

Institution:	Goldsmiths, University of London
Unit of Assessment:	30: History
Title of case study:	History as Reconciliation – West Belfast during the First World War
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)	

Professor Richard Grayson's research on the experiences of soldiers from West Belfast in World War I is a street-by-street analysis of a type never before carried out for any part of Britain or Ireland. It shows how Nationalists and Unionists fought together in the war, giving it significance at a local level in Belfast and for wider community groups. His research has led to him to carry out community outreach to Nationalist and Unionist groups in Northern Ireland, impacted on school curricula, and garnered a large amount of media attention, reflecting its relevance to communities in both Northern Ireland and the Republic.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)
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Richard Grayson was appointed to a lectureship at Goldsmiths in 2005, and is now Professor. His research during the first four years of his appointment at Goldsmiths in 2005 focused on the experiences of those from the Falls and Shankill areas of West Belfast in World War I. Supported by a British Academy Grant,^[1] Grayson aggregated and analysed data from newspapers, church memorial rolls and wills, as well as approximately 18,000 individual pension and service records, to generate a database of 8,798 soldiers, 2,002 of whom died in the conflict. This permitted a street-by-street analysis of military service in West Belfast of a kind which has never been carried out before for any part of Britain or Ireland. Because the research focuses on a geographical region rather than on specific military units, it allows a much broader understanding of the impact of war than can be obtained from traditional approaches. This approach makes it possible to gain detailed knowledge of the social background of those who enlisted, providing an understanding of the composition of battalions to a level never before possible. Furthermore, by examining a mixed Catholic-Protestant area, Grayson's research has allowed for a more rounded picture of the experiences of both Unionists and Nationalists who served in the British army during the First World War.

Traditional World War I narratives on the island of Ireland have focused on the 16th (Irish) and 36th (Ulster) divisions, which were political and sectarian in nature. The service of Unionists in the 36th, and especially in the Battle of the Somme in 1916, has formed a central part of Unionist identity in Northern Ireland. For the Nationalist community, the presence of Nationalists among the British forces is problematic, and tends to be ascribed to political motives such as a desire to support the movement for Home Rule. Meanwhile, Unionist experiences at the Somme are often contrasted with Nationalist participation in the Easter Rising in the same year. Such narratives have reinforced a partial and divided understanding of the war. By researching all the men who enlisted from a mixed area, Grayson has made it possible to tell a far more nuanced story of service in the war than previously. This work is important because it shows significant numbers of Catholics and Protestants serving side by side in regular units of the British army. Grayson draws attention specifically to the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles, a mixed battalion where men who had been in rival paramilitary groups prior to the war fought alongside one another in the First World War.

The research was described in depth in his 2009 monograph, *Belfast Boys*,^[2] with a subsequent article in *Irish Political Studies*.^[3] The book received highly positive critical reviews, with the *Times Higher* hailing it as 'a new form of social-military history', and the *Irish Times* describing it as 'provocative, [and] meticulously researched'.^[4]

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Evidence of the quality of the research: Reference 2 was published by a leading publisher which is now part of Bloomsbury; Reference 3 was published in a very selective peer-reviewed journal. Reference 4 points to the extent to which reference 2 was given attention to by leading national publications.

1. British Academy Small Research Grant (SG 45806) 1-4-2007 to 31-10-2008, £3, Grayson, Richard. *Belfast Boys: How Unionists Fought and Died Together in the First World War*, Continuum: London, 2009 (and updated paperback 2010)
2. Grayson, Richard. 'The Place of the First World War in Contemporary Irish Republicanism in Northern Ireland', *Irish Political Studies*, 25 (3), 2010, pp. 325-345
3. Newspaper reviews:
 - *Irish Times*, 4 September 2009, p. 15.
 - *Times Higher Education*, 29 October 2009, p. 51.
4. Academic journal reviews:
 - Stephen Badsey, *War in History*, 17, 4 (Nov 2010), pp. 540-541.
 - Arthur Aughey, *Irish Political Studies*, 27, 1 (Feb 2012), pp. 155-156.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Grayson's research has had three main types of impact, both in the UK and internationally, because it breaks new ground in the way local narratives are researched, while also challenging deeply held (and divisively sectarian) myths about the First World War. The first is the large amount of media attention his work has garnered, reflecting the contemporary relevance of this issue to communities in both Northern Ireland and the Republic. The second is his outreach to Nationalist, Unionist and other community groups in and beyond Northern Ireland; and the third is outreach which he has conducted to schools to help teachers develop effective curricula for discussing local history with respect to the First World War.

i. Media attention and public interest in Belfast Boys

The research's primary output, the book *Belfast Boys*, has been widely discussed in the media in Ireland on both sides of the border. It was serialised over three days in the *Belfast Telegraph*.^[5] The *Belfast News Letter* ran a full-page article on the book and it was reviewed in the *Irish Times*.^[6] Grayson was interviewed on BBC Radio Ulster's *Talkback* programme, on UTV News, on RTÉ's flagship *Today* radio show and on *Newstalk* radio.^[7] He has accepted an invitation to speak about it at the Cheltenham Literature Festival in October 2013 as part of a four-person AHRC-organised panel on the First World War. To the end of June 2013, the book had sold 2,379 copies of which 840 are international sales.

ii. Outreach to groups in Northern Ireland and beyond

The interest generated by the methods being used to write *Belfast Boys* led to Grayson being invited to serve on the steering committee of the 6th Connaught Rangers Research Project, a group funded by the Community Relations Council to tell the story of the battalion which recruited most noticeably from the Falls area of West Belfast.^[8] This has involved engagement with members of the Nationalist community, including former paramilitaries. Grayson has contributed writing and data to the Research Project's publications. He has also provided data to the 'Belfast Book of Honour' project,^[9] a publication supported by Belfast City Council and three local newspapers, listing Belfast residents who died in the First World War.

On 6th August 2010, Grayson was an invited participant in an event for the West Belfast Festival (Féile an Phobail) called "Remembering/Forgetting the First World War", where he spoke on the First World War remembrance. He was invited because his research, both the methods he developed and the conclusions he reached, are directly relevant to local people, and offer a significant new angle on politically contentious debates on remembrance of the war. After a talk on his conclusions,

he ran a research workshop, drawing on his research, for an audience that included ex-paramilitaries from both sides of the conflict in Northern Ireland. The session marked the first time the Féile, which is closely associated with Republicanism, had held an event in the Loyalist Shankill area of Belfast. He has been invited to speak at the Féile again on 4th August 2014, on the centenary of the war's outbreak.

In the spring of 2012 Grayson was approached by the Ulster Historical Foundation to provide advice for a project, initiated by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), to reach out to disaffected young people in parts of Northern Ireland, and has provided materials for use in this initiative. His community outreach activity stems from the extensive contacts in the Nationalist and Unionist communities that he has developed in the course of conducting his research.

On a national UK scale, Grayson's expertise has led to his chairing the expert panel for the Imperial War Museums' [IWM] digital projects relating to the First World War's centenary.^[10] The IWM commented '*We invited Richard Grayson to chair the group because his book Belfast Boys pioneered using large quantities of digital and other sources to analyse the war experience of one area.*' He has also been advising Dr Alastair Massie, the Head of Academic Access at the National Army Museum, on the digitisation of the NAM's archives on disbanded Irish infantry regiments.

Grayson's research findings have been drawn on by the media in relation to the forthcoming centenary of the war, where he has been consulted as an advisor. The insights from his research also led to him winning an AHRC competition to be one of twelve academics advising the BBC in the early stages of its First World War centenary programming.^[11] In this capacity during 2012 and 2013 he took part in workshops which led to a number of interactions with Mike Connolly (Executive Producer, Commissioning and Development, BBC Northern Ireland) and to his involvement in developing and being a contributor to a commissioned programme for the BBC (a two-parter, *Ireland's Great War*, made by 360 Productions and being filmed in late 2013). He is currently in discussion with UTV (the ITV channel in Northern Ireland) over contributing to a programme on the 16th and 36th Divisions.

Grayson co-edits www.irelandww1.org which acts as a hub for academics and the public, spreading the latest research on Irish history in the 'Decade of Commemoration', publicising projects run by non-academics, and encouraging academics to work with members of the public. Launched in November 2012, it had by the end of August 2013 received over 3,500 visits from over 2,500 different users in 48 different countries.

iii. Outreach to schools

Grayson has used his research to improve teaching about the history of the First World War. In March 2012 he gave a keynote lecture at a major north-south education symposium in Dublin, 'Commemorating 1916, the Battle of the Somme and World War I: Questions for Education'. The event was organised by St Patrick's College, Dublin, and the University of Ulster, and co-funded by the Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South. He discussed how to address the upcoming First World War centenaries in the classroom, and following from this was asked by the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council to provide written guidance on methodology which is now publicly available on the CRC website.^[12] He is currently working with Rathmore Grammar School in Belfast to design downloadable resources for schools based on his research, which can be used in conjunction with the A-level module *Ireland: 1900-1925*.

Drawing further on his West Belfast research, he was a co-founder of the '[Hemel at War](#)' project, relating to Hemel Hempstead in England. The project has produced booklets for educators interested in developing classroom exercises on discovering their local community's history during the First and Second World Wars. That project has been written up in the widely-circulated specialist magazine *Teaching History* [12], which has a circulation of over 3,000, and a research guide was also produced for a family history publication [13]. Most recently, Grayson has accepted an invitation to serve on the academic advisory group for the Institute of Education's 'The First World War Centenary Battlefields Project' being run on behalf of the Department for Education and the Department for Communities and Local Government to allocate the £5.3m for school visits to battlefields which was announced by the Prime Minister earlier in 2013.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

NOTE re accessing the sources listed below: Hard or electronic versions of all material listed here is available on request from Goldsmiths Research Office.

5. Newspaper serialisation: *Belfast Telegraph*, 31 August 2009 p. 31, 1 September 2009 p. 24, 2 September 2009, p. 22. News item and reviews:
 - *News Letter*, 9 September 2009, p. 3.
 - *Irish Times*, 4 September 2009, p. 15.
 - *Times Higher Education*, 29 October 2009, p. 51.
6. Radio programmes: [Available on request from the Research Office.]
 - 'Talkback', BBC Radio Ulster, 10th September 2009.
 - 'Today with Myles Dungan', RTÉ Radio, 28th October 2009
 - 'Talking History', Newstalk 106-108 FM, 1st November 2009
7. The 6th Connaught Rangers: Belfast Nationalists and the Great War. 6th Connaught Rangers Research Project: Belfast, 2008 and revised 2011
and
'Finding out about Irish Servicemen in WWI', *North Irish Roots: Journal of the North of Ireland Family History Society*, 20, 1 (2009), pp. 4-7.
8. Belfast Book of Honour Committee, *Journey of Remembering: Belfast Book of Honour* (Belfast: Johnston Publishing, 2009). [Available on request from the Research Office.]
9. [Imperial War Museum's digital Centenary Programme](#)
10. [AHRC/BBC workshop on the First World War](#)
11. Community Relations Council website: [case studies](#) and "[Decade of Anniversaries Toolkit](#)"
12. Reports on Hemel at War project: [Available on request from the Research Office.]
 - Grayson, R. and Abbott, L., *Your Community at War: A Guide for Schools*, Goldsmiths: London, 2011, p. 5.
 - Grayson, R. and Abbott, L., 'Community Engagement in Local History: A report on the Hemel at War project', *Teaching History*, 145, December 2011, pp 4-12