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Welcome to the fourth edition of Britain and Ireland: Lives Entwined

I first came across the Lives Entwined project when I was based in Baghdad in 2006: I was reopening our operation there after the war. On arriving in Iraq I had been struck immediately by the resonances with Northern Ireland in the 1970s. It's too simple to say – for Protestant/Catholic read Sunni/Shia. But there were echoes: not least the same depressing facility of mankind to find and home in on deep malevolent feelings of resentment and mistrust, and their close cousin, violence.

Added to this was the surreal proposition of just so many Ulster accents. The Royal Ulster Constabulary (as was) had, it seemed, decamped en masse to Iraq to work for the private security details that made up our close protection teams. Having fled Northern Ireland in 1979, Iraq forced me to reflect on two things – one, there's no escape from your roots; and, two, where there is no move to understanding and dialogue, we are doomed to repeat our mistakes – again and again and again.

Essentially, what struck me then, and stays with me still, is the profound human need for dialogue – to test and share beliefs – and the consequences of ignoring that need – conflict, hatred and violence. That dialogue, and the consequent building of trust and engagement, is what the British Council means by cultural relations and it underpins everything we do.

Reading *Lives Entwined* back in 2006 – in a sense it seemed the opposite of conflict. There were contrary views, of course, but the project was underpinned by the worth of dialogue, of views expressed and listening done.

When I returned to Northern Ireland last year to take up my current job, one of the first things I did was to reread Lives Entwined I, II, and III. That was when I started thinking about a Lives Entwined IV. My initial question was how have our expectations, hopes and fears changed in the years since the last volume in 2008?

In the intervening years we have seen the continuation of the peace process into an occasionally troubled maturity. We have seen the momentous visit of the Queen to Ireland in 2011 and her return to Northern Ireland in 2012 – including the symbolic and very public meeting with Martin McGuinness in Belfast. We have embarked on the so called 'Decade of Centenaries' – The Ulster Covenant, the Easter Rising, the Somme, the War of Independence, the Establishment of the Northern Irish state, etc.

On the macro level we have seen the global economic crisis buffet both countries and within the United Kingdom we have seen the move towards greater autonomy of the four countries and the deepening of a cultural exploration of what that might mean.

Is there a generational change? For those of a certain age, the Troubles inevitably loom large in any reflection on the relationship, but what of a younger generation – what do they think? Young people born when the Good Friday agreement was signed are rapidly moving towards voting age: what does the old relationship mean to them? What too of arts and culture – how has the flowering of diversity in the island affected the artistic imagination?

Are our lives still so entwined? Do we still define ourselves through our historic relationship or have the tectonic plates shifted? Where does the relationship go from here in the context of the pressures outlined above? And what of the future?

We have commissioned a number of writers here to help us explore these questions – two repeat contributors from the earlier series to have a sense of what the intervening years have said to them, but mainly new voices. The writers were given a brief – essentially what is written here – and the freedom to write in their own authentic personal voice. The outcome, we hope, is a new definition of the relationship between the United Kingdom and Ireland brought right up to date for 2012.

In commissioning this volume, we didn't aim for balance politically, geographically or philosophically – we aimed for interesting voices with something to say. We hope you enjoy the result. If we offend any political, geographical or philosophical sensibilities, blame me – I've obviously been away too long...

David Alderdice obe
Director, British Council Northern Ireland







Fionola Meredith is a writer, broadcaster and commentator, living in Belfast. In 2001, she received her doctorate in continental philosophy from Queen's University Belfast, and her philosophy book, *Experiencing the Postmetaphysical Self: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*, was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2005. However, Fionola turned away from academia in favour of a career in journalism,

after her irreverent account of a night at Belfast's first lapdancing club was published in *Fortnight* magazine. Now she writes features and opinion pieces for *The Irish Times*, provides comment and review to BBC Northern Ireland, and writes a weekly column in the *Belfast Telegraph*. This year, she wrote and presented her first documentary for Radio 4, on the Belfast poet, novelist and medieval scholar Helen Waddell. Under her pseudonym, Bitsy Sonomabiche, Fionola enjoys writing for The *Vacuum*, Belfast's satirical arts and culture magazine.

Outside of her media work, Fionola currently sits as chair of the board of directors of the Golden Thread Gallery, Northern Ireland's leading international contemporary visual arts space, and she also chairs the board of Source, Ireland's review of contemporary photography.

Who we are, and where we're going Fionola Meredith

We expected too much. Our hopes for the transformative power of devolution, and a decisive end to the conflict, were too high. Oh, we said we were realistic, that we knew the new settlement in Northern Ireland was bound to be imperfect. The bitter old tensions would not – could not – simply evaporate into thin air. There would still be a sense of pain and loss and wasted lives. There would still be pockets of hatred, moments of despair, when the whole fragile enterprise might collapse in a welter of confusion, blame and counter-blame. I said as much myself, in my contribution to the 2008 volume of *Lives Entwined*. 'Springtime in Belfast'.

But what strikes me most of all, looking back at the words I wrote then, is the sense of barely-contained optimism, an irrepressible, breathless conviction that at last – and despite the twisted legacy of the Troubles – we had a future. I spoke of the feeling of 'possibility and purpose' in the air. The lines from poet Derek Mahon seemed apposite:

There will be dying, there will be dying, but there is no need to go into that.
The poems flow from the hand unbidden and the hidden source is the watchful heart.
The sun rises in spite of everything and the far cities are beautiful and bright.
I lie here in a riot of sunlight watching the day break and the clouds flying.

Everything is going to be all right.

I was naïve. The springtime honeymoon period is over, the cherry-blossom and confetti has blown away, and we are now living in the day-to-day reality of post-conflict Northern Ireland. Of course, we are all delighted that the shootings and bombings have (largely) come to an end, and that the dark, dirty, ignoble war is over. For that, we are grateful, we really are. Despite the activities of dissident republicans, the constant threat – by me anyway experienced as a thrum of internal dread, the ever-present fear of what might happen next – has long since dissipated.

But it never entirely goes away.

Recently, I watched a new Troubles thriller, *Shadow Dancer*, set in 1990s Belfast, and it proved a powerful reminder of those mean-minded, impoverished days. For some, the memories are deeply visceral. I saw the film with a friend whose father was a senior member of the security forces when she was a child. She remembers the inch-thick protective glass in their windows (designed to withstand shots at point-blank range), the panic button under the stairs, the morning checks under the family car, in case an explosive device had been attached in the night. In the film, when a car bomb suddenly went off, killing the vehicle's driver, she leapt in her seat, hands flying out to her sides.

Such fear is involuntary, hardwired into the nervous system, lying dormant until a trigger – a sight, a sound, a smell – releases it once more into the vivid present. The Belfast-based clinical psychologist, Michael Paterson – a former RUC man who lost both his arms in an IRA rocket attack in 1981 – specialises in helping people with trauma, and has worked extensively with police officers who were disturbed by their experiences during the Troubles. He told me about one former policewoman, suffering post-traumatic stress disorder after attending to the dead and dying at bomb scenes, who panicked when she caught the Christmassy scent of marzipan – because it reminded her so strongly of the strange, almond-like smell of explosives.

For many of us, the Troubles are more than a defining part of our history: they have become part of our bodies, part of our minds. You can't simply cast that off like a winter coat when the weather gets warmer and brighter.

The hoped-for era of tolerance, respect and mutual understanding has, so far, failed to materialise. For that to happen, the new situation needed to be mulched with vast quantities of confidence and generosity (both personal and political), and those are two important resources that we collectively lack in Northern Ireland. More money would have helped too – it always does – to sweeten tempers, and to pad sharp, awkward corners. But the effects of the global economic crisis have been felt particularly acutely here, as house prices nosedive and unemployment soars. Now that we are not actively engaged in killing each other, and have graduated to the responsibility of a devolved administration, the British and Irish governments' intensive focus has been diverted onto new, more pressing priorities, closer to home. We are on our own: uncertain, querulous and adrift. All in all, it is a challenging time to build a new society.

Here is what we do have: a rickety, legislatively-constipated Assembly dominated by two political extremes: the DUP and Sinn Féin. The old enemies have discovered that they have a great deal in common, including a ruthless grip on power, and together they operate a fearsome carve-up which leaves the other parties in disarray, squeaking with impotent fury. It is as though the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists, in particular, have been drained of energy by the so-called 'Big Two', desperately searching for meaning and purpose while their vote continues to dwindle away. And, as Naomi Long – the Alliance MP who knocked Peter Robinson off his comfortable Westminster perch in East Belfast – has observed, it's all 'predicated on the continuing existence and maintenance of two communities - separate but equal'. Far from dissolving the old divisions, the situation at Stormont effectively maintains them, in a strained, artificial embrace. This is better, of course, than the violent chaos of the past, and there are some encouraging signs of real change. But it is much, much less than we had hoped.

One of the most telling indicators of an evolved, confident, even-handed democracy is its attitude to the free flow of public information. Enlightened administrations understand that openness, transparency and accountability keep government healthy. The opposite is also true. A key marker of political immaturity is the restriction of information. This type of governance – sadly all too common in Northern Ireland – is characterised by paranoia and a narrow-minded, acquisitive relationship with power.

Much of this impulse towards secrecy, and the crude desire to control, is motivated by fear and suspicion of the press. It's well known that Stormont is absurdly overendowed with press officers (161 at the last count), dedicated to making our ramshackle Assembly look functional, pro-active and purposeful. Special advisers, unsackable and accountable only to the minister that appoints them, hover like hawks: ready to pounce with sharp talons on any sensitive freedom of information requests, and kill them off, if possible, in the manner of troublesome vermin.

We are not even allowed to know who funds our political parties. Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK where all identities of donors to political parties are kept secret, supposedly because of the possible threat of paramilitary intimidation. That's rather convenient for the parties themselves, allowing them to claim that they would absolutely love to be fully transparent about their finances, but the security situation just doesn't allow it – even though there is no evidence of a specific terrorist threat to politicians at this time.

Earlier this year, we saw government paranoia perfectly illustrated when Sinn Féin Sports and Culture Minister Carál Ní Chuilín sent out a diktat – she called it a 'media protocol' – to arms length bodies (ALBs) such as the Arts Council and National Museums Northern Ireland. It required them to consult with her department, Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), about any approach from the media. Any hint of 'negative publicity' and they were to get on the phone to Fortress DCAL instantly, or face the consequences. The ALBs were told that there would be 'an early warning system' in place – an air-raid siren? Titanic-style distress flares? – 'to ensure there are no surprises'. This would be hilarious, if it were not symptomatic of a disturbing culture of control-freakery.

Responsibility, collegiality, independence and neutrality – the four essential lessons of the administration of devolved power – have yet to be learned by the members of the Northern Ireland Executive.

This troubling lack has been brought into especially sharp focus when the religious convictions of ministers – and I am speaking specifically about DUP ministers here – are brought to bear on political decisions.

Of course, Northern Ireland has long been notorious for its intense, politically-motivated religious conservatism. In January of this year, I stood among the Free Presbyterian faithful, who had gathered from all over the country to bid farewell to Rev Ian Paisley, marking the conclusion of his 65-year ministry on the Ravenhill Road. Yet less than 24 hours after the strains of Rev Willie McCrea's soulful tribute, *Take the World but Give Me Jesus*, had died away at Martyrs Memorial Church, Paisley's former protégé, Peter Robinson, stepped out to a warm welcome at Armagh Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) ground, just seconds after the final bars of *Amhrán na bhFiann*. He took his seat with a smile alongside a cardinal and a former IRA man to watch the Dr McKenna cup final.

The strangest thing is that Robinson wouldn't have been sitting in that stand if it wasn't for Ian Paisley. His late-flowering and unexpectedly friendly relationship with Martin McGuinness was the biggest unthinkable of all. This pair of die-hard ideologues had more in common than we realised, and the comical warmth of their connection forged a link that Robinson, although much stiffer and chillier than his predecessor, has nonetheless maintained to their mutual advantage.

If Paisley left the political scene in winsome cuddly-grandad incarnation, his rabble-rousing Calvinist street-preacher side all but forgotten, that wasn't the case at Martyrs Memorial. The tenor of the farewell service itself was joyful, celebratory and affectionate. Fellow-travellers queued up to pay tribute and reminisce about the old days of protest and dissent, swapping stories about being bombarded with rotten tomatoes and flour bombs, or jetting over to Rome to rattle the shackles of apostasy. 'We knew God wanted us to do these sorts of things', said Free Presbyterian Minister Dr Brian Green, with customary evangelical confidence. Meanwhile, all the ladies seemed to be vying to outdo each other with ever more elaborate hats: with all the colourful ribbons, lace and bobbing ostrich feathers, it was more like Ladies' Day at Ascot than a fundamentalist religious gathering, though admittedly with longer skirts and less fake tan and cleavage on show. Children giggled as they scampered along the aisles, the electric grand piano was set to jazzy gospel mode, and tinfoil-covered trays held piles of sumptuous sandwiches, all ready to be devoured once the service was over.

Yet when Paisley got to his feet to acknowledge the praise, the party mood changed. The ancient preacher looked stooped and frail at first. His voice was hesitant and it cracked as he spoke. But a transformation came over him when he stood for one last time in his beloved pulpit. His voice gathered strength, his shoulders straightened, and soon he was booming away like a man half his age. Under the watchful ghosts of John Calvin and John Knox, he warned that anyone who was not saved had better take prompt action to rescue their soul, otherwise they faced eternity in the blackness and terror of hell.

It was visceral stuff, and a powerful swansong. But it felt like a voice speaking from another century, from a time and a place when people dealt in spiritual certainties, when politics and religion held each other in a death-grip, and when the prospect of burning forever in hell seemed like a definite and urgent threat.

At the time, this really did seem like the end of an era. Now I'm not so sure.

Peter Robinson has sought to represent the DUP as a pragmatic, progressive, modern political force that has moved beyond the hoary, Bible-bashing days of 'save Ulster from sodomy'. But while Paisley may have departed from the political and religious scene, I am increasingly convinced that the party has retained its theocratic heart.

In recent years, this has been most clearly illustrated by the promotion of Young Earth creationism – the belief that the world is only 6,000 years old – by leading members of the DUP. Creationists insist that every word of the Bible is the literal truth. They have developed a wobbly pseudo-scientific framework to justify their beliefs, borrowing selectively from mainstream research, misrepresenting legitimate findings and filling the gaps in between with theories of their own making. All this would be a matter of harmless curiosity were it not for the fact that creationists want their religious beliefs taught as scientific fact in schools, museums and galleries.

In 2010, the then culture minister Nelson McCausland – who also believes that Ulster Protestants are descended from the lost tribes of Israel – asked the Ulster Museum to include Young Earth creationist accounts of the world's origins alongside its displays on evolution. Later, Mervyn Storey, the DUP chair of the Stormont education committee, called for the teaching of creationism in school science classes, insisting that 'creationism is not for the RE class, because I believe that it can stand scientific scrutiny'. Storey is also vice-chair of an evangelical Christian lobby group called the Caleb Foundation, dedicated to 'promoting the Fundamentals of the Historic Evangelical Protestant Faith'.

And this summer, these highly-motivated lobbyists scored their first small but significant victory. It seems unlikely it will be their last. When the National Trust opened its long-awaited state-of-the-art visitors' centre at the Giant's Causeway in Co Antrim, it included a reference to Young Earth creationism. Reaction was swift, sharp and scandalised. Richard Dawkins led the charge, insisting that the Trust should never have given in to pressure from 'intellectual baboons'. He said it was regrettable that the Trust had 'paid lip service to the ignorant bigotry' of fundamentalists. But Wallace Thompson, chair of the Caleb Foundation, hailed it as, 'a precedent for others to follow'. He said it was important that the centre, having been 'largely funded out of the public purse', should be 'inclusive and representative of the whole community'.

The seventeenth century Irish bishop, James Ussher, famously calculated the date of creation by adding the ages of the 21 generations of people from the Old Testament, beginning with Adam and Eve. He came up with an astonishingly precise answer: creation occurred, said Ussher, 'at the beginning of the night which preceded the 23rd of October in the year 710 of the Julian period', or 4004 BC. Today's Young Earth creationists are Ussher's true inheritors: pre-Darwinist in spirit, yet equipped with the modern language of equal rights.

In matters of sexuality and reproductive rights, the DUP also shows its true theocratic colours. Current Health Minister Edwin Poots (himself a Young Earth creationist) has struggled to find a medical rationale for his continuing ban on blood donations from gay men, leaving many to conclude that this ministerial ruling is motivated by little more than prejudice and moral opprobrium.

Meanwhile, Jim Wells, who is set to become the next health minister, declares his opposition to abortion in all circumstances, even in the case of rape or extreme foetal abnormality. With breathtaking complacency, he suggests that rape victims continue the pregnancy to term and then hand over the infant to one of the 'hundreds of married couples in Northern Ireland who would love to adopt children'. What's more, the DUP plans to reinforce the already draconian abortion laws here, with tougher procedures which will require GPs to provide detailed explanations for each termination carried out.

Sometimes I wonder whether I am living in Alabama or Northern Ireland.

But this is what happens when personal religious convictions drive political action, and it kills true democracy. The price of devolution has been far higher than we had realised. Our relief at an agreed settlement blinded us to the inevitable consequences: that once local politicians seized power they would shamelessly manipulate it to their own ends, continually trading on our gratitude that the Troubles were over.

The same is true of the DUP's partners in government, Sinn Féin. They may not have the same fanatical moral impetus, but they are often equally brazen in pursuit of their own ideological goals, such as the ending of post-primary educational selection. Successive Sinn Féin education ministers have tried various tactics to undermine the ongoing selection process. In the most recent instance, the current minister, John O'Dowd, appointed IRA bomber Paul Kavanagh to the board of governors of Lumen Christi College in Derry. Lumen Christi is one of the North's highest performing grammar schools, and it has remained steadfastly pro-selection. Obviously, it would be highly advantageous for O'Dowd to have an anti-selection place-man on the board: Kavanagh was evidently a ministerially-placed political appointee in the furtherance of a party agenda.

There was further disquiet because of Kavanagh's own background. He was convicted of killing three people, including an 18 year old boy. These are the things that tear at you, reawakening old feelings of revulsion, which we had forcibly buried for the sake of a new future.

It was similar when Martin McGuinness ran for the Irish presidency. Those of us who want to see power-sharing work – and of course, I still do: what other choice do we have? – effectively agreed to say nothing about the past, not to ask too many hard questions, because we know that the whole shaky set-up at Stormont is built on the principle of don't ask, don't tell: just be glad that things are moving forward democratically now, and don't ever look back too far. Peace is precious, and when you have been exposed to the opposite, you won't do anything to jeopardise that hard-won, fragile state. Yet McGuinness's entry into the Irish presidential race, as a former paramilitary chief, shone a light on the strange and anomalous set-up we have here. It showed us once again what we've been willing to swallow for the sake of an end to violence.

I believe that McGuinness's quest for lasting peace is authentic. But it's one thing to take a leadership role in the governance of Northern Ireland, in a specific political accommodation that was enacted to resolve the particular difficulties of this place. In that context, his dubious past could be accommodated, if not forgotten. McGuinness and the republican movement were part of the problem, so they had to be part of the solution. It is quite another matter to embody the collective values of an entire country, in seeking to become the figurehead of the Irish Republic.

Returning to the Kavanagh appointment, where else but Northern Ireland would a killer on a school board even be mooted as a possibility, let alone the reality? It begged the question: if convicted murderers can pass the test, exactly what kind of criminal record would actually result in debarment from a school board? This is not the same as having former republican terrorists in government. These politicians have a clear and unassailable democratic mandate. There is no similar requirement for the likes of Kavanagh to become a school governor.

The appointment also set a dangerous precedent. DUP members may have held up their hands in horror, but there is no reason to think that they would act any differently if they got the chance. For instance, a DUP education minister might consider it perfectly acceptable to infiltrate schools with Young Earth creationist governors. Before long, our children would be taught bogus science as fact, coming home convinced that dinosaurs and human beings existed at the same time, and that childbirth hurts because women are still atoning for wicked Eve's original sin.

Northern Ireland is not yet a fully-evolved democratic state, and it is vital that these highly questionable political machinations are curbed now, before they lead to even more serious abuses of power.

One of the biggest challenges of a post-conflict society is developing a collective sense of identity. That's not something that you can buy flat-packed from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, suitable for instant assembly. It can't be imposed or dictated. It has to evolve over time, as old enmities start to crumble and disintegrate, and new shared priorities grow.

Unfortunately, the only form of civic pride currently available to us is the glossy, sanitised official variety. 2012 has been billed as 'Our Time, Our Place', a year of megaevents – including the Titanic centenary and the Irish Open at Portrush – which was to be 'the tipping point for Northern Ireland and a real chance to change perceptions'. There was no room for dissent: the public was told that, 'we need everyone to pull together to really make the most of this'.

The aims of the 2012 campaign itself were reasonable: driving visitor numbers, generating economic impact and so on. It's just that many of us don't recognise this one-dimensional image of Northern Ireland, painted in primary colours, that we're all supposed to be selling. It is the PR-generated version of our country, full of froth and sparkle. It is not the unique reality, which is actually far more fascinating. Why should the bureaucrats be the ones to write the stories of our times? Why should we buy into this slick marketeer's version of local identity?

There are signs, though, that Northern Ireland may be changing for the better. They do exist, despite my disappointment and frustration with the deeply flawed political situation. They may be sporadic, disconnected and imperfect, but they are encouraging to those of us who care about this place.

For instance, this summer, amid the usual bitter rows over the marching season, I saw a surprisingly different flag fluttering from the top window of a terraced house in loyalist East Belfast. It was a giant rainbow flag, flown in support of that day's Pride parade. You would not have seen that happen ten years ago. The fact that it was there at all, and that it wasn't ripped down and immediately burned on an impromptu bonfire, was a small victory for love, freedom and tolerance.

Sometimes even the politicians surprise you. Recently, it emerged that veteran Sinn Féin MP, Pat Doherty, lobbied for Arts Council funding for a 'blood and thunder' loyalist marching band whose website includes deeply offensive sectarian songs. Doherty said that the band had made a 'huge contribution in helping to resolve community tensions' in their home town of Castlederg, Co Tyrone, and that he supported their application to buy new instruments.

Doherty's quiet intervention is welcome, regardless of whether the band deserves the money or not. If we are to flourish and grow, we need to find points of connection, different ways of doing things. We need more of these simple acts of unexpected generosity.

Such acts might come more easily to the next generation, unburdened by direct contact with the Troubles. A new political identity – not Irish, not British, but Northern Irish – is gaining momentum, particularly among the young. Champion golfer Rory McIlroy, from County Down, is a notable example. Although he has recently admitted that he 'feels more British than Irish', he prefers to describe himself as Northern Irish. Perhaps for the first time, that is a term that is beginning to accrue real meaning, finally becoming something more than an empty signifier, a way to duck the old nationalist/unionist assignation of identity.

We are slowly shaking off the dry dust of the past. Yet at this point in the history of the new Northern Ireland, we are still not quite sure who we are, or where we are going.

Last weekend, a group of young artists living in and around the Ormeau Road in south Belfast organised a small contemporary art festival in which they opened up their homes for performances and exhibitions. It all culminated in an outdoor disco, open to everyone, at the grand Victorian gates of Ormeau Park. I went along with my Dalmatian dog, Rudi, and we spent a happy night dancing in the moonlight and talking to complete strangers. It felt joyous, unexpected and pleasantly transgressive. Once more, that elusive sense of possibility and purpose was in the air.

If the future is to be a good one, this is how it will be. Not in a dramatic political accommodation, as we had thought, but in neighbours standing in the street talking to each other

You never know. There could be hope for this place yet.

Perhaps everything really is going to be all right.



Rachel Hooper Joseph O'Connor



Rachel Hooper is a radio and television producer based in Belfast. She has worked for the BBC as a journalist and feature maker, where she won bronze, silver and gold Sonys for various different radio projects, as well as the UN correspondent award for a documentary about blood diamonds in Sierra Leone. She left the BBC in 2010 to work as an independent for, amongst others, Falling Tree Productions, an award winning production

company in London. For the last ten years she has made programmes examining the conflict in Northern Ireland for Radio 4 (Or, as a colleague in Dublin put it, 'letting everyone see our dirty washing'). The most recent of these was The Disappeared about the families still waiting to recover bodies of loved ones murdered and secretly buried by the IRA. She recently worked on a series of programmes about cities for Radio 4 – which has nothing to do with Northern Ireland – which were broadcast in January 2012.



Joseph O'Connor was born in Dublin. He attended UCD, Oxford University and the University of Leeds. He is the author of the novels Cowboys and Indians (Whitbread Prize shortlist), Desperadoes, The Salesman, Inishowen, Star of the Sea (France's Prix Millepages, Italy's Premio Acerbi, Irish Post Award for Fiction, New York Times Notable Book of the Year, Neilsen Bookscan Golden Book Award, American Library Association Award, Hennessy/

Sunday Tribune Hall of Fame Award, Prix Litteraire Zepter for European Novel of the Year), Redemption Falls and Ghost Light (Los Angeles Times Prize for Fiction shortlist, Dublin One City One Book novel 2011). In 2009 he was Harman Visiting Professor at Baruch College, City University of New York. In December 2011, he received an honorary Doctorate in Literature from University College Dublin. He is the winner of the Irish PEN Award for Outstanding Contribution to Irish Literature, 2012. A collection of his short stories, Where Have You Been?, is published in October 2012.

Irish Blood English Heart

Rachel Hooper and Joseph O'Connor

I had a title, a slot on BBC Radio 4¹ and a very definite deadline. What I didn't really have was any idea of how to make a programme about the Queen's visit to Ireland that would be distinctive from the news coverage that would surround it.

The wonderful thing about my job as a radio producer is that you can approach extremely talented people and ask them to do all the work for you. After a small amount of persistent persuasion Joseph O'Connor agreed to be involved and we started a discussion about the relationship between Britain and Ireland. (Actually, the discussion went on for quite a while before Joe agreed to present it. I'm not sure he ever formally agreed; I turned up with a microphone one day and that was it.)

In an email to me, Joe said 'The book that reveals most about the relationship between Ireland and England is no novel or history textbook or learned tome, but the telephone directory of any major British city, in which hundreds of people bearing my own surname will be found. The Irish and the English are far more mulatto than they ever acknowledge officially, but privately we all know this to be true.'

I knew this to be true, as did Joe. We had a starting point. I had a title which I emailed to Joe, 'Irish Blood, English Heart'. It crossed over an email he'd sent me, with a link to the Morrissey song of the same title.

The thing is, I have no Irish blood. I'm straight up and down English. I'm married to a Belfast man who has 400 years of Ulster Presbyterianism distilled in him: he once joked that I'd 'polluted' his blood line. I think it was a joke, anyway. But between us, an Irishman living in Dublin and an Englishwoman living in Belfast, we made this programme, 'Irish Blood English Hearts' which went out on Radio 4 to coincide with the royal visit in 2011.

We recorded it largely without a script, on location in Dublin and London. The exceptions were the letters Joe wrote to Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth. Both are included in these highlights from the transcript of a programme which took us from London to Dublin, and which the second of these letters brings to a close.

Opening:

Narrator (reads Irish names from London phone book): Miss A O'Connor, Miss AE O'Connor, O'Connor C, O' Connor D, O'Connor DE, O'Connor F.....

Joe: So many literary texts have been written about the relationship between England and Ireland, and then on another level, on the political level, there's a kind of silence about it. And a series of propagandas, on both sides. But I always feel that the real storybook of the relationship between Ireland and England is not to be found in a novel ... we all know that there are connections of a very intimate and rich kind, to do with culture and intermarriage and sport and business, you know? The guilty fact about the Irish and the English is that secretly, they're guite fond of each other...

Scene one - London

Music: The Pogues A Rainy Night in Soho

Joe: Well, here we are in Hammersmith on a chilly evening in March. I love London, I lived here as a lad, as did pretty much everyone that I went to college with. That's the way Ireland was in the 1980s; you got your plane ticket to London at the same time as you got your degree. I mean emigration was such an unquestioned factor in Irish life. I grew up in Dun Laoghaire, a coastal town eight miles south of Dublin city where there was a pier and a waterfront, and the nightly entertainment in the summer when you were a teenager was to walk down the pier and look at the boats and the ferries leaving for London and wonder to yourself would you go to Manchester or Coventry or which English city you would go to. There was no notion that you'd stay in Ireland. Ireland was a joke and we all knew that, it was this funny little failed place on the western shores of Europe that only survived due to the incredible irony that every ten years or so a hundred thousand of its people would go and live in the land of the old enemy.

But my parents would say to us you know, this little rainy sad place on the western shores of Europe where we don't do many things brilliantly – this is the country of WB Yeats, and Patrick Kavanagh and Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw, very interesting figures of course, because many of them felt an allegiance to both countries. Oscar Wilde is included in anthologies of English writers as well as Irish. I mean we used to feel very neurotic about this in Ireland, but I think this is a great thing – Irish blood English heart ... you know?

Interviewee 1: The late Josephine Hart, interviewed shortly before her death. A novelist born in Ireland but who lived in England for many years.

Josephine: Well I came (to England) really full of gratitude that when people would meet me I would have no historical identity i.e. I wasn't Sheila Hart's daughter or I wasn't Dermot Hart's daughter. I would come without an identity and to be without a recognizable identity I think that is the great gift of exile.

My personality was so intense that I did have to learn to calm that down. I think in the beginning I approached language in the way that I had in Ireland, that a conversation was like a rugby match – you know you got the ball and you kept running with it. In Ireland it works because we're all ready to jump on the ball but in England you would never dream of doing that! So out of good manners I had to say, 'stop it Josephine, let someone else talk here!'

Joe: Shortly after I met my wife – we both loved opera, and I'd never been to Glyndebourne so we decided we'd go. So we went to the opera, and after the end of the first act there was a break, as is traditional, for people to go outside and have their hampers and their picnic. And we'd slipped up there, we hadn't brought the hamper. But we stood there watching and I think I was smoking a cigarette, and people had their rugs and their fold out chairs and fold out tables and their fold out waiters, and they sat there having these incredible meals. And about ten minutes in the sunshine disappeared and the sky darkened and a thunderstorm began, probably the worse one I've ever been in, in my life, and within about two minutes I was completely soaked to the skin. Nobody moved. Everybody sat there under their umbrellas eating their lobster thermidor and drinking their champagne and saying to God: 'We are the English at play. You have nothing you can throw at us that is going to put us off. We're going to sit here for half an hour and eat our picnics. And then we're going to damn well go back in and see the opera'.

Music: Morissey Irish blood English heart

Josephine: There is the love of narrative in Ireland to shape the story and there is a reticence in English society. And you know, each society changes of course every decade or every 20 years and English society has changed a lot since I came here, but the idea of English self-deprecation, of being hidden behind language, is very definitely in my opinion in their psychology.

Joe: I think that the inculcation of feelings of antagonism towards Britain is something that belonged more to my parents' generation. I mean my father – who's in his seventies now, who had a standard issue Christian Brothers education in inner city Dublin growing up – he could still quote you reams of verse about the treacherous Saxon dogs and how they 'poisoned our hero Owen Roe O'Neill, did they dare to slay him they feared to meet with steel'. But I think, from talking to him, that he and the other little boys didn't really believe this. They thought it was great poetry; but their fathers and their mothers had worked in England and their uncles and aunts lived there now, and some of their uncles had been in the British army and they knew it was slightly more complicated than those aspects of the culture would lead you to believe. And certainly by my own generation, by the time I went to school there was still a little bit of it, not very much. But it's hard to tell kids to hate the English when they all love Manchester United and The Beat and The Specials and The Clash. People don't think in such big terms. The Irish have a great ability to make exceptions, and I think that was often applied when England came up in the conversation.

Interviewee 2 – Professor Diarmaid Ferriter, Irish author and historian.

Diarmaid: There's no doubt in Ireland that there are people who would proclaim themselves to be proud Irish republicans, who think the monarchy is a ridiculous institution and they have to be very ironic about it and very satirical about it. And yet curiously they are extraordinarily knowledgeable about the ins and outs of the royal family and royal goings on and the various individuals associated with it – I wouldn't quite call it a forbidden love, but it's a slightly clandestine indulgence on the Irish part.

When Queen Victoria came to Ireland in 1900 there was a mixed response. There were those who protested and took the opportunity to make their protest against the British Empire. They would have linked their protest to the wider protests against British Imperialism in the context of the Boer War; and they saw this as an opportunity to demonstrate their allegiance to Irish republicanism and Irish nationalism. But you've got to distinguish between that reaction and the reaction of ordinary people. There was a sense of it being a popular occasion; people lining the street, people being curious and interested in the royal family and wanting to demonstrate their allegiance to the royal family. There would have been plenty who identified with the British Empire in Ireland at that time as well; nationalism and republicanism were not developed to the extent at that time that they could be representative of mainstream public opinion. So you've got to really see two different public attitudes to the British royals, and Queen Victoria herself would have expressed herself as very gratified at the reception she got in Ireland at that time. That reflected the close ties between the two countries in terms of geography and history and personality.

Letter to Queen Victoria, from Joseph O'Connor, Dublin, 2011

Dear Queen Victoria.

Properly, by the rules of etiquette, I should address you as 'Your Majesty', and for that reason I am willing to do so. But since stating a willingness is also to state a form of reluctance, let me add that my reluctance is not to intend the slightest disrespect to your shade – people are entitled to be called what they wish, and a head of state has a whole nexus of particular entitlements, most of which are embodied in language. But it's hard for any Irish person to use the words 'Your Majesty' and mean them. And thereby hangs a tale.

For me to address you using those words – for me to call you 'Your Majesty' – feels as strange and as foreign as it would feel for you to be invited to call me 'Joseph' or 'Joe'. You would do it, I know, if absolutely required; but let's face it, you would not be amused.

What we call each other has so often become a matter of great importance in the history of these neighbouring islands. People have killed and died over matters of naming, because Shakespeare was wrong when he said a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. Call a rose a noxious weed and it would cease to be a rose. Soon, it would lead the garden into war.

As Shaw, a man who was both Irish and English, pointed out, the Irish and the English are two peoples divided by a common language. But there have been one or two other divisions along the way. And there have been interesting affinities also.

My grandmother, Eleanor O'Neill, was born in the year of your death, in the city of Dublin, the capital of Ireland, a country that gave you and your ministers many troubles and sleepless nights all through the years of your reign. She was born in a district called 'The Liberties', the city's oldest neighbourhood, an enclave of fierce autonomies, as all poor places are, near the stern, black cathedral in which Swift had thundered the gospel, near the slums of O'Casev, those rookeries of the broken, near the house on Usher's Island in which the family in James Joyce's The Dead are gathered in the hope of epiphany. Dublin Castle, bastion of colonial power down all the long centuries, was a mule's bawl from Francis Street, her childhood home and habitat. The Liffey flowed adjacently, by Wood Quay and the Four Courts, by the steeples of Christchurch and Adam-and-Eve's, a dirty, eddying watercourse serenaded by the seagulls and the calls of the bargemen through its mizzle and stench. Twenty years after her birth it would bear into history the last British garrison ever to guard Ireland's capital. The river that once brought them would take them away, under the conquering gaze of Michael Collins.

Francis Street was a district of intertwining ideologies, where nationalism's pieties, if often acknowledged, would be complicated by other, more pressing realities into which one's patriotism, if one possessed any, had to be resolved. 'Pray and Save' would be the dictum of newly independent Ireland, slogan of a regime that favoured obedience above all other modes, as perhaps all post-revolutionary societies will – but Francis Street said more than its prayers. The Liberties, aptly named, a kind of independent republic. had its own web of fealties and ethics. It was a place of trade and commerce of one kind and another: small shops, dairies, rent-collectors, corner-boys, people who kept animals, survivors, adapters, with as many sceptics as true believers. My grandmother, as a child, had seen the black bunting draped from the tenements – commemoration of those hundreds of her neighbours who had died in Britain's armies. From Bloemfontein and Spion Kop and Gallipoli and Ypres, from countless unpronounceable battlegrounds of empire and its desires, many sons of Francis Street had never wended home. Their absence from the Liberties was itself a kind of presence. It suggested allegiance was more complicated than you'd been told.

Perhaps, in these complications, and in others we know about, lies the true nature of the relationship between my people and yours. As Oscar Wilde wrote in one of the most immensely popular plays of your era 'the truth is rarely pure and never simple..' How true that is. Your Majesty.

Yours sincerely Joseph O'Connor

Music: Paul Brady Nothing But The Same Old Story

Joe: Well, Paul Brady has a very interesting song called Nothing But The Same Old Story, and it tells a story that appears in a lot of Irish literary works about a young man who goes to work in England and he comes down the gangplank of the ship with his eyes wide as headlights like the thousands and thousands who've gone before and it's about experiencing discrimination, about experiencing anti-Irish feeling, which has certainly always existed as a seam of English life, right back to the 19th century and previously. There's a refrain in the song 'in their eyes we're nothing but a bunch of murderers' and he even says in a very knowing very insightful critique of a kind of English liberal who loves Irish culture, he says, 'there's a crowd says I'm alright, they love my turn of phrase, take me round to their parties like some dressed up monkey in a cage, and I play my accordion but when the wine seeps through the facade it's nothing but the same old story'.

And that song is true, you know? There's no point in pretending the relationship between the two countries has been untroubled. My own father-in-law, John Casey, was from County Roscommon, he remembered seeing the signs in the boarding house windows saying no Irish could stay there. I think you see it all the way back to the works of James Joyce, in traditional music, in ballads, in stories. But I think even while all of that bitterness and ignorance and fear which has existed on both sides has gone on, there've been people who make an exception. And the Song of Heart's Desire is a very powerful song. It's stronger than any hatred or prejudice, and that has brought people together in remarkable ways over the years.

Scene two - Dublin

Joe: Well, we're now on the corner of Marlborough Street and Abbey Street right in the centre of Dublin. There's the Liffey over there not a hundred yards from us and the GPO on O'Connell Street is just a couple of hundred yards in the opposite direction. We're standing outside the Abbey Theatre – a modern building that stands on the footprint of the original Abbey – which was founded about a century ago by Yeats and Lady Gregory and John Synge.

It was quite a beautiful building. Some people in Ireland have the impression that it was set up in a garage and was very improvised, but in fact Yeats and Lady Gregory and the people who founded it felt it was very important for the building itself to be beautiful. So the project, I suppose, was to have a place where the stories and the mythologies and the languages of Ireland could be celebrated. From its earliest days, the Abbey featured plays in Irish and English, and it was really a kind of cauldron and laboratory where people experimented with what kind of place this coming country would be. But a very important feature of it is of course that its greatest poets, its greatest playwrights, all wrote in the language of England and perhaps borrowed it and infused it with how English is spoken here in Ireland. But the fact remains, Sean O'Casey and John Millington Synge were English language writers: they chose not to write in Gaelic, and it gives their work a richness and reveals a very interesting thing about Irish society at that time; that we decided to take the language of the conqueror and see if we could speak it better than he did, you know? A bit like how people in other countries decided to play cricket better – we decided to speak English better...

Josephine: It is very interesting that there is a certain ambivalence in the English about their identity at the moment but there is none at all in Ireland. If you say you're Irish, people know what that is. But England itself is in this strange debate – what does it mean to be English? And in many ways what it means to be English is its great cultural heritage as much as it is in Ireland but we make more of ours I think.

Joe: When people leave the tribe is when they begin to become very interesting, creatively. And all the musicians that my friends and myself liked – like The Sex Pistols and The Clash, it was a factor that John Lydon's parents had been Irish immigrants, and there was a kind of Irishness to his persona and the particular way that he performed, and you see that in music in England all the way up to Oasis and beyond, and in stand up comedians, a kind of storytelling and an Irish attitude, a sort of braggadocio and a notion that language is not just to tell a story. Language itself is performance. When people are very poor all they have to play with is their words and I think there's something of that in English rock and roll, a sort of mischievousness.

Music: The Sex Pistols God Save the Queen

Letter to Queen Elizabeth from Joseph O'Connor, Dublin, 2011

Dear Queen Elizabeth.

You are soon to visit Ireland, for I think the first occasion, although many of your representatives and employees have spent time with us previously, not always with happy results, either for them or for us. But let's let bygones be bygones and the past be the past. You will be welcomed by the great majority of the Irish people, whose links to your own people are so many, rich and varied. The most important of those links is the shared citizenship of affection, the one that sings quieter than any national anthem, always trickling along, like underground water, but no less real for its tact.

In the Republic of Ireland we are citizens. Your own people are subjects. Since most of them would appear to find that situation agreeable, it would be churlish of us to ask any questions. It is not for the neighbours to go forming opinions about the people who live next door. But of course, we do. As you do, also. The main thing is for us to greet each other amiably when we pass in the street, not to let private unease interfere.

As for us, recently we have begun to wonder what citizenship really means. We have socialism now in Ireland, but only for millionaire bankers and property speculators. Everyone else has to endure the brutalities of the market. How this has happened to us, we are not quite sure. But as a great Dubliner who was also a great Londoner, George Bernard Shaw, once wrote: 'If you rob Peter to pay Paul, you can always be sure of Paul's support.' Thus, life in a republic has turned out to be strange.

Then again, Your Majesty, it was always strange enough. The great Irish novelist. John McGahern, was fond of observing that Ireland is not really a country but a collection of tens of thousands of little republics called 'families', each with its own finely calibrated modes and habits and laws. often – vou will like this – with a matriarch as monarch. He spent time in your kingdom, as so many of our people did, and he wrote of those people with grace and acuity: the men who built your motorways, the women who nursed your sick, who met everything England had to offer, from hatred to love, and sent their wages back to the place so many of them always called 'home', despite living in Kilburn or Birmingham. Too often those heroes were forgotten, by your people and by ours. They live in our songs, in the fragments of our stories, but they were inconvenient to the fantasies of a country that thought itself free, as much as to a country that thought itself the capital of the world so profoundly that it decided the central meridian would run through a little town called Greenwich, every other position on the face of God's Earth being measured from south east London. James Joyce wrote that the reason why the sun would never set on the

British Empire was that God would never trust an Englishman in the dark. Remarkable, how we have joked about one another, my people and yours, like spouses in a marital sitcom.

In some ways – in many – Ireland is indeed like a dysfunctional family. Such families have their troubles – as you will yourself have had cause to reflect – but they are often capable of presenting a clean face to the world. Let us hope that your forthcoming visit is one of those occasions, a moment of new beginnings for us all. I speak as the husband of a beautiful Londoner, as the father of a son born in that greatest city in the world, as someone who has always felt the truth in the writer Frank O'Connor's remark that an Irishman's private life begins at Holyhead. Certainly, for this Irishman, it was where happiness began. If I sometimes met prejudice, I more usually met peace. And English prejudice, at any rate, is sometimes little more than gossip, one of the ways a troubled society develops of holding itself together. Pretending not to like the interloper is a remarkably effective means of pretending to like oneself.

You will find the city of Dublin, which your great great grandmother visited, an interesting and welcoming place. My local park is named after her, Victoria Hill, and you will notice, perhaps, as you are driven about the city, that many of the mailboxes still bear the commemorative initials 'E.R', still legible through history's multiple layers of emerald green paint, where once they had been imperial red. But we have not painted out England completely. How could we, ever? That would be to obliterate a part of us, the language our greatest authors wrote in, the culture to which Shaw and Wilde felt an equal sense of belonging, the island across the water to which so many of us had to flee in order to find work or freedom. So many strange paradoxes, and yet they somehow bind us. There is a song by a great Anglo-Irish writer called Stephen Morrissey – you possibly won't know his work – called *The More You Ignore Me, the Closer I Get.* I sometimes think of those words (and that song) as the best comment possible on the relationship between your country and mine.

Often your people and mine have been represented as poles apart. But that is not the case, and we know it. In truth, we are a Venn diagram whose shared space sometimes shifts, altering itself to the realities of simple human fellowship and of that beautiful of all the mercies, forgiveness. There is much to forgive. On both sides, there is much. But there is also much to celebrate and share.

In conclusion, I hope your visit to Ireland is everything you would wish. Happy and glorious. Indeed.

Yours sincerely Joseph O'Connor

Music: Morissey Irish Blood English Heart

¹ The programme presented by Joseph O'Connor, produced by Rachel Hooper was a Falling Tree production for BBC Radio 4 broadcast on 13 May 2011.





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His most recent books are A History of Ireland in 100 Objects; Up the Republic!; Enough is Enough; and Ship of Fools.

Chums?

Fintan O'Toole

My first memory of being in England is from the hot summer of 1969. I know now that this was the summer that British troops were sent into Northern Ireland, but I don't remember that at all. We were with my father in London and the thing he was most excited about was that he was going to see the West Indies play cricket against England. I remember certain names – Garry Sobers, Clive Lloyd – but I never saw them myself. Neither did I see the Rolling Stones, though my father dutifully asked my older brother and myself (I was 11) if we wanted to go to the free concert they were giving in Hyde Park. We declined the offer because we thought the place would be full of drug-crazed hippies. The memory I do have is much more banal than that but at the time the incident was overwhelming.

My brother and I are sitting on a low wall outside a pub in which my father and his cousin are having a drink. We've been given bottles of lemonade and we're sucking through straws. We're thrilled with the lemonade but a little scared to be on our own on an English street. In my head, there are nameless fears about England, all of them traceable to the fact that it is known to be full of Protestants and therefore entirely without order or morality. Around the corner, in the blazing sun, comes a huge African man in flowing white robes and a tall leopard-skin hat, followed by a small retinue of attendants. We stare at him. He stops and beams benignly at us. He raises his arm and extends his hand from the sleeve of his robe. He pats me on the head and says 'Hello, boys. Are you enjoying your pop?'

Pop – the word belongs entirely to the English comics we read. We don't use it in Ireland – all fizzy drinks are lemonade and we get them so rarely that one word for them is quite enough. It comes to me in a panic that he thinks we are English. He's some kind of exotic foreigner – a king? a chief? – and in that moment, I decide that he's visiting London and has deigned, graciously, to say hello to some English kids. But we're not English, we're Irish, which is, of course, the opposite.

I open my mouth to try to explain this to him – not, I think, for our sake but for his: this is something he should know. But it's all too much – the pre-existing tinge of fear, the awe of his regal presence, the strangeness of his black skin, the confusion of this sudden and unprecedented experience. Nothing comes out except a short, high-pitched gabble. He pats my head softly again, turns away and sails majestically down the street.

My father and uncle come out of the pub. They ask us if we're okay. Did anyone bother us? We don't have time to confer but instinctively we both say that no, nobody came near us. We both feel that if we tell the truth we might get into some kind of trouble. For the rest of our first visit to England, I feel vaguely ashamed. I've somehow let Ireland down by passing as English and this seems to matter. Somewhere out there, there's an African prince or king or chief who believes he has fulfilled his social duties by patting an English boy on the head and asking him if he's enjoying his pop. And in fact he has encountered an entirely different brand of humanity. I should have said something. But, I ask myself, how could I ever have anticipated that anyone would know so little about the world that they would confuse Irish and English?

Yet, looking back, I must have known at some level that this whole notion was ridiculous, even for a child. Why shouldn't a foreigner take us for English? For on that same week-long trip, we stayed with our English first cousins in Maidstone and our other English cousins in Manchester – one set from my father's side of the family, the other from my mother's. My Uncle Kevin, a court clerk in Kent, looked so much like my father that we laughed at the way even the backs of their heads, with matching bald patches and a few last wisps of curls, looked indistinguishable. But he was, of all shockingly English things, a Tory. My Uncle Peter, a bus driver in Manchester, had my mother's soft eyes and gentle manner, but he expressed approval and enthusiasm with words like 'champion' and 'belter'. And seeing us and his own children play happily together, he called us 'chums'.

That word leapt out at me a few years later when I read *Guests of the Nation*, Frank O'Connor's story, written in 1931 and set during the then-recent War of Independence. The story begins with ordinary human friendship – Englishmen and Irishmen calling each other 'chum':

At dusk the big Englishman, Belcher, would shift his long legs out of the ashes and say 'Well, chums, what about it?' and Noble and myself would say 'All right, chum' (for we had picked up some of their curious expressions), and the little Englishman, Hawkins, would light the lamp and bring out the cards.

When I read the story first as a teenager, it struck me as a little strange that O'Connor's narrator picks up on 'chums' as a 'curious expression'. It is, just like *pop*, redolent of Englishness and, for that very reason, you'd seldom hear anyone use it in Ireland. But it was hardly 'curious': it was there all the time in Enid Blyton stories, in *The Beano* and *The Dandy*, in Dickens, in virtually everything we read. And it is, after all, a warm, cosy word, implying a simple human (though especially male) affection, a familiar intimacy. It has a sense of ease about it; it is uncomplicated and unpretentious. It suggests something beyond – or rather below – politics, history, race, religion, identity. That, of course, is why O'Connor inserts it so prominently at the start of his story and draws our attention to it.

For the word will come back in a cry of terror. We gradually learn that the Englishmen are captured soldiers – hostages being held by the IRA, to be killed in reprisal for British executions of IRA prisoners. When told that they are indeed to be taken out and shot, one of the soldiers, Hawkins, gives a cry of despairing incomprehension: 'Why did any of us want to plug him? What had he done to us? Weren't we all chums? Didn't we understand him and didn't he understand us?'

The question turns on that little word – 'chums'. Chums don't shoot each other. Hawkins asks his captors if they could imagine, with the situation reversed, that he would shoot them 'for all the so-and-so officers in the so-and-so British Army?' The idea, like the word, is supposed to transcend politics and history, to make demands of a different order to those of states and armies and officers. Except, of course, that it can't. Hawkins and Belcher must be shot and the narrator must help to do it. Historic imperatives are in motion and a little, silly, unpretentious word like 'chums' cannot stand in their way. It will be crushed and silenced.

O'Connor's story is very simple but also very complex. For it entirely depends on something that is not supposed to be the case. Writing just a decade after the bitterness of the Anglo-Irish conflict in which he participated, O'Connor is able to make an ostensibly extraordinary assumption and take it for granted that it will be shared by his readers. What he assumes is this: ordinary readers, both Irish and English, will find it entirely credible that, given some time together, IRA men and British soldiers will become 'chums'. This process has no drama or romance. It is treated as a normal state of affairs. It may be, in the context of conflict, fragile and disposable. But it is an everyday, unremarkable reality.

When I read O'Connor's story for the first time – I must have been 15 or 16 – it did what good fiction ought to do – it put words on an unarticulated feeling. It was the first thing I read that captured so directly a deep ambivalence that attached to my Irish feelings about England. In the story, two entirely different attitudes collide. One is political and historic: English oppression and Irish resistance. The other is human and mundane: chums. One is big, powerful, coercive. The other is small, ordinary, natural. One is about ideas and identities. The other is just about living. One demands, even at its most benign, a large-scale language of negotiation, compromise and reconciliation. The other just is. It's about getting along in both senses – surviving and co-existing. One is a very big deal. The other is a very small deal – but, perhaps, it is in such small deals that humanity endures.

Even as a teenager, I knew that these two realities did not cohere. For me, as for many Irish people, they had to exist in different spheres, one public, the other private, that have to be sealed off from each other. The public aspect consisted of all the stuff of inherited resentments and contemporary turmoil. Certain things just gave me the creeps: Stanley Baldwin's 'tinkle of the hammer on the anvil in the country smithy'; George Orwell's 'clatter of clogs in the Lancashire mill towns... old maids bicycling to Holy Communion through the mists of the autumn morning'; John Major's 'long shadows on the county grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs'; imperial delusions and patronising public school voices; the impregnable self-righteousness of a brilliantly self-serving ruling class; a tone, real or imagined, of benign condescension; a blithe assurance that Irish problems were purely Irish and that England was simply there to help. All of these aversions are (to me) perfectly rational, and I can defend them if need be, but in truth they are also pre-rational. They come with the territory – in my case a native terrain that was Irish, Catholic and working class. I can rationalise them all – but even if I couldn't, I'd still feel them.

Growing up with the Troubles gave all of these instincts a focus and an urgency. British policy – swinging from utter neglect to authoritarian control, from reform to reaction – was, at best, inadequate. Disasters from internment to Bloody Sunday to the mishandling of the H-block hunger strikes seemed, fairly or not, to stem from a deep carelessness. It seemed that Britain had never collectively taken the trouble to really understand Ireland; that the ghastly mistakes came from a kind of laziness. Centuries of control had not been matched by centuries of real engagement. Britain, and especially England, seemed in this light very foreign indeed, so distant that all the nuances and subtleties that define a friendship were entirely absent.

But there was also that other Britain, or in my case, other England. It was barely foreign at all. I grew up reading *Just William* and *Billy Bunter* and *The Famous Five*; *Desperate Dan, The Bash Street Kids* and *Dennis the Menace*. I followed Nottingham Forest and adored Brian Clough (still do). The highlights of the cultural week were *Monty Python, Top of the Pops* and *Match of the Day.* The Beatles and the Stones formed the soundtrack of adolescence. I was taken captive by Shakespeare and Shelley, Austen and Hardy, Orwell and Huxley, Tom Paine and Christopher Hitchens. The first newspaper I decided to buy for myself was Harold Evans's *Sunday Times*. I learned to write journalism from reading Charles Shaar Murray and Nick Kent in the *New Musical Express*. I learned about theatre criticism from reading Kenneth Tynan.

There was, in all of this, a kind of freedom. Irishness, in all its complexities and perplexities, is what you inherited. It was given to you and you had to make the best of it. You were stuck with it and, to a degree, responsible for it: the bad bits as well as the good. But English culture came free. It was a bonus offer, not an essential part of your own identity. You could take what you wanted and leave the rest – hang on to the anarchic genius of *Just William* and ditch the twee world of Enid Blyton; take David Bowie doing *Starman* and leave Edward Heath; adore the Shakespeare of *King Lear* and ignore the Shakespeare of Henry V; love the England of Blake, Shelley and Paine and loathe the England of *Brideshead Revisited* and the Bloomsbury group. You could construct your very own England from the bits that appealed.

The thing about all of the appealing stuff is that the imagined community it conjured didn't feel like *Them.* It wasn't Us either – I always had the sense of being outside of it. But it was entirely interwoven with daily life in Dublin. It didn't set me apart – on the contrary, not to have read the comics or followed an English football team, not to have seen *Top of the Pops* or the latest *Monty Python*, was to be out of it. It wasn't even glamorous or exotic – it was just there. In truth, it was even more there than most of traditional Irish culture was. It was much easier for me, as a kid on a Dublin housing estate, to connect with English urban culture than with what I later came to know as the majesties of sean-nós singing or Peig Sayers's stories of island life. *Boys from the Blackstuff* was a much more pertinent reflection of the life I knew than The Riordans could ever be

But it wasn't just this sense that aspects of English popular culture were more resonant in the present. My sense of the past was also shaped in significant ways by English imagery. Thus, for example, Irish neutrality in the Second World War was entirely irrelevant to the mental universe in which I lived as a child and teenager. It was a huge historic fact – the most important single decision an Irish government had made up to that time. But it was completely supplanted at the imaginative level by English comics in which the war was still everywhere. We knew about rationing and the Blitz and the Battle of Britain and Dunkirk. We knew that German soldiers ('Gerry') said 'Achtung! Schweinhund!' and that the Japanese said 'Banzai!' The Emergency – a literal non-event – couldn't compete with the visceral drama of Britain's war. And it was a specifically British mythology of the war that shaped my early notion of what happened and what it meant. I remember watching Winston Churchill's funeral on the television and knowing, at some level, that it was about something much more profound than the passing of another Tory toff – it was about the searing experience of the war.

This made complete sense to me because of another aspect of the private side of my relationship to England. Like almost everyone I knew, I had aunts and uncles – and therefore gangs of cousins – in England. And three of them had fought in the war: two in the army, one as a clerk in the Women's Royal Air Force. For them, Irish neutrality was a fiction. Poverty at home on the docklands of Dublin and the opportunity of a decent wage and perhaps some vocational training in the forces drew them into that defining conflict.

It strikes me, in retrospect, that there was never the slightest sense of shame about this, or any obvious rupture with their Irish Catholic background. I'd like to think that this was because of the nobility of the fight against fascism, and I'm proud that my Uncle Kevin, who joined the Royal Engineers, helped to get troops through Rommel's minefields at El-Alamein and to run the railway system in occupied Berlin. But I don't think there was anything as fine as that going on here. Such grand thoughts are part of the large, public history. This belonged to the other, private history, the mundane normality of life. Joining the British army in wartime was simply much better than being unemployed on the Dublin docks. So far as I could gather, nobody in the flats complex they came from – an area in which nationalist sentiment was strong – thought it at all strange that three of the O'Tooles (and later a fourth) joined the British forces. If someone had asked them in a TV vox pop or an opinion survey, they'd probably have felt a duty to say it was a disgrace. In the private reality, it was unremarkable.

There's no great mystery in any of this, no large moral or sententious conclusion. It's just what people do. They do what they think is best for them at the time. Poor people, in particular, can't afford too many abstract principles. I'm sure my uncles and aunts grew up with all the inherited hatred of England and Englishness – they'd been born in the decade after the Anglo-Irish conflict. But it made no difference to the decisions they had to make – decisions about survival and boredom and adventure and advancement. They made their choices and adapted their lives to the choices they had made.

It strikes me, indeed, as interesting that, of the four who joined the British army, two came home and two stayed in England. And that, in each case, they adapted happily to whichever place they were in. With the two who came home – one uncle, one aunt – you'd never have known that they had been, for a time, officially British. They slipped back easily and naturally into Dublin working-class life – their accents, their attitudes, their way of carrying themselves, all indistinguishable from those who had never left. But the two who stayed in England – one in Maidstone, one in Birmingham – slipped just as easily into English life. They didn't cease to be Irish, of course, but neither did it particularly bother them that their kids would have English accents.

Why did it not bother them? Because, ultimately they – and many more of my aunts and uncles who left in the 1950s didn't emigrate to England. They emigrated to social democracy. The place they wanted to be wasn't Hammersmith or Ealing, Birmingham or Manchester, though they ended up in all those places and more. It was National Health Service Land, Free Education Land, Unionised Workforce Land, Jobs for Women Land, where being female didn't mean your only choices were whether to be a housewife or a nun. It was a land of basic decency where ordinary working people believed they had a right to a reasonably tolerable present and the hope for a better future.

If, in the period between 1945 and 1979, you wanted to understand the difference between ideology and human realities, the question to ask was: what's the difference between England and Ireland? In the realm of rhetoric and abstraction, the answer was to be found in endless discourses about history, religion, victimhood and oppression, the Empire and the Four Green Fields. But for those who grew up on small farms or in the working class ghettoes of Irish towns and cities, the answers were entirely different. You could get a job in England. Your kids could go to secondary school and, if they were smart, they had a good chance of getting to university. You could get your eyes tested and your teeth fixed. You could get some kind of a house. And in Ireland, if you came from those social classes, you couldn't.

And all of these things trumped nationality and religion. It wasn't that the hundreds of thousands who left for England felt less Irish – in many ways, they were forced to feel more so, to be suddenly and uncomfortably aware of the way they spoke and moved. Whether they liked it or not, they were Paddies, forced to deal with everything from outright racism to 'good-natured' joshing. ('What's the matter, Paddy, can't take a joke?') In relation to religion, it wasn't that they hadn't been force-fed warnings of the dangers of Pagan England to their faith, their chastity, their very souls. Irishness and Catholicism remained immensely important to the bulk of those who went. But ultimately they were less important than wages, houses, schools, prospects.

This is just the way people are. Given a choice, most people prefer a decent life to national or ethnic purity. Given a choice, most people like to get on with their neighbours, to fit in with their communities, to carry on with the business of going to work and raising a family and hoping for the best. They may have and hold an identity that is ethnic and political and religious and historic. But they also have an identity that is contingent, that they make up as they live their lives, that they form out of the daily stuff of coping and hoping. There are grand antagonisms and reconciliations but there are all those things implied in the word 'chums' – ordinary acts of getting along.

Here, though, is the big question: could these two kinds of experience be brought together or must they always occupy parallel universes? Must there always be a disjunction between the public and private sides of the relationships that tie Ireland and England together? Is it possible to imagine that the tragic disconnection that O'Connor dramatises in *Guests of the Nation* might be repaired?

Well, perhaps it is, and perhaps it has actually happened. Queen Elizabeth's state visit to the Republic didn't really change anything. But it did dramatise a change that had already happened. It gave a sharp, immediate focus to a process that has been slow and incremental. It had its lovely moments of graceful presence but what it really did was to embody a paradox – making an absence suddenly visible. What we saw were two things that were, astonishingly, not there: Anglophobia and condescension.

This took me by surprise. I was at Dublin Castle, blathering for some TV crew, and when I'd finished I was grabbed by another and put in front of a monitor with a live feed from the Garden of Remembrance in Dublin. I was doing the usual stuff: explaining that the garden was primarily built to commemorate the heroes of violent nationalism, and the resonance of a British monarch entering it to pay her respects... I was completely unprepared for the emotion of that simple but extraordinary moment when the queen laid her wreath and bowed her head. That moment appealed to something far beyond the rational. It reached into places where no speech or declaration could, or should, try to go: the irrational, psychological terrain of superiority and inferiority complexes, of inherited insult and thoughtless condescension. It hit all the raw nerves that lie just beneath the surface of this knotty relationship, delivering a shock that was, paradoxically, soothing.

Before the queen did that, the visit was overwhelmingly about us, the Irish. It was about the Irish proving to ourselves that we are mature, that we're over all that bitterness, that the chip on our shoulders is now a mere mole. The visit seemed like a kind of immersion therapy: you cure yourself of Anglophobia by welcoming the queen in the way you might cure yourself of arachnophobia by walking into a roomful of spiders.

The ceremony in the Garden of Remembrance transformed the visit by making it also about *them*, the English. It wasn't just the Irish who were being bravely mature: it was also the English. Generations of English superciliousness towards Ireland (the suave, upper-class, good-natured sort being the worst) was disavowed in that moment. The queen managed a dignified humility and simplicity that were the polar opposites of condescension. Her gesture was not, as some overexcited commentators and headline writers sought to insist, some kind of homage to the rebels who beat the Brits. It was more meaningful than that. It was a simple acknowledgment that Ireland is a different place, with its own history and mythology, its own encoded meanings. Different, that is, but equal.

And perhaps all we needed was that simple gesture of respect to bring the official and unofficial, the public and the private relationships, into alignment. For the trick was never to create an amity that did not previously exist. It was to evolve a politics that is adequate to the simple, mundane intimacy that has been there for generations. The need was not for something grandiose. It was for the possibility of going back to Hawkins's terrible question: 'Weren't we all chums? Didn't we understand him and didn't he understand us?' Only this time with the vivid likelihood that the answer might be 'yes'.



Laoise Holohan Fionnuala McGill Tarah Graham



Laoise was born in Donegal and then shortly moved to Galway. She never grew up in a religious background. She then moved to Belfast at a young age and has lived there since.



Fionnuala attends St Rose's Dominican College. She is a member at *Headliners*, which focuses on young people and journalism. She likes to read and loves cats.



Tarah Graham is 15 and from Belfast. She goes to Hunterhouse College and is doing her GCSEs. Her favourite subjects are art and technology and design. She has been going to *Headliners*, which is a youth media organisation, for four years and loves it. Her favourite experience with *Headliners* was going to Japan. She loves drawing and photography.

Headliners:

Introduction

Laoise 13, Fionnuala 15, and Tarah 15, attend a youth media organisation called Headliners. Its aim is to inspire and encourage the personal development of young people through journalism. Young people are trained to research and produce stories on issues important to them for publication and broadcast in national newspapers, magazines, television, radio and online.

Headliners provides a shared space where young people can air their views openly as well as gather the views of a wide range of other children, young people and adults. It is not easy for any young person to encapsulate what it means to be who they are but here their views hold a mirror to the rest of us.

Derville Quigley, Headliners Staff.

The surroundings that the kids grow up in Laoise Holohan

I remember my first time in Belfast. Straight away I knew this was different to 'down south'. I know people try to say that everything is changing in the world and how we're less sectarian than we used to be. But the truth is, we're not. Well, I'm not saying that everyone is, but there is people who are, but you'll find that everywhere. Small minded people. I guess that's not quite fair calling them that, but what else can you say? They're people who have built up a prejudice about a certain type of person and can't see anything around that.

I remember driving into Belfast. I was just visiting my aunty, nothing out of the ordinary. We were driving in on the Malone Road and automatically my mind jumped to the conclusion that Belfast was rich. I was only young and they were big houses. Almost everything about the whole Belfast set-up was different. The shops were different, the cars had a different registration, the people seemed different and even the radio stations were different. But what struck me the most was the houses. At the young innocent age of six, I had felt like I had stepped back in time to Victorian houses and new ways of living that up until then, I had seen only on television.

I had also been amazed with the amount of murals; there is hundreds, not many with particularly friendly messages. When I saw one that had 'Easter 1916' written upon it, I turned to my mom and said:

'You'd think they would of cleaned it off by now.'

In the five years I've lived in Belfast I have technically been a child and as a child I noticed a lot. Like how in my primary school everyone went to mass. Everyone. Every day we learnt religion. Well it was a Catholic school. But it did say that they let in all religions. Well – not that I saw. But in secondary school and up, well that's where I saw it the most. Not even then, the last summer is where I saw it the most. And by 'it', I mean the obvious split between two communities.

Now here's basically how I see this all. There's one big community of people, but the people don't see it like that. They see it as two communities. Catholics and Protestants. Look, I don't mean to dis these religions, but they're in essence the same. They believe in the same thing, that Jesus was the living God on Earth and all that. The only difference is that Protestants believe in different sacraments, that churches should be less decorated, the way they understand the bread and wine at church, religious leaders can marry and that the Pope isn't the head of the church. The hatred is no longer about this; it's about that your lot killed someone out of our lot.

It's ultimately circular and will continue to be so. Because when all this started with Martin Luther the world was more violent, people killed among each other with less hardship. So people continued killing each other because of one death and it's still going on.

I was talking with a girl and the touchy subject arose in our conversation. She insisted that:

'I hate all Protestants.' She informed me as soon as I mentioned the word. 'Don't even try explaining it, I hate them all.'

'But, that makes no sense.' I said. 'You can't just hate a whole group of people; they're not all the same person.'

'Don't even try explaining it to me, people have tried and failed,' she persisted.

'That's just small minded.' I said.

'Is it small minded to hate the people who killed your aunt?!' she asked rhetorically.

'But they're not all the same person!' I insisted, because they aren't.

'Just don't.' she said. That was the end of that. Nothing more was going to be said.

But I don't get it. If the person was black who killed her aunt, would she hate all blacks? If they were a woman, would she hate all women? If they were homosexual, would she hate all homosexual people? No, she wouldn't. But the years of brewing hatred against one another is causing her to hate all Protestant people.

As an outsider on all this, being an Atheist, I just don't get it. Some people refuse to say Londonderry instead of Derry, and that's okay. But when it's a teacher doing a lesson and it's in the book, you can sense there's hatred lying there. Sometimes it's not even lying there. It's coming up to you and smacking you in the face, parading on televisions and radios.

I do Irish in school because all my family did it and I feel it will be a valuable piece of my country to be a part of, but I don't think that's why all these other kids do it in Belfast. After going to a Gaeltacht with other schools I've come to the conclusion that people do it because they want to prove a point that they hate England and that they refuse to acknowledge them as people. Not all kids were like this, but the fact that there were people who are and that they're only young, well I just don't think that's right! Parents are putting these impressions upon their kids.

Sometimes it isn't even the parents doing this. It's the surroundings that the kids grow up in. It's hard to tell, really, but the fact that the prejudice is there is bad enough.

Also, a lot of people at the Gaeltacht supported Celtic. It was like a religion to them. Well, when it comes to football most people are like that, but the fact that I didn't know who they were was shocking to them. I mean, come on, they're Scottish. Everyone sang anti-Ranger songs. It would have been fine but they made such a big deal of it. The amount of hatred towards Rangers was almost scary. Can I just point out, there are Northern Irish football teams, and you don't have to go searching out for other teams. What have Rangers and Celtic to do with Protestant and Catholics? Again, they are Scottish.

I hope that anything that I've written so far can give an impression as to what it's like as a kid with all this. It's barely even the half of it. It's the fact that I can't go out trick or treating at Halloween, the fact that there's a bomb scare almost every month and the fact that on one day every July it's not a nice day to be in Belfast. It's things like how schools make children go to mass with the school: it's not optional.

I'd never say this normally, but I just zone out at church. I just don't believe in it: but I can't really go about saying that.

I was born a while after the Good Friday agreement. Me being me, I could barely tell you what it's about. One thing I know about it was that it was needed and that afterwards it has gotten a bit better.

A lot of people think it's weird that the IRA confuses me. Apparently there are two. The real one and a fake one doing things in their name or something. I don't know what the original one did; I only know the bad things that the fake one did.

I think some of the people in that group need a good shaking. Don't they see that they're harming us more, bringing us back a couple of decades ago? And almost everyone knows the song 'Ooh Aah up the Raa?' I think that's just awful. It's a song in support of the IRA and what they do. Kids know it! They shouldn't be worried and thinking about this sort of thing, they should be worried about stupid things like acne, exams and that quy they fancy. Nothing at all like this or even close to this.

And when the Queen visited Belfast I was so afraid that there would be violence. People rioting and bomb alerts everywhere. That 'Erin is our Queen' was probably the smallest possible act against the Queen. It wasn't anything too bad; it was just people saying that she just wasn't their Queen, nothing like 'Get out of our country'. Some people really seem to hate the English monarchy. Other than the fact that I find their lives filling up our TV annoying, I'm fine with them.

So I remember that first day I was in Belfast. Driving through the streets and looking at the old homes, I never thought that there would be so much hatred and resentment towards the throne lying within them or the hatred against one another. Who would suspect that something so big could derive from something so old?

I know I didn't At first

Forcing myself to be part of it all

Fionnuala McGill

As I begin to write this, I think to myself: 'How do I write this unbiased, without coming off the wrong way?' But I can't and I suppose that is a characteristic of someone being brought up in Northern Ireland after the Troubles. Everything I do – the way I speak, places I go and the way I think are traced back to a biased upbringing within this biased society that I belong to.

Being raised in a Roman Catholic household in an area of west Belfast, I see signs of my background every day; masked gunmen painted in *memoriam*, scenes from the Easter Rising and faces of hunger strikers. Symbols of republicanism, of nationalism: but does it have any relevance to people my age today? I think not, but I think a portion of us, including myself, almost force it to be a part of our daily lives.

By force I mean I realise the importance of remembering the past. I don't think the murals should be painted over, I don't think people's sacrifices should be forgotten. Those stories should continue to be told and I recognise that we as young people from the area have a role to play in that. To me I will always be an Irish citizen in my own right, I imagine myself telling my children what I was told, about the Troubles, about the sacrifices people made – the hunger strikes, the protests. I would want to continue learning the Irish language, something that I didn't get the chance to learn when I was younger – as I think language is a very important part of any national identity, especially to me at least.

To 'let go' of all I've been raised in, to throw away the idea of nationalism and disregard all that happened in the Troubles would seem nearly disrespectful, almost like betrayal, because I see it as a bond with my community and friends alike. It's like it's my sense of identity and pride and without these traditions and ideas I wouldn't be who I was, and am. So in forcing myself to be a part of it all I feel as if I have a reason to be an Irish Catholic. And actually a lot of the time it isn't forced: it's there, it's chiselled into your mind. But at the same time I'm not sure how much of this is healthy or good for me and my generation and other generations to come. Half of the time some of my generation don't understand it; they feel as if burning flags and starting riots must be a way to display their Irish pride.

Here I sit, as I write this, staring out upon Belfast and even I can spot the areas I would dub as 'safe', which would be other Catholic areas. Even though there may be more crime in certain areas populated by Catholic communities and therefore deemed much less safe than nearby Protestant areas, to me and other members of my generation they still are the 'safe' parts.

I remember a time when my sister, who was going away on a holiday bought a scarf. She remarked continuously how lovely it was, then I took it and opened it up – Io and behold, it was decorated as a Union Jack. Suddenly the loveliness was taken away. But if worn a certain way it would be fine, as long as it wasn't exposed. If that doesn't say something about how my culture is, then I don't know what will.

I feel comfort in the Irish tricolour. When I was younger and driving through Protestant and Unionist areas I was overwhelmed by the number of Union Jack flags, a sign of British pride. It was as if you knew right off the bat you were no longer 'in your side' of Belfast.

I was astonished when I visited England when I was 10 and the place was void mostly of any Union Jacks at all. Alas, no person could say my name either, but I figured that also was because they were British. To me, Union Jacks seemed to become less germane to Belfast areas. I thought if people in England didn't hang them in their areas, why did we? Or should I say they? Because back then I was much more separated from the Protestant community. However I must remark on how different it felt seeing that flag in England compared to any other part of Belfast. It just didn't feel as threatening. Even after the visit the Union flag in Northern Ireland still felt rather ominous.

Being brought up to a father born and raised in Donegal and a mother born and raised in Belfast, I was nothing short of an 'Irish' upbringing. I remember fondly watching RTE as a child, saying Ireland when asked where I was from and hearing old Irish folklore stories. It wasn't until later in my life I noticed just how different each 'side' (being Catholic and Protestant) was. I wasn't aware until not so long ago that many people also born in Belfast didn't have any idea what hurling or camogie or even Gaelic football was, or couldn't in fact pronounce my Irish name.

Growing up I was astounded by how few people could pronounce my name, or even try to. I didn't understand how people just didn't know.

When looking at murals and symbols of Nationalism and the Troubles I feel at home, but also pity when I see derogatory slogans about Catholics and Protestants. In a humorous sense you also know what type of area you are in if you see nationalist paramilitary or Irish murals in other areas you've never been in. I think it's important for anyone of any community in Northern Ireland to know if they're in a Catholic or Protestant area. I think it's just a weird precaution and that one must know who they're around – well, just because. I know I do it myself, glancing at murals and flags and people's schools uniforms and their names to get a sense of where they come from. Maybe everyone from Northern Ireland does it at some point. There's a fear here that I think will always be here no matter how long the peace process goes on, and I hope the peace process does carry on.

I'm not sure what comes next for Northern Ireland, I just hope the future is bright. I remember hearing a story of a relative's friend, who said she would date a Protestant but not marry one; I think there is still discomfort here from both sides of the pond. And as new generations come about, it won't stop, because when my generation become parents they'll tell their children the same they were told and it will continue on. Ignorant people breed more ignorance. A friend of mine wasn't aware Protestants celebrated Easter. I wasn't aware the 12th of July was an actual celebration that went for days with parties for children and the like.

In the short time I have lived, I have one close Protestant friend, living in a Catholic area and attending a Catholic school. It is no surprise to me. However, every time my friends and I (all being Catholic) come to stay over at my Protestant friend's house we all go over the same routine of sometimes changing your name, depending on the time of year and how to pronounce the letter, 'H'.

Although there is little to no threat, there is still a fear that maybe something might happen and I might have to pronounce the letter 'H' in a different way. I'm still not sure why that is.

I think bringing both communities together is the only way to solve our problems, but trying to do that is a problem in itself. I'm positive in the changes I see happening around me, albeit not some. I don't think trying to mix already standing Catholic schools with Protestant schools is a good idea, nor knocking down the peace wall or painting over murals from the Troubles. Changing our mindset is the first and foremost thing and even now the notion of knocking down the peace wall is a touchy subject. Although, from my point of view anyway, I don't see a great change being made in the actual communities, as I don't think many people in Belfast are ready for drastic changes just yet. Many people who lived through the Troubles still feel the pain and I'm not completely sure how Northern Ireland will achieve complete peace, and I'm not sure we ever will. But if we keep moving forward positively and successfully working together, it can't be anything but a bright future.

Taking a leaf out of Japan's book

Tarah Graham

People are the way they are. Everyone is brought up in certain ways and since we are young, subliminally we can end up believing or having the opinions of the people that surround us, no matter how much willpower we have.

I don't know much about history and I don't particularly want to, although I do know things that are forgotten can easily be repeated.

History doesn't have to be all doom and gloom. I think that events like the Troubles should be remembered, not in a bad way but in a good way. We can all easily say many people were hurt and injured and that there is still a great divide, but if we look at it in an optimistic way we can celebrate the fact of how far our country has come since then. We have the Good Friday Agreement, also schools, workplaces and youth groups both with Catholics and Protestants working and playing together. It's all positive progress.

I was brought up as a Protestant and I am proud to be who I am. I do want to stay part of Great Britain and not part of Ireland, for the sheer fact that Ireland isn't exactly in good shape. And if I was asked where I was from I would say Great Britain, though when I hear people saying they want to be part of the Republic of Ireland, I just feel like saying sometimes, 'move'. If they want to be part of it, they know what they can do.

I do think the Queen is pretty cool, still working at her age. But, no, I do not know every single word to the national anthem. I would never hold back who I am because I think it could offend someone. Like when the Queen came to visit for her diamond jubilee I was really quite excited and I actually really wanted to go to Stormont, the day she was here, to see her. But that was the day of my technical drawing GCSE, so I couldn't. Also my family didn't have a party for the jubilee. I don't think it meant all that much to them: but we did watch a lot if not all of the celebrations on TV because it was a very historical moment in time, and I did really enjoy it.

It angered me so much when I saw that people had put the tricolour flag and the words, 'Ériu is our Queen' on Black mountain when the Queen was here, because I thought it was just so disrespectful.

I had friends from catholic/republican/nationalist areas texting me about how horrible it was that the people that had organised and were protecting the flag had got hurt by people from Ballysillan but in my head I thought they should have just not done it in the first place. I didn't care that they got hurt and if that makes me close-minded then I don't care.

To be honest, I don't exactly know if I could call myself a Protestant, because I don't go to church and I don't know what religion I have or if I even believe in a religion? But these thoughts obviously pass through every single person's mind and it's probably just a part of growing up.

In my head, religion is the start of many problems for people because I can see that some people are so embraced by their religion or culture that they are too closeminded to think that people can have other views or opinions. I think that this is the basis for many problems that exist today. You must accept people don't have to believe what you think. That's why I think there should be more things like culture-days where different religions can understand one another.

Last year I was lucky enough to be chosen to travel to Tokyo as part of a cultural exchange programme run by youth media organisation, Headliners. In Japan there are two religions which I was introduced to. They were Buddhism and Shintoism. Shinto or Shintoism is the native religion of Japan. They believe there are many kami translated as gods or nature spirits. Some kami are just spirits of certain places, and some are the overall kami. And Buddhism teaches people how to reduce their suffering by understanding themselves better. Often, people do bad things, and they get evil responses. Buddha discovered a way to end this, and taught it. Some see it as a religion: other people think it is a philosophy; and for others, Buddhism is a way of finding reality. But with these two religions both being very very diverse and not like each other at all, the people that live in Japan can both get on with their day to day life living in harmony with both of these religions and I really like the fact a country can do that and that maybe we should take a leaf out of Japan's book. I'm not saying that the country is perfect because nowhere is perfect but it's maybe food for thought.

I think one problem is that young people aren't taught about both sides enough and can be completely ignorant about Catholics and Protestants until they are of an older age.

I remember doing an integration project with a Catholic school when I went to primary school. Its aim was to try and bring two different schools together to show us there was no difference between us, without teaching us about history. They used team-building activities and trips between our schools. I remember the first time we met, we went to their school and were led through to their assembly hall. When we walked in, all the kids were at one side of the hall and us at the other. We had name tags on; also the other kids did. But at that age this didn't help me much because most of them had Irish names that I wouldn't have even understood how to read or pronounce. We played a few games with them and we did the same when they came to our school a few months later.

But I really think none of these things work, because we were just told they smelt weird and that we shouldn't talk to them by other kids. As I was little and didn't know any better, I didn't really talk to them. Also our teachers didn't really encourage us to talk to them. We were just told to be on our best behaviour. Most of the kids on the

trip with me didn't really have a view on it. They just thought it was a waste of time and that they didn't like the other kids. Also that it was boring, but they were just glad to get out of doing actual work in school. We probably found the bus ride there and back more enjoyable, and it was probably the same for the kids from the Catholic school.

I know children can go to mixed schools and I do go to a mixed school, but it is obviously a touchy subject as it can get students talking a lot - because there could be a lot of debates. So I do think teachers try and skip it. So there is still kind of a grey area for many people even in their late teens.

Though I do know that if I hadn't got into the school I did or if I hadn't started Headliners, there would be a very slim chance that I would have actually met Catholics, and I still probably would be very close-minded.

I have been asked many stupid questions. Only a few weeks ago a Catholic asked me if Protestants celebrated Easter? I was just completely baffled as to how she could not know we celebrated Easter. But I understand how if people aren't taught they would obviously just not know.

As I attend a youth group in Belfast city centre, I have many Catholic friends and sometimes I can find it hard to get my point across without feeling like I've upset someone. For a long time I just wouldn't say anything if someone said a point of view, because I was scared of my friends respecting me less or being horrible to me or something. But over the last few years I have realised to be and stand up for who Lam and if someone doesn't like it, then it's their loss.

Nowadays there are obvious things my friends make fun of me for, like the way I say the letter 'H'. But I just take it as a joke because I know my friends are only messing around. Though I do get very annoyed when they come to stay, because those with very Irish names are always telling me to call them a different name until they get into my house. There aren't going to be people patrolling the area, listening or looking out for people that aren't Protestant.

Sometimes I find it very hard with my friends, because it feels like I'm more open-minded than them. Because when I'm staying in their houses, I don't even think twice. The only way I'd be scared or afraid is if I got lost somewhere. I don't know, but obviously I could never say this because it would just make things between everyone very awkward.

It can be harder from about the 10th to the 13th of July as some of my friends aren't allowed to visit my area by their parents. And this really annoys me, because it's not like I'm going to throw them onto a bonfire. But obviously I can see why their parents would have concerns. And probably that is the way it is going to be for a long time, because, like I said, opinions are passed down through families. Things should be forgiven, not forgotten.





Anne Bonnar provides support and advice to artists, cultural organisations, public agencies and governments in Scotland, England and Ireland. Her early career includes publicity at the Citizens' Theatre Glasgow and General Manager of the Traverse Theatre, which she transformed from being a club in a back alley into a public theatre in a new home. A founder director of the National Theatre of Scotland, former trustee of the National

Galleries of Scotland and Transition Director for Creative Scotland, Anne has also worked with national cultural institutions in Ireland. She led the change process at the Abbey Theatre during its crisis in 2004–05. Her first project in Ireland was working with the artist founders of the Model and Niland Centre in Sligo. Recent projects in Ireland include a review of Dublin Contemporary 2011, curation of Theatre Forum conference, a discursive programme for the British Council Ireland's Next Door Neighbours programme and working with the National Campaign for the Arts on the Value of the Arts to Ireland.

On the importance of getting under others' skins: or, the perils of self-sufficiency

Anne Bonnar

The Abbey Theatre, founded in 1904 by WB Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory, is inextricably linked with the formation of the Irish Free State, becoming the first ever state-subsidised theatre in the English-speaking world. On 20 August 2005, an historic meeting was held in the rehearsal room of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. Viewed as of high public interest, news cameras waited for its outcome on the pavement outside the theatre. The Theatre's Advisory Council, whose members included some of Ireland's major cultural and civic figures, met in the room where productions by Irish playwrights from JM Synge and Sean O'Casey, to Tom Murphy, Frank McGuinness, Brian Friel and Marina Carr had been brought to life.

The meeting in 2005 was to discuss neither poetry nor politics, but the no less critical subject of governance. Governing a major producing theatre, and a national one, requires a range of attributes and leadership in setting artistic policy, risk management, audience development, financial planning and governance; it needs commercial and management acumen, far sighted policy setting, powerful private and public networks, together with the muscular support and challenge of its director and senior executives.

The significant gaps in skills and experience on the Abbey board in 2004 contributed to a major crisis. 2004 was celebrated as the centenary of the Abbey, and the Theatre embarked upon an ambitious programme of productions plus a glossy publication which it anticipated would be funded through major donations and sales. By autumn, after the bulk of the expenditure was committed, the failure to achieve funds was evident, as was falling box office income. A sudden and unexpected proposal by the Abbey management to cut the workforce by one third was attributed to structural problems with the business model. The way this was communicated, plus the notable absence of the then Artistic Director, unleashed a tirade of criticism against the Abbey's leadership, management, programme, funding and its governance – culminating in a vote of no confidence from the shareholders in the Artistic Director.

In October 2004 I was commissioned by the Arts Council to review both the findings of an internal working group and the operations of the Abbey itself, as a result of which I made a suite of recommendations. This informed an Arts Council offer of one-off funding to the Abbey on specific conditions attached to major changes to the organisation. The Arts Council awarded me the commission as a result of a competitive process and on the basis of having worked in and with many producing theatres in the UK to help them get their businesses in shape.

As a consultant, I am a critical friend to arts organisations and arts leaders, getting under the skin of an organisation, questioning areas which I can see may not be working as well as they should be, and offering alternatives in achieving artistic, community and financial ambitions. In early 2005, I began to work with the Abbey. This is the organisational equivalent to putting one's self under the guidance of a doctor or therapist. For this to work, the patient has to subject himself to investigation to inform an accurate diagnosis, accept his condition, trust the doctor and take the prescription.

Working deep inside this quintessentially Irish national cultural institution was a great privilege, presenting its quota of challenges and surprises and also illuminating some of the differences in the way that cultural organisations function in Ireland, in England and in Scotland. Just as the Abbey was born at a time when Ireland wanted to express its unique cultural identity and mark its separation from England, the National Theatre of Scotland was born at a similar juncture. As a child of Scottish devolution, it expresses national identity not only through its artistic choices but more pointedly through its innovative business model. The 'theatre without walls' was created in a truly Scottish manner through a process of committees, endorsed by the theatre community and the politicians. This was handed over for development to a young English woman, rather than a more usual suspect, to build on the Scottish cultural traditions of making work outside of theatres, community engagement and artistic risk. Establishing a national theatre which has partnership in its DNA and which is not based in a theatre in the capital city illustrates Scottish inventiveness.

Having researched international models of theatre, I was well-equipped to work with the Abbey. I wonder how important it was to the successful relationship with all involved not only that I was not Irish but also that I was not English. Not being Irish or from Ireland underlined my objectivity and also allowed me to ignore some of the niceties of doing business in Ireland of which I was blissfully ignorant. Not being English may have reduced some resistance to being offered strong advice from someone associated with a previous imperialism. As a British expert, I was an outsider. As a Scot, there may have been a feeling that I might be more sympathetic to some of the particularly Irish ways of doing things than if I were English.

The Abbey, as a premier Irish cultural institution, designed to protect Irish cultural identity and create Irish theatre, was structured in a way which made it clear that it was no direct descendant of British imperial institutions. Its determination to be different contributed towards its weak governance structure, the governance that was now being blamed for the crisis of 2004. There was no system in place for challenge and change. Neither was there a habitual practice of critical comparison with international peers.

There are also differences in the culture, manners and mores of operating an arts organisation in Ireland, England and Scotland. One of the particular differences is between the direct and plain speaking of the average British arts manager or governor compared to their counterpart in Ireland. I have found colleagues in Ireland to be charming, respectful and polite sometimes to a point where important truths are skated over or left unsaid. Another difference is the tradition of 'falling on one's sword'. Colleagues in the UK seem more willing to resign where that action will clearly be for the public good than is the tradition in Ireland.

During the early months of 2005, the change process overcame several barriers and blockages. The pace picked up in May after the end of year financial audit exposed a variance of €1m between the management accounts and the audited accounts. This generated a powerful force towards change, the early succession of Fiach Mac Conghail, the Abbey director in waiting, and the 'stepping aside' of his predecessors.

So, when the members of the National Theatre Society met together to debate the future of the Abbey Theatre in August 2005, they did so in the context of clear proposals supported by the major funder of the Abbey, the Arts Council, and the government. These changes to governance were radical because of the new concept of skills matrix that they introduced, seeking a balance of required expertise and experience. The National Theatre Society advocated for an actor and a playwright to be essential to the board and this was agreed. After several hours of passionate debate, the Society voted for its own dissolution and the creation of the new company, Abbey Theatre Amharclann na Mainistreach.

Cultural institutions are structured to safeguard national identity and also reflect the values of a nation. While the trustees of the National Gallery of Ireland and the National Gallery of Scotland have similar responsibilities, in Scotland trustees are appointed through an open recruitment process and are not remunerated. In Ireland, board members may claim fees and are not subject to open recruitment. In the UK, chairmen of national cultural institutions are often recognised through an honour, sometimes a knighthood. In Ireland, there is no honours system and it was explained to me that ministers would sometimes recognise individual achievement by rewarding those involved with a seat on the board of a national cultural institution. Both systems can allow a selector the opportunity to recruit according to skills. The previous Abbey system of nominees precluded such a selection and the new system is more robust than most in Ireland.

Seven years on the Abbey, under the leadership of Fiach Mac Conghail, his team, and the board of the new company chaired by Judge Bryan McMahon, is in fine form despite the hardships of the economic crisis which has reduced public expenditure and advance ticket sales. The Theatre's working practices including an historic demarcation system which prevented workshop staff from fixing a nail onto a flat on stage have long since been reformed. It receives greater funding than in 2004, more private investment, higher audience numbers, produces and commissions more new plays, achieves greater critical acclaim and has increased its touring.

I have continued to work with the Abbey at various points as the guest 'Presbyterian' as Fiach Mac Conghail calls me, around the board or management table. My style of working and communication is influenced by what I like to think of as my Scottish values and characteristics – fairness, honesty, hard work, plain speaking and a canny inventiveness. An outsider, with no agenda other than the success of the arts in Ireland. A professional, whose relationships with arts organisations, artists and leaders in Ireland are not at all 'entwined'.

I do not believe the concept of entwinement validly describes cultural relations between the UK and Ireland. Rather, we have cultural exchange, some assimilation and a tendency to be so concerned with what Freud called 'the narcissism of small differences' that we fail to open ourselves up to genuine creative collaboration.

Working also with government, public agencies and arts organisations throughout Ireland, I have come to appreciate the differences about how we work and what we do. I know well the hotel lobbies and coffee shops of Dublin and which tribes of Irish society might be found there. I have learnt the importance of the preamble in a business meeting. In my early days, I would stride into a meeting punctually and expect to get down to business immediately, bemused by the apparently diversionary chit-chat about family, the news, travel, the theatre and so on. Eventually disarmed, I was then taken aback towards the end of the appointed time when my meeting partner would swoop in to transact the business in ten minutes flat. Now, I can outpreamble others. I expect a cup of tea and not coffee. I am relaxed when others take mobile calls in our meetings. I am charmed by the humour, the politeness, charm and collegiate respect. I recognise the hierarchies and tribes and can relax in a society where there is very little of the old school tie and old money élitism of the UK.

But I am not sentimental. As a 'Bonnar' living in Scotland and often working in Ireland, I am immediately welcomed with all the warmth accorded to those British, and particularly Scots, who feel strong connections with Ireland, its landscape, its culture, Catholicism and its people. There are many more Bonnars in Donegal than in the whole of Scotland and Pat 'Packie' Bonner is a celebrated Irish goalkeeper who played for both Ireland and for Glasgow Celtic Football Club. Many Scottish artists and particularly theatre directors and playwrights identify as Irish/Scots, Irish or Scots of Irish descent. There is a strong sentiment about Ireland and the Irish amongst several of my artist friends, for some of whom the attraction is so powerful that they want to live there.

My family is plain Scottish and English and I am not aware of any ancestral connections with Ireland. My love for Irish theatre comes simply from studying WB Yeats and JM Synge and seeing some great Irish plays in theatres in Edinburgh: Druid Theatre, Enda Walsh, Elaine Murphy's *Little Gem* and the two greatest for me were by the Abbey Theatre: Patrick Mason's production of Tom McIntyre's *The Great Hunger* in 1986 – epic, poetic, graceful, visually compelling, moving and powerful and Mark O'Rowe's exhilarating, poetic and mythic *Terminus* in 2008. Irish theatre has been a joy and stimulation; it has made me think, made me laugh and has moved me on the subliminal levels where great mythic drama takes us.

All of this work has been available to me because of the Edinburgh festivals, most of it on the Fringe. Whereas the Edinburgh International (*the official*) Festival curates 100 per cent of its programme, the Fringe is open to anyone who wants to come and can find a venue and somewhere to stay. Some venues on the Fringe curate companies like the Traverse, Dancebase, Aurora Nova, the Pleasance, Assembly and, the latest of these, Summerhall, and it has been these venues, each with its different tastes, where the Irish theatre programme has mostly landed. The importance of these Edinburgh venues in bringing Irish theatre to the UK, increasing understanding and enjoyment of a range of styles of work, cannot be underestimated. Fishamble, for example, the Irish new writing company which has internationalism hard wired into its operations, won a Fringe First Award at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival for *The Wheelchair on My Face* by Sonya Kelly this year and last year for Silent by Pat Kinevane, following a long line of success. The role of Culture Ireland has been pivotal in recent years, providing funding and proactive networking support.

Theatre festivals in Ireland also present UK work, curated according to the taste and resources of the directors of the Dublin Theatre Festival, Dublin Fringe, Galway Arts Festival, Cork Midsummer, and Kilkenny. During the particularly difficult political times during the 1990s, the British Council made heavy investment in the presentation of a wide range of British arts in Ireland, a time fondly remembered by Ireland's festival and venue directors. This year, with the support of the Irish Arts Council and in parallel with the Cultural Olympiad, the British Council's Next Door Neighbours programme has enabled work to visit seven arts festivals in Ireland. It's interesting what choices the festivals made. While Kilkenny Arts Festival embraced a great British cultural treasure, with Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, other festivals focus on British counter-culture, mostly seen on international rather than British stages. The Dublin Fringe, 18 years old this year, has a long association with interactive, immersive gaming and experimental artists such as Coney, Tim Etchells and Ant Hampton.

The result is a dearth of up-to-the-minute mainstream UK theatre coming into Ireland. Irish theatres have so many Irish plays they want to produce, there is little room for anything else. Directors of theatres and festivals would prefer to have non-UK work if there is to be any visiting. It's not only a question of taste – but I also have a sense that many Irish theatre leaders don't want great work in from the UK if it is associated with English or other UK institutions. For some perhaps it's a matter of resources. But there is also an element of defensiveness, a fear of being swamped or contaminated by English values. This insecurity is fed by the complete failure of many arts leaders in the UK (well, England), to recognise that Ireland is not part of the UK and to be sloppy about rolling Ireland into Britain when communicating with international colleagues. And of course, colleagues in Ireland often use England as a synonym for Scotland.

Ireland's main producing theatres produce mostly, but not exclusively, Irish work. The historic repertoire is bountiful and there is a wealth of new writing. Several Irish writers enjoy international reputations so great that much of their work is premiered out of Ireland, like Conor McPherson's *Seafarer* and *The Veil* at the National Theatre in London. There are not sufficient opportunities in Ireland for Irish writers and so, on the other hand, it's not surprising perhaps that contemporary UK writers are rarely produced on the professional stage in Ireland. While audiences in the UK get the chance to see the great contemporary Irish playwrights, the traffic is mostly one way.

As well as the importance of politeness and the preamble, I have learnt from colleagues in Ireland the importance of timing and of waiting for the right moment. In England and Scotland we tend to have a plan and drive through to meet the deadlines whereas in Ireland there can be a more sensitive and often more successful process of testing the water and waiting for the right time. The Abbey change process benefited from a combination of my strategy and Fiach Mac Congail's tactics, my project planning and his impeccable timing.

I have learnt also about the muscular power of a report which has involved many drafts and iterations before adoption.

I have learnt about the power of persuasion and witnessed the most extraordinary energy and passion from leaders involved in the National Campaign for the Arts, and Tania Banotti the ex-CEO of Theatre Forum. Theatre Forum is a tiny organisation which punches way above its weight, delivering training, conferences, statistical analysis and advice on a shoestring, achieving many times more than any equivalent in the UK as well as running the hugely successful national campaign fought all over Ireland to safeguard arts funding during the political and economic crisis.

And I can see where Scotland might learn from Ireland.

The sentiment with which individual artists look to Ireland has found its way into public reports in Scotland. A recent Literature Working Group commissioned by the Scottish government referred wistfully to Ireland. The perception amongst many involved in literature and publishing is that writers and artists are better rewarded and recognised in Ireland. Much of this perception comes from the Irish government's tax exemption on some artists' earnings which, although modest in cash terms, has been widely held up as proof that Ireland values its artists – a scheme which, as the SNP pointed out in an early manifesto – a Scottish government could adopt if it had the fiscal autonomy sought by pro-independence supporters. Artists in Scotland have an even deeper desire for a version of Aosdána – Ireland's affiliation of creative artists established in 1981 'to honour those artists whose work has made an outstanding contribution to the arts in Ireland, and to encourage and assist members in devoting their energies fully to their art'.

For Scotland, the support and celebration of our own cultures and creativity are important elements of our national journey. After decades where many of us felt bad about being Scottish, with little idea of our own distinct history, positive traits and creative characteristics, today we are happily living and working in a country where arts and artists are valued. Our current government and ministers are hugely supportive of the arts and culture, and the public agency Creative Scotland which superseded both the Scottish Arts Council and Screen, plays a role as a champion for the arts, culture and creativity in Scotland.

But we must avoid both complacency and pre-occupation with the narcissism of small differences between Scotland and England if we want our arts continuously to refresh, develop and take the risks essential for a healthy sector. Specifically, to avoid being too inward-looking we need to engage with the wider world, and to attract non-Scottish influences and artists – including English – to prevent the weakening which comes from insularity.

There has recently been a spate of top arts job vacancies in Scotland, for directors and chief executives, in which all the successful applicants have come from within Scotland. While demonstrating the high calibre of Scottish arts professionals, several of the recruitment processes attracted a very small number, if any, of English applicants. Despite interesting roles, good salaries and UK advertising and headhunting, good applicants from England, or from Ireland, Wales or Europe, were not attracted even to apply. Scotland's arts sector is in danger of weakening itself by recycling from within its own, sending out vibes to the rest of the UK, Ireland and Europe that it is quite self-sufficient.

Ireland and Scotland are small countries with a similarly sized population. We share some genes, religion, traditional music and language. We share a fierce need to express our own identities within differing degrees of self-autonomy and governance. Our National Galleries were established during the reign of Queen Victoria when we were all under the governance of a Westminster parliament of Great Britain and Ireland. In Scotland, and in Ireland, we may still take cultural decisions with one eye on what our next-door neighbour, England, is doing, slighted by those who, in speech, carelessly roll Ireland into Britain or Scotland into England, still smarting after centuries of internal colonialism

Instead, we need to let each other under our respective skins, and that is more than about controlled cultural exchange. International festivals in Edinburgh and Dublin, Glasgow and Galway play premier roles in increasing curiosity and deepening mutual understanding. But the most creative theatrical collaboration between Ireland and Scotland has taken place outside of the British Isles and outside of any existing institution. Once, the musical, is set in a Dublin pub and was originally made as a film. After seeing Black Watch, the American producer Barbara Brocolli who bought the rights to the film, asked John Tiffany, the Yorkshireman who directed the National Theatre of Scotland's show to direct the stage version, and Irish playwright Edna Walsh to produce the book for it. Breaking the established mould for international collaborations – and for producing Broadway musicals – the show won eight Tony awards this year. Artists working together, outside the national institutions. Lives creatively entwined, for a while.







Nick Garbutt is a former editor of the *Irish News* and deputy editor of the *Belfast Telegraph* and is today a media advisor and commentator. He is currently researching the history of the Suffolk/Lenadoon interface in west Belfast. He is chair of Opportunity Youth in Northern Ireland and organised an international conference earlier this year examining the impacts of austerity on young people, post-conflict, and the dangers that

poses to peace. The illegitimate son of a northern Protestant and a southern Catholic his favourite quotation is from the 1966 cowboy movie *The Professionals* when the character played by Burt Lancaster calls Lee Marvin a bastard. He responds: 'Yes, sir, in my case an accident of birth. But you, sir, you are a self-made man.'

There is no such thing as 'bad blood' Nick Garbutt

I've never met either of my parents and I don't know my father's name. She was a Catholic from over the border he was a Protestant from Belfast and they chose to give me up for adoption in Manchester rather than face the respective wrath of their families. At home I have a copy of my birth certificate. It states I was born on 21 June 1959, that my birth name was Cornelius Brennan, my mother was called Mary and the space for details about my father is blank.

When my adoptive mother first wheeled me around our estate in Manchester, a neighbour and someone she had considered as a friend, glanced down into the pram and said to her. 'Be careful with that one, bad blood will out'.

And I suppose I've been on a journey of understanding ever since, not to find my natural parents, but to understand more about the divided society of which I am a product.

The reason why my parents were unable to have children of their own was because my mother Norah had rheumatic fever as a teenager, a condition that nearly killed her and left her with an irregular heartbeat which meant she was physically not strong enough to give birth.

When she and Dad went to see her parish priest to say they planned to get married he refused to conduct the sacrament, telling them that as the purpose of marriage was to procreate and they were not going to, then, in his eyes, their union would be a sham and he wanted no part in it. They had to find another priest.

This incident, although it took place before I was born, angers me when I think about the humiliation and upset it must have caused, and it has left me suspicious of the unbending, inflexible and righteous amongst us.

I was sent to a Catholic primary school where every year our headmistress Mother Victoire organised a football match for the boys between England and Ireland. I played for Ireland, not because I felt Irish but because I preferred the colour of the shirts. Green seemed so much nicer than holier-than-thou white.

Mother Victoire was a very good friend of Sir Matt Busby, the legendary Manchester United manager. In those days, when he was still just Matt he used to bring the United squad down to watch these England vs Ireland matches: Georgie Best, Bobby Charlton, Paddy Crerand, Nobby Stiles, all those great players used to turn up. I can remember the girls screaming when Best arrived, just like they used to do for the Beatles, and subversively vowing that from that day forward I would be a Manchester City fan!

That apart, Ireland did not feature in my childhood, except that I remember that whenever something really bad had happened in the North, my mum used to switch the news off. I think that was quite a common thing for English people to do in the 1970s – whenever the Troubles got onto the news you turned over to ITV.

Yet for me there was always something nagging away, as I'm sure is the case for any adopted child. Simple, obvious things like: What am I going to look like when I'm an adult? How tall will I be? Will I go bald? Have I got any brothers or sisters? And on my birthday: I wonder what my mummy is doing today?

We had an old travel guide to Ireland in the bookshelves and I sometimes used to look at it to see if there were any pictures of people who looked like me, and whether they could conceivably be related.

But it also prompted deeper questions about identity: about what shapes us most, the people who surround us or invisible genetic forces? I felt different from other people, sometimes really blessed with a potential to do things unconstrained by family and background, at other times isolated and lonely, with issues I knew other people would never understand. Most of all, as I got older, I wanted to learn about conflict and division and all this in a very deeply personal sense because, no matter how loving my family was, I still felt rejected and cast aside and wanted answers.

That's why I came to work in Northern Ireland in April 1990.

On my first evening in the city I went for a drink with a friend from Andersonstown I had met in Liverpool. We were walking to a bar when we passed Sandy Row. I asked him what it was like down there, and he replied: 'I've no idea and I've no intention of finding out.' It seemed to me then that Belfast was not one but two cities, and between those two communities the interaction was as close to zero as it was possible to be.

In my first week at work several things struck me. At 5.00 p.m. on the dot, as soon as the shops and offices closed everyone scurried home into their own communities so that by 5.30 p.m. the streets were deserted. It was confusing to be searched going into stores. In Liverpool we were always searched on the way out! Then there were the troops who were everywhere. I remember watching one patrol going up Royal Avenue. The soldiers looked twitchy and nervous, yet when the first man reached a pelican crossing, he pressed the button and they waited before filing across the road when the light turned to green. For me it was a surreal moment on the one hand normal and ordinary, on the other strangely menacing, and that's how the city as a whole felt

That week Brendan Murphy the *Irish News* picture editor took me for a tour of the north and west of the city. Somewhere in Ardoyne he slowed his car down as we approached a row of shops. Everyone immediately ran indoors. Strange men in strange cars spelled danger in those days.

In my journey of understanding I've found my outsider status to be an advantage. My name Garbutt is Anglo-Saxon, it means spear bearer in that language and the warrior clans that spawned it were amongst the Germanic hordes that defied and defeated Rome, they were also early proponents of a primitive form of democracy. Everyone tries to label you in Northern Ireland as being part of one community or the other. In my case that proved impossible, because as nobody knew my story, there was no apparent motive for what I was doing here, especially as editor of the Irish News. Yes, there is a long tradition of people coming over from England and Scotland to involve themselves in Irish politics: James Connolly was from Edinburgh, and, in the interests of balance, Enoch Powell was from Birmingham but I was just trying to understand what was going on, and being hard to categorise suited me well.

In that context I've always felt a little sorry for people from our second biggest city because it is not possible for them to answer a straightforward question about where they are from without revealing their religion or cultural identity.

When people ask you questions like that it is usually because they don't know you very well and are looking for something to talk about. So when people ask me where I'm from I say Manchester and that is normally the cue for asking me which team I support (City) whether it rains all the time there (yes) and what I think about the Gallagher brothers (not a lot).

If I were to preface those answers by saying, well before we get onto the weather I would first like to say that I vote Labour and do not have any strong religious beliefs, people would think I was weird, and quite rightly so.

So in that context I think it must be quite hard for people from Derry/Londonderry to be forced to identify the community they are from at the very start of any kind of relationship.

And yes, I've lived here long enough to know that there are those for whom any encounter is a sectarian guessing game and because our society is so divided, that Sean from Castlederg is unlikely to be a member of that town's Loyalist Flute Band, and that Stewart from Newtownards will probably not be attending Sinn Féin's ard fheis any time soon

The challenge is to move beyond that.

More recently I've been doing some research on the history of the Suffolk/Lenadoon interface in west Belfast. I've spoken to members of both communities, many of whom were forced out of their own homes in the most distressing circumstances imaginable.

The burnings and evictions in Belfast, which started in 1969 and went on for more than a decade, were the largest forced migration in Western Europe since the Second World War.

I have spoken to a woman from Suffolk whose earliest childhood memory is of glimpsing the red stair carpet in her former home as she was plucked out of her bed by a stranger in the night and bundled into a van to be driven away to stay with her grandma.

I've spoken to a man from Lenadoon who, as an eight year old, watched his own MP lead a mob down his street, systematically setting fire to the houses as they went. And to a woman who still regularly passes the house she used to live in, which was bought and paid for by her own mother: where others live today.

The conflict did not spare children, people like Paul who lived in a flat overlooking the interface who was woken many nights as a young child by petrol bombs exploding against the iron grille that covered his bedroom window, and Joe who, as an 11 year old saw a soldier fire a rubber bullet at point blank range into the face of a neighbour, and remembers her eyeball bouncing off her cheek, still attached to the socket by the optic nerve. And there's more and much, much worse as everyone who lived through that will attest. And all who did, seemingly without exception, shrug and say that was normal and it did not affect them. Yet it did.

The trauma of these experiences still resonates in working class communities. Research recently published by Professor Mike Tomlinson of Queen's University demonstrates the lasting legacy of the conflict in many parts of the city: we have concerning levels of mental ill health, depression, self-harm and suicide in areas most impacted by the conflict, areas which are also those with the highest levels of social deprivation.

Despite this, much progress has been made.

An unsung hero in Northern Ireland is a community worker called Chris O'Halloran. He inadvertently provided the impetus that brought the communities in Suffolk and Lenadoon together.

He decided to conduct a survey in both communities to find out what their problems were, what needed to happen to make things better and what government needed to do to stimulate that

He started in Suffolk. When he got to Lenadoon people told him that they would be interested in participating, but wanted to know what the results of the Suffolk survey were. There was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing. The result was that the communities shared their results. And that led to the realisation that members of the two communities had the same needs, battled with the same problems, and worried about the same things.

This is how the dialogue started: people started talking to each other, at first through intermediaries and then directly, and when they did, boundaries started to break down, the rumours and the misunderstandings began to dissolve, and the communities slowly started to work together to resolve common problems.

Today the Suffolk and Lenadoon Interface Group is based on the Stewartstown Road in regenerated shops and office space which have created jobs for members of both communities

It's not perfect, there are still problems, just as there are in many other parts of Belfast, and nobody is arguing, just yet, that it is time for the peace walls to come down. Yet there are lessons we can learn from the progress we are making in Belfast which can be applied elsewhere.

Before I came to Northern Ireland I worked in Liverpool, where my earliest experience as a journalist was covering the Toxteth riots. I also had a spell working in Bradford in West Yorkshire, where at the time there were frequent street battles between the National Front and young men who had settled in the city from Pakistan.

Today there are parts of Oldham in Greater Manchester, and indeed other towns and cities in England where communities are physically divided, kids go to different schools, and there is no interaction. All that is missing are the peace walls. And it is the same in Berlin and in Paris and in many other cities in continental Europe. Strange isn't it that problems we thought unique to us are now manifesting themselves elsewhere?

One of the troubling aspects of the emergence of division in England was that an approach was developed which effectively demonised host communities who had reservations, asked questions or in any way expressed concern about others moving into their locality. They were simply branded as racist.

The reality of course is that those concerns and tensions revolve primarily around jobs and housing, and again, given our history, this should not be surprising as these were and remain key communal issues here.

I feel very strongly about this because from my own experience working class communities are welcoming, warm and generous. I do not understand why it has become fashionable to sneer at people from a so-called ordinary background — I suspect this is an import from the United States of America where your wealth seems to be an index of your worth.

It was interesting and very significant to notice that in the Equality Commission's latest attitude survey it is middle class, middle aged, so-called well-educated men who have the most propensity to openly express views that most of us would find sectarian or racist.

The tragedy today, as we 'normalise' is that a new division is opening up, not so much between communities set against each other, but between those scarred by the conflict and those who were not.

There are plenty of places in Northern Ireland which were never really impacted by the conflict. The day after inadvertently terrifying people in Ardoyne I walked from Bangor to Cultra along the coastal path and was struck by the wealth and tranquillity of what used to be called the 'Gold Coast'. The 'professional classes', by and large, were not involved, and today simply want to 'move on'. For them the political compromises required to reach peace were a necessary evil. They have a clear conscience, they did nothing wrong. Today it is all about reducing Corporation Tax and the devastation the Troubles have caused are, quite naturally and understandably, an inconvenient truth. Paint over the gable walls, this is 'Our Time, Our Place', let's forget it ever happened.

This after all, was a 'low intensity' conflict where most of the suffering was consigned to small, readily identified working class communities which is one of the reasons why it lasted, unresolved, for so long.

But it is not so easy to move on if you can't walk any longer or if you have lost people you care about whose memories linger, or if you can't sleep at night because you are haunted by the memories of what you have seen or what you have done.

In Britain there is a lot of focus on the 'Help for Heroes' campaign, which sets out to rehabilitate those members of the armed services who have suffered as a result of conflicts they were involved in. But in Northern Ireland, what of the victims? And here I am not just writing about story telling, finding the 'truth' whatever that means and might involve, and getting 'closure', important though all those processes are. I'm wanting to see more practical support for the many, many victims whoever they are, to help them move on. It would not be as expensive as removing Corporation Tax. It would not cost very much at all. But it would mean a lot, and it would also mean a collective acknowledgement of the pain and suffering that the conflict has caused and continues to cause to victims families and their children

So there is a first conclusion here for me in my journey. I contrast people from Suffolk and Lenadoon who have suffered and have too many reasons to fear, distrust, and yes, to hate the people on the other side of the Stewartstown Road to make tentative steps to finding a common purpose with them – with those who were not directly involved in the conflict and would rather wish to pretend that what happened never did, people a bit like my mum when she switched over to ITV, who would rather we only talked about the 'new' Northern Ireland.

And here we come to the nub of it. In a society where the gap between rich and poor is widening by the day, as wide today as it was in mid-Victorian times, and when social mobility has become as difficult as it was in the 1920s and when, even in our own city people in, for example, the Malone Road area can expect to live as much as 15 years longer than those from less privileged areas – is it any surprise that people in working class areas feel concerned and anxious about their futures?

To me this is a tragedy. Working people have been divided and weakened and forced into separate 'tribes', fighting with each other for a bigger slice of the cake, when what is really required is for someone to bake a bigger cake.

I used the term working people. Sadly many of those people are not, any longer, working. In the days when James Connolly and Jim Larkin were campaigning for the rights of people in working class communities in Belfast 100 years ago, that city was one of the most productive and industrious on Earth.

Today, thanks to the collapse of the linen industry and heavy manufacturing, exacerbated by the instability conflict brings, it is very far from that. The public sector in Northern Ireland now accounts for 70 per cent of GDP, more than the People's Republic of China, more than the old USSR. That's our economic legacy. Unless it is addressed there is danger ahead.

What would contribute most to community cohesion, between our two traditional communities and all our more recent residents, is to ensure that every citizen in Northern Ireland has the opportunity to develop and grow and to live their dreams. Communal discord is exacerbated when there is a lack of fairness, a failure to invest and engage in areas that need it the most, when health inequalities and the lack of social mobility are not addressed and when the gap between rich and poor is allowed to widen

In the meantime we have much to offer the world. We can and should draw on our past. There is a way of showing that those who used to brand everyone here as barbarians and who are now experiencing at first hand segregated communities, communal disengagement and potentially starting off down the path we once trod, can learn from our painful lessons. We've lived through division, we know about separated and alienated communities, the anguish of sectarianism and the remorseless logic of the escalating violence that can lead to, and we are starting to learn how to bring people together. Northern Ireland is a special, if not unique place, because conflicts are so rarely resolved. Issues remain but progress, by any international measure, has been remarkable.

Both my adoptive parents are now dead. I feel therefore twice orphaned, by those who brought me up and by those who chose not to because of the pressures they felt from their churches and their families and division. I know that my own experience is nothing to what so many people in Belfast have been through. I just happen to believe that it is important to learn from it and to ensure that future generations never have to suffer the pain of rejection, of alienation, the feeling of somehow not belonging, that everyone inevitably feels when decisions are made about them that are not based on their merit, but on who they are and where they are from. There is no such thing as 'bad blood'

Before I came to Ireland I studied for an MA in Irish Studies, trying to understand how the past plays into the present and it is strange to see how positions that now seem fixed and immutable were not always thus.

The house next door to where I now live in Greyabbey used to contain the old police barracks and one of the rooms was the cell where the Presbyterian Minister and journalist James Porter was held before he was led out to be hanged, in front of his congregation, on an improvised scaffold at the back of his church on 2 July 1798 for his alleged role in the rebellion of that year.

The previous month the people of the Ards Peninsula had been on the march, attacking the military bases in Newtownards and Portaferry armed with pikes and farming implements and forcing loyalists in Donaghadee to flee to Belfast by sea. From 10–13 June Newtownards and Donaghadee were run by 'Committees of Public Safety' styled on French revolutionary lines. The insurgency on the Ards Peninsula, though largely forgotten today, led to the establishment of the shortest-lived republic in history. The United Irishmen of that area were Ulster Scots planters who paid a heavy price for their sedition with the executions, reprisals and deportations that followed.

Not everyone has always been on the 'same side'. Allegiances shift with circumstances and with time and when you delve into the past you do not always find what you expect.

My journey has been redemptive and revealing, I started off trying to find where I came from, what shaped me – and I suppose, what it means to be Irish or Northern Irish or both without any reference points, family stories or influences, and also, of course, what it means to be British.

And after hours of academic research and study and more than two decades in Belfast and speaking to so many people from ex-combatants to the politically disengaged, I'm led to conclude that it doesn't really matter. Well at least not to me.

I mean by this that I would rather define myself by my interests and my talents and my love of family and friends and I am afraid that after all I have seen and studied I infinitely prefer an outsider status to being a member of any tribe, however warm and welcoming, because by being so it might exclude me from the other, and I like and respect both communities here. I have felt welcomed everywhere.

The obvious question that I have not addressed is the one I am constantly asked ever since I revealed the circumstances of my birth. Would you like to find your mother and father and any siblings? That's one to which I have no answers, not because I've not thought about it, a lot. I've even written letters to both which are probably somewhere at the bottom of a drawer, never posted because, obviously I had no addresses, and in my father's case not even a name to write to. I can't exactly remember what they said, but it was to the effect that I was fine and have had a good life and had fun and that I hoped neither of them had worried about me. But I did not ask for a meeting.





Claire Hanna was born in Galway in 1980 and moved to Belfast in childhood. She has been politically active since her teens and a member of the Social Democratic and Labour Party for over a decade. She currently serves as SDLP International Secretary, with responsibility for relations with other European democratic socialist and labour parties, and represents the Balmoral district on Belfast City Council. Claire's 'day job' is with an Irish

international development agency and she has worked in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. She is a recent graduate of the Open University and is trying to motivate herself towards further study. Claire is an active environmentalist, an enthusiastic gardener and cook, and a budding linguist. In 2012, Claire became the besotted mother of baby Eimear Rose and accepts that her days of going to music festivals throughout Britain and Ireland are finished for the foreseeable future.

'The enormous condescension of posterity' Claire Hanna

Men fight and lose the battle and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat and when it comes, turns out not to be what they meant and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name

William Morris, libertarian socialist, 1887.

Gaeltacht

I was born in Galway in June 1980 and brought up in early childhood in Bearna, a village on the northern side of Galway Bay six miles west of Galway City. Bearna is in the *breac-Ghaeltacht*, (literally, 'speckled' or 'patchy' Gaeltacht) where the English language predominates but, for example, primary education is delivered through Irish and many of my childhood companions talked Irish, or used Irish phrases.

My father, born in 1946, from Belfast and mother from Warrenpoint, were beneficiaries of the relatively recently opened up access to grammar and university education. Both my parents had been civil rights activists in the North. My father had been at the civil rights march in Derry on 5 October 1968 ('I ran like hell') which had sparked the first violence of the 'Troubles'. He later remarked that the areas which the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association found hardest to organise, such as Crossmaglen, were later the most militant in the 'armed struggle'.

My mother trained as a registered nurse and midwife and, after a stint of voluntary service in Africa, in the early 1970s returned to work in hospitals in Belfast, most notably in Belfast's Mater Hospital Accident and Emergency Department at the height of the violence. By the time they were married in 1973 my mother was exhausted by the intensity of her work. They moved to Dublin soon afterwards ('white Russians' my grandmother wryly referred to us), and to Galway four years later.

We were very happy in Galway and from our earliest years we children looked forward at the start of the holidays to getting back down to Galway, and to picking up once again the threads of our local childhood friendships.

Living for extended periods throughout the year in two jurisdictions, I was occasionally aware of my parents' mild exasperation at the infrastructural and public service patchiness in the South compared to the North. Though only a few miles from Galway our modern bungalow had no public water supply, with the domestic water supplied from a borehole in the garden, which eventually became polluted by seepage from septic tanks. With four children under six years my mother was agitated when an analysis showed that the drinking water was contaminated with traces of *E. coli*. Discreet enquiries showed that nearly all the neighbours had the same problem but nobody talked about it because it might affect house values.

My father set about organising a group water scheme initially involving about 30 houses but which soon grew to a multiple of that number. The scheme was a great success, helped by generous EU grants which encouraged 'self-help' and was a positive lesson in the efficacy of concerted community action.

Other North-South dissonances were the lack of an equivalent of a National Health Service (NHS) in the South (visits to the doctor were paid for), the lack of an efficient waste collection system (because the Council had no rates income, it couldn't afford it) and the high cost of school books and uniforms. My parents freely acknowledged that by comparison the UK delivered a lot of benefits to the North, particularly in relation to health, welfare and education. The most socially radical initiative ever taken by a democratically-elected (Attlee Labour) government, the establishment of the NHS and the welfare state, had also become the most enduringly popular.

In Galway, though, there was none of the trauma for children of academic selection at 11 plus and pupils proceeded to the various Galway secondary schools without any apparent class divide: 'academic selection' came later at age 18.

People were much freer in disclosing their political allegiances in the South, and in discussing politics, though overlaid with cynicism and clientelism. Galway West was a Fíanna Fáil stronghold, though my parents voted Michael D Higgins of Irish Labour, but when the people turned on Fianna Fáil, as they did in the 2011 general election, they did so with a vengeance. Overall, Bearna was a closely-knit community which, for example, through a parish voluntary group, gave great care to the elderly, quite self-confident but lacking the institutional safety net of an adequate welfare state.

Family moves and party fortunes

My family moved to Belfast when my father was asked to take over as General Secretary of the SDLP in 1984 and managed to buy a run-down house in Belfast which my parents 'fixed up' so that we had a foot in both jurisdictions. My parents had always been committed to the values of the SDLP as articulated by John Hume and my father still has his signed receipt of membership, joining on the first day it was open to the public. They were active later in the SDLP Dublin group (my father was Treasurer), providing a financial lifeline to the party when democratic politics in the North was reeling from the collapse of the power-sharing Executive in 1974.

In the maelstrom of violence from the 1970s, culminating in the 1981 Hunger Strike, the SDLP was still getting most of the votes of northern nationalists: the barbarity of the actions taking place, neighbour on neighbour, were so horrific, and the moral integrity and consistency of Hume and his colleagues were so compelling that, if someone like John Hume had not existed, he would've had to have been invented to retain the self-respect of the community.

When Sinn Féin began to overtake the SDLP electorally, I was disconcerted and bemused by the voters who easily switched to Sinn Féin 'now the IRA has stopped'. Of course they had the democratic right to do so. This still seems to me to be a morally ambiguous position, many expecting approval of their sagacity and perspicacity in switching votes. The full implications of the attitude of those voters, clearly a large proportion of the nationalist electorate, still has to be worked out.

Meanwhile, I have no doubt that the majority of former combatants in the North have left violence behind them, but they have not abandoned the principle of using violence, if they think it justified. The bacillus remains in the system and Sinn Féin, which unambiguously supported the 'armed struggle', can with credibility claim the support of switched voters as a retrospective endorsement for that violence, whether intended or not. And they will publicly bank on that support in the periodic commemorations and marches marking past 'heroic' actions.

I believe that glorifying past atrocities in some sense represents continuation of the conflict, and that uncritical celebration of the 'Decade of Centenaries' from 1912 to 1922, with its unrestrained use of violence on many sides, gives succour to those who still support non-democratic means.

The SDLP started life as a 'top-down' party, a coming together of strong individuals bound together by determination to deliver civil rights, unite the people of Ireland, and to give a political voice to a hitherto largely passive community. As a party, it lacks that sentimentality towards past history which is shown by many Irish parties – the wreath laying and battle site and graveyard visiting does not appeal. The SDLP's founding document, its constitution and policy papers such as 'Towards a New Ireland' embodied fresh thinking and showed that the SDLP wasn't content to aspire simply to be a populist vehicle for Irish nationalism.

Some SDLP representatives in the period up to the 1990s were standing only on a platform of their opposition to violence and the abhorrence of so many nationalists towards what the men of violence, in and out of uniform, were doing. For them the SDLP label was effectively franchised out. So, without the maintenance of a local electoral organisation, they became sitting ducks for a resurgent Sinn Féin. Once the 'armed struggle' was wound down their electoral machine appeared to the SDLP to be organised on quasi-military lines.

Due to the economic necessity of raising a family, my father moved on from employment with the SDLP, leaving it somewhat stabilised in organisations and votes, and set up a chartered accountancy practice in south Belfast. My parents, and inevitably we children, remained politically committed throughout the 1980s and 1990s, when my parents were influenced in the development of their political thinking by the remarkable Dorita Field, the first SDLP councillor for the largely middle-class Balmoral area of Belfast, and her husband. Claude.

Dorita was a liberal white South African, academically distinguished, and she and Claude had an exemplary war record. She had a tolerance towards, rather than attachment to, Irish nationalism, but had a strong commitment to social democracy. After an unsuccessful by-election run in 1996 my mother was elected as councillor to succeed Dorita Field in 1997. She was then elected as an SDLP MLA for South Belfast in the 1998 elections to the new Assembly, the high water mark of SDLP electoral support as the largest party in the North in terms of votes.

My mother served as SDLP MLA for South Belfast for 12 years and, for a brief period, as Minister for Employment and Learning, before one of the Assembly's periodic collapses (over 'Stormontgate' in 2002). She stood down due to ill health in 2010, having a recurrence of cancer that first required treatment in 2000.

Elections seemed to come about in the North every year, generally in May and June (exam time), and my childhood, as with a lot of politically-active families in the North, was taken up with sticking address labels on cards, bundling election literature and door-to-door leafleting and (as we got older) canvassing. Though my brother and two sisters loyally pitched in (he postering, with any boyfriends of my own or my sisters press-ganged into helping), such activity led to some aversion to political involvement among all my siblings except myself.

I liked organising

What I inherited politically from my parents was a commitment to social democracy, a focus on the minutiae of political organisation and team building, and an ethic of unremitting hard work and public service. My mother has a patience and an empathy towards the underdog that amazes me: the twofold political legacy she has valued most being the establishment of the Assembly All-Party Group on International Development, and taking up the cause and tabling the motion adopted unanimously by the Assembly to set up an inquiry into institutional child abuse in Northern Ireland to complement the Murphy and Ryan reports in the Irish Republic.

My political consciousness began to develop as the Northern conflict reached some kind of resolution. I was 14 at the time of the IRA ceasefire and 17 when the Good Friday Agreement was signed. I was getting on fine at school, but enjoyed my part-time job and was not remotely interested in immediately proceeding to third level education, to my parents' chagrin. I liked organising and enjoyed helping my father in his role as Chair of the United Irishmen Commemoration Society in putting together the bicentenary events. A series of brilliant lectures in the Linenhall Library delivered by people like Professor Kevin Whelan and Finlay Holmes sparked my interest in Irish history which got me thinking about my acquired political viewpoints. I could not understand why at school we were studying the Tudors and the Normans when the era of the United Irishmen felt much more relevant.

After a few years working in a busy south Belfast restaurant in the exciting post-ceasefire rebirth days of Belfast, I got a post with the BBC and then a lucky break into the Comic Relief charity, organising the Red Nose Day campaigns. I subsequently secured a job with an international development charity which led to short periods working in Bangladesh, Zambia and Haiti – useful doses of perspective for any activist – and campaigning alongside Northern Ireland's growing immigrant communities.

In part due to exposure to those living on the very front line of climate change in Africa and Asia, I became involved in environmental activism, establishing a 'Transition Town' project in Belfast with activities like gardening and cooking classes, 'stitch and bitch' knitting groups and foraging walks along the Lagan canal. One of the lowest density cities in Europe, Belfast suffers from weak public transport and heavy congestion and I busied myself lobbying for electric car infrastructure and public hire bicycles, both schemes recently coming to fruition. On a visit to Dublin to a Trade Union event I met (reader, I married him) Donal Lyons, a Dubliner who, as a former chair of Irish Labour Youth and an aide to Irish Labour Party Leader Eamon Gilmore TD, was as politically engagé as myself, though better read and more even tempered.

Heavily involved with the SDLP organisation in South Belfast and chairing the Balmoral branch (the party's largest), I was electorally 'blooded' standing in the strongly unionist constituency of Strangford in the 2010 Westminster general election and barely saved my deposit. Determined to avoid accusations of nepotism, I did not stand for election to Belfast City Council until two years after my mother's retirement from that body; and in May 2011, I was elected to Belfast City Council in my own right, on the first count, to represent Balmoral.

In 2008 I was elected as a party officer of the SDLP, International Secretary, charged with maintaining relations with the other parties in the Party of European Socialists (PES) and, more broadly, the Socialist International – a more challenging role since SDLP had lost its Northern Ireland MEP seat in 2004, held by John Hume for 25 years.

The greatest conflict resolution project in history

Exposure to social democrats from throughout the EU opened up new perspectives to me and I now appreciate that the founders of the SDLP in 1970 were brave and prescient not only in calling the party 'Social Democratic and Labour', avoiding history-laden trigger words like 'Republican', 'Irish' or 'Nationalist', but also in firmly committing the party to the ideal of an ever-closer European Union (not without some opposition from people like the late Paddy Devlin).

I progressively began to appreciate the breadth and success of the European project – the freedom of movement which was allowing people to share ideas and prosper across Europe, and the determination to end in justice the legacy of centuries' old grievances. I recollect my cousin's Polish wife telling me about the death of a daily average of some 3,500 Polish people (mostly Jews) every day during nearly six years of the Second World War.

Ireland's supposedly intractable, enduring and unique problems had been replicated all over Europe and in many cases, had been triumphantly overcome. The late Tony Judt's book Postwar brought home to me how shallow were the roots of democracy across the continent, and also the curious detachment of Ireland North and South from the transformative social democratic and Christian Democratic movements in Europe after 1945

When our local tribal chiefs contrive their periodic crises of parades, flags or commemorations, or bask in self-congratulation about symbolic gestures, I think of European colleagues of both democratic left and right who found it in themselves to genuinely reconcile and rebuild.

For me a primary benefit to the Irish Republic of 40 years of EU membership is that it has allowed its economy, society and national self-confidence to emerge from the shadow of centuries of UK domination and to evolve a new relationship with the UK, based on equality, respect and even affection, so aptly exemplified by Queen Flizabeth's visit in 2011.

Despite the manifest benefits for North and South of EU access and funding, anti-EU sentiment has risen steadily in the polls in the aftermath of the Republic's 2008 economic and financial collapse and the trauma of the imposition of the Troika bail-out. Northern Ireland returns three MEPs, one of whom represents a virulently Europhobic party and the other two who can most kindly be described as Eurosceptic, engaging with Europe on 'cargo cult' terms, i.e. taking the money with no obligation to give anything back.

Given the political and economic support we have received from around the world over the last 40 years to resolve our own difficulties, I believe that we in Northern Ireland are under an obligation to play a much more constructive and participative role in the EU and further afield. It certainly causes mild bewilderment to my PES colleagues that Northern Ireland returns no pro-Europe MEPs. There is an obligation on pro-Europeans in the North to communicate to voters the full dimensions of the benefits of the EU and what it stands for. As John Hume so often said, the EU is the greatest conflict resolution project in history.

Priorities, aspirations and partners

Currently the EU is besieged by many pressures in relation to the survival of the euro, the distressed economies of Greece, Portugal, Italy and the Irish Republic, and by the claims of competing political and economic nationalisms. Across Europe we see the far right and far left making common cause in their opposition to the EU project, while at home, decades of direct rule has led to an ingrained culture among elected representatives of avoidance of responsibility on hard choices.

Northern Ireland's economic weakness, lack of productivity and unhealthy dependence on the $\pounds 8-9$ billion annual subvention from the UK Treasury is well-documented. The continued reliance on Treasury subvention, EU structural and peace funds and the like, has helped the North partially protect itself against the world economic crisis, most notably since 2008. But this is a situation that will inevitably change.

This is not necessarily related to the persistence of sectarianism (which I think of as the 'three Ds' – division, domination and demonisation) for sectarianism in the North reached a high-tide during the first two decades of the twentieth century when the North was one of the most industrially productive regions in the world. For me the tragedy is that we produce so many articulate, well educated young people who are essentially export fodder. In my immediate family, my sister emigrated the week she graduated to a career in California that she could only have dreamed of had she stayed at home.

The ongoing absence of violence and the stability of the Assembly is an opportunity for us to re-examine identity, which in the North fails to reflect the sum of our priorities and aspirations. Those of us who aspire to a united Ireland must be confident enough to recognise the positive application of social democracy resulting from Northern Ireland's place in the UK. A future possible re-unification with the Republic should not be seen as the correction of an historic aberration, nor the simplistic righting of an historical wrong, but as the joining of two jurisdictions with their own characteristics and expectations.

Recognition of differing national identities should not be seen as a magnanimous act but rather a basic right. The Irish tricolour does not only symbolise peace between the orange and green traditions, it also importantly recognises the Orange tradition as partners.

The forthcoming data results from the 2011 census will, I believe, show how significantly the ethnic diversity in the North has changed over the past decade, particularly through immigration from Eastern Europe. Indeed, the inspirational and innovative declaration to the effect that the 1998 Agreement signatories,

...recognise the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose...

may in the near future need to be amended to incorporate EU citizens.

The Agreement has provided a rational democratic mechanism for determining ultimate political sovereignty although in the decade after the Agreement this did not prevent some manipulating of the situation for political advantage – presenting the Agreement as either a 'slippery slope' or 'staging post' to a United Ireland.

What is not redundant is the label 'republican' and that should be reclaimed in the face of 'junk republicanism'. In contemporary Ireland a debate has started about what true republicanism and what social democracy should mean: high personal standards of civic virtue, acceptance of the rights and obligations of citizenship, social solidarity, commitment to the democratically-agreed institutions of the state, willingness to pay fair and just taxes, both corporately and individually.

'Junk republicanism' has in no small way contributed to the cronyism and clientelism that infuses our political discourse. In the Republic, 'pulling strokes' by the 'cute hoor' became respected (or at least admired) and all considerations of need, fairness or justice were substantially discounted.

In Northern Ireland 'cute hoorism' took a different form with Sinn Féin's repeated playing of the decommissioning card when the Irish and British governments should have had the integrity and firmness to call Sinn Féin's bluff and demand that they live up to their commitments, not to mention the squalid way in which David Trimble, a difficult man but a courageous politician, was 'put under the bus', again with the connivance of the two governments under Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern.

The corrosive effect this type of cynicism has on communities in both the North and South is visible. Active and engaged citizenry, like standing for election, often is either regarded as an eccentric if worthy pastime or greeted by outright cynicism ('how much does it pay?'). A generation of observers in Northern Ireland have grown up to the backdrop of a decade-plus of peace processing, with a left right discourse as far away as ever. The 'res publica', the 'affairs of the public' should not be an exercise in utopianism or nostalgia. Real and practical steps can be taken to defuse power, moving away from the winner takes all approach and confrontational politics that have dominated western parliaments in the last century.

Credo

It is in the European project too that we are reminded that democracy is not just a case of having a simple majority – a lesson we have learnt all too well from our own history in Northern Ireland. Consociational democracies (or consensus based democracies) have shown themselves time and time again to be kinder, more inclusive and socially just. It was hoped, when we shaped the nature of our own Assembly in Northern Ireland, that this would be the case. But any system of governance is open to being manipulated to satisfy vested interests, and it is in the constant battle against this that the truth of the expression 'democracy needs democrats' can be seen. While the letter of the law will only result in power division, it is in the spirit that we get power sharing.

We must delve further and be confident enough to recognise that 'Irish' or 'British' is not the sum total of who we are. As both individuals and communities we contain a broad spectrum of beliefs, aspirations and passions. As a social democrat I believe that a society which celebrates and cherishes diversity is not just a positive thing but a requirement. The competing labels 'nationalist' and 'unionist' are becoming ever more redundant and are no substitute for well-considered economic policies. For the first time ever there is a democratic mandate in place in both jurisdictions in Ireland, and Ireland is governed by all the people of the island in all their diversity.

In the light of the western world's near financial collapse in 2008, the socialisation of private debt and after decades of being under pressure from the apparent long run of success of Thatcherism, the exploitation of globalisation, the cult of 'light regulation', privatisation, the celebration of individualism, the pursuit of wealth-creation regardless of social and environmental cost and the growing disparities in wealth and income, I believe that European social democracy is finding its confidence again to implement policies that are equitable and just. These will aim, in all humility, and with a willingness to learn from past mistakes, to bring about a fairer and more just society.

The title of this contribution comes from EP Thompson, historian of the working classes, when he counsels both against retrospective assumptions about history, and seeing any developments as inevitable. Human activism is the greatest transformative influence in public affairs.



Trevor Ringland



Trevor Ringland MBE is a Partner in the firm of Macaulay & Ritchie, Solicitors, in Belfast having studied law at Queen's University Belfast. He is married to Colleen, with three children. Born in Belfast in 1959, he played rugby for the University, Ballymena, Ulster, Ireland and the British and Irish Lions. He is a member of the British Irish Association, a founder member of Re-Union which promoted a positive vision of Unionism,

was a member of the Ulster Unionist Party and now has joined the Northern Ireland Conservatives. He also co-chaired the One Small Step Campaign which promoted a shared future for the people of Northern Ireland. He is a Director of the Ireland Funds, Co-operation Ireland, Peace Players International (which accepted the ESPYS Arthur Ashe Award for Courage in Sport for their work in 2008) and a Trustee of the RUC (GC) Foundation. He co-authored a pamphlet *The Long Peace*. A future vision for Unionism with Mick Fealty and David Steven and was a member of the Policing Board for Northern Ireland. He is currently Chair of Sport4Change facilitating co-operation between Ulster Rugby, Ulster GAA, the Irish Football Association and PPI in promoting cross community work, including the Game of Three Halves.

Friendship our weapon of choice

Trevor Ringland

'What would a genuinely shared future for the people of Northern Ireland look like to you?' It was a question posed to me by a film crew as I stood on the pitch at Seaview' football ground in north Belfast, shared by two clubs, Crusaders and Newington FC, each of whom draw their support from different sides of our community. Behind me around 90 kids from across Belfast's interfaces were competing in the 2012 Belfast Interface Games.

They were playing the Game of Three Halves, combining rugby, Gaelic football and football, supported by the three governing bodies of Ulster Rugby, Ulster Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) and the Irish Football Association (IFA), and an indispensable fourth half of community relations engagement delivered by Peace Players International. In the stand above the pitch were the parents sitting together and enjoying the action.

Robert Lloyd Praeger (1865–1953) once profoundly said:

Ireland is a very lovely country. Indeed there is only one thing wrong with it, and that is that the people that are in it have not the common sense to live in peace with one another and with their neighbours.

Northern Ireland is a beautiful place, as is the Republic of Ireland. The people of both countries are basically good, provided you press the right buttons. Looking back on my hopes in 2005 as I write in 2012, I have to admit I am concerned that having come through some 40 years of conflict we do not appreciate to the extent necessary that we can share this island better. As a result, are we not in danger of making that age old mistake that so frustrates historians, namely, not learning from our past so that we do not repeat it? My friend Dr Peter Shirlow, Professor of Conflict Transformation at the School of Law at Queen's University Belfast, puts it more challengingly:

'The people of Northern Ireland have to realise that they can now shape their own future'

Having said that, it is important to remember that so much has changed here for the better. Our society is relatively stable and peaceful and our main concerns – economic – a problem we share with much of the western world.

At the same time too many in positions of influence seem ignorant of what has been accepted by those who have suffered hurt and loss, in order to create the space for politics to work and our society to begin to heal the wounds caused by that conflict. This is better reflected than anywhere else I know in the words of Michael Longley in his poem, *Ceasefire*, where he describes King Priam seeking the return of his son Hector's body, soon after he has been killed by Achilles.

I get down on my knees and do what must be done. I kiss Achilles' hand, the killer of my son

Our 'son', Northern Ireland, has had its people devastated by the tragic consequences resulting from the actions and words of the two flawed ideologies of Ireland. The ideologues promoted their narrow and exclusive concepts of Irishness and Britishness in their selfish pursuit of power with little or no regard for the people. Our 'Pragmatic Peace Process' has required those who lived through those terrible times and consistently argued for a different way, to accept that which otherwise would be unacceptable in a normal democracy in order – hopefully – to move our society into a peaceful, stable and genuinely shared future.

The two political parties that best represent those flawed ideologies, namely Sinn Féin and the DUP have evolved in their attitudes, adjusting their politics accordingly in their pursuit of power. Their acceptance of more conciliatory and constructive politics is of course to be welcomed, but their expectation of thanks for their strategic shift shows a lack of understanding on their part with respect to the impact of their past words and actions on the people of these islands, and Northern Ireland in particular. Their political aspirations also seem limited to mere co-existence. A 'cold peace' which I feel will ultimately break down.

To add to the frustration of the political 'middle ground', the St Andrews Agreement of 2006, with the acquiescence of the two governments, effectively consolidated their positions of power undermining that 'middle ground'. So, what was the outcome of the change that guaranteed that the leader of the largest party would automatically have the right to become First Minister? It was that each election would become a sectarian stand-off between the two main parties, the DUP and Sinn Féin. Such a situation is anti-democratic, as even with a mandatory coalition there should be the ability to change the emphasis of the government.

After listening to my expressions of frustration over this, one friend advised me in relation to the much more difficult challenge of promoting a genuinely shared future in such a political environment, to:

Dry your eyes, and get on with it.

Which is exactly what I, and so many others have done, and will continue to do; each working to influence the part of the world in which we operate in a constructive way, and to build on the similar work of so many others in our past. We were fortunate to avoid a civil war, particularly in the last 40 years. This was thanks not only to the actions of the police and the army (despite those who argue otherwise) but also those, who, at many levels in our community, continued to build and maintain relationships while others were destroying them.

This is why, in my opinion, the forthcoming 'Decade of Commemorations' represents a reminder of the failure in relationships on this island, whether we are commemorating the Solemn League and Covenant of 1912 or the formation of the UVF in 1913 (that is the one that fought and died so bravely at the Somme, as opposed to that founded in 1966 by loyalist paramilitaries, which murdered Catholics in particular as well as others in the period from then onwards). Strangely, it would appear that this UVF was formed so as not to fight, since any action against the British Army would have led to a swift exit from the United Kingdom, courtesy of the parents of those dead soldiers sent back to England, Scotland or Wales and the public reaction that would inevitably have followed.

Or take the formation of the Irish Volunteers, too often ignored as the men who also fought so bravely at the Somme in the 16th Division. Similarly, I have no doubt, John Redmond, its leader, fully appreciated that the Volunteers could never use violence as a means of uniting the people of Ireland, as doing so would inevitably have ensured precisely the opposite outcome.

Then in 1916, the Easter Uprising (approximately 450 dead) made that threat of violence a reality; and as a result I believe, introduced a poison into the relationships of this island, whose consequences we continue to suffer.

The Anglo-Irish war of 1919 to 1921 (approximately 1,400 dead) was surely an unnecessary war, which again further alienated a significant proportion of the people of the island who saw themselves as British and must have reinforced in their eyes the need for partition.

To compound matters, between 1922 and 1923, a pointless civil war then occurred with further loss of life (strangely there does not seem to be a precise figure for the number of dead but it appears to be somewhere between 1,000 and 4,000) and the partitioning of relationships between many of the new state's citizens. It was a battle of egos, again with little regard for the welfare of the people.

As we look back at that troubled period one could reasonably argue that there could have been no worse way of conducting those relationships between the people of all persuasions of this island and these islands; and yet, we want to commemorate them, instead of highlighting the obvious failings to our children.

What is tragic is that in many ways we have remained prisoners of that history, leading to intermittent periods of violence since the 1920s, yet more deaths, and ultimately the breaking out of the Troubles from 1969 to 1998 (approximately 3,600 dead).

I recently discussed with my father whether or not, when we lived as a police family in west Belfast before the Troubles, there was any indication that our society was about to degenerate into violence in the way it did. He said, No, none whatsoever.

Partition of the island was something that was regretted by many unionists, including Lord Edward Carson. In many respects it could be argued with some justification that it was wrong, except that the actions of Irish Nationalism and Republicanism since it occurred, have done nothing other than prove that it was right. Violence was not and never will be the way to build relationships between the people in Ireland, North or South.

As I said to my friend, the late Paddy O'Hanlon, in a discussion we were having on equality, 'What definition of Irish are you using and does it include me, as my definition of British includes you in that its main constituent parts were English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish?'

He said he would get back to me, but never did.

Many years later I told that story to members of Sinn Féin. They laughed and said they would get back to me, but I am still waiting.

So perhaps, as a first and most important step, the people who have to share this island, much like the alcoholic admitting that he has an addiction to alcohol, need to face up to the failures and wrongs of our past and in particular to the fact that the threat of, or use of, violence has always proved counter-productive.

If we do this, we can then continue the long journey to bring the people of this island together, even if constitutionally they will probably remain apart. A creation of a genuinely shared future in Northern Ireland and on this island should be seen as an imperative.

If we commit to such an endeavour, I would argue that there are a number of issues to be addressed, each of which it is possible to do, except one. Yet dealing with the others may at least assist us in going some way to helping with the last. These are the overarching issues generally described as fostering sectarianism/cultural racism in an anti-Irish/British sense, whose main components are as follows.

1. Exclusive concepts of our identity

To create exclusive concepts of British or Irish identities ignores the reality of the existence of two main traditions on this island. To be Irish in the 21st century means accommodating a multitude of different ethnic groups including a British tradition that makes up around one fifth of the population of the island. To develop an inclusive concept of who we are is achievable and this was recognised by the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, who did say (on the first visit of an Irish head of state to an Orange hall) you could be both Irish and British.

Increasingly, young people in Northern Ireland see themselves as Northern Irish with an identity that includes those from many different ethnic groups who regard it as their common home.

Sport illustrates well how this can be achieved. In the London 2012 Olympics we had athletes from Northern Ireland competing for both Team GB and Team Ireland. Some time ago it was accepted that athletes from Northern Ireland could compete for either team, no matter what their opinion was on the constitutional question. Why this is achievable is that both teams were striving to be inclusive. Those same athletes often represented Northern Ireland in the Commonwealth Games.

There has also been the work of the Irish Football Association (IFA) through its Football for All programme.

After the appalling sectarianism on display at the match against the Republic of Ireland in Belfast in 1993 and further exposed in the intimidation of Neil Lennon in 2002, the IFA, through its Community Relations officer Michael Boyd and the fans themselves, led by amongst others Jim Rainey, recognised their sectarianism and that it was destroying the game they loved. And so they set about tackling the problem. They turned the terraces from red, white and blue to a sea of green and replaced sectarian songs with others such as *We're not Brazil, we're Northern Ireland*.

That work continues, but as a consequence there is now a family friendly atmosphere at Windsor Park, big crowds, a team that clearly wants to play for its supporters and the fans themselves who have won international awards for their work and their behaviour.

In turn the GAA has continued to build on its outreach work in the section of society that previously felt alienated from it, including modernising some of its rules. They have adopted an anti-sectarian policy, opened up Croke Park for use by other sports and welcomed the Queen there on her visit to Ireland in 2011.

When England played the Irish Rugby Team at Croke Park in 2007 it was a momentous occasion with *God Save the Queen* being played and respected by the crowd. As one friend later told me, he turned to all those around him and asked 'What's it to be, all three (*Soldier's Song, God Save the Queen and Ireland's Call*) or none?' They agreed on all three, with assistance readily given to those who did not know the words.

The media, meanwhile, had been stirring controversy around the match, and I was involved in a number of television, newspaper and radio interviews. Rightly or wrongly I expressed the view that in the world of sport nothing unites the Irish better than playing England! This seemed to work well until a radio interview was heard by one of my English brothers-in-law; but as friends we agreed to disagree!

That event signified a maturing of the relationship between the Irish of the Republic of Ireland and their English neighbours.

The visit of the Queen built upon that and I for one was duly convinced that a friendship that had gone wrong was being rediscovered to mutual benefit; and that this in turn was having an impact in helping to mature the improving relationships in Northern Ireland, particularly amongst many of our young people.

In many ways that sense of inclusion emanating from the GAA represents an Irishness comfortable with its own identity and prepared to expand its sense of community to include the British tradition. It is epitomised by the words of the Ulster Director Danny Murphy who said, 'When Down play, they represent all the people of the County, no matter what their background.' A simple gesture, but so important in a culturally diverse society striving to build a sense of interdependence, and especially one emerging from the consequences of conflict.

Finally there is the impact of Irish Rugby, which I feel managed to get relationships right on this Island when others failed: an Irishness that can accommodate its Britishness and vice versa. Yet it struggles to maintain that position at a time when one might have thought things would be getting easier. When I played rugby for Ireland, 'the Deal' was that when matches were played in Dublin the anthem of the Republic of Ireland would be played and respected by all: similarly if matches were played in Belfast, then that of Northern Ireland would be played; a position of mutual respect appropriate to an all-Ireland sport drawing support from all its people. Yet when Ireland played Italy in Belfast in 2007, 'the Deal' was not reciprocated. I can understand all the reasons for not doing so. But it is important in a sport that is not only all-Ireland but is also one for all its people, that its symbols are inclusive and properly representative.

Such matters are vital as we continue to build relationships on this island. I suspect, for example, that the implications of the pursuit by the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) of young footballers from Northern Ireland and its acceptance of their right to do so by FIFA have not yet been fully appreciated.

I had a private dream that the anti-sectarian work carried out by IFA together with the fans would in the not too distant future help us achieve a situation in which a match could be organised between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland which would be attended by over 40,000 (both groups acknowledged internationally as the best-behaved of fans) in an atmosphere of friendly rivalry, with the proceeds being shared between the associations and various charities. After all, sport teaches us how to compete without destroying a relationship.

Unfortunately such an event is now a long way off and I suspect the FAI do not even understand the damage they have done, or to what extent their actions are perceived as sectarian or racist, and how this perception risks undermining the work of the IFA in tackling our sectarian divisions. The development of an inclusive concept of our identity is achievable, both North and South, but we need to remain wary of that which narrows what is otherwise an enriching confluence.

2. Religious intolerance

I am often reminded of a statement made by Gandhi to the effect, 'When I read the scriptures I see Christ. When I meet Christians, all too often, I don't.' I suspect if Gandhi had visited Ireland he may well have felt compelled to make a similar statement.

Throughout our history there have been many examples of our different churches failing to promote the simple Christian message of 'love your neighbour' and 'treat others the way you yourself would like to be treated'. Too often they have acted out of self-interest rather than abiding by the obligations emanating from those words.

So as we look to the future let us reflect on the words and actions of those such as Ray Davey and John Morrow and others connected to Corrymeela and the work they carried out in building relationships throughout a time when others were destroying them. Or the small but significant personal gesture of the late Terence Donaghy who each week would attend his own church and then another of a different denomination in his local area. There is also the relationship of the Rev. Ken Newell and Father Gerry Reynolds and the congregations of their respective churches, again living out their Christian obligations.

Add to that the leadership of forgiveness shown at crucial times, whether by Gordon Wilson after the Enniskillen Remembrance Day atrocity in 1987, Patrick McGurk after the McGurk's Bar bombing in 1971, or the clear Christian leadership of the Rev. William Bingham at Drumcree in 1998. Each made very Christian interventions at crucial times to avoid our society stepping over the edge of the abyss into an all-out civil war.

Yet the churches could and need to do more, challenging themselves where they maintain or promote division. If they adhere to their core principles they should be a powerful voice for the building of a shared future across these islands.

However, probably the single most significant gesture that the churches could make to our society is to reach agreement with respect to the relationship between our Christian churches and our schools – in Northern Ireland in particular, but also across the island. This would help free up our education system to move to a more shared structure, enabling our children to build the sort of normal relationships that the current structures prevent them from developing.

3. The demonisation of the other.

A thread that runs through the events that we will spend this decade commemorating is that of the demonisation of the other. There is the clear anti-Britishness of the republicanism of Eammon DeValera, Michael Collins and others which became interwoven with Catholicism

Anti-Irishness was not as prevalent in Unionism but there was a strong undercurrent of anti-Catholicism

President McAleese stated in an interview after she visited Auschwitz: 'They gave to their children an irrational hatred of Jews in the same way that people in Northern Ireland transmitted to their children an irrational hatred, for example, of Catholics.'

Her mistake here was not to balance her comments by including the same hatred being promoted by some from the Catholic/nationalist/republican section of our society. She apologised accordingly and in doing so challenged the people of this island to stand against the attitudes which fed our hatreds by saying, '...and I should have gone on to say, and Protestants, because the truth of the matter is that, of course, sectarianism is a shared problem.'

Throughout her Presidency she constantly worked to build relationships across the island, with considerable success. The visit of the Queen to the Republic of Ireland was a personal triumph, for which she deserves much credit. But too often we permit those in positions of power and influence to demonise the other. A challenge has to be launched and maintained to counter such attitudes.

What counters the hatred of the extremes is the many small steps being taken throughout our island that build relationships. Such actions too often go unpublicized. Yet one could argue with some justification, that while politics did deliver a political settlement in 1998 which was endorsed by the people of this island, it has been the ordinary person who has actually best embraced the spirit of the Agreement. What we do see time and again is that while hatred is taught, it can also be untaught.

4. The flawed politics of the island

On one view, our politics – whether you consider Fine Fail, Fine Gael, the Unionist Parties or Sinn Féin and the SDLP – has remained in a time-warp emanating from the events of a century ago. All of them to a greater or lesser extent endorse the flawed ideologies that I would argue have to a considerable extent failed the ordinary people. It is surely time that we became far more demanding of our politicians and the policies they promote.

They say that politics is about the pursuit of power. They should add the qualification that this power should be used constructively for the benefit of the people they are elected to serve. Simple populism or flag-waving should be exposed for its superficiality and we should be intolerant of those who promote intolerance of the other, victimhood, hatred, fear, exclusion, division or exclusive concepts of nationalism.

There has been too much tragedy as a result of our failure to challenge such base politics.

As to the constitutional question, let it be pursued by the open building of relationships whether inside Northern Ireland, on this island or between these islands. To argue for a Northern Ireland for all, or a North of Ireland for all, is first and foremost the right thing to do, while also making sense strategically.

Moreover, it would be a pity, Northern nationalists and republicans having demanded the structure of a government of shared responsibility – if they failed to take on such responsibility. If you want to prove that a United Ireland could work, then make Northern Ireland work. It is not the contradiction that it seems.

5. The structures of division

In Northern Ireland we need to strive harder to break down or remove the structures that divide us, that are often the visible manifestations of the failures in our relationship from our past.

It has been proved by the integrated education sector that integrated schools do work; or that a local structure can be built, such as in Limavady, that ensures greater sharing of schools and hence contact between our children.

Shared housing estates, as in Antrim, have also been piloted and again prove that, when proper leadership is given, the people are prepared to make the necessary compromises to ensure such projects are successful.

Our 'Peace Walls' remain in existence, but much debate is taking place between those on either side of the walls as to how better relationships can be built, so that at some stage in the future they can come down.

There are also the socio-economic divisions right across the island. As we try to manage the current economic problems, it is so vital that we maintain and, where possible, create employment. That needs a strong and vibrant financial economy, But it should not be forgotten that its success is also linked to the social economy. Poverty and unemployment are fertile ground for extremism.

6. The consequences of violence

While these issues remain in our society that fed the conflict in our history, each can be tackled with leadership and commitment at all levels in our society. This is what I have so far tried to outline. The one matter that we cannot undo is the hurt and tragedy that has been visited upon too many by the failure in our past relationships.

Some of the families involved have a high public profile while most have remained quiet and many from all sides have shown what can best be described as grace, to permit the space to open up for our peace process to evolve and politics to begin to work.

In some ways it may ultimately be understandably impossible to somehow ease the hurt caused to too many families. There are also those, who, while regretting their past actions, feel they were somehow justified, a position which is unacceptable to many others, nationalist or unionist.

But we have an opportunity now to create that different, better and genuinely shared future in Northern Ireland, on this island and between these islands, which is perhaps the best tribute we can pay to those who suffered loss and tragedy. To grasp it we have to learn to care about each others' children and value them as if they are our own, standing resolutely against those who continue to promote the flawed ideologies of old, using our friendship as our weapon of choice. We must have the courage to believe that we can create that different future

Perhaps in this 'Decade of Commemorations' we could all reflect on one missed opportunity that occurred during that same period, the Christmas Truce in 1914 along large sections of the Western Front in northern France. What if those soldiers, on both sides, having met the other, had had the courage to stay in their 'no man's land' and not let their leaders force them back into their trenches?

¹ Seaview is owned by Crusaders FC, but is shared (under a formal ground-sharing arrangement) by Newington FC. The two clubs, under the 'Mes Que un Club' ('more than just a football club' – strapline 'borrowed' from Barcelona) initiative have jointly developed a shared space comprising offices and a training suite/hospitality space under the Seaview North Stand. Still under construction, but due to open soon. The 'Mes Que un Club' initiative aims to undertake cross community work through sport – meeting educational, social and other goals.

In my head, there are nameless fears about England, all of them traceable to the fact that it is known to be full of Protestants and therefore entirely without order or morality.

Fintan O'Toole

I was naïve. The springtime honeymoon period is over, the cherry-blossom and confetti has blown away, and we are now living in the day-to-day reality of post-conflict Northern Ireland.

Fionola Meredith

The book that reveals most about the relationship between Ireland and England is no novel or history textbook or learned tome, but the telephone directory of any major British city, in which hundreds of people bearing my own surname will be found.

Joseph O'Connor