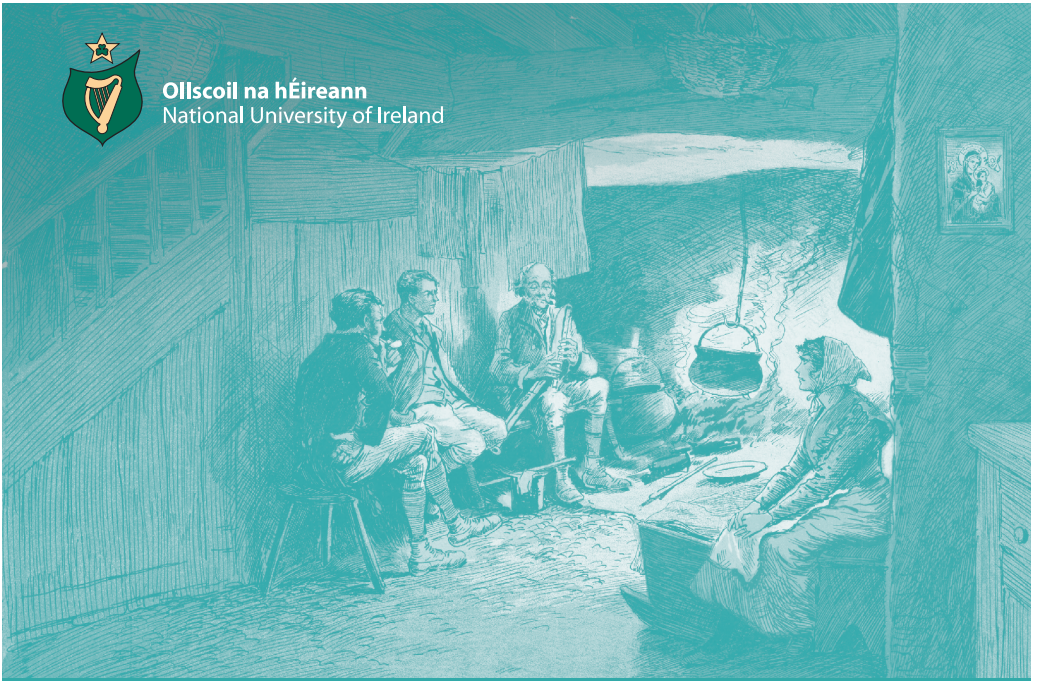




Ollscoil na hÉireann  
National University of Ireland



# Forgetting in the Decade of Commemorations: New Directions for Irish Historical Research

**Guy Beiner**

A lecture given in connection with the  
Award of the National University of Ireland's  
Irish Historical Research Prize in 2019



Cover illustration is based on front cover of Guy Beiner, *Forgetful Remembrance: Social Forgetting and Vernacular Historiography of a Rebellion in Ulster* (Oxford University Press, 2018)

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## CONTENTS

<b>Opening remarks</b>	
Dr Maurice Manning, NUI Chancellor	4
<b>Forgetting in the Decade of Commemorations: New Directions for Irish Historical Research</b>	
Professor Guy Beiner	6
<b>Response</b>	
Professor James Kelly	25
<b>Biographies</b>	29
<b>NUI Publication Prize in History 2019</b>	30
<b>NUI Awards 2023</b>	32
<b>Irish Historical Research Prize Winners 1922-2017</b>	33

## OPENING REMARKS



As Chancellor of the National University of Ireland, I am delighted to welcome you all here this evening for this lecture by Guy Beiner, winner of the Irish Historical Research Prize 2019.

This prize, first awarded in 1922, is offered in alternate years for the best new work of Irish historical research, published for the first time by a graduate of the National University of Ireland. NUI sees it very much as part of its mission to promote research and scholarship, particularly in areas related to Irish history and culture. This year's winner is Guy Beiner's wonderful book, *Forgetful Remembrance: Social Forgetting and Vernacular Historiography of a Rebellion in Ulster*.



*NUI Chancellor  
Dr Maurice Manning*



The book represents a magnum opus and is a remarkable, erudite, and original study by a master scholar providing an insight into the vernacular history of the 1798 Irish Rebellion in Ulster. Beiner skilfully offers a new model for the study of memory, tracing how kin groups remembered and cherished the ancestral deeds that have been long omitted from public memory. The book makes very effective use of folklore material, oral histories, and popular music in the nineteenth century and will attract a wide audience well beyond the range of Irish studies. I have no doubt that this tremendous work will stimulate many theses, articles, and books, and will be read for many years to come.

As a graduate of University College Dublin, Guy Beiner is no stranger to Ireland, and we are delighted to welcome him to NUI this evening.

*Maurice Manning*

**Dr Maurice Manning**  
Chancellor



## FORETTING IN THE DECADE OF COMMEMORATIONS: NEW DIRECTIONS FOR IRISH HISTORICAL RESEARCH<sup>1</sup>

Guy Beiner



I would like to thank the Chancellor, Maurice Manning, and the National University of Ireland for this remarkable honour. The award of the Irish Historical Research Prize is quite overwhelming for me in many ways. Being somewhat of a compulsive historian, I would like to comment briefly on the history of the Irish Historical Research Prize. Looking at the programme this evening, this is the first time I have seen the full list of previous awardees and in light of this distinguished roll of honour, the award seems even more overwhelming. I would also like to thank Professor James Kelly for taking upon himself to respond to this paper which, for me, is a great honour in itself because I am a great admirer of Professor Kelly's work. Admittedly, this is not as simple a task as it may seem, because he wasn't sent a script in advance.

In this, I am reminded how just a week ago, I had a great privilege. I had an opportunity to go and meet a Nobel Literature laureate who has inspired me since I was a lad. That said, I did not meet him by myself, there was a couple of thousands of us who went to see Bob Dylan perform in Lowell, Massachusetts. For those of you who have been to a Bob Dylan concert — and I admit it wasn't my first — you can never know what you are going to get. You do not know for certain what songs he is going to sing, or how they are going to be performed. That evening I couldn't help but notice how, each time when a song began, it took the audience, who were all Bob Dylan fans, quite a few seconds until we recognised what song he was singing, and only then

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1 This lecture was delivered orally, without notes. It has been transcribed from a recording and edited.



could we enjoy the performance. In a somewhat similar fashion, there is an unpredictability factor in delivering and responding to an unwritten paper, and we will see how that goes.

This is the first time I have seen the full list of previous winners of the IHRP, because it has proven hard to get this information elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> I would point out that, if I'm not mistaken, to date no proper history has been written of this prize. I would even suggest that it might be a worthwhile exercise for the students in the room here to attempt a survey of Irish historiography vis-à-vis this prize. Such an undertaking might produce interesting results. On the one hand, you would find that many fine and outstanding historians won the prize, so that we can all feel the weight of its pedigree. On the other hand, you would find that many fine and excellent historians did not win the prize. You will find that in some cases, people won the prize twice. There have even been two generations of a family that have won. If you look through the list, you will find that, in 1935, Robert Dudley Edwards, a doyenne of history from UCD, won the prize and forty-two years later, his daughter Ruth Dudley Edwards was the co-winner of the prize. That was for the biography of Patrick Pearse, of which the evocative title alone — *The Triumph of Failure* — deserves a prize, because it captures so much of the essence of Irish nationalist and republican *mentalité*. But, I do think something novel has happened this year. As a historian, I try to identify changes as they happen over time. I would venture that, in all likelihood, all the prize winners up until today could be considered native to the island of Ireland. 'Native' is not a word we often use, and it begs qualification. Most recently, Theo Hoppen won the prize for the second time.<sup>3</sup> Hoppen, as he explained in his lecture two years ago, was born in Germany, but was raised in Ireland. There has always been a strong connection between the award and, let's say, with historians who were not necessarily born in Ireland, but who grew up on this isle. I think that an interesting change has happened this year, which is quite remarkable. This is the first time, I believe, though I might be wrong, that the prize has been given to a complete outsider. I prefer to see occurrences as not just happening by chance, and I think there may be a wider context to this curious development.

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2 Full list now available on NUI website, see [www.nui.ie/awards](http://www.nui.ie/awards).

3 Theo Hoppen won the prize twice: first in 1985 for *Elections, politics and society in Ireland 1832-1885* (Clarendon, 1984) and again in 2017 for *Governing Hibernia: British politicians and Ireland 1800-1921* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

Looking at Ireland today, I think that awarding the prize to an outsider is indicative of a wider change in society and culture. Ireland is becoming increasingly cosmopolitan, and has embraced this cosmopolitanism, while in the past the word itself would have been frowned upon. That is no mean feat in a time when the world is becoming increasingly narrowminded and insular. Recognising this commendable evolution can serve to accentuate the honour of receiving the prize this year. Furthermore, I would suggest that there is something else that has happened in this year's choice of award, which is historiographically innovative, or, to use a phrase taken from modern Irish history, perhaps signals a 'new departure'.

For those who are familiar with Irish historical scholarship, and I expect that this would practically include everybody in the room today, Irish historiography is not particularly well known for its engagement with theory. It has not produced major theoretical innovations, or at least that is not the reputation it has acquired.

It is often said that my own work has a strong theoretical dimension, but I am not too sure that I buy into that. That's a label that has been applied to my work, though it may be an overstatement. It's a bit like a scenario in an episode of the Derry Girls. The kids are cramming for a history exam and the English lad James complains: 'I can't tell my risings from my rebellions'. That is actually a very good joke. I will let you in on a secret — most historians cannot tell the difference either. I am not sure there are essential differences between the two, even though we are trained to be able to spot them. I think about such matters often, because on occasion I read dense theoretical texts and I am not at all sure if I can spot my epistemologies from my ontologies and my axiologies, but that is not really the point of engaging with theory. The main issue at stake is do we raise bigger questions; do we look for the wider ramifications of the particular events we research? That is a challenge that historians must rise to. The theoretical conclusions of our intellectual inquiries do not have to end up being presented in esoteric jargon, which is impenetrable to the public at large. On the contrary, while I very much believe that we have to engage with theory, it should preferably be some form of layman's theory. I maintain that there are no grand ideas, no great complicated theses, which cannot be clarified in a straightforward conversation over a cup of coffee. Any complicated idea can be broken down and explained in simple, understandable terms.

I take my inspiration in that regard from a quip by the French traveller Gustave de Beaumont, a companion of the better-known Alexis De Tocqueville, who came to Ireland a couple of times in the 1830s. He has this pithy quote, originally written in French, but it does not lose its appeal when translated into English: 'Ireland is a little country which raises the greatest questions of politics, morality and humanity'.<sup>4</sup> This notion of looking at particular Irish experiences and asking larger questions has always been my inspiration, not only in this book, but in all my historical research.

Perhaps in this context I should say a few words about my engagement with the institution that made it possible for me to be even eligible for this prize, which is University College Dublin. I came to take an MPhil at UCD just over two decades ago. And I'll be honest, at the time, I knew precious little, practically next to nothing, about Irish history. I therefore ended up spending many a long hour reading voraciously in the library at UCD, which at the time was not yet named the James Joyce library. Fortunately for me it is an open shelf library, so I could go in and take whatever seemed to be of interest, and one shelf led to another. I would take stacks of books off the shelf and read as much as possible about Irish history and related subjects from other disciplines, and when I felt out of my depth, I would consult experts. That is the great thing about being part of the NUI system and of UCD — there are so many outstanding academics around. Just yesterday I had the privilege of attending the awards ceremony and I realised the calibre and talent of creativity that is within the NUI system.<sup>5</sup> Upon coming to UCD, I realised that I need not devote my time exclusively to reading, as I also had at my disposal a carte-blanche to meet great intellectuals and to learn from them first hand. I was in the Combined Department of History, so I could meet a whole range of historians who were doing fascinating work on a wide variety of topics. At the same time, I made a point of walking down three floors every day to the Folklore Department. There I sought training with some of the greatest Irish folklorists of our times, Bo Almqvist, Séamus Ó Catháin, Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, Ríonach uí Ógáin, Críostóir Mac Cárthaigh, and others, and that was inspirational.

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4 'L'Irlande est une petite contrée sur laquelle se débattent les plus grandes questions de la politique, de la morale et de l'humanité'; Gustave de Beaumont, *L'Irlande sociale, politique et religieuse* (Paris, 1839, 3rd edn), vol. 1, p. ii.

5 NUI Awards Ceremony 2019 was held in the Aviva Stadium, Dublin on 26 November 2019.



I could then walk up a couple of floors and go into the Anglo-Irish Literature Department and have conversations with Declan Kiberd and other brilliant literary critics about representations of the past. I could walk over to the Irish Department and have conversations about Early Modern Irish writings with Breandán Ó Buachalla, and Modern Irish literature with Angela Bourke. Then I could head off to the Economics Department and have a chat with Cormac Ó Gráda, and this could go on and on. At the Geography Department I could meet with Willie Nolan, or in the Politics Department, your own department Dr Manning, have long conversations with Tom Garvin. The opportunities were endless: Archaeology, Philosophy, Sociology, the French Department, the Spanish Department, the German Department, and so on and so forth.

Over the course of this stimulating process of intellectual inquiry, I constantly thought about what I was doing with history. I distinctly recall one of the conversations with my supervisor. I called in to his office and explained to him that I had been reading all this material about Irish history and was thinking about history more generally. I then mentioned that I would ultimately like to ask the kind of questions that will challenge us to look in a different way at how we engage with Irish history, and by that, to rethink what we mean by studying history at large. I remember quite clearly how he rolled his eyes, and now I can understand that better, having supervised quite a few students myself. He went over to a shelf, and pulled out a slim black MA thesis volume, saying 'that's alright Guy, but then it should end up looking something like this' (i.e., a treatise that narrowly focusses on a very specific subject, rather than taking to task the parameters of the entire discipline). I had my work cut out for me and my studies developed into a two-volume PhD thesis that ended up published as a book titled *Remembering the Year of the French*, which did quite well.<sup>6</sup> But I still thought that there are other, even bigger questions to be asked. That is ultimately the path that led to this book on *Forgetful Remembrance*. The aspiration was to not just answer narrowly defined questions and trace particular historical developments over time, but to consider also the wider implications, both for Irish history and for history at large, to explore other ways of looking at history.

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6 Guy Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French: Irish folk history and social memory* (Madison, 2006).

Of course, there is always a wider context for such critical explorations. At the time when I came to Dublin, Ireland was at the tail end of a decade of commemorations. It had just marked the sesquicentenary of the Great Irish Famine and was celebrating the bicentenary of the Great Irish Rebellion of 1798. Note how calamitous events in Irish history tend to be called 'Great', not in a positive sense of course, but in reference to the scale of the events and the extent of the catastrophe. There was a heated debate over the engagement of historians in these commemorations. Specifically, Tom Dunne, from University College Cork, asked the question whether historians had compromised their integrity. Others would not agree with that contention. Indeed, there was controversy as it was the first time that Irish academic historians were engaged so extensively in state-supported commemorations. Time has since moved on, and we find ourselves once again facing similar questions — I think it was Martin Mansergh who remarked that those commemorations were a dress rehearsal for this current decade of centenaries — in an even greater, and larger, decade of commemorations.

Terminology is significant and I should note that my choice of title is deliberate: I have opted for the term 'Decade of Commemorations', rather than the official term the 'Decade of Centenaries'. Here I am taking on board a body of criticism that has emerged mainly from a number of brilliant female historians, with at least one of them joining us here this evening, Linda Connolly. I am thinking of a volume of essays edited by Oona Frawley on *Women and the Decade of Commemorations*, which is about to come out shortly with Indiana University Press, that calls attention to other commemorations that are not necessarily recognised in the calendar framework of a century.<sup>7</sup> Present-day remembrance is not exclusively preoccupied with commemorating a select list of events that happened a hundred years ago and that have been designated by historians as the principal milestones of the Irish Revolution. There are additional events from around that time which are not always recognised in the official commemorative calendar, and there are other significant events from other periods that pop up in our historical consciousness and also clamour for a stage in the programme of commemorations. If Ireland is undertaking a comprehensive reckoning with 'the past', then there are also many other versions of the past which are waiting to be commemorated. Therefore, it is more useful to think in terms of a decade of commemorations.

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7 Oona Frawley (ed.), *Women and the Decade of Commemorations* (Bloomington, 2021).

Even then it could be asked whether historians are uniquely qualified to comment on commemorations. The connection between the study of the past and its remembrance in the present is not as obvious as it may seem. This point has been made quite forcefully, if not provocatively, by the Belfast anthropologist, Professor Dominic Bryan, who has argued that since commemoration is about evoking the past in the political context of the present, and is manifested through ritual and ceremony, then the study of commemoration should be in the domain of social scientists — anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists, who specialise in the study of such present-centred practices.<sup>8</sup> Historians, who are trained in the study of the past, might not be as fully aware of the current socio-cultural dynamics entailed in the re-staging of the past. Nonetheless, historians have much to contribute to the understanding of commemoration because at some level it is another form of what we do — uncovering the past and making it relevant for today. Remembrance is another discourse on the past, not quite academic history, but something else.

In engaging with remembrance, Irish historians, and historians in general, need not limit themselves to the obvious kind of commentary that points out historical errors in commemorative programmes, identifying what is factually correct, and factually incorrect, what is ‘myth’ and what is history. Fact-checking (particularly in an age of so-called ‘fake news’) is important and we cannot allow spurious misinformation to pass without comment. However, that is just the very beginning of a much more meaningful, multidisciplinary exploration into why certain narratives emerge, why they are charged with meaning, and why they acquire significance? Why some narratives are suppressed, while others get to be celebrated on centre stage? That is the kind of critical exercise with which we should be engaged. Historians have much to contribute to such an investigation. We are required to move beyond the remit of just reconstructing the past and take on board how it is perceived today by the wider public. Historical memory is far more complicated than it is given credit for, and a more sophisticated understanding of that complexity is at the heart of the issue I thought of addressing briefly today.

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8 Dominic Bryan, ‘Ritual, identity and nation: when the historian becomes the high priest of commemoration’ in Richard S. Grayson and Fearghal McGarry (eds.), *Remembering 1916: the Easter Rising, the Somme and the politics of memory in Ireland* (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 24-42.



In its intensive preoccupation with commemoration and remembrance, Ireland has finally caught up with a much bigger worldwide trend which has received the moniker 'the memory boom'. It is a development that has emerged across the world over the last three decades or so, amounting to pervasive engagement throughout and beyond academia with the overriding theme of memory. Indeed, the field has recently become institutionalised. Three years ago, a memory studies association was formed. It originated in a small gathering in Amsterdam, and the year afterwards there was another, much larger gathering. The second conference was in Denmark, in Copenhagen, and last year it was in Spain, in Madrid. From year to year these gatherings of memory studies scholars have grown exponentially, as the field mushroomed. Hundreds, I think thousands, of delegates from all over the world attend these conferences. This demonstrates how in Ireland we are tapping into a much larger sphere.

Ireland now has its own flourishing Memory Studies Research Network, based through the NUI network in Belfield at UCD and spearheaded by remarkable researchers, for example Emilie Pine from the School of English, Drama and Film, Emily Mark-Fitzgerald from the School of Art History and Cultural Policy, as well as Oona Frawley from the Department of English at Maynooth University, among many talented others. Its activities facilitate myriad initiatives of researchers from different disciplines engaged with cultural memory, going way beyond the study of history. With due respect to this work, I'm going to suggest, in an attempt to take the interdisciplinary field of memory studies a step further, that the relationship between memory and history has been well explored in recent years and that we should be thinking of a new agenda. I would like to propose that we need to focus more attention on forgetting. What I mean by that, as I will explain, is not quite as simple as it seems. Even within the familiar terrain of the 'memory boom', anyone who has engaged with memory knows that there is no memory without forgetting. It is almost a cliché. If you look through the literature, and we are talking about thousands of publications on memory from the last three decades, you will often find multiple titles that couple references to remembering and forgetting of particular historical episodes. But when you actually read these studies, they are almost always predominantly preoccupied with remembering and only briefly acknowledge the role of forgetting, without teasing out its theoretical implications. Forgetting is generally considered self-evident and self-explanatory, as if it is merely the opposite of memory. It is perceived as a void,

or a body of impenetrable dark matter. We seem to recognise its significance but choose to focus our attention on the more visible presence of memory. That, I'm afraid, is not good enough. We need to think more rigorously about this presence of absence and what that means, beyond vague allusions.

That is what I am going to reflect on, albeit very briefly. First, I would like to flag to your attention a number of significant publications that have emerged in recent years on the subject of forgetting, which perhaps not everybody, even in memory studies, noticed. It is worth putting the subject of forgetting on our intellectual radar. For many years, I have been interested in tracking studies of forgetting and I think that in the English language the year 2004 is somehow particularly significant because that is when three books, which were written a few years earlier in other European languages, were translated into English (and so there is no longer any valid excuse for not reading this literature). In 2004, the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur's big tome, *Memory, History, Forgetting* came out in English.<sup>9</sup> In the same year, the German Classicist, Harald Weinrich published an English version of his book, *Lethe: The Art of Forgetfulness*.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, in that year, the French ethnologist-anthropologist Marc Augé published a book called *Oblivion* (in the original French it was titled 'Shapes of Oblivion' — *Les formes de l'oubli*, which better reflects his thesis).<sup>11</sup> These publications signalled the emergence of a new body of literature in the field of memory studies, which has since continued to grow.

These are just some of the highlights and there are quite a few other major publications, which need to be taken into account. Paul Connerton, the Cambridge sociologist, wrote in the 1980s a short and yet influential book on how societies remember. In 2009 he published a follow-up book on *How Modernity Forgets*.<sup>12</sup> This transition is a sign of our times, moving from remembering to forgetting. The following year, although not noticed adequately by historians or other scholars, an important book was published by Bradford Vivian, who is a Professor of Communications in the United States, at Penn State University. He had previously written about rhetoric and then

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9 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, history, forgetting*, translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago, 2004).

10 Harald Weinrich, *Lethe: the art and critique of forgetting*, translated by Steven Rendall (Ithaca, 2004).

11 Marc Augé, *Oblivion*, Translated by Marjolijn de Jager (Minneapolis, 2004).

12 Paul Connerton, *How modernity forgets* (Cambridge, 2009).

moved on to write a book on *Public Forgetting*.<sup>13</sup> A bit later, in 2015, the Dutch psychologist Douwe Draaisma, who had previously written about remembering, wrote a book called *Forgetting Myths*.<sup>14</sup> Another substantial book, which did make a mark in Ireland, was written by the cultural critic David Rieff, who actually spent some time researching here and even provided Irish examples for his arguments. Rieff effectively re-adapted a previous book that had offered a critique of remembrance and renamed it *In Praise of Forgetting*. This book came out in 2016, an interesting time to argue for forgetting, when Ireland was hyped up by multiple commemorations of 1916.<sup>15</sup>

As we now enter the second stage of the decade of commemorations, we are perhaps suffering from a condition of commemoration fatigue and have to rally ourselves to sustain enthusiasm after the apex of 2016. In the wake of excessive remembrance, it would seem that a new-found appreciation of forgetting has gained current relevance. Interest in the subject is continuing to grow. Just a few months ago, the Boston writer Lewis Hyde published *A Primer for Forgetting*.<sup>16</sup> This select list of book-length studies is supplemented by many essays and articles. A good example would be the work of William Hirst, a psychologist in the New School, who dealt before with experiments on how groups remember and has moved on to study how groups forget. Note that I purposely mentioned the discipline of the authors of all these publications and that none of them come from history. It is about time that historians start thinking more rigorously about forgetting.

Historical studies have largely neglected forgetting and redressing this lacuna was part of what the project of my book *Forgetful Remembrance* was about. Ireland again has a lot to contribute here. It has been convincingly demonstrated that Ireland has a particularly rich mnemonic culture, saturated with memorial practices on many different levels. Similarly, I would argue that Ireland has also cultivated particular traditions of forgetting, and in the book, I even suggest that this may be even more evident in Northern Ireland, though that is debatable. One of the reasons Northern Ireland is particularly suitable for

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13 Bradford Vivian, *Public forgetting: the rhetoric and politics of beginning again* (University Park, PA, 2010)

14 Douwe Draaisma, *Forgetting myths, perils and compensations*, translated by Liz Waters (New Haven, 2015).

15 David Rieff, *In praise of forgetting: historical memory and its ironies* (New Haven, 2016).

16 Lewis Hyde, *A primer for forgetting: getting past the past* (New York, 2019).



a study of forgetting is that, whereas the rest of Ireland is commonly known by stereotype for the 'gift of the gab' and a propensity for verbose talk, the North is known for its reticence, encapsulated by the dictum 'whatever you say, say nothing'. These loaded stereotypes have a long history, waiting to be unravelled.

The question I am posing is, if Ireland is a good setting for innovative studies of forgetting and if the current state of the decade of commemorations is a good time to think about this subject, how can historians tackle forgetting? We have developed an understanding of historical memory, but what do we mean by historical forgetting? In this talk, I can only give some general pointers. As you can see it is a big book (over 700 pages long), which demonstrates the arguments in detail. Instead of recapping what is covered in the book, let us look at some of the wider implications for where we are in Ireland now. Yet again, some preliminary theoretical thoughts may prove helpful to think about what we mean in this regard. The first proposition, which I have to make very clear, is that we have to rethink what we mean by remembering and forgetting and reconsider the balance between the two. We assume, in my opinion wrongly, that memory is the normal condition and forgetting is the exception, which occurs when memory malfunctions. This intuitive presumption is akin to the notion of misplacing where you put your keys and wondering if this is an indication that you are losing your memory. I would, however, argue that forgetting is the normal condition and remembering is the exception. Our memory is highly selective. In practice we remember very few things, considering that in any given day we go through an infinite number of experiences. Try to recall all the details of what you did today before you came here. Then think about this week, this month, then think about the past decade. Then think historically backwards. How much do we really remember of the totality of human experiences? The vast majority of human experiences have been consigned to oblivion. History, and even more so historical memory, is concerned with the precious few cases which are remembered. And I'll go even further than that: the vast majority of human experiences have been irredeemably forgotten. We don't have any source material to retrieve them in any way. Moreover, this is not a problem. It is good that we have forgotten so much, because otherwise we would be overwhelmed with the sheer enormity of data beyond our ability to process. Memory only functions because of the forgetting that wipes out countless information considered excessive or insignificant.

I start with this point because I do not think we can talk meaningfully about forgetting at large because almost everything has been forgotten and cannot be reclaimed. As a historian, if something has been completely forgotten and has left no traces whatsoever, what can I say about it? At best I can trace the absence. I can comment on a gap, but I cannot say much more beyond that. The picture becomes more complicated when we look at subsets, or particular types of forgetting. A case that is particularly interesting to look at is a subset within forgetting studies and psychology that pertains to intentional or directed forgetting, when an episode is seen as too problematic, too embarrassing that we want to deliberately forget it. You must of course sense the paradoxical ambivalence of this notion. We want to forget something but by signalling it as a subject for forgetting we are calling attention to its existence, and effectively remembering it. The paradigmatic example, which can help elucidate this problem by way of a familiar analogy, is the scenario of a courtroom drama (which even if we have not experienced personally has been vividly portrayed in television and cinema). A judge may determine that certain evidence is inadmissible and instruct the jury to disregard it, or 'forget' about it. Consequently, for the rest of the court case, the jury will be preoccupied with remembering to forget this information. They have seen the evidence but are not allowed to recall it. It is designated as forgotten and yet is not eliminated. I have extrapolated on this dynamic in the book by introducing the concept of *social forgetting*. It is not an individual activity; it is a group activity, which corresponds with the wider notion of social memory. Just as a society engages in remembrance, there is also place for social forgetting.

Note again, the words are chosen carefully. In opting for social memory and social forgetting, I am deliberately not using the more familiar terms of 'collective memory' or 'collective forgetting'. I rarely use collective memory, except for very specific cases. The reason I don't like 'collective memory', briefly, is because of the semantic baggage and the connotations that come with it. Collective memory gives us an illusion of homogeneity, of remembrance being uniform, as if all members of a society remember a historical event in the same way and in turn that is supposed to be the memory of a society. Invariably, in each and every case that one studies in depth, you will find that memory is always contested and varied. There are many different narratives that compete against each other. There is no singular collective memory. Collective memory is inherently variegated. The other problematic connotation often attached to collective memory is that it is too-readily taken to be a top-down construction.

The government supposedly has a programme for instilling collective memory through the school system and commemoration, or it is supposed to be propagated through the work of historians, while the rest of the public are depicted as passive consumers of this memory. It seldom, if ever, works like that in practice. On a ground level, there are always negotiations concerning what is received, what is accepted, what is rejected, and alternative narratives can emerge from other sources and challenge official narratives, so that communal remembrance is a much more complicated dynamic. Hence, I believe the term 'social memory' might be more appropriate than 'collective memory', with its problematic associations. I have even gone on record suggesting that collective memory is perhaps no more than an aspiration. It is a lie that politicians tell themselves, maybe even historians tell themselves, believing that they are authoritatively shaping the past, whereas in reality perceptions of the past are multi-authored and always contested on different levels.

Similarly, when we consider intentional forgetting, it is not collective forgetting, but social forgetting. It is not the result of a single collective decree, but a process involving contestation between different groups, and it does not ultimately result in total forgetting. That would be, for example, my criticism of the otherwise very stimulating and provocative book by David Rieff *In Praise of Forgetting*. Rieff treats forgetting in the way he treats collective memory, as if it is a light bulb that we can switch on and off, on demand. It does not quite work like that, we can try and switch it off, but then we see that there is a little flicker going on in there. A more complex understanding of forgetting is required. I feel obliged to give a simple working definition for this complicated dynamic – as I said it is important to be clear with our terms – and so I would say that social forgetting is what happens when a community or a society tries to suppress, to disregard, to bury embarrassing events in its past. Every society is laden with embarrassing events in its past, every country, every nation state. If we're dealing with the decade marking the Irish Revolution, then I think that it is crucial to recognise this. A famous lecture delivered in the Sorbonne in 1882 by Ernest Renan, the French-Breton philosopher raised the question of 'What is a nation?' Renan asserted that every nation state invariably has dark secrets lurking in its historical past, as it was inevitably born out of acts



of violence.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, national historical consciousness is about remembering and forgetting certain episodes – you remember the events that you want to valorise and try to forget the discomfiting episodes that you prefer to suppress. This results in social forgetting.

The more we excavate our history, we realise that social forgetting is paradoxically, an obscure form of social remembrance. It pivots on tensions between, on the one hand, public silence on certain issues – avoidance of embarrassing or painful topics, and on the other hand, if we dig deep enough, we encounter persistence of more private and local instances of remembrance. We can follow these traces and uncover muted recollections that are not given a public platform. These tensions of social forgetting can start a chain of mnemonic reactions, which is quite fascinating. My book unravels this dynamic both in theoretical terms, but primarily through concrete examples grounded in Northern Ireland. I took the case of the 1798 Rebellion in Antrim and Down, where there was a clear interest for Presbyterian communities that were radical and republican in the 1790's and afterwards became predominantly (though not entirely) unionist, loyalist and orange, to forget the green background that they may have had. Yet recollections of the repressed memory of '98 keep cropping up in different situations and in various media. Social forgetting is to be found in the dialectics between private recollections and public silencing. That is a dynamic that we need to tease out in greater detail. I would even say that the challenge for us as historians engaging with commemoration is essentially not all that different from motor vehicle mechanics, as portrayed in a book that was very popular a few years ago, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.<sup>18</sup> We need to inspect the engine, look under the hood and take it apart to carefully examine its components in order to see what is happening behind the public displays of memorialisation.

If we are considering the decade of commemorations, then let us take one of the classic examples. It is often stated, by the likes of knowledgeable commentators such as Kevin Myers and Myles Dungan, that the First World War was completely forgotten in Ireland up until fairly recently, when a trickle of remembrance commenced in the late 1990s and culminated in the open

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17 Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation? Conférence faite en Sorbonne, le 11 Mars 1882* (Paris, 1882); Ernest Renan, 'What is a nation?' translated and annotated by Martin Thom in Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and narration* (London and New York, 1990), pp. 8-22.

18 Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance* (New York, 1974).

commemoration of the centenary. If we were to examine this claim more thoroughly, would we really find that the war was completely forgotten by all the hundreds of thousands who participated in it? Could it have been entirely wiped from their memory? Was it ever some kind of *Men in Black* moment, as if somebody pulled out a device, clicked and all traces of memory simply vanished. The more we look into this case of forgetting as attentive historians, the more we keep finding instances of remembrance, some of them very public and open, alongside constant pressure to suppress this memory, because it is inconvenient and did not fit within dominant nationalist narratives. There was a deliberate effort to banish this memory from the centre stage of public commemoration, to make sure that the war memorial gardens would be located in Islandbridge, just outside of the city centre, and to allow them to fall into neglect. Yet the monumental site is still out there in plain view. Through a critical awareness of these kind of tensions, the study of social forgetting allows us to re-examine our understanding of commemoration. So much has been said and written about the memory of the Great War in Europe, another of the 'great' dark episodes of modern history. The memory of the First World War has been studied extensively and we now need to look at the social forgetting of the First World War. In Ireland, we need to unravel how memories were retained within families, often within nationalist families, often within families of veterans who came back from the war and ended up participating on different sides, in different ways, in the Irish Revolution, yet retained these memories, in ways that could not be officially recognised or commemorated in public.

The moment that we set the uncovering of suppressed memory as our research agenda and begin looking for the places where it can be recovered, we will find that the study of social forgetting, far from being an empty void, is incredibly rewarding in its yields. We may realise that, just as we seem to have found memory everywhere, once we start looking around with a sharp eye, we might notice traces of social forgetting everywhere. We will start seeing what has not been commemorated openly, but has been remembered nonetheless in other subtle ways, outside of the public gaze. It just takes more work to look for these recollections. What are the subjects of these repressed memories? Some of them, I am afraid, will be very unpleasant, indeed a good deal of them will be very unpleasant. Think for example of the revelations that have come up in recent years about the abuse of women and children in institutions in Ireland. Even though it was seldom discussed, people knew about this abuse

and people remembered it. But was it commemorated in public? So, there we have a prime example of social forgetting that needs to be carefully excavated by asking such questions as what was remembered in secret, when could it come out in the open and when could it not come out into the open? What happened to the first people who dared to break the silence? That's always an issue: silence breakers and the ways by which they are censored and disciplined for not adhering to social taboos. Silencing is not only enforced from above by the authorities, it is also enforced from below through social conventions, when a community engages in social forgetting.

That is just one example waiting to be unravelled. Evidently it will not be pleasant, but it is part of the process that Ireland is currently going through, and it is a brave process. There are many other topics waiting in line. I'm thinking, for example, of Ida Milne's fine book on Spanish Influenza, a topic which interests me a great deal.<sup>19</sup> In Ireland, there are no monuments, no museums, no commemoration for the devastating pandemic that broke out at the tail end of the First World War. Yet the moment that Milne and other researchers (as she is not the only one), started digging for recollections of the Great Flu then more and more stories came out, revealing family recollections that we hadn't publicly heard about before. Indeed, medical history research in its cultural variants will open up a whole series of social forgettings. What about the memory of tuberculosis (TB)? If we start asking those kinds of questions about the social forgetting of TB, we'll find traces of its memory all over Irish historical experiences. Again, this not a subject publicly celebrated or commemorated, but strong memories of disease and illness have been retained under the surface, which we need to look for.

It is the same for other issues of which we now have more awareness such as LGBT memories, which were suppressed. Histories of homosexuality were suppressed alongside other forms of gender and sexuality that couldn't be openly discussed in public until fairly recently, and even now are still subject to moments of reticence. Social forgetting is marked by reticence and the use of euphemisms. Therefore, in search of such hidden memories, which were often recalled in various unofficial forums, we should not always look for the clues directly under the spotlight. We have to cast our gaze towards the less

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19 Ida Milne, *Stacking the coffins: Influenza, war and revolution in Ireland 1918-1919* (Manchester, 2018).

luminated arenas of Irish history and decode the hidden references to find these unacknowledged stories. To give another telling example, we can find social forgetting of Irish migrant communities all over. The Travellers, for one, have been marginalised in Irish memory, but not only them. Ireland now is much more multi-cultural than it used to be and yet there have always been foreigners coming in and out, reflecting immigration coming into Ireland, not just the familiar narratives of emigration. There is a lot of social forgetting about migration, often not marked in Irish history, and that is another area that I think is particularly fertile ground for further study and will be even more rewarding as Ireland becomes more multi-cultural and all these stories will clamour for their place in the public eye. The inclusion of these stories makes for a far richer Irish memory culture. We can look back at earlier groups that migrated here and learn from their experience. My own encounter was with the Jewish community, uncovering local memories of Jewish immigration to Ireland from Lithuania at the end of the nineteenth century and from Central Europe before the Holocaust, looking for local residues of remembrance that were not commemorated in public for a long time.

There are many other cases of social forgetting, which are not always on our radar and are waiting to be discovered. One of the big adages of Irish historical revisionism was the call to recognise ‘varieties of Irishness’, but for a long time Irish historiography did not feature all that many varieties of Irishness. It is high time to remember other varieties of Irishness, we will see that they are manifold, and all over the place. That is how an exploration of social forgetting can contribute to making the decade of commemorations a more meaningful exercise.

I will conclude with some observations in a different area, after all this talk is happening not in the 1990’s but in 2019. How does the digital age come into all this? This pertinent issue was raised by Viktor Mayer-Schönberger in his book *Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age*.<sup>20</sup> A point that Mayer-Schönberger makes is that we might be experiencing a shift in paradigms. Recall what I told you before when I said that throughout history the norm has been forgetting and the exception has been remembering. Perhaps in a digital age, without us even noticing it, this truism has turned on its head. It seems as if everything can be remembered and that everything is being recorded

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20 Viktor Mayer-Schönberger, *Delete: The virtue of forgetting in the digital age* (Princeton, 2009).

and stored. Google and other social media claim to know everything about us. Technology knows about our actions before we even commit them. It is conditioning us in real time, as we live our lives. Data is being compiled on everything, in what seems to amount to an endless archive. So perhaps we are living now in an age of total remembrance. Where does forgetting fit into that?

I do not subscribe to the big slogans of technology. We live in an age where it seems that everything is being documented, and sure, I have teenage children and if something is recorded on social media, they believe it will never disappear. However, I am less confident about this promise of permanence. Digital memory is much more ephemeral than we think. In a discussion with Jane Ohlmeyer from Trinity College Dublin (who, among other outstanding projects was responsible for the invaluable digitalization of the 1641 Depositions), I realised the fragility and limitations of digital history projects that require constant maintenance and updating. Digital humanities are all the rage now and in making massive digitalised archives we may think that we are creating lasting repositories, but afterwards a considerable investment is required to keep sustaining them, while technology constantly changes. After a while, it is not certain that the digital records will remain accessible, if they are not also available in print, which would seem to be a regression. Try looking for resources that you found on the internet five years ago and you might find that they are no longer accessible. Despite this ephemerality, for the sake of the argument, let us run with the idea that we now have technologies that can capture and retain much more information than ever before. The European Commission, which is in some ways ahead of other places, has been required to deal with the issue of the 'right to be forgotten'. You now have a right to appeal and request that awkward or embarrassing information be removed from search engines and social media. Exercising this right raises a series of questions, such as can it be used for censorship, and can it be abused? These ethical issues are at the forefront of engaging with forgetting and remembering in our time, not just in the decade of commemorations. Indeed, if in the past, the discourse was about rights of memory, and much has been written about the ethics of remembrance, we have entered a stage where we are now required to deal with rights of forgetting.

With that in mind, I would like to end with one final comment and suggest that perhaps we should be looking at this the other way around. It seems to us that we have an imperative to go forth and expose all the various events that were



not spoken about in public, that we should bring these memories out into the open and shine a spotlight on them. There is a good deal of memory activism going on at present, engaged in reclaiming, recovering and repossessing memories, and this is generally considered to be an empowering and positive development. I would be a bit cautious and point out that even here there are serious ethical questions to be considered. Should everything be dragged out in public, and what would that entail? I would suggest that sometimes a good degree of care is needed, and not only care, a certain respect, because in a way, societies have also found ways of dealing with problematic issues through social forgetting, by effectively generating traditions and rites of forgetting. In referring to the decade of commemorations, not just the decade of centenaries, we can also include, for example, the many anniversaries of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Numerous traumatic events that occurred during the Troubles were subsequently processed, not so much by dragging them out into the open, but by keeping them within. Public commemoration is not always an appropriate form of remembrance, when respect is required to not violate the privacy of people who believe that certain memorial practices should stay in the privacy of the home or the local community. This poses a challenge to historians and scholars of memory. I'll leave us with these troubling questions, which cannot all be resolved this evening, while suggesting a new agenda for interdisciplinary historical research in the decade of commemorations and beyond. In writing about historical memory, let us remember to start thinking about forgetting.

## RESPONSE

### Professor James Kelly



History is a subject for which one proposes ‘new directions’ — or what in other contexts have been identified as ‘agendas for research’ — with an advisably large measure of caution. There are good reasons. First and perhaps, foremost, there is the underlying epistemological fact that historical interpretation (if not historical knowledge) is inherently contingent, which not only means that it is subject to revision as a result of the accrual of new information (which every historian accepts and acknowledges), but also that it is susceptible to re-interpretation according to the perspectives, interests, and requirements of the society in which it is created. This disciplinary fact is in keeping with the fact that every generation looks differently on the past, and that this is not always identifiable. This is not always recognised, still less acknowledged, and it does not sit easily with those who conceive (or should I say conceived, since they are a contracting phalanx) of history as ‘a science’ and their methodology as ‘scientific’. It does, however, provide, the discipline with a *raison d’etre*, a reason for being over and above that of acknowledging and recording in as fair a way as is possible the history of the communities of which we are a part. Moreover, we do this not just because it is important that we possess as accurate a record as can be constructed because of the need that defines us as thinking beings to understand our history – a point that bounds of nearly every page of Guy Beiner’s work.

Guided by these, and other aspirations (not all of which will receive complete acceptance), historians have sought to identify ways in which the understanding of the past can be enhanced by taking on board new

perspectives and by identifying new questions. This has a long pedigree. An early, and pertinent intervention of this kind was penned by the Irish American publisher Mathew Carey who appealed in his work *Vindiciae Hibernicae* (Philadelphia, 1819) for history to 'expose the multifarious errors and falsehoods respecting Ireland' in a veritable 'who's who' of the pantheon of historians that Protestant Ireland looked to for their understanding of the Irish past. More recently, I was present at a gathering of practitioners that identified the publication in 1992 of 'An agenda for women's history in Ireland, 1500-1900' as a major moment in the adoption of the more gender inclusive approach to the past.<sup>21</sup> They certainly possess value in encouraging disciplinary reflection, disciplinary introspection, and, particularly important in History, retrospection.

It might be argued, indeed, that this is an issue with which Irish history writings has been unduly preoccupied, but if so, it is explicable given the centrality of history in Irish national consciousness, though it is appropriate that, with the advantage of hindsight, we acknowledge that the certitude with which the revisionist impulse promulgated its findings may have been taken too far. It is, of course, appropriate that we recognise that this was in response to the still greater certainty of the interpretative thrust of the long dominant Catholic Nationalist approach, but it may be that Brendan Bradshaw not only struck a chord but made an important point when he called upon historians to show 'empathy' for their subjects. Empathy is not the same as sympathy, and still less identification, which is, of course, what some of the loudest participants in the so-called revisionist controversy of the 1980s and 1990s promoted, and some of their successors continue to promote, but is it not a matter that historians can ignore if they are to satisfy the requirements of the discipline and to retain a prominent place in public consciousness, and, dare I say, an engaged audience.

If this is to be the case, it is necessary, among other matters, that we re-engage more sympathetically and constructively with myth and memory as a constituent of Irish consciousness in the past as well as the present than T.W. Moody famously delineated in 1977 when he charged the profession to cast a forensic eye on the myths that then informed Irish historical

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21 *Irish Historical Studies*, volume 28 (1992).

consciousness, with a view to their invalidation. Much has changed in the decades that have elapsed since Moody made his appeal because, as Guy Beiner, has pointed out, and his works exemplifies; we can now recognise that myth are 'highly meaningful narratives' in their own right', and 'as articulations of attitudes and reflections of mindsets' deserving of close investigation. This is, of course, what Guy Beiner has done with such grace and effect, and in the process not only demonstrated the value of taking myth seriously but also the utility of subjecting its origins, its construction, its dissemination, its protean character, and its endurance to close scrutiny. His primary focus to date has been with how the events of the 1790s can with careful excavation provide a window into the mentalite of a society. He has by this means revealed what many historians, who have prioritised the state archives, the personal papers of the great and estate and institutional papers that dominate the holdings of our major archives and libraries, deemed barely possible. Moreover, because he has done this in a manner that is theoretically innovative, evidentially rigorous, and aesthetically satisfying, he has accessed the 'vernacular historiography' of two different strands of Irish society across a period of two centuries in a manner that illuminates the worlds in which it is located. This would be a marvellous achievement in any circumstances; it is all the more praiseworthy in this because it is anchored in evidence and a theoretical and methodological structure that melds the historian's love of detail with the theorist's desire for an overarching framework.

The order and value of this achievement should not be understated. *Forgetful Remembrance*, which is the book that has brought us here tonight, is a towering intellectual achievement. It can, and I dare say will, spawn imitators, not only in Ireland, but also abroad for this is a work that will, I anticipate, draw scholars from far and wide to Irish history. Professor Beiner has illustrated in his talk this evening the challenges and prospects of its application to the 1916 Rising, and suggested how both 'remembering', which he applied to especial effect to 'the year of the French' and what he calls 'forgetful remembrance', which he has applied with still more comprehensively to the contested memory of rebellion in Ulster, might be utilised both to deconstruct and to elucidate the construction of social memory, and thereby to illuminate the thinking not only of a society as a whole but also the different communities that make it up.

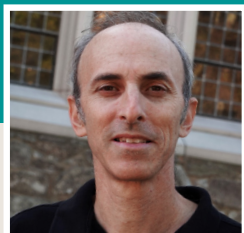
This may elicit disagreeable difference, if the contested response if the manner in which the War of Independence was constructed is any guide, and we have yet to engage publicly with the still more contested episode that is the Civil War, but this is to underline its value, as there is plenty of evidence — written, material and oral — to explore.

The prospects for students of modern Ireland of the application of ‘forgetting’ to the twentieth century is, I am sure you will agree with me, an exciting one. But why stop there? The early modern period also pursued an active practice of memorialisation and commemoration that offers a window into popular consciousness. To date, we have devoted more effort to scoping the temporal and official contours of this practice than understanding its impact on a public that had understandably conflicting attitudes to the events (1641, for example) and personages (William of Orange might be instanced) that were being honoured. It may also be countered that, valuable and all as this might be, it is less of a desideratum than a more ecological history that engaged with the history of the impact of man on climate and the environment; or that seeks, as the recent call for papers by the *Radical History Review* proposes, ‘to provide a platform where new approaches to the Irish historical experience can serve to enrich broader histories of capitalism, colonialism, race and gender’, but this would be to understate its utility and the achievement of Guy Beiner to date.

It is certainly a good time to suggest the application of memory and forgetting to the Irish revolution, and we could hardly do better than applying the methodology outlined here this evening, and applied with such sophistication in *Forgetful Remembrance*. It represents the finest illustration of historical scholarship at its best and is an exemplary illustration of how the combination of detailed inquiry (just look at the bibliography), imagination, theoretical sophistication and lucid writing can change how we view and engage with the past. The very prospect of its being applied to the 1916 Rising certainly whets the appetite, but in its absence we should just be grateful that we have seen it in application twice with reference to 1798, and that we can this evening not just celebrate what has been achieved to date but also congratulate the man who is responsible, and respond positively to the suggestions he has advanced this even with his characteristic lucidity and insight.



## BIOGRAPHIES



**Guy Beiner** is the Sullivan Chair in Irish Studies at Boston College. Formerly Professor of Modern History at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel and was the Burns Scholar for 2019-2020 at Boston College. He has a PhD in modern Irish History from the National University of Ireland and was an Irish Research Council scholar at University College Dublin. He has also held fellowships at Trinity College Dublin, the University of Notre Dame, Central European University, and the University of Oxford. Beiner's research mainly focusses on remembering and forgetting in the late-modern era. He is the author of the multiple-award-winning books *Remembering the Year of the French: Irish Folk History and Social Memory* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2007) and *Forgetful Remembrance: Social Forgetting and Vernacular Historiography of a Rebellion in Ulster* (Oxford University Press, 2018).



**James Kelly**, MRIA, is Professor of History, and Head of the School of History and Geography, Dublin City University. His main research interests lie in the areas of Irish political and social history in the period 1660-1860, on which he has published widely. He is a member of the Royal Irish Academy and the Irish Manuscripts Commission. He has published extensively on a variety of themes on late-early modern Irish History, with particular reference to the eighteenth century. These include *The proclamations of Ireland 1660-1821* (5 vols, IMC, 2014); *Sport in Ireland, 1600-1840* (Four Court Press, 2014). His most recent book is *Food rioting in Ireland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries* (Four Courts Press, 2017). He is editor of volume 3 of the *Cambridge history of Ireland: Ireland, 1730-1880* (Cambridge, 2018)

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**Professor Guy Beiner** for

*Forgetful Remembrance: Social Forgetting and Vernacular Historiography of a Rebellion in Ulster* (Oxford University Press, 2018)

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**Dr Ruth Canning** for

*The Old English in Early Modern Ireland: The Palesmen and the Nine Years' War, 1594-1603* (Boydell & Brewer, 2019)

Special Commendations to:

**Dr Michael Dwyer** for

*Strangling Angel: Diphtheria and Childhood Immunisation in Ireland*  
(Liverpool University Press, 2018)

**Dr Ciarán McCabe** for

*Begging, Charity and Religion in Pre-Famine Ireland*  
(Liverpool University Press, 2018)

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- 1922** George A.T. O'Brien, *The Economic History of Ireland from the Union to the Famine* (Longmans, 1921)
- 1925** Cecilia Rahilly, *Ireland and Wales* (Longmans, 1924)
- 1927** Kate Mulchrone, *Die Abfassungszeit und Überlieferung der Vita Tripartita* (ZCP, 1927)
- 1929** Three Cash Prizes of £25 each:  
John C. Conroy, *A History of Railways in Ireland* (Longmans, 1928)  
John J. Webb, *The Guilds of Dublin* (Three Candles, 1929)  
*Helena Concannon, The Poor Clares in Ireland 1629-1929*  
(M.H. Gill and Son, 1929)
- 1931** John Ryan (SJ), *Irish Monasticism, Origins and Early Development* (The Talbot, 1931)
- 1933** Richard Hayes, *Ireland and Irishmen in the French Revolution* (Phoenix Pub. Co., 1932)
- 1935** Robert W.D. Edwards, *Church and State in Tudor Ireland* (Longmans, 1935)
- 1937** Gerard A. Hayes-McCoy, *Scots Mercenary Force in Ireland (1565-1603)* (Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1937)
- 1939** Dermot F. Gleeson, *The Last Lords of Ormond* (Sheed & Ward, 1938)
- 1941** Not awarded
- 1943** Mary J. Donovan O'Sullivan, *Old Galway* (W. Heffer, 1942)
- 1945** James E. Handley, *The Irish in Scotland, 1798-1845* (Cork University Press, 1943)



- 1947** Thomas F. O’Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1946)
- 1949** Denis R. Gwynn, *Young Ireland and 1848 O’Connell, Davis and the Colleges Bill Father Kenyon and Young Ireland* (Cork University Press, 1949)
- 1951/3/5** Not awarded
- 1959** Hugh F. Kearney, *Strafford in Ireland, 1633-1760* (Manchester University Press, 1959)
- 1961** Maureen McGeehin (Wall), *The Penal Laws, 1691-1760* (Dublin Historical Association by Dundalgan Press, 1961)
- 1963** Rev. Maurice P.J. Sheehy, *Pontificia Hibernica* (M.H. Gill, 1962)
- 1965** Not awarded
- 1967** Maurice O’Connell, *Irish Politics and Social Conflict* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965)  
  
(Additional Prize: £100: Kevin B. Nowlan, *The Politics of Repeal* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965))
- 1969** Gerard A. Hayes-McCoy, *Irish Battles* (Longmans, 1969)
- 1971** Not awarded
- 1973** Francis J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings* (Batsford, 1973)
- 1975** Not awarded
- 1977** Nicholas P. Canny, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland* (Harvester Press, 1976) jointly with Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse: The Triumph of Failure* (Gollancz, 1977)
- 1979** Not awarded
- 1981** Colin A. Lewis, *Horse Breeding in Ireland* (J.A. Allen, 1980)
- 1983** Daniel Augustine Kerr, *Peel, Priests and Politics* (Clarendon, 1982)
- 1985** K. Theodore Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland, 1832-1885* (Clarendon, 1984)
- 1987** Patrick J. O’Connor, *Exploring Limerick’s Past* (Oireacht na Mumhan Books, 1987)

- 1989** Patrick J. O'Connor, *People Make Places: The Story of Irish Palatines* (Oireacht na Mumhan Books, 1989)
- 1991/3/5** Not awarded
- 1997** Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin Slums 1800-1925: A Study in Urban Geography* (Irish Academic Press, 1997)
- 1999** Thomas McGrath, *Religious Renewal and Reform in the Pastoral Ministry of Bishop James Doyle of Kildare and Leighlin 1786-1834* (Four Courts Press, 1999) and *Politics, Interdenominational Relations and Education in the Public Ministry of Bishop James Doyle of Kildare and Leighlin 1786-1834* (Four Courts Press, 1999)
- 2001** Gerard J. Lyne, *The Lansdowne Estate in Kerry under W.S. Trench 1849-72* (Geography Publications, 2001)
- 2003** Nicholas P. Canny, *Making Ireland British, 1580-1650* (Oxford University Press, 2001)
- 2005** Christopher Robert Maginn, *'Civilizing' Gaelic Leinster: The Extension of Tudor Rule in the O'Byrne* (Four Courts Press, 2005)
- 2005** (Commendation) Nollaig Ó Muraíle, *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach: The Great Book of Irish Genealogies (1645-66)* compiled by Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhsigh (de Búrca 2003)
- 2007** William J. Smyth, *Map-making, Landscapes and Memory: A Geography of Colonial and Early Modern Ireland c. 1530-1750* (Cork University Press, 2006)
- 2009** Maurice J. Bric, *Ireland, Philadelphia and the Re-invention of America, 1760-1800* (Four Courts Press, 2008)
- 2011** Bernadette Cunningham, *The Annals of the Four Masters: Irish History, Kingship and Society in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Four Courts Press, 2010)
- 2013** Colmán Ó Clabaigh, *The Friars of Ireland, 1224-1540* (Four Courts Press, 2012) 2015 Elva Johnston, *Literacy and Identity in Early Medieval Ireland* (Boydell Press, 2013)
- 2017** K. Theodore Hoppen, *Governing Hibernia: British Politicians and Ireland 1800-1921* (Oxford University Press, 2016)







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