Class and culture in twentieth-century Ireland
Resilience, resistance, and transformation

A three-day conference at St John’s College, Cambridge, Saturday to Monday, 18-20 April, 2015

Map and directions

Saturday 18th April

14.00-16.00 - Conference registration

16.00-18.00 - Plenary session: Reconstituting Poverty
Chair: Prof Bronwen Walter (Anglia Ruskin University)

Dr Olwen Purdue, (QUB) ‘Poverty Crisis and Class in Interwar Belfast’

Dr Lindsey Earner-Byrne, (UCD) ‘A Discriminating Culture: Priests and the Role of Charity in Forging Class Distinctions in Ireland 1920-1940’

Dr Ciara Breathnach (University of Limerick) ‘Lines from Limbo: Seán Ó Riordáin and TB in modern Ireland’

Dr Carole Holohan, (UCD) ‘Rediscovering poverty and class? Ireland in the 1960s’

18.00-18.20 - Tea break

18.20-19.20 - Opening keynote: Prof Joe Cleary (Yale; Maynooth University) ‘Class as a category in cultural analysis’

19.40-20.40 – Dinner (Pizza Express, 7A Jesus Lane, Cambridge CB5 8BA)

Sunday 19th April

09.00-11.00 - Panel 1: Elites: trauma and transformation
Chair: Dr Donal O’Drisceoil (UCC)

Dr John Borgonovo (UCC), ‘Republican civil administration, taxation, and class tensions in the “Munster Republic”, July-August 1922’

Dr. Jackie Úi Chionna (NUIG), “Mr. Galway”: Martin ‘Máirtín Mór’ McDonogh: A Case Study in Class and Culture in Twentieth-Century Ireland
Dr Guy Woodward (Maynooth University), ‘The Northern Irish Aristocracy and the Second World War’

Dr Tony Varley (NUIG), ‘From Landlords’ Man to Farmers’ Man: Col. George O’Callagan-Westropp, Class Politics and Identity in interwar Ireland’

11.00-11.20 - Tea break

11.20-13.20 – Panel 2: Discipline, gender and sexuality

Chair: Dr Máire Ní Mhaonaigh (St John’s, Cambridge)

Dr Clara Fischer (LSE), ‘Ireland’s politics of shame: gender sexuality and Irish nation building’

Prof Cara Delay (College of Charleston), “‘Relieve Me and I Will Pay You Well”: Culture, Class, and Abortion in Twentieth-Century Ireland’

Dr Jennifer Redmond (Maynooth University) ‘Class, Gender and Moral Philanthropy: ‘Fixing’ the ‘Girl Emigrant Problem’ in Twentieth Century Ireland’

Dr Ciara Meehan (University of Hertfordshire), “‘Is There a Clear Yes or No Now Any More?’: Attitudes Towards Sex in Women’s Magazines in 1970s Ireland’

13.20-14.20: Buffet Lunch (Main hall, Divinity School, St John’s College)

14.20-16.20 - Panel 3: Ideology and popular culture

Chair: Prof Joe Cleary (Maynooth University; Yale)

Dr Aidan Beatty (University of Chicago), ‘Irish Nationalism as Capitalist Consumer Culture’

Dr David Toms (UCC), ‘Popular Culture in Ireland during the interwar period: work, unemployment and leisure’

Donal Fallon (UCD), ‘Contested working class history: Radical commemoration in 1930s Dublin’

Dr Liam O’Callaghan, (Liverpool Hope), ‘The ‘Catholicisation’ of rugby football in twentieth century Ireland: transformation and resilience?’

16.20-16.40 - Tea break

16.40-18.40 - Panel 4: Work, state and resistance

Chair: Prof Patrick Joyce (University of Manchester; University of Edinburgh)
Dr Bryce Evans (Liverpool Hope), ‘Farewell to Plato’s Cave: Ireland during the Second World War, 1939-45’

Liam Cullinane (UCC), ‘Workplace Culture in Three Irish Factories, 1932-1990’

Dr Sinéad Moynihan (University of Exeter), ‘“Lording it over them”: The Returned Yank and the Land Commission in the Irish Cultural Imagination’

Dr Daryl Leeworthy (University of Huddersfield), ‘Making Room for Jesters: Class, Sexuality, and the Irish in the Miners’ Strike, 1984-1985’

19.00-20.00 – Dinner (Côte Brasserie, 21-24 Bridge Street, Cambridge CB2 1UF)

Monday 20th April

9.00-11.00 - Panel 1: Panel 2: Articulating class

Chair: Prof Eugenio Biagini (Sidney Sussex, Cambridge)

Dr Julie Bates (International University of Sarajevo), ‘Beckets Bowler hats: maligned relics of the Irish Protestant middle class’

Dr Ian D’Alton (Sidney Sussex), ‘The Borrowers: southern Irish Protestant writers, cultural appropriation, and purgatory’

John Porter (TCD), ‘“The Squeezed-Middle”: The Johnson Committee and the Irish Middle class under Fianna Fail, 1932-47’

11.00-11.20 - Tea break

11.20-13.20 - Panel 2: The making of youth and infancy

Chair: to be seen

Dr Jutta Kruse, (University of Limerick) ‘Medicalisation of poor infants - Class and the construction of infancy in Ireland, 1900-1930’

Dr Eleanor O’Leary, (Maynooth University) ‘Teddy Boys and Youth Culture in 1950s Ireland’

Dr Sarah-Anne Buckley, (NUIG) ‘Children on Strike’: an examination of child labour and resistance in Ireland, 1880-1970’

13.20-13.40 - break

13.40-14.40 – Closing keynote: Prof Patrick Joyce, (University of Manchester; University of Edinburgh) ‘Rethinking political history: the state’
Poverty, class and crisis in interwar Belfast

Olwen Purdue, Queen’s University Belfast

Dr Olwen Purdue, (QUB) ‘Poverty Crisis and Class in Interwar Belfast’ 1930s Belfast was a city in a state of economic crisis. The rapid industrialisation and incredible economic and physical growth that Belfast had witnessed during the nineteenth and very early twentieth century was followed by the collapse of the staple industries on which the hugely inflated industrial population of the city depended. The escalating unemployment levels threw the welfare and administrative structures of the city into sharp relief, highlighting not only the inadequacy of welfare provision in the city, but also the extent to which Victorian ideas of poverty and its relief continued to shape official responses to poverty. With any form of unemployment insurance limited to the few, and with unemployment levels soaring, individuals and families found themselves facing real destitution and the very real possibility of being admitted as inmates of Belfast Union workhouse.

Remarkably in a city whose working-class population was deeply divided, and in a decade that saw frequent and bitter sectarian rioting, the threat of destitution and the degradation represented by the workhouse briefly brought the city’s unemployed Protestant and Catholic working classes together in a sense of common grievance and class solidarity. While the political ramifications of the resulting Outdoor Relief marches and riots of 1932 have received considerable attention, the actual experiences of Belfast’s working-class population and the nature of their engagement with welfare provision in the city has been largely overlooked.

This paper will draw on a range of sources in order to explore the relationship between Belfast’s unemployed labouring class, its welfare providers and the devolved unionist government at this time. It will examine the attitudes to poverty and its relief shown by the largely middle-class municipal and welfare authorities before going on to look at the ways in which the city’s poor understood and articulated their own position, the expectations they had regarding right to welfare particularly in the context of service in the First World War, and the strategies they adopted in attempting to avoid the pauperising stigma of the workhouse.
A Discriminating Culture: Priests and the Role of Charity in Forging Class Distinctions in Ireland 1920-1940

Lindsey Earner-Byrne, University College Dublin.

The process of vetting and vouching is a universal feature of any charity system, whereby potential recipients are investigated, assessed, examined and judged. Between 1920 and 1940 thousands of impoverished Irish Catholics wrote begging letters to the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Edward J. Byrne. All petitioners were required to have a priest’s reference before their case could be considered, and many of these priests’ letters have survived allowing a more rounded examination of the deployment of charity. Building on Mark Peel’s assertion that ‘class distinctions are forged… in the intimate skirmishes between investigators and investigated’, this paper analyses how priests deployed their role as advocate-cum-investigator. The priests’ assessments were often permeated by class prejudice and reveal how often class distinctions were based on ethereal notions of character, morality and truthfulness. However, these letters confirm that it is not possible to arrive at simplistic readings of the role of these religious arbitrators. Despite ambivalence when it came to Christian charity and the misunderstandings based on gender assumptions and mean-spiritedness, there were also many cases of compassion, forgiveness and empathy. Thus, Fr. Fleming dismissed Mrs Edith G. as ‘worldly’ because ‘she goes to the pictures on an average of six times a week’, whereas, Fr Moriarty displayed a compassionate understanding that people must censor their lives to make a ‘deserving case’, and still recommended Mrs O’R. for charity despite her ‘slight “suppressio veri” in not mentioning that it was ‘more through intemperance than anything else that her husband…was unable to procure employment.’ This paper reflects on how these priests vetted and vouched and in so doing helped to create the discriminating culture of charity that ruled the lives of so many and that ultimately trapped giver and receiver in a myopic vision of the world that precluded imagining one based on equality.
In February 1971 Seán Ó Ríordáin (1916-1977) published an article in the *Irish Times* article entitled *Aicme Íseal* or the lower class in which he recounted his experience of being a Tuberculosis (TB) sufferer in pre drug-therapy Ireland. Several Irelands emerged post-1922 and the Kafka-esque Ó Ríordáin, renowned poet of the Irish language, civil servant and ‘professional patient’ occupied some of each. In his lifetime he was quarantined by TB, reduced to poverty, treated with distain by his manager at City Hall and his poetry was criticized heavily as Irish ‘Esperanto’. As with the ethos of the Irish State he struggled with the destruction of modernity and internalized it. This paper focuses on three inextricable themes that dominate his writings: the position of the Irish language, poverty and illness. I use translations of his diaries to trace his keen observations of social injustice in the New Ireland and his position within it. For instance, Gaeltacht areas along the western seaboard were burdened with the custodianship of Irish language and tradition but with little economic support. On his first visit to Dun Quinn in West Kerry Ó Ríordáin was horrified by the dire poverty he witnessed. He was no stranger to the poverty and regularly found himself in its bind owing to illness. A complex character who interloped between the Irelands of the twentieth century Ó Ríordáin mainly found himself in the liminal spaces therefore his diaries offer unique perspectives on Irish social life.
Rediscovering poverty and class? Ireland in the 1960s

Carole Holohan

The 1960s saw reformulations and rediscoveries of poverty in the West. This paper examines the experience of the Republic of Ireland, a country with a large network of charitable agencies and a Catholic predilection for voluntary over statutory services. A recurrent phenomenon common to industrialised countries, a ‘rediscovery’ of poverty occurs during a period of rising living standards, when the persistence of poverty amongst certain groups becomes more apparent, provoking debate and a range of responses. Unprecedented growth in the Irish economy in the early 1960s set the scene for such a ‘rediscovery’, as sociological studies and the reports of investigative journalists demonstrated that sizeable sections of the population continued to experience poverty. Key to the Irish rediscovery was recognition of both the structural causes of poverty and of the larger role the state should play in the provision of services to alleviate poverty. These ideas accorded with new, and international, social justice and human rights agendas but contradicted long standing views of the causes of poverty and the place of the poor in Irish society. Through an analysis of contemporary journals, media output and the proceedings of a seminal conference on poverty at Kilkenny in 1971, this paper addresses how external ideas penetrated official, religious and media circles and influenced a reformulation of poverty in Ireland. A close reading of this material allows for an exploration of understandings of class in 1960s Ireland, which were expressed through concepts such as snobbery, stigma and social distinction.
Republican civil administration, taxation, and class tensions in the “Munster Republic”, July-August 1922

John Borgonovo, University College Cork

The so-called ‘Munster Republic’ lasted for six weeks in the opening phase of the Irish Civil War. During this time, Irish Republican Army members and their Anti-Treaty supporters governed much of the province of Munster, with Cork city serving as the defacto capital of the Republic. This paper will focus on the IRA’s ‘civil affairs’ department during the ‘Munster Republic’ period, and explain the societal complications that arose from such efforts. To fund its war, the IRA taxed the wealthiest elements of Cork society, which generated strong opposition from the city’s economic elite. Other class tensions of this period will also be explored, including the expulsion of senior civil servant managers of custom houses and income tax offices in counties Cork and Kerry, and their replacement by low-ranking IRA clerks; the mobilisation of trade unionists and other elements of civil society against continued civil war combat; and the responses of ex-soldier organisations to republican governance. The paper will contextualise these events by examining the class components of the Anglo-Irish Treaty division in Cork. It will offer data concerning the class makeup of the republican and Irish Party elites in Cork city, which shows a clear class divide between the republican and constitutional political parties after 1918. This case study will illuminate how such a class divide reappeared in the subsequent civil war, and played a role in the republicans’ ultimate defeat.
“Mr. Galway”: Máirtín Mór’ McDonogh, A Case Study in Class and Culture in Twentieth-Century Ireland

Dr. Jackie Uí Chionna, NUIG

Martin ‘Máirtín Mór’ McDonogh (1860-1934) was described by the writer Sean Ó Faoláin as ‘the son of a poor man who got a foothold in business and left Martin with a chance to make good...before he passed on he had become a T.D., was chairman of various local councils, owned a saw-mill, a fishing-fleet, a flour-mill, a chemical-works, thriving shops, more or less owned the Galway Steam-Shipping Company, was a Director of the Gas Company, a coal-importer, kept a stud of racehorses, had his own electric power years before the Shannon scheme, owned house property...and lived on Corrib Island.’ This short synopsis, comprehensive though it is, fails to capture the breadth and complexity of McDonogh’s rise from his birth in a one-roomed cottage in Connemara, to becoming the biggest employer in the West of Ireland – the McDonogh Group today is valued at €86m. A typical product of the ‘middle middle class’, McDonogh and his brothers were educated by the Jesuits at Tullabeg, matriculated at London University, and attended Queens College Galway, where he studied Law. Originally a Parnellite, McDonogh subsequently became a Redmondite, becoming in the process a friend of both Redmond and the M.P. Stephen Gwynn, both of whom held him in very high regard. His support for the war effort in 1914-18 saw him establish a munitions factory in Galway, and almost cost him his life during the 1916 Rising. Ultimately McDonogh embraced the changed political and economic environment of the Irish Free State, and entered the Dáil in 1927 as a Cumann na nGaedheal T.D., where he represented Galway until his death in 1934. McDonogh’s life and career, complete with elements of resilience, resistance and transformation, is a fitting, and revealing, case study in class and culture in twentieth-century Ireland.

1 ‘Máirtín Mór’ translates from the Gaelic as ‘Big Martin’.
The Northern Irish Aristocracy and the Second World War

Guy Woodward, Maynooth University

This paper examines cultural representations of aristocracy in Northern Ireland during the Second World War. It explores the promotion of the leadership of the aristocratic ‘founding fathers’ and ancient families of Northern Ireland as part of the local and British war effort, symbolised by the elevation of the baronet Sir Basil Brooke to Prime Ministerial office in 1943. I examine officially-commissioned popular histories and biographies of the period which, as Gillian McIntosh has observed, draw on a ‘protestant past to legitimise the actions of unionists in the present and to endorse the state in general.’

The wartime exploits of the four aristocratic so-called ‘Ulster Generals’ – Claude Auchinleck, Bernard Montgomery, Alan Brooke and Dorman Smith – were also promoted through contemporaneous popular culture and media, as part of a growing, often officially sponsored campaign to promote the unique strengths and virtues of the post-partition province as, in the words of the official historian John Blake ‘a reservoir of strength for a United Kingdom at war.’

The spectre of the disgraced former British Air Minister the seventh Marquis of Londonderry, who had made concerted efforts during the 1930s to forge unofficial diplomatic connections with senior Nazis, looms across this landscape, however. I also examine some satirical deconstructions of the dominance of Stormont and other post-partition institutions by a titled, complacent and incompetent gerontocracy, such as Hugh Shearman’s 1944 novel A Bomb and a Girl. These hint at the waning power of aristocratic ancient families in the face of a growing middle class, and presage the insecurity felt by the unionist elite following the election in 1945 of a Labour government in Britain.
From Landlords’ Man to Farmers’ Man: Col. George O’Callagan-Westropp, Class Politics and Identity in interwar Ireland

Tony Varley, NUIG

Even though it is widely accepted that the landed gentry became a transitional class in 20th century southern Ireland, how this transition was actually accomplished and experienced by specific individuals and families could be better understood. This paper will seek to advance our understanding by considering the case of Col. George O’Callaghan-Westropp (1864-1944) who, over the course of his lifetime, went from being a prominent landed class activist to being a leading figure of the farmers’ movement of the 1920s. In the interwar period, the Colonel’s politics, and his own sense of class identity, came to depend heavily on the success of his project of seeing Irish farmers emerge, via the Irish Farmers’ Union and the Farmers’ Party, as a worthy successor to a once dominant landlord class. To go by his own appraisal of the late 1920s and early 1930s, O’Callaghan-Westropp’s desire to belong to a stable dominant class had been frustrated twice in his own lifetime. The pre-independence destruction of a once dominant landed class in the south was evidently to be followed by the failure of the newly arrived farmer-owners to realise their potential to become a dominant economic and political class. The Colonel’s assessment here strongly contrasts with the suggestions that farmers constituted a dominant class or classes in early post-independence Ireland. Far from dominance, the new farmer-owners he saw as rapidly following the southern Irish gentry in becoming another declining agrarian class, sinking ever deeper into economic and political powerlessness.
Ireland’s Politics of Shame: Gender, Sexuality, and Irish Nation-Building

Clara Fischer, LSE

The complex history of Irish nation-building and identity-formation post-Independence has been shown to involve the construction of deviant Others marked by, inter alia, class and gender. In this context, normative proscriptions concerning sexuality and gender were maintained by severe, punitive measures, including the mass-incarceration and containment of populations deemed to be problematic. What Foucault terms the “great confinement” was thus increasingly evident in the early decades of the new Irish state, and a system of interlocking institutions, the “carceral archipelago,” enforced strict conformity to gender norms. Much of the control exerted by Catholic Church authorities and by the state, in their complicity and promotion of the confinement of Others, can be thought of in terms of a politics of shame. Testimony by survivors of Irish institutions bears this out, as shame was used not just as an instrument to prompt and sustain physical, spatial confinement, but also to exert psycho-social control. Shame, then, played a central role in the “surveillance” of Irish subjects, particularly of gendered Others. In this paper, I argue that the politics of shame functioned as a means of entrenching moral, sexual purity as the essential feature of a new Irish national identity. Since the emotion of shame is generally acknowledged to involve hiding – a hiding of one’s often embodied failings or shortcomings – Ireland’s mass-confinement of sexual transgressors can be read as the physical, spatial, and corporeal hiding of Ireland’s shamed Others. Furthermore, the normative control, denial and repression of sexuality, particularly women’s sexuality, required hiding the presumed shame of gendered Others in contravention of permissible feminine subjectivities (notably motherhood). While certain contemporary interpretations of sexuality in the early decades of the Irish state adopt sometimes reductive narratives of Irish sexual repression and later liberation, I argue that Irish history has always witnessed sexual transgressors and agents resisting gender norms premised upon a morally pure Irish identity, and maintained by a politics of shame.
“Relieve Me and I Will Pay You Well”: Culture, Class, and Abortion in Twentieth-Century Ireland

Cara Delay, College of Charleston

Over 100 criminal abortion cases were tried in Ireland, north and south, from 1900-1967. Helen O was a sometimes-transient mother of six.² Twenty-year-old Irene A was an unmarried immigrant and student.³ In 1948, a woman who pled guilty to giving abortions to at least eight women in rural County Laois had amongst her clients a teenage girl and a married mother of two.⁴ The variety that these examples reveal suggests that abortion was widespread and practiced by Irish women of all different backgrounds.

This paper explores the cultures of illegal abortion in twentieth-century Ireland. It explores the backgrounds of Irish women who sought abortions, focusing on class. More than half of the women who sought abortions had at least some economic means and/or education. These realities distinguish abortion cases from infanticide cases. As the work of Cliona Rattigan has shown, most Irish women who committed infanticide—over 80 per cent—were single and poor. Studying an earlier period—the late nineteenth century—Elaine Farrell argues that only women with means would be able to afford an illegal abortion.⁵ Still, many Irish women with unwanted pregnancies were not always financially sound; some attempted the less expensive abortifacient or drugs option before seeking the services of a “professional.” In addition, the variety of fees charged by abortionists—from two guineas in rural County Laois to reportedly up to £80 in Dublin—suggests that women of all social classes attempted to end their pregnancies.

Abortion cases provide a unique perspective on class, revealing the lengths to which women of different backgrounds would go to terminate their pregnancies and, in the process, shedding light on the cultures of abortion that existed throughout women’s networks in the twentieth century.

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² “Nurse on Charge of Murder,” Irish Times June 12, 1956.
⁴ National Archives of Ireland, Central Criminal Court Laois file 1D-29-7.
Class, Gender and Moral Philanthropy: ‘Fixing’ the ‘Girl Emigrant Problem’ in Twentieth-Century Ireland

Jennifer Redmond, Maynooth University

Emigration from Ireland was a consistent feature of Irish life before, during and after the twentieth century. It continued with little regard to the political transformations in Ireland that saw independence emerge and flourish. This was because emigration was driven not by political but by economic and social concerns, and it was a process riven by class differences. Ireland continued to produce more medical graduates than it could employ but middle-class migrants were not viewed as problematic; if they were conceived of at all it was as a credit to their country, ambassadors for Ireland’s spiritual empire, and at worst, a loss to the ‘good stock’ of the nation. The majority of emigrants were working-class, and somewhat unusually, many were young, single women, in search of opportunities beyond the narrow confines of Ireland’s gendered economy. The primary destination was the former ‘colonial oppressor’ Britain, and thus class, gender and religion came together in discourses on such women.

Both the Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland responded to a perceived need for spiritual and welfare guidance for female emigrants, in their travelling arrangements and in their new homes. Despite their other differences, they appeared united on the need for their Church’s presence in welfare provision for the poor in Irish society in lieu of state funded initiatives. This was particularly the case with emigrants, who successive governments continuously lamented but did nothing to help. ‘Safeguarding’ these girls emerged as part of the panoply of philanthropic initiatives in this period run by mainly middle-class women along religious lines that were aimed at both the protection and ‘betterment’ of working class women. A review of these societies reveals numerous tensions, particularly of a sectarian nature, as well as the declining ability of lay women in the twentieth century to direct charitable organizations outside of the direct control of the Catholic Church. Tellingly, no such services existed for men. This paper traces the social history of these organisations in Ireland, their connections to international welfare work related to the trafficking of women, and argues that the motivation for such work was not only gendered but driven by class and status.

This paper speaks to the conference programme’s description as addressing not just (Catholic) Church-State interaction across the twentieth century, but more importantly the ‘society obsessed with the strictures of social and sexual respectability’ and could be classified under the ‘Gender and the relationship between social and sexual control in modern Ireland’ strand as well as the ‘Class and culture in the Irish diaspora’ strand as it encompasses reflections on the perception of Irish female emigrants within Ireland and in Britain, the primary destination of all migrants from the 1920s onwards.

Ciara Meehan, University of Hertfordshire

In a decade during which the sale of contraception was made legal, concern grew about the moral fabric of Irish society. The title of this paper is taken from a letter to *Woman’s Way* magazine in February 1973 from the mother of four teenagers. She was concerned that they would ‘remain in a state of mortal sin’ if they engaged in passionate kissing and did not confess their behaviour. Her concern reveals the unease experienced by an older generation that was attempting to locate itself in a changing Ireland. That change was reflected, for example, in letters from young Irishwomen who wrote asking for advice having engaged in pre-marital sex. The nature of such letters contrasted with those of only a decade earlier, when women wrote instead asking if pre-martial sex was ever acceptable.

‘Ordinary’ women, rather than politicians or activists, are at the centre of this paper. Drawing on an array of women’s magazines, this paper will examine inter-generational differences in attitudes towards sex in 1970s Ireland. Advice columns, letters to the editor, features and articles will be explored for what they reveal societal expectations of everyday Irishwomen, and about those women’s varying attitudes towards intimacy.
Irish Nationalism as Capitalist Consumer Culture

Aidan Beatty, University of Chicago

Richard English has argued, in *Radicals and the Republic*, that socialist nationalism in Ireland was riven by the contradictory attempt to weld proletarian economics with ostensibly cross-class nationalist ideology. This is certainly accurate. In this paper, however, I am interested in studying the much less discussed but far more prevalent capitalist nationalism, which similarly sought to merge two contradictory ideologies: an economic ideology favouring individual self-interest and a nationalist ideology stressing cross-class unity.

As is widely discussed, ‘The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as an immense accumulation of commodities, its unit being a single commodity and therefore our investigation must begin with the analysis of a commodity.’ And so, in this paper I begin by studying the immense accumulation of Irish nationalist commodities offered for sale in the years in and around 1922: the Irish-made tweeds promoted by the Gaelic League, Volunteer Sauce (produced by Twinem Bros. in Dublin), the GAA-approved sporting goods of Whelans, and the various badges, souvenirs and booklets produced for, or in the aftermath of, the O’Donovan Rossa Funeral in 1915 and the Easter Rising a year later.

Looking at these commodities in conjunction with the economic writings of various nationalist thinkers as well as recent scholarly studies of material culture and of nationalism’s intersecting with peripheral economic development, I seek to address the following questions:

- What were the underlying assumptions of Irish nationalists about the country’s status in the broader capitalist world-system?
- What were the class assumptions that went along with this, particularly as Irish nationalists prepared themselves for formal sovereignty?
- How much can Irish nationalism be understood as a conscious project, not of cultural or national liberation, but instead of capitalist development?
- How much can this kind of analysis contribute to our understanding of the suppression of Irish nationalism’s more left-leaning variants, such as the socialist nationalism studied by Richard English?
Popular Culture in Ireland during the interwar period: work, unemployment and leisure

David Toms, UCC

The interwar period in Ireland was marked, as it was in Britain, by the emergence of new leisure forms and media to be enjoyed by mass popular audiences. As well as all-night dances, the cinema, records, radio, cheap consumer goods, there was in Ireland the legalisation of betting, greyhound racing, and a new popular form of spectator sport in the form of soccer which had spread its wings from its former strongholds of Belfast and Dublin to reach into the towns and cities of the provinces. At the same time that all of these consumable modes of culture emerged, Ireland also lurched through economic stagnation and depression, as it became entrenched in a protectionist policy that saw it at ‘economic war’ with Britain. As money grew tighter and enforced leisure time grew more plentiful with unemployment soaring, cheaper forms of participatory sport such as boxing emerged alongside increasingly commercialised leisure forms. Amid the moral panic over jazz, gambling and the increased popularity of “foreign games” we can see Irish popular culture in the interwar period opening itself up not just to British influence but American popular culture too. The complex relationship between work, leisure, and unemployment in interwar Ireland will thus be explored as a reaction to the changed and often desperate circumstances in which people found themselves, but who still found time to play. It would be, in the words of Stephen G. Jones "wrong to depict the working class as impotent consumers, having little or no say in the form and content of the leisure product. In fact, working people had the capacity to resist and contest attempts at social control. There was, in short, a great deal of ingenuity in workers’ leisure." As it was in Britain, so I will argue was it in post-independence Ireland between the wars.
Contested working class history: Radical commemoration in 1930s Dublin.

Donal Fallon, UCD

This paper will examine the ritual of commemoration among the radical left in 1930s Dublin, when organisations such as the Communist Party of Ireland and the Republican Congress organised commemorative events to mark anniversaries such as the execution of Liam Mellows in December 1922 and the United Irish rebellion of 1798. Such commemorations were intended to promote a sense of working class history and struggle, and to demonstrate that the (perceived) lineage of these radical organisations was deeply embedded in nationalist history.

The 1930s witnessed violent confrontation on the streets of Dublin between members of the radical left and their political opponents. On occasion, the commemorative events of the radical left were brought to abrupt endings by hostile crowds. This paper will examine the class composition of those who targeted the radical left in this period. The Irish Workers’ Voice, newspaper of the Communist Party, accused the ‘dregs of the city’ of attacking the organised left in Dublin, while the republican Peadar O’Donnell believed that the much feared ‘Animal Gangs’ the left blamed for violent assaults upon it was made up of ‘very fine fighting material in the slum basements.’ Gardaí however were adamant in Department of Justice correspondence that the make-up of anti-communist mobs was often more complex.

This paper will contrast radical commemoration with the commemorative rituals of the state in this period, illustrating that the radical left wished to construct a new narrative which placed the working class and class conflict at the centre of Ireland’s separatist history. The paper will draw upon material from the archives of the Communist Party of Ireland, the Department of Justice and the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) among other primary source material, as well as consulting the body of commemorative literature issued in this period.
The ‘Catholicisation’ of rugby football in twentieth century Ireland: transformation and resilience?

Liam O’Callaghan, Liverpool Hope

On the surface, rugby football in Ireland has historically had a largely stable social constituency. With the exception of Limerick, where it acquired a popular following in the 1880s that would thenceforth characterise the game in the city, rugby has been the game of the urban and provincial town middle classes in Ireland. It has strong traditional associations with many of the common features of middle-class life in Ireland: suburban living, fee-paying education, and careers in the professions and business. Yet this appearance of social homogeneity is deceptive. In fact, rugby presents a potentially fruitful case study for analysing social change and cultural diversity within the Irish middle classes.

In the first instance, the period from c.1900-1930 witnessed a silent but dramatic change in the cultural profile of the game’s players and followers. At the turn of the twentieth century, the rugby ‘establishment’ (the Irish Rugby Football Union, a number of key clubs, administrators and press supporters based in Dublin and Belfast) was overwhelmingly protestant and unionist. Within three decades, however, the emergent Catholic middle-classes had acquired a much more influential (and probably dominant) position within the game. Yet this was not a case of one group replacing another. Clubs with faultless protestant middle-class pedigrees gradually became ‘Catholicised,’ and individuals from different cultural and religious backgrounds in Free State Ireland sat on the same committee tables, played for the same clubs, and supported the same international team.

This paper will investigate how and why this process occurred. Among the key considerations will be the manner in which cooperation between groups on the rugby field was preceded or accompanied by business, professional and educational links. In addition, the resilience of the rugby club and the rugby administrative body will also be explored. These, ultimately, were institutions that often possessed sufficient social and cultural capital to overcome potential social cleavages and cultural hostility. Middle-class status and ambition facilitated their perseverance.
Farewell to Plato’s Cave: Ireland during the Second World War, 1939-45

*Bryce Evans, Liverpool Hope*

Narratives of ‘the Emergency’, to use the government term for the Second World War, are dominated by high political narratives of diplomatic intrigue. But this focus has, for too long, obscured a thoroughgoing analysis of what socio-economic life was like in Ireland in these years. Likewise, considerations of Irish wartime culture tend to concentrate on a waggish literary elite at the expense of the mass of people.

By contrast, this paper looks to explode the historian FSL Lyons’ claim that wartime life in independent Ireland, for ‘ordinary people’, was akin to life in Plato’s Cave (in other words, that social life was characterised by stasis, ignorance and boredom). Detailing the everyday reality of food and fuel shortages, it challenges the popular perception that these were met by mere resignation and subservience.

Instead, this paper charts the rise of resistance alongside the extraordinary ascent of state intervention in everyday life in Ireland between 1939 and 1945. Whether small farmers chasing tillage inspectors off their land; turf camp workers rioting; people dabbling in black market transactions; or cross-border smugglers evading customs men, there was a lively culture of socio-economic resistance in Emergency Ireland.

Intriguingly, this hidden history of resistance came from some unexpected quarters and this paper is not a history of organised labour during this period but rather an exploration of overtones of ‘moral economy’ – although not in the classic sense. For example, priests justified their resistance to state economic diktats by reference to notions of ‘moral price’ and their own moral role. State law and moral law do not necessarily coincide - a point emphasised by colonial experience as well as Catholic belief – and many ‘ordinary people’ used such arguments to justify subversive behaviour and everyday acts of resistance.
Workplace Culture in Three Irish Factories, 1932-1990

Liam Cullinane, UCC

Throughout the twentieth century, the firms of Sunbeam Wolsey, Irish Steel and Henry Ford and Sons Limited were among the largest employers of labour in the Cork area. These factories were, for their employees, not merely places of work, but a nexus around which much of their lives were organised. This paper, based on both documentary research and extensive oral testimony gathered from former workers, examines the cultural dimension of these workplaces as articulated by interviewees. In doing so, the paper will examine four primary issues:

1. What meaning did narrators attribute to their period of employment with the firms in question? How did gender and status differences affect the construction of such meanings?
2. What was the significance of customs such as pranks and nicknames?
3. How did workers utilise the workplace in order to pursue leisure activities?
4. How were different status groups (blue collar, tradesmen, white collar / staff) constructed and what significance did such status groups have within the firms?

The paper, in examining these issues, will pay appropriate attention to the broader social and historical dynamics in which they occurred, in particular analysing the patriarchal and conservative ethos of the Irish state and society, as well as broader features of Irish working class life, and how these affected cultural constructions of work and the workplace. In conclusion, the paper will argue that the three firms, all of whose workers tended to remain there for extensive periods of time, and which often employed multiple generations within individual families, had a particular significance due to their longevity and stature within the local economy and that, given the central position accorded the workplace in the life-stories of narrators, the oft-neglected history of the workplace itself is an important object for study by social and labour historians in Ireland.
Yet here I was lording it over them, not like the English or the old landlords but a bit like one of their own, a returned Yank or something, like them but not enough.

In April 1976, Princess Grace of Monaco bought her ancestral home at Drimurla, Co. Mayo, a cottage on 35 acres. When Ellen Mulchrone, owner of the cottage, moved into a local care home, she offered to sell the property to Princess Grace, who had visited it with her husband in 1961. However, news of the purchase was greeted with some controversy: the *Irish Times* reported that it had “angered a number of local residents, who [felt] that the farm should have been obtained by the Land Commission and divided among local farmers.” Indeed, the Farmers’ Defence Association expressed its “strong condemnation” of the purchase. The matter was even debated in the Dáil: on 18 May, Denis Gallagher (Fianna Fáil) asked the Minister for Lands, T.J. Fitzpatrick, how the Land Commission reached its decision not to acquire the Mulchrone estate for redistribution among local farmers. Fitzpatrick responded that the land was deemed unsuitable for farming and that, given the “international status of the purchaser” and “her family association with the area” that “the local and national interest would be best served by permitting the sale.” William Kenneally (FF) followed up by asking whether, “the same criteria will be laid down by the Land Commission as outlined by the Minister, that a person whose forefathers occupied the land previously will get the land?”

The controversy over the Mulchrone land reflects the extent to which the figure of the “Returned Yank” surfaces in debates regarding Irish land acquisition and ownership, specifically during the lifetime of the post-independence Land Commission (1923-1999).

The dual function of the Commission was to complete the transfer of land ownership, begun under British rule, from landlord to tenant and to acquire untenanted lands compulsorily and redistribute them among farmers whose own holdings were economically unviable, particularly in the “congested” farming districts along Ireland’s western seaboard. One strategy to alleviate congestion was the migration of over 14,500 farmers from the west “onto lands totalling over 382,000 acres in uncongested areas primarily in the east and midlands,” a policy that attracted widespread criticism of “what was perceived to be the establishment of ‘a new plantation’ in the eastern and midland counties.” The Land Commission, then, performed an ambivalent role in post-independence Ireland – at once carrying out the work of decolonisation and, according to some, of neo-colonialism. Surveying a number of literary texts, including Edna O’Brien’s *Wild Decembers* (1999) and Thomas Lynch’s *Booking Passage: We Irish and Americans* (2005), this paper argues that the Returned Yank emerges in cultural negotiations of Irish land acquisition and ownership because s/he is also a figure of ambivalence. As both insider and outsider, of Irish descent, yet not or no longer securely “Irish,” s/he embodies the anxieties elicited by the Land Commission which, in Roddy Doyle’s terms was “not like the English or the old landlords” but was “one of their own.”

Daryl Leeworthy, University of Huddersfield

With the release of Pride in 2014, the important role played in aiding the striking miners of South Wales by the London-based Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) is now becoming much more widely known. Whilst the film did not dwell significantly on the Irish background of several of the members of LGSM, including Mark Ashton, the group’s papers, which are housed in the People’s History Museum in Manchester, reveal a considerable Irish presence. Indeed, it may be argued that LGSM was as much about working-class Irishness as it was about supporting comrades in the Dulais Valley: this was especially evident in March 1985 when LGSM organised a St Patrick’s Day festival for members. This paper draws on these records as well as oral histories, contemporary newspaper accounts, and more recent interviews, to reflect on the relationship between sexuality, radical politics, and the emigrant Irish working class in the 1980s. The paper suggests that just as the strike offered South Wales miners and their families a means of comprehending (in their words) what ‘socialism really is’; the engagement of gay, working-class Irishmen with the strike provided an opportunity of experiencing class solidarity in ways that were otherwise closed off.
Beckett’s bowler hats: maligned relics of the Irish Protestant middle-class

Julie Bates, International University of Sarajevo

The ways in which literary characters are capped or shod tells us much about their place in the world. In this presentation, I will explore how the battered and ill-fitting bowler hats of Beckett’s characters from the 1930s to 1950s function as relics of the Irish Protestant middle-class of his youth, a group to which little academic attention had been paid. Rónán McDonald has noted how the professional Protestant bourgeoisie of the early twentieth century was an insulated, largely apolitical class that slipped through the net of orthodox stories of the ‘landed Anglo-Irish ascendancy yielding power to a burgeoning Catholic middle class.’

The bowler hat is an iconic twentieth-century item of dress which carries with it a host of associations. The most germane of these, for Beckett, are the cultural values travestied in his poetry, fiction and drama of this period: Irish Protestant middle-class mores of piety, professionalism and, above all, unquestioning adherence to habits of thought and behaviour. The enthusiastically rough treatment to which bowler hats are subjected in Beckett’s writing articulates clearly his opposition to convention, respectability and hard-headed thought.

However, bowler hats are also relics in the sense that they are valuable objects in Beckett’s establishment of a singular form of writing. By following the iterations and fluctuating uses of Beckett’s bowler hats over two decades and a range of genres, it is possible to chart the ways in which his writing proceeded by deliberately wrenching itself free of tradition and place, and by treating the culture and class to which the bowler refers as a lost world. For Beckett, crushing the bowler hat was an important part of this imaginative process.

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Cultural appropriation in modern Ireland is a recognised phenomenon, from Declan Kiberd’s ‘Protholics and Cathestants’ to Roy Foster’s ‘How the Catholics became Protestants’. Treating religious dogma as a cultural rather than a theological phenomenon, and thus ‘borrowable’, was one way in which a Lilliputian southern Irish Protestantism could demonstrate not being wholly a stranger in its own country in the twentieth century. This paper picks up on one facet of this - an inversion of Foster’s nostrum – in what might be called the articulation of a Protestant Purgatory in twentieth century writing. On the face of it, this was a doctrine, in the purely theological sense, unacceptable to Protestants - the 1562 Anglican Article of Faith, adopted by the Church of Ireland in 1870, is quite clear: ‘The Romish Doctrine concerning Purgatory...is a fond thing, vainly invented...’. Nevertheless, there are elements in Irish Protestant writing which wrestle, in the temporal sense, with the attractive Catholic idea of achieving sinless perfection by being tormented in some limited purgatorial way, against the antithetical Protestant belief of sanctification by grace alone. W.B. Yeats’ grim take on this in his eponymous poetic drama, though perverse and contrarian – guilt atoned for and assuaged by murder - is perhaps a paradigm for the epistemology of Protestant acceptance of purgatory as a notion. This paper will examine these resonances through the writings of those from the Protestant/Anglo-Irish tradition, such as Elizabeth Bowen – her ‘purgatory’ was to lie in limbo between lovers - Lord Dunsany, Hubert Butler, Louis McNeice, Iris Murdoch, William Trevor, Jennifer Johnston. It will examine the differences and concordances in how these writers approach the idea of purgatory, and the manner in which they use the concept – and how it had utility, especially after independence in 1922, in shaping an explainable self-perceived version of southern Irish Protestants’ own history and identity formation.

Naively credulous or foolish.
The 1933 Johnson Committee Report on the Cost of Living introduced a new concept into Irish political and economic life. By concluding that ‘an index figure based on middle-class standards should be computed’ the report accepted the principle that the Irish middle class had the right to a quality of life beyond that of the poor and labouring classes. The findings of the report are connected to a discourse evident within Ireland during the 1930s and 1940s; namely the idea of the “squeezed middle”. Excluded from housing schemes, food subsidies, and health insurance, yet, forced to contribute to such schemes through taxation, many voices, claiming to speak for the middle class, complained that they were being ignored or unfairly targeted by the state.

This paper will interrogate the claims made and justifications used by those constructing the idea of the “squeezed middle”. It will suggest that this rhetoric was vaguely targeted at the Fianna Fáil administration in an effort to associate the party with working-class populism. Additionally, it will consider the ways in which international events were interpreted through the prism of attacks on or victories for the middle class, and what impact this had on political and social life in Ireland.

Terms, such as, the middle class are deliberately constructed to be ambiguous and amorphous in nature. One commentator using the phrase “middle-class” could have a very different group in mind to another, and the carefully fabricated vagueness can serve vastly divergent political ends. This paper will also ask if the indistinctness and fluidity of “the middle-class” as a concept is perpetuated today by historians of Irish history, and what impact this has upon our understanding of class in Ireland.
Recent research has revealed that several factors informed the discourse and construction of infancy as a separate and distinct section of the lifecycle in Ireland during its formative period, 1900-1930. This research resulted in my PhD thesis entitled 'Social construction of infancy in Ireland, 1900-1930. The role of medicine.' As the title suggests, the focus was on the medical impact on the discourse of infancy. However, several other agents became apparent during this research, for example the nascent dairy industry, political agitators, religious dogmatists and social reformers. It is the agency of the latter which forms the subject of this paper. Many of the most influential reformers originated in the upper- or comfortable middle-classes. Their concepts of infant rearing were profoundly informed by class-specific values. By way of social reform and philanthropic movements they extended these ideas on the physical, spiritual and educational aspects of infant- and child care to other social classes in Ireland. This paper explores the agency of several such activists: Lady Aberdeen, wife of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, campaigned to raise public awareness of the advantages of hygienic practices and her efforts to stop the transmission of tuberculosis were instrumental in the dissemination of middle-class medical concepts. Nathan Strauss, an American philanthropist, promulgated his ideas on the improvement of the public milk supply – especially important for infants - by donation of pasteurisation equipment to the Dublin Pasteurised Milk Depôt, thereby directing the development of a safe milk supply for infants from deprived socioeconomic backgrounds. Kathleen Lynn and her life partner Madeleine ffrench-Mullen initiated the first hospital for infants in Ireland, St Ultan's Hospital for Infants. Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington, a dynamic middle-class political and social activist, was involved in the Irish anti-vaccination movement whose campaign directly opposed government policy on smallpox vaccination for infants. The conclusion highlights the diverse forms of inter-class dissemination of concepts and suggests the scale of their impact on the construction of infancy in Ireland.
Teddy Boys and Youth Culture in 1950s Ireland

Eleanor O’Leary, Maynooth University

The 1950s is arguably the decade most clearly established in the Irish imagination as dark, dull, conservative and lost. This is similarly reflected in academic studies of the decade which focus on issues such as emigration, economic stagnancy and censorship. This paper presents original research on youth cultures in 1950s Ireland with a particular focus on Teddy Boys. The paper outlines the extent to which this subculture transferred to Ireland and how it was mediated within the social and cultural landscape specific to Ireland. British Teddy boy culture including modes of dress, gang violence and anti-social behaviour was regularly represented in Irish newspapers and in the British newspapers widely available in Ireland. The subculture, therefore, offered Irish youths an established form of collective identity and self expression which was immediately recognisable as subversive and disruptive. Utilising newspaper reports, advertisements, photographs, letters and other documentation this paper highlights manifestations of Teddy Boy culture in Irish urban centres. The subculture will then be discussed as one element of international youth cultures in Ireland in the post-war period. The paper argues that these popular and sub cultural trends represent an alternative narrative of life in mid-20th century Ireland which strongly challenges previous readings of the decade as closed and dull.
‘Children on Strike’: an examination of child labour and resistance in Ireland, 1880-1970

Sarah-Anne Buckley, NUIG

Children and striking are unfamiliar terms in the context of western society in 2015. Yet throughout the modern era, children have fought for a variety of rights – some quite trivial (the need for longer shows in the cinema), some more poignant (the provision of school meals in a Co Mayo school). They have fought alongside parents and teachers, often for extended periods of time. From the now infamous newsboy strikes at the start of the twentieth century, to the schoolboy strikes that spread from Liverpool to London to Dublin, children on the cusp of adulthood demonstrated an acute awareness of their own labour and economic/social worth. While they fought against a variety of perceived and real injustices, they also demonstrated solidarity with their families, teachers and fellow workers.

This paper will examine the history of children and striking in Ireland from 1880 to 1970. Due to the lack of historiography on child labour during this period, it will begin with a brief history of children and work, before moving on to an analysis of individual strikes, particularly in the context of class, gender and regionalism. It will address the demands of the young strikers, their ability to organise and the reaction of authorities and employers. Central to the topic are changing attitudes to childhood and adolescence, poverty and destitution in both urban and rural families, changing attitudes to children and work, and the impact of compulsory schooling on families.
YELLOW BUILDING = Divinity School, St John's College (opposite the Porter's Lodge of College SEE Picture) The conference will take place in the LIGHTFOOT ROOM inside the Divinity School (SEE Picture 2 of Room)