



**IRELAND, MUSEUMS, EMPIRE, COLONIALISM  
CENTRE FOR PUBLIC HISTORY, QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST  
8-9 APRIL 2022, ULSTER MUSEUM, BELFAST**

**PROGRAMME**

**FRIDAY 8 APRIL 2022**

**08:30-09:00** Registration

**09:00-09:15** **WELCOME:** Kathryn Thomson (Chief Executive, National Museums NI).

**09:15-10:15** **KEYNOTE: Professor Corinne Fowler** (University of Leicester).  
**Sensitive Histories, Culture Wars and National Acceptance of Colonial Pasts.**  
**Chair: Kathryn Thomson** (Chief Executive, National Museums NI).

**10:15-10:30** **BREAK**

**10:30-12:00** **PANEL 1: MUSEUMS AND HERITAGE DECOLONISATION**  
**Chair: Prof Dr Laura Van Broekhoven** (Director, Pitt Rivers Museum).

**Hannah Crowdy** (Head of Curatorial, National Museums NI).

**Inclusive Global Histories at National Museums NI**

National Museums NI recognises the imperative to decolonise its collections, sites, structures and activities. This presents particular challenges and sensitivities in Northern Ireland, given the history of conflict and division in this place. In looking at issues relating to culture, identity and the legacy of the past within our own communities and experiences, we must be careful not to fall into old 'Orange and Green' stereotyping. If we do, we risk undermining the core principle of decolonisation, which is to address racism and exclusionary practices.

In January 2020, 'A New Decade, New Approach' restored power sharing in Northern Ireland. Annex E (Rights, Language and Identity) recognises 'the need to encourage and promote reconciliation, tolerance and meaningful dialogue between those of different national and cultural identities in Northern Ireland with a view to promoting parity of esteem, mutual respect, understanding and cooperation'. We absolutely should interrogate the British Empire and its legacy, and the different roles Ireland has performed within that, but in a hospitable and informative way, respecting different identities and perspectives and allowing marginalised voices to be heard.

For this reason, we believe that the approach to decolonisation in Northern Ireland is most helpfully framed as one of 'inclusive global histories'. Whilst we are very clear on our ethical responsibilities, and the spectre of colonial violence and injustice, we feel strongly that decolonisation can be a positive force for encouraging mutual respect and understanding, tackling racism and promoting community pride – in short, to progress critical Good Relations work. This presentation will explore our approach and activities to date, including a new and questioning exhibition at the Ulster Museum, and new partnerships with communities from whom we are learning so much.

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**Dr Gaye Sculthorpe** (Head of Oceania, The British Museum).

**“Some specimens which bear such a remarkable resemblance to ancient Irish weapons”: Aboriginal objects and Irish colonial collections**

The Swan River Colony of now Western Australia was established by colonists from Britain and Ireland from 1829. Aboriginal objects from the early days of the colony were sent 'home' to Ireland and Britain and museums in those countries today contain some of the earliest surviving Aboriginal cultural items from this region. Many Irish-born collectors are represented in collections by the Aboriginal objects they collected. They include prominent colonist, lawyer and Trinity College graduate George Fletcher Moore who emigrated from County Tyrone in 1830; Samuel Neil Talbot of the Talbot family of Malahide Castle, Dublin who collected objects in the 1830s; Tipperary-born magistrate Edmond Power Dowley, and geologist Edward Townley Hardman, from Drogheda, both of whom in the 1880s collected objects from the northwest of Western Australia. Whilst Talbot donated his collection to the British Museum on his return in 1839, the other collections remain in the National Museum of Ireland. With the establishment of the Western Australian Museum in Perth in 1891, the nature of the traffic in objects changed as the new institution continued to build its collection in the early twentieth century: marsupial skins and Aboriginal objects were sent from Perth to Dublin in an exchange after the receipt in 1911 of a cast of the Monasterboice Cross which the museum considered on receipt as one of its finest possessions. Like in Dublin, Aboriginal objects in Ulster Museum Belfast contain some of the earliest surviving objects from the Melbourne region of Victoria due to Irish colonists sending material back to Ireland. This paper will discuss not only the nature of these collections but draw on experiences in the 'Collecting the West' research project and related Australian projects to consider both impediments and possibilities in engaging Aboriginal communities in museum projects to reconnect objects to the communities from which they come. It will also consider what these collections say about the places where the collections now reside. The collections in Dublin and counterparts in Belfast remain largely unknown to the people to whom they mean the most or the wider world thus this work demands urgent attention and resourcing.

**Jenny Siung** (Head of Education, the Chester Beatty).

**Changing the narrative of Irish cultural identity through museum learning: Chester Beatty, a case study**

The Chester Beatty's rich collection is from across Asia, the Middle East, North Africa and Europe plays a key role in its mission and encourages visitors to compare, contrast and explore the historical, cultural, scientific and religious aspects of its collections. The Head of Education developed a number of pilot initiatives in order to understand cultural diversity in the Irish classroom and museum. This has all been achieved through collaborations and partnerships with the formal education sector. In response to the changing contexts of both the Irish demographic and curriculum reform in primary and post-primary schools, the Chester Beatty launched an intercultural programme for schools in 2020. Partners include third level teaching universities, the Intercultural Education Services of Northern Ireland and an independent education consultancy. This paper proposes to look at how museums can address barriers that exist to learning about cultural diversity through historical collections; how teachers and students can be empowered to learn about cultural identity other than that of traditional Irish identity present throughout much of 20th and early 21st century national curricula. It is important to understand preceding colonial ideologies under the British Empire, more importantly post-1922 with the emphasis on Catholicism as the religion of nationalism and how museums can renegotiate Irish identity today. The paper will look at museums as a learning space both onsite and online, that offers innovative approaches to cross-curricula and museum-based learning providing greater access to the diverse collections of the museum. The voice of the child and teacher will encourage and inspire their peers the same.



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**12:00-13:00** **KEYNOTE: Dr Audrey Whitty** (Deputy Director/Head of Collections and Learning, National Museum of Ireland; Chairman, Irish Museums Association).

**Asian Collections at the National Museum of Ireland.**

**Chair: Professor Olwen Purdue** (Queen's University Belfast).

The Dublin Science and Art Museum (now the National Museum of Ireland (NMI)) was founded in 1877 under the 'Science and Art Museum Act'. Officials for the Museum began collecting based on the South Kensington model, which they were tied to administratively. Like other metropolitan centres of these islands, such as Edinburgh and Liverpool, policy dictated that the acquisition of the applied/ industrial arts be internationally as well as nationally based. As a result many objects of non-Western provenance (in the National Museum of Ireland's case, approximately 7,000 objects of Asian origin) were acquired. By examining a number of case studies, both pre- and post-Irish Independence, this paper will put forward the hypothesis that any examination of provenance and potential repatriation must involve all Asian collections, either within the supposed ethnographical canon or without. From a Burmese Buddha statue looted by Col. Charles Fitzgerald during the Third Anglo-Burmese Expedition, to the acquisition by the NMI in 1897 of folios from China's Huangchao Liqi Tushi (HCLQTS)/Illustrations of Imperial Ritual Paraphernalia, and the donation in 1904 of Tibetan metalwork within the same year the Younghusband Expedition annexed Tibet as part of the British Empire - these case studies will serve to give pause for reflection about what resides in Ireland's National Museum, and what should be encompassed when making the case for additional resources towards provenance research and potential repatriation.

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**13:00-  
14:00** LUNCH

**13:15-  
13:45** LUNCH TIME WORKSHOP SESSION

**Dr Roshi Naidoo** (Decolonising Programme Officer, Museums Association).

**'Supporting Decolonisation in Museums' – silence, sighs and the elephants in the room.**

**Chair: Sharon Heal** (Director, Museums Association).

Can the guidance from the Museums Association's document *Supporting Decolonisation in Museums* provide practical approaches to the more complex and often unspoken issues that arise in this work? For example, discussions of memory, evasion, trauma, anxiety and white supremacy, have long been part of the dialogue between academics and museum professionals working on the domestic and international histories of colonialism and empire. But how hard has it been for the latter to do justice to these matters in public spaces? Did the cultural policies of the past that purported to address the legacies of colonialism leave space for these difficult conversations? And are we now in a place where it is possible to discuss the more messy and conflicted aspects of this work? Can *Supporting Decolonisation in Museums* help redress these past omissions and provide guidance on what to do when things previously left 'outside the room' are let in?

**14:00-  
15:00** THE WAR IN UKRAINE

**Statement: Dr Audrey Whitty** (Chairman, Irish Museums Association).

**Letter from Fedir Androshchuk** (Director, National Museum of the History of Ukraine), read by **Ragnall Ó Floinn** (former Director, National Museum of Ireland).

**PANEL 2: IDENTITIES AND NATIONHOOD**

**Chair: Gina O'Kelly** (Director, Irish Museums Association).

**Dr Shahmima Akhtar** (Royal Holloway, University of London).

**Curating Irish Whiteness in the Margins of Empire: The Franco-British Exhibition of 1908**

My paper is interested in exploring how the Irish existed at the margins of white citizenship in the British Empire; and how they were subsequently denied access to the socio-economic privileges associated with whiteness based on a racialised discourse of civilisation and class. Importantly, the discourse of assimilation popular in the British imperial state did not signify the equal treatment of those in the colonies, with English people. My paper will be rooted in a single case study of the Irish at the beginning of the twentieth century, and interrogates how the Irish, who were typically subject to simian and derogatory designations of their character claimed white citizenship. I take the exhibition of the Irish at the Franco-British Exhibition in 1908 to see how Irish businessmen and women authenticated their whiteness. This shows the multitudes of labour involved in proving a political whiteness within the British Empire. Anti-Irish racism in Britain comprised elements of racism that were both colonial and cultural; that is, the Irish have been constructed as inferior and as alien. Ireland was curated for national and international audiences within international exhibitions of the twentieth century. My paper will explore how Irish display sustained the cultivation of a white Irish identity to be consumed by the British metropole and colonial periphery alike.

**Professor Elizabeth Croke** (Ulster University).

**Museum legacies: the politics of empire and nation in the museum space.**

A nation needs a past fostered through the work of history and archaeology and embodied in cultural

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practices, museums and heritage. This is a selective process – we choose the moments in our past we wish to remember, the people we want to mimic and the stories worth passing on. This is the past that bolsters, fosters pride and has purpose. Within our museums, collections can tell us about our social and political aspirations as well as cultural relationships. Further to that, silences are recorded by the absence of objects, and the absence of people to whom those objects may have belonged. As we look to museums and heritage institutions in Ireland, we see the past manipulated, hidden, revived and reinvented, both during the dominance of British rule in island, and in the century since partition. This paper reflects on key moments in the histories of museums in Ireland for the insights into museums as fundamental to the processes of actively constructing the nation, rather than a passive mirroring. As collections formed in nineteenth century Ireland, they were as much the consequence of the construction and legitimisation of the British empire as they were of the formation of the Irish nation (Crooke 2000). Those meanings, put in place by our forefathers are passed on from generation to generation, with increasing critique. By exploring the tensions between the legacies of empire and Irish nationalism, as embodied in our collections, this paper gives new insights into the political consequence of our museums.

**Pat Cooke** (former Director of MA in Cultural Policy, UCD).

**From imperial ambition to republican conspiracy: George Plunkett's reign as Director of the National Museum of Ireland 1907-16**

George Noble Count Plunkett became director of the National Museum of Ireland in 1907. As a member of the Parnellite wing of the Irish Parliamentary Party, he had been twice unsuccessful in a bid to win a seat for the party in the 1890s. He brought all of the instincts of a moderate Home Ruler to his job as director of the National Museum. From 1907-14 he sought to build the museum's profile as part of an imperial network of museums spanning India, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. He worked assiduously to build up the museum's collections from the resources of empire. In 1912, as chairman of the UK-wide Museums Association, he welcomed delegates to their annual conference in Dublin. During 1915, however, he succumbed to the influence of his sons, three of whom participated in the 1916 Rising. One of them Joseph was executed for his leadership role in the Rising. Plunkett was sacked from his job as director and exiled to Oxford for his part in the Rising. His departure had a profound impact on the museum. It would remain leaderless for nineteen years, until Adolf Mahr was appointed director in 1935.

**15:00-15:15**      **BREAK**

**15:15-16:45**      **PANEL 3: STORIES AND HISTORIES OF COLLECTING, MEMORIALISING AND FORGETTING**  
**Chair: Professor Terence Dooley** (Director, Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates, Maynooth University).

**Dr Rachel Hand** (Collections Manager of Anthropology, Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology, University of Cambridge).

**Gifts and Loot: Entangled and contradictory histories of Irish collecting**

In 2016 the National Museum of Ireland commissioned an overview of the Museum's Ethnographic Collection. Research has revealed complex and entangled relationships between Irish collectors, Indigenous interlocutors, and Irish, British, and Australian institutions. Yet it has raised almost as many questions as it has answers and offers compelling insights into the complexities of Ireland's relationships with the British Empire as both colonised and coloniser.

The book seeks to reposition the collections as part of networks of colonial relationships by Irish

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explorers, soldiers, colonial officers, and missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant. These collectors engaged with Empire and Indigenous people with both empathy and brutality. Indigenous leaders gifted material to explorers and colonial elites to draw them into networks of reciprocal relationships. Māori taonga and Tahitian funerary costumes were exchanged with the ships' crews led by James Cook in the late 18th century, and 100 years later Asantehene Otumfuo Nana Prempeh I, the leader of the Ashanti Empire, Ghana, gifted royal clothing to Major Wilfred Davidson-Houston. Yet Cook's voyages resulted in the murder of Pacific Islanders and heralded the start of colonial dispossession in Oceania. Davidson-Houston also acquired objects probably looted in 1896 during the Fourth Anglo-Ashanti War, and trader Charles Graham collected looted Benin regalia. As the Museum prepares to return Benin material these histories of friendship and conflict offer a platform to debate Irish colonial legacies. They also open up avenues to collaborate with Indigenous museums and communities on the futures of looted ancestral treasures but also the gifts and items made for sale as part of these colonial encounters.

**Dr Aoife O'Brien** (Oceania Curator, National Museums of World Culture, Sweden):

**Indigenous agency, resistance, and empire in the Pacific collections of Arthur William Mahaffy**

As an officer for the Colonial Office, Anglo-Irish born Arthur William Mahaffy established himself as an agent for British Imperialism and colonial rule in the Pacific during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Acquired from across the Pacific, Mahaffy actively amassed a sizable ethnographic collection in the course of his duties. Held by the National Museum of Ireland, Mahaffy's collection presents an interesting example, demonstrating as it does the complicated and contradictory ways through which ethnographic collections were frequently made. Embodied within the objects and texts that comprise his collection are stories of violence, dispossession, and loss alongside those of Indigenous resistance, cultural perseverance, and artistic mastery.

The ethnographic collections held by the National Museum of Ireland have been somewhat excised from public knowledge and discourse over recent decades. While these collections are historic, their relevance to present-day Indigenous descendants could not be more pertinent, particularly in the light of current conversations and actions surrounding the role and future for Ethnographic and World Culture Museum collections.

Reengaging with collections such as Mahaffy's can help situate and contextualise the directional roles played by empire, colonisation, anthropology, and personal ambition in the creation of an ethnographic collection, one later transformed into part of a national museum collection. Reengagement can further facilitate discussion around the relevance such collections have today within Ireland, within museum contexts, and for descent groups.

**Professor Annie Tindley** (Newcastle University).

**Aristocratic collecting and imperial identities in Ireland: class, colonialism and legacies at Clondeboye, Northern Ireland.**

Ireland's engagement with the British Empire has long been and still is under critical historical and contemporary review. One of the key areas of that engagement was through the activities of Ireland's landed and aristocratic elites, particularly those who took up posts in colonial administration and governance. One of the most successful nineteenth century examples was Frederick Temple Hamilton Blackwood, the first marquess of Dufferin and Ava, who - alongside a distinguished diplomatic career in Europe - was Canada's Governor General 1872-78 and the Viceroy of India 1884-88. He was an assiduous and discerning collector of imperial artefacts, both from these imperial postings but in Egypt and the Levant 1850s and Iceland and northern Europe 1850s. The re-design of the house and its interiors to display these collections, particularly those gleaned after the annexation of Burma in the



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1880s, and the complex and contested legacies of these collections will be the subject of this paper. It will ask questions about their provenance, display and changing meaning from the 1850s to the present and discuss the opportunities and complexities that they may face in the future.

**Dr Jonathan Wright** (Maynooth University).

**The museum and the mokomokai: collecting empire in early nineteenth- century Belfast.**

**16:45–** **KEYNOTE: Professor Hakim Adi** (University of Chichester).

**17:45** **African histories, Eurocentrism, and dominant narratives in museums.**

**Chair: Dr Manal Hassen** (Africa House NI).

**19:30** **CONFERENCE DINNER** (The Canada Room, Lanyon Building, Queen's)



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**SATURDAY 9 APRIL 2022**

**09:00-09:30**      **Registration**

**09:30-09:45**      **Introduction: Professor Dominic Bryan** (Queen's University Belfast).

**09:45-10:45**      **KEYNOTE: Lynn Scarff** (Director, National Museum of Ireland).  
**Placing audience at the centre of decolonisation in Museums – reflections on identity and cultural value in a National Cultural Institution**

The paper will explore a number of ideas and strategies in relation to the discourse on the decolonization of museums and how these actions are mobilized to reinforce more recent contemporary practice which seeks to re orientate our museums towards greater relevance, inclusivity and democratization. It will explore the role and purpose of greater public consultation in the process and outline how the legacy of Empire and in turn the actions of the early Irish Free State have left structures and systems that the NMI is only now addressing.

**Chair: Professor Dominic Bryan** (Queen's University Belfast).

**10:45-11:00**      **BREAK**

**11:00-12:30**      **PANEL 4: STATUES AND PUBLIC SPACE**

**Chair: Siobhan Stevenson** (Director, Northern Ireland Museums Council).

**Professor Dominic Bryan** (Queen's University Belfast).

**Empire on the Streets: symbolic references, contested spaces and colonialism in Northern Ireland.**

This paper will explore the public space within which the museum collections exist. It will take broad look at the way ideas of Empire and colonialism are embedded within everyday life, looking particularly at the naming of places and the rituals and symbols that play a part in the social construction of the past. In addition, the paper will explore the nature of contestation over symbols in the public sphere and make some preliminary suggestions around processes of change and transformation.

**Dr Dominique Bouchard** (Head of Learning and Interpretation, English Heritage).

**The past and present of British imperial monuments in public spaces on the island of Ireland.**

**Dr Mobeen Hussain, Dr Ciaran O'Neill, and Dr Patrick Walsh** (Trinity College Dublin).

**Understanding Trinity's Colonial Legacies.**

In autumn 2021 Trinity College Dublin commenced a two-year research project to investigate the university's colonial legacies both within Ireland and within the British empire. This paper will provide an interim report on our findings and highlight the key questions emerging from our research. Universities across Britain and North America have begun to investigate their benefactors, collections and imperial connections in a bid to greater understand how colonial legacies have shaped their current status and wealth. These investigations have been given a greater impetus by the emergence of more diverse student bodies eager to understand their



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institutions better within a more globalised world. Much of the international focus has been on connections to slavery and the slave economy and while these do exist in the case of Trinity, they are as we shall demonstrate only part of the story we are investigating. We begin by placing Trinity within its original seventeenth century context as an important institution within the English colonial project in Ireland before moving on to examine how by the mid-eighteenth-century Trinity was revising its curriculum to prepare students for imperial service in the expanding empire especially in Asia. Our paper will show how by the mid nineteenth century Trinity fellows, staff, and students were engaged in diverse imperial activities, whether collecting manuscripts, developing engineering and linguistic projects in India, preaching the Protestant gospel in India and China as well as bringing the new racial sciences developed through imperial engagement to more local fieldwork studies in Ireland.

**Dr Maebh O'Regan** (National College of Art and Design).

**A Discourse on Death: Fact and Fiction in Richard Moynan's Visual Representation of the Battle of Isandlwana.**

In 1883 the Irish artist, Richard Moynan 1856-1906 won the Albert Prize at the Royal Hibernian Academy for the best picture submitted by a student to the exhibition. The painting entitled, *The Last of the 24th at Isandlwana*, is very much in the last stand tradition, memorialising the sacrifice that a soldier made for Queen and country. The artist's depictions of this recent historic event were derived from a newspaper report in the *Natal Times*, and the printed source was quoted in full in the RHA catalogue.

Moynan's visual interpretation of this event touched a chord with the Irish public. In the wake of a stinging defeat of the First Battalion of the 24th Regiment of Foot by the Zulu forces it showed the bravery of Dublin-born, Nevill Coghill's efforts to save his regimental colours. However, recent scholarship has proved that the account in the *Natal Times* was far from accurate. The annihilation of an entire British regiment at the Battle of Isandlwana by the Zulu army served a severe blow to the British military and English newspapers sought to put a positive spin on this humiliating defeat. The Commander in Chief of the British army, Lord Chelmsford, was Queen Victoria's cousin. Chelmsford's decision to attack the Zulus and annex Zululand was a personal initiative and he did not seek to have this manoeuvre ratified by Queen and Parliament. The British government, military intelligence and the monarch conspired to obfuscate this disaster by focusing on a different event that took place later in the same day, the successful defence of Rorke's Drift magazine and military hospital against the Zulu forces. Queen Victoria endorsed this victory by awarding eleven Victoria crosses to the British soldiers who successfully defended Rorke's Drift. She also personally commissioned a painting to commemorate this event from the most famous military artist of the day, Lady Elizabeth Butler.

Propaganda is a key tool of warfare and this paper seeks to separate fact from fiction in the newspaper version of this story. What was the role of the Irish soldiers in this engagement? Why did a young painter like Moynan choose this topic for such a significant award? How was the work received by the Irish public? Was there 'on the ground' support in Ireland for the Zulus? How did the creation of this work contrast with Butler's royal commission *The Battle of Rorke's Drift*? This paper seeks to explore the multiple narratives in these colonial events. The Albert Prize, generally of about £20, was awarded annually for the best figure or landscape painted by any Irish artist or student under who was, or had been a student at the Academy. (Walter Strickland, *A Dictionary of Irish Artists*, p.613).



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**12:30-  
13:30** LUNCH

**13:30-  
15:00** **PANEL 5: RACE, ETHNICITY, DOCUMENTATION, REPRESENTATION**  
Chair: Dr Shahmima Akhtar (Royal Holloway).

**Dr Ashok Malhotra** (Queen's University Belfast).

**Robert McCarrison's Nutritional Research Laboratories and Museum in Tamil Nadu, 1925-1935.**

Robert McCarrison, who was born in Portadown and who had received his medical training at Queen's College Belfast, had by the 1930s become seen to be the founding figure of Indian nutritional research. Indeed, McCarrison had been awarded a knighthood in 1933 for his research principally in the field of nutrition. His Nutritional Research Laboratories in Coonoor, Tamil Nadu, had by 1928 become the centre for nutritional research in India. The question that this paper seeks to address is how did McCarrison's name manage to accrue such cultural capital? This paper argues his reputation was largely established through a set of experiments he performed in 1925-27, in which he fed different groups of rats, diets which supposedly corresponded to the different "races" of India and to working class Bentionritons. This paper argues that these experiments were crucial in attracting funding from the colonial state principally because they tapped into contemporary British anxieties about the deleterious effects of modernisation on lower class Britons, as well as racial theories pertaining to the martial races that were in existence in colonial India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Upon retiring in 1933, McCarrison's reputation as the founding figure of nutritional research in India was further cemented by a museum attached to the National Institute of Nutrition which documented the origins of the Centre and foregrounded the colonial scientist's role in its formation for visitors.

**Dr Darragh Gannon** (University College Dublin/New York University).

**Provincializing Irish History: the case for the Global Archive.**

If, as Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests, political modernity - 'the rule by modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise' - has been formulated by the intellectual and cultural traditions of Europe, then Irish history, by European standards, is very modern indeed. But what kind of Irish histories could be written beyond the von Rankean tradition? The proliferation of 'alternative' historical sources since the turn of the twenty-first century - material culture, visual culture, memorial culture - attests to the valence of postcolonial and postmodern approaches to Irish history. This paper, in turn, makes the case for 'provincializing' Irish history by exploring the theoretical, empirical, and experiential frameworks of an emerging transnational paradigm in modern history: the 'global archive'. Based on research collaboration with archives, museums, and libraries in the United States, Canada, Argentina, Australia, India, Egypt, and beyond, this paper asks new questions of modern Irish history. In what texts, and contexts, did colonial archivists record histories of Ireland? Did Irish independence partition Irish 'migrant' and 'island' historical narratives? Does Irish history, as the possessive case suggests, belong to histories and historians of Ireland alone? In short, where, in modern Irish history, 'can the subaltern speak?'

**Dr Laura McAtackney** (Aarhus University).

**The Potential of Including Other Irish Experiences of Empire.**

While we are increasingly aware of the complexity of Irish experiences of the British Empire - on its most basic level of being simultaneously colonized and colonizer - there are many other colonial contexts in which Irish people had a variety of impacts and experiences. Looking to the

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Colonial Caribbean there is ample evidence of Irish people who were able to navigate various colonial contexts, often simultaneously, and to varying degrees of success. Moving beyond the Irish experience of the British Empire can provide us with a much broader view of the realities, opportunities and impacts of Irish people more generally in a wider European colonial world that is not simply framed by a British Imperial experience. These studies are potentially useful in educating against simplistic ideas that the Irish were always exploited, even 'white slaves', who had comparable experience to racialised enslaved people of African descent, which are particularly prevalent on social media. This paper will focus on two aspects of 'other Irish experiences of Empire'. First, it will briefly present a case-study of the Irish who moved from the British island of Montserrat to the Danish island of St Croix to show how elements of the Irish plantocracy were adept at navigating more than one colonial world. In doing so they not only brought their experiences and wealth but also used their knowledge of the British plantation model to gain power and prestige in the Danish context. Secondly, it will consider what the material legacy of these experiences are and why they have made relatively little impact on Irish museum? It will ask how much our knowledge is shaped by historical legacy collections that are determined by enduring connections to Ireland and will finish by considering ways to ensure these experiences can be included.

**Dr Angus Mitchell** (MDU/University of Limerick).

**Voice of Reason: curating Roger Casement's colonial artefacts during the Decade of Centenaries.**

During Ireland's Decade of Centenaries, the life and legacy of Roger Casement produced various curatorial responses and challenges that rendered Casement the most visible of all the 1916 rebels. Exhibitions included Roger Casement in Brazil (University of São Paulo), Voice of the Voiceless (National Museum of Ireland), Casement in Kerry: A Revolutionary Journey (Kerry County Museum) and High Treason (Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane). Each of these interventions sought in different ways to elucidate complex and contested relationships between Casement, Ireland's national body and legacies of the British Empire. If Casement's configuring with the histories of human rights and sexual liberation helped to reconcile him to present-centred issues and identity politics, such consoling and reconciling narratives masked other questions to do with imperial and national histories that were messier and less palatable. During his long spells of consular duty in sub-Saharan Africa and South America, Casement collected an array of objects that spoke to different dimensions of the colonial contact zone. Residing in this archive of ethnographic curios is evidence of Casement's interest in natural history, physical anthropology and indigenous arts and crafts. Other artefacts, including his photographs, speak to his work investigating the violence of colonial capitalism and the resource wars fought for extractive rubber in the Congo and Amazon river systems. Casement was adamant that these objects should be bequeathed to the 'Irish people' and form part of a national museum collection. However, the curating of Casement's ethnographic objects raises important questions about the decolonization of heritage. First, did the centenary exhibitions speak against or on behalf of empire? Second, was the intent behind Casement's deliberate archiving of objects encoded with meanings which could only be revealed once the ideological hierarchies of colonialism were in a process of dismantling, as they are now? Third, how did these objects wire Ireland's struggle for independence into the broader circuitry of global anticolonial activism that would emerge in the wake of his execution? Looking at the affective signifiers arising from the abovementioned exhibitions, this paper will consider how Casement unsettles contemporary constructions of race, racism, empire and nation. And finally, why Ulster, the province of Ireland with which he identified most tenderly, has found Casement's life and anti-imperial legacy awkward to accommodate into its programme of public

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commemoration.

**15:00-  
15:15**            **BREAK**

**15:15-  
16:15**            **PANEL 6: IMPERIALISM AND COLLECTING**  
**Chair: Professor Shahid Vawda (University of Cape Town).**

**Dr Emma Reisz (Queen's University Belfast).**  
**China in Irish museums: collections and collectors.**

**Lucy Wray (Queen's University Belfast).**  
**Projecting the empire? Colonialism, identity and mission in National Museums NI's Lantern slides.**

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, magic lantern shows gained popularity in Britain, Ireland, and across the empire. These early forms of image projection shows were a means of both entertainment and instruction; reflective of societal and cultural views, trends and ideals, particularly for the middle classes. This paper explores slides held in National Museums NI's sizeable collection. Shows ranging from, an Illustrated history of the Union Jack and those depicting British Royalty and military figures, to picturesque scenes of Irish landscapes or customs and those recording overseas mission will be considered. This paper will build on the work and themes developed recently by scholars including Amy Cox, Jane Lydon, and J.P. Short. It will explore the role of visibility, specifically magic lantern shows, in communicating notions of empire and colonialism, both implicitly and explicitly, to Irish audiences. This paper touches on some of the conference's main themes, particularly 'awareness and education' by discussing of how these slides were used as educational tools, and 'emotion and affect', due to the often immersive or persuasive nature of the shows and their images. I will consider how these slides and their display corresponded and contrasted with those shown elsewhere in the British Isles and further afield. I will also discuss their place within the wider NMNI's collections.

**Dr Briony Widdis (Queen's University Belfast).**  
**Museums, Empire and Northern Irish Identity: some histories and responses to Colonialism and Empire.**

Based on autoethnographic interviews conducted during the pandemic, this paper examines what 'colonialism' and 'British Empire' mean to people living in Northern Ireland today. It considers whether their perspectives on, and experiences of, local conflict, have a bearing on their relationships with objects in museums that were collected globally during the colonial period; and on questions surrounding the items' interpretation, display, and potential repatriation. The driver behind this research is to examine whether, and if so how, histories of binary division in the six counties connect with narratives of 'othering' of, and identification with - or perhaps 'us-ing' of - global objects and their originating communities. The intentions are to contribute to explorations of the themes of colonialism and empire in museums, in ways that are inclusive of diverse identities in Northern Ireland in the present; and to the understanding of whether contemporary relationships with 'colonial objects' transcend community divides.

**Nandi Jola (Poet, Essayist and Playwright).**  
**Reading.**



**IRELAND, MUSEUMS, EMPIRE, COLONIALISM  
CENTRE FOR PUBLIC HISTORY, QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST  
8-9 APRIL 2022, ULSTER MUSEUM, BELFAST**

**16:15:17:15 KEYNOTE: Professor Jane Ohlmeyer** (Trinity College Dublin; Irish Research Council).

**The English Empire and Early Modern Ireland.**

**Chair: Professor Dominic Bryan** (Queen's University Belfast).

Ireland may have been England's first colony, but it also formed an integral part of the imperial system and people from Ireland served as colonists and as active imperialists. Drawing on a wide variety of sources, especially those relating to material culture and collecting, I examine how engagement in the First English Empire c.1550-c.1770s shaped the lives, the landscapes, and the mindsets and identities of those living in early modern Ireland. I conclude by reflecting on how imperialism and colonialism, as experienced during the early modern period, is remembered today.

**17:15-17:30 Closing Remarks: Professor Olwen Purdue** (Queen's University Belfast).

*This conference is hosted by the Centre for Public History as part of the QUB Research Project, 'Museums, Empire and Northern Irish Identity', a partnership with National Museums NI, the Irish Museums Association, Northern Ireland Museums Council and Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates at Maynooth University.*