

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of Liverpool</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 30 - History</p>
<p>Title of case study: Religion, Identity and Conflict in Ireland</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study relates to Professor Marianne Elliott’s research into the history of religion, identity and conflict in Ireland. Through original research, covering many centuries, Elliott has demonstrated how conflicting identities have been based on simplified origin-myths. This case study describes some of the ways in which her research has benefitted a wider public. Through engagement with community organisations such as the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council, through dialogue with religious leaders and prominent peace campaigners, and through vigorous engagement in public discussion and media debate, Elliott’s research has made a tangible contribution to the processes of peace-building and reconciliation as well as heightening public understanding of Irish history.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The impact detailed in Section 4, below, relates to research conducted by Professor Elliott at the University of Liverpool between 1993 and 2012. Elliott’s work investigates the historical development of different cultural traditions and hostile identities in Ireland. In particular, she has shown how choices made by political and religious leaders in the past underpinned the Troubles in Northern Ireland. By challenging what she terms “origin-myths”, Elliott’s research is intended to show how heightened historical understanding can aid the processes of peace-building and reconciliation.</p> <p>Covering a period of nearly 2000 years, Elliott’s monograph on <i>The Catholics of Ulster</i> (2000) examined a community which had been consistently neglected in histories of Ireland, and of Irish Catholicism. It examined the history of those people “who have called themselves Catholics”, their culture and sense of identity, and their relationship with people in the rest of Ireland, above all their immediate neighbours: the Protestants and Presbyterians of Ulster. It explored the stereotypes through which Catholics and Protestants alike defined themselves in opposition to each other, and challenged perceptions of Ulster Catholics as “natural rebels”, pointing out that at the outset of the Troubles, Catholics were less willing to use violence in pursuit of their political aims than Protestants.</p> <p>Elliott’s edited volume, <i>The Long Road to Peace in Northern Ireland</i> (2002, 2007), grew out of a series of Peace Lectures given at the University of Liverpool’s Institute of Irish Studies between 1996 and 2000. Instigated by Lord Owen, the series was intended as a means for those involved in peace negotiations, in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, to share their insights and experiences with a wider audience. Elliott’s own contribution to the volume was derived from her participation in the Opsahl Commission (1992-3). Elliott argued that the root of the Troubles lay in conflicting religious identities, but she drew on the findings of the Opsahl Commission to argue that there was “a greater willingness than ever before” among the people of Northern Ireland to admit and explore the prejudices which have divided them.</p> <p>Elliott’s work on religion and identity led to her being invited to deliver the prestigious series of Ford Lectures at the University of Oxford in 2005. A revised version of these lectures was published as <i>When God Took Sides</i> in 2009. Building substantially on <i>The Catholics of Ulster</i>, and drawing on more than two decades of archival research and scholarly reflection, <i>When God Took Sides</i> showed how each side in the Northern Ireland conflict came to view itself and the other, and how religion, politics, class and economics were entangled in constructing these identities. Elliott showed the role of the imagination in moulding communal memory, and the tendency to dehumanize those close at hand on the basis of only slight differences. By showing how religious and political elites in Ireland created the origin-myths that still underpin divided identities today, <i>When God Took Sides</i> suggested ways that such simplified myths can be defused in the long term. Elliott’s biographies of <i>Wolfe Tone</i> (1989, 2012) and <i>Robert Emmet</i> (2003) tackled the legends surrounding the key founders of Irish republican nationalism. These works, too, challenged the</p>

simplified myths that were later taken up to condone violence. In particular, her emphasis on the Protestant allegiances of these republican figureheads has helped those involved in promoting 'shared future' policies to challenge the idea that republicanism is necessarily Catholic and anti-Protestant.

3. References to the research

Publications:

1. *The Catholics of Ulster: A History* (London: Allen Lane, 2000), 643pp. ISBN 0-713-99464-9. The outcome of a Nuffield Foundation Research Fellowship. Shortlisted for the Ewart-Biggs Prize. "In this fine book, Marianne Elliott, an Ulster Catholic who has lived in England for decades, has triumphantly succeeded in showing why her people are as they are," *The Times*, 18 October 2000.
2. (editor), *The Long Road to Peace in Northern Ireland* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002, 2007). ISBN 0-85323-677-1 and ISBN 1-864631-065-1. This book was listed by one Irish county public library as among the '[Hundred Books With a Difference](#)'.
3. *Robert Emmet: The Making of a Legend* (London: Profile Books, 2003, 2004), 292pp. Outcome of a British Academy Research Readership. "[A] brilliant masterclass in how history and legend might be interpreted," Colm Toibin, *Dublin Review*, 12 (2003).
4. *When God Took Sides: Religion and Identity in Ireland - Unfinished History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 330pp. [REF2 output] Outcome of an AHRC research leave award. This book is a revised version of Prof Elliott's 2005 Ford lectures. It was also shortlisted for the Ewart-Biggs Prize, and was endorsed by the U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East and former Chairman of the peace negotiations in Northern Ireland, Senator George J. Mitchell, thus: "Marianne Elliott combines historical understanding with a hands-on involvement in the process that led to peace in Ireland. The result is a book that is challenging, illuminating, and that sheds light on other situations of sectarian, religious, or ethnic tension beyond the Irish case."
5. *Wolfe Tone*, 2nd edition (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012) [REF2 output] "[A] cool, splendidly researched biography ... if Marianne Elliott dismantles the myth, she in no way debunks the individual. Rather she releases a much more admirable figure, humane, high spirited, cultivated, very much of his turbulent, radical liberal times," *Guardian*, 9 November 1989 (review of first edition).

Major Research Grants:

- Nuffield Foundation, £30k (1994-5, 1996-8) awarded to Marianne Elliott for 'A History of the Catholics of Ulster'.
- British Academy, £56k (2001-3) for 'Robert Emmet: The Making of a Legend'.
- AHRC, £34k (2008), for 'Religion and Identity in Modern Irish History'.

4. Details of the impact

In modern Ireland, a partitioned and contested territory, the role of the historian is central to civic debate and understanding. Professor Marianne Elliott is widely admired and respected as one of the historians who has worked hardest to demythologize the Irish past. She is recognised as having enhanced public understanding of the issues which have underpinned conflict in Ireland. Writing in the *Irish Times* (10 September 2011), Ireland's leading public intellectual, Fintan O'Toole, commented: "History matters in Ireland, not least because the past is so unsettled ... The meaning of historical events is still up for grabs in the public realm ... More than in other western countries, historians (Roy Foster, Marianne Elliott, Diarmaid Ferriter and many others) are key public intellectuals, trusted to bring some kind of perspective to bear on current events." That Elliott should be named as one of his three examples of the committed historian is no accident.

The findings of Elliott's research have frequently been taken up by both individuals and

organisations working to promote peace-building and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. In 2010, in anticipation of the looming 'decade of anniversaries', she was invited by the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council (NICRC) to address a public conference at Belfast City Hall on the vexed question of public commemoration. Held in March 2011, the conference was organised in two panels, the first comprised of four historians (including Elliott) and a journalist, the second comprised of five politicians (from the DUP, SF, UU, SDLP and Alliance parties). The 250-strong audience included representatives of various cultural organisations, and community and religious leaders as well as politicians and journalists. Elliott used her address, 'Remembering Different Pasts for Different Futures', to highlight key findings from her own work on history, identity, myth and conflict, and to plead for a shared and dignified commemoration of a divided past. Her presentation was published by the Community Relations Council in pp. 25-7 of its booklet based on the conference proceedings, [Remembering the Future](#). NICRC's Cultural Diversity Director identifies the two major outcomes of the conference as follows: "broad support for the adoption of 5 principles for remembering in public space; and secondly the Centenaries are now discussed at all levels ... playing into the complexities rather than the simplicities." While these are outcomes of a collective endeavour, the organiser commented that Elliott's contribution was especially valuable as "it gives a really accessible entry point into thinking about public and local history."

Elliott's work has been very widely reviewed in the Irish press (including church publications as well as broadsheet newspapers, such as the *Irish Times*, 24 November 2009). Reviewers include leading figures in the churches and influential peace activists. A former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church - himself a prominent peace campaigner - reviewed *When God Took Sides* in glowing terms in the *Presbyterian Herald* in April 2011. (The *Herald*, circulation 14,000, is the official magazine of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.) The review concluded: "This is a book which will stimulate and illuminate the mind with its descriptions and insights as the attitudes, strengths, deficiencies and prejudices of the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian communities are uncovered. Before that which is comforting from a particular point of view is absorbed and the uncomfortable is dismissed, each community would do well to pay attention to how it is seen by others." Prior to publication of this review, its author wrote to Elliott to tell her that he had already urged other people to read *When God Took Sides* since it captured the anxieties and fears of the different communities in Ireland so well.

Elliott frequently takes part in public discussions of her research in Northern Ireland. For example, in March 2009 and February 2010, she appeared at two public events organised by the Belfast Exposed gallery. The first, at which Elliott appeared in conversation with 'catholic atheist' Dr Michael Fitzpatrick and broadcaster William Crawley, addressed the enduring power of religion, its specific appeal to the poor and marginalised and the problems it raises for contemporary secular societies. The second saw Elliott give a public lecture on Belfast's eighteenth-century role as hub of the Enlightenment and of Presbyterian republicanism. Both events drew audiences of around forty, including artists and members of the general public as well as academics and students. The gallery's director reports that Elliott's lecture received "great feedback from [the] audience." She notes of the two events: "They were both extremely well attended as gallery talks, and were very lively events with lots of audience participation."

As one of Ireland's best-known public historians, Elliott is regularly invited to contribute to media debates on history, identity and conflict. Television and radio producers, along with print journalists, frequently draw on the findings of her research. Publication of her books has led to invitations to take part in lengthy interviews, in which the findings of her historical research and the messages that might be drawn from it have been relayed in considerable depth. For example, following the publication of *When God Took Sides* (2009), Elliott gave a seven-minute interview to BBC Radio Ulster's flagship religious affairs programme, 'Sunday Sequence'. (The regular audience for 'Sunday Sequence' at this time was around 100,000.)

In 2011, Elliott was one of the central contributors to 'The Story of Ireland', a major, five-part television series, co-produced by the BBC and RTE, and presented by Fergal Keane. This was shown at primetime in Britain and both North and South of the Irish border and attracted very high viewing-figures (an average of 1.2 million viewers per episode). It achieved live viewing-figures in

Impact case study (REF3b)

the Republic of Ireland of just under 250,000 and an audience-share of 21% (the usual figure for programmes of this sort is 5%). Strikingly, the makers of the series received many emails from individual viewers in Ireland and the UK, and the USA, praising the series for telling them things they had never heard about their native country, and altering the perceptions they had inherited from childhood stories. (A typical message, from the headmistress of a school in County Roscommon, 10 March 2011, read: "There's a fantastic reaction to the whole series here in Ireland. We need more of this sort of stuff for our young (and OURSELVES) to know and appreciate our history. Well done to the whole team.")

The BBC book, *The Story of Ireland* (2011) drew extensively and directly on Elliott's work, including *The Catholics of Ulster* and *Robert Emmet*. Its author describes his brief as "to write an intelligent and accessible history ... and, importantly, to create a book which would utilize the most recent academic research in the field." He adds: "I found Marianne Elliott's texts simply crucial in piecing together the heavily contested history of Ireland in the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries." *The Story of Ireland* has sold 22,000 copies in the UK and Ireland, plus an additional 4,500 in the USA, helping to bring key insights from Elliott's research to a new generation of readers.

Media interest in Elliott's work has thus afforded her many opportunities to communicate her research to a broad range of audiences, informing public debate and increasing popular understanding of Irish history, identity and culture.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Elliott's contribution to the conference on 'Remembering the Future' was published by the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council / Heritage Lottery Fund, [Remembering the Future](#) (2011), pp. 25-7.
2. The Cultural Diversity Director of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council has provided a statement describing the outcomes of the 'Remembering the Future' conference and the particular value of Elliott's contribution.
3. This [review](#) of *When God Took Sides* by a former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland was published in the *Presbyterian Herald* in April 2011.
4. This former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland provided a statement confirming that he had already urged others to read Elliott's book, *When God Took Sides*, prior to the publication of his review in April 2011.
5. [This document](#) supplied by the gallery's Director provides details (including audience numbers) of the following public events held at the Belfast Exposed gallery:
 - i. 'Crisis of Faith: Marianne Elliott and Michael Fitzpatrick in conversation with William Crawley', March 2009
 - ii. Elliott's public lecture on the United Irishmen, February 2010
6. The Director of the Belfast Exposed gallery has provided a further statement corroborating audience responses at the two events hosted by the gallery listed above.
7. Details of Elliott's appearance on 'Sunday Sequence' (BBC Radio Ulster) on 20 September 2009 to discuss *When God Took Sides* are contained on the [BBC website](#).
8. A Series Consultant for the BBC can be contacted for corroboration of Elliott's contribution to the BBC / RTE co-production *The Story of Ireland* (2011), plus viewing figures and feedback.
9. A statement from the author of *The Story of Ireland* (BBC Books, 2011) in two parts, dated 2 and 21 November 2013, details his reliance on Elliott's works including *The Catholics of Ulster* and *Robert Emmet*, and provides details of sales figures in the UK and Ireland, and the USA.