited by Julitta Clancy.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON SPEAKERS and CHAIRPERSON – Session I

Mary Ann Lyons is Head of the History Dept at NUI Maynooth. She is President of the Irish Historical Society and Chair of the Irish Committee for Historical Sciences. Professor Lyons's publications include *France and Ireland, 1500-1610: politics, migration and trade* (London, 2003);

Church and Society in County Kildare, c.1470-1547 (Dublin, 2000); *Gearóid Óg, the ninth earl of Kildare* (Dundalk, 1998), and (with Thomas O'Connor) *Strangers to Citizens: the Irish in Europe, 1600-1800* (2008).

Gordon Lucy is the author of *Schomberg* (2004), *The Great Convention* (1995) and a new edition of *The Ulster Covenant* (2012). He has co-edited (with John Erskine) *Varieties of Scottishness* (1995), which examines the relationship between Ulster and Scotland, and (with Elaine McClure) *The Twelfth: What it means to me* (1997), *Remembrance* (1997) and *Cool Britannia? What Britishness means to me* (1999)

Thomas Byrne is Fianna Fáil Spokesperson on Public Expenditure and Reform in Seanad Éireann (Senate). A solicitor by profession, he previously served as TD for Meath East from 2007 to 2011. Most recently he ran as his party's candidate in the Midlands-North West constituency for the 2014 European Parliament election.

Chair: **John Clancy** is President of the M.A.H.S. and a member of the Meath Peace Group. An architect by profession, he has been very involved in the preparation of the M.A.H.S. submissions on planning/heritage issues, and is one of the Society's representatives on the Meath Heritage Forum.

Seminar organisers: **Julitta Clancy** (PRO of the M.A.H.S. and a founder member of the Meath Peace Group) and **Kevin Reilly** (history teacher at Dunshaughlin College and M.A.H.S. Council member) with assistance from the committees of both groups.

Acknowledgments: *The Meath Peace Group and the Council of the Meath Archaeological and Historical Society would like to thank all who have participated in this seminar and all*

who have helped with planning, publicity, organisation and catering on the day. In particular we thank the speakers and chairpersons, the organisers, and the audience, some of whom travelled long distances. Special thanks are due to Cllr Jim Holloway, Chair of Meath Co. Council (who opened the seminar), to Anne Nolan, Marie Cosgrave, Leona Rennicks and Canon John Clarke, and to the Columban Fathers and Lisa and David of Dalgan Park for assistance on the day, and to the Dept of Foreign Affairs Reconciliation Fund for financial assistance given to the Meath Peace Group.

MPG and MAHS report; (c) Meath Peace Group and Meath Archaeological and Historical Society