

# Negotiating public history in the Republic of Ireland: collaborative, applied and usable practices for the profession

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## Abstract

Since the nineteen-seventies public history has emerged as an increasingly coherent discipline in North America, Australia, New Zealand, the U.K. and, latterly, in a wider European context. In all of these places it has had a connected but distinctly different gestation, and the nature of how history is applied, constructed, proffered or sold for public consumption is unique to each society. In Ireland, and within the history profession connected to it, its meaning is yet to be fully explored. Recent talks, symposia and conferences have established the term in the public imagination. As it is presently conceived public history in Ireland either relates specifically to commemorative events and the effect historians might have on official discourse relating to them, or to a series of controversial and contested historiographical debates. This article, by contrast, seeks a wider, more inclusive definition that includes the 'public' as an actor in it.

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Performing Irish history in public can be thrilling, enervating and anxiety-laden, and that is arguably the price we pay for an engaged public that is anything but apathetic about the telling of its own story. The Republic is currently standing at a commemorative crossroads, halfway through a decade of centenaries and attempting to negotiate the particulars of everything from the campaign for devolved government, Ireland's place in global warfare, guerrilla insurgency, civil war and, of course, the republican martyrology of 1916. This latter commemoration has, inevitably, caused the most anxiety. In late 2014, as initial plans for the 2016 commemoration first emerged, Diarmaid Ferriter, unimpressed with the corporate spin in the government's short video 'Ireland Inspires', described it as 'embarrassing unhistorical shit', a memorable phrase that has been picked up by many commentators since.<sup>1</sup> Other historians took a more circumspect approach, noting that commemoration and history were very different (and ought to be) and that the video 'quite eloquently expresses the gap' between them.<sup>2</sup> While recognizing this gap between the state and its historians, this article seeks to contextualize public history in Ireland with reference to the many other elements encompassed by that term. The public itself takes an active role in the production of

<sup>1</sup> L. Siggins, 'Profile: John Concannon, Mr 1916', *Irish Times*, 15 Nov. 2014 <<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/profile-john-concannon-mr-1916-1.2001432>> [accessed 4 Apr. 2017]; B. Feeney, 'Fine Gael attitude to commemoration changed utterly', *Irish News*, 25 March 2015.

<sup>2</sup> A. Dolan, 'Commemorating 1916: how much does the integrity of the past count?', *Irish Times*, 2 Jan. 2015.

public history, as do the overlapping cultural, philanthropic and corporate sectors that serve that public.

In 2016 more than 1.6 million people visited the Guinness Storehouse at St. James's Gate. It is, by some distance, Ireland's leading tourist attraction. After digesting a piece of carefully crafted corporate history as they ascend to the Gravity Bar® via the Atrium, their gaze might linger on the National Museum of Ireland, housed in a converted early eighteenth-century army barracks just across the river, which, although free, currently attracts about a third of that figure per annum. In good humour after sipping their complimentary pint of 'the black stuff', the visitor might buy a souvenir in the gift shop, perhaps even a book, bringing their average spend above €20. For many of them, this might be the only history or heritage-related activity scheduled into their weekend. They will have ticked this box by buying into the merger-acquired mythology of a multi-national corporation, and will have been guided through the narrative by a firm of interpretive planners who design impressive entrance and exit exhibition spaces to a design brief created by a consultancy. Should the visitor wander aimlessly back towards the city of Dublin on foot they will probably pass through Pimlico and the Liberties, right by an Iveagh Trust-sponsored community memory project – The Museum Flat – past the collaborative-history art project of Chris Reid, 'Heirlooms & Hand-me-downs'.<sup>3</sup> As they reach the twin landmarks of St. Patrick's and Christchurch Cathedral they will by now find themselves walking along a pre-ordained heritage highway, 'Dubline', created in 2013 by Sherwood & Associates for Fáilte Ireland, the office of public works and Dublin city council. A heady mixture of big business, the state and the local.

Public history is a term that emerged in the United States in the nineteen-seventies and later spread to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the U.K., and emerged recently in Continental Europe. In all these places, public history has had a connected but distinctly different gestation, and the nature of how history is applied, constructed, proffered or sold for public consumption is unique to each society.<sup>4</sup> However, public history developed according to three main principles: a focus on non-academic audiences, an interest in the present-day uses and applications of the past, and the development of collaborative practices.

Controversies about public history come from the non-explicit relations between the terms 'public' and 'history'. As Ludmila Jordanova argued in her book on history practice, 'we should concede from the outset that "public" is a difficult term'.<sup>5</sup> Public history is an umbrella that refers to and encourages the public role and activity of historians. Robert Kelley, historian at the University of California at Santa Barbara, invented the term public history in the early nineteen-seventies, defining the phrase as referring 'to the employment of historians and historical method outside of academia'.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The authors thank Maeve Casserly for drawing their attention to the last two projects.

<sup>4</sup> The meaning of the term 'public history' has been interpreted variously in different national contexts. For North America, see the classic text by R. Rosenzweig and D. Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York, 1998). For a discussion of public history in the U.K., where the term is interchangeable with 'people's history' and 'cultural heritage', see *People and their Pasts: Public History Today*, ed. P. Ashton and H. Kean (New York, 2009). For European manifestations, see B. E. Jensen, 'Usable pasts: comparing approaches to popular and public history', in Ashton and Kean, pp. 42–56.

<sup>5</sup> L. Jordanova, *History in Practice* (2000), p. 141.

<sup>6</sup> R. Kelley 'Public history: its origins, nature, and prospects', *Public Historian*, i (1978), 16–28.

He encouraged historians to recover their public roots, having noticed a widespread disconnection and uneasiness between academic historians and popular audiences. This relative disconnection came from the professionalization of the discipline in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when professional historians adopted a more scientific stance based on archival research and critical analysis. In order to reach scientific objectivity, historians were encouraged to disconnect from present-day issues. Professional historians became hyper-specialists and adopted a 'scientific', academic, emotion-free writing style based on footnotes and primary sources. The public history movement emerged largely in opposition to this gap between academic and non-academic audiences.

At first, the movement aimed to gather practitioners who were not working in academic circles but were nonetheless practicing history. Therefore, in terms of methodology and archival works, public history was not supposed to differ from more traditional and academic history. The National Council on Public History – the American association of public historians – warned on its website that 'in terms of intellectual approach, the theory and methodology of public history remain firmly in the discipline of history, and all good public history rests on sound scholarship'.<sup>7</sup> So although we may find historians who are not public historians, the opposite is inconceivable.

Public history is based on the wish to reach popular audiences. The historian and television presenter Lucy Worsley declared that 'if history is "finding what happened in the past", then, public history is "telling lots of people about it"'.<sup>8</sup> Public history is not necessarily simply history with a loudspeaker, but it is based upon democratizing principles of history for the people. Jordanova underlined that 'public history is popular history – it is seen or read by large numbers of people and has mostly been designated for a mass audience'.<sup>9</sup> We find public historians working in museums, historical societies, archives, libraries, historic buildings, newspapers and other media. We may read, hear and see them on television, in movies, on radio and on the internet.

To some extent, those public practices are not new in Ireland. A 2010 article by John M. Regan in the house journal of Irish academic history, *Irish Historical Studies*, has helped to draw attention to the term among professional historians.<sup>10</sup> Based on his perception of the political use and distortion of the past, Regan was very critical of the concept and denied both the need for, and the validity of, public history. While he acknowledged that there existed in Ireland 'a healthy practice of disseminating historical knowledge from the universities to general audiences', he questioned the simple existence of public history.<sup>11</sup> According to Regan, historians – including academic historians – already reach popular audiences. But should a historian who has a weblog or is interviewed on television be considered a public historian? Although most historians are, from time to time, in contact with non-academic audiences, this does not mean that

<sup>7</sup> The National Council on Public History, 'How is public history different from 'regular' history?' <<http://ncph.org/cms/what-is-public-history/>> [accessed 22 Sept. 2016].

<sup>8</sup> L. Worsley, 'What is public history?', *Historical Association*, Feb. 2010 <[https://web.archive.org/web/20150202232716/http://www.history.org.uk:80/resources/public\\_resource\\_2903\\_75.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20150202232716/http://www.history.org.uk:80/resources/public_resource_2903_75.html)> [captured 2 Feb. 2015].

<sup>9</sup> Jordanova, p. 141.

<sup>10</sup> J. M. Regan, 'Irish public histories as an historiographical problem', *Irish Historical Studies*, xxxvii (2010), 265–92.

<sup>11</sup> Regan, 'Irish public histories', pp. 89–90.

they are ready to face the difficult task of regularly engaging with the public. To reach and collaborate with broad non-academic audiences, historians need to adopt new formats and new practices.

Another aspect of public history deals with the present-day uses of the past. In one of the first collective works on public history, Leslie Fishel and Rutherford B. Hayes regretted that ‘traditional historians have rarely confronted the issue of utility, they have dismissed it from their vocabulary as irrelevant or commercial’.<sup>12</sup> On the contrary, public historians put great emphasis on the ways in which the public uses the past. The concept of usability is at the core of public history. Public history can be applied to specific projects in which historians work for non-educational programmes as consultants for clients and customers. The purpose, then, is not necessarily to touch as broad a public as possible, but rather to apply historical methodology to the production of narratives for a corporate demand. We touch here upon the more controversial activities of public historians as entrepreneurs or consultants. In her essay on history and business, Shelley Bookspan regretted that the link between history and entrepreneurship ‘generally remains unexplored’. She argued for ‘history as a platform on which to build new businesses’ because ‘it has been far likelier for non-historians to create history-based enterprises, or even history-based industries’.<sup>13</sup>

Certainly the most symbolic aspect of public history in Ireland, official commemorations have been the source of many historical projects and practices. Historians tend to be critical of commemoration in general, while at the same time benefiting from the ‘crumbs at the commemorative table’ in the form of increased funding and public interest at the point of intersection between their work and the centenary moment.<sup>14</sup> Strong links exist between historians’ public activities and the Irish national narratives. The contiguous and equally present-centred fields of memory and commemoration studies have been under construction in Ireland since the late nineteen-nineties and are well developed.<sup>15</sup> Public history in Ireland has been greatly associated with authorized commemorative events and the discussion on the effect historians might have on official discourse or policy relating to them. The Irish case stands out because of the series of controversial and contested historiographical debates which have entered the public sphere through newspapers, radio and television programmes.<sup>16</sup> The historical interpretations of the relations between Ireland and Britain, and between political traditions in Ireland (Republicanism, Unionism) have created jobs and projects for historians outside traditional academic circles.

<sup>12</sup> L. Fishel and R. B. Hayes ‘Public history and the academy’, in *Public History: an Introduction*, ed. B. Howe and E. L. Kemp (Malabar, 1986), pp. 7–20, at p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> S. Bookspan, ‘Something ventured, many things gained: reflections on being a historian-entrepreneur’, *Public Historian*, xxviii (2006), 67–74.

<sup>14</sup> Dolan, ‘Commemorating 1916’.

<sup>15</sup> For early examples, see *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. I. McBride (Cambridge, 2001); K. Jeffery, *Ireland and the Great War* (Cambridge, 2000); and A. Dolan, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War: History and Memory, 1923–2000* (Cambridge, 2003). For more recent works, see G. Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French: Irish Folk History and Social Memory* (Madison, Wis., 2007); R. Higgins, *Transforming 1916: Meaning, Memory and the 50th Anniversary of the Easter Rising* (Cork, 2012); and E. Mark-Fitzgerald, *Commemorating the Irish Famine: Memory and the Monument* (Liverpool, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> For a contribution to a very public debate about an alleged ‘false surrender’ and sectarian massacres during the Irish civil war and War of Independence, see J. M. Regan, ‘The “Bandon Valley Massacre” as a historical problem’, *History*, xcvi (2012), 70–98.

Irish historian Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh has recently defined public history as ‘the state of historical awareness among the general public, not specifically trained or educated in historical enquiry or exposition’.<sup>17</sup> Like Regan, Ó Tuathaigh spent the majority of his analysis ruminating on the role of the historian and the academy in relation to this deregulated sector. The result is a rather narrow definition of public history in an Irish context, and one that posits it as either state or academy-led and lacking any element of public agency or input. Although debates about public history in Ireland have been dominated by reflections on official history and political uses of the past, the most radical shift coming from public history, namely the participation of the public, has largely been overshadowed.

Public history has increasingly moved from working for to working with popular audiences, and has become a stance to make history more participatory, collaborative and inclusive. In 1990, oral historian Michael Frisch presented a new concept that would be very important for the conceptualization of the relations between historians and audiences. He argued that history was based on ‘shared authority’.<sup>18</sup> This shared authority relates to the democratization of the knowledge-building process; in other words, audiences are never passively consuming knowledge produced by expert historians. Thanks to new digital media and tools, everybody can easily produce, record and display representations of the past. The internet has, de facto, forced historians to confront the multiplication of popular productions. The challenge, therefore, for public historians is to pursue critical methodology and collaborate with the public.

Many public historians would today accept that public history is not ‘doing history’ for the general public but with them. The participatory construction of history results in a major redefinition of the role and authority of historians. Historians cannot see themselves as missionaries who bring truth to non-academic audiences, but should be prepared to collaborate and to share authority. Shared authority comes from the conviction that historians do not own history, but that it is rather a sort of public domain. Public historians acknowledge the need to share the different steps of the process with broader audiences. Not all historians, however, are willing or able to do so.

Public history articulates usable and relevant pasts in contemporary society, and the field pivots on questions of legitimacy and authority. In Ireland, and within the history profession connected to it, its meaning is yet to be fully explored. However, recent talks, symposia and conferences have all helped to establish the term ‘public history’ in the public imagination,<sup>19</sup> as the foundation of specific higher degree programmes and Masters degrees have helped to establish it as an academic discipline.<sup>20</sup> Exploring public history practices in Ireland raises questions about what the role of historians in

<sup>17</sup> G. Ó Tuathaigh, ‘Commemoration, public history and the professional historian: an Irish perspective’, *Estudios Irlandeses*, ix (2014), 137–45.

<sup>18</sup> M. Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany, N.Y., 1990).

<sup>19</sup> In 2012, in reaction to the onset of the ‘decade of centenaries’, several public talks by prominent Irish historians tackled the idea of public history in Ireland. Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh gave a lecture entitled ‘Public history and the professional historian: an Irish perspective’ to Cúirt Arts festival in Galway in Apr. 2012, later published under the same title in *Estudios Irlandeses* (see n. 17 above). In summer 2012, a large gathering of over 300 people attended a one-day event at the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, Dublin, entitled ‘Historians and the public: reflecting on a decade of war and revolution in Ireland 1912–23’, the first in an annual series run by Universities Ireland.

<sup>20</sup> The M.Phil. in public history and cultural heritage began in Trinity College Dublin in 2011, and the M.A. in history at Queen’s University Belfast has run a popular public history strand since 2012.

contemporary societies should be. Due to specific audiences (popular, non-academic, business-oriented) and formats (exhibit, audio-visual, online), public history requires specialized training that goes along with more general consideration on the changing role of historians. Historians themselves are not to be supposed as being without motive or gain in the field of public history. Within the academy an interest in public history is to some extent motivated by the greater stock now being put into research output metrics and ‘impact’, and the newly developed need to prove that academics are seeking new audiences for previously under-circulated work.<sup>21</sup>

The field of public history is in vogue because it answers a need in societies where state-funding for curatorial expertise, strategic acquisition, long term storage facilities and associated support staff is on the wane as museums and cultural institutions become gradually more public-oriented through outreach, education and visitor experience.<sup>22</sup> As museums, galleries and other cultural institutions are being encouraged to outsource the creation of content, exhibition design and other areas of expertise, the need for dependable consultancies, narrative architects and interpretive planners has become apparent. Alongside this private sector boom, there has been a parallel public sector response, as well as an increasing involvement of the public, broadly defined, in the production of heritage, histories and culture.

Likewise, the rise in public history graduate programmes is indicative of how attractive an industry-aimed humanities degree can be at a time of global recession. The same phenomenon may well account for the rise in public history appointments worldwide, and for the prevalence of what are now called ‘twitterstorians’ (historians with active twitter accounts), as well as an increase in ‘impact-friendly’ outreach activities such as exhibition collaboration or co-design. Whatever the impulse, it is clear that the rhetoric of public engagement and collaboration has begun to have an impact on official heritage and historical discourse in various ways. In the next section we outline the state of the field globally and locally before dividing Irish public histories into two distinct types: the authorized/official kind and the unauthorized/democratized kind. We close with some thoughts as to the likely impact of public history on the profession in the coming years.

One of the most distinctive aspects of public history in Ireland is the fact that the state has been the largest provider of official and semi-official historical content for public consumption in the Republic. In the two decades that followed the creation of the Irish Free State, Irish politicians barely participated in the construction of official historical narratives that mostly emerged from Republican groups. The 1916 Easter Rising collection at the National Museum of Ireland, for example, was designed and organized in 1932 by Helen Gifford-Donnelly – a member of the Irish Citizen Army. The

<sup>21</sup> This has been most clearly seen in the U.K., as the R.A.E. (2008) and R.E.F. (2014) have begun to change the very character of the higher education sector (see S. Smith, V. Ward and A. House, ‘“Impact” in the proposals for the U.K.’s Research Excellence Framework: shifting the boundaries of academic autonomy’, *Research Policy*, xl (2011), 1369–79; R. Watermeyer, ‘Issues in the articulation of “impact”: the responses of U.K. academics to “impact” as a new measure of research assessment’, *Studies in Higher Education*, xxxix (2014), 359–77; B. R. Martin, ‘The Research Excellence Framework and the “impact agenda”: are we creating a Frankenstein monster?’, *Research Evaluation*, xx (2011), 247–54).

<sup>22</sup> N. Merriman, ‘Museum collections and sustainability’, *Cultural Trends*, xvii (2008), 3–21. For more on the Irish context, see K. Oman, ‘Weighing the heritage burden: the cost of museum storage’ (unpublished Trinity College Dublin M.Phil. thesis, 2013) and E. Negussie, ‘Implications of neo-liberalism for built heritage management: institutional and ownership structures in Ireland and Sweden’, *Urban Studies*, xliii (2006), 1803–24.

reluctance of the Irish government to deal with the official commemoration of a troubled past – especially the recent period of the Irish civil war – led David Fitzpatrick to argue that between 1922 and 1939 commemorations appeared as a ‘chronicle of embarrassment’.<sup>23</sup> A gradual softening in approach was evident from the early nineteen-forties and since then the southern state has collaborated or colluded with its most prominent historians to create various set-piece ‘authorized’ commemorations, displaying a continuing will to manipulate sentimentalized and popular topics for further political gain.<sup>24</sup>

This cosy arrangement was evident, for example, in 1944, when the centenary of Thomas Davis and the Young Irelanders was choreographed by Sean Moylan, Oscar Traynor and Éamon de Valera, working with T. W. Moody and Robin Dudley Edwards of Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin respectively.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, state and academy collaboration was again evident in 1966, when a highly criticized polemical and celebratory tone was struck in commemoration of 1916.<sup>26</sup> Such a reaction, along with the outbreak of the Troubles in Northern Ireland may well have contributed to the long neglect of commemorations by the state. This eventually came to a close in the mid nineteen-nineties with the sesquicentenary of the Irish famine, and the bicentenaries of 1798 and the Emmet rebellion of 1803, all of which were backed by a level of government funding not seen since the mid century.<sup>27</sup> The commemorations of the nineteen-nineties symbolized the political involvement in historical projects. Irish academic Kevin Whelan was hired as historical advisor for the events surrounding both the Famine and the 1798 rebellion. In the context of the Northern Irish peace process, Whelan and the Irish government decided to emphasize the 1798 rebellion’s plurality of ideals and the union between Protestants and Catholics – at the risk of ignoring evidence of sectarianism and violence – to contribute to the present-day appeasement between communities. Reconciliation in the past would facilitate, according to the Irish government, reconciliation in the present.

In all of this official process, museums remain of paramount importance. Surveys of state-funded ‘official’ museums indicate that the general public considers such bodies to be the trustworthy.<sup>28</sup> Ireland is no different, though there is a limited appetite among the general public for more money to be spent on museum exhibitions or visitor care.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>23</sup> D. Fitzpatrick, ‘Commemoration in the Irish Free State: a chronicle of embarrassment’, in *History and memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. I. McBride (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 184–203.

<sup>24</sup> T. Cauvin, ‘National museums and the mobilization of the past in Ireland and Northern Ireland: commemorative exhibitions of Anglo-Irish conflicts, 1921–2006 (unpublished European University Institute Ph.D. thesis, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> This has been recently examined by G. Finlay, ‘Commemorating Thomas Davis and young Ireland, 1945: politics, national identity and public memory’ (unpublished Trinity College Dublin M.Phil. thesis, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Higgins.

<sup>27</sup> E.g., many of the 1798 commemorations in Co. Wexford arose without any government intervention or financial stimulus (T. Cauvin, ‘Commemorating historical conflicts during the peace process: the bicentenary of the 1798 rebellion in Ireland and Northern Ireland’, in *Visual Conflicts: on the Formation of Political Memory in the History of Art and Visual Cultures*, ed. P. Fox and G. Pasternak (Newcastle, 2011), pp. 65–87).

<sup>28</sup> For the U.S., see S. Tam, ‘In museums we trust: analyzing the mission of museums, deaccessioning policies, and the public trust’, *Fordham Urban Law Jour.*, xxxix (2012), 849–901 and *Whose Muse? Art Museums and the Public Trust*, ed. J. Cuno (Princeton, N.J., 2009). For a more global take, see W. L. Boyd, ‘Museums as centers of controversy’, *Daedalus*, cxxviii (1999), 185–228.

<sup>29</sup> K. Simpson and others, *Valuing Heritage in Ireland* (2007) <[http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/valuing\\_heritage\\_in\\_ireland\\_2007\\_6mb.pdf](http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/valuing_heritage_in_ireland_2007_6mb.pdf)> [accessed 4 Apr. 2017], p. 11.

The museum sector remains one of the most important in promoting history and heritage, though other cultural institutions also contribute, notably art galleries.<sup>30</sup> All told, state-sponsored historical content is produced and funded from three main arms of government. The use of Irish heritage and history for promotional use is largely handled by Fáilte Ireland (department of transport, tourism and sport), the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland – the latter a shared cross-border initiative that arose from the Good Friday Agreement. The preservation, site access and interpretation and maintenance of sites of major historical importance, as valuable state assets, are handled by the office of public works in the Republic (department of finance) and by the Northern Ireland environmental agency. Finally, the less lucrative aspects of heritage and history, such as commemoration, management of cultural institutions and so on are run through the department of arts, heritage and the gaeltacht in the Republic, with input from the department of the taoiseach.

The Republic ring fences funding to between seven and fifteen cultural institutions, via direct grant, grant-in-aid and subsidy, including the National Gallery, Archives, Library and Museum, all of which have footfall in the hundreds of thousands and display a great deal of historical content as well as caring for their collections.<sup>31</sup> The majority of local, town and county museums are in the care of local authorities and county councils on both sides of the border. Both Irish governments, therefore, continue to be major actors in the production of public historical content, albeit with an increasing degree of outsourcing and public-private collaboration.

For the current decade of centenaries/commemorations it appears as though both the All-Party Oireachtas Committee for Commemorations and its connected ‘Expert Advisory Group’ of Irish historians have been thoroughly ineffective in restraining the government from engaging in a by now familiar pattern of ad hoc commemoration funding and opportunistic photo-bombing. The clear and evident pattern within arts, culture and heritage funding can be seen in ‘The Gathering’, a Fáilte Ireland tourist initiative of 2013, a highly successful umbrella branding of small-scale nationwide activities that would have happened in any case.

The state commemorative platform for the most controversial centenary of all – that of the 1916 rebellion – showcases these elements of contested Irish public history. Arguably, the commemorative programme is being used in Ireland to placate a strong domestic demand for visible public history while simultaneously showing an acceptable face to the high numbers of tourists who are beginning to return to Ireland following a dip in visitors after the economic collapse of 2008–15. No attempt was made to highlight Ireland 2016 as something for that tourist market, and no mention was made of it on the Fáilte Ireland website. Both ‘products’ utilize the same network of cultural institutions, but are kept separate. ‘The Gathering’ in 2013 had a direct effect on the planning for the centennial commemoration of the 1916 rebellion, with the Irish government seconding the driving force behind it, marketing executive John Concannon, despite his having no

<sup>30</sup> Heritage is inextricably bound up with history in the public imagination, as the results from a 2007 government funded survey can show (Simpson and others, pp. 21–4).

<sup>31</sup> A. Sawyer, ‘National museums in the Republic of Ireland’, in *Building National Museums in Europe 1750–2010*, ed. P. Aronsson and G. Elgenius (EuNaMus report, i, Linköping, 2011) <<https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:450373/FULLTEXT01.pdf>> [accessed 26 April 2017], pp. 435–60; M. Bourke, *The Story of Irish Museums 1790–2000: Culture, Identity and Education* (Cork, 2011); E. Croke, *Politics, Archaeology and the Creation of a National Museum in Ireland: an Expression of National Life* (Dublin, 2000).

particular background in history or heritage.<sup>32</sup> What resulted was a broad based ‘umbrella’ approach where various local and self-financed initiatives received coverage and exposure via the Ireland 2016 initiative, and the state outlay on commemoration was kept to a relative minimum.

The state programme itself was an updated traditional approach, with greater allowance made for alternative and subaltern voices than in 1966, but essentially following a similar approach to previous commemorations by accentuating the role of the signatories of the proclamation of independence. Nevertheless, the programmes attempted a diversity that had not been seen in Ireland before. Such elements included acknowledging the previously unheralded role of women in the 1916 rebellion, as well as a wreath-laying for British soldiers who died in the conflict at Grangegorman cemetery. Despite this, the set-piece of the commemoration returned to a format much derided and previously trialled in 2006 – a highly militaristic display involving the various armed forces of the state, staged outside the General Post Office in the centre of Dublin City on the anniversary of the rising. The various details, from presidential wreath laying, the reveille, the air corps fly over, and all the other grandiose gestures might very well have occurred in 1966.<sup>33</sup>

What is perhaps interesting about Ireland 2016 is how little impact it had on the tourism agenda for overseas visitors. Fáilte Ireland made no mention of the programme on their main website, and the entire enterprise appeared to be capsuled and contained within one disconnected government body, under the direction of a marketing professional, and one that had a shelf-life of just two years in total. All of this highlights the fact that many of the people consuming public history in Ireland are not in fact Irish. In 2014, over four million overseas visitors attended a historical or cultural attraction, with 1.5 million visiting monuments, and 2.1 million visiting historic houses or castles. Tourist numbers have been healthy in recent years, with 2016 numbers estimated at a 16 per cent increase from 2015.<sup>34</sup> Irish heritage sells well to the tourist market, but Ireland’s controversial domestic debates surrounding that heritage are detached from the product sold abroad. The state was faced with fighting on two artificially separated fronts, one domestic and one international. This capsuled approach to Irish public history is intriguing because it raises questions about the changing role of historians in Irish society, and how they might add some much needed nuance in the crowded landscape of history providers.

Over the past two decades, the manner in which official or authorized history is being commissioned has changed noticeably, and is moving toward a partially state-funded autonomous model, one consistent with government strategy on reducing public spending and stimulating philanthropic donation and the development of new and diversified revenue streams. This loosening of state control over commemoration marks a departure from the dominant state presence in previous generations. In the Republic a rather chaotic approach to history and heritage is evident, as evinced by the recent

<sup>32</sup> Concannon worked for Unilever and Dubarry before his time with Fáilte Ireland from 2006 (<<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/profile-john-concannon-mr-1916-1.2001432>> [accessed 26 May 2017]).

<sup>33</sup> For a summary of the state ceremonial programme for 2016, see <<https://www.dfa.ie/our-role-policies/our-work/casestudiesarchive/2015/april/ireland-2016-centenary-programme/>> [accessed 8 May 2017].

<sup>34</sup> Fáilte Ireland, *Cultural Product Usage among Overseas Tourists in 2014* (March 2016) <[http://www.failteireland.ie/FailteIreland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/3\\_Research\\_Insights/1\\_Sectoral\\_SurveysReports/Cultural-activity-product-usage-among-overseas-tourists-in-2014.pdf?ext=.pdf](http://www.failteireland.ie/FailteIreland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/3_Research_Insights/1_Sectoral_SurveysReports/Cultural-activity-product-usage-among-overseas-tourists-in-2014.pdf?ext=.pdf)> [accessed 26 May 2016], p. 1).

controversies related to the commemoration programme for the centenary of the Easter Rebellion in 2016.<sup>35</sup>

Public history, as a discipline and approach, has long advocated increased public-private partnership in the production and maintenance of heritage in the public sphere. A seminar on 'Governance of cultural institutions' run by the Irish Museums Association in March 2013 found that 'the prevailing trend internationally has been to remove national cultural institutions from the detailed control of the civil service, giving them an independent corporate status which is consistent with government strategy'.<sup>36</sup> One form of institutionalized history is available to the general public in the form of non-profit trusts and for-profit heritage and history consultancies. State actors in the field have several reasons to consider themselves publicly accountable to taxpayers in a way that for-profit consultancies do not. Nevertheless, as the resources at the disposal of such major institutions decline, alongside the curatorial experience required to wield them effectively, the rate at which national institutions tender, fund and then sign over to the largely unaccountable for-profit sector has increased exponentially since the late nineties. The for-profit sector takes many forms, from smaller consultancies specializing in using their industry experience to advise specific types of cultural institutions, to larger firms who will aim for major contracts which demand that they deliver all aspects of a large scale renovation or exhibition from content to light bulbs. An example of the latter, more holistic and elaborate type, would be Martello Media – a firm of 'narrative architects' based in Sandycove in south Dublin and responsible for the creation of content and interpretation in some of the most popular history-led tourist attractions in Ireland.

Martello's major commissions in Ireland include the entrance and exit exhibitions at the largest tourist draw in Ireland, the Guinness factory at St. James's Gate brewery (2008). Martello has designed major exhibitions at the National Museum of Ireland (1998), National Library of Ireland (2005) and Dalkey castle (2013). In a development that encapsulates just how sophisticated private sector provision of history is becoming in Ireland, the company recently won the Kenneth Hudson award at the European Museum of the Year Awards in 2012, for their 2011 collaboration with the Glasnevin Trust on the afterlife-themed and subterranean 'City of the Dead' exhibition in the purpose-built Glasnevin Cemetery Museum – the first of its type anywhere in the world.<sup>37</sup> Though Martello has a strong domestic profile the global nature of this type of design means that it is conceding ground to international competition while simultaneously picking up major international commissions, such as the *Churchill: the Power of Words* exhibition in the Morgan Library, New York.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, competition from established firms such as Jack Harrison & Associates, Scroope Design and McCabe

<sup>35</sup> For coverage, see N. Anderson, 'Centenary row escalates as 1916 relatives to launch rival commemoration', *Irish Independent*, 15 Nov. 2014; 'Invocation of men of 1916 has backfired', *Irish Examiner*, 15 Nov. 2014; M. O'Halloran, '1916 commemoration plans "shambolic" and symbolic of "cynical indifference" – Adams', *Irish Times*, 20 Nov. 2014.

<sup>36</sup> 'Governance of cultural institutions' seminar <<http://www.irishmuseums.org/assets/Governance-of-Cultural-Institutions.pdf>> [accessed 4 Apr. 2017].

<sup>37</sup> The award committee noted that the design team had 'turned an unexpected place into a vibrant historically informative experience about life and lives' and that the 'museum is out of the ordinary and its creators have put the public firmly at the heart of their endeavour' (*European Museums Forum* <<http://www.europeanmuseumforum.info/emya/history/64-2012-penafiel-portugal.html>> [accessed 4 Apr. 2017].

<sup>38</sup> E.g., the strategic plan for a heritage thoroughfare running from College Green to Kilmainham, Dublin, was awarded to a combination of domestic and international consultants, including the Irish-based Sherwood & Associates.

Design Group, as well as newcomers Exhibit Design Group and Belfast-based Tandem Design, is expanding the palette of 'domestic' options now available to those bodies in a position to put exhibitions out to tender, such as Fáilte Ireland. Public history is an international field, and when historians can be hired locally on an ad hoc basis there is little to stop a competitor with a lower cost base undercutting an Irish-based firm in a sector that is more and more cognizant of total project costing as government funding contracts. Recently, major Irish tenders have been awarded to Haley Sharpe Associates (Leicester), Event Communications (London), Ralph Applebaum Associates (New York) and Studio SP (Edinburgh).

In a sector where revenue generation is rarely the sole motive, non-profit groups are major funders of cultural initiatives in the private sector. The Glasnevin Trust, an elected board charged with running the iconic Glasnevin Cemetery in north Dublin sustainably, has recently opted to privilege its long-term viability as a cultural-historical attraction over its short-term viability as a place with enough space to bury Dublin's dead. Glasnevin is as much a tourist attraction as an active cemetery, housing most of Ireland's major political and nationalist figureheads from O'Connell to Parnell, De Valera and Michael Collins, as well as a huge number of military burials from service in the First World War, both sides of the Irish civil war and 1916. In a move proving interesting to many European cemeteries with historical-cultural resonance, Glasnevin opened an interpretation centre with a permanent exhibition designed by Martello, temporary exhibition space, an extensive education department, public lecture series and re-enactments, as well as a redesign of its popular guided tours. Glasnevin works with Slattery Communications for its public relations, employs an in-house historian, and has begun to partner with university programmes in Trinity College Dublin and Dublin City University in an attempt to bolster and moderate its provision and mediation of (potentially sensitive) historical content to the general public. The Glasnevin model has limitations and advantages – it is much more flexible and reactive when compared to major cultural institutions in the public sector, but as yet lacks the sort of institutional credibility, name recognition and public trust built up by comparable public organizations. Such significant investment also requires the Trust to charge for admission, and though the success of the venture will not be apparent for several years it ought to interest all Irish historians as an example of a historical-cultural development conceptualized from beginning to delivery with very limited exchequer funding, without the aid of the academy, and in direct competition with public sector actors such as the National Museum of Ireland, and other non-profit organizations like the more established Kilmainham Gaol – all of whom are vying for (arguably) the same nationalist 'green dollar'.

A third type of actor in the private sphere is the pop-up, temporary or medium-term non-profit museum or event co-coordinator. There are several of these in Dublin alone, from the Little Museum of Dublin in St. Stephen's Green to the Georgian Townhouse museum. The Little Museum – a successful attempt at a small-scale city-focused people's museum – was set up by two media professionals in 2011 and costs about a quarter of a million to run per year. Visitor numbers in 2012 reached a reasonably impressive 35,000 considering a low but nevertheless prohibitive admission charge. The museum is, perhaps, a vision of the future in the cultural sector, as it is facilitated by a peppercorn rent from Dublin city council, while much of its outreach, education and cataloguing work is financed from the corporate sector, with sponsors like Guinness and Johnston, Mooney, and O'Brien. This means that on the one hand the city gets a low-cost city museum free of operational costs, and that the corporate sector gets some feel-good

advertising exposure. It is, if you like, the perfect blend of small government, innovation and corporate philanthropy, and, along with Glasnevin and the Titanic museum in Belfast, is a potential vision of the future. The historian is absent from this vision, except perhaps as a hired hand at design stage, or a quality control device as an exhibition nears completion. Neither is the public given much of a role in this type of new museology, though their anticipated reaction and footfall may greatly influence the product design. Greater scope for collaborative approaches exist elsewhere in Irish society, and at a more grassroots level. This fusion of the private and public spheres in the field of public history is contested, however, with many advocates preferring to accentuate community empowerment, collaborative ‘shared inquiry’, and the greater diffusion of historical knowledge as its defining features, rather than an outsourcing of cultural content-creation to corporate interest.<sup>39</sup>

History can now be produced faster, by a wider variety of people, and (arguably) at higher quality than ever before. The proliferation of weblogs, crowdsourcing projects, metadata harvesting and online exhibitions has contributed to a democratization of history that truly constitutes a paradigm shift for the profession. Professional historians habitually use resources like Flickr and Retronaut to add lustre and colour to PowerPoint or Prezi presentations, or develop more specific projects using websites such as Historypin. Genealogical forums, and census and newspaper digitization have contributed positively to how we ‘do history’, but there is also the realization for the professional that they no longer control history in the way that they once did. This has advantages, of course, but it also presents the profession with significant questions that it will struggle to answer. What, if anything, are we sacrificing if access to creation of convincing historical content has been widened? Who controls quality in history now?

A related, but much less highlighted, change in practice is the general increase in forms of performed or participatory history – what we might call the greater ‘democratization’ of Irish history.<sup>40</sup> This refers to an expanding constituency of amateur history enthusiasts, who are beginning to change the way history is produced. Such democratization takes many forms and brings with it many possibilities in terms of widening the demographic appeal away from the traditional market for history and heritage as a product (white, often male, aged over thirty, medium to high income) to new audiences.<sup>41</sup> In this section we begin with the greater space afforded to history in the past ten years in what is considered ‘old media’ – printed newspapers, radio airplay, documentaries etc. Following on from the ‘old’, we must chronicle history and ‘new’

<sup>39</sup> For an articulation of the collaborative-empowerment interpretation, see J. R. English, ‘The tradition of public history in Canada’, *Public Historian*, v (1983), 46–59; J. M. Winter, ‘Public history and historical scholarship’, *History Workshop Jour.*, xlii (1996), 169–72; D. D. Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* (Amherst, Mass., 2012), pp. xiii–xxxii; K. T. Corbett and H. S. Miller, ‘A shared inquiry into shared inquiry’, *Public Historian*, xxviii (2006), 15–38.

<sup>40</sup> For the democratization of history in a global context, see H. Hermans and A. Hermans-Konopka, *Dialogical Self Theory: Positioning and Counter-Positioning in a Globalizing Society* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 99–102. E.-C. Pettai (nee Onken) has written about democratization in a Latvian context (see E. C. Onken, *Demokratisierung der Geschichte in Lettland: Staatsbürgerliches Bewusstsein und Geschichtspolitik im ersten Jahrzehnt der Unabhängigkeit* (Hamburg, 2003)).

<sup>41</sup> For a classic text on heritage and history as a product, see D. Light and R. C. Prentice, ‘Who consumes the heritage product? Implications for European heritage tourism’, in *Building a New Heritage: Tourism, Culture, and Identity in the New Europe*, ed. by G. J. Ashworth and P. J. Larkham (1994), pp. 90–118; for a discussion of the market segment identified by *The History Channel*, for example, see G. R. Edgerton and B. R. Rose, *Thinking Outside the Box: a Contemporary Television Genre Reader* (Kentucky, Ill., 2005), p. 253.

media, from ‘twitterstorians’ to history bloggers, Facebook, Flickr and other web-based participatory platforms. Finally, we look at the phenomenon of public history events, from the newly instated History Festival of Ireland to popular re-enactments. These are all constituent elements of a much more genuinely collaborative public history than that discussed earlier, one that relies on genuine enthusiasm and demand ‘from below’ to guarantee its survival in a free market.

Irish people with an amateur interest in history can still enjoy a high degree of exposure to it in what is now generally referred to as ‘old media’ – print, radio and television. History has been well catered for in mainstream media outlets and, in particular, on Irish radio, where early initiatives such as the Thomas Davis Lectures (1953–) firmly established history as part of public service broadcasting. Two major magazine-style radio shows exist and run back-to-back on Sunday evening slots from 6.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.<sup>42</sup> The first, fronted by Myles Dungan for the state broadcaster R.T.E., focuses for the most part on Irish themes and content, and has been broadcasting since 2010, establishing a regular slot for history discussion where there was only a fitful presence before.<sup>43</sup> A much longer-running series is ‘Talking History’, the pop-history show on Newstalk, which has run regularly since 2006, fronted by Trinity College Dublin historian Patrick Geoghegan, and co-hosted in its early years by University College Dublin’s Lindsay Earner-Byrne. There are regular and prominent history slots on some of the major daily radio shows at both stations, with Sean Moncrieff, George Hook and Pat Kenny at Newstalk all regularly foregrounding history for their 200,000-plus listeners.

Irish history on film has a chequered and controversial track record, with qualified critical successes like Ken Loach’s *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (2006) typically juxtaposed with the more contentious and critically derided *Michael Collins* (1996), directed by Neil Jordan. Such films have occasioned spikes in public debates around history, but it is to the more everyday world of television that we must look for a pattern. Irish people have remained loyal to the medium of television, watching an average of three hours and thirty-five minutes per day.<sup>44</sup> Mainstream television history is dominated by global players such as The History Channel, though in Ireland there is a strong domestic provision, with docudrama and documentary series featuring prominently across the schedules of Ireland’s three main providers, T.G.4, T.V.3 and R.T.E. In fact, history has been well represented on the state broadcaster since its first airing in 1961.<sup>45</sup> The major documentary series of recent years has seen Diarmaid Ferriter, professor of modern history at University College Dublin, consolidate his position as Ireland’s most prominent historian. His three-part series for R.T.E., *The Limits of Liberty* (South Wind Blows, 2010) marks the last major investment in Irish history by the state broadcaster. Documentaries such as *Cromwell in Ireland* (Tile Films, 2008) and *In the Name of the Republic* (Tile Films, 2013), fronted by Trinity College historians Micheál Ó Siochrú and Eunan O’Halpin, reveal the continuing popularity of

<sup>42</sup> There are also several others, such as ‘The History Show’ on Near F.M., and many regional radio stations carry history and heritage content of a more localized nature.

<sup>43</sup> The biggest R.T.E. success in this regard was probably Diarmuid Ferriter’s *What if?* series, which ran between 2004 and 2005 and spawned a successful crossover book *What If? Alternative Views of 20th-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 2006).

<sup>44</sup> Figures from *Television Audience Measurement Ireland* <<http://www.tamireland.ie/random-facts>> [accessed 3 Nov. 2013].

<sup>45</sup> Precursors of this would have to include the Thomas Davis Lectures, first broadcast on radio in 1953.

contested and divisive histories. They also demonstrate the tendency of film companies to recruit from Ireland's most prominent history departments; a distinct and problematic gender bias; and a switch from a 'talking heads' style to productions shot on location in exotic surroundings and featuring multiple contributors.<sup>46</sup> The slick B.B.C. Northern Ireland production *The Story of Ireland* (2011), fronted by well-known journalist Fergal Keane, utilized this format and was the largest survey attempted since Robert Kee's *Ireland: a Television History* (1980), though it received mixed reviews. Recent indications are that the decade of commemorations will continue to lead content in this area, with companies such as Abú Media concentrating on the revolution period in the coming years. Their Irish Film and Television Academy Award-winning docudrama *1916 Seachtar na Cásca* (2010) was narrated by Brendan Gleeson and looked at the lives of the seven signatories of the Proclamation of Independence in 1916. Their follow-up *1916 Seachtar Anaithnid* (2014) looked at the other seven men executed in Kilmainham Gaol.

This sort of Irish history-themed television garners an impressive audience share and, if Irish-produced, will often feature in prestige or premium slots on the television roster.<sup>47</sup> The manner in which many of these documentaries revisit well-worn and reliable themes in Irish history suggests an innate conservatism in a sector where much is made of viewer figures and where high investment from state broadcasters can be in the region of over €100,000 per hour. Done well, television history is a costly endeavour, and this typically leads to a low-risk approach. The same conservatism has long been decried in Britain, where the author-presenter format is equally strong and has strengthened the grip of historians such as Simon Schama, Bettany Hughes, David Starkey and Niall Ferguson. This reliance on high-profile (usually male) academics working on subjects with pre-existing levels of public interest restricts democratization in this sector in Ireland as elsewhere, though the recent €6 million, R.T.E.-Zodiak miniseries *Rebellion* (2016) built its narrative around three female protagonists, showing that female-centric history programming may well be on the rise in Ireland. Nonetheless, it is still largely to other media outlets that we ought to look for new directions.

Since 1993 Ireland has had a dedicated history magazine, *History Ireland*, with a core group of contributors composed of publically engaged historians, and edited by Tommy Graham. Aimed squarely at the interested public, *History Ireland* has maintained its position as the public history mouthpiece and facilitated several major debates in its pages. Standard print media has responded to the demands of online content over the past ten to fifteen years in a variety of ways that has affected the production of Irish history. *The Irish Times* is perhaps most active in this area of heritage and history, running a dedicated weekly column on the heritage sector as well as a series of special supplements tied to what it calls the 'decade of revolution'. Since 2011 special editions

<sup>46</sup> This is a global trend that comes at the cost of in depth analysis (see T. Downing, 'TV history: requiem or resurrection?', *History Today*, lxi (Jan., 2011), 27–30. The findings of an A.H.R.C.-funded project at Lincoln University researching history on television will also make interesting reading for Irish historians (see 'Televising history 1995–2010' <<http://tvhistory.lincoln.ac.uk>> [accessed 8 May 2017], as well as a special issue of the *European Jour. Cultural Studies*, x (2007) arising from their work). Erin Bell has recently tackled gender bias in television history (see 'No one wants to be lectured at by a woman – women and history on TV', *Women's History Magazine*, lix (2008), 4–12).

<sup>47</sup> E.g., M. Ó Siochrú's *Cromwell and Ireland* was broadcast on 16 Sept. 2008 in a Tuesday evening slot (10.15 p.m.). It gained an audience share of 28.4% (i.e., percentage of all of those watching television at that time of evening) well above the average for that slot. D. Ferriter's *The Limits of Liberty* (2010) aired in the same slot on 1, 8 and 15 of June 2010, garnering 19.5% of the audience share, slightly below average.

have covered the 1913 lockout, the third Home Rule crisis and Irish women and suffrage. Literary editor Fintan O'Toole is a prominent voice for issues of culture and heritage, and the commercial success of *A History of Ireland in 100 Objects* owes much to the commitment of the *Irish Times* to establishing itself as the voice of the arts and culture in Irish media. History features less frequently in tabloid newspapers, but is certainly evident in both the *Sunday Times* and in the publications of Independent News Media, the *Irish Independent* and the *Sunday Independent*, where cultural commentators, such as Kevin Myers, Eoghan Harris and John-Paul McCarthy, frequently comment on historical events that have contemporary relevance.

The new media landscape is simultaneously more diverse and more focused on specific or special interest groups. Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, YouTube and Flickr are all web-based platforms that have arguably revolutionized the production of history and historical content since the date of their foundation in 2004–7. Online blogging freeware, such as WordPress, has made it relatively easy to construct a special-interest website relating to a defined research project, and though Irish historians have been reluctant to embrace Twitter, Facebook and Wikipedia they are increasingly turning to them in their daily practice to flesh out lectures. Perhaps more usefully, websites such as Historypin, Wikipedia or Omeka can be used to direct the type of student-led research or editorial projects that in the past have had very limited reach. Whether Irish historians should be on Twitter or Facebook is quite another matter, raising issues of time and resource allocation as well as concerns over copyright, defamation and other legal travails that might arise from an 'authorized' figure such as a professional historian commenting freely on debates on which they may or may not be an expert. Typically, the cultural institutions are doing this more effectively. The only university department with an elaborate new media profile is at University College Dublin, where podcasts and other resources are hosted at the website [www.historyhub.ie](http://www.historyhub.ie), while Queen's University Belfast also has a group of digitally active historians in their employ. This tends to work best in an integrated format in a strategy such as that employed by the National Library of Ireland. There the various social media branches are centralized through one dedicated employee who co-ordinates Twitter, Facebook and Flickr 'feeds', while remaining cognizant of older forms of mass communication, such as email-lists and the increasingly outmoded form of physical mailing lists. History departments are very likely to remain behind the pace in this area unless administration and time resources are reconfigured to accommodate such an integrated strategy.

Where the academy has been more successful is in encouraging (often at the behest of tech-savvy early career historians) the development of online blogs. One such blog to feature many Irish historians was *Pue's Occurrences* – a dedicated Irish history blog that ran from 2009–12, exceptional in that it was a public historical resource that came from within the academy.<sup>48</sup> Other long-term and popular blogs that draw from both the academy and independent scholarship are the emphatically left-wing *The Cedar Lounge Revolution*, and the Dublin-focused *Come Here to Me! Dublin Life and Culture*, as well as a fine example of a special-interest blog *Irish in the American Civil War*.<sup>49</sup> Two of these three have already spawned popularly-aimed publications arising from content added

<sup>48</sup> *Pue's Occurrences: the Irish History Blog* <<http://puesoccurrences.wordpress.com>> [accessed 4 Apr. 2017].

<sup>49</sup> *The Cedar Lounge Revolution* <<http://cedarlounge.wordpress.com/about-us/>>; *Come Here to Me! Dublin Life and Culture* <<http://comeheretome.com/>>; *Irish in the American Civil War* <<http://irishamericancivilwar.com/>>. Another example of a more all-purpose political blog with a heavy emphasis on the historical would be *Sluggor O'Toole* <<http://sluggerotoole.com>> [all accessed 4 Apr. 2017].

online. These are all prime examples of the possibilities of crowd- or co-sourcing editorial projects online to produce content that has already been tested, to some extent, outside the academy.

Since 2010 Irish historians will have noted the rise of the history festival. In a market previously catered to by stand-alone lectures at public buildings, the history festival promises a more total approach. There are two models in operation. The first is based on the literary festival format, where a range of academic speakers help to populate a weekend's worth of connected literary workshops, and dramatic and theatrical performances spread across a number of participating cultural institutions. The most obvious example of a dedicated festival of this type is the new Dublin History Festival, where Irish-based historians vied for public attention with actors like Barry McGovern and Bryan Murray, writers of historical fiction, and high-profile imports like Simon Schama.<sup>50</sup> Historians are also being integrated with several of the more established literary festivals, with the relatively new annual Bram Stoker Festival integrating historical panels and speakers in much the same way that the various Joyce festivals have utilized the historical expertise surrounding them to ground the more fantastical events connected to Bloomsday.

The second type of festival is a hybrid of the music festival template and the typical academic conference format. The History Festival of Ireland – which began in 2012 at Lisnavagh, Co. Carlow, the ancestral home of its founder, Turtle Bunbury – featured a 'line-up' of prominent public and academic historians. The festival ran across two days at an atmospheric location with a range of entertainment on offer, from film screenings to stand-alone lectures and the more classic academic panels held in front of a public audience and followed by a question and answer session. The entrance fee of €40 was subsidized by various local bodies including Éigse, a Carlow-based arts festival. Another initiative connected to this music festival template are the *History Ireland* hedge schools, run under the auspices of the leading public history magazine in Ireland. These 'hedge schools' began as a hybrid initiative first trialled at the boutique music festival, Electric Picnic, in Stradbally, Co. Laois back in 2010. There have been over sixty hedge schools thus far, spread across the country, with some drawing over 100 spectators, adding a genuine outreach beyond the limited circulation of the magazine itself. The talks are free, marketed widely using social media outlets and recorded for posterity via podcasts. Nevertheless, festivals and hedge schools continue to rely on academy co-operation for their success – many of the speakers are publicly funded researchers – but they are certainly tapping into a new, and more regional, market that has previously been the preserve of local history societies.

Ireland can lay claim to a rich tradition of re-enactment and public displays of battle remembrance. Much of that culture has been a feature of the annual calendar of cities in the north of Ireland, particularly Derry-Londonderry and Belfast – where re-enactment has sometimes spilled over into recreational violence. The triumphalist parades, burnings and commemorative activities of the Orange Order or the Apprentice Boys of Londonderry, both of which have significant presence among the Irish diaspora, have kept the memory of various late seventeenth-century conflicts to the fore of Irish public life.<sup>51</sup> Other types of battle re-enactments have, until recently, been something of a

<sup>50</sup> The event ran 27–30 Sept. 2013 and was sponsored by Dublin City Council (see <[www.dublinfestivalofhistory.ie](http://www.dublinfestivalofhistory.ie)> [accessed 6 July 2017]).

<sup>51</sup> See I. McBride, *The Siege of Derry in Ulster Protestant Mythology* (Dublin, 1997); S. Cohen, 'Winning while losing: the Apprentice Boys of Derry walk their beat', *Political Geography*, xxvi (2007) 951–67.

niche market in Ireland despite their prominence in other history-centric societies, notably the United States, where redcoats and rebels are frequently resurrected by enthusiastic amateur societies in what is generally known as ‘living history’. This newfound interest in living history was recently touted by an *Irish Times* journalist to be something that could replace the momentum of ‘The Gathering’ in 2013.<sup>52</sup> The more performative aspect of living history is by nature organic and ‘grassroots’ in origins. Globally, living history and re-enactment tends to cluster on two main periods – military history post-seventeen-seventies and medieval history – and this is also the case in Ireland. Newcomers to the Irish scene include ‘Medieval Mayhem’ at Malahide castle in June 2013, competing with the more established Linn Duachail – Annagassan Viking Festival for public attention.<sup>53</sup> The largest recorded re-enactment took place in Clontarf on 19–20 April 2014 to mark the millennial centenary of the eponymous battle in 1014. It was watched by an estimated 60,000 or more spectators on the same weekend that less than 5,000 turned out to witness the annual official state commemoration of Easter 1916.<sup>54</sup> Critics quite rightly point to inconsistencies and a tendency to relegate such periodized re-enactments to imagined, sanitized and family-friendly events in order to accommodate a participationist and positivist retelling of a familiar story. Central to the popularity of Clontarf, of course, was the idea that this was a battle ‘the Irish’ had actually won. Covering the story for the *Irish Times*, Patrick Freyne noted that Clontarf featured some ‘incongruous’ sights: ‘A tall, bearded warrior walks an Irish wolfhound by a woman pushing a Yorkshire terrier in a pushchair. A bespectacled little girl fires arrows at a range depicting a deer and a tiger and a rhino (did Vikings hunt rhinos?)’.<sup>55</sup> Criticism aside, the very fact of such large-scale attendance at a history-themed event such as this points to a greater participatory tendency than we have ever seen before in Ireland, at least in a context that was not motivated by an ostensible sectarian or political grievance.

More modern re-enactments have appeared on the scene in recent years and are usually of a militaristic nature, focusing on late eighteenth-century events or on the revolutionary period of 1914–23. The Battle of Vinegar Hill was re-enacted for the second year in succession in early August 2013. The Irish Military Re-enactment Group is the largest in the field, but there are a host of smaller revolution-era groups, such as Lord Edward’s Own, the Enniscorthy Historical and Re-enactment Group and the Khaki and Green War of Independence Re-enactment Group.<sup>56</sup> In August 2013, a 1798-themed event called ‘In Humbert’s Footsteps’ attracted up to 10,000 people to Killala and Castlebar, Co. Mayo, including an appearance from the taoiseach, Enda Kenny, a serving member of parliament for the area. The Castlebar event, celebrating the brief triumph of General Humbert’s troops in Killala and Castlebar, rather than their eventual defeat at Ballinamuck, was co-ordinated with the help of a French-based re-enactment group, Le Garde Chauvin, who specialize in Napoleonic-era re-enactment.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>52</sup> K. Holmqvist, ‘After the Gathering . . . What’s next?’, *Irish Times*, 14 Sept. 2013.

<sup>53</sup> *Annagassan Viking Festival* <<http://www.annagassanvikingfestival.ie>>.

<sup>54</sup> This was picked up by some commentators in the media as a sign of how much more contentious 1916 would be to remember in 2016 (see J. Downing, ‘Why Battle of Clontarf was a cake walk compared to commemorating the Rising’, *Irish Independent*, 21 Apr. 2014).

<sup>55</sup> P. Freyne, ‘Slaying, knitting, musical Vikings: beware!’, *Irish Times*, 21 Apr. 2014.

<sup>56</sup> See *Living History* <[www.livinghistory.ie](http://www.livinghistory.ie)>; *Lord Edward’s Own Historical Re-enactment Group* <<http://www.kildare.ie/monasterevin-historical-society/reenactment.htm>> [both accessed 4 Apr. 2017].

<sup>57</sup> Other re-enactment regiments contributed (Lord Edward’s Own, Le Garde Chauvin, 45eme Regiment d’Infanterie de Ligne, 70e Demi-Brigade d’Infanterie de Ligne and Rebel Pikemen and Women).

The *Mayo News* quoted a local publican, Shane Donnelly, who captured the very essence of this tourism-related heritage event when he declared of his French customers ‘there’s nothing better than looking at a foreigner listening to Irish music and drinking a Guinness in your pub and having a good time. It makes me feel proud’.<sup>58</sup> Complementing the 2014 follow-up event for ‘In Humbert’s Footsteps’ was the neighbouring Festival of the Pirate Queen in Westport, this one making even more explicit the link between tourism, ‘edutainment’ and revelry with its very own ‘Grainne Ale’ brewed for the duration of the weekend.<sup>59</sup>

Such groups and societies are notable for their willing co-operation with societies throughout Ireland and the U.K., and the manner in which the bigger events are organized (usually within the framework of a larger festival) hint at an aspect now being exploited to good effect by the History Festival of Ireland – the need for an ‘experience’ to go along with this sort of seasonal historical event. Many of the more niche groups, such as Kampfgruppe Sud/Battlegroup South – a society interested in the history and maintenance of German World War II era military vehicles, quite naturally interacts with international societies much more than Irish ones.<sup>60</sup> Numbers involved in these re-enactments, as well as estimated attendances, are still well below those of other societies. About 5,000 people turned up to the Battle of Vinegar Hill re-enactments in 2012 and 2013. However, there appears to be little engagement with these groups from those within the academy.

Collaborative projects across different forms of media may well become more common. An exciting example of this sort of initiative is *Century Ireland* – a website that is hosted by R.T.E. with support from Boston College and the department of arts, heritage and the gaeltacht.<sup>61</sup> It is essentially a conglomerate of several historians working within the academy or other cultural institutions who have collectively committed to producing near-daily content to a slickly-produced website, from which traditional news media can draw for topics of interest related to current commemorative events. In one sense this is a limited democratization, as those moderating and producing the content are traditional historians, but should such a format be widened out to incorporate user-generated content then it could become a model for other projects.

What does all this mean for the academy? Irish history departments have, for much of the twentieth century at least, had a sizable minority of historians who specialized in media and public engagement. The Irish public has always interacted with history and heritage. Probably the greatest impact of public history on the academy is the expectation that this minority become a majority who are interested in reaching large audiences, and in investing energy in doing so, whether that be through old media, new media or the festival circuit. That may be a good or a bad thing, but the temptation is to prophesy that it will potentially lead to more broad-based, shallow work that can be tailored according to funding cycle requirements, Research Excellence Framework metrics, and institution specific goals. More positively, it means that historians within the academy are unlikely to be able to ignore the outside world to the same extent ever

<sup>58</sup> T. Quinn, ‘Killala comes alive for historic re-enactment’, *Mayo News*, 20 Aug. 2013.

<sup>59</sup> See *Festival of the Pirate Queen* <<http://www.piratequeenfestival.ie>> [accessed 4 Apr. 2017] for details of this 2014 event.

<sup>60</sup> *Battlegroup South: Ireland’s Largest Axis Re-enactment Group* <<http://battlegroupsouth.com/>> [accessed 4 Apr. 2017].

<sup>61</sup> *Century Ireland* <<http://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/>> [accessed 28 June 2017].

again. There are obvious signs that the profession is at last reacting to these changes. In 2010, the Oral History Network of Ireland was founded in order to aid professional development in a key area of public history production. The 2014 launch of the Irish Association of Professional Historians was followed by a sponsored workshop called 'Historians in the media', further demonstrating a willingness within the profession to engage.<sup>62</sup>

It seems self-evident that academic voices are no longer considered the sole authority in the production of history for public consumption. State agencies, trusts, for-profit organizations, consultants and broadcasters have joined in chorus with the new constituency of a crowdsourcing and engaged public, and the cumulative effect of this has been to drown out the authoritative academy voice. This is not necessarily a good thing for either party, as the academy loses (arguably) some legitimacy and leverage if the trend continues, and the public stands to lose valuable historical professionalism and expertise.

<sup>62</sup> See *Irish Association of Professional Historians* <<http://iaph.ie/>> and *Oral History Network Ireland* <<http://www.oralhistorynetworkireland.ie>> [both accessed 4 Apr. 2017].